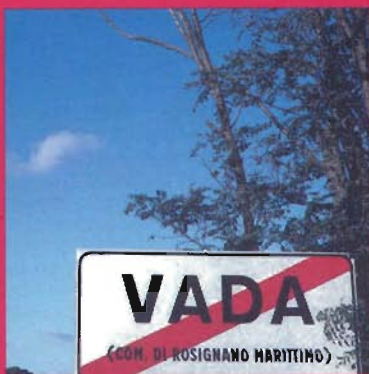


VADA





Dublin, 1988. I'm standing beside my sister as she speaks into the phone

'Hello B\_\_\_? This is D\_\_\_.'

'Oh hi there...'

'Well, I've decided to make the move.'

'That's great... listen, I think you could be very happy here, but I don't want you to get the wrong idea – its not Nirvana y'know.'

'Sure, sure, I know that.'

'Oh ok, that's fine then.'

'Ok, so, em, see you soon.'

'Great, ok... Bye.'

'Bye.'

She puts the phone down and stands there frowning at it. Finally she says,

'... Jaki? Where's Vada?'

# Somewhere Near Vada

A show of international artists' work with the moving image

Curated by Jaki Irvine

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The invitation to Jaki Irvine to curate a moving image show to open Project's new building emerged from conversations between the artist and past Director at Project, Fiach Mac Conghail. The conversation has broadened as many people have entered into dialogue about the exhibition and the opening of the new building.

From the pleasure of the initial abstract propositions to the installation of the works, *Somewhere Near Vada* has kept time with the construction of the building. This show announces Project's return to a familiar address and it is installed at an important threshold for Project. The dereliction of the old building is vindicated in *Somewhere Near Vada*'s open invitation to the viewer/listener to participate in an artist's treatment of the space and place of Project. The first visitors to *Somewhere Near Vada* will make tracks through the new building - pacing out the space - accompanied by the rhythm of the projectors, and to the sounds and silences of the works. The mechanisms of exhibition, as well as the movement of people through the show, will complement an understanding of Project as a kinetic architecture, which will change time and again, with performers and artists making interventions into the fabric of the building and into the idea of Project.

For *Somewhere Near Vada* daylight is mediated or absented from the inside of the building. The revelation of the building by the light of the film and video work is discreet. The reconciliation of sights unseen, a further liminal realm beyond the sites of *Somewhere Near Vada*, remains, for now, in the imagination. *Somewhere Near Vada* is not a survey show or a definitive review. *Somewhere Near Vada* does not open into every nook, cranny and utility space. Instead the works are *about* the building, placed through it – not everywhere.

In her essay, Jaki Irvine has written on the detail, spaces and threads between the selected works in *Somewhere Near Vada*. The curator, and many of the artists and works on film and video in the show, draw on and include literary and performative practices. Shirley MacWilliam has contributed an essay that brings to *Somewhere Near Vada* a further context, discussing 'filmic' space and architecture.

I would like to pay sincere thanks to the lenders to the exhibition, and the individuals who have assisted Project in making works available for exhibition, for their unwavering good faith in looking forward to the opening of the new building. I would like to thank Jaki Irvine for her care and patience in working from plans to actuality, and to express an appreciation of her resolve in working into unfolding spaces, over some two years of anticipation. A final thanks to Fiach Mac Conghail who looked beyond his own tenure as Director and toward the realisation of the new building, recognising in *Somewhere Near Vada* a fitting acknowledgement of artists' contributions to Project's beginnings, longevity and critical currency.

**Valerie Connor** Visual Arts Director

Somewhere Near Vada Jaki Irvine

Dublin, 1988. I'm standing beside my sister as she speaks into the phone.

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'...Jaki? Where's Vada?'

*Somewhere Near Vada* came about as a response to an invitation to curate a moving-image show which would coincide with the inaugural moment of the new Project building – a moment that is also a re-founding and a re-finding both for Project and its audiences. As such it is a moment which marks Project's simultaneous acknowledgement of its past whilst moving towards its future in a re-configured landscape.

*Somewhere Near Vada* has been informed by this sensibility. The impulse to bring this work together here stems from my interest in the questions these individual works, and sometimes, individual practices, seem to ask. This is accompanied by a feeling that an appreciation of something of the richness and depth of the conversations to which these works have long assumed themselves to belong to and partake in is not merely timely here, but pressing and long overdue.



JB – I am cold. Close the window please. What is all this lights and apparatus?

MB – It is the material of cinema

JB – What is that?

