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Visualizing Mass Exodus

Vincent Lavoie

The Syrian and Iraqi refugee migration crisis has not escaped the attention of the institutional royalty of contemporary photojournalism. Aside from the “masterpieces” of photojournalism, the iconography of this crisis includes “amateur” images made by refugees themselves, as they follow complex escape routes and wanderings that form a moving cartography of migration. The sincerity and evidentiary value of these images was the inspiration behind a major network documentary (*Exodus: Our Journey to Europe*, BBC, 2016), in which they are perceived as expressions of a rediscovered authenticity. Then, artists appropriated military technologies capable of building a thermal mapping of migratory flows (Richard Mosse, *Incoming*, 2016) and challenged the position of the spectator confronted with this form of visual predation. What topographies of migration do these three modes of visual production – journalistic and canonical, amateur and diasporic, military and artistic – establish? What political intentions or operational realities are discernible in each of these representative regimes? This article is devoted to an exploration of the topics, beliefs, and critical perspectives encountered within such a visual triangulation of exodus.

The Migratory Crisis and the Cardinal Virtues of Photojournalism

In 2016, World Press Photo, Pulitzer, National Press Photographers Association, Best of Photojournalism, and all other photojournalism competitions placed images of the migratory crisis at the top of their honour rolls. So many photographs on the theme were submitted to Pictures of the Year International, a competition sponsored by the Reynolds Journalism Institute, [1] that a specific category created for the occasion – “Exodus” – garnered awards for no fewer than nine photographers. Obviously, many well-known photojournalists [2] saw the migratory crisis as an event that highlighted the canonical values of the trade: the humanism of the subject, the highly factual content of the images, the photographer’s empathy. [3] Some of the photographs that received awards in 2016 demonstrated these aspects particularly well. For example, the picture taken by Warren Richardson, winner of the World Press Photo of the Year, showed a father passing his son into life-saving hands during a night-time migration.

1. This institute is affiliated to the University of Missouri. Its School of journalism played a vital role in the academic recognition of photojournalism. Clifton C. Edom even argues that Frank Luther Mott – director of that school in 1942, headquarter from 1944 of the POYI (then called *Fifty-Print Exhibition Contest*) – has coined the word *photojournalism*. Clifton C. Edom, Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1976, p. 41.

2. Several photographers were awarded in 2016 for having taken pictures about mass exodus: Mauricio Lima, Sergey Ponomarev, Tyler Hicks and Daniel Etter / *New York Times* (Pulitzer); Fabio Bucciarelli/MeMo (POYI); Warren Richardson/freelance (WPPA); Moises Saman and Alex Majoli/Magnum/MSNBC (NPPA); finally, James Nachtwey (TIME’s Best Photojournalism of 2016).

3. For a critical analysis of press pictures’ axiology, see Vincent Lavoie, *Photojournalismes. Revoir les canons des images de presse*, Paris: Hazan, 2010.

The scene unfolded at the border between Serbia and Hungary, during the night of August 28, 2015. The Hungarian government had just hastily erected a razor-wire fence in order to prevent a group of Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan refugees from entering European territory. It was three in the morning, and the photographer and refugees had been playing cat-and-mouse with the Hungarian police force for more than five hours. The photograph was taken with no lighting but the moon. "You can't use a flash," Richardson recalled, "while the police are trying to find these people, because I would give them away." [4] The photograph is therefore a technical feat – photographing without adequate lighting – and the sign of an ethical position taken – being on their side, not giving them away. The blurred, sooty-looking image, which under other circumstances might have been judged on the formal level, here embodied the moral commitment of a photographer concerned with preserving the concealment of the migrants. *Hope for a New Life* is a highly symbolic image whose rhetorical authority is based on a series of contrapuntal elements: the fragility of the child and the sharp edges of the razor wire, the identity of the protagonists – which one is the father, the man whose face we see or the one in the shadows? – and the ambiguity of the action in the scene – is the baby being passed from right to left or from left to right? Despite these uncertainties, the overall power of this image, in which a child sleeps on the line that divides states, supported by these benefactors' hands, stands out as an allegorical figure for exile. Thus portrayed, the child highlights the utopia of the unimpeded mobility of individuals, that mirage of the 1990s that, in the years since, states have incessantly dissipated by fragmenting territories, erecting walls, and hardening regulations. [5] Nevertheless, Richardson's photograph, as its title suggests, is presented as the symbol of humanistic resistance to state policy.

