

Lyotard's pedagogies of affect in *Les Immatériaux*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the continuing relevance to education of ideas about art and resistance that Jean-François Lyotard signalled in his curated exhibition in 1985 at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris entitled *Les Immatériaux*. The exhibition was for Lyotard the 'staging' of a resistance at the dawning of an information age that challenged the prioritisation of computerised 'data' through the very deconstruction of data as presented in artistic form. While the implications of this event for art exhibitions are still being theorised and debated, it is the insight *Les Immatériaux* provides as pedagogical encounter that is the focus of this article. The paper explores the exhibition in the context of the immateriality of art and develops this argument towards a notion of artistic testimony that then culminates in an analysis for the pedagogical significance of the exhibition in the information drenched, highly networked context of contemporary education.

KEYWORDS

Affect; immaterial; Lyotard; exhibition; pedagogy

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These works appear to the public of taste to be 'monsters', 'formless' objects, purely 'negative' entities... (Lyotard, 1991, p. 125).

To present the 'suffering' of presentation

This paper explores the continuing relevance to education of ideas about art and resistance that Jean-François Lyotard signalled in his curated exhibition in 1985 at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris entitled *Les Immatériaux*. The exhibition was for Lyotard the staging of a resistance at the dawning of an information age that challenged the prioritisation of computerised data through the deconstruction of data as presented in artistic form. The exhibition consisted of a conglomeration of material objects that drew on artefacts spanning centuries of Western civilisation up to and including contemporary 1985 Paris. As such the exhibition presented itself as an affective experience that challenged the increasing desire for certainty and the modern impetus for transparency of meaning and communication that, according to Lyotard's postmodern perspective, was eating away at the affective and un-archival power of creative activity in an age of increasing informational power and transparency. As a mantra that could be recited at any point within the conceptual and physical orbits of the exhibition, the staging of the suffering of presentation and materiality, in an exhibition devoted to immateriality, was Lyotard's attempt to perform the postmodern. 'When the point is to try to present that there is something that is not presentable', Lyotard urged, 'you have to make presentation suffer' (Lyotard, 1991, p. 125). The conceptual paradigm within in which presentation would suffer was 'presented' through art forms whose features, as recounted by Hudek, included:

an emphasis on language as matter, the immateriality of advanced technological materials (from textiles to plastics and holography), exhibits devoted to recent technological developments in food, architecture, music and video, and, crucially, an experimental catalogue produced solely by computer in (almost) real time (Hudek, 2009, para. 4).

While the implications of this event for art exhibitions are still being theorised and debated, it is the insight *Les Immatériaux* provides as pedagogical encounter that is the focus of this article.

1985 marked the point at which Lyotard's fame in Europe was eclipsed by the Anglo-American reception to his newly translated treatise on the notion of the postmodern, as first presented in the eponymous *La condition postmodern: rapport sur le savoir* in 1979. While a dense and complex piece of philosophical prose, Lyotard's observation that the grand narratives of modernity as emancipation and progress were being met with increasing incredulity, spoke emphatically to the social, political and cultural context of the 1980s. Framed as a report on knowledge and its changing conditions of existence through the advancement in technology and capitalism, Lyotard illuminated the implications for aesthetic activity—a largely useless endeavour in times of measurements, efficiencies and outcomes. For Lyotard the postmodern was not simply about the loss of faith in the grand narratives that structured modern society, but also the moment when the performativity of the system negated the need for artistic experimentation. The goal in this contemporary postmodern context, explained Lyotard, was 'no longer truth but performativity—that is, the best possible input/output equation' (Lyotard, 1984, p. 46). If art could not follow a straight line of communicability and transferability in which meaning and information could be transmitted and understood, its purpose and reason for being were up for debate.

Les Immatériaux was Lyotard's revolt against the technological determinism of performativity. To stage presentation, in the form of an exhibition, presentation itself would suffer. Lyotard's interest in the immateriality of art meant that art as an artefact or object had to be interrogated and dismantled so that artistic matter as 'affect' before meaning, could be exposed (or at least evoked). In conversation with Bernard Blistène, Lyotard (1985, p. 7) articulated the questions that would drive the staging of *Les Immatériaux* as an act of resistance: 'What do we do if we no longer have the prospect of emancipation, and, what sort of line of resistance can we have?'. Evoking the immateriality of art philosophically mirrored these questions as a tool to critique the notion of progress, and the way that progress in technology and the arts has been connected to material objects. For Lyotard, the notion of the *immaterials* was to serve as a disruptive device that made visible that which cannot be seen through questioning what makes it *possible* to see.

