

## Single Dark Space

It is often asserted that cinema is the most powerful art form of the last two centuries, cinema initially was seen as a reflection of life but in more recent times life has become a reflection of cinema. Cinema with its power to entertain, drawing together large groups of people in a single dark space, with its power to influence and create a multitude of images and emotions. As such this art form also becomes a source for propaganda, for the promotion of ideological positions and as a site of our collective anxieties, at the same time it establishes a space for our individual projected fantasies, our identification with characters, constructed identities and narrative scenarios. Hollywood as one of the most globally powerful image industries is also one of the most controlling and fascistic in its promotion of ideas, morals and political values. It remains as an industry tightly regulated and censored (by an anonymous committee) driven by profit and as such severely limited with the scope of its subject matter, its use of familiar narratives and correspondingly its inability to critically address important crucial concerns in a climate of gradually changing power balances. Yet cinema in its illusory state of being able to present us with a reality, its ability to visually assault us irrespective of our different language systems is a powerful force for change.

Nooshin Farhid's work locks onto this sense of the cinematic in her appropriation of the intense 'visuality' of cinematic constructions, in doing so she consciously exploits our recognition of visual strategies and narrative scenarios each of which triggers our memory banks into a false sense of security. As the viewer we are placed in a position of control for what appears to be a familiar plot line allows us to be passive receivers, undisturbed and settled within the limits of our experience. However with Farhid's videos this is very short lived, our complacency is comprehensively challenged, we are jolted out of this state of comfortability. The tactic is one of

disruption whereby we enter into a kind of game, one of the recognisable and the unrecognisable as we find ourselves on varying levels of spatial and psychological narrative awareness. Elements are derived from different unrelated sources; in recent pieces we come across documentary footage as dispersed as political events, scientific and medical material to the tracking of hurricanes and other natural disasters. Added to which is the use of found and original animation and real time material shot under direction and on location. In historical terms there is a referencing of collage, Hannah Hoch and Kurt Schwitters and in relation to film the work of Andrej Tarkovsky though this is not directly evident, Farhid does not pay any kind of homage to them, her approach is more genealogical than historically linear. There is though the same radical uncompromising approach in that what we are forced to take on board is our own fragmented experience one which is not ordered and regimented but in which our state of consciousness flits and darts as it receives and processes stimuli and information. It is as if these video works operate between the reception point and the rationalisation point in our brains, the space between the raw and the filtered.

Appropriation, eclectic and low tech would seem to be keywords in understanding the platform from which Farhid's work operates, this sometimes brutal acquisition of different generic material in its process refuses to acknowledge any hierarchy of high art/low art evaluation but sees all visual material as being potentially useful and exploitable. Strategically this implies a resistance to working within established genres or adhering to known modes of time based practice at a time of conservatism within contemporary art and consequently a lack of serious critical engagement.

Such is the current situation that the political voice is simply one of a familiar rhetoric akin to red top journalism, apparently unwilling to address more wider critical concerns. This in some ways relates to Theodore Adorno's comment on the capitalist system as being one which maintains its power by continually deflecting our focus away from the important and towards the comparatively trivial. Farhid in fact does the reverse her often humorous and playful images, her delight in bringing together a wide range of image types makes initially for an experience of visual pleasure which touches on the sensuously sublime as we jump cut from image to image, but this is purely a vehicle for alienating us from our habitual reception of mainstream media imagery, for threading its way through is a more disturbing and disruptive set of concerns that explore the fragility of the human psyche within a system that seeks to portray the individual as robotic and target led. Similarly in recent works less directly involved with the human subject as individual being as in 'Signals' and 'End Zone' images of celebration and inclement weather conditions become metaphors for pending social and political change. The more that western democracies desperately strive to restrict change the more that eastern societies accept change as a prerequisite.

**Olivia Usher**  
**March 2007**