

**khiasma**

Saison Arts Visuels  
2010-2011

*Manifeste pour  
des villes invisibles*

# *Self Fiction*

**Christian Barani**

**- ENGLISH VERSION -**

***Self Fiction*, video installation produced by Khiasma within the framework of its programme “Manifesto for invisible cities” with the support of the Conseil general de la Seine-Saint-Denis.**

**From September 16 to October 15, 2010**

Open Wednesday to Saturday from 5 pm to 8 pm (Welcome for groups and by appointments on Tuesday)

Admission Free

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**«In our time the art of dissimulation has reached unequalled heights. But with a signal new difference ; far from playing hide and seek with reality, it now expresses itself at the very surface of things, in the immediately obvious, with its perverse way of pushing things into view so as to render them invisible.»**

**Bruce Bégout**

Dubai, formerly a desert inhabited by Bedouins, has become over the past twenty years the theater of one of the world's most spectacular architectural projects. In addition to the *Burj Dubai-Burj Khalifa*, the world's tallest building - 828 meters - the city-State of the United Arab Emirates is collecting records in a style that's most characteristic feature is extravagance. Largely dedicated to luxury tourism and real estate speculation, Dubai's activity is geared to generalized leisure, to the commerce of total experience that brings to mind the sort of vocabulary used to describe a gigantic amusement park. But its use of the art of monstrous collage and exaggeration warn us that there is probably more to see here than the tale of an exuberant pursuit of fantasy in Las Vegas.

Dubai, urban experience - social ? – released from the weight of history, a city with no society, no sense of measure, becomes a site of novel plasticity where the classical opposition between object and image seems at first view to have lost its pertinence

Christian Barani suggests we think of Dubai via image, both the most direct access and the most convoluted since clearly the overexposure of the city is part of the strategy of dissimulation. And yet *Self Fiction* is not a process of unveiling, but rather an experiment in seeing, beyond the surface of contemporary paradises, both the obscure dream factory and its' power when in action.

## INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIAN BARANI

### **- Where did the title of the exhibition come from?**

From the relation between the self and the projection of the self. It's a title that allowed me to include all the points of view that are shown in the exhibition. An ensemble of self fictions.

### **- You present Self Fiction as a one hour and thirty-five minute film. In fact it's a disposition of ten sequences of differing size and length installed in the space. Why was it important for you to make reference to the principal of a film?**

Because the procedure I implemented to collect these images is the same as usual. A process based on improvisation, chance, meetings, a relation to the other that is recorded in the form of sequenced shots. Material was constituted. Later came editing, and, therefore narration. As long as possible I wanted to maintain this sense of narration, of a film and thus of linear time. At the same time, the viewing space you proposed to me allowed me to try an experiment. We've noticed over the last few years the removal of moving images from cinemas towards venues that traditionally showed spatial art. It seemed interesting to me to question

this confrontation. What kind of transformation might occur with this displacement, how would the film be transformed? Showing images in such a space means taking into consideration the displacement of the spectator, his/her liberty to move at will and by so doing, to create his/her own editing. The finesse is to make a film that takes this confrontation into consideration.

### **- How did you approach a city like Dubaï that has such a very pregnant, visual dimension, totalitarian, in the sense that it occupies all possible positions, saturates visible space as do imaginary places. It would seem to be full of traps for someone like you, who thinks and recounts via images.**

The great difficulty in Dubaï is that spaces dedicated to the visible and therefore to filming, have been emptied by the millions of recordings that have already been made. The sites have been vitiated by being visually captured by machines. There is no more energy or link between you and the space. Besides this disagreeable sensation, I quickly realized that it wasn't worthwhile to add a supplementary point of view. I could just use all the compressed images that circulate on the Net. Its material that represents an inside view of these sites dedicated to

commerce and entertainment. It's a place of projection where 85% of the population comes (temporarily) to earn money. From the start, I had decided to live in a popular neighborhood called Old Dubai. Constructed in 1980, it's a neighborhood that regroups a large number of the city's immigrant population. In majority Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshi, Afghans and a few Russians. A place that is rarely shown. Where there is still a sense of cultural roots and possible encounters. A place favorable to my way of working.

