The Great Reimagining

Material Mediations: People and Things in a World of Movement

Edited by **Birgit Meyer** (Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University) and **Maruška Svašek** (School of History and Anthropology, Queens University, Belfast)

During the last few years, a lively, interdisciplinary debate has taken place between anthropologists, art historians and scholars of material culture, religion, visual culture and media studies about the dynamics of material production and cultural mediation in an era of intensifying globalization and transnational connectivity. Understanding 'mediation' as a fundamentally material process, this series provides a stimulating platform for ethnographically grounded theoretical debates about the many aspects that constitute relationships between people and things, including political, economic, technological, aesthetic, sensorial and emotional processes.

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Volume 4
The Great Reimagining
Public Art, Urban Space and the Symbolic Landscapes of a 'New' Northern Ireland
Bree T. Hocking

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Abbreviations

ACNI	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
BCC	Belfast City Council
BCCM	Belfast City Centre Management
CRC	Community Relations Council
CSI	Cohesion, Sharing and Integration
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (NI)
DCC	Derry City Council
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport (UK)
DOE	Department of the Environment
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department for Social Development
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EPIC	Ex-Prisoners Interpretive Centre
EU	European Union
GSP	Greater Shankill Partnership
GVRT	Greater Village Regeneration Trust
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
HOTS	Healing on the Streets
ICE	Intercontinental Exchange Group
IFI	International Fund for Ireland
IJS	Irish Jumpstyle

KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NIE	Northern Ireland Executive
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
PAW	Public Art Wales
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RAAD	Republican Action Against Drugs
RTPI	Royal Town Planning Institute
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SWAT	SouthWest Action Team
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
VAC	Verbal Arts Centre

Introduction
Landscapes of Change in the Transitional City

> Civic places and spaces in Northern Ireland have always been exclusive of one or another part of the population, and quite deliberately so. A civic life, inclusive of all, has to be constructed. And we do not mean constructed in the sense beloved of discourse theory, but in the solid form of concrete, steel and bricks, stone and glass.
>
> —Alan Jones and David Brett, *Toward an Architecture: Ulster* (2007: 22–24)

On a bright, bitingly cold day in early December 2011, Northern Ireland's First Minister Peter Robinson stood in front of a triptych of steel pillars, each one chiselled with a single word. Together they read, 'Remembrance', 'respect', 'resolution'. As a small gathering of shivering officials waited for the unveiling to commence, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader gestured expansively at the humble brick terraced dwellings in the Lower Shankill Estate. 'It doesn't make the place a cold place for people from other sections of the community', Robinson said of the artwork. 'There's no fear in walking down a street that talks about respect or resolution or tolerance'. The steel pillars, which replaced a controversial mural dedicated to the 'Defender of the Protestant Faith' Oliver Cromwell, would send 'a different message', the first minister went on to aver. Robinson favourably contrasted this new addition to Belfast's symbolic landscape with the remaining sectarian wall paintings in the surrounding area, which he said had been used to 'stake out territory'. 'I think it is important to create shared space for everyone', he asserted. 'In the future, we will move forward together'.[1]

Robinson's optimistic assessment that day says much about the 'post-conflict'[2] vision of politicians, policymakers and planners seeking to reconstruct the meaning and experience of public spaces in Northern Ireland.

Indeed, the statement is pertinent on a number of levels. First, it suggests a belief in the power of visual images and symbols to express new realities about space – in effect, to communicate inclusive values and endorse social change via material forms. Second, it implies that people's response to and embodied experience of space can be predicted, or at least influenced, by certain 'technologies', such as public art. And finally, it embeds the production of a new society in which 'we will move forward together' within broader processes of spatial production. In this way, the micro-politics of the symbolic landscape provide insight into the post-conflict state's relationship to space, the pressures and aspirations it contends with, and the role it envisions for citizens in a new public sphere where 'equality' and 'good relations' are both offered as virtues and legally required. While this state-space relationship is inevitably informed by the province's legacy of conflict and communal division, it also reflects a number of universal trends in urban space, such as a desire to promote global capital investment and consumption, specifically through tourism.

This has implications for the current campaign to reimage Northern Ireland, which goes far beyond efforts to jettison sectarian wall paintings, such as the Cromwell mural mentioned above, from working-class housing estates. More than 16 years after the defining moment of the peace process, the Good Friday Agreement,[3] a range of public art initiatives, from small-scale community projects to expensive city-centre contemporary art installations, have been touted by officials as transformative tools that can contribute to the mixing of Catholics and Protestants as well as to the province's economic renaissance. These have frequently occurred alongside wider regeneration efforts to reconstruct this former zone of conflict dramatically. As Northern Ireland repositions itself as an attractive 'destination' on the international tourist circuit, officials have looked to the built environment to tell new stories about the province to a global audience as well as to alter internal spatial perceptions. A glitzy new shopping mall and a *Titanic*-themed visitors' centre now pierce the skyline of the provincial capital. A hotel and spa, and even a whisky distillery, are in the works for former prisons that once housed combatants of the Troubles. Contemporary art even pops up along Catholic-Protestant interfaces. As in post-apartheid South Africa, where the process of national reconciliation and, in effect, the creation of shared social space entailed the suppression of vengeance in the public sphere (R. Wilson 2005), Northern Irish officials have sought to downplay symbolic conflict in reconstructed public spaces. But how and to what end the state refashions 'a place that in terms of meaning remains disagreed' (Shirlow 2006: 105) is not without its complications. For although international capital and global interconnectedness exert considerable sway over these new landscapes, the demands of place, with its residual troubled

history and conflicted ethno-national groups, remain powerful forces. And the ability of state authority in Northern Ireland to impose its preferred vision, or order, onto civic landscapes confronts limitations beyond what is typically found in 'normal' Western urban space.

