

## Moving Image

### No Longer Peripheral

EMER LYNCH REFLECTS ON A RECENT EVENT, ORGANISED BY ARTISTS' EXPERIMENTAL MOVING IMAGE (AEMI).

'NO LONGER PERIPHERAL' was a day-long event hosted by aemi (Artists' and Experimental Moving Image) that took place on 2 November 2019 at the Robert Emmet Theatre in Trinity College Dublin. Supported by IADT's MA Art and Research Collaboration (ARC) and funded by the Arts Council, the event took place in association with The Douglas Hyde Gallery and was devised by aemi Co-Directors Alice Butler and Daniel Fitzpatrick in close collaboration with writer, researcher and lecturer Maeve Connolly from the faculty of Film, Art & Creative Technologies, IADT.

The idea behind 'No Longer Peripheral' was to facilitate dialogue and deepen connections between moving image cultures in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland. These places are intrinsically interconnected through shared experiences relating to the fight for independence, language and migration. 'No Longer Peripheral' gave representation to these three places and established a platform for cross-community critical discussion, peer support and research.

The event was a live research process, comprising screenings curated by aemi, LUX Scotland and AMINI (Artists' Moving Image Northern Ireland), followed by panel discussions and responses from invited respondents and the audience. After introductions by aemi and The Douglas Hyde Gallery's Georgina Jackson, the first screening programme commenced with four short films, drawn from two 2019 aemi touring programmes. These works – by artists and filmmakers Moira Tierney, Vivienne Dick, Sarah Browne and Saoirse Wall – dealt with body politics, agency and relationships to place. The follow-up panel had a historical and theoretical focus. Points of connection between practices and the changing models of archives were amongst key concerns brought to the fore by Maeve Connolly, University of Glasgow's Sarah Neely and CCA Derry-Londonderry's Sara Greavu during the discussion, chaired by Valerie Connor of TU Dublin. Artist and filmmaker Myrid Carten, the first respondent, reiterated the need for access to archives and collections and, as some of the panellists suggested, greater belief in the generosity of peripheral positions. She spoke about tensions between amateur and professional practice, as well as her zeal to see experimental film culture encouraged, highlighting the roles of stakeholders in this regard.

After lunch, artist, researcher and curator Alberta Whittle presented *between a whisper and a cry* (2019), a film addressing climate trauma and fear, colonialism and memory, and geographical privilege. She introduced this film, created with Matthew A. Williams, by quoting American writer, Saidiya Hartman, proposing multiple understandings of the term 'wayward', such as: "the errant path taken by the leaderless swarm, in search of a place better than here". Whittle propositioned the audience: "How can we refuse numbness as a survival strategy?" She admitted to feeling galvanised when discussing political methods of refusal (especially considering the Brexit extension a few days earlier).

Whittle's presentation influenced the frank

and discursive nature of the second panel. Whittle and artists Emily McFarland and Saoirse Wall spoke openly about their experiences of making work in different places across the UK and Ireland. Sarah Durcan from NCAD chaired the discussion, which led into interesting territory around autonomous learning and exhibition making. The panellists discussed artist-led education, legitimising practices, privilege, access to archives, and the pressures of making work in these similar-but-different contexts. Emily McFarland commented on the potential for 'periphery' to slip into isolation. Likewise, the respondent, Isobel Harbison of Goldsmiths, problematised the aspirational nature of the event's title, as well as Northern Ireland's geopolitical position becoming sidelined.

The final segment was hosted by AMINI. Co-founder and artist Jacqueline Holt introduced artist Emily McFarland, who in turn introduced her film, commissioned by EVA International 2020. *Curraghinalt* (2019) depicts the valley and farmland around Greencastle People's Office – a collection of caravans in the mountains of West Tyrone – and airs personal testimonies from a community of anti-mining protesters. The voices in the documentary-style video speak of political representation, solidarity, sovereignty, capitalism and colonialism, all experienced through their perspectives. This work shifted the tone of the event and offset a dominance of female representation.

The ensuing panel, chaired by Maeve Connolly, focused on the potential futures of the three represented organisations, and Jacqueline Holt, Alice Butler and Daniel Fitzpatrick were joined by Kitty Anderson of LUX Scotland. Connolly posed questions around the organisations' futures: how to make connections beyond the regions they operate in; and the main challenges faced by moving-image cultures in each context. The sustainability of voluntary and funded work, reliance on people-to-people relationships and a resilience to becoming over-institutionalised were also discussed. As respondent, Prof Laura Rascaroli of UCC acknowledged paradoxical positions and practices that are both marginal and assume a centrality, that thrive upon the battle not to become relegated. Rascaroli reiterated the need for networks and suitable conditions for artists and spoke about the positive and negative fluidity that digital technologies bring to tangible interactions and relationships.

Overall, the day was an accumulation of substance and confidence around artists' moving image on the island of Ireland and in Scotland. We were happy with the format and the open nature of the panel discussions. Ideally 'No Longer Peripheral' was a starting point to wider conversations about producing and archiving moving image works in these contexts, which we look forward to developing.

