

*Representations, Images and the Global Landscape:  
Locating Culture in International Security*

**Dr. Michael Dartnell, Dept. of Political Science  
York University, Toronto, Canada**

Rather than conceiving representation as the sublime or as a tool of resistance, we need to conceive it as a *site of contemporary issues*. Through examining the ways in which contemporary representation serves as a fulcrum for issues, we might then reconceive the possibility of resistance or reflection. Representation here refers to the depiction of moralities, emotions, ideas, and beliefs. A word of caution: the character of contemporary representation is not a pretty picture (no pun intended). Images of suicide bombings, the AIDS-HIV pandemic, landmines, and barbed wire provide a wide range of representations and need to be understood as paradoxical. Each example is aestheticized in a particular way. Representations of conflict and security, for example, often centre on “timeless insoluble tragedies”, “irrational hatred”, maiming, and sub-humans. Representation appears in a technological/ social/ cultural context in which images drift out of the confines of the gallery and migrate to television, the web, hand-held devices, gameboys, and other wireless devices. This is a context in which distinctions between “high art” and “popular culture” are increasingly difficult to delineate. I argue that in the context of tragedy, hatred, maiming and sub-humanization, the aesthetic turn in IR has to be posited as community, humanity, and justice.

Viewing art as a narrative of community is relevant for international relations in a number of ways. For one thing, representation assists us in understanding a world that is no longer strictly bound or defined by states. It helps us to understand the

language of identities, groups, religions and nationalisms. Representation allows us to literally “see” and “read” the interaction of politics. Beyond this, it helps us to conceive the simultaneity of time and space in the contemporary world. Images provide a bridge between different global contexts and can provide a representation of “now” and an imagined past for future reference. Representation is thus also a path to understanding behaviours and actions. Suicide bombing is one example of a behaviour that is difficult to comprehend and for which representation offers some insight. Through representation, we can access some of the emotions and moralities (even repugnant) that structure acts and, sometimes, even power. These are the emotions and moralities of horror, excess, and beauty.

In a performance entitled “My New York” (2002), Chinese artist Zhang Huan dons a suit made of beef and parades before a crowd at the Whitney Museum. Huan says the performance highlights the double marginality of Chinese artists in the art world: marginal in their own country and marginalized by international art standards set in wealthy countries. I argue that the excess, shock and marginality in Zhang Huan’s performance embody the paradoxical aesthetics of international relations theory. Zhang Huan’s performance, which is centred in a proclaimed marginality, but set in a leading international art venue (the Whitney), reproduces similar contradictions. In this way, the beauty, horror, and excess of his performance is a useful point of departure for understanding a paradoxical world of inequalities, the AIDS-HIV pandemic, and environmental threats. As in art, information about these issues is mediated through conventions of representation and discourse set by wealthy nations. Similarly, understandings of “global society” are propelled and limited by highly structured and aestheticized communication. This is seen in the

many photographs on the Web, such as those of 9/11 that evoke fear or those of the Holocaust that evoke memory. These photos are part of a contested terrain of representation that blurs distinctions between real events and the stories told about them. Instead of viewing photos in an innocent/naïve manner, our perceptions proceed within a framework of labels, icons, moralities, and emotions. The result is an unconscious mix of event and perception as we “read” representations through a particular lens. We rarely unpack the cultural ensemble that animates representations and its relation to power, which consigns us to a ghetto known as “taste”. Aesthetics are paradoxical in IR theory because the fundamentals of how the world is framed in the discipline – the state, democracy, rights, “development” or ethics – have an “approximate” relation to global civil society. The behaviour of global actors remains closely linked to the acquisition, retention, and exercise of power in spite of discourses based in notions of participation and transformation.

**How can we conceptualise the embodiment and transformative possibilities of ‘the sublime’?**

Conventional so-called bourgeois art in the nineteenth century was based on a notion of the “sublime”. This product of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romanticism is not, in the twentieth-first century, a sufficient basis for conceptualizing human transformation. In an age scarred by brutality, violence and inequality, the sublime is perhaps a site of refuge, repose and reflection. The concept is closely tied to notions of representation that are derived from a linear notion of history and social development. These notions have been globally destructive since they were unleashed from Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In *The Critique of Pure Judgment*, Kant defines the sublime as something that exists either only in our

ideas or in nature. He adds that the sublime inspires awe, but presents no danger (Kant). The idea is provocative and influential, but reflects late eighteenth-century nostalgia for societies in which the alleged separation between the human and the natural was overcome rather than a society that witnessed the collapse of symbolic (and real) order through the aesthetic conventions of television on 9/11. The possibility that the nature-human dichotomy is culturally specific, if it did occur to Kant, was tied to countervailing assumptions of racial and scientific superiority.

Late eighteenth century Europeans formulated romantic notions of various phenomena, including art, that became global standards through the agency of imperial conquest.<sup>1</sup> Such notions resonate in Western social and cultural theory. Jacques Lacan, for example, argues that Sophocles' *Antigone* is a model of pure desire, a sublime position that transcends the comfortable binary oppositions that structure our daily ethical and social lives (Lacan: 281). However, viewing everyday life in relation to binary oppositions is itself a culturally bound [i.e., not universally valid] proposition that developed from European philosophical and literary romanticism. It makes life a drama and the world a stage in which specific narratives vehiculate particular sets of perceptions. For international relations, the issue is whether, in a diverse and supposedly globalized world, a binary conception is adequate at all. Are there really only two choices?

