

- E Lately I've been thinking a lot about the consciousness of objects, or more specifically if objects have an immaterial force which allow them to come into our awareness, independently of our activation of them. Plato wrote about *Anima Mundi*, which was the idea that the planet has a soul that is somehow connected to all living bodies that inhabit it. Many ancient tribal cultures believed in totemism and the power of inanimate objects to hold 'conscious' spirits that interact with society. All of the passive objects that surround us are made up of systems of natural and man-made compounds that are held together in the system by energies. Even plastic is derived from petrochemicals taken from geological sources which date as far back as beyond our comprehension. Spinoza believed that 'each thing, as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being' meaning a 'thing', when inter-acted or perhaps tampered with, has an innate desire to continue to exist and enhance itself. Therefore I can't help wonder if the seemingly passive objects in our lives, which hold some authority, consciously choose us, or do we choose them?
- W The sculptures which make up your work *Tephra* do seem to hum with a certain dense, uneasy energy. I like the suggestion that they might be emitting certain embedded properties, transmitting something other than just their illustrative qualities. Spinoza also researched the sources of human feeling, proposing that emotions are based in tangible biological causes, rather than being unexplainable reactions. This is supported by more recent neuroscientific research. It would be interesting to really definably assess the ways in which audiences emotionally respond to art works or objects. Even something as simple as this poster-booklet; I could rationally explain the choice of paper stock, dimensions, ink colour and typeface on a conceptual and contextual level, but much harder to unpack instinctive decisions, something which as a graphic designer you are taught early on to avoid.
- M The attraction of people to certain objects or things is difficult to qualify. Roland Barthes in relation to photography referred to the forces of attraction that sets off the punctum (what pierces the viewer) as advenience. 'A photograph's punctum', he asserts, 'is that accident which "pricks" me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'. Why we are attracted to certain images and not others, can be similarly related to how the appearance of an object can

arrest us. The advenience of an appearance acts upon our perceptual tendencies, and redirects our attention, which then becomes sensory. Maybe it is an energy that emanates from the objects, but there is a sensation that is particular to humans in how inanimate objects have the capacity to activate us. I am curious why you chose certain materials for the exhibition, as they have a very distinctive texture as well as colour. Spinoza wrote a thesis on rainbows which I thought was apt, that I couldn't find anywhere...

E Over the last number of years I've worked a lot with digital technology, then suddenly last year material objects crept into my practice. The kind of art work that I began gravitating towards at other peoples' exhibitions were the pieces that were heavily material-orientated. I thought perhaps this was a natural want to try something different for a while. However when you think of how technology is present in our lives, that the most successful digital objects are developed to be intuitive, (for example the sleep indicator light on a Mac pulsating like human breathing, or when Facebook asks how you are feeling), it is extremely hard not to address the issue that this could be causing a resurgence in animism. Perhaps this is leading people back to the spiritual preciousness of material objects rather than consumption. Life seems so ephemeral these days in the way we communicate (email), read (Kindles), remember (digital photos which get collected but perhaps not printed) and even the way we navigate spaces (Google Maps/Google Earth). All of these things are fleeting and will one day dissipate. Maybe we begin to be drawn to physical objects, which act as totems for situating us in the now or which will outlive us. The tactility of using materials makes me feel somewhat more present and aware. It makes me look at objects in my domestic life, which didn't hold much gravitas before, with a new kind of potentiality. I choose materials to redescribe these objects because of their kinesthetic properties. The colours, even though I can certainly contextually speculate that they come from memories or intuitive understanding within an art-historical context, I must admit are probably more instinctive. It's really an emotional-responsive process, like when you taste something for the first time and you know you love it or hate it.

W Focusing on your mention of Kindles, this is an area I am actively involved in, as I'm currently producing and publishing a number

of ebooks. It's interesting to raise the idea that this new way of reading might be more ephemeral than reading a printed book, when Amazon, Apple et al would of course try to convince us otherwise. The slightly troubling thing for me is that readers of ebooks and other forms of digital publications are completely reliant on whatever formats they choose. If Amazon announced tomorrow that they were discontinuing the Kindle device and sale of Kindle books, I'd be left with an object that, while still functional, would be largely useless (and the battery would likely completely die in time). What would happen to my library of Kindle books if Amazon were bought out by, say, Apple? These things are not very likely to occur, but nevertheless the thought lingers that there is a certain loss of control and a fragility in transitioning to these new ways of reading. I've yet to decide if the pros of ebooks over print books outweigh the cons; it will still take some time to really see how the publishing industry will be affected and how reading habits develop. It's worth considering the physical qualities of e-readers; for example, the plastic touchscreens on newer Kindle models attempt to simulate the tactility of uncoated paper. It's a subtle, logical and gratifying addition to such a device, and far more preferable to the skeuomorphic page-turning effect seen in Apple's iBooks app. I'm not convinced that people really need real-world objects to be simulated within an interface design.

