Part III

The Ethics of Evidence
Recollecting and Re-Collecting

The Ethical Challenges of Social Archiving in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland

Alison Jeffers

Archives, viewed as active and interactive tools for the construction of sustained identities, are important vehicles for building the capacity to aspire among groups who need it most. (Appadurai 2003, 25)

The ethical dimensions of remembering might usefully be thought of through the activity of recollection in both its contemporary connection to remembering and its archaic sense of re-collection. Since the function of memory turned to principles of what Aleida Assmann calls ‘reactivation, reformulation and reinterpretation’ (2011, 80) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, recollecting is mostly taken to mean remembering. However, equally important is its archaic pre-sixteenth-century usage in the sense of re-collecting, which, in addition to meaning ‘recalling to memory’, had the implication of summoning up one’s spirits or courage, of gathering together after some kind of dispersal. This chapter will explore the acts of recollecting in the sense of remembering and re-collecting, of gathering and reassembling depleted resources and energies, to explore the significance and consider the ethical implications of memory following the violence of a protracted conflict. Recollection is necessary to work out appropriate ways to remember the dead of the conflict as well as how to pay attention to the continuing impact on those who remain. Re-collection is also essential in the sense of taking stock, creating an emotional inventory of capacity, strength and the desire to rebuild.

To analyse these ideas I will examine the social archiving project on Mount Vernon, a housing estate in north Belfast, to show how a social archiving project there enabled the community that took part
Figure 8.1 The mural of two hooded gunmen with the logos of the north Belfast paramilitary organisations clearly on display. Photograph by Ian Jeffers

to examine its collective archive through recollection: how they used this to re-collect and expand what Diana Taylor calls the ‘repertoire’ available to them (2003). In this process the mural shown in Figure 8.1 became a marker or touchstone of identity by absorbing and reflecting back the range of choices open to the community for its future. Part of the focus of this chapter is on the ethics of asking participants to remember or revisit a difficult and troubled past when some would argue that it would be more profitable to forget and to move on. However, this chapter argues that it is essential to undertake the kind of memory work outlined here in order to recollect or to make sense of the past and to re-collect or create a space for the new identity formations and views of history that will be needed to move away from conflict. In both of these senses the emphasis is on activity, remembering and gathering, and the key to understanding social archiving lies in thinking of it as a process of archiving rather than placing undue emphasis on the archive itself: to use Appadurai’s terminology above, archiving as an active or interactive tool.

Within theatre scholarship social archiving would be most likely to be associated with applied theatre but in practice would more accurately be
allied to community arts, a multi-arts activity where drama and theatre work is likely to take place alongside music and film making, public art works, writing and photography. Community arts methods have been used as part of a community development approach, intended to open up discussion, to consult with communities and to generate ideas and encourage self-reliance. This was the process used in the social archiving project on Mount Vernon, whereby personal memories were brought into a social arena through discussion exercises, guided imagery and personal and social history mapping before being turned into a document designed to generate wider discussion.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the political and cultural context within which the social archiving project was located before introducing the activity in detail and discussing some of the ethical challenges inherent in setting up and organising this project as well as using it as a site for research. This is followed by a discussion of Paul Ricoeur’s three levels of memory that he uses to set up the possibility of thinking about the ethics of memory, which functions here as a prelude to exploring recollecting as a collective act which is necessary to enable communities to move away from conflict. The chapter then considers the practice of re-collecting, using Pierre Nora’s notion of lieux de mémoire and Diana Taylor’s interpretation of that within the scenario of the social archiving project. Finally, Aleida Assmann’s ideas of cultural memory lead back to Arjun Appadurai’s ideas about the functions of creating an archive and the value that has emerged from archiving an ethically troubling piece of public art.

