Fear and loathing in lost ages: journeys through postmodern Dublin

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I met them at the half-built arrivals area in Dublin airport. I was delighted that they all arrived together, though coming from different parts of the world. My sense of good fortune, rarely attached to contemporary Dublin transport, quickly evaporated when we got outside to find that a lightning strike among the taxi drivers, caused by the liberalisation of licences, had made a quick escape from the airport seem impossible. However, I found a 'new plate' and bribed him to take us into the city to the General Post Office (GPO), where, allegedly, it all started in 1916.

In the back of a wheelchair-accessible van, recently acquired from a driver unable to face the rigours of the new free market of the Celtic Tiger, we sped towards the GPO accompanied by a narrative from our driver on how 'fucking fantastic' everything was since the Celtic Tiger arrived in Dublin. On enquiring after our business, I assured him that my guests and I were in earnest pursuit of the craic.

There was Doctor Gunther Brenner, formerly of the Institute for the Study of Folklore at Heidelberg University. He left the Institute suddenly some six years ago and no one has had the nerve to enquire why. I believe he has spent some time in an asylum near Cologne and now writes a weekly column for a local newspaper. He was concerned with anonymity, arguing that not just uninformed informers should have their identities preserved, so I agreed to call him Hans. Hans had been in Ireland in the 1970s, touring the west with a German céilí band, and considered himself to be well informed on traditional Irish culture. I had met Hans at a conference in Cambridge the previous summer and he had begged me for an excuse to visit the 'sexiest destination in Europe'. Hans's views can be regarded with suspicion, if at all representative, as he is now outside the academy.

There was Doctor Claude de Ville from the Department of Sociology outside Lyon. I will just call him Claude, as he had no patience with disguise. Claude is a distant relation of Durkheim and for that reason

his opinions are given more credit than they deserve. He resisted visiting Ireland for many years and, on this occasion, believed that he was sacrificing himself to the cause of science or, indeed, nonsense. Claude had allowed himself to be talked into the visit and considered it something of a privilege to be entirely ignorant of Dublin.

For gender balance there was Claude's girlfriend, Doctor Sarah Breakweather, who was a temporary lecturer in cultural studies in a North American university. Sarah was writing a book on travel and gender and was a regular visitor to Ireland, strictly post Peace Process. She was looking for an academic post in Europe, to be nearer Claude, and was specifically using this trip to check out the intellectual potential of Dublin. I had explained to her before her arrival that Dublin was only 'a stone's throw' from Paris, with its Joyce, Beckett and cuisine de France.

As Barbara O'Connor¹ reminds us, we Irish cannot help but be nice to foreigners and go out of our way to help them. Therefore, I was compelled to provide a traveller by the name of Harvey Keitel from Bristol, no relation to the actor, I was assured, with a lift into the city in our taxi. Harvey, in character, had a cameo role to play in our drama and was in Dublin to join, in Bobs in Temple Bar, a group on a stag weekend which had left England two days before.

In the taxi, I informed my collaborators of my plans to document our collective experience of postmodern Dublin and outlined my considered approach. I explained that I wished to write on the effects of globalisation on the city in such a manner that I might avoid the usual attitudes and platitudes: a jaded irony; a disaffected nostalgia inversely related to the extent of the experience of modernity; a Marxist superiority. To achieve this I had to develop an entirely original theoretical approach. Having been interrupted by Hans to tell me that, after much experimentation on his part, no such novelty was available, I continued in the same vein. I told my guests that attempts to understand postmodern culture tend to be Marxist in some respect, in that they invoke some notion of false consciousness and inauthenticity. Furthermore, I link life in Dublin to transformations in forms of consciousness rather than transformations in capital, which is very different from other understandings of the Celtic Tiger. Postmodern renderings of Dublin invoke a nostalgia for the 'modern Dublin' reputedly best exemplified in Joyce's *Ulysses* and redeploy that nostalgia into the listless contemporary.

This phenomenon is best seen in the traditional pub, which invokes a lost home industry manifest in sewing machines, sewing tables, mangles and other mechanical instruments of dubious efficacy. The modern pub reputedly was a place of rest from the daily imposition of work or, indeed, during long epochs of repression and unemployment, a place to eek out a few pints against a backdrop of mandatory idleness. The contemporary pub deploys implements from a false historical industrious consciousness

as the props of leisure to remind one of the industry of the past. While relaxing in the postmodern Dublin pub, we are made nostalgic for an allegedly simpler past. But this is to suppose that the postmodern pub is a site for relaxation. It does not facilitate relaxation. Instead, it promotes an anxiety about the present in the form of a constant engagement with the past. How can we coherently embrace postmodernity and live comfortably in the inalienable midst of globalisation?