The purpose of this paper is to explore Lyotard's curatorial attempt at presenting the unrepresentable according to his stated intention in the opening quote to present the 'formless' and the 'purely negative entities' of art. The immateriality of the material, the invisibility of the visible and the unrepresentability of the representable were the theoretical drivers to this task in the staging and form of the exhibition. These drivers illuminate the relevance of Lyotard's work today and are the reasons why *Les Immatériaux* is worth a revisit for the perspective it offers on our information-rich condition of existence in the twenty-first century. The expectation and demand of contemporary existence in late capitalist societies is one of easy access to information and quick digestibility of data in which anything that is not useful can be deleted. Of importance are the application of these drivers and the primacy of challenging such expectations in the context of education. Where do we go in education when progress and the parallel belief in the transformative power of education are challenged? How do we translate Lyotard's staging of resistance and importance of artistic experimentation to public education in a context of standardisation and homogenisation in global educational contexts? What could the immaterial say to education in the context of twenty-first-century learning where a networked, data-driven, evidence-based form of education provides little space for imagination and resistance?

These questions have set the context for an exploration of Lyotard's work and its broad relevance to the conditions of contemporary education (see, for instance, Blake, Smeyers, Smith, and

Standish (1998), Dhillon and Standish (2000) and the edited collection by Peters (1995)). Readings' (1996) seminal analysis of Lyotard focuses on the increasing drive to performativity in the university context, and more recent analyses have looked to Lyotard to explain the extent to which postmodern theory has equipped schooling and contemporary educational spaces to meet the increasingly fragmented and unequal global educational context (see, for instance, Edwards (2006) and the special issue devoted to Lyotard and the postmodern in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*). What has not been engaged with on any significant level, however, is the extent to which Lyotard himself asked pedagogical questions of his public in the form of his exhibition, and indeed, performatively enticed out of his public an embodied engagement with a pedagogy predicated on the 'affect' of that engagement. While Ruitenberg points out the educational turn in curating exhibitions of the last couple of decades (and it is possible that *Les Immatériaux* was seminal in this regard), the 'curatorial turn in education' (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 229) is a recent concern in educational research. Following Ruitenberg, this article explores Lyotard's curatorial turn and its relevance to pedagogy.

The ensuing analysis of Lyotard's exhibition highlights the importance of finding spaces of resistance to contemporary information-drenched reality, and highlights the importance of disrupting the assimilation of the unknown into the known in relation to education. Lyotard demanded of the exhibition spectator to viscerally experience disruption and resistance in ways that ensured a feeling of confusion and bafflement, and of epistemological and ontological struggle. By doing so, *Les Immatériaux* is an interesting dramaturgy of the resistance inherent to the creative impetus of art that challenges transparency and the communicative demand of our present educational context. The paper is split into two sections that deal with the immateriality of art, in the context of the exhibition, and the role of art as testimony to the unrepresentable through attesting to that which escapes forms of inscription. While not engaged with in any direct sense from this point, the paper is to be read in the context of a haunting by the postmodern, and Lyotard's attempt to provide spaces that, for a moment, resist the logic of performativity. The paper concludes with an analysis of these implications in the context of education.

The Immaterials: *Les Immatériaux* (1985)

Decked in demanding grey, illuminated by improbable lighting, with unpredictable ideas allowed to hover, this hour, this day in this year, suspended, rigorously ordered yet without system, 'The Immaterials' exhibit themselves between seeing, feeling and hearing. (Thierry Chaput in Hudek, 2009, para. 2)

When asked in an interview whether he was heading towards writing a systematic theory of aesthetics due to an increasing engagement with art, Lyotard admitted that the majority of his texts on artists and their artworks were due to chance encounters, collaborations and personal sympathies. *Les Immatériaux* was co-curated by Lyotard and the director of the Centre de Création Industrielle,¹ Thierry Chaput.² In the interview released alongside the exhibition conducted by Bernard Blistène, Lyotard spoke of his interest in art in general and painting in particular, as endorsing a kind of artistic mode of thinking and acting. This unique disposition could be valuable, Lyotard contended, because it provided a space of resistance to the (dominant) Cartesian programme based on ideals of emancipation and rationality, and of truth 'measured by the yardstick of signification and knowledge' (Lyotard cited in Bennington, 2008, p. 4). Having published *The Postmodern Condition* in France six years earlier, Lyotard continued the line of critique articulated in this book through the conceptual impetus of the exhibition. As such, the exhibition continued to question the validity of signifying processes propagated alongside modern notions of technological 'progress' and performance. The focus on the impact of technology, and on the ways and means of living in a changing world coping with technological progress, remained of particular importance.

