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VIDEO ART AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN TURKEY*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present and study contemporary video practices since the 2000s in Turkey through the representation of time and collective memory. The article features the four video artists who have structured the video art scene in Turkey: Ali Kazma, Halil Altındere, Erkan Özgen and Seza Paker. This research addresses two interconnected issues: firstly, the purpose is to examine how the distinct technical parameters of video production shape a synthesized temporality. This inquiry naturally gives rise to a secondary purpose: in what manner does this constructed temporality facilitate the exploration of memory and historical discourse? The hypothesis is that the video image, both as a technical artifact and a conceptual construct, inherently possesses its unique framework for temporal construction, thereby actively contributing to novel reinterpretations of collective memory and historiography The methodology involves conducting a formal analysis of the video content. This approach focuses on examining the visual elements, composition, use of color, sound, editing techniques, and overall aesthetics of the video to gain deeper insights into its artistic significance and meaning. By employing formal analysis, the aim of this article is to decipher the visual language employed by the video artists and uncover nuanced layers of interpretation.

Keywords: Video Art, Turkey, Collective Memory, Time

INTRODUCTION

The burgeoning art landscape in Turkey mirrors the widening scope of the global contemporary art market, extending its reach to regions traditionally perceived as peripheral. Istanbul, in particular, has emerged as a pivotal hub for cultural interchange, facilitating dialogue between the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and beyond. Through its array of international fairs, biennials, exhibitions, and diverse museums, the art scene is experiencing unprecedented growth and vitality. As noted by Fanny Roustan, (2009: 25) the confluence of intellectual vibrancy and robust economic infrastructure both within Istanbul and in peripheral regions since the 1990s has been a driving force behind this flourishing phenomenon.

The advent of a liberal regime and the influx of migrants from rural areas to urban centers during the 1990s catalyzed the expansion of neoconservative ideologies. Consequently, in 2002, with the ascension to power of the Islamoconservative AKP (Justice and Development Party), which staunchly advocates for economic and cultural globalization, Istanbul assumed the mantle of a regional metropolis (Tutal, 2014). This influx, predominantly comprising Muslim and Kurdish populations, is precipitating a socio-political metamorphosis encompassing the myriad societal differences and oppositions inherent in the urban landscape, resonating within the public sphere. This socio-political dynamic necessitates swift urban development and the bolstering of the city's image to assert itself amidst commercial and touristic competition. On one hand, there is a concerted effort to democratize culture, symbolized by the establishment of new concert halls, cinemas, and art galleries. Conversely, the emergence of a new conservative elite is reshaping cultural values to align with the imperatives of cultural globalization and its attendant market forces.

As a consequence, during the 2000s, there was a notable surge in the establishment of art galleries and museums, including Borusan Sanat, Proje 4L-Elgiz Museum of Contemporary Art, Istanbul Modern, Garanti Platform, Pera Museum, Sabancı Museum, Kasa Galeri, Siemens Sanat, and Santral Istanbul, alongside the emergence of influential curators such as Ali Akay, Erden Kosova, Başak Şenova, and Levent Çalıkoğlu. This marked a significant opening of the sector to global influences, a departure from the situation two decades prior when works by Turkish artists were primarily acquired by a limited segment of local collectors. In tandem with the emergence of new thematic concerns and diverse perspectives, there has been a proliferation of expressive modalities reflective of the ethos of the 2000s. Particularly noteworthy is the increasing prominence of new media as a domain for artistic exploration. Video art, being among the most accessible forms within the realm of new media, has emerged as a pivotal domain within contemporary Turkish art, a trend that gained momentum from the mid-1990s but has notably accelerated since the 2010s (Akay, 2001).

In the article, contemporary videographic practices in Turkey, particularly since the 2000s, are examined in terms of their representation of time and collective memory. The exploration of the relationship between videographic images and their construction techniques naturally led to an inquiry into the concept of time. This stems from the fact that the techniques employed in producing these images inherently shape temporal dimensions, durations, and rhythms within the visual medium. This temporal correlation entails two interconnected notions: firstly, the creation of a synthesized temporality facilitated by specific technical parameters that engender aesthetic forms unique to video. This inquiry seeks to elucidate the aesthetic strategies employed by video artists to evoke the viewer's perception of temporality through visual imagery.

The second idea revolves around a critical examination of memory. Drawing on Aby Warburg's (2012) conception, collective memory is conceived as an amalgamation of impressions stored in mental archives, governed by principles emerging from a novel understanding of images through their juxtaposition. In the context of videographic imagery, one method of juxtaposition involves establishing temporal connections between images. Hence these temporal attributes are assessed to elucidate the potential imprints that videographic images may leave on Turkey's collective memory. By pursuing these dual

concepts emanating from the temporal correlation, this research confronts two interconnected challenges: firstly, to explore how the specific technical aspects of video production engender a synthesized temporality. This inquiry naturally leads to a second question: how does this temporal construction contribute to raising inquiries about memory and history? This paper contends that the videographic image, both as a technical and conceptual entity, engenders its unique framework for temporal construction, which in turn facilitates novel reinterpretations of collective memory and historical narratives.