Like its predecessors, this volume of the Material Mediations series engages with themes of cultural production, transnationalism and the impact of globalization processes on human subjectivity and expression. Aiming to further these explorations, this book offers a critical assessment of the reimagining of urban space across Northern Ireland with resonance for a range of societies undergoing social, political and economic change. Here, the focus is on the ways in which the state has turned to symbolic elements, specifically public art, to facilitate new meaning for places in the process of 'becoming', places where internal conflict has to some degree retarded macro processes of globalization. In this way, Northern Ireland may be viewed as a laboratory for observing the means by which the global 'network society' (Castells 1996) is embedded in place via material interventions in landscape. Based on my ethnographic findings, I argue that shifts in the symbolic landscape are representative of wider aspirations to create new civic identities for Belfast and Londonderry on a global stage.[4] Far from being merely cosmetic, however, these symbolic changes provide a vehicle to explore how dominant discourses are materialized in the landscape, and the means by which these discourses, and the ideologies underpinning them, are contested and constrained. Using public art as a prism, this volume aims to elucidate a more nuanced understanding of the state's vision for urban space, and the degree to which this vision is curtailed or even upended in practice. As Wells (2007: 136) succinctly puts it, 'It is the quality of visual and material culture to condense at once the everyday, the monumental, and the spectacular that makes it such a powerful tool for analysing the power relations that structure city living.'

Moreover, these 'new' landscapes also speak to the state's vision of civic life and hold important clues as to the 'type' of citizen desired for the reconstructed spaces. Among the cultural artefacts that define and shape the urban experience, public art and the processes giving rise to it have much to tell us about the economic, social, political and cultural production of cities in transition, as well as the complex forces of globalization, consumption, community and troubled history with which such conurbations grapple. While serving as a sightline into the dominant discourses of the public sphere, the public art object is also implicated in the individual's experience of and relationship to the built environment, with potential repercussions for the understanding of self in society. In *Moving Subjects, Moving Objects*, the inaugural instalment of this series, contributors plumbed the role of objects in evoking emotion and linking people and places across transna-

tional contexts. As Svašek (2012: 20) asserted in that volume, 'the range of possible ways in which people understand their interaction with material realities is vast'. Nevertheless, it is not entirely open-ended. The ability of public art materially to inject particular narratives of memory, heritage and identity into public space – to, in some respects, territorialize – assures that its creation and reception are inevitably subject to contestation. Battles over the right to define landscape before, during and after its material production reflect entrenched and contemporary social struggles. This book sets out to engage with these processes as a means to shed light on the 'power relations that structure urban life' (Wells 2007: 138) and order spatial practice in an interconnected age. Among the questions it explores are: What kind of visual images are privileged in civic space by state-financed public art processes? What response does the material mediation of space via art elicit? To what degree are official objectives for these spaces met? And finally, what vision of citizenship/subjectivity might these new symbolic landscapes foreshadow?

Theorizing the Symbolic Landscape: Power, Image, Contestation

In considering the questions at the heart of this work, certain theoretical assumptions are acknowledged. Following Lefebvre, space is conceived as a social product, an arena constituted by ongoing political, ideological and strategic power negotiations (Harvey 1976; Lefebvre 1976, 1994; Soja 1989) that are intimately influenced by dominant modes of production (Lefebvre 1994). The restructuring of global capital, in the form of neoliberal institutions and economic regimes, combined with an ongoing information technology revolution and the rise of the 'network society' (Castells 1996), has radically altered urban space and the conditions of its production (Castells 1989; Harvey 1989, 1993, 2002; Soja 1989, 1997). Increasingly fashioned by the 'economies of signs and space' (Lash and Urry 1994), the cities of postmodern capitalism are chiefly characterized by 'continuous spectacles of commodity culture' (Harvey 2002: 168) and privatized, hyperreal themed spaces, awash in simulation and pastiche (Urry and Larsen 2011). As civic spaces are remade for tourism, now one of the world's largest industries, place marketing and branding and the visual imagery required to propel these processes, have become central to urban policymakers (Urry 2006; Lash and Urry 1994) seeking to situate their municipalities within the global 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore 1999). But the experience of space is rarely left to chance. Signposted at every step of the way, the new urban stage sets contain and demand a constant supply of symbolic mediation, delivered primarily through cultural productions and artefacts, both material and ephemeral. That said, as Soja (1989: 158) reminds us, '[c]apital … is

never alone in shaping the historical geography of the landscape and is certainly not the only author or authority'. Urban space is lived in myriad ways counter to official diktat and is marked by 'coexisting', if highly unequal, 'heterogeneity' (Massey 2005: 9). From an anthropological perspective, spatial analysis must take into account the 'cultural and intercultural context' and the importance of the vernacular in exploring 'new forms' of globalized, postnational spaces (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 29–30).

Real places, imbued with layers of political, economic, cultural and social meaning, are conceived here as 'landscapes', and the production/construction of landscape as illustrative of ongoing negotiations over identity, ideology and control in urban space (Zukin 1993; Schein 1997; Cosgrove 1998; Ross 2007, 2009a, 2009b). On an empirical level, the symbolic landscape embodies 'social and political meaning' through 'specific public images, physical objects and other expressive representations', including public artworks and monuments (Ross 2009a: 6). These constitute a form of 'masquerade politics', in which 'politics [are] articulated in terms of non-political cultural forms' (Abner Cohen 1993: xi). Such 'icons of identity' (Whelan 2003: 17) make up a broader 'geography of identity' (Osborne 2001) for both places and people. Reflecting on the importance of the built environment to the production of meaning, Neill (2001a: 7) contends that the 'the narrative of identity is constituted spatially'. Symbolic sites in cities are subject to struggle 'because of the power which they bestow' (Neill 2001a: 7). Ashworth and Graham (2005: 4) also posit that 'if it is axiomatic that place images are created, then someone creates them for some purpose'. Landscapes contain the spatialized 'mediation and contestation' of power (Whelan and Harte 2007: 196), and serve as valuable analytical tools for approaching questions of history, memory and identity (Schama 1995; Johnson 2003). According to Cosgrove (1989: 125), 'All landscapes are symbolic … reproducing cultural norms and establishing the values of dominant groups across all of a society'. In this respect, Vale (2008) sees monumentality as an incisive commentator on the relationship among power, architecture and national identity. Numerous studies have assessed the importance of iconic monuments and buildings to wider social and political projects. Prominent among these are David Harvey's (1979) reading of the Sacré-Coeur basilica's construction as a metaphor for broader nineteenth-century clashes between French labour and the bourgeois, and Atkinson and Cosgrove's (1998) critique of the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome as a (somewhat unsuccessful) political 'theater' for the manipulation of 'public memory'. Whelan, whose work has explored the symbolic reimaging of postcolonial Ireland, interprets the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century European 'frenzy' to construct new monuments as indicative of 'their key role as foci for collective participation in the politics and public life of villages, towns and cities'

(Whelan 2003: 18). She proceeds to endorse Lerner's observation that the monument 'is a particular way of staging politics that is centred on the spectacle or visual display' (Lerner 1993: 178).

