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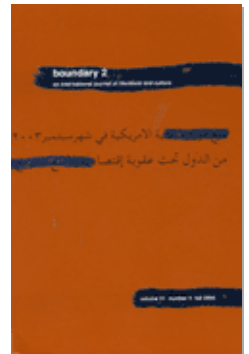
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Sighting an Irish Avant-Garde in the Intersection of Local and International Film Cultures

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Sighting an Irish Avant-Garde in the Intersection of Local and International Film Cultures

Maeve Connolly

Introduction

Vivienne Dick is an Irish filmmaker who has yet to acquire a place within Irish film history, despite international critical recognition for films such as *Guérillière Talks* (1978), *She Had Her Gun All Ready* (1978), *Beauty Becomes the Beast* (1979), *Liberty's Booty* (1980), and *Visibility Moderate: A Tourist Film* (1981). Born in Dublin, she moved to the United States on leaving university in the 1970s and first came to prominence as a member of New York's "No Wave" or "Punk" movement. Since then, her work primarily

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has been theorized within the American film avant-garde.¹ It was the subject of two programs at the Pacific Cinemathèque, San Francisco (1981, 1988), and *Visibility Moderate* was included in the 1983 Whitney Biennial. Dick's Super 8 films also featured in two major American film retrospectives, "No Wave Cinema 1978–87," at the Whitney (1996), and "Big as Life: An American History of 8mm Films," at the Museum of Modern Art (1999). Her films are characterized by a fascination with American culture and are defined by appropriation from Hollywood, television, and pop music. This exploration of "Americana" through myth and popular iconography is, however, structured by Dick's perspective as an outsider, and the investigations of incest and prostitution in *Beauty Becomes the Beast* and *Liberty's Booty* are informed by a critique of Irish society. The Irish subtext becomes overt in *Liberty's Booty*, through direct references to the Irish economy and Catholicism. *Visibility Moderate*, the last of the New York films, is set partly in Ireland, and it parodies an American tourist's home movie. Dick returned to Ireland in 1982 before relocating in 1985 to London, where she joined the London Filmmakers' Co-operative. During this period, she completed *Like Dawn to Dust* (1983), *Rothach* (1985), and *Images/Ireland* (1988), which explore representations of the Irish landscape in greater complexity.

Dick's work parallels that of her Irish contemporaries, Joe Comerford, Thaddeus O'Sullivan, Bob Quinn, and Pat Murphy.² Because of her status as an outsider, however, Dick is not usually discussed as an Irish filmmaker, and her films are largely absent from published histories of Irish film.³ The Irish Film Archive did not acquire copies of her films until, in 1999, the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum co-funded the production of new prints from the deteriorating Super 8 originals. Within Irish cinema studies, the period from the late 1970s to the early 1980s has been historicized in terms of the emergence of an indigenous industry. This serves to reinforce the notion that avant-garde practice constitutes a transient pro-

1. J. Hoberman, "A Context for Vivienne Dick," *October* 20 (Spring 1982): 102–6; "No Wavelength: The Para-punk Underground," *Village Voice*, May 21, 1979, 42–43; "Notes on Three Films by Vivienne Dick," *Millennium Film Journal* 6 (Spring 1980): 90–94. Hereafter, "A Context for Vivienne Dick" is cited parenthetically as CVD.

2. Luke Gibbons, "The Politics of Silence: *Anne Devlin*, Women, and Irish Cinema," in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 107–16; and Jerry White, "The Films of Bob Quinn: Towards an Irish Third Cinema," *Cine Action: Radical Film Criticism and Theory* 37 (1995): 3–10.

3. An exception to this is Christine Clear, "Vivienne Dick—Getting Stuck in . . .," *Film Base News* 14 (September–October 1989): 10–14.

cess of “experimentation”⁴ rather than a critique of the industrial apparatus and the institutions and structures of production and reception. This period was also marked by the emergence of a critical film culture⁵ associated with developments in film policy. It also witnessed a “new wave” in independent Irish filmmaking, supported by the Production Board of the British Film Institute and, subsequently, by the workshop program developed by Channel Four Television. These developments in Irish film culture should be situated in relation to contemporary theories of avant-garde practice. The exploration of identity and landscape in Irish filmmaking was mirrored by a new concern, in film theory, with sociohistorical formations and questions of reception. Dick’s work, which transects the independent film cultures of New York, Dublin, and London, occupies this intersection between local and international avant-gardes.

The Avant-Garde and No Wave Cinema

In the late 1970s, New York-based filmmakers, including Vivienne Dick, Beth and Scott B, Eric Mitchell, and Kiki Smith, created low-budget film narratives, appropriating the iconography of Hollywood B-movies and incorporating the sound track of retro pop and contemporary punk music. Many of them worked exclusively in the inexpensive and accessible medium of Super 8, taking advantage of its new capacity to record sound. Dick’s first film, *Guérillière Talks*, emerged from this milieu. It is composed of a series of unedited monologues, each the length of a Super 8 roll, interspersed with frames of leader strip. In many respects, it recalls the “structural-materialist” aesthetic associated with filmmakers Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice. But *Guérillière Talks* is less concerned with the material properties of film than with an exploration of performance and identity through the voices of its characters.

This tension between performativity and the discourse of documentary is explored further in *She Had Her Gun All Ready*, a narrative of obsessive desire played out between two women, the androgynous Pat Place and the femme fatale Lydia Lunch, set within iconic New York settings, from

4. Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 95–113.

5. Contemporary accounts are more explicitly concerned with distribution and exhibition. Kevin Rockett, “Constructing a Film Culture: Ireland,” *Screen Education* 27 (Summer 1978): 23–33.

