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# The Migrant Through the Looking Glass

*A Material Semiotics of the Contemporary Visual Art and Media*



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Master Thesis

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- Fig. 6 (p. 74) “Deleuze and Guattari’s spiral diagram of signifiante.” Taken from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988, 157).
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# Abstract

In the midst of the current crisis of migration to Europe from the Middle East, a complex network of images and media materialities have been permeating through variegated bodies, technologies of representation, and visual territories. The term ‘crisis’ gained currency in the media from 2015 onwards, mainly due to the radical increase in the number of migrants to Europe. The civil unrest in North African countries, the Syrian civil war and the rise of Da’ish in Iraq and Syria led to a statistical abnormality in the number of immigrants to Europe, unprecedented since the second World War. In this context, media has played a key role in shaping a certain conception of the crisis. Owing to the pronounced effect and fear of large numbers, media, in particular journalistic media, have adapted a simplified casual schema to explain away this pressing issue. Accordingly, the crisis of twenty-first-century migration has been formulated in mainstream journalism as the effect of the military mayhem, social upheaval and the operation of certain opportunistic forces in the region (*Reuters*). Through what material and semiotic processes have these framing procedures been performed? In what ways have media sought to form the conception and perception of European migrant crisis? And above all, in what ways such framing acts can be contested and overturned?

This thesis seeks to answer these questions through two tracks of analyses. First, by analysing an embedded video in one of Reuters’ journalistic programmes titled *Migration Machine*, this text shows how journalistic media frame the ongoing migrant predicament through mixed semiotic and technical procedures. Second, by examining the visual works of the Lebanese artist, Rabih Mroué, it is argued that art has the capacity to break through the signifying order of journalism to the effect of creating a new form of perceptual and conceptual experience. These analyses are carried out by adapting and readjusting Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of ‘assemblage’ as a theoretical choice to move past the simplistic causal schema in mainstream media representation.

**Keywords:** European migration crisis, Assemblage, Media and Art Images, Media Materialities, Frames, Perspectives.





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# **Introduction:**

## **The Mediatised Aesthetics of Europe's Migrant Crisis**

## Prologue

In a staged-photographic image Ai Weiwei, the Chinese artists and activist is shown lying prostrate on a pebbled beach. The photo is in grey scale. His face is turned, one side resting on the pebbles while the sea waves barely touch his head. The sea lies to the left and the pebbled beach to the right. Weiwei is closer to the foreground while the wave-line stretches diagonally from the left bottom all the way into the far depth of the image behind the silhouettes of two trees (fig. 1).

Twenty-first-century visual media could very well remember a photo taken a few months before by a Turkish photojournalist. It had gone viral within only a few hours after it was uploaded on social media and official journalistic platforms. It shows a child from a low angle medium shot against a wave-sand background (fig. 2). He is lying on the beach in a similar posture to that enacted by Weiwei. The child's face is only partially visible. Its left cheek and lower jaw are covered by its left shoulder while the right side of its face is pressed on the sand. The rest are its head, the red shirt, the soaked shorts and the neatly-paired shoes. The death of this child very quickly became the emblem of twenty-first-century migration crisis when it became clear that the child had drowned, along with a few more people, in a failed attempt to cross the Mediterranean sea.



Fig. 1. Ai Weiwei posing as the Syrian drowned child figure. Credit: Rohit Chawla, *India Today*.



Fig. 2. The original photo of the death of Alan Kurdi taken by the Turkish photojournalist Nilüfer Demir.

The 'crisis' in the European migrant crisis became a recurrent term in global discussions about immigration to Europe in the aftermath of the military and civil shock in Middle Eastern Islamic countries. This term gained currency in media reports and political discourses from 2015 onward ("Europe Migrant Crisis"), mainly due to the radical increase in the number of migrants to Europe. Following the civil unrest in North African countries, the Syrian civil war and the rise of Da'ish in Iraq and Syria, a great number of people sought refuge in European countries, some

travelling afoot and some by boat across the Mediterranean sea. According to the UN Refugee Agency, nearly a million migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea and Pakistan arrived in Italy and Greece only in 2015 (“Global Trends in 2105”).

Migration has of course never been an entirely strange phenomenon for twentieth and twenty-first-century Europe. The modern history of Western Europe has been always mixed with migratory experiences, particularly throughout the post war and post cold war era. Either by force or by their own will, migrants from Algeria, Morocco, sub-Saharan countries, Arab countries, India and Indonesia, to name a few locations, have been steadily moving to Europe for the past few decades in search of better standards of life (Randall Hansen 25). The past few years only felt the most concentrated effect of this dispersed and divergent phenomenon, only the tip of a much larger and heavier iceberg; an effect that was marked by a high rate of immigration as well as by high death tolls, a statistical abnormality unprecedented since the Second World War. The images in fig. 1 and fig. 2, each with their unique modes and techniques of visualisation, set out a certain relation with this crisis. They open up (a) perspective(s) to the experience of migrancy by slicing (an) instance(s) from it and composing it in visual terms. By putting it in perspective, these images in-form our perception of contemporary migration. As such, the images mentioned above are only two cases of a much more pervasive imagescape that confronts us everyday with yet another snapshot or instance of the predicament we are experiencing, with more photographs, videos, televised or digitised reports of that ‘crisis’. Bearing in mind this predominantly visual encounter with the starkly physical experience of migration, it is becoming ever more pressing to question the working of this image-making machine. How do these images, and the technical means behind them, affect the ways in which the Euro-Mediterranean migration crisis is comprehended? How do they operate and function as such?

