Migrant Images

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The twenty-first century is an age of mobility. Enormous numbers of people are on the move today in increasingly unequal ways. More images, too, are on the move. The migrant has become the political figure of our time just as the mobile digital image has become the aesthetic figure of our time. The migrant and the image are part of the same historical primacy of motion and mobility that defines life in the early twenty-first century. This chapter argues that we need to re-theorize the migrant and the image *from the perspective of motion*.

This is an important conceptual move because, on the one hand, the migrant has been predominantly understood as a secondary political figure derived from the static basis of states. The migrant is typically defined as the one who moves between pre-established states. Opposed to this, this chapter argues that the migrant is in fact a constitutive figure of social life itself. On the other hand, the image has been predominantly understood as something static, either as a representation of an object or as an imagination by the subject.

Both of these static conceptions, I argue, should be replaced with a kinetic theory of the "migrant image." However, by the term "migrant image" I do not necessarily mean visual or art images *of* migrants, art *by* migrants, or the migration of art images across borders, although these are all important aspects of migrant images. I mean something much more general about the material structure of images and migrants themselves. The image does not become mobile just because it represents migrants, and the mobility of migrants is not derived merely from our images of them. Rather, the argument I would like to make in this chapter is that the social primacy of the migrant and the aesthetic primacy of the mobile image are two dimensions of the same historical zeitgeist at the turn of the twenty-first century in which everything appears to be characterized by *the primacy of motion*.

Therefore, instead of trying to derive the mobility of one from the other, I would like to show the common conceptual redefinition occurring in both with respect to the primacy of mobility in the twenty-first century. In order to do this, I begin first with the social primacy of the figure of the migrant and then move on to consider the kinesthetics of the mobile image. The aim is to demonstrate the sense in which the migrant has become a dominant *social image* for us today, as well the sense in which the image has become *aesthetically migratory* and mobile at the same time.

The Figure of the Migrant

We live in the age of the migrant. At the turn of the twenty-first century, there were more regional and international migrants than ever before in recorded history.[1] Today, there are over 1 billion migrants.[2] Each decade, the percentage of migrants as a share of the total population continues to rise. In the next 25 years, the rate of migration is predicted to be higher than over the last 25 years.[3] More than ever, it has become a necessity for people to migrate due to environmental, economic, and political instability. Climate change, in particular, may even double international migration over the next 40 years.[4] Even more, the percentage of total migrants who are non-status or undocumented is further increasing, which poses a serious challenge to democracy and political representation.[5]

In other ways, despite the gulf that separates different forms of movement, we are all *becoming* migrants.[6] People today relocate greater distances more frequently than ever before in human history. While many people may not cross a regional or international border in their movement, they tend to change jobs more often, commute longer and further to work,[7] change their residence repeatedly, and tour internationally more than ever before.[8] Some of these phenomena are directly related to recent events, such as the impoverishment of middle classes in certain rich countries after the financial crisis of 2008, which include subsequent austerity cuts to social welfare programs, rising unemployment, the subprime mortgage crisis, which led to the expulsion of millions of people from their homes around the world (9 million in the United States alone since 2008), the eviction of millions of small farmers in poor countries owing to the 540 million acres acquired by foreign investors and governments since 2006, and increasingly destructive mining practices around the world, including hydraulic fracturing and tar sands. This general increase in human mobility and expulsion that affects us all is now widely recognized as a defining feature of our epoch.[9]

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1 In total number (1 billion: 1 in 7) and as percentage of total population (about 14 %) according to the International Organization on Migration.

2 United Nations Population Fund, *State of World Population 2015*. As of 2015, there were 244 million international migrants and 740 million internal migrants according to the United Nations Population Fund.

3 On the theoretical implications of this phenomenon for liberalism, see Cole, *Philosophies of Exclusion*.

4 According to the International Organization for Migration, future forecasts vary from 25 million to 1 billion environmental migrants by 2050, moving either within their countries or across borders, on a permanent or temporary basis, with 200 million being the most widely cited estimate. This figure equals the current estimate of international migrants worldwide; International Organization for Migration.

5 The International Council on Human Rights Policy estimates that the approximate numbers of global irregular migrants have grown to 30–40 million persons.

6 With the rise of home foreclosure and unemployment, people today are beginning to have much more in common with migrants than with certain notions of citizenship (grounded in certain social, legal, and political rights).

7 World Bank's World Development Indicators.

8 World Tourism Organization, "World Tourism Barometer." International tourist arrivals exceeded 1 billion annual tourists globally for the first time in history in 2012.

9 Sassen, *Expulsions*, 1–2. I use the word expulsion here in the same sense in which Saskia Sassen uses it to indicate a general dispossession or deprivation of social status. Many scholars have noted a similar

However, not all migrants are alike in their movement, and neither are the reasons for their movement consistent, shared, or uniform across space and time.[10] For some, movement offers opportunity, recreation, and profit with only a temporary expulsion from or deprivation of their territorial, political, juridical, or economic status. For others, movement is dangerous, constrained, and their social expulsions are much more severe and permanent. Today, most people fall somewhere on this migratory spectrum between the two poles of "inconvenience" and "incapacitation." But at some point, everyone on this spectrum shares the minimal experience that their *movement* results in a certain degree of expulsion from their territorial, political, juridical, or economic status. Even if the end result of migration is a relative increase in money, power, or enjoyment, the *process of migration itself* almost always involves a "sacrifice" or "cost" of some kind and duration: the removal of territorial ownership or access, the loss of the political right to vote or to receive social welfare, the loss of legal status to work or drive, or the financial loss associated with transportation or change in residence.