East Village diners to Coney Island. *She Had Her Gun* is fascinated by the dark side of American culture and incorporates fleeting references to serial killers and stalkers, echoing contemporary film narratives such as *Taxi Driver*. *Beauty Becomes the Beast*, her next film, focuses on a teenage-runaway, again played by Lydia Lunch. It explores the theme of violence against women, introduced in *She Had Her Gun All Ready*, but it takes the form of a documentary, disrupted by elements of Hollywood melodrama. The film is interspersed with flashback sequences that suggest incest, but the passage of time is indicated through music and pop culture references rather than by elaborate costuming or period detail. Lunch's on-screen performance as child and teenager, combined with the sound track (by her band *Teenage Jesus and the Jerks*), continually disrupts processes of narrative identification. Dick's engagement with incest, violence, and exploitation, through Hollywood melodrama, pop songs, advertising, fashion, and trash television, identifies her work as a feminist exploration of popular culture.⁶ Her exploration of performance and the theme of "masquerade" offer parallels with feminist theory and practice. But her work has also been read as a critique of feminist orthodoxy, a "brilliant antidote to Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, the almost religious canonization of the cultural stars of feminism."⁷

In April 1981, *She Had Her Gun All Ready* was screened, together with such feminist works as *Film About a Woman Who . . .* (Yvonne Rainer, 1974) and *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1977), during a five-day symposium on issues on contemporary film organized by the Collective for Living Cinema in 1981. The collective promoted a more critical context for avant-garde film, informed by developments in British film theory, and the symposium included presentations on Third World and minority film practice and the representation of women.

If the feminist film and art practices of the 1970s were informed by a critique of art institutions and canons, the No Wave movement revolutionized the institutions of American avant-garde film. The established circuit, associated with P. Adams Sitney and "structural film," encompassed Anthology Archives, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum. No Wave filmmakers, however, initially addressed new audiences through screenings in clubs and bars, often showing their films between performances by punk bands. The movement was supported by the emergence

6. Amy Taubin, "The Other Cinema: Films by Vivienne Dick," *Soho Weekly News*, June 7, 1979, 94.

7. Karen Kay, "New York Super-8: Edinburgh Event, 1980," *Idiolects* 9–10 (Winter 1980/81): 9.

of temporary exhibition venues, including the New Cinema (a storefront cinema in St. Mark's Place, reminiscent of the Nickelodeon era) and new production cooperatives such as Millennium and the Collective for Living Cinema. The No Wave movement coincided with a new engagement with the politics of place among filmmakers, punk bands, and artists. By the late 1970s, rising property prices in New York's Lower East Side had heightened awareness of the relationship between art practice and gentrification.⁸ Dick was influenced by the activist work of CoLab, who staged impromptu, and ephemeral, protest events and exhibitions throughout New York.⁹

No Wave film—Dick's, in particular—generated considerable critical interest, despite its “unequivocal rejection of structural filmmaking and academic film discourse” (CVD, 104). The critic J. Hoberman located her work within the marginalized American 8mm avant-garde, which encompassed George and Mike Kuchar, Bob Branaman, and (briefly) Stan Brakhage. Hoberman theorized four traditions specific to narrow-gauge film, including the home movie or diary (explored by Brakhage and Ken Jacobs), the urban documentary (primarily associated with Bob Branaman), the “ironic spectacle” (the Kuchar brothers, Eric Mitchell, and Beth and Scott B), and “self-dramatization” (Vito Acconci) (CVD, 104).

These traditions are by no means exclusive. Dick's New York-based films explore elements of spectacle, documentary, self-dramatization, and the home movie. The “home movie” quality is suggested by the repeated appearance of a familiar cast of characters from the No Wave scene, most notably photographer Nan Goldin and performers Pat Place and Lydia Lunch. Hoberman describes Dick as the “quintessential narrow-gauge filmmaker of the second wave” (CVD, 104). But her exploration of American culture in *Liberty's Booty* is marked by the perspective of an “outsider.”

Like *Beauty Becomes the Beast*, *Liberty's Booty* deals with various forms of exploitation. It interweaves interviews with women working in a New York brothel with a series of staged and animated sequences, and is resolutely focused on the everyday, calling attention to the domestic details of its characters' lives despite the apparent sensationalism of its subject matter. The analysis of gender relations is informed by a broader critique of capitalism, which contrasts various forms of consumption and suggests an analogy between the brothel and McDonald's restaurants. In order to make this point,

8. Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, “The Fine Art of Gentrification,” *October* 31 (1984): 91–111.

9. Stephen Barth, “Not Your Ordinary Dick: An Afternoon with Vivienne Dick,” *East Village Eye* (March 1980): 10.

Dick references a strike by McDonald's workers in Ireland, which was broken by "heavies from America." "Ireland" is initially represented simply by images of rolling fields, viewed from above, and by a tourist postcard of Irish dancing. In the closing shots, however, news coverage of Pope John Paul II, identified by the newscaster as "the superstar Pope," complicates any easy parallel between Irish and American society.

Liberty's Booty inaugurates a concern with Irish society and with the representation of Irish landscape, which dominated Dick's work throughout the 1980s. The investigation of gender relations in *She Had Her Gun All Ready*, *Beauty Becomes the Beast*, and *Liberty's Booty* suggests an engagement with the specificity of gender in Irish society. The two earlier films are ostensibly concerned with interpersonal relationships and are initially set within domestic environments. But in each of these narratives, the action spills over into public spaces such as busy New York diners or the Coney Island fairground. Finally, in *Liberty's Booty*, a private apartment is revealed as a brothel.

Luke Gibbons has explored the "blurring of boundaries between the personal and the political" within Irish culture and history. He suggests that, while the experience of colonization conceptualizes the nation as a literal "body politic," an "alternative 'feminized' public sphere (imagined as the nation)" can turn the colonial stereotype against itself and provide a critique of the patriarchal state.¹⁰ The various mythic tropes through which the nation has been imagined provide the focus of Dick's later films. Before addressing this aspect of her work, however, the wider parallels between the American and Irish contexts of production and reception during the late 1970s should be explored.

Irish Film and the Rise of Independent Production and Distribution

No Wave emerged within an independent American film culture, which had thrived since the postwar period. By the late 1960s, the co-op model of production and distribution, associated with the American New Cinema, had also spread to Britain. Co-ops were part of a complex of independent practices, extending beyond abstraction or structuralism, that challenged Hollywood during this period of social and economic change.¹¹ Mar-

10. Gibbons, *Transformations*, 21.

11. David James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

garet Dickinson describes the London Film-Makers' Co-operative, formed in 1966, as a "direct spin-off from the New York Film-Maker's Co-operative" and notes that "most of its members were influenced by the American underground and American New Cinema."¹²