MB – Movie pictures... Representation of reality

JB – Very interesting. I desire to see a film

(Pictures of Jeremy Bentham')

JB – Is it me?

Marcel Broodthaers, subtitles from: *Figures of Wax*, 1974

Before the spaces of Project's new building become fully occupied and demarcated by furniture, by administration and by a set of differentiated aesthetic forms they will first have been overrun by the lights and apparatus of *Somewhere Near Vada*. The event stages the opening of the building and invites its audience to explore the space within and beyond the limits of what will normally be public. *Somewhere Near Vada* is the debut performance of the building, its inaugural speech and, like a pre-emptive strike, the first aesthetic mapping of its topology.

Any new building is a kind of fantasy, a kind of heaven: the practice of architecture endeavours to forge ideal space for future existence. Project occupies the same geographical, physical space in Dublin as ever but that physical volume has been re-sliced and re-moulded. In the last months of its previous incarnation Project offered artists the opportunity to carve literally into the fabric of the building and so to participate in its entropy: in its new manifestation it arrives, purpose-designed, unblemished and empty. A gallery is required to be a forgiving space that absorbs and heals over the scars of each prior exhibition as the next one colonises and reinvents it. Conceivably, all the lights and apparatus of *Somewhere Near Vada* might leave no palpable physical trace – perhaps a fitting here, a painted frame there – the first minor marks on an otherwise pristine space.

To consider the impact of *Somewhere Near Vada* purely in terms of its physical discretion and impermanence is to underestimate the subtlety of our relationship to architecture and image. The first encounter of the audience with this new space will have been mediated by the selection, position and projection of the film, video and slide works of the event. The architecture, which in the curatorial process has been imagined through these images, will be, for the audience, articulated and concretised through their presence.

same... those discoveries and anxieties that were as much to do with the medium itself as with the character that allowed its exploration.

Suspended between one frame and the other, the very movement of his invisibility, like that of the hands of a clock, has been rendered imperceptible, so that the only way to really see it is to stop looking, to accept the impossibility of seeing in the way I have come to expect, in favour of a series of leavings and returns that allow me to keep an eye on its progress. So I return yet again to this work, all the while filling in the gaps, convinced of the ongoing presence of the invisible man, regardless of his apparent absence... and the implications of such an awareness double and redouble in the margins.

In 1974, Marcel Broodthaers presented a film as part of an installation called *Un Jardin d'Hiver*, in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. Part of the performance for the film involved a zoo-keeper bringing a camel for a walk around the gallery – past fold-out chairs, video monitor, potted palm trees, and the photographs which adorned the walls of illustrated birds, camels, bees, elephants.

Later, in conversation about this piece, Broodthaers speaks of the apparently simultaneous presence and absence of the desert in this work – a desert, he specifically identifies, as the artworld as he then conceived of it. In the face of this symbolic desert Broodthaers says he finds the camel comical, because 'beauty, in the present situation, when you touch on it, is comical.'<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile the physical presence of the camel dumbly – and therefore indisputably – insists on the absence of an actual desert – that is, one that could hold any real sense or meaning for it... a camel walked by its keeper, deadpan, on a line of absurdity strung between meaning and meaninglessness.

The suggestion then is that 'Beauty', if one were still thinking or hoping to find such a thing in an art gallery, is not, nor cannot be, where one would expect, but must – if one is to recover it personally, i.e. in a way that might matter – reside there almost accidentally, illicitly, like a camel attending an educational exhibition on the desert.

When, more than 20 years later, Anneke A. de Boer films *Black Piano*, 1996, this absurd beauty once again raises its head and stamps its feet as the legs of both woman and horse step backwards and forwards, sideways and back, across an invisible line on the ground between them. Tightly framed by the camera, the horse steps in and out of the illusion of being human. Despite

the awareness that those small steps are in response to other pressures, the illusion of these dance partners holds sway and I find myself drawn to follow the intricate movements of what is turning out to be a tango, with all its finely crafted footwork of eroticism and sensuality. Meanwhile the piano accompaniment extends its own invitation towards the nefarious pleasures known by young women and horses. Here, as in many of the works in *Somewhere Near Vada*, the pleasure afforded, when I try to think about it, is to do with a kind of knowledge, or rather, a staging of a lack of knowledge and a working with and in the face of this unknown that is acknowledged as precisely this.

