GENDER
OPEN
REPOSITORIUM

Video Against the Machine: Lens-Based Interventions in The Refugee Crisis

Houwen, Janna

2019

https://doi.org/10.25595/2112

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Houwen, Janna: *Video Against the Machine: Lens-Based Interventions in The Refugee Crisis*, in: FKW : Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur (2019) Nr: 66, 72–86. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2112.

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY NC ND 4.0 Lizenz (Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.de

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY NC ND 4.0 License (Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivates). For more information see:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode

GenderOpen – Repositorium für die Geschlechterforschung: www.genderopen.de

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

VIDEO AGAINST THE MACHINE: LENS-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN THE REFUGEE CRISIS

Lines, arrows and clusters, digits and data points. In contemporary art, refugees[1] taking flight to Europe frequently appear in contemporary visual art in the form of abstract diagrammatic categories: caught in graphs, charts and diagrams. Lens-based artworks such as *In-Formation* (Harun Farocki 2005), *The Mapping Journey Project* (Bouchra Khalili 2008–2011) and *Friday Table* (Foundland 2013–14), for instance, all use maps, charts and graphs in order to reflect on forced migration to Europe, as well as its regulation by the EU. This representational strategy contrasts with numerous attempts by artists to construct empathic relationships between European viewers and refugees by forging identification through shared experiences.[2] What is more, the diagrammatic forms in recent art practices seem to respond to a politics of numbers that is, in the words of Nicholas de Genova et al., "exploited by national governments, EU institutions, as well as fear-mongering news media and right-wing populist political parties" in order to "fortify the more general staging of a spectacle of 'invasion' or 'inundation' conjured by images of seemingly desperate 'foreign' masses seeking entry to places where they ostensibly do not belong" (De Genova et al. 2016: 22).

The constant circulation of accounts of dramatically rising numbers of recent migrants and refugee arrivals instill a sense of 'crisis' with regard to contemporary movements of people into 'Europe' (ibid: 21). Instead of raising understanding or offering Europeans the possibility to empathize with people seeking refuge in the EU, these threatening charts rather erase "the individuality and political subjectivity of people on the move" (ibid: 22). Turned into dots on a line or digits in a diagram, people crossing dangerous territories in order to reach Europe are no longer represented as human subjects at all; they are depicted as parts in a process that is bringing Europe into crisis.

However, in spite of the fact that the 'numbers game' can help to sustains xenophobic politics, it can be argued that some artworks adopt this rhetoric not so much with the aim to (re) produce a sense of crisis (even though that may be an inevitable effect), but rather to point to a certain system that the notion of 'refugee crisis' sustains and justifies. This system is what I will call the *refugee machine* at Europe's borders: a military-industrial-

1) I use the term *refugee* throughout this article to refer to people who have left their home countries in order to escape from poverty and/or violence. I consider refugees as migrants who have made an 'involuntary choice': their decision to take flight and move abroad was forced by disadvantageous, oftentimes life-threatening circumstances. See also note 7

2) For a reflection on the possibilities and pitfalls of empathic encounters with refugee experiences in art elsewhere, see: Houwen 2016.

surveillance complex that manages incoming refugees in a highly organized, processual manner. The threat of disorder and enduring instability that the notion of 'crisis' has come to signify in Europe are absent from this well-oiled machine; a machine in which numbers, graphs and charts are not only used as rhetorical tools, but function as signs in tracking down, identifying, monitoring and processing 'foreign' bodies as (bio)data so as to regulate migration to Europe.

In this article, I study the military-industrial-surveillance complex at Europe's borders as a machine that functions alongside and in response to the so-called refugee crisis, but that in itself is not in crisis at all. Following philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato's definition of machinic systems (2014), I conceptualize the machine as a series of intertwined discursive/semiotic as well as non-discursive/material elements. In Lazzarato's writings, the concept of the machine denotes an apparatus that does not depend on *techne* per se. Machinic systems can be technological, but also political, economic, social, or all of these at once – as the machinic system of capitalism that Lazzarato focusses on proves. Drawing from theories by Karl Marx, Gilles Deleuze and, most of all, Félix Guattari, Lazzarato defines the machine as a series of intertwined devices; an assemblage of multiplicities that work together as parts in a machine. Public institutions, factories, the media, and so on, can all be understood as (non-metaphorical) machines because they assemble people, procedures, semiotics, techniques, rules, etc. Together, discursive and non-discursive, semiotic and material components make up a whole that surpasses them (ibid: 82).

