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Vertigo of Presence: Chantal Akerman's NOW, Nomadic Dwelling and the 'War Machine' within the Context of Contemporary Moving Image Works

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Abstract

How can the heightened time-space correlation of (armed) conflict, if at all, be represented in an art context? This article explores how Chantal Akerman's multi-channel installation *NOW* (2015) can be read in view of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1988) 'war machine', a concept suggesting a rebellious strategy defined by nomadic existence and acted out against the State and its involvement in capitalist control systems. In this context, nomadic dwelling with its enhanced sense of 'smooth space' offers geographical, psychological and audio-visual dimensions. Aiming to examine a range of takes on the political, economical and existential dimension of warfare within contemporary art, the discussion draws parallels with moving image works by Harun Farocki, Anri Sala, Regina José Galindo and Elizabeth Price. A mapping of the proposed theoretical framework across individual case studies allows for a rigorous examination and differentiation of audio-visual and conceptual methodologies and their phenomenological implications.

Introduction

This article sets out to explore how the installation *NOW* (2015) by the late film-maker Chantal Akerman can be read in view of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1988) concept of the 'war machine' and its confrontation with the hegemony of the State, a discussion which was prompted by the author's phenomenological experience of the work.[i] It will also consider the notion of nomadic dwelling[ii] with its enhanced sense of 'smooth space'. Aiming to examine a range of takes on the political, economical and existential dimension of warfare within contemporary art, the discussion will draw parallels with moving image works by Harun Farocki, Anri Sala, Regina José Galindo and Elizabeth Price.

A close reading of Akerman's multi-channel installation will consider how a recognition of place (contemporary war zones) is conditioned by nomadic dwelling, where place is experienced 'whilst moving' as put forward in Deleuze and Guattari's Chapter 'Treatise on nomadology – the War Machine' (1988). For them, the being-in-place of the nomad is marked by an understanding of place where 'lines of flight' are understood as a form of 'deterritorialization'.[iii]

NOW includes a continuous juxtaposition of various 'lines of flight' on multiple screens, compounded by the sound of the machineries of combat. Like in a cabinet of mirrors this installation by the late filmmaker conjures a virtual or possible place whilst alluding to actual, geo-political sites. In relation to her previous installations, Akerman's last work is seen by some as 'extreme departure' with viewers finding themselves in an audio-visual environment where "trauma to eye and ear are overpowering". (Cumming, 2015) The installation takes different facets, as it is

shown within the same year in different locations, spanning across the (still) 'being-in-place' (when shown at the 56th Venice Biennale) and the absence of its maker (when exhibited at Ambika P3 in London). [iv]

In order to further reflect on the psycho-spatial geographies of warfare within a contemporary art context, Akerman's last installation will be contrasted with one of Harun Farocki's multi-channel works, *Immersion* (2009), where actors or soldiers respond to computer-simulated imagery of combat scenes in Middle Eastern war zones. Further considerations within the argument will involve Galindo's performance in the film *La Sombra/ The Shadow* (2017) where she presents the human body in its exposure and challenge of the State — in this case the modern German arms industry — as she runs away from a tank chasing her on dirt tracks in the vicinity of Kassel (Vogel, 2017, 366).[v] Equally focusing on the civilian population during armed conflict, Sala's film *1395 Days without Red* (2011) contemplates the dilemma faced by the inhabitants of Sarajevo when negotiating street crossings during its siege in the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s.

Deleuze and Guattari's 'war machine' offers a concept that suggests a rebellious strategy against the State and its involvement in capitalist control systems. In her prize-winning installation *The Woolworths Choir of 1979,* Elizabeth Price (2012) presents a grim image of the pitfalls of a system where health and safety regulations are jeopardised in favour of maximum cost effectiveness leading to tragic loss of life. Whilst this latter work does not involve actual warfare, it engages with the antagonistic forces between the State (capital) and the needs or welfare of the individual. The inclusion of Price's installation in this discussion is motivated by the

need to highlight how the war machine and its entanglement with the State is at play in seemingly 'peace time' scenarios, suggesting the conflict of power relations within these. As the digital montage of this work combines historical footage, textbook information and pop culture in a frenzied rhythm, it also points to our Internet culture of sensationalism and surveillance that feeds into big data society and its control mechanisms.

Place as Vertigo of Presence – Reflections on the War Machine

"The variability, the polyvocality of directions is an essential feature of smooth space of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography. The nomad, the nomad space, is localized and not delimited." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 382)

Deleuze and Guattari's reflections on how the nomad engages with place 'whilst moving' through a terrain of smooth space describe a haptic encounter with the surrounding elements[vi] mediated by an awareness of unlimited locality. (1988, 382-383) They elaborate on relations between the 'smooth' and the 'striated'. The latter is associated with a surveying visuality where the striations of space indicate clear boundaries. The former concerns the immediate vicinity, the local and haptic appreciation of space where all the senses are implied. The nomad's perception is marked by a shifting terrain where sound and tactility predominate over the visual. (382) Akerman's NOW echoes this scenario within the visceral representation of a war zone. Its close-up shots of desert terrain are defined by an all-encompassing soundtrack, generating smooth space as 'horizonless milieu', as location for nomadic resistance. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 379)

Deleuze and Guattari develop the concept of the war machine to reflect on how the logic of the State[vii] with its striations and demarcations of a controlled territory are challenged by nomadic existence, by sudden outbursts of movement where space becomes 'deterritorialized' in an encounter of proximities. To further elucidate the dichotomy of State and 'war machine', they equate the strategies of the chess player with the striations of authority in stark contrast with the dynamics involved in the game of Go.

