Rescue Politics: Richard Mosse's Thermal Imaging and the Containment of Migration

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In the opening scene of *Incoming* (2017), a multi-channel video installation by New York-based Irish artist Richard Mosse (b. 1980), an American A-10 Thunderbolt aircraft dive-bombs a village near Dabiq, Syria. The military strike is shown in fragments across three image tracks. White hot shapes careen across the black sky. You hear a high-pitched whine and the thunder of a jet. The sound elicits a physical response, unsettling the view of distant action. Your heart rate accelerates, and then there is the thud of bombs reaching their targets. The noise works as an emotional trigger, making the events feel very close. The incident was filmed with a modified thermal camera from about 10 kilometres away as the Free Syrian Army moved in on a town held by ISIS. Mosse recounts that at the time a group of displaced Syrians trying desperately to get away from the conflict were turned back at the Turkish border.[1] Produced in collaboration with cinematographer Trevor Tweeten and composer Ben Frost, *Incoming* and the related photographic series, *Heat Maps*, offer a critical new perspective on twenty-first-century migration.

Produced in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa between 2014 and 2017, the artwork portrays the migration routes and makeshift camps of the so-called refugee crisis. It is centred along two of the main migration routes from the Middle East and Africa to Europe. Along the eastern route, people are fleeing countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. They travel to Turkey and enter the European Union (EU) through Greece. The southern route runs from the Sahel region of Africa through the Sahara Desert to Libya, and across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy.[2] From there, people often try to get to France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (UK). The challenges migrants face while travelling along these routes are frequently represented in the media.[3] One often-cited image is Nilüfer Demir's September 2015 photograph of a Turkish rescue worker on a beach carrying the body of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Kurdish boy. The photograph was commonly interpreted by Western media outlets as putting a human face on the hardship faced by those fleeing conflict zones. In the mainstream media, it at once raised awareness and reinforced the experience of looking at tragedy happening elsewhere. Mosse's work uses a range of formal and conceptual strategies to present another perspective and to offer insight into the ethical and political stakes of attempts by the global north to contain involuntary migration.

This article focuses on a body of work by Mosse that includes the multi-channel video installation *Incoming*, shown as a 52:12 minute three-channel video installation with 7.3 surround sound, and the photographic series *Heat*

1. Richard Mosse, 'Transmigration of the Souls', *Incoming* (London: MACK Books, 2017), np.

2. Mosse, 'Transmigration of the Souls', np.

3. In this essay, I use the term migrant to refer to people attempting to resettle in a place outside of their country of origin. This includes both those who are fleeing conflict and persecution and may be able to claim refugee status, as well as those who may not have sufficient grounds for an asylum claim or who left their home country in search of employment and opportunity.

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Fig. 1. *Richard Mosse: Incoming*, installation view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 26 October 2019 – 17 February 2020. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. (Photo: Katherine Du Tiel.)

Maps (2015–2017) (Fig. 1). While *Incoming* concentrates on migration routes, *Heat Maps* portrays the architecture of refugee camps.[4] I consider how the artist's use of thermal imaging and his immersive mode of documentary complicates tropes used to represent migration. I reflect on the way Mosse's artwork intersects with a long-standing interest by practitioners and theorists of film and photography in the idea of the camera as a tool that extends vision, and in this way, how it takes up Jacques Rancière's claim regarding the political significance of an aesthetic endeavour as its ability to make visible what is not normally recognised.[5] I differentiate my approach from discussions that deal with forced migration in terms of the concept of bare life and migration zones as spaces of exception.[6] This framework, which borrows from philosopher Giorgio Agamben, tends to establish an opposition between subjects with and without rights, disconnecting migrants from the complex problems that have caused their displacement. Instead, taking a cue from Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic, I consider how Mosse's representation of involuntary migration offers insight into the political failures that have led to migrant precarity.[7]

The four-year period that Mosse spent making the artwork is significant not only because of the high number of people on the move, but also because during that time the global north established new policies of containment to control access to their borders. I draw on political theorist Martina Tazzioli's concept of 'rescue politics', a term she uses to describe a mode of governance

4. Mosse describes *Incoming* and *Heat Maps* as the same body of work. See Richard Mosse in conversation with Alona Pardo, *Richard Mosse* (London: Barbican, 2017), p. 40.

5. Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer both explored the social and political impact of photography in terms of visibility and invisibility. For Benjamin, photography's optical unconscious revealed what was outside of the field of vision. Kracauer found that photography exposed 'blind spots', his term for cultural assumptions that pass unnoticed in everyday life. See Walter Benjamin, 'A Little History of Photography' [1931], in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1935–1938*, eds. Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et al. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp 507–30; Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960], intro. Miriam Bratu Hansen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 46, 53. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 140.

that connects military and humanitarian interventions in the field of migration.[8] Rescue politics involves controlling migrant mobility through military supervision of humanitarian tasks, such as saving lives. Tazzioli argues that rescue increasingly became a means of governing migration in response to shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea in 2013. Around the same time, governments in some EU countries formulated policies of containment under which the military began to play a more active role in managing migration. Defined by mobility and containment, migrants were thus considered problematic subjects who could be managed by the paired strategies of heightened security and increased aid. I look at how Mosse's work critiques attempts by the global north to govern migration through rescue politics – the paired mechanisms of military defence and humanitarian aid. I contextualise his artwork within the field of contemporary art and draw on formal analysis, a conversation with Mosse, art criticism about his work, and political theory in my discussion. In the process, I explore the vital role of art in questioning political claims about global crises.

Migration in Contemporary Art

Mosse's artwork is a response to a period of mass migration that reached its peak in 2015. As people fled conflict in the Middle East and Africa, governments in the global north devised strategies to keep asylum-seekers out. The term 'Fortress Europe' became an efficient way to describe the anti-immigrant sentiment and increased border security that reconfigured the continent. Containment became the order of the day. Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Macedonia all fortified their borders, blocking entry and redirecting flows of asylum-seekers to neighbouring countries. Italy provided funding to Libya to intercept boats attempting to cross the Mediterranean.[9] Further north, the UK spent millions on security in northern France to prevent people from reaching England's shores. In Calais, France, the port and train station were transformed into militarised zones, with mesh panel fencing topped with coils of razor wire lining the highway to the Channel Tunnel. Police patrolled the motorway to prevent asylum-seekers from getting on trucks. Electrified fencing, hundreds of surveillance cameras, and drones equipped with thermal imaging were deployed at the Eurostar terminal.[10] Instead of assisting those in distress, European governments used military and security technology to externalise their borders.

Contemporary artists have considered the era of twenty-first-century mass migration from a variety of perspectives. One important approach has been to draw attention to the human cost of forced resettlement. Acclaimed Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, for example, emphasised inhumane treatment towards asylum-seekers in his documentary *Human Flow*, while his installations, including *Law of the Journey* (2017), a 70-metre-long inflatable boat packed with 258 faceless figures, convey the scale of migration. Some artwork has been widely condemned, such as *Barca Nostra*(*Our Boat*), by Swiss-Icelandic artist Christoph Büchel. His installation of the recovered remains of a ship that sank in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, killing hundreds of migrants, was shown at the Venice Biennale (2019) without explanation or context.[11] T. J. Demos argues that one of the challenges for contemporary artists is to create new ways of questioning the complex and intersecting causes of the migration crisis without turning suffering and misery into a spectacle.[12] One artwork that grapples with this issue is the installation *La Mer Morte* (*The Dead Sea*) (2015) by Kader Attia, a French artist of Algerian origin, which uses allusion to represent and memorialise the loss of life in the Mediterranean Sea. Instead of faces or bodies, viewers encounter an array of blue clothes strewn across the gallery floor. On an

6. T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Anthony Downey, 'Scopic Reflections: Incoming and the Technology of Exceptionalism', in *Richard Mosse* (London: Barbican, 2017), pp. 21–5; Giorgio Agamben, 'Biopolitics and the Rights of Man', in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 126–35.

7. Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic, 'Rethinking Media Responsibility in the Refugee "Crisis": A Visual Typology of European News', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 39, no. 8, November 2017, pp. 1162–77.

8. Martina Tazzioli, 'Border Displacements: Challenging the Politics of Rescue between Mare Nostrum and Triton', *Migration Studies* vol. 4, no. 1, 2016, p. 4.

9. See Charles Heller *et al.*, "'It's an Act of Murder": How Europe Outsources Suffering as Migrants Drown', *New York Times and Forensic Architecture*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/12/26/opinion/europe-migrant-crisis-mediterranean-libya.html> [accessed 5 April 2019].

10. See Sarah Bassnett, 'Turn the Cameras on the Architecture of Exclusion in Calais', *Witness*, World Press Photo magazine, 27 July 2017, <https://witness.worldpressphoto.org/turn-the-cameras-on-the-architecture-of-exclusion-in-calais-27fd1ac5653> [accessed 15 August 2019].

11. Javier Pes and Naomi Rea, "'Absolutely Vile" or "Powerful"? Christoph Buchel's Migrant Boat is the Most Divisive Work at the Venice Biennale', *Artnet*, 16 May 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/barca-nostra-1548946> [accessed 2 July 2021].

12. T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image*, p. 249.

adjacent wall are three light boxes showing scenes of a shoreline in Algiers piled high with concrete blocks to prevent boats from mooring. This work creates a space to consider what has happened to migrants without dwelling on either scale or individual suffering.[13]

Several artists have taken a personal approach by exploring experiences of displacement. In Bissane al Charif's video installation *Memoire(s) des Femme* (2014–2015), exiled Syrian women recount memories of home, and in Camilo Ontiveros's sculpture *Temporary Storage: The Belongings of Juan Manuel Montes* (2017) the furniture and personal items left behind by Montes, the first recipient of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program (DACA) to be deported by the Trump administration, are stacked, and bound together with rope. Indian artist Reena Saini Kallat's *Woven Chronicle* (2011–2019), a cartographic wall drawing and soundscape, explores connections between family history and collective experience by representing transnational migration routes as a world map woven with electrical wire.[14] Another method artists have used is to draw connections between migration and systems of global capitalism, such as in Ursula Beimann's work, including *Performing the Border* (1999), a video essay about women working in the maquiladoras of the US–Mexico border region, and *Sahara Chronicle* (2006–2009), an installation of video essays representing multiple perspectives on migration networks in northern Africa.[15] The range of approaches and richness of the work attest to the important role contemporary artists play in reflecting on different aspects of the complex issue of migration.

Thermal Imaging and Humanitarianism

Mosse's body of work contributes to this field of inquiry but is distinguished, in part, by the technology he used to make it. Shot with a modified thermal camera designed by a multinational defence contractor, *Incoming* and *Heat Maps* are artworks made from a weapon. Used regularly in military operations, thermographic cameras track and target enemy combatants. They are employed in tactical reconnaissance, with small versions mounted on aircraft to guide missiles to their targets. They are also used in border control to monitor the flow of people. The camera's images are rendered in ethereal tones of silver. In some scenes of *Incoming*, heat is shown as glowing white: explosions erupt in a blackened landscape, a child's face and hands appear luminous (Fig. 2). At other times, heat is portrayed as darkness and figures appear dark against the light surroundings (Fig. 3). Mosse based his decision of whether to visualise heat as light or dark on aesthetic considerations and was able to easily switch from one to the other to accommodate that choice. But no matter the tone of the image, the camera measures contrast between thermal temperatures, rendering as an image the relative temperature of different heat signatures.[16]

With this weapons-grade camera, heat can be detected over great distances (more than 30 km away), including in low light or hazy conditions. When used in the intended manner, these cameras expand the realm of the visible to amplify military and sovereign power. However, when used to create this body of work, thermal imaging allows viewers to consider the political implications of the seen and the unseen. These themes of visibility have been explored by other contemporary artists, including Trevor Paglen and Hito Steyerl, who have considered how to expose the surveillance infrastructure and clandestine operations of the state. But with this body of work, Mosse uses a camera classified as military technology to envision the world as an interconnected system.

13. Anni Pullagura, 'Kader Attia', in Ruth Erickson and Eva Respini (eds), *When Home Won't Let You Stay: Migration through Contemporary Art* (New Haven, CT; London; Boston, MA: The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston with Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 94–7.

14. Work by Kallat, Ontiveros, and Mosse was included in the exhibition *When Home Won't Let You Stay: Migration through Contemporary Art*. See the exhibition catalogue: Ruth Erickson and Eva Respini (eds), *When Home Won't Let You Stay: Migration through Contemporary Art* (New Haven, CT; London; Boston, MA: The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston with Yale University Press, 2019).

15. See Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Materialist Feminism for the Twenty-first Century: The Video Essays of Ursula Biemann', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 30, no. 2, June 2007, pp. 205–32; T. J. Demos, 'Video's Migrant Geography: Ursula Biemann's Sahara Chronicle', *The Migrant Image*, pp. 201–20.

16. See Mosse in conversation with Pardo, *Richard Mosse*; Fiona Doyle, 'In Conversation: Richard Mosse in Conversation with Trevor Tweeten and Ben Frost', Barbican Centre, London, February 2017, *The Artiscape*, <http://theartiscapegallery.com/review-richard-mosse-conversation-trevor-tweeten-ben-frost> [accessed 20 July 2019].

Fig. 2. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming #175*, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). Scene of a child gazing at a phone, Templehoff Camp, Berlin, with heat rendered in light tones. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Fig. 3. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming #96*, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). Scene of people on a vessel in the Mediterranean with heat rendered in dark tones. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

In this respect, Mosse's artwork references debates in the field of political philosophy, where scholars have studied the causes of global insecurity. Some experts argue that defence and aid merged during the Cold War when the global north identified conflict and poverty in the global south as a threat to their stability. Mark Duffield, an expert on global governance and international development, explains how, in the context of the Cold War, the north began to rely on the coupling of aid and security as a mechanism for managing populations in decolonised states. Human life became increasingly subject to procedures aimed at governing 'surplus population'. He uses this term to describe those who receive state support, for themselves, but also to mitigate the risk of social instability.[17] The merging of aid and security has resulted in blurred lines between material technologies and identities, such as in situations where military personnel deliver humanitarian assistance. Kelly Oliver describes this merger as 'carceral humanitarianism'. She explains how defence and aid now function as

17. Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 9. Hannah Arendt uses the term the 'human debris' of capitalism. See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951), p. 150.

Fig. 4. *Richard Mosse: Incoming*, installation view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 26 October 2019 – 17 February 2020. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. (Photo: Katherine Du Tiel.)

two sides of state warfare, and humanitarian military operations have become a means of managing asylum claims.[18] While these connections are abstract and may be hard to grasp, *Incoming* sheds light on the way the aid–security nexus operates to manage migration.