Symbolic landscapes have particular salience in societies undergoing political and economic transitions. Their evolution can be a powerful indication of social change (Ross 2007, 2009a), with 'greater inclusiveness' (Ross 2007: 320) signalling 'a mutuality and shared stake in society' that may 'help to reshape relations between groups' (ibid.: 325). This book is informed by, and hopes to advance, a body of work that has examined the role of symbolic landscapes after conflict. These are drawn from a number of societies, including that of Guatemala (Steinberg and Taylor 2005; Hoelscher 2008), the American South (Ross 2007), Mozambique (Tester 2006), South Africa (Freschi 2007; Ross 2007, 2009b; Marschall 2009, 2010a, 2010b), the Irish Republic (Johnson 2003; Whelan 2003), the Czech Republic (Svašek 1995, 2007) and post-Soviet Russia (Grant 2001; Forest and Johnson 2002), to name just a few. In addition to the creation of new monuments and artworks, strategies employed have included the removal or recontextualization of old monuments, as well as the reappropriation of existing public art for new political purposes (Levinson 1998; Ross 2009b). Of course, the marked absence of particular symbolic expressions, such as memorials and monuments, is also telling. Where power relationships may still be in the process of 'settling', Steinberg and Taylor (2003: 449–50) observe, 'no one side can claim public space in which to construct obvious landmarks'.

To be sure, the presumed isomorphism between the identity of any 'imagined community' (Benedict Anderson 1983) and place can no longer be taken for granted and must be situated 'within systemic developments that reinscribe and reterritorialize space in the global political economy' (Gupta 2003: 322). These developments range from transnational population movements, and the 'global memoryscapes' (Phillips and Reyes 2011) that accompany such mobilities, to the (often-fleeting) arrival of multinational firms that 'creatively' destroy and reconfigure space for extra-local purposes, frequently with the assistance of significant public subsidies. It is here that this book aims to fill a critical gap. With much public art production firmly embedded in economic and spatial frameworks aimed at promoting tourism, the production of meaning is imbricated within global capital networks, which exert considerable sway over both people and place in the 'new' Northern Ireland. Like those in many transitional societies, Northern Ireland's evolving symbolic landscapes are intended to signal the province's status as a desirable 'stopping-point' for capital (Urry and Larsen 2011: 29), redolent of the symbolic and aesthetic experiences such a designation implies. In achieving these ends, art holds particular appeal. It projects mean-

ing and definition onto landscape, providing the instantaneous '*imageability*' (Lynch 1960, emphasis in original) considered so crucial to urban fortunes. Within urban regeneration programmes, public art is credited with a range of (mostly unsubstantiated) social agencies, from instilling civic pride and social cohesion to spurring economic regeneration (Selwood 1995; Miles 2000). It has become an established means to 'bolster the image and competitive position of place' (Pollock and Paddison 2010: 335) and attract 'mobile finance and tourist capital' (ibid.: 336). This *doxa* has been widely embraced by municipal officials via the adoption of 'creative class' theory (Florida 2002), which predicates urban economic success on the presence of (or an area's attractiveness to) 'creative' professionals. The spread of cultural quarters, cultural tourism and the promotion of the so-called creative industries[5] as a means to wealth, jobs and regeneration are key components of this urban orthodoxy and the 'aestheticization of everyday life' (Featherstone 1991) it entails. Furthermore, the global embrace of culture-led regeneration strategies, which nearly always include a public art component, also reflects Pierre Bourdieu's assertion that the 'field' of art production is the 'most predisposed to express social differences' (Bourdieu 1984: 226) and distinctions through its influence over taste and consumption patterns. Cities seek to enhance their symbolic positions (and attractiveness to capital) through high-profile cultural additions such as public art.

The increased international reliance on 'globalized civic patronage' (Julier 2005: 871) and 'urban policy tourism' (González 2011: 1398) are inseparably linked to wider processes of globalization, or what Robertson (1992: 8) terms the 'compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness about the world as a whole'. Globalization processes, in Eriksen's (2007: 6, emphasis in original) view, are marked by a weakening of 'local *power*' concurrent with an emphasis on 'local identities'. This is manifest through 'glocalization' (Robertson 1992; Ritzer 2003), or 'the interpenetration of the global and the local' (Ritzer 2003: 193), as well as through 'grobalization' (Ritzer 2003), which references the 'ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations and other entities' (ibid.: 194) to expand their power, profits and presence throughout the world. Ritzer argues that 'grobalization' is 'associated with the proliferation of nothing' (Ritzer 2003: 194) or 'forms that are centrally conceived and controlled and are largely devoid of distinctive content' (ibid.: 205). The grobalized quickly becomes the glocalized when it touches down in specific places (Ritzer 2003: 195).

Against this backdrop, I propose the term 'civic identikit' as a useful designation for public art, as well as other urban development projects, that harmonize symbolic forms across urban space while (ironically) aiming to distinguish place and bolster cultural or symbolic capital. Like globalization itself, civic identikit public art is typified by 'form not content' (Eriksen

2007: 11), and may be classified among what Castells (1996: 419) has called the 'architecture of the space of flows'. After Castells, I adopt the term 'civic identikit of flows' to designate largely abstract work overlaid with location-specific narratives or heritage references intended to add an element of local flavour or place identity to the work. This allows for considerable interpretative flexibility before, during and after construction, although as a term it may also be applied to the reimagining of places (both materially and cognitively) through standardized, replicable processes. As such, civic identikit may include the perpetuation of a limited menu of nostalgic images of the past or present, images that nearly always elide uncomfortable historical and social realities. Such art is referred to here as the 'civic identikit of place'. The civic identikit of place, while representative of specific local identities and histories, is part and parcel of the broader 'Disneyization' (Bryman 2004) of society and its concurrent commoditization of space through 'theming' and other performative practices. As a form, the civic identikit of place contributes to the 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 1999) of so-called tourist locales, offering consumable narratives for specific places denuded of their full complexity, ambiguity and contradiction. Unlike mere 'plop art', civic identikit public art claims to represent or evoke defining aspects of locality and to channel some sense of its civic ethos. In this way, the term is intimately linked to the intersection of 'grobalization' (as the content-free product of global firms/consultancies/artists that produce spaces around the world) and 'glocalization' (whereby the local has an impact on a global form or process). Much civic identikit public art exhibits a close relationship to Marc Augé's 'non-place', where the 'link between individuals and their surroundings' exists 'through the mediation of words' (Augé 1995: 94). Globally, the popularity of culture-led regeneration strategies, combined with the growth of multi-billion dollar design consultancies such as AECOM, which has carried out infrastructure and public-realm work in more than 150 countries and is heavily invested in the production of public space in Northern Ireland, has accelerated the spread of civic identikit public art. This trend was perhaps foretold by the counterintuitive subtitle of an early work heralding the potential of culture in urban development, Charles Landry's (2000) *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. In the Northern Irish context, a civic identikit model has held additional appeal, as it offers the opportunity to transcend the divisive sectarian territorialization of past and place in favour of a 'normalized' future in the 'space of flows' (Castells 1989).