The gains of migration are always a risk, while the process itself is always some kind of loss. This is precisely the sense in which Zygmunt Bauman writes that "tourism and vagrancy are two faces of the same coin" of global migration.[11] Both the "tourist" (the traveling academic, business professional, or vacationer) and the "vagabond" (migrant worker or refugee), as Bauman calls them, are "bound to move" by the same social conditions, but result in different kinds and degrees of expulsion from the social order.[12] Business people are compelled to travel around the world in the "global chase of profit," "consumers must never be allowed to rest" in the chase of new commodities and desires, and the global poor must move from job to job wherever capital calls.[13] For the "tourist," this social "compulsion, [this] 'must,' [this] internalized pressure, [this] impossibility of living one's life in any other way," according to Bauman, "reveals itself to them in the disguise of a free exercise of will."[14]

The "vagabond" sees it more clearly. The social "compulsion" to move produces certain expulsions for all migrants. Some migrants may 'decide' to move, but they may not decide the social conditions of their movement or the degree to which they may be expelled from certain social orders as a consequence. Migration in this sense is neither entirely free nor forced; the two are part of the same internally differentiated *regime of social motion*. 'Expulsion' simply means the degree to which a migrant is deprived or dispossessed of a certain status in this regime.

The "tourist" and "vagabond" are always crossing over into one another. "None of the insurance policies of the tourists' life-style protects against slipping into vagabondage [...] most jobs are temporary, shares may go down as well as up, skills, the assets one is proud of and cherishes now become obsolete in no time."[15] Migration is the spectrum between these two poles, and the figure of the migrant is the one who moves

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trend. For an excellent review of the "mobilities" literature on migration, see Blunt, "Cultural Geographies of Migration."

10 Bauman, *Globalization*.

11 Bauman, *Globalization*, 96.

12 Bauman, *Globalization*, 85.

13 Bauman, *Globalization*, 78, 83.

14 Bauman, *Globalization*, 84.

15 Bauman, *Globalization*, 97.

on this spectrum. In this way, migratory figures often change their status as mobile social positions and not fixed identities.

Accordingly, there is no theory of the migrant "as such." There is no general ontology of the migrant. There are only figures of the migrant that emerge and coexist throughout history relative to specific sites of expulsion and mobility. A figure is not a fixed identity or specific person but a mobile social position. One becomes a figure when one occupies this position. One may occupy this position to different degrees, at different times, and in different circumstances. But there is nothing essential about a person that makes the person this figure.

A figure is not an unchanging essence lying beyond the concrete, but neither is it merely a specific individual or a group of individuals. A figure is a social vector or tendency. Insofar as specific individuals take up a trajectory, they are figured by it. But it is also possible for individuals to leave this vector and take up a different social position, since it does not define their essence. In other words, the *figure* of the migrant has a "vague essence" in the etymological sense of the word: a vagabond or migratory essence that lies *between* the ideal and the empirical.

For example, in geometry, a circle is an exact ideal essence. This is in contrast to inexact empirical objects that are round (such as bowls, planets, or balls). However, figuration is like "roundness": it is more than an empirical object but less than an ideal exact essence. Roundness can refer equally to bowls and to ideal circles: both are round. Thus, as a figure, the migrant refers both to empirical migrants in the world *and* a more abstract social relation. It is irreducible to either.

One is not born a migrant but becomes one. However, there are two central problems to overcome in order to develop a movement-oriented theory of the migrant.

Two Problems

The first problem is that the migrant has been predominantly understood from the perspective of *stasis*. The result is that the migrant has been perceived as a secondary or derivative figure with respect to place-bound membership. Place-bound membership in a society is posited first. Then the migrant is defined as the movement back and forth between social points. The emigrant is the name given to the migrant as the former member or citizen, and the immigrant as the would-be member or citizen. In both cases, a static place and membership is conceived first, and the migrant is the one who lacks both. This is the case because more than any other political figure (citizen, foreigner, sovereign, etc.), the migrant is the one who is least defined by their being and place, but rather by their becoming and displacement: by their *movement*.

Therefore, if we want to develop a political theory that *begins* with the migrant, we need to reinterpret the migrant first and foremost according to its own defining feature: its movement. Thus, we should develop a theoretical framework that begins with movement instead of stasis, following in the tradition of those thinkers who have granted theoretical primacy to movement and flow: Lucretius, Marx, Henri Bergson, and others.[16] However, beginning from the theoretical primacy of movement does not mean that one should uncritically celebrate it. Movement is not always good, nor is

16 For a full literature review of the history and thinkers of the ontology of motion, see Nail, *Being and Motion*.

movement always the same or uniform.[17] Movement is always distributed in different social formations or circulations.[18] Thus, the *migrant turn* is neither a valorization of movement nor an ontology of movement in general. Rather, it is a philosophical or what I call a "historical ontology" of the subject of our time: the *migrant*.[19] It seeks to understand the historical conditions under which something like contemporary migration has come to exist for us today.