Episodes in Rescue Politics

Like many video installations, *Incoming* is displayed on a loop in a darkened gallery, with audience members entering or exiting at a point of their choosing (Fig. 4). It is comprised of three parallel image tracks and three discrete soundtracks, one for each image stream, and it is structured as a series of episodes. The format, viewing conditions, and episodic structure mean that the work is experienced through a sequence of scenes, each shown across the three image tracks and set in a different location. It may not always be easy for viewers to identify locations, but there are clues in the work, and Mosse is open about them in discussions: the Templehoff camp in Germany; the so-called 'jungle' in Calais; the Aegean Sea and Lesvos, Greece; the Sahel region of Niger; the Syrian border with Turkey; and the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt are just some of the locations. There are more scenes set at sea than anywhere else, and this is no coincidence, as maritime environments are less regulated than land and thus have increasingly become the site of rescue. But no matter the location, as the title indicates, *Incoming* locates the viewer in the West, asking viewers in the global north to reflect on our complicity with a system of rescue politics that penalises the vulnerable in the majority world.[19]

One episode of *Incoming* probes the mechanisms of rescue politics – that coupling of military and humanitarian operations – through scenes of calamity on the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Lesvos. This disturbing sequence begins with the three screens black. The sound indicates that rescuers are attempting

18. Kelly Oliver, *Carceral Humanitarianism: Logics of Refugee Detention* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 1–13.

19. Richard Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018. Also see Mosse in conversation with Pardo, *Richard Mosse*, pp. 34–9.

Fig. 5. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming #99*, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). Scene of people disembarking rescue vessels in the port of Molyvos, Greece. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

to resuscitate someone with water in their lungs from drowning. Their voices convey urgency: 'watch the breath, watch the chest'. 'Make some space around us please, you're too close'. As the image tracks begin, an overcrowded dinghy appears on the horizon. With its approach there are sounds of waves and a woman moaning and crying. The rescue operation that unfolds across the three screens exposes how aid and security merge; rescue only becomes necessary at the sea border to Europe because militarised zones mean safer methods of arrival are not available to most asylum-seekers. In the scene, people disembark from small vessels and make their way to shore (Fig. 5). Some are wrapped in thermal blankets, and medics use the heat of their hands to revive hypothermic bodies. A helicopter with its own heat-sensitive camera trained on the scene of rescue below is emblematic of the way technology designed for military purposes is also deployed in crisis. In the aftermath, piles of life jackets are scattered along the shoreline. Hundreds of people sit, their meagre belongings in plastic bags, while they wait in a holding area at a port on the Greek island of Lesvos (Fig. 6). Tents are set up amongst the trucks, showing how containment follows rescue. In these border zones, migrants are categorised and sorted, with some people identified for quick return to their home countries and others recognised as potential asylum-seekers.[20] Watching this episode is disorienting, and viewers are left to reflect on the role of rescue as a response to crisis and a tool in regulating migration.

Quite intentionally, the thermal imaging that Mosse used to create the artwork is a crucial instrument in the system of rescue politics and in migration's regime of visibility. Tazzioli describes a regime of visibility as 'the material and epistemic conditions that make some phenomena visible or invisible'.[21] Conditions of visibility and invisibility are actively generated by technologies such as thermal cameras, but also by other means, including biometric data and radar. At times, the visibility of migrants allows for state surveillance and control, but in other instances, migrants seek to make themselves visible to receive aid. Neither condition – visibility nor invisibility – is necessarily repressive or liberating. As Simone Browne explains in her study of the racialisation of surveillance, the field of visibility encompasses forms of subjection as well as strategies of survival.[22]

Mosse's artwork explores themes of visibility as one element in the aid–security nexus through scenes of migration camps and shelters. In the Templehoff

20. Tazzioli, *The Making of Migration: The Biopolitics of Mobility at Europe's Borders* (London: Sage, 2020), pp. 25–9.

21. Tazzioli, *The Making of Migration*, p. 96.

22. Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 16–22.

Fig. 6. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming #140*, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). Scene of asylum-seekers at the Port of Molyvos, Greece. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

camp in Berlin, the German government set up temporary accommodation for asylum-seekers within the aircraft hangars of a former airport. In this episode, children play games as music and voices reverberate off the metal walls and ceiling, creating an unsettling din. A young child gazes at the screen of a smart phone, reminding us that this technology has become an essential tool of migration (see Fig. 2). When two boys fight in an open area near the living cubicles, adults intervene. The people staying here are given aid but are under constant scrutiny. In another scene at the unsanctioned settlement in Calais, a group of Eritreans sing together as they carry religious artefacts from a make-shift church during a final ceremony prior to demolition of the camp in October 2016.[23] Here, the thermal camera registers traces of face and handprints on the structure during an emotional service held as French officials dismantled shelters and evicted inhabitants. These scenes convey how the regime of visibility shapes the conditions of migration, both in terms of modes of subjection as well as in resistance to surveillance.

Mosse describes the artwork as an exploration of the logic of the thermal camera, meaning he had to figure out how to represent time and space with a device designed for surveillance. Because the camera records at sixty frames per second, the raw footage had 'an unnatural, almost nauseous quality'. Mosse slowed it down to twenty-four frames per second–the frame rate of Hollywood cinema–allowing viewers to see details and tactile qualities that would otherwise be missed.[24] Scenes of crisis and chaos appear purposeful and controlled. The second episode of the video installation depicts a marine rescue operation by Croatian and Italian vessels in which crew help women and children disembark from a lifeboat (Fig. 7). The central image track focuses on the figures as they interact during the rescue. A woman climbs the ladder to safety; a man lifts a child from the small boat and passes him up the ladder of the rescue vessel. Figures seem to move in slow motion, their gestures exaggerated and deliberate.

The slower frame rate is crucial to the work because as Tom Gunning suggests, what fascinates us about cinema is the way it arouses our 'wonder at visual movement'. By slowing down the frame rate, Mosse has made duration and movement – in other words time and space – tangible to viewers.[25] The result is that we are drawn into an experience of time as fleeting. An awareness of time passing is characteristic of cinema, and as Laura Mulvey explains, heightened attention

23. Richard Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018.

24. Mosse, 'Transmigration of the Souls', np.

25. Tom Gunning, 'What Is Cinema? The Challenge of the Moving Image Past and Future', in Chrissie Iles (ed.), *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016* (New Haven, CT; New York: Yale University Press and the Whitney Museum of American Art, 2016), p. 142.

Fig. 7. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming* #27, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). Scene of a rescue operation in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

to duration makes time palpable by producing an elusive present that is always fading into the past.[26] An important aspect of creating the artwork was the editing, which Mosse explains was partly about creating kinetic connections across three screens.[27] Because the scenes are cinematic – that is, fluid and fleeting, rather than mechanical (as they would have been at sixty frames per second) – looking becomes about feeling, and the remote imaging is surprisingly intimate. Watching the action unfold, you can almost experience the movements in your own body: shifting, reaching, holding. This creates moments when it is possible to recognise the relationship between our bodies and those of others. The visceral connection constitutes us as viewers in relation to the figures on screen. The result of Mosse's investigation of thermal imaging is to immerse viewers in an encounter across time and space that engages our sensory connection to others.

This encounter contradicts the rhetoric of us and them that is so common in contemporary discussions of migration. When nation states use security and aid to manage involuntary migration, they constitute two seemingly contradictory subject categories, those considered threatening and those regarded as vulnerable.[28] *Incoming* pries open this dichotomy and its diminishment of humanity with moments of reflection and human connection. In one scene, a Muslim man performs salah, affirming his connection with God through the practice of his faith. In another, someone lifts a child from a lifeboat to the waiting arms of a worker on the rescue vessel. Even the co-ordinated movements of workers aboard the US aircraft carrier portray the synchronous relationships that humans form with others through daily interactions (Fig. 8). These moments of synergy punctuate the piece, highlighting the essential humanity of subjects caught on either side of the web of rescue politics.

