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Conflict, territory and new technologies: online interaction at a Belfast interface

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between new information and communication

technologies and territorial boundaries through an analysis of online interaction

oriented around a sectarian interface in north Belfast. It is widely argued that new

information and communication technologies are contributing to fundamental changes

in the nature of territory and boundaries, with many arguing that they contribute to a

deterritorialisation of social interaction. This article argues that new technologies

neither transcend nor obliterate territorial boundaries but in certain senses reinforce

and extend the role of physical boundaries as orienting locations for hostile

interaction. Focusing on the interlinked territorial strategies of penetration and

surveillance it argues that online interaction facilitates the extension and elaboration

of territorial strategies oriented around physical lines of confrontation and the

associated development of new material practices oriented around the physical boundary.

BOUNDARIES, TERRITORY AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

It is widely argued that new information and communication technologies are contributing to fundamental changes in the nature of territory and boundaries. These changes are characterised variously as a process of deterritorialisation (Appadurai 1996) a simultaneous deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) or a co-evolution of technology and space (see Graham 1998 for a survey of this literature). Much of the early literature on online interaction argued that the new information and communication technologies liberated people from offline identities and locations. These arguments fitted well with globalisation theories which emphasised the erosion of territorial jurisdictions, the death of distance, the emergence of a space of flows and the unanchoring of people from place. Cyberspace, in this formulation, was a "domain which has no territorial boundaries" (a view described by Loader 1997: 1). Deterritorialisation was a central theme in writing on the new technologies (See Graham 1998 for a critique of this literature).

More recent work acknowledges the fundamental shifts in the nature of space but emphasizes the persistent importance of space, place and territory. The new technologies "…are bound up in the active construction of space and place" as Graham puts it (1998 174) while Crang et al argue that we need to examine "…the (re)territorialisations produced through the incorporation of the virtual into other geographies" (Crang, Crang and May 1999: 12). Online interaction and offline

contexts have to be understood together, as they are in the recent ethnographic literature surveyed by Leander and McKim which "has begun to document how online and offline practices and spaces are co-constituted, hybridized, and embedded within one another" (2003, 223).

Territoriality is one of the key concepts necessary for any analysis of the relationships between online interaction and offline spaces. Characterizing territoriality as a strategy for exercising control, Sack has emphasized the extraordinary power inherent in the drawing and maintaining of boundaries (1986). Sack notes that the power of boundaries derives to a great extent from their simplicity and clarity as a form of communication (1986: 32). As a powerful and simple form of communication, boundaries are integral to online interaction and these online boundaries are embedded in, and inseparable from, offline bounding practices and territorial frameworks. As Paasi notes, territoriality "…is still in use 'in the world of flows' but the forms in which it occurs must be much more complicated than before" (1999a, 72-73). Territoriality and bounding remain powerful and invaluable concepts for understanding online interaction while online interaction has direct implications for action oriented around territorial boundaries.

This article focuses on the inter-related territorial strategies of surveillance and penetration to explore wider issues in the relationship between boundaries and new information and communication technologies. It looks at these issues in the context of urban ethnic division in Northern Ireland, focusing on online interaction associated with one physical line of confrontation in the city of Belfast. It outlines the way in which new technologies have been appropriated in this context to extend existing

territorial strategies in a situation of conflict. It argues that in certain senses the physical boundary gains intensified importance and significance as new technologies reinforce its role as an orienting location for confrontation.

CONTEXT

Territory as both stake and strategy has been at the heart of violent conflict in Northern Ireland. Political competition and political discourse has been strongly oriented around the disputed international border since the establishment of Northern Ireland as a political entity in 1920. Internal sectarian boundaries gain much of their intensity from the way in which they are related to the longer-term dispute over the international border (Boal 1994; O'Dowd; 1994; O'Dowd 1998).

High levels of sectarian residential segregation existed at the foundation of Northern Ireland. Segregation was intensified by discriminatory housing policies and was further intensified in the course of violent conflict from 1968 onwards. As Bollens (2000) and Murtagh (2002) note, increasing segregation was not simply a product of popular action but part of a process in which government housing policy was deeply implicated. At many urban locations blurred sectarian boundaries took on a sharp physical form as dividing walls and fences were built from 1969 onwards. While the barriers reduced contact they also served paradoxically as sites of contact and communication, much of it hostile (Feldman 1991; Jarman 2002; Jarman 2004; Shirlow 2003a; Shirlow 2003b). Walls and fences became in a sense the face of the other community, providing a location at which communication with this imagined, territorially defined audience was possible. The location signals the audience addressed and adds to the message conveyed, as in the case of murals and graffiti

positioned to be visible to an audience on the other side of the sectarian interface (Jarman 1998).

Segregated neighbourhoods are by no means monolithic and there is wide variation in the extent to which residents identify with the dominant political sentiments in their neighbourhoods (Shirlow 2003b). Much of the work of defining entire areas as mutually hostile is done at the physical boundary where the violent actions of often small and unrepresentative groups reinforce perceptions of two monolithic, opposing and territorially defined communities, defined by, and oriented around the physical boundary between them. As a key symbolic location for defining the areas it separates, the significance of the boundary extends throughout these areas and is crucial to their definition (Paasi 1996).