In this way, we need not only a theory of the migrant, but also a theory of the social motions by which migration takes place. Society is always in motion. From border security and city traffic controls to personal technologies and work schedules, human movement is socially directed. Societies are not static places with fixed characteristics and persons.[20] Societies are dynamic processes engaged in continuously directing and circulating social life. In a movement-oriented framework there is no social stasis, only regimes of social circulation pockmarked by temporary and contingent sites of concrescence. Thus, if we want to understand the figure of the migrant, whose defining social feature is its movement, we must also understand *society itself* according to movement.[21]

The second problem that needs to be overcome is that the migrant has been predominantly understood from the perspective of *states*. And since history is all-too-often written by the state, the result is that the migrant has often been understood as a figure without its own history and social force. "In world history," as Hegel says, "we are concerned only with those peoples that have formed states [because] all the value that human beings possess, all of their spiritual reality, they have through the State alone."[22] This is not to say that migrants are always stateless, but that the history of migrant social organizations has tended to be subsumed or eradicated by state histories. Often, it is the most dispossessed migrants who have created some of the most interesting non-state social organizations.

In response to this problem, we need a counter-history of several important migrant social organizations that have been marginalized by states. The migrant is not only the figure whose movement results in a certain degree of social expulsion; the migrant also has its own type of movement that is quite different from the types that define its expulsion. Accordingly, migrants have created very different forms of social organization, as can clearly be seen in the 'minor history' of the raids, revolts, rebellions, and resistances of some of the most socially marginalized migrants.[23] This is a challenging history to write because many of these social organizations were not written down, or if they were, they were systematically destroyed by those in power. It is

17 Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*.

18 For a review of the criticisms against the philosophy of movement, see Merriman, *Mobility, Space and Culture*, 1–20.

19 Nail, *Being and Motion*.

20 Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies*.

21 In this sense, this chapter can also be placed in the context of what is now being called the "new mobilities paradigm" or "mobility turn" in the social sciences. See Hannam et al., "Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings," 1–22; Cresswell, *On the Move*; Kaufmann, *Re-thinking Mobility*; Urry, *Mobilities*; Thrift, *Spatial Formations*.

22 Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 41–42.

23 Notes from Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere*.

not a natural fact that the history of migrants has become ahistorical, as Hegel argues; it is the violence of states that has rendered the migrant ahistorical.

The Consequences

There are three important consequences of developing a political theory of the migrant in this way. First, it will allow us to *conceptualize the emergence of the historical conditions* that gave rise to the types of social expulsion that define the figure of the migrant. These forms of social expulsion linked to migrant motion did not emerge out of nowhere in the twentieth-first century; they emerged historically. At different points in history, migratory movement resulted in different types and degrees of social expulsion (territorial, political, juridical, and economic) due in part to the presupposed ontological primacy of stasis. Once a new form of social organization becomes historically dominant (i.e. villages, states, feudal lands, markets, etc.), we begin to see an explosion in new techniques for expelling migrants from their territorial, political, legal, or economic status. Once these techniques emerge historically, they are differentially repeated again later on. Today, we find the contemporary migrant at the intersection of all four forms of social expulsion, albeit to varying degrees.

The aim of such a project should also be historical: to provide an analysis of the major techniques for expelling migrants during their period of historical dominance and to provide a conceptual, movement-based, definition of the migratory figures associated with these expulsions.[24]

The second consequence of the theory of the migrant is that it will allow us to *analyze contemporary migration*. This is possible because the history of migration is not a linear or progressive history of distinct 'ages.' Rather, it is a history of co-existing and overlapping social forces of expulsion. The same techniques of territorial, political, juridical, and economic expulsion of the migrants that have emerged and repeated themselves in history are still at work today. For example, territorial expulsion (the dispossession of land)[25] does not only occur once against the nomadic peoples in the Neolithic period. Once this technique of expulsion emerges in the Neolithic period, it is taken up again and mobilized in various ways throughout history up to the present.

The first territorial expulsions created *historical* nomadic peoples, but they also defined a *conceptual* type of migrant subjectivity characterized by territorial expulsion that also defines other territorially displaced peoples. This is the sense in which migrants may be 'nomadic' without being the same as historical nomads. As an example, in the ancient world, migrants were expelled from their territories by war and kidnapping; in the medieval world, they were expelled by enclosure and the removal of customary laws that bound them to the land; and in the modern world, they were expelled by the capitalist accumulation of private property. In each case, these events,

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24 Castles, *Mistaken Identity*. Stephen Castles has also argued that the figure of the migrant needs to be defined in relation to its other overlapping historical figures, such as indentured laborer, refugee and exile.

25 Here I am using the word "territory" simply to mean "delimited land" (following the OED) and not in a strictly historical way since, as Stuart Elden argues in *The Birth of Territory*, the usage of the word territory varies significantly throughout history and cannot be used in a univocal way.

like a festival, paradoxically repeat an "unrepeatable." "They do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the 'nth' power."[26]

Contemporary migration is part of this legacy.[27] Migrant farm workers expelled by industrial agriculture, Indigenous peoples[28] expelled from their lands by war and forced into the mountains, forests, or waste lands, and island peoples expelled from their territories whether by militarized relocation, nuclear detonation, or the rising tides of climate change are all often popularly described as "nomads."[29] In a certain sense, this is true. All these migrants share those similar social conditions of territorial expulsion that first produced historical nomads.

