

REVERSE



Reverse Perspective
A view beyond and between borders of identity
in a “Liquid modern world”

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

George Keith Crawford..........9/10/2014

“You can never step into the same river; for new waters are always flowing on to you.”

Heraclitus (c. 535–c. 475 BC)

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Abstract

My research is concerned with the flux of cultural transition, emergent identities, and pluralism within a community. It explores a changing point of view beyond traditions and is informed by the ontology of “becoming rather than being”, to paraphrase William H. Hastie. This research is a response to the phenomenon of recent immigration to the town of Dungannon in Northern Ireland as a consequence of globalization and postmodern politics. Biographical narrative enquiry is the primary research methodology used as I draw upon my life experience to reflect on the condition of being an immigrant.

This research project aims to initiate a dialogue of identity generally and specifically within the community of Dungannon. The agency of immigration within a traditionally homeostatic environment informs this inquiry. Through a series of exhibited works this research will question the validity of cultural community borders.

I focus on the arbitrary nature of the “false closures” (Hall, 1987) that form identity and delineate borders between identities, and the realization that borders are points of contact as well as points of separation.

The research is practice-led and is concerned with what is beyond the border.

Introduction

Critical Theoretical Framework/Background

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1987) argues that when it comes to identity there is no full stop and that all identity is created with artificial closures. This is the kind of paradox that interests the British artist Patrick Hughes, who is a primary reference in my creative practice. He is the creator of “reverspective”, an optical illusion on a 3-dimensional surface where the parts of the picture which seem farthest away are actually physically the nearest. My work is concerned with competing points of view, both literally through my practice and philosophically through the theory that has informed my work. It is the contact at the edge of competing points of view where frictions begin.

My graduate studies began in 2013 with a focus on the measurement of cultural values of communities. These included various definitions of culture that have been proposed in the past, including Edward Burnett Tylor’s (1871) focus on “the customs and habits of communities” and Mathew Arnold’s (1875) “the best which has been thought and said”, and culture’s relationship to hegemony and individual identity. Arnold’s definition of culture is, as expressed by Zygmunt Bauman (2011, p. 8), “something akin to land cultivation”. This cultivation and management, not of the land but of minds, has historically been a tool used by the elite classes of nation-states to form and consolidate their distinctive homogenous identities, a practice that has been re-evaluated by postmodernist and their concepts of pluralism and heterogeneity.

As a graphic designer working in the 21st century, I am particularly fascinated by hybrid and dual identities as they resonate with the narrative of my own life and inform my point of view. I visited Dungannon, the Northern Irish town of my birth, in Christmas 2013 after being five years away to find that the town was greatly changed. Recent immigration has significantly altered the demographics and created a far more ethnically mixed population. This unexpected shift proved to be critical for the focus of my Master’s research and experimentation, which is concerned with perception and the changing identities within the town of Dungannon and elsewhere. Changing political and cultural environments and their impact on mixed communities also inform my research, with a particular focus on the evolving changes in perception typically experienced by immigrants.

The work described in this exegesis will be publicly exhibited in Dungannon¹ and will be viewed by members of the town who are currently experiencing change brought about by immigration and global economics. My work is designed to communicate broadly to engage immigrant factory workers with limited formal education and English-language skills. It does not require connoisseurship, or for the audience to be experts in hermeneutics. The work is consciously non-elitist. It is however very much subjective, imbued with my personal aspirations for people to better recognise rights of belonging and difference that have not been recognised for so long in Northern Irish communities.

This specific audience will test my work uniquely. It is my hope that some of them may recognise the referent of exchange which their newly ethnically mixed community inspired.

1 Please note this exhibition is not part of my exam.



Fig. 1 Dungannon, in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, the hometown of the author. Note the way the district has been identified as a protestant area with the flying of the Union flag. Photo: Author (2014).



Methodology and Design of the Project

The primary methodology I adopted for this project was reflective practice, involving both reflective-in-action and reflective-on-action (Schön, 1983). Reflective practice enabled me to examine, interrogate, and modify my work in a way I felt was progressive and would “keep [the] inquiry moving” (Schön, 1983, p. 136). The key to this methodology is the doing and the seizing of potentials, working towards a practical “warranted assertibility” (Dewey, 1941) through a series of repeated steps. These are the reframing of the situation (or problem), reflection (through “talkback”) and the concomitant modifications to further experimentation. These local adjustments, nudges or shifts are measured against “conformity or violation of implications set up by earlier moves” (Schön, 1983, p. 101).

Schön’s (1983) concept of double-loop learning refers to learning that occurs when error is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organization’s underlying norms, policies and objectives. I adapted this concept to my own research and was able to reformulate my designs inductively and iteratively as the project progressed.

Initially my investigation focused specifically on a community in conflict. I was able to progress my inquiry by moving its focus towards identity, which my research identified as a key element of conflict. By reframing the situation to include not only conflict but its causes and by listening to what the reframed situation “talked back” (Schön, 1983, p. 79) I was able to modify my experimentation progressively. This was the “reflection-in-action” stage of reflective practice. I nudged my inquiry further towards the edges of identities, and began to explore their margins, lines of delineation, and trajectories.

An example of “a successful reframing of the problematic situation [leading] to a continuation of the reflective conversation” (Schön, 1983, p. 136) is my modification of imagery on “The Projected” (p. 34). I sought to speak to a broader audience, but one that still included my initial target audience (the community of Dungannon). Listening to how my work “talked back” to me I realized the reference to the square (Fig. 16a–c) would have no signification to a wider audience. Thus I modified my imagery by excluding the the image of the square in the final work.

My work therefore moved away from a focus on a local conflict towards a broader focus on identity choices that can lead to conflicts. Through continual reframing and listening to the “talkback” from the reframed situation, the final artefacts emerged.

The reflection-on-action part of reflective practice mirrors elements of the Pasifika research methodology *talanoa*, in which empathic conversation is key to critical reflection. *Talanoa* has “recently been taken up by development practitioners and others as an appropriate research method in Pacific contexts” (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012, p. 1). My reflection-on-action included conversations with fellow students where I would test the consequences of the latest reframing with open questions. Their answers were used to co-construct new options.

“The Shifting” (p. 35) was modified as result of this dialectical process when I decided as a local experiment not to have imagery on the angled planes of the trapezoid because it retained a desirable “figure-ground effect” without it. There is a playful and exploratory aspect to this reflective practice which “violates the canon of controlled experiment . . . which calls for objectivity and distance” (Schön, 1983, p. 147). The practising of readjustment and reflection however gives enough structure to the creative process while still enabling fluid progressive work.

Experimental moves with colour tones in “The Projected” (Fig. 16) yielded important changes that I used in future development. I realized that projected colour on separate planes of the trapezoid needed to have the saturation adjusted in order to seem to be the same from the audience’s perspective. Although I did not use this image I did adapt this colour modification in my final exhibited work (Fig. 25a).

Schön (1983) states “the whole is at stake with every move” (p. 101) and this became evident in my experimenting with “The Shifting” when I added intermittent flickering lights in the hope of signifying changing personal connections for immigrants. This modification failed to have any connotations for viewers and this indicated further reframing was needed. This “what if” was unsuccessful, but held potential for future development and could still contribute to the final global experiment.

Positive unintended outcomes came from my “move-testing” for my experiment entitled “The Ingrained” (Fig. 9). By creating tonal changes with the natural colour of the laminated wood I was able to create imagery without staining or etching, as I had originally intended. Similarly, the metaphor of “negative space” was a useful unintended addition to “The Rubbing Along” (Fig. 11). I used the chiasitic arrows to signify two sides of a shifting border and the connotations of negative space (i. e. “the other”) added, in my opinion, an unintended layer of meaning.

When I experimented with typography in “The Shifting” (Fig. 7) my expectations were not fulfilled as it failed to add signification when used out of context. This is exemplified by the use of “13%”, which referred to the percentage of immigrants in Dungannon.