In the wake of the paramilitary ceasefires in Northern Ireland in 1994 street violence intensified at interface locations in Belfast and several new peace lines were built. Paradoxically, the end of the 'shooting war' had opened up the space for regular large-scale street violence. Paramilitary campaigns were formally brought to an end but conflict oriented around local sectarian boundaries persisted and even intensified.

One of the most violent interfaces in recent years has been the Whitewell interface on the northern outskirts of Belfast running between Whitewell, a Catholic neighbourhood and the adjoining Protestant neighbourhoods of Whitecity and Graymount. Between 1996 and 1999 police recorded 757 incidents of criminal damage, 163 assaults and 83 incidents of riot at this interface, making it one of the most intensely concentrated sites of violence in Northern Ireland (Jarman 2002: 11;

McCaffrey, 2005). In 2001 and 2002 three local teenagers died violently in separate incidents related to the conflict, two of them Catholics shot dead by Loyalist paramilitary organisations, one a Protestant killed in an incident at the interface. These deaths lent, and continue to lend, a particular intensity to conflict in the area.

(insert figure 1 about here)

Adoption of new media technologies has had a direct impact on patterns of street violence in Belfast. Mobile phones, text messaging and the Internet have been used on a number of occasions to organise riots at pre-arranged times in pre-arranged venues, according to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (BBC News, 6/9/05: Hunter 3/2/05). New technologies have also been deployed in novel schemes to prevent violence. Community workers and mediation workers have been involved in establishing extensive mobile phone networks in Belfast from 1997 onwards which aimed to defuse tensions by maintaining multiple lines of communication between key individuals on opposite sides of the physical barriers (Hamilton 2001; Jarman 1999; Jarman 2002). The installation of CCTV cameras at interface areas in recent years has also had an impact, displacing some of the interface violence to spaces beyond sight of the cameras (Jarman 2004).

In addition to this, large numbers of websites related to the politics of conflict in Northern Ireland have been established. In 2004 there were almost 300 Ulster loyalist and unionist websites, for example (O Dochartaigh 2005). There are no figures available for the number of Irish nationalist or republican websites but they are likely to number in the hundreds as well. Many of these sites can be mapped directly on to

specific physical locations and several sites are explicitly mapped onto segregated neighbourhoods at interface locations in Belfast. In 2001 and 2002 three websites associated with the Whitecity and Whitewell areas were established.

Some time before November 2001 a website was established for the Whitewell Defenders Flute Band (hereafter WDFB) a loyalist flute band based in Whitecity[i]. Flute bands such as the WDFB provide a major social outlet for young people in Protestant working-class areas and are often highly political (Bell 1990; Bryan 2000). The band was at the heart of regular disputes over local parade routes and its website openly displayed the emblems of the loyalist paramilitary organisations, the UDA and the UFF. As such, the site was directly associated with an intensely local network which was central to continuing tensions on the ground.

In 2002 a website called *Whitecity under attack* was established, apparently by the webmaster for the WDFB. It represented Whitecity as a beleaguered loyalist stronghold under siege from hostile surrounding Irish republicans. Later in 2002 an individual in Whitewell established *Whitewell under attack* to directly address the case made on the *Whitecity under attack* site[ii] (*Whitewell under attack* webmaster, interview). This site argued that aggression and violence was generated primarily from Whitecity. Although this site did not have the clear organisational connections of the WDFB site the use of photographs taken locally, some of them apparently taken covertly, and the detailed references to local incidents, served to map this site closely onto Whitewell.

These sites quickly became a focus for intense, and intensely local interaction, between people located on either side of the sectarian interface. The bulk of contributors to the guestbooks claimed residence in north Belfast and the overwhelming majority of interaction was intensely local in its concerns, making detailed reference to local places and incidents. Of 127 messages posted to the Whitewell Road guestbook over a one month period in early 2004, for example, 105 came from people who gave their location as north Belfast or whose detailed references to local events indicated close familiarity with the Whitewell interface. A further seven messages from contributors who gave locations outside north Belfast related directly to local topics. Of 111 messages posted to the WDFB guestbook over a one month period in May and June 2005, 73 were local while a further 27 came from contributors outside the area whose messages related to local topics. These messages provide a record of an intense, novel and locally concentrated interaction marked by high levels of hostility.

The intensity and novelty of the discussion, the level of local knowledge displayed by contributors and the fact that, amidst the hostility, competing explanations of contentious local incidents were passed between people located on different sides of the physical boundary, were striking and novel. The new technologies had facilitated the development of significant new lines of locally concentrated communication which both crossed the boundary and were oriented around it, much like the mobile phone network aimed at reducing violence at interface locations in Belfast, but with very different implications.