The analysis of contemporary migration I am arguing for here is not one of total causal explanation of push-pull factors, psychological volunteerism, neoclassical or structural economism, and so on. Rather, it offers a descriptive kinetic analysis. The aim is not to explain the causes of all migration, but to offer better descriptions of the conditions, forces, and trajectories of its historical emergence and co-existence in the present from the perspective of motion.

The third consequence of a theory of the migrant is that it will allow us to *diagnose the capacity of the migrant to create an alternative* to the social expulsion of the migrant. The figure of the migrant is not merely an effect of different regimes of social expulsion. The migrant also has its own forms of social motion in the form of riots, revolts, rebellions, and resistance. Even occupation and "staying put" has its own pattern of motion.[30] Just as the analysis of the historical techniques for the expulsion of the migrant can be used to understand contemporary migration, so too can the historical techniques of migrant social organizations be used to diagnose the capacity of contemporary migrants to pose an alternative to the present social logic of expulsion that continues to dominate our world.

Today, the figure of the migrant exposes an important truth: that social expansion has always been predicated on the social expulsion of migrants. The twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant not only because of the record number of migrants today, but because this is the century in which all the previous forms of social expulsion and migratory resistance have re-emerged and become more active than ever before. These two events also reveal, however, a certain historical and conceptual continuity of migratory struggles for an alternative to social expulsion.

If we think of the recent "migrant crisis" as if it were an unexpected and contingent outbreak that can simply be "solved," we will continue make the same historical mistakes and misunderstand what migration is as a broader historical social structure. Thus any theory of the migrant today requires a much deeper historical account to properly see that it is not migration that is the problematic historical anomaly, but nation-states.

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26 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1.

27 As Tim Cresswell writes, "We cannot understand new mobilities, without understanding old mobilities." Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility," 25.

28 Nail, *Theory of the Border*; Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*.

29 Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility."

30 Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*, 156–178.

The same historical conditions at the beginning of the twenty-first century that give rise to the primacy of the figure of the migrant also give rise to the primacy of the mobile image.

The Mobile Image

We also live in an age of the image. Just before the turn of the twenty-first century a host of digital media technologies (computers, the Internet, video games, mobile devices, and many others) unleashed the largest flow of digitally reproduced words, images, and sounds the world has ever witnessed. No other aesthetic medium can possibly compete with what digital media have done to human sensation in the last twenty years. The digital image has mobilized sensory and aesthetic experience in more ways than ever before in history.

While the effect of television and radio on sensation was significant, they still restricted sensation to relatively centralized, homogenized, and unidirectional programming. The interactive and multi-directional nature of contemporary digital media has expanded the mobility and mutability of the image in a way that analog media never could. With the popularization of the Internet and mobile devices at the turn of the twenty-first century—cell phones, smartphones, tablets, and laptops—digitized images have become not only dominant but increasingly portable.[31] As of 2014, there were more active mobile devices than there are people on the planet. The mobile phone is probably the single fastest-growing human sensory technology ever developed, growing from zero to 7.2 billion in a mere three decades.

The mobility of the digital image has incited a revolution in publishing, journalism, entertainment, education, commerce and politics. It has both overthrown and wholly integrated analog media, giving rise to whole new digitized industries in the process. Industrial factories and workers are increasingly supplemented by internet servers and automated checkout software. It is plainly obvious to everyone that we have now entered a new aesthetic regime; we are now in the age of the digital image.

Today, it is possible for huge numbers of people to communicate by voice or text with anyone else; to listen to almost every sound ever recorded; to view almost any image ever made; and to read almost any text ever written from a single device and from almost any location on Earth. All of this is now available on the move and is itself in movement in the form of electrical flows. The image will never be the same. Yet, at the same time, unequal access to digital media and information is also a growing problem directly related to the unequal distribution of mobility and migration.

The contemporary mobility of the image and its sensation, made possible by the advent and now dominance of digital media, is not just a quantitative increase in reproduced images. Digital media and digital images have transformed the very conditions of sensation itself. Anything can now be potentially digitized, mobilized, and browsed non-linearly through a single portable device. The whole of aesthetic reality can now be made responsive and interactive with the viewer through the use of digital software

31 Internet World Stats. Today 77 % of developed countries and 40 % of the entire world use the Internet. It has become the single-largest mechanism for the production, mobilization, and consumption of sensory media.

and a continuous flow of electrical current—which is also key in the shaping of citizenship. None of the senses have remained unchanged by digital media; even taste and smell can now be synthesized using computer software.[32] Something is always lost in transit as the continuous is converted into the digitally discrete, but the affect moves on regardless, sweeping us all along with it.

More than ever before, the fact that the image is up in the air and on the move requires a serious rethinking of the nature of art, media, and affect from the perspective of the present, from the age of the mobile image. Something fundamental about our world changed around the turn of the twenty-first century; not just an empirical change introduced by new technologies, but a new and fundamentally *kinetic* set of relations in media and aesthetics have begun to appear.

