

IN PRINT



"EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH"

THE FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM, PHILADELPHIA
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In their two-channel video *Solid Sea 03: Road Map, 2003*, the Milan-based collective Multiplicity dramatize the geopolitical stakes of Mark Nash's curatorial examination of the status of truth in contemporary film and video. The work documents two road trips of equal distance, with each projection showing the path ahead: on the left, an Israeli's one-hour journey between settlements in the West Bank; on the right, a Palestinian's five-and-a-half-hour slog from Hebron to Nablus. The crucial difference is speed. The first trip is fast, straight, and smooth, gliding over clean Israeli highways that bypass Palestinian zones. The second, often slowed to the pace of walking, is fraught with congestion on dirt side roads and interrupted by concrete blocks and innumerable checkpoints. Mixing conventional documentary imagery with avant-garde presentation, the project exemplifies the recent innovations of work gathered in "Experiments with Truth," which explores how modes of representation and viewership have shifted.

Solid Sea presents video as evidence but renders its meaning ambiguous. Positioned in the interstice between projections, viewers must draw their own conclusions, even while infrastructural inequities between Israel and Palestine are exposed. Rather than proselytize, the piece presents the opportunity for an undirected experience of two journeys but warns of a potential future of congealed boundaries for us all, "where rigid border definitions prevail over the permeable internal flow," as an accompanying text explains. Multiplicity challenge this politics of rigidity cautiously, with a nonjudgmental address and open display matched by the frictionless current of DVD. This demotion of physical constraint I take to be an analogue for the deterritorialization of meaning, prevalent in many of the projects, whereby the show throws us into a virtual realm dominated by video projection (in fact, the few included films are being screened outside the exhibition venue). Yet can the resulting desubstantialization of forms of absolute knowledge—such as those that shore up the Middle East conflict—have any effect on the ground?



Multiplicity, *Solid Sea 03: Road Map, 2003*, stills from two color videos, 28 minutes 14 seconds, and 28 minutes 48 seconds.

The design of the exhibition space fell to the collaborative team Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, who created an immaculately smooth environment for projection. Made of carpeted viewing areas divided by lulling gray walls and elegant translucent scrims, the space constitutes a cross between a gallery and a theater. Viewers can move among partitions while, impressively, sound cannot travel. This neutralization of the gallery creates ideal conditions for an uninterrupted focus on the singularity of each work, uniformly emphasizing—the luminous field of the image over the physical area of display. The curatorial selections complete this virtualization of experience. Whereas video and film projects of the '60s and '70s stressed embodiment before the image, whether by placing the spectator within feedback loops, provoking a phenomenological sensitivity to the space of presentation through interactive physical tasks, or staging the projection apparatus itself—as in the work of Peter Campus, Bruce Nauman, and Anthony McCall—here we encounter an experiment in minimizing the viewer's bodily sensation. Work by artists concerned with the physical arena of projection, such as Steve McQueen, Tacita Dean, or Matthew Buckingham, has been curiously omitted. Apparently, it would have materialized a certain resistance to the immaterial, discursive zone that today has become a key site of investigation in video and film and which forms the central focus of the show.

Just as the body loses its stable position, knowledge surrenders its conventional grounding in oppositions of truth and falsehood, subject and object, reality and representation. This defamiliarization is clearest in Glenn Ligon's *The Orange and Blue Feelings, 2003*, a two-channel video that drops us into one of the artist's therapy sessions. While the fixed-frame views settle anonymously on the analyst's torso and sundry other objects in the room, the sound track relays a tortuous conversation. Documentary image fuses with psychological projections of analyst and viewer alike, and video becomes an irresolvable symptom, its visible truth splintering into an infinity of imperfect recollections, disparate moments, and intersubjective associations.

By releasing the flow of temporality, Ligon's video dissolves constants and derealizes physical fact. Yet many other projects still hover around sites of material inscription, not only attesting to geopolitical inequality, as in *Solid Sea*, but characterizing its erasure by digital technology as traumatic: Zarina Bhimji's *Out of Blue, 2002*, steadily probes the decrepit walls of Uganda's colonial architecture, whose torn surfaces

divulge phantasmic traces of tortured flesh under Idi Amin’s dictatorship; and Amar Kanwar’s *To Remember*, 2003, tours Gandhi’s final residence in New Delhi, now a museum-*cum*-shrine that commemorates his untimely death. In each, video confronts what it can never fully record: bodily experience at its most intense. These spaces of physical testimony are thrown into an ever-unfolding relation with an ongoing present—what Deleuze called “the force of becoming”—and their meanings are rendered uncertain. Rather than truth’s destruction, however, we are left with its perpetual negotiation—what Nash calls experimentation—within divergent historical and cultural fields. If the viewer’s physical presence remains a center of indeterminacy, it is because the exhibition expresses the compelling hope that material reality itself will yield to the power of the virtual and cast absolutism to the wind.

“Experiments in Truth” remains on view through March 12.

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