METHODOLOGY

This article analyses territorial dimensions of three websites associated with the neighbouring districts of Whitewell and Whitecity and over four hundred messages posted between 2003 and 2005 to the guestbooks associated with these sites. It also draws on semi-structured interviews with a city councillor, a community worker and the webmaster of one of the sites, all of them based in Whitewell and with three people involved in mediation and cross-community communication in north Belfast[iii]. The article draws too on less formal conversations with other politicians, community workers, academics and mediation workers concerned with conflict in north Belfast.

Attempts were made to interview those running the websites but this proved difficult. The webmasters guard their privacy and none of the sites provide an email contact address or any information about the webmaster's identify or location. Several attempts to contact the WDFB webmaster via the site guestbook met with no response. There is no means of online communication with the *Whitecity* site, which was apparently established by the WDFB webmaster.[iv] It was however possible to make contact with, and to interview, the *Whitewell* webmaster.

Records of the content of these three websites and their guestbooks, first established in late 2001 and in 2002, are incomplete. Both the *Whitecity under attack* and *Whitewell under attack* websites have been hacked at different stages by political opponents. The guestbooks of both sites have also been shut down by service providers at different stages, though new guestbooks were later established. In July or August 2005 the *Whitewell under attack* Webmaster removed all content on the site and its guestbook, though a front page for the site remained available. This step may

have been related to the increasing attention the site was attracting. The third site, the *Whitewell Defenders Flute Band*, was completely revised in 2005, becoming much more professional looking, and the contents of the old site and the old guestbook became unavailable. The one project that might have saved these materials, the *Internet Archive*, did not archive the guestbooks and archived little of the site content. Thus the bulk of the material discussed in this article is no longer available online and the regular disruption of these sites made it impossible to gather a full record of the interaction.

The analysis of guestbook interaction is based on 423 entries saved from the three guestbooks at various stages between November 2003 and August 2005. A necessarily incomplete assessment shows that a minimum of 1,700 entries, and probably several hundred more, were posted on the combined guestbooks up to August 2005.[v] Quotations from the messages preserve the original spelling and use of capitals for emphasis.

Names, locations and other details have been deleted from guestbook exchanges quoted in this article to protect the identity of individuals named in those exchanges. The webmasters guard their anonymity carefully, to the extent that they do not even provide email addresses at which they can be contacted. Virtually all of the guestbook contributors used pseudonyms and avoided giving information that would identify them. Contributors sometimes displayed an acute awareness that hostile forces could monitor their contributions. As one contributor put it

…incase your watching this site MR POLICE OFFICER GO ****

YOURSELF DOES THIS LOOK LIKE A FACE THAT GIVES A ****

Whitewell Road Guest Book, 5/12/03.

(Emphasis in the original. Swear words in the message have been blanked out

by the automatic censorship built into the guestbook software.)

In the circumstances it would be redundant to supplement the measures taken by

contributors and webmasters to conceal their identity. These guestbook contributions

are analogous in many ways to the writing of graffiti. They are intimate, local, and

personalised and were not intended for a wider audience but they have been

deliberately put in the public domain anonymously as a means of reaching a hostile

target audience. As such they are a form of public communication which can be

legitimately analysed and quoted without seeking the permission of contributors.

ASSESSING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ONLINE INTERACTION

Online interaction associated with the Whitwell interface involves a relatively small

number of people, a couple of hundred at most. Many of them are apparently young

male teenagers and the interaction does not provide a representative sample of wider

feeling in the areas concerned. Nonetheless, the kind of confrontational attitudes

expressed in this interaction are widely held in segregated areas of north Belfast (see,

for example, Shirlow's work on Ardoyne, 2003a; 2003b). This interaction may not be

strictly representative of local opinion but this is not to say that it is not significant. It

is arguable that hostile communication and violence at the physical boundary is

similarly unrepresentative of local opinion. Political graffiti, casual rioting and

sectarian attacks often involve relatively small numbers of young teenagers and

children, often acting in defiance of dominant opinion in the areas in which they live. In some respects teenagers and children become involved in confrontation across the interface, not as representatives of their communities, but as people forced to the margins of their communities. Jarman (2002) notes that many teenagers gather at interface areas because they are moved on from other gathering places in their own communities. As one interviewee put it "No one lives there so we get less bother from our own community" (Jarman 2002: 32). These teenagers are widely perceived, on the other side of the interface, as representative of their communities, and their actions are very important in shaping the territorial character and boundaries of these areas.

In this sense, online interaction mirrors hostile contact offline as younger and less moderate members of the community come to the fore in defining their community at its outer boundaries, reinforcing perceptions on both sides of monolithic and fundamentally opposed communities. Shirlow, describing the diversity of opinion within segregated neighbourhoods, notes that it is difficult for residents to "publicly challenge" violence emanating from their own communities (2003b; 77) and argues that "Fear of the 'other' community was constantly employed as a tactic in the political homogenisation of communities" (2003a; 80). An example of the way in which these dynamics persisted online is illustrated in one notable interaction on the Whitewell Road Guestbook. In a rare intervention expressing a 'moderate' standpoint, one Catholic resident of Whitewell, signing themselves 'Anon', challenged the opinions expressed on the guestbook, asserting that they didn't represent everyone in Whitewell, while conceding that they probably represented majority opinion in the area:

21/3/05

What age are you all ? carrying on like children in a playground!... We are all entitled to live in peace , so whatever your grudges get over yourselves and focus your efforts on the future of this area!...In my view both sides are as bad as each other !!

