

Luisa Passerini

Conversations on Visual Memory

Synopsis

60,000 words. 60 color images. 4 videos not longer than 5 minutes each.

In the last three decades, the visual arts in their various forms (films, photographs and videos) have powerfully documented the global population diaspora, which challenges borders around the world—particularly those surrounding and crossing Fortress Europe. This book is based on an exploration across two fields of knowledge that develop along different, sometimes converging and sometimes diverging lines: art concerning migration, on the one hand, and a research project that has collected visual material from people involved in the process of mobility towards and through Europe, on the other.

The book combines two approaches to visual memory: a series of conversations with well-known experts in this field, and the presentation of images of the migration itineraries produced by migrants to and through Europe in the two last decades. For the former: in the first part of the book, the author exchanges ideas with colleagues she was friend with during her life, on the basis of her autobiographical memory and re-reading of their works (the interlocutors include the anthropologist Jack Goody, the psychologist Jerome Bruner, the philosopher Gianni Carchia). For the latter: a dialogue is established between the “maps” of migration representing a geography of emotions, drawn by people from all over the world, with video-art on migration by artists such as Ursula Biemann, Eva Leitolf and Bouchra Khalili, who have denounced Fortress Europe in their visual works. Many of the people interviewed for the European Research Council project “Bodies Across Borders: Oral and visual memory in Europe and Beyond” (around 400 interviews in Italy and the Netherlands) have produced drawings in which their experience is conveyed in an almost tangible way. See example below.

In the second part of the book, the author engages in conversations with some of the artists on the following topics: different forms of visual memory (art/non-art), mobility of populations and individuals, migration and gender. These artists place their production at the limits of cinema and the fine arts, documentary and experimental work, blurring the lines between these practices. Their videos and photographs explore the borders of Europe, seen as a territory inhabited also by a wandering, nomadic existence.

The conclusion is a collective conversation that took place in an advanced class on memory studies at Columbia University’s Oral History Master of Arts Program, where Luisa Passerini a short course on memory and visibility to both students and alumni in