The meritocracy of photojournalism is fuelled by this subtle mixture of beneficence and aesthetic uniqueness. In this regard, 2016 was no more exceptional than any other year. The Vietnam war in 1972, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the war in Kosovo in 1999, and the tsunami in Japan in 2005 also generated pathetic and iconic images of compassion. In fact, the winning images from these events all gave rise to the expression of outraged and critical discourses, manifestations of solidarity with murdered populations, or commentaries attesting to these populations' influence. [6] The primary vocation of these competitions is to reinforce, through the elevation of emblematic images, the social utility of photojournalism.

The 2016 vintage of photographs nevertheless stood out on in fundamental way: mass exodus is not a subject just like the others. In fact, it has brought to the fore the highest aspirations of contemporary photojournalism. These aspirations have precedents. During the Spanish Civil

4. "I was exhausted by the time I took the picture. It was around three o'clock in the morning and you can't use a flash while the police are trying to find these people, because I would just give them away. So I had to use the moonlight alone." Cited in Jess Denha and Iwona Karbowska, "World Press Photo 2016 Winners: Warren Richardson Takes Top Prize With Powerful Refugees Picture", *The Independent*, 19 February 2016: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/photography/world-press-photo-2016-winners-warren-richardson-takes-top-prize-with-powerful-refugees-picture-a6884501.html>

5. See T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image. The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013.

6. About the alleged influence of photographic icons on the course of events, see Camille Rouquet, *Les Icônes du Vietnam et leur pouvoir. Mécanismes de consécration des images photographiques et rhétorique de l'influence des médias depuis la guerre du Vietnam*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Université Paris Diderot – Paris 7, 2017. For a review, see André Gunthert, "La matrice du Vietnam et le photojournalisme", *L'Image sociale. Carnet de recherches*, 9 January 2018: <https://imagesociale.fr/5339>

War, the illustrated press was deluged with unprecedented visual tropes of migration, notably by Robert Capa, at the time the new dean of war photojournalism: columns of refugees, displacements to internment camps, sanitary and nutritional infrastructure, and more. In the wake of the Great Depression, Dorothea Lange, trailblazer of American social photography, and Paul Taylor published *An American Exodus*, a book documenting the displacement to the west coast of three hundred thousand Americans. [7] Widely disseminated by the illustrated press, in its mature phase at the time, the images by Capa and Lange – to name only those two – instituted figurative models, defined ethical postures, and assigned roles to press images, including that, critiqued by certain Marxist historians of photography, of sentimentalizing visual evidence. [8] Mass exoduses are thus connected to the historical origins of social and humanitarian photojournalism. Along with the other principal stakeholders in the profession, photographers are well aware of this heritage – to such an extent that the dominance of the theme of exodus among the 2016 winners proceeds, among other things, from the resurgence of this foundational moment. This is characterized by more or less literal reprises of the primary motifs of exodus – migrants escorted by the forces of order (Sergey Ponomarev), refugee families living in temporary camps, groups of people massed at a border crossing (Petros Giannakouris), to which are added subjects more specific to the current migratory crisis – migrants debarking on the coasts of the islands of Lesbos or Lampedusa (Antonio Masiello), lifeless bodies on the shore (Mauricio Lima), heaps of abandoned life jackets.