If I am fashionably appalled by the fungal profligacy of modern McDonald's, with its rendering of the potato as reconstituted fried uniformity with globally guaranteed quality and consistency, I am perhaps more appalled by the traditional Irish rendering of the potato as flowery spud. Like most of my kind inhabiting the global city of Dublin, I am contemptuous of the potato-ridden past but unable coherently to situate myself in the pasta present. Towards the end of developing a methodology appropriate to the rendering of the globalised postmodern condition, I had invited these thinkers to the most profligate site of postmodern productions. Could we capture the meaning of postmodern Dublin that runs together the redundantly isolated categories of drink, drama, lies, stories, academic analysis, literature, history, exaggeration and much more? Thus I defined our mission: the pursuit of the postmodern conflation we call the craic.

Our now silent taxi driver dropped us on O'Connell Street, outside the Ann Summers lingerie shop opposite the GPO. Harvey begged us to allow him to tag along until such a time as he could, with good conscience as an Englishman, enter the pub and join his friends. It was 11.00 a.m. and he had nowhere to go. Unconsciously suspecting that he may have a structuring role in our day, we willingly allowed him to stay.

In response to expressions of surprise on the faces of my visitors gazing at the contents of the Ann Summers window in good Catholic Ireland, I quickly drew their attention to the building across the boulevard and explained that the GPO is the original site of pure Irish asexual consciousness, where, in 1916, Catholic Ireland rose up to throw off the yoke of the cosmopolitanism of colonial consciousness. Harvey wondered why Irish nationalism was involved with philately and we looked forward to his removal from the narrative.

I informed my audience that not since medieval times had sin been an object of such commercial focus in Dublin. Contemporary Dublin sees sex released from its necessary association with Catholicism and freed into a general regime of commodification. Irish sin, or sex, is transformed in postmodern Dublin and forms a new defining relationship to money. In modernity, sex was articulated through a series of necessary transgressions focused on marriage. Today, sex is articulated through a series of expenses focused on the deployment of the necessary equipment: Ann Summers provides that equipment opposite the site of pure

celibate national consciousness, if our revisionist historians are to be ignored. I explained that postmodern Dublin was characterised by many examples of such historical transformations and oppositional disruptions in the tranquillity of our modern consciousness. We were overtaken by a tourist bus blasting historical trivia from its upper deck. The guide called the attention of his passengers to the Millennium Spike in front of the GPO. Perplexed, my guests looked around for this sign of the times until I explained that this was a tour of the idea of the Spike, as it had not yet been built.

With this kind of talk, my audience could immediately discern my Foucauldian influences. I wanted to approximate his kind of serial history that was neither traditionally hermeneutical nor teleological. Could we, I asked, waving my arms energetically above my head to encompass the streetscape, avoid analysing Dublin as just another monument to pleasure in postmodernity appropriate to the well documented anthropocentric thought of modernity? I wanted to strip Dublin of its ethnological content, resituate it as archaeology and embrace the much postponed confrontation with the tangles of postmodernity. What kind of positivity could the discourses of contemporary Dublin reveal?

Hans interrupted my monologue to remind me that Gellner² believed that both orthodox Marxists and liberals predicted a transition from the form of nationalism evident in the GPO to a form of universalism manifest in Ann Summers, which he describes as a kind of international identification with one standard culture. Gellner imagined that this cultural homogenisation might yet happen but it conspicuously had not happened to date. This great mistake, he claimed, is the one thing that unites Marxists and liberals: cultural difference persists in the face of unifying discourses and aspirations. Would Gellner have changed his mind if he had the opportunity to visit contemporary Dublin with us? The question of whether the production of Dublin was one of different cultures seemed central to Hans. Specifically, the question of whether the European Union, as a form of globalisation, is a unifying or fracturing force in Dublin.

Claude's view on this was that while national culture was the product of the state, culture in general is the product of institutions such as the pub and sex industries. He argued that an analysis of institutions as sites for the invention of traditional culture needs to be made, to determine to what extent these institutions can fulfil roles such as those identified by Hobsbawm³ as belonging to state traditions. The macroscopic processes of our social, political and economic development are essential in understanding changes which take place in our perception of ourselves. Claude reminded Hans that we may not be straying too far from master narratives such as Marx's sense of the grammar of commodities. When discussing cultural sites as the loci for the production of tradition and national

identity, I was put in mind of Georgian Dublin. In the Georgian streetscape we see the commandeering of old materials in the production of traditional narratives on identity that are novel for unique purposes. This is a feature in the invention of the traditional pub. Such inventions use the large storehouse of materials accumulated in our past, from folklore, industry, religion and archaeology. In the past, the state rallied these resources to create a nationalistic culture legitimising the links between the new state and a mist-shrouded past: thus we have the GPO, Kilmainham Hospital and Gaol, and Christchurch. Today, these materials are under the command of individual institutions like Temple Bar Properties, Ann Summers and the Guinnesses' Brewery.

