

Maeve Connolly

Writing After the Exhibition: Tactically Yours



Frances Hegarty & Andrew Stones *Tactically Yours*, 2007. Installation view. © Courtesy the artists.

IN an analysis of North American narrative cinema during the 1970s and 80s, focusing on the recurrence of political conspiracy themes, Fredric Jameson emphasises the critical potential of the 'indirect'. He argues that *Videodrome* (Cronenberg, 1983) is particularly effective as a representation of post-modern urban life precisely because it does not aim to capture the documentary truth of Toronto but instead highlights the generic qualities of the city, through settings that are placeless and timeless. Elaborating on this concept of indirection, Jameson wonders whether direct experience is actually possible⁽¹⁾. He suggests that if we confront experience "with a will towards assimilating it at once, without mediation, we lose it". In earlier contributions to this column I have suggested that writing a review often serves to erase memories of the exhibition, perhaps implying that 'real' experience has been lost in the process. But Jameson's concept of indirection contests the very possibility of any immediate encounter and, by insisting upon the role of mediation, draws attention to the collective dimension of all experience.

Returning to the domain of contemporary art practice, the work of Frances Hegarty and Andrew Stones – specifically the exhibition 'Tactically Yours' at the Butler Gallery in 2007 – employed mediation and repetition to comment on the experience of collaboration and to explore the relationship between political action and art practice. Twenty-four CCTV monitors displayed black and white video imagery of a left-handed woman and a right-handed man hurling rocks in a forest clearing. Filmed from above, the figures are engaged in a form of self-surveillance, repeating the action as though in competition with each other and themselves. Significantly, the documentation of this repetitive action is itself repeated, played out in various arrangements of monitors across three rooms, so that the visitor may be tempted to return to an earlier work and revisit their own experience. In the fourth room, a colour video projection showed a woman's left-hand and a man's right-hand drawing rapidly with charcoal on the same sheet of paper, filling the frame before the image is erased by the appearance of another blank sheet. This final video ultimately withholds the closure it promises because, as noted in the press release, 'if the end of the work is to be 'drawing' or 'art', what, then, of the other connotations of the action in the forest, the undercurrent of violence, the allusions to insurrection, protest and resistance?'⁽²⁾

For Brian Hand, 'Tactically Yours' should be read partly as a response to the specific location of the Butler Gallery in the Kilkenny Castle, so that the action of stone-throwing references a wider history of rebellion and insurrection, and the exploration of collaboration becomes historically loaded⁽³⁾. He notes that, in the final room, the viewer is invited into the work, both as 'graphologist' (to interpret the drawings) and referee (to judge the winner) and crucially, as 'co-conspirator' in a collaborative project. This suggests that the invocation of art in this final video does not constitute a dead-end, but rather offers another route into this exploration of collaboration, in which the specific location of the Butler is perhaps no more important than the generic qualities of the gallery setting. Here I am referring to the ways in which 'Tactically Yours' draws its strategies of production and display from a repertoire (even arsenal) shared by many artists working with video and performance.

It does not seem accidental that Hegarty and Stones use CCTV imagery to explore repeated gestures and actions, and employ a sculptural approach to the arrangement of monitors. This allows for the experience of 'Tactically Yours' to be productively mediated, consciously or otherwise, by the memories of other works.

Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, *Totality as Conspiracy, The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Bloomington, Indiana and London: Indiana University Press and BFI, 1992, 83, note 10.

2. Press release, 'Tactically Yours', Butler Gallery, June 23 – July 29, 2007.

3. Brian Hand, 'Tactically Yours', *CIRCA* 121, 2007, 110 – 111.