It is through photographers' physical proximity with their subject, the visual signature of their engagement with the other, that the references to historical images seem most obvious. These images – close-ups of faces in distress, shots taken in the tumult of a boat landing or the pandemonium provoked by a repressive police action – are photographic attestations to proximity that aim to establish the photographer as witness to the event, a status highly valued by the profession. A picture taken by Tyler Hicks, winner of a 2016 Pulitzer in the "Breaking News Photography" category, is exemplary in this regard. The photograph shows a group of migrants from Turkey landing on the coast of Lesbos. Hicks is with them, in the water – or, at least, on the rocky shoreline in the sea swells. He is being splashed by the waves. A drop of water is thrown onto his camera's lens, visible in the halo that blurs part of the image on the upper left. Movement blur, imperfect framing, and imprecise focus attest to the phenomenological dimension of a shot taken hurriedly or secretly; [9] this drop of water stamps the image with the seal of an urgency that reflects the subject of the picture. Dust and mishaps affecting the craftsmanship of photographic images are in the arsenal of rhetorical artifices used in abundance by press photographers. They

7. Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*, Paris: JeanMichelPlace, "Histoire Figurée", 1999. See also, Jan Goggans *California on the Breadlines: Dorothea Lange, Paul Taylor, and the Making of a New Deal Narrative*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010.

8. This is essentially what John Tagg argues by deploring the fact that "the status of the official document as proof transformed the flat rhetoric of evidence into an emotionalised drama of experience". John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation. Essays on Photographies and Histories*, London: Macmillan, 1988, 12. See also Caroline Brothers, "Refugees and the Limitations of Documentary", in *War and Photography. A Cultural History*, London: Routledge, 1997, 141-160.

9. See the analysis Georges Didi-Huberman devoted to the four photos taken clandestinely at Auschwitz on August 1944 by a member of the Sonderkommando known as Alex. Georges Didi-Huberman, "Four Pieces of Film Snatched from Hell", in *Images in Spite of All*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-18.

are intended to coat the shots with the varnish of authenticity. Capa understood this perfectly: "If you want to get good action shots, then they mustn't be in true focus."^[10]

The Authorial Power of the Migrant

Mass exodus thus appears at the root of a conception of photojournalistic excellence indexed to the photographer's ethical probity. Arising from the author's reputation and, perhaps even more, sincerity, such probity – the measure of the authenticity of images – is by no means the exclusive prerogative of professional photographers. Amateurs, among other things because they are said to be ignorant of the "tricks of the trade" and the value systems ruling the field, compete with the professionals on this basis. More than the pros, amateurs, and even simple smartphone users for whom photography may not be even a recreational activity, are credited with a sincerity of intention that few experienced photographers can claim.

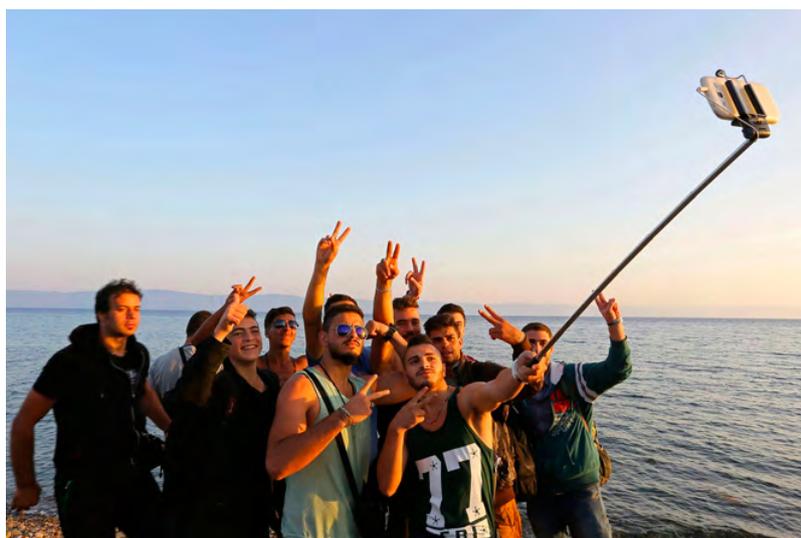
The migratory crisis has made it possible to verify once again this old principle, [11] while updating it in an unprecedented way. It is unprecedented because the migratory crisis has generated its own system of iconographic production through the extensive use of smartphones, which disseminate images made by the migrants themselves. These images dominate, in sheer numbers, the visual repertoire of the exodus. This abundant production is attributable to various factors. The first is technical and statistical in nature. A 2016 report produced by The Open University and France Médias Monde shows that 98 percent of the population of the Middle East and North Africa have a mobile phone, the vast majority of these being smartphones with the capacity to upload to social networks pictures taken during a migration. [12] On the scale of priorities, possession of a working mobile phone supplants food supply and the search for lodging. This says everything about the importance assumed by such technology in a situation of homelessness. The favoured device is a Samsung, because its dead batteries can be replaced, which is impossible with an iPhone. The search for sources of Wi-Fi connection, points of sale for SIM cards as area codes change, and recharging ports for the devices also contribute to the logistics of migration. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, noting this fact, has distributed to Syrian refugees in Jordan 33,000 SIM cards and 85,000 solar lanterns that make it possible to recharge portable devices. It is important for migrants to possess what the authors of this report call "network capital" – a group of technological resources needed to communicate with other people, plan itineraries, and protect populations.

