

# Memorializing the ethos of 1968 in Limerick City.

Paul Tarpey.

Paul Tarpey is an artist and fine art lecturer undertaking a long-term project exploring place and identity in Limerick City.

Outcomes and interventions in city space focus on how themes of resistance stemming from the legacy of the period 1965–1973 contribute to a sense of place.

Place operates as 'a locus of collective memory'.<sup>1</sup> This research explores how the political use of place can manifest itself in various forms to create anti-monuments and reactivate past situations of protest. This process of memorializing serves to position the period 1965–1973 as being a significant contributor for on-going themes of resistance which act to define city space. Since 1968 competing definitions for Limerick have registered the city as a contested terrain.<sup>2</sup> Certain memories that have come to define the city are edited to support particular agendas to the detriment of others. It is obvious to state but the notion of generations adhering to a collective memory is one that is not easily quantified or can be represented properly.

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1: *Social Geographer David Harvey in 'Place – a short Introduction' by Tim Creswell (p. 61).*

2: *See Harvey 1996 (p. 309).*

**QUESTION** This research began by exploring how a music-based subculture in Limerick sought to establish meeting places that broke from regulated social paths. By 1965 the process of being a Mod and seeking independence constituted a type of resistance. Teenage Mods were not fully compliant in roles designated for them as young adults to be monitored by the Catholic Church in city space. Were Mods and their foreign influence seen as a threat?

**ANSWER** By 1965 a priority for the powers that made up the church state was the management of the cultural implications brought by internationalisation. In Limerick a moral watch was overseen by a combination of secular and church officials called the Catholic confraternity. They regarded teenagers attempting to manifest their own identity and articulate this, as a community, as a concern. In fact any type of youth activity that threatened this patriarchy was seen as a threat, particularly if it involved an awareness of the godless ideologies championed by the left abroad.

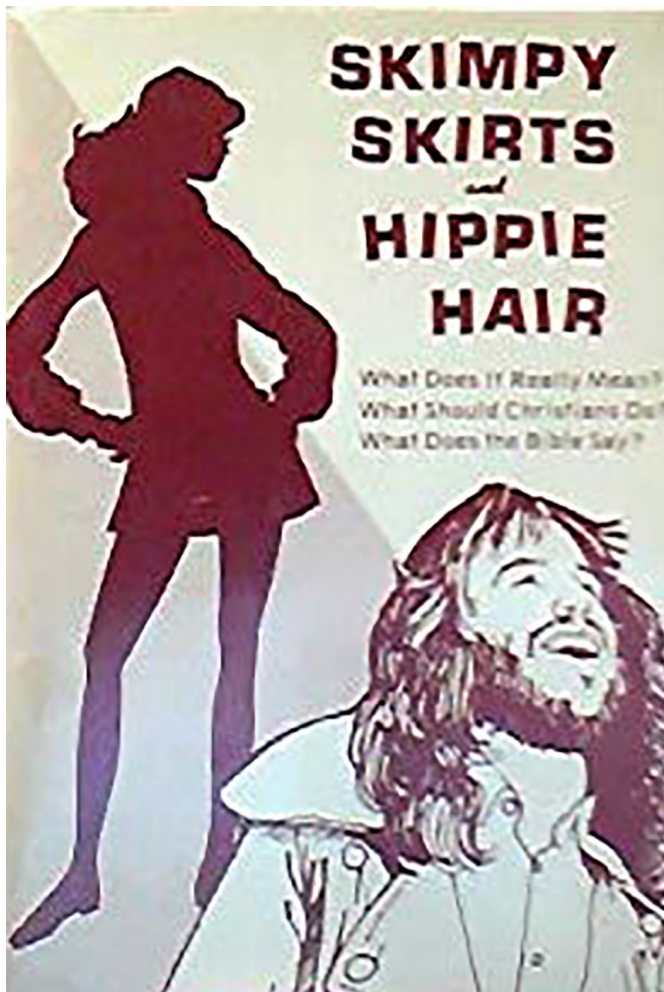
**QUESTION** By 1968 the language of protest culture which featured in music based subcultures became familiar to Limerick youth especially those who had been exposed to the counterculture while labouring in London.