My tacit knowledge acted as a repertoire of experiences from which I could draw strategies that have worked in comparable creative situations. This repertoire enabled me to hit on solutions as I reframed and nudged along the design process. As Schön (1983) states, “It is our capacity to see unfamiliar situations as familiar ones and to do in the former as we have done in the latter, that enables us to bring our past experience to bear on the unique case” (p. 140).

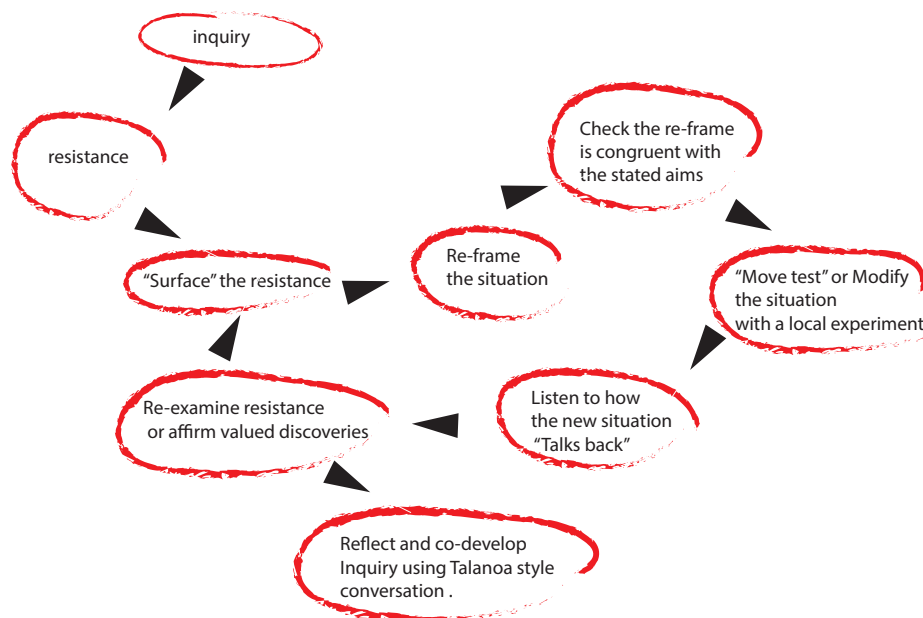


Fig. 2 Diagram illustrating methodology

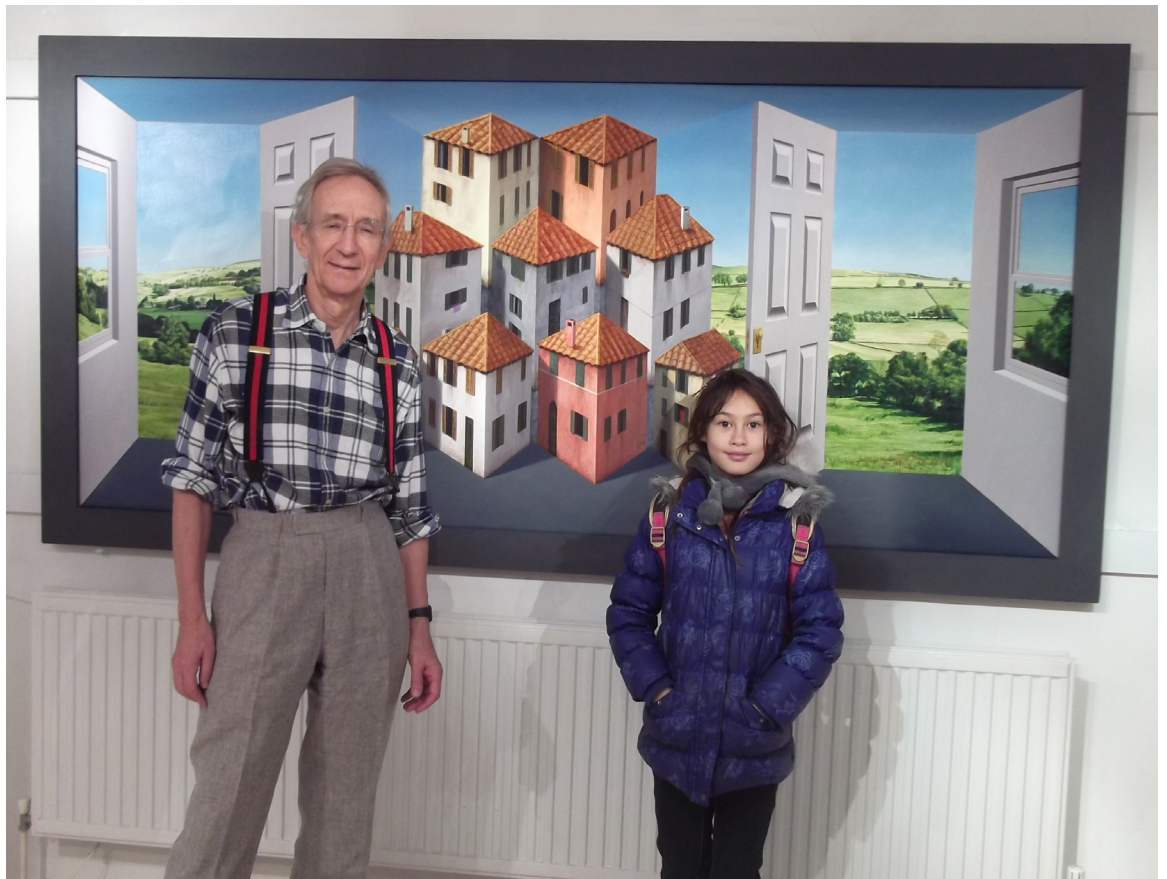


Fig. 3 The British artist Patrick Hughes with the daughter of the researcher at the artist's studio in London. Photo: Author (2014).

2

Creative Inspiration: Patrick Hughes

Patrick Hughes's work was uniquely inspirational for this project in that the "reverspective" technique he developed creates opportunities for his audience to pleasurably scrutinise their own perception. I felt this technique – which literally exposes an individual's false preconceptions caused by ambiguity in perceptions of "figure-ground effect"¹ – could be adapted for my research and its sociopolitical and biographical narrative context.

In his paintings Hughes paints the view in reverse to the natural three dimensional (normally perceived perspectives of the 3-dimensional shapes and thereby creates an illusion. Illustrated on the planes closest to the viewer are the parts of the scene that are actually furthest away (in the distance) and the painted foreground is physically furthest from the viewer. "The geometry involved in each piece requires each plane (of the trapezoid) to merge seamlessly with the next" (Slyce, 2011, p. 103). Hughes states "there are two ways my pictures work. One is that they create an illusion of space and the other is that they appear to move." (Slyce, 2011, p. 103).

Slyce (2011, p. 95) observes that "conservative critics call his work painted reliefs" and that the 1960s description was "specific objects". The "plain English" label of "sticking-out pictures" suggests something of the childlike magical experience of the viewer that is central to Hughes's work. It is the experience of the viewer – that "gestalt moment" – that Hughes hopes will be a challenge to the viewer's own perception of the world. While visiting Hughes in his London studio earlier this year a question formed

¹ The figure-ground effect suggests that the eye tends to see the objects, rather than the spaces or holes between them. See <http://www.lifecircles-inc.com/Learningtheories/gestalt/gestalttheory.html>

in my mind: If the viewer cannot even trust their own eyes, what other orthodoxies merit closer scrutiny? In my work I hope this moment of “shock”, consideration, and interpellation while encourage the viewer to examine their own beliefs and perhaps grow beyond their perimeters. Ideally after viewing it they will have had an experience where more was revealed than they expected, because they will have shifted their position, in every sense of the word.

When commenting on the imagery in his paintings, Hughes states, “I’m not ultimately interested in skyscrapers or picture galleries, they are just a means not necessarily to an end, but rather I would say to a beginning” (Slyce, 2011, p. 66). The viewer is at the heart of the experience of their viewing. The work changes with the movement of the viewer as they move back and forth in front of it. Literally and metaphorically, different points of view reveal alternative ways of looking. As Hughes says about the strength of the viewer experience when viewing his work, “What people have created, they will believe in” (Slyce, 2011, p. 125).



