

MATTHIAS MÜHLING

RESET

in:

BETTINA POUSTTCHI - REALITY RESET

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Some places are tied to the idea that they are the heart of current events. In such places time does not simply pass, it pulses. Times Square in Manhattan is one of those places that want to make us believe that time there is either created or transcended. Although not much more happens there than in any other urban traffic junction, Times Square has an almost mythical quality. Its resplendent billboards, the NASDAQ ticker, Broadway theaters, and above all the fact that the square gets its name from *The New York Times* have turned it into the world's omphalos.

The video work *Reset* from 2001 is based on images of Times Square on the night the year changed from 1999 to 2000—a night in which the people who oriented their lives around the Gregorian calendar had expected something spectacular, from Armageddon to computer crashes, but nothing unusual occurred.

Bettina Pousttchi's stocktaking of this highly symbolic situation was shot from an elevated camera position, and yet what it offers us is less an organizing overview than a montage of numerous fragmentary camera views. From the close-up of an LED ticker to the only long shot at the end of the video, various views and pans over the events have been edited together into a nearly linear narrative. The tempo and rhythm of the edits is based on the continuous crescendo of the accompanying music. The images and soundtrack pan past the media-covered architecture and come together into a narration that tells of globalized urbanism, of time and history, of news and its construction.

An incessant stream of historical data runs across the LED ticker. They are the "Millennium Milestones" that, on the occasion of the turn of the year, presented a retrospective of the history of the previous century. The images selected for the video feature only the historical data that refer to the end of apartheid in

South Africa in the early 1990s. Only the headline "VIDEO CAPTURES BEATING OF MOTORIST RODNEY KING BY LOS ANGELES POLICE (MARCH 3, 1991)" tells of another event in a different society, one supposedly based on equal rights.

What remains, then, of the history whose fragments we look back on through the eye of the camera? A text that suggests history. A stream of events that on Times Square become a commodity. The selectivity of the video shows how selectively our world and its history are perceived. *Reset* describes the world and its history not as a reality that could be described objectively but rather as one radically constructed by its observer—whether that be a person, the media, or art.

But the video does not dwell on cultural criticism that laments the manipulation of the mass media. Rather, Pousttchi's images also express an enthusiasm for the promise of urban modernity. Condensed into striking snapshots, the city's contingent surfaces are transformed into powerful images that narrate the structure of a society with great precision.

The last image in the work pulls back to a long shot. It shows the smoke around the buildings from New Year's Eve fireworks. And yet it is more reminiscent of a doomsday scenario than of a new beginning. Event piles on top of event, what is forgotten and what is remembered remain indefinite, and are both a task for and challenge to the future.