When viewed through the lens of machine theory, the reduction of refugees to calculable formula and neatly arranged data packets cannot be seen as an isolated, purely discursive matter. It is part of a large machinic assemblage in which economic, judicial, social and technological components work together, producing material, immobilizing, de-subjectifying, as well as oftentimes lethal consequences for the human beings involved. Only after carefully studying the workings of this *refugee machine*, I argue, will it become possible to uncover possible modes of resistance against this controlling and objectifying system.

FIRE AND FLOWS: DOCUMENTARY PERSPECTIVES ON MACHINIC SUBJECTION

In order to analyze the military-industrial-surveillance complex at Europe's borders as a machinic system, I turn to two art-house documentary films which do exactly that. Nathalie Loubeyre's *Flow Mechanics* (2016) and Morgan Knibbe's

Those Who Feel the Fire Burning (2014)[3] analytically uncover intertwining parts of a large refugee-controlling system at work in Southern European countries. Whereas Loubeyre's movie can be defined as a documentary in what Bill Nichols (2001) calls the *observational mode*, because of its use of an unobtrusive camera, Knibbe's work is a poetic docufiction that combines documentary footage with a fictional narrator. What the films have in common is that they both position themselves in the afore discussed tendency within visual art to point out the processual character of 'refugee-management' in the EU. However, whereas many artworks (such as the aforementioned ones by Farocki, Khalili and Foundland) bring out the machinic workings of European refugee-control by way of graphs and diagrams, *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel the Firing Burning* manage to do so without inserting numerical representations into their formal structure. It is rather through a structured mode of mapping, of outlining a complex machinic assemblage, bringing all its parts into view, that both movies can be regarded as forms of machine analysis that are very much in line with Lazzarato's machine theory (2014).

In light of the refugee crisis, Lazzarato's theory is not only relevant because it enables the examination of seemingly heterogeneous, yet interrelated assemblages of control, but also because it unravels ways in which contemporary machines have the power to create and dismantle subjectivities. Unlike scholars following the *linguistic turn* in analytical philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lazzarato does not understand subjectivity as a merely discursive construct that is the result of signifying operations. Following Guattari, he believes that subjectivity has a non-discursive, a-signifying, unnamable core that is existential, pathic and affective prior to being (or becoming) linguistic or cognitive. In a pre-personal and pre-linguistic phase, human beings can already experience an emergent self through affects, intensities and ways of feeling, even though there is not yet a division between subject and object. According to Lazzarato, this pre-personal, pre-individual core remains active and mutable in later stages of subject formation.

A consequence of this understanding of subjectivity is the notion that the production, mutation or adaptation of (political) subjectivity are not necessarily discursive processes. For Lazzarato, this realization is of essential importance. Without discarding the role of language in subjectivation processes entirely, he urges political theorists to pay more attention to the non-discursive aspects of subjectivity: our present circumstances cannot be understood

3) Abbreviated as *Those Who Feel* from here onwards.

or critiqued without it. Lazzarato claims that, under the conditions of global capitalism and in our increasingly technology- and media-saturated time, we have entered a machine-centric world in which the production of subjectivity takes place at the intersection of two modalities.[4] On the one hand, people are controlled and assigned to specific subject positions by way of discourse; a process Lazzarato labels *social subjection*. We are *subjected* to machines," he writes, "when we, constituted as its users, are defined purely by the actions that the use of the machine demands" (2006a). Social subjection entails an allocation of roles. Even though we may feel alienated from these allocated roles, we cannot escape from being turned into individual subjects via categories such as identity, sex, profession and nationality.