Fig. 4 One of Patrick Hughes’s “sticking-out pictures”. Photo: Author (2014).

Liquid Modernity and Demographic Change

There are two main theoretical strands that come together to inform my research. The first is the fluidity of identity, where I look at how individuals identify themselves within a network of connections. These networks can include nation-states, family, religion and cultural habits. This change occurs on the micro scale when an individual's psychology changes affectively and transformationally because of exposure to new environments or the experience of cross-cultural adaption.

The sociologist Stuart Hall (1987, p. 136) argues "more and more people now recognize themselves in the narrative of displacement". This can be as true for those who stay at home as well as for those who leave. Adaptive pressure is confronted by "those who find ... their own home milieus undergo cultural shifts due to rapid changes in ethnic composition" (Young, 2001, p. 10).

The second main strand in macro change in response to postmodern politics and global and national economic trends that act as agents of change within communities. This phenomenon has been called "liquid modernity" by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2011). He identifies one element of this postmodern environment as the move away from the modernist cultural principles of "ennobling"² which were inherited from the Enlightenment.³ "Ennobling" effectively, meant that "until further notice" (Gibbons, 1991, p. 84) the dominant group in society would establish the best way for it to progress. With liquid modernity, "the signposts established by tradition are now blank" (p. 82) in as much as pluralism offers us variety and choices that can be bewildering. The journalist Paul Roberts (2014) also identifies this trend in the governance of the United States: "A democracy once capable of ambitious, historic ventures can barely keep government open and seems powerless to deal with challenges like debt reduction or immigration" (2014, p. 6).

It is within this context that Bauman (2011) argues that the dominant elites within society are spineless, because in his view they are withdrawing from their duty of guiding society. He equates "flexibility" not with pluralism but with "the politically correct name for spinelessness" (p. 14). Bauman proposes that culture today (meaning postmodern culture) is not engaged with "normative regulation" (p. 13) where there is a consensus of desired social norms in opposition to the current trend towards pluralism.

The "Rubbing Along" (Fig. 11) used the negative space within each of the arrow shapes to signify trajectory along a delineating border, with connotations of movement and the fluidity of identity. The local environment in Dungannon is the context of the artwork, where the movement across borders is signified as the viewer investigates its 3-dimensional space.

² In "Culture and Anarchy (1869), Matthew Arnold states that culture "seeks to make the best that has been thought or known in the world current everywhere".

³ The Enlightenment is the period in the history of Western thought and culture stretching roughly from the mid-decades of the seventeenth century through the eighteenth century, characterized by dramatic revolutions in science, philosophy, society and politics. These revolutions swept away the medieval worldview and ushered in our modern Western world. The paradigmatic Enlightenment view is that the history of the human race is one of continual progress towards perfection. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enlightenment/>

Position of the Researcher

4. I A New Horizon beyond the Border: A Personal View

In *The Strangeness of Tragedy* Paul Hammond (2009) explores Freud's essay "Das Unheimliche" (The Uncanny) in which "the distinction between home and foreign is elided one becomes divided or multiplied" (p. 5). Like many people living away from home, I began to experience such multiplication. I was a member of a diaspora⁴ living in an ethnic enclave and experienced the phenomenon of a community of Irish people in London who seemed to be able to get along with each other better when away from the cultural restrictions of their home environment. This group of Irish friends abroad were to a greater or lesser degree engaging in cross-cultural adaption. This adaptive trajectory was guiding us towards a convergence in cultural values and personal traits. In London I enjoyed the wider horizons offered by this new environment. This pluralism was exemplified by the lack of religiously segregated education in England compared to Northern Ireland and the concomitant widening of social contacts afforded by such friendlier beginnings.

The constitutive elements of a person's identity and how fluid that identity is, is a focus of this research. As Hammond (2009) remarks, "The space which we think of as home and by space here I mean both geographical space and conceptual space, both the literal hearth and that framework of familiar assumptions which holds ourselves in placesuch a space is labile", (p. 5). It is this changeable space, this dynamic at the edge of the border of a persons identity that signifies a hopefulness. This hope lies at the other side of the border. It is the hope of the immigrant or the candidate. It is hoping for an improvement that propelles a trajectory across this border.

4.2 My Identity/Identities

Some identities are chosen by us and some are chosen for us. For me, growing up in the Irish province of the United Kingdom within a Protestant family, there was never any notion of my identity being anything other than British. I don't think this was unusual for Protestant children. It might have been different had I been born into a Catholic family, as an Irish identity competed with the British one in some Catholic households.

The British passport clearly states the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" but it was not until I went to study in England in 1977 that I discovered that most English people grouped all Irish people together, whether they were from the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. For the first time I began to include an Irishness in my identity. This was the beginning of a change in my own *Weltanschauung*,⁵ where I came to realise that a dialectical way of thinking would be helpful if I was going to live and work within a variety of different societies and communities. To quote the poem "Sarah Ann" by the Tyrone poet William Forbes, Marshall I began to "change me way o goin".

⁴ A group of people who live outside the area in which they had lived for a long time or in which their ancestors lived.

⁵ *Weltanschauung* is a German word that often is translated as "worldview" or "world outlook" but just as frequently is treated as a calque or left untranslated. See [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Worldview_\(Philosophy\).aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Worldview_(Philosophy).aspx)

From the safe distance of my life in England, one step removed from the restraints of traditional enculturation and explicit identity politics, I was able to observe Ulster⁶ from “an other’s” perspective. As my tribal identity weakened and I adopted a more Anglicised and less tendentious viewpoint, I began to adopt a more pluralistic way of thinking. Whereas in the past my conversations concerning “The Troubles”⁷ were typically Irish in that they were polemic, my thinking was becoming more tolerant as I began to realise that the perimeters of traditional binary points of view were limiting. Metaphorically, in the tradition of Irish builders working in London, I had moved on to a different construction site.

I do not consider London an English city. This may sound counterintuitive to say the least but many people who proudly identify themselves as Londoners do not identify themselves as English and sometimes not even British. According to the UK 2007–2008 Citizenship Survey, “70% of Black Caribbean UK residents identified themselves as British while only 23% identified themselves as English” (NatCen, 2009, p. 22).

After living in London for 25 years I added “Londoner” to my personal identity but never “English”. Londoners are more likely than those from other regions to mention another identity in addition to their primary choice (NatCen, 2009, p. 23).

My personal list of identities increased again with New Zealand accepting me as a citizen in 2013. In my own case the New Zealand element of my identity is not as strongly felt as the Irish, British or Londoner elements. My idiolect⁸ stubbornly continues to be Northern Irish. My experimental work aims to reference individual compound identities and their flux and consolidation in relation to enculturation and dominant groups in society.

6 Ulster is one of the four ancient provinces of Ireland.

7 Between 1969 and 1999, almost 3,500 people died as a result of political violence in Northern Ireland, which is a part of the United Kingdom (UK). The conflict, which has its origins in the 1921 division of Ireland and is often referred to as “the troubles,” has reflected a struggle between different national, cultural, and religious identities. Protestants in Northern Ireland (48%) largely define themselves as British and support continued incorporation in the UK (unionists). Most Catholics in Northern Ireland (45%) consider themselves Irish, and many desire a united Ireland (nationalists). From <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21333.pdf>

8 Idiolect: The speech of an individual, considered as a linguistic pattern unique among speakers of his or her language or dialect. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/idiolect>

Historical Context

5.1 *Them and Us*

Being mindful of the responsibility of the researcher to be truthful and of “the dualism between the individual and her or his social environment” (Moen, 2006, p. 57), I will cautiously give a historical context for my research. I am also conscious that “narratives are seen as producers and transmitters of reality” (Heikkinen, 2002, p. 57) with a particular point of view.

Historically, my home town of Dungannon in Northern Ireland is an example of a split community. Public housing was unfairly allocated to protestant families in favour of their catholic neighbours. Eamonn Mallie’s interview with Ian Paisley (BBC, 2014) uncovered that for thirty-four years, with three hundred families on the waiting list for council houses, no Catholics had been allocated housing. This example of local government inequality has deep historical roots. These roots have divided the community I was born into, creating a dichotomy that has motivated my research, the sociological and philosophical aspects of which will be expressed through my experimentation (see Chapter 7).

The Guardian newspaper in 2011 reported a speech from the Irish/British politician Peter Robinson in which he encouraged a change in Northern Ireland, away from religiously segregated education: “We cannot hope to move beyond our present community divisions while our young people are educated separately”. It is my observation that Northern Ireland is in transition, slowly following a trajectory towards pluralism away from the historical divisions that create borders between people. Journalist Fionola Meredith (2014) expresses the thoughts of many with her comment about the politicians of Ulster: “Time they grew up and gave us society we crave”.

As a protestant in Northern Ireland I did not share a classroom with a catholic until I was seventeen; as a community we were split into two tribes with different points of view. These different points of view spilled over into violence and hatred that have impacted my family directly, like every other family in Northern Ireland.

5.2 *A Changing View*

Thus far I have focused on the divisive aspects of nationalism and religion relevant to my personal experience and the formation of my early identity. Research concerning the phenotype⁹ of individuals nurtured from more than one cultural background also informs my work, which is designed to provide opportunities to see paradoxes and competing points of view that have equal merit. The viewer literally sees competing points of view as they interact with my work (see Chapter 7). A viewer’s experience of my work can be seen as analogous to a question posed by the sociologist Abraham Maslow (1962): “Do we see the real, concrete world or do we see our own system of rubrics, motives, expectations and abstractions which we have projected onto the real world?” (p. 39).

⁹ The appearance of an organism resulting from the interaction of the genotype and the environment.

5.3 “The Foreigners” (Another Self)

I observed a different homogeny for the first time when I moved to London from Ireland as an eighteen year old in the 1970s, which allowed me to experience and consider cultural differences in relation to my own identity. This experience has made me cognisant of the adaptive pressures that can accompany immigration. This year, a visit to my home town of Dungannon, I noticed a tension between the traditional native population and the new immigrant communities in the town.

In addition to the feelings of disconnectedness that are typical of the condition of being an immigrant, many of these new residents endure racist abuse and even physical attacks from some of the native population. A Brazilian couple who had immigrated to Dungannon spoke of their feelings of isolation and experiences of racism to the Christian newspaper the *Lion and Lamb* (2005):

“The links in a church of foreigners are much stronger because we are the only people they know here. Christmas time is terrible for foreigners because they are sad and homesick for their families ... Racism is still a problem in Dungannon. The local newspaper reported that there were 50 racist attacks in Dungannon in 2004 – four times as many as in 2003. That’s a high number in a small town like this.”

Exemplifying these feelings of marginalisation is Nisha Tandon OBE, founder of Northern Ireland’s leading ethnic arts organisation Arts Ekta. She initially felt at home in Northern Ireland when she emigrated with her husband from India in 1977.

“I’ve been living here for 37 years, I’ve brought my three children up here, and I’ve never regretted coming to live in Northern Ireland. But after all the racist attacks, I have started asking myself – do I want to be here, long-term? I don’t think so.” (Belfast Telegraph, 2014).

With this in mind I noticed that the new residents of Dungannon were frequently referred to as “The Foreigners”. I found a new other – another self; not the familiar one that speaks of our traditional sectarian delineation previously discussed. My practice signifies borders and concerns itself with the delineation of the borders’ edge and borders as horizons, signifying opportunity or the last point of contact with the familiar or belonging. The idea that a border not only separates but also joins is explored in my experimentation (see Chapter 7).

In this project I have investigated some aspects of the nature of identity, including my own, and how identity is woven into a network of connections. I recognise that these interconnections are always in flux. This is exemplified by the newly ethnically mixed population of Dungannon. Lauren Berlant (2002) discusses the symbolic death and rebirth of identity as immigrants cross the threshold. The crossing of thresholds is also an important signifier in my experiments (see Chapter 7).

The condition of being an immigrant is very likely to facilitate changes in identity, not only for the immigrant but also for the host community; both parties are exposed to new ways of looking and seeing. Adler (1972, p. 29) states, “The culture shock ... is at the very heart of the cross-cultural learning experience, self understanding and change”. This is in contrast to some members of traditional communities who remain parochial and conservative rather than merely local in a geographical sense.

Zaharina (1989) notes that identity-bound behaviour among both local and new populations makes intercultural communication more difficult because meanings between groups are not shared. The expectations of some locals are summarised in a recent report on social cohesion published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008): “In communities which imagined themselves as settled, new arrivals were expected to fit into fixed ideas of Britishness.”

Networks in a Liquid Modern World

Bauman's (2011) concept of 'liquid modernity' speaks to the relational thinking evident in networks of interconnections between economics, immigration and changing demographics in Dungannon. The concept of "networks of connections" led me towards actor network theory (ANT), which is a theory developed by Michel Callon (1991) and Bruno Latour (1992) that tries to explain how networks come together to act as a whole. Its focus is on networks of heterogeneous connections that are diverse in character.

ANT can be thought of as a tool to reveal "the complexities of ... our sociotechnical world" (Cressman, 2009 (p. 2)), a world which is currently changing communities in Dungannon and creating competing points of view about belonging within those communities. The phenomenon of immigration in the town is an agent of change that is challenging a historic "habitus"¹⁰ and its homeostatic conditions. This was the starting point for my research and creative experimentation, in which networks and connections are referenced as iconic and indexical signs.

The phenomenon of the arrival of immigrant workers in Dungannon is only one element in a network of other agents that work together to create this demographic change. These include global economic interconnections, employment opportunities, and government policy that facilitates movement between national borders. The UK government's decision to allow labour market access to citizens of a newly enlarged Europe in 2002 has been identified as a turning point (Migrant Policy Institute, 2009). Overall, the network of agents in Dungannon is mostly invisible, with the exception of a noticeable increase in immigrants within the community. A large percentage of these immigrants work for the food industry giant Moy Park,¹¹ which has a chicken-processing factory in Dungannon.

6.1 Changing Connections

My own experience as an immigrant, geographically distanced from my "home culture", has made me aware of the loosening and tightening of different strands that form my network of connections. As an immigrant you make new acquaintances and in many instances your close friends and family are elsewhere. It is through these new connections that immigrants become exposed to ideas that differ from those of their traditional social connections. These "weak ties" are identified by the sociologist Mark Granovetter (1983) as bridges that offer access to different points of view than those from an insulated group of close friends who think the same way. According to Granovetter (1983, p. 202), "individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends". Thus "weak ties" offer potential for changes of perception that in turn may lead to changes in identity.

¹⁰ "Habitus is one of [Pierre] Bourdieu's most influential yet ambiguous concepts. It refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life." Habitus also extends to our "taste" for cultural objects such as art, food, and clothing. See <http://theory.routledgesoc.com/category/profile-tags/habitus>

¹¹ The food giant Moy Park "is the biggest company in Northern Ireland". It is owned by the Brazilian food group Marfrig. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/11038950/Poultry-giant-Moy-Park-cooking-up-London-flotation.html>

I expect a reading of my work could lead to a “Gestaltlike”¹² experience for the viewer. This experience is an opportunity to recognise that our perceptions can be fallible. That said, as Roland Barthes pointed out in his seminal text “The Death of the Author” (1967), meaning will be made by the viewer alone. In this work it will literally be made at the pace of the viewer as they engage with the work kinaesthetically and experience changing perspectives. My practice has involved itself with the fabrication of artefacts that are designed to be a catalyst for thinking.

Networks of weakening and strengthening connections experienced by recent immigrants in the liquid modern world of Dungannon are signified throughout the practice as borderlines and border crossings.

6.2 Physical and conceptual borders

Borders can be physical and conceptual. They are enclosures that are everywhere with varying degrees of porousness. We create them to define ourselves and separate us from “the others”¹³. An interdependence creates the line of delineation that simultaneously connects and separates among other things the iconoclast from the erector of icons. It could be argued that there is no us without them. My research has identified a changing political environment that facilitates the crossing of both types of borders. The crossing of physical borders can bring into view conceptual borders previously unseen.

A typical border edge encountered by immigrants is identified by Noesjirwan and Freestone (1979, p. 190), who speak of how immigrants bring their cultural perspectives to their host countries and how “taken-for-granted” meanings can lead to intercultural discomfort or conflict between groups.

A border can possess connotations of opportunity as in a new horizon that signifies the future or a sign of despair donated with a barbed wire fence. Like my experimentations the line that separates the sky from the land changes shape relative to the position of the viewer. Other borders are temporal uni-directional crossing points such as puberty and old age. As the present emerges from the past into the future the borderlines shift.

Linguistically, the political term “liberal” seems to deteriorate and become tainted as it crosses the border of the Atlantic from Europe to America. It could be argued that the movement from dominant to residual as defined by Raymond Williams (1977) is a dynamic; with agency currently shifting cultural borders everywhere. Biologically, the crossing of borders begins with our conception and nativity, never stopping until our death. Rhetorically you could argue that the crossing of borders is not a marginal activity but that it is at the heart of all of our lives. Physical borders mirror the physiological boundaries that are delineated by the milestones that measure our life changes. Life itself could be viewed as a series of border crossings.

12 A Gestalt is an integrated whole system with its parts enmeshed. The whole is greater than just the sum of the parts. See <http://www.lifecircles-inc.com/Learningtheories/gestalt/gestalttheory.html>

13 The Other: the group we don't belong to.

My Practice

This research is my artistic response to the phenomenon of recent demographic changes and the crossing of conceptual borders within my home town of Dungannon. It consists of a series of experiments informed by my own experiences of an identity that keeps shifting on me, and of my home town that is barely recognisable after the impact of immigration caused by postmodern economics and politics.

In my experimentation there are constant references to the edges of borders when viewing the shared margins between different surfaces used to create the artefacts. This blending of 3-dimensional and two dimensional perspectives is where “reverse perspective” interpolates and arrests the viewer.

As stated above, my own identity has shifted and continues to shift. The consequence of which is a core concept in my practice-based research. An example of this is the way my legal identity has become dual. I am no longer a UK citizen only; I am now a dual citizen of both the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

My experimentation with trapezoids produced work that could be described as neither one thing nor another. It was not quite a sculpture and neither was it traditionally framed imagery. This in-between liminal quality usefully signifies the in-flux aspect of the changing population of Dungannon. The animation effect generated by the viewer’s own movement will stop mid-transition. Transitional views reveal themselves at the pace with which they are viewed by a moving viewer/audience.

The method of laser-cutting imagery onto wood mimics the skill of traditional master craftspeople. It exemplifies changing values and perceptions in that traditional carved work is admired for the skill needed to produce it, unlike modern laser-etched imagery. This temporal variant in perception is encoded within the artefact as an indexical sign.

As stated earlier, according to Hall (1987, p. 136) identity is created with “arbitrary closure”. The referent¹⁴ of closures in my experimentation is signified as borders and border zones. It is the liminal region between borders, the territory where the “arbitrary closures”/ borders are positioned. Hall’s statement that “it may be true that the self is always in a sense, a fiction” (p. 45) resonates with my own identity story and indeed everyone else’s as well.

Bauman (2011) identifies a recent phenomenon in the “need for identity stories ... for making meaningful interaction with others possible” (p. 80). Not only are borders signified in my work but so too is the movement between borders. The arrow signifies exchange as the shared border allows for varied interpretations of the arrow’s direction. Beyond semiotics, of course, there remains a border between the artist, the text, and the viewer. The physical discontinuity of imagery projected onto or etched into my trapezoid artefacts is metaphorically emblematic of a change of view or cultural adjustment.

14 “The referent is the ‘item’ to which the sign (unifying signifier and the signified) refers. See <http://www.citelighter.com/communications/communications/knowledgecards/signsignifierssignifiedreferent>

The Projected

I initially included in my choice of imagery – sectarian bunting – referencing aspects of contested identity within Northern Ireland with explicit signification of religious delineation. As I progressed, I sought to avoid clichéd use of colours and symbolism signifying Loyalist and Nationalist identities as the research was concerned with change/exchange and immigration as much as historic identity choices.

Heuristically, after projecting images onto the trapezoid in order to trace them I realised the process of projection was itself a signifier for identity and its transference. For this reason I decided to include the process of projection as an integral element in the exhibition of the piece I called *The Projected*.

I sought to signify with a square the town square in Dungannon, because a common sentiment I heard there was that “the square was changing” as a result of the changing demographics. The second projected image implied this concept rhetorically as the square image literally changes before the viewer as they move. I intend to exhibit both images projected onto the trapezoid.

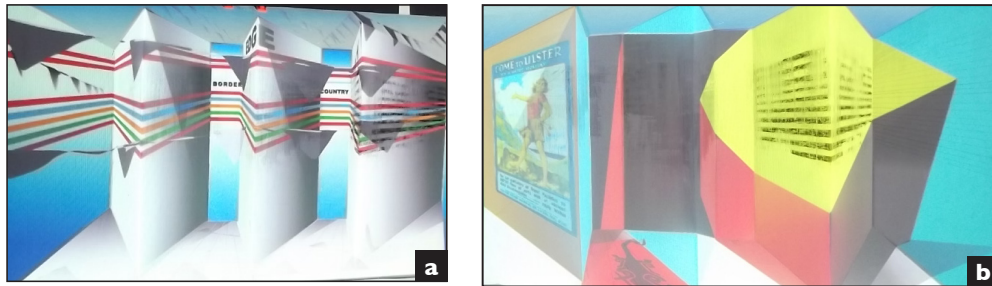
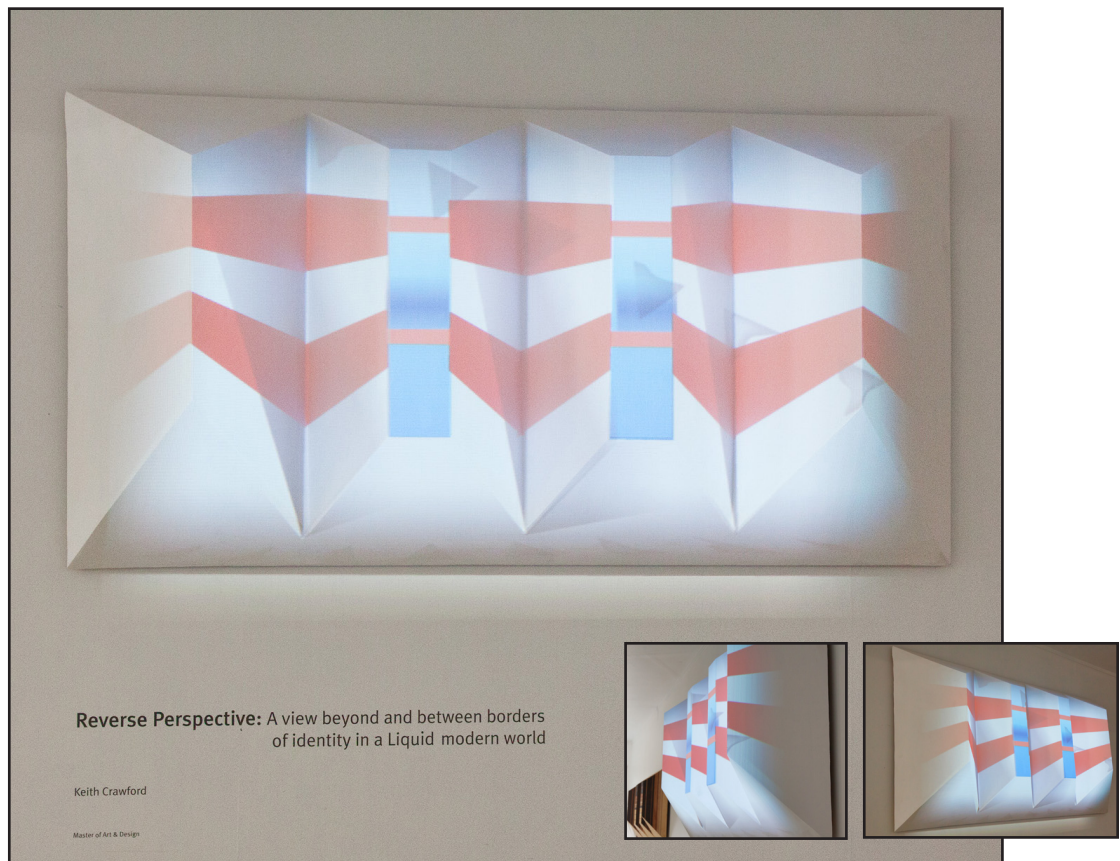


Fig. 5 Two experimental projections (above) final work (below).



The Shifting

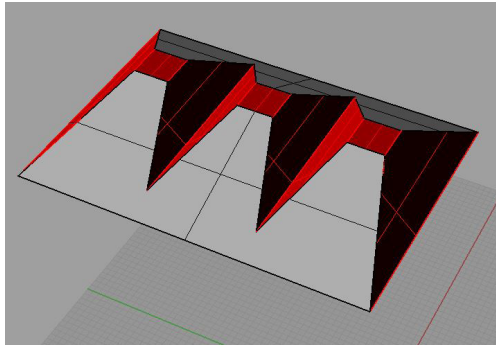


Fig. 6 Computer-generated design for The Shifting

The breaking and forming of connections that create identity is signified in *The Shifting* by backlit acrylic panels that form a triptych of squares intermittently illuminated. The uncertainty of the illumination signifies the tenuousness and transitory nature of connections that are forming or breaking, joining

or separating. The imagery used is not on all the planes of the trapezoid but only the three shown in Fig. 6. As most of the planes are plain, void of colour and images, it is left to the light and shadows to generate the “figure-ground effect” shift in perception. This included a temporal dimension to signify a focus on connected networks not present in “the projected”. It required the viewer to move less and was a step further from Hughes inspirational painted Trapezoids.

Fig. 7 The use of typography was tested in this experimentation. In the end I felt its use here was didactic and prescriptive, restricting options for viewer interpretation. I modified my final artefact by removing the typography and adopting backlit acrylic panels as an alternative focus.



The backlighting with a flickering light is an effect borrowed from the controversial winner of the 2001 Turner Prize, Martin Creed. He is one of three artists referenced here, the other being Hughes. Their influence serves semiotically as a metaphor for the notion of cultural transference or adoption. I sought permission from the Irish/British artist Garrett Carr to use his “Apple tree at the end of the border” image from his psycho geographic¹⁵ explorations of Ulster’s unofficial border crossings. It represents a wild apple tree he discovered growing on the border between Northern and Southern Ireland. I use it not as an arbitrary addition for my trio of artistic references but as representation of a personal talisman of hope in recognition that for most of us there are many borders still to be crossed.



Apple tree at the end of the border.



Fig. 8 Garrett Carr’s “Apple tree at the end of the border”

image. Reproduced with permission.

¹⁵ Psychogeography: The practice of exploring the urban environment while being led by curiosity and a paused sense of time and place.

See <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=psychogeography>

The Ingrained

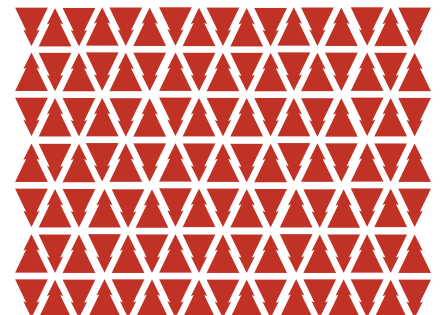
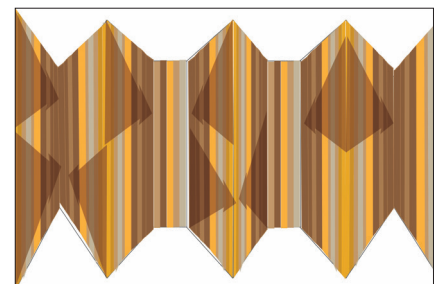
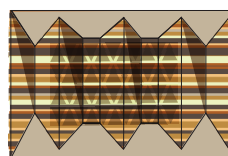
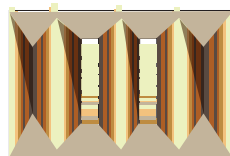
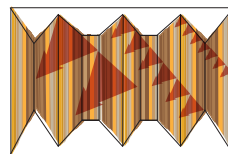
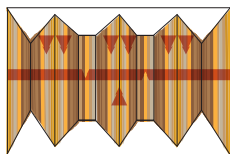
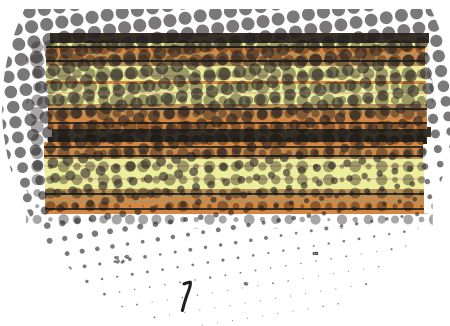
Fig. 9 Design of The Ingrained: Fabricated with wood from many countries



The Ingrained speaks of established cultural hegemony and a resistance to change, signified with laser-etched imagery. The imagery is part of its structure and donates permanence. A metaphor for cultural resistance to change in opposition to the transience of projected images. The structural cohesiveness of the artefact is achieved through perceptions of depth via the tone and colour of the woods that it is made from. This contrasts with a media that only is applied to the structure, sitting upon it but not embedded within it.

In earlier designs (below), there is a polysemic aspect to the design as it also has connotations of flux and exchange with bidirectional arrows using negative space chiastically. There is also a palimpsest element to the design which references earlier local industry absent from “The projected” and “The shifting” recalling the “Moygashel”¹⁶ textile factory that produced bold Irish linen designs until the late 1960s. This historic reference is donated through patterns used in this experimentation and in the cover design of this document, combining to speak of networks of connections.

Fig. 10 Experimental designs for The Ingrained



¹⁶ On the outskirts of Dungannon is situated a famous linen firm, Stevenson & Son Ltd. Their products, known the world over, take their brand name from the Dungannon locality Moygashel. See <http://www.irishlinenmills.com/History/history.htm>

The Rubbing Along

In a move away from trapezoids The Rubbing Along artefact references an accommodating cultural habit I observed while living in England – a certain tolerance that was a world away from the previously discussed identity politics that cast a shadow over Northern Ireland. The English phrase alludes to the recognition that friction is a part of being together. The Rubbing Along is a design for a pair of acrylic chiasitic arrows with connotations of crossing over. The acrylic will be shaped using heat to create the inverted imagery. The inclusiveness of negative space reaches out to that which is not yet part of the form.

The acrylic is clear and therefore uses light and shadow to indicate difference without a hierarchy, an interchangeable difference where both sides work together “fornenst”¹⁷ each other to create a whole. A metaphor for “to change our way o goin”,¹⁸ the ubiquitous border is signified with a stripe of red acrylic.

This work unlike the previous three does not have the influence of Hughes. It’s whole focus is the border. It is not as immediately compelling as the others but demonstrates the nature of how intimate and symbiotic the border connection is. A key word for this work could be reflected whereas the previous three pieces use refraction to interpolate

Cultural exchange and adaption is the focus of all the artefacts. Each of them speaks of moving between different realms and of searching for crossing points.

Fig. 11 The Rubbing Along: With connotations of exchange and crossing over.



17 Ulster Scots word meaning “up against”.

18 A colloquial Tyrone expression.

Conclusion

My research investigates the arbitrary nature of the points of closure concerning the formation of the borders of identity. It considers a way to see them rather, as border zones with softer merging edges through a change in perspective.

It is with a warning from the novelist Will Self (2014) that I consider my hope for my work, that it might bring about positive change: art [and design] that seeks to affect change usually collapses into didacticism I create opportunities through my practice for the viewer to immerse in the border and beyond it.

That compelling and intriguing quality in Hughes' reverse perspective that demands attention was the reason why I developed the belief that, by adapting and expanding this most arresting quality, I could engage an audience in Dungannon with work that is inspired by their own market-town communities. I hope to offer views beyond traditional borders through an ontology of becoming rather than being.

The use of reverse perspective offers the viewer an unexpected / expanded way to see. It generates barriers to seeing before closer examination reveals a way through those barriers. Metaphorically it demonstrates to the viewer that there is more than one way to see and that sometimes it is necessary to adapt different ways of looking in order to see more.

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Appendix

Documentation of Practice

1. Making a Trapezoid

The first experiment involved making a large trapezoid in the way Patrick Hughes had suggested. I was unsure if I could generate the reverse perspective imagery. Using string I established vanishing points by tracking the lines of the trapezoid forward into the area of convergence in the foreground. Their trajectory was used to create single-point perspective for the linear image and the “figure-ground effect” illusion.

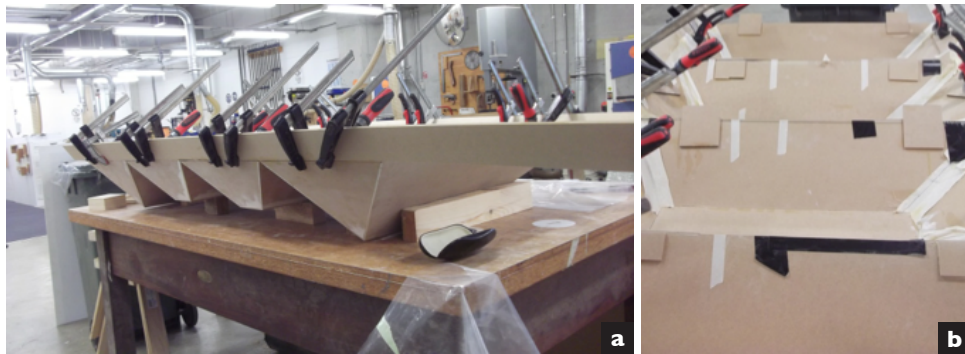


Fig. 12 5mm thick MDF was laser-cut from an Illustrator file using a plan generated with vector graphics. The MDF was then assembled into 6 parts and positioned using tape before gluing. Filler was applied to the edges before sanding and clamping into position for more gluing into the final combined structure. The last stage was the application of several coats of gesso. Each application was sanded before applying another coat.

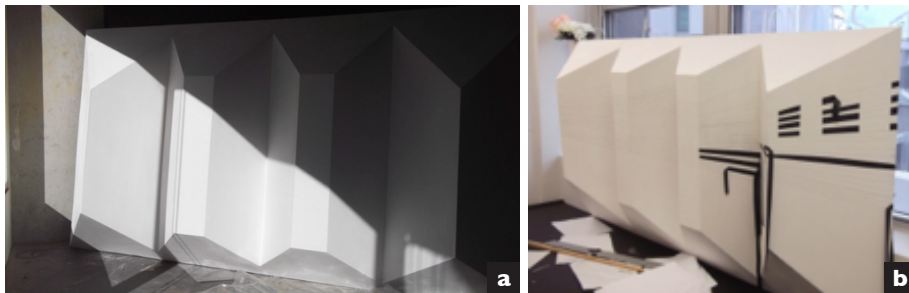


Fig. 13 Creating perspective lines with tape was abandoned as the latter kept falling off. Perspective lines were darkened to create more contrast and applied with charcoal. This was the largest of my experiments and worked best if the viewer was encouraged to walk back and fourth in front of it while viewing.

2. Imagery

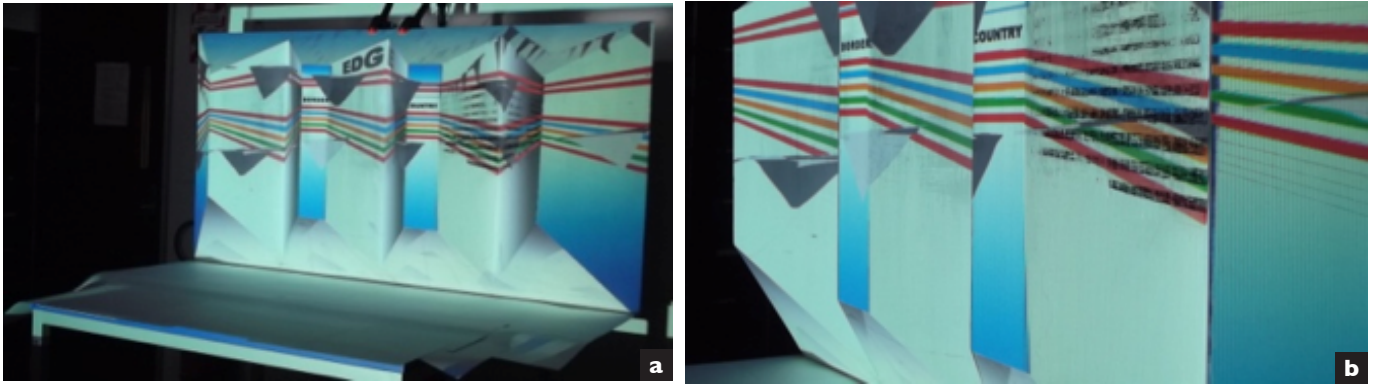


Fig. 14 In this experiment projected illustrations of shadows as well as real shadows were employed to aid the illusion of depth, in addition to typography. The imagery includes stylised bunting which signifies street decorations on the National Holiday in Northern Ireland on the 12th of July. This traditional celebration has historically been considered divisive for inter-community relations. The linear design element signifies border or horizon lines. The colours used in the perspective lines signify the two competing identities: Irish Nationalist and British Loyalist. I became uncomfortable with using these colours as they are overly used as signifiers for this disputed identity.

3. Method

At the 2014 AUT Postgraduate Conference, the theme of which was “Exchange”, I was able to verify that an experienced academic audience could also enjoy the viewing experience. This gave me confidence that my chosen media created a viewer centred-experience that was enjoyable and engaging for mixed audiences.



Fig. 15 A trapezoid with projected imagery (tested on the harshest of audiences at Newton Central Primary School, Auckland). Literally and metaphorically, different points of view reveal alternative ways of looking.



Fig. 16 Alternative experimentation of projected imagery. This work made a rhetorical reference to the town square in Dungannon. A common phrase you might hear from natives regarding the new immigrant population is: “The square is changing.” A portion of the earlier painted imagery on the trapezoid is visible, a sign intended to indicate the palimpsest nature of cultural change.

The second work, *The Shifting*, does not use projected imagery but lets the viewer experience a changing point of view with a trapezoid that is plain and painted white, with backlit acrylic panels. This allows the viewer to experience a shifting-edge assignment which equally defines the foreground and the background.¹⁹

The work was created by laser-cutting 12 planes of MDF to be assembled into a trapezoid with a configuration of three squares as the closest surface to be viewed from the front. This will be exhibited for examination.

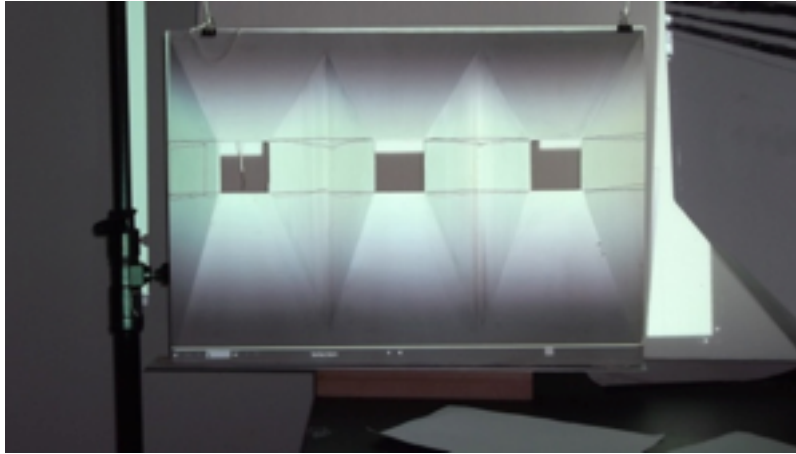


Fig. 17 Imagery was projected onto this smaller trapezoid in earlier experiments but I noticed the shape itself works well without the projections. I accordingly modified it into its current final form. This is same shape which will have when completed three central backlit square acrylic planes displaying a red borderline, one of which is etched with Garrett Carr's "Apple tree on the border" image. The backlighting flickers intermittently.



Fig. 18 Earlier work: "Test site 3"

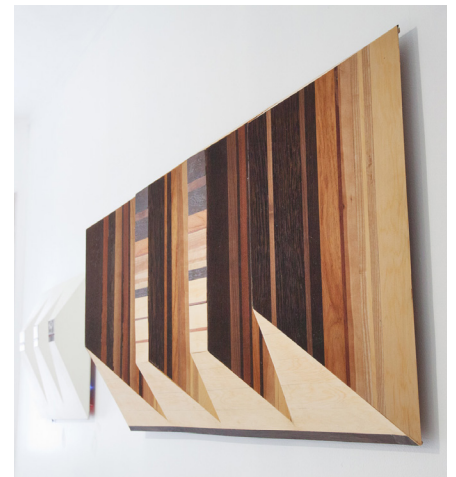


Fig. 19 Wood for use in *The Ingrained*. A variety of European, African, American and Pacific hardwoods with different strengths and flexibilities were laminated to create the individual planes of the trapezoid. These separate planes dress 6mm MDF board in a 5mm thick veneer.

Laser-etched imagery as in the panel opposite was considered and rejected as the colours of the wood are alone sufficient for the 3D work.



¹⁹ Similar to Figure /Ground relationship where the figure always defines the ground and the ground defines the figure from <http://daphne.palomar.edu/design/fandg.html>

The third piece is a trapezoid made from MDF and dressed with a surface made from a variety of different woods combined into a single structure. This experimentation is a development from earlier practice (see Fig. 17). The use of wood from different countries combined and fabricated into a single artefact in my current experimentation is directly related to this earlier experimentation. There are connotations of an established cohesive structure in contrast to the newly projected transient imagery of “projected identity”.



Fig. 20 Earlier work: Remember We Includes Them Too (“Test Site 4”). Laser-etched imagery was used in earlier experimentations. Here it is applied to antique reclaimed wood that has been fabricated into an artefact based on a traditional children’s toy which is capable of animated movement (Chinese blocks). With this work I was able to signify change, movement and transference which had eluded earlier experimentation.



Fig. 21 An earlier experimentation in my garage at home. With this experiment I was using the interaction of arrows and negative space to signify exchange. I deliberately retained earlier sketched imagery (on the right) to investigate how applied charcoal sketching and projections could combine.

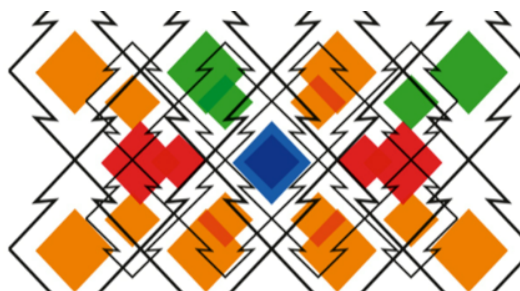


Fig. 22 Moygashel-influenced design. The colours recall those of the British and Irish national flags. I thought this design may work as a print, but not if it were etched into the planes of composite wood.



Fig. 23 Experimentation in which stain and etching was tested on composite wood. It was noted that the laser affected the wood differently depending on layer density.

REVERSE



Fig. 24 Reverse perspective letterform. This image was first set in type then photographed before being modified into vector graphics using Adobe Illustrator so that it could be laser-cut and used as a debossed image in this document. It is designed to evoke connotations of the other side of the border.



Fig. 25 Experimentation where fabric was saturated with resin and allowed to dry in a solid form, retaining the look of its original folds. This experiment referenced flags of identity and may be developed for future work in the form of fabric stretched into a trapezoid.

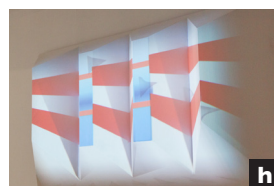
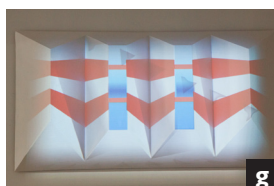
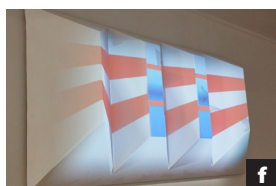
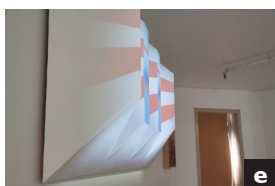
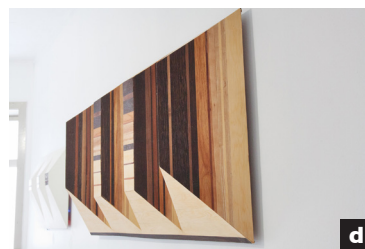


Fig. 26 The work exhibited for examination

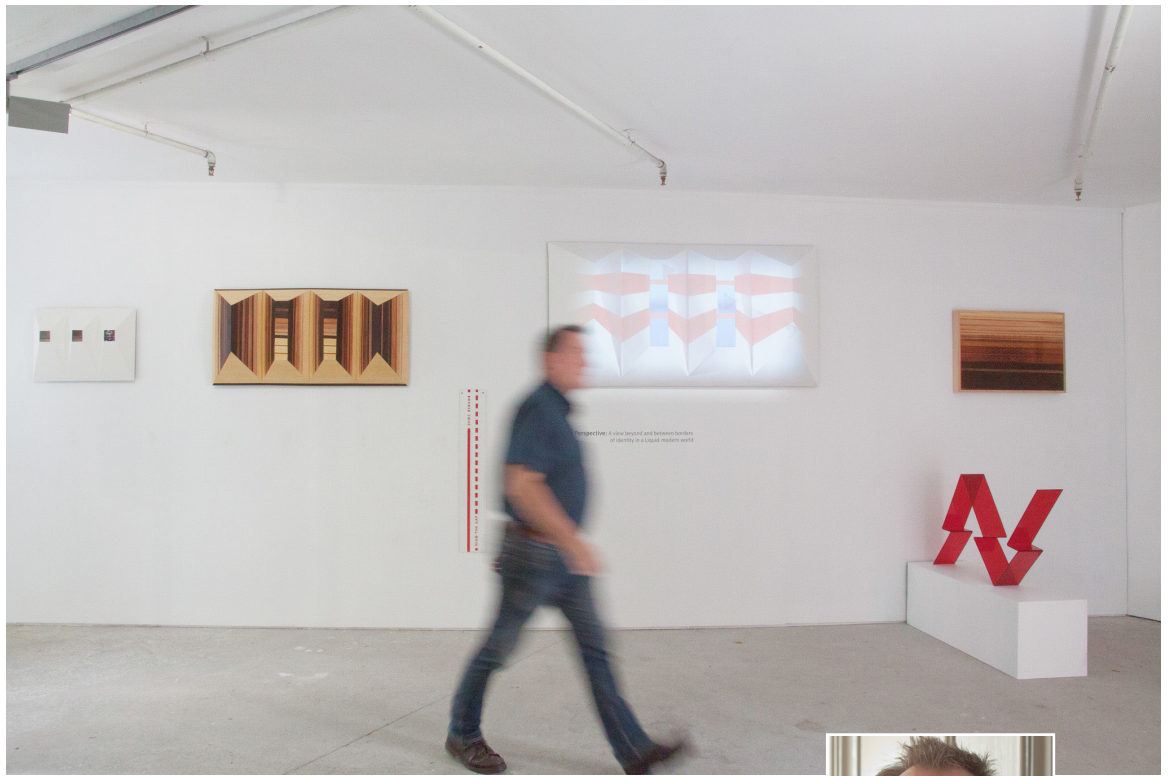


Fig. 27 The researcher at site of examination