



Born in Dublin, Clodagh Emoe studied at the National College of Art and Design, where she received a BA in Fine Art Sculpture, before moving on to London to complete an MA in Fine Art at Chelsea College (hons. Distinction). Upon completion of her MA she undertook research based residencies at the Banff Centre, Canada, VCCA, Virginia, USA, and IMMA. Recent projects/events include, *Come Together*, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, *An Exhibition in Five Chapters*, CAC, Vilinius, *Somewhere Here*, NSCAD, Canada, *Precairous Renderings*, Market/Glasgow College of Art and Design, Scotland, *Losing Ourselves*, a star-gazing session in conjunction with " I Am Here Somewhere", a solo-show at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin, and *Mystical Anarchism*, a collaborative project with Professor Simon Critchley (New School NY), Glendalough, Wicklow. She is part-time associate lecturer of Visual Art Practice at IADT, she has been appointed external examiner for GMIT, and is a research scholar at Gradcam, where she convenes 'the experiential: re-reading aesthetics'. The working title for her PhD thesis is 'Disclosing the In-Between: Encountering the Liminal in Contemporary Art'. Her lucky number is seven and in many cases she uses this to overcome problems. Rather than reason, she would find herself responding to the logic that arises within the work. As soon as she has mastered a technique to enable her in her practice there is a tendency to move on - there seems a rationale to this irrationality. If she doesn't eat regularly she becomes irate and distant, equally, if she doesn't expend superfluous energy she gets anxious.

Both, Clodagh and Edia, would like to thank Tessa Giblin, Mary Cremin, and all the crew involved in 'Parados', esp. STUDIOSEVENTYSEVEN photographers.



Above: the 'chorus' from 'Parados' (2009) await Clodagh Emoe's direction; from contact sheet shot on location in the Pheonix park, Dublin, by STUDIOSEVENTYSEVEN photographers

Edia Connole: Your upcoming show at Project 'Cult of Engagement' continues your situated enquiry and research into liminality, what do you understand by this term?

Clodagh Emoe: I'm looking at liminality as something radically other than our quotidian experience; as something, or rather, that other thing, that is fundamental to our very existence. I'm interested in the possibility of art being an apparatus or tool to engage with this. This has prompted me to look at the ritual - described in anthropology as an operational system of marking life processes that are outside of the quotidian. The term liminal, is derived from Latin, limen, meaning threshold, and the term liminality, is used within anthropological discourse to describe the "invisible structure" of the threshold state. In 'The Ritual Process' (1966) Victor Turner identified ritualistic strategies as a

means of transformation. Encountering the liminal (threshold state) enabled participants to progress from one social status to another. The initiate, that is, the person undergoing the ritual, is first stripped of the social status that he or she possessed before the ritual, inducted into the liminal period of transition. Turner described this as "betwixt and between". Through ritual, the status of the individual changes, becoming socially and structurally ambiguous. In this respect the liminal is a zone of undecidability - an indeterminate state of being. Liminality could be claimed as the encounter with a nothingness of being without total annihilation. This radical separation from the everyday flow of activities enables the passage through a threshold state into a liminal zone removed from the everyday notions of time and space. It is fitting that Turner described liminality as the realm of "pure possibilities". In this way I'm considering the ritual as a form of potential.

EC: In Turner's description of liminality as the realm of "pure possibilities", is God this pure possibility, I wonder, it seems by and large in coherence with the operative structure of what Alain Badiou and Slavoj Zizek, amongst others, would term the 'universal'. I'm also thinking here of Epicureanism, which held that God existed in the "in-between", *intermundia* I think they called it - an appropriately vague location, for sure. Is 'faith' something that you have, does 'faith' inform your practice?

CE: Well, I think its a desire for faith, more than faith itself.

EC: Its interesting that you say this because in Terry Eagleton's new book *Reason, Faith and Revolution* (2009) he talks about, and in relation to Islamic fundamentalism, for example, that what it confronts us in the Western world with, is not only 'blood and fire', but with *our own* desire to believe in God and our chronic incapacity to do so. I believe in God, or at least I like to think I do, in the

Badiouian sense, and in the Zizekian sense, that is to say, I believe in Universal truth and its manifestation through discipline. Eagleton reckons, and this is fairly obvious to those of us who follow Badiou, jeeez I'm making him sound like some sort of messiah here, that is to say, *of course*, those who follow his philosophy, that we are, quote: 'witnessing an alarming re-enchantment of the late capitalist world, a rekindling of the spiritual aura, so to speak, after an age of mechanical reproduction.' Would you agree?