‘The Troubles’, Mount Vernon and Political Murals

The ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland are usually dated from the late 1960s to the signing of the Belfast, or Good Friday, Agreement (GFA) in 1998. The human cost of the Troubles has been immense, with an estimated 3700 people killed¹ and tens of thousands of people directly affected through mass displacement as areas have been ‘made safe’ along what Shirlow calls ‘ethno-sectarian’ lines, often by intimidation and forced removals (2006, 105).² It is broadly understood that the roots of the conflict, and the apparently slow process of moving on, despite political agreement, lie in what Neuheiser and Wolff call ‘two incompatible conceptions of national belonging’ (2003, 1). Oversimplified binary pairings of Protestants and Catholics, loyalists and republicans, unionists and nationalists are often used to describe the religious, political and ethnic divisions that have become entrenched
around these incompatible national imaginaries. The post-conflict situation has been described as one where a ‘slow and sullen peace [exists], in which people are glad to emerge from the past but deeply sceptical of the future’ (Morrow 2006, 74). One way to measure opinions on the changes wrought since the GFA is through the political murals found in Belfast (Jarman 1998; 2005; Rolston 1987, 1998, 2003b, 2010, 2013) and, to a lesser extent, Derry (Woods 1995), where they are traditionally painted on the gable ends of the terraced housing characteristic of those cities. Historically, they are associated with unionism (Hill and White 2012; Jarman 1992, 1997; McCormick and Jarman 2005; Rolston 2012, 2003a; Vannais 2001), with the first one dating from the early twentieth century when murals were painted to coincide with celebrations for 12 July, the annual Protestant commemoration of William’s defeat of the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Republican murals began to appear in the early 1980s, when depictions of the 1981 hunger strikes were painted in nationalist areas.

Many commentators perceive a post-GFA ‘softening’ of the imagery in republican murals, arguing that they are moving away from overt depictions of violence and paramilitary activity towards images emphasising political activity, community organisation and remembrance. Rolston, who has made an extensive study, reports that there was an agreement among the republican mural painters that the only guns to be depicted would be those from historic conflicts (2013, ii). This is in direct contrast with many loyalist murals, like the one on Mount Vernon, which have become more belligerent and more ‘threatening and chilling in their effect’ (Vannais 2001, 142) since 1998. Rolston suggests that this may be because loyalism feels under siege, so that the murals have become a ‘form of posturing from a people who are deeply insecure’ (2003a, 9). This is corroborated by Vannais (2001), who sees the more strident-loyalist murals representing a crisis of confidence among disillusioned Protestant working-class communities who are under the impression that ‘republicans [are] benefiting much more from peace than the loyalists’ (Rolston 2013, ii). It was against this background of continued volatility and uncertainty, especially in loyalist communities, that the social archiving project took place on Mount Vernon.

On the edge of the city centre, Mount Vernon is known as a ‘Protestant’ estate, if not a loyalist one. Located on the side of the Cave Hill, which dominates the landscape as it sweeps down one side of Belfast Lough, it has been described as ‘looking like a broken-down fortress’ from the outside (McKay 2005, 20). Mount Vernon is classed as an area of economic deprivation by Belfast City Council and has...
a reputation for having a strong presence of the loyalist paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Furthermore, the approach to the estate is dominated by a well-known mural showing the insignia of the North Belfast Battalion of the UVF and two masked gunmen alongside the slogan ‘Prepared for Peace Ready for War’ (see Figure 8.1). Painted after the signing of the GFA, this mural could be seen as a chilling performance of extreme ambivalence about the ‘peace process’ on the part of the loyalist paramilitaries who painted it.

The social archiving project was set up in response to the political and social possibilities that had opened up since the signing of the GFA in 1998 and the official cessation of conflict in Northern Ireland. It emerged from discussions between the Mount Vernon Community Development Forum (MVCDF), a voluntary group of local people living on the estate, and William Mitchell, a researcher and practitioner in restorative justice. They invited Gerri Moriarty and Jo Egan, community arts workers with wide experience of working on community theatre projects in Northern Ireland and beyond, to join them, using their facilitation skills to run the workshops. Moriarty and Egan invited me to observe the process because of our links through community theatre practice and because they thought I would be interested in how arts facilitation skills were being used to facilitate discussion and memory work in this project. Over the period of about a year this group developed the process of ‘social archiving’, emphasising not the archive as an object or place so much as archiving, an activity or process by which the organisers hoped that those involved, and by implication the wider community, might come to new understandings about the past and a changed sense of the possibilities for the future. Billy Hutchinson, the community development worker on Mount Vernon, talked about archiving as a way to understand and interpret change both for the ex-paramilitaries living there and for the wider community:

Whatever we do is about change and people need to understand that change and what it is […] for instance, the stuff that we’ve been doing with what we would call the ex-combatants is that anything they do, they must do it for a reason, and they must understand why they’re doing it. As well as understanding why they’re doing it presently, they also need to understand why they did it in the past. And we need to archive that in some way. ⁶

