

## As ‘index and metaphor’: Migration and the Thermal Imaginary in Richard Mosse’s *Incoming*

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Towards the end of *Incoming* (2017), Richard Mosse’s conceptual documentary exploring the conditions and causes of migration at the southern borders of fortress Europe, a man steps away from a truck loaded with African migrants and walks off into the dark of the desert night carrying a plastic water bottle. Here, believing himself unobserved, he relieves his bladder, and after carefully washing his hands, face, eyes, ears and nose in observance of the Islamic *wudu* ritual, still believing himself unobserved, begins to pray. We, as viewers, are privy to this act of devotion because *Incoming* is shot using a thermal image camera equipped with a telephoto-lens: a camera, which in this sequence, seems not only to register the heat signatures of bodies otherwise invisible to the human eye, but to allow us to peer directly into somebody’s soul. In watching somebody in the dark of night perform their faith ‘untainted by self-consciousness’ (Mosse, 2017b) we witness the convergence of a hypermodern surveillance technology with the far more archaic perspective that both Islam and the Judeo-Christian religions reserve for the eyes of angels. Heat, we are reminded, signifies not only an attribute of material properties, but, as a sign of life, the mystery of life itself: the dimension of the soul.



Figure 1: Still from *Incoming*.

It is this understanding of the thermal as marking the intersection of the material and cultural, as an agitation of matter that fuses the questions of physics with those of metaphysics, that Mosse identifies as the guiding concern of both *Incoming* and its companion pieces, *Heatmaps* (2017) and *Grid (Moria)* (2017). Reading heat 'as both metaphor and index' (2017a), he notes that as metaphor, 'heat ... speaks sideways about human displacement resulting from climate change and global warming' but more indexically 'about the struggle of [refugees]' who 'literally leave the heat behind them, exposing themselves to the elements, the cold sea waves, the winter rain and the snow' (2017a). We should also note that his work is indexical too in that it reveals how his camera (or more properly telescopic thermal imaging technology 'designed for battlefield situational awareness and long-range border surveillance' (2017c) opens a new world of information to its operators: the ability to locate a human body at 30 kilometers. It indexes, in other words, just what in the early twenty-first century it means, in James C. Scott's phrase, to 'see like a state' (1998: *passim*). Mosse's images are indexical, consequently, not only in their capacity to make visible a spectrum of information that would otherwise be inaccessible to the human eye, but also to present to the public gaze an otherwise inaccessible technology of surveillance.

What it means to see like a state, we quickly discover, is to enter a thermal imaginary in which the 'human' figures as a subject that is either to be destroyed as a target (the camera is in fact classified as a weapons system), or to be in need of rescue, either from peril on the sea or (in the dominant, state-sanctioned narrative) from those who place them in peril on the sea, the 'traffickers'. In both cases the thermal body is the object of a gaze which is distinguished by its *concern*, but a concern which is deeply ambivalent insofar as it is both a concern *about* and concern *for*. It is this ambivalence within the thermal body as an object of concern, a subject that is both threatening and in need of rescue, that is explored in the separate works made with the camera. In the Prix Pictet-winning photographic series *Heatmaps* and sixteen-panel flatscreen installation *Grid (Moria)*, Mosse focuses on the architecture of concern as expressed in prominent European refugee camps and holding stations which are simultaneously places of refuge and danger, escape and confinement, and, of course, places of thermal struggle, against the elements and against ennui and inactivity. In the 52 minutes, three-channel HD video *Incoming*, narratives about the two forms of concern are more explicitly intertwined with the film opening with footage of American jets targeting ISIS fighters before moving

via the flight deck of USS Theodore Roosevelt to the search and rescue missions for African migrants in the Mediterranean.

But the ambivalence implicit in the idea of concern is manifest too in Mosse's rationalization of his project. His own humanist concern is evident in his expressed intention of using these works to address the problem of 'compassion fatigue': 'How do we find a way, as photographers and as storytellers, to continue to shed light on the refugee crisis, and to keep the heat on these urgent narratives of human displacement?' (2017c). His solution is to emphasize the dehumanizing optic of this technology through exaggerations of scale and thereby to blow up and make monstrous that which surveillance technology keeps hidden from view.