"In Go, it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point. The movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival. The 'smooth' space of Go against the 'striated' space of chess. The *nomos* against *polis.* (original emphasis) The difference is that chess codes and decodes space, whereas Go proceeds altogether differently, territorializing or deterritorializing it […] Another justice, another movement, another space-time." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 353)

The concept of nomadic dwelling as an analogy of a state of uprooted mobility has become common, even if contested, currency within contemporary theory.[viii] Within a context of socio-political globalization, the question of how we dwell in actual or virtual place or how we move through place continues to be at the forefront of debates within and across disciplines. Further questions involve the body and how it is instrumental in experiencing and negotiating our movement through actual and virtual space.

This article aims to reflect on how Akerman's installation and other selected artworks might succeed in bridging the gap identified by Braidotti (2011) between lived nomadic experience and its theorization through a phenomenological involvement of the viewer in situations that somehow span across the actual and virtual experience of the nomad. Rose Braidotti claims that there is a discrepancy within the lived experience of nomadic subjectivity "in emancipated or postfeminist, multiethnic, global societies, with advanced technologies and high-speed telecommunication, allegedly free borders, and increased border controls and security measures" and the theoretical representation of this experience. (2011, 4)

NOW (2015)

"*Maintenant, s'il fallait faire un film sur le Moyen-Orient, ce serait un film sur l'impossibilité de le faire. En tout cas pour moi.* (Now, if it was necessary to make a film about the Middle East, it would be a film about the impossibility of making it. At least for me.)" (Akerman, 2004, 148)[ix]

The 'perpetual movement without aim or destination' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 353) comes into play in Akerman's *NOW* taking us to a topography of armed conflict where we experience the accelerated pace, the 'lines of flight' of the war machine as we move between the screens of her installation. The physical encounter with this work puts us in a place where ideas of nomadic dwelling become visceral; they make us aware of sensations deeply felt in the body through the fleeting images of desert textures and the rumbling of the *literal* war machine. The orchestration and structure of NOW echoes the pace of the nomadic war machine, "speed and absolute movement

are not without their laws, but they are the laws of the *nomos*, of the smooth space that deploys it, of the war machine that populates it." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 386) When developing NOW, Akerman wanted it to "transmit the claustrophobia of war". (Mazière, 2015) Through Akerman's use of sound as corporeal, defining factor in the perception of the imagery the viewer becomes acutely aware of their body, a body submitted to the dangers of war. The undeniable effect of Akerman's undertaking suggests that the gap between 'lived experience' and the theorization of nomadic experience (Braidotti, 2011, 4) can be bridged by the combination of conceptual rigour and phenomenological depth in artworks such as NOW.

Akerman had been commissioned to create *NOW* for the Venice Biennale in 2015. Many years before presenting this work, Akerman talks about wanting to film in the Middle East:

"Je voudrais filmer là-bas sans pour autant ne filmer que le désert [...] qui répond à mes voeux pieux de nomadisme et à l'idée que la terre qu'on possède est toujours signe de barbarie et de sang, et que la terre qu'on traverse et qu'on ne prend pas fait penser au livre. Je voudrais filmer cet ailleurs sans tomber dans l'exotisme qui annule l'autre. (I would like to film over there but not just film the desert [...] this relates to my pious vows of nomadic life and the idea [Akerman paraphrases Blanchot] that the land that one owns is always a sign of barbarity and blood, and that the land that one moves across and that one does not take, can be thought of as a book. I would like to film this elsewhere without falling into an exoticism that erases the other.)" [x]
(Akerman 2004, 141)

This multi-channel video installation with surround sound presents the viewer with images of desert spaces filmed from a vehicle driving through an unspecified war zone. The horizontality of the terrain is broken up through multiple screens where imagery involves long distance views of arid landscape, close-up shots of walls, sparse vegetation and dirt roads, the moving imagery at times coming briefly to a halt whilst being juxtaposed with accelerated blurred footage of other screens. [Figures 1-3]

Giuliana Bruno remarks that Akerman's 'itinerant way of filming, was especially suited to the peripatetic mode of reception experienced in the art gallery, where visitors interact with screens that can enhance displacement as well as forms of encounter and liminality'. (2016, 164) The format of the gallery encounter where viewers are able to move between screens setting their own pace in approaching the work corresponds well with Akerman's method of filming where the camera captures footage *en passant*. This can be observed in relation to many of her installation works including *NOW* and *D'Est/From the East* (1993).[xi]

In *NOW*, the images and sound immerse the viewer in a corporeal sense of presence, a *now* of war, of disorientation, fear and speed. The sound of artillery, gunshots, engine noise and the occasional birdsong contribute to an impression of *nunc stans* – not so much as Walter Benjamin would have it with his concept of *Jetztzeit* (literally 'now-time')[xii] as a mystical quality outside of time,[xiii] but an adrenaline-heightened rollercoaster of a transcribed reality. The latter is somewhat countered by small objects, such as toys and flowers, placed in a corner of the exhibition space, sparsely lit by a pink strip light, also small lit-up decorative screens and a floor projection

(apparently of a detail of Akerman's bedding) at the rear side of the space – like small notes of otherness such elements indicate a more personal, intimate environment despite its artificial connotations.[xiv]