At that point, I had planned a tour of Georgian Dublin along North Great George's Street into Parnell Square, taking in the Joyce and Writers Museums, along with the Hugh Lane Gallery, in order to test our hypothesis, but it began to rain so we retreated to the nearby Epicurian Foodhall, where our diverse culinary tastes could be satisfied. Here Claude enjoyed traditional French cuisine from Christophe's, Hans had a curry with free nan bread and Sarah opted for a vegetarian wrap. Harvey had a salami panini. As I could not remember whether the wrap had replaced the bagel as that month's fashion food, I settled for a kebab. We all had coffee despite my nostalgia for traditional tea. We returned to our discussions of globalisation, tradition and the city while consuming our food.

I blithely remarked that the viral efficiency of the spread of ethnic menus in Dublin, as an example of globalisation, is generally welcomed by us locals, who maintain a healthy amnesia about the past in Irish cooking. Tourists struggle to find traditional Irish food, as if there had been such a phenomenon in history, and in the pursuit of this their searches end in such places as Johnny Fox's Irish Pub or Gallagher's in Temple Bar, where they feed on smoked salmon, cod in various sauces and lamb. The Great Famine of the 1840s was more than a humanitarian disaster – it was embarrassing proof of the absence of a culinary tradition. In many other areas, however, outside of food, we are often uncomfortable with the eradication of what we view as our heritage. Like Lowenthal, we can see heritage as the very essence of society – the anthropological.⁴ Fish now sustains established menus in Dublin. Globalised postmodern Dublin is allowing us to re-represent our identity, to ourselves, where the only inauthentic place is the hysterically immediate present.

Sarah informed us that academia had subjected the study of the production of new cuisines to a general neglect, because academics were too intellectually snobbish to study tourism, which she held as being mostly responsible for the development of contemporary heritage consciousness. Without tourism, there would be no restaurants in Dublin. She believed that tourism is one of the most promiscuous forms of contemporary

behaviour. She wondered if this neglect is part of social science's insecurity about all things regarded as politically incorrect, where correctness is identified with a view of authentic behaviour. She said that Denison Nash suggests that this neglect might be traced to the view that touristic encounters with the other are viewed as the antithesis of what researchers have sought to do in sustained participation/observation: he suggests that we have feared contamination through association with the shallow concerns of the 'inauthentic' tourist.⁵ In her book she wished to tackle the notion of authenticity as a processional feature of the mode of production of interpretations, rather than as a nature adhering to any behaviour itself.

Harvey, an accountant, who made a brave effort to appear interested, asked her what happens when researchers such as ourselves go on holiday, especially to Dublin? We all impressed on him that we were strictly researching and were not in pursuit of the shallow experiences of tourists like him. We concurred that, as a result of what might be a simple oversight, a political prudishness, or more likely the constipations of modernity, or the anthropological neglect of contemporary society in favour of the exotic other at the margins of colonial consciousness, anyone pursuing a study of postmodern Dublin is confronted by something of a *tabula rasa* in content and, most especially, theoretical approach. In the liberating context of this neglect, we turned to Baudrillard, Foucault and Lowenthal, among others, between mouthfuls, to provide us with some framework within which we might make sense of Dublin: most especially to make sense of contemporary simulations which could define the Dublin of these intellectuals on holiday in Dublin. Nowadays, people come to Dublin because, after all, everyone has been here – it shares a remembered nature with Woodstock.

We opted for traditional scones and, over these, Hans took up the particular idea that perhaps the absence of mass industrialisation in Dublin places its inhabitants in a peculiarly advantaged position to exploit current cultural formations, where the postindustrial seems to have a relationship with the postmodern. It could be argued, he claimed, that there is a relationship of epistemological interdependence between tourism and heritage as they emerge in contemporary Dublin. They are epistemically related to each other in postmodern consciousness – in place of the rather banal functionalist conclusion that they are related economically through demand. The functionalist cannot account for the emergence of the past as a contemporary consumable at this precise historical point. This, he believed, was peculiarly the case in the example of food.