Traditionally, Western art history views painting as the highest form of aesthetic imagery and traces the medium's lineage to at least Greek antiquity. A conventional

interpretation of the history of painting also sets the sublime on a pedestal as a higher form of representation. This reflects the origins of Western art in religious images of the sacred. Nonetheless, the tendency to overvalue painting is present in theories of art history, as seen in E.H. Gombrich’s *The Story of Art*, a standard text since the 1950s (Gombrich). The problems with Gombrich’s analysis include overemphasis of painting and exclusion/marginalization of non-European representations, art traditions, and practices. In today’s setting, where various global regions represent, contest, and articulate images, the inadequacy of the concept of the sublime is apparent because it is only one narrative thread.

Giorgio Agamben argues that a linear notion of art based on the idea that viewers intrude and so maintain a measure of objectivity is impossible in the media age in which, through pornography and advertising, “the image appears more convincing if it shows openly its own artifice” (Agamben: 93). Walter Benjamin already noted in the 1930s that technological expression is characterized by absence of aura and immersion in the everyday. An aesthetic turn that relies on “the sublime” fails to correspond to complex global forms of representation that are based in technology, artifice, and diversity nor does it facilitate an examination of issues of cultural specificity, authenticity, and objectivity. While the conventional view would have us gasp in innocence or the sublime, today’s images wink at viewers.<sup>2</sup> Since

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, John Grayson’s *Proteus* (2003), a film narrative that provides a glimpse into the scientific methods and racist predispositions of Carl Linneus and their impact on botany.

<sup>2</sup> The point is made in San Francisco Larry Sultan’s series *The Valley*. The photos focus on the San Fernando Valley, “where he grew up, and addresses the use of ordinary homes as sets for pornographic films. In Sultan’s large-scale color photographs, mundane objects — a roll of paper towels, a stack of dirty dishes — take on new weight, and suburban life becomes a symbolically charged

representations frame what we see and how we read, the aesthetic turn needs to do more than simply recapitulate culturally specific forms and content to the exclusion of other narratives.

**Does this embodiment constitute a form of resistance to contemporary political articulations?**

The relationship between politics (power) and artistic practice (representation) is more complex than a simple relation of cause and effect. In many contexts, powerful forms of artistic production have no obvious impact on power and the abuse of power. Theodore Adorno famously expressed this as the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz. One meaning to his remark is that survival, not art, is the only suitable response to incarceration and the labour and extermination camp politics of the twentieth century. Today, when carceral practices are deeply ingrained into political life (as in the US where prison is openly used to sequester large populations such as African American males), imprisonment is represented in media to enhance celebrity, as in the case of Martha Stewart. Another aesthetic response to the carceral culture in the US has been “gangsta” rap, which glorifies transgression of laws and social norms. All the while, the prison system glorifies and routinizes gender, racial and homophobic attitudes and behaviors. In this way, representations of repression and resistance have become commodities.

Both Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan see aesthetics as a site for resistance and transformation. They conceive the process in distinct and complimentary ways. Benjamin argues that the use of technology in art and liberation from the false

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backdrop. The project investigates the meaning of home and asks why the ideal of middle-class domesticity lends itself to this most curious form of cultural appropriation” (“The Valley”).

“aura” allows ordinary people to both enjoy the everyday and envision a better life. He thought that technology would provide transformative possibilities for a broader section of society. Likewise, thirty years after Benjamin, McLuhan argues that television embodies a technology of liberation, creates new forms of aesthetic experience, new tools for learning, and a new sense of commonality and community that crosses previous barriers of nation, language and territory. Both Benjamin and McLuhan, in distinct ways, position representation as a way to recast individual and group identities that are the basis of community.

Sharing contemporary experiences of community, humanity and justice is a framework for understanding art. Controversial art such as Gunther Van Hagen’s plasticized bodies and Stellarc’s prosthetic performances with industrial machines continue to aestheticize the experience of advanced technology that is widely lived in the West. Both artists thus embody a continuity of modernism as well as the innovation of post-modernism since a focus on the body and violence done to the body have been central to Western art, as seen in the many representations of the body of Christ, the Crucifixion, the martyrdom of various Christian saints, and the figures of men and women. Zhang Huan’s performance recapitulates this theme, casting his own body, that of a creator, as “meat”, an object of consumption that, in this case, is not consumed. Like Zhang Huan, Van Hagen and Stellarc do not use painting, but rather the body as a tool to express and transform. If the sublime could be referred in any way to their work, it would be located in technology rather than nature, in techniques of plastination and industrial robotics. Their art embodies elitist anxiety over technology and uses exotic and expensive technology (plasticization, industrial gear). It is doubtful that either artist articulates a site for resistance or

transformation in spite of the space that they create for refuge, repose, and reflection. Stelarc’s art, for example, presents a vision of society in which machines and *industrialia* take over functions of the human body (walking, reaching, even talking). It is a vision of human productive capacities and techniques overwhelming traditional conceptions of human existence. In Stelarc’s performance, a lumbering post-human tech body in steel and cable replaces a walking human body. Awe of the natural or divine is superseded by awe of technology, ultimately a fear of what humans can achieve.

