Daly — Sean, I was introduced to your practice through your publications, initially by way of the comprehensive collection of pdfs on your website, and, subsequently, many of those same publications in hard copy, which you kindly sent to me. Encountering these ostensibly identical documents in quite dissimilar circumstances suggests an open-ended strategy in circulating your work. Could you elaborate on your relationship to books and printed matter, and how you deploy them?

Lynch — This strategy is a fairly pragmatic one, linked to the wider activities of my practice. Working more-or-less on a project by project basis, I’m interested in developing representations of idiosyncratic moments of the past, instances mostly eradicated from popular consciousness that yet exist through a disparate series of objects, events and narratives swaying between the anecdotal and objective-informative. I’d consider my task to track down and investigate what this material, often sidelined by the progress of history, might mean as an alternative when presented within today’s neoliberal cultural hegemony.

A scenario can be told and described so many times; it begins to narrow down to a particular narrative and content. I am interested in loose ends, the footnotes that tend to get lost, and how to mediate their presence. This usually occurs through photographically-based installations, refabricated or found artefacts, and freely-distributed publications. A useful example in this regard is DeLorean Progress Report, a project based around the bankruptcy and subsequent aftermath of the DeLorean factory which operated in Dunmurry outside Belfast from 1981–2. The car produced there, the DMC-12, is known as a Hollywood star of Back To The Future, and a cultural icon of the 1980s. It has found itself cast in many other roles: for example, last year it featured on Newsnight as an analogy for the ‘crash and burn’ status of the economic crisis.

My investigation, based on an article found in a Detroit newspaper and scant rumours in the enthusiastic DeLorean owners club community, was to seek out and find the location of the tooling once used to make the body of the car, essentially the form givers that gave DeLorean its famous profile. Sold off and dispersed to scrapyards through the country, it was suggested that some of the tooling, made of heavy cast iron, was purchased by fishermen to be used as anchors. Through visiting scrapyards, tracking down individuals who would have known of this particular chain of handling, I eventually located the metal shapes at the bottom of Galway Bay, where lobster and crabs now live in the coral around the nooks and shapes that once pressed out stainless steel panels of the car’s exterior.

Photographs of sites encountered during this trip, along with the continuing refabrication of exterior panels of the car by handmade rather than industrial means feature in a gallery presentation, along with a written text made into a publication and disseminated freely both online
and in paper form. Since 2010, changes to the text have frequently occurred, and each time the project is exhibited further knowledge or points of view have been incorporated into a new edition.

Many of these revisions have occurred by simply by reintroducing the material I’ve been working with into the public realm, where a reciprocation of knowledge is then exchanged. I gave a talk in Belfast last year at Eurofest, the quinquennial International DeLorean Owners Convention. It was in the ballroom of the Europa hotel, with a large crowd of DeLorean owners from around the world. I spoke of an unconfirmed rumour I heard about some stainless steel destined to become part of a DeLorean that was then salvaged and turned into pig troughs on a farm somewhere in Ireland. After coming down off the stage, I was beckoned to join a table where I met Mervyn Richardson, who excitedly informed me he was the man who shaped and owns those pig troughs! This transformation from potential sports car to farming utensil could be valorised as a genuinely important act in terms of the framework of my project. Moreover, as an understanding of the materiality of Irish scrapyards in the 1980s, it could be seen as an evocation of Merleau Ponty’s ‘flesh of the world,’ an idea of mass in which ‘everything’ is touching ‘everything’ else, in which all things are connected in a formless whole.

Daly—It resonates to hear of these conversations and exchanges being incorporated into revised editions. My activities with Bedford Press at the Architectural Association encompass the production of publications which act as dialogic spaces, questioning how a publication can be an intrinsic part of a work rather than merely a prosaic documentation of it. I guess at the scale you are producing your publications, it is quite practical and logical to allow these updates. This responsive model could be regarded as publishing in a very true sense i.e. ‘making public’. Does this adaptive quality lend itself to other manifestations of your work; can it also be implemented in a gallery setting, for instance?