10. These words were reported by journalist O'Dowd Gallagher, correspondent for the *London Daily Express* during the Spanish Civil War, in an interview conducted by Phillip Knightley, main opponent to Capa's legendary historiography. They should thus be interpreted with caution. Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, p. 230.

11. The authenticity of the photos taken by non professional photographers were praised during the First World War while the illustrated press issued calls for amateur shots and photography contests related to the conflict. The centenary commemoration of World War I gave rise to publications acknowledging this fact. See for instance, Frantz ADAM, *Ce que j'ai vu de la Grande Guerre*, Paris: La Découverte, 2013.

12. Marie Gillepsie et al., *Mapping Refugee Media Journeys. Smartphones and Social Media Networks*, The Open University/France Médias Monde, 13 May 2016: https://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/sites/www.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/Mapping%20Refugee%20Media%20Journeys%202016%20May%20FIN%20MG_0.pdf

A second factor explaining the quantitative and strategic importance of the iconography of migration is related to the diversity of uses to which this visual production is put: keeping a permanent connection with relatives in a migratory situation or who remained at home by sending and receiving images, documentation of the exodus and construction of a personal visual archive, recording violence observed or suffered for evidentiary and legal purposes, planning and verification of travel routes, liaison with people smugglers and emergency services (such as healthcare personnel, NGOs, and coastguards). In this sense, the making of images by refugees is situated within an overall strategy for survival.



› Refugees capture their celebration on safely reaching Eftalou beach in Lesbos Island, Greece, 2015 © Anadolu.

No doubt the most eloquent pictures are the selfies that refugees take at key moments on their journey: landing on terra firma, arriving in a secure zone, successfully crossing a border. A proven form of personal testimony, selfies provide definitive proof that the migrants are still alive. Self-representation also stands as a strong visual topic in iconographies of migration. A number of press agencies have distributed images showing men and women photographing themselves in poses that conform with digital photography social practices. Yet, these images have given rise to interpretations that are potentially detrimental to migrants. Bloggers obviously hostile to policies of taking in refugees, for example, have cast doubt on the idea that these persons are penniless by pointing out the cost of the smartphones that they hold in their hands. [13] This shows the critics' ignorance of the importance of the role played by this technology in the migration process. Others, better intentioned, feared that distribution of migrants' selfies might give the impression that the technology mitigates their tragedy, thus obscuring the political roots of the problem. [14]

13. Feed by two sisters "two sisters with a passion for our Lord Jesus Christ and an enthusiasm for the news", the Christian blog *Homespun Vine* is in this matter particularly edifying. "Syrian Refugees Using Expensive Phones To Take Selfies Upon Arriving In Europe", 5 September 2015: <http://homespunvine.com/2015/09/05/>

14. This position is shared by the authors of the report aforementioned. Marie Gillespie et al., *Mapping Refugee Media Journeys*, 38.

