13. | Commercial





2004, France, 6 min 38, SD, 4/3, color, stereo.
Courtesy of the artist and Ceysson & Bénétière, Paris.
Ed. of 5 + 2 A.P.

Collection of N.B.K. Video-Forum, Berlin

Sorte de plan-séquence fixe, *Commerciale* pourrait être vue au premier abord comme la vidéo de surveillance de l'entrée d'un centre commercial. Des gens entrent et sortent, poussant les pales de verre de la porte tournante d'un de ces temples de la consommation saturant toutes les zones suburbaines du monde. Seuls, en couple, en promenade ou pressés, chariots vides ou pleins, mères et enfants, des centaines de clients tournent chaque jour cette porte à tambour, en un ballet implacable qui donne le tournis, et les effets de surimpression et de transparence ajoutent à cette impression de flux continu et indifférent, fantômatique.

Ce jour-là, certains remarquent qu'au centre de la porte a été placé un petit cube noir ceint d'une bande blanche, qui tourne avec elle chaque fois que que quelqu'un la pousse. Ce petit cube noir, c'est une Kaâba. Réduite à sa plus simple expression minimaliste, elle a perdu le faste du brocart noir et de ses versets d'or brodé, et, d'une certaine manière, ce cube désacralisé aurait toujours pu faire partie de ce décor banal.

Depuis plus de treize siècles, des millions d'hommes se tournent chaque jour en direction de cet objet sacré, des milliers d'entre eux traversent le monde pour sept fois tourner autour de ce cube noir qui, débarrassé de ses anciennes idoles, manifeste l'unique et invisible présence divine.

Commerciale, taking the form of a still sequence shot, could at first sight be mistaken for video surveillance footage of the entrance to a shopping centre. People walk in and out, pushing the glass panels of the revolving door of one of these temples of consumption that invade every suburban area worldwide. Alone, in couples, wandering past or rushing in, trolleys empty or full, mothers and children, hundreds of people push this revolving door day in, day out in an unrelenting and dizzying ballet. The effects of superimposition and transparency applied to the video heighten this sensation of a ghostly, indifferent and endless flow.

On this particular day, some people notice the small black cube with a white stripe around it, placed at the centre of the door, which turns each time someone pushes it.
This small cube is a Kaaba. Reduced to its simplest, minimalist expression, it has lost the splendour of the black brocade sewn with golden verses, and to some extent the desecrated cube could always have been a part of this ordinary setting.

Every day, for more than thirteen centuries, millions of people have turned in the direction of this sacred object and thousands of them cross the world to walk seven times around the black cube that, relieved of its former idols, expresses the unique and invisible divine presence.

En plaçant ce cube au centre de la porte à tambour, mounir fatmi en bouleverse radicalement l'investissement symbolique. Vidé de sa consistance spirituelle, devenu anonyme, il ne dirige ni n'oriente plus rien ni personne car il tourne sur lui-même. Ce n'est plus vers lui que l'on se tourne mais l'attention, la prière est projetée ailleurs, vers les rayonnages et têtes de gondole du supermarché, vers les chariots à remplir de nourritures terrestres. Le centre commercial est devenu un pèlerinage d'un autre genre, la consommation, une idole véritable.

Ce constat, aujourd'hui un truisme, n'a pourtant rien de contemporain, et la présence de cette Kaâba est pour l'artiste une manière de souligner les liens constants dans l'histoire entre commerce et religion. Dans les temps préislamiques, La Mecque était le cœur du commerce oriental. La Kaâba polythéiste, en attirant en pèlerinage toutes les tribus arabes, permettait en même temps des échanges commerciaux qui faisaient de La Mecque le cœur d'une économie florissante. Aujourd'hui, plus de quatre millions de musulmans entreprennent chaque année ce pèlerinage et cela implique une économie du rituel, parfois parallèle, aux bénéfices non négligeables. Alors cette kaâba à l'entrée d'un centre commercial pourrait tout aussi bien se faire objet promotionnel pour un voyage qui, pour être hautement spirituel, n'en exige pas moins que l'on vende, que l'on dépense, et que l'on consomme, encore.

Commerciale a été présentée dans le cadre de l'exposition « Comprendra bien qui comprendra le dernier », en 2004, au Centre d'Art contemporain Le Parvid d'Ibos.

Marie Deparis**,** Paris 2007.

vidéo distribuée par Heure exquise ! www.exquise.org

By placing the cube at the centre of the revolving door, mounir fatmi radically changes its symbolic meaning. Deprived of its spiritual substance, anonymous, revolving, the cube no longer guides or leads anyone or anything. Attention and prayer are no longer focused on the cube but on something else, on the shelves and the products on display in the supermarket, on the trolleys that will be filled with earthly food. The shopping centre has become the new pilgrimage, and consumption a true idol.

This acknowledgement, if today a truism, is not new, however, and the presence of this Kaaba is a means for mounir fatmi to highlight the consistent historical ties between trade and religion. In pre-Islamic times, Mecca was the centre of Eastern trade. By attracting all the Arabic tribes, the polytheistic Kaaba developed trade and made Mecca the heart of a flourishing economy.
Today, over four million Muslims make the pilgrimage annually, involving a sometimes parallel economy based on religion, with substantial profits. This Kaaba in a shopping centre then might as well be the way to advertise a trip that, however spiritual, nonetheless demands that we sell, spend and consume even more.

Commerciale was presented as part of the 2004 exhibition « Comprendra bien qui comprendra le dernier » at Le Parvis Modern Arts Centre in Ibos.

Marie Deparis, Paris 2007.

Translation: Julien Castel, Suzan Leclerq.
Editing: Caroline Rossiter.

" I like the ectoplasms of Commercial, in particular the one that passes through a transparent door of the supermarket with shoes in hand, without even noticing the black Cube with the white band, the incarnation of his, of our damaged brain. "

Ariel Kyrou, 2007

exhibitions:

2011

Linguaggi Costituenti - Fondazione Collegio San Carlo - Solo show

2007

Fiac cinéma - Palais de Tokyo - Expo collective



Linguaggi costituenti, SFpublishing 2025

Fatmi, always attentive to the consequences of global capitalism, migration and fundamentalism, precarization, and various forms of denial of freedom, seems to pose a question above all: how to avert a state of servitude to absolute powers?

Francesca Lazzarini, 2011



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COMMERCIALE



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