**Does ‘the sublime’ assist us in understanding the formation of a context in which the body can be understood as a tool of resistance?**

A classic visual narrative of the body in Western art is Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s *Bal du Moulin de la Galette*. The painting was controversial when it appeared due to the extremely fine brushstrokes that give it a dreamy, blurred quality. The technique underlines *impressions* of lived experience rather than accuracy of representation. Renoir argued that art should be “pretty” because the world is full of unpleasant things. The impressions Renoir wanted to convey *are* interesting from the point of view of the body although he did not aim to represent social and cultural conditions. The women in the painting are beautiful, fine objects of desire for men, courtesans, not equals. They are not the counterpoise to aggressive masculinity so much as its antithetical construct.<sup>3</sup> That many of the women depicted in the painting, set at a dance party in Montmartre around 1876, were prostitutes who suffered from consumption and syphilis is not apparent since they are presented through the optic

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<sup>3</sup> Sandra Whitworth, for example, points out that gender can be a counterpoise to aggressive masculinity. As such, gender needs to be represented in a radically different manner from the passive femininity that characterizes Western images of the sublime (Whitworth: 103).

of masculine fantasy rather than as actual living persons who might articulate their own perspective by blogging. Yet, the masculine ideal of “beauty” occupies the figurative and physical centre of art history in the Musée d’Orsay. Ironically, the location embodies the inequalities of art. The painting reflects a particular moment in art and has become an icon. It is doubtful that this exalted status reflects an expression of truth-value that could be a basis for IR theory. We can view and enjoy one copy of the *Bal du Moulin de la Galette* when we visit Paris, but I doubt that we should reify nineteenth-century masculinist fantasies of the feminine into an ideal of the sublime. The other copy was sold May 17, 1990 for \$78 million (US) to Ryohei Saito, honorary chairman of Japan’s Daishowa Paper Manufacturing Company. The ultimate irony is that this Western masterwork of the sublime has become the fetish object for an Asian tycoon. The fetishized image of woman has itself been fetishized.

### **Suicide bombings**

A frequent representation of the body in contemporary discourse is the suicide bomber. Images of non-white men in the London Underground were globally disseminated following the July 7, 2005 attacks. In addition to their value for investigators, these images crystallize fears of angry men of colour running amok in Western cities. They are part of an aesthetics of surveillance in which accuracy of representation is fetishized to the point of places, dates, and times becoming, to varying degrees, integral to presentation of the image. This is simultaneously a representation of threat by non-states actors and of the watchfulness of states. The alleged accuracy of the image contrasts with an anti-terrorist discourse that emphasizes the unprecedented nature of acts, the in/non/sub-humanity of the

perpetrators, and the unpredictable character of such acts. The image is powerful when coupled with the discourse on the irrational and unpredictable nature of suicide terrorists that paradoxically reformulates the sublime into a threat.

However, an examination of the beliefs and actions of suicide bombers reveals that their self-representation is varied and differs from Western apprehensions. In many contexts, the image of the suicide bomber appears as action by the powerless against the omnipotent, as reaffirmation of community, as necessity, and as an image of private community that is inaccessible to outsiders. Images of the Palestinian *intifada*, for example, often use body parts of form images and words:

Visceral imagery such as this abounded in all the media of the *intifada* – images of spitting, shaking, shuddering, riding, cutting, writhing, stabbing, thrusting, bleeding. The very word chosen by Palestinians to describe the cataclysmic changes wrought by the *intifada* relies on the body in this way, derived as it is from the verb *intafada*, meaning “to shake; to shudder, shiver, tremble.” (Oliver and Steinberg: 63)

The aesthetics of suicide bombing are not only images of resistance. Many descriptions of martyrdom in the *intifada* are strikingly similar to Christian interpretations of the martyrdom of Christ. Their supporters speak of their actions in terms of joy, paradise, reconnection with community, transcendence, and faith,

Living martyrs spoke often of the joy of martyrdom and their hopes of seeing Muhammed and his Companions and their friends and family who were already in Heaven, for it is said that with the first drop of blood spilled, the martyr went straight to Paradise and was reunited with everyone he loved who had died before him. He might be buried in the clothes in which he died, the bloodstains of his wounds serving as witness to his sacrificial death. His body was believed never to decay – indeed, it was said to smell sweet for a month or longer after death. Numerous stories circulated during the *intifada* to support the belief in the immortal intactness of the martyr’s body – stories of roses blossoming on the bodies of martyrs, mothers obtaining fatwas to open the tombs of their

sons and finding them completely unchanged, corpses emitting spectacular lights (74).

Death and martyrdom are deeply rooted in the aesthetics of many cultures, that of Christ being central to the history of Western art and Christianity. The crucifixion of Christ used an ancient method in which victims are tied or nailed to a large wooden cross and left to hanging until dead. Crucifixion was common from the 6th century BC to the 4th century AD among the Persians, Egyptians, Carthaginians, and Romans. It became notorious in Christianity as the Roman method that killed Jesus, and the cross, the death instrument, was adopted as the symbol of Christianity. Other Christian martyrs include Saint Peter, who asked to be crucified upside down since he did not feel worthy to die the same way as Jesus, and Saint Andrew, who was allegedly crucified on an X-shaped cross that became known as the Saint Andrew's Cross. Another famous martyrdom occurred after the Spartacus revolt in 71 B.C. when about 6,000 captives were crucified along the 200 km road between Capua and Rome as a warning to other potential rebels. As fear of suicide attacks alarms America, one of the most popular (and heavily representational) television series in the U.S. is *Six Feet Under*, a narrative of death, dying, self-sacrifice, and community in contemporary California.

El Greco's renowned representation of the Crucifixion, *Christ on the Cross Adored by Donors*, is a dramatic portrayal that also includes two anonymous art patrons (who presumably paid the painter) at the foot of the cross. The scene, painted between 1585 and 1590, is shrouded in reverence that resonates in a manner that recalls Palestinian esteem for the martyrdom of suicide bombers. Where El Greco evoked the sublime through the image of the crucifixion, suicide bombers now evoke awe in

many by their will to die and defy the powerful. The emotion is seen as the same, yet this contemporary recapitulation of the sublime evokes widespread horror, incomprehension, and panic.