These small idiosyncratic objects of intimacy in juxtaposition with fleeting desert scenes seem almost like a reversal of emphasis when contrasting *NOW* with Akerman's last film *No Home Movie* made in the same year. Within the latter she introduces footage of similar topographies[xv], which in this context read like inner landscapes of movement caught by a fast travelling camera — images that offer release from the claustrophobic interior of her mother's apartment and that take us to a place that is other. In *No Home Movie*, the visuals of the desert imply a longing for a land of past and future, or of an introspective 'now'. When contrasted with images of 'home', of the interiors in her mother's house, the fleeting desert scenery reveals to us here, or confirms what transpires in so many of Akerman's films, that she draws from a vision, an understanding of self, that, as much as it is marked by the Shoah and her mother's trauma as Auschwitz survivor, is also defined by the 'deterritorialized' space-time of the nomad (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).[xvi] In his review, Nick Pinkerton (2016) understands the desert imagery in *No Home Movie* to imply the longing of the nomadic Jew for a homeland. "There's also a double meaning here, for the interstitial views of desert landscapes in Israel, taken with a BlackBerry camera, evoke the myth of the eternal Wandering Jew – the title might also be taken as Homeless Movie." One could argue with Pinkerton's view that 'no home' is a deliberate stance, expressing a nomadic attitude that Akerman fully embraced, whereas 'homeless' has connotations of exposure to an unwanted situation.

In contrast to the impression of longing in the desert visions of *No Home Movie*, Akerman's installation *NOW* confronts us with the experience and terror of war. She does this without showing images of actual warfare, nor people caught up in the midst of it, but with leaving us in a no-man's land of barren mountains and dirt tracks. We are presented with a visual absence – however, the surround sound effects remind us of the presence of the 'war machine', of the constant threat of physical danger, gunfire, explosives and machine noise. The images on the screens move at different speeds, at times accelerating, at times slowing down, creating a sense of dizziness.

Adrian Searle describes this eloquently: " [...] Horizons rush across the screens, grey deserts sweep away and nearer bluffs of red rock and crumbling stone walls rush from left to right, sometimes faster, sometimes slowing to a halt. Visually relentless, Akerman's Now is also a furious aural cacophony, filled with the sound of skylarks, gunfire, ululations, calls and cries, the whinny of frightened horses, the sound of helicopter blades, thuds, engine noise and armoury. We hear all this but the deserts are empty. They could be anywhere: the Negev, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, places between places, regions whose names we hear constantly on news reports, places with no names at all. Everything rushes, slows and rushes again." (Searle, 2015)

Farocki's *Immersion*

With *NOW,* Akerman creates a nomadic 'milieu-space'[xvii], a visceral experience of conflict and the deterritorialization brought about by warfare. Its setup is at the antipode of some of Farocki's presentations of digital scenarios in his multi-channel video installations. In the latter we access the imagery of electronic war games or the computer-simulated topography of war zones used for training soldiers for combat or

dealing with US veterans' post-traumatic stress disorder in works like *Serious Games I-IV* (2009). Part III of this body of work, *Immersion,* shows how "computer animation software called Virtual Iraq can be used to enable traumatised soldiers to repeat and retell key experiences in the virtual world." (Fact Liverpool Official Website 2010)[xviii] [Figures 4-5]

Within the logistics and presentation of Farocki's *Serious Games I-IV*, we are reminded of how the war machine can become instrument of the State and as such finds itself at the opposite of the nomadic 'line of flight'. Deleuze and Guattari explain that there are two aspects or 'poles' of the war machine, the first - "a line of destruction" where the war machine is appropriated by the State or part of a rationale of dominance, the second - where the objective of the war machine is "not war but the drawing of a creative line of flight" that counters the machinations of the State. (1988, 422) Whereas Akerman takes the viewer to experience the terrain of the nomad, Farocki sets up a two-channel presentation of documentary material, which exposes the political, technological and psychological dimension of State warfare. In the latter installation, we are shown how soldiers are trained to combat an unknown enemy, who is however represented through drawn samples of stereotypical images of people from the Middle East. With minimum written on-screen commentary, we learn about the war machine of the State in fighting mode. This creates an unease with the viewer reminding us of Deleuze and Guattari's concerns back in 1980[xix]: "We have watched the war machine grow stronger and stronger, as in a science fiction film, [...] we have seen it set its sights on a new type of enemy, no longer another State, or even another regime, but the 'unspecified enemy'; we have seen it put its counterguerilla elements into place so that it can be caught by surprise once, but not twice." (1988, 422)

Farocki comments on *Immersion*, "The veteran wears a *head-mounted display*. The perspective of the image he sees on the data goggle change in accordance with the position of his head and body, and the sounds he hears over the headphones – children screaming, fragments of words in Arabic, shrapnel exploding, rescue helicopters approaching – are spatially modulated. The low-frequency rumble of engines and explosions sends shudders through the platform he is standing on." (2012, 64-65) [Figure 6]

Within the footage in *Serious Games,* explanatory text is inserted commenting on the commonalities and differences of the software that is preparing US soldiers for combat or treating their post-traumatic-stress disorders. We learn that both applications use asymmetrical imagery. We are also informed that the former is far more costly than the latter as the virtual landscapes where traumatized veterans relive their memories (*Serious Games III/Immersion*) have no shadows. One could here speculate how this absence of shadows, other than being more cost-effective, does compromise the 'reality effect' of the traumatic scenes and transfers them into a dreamlike, almost surreal context.[xx]

D.N. Rodowick (2015) comments how, as the gaze of the veterans is turned inward to allow for traumatic memories to resurface, images of these memories remain invisible to the viewer. However, we perceive the emotional stress of the veteran/actor through their distressed head movements as if they were trying to shake off the helmet and with it the memory of the traumatic event. "In each case, the historical real, present or past, is not visible in the image. Yet in *Immersion* it is visualizable in the return of

memory as disturbed actions on the body [...] We can access that event only through the voice in his [the veteran's] recounting of it, and in the confused and unsettled movements of the simulacral space as he throws around his agitated digital gaze." (Rodowick, 2015, 190)

The unstable footage caused by the veteran's movements in Farocki's *Immersion* resonates with the frantic scenery in Akerman's installation *NOW* where the camera work suggests the agitation and movement of someone fleeing the terrors of war. With Akerman, we are exposed and we endeavour to escape the dangers of the war machine. Similarly, with Sala and Galindo we experience with the main character or performer the frenzy of running for survival. The situation is quite different in some of the scenes in Farocki's *Serious Games* where soldiers, who will be actively involved in warfare, train to combat the enemy in a virtual environment, or relive scenes to overcome trauma. With Price, escape seems tragically hopeless and is taken to an absurd state of rapture when images of people in fear for their life are juxtaposed with scenes of pop music entertainment.