On the other hand, people are taken over *from the inside* as affects and sensations of, what Lazzarato calls, subjectivities' pre-personal core are captured by machines (Lazzarato 2014: 38). Lazzarato labels this process of taking over from the inside *enslavement*. We are enslaved to a machine when we are turned into "a cog in the wheels, one of the constituent parts enabling the machine to function" (ibid). As opposed to the process of social subjection, the mechanisms of machinic enslavement are not aimed at subject constitution but rather dismantle and fragment the individual. Pre-subjective elements of human beings such as affects, emotions, perceptions, sensations, rhythms, and non-verbal bodily movements, function as parts of the machine, but without a singular subject as referent. Machinic enslavement does not bother with subject/object, words/things, nature/culture dualisms, and disregards distinctions between human and non-human operators (ibid: 26). On the level of machinic enslavement, fragmented human beings are not persons, but recurrent and interchangeable parts of a process.[5]

As an example of a machine that both subjects and enslaves its users, Lazzarato mentions the television. A television is a technological, but also an ideological and social machine that subjects its users by producing specific subject positions through enunciation (such as viewer/listener, or represented/speaking subject). At the same time, the enunciated subjects of the television are enslaved by the machine, because they become part of it by receiving and producing input and output, thus facilitating the transmission of information. The television machine works, for instance, on behalf of users operating the remote control; their choices are collected as data that influence programming. The affects, emotions, perceptions and physical actions of viewers as

4) See also Hesselberth et al. (2018) for a discussion of Lazzarato's ideas in relation to contemporary issues of legibility.

5) Lazzarato turns to Deleuze's notion of the *dividual* in order to further define this fragmentation: "subjection produces and subjects individuals, whereas in enslavement individuals become '*dividuals*', and masses become samples, data [...]. The dividual 'functions' in enslavement in the same way as the 'non-human' component parts of technical machines" (Lazzarato 2014: 26).

well as of guests or hosts on screen are sent out and fed back into the machine in a loop that makes the machine run. On this level of machinic enslavement, viewers are sets of multiple elements that become part of the television network. Their affects, emotions, desires or simply their hands pressing the remote control do not need a single subject as referent in order to function as cogs in the machine.

Whereas subjection takes place in "the register of 'representation' and 'signification' or 'production of meaning', both of which are organized by signifying semiotics (language) with the purpose of producing the 'subject', the 'individual', the 'I'" (2006b, n.pag.), the process of machinic enslavement depends on a register organized by a-signifying semiotics that tune in directly to the body by means of a-signifying signs. Even though a-signifying signs remain more or less dependent on signifying semiotics, "at the level of their intrinsic functions they circumvent language and dominant social significations" (Lazzarato 2014, 40).[6] As "power signs" they make things happen, they produce changes by engaging material flows (of goods, or bodies, for instance). They have a direct, unmediated impact on the real without being routed through signification and representation. The bar code on a parking ticket for instance opens the garage's lever, computer languages command technological machines to carry out certain tasks, a magnetically loaded strip allows you to travel by train in some countries. These a-signifying "power signs" are operational rather than representational. They produce direct material consequences, while bypassing signification (Lazzarato 2014, 85).

In *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel*, the conjoined regimes of subjection and enslavement are mapped out by way of images. In *Those Who Feel*, the bird's eye view of a moving camera scans over European sea-side cities, where it zooms in on different people, such as undocumented refugees in a detention center; administrators filing asylum applications; police chasing suspect foreigners in the streets; refugees living in dilapidated buildings that are watched by cameras; military officers with radios overseeing the loading of coffins of drowned refugees on a ship, while news crews are filming the bereaved.[7] *Flow Mechanics* traces fences and gates in indistinguishable places across Europe's Mediterranean borders. The 'foreign bodies' behind these fences are regulated by military soldiers, policemen and Frontex officers, with the help of concerned citizens (who are on the look-out for strangers entering their villages), as well as watchdogs and surveillance technologies, all of which form part of a machinic

6) The circumvention of social significations is important, as it distinguishes Lazzarato's notion of a-signifying signs (or, in other words, *power signs*) from performatives as defined by J. L. Austin. The performative speech act is a social act. In the words of Lazzarato, the performative entails a "social obligation" (2014: 170). A-signifying semiotics functions apart from social roles or meanings.

7) My use of the term 'refugee' is not in accordance with the much narrower European judicial meaning of the word, which indicates a legal status that many of the people in *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* do not have. I use 'refugee' in a broad sense instead of turning to categories such as 'illegalized migrants', 'economic asylum-seekers' or 'undocumented immigrants', so as not to reproduce the exclusion that is produced by the narrow definition of the term under EU Law. The process of distinguishing between legal/illegal is an element of the 'refugee machine' that I aim to 'plug out' from in my writing.

assemblage. Other identities have a place in the machine as well: a doctor treats ill refugees; a priest buries their corpses. These two men are linked to economic components of the machine (e.g., who pays for the medicines or coffins?), as well as to social ones (e.g., locals not accepting dead strangers in their cemeteries).

