

Beyond the Limits

Book Review

Beyond the Limits is the much awaited mid career survey and follow up to artist Mitra Tabrizian's *Correct Distance*¹, published by Steidl, with critical essays and commentary by distinguished key thinkers Stuart Hall, Francette Pacteau, Christopher Williams, Homi Bhabha and Rosie Thomas. Tabrizian is without a doubt one of the most innovative and visually powerful artists practising in the United Kingdom today with an impressive career in film and photography spanning nearly two decades. Evidently distinctive in her style, Tabrizian presents a radical body of work that demonstrates a politically considered creative process inspired by her engagement with psychoanalytical theory, and identity politics such as feminism, race, gender and sexuality formed by the debates of the past two decades.

A recurring theme in *Beyond the Limits* is an investigation and questioning into the notion of 'model' minorities who are both simultaneously marked and unmarked. These citizens appear as the by-products of their society, and deploy the high gloss, glamour and artificiality of the post-modern corporate entity otherwise known as late capitalism. These "models" have a mutant like quality whereby men, women and children are all unilaterally attired in the powerhouse dress of the business suit which suggests nothing and everything at the same time. In one photograph from *Beyond the Limits*, 2000 photographic series a WASPY father sits with his two sons at supper time with a bullet in his head echoing suicide and a possible trigger happy alternative to the absurdities of daily life. Coupled with this alien existence Tabrizian also creates an architectural cityscape environment through photographic installations that mirror spaces that are devoid of humanity where the only exchange that occurs is in technological and financial commodities. In another image from the same series the empty exterior space translates into the interior realm of the white cube of the gallery whereby upscale performances of identity are being performed with the ironic absence of any actual art work being present within the gallery space! In essence, the visual rendering that Tabrizian's photographs create as Stuart Hall points out, suggest

¹ Tabrizian, Mitra *Correct Distance*, Cornerhouse, 1990.

a “[...]world without affect, an emotionally hollow, ‘indifferent’ universe, which, lacking any critical distance on itself, subjective inside or constitutive outside has gone beyond its limits.”² As the audience, we are invited to retain a special position of acceptable distance as outsiders/insiders who, to some degree, are both central and peripheral in this assessment.

The notion of surveillance and spectacle also feature heavily in Tabrizian’s works and her text offers readers a sense of confrontation between an imaginary “them” and “us.” *The Perfect Crime* series demonstrates the slickness of a Tarantino *Pulp Fiction* or *Reservoir of Dogs* style blue-print. Once again the suit is seen as the perfect uniform in dense tension ridden scenarios that suggest a heavy sense of foreboding. Within these works it is as though one quietly awaits some sort of final showdown, of what possibly could be an offering or a departure from the artificial realm to that of the real. Perhaps intentional on Tabrizian’s part who highlights that “[...] the more we move towards the artificial world, the more we emphasize ‘reality’.”³

Sara Raza

curator and writer, 2005

² Hall, Stuart, *The Way We Live Now*, in *Beyond the Limits*, Steidl, pg 8.

³ Mitra Tabrizian in conversation with Homi Bhabha, chaired and edited by Rosie Thomas in *Beyond the Limits*, Steidl, pg 103.