

Caution

by Shahram Entekhabi in collaboration with Mieke Bal

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Film data

Year:
2004

Original format:
video on dvd

Duration:
9:08 min

Artists' statement

Caution responds to performance art. Here, the man reappears on the prestigious oval lawn in front of the library, where students walk by to go to classes. A normal day on an American campus. Nothing is likely to happen, and for a few minutes, that is just what you see, from the distant height of a rooftop, as well as from the frontal and side positions on the ground. The tiny figure walking the middle of the path opposite the high viewing point, strikes as slightly out of place: the gap is put in place, visually. It is also put in place in the performance, as he walks faster than others, as if he had a purpose.

He begins to unroll red-and-white European caution tape, routinely used to block off areas that represent a danger for the public. He knots the end of that tape to a tree. With fierce determination – or is it resigned repetition? – he screens off an area. First, between trees, so as to block off the busiest path that leads to the center of campus. Repetition, constituting a dense sculptural wall of bright colors, establishes the hallmark of the series as video installation. Then, he begins a somewhat longer walk over the lawn to the other side of the oval. After attaching the tape to a tree there, he returns.

Color, sculpture, and performance vie for attention as the kick-off media, measured against video's power to make surface stick on the retina. Some of the images ask how it is that space can get overruled by intervention. When the people behind the tape lose their visibility, or their faces, for example, one can wonder how abstract art – here, blocks of bright red and clear white – takes over figuration as if it had always been lodged at the latter's heart. Or, whether the walking man is the sculpture, or is it the tape waving in the wind? One wonders, too, about the blandness of the public space before, and its new

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look after the intervention. And of course, the close-ups of the action are fundamentally different from the long shots, just as the actions differ.

The walk across the lawn is bolder, and longer, and more incomprehensible than the earlier, shorter itinerary. His walk is steady, remains faster than "normal," and his face remains unreadable. At one point, he is himself inside the space he is creating, turning sculpture inside out. But this being inside is only for the performer; everyone else is kept out. This inside-outside dynamic creates a new gap, between expectation and the small change effected upon it by this stranger. Instead of protecting the people from accidents, the caution tape pushes them out of the space they consider legitimately theirs.

When the act is completed, he turns around and walks away, just as briskly as his arrival stride, trailing the last end of the tape behind him. Mid-path he tosses the remaining spool into the bushes, and he is gone. The image from the roof shows the difference he leaves behind. He has come and gone, but the space remains definitively altered.

Mieke Bal



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Review by S. Griffith

Visiting Scholars Collaborate to Shoot Film on Case Campus

Shahram Entekhabi, an Iranian-born artist and architect, and Mieke Bal, art historian and cultural theorist from the University of Amsterdam, engage in an 8-week project as part of a seminar program sponsored by Case's Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities.

Iranian-born artist and architect Shahram Entekhabi pauses by the oval in front of the Kelvin Smith Library at Case Western Reserve University. He opens a suitcase and takes out a roll of red and white striped caution tape.

Atop the library with a camera rolling is Mieke Bal, art historian and cultural theorist from the University of Amsterdam. Bal captures the performance as Entekhabi unravels the caution tape, wraps it around trees and crisscrosses the oval. Students unexpectedly walk into the film's frames as they bypass the barrier or weave under and over the tape as they head to other places.

The performance film, "Caution," is the outcome of the collaboration between two Visiting Fellows of the Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities in Case's College of Arts and Sciences. They are participants in the Baker-Nord Center's 2004 seminar series on "Homelands and Security," which is the first of four annual integrated Senior Faculty Fellowship seminar programs at the university. The artists join this year's seminar group that is comprised of faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences and from the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Prior to their visit, Bal and Entekhabi planned to produce one film. When they depart from Cleveland next week, they will leave with materials for as many as six films-in-progress.

"Normal people spend a year doing what we did in eight weeks," Bal told other Baker-Nord fellows during a preview showing of the artists' works-in-progress at a recent seminar meeting.

Bal has written and published widely on such subjects as literary and cultural arts, semiotics, transcultural theory and contemporary culture. She now has turned

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to exploring ways filmmaking can be “a tool, an instance and an object of cultural analysis, all at the same time.” For Entekhabi, who now lives in Berlin, the topic of homelands and security has different meanings. The artist left his native homeland in 1978 to attend school in Italy and has never returned.

The Cleveland collaboration continues an artistic partnership that began when the two artists worked together and produced the installation exhibit, “Glub.” While at Case, they staged “Glub” at Case’s Art Studio on Murray Hill. The installation exhibit delved into the aesthetics of migration through film, video, audio and performance art. “Glub” (the Arabic word for heart) is a celebration and comprehensive view of migration and builds upon Bal’s new research project in “Migratory Aesthetics.” The work leaves Cleveland for an Ohio State University showing in January.

