

Permanent Transit: net.remix

A project by Mariam Ghani in collaboration with Qasim Naqvi, Zohra Saed, & Ed Potter

Statement

My single-channel video *Permanent Transit* (shot in 2001 and edited in 2002) takes viewers on a journey through 11 countries between East and West, glimpsed only through the frames of various windows. These still and shifting landscapes are woven together with fragments of sounds and stories from the border zones crossed, inhabited and embodied by expatriates, exiles, refugees, immigrants and other itinerants, chief among which is the absurd appropriated narrative of a traveler who becomes trapped in the nomansland between two borders and must find a way to make his home there -- retold through many gaps of memory by my mother from a television bit made famous by comedian Doreid Laham during the Lebanese civil war -- in an allusive and elusive exploration of the contested territories called home by the hybrid generation, those who balance on the borderline between cultures whose equal and often conflicting claims are negotiated on the tiny battlefields of our everyday lives.

In remaking *Permanent Transit* for the web for the summer 2004 issue of **artwurl**, I wanted to exploit two of its defining properties: first, that its video track is essentially a collection of individual windows filmed at different moments in time, navigated in the video (through an edit assembled primarily of cuts) as one linear sequence of simultaneous events, but quickly returned by re-cutting to a database of discrete clips that could be assembled into any number of convincing possible sequences; and second, that almost all of its narrative arguments and movement happen in the soundtrack, which is made up of a series of discrete audio events stitched together with and given sense by an overarching story told over a series of different windows -- most of which are associated to the video track in nontraditional sync relationships. So it was possible to deconstruct the original project into ten different groups of footage, which become ten QuickTime windows out of which the eight between beginning and end are each dynamically generated by viewer interaction as a sync pair (and then re-generated as many times as the viewer wishes) from a defined subset of discrete audio and video clips. And it was also possible to reconstruct the project with a new layer of complexity by inviting two collaborators to literally remix its sounds and images, and the ideas, meanings and associations generated by their accumulation in the original linear sequence, into two new forms: a fragmented score created by composer Qasim Naqvi from their patterns and rhythms, and a text written by poet Zohra Saed that take as their starting point words and ideas discovered in those same clips. These remixes are then mixed back into the deconstructed original: the text is edited into two video sequences that become two more windows, where its reflections can mirror the coincidences with the newly generated windows unfolding before and after it and then running simultaneously on all sides, and the score is used both as the primary soundtrack of those text-videos and as a series of samples that are distributed into the different subsets of the database so they can appear as sync pairs on any of the newly generated windows.

The result is an experimental documentary reconstituted as a documented experiment, a narrative spliced with poem and essay and splintered into a database, a remembered journey snapped into film-souvenirs and swapped to extend a conversation between friends and strangers, and a linear video unpacked into a twelve-channel interaction: all designed to dislocate viewers from their ordinary lives and re-place them in the

crossroads of the hybrid generation, that difficult, absurd, productive zone where borders blur and cultures intersect, overlap and exchange.

Project URL:

<http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/transit>

***Permanent Transit: net.remix* requires the QuickTimePlayer 6 plugin (available at <http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download>), and is optimized for Internet Explorer 5+, Netscape 6+, Mozilla 1.7, or Safari 1.2+ with plugins and Javascript enabled, and a DSL or cable modem connection.**

Bios

Mariam Ghani was born in New York in 1978 to an Afghan father and Lebanese mother, and in her practice as a media artist uses these multiple identities to position herself as a translator, revealing channels of communication between cultures that consider themselves foreign to each other by investigating the border zones where those cultures intersect. She received her B.A. in Comparative Literature from NYU and her MFA in Photography, Video and Related Media from the School of Visual Arts, and over the past few years has also been a Paul & Daisy Soros New Americans Fellow, a Bronx Museum Artist in the Marketplace, and a Visiting Artist in the MFA Computer Arts department at SVA. She exhibits her work in video, installation and new media nationally and internationally, with recent and upcoming projects including screenings at the New York Video Festival, the Asia Society, Cinema East, Rooftop Films, Participant Inc., the Liverpool Biennial, Smart Project Space in Amsterdam, the 13^a Mostra Curtacinema in Rio de Janeiro, and transmediale.03 in Berlin; site-specific installations at the Queens Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, White Box, Exit Art and the Bronx Museum of the Arts; a collaborative video/dance/sound work produced as an artist in residence at the Woolworth Building through the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and a net art commission for Turbulence.org. She is currently an artist in residence at Eyebeam Atelier, where she is working on the second phase of her ongoing web-based interactive documentary and public dialogue project <http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net>.
Mariam's URL: <http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/mariam>

A multi-instrumental performer of new and improvised music, **Qasim Naqvi** has toured and collaborated with artists such as Reggie Workman, Don Byron, Lawrence D. Butch Morris, Vernon Reid, Brandon Ross, Carl Hancock Rux, Roswell Rudd, Charlie Burnham and Buster Williams. He is a member of the New York based avant-rock group Elysian Fields, the Electric Secrets Ensemble, and the Burnt Sugar Chamber Arkestra, a 21-piece ensemble for electro-acoustic improvisers. Qasim has also composed and arranged music for the BBC, Discovery Health, PBS, the HBO Undercover Series, and Prashant Bhargava's Sundance-nominated film *Sangam*. He has composed original dance works for the Israeli choreographer Yael Caravan, Tai Jiminez (Prima Ballerina for Dance Theater of Harlem), and Berlin's Ten Pin Chi Bhuto. His works have premiered in London, Berlin, Paris, Boudreaux, Amsterdam, Sapporo and Lahore. Qasim has also completed residencies at the Studio for Electro Instrumental Music in Amsterdam, and Harvestworks Digital Media Labs in New York, where he developed a computer based

control system that interacts in real time with acoustic instruments based on varying principles of improvisation.

Zohra Saed is a Brooklyn-based Afghan American poet, teacher, and co-editor of the forthcoming literary anthology *Drop by Drop, We Make a River: Afghan Writings of War, Exile, and Return*. She received her MFA in Poetry from Brooklyn College in 2000 and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in English with an emphasis on Afghan Diaspora Cultural Production at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She has made appearances as a poet at the American Museum of Natural History, the Asia Society, the Cornelia Street Café, the Nuyorican Poets Café, MTV, WBAI Radio, WNYC Radio and numerous university campuses. Saed is on the Board of Directors for Afghan American Peace Corps and of Up-Set Press, an independent publishing house that showcases the works of marginalized voices. She teaches in the Asian American Studies Program at Hunter College.

Edward J. Potter is a programmer specialized in designing browser-based database interfaces via PHP, XML and MySQL for ventures ranging from e-commerce to non-profit, with clients including AT&T, Apple, Earth Pledge, T3, Wiley and Metrobeat. He is also a partner in the software development company Art Box Technologies and the IT manager of the nonprofit gallery Exit Art in Manhattan. He has previously collaborated with Mariam Ghani on the net art projects <http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net> for Exit Art, *Permanent Transit: net.remix* for artwurl.org and *How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database* for Turbulence.org.

Credits

Permanent Transit

Shot on DV on location in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey, Armenia, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, the UK and the USA. Directed, shot & edited by Mariam Ghani. Story by Doreid Laham (1981) retold by Rula Ghani. Original music by Qasim Naqvi. Sound mix by Michael Floyd and surround mix by Mariam Ghani. Additional storytellers: Steven Endicott, Mikhael Antone, Zarina Maiwandi, Jon Birdseye, Ramzi Kassem, Emily Gibson, Lucas McCann, Diane Saade, Mariana, Sonia Balassanian, Huri Islamoglu, Feride Inan, Riad Saade, Henriette Saade, Armen Balassanian and Samia Halaby.

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Music by Qasim Naqvi
Text by Zohra Saed
Video by Mariam Ghani
Sound mix (video clips) by Michael Floyd
Web design by Mariam Ghani
Programming by Ed Potter