In Tacita Dean's *The Story of Beard*, 1992, this is articulated on many different levels. The artist, in voice-over, recounts how she met an old woman in Canterbury who had a collection of beards in the back room of her shop. The woman, we are told, related the various histories which attached to some of them. One – a fragile black beard – came from Delphy, passed down as an oracle from priestess to priestess until female wisdom became unfashionable and no longer able to bear the responsibility of prophesizing, they sold it to an old man... another, a long white 'God' one, was found in a dustbin in Rome. As these tales are being re-counted, the camera follows an old woman who is slowly making her way down a street and disappearing around a corner. The camera circles the broken toe of a statue and fixes on the face of a statue, replete with beard blowing in the wind. Later – old woman, shop, beard collection all gone – the artist tells us she has to make do with modern synthetic beards to make her film.

For me, the pleasure of this film lies in its speaking of desire and curiosity and fantasy, while at the same time calling into question the very means through which this is being articulated, as for example when an announcement of the film to be made happens halfway through the film we are watching as if this film is not the film we should be watching, but another which is to follow: a short re-staging and gender shifting of Édouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, 1863, where the female characters sport beards – like a home-movie of a 19th Century French painting. There is the suggestion that, like Ravel's piano accompaniment, the fantasies and expressions of others are there to interpret and to make one's own. This film then is as much about listening as speaking, a gesture towards the idea that language is always borrowed, tho' what you might come to say need not necessarily be so.

This focus on the apparatus itself, its reflecting on its own means of production – i.e. the conditions upon which it depends in order to exist – is one which recurs on different levels and in different registers throughout the various works on show here. At the very least it carries with it the suggestion that, if one is to draw attention to the world we believe we inhabit, how we might do so, what approach we come to take in order to conceptualise it and our relation to it, and the means we finally use to represent this, must also, of necessity, come under scrutiny.

It is this act of conceptualising and speaking that is put under the microscope and passed through the telescope/looking glass in Gary Hill's *Why Do Things Get In a Muddle? (Come on Petunia)*, 1984. Much of the text is based on his reading and thinking through the writings of Gregory Bateson who was concerned, amongst other things, with the individual's relation to others (what elsewhere has been referred to as 'the problem of other minds') and the potential for play to loosen the rigid interpretative structures in which one might come to be trapped...

Hill's two characters are found to be reading at the opening of the work, before they slowly metamorphose into a space, through the looking glass, where the narrative logic of the work seems to be founded on an exploration and working through of the muddle referred to in the title.

In making this work, the actors were trained to speak backwards, so that ultimately, when the tape was played in reverse, their speech would be intelligible, if stilted, in a late twentieth century echoing of Lewis Carroll's use of palindromes and other language games. At one point, the 'Daughter' who has changed into 'Alice' makes specific reference to the means by which she and the things about her, the fascination of their movements, has been brought into existence: 'Oh, Daddy – I knew that and I did so want to tell you that – and then when they run the film, they run it backwards so that it looks as though things had happened forwards. But really the shaking happened backwards. And they have to photograph it upside down... *Why do they, Daddy?*'<sup>4</sup> As with Carroll, the question of meaningfulness in relation to nonsense looms large, both within the space of the work and beyond, while the objects to hand, and even the very letters that form the title of the work shift and shrink and twirl and jostle each other, depending on who is looking and how. And always there's the delight in the medium itself, the twists and turns and joy of itself reflected and recorded in the mirror of its own fascination.

In Peter Fischli and David Weiss' *Der Lauf der Dinge* (*The Way Things Go*), 1986/87, this line between meaning and nonsense becomes that upon which the narrative movement and logic of the work teeters. Here a motley collection of objects – old shoes, tyres, plastic bottles, kettle, roller skates – have been brought together and set up like a cartoon laboratory experiment. Here the action must proceed without the aid of those human actors who ordinarily set the visual gags and props in motion, both physically and by way of providing, if not a reason, then at least an excuse for the world of slapstick to take effect. In their absence the whole thing proceeds haltingly, precariously close to breakdown. A boiling kettle rolls on a skate along a metal runner, its arrival precipitating another movement, a build up of pressure, a slow shifting of weight, a burning string, a small explosion, a dripping, hissing, series of knock-on effects, that almost don't happen, almost come apart at the seams.

The logic of the piece, its *raison d'être*, is that of the process itself, its faltering momentum propelled by faint fizzles, implosions and collapses, its means as its ends. Elsewhere, referring to this aspect of the work Peter Fischli said, 'when it's nicely functioning, just on the edge of failure, then for us it's beautiful'.<sup>4</sup> What strikes me about Peter Fischli's description of this piece is the understanding that the crude mechanics and chemistry that are at work here aren't taken for granted, not even by the artists themselves who have set the whole thing up. Maybe it is on account of this that *The Way Things Go* exercises a particular fascination for me, as if what has come into being here is a setting out of something that they don't own, even if they have come to know it... that the physical world has a life, a thingness of its own that we partake in precariously, without authority as such (despite our frequent claims to the contrary), and that this might be the only approach that can acknowledge or make sense of our own position. Beauty, in this scenario wobbles like a clown on the edge of breakdown, its existence predicated on the possibility of failure.

