



INTERNETCAFE IN
MAROK, video still,
2001



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noelle pujol

far away, so close

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It was in March 2001 that a group of artists, including Noelle Pujol, went to Morocco to take part in a workshop organized by Le Pavillon, a study program at the Palais de Tokyo, in collaboration with Le Fresnoy (Studio national des arts contemporains). During this ten-day stay Pujol compiled digital video material, shooting in the cities, villages and the desert and edited it for "Touching from a Distance". The version presented in the exhibition is titled "Marweb" - the name of the search engine/portal site www.marweb.net - and consists of three individual parts.

Arguably central to this piece is a sequence set in a rural cyber café. As Pujol reports, it is a popular meeting spot for the whole family - a place where age and social background don't matter. There is however one thing most of the people have in common: lots of them come there to establish contact with the outside world, especially France, their aim being to obtain visas and, hence, the possibility of leaving their home country. The way Pujol captures this situation is very reduced. She has installed the camera at a fixed angle on the desk with the camera focused on the shop front - a window partitioned by wooden bars with a huge Microsoft Windows logo in the upper right part. During the day the traffic on the street in front of the cyber café causes most of the movement within the static picture: people dressed in traditional fashion as well as cars and other vehicles pass by. This activity somehow corresponds to a moving hand resting on a mouse that is located on the desk in front of the camera.

Another set of formal correspondences also sets the outside in relation to the inside. It is curious to notice how the Windows logo (itself an abstracted window icon) corresponds to the window front of the cyber café and, moreover, to the windows of the building on the other side of the street. At night the situation changes in so far as the outside is "deactivated" by natural darkness, while the inside of the cyber café is lit and gets crowded with people.

Pujol's visual choreography suggests a couple of things. Drawing upon the history of analogies between media and vehicle (e.g. the windows of a train correspond to the sequential frames of a film), the artist uses the formalized setting to undermine the very notion of movement itself. The space of the cyber café is entirely circumscribed by the Windows logo. After the sun has set this becomes even more obvious, as the window on which this logo is somewhat proudly presented signifies the enclosure of this space; the light that emanates from the ceiling turns the shop window into some sort of mirror, reflecting the interior of the cyber café.

The sense of immobility recurs in the second "Marweb"-video. Camels rest in the desert, eating out of boxes that are ornamented with gasoline combines' logos, such as Shell. The legs of the most popular vehicle of the desert are locked, however, bringing to mind the difficulties of leaving the country while exposing the false ideology of globalisation that promises everybody mobility in a borderless world. The third video shows a man busy with some repetitive work. His body is somehow suspended in the air as we don't see on what ground he is actually standing. While the landscape is sparsely filled with objects (telecommunication masts, a minaret) there is no sense of scale and, therefore, no sense of distance. It is as if the body floats in immaterial space - an aspect that adds up to the leit-motif of (im)mobility and establishes a link to Pujol's overarching interest in the relationship between body and machine.

----- Krystian Woznicki

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