Figure 2: Richard Mosse's *Incoming* at the Barbican.

However, it is a solution which lays him open to the accusation that in the process of turning suffering into spectacle he makes himself complicit in the dehumanization of the Other he seeks to challenge (Blight, 2017; Shah, 2017). Contesting Mosse's description of himself as a 'conceptual' photographer, Daniel C. Blight, for example, suggests:

Mosse may share more in common with the nineteenth century [sic] gentleman photographer who lugs around his heavy box camera to foreign lands – reporting home with photographic representations of the cultural Other that foreground his knowing apologetic complicity and fetish for technology over his critical ethics – than the nimble conceptualist he sees himself as. (2017)

Against this critique Mosse can of course point to the indexical function of his work in revealing and exposing the optics of biopower and as an exploration of the conditions for the production of biopolitical life. The motivation of his project, he explains, is to take the tools of the state and by using the

language of documentary as story to turn the imagery of surveillance back on itself:

we were trying to work the technology against itself, to brush it against the grain. But we weren't attempting to rescue this apparatus from its sinister purpose. Rather, we were trying to enter into its logic – the logic of proprietary government authorities – to foreground this technology of discipline and regulation, and to create a work of art that reveals it. (2017b)

Mosse locates his own concern squarely within the parameters of biopolitics as theorized by Giorgio Agamben. Recounting how he picked up the abandoned passport of a Syrian refugee who had landed on Lesbos, he notes:

All that is left to them is the biological fact of their birth – a thing foregrounded by the camera, which depicts the human body as a radiant glow of biochemical processes such as respiration, energy production, hypothermia, and warmth. (2017b)

The connection with Agamben is explicit: 'These signs of mere life, the biological trace, are similar to what Giorgio Agamben refers to as "bare life" (or the Ancient Greek *zoē*), a life stripped of political representation and legal status' (Mosse, 2017b).

To further reinforce the frame of his concern, the book of stills from *Incoming* published by MACK, also contains Agamben's essay 'Biopolitics and the Rights of Man' which, departing from Hannah Arendt's identification of the idea of 'human' rights with the nation-state, asks what becomes of those 'human' rights when the 'old trinity of state-people-territory' (Arendt, 1958: 281) is threatened by a series of factors including the inequalities of economic development in the context of globalization and the challenges of population movement consequent on global warming and energy security? In this context, Mosse suggests, the concern of the thermal imaginary identified in his work establishes a commonality between viewer and viewed: 'The camera seems to level all, representing each of us in terms of "bare life", as a creature rather than an individual vested with essential rights, both legal and political, that cannot be suspended.' (2017b) In the migrants pressing and pressed against Europe's southern borders, he claims, we – the consumers of his images – can see revealed a wider biopolitical logic that applies to the viewer as much as the viewed. As he tells the UK's Channel 4 News:

It's not just the refugees that are dehumanised, it's you or I ... we're trying to make a humanizing ... a humanist piece of art, which sets the viewer into a space of compassion, complicated by a sense of their own complicity. (Snow, n.d.)

In this explicitly humanist framing of his project, Mosse's project of course remains open to critique from the perspectives of posthumanist and critical race studies (O'Hagan, 2017), and I will return to Blight's race-focused critique below, but first I want to suggest that a more direct consequence of Mosse's use of humanist discourse to frame his project is to obscure the distinctive and agential properties of his immediate subject, heat. In translating his concern with 'the refugee' directly into the conceptual framework supplied by Agamben, I will argue that Mosse neglects the aspects of his own project that are most critical for considering the position of refugees in the context of globalization and the mutation of the nation state marked by the use of thermal imagery as a bordering technology.

As Lisa H. Malkki argues, with its complex history, the concept of 'the refugee' can usefully be regarded as an 'epistemic object in construction' (1995: 497). As a political figure, it is a 'product of knowledge and power shaped in and by discourses' (Herscher, 2017: 6) most importantly, that of the nation state for which it is, Agamben suggests, a 'limit concept' (1998: 23). However, as an 'epistemic object in construction' the refugee is produced not solely by discourses of the nation and of human rights, but (as a subject that is materialized at borders) equally by the changing technologies through which borders are marked and maintained. The most immediate question posed by Mosse's work then is, *what does it mean to the epistemic figure of the refugee when thermal imagery is added to the technologies of bordering?* To explore this question I want to examine the effect of this thermal imagery in materializing bodies through a consideration of three thermal figures or vectors, namely the principles of entropy, conductivity and phasal transformation or, intensity that together map out the dimensions of something that might be called a distinctively thermal imaginary. What lessons do these specifically thermal figures contain about the logics of borders and bodies in the early twenty-first century?