The research focuses on video imagery crafted by Turkish video artists. The utilization of video as an artistic medium in Turkey began to gain traction in the late 1990s, but it wasn't until the 2000s, with advancements in production and exhibition infrastructure, that video art proliferated within the country (Berensel, 2016). As a result, the corpus under examination comprises videos exhibited from 2010 onwards. Four prominent video artists have been selected to provide a representative overview of the Turkish art scene: Ali Kazma, Halil Altındere, Erkan Özgen, and Seza Paker.

The task of citing the most renowned artists within the post-2000 art scene involves a certain degree of subjectivity, as it relies on factors such as reputation, which may not necessarily reflect the objective quality of the works or the artists themselves. Therefore, the selection methodology adhered to three distinct criteria: First, citations from prominent art historians and critics such as Hasan Bülent Kahraman, Ali Akay, Levent Çalıkoğlu, and Beral Madra were consulted. Additionally, consideration was given to the prevalence of video artists in contemporary art literature in Turkey, as well as their participation in exhibitions with significant national and international visibility, such as biennales. Employing this methodology yielded approximately fifteen video artists. Given the research focus on the representation of time, it was imperative that these artists demonstrated a distinct approach to temporal communication in their works. Consequently, the selection was narrowed down to four video artists deemed most conducive to an analysis of temporality. Considering the thematic focus on the representation of time, priority was given to videos that depict either the artist's personal memories, such as childhood experiences or significant life events, or explore broader themes related to collective memory through historical references, the transmission of cultural traditions, socio-political issues, or interactions with public spaces. Subsequently, descriptions encompassing both the content and structural aspects of the selected videos were provided. Secondly, an attempt was made to delineate the forms of temporal representations, aiming to elucidate time as duration, eternal present, or speed, utilizing aesthetic techniques such as repetition and juxtaposition. Thirdly, an examination was conducted on the theme of memory, exploring motifs of embodiment and confrontation with the memento mori, with a focus on how each artwork has contributed to shaping collective memory within the Turkish art milieu.

The methodology to decipher these temporal representations and the repeating theme of memory involves conducting a formal analysis of the video content. Formal analysis is a qualitative research method that focuses on examining the visual elements, composition, use of color, sound, editing techniques, and overall aesthetics of the video to gain deeper insights into its artistic significance and meaning. By employing formal analysis, the aim is to decipher the visual language employed by the video artist and uncover nuanced layers of interpretation within the artwork.

A FEW REMARKS ON THE ART SCENE IN TURKEY

Nilgün Tutal explains that with the accession of the AKP to power, to attract new clientele to Turkey and Istanbul, promotional policies shifted towards "the search for a greater market share in cultural tourism" (2014: 45). As a result, by the 2000s there was an increase in the number of art galleries and museums such as Borusan Sanat, Proje 4L-Elgiz Museum of Contemporary Art, İstanbul Modern, Garanti Platform, Pera Museum, Sabancı Museum, Kasa Galeri, Siemens Sanat,

Santral İstanbul as well as curators Ali Akay, Erden Kosova, Başak Şenova, Levent Çalıkoğlu. In this way, the sector opened up considerably to the world, whereas 20 years previously works by Turkish artists had only been bought by a small proportion of the country's collectors.

Gallery owner Murat Pilevneli points out that the economic crisis in 2001 was an advantage for the development of contemporary art because the established art market was no longer worth what it used to be, giving way to a new art form:

> With the crisis [...] art objects that were worth a few thousand dollars, all of a sudden, became worthless. That was the turning point for today's art. Fresh and worthless in the marketplace. The majority of the institutions present, such as Istanbul Modern, Proje 4L, Aksanat with their new program and galleries belonging to other banks, all came into being after this date. Although the increase in the number of galleries was not particularly noticeable, contemporary art has truly become a sector. (2007: 139)

However, İlker Birkan (2012) suggests that Istanbul's ranking as Europe's cultural capital in 2010 is one of the reasons for this artistic interest, which at the same time attracts investment to Istanbul and especially to the cultural aspect of this city. He explains that the relationship between the increase in tourist numbers in Turkey and the number of museum visits should not be ignored.

The consequence of such cultural richness can also be seen in today's art scene, with artists addressing issues of identity (including gender, ethnicity, culture, urbanity, and otherness), criticism of the media and the state, globalization, urbanization and deterritorialization. With the emergence of new issues and the formation of different perspectives, the means of expression are multiplying in line with the spirit of the 2000s. In particular, new media have become a territory for artists to invest. Video art, then, as the most accessible of the new media, has been one of the most important territories of contemporary art in Turkey since the mid-1990s, but especially in the 2000s.