CE: The dominant attitude of apathy today described by some as "passive nihilism", is a cause of much concern and anxiety, this much is clear. There is a need to overcome this dominant attitude, and consequently a reevaluation of previous ways of being in the world might be helpful. Remember we spoke about Mark Fisher the other day, about his new work on *Capitalist Realism* (2009)? I think the general disenchantment he conveys - a situation which leaves nothing to the imagination insofar as 'it's easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism' - is unacceptable to many. We need something more. However, I am confused by Eagleton's use of the term "alarming", in respect to the idea of "rekindling the spiritual aura", or "re-enchantment": these are terms which I would consider joyous, rather than "alarming". Re-enchantment, for me, would assume an active position, a serious strategy from which to inhibit this attitude of inertia. This idea of desiring something other - be it the 'Absolute', or the Badiouian 'Universal Truth' - has informed my practice for the last seven years. Whilst some might assume that such endeavors are doomed to failure, there is something disruptive in these activities - in the very refusal of resignation. Rather than referring to God, however, it might be interesting to look at this other, in terms of nothingness, in the sense that, perhaps, it is through this nothingness that something emerges, and perhaps, it is through

the endeavor, the activity, or in your terms - through 'discipline', that this re-enchantment takes place.

EC: Eagletons a bit of a fuddy-duddy in his wording. I don't think he is implying its "alarming" in a worrying way or anything, at least in this instance, he's just quite British at the end of the day - quite regal in his conveyance of matters; but I like your take on things, and I think if God is anything it is certainly the realm of pure possibility, which carries with, both the Badiouian 'universal', and your account of 'nothingness'. Speaking of Badiou - the Event, which is to say, philosophy of the Event, is writ large in your approach to art making, as are the historical forms of ritualistic induction, how do you deem these technologies coefficient? I'm thinking here of your collaboration with Simon Critchley on 'Mystical Anarchism', and your continued attempts to channel communities as something other than a limited audience.

CE: Badiou explains the Event through the story of the apostle St. Paul. There are requirements for an Event, or truth procedure to take place, and through St. Paul's radical conversion, evidenced in his name change from Saul to Paul, the necessity of fidelity (to the Event) is disclosed. The former Roman soldier renounces his previous life and devotes himself to Jesus - surrendering his previous identity in his unwavering devotion. This renunciation of identity is a fundamental aspect of ritualistic induction, comparisons can even be drawn in this sense. The procedure of ritualistic induction not only requires the renunciation of identity, but this procedure affects the space-time continuum for the passengers (this is the term Turner uses for participants). This disruption to conventional or, chronological time, occurs within a time frame and location that has been specified. It is claimed that a similar transformation takes place through the Event; however in this instance the alteration to the space/time continuum is overarching.

This brings up the notion of messianic time and the Italian linguist and philosopher Giorgio Agamben explains this through the Greek term *kairos*, using the original letters (written in Greek) of St. Paul to the Romans. The Greeks had two words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*, while *chronos* was sequential chronological time, *kairos* was used to signify an undetermined period of time: a time that cannot be encountered through the normative, or sequential construction of time. Rather than being formulated through the chronological structure of the *eon*, messianic time operates through the commitment of the subject. It is through Paul's declaration that messianic time is activated, as Agamben puts it: the 'messianic is not the chronological end of time, but the present as an exigency of fulfillment'. The Event requires perpetual commitment, and it is through this commitment that the messianic is activated, and although the disruption to time only occurs momentarily through ritualistic induction, the affects of this "technology" are more comprehensible.

But I think its also important to consider the event in it's colloquial sense in my practice. I like the fact that art facilitates a gathering, be it a gathering of people or a site where thought processes and ideas come together. The focus of gathering is heightened through the intensity of the ritual. I decided to play with this technology in my collaboration with Simon Critchley. Simon visited in February 2009 to talk about his recent publication *Infinitely Demanding* (2007). While he was over we discussed the Beguine Nuns and the Movement of the Free Spirit: communities of mystics that had informed his current research. In a way these movements could be described as *communitas*, a term used by Turner, and which had emerged in my own research, as that which breaks through the interstices of structure to encounter liminality. *Communitas* is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy", possibly because it

transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships. While in conversation with Simon we realized that it would make sense to bring these ideas together, to organize an event that forged a link between Simon's theoretical enquiries and my experimental processes. I had recently produced a 17metre x 7 metre quilt in an endeavor to produce a platform specific to enable large, but intimate gatherings. We decided that it would be fitting if we hosted a talk by Simon on this quilt. I was keen to consider the notion of *kairos* in the project, and felt therefore that it was important that the event took place outside of the institution. We decided on Glendalough as the location.

Glendalough is a typical state park with recreational facilities and maps of the area depicting suggested walks. At night however, the darkness obliterates these points of demarcation, and Glendalough is transformed to its former condition – a place inhabited by the hermit St. Kevin. I am specifically interested in the indeterminate nature of *kairos* and attempted in some sense to respond to this in the project, i.e. staging the event at night and with the destination remaining secret.