Both Akerman and Farocki use documentary features to reflect on place, albeit through very different audio-visual means. Farocki shows us the alienation of technological warfare in the contemporary advanced phase of the information society where soldiers (in training) 'see a virtual desert, or a virtual city, and learn how to patrol and how to avoid ambushes.' (Eshun, 2012, 68) In contrast, Akerman takes us to a place where we encounter images of non-descript but actual deserts whilst making us aware of the presence of self, engulfed by the shifting grounds of conflict with footage suggesting a desperate effort to escape from the risk of bodily harm.[xxi]

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As much as the strategies of these artists differ, one could argue that the works

mentioned above touch on how we are in place through body and how this access

through body might be denied. This takes us to a political economy where emphasis

on self and awareness of *now,* or of a *Jetzt-Zeit*, as experienced within embodiment,

has become troubled, to say the least. When considering the nomadic subject,

Braidotti takes up Paul Virilio's observations that 'not even warfare really takes the

body seriously' as the geopolitical framework of military operations is merely

considered in logistical terms whilst downplaying the damage of warfare to the body.

(Braidotti, 2011, 180).[xxii]

Further to considerations of presence or absence of embodiment within these works,

one needs to consider how images are used to describe the war machine. In *NOW*,

Akerman opts for evasive and yet concrete images clearly depicting a terrain, which is

familiar through current media footage but without naming specific geographical

zones nor showing visual presence of human activity.

Akerman's depiction of war zones in *NOW* is somewhat offbeat*,* despite the tempo of

the sonic *mosso*. We find ourselves in an iconic no-man's land following moving

footage on-screen whilst considering the intermittent *non-screen* space[xxiii] of the

multi-channel projections. Akerman, as always, leaves space to the viewer – violence

and trauma are implied rather than shown, the war machine is rumbling in its

approach, we are somehow caught in the middle, but we never see it. As the title

NOW suggests, we are taken into a present time, a *nunc stans*, the urgent flight of war.

As to Farocki's oeuvre, Georges Didi-Huberman (2010) offers a thorough analysis of key strategies, in particular how montage enables a critique of his presentation of documentary material. He sees Farocki as "part of a 'constellation' of artists, among them Walid Raad or Alfredo Jaar, Pascal Convert or Sophie Ristelhuber, who do not 'impose the icon', nor the abyss of the 'invisible', nor the cynicism of 'this has all been seen', nor the resignation that 'there is nothing to be seen'." (original emphasis) [xxiv] (2010, 128-129) That is, Didi-Huberman observes how Farocki engages in a visual method, which does not rely on the image as iconic absolute, nor does it instrumentalize the metaphysical dimension of an abstract void.

Didi-Huberman points to Jacques Rancière's claim of the emancipation of the viewer, suggesting that there is an alternative, an image which would "incite us, as viewers, to abandon the dichotomy of 'everything has been seen' and 'there is nothing to be seen' (original emphasis), neither *l'image-mot d'ordre* (image with a clear message) nor *l'image-silence magique* (image that is principally illegible but re-enacting a metaphysics of the sublime)." Rancière acknowledges that there might be a visual mode that is not caught up in a choice between depictions of graphic violence and the muteness of sublime abstractions and calls for the viewer to actively engage. (Didi-Huberman, 2010, 128-129)

According to Didi-Huberman it is through montage, splitting, juxtaposing, repeating and re-positioning images that Farocki is able "to invent new 'war-machines' so that the State does not gain the upperhand in presenting to us the *irréparable* (irrecoverable)." (133)

In Farocki's *Immersion,* veterans — within the documentary footage these are actually therapists acting as if they were soldiers, their acting based on their experience of treating soldiers — are taken to a virtual place where they relive their traumatic experiences of war to engage in a healing process. Farocki's agenda of montage, of displaying documentary material in an art context, is motivated by a political interest in disseminating information to show how the State apparatus operates and to offer, through showing this material, new strategies to engage the 'war machine'.

It is worth mentioning that the development of the software for VRET (virtual reality exposure therapy) was based on models of the games industry, which were adapted by therapists who saw their 'virtual Iraq device' as a commercial venture with the US army. (Eshun, 2012, 67) Farocki explains in a discussion with Kodwo Eshun how the investment in US state-funded programmes covering research as the one observed in *Serious Games* was substantial ($ 900 million at the time) (74). In contrast, the relatively modest production team of Farocki's work for the *Serious Games* project (his own crew consisted of three people) allowed them to operate promptly and within a modest budget (77) bringing to mind the nomad when venturing out in sudden lines of flight.

The Woolworths Choir of 1979

In contrast to Akerman's immersive installation, with Price's *The Woolworths Choir of 1979*[xxv], we are spectators rather than participants although we remain engrossed by the disturbing images of people trapped in a department store fire. Where Akerman takes us to the open desert, Price highlights confinement within the urban

environment. Both artists rely on overwhelming and fast-paced soundtracks to structure the visuals. Akerman's cacophony of war commotion is nonetheless very different from the frantic, yet regular, beat of the pop music with Price. The latter uses sound to march us through imagery that morphs within a collage aesthetic from entertainment to disaster footage in a hectic repetition of visual tropes and text.