**Emer Lynch is curator (maternity cover) with aemi.**

aemi.ie

## Internationalism

### Imagined Communities

MATT PACKER CONSIDERS THE DISTRIBUTIVE POWERS OF ART WORLD COMMUNICATION.

IN HIS LANDMARK and often-cited book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes the links between the development of the printing press and the birth of public national consciousness. He describes how the facility of printing text in vernacular languages became instrumental in identifying, conceptualising and shaping an audience of readers. The strategies of producing and distributing books and newspapers from the 16th century onward became a way of qualifying the reach and bounds of that language-community, in the logical evolution towards a self-conscious form of nationalism that would find its full expressions years later. Anderson describes the ceremony of the reader being aware that their reading is "replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he [sic] has the slightest notion".<sup>1</sup> He goes on to suggest that this kind of readership became a model of community itself.

In our own time, the development of the internet as a space of shared discourse has done something similar to shape the imaginary locus of a transnational community. Extending Anderson's logic to the specific context of the 'art world', it is easy to understand how art's increasingly-online and monoglot communication media has accelerated the possibility of thinking about the art world as a world, with a reinforced sense of global plurality and synchronicity of artistic practices and discourses wherever they seem to be occurring (provided that it's communicable in English, typically). As Alex Rule and David Levine have noted for the writers, commentators and PR people that input into this system, "the distributive capacities of the internet now allows them to believe – or to hope – that their writing will reach an international audience", despite the full awareness that English is not the primary language in most countries, nor is there anything globally universal about internet access.<sup>2</sup>

At the receiving end of these communications – whether it's a critical appraisal of a new biennial in Turku, or the promotion of a seminar series in Skopje – this saturation of international art communication rarely corresponds to the possibility of our attendance or direct participation, regardless of where we're based or the opportunities at our disposal. A lot of what is trafficked through our inboxes and social media feeds can often feel designed to adhere to recognitions of value, relevance and discourse that is both suggestively within our own interests, and yet calculated beyond our reach.

It is difficult to measure the impact that e-flux has had in shaping these conditions and worldly self-perceptions, since it was established by Antony Vidokle in a Holiday Inn in New York's Chinatown in 1998. Describing itself as "a publishing platform and archive, artist project, curatorial platform, and enterprise" its outputs include a news digest, events, exhibitions, schools, journal and books, with a mission to produce and disseminate "strains of critical discourse surrounding contemporary art, culture, and theory internationally".<sup>3</sup> It is best known

for its email announcements that arrive three times a day, each of which are paid-for by selected public arts institutions and larger-scale arts initiatives, whose exhibitions and projects are promoted to over 90,000 subscribers across the world.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of e-flux goes further, if we consider that many colleges encourage undergraduate students to subscribe to e-flux, to help build professional awareness, while the announcements themselves have become a communication culture of their own – somewhere between a press release and a proto-generator of artistic discourse itself. It was enough to warrant the publication of *The Best Surprise is No Surprise* in 2006, a printed selection of previous email announcements, selected by curators, writers and artists including Nancy Spector, Molly Nesbit and Hans Ulrich Obrist. Daniel Birnbaum's essay for the book describes the 'e-flux effect' as a mixture of enchantment, curiosity and hope that now feels dated with the political ethics of peak neo-liberalism: "Since many of these things seem to take place in distant locations where I have never set foot ... those punctuations, which seem to hint at new possibilities for art (at least in my fantasy), make me curious and full of hope: strange and radically new things are going on out there in the world".<sup>5</sup>

Here in Ireland, there is a general sense that the distributive powers of art world communication are located elsewhere. There are only a few visual arts organisations based in Ireland that have the capacity to circulate their work internationally, whether promotionally or otherwise. There are no art magazines or journals (print or online), blogs, lists, information portals, or specialist communication agencies based in Ireland that have comprehensive international distribution and reach. The print edition of *CIRCA Art Magazine* – still cited and memorialised as an important discursive vehicle for contemporary art in Ireland – during its highpoint in 2005, had only 52 international subscribers beyond Ireland and the UK, taking into account both individual and institutional subscriptions.<sup>6</sup> When we imagine the possible international publics for our work and the remote community of discourse that we see ourselves being part of, we should also be aware of how these imaginings are both constructed and administered into reality.

**Matt Packer is the Director of EVA International.**

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Alix Rule and David Levine, *International Art English* (Triple Canopy, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> e-flux website

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 47% in Europe, 42% in North America and 11% Other (South America, Australia, Japan, etc) with a demographic breakdown of 18% writers/critics, 16% galleries, 16% curators, 15% museum affiliated, 12% artists, 10% consultants, 8% collectors, and 5% general audiences.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Birnbaum, 'Temporal Spasms or, See You Tomorrow in Kiribati!' in *The Best Surprise is No Surprise* (Zürich: e-flux and JRP Ringier Kunstverlag AG, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Email conversation with Peter Fitzgerald, former editor of *CIRCA Art Magazine*.