M It is an interesting turn as our lives become stored on iCloud. I like the visual denotation that one's life is suspended in the atmosphere by something that is ephemeral. Lifestyle choices through the medium of Facebook, Spotify, Instagram and the tweets you follow provide people with an insight into your personality and become the means by which people define you. It can become very self-conscious as one curates one's online persona. As a society, especially through the development of capitalism, our lives were defined by the objects we accumulated, and would determine your class or your aspirations. This would also be tied up with desire. Maybe this shift away from the accumulation of objects will be a means to liberate society in some ways, although one has to recognise that this is only available to a certain segment of society. I think it is innate in us to be drawn to objects. As we spend more of our time in the ethereal aspects of life, the desire to be connected or grounded becomes paramount. Eleanor, you mentioned a newfound appreciation of objects that you normally see every day. Maybe this is our new way of seeing where

objects are activated, by a more pared back sensory perception as when you were a child. You are ascribing a new dimension to the object. The idea of animism, that inanimate objects have a spiritual essence, and that there is no separation between the spiritual and physical world – that we coexist – is an idea that has persisted throughout the ages and it is one that seems to have captured the zeitgeist at this present time.

E Something that has concerned me for a long time is the idea that society currently has an unquestionable faith in science. I had the opportunity a number of years ago to have access to some of the world's top scientists. What struck me during my visit to their various research labs was the way in which they discussed or verbalised their practice. They all seemed to have an infallible belief in speculative theories, which struck me as slightly worrying, considering that my naive understanding of a scientist's role was to 'experiment' in order to find empirical evidence to prove or disprove a hypothesis. I wondered if the fact that they wanted so strongly for their theories to be 'true' caused some sort of observer effect, and would inevitably lead to a perseverance to influence the outcome. It seemed that each scientist talked in such an enthusiastic manner about their field of knowledge, it became very difficult not to be convinced by the idea of the speculation that the hypotheses were enough to sustain an interest and that perhaps the process becomes irrelevant.

It's almost cultish that in current society we have become more enamoured by the idea of a 'thing' rather than the obvious attributes or physical effect of the 'thing' in itself. That in a gallery setting we seek out the wall text for an explanation of the ideas or story surrounding a contemporary art object. We somehow overlook the act of observation or experience of encountering it. For some artists, for example Simon Fujiwara, there is a blurring between the 'real' story of an object and the fictionalised desire of what an artist wants the object to signify. Placing something in a gallery space wipes away or enhances connotations of an object which can be negated through wall-based text. I'm not a huge fan of illustrative explanations of art works, and even with the titles of my own work, I wish for them to be an extension, not a descriptor. I know Wayne that you have worked with artist Joseph Grigley on the book *Exhibition Prosthetics* which, on reading, had a profound effect on the way I view exhibition ephemera.

W Not to get too reflexive, but this question of representing an art work or collection of art works has informed the structure of this very booklet. As you say, Grigley understands the ephemera that surrounds art works and exhibitions as being inherently a part of them. Invitations, posters and catalogues can be a route into an artist's work, and often our first knowledge of a practise. I worked on a book a couple of years ago with an artist, Tom Benson, the form of which came out of a discussion about the difficulty of illustrating an exhibition in a catalogue. Standard installation shots are not necessarily that interesting. Ultimately the book was printed using a coarse halftone screen, which referred to works from the show; colour paintings were reproduced in greyscale, with only the captions pointing to their true form. In the case of this present publication, I think we were right not to include images; they would not serve any useful purpose, given that most people reading this will have picked it up at the exhibition. The show will be supported by documentation somewhere on the internet, and for sure on Eleanor's website. This seems a more constructive way to show images of work, and can enable publications to pursue other motives.

M The ephemera of an exhibition has evolved and become more sophisticated over time; invitations have been replaced by e-invites and the foldout with text has become the new format as a means to translate the exhibition for the audience. It is also a means to inform an absent audience that will never physically enter the gallery space and experience the exhibition. Has ephemera come to supersede the exhibition? I have often thought, with the dominance of e-flux as a means to disseminate information on institutions' or galleries' programme, that exhibitions would not necessarily have to manifest physically. It could simply become a conceptual space where proposed exhibitions and ideas can exist. Although, with over-saturation of the use of e-flux, we edit what we decide to read as an audience and the subject of the email is ever more important to grab our attention and delve further.

Having worked in different contexts in commercial galleries, not-for-profits and institutions, the use and function of text is varied. In a commercial gallery context you would rarely see a wall text; the press release serves as the text and usually contains the prices of the works. The not-for-profit is less prescribed and would vary depending on the format that the artist or curator would take. As for institutions,

as their remit is often predicated on education and accessibility, you will often find an exhibition illustrated throughout by text and extensive labelling, which serves as a means to place an exhibition or artist's work within an art historical context.

Exhibition ephemera is constantly being rethought. The hard book catalogue may be replaced by an e-catalogue that we can download on our Kindle. An art audience is quite specific in that we do tend to fetishise the objects that accompany exhibitions, so the catalogue and ephemera will survive and will become more specialised and highly-designed. This brings us back to the point we had discussed earlier in terms of what draws us to an object; there is an insatiable desire to obtain the objects that illustrate our cultural lives.