It is across such a trajectory that I understand Bas Jan Ader to be falling, a falling that, as a failure to hold on, to balance whatever physical or existential contradictions have led him to this point, is also a staging of the indifference of the physical world to the claims of knowledge or mastery one might lay on it.

Stanley Cavell has written of '...being seated anywhere as a way and a time you might be living, spending your life, in a word, taking up residence'.<sup>5</sup>

Bas Jan Ader, sitting on a chair on the roof of his house cannot stay there. He loses his balance and tumbles from the roof to land in a bush underneath. He falls over a trestle in a landscape where, behind him, the fire station building notable as the subject of a series of paintings by Piet Mondrian stands tall and unwavering in the background. Later that purity of colour and clarity of line writ large in the architectural certainties of modernism are put to the test and found wanting as Bas Jan Ader drops a breeze block on a glass of liquid pigment that has been filling our horizons, shattering the solidity of that illusion, if it had held any water to begin with. The gesture is repeated until all three primary colours have been dealt with.

He cycles into a canal, falls from a tree... This is not the heroic leap of Yves Klein, but a drop that asks how far one can fall before the ground or water will rush up to meet one with a resounding, if silent, thump, leaving one winded but certain in its wake, until that is, a small element of doubt creeps in causing that certainty to waver yet again. Bas Jan Ader sits crying for the camera in a work called *I'm Too Sad To Tell You*, 1970, and I am drawn to think of Cavell's intuition of '...an intimacy with existence and of an intimacy lost, that matches skepticism's despair of the world'.

I understand Zoë Walker's *Dream Cloud*, 1998, to assume something of what Bas Jan Ader was struggling with, almost as if it inherits the fact of failure... accepts it as a foregone conclusion. Oddly, this does not diminish the yearning, that 'search for the miraculous'<sup>8</sup> in Jan Ader's terms, which as Cavell would have it, comes to be figured as a 'quest for the ordinary'.<sup>9</sup> Rather it seems to sustain this desire at a point of near constant frustration and fulfillment... I know, but all the same... a continual wavering between suspensions of disbelief and belief in order to allow something to come into being. The silk cloud has been carefully stitched with all the care one would take with a parachute, replete with harness. The artist is suitably attired in a yellow ski-suit, poised for take off with her helium-filled cloud, standing on a hilltop waiting to join the other clouds that float effortlessly by in the sky above.

Then she sets off: running, jumping, both feet off the ground, suspended there in slow motion by the editing of the video, so that the moment of fulfillment is a disappointment, an illusion all too easily achieved after the event in an edit suite. But the desire is there, too strong not to be indulged in... to change the speed of the tape... to actively mis-remember, that this mis-remembering be the thing itself... the video with its vaguely trance-like

electronic soundtrack... a substitute that can be no more than that... What is the nature of this desire that would 'really' be fulfilled? And then her feet are all too soon on the ground again, so that the whole thing has the feeling of a dream of flying where one never really gets off the ground, flying at the height of a foot or two and landing again, like an extended jump. She heads off again, this time tumbling with the cloud, getting tangled up, running across the hills, throwing it, willing it up up up, to take its place amongst those others and to carry her with it. Finally, at the end of what must have been a long day, the sun begins to sink. In the late evening sky, the clouds slowly turn into silhouettes and the artist and her cloud undergo a similar transformation, so that in the closing moments of the video all are united visually, as silhouette, if not actually... a resolution that is both fulfillment and disappointment... but what more could have been expected?

Adam Chodzko's *Nightvision*, 1998, also knows itself to occupy this illusive space, openly declaring the apparatus upon which its existence depends. Here, in voice-over, different lighting technicians suggest how they would go about lighting heaven: '...I'd put a 20 or 10K behind a huge frame with graduated gels, just strips of gel across, creating all your graduated colours and they'll bleed into each other and they'll create a rainbowy effect...' <sup>10</sup> In the rainy darkness of a forest at night, figures are moving about, in and out of the frame and the undergrowth. A tracer effect has been applied to the image so that, in movement, the figures appear shadowy, insubstantial, breaking up into an ever-shifting mass of pixels that then settles again when they stop, as if they fully materialise only to tweak at a lighting stand, fix a piece of cable, adjust a filter. The scene takes time to set up, the cumbersome lighting apparatus that would create the illusion of heaven in a forest, in need of tests, alterations, checking, shifting. What care has been lavished on a scene that could nearly be nothing, or at least nothing more than it is, trees in a park at night. And then finally, it is ready. The lights bang on with an electrical hum and bathed in a wash of colours and lights...