But Claude interrupted that for Baudrillard, contemporary experience of the world is part of the generalised postmodern simulacra, where all sense of reality escapes us. Gazing around the Epicurian Foodhall, he argued that contemporary Dublin seemed to fit this model of simulated

reality quite well. But I argued that it remained to be determined whether the city is not just an inauthentic historical representation but rather simulated history in this sense: in other words, contemporary Dublin has a complex relation to history that is concerned with the simulation of the traditional narrative chronology. Simulation is not some arbitrary free-for-all but is constrained by its own logic. However, any argument for the limits of simulation seemed difficult to sustain in the unrestrained confines of the Epicurian Foodhall.

To test our ideas on simulation we determined, unlike Baudrillard, to check out Temple Bar via the nearby Halfpenny Bridge. This would allow us to achieve both a valuable research goal and the charitable act of delivering Harvey to his mates enjoying the craic. We chatted as we strolled along Abbey Street. Sarah held forth on MacCannell's concern with the inauthenticity of modern tourism. She told us that he believes that the Boorstin-type analysis of tourism as a pseudo-experience is the characteristically intellectual-snobbish view that other people, like Harvey, are tourists, while myself, Claude, Sarah and Hans are, indeed, travellers.⁶ This snobbery appears as a constant in research into simulations, where those who do not participate are at a loss as to how anyone, like Harvey, could be 'conned' by the craic in the pubs of Temple Bar. But she argued that this attitude is to mistake simulation for pretending. Simulation is a technically precise mode of signification and not the free-play of the imagination.

Increasingly animated, pushing our way through the indifferent crowds on Liffey Street, past the 'Hags with the Bags', Claude argued the absurdity of treating authenticity as an end of a process, rather than as a strategy for producing cultural products, as revealed in the extreme relativism of Crick's argument that all cultures are 'staged' and thus inauthentic, since cultures are constantly invented, remade and reorganised.⁷ This position, he contended, would result in the absurdity of denying reality. Postmodernists, he told an increasingly distracted Harvey, do not deny reality but simply claim that an appeal to reality has no explanatory force.

Thus preoccupied, Harvey failed to observe, or along with some fifty-seven other people ignored, a 'red man' signal for the crossing at the bridge and walked under the Viking Splash Ship that was at that moment driving by. Harvey was hit on the head by the prow and left for dead on the street by these Vikings, like thousands before him a millennium ago. An elderly local who was passing by this scene called the ambulance on her mobile phone. On asking what had happened, I informed her that our recent acquaintance from Bristol had been run over by the Vikings, to which she replied 'Jasus – ye must be really having the right craic'.

This encounter with a local brought to my mind Cronin's claims that dialogue has been the process of authentication in contemporary travel

writing in Ireland, where anecdote provides comic relief and we Irish are portrayed as irrepressible in the face of misfortune and intrinsically burlesque.⁸ This is a device deployed by Joyce to authenticate Bloom's experience of Dublin. I consoled my surviving colleagues that the principal process of authentication in Dublin is provided by such street scenes, bringing the drama of the burlesque in contact with the artificial experience of the visitor. Here, in the form of a boat that sailed the streets of Dublin, we found a genuine example of the deployment of opposition. Thus comforted, we agreed that, once the ambulance had arrived to take Harvey away to some more prosaic reality inside the emergency ward, we would temporarily adjourn to Mulligan's, spurning the tacky commerciality of the nearby Russian bar, Pravda. Relieved of our structuring prop, we waited while the ambulance made its way to us through the gridlock. I was reminded how, for Urry, tourism is generated through difference and results from a basic binary division between the ordinary/ everyday and the extraordinary. For this reason, Urry⁹ believes that any account that suggests tourism is motivated by a search for the authentic is incorrect. Feifer¹⁰ has even suggested that many tourists, what he terms post-tourists, delight in the inauthenticity of the normal tourist experience, exemplified in front of us on the street in the form of six Vikings offering first aid to Harvey. From all this, we can see that the notion of authenticity is a complex one.

We waited for the ambulance. While doing so, I fell into a reverie on my experience of living in Dublin. I have come to think about authenticity in terms of bounded strategies and spaces: in moving through the city we are moving through modern authentic representations and post-modern simulations, with no effort made to distinguish between them. Borrowing from Lowenthal's analysis of factitious history, we might come to think of this as a strategy to persuade both the tourist and the resident that the entire city is presenting the same type of truth throughout, regardless of the differences between economic spaces: contemporary Dublin disguises the differences between Merrion Square and Mountjoy Square from the visitor. This reflects how Dublin is caught between modern modes of representation and postmodern simulation.