The figure of the drowned child had an impact on a variety of governmental and societal arenas. It affected, directly or implicitly, state politicians, NGOs, political activists, art communities, social media journalists and photo editors. State politicians, from Canada all the way to Turkey, took up a moral and juridical stance. Focusing on finding the culprits behind this tragic incident, the Turkish government sentenced two smugglers to four years in prison (“Alan Kurdi...”) while the Canadian Citizenship and Immigration office had to explain why they had not issued visas to the child’s family (“Canada Says...”)¹. A few weeks later, in a benevolent and philanthropist gesture, Angela Merkel ordered the transportation of ten thousand refugees from the Hungarian borders to Munich (Walker and Tronaiovsky 2015). On the other side of the Atlantic, the republican senator John McCain went as far as displaying the picture on the Senate floor, put on an easel behind him during his entire speech (Saeed 2015). In all these instances, the image has been positioned within a meaningful order. It has been given certain discursive and semiological coordinates, ordered and *framed*.

To be framed is defined here as being organised by and being bound to a certain perceptual and signifying order. It disciplines the act of looking and serves as a semiotic and perceptual paradigm. It imposes a certain aesthetic paradigm on the process of viewing, a certain perceptual template. Etymologically, through the Germanic route/root of the word, 'frame' relates to 'form', and through its Old English sense, it relates to being useful (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In the sense that I use the term in this text, it is defined primarily by certain formal and structural necessities. It determines everything from the start and does not allow anything to spill over, escape or stand on its own as independent from the enclave of frames.

As for the other image, Weiwei's enactment took place on the Greek island of Lesbos, one of the most strategical locations for migrants crossing the Mediterranean sea in the hope of reaching Europe. This location functioned as the artist's studio, where he had started an art project a few months back to think about and experiment with the his contemporary crisis of migration. The artist's choice to work in Lesbos, in this way, situated him within the very material he had chosen to work with. He could experience an immediacy to his subject matter that he could never have achieved had he stayed remote from the content of his performance. The image that he stages orients the eye to look through the image, along the wave-line beyond the trees across the photo-frame, as it were. It puts the image before the eye *in perspective*. There is evidently a different aesthetics at work in this image, a different perceptual paradigm and a different viewing format.

Etymologically, the word perspective comes from the latin verb *perspicere*, which conveys a sense of looking *through* rather than *at* (*Oxford English Dictionary*). I use the term perspective here not only in a technical sense of the term,<sup>2</sup> but also in a more conceptual sense. Hence, next to being defined in terms of the technics of reproducing a three-dimensional reality, it is also understood as a conceptual trope opening up, in the words of image theorist Ron Burnett. "different strategies, tests, and hypotheses about experience. Therefore, perspective is not the result of *one* (emphasis added) approach to reality or fantasy" (2005, 10). Understood from this conceptual point of view, getting or putting something in perspective is preferred over creating, drawing or simulating a perspective. This is less about imparting an illusion of three-dimensional reality than aligning the viewer to perceive that reality immanently and immediately. It amounts to a much more open and dynamic aesthetics. In perspectives, percepts are not primarily ordered according to any exogenous stimulus from whose gaze the image would be looked at. Rather, the image's visual stimuli are endogenous and autogenic processes immanent to the very content of the image: the trees in the depth, the wave-line gravitating towards the vanishing point, the prostrate figure and the pebbles. These components should be treated as 'things' that are put in perspective rather than being positioned in a simulation of a three-dimensional space.

The distinction between the aesthetics of frames and perspectives corresponds to two ways of perceiving the migrant. The framed migrant, on one hand, appears as a well-coordinated *object*

safely positioned within the photo, qua only a migrant and nothing else. It brings with itself a pang of sympathy and a rather heavy burden of humanistic sentimentality. While on the other hand, the migrant in perspective appears as a *thing* that can bring to mind virtually any figure. It could be a migrant, a puppet or a dead pirate. It is open to multiple ways of perception. This amount to the following argument: if frames privilege the order and objectivity of things over the things themselves, perspectives do exactly the opposite. If in frames things are taken as signs that cannot mean anything independent from the signifying order, in perspectives, they can only be meaningful if they are taken as endogenous operatives. An important point arises from this comparison. On one hand, frames amount to *textuality*, whose components are necessarily taken as certain signs positioned in a semiological relation to one another. On the other hand, perspectives amount to *materiality*, allowing things to be expressed according to their material logic, that is to say, according to their physics and optics, or more particularly, according to the logic of light.