It takes a while to realise that I'm facing the wrong way, looking at the wrong thing. That space to which I've so far paid no attention is the one I'd better attend to now, if its not too late, if I haven't already missed it... and then what is it, but an effect of light and shadow... but if that isn't enough, maybe nothing is and I'll have to go back and take another good look at what it was I thought I wanted in the first place.

Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1988, p. 9

*ibid.*, p. 4

See *Mixed Bloodlines: Cinema* catalogue to the exhibition curated by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Michael Compton in collaboration with Maria Gibssen, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona 1997, p. 247

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Bateson, 'Metaphor: Why Do Things Get In A Muddle?' in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Intertext Books, London 1972, p. 6. Quoted by Lynne Cooke in 'Gary Hill: Beyond Babel', *Gary Hill*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 1993, p. 49

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Sandra Sitch in '(Dis)Ordered Artifice in the Art of Fischli & Weiss', *Perkett* 17, 1988, p. 71

<sup>7</sup> Cavell, *ibid.*, p. 21

Cavell, *ibid.*, p. 4

In 1973 Das Jan Ader produced a series of 14 black and white photographs under the collective title *In Search of the Miraculous*

Cavell, *ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>8</sup> See *Adam Chodźko*, essays by Michael Bracewell and Jennifer Higgie, August Publications, London 1998, p. 46



An architecture in the play of light Shirley MacWilliam

If one is to seek a thread through the various pieces and practices, one might begin to look for it in the spaces set up by, and residing between, individual works and practices.

In his book, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, Stanley Cavell has suggested that while for many of us our everyday may have become, through habit, so dulled as to be all but imperceptible, it is also, almost because of this, home, and all that there is. The question then arises as to how we might manage to bring focus and thought to bear on this place, how we come to wrest meaning or interest from it and at what cost do we forget to do so.<sup>1</sup> This is something which I understand to be fundamental to many of the works in *Somewhere Near Vada*. Often it seems to be articulated through a doubting and testing of the very fact and fabric of what is ordinarily taken for granted, as if in response to Cavell's intuition of 'that anxiety about our human capacities as knowers... our subjection to doubt.' The doubt in question here goes so far as to extend to the very existence of the world around us and those who are said to live in it.<sup>4</sup>

That this matter should also pertain to the cinematic can come as no surprise, although what perhaps still might cause pause for thought is the extent of our investment in its mechanisms, our willingness and near determination to suspend our disbelief in order to sustain its illusions.

It is those forces which we bring to bear on so fragile a thing as a celluloid image that come to be specifically foregrounded and brought into focus in James Coleman's slide installation *La Tache Aveugle, 1978–90*. Here a panning shot of the invisible man making his way across a room, has been taken from James Whales' 1933 film adaptation of H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*. Less than one second long in the original film, the sequence has been slowed down to the point where each frame takes 20 minutes to dissolve.

Stilling and distilling, this process is one of taking pleasure in the material that is narrative cinema, in the enigmas it leaves hanging... and holding onto this pleasure, spinning and opening it out... so that, in the interstice between one frame and the next, a splitting and a doubling seem to take place, so that the piece seems to enact simultaneously both its present and its past. I am called to look again at this suspended cinematic space which the invisible man inhabits and at those imaginings which I all but unwittingly project into the intricacies of light and shadow that give substance to that space. *The Invisible Man*... such an old film... I'm sure I recognise this... sure I've seen it a thousand times... tho' I don't quite remember this particular shot, but all the

## Architecture as an arena of distraction and return

'Buildings', Walter Benjamin tells us, 'are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception – or rather, by touch and sight.'<sup>3</sup> Except in the case of the awed gaze of the tourist, we experience and assimilate architecture through a combination of distracted attention and habit. For Benjamin, this distinguishes architecture from other art forms, which require our contemplation, our complete absorption. In the 1930s, film seemed to Benjamin to offer itself up to a similar mode of attention for two reasons: its address to a mass audience and its formal properties. The distracting aspect of film, its tactile or 'shock' effect, he speculates, is 'based on the changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator [...] No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed.'<sup>4</sup> Distraction, for Benjamin, heralded radical change in our aesthetic and political landscape. Over half a century later, the smug and seductions of mainstream cinema have repositioned film as another art of contemplation before which one suspends disbelief and is immersed; the radical promise of distraction has been assimilated by an ever-flexible culture of consumption. *Somewhere Near Vada* revisits this promise in the exchanges between a collection of artists' time-based works, which do not conform to cinematic expectations, and a barely inhabited architecture. Herein new habits will germinate in the glint and reflection of light as the space is explored by its audience.