Sociologist/curator Ali Akay (2001: 141) argues that video as an artistic medium found its place in the Istanbul art market in the 2000s. Although national and international exhibitions, biennials and fairs in the second half of the 1990s contributed to the medium's integration into the art world, the production and distribution of video works increased, especially among young artists, in the 2000s. There may be several reasons for this expansion. This research focused on the economic aspect of this development because, quite simply, the expansion of the international contemporary art market and the development of video art in Turkey took place in the 2000s, thanks to improved means of production and exhibition. The Turkish art world's definition of contemporary art took a different path after the 2000s. Prior to this date, video, installation and space-related works held a more experimental or alternative place for viewers, who had the only opportunity to encounter them at biennials. What's more, they were not given a market value, as the number of galleries was not that high (Sönmez, 2007). Yet being visible and being integrated into the art market are two different things. While in the 1990s, thanks to biennials and exhibitions organized by a few curators, video art became visible in the history of art in Turkey, its integration into the market would take place in the 2000s. Although still avant-garde in the 1990s, video research at GISAM METU in Ankara and the efforts of video activists (such as Karahaber, Videa and Xurban) are examples that show us that artists had already begun to produce in Ankara.

Ege Berensel (2016) also espouses the notion that in the 1990s, Ankara, particularly through GISAM, served as a focal point for video art production, albeit its assimilation into the art market primarily occurred in Istanbul post-2000. However, the artistic praxis during this period markedly differed from contemporary conceptions of video practice in Turkey. Artists in Ankara cultivated their distinctive artistic lexicon, which remained largely unrepresented elsewhere (Berensel, 2016). Their approach paralleled that of artist Ursula Biemann, as their adherents generated videographic compositions imbued with a predominantly documentary ethos. This documentary inclination diverges from contemporary

perceptions of video art in the art world. The prevailing artistic praxis in videographic imagery today does not trace its lineage to the documentary explorations of Ankara in the 1990s. Furthermore, the ascendancy of this current praxis, entailing the integration of video into the Turkish art market in the 2000s, is not exclusively attributable to Istanbul-based artists. Diyarbakır, serving as a significant center, also exerted considerable influence on the artistic production of videographic imagery.

In addition to this viewpoint, Melis Tezkan (2014: 47) advocates the notion that video art validates itself through its responsiveness to artists' needs, owing to its ease of transport for production and its financially accessible semi-professional nature. This attribute elucidates why, in locales such as Diyarbakır-a city in southeastern Turkey characterized by a predominantly Kurdish population-artists opt for video as a medium to engage with the social and political dynamics of their immediate environment. Tezkan underscores that contemporary artists demonstrate a heightened interest in micro-cultures, communities, and societal issues compared to preceding generations. This shift is attributed to "the challenge of political engagement beyond the relatively uninhibited sphere of art" and "the proliferation of artists with diverse local backgrounds, spurred by the evolution of cultural policies" (Tezkan, 2014: 47).

Around the year 2000, exhibition venues commenced outfitting themselves with video projectors to facilitate the showcasing of videographic works. Similarly, Beral Madra, a critic and curator, identifies this period as pivotal for the proliferation of video practices in Turkey. She notes, "the video workshops and screenings of video imagery held in 1995 at the BM Contemporary Art Center, featuring Angela Melitopoulos (a protégé of Nam June Paik) and Claus Blume, a German video artist, laid the groundwork for the burgeoning of video art in the 2000s" (Madra, 2007: 34).

COMMON THEMES IN TURKISH VIDEO ART

When queried about prevalent themes and methodologies among Turkish artists working in video art, curator René Block posits that contemporary art in Turkey does not adhere to a singular direction or stylistic movement akin to Western avant-garde movements like Futurism, Zero, or Fluxus. Instead, he suggests that artists are engaged in a quest for their own distinct individuality (Block, 2007: 174). Conversely, Block (2007) contends that a shared characteristic among these artists is their utilization of new media such as photography, video, and installations-an attribute that aligns with the broader global trends observed in contemporary art.

From this line of reasoning, one could assert that contemporary art necessitates technological mediums that offer swifter responsiveness, capture capabilities, and dissemination channels, such as video and photography. Dissident political viewpoints find a more accessible platform for documentation and communication through these mediums. This trend is evident among artists who emerged after the 2000s and increasingly focus on themes of resistance or acquiescence. Considering the socio-political landscape in Turkey post-2000s, it could be argued that the presence of a religiously influenced government, aligned with capitalist interests, has spurred artists toward either resistance or compliance, often infused with sardonic humor born out of despair. This shared thematic thread is palpable in the works of artists like Halil Altındere or Erkan Özgen. Furthermore, one might contend that these artists function akin to documentary filmmakers or sociologists in their video production, crafting a visual narrative that critiques or satirizes official historical narratives.