We waited for the ambulance. Simulation is the postmodern mode of signification that produces an economy of signs through which we think ourselves in culture and through which we communicate. Obviously, the meaning of simulations often escapes us at a conscious level, so there is a need to unpack their cultural values: this is the heuristic strategy. I realised that this is what Baudrillard attempts to do and what we were attempting in our study of Dublin. I daydreamed about authentication processes as an aspect of the production of images, rather than their relation to a philosophically privileged reality. The image of Dublin precedes any notion of 'real Dublin'. This is why the Millennium Spike

featured on the Dublin bus tour prior to its being built. In postmodernity, simulation takes over from representation. But representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation and produces a discourse on the real. This is the way daydreaming tries to absorb consciousness. Simulation can include representation as simulation, just as consciousness can accommodate a reverie or daydream. The idea of authenticity belongs to history at the level of history's relation to reality, but it belongs to postmodern experience in terms of authenticating procedures. So I realised that Dublin cannot be authentic in a naively realist way. The city, with its diversity of ethnic restaurants and food, in the absence of ethnic difference, does not work on the basis of imagining or pretending we are in a real place or epoch. It works through the precise processes of simulation. I decided to abandon the notion of authenticity as a burden from modernity. But could I really leave it go? What would happen if I did not cling to our well established modes of validation? Surely the result could only be disastrous?

The ambulance arrived! Harvey briefly regained consciousness and during that moment we assured him that we would find his mates in Bobs and let them know what had happened. Relieved of our inauthentic tourist we made our way to Mulligan's, the interior visible only through the invitingly open door. Here the visitor is confronted by a range of Dublinesque images that reinforce our literate past: the real home of James Joyce.

We changed to mass-produced lager after two pints of Guinness and, at this point, Claude could not resist invoking Baudrillard, who, he told us, characterises the contemporary experience of the world as being mediated by postmodern consciousness, which, he argued, has its conditions of possibility in simulation. He informed us that simulation has come to replace the anthropomorphism of modernism in an epistemological transformation that has radically altered both our experience of culture and our modes of cultural production. The presence of forms of simulation lends weight to the operation of postmodern consciousness, whether we like it or not. Contemporary pub behaviour, with what appears to be the fairly extensive deployment of simulacra, suggests itself as a fruitful place to test hypotheses on postmodern behaviour: in this context, we were informed, pub behaviour in Dublin is a metaphor for contemporary western behaviour in general. It provides an opportunity to make a theoretically informed analysis of the self – where we think ourselves through simulations – and of the other – where we come to think others through how they are simulated. 'Stimulated?' enquired an animated customer and we all laughed at this propitious pun in the pub.

To celebrate this methodological breakthrough, we had three more lagers each, just for the craic, and made our way back to Pravda, having lost some of our concern for its cultural dislocation along the boardwalk

overhanging the river. As we made our way above the river, we realised that Dublin is to be understood from the point of view of both cultural production and consumption and, towards this end, we realised that Baudrillard is useful. The production of the boardwalk does not have a use value, because it runs parallel to the footpath, but is primarily consumed simply as a sign: it has a culture value in consumption. The boardwalk is another means people have for relating themselves to the social order. These kinds of architecture can be used to think within contemporary social order. In this way, it is a semiotic order that precedes the individual, like any language. Much of Dublin is about establishing the individual's place in the social order rather than fulfilling needs and so has a use value.

We consumed the boardwalk, gingerly sidestepping the winos and, once inside Pravda, we saw an example of how Dublin has been stripped of all images of colonisation and emigration – these, if they exist at all, are featured signs rather than historical evidence of conquest. The story in Pravda is one of productive cooperation, where there are no embarrassing conflicts. Conflict is incongruous with the craic. The inability to simulate political or ideological divisions that have marked modern consciousness is a hallmark of simulation evident throughout the city. This is no better manifestation than being surrounded by Cold War iconography. Thus, the postmodern rendering of the craic avoids embarrassing conflict.

This seemed a good location to debate the merits of Marx, surrounded by the most incontrovertible evidence of his demise. However, Claude would not have any of it. It seemed to Claude that Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*¹¹ provides us with a means of analysing ordinary practices such as 'having the craic'. Irishness is expressed in the craic – having fun – which is exported through the globalisation of the Irish pub, a fun divorced from emotion. We reflected on the ironic inversion of drinking in a Russian pub in Dublin and wondered how we should behave never having internalised such an experience. Claude argued that the relationship between history and the craic in Pravda is not a necessary one: it is just one of many techniques of authentication, where the notion of the craic has come to occupy the role of the most important authenticifier. I refused to go back to that idea. Claude continued that simulation is different from pretending but has a real impact on our mode of imagining the past in our contemporary experience and, therefore, necessitates serious consideration. Sarah informed us of attempts that have been made to understand the nature of its operation rather than simply dismissing ourselves as anachronistic modern snobs. She told us that, as academics, we need to wake up and smell the vodka. Now drunk, like every other drunk, Sarah decided to relocate to Dublin.