This techno-optimistic vision of the migratory crisis imbues *Exodus: Our Journey to Europe*, a three-part documentary that the BBC broadcast in fall 2016. Highlighting the exemplary value of this “network capital” and the instrumental role played by portable technologies in the migration process. *Exodus* was produced in part with images made by migrants, notably during a crossing of the Aegean Sea from Turkey.



► Poster of *Exodus: Our Journey to Europe*, 2016 © BBC2/KeoFilms.

Two ambitions stood behind the making of this documentary, produced by James Bluemel and Itab Azzam: on the one hand, to recognize that migrants have authorial power and evidentiary legitimacy by enabling them to portray the reality of the exodus ; on the other hand, to obtain original images, taken from within the events and under conditions excluding, in principle, the presence of professional photojournalists, at least for the scenes filmed on the rickety boats. The first ambition proceeded from an ethics of representation based on recognition of the legitimacy of points of view and the authenticity of gazes ; the second testifies to the insatiable appetite of the mass media for exclusive images, and especially for “amateur” pictures, a form of “photography vérité” or the “outsider art” of photojournalism. The value of authenticity accorded to these images appears, under the circumstances, so emphatic that the entire aesthetic of the film is affected by it.

In fact, the look of the documentary is designed so that it is difficult to distinguish the images taken by the migrants from those taken by the production. The migrants had to live in constant secrecy: they chose to move at night, take unmarked routes, use the services of human smugglers, and so on. Escaping detection was essential. Avoiding being tracked resulted, as part of their technological peregrinations, in ploys such as communicating via encrypted applications such as WhatsApp and Viber, posting on Facebook or Twitter with a pseudo-identity, and using multiple prepaid SIM cards. In this film, the indiscernible nature of the migrants’ images is a metaphor for the discretion that their makers must observe. The images are present in the documentary, but in a clandestine way, because they are not so much illegal as secret. It is a secrecy that is aesthetic, not legal, as the identity of the film’s protagonists is clearly established.

From this aesthetic harmonization responsible for the lack of distinction between visual sources flow two general observations. The first has to do with the value systems to which visual information

is submitted. As the example of photojournalism awards shows, press images stand out through how they reaffirm certain canons instituted over time. Photojournalistic excellence is, in this sense, very much an affair of deference. There is none of this in the BBC documentary: no axiology establishes a hierarchy among the visual sources employed. The migrants' images are neither better nor less well made than the production's. The second observation concerns this very lack of aesthetic distinction and the ethical value associated with it. The undecidability is due mainly to the fact that the production mimicked the aesthetics of amateur video, as if there were some kind of prestige to be gained through this voluntary act of disqualification of a profession. Proceeding in this way, Bluemel and Azzam are following a marked trend in the publishing sector that hopes to "re-enchant" the field of visual information by copying the attributes of authenticity evident in amateur imagery. [15]

We understand now that what is being called upon is an ethic of witnessing – more precisely, forms of personal testimony. On this point, *Exodus* is not so different from award-winning press images that attempt to arouse the viewer's empathy by accentuating individual stories or highlighting subjective interactions between photographers and migrants. Warren Richardson's and Tyler Hicks's images are exemplary in this regard. Similarly, *Exodus* deals with the migratory crisis by following the paths of four migrants – Hassan, Isra'a, Ahmad, and Sadiq – whose biographies are given on the production's web page. [16] The personification of the tragedy of exodus appears here as a precondition to establishing a "dialogical situation" [17] in which the witness – in this case, the migrant – attests before the other – in this case, the spectator – to the veracity of his or her experience. The BBC film thus leaves little freedom to viewers, as it forces them into the role of validator of the witness's words. An ethical imperative underlies our relationship with these images, which abound with the visual rhetorics of testimonial probity. It is similar for press images in which the presence of the photographer – dependent on the situation recorded – incorporates the viewer by proxy.

