

Cecilia Dougherty: *The Fourth Space*, 2010, 4-channel video, 30 minutes; at Participant, Inc.

## CECILIA DOUGHERTY PARTICIPANT, INC.

Can people ever truly distinguish what's going on in the real world from the narrative playing out in their heads? Can they ever say with certainty that the mundane isn't meaningful? Such questions, rich with poetic nuance and impossible to answer, constitute Cecilia Dougherty's comfort zone. Dougherty is known primarily as a filmmaker who favors offbeat image-capture methods (a Fisher-Price kiddie camcorder, for example) and edgy twists (casting, in her 1989 film *Grapefruit*, "sexpert" Susie Bright and performance artist Shelley Cook as John and Yoko). Here, in an exhibition titled "The Fourth Space," Dougherty made her first major foray into media installation.

Three wall-projected videos, a video displayed on a monitor and an animation looping on a wall-mounted iPod played simultaneously in the single-room gallery, imparting a gentle blue glow to the space. Sound artist Aleksei R. Stevens provided an electronic composition that was intended to accompany just one of the videos, but, chiming in occasionally as if on its own, it contributed to the show's overall ambience.

Dougherty combines personal details with heady academic matters and lofty themes (20th-century philosophy, modernist architecture), or shrewdly edits image-themes (expanses of sea and sand, for instance, shot with her Nokia cell phone) into near-abstract continuums. Text plays an important role in one of the two strongest videos here, *The Third Space* (2009), a wall projection in which excerpts from weighty philosophical works appear, subtitle-style, below deceptively mundane footage. We look around Dougherty's Swiss hotel room—noting the unmade bed as well as various toiletries and souvenirs—while "reading" Martin Heidegger's *Basic Concepts*; and we take a typical Chinatown bus ride out



of New York City, past the teeming street vendors, through the Holland Tunnel and into the urban blight of New Jersey, as passages from *Hatred of Democracy* by Jacques Rancière flash without pause across the bottom of the frame. We all know what it's like to read a book on a bus, occasionally breaking our concentration to gaze out the window. In evoking that experience Dougherty delivers us into a filmic space in which no ordinary moment seems wasted and no idea not worth contemplating.

Modernism (and its demise) is the apparent subject of *The Fourth Space* (2010), a 5-channel wall-projected video featuring repetitions of architectural images, some of them altered to the point of abstraction: Marcel Breuer's Armstrong Rubber/Perelli Tire building, for example, which sits sadly isolated and diminished in an IKEA parking lot. At times its silhouette is reversed in "negative" and looks menacing, at other times its lines appear scattered, off-register. We quickly sense that there's no "right read" to any one horizon in a Dougherty film—and that's a good thing. Everything is illuminated when there's no last word.

—Sarah Schmerler