Two arts-based community consultation projects preceded and led to the social archiving project: a participatory consultation exercise called
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the 'Big Weekend' in 2006 and *Cinderella Does Community Consultation*, a community pantomime in 2007. The first event involved creative writing and photography workshops, a tea dance, video vox pops, outdoor art installations and a sports quiz, all designed to involve local people who might not have participated in more traditional community consultation processes. The community pantomime used a performance of the well-known story to ask important questions about the future of the estate in a light-hearted and accessible way. In creating social memory the listening role is ‘performed by multiple figures, including historians, public intellectuals, [...] politicians and educators’ (Hoskins 2007, 245). In the context of the social archiving project the MVCDF and the arts facilitators took on this role, setting up the framework which facilitated individual memories and encouraging participants to place these within a wider social, political and historical frame. In the workshops it was possible to observe an easy sense of familiarity where participants operated in a space (the local youth centre on Mount Vernon) with which they seemed comfortable and familiar. There was very little obvious sense of demarcation between the facilitators, organisers and participants, and a strong sense of collective activity and mutual understanding. Tea and biscuits were produced from the small kitchen by members of MVCDF throughout the workshop, and children and adults came into the space and left at will, creating a casual, homely feel to the activities. Nevertheless it seemed as though being looked after and listened to as a group was important and meaningful.

In the first stage of the social archiving workshops the facilitators worked with a range of groups including children from the primary school, young people, adults (including ex-combatants), a women’s group and an elderly people’s group. They took participants through a series of exercises using guided imagery and photographs of local places, including some of the ‘Prepared for Peace Ready for War’ mural (see Figure 8.1) and two smaller murals on the side of a block of flats (see Figure 8.2). Participants produced a ‘history map’ which explored what individuals were doing in the 1960s, the decade in which the Troubles began, and what was happening within their social group, community and wider society using mind-mapping techniques to make links between them.

The second stage of the social archiving process used this material to produce an open question that was designed to generate a narrative response: ‘As a resident, or someone associated with Mount Vernon, tell us of your past and present experiences and how you would want these to influence Mount Vernon’s future relationship with the outside
world’ (Moriarty 2009). This question was put to twelve individuals who had attended the workshops, and their narrative was recorded on film. The resulting footage was edited into a twenty-minute film called Mount Vernon: More than just a Mural, which contained extracts from the participants’ interviews interspersed with footage from the workshops and with contextual material emphasising the political violence of the last thirty years in Northern Ireland. This video was given a public screening on Mount Vernon after the social archiving project was completed and has been included in a formal bid to Belfast City Council for the redevelopment of the area.

I will return to the activity of social archiving below, but first it is important to outline some of the ethical challenges that the project revealed and in particular to understand the role of the facilitators (and the researcher) in this complex network of relationships. We did not escape our own involvement in the place and its politics because we had a stake in the project; all the facilitators were connected to Northern Ireland and the conflict there in multiple ways. While it might be considered unethical to outline any one individual’s background, it is helpful to know that some identity markers of the facilitators and the researcher included patterns of leaving Northern Ireland and returning; having been born outside Northern Ireland; having shades of a number of religious affiliations and none; and having undergone periods of imprisonment for paramilitary activity. Offering a space in which to discuss the past in a community that is emerging from thirty years
of conflict presented a number of particular ethical challenges. These included the facilitators’ responsibility for the personal safety of participants who spoke out openly to air views on the history of the area, and of politics more generally, that may not be popularly held. The initiators of the social archiving project had to face the challenge of bringing together people who may have believed in, and even carried out, violence with those who have rejected violence as a way forward for communities in Northern Ireland. They also had to ensure the representation of the voices of those sometimes drowned out by more dominant figures in traditional political discourse.