**ANSWER** Whereas many strands of youth led protest featured in the countercultural movements that came to affect change in the US and Europe, the conditions for youth based revolution were isolated in Ireland. The hold the church state had in the process of how the nation was showing itself to the world featured here. The process of identity circa 1968 portrayed the nation as a mix of rural based stability (supported in the main by Catholicism) and an eagerness to embrace consumer based modernization. In these terms Ireland was an unrealized modern space which meant that 'Irish Youth' who were following conversations abroad had a significant extra hurdle to surmount if they sought to apply revolution locally.

In 1968 De Gaulle addressed the country saying this explosion was provoked by groups in revolt against modern consumer and technical society, *whether it be the communism of the East or the capitalism of the West*.<sup>3</sup> However as Ireland was still adjusting to the different types of freedoms offered by the modern consumer technical society any critique by the Irish youth could not mirror French concerns. That is not to say that Irish events are without significance. A reflection on under-represented memories of this time finds that Irish youth were aware of international unrest and sought to apply its ethos locally. It was inevitable that no matter what action was taken in attempts to further the revolutionary spirit abroad a reception of protest would be seen as a direct attack on the hegemony of the Church State. With this in mind I propose that exploration of understated events from the period can contribute to ongoing conversations on resistance and appreciate the impact and significance of youth activity in Limerick during the period 1965–1973.

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3: Donal Fallon MAO 68! Article in Rabble magazine (Dublin) May 2018.



## TEEN CREED

*Don't* let your parents down,  
They brought you up.

*Be* humble enough to obey,  
You may give orders someday.

*Choose* companions with care,  
You become what they are.

*Guard* your thoughts,  
What you think, you are.

*Choose* only a date  
Who would make a good mate.

*Be* master of your habits,  
or they will master you.

*Don't* be a show off when  
you drive,  
*Drive* with safety and arrive.

*Don't* let the crowd pressure you,  
*Stand* for something or you'll  
fall for anything.

800-310

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**QUESTION** You intend for art-based outcomes to communicate both the legacy and relevance of these events by visualizing and presenting them as anti-monuments?

**ANSWER** Yes. Official monuments in a city exist to fix time and space and mark out the extent of a specific cultural realm. They contribute to the idealization of some spaces as being 'normal'.<sup>4</sup> For Limerick in particular spaces mapped by public markers have become a significant part of the city's commercial agenda. Also, echoes of the Church State continue to feature in a commemorative process that seems increasingly tied to a tourist agenda. In 2018 the nature of commemoration in public space remains contentious, as many statues of celebrities and Catholic subjects have suddenly appeared in public space without full public consultation.

Much of what is commemorated in the city appeals to a nostalgia that renders history as subservient to agendas that are managed by private or religious interests. If private interests unduly influence this process it not only manifests power but also maps the city by creating markers for pseudo-places. Monuments, including those in the guise of advertising (which thrives on nostalgic interpretation of place), act as beacons fixing boundaries hinting that the priority for those engaging in city space is that they regard it as a transient zone. As space is more and more designated by how public and private funding merge to consolidate the idea of the city as a transient zone, the process of deciding on public monuments will be more and more subservient to this cause.

## Nine-foot statue of Padre Pio to be installed in Limerick city



by Maria Flannery 20 May 2018  
Email: maria.flannery@limerickleader.ie

share 0 comments



Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz alongside his piece depicting Padre Pio hearing confessions. One of four of these statues will be placed in Limerick city

*Limerick Leader, 20 May 2018.*

RESISTANCE: EXAMPLE ONE.

Below is an example of an understated event from the period, the location of which is across from King Johns Castle. The site of a former Maoist bookshop serves here as a prompt for an anti-monument referencing the emotional traces of a revolutionary site.

# Scuffle over Mao

Legal proceedings against the Internationalists have been initiated by two individuals following scuffles at Front Gate last Friday afternoon. David Naisby-Smith and Beverly St. Vaughan have both sent solicitors' letters to the Editor of "Words and Comment" threatening her with civil and criminal court action. Naisby-Smith may also file a charge of assault.