Within the machinic assemblage of interrelated social, political, geographical, architectural, and technological components that becomes visible in both movies, a process of social subjection can be recognized. All represented persons have clear cut roles; they are defined by the actions expected of them within the machinic assemblage. What is more, the identity of the involved individuals is shown to be largely discursive in *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel*; identities are formed by the words with which the people in the movies talk about themselves and others, illustrating Lazzarato's claim that mechanisms of subjection depend on signifying semiotics (language). In *Flow Mechanics*, policemen for instance talk about themselves as "protectors" and about refugees as "strangers". A helping doctor in *Flow Mechanics*, on the other hand, speaks about refugees as patients in dire need of care. Such utterances by European law enforcers and aid workers produce binary schemes in which the identity of refugees is very much defined along the axes of active threat (to be resolved) and/or passive victim (to be helped). Yet, without denying their suffering or criminalization, refugees in both *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* do not speak about themselves as mere objects of care or control. By, for instance, discussing ways to make money, difficulties in border crossing, or successful attempts of others moving North, small communities of (mostly male) refugees appear as actors in larger economic and social migratory networks.

However, even though the refugees in *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* are shown to defy surveillance systems and form social networks that resist passive victimhood, their networked agency cannot be understood as a *counter-machine* that functions in opposition to, or apart from, the EU military-industrial-surveillance complex. With Lazzarato's definition of the machine as an assemblage of heterogeneous components in mind, the refugees' actions and ways of living together cannot be seen apart from the push and pull with EU authorities, aid workers and journalists (including their technological, medical and discursive tools). These co-define their identity, or, in Lazzarato's terms, subjection. All are *plugged into* the same refugee machine.

In *Those Who Feel* and *Flow Mechanics,* the autonomy of migration[8] is denied by way of cinematic devices. *Those Who Feel*

8) A concept discussed by for instance Casas-Cortes et al. (2015). In the words of Casas-Cortes et al., autonomy of migration refers to "the multiple and diverse ways in which migration responds to, operates independently from, and in turn shapes [...] apparatuses [of control] and their corresponding institutions and practices" (2015: 895). I would rather argue that migration and apparatuses of control shape *each other* and are therefore not operating independently at all. As intertwined mechanisms, they are part of the same machinic system.

suggests continuity and contiguity between the depicted refugees on the one hand, and European citizens and law enforcement on the other, through an absence of cuts. A smoothly floating camera hoovers over cityscapes, revealing a network of streets that connects different groups of people. Their adjacency in time and space is emphasized by the fact that the moving images do not break up time and space either. The camera zooms in and out on the groups of people living in the same place, at the same time, with uninterrupted crane shots.

In *Flow Mechanics*, on the other hand, the spatial and temporal interrelation between refugee 'strangers' and European 'protectors' is made apparent precisely by way of cuts. Cross-cuts between border officials and refugees draw a parallel between the two groups, especially when the cross-cuts are match-cuts. For instance, a shot of a male refugee walking towards the camera through the snow with a bag in his right hand, is cross-cut with a matching image of a Frontex officer scouring a similar white landscape, holding the leash of a watchdog in his right hand. Because of the similarity between the mise-en-scène of the two men within subsequent shots, it is unclear if the officer is following the refugee, or the other way around. Even though they are visually distinguishable, the two men seem to be walking the same route in the same pace, yet in a temporally unreconstructable order. This way, the film makes clear that the two men are involved in interrelated actions that form each other's cause and effect. The men are different and oppositional, yet closely related, parts in the same machine in which refugees respond to border surveillance and border technologies are tethered to refugees' strategies.