## Entropy

Of these figures, entropy (the principle that a closed system will move from an ordered to a disordered condition, as expressed in the Second Law of Thermodynamics) has the most venerable history as a figure of cultural thought. Elevated into an allibi of nineteenth-century, *fin-de-siecle* catastrophism by Henry Adams (1910) it recurs regularly as a trope for the dissipation of energy and the triumph of disorder over order, for example, in Martin Amis's 1991 novel *Time's Arrow* and the early fiction of Thomas Pynchon. More recently Luciana Paresi and Tiziana Terranova (2000) have invoked the Second Law of Thermodynamics as a marker of the transition from the disciplinary society associated with an industrial, Fordist economy, to a post-industrial, control society. Fordist economics (and we might add the understanding of nations as bounded entities instituted by the Treaty of Westphalia) correspond to the 'closed systems' that are fated to collapse into disorder, or heat death according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. 'The disciplined body is the thermodynamic organism, the hierarchical organizations of organs, bounded within a self, crossed by currents of energy tending towards entropy and death' (Paresi and Terranova, 2000). As such thermodynamics are to be contrasted with fluid mechanics – which, as the science appropriate to chaos and economies of flows, predominates within societies of control: 'Post-disciplinary power operates in a space of flows, a liquid, turbulent space which it rules by way of modulation and optimisation' (Paresi and Terranova, 2000).

Ironically, their argument is persuasive, as they themselves seem to recognize, because it offers a neatly articulated distinction between industrial and post-industrial modes of value production, and as such produces a world of bounded entities much like that posited within the entropic model itself. Accordingly, the use of the Second Law of Thermodynamics as a thermal figure to conceptualise a shift from industrial to post-industrial capitalism is vulnerable to the familiar objections that attend all discussion of 'transitions' within a global economy. The equation works to produce a subject – 'industrial capitalism' – that corresponds to the law, rather than to describe the geopolitical complexities and material and discursive entanglements that describe global economic exchange and value production. Perhaps the real value of entropy as a distinctively thermal figure of thought, then, is that it complicates any simple division between bounded and open systems. For example, while entropy seems to work too effectively as a periodising figure we can also note that the

entropic idea of a closed system succumbing to disorder retains great imaginative force in thinking through the ecological consequences of capitalism *sui generis*. Rather than a division between Fordist and Post-Fordist eras or regions, from a global ecological perspective the industrial and post-industrial economies are indistinguishable in their reliance on carbon and 'cheap nature'. Hence as well as marking a transition, the entropic model/metaphor also marks a continuity which is manifest in global warming and environmental degradation.

Within Mosse's work, entropy as a thermal figure of thought is most clearly manifest in the sense that his camera discloses a new condition of statelessness, for insofar as the refugee as an 'epistemic object in construction' emerged within the context of the nation-state as a figure who was stateless, it becomes increasingly illegible in the context of what Agamben describes as the nation state's 'unstoppable decline' (2000: 16). Entropy, as such, becomes the most adequate figure for the form of the *crisis* represented by the refugee, for as Andrew Herscher points out, '[t]he term "refugee crisis," ... does not point only or even primarily to a crisis threatening refugees – the name now given to people who, fleeing persecution, are by definition in crisis – but rather to a crisis facing those who feel threatened by refugees' (2017: 2). The bodies pressing against the southern ramparts of fortress Europe are illegible (belong to no order) because they do not appear to be without a state so much as figures that emerge from a realm which itself seems stateless. They are the avatars not of a temporary breakdown in the social-juridical structures of a state, but, thanks to the thermal imaginary, metonyms of a crisis in which the constitutive outside of the European mega-state is defined both by the absence of the state and an idea of statelessness which is increasingly understood as environmental, or climatological.

