According to Henri Bergson, memory is an accumulation of time to introduce the possibility of an intentional selection. We can expand or compress certain fragments of input-time at will. By forming intervals memory brings the past into the present, letting ‘the dead’ appear in ‘the living’.

Video technology operates as time technology. Electronic image technologies do not double reality, but rather imitate a function of perception by forming intervals: a new system synthesizing duration and intensities. As a technical system the camera functions as a sensory-motoric (bodily) memory: it records movements (of light) and modulates them through contraction and expansion into electromagnetic currents or frequencies, which are time. The movement of the video image is directly determined by the wave motion of the material. The camera operates as a system of input and output time within the light waves. It is a technical system, however, because there are no opportunities for ‘intentional influence’; in other words, because contraction and expansion are repeated automatically. The montage functions as a system of contracting and expanding these flows of time, which can be intentionally influenced, because relations and durations of time are manipulated in the montage (ten seconds of material can be generated from one second of material). The camera and montage are thus the two essential types of memory that Henri Bergson defines in his ‘Matière et Mémoire’, and video (camera and montage) can be described as a technical system that simulates the neurological function of memory.

Video images have a pre-representative life: a molecular life of (tape) speed, (light) intensities, (camera) movements, and (video) streams of light, which are determined by the smallest forces of desire and affects. Electronic images, sounds and the smallest pixels are understood here as bodies, which affect other bodies, because every image is a body and every body is an image. Every camera shot has a kind of birthplace, an incision in the time/space continuum, the past and present of which remain invisible. A virtual time appends itself directly to the segment, future settings of possible events in the montage. This portion of the fictive is part of every acted camera image. The video image is a ‘circuit center’, a visual memory, which functions as an agent and not as a replica. There is no objective/documentary image. Camera locations are event locations open to a multitude of streams (of consciousness). They contain virtual actuation potentials that can later be developed in the montage.

The video ‘Passing Drama’ reflects the acoustic image of my family history. It tells the refugee story of my Greek family that came to me across three generations as a fragmentary and fairy-tale-like image. Flight as the fundamental motif of the story became the videographic theme of narrative, history and memory.

‘Drama’ is the name of a small town in northern Greece, where many refugees (including my grandparents) from Asia Minor settled, who had survived the trauma of the so-called ‘Asia Minor catastrophe’. Between 1922 and 1925 the Greek minority (around 1.5 million people) living in various areas of Asia Minor, today Turkey, were deported and displaced. Many children of these refugees (including my father), who were born in northern Greece in formerly Turkish villages (the Muslim population, about 500,000 people, were evacuated from Greece in accordance with the Lausanne Agreement of 1923) or had experienced the exodus from Turkey as children, came to Austria and Germany in 1942 as forced laborers. This part of northern Greece had been occupied by the Bulgarian army, which was allied with Hitler. Poverty, racism, the concealment of historical facts, but most of all the inner necessity of forgetting the traumatic experiences of the deportation from Turkey and forced labor in World War II marked this acoustic image of a flight that was retold again and again from one generation to the next, from one place to the next.

The association of the title ‘Passing Drama’ with stage and film is intended to indicate the performative character of the narrative. The ‘now-time’ was a defining force for the narrator in the video. The performative act of recounting determined the content of what was conveyed. The refugees told me their story at an advanced age; they had lived their life, yet it seemed to be the first time that they were asked
about their history. Their stories indicate a structure of oral tradition marked by survival: the echo chamber of a mental fight for survival, which still determined the present. The text level of the video consists of interviews with this second generation, who had heard their parents’ story as children. These were sentences like stones. Sentences whose vocal melodies had been inscribed in collective and individual memory across three generations. Forgetting yesterday had become interwoven with forgetting the day before yesterday and mingled with forgetting today. Across the generations this narrative profiled from the theatrical talent of its narrators, who extended or abridged single moments and repeated inextinguishable fragments themselves, which became a kind of song about flight through repetition and transfer. Fissures and discontinuities gaped open in the transfer of memory, of knowledge, of habits of thinking and living. Yet the blocks and aphasia in the memories of these inhabitants that had become migrants contains a truth that does not only apply to them. For what happened to them has also happened to us: a radical change in living one’s memory and one’s time.

Forgetting or the notation of forgetting is expressed in ‘Passing Drama’ through the montage of various levels of the past. Each place represents a different level of time in the narrative: the farther back the location of the story was, in other words the farther back in the past that the events were that happened in this location, the more the image manipulation and montage was impelled in this place. From one image generation to the next, I constructed different levels and degrees of abstraction through the image manipulation, which were attributed to the ‘generation’ of the story accordingly. ‘Realtime’ represents the machine location (here and now - Germany). This image material was not influenced in post-production. These are images of industrial weaving machines that repeatedly come up between the sequences. They are not only sociological descriptions (many refugees worked in the textile industry), but also function as a paradigm of the narrative construction.

