

CINDY BERNARD

MAT COLLISHAW

DOMINIQUE GONZALEZ-FOERSTER

MARCO MAZZUCCONI

HIRSCH PERLMAN

CESARE PIETROIUSTI

SAM SAMORE

CATHERINE YASS

exhibit a

eight artists from europe and america

trading images: the work of cindy bernard and catherine yass

The film *Trading Places* puts forward a fairly crude set of moral issues. Two rich elderly businessmen make a wager. One of them claims that people are unaffected by the circumstances of their upbringing and their current situation; they are simply good or evil. No matter how heavenly or squalid someone's circumstances may be, that individual's latent honesty or dishonesty will emerge. The other thinks the opposite. That is, all people are a product of their surroundings and actions are thus conditioned by society. The two victims of the wager are a young homeless man (Eddie Murphy) and a pampered relative of the two men (Dan Ackroyd). Ackroyd's character has been groomed for life as potential inheritor of the business and is suitably rich and feckless. Predictably the two of them initially prove the social conditioning argument. Murphy turns out to be a very good businessman while the other guy ends up mugging people while devastated by drink and drugs.

The power structures that are established in the film are familiar. The fact that, by the end of the movie, both Murphy and Ackroyd join forces to overturn the game-playing of the two old, rich and avaricious men, injects an element of fantasy that is essential for the story to end happily. Both young men have proved themselves within the limits of the film, changed their opinions and had some of their values challenged. Questions of wealth and power here do not result in a critique of capitalism, rather the film is focused on who is in power, and the details of that control, not why they are in power and what that might imply. At no point is it clear quite who is in the wrong and who is right. *Trading Places* is an eighties film.

Exhibit A includes the work of various artists who deal with notions of identity, power and investigation. Film and the various structures that emerge behind the images and relationships that processed narrative establishes (of which cinema is just one) are recurring sources of reference in the show. The fact that cinema at times deals with certain issues in a relatively immediate, responsive and popular form allows one to recognise key features of current society in a particular way. That some artists now are continuing to address and re-examine issues that surround the relative status of processed images and the people that control them is a key aspect of this exhibition. Both Cindy Bernard and Catherine Yass approach these topics, from quite different directions. While Bernard has, in the *Ask the Dust* series, rephotographed the sites of scenes from various movies like *Easy Rider* and *The Alamo*, devoid of actors and the context of the shoot and film, Yass documents the people responsible for the exhibitions she takes part in, making them visible in their own environment, thus investing them with a central role or at least a central place. Catherine Yass adds characters and exposes context while Cindy Bernard removes characters and neutralises context, moving things from film referential to art referential. In their own way, each artist attends to issues raised by the presence of familiar images in society, yet avoids

the advertising-based investigations of the eighties, opting instead for a less clearly defined yet no less seductive set of sources. Bernard deals with an over-exposed and ready-contextualised theme while Yass disrupts the familiar company brochure approach to photographing those in power. What ties them and others in the show together is a desire to forefront an examination of images or situations that are already invested with status even before the artist has got her hands on them.

The post-war political and economic map is being redrawn. The USA – USSR dominated axis has collapsed. The cultural life of America, so affected by affluence, is open to change as we emerge from an eighties art world that at times appeared dominated by consumer commentaries. Yet all through this period artists were working on what one might term personal, specific, investigative and intrusive art, not always studio-based and clearly attempting to deal with worlds away from the central art referential discourse. This is not to say that artists have been unaware of recent socio-political developments. Rather, those very developments centre on investigative forays into the nature of power structures, the realms of film, politics and the individual as a source for work. Sophie Calle's investigations, John Baldessari's altered film stills, Bernd and Hilla Becher's continuing survey of generic types of building all figure as influences here. Any consideration of art now that uses the photograph as a central element of its form must also take into account the influence of eighties artists like Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine. Their appropriation of the camera as a tool is notable. The fact that Sherman takes her photographs, is both the subject and object, makes a difference. Catherine Yass does not appear in her own work. Yet the act of photographing those responsible for the fact of her shows could be interpreted as something of a cathartic act, reclaiming the power in a situation where artists could be perceived as increasingly embroiled in a web of shows, power structures and subject to all the effective feelings of dislocation that go with that. A dislocation rooted in notions of inclusion or exclusion in roughly equal quantities. Yet Yass does not opt to present apparently neutral images, in the manner of Thomas Ruff or Thomas Struth; instead she applies a variety of technical manipulations to the photograph.