Simon's talk was based on the writings of the Mystic Magueritte Poirette and her book *The Mirror of Simple and Annihilated Souls and Who Remain Only in Wanting and Desire of Love*, (discovered in 1946) in which she outlines seven stages that the soul must pass through in order to overcome original sin and recover the perfection that belonged to human beings prior to their corruption by the Fall. This fidelity, this commitment to God, is activated through a process with radical transformative properties. It was interesting facilitating a gathering where these ideas could be considered, where the formation of specific communities, or *communitas*, could be approached - and the fact that the event took place outside the institution, and at midnight, disrupted the quotidian.



Above, and below: 'Mystical Anarchism' (2009), Glendalough, Wicklow, images courtesy of STUDIOSEVENTYSEVEN photographers



EC: Yeah, 'Mystical Anarchism' was a really great event. I love the way you guys broke the law, am I allowed say that, you cant get arrested *ex post facto*, can you? Anyway, Simon is a great guy isn't he, and a great philosopher, its hard to believe a philosopher can be that cool, was it difficult collaborating with a philosopher - was it "infinitely demanding"?

CE: Not at all, quite the opposite really and under the circumstances he was very relaxed. I decided not to attempt to get permission to host the event in Glendalough as I felt it was probable that they'd refuse. It's easier to go ahead with something in this regard and it's the M.O of most artists I know. Because it was really a covert operation we found ourselves negotiating problems as they arose. To begin with, Simon had to cut short a holiday trip with his wife and his kid Soren, which kinda indicates his generosity. So Cormac and I pick him up from the airport and dump him at the hotel to freshen up. In the meantime Cormac hooks up with yourself, Gearoid, Andrew, Ciaran, Dan, Kathy and Danzer. The plan was to set the quilt up in advance of the crowds arriving. As the weather had been crazy, with some torrential rain,



the plan was to set up a huge tarp covering the quilt. And, you know what happened: I arrived with Simon at 9pm expecting the whole place to be set up, and there was nothing there and nobody around. So, you guys thought that the park keeper was around and the only thing that could be done was to wait in the pub, about 3 miles down the road. The other thing was that there was no mobile coverage. When you guys came back to the scene to begin the set up Thomas arrives with word that the coaches had left the city centre. We had about 45 mins for setting up – it was pretty frantic, even the simple task of lighting the tea lights (100 in total) was an ordeal as the wind blew out flames. I suppose I'm relaying this story because in the midst of all of this Simon remained totally calm considering he had just flown from the East coast of Italy to be standing amongst the trees in the freezing cold. It was a pleasure to work with him. I suppose he's used to the way artists operate - he's worked with Phillippe Parreno and Liam Gillick, so in some way he probably knew what he was getting himself in for. I'm sure he didn't realize how cold it would be though, August was a very bad month. I think the event itself was, not infinitely, but extremely demanding on all of us involved. Oh, and one more thing, I mentioned Simon's generosity, and I think this also comes into play with regard to his work. Throughout his writings he seems to make sure that the reader is with him, following his train of thought. He also used this approach in the talk that we organized between NCAD and the Event Research group in February (2009). The response from the audience after the talk was really positive, Simon is clear in his disclosure, unlike some academics who seem more concerned with promoting the extent of their knowledge.

EC: In so far as your work attempts to channel communities from the standpoint of form, and perhaps - by default, through method, are the terms "relational art" or "participatory art" terms that you

would be comfortable with, or do you think such now *notorious* neologisms fall short of describing what is at stake in your practice?

CE: I'm not comfortable placing my practice in a specific category. My practice has always been and I assume, will remain, interdisciplinary. The materials and methods that I choose to work with are determined by their suitability to responding to the enquiry. It might be interesting though to outline how the event, in the colloquial sense of the term, has emerged in the practice. The solo-show "I am Somewhere Here" (2006) dealt with the anticipation induced by tension of desire and fear for this loss of self - a loss of the self, described by Poirrette, as the annihilation of the soul. The show consisted of a video piece 'The End is in the Beginning' which was displayed on a small insignificant monitor hidden behind a curtain that spanned the width of the gallery, a drawing produced by projected light, and other sculptural forms. A passage from Thomas Hardy's 'Tess of the Durbevilles' articulates the specific moment where the constructed self dissolves. This specific moment is when she looks up at a big star and "by fixing your mind upon it, you will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds of miles away from your body, which you don't seem to want at all". I decided to play with this and organized a star gazing session on the rooftop of Temple Bar. It was fitting that on the scheduled night there was 99% cloud coverage and so the session had to take place in one of the studios in the gallery instead. We looked at stars projected on a screen. It has been said that my work articulates this disrupted, frustrated desire for absolute knowledge, and this event "Losing Ourselves" was exemplary. In a sense, the purpose of this event was to support objects themselves. The focus changed in 'Mystical Anarchism', and the object, that is the quilt, which fittingly is without a name, became secondary to the event itself. Rather than participation I am keen to enable a gathering and this gathering might be participatory as in, "I am