Claude, now slightly drunk, insisted on spelling out Bourdieu's relevance to our present situation.¹² Cultural capital contains the symbolic

competence necessary to appreciate certain forms of culture: in our case, to be able to appreciate Pravda. Most of the customers in Pravda are made up of the much increased, in Dublin, service class, which Bourdieu terms the 'new petty bourgeoisie'. Bourdieu argues that this group demands 'to have fun'. There is a fear of not getting enough pleasure and this is combined with a search for self-expression and 'bodily expression' and for communication with others. This new class, then beginning to swarm Pravda, are to be found teeming at the counter, wearing labelled clothes and talking in loud voices to each other over the throb of music and general conversation and talking with their absent counterparts on mobile phones, where what can be overheard is more important than what can be communicated. They were having the craic. Thus we discovered that the craic, as an expression of postmodern entertainment, had taken all the danger out of history and redeployed it for consumption. There were no spies in Pravda and no members of the proletariat.

Claude, now shouting over the increasing din of background music and the cacophony of mobile phones, designed to eradicate the mainstay of the modern pub experience, conversation, screamed at us about the growing role of the media in minimising the importance of separate and distinct systems of information on which a social class or group would base its behaviour. Individuals from all social groupings are exposed to more generally available systems of information and each grouping can now see some representations of the private spaces of other social groupings on television. The media have provided a hugely increased circulation of the representations of other people's lives, including those of elite groups such as the royal family and the working classes depicted on the television soap opera *Fair City*. This kind of institutionalised voyeurism allows people to adopt the styles of other groups and to cross social boundaries between different social groupings. The media have also dissolved the distinction between private life and public behaviour. This is the same type of person as the one who, screaming into her mobile phone in virtual conversation with someone made interesting only by being absent, crashed into our tray of pints and made us resolve to leave immediately for a quieter place to exchange our important views. We found it noteworthy that the craic can be 'had' in all Irish pubs, even Russian ones.

Thus, with Pravda rapidly filling up, and becoming increasingly anxious that we might miss some worthwhile experience, we continued our journey to Temple Bar. However, I realised that if we hurried we could see the sun go down on Dublin harbour from the viewing tower in Smithfield. We left Pravda and hastily made our way across Capel Street, through the closing Fruit Market, past the restored traditional Distillery Buildings and into Smithfield Hotel. In the lobby of the hotel, we were just in time to collide with the arrival of a loud group of American

tourists intent on taking traditional set-dancing lessons. We ascended the tower struggling with vertigo brought on by the alcohol rather than the height and took up our places on the viewing deck. We wondered about the nature of the panorama before our eyes. Boorstin,¹³ anticipating Jean Baudrillard, argued that contemporary Americans cannot experience 'reality' directly but thrive on pseudo-events. These pseudo-events are the indirect experience of an unreality. We have inherited them through globalisation in the form of the Patrick's Day Parade, for example. Indigenous populations are induced to produce extravagant displays for the gullible observer, who, in turn, becomes further removed from reality. Sarah remarked on the lack of extravagance in the Smithfield display. When tourists come to Dublin they want to gaze on the splendour of the city – the real Irish experience – and not on inner-city poverty, which must be screened from their view. On this model, the real becomes invisible while the symbolised unreal is made real. Thus, down below, Dublin Corporation struggles with the removal of the view of the indigenous. The view now is purely postmodern, in that it tries to efface the distinction between the past and the present, a distinction that gives rise to history.

Back on the ground, we retired to the Cobblestone pub to listen to traditional music in the company of real travellers who act as travellers on RTÉ. We were in the Company of Professional Simulators, masters of the trade: those who simulated themselves but who, in the act of self-simulation, were thus removed from modernity. As the boundaries between the masses and ourselves blurred, travellers and those who play them on television blurred, live traditional music and that in the museum across the square blurred, we again took up the challenge of making sense of it all over a few pints of real Guinness; our vision was blurring. As we chatted, and drank and listened to the music and enjoyed the craic, we felt all the boundaries that had hitherto held us in place dissolve. This was surely the site of real Dublin culture in postmodernity. We witnessed the dissolving of boundaries between high and low culture and between different cultural forms such as art, education, photography, music, sport, shopping, drinking, acting and research. In the Cobblestone, postmodern culture affects the audience through its impact, through regimes of pleasure, and not through passive aesthetic contemplation. Under the influence of Guinness, the sign of postmodern Dublin, we experienced the dissolution of the bonds of modernity.