It is in the context of the thermal migrant as an avatar of statelessness that it seems most productive to return to the issues of race and of 'whiteness' signalled by Blight when he writes: 'In its effects, *Incoming* creates an indirect and questionable representation of migrant people of colour, playing into and promulgating racist social relations dominant in the world today' (2017). In noting how the figure of entropy facilitates the entanglement of the thermal imaginary with a European racial imaginary as the index of a new statelessness we register how heat is inescapably bound up with race. If the articulation of capital into industrial and post-industrial phases betrays an obvious Eurocentrism in its displacement of manufacture into 'developing' economies (Chatterjee, 1997), it also masks the foundational role of the conversion of racialized

bodies into a form of living machine in the plantations of the European colonial system. As Donna Haraway reminds us, 'the slave plantation system was the model and motor for the carbon-greedy machine based factory system that is often cited as an inflection point of the Anthropocene' (2016: 206). As such the industrial and post-industrial, Fordist and post-Fordist nomenclature works to mask the entanglement of 'race' as a category with heat as an affect whose indexical form is global warming and whose avatar is Mosse's spectral figure of the African as 'climate refugee'.

Achille Mbembe, who, in the concept of 'necropolitics' provides a trenchant corrective to the racial blindness of Foucault's formulation of biopolitics, points out that 'blackness' has always functioned as the negative image that enables the fusion of whiteness and modernity, or Western humanist civilization. In identifying blackness as the constitutive Other, he allows us to see the equivalence of blackness and heat. The racialization of the thermal occurs in the association of the black body with regions that are *too* hot, an association of the black body as the intemperate other of a temperate gaze which is reinforced in the cover image of *Incoming* with its *Mad Max* truck, full of turbaned and sunglass-wearing migrant-warrior-Arab-Africans emerging through a mirage of desert heat. Here heat has replaced colour as the signifier of an Otherness over and against which the humanist subject can be defined.



Figure 3: Still from *Incoming*.

Adding a more general racial critique to Foucault and Agamben's concept of mere life, he argues that mere life is always racialized insofar as it is the function of the category of blackness to designate the *mereness* of life, a human that is merely human.

Mbembe makes explicit the direct correlation between technologies of bordering and the production of blackness when he writes that '[t]he reactivation of the logic of race also goes hand in hand with the increasing power of the ideology of security and the installation of mechanisms aimed at calculating and minimizing risk and turning protection into the currency of citizenship' (2017: 22). In the failure to recognize the blackness of the thermal body as the figure of mere life, Mosse's commentary obscures one of the most salient features of his own thermography, the volatile relationship between colour and heat.

In *Incoming* we realise that heat is both black and white. Indexically heat is coded as white insofar as white signifies energy but metaphorically it is coded black insofar as blackness is the focus of concern. Mosse notes that the camera is colour blind, but it is colour-blind in the racialized sense because the thermal body as an object of concern, irrespective of its skin colour, is already black. Life as pure force is white, while its features are black: blackness is thus transformed into a contingency, an accident of birth. As a result, the individuality of Mosse's subjects is reduced to incidental features on a molten flow that signifies life. In one sequence of a child studying their mobile phone, for example, the body becomes incandescent, hair, clothes, facial features resemble the crust on molten steel, and seem on the point of being consumed by the furnace which is the crucible of the migrant body – a migrant body in which earlier signs of blackness have been detached from race and reconfigured purely as heat.



Figure 4: Still from *Incoming*.

## Conductivity

In this transference from skin colour to skin heat as the percept that signifies the Other of Western humanism, *Incoming* registers the importance of conduction within the camera's thermal imaginary. More generally it seems possible that the persistence of entropy as a figure for thinking the thermal is due in large part to its entanglement with ideas of conduction, particularly in relation to the understanding of globalization in terms of the exacerbation of inequality and of the wider dissemination of information about inequality and the possibilities of mobility. The entropic idea that heat will disperse across a conductive medium returns in the assumption that there will be a natural movement from poorer to richer societies and economies as a corrective to these imbalances. Zygmunt Bauman, although sticking with his preferred liquid analogy, gives a particularly entropic turn to this vision of a homeostatic logic within migration:

Left to its own logic and momentum, we may say, the populations of poor and rich countries would behave like the liquid in corresponding vessels. The number of immigrants is bound to rise towards equilibrating, until the levels of well-being even up in both "developed" and "developing(?)" sectors of the globalized planet. (2016: 7-8)

Within this model, territorial borders exist to counter a natural tendency to economic and cultural homeostasis, and as such they function as points of resistance that inevitably produce friction and violence. As Reece Jones notes: 'There is a powerful idea in the media and wealthy societies that violence at borders is inevitable when less developed, less orderly countries rub against the rich, developed states of the world' (2016: 4). Borders are hot spots whose status as de facto 'war zones' legitimizes the use of military force against 'traffickers' and the transformation of migrants into figures of concern.