Parents dressed their babies and toddlers as suicide bombers and them photographed in local photography studios. Children marched with suicide belts around their chests. University exhibitions included one that recreated an actual suicide bombing carried out in the Sbarro restaurant in Jerusalem, replete with pizza slices and bloody body parts. The Palestinian Authority named popular soccer tournaments after martyrs belonging both to Fatah and the rival Hamas, with even the suicide bomber who blew himself up during an Israeli family’s celebration of Passover, killing thirty of them, thus honored. On public TV, the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation aired videos of men being lured away by the *hur*, the beautiful virgins of Paradise promised to martyrs, as if they were commercials or public service announcements. (Oliver and Steinberg: xxiii)

In the twentieth century, Salvador Dali produced a controversial depiction of the crucifixion as a media event. His mediated view emphasizes how the event did not occur “naturally”, but is actually perceived, understood and so constituted by a viewer who attributes meaning to it. One Dali painting, called “Crucifixion”, shows Dali’s wife Gala at Christ’s feet during the martyrdom. She takes the place of Mary Magdalene, who is traditionally set in the scene in Western art. Still another painting shows the crucifixion from above, implying that the artist frames events rather than God. Like representations of suicide bombing, the variety of crucifixions in El Greco and Dali transposes martyrdom and the body into narratives about power, agency, and redemption.

Images of suicide bombing that place the body at the centre of the narrative are only one (extreme) example of how representation is used to articulate a vision of

community. In contemporary high art and popular culture, a vision of community can be as easily seen in the media or the street as a gallery. In Gaza, San Francisco, Belfast, and other cities around the world, wall murals flourish as a transient and idiosyncratic form of representation that draws together the esoteric and prosaic. Murals are transient because they fade, are defaced and are often destroyed as their environment changes. They are idiosyncratic because they often comment on local circumstances not immediately apparent to non-locals. They have local content, but appear around the globe in a wide variety of contexts. In August 2005, the British artist Banksy painted a series of mural images on the wall that the Israeli state is constructing across the West Bank. The sensitive political nature of this art is obvious. Banksy's spokesperson said that "the Israeli security forces did shoot in the air threateningly and there were quite a few guns pointed at him" as he painted (BBC News, Aug. 5, 2005). While Banksy condemns the wall, he also commends Israeli authorities for having constructed the “ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti writers” (*Ibid.*).

As well as being directly political, Banksy's images on the West Bank wall are sly commentaries on traditional conventions of Western art. Each image depicts a “hole” in the wall through which we glimpse cartoon-like representations of ideal tourist destination. The hole functions as a revelatory gap that draws the passer-by or viewer into an attitude or stance of “knowing” and “seeing” that follows the conventions of linear perspective. At the same time, through using cartoon style Banksy satirizes the notion of the sublime by providing rather banal images that could be found in a very typical family living room in the West. At another level, the style highlights the fact that many banal pleasures are unavailable or precarious for

the Palestinians who have lived under Israeli occupation since 1967. The sentimental vulgarity (or *kitsch*) Banksy’s images can also be read as commentary on Bush administration declarations that current peace efforts aim to provide Palestinians with the same advantages as Americans. How to reconcile these declarations with construction of the wall is a fact that is directly addressed by these images.

According to Banksy’s images, the ideal presented by the powerful (that is, the U.S. and Israel) in the terms depicted on the wall remains little more than a cartoon-like approximation of the real peace needed and desired by Palestinians.

Three of Banksy’s wall mural images provide a rich text on the relevance of art and politics in a conflict zone. Each image depicts a hole in the wall as a fictional breach in the daily reality of separation, violence, and hostility. Through the first imagined “breach/hole”, the viewer sees a background of blue sky and light clouds that suggests open expanse, freedom, and lack of restraint. In the middle of image is a rocky hilltop with a child standing on it. The hilltop suggests both a struggle that has been overcome and a viewpoint of distant horizons. The child holds a small pail, reaffirming the validity of play in human society. The child looks back at the viewer, using a technique, the “look”, that has long been present in Western conventions of representation. Questions that arise from this look range from “what does the child want?” to “why is the child looking at us?” to “what does the child think and feel?” The cartoon style recalls that this is no child, there is no play, and that freedom does not exist. This is, after all, paint on a concrete barrier.

In Banksy’s second image, two children are depicted with pails, as though they were again playing in the sand on a beach. They are in front of a large hole through which

the viewer can see a tropical beach with palm trees. Importantly, the children are not in the breach, but placed in front of it on a concrete wall behind some all-too-real barbed wire. The tropical paradise is not achieved, only an imagined and possible future for children who remain trapped by the wall and hemmed in by barbed wire. Both children look at the viewer, perhaps asking if the viewer can/will do anything to realize the vision of peace and tropical paradise. The third image does not depict persons, but rather cartoon-style images of comfortable armchairs in front of a curtained window. Through the window, the viewer sees a valley with a mountain in the background. The image again suggests peace and harmony. As in the previous two images, the cartoon style emphasizes the fictional nature of these visions. The possibility of peace is simultaneously suggested and ridiculed by realist depictions of skies, mountain-valleys and a tropical beach. Bansky's images cast peace as an unattainable fiction so long as it is envisioned against a concrete security wall, but affirms its potential through realist-style backgrounds. Each image cuts through the constraining wall with visions of an alternative social and political order and its impact on everyday life.