Looking to future installations, Bal and Entekhabi imagine “Caution” serving double duty as the centerpiece for two installations.

The first multimedia installation, “Lost in Space,” reflects and builds upon the Baker-Nord Center’s theme of homeland and security.

“Caution” serves as one piece in the installation that is envisioned to include photographs that visually and physically lead viewers to three television monitors with films focusing on home, borders and security. The televisions will air approximately 85 interviews by people in refugee camps and those seeking asylum in Macedonia and the Netherlands, as well as people from the Cleveland-area Interfaith Hospitality Network, an organization that has set up homelike accommodations for homeless families in churches across the area.

“We wanted to make a politically responsive film that was not propaganda,” said Bal. Many of the interviews were conducted prior to their visit to Cleveland. The artists sought answers to what is home, how secure did people feel and what do country borders do for a person.

The footage from “Lost in Space” reveals such reactions to the questions as “language opens up borders,” “security makes me feel more insecure,” “the average

age of a homeless person is nine years old” and many more personal statements of feelings and emotions—like the woman who tells the story of the cake with 12 candles. She thought the person was celebrating a birthday but the individual was instead marking the 12th anniversary of his seeking asylum.

“Caution” also will serve as an anchor piece in the second installation that includes other Cleveland-filmed movies: “Road Movie,” a fix positioned landscape film along a long flat highway for which Bal spent hours searching; “Alcazar 2450,” a performance work based on a birthday party in the lobby of the historic residential home in Cleveland Heights where the artists stayed (and like Case students, people at the Alcazar unwittingly became part of the performance); and “Rockefeller Boulevard,” which includes scenes from the Cleveland Botanical Garden and other places in University Circle. In addition, Bal and Entekhabi chronicled their trip in photographs and written observations from its beginning in Amsterdam until their departure from Ohio. Tentatively, this personal documentary piece will be called “Diary.”

The suitcase, seen in many of the films, illustrates the sense of transience, wandering and disconnection in society, explained the artists during the discussion of their work with the Baker-Nord fellows.

In January, Entekhabi will return to update the seminar fellows on their progress toward completion of the projects.

Susan Griffith

The Baker-Nord Center was established in 1996 to highlight the arts and humanities at Case. The center comes under the direction of Timothy Beal, the Harkness Professor of Biblical Literature, and Marie Lathers, associate director and the Elizabeth M. and William C. Treuhaft Professor of Humanities and French.

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Credits

performers shahram entekhabi

camera mieke bal, tim beal, linda ehrlich, benita moore, john orlock, yianni yessios

photography by shahram entekhabi

assistance of photography scott cohen, chelsea meyers

sound track / edited by shahram entekhabi

costumes Baerbel kirchhof

make-up aimee marcereau de galen

written, directed and edited by

shahram entekhabi, in collaboration with mieke bal

supported by

baker-nord center for the humanities, of case western reserve university, cleveland, ohio
kelvin smith library , cleveland, ohio

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Artists' info - Shahram Entekhabi

Born in Beroujerd (Iran) in 1957

1976 -1979 studied graphic-design at the University of Teheran, Iran; studied architecture, urbanism, and Italian language in Perugia and Reggio Calabria, Italy

Since 1983 lives and works in Berlin

1983 - 2000 works as independent architect: Architecture projects and competitions

Since 2001 active in the fields of video art, photography, drawings, installation, and community art

2004 fellowship at the Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland/OH

2005 "Walled Souls" on the occasion of the exhibition "Circa Berlin", Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen, Danmark / "Bologna Flash Art Show", Hotel Sofitel, Bologna, Italy / "GLUB (Hearts)" (with Mieke Bal), Hopkins Hall Gallery, OSU College of the Arts, The Ohio State University, Columbus/OH, USA / "I LOVE ART VIDÉO - 6ème édition", Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg, France

2004 Solo exhibition "GLUB (Hearts)" (with Mieke Bal), Case Art Studio Gallery, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland/OH (GLUB, catalogue) / Participation in the exhibition "Labyrinth X - zu Rassismus und Ausgrenzung", Stadthalle Ludwigslust (i?, newspaper) / Participation in the exhibition "Entfernte Nähe. Neue Positionen Iranischer Kunst", Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (Kilid, catalogue) / exhibition architecture and exhibition designer of "Entfernte Nähe. Neue Positionen Iranischer Kunst", Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (Pasheband, catalogue) / Participation in the exhibition "Not in the sky and not on the earth", Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje/Macedonia (How to perform prayers, catalogue) / Solo exhibition, PLAY_gallery for still and motion pictures, Berlin (i?, Happy Meal, Herr Karl aus Nemsas and me?) / Participation in the exhibition "Schizorama", National Center for Contemporary Art/NCCA, Moscow, (Happy

meal) / Participation in the film program on the occasion of the solo exhibition of Louise Bourgeois, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (Eye Contact, directed by Mieke Bal & Shahram Entekhabi) / Participation in the exhibition "La Sage-femme y Spiral Woman", Sala Municipal de Exposiciones del Museo de Pasió (Eye Contact, catalogue) / Participation in the exhibition "just pLAY", Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles (Happy Meal and GLUB)