This message drew a response which equated this criticism with not being a 'true Catholic' and which provides an example of the way in which the work of 'political homogenisation' was continued online.

23/3/05

WELL ANON JUST IN CASE U HAVEN'T HEAR LONGLANDS[vi] WAS ATTACKED LAST NITE WITH PAINT BOMBS. SO TELL ME AGAIN ABOUT PEACE OR WAR… LOYALISTS R THE ONES WHO ARE DOING THE ATTACKING. IF YOU WERE A TRUE CATHOLIC YOU WOULD BE STANDING UP FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE WHITEWELL NOT PUTTING THEM DOWN FOR SOMETHING THEY HAVEN'T DONE.

Just as many of those who live in segregated areas in Belfast forge connections with people outside the area on the basis of shared interests which have little to do with local identity (Shirlow 2003b), it seems likely that many local people who use the Internet are interested in websites and discussion forums that have nothing to do with their local area and have little or no interest in online interaction oriented around the local boundary. The importance of the local online interaction derives not from its

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representativeness but precisely from the fact that it continues a pattern of unrepresentative but politically significant hostile contact oriented around a local boundary that serves to marginalise more moderate voices.

The numbers of those directly involved in online interaction may be relatively small but awareness of this interaction is not restricted to direct participants. It filters out to a much wider local audience through local media coverage and word of mouth. Several reports in a local newspaper, the *Newtownabbey Times*, and one story in the Northern Ireland edition of the *Daily Mirror*, a British tabloid newspaper, contributed to widespread local awareness. The three interviewees based in Whitewell all spoke of the websites as a subject of street corner conversation in the area. They also reported that at least some people locally attached a lot of significance to the messages appearing online.[vii] According to local SDLP[viii] councillor Pat Convery "The perception is in people's minds that people are looking out for them" and the rumours about the messages posted online had led some in Whitewell to ask "Is there somebody watching us? …Are they targeting?" He described the way in which information about the websites spread locally as being like a game of "Chinese Whispers" where information became distorted as it was passed by word of mouth from person to person.

The online interaction caused sufficient concern that existing channels of communication between community activists in Whitecity and Whitewell which were used to reduce violence in the area were used to make face-to-face complaints about some of the messages on the Whitewell guestbook. As a direct result of this

communication the Whitewell Webmaster began to delete personal details posted to the guestbook by visitors.[ix]

TERRITORY, CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The intersection between conflict, territory and new technologies has been a major theme in the work of a number of social theorists in recent years. Mann notes, for example, how the new communication and transport infrastructure of the 19th century increased the infrastructural penetration of modern states across their territory, facilitating much stronger central control, and contributing to the increased boundedness of state territories (1986a). Giddens has also written extensively about the way in which new transport and communication technologies contributed to fundamental changes in the nature of warfare and the modern state, outlining the direct relationship between new communication technologies and the changing territorial configuration of conflict (1985).

The relationship between technological change, territory and conflict has also been noted in the context of Northern Ireland. The development of a railway network in the 19th century, for example, allowed large numbers of people to travel longer distances to take part in political parades and demonstrations, thus contributing to increasing levels of violence and tension surrounding certain events (Stewart 1977: 73). As a result, the scale of confrontation at certain events shifted from the local to the regional while transport terminals and travel routes became new sites for confrontation between opposing groups. The spread of car ownership in the 20th century was similarly important in changing the territorial configuration of violent conflict as cars allowed a much deeper and faster penetration of segregated areas than was previously possible, helping to erode the sanctuary function of segregated sectarian neighbourhoods (Feldman 1991).

New communication technologies similarly contribute to changes in the territorial configuration of conflict. The discussion below focuses on the related territorial strategies of surveillance and penetration to examine the way in which new communication technologies are appropriated to extend and elaborate on an existing stock of territorial strategies developed in the course of thirty years of violent conflict, and the associated development of new material practices oriented around the physical boundary.

Communicating surveillance

> We… named our targets and pointed out the house they were in, and then the room they were in. 'Tell them we were here, tell them who we are, and tell them they won't be so lucky next time.' All of that was designed to put fear into them, to let them know that they were being targeted…" (member of loyalist paramilitary assassination group, quoted in Crawford 2003: 181)

Surveillance is a deeply territorial strategy for exercising power, marking out spaces as sites of surveillance with the intention of inhibiting, shaping and controlling action in those spaces. Foucault characterised surveillance as a distinctively modern strategy for exercising power at the intersection of knowledge and space and emphasised that much of this power derives from communicating the fact of surveillance, or potential surveillance in order "…to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1977, 201) In this sense communicating surveillance is as important as the surveillance itself, an idea inherent in Bentham's original conception of the panopticon (1995).