Different films in different rooms promise a journey of pleasurable distractions during which changes in place, focus and scene will be effected by shifts of the attention, caught by a flicker next door, from one work to another. It is possible that a viewer may not watch any individual piece from beginning to end and will instead construct, via the journey taken, a personal narrative, a unique edit of the available images. 'A journey is a hallucination' proposed Flann O'Brien's fictional philosopher-scientist de Selby. De Selby's theory arose from his 'discovery', made when examining some old cinematograph films, that human existence is a 'succession of static experiences each infinitely brief' and therefore that any and all movement is illusory. On the basis of this logic he conducts, entirely within a closed room, a hallucinatory journey from Bath to Folkstone. Like the unseen invisible man of James Coleman's *La Tache Aveugle*, 1978–90, de Selby's encounter with celluloid renders him almost immobile. The stilled frames of Coleman's work unmask the trick of attention at play in the very operational

level of film. Normally, the eye is distracted by the next frame before it has registered the prior one as a still, and thence motion is hallucinated. In a glorious self-contradiction, what ultimately, for de Selby, distinguished films from life was the tedium of the former: 'Apparently he had examined them patiently picture by picture and imagined that they would be screened in the same way.'<sup>4</sup>

At any moment of *Somewhere Near Vada* an entirely different combination of stills are apparent in Project. The moment conjures an image of the cross-section of the architecture: the simultaneity of an object about to topple next door, a body mid-air upstairs, a blur of white silk against a wall, a view of a frozen street in the room below. This synchronicity and multiplicity invites the audience to wander and cut across the temporality and event of each work. In the very attempt not to miss anything, one passes from one space into another, just at the point that something might be about to happen, might have already happened, in the space one leaves, in the space in which one arrives.

Many of the works are single-screen and therefore cinematically logical. Yet none of these spaces is specifically or exclusively designed for projection and there is no cinematic logic as to the orientation of the works within them. Just as one will interrupt the temporal structure of individual works, so too, spatially, the spectator will arrive at these images obliquely: by catching an image, from the street, through an open door; by entering the room from behind the screen or perpendicular to the beam; by occluding the image with one's shadow.

The spectator's apparent freedom to come and go contrasts with the condition of the images, necessarily caught in their respective rooms like de Selby's hallucinatory journey. Lodged in its pictorial and architectural frame each work repeats itself: a gesture is re-enacted, a search of the city re-undertaken, a fragile object destroyed or lost and then re-found whole, a spontaneous response reiterated, a game replayed. In their exploration of our cultural and material world these works readdress tenets and assumptions of perception, of belief, of material certainty and delicately unsettle them. Like the child's discovery that by repeating a word umpteen times it can be divested of its meaning, these repeated soundings of the details and parameters of institutional space, the human body, language and common sense provoke localised disruptions which eddy into the wider world we inhabit. It is the intense constraint of space and motion, and the consequent

incessant dancing on the spot by the girl's and pony's legs of Anneke A. de Boer's *Black Piano* that elicits our disconcertion and fascination. The delight of the aimless progression through space and time, in which experience seems to unfold afresh before one, is teased by these filmic and video investigations and speculations which resume at their beginnings and echo themselves again and again. Indeed, the space of Project is already highly choreographed in anticipation of our presence. Architecture is precisely an organisation of space that leads us to retrace our steps, to wear furrows, to circulate and to return.

The simultaneously and disconcertingly arbitrary character of architecture is dramatised by the strange space in which Gary Hill's *Why Do Things Get In A Muddle? (Come on Petunia)* was positioned, in the curatorial mind's eye, before the completion of the building. According to the architectural plans the image would hover on a wall, above one door and below another. The drawings indicate that the lower door opens into and out of the room at the level of the floor, whereas the isolated upper door suggests an absent floor, a division of space that the architect inadvertently forgot to effect, a missing room. It promises an accident: the arrival of somebody, who will step through the doorway, never hesitating to imagine that a door might not lead to a floor, and fall through the beam, casting their shadow into the space of the projected image.