The artists endeavor to illuminate Turkey's political, economic, and social challenges, spanning both overarching and nuanced issues, while exploring existentialist themes concerning the individual. However, it should be noted that this disposition is not exclusive to contemporary artists; similar subject matter was also addressed by artists in the 1980s and 1990s. What distinguishes the contemporary approach is the employed technique: in earlier periods, such

content was often presented alongside other media, whereas in post-2000s art, there is a preference for mediums that are swiftly comprehensible and easily transportable, such as video.

THE REPRESENTATION OF TIME AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE WORKS OF ALİ KAZMA, HALİL ALTINDERE, ERKAN ÖZGEN, AND SEZA PAKER

In order to get a general idea of the video artists on the art scene in Turkey, the corpus of this article contains the major video artists who have been part of this scene since the early 2000s.

Ali Kazma

The first video artist to be mentioned is certainly Ali Kazma. He is internationally renowned for his work at the Havana Biennial in 2006, the Lyon Biennial in 2007, the Sao Paulo Biennial in 2012 and the Venice Biennial in 2013. He has exhibited three times at the Istanbul Biennial, in 2001, 2007, and 2011 with works that generally deal with man's relationship with manual labor.

In the majority of his video works, Kazma contemplates the notion of human existence within the framework of temporality, particularly by examining the production and transience of spatial environments. By capturing settings associated with production or maintenance, such as factories, dance studios, ceramics workshops, surgical theaters, and slaughterhouses, the artist underscores humanity's existential struggle against the backdrop of the second law of thermodynamics. A notable example is his 15-minute video *Clock Master* (2006), a segment of the *Obstructions* series, which centers on a master clockmaker from the Dolmabahçe Palace. In this piece, the elderly clockmaker meticulously disassembles, cleans, repairs, and reassembles a 19th-century clock solely from memory. The camera focuses closely on his hands as they manipulate the intricate mechanisms of the clock, occasionally offering glimpses of his aged visage and wrinkled eyes adorned with a monocle. The interiors of the workshop, adorned with an array of antique clocks and watches, intermittently punctuate the visual narrative. Notably, the ambient sounds of the workshop, predominantly emanating from the workings of the clock itself, constitute the sole auditory accompaniment to the film. Kazma's deliberate omission of music or dialogue in favor of ambient soundscapes serves to immerse viewers in the sensory experience of the depicted spaces, underscoring his thematic exploration of temporality and human endeavor.

The primary mode of representation employed by the artist is visual or plastic, as opposed to narrative or fictional approaches, within the realm of videographic practice. Rather than relying on traditional storytelling techniques, Kazma opts to imbue images with meaning through the strategic use of repetition. It is important to clarify that by repetition, it refers not merely to the duplication of identical images, but rather to a theoretical device employed to convey a particular motif over time. In the artist's videos, this theoretical tool manifests in the repetition of imagery featuring hands, depicted from various perspectives and framing, consistently captured in close-ups. Additionally, commonplace activities associated with daily work, habitual behaviors, and learned gestures are recurrent themes favored by the artist for cinematic exploration. In an interview, the artist elaborates on this approach:

> In all my work, I'm very interested in the point of communication between man and the world. How a man touches the world, and of course, how the world responds to him. Most of the time, I direct my camera to this circular interaction. Man touches the world with his hands. I'm fascinated by this wonderful organ/tool, and that's why they're often featured in my videos. (Kazma, 2014)

Ali Kazma meticulously captures the dexterity of the human hand, intricately documenting the interplay between hand gestures and the passage of time. Through observing the repetitive motions of the hands, viewers are invited to contemplate time directly, transcending the need to seek meaning solely within the movement itself. Within this cycle of repetition, time emerges as a tangible entity, rendered visible through the artist's lens.

Employing repetition and the recurrent reappearance of imagery, Kazma subtly guides the viewer's gaze, seemingly rendering time perceptible within his works. Through this repetitive aesthetic, the conventional sense of temporal duration dissipates; the imagery presented appears suspended in an eternal present, devoid of past or future. It is an infinite continuum of hand gestures that bridges the temporal chasm between past and future, evoking a sense of eternal recurrence.

In this contemplation of constant production, inscription, and maintenance -a motif reminiscent of the existentialist myth of Sisyphus- Kazma prompts reflection on the intricate relationship between time and human existence. Moreover, his works evoke the notion of combating entropy by constructing a virtual temporality intrinsic to the medium of video, wherein order is perpetuated through the mechanism of repetition.