Distinct from the textuality of images, perspectives give ascendancy to *matter*. They allow an image to be expressed primarily by virtue of its appearance to the viewer, that is, by virtue of the logic of light. Whereas, a framed image gives primacy to the semiological order through which the viewing is made possible. Matter is not fixed and cannot be framed. It is in constant flow, perpetually moving and changing from one state to another. Frames, at best, only represent a formal semblance of matter. Matter is unformed and shapeless, or in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's words, there is always "the flow of matter-movement" (1988, 473) rather than "form-matter". It cannot be represented as such but only engineered using a variety of technical interferences. Within the mediatised realm of images, there is always various interplays between text and matter, frames and perspectives, orders and free movements or between optics and light.

Given this close tie between matter and text, images such as the ones referred to above perform very specific roles in very specific ways within what Arjun Appadurai would call the "landscapes of images" (35) in our contemporary mediatised globe. They have the potential to bring to the fore certain underlying relations within the ongoing crisis of migration to Europe. We may not readily see it, but we can perceive certain arrangements within these images if we look closely. We might be affected by the migrant's effort and struggle to arrive at Europe, or by the harsh consequences that might befall them along the way. We might as well notice the determining role of the photographic lens in making this struggle perceivable. We are constantly confronting textual and material arrangements. A news journal shows us a photo and assigns a particular narrative to it—textuality. A photojournalist goes to the actual war zones to take pictures with his/her camera looking for certain interesting moments and proper gradient of light—materiality. In this fashion, these images affect and inflect the way we perceive and comprehend one of the most unrelenting crises of our decade. This thesis explores the hows of this affectivity through certain analyses of the textuality and materiality of the contemporary imagescape. The

images referenced above will disappear henceforth, but certain abstractions, complications and dilemmas within them will remain to be traced elsewhere.

## **Aims and Questions: an Interdisciplinary Thinking Act**

This thesis deals with two modes of frame-based and perspectival thinking in visual media against the backdrop of European migrant crisis. Through the analyses of two theoretical objects, a video clip on a journalistic online platform and a set of (audio)visual installations by the Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué, this thesis investigates the ways in which media materialities and media images affect and are affected by the crisis of migratory movements in the present century. I understand this mutual affective relation as specifically one in which visual media and migrancy arrange, determine, inform and transform one another. I formulate this relation through the conceptual lens of ‘assemblage’, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988). They introduce this concept to capture the complex ways in which multiple setups of disparate objects, processes of becoming, effects and/or affects exist, endure, experience and are experienced in the world. When a migrant from Syria decides to leave his/her war-ridden land and would not be content with anywhere but Western Europe—not Hungary, not Poland and not Slovenia—s/he wants something very special that cannot be explained in terms of a simple cause-and-effect schema. That which s/he wants and how s/he wants it cannot be reduced to the fact that s/he cannot live in his/her homeland or to the the fact that there is a war going on therein. His/her *desire* is much more complex and cannot be reduced to a causal-based system of relations. S/he is within an assemblage, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it. S/he is being affected by an array of disparate elements that cannot be reduced to any single one of them nor can it be adequately explained in terms of their totality—images, media and communication technologies, memories, the logic of borders and the list can go on. Motivated by this concept, I will ask the following questions with respect to a selected set of images:

*How do these images operate both textually and materially? Through what material and semiotic processes do they shape the perception and conception of migrants and migrancy? How do they define, intensify and draw from the ‘crisis’ of migration to Europe in the twenty-first-century? Can they potentiate new ways of thinking and seeing beyond these processes? What would these ways of thinking and seeing consist of? How do they operate in terms of the materiality and the technicity of contemporary media images?*

It must be also noted that the complex relations between these seemingly ontologically and epistemologically incompatible components—media technologies, media images and migration—may cause a tremendous conceptual and methodological difficulty. One has to be equipped with powerful concepts and an advanced verbal versatility to be able to theorise and think about these complex relations, not to mention the necessity of having sufficient experience in and knowledge of several academic disciplines—media and cultural theory, philosophy, international relations,

law, ecology and the list could virtually cover the whole academia. Acknowledging this academic and scholarly limit, this text does not set out to tackle this interdisciplinary predicament by proffering a thorough analysis of all possible aspects of this complexity. The aim of this thesis is much more modest in tone, in that it does not question the ‘what’s and ‘how’s of every possible relation. It focuses instead on those relations that are more interesting from the point of view of media theory. It also narrows down its scope further by focusing on particular cases: a video clip on a journalistic online platform and a set of (audio)visual installations.