Incoming (2016), or Reflexive Visual Predation

As Robert Capa's famous adage, the watchword that has become the cardinal virtue of contemporary photojournalism, goes, "If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough." In 2014, photographer Richard Mosse and director Trevor Tweeten attended the nocturnal military operations being conducted in the Syrian city of Dabiq, situated ten kilometres from the border with Turkey. Perched on a hill, Mosse and Tweeten used a thermal camera, a military

15. This trend started in the 2000s. Thus, the mobilephone is no longer a mere purveyor of amateur imagery: it has now firmly established itself as both a portable communications platform – the nodal point of a new information economy – and a tool for the redefinition of photojournalistic skills, not to say the moving force behind a re-legitimization of press photography. See Andy Plesser, "New York Times Staffer Using Apple iPhone 4 for Video News Gathering, "A Huge Game Changer" Says Paper's Video Chief", 1st February 2011: <http://www.beet.tv/2011/02/iphone4nytimes.html> ; "Wall Street Journal Deploying iPhone 4 Globally for News Gathering and Live Streaming", 10 May 2011, <http://www.beet.tv/2011/05/wsjiiphone.html> ; and Joel Gunther, "BBC developing new iPhone app for field reporters", 14 June 2011: <http://www.journalism.co.uk/news/bbc-developing-new-iphone-app-for-field-reporters/s2/a544714/>

16. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/kY8dKDD7INV7lpzdctQGf6/the-stories-behind-the-journeys>

17. Paul Ricoeur, "The Documentary Phase: Archived Memory", *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 164.

instrument capable of picking up every heat source within a range of more than thirty kilometres, to observe all the action: the paths of missiles launched against enemy positions, the fires caused by bombs, and even the troop movements of Daesh as they fled attacks. These actions could be seen barely, if at all, at night, but the camera conferred upon them an unexpected luminescence.



› Richard Mosse, *Incoming*, 2015-2016. Installation view, Barbican Art Gallery, Londres, 2016 © Tristan Fewings/Getty Images for Barbican Art Gallery.

This experience was the basis for *Incoming*, a fifty-two-minute multi-screen video installation presented in spring 2017 at the Barbican Art Gallery in London.^[18] Mosse and Treven employed this same prohibited military technology, which they also applied to other subjects: migratory movements of populations, rescue operations at sea, groups of refugees in holding patterns, and individuals going about everyday business. In the work, refugees are not so much visible as thermo-detectable, as are the vehicles that transport them, the clothing that covers them, and the water in which they are engulfed. Everything is revealed by its heat signature: the deep black of a car tailpipe, the dark stain of breath passing through fabric, hand imprints that contrast with the whiteness of a body that is hypothermic, or maybe dead.

18. Mack publishing house has published on this occasion the eponymous book *Incoming*, London: Mack, 2017.



› Richard Mosse, *Incoming*, 2015-2016. Still © Richard Mosse, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and carlier|gebauer, Berlin.



› Richard Mosse, *Incoming*, 2015-2016. Still © Richard Mosse, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and carlier|gebauer, Berlin.

The technology generates images in which faces are redrawn through their caloric modulations. For instance, sweat on a forehead or a warm breath remodels physiognomy to the point that it is barely recognizable. Some subjects have strangely swollen features, mouths black as ink, eye sockets without eyes, or skin as blotchy as a camouflage pattern. Limbs and some other parts of the body – fingers, nose, ears, eyelids, hair – in which blood circulation is low look pale, sometimes even glowing, offering a strong contrast with the much darker tone of more massive portions of the anatomy. Thus distorted, these people stand out to the spectator as deprived of that welcoming feature that is the face.