FILMING FRAGMENTS: MACHINIC ENSLAVEMENT In addition to the process of social subjection, *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* demonstrate how the refugee machine enslaves its 'users'. Within the regime of enslavement, opposing or different people, such as refugees and Frontex officers, become equivalent cogs in a wheel. The filmic depiction of the loss of binary oppositions such as hunter–hunted, citizen–stranger, and lawful–illegal, illustrates Lazzarato's claim that machinic enslavement does not bother with dualisms, and disregards distinctions between human and non-human operators. In *Flow Mechanics*, this can be seen in the functioning of video surveillance technologies. Thermal video cameras that trace down refugees in the dark are unable to distinguish between animals and human beings: groups of people crossing the land and flocks of birds crossing the sky

are both measured as objects with higher temperatures than the surroundings. As such, humans and animals appear on the video monitor as similar abstract white figures, captured within the square corners of the camera's viewfinder. Furthermore, not only animals and humans are shown as similar pieces of data, also video cameras and policemen appear as equivalent actors in surveillance practices. Shots of policemen scanning the land from their watchtower are matched by shots from high-angled video cameras doing the same.

The abstract representations such as the ones produced by thermal cameras can be seen in light of Lazzarato's definition of a-signifying signs: they are not so much (or not in the first place) signs that produce meaning, but rather signs that intervene in reality in a direct manner. White figures of a certain size on the video screen function as a command. Like a bar code opening a lever or computer language directing a production process, the video measurements tell the police officers (enslaved as cogs in the wheel) to go to the border the camera is filming and to halt moving bodies there. The fact that the white marks possibly produce a number of additional meanings (e.g., refugees, threats, ghostlike figures) does not obliterate the fact that their functioning as command, as a *go*, in the refugee machine does not depend on signification.

In *Flow Mechanics*, the video cameras that form a recurrent theme in the film are shown to be aided by a wide array of other instruments, such as CO2 detectors, radars, sensors, and computer programs – all of which produce abstract a-signifying signs. "In this tele-techno-mediated surveillance context," Joseph Pugliese writes, "refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants are seen as mere radar blimps, infrared blobs and anonymous numbers" (2013: 577). The presence of refugees is measured, and when they are captured, they are processed as pieces of data by computers. *Those Who Feel* shows how refugees' bodies are scanned and photographed, their data subsequently put in graphic forms and stored in computers connected to EURODAC's central database. Pugliese has aptly termed this database an anatomizing archive "of biometric-templates-as-'body-bits'" (ibid: 587). I deploy the term 'bits' in both its *in-silico*, digitized sense and its metaphorical meaning of segmenting and anatomizing the body of the biometrically scanned subject. "This statist archiving of biometric 'body bits' fundamentally functions to dislocate the subject from their body, and through processes of networked classification and dissemination, precludes them from [...] agentic governance over

their own biodata" (ibid: 587). The graphs and diagrams store and organize these body-bits function as a-signifying *power signs*, because even though the dissection of bodies is only metaphorical, the effect of the data-packets is quite real: they preclude and allow bodies to cross borders.

The audio track in *Those Who Feel* underscores the fragmentation of the individual on the refugee machine's enslaving level. Soft voices whisper pieces of dreams, memories and sensations that are only loosely attached to refugees' faces or bodies appearing on screen. It seems as if language can hardly be uttered anymore, and it certainly does not produce a coherent individual in these stilled and almost silent scenes. When one of the refugees breaches the silence with a loud voice, she laments, "I do not exist, *I* do not exist in this world!" Upon which she ties off her left arm (full of needle holes) with a cable in order to take a shot of heroin and retract in a state of psychic absence.

Flow Mechanics emphasizes the lack of a stable, present, coherent *I* by shots of data units (scans, CO2 graphs, etc.) combined with auditory fragments about the amputation of frozen limbs and the collection of body parts. Hence, just like their subjectivities, the bodies of refugees are shown to fall apart. In fact, in both *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel,* the latter can be read as a result of the former. Images of body collection follow on images of data collection. As such, *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* demonstrate how this machinic system of surveillance, marking and controlling, leads to bodily disintegration, and death.[9)]

NOT THIS AND BARELY THERE: COUNTER CAMERAS As the term *flow* in Loubeyre's film title indicates, the *refugee machine* functions in an ongoing rhythm, processing people effectively as input and output without any change or end in sight, yet with lethal consequences. Both *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* paint a bleak picture when it comes to resistance against this machine that holds everyone firmly in its destructive grip. Notably, some of the refugees in *Flow Mechanics* engage in critical analyses of the system they are part of. They, for instance, discuss how their motives for taking flight are caused by economic, military and political interventions of Northern countries that now refuse to let them in. *Those Who Feel* shows an inconspicuous form of resistance in a scene where refugees show each other video images on their mobile phones of friends climbing on board of a ferry in order to cross the Italian border. The technology that is such a dominant cog in the wheel when it comes to the objectification and control

9) A conclusion that is very much in line with Pugliese's critique of the lethality of the EU's integrated systems of surveillance.

of refugees, is now taken up by the objects of surveillance in order to show (and show off) their own successes in circumventing surveillance. Although still functioning largely within the parameters of the machine, refugees who turn the video camera from a tool of repression into a trophy-maker manage to take up one of the components of the refugee machine, namely video technology, and use it against the grain.

