

# [PERSONAL]—geographies—

—ANGELA MELITOPOULOS—

## PASSING DRAMA

video essay, 66:00, 1999

*Drama (which means “stage” in Greek) becomes a stage for oblivion, oblivion however which hasn’t ceased to stir up movements. Drama is the name of the town around which many refugees from Asia Minor, among them my grandparents, settled after 1923, after having survived the trauma of deportations and the ‘catastrophe of Asia Minor.’ For many of them, Drama wasn’t the final refuge: in the next generation, thousands of these refugees ended up in forced labor camps in Austria, or became ‘guest workers’ in Germany yet another generation later. The tales which these ‘guest workers’ could tell were not only about poverty and civil war, but also about their persistent resistance and the guerilla war, about camps and forced labor, and about a genocide officially termed ‘expulsion’. From generation to generation and from place to place, their story was reshaped anew by a life without rights, by racism and rejection, by economic conditions, by the concealment of historical facts, and, above all, by the need to forget the traumatic experience of deportation. That experience was banished from history and politics. Without a territory, they had no claim to citizenship. Because they were constantly coming and going, they were unable to develop their own history.*

*The textual level of Passing Drama consists of interviews with members of the second generation of refugees from the area around Drama. They are statements like stones – statements whose vocal melodies have been inscribed over three generations into collective and individual memory – inedible fragments that have become like a song about flight through repetition and narration. At one level, the video Passing Drama is a construction of a mental space in which memories interact with one another as they do in the cerebral system. Images and sounds work as powers of memory. Instead of concealing breaks and gaps and replacing them with fictitious (historical) elements in order to create a homogeneous continuity, transition between the different visual and narrative levels were used in Passing Drama to visualize the process of forgetting or the awareness that something has been forgotten.*

*Angela Melitopoulos is an artist and researcher in the domain of time-based arts, video- and sound-installations, visual essays and documentaries. She studied fine arts at the Art Academy Düsseldorf with Nam June Paik and holds a PhD in Visual Cultures from the Goldsmith University in London. Currently, she is a professor at the Media School of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Melitopoulos foregrounds experimentation with new formats, multi-screen works, performance, expanded cinema and philosophically grounded video essays. Her work focuses on mnemopolitics, migration/mobility and narration in relation to electronic/digital media and documentation. Her installation Assemblages, co-realized with the philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, triggered a series of debates around Félix Guattari’s notions of the role of machinic animism in human subjectivity. From 1985 on, her works have been awarded and presented at numerous international video and film festivals (Berlinale, Film and Videofestival of Locarno, Filmfestival Rotterdam, to name a few), exhibitions and museums such as Whitney Museum New York and Musée d’Art Moderne Montréal, among others. Her latest project Crossing was exhibited at Documenta 14 (Athens and Kassel, 2017). Melitopoulos organizes international seminars, initiates and engages in collaborative and activist media projects. Lives and works in Berlin.*