The incident, it is alleged, took place when David Naisby-Smith, after buying "Selected Readings of Mao Tse-tung," burned the frontpiece photograph of Mao and proceeded to rip the book into shreds in front of the sellers' stand. An argument and a struggle then ensued between Naisby-Smith and the seller for possession of the book, Naisby-Smith asserting that since he had paid 8/9d. for it, it was his to do with as he wished. Having forcibly got it back he retired to the railings where he and a group of friends began shredding every page. Another Internationalist arrived and asked the sellers what had happened and having learned went over to

Naisby-Smith and allegedly struck him. "If you think that you can get away with this sort of thing, you're wrong. And it won't be just a fist next time," he shouted.

Beverly Vaughan, outraged at the treatment which Naisby-Smith had received, bought a copy of "Words and Comment" which he immediately tore in two. He also had to struggle with a seller as a result. A general argument then began at Front Gate between the Internationalists and about twenty or thirty students. Vaughan had a solicitor's letter back at Front Gate within an hour. David Naisby-Smith saw his solicitor next morning.

An Internationalist leaflet released on Monday defended the "strong and militant" action and accused Naisby-Smith of "Fascist book burning." The Internationalists have also sent a letter to the Junior Dean.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Trinity News, February 1968.

In October 1969 a small group of Maoists, led by Arthur Allen (the son of an Irish industrialist and student leader in Trinity), became workers in the Shannon Industrial Estate and opened a bookshop in Nicholas Street selling the works of Mao Tse Tung, Stalin, Lenin, and Marx. Such acts followed the Maoist *call to action*. They were immediately seen as a threat as the Redemptorist priests of the arch confraternity uncompromisingly associated Maoism with godlessness. Quickly the local press supported what amounted to a persecution led on the street by the city's mayor Stevie Coughlan. Attacks followed as *The 8 Maoists* were vilified, sacked from work and refused service in shops and bars. As the witch-hunt grew the local press explicitly said that the group sought to disrupt the arch confraternity and should be ran out of town. A bullet fired into the shop at night while a female member was inside sealed its fate and the Maoists left the city. They had lasted 6 months.

The same year President Nixon visited the city and was confronted by a guerrilla action by young Limerick Socialists protesting against American imperialism. One youth threw a copy of Mao's Red Book at Nixon's open-topped limousine and hit Nixon.<sup>5</sup> Mao had said (as part of a statement advocating support for the African–American struggle) that: “the general struggle of all the people of the world against U.S. imperialism, (is) a component part of the contemporary world revolution. I call on the workers, peasants, and revolutionary intellectuals of all countries and all who are willing to fight against U.S. imperialism to take action.”



*Bullet hole in the Maoist bookstore Nicholas Street in 1970. (Photographer unknown).*

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<sup>5</sup>: As recounted to me by the late Limerick socialist Pat O'Connor.





Image from the 1967 film *La Chinoise* by Jean Luc Goddard.  
*You Tube clip: Arte Socialista Published May 17 2016.*

To reference this history in the context of resistance and place for on-going conversations for example issues surrounding Ireland subservience to the imperial actions of the United States, I needed to take on board the speculative elements involved in the story of Nixon being hit in a hugely symbolic act. In choosing to construct a memorial trail based on where the event happened I sought to include curiosity as a determining factor by replicating an image throughout the route where the protesters were said to have dispersed.<sup>6</sup> With this art-piece I aimed to highlight the core concept of youth defining themselves and by extension city space by protest.

The finished piece plays off conversations between the street and officialdom that has been led by graffiti and tagging. I followed the idea of instigating an ironic tourist type trail as a route based on the dispersal of the protesters. The Mayor once again featured in this event. The 'key stone' for this piece was co-incidentally finding a disused pillar from a neglected tourist trail for rugby. It was near enough to the reputed spot where Nixon was hit for it to register as an exact site for commemoration. I designed a strong sticker to fit the top of the pillar, keeping in mind that what was taking shape was similar to protest markers found in Manchester. The text on the 'keystone' sticker reads: *On this spot on 3 October 1970 a socialist Limerick Youth who was protesting against the US presence in Vietnam threw a red book containing the words of chairman Mao at the motorcade of the visiting US president Nixon. A Limerick City Councillor also protesting on the day said Nixon's presence was 'no credit to a Christian Country like Ireland.'*