The exceptions to the rules of the previous historical paradigms have now themselves become the rules in a whole new game. Mobile digital devices are no longer luxury items for the privileged few but have transformed every aspect of daily life around the world, including the very structure of human experience, thought, and sensation. If everything looks like a crisis today—the migration crisis and the digital media crisis (big data, privacy infringement, the privatization and censorship of the Internet)[33]—it is because we are still looking at our present through the eyes of the past. As long as these kinds of critical events continue to appear as secondary or derivative, as long as motion and mobility appear to be deviations from stasis, we have no hope of understanding some of the greatest events of our time.

Migrant Media

The mobile image and the centrality of the migrant mark a new period in aesthetics and media culture.[34] The digital image is not only mobile by virtue of its form but by the mobility of its content, material infrastructure, and author. Some of most shared and viewed images of the last few years have been digital images of migrants, refugees, and the conditions of their travels, and even their death. The image of Alan Kurdi, the dead Syrian three-year old, is now one of the most influential images of all time.[35] An iconic photo of migrants on a beach holding their mobile phones up in the air to try and get a signal to call home won the 2014 World Press Photo Award. We think of image viewing as a passive activity separate from the legal system, but the circulation of migrant images should be taken seriously as a political act with real consequences.

On the other hand anti-immigrant media representations and rhetoric have also proliferated. In particular, the spread of images and rhetoric of the migrant caravan as a military "invasion" of the United States have had disastrous consequences. President Trump called the caravan an "invasion" and "an assault on our country;" the Associated Press called it an "army of migrants" and tweeted about "a ragtag army of the poor;"

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32 Turin, *The Secret of Scent*.

33 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*.

34 This turn perhaps had its early origins at the turn of the last century. See Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

35 See Vis and Goriunova, *The Iconic Image on Social Media*, as well as Bishnupriya Ghosh's "A Sensible Politics" in this anthology.

and Robert Bowen murdered eleven people in a Synagogue because a Jewish refugee group supported caravan refugees.[36] Trump even told the border patrol to shoot migrants if they throw rocks.[37] This aesthetic criminalization of migrants and the rise of cyber-racism helped mobilize anti-immigrant militia groups and popular support against refugees.[38] Now refugees are being deported from the US and detained in cages in Mexico *as if* they were criminals. The explicit media framing of migrants as a violent, criminal, military invasion is an old historical tactic with a huge popular resurgence in the US and Europe.[39]

Because these images circulated across digital and social media so quickly, people formed opinions and judgements before the real details of the caravan were known or could be disseminated by more accurate sources. In this way so much of migration politics happens before the confrontation at the border or transversally across borders. Thus the circulation of media images has its own kind of migration and has its own kinds of borders that are not necessarily spatially or temporally congruent with the migrant bodies at the border or in detention. There is simply no way to fully understand migration politics without understanding migrant images as part of the process—confronting their own barriers and waging their confrontations as they affect everyone.

However, the widespread access to cell phones with digital cameras has also made it possible for migrants and refugees themselves to generate more images of their own movement and experience than ever before. The itinerant, grainy, handheld, and "poor" images of migrant cell phone cameras have become their own film genre: the "wretched of the screen."[40] In these videos migrants are not silent victims but creators of new aesthetic forms, "an imperfect cinema"[41] as demonstrated in Elke Sasse's 2016 film *#MyEscape*.

Cell phones have also become literal lifelines for migrants to obtain travel information in isolated areas, to share videos, sounds and images with friends, family, and authorities (but, as well, as Heller & Pazzani, in this volume, tell us, they are also part of a perilous politics of visibility that render migrants detectable, identifiable, prosecutable by migrant-exclusionary states). Images of all kinds (sonic, visual, haptic, etc.)[42] produced by migrants have become the material basis of the aesthetic threads that hold together numerous committees across borders, not just refugees. Although it is most obvious in the case of refugees, these are the same aesthetic lifelines that make possible sustained social and informational communities around the world. The migrancy of the digital image is what allows for community in a world of global migration, continuous mobility, and displacement. What would global migration look like without the migrancy of the image and the images of the migrant?

The migrant image thus marks the limits of the previous century and the outline of a new one defined by the mobility and migration of the image. This requires a new

36 Gitlin, "The Wild-Eyed Coverage of the Caravan."

37 Democracy Now, "Trump ramps up migrant attacks, says soldiers can shoot migrants."

38 Miroff, "U.S. militia groups head to border, stirred by Trump's call to arms."

39 Nail, "We are Entering a New Epoch: The Century of the Migrant."

40 Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*.

41 Espisona, "For an Imperfect Cinema."

42 Nail, *Theory of the Image*.

approach both to the politics of migration and the media image. However, the advent of the present is never limited to the present alone. Now that our present has emerged, it has become possible in a way it was not before to inquire into the conditions of its emergence and discover something new about the nature and history of mediation. In other words, the present reveals something new about the nature of sensation and what it must *at least* be like so as to be capable of being defined by the primacy of motion and mobility as it is.

So, what does this say about the nature of the image such that it is capable of this mobility? If the image is defined by the primacy of mobility today yet existing theories of it are not, then we need a new conceptual framework. We need to produce such a new conceptual framework based on the primacy of motion to better understand contemporary sensation and aesthetics, as well as the historical events from which it emerges. In short, the rise of the mobile digital image draws our attention not so much to its radical novelty,[43] but to the inappropriate understanding of historical 'crisis' itself.