Within the Irish context, structures for independent production and distribution developed at a different pace. Ireland lacked an industrial infrastructure, and there was little support for indigenous production during the 1950s and 1960s, as state policy focused on promoting Ireland as a picturesque location for international productions.¹³ Ireland's proximity to Britain limited indigenous filmmaking: Irish producers were ineligible for support from the Irish Film Finance Corporation unless they could guarantee international distribution, and Irish technicians were excluded from the state-funded Ardmore Studios, so that it could take advantage of Britain's Eady Fund.¹⁴ Pressure from Irish filmmakers, however, combined with a new emphasis on film as a medium for cultural promotion, transformed these policies. The state funded promotional films through agencies such as Bord Fáilte (the Irish Tourist Board), Aer Lingus, and the Industrial Development Authority.¹⁵ Although they were intended to promote indigenous industry, these films had to be commissioned from foreign companies, because distributors such as Rank and Pathé dominated international markets.¹⁶ These policies prompted criticism from the Irish-language body Gael-Linn, who argued that the state should instead take its lead from the Griersonian model employed by the Film Board of Canada "by side-stepping the propaganda issue altogether."¹⁷ Filmmaker Louis Marcus also suggested that the state should support "prestige" documentaries, such as Patrick Carey's *Yeats Country* (1965), which could be shown on nontheatrical circuits and

12. Margaret Dickinson, "Confrontation and Community (1966–74)," in *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945–90*, ed. Margaret Dickinson (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 41; and Jim Pines, "Left Film Distribution," *Screen* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1972/73): 116–26.

13. Kevin Rockett, "An Irish Film Studio," in *Cinema and Ireland*, by Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill (London: Routledge, 1988), 95–126.

14. The Eady Fund was a statutory levy on cinema seats, distributed among British producers in proportion to their success at the box office.

15. Stephanie Rains, "Home from Home: Diasporic Images of Ireland in Film and Tourism," in *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Study*, ed. Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor (Clevedon, England: Channel View Publications, 2003), 196–241.

16. Kevin Rockett, "Documentaries," in *Cinema and Ireland*, 84–85.

17. Gael-Linn, "Memorandum to the Department of External Affairs on the Production of a 35mm Film on Ireland for Distribution Mainly Abroad," June 9, 1961, p. 6, Irish Film Archive Distribution files. For further details on Gael-Linn, see Rockett, "Documentaries," in *Cinema and Ireland*, 86–91.

foreign television stations.¹⁸ Carey's film, a lyrical documentary combining spectacular landscape photography with music and poetry, won the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival and was also nominated for an Oscar. It circulated widely in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and Japan, as well as in Britain and Ireland. It also featured prominently in the Toronto Film Festival in 1970, alongside such Irish-themed international avant-garde films as Mary Ellen Bute's *Passages from Finnegans Wake* (1965).

To support his call for a "quality" cinema, Marcus emphasized the boom in art-house exhibition, particularly in the United States, and he highlighted a "quality audience": "For among this audience will be found not only the foreign administrators and businessmen whose good opinion of us will be vital in the competitive years ahead, but also the men who run the mass-media of their various countries, and thus create the popular image which Ireland enjoys in most countries."¹⁹ This argument would appear to have influenced Irish cultural policy. The Arts Act of 1973 for the first time recognized cinema as an art form (at the behest of Mary Robinson, future president of Ireland). The Arts Council subsequently established a script award as a means of funding indigenous production and also began to support existing independent structures for the distribution and exhibition of art-house and independent film.

Critical Contexts: Irish Film Clubs

In the United States, avant-garde filmmakers could address their films to local, national, and international audiences through a network of clubs formed during the postwar period. No Wave filmmakers could tour throughout the United States, supported by national organizations such as the American Federation of the Arts. While no comparable circuit existed in Ireland, film societies had been established intermittently from the 1930s on as an alternative to regional commercial cinemas, where there was "no opportunity whatsoever" to see foreign-language films or U.S. and UK independent productions.²⁰ In 1976, the Federation of Irish Film Societies (FIFS) was formed, with funding from the Irish Arts Council, to provide a link to independent British distributors and to coordinate programming for a national

18. Louis Marcus, *The Irish Film Industry* (Dublin: Irish Film Society, 1967), 28.

19. Marcus, *Irish Film Industry*, 29.

20. There were twenty-three societies listed in "Film Diary," *Film Directions* 1, no. 4 (1978): 23.

network. The FIFS had an office in the Project Arts Centre, then the site of the most innovative theatrical and arts activity in Ireland, and it employed a full-time administrator, who organized bookings on behalf of each member society. There were no selection criteria with regard to distributors, but in practice, the FIFS dealt primarily with independent British distributors, such as Contemporary Cinema and The Other Cinema, which were established as a consequence of the politicization of British film culture in the late 1960s.²¹

Although its programming and policy objectives remained implicit rather than explicit, the federation supported the circulation of Irish-themed international work, such as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Joseph Strick, 1977) and *Passages from Finnegans Wake*. It also provided a platform for Irish filmmakers, distributing Carey's *Yeats Country* and *Errigal* (1968), and, later, Bob Quinn's *Caoineadh Airt Ua Laoghaire* (1975) and Joe Comerford's *Down the Corner* (1978). The federation also organized national viewing sessions (weekend screenings with information meetings) in towns across the country. These contributed to the unexpected popularity of some explicitly political films, such as *Harlan County USA* (Barbara Kopple, 1976), a documentary on the Kentucky coal miners' strike in 1973.

There were no unions or workers' groups within the FIFS, and the filmmaker Bob Quinn actually dismissed film society members as "aesthetes," emphasizing the need to reach "people that might benefit from seeing independent films."²² Quinn's critique echoed the position taken by journalist Ciaran Carty, who noted that many films (specifically foreign-language features) were "the exclusive pleasure of a small minority of privileged members of the Irish Film Theatre, Project and the Federation of Film Societies."²³ There were significant differences between these clubs, however, in terms of programming. While the Irish Film Theatre, the first art-house cinema in Ireland (1977–84), and the FIFS focused on "mainstream art-house film,"²⁴ the Project Cinema Club (1976–80), based in the Project Arts Centre, was informed by an explicitly political, and pedagogical, agenda.

21. Sylvia Harvey, "The Other Cinema—A History: Part 1, 1970–77," *Screen* 26, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1985): 40–57; and "The Other Cinema: Part 2, 1978–1985," *Screen* 27, no. 2 (Mar./Apr. 1986): 80–96.

22. Michael Open interviewed Bob Quinn, Joe Comerford, and Cathal Black in "Standard Deviations: Distribution for Independent Films," *Film Directions* 2, no. 5 (Spring 1979): 14–16.