Many companies present brochures and reports. The photographs within those brochures are familiar and tend towards a particular format. There are photographers who disrupt the head-shot tradition such as Brian Griffin, yet even in his case the resulting image is one of affirmation, clarity and purpose. The apparently extraneous application of solarised colour bursts and overlaid printing in Yass's work must be read as overriding constants, alluding to a more elemental state of things; a fantasy state or notional aura of the subject is exposed resulting in images where each person is somehow equally lost within a hallucinogenic place; a metaphorical revelation is put forward, yet the final decision as to

where we all stand in relation to each other is still in question.

While the relationship between characters in a narrative is constructed, considering the location of that set of relationships once it has been abandoned leads to a whole new set of questions relating to place, meaning and the validity of the photographic image as a means with which to communicate. There is an often repeated piece of documentary footage where David Attenborough is sitting in a tree canopy with a social group of gorillas. His whispered enthusiasm conveys a sense of awe and excitement at the possibility of decoding the social structure that exists between the animals. This man is there on our behalf and he's not alone. Discussions about the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, the subject and object of scrutiny in considerations of photographic work, have been well documented and often appear tired and overstated. Yet any examination of these ideas in relation to 'close-to-nature' situations, with the invisible camera crew ever present and ever silent, is twisted, undermined and heightened when one considers the emergence of reconstructed true-crime television. *Emergency 911* presented by William Shatner is a particularly good example of the kind of affirmative real/reconstructed television, focusing on the apparent daring and heroism of the emergency services in America. Occasionally they use news footage shot at the time of the event, at other times they create reconstructions. The two techniques are intertwined towards an idealised, speeded-up version of events. Currently, in Britain there is a media ban on all Sinn Fein broadcasting. Members of that party may be seen, their words heard, but not simultaneously. Television companies in Britain have found that to get round the ban, all you need is an actor to lip-synch the words spoken by the Sinn Fein member over the video recording of the interview, then broadcast as usual. The disorientating effect of this technique ensures that one tends to pay much more attention to what is being said if only in order to compare the success of the lip-synching in different programmes. In these situations the temporary nature of the act of filming and the translation of ideas and messages using the medium of film is crudely accentuated. From close-ups of a beetle being attacked by an ant on a nature series to the familiar silhouetted head of the anonymous television witness on documentaries, proximity and access is implied, to situations, places and events that are otherwise relatively unattainable. A great number of artists have alluded to the dislocating effect of this state of affairs. Yet that attention has tended to focus on individuals or ready-made film stills rather than the place and location of the filmed material itself. With the *Ask the Dust* series, begun in 1988, Cindy Bernard has returned to these now depopulated landscapes, using information from various sources. While a great number of production records are lodged at the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences in Beverly Hills, Bernard gets other information from directors and production managers. Considering the varied films she considers, locations from *The*

Godfather, *Five Easy Pieces* and *Vertigo* for example, seeking out the exact place as viewed in the movie can be laborious and time consuming. Once included in the complex narrative of a particular film, the landscapes have often become symbolic of a particular vision of America. The vision, once removed from its film context and replaced within an art context, presents a mute landscape of possibilities and loss. One thinks of Bernard scouring the Arizona landscape to find the place of a scene in *3:10 to Yuma*, looking for somewhere that matches the curve of a hillside in a landscape of saguaro cacti. At a certain point in the preparation of the film, a location manager or the director will have done the same thing. What has been constructed and used in terms of the movie has been removed and replayed as a lost place, now frozen and caught for contemplation in a way that was not necessarily part of the initial reason for choosing the location. If Bernard used film stills and re-presented them in the gallery everything would be different. It is her presence at the sight of these shootings that makes the work. There is a fine line here between the emblematic, the overly familiar and the obscure. Somehow the work of Cindy Bernard is not connected to ideas of the visual cliché, nor is it overly specific. Rather a balance is retained between the evidential satisfaction of witnessing for yourself and the peculiar pedantry of checking on someone else's sources. Alfred Hitchcock's series of television mysteries is still being made. Each one is prefaced and concluded by a few words from the dead director. The fact that those short clips were originally recorded to surround another programme does not deprive them of a particular power, if anything it accentuates a temporary and generalised state of things alongside the specifics of a story. Bursting into another person's narrative can be like arriving at the party when not only has everyone gone, but you are not even sure if they were ever there in the first place.