A real fight broke out in a corner of the pub, which quickly consumed the entire crowd and, to the sounds of sirens, we found ourselves back out on Smithfield Square with the sky on fire. But how were we to make sense of this scene when nothing in our experience had prepared us for it? Hans wondered if there was a gas-field beneath our feet. Here was incontrovertible evidence that the visual has come to dominate bourgeoisie

society,¹⁴ partly as a result of photographic culture, in the form of ‘blazing dustbins at the top of poles’. The epistemic order – which functions as a historical *a priori* to structure both the field of knowledge and the content of the perceived in a specific period – broke down. Cronin reminds us that implicit in the Foucauldian gaze is the idea that seeing is culturally determined and politically coercive.¹⁵ Cronin mentions ruins as examples of constructs rather than mere natural givens, selected for observation on the basis of political, social/cultural criteria that change with circumstances.¹⁶ Edward Said claims that the western convention of writing about ruins was to reduce present-day societies to the remains of a once glorious past.¹⁷ Here, in the embarrassing ruin that constitutes two sides of Smithfield Square, the blazing poles seem to distract us from the decidedly unromantic streetscape. Without knowing how to respond to these as pure spectacles, we made our way, by gaslight, to Zaytoon on Parliament Street, where we had resolved to take dinner in the form of real kebabs.

We were on Church Street before we realised that Claude was missing. Sarah said that she had seen him with a group from the pub who had retreated quickly down an alleyway. We decided to look for him after getting something to eat. However, we agreed to try the Porter House for Real Ale before Zaytoon. Equipped with Weiss Biers, we took up shouting at each other in the display of the window. Here, alcohol is to be consumed as a public spectacle, where the very processes of production are on display. Postmodern pubs have huge windows (or no windows at all) to facilitate the outside looking in, so that those inside can exercise their sign value as customers enjoying the craic and those outside can revel in their sign value. The craic, after all, is a disposition that needs to be made visible for its meaning. Inside the pub, we were bombarded with different levels of representation in a technique similar to the way factional documentaries function. The Porter House interior exteriorises the processes involved in the manufacture of beer. This visual confession creates an environment sympathetic to the production of beer predominantly as sign value rather than beer as intoxicant.

Our conversation turned to how we might deal with the decidedly unromantic nature of the streetscape around Smithfield and how we might reconcile this with an integrated experience of Dublin. I related my reading of Cronin, where he tells us that attention to the material fabric of Irish life invites aesthetic disappointment, so the attention of the traveller shifts to the landscape.¹⁸ Trapped in the city, we turn to the people for romance, or at least the people as represented through the institutions for the production of people. The predominant such institution in Dublin is the pub. At that point, it seemed clear to Sarah that, unlike other European cities, Dublin is the place of drink, rather than, for example, sex, where identity is produced. Relationships are difficult

to form in the craic of the super-pub, where individual communications surrender to regimes for the production of the collective. Cities are either ignored or condemned for their visual poverty. This outer, visual poverty is compensated for by the vision of the inner eye, which is informed by fiction, history and myth, which has its home inside the traditional pub. In this way, images of Ireland in the imagination are what excite the traveller and we, as increasingly excited images of Ireland in the pub, excited the gaze of those passing outside. This seems to push the contemporary experience of Ireland into the heart of simulacrum.

A concern with the spectacle of scenery has dropped out of contemporary Irish travelogues, perhaps because of competition with visual media, and has been replaced by a sense of dialogue and theatricality, often centred on the pub. Social theorists tour Dublin through their theories and then travel to Dublin to carry out their postmodern fieldwork, where fieldwork is the experience of what they already know.

We were left with the consideration of whether the major organising principle in this mode of cultural production is symbolic or economic. This seemed particularly relevant in the thriving business of the Porter House. Bourdieu rightly highlighted the relational dynamic that operates between these two structuring principles. The heritage industry appears to mark a shift in the sociology of knowledge from the relatively autonomous museum to the economic capital of entertainment. In the Porter House, living museum of beer production, site of cultural production and habituated display of bodies at ease with postmodernity, a living lesson in how to have the craic, these principles come together. This is the Irish habitus. Its grammar is globalised heritage, which is necessarily universally recognisable. There is a moving together of economic and symbolic capital in this very Irish German pub.

There in the pub, before eyes that would be astonished were they not bleary, I unveiled my brand new technique. I call my method decomposition, or more precisely pristine Aquinian decomposition, or, for short, pure tommyrot. Only this approach can reveal the complex nature of the postmodern global city. Decomposition is interdisciplinary, because it involves the collaborative efforts of scholars from cognate disciplines actively engaging themselves together in fieldwork. It is an active deconstruction of the sole egomaniacal ethnographer in the field: it is multi-egotistical as opposed to multi-sited. With its reference to Aquinas, it maintains the infallibility of that essentially Irish intellectual inheritance. Like Aquinas, I aimed to dominate the Irish intellectual scene for hundreds of years; like Bourdieu, I aimed to disconcert those who practised sociology without reflecting on it. After that, I remember very little.