While the capabilities of the thermal camera are fundamental to the artwork, its limitations are too. A significant challenge of working with the thermal camera, Mosse notes, is its inability to produce an establishing shot.[29] In narrative film, the establishing shot is usually an innocuous view of the setting in which the action takes place. Its purpose is to orientate viewers and to provide a context for the story that unfolds. Without an establishing shot, it is hard for viewers to get their bearings. Throughout *Incoming*, details such as dates and locations of scenes are not divulged, suggesting that while events are specific, they are also

26. Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 189.

27. Richard Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018.

28. Tazzioli, *The Making of Migration*, pp. 10–12.

29. Mosse, 'Transmigration of the Souls', np.

Fig. 8. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming #68*, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). Scene of workers aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

representative. There are indications about settings, but often the specific context evades us, and viewers can only definitively identify locations in the artwork with information from the artist. As a result, for all that is revealed, viewers also experience a form of blindness. In this sense, we could consider the thermal camera a metaphor for our times. The very technology that enables these complex intersections of security and aid also makes it difficult to see beyond the narrow field of vision it provides. In other words, with a heightened power of vision, we have lost perspective.

Critical Responses

This body of work has received praise as well as criticism. Those who endorse the work comment on its aesthetic power and its ability to unsettle viewers. Art critic Jeffrey Kastner describes the effect of the work as 'deeply humanizing'.[30] Artist and writer Olivia Jia comments on the way viewers are made complicit in the surveillance of migrants, but she notes that this is done to 'turn a critical eye towards governments' insufficient responses to a humanitarian crisis'.[31] Max Campbell, writing for *The NewYorker*, suggests that Mosse does not shy away from the violent history of the infrared camera, but uses this tool of surveillance to challenge distinctions between refugees and citizens.[32] Novelist and photography critic Teju Cole says that the 'imperial underpinnings of Mosse's project are inescapable' and while the thermal imaging replicates surveillance, it does so not merely to aestheticise but rather to implicate viewers in the scene of migration.[33] Alexandra Genova, a contributor for *Time Lightbox*, notes that the work makes viewers feel uneasy and is 'deliberately disconcerting'.[34] These writers all reflect on how the body of work repurposes a powerful technology and provokes viewers to question their role in the politics of migration, and their comments align with Mosse's own statements about the body of work.[35]

Criticism of the work has tended to focus on the use of a military-grade camera and the lack of agency of vulnerable, racialised subjects. Sean O'Hagan from *The Guardian* asks whether the work aestheticises human suffering 'by rendering it mere spectacle'.[36] Another writer questions Mosse's use of a military surveillance camera on the basis that it eliminates visible distinctions such as skin colour.[37] Art historian Derek Conrad Murray suggests that the work

30. Jeffrey Kastner, 'Reviews: Richard Mosse, Jack Shainman Gallery', *Artforum* (March 2017), pp. 208–9, <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201704/richard-mosse-67372> [accessed 6 November 2022].

31. Olivia Jia, 'Richard Mosse Uses Military Equipment to Show the Reach of the Surveillance State', *Hyperallergic*, 3 April 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/435402/richard-mosse-uses-military-equipment-to-show-the-reach-of-the-surveillance-state/> [accessed 6 November 2022].

32. Max Campbell, 'Richard Mosse's *Heat Maps*: A Military-Grade Camera Repurposed on the Migrant Trail', *The NewYorker*, 5 February 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/richard-mosses-heat-maps-a-military-grade-camera-repurposed-on-the-migrant-trail> [accessed 4 July 2019].

33. Teju Cole, 'When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism (And When It Still Is)', *The NewYork Times*, 6 February 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/magazine/when-the-camera-was-a-weapon-of-imperialism-and-when-it-still-is.html> [accessed 6 November 2022].

34. Alexandra Genova, 'A Dystopian Vision of the Refugee Crisis', *Time Lightbox*, 15 February 2017, <http://time.com/4667825/a-dystopian-vision-of-the-refugee-crisis/> [accessed 6 November 2022].

35. Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018; Mosse in conversation with Pardo, *Richard Mosse*, p. 35.

36. Sean O'Hagan, 'Richard Mosse: Incoming Review – Shows the White-Hot Misery of the Migrant Crisis', *The Guardian*, 15 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/feb/15/richard-mosse-incoming-review-barbican-curve-migrant-crisis> [accessed 4 July 2019].

37. Daniel C. Blight, 'Incoming: Photography, Contemporary Art, Whiteness', *ASX*, 23 May 2017, <https://www.americansuburbx.com/2017/03/incoming-photography-contemporary-art-whiteness.html> [accessed 4 July 2019].

demonstrates 'the ease with which the Western art world has become comfortable with images of the suffering racialized body', and he doubts whether this will 'lead us to greater awareness or empathy'.[38] These critiques point to a sense of discomfort with the work but decontextualise certain features to oversimplify its nuanced meaning. They seem to make assumptions about the work based on critiques of an earlier project by Mosse that includes a series of photographs titled *Infra* (2010–2015), and a six-channel video installation, *The Enclave* (2012–2013), both photographed with Kodak Aerochrome, a discontinued colour infrared film. Criticisms of this work focused on the tension between form and content. The aesthetic effects of Kodak Aerochrome film were considered by some too beautiful for portraying the people and landscapes associated with the horrors of a decades-long conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.[39] This line of thinking follows conventional critiques of representations of suffering, which express suspicion and anxiety about the effect of looking at beautiful images of difficult subjects. Recent scholarship has addressed this scepticism by teasing open the relationship between trauma and spectacle to explore the power of difficult images to produce new subjects and identities, as well as new forms of political action.[40] Rather than dismissing Mosse's work for its use of military technology or its haunting beauty, film critic Tanner Tafelski describes his experience of *Incoming* as 'discombobulating yet meditative', suggesting it leaves viewers 'feeling unmoored'.[41] I had a similar response, and this essay reflects on why the work is unsettling.

Art critic Jarrett Earnest suggests that the way an artist's work is discussed tends to get established early on and is then recycled, sometimes for decades.[42] Keeping in mind that the suspicion some critics have expressed towards Mosse's art practice may be a case of writers following one another's lead, it is important to look beyond his use of a military-grade thermal camera. Aspects of the body of work that have been overlooked in the literature include its display and how Mosse draws on and subverts conventions of documentary.

Immersive Documentary

The documentary mode is particularly compelling in times of crisis because, as Hito Steyerl, T. J. Demos, and others have noted, it has the potential to intercede in the political domain.[43] This promise comes from its affective power. Steyerl writes: 'Even though we believe less than ever in documentary truth claims', the documentary form has the ability to turn information into 'powerful and moving affects'.[44] Mosse's approach to documentary recognises recent shifts in practice and participates in its reinvention by disrupting conventions.[45] *Incoming* is composed of footage and sound recorded on site and in that sense it adheres to documentary practice, but it diverges from the documentary method by rejecting conventional claims of truth and by abandoning a linear account. Instead of following a narrative structure, the work is comprised of expressive fragments that surround and absorb viewers, immersing them in the sights and sounds of migration. This immersive quality is key to its effect of overwhelming viewers and is made possible by its mode of display.

Commissioned and exhibited by the Barbican Centre (London, UK) and the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne, Australia), *Incoming* has been shown in numerous other venues, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, USA, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, USA, and La Lieu Unique, Nantes, France. It was acquired by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, USA in 2019 and was also exhibited there. In the unique space of the Curve gallery at the Barbican, *Incoming* was projected onto the curved outer wall of

38. Derek Conrad Murray, 'Richard Mosse @ SFMOMA', *Square Cylinder, Northern California Art*, 26 November 2019, <https://www.squarecylinder.com/2019/11/richard-mosse-sfmoma/> [accessed 6 November 2022].

39. Susan Gibb, 'An Ongoing State of Conflict: Richard Mosse's The Enclave', *Art Monthly Australia,* no. 269, May 2014, pp. 20–5; Alexandra McIntosh, 'Richard Mosse: An Engaged Distraction', *BlackFlash*, vol. 32, no. 2, Spring 2015, pp. 38–45.