The reconstruction of the city as a site of civic identikit has implications beyond mere aesthetics. Public space and the identities it embraces matter. The built environment contains significant clues about the nature of acceptable identities in space. It telegraphs who belongs in certain places, as

well as what activities, behaviours and values the state or other governing authority is keen to encourage in the public domain – in essence, what public(s) it hopes to attract or create. Hence, the production of public space as site of super-saturated consumption has repercussions for the meaning of citizenship and plays a constitutive, though not wholly determinative, role in delimiting the outlines of civic participation and virtue. For instance, urban spaces rooted in an 'ethic of seamless, individuated movement and circulation; public interaction based on the model of commodity and capital flows' (Mitchell 2003: 11) reflect the dominance of neoliberal governance structures, structures that have done much to perpetuate the civic identikit model. This book speculates that post-conflict spatial restructuring in Northern Ireland has promoted an idealized vision of citizen as consumer-tourist, a vision that also points to a concomitant class of symbolic citizens needed to perform the landscapes on which its antipode grazes. This vision is further supported by the centrality of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 2002) to spatial 'imagineering' across Northern Ireland, and the ordering power this global gaze is presumed to wield in official rhetoric. The implications for cultural and political identities delimited by the narrative demands of global capital are potentially (counter)revolutionary and even deleterious. The commodified self and city, designed to service certain experiences in space, may find themselves ultimately subsumed into the harmonizing wash of 'grobalization', albeit a grobalization marked by vestigial traces of place.

Given its role in shaping urban visual cultures, public art has been critiqued by scholars for its potential to mask the inequities of urban regeneration programmes (Zukin 1995; Deutsche 1996; Miles 2000). Deutsche contends that the 'new' public art that emerged in the 1980s and was proclaimed as 'socially responsible', 'site-specific' and 'functional' (1996: xv) is one tool that has altered space in the interest of 'the late-capitalist city' to produce a veneer of consensus for 'uneven development' (ibid.: xv–xvi). Such art asserts spatial 'coherence' and conceals 'social conflicts' (Deutsche 1996: 68). Nearly all the case studies considered in subsequent chapters support these assertions. To some degree, in each, uncomfortable social realities and divisions were downplayed or ignored. That said, Young's assertion that public art helps 'to create shared spaces that lend a common spatial frame to otherwise disparate experiences and understanding' (1993: 6) is not without merit, though the extent to which this occurs varies. Theorists such as Deutsche (1996) and Miles (2000) are right to question the ability of government-funded art to interrogate what Hall (2003: 234) has called the 'prevailing trajectories of urbanisation', though some degree of social critique through processual negotiations and postproduction reappropriation of space is hardly precluded by such art. Hegemony, as Gramsci reminds us, is never an absolute project. Urban regeneration programs reflect the power

relationships that produce these redevelopments, and these relationships inevitably shift over time. The 'political exercise' of public art is constrained by the multiple ways in which people interpret and respond to landscape, and thus can never be assured in its outcomes (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005: 1020).

That these recreated urban spaces, and the art that defines them, do not always 'work' as intended is evident across the following ethnographic investigations. The materiality of public art may exist as a mediator between ideology and subjectivity, but the 'always polymorphous' meanings of cultural landscapes are shaped by reception in addition to government or other elite 'authorship' (Forest and Johnson 2002: 538). As de Certeau has stated, space is produced through a combination of 'strategies' employed by the powerful, such as urban designers, planners and politicians and 'tactics' used by the less-powerful to subvert official representations of space (de Certeau 1984: xix–xx). These 'tactics' may include walking routes, systems of naming and other non-sanctioned interactions with the built environment, such as graffiti. The semiotician Roland Barthes stakes a similar position when writing that the urban 'speaks to its inhabitants', while acknowledging that individuals also 'speak' the city 'simply by living in it, by wandering through it' (Barthes 1997: 168). In this manner, individuals and groups are invested with power in the production of space.

Nevertheless, the production of space is more complex than strict global/local, powerful/weak binarisms suggest, and may just as easily be marked by mutual appropriations as by strict oppositional positions. Indeed, the global-local dialectic, or the ways in which the global shapes the local while the local also informs activities elsewhere, is one aspect that makes the study of urban landscapes, and the artefacts that define them, so compelling. Conceptually, Bourdieu's 'habitus', the so-called 'structuring structure' (Bourdieu 2002: 31), is a useful starting point in bridging the critical divide between the ways in which space shapes (and is shaped by) various practices, including both 'strategies' and 'tactics' (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 10). This spatial dialectic underscores the tenuous link between civic image projected in global space and actual spatial practice, rooted as it is in 'perceived' real-life territorial fixities and fluidities (Lefebvre 1994: 38–40). It is my assessment that the public art process offers one window into these disjunctions.

The use of certain key terms employed in this book must be clarified. By *state,* I refer loosely to a range of entities charged with carrying out official agendas using some measure of public funds. These primarily include government departments and statutory agencies, elective bodies such as legislative assemblies and district councils, government-initiated public-private urban development corporations, publicly supported regeneration groups

and transnational confederations, such as the European Union (EU). While recognizing that the 'state' – particularly in the virtual 'laboratory for experiments in transterritorial governance' (McCall 2001: 2) that is Northern Ireland – is a problematic concept and far from monolithic, it remains a useful point of reference for assessing the 'official' production of symbolic landscapes. Likewise, *public space,* a similarly slippery concept, is broadly understood as those physical spaces under public ownership or oversight that are 'open to greater or lesser public participation' and social mixing (Smith and Low 2006: 4). These are spaces in which, at least ostensibly, those allowed entrance 'are not pre-selected' (Bauman 2005: 77). *Public art* is defined as any 'permanent, static and object-based' work, such as memorials, murals, monuments and site-specific sculpture, that is 'freely, physically accessible' to all (Selwood 1995: 7–8).