E This leads me to wonder what will become of the cultural artefacts of our time? If the *Anima Mundi* decided to reboot and an ice age began, following thousands of years of natural resource exploitation, and if in some sort of Kubrickian twist of fate a primitive human life once again evolved, what would remain to identify the idea of us? Art objects have become increasingly economically commodified, but in contemporary art practice it is usually the idea/intention of the object or even a process of investigation, which activates the object, rather than its denoted physicality. Sometimes decoding these objects takes sophisticated and complex understanding of the system within which they are derived. Without the ephemera which act to decipher, how will these objects be connoted? Even the artworks themselves can be transitory or gestural acts, so how can these fleeting moments act as monuments to our time? If ideas are our emblems, should the objects thus become redundant?

*Eleanor Duffin* was born in Wexford and currently lives and works in Dublin. After graduating from Limerick School of Art and Design with a BA in Sculpture and Combined Media in 2003, she went on to complete a two-year Masters program at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. She is currently an artist-in-residence at the Fire Station Artists' Studios, Dublin until June 2013. She has exhibited both in her home country and internationally. Her work has been included most recently in *Whitewashing the Moon*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin (2012); *PVA*, The Guesthouse, Cork; *Radical Love II*, Dublin (2011); *Transference*, Broadstone Gallery, Dublin (2011); and *Little Constellation Archive*, NUA: New Contemporary Arts and Research, The Republic of San Marino (ongoing).

Her current research is an empirical inquisition, which observes belief systems and the construct of truths. She is also currently preoccupied with knowledge production and slippages between reality and fiction. Beginning with a set of seemingly unrelated facts or objects, armed with an intuition that they are somehow connected, she works with abductive reasoning, causing a process of interference that produces a hypothesis. Recurrent themes within her practice include a preoccupation with ideologies of modernity and the constructs of utopianism. The outcome of her research is presented as installations. Using both appropriated and constructed disparate objects, she wishes to create environments, which reflect an overall sensibility of her concluded hypotheses.

Eleanor has been selected to participate, as international artist-in-residence, at the Gertrude Contemporary space in Melbourne, Australia for June and July 2013.

*Mary Cremin* is a curator based in Dublin. She holds a degree in Art History and Geography from University College Cork and graduated with a Masters in Visual Art Practices from the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dublin. She is currently Project Manager of the Irish Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2013. Prior to this she was Project Curator at the Irish Museum of Modern Art and Director of the Green on Red Gallery, Dublin. She has worked with artists such as Lynda Benglis,

Francis Alÿs, Carlos Garaicoa, Romuald Hazoumè, Cyprien Gaillard, Gerard Byrne, Alice Maher and Garrett Phelan and has acted as editor/assistant editor on IMMA publications and the multi-disciplinary publication *Boulevard Magenta*.

Curated projects at IMMA include Sidney Nolan; Ned Kelly Series (2012–2013); Garrett Phelan, off site *NEW FAITH LOVELSONG* (2012); and *Conversations: Photography from the Bank of America Collection* (2012). Independent curatorial projects include *Lights, Camera, Action!*, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios (2012); *The Inhabitant*: Martin Healy, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios (2011); *Pilgrimage from Scattered Points*: Luke Fowler, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios (2011); *Dawning of an Aspect*, Dublin (2009); *Arise Ye Starvelings...*, Pallas Contemporary Projects, Dublin (2008); *Sonic Youth*, Dublin and Wallace Gallery, New York, (2008); *Sheltering Daydreams*, New York (2007) as part of House Projects, Eoin McHugh: *Drawings*, Dublin (2007); and *From Where I Stand*, Cork (2006). Co-curated projects include: spring film program, Rubicon Gallery, Brussels (2013); *Here and There*, Oonagh Young Gallery and Wallace Gallery, New York (2010–2011); and *Blasphemy* at the Oonagh Young Gallery, Dublin and The Dock, Carrick on Shannon (2010). She was awarded the curatorial residency in Temple Bar Gallery & Studio, Dublin for 2010/2011.

She has recently been awarded the 2013 visual arts curator residency at Roscommon Arts Centre from the Irish Arts Council and curator studio residency in Block T, Dublin. With Josephine Kelliher she has co-curated the 2013 spring film program for Rubicon Gallery, Brussels.

*Wayne Daly* is a graphic designer at the Architectural Association (AA) Print Studio, London. Daly studied at Ireland's Waterford Institute of Technology as well as at the London College of Communication (LCC). He recently established the micro-press Precinct, publishing books which focus on music criticism, including a recent essay by Adam Harper on the work of American musician John Maus. He has written for *The National Grid* and *A Circular*, and has guest-lectured at LCC, Werkplaats Typografie, and the American University of Beirut. In the summer of 2008, he co-founded Bedford Press, a private press based at the AA.

Dialogue with Eleanor Duffin, Mary Cremin and Wayne Daly as part of Eleanor Duffin: More Often Lost Than Gained, Roscommon Arts Centre, 28 March – 8 June 2013  
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