In Roland Barthes' exploration of cinema and photography in *Camera Lucida* (2014) he articulates a preference for cinema, attributing it to the inherent hurried nature of the cinema viewer's experience. Barthes suggests that the cinema-goer is constantly propelled forward, lacking the leisure to pause before the screen, reflect on the unfolding narrative, or infuse the viewing with personal experiences. Closing one's eyes offers no reprieve, as alternative images immediately flood the mind (Barthes, 2014). However, this assertion is challenged by instances such as the final scene of François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), where viewers are presented with a prolonged shot of Antoine's impassive countenance. Truffaut masterfully extends time, allowing for a contemplative pause within the narrative, despite the medium's typically brisk pace. Through this deliberate choice, Truffaut accommodates the hurried cinema-goer, providing an opportunity for reflection and emotional resonance.

Similarly, in Ali Kazma's video works, despite the inherent mobility of the medium, a sense of eternal present is evoked through the strategic use of repetition. By returning to familiar imagery and gestures, Kazma creates a temporal loop, inviting viewers to linger within the moment and experience a heightened sense of immediacy. In this way, Kazma, like Truffaut, disrupts the conventional rhythm of cinema, offering a space for contemplation and introspection within the fleeting passage of time.

From an alternative perspective, the repetition of images can also be interpreted as imbuing a sense of rhythm. Here, rhythm refers to the tempo and structure of the sequence of shots, or sometimes, more abstractly, the temporal arrangement of a slightly prolonged shot. In cinema, the content of the images typically dominates, making it challenging to precisely delineate and quantify rhythms. However, in video, it is often the duration of shots that imparts a sense of rhythm to the viewer. For instance, in *The Clock Master* (2006) the rhythm is established through the repeated close-up shots, each lasting roughly the same duration. This repetition not only echoes the concept of time as an eternal present but also serves to engender a rhythmic cadence within the viewing experience.

Moreover, the repetition of gestures, as observed in Kazma's video works, can be interpreted as a means of grappling with the body's inherent vulnerability in the face of time. Through documenting the body's resilient and productive capacities amidst the inexorable passage of time, the artist underscores humanity's ongoing struggle against temporal constraints. This thematic exploration reaffirms the artist's intention: "I see things disappear that seemed to me to be good things for human beings; it's a shame to lose them. I want to keep them safe, even if only through my images. I don't want to forget them" (Scorida, 2017). This quote takes us back to his relationship with the concept of memory. In *Image and Memory*, Agamben (1998: 17) explains that the stylistic and formal solutions adopted each time by artists are presented as ethical decisions defining the position of individuals and of an epoch in relation to the legacy of the past, and the interpretation of the problem becomes, by the same token, a diagnosis of man struggling to heal his contradictions and to find, between the old and the new, his own vital home.

In this context, Kazma's artworks serve as a testament to humanity's inherent vitality, encapsulated in the acts of production and transmission of knowledge.

Through his meticulous documentation, Kazma sheds light on the individual's capacity for innovation, technical prowess, and remarkable feats of labor, all of which stand as defiant bulwarks against the inexorable march of entropy.

In particular, *The Clock Master* (2006) emerges as a quintessential exemplar among Kazma's repertoire, showcasing how time becomes preserved within the spaces and objects captured by the artist's lens. Indeed, it would not be amiss to posit that this video constitutes one of the most compelling artistic illustrations for comprehending philosopher Bernard Stiegler's notion of tertiary retentions. According to Stiegler (1998), tertiary retentions encompass all remnants of the past that resist the transience of time, existing as cultural, historical, and social imprints. Through the lens of an object, one can decipher the cultural milieu from which it emerged; a clock, for instance, serves as a tangible artifact that reflects the societal norms and values of its era.

The clockmaker depicted in the video commands admiration as he meticulously restores this instrument of societal synchronization to its original condition, imbuing it with the ability to measure time with unparalleled precision. As the clock bears the indelible imprint of history, it becomes a conduit through which people glimpse the collective memory engendered by its historical lineage: not only the technical expertise required for its craftsmanship but also the profound significance accorded to the mastery of time itself.

Halil Altındere

Halil Altındere, an artist and publisher, originates from Mardin, a city nestled in southeastern Turkey known for its rich cultural mosaic, where diverse religious and ethnic communities coexist harmoniously, including Kurds, Turks, Arabs, and Assyrians. Altındere's artistic endeavors are deeply imbued with the eclectic influences of this multicultural milieu. His artistic journey commenced with the unveiling of his debut video, *Hard&Light*, in 1999. In this seminal work, Altındere employs Marlboro cigarette packs as potent symbols, provocatively exploring themes of sexual allure within the public realm. Building upon this symbolic framework, his subsequent creation, *The Walk* in 2002, ingeniously transforms a Marlboro packet into an animal figure, serving as a poignant critique of the values propagated by the capitalist system.