Price takes us through three different interpretations of the choir. The film begins with a set of images and text focusing on the choir as an architectural feature. The second strand shows images of a female pop chorus from the sixties; the third considers the witnesses of the 1979 Woolworths fire as a chorus telling the traumatic events. The different sections of the film are linked by 'recurring images of hand gestures', such as the flame-like waving gestures of carved figures within the ecclesiastical architecture, the gestures of the chorus dancers and the gesture of people waving from the burning building. (Price, 2012, Blanchflower, 2013)

Price collates architectural diagrams and photographs of church choirs with found clips of 'female pop performances', archival footage of a department store fire and scenes of flammability testing. The edit[xxvi] conjures a frantic audio-visual rhythm to the beat of hard clapping. This is the 'war machine' at work in its relentless covering of ground to expose the pitfalls of a society where surveillance, control and economic profit lead at times to disastrous results.[xxvii]

Price comments on the edit of the installation where very different types of footage are juxtaposed, so that it moves "from something that looks like a powerpoint lecture

to something that looks like an info-mash to something that feels like a cinematic melodrama". (Price, 2012)

Price hammers it in, through sound, text, red typography, black screens, changes between black and white images and colour images — creating a crescendo with the harrowing scenes of hands stretching through barred windows waving and the images of burning material. Here the somewhat jarring, mundane sound of the chorus becomes the megaphone of the 'war machine', defying, accusing and challenging mechanisms of control, money and authority. [Figures 7-9]

One might ask how these very different iconographical categories used in Price's installation relate to ideas of State and its challenge through the nomadic 'war machine'. The artist plays and offsets somewhat disparate categories (although linked by the concept of the chorus) to hone in ideas of structure, violence and control.

Braidotti explains how the violence of nomadic warfare and of the state reflect on each other. 'Nomadic violence and state violence are mirror images of each other, divided by an antithetical hostility. Differences in the kind of violence are also a question of different beats, that is to say, of variations of intensity or speed.' (2011, 62)

One could argue that Price's film endeavours to reflect on the shortcomings of the State — that is to critique an economic system where the individual/the nomad is vulnerable and exposed. Whilst her work is not concerned with actual scenes of war, it deals with place defined by commercial priorities, places of worship (ecclesiastical

architecture), places of entertainment and finally with disaster and place as entrapment. (Blanchflower, 2013)

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1988, 360), these scenarios are very much part of the war machine's 'exterior' aspects, that is where it can take a variety of forms within different socio-political situations, such as industrial, technological, commercial or even 'religious creation'. Here the war machine is to be understood not only in relation to actual warfare but equally within the expansive dynamics of different areas within society.

"But the war machine's form of exteriority is such that it exists only in its own metamorphoses; it exists in an industrial innovation as well as in technological invention, in a commercial circuit as well as in a religious creation, in all flows and currents that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 360)

(Post)-Industrial progress is made possible through a political economy that constantly strives to be ahead of itself succumbing to the illusion of stability and eco-political dominance, of the 'State' in contrast with the Deleuzian-Guattarian war-machine. (Recent history, has once again confirmed the illusionary character of this stability).

In Price's two-channel presentation, we are aware of the *power-machine* of industrial progress, but also of its limitations in its dangerous oblivion of human life. This installation from 2012 becomes uncannily amplified by the 2017 Grenfell disaster

leaving British society confronted with the trauma of the survivors and their questions as to the economical and political priorities of the State.

Sala's *1395 Days Without Red*

Whilst the Artangel Project *1395 Days Without Red* commenced as a close collaboration between Anri Sala and Šejla Kamerić to make a film about the siege of Sarajevo, the artists ended up each presenting their own filmic version of the project. (Artangel Official Website, 2011)

For Sala, sound is often a main impetus in the development of his video works/installations. His version of *1395 Days Without Red* is marked by an effort to orchestrate and adapt the sound along the (visual) narrative to highlight moments of vertigo, of deceleration and acceleration in the daunting navigation along the pathways of a besieged city. "Crossroads were places of trial, locations where lives were decided. To sprint across a difficult crossroad was a demanding operation, an extraordinary trial for the body." (Kebo, 2011) [Figure 10]

The entire film is structured into two parallel events, the rehearsal of an orchestra and the dangerous journey of a woman across war-time Sarajevo with the musical score adapted to reflect the dramatic developments of events. Sala speaks about the editing process, how it was crucial to play with the timing of the musical piece (Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony). The music needed to be well known so that viewers/listeners would be able to identify changes of pace and modulation of sound to reflect the inner conflicts, the waiting, the angst, the accelerated breathing, the pause — *das Innehalten* (holding within)[xxviii] — before they would gather their

courage to run across. Sala explains " [...] at the moment [...] you reach the crossing

—– then you are there, in that moment, in that place [...] " (Artangel, 2011)

Whilst Sala's *1395 Days Without Red* might lull us into a contemplative mode through its somewhat seductive visuals, we become aware of the danger when the protagonist arrives at the crossroads. Everything is heightened by the musical score — the sound does not accompany the visuals but its modus operandi defines the visual narrative.

This brings to mind Deleuze and Guattari's description of Kleist's writing where one is confronted with "sudden catatonic fits, swoons, suspenses, with the utmost speeds of a war machine". (1988, 400) We are being taken on 'lines of flight' with urgency, like a violent reminder of where we are, in this case in a war zone, here — *now*.