Two main ethical challenges presented themselves to this researcher. The first concerned whether and how this material might reach a wider audience. The participants and organisers of the social archiving project wanted to use the process to create political and social change: they might legitimately question the efficacy of bringing this process to wider public attention through an academic volume on theatre history. Its status as a document, an example of what Diana Taylor would call the privileging of writing over embodied experience (2003, 8), means that this essay might be seen as an end to dialogue rather than another step on the path to improving mutual understanding between people. Secondly, I do not have the luxury of remaining ‘hidden’ as a researcher as some of my colleagues in this book who are dealing with more distant histories are able to do: I have to be held to account as an academic researcher and as a native of Belfast who left Northern Ireland in the early 1980s. Like Taylor, whose work on the archive and the repertoire I will return to below, I am compelled to take on a role of a social actor in my own scenarios (Taylor 2003, xvi). The workshop participants and facilitators would have been able to read, in my audible markers of place and class, an anglicised Belfast accent, an account of the educational and cultural capital which enabled me to leave Northern Ireland in a planned way, thus further increasing my privilege by pursuing an academic degree. The fact that I did not have to endure a further eighteen years of political violence also has to enter into the documentation and discussion of the ethics of this project and its outcomes.

Recollection: Memory Work

The workshops for the social archiving project used techniques introduced by Mitchell, whose research involves interviews with ex-combatants to ascertain their motives for using violence during the conflict. Based on Wengraf’s Biographic Narrative Interpretive Methods
(BNIM), the work involves using ‘semi-structured depth interviews’ where interviewees are ‘asked to tell a story [or] produce a narrative of some sort regarding all or part of their own life-experience’ (Wengraf 2001, 75). An important feature of this technique is that interviewees are not under any pressure to produce a coherent chronological account and can freely associate and move between different memories, work in different time frames and switch location in their story as their thoughts occur. BNIM interview techniques frame the interviewer as an active listener who intervenes as little as possible to allow the interviewee a high degree of control over the direction of their testimony. Wengraf relates this to the free-association technique of listening more often associated with psychoanalytical processes, though he is at pains to stress that ‘therapy is definitely not the concern of the BNIM researcher’ (Wengraf 2001, 125). Neither did the artists and community workers involved see themselves in a therapeutic relationship with the participants; indeed, it would have been unethical to do so. However, thinking through Paul Ricoeur’s ideas about how best to ‘broach the problems of the ethics of memory’ (1999, 6) in relation to the formation of collective identities is a helpful step in understanding what may have been taking place in the social archiving project.

Ricoeur suggests three levels of memory, the understanding of which precedes thinking about the ethics of memory; he emphasises that they are not stages and can overlap with each other and exist out of sequence. The first level, ‘pathological/therapeutic’, is heavily influenced by Freud’s work. At this level the subject repeats an action that bars them from making ‘any progress towards recollection, or towards a reconstruction of an acceptable and understandable past’ (Ricoeur 1999, 6). The way beyond repetition is active remembering, a long process characterised by Freud as ‘working through’, or what Ricoeur calls ‘the work of memory’ (1999, 6). Part of this working through involves mourning or reconciliation with loss which, on a social level, might be the loss of ‘fatherland, freedom — ideals of all kinds’ (Ricoeur 1999, 7). Mourning and working through are brought together in the ‘fight for the acceptability of memories’ because ‘memories have not only to be understandable, they have to be acceptable’ (Ricoeur 1999, 7) in order to move on.

In Ricoeur’s account the second level of memory is ‘pragmatic’, and it is here that abuses can occur because of the links between memory and identity. Memory locks the subject (singular and collective) into certain identities where the other is seen as a threat which, in turn, becomes linked to ‘humiliations, real or imaginary […] when this threat is felt as
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a wound which leaves scars’ (Ricoeur 1999, 8). Memory then becomes ‘a
kind of storage’ of these wounds, and the only way out of this impasse
is narrative because ‘that is where the education of memory has to start’
and through editing and plotting narrative ‘a certain healing of memory
may begin’(Ricoeur 1999: 9). ‘Letting others tell their own history espe-
cially the founding events’ (Ricoeur 1999, 9) becomes a helpful space
in which collective memory-making renders the story useful for the
future. In Ricoeur's final ‘ethico-political’ level there is a duty to move
the story back out into the wider social arena through telling 'as a means
to fight the erosion of traces'(1999, 10). At this level there is an ethical
imperative to use the narrative for the benefit of the wider group and
society.