**- Your cinema is based on physical experience, the implication of the body in the act of filming, which produces very particular values in shots, proximity, even promiscuity. And in this case the question of experience becomes central, in particular because of the friction implicit in the idea of a project with Dubai, a space dedicated to the commerce of experience.**

It seems essential to me to approach the question of image in movement by the question of experience. This allowed me to avoid the cultural dichotomy between real and fiction. I don't ask myself that question. I just represent my personal experience, my reality. I don't believe in a global, common reality. I put in place a performative structure based on walking, drifting and improvisation. This permits me to enter into a certain state of consciousness and the recording of my experience takes place in real time, with no touching up later. My body/camera becomes a language tool engaged with the other. In silence, our bodies can

create a dialogue, stage themselves. That's what I film. In Dubai, the concept of experience was salvaged from the commerce of entertainment. Experience has become a product. It regroups hundreds of people in a staged and repetitive space.

**- On the question of proximity, Yan Ciret says that one of the rare spaces of invention that remains is located precisely in the summary forms of life, unqualified practices, free associations, where we rediscover the spirit of a popular cultural that has otherwise totally disappeared. It seems to me that your cinema is trying to find this place too.**

I started by making art videos at the end of the eighties. Filming was in studios and the technique of incrustation ruled. But very soon I found that my place was outside, getting lost. I wanted to confront myself with otherness. The freedom of working with video allowed me to go off without knowing what I was going to do. In 1994, for my first shoot, I set off to find a place I'd seen years earlier, in the north of Italy. A place of fishermen, tin-roofed cabins that reminded me maybe of my childhood or that corresponded to a deep and nourishing sensation. It was the beginning of my interest for indigenous culture. I enjoy discovering non-dominant cultures and the "non-spectacular" that constitutes them.

**- You place the exhibition under the aegis of « the age of access », the book by Jeremy Rifkin, even to the point of using quotes from it in the exhibition space. What role did this text have in your work?**

It allows me to approach Dubai with a post-modern eye. Many texts offer a critical take on Dubai but with Modern viewpoints. This book is essential on the post-modernity that is in play in the Emirates but also here at home. The relationship between modernity and post-modernity that Jeremy Rifkin describes is present in Dubai. Two different temporalities. Two separate spaces separated by an arm of sea cohabit in the same city. Popular neighborhoods where modernity still has its place with the presence of a traditional anchored culture, a belief in progress, the commerce of an industrial production of objects, modern architecture and urban planning. On the other side, neighborhoods where play and ego rule, where city planning is thought of in terms of flux, where you can obtain almost anything, where boredom and security ooze through the rails of the gated communities surrounded by golf courses, where an international culture dominates, composed of collages and where the building of a future for the territory has no sense since the presence of residents is only temporary. Rifkin's thought needed to be in the space so that the public could shift its perspective. As to the disposition of his quotes, Sophie Breuil suggested that I present them in the space as footnotes in a book.

**- Speaking of which, I noticed that we read a lot with this work, the « footnotes » for Rifkin, the electronic messages, the demands but also the voices themselves, as if you were returning to a heterogeneous form of cinema where the equation of the relation between text (as program) et image (as proof) remained unresolved. As if the viewer had “in his hands” an object broken down into parts that he had to construct with his own regard, his own engagement.**

The space where the images are exhibited necessarily engenders a different form. When a film is projected as it is here, in a complex space, the spectator is free to operate his own editing montage and I like the idea that no one sees the same thing.

This demonstrates that there is no dominant or universal point of view, but instead individual relationships to otherness.

The visuals and words meet in the same situation. They have to confront an industrialization of language, a plethoric development that submerges everything. In the first sequence that I edited with Matthieu Foulet, the words and images were on the same level. On the Net commentaries (and thus words) are indissociable from images. The both suffer from the same exhaustion.

**Interview conducted by  
Olivier Marboeuf**