23. Ciaran Carty, "Public Barred from the Year's Best Movies!" *Sunday Independent*, December 31, 1978, 31.

24. Michael Dwyer, email interview, June 5, 2002.

From the start, its film policy, developed by Kevin Rockett in 1976, stressed a rigorous theoretical approach. It advocated a critical engagement with women's cinema, documentary history, silent cinema, and an analysis of the interconnections among film, theater, and the visual arts. Project Arts Centre was a multipurpose arts space, incorporating visual art, theater, music, as well as film, and prefiguring the later involvement of arts centers and galleries in film exhibition. It brought together in one space figures who later played a prominent role in Irish theater and cinema, including the directors Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan, and the actors Liam Neeson and Gabriel Byrne. The Project Cinema Club was just one element in Rockett's highly ambitious plan to revolutionize Irish film culture. This plan initially encompassed the development of a 16mm production workshop, along the lines of the London Film-Makers' Co-operative, but, given the level of available funding, the development of production facilities ultimately proved problematic.

The Project Cinema Club programs for 1978–79 contained a high proportion of feminist work, including *Riddles of the Sphinx* (Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1977), *Lives of Performers* (Yvonne Rainer, 1972), and *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975), as well as such classics as *Dance, Girl, Dance* (Dorothy Arzner, 1940). It also introduced Irish audiences to structural-materialist work and European avant-garde traditions, screening films by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, and Jean-Luc Godard, as well as Peter Gidal, Malcolm le Grice, and Michael Snow. The Other Cinema supplied much of this material, but many films were also provided, free of charge, by embassies. The Project Cinema Club received little support from commercial distributors, however, and screenings of Hollywood films proved problematic. The exhibition program developed in response to debates in *Screen*, the leading film theory journal, and it encompassed thematic seasons, such as “Women and Film” (1977, 1978), “The Two Avant-Gardes” (1978), and “Versions of History” (April 1978), with lectures by *Screen* theorists such as Laura Mulvey.²⁵ In addition to showcasing international theory and practice, the exhibition programs were also informed by developments in Irish filmmaking.

The Project Cinema Club promoted the pioneering films of contemporary Irish cinema, such as Quinn's *Caoineadh Airt Ua Laoghaire* and *Going, Going, Gone* (Sinn Féin—The Worker's Party, 1976), scheduling them alongside such international oppositional and political films as *The Miners' Film* (Cinema Action, 1975), *Quemada!* (Pontecorvo, 1969), and

25. Ray Comiskey, “The Female Eye,” *Irish Times*, May 22, 1978, 10.

Kuhle Wampe (Stan Dudow/Bertolt Brecht, 1932). It hosted the “Film and Ireland” season in 1978, the first of its kind in Ireland, and it challenged the Cork Film Festival, which had largely ignored the work of Irish filmmakers.²⁶ By the end of the 1970s, the Project Cinema Club was under pressure to maintain its audiences, both because of increased competition from the Irish Film Theatre and internal funding crises. Although a relatively short-lived venture, it served as a focal point for developments in Irish filmmaking. The “Film and Ireland” season, which focused on indigenous filmmaking and documentary, also formed the basis for many subsequent festivals of Irish film, in London, Barcelona, and San Francisco, under Rockett’s direction.

Irish Film and the Production Board of the British Film Institute

By the mid-1970s, Irish filmmakers looked beyond the state for funding opportunities. Bob Quinn established an independent production company (Cine Gael) following his departure from Irish television in the late 1960s in protest against restrictive policies. His first independent feature, *Caoineadh Airt Ua Laoghaire* (1975), was financed by the left-wing Sinn Féin—The Worker’s Party, during a period of ideological change.²⁷ Other important Irish films, including *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (Thaddeus O’Sullivan, 1978), *Maeve* (Pat Murphy, 1982), and *Down the Corner and Traveller* (Joe Comerford, 1978 and 1981, respectively), received funding from the Production Board of the British Film Institute.

The British Film Institute’s overt support for Irish filmmaking can be explained in various ways. Irish filmmaker Peter Lennon, director of *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968), became a member of the Production Board during the 1970s. His film, photographed by Raoul Coutard (Godard’s regular camera man), is a forceful indictment of Irish media and society, and, despite international critical acclaim, it was censored in Ireland. Irish politics also provided a focal point for British independent film culture of the early seventies: the board funded two documentaries on the civil rights protests in Derry, *Ireland: Behind the Wire* (Berwick Street Film Co-op, 1973) and *People of Ireland!* (Cinema Action, 1973). The Production Board had no

26. Michael Dwyer, “The Reel News,” *In Dublin* 158 (July 1982): 9.

27. Based around an eighteenth-century Irish lament, the story of a Catholic nobleman’s resistance to the Penal Laws, *Caoineadh* explores the role of narrative in the construction of history and nationalism. Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000): 131–33.

explicit policy in relation to funding, and each film was simply assessed on its merits. Formerly known as the Experimental Film Fund, the board had been established to support filmmaking outside the dominant feature and documentary industries and to provide “a passport” into these same industries.²⁸ By 1978, it was in receipt of £90,000 per year from the British Arts Council for the production and distribution of film, but this level of funding was regarded as “drastically inadequate.”²⁹ In 1976, BFI had supported a theatrical venture, a cinema in London’s West End to be run by independent distributors. In addition to providing an outlet for Production Board films, the cinema was intended to develop new audiences and generate press coverage for features prior to regional, nontheatrical release. The cinema collapsed after only fifteen months, partly due to insufficient capital.

In 1976, John Ellis critiqued these policies in an article for *Screen*.³⁰ He suggested that the Production Board was more at ease with “openly revolutionary content,” as exemplified by *Ireland: Behind the Wire*, than with a “politicization of form.”³¹ The Production Board’s films were poorly distributed and were simply “abandoned, thrown onto the market.”³² This critique sparked a wider debate concerning the role of state agencies and independent structures of distribution, reception, and production. In 1976, Ellis joined the Production Board, and, by 1978, its policies were marked by a fresh emphasis on theoretical debates, in relation to realism and the avant-garde.³³ The new wave of Irish filmmaking coincided with these developments. Like the work of Yvonne Rainer (whose *Journeys from Berlin* was funded by the Board in 1979), *Down the Corner*, *Traveller*, *Maeve*, and *On a Paving Stone Mounted* are all defined by a politicization of form and content. They explore narrative genre and convention within specific sociohistorical formations, suggesting a departure from both the “realisms” of “classical” cinema and documentary, and the modernism of the structural-materialist tradition.