### In the play of light

Imagine a projection in the absence of architecture, a projection simply in space. Its beam would proceed into the distance, ad infinitum, becoming fainter and fainter. One might see motes caught in the light and so perceive its presence but without an architecture or screen its focal point is pointless, the distance between celluloid and lens irrelevant. Projection is predicated upon architecture, upon spatial interruption and division. The projection requires its camera obscura, its darkened room, with the lights turned off and the windows closed and blinded. Then the image can be caught, focussed and perceived on the screen-wall and thence the retina; then there is a logic of distances between celluloid, lens and wall; then Project becomes an architecture of screens.

The monitor provides its own architecture, a contained space for its

electromagnetic beam. Nonetheless it is still, and indeed physically even more so, like a lantern that illuminates the space it occupies; it draws with light in the space and it draws the eye.

One can imagine *Somewhere Near Vada* as a geometry, drawn, floor by floor, room by room, onto the architectural plans: a collection of points of emanation distributed in space; of rays of light controlled by lenses, mirrors and prisms, photons directed by electromagnetic fields; and of multiple surfaces of focus, the wall here, the screen there, the glass surface of the video monitor, the interior of the eye.

Such a geometrical model fails, however, to fully elucidate our sensory and psychological experience of light. Jacques Lacan argues that the geometry of optics could be explained to a blind man, who would be perfectly equipped to understand it. Thus, the optical account is insufficient; it explains its spatiality, the rays but not the iridescence of light 'It is not in the straight line, but in the point of light – the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth. Light may travel in a straight line, but it is refracted, it floods, it fills – the eye is a sort of bowl – it flows over, too, it necessitates, around the ocular bowl, a whole series of organs, mechanisms, defences. The iris reacts not only to distance, but also to light, and it has to protect what takes place at the bottom of the bowl, which might in certain circumstances be damaged by it. The eyelid, too, when confronted with too bright a light, first blinks, that is, it screws itself up into a well known grimace.'

It is in an excess of the purely optical-geometrical that the psycho-sensory relation to light, and thence to the space, can be located. The building is absorbed by light. It is flooded with the lights of multiple other interiors, exteriors and landscapes: an artificially lit forest masquerading as heaven; a studio-become-circus in which objects perform; an outdoor tableau vivant reinventing a painting; an island shadowed by real and synthetic clouds. Viewed in these lights the building is only partially visible. Some areas remain unseen because no light is cast into them; others are burned out, to the eye, by the intensity of the projector bulb or projected image. We can only see the building in the gap between brightness and darkness, in the space in which the light spills out beyond the image. Simultaneously, the building absorbs light; it is warmed by light, dried by light; it drains the energy of light at the very surface upon which the image is apparent.

## Afterimage

Through a series of flickerings, over exposures, shadows, absorptions and spillages of light the new Project will be experienced. The mnemonic practice of Greek rhetoric was to map the elements of a speech onto an imagined architecture, and in the mind's eye to walk from room to room and so encounter each proposition, hypothesis, argument and rhetorical flourish in its place. Conversely, *Somewhere Near Vada* scatters images of objects, gestures, places, events through an actual architecture: this building will enter the imagination and the memory via the tissue of accidental routes and returns, passing glances and encounters, overlapping sounds, incidental thoughts, grimaces of the eye that weave through and punctuate the perusal of the space and its luminous images.

'From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me who am here: the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being [...] will touch me like the delayed rays of a star.'<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes' account of the photograph describes a physical connection, embodied in rays of light, between the missing being, the image and his own body. His fascination for this contact with beings that once-were-there recalls Benjamin's assertion of the tactility of film. In the same instance, however, that Barthes identifies the immanence of contact he reminds us that all light is subject to time, that all vision is of a moment anterior to the moment of perception, like that of the telescopic image of the heavens light-years away and ago.

Film, video and the photograph merely dramatise this inevitable perceptual delay. The light and image of each work of art in *Somewhere Near Vada* occupy and share our present but each work retains its strange irradiating relationship to the past: to actions, bodies, practices and preoccupations that have already been played out but are transmitted forth like 'the delayed rays of a star'. In *Figures in Wax* Broodthaers conducts a kind of seance with another missing being – the dead but corporeally present Jeremy Bentham. Thanks to the devices of cinema Bentham speaks through the centuries. Similarly, all the works are called upon, like witnesses and heralds, to speak from one time into another and so to stage the beginning of a new phase of Project's history. The event is simply a collection of works contained within a building, but these works are, of course, part of a vast network of practices and histories in which Project is itself contained and of which it is a part.