2003 Participation in the screening program "Different views in and out of Berlin" on the occasion of the project "In-between countries", Haus der Demokratie und Menschenrechte, Berlin (The Crow) / Participation in the screening program "Einige Bemerkungen über den Nutzen wissenschaftlicher und methodologischer Filme" by Olga Egorova (St. Petersburg), Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin (Fresh Azan) / Permanent installation of the sculpture seat in the lounge of the Video-Forum at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin / Participation in "The 2nd International Kansk Video Festival", Kansk/Russia (Fresh Azan) / Participation in "Fair Play. Video contest", PLAY_gallery for still and motion pictures, Berlin (Klaatu Barada Nikto) / Participation in the exhibition "models + frames 8: Überlebensstrategien für Untrainierte - The Winner Takes It All...", Kunst- und Medienzentrum Adlershof/KMZA, Berlin (RE-CY-CLE)

2002 Participation in "The 1st International Kansk Video Festival", Kansk/Russia (Express Malevich) / Participation in the project "Stardust Deluxe. Kunstaktionen zur Popkultur", Lisa Lounge/Villa Elisabeth, Berlin (Playback) / Participation in the project "Evolutionäre Zellen" of the group "finger", Neue Gesellschaft für Bildene Kunst (Staatrundfahrt) / Participation in the screening program "Pop-Sound-Video", Städtisches Museum Zwickau (Playback) / Participation in the Bush Videonight, open space, Berlin-Kreuzberg (Klaatu Barada Nikto)

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Artists' info - Mieke Bal

A cultural critic and theorist, is Professor of Theory of Literature and a Founding Director of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, Theory and Interpretation (ASCA) at the University of Amsterdam, as well as A.D. White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University.

Her most recent publications are *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (University of Toronto Press, 2002) and *Mieke Bal Kulturanalyse* (Suhrkamp, 2002). Among her many other books are: *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Artwriting* (University of Chicago Press, 2001); *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* (G&B Arts International, 2001); *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (University of Chicago Press, 1999 [2001]); *Narratology: An Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2nd, thoroughly revised and expanded edition, University of Toronto Press, 1997); *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually* (Stanford University Press, 1997); *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (Routledge, 1996); and *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1994]). She also edited a programmatic volume *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation* (Stanford University Press, 1999). Her areas of interest include literary theory, semiotics, visual art, cultural studies, transcultural theory, feminist theory, French, the Hebrew Bible, the seventeenth century and contemporary culture. Her current research centres around four themes: "narratology between the disciplines", which may lead to a replacement of her revised and expanded *Narratology* (1997) and focus on fully integrating the interdisciplinary perspective she has developed over the past decade; "travelling concepts", now a book, as a result of her intense involvement with the ASCA Theory Seminar and her conviction that reflection on and deployment of concepts can make an indispensable contribution to interdisciplinary cultural analysis; "in time: between

performance and performativity": a project based on the cluster of aspects of the two terms, to be developed into a book with a theoretical grounding and involving literary texts as well as contemporary art; "preposterous history", to further exploit the idea broached in her book *Quoting Caravaggio*. She is interested in linking theory and practice in the domain of art presentation.

In this context, she recently made a series of nine 61/2-minute video clips, *Art Clips*, on audience interaction with single art works. With Shahram Entekhabi she made *Eye Contact* in 2003, a 10 minutes film on an exhibition of works by Louise Bourgeois. Also in 2003 she made a film on migrancy in France, with a collective of five video artists called *Cinema Suitcase*. This film, *Mille et un jours*, has been shown in a number of European universities, most recently at the Einstein Forum in Potsdam and the *Lichthaus Kino* in Weimar. She works with Shahram Entekhabi on a number of projects on migratory aesthetics.

fine arts unternehmen ag
obmoos 4 / ch-6301 zug (switzerland)
phone +41 41 711 68 20 / fax +41 41 711 54 15
filmbox@artisant.com
www.fineartsunternehmen.com

**fine
arts
unternehmen**
video+film