Jones himself inverts this model in his argument that it is the break effected by the border as the marker of bounded, Westphalian territories that produces flow: 'The border creates the economic and jurisdictional discontinuities that have come to be seen as its hallmarks, providing an impetus for the movement of people, goods, drugs, weapons, and money across it' (2016: 5). The border produces, in other words, the inequalities that are masked within humanist constructions of natural rights and in so doing, they create a direct equivalence between the human and material as resources for exploitation:

Just as borders are used to limit the movement of the poor by creating pools of exploitable labor, they are used to control the environment by creating pools of exploitable resources with rules on extraction and access that differ across territories. (Jones, 2016: 143)

In articulating the equivalence of the human and the material by creating 'pools of exploitable resources' the border effectively produces heat as the perfect index and metaphorical coefficient of the difference it has itself engineered. In *Incoming* the stark division between a world that possesses A-10 Thunderbolt jets and aircraft carriers and a world of overladen trucks and inflatable dinghies with fatally unreliable engines becomes a direct expression of the thermal logic that marks the non-alignment of the political 'division of the earth into separate political jurisdictions' (Jones 2016: 143) each of which is defined by their ability to access thermal technologies. And lest we forget that the ability to transform heat into an exploitable resource is also inseparable from the politics of vision indexed in Mosse's project, the use of a young African migrant with a battered torch strapped to his or her head as the cover image for the text accompanying the Barbican exhibition explicitly reinforces the point.



Figure 5: Detail from *Incoming*.

The difference between technologies of vision so graphically illustrated here also speaks to the difference in the flows of matter and information that separates the migrant from the image of the migrant that entails that Mosse's images will circulate in areas inaccessible to the bodies that produced them.

Heat as entropy and heat as conduction, then, both inform the operation of Mosse's thermal imaginary as both index and metaphor, however it is in the final figure, phasal transformation or intensity that Mosse's work articulates its most medium specific message about the materialization of the migrant body.

### **Intensity**

As Nicole Starosielski observes, within media studies, there is an approach to the thermal in terms of phase transitions whose 'genealogy can be traced back to Marx's phrase "all that is solid melts into air," which draws upon the process of boiling to describe the coming revolution' (2014). This association of heat with the phase change of social revolution is inscribed at the heart of the thermal imaginary and is critical to Mosse's own understanding of his thermography. As he notes, his project is concerned with a series of recognizable figures: 'migrants intent on crossing international borders illegally; or human traffickers illegally assisting and frequently risking the lives of vulnerable refugees; or young servicemen and women fixing weapons payloads to the wings of fighter jets; or border police shooting tear gas at refugees' (2017b). All these figures, he observes, are produced by the thresholds they cross: 'These are all ethical choices, many of them transgressive – they are thresholds that each individual has decided to cross' (2017b), and it is in crossing, we can add, that they transform themselves into subjects of concern.

These different manifestations of the phasal – people transformed by their passage across a threshold, or waiting to become 'citizens' and hence legible to the Westphalian state, reveal what Thomas Nail identifies as the 'intensive' and 'extensive' operations of the border in producing bodies. As Nail points out, the border is always "'between" states' in that like 'the cut made by a pair of scissors that divides a piece of paper is definitely not part of the paper, so the border, as a division, is not entirely contained by the territory, state, law, or economy that it divides' (2016). As such the border becomes in Nail's account a mechanism for producing phasal transformations:

The "in-betweenness" of the border is not a lack or absence. The border is an absolutely positive and continuous process of multiplication by division – the more it divides social space the more it multiplies it. It is thus important to distinguish between two kinds of

division: extensive and intensive. The first kind of division (extensive) introduces an absolute break – producing two quantitatively separate and discontinuous entities. The second kind of division (intensive) adds a new path to the existing one like a fork or bifurcation producing a qualitative change of the whole continuous system. The bifurcation diverges from itself while still being the “same” pathway. (2016)

Nail distinguishes, in other words, between the border as producing extensive and intensive divisions, divisions within political juridical space and divisions which are more properly epistemic in that they produce new kinds of figures, or further modulations in Malkki's refugee as an 'epistemic object under construction'. The extensive border divides Westphalian space but as an intensive structure it also transforms space.