Throughout his artistic career, Altındere has maintained a steadfast focus on themes pertinent to contemporary society. His oeuvre delves into the intricacies of capitalist values, the dynamics of cultural transmission and memory, as well as the aspirations for identity, libertarianism, and egalitarianism. These thematic threads serve as the bedrock of his artistic inquiry, reflecting his unwavering commitment to interrogating societal norms and power structures.

An exemplary manifestation of Altındere's artistic perspective is evident in his 2016 video *Space Refugee*: On July 22, 1987, Syrian President Hafiz Al-Assad received a heartfelt message from his country's first astronaut, Muhammed Ahmed Faris, who had ascended to this esteemed position after undergoing rigorous training in Moscow and spending seven days aboard the Soviet space station. Faris, a former army pilot, conveyed his deepest respect and affection to President Assad, becoming a symbol of national pride and heroism for millions of Syrians. However, in 2011, amidst the onset of the Arab Spring protests, Faris found himself grappling with a profound moral dilemma. As a general in the Syrian Air Force, he was confronted with the government's violent crackdown on dissenting voices. Unable to reconcile his duty with his conscience, Faris made the courageous decision to depart Syria, citing his refusal to partake in the repression of his fellow citizens. His act of dissent transformed him from a celebrated national figure into a defector, as he sought refuge in Istanbul, Turkey. Today, Muhammed Ahmed Faris resides in an apartment located in Kocamustafapaşa, a conservative district of Istanbul, where he shares his living space with five other members of his family. Despite the stark contrast between his former glory as an astronaut and his current circumstances as a refugee, Faris's principled stance against oppression serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring human capacity for resilience and moral courage in the face of adversity.

In this video, Altındere utilizes Faris's story to explore themes of civil war, migration, and the future of humanity, incorporating elements of politics and satire. The work sarcastically highlights the challenges faced by Syrian refugees, with over two million currently residing in Turkey, making it the second-largest host country after Lebanon. By blending Faris's astronautic history with his current status as a refugee, the artist presents a mock documentary depicting Syrian refugees planning to colonize Mars, drawing parallels to their historical efforts on Earth centuries ago.

Altındere's videos, despite their humorous tone, delve into a profoundly serious subject matter. The juxtaposition of various scenes serves to underscore the absurdity inherent in this grave circumstance: scenes from Faris' childhood, depicted in his astronaut attire; archival footage documenting both the Soviet space conquest and the Syrian conflict; Faris' personal narratives intertwined with imagery of three young Syrians traversing the Martian terrain. The amalgamation of disparate temporal elements imbues these visuals with a significance transcending their original contexts. Essentially, the amalgamation of heterogeneous images, characterized by differing speeds and meanings, establishes novel connections across temporal planes. Ultimately, this convergence engenders a new temporality, evoking a sense of the absurd or a speculative narrative wherein the refugee exodus to Mars materializes as an alternate reality -a divergent narrative that might have unfolded had historical circumstances taken a different course.

In this endeavor, the artist engenders within the viewer's cognitive framework an alternative mode of image reception and its ensuing ramifications. The images appropriated or captured by the artist, stemming from disparate epochs of the past, metamorphose into a reservoir of memory that the viewer may perceive through diverse lenses: as an artistic reverie, a fabricated documentary, a dystopian projection, or even a utopian aspiration for European policymakers eager to alleviate the refugee crisis by resettling individuals on Mars. The amalgamation of heterogeneous imagery serves as a conduit for embodying the prospect of an alternate reality within the viewer's mnemonic construction. Drawing upon a Warburgian sensibility regarding the imagery, the artist adeptly crafts an alternative narrative -a narrative of absurd science fiction. Through this interplay of cinematic visuals depicting historical junctures such as civil strife, the scientific zenith of the U.S.S.R., and Faris's valorous exploits, Altındere engenders a novel cultural significance: a direct confrontation with the hubris and irrationality underpinning prevailing discourses of power.

Erkan Özgen

Erkan Özgen, another contemporary Kurdish artist, is based in Diyarbakır, where he conducts his artistic practice. Primarily utilizing video and photography, Özgen finds these mediums advantageous due to their cost-effectiveness in both production and dissemination. Through his artistic endeavors, Özgen interrogates the mechanisms of individual conditioning perpetuated by the dominant powers, particularly Kemalism and militarism, which have exerted influence in Turkey since the inception of the republic. Additionally, he underscores the absurdity and tragedy inherent in the plight of the Kurdish populace within Turkey. Aligning his artistic output with his political convictions, Özgen identifies himself as an artist-activist, thereby solidifying the inseparable connection between his creative expression and his advocacy for socio-political change.