This reading of Ricoeur's three levels of memory work in building col-
lective identities helps to explain why the stress on recollecting in the
social archiving project was a fundamentally ethical gesture. On the first,
‘therapeutic’ level it is possible to see that the social archiving project
offered a literal space which initiated active remembering or ‘workingth-
rough’ in an attempt to reconcile people to a sense of mourning or loss.
Sometimes this was loss on a personal level where participants had lost
friends and family in the conflict. There was also, echoing Rolston's
ideas about the fragility of Protestant loyalist identity, a sense of the loss
of identity as a community in the aftermath of the conflict and a need
to address this. On Ricoeur's second or 'pragmatic' level the workshops
allowed participants to discuss their own individual 'founding myths'
before placing them in relation to the founding myths of Mount Vernon
and, by implication, to Protestant working-class identities generally. Par-
ticipants were enabled to create a narrative through the timelines that
saw their own personal histories mapped onto the wider socio-political
history in which they had grown up. Finally, on the 'ethico-political'
level, the duty to speak out beyond the group might be said to have
been fulfilled by the film, which represents the collective narrativations
of the individual work begun in the social archiving workshops. The film
begins with an introductory narrative voice-over by Maura, one of the
residents, as she explains the social archiving workshops: ‘The discus-
sions we had encouraged us to look closely at ourselves.’111 This suggests
a sense of ‘working through’, echoing Ricoeur’s first stage of memory
work, and the subsequent speakers in the film hint at this process of
collective self-examination.

Although the film covers many aspects of living on Mount Vernon,
when the subject of the ‘Prepared for Peace Ready for War’ mural comes
up opinions are divided. For Hughie keeping the mural in its present
space could prove educational, and he says at one point, ‘I think the mural should be kept to remind [young people] of their past [long pause] and not to go down that route again.’ For him the mural acts as a cautionary object which evokes a dark past that should not be repeated. Maura suggests that the mural as an object is no longer relevant to the residents of Mount Vernon but that ‘The history of the mural has to be kept because it was out there at a time when a lot of people thought that it was right to be there but I think that time is now gone.’ She recognises that the message on the mural might be outdated but that the sentiment behind it is still an important cultural memory that needs to be preserved. By examining a range of reactions to the mural and thinking about its possible future the video serves to bring these questions to a wider public. It asks its audience to question the role of the mural, its history and its future but, in asking this, what the film is really presenting is a series of ethical questions about Mount Vernon itself: to what extent is the community content to be defined by a history of violence? What is the way forward for this community if violence is rejected? How does it work towards this future? The mural then could be seen to act as a touchstone, or as a way to store memory, as important for its symbolic qualities as for its materiality.

Re-Collecting and Lieux de Mémoire

Edna Longley describes Northern Ireland as a lieu de mémoire or ‘ethnic site where religion, politics and history powerfully fuse’, making it a ‘territory marked outwardly by competing symbols, inwardly by communal understandings of history’ (Longley and Kiberd 2001, 35). Briefly, Pierre Nora suggests that lieux de mémoire are ‘external props or necessary reminders’ (1996, 8) in a world where our milieu de mémoire — living embodied memory — is being eroded and replaced by ‘the acceleration of history’ (1996, 1) with its tendency for ‘sifting and sorting’ (1996, 2). Lieux de mémoire ‘arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory’, meaning that we are forced to create ‘archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations’ (Nora 1996, 7) in these sites, which are described as ‘hybrid places [...] endless rounds of the collective and the individual’ (Nora 1996, 15). The ‘Prepared for Peace Ready for War’ mural could be conceived of as a lieu de mémoire, acting as a site, both literal and metaphorical, in which the residents of Mount Vernon could focus their collective memory of the conflict. It was brought into existence because it was thought necessary at the time, and the fact that its future existence was able to be discussed through the process of the
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social archiving project could be seen as evidence of changing attitudes and a developing sense of confidence on the part of the community that produced it. In this sense the mural can be seen as acting as evidence in two ways: through its own materiality and through attitudes towards it.

This can perhaps be best investigated through Diana Taylor’s work when she picks up on Nora’s ideas, likening *milieux de mémoire* to what she calls the repertoire, a ‘non-archival system of transfer’ (2003, xvii) made up of embodied practices and knowledge. In describing the repertoire she quotes from Nora’s description of *milieux de mémoire* as being made up of ‘gestures and habits, in skill passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories’ (Taylor 2003, 22). The repertoire is set against the archive, which is characterised by ‘documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items seemingly resistant to change’ (Taylor 2003, 19). While the archive is more closely associated with *lieux de mémoire* Taylor suggests that it is not helpful to polarise *lieux* and *milieux de mémoire* or the archive and the repertoire, or history and memory, as it is too easy to read the written archive as constituting hegemonic power while seeing the repertoire as providing an ‘anti-hegemonic challenge’ (2003, 22): instead the two interact with and are dependent on each other.