The research program proposed by this chapter is therefore neither a theory of the migrant image that applies strictly to the novelty of the digital image nor an ahistorical theory of the image that applies forever and all time to all images and media. I am not proposing a naive realism in which the discovery of the contemporary primacy of motion gives us pure access to unchanging essence of the image. Instead, I am proposing a realism of the *minimal affective conditions* of the emergence of the present itself. That is, a *critical* or *minimal realism* in the sense in which the image is interpreted only with respect to that aspect of the image that must at least be the case for our present 'to have been possible,' i.e., actual.

Therefore, the method proposed here is neither realist or constructivist in their traditional senses, but rather *minimally* or *critically realist*. The question is not what the conditions of the human mind must be for the image to be what it is, but rather what *the image itself* must *at least* be like such that the present has come to be defined by the primacy of a mobile or migratory aesthetics.

Without a doubt, contemporary reality is shaped by multiple human structures, but these structures are in turn conditioned by other real, non-anthropic, affective, and aesthetic structures. This chapter proposes that we locate the real conditions necessary for the emergence of the contemporary mobility of the image and of global migration. The type of global migration we are witnessing today would not be possible without the unique material and media structure of the digital image.

The Migrant Image

The migrant image is not a copy. It is not even a copy of a copy without an original.[44] There is no mimesis whatsoever. If we are looking for a new and more fruitful definition of the migrant image, we need look no further than within the same Latin root of the word itself. The word image, from the Latin word *imago*, means "reflection, dupli-

43 Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media;* Hansen, *Bodies in Code;* Manning, *Relationscapes;* Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual;* Naukkarinen, "Aesthetics and Mobility"; O'Sullivan, "The Aesthetics of Affect"; Gregg et al., *The Affect Theory Reader.*

44 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation.*

cation, or echo."[45] These definitions imply precisely the opposite of what we typically think of as a copy. A copy must be something other than its model or, by definition, it cannot be a copy *of a model*.

Reflection, however, from the Latin word *flex*, means to bend or curve. A reflection is a re-curving or re-bending that folds something back over itself. Duplication, from the Latin word *pli*, meaning fold, and the example of an echo, given in the Oxford Latin Dictionary, make this meaning quite apparent. The image is not a distinct or separate copy but the process by which matter curves, bends, folds, and bounces back and forth.[46] The image is therefore the mobile process by which matter twists, folds, and reflects itself into various structures of sensation. The migrant too is defined by its flows, folds, and circulations—always in transit and caught between worlds.

There are not first static objects, subjects, and states and then second a movement or transfer of images or migrants between them. Rather, there is first matter in motion and then a folding, composition, and duplication that generates larger sensuous matters like objects and subjects that then further reflect and duplicate the flows of matter between them.[47] A folded image is not a copy because a fold is not something separate from the matter that is folded. The fold is a completely continuous kinetic and topological structure. There is not one part of the fold which would be an original and another that would be a copy. This is the sense in which Henri Bergson writes that the image is "more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*—an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and the 'representation.'"[48] It is more than a representation because it is not a copy of something else, and it is less than a thing because it is already the material of which things are composed and as such is irreducible to our empirical sensations of them. Images, in our view, are an aggregate of "matters."[49]

However, there are two central problems to overcome in order to develop such a migrant theory of the image.

Two problems

The kinetic theory of the image encounters two problems related directly to the problems encountered by the figure of the migrant. Both have been treated as *static* and *ahistorical*. The fate of the image and the fate of the migrant are thus related to the problem of stasis. One of the biggest dangers in migrant media politics is that images are seen to be representations of an objective situation and not, as they really are, themselves migrant bodies with their own affective and material power to move or not.

45 Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*.

46 Nail, *Being and Motion*, 29–41.

47 For related attempts to think about the materiality of the moving image see Munster, *Materializing New Media*; Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity*.

48 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*.

49 An inversion of Bergson's claim that "matter, in our view, is an aggregate of images." (*Matter and Memory*).

First problem: stasis

The first problem to be overcome is that the image has been traditionally subordinated to something *static*. This subordination has taken two complementary formulations: an objective one and a subjective one.

Objective stasis. On the one hand, the image has been subordinated to a static object or unchanging essence. The image, in other words, has been treated as a copy or representation of an original, just as the migrant has been treated as a failed citizen (a failed copy of the original). The difference between the object and the image of the object becomes the degree of movement or change in the image itself with respect to its unchanging original. This is the classical model/copy relation famously dramatized by Plato in the *Timaeus*. The original or model object remains static and unmoved while subsequent images aim to work like mobile snapshots to accurately represent the original object in all its immobile perfection and essential form.

As Plato writes, "Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity.[50]" There can be no higher exhalation of eternity and denigration of the image than this. For Plato, the image is nothing but illusion, appearance, and likeness organized according to discrete numerical quantities. The object is thus fixed in its essence and the image is fixed by its discrete number. These discrete numerical images fail to represent the object precisely because of the *mobility of the image*. Motion and mobility thus become the conceptual names for the failure of the image to represent the object. Similarly, the mobility of the migrant challenges the political distinction between the inside of the constitutional nation-state (model) and its outside (failed claimants).