In his most characteristic video, *Lost Body* (2005), Özgen shows us a pair of combat boots with bare legs turning the corner of the wall, dribbling a white ball. The camera follows the legs from knee level. The dirt track is quite narrow, partly muddy with stone walls on two sides, half in sunlight, half in darkness. The tempo is slow, and the person driving the ball would look like some kind of Baudelairean passer-by if they weren't wearing those military boots. It's a tiny village, even abandoned, yet children's sounds can be heard from distant. The person, with his ball on his foot, continues along the path, which seems circular to us, as it's hard to tell whether he's going through the same streets or not. Is this a bored

soldier? The village fool? The audience doesn't know. Gradually they begin to double up, the tension rising. The audience even hears the player's breath and wait to witness a scene of violence. With this new tempo and multiple close-up montages of scenes, the viewer is left with a feeling of vertigo. There is a struggle for control between the player and the ball, which from time to time becomes difficult to watch because of this sensation of vertigo. Trying to follow the ball, the audience even feels virtually lost in this village. In the end, they press the ball against the wall and bursts it.

The combat boots undoubtedly signify a kind of physical and emotional violence. From one perspective, it's a ball game, but from another, it's a struggle between power and the subjugated. As the title suggests, the individual as a soldier loses his identity and becomes a means of power to control and manipulate subjugated peoples. The military power represented by the combat boots controls both the bodies of the soldiers and those of the subjugated, even by violence if necessary. The camera angle, the high tension and the player's repetitive movements create an atmosphere of anxiety and discomfort. Just as with this body lost in the dead ends and circular streets, the viewer ends up feeling uncomfortable because of the video's aggressive tension. Özgen makes frequent use of metaphors and symbols. On closer analysis, one can see that the political and social relationship between power and the subjugated is placed here in a ball game. The pairs of combat boots signify tyranny, while the ball symbolizes the bodies subjected to this force. The player's face is hidden behind a scarf, a reference to the fact that tyranny never has an identity and is impersonal. In fact, the only rule of the game is that the player has no identity; he is everywhere, determining the rules of the game, constructing language and devouring bodies.

Repetition as an aesthetic gesture plays an important role in Özgen's work. Firstly, the player's circular movement through the same streets takes us back to an eternal present: one feels that this movement has neither a beginning nor an end. The main thing is the infinite nature of time. As a result, the meaning or significance of the movement loses its importance, and the viewer's perception becomes linked to the thought, rather than focusing on the action itself. Therefore, it can be argued that this circular repetition underlines the image-time aspect of this video. This aspect is also apparent in the repeating images. For four and a half minutes, the camera only shows the legs, the hidden face, the player's boots and the ball. After a while, seeing the same images makes us think that there will be no new action, and that the artist is giving us enough time to find different perspectives to interpret the meaning. The absence of the player's identity also means that we can't link him to a story, an action or an actor. As a result, the power he represents lacks temporal limits (such as a beginning and an end) and refers to the idea of eternity or timelessness. The question then arises: how does this video reflect collective memory, or how does it contribute to the archive of memory?

The use of repetition as a videographic gesture may be a choice for the expression of memento mori, pointing us towards a reading of videos whose subject is the human body. In this video, the body that controls the speed and direction of the ball also controls the rhythm of the video and the repetition of images. Instead of fighting with memento mori, the artist accentuates the invisible force that plays with the lives of others, that devours bodies. It's as if he's bringing out, or making visible, the modern power that's even in control of other people's lives and deaths. So, the answer to our question about collective memory is that the artist adds to the archive of our collective signs the inevitable, invasive character of military force or political power, particularly in his country, which builds, shapes and devours bodies in the same way that a pair of rangers blows a bullet against the wall.

Seza Paker

Seza Paker, contemporary artist, lives and works in İstanbul and Paris. She uses various media as a form of expression, such as photography, installation, collage, drawing and sound. Through her images, she often references art history, the passage of time, the Second World War and the subjectivities of perspective.

The Long March, produced in 1999, presents a series of black-and-white photographs, arranged one after the other. These are photographs from the artist's personal archive, taken by his father in the 1950s. The photos were taken during the founding of Israel, in the north of the country. The photos are digitally juxtaposed with computer-generated animations of tulips in red and purple. The music accompanies the images is Max Roach and Archie Shepp's musical piece, inspired by the march of Mao Zedong, the leader of China's communist struggle. The rhythm of the music and the diffusion of the images are in total harmony. In this 4-and-a-half-minute video, the audience sees the happy, hopeful faces of men and women. They're working in a field, building a house, traveling in a horse-drawn carriage... all smiling at a long-awaited future. Tulips appear and disappear near the figures, in coordination with the music. Unlike the photos, the tulips are always mobile. They open, turn, close, bloom, grow... Sometimes one sees birds in the sky, always in black and white, accompanied by a new tulip shape. After five or six photos, the video ends with a shot of a monkey behind a cage.