Within the physical space of the exhibition, Lyotard coaxed the spectator to intuitively experience the way technology could alter and transform the Cartesian impetus of 'man' as

possessor and master of nature and as the stable referent to (and of) knowledge and knowledge production. This was evoked by turning the exhibition rooms into a matrix in which sheaths of uncoloured metal mesh and other materials that served to partition the exhibition space into 31 different zones created a labyrinthine effect. Standing as the metaphorical portal for signification, the spectator would be persuaded (or seduced) into experiencing the displacing effect of the dissolution of material objectivity within the exhibition space. Within this matrix effect, Lyotard urged an embodied experience as the 'figure' that displaces meaning and representation within discourse experienced, in this case, within the parameters of an exhibition. Here, we can see Lyotard creating his own artwork that acquires the qualities of the artistic event by cleverly utilising the unpredictable movements of individual spectators trying to navigate their way around the art space. One would be tempted to say that they are also trying to navigate their way towards some kind of cohesive meaning within the parameters of the exhibition space, an attempt doomed to failure. Instead, Lyotard turns this search for direction within the labyrinth of the exhibition into the metaphor of searching for the meaning and certainty that postmodern life inflicts on those condemned to wander around its endless maze. This, Lyotard states, is the purpose of the exhibition, 'to make us feel the strange in the familiar, and how difficult it is to imagine what's changing' (cited in Crowther, 1992, p. 192). To further achieve this disorientating effect, Lyotard describes the elaborate structural element in the exhibition in more detail:

So, instead of walls, we'll have a system of webbings that will be stretched from floor to ceiling, and the ways in which they're lighted will permit us to vary the distances that the eye can cover and to modulate the indications that ought to be followed, but without being prescriptive, since many of the sites we'll be building will be in the form of intersections that allow one then to go off in any number of directions ... Each of the visitors will have a kind of Walkman, and even though they won't have to tune into different stations, they'll move from one broadcast to another as they walk through the exhibition space ... This is a way of permitting me to create a soundtrack of commentaries that won't even really be commentaries at all, and the textual elements included in the visit to the show will be a considerably more forceful presence than it usually is; there will also be music and other sound effects. (Lyotard, 1985, p. 7)

This extract provides a unique insight into the way Lyotard provided a physical platform to realise the philosophical basis of his critique on modern, techno-scientific society. Involving all senses, the discontinuous and fragmentary elements to the materials serve to illustrate the dissolution of representation and materialism, and the emergence of an intensification of a non-materialist postmodern milieu. The interview extract also illuminates Lyotard's pedagogical stance of the philosopher to find new modes of inscription other than the book.³ Here, the surface of the support, whether it is pictorial, musical, or otherwise, must in its mode of inscription incorporate the new technologies in order to alleviate the totalising qualities that Lyotard considered so entwined within the locus of techno-scientific development. Through an artistic interaction with such dangers, Lyotard suggests that the openness that is created within such spaces might serve to nurture and protect possibilities of creating new spaces of meaning and knowledge. As the only time he was involved so pivotally in an activity of this kind,⁴ *Les Immatériaux* can be seen as the physical and practical staging of Lyotard's thought as an alternative platform and apparatus to the written text and material object of the book.