### **An alternative narrative of art: creation of community**

As mentioned above, an alternative narrative to the focus on the sublime frames the aesthetic turn as creating communities. They are created through a communicative or shared experience that is inherent in art as well as through the contents of artistic production. Powerful and well-known non-Western narratives of community in art were produced by the Mexican mural artists José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros between the 1920s and 1970s. Their mural art was part of

a broader intellectual, social and cultural movement in Mexican society. After dictator Porfirio Diaz organized an exhibition of contemporary Spanish art to mark the centenary of the national struggle for independence, nationalist opinion was mobilized. Mexican artists and intellectuals believed that the exhibition was disconnected with national life and reflected the European cultural preoccupations of the ruling elites (Rochfort: 16). In response, the mural movement expressed the idea that “art was another reality and not just an allusion to something” (19) such as the sublime. From this origin in the revolutionary movement in early twentieth-century Mexico, the nationalist and social character of the murals became the basis for a globalized aesthetic form. This process of transmission is particularly evident in Diego Rivera’s U.S. murals from the 1930s and early 1940s, which in today’s terms could be understood as a form of aesthetic and cultural globalization.

### **Rivera and Coit Tower murals**

Among the murals that he completed in the U.S., Rivera’s three murals in San Francisco (at the Pacific Stock Exchange, City College of San Francisco, and the Art Institute of San Francisco) are less well known than his Detroit mural or the notorious work that J.D. Rockefeller had jack-hammered in New York City’s Rockefeller Center. However, the impact of his mural techniques and contents in Bay Area art, and especially the artists who produced the murals inside the base of Coit Memorial Tower in 1934, is enormous. Rivera’s art blended influences that ranged from Cubism to the frescos of the Italian Renaissance to “the realities and demands of a country whose identity and culture were being reborn from the dynamics of a repressed history liberated by popular revolt and revolutionary

struggle” (: 40). The power in Rivera’s work also draws on his ability to narrate and represent community, including the component nations, races, genders, and classes, as well as in his depictions of shared humanity and the quest for justice. His tremendous representational capacity drew images of community from both American and European experiences.

Rivera’s mural at the City College of San Francisco, entitled *Marriage of the Artistic Expression of the North and of the South on this Continent* (usually called *Pan American Unity*), reflects a vision of community based in race, anti-fascism, and labour. The mural was painted for the 1940 Golden Gate International Exposition. This was six years after the influence of Mexican mural art on American artists was seen in the Coit Tower murals. The exhibition plan was for a large-scale Rivera fresco at the fair’s “Art in Action”, an exhibit where people could watch artists work. The mural was supposed to be moved to the college library, but the building was never built. It ended up in the lobby of the campus theatre in 1961. Rivera described the idea behind the mural as

the marriage of the artistic expression of the North and of the South on this continent, that is all. I believe in order to make an American art, a real American art, this will be necessary, this blending of the art of the Indian, the Mexican, the Eskimo, with the kind of urge which makes the machine, the invention in the material side of life, which is also an artistic urge, the same urge primarily but in a different form of expression (Diego Rivera Mural Project).

To depict his theme, Rivera created a mural with five panels. The first represents the South and specifically Mexico’s indigenous past through images of a plumed serpent, dancers, pottery makers as well as Netzahualcoyotl, an Aztec poet-king who

designed a flying machine. The second panel features a female diver who arches from pre-Colombian Mexico to the Bay Area. In the third panel, the Aztec goddess Coatlicue merges with a Detroit Motor Company stamping machine. The fourth panel presents film as the typical art form of the North. In this panel, Charlie Chaplin's *Great Dictator* and Edward G. Robinson's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* illustrate the fight between democracy and totalitarianism that soon engulfed the then-neutral U.S. The final panel celebrates the technological genius of the North through images of engineering, bridges, oil derricks, and the inventors Ford, Morse and Fulton. Rivera's mural showed the peaceful inter-penetration of the U.S. and Mexico as a way to recast an often-difficult and violent history. In general, "Rivera's portrayal is, like many of his other American murals, optimistic and celebratory. His only allusion to the world conflict of the time is the small lampoon of fascism at the bottom of the mural" (Rochfort: 171).

The many elements in the mural – Chaplin, FBI, Pauline Godard, Freda Kahlo, East Bay Bridge construction, Native American crafts, engineering, film making - were done *al fresco* (meaning "fresh" in Italian), which consists of applying resistant pigments of minerals mixed with lime and water on a wall and then plastering it with moist or fresh lime plaster. The technique, also known as the Italian style, is closely related to the history of Western art. Italian masters such as Michelangelo and Raphael used the technique. In contrast to these artists, Rivera depicted and validated the unique creativeness of the "New World" by blending technological and artistic pasts and presents. He drew on the Americas rather than Europe for enrichment. In doing so, he took to task the superiority complex and inherent racism of European art, arguing that its success was simply based in opportunity

rather than any inherent genius or gift. One issue that arises here is whether to consider disciplines such as IR in the same light, that is, a reflections of Euro-American priorities and preoccupations.