Conceptualising the ‘Prepared for Peace Ready for War’ mural as a *lieu de mémoire*, as part of the archive, might seem extravagant, a rather exaggerated claim made on behalf of a crudely painted mural which threatens violence if the desired outcome of a political settlement is not realised to the satisfaction of the mural’s sponsors. Would it not be more ethical to simply shun its violent imagery? However, understanding the social archiving project as part of what Taylor calls a ‘scenario’ shows how important it was to place the mural at its heart. The scenario is a methodological tool by which we can study and understand the repertoire as a ‘meaning-making paradigm that structure[s] social environments, behaviours and potential outcomes’ (Taylor 2003, 28). The scenario is multi-faceted, allowing us to draw from both the archive and the repertoire. Rather than trying to translate between embodied and linguistic expression, for example, the key is to ‘recognise the strengths and limitations of each system’ (Taylor 2003, 32). It is too simple to consign the mural to the archive while possibly over-valorising the social archiving process. The *lieu de mémoire* was imbricated in the *milieu de mémoire*; the archive and the repertoire can be read together within the scenario of the social archiving project. For the instigators and facilitators of the social archiving project it was important to give
participants permission and space to discuss their relationship with the mural and to come to an understanding of why it seemed to be such an important part of their community. As Hutchinson says in his interview:

I don’t want people taking murals down for the sake of taking them down [...] the point is it needs to be interpreted [...] it’s about change. And the whole point of having these discussions at public meetings was not to get people to talk about the mural but to give people the opportunity to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about. And if the mural was talked about, fine.

Aleida Assmann’s conception of political and cultural memory completes the theoretical framework through which we can understand the ethical dimensions of social archiving in the highly charged political situation in Northern Ireland. Political memory is ‘group related, selective, normative and future-oriented’ (Assmann 2006, 213). Often associated with the text and with hegemonic impulses involved in nation building, it ‘relies on effective symbols and rites that enhance emotions of empathy and identification’ (Assmann 2006, 216) and so can be said to be more closely tied to the archive in Taylor’s terms. Cultural memory is more like ‘a memory of past memories’ (Assmann 2011, 124) in that it is latent and its function is to act as a potential reservoir or a ‘repertoire of missed opportunities, alternative options and unused material’ (2011, 127, my emphasis) from which communities can draw in order to craft or shape identities. In the film Hughie makes a startling claim for the social archiving project, seeming to sense the political and ethical potential of the process of generating and sharing cultural memory: ‘If this had happened maybe when we were growing up we might not have had these Troubles. We might not have had thirty years of conflict.’ This is the key to the social archiving process in which participants were asked to re-collect or create a kind of inventory of their individual and collective past using the kind of memory work or recollection outlined above. Sharing these memories involved plotting them into a series of narratives by which the participants were enabled to expand their repertoire, to see which parts of their history were useful and which were preventing them from moving on. Finally, the film allowed the participants to take these narratives to a wider audience and into the ‘ethico-political’ arena, through which they asked the wider community what memories should be kept and which discarded, thus potentially extending and expanding their repertoire.
What Kind of Archive? What Kind of Repertoire?