In *Les Immatériaux* the position of the artist is crucial in formulating responses to these totalising tendencies and as such is awarded by Lyotard a philosophical status that transcends traditional conceptions towards the functionality of art. Within the ambit of Lyotard's intellectual life at this particular point, it is also interesting to view this exhibition as fully endorsing an ethic of artistic activity that champions the avant-garde. While this is certainly not a new addition in Lyotard's oeuvre at this time, *Les Immatériaux* did serve the purpose of very effectively marrying the intellectual/philosophical impetus of his work to the practical expressions of the artist. In terms of the role of the intellectual, especially in the context of the demise of the grand narrative of emancipation, Lyotard clearly considered his involvement with the avant-garde in art to be a response that endorsed artistic activity that resonated at a certain level of 'the political'. The

intellectual in Lyotard's view then, would need to take the artistic disposition of the avant-garde artist in order to rejuvenate and expand alternatives to notions of mastery and certainty. This, he continues, is the only alternative philosophers have when faced with the corruption of such modern ideals. He explains further in the interview:

I think that it's something that's very closely connected to artistic activity, or philosophico-artistic activity. It's something that has to be thoroughly explored by asking ourselves what's happening at the level of time, space, and the social community in contemporary art. That's what I've been trying to explore by means of these various small texts that I write on art, and sometimes of music, when I feel sufficiently audacious. (Lyotard, 1985, p. 7)

This approach to analysing art within the nominal parameters of time and space would be elaborated further, and anthologised in the collection of presented papers and essays published as *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Lyotard, 1991). In the context of the exhibition, the notion of the immaterials serves as a disruptive device that Lyotard considered himself responsible, as the philosopher, to elaborate upon within the terrain of the artistic.

Through juxtaposing industrial objects (such as the computer—a mammoth advance in technology in 1985) within 'artistic' contexts (such as in the exhibition space itself) Lyotard tried to illustrate what he considered to be the insoluble links between progress in art, and the Enlightenment project of *progressing* towards emancipation. The point of the juxtaposition of the technological/industrial with the artist/experimental was to highlight the intensification of the way conceptions and sensibilities of and towards reality have been altered because of technological advancements. Reality in such conditions, says Lyotard, becomes *less* material and solid and more ethereal and complex, especially with the introduction of digital data. The press release given for the exhibition further illustrates the dissolution of reality into non-materials, into the immaterial:

Why 'Immaterials'? ... A colour, a sound, a substance, a pain, or a star return to us as digits in schemes of utmost precision. With the encoding and decoding-systems we learn that there are realities that are in a new way intangible. The good old matter itself comes to us in the end as something which has been dissolved and reconstructed into complex formulas. Reality consists of elements, organised by structural rules (matrixes) in no longer human measures of space and time. (Lyotard cited in Kluitenberg, 2002, para. 25)

This extract evokes Lyotard's impression of the transformative dimension to reality once it has been filtered through a digitalised process. The dissolution of materials as objects to fragmentary and immaterial forms of energy serves as a metaphor for the fragmentation of the grand narratives that structure society. An exhibition of *non-materials* requires not only a deconstruction of art, but also technology, and also the conceptual and physical space in which art occurs. The fragmentary nature of the exhibition was for Lyotard the physical manifestation of this notion of matter as energy, as opposed to the modernist view of the complete and objectified work of art as artefact. 'There's no such thing as matter', Lyotard continues, and the only thing that exists is energy; we no longer have any such thing as materials, in the old sense of the word that implied an object that offered resistance to any kind of project that attempted to alienate it from its primary finalities. (Lyotard, 1985, p. 4)

The 'traitorous' witness

However, immaterial matter is necessarily fragile and elusive. Issues of memory, of historical narrative, and of the need and impetus for proof, are mingled together with Lyotard's drive to attest, in *Les Immatériaux*, to that which escapes such forms of inscription. Memory is unreliable, historical 'truth' is debateable and the constant drive to prove facts could be seen as a circular and self-reinforcing mechanism of modernity. How then, to testify to the unknown, the unheard or the unthought without betrayal? The testimony is a task, says Lyotard, and the task is an aesthetic one. In broad terms testimony does not involve bringing onto the stage of history the lost facts that, once retrieved, complete the cast of actors in the definitive rendition of the story of humanity. This is

idiocy; more than this, such notions of completion and fulfilment trace the outlines of terror. Rather, the aesthetic task that Lyotard considered worthy of the obligation to testify in *Les Immatériaux* is a retrieval of a different sort. This is a retrieval that doesn't look for the rule or concept of its action that has no final and definitive destination in the mechanics of its processes, and that lacks all cognitive 'human' coordinates of rationality. Instead, this retrieval is in search for a *trace* of a presence that can only be eluded to and searched for through the creative process.