"If the nomads formed the war machine, it was by inventing absolute speed, by being 'synonymous' with speed. And each time there is an operation against the State [...] it can be said that a war machine has revived, that a new nomadic potential has appeared, accompanied by the reconstitution of a smooth space [...]." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 386)

Sala plays off visual and acoustic elements to take the viewer to a situation where one is acutely aware of what is now, the *nunc stans*, of the character's and one's own physical present. Here a 'smooth', acoustic, visual and similarly tactile space[xxix] — change of volume and pace combined with close-up camera work — comes to the forefront. This is the place where the nomad 'dwells whilst moving' (Deleuze and

Guattari, 1988, 381) before getting ready to defy the dangers of open space and to run across to the next relatively safe haven of built-up areas.[xxx] This echoes the sudden outbursts of movement found in Kleist.

"The nomad knows how to wait, he has infinite patience. Immobility and speed, catatonia and rush, a 'stationary process', station as process — these traits of Kleist's are eminently those of the nomad [...] only nomads have absolute movement, in other words, speed; vortical or swirling movement is an essential feature of their war machine." (381)

As we follow the protagonist we share her acute listening — involving all the senses, not only sound — as she shows fear of this potentially life-threatening danger. We perceive her fear, but as with Akerman, we are not shown what causes it (with Akerman though, we hear shots of artillery). We are also aware of the contrast between closed-in, sheltered space and the risks of exposure in open space.

This takes us back to Deleuze and Guattari's description of Go where the player finds themselves in open space and needs to be ready "to spring up at any point". (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 353) With Sala, the tension within the characters is at breaking point. They are acutely aware of becoming a potential target of snipers as they prepare themselves to move across the open space before they suddenly 'spring up' as they hurry towards safety. There is a particularly telling long shot where the smooth space of the nomad cutting across the striated space of the State is taken to a maximum tension. Here a main road runs vertically through the frame with its perspectival lines

disappearing far in the distance pointing towards the danger of snipers on the hills.
[Figure 11]

The film has a dizzying effect — in its contrast of crystal-clear focus as the characters slow down and prepare to tempt fate and run across open space and the acceleration of movement amplified by heavy breathing when they actually negotiate 'the war zone'. However, one also detects a sense of measurement when the accelerated breathing falls back into a more evenly paced performance. This transpires when the main character expresses her relief of a safe crossing with a louder, yet calmer humming of Tchaikovsky's music in tandem with the orchestra's rehearsal. [Figure 12]

Here, as in Akerman's installation, sound creates a sense of embodiment — a *here in this place* — though with Sala, embodiment is more literal, as we synchronise our breathing with the people caught up in the siege of Sarajevo.

La Sombra

In Galindo's *La Sombra,* we are aware of the artist's body engaging in an endurance test as she flees from an approaching tank.[xxxi] She trained for months to prepare for this performance[xxxii] reflecting on the inescapability of war where the viewer witnesses the artist's utmost physical exhaustion as she runs across a terrain of dirt tracks cutting through fields and forests. (Matamala, 2017) The military tank in its relentless pursuit is the war machine appropriated by the State, whereas the figure of the artist suggests in its accusatory performance the resistance of the nomadic war

machine. Galindo writes, "we cannot escape the horror/ follow us/ it is our shadow".

(Vogel, 2017, 366). [Figures 13-15]

The perception of (sonic or visual) embodiment or grounding can be traced in all the artworks considered for this discussion. It might be a question of movement (of the camera, the actor/performer) in relation to a terrain or ground as in Akerman's, Sala's or Galindo's work — or with Farocki, the idea of troupes on the ground within an actual/virtual territory (as traumatic memory, or anticipated battles) — or as with Price, of being back on the ground (having escaped from the Woolworths fire). The artist Hito Steyerl (2012), in contrast, suggests in her appraisal of 'new visualities' that, within the complexities of contemporary image worlds, we might have 'to get over the idea that we need a ground in the first place'.[xxxiii]

So, how do these filmic installations help us to experience the ground or is the ground out of sight in this vertigo of presence?

Conclusion

After having engaged in a close reading of a selection of filmic installations and single channel works, one might still wonder how the heightened time-space correlation of (armed) conflict, if at all, can be represented in an art context. However, one might also conclude that, at best, it is through what is not depicted but insinuated, or made tangible through an audio-visual emphasis on 'smooth space', that we gain a *soupçon*, a suspicion, of this vertigo of presence within the storms of the war machine. It is in the 'smooth space' found in the visual and sonic textures of Akerman's footage of Middle Eastern desert terrains, the change of musical tempo

and of breathing patterns in Sala's reflection on the siege of Sarajevo, the disturbing details of narration in Farocki's documentary montage of virtual warfare in the treatment of PTSD of veteran soldiers, the focus within Galindo's performance on her accelerated breathing as she runs away from the tank, or with Price, the close up shot of hands calling for help.

As much as these artworks reflect on the 'war machine' indicating nomadic resistance to the State, one could look into how their modes of production, funding sources and exhibition in art institutions show the entanglement of the 'nomadic war machine' and the 'State apparatus'. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 420)[xxxiv]

In NOW, Akerman takes us to a place where we sense the imminent threat of the 'war machine', where we are shown impressions of a 'deterritorialized' smooth space of nomadic engagement with place. The visuals are rather formless, engaging us in a topology devoid from a literal representation of war. We are left with the projection of our fears to the beat of the approaching 'war machine'.