The long march of around 12,000 kilometers by the Chinese Red Army in 1934 and 1935 remains the most important symbol of victory in the Chinese Communist struggle. However, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained unresolved for decades, and the hope clearly visible on the faces of the people in the photos is fading like tulips. Perhaps this one is a long march yet another decade away? Or are these people definitively prisoners of their fate, like the monkey in the zoo? Instead of providing answers or remarks on the contemporary political situation, Seza Paker leaves us with questions for a much deeper interrogation.

Seza Paker fuses still and moving images, i.e. photos and computer-generated moving images. Merging different media also deconstructs known forms to create new possibilities for expression. As a result, even when using frozen images in a moving medium such as video, the integration of animations on photos renders the image always in a state of becoming. Time doesn't take us back to the past, even if the photos belong to the 1950s. In his book on Seza Paker, entitled *Refleksif Akışkanlıklar (Instinctive Fluidities)*, Ali Akay interprets this fusion as follows:

> History, instead of being the past or the present, is dragged towards a becoming, and therefore, by opening up towards the future through a minor becoming of the past and present, Seza Paker poses open questions. Paker, instead of being in time and leaning on what is popular, actualizes Nietzsche's timeless, timeless concept in his art, overflowing time onto itself. (Akay, 2015: 9)

Becoming minor is explained by Deleuze and Guattari as a transformation that produces "one's point of underdevelopment, one's patois, one's third world, one's desert" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975: 33) by art in a minor state, it means art that is the opposite of popular/commercial culture, of standardization. In this way, Paker is marginal to her time. It's art that breaks with the conventions of its time. It stands in opposition to the thinking, the major, dominant ideology of its time. As a result, Seza Paker doesn't treat history as a past or a present where people must conclude the consequences but asks open-ended questions that take into the future. She shows photos of Israel in the 1950s, but she doesn't do so to bear witness to that era. On the contrary, through the tulips in a state of ceaseless becoming, Paker shows time as a duration that opens up to future questioning. Superimposing animations and photos create a multitude of image layers, linking temporalities with greater possibilities. This mixing technique opens up to the production of a new temporality, as in the case of *The Long March*.

Mixing as an aesthetic gesture serves to conceptualize the life of images through the motif of embodiment. Embodiment, in the sense of opening up the image to the viewer, is achieved by integrating time as an extra dimension to the images. By gaining another dimension, the photos in The Long March do not relate us to the past they were taken in, but behave as if they were still alive. Seza Paker's images can thus be said to behave like a living memory in the process of being constructed, always in a state of becoming. The artist comes from a family that immigrated to Istanbul from Palestine. This video was made during his second visit to Israel in 1999, over the memory of archived photos from the 1950s. She leaves current politics aside. As a result, what she adds to these personal

archives goes further than an interrogation of identity, dreams of socialism or the independence/dominance of the two countries. She transforms the generic images of history into a future that is always open to minor questioning, at the opposite end of the spectrum from the banal, the dominant norms.

CONCLUSION

Aesthetic gesture/technique such as repetition refers to a representation of time as an eternal present, while the dilation/contraction of durations to time as speed. Finally, it has been noted that the gesture of mixing represents time as duration. The images of memento mori are generally linked to the mortality of the body, which gives rise to a feeling of incapacity or powerlessness in the face of time. Consequently, representing time through repetition in video images, as seen in Kazma and Özgen, often leads us to images of the human body via the concept of memento mori. These are both impressive forms of resistance and the production of the human body in the face of time, or the modern power that controls the life and death of others.

This first aesthetic gesture is followed by the use of mixing. In the videos by Halil Altındere and Seza Paker, mixing is the technique chosen to often group heterogeneous images. This grouping brings the separate stories together and links them in the same duration. Typically, these are stories belonging to different individuals who find themselves in the same difficult situation to overcome, like the Syrian refugees in Altındere's video. In Seza Paker's case, the generic images of history are transformed into a becoming that is always open to minor questionings, which stand in opposition to the dominant norms. Thus, an image belonging to the past is incarnated in the present and even in the future as an ever-living memory. This motif of incarnation can also be seen in the two previous videos.

In Halil Altındere's video, on the other hand, a new cultural meaning of the absurdity of the dominant discourse is presented through the juxtaposition of images of various socio-political events. A further line of thought would be to add other aesthetic/technical gestures to those in this research. As video is a contemporary art form, it is always in a state of becoming and updating. As a result, it is needed to keep abreast of the most recent artistic productions and deduce various gestures and perspectives. What's more, technology is developing at a very rapid pace, opening up new possibilities for recording images. A second line of inquiry would be a study of how video images integrate with technology while retaining their temporal aspect.

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