

REMOTELY SPYING ON UNCERTAINTY

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She had been monitoring and recording the same spot from a distance for months. She spent hours each day uncovering the alchemy of this unusual area, inhabiting three distinct divisions: a lavishly designed brand new beach; Turkish State Railways Recreation Camp; and the Military Zone. Haunted by curiosity, she recorded like an agent, floating through the retrograde flow of the overlapping imageries of her past. The closer she got, the more she realised the segregated realities that didn't belong to anything, but existed only in the course of their own transitory states. In the exact sense of Agamben, these singularities communicate only in the empty space, without any link to a common property or identity. This corner in Istanbul designates an empty space without a significant codification. Yet, it is almost hidden beneath the posh area that hails the monetary politics of escalating capitalism. The first segment is the beach with 39 imported palm trees. The area was converted into a private beach club after the demolition of a leisure centre that had existed illegally for twenty years. The second segment is the derelict Turkish State Railways Recreation Camp, which has been inhabited by 160 Chechen refugees for the last six years. Finally, the third segment is a typical Military Zone: the soldiers are in a constant cycle of standing guard, but the shell of the segment looks the same due to their uniforms and locations; it is impossible to detect the changes of this organism with static camouflage. These three segments are located side by side without any connection or interference with each other. The strict borders between them imply socially determined mental gaps. There is no direct communication, opposition or negotiation. These segments simply exist in their own language. The most "uncertain" segment is the Recreation Camp with its invisible and unrecorded inhabitants. The semi-presence of the refugees denotes a redundant situation, which the system seems to tolerate temporarily. Therefore, being expropriated from the system turns this segment into a real threat, also foreshadowing menace for the users of the system. "Are there any palm

trees in Grozny?” (2005) tracked the log of the uncertain and unpredictable developments in a specific time-frame. Nonetheless, the log creates a sense of timeless voyeurism, which could be extracted from any other geography.

In like manner, Cennetoğlu rendered a series of photographs in a book entitled “False Witness” (2002). Although the starting point of the series was the Asylum Seeker Registration Centre in Ter Apel, The Netherlands, the book was diversified with cumulated photographs of parallel cases. The sense of uncertainty blended with the depicted states of “not belonging” and “not possessing”. Once again, such unregistered states imply a potential threat. Controlling someone is only possible through an attached belonging. Once an entity has nothing to register to the system, it acquires the stigma of uncontrolled energy. It is not a resistance at all. It is the situation itself which has the potential to generate unpredictable and unwanted gestures, conflicting with the constructed collective behavioural codes through the operational logic of the system. At this point, what is at stake is the positioning of Cennetoğlu as the agent to convey this information to us. The act of representing this potential threat constitutes a second degree of threat, and even the manifestation of the evidences in multiple formats starts to challenge the viewer as the witness and accomplice. As Grzinić states, “In the Lacanian analyst discourse, the agent reduces itself to the void, provoking the subject [in Cennetoğlu’s case, it is the viewer] to confront the truth of its desire”. It may easily be read as a trap for the viewer.

In “False Witness”, the photographs hide their stories beneath their identical grains: the buildings, the interior, the architecture, the scenes, the people, the gazes of these people. Everything occurs in its own language, hence it is totally obscure. Repetitive collapse and replenishment of “uncertainty” blurs the time-space coordinates of the frames. Although Cennetoğlu photographed and restored these scenes from Chamarande, Quito, Otterloo, Batumi, Ter Apel, Amsterdam, Istanbul, Glasgow, Mardin, New York, Egin, Şanlı Urfa, Antwerp, Rize and Tbilisi, these stills can address any node detached from the signifier of its co-ordinates. The broken link of the timespace coordinates of these nodes can be epitomised by borrowing terms from quantum mechanics: the effect of “non-commutativity” manifests itself as an external, constant magnetic field (Smailagic and Spallucci, 2003). In this respect, the “non-communicativity” (as the result of being-in-language of its own) turns the node into a separate being with its own energy. If a part is capable of producing its own energy without any connection to the outer world, it indicates an autonomous field within the system, alias a threat for the operational logic of the system. Furthermore, “False Witness” duplicates the question concerning the “state of belonging” on two other extended levels. The first level is the format of “a book”. While the format itself poses critical questions about “re-presenting” photography, the structure of the format indicates an inquiry into the capability and the limits of the medium itself. The second level is the text in the book, which formulates the order of the photographs into the manipulated

version of the corpus-based data for the word “measure”. Cennetoğlu always experiments with different formats in order to underline the limits and the vagueness of borders in conjunction with the uncertain time and space co-ordinates of her photographs.