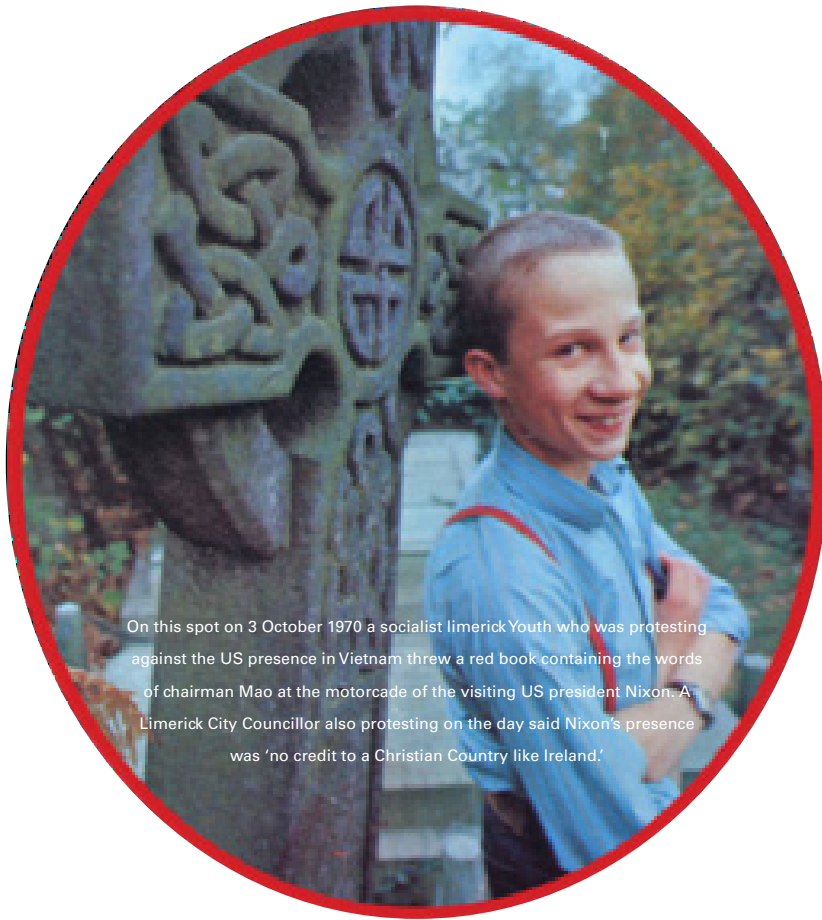
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<sup>6</sup>: According to a report in the *Limerick Leader* the dispersal was mainly towards William Street.



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*An LP from 1968- 69. Paddy is Dead and the Kids Know It. Found in Limerick City.  
Disused Rugby Trail, Limerick.  
Demonstration of the Unemployed in Manchester 1930.*



On this spot on 3 October 1970 a socialist Limerick Youth who was protesting against the US presence in Vietnam threw a red book containing the words of chairman Mao at the motorcade of the visiting US president Nixon. A Limerick City Councillor also protesting on the day said Nixon's presence was 'no credit to a Christian Country like Ireland.'



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*Description of Nixon protest using the LP image.*

*Installed piece as an intervention at the site of where the Red Book was thrown.*



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*Markers mapping the dispersal of the protestors from Sarsfield Street to William Street.*



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*Disused advertising site and the image installed on a disused Coca-Cola sponsored bike scheme, directly outside the site of the Maoist bookshop.*

The rationale for the trail was supported by the inevitable clash of signifiers that would occur. Long term disused advertising sites are rare in the spectacle of the modern city. This type of re-purposing draws attention to how commercial agendas are visualised and linked together to provide an unmasked backdrop for the city. I regard these individually as anti-monuments superciliously intended to commemorate the spirit of 1968 in the everyday.

My research in the city has also found material in private archives that is directly related to the period. I pool this material as potential components to apply appropriately. These are elements I can both reference and curate for appropriate situations by themselves or with related objects.



