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Before the Representation

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1.

Playing a role in someone else's dream or being stuck in the idling mode of habits is a reasonable image of the fear of a postmodern social death. In this sense the emergence of media art is not only an art genre, but is also based on the collective forces of desiring in opposition to this postmodern death. If the potentials of individual possibilities for agency oscillate between technical and social developments, then that which is subsumed under the category of media art is also the expression of a resistance against this postmodern death of desubjectivation.

Since the 80s, with the invasion of audio-visual apparatuses and the computer into the area of private living, the computer now occupies the most important place in the home next to the bed. An "audio-visual production of the self" with PCs, camera, sound machines, etc. has since then shaped the spaces of imagination and agency of a first, second, and meanwhile even fourth or fifth generation of media consumers/producers and determined new social categories. Stephan Geene describes this "production of the self" as a "second self with media", a term he has borrowed from the investigations of the psychologist Sherry Turkle into the relationship between subject and technology. According to Turkle,

the computer has "a second nature as an evocative object, as an object that fascinates, disturbs our composure, and propels our thinking towards new horizons. The computer is a metaphysical machine, a psychological machine, not because one can speak of the psychical unconscious of the machine, but because it influences how we think about ourselves ...". The "second self with media" is "not an artificial subject, but rather the product of a reflective self-observation that depends on a disposition in the social network," according to Geene[1]. The individual update of flows of information intensifies and accelerates the interplay and exchange between consumption and production, between the reception of stereotype verbal and image affects (e.g. through television), and the production of an interruption of the flows of time, the creation of an interval, because the influence of the flows of images, sound and information is always processive memory work, in which collective references and personal experiences are superimposed. This "audio-visual production of the self" becomes the message material in the mass media flow of information, the collective "body" of the media recipient. This message material activates new processes and channels in both directions, it co-determines the circulation of information, it is the drug of postmodern rituals. It is introduced into the collective echo chamber, the bodily and immaterial space of memory, in homeopathic doses. It inscribes itself as a painful process into collective memory, painful because it is first rejected and then utilized when it has become part of the social machine through uninterrupted repetition.
Impulses flow out of the molecular production space of private media producers for the creation of new relations of memory from the perspective of new conjunctions of perception. Conversely, every generation of producers is tied to "their" mass media. In an interview that we conducted in Paris during the first Gulf War[2], Félix Guattari declared that "every generation has the media it

deserves." The television viewer, whom Guattari called an agent rather than a consumer long before the computer revolution, is taking leave of their victim role as a recipient of manipulated mass media. Today the television viewer is a producer making use of the refraction of public, stereotype flows of affects as an element of self-production (even if the viewer does not realize any audio-visual productions). The television viewer is dependent on movements in the media echo chamber, not an independent author and critic.

The necessity of making it possible to examine and convey one's own processes of perception and subjectivation gave birth to a critical reflection with machines that has become popular with electronic art production since the sixties. This thinking with machines within "social machines", which is doped by the effect of a "machinic unconscious" (Deleuze/Guattari), oscillates between repetition and difference, between an automated and a created memory, between habit and invention. It would be too simple to dismiss this "production of the self" as an elitist phenomenon of the first world. Today computers and cameras are almost cheaper than machine guns and politically more effective, in my opinion, where it is a matter of gaining access to the collective public sphere of technicized societies. There are examples of this from every part of the world where political conflicts are carried out.

In art operations, however, in which the traces of this "self-production" first found a public sphere, the inflationary way it began to appear became a problem. The "production of the self" reserved to a small group lifts art out of its traditionally exclusive and elite sphere. The star cult becomes the sure sign of a mass commerciality, in which only a small portion of new processes of subjectivation can be contained, because if the question of subjectivation is tied to disposition in the social network, then it cannot result from a one-sided relationship between consumption

and production. The representations of the "production of the self" are not long-lasting, they are a temporary expression of a process, but the instance that generates this process is alive. For this reason, exhibition spaces have turned into platforms for encounters, which have long since redefined the social function of art in society.
The world of cinema, as well, which has been controlled and determined since World War I by the propaganda ministries and since World War II by nation-state media institutions, until recently ignored the microscopic, economic strategies of increasingly differentiated production possibilities. However, this may be due more to the power interests of the major media, which can operate temporarily, similarly to military institutions, above and beyond any economic argumentation.
The end of the great history (of progress, of revolution, of the new, modern human being and the machine) in literature and history had already been sealed, though, according to Maurizio Lazzarato. "The crisis of representation was already evident before the world wars in art and politics at the same time. The most important research on memory, the brain and mental space was conducted before World War I. It anticipated a social experience that was to mark the twentieth century: the cooperation between brains. The world becomes memory. In a world that is becoming a collective brain, the life of human beings is as uncertain and probable as the relations among the synapses. Life has no history in the literal sense. It does not run its course directed to a goal, but concatenates situations and can run in all directions. It cannot be described as a dramatic sequence until it is over. Only then can all the events be ordered into a history and become visible as necessary actions in a sequence. Viewed from this perspective, life cannot be represented."[3]

2.