Lynch—Well, it is straightforward to fit some avenues of thought in the guise of cultural production in a gallery space, no doubt. I often joke with artist friends, ‘Just make sure you measure the doors first!’ I’m sure we both agree that there exists a specific demographic inside the gallery that partakes in keeping the communal gluejob of culture intact. While this audience is of course a valuable necessity in the rarified activities that we are involved in, your question is useful to begin to problematise these relationships. Forms of ad hoc publishing can be about creating a contestation around the public realm as much as trying to create a community of consensus and clarity within it. The notion of building up an appropriate working framework that can accommodate these somewhat awkward notions is an ongoing concern for me, especially when I revisit Adorno—whether art is understanding the world, or whether the world is understanding art.

Hence, it is not a case of withdrawing from the discomfort of everyone looking at the same thing in different ways, but rather embracing fragmentation and the frictions that go along with it. For my work, this often involves a need to track down and acknowledge certain flaws or glitches in our communal understanding of the public realm in order to realistically position ourselves within it. An example might be useful here.

III

Here is a report from the Irish Daily Mirror of 5 March 2008. I’ve used this artefact in published pieces and exhibitions in recent
times. It details a stack of bricks, covertly removed from the ground and neatly piled on top of each other, at the centre of a roundabout in Wexford town. The structure existed for a few hours on a Saturday night and Sunday morning, and was photographed by an unnamed local man. An accompanying editorial recognised and endorsed it as being an unusual piece of public art. While the story did not feature in that day’s UK edition, the report suggests an editorial shift in the Mirror’s stance on the use of bricks in art. In 1976 the paper famously led with the headline “WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH”, reacting angrily to the Tate Gallery spending taxpayer’s money and purchasing Carl Andre’s sculpture Equivalent VIII, which consisted of 120 bricks arranged in a rectangle, for their collection.

I am not yet aware whether the incident in Wexford and its reportage is an ode to Andre’s work, but it is clear that a use value exists around the scenario as a touchstone and reference point for further research around populist reactions to art. Moreover, an evocation might occur of Andre’s work as a devise outside its museum context and within a flexible public sphere, constantly changing and offering contingent viewpoints. Could its unconscious transposition to a traffic roundabout in Wexford be evidence of a mythology that, rather than present a defacto version of its own authority, finds the doubtful nuances in the constructions of its own history? Do the use of bricks in sculptural form continue to successfully challenge the petit bourgeois and neoliberalist viewpoints of art, or have bricks been subsumed into the apparatus of the mass media? Ultimately, such concerns allude to how isolated threads of history have been and might continue to be recontextualised, and that further investigations and continued updates need to occur.

**Daly** — I’m interested in this recurring role that newspaper reports have in your work. At a recent Architectural Association lecture, Brian Eno argued that the current government cuts in art schools and institutions are largely due to art criticism’s failure to develop a cogent canon, unable to adequately clarify art’s function within society. With the ongoing News International debacle, and a conceivable diminishing interest in tabloid sensationalism, is there a possible scenario where the popular press could play a more significant role in the public discussion of art?

**Lynch** — My use of newspaper reports and photojournalist images tend to signify certain limits of ontological understanding: a newspaper the day after an event is often the most reliable source of objective information when compared to the recollection of actual human memory. Despite this, a journalist and editor’s angle or bias on a subject can also reveal particular tensions around the material or moment at hand. These kinds of frictions are useful to re-animate and re-examine situations that have been glossed over by contemporary progress.

Most of my research around the relationship between art and newspapers is sited from the 1950s onwards in Ireland, for I edited an anthology of material drawn from national and regional titles on the island in 2008. Outside of its presence in specialised exhibition reviews, the appearance of art in this locale is based on an exotic materiality, as an object of beatnik mystique.
it is hard to see a change around these relationships in the short term. Art’s value and format as a wild card in the media is far from the possibilities of its usage as a critical political tool with an embedded sense of immediacy. What might be useful is to examine our role as the readers of the newspaper and moreover the public realm, and develop somewhat parasitical strategies to disrupt and re-align certain strands of information.