28. Julian Petley, *BFI Distribution Catalogue* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), 134.

29. This funding was supplemented by a grant of £30,000 from the Eady Fund. Peter Sainsbury, “Funding Bodies and Funding Procedures in Relation to Independent Filmmaking,” in *BFI Production Board*, ed. Alan Lovell (London: British Film Institute, 1976), 6.

30. John Ellis, “Production Board Policies,” *Screen* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1976/77): 9–23.

31. Ellis argues that these films received funds because they provided the board with an opportunity to demonstrate its “liberalism.” See Ellis, “Production Board Policies,” 18–19.

32. Ellis, “Production Board Policies,” 13.

33. Petley, *BFI Distribution Catalogue*.

Irish Film and Theories of the Avant-Garde

In their analysis of film theory, Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake identify a theoretical shift away from an opposition between realism and modernism and toward the definition of a new avant-garde. After 1968, critical attention focused on the avant-garde movements of the interwar period and on the work of Brecht, in particular, “because of the political urgency of his work, and because of his conception of art as intervention.”³⁴ The alignment of Brechtian practice with French poststructuralism emphasized the revolutionary role of avant-garde art and the moment of the text’s reception. Peter Wollen’s “The Two Avant-Gardes,”³⁵ one of the key analyses of this period, distinguished between the North American Co-operative movement and a more political avant-garde, centered around the work of Godard and Straub and Huillet, and indebted to the work of Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein. Wollen subsequently redefined this model to distinguish between a modernism “concerned with reflexiveness” and an avant-garde “concerned with semiotic expansion.”³⁶

Paul Willemen reevaluated this distinction between modernism and the avant-garde, critiquing modernism’s appropriation of avant-garde techniques as medium-specificity. He theorized “an avant-garde for the 80s,”³⁷ in which the avant-garde was defined through reference to the sociohistorical conjuncture within which it was sited. This exploration of historical and social formations was already evident in the analyses of “Brechtian practice” in British independent film, developed by Willemen and by Claire Johnston and Sylvia Harvey.³⁸ Willemen’s theorization was also directly informed by Johnston’s 1982 article on the landmark Irish film *Maeve* and the “new wave”

34. Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, “The Avant-Garde,” in *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 186.

35. Peter Wollen, “The Two Avant-Gardes,” *Studio International* 190, no. 978 (Nov.–Dec. 1975): 171–75.

36. Lapsley and Westlake, “The Avant-Garde,” 191.

37. Paul Willemen draws heavily on Johnston’s work in “An Avant-Garde for the Eighties,” *Framework* 24 (1984): 53–73. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as AE. An extended version, “An Avant-Garde for the ’90s,” was included in Willemen, *Looks and Fric-tions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London and Bloomington: BFI and Indiana University Press, 1994), 141–61.

38. Sylvia Harvey, “Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties,” *Screen* 23, no. 1 (May/June 1982): 45–59; Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, “Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film in Britain,” *Screen* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1975–76): 101–18; and Claire Johnston, “So That You Can Live: Popular Memory,” *Framework* 19 (1982): 12–14.

of Irish filmmaking represented by O'Sullivan and Quinn.³⁹ In her analysis of *Maeve*, Johnston focuses on shifting conceptions of gender, class, and national identity, and highlights the radicalism of certain literary elements within Irish culture. Most significantly, for a theory of the avant-garde, she explores the representation of landscape in *Maeve*. In order to construct "an imaginary *for* women," the film subverts the status of landscape as either "male domain . . . the central metaphor for generations of republican men" or as "the repository of a 'Celtic' truth which lies beyond history and politics."⁴⁰ This process involved a reconfiguration of both narrative and setting.

In "An Avant-Garde for the 80s," Willemen argues that this contemporary avant-garde (encompassing films as diverse as Godard's *Passion*, Chantal Akerman's *Toute une nuit*, and Mulvey and Wollen's *Crystal Gazing*) represents "subjectivity as one, and only one, not necessarily important process within a situation over-determined by the forces that shape social existence" (AE, 68). He foregrounds the mobilization of landscape "as a layered set of discourses, as a text in its own right," in both *Maeve* and Cinema Action's 1981 Welsh film *So That You Can Live* (AE, 53). This contrasts with conventional representations of landscape, where "a tourist's point of view is adopted as opposed to the point of view of those whose history is traced in [the landscape], or for whom the land is a crucial element in the relations of production that govern their lives. The tourist sees in the landscape only mirrors or projections of his/her own phantasms" (AE, 69). The new avant-garde is characterized by a double strategy, in terms of diegetic setting (location, decor) and narrative. While the location is mobilized as a text, the narrative is split between story and "generic setting," with genre understood in terms of "the inscription into the narration of a history of discursive practices" (AE, 70–71). Dick's films, like those of Comerford or Murphy, are characterized by this investigation of generic setting; the landscape mobilized in Dick's No Wave films incorporates elements of Ireland and America.

Hollywood and the Irish Imaginary

No Wave filmmaking borrows heavily from Hollywood as well as from advertising, television, and pop music, and is also characterized by a popu-

39. Claire Johnston, "Maeve," *Screen* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 54–71.

40. Johnston, "Maeve," 59.

list mode of address, recalling the American underground cinemas of the sixties. For this reason, J. Hoberman reads the No Wave movement as a postmodernist repetition, comparable to Hollywood genre pastiches such as *American Graffiti*, *Star Wars*, and *Body Heat*.⁴¹ Hoberman is primarily concerned to situate the No Wave in relation to a specifically American avant-garde tradition, encompassing both the “authentically modernist” work of structural filmmakers such as Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton⁴² and the “postmodernism” of underground cinema.

Despite Hoberman’s emphasis on a definitively national avant-garde tradition, however, Hollywood’s influence extended beyond the American avant-garde. Classical Hollywood, encountered in the cinema or in television reruns, served as a shared reference point in successive European and American No Waves since the 1960s.⁴³ Miriam Hansen, in exploring the relationship between classical Hollywood and the avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s,⁴⁴ theorizes classical cinema as a form of vernacular modernism, an aesthetic idiom encompassing elements of the American quotidian, which mediated competing cultural discourses on modernity and modernization (MPS, 333–34). She notes that Hollywood film appealed to both “avant-garde artists and intellectuals in the USA and the modernizing capitals of the world”:⁴⁵ Soviet cinema, in particular, was characterized by a fascination with Hollywood’s “lower genres,” such as the detective serial or slapstick comedy (MPS, 334). The “Americanism” of classical cinema intensified its appeal for European avant-gardes, but, equally, Mulvey’s account calls attention to the particular cultural associations of “Americanism” within different social and political formations.