As we have seen, for Mosse, thermal imaging technology effects an intensive change – dehumanizing viewer and viewed alike, and we can add, reinforcing the transformation of Westphalian states into neoliberal enclaves. In its indexical function Mosse's thermal imaginary ushers us beyond the coordinates of the Westphalian order which underpins his own humanist paradigm, founded as it is in a state-based understanding of rights and the bearers of rights. His imagery opens out onto a world where the link between the state and the human seems irrevocably broken, where, as an avatar of the mass migration consequent on climate change it will be necessary to find alternative models for the relationship between rights and territory.

However, it is important to note that this phasal shift is also aesthetic in sense of 'pertaining to sense perception' in that by making heat visible it introduces heat as a percept of matter, but precisely because it makes it *visible* it reminds us that heat as an expressive quality of matter is otherwise excluded from those percepts – colour, sound, form – gathered within the domain of the aesthetic. After Mosse's disclosure of the thermal imaginary in the production of the migrant as a subject of knowledge it becomes possible to see in the photographic image, a *merely* photographic image, an image which somehow forgets what is most vital to that which it depicts. It is in this context that Mosse's engagement with the metaphoric dimension of heat as containing the mystery of the soul, marked in the sequence of the man at prayer, takes on a greater resonance. The association of heat with the mystery of life implied in that sequence is further amplified by Mosse in his essay on *Incoming*, which in a nod to James Joyce's *Ulysses* is

titled 'Transmigration of the Souls'. One function of this allusion to the Greek idea of metempsychosis, or the doctrine of the soul's rebirth, is to remind us of the classical Liberal argument for recognizing the rights of refugees articulated in John Rawls' 'veil of ignorance' thought experiment: build borders in the assumption that you cannot know on which side of them you will find yourself. But in this allusion too, Mosse also reminds us of the iconic dimension of the thermal image in that it is produced not by the reflection of light on surfaces but by energy contained within the subject. Thermal images are produced by the mystery of life itself and in this index what always eludes the *mere* photograph. This concern with the theology of heat is perhaps most clearly expressed in a sequence showing the transportation of Orthodox religious paintings immediately before the man at prayer scenes.

In confronting us with heat as both the index of a twenty-first century biopolitics and the ineffable *sine qua non* of life, Mosse fuses a metaphysical discourse of the soul with the racialized optics of biopower: he makes soul an affair of skin. Following Deleuze, we might say that in revealing heat as an expressive quality of matter, the camera gestures to a new assemblage of the sensual and political that incorporates the tactile, or the border as a place of touch. However, rather than Deleuze, it is Michel Serres' discussion of the senses that provides the more resonant commentary on the thermal logic within Mosse's images. In Serres' account of how the senses produce the human, the soul is born in the body's passing consciousness of its own corporeality, for 'consciousness belongs to those singular moments when the body is tangential to itself' (2008: 22). His instruction to '[o]bserve on the surface of the skin, the changing, shimmering, fleeting soul, the blazing, striated, tinted, streaked, striped, many-coloured, mottled, cloudy, star-studded, bedizened, variegated, torrential, swirling soul' (2008: 23) seems to be given a graphic illustration in Mosse's depiction of the heat-mottled skin of migrant children playing football and wrestling in an aircraft hangar at Berlin's former Tempelhof Airport.



Figure 6: Still from *Incoming*.

