



Kerry Tribe
Here and Elsewhere
2002
2-channel DVD projection, 10:30 minutes loop
Installation view, DHC/ART
Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay

Watching Audrey Think Here & Elsewhere

2002

by Leora Morinis

"If I said, 'Oh, back in the 1970's such-and-such happened, would you know what I meant, would you know what I meant by the 1970s?'"

"Yes."

"What do you see when you try to imagine the 1970s?"

"I don't see anything. It depends what you said. But just the 1970s in general, I can't see it, but I know there is the 1970s."

"What do you see if you try to imagine the 1970s?"

"I don't see anything."

This excerpt is part of a conversation from **Kerry Tribe's** two-channel video installation *Here & Elsewhere* (2002) on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The film is loosely based on Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville's television program *France/tour/detour/deux/enfants* (1978), a 12-part documentary that follows the lives of two children in France. I haven't seen this series (copyright complications have rendered it unavailable in the United States) and so I can't track the overlap or divergence, but the rhythms of cinéma vérité remain evident in *Here & Elsewhere*. Indeed, they prove crucial to the piece's power.

In Tribe's version, a person with a confident British baritone voice (Peter Wollen), asks pointedly existential questions from off-camera (*Do you have a singular existence? Does memory happen in the present?*), while on screen a ruddy-cheeked, sparkly-eyed ten-year-old responds in turn, somewhat wistfully, though with

complete concentration (she happens to be his daughter, Audrey). Described on paper and for those not familiar with Tribe's work, this piece could easily reek of schlock and literalism—a dull mix between an afternoon cable special and a beginner's guide to existentialism. For one thing, it circles around some very usual suspects: memory, forgetting, existence, loss, interpretation, material reality and finitude. Furthermore, it stars an adorable child!

But *Here & Elsewhere* avoids these pitfalls, delivering instead a captivating conversation that feels frank, poetic and unexpectedly fresh. What becomes clear very quickly is that the piece does not have a moralizing or illustrative imperative. And, in part, this is what makes it feel so distinct from the frequently staid and pedantic textures of Philosophy 101—despite their shared questions. Indeed, *Here & Elsewhere* does not provide, or aim for, airless theories based on premeditated thoughts or foregone conclusions. Instead, it depicts the experience of thinking itself—replete with the long pauses, bouts of enthusiasm, furrowed brows and doubt that seldom appear in theoretical texts, where, in most cases, certainty and firm footing comes at the expense of the corporeal outbursts and second thoughts.

In almost every instance, before Audrey Wollen responds to her father's questions, she hums and sighs, pursing her lips while she mulls over her answer, closing her eyes or looking off into the distance, and giggling faintly at some of the trickier questions. In each of these moments, it seems as though she's observing her own cognition—trying to figure out if memories come forward to meet her brain or if she travels back; if having singular existence can logically coincide with an ever shifting body, etc. The two-channels mirror these cognitive and conversational workings: when focused on Audrey, slight gaps and overlaps mar her image into fragments, and intercut throughout are moments of complete blackout and rambling scenes of vacant streets in LA. In these ways, Tribe integrates pauses and interruptions into the visual structure of the piece. More, as the present landscape of L.A. (the "Here") flits in and out of view, the Wollens' accents, one heavy, one faint, make manifest a receding "Elsewhere." These devices make for a picture of cognition as an incomplete, multi-sensorial process of fits and starts.

Significantly, in filming Audrey, Tribe doesn't fall prey to any patronizing, cutesy or heavily-glazed tropes. Both the camera and her father treat her with a degree of remove, which, coupled with her own composure, makes it so nothing about her seems particularly childlike. If anything, it is her rhythm—her willingness to pause—and her lack of hubris or cynicism that signals her youth. But if we want to call those traits childlike, then it doesn't bode well for the rest of us. Indeed, as I write this, I can't get out of my head a recent comment of Hal Foster's in the latest *Artforum*. Reviewing the September 11th show at PS1MoMA, but addressing the state of judgment more generally, he writes "*If Kant asked 'Is the work beautiful?' and Duchamp, 'is it art?' we tend to wonder, 'how does it affect me?' Where we once spoke of quality, as judged by comparison with great work of the past, and then about 'interest' and 'criticality,' which are more socially synchronic than artistically diachronic in emphasis, we now often look for pathos, which cannot really be tested objectively or, when experienced as trauma, communicated with others much at all. One person's punctum is another's yawn.*" (221).

He's right. Now more than ever, I read about the affectual capacity and subjectivity of a given work, without much in the way of helpful elucidation. But perhaps the trouble with all of these categories is that they posit that *we know what we are looking for* in the first place, rather than developing criteria *ex post facto*—based on what the work presents us, taken on its own terms. Granted, these tasks are largely impossible. We all come to art with our fists full of biases. Nonetheless, in *Here & Elsewhere*, judgment of the kind Foster has outlined feels largely beside the point. Indeed, Tribe presents not fully-formed ideas, but a call and response mode of thought-in-the-making—a reminder that thinking requires duration and an invitation to recognize moments of search and suspension. Not that this leaves us with a better criterion for judgment—it doesn't—but still, we've probably all had conversations flatline when talking to someone who knows all the answers or has foregone conclusions in mind; and watching Audrey think is a decidedly countervailing experience.

Leora Morinis is a writer and curator living in Upstate New York.

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