

(working title):

DISTANT DRUMS.

a detailed treatment .

MARION THERESA VERONICA URCH.

1988.

DISTANT DRUMS.

a lyrical documentary in installation form evoking
2nd generation Irish experience.

Probable length: 25mins.

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INTRODUCTION.

The question of identity for 2nd generation Irish people is a complex one. Unlike for example, people of African descent, our heritage is not clearly visible in the colour of our skin or in terms of patois or language. Whilst this means that we escape the aspects of racism which black people have to endure, it also means that our roots and heritage are often denied to us.

Often we have internalised a sentimental sense of Ireland culled from childhood stories and holidays 'home'. A nostalgia for rural Ireland and our parents feelings of Loss and exile become entangled with the stories of Irish suffering and British oppression told to us as we grew. Yet we have no language, accent or skin colour to make us visible either to Irish people or to other 2nd generation Irish people and often our parents are the first to point out to us that we are English.

We are often accused of being more Irish than the Irish; of knowing more about Ireland than our parents, of developing an Irish way of putting words together, of idealising and sentimentalising all things Irish; often with comic results.

If post-Imperialist society leaves no space for divergent cultures and racial identities within an apparent process of assimilation, then the sense of awareness in those it marginalises will become more acute. Respect for a diversity of cultures and an active questioning of society and its manifestations is likely to be the result.

The 'Troubles' have had a high profile this year in the British Press. Events have made it impossible to retain the distance between Britain and 'over there', the north of Ireland gets nearer and nearer. With the growing realisation that the Troubles can no longer be ignored, anti-Irish racism in the British press is becoming more apparent. The abuse our parents suffered during the IRA mainland bombing campaign in the 70's comes to mind, when simply to have an Irish accent equalled barbarian in the eyes of many British people. This year has served as a reminder of the ignorance that exists about the history of British oppression in Ireland and the refusal, reflected in the British press to accept either that there is a war going on or that historically Britain is responsible for that war.

YET as hostility towards the Irish grows, the second generation

increasingly acknowledges and celebrates their Irishness. Irish music and culture, gaelic and Irish dancing are all becoming very popular; evening classes in Irish History and Identity are oversubscribed and multiplying to feed demand. A newly well informed and vocal 2nd generation is now positively identifying as being Irish, rather than as formerly, English with parents who just happened to be Irish. Irish culture has very recently become the substance for a broad based popular sub culture - unthinkable a couple of years ago.

SYNOPSIS.

The video will address issues around cultural identity for 2nd generation Irish people in this country. It will attempt to reflect the tensions within this identification. Heightened awareness of 'Irishness', growing politicisation with the escalation of events since the Anglo-Irish agreement and resulting anti-Irish media coverage are paralleled by a relatively new celebration of Irish culture by the second generation.

Deliberately questioning the divisions too often set up between politics and psychology, documentaries and 'art', the form will be lyrical documentary. Here the lyrical and the the crass, the sentimental and the comic will all be treated equally. High Art and popular culture, the genres of the poetic and the documentary will all be utilised. The sense of tension of ideas and form and of new possibilities arising out of juxtaposition will be a constant and will operate at all levels.

The video will attempt to convey some of the feelings of internalised exile, the comic moments of overcompensation as well as the sense of celebration at being able to lay claim to such a rich and textured folk culture.

The video should be intimately involving, engaging the viewer emotionally as well as intellectually - it should touch people's hearts.

OUTLINE OF INSTALLATION.

5 monitors. (to be raised/form dependant on budget available.)
2 decks.
1 bench.
see drawn plan.

The installation will take the form of an empty railway station waiting room or the departure lounge of a Ferry Service.

A number of battered old suitcases will be scattered on the floor; autumn leaves are strewn across the floor as if they just blew in. Something has been left behind - a hat, an old umbrella, a photograph perhaps.

The five monitors are arranged in a line. The outer and central monitors running from one deck; the two inner monitors from another. The recurring images are of trains or views from trains. (See detailed Structural Outline for elaboration. Page). The frame of the train windows is echoed by the frame of the monitors.

The bench and the monitors are laid out at an angle against each other creating a sense of forced perspective.

The line of monitors are like a train; they tell the story of a journey.

The dominant element in the soundtrack is of announcements both from a train station and from the docks as the ferries come in from Ireland. Other voices and snatches of song and prayer emerge and recede like flashbacks. (See pages + , structural outline and appendix for detailed account.

DETAILED STRUCTURAL OUTLINE.

The structure of the video will be liturgical or song based - verse, chorus, refrain; so that the structure itself emerges out of the traditions which are the subject of the video (i.e., the Catholic Liturgy and Irish song and storytelling traditions.) The structure of the video will also be reflected and extended aurally.

THE VERSES.

The verses of the video will be carried by images of train journeys and of images of arrival and departure. Images from the Irish Community will be presented like glimpses from a train or as stopping or departure points. Images of the singing Irish, of Irish dance halls, political demonstrations with flute bands, Holloway Road with its Irish shops- the Emerald Estate Agent, the Shamrock Employment Agency, St. Patricks day celebrations, the drinking Irish, the Irish down on their luck, the working Irish- images from the fifties of nurses and navies.

The constant images of the train journey are used to represent the sense of transition, of being caught between two cultures as well as being a linking device for the different sites of identification and exclusion.