40. Mark Reinhardt, Holly Edwards, and Erina Duganne, *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 2007); Geoffrey Batchen *et al.*, *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

41. Tanner Tafelski, 'The Refugee Crisis Seen Through a Heat-Detecting Camera', *Hyperallergic*, 14 May 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/500008/inresponse-immigration-incoming/> [accessed 6 November 2022].

42. Jarrett Earnest, 'Some Ways of Writing About Art in the Twenty-First Century', in *What it Means to Write About Art* (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018), p. 10.

43. Hito Steyerl, 'Documentary Uncertainty', *A Prior*, vol. 15, 2007, pp. 300–8, republished in *Re-visiones* vol. 1 (2011) <http://re-visiones.net/anteriores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html> [accessed 7 April 2019]; T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image*, p. xvii.

44. Steyerl, 'Documentary Uncertainty'.

45. For a discussion of the documentary turn, see T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image*, pp. 33–53.

Fig. 9. *Richard Mosse: Incoming*, installation view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 26 October 2019 – 17 February 2020. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. (Photo: Katherine Du Tiel.)

the narrow exhibition space. In other venues, the installation has been shown in oblong galleries, meaning viewers are always close to the screen (Fig. 9). This proximity results in a viewing experience that is dynamic and variable.

In fact, in the space of a narrow gallery, the scale of the installation and your proximity to the screens makes it impossible to absorb all three image tracks at the same time. In addition to the image tracks, there are also three discrete soundtracks, and it becomes too much to take in. I was reminded of the experience of watching *Nu'tka'* (1996; National Gallery of Canada), a ground-breaking video installation by Canadian artist Stan Douglas (b. 1960). That artwork is a speculative history of the year 1789, when British, American, Russian, and Spanish explorers and traders hoped to claim Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island for the lucrative sea otter trade with China, and Douglas threaded together sound and image tracks to create a space of intense doubt and confusion. With *Incoming*, Mosse explained that he was interested in proximity because he wanted to involve viewers in the editing process by having them choose what to look at.[46] The effect was less confusing and more absorbing than Douglas's work, as I selectively moved my gaze back and forth across the unfolding scenes.

The effect of this experience of immersion is at the heart of the work. In an episode set in the Calais migrant camp, multiple points of view play across the

46. Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018.

three tracks as a fire burns. The different viewpoints create instability through a shifting sense of space and time. Anne Friedberg describes encounters with multiple-screen artwork as a new 'vernacular system of visuality' that is highly mediated and yet unstable, and this new form of visuality is certainly at play in Mosse's work.[47] You see reflections on the visors of firefighters as they hose the flames; a group of people stand on a grassy elevation watching the white-hot blaze; police and firefighters cluster together; photographers look for a shot. The effect is constant motion, as tracks move in and out and the camera pans across scenes. I found myself looking from one image track to the next, mimicking the panning of the camera, trying not to miss anything but never able to absorb all three image streams at the same time. Pictures transform as points of view and distances change, unsettling distinctions between what is shown and what is felt. Analogous scenes at once offer too much and not enough, creating the feeling of being overwhelmed.

The effect of constant motion builds on the episodic structure of *Incoming*, in which one scene connects to the next. But unlike the linear narrative of documentary, *Incoming* links concepts through sequencing and juxtaposition. Viewers might notice how military technology and humanitarian operations are often side by side. I wondered whether I should presume a causal relationship between the conflict in Syria in the first episode and asylum-seekers on overcrowded boats attempting to cross the Mediterranean in a later scene. Similarly, I thought about a scene of a rescue operation, launched in response to life-threatening conditions at sea, as a precursor to an episode showing pathologists conducting an autopsy. The gaps between image tracks and the indeterminate relationships between scenes resist the truth claims of conventional documentary, emphasising instead the poetics of meaning as relational and contingent.

Unlike in mainstream documentary, where images are used to support a storyline that is delivered to the audience, this artwork constitutes viewers as interpreters of the events depicted on screen. This mode of engagement differs from documentary-style representations that attempt to raise awareness, which tend to generate ambivalence. Steyerl describes the experience of viewing mainstream media as a vacillation between 'false certainties and feelings of passivity and exposure, between agitation and boredom', positioning us between our roles as citizens and consumers.[48] Mosse's work creates uncertainty but in another form. Rather than immobilising viewers with apathy, it requires our involvement in a world made both more intense and less familiar, and the sound is crucial to this process.

The three image tracks and synchronised soundtracks of *Incoming* converge to create harmony and diverge to create points of tension, contributing to a multisensory experience that combines the pacing of Hollywood cinema with aspects of documentary film. Composer Ben Frost recorded most of the sound in the field, and some was modulated in the studio, while much of it was left raw. He wrote the three tracks separately and then merged them together with the corresponding image tracks, creating some surprising juxtapositions.[49] Mechanical noise, such as the high-pitched whine of machinery, is punctuated by human sounds. During one rescue scene, the roar of an engine saturates the background, while a voice calls out over a loudspeaker. At another point, we hear the noise of an operating theatre: a medic calls for a gastric tube over the beep of a heart monitor. While the video is slowed down, the audio plays in real time, heightening its emotional resonance. The differential relationship between sound and image creates a feeling of dislocation that interrupts the documentary effect. Steyerl describes doubt about truth value as a decisive feature of contemporary forms of documentary.[50] As with other experimental challenges to documentary, such as

47. Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 3, 231.

48. Steyerl, 'Documentary Uncertainty'.

49. Richard Mosse, email correspondence with the author, 15 August 2017.

50. Steyerl, 'Documentary Uncertainty'.

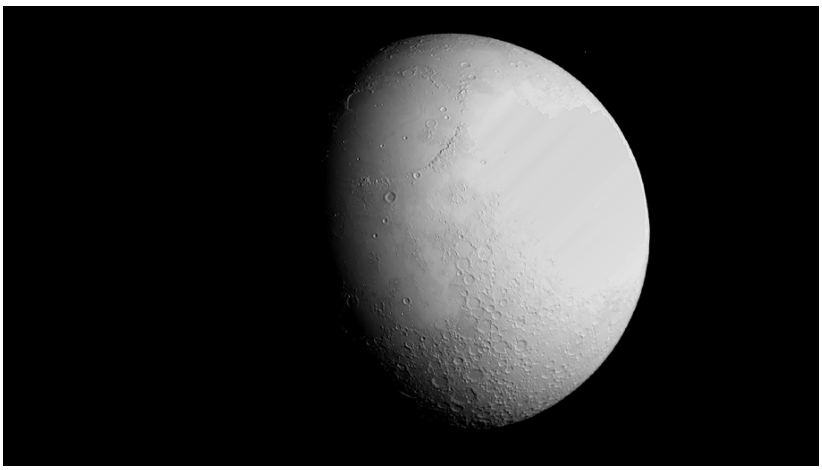

Fig. 10. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming #91*, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

docufiction, essay film, and found footage, Mosse's work complicates notions of truth. With its reconfigured relation between visual and sonic fields, the work is less about truth as something that can be represented and is more about viewer perspective and experience.