## **Research Objects**

The first case is a video clip edited and distributed by Reuters news agency. The video is part of Reuters’ program *Migration Machine*, lunched in early 2016. This programme uses the term ‘migration machine’ as a trope to lay bare the underlying mechanisms in the crisis. Reporting from the actual sites of struggle, photo- and video-shooting the actual bodies in endless persistent crossings, and recounting testimonies of survivors and of non-survivors’ relatives, they argue that behind this crisis lies a brutal network of smugglers and human traffickers functioning as intermediaries in this menacing machine of migration. In this light, Reuters’ journalism draws attention to how migrants’ materially-grounded journeys unfold in reality.

The second case consists of a set of works by the Lebanese artist, Rabih Mroué. He is a theatre director, a visual artist, a performer and a writer whose works are deeply influenced by and interwoven with Lebanese Civil War of the 1990s (Mroué and Martin 2012). One can always find a strong accent on death, violent conflict and traumatic human displacement in most of his works. Despite the fact that his nationality and ethnic background does not fit into the dominant ethnic paradigm of today’s migrant crisis, his works, as will be explained in the third chapter, should prove to be informative and conceptually suitable for the analyses of this thesis.

In April 2016, Mroué put on display his newest project titled *I was fortunate not to have seen what the others had witnessed*, set up at Sfeir-Semler gallery in Hamburg. This exhibition consisted of four (audio)visual installations. The third chapter analyses and thinks through one of these installations, titled *Black Box I-X*. The work is comprised of ten boxes, each of which contains an image which can be only seen through a concave lens. Mroué’s imagery in this work relies predominantly on the technique of collage, composing photos and pieces taken out from newspapers and magazines.

## **Theoretical Approach**

This thesis analyses two theoretical sets of objects so as to think through the relations between visual media and European migration crisis. I develop the term *technotactics* as a theoretical trope to lay bare the material and the technical dispositions within the assemblage of migration and



media. The term technotactics, or more particularly for this thesis *media* technotactics, is coined to refer to the choices that viewers, artists and designers make in relation to certain technical objects, literacies and capacities: the specific technologies that a certain viewer, artist or designer encounters with, the ways s/he navigates through its complex technical ecology, and the capacities that emerge through these encounters. This term functions as a theoretical stabiliser in this text, in that it should be understood as an adaptation, or a minimal readjustment, of certain key Deleuzoguattarian<sup>3</sup> terms in their assemblage theory.

This theoretical twist is mostly informed by what has come to be called ‘new materialism’ in the present century. In the light of this trend of thought, as Manuel Delanda proclaims, ‘matter’ is no longer opposed to ‘meaning’, (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2012). Instead, it has an autonomy that provides the very condition of possibility of meaning. It is no longer understood as dead but in constant flow and vibration (Connolly 2013). It is no longer conceived as formal or substantial fixities but as functional autogenic processes inherent in “matter-energy” continuum (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 474). It is no more considered as waste but on the contrary as that which gives birth: the “mater” (Braidotti 2006b).

The present thesis is as much a work of theory as a practical act of research. In that, I will not merely analyse a given set of theoretical objects according to certain theoretical framework. There is no theory in this text as ‘applied’ to a set of objects. Instead, the two are in perpetual encounter with one another transforming and readjusting one another. To this end, within this interdisciplinary act of thinking, I have allowed the concepts that I have activated by drawing mainly from Deleuze and Guattari to change according to how they came to meet or read the selected case. At the same time, I have allowed the cases to give rise to different objects of analysis. In this way, this thesis should be seen as reciprocating processes of thinking between certain theories and concrete cases, not as an application/subjugation of one to the other.

## **Outline of Chapters**

What follows in the proceeding chapters is the result of this to-and-fro act of thinking, in the sense that the concepts and objects have already undergone certain transformations that might not be so much evident from the text.

I have allocated the first chapter to explain how and why I have adapted certain concepts from my primary sources. I start with discussing the methodological and conceptual challenge in working with Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. I argue that it is quite risky to take a concept from their rhizomatic thought processes and ‘apply’ it to one’s selected cases. Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts are all rhizomatically connected in the sense that one cannot use his/her favourite Deleuzoguattarian concept without taking into account the ways in which that concept informs and is informed by other concepts in their writings. This poses a range of difficulties and

incompatibilities: how can the concept of ‘assemblage’, which will serve as a starting point for my thinking in this text, be used without drawing on the concepts of territoriality, deterritorialisation, lines of flight, stratification and plane of consistency, just to name a few obvious associations. If I were to incorporate all these terms and concepts, my text would suffer from an explanatory overtone and hence Deleuze and Guattari’s text itself would become the subject matter of my study. This chapter, in other words, prepares a practical ground for writing and thinking immanent to the materials I am working with. It serves as an activation process whereby Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts are made to work within the context of media materialities, media images and migration. The term ‘technotactics’ is developed as a modest and practical adaptation of Deleuzoguattarian overarching and versatile concepts of diagram, function and abstract machine. Media technotactics, the chapter reads, refer to those diagrammatic operations that take place within the technical realm of media imageries, which is always a fusion of human and non-human forces. The development of this term feeds into the analyses of the preceding chapters.