Boundaries can contribute to a sense of security by securing a space free from surveillance by potentially hostile external forces. Communicating the capacity to conduct surveillance within those boundaries provides a powerful way to erode that sense of security. In the extract that begins this section a former member of a UDA assassination team describes the communicating of their capacity for territorial penetration and surveillance as an integral part of the activities they were engaged in, as an act directed towards the same ends as the violence itself, reducing security. The quote describes their parting message to the occupants of a house in a Catholic area which they had taken over for an assassination bid on people in a neighbouring house which they were unable to carry out. It illustrates the directness of the relationship between surveillance and violence and the importance of communicating such surveillance.

Emphasizing the territorial dimensions to surveillance in Northern Ireland, Feldman argues that "Projects of surveillance regulate movement between spaces and create a spatialized social life mediated by rigid and normative geographies" (1997 46). In a situation of violent conflict, to communicate surveillance of a space is to mark it out as an unsafe space. It is an act intimately connected with the possibility of violence. As Feldman argues "…seeing and killing, being seen and being killed, are entangled and exchangeable in the ecology of fear and anxiety" (1997 29). Zurawski, focusing on popular rather than state surveillance also outlines the way in which 'being seen' can have direct violent consequences in Northern Ireland (2005 503).

Much of the work on the relationship between surveillance and technological change has focused on the way in which personal data is aggregated by databases and the way in which this process facilitates 'social sorting' (Ball and Webster 2003: Haggerty and Ericson 2000: Lyon 1994: Lyon 2004). There has been far less emphasis on developments in embodied surveillance, although new forms of embodied surveillance such as proposed schemes to use intensified citizen surveillance in 'The War on Terror' have been discussed (Lyon 2003: 56-61). New technologies facilitate a dramatic extension of embodied surveillance by non-state actors and individuals. Cheap and simple new technologies such as camcorders and mobile phone cameras facilitate surveillance while the Internet and mobile phones provide new media for the crucial purpose of communicating that surveillance across physical lines of confrontation. As a result, there is a wide range of new ways in which individuals and non-state actors can mark spaces as sites of fear through communicating the surveillance of those spaces.

The guestbooks and websites dealt with in this article were used extensively to communicate surveillance. One way in which this was done was through the placing of photographs on the websites. The *Whitewell under attack* website, for example, displayed several photographs taken locally in which the faces of individuals or groups of people were clearly visible. The local situations in which they were pictured aimed to demonstrate their associations with Loyalism. They included images of people welcoming a loyalist band, of people displaying loyalist flags, taking part in Orange marches and being present at a riot scene. Some of the images appear to have been taken from a passing vehicle. These images, many of them taken around the

sectarian interface, marked out spaces along the interface as sites vulnerable to surveillance.

A simpler form of surveillance was also regularly communicated in guestbook messages which identified places as sites of surveillance through the simple act of associating person and place. The example below is typical of many messages at whose core is the threat implicit in simply fixing an individual in place, indicating a capacity to locate the person and marking out assumed sanctuary spaces of home or neighbourhood as sites subject to surveillance.

> I WAS DRIVING UP IN MY CAR UP THE WHITEWELL RD TWO
> NIGHT WHO DID I SEE BUT THAT B@stard[x] [woman's full name] out
> with her dog.so till[xi] [woman's first name] off [full address]…her dog looks
> dead like her
> (Whitewell Road Guest Book, 12/12/03)

In the example below people are associated with work locations and the make and colour of a car, the kind of information that has frequently been used to target people for assassination.

> …WE KNOW THAT WEE FUC.KER FROM WHITECITY IS STILL
> WORKING IN [named work location] (BAWNMORE)[xii]…AND [man's first
> name] WONT BE SO LUCKY THE NEXT TIME,…BY THE WAY ANY
> JOBS GOIN AT [name of local firm], [woman's first name]S PLAICE, [make

and colour of car],IF NOT MAYBE IN [named work location] WHERE HER

HUSBAND [man's first name] WORKS

(Whitewell Road Guest Book, 1/12/03)

New media also provided the opportunity to directly respond to surveillance and

intimidation, turning surveillance into a process of interchange. Messages aimed at

conveying surveillance were regularly challenged, dismissed and ridiculed as being

common knowledge, out of date or inaccurate. "…AS FOR THE CRAP ABOUT

CERTAIN NAMED INDIVIDUALS(WHITE VAN…BLUE ROVER)BIGGEST

LOAD A SH/TE", as one contributor put it (Whitewell Road Guest Book, 1/12/03).

The continuity with existing practices of popular surveillance (Zurawski 2005) are as

important as the novelties. Among the intimidation techniques used in Northern

Ireland in the early 1970s Darby noted the posting of bullets and sympathy cards,

anonymous phone calls and the posting of death notices in newspapers (1986; 86).