Even though *Pan-American Unity* was painted later, Rivera's Italian style and vision of community had already had an obvious impact on the murals in San Francisco's Coit Tower. San Francisco artists completed these murals in 1934 as part of a Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA-FAP) project. Coit Tower was selected as the mural site because it was a prominent, newly completed, and structurally suitable public building. The project was also a prototype for subsequent New Deal art. Based on selected artistic talent, the project provided iconography of the "American Scene". The themes of agriculture, education, urban and rural life, social protest, and New Deal Idealism established at Coit Tower subsequently became subjects for artists who worked under other government-sponsored art programs throughout the U.S. The idea behind the WPA-FAP was originally inspired by the Mexican use of art to illustrate social realities. The destruction of Rivera's murals in New York's Rockefeller Center in 1933 mobilized left-wing artists and undoubtedly attracted attention to his techniques and themes. After Rivera placed an image of Lenin in the Rockefeller Center mural, he was allowed to finish and the work was then rapidly destroyed. The San Francisco Artists' and Writers' Union, a newly formed group with about 350 members, joined a nationwide protest, speaking out against this act of "outrageous vandalism and political bigotry" (Coit Tower).

The artists were concerned that incidents like the obliteration of the Rivera mural

were on the increase at a time of growing repression and censorship in Germany, France and Austria. Representations of newspaper headlines that chronicle such events appear in the paintings at Coit Tower. In addition, local San Francisco politics strongly influenced the Coit Tower artists. In early 1934, unemployed longshoremen and their union, the International Longshoremen's Association, had a labour dispute with the Waterfront Employers Association along the waterfront that stretches along the Bay below Coit Tower. The union called what became known as the Pacific Maritime Strike, which extended from Seattle to San Diego and was supported by other unions. It paralyzed West Coast trade and closed the port of San Francisco. In July 1934, police shot three people in riots below the tower. The mural controversy was eventually resolved, but some images labelled “communistic” were removed by the time the project was unveiled in October 1934. The murals’ overarching themes were creation of community through art.

Far from being a self-contained cycle, the Rivera and Coit Tower murals are part of a culture that still flourishes in San Francisco. This mural culture provides alternative view of history and a focus on communities that includes the city’s many racial and ethnic groups, the AIDS-HIV pandemic, opinion over current events, individual and group cultures, the view of San Francisco as a place where alternatives co-exist, and a sense of resistance through community. The murals tend to be thematically and geographically grouped according to the communities they address. In the Mission District, an important Mexican-American community, murals focus on the Hispanic American experience, culture and issues. In the Castro district, murals address the large gay community. In other areas of the city, murals refer to a range of perceptions and address a wide variety of issues. Another feature of San Francisco’s

visual narrative is the frequent use of sidewalk graffiti as a vehicle for social and political commentary and even resistance to broader social trends. The gay group Gay Shame, for example, regularly posts graffiti on sidewalks to protest against the mainstream gay community. The group’s graffiti response to the same-sex marriage debate simply states “End Marriage”. Other street graffiti addresses environmentalist, lesbian, and anti-capitalist themes. The effect of the murals and graffiti is to substantiate a sense of the distinctive culture and communities in the Bay Area.

### **Belfast**

The mural tradition in Northern Ireland, which took off in the 1920s, parallels and contrasts the representations of Rivera and Coit Tower. The murals situate themselves directly in community and politics yet are carefully crafted representational images. The murals I saw in Belfast in June 2000 construct community as a place (Northern Ireland) that is “Irish” or “British” through representations of historical narrative, symbols, events, and persons. In these images, the complex and continued effect of partition in Ireland is evident. Catholic and Protestant muralists provide contrasting characterizations of Northern Ireland, an area where Protestants monopolized institutions and government from 1922 until 1969. Representing Ireland has long been a contentious issue. In the nineteenth century visually articulating a sense of Ireland was integral to both nationalism and unionism. The dispute was not over location or existence, but rather meaning, import, and control of community and public space. Nineteenth century romantic nationalism depicted critical moments in the national mythology, such as marriage of

Strongbow to Aoife<sup>4</sup> and was part of "the spirit of the burgeoning cultural nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century." Nationalists used Celtic imagery to represent a "nation striving to see its Celtic legacy as part of a glorious past awaiting revival" (Berger: 71). Painting was part of a nationalist, de-colonizing and later post-colonial discourse that had parallels in politics, culture, society and language as well as economics. The discourse met a unionist and loyalist response.<sup>5</sup>

Ireland's division into two political entities (republic and British province) and separation of six northern counties did not end the dispute since "both unionist and nationalist identities in Ulster remain heavily informed by representations of nineteenth-century ethnic nationalism" (Graham: 193). Representation and images eventually fit into an undeclared thirty-year civil war. Northern Ireland does not fit the classical Westphalian state paradigm, as illustrated by the contradictory images represented on murals. The murals effectively demarcate post-colonial fragments,

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<sup>4</sup> The marriage of the Norman Richard Fitzgilbert to Aoife, daughter of Diarmait McMurrough, King of Leinster, in 1170, followed a Norman slaughter of the defeated Irish in Waterford. After McMurrough lost the kingship of Ireland to Ruaidri, Prince of Connacht, he fled to England and sought the assistance of Henry II. Diarmait was able to secure the help of Strongbow in exchange for his elder daughter's hand and succession to the kingdom. At the same time, the English Pope Hadrian IV granted Henry II the Irish throne at the request of John of Salisbury. Once Strongbow's victory was secure, he offered the throne to Henry. Nationalists trace the beginning of English colonization and imperialism in Ireland to this event.