The journey echoes the real journey of the Irish to England looking for work as well as the journeys of their children in search of a sense of belonging.

The use of the train journey, of views from the train, of a girl departing, another arriving or awaiting an arrival, of images receding and others approaching will be echoed in archive material of Irish immigrants arriving here in the 30's and 50's.

Obvious images of the Irish will be combined with less obvious images of for example.., the photograph of the matchgirls, turn of the century engravings of Irish beggar children in Liverpool. (Apparently the basis of Heathcliffe in Wuthering Heights.)

The visual impression should be of constant movement, transition, transformation. The soundtrack with its fragments of verse-chorus-refrain extend the sense of journeying and layering. The central voice itself will shift between accents - between a Northern English accent, an Irish accent, a parody of an Irish accent and a BBC type accent.

THE CHORUS.

The chorus of the film will be the heads of four sisters of varying ages shot against detailed, wide shot, flattened out urban backgrounds. These shots should be reminiscent to pre-Renaissance paintings; the backgrounds lacking perspective, foregrounded, colour softened to the colours of landscape.; the faces will have the aspects of Icons, of Saints. The urban backgrounds will be shot like rural landscapes in terms of composition and colour, the landscape being evoked that of childhood holidays to Ireland. The faces should be alternately open, stoic, defiant, inquiring, patient, challenging and questioning.

THE REFRAIN.

The refrain will be a coming together, graphic images of solidarity in an urban setting - close ups of feet Irish dancing, of arms linking shot (in high contrast) against a decayed industrial background. So that 'verses' which verge on the desolate or melancholy are pulled back by images of strength and affirmation.

'Cinematic' images (verse and chorus) are intercut with the kind of close ups graphic images more usually associated with video.

The sense of splitting and dislocation which is a central theme may be extended and accentuated by the use of appropriate video editing techniques.

WORKING METHODS.

As DISTANT DRUMS could be seen as 'quasi' or 'lyrical' documentary there is obviously no shooting script as such. It is my intention to use the method of working with biographical material which developed when I made "Speak English Cathleen" (shot in Ireland in 1982 it dealt in storytelling form with the shifting sense of identity for the Irish immigrant to this country.)

As follows..

1. a) to draw up a detailed basis for inquiry- a synopsis.
 - b) Using the synopsis to build a framework or structure for the collection of images.
2. a) To interview 2nd generation Irish people.
 - b) shoot material on location in a fairly intuitive and open way using synopsis as a guide.

c) looking and listening very carefully to what 2nd generation Irish people say and how they say it, always taking notes.

d) Research archive material.

3. To look at assembled footage for emerging themes and narrative structures then to write script based on footage, notes, observations, re-emerging memories etc..
4. Having written script and finalised structure to then shoot any additional framing material to make the structure both more solid and reverberating.
5. Edit..

When working with this kind of material, to both have a structure and framework and to allow it to be loose enough to allow chance, intuition and coincidence to play a part is, I think, the most fertile balancing act. Because it is the chance moments, fully utilised that are most likely to intimately engage and emotionally involve the viewer.

7.
APPENDIX.

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE SOUNDTRACK.

Fragments from the following may be used as instruments or refrains within the soundtrack though they will not form the basis of it.

a section from the Witches speech in Macbeth.

I'll give thee a wind.
Tha'art kind.
And I another.
I myself have all the other;
and the very ports they blow
All the quarter that they know..

The Wayward sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and Land,
Thus do go about, about;
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
and thrice again to make up nine.

By the pricking of my thumbs,
something brighter comes-
open, locks
Whoever knocks.

(Currently looking for verses about the Morrigan- the Irish equivalent of the three fates.)

The following are fragments of dialogue which will either be used in fragments entwined through song or prayer or used as the basis for a narrative. If fragments use a number of different accents sometimes shifting in between.

What a shame that none of you are making signs of marrying or having children.

Its not so bad for the time of year...

If you lived here, you'd be married with three kids by now, you know that don't you..

People in London, they don't know anything about up here, Jane went around kicking cars when they were in London, we couldn't believe the wealth.

When are you coming home, come home soon, we miss you..

I hope you're keeping well anyway, we miss you, we pray for you.. Its getting warmer ow thank God.

I'm going to be a teacher when I leave school.

Just give yourself a few little surprises, like something at night to make the morning more pleasant, but we have the spring and the summer to look forward to.., thank God..,

.. and I do wish everyone wasn't so far apart.

I'll take you home again Kathleen. (traditional song.)

I'll take you home again, Kathleen,
Across the ocean wild and wide,
To where your heart has ever been
Since you were once my bonnie Bri
The roses all have left your cheeks
I've watched them fade away and die;
Your voice is sad whene'er you speak,
And tears bedim your loving eyes.

Oh! I will take you back, Kathleen,
To where your heart will feel no pain,
and when the fields are fresh and green,
I'll take you to your home again!

(1st verse only included here.)

Distant Drums- Jim Reeves.

(both popular songs which express in sentimental terms the sense of

The Black Velvet Band- The Dubliners. exile.)

8.
Salve Regina. (Catholic prayer dating from the 10th century.)

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy;
Hail Our life, our sweetness and our hope!
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
To thee do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate,
Thy merciful eyes towards us.

And after this our exile, show unto us,
The blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.
Pray for us.
O Holy Mother of God.
That we may be made worthy of
The promises of Christ.