When the postal service was first established it provided a novel and convenient

means of communicating threats. The telephone facilitated threatening phone-calls

that made it easier to erode the security of domestic space. Newspapers provided a

way to address a mass audience. Cameras provided a new means to communicate

surveillance by sending a photograph to the person targeted. As with these earlier

examples, the new technologies have been appropriated to extend and elaborate on an

existing stock of territorial strategies, but in a way that significantly alters those

strategies. The new lines of communication both crossing, and oriented around a local

boundary, make it possible to address elaborate and detailed information on

surveillance to a territorially-defined audience rather than to a single individual.

While such messages have long been conveyed in graffiti the websites allowed for significant elaboration on such messages.

In providing channels for much more elaborate communication of surveillance across the physical boundary, and new media for capturing images and information, the new technologies provide both motivation and means for intensified popular surveillance around the boundary. They thereby contribute to an intensification of activity at the boundary.

Territorial penetration

A key function of boundaries is to provide security, to create a safe zone in which to operate by securing its perimeter. In one of the earliest studies to discuss the way in which graffiti is used to bound urban territories, Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) argued that:

> To define a small space of one's own permits a higher level of social control to be maintained, by surveillance, by restricting entry to recognised friends, and by limiting the range of acceptable behaviour within the area. Establishing the territory generates security…

Breaching boundaries provides a powerful way to erode security, affecting action within the boundaries by communicating the message that the boundaries are not secure. Surveillance constitutes a form of penetration in its own right and is arguably integral to all forms of penetration. The discussion below focuses on territorial

strategies that include elements of surveillance, but that also involve the calculated physical penetration of boundaries.

The penetration of territory, whether by perpetrators of violence, by marchers, or by the hurling or firing of missiles from outside the territory can constitute both a provocation, asserting dominance and ownership of the territory, and penetration, an act eroding the security of the territory. Territorial penetration has been a central feature of violent conflict in Northern Ireland. Feldman argues that the penetration of segregated areas by assassination squads "transgresse[d] the territorial integrity of the victim's community" (1991: 73-75), that killings of people within the imagined sanctuary space of a segregated neighbourhood "violate[d] the spatial constructs" that contributed to a sense of security. In recent years some rioters in Belfast have gone to ever greater lengths to reach further and further into neighbouring areas with missiles, using rockets and catapults rather than just stones and petrol bombs to extend their reach, aiming to attack the whole territory rather than just the margins, extending the penetration and the associated erosion of security and the sanctuary of the territory.

The new technologies facilitate a significant extension of penetrative territorial strategies, strikingly illustrated by the example below. In continuation of a discussion on the Whitewell Road Guest Book in December 2003 arguing that Whitecity would cease to be a Protestant neighbourhood because it was emptying out, and that it would become Catholic, that the territory would be overwhelmed and obliterated, the following exchanges took place.

    9/12/03 7pm

BAWNMORE REPUBLICAN YOUTH…

BAWNMORE

IS THERE ANYONE LEFT IN WHITECITY?

9/12/03 10.49pm

whitecity willy

w.d.f.b.[xiii]

loyalist whitewell[xiv]

…why not come in and find out!!!!

9/12/03 11.52pm

BAWNMORE REPUBLICAN YOUTH…

BAWNMORE

…WELL WILY,ACTUALLY I WALKED THROUGH YOUR SCUM

ESTATE LAST NIGHT,10.45,DOWN THE SERPENTINE,DOWN

THORBURN ROAD,DOWN MULDERG… ACTUALLY I DO THE SAME

3OR4 NIGHTS A WEEK,,NOT A FU CKING PROBLEM…'

The claim in the above message is clearly exaggerated. The level of detail provided

suggests some knowledge of the neighbouring area but the knowledge might well

have been acquired without going into the area. It does not convincingly communicate territorial penetration.

> 10/12/03, 2.03am
>
> sean south[xv]
>
> whitewell
>
> well willy sinced to[xvi] asked nicely we were in 2nite, some stupid cu/ny even directed us back on the whitewell…walk straight past [nickname]s house, his house his[xvii] well done up, il give him that, then walk on down past the club, then on to the whitewell, even the cops drove past…'

The detail given in the message above however, is more convincing, making reference to less well known locations and adding a few touches of detail. It was detailed enough to provoke the response below, which relied on current local detail to refute the claim of penetration.

> 10/12/03 9.22 am
>
> whitecity willy
>
> wdfb
>
> loyalist whitewell
>
> yeah and im the king of sheba ffs[xviii] hope u liked [nickname]s house lol[xix] he don't live here anymore it was [nickname]s offies u walked past ffs wise up cockhead

10/12/03 2.20pm

sean south

prod free whitewell

o is that a fact willy, don't talk shi/te ya p/rick how come his [make and colour

of car] was parked outside his house, not in the drive way but infront of the

house. O i see that he has sold his we sh.ity caravan everytime u go through

white city its in some1 elses driveway… white city is a nice we[xx] place i cant

wait til[xxi] move in to it.

i also see that the big hard men who live further on white city have we uda

placks[xxii] on their houses, they are mad! Yip mad to think they are safe cause

they live in the middle of the estate…maybe see u in the street some time, ma

chara![xxiii]

The detail in this message is much more convincing and much more explicit in its

communication of penetration and the implications of this penetration. It emphasizes

the fact that the penetration went to the heart of the area and asserts that even this core

should not be considered safe. It derives its power from the level of detail. It suggests

a new form of territorial penetration that is meaningful only because online

interaction provides a way in which it can be communicated to a territorially defined

audience associated with that penetrated neighbourhood. It is followed by a message

from another contributor that makes explicit the threat implicit in the penetration

described above.