If the history of what happens in a place constructs its identity, then *Somewhere Near Vada* will lay down the first sediment and so the pattern of the building's unconscious, its screen memories. Later visits will render the architecture differently: not all spaces open during *Somewhere Near Vada* will remain so – workshops, offices and storerooms will close onto their hidden activities; where one may go, what one may see and what is there to be seen will have changed. Like a lost domain, the event, the opening celebration, the coincidence of images in spaces that is *Somewhere Near Vada* will be irrecuperable but will leave its residue, its sensation, its ghosts and afterimages.

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Bentham was the founder of University College London, where Marcel Broodthaers worked during the 1970s. After his death and in accordance with his will, Bentham's body was stuffed and put on display in the cloisters of the University. Every morning the doors of the cabinet in which the body sits are opened and Bentham can survey his world.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, Fontana Press, London 1992, p. 233  
ibid., p. 231

<sup>3</sup> Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*, Picador, London 1974, p. 44

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, Penguin, London 1994, p. 94

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, Flamingo, London 1984, p. 80



## Bas Jan Ader

*Fall I, Los Angeles* 1970  
16mm film, 24 seconds, b/w

*Fall II, Amsterdam* 1970  
16mm film, 19 seconds, b/w

*Nightfall* 1971  
16mm film, 4 minutes and 8 seconds, b/w

*I'm Too Sad To Tell You* 1970-1971  
16mm film, 3 minutes and 34 seconds, b/w

*Broken Fall (geometric)* 1971  
16mm film, 1 minute and 32 seconds, b/w

*Broken Fall (organic)* 1971  
16mm film, 1 minute and 26 seconds, b/w  
Projection, loop system

Images courtesy of  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

## Anneke A. de Boer

*Remote Controller* 1998  
Photographs on aluminium  
69 x 103cms each  
(additional catalogue images)

*Black Piano* 1997  
16mm film, 2 minutes, b/w, sound  
Projection, loop system

Images courtesy of the artist

## Marcel Broodthaers

*Un Voyage à Waterloo* 1969  
16mm film, 13 minutes, b/w

*La Pluie* 1969  
16mm film, 2 minutes, b/w

*La Pipe Satire* 1969  
35mm film, 3 minutes b/w

*La Bataille de Waterloo* 1969  
35mm film, 11 minutes and 20 seconds, colour, sound

*Une Seconde d'Eternité* 1970  
35mm film, 1 second, b/w

*La Pipe* 1969 – 1972  
16mm film, 4 minutes and 20 seconds, b/w with blue tint

*Speaker's Corner* 1972  
16mm film, 8 minutes, b/w

*Figures of Wax (Jeremy Bentham)* 1974  
16mm film, 15 minutes, colour, sound

*Un Jardin d'Hiver* 1974  
35mm, 7 minutes, colour, sound

*Berlin oder ein Traum mit Sahne* 1974  
35mm, 10 minutes, colour, sound

Images courtesy of Maria Gilissen

16mm screenings at Project  
35mm screening at Irish Film Centre

## Adam Chodzko

*Nightvision* 1998  
Video, two-screens, 16 minutes and 20 seconds,  
colour, sound  
Synchronised projection, repeat play

Images courtesy of the artist  
Stills for *Nightvision*, Justin Westover (pages 34-37)

## James Coleman

*La Tache Aveugle 1978 - 90*  
35mm slides, continuous, b/w  
Projection, slide dissolve, installation

Image courtesy of the artist

## Tacita Dean

*The Story of Beard* 1992  
16mm film, 8 minutes, colour and b/w, sound  
Projection, loop system

Images courtesy of the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

## Peter Fischli and David Weiss

*Der Lauf der Dinge (The Way Things Go)* 1987  
Video, 30 minutes, colour, sound  
Projection, repeat play

Images courtesy of the artists

## Gary Hill

*Why Do Things Get In A Muddle?*  
(*Come on Petunia*) 1984  
Video, 12 minutes, colour, sound  
Projection, repeat play

Images courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

## Zoë Walker

*Dream Cloud* 1998  
Video, 12 minutes, colour, sound  
Projection, repeat play

Images courtesy of the artist  
and The Travelling Gallery, Edinburgh  
Stills for *Dream Cloud*, Colin Kirkpatrick (pages 24-25, 26)  
and Grunnie Moberg (page 26)

## List of works

## Somewhere Near Vada

A show of international artists' work with the moving image

Curated by Jaki Irvine

13 June – 16 July 2000

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