



## External Space



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Abedar Kamgari  
***The Walk Home***  
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In the 30-minute footage of the two-channel long-take performance-for-video, *The Walk Home* (2017), Hamilton-based performance and video artist Abedar Kamgari displays how she navigates the “Canadian” land as a settler/immigrant. As in many of her previous works, Kamgari uses the medium of two-channel presentation to display and explore the ambiguity and uncertainty of her dual identity on Indigenous land as a settler and, also, as a racialized immigrant. *The Walk Home* occupies that limbo space in between the two identities that are represented metaphorically by employing the juxtaposition of the two videos. Like Kamgari, these two videos are very much the exact footage of the same actor, same scenario, same prop and actions. Conversely, each video has its own storyboard - where one’s beginning is another one’s ending.

The videos begin with Kamgari stepping out of the house and down from the bus respectively onto the same stretch of suburban blocks that are presumably the artist’s home neighbourhood. The path is familiar to most Canadians: from the steps of the house to the bus stop or in reserve. However, on the day of the performance, Kamgari carries with her a large, unfamiliar white sculpture, which is used by the artist as a means of destabilizing the audience’s sense of familiarity. Assuming the shape of the gigantic spinning top, the sculpture appears significantly heavy as it takes half of the artist’s body weight to be carried around. Once on the pavement, Kamgari starts dragging the object, scoring the concrete pavements with chalk-like traces on the land.

Kamgari's mirroring set-up of the two videos creates a Möbius<sup>1</sup> strip of a narrative where both sides of the story are simultaneously played out.

The fluidity and interchangeability of the video content reflect the strife in navigating the ambiguity of dual identity of a racialized settler in Canada. Kamgari intensifies the effect of the narrative by employing long takes, or 'one-scene-one-cut', allowing the viewers to genuinely follow the narrative in its entirety without editorial interferences. The common goal for the 'one-scene-one-cut' technique is to consider the depth and range of the field inside the spectator's visual range constituting a theatrical space allowing the actors to perform in a continuous mode (Nagib, 30). When it was first experimented with by Japanese director Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956), such as in the 1939 film *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*, the close resemblance to theatre production's 'long-take technique' was criticized against the heavy 'cut-and-edit' of Western cinema in the neorealist combination of location shooting, non-[theatrical] acting and independent production (30). Neorealist filmmakers like Italian director Roberto Rossellini<sup>2</sup> were also in favour of quick-fire movements that were reflective of the urban velocity that was highly promoted during the cinema boom from the 1930-50s (Nagib, 28-29). Stretching of the movie beyond 30-minutes allows the eyes to wander within the visual range and to pick up subtle details hidden in the construction of the performance's environment.

In *The Walk Home*, Kamgari synthesizes two types of cinematic movement: the 'objective motion' which refers to the movement of object in front of the camera and the 'subjective motion' in which the spectator's point of view is aligned with the titling, panning or travelling of the camera, bringing motionless, as well as moving the object to the viewer's attention (Nagib, 27). Every element in the videos is *mis-en-scene*; the

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<sup>1</sup> Named after the German mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius (1790-1868) in 1858, the Möbius strip is a loop created out of one single strip joined by its two ends with a half-twist. The outcome effect is a twisted cylinder with a closed path surface, one can cover the both the inner and outer sides of the cylinder in one continuous travel. (Weissten, n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> Robert Rossellini (1906-1977) was an Italian filmmaker who pioneered Neo-Realism in the history of world cinema. He was notable for "mixing authentic people and locations in with actors and studio sets", merging fiction and reality "offer[ing] fragments of reality that retain all of its mystery and ambiguity and whose meaning we piece together, much as the characters do" (Dargis, 2006).

artist is no longer the protagonist but an actor in an ensemble composed of human and non-human characters. As the camera moves forwards following the artist, the back and foreground relationship continuously changes, folding and unfolding new elements of the artist's surroundings: different houses, untrimmed front lawns and bypassing neighbours who give bewildered looks to the performance before making swift contact with the camera.

The contrast between the desolate landscape and Kamgari's determination to transgress through the landscape, creates multiple on-screen places for contemplation and meditation. The format of the long-take allows for prolonged focus on these areas. Kamgari's performance decelerates the viewers, as well as the by-passers seen in the videos. By dragging the large sculpture, Kamgari forcefully rejects the homogenization of the landscape while constantly moving deeper into it. The cinematic dynamic here recalls 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,' (Nagib, 33) "the rejection of realistic mimesis, the use of symbols, the actors' emotional control, the absence of a fourth wall and the construction of the sets before the eyes of the audience (Brecht, 1964: 91 ff.)."

Kamgari's goal of revealing "the construction of the sets" – evident through accidental shadows of the camera operator in some shots – aims to evoke a double reflexivity within the viewers, in and outside of the screen (Nagib, 36). Kamgari's viewers engage the same durational physical experience as the artist undergoes. They can feel the physical exhaustion that takes over Kamgari's body as friction chips away the exterior of the sculpture. Here, both the artist and the object are slowly altered. The sculpture stands not only for the artist, but also for the burden that she carries constantly. Kamgari visualizes her feeling through an affective visual language, an act that is politically apt to address the complexity of being a racialized settler/ immigrant on Canadian Indigenous land. *The Walk Home* is political not entirely because of Kamgari's artist's statement. It becomes political when it allows the viewers to participate in the on-screen and unedited performance (Nagib, 38). The emotion is raw, and the exhaustion is in real-time. The long take and the reservedly mirrored narratives constitute an ambiguous space for viewers to participate in the artist's complete but irresolute story.

-Tak Pham

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