Setting the Stage: Visual Culture in a 'Troubled' Northern Ireland

While the push to reinvent the visual culture of Northern Irish public spaces has no doubt benefitted from peace process developments as well as from an infusion of lottery money for Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) projects from 1995 onward, an official focus on image as antidote to social strife can be traced back to the direct-rule[6] policies of British government ministers intent on highlighting the province's 'normality' as a means of improving its economic situation, and, in turn, its political stability (Rolston 1991: 54–55). In 1976, as part of 'Operation Spruce-Up', the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), in conjunction with Belfast City Council (BCC), acquired two moveable murals completed by students at the Art College, which were subsequently displayed in prominent, if blighted, areas, including a major gateway into the city (Rolston 1991: 55). Deemed a success by government, this initial move spurred the establishment the following year of a community murals programme, jointly administered by the city council's Community Services Department, the Northern Ireland Office's Department of the Environment (DOE), ACNI and the Art College (Watson 1983; Rolston 1991). Under the scheme, which ended in 1981, Art College students were paid to paint murals in working-class neighbourhoods during the summer months. The murals, executed after consultations with pre-selected residents' groups, were placed on gable walls. These were sometimes designed or painted with the help of local youth, and were intended to provide a more attractive aesthetic for the city's deprived areas (Rolston 1991). For the most part, however, mural themes ignored the conflict and actual conditions of life in such neighbourhoods, preferring 'non-aligned' (Watson 1983: 6) imagery, including a disproportionate number of references to 'circus and

jungle scenes' (ibid.: 7). Reception of the programme was mixed. Prominent community members on both sides of the sectarian divide rejected the effort as little more than window-dressing that suppressed community issues in favour of John Travolta and 'Jack and the Beanstalk' imagery (Redpath 1983) and offered little more than an 'escape … into a world of fantasy which someone has created for us' (D. Wilson 1983: 21). Rolston (1991: 66) notes that 'as the summer of 1981 approached, it was clear there were no applications for murals from any community' organizations. Though a few groups were eventually convinced to participate, it would be for the last time. (Ironically, a quarter century later, a government-funded mural reimaging programme created to paint over the unofficial sectarian wall murals that proliferated in working-class communities from the 1981 republican hunger strikes onward would reflect many of this earlier programme's concerns, including desensitizing the environment and promoting a positive local image.) However short its tenure, the community mural programme represented an important development in the state's emerging involvement in urban visual culture.

In Belfast, this initial focus on environmental improvement as a driving force for public art, though clearly limited when the city was engulfed by violence, has continued until the present, as has a tacit (and sometimes not-so-tacit) aversion to potentially controversial or unsettling projects. Moreover, from the outset, multiple, and sometimes contradictory, layers of jurisdictional oversight have dogged the realization of some artworks. For instance, in the late 1980s, the DOE, in partnership with the Art College, initiated an Art in Public Places Research Group charged with identifying locations for potential artworks in city-centre developments (U. Walker 1998). Their inaugural 'test case' was an effort to regenerate Belfast's Blackstaff Square, a prominent plaza not far from the city's famous Europa Hotel (Hill 1989: 27). A former haunt of local prostitutes, the square was envisioned as the site of a sculpture that would represent this social history, and artists were invited to submit proposals. But after the public art research group and the project landscape architect recommended the selection of Louise Walsh's *Monument to the Unknown Woman Worker* (a recommendation they believed was all but a final decision), the DOE's Belfast Development Office delayed its approval, shifting the decision to the city council's parks committee (Hill 1989; Odling-Smee 1989). Despite Walsh's assertion that her proposal, featuring two bronze cast working-class women, 'was not intended to be a monument that glorifies prostitution, but a carefully thought-out tribute to all of Belfast's women' (quoted in Odling-Smee 1989: 27), the tone of the ensuing debate failed to reflect this nuance. Heated council discussions followed as well as salacious media headlines related to the 'sex

and politics' theme (Odling-Smee 1989: 27). In the end, the proposal was soundly defeated by the unionist majority council and 'banned from public property by Belfast City Council' (Walsh 2012). Nevertheless, it did receive support from the republican Sinn Féin Party, and ultimately led to calls by one prominent Democratic Unionist Party member, Rhonda Paisley, for the establishment of a city council art committee and a full-time arts officer (Odling-Smee 1989).[7] A few years later, a private developer (assisted by funding from the Arts Council) recommissioned the work, which features symbolic tokens of women's life and labour, including clothespins and colanders, 'embedded … into the surface' (Walsh 2012) of the statues. Situated just off Great Victoria Street at the entrance to the Great Northern Mall, the monument stands as a prominent and rare example of socially conscious, permanent public art in Belfast civic space. McAvera (1990: 32) attributes a general lack of coherent policy guidance and disassociation from social context and politics to ACNI's 'passive role' in visual culture development as well as its insularity at the time. Notably, a substantial portion of the public art that did occur during the conflict was placed in hospitals or other highly protected environments such as the Arts Council's erstwhile sculpture park in Belfast (U. Walker 1998; McAvera 1990).

The situation was slightly different in Londonderry, where the institutional support provided by that city council's Orchard Gallery, established in 1978, allowed for a more experimental approach to the urban symbolic landscape. Under the vision forwarded by the Orchard's founding director Declan McGonagle, who also served on the executive of the public art research group in Belfast, the city was to be reimagined as gallery. With an organizing principle to 'bring a larger dialogue at play in the international field of contemporary art in direct confrontation with the Derry context' (Gee 2013: 6), the Orchard, until its closure in 2003, showcased prominent Northern Irish artists such as Dermot Seymour and Willie Doherty, as well as facilitated the globalization of visual culture, through such ventures as the TSWA 3D project. Liam Kelly (1996: 16–17), who also served as an Orchard director, has attributed Derry City Council's earlier support for public art programmes such as TSWA, which placed temporary public art at nine sites in Britain and Northern Ireland as a means to explore notions of meaning and place, to the nationalist city's greater degree of political consensus. In 1987, that initiative, co-organized by Television South West and South West Arts, famously led to the gallery's invitation to the English artist Antony Gormley to realize his *Sculpture for Derry Walls,* a three-part work featuring 'two identical cast-iron figures joined back to back' in a cruciform pose (McMenamin 2001: 14), which were placed along the walls at three critical locations. As former Orchard director Brendan McMenamin (2001:

14) writes, '[I]t can be said that the sculptures represent Derry's two dominant religious communities, turning away from each other but paradoxically joined'.