At 5.00 a.m. I was interviewed by Sergeant McGuire in Store Street garda station. He was friendly enough and gave me two styrofoam coffees.

However, I had to make a statement and thus I tried to explain to his sceptical modernism what it was we had been trying to accomplish. I explained to him that Ireland is always portrayed to travellers as a place of friendly and quaint people, a place steeped in past traditions and ways of life, poetry and the craic. The Irish are seen as having a peculiar skill at enjoying themselves: Irish people are constantly portrayed talking, laughing, drinking, dancing and playing music and, indeed, theorising in pubs. Leisure is represented as the tourist joining in the craic. How was I supposed to resist this and disappoint my guests? I explained how thinkers like O'Connor¹⁹ showed how these images had their origin in British-produced images of Ireland, which are stereotypes emerging from colonial rule. Just as landscape, work and leisure have been commodified in tourism and are the result of cultural construction, so also are we, the people. O'Connor²⁰ argues that the people of Ireland have featured centrally in images of Ireland because of its colonised, economically dependent and peripheral condition. Ireland shares with other 'peasant' societies the setting up of the 'peasant' as a tourist attraction. This has meant that Irish people's behaviour has become an element of the tourist's experience. What could I do in those circumstances but join in? He asked me how much we had had to drink but I told him that it was impossible for me to know with any certainty because part of our received Irish charm is to exaggerate everything.

I further defended myself by informing him that Lowenthal²¹ argues that an awareness of the past has a relationship to our wellbeing. Despite my short-term memory lapse, I was aware of the past as a realm both coexistent with and distinct from the present. Historical interpretations are shaped by anachronisms and hindsight: history is necessarily anachronistic because we can only live in the contemporary world; history employs hindsight to shape our interpretations of past events. We constantly see historical events differently as new consequences emerge. Oral narratives telescope, expand and rearrange segments of the past in line with whatever significance is attributed to them, where perceived changes tend to cluster within discrete periods separated by long intervals where nothing happens. I asked Sergeant McGuire to tell me what impact academic narratives might have on the way I might apprehend what had happened. Combine these narratives with the traditions of storytelling in Ireland, with their humour, fictions, exaggerations, scatologies and iconoclasms and downright lies, and the constraints of academic narratives, and you would have a complex mixture.

I told the increasingly uninterested Sergeant that Lowenthal also argues that we illuminate the diversity of the past by presenting it in the present and this is what he was demanding of me. But I impressed on him the difficulties facing his interrogation because in such processes we anachronise the past by making it intelligible in the present. We shape

the past to fit our present-day image of the past: we shape the past to make the past fulfil our present-day need for certain kinds of stories. He had a need for a story of misdoings; I had a need for a story for the academy. By combining this with the narrative styles of modern Ireland and postmodern narrative strategies, we could demolish the traditional genres of recounting. I suspect that I did not convince Sergeant McGuire but, in any event, he promptly let me go, with a warning to behave myself.

We never got to Temple Bar: we skirted its edges. We never arrived at the heart of the matter – Bobs. I never saw Claude again but I understand that he is living outside Galway in a dormer bungalow with members of a travelling family who have stopped travelling. Sarah now lives with Hans in Heidelberg and I meet her on occasion when she is in Dublin.

Notes

- 1 B. O'Connor and M. Cronin (eds), *Tourism in Ireland. A Critical Analysis* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993).
- 2 E. Gellner, 'On nations and nationalism', *Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School*, 1 (1995).
- 3 E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 4 *Sunday Times Review of Books*, 12 January 1997.
- 5 D. Nash, *Anthropology of Tourism* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1996).
- 6 D. MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: Macmillan, 1976).
- 7 M. Crick, 'Sun, sex, sights, savings and servility', *Criticism, Heresy and Interpretation*, 1 (1988), pp. 37–76.
- 8 O'Connor and Cronin (eds), *Tourism in Ireland*.
- 9 J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze. Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990).
- 10 M. Feifer, *Going Places* (London: Macmillan, 1985).
- 11 P. Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 D. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper, 1964).
- 14 D. Bell, 'Framing nature: first steps into the wilderness for a sociology of the landscape', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 3 (1993), pp. 1–22.
- 15 O'Connor and Cronin, *Tourism in Ireland*, p. 53.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- 21 D. Lowenthal, 'How we know the past', in *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).