

On Rooftops and Other Points of View, 2005

3 channel video installation

channel # 1: the interviews, 47 mins

channel # 2: the auditions, 15 mins

channel # 3: candyfloss stories, 17 mins

*On Rooftops and Other points of view, 2005* attempts to explore the complex and metamorphic relationship between the city and its inhabitants.

The city exercises a significant pressure on its inhabitants that defines and regulates their place, demeanour and activities in the public space. The pressure is the resultant of a combination of forces: social norms, demographics, geography and economics... This renders the individual insignificant in his capacity to instigate change in the face of the collective. However, when looked at from a micro level, each individual is in his/her own way interrupting the collective flow with as much power as the collective is restricting him/her. The sum of individual "interruptions" sets a higher overall order.

In channel # 1: *the interviews*, six extras are placed under the spotlight and asked to answer the same set of questions. The questions address their position in society, their relationship to Cairo, their values and their dreams. The artificiality of the setting stands in sharp contrast to the spontaneity of the delivery. This questions the documentary nature of such a product. The interviewees being actors whose livelihood rests on assuming different personas further complicates the process.

Ultimately, the viewer is implicated in assuming the role of the absent interviewer and of the spotlit interviewee.

In channel # 2: *the auditions*, the extras are asked to respond to documentary text collected from Cairenes regarding the same questions addressed in *the interviews*. In their delivery, they imbue the reading with their own preconceived ideas about societal roles and notions of gender, heroism and citizenship. The same actors appear in the third channel playing the roles they casted for.

Channel # 3: *candyfloss stories* opens with an old errant seller calling out to the lady of miracles to come to his rescue, to see what has become of the people and the city.

This short film is based on interviews with Cairenes about their aspirations and frustrations interspersed with news bits relating to the city collected over the Internet. In cyclical fashion, the characters turn Cairo roofs into sets in which they are on "top of the world": rooftops being ambiguous places that hover between the public and the private, the personal and the collective. The "New Comer to the City" talks of a coexisting parallel reality where titillating underwear is cheap and chickens are injected with hormones, the "Drug Addict" of writing his

own obituary in the last pages of the national newspaper, the “Ageing Man” of passing his expiry date while trees are dying and buildings are mushrooming...

Rendered in black and white and scripted as prose with music commissioned by sound artist Cevdet Erek, the virtual journey of the candyfloss seller into the psyche of the people who negotiate their existence under the extreme conditions presented by the megalopolis, that is Cairo, concludes with his arrival at the ultimate top of the city: Mokattam, calling out to the lady of miracles to come to the help of the “passer-by” in “no-man’s land”, his candyfloss stack still intact.