This challenge to linear construction of modern progress and forms of memory served as a structural device in the staging of *Les Immatériaux*. For Lyotard, a recollection of events grounded in memory involves a necessary judgement; a selection of memories or facts must be chosen, must be put to use, while other memories are silenced. On the other hand, a retrieval of the sensorial feelings of affect as the unknown quotient to historical narration through a Freudian theme of anamnesis, attests to a type of memory and truth in a state of privation and incompleteness. No account can hope to be exhaustively and definitively complete. In this respect, art's deficiency is its secret power. 'It does not say the unsayable' comments Lyotard, 'but says that it *cannot* say it' (Lyotard, 1990, p. 47, my emphasis).

As such, the exhibition allowed no forms of logical progression or linear chronological display of art and instead plays with Lyotard's notion of artistic (psychical, modern) deficiency in many ways. Rather, the visitors to *Les Immatériaux* were confronted with a baffling array of art forms from which no clear directive or intention was ever given. As Lyotard demonstrated through the deconstruction of the solid materiality of the object in the exhibition, for art to be able to testify to the immaterial it must move beyond the reaches of communicative transparency. Rather than *re-presenting* a concept or underlying meaning, art's job in *Les Immatériaux* was to *evoke* what escapes the conceptual paradigm through the means of artistic representation. Like many of his generation, the gold standard of this type of testimony for Lyotard is with regard to the Holocaust and to the inadequacies of a straight representation of the facts as recounted in history. As such, another element of *Les Immatériaux* was one of emotional ambiguity in which the spectator/visitor/witness was to be left with a feeling of sorrow or loss that was performed through the artistic structural support of the exhibition. The exhibition utilised a deliberate design palette of muted greys and non-colours that cast the viewer into shadow and darkness. Instead of the traditional stark white cubes from which paintings are usually displayed, the sheaths of metal mesh and monochrome partitioning materials provided no distinct border between the zones, and instead staged the sorrow of meaninglessness through blurred interactions of artistic forms and genres.

For Lyotard no form of inscription, whether historic or artistic, is ever going to fully capture abject horror and terror by merely representing these emotional dimensions as replications of the 'real thing'. Rather, what Lyotard tried to demonstrate in *Les Immatériaux* was the power art has in conjuring the deficiencies of rational, real, eye-witness accounts of the horrors inflicted upon humanity in ways that resist the temptation to consider an horrific account as definitive, and therefore finished and 'done with'. Such a definitive rendering is tantamount to a termination of the (continuous) ethical obligation to attest to such atrocities, and is the main problem or inadequacy of the historical process of narration. Rather than presenting the 'facts' of the Holocaust in the exhibition, rather than direct accounts of its horrors, art is positioned as the conduit that provides a direct link to the threat of annihilation as the primaevial condition of human existence made explicit through the Holocaust. Nothing can hope to capture exactly terror in its contradictory minutiae and vastness, but for Lyotard the focus on the immateriality in the exhibition performed the process involved in art to *allude* to the dangers of annihilation through eschewing cognitive coordinates of memory and direct forms of representation. In a later text, Lyotard depicts the immaterial as a 'feeling' or 'affection' that somehow defies memory and representation:

Whenever one represents, one inscribes in memory, and this might seem a good defence against forgetting. It is, I believe, just the opposite ... what is not inscribed, through lack of inscribable surface ... cannot be forgotten, does not offer a hold to forgetting, and remains present 'only' as an affection ... (Lyotard, 1990, p. 26)

Lyotard equates visibility alongside representation as a form of annihilation. Once something is made visible and is inscribed onto a surface, it is instantly vulnerable to the act of forgetting and erasure. The above quote also draws a contradictory judgement on the value of art (if we take Lyotard's lead and consider inscription in as wide a view as possible). One needs to represent (to paint, to write) but this representation must hold within it the traces of the unknowable and the unthinkable at the very limits of, and as the deficiency within, its occurrence as an artistic event.⁵ An interesting enactment of this form of inscription was Lyotard's displacement of some artists in the staging of the exhibition of *Les Immatériaux* through the many retrospective catalogues. Rather than exhibit his art work in the exhibition, for instance, the writer Daniel Buren instead performed his own displacement to the site of those working only in text through the computer-mediated discussion that could be accessed through the 'minitel'⁶ terminals in the 'labyrinth of language' section of the exhibition (and published as a retrospective catalogue entitled *Epreuves d'écriture*). If we recall the anamnestic quality to Lyotard's notion of the exhibition as a *working through*, this temporal displacement asks some interesting and demanding questions of the spectator as delayed witness in the theatrics of gallery exhibitions.