This scene raises questions as to the position of both movies vis-à-vis their object(s) of representation. Moreover, the filmmakers place subjects in front of their lenses who are already under constant lens-based surveillance, documenting the documented. Are Loubeyre's and Knibbe's cinematic representations able to function apart from the machine they depict, or are they cogs in its wheel as well? This question puts forth a more general issue with respect to machine analysis. As Frederik Tygstrup puts it well: "Following Lazzarato, we could say that contemporary cultural analysis is not about reading what the objects we study are saying about something extraneous to them, but about reading how they retain a particular function in such contexts" (2018, 267). This latter mode of reading is also called for when it comes to *Those Who Feel* and *Flow Mechanics*.

Those Who Feel was recorded with an instrument of surveillance: a drone camera. Therefore, the bird's eye perspective of the camera cannot be seen apart from the ubiquitous system of surveillance in the refugee machine. *Flow Mechanics*' camera also 'plugs into' the machine it attempts to depict. In order to bring the workings of the refugee machine into sight, Loubeyre's camera follows the surveilling gazes within the machinic system. Shots taken by her digital video camera are sutured to the searching look of border agents in shot-reverse shot patterns, thereby suggesting visual access to the agents' points of view. Also, grainy black and white video surveillance images are filmed up close in *Flow Mechanics*. As screen-filling images, they become part of the primary structure of the movie.

However, the scene in *Those Who Feel* of refugees using video against the machine's grain can be read as mise-en-abyme for the functioning of *Those Who Feel* and *Flow Mechanics* themselves; the movies are cogs in the wheel, but cogs that act up, counter-cogs. In *Flow Mechanics*, a counter-act is produced in scenes where the camera suddenly cuts or swerves away from the machinic assemblage it is mapping. Shots of cameras, fences, and arrests are intersected by images of, for instance, the sky, plants, or abstract dark images. By intermittently showing images that

cannot be related to the refugee machine, the movie interrupts the act of mapping it is simultaneously carrying out. In addition, the cutaways from machinic elements suggest a form of judgement. It seems as though the camera accusingly turns away from the refugee machine, as if it can no longer bear to look at it and chooses to disengage itself from the system.

This disengagement is enforced by way of cinematic editing techniques that turn the function of surveillance video even further around. In a scene that shows grainy surveillance footage of a boat overloaded with refugees who appear only as small pixels, a male survivor of a 'left-to-die-boat' looks back on crossing the Mediterranean Sea in an accusatory speech addressed to *you*, Europeans. Close-ups of the man alternate with images of the boat. At first, the images seem to match the man's story, who tells how his boat was approached by coastguards. The video footage, so it seems, shows the perspective of these coastguards, looking through viewfinders at the boat. This assumption, however, is undermined when a mismatch arises between the story and the images. The coastguards abandoned the boat, the man explains, yet grainy surveillance images still accompany close-ups of the internal narrator. This mismatch invites reading the relation between the man and the surveillance footage according to the conventional narrative film principle of *suture*: when a character is looking at or describing something (such as memories), subsequent shots fill in his or her point of view. In *Flow Mechanics*, grainy surveillance images are *repurposed* as personal memories. This is confirmed all the more when the man tells about the appearance of a helicopter in the sky, which was a moment of hope and relief: "Now we are saved." His words are accompanied by shots of an aircraft, in exactly the same grainy quality as the images of the boat, yet from a low angle that corresponds with the position of the man when he was on the boat. Thus, the video images appear to express the focalization of this refugee.