History appears in ‘Passing Drama’ as industrial machinery that devours minorities on behalf of an invisible majority. ‘Halfspeed’ describes a location of the documentary, the location of the narrative (2nd Generation: Greece/Germany). A single generative level of transfer influences the course of the narrative. Distortion becomes palpable, but the degree of fragmentation does not yet destroy the conventional image sequences. The material was manipulated once in the post-production process by decelerating or stretching it, so that my reading process was appended or added into the next generation of images once. My observation time flowed into the next generation of images, similar to the way memories are actuated in oral tradition and longer periods of time result from brief moments. The more dynamic picture sequences (two levels of transfer) represent the ‘generated’ image of a place that was passed on to the narrator (Asia Minor), which he never saw himself. The extension and compression of time was impelled to the most extreme in the material. The levels of information intrude, the text remains fragmentary, the intensity of sifting through the material is most massively inscribed in the original material. My own imagination distorted the material most.

The camera shots and the images and sounds processed in this way were digitized and constituted a time-mapping in the computer, a memory from images, intensities, speeds and movements from the various locations of the story of flight, which became different levels of time and past. This database was coupled in non-linear editing with a linear runtime system. The moments of tension emerged from the constant back and forth between the archive order and the resultant linear course. The ‘montage’ was defined from the ability to navigate within the archive-memory to reveal new links and montages. The possibility of layering material in a linear sequence resulted in different text/image/sound fields for image and sound, which determined the emphasis or deletion of information. The flows of image and sound were newly interwoven again and again based on motifs, in order to define a different mental and material space allowing for possibilities of a non-linear narrative, in which various modes of perception can be interlocked.

In its narration structure ‘Passing Drama’ is neither a documentation nor fiction. Instead it deals with the choice between polyvocality and unanimity, between shorter or longer vocal phrases, between open and closed logics of a story, which characterizes the refugee story in general. Trauma, dramatic escapes and survival strategies determine the levels of the perception of the stories as constitutive psychologies.

In ‘Passing Drama’ the viewer is compelled into other dimensions. (This both touches and disturbs the viewer at the same time, because the viewer’s own sensibility allows them to intuitively recognize the pre-individual, pre-representative life of their subjectivity.) We are transported to another dimension, which psychologists refer to with the lovely expression ‘a-modal perception’: as in the pre-verbal life of the newborn, here we still have the freedom of not fixing what touches us in categories of image, sound or the designation of the object, but rather of gliding from one emotion into the next. It is not a matter of
countering the representative image with its infinitesimal elements, but rather of moving from one into the other, for example from the molecular to the molar dimension, just as it is constantly practiced in life. The discovery of this dynamic in both directions leads us to the source of our own creativity. With the compression and extension of movement, with the weaving and interweaving of the flows of images and sounds, new experiences of perceptions and logics arise, which are for the viewer vectors of dehumanized subjectivity at the same time.

In ‘Passing Drama’ the infinitely small lines of flight (molecular becoming) indicate the minorities (migrants). The video image becomes the echo of the movement of the migrant proletariat (the great deterritorialized). In this work the images of the looms function paradigmatically. Here one might recall that Plato’s metaphor for politics was weaving. Yet flows of images cannot be represented. One can only conjoin and compose them. They cannot be dissected to be rearranged (hybridization). The impossibility of the political representation of minorities and the impossibility of their aesthetic representation are equally caused by the deterritorialization of the flows. Weaving as a method of non-linear montage is a narrative of the process of memory. The framework of meaning is constantly newly constructed. Every new element is integrated in the fabric like in a network of relationships. These relations are mutually ‘remembering’ or ‘forgetting’ (fiction, quotation, account). These two fundamental directions influence the flowing or blockage of information and the narrative logos. Linking different logics of the dramaturgy especially emphasizes the moments of transitions. Transitions become the hinges determining the contents. The way events become intense in memory finds a correspondence in the intensification of audio-visual transitions. These mental transitions and here the transitions of different narrative logics are moments that particularly occupy our attention. The monotony of a logic ends in the transition. Habits of seeing and hearing are opened up. Our attention navigates from node to node, from one link to the next, from one transition to the next. As soon as logics of a sequence settle into a longer duration, our attention dwindles (relaxation). It is activated again as soon as the dynamic of an emerging event is anticipated. We observe an event unfolding, a story growing, or a framework of meaning falling apart.

The ethics and politics of the image in ‘Passing Drama’ constitute an ecology of the intellect for machine subjectivities.

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