Within the Irish context, a familiarity with American modernity predated Hollywood. Mass emigration to America contributed to the “disin-

41. J. Hoberman, “After Avant-Garde Film,” in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 68–69.

42. Hoberman, “After Avant-Garde Film,” 64.

43. Laura Mulvey, “New Wave Interchanges: *Celine and Julie* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*,” in *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, and National Identity, 1945–95*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steven Ricci (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 119–28.

44. Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses,” in *Re-inventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 332–50. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as MPS. My reading of Hansen’s text is informed by Dudley Andrew’s “Dialects and Dialectics of Cinema in the World” (paper presented at the Keough–Notre Dame Centre’s Irish Seminar, Dublin, July 5, 2002).

45. Joyce’s appreciation for cinema extended to his involvement in the management of Dublin’s Volta, an episode chronicled in Pat Murphy’s film *Nora* (2000).

tegration and fragmentation” of Irish society, accentuating the premature “shock of modernity” on Irish culture, even in its most remote rural outposts.⁴⁶ While literature and music articulated the trauma of exile, the letters, remittances, and commodities sent home by Irish emigrants undoubtedly structured Irish perceptions of America.⁴⁷ Hollywood’s subsequent incorporation, and mediation, of images of Ireland and Irishness added a new dimension to this complex relationship between Irish and American modernity.⁴⁸ American popular culture retained a hold over the Irish imagination, through the twentieth century, despite opposition in the form of censure or overt censorship. Dick’s films explore this cultural landscape through the borrowed conventions and iconography of classical Hollywood.

Genre and Landscape in the Films of Vivienne Dick

Visibility Moderate: A Tourist Film (1981) charts Dick’s transition from New York’s No Wave film culture toward a film practice based in Ireland. It explores the difficulty of representing Ireland, and Irish experience, within a wider context, and it inaugurates a new concern, explored in her subsequent “Irish” films, with the intersection of narrative genre and landscape. The title is taken from a weather report, overheard at one point in the narrative, but the phrase *visibility moderate* also describes Dick’s own relation to filmmaking in Ireland. In its thematic focus on exile and emigration, and its exploration of performance, documentary modes of address, and Irish visual culture, it parallels O’Sullivan’s earlier *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (along with Murphy’s *Maeve*, the most influential of Irish avant-garde films).⁴⁹

Visibility Moderate is a restless exploration of the perspective of “outsider,” encompassing the genres of the home movie, advertisement, documentary, and thriller. The precredit sequence, staged around the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, incorporates suggestive references to economic imperialism. The Twin Towers call attention to transnational economic flows structuring cultural and political relations. The first part of the

46. Gibbons, *Transformations*, 6.

47. Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 357–61.

48. Kevin Rockett, “The Irish Migrant and Film,” in *The Creative Migrant*, ed. Patrick O’Sullivan, vol. 3 of *The Irish World Wide* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), 170–91.

49. Cheryl Herr, “Addressing the Eye in Ireland: Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (1978),” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 20, no. 3 (2000): 367–74.

film traces the journey of an American tourist, dressed in fashionably “retro” clothes, around Irish landmarks familiar from postcards and films such as John Ford’s *The Quiet Man* (1952). The “tourist” poses in Irish monastic ruins, kisses the Blarney Stone, and travels on a horse-drawn cart. The “tour” is punctuated by a montage of TV and radio ads promoting well-known Irish and international brands, and by an encounter with actors on the set of an Irish play. It culminates in a dreamlike sequence in which the tourist imagines herself as a “Celt” running through a mystical rural landscape. These interruptions to the narrative complicate any simple critique of the heritage industry.

In the second part of the film, the exploration of “visibility” shifts the focus toward surveillance. The tourist embarks on an alternative tour, through the urban spaces of Dublin and Belfast, where she encounters a kitsch religious singer and a street protest against the H Block prisons. Again, the narrative is disrupted by a staged sequence, in which one of the tourist’s Irish friends is interrogated. The final section includes an interview with Maureen Gibson, a former political prisoner. Shot in an entirely different style, straight to a camera that is slowly pulling back, this sequence calls attention to the problem of representing Gibson’s experience and the political situation in the North. As if to acknowledge the conventions of the Hollywood thriller or film noir, which have dominated filmic representation of the North of Ireland, the film closes with ambiguous scenes of a city at night.

In her next film, *Like Dawn to Dust* (1983), Dick produced a more self-consciously “romantic” representation of the Irish landscape, exploring the convergence between Irish and American Gothic. The opening shots of a period house, bearing the scorch marks of a fire, are accompanied by an off-key piano, recalling the stage melodrama or early cinema. In particular, these scenes seem to reference the work of Dion Boucicault, which provided a focal point for silent film production in Ireland.⁵⁰ The house, most likely a remnant of Anglo-Irish society, is abandoned but for Lydia Lunch, wearing her signature New York goth makeup and clothes. Lunch delivers a poetic monologue, on-screen and in voice-over, accompanied by sounds of traditional music and images of a rural landscape populated only by wild animals. The closing shots emphasize the circularity of Irish narratives: “the

50. Earlier, in the silent era, Sidney Olcott of the U.S.-based Kalem Company had also made films in Ireland, featuring well-known landmarks and adapting the Irish stage melodramas of Boucicault. See Kevin Rockett, “The Silent Period” and Luke Gibbons, “Romanticism, Realism, and Irish Cinema,” both in *Cinema and Ireland*, 7–12 and 221–23, respectively.

past never dies, it just continually repeats itself." Although unresolved in many respects, *Like Dawn to Dust* signaled a shift toward a more "poetic" form of filmmaking in place of montage and appropriation. It was Dick's first "Irish" film, and it was shown at the grand opening of a new Irish film club, the Ha'penny, in October 1983. Instead of the rigorous theoretical framework associated with the Project Arts Centre, the Ha'penny Film Club adopted the informal approach associated with No Wave cinema. It screened several of Dick's films, including *Visibility Moderate* and *Liberty's Booty*; international avant-garde films by Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, and Hollis Frampton; and Irish films, such as Quinn's *Cloch* (1978), Comerford's *Emtigon* (1972), and the Belfast Film Workshop's *Acceptable Levels* (1983).