A similar approach is seen with “Determined Barbara” (2004), which was exhibited in different formats in a different context. The exhibition and screening route also duplicate the work: “Determined Barbara” is a voyage from Belgrade to Glamoc via Banja Luka. Barbara, located in Glamoc, is a temporary military training ground zone constructed for SFOR units. It occupies the land of 704 pre-war inhabitants of Glamoc. Their land was expropriated for construction in 1998, and in 2001 pre-war inhabitants were allowed to move back. But now, Barbara was awaiting them. Barbara itself signifies an enigma hovering around the definition of “the land” and “the inhabitants” in the course of political conflicts, territorial arrangements and geopolitical debates. Despite her clash with uncertainty, Cennetoğlu deals directly with the most visible occurrences in politically, socially and economically charged situations. Yet, the “sharpness” of her questions unfolds her stance as a photographer: What is the limit for uncertainty? What is the limit for blindness? How can pure energy be controlled? How can a disconnected temporality be documented? And how to betray art?

THE CATALOG

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Negatives in the box. Photographs in the files. Photographs out of sight. Hidden ones. Old ones. New photographs. Cennetoğlu has carefully examined all of these photographs; time-lapses in between these photographs were quite noticeable. They all belong to different situations, contexts and realities. She has divided them into categories; eliminated some of them, grouped them in various ways, and finally decided to take some new photographs to fill possible lapses in her mind. She has then applied an indexing system to build up a mailing catalog. Cennetoğlu creates a seemingly formal setting in which she subtly enforces viewers to create customized indexes out of the “CATALOG”, unless they give up and leave the room due

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to becoming overwhelmed with the overloaded visual information, or find it demanding to sit and check a thick book in the midst of a substantial exhibition visit to the Biennale. This very act imitates the way in which we re-construct memory: we select and dismiss segments. Each dismissed segment creates a lapse.

Cennetoğlu traverses the process of experiencing an “artist’s book” with the way the work would disseminate. The artist allows free downloading from the internet of all the photographs, only for the duration of the biennale. Although, the work indeed enables free dissemination, as “art work”, it can never be possessed and/or taken away by the audience. The downloadable photographs operate as metonyms of the entire work. They each present the work, but can never facilitate in composing the “CATALOG” outside the Pavilion.

Cennetoğlu’s “CATALOG” misleads the audience in terms of its documentary look by disguising itself as a mailing catalog which contains hundreds of photographs. Regardless of the assumption that photography is an evidence of “reality”, “CATALOG” is a fiction and even more distant from the known facts. Each category, and even each photograph either produces its own context or signifies something that is beyond its context by radiating in all directions with divergent references. They are all self-referential signs. In this sense, it manifests the third order of simulacrum.

The way Cennetoğlu exploits the multiplicity – along with the ironic and even sarcastic titles of the categories – is a direct criticism towards the responsibility of the artists and the audience. If photography is a fiction, and even a “drama”, then how do we interpret and respond to a photograph? How responsible are we for what we see and how we interpret it? The distance in between photographs, as well as their enforced placements within the categories, mirrors the pressure of manipulation by the media that we have to face on daily basis. In this respect, another category titled “Composition” contains 32 photographs displaying single beings from various sources placed in the urban or rural architecture. At first sight, it is impossible to understand the occasion in which these photographs were taken, nevertheless, they are all eclipsed by the title “Composition”, which manipulates our perceptions. These photographs are filled with fragmented narrative elements; something is always lacking; they are always incomplete. The structure of “CATALOG” never allows the audience to accomplish a story through the photographs or categories. The work extends outside the exhibition space many times in many respects, yet, can never be completed.