The singularity of the inscribed event can be effaced precisely in the representational testimony to it, in that not everything has been represented in that testimony (hence, the traitorous status of Lyotard's witness at the top of this section). Something has always escaped and for Lyotard, there must always be a remainder. This remainder is powerful and unsettling because it cannot be forgotten if it is not inscribed in memory, and as such is not 'a breakdown of memory but the immemorial always "present" but never here-now' (Lyotard, 1990, p. 20). It is important to see the links Lyotard is making between a 'mechanics' of memory in the apparatus of the mind, and the retrieval of a forgotten affect within the art-as-work that emerges through *Les Immatériaux*. Here, Lyotard links together the psychological apparatus of the mind where memory is inscribed in a way that cannot be represented cognitively but is felt as anxiety (as exhibited in Freudian secondary repression), and the artistic retrieval of affect and sensation that are constitutive of the artwork. Through such retrieval there is no memory of the desired affects and sensation that the artwork creates. Importantly for Lyotard, what art can reveal is 'what every representation misses, what is forgotten there: this "presence" whatever name it is given by one author or another, which persists not so much at the limits but rather at the heart of representation' (Lyotard, 1990, p. 5). *Les Immatériaux*, in the context of memory and inscription, was for Lyotard the dramaturgy of the paradoxical nature of art as representation and the concomitant impossibility of ever presenting the immaterial through the very materiality of art.

The staging of pedagogies of affect

Importantly, when drawing links to education one of the factors that is perhaps most interesting is the fact that the exhibition was plagued with technological failure. The headsets were often faulty as they were a prototype Philips were trialling, and the exhibition had to be closed for a day as further technological problems were addressed. In line with the technological problems, the exhibition itself was regarded as a commercial and, largely, critical failure. The public complained about the impracticalities of the exhibition—they could not read anything in the dark, they often found the philosophical intent behind some of the staging too elaborate and esoteric, and the random voicing of each partition that changed as they moved to different physical locations, was not appreciated. Lyotard himself spoke of utter fatigue and emotional and physical exhaustion at the end of the exhibition, although this did not stop him from sparring with his critics in public newspapers.

However, what is really interesting from an educational point of view is the way the exhibition expanded the perimeters of physical space into the digital and thus immaterial realm, at a time when what we now know as the 'internet' was in its very early infancy. Through the aesthetic utilisation of language and art as matter, Lyotard forced his exhibition participants (or 'witnesses')

to experience movement, connectivity, and space in radically different ways. The new technologies, he seemed to say, were to be met with the same openness and scepticism as all new developments, and their properties were to be engaged with critically. Through the evisceration of matter, Lyotard's message speaks of a negative exposure to the dynamism of the experienced world. To really experience presentation, then presentation itself should suffer. Drawing a line to the educative endeavour, to really teach and learn is not a straightforward equation of transferring information, but instead lends itself to the vital and alternative reading of experiencing the visceral loss and affect of the immaterial in education.

Les Immatériaux offered the notion of open ended artistic creativity, and the deconstruction of technology as a pedagogical encounter that highlighted the affective dimension to learning, looking, experimenting and seeing. It staged, in visceral and affective form, an enquiry stance to learning that demanded reciprocity between viewer and artwork. What would have happened had *Les Immatériaux* been a success? To a certain extent failure was embedded in the very principle of the entire exhibition where presentation had to suffer. In many ways, Lyotard's attempt to challenge meaning and certainty through staging the experience of the deterioration of meaning through the apparatus of an exhibition, *demanded* failure if its promise of presenting the unrepresentable was to be honoured. From this perspective, the 'negative entities' and 'formless monsters' that Lyotard talks about in the opening quote to the paper turn the event of the exhibition into an unrepresentable artistic performance and an 'affect' unable to be forgotten. Indeed, the exhibition did clear a space of resistance to the constant assimilation of all that is shocking and new by ensuring its own performative failure in the history of curatorial experiments, and in a strange way could then be considered a success of sorts.