Perspective is important because viewers of *Incoming* are implicated in an unfolding crisis by becoming immersed in it. In large-scale projection-based contemporary art installations, immersion can operate on the level of spectacle, and as film theorist Erika Balsom notes, a highly sensorial installation may replicate the experience of advertising with its surface appeal.[51] Alternatively, art historian Oliver Grau suggests that immersion is a process of absorption characterised by 'increasing emotional involvement'.[52] For architectural theorist Mark Wigley, immersion is experienced as 'a loss of limits', and a dissolution of boundaries.[53] In one way or another, these formulations all suggest that immersion can create a radical experience of displacement that shifts viewers' sense of themselves and their relation to others. In psychoanalytic terms, displacement is the transfer of emotion from one object to another. In Mosse's work, the shifts in perspective caused me to feel ungrounded, and I found the immersion both absorbing and uncomfortable. As viewers, we are constantly navigating the differential relationship between sound and image, our inability to take in the three constantly moving image tracks, and the work's episodic structure. And, as it turns out, the mechanics of the thermal camera also play a crucial role.

The powerful machine-like capabilities of thermal imaging, especially the ability to see body heat in the dark, even over great distances, comes at the expense of an orientation in space. With this loss of perspective, we are uneasy, struggling to make sense of an interplay of ephemeral visual fragments and kinetic connections that shift between the mundane and the majestic. Abstract patterns of light on water and views of the distant moon offer moments of grace after difficult scenes, but even this otherworldly respite is fleeting (Fig. 10). Without a way to orientate viewers in space, the thermal camera can only navigate between proximity and distance, or between micro and macro viewpoints. By interrogating the surveillance technology that was used in its creation, *Incoming* reveals how a technologically derived field of vision makes us complicit in a system of power that prioritises security in the global north.

51. Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), p. 55.

52. Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. 13.

53. Mark Wigley, 'Discursive versus Immersive: The Museum Is the Massage', in Isabelle Priest and Christel Vesters (ed.), *Stedelijk Studies*, (Amsterdam), vol. 4, Spring 2016, p. 7.

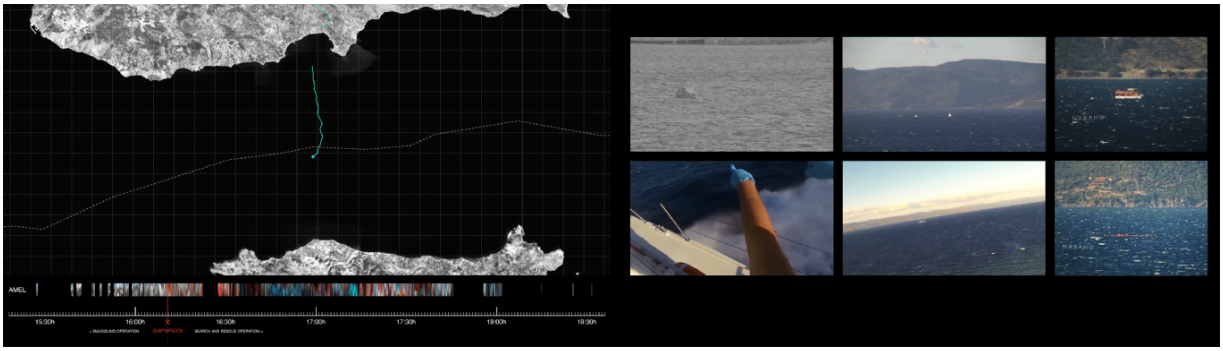

Fig. 11. Forensic Architecture, still frame from *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea*, 28 October 2015, published 19 February 2020, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/shipwreck-at-the-threshold-of-europe> [accessed 2 November 2022]. Image Credit: Richard Mosse, Amel Alzakout, Forensic Architecture. Courtesy of Forensic Architecture.

Containment as Policy

Mosse's body of work intersects with two other important projects about migration to Europe, both of which focus on a specific shipwreck and botched rescue operation in the Aegean Sea between the Turkish coast and the Greek Island of Lesvos on 28 October 2015.[54] Like Mosse's video installation, they both reflect, but in different ways, on rescue politics and the EU policy of containment. One is an investigation conducted by the research agency Forensic Architecture, an interdisciplinary team of architects, filmmakers, artists, scientists, and lawyers dedicated to investigating and raising awareness about human rights abuses.[55] The other is a feature-length experimental film by Syrian artist Amel Alzakout (b. 1988), who survived the shipwreck. These works offer another context for understanding Mosse's work and for appreciating how art, evidence, and experimental documentary participate in the broader conversation about migration.

Forensic Architecture's investigation, *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea* (2020), analysed image data of the events of the October 2015 shipwreck and rescue operation to reconstruct what happened, generate evidence, and determine who was responsible for the deaths of at least forty-three of the over 300 passengers from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Kurdistan.[56] They undertook this study at the request of Alzakout. Investigators wanted to understand why so many people died when the shipwreck occurred in a busy, narrow passage that is heavily monitored by the EU border agency Frontex and national coast guards (Fig. 11).

Forensic Architecture's approach is collaborative, and they create a 'community of praxis' for each investigation.[57] For *Shipwreck*, they used video footage from a variety of sources, including from Mosse's thermal camera and Alzakout's waterproof camera, to reconstruct events. They identified shooting locations for the source footage, along with the position of the wreck and rescue vessel, and then used 3D modelling to map the scene (Fig. 12). Forensic Architecture determined that the shipwreck occurred in EU territorial waters, making Frontex responsible for rescue operations. The investigation also found that the high death toll was a result of government policies that attempt to keep migrants out of the EU. Instead of using boats designed and equipped to conduct rescue operations, Frontex and the coast guard use patrol vessels intended for surveillance and defence. Their high, rigid hulls make it difficult to bring people onboard, and in this operation the only ones capable of pulling people from the water were local fishers and volunteers from the Spanish NGO Proactiva Open Arms.[58]

54. Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018.

55. Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: Zone Books, 2017). Also see <https://forensic-architecture.org/> [accessed 5 April 2019].

56. See Christina Varvia, 'On the Retrieval of Depth', *Perspecta, The Yale Architectural Journal*, vol. 51, May 2018, pp. 45–59. The investigation, *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea*, 28 October 2015, published 19 February 2020, is available at: <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/shipwreck-at-the-threshold-of-europe> [accessed 2 November 2022].

57. Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth* (New York: Verso, 2021), p. 208.

58. Forensic Architecture, *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea*, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/shipwreck-at-the-threshold-of-europe> [accessed 2 November 2022].

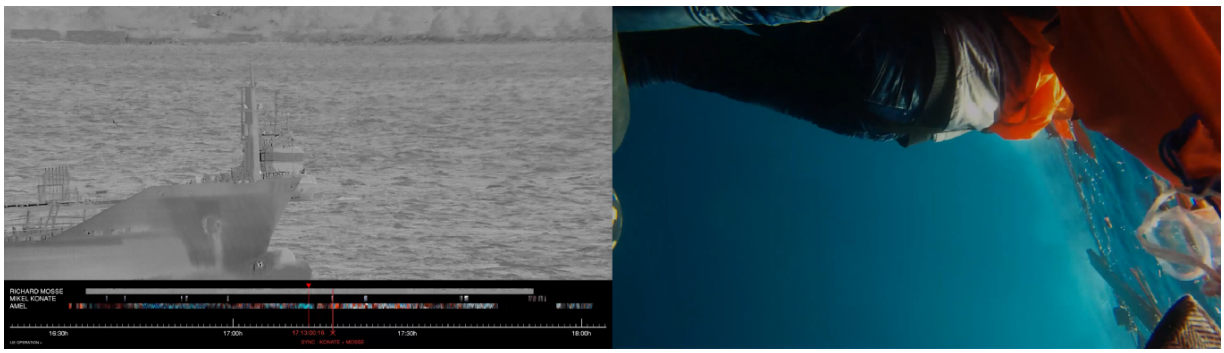

Fig. 12. Forensic Architecture, still frame from *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea*, 28 October 2015, Published 19 February 2020, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/shipwreck-at-the-threshold-of-europe> [accessed 2 November 2022]. Footage from Mosse's thermal camera is on the left and a frame from Alzakout's film is on the right. Image Credit: Richard Mosse, Amel Alzakout, Forensic Architecture. Courtesy of Forensic Architecture.