Goedart Palm writes about the perception of media images "[...] *dass inflationäre Bildwelten — gleich viel, ob sie nun kritisch, affirmativ oder dokumentarisch motiviert sind — sich schließlich selbst entwerten*." (that inflationary imagery, no matter if with critical, affirmative or documentary motivations, will in the long run become devalued). [xxxv](Palm, 2003, 94) The artist Alfredo Jaar similarly acknowledges the desensitization we experience through the constant overexposure to media images of violence and warfare.[xxxvi]

The initial impetus for this article was to reflect on how the experience of artworks like Akerman's NOW can take us as viewers to a place where we gain a better understanding of how one might experience place through nomadic dwelling and how we are caught up in the machinations of the 'war machine' within global socio-political dynamics of capital and the State.

Akerman acknowledges, "*Je voudrais filmer pour comprendre et prendre le risque de ne peut-être rien comprendre en filmant.*" (I would like to film to better understand and take the risk of perhaps not understanding anything when I am filming).[xxxvii] (Akerman, 2004, 142)

Akerman's life and work was deeply influenced by her identification with nomadic existence. Her oeuvre is that of a nomad who 'dwells whilst moving' where 'lines of flight' enable a constant 'de-territorialization and re-territorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) of what is presented to us.

In reflection, whilst as viewers we might remain somewhat removed from the 'war machine', it is through art works like those explored in this discussion that we gain better insights as to the significance of the 'war machine' in challenging relations between the State and nomadic existence.

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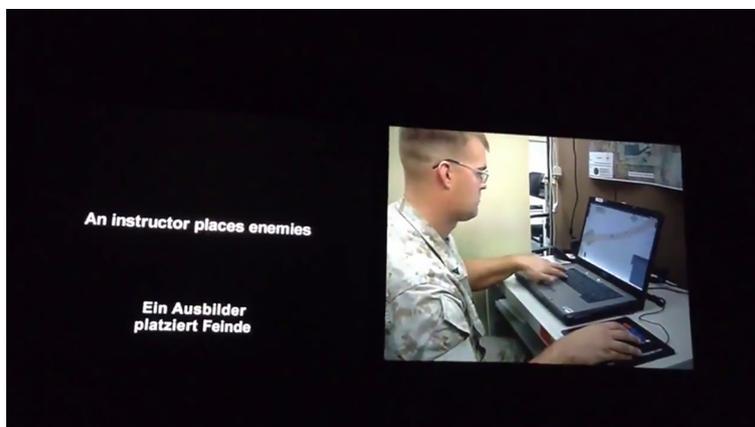
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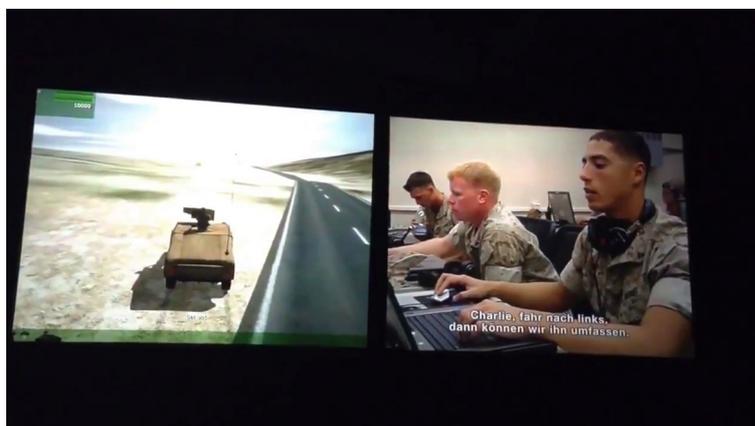Figure 4 Harun Farocki, *Serious Games*

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[i] The author has seen both versions of NOW presented in 2015; the first encounter was at the Venice Biennale and a second viewing at Ambika P3 in London. All other works discussed have also been seen by the author in various exhibition contexts, except for Harun Farocki's and Regina José Galindo's installations, which were viewed on-line.

[ii] The concept of 'nomadic dwelling' relates to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'nomadic space' and Heidegger's notion of 'nearness'. (Thoma, 2006)

[iii] "[…] the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterriorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 21)

iv Akerman committed suicide a few weeks before the opening of her exibition at Ambika.

v It might be worth noting that Allied forces heavily bombarded Kassel during World War II due to its strong links with the German arms industry.

vi See also Rose Braidotti's theorizing of nomadic experience in 'Nomadic Subjects' (2011).

vii Whilst Deleuze and Guattari argue that the State is without 'war machine' and can only 'appropriate one in the form of a military institution' (1988, 355), Henri Lefebvre understands the aggressive forces of a military state as closely linked to ideas of nationhood.
"Secondly, nationhood implies violence — the violence of a military state, be it feudal, bourgeois, imperialist, or some other variety. It implies, in other words, a political power controlling and exploiting the resources of the market or the growth of the productive forces in order to maintain and further its rule." (Lefebvre, 1991, 112)

viii Doreen Massey points out how Caren Kaplan is highly critical of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad as a 'modernist Western' projection. Kaplan challenges their use of binaries as a strategy to lure the 'subversive bourgeois/intellectual'. (Kaplan cited in Massey, 2005, 173)

ix Author's translation. In Akerman's reflections (2004) on why she had not (to that date) made a film about the Middle East, she explained that she had wanted to but was not able to deal with the topic earlier. (2004, 148)

x Author's translation.

xi D'Est (1993) was shown as installation work on 24 monitors at Ambika P3. (Cumming, 2015) There is also a film version (one channel) of the same material.

