

## PROJECT PROFILE

# Counter-Exhibitionary Strategies

JEANETTE DOYLE, JENNIE GUY, FIONA HALLINAN, EMER LYNCH AND KATE STRAIN INTRODUCE 'THE ENQUIRY @ IMMA', A SEMINAR GROUP AFFILIATED WITH GRADCAM THAT ARE DEDICATED TO ANALYSING EXHIBITION-MAKING STRATEGIES, BOTH HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY.



The Enquiry @ IMMA; photo (detail) by Louis Hough



The Enquiry @ IMMA; photo (detail) by Kate Strain

**THE** Enquiry is a seminar group affiliated with the Graduate School for Creative Arts and Media, Dublin (GradCAM) and hosted by IMMA. It was first convened in 2009 by Georgina Jackson, who was then a PhD candidate with GradCAM. Originally the group was concerned with collating research on seminal counter-exhibitionary strategies. The current working group comprises Jeanette Doyle, Jennie Guy, Fiona Hallinan, Emer Lynch and Kate Strain. We are concerned with developing a performative analysis of exhibition-making modes, both historical and contemporary.

## LES IMMATÉRIAUX

Our current research focuses on the relationship between Lucy Lippard's theorisation of dematerialised art practices during the 1960s and 1970s, and more recent considerations of 'immateriality', including explications of the digital age by French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. We recently examined 'Les Immatériaux', a groundbreaking exhibition held at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1985, curated by Lyotard and Thierry Chaput. 'Les Immatériaux' was informed by theories on matter and materialism found in Lyotard's earlier writings, including *Discourse, Figure* (1971), perceived as a veritable 'postmodern manifesto' and *The Post Modern Condition* (1979), which infused the exhibition with its "language games", refusal of a "meta-narrative" and predictions of the rise of the digital.<sup>2</sup>

The exhibition had five different strands, categorised using titles beginning with 'mat', which conjured an ontology of telecommunications: Matériau (medium); Matrice (matrix/code); Matériel (receiver); Matière (referent); and Maternité (emitter). The format of the exhibition itself was a form of physical 'surfing'. Dramatically-lit grey walls, suspended wire meshes that supported artworks. An obligatory headset indicated aurally which path visitors might take, with a different track for each of the five sections offering multiple pathways through the exhibition. Lyotard later theorised the 'immaterial' in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1991), a text that has proven central to our research. Using terms like 'nuance' and 'timbre',<sup>3</sup> Lyotard denoted the barely perceptible differences between sounds (such as the same note played on a piano and flute) and colours,

depending on the medium used to produce the colour, situating the sublime within these "minutiae of difference".<sup>4</sup>

## THE ENQUIRY @ IMMA

As a culmination of six months of regular meetings, 'The Enquiry @ IMMA' was conceived as a platform to perform our practice-based research. The event took place on Friday 15 July 2016, commencing in IMMA's former bookshop, where visitors were welcomed with warm beverages prepared by Fiona Hallinan. The drink was yellow in colour and visitors were invited to alter its gradient, taste and intensity with turmeric available in various forms: fresh, grated, powdered, whole and in syrup. Hallinan had also organised a selection of key readings that had informed the group's research, printed on different shades of yellow paper. The audience were invited into the lecture room for a series of screenings and live presentations. Having departed the now disused bookshop, the first film, presented to the audience by Jennie Guy, was an extract from *Fahrenheit 451*, François Truffaut's 1966 film adapted from a novel by Ray Bradbury, which portrays the mass incineration of books ('Book Drop').

This was followed by Emer Lynch's piece, a 14 minute reading of an abridged chapter from Lyotard's *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Chapter one, entitled 'Can Thought go on Without a Body', is split into two parts: 'He' and 'She'. 'He' speaks largely from the perspective of the impatient, practical-minded scientist, accusatory and reproachful of 'She' – the philosopher – for "wearing out your reader" with questions that "have to remain unanswered in order to deserve being called philosophical". The text was delivered live from the back of the room by Lynch and her father, Brian. The difference in tone between the two familial voices reflected Lyotard's inquiries.

This was accompanied by an initially almost static video of a bleached out scene depicting a tiny black hole on a cliff face. Four adult bodies eventually emerged feet first from this hole, blinded by the intense natural light, stumbling forward and then crawling precariously down the rock formation, before walking off-screen. The intellectual density of Lyotard's text was diffused by this footage, which was partly humorous and partly a primal 'birthing' scenario.

According to Lyotard, to be 'inhuman' is our natural state, while to be 'human' is something that has to be learned.

Following a second extract from *Fahrenheit 451* ('Train Gaze'), Kate Strain began to tell a story connecting a recent aeronautical experience with two existing texts: *Ernst Fischer: A Philosopher and Death* written by John Berger in 1974, describing the last day of Fischer's life; and *The Necessity of Art* by Ernst Fischer himself, published in 1959, describing why art matters in the face of capitalism. While Strain told the story, footage played in the background, showing her computer desktop and various internet searches for material related to 'Les Immatériaux'.

After Guy's third extract from *Fahrenheit 451* ('Running Man'), Jeanette Doyle presented her piece *Rough*, which began and ended with a text-based animation playing out against eight different background colours. Donna Summer and Barbara Streisand's duet *Enough is Enough* formed part of the soundtrack, emphasising the distinction between the nuance and timbre of the two voices. Halfway through, Streisand and Barry Gibb's rendition of *Guilty* was accompanied by moving images of destruction caused by erupting volcanoes. This work contrasted theorisations of the sublime by Kant and Lyotard, whereby the former would cite the sublime in our inability to comprehend vastness and magnitude, while for the latter the sublime appears in the minutiae of details. The event concluded with a final extract from *Fahrenheit 451* – a film that foretells a future reality where information is considered a dangerous force. Guy's aim was to slow things down a little, delivering relentlessly slow edits or looped sections that confront the viewer with what it means to discard or disrespect knowledge.

**The Enquiry (Jeanette Doyle, Jennie Guy, Fiona Hallinan, Emer Lynch and Kate Strain) continue to meet regularly at IMMA and would like to thank Lisa Moran (IMMA) and Dr Noel Fitzpatrick (GradCAM).**

## Notes

1. Bernard Stiegler, *Shadow of the Sublime*, p.148
2. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1979
3. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: A Reflection on Time*, 1988, p.140
4. Jeanette Doyle, Jeanette Doyle: Fifteen Days and Factory Direct at the Andy Warhol Museum: The Relationship Between the 'Immaterial', 'Dematerial' and 'Material' in Contemporary Art Practice in M. Causey, E. Meehan and N. O'Dwyer (eds.), *The Performing Subject in the Space of Technology*, 2015