Here Somewhere" in the Process Room at IMMA, which ran concurrently with "I am Somewhere Here" or "Metaphysical Longings" at Pallas Contemporary Heights, however this is not what is at stake in the work. Many of my projects would not be realized were it not for the help and support of friends and colleagues. It would be impossible to realize 'Mystical Anarchism' or 'Cult of Engagement' without the help of friends, whom I constantly rely on. I think this generosity cannot be described under a term "participatory".

EC: Your work is extremely contemporary in its 'untimeliness', in its engagement and conversation with the past; in the case of 'Cult of Engagement' the work is in conversation with the artistic configuration known as Tragedy, *who in particular is the work speaking to*, or what, specifically, is it engaging with?

CE: Regarding the work itself, I am looking at the "social" role of Tragedy, which according to Aristotle developed in the Athenian form from the dithyramb - the songs sung in the worship of Dionysus. I am interested in the chorus, and of how it emerged from these followers of Dionysus, who renounced their social and civic position to engage in rapturous devotion. Nietzsche described the chorus as 'a living wall that tragedy pulls around itself, to close itself off entirely from the real world, to maintain its ideal ground and poetic freedom'. Tragedy celebrated rather than disguised. The work is engaging with the fact that the human condition as human suffering was made manifest on the stage: that the human condition was passionately affirmed. This affirmation transcended the nihilism of a fundamentally meaningless world. The chorus disclosed the events of the tragedy as they unfolded, commenting on the action, revealing elements of truth - which were, in most cases - unknown by the actors themselves. The chorus in 'Cult of

Engagement' is silent, however, it does not disclose truths, but its presence prompts expectation.

When I think about the audience I consider the network of individuals who become engaged, in some respect, with the ideas that emerge from the work. This is not to say that these ideas must be theoretical, because an engage on an 'experiential' level is also important. I would like to think that the audience itself emerges from the outset of the project, and in this respect it is tricky to define an "audience" - in a way I like to think of a self-configuring audience. For *Cult of Engagement* I want to create a sense of anticipation, a sense that something, or somebody, of great significance is 'bound': in this sense, the work is engaging with the desire for something other, perhaps, even in the sense outlined by Fisher, in *Capitalist Realism*, something radically other than the general sense of disenchantment that 'abounds'.



Above: a maquette of 'Azimuth' which will feature in 'Cult of Engagement', and below, installation view of 'The Approach', which will also feature.



EC: Would you put the works 'untimeliness' down to a simple 'archival impulse', or do you think that your need to return to historical forms of ritualistic induction, or an artistic configuration such as Tragedy, as in case of 'Cult of Engagement', reflects the uncertainty and indeterminacy of forms and configurations in our own age? I'm thinking here, again, of Alain Badiou, whose 'evental philosophy' suggests that artistic configurations can always be seized upon again in epochs of uncertainty, or re-articulated in the naming of a new event; in this sense then, perhaps one could even enquire as to whether the 'archival impulse' is itself the Event, insofar as it is a practice of 'active remembering' or of 'actively remembering the memory politic' that has emerged, in some sense, as a *generic* multiple in contemporary art practice over, say, the last ten years?

CE: I've never considered my practice in light of an 'archival impulse'. Although, my drawings of black holes, or those recordings of my attempts at understanding phenomenology, might be considered in this way. Nonetheless, there are contemporary art practices, such as Declan Clarke's or Heidrun Holzfeind's, that would be much more applicable to this term.

Regarding 'Cult of Engagement', rather than attempting to re-stage Tragedy, the exhibition makes use of the element of the chorus from this configuration to enhance the intensity of the space. In the configuration Tragedy the chorus forewarned the audience of the culmination of the actions on the stage through their access to esoteric knowledge, representing that which we do not know, but seek to find. 'Parados' is the term used for the introductory song of the chorus, the song that introduces the event that is about to take place. The projected film in the exhibition, with the same title, could be deemed as a contemporary reenactment of a chorus 'entering' the space, but the silence of this chorus, the absence of

song, disrupts the accuracy and historical reading of this configuration. Through its failure to disclose, the chorus might well represent something we have lost, but equally, as I have said, something that is 'bound'. To answer your question, in some sense, yes, its presence does have significance in light of an active form of remembering.

'Cult of Engagement' is commissioned by Project Arts Centre, Temple Bar, Dublin. It opens on Dec 18th and continues until January 30th 2010. It is curated by Tessa Giblin, with production co-ordinator Mary Cremin.

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