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*A private archive of Art magazines once held in a catholic school in Limerick.*

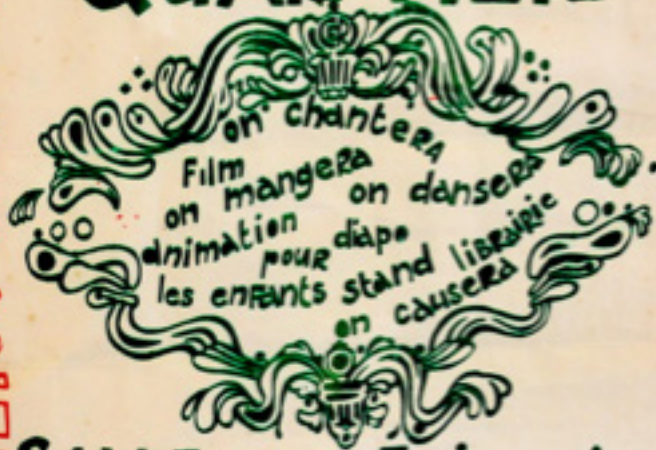
**COMITÉ DES "ENFANTS ROUGES"**

20, RUE DES VERTUS (3<sup>e</sup>) ESC: GAUCHE 2<sup>e</sup> ETAGE  
TELE: 278 36 33

VOUS INVITE:

**SAMEDI 22 MARS**  
DE 14<sup>H</sup> A 18<sup>H</sup>30

a la **FETE** DU  
**QUARTIER**



**SALLE DE L'ÉPICERIE**  
12, RUE DU RENARD (4<sup>e</sup>)

avec la **PARTICIPATION:**

MLAC, JUSTICE & PAIX, AFG, CH3,  
CH4, MNSPI, COMITES DE DEFENSE.



IND. SPÉ. CER



Original poster from Paris 1968. Found in Ballyclough Limerick.





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A 1968 print by Karl Appel. Found in Clare Street, Limerick.

IT 134, 27 July - 10 August 1975

# it



The Ape that Shocked a City,

Mr Natural:  
On the Bum Again,

& the Transamerican  
Superboogie



Copy of the International Times from 1975. Copies were brought from London by returning youth.

RESISTANCE: EXAMPLE TWO.

I wanted to explore a traditional form of monumentality by making a maquette for a sculpture inspired by a ceramic bust of Mao as a money box for sale in a Limerick bookshop. It was inscribed with the phrase *Money can't buy me Love* in Chinese characters.

Keeping in mind that the current owner of the Maoist site has a shop aimed at tourists who visit the Castle. I approached her and asked would she consider selling a limited run of repurposed money boxes now with the commemorative tag *Nicholas Street 1969* instead. She was aware of the history of the shop and was positive about the project.

To acknowledge Limerick's industrial history in the 1960's, where the Maoists briefly worked, I cast the bust using a piece of red vinamould. This was material common in that period. Red vinamould is regarded as the most flexible.



It is a self-releasing and re-usable mould making material suitable for short casting runs when heated to 150 degrees. From the amount I found I was able to make an edition of 3 (non-money-box) busts. A copy of the Red Book was given to me at the beginning of the research. I explored the idea of recording it as an object in itself.



One edition will greet tourists who browse through the shop called Wild Ireland. Another in the mode of a maquette for unrealised monuments will be presented to the bars of Nicholas Street. They, like the building that housed the Maoist bookshop, still remain.



In a reference to how the Art and Artists magazine reflected the accelerated change of 1968 alongside the assumption that the traditional language of the arts would remain as a voice of the establishment. I explored recording the bust in the auction house style of that time. A particular bust of Pope Urban II stood out as a perfect example.

Another image taken at a Limerick Pound shop that specialised in selling a democratic series of religious icons of all faiths also featured.



In conclusion, outcomes from this process of memorializing fit in with the distinct vernacular of the extended nature of the site of the Maoist Bookshop.



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*Vernacular signpost from a street festival, Nicholas Street, Limerick 2018.*

*International Brigade flag in shop window Nicholas Street, Limerick 2018.*

*Protest by Nicholas Street publican, circa 2012.*

*'A storm of thoughts. A river of revolution.'*

*Wall text left from a civic project to promote the City of culture. Nicholas Street, Limerick 2018.*