Reading back from Serres' corporeal phenomenology in which the soul is located in the points and moments when, as 'skin tissue folds in on itself' (2008: 22), the body becomes conscious of itself as both subject and object, it becomes possible to glimpse an alternative political topology within the swirls and volutions of Mosse's thermography. In this topology the soul is no longer located within the body as an essence or bearer of rights. Rather, as an expressive quality of matter as thermal, it is 15 sto15new at points and moments of self-encounter, at the points of encounter represented by borders as zones of intensive production, the points and moments in which the political body is folded in on itself. Thinking the border as a zone of self-encounter – where the subject of rights is constituted through its encounter with a subject in which life is understood simply as heat, allows 15 sto glimpse a form of border that, as a place of encounter, would be understood as the producer rather than defender of rights as such.

W.J.T. Mitchell does some of the preparatory work in helping us think the role of aesthetics in relation to this productive, rather than defensive, border. There is, he notes, an implicit tension between images and the abstraction of liberal constructions of the subject. The Liberal understanding of law, he points out, interpellates its object in terms of an equality that necessarily denies all particularity and singularity, and it is in this context that the image engages the law or 'collides' with it. This collision takes place at borders, for at borders,

Rawls's "veil of ignorance" is rent by a revelation of flesh-and-blood human beings who are *not* members of a political community and are outside the contractual protection of a nation-state. The abstract legal subject

takes on a human face, and the abstract notion of borders becomes a concrete site. (Mitchell, 2012: 129)

The calculus that underpins state-based ideas of rights – the equality of self-interest – is disrupted by the emergence of the subject of concern in all his or her particularity. But at the border too, the image itself becomes migrant for as Mitchell observes '[m]igration is not a mere content to be represented in images but is a constitutive feature of [the image's] life, central to the ontology of images as such' (2012: 127). In the context of human migration, his point here is more than figurative, for, as he notes,

[i]mages “go before” the immigrant in the sense that before the immigrant arrives, his or her image comes first in the form of stereotypes, search templates, tables of classification, and patterns of recognition. At the moment of first encounter, the immigrant arrives as an image-text whose documents go before him or her at the moment of crossing the border. (2012: 127-128)

As we have seen, in the thermal image heat as information, the heat that indexically informs the image of the migrant (and again of the migrant as a figure of concern) travels where the migrant cannot, being disseminated through the reproduction of thermal imagery in the broader cultural depiction of the migrant as a body of concern.

However, in its dissemination, in travelling where the migrant as a subject of concern cannot, the thermal image also transforms our understanding of the aesthetic, for it reminds us that within the existing domain of the aesthetic there is no place for touch and as such, no place for the thermal as an attribute of touch and the tactile. But, at the same time, in pointing to the absence of any place for heat among the percepts of the aesthetic, Mosse's thermography might also make us more conscious of the central position of the thermal within the vocabularies of aesthetic affect, where an image can incense or leave cold, can warm, chill or arouse. In effect, Mosse's thermal imaginary shifts the focus back on the affective agency of the image as migrant, crossing the impossible border between the indexical and the metaphorical. In this Mosse's work does something more than help in the struggle against compassion fatigue – the image puts into circulation an enhanced understanding of heat as a form of contact that challenges the distribution of the sensible founded in Westphalian political space. It reminds us of the productive nature of touching and being touched as a potentiality of a new

post-Westphalian configuration of political space outside the encroaching dangers of 'compassion fatigue'.

To conclude then by returning to the question *what does it mean to the epistemic figure of the refugee when a thermal imaginary is added to the technologies of bordering?* This provisional answer notes that although thermal technology most immediately produces a subject of concern and amplifies a wider biopolitical logic of 'dehumanization', it also provides new vectors of perception – entropy, conductivity and intensity – which together and separately encourage a re-examination of Arendt's 'old trinity of state-people-territory'. The vectors of entropy and conductivity complicate any simple distinction between paradigms organized around bounded and open systems, whether Fordist or Westphalian, while the thermal figure of intensity – or phasal shifts – in inviting us to imagine connections between the indexical and metaphorical, demands we rethink the possibilities of the border as the point of articulation of the human and of rights. The border as a producer of extensive and intensive subjects ushers us into a world where the Westphalian concern with the refugee as the product of state-guaranteed rights is imaginatively displaced by a perception of bodies whose primary concern is with surviving in thermal economies that are transnational. This concern is both political and aesthetic in that it involves rethinking political space in terms adequate to climate crisis, and aesthetic in that it points to the critical absence of heat as a percept within the sensorium available for imagining responses to that problem.

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