If Derry exhibited more openness to globalized art discourses and aesthetic experimentation, Troubles-era public art projects such as the Gormley work also prefigure an early propensity towards a civic identikit approach to public art, namely, its focus on abstract form and language to mediate relationship to people and place. Despite the lofty rhetoric heaped on the project, which praised it as an example of the 'emancipatory power of art' to connect people and place (McGonagle 2001: 24), the most striking aspect of Gormley's artwork is arguably its essential versatility. McAvera (1990: 113, emphasis in original) noted that '[t]he whole point about Gormley's work is not that it is site-specific but that it is site-general. The concept is so vague that it will take the *imposition* of almost any roughly analogous situation where there are two sides plus a christian [sic] element.' Indeed, since the early 1980s, Gormley's featureless iron casts of his own body have appeared in all manner of contexts and locations, from plazas and motorways to New York City skyscrapers and even the Austrian Alps. McAvera also contends that the English artist's approach to the walls, a highly contested space then under the jurisdiction of the British military, carried a whiff of colonial arrogance alongside a rather obvious distillation of the political context into neat binaries. This disconnect is manifest in the artist's language. Indeed, according to Gormley, the installation was to serve as 'a sort of poultice, drawing out what was already there' (quoted in McGonagle 2001: 25). Vandalism, Gormley reportedly stated, would only help to complete the work (McGonagle 2001). He got his wish. The Janus-faced men were stoned, graffitied and on one occasion surrounded by bonfires and even necklaced with a burning tyre by residents who apparently misunderstood, or felt threatened by, whatever meaning they chose to project onto the figures (McAvera 1990; McGonagle 2001; McCann 2011). One of the statues, which had been positioned in front of a small church on the walls, was also moved after the dean of the church compared it to an idol (McGonagle 2001: 30). Whether the installation resonated with ordinary residents other than as an ambiguous and potentially threatening imposition on public space is debatable, though the publicity no doubt helped launch Gormley, who would go on to win the Turner Prize and was recently knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. One of his three original statues now stands outside Derry's Millennium Forum at the east wall, where it continues to be subject to all manner of rude anatomical inscriptions.

The tense relationship between contemporary arts practice and local communities resurfaced during the TSWA's 1990 event, when two of the works presented in Derry by American artists Dennis Adams and Nancy

Spero triggered fundamental questions about what constitutes 'community' and who has the right to speak for it (Barber 1990). Spero's work featured female images reflective of both a Northern Irish and international context transposed onto a working-class gable wall in the republican Bogside – a wall that had reportedly previously displayed a political mural (Barber 1990). Meanwhile, Adams's *Siege* used Gaelic football goalposts (associated with Catholics or nationalists) to frame a photograph of a demolished republican working-class tower block. The work was placed near the city walls at the Butcher Gate along a prominent sightline to the former location of the demolished flats. Both projects generated considerable backlash from local community members and led to a heated public meeting at which the artists defended their right to make a statement about the communities in question (McMenamin, interview 2010). According to McMenamin, now arts officer for the Derry City Council, the discussion proved beneficial and helped to foster community understanding and support for the works. As he relayed it, once Adams 'engaged people in conversation, people didn't have a problem. People actually says [sic], "Well, that's ok. Yes of course you have the right to make a comment." … And then the conversation started with Nancy Spero. "Well, what was your work about anyway?" And she started talking about the issue base of the work, and people were going, "I like that." So there was a huge education going on there both for the artists and … for the community' (McMenamin, interview 2010).

Such episodes as these reflect an enduring communal resistance to official interventions in contested or residential areas, as well as a pervasive perception (real or imagined) that these interventions are imposed on the communities involved. Sometimes, as was the case in 1990, such resistance can be negotiated after the fact. Nevertheless, as the following chapters will elucidate, this dynamic continues in various forms in the post-conflict era. Indeed, some of the most prominent features of Northern Irish urban visual culture, the political murals in working-class areas, are elements that have historically existed outside of the state's imprimatur. Notably, in Derry, since the start of the peace process in 1994, an independent group calling itself the Bogside Artists has decorated no fewer than a dozen gable walls along the central Rossville Street artery with iconic images of protest and violence from the civil rights struggle. Known as the People's Gallery, the artworks have become a major tourist draw for the city, though the initiative has historically had a tense relationship with the local political establishment and council (People's Gallery n.d.). The essential independence of republican neighbourhoods such as the Bogside, a key no-go area for state security forces in the early days of the conflict, is further crystallized in the famous 'You Are Now Entering Free Derry' gable wall, which also stands at a prominent location on Rossville Street. First painted in early 1969 after an attack

on civil rights marchers, the wall has become a key and evolving element in the area's identity.

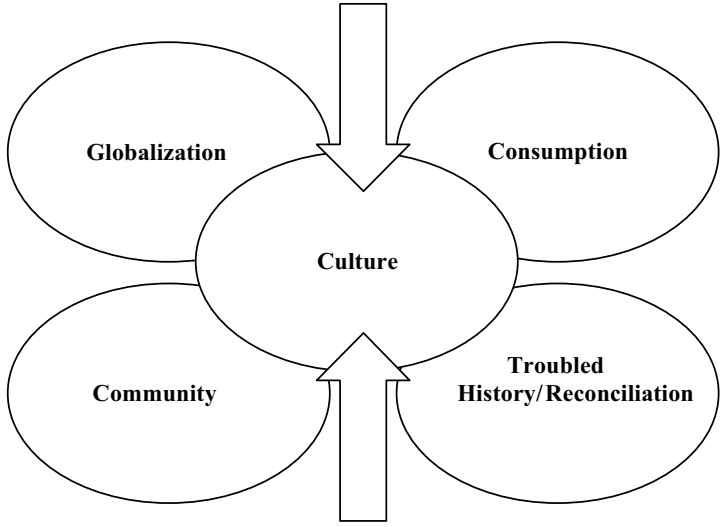
Methodology: Towards a Framework for the Analysis of Transitional Landscapes