The original conception of the archive shows that it was conceived of as a shelter or house for those who made the law and who were accorded the ‘hermeneutic right and competence’ (Derrida 1995, 2) to interpret the law. But the wall on which the mural is painted has, literally, proved a false shelter. In the film Maura describes how the original mural was painted on another wall in a different part of the estate, on the gable end of a house which was due for demolition to make way for a block of flats. In a deal with the architects the original mural was demolished, along with the house, in return for the resources to paint a new mural on the current site. The wall on which the current mural is located is a fake wall, built at the suggestion of the architects to resemble the gable end of a house but with only open ground behind it. Despite, or maybe because of, the irony that the wall on which the mural was painted is a false one, the mural itself has fulfilled an important function. Its role in the scenario of the social archiving project facilitated the move away from seeing the archive as a ‘house of records’ (Derrida 1995, 1–6) towards what Jeanette Bastian calls a ‘community of records’ where the people themselves are both the producers of records and the holders of the ‘memory frame that contextualises the records it creates’ (2003, 3). In conceptualising the mural as a storage place for wounds, to return to Ricoeur’s terminology (1999, 8), its falsehood is important because it deprives the mural of some of its symbolic power, perhaps encouraging the residents to question their relationship to it and what it symbolises. In the process of archiving the mural the participants have displaced and de-centred it, taking greater control of its meaning and role within the community and beyond. Even if they cannot control the political memory in which they are enmeshed, by extending their repertoire residents both keep and transform ‘choreographies of meaning’ (Taylor 2003, 20), exerting a degree of control over what is included, or not, in their cultural memory. They have regained the choice to select from the repertoire such memories as are useful and given themselves permission to leave others behind, possibly for re-circulation but maybe to be relegated to the most ‘inaccessible’ parts of the archive, to slip out of the repertoire altogether and be forgotten.

For Appadurai, whose words opened this chapter, the traditional conception of the archive as an empty box waiting to be filled, ‘a neutral, or even ethically benign tool’, disappeared when Foucault ‘destroyed the innocence of the archive’ (Appadurai 2003, 15, 16). Appadurai is interested in the possibilities of thinking about the archive as a collective tool by developing popular archives which are less an empty container
waiting to be filled and more the ‘site of a deliberate project’ (Appadurai 2003, 24). In looking at the archive as a tool or social process we can see it as an important site of aspiration and a ‘conscious site of debate and desire’ (Appadurai 2003, 24). The ‘aspiration’ that has emerged from this re-collection of collective identity may be seen in the recent removal of two smaller murals situated on the side of a block of flats on Mount Vernon in January 2014 (UTV News 2014; see Figure 8.2). Described by the local press as the outcome of ‘three years of dialogue and groundwork’, in which the social archiving project played a vital part, the removal of these smaller murals is thought to have paved the way for the removal of the larger ‘Prepared for Peace Ready for War’ mural considered here.

Rather than dismissing the mural as a bellicose piece of paramilitary posturing, it has proved more fruitful to investigate its role in social archiving, in the formation of identities and in gesturing to a future beyond conflict. Working with the residents of Mount Vernon has allowed for the construction of a kind of archive where ‘voices that have as yet played no part in forming traditions of the collected memory and that, with their different experiences and buried hopes, run counter to the framework of the established tradition’ (Assmann 2011, 132) can be heard. Using the mural as part of an active process of social archiving has been a valuable way for participants to understand the new political realities within which they are now operating. It has allowed them to recollect in a social forum some of the perceived injustices of the past and to re-collect, in the sense of gathering energy and summoning up the courage to face the future. The power of the mural has been shown to lie not in its warlike message of defiance but in the way it has held the possibilities inherent in discussing its role past and present, and its importance, or lack of it, in a possible future. Considering how the residents wanted the mural to be archived, remembered, forgotten, dismissed or ignored through the scenario of the social archiving project has extended their repertoire. The ostensibly more ethical gesture of removing a piece of public art that might be deemed ‘offensive’ by some has turned out not to be the most efficacious one. In absorbing the disappointments and aspirations of the residents on Mount Vernon the mural has played a valuable role as an archive and as the generator of an extended range of possibilities for future repertoires.

Notes

1. See McKittrick et al. (2012) for an account of all lives lost in the troubles.
2. See Poole (1997) for discussion of the ethnic dimensions of the conflict.
3. This is a necessary over-simplification of a complex set of political circum-
for further discussion.
4. I will call this group the ‘facilitators’ for ease of reference.
5. Readers who are interested can read about their community theatre work in
6. Interview with the author, 13 September 2010.
7. Gerri Moriarty, one of the arts facilitators, interview with the author,
14 January 2014.
8. Readers who are interested in the role that some loyalist ex-paramilitaries are
playing in post conflict Northern Ireland should consult Graham (2008).
9. William Mitchell, one of the facilitators, telephone interview with the
author, 19 July 2010.
10. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from the voice-over and interviews
in the film.
11. Assmann later seems to identify political memory as functional (or inhab-
ited) memory and cultural memory as storage (or inhabited) memory (2011)
but, although these terms may be more recent, I will use the ideas of political
and cultural memory as they are clearer in this context.