Forensic Architecture also found that the rescue was impeded by a Greek military helicopter that hovered over hundreds of people who were in the water for several hours, causing waves, blocking the sound of their cries for help, and intensifying panic.

In the Forensic Architecture investigation footage, Mosse describes the rescue effort as slow and ineffective. He says the operation was 'like a scene from hell, it was an absolute nightmare'.[59] He explained that many of the children drowned or died of hypothermia, either on site or shortly after. *Incoming* includes footage of volunteers at Molyvos Harbour trying to resuscitate people by rubbing their hands over the bodies to transfer heat.[60] Forensic Architecture's repurposing of Mosse's video footage documents and contests rescue politics and EU policies of containment.

Forensic Architecture describes their investigations as working out 'the genesis of an incident'.[61] By reconstructing what happened, they offer an account of why something happened that challenges official narratives attempting to conceal injustice. Their method of 'investigative aesthetics' uses technology as an analytic tool alongside aesthetic processes that integrate multiple perspectives to generate new interpretations.[62] Instead of trying to create a new master narrative, they recognise knowledge production as a process of bringing together diverse ways of knowing. This may include sensory information from participants, as well as expert testimony.[63] In trying to find out not only what happened but why something happened, Forensic Architecture is concerned with investigation as a political project.[64] In this case, they consider why October 2015 was such a busy month for sea crossings in the Mediterranean, with over 200,000 people attempting the voyage. They determined that pressure mounted in advance of a new plan to further restrict access to Europe's border through a new deal between Turkey and the EU, which was announced in March 2016. These political conditions helped set the stage for smugglers loading hundreds of passengers on unsafe vessels and for failed rescue efforts by the very governments responsible for the harsh border policies.[65]

The other notable project that intersects with Mosse's body of work is a film by the Syrian artist Alzakout, who survived the October 2015 shipwreck. She used the footage from her waterproof camera as the basis of *Purple Sea*, an experimental documentary film co-directed with Khaled Abdulwahed (Fig. 13).[66] In this film, the first-person narration and the image fragments of legs and arms, the belt of a coat, a blouse with butterflies, and orange and blue life vests offer an intense and personal perspective of a traumatic experience. Much of the

59. Forensic Architecture, *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea*, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/shipwreck-at-the-threshold-of-europe> [accessed 2 November 2022], 21:23.

60. Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018.

61. Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, p. 107.

62. Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, pp. 1–30.

63. Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, pp. 209–12.

64. Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, p. 195.

65. Forensic Architecture, *Shipwreck at the Threshold of Europe, Lesvos, Aegean Sea*, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/shipwreck-at-the-threshold-of-europe> [accessed 2 November 2022].

66. Amel Alzakout, author/director/narrator, and Khaled Abdulwahed, co-director, *Purple Sea*, produced by PONG FILM, 2020. *Purple Sea*, a feature-length documentary, won the Film Prize for International Cooperation, Germany – Arab World, by the Robert Bosch Stiftung. See Lightdox <https://lightdox.com/purple-sea/> [accessed 2 November 2022].

Fig. 13. Amel Alzakout (author, director, narrator) and Khaled Abdulwahed (co-director), still frame from *Purple Sea*, 2020, PONG Film, Berlin. Courtesy of Amel Alzakout.

film is comprised of scenes and sounds shot underwater, which creates a muted sensory landscape that contrasts with occasional glimpses of the panic-stricken atmosphere at the surface, experienced by Alzakout and the other passengers. The subdued sound makes the film bearable to watch and is determined by the footage available from the camera strapped to Alzakout's wrist, but it is also fitting because it conveys the disassociation of trauma. If trauma means living an event but not experiencing it, and then compulsively attempting to master the incident afterwards through repetition, the film is at once a glimpse of the traumatic event and a way of processing the trauma as narrative.

The film tells the story of the shipwreck through Alzakout's thoughts and memories. Narrated in Arabic with English subtitles, Alzakout speaks as if to her partner, Khaled Abdulwahed, whom she seeks to join in Berlin. Instead of talking directly about her perilous condition as sea, she speaks of memories, such as falling into a pond and later of meeting her partner in Istanbul. At one point she says, 'I hate the sea. Mountains, that's where I belong'.[67] She recounts watching the Iraq war on television and the Syrian war on YouTube. And reflecting on the role of cameras in these wars, she says, 'the camera records everything'.[68] Her narrative refers to the dangers of living in a conflict zone: 'snipers against demonstrators, run; grenades against bakeries, run; bombs against vehicles, run; missiles against homes, run; chemical weapons against everything, leave'.[69] She remembers studying journalism in Damascus and wanting to be a war correspondent. 'What a stupid idea', she says, 'somehow now, I've become one'.[70]

Alzakout's narrative is profoundly moving and compelling. Through her restrained commentary, we come to understand something of the circumstances of her departure and why she ended up on the fateful journey. While her partner and later their cat ('no visa required') were able to take a plane to Berlin, she spent two years waiting for a visa. Her partner says he will come back, and she replies, no, 'I'll come to you'.[71] It must have been hard to make this film and relive the experience, but perhaps it would have been impossible not to make it. For as difficult as it is to witness Alzakout's struggle to survive the shipwreck, the film allows her to regain her agency. Her powerful story destabilises viewers but offers a deeply personal account of the impact of the EU's border policy.

67. Alzakout and Abdulwahed, *Purple Sea*, 41:24.

68. Alzakout and Abdulwahed, *Purple Sea*, 16:58.

69. Alzakout and Abdulwahed, *Purple Sea*, 16:58–17:28.

70. Alzakout and Abdulwahed, *Purple Sea*, 43:31–43:49.

71. Alzakout and Abdulwahed, *Purple Sea*, 23:01.

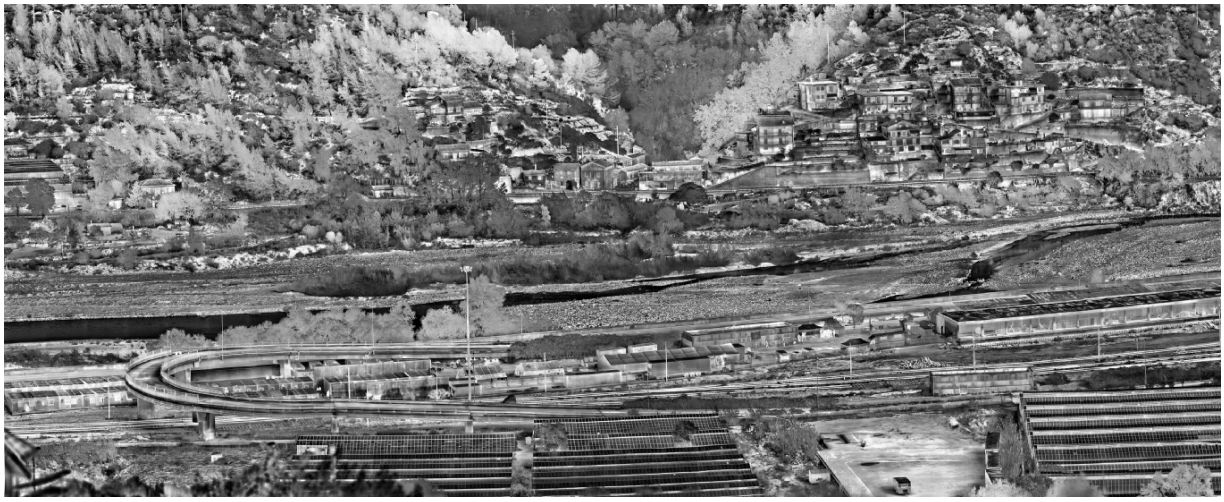

Fig. 14. Richard Mosse, *Ventimiglia Camp, Imperia, Italy*, 2016, digital C-print on metallic paper, 50 × 120 inches (print), 52 × 122 × 2 inches (framed). © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Mapping Containment