Official discourses offer insight into the state's 'attempts to shape and regulate ways of life and identities', in effect to 'determine the sorts of statements that can be made' in public space (Ogborn 2003: 10–11). This book presents a conceptual framework for considering the spatialization of official discourses in landscape. While any number of discourses are potentially present in a given landscape (Schein 1997), the quintet examined here was selected to reflect a mix of global and local trajectories. In this way, it presents a model for assessing the ways in which universal, top-down discourses, e.g., 'globalization' and 'consumption', closely aligned to the 'space of flows' (Castells 1989), and those discourses more closely associated with 'place', e.g., 'community' and 'reconciliation and/or troubled history', are '*materialized*' (Schein 1997: 663, emphasis in original) in the landscape through public art processes. At the same time, an ambiguous 'culture' discourse (neither solely artistic nor anthropological in definition) is considered as one bridging discourse for the state as it seeks to civilize urban space for its purposes. All of these discourses are present to varying degrees in the public art case studies examined, but in each instance, one case study emerged as best-positioned along a continuum to tell the story of how a particular discourse or strategy for reconstructing space was reproduced in landscape. Each site, then, serves as a microcosm of the wider public sphere, the discourses and ideologies the state forwards there and the ways these objectives are empirically spatialized. Like all categories, these discourses represent a simplification that is problematized in practice. After all, globalization and consumption only become real in local contexts, while so-called localized discourses such as community or the troubled history/reconciliation of specific places are just as easily influenced by activities elsewhere (note, for instance, Irish American funding for the Provisional IRA). Meanwhile, the culture discourse occupies a unique position on the global-local spectrum. On one hand, a culture discourse has been used to facilitate political resistance (Abner Cohen 1993) and personal cultivation or empowerment (Williams 1976, 1982). But scholars have also explored its role in piquing desire for the purposes of global capitalism and the consumerism that fuels it (Bauman 2011; see also Sack 1988, 1992; Zukin 1995). They have assessed its role in effecting state spatial strategies to exert control over particular landscapes for economic ends (Ren and Sun 2012). Such work has exam-

ined the 'degree to which the commodity has become integral with culture' (MacCannell 1999: 21), as well as the increasing interest of all forms of government in 'controlling cultural production' (ibid.: 25), which, I suggest, in the present globalized context, has contributed to the expansion of civic identikit landscapes. Due to its inherent multivalence, the culture discourse is positioned simultaneously to seduce for the demands of global capital (Bauman 2011) and also to fulfil the 'aesthetic-expressive dimension of the modern self' (Lash and Urry 1994: 32) and the 'identity-building' (ibid.: 57) this requires. It is, quite conveniently, all things to all people. Taken together, these discourses provide a useful organizational matrix for investigating the production of transitional urban spaces, and the comparative role of various forces in delimiting spatial practice. Therefore, with some modification, the framework (see Figure 0.1) has application for a range of post-conflict and/or post-industrial societies.

The Reimagined Landscape

The Civic Identikit of Flows



The Civic Identikit of Place

Figure 0.1. A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Transitional Space.

The five public art case studies examined in-depth in subsequent chapters were arrived at after much consultation with local scholars, public officials, regeneration workers, artists and community leaders in Northern Ireland. Those selected do not claim to represent the full spectrum of Northern Irish public art in the post-conflict period. Rather they provide sightlines into the post-conflict, global-local dialectic in theory and practice. Because my focus is the material mediation of urban life and the mixing of difference cities require, I identified artworks explicitly commissioned or reconceptualized to inject a sense of civicness or 'shared space' into landscapes undergoing significant transition. As noted, each artwork tells the story of how one of the dominant discourses considered in the above model – globalization, consumption, community, troubled history/reconciliation and culture – has been materially mediated in urban space. In selecting the public art case studies, commissioning briefs and project documents were also reviewed to determine the norms and values shaping the production process. The five case studies selected include *Rise*, a large-scale gateway piece intended in part as a global branding device for Belfast on the world stage; the *Spirit of Belfast,* a contemporary city centre installation commissioned to complement a major shopping centre development and promote consumption in the retail circuit; *Hewitt in the Frame,* a community project undertaken along a peace line to facilitate positive expression and identity building for a working-class Protestant neighbourhood in West Belfast; the Diamond War Memorial in Derry, a focal point for anti-British sentiment among the city's Catholic majority that became the subject of efforts to redeploy history in the service of reconciliation; and *Mute Meadow,* an abstract work located in a former Londonderry army barracks that aimed to produce 'new meaning' for a contested site and city via innovative engagements with local culture and community groups.

The fieldwork this book is based on took place in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry primarily between May 2010 and December 2011. Roughly 60 semi-structured interviews were carried out with individuals involved in the public art process in these cities. Formal interviews were weighted in favour of those with an official role in shaping the space in question, through the funding, selection, design or consultation process. The interviews typically occurred at the individual's place of work and lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. These conversations focused on the stated objectives of the artwork and the normative policy context that backgrounded the commission, as well as symbolic content and spatial considerations. The data used in this analysis was also informed by archival resources, such as government planning strategies, tourism and culture frameworks, commissioning briefs and media reportage. Public reception was primarily gleaned through hundreds of informal vox-pop interviews, which took place in or

near the spaces where the art was located.[8] Additional fieldwork included participant observation of public spaces in both cities, as well as attendance at public art unveilings, conferences and community art workshops. Finally, the 'text' or actual artwork was a critical third component – in addition to producers and audience – in assessing these visual geographies (Rose 1996: 284). After all, the materiality of art invests it with agency (albeit secondary and inherently contingent), which, in turn, allows it to amplify the agency of 'intentional beings' (Gell 1998: 20) in the public sphere. As such, I recorded human interactions with the artwork as well as any alterations to its physical form, such as graffiti or other material additions. In one instance, a passerby was able to provide additional iPhone photographic evidence of interactions with a public art monument that had occurred in the early hours of the morning. Taken together, this data fed into my understanding of whether the art and its associated symbolisms accomplished what the officials, commissioners, artists and community facilitators responsible for its existence intended. It also helped suss out the meanings projected onto it by different publics, and the many ways individuals experienced space in concert with, or in opposition to, official discourses.

