

Case Study

The Interface: Peace Walls, Belfast, Northern Ireland

James O'Leary

The Interface

The Interface is a system of control.

The Interface manages and controls both spatial and interpersonal relations.

The Interface is reinforced concrete, brick, steel, sheet metal, razor wire and mesh.

The Interface mutates by adapting to local conditions, both real and perceived.

The Interface is an equilateral triangle with the word 'VISION' at its apex.¹

The Interface is a manifold of local adjustments and modifications.

The Interface is material, opacity, dimension, solidity and communicative value.

The Interface alternates between barrier and backdrop.

The Interface is nine feet deep underground wall, built in the City Cemetery in the 1880s.

The Interface actively encourages, maintains, and polices separatist conditions.

The Interface is both system and sign.

The Interface truncates through-roads.

The Interface engenders ghettos.

The Interface generates space for temporary businesses, both legitimate and otherwise.

The Interface is a medium for the reproduction of closure.

The Interface is a canvas that accepts pigmentation.

The Interface eradicates horizon.

The Interface splits a park in half.

The Interface is a form of relation.²

The Interface closes roads.

The Interface constructs interstitial spaces.

The Interface is a particular pattern of local shopping habits.³

The Interface is no man's land.

The Interface is PRONI HA/32/2/55.⁴

The Interface is scanned by multiple video cameras simultaneously.

The Interface resists landscaping initiatives.

The Interface pretends it is not an Interface.

The Interface harbours small broken trees.

The Interface is witness to scenes of violence and killing.⁵

The Interface presents Bob Marley, Che Guevara, and Nelson Mandela.

The Interface supports art projects that have no meaning.

The Interface is a perceived loss of tourist revenue.

The Interface is haunted by low-res, high-contrast faces.⁶

The Interface is a support for melted materials that form local encrustations.

The Interface shields fires, locally blackening metal grates.

The Interface is seven locations where roads have gates that are closed occasionally.

The Interface generates furtive glances.

The Interface is a cluster of flowers tied to a tree next to a metal mesh gate.

The Interface closes at 4pm.

The Interface is a memento mori, a network of remembering.⁷

The Interface is offset lines of boulders, palisade fencing, metals sheets.

The Interface is an enclosed piece of ground,

inaccessible, filled with debris.

The Interface is viewed from watchtowers.

The Interface is a quick look over your shoulder.

The Interface exfoliates over time, revealing remnants of past events.

The Interface is an uprooted tree, discarded on the grass, next to an empty bag of crisps.

The Interface opens at 6.30am.

The Interface guides runoff from industrial processes.

The Interface tries to erase itself.

The Interface comingles the military-industrial with the domestic.

The Interface is five concrete blocks misaligned.

The Interface is an index of deaths recorded straightforwardly and with equal respect.⁸

The Interface is a paint-ball machine.

The Interface supports strange forms of plant growth.

The Interface cuts down oak trees that block a visual axis.

The Interface is GOC Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Freeland, dealing with things on the ground.⁹

The Interface is multiple shards of broken glass next to a concrete bollard.

The Interface oscillates between conditions of 'porosity' and 'lockdown'.

The Interface is a statistic.¹⁰

The Interface attempts to be decorative, varying its silhouette through faceted extrusions.

The Interface is primarily in Flemish stretcher bond.

The Interface is a curve of large concrete cubes, tied together with horizontal scaffold bars and clamps.

The Interface occasionally cleans its brickwork of unwanted messages.

The Interface is a pink shipping container that supports a car-wash business worked by eight Romanians.

The Interface is an irregular pattern of dents caused by projectiles of various classes and types.

The Interface can become a row of shops with space for a suicide hotline.

The Interface is a paramilitary mural overgrown with

small shrubs surmounted by a large advert for the Ulster Bank.

The Interface is a park that resembles a military cemetery.

The Interface is reference code UK INT-ARC PA2015 CL09-P0001.¹¹

The Interface is gold-enameled celtic knotwork on dark polished stone.

The Interface is an array of monochrome faces surrounding a local map.

The Interface is a fence that is bigger than a house.

The Interface supports plywood cut-outs of Pac-Man characters floating above the surrounding landscape.

The Interface has tri-partite classical proportions.

The Interface is to be reduced to a 'normal' size, some time in the future.

The Interface supports non-committal light industrial sheds.

The Interface is an MP4 video file on YouTube, with justification for a riot explained in a fluoro-pink font.

The Interface is a warning sign bleached white by fire.

The Interface is a curving line following the motorway.

The Interface is a matrix of responsibility for 54 interface structures, 41 walls or fences and 13 gates.¹²

The Interface attracts used tires.

The Interface is a landscape of inscription.

The Interface is a band of pink sheet metal, tap-welded at lapped edges.

The Interface is a strange feeling that creeps over you.

The Interface is a yellow sun painted over a uniform blue sky on corrugated sheet metal.

The Interface mutates as the conditions mutate over time.

The Interface is an abandoned cross-community family centre with broken windows throughout.

The Interface is emblematic of contested origins.

The Interface is a parody social media account, adding fuel to the fire.

The Interface is a fantasy landscape, a 'Secret

Garden' in red lettering, next to a metal-shuttered window.

The Interface is an institute for conflict research.

The Interface is the possibility of sealing off access to prevent infiltration.¹³

The Interface enfolds various institutions of the state including gaols, police headquarters and army compounds.

The Interface stretches from mountain to motorway ring.

The Interface is an attitude hardening.

The Interface is a communications site purchased by the Ministry of Defence.¹⁴

The Interface is the hope for collective acceptance of a shared narrative.

The Interface is a discussion regarding the optimal conditions for contact.

The Interface is an array of video surveillance screens monitoring the situation in real time.

The Interface configures openness and closure.

The Interface is organised geographically by cluster.¹⁵

The Interface is the word SECRET in red ink, stamped on the top-middle and bottom-middle of each page.

The Interface is formal government decisions, including the information and evidence placed before ministers.

The Interface is a 15-foot-high weldmesh fence installed above a 10-foot-high school perimeter fence.¹⁶

The Interface is greenstone (dark red) to porphyritic trachyte (orange).

The Interface is a wider trend of cul-de-sac planning facilitated by ongoing planning initiatives.

The Interface is 67 hectares of adjacent wasteland.

The Interface is local residents being surveyed out.

The Interface encircles enclaves.

The Interface is the continual occlusion of the 'day after' question.

The Interface is an immaterial psychic dimension.

The Interface adapts, folds, creases, extends and disappears as local conditions demand.

The Interface is a published policy that specifies a government goal by 2023.

The Interface is Trend Analysis: Contested Space.¹⁷

The Interface does not register on the current Ordnance Survey map.

The Interface is contoured by fear.

Notes

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4. A copyrighted asset of the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.
5. Niall Cunningham and Ian Gregory, 'Hard to miss, easy to blame? Peacelines, interfaces and political deaths in Belfast during the Troubles', *Political Geography* 40 (2014): 64–78.
6. Martin Melaugh, "'Remembering": Victims, Survivors and Commemoration. The Human Face of Conflict: Photographs of those killed', 2009, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk>.
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Biography

James O'Leary is currently a Senior Lecturer in Innovative Technology and Design Realisation at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, where he leads the M.Arch Architecture 'Design Realisation' module operating across all Masters design units.

In 2014 he was granted a TECHNE doctoral studentship to conduct research into the role of the architect in the transformation of 'post-conflict' sites, with a specific focus on the long-term transformation of 'Interface Areas' in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is pursuing this work as a member of the 'Understanding Conflict' Research Cluster at the University of Brighton.