Importantly, *Les Immatériaux* can be seen as the 'staging' of Lyotard's pedagogies of affect—never articulated by the philosopher as such, but rather performed in and through the event of the exhibition. It has been the task of later educational thinkers to articulate the approach and philosophy to teaching that Lyotard implicitly expressed through the exhibition. As Lewis (2013) intimates along the lines of a Lyotardian approach to education, the task that education asks of us is an aesthetic one. Rather than falling into the rhetoric of 'practice' and 'effectiveness', Lewis argues that teaching is about performing the *impotentiality* of one's approach to knowledge and certainty. Lyotard's staging of the exhibition was a performative strike against the ready explainability and easy transparency of 'an exhibition'. It instead performed something of this impotentiality by demanding a decentring of experience and navigation as spectators were forced to navigate their own path throughout the exhibition and to search for meaning as a process of looking and exploring. This is a pedagogy that is built on knowing the impossibility of mastering knowledge, as *Les Immatériaux* so persuasively demonstrated to its participants.

Les Immatériaux used the immateriality of digital renderings of art to try and make the immaterial material, and the invisible visible. It was to prove to be a seminal critique by Lyotard that would be continued by philosophers such as Vattimo who in 1993 analysed the intensification of social communication that moved towards a promised future of self-transparency. As Readings argues, the subject no longer has the capacity to understand everything because the nature of mass information has 'exceeded the capacities of the subject who had been destined to master such information' (Readings, 1996, p. 190). This is particularly important at a moment in educational history where digital pedagogies and the online space are being framed as the panacea for learning. In fact *Les Immatériaux* looks forward to an educational critique of the information society, simply by stating again and again and again, the lack inherent to transparent communication and the unintentional excess in forms of communication. The scene of pedagogy for *Les Immatériaux* is one of excess—when thinking becomes something that exceeds the subject. *Les Immatériaux* staged this excess, in that it was deeply pedagogical in intent and action. The lesson Lyotard leaves us is that the time of pedagogy is predicated on this excess. It is not about straight transparency or transference of information, it is about exceeding what one already knows so that knowledge can be brought into being, and then acknowledged as never complete or finite. In forcing his visitors to

wander aimlessly around the exhibition with no straight direction or narrative to guide their way, Lyotard was staging a type of pedagogy that dwells in the space of indecision and unknowing.

However, it is in the pedagogical encounter of the exhibition that Lyotard's quest to stage a resistance to the neat and tidy determinism of certainty, mastery and control so emblematic of our information age that educational questions relevant to today's digitally informed and information rich context are invoked. In many ways, the pedagogical encounter of *Les Immatériaux* was predicated on loss of meaning, loss of direction and even loss of self. This agenda runs counter to standard educational rhetoric that basis itself on continuous growth and development; Lyotard's pedagogical encounter is firmly positioned as a deconstruction of such approaches. The issue of engagement as a touchstone in recent educational research in the context of digital pedagogies is displaced when taking Lyotard's seduction of subjectivity through the negative and even painful task of 'learning' through the staging of histories in exhibition form as an education device. Lyotard, through encounters with the immaterial, wants us to learn to create spaces—however, 'negative' his approach—that allow for such resistances to emerge. This is the possibility provided by revisiting Lyotard, a possibility that places the pedagogical importance of the unknown at the heart of the educational endeavour.

Notes

1. Centre de Création Industrielle is a subsidiary of Centre Georges Pompidou that specialises in exhibitions in abroad base of design disciplines from science to art and high-tech industry.
2. The press release and other information about this exhibition can be found in the blog of Kluitenberg (2002). However, it is important to note that according to Jean-Louis Boissier (in Hui & Broeckmann, 2015), Lyotard arrived late into the project and was appointed once plans were well advanced. The innovative move was to appoint Lyotard as a philosopher whose express purpose was to provide a philosophical impetus to the exhibition.
3. Which, to a certain extent he ignored himself. Whilst always writing and championing art, his most prominent mode of inscription was undoubtedly writing. However, we must also be aware that Lyotard thought of 'writing' in a rather extended sense.
4. Though there would be no more curated shows, he actually wrote many catalogue extracts for exhibitions as described in *Gesture and Commentary* (Lyotard, 2002). Lyotard's writing on art has been collected in the six- volume collection released through Leuven entitled *Jean-François Lyotard: Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists* (Parrett, 2009–2013).
5. For an example of this fleetingness refer to Locke (2012).
6. Minitel was the word the French named the early form of the internet that Lyotard was using in the exhibition to catalogue in real time through the discussions of artists such as Buren. The catalogue was compiled over a couple of months extending the duration of the exhibition and was published in hard copy in 1985.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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