LIAM GILLICK

EXT FORT POINT

The FOLLOW SHOT and the PLATE from the gateway leading down to the Ft. Point that Mr. Hitchcock had requested is now out.

Sc: 132 LONG SHOT along road with the city in the B.G.- the jaguar followed by Scottie comes along road. The jaguar exits picture. We stay with Scottie's car and PAN left to right to include again the jaguar stopped alongside the Ft.

The Golden Gate Bridge seen in B.G.

Sc: 132A CLOSER ANGLE overlapping Scottie's car stopping in close f.g.left. In the b.g. Madeleine gets out of her car, crosses toward seawall.

Sc: 133 REVERSE CU - Scottie looking off - this shot is up showing the bridge approach girders in the b.g.

Sc: 134 VIEWPOINT of Madeleine disappearing around corner of Ft.

Sc: 134A Scottie crosses to corner of Ft.

Sc: 135 Holding corner of Ft. close f.g. right - Scottie appears & peers off scene.

NOTE: The corner used in this shot is not the corner we see Madeleine disappear behind but is the 2nd corner of the Ft.

Sc: 136 We cheat the angle of this shot. The camera is moved around the Ft. to the return courtyard. We see Madeleine standing at the seawall silhouetted with the bridge above and behind her.

NOTE: PENNY - Prepare the nosegay that Madeleine tears and drops into the water in such a way that the strong winds always found here will not carry them away but will allow the pieces to fall to the water below.

Sc: 147 Scottie starts carrying Madeleine up the stone steps in the studio set.

Sc: 147A REVERSE ANGLE on location - same angle as used for Madeleine throwing pieces of nosegay in the water except that camera is now at a lower angle. Scottie carries Madeleine up stairs and exits f.g. right.

From NOTES DURING HITCHCOCK-BURKS SURVEY SAN FRANCISCO, BIG BASIN, SAN JUAN BAUTISTA prepared September 20, 1957 by H. Coleman (Hitchcock Collection: Vertigo file, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles)

(voice over)

I am writing you all this from another world, a world of appearances. In a way the two worlds communicate with each other. Memory is to one what history is to the other - an impossibility. Legends are born out of the need to decipher the undecipherable. Memories must make due with their delirium with their drift. A moment stopped would burn like a frame of film blocked before the furnace of the projector...

He wrote me that only one film had been capable of portraying impossible memory, insane memory - Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo". In the spiral of the titles he saw time covering a field ever wider as it moved away, a cyclone whose present moment contains motionless, the eye.

In San Francisco he had made his pilgrimage to all the film's locations: the florest Podesta Baldocchi where James Stewart (Scottie) follows Kim Novak (Madeleine). It seems to be a question of trailing, of an enigma, of murder. But in truth it's a question of power and freedom, of melancholy and dazzlement so carefully coded within the spiral that you could miss it and not discover immediately that this vertigo of space and reality stands for the vertigo of time.

He had followed all the trails even to the cemetery at Mission Dolores where Madeleine came to pray at the grave of a woman long since dead whom she should not have known. He followed Madeleine as Scottie had done to the Museum of the Legion of Honor before the portrait of a dead woman she should not have known and on the portrait, as in Madeleine's hair, the spiral of time.

A small Victorian hotel where Madeleine disappeared had disappeared itself. Concrete had replaced it at the corner of Eddy and Gough. On the other hand the sequoia cut was still in Muir Woods. On it Madeleine traced the short distance between two of those concentric lines that measure the age of the tree and said, "Here I was born and here I died." He remembered another film in which this passage was quoted. The sequoia was the one in the Jardin de Plantes in Paris and the hand pointed to a place outside the tree, outside of time. The painted horse at San Juan Bautista, his eye that looked like Madeleine's, Hitchcock had invented nothing. It was all there. He had run under the arches of the promenade in the mission as Madeleine had run towards her death. Or was it hers.

From this fake tower, the only thing that Hitchcock has added, he imagined Scottie as time's fool of love finding it impossible to live with memory without falsifying it. Inventing a double for Madeleine in another dimension of time, a zone that would belong only to him and from which he could decipher the undecipherable story that had begun at Golden Gate when he pulled Madeleine out of San Francisco Bay, when he had saved her from death before casting her back to death. Or was it the other way around.

In San Francisco I made the pilgrimage of a film I had seen 19 times...

From Sans Soleil, a film by Chris Marker, 1983