An Irish Film Board had been established in 1981 to support indigenous industrial production. Super 8 filmmaking was largely unrecognized by state institutions, however, because of its peripheral status in relation to the film industry. Following her return to Ireland, Dick contributed to an influential Irish film production course, based at Rathmines College in Dublin. Given the absence of any established Irish cooperatives, however, facilities for low-budget production remained limited. Dudley Andrew suggests that certain Irish films made during the 1980s, notably Peter Ormrod's *Eat the Peach* (1986), can be read as an "allegory of the cottage industry," of which they are a part.⁵¹ Dick's practice, shifting between New York, Dublin, and London, also constitutes a commentary on institutional structures of production. In 1985, Dick relocated to London, where she became an active member of the London Film-makers' Co-operative and continued to explore Irish themes and subjects.

Rothach (1985), Dick's next film, and her first on 16mm, was produced with the assistance of the British Arts Council and the Cinema Action collective. Filmed in the countryside of Clare and West Cork, it takes up the exploration of vision and surveillance instigated in *Visibility Moderate*. Although it is only eight minutes in length, *Rothach* recalls sections of Michael Snow's *La Region Centrale* (1971) in terms of its structure, its use of sound, and its setting. Like Snow's film, *Rothach* incorporates rhythmic pans, and its title means "cycle" or "wheel," but unlike *La Region Centrale*, it features narration and ends with a recitation of Sean O'Riordáin's Irish-language poem "An Roithleán."

The landscape of *Rothach*, in contrast with that of *Like Dawn to Dust*, is filled with evidence of activity. The pans across rolling fields include

51. Dudley Andrew, "The Theater of Irish Cinema," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 34.

scenes of a child playing the fiddle, farm machinery, and turf cutting on the bog. These scenes are strikingly picturesque and reminiscent of the iconic Irish color postcards produced by John Hinde since the 1950s.⁵² But the relentless movement of the camera also suggests surveillance, or a process of mapping. The serenity of the location is gradually undercut by the sound track, which changes from a melody into a series of shifting electronic pulses, and through the uncanny image of the child, reappearing as the camera moves from place to place, it becomes apparent that this landscape is highly constructed. While *Visibility Moderate* foregrounds the difficulty of finding a vocabulary adequate to the representation of the landscape and is explicitly concerned with the perspective of the outsider or tourist, *Rothach* focuses on the historical relationship between image, language, and landscape. The use of oral narration, in the Irish language, works against a "tourist" perspective. Perhaps more than any other of her films, *Rothach* literally mobilizes landscape as a text to be read.

Both *Rothach* and Dick's subsequent film, *Images/Ireland* (1988), were included in "A Sense of Ireland 1988," a major festival of Irish culture in London. First held in 1980, "A Sense of Ireland" aimed to counter negative Irish stereotypes in the British media and to promote cultural and political relations between Ireland and Britain in the interests of tourism and commerce by providing an insight into Irish history and culture.⁵³ The 1980 festival included a season of Irish and Irish-related films, selected by Kevin Rockett and based on the "Film and Ireland" season at the Project Cinema Club. It provided a critical context for Hollywood's representations of Ireland and was intended to "serve as a reminder that 'lost' histories can be reconstructed."⁵⁴ The second "Sense of Ireland" event in 1988, which featured Dick's *Ireland/Images*, was less concerned with the reconstruction of cultural histories. Instead, critical emphasis had shifted toward a more open-ended exploration of Irish cultural identity. Dick's films were included in a visual arts exhibition entitled "Selected Images" rather than in the film program. The exhibition, curated by Declan McGonagle and Irish artist James Coleman, focused on the intersection between image and narrative in Irish culture and foregrounded artists who had established a reputation outside Ireland. In particular, it highlighted "ideas/processes which . . . link the artists

52. Gibbons, *Transformations*, 37–43.

53. John Stephenson, introduction to festival catalog, *A Sense of Ireland* (Dublin: A Sense of Ireland Ltd, 1980), 13.

54. Kevin Rockett, "A Sense of Ireland: Irish Cinema," *BFI/National Film Theatre Programme* (February 1980): 30.

and their activity to a continuum from Armagh to America—beyond expectations of categorization or nationalistic identities.”⁵⁵

Images/Ireland touches on themes explored in Dick’s earlier work, albeit in a fragmentary way. It opens with scenes of children and family, followed by home movie images of sailing and the seafront, and interspersed by ambiguous staged sequences. Gradually, this domesticity is disrupted by images of violent political protest and by a distorted electronic pulse on the sound track. In the process, the images of children and family acquire more ominous associations, perhaps hinting at a relationship between political violence and the structure of the Irish family. “A Sense of Ireland,” in 1988, represented the first official recognition of Dick’s work as an Irish filmmaker. Through an exploration of conventions of representation specific to an expanded Irish landscape, both *Rothach* and *Images/Ireland* present a cultural identity that is Irish, postmodern, and, arguably, postnational. In this respect, Dick’s work parallels the contemporary emphasis on local and regional specificity in the work of cultural theorists and policy makers.⁵⁶

The Avant-Garde of the Regions: Independent Film and Video at Channel Four

Vivienne Dick’s work was also supported by developments in British television broadcasting during the 1980s. Channel Four, launched in 1982, was explicitly intended to serve “a variety of publics, particularly those which had been ignored by existing broadcasting—ethnic minorities, specialist sports fans, regional and linguistic minorities.”⁵⁷ As a “publisher-broadcaster,” the new channel prioritized the commissioning of independent and avant-garde film, and the first feature broadcast was Cinema Action’s *So That You Can Live*, one of a number of films acquired through independent distributors such as The Other Cinema. “Irish politics,” and media representations of the “Troubles,” also continued to serve as a focal point

55. Declan McGonagle and James Coleman, introduction to exhibition catalog, *Selected Images: Vivienne Dick, Micky Donnelly, Paul Durcan, Brian Cronin, Joan Fowler, Paul Graham, Alanna O’Kelly, Victor Sloan* (London: Riverside Studios, 1988), 1.