The second chapter takes a video clip uploaded on Reuters’ programme *Migration Machine* as its theoretical object.<sup>4</sup> Through detailed and rigorous descriptions and analyses, I argue that there is a certain regime of signs operating within the video clip that ultimately defines and imposes a framework for the perception and conception of migrancy, an operationality that I have called ‘framehood’ in this text. Furthermore, I develop the concept of perspective as a technotactical intervention into that framehood, providing the possibility of reading the video against its ordering regime. The thinking of this chapter follows a “zigzagging”<sup>5</sup> movement (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 429; Braidotti 2006b, 5) in between certain theoretical persona and concrete examples taken from photography and journalism.

The third and final chapter focuses on Rabih Mroué’s works of art as the theoretical object. One set of his installations exhibited in Hamburg in April 2016, *Black Box I-X* is analysed. I argue that the artist’s technotactical interventions in his contemporaneous mediascape takes place on two practical modes. First, on the level of collage, he disturbs the framehood of images by changing the nature of the signs from symbolic to iconic. Second, on the level of viewing the images, he disturbs the way one normally looks at a picture or a photo by allowing the photos to be seen only through a concave lens, which imparts an illusion of depth upon the image.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The office claimed that the family had never applied for visa to any Canadian embassy. It was only assumed that they must have applied since the child's father said so in several interviews with journalists.

<sup>2</sup> Perspective in its technical sense, according to Andre Bazin, refers to a “scientific” and “mechanical system of reproduction” which would enable the viewer to partake in an “illusion of three-dimensional space within which things [appear] to exist as our eyes in reality see them” (1960, 6).

<sup>3</sup> The term Deleuzoguattarian was first coined by Ronald Bogue in *Deleuze and Guattari: Critics of Twentieth Century* (1989).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term ‘theoretical object’ in the sense that Nanna Verhoeff understands it, that is, as objects “that compel us to propose, interrogate, and theorise” (Verhoeff 2009, 279).

<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti in her book *Transposition*, adapting from Deleuze and Guattari, describes a proper “zigzagging” thought-movement as “non-linear, but not chaotic; nomadic, yet accountable and committed; creative but also cognitively valid; discursive and also materially embedded—it is coherent without falling into instrumental rationality” (2006b, 5).

# **Chapter I:**

## **The Assessment and Positioning of the Concepts**

## Concepts in Movement

Philosophy does not contemplate, reflect, or communicate, although it must create concepts for these actions or passions. Contemplation, reflection and communication are not disciplines but machines for constituting Universals in every discipline (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 6).

It is with this caution that I begin this chapter: philosophical thinking does not, and should not, create Universals but concepts. The two are highly prone to be confused with one another, particularly within the scope of interdisciplinary research. It is indeed quite tempting to pick out a notion in one context or discipline and transport it to one's selected field of interest. This acrobatic transportation might actually work, that is to say, it might produce new arguments and new 'special effects' of knowledge. The work of a researcher, if s/he were to function as an effect-producer, would be to create and parcel up knowledge as to make it transportable to his/her disciples. What is being transferred in this exchange comes close to what Deleuze and Guattari call Universals. For such Universals to be defined and parcelled up, the researcher may resort to a coordinate system, against whose axes the parcels can be measured and be "communicated" if need be. Concepts, in contrast, are in perpetual "variations", as Deleuze and Guattari assert. They are "pure and simple *variations* ordered according to their neighbourhood. They are processual, modular" (1994, 20). Concepts are not bound to any *coordinate* system in which they would be defined in terms of an  $x$  or a  $y$ . Rather, to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, they can be traced in terms of their differentials along certain *ordinates*. In contrast to coordinates, ordinates only define certain vectors—an intensity with direction—along which variations take place. This important distinction between Universals and concepts may become more intelligible by resorting to a simple analogy: a GPS device is a Universal machine by virtue of specifying the exact coordinates of one's location on a map according to 'extensive properties', i.e. length and area.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, a compass is a conceptual device, which only gives direction without specifying any point in space, leaving all the rest to the navigators's desires and decisions. It functions as a vector, an 'intensive property', or as Deleuze and Guattari would have it, as an "intensive ordinate" (*ordonnée intensive*) (1994, 20). In brief, these intensive ordinates can be traced or "surveyed" when from one idea to another a heterogenous set of components change.