According to Henri Bergson, memory is an accumulation of time to introduce the possibility of an intentional selection. We can chew the cud of a brief moment from our childhood a whole life long. This means that 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 their 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 actuated 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 profited 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."[4]

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."[5]

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."[6]

The video "Passing Drama" was also shown as a performance by mixing additional sound levels live during the screening. This was intended to take the story back to the open process, from which it was born: the process of montage. Taking recourse to the open time period of the stage ties into the performative situation of the protagonists by including the "second self with media". It is an

attempt to allow a trace to emerge, leading back to one's own story, the perception of which was shaped by the use of media apparatuses, which co-determine the possibility of the process of subjectivation today.

3.

The concept of the video project TIMESCAPES developed from "Passing Drama". TIMESCAPES investigates the aesthetics of non-linear film montage as collaborative processes among video authors from different countries in western and southeastern Europe. It is a collaborative non-linear montage project (with Hito Steyerl, VI.DEA_Media Collective Ankara, Dragana Zarevac and Freddy Viannelis) within the research project "Transcultural Geographies" by and with Ursula Biemann, Lisa Parks and Ginette Verstraete.

TIMESCAPES examines representation, memory, politics and poetics of the video image in the montage process, in order to visualize pre-individual and collective subjectivation processes and explore new forms of videographic narrative. This research illuminates different story formations that characterize the collective memory of technicized societies today and have characterized them in the past. This presupposes that electronic image and sound production and networked modes of production simulate functions of memory.

To deconstruct habitual images (clichés) and concatenate them differently, TIMESCAPES first examines new camera and montage techniques. Digital post-production as a web instrument is also a possible paradigm for image construction here. The development of information and duration in the montage (cut) are the key to

this discussion about representation, memory and minority politics, which relates to a methodological practice here and constitutes the montage process in terms of both form and content. The goal of the research is to learn to understand the internal dynamic of a group working in different locations as a constituting process. Force fields of pre-representative potentials can be grounded in this as open opinion fields, generative processes of notation in montage, connective and disruptive interfaces between text, image and sound from different fields of perception (hearing, seeing, logic) and from different positions, and amalgamations, distortions and selections of memory can be investigated as a creative potential.

The goal of the collaboration is a linear story on video, yet this only serves to focus the working process, which is foregrounded as the formal solution of the problem of representation. At the same time, new representation surfaces for the screen are examined, which make sense for the artists' collaboration.

Through its concept and mode of production, TIMESCAPES deals with the theme of "private story versus world politics" or the interlinking of micro and macro political worlds (local/global, minority/majority, male/female) in relation to narration and to memory. The starting point is given by the spatial reality, which is an initial element of the story as the birthplace of the camera image: along the European axis, which was strategically determinant for the German empire before the two world wars and still forms the axis of the streams of migration to Germany today.

Finally, TIMESCAPES is also a social film network, because each of the authors becomes producer and agent of the project.

Foucault interprets the "entry of the living into history" as a positive possibility for thinking of the "political subject as an

ethical subject", specifically contrary to the traditional western way of thinking, which defines the political-ethical subject solely in the form of the "legal subject". When power makes life itself the object of its authority, then Foucault is interested in determining what resists this power: the forms of subjectivation and living that elude this power. TIMESCAPES interprets the "entry of the living into the audio-visual story" as a positive possibility for representing the politics of representation themselves as a process through exploring collective processes of subjectivation.

Passing Drama, 1999, 66 min

TIMESCAPES http://www.timescapes.info/

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[1] Stephan Geene, *"money aided ich design",* Berlin 1998, 45

[2] Canal Dechaine, *Avez-vous vu la guerre du Golfe*? Paris 1991

[3] Maurizio Lazzarato, *"Digitale Montage und das Weben: Eine Ökologie des Gehirns für Maschinen Subjektivitäten"* on the video "Passing Drama" by Angela Melitopoulos, Zürich 2002

[4] Maurizio Lazzarato, *"Digitale Montage und das Weben: Eine Ökologie des Gehirns für Maschinen Subjektivitäten"* on the video "Passing Drama" by Angela Melitopoulos, Zürich 2002

[5] Essay for the catalogue for the exhibition 'Privat Affairs' at Kunsthaus Dresden: Maurizio Lazzarato, *Digitale Montage und Weben: Eine Ökologie des Gehirns für Maschinen-Subjektivitäten*, Paris 2002

[6] Essay for the catalogue for the exhibition 'Privat Affairs' at Kunsthaus Dresden: Maurizio Lazzarato, *Digitale Montage und*

Weben: Eine Ökologie des Gehirns für Maschinen-Subjektivitäten,
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