12/12/03 3.15am

Trodai[xxiv]

Whitewell

Whitecity[xxv], anyone loyalist really, when your sleepin at night and you hear the vroom vroom through the street…be afraid cos we can/will/are gonna take your estate. Im serious here it si gonna happen..YOUR AREA IS NOT SAFE, BELIEVE.

These concerted attempts to reduce a sense of territorial security by communicating penetration and to provoke by asserting dominance and entitlement to the territory derive power from local detail of a kind that would be difficult to communicate through older forms of media used for communication across this local boundary. The central purpose of the act is provocation and that purpose can only be achieved if the act is communicated. In providing a new medium for the communication of penetration the new technologies provide a motivation for new forms of activity at the physical boundary, arguably adding another layer of meaning to the boundary rather than transcending or eroding it.

While the example above illustrates a new form of penetration, the example below shows how new technologies can be used to extend the penetrative dimensions of existing practices, and illustrates the way in which online interaction is bound up with the intensification of popular surveillance oriented around the boundary.

In March 2005 the loyalist Whitewell Defenders Flute Band succeeded in walking along the Whitewell Road despite a legal ban, symbolically penetrating the neighbouring Catholic area. Guestbook contributors on both sides provided detailed and competing eyewitness accounts of the events around the march and claimed to have video footage backing their arguments. One participant in the parade from Whitecity wrote:

> "WE DID HAVE CAMCORDERS WE HAVE THE FILMS WE HAVE
> NATIONALISTS SPITTING ON UNIFORM MEMBERS PLUS THE
> SECTARIAN ABUSE WE HAD TO TAKE"
> 2/3/05

These claims drew responses from contributors based in Whitewell, including one which countered loyalist claims with video evidence from the other side of the interface.

> "I refute yr claim you had camcorders as I personally saw none… but im now aware you wernt the only ones to have camcorders if what you claim is true…when women and children were brought home by bus they got of the bus at the top of the serpintine road and walked back down Gray's lane to meet the band, are you going to deney that, because that's all on home video"
> 4/3/05

Thus the territorial dimensions to parades, understood by many as symbolic penetration and claiming of space, have now been extended. A parade can now

represent an opportunity, on both sides, for the capture of video and still images whose existence can then be communicated across the physical line of confrontation as well as being circulated internally. It becomes an occasion of intensified surveillance activity. In this sense the penetrative dimensions of a long-established territorial practice are extended and the territorial incursion gains rather than loses meaning.

CONCLUSION

New information and communication technologies including email, the Web, text messaging, instant messaging and mobile phones have facilitated the rapid multiplication of new lines of many-to-many communication across territorial boundaries at a variety of scales. Far from transcending boundaries, these new lines of communication have very specific territorial configurations and are oriented to varying degrees around the boundaries they cross. In addition to this, new visual technologies, including mobile phone cameras, cheap camcorders and digital cameras, are being used intensively to demarcate spaces of surveillance and penetration at lines of confrontation. This demarcation can now be much more easily communicated to people on the other side of a territorial boundary.

The case dealt with in this article illustrates how these new channels of communication and these new technologies for demarcating space facilitate an extension and elaboration of territorial strategies for exercising power, generating new forms of action around a physical boundary. While the case dealt with here is an exceptional one, its very exceptionality is valuable in starkly illustrating the potential inherent in the new technologies. And while the boundaries dealt with are local

boundaries with no administrative standing, some of the conclusions might usefully be applied to other kinds of boundaries at a variety of scales.

One key element in the changing territorial configuration of conflict is the way in which new technologies facilitate a rapid proliferation in the representation of boundaries. Extra representational layers are piled up on existing boundaries, reifying and naturalising them in the course of popular interaction oriented around these boundaries. The work of Paasi emphasizes the importance of representations of a territory and of its boundaries in the institutionalization of 'regions', a term Paasi uses to describe bounded units at a variety of scales, while focusing primarily on state boundaries. This process "… includes the production and reproduction of regional consciousness and images of the region… as part of the ongoing process of social reproduction" (1996: 35-6). Paasi stresses the extent to which boundaries are reproduced in everyday interaction, arguing that "…the forms and rules of territorial discourses are mediated and sedimented in the practical consciousness of individuals, to become one part of their local daily routines and their social identities" (1999a: 85). Paasi stresses the role of state institutions in representing boundaries but the new technologies facilitate a radical decentralisation of this process. Residents throughout an interior space can now play a much more direct and significant role in representing and defining that region at its outer boundaries. Territorial identities can now be reproduced, negotiated and challenged in direct contact with a territorially-defined hostile 'other' to a much greater extent than was possible before, with significant implications for the way in which territorial boundaries are related to identity formation and reproduction.