Plan of the Book

Chapter 1 reviews the role of public space in the Northern Irish conflict and its relationship to the province's sectarian geographies. It examines the post-Good Friday Agreement policy push to reshape public space as shared and open for business and the implications this has had for the visual culture of the built environment. Chapters 2–6 are organized to represent one of the dominant discourses considered in this framework and assess the extent to which the official discourse is upheld or constrained, effectively gauging the degree to which state objectives are carried out or contradicted by spatial practice. Chapter 2 looks at the globalization of Belfast's Broadway Roundabout through the lens of Manuel Castells's 'dual city' (1989) as the space of flows and places intersects and diverges in the effort to build *Rise,* a massive geodesic sculpture meant to symbolize the city's re-emergence on the world stage and contribute to the global marketing of the provincial capital. The project is considered representative of the opportunities and limitations of civic identikit art as spatial strategy, as well as the tensions inherent in processes of glocalization. Here, the globalization discourse is paramount. Chapter 3 builds on the theme of glocalization and adaptation in the examination of the regeneration of Arthur Square in Belfast City Centre. It considers the role of the public art sculpture *Spirit of Belfast* in the promotion of a consumerist 'habitus' (Bourdieu 2002). But the sculp-

ture, part and parcel of a public policy environment aimed at promoting the consumption of multinational goods, has also precipitated unintended reappropriations and counterappropriations in the ongoing struggle over space there. The ways in which landscapes of consumption, and the material artefacts that define them, are susceptible to multiple 'consumptions' is explored. Chapter 4 shifts attention to a peripheral, inner-city urban space, a sectarian interface and peace wall in West Belfast that has recently been the focus of competing efforts to create an outdoor art gallery on the Protestant side of the wall. While pointing to the limitations the 'community' discourse exerts over official goals to redevelop the site for cultural tourism through a form of community theming, this chapter also traces the influence of extra-local forces in the symbolic construction of the Protestant community. The myth of community as a coherent social entity amenable to visual representation is problematized. Chapter 5 looks at the reconciliation discourse's impact on a space of troubled history, Derry's Diamond War Memorial, which has been reconceptualized as a shared monument to joint Catholic-Protestant First World War military sacrifice, a popular trope in the post-conflict public sphere. While the cognitive 'recasting' of the memorial indicates an acknowledgement of a mutual right to civic space in Derry, a closer reading of the 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts (Scott 1990) surrounding the memorial sheds light on the resilience of existing social division. The memorial's reconceptualization further elucidates the ways civic identikit spatial strategies are glocalized to reflect local histories, thereby contributing to the civic identikit of place. Chapter 6 explores how an ambiguously defined culture discourse obfuscates (and mediates between) the top-down and bottom-up discourses considered in the previous chapters. Like many cities, Londonderry, which in 2013 assumed the mantle of inaugural UK City of Culture, has turned to culture-led regeneration as a catalyst for urban renaissance. This chapter posits that the culture discourse offers the Northern Irish state a strategy for neutralizing the divisive spatial politics of the past, but contains its own unacknowledged elisions and may ultimately prove unsustainable, as developments in 2013 and early 2014 suggest. This assessment is carried out through a critique of *Mute Meadow*, the first major artistic intervention at the former Ebrington Barracks, a symbol of erstwhile British Army domination that was a central focus of the City of Culture year. At the redeveloped Ebrington site, the evolving Northern Irish public sphere and the vision of citizenship it may encourage come into sharp relief. Here, the culture discourse emerges as the key mediator of local-global urban space in Northern Ireland, a dynamic that underscores the province's contingent position in the global order. Finally, the conclusion reiterates the importance of urban imagery and artefacts in assessing state objectives and power, and untangling the web of influences that shape official spatial

policy. It also underscores the disjunctions between image and reality across the symbolic landscapes of a 'new' Northern Ireland. The chapter speculates on the end point of 'city as civic identikit' visual trajectories and considers what these might mean globally for subjectivity and citizenship in increasingly postnational urban milieus defined by transnational flows and capital pressures. It recognizes, however, that the outcomes of material interventions in public spaces are difficult to predict, and remain hostage to a host of volatile forces.

Notes

1. Peter Robinson, personal communication, 9 December 2011.
2. The 'post-conflict' term poses obvious problems. Binns (2009) points out that a body of literature has critiqued the notion of Belfast as a 'post-conflict' city on the rise. Such work has examined the continued existence of sectarianism, violence and social exclusion in the 'new Belfast' (see Neill 2006; Shirlow 2006; Shirlow and Murtagh 2006; B. Murtagh 2008). The term 'post-conflict' is used as a matter of shorthand to refer to the state of Northern Ireland after the approval of the 1998 Belfast Agreement and is not meant to suggest the absence of conflict in Northern Irish society.
3. The 1998 multi-party peace agreement, which created new power-sharing political institutions and led to the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, is typically referred to as the Good Friday Agreement in Catholic, nationalist circles and the Belfast Agreement among Protestant unionists. These terms for the Agreement are used interchangeably.
4. Disagreements in the Northern Irish landscape are evident at every level, even in the names of cities. While Catholics tend to prefer the name Derry for the province's second city, Protestants often favour Londonderry. Here again, both appellations are used interchangeably.
5. 'Creative industries' is a broad umbrella term that takes in everything from film and traditional arts to e-learning and gaming (Northern Ireland Assembly 2011).
6. Direct rule, which ended unionist control in Northern Ireland, was first introduced in March 1972 in response to the province's worsening security situation. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement led to the creation of the Northern Ireland Assembly in December 1999. The assembly has been suspended four times since its inception. The most recent period of direct rule came to an end in 2007 after multi-party negotiations at St. Andrews resulted in an agreement to devolve policing and justice issues, and restore power-sharing between unionists and nationalists.
7. Despite her support for the project, Paisley, daughter of the prominent unionist politician Ian Paisley, ultimately was forced to abstain from the final vote. In an email message, Paisley recalled that 'had I voted in favour I was told that I would have had the party whip withdrawn', meaning she would have been removed from DUP meetings and decision-making processes. Nevertheless, in the wake of the controversy, Paisley asserts that 'unionist minds became a little less closed from that point on, and there was a little mustard seed of realisation as to how important a role the Arts play especially in a situation involving conflict' (Rhonda Paisley, email message to author, 18 January 2014).
8. See the Appendix for a breakdown of interviews by case study and subject profile.