All definitions of media as representation are defined by some version or degree of this static model/copy/resemblance relation. Not only is the object immobilized in the model to be copied but the image of the model itself remains nothing more than a failed numerical attempt to reproduce this same static condition. Between the two stands a gulf of movement and turbulence that ensures their incommensurability. In this way the only real or true sensation occurs in the object itself—all images of the object are mere appearances or modified snapshots of the original. It is also no coincidence that images of migrants and refugees tend to be treated as victim-images, as if the process of their suffering was not still ongoing and many others were not suffering the same.

Subjective stasis. On the other hand, the image has also been subordinated to the relatively static mental states of the subject. In this theory perceptual images are only given conceptual and aesthetic coherence and reality *in the faculties of the perceiver*. Versions of this theory are closer to the more modern aesthetics developed by Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*. In this theory what remains static, fixed, and universal is not the object being represented but the concept of beauty itself found in the mental structure of the subject. Fluctuating images occur in the body of perceiver but it is only in the *concept* of beauty that they are given fixed and universal form. It is thus human mental

50 Plato, *Timaeus*, 37 c-e.

and perceptual structures and not sensual images themselves that lie at the firm foundations of truth and beauty.

Again, for Kant, it is the movement of the image in the mobile and affected body that marks the inferiority and subordination of the image. The nature of the object in itself remains unknown *because the body and its perceptual images are moved and mobile*. The senses are thus led to misrepresent reality to the mind. The senses of the body cannot be trusted in knowledge or in beauty. Our experience of beauty, therefore, is not the beauty of nature or even of the beauty of the images, but rather the beauty of our own idea, experience, or faculty of representing these images to ourselves. Nature is only the prompt for us to discover the beauty of our own aesthetic and phenomenological faculties.[51] This is the inverse of the classical idea of the model/copy relation. Instead of defining the image by its subordination to the static essence of the object, it is defined by its subordination to the static aesthetic structures of judgment in the mind of the experiencing or intentional subject.

This subjective form is most dramatic in Kant and post-Kantian aesthetics, but a similar model is also at work in other anthropic constructivisms as well, including social, anthropological, linguistic, economic, and other non-psychological versions. All these different constructivisms share the reduction of the image not to the Kantian ego, but to other anthropic structures. In contrast to Kant, some of these anthropic constructivisms can even be transformed to some extent by moving images. However, even in those cases the movement of the image still remains tied to the *relatively static* anthropic structures that produce and consume those images. Since numerous full-length works have recently been devoted to making this argument, including my own, and since this is not the primary focus of this chapter, I must simply refer the interested reader to those works at this point.[52] My worry with respect to the migrant image is that this constructivist approach does not take seriously the materiality, borders, and circulation of the "image operations" that constitute the social field in the first place.[53]

Both the objective and subjective/constructivist theories of the image thus subordinate it to something relatively static. Furthermore, they both treat the movement of images as something discrete, either in number (Plato) or in the body (Kant). In both cases movement is what makes the image inferior but also what secures the difference between the object and subject in the first place. For Plato, the object remains different from the inferior images of it precisely because the object does not move. For Kant, the same is true of the transcendental subject. For constructivists, images remain extensions, projections, or reflections of more primary human structures. In both cases the object and subject are separated by a kinetic gulf of fluctuating material images. The political connection here is that it is the figure of the migrant that relies most deeply on this subordinated aspect of the image's mobility. The use of images is not just a luxury of fixed citizens but a defining feature of survival for migrants. Their

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51 We can see a later expression of a similar idea in Aby Warburg's interesting, but also socially and anthropocentrically limited, idea of the "pathos of images" and in Bredekamp's *Theory of the Image-Act*, in which images have agency, but only for human reaction, will, desire, and perception. "The 'I' becomes stronger when it relativizes itself against the activity of the image."

52 See Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*; Barad, *Meeting the Universe*; Hodder, *Entangled*; DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*; Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*; and Nail, *Being and Motion*.

53 Eder and Klonk, *Image Operations*.

own mobility is thus tied to the mobility, and often hybrid and shaky mobility, of the image in a way that it is not for others. When images cross borders or do not this is not merely a subjective question, it is a material one of how images are (or are not) allowed to circulate, and with what consequences. There is thus a migrant politics of the image that takes place and should be studied as part of the migration process. Treating images as having purely constructible meanings (we choose what to think about them) ignores the role of the real material and kinetic structures that put them in front of us in the first place.

There are two kinetic paradoxes here. The first is that the movement of the image is both necessary to ensure the *division* between subject and object but also necessary to ensure the region of transport that *connects* them as distinct. The model transports its image to the senses. The subject then receives these images on the surface of its sensitive mobile body. Without this zone of transport between the object and subject, nothing transpires—sensation fails. And yet, precisely because of this mobility representation is undermined. The mobility of the image, just like the mobility of the migrant, is thus both the condition of *possibility* for the object and subject and the condition of their *impossible* convergence in perfect media and political representation. Therefore, the study of migrant images is the study of aberrant affects not of representations.

Hence the related second paradox, that the image is treated as necessarily mobile in its transport but fixed and limited by number and body. The image, in the subjective and objective accounts, must move but only as a frozen mobility, a snapshot, or particle of sensation. The mobility of the image is thus described as secondary to the fixed object or subject when it is in fact the mobile substratum within which regions of relative immobility emerge. The citizen and the snapshot are thus crystallizations of the mobile migrant image.