As an example, the word 'perspective', from a Universal point of view, refers to the illusion of a three-dimensional space as made visible to the eye on a two-dimensional surface. Fixed and clearly coordinated, this Universal term can be safely transported to anywhere as long as its coordination system is sustained and acknowledged during the trip. But if we were to question, for instance, the implication of the term 'space' in this definitional system and suggest that it can

be in fact a vague notion itself, ‘perspective’ could no longer function Universally—it is not very clear what it means and what it does in, say, a non-Euclidean space. In this way, it can become a concept if we were to focus on its variations, instead of its coordination, along intensive ordinates such as spatiality, dimensionality, perceptivity and so on. This will be unravelled in more detail in the second chapter.

In contrast to Universals, concepts are not frigid theoretical abstractions, fixed definitions, denotations, designations or even connotations. As cultural theorist Mieke Bal asserts,

concepts are not fixed. They travel—between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ. (2002, 24)

If concepts are prone to such instability in their crossover between disciplines, how should an interdisciplinary research think with and through them without turning them into fixed definitions or Universals? Bal immediately adds to the above mentioned quote that “these processes of differing need to be assessed before, during and after each ‘trip’” (2002, 24). To rephrase Bal, this “assessment” requires a close inspection of the concepts in relation to the context in which they are activated. In other words, one should vigilantly survey the ways in which the selected concepts change in relation to the field in which they are made to operate. There is a fine line between a concept that is operating within a field according to what the field itself requires and a concept that is being ‘applied’ to that field according to the coordinates that are externally imposed on the field. Bal treats this issue in most of her writings on interdisciplinary research under the rubric of ‘travelling concepts’ (2002; 2009, 4-13).

As many Deleuzian or Deleuzoguattarian scholars attest, applicationalism is an endemic pitfall in working with Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. Bruce B. Janz, for instance, in his essay “Forget Deleuze” suggests that “Deleuzian concepts must neither be ‘applied’ to new situations, nor be used to ‘interpret’ or ‘explain’ existing phenomena. Deleuze is not an applied philosopher, nor a hermeneuticist, nor a closet social scientist” (2012, 23).

These precautionary remarks concerning how to read and use Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts imply that one should give up the position of an interpreter and refrain from eliciting universal constants or variables for the purpose of application. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, “there is neither constant nor variable in the concept” (1994, 20), only “pure variations”. To understand concepts otherwise could turn one’s entire project into an act of exegesis. As Janz suggests, in order to circumvent this problem with Deleuze and Guattari, it is necessary to ‘forget’ them at some stage of research. This should be understood, as Janz emphasises, not as ‘rejection’

or ‘denial’ of Deleuzian philosophy but as “its own erasure, before it can be truly creative” (2012, 24).

In sum, the activation and operation of concepts consists in two simultaneous tactics. First, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, certain ordinates are selected. Second, following on Bal’s methodological advice on interdisciplinary research, the variations of the concepts are observed and “assessed” while they change along those ordinates. These two tactics will be concretely followed in this thesis. To this end, the next section begins by activating, not applying, the first powerful and over-arching Deleuzoguattarian concept within the context of my research material.

## **The Mutual Arrangement of Migrancy and Media Imagery**

The argument I put forward in this thesis is that media materialities, media images and migrancy are inseparable operationally yet different in their forms of content and expression. The relations between these elements cannot be reduced to casual or logical structures. Content and expression, as Patricia Pisters expounds on Deleuze and Guattari, “are not opposed but interlocked” (2016, 15). The media, to refer to the opening example of this thesis, could not take and distribute the photo of the Syrian drowned child from a point of view external to the context in which the child is drowned. The migrant, in turn, could not determine where to go and how to flee, from a point of view alien to the context in which such images are produced and circulated.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the photo of the Syrian child cannot be seen as merely a representation of what migrants go through in the present century. It cannot be reduced to a system of representation or a semiological order. The migrants, the boats, the sea, the photojournalists, European states, digital media platforms and many more corporeal and incorporeal elements are intricately tied together in ways that cannot be reduced to causal, syntactic or semantic features.

It is precisely for this intricate interdependence that the concept of assemblage should prove to be helpful in studying the migrant crisis. To this end I coin the term migrant-image assemblage to be able to talk about these interdependent and complex relations between migrancy and media materialities and expressivity. The activation of this concept helps avoiding the common misunderstanding of migration crisis as an effect in a causal mechanism: the result of certain choices made by despotic regimes like the Syrian or the Islamic States in the region, smugglers, Western States, Western media or the very migrants themselves.

An assemblage, bearing in mind its association with the original French term *agencement*, takes into account both the corporeal/material and the incorporeal/textual relations in a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> It considers both how elements are ‘arranged’ with regard to one another *and* how their arrangements are ‘disposed’ towards incorporeal variations. The concept of assemblage acknowledges the fact that the corporeal and incorporeal are inseparable.

Looking at the photo of the dead Syrian child, is there a way to assert where and when ‘migrancy’ ends and ‘imagery’ starts? Or where and when ‘imagery’ ends and the media materiality and technicality, begins? Is it even possible to think of such perceptual or conceptual boundaries between these disparate elements? Is not the figure of the dead migrant as much embedded in the image as in the materialities and logics that made the shooting and the distribution of the image possible? The argument that I set forth in this chapter is that media materialities and logics—the camera lens, the photographer, the norms and procedures of journalism and so on—and migratory materialities and logistics—the bodies, their crossings, the borders and the sinking boats—are inseparably interwoven in contemporary media ecosphere.

According to Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation, an assemblage does not entirely operate according to a bilateral cause-and-effect logic. Rather more complexly, it operates according to a tetra-directional ordination (fig. 4). They distinguish in an assemblage between a horizontal syntagmatic axis of ‘content’ and ‘expression’ and a vertical paradigmatic axis of ‘territoriality’ and ‘function’. It should be made clear from the outset that these axes should not be taken as a coordinate system. They are rather certain ordinates, along which the concept of assemblage changes.

Towards the left side of the horizontal axis, an assemblage becomes “machinic” arrangements and dispositions of bodies in relation to one another. This becoming

relates not to the production of goods but rather to a precise state of intermingling of bodies in a society, including all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations, and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another. (1988, 104)

Towards the right side of this axis, an assemblage comes to be expressed in terms of certain incorporeal “collective assemblages of enunciation” or in other terms, different “regimes of signs”. Activated within the context of the contemporary migrant crisis, the machinic assemblage should bring to mind the migrants’ bodies, the navigating technologies that enable their movements across borders, the terrestrial features of their journey, the media technologies that physically approach them to photograph or film them, and certain transportation infrastructures, to name a few most prominent components. The ‘expression’ of this assemblage, on the other hand, should remind us of the image of the Syrian drowned child or Weiwei’s staged photo. These images draw from the machinic and material archive of migrants’ actual experience and articulate a scene, a visage or a figure using different regimes of signs, linguistic as well as non-linguistic ones.

Facing downward along the vertical axis, the assemblage becomes delineated, coordinated and fixed. Manuel DeLanda understands this direction in terms of ‘territoriality’ which are



“processes that define and sharpen the spatial boundaries of actual territories” (13). In addition, DeLanda continues, these processes “stabilise the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries” (12).

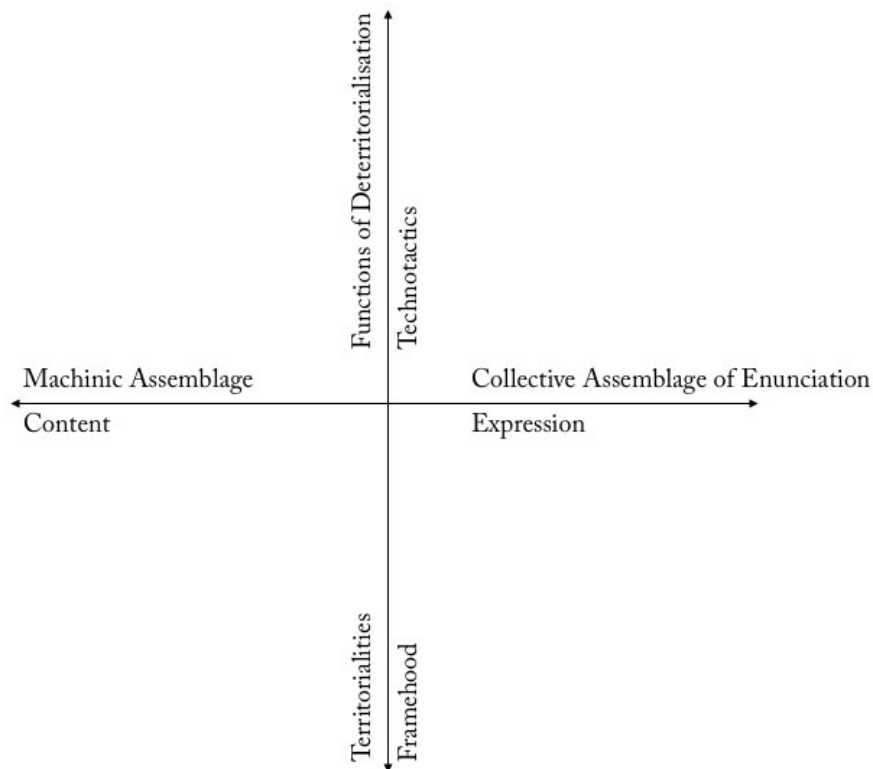


Fig. 3. The tetralogical conception of an assemblage. Drawn according to Deleuze and Guattari’s elaboration in *A Thousand Plateaus* (103-104).

And finally, facing upwards along the vertical axis, the assemblage is set free from all its relations, from both its content and its expression, and from its territoriality. Along this ordinate the assemblage is deterritorialised and changes into a different assemblage, one that can take up different forms, draw from different contents, delineate new territories and be reterritorialised in new terms. This proclivity for deterritorialisation has been conceptualised by Deleuze and Guattari under the guise of various terms, among them: “function”, “diagrammatic movement”, “abstract machine”, “war machine”, “nomadic movement” and more graphically “probe-head”.

It is precisely this tetralogical ordination that guides and informs the hyphen between the two terms of the migrant-image assemblage. However, it is not within the capacity of this text nor is it the intention thereof to engage with *all* these ordinates for the simple reason that it would require a much more advanced interdisciplinary insight and a much more versatile conceptual adaptation. In this text, the tetralogical schema offered by Deleuze and Guattari is narrowed down more specifically according to how I choose to navigate within this assemblage. To this end, the ordinates within this schema have been adapted and readjusted in such a way that it can be

operative in the context of media imagery. Two ordinates have been adapted from and activated in this schema. The first one surveys the changes along the vertical axis towards the bottom side, i.e. territoriality. What is important along this ordinate, is how an image acquires an identity by fixating certain material/corporeal and textual/incorporeal relations. I have provisionally called this adapted ordinate the *framehood* of the image. Borrowing DeLanda's terms, the photo of the Syrian child (fig. 2) is homogenised and "stabilised" along this ordinate. It acquires an identity, in that the image is clearly defined in terms of a certain ideological and humanitarian framework, one that fixates the figure of the dead as an object of lamentation over lost humanity. This will be addressed in more detail in the second chapter through an analysis of a video-image.

The other ordinate that this text focalises and foregrounds lies along the same vertical axis, except towards the top side of the schema, i.e. 'functions of deterritorialisation'. What is important along this axis is the capacities of images to change and transform beyond the stability and fixation of their framehood. To put it in concrete terms, along this direction the question becomes how can we cut through the order of meaning and the framehood of the image? Along this direction, the variations of the migrant-image assemblage give rise to new possibilities of expression, composition and/or visualisation. This should remind us of the ways in which ecological components of Weiwei's image escape the frame and give way to the working of imagination beyond the edges (fig. 1).

It is in line with this navigational choice that I explore the ways in which media imageries affect and are affected by migratory experiences in the context of the twenty-first-century crisis of migration. It is along these ordinates that I enquire about the ways in which images in contemporary mediascape change our perception and conception of migrants and migrancy. The other ordinates will be of course present in my thinking and analysis but are pushed more to the background.

Recalling the cautions proffered by Janz and Bal, it is important to specify even further the use of the concepts borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari. This is a crucial stage in this text since none of the concepts of 'deterritorialisation', 'function', 'abstract machine' and 'diagrammatic' can readily be used for the purpose of this analysis without proper adjustment and "assessment". In most cases, a lack of proper adjustment may result in misunderstanding and concomitantly misusing the concepts.<sup>4</sup>

The next section works through this theoretical re-adjustment by first drawing on the concept of abstract machine as conceptualised and explicated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. It then thinks the concept in relation to visual media as developed and activated by a few selected scholars in the field of art history and media studies. At the end, the term *technotactics* is coined as a theoretical trope that specifies how the concept of abstract machine should be activated within the scope of the migrant-image assemblage. This coinage draws from a

range of interrelated concepts, namely, function, diagrams, abstract machines, media technics and media materiality.

It might be objected that far too many concepts are being used to arrive at a working definition of the term technotactics, specially given the fact that they will not appear that frequently in the proceeding chapters. However, I should argue in favour of this stance. I maintain that in order not to repeat all these complex concepts later on, it is necessary to clearly state the *process* of arriving at the analytic term of technotactics. Departing from the concept of assemblage, it is binding for this text to explicitly mention how the key terms and concepts such as function, diagram, abstract machine, technicity and tactics are understood, and how they ultimately come together under the rubric of technotactics. Only after this conceptual path is made clear, my text can work towards a theoretically clear analysis of the cases. Otherwise, the assemblage theory that this text aspires to make use of, would fall short of its analytic thrust and would turn into a mere ornamental talking trope. As Ian Buchanan attests to in his essay “Assemblage Theory and Its Discontents”,

however useful and analytically revealing assemblage theory can be, in practice its use of the concept of the assemblage is often indistinguishable from that of an adjective, serving more to name than frame a problem. Therefore, rather than opening a problem up it tends to close it down. Instead of a new understanding of the problem, it simply gives us a currently fashionable way of speaking about it. This issue becomes more urgent the more widely assemblage theory is embraced. If everything is or must be an assemblage then the term loses precision, indeed it loses its analytic power altogether. (2015, 391)

It is for this reason, to avoid using the concept of assemblage as merely an adjective or a gingerbread concept, that the proceeding sections follow. More detailed explanation on the use of the concepts of ‘media materiality’ and ‘media technicity’ and ‘technics’ can be found in Appendix I.

## **Technotactics: Abstract Machines in and of Visual Media Imagery**

An abstract machine in itself is not physical or corporