



REMOTE SENSING

A video essay by Ursula Biemann



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Synopsis

In Biemann's latest video, she traces the routes and reasons of women who travel across the globe for work in the sex industry. By using the latest images from NASA satellites, the film investigates the consequences of the U.S. military presence in South East Asia as well as European migration politics. This video-essay takes an earthly perspective on cross-border circuits, where women have emerged as key actors and expertly links new geographic technologies to the sexualization and displacement of women on a global scale. By revealing how technologies of marginalization affect women in their sexuality, "Remote Sensing" aspires to displace and resignify the feminine within sexual difference and cultural representation.

2001, 53 minutes, Color, Video

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FILM FESTIVALS

Duisburg Film Festival
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm
Lux Centre, London

QUOTES

“An artistic triumph, Bieman's tape provides a searing account of the parasitic networks of global, sexual trafficking in the digital age.”
—Timothy Murray, CoCurator of CTHEORY Multimedia, Cornell University

“Biemann navigates a unique path through critical dialogues on the global sex trade, feminist geography and media activism and her video will become a natural resource for anyone interested in these areas.”
—Lisa Parks, Dept. of Film Studies, UC Santa Barbara

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Ursula Biemann © 2001, 53 min. English

STATEMENT

Spiralling down from an orbital view captured by image satellites, the video-essay takes an earthly perspective on cross-border circuits, where women have emerged as key actors. *Remote Sensing* traces the routes and reasons of women who travel across the globe for work in the sex industry. Voluntarily or not, women are displaced in great numbers from Manila to Nigeria, from Burma to Thailand, from Bulgaria to Europe: female bodies in the flow of global capitalism. The highly digital documents generated for this video link new geographic technologies to the sexualization and displacement of women on a global scale. Using the latest images from NASA satellites, the video investigates the consequences of the U.S. military presence in South East Asia as well as the European migration politics.

Remote Sensing visualises the multi-layered meaning of geography where the sexualization of women in global capitalism is linked to the implementation of new technologies, in often contradicting ways. While the Internet facilitates the migration flow, particularly for women via bride market, the border reinforcement technologies, on the other hand, hinder and push it into the illegal sector. The European visa politics are quite explicit in their practice to channel migrant women directly into the sex industry. The assemblage of documents reveal how technologies of marginalization affect women, and particularly economically disadvantaged women, in their sexuality and how powerful players like States, scientific complexes and military institutions, install a sexuality that eroticizes hierarchies.

Female bodies are the new cargo in the highly lucrative transactions across boundaries. Of course there are numerous structural and political reasons that lead women to move, or to being moved, into the gigantic Fordism of service of the global sex industry. But there is no simple moral distinction to be made between trafficked women and those who choose this venue of survival. The video explores the large grey zone of negotiation women engage in and the different concepts of prostitution they adhere to. *Remote Sensing* aspires to displacing and re-signifying the feminine within sexual difference and cultural representation, where sexuality is often presented within the narrow confines of a masculine symbolic.

The use of imagery generated by geographic information systems (GIS) opens a fundamental critique of Western thinking. Satellite images propose an abstract

and highly accurate view of the world from the top down. The evaluation and interpretation of the millions of geospatial data collected by the satellites currently in the orbit are based on binary computer languages. Through this lens, the world may seem graspable, controllable and easy to categorise. Yet capitalism creates social as well as material landscapes which are only comprehensible in their complex interrelation. *Remote Sensing* fills in missing geographic data which offer a gendered and relational view on the global flows of humans.

Ursula Biemann is an artist and videomaker focusing on gender and globalisation issues in economy, media and the urban space.
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