Through a technique originally designed to detect, track, and target, *Incoming* produces a surprising thermal mapping of the mass exodus. Given that security concerns govern both military and civil uses of thermography, what should we think of this diversion of its use? Operational night and day, capable of sniffing out heat sources through smoke, fog, and dust, thermal cameras are formidable instruments of detection and death. At the time when Mosse was conceiving

his work, they were still being used for control and repression of migrant populations – by Slovene police forces following the nocturnal population movements and by the authorities in some British cities for flushing out illegal housing sites.^[19] The civil surveillance industry vaunts the merits of the technology in repression of crime and delinquency by emphasizing the augmented visibility that it offers, and also warns the population about its possible criminal uses, such as recovering thermal residues left when entering numbers on the touchpad of an ATM cash machine.^[20] Thermographic surveillance makes it possible to constantly cover actions and situations, thus realizing the fantasy of a panoptic view of the world – a privileged view, however, reserved essentially for police forces, private companies, and states. Mosse was therefore using a technology based on the principle of unequal visibility ; some – the military and police forces – see everything while remaining invisible, whereas the others – the enemy and refugees – are unable to see those who are watching them. But whereas there is usually a distance of several kilometres between observers and observed, preventing any possibility of direct interaction among the protagonists, Mosse abolished this gap by situating himself close to his subjects, as a photojournalist would. A number of close shots attest to this proximity typical of evidentiary photography practices. The atypical instrumentation that he and his assistants employed, however, soon distinguished them from the other photographers on site. The refugees' curiosity about the thermal camera grew into an interactional relationship – a very unusual situation for this device of visual predation.

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19. Martin Robinson and Mark Duell, "Revealed: Up to 6,000 'beds in sheds' set-up by rogue landlords are found by spy plane's thermal image camera", *Daily Mail*, 31 July 2013: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2381451/Slough-spy-plane-detects-6-000-illegal-beds-sheds-thermal-imaging.html> ; Jennifer Newton and Stephanie Linning, "Migrants marching through the night: Incredible thermal images show vast river of humanity snaking for miles through Slovenia", *Daily Mail*, 24 October 2015: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3287510/Refugee-children-resorting-survival-sex-pay-people-smugglers-claims-record-56-000-migrants-land-Greece-just-six-days.html>
 20. Keaton Mowery, Sarah Meiklejohn and Stefan Savage, "Heat of the moment: Characterizing the efficacy of thermal camera-based attacks", *WOOT'11 Proceedings of the 5th USENIX conference on Offensive technologies*, 2011: <https://cseweb.ucsd.edu/~kmowery/papers/thermal.pdf>



› Untitled, 2015-2016 © Richard Mosse.

The camera that Mosse trained on the refugees was diverted from the objective of uncovering clandestine lives. The warmth of their bodies is never, here, a betrayal of their presence. *Incoming* goes beyond simple thermal detection: the images are rendered with an aesthetic that substantively overrules all purely denotative or probative goals: milky and iridescent, they smooth over physiognomies and ethnic specificities, invert values, metallize bodies and objects, and thus tip the referent into another world, a world of ghosts. This undermining of reality is accentuated by a non-narrative electro soundtrack, and the slight slowing of sequences situates the action in a temporality other than ours. Like phantoms, the subjects seem to live in a liminal space, an indeterminate time, in a clear break from reality – in any case, unlikely to produce politically and emotionally operative images. With its spectral images scrolling by on the screen, *Incoming* frees the portrayal of the refugee from contingencies of the present. Spectators thus face a dilemma: what type of relationship can be engaged with these images that present refugees with no voice, without real consistency, and without recognizable faces? How can one reconcile the fascination that these images may exert with the military vocation of the technique employed, knowing that the principle of artistic appropriation does not in any way invalidate the violence of this type of observation? Although the aesthetics of visual predation are present, the goal is to provoke viewers to reflect on these images before them. This is the strength of *Incoming*: it assigns spectators an ambivalent position that causes them to consider their function of curiosity, to measure their distance from the subject, and, finally, to take responsibility for their external position with regard to the migratory crisis.

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