56. Richard Kearney, ed., *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988).

57. Geoff Mulgan and Ken Walpole, *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning: From Arts to Industry—New Forms of Cultural Policy* (London: Comedia, 1986), 46; John Ellis “The Independent Filmmakers Association and the Fourth Channel,” *Screen* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 56–57; and Simon Blanchard and David Morley, eds., *What’s This Channel Four? An Alternative Report* (London: Comedia, 1982).

within British independent film culture as a whole. Many independent distributors had shifted focus away from university film societies⁵⁸ and toward issue-based political campaigns by the early 1980s. The Other Cinema, for example, supplied film and video on subjects such as Ireland, the media, and antiracism⁵⁹ to various political organizations.

Channel Four quickly dominated this independent sector, dwarfing other networks for distribution of political film and screening avant-garde works, such as Dick's *Like Dawn to Dust*.⁶⁰ Channel Four's support for Irish filmmaking encouraged a degree of regional and local specificity, largely absent from Irish film policy until the 1990s. Channel Four was committed both to the coverage of Irish issues⁶¹ and to community-based workshop production. A new union agreement, the Workshop Declaration,⁶² enabled the channel to fund a network of twelve to fifteen workshops each year, including two groups from Northern Ireland. This funding was relatively long term, especially by comparison with the short-term contracts issued to commercial producers.

One Irish workshop supported by Channel Four, the Derry Film and Video Collective (DFVC), developed a feminist perspective on the political situation in the North and critiqued representations of Derry produced by visiting TV crews. DFVC members were skeptical of Channel Four's engagement with Irish issues.⁶³ They claimed to be subject to greater scrutiny than British workshops (even those making programs about the North) because of their location within Northern Ireland. One of its productions, *Mother Ireland* (1988), was not broadcast because it included footage of

58. Andi Engel of Politkino (and later Artificial Eye), interviewed by Pines, "Left Film Distribution," 120.

59. Ben Gibson, quoted by Harvey, "The Other Cinema—A History: Part 2, 1978–1985," 89.

60. In 1936, Kino's one thousand screenings reached an estimated 250,000 people. In 1983, *The Cause of Ireland* (Platform Films, 1983), a film critical of the British state in Northern Ireland and focusing on working-class people, reached 294,000 through one screening on Channel Four Television. See Sylvia Harvey, "The 'Other Cinema' in Britain: Unfinished Business in Oppositional and Independent Film, 1929–1984," in *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, ed. Charles Barr (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 235.

61. "Channel 4 and Ireland," in *Film Base News* 10 (Dec./Jan. 1988/89): 12.

62. Established in 1980 and revised in 1984, the declaration represented formal recognition, by unions, filmmakers, and broadcasters, of the principles of workshop practice. See Dickinson, *Rogue Reels*, 163–67.

63. See Johnny Gogan's interview with Margo Harkin and Anne Crilly, "Derry Film and Video Collective," *Film Base News* (Sept./Oct. 1987): 10–11.

members of proscribed Republican organizations.⁶⁴ Other sources of production funding for the collective were limited, however, as the BFI Production Board did not recognize the Six Counties as qualifying for regional funding, and the DFVC's other source of income, the European Social Fund, was exclusively earmarked for training.

Channel Four did not maintain this commitment to Irish independent filmmaking, however. The late 1980s brought deregulation and a change in personnel, with Michael Grade replacing Jeremy Isaacs as chief executive. Isaacs had been closely associated with the channel's initial support for Irish material. He had overseen the funding of Irish films, including Neil Jordan's *Angel* (1981) and Comerford's *Reefer and the Model* (1988), and the commissioning of the 1987 "Irish Reel" documentary season. With Grade's arrival, the second "Irish Reel" series planned for 1989 was abruptly canceled.⁶⁵ Channel Four's involvement in workshop production did not survive into the 1990s. The Workshop Declaration was, in some respects, a means of implementing cutbacks⁶⁶ within the independent production sector, and the withdrawal of support for workshops can also be attributed to a new emphasis on "innovation" at the expense of continuity within the channel.⁶⁷ Some British workshop organizations, such as the UK-based Worker's Film Association and Amber Films, are still in existence, but few have maintained the engagement with a broader audience that Channel Four offered. In addition to the benefits it offered to individual filmmakers and local communities, Channel Four's involvement in regional workshop practice and independent film production provided a model for Irish film policy. When the Irish Film Board was reactivated in 1993 (following its dissolution in 1987), it was defined by a new emphasis on regional specificity and headed by Rod Stoneman, Channel Four's former commissioning editor for independent film and video.

Conclusion: Sighting an Irish Avant-Garde

Vivienne Dick's film practice has yet to be fully theorized in relation to developments in Irish cinema, despite its evident concern with the specificity of Irish experience. Her work has entered the canon of Irish visual culture

64. See Belinda Loftus's "Review of *Mother Ireland*," *CIRCA* 44 (Mar./Apr. 1989): 33–34.

65. Paul Donovan and Johnny Gogan, "The Last Irish Reel," *Film Base News* 13 (July/Aug. 1989): 8–9.

66. Dickinson, *Rogue Reels*, 59.

67. Rod Stoneman, "Sins of Commission," *Screen* 33, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 133.

only through events such as “A Sense of Ireland 1988” and through the intervention of the Irish Film Archive. The international networks for production and distribution that supported her work and that of other Irish filmmakers no longer exist, and a convergence between film, video, and art practice since the 1970s has seen the gallery emerge as the primary context for avant-garde film. Cultural festivals (like “A Sense of Ireland”) and gallery exhibitions now provide an increasingly important platform for avant-garde film. But these international events do not necessarily support the development of local film cultures⁶⁸ or challenge the marginalization of avant-garde filmmaking within national contexts.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were marked by an intersection of local and international film cultures that proved productive for both theorists and practitioners. As Hansen notes, the “postmodernist challenge to modernism and modernity” opened a space for the understanding of “alternative forms of modernism . . . that vary according to their social and geopolitical locations, often configured along the axis of post/coloniality, and according to the specific subcultural and indigenous traditions to which they responded” (MPS, 332). Dick’s work contributes to this wider critical project, through its exploration of American society and popular culture from the perspective of the immigrant outsider, and through its exploration of the particular place of Hollywood iconography within the Irish imaginary. This critical engagement with the forms and conventions of globalized modernity defines Dick’s work as avant-garde.

68. Manthia Diawara, “On Tracking World Cinema: African Cinema at Film Festivals,” *Public Culture* 6 (1994): 385–96.