

90
VIVIENNE
DICK:
THE
TRUE
CENTRE
IS
ALWAYS
NEW



“My ambition is to choreograph images and sounds that breathe.”¹

Vivienne Dick

In Fergus Daly’s documentary *Experimental conversations*, French film theorist Nicole Brenez characterises experimental cinema as operating “an ongoing return to sensory intuition,” as well as being “the field of investigation of the very modalities of our apprehension.”² These definitions take on particular resonance for the viewer of Vivienne Dick’s latest video installation, *The True centre is always new*.

The film presents itself as a two-screen video projected on two opposite walls simultaneously. It is composed of a series of ‘moments’ shot over the last couple of years in Galway, Donegal, Queensland, Wellington and New York.

Each fragment resembles the memory of a particular sensory experience; a moment isolated from a continuum. We see in turn: the outback going by a bus window in Australia, the waves crashing at Salthill’s promenade, a nighttime tropical storm seen through a screened window, a palm-reading in the flickering light of a campfire in Donegal, the ambiguous messages of the multiple neon signs of Time Square around midnight, the goose-bumps on the thighs of a woman in red skirt in New Zealand, and a full moon in a forest somewhere.

These moments are intercut with varying lengths of black screen, at times long enough to leave the viewer uncertain whether the film is over or not. This uncertainty brings back to the spectator an awareness of his own presence in the gallery; a type of tension Dick is interested to explore.

Reflecting the structure of the projection on two facing walls, the

film play on a number of oppositions. There are the multiple locations which, from Ireland to New Zealand, span the two hemispheres. This is echoed by a juxtaposition of daytime and nighttime shots in the diptych. This construction suggests that the space in which the audience is situated is somehow the fluctuating centre of the title.

The film is also composed of two distinct types of shot. Developing an approach begun with *Excluded by the nature of things*, 2002, Dick uses long-held still shots, often in close-up, where little happens. Here the shot of the storm or of a hand in the sand are held long enough for the viewer to absorb the details and textures, inducing a meditative approach to the image. In her essay on *Excluded*, Maeve Connolly commented: “Dick shifts attention away from vision and toward other senses (smell, touch, hearing) through close-up images of gorse, bracken and cattle and sounds of driving rain on the lens and the windowpanes.”³

The second type of shot used, for example, in the scenes at the campfire or in Time Square, is a fluid movement made with a hand-held camera, reminiscent of Dick’s early films. The effect is that of an immersion in the action, with the presence behind the camera hovering between looking on and partaking in the scene.

This particular approach to filming has informed Dick’s relationship to medium in which she favours practicality over a specific aesthetics. From her beginnings with Super 8 to her present use of mini DV, what attracts her is the relative inconspicuousness of the camera: “You can catch things with a small camera that you could never catch with all the big camera equipments. You are more part of the group and people don’t pay so much attention to it. So you can get

a type of footage that’s very relaxed and very unpretentious.”⁴

Projected alternately with *The True centre is always new* in G126 was *She had her gun all ready*, Dick’s best-known film, shot in New York in 1978. The presence of the two films invited some reflections on Dick’s practice over the years. Her use of alternative venues, for instance: Dick has always been interested in showing her work in a variety of venues, such as Rock clubs, pubs or gallery spaces, as well as more conventionally at film festivals, thereby reflecting her desire to bridge the gap between the worlds of filmmaking and the visual arts.

In addition to her film practice, Vivienne Dick teaches film production in GMIT. Interestingly, she points to the difficulty of teaching the rules of conventional filmmaking to her students whilst making them discover experimental cinema, the ongoing aim of which is to break away from established rules to invent new relationships with sensation.

- 1 www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/vivienne_dick
- 2 Nicole Brenez in *Experimental conversations*, a film by Fergus Daly, 2006
- 3 Maeve Connolly, ‘*Excluded by the nature of things?* Irish cinema and artist’s film’, *Circa* 106, Winter 2003, pp 33 – 39 (see www.recirca.com/backissues/c106/excluded.shtml) p 7 of 11)
- 4 Conversation with Vivienne Dick, Galway, 12 June 2007

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[opposite]
Vivienne Dick
The True centre is always new
2007, film stills
courtesy of the artist