Rescue politics and the EU border policies that attempt to contain migration connect Forensic Architecture's investigation and Alzakout's experimental documentary to another component of Mosse's body of work. His photographic series *Heat Maps*, which was awarded the 2017 Prix Pictet, consists of a series of large-scale digital c-prints on metallic paper. Whereas *Incoming* chronicles migration journeys, the *Heat Maps* delineate Europe's makeshift and state-sanctioned refugee camps.[72] These large-scale panoramic surveys depict sites along Europe's borders, each one created by combining hundreds of individual frames shot with the thermal camera attached to a robotic motion-controlled arm.[73]

Ventimiglia (2016) depicts a spectral scene of houses and trees blanketing the hillsides of an Italian border city that became a major transit route for asylum-seekers attempting to get to France (Fig. 14). Upon close inspection, the viewer can see the radiant glow of human bodies sheltered beneath an underpass. Because Ventimiglia is a transit point rather than an arrival zone, migrants are not subjected to biometric data collection as they are, for example, in Lampedusa. However, migrants are monitored by drones, and local police prevent them from gathering or becoming a visible presence in the city.[74] In the artwork, the thermal images reveal people hidden in the landscape and attest to a form of containment that functions on the principle of forced mobility. In Ventimiglia, containment operates both by setting up barriers between countries and by keeping migrants from gathering and establishing informal camps within the city.[75] Instead of relying on the tropes of disorderly crowds and groups on the move, which are often used to represent contemporary migration, *Ventimiglia* considers the architecture of containment in the form of a composite panorama.[76]

Another work in the *Heat Maps* series depicts Skaramagas, the largest refugee camp in Greece with over 3,000 residents. It is located on the site of a former military base in an industrial area next to a commercial port and is administered by the navy (Fig. 15). This artwork, which takes its title from the camp, visualises the connection between state security in the global north and migration from the global south. In *Skaramagas* (2016), the regimented atmosphere of the military

72. Mosse in conversation with Pardo, *Richard Mosse*, pp. 40–1.

73. Mosse's assistant works on stitching together hundreds of frames in Photoshop, carefully adjusting focus and balancing the heat temperature. Each heat map takes between 60 and 200 hours of work to produce. Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018; also see Mosse in conversation with Pardo, *Richard Mosse*, pp. 40–1.

74. Tazzioli, *The Making of Migration*, pp. 121–3.

75. Tazzioli, *The Making of Migration*, p. 123.

76. On tropes, see Terence Wright, 'Moving Images: The Media Representation of Refugees', *Visual Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2002, pp. 53–66; Chouliaraki and Stolic, 'Rethinking Media Responsibility in the Refugee "Crisis": A Visual Typology of European News', pp. 1167–8; Sarah Bassnett, 'Visual Tropes of Migration Tell Predictable but Misleading Stories', *The Conversation*, 5 November 2018, <https://theconversation.com/visual-tropes-of-migration-tell-predictable-but-misleading-stories-106121> [accessed 4 April 2019].

Fig. 15. Richard Mosse, *Skaramaghas Camp, Athens, Greece*, 2016, digital C-print on metallic paper, 50 x 288.5 x 2 inches (framed overall dimensions). © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

has been transplanted to a refugee camp on the outskirts of Athens. Contained between the sea and the industrial area of the port, the camp has been described as a waiting room for migrants. Tiny figures are dwarfed by rows of uniform trailers in a vast industrial landscape where the navy functions both as security and as relief agency. The panorama maps the instrumentalisation of aid as a tool of conflict management and connects it to the economy of global capitalism.

Mosse's *Heat Maps* draw on the idea of the map as a symbolic representation yet resist the kind of totalising knowledge we have come to associate with empirical mapping. Rather than producing a rationalist cartography of migrant flows, the artworks interrogate privileges of belonging. They refer to the arrangement, relationship, and movement of people and goods under a political system that prioritises various forms of capital. The series catalogues sites created by EU policies of containment and thus makes visible divisions that are not normally seen. Political theorist Chantal Mouffe explains how global capitalism has redefined social relations along economic lines, with, for example, the EU predicated on a common market rather than a shared political will.[77] The *Heat Maps* explore the implications of these new political relationships, while reflecting on themes that have a much longer history.

Mosse explained the genesis for *Incoming* and *Heat Maps* as J. M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Franz Kafka's *The Castle*.[78] Responding to themes of fear, empire, proximity, and the objectification of the other, Mosse's *Heat Maps* perform their role as maps in the sense that they have the potential to help us find our way. Since 2015, a complex set of issues, frequently characterised as a refugee crisis, has been represented in the mainstream media by images of desperate people. Sometimes they are pictured on the move, in overcrowded boats on the Mediterranean, or trudging across fields with packs on their backs. At other times they are shown stuck, in makeshift shelters or living in camps. Often the focus has been on human misery, portraying asylum-seekers and migrants as desperate people living on the margins of society. In recent years, many photographers have become increasingly careful not to objectify their subjects and have taken the time to talk to them and record names and details of their stories. Some of this work has helped to humanise refugees and has likely increased compassion from at least some viewers, but in other cases these stories of hardship are used to fuel recurring white saviour narratives. Another troubling issue is that many of the stories focusing on people in distress encourage those in the global north to feel comforted by our own safety. These representations of migration contribute to what Nicholas De Genova has called 'border spectacle', a performance of policing that serves to reinforce the idea that migrants do not belong in a particular space, thus naturalising their exclusion.[79] Mosse's work pushes against conventional representations to unravel these tropes. The political work of *Incoming* and *Heat Maps* is in repurposing military technology to consider migration not through the lens of border spectacle but in terms of a regime of visibility. The artwork helps us understand the

77. Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 59.

78. Mosse in conversation with the author, 27 April 2018; J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980); Franz Kafka, *The Castle* [*Das Schloss*] (London: Secker and Warburg, 1930[1926]).

79. Nicholas De Genova, 'Spectacles of Migrant Illegality: The Scene of Exclusion, The Obscene of Inclusion', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* vol. 36, no. 7, 2013, pp. 1180–98.

Fig. 16. Richard Mosse, *Still from Incoming #88*, 2014–17, digital C-print on metallic paper, 11.5 x 20 inches (print). © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

purposeful interconnectedness of military and humanitarian operations and to consider how this system of rescue politics serves to govern migration.

There is one motif from *Incoming* that seems to encapsulate the intervention that Mosse makes with this body of work. In a short sequence after an episode on the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier and before the scene of the rescue operation off the coast of Lesvos, where Alzakout was eventually rescued, a man appears on screen, peering through a pair of binoculars (Fig. 16). His face and arms are dark silver against the bright white of the cold sky. His binoculars are trained on us – the viewers – and the glass of the objective lenses is opaque white. This figure is reminiscent of the man with opera glasses in Pierre-Auguste Renoir's (1841–1919) *La Loge* (*The Theatre Box*), (1874; The Courtauld), an impressionist painting about spectatorship and modern life. In Renoir's artwork, the man is a surrogate for the viewer, using an optical device to magnify his vision and assert his mastery over the scene. In Mosse's work, the figure acts more as mirror and critique, pressing us to consider how we in the global north collaborate with an inhumane system of power that causes tragedy and uses rescue as a mechanism to regulate migration from the global south.

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