Daly — This attempt at disruption and realignment is addressed in two projects from 2011: Me Jewel and Darlin’, installed in Dublin’s O’Connell Street, and A Rocky Road, an exhibition that you curated at the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork. What position do both of these projects assume in the discussion of art production and reception?

Lynch — Me Jewel & Darlin’ was a display case, a wunderkammer of sorts, prominently placed along a street where a series of memorials and monuments remembering the great political and social deeds of the Irish nation are sited. The work was positioned between a statue of Father Theobald Matthew, a nineteenth century apostle of the Total Abstinence Pledge from alcohol, and a 120 metre-high stainless steel spike erected in 2003 entitled The Spire of Dublin.

Exhibits of relatively diverse material were presented over a 15-month timeframe, each accompanied by contextual notes in published and online form. The selection of objects and artifacts evoked a very subjective view of the contingent materiality of the city, and attempted to be reactionary to its locale. A reproduction of a now lost drawing by the graphic artist Harry Clarke (1889–1931) detailing Dublin in flames and in ruin due to a vampire demon was presented as a counterpoint to the somewhat sober quality of the street, which might be described as a fairly generic large European thoroughfare.

VI

Another display centred around a scrapyard company, National Recycling, on the western edge of the city. Last year, they repossessed a BMW car owned by Sean FitzPatrick, former CEO of Anglo-Irish Bank and now known as a main protagonist of reckless financial practice that pre-empted the collapse of economic sovereignty in Ireland. An eBay auction was organised where the highest bidder would get to press the button to crush the car, as a kind of ritualistic revenge for the death of the Celtic Tiger. I attended the event, which drew substantial media interest and several recycling artists who hoped to use part of the crushed car as raw material for a sculpture! While the car was subsequently crushed and shipped to China to be recycled, a small tail light fragment picked up from the ground of the scrapyard was transposed into the display case on O’Connell Street some months later. Effectively, the case acted as a framework for this scavenger.

A Rocky Road was also about attempting to build up a particular modality, this time to consider the underlying attitudes of what could be termed an ‘aesthetics of reception’. Public response and the subsequent afterlife of an artwork were considered as themes of enquiry, as relevant as the creative intentions that bring the artwork into being. As an exhibition investigating artistic production and its reception in Ireland, several topics repeatedly arose: conservative reactions and protest to the growth of modern art, vandalism of artworks, and the newsworthy character of artists with their many creative ideas and schemes were all prominent.

By focusing on and gathering together a selection of such instances into a common heritage, the exhibition suggested that they might be considered more than occasional oddities or nuggets of art trivia. Instead their presentation might be viewed as a recurring
David Lilburn’s print was featured in 1984’s Eva exhibition in Limerick. British curator Peter Fuller selected the show from over three hundred entries, made by open submission, and awarded Lilburn a £500 prize for graphic art. By the artist’s own admission, Towards from the Forceps to the Chains of Office alludes to a desire to be free of personal constraints that inevitably arise from membership of society. Pictorially, the print depicts the artist, naked, lying on his back, with an erection. Writing in the exhibition catalogue, Fuller criticised the tendencies of much Irish art of the time towards the style of neo-expressionism, before complimenting Lilburn who, in his juried opinion, was ‘conspicuously using the figure itself—and not just the substances and processes of painting—as a means of expression.’

On 2 November 1984, a phone call was received by local newspaper the Limerick Leader, alerting the newsdesk to an imminent attack upon the artwork. Local café owner Richard Coughlan was enroute to Limerick City Gallery of Art to destroy the drawing, which he considered pornographic. Reporter Conor Keane and photographer Owen South were dispatched to the gallery. Around 5pm, Coughlan arrived and proceeded to smash the glass on the artwork’s frame. Hugh Murray, chairman of the exhibition committee, pushed him away from the drawing as he was about to spray it with paint. The ensuing struggle between the two men, as they fell to the gallery floor strewn with broken glass, was photographed. A gallery attendant came to Murray’s aid, and a shouting match occurred between the two men. Coughlan demanded to be arrested on a charge of causing malicious damage so that he might be able to bring to the notice of a judicial court the reason for his act.