<sup>5</sup> Part of the unionist-loyalist cultural response to Irish nationalism involved the adaptation of the Medieval tradition of religious and artisanal processions through the vehicle of the "loyal orders" that appeared in the late eighteenth-century. These processions have long spawned serious problems. For example, a violent riot at Dolly's Brae on July 12, 1849 led to the deaths of 30 Catholics and provoked anti-procession legislation in 1850 in the form of the *Party Procession Act*. Government forces used buckshot (a nineteenth-century version of plastic bullets) to disperse an Orange demonstration in Dungannon in 1880. The violence and intensity of Orange marches usually reflects the rising and waning of Irish nationalism. See Fraser and especially James Kelly, "The Emergence of Political Parading, 1660-1800" and James

which are entities that are unrecognized in international law and theories of political society and organization. In these areas, paramilitaries power periodically reduces the British state to a nominal status. In Belfast and elsewhere, the state is bunkered into compounds and shielded by armoured vehicles.

Post-colonial loyalist and republican representations on murals generally respond to a sense of disorder and incompleteness in Northern Ireland. They provide a visual coherence and control of public space that is otherwise lacking. The mural medium has four features. Firstly, murals are located in specific places. Secondly, they address an unknown body of viewers. Thirdly, mural images are allegorical and moralizing. They are linked to a concept of inherited culture and ennobling reconstruction of a lost history. Finally, murals have a volatile relation to public space, debates about governance, and visual language. They are frequently painted over as circumstances change.

Loyalist murals initially expressed control of public space (MacRaild, *The Irish Parading Tradition*: 44-59, and 50.). As Orange parades illustrate, control of public space is central to loyalism. By altering their physical surroundings, murals, parades, flags, arches and other emblems of the loyalist tradition are seen to endow permanence and control<sup>6</sup> even if meanings change over time. The loyalist focus on

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Loughlin, "Parades and Politics: Liberal Governments and the Orange Order, 1880-1886", in Fraser.

<sup>6</sup> Flags are also central to control of space in Northern Ireland. The number of Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) flags in loyalist areas represents territorial competitiveness between two paramilitaries. Republican attitudes to flags are quite different. One early dispute over the implementation of the Belfast Agreement involved two Sinn Fein ministers who refused to allow Union (i.e., UK) flags to fly over their departments (Moriarty).

Great Britain and the Westminster parliament has gradually been displaced by concentration on the Crown, which points to deeper anxieties,

Loyalists, particularly since control over their destiny has gradually slipped out of their hands, earnestly believe that they have, against their wishes, become physically, psychologically and increasingly spiritually detached from their nation. Unlike their Catholic counterparts, who enjoy sympathy throughout Ireland, within the ranks of the political left in Britain and particularly amongst the huge Irish community in America, support for the loyalist cause is minimal and unionists feel friendless, deserted and betrayed...(Parkinson: 19).

Early loyalist murals often depicted William of Orange as a conquering Protestant champion of individual rights and liberty over treachery (in loyalist terms: Catholicism) and betrayal (supporters of James II). The first murals appeared as the British government implemented home rule, a plan for devolution that would have ended Protestant domination. Although these murals were politically and culturally defensive, post-partition representations symbolized Unionist control of public space, discourse and power. The imagery has continually evolved.

In June 2000, loyalist murals in Belfast focused on the themes of martyrs, warriors and history with a rich variety of representations, images and icons. Interpretation is complicated by the division of loyalists into two movements organized around the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and its paramilitary wing, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), and its paramilitary wing, the UDA-UFF (Ulster Freedom Fighters). These two parties are themselves separate from the mainstream unionists in the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The murals speak for a community that sees itself under siege, has difficulty building alliances, and fails to clearly communicate its

anxieties to outsiders. Since loyalists are very aware that republicans draw more international attention and support, their murals express a counter-narrative and self-image.

Republican murals appeared in 1981, seventy-three years after their loyalist counterparts. Appearing during the hunger strikes in which Bobby Sands died, they were part of a republican effort to convey their message to the public.<sup>7</sup> Since the republican community was long marginalized and unable to access conventional media, wall murals became a form of mass media and visual display of local power. Communication was a problem for the nationalist-republican camp since unionist domination of Northern Ireland meant that "any public manifestation of Catholicism and Irish nationalism could be represented as a threat to the state and therefore dealt with accordingly" (Jarman and Bryan in Fraser: 96). Painting republican murals was initially risky. In 1980, a sixteen year-old boy was shot as he painted republican slogans. The police officer who killed him was found not guilty of murder after claiming that he thought the brush was a gun (Rolston, 1991: 102).

In contrast to their loyalist counterparts, interpreting republican murals is simplified by the visual hegemony of the IRA-Sinn Féin (SF) (aside from occasional INLA graffiti). There are some parallels to the loyalist themes of martyrs, warriors and history, but republican imagery is much richer. In particular, republican murals commemorate history and celebrate Irish culture. Many murals incorporate images of women as in the well-known "Who fears to speak of Easter Week" mural on

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<sup>7</sup> "After January 1971 the system of reference upwards [for permission to interview members of the IRA] operated (more or less) as a means to ban interviews with the IRA altogether. Permission had always to be sought and therefore was requested

Whiterock Road in Belfast. The mural adds an image of Countess Markievicz, an important turn-of-the-century nationalist women's leader, to the seven men who signed the Proclamation of Independence during the Easter Rising.<sup>8</sup> The meaning of such images can be interpreted differently, but ambiguity gives them strength: they speak to a broader public and contain multiple meanings. Locating particular images at specific places also consolidates a sense of place and community (Jarman: 55). The murals show the power of images and construct a difference that is used to build political identities.