In light of Lazzarato's machine theory, such repurposing of video surveillance technology for the expression of affective and emotional perceptions can be read as a form of resistance to, if not a bringing into crisis of, the refugee machine. As explained, Lazzarato argues that machinic enslavement involves a process in which individuals are taken over from *the inside*, by a machinic system determining and using our affects, emotions and perceptions. Surveillance technologies are an example par excellence in this regard: "The cycle of fear, anxiety and panic penetrating the atmosphere and tonality in which our 'surveillance societies'

are steeped are triggered by [a-signifying] sign machines; these machines appeal [...] to the nervous system, the affects, the emotions" (2006b). The affects and emotions that the machine causes, Lazzarato explains, are also used by it as cogs in the wheel. Fear and panic are, in part, what makes surveillance systems effective. *Flow Mechanics* manages to turn video from a technology that causes negative feelings, affects and perceptions, and moreover fragments people into pixelated objects, into a technology that can be used to express the meaningful memories and feelings (fear, despair, but also hope) of a person. *Those Who Feel* takes up the same project of turning video against the machine, yet here the appropriation of affects takes place on a different level: that of machinic enslavement. Whereas in *Flow Mechanics,* the focalized video images are tied to an individual, *Those Who Feel* presents a focalizing narrator who is not present as a whole or coherent subject. At first, the male Persian voice of this invisible narrator is reminiscent of the male 'voice of God' that conventionally accompanies so-called expository documentaries.[10] Yet, whereas the voice-over in such documentary films speaks to the audience in a loud, authoritative manner, explaining a problem and its solution in a clear-cut linear argument, the narrator in *Those Who Feel* does not present a coherent, instructive 'truth'. Rather, the soft voice-over asks questions which express a sense of being lost, and moreover murmurs seemingly unrelated sentences that have a polyphonic character even though they are uttered by one voice. This voice ties the drone images to the viewpoint of a ghost, who whispers that life and death are equally strange to him, while we look at the world through his eyes. After drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, this refugee flies through cities as a specter that is only visible to a little girl. Dispossessed of his body, the ghost visits others who are barely there: dispossessed refugees leading spectral lives, hiding in decomposed buildings or locked up in detention centers while their bodies threaten to fall apart through drug use, poverty, or datafication.

Flow Mechanics also acknowledges the liminal state of barely living that is enforced upon refugees by the refugee machine which even obliterates the life-death dualism. In Loubeyre's movie, refugees say that they are already dead, or "seventy percent on the way to death", while images show body bags, body parts and traces of refugee bodies left in trucks: indexes of present absences. However, in *Flow Mechanics* the expression and re-appropriation of affects through *videomatic* focalization takes place at the level of social subjection. The speaking and focalizing subject *is*

10) See also Nichols (2001).

a subject: a visible person who is able to interpellate "you" as an "I" in a public speech. In *Those Who Feel,* on the contrary, affects and perceptions are expressed from a register where "I"'s do not exist. Although not completely disconnected from the register of signifying semiotics, the fragmented text whispered by the ghost describes affects and sensations that are not visualized in the images: "The soft smell of grass. A fresh morning breeze. Our hearts are beating fast. A warm, sunny day." These impressions are not rooted in one subject; they could be the narrating ghost's or belong to the 'ghosts' he is watching, while other voices at times intersect his speech. In addition, he visually focusses on aspects that Lazzarato defines as *pre-personal* components. Zoom-shots suggest that the focalisor is pulled towards the laughter, the rhythms of dance and music, and the physical movements of the refugees he watches. It is important to notice that these feelings, sensations and rhythms are not merely the fear, anxiety and panic that the *refugee machine's* surveillance technologies produce. Without at any moment glorifying the liminal lives of refugees, *Those Who Feel* turns a drone camera into a device that also expresses affects and movements of "those who feel the fire burning" that retain some freedom vis-à-vis the refugee machine.

In addition, these evasive affects and sensations have a disruptive effect on the refugee machine on a temporal level, as it is unclear if they belong to the past as memories, express sensations produced in the present, or relate to dreams of a future. As such, they cannot be integrated into the linear temporality of the refugee machine with its ongoing push and pull between refugees moving North and EU authorities responding to this. At the end of *Those Who Feel,* the images slow down, and as they turn dark and silent, the ghost says: "All moments melt together in one single instant, on my way to love." At that one instant, the machine stops.