An antagonistic relationship between the gallery, artwork and protestor continued in the days after the attack. The front page of that week’s Limerick Leader reported on the scene, prompting the exhibition committee to issue a statement: “The violent intolerance implicit in this incident has far deeper implications for our society than the alleged offence of which the artist is accused. The committee also regret the role of the Limerick Leader in the incident... is art fair game for this kind of treatment and if information on a different kind of crime came to the Leader’s notice would the same strategy of set-up, watch and photograph, be employed?” The newspaper responded: “Mr. Coughlan informed a Limerick Leader reporter of his intention to deface the drawing. This placed the newspaper in a dilemma. Prior disclosure of Mr. Coughlan’s identity would have been a breech of confidentiality. Yet the Leader’s duty to the community demanded that the newspaper warn the exhibition organizers. The editor resolved this dilemma by instructing the reporter to inform that the attack was imminent, but not to volunteer the name of the informant.” Lilburn’s print was reframed and placed back into the exhibition.
A protest, organised by Coughlan, was held in front of the gallery the following Wednesday. Two small holes, punctured in the drawing by the broken glass, can still be seen today.

* Daly — These lines of inquiry correspond to those of an auditor, (perhaps even a necromancer?), assembling and foregrounding certain threads of hidden knowledge. Yet they are also reflexive actions, unavoidably implicated, mise en abyme-like, within the histories that you are portraying. Where do you see your work residing within these histories, either now or in the future, in how it is itself reported, documented and circulated? 

* Lynch — To describe the processes I’m involved in as necromancy would be an exaggeration. Most of the material I work with is not necessarily accessible or summoned despite the prominence of the internet and the process of hyperlinking we are used to nowadays. I’m more interested in understanding how my labour relates to the platforming, dissemination and associative politics of my subject matter rather than, say, pulling a rabbit out of a hat. (In a more assertive way, I could suggest a necessity to counter a social ritualism that dreams its spirituality instead of comprehending it through a thousand and one tasks of everyday life.) My working process is somewhat procedural and operational in nature, an endeavour to identify blind spots within a communal understanding that can keep both audience and I working on having to revise our current position to today’s generalisations.

Despite the built-in possibility of constant revision of material at hand, my work can often end up being the defacto version and the primary experience of the subject matter it engages. Any process of cognition involves such pitfalls. It would be unreasonable to imagine any real boundaries between narrative levels; the storyteller will appear through and in the story itself, and will contaminate any previous definition of narrative. Each memory of a history is the recollection of the last memory of the same event. Each time it is written or spoken about down it challenges the moment of its own conception. The motor that keeps history moving in these impulses and slippages continues to be the struggle for its own recognition. Accordingly, I wouldn’t speculate a future for my activity, yet I would constantly allude to positioning the residual, that which is eliminated from the habits and practices of other modes of cultural production, for it might hypothesize a modification or displacement of the very ideology-critique that cast it aside.

CAPTIONS

I & II
DeLorean Progress Report, 2009–10

III
‘VANDALS GET ARTY’, Irish Daily Mirror, 5 March 2008

IV
Image by cartoonist George O’Callaghan, Evening Herald, Dublin, 16 August 1957. ‘People seemed to have the idea that all modern art looked the same, which amounted to a confused caricature-image of Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon of 1907.’ Source: Dorothy Walker, Modern Art in Ireland, 1997, 116

V
Reproduction of The Last Hour of the Night, by Harry Clarke, 1922.

VI
Former Anglo-Irish Bank CEO Sean Fitzpatrick’s crushed BMW

VII
Richard Coughlan defaces David Lilburn’s monoprint. Courtesy Owen South

VIII
Protest against a drawing by David Lilburn, Limerick, November 9, 1984. Courtesy Owen South

IX
A popular pastime of the Renaissance, the Pasquino consisted of verses and notes about topical issues being attached to statuary of Ancient Rome. These arrangements appeared as if these antiquated fragments could now speak for contemporary life, their presence would appear reanimated or repersonalised by those around them.