Focusing on state boundaries, Paasi describes how boundaries are reproduced not just at the boundaries but throughout the internal spaces they enclose and argues that "… boundaries are thus one part of the discursive landscape of social power, control and governance, which extends itself into the whole society and which is produced and reproduced in various social and cultural practices" (Newman and Paasi 1998: 196). In allowing people to take part in cross-boundary confrontations without being present at the boundary itself, the new technologies facilitate a thickening of the boundary's presence throughout the internal spaces it encloses. The external presence against which the interior is defined is now present in new ways throughout those internal spaces, in the cross-boundary encounters people engage in from their homes.

One of the most striking features of this case is the way in which online interaction is bound up with new forms of action at the physical boundary. While much of the work on space and new technologies has focused on metaphors, imagined spaces and the narrative construction of boundaries, this case illustrates the way in which the new technologies are also deeply implicated in material changes on the ground. Far from new technologies obliterating boundaries, their use facilitates the extension of territoriality as a strategy for exercising power. This technologically enhanced territoriality can reinforce or even intensify the orienting function of physical boundaries as locations for confrontation and contribute to an intensification of activity on the ground.

Michael Mann argues that there is a long-term historical trend towards "increasing boundedness", facilitated by new technologies in different eras, and argues that "… the increase in territorial penetration [of the state]… has dramatically increased

territorial boundedness…[and] the territorial boundedness of social interaction".

(Mann 1986a: 134). While new communication technologies might seem to signal a

reversal of this trend in permitting the rapid intensification of interaction across

boundaries, this article argues that, in certain senses, the trend towards increased

boundedness is proceeding and even intensifying. Cross-boundary interaction oriented

around boundaries, between people located in, or identified with, tightly-bounded

territories, radically erodes the territorial boundedness of social interaction, but

simultaneously adds multiple new layers to the boundaries, strengthening the

significance of boundaries as defining and orienting lines of interaction. The very act

of crossing the boundaries reproduces the boundaries more intensively and

immediately in the everyday lives of the huge numbers of people now involved in

novel forms of cross-boundary interaction, with direct implications for action on the

ground.

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[i] The use of the name 'Whitewell' deliberately associates the band with the greater Whitewell area, now mainly Catholic in population but including key buildings associated with the Protestant community.

[ii] Interview with the *Whitewell under attack* Webmaster, Belfast, June 2005.

[iii] Interviewees included Sean Brennan, Edward de Bono Foundation Northern Ireland; Pat Convery, Social Democratic and Labour Party member of Belfast City Council, deputy-mayor of Belfast and resident of Whitewell; John Loughran, Intercomm; Paul McKernan, community worker, Greencastle Community Empowerment Scheme; Seán O Baoill, Mediation Northern Ireland; Webmaster, *Whitewell under attack*. All interviews were conducted in Belfast in June 2005.

[iv] Virtually identical URLs for the *Whitecity* site and the early version of the WDFB site strongly suggest that the same individual was responsible for both.

[v] Insert table 1 here

By September 2004 the *Whitecity under attack* guestbook had attracted 851 entries. By summer 2005 it was defunct, apparently for violating the terms of service agreement with the service provider. The *Whitewell under attack* guestbook had attracted 401 entries by February 2004 but became unavailable some time after that. A new guestbook for the site was established in January 2005 and attracted 145

entries by June 2005. By August 2005 it was unavailable. In April 2005 a new guestbook was established for a completely revamped WDFB site and by August 2005 it had attracted 303 entries.

[vi] A Catholic area near Whitewell.

[vii] Interviews with Pat Convery; Paul McKernan, and the *Whitewell under attack* Webmaster, Belfast, June 2005.

[viii] Social and Democratic Labour Party, usually characterised as the moderate Catholic party.

[ix] Interviews with Paul McKernan and the *Whitewell under attack* Webmaster, Belfast, June 2005.

[x] Contributors made use of a variety of devices to circumvent automatic censorship of swear words, as illustrated here.

[xi] tell

[xii] A Catholic area near Whitewell.

[xiii] Whitewell Defenders Flute Band

[xiv] Like the use of the name Whitewell for the band, describing Whitecity as 'Loyalist Whitewell' deliberately associates loyalism with the greater Whitewell area as a whole.

[xv] Sean South was an IRA member killed in the 1950s and memorialised in a well-known Republican ballad.

[xvi] since you

[xvii] is

[xviii] An abbreviation of 'for fuck's sake'.

[xix] An abbreviation of 'loads of laughs' or 'laughing out loud'.

[xx] wee

[xxi] to

[xxii] 'wee UDA plaques', indicating affiliation with this Loyalist paramilitary organisation.

[xxiii] 'mo chara', the Irish for 'my friend'.

[xxiv] Trodaí is the Irish for 'fighter'.

[xxv] Addressing Whitecity Willy, presumably.