

Disrupting the Scene. Fiona Banner, Pierre Bismuth, Fiona Crisp, Tacita Dean

by Juan Cruz

Tacita Dean's *Trying to find the Spiral Jetty* is an audio recording of the artist and a friend setting out in Utah to find Smithson's famous earthwork. They read out and follow the very precise instructions that Smithson left to locate the *Spiral Jetty*, but ultimately fail to find it when their car meets with an insurmountable obstacle. Smithson's instructions form a kind of script for the journey that the piece records. The fact that the *Spiral Jetty* is never found denies the narrative a culmination and throws attention back on the journey and the search; it appears that the enactment of the instructions is more important than the attainment of the goal to which they lead.

Whereas Dean's piece fashions an audio road-movie from a set of instructions that is treated like a script, Pierre Bismuth's *The Party* interferes with the narrative thread of a comedy film by removing the soundtrack. This is interpreted for viewers by a typist who listens to the soundtrack without the images and attempts to describe the sounds heard. The words are projected on the wall next to and in sync with the images from the film. *The Party* arrests the immediacy of reaction that comedy often engenders without actually dulling the comic potential of the original film; that is to say, it is still quite possible to laugh at the film whilst simultaneously considering the insights about narrative, naturalism and character identification that Bismuth's intervention proffers.

In the context of the exhibition – the stated aim of which was to bring together works that related to film – both Dean's and Bismuth's pieces could be seen to reflect quite consciously and in a complex manner upon the presentation and reception of events, such as films, that unfold through time. Fiona Banner's two text pieces were much more concerned with the sheer thrill and excitement that films are able to engender. Printed in red type that bunches up as it nears the bottom of the paper are Banner's transcriptions of the car chases from the films *Bullet* and *The French Connection*. The bunching of the text is a very direct metaphor alluding to the frenetic and destructive excitement that meets the end of a car chase; that the text becomes unreadable suggests, perhaps, the impossibility of expressing how that excitement feels.

Fiona Crisp's photographs are more concerned with examining how that excitement is manufactured. In *Still Film #4* a hooded figure crouches on the ledge of a slightly opened sash window. The figure is seen from the back with one leg hanging out of the opening, its hands exerting pressure on the frame – suggesting that they are attempting to open the window further. The tension of the moment is echoed physically by the taut and buckled photographic paper on which the image is printed. Whereas many of the other pieces in the exhibition

reference pre-existent narrative structures in order to subvert or interpret their unfolding, Crisp's work is refreshing in that it addresses the question of how that narrative is created by examining its most potent constituent element – the still image. Crisp's works allow the viewer to be the interpreter of what is presented rather than the witness to the artist's interpretation.

Disrupting the Scene was at Cambridge Darkroom Gallery, Cambridge, 9 August – 13 September

FIONA CRISP, Still Film #4, 1998, photographic paper, aluminium and rubber, 300 x 140 cm. Courtesy: the artist