xii "*Jetztzeit* - Walter Benjamin uses this term in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' to describe a notion of time that is ripe with revolutionary possibility, time that has been detached from the continuum of history. It is time at a standstill, poised, filled with energy, and ready to take what Benjamin called the 'tiger's leap' (original emphasis) into the future." (Oxford Reference)

xiii Walter Benjamin comments on history: "A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop." (Benjamin and Arendt, 1999: 254). See also Hannah Arendt's footnote, "Benjamin says '*Jetztzeit*' (original emphasis) and indicates by the quotation marks that he does not simply mean an equivalent to *Gegenwart*, (original emphasis) that is present. He clearly is thinking of the mystical *nunc stans* (original emphasis)." (1999, 253)

xiv Babette Mangolte explains how the soundtrack of *NOW* includes a wealth of different sound elements conjuring human presence which is mapped against the void of the desert images. What the viewers experience is only in the present, "because the filmmaker has covered her traces and has made sure that the dense collage of sounds referring to multiple countries and cultures reveals nothing other than what is viewed and heard." (2019, 71)

xv The first scene of the film shows a tree moving in the desert wind. Then, halfway through the film, as Akerman leaves her mother's appartment in Bruxelles to return to her nomadic existence, fleeting images shot whilst driving through the desert are inserted — and once again, we see the desert at the end of the film just before the closing scene of her mother's flat.

xvi Akerman is known to have attended a seminar by Deleuze in late sixties Paris (Brenez, 2011). However, it was later that her interest in Deleuze and Guattari's writings came to the forefront, in particular their concept of the 'minor' and 'deterritorialization' in relation to literature (Margulies, 1996, 16; Akerman, 2004, 80). Influenced by these ideas, she sees her engagement with film as that of a 'minor cinema' understanding it as "an art form that consciously embraces its own marginality, rebels against the dominance of big production systems and makes exile [...] from restrictive forms of belonging – one of its central themes." (Schmid, 2010, 6)

xvii See Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) use of 'milieu'. "It [the nomad thought] [...] does not ground itself in an all-encompassing totality but is on the contrary deployed in a horizonless milieu that is a smooth space, steppe, desert, or sea." (381) They also comment on Kenneth White's use of 'milieu-space' in relation to places like 'the Orient' or the 'Gobi desert'. (381)

xviii See also the exhibition at Fact Liverpool *MyWar: Participation in an Age of War* (2010).

xix Publication Date of the original French version of *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Mille Plateaux*).

xx However, both imageries, to prepare soldiers for war and to help them overcome their experiences of war, use computer animation, which could be seen as an alienation from real life war zones.

xxi In contrast, Akerman's *Down there/Là-bas* (2005) alludes to the dangers of war/terrorism in a more oblique way. With the main scenery showing images filmed from the interior of an apartment in Tel Aviv, we learn through Akerman's narration that a bomb in the immediate neighbourhood has killed four people, changing her and the spectator's perception of the apartment's interior from a slightly claustrophobic environment to a location offering shelter from the war zone outside.

[xxii] It is worth noting how the military's use of virtual reality, 'the structure of the images, of the software' is derivative of the game industry, which in turn was influenced by military imagery. (Eshun, 2012, 69)

[xxiii] Non-screen space is here understood as the actual space between screens in the installation rather than the off-screen as a filmic method to imply a space that is not depicted but implied.

[xxiv] Quotations from Didi-Huberman's *Remontages du Temps Subi*: *L'oeil de l'Histoire, 2* (2010) are the Author's translation.

[xxv] The author has seen the installation at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (2012), at Tate Britain for the Turner Prize exhibition (2012) and at Tate Modern (2018).

[xxvi] Price highlights the technical possibilities of digital editing within the procedure of montage. (Price, 2012)

[xxvii] The fatal Woolworths fire was aggravated by high flammability of furniture materials and unsafe storage. (Blanchflower, 2013)

[xxviii] The German term *innehalten* seems particularly adequate in suggesting a pausing, literally a 'holding within'.

[xxix] "[Smooth space] is a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact, rather than a visual space like Euclid's striated space." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, 371)

[xxx] 'The nomad distributes himself in a smooth space; he occupies, inhabits, holds that space; that is his territorial principle. It is therefore false to define the nomad by movement [...] Of course, the nomad moves, but while seated, and he is only seated while moving [...]' (381)

[xxxi] A feminist reading of Galindo's performance would also comment on power relations between the tank with its phallic gun and the female protagonist as persecuted object of desire.

[xxxii] Galindo showed three performance-based works at Documenta 14 in Kassel (Matamala, 2017)

[xxxiii] Hito Steyerl discusses how 'new visualities' in the game industry, military surveillance and other digital art forms often prioritise a view from above, or a juxtaposition of different angles or viewpoints, and these modalities seem to do away with clear references to a ground. "In many of these new visualities, what seemed like a helpless tumble into an abyss actually turns out to be a new representational freedom. Perhaps this helps us to get over [...] the idea that we need a ground in the first place." (Steyerl, 2012, 27)

[xxxiv] Most of the works discussed here (by Akerman, Farocki, Galindo, Sala) were commissioned and sponsored by art institutions that receive public funding (Venice Biennale, Bienal de São Paolo, Documenta, Artangel, etc.), some also by commercial galleries. Price developed her installation during Arts Council England and British School at Rome residencies; it was included in her (winning) exhibition for the Turner prize 2012. (Blanchflower, 2013)

[xxxv] Author's translation.

[xxxvi] Jaar has questioned our desensitization to (media) images in many of his politically motivated works. The author was particularly taken by his installation *Lament of the Images* "shown at Documenta XI (2002) in Kassel, [it] was presented in two adjacent exhibition spaces, one darkened showing light boxes with text referring to the political control of images, the other confronting the viewer with blinding light that wiped out any possibility of discerning an image." (Thoma, 2012)

[xxxvii] Author's translation.