Both loyalist and republican murals help define public space and give coherence to otherwise mute physical places. Republicans and loyalists in Belfast use murals to situate communities that are often physically uneven by "tagging" (signifying their presence). They are windows into political worlds,

Loyalism and republicanism are not equivalent political practices; their imagery thus has very different origins and purposes. Each political ideology has its themes and traditions and above all separate relationship to the British state. Given that, it is as naive to accept murals as identical cultural artifacts as it is to reject them out of hand (Rolston, 1992: viii).

The Belfast murals also express a transnationalizing process of de-territorialization in which even old states such as the UK face less tangible and less spatially defined agents that undercut their abilities to exercise "absolute dominion" in their territories.

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less and less often - and when requested it was more and more frequently refused" (Smith in Rolston and Miller: 31).

<sup>8</sup> Countess Markievicz did not participate in the occupation of the Dublin General Post Office (GPO) or sign the Proclamation. The first woman to be elected as a Westminster MP, her presence acknowledges the role of republican women.

## **Toronto**

Most cities have mural cultures, sometimes in less elaborated and structured bases than Belfast or San Francisco. A high concentration of murals in the Kensington Market area of Toronto articulates an alternative vision of community, and sense of resistance to prevailing social norms in Canada’s business and financial centre. The Kensington Market neighbourhood, with origins in a substantial Jewish immigration into Toronto in the early twentieth century and enriched by subsequent waves of Portuguese, Italians Hungarians, Ukrainians, Africans and African Canadians, Japanese, Arabs, and Latin Americans, has a long “alternative” history. The area is now racially and ethnically mixed, near Chinatown, Little Italy and Little Portugal, and blends public, low and middle income income and luxury housing. The various influences in the neighbourhood create a distinct sense of place, community and solidarity. Neighbourhood groups spontaneously form in response to development proposals and policing. Local festivals and fairs are common. On December 21, a large crowd gathers to mark the winter solstice as the long Canadian winter begins. In this context, a sense of place is supplemented by a lively mural, graffiti, and poster culture. The impetus is to create a community in a large and often anonymous city.

## **Conclusions**

Rivera, the Coit Tower and Belfast mural artists, and the Kensington Market examples show how representation often crosses cultural, social and economic boundaries and addresses more prosaic concerns than the sublime. The mural cultures described above show how, in the late twentieth century, a common

narrative or explanation for artistic production became community. Benjamin, who noted that technology places more means for expression and self-representation in more hands, foresaw the development. In this setting, the notion of the sublime is elitist, restricted to parts of the population that are removed from want and struggle and the “everyday”. The development of mural culture is moreover paralleled by the emergence of electronic forms of art that also seek new forms of community. The overall impact is to substantially complicate the narrative of international relations. The notions of state development, democratic transition and market liberalization, with origins in a Western narrative of social elaboration, are increasingly conditioned by a complex global scene. Articulation of community has become a central tool to meet many contemporary challenges, whether AIDS-HIV, environmental degradation or hunger and poverty.

Thomas Hammes underlines how the perception of states is integral to global security,

Posing the most serious challenge to international security today, fourth-generation warfare (4GW) uses all available networks – political, economic, social and military – to convince the enemy's political decision-makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit. It is rooted in the fundamental precept that superior political will, when properly employed, can defeat greater economic and military power. (Thomas X. Hammes, “War evolves into the fourth generation”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Aug. 2005: 189 - 221)

Hammes says *perceptions* of security are critical in a world of increasing interaction and cultural exchange because we are learning new ways of looking at old certainties. Built on Western views of representation, these old certainties were

articulated in discourses on politics in which the state and its institutions occupy centre stage. Considered in this way, the state is an aesthetic construct. In a world of what Rosenau calls “distant proximities”, the erosion of this model of representation and discourse is already well advanced. Zhang Hua points to power discrepancies in cultural production, but paradoxically does so at the prestigious Whitney, a location that seems to undermine his claim of marginality. Culture, society, technology, economics, and other factors in the contemporary world mean that we often no longer read ourselves as secure and that conventional perceptions can be overwhelmed by unanticipated anxieties.

Murals show one aspect of representation in international relations. In cities such as London, New York and San Francisco, representation on the street and illustrates how community is embodied and articulated. Street graffiti is also a case in point. The sense of community created through some street graffiti is masculinist insofar as

Writers use the city as their canvas aware that outsiders know nothing of little of the markings they see. The public yet very private parade of their subculture appears to give them a sense of power. The subculture is flaunted in the face of the public, but it remains out of their reach (Macdonald: 158).

The issue then is to sketch how representation, viewed as a narrative of community, might be relevant for international relations. There are a number of points to be made here. Representation primarily assists us in understanding a world that is no longer strictly bound or defined by states. One must of course immediately ask whether the world was ever defined by states or if they serve as a practical device. This is how representation can serve as a fulcrum for issues. Representation helps us

to understand the language of identities, groups, religions and nationalisms. By breaking political themes into symbols, images, icons, emblems, allegories, and moralities, representation allows us to literally “see” and “read” the interaction of politics. Beyond this, it helps us to conceive the simultaneity of time and space in the contemporary world. Images provide a bridge between different global contexts and can provide a representation of “now” for future reference. Representation is thus also a path to understanding behaviours and actions that are not obviously comprehensible. The discussion of suicide bombings above is one such example since representation provides a path into the world views of the martyr. Through images, we can access some of the emotions and moralities (even repugnant) that structure acts. In other contexts, the impact of representation can be negligible. In some areas of San Francisco, for example, murals often function as inexpensive props to “cheer up” or “dress up” poor neighbourhoods. The result can be an incongruous mix of colour and squalour as community struggles while justice and humanity are absent. These are the emotions and moralities of horror, excess, and beauty.

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