

Wim Wenders' film *Paris, Texas* tells the story of Travis Henderson, a father who stumbles from the desert four years after abandoning his wife and son. Wenders combines the motif of the road movie with the mythology of the desert frontier to parallel the characters' experience of transformation. Collapsing in an unnamed town, Travis is recovered by his brother, who informs him that he has cared for Travis' son, Hunter, in his absence, as Jane (Travis' wife) disappeared shortly after he did. Gradually recovering from the sustained trauma of the desert, Travis begins to form a bond with Hunter, and the two set out to find Jane, who now works in a peep show in Houston. Upon finding her, Travis poses as a client at the peep show to see Jane, afraid to make direct contact. Kristen Coleman's *You Can See Me but I Can't See You* appropriates the scene in which an unknowing Jane realises that the voice from beyond the one-way mirror, in fact, belongs to Travis.

Here, Coleman casts off Wenders' narrative of transience and transition, instead presenting the penultimate narrative apex—when Jane realises that Travis has found her. The scene plays out through the peep show's one-way mirror which, in Coleman's work, draws our attention to the screen as a dividing presence. This implicates us in Travis' position, drawing us into the scene and collapsing the distinctions between the real and the fictive.

In stretching and looping the scene, Coleman creates a ceaseless stare where Jane's inability to see Travis parallels her inability to see us. Despite this concealment, Jane stifles the uncertainty at the core of her character, her knowing gaze puncturing the surface separating us from her, and her from Travis. This surface exhibits the compounded functions of mirror, screen, and window. From different perspectives, it bears properties of transparency, opacity, and reflection that connect and disconnect subjectivities at the mercy of camera and script.

Coleman's treatment of the scene results in a temporal collapse that draws out Jane's expressions, rendering them more deliberate, more knowing. For a film whose characters are caught in a state of reckless nostalgic drive, the reluctant crawl of time further punctuates the characters' fixation on the past. The philosopher Henri Bergson reminds us that 'action, in spite of its duration, is indivisible if accomplished without stopping',¹ which is precisely Coleman's intervention—the suspension of Jane's revelation ad infinitum.

Realisation is a liminal act defined by two states of mind—knowledge before, and knowledge after. Coleman refutes this transition by presenting the indeterminate mingling of moments at the absolute centre of Jane's realisation. We are caught in the tension constructed by sustaining an act defined by transition, fixing Jane (and us) in what Bergson describes as 'a living, and therefore still moving eternity...'²

Ash Tower

June 2016

¹ Henri Bergson, "Duration and Intuition," in *Problems of Space and Time*, ed. J. J. C. Smart, The Problems of Philosophy (New York & London: The Macmillan Company & Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1968), 141.

² *Ibid.* 144