CONCLUSION According to Lazzarato, one of the main shortcomings of contemporary political theory is that it can only envisage resistance and emancipation in a logocentric way; as something that is created with language by subjects who are themselves a product of language. Through small interventions in the application of a visual technology that holds a dominant position in the refugee machine, *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* show that resistance can be performed and thought otherwise. As the refugee machine comprises discursive and non-discursive elements, *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* respond to it on signifying and a-signifying levels, involving bodily actions

(turning the camera away, turning it off) and narrative strategies (applying narrative editing conventions, 'film language'). Paradoxically, these narrative strategies affirm once more that resistance does not only involve discourse and signifying semiotics: the *videomatic* focalization created in the two documentaries does not so much give voice to the represented refugees; it expresses affects, bodily sensations and feelings. As the refugee machine does not merely subject through language, but also enslaves by tuning into the body and its a-signifying sensations, countering control and dispossession necessarily involves the repossession of non-discursive affects as well. Moreover, the fact that the disrupting affects of the speaking *and* feeling refugees in *Those Who Feel* cannot be attributed to unified individuals, demonstrates that resistance can also be performed by fragmented forms of being-in-between. In sum, as counter-cogs plugged into an enslaving assemblage, *Flow Mechanics* and *Those Who Feel* tentatively open up possibilities of opposition and change by reconfiguring the refugee machine.

// References

Casas-Cortes, Maribel / Cobarrubias, Sebastian / Pickles, John (2015): Riding Routes and Itinerant Borders: Autonomy of Migration and Border Externalization. In: Antipode. Vol. 47, Issue 4, pp. 894–914

De Genova, Nicholas, et al. (2016): Europe/Crisis: New Keywords of 'the Crisis' in and of 'Europe'. In: Near Futures Online. Vol.1, pp. 1–45. http://nearfuturesonline.org/europecrisis-new-keywords-of-crisis-in-and-of-europe/ (12 March 2019)

Lazzarato, Maurizio (2006a): The Machine. In: Derieg, Aileen, et al. (eds), Transversal Texts: Machines and Subjectivation. Vienna, EIPCP. http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lazzarato/en (21 March 2019)

Idem (2006b): 'Semiotic Pluralism' and the New Government of Signs: Homage to Félix Guattari. In: Derieg, Aileen, et al. (eds), Transversal Texts: Machines and Subjectivation. Vienna, EIPCP. http://eipcp.net/transversal/0107/lazzarato/en (21 March 2019)

Idem (2014): Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity. South Pasadina, Semiotext(e)

Hesselbert, Pepita / Houwen, Janna / Vos, Ruby de / Peeren, Esther (eds.) (2018): Legibility in the Age of Signs and Machines. Leiden, Brill

Houwen, Janna (2016): An Empty Table and an Empty Boat: Empathic Encounters with Refugee Experiences in Intermedial Installation Art. In: American, British & Canadian Studies. Vol. 27, Issue 1, pp. 44–73

Nichols, Bill (2001): Introduction to Documentary. Bloomington, Indiana University Press

Pugliese, Joseph (2013): Technologies of Extraterritorialisation, Statist Visuality and Irregular Migrants and Refugees. In: Griffith Law Review. Vol. 22, Issue 3, pp. 571–97

Tygstrup, Frederik (2018): Representational Assemblages: Forms, Concerns, Affects. In: Hesselberth, Pepita et al. (eds.), Legibility in the Age of Signs and Machines. Amsterdam, Rodopi, pp. 263–274

Vogl, Joseph (2018): "The History of the Notion of Crisis." Interview conducted and translated by Sven Fabré and Arne Vanraes. In: De Cauwer, Stijn (ed.), Critical Theory at a Crossroads: Conversations on Resistance in Times of Crisis. New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 61–74

// About the Author

Janna Houwen is Assistant Professor of Film and Literary Studies at Leiden University. She is the author of *Film and Video Intermediality: The Question of Medium Specificity in Contemporary Moving Images* (Bloomsbury, 2017), the co-editor of *Legibility in the Age of Signs and Machines* (Brill, 2018) and *From Crisis to Critique: Languages of Resistance, Transformation, and Futurity in Mediterranean Crisis-Scapes* (Palgrave, forthcoming 2020), and has published on, among other things, cinematic and televisual representations of terrorism and violence, and lens-based artistic interventions in the so-called refugee crisis.

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and the Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts Zurich University of the Arts
Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann // www.fkw-journal.de

// License
This work is licensed under the CC-BY-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode

