

Boolean Logic and Brexit: Entropic Times

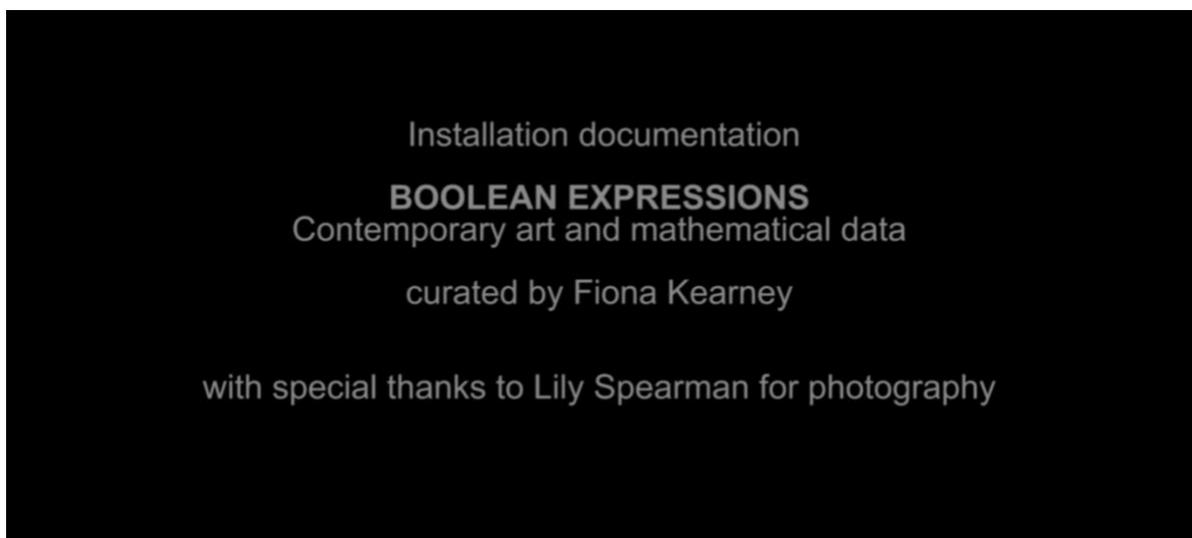


Still from installing 'Boolean Logic' in *Boolean Expressions, Contemporary Art and Mathematical Data*, Lewis Glucksman Gallery UCC, Cork Curated by Fiona Kearney 2015, photo Lily Spearman

The following is a set of notes that I used to address a list of guiding questions posed by AICA to the speakers at the Brexit Discussion 1st Nov 2018. As I spoke the film 'Boolean Logic' charting the construction and collapse of 'Boolean Logic' an entropic installation from 2015, played on a continuous loop. The piece, seeking to understand mathematician Boole's logic gates was commissioned to for *Boolean Expressions, Contemporary Art and Mathematical Data*, an exhibition celebrating his bi-centenary in the Lewis Glucksman Gallery UCC, Cork Curated by Fiona Kearney. Showing the pieces' continuous collapse whilst under construction was an attempt to consider entropy as a political metaphor and Brexit as a tipping point.

Boolean Logic

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_u10USZFIA



BOOLEAN LOGIC AND BREXIT: ENTROPIC TIMES (NOTES) Belfast Nov 2018

Being asked to speak about Brexit is an almost impossible task regardless of how one describes themselves. It is an issue that will undoubtedly deeply affect all citizens here but it is hard to know exactly how the mechanics of Brexit will affect day to day lives. Even the keenest political pundits can only resort to speculation as each passing day presents more and more questions. This seems an entropic moment to me, a tipping point, characterised by political stagnation coupled with constant change and uncertainty, where things could go one way or the other with even the slightest of nudges. So you'll understand if everything I might say here takes the form of questions.

Artists and academics are among the most affected when nation states turn inwards/close down, but are they/can they be part of a different thinking on political territories?

It seems everyone here could be deeply affected by Brexit, not just artists or academics, which begs the question how will people be affected? Could it be argued that artists always have been engaged in different form of thinking on political territories? Artists don't make work in a vacuum, it's impossible. There is a wealth of work being produced on the island that is informed by and deals directly with its political environment. Brexit will be no different. There are already artists responding to its potential effects, such as US artist Susan Lacey's recent work *Across and In Between*, working with border communities, commissioned by *14-18 NOW and Belfast International Arts Festival*. Whilst this is an example of an international artist responding to communities living on the border there are countless examples of artists dealing with political issues on the island as both artists and activists. To name a few Shane Cullen's long-term engagement with politics on this island with such pieces *Fragments sur les Institutions Républicaines IV* and *The Agreement* spring to mind or Mairead McClean's current, almost daily tweets *Register of Seizures* from her show *Making Her Mark*. Commissioned by Wopping Project

Another recent example, which incorporates artmaking and activism, is the Artists Campaign to Repeal the 8th with involvement of many of Ireland's leading artists such as Alice Maher, Cecily Brennan, Aine Phillips, Breda Mayock, and Aideen Barry to name but a few. This campaign played a vitally important role in the ultimate Repeal of the 8th Amendment by rendering the issue visible and generating positive images to allow productive debate to happen around what is a devise issue. This work continues North of the border with the involvement of many artists such as Emma Campbell in *Alliance for Choice* pushing for the decriminalisation of abortion and the extension of the 1967 Abortion act to N. Ireland. Whilst this campaigning might initially seem only tangentially related to Brexit the historical and contemporary differences between the legislation around bodily autonomy on both parts of this island, Britain and other parts of the EU, coupled with the very lengthy campaigns to have legislation, governing the domain of the body, changed either side of the border point to the complexities of the law and how legislation permeates every aspect of peoples' lives including the private. This is the same regarding equal marriage. Such legislative differences make the border more pronounced and manifest. If large tracts of legislation have to be revisited or reinvented post Brexit how pronounced will the border be then? How long will legislative clarification take on issues ranging from movement of people, movement of livestock, agricultural standards, workers' rights, tax regulations for cross border workers? The list could go on and on. Artists carnets will seem a drop in the ocean when looked at in light of all these other issues.

What does being part of the EU mean to its citizens in cultural terms and in terms of their identity in the contemporary world? Does it mean anything beyond the economic?

The economic is but one aspect of being part of the EU. There is a legislative and geographical territory that encompasses the political, historical, cultural and social too. There is currently free movement of EU citizens within the EU. It should also be remembered that the EU as a political and territorial entity curtails the movement of people from outside the EU. Doors are increasingly closing to those from outside the EU as is highlighted by the refugee crisis where more and more people are finding themselves forcibly displaced and on the move from countries where EU or western policies have had a destabilising effect. The rise of the right has also become apparent across Europe in recent years.

Brexit will only see the further curtailment of the movement of people. Britain's current hostile environment is very worrying, closing doors to potentially thousands more whilst arguably opening the door for the far right who are now more emboldened globally. We are having nasty foretastes of this rise off the right locally. Only recently a presidential candidate in the republic worryingly shot from a 1% to a 20% poll rating after he made derogatory and racist remarks about travellers whilst in Newtownards a group of people dressed up as Klansmen and posed outside a Muslim prayer centre for pictures that were posted to social media. The

Muslim centre had been subject to previous hate crime incidents. Becoming more insular and isolated under such circumstances can only be unhealthy.

As an artist who as in the past been involved in an artist organisation which ran an international residency program I saw how difficult it can be for artists from particular countries to get a visa to come to Belfast for a residency. I have seen situations where artists had to turn down the residency as they could not get the required visa. Is this situation set to get more prohibitive? Will it become harder if not impossible to engage in international cultural exchanges? We are already on a small rock in the ocean, is it healthy to become more isolated?

In higher education this is an issue too. Students studying on tier 4 Visas are subject to stringent monitoring at the behest of the Home Office. Depending on which country they come from their Tier 4 Visa might not always enable them to travel South of the border. International staff and students enrich the environment for local students exposing them to different cultural contexts. These points beg another set of questions. Will it be harder for international students to study here in the future? What will become of international exchange programmes such as Erasmus which fosters international dialogue? Will increasingly stringent regulation be extended to EU nationals? Does this include Irish citizens who will remain EU citizens? What of people who are entitled to and employ dual citizenship, i.e. both Irish and British ? Will Brexit make them simultaneously being EU and non-EU citizens? What might this mean for the Good Friday Agreement? Is this the Schrodinger's Cat of political change?

What does leaving the EU and becoming a citizen of a 'great global trading nation' mean to artists or alternatively being part of a small, geographically isolated country that culturally is more Anglo-American than European?

Does the 'great global trading nation' smack a little of a nostalgic hark back to days of Empire ? Is this a search for the latter day 'pink bits' on the map?

What role can pan Ireland organisations like AICA Ireland play in this new scenario?

Allowing debate and cultural activity to happen on an all island basis. Keeping international links open to artists working north of the border so that they don't become isolated internationally or on the island of Ireland.

What is the potential for new directions? Is there an upside to Brexit?

Brexit brings with it an urgency, it shows that a range of political crisis' must be addressed. It demands that people be far more vigilant about the rise of the far right, not just here but everywhere. Britain's closed doors policies must be addressed, but so too must the EUs' closed doors policies. It has been and is currently very difficult to secure visas for artists outside the EU, USA, Canada or Australia (this was our experience when I was involved in Flaxart's residency programme in the mid to late 90s and early 2000s). This already limits the potential for cultural exchange.

How has Brexit affected or changed our perceptions of the past?

It has brought the unresolved issues relating to Anglo Irish politics into very sharp focus. Whilst there has been a very welcome absence of conflict in the North the actual causes of the conflict and the traumatic legacy of the conflict remained unresolved. Brexit in my opinion has brought colonialism home to roost. It has highlighting unfinished business on this island but we can also see how the Windrush generation were so abysmally treated recently as well as the very visible rise in various forms of racism and Islamophobia. It forces us to address this past.



Stills from animation of installing 'Boolean Logic' in *Boolean Expressions, Contemporary Art and Mathematical Data*, Lewis Glucksman Gallery UCC, Cork Curated by Fiona Kearney 2015, photo Lily Spearman

LINKS

AICA Advertisement for AICA Brexit Discussion Day
<http://aica.ie/#!biz/id/58f7c3719865a1eb2c5fe82c>

Theatre NI Advertisement for AICA Brexit Discussion Day
<https://theatreni.org/invitation-brexit-discussions-day/>

Tipton, Gemma *The limits of reason: Boolean links between art and science*, Irish Times online 5/8/15
<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/the-limits-of-reason-boolean-links-between-art-and-science-1.2306733>

Art Meets Technology, Cork Independent, 22nd July 2015
<http://www.corkindependent.com/news/topics/articles/2015/07/22/4047535-art-meets-technology/>

Glucksman Gallery, Boolean Expressions
<https://vimeo.com/137620854>

Mathematics: a skill for every career Artist Aisling O'Beirn in We Use Maths http://weusemaths.ie/career-item/aisling_obeirn/