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The Necessity of Being Lost

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Daydream is concerned with the notion that it may be valuable, even necessary from time to time, to become 'lost' and this idea can be traced through both the narrative structure and certain aspects of the production process. There are clear continuities between this film and earlier works by Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor, such as the Civic Life series; most obviously in the use of a largely non-professional cast, 35mm cinemascope and long takes filmed with a steadicam. But in many respects *Daydream* also represents a bold move into uncharted territory, in that it is staged across a series of disparate locations and involves the participation of many different groups. Commissioned as a response to the 2005 project, *Around the City in 80 Days*, which involved the participation of over 80 groups, *Daydream* explores some of the possibilities that may emerge, for individuals or for communities, when they are set adrift from familiar bearings.

In the opening scene a group of children and teenagers are walking through a sunlit forest; the mood is peaceful but subdued and there is little noise other than occasional birdsong and the whistle of the park ranger. It transpires that three members of the group are lost and the others are anxious. Seeking to calm them, the park ranger explains that while people often become lost in this forest they are always found again. There is a strong sense of predetermination suggested by these words, reinforced by the self-consciously mythic setting, and the scene appears to be set for a quest that, after some twists and turns, will lead to discovery and resolution. But as the narrative unfolds and the forest gives way to an array of apparently disconnected, disparate spaces, the central enigma of the missing teenagers recedes into the background and we too lose our bearings. The complex use of off-screen sound, the repeated evocation of absent or imagined spaces, and the unexpected movements of the camera (often panning left rather than right) within each long take, combine to enhance this sense of disorientation.

Daydream does not aim to resolve the narrative enigmas that it generates; instead it directs awareness towards the interplay between past, present and future, which animates every moment.¹ In every scene, individuals and groups are vividly present, yet simultaneously reaching towards another time or place. The youth orchestra in the civic hall, for example, wear traditional clothes and instruments that suggest an earlier era but they are intently focused upon a future moment of performance. In the same space, a man about to launch a new business venture stares out of the window, suspended in a moment of fear and hope. Elsewhere, in a hotel function room, an elderly waiter in conversation with a barman realises that he is unlikely to see Australia in his lifetime, even though it is a place that has always existed in his imagination.

This exchange is significant for many reasons; most obviously it calls to mind such cinematic evocations of ‘dreamtime’ as *Walkabout* (Nicholas Roeg, 1971) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975). The staging of this scene in a hotel also seems to reference *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) a work that Fredric Jameson has defined as a “ghost story”, rather than horror film, because of its particular concern with place. In an analysis that centres on the appropriation and transformation of popular genres within postmodern cinema, Jameson argues that *The Shining* is specifically concerned with social amnesia and the dislocation of the suburban family from a wider network of communal bonds.² Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor seem, however, to offer a counterpoint to Jameson’s bleak vision of late capitalist society; by actively participating in the formation and exploration of civic spaces and identities, they repeatedly direct attention towards the city as a fragile but evolving network of social relations.

It is significant that, in *Daydream*, the hotel function room is also inhabited by the members of a housing association, who have come together to celebrate the launch of their housing development. In the background, a poster displays an aspirational image of the development, which seems to bear the familiar, somewhat nostalgic, name of

¹ The exploration of time in *Daydream* evokes aspects of Raymond Williams’ influential theorisation of dominant, residual and emergent ‘structures of feeling’, as developed in *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977: 128-135.

² Fredric Jameson, “Historicism in *The Shining*”, *Signatures of the Visible*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992: 82-98.

Riverview. But the group are not simply the co-owners of a new property, instead this scene is concerned to articulate a much more complex set of bonds. Seated in a circle, they speak directly to the camera and express their commitment to each other and to the project. While the setting and tone of the exchange may suggest a form of therapy this group are linked primarily by a shared vision for the future and are engaged in the formation of a sense of place that is grounded in social interaction.³

This sense of place is produced partly through acts of remembering and ritualisation. In a subsequent scene, the camera follows one young couple from the housing association group as they visit the Riverview site, observing from a distance as they scatter the ashes of a child that they have lost. Civic monuments also play a role in the staging and restaging of personal histories, as evidenced by a scene in which a deaf woman revisits the public square where she was discovered as a baby. Accompanied by her own daughter, she walks across the square towards the place where she was found, and questions a witness to the event in the hope of establishing a connection to her past. An emphasis on the relationship between trauma and desire is also evident in a scene towards the end of *Daydream*, focusing on a young man who is connected to the world only by physical pain. In order to escape his reality he struggles to envisage a moment, perhaps invented, when he knew exactly what he wanted. He recalls walking towards the sea on a hot day, anticipating the pleasure of a refreshing swim. Significantly, it is the anticipation rather than the satisfaction of desire that remains most compelling for him.

This interweaving of compelling narratives of imagined and remembered experience creates a layered and highly complex sense of place and time, capturing a moment of anticipation as well as disorientation. It could be argued that *Daydream* also articulates a sense of expectation and hope with regard to filmmaking itself, and it is worth noting that Molloy and Lawlor are now working on a feature film, which will be staged across five cities. At the close of *Daydream*, the missing teenagers finally appear but this does not signal the resolution and closure of the narrative. Instead, the last words, spoken by mysterious girl who lives in the forest, suggest both a warning

³ For further exploration of this aspect of place see Marc Augé *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, translated by John Howe, London: Verso, 1995.

and a promise; “something very important is about to happen”. Evidently, this quest has only just begun.