

Press Release – The East End

From the outset *The East End*, Dominic Wade's experimental prelude to his next documentary, is compelling viewing. With one eye watching Reggio's inspirational *Koyanassqatsi*, Wade has sculpted a montage of visually anarchic images to the impeccable accompaniment of Leftfield's *Melt* and *Song of Life*. It would be very easy to believe that they had been composed specifically for this striking film.

Shot in black and white Super8, *The East End* is a startlingly raw film using natural light to carve the physical information just as Wade perceives it. Since his acclaimed Raindance Festival debut, *Modern English*, this auteur has refined his technique; he evidently understands his skills and subject more precisely but has not lost his defining attitude. With every shot he announces 'this is my work; take it or leave it' but for those who succumb to this film's charms the dividends are great indeed. Wade continually rewards his audience with visual gifts but whisks them away before we can become indifferent.

Whilst shot entirely in 21st century London, for thirteen minutes we are treated to footage that segues between two eras. Though they should contrast severely, the director confounds us with images straight out of World War II that evolve into today. What appears to be a Spitfire returning from France transmogrifies into a modern jet and is then replaced with a kite resembling a parachute under which we expect to see a battle-ready paratrooper. Chilling images of barbed wire surround not a POW camp but bleak flats in which people are still expected to live. Even a grand school becomes a prison as the camera pulls back through the black, iron gates to add finality to the prison sentence. Orwell would be proud of his disciple.

This is a film that is variously poignant, harsh, nonchalant and humorous. Throughout, there resides an air of violence and oppression although it remains compelling viewing; it is demanding, certainly, but it is also gentle, engulfing and very sharp in its portrayal of life.

As images of industry, buildings and people pass before the lens abstractly, Wade continues to surprise with tantalising sparks of humour. For a moment we observe two tower blocks and the shot lingers until a half face in the bottom corner of the frame is noticed. But before comprehension is achieved Wade cuts away lest we become complacent.

For a mad two minutes, Wade appears to let anarchy get the better of him as he dances light flares across the screen, overlays images of unwitting actors in Billingsgate Market and raises two fingers at sombre documentalists. His frame fills with abstract shapes that look both familiar and unrecognisable and he plays with his presentation as eagerly as he toys with his subject

matter. Throughout we are treated to split screens, negative images and crops in a more real, less flash manner than BBC's *24*.

Wade's *Modern English* is never far away, though, as the isolated titles and a few intruding frames of Mod Blue testify. But impressive as his debut was, Wade's montage of London is infinitely more complete both in structure and visual impact. It is a film that demands repeated viewing and is all too brief. The full version cannot arrive quickly enough.

If there is criticism it is slight. Some edits could be tighter, some repetition avoided. At times Wade elongates his shot as if to ensure we absorb the full impact of the information he is throwing at us and realise the full extent of his skill. It is unnecessary; his ability as cameraman, director and editor are not in question. It is evident for all who sit back and take his journey that this is a talent standing on the doorstep of greatness. *The East End* is the surefooted step that just might take Dominic Wade inside.

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