Therefore, if we want to develop a theory of the migrant image that does not fall into these paradoxes we need to begin from its most primary and defining feature, its mobility, and not try and deduce this mobility from something static or statist. This requires, however, a theory based on the motion of the image. The division between the object and subject of sensation is not a primary ontological determination but rather the effect of a more primary kinetic process of kinetic images themselves.

This is the novelty of the kinetic approach: it reinterprets the structure and history of media from the perspective of the primacy of the migrant and mobile image.

Second Problem: History

The second problem the kinetic theory of the migrant image aims to overcome is the supposedly ahistorical nature of the image, just like the ahistorical treatment of the migrant. There are three formulations of this ahistorical thesis: an objective, a subjective, and an ontological one.

Objective. On the one hand, if the image is subordinated to a static model object then it can have no history, or its history is a *mere illusion*. History presupposes the real movement and transformation of matter, but if objective essences do not move, then they can have no history, and their images can have no real history either. The state treats the migrant in the same manner.

Subjective. Second, if the image is subordinated to the static conceptual or constructivist structure of human subjects then a similar problem occurs. If subjective

structures are universal, as Kant and much of post-Kantian phenomenology argues,[54] then they do not change (or change only within a fixed domain) over time, and if subjective structures themselves (not just their contents) do not change over time then they have no real history. Perceptual images may change *within this structure*, but the aesthetic conditions of making sense of these images and ordering them have always been the same—and thus the image too, as subordinate to the structure, remains ahistorical. A notable exception to this post-Kantian ahistoricism is the tradition of Marxist aesthetics, including the Frankfurt School.[55]

Ontological. The third formulation of this problem is ontological. In order for the object to be copied by an image, the object must *appear* in sensuous reality and thus must be, in some sense, affected by the conditions of its appearance. Similarly, in order for the subject to schematize and conceptualize its perceptions, it must in some sense be affected or receptive to the sensory images of its body. The affective nature of the image is therefore continuous with the whole process of becoming in which the object and subject both transform and are transformed through their appearance as images. In this way, the ontology of the affective image liberates the image from its twin subordination.

It does so, however, only at the risk of reintroducing its own form of ahistoricity. If the affective image comes to be understood as ontologically 'autonomous' with respect to the objects and subjects it produces or distributes then its constant change becomes something relatively changeless: pure becoming.[56] If all images are reduced to their lowest common denominator, affect, becoming and ontological change, then the particularity of historical and regional images risks being submerged entirely into a pure ontological flux. Pure change becomes pure stasis. The ontology of becoming is ahistorical. The ontological rejection of history in favor of becoming has been put forward by a number of recent process ontologists.[57]

The process ontology of the affective image treats the image as if it were possible to describe its structure for ever and all time and from no position in particular. The ontological image, in this way, risks becoming something like its own kind of 'autonomous' substance or pure 'force'—adding nothing to the historical description of the image but a generic ontological language applied to new phenomena.[58]

In response to the problem of ahistoricity, this chapter proposes not only a theory of the image and media grounded in the migrant present, but also offers a history of this present and the material conditions of its emergence. In short, it does not offer an

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54 Merleau-Ponty and Edie, *The Primacy of Perception.* Merleau-Ponty's late essay "Eye and Mind," for example, makes great strides toward overcoming the anthropocentrism and constructivism of earlier phenomenology, including his own. In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty aims to give back historicity to the image itself as a continuous fold, fabric, or pleat in being: "the world is made of the same stuff as the body" because it is "visible and mobile: a thing among things." While the emphasis of the text remains largely on the human body, it also aims to break down the division between image and body.

55 While they remain anthropocentric humanists they also allow for radical historical changes in existing social and aesthetic structures. See Adorno, *History and Freedom.*

56 Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual.*

57 Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual;* Manning, *Relationscapes;* Bennett, *Vibrant Matter;* Connolly, *A World of Becoming;* Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 73.

58 Nail, *Theory of the Image.* For a critique of this ontological position see Hayles, *Unthought*, 80–83.

ontology of the image. It is precisely because the image is mobile that it has a history and therefore that media must be theorized historically, and not ontologically. Furthermore, because the image has a history it also has a whole typology of distributions that organize the world of subjective and objective structures. All these structures have to be accounted for, starting from the *historical mobility of the migrant image*.

It is precisely because of the dual historical migrancy of the image and media kinaesthetics of the migrant that this type of inquiry is now possible and crucial. Just as it is impossible to understand our contemporary world without understanding the primacy of the migrant, so it is impossible to understand it without the migrancy of the image itself and its global network of affective lifelines, which socially and aesthetically support a world-in-migration.

Conclusion

The *migratory turn* in media studies is not just a turn toward the prevalence of images of migrants, the emergence and importance of migrant art works, but also the mobile and migratory nature of the image itself. There is thus a becoming migrant of the image and a becoming image of the migrant at the same time. Because of the current historical conjuncture, it is impossible to untie them from each other. Therefore, the two must be thought together as migrant images. This chapter, however, has only laid out the problem conceptually and suggested some possible methods and trajectories for a much larger research project that would look more closely at the images of migrants, by migrants, and the mobility of images themselves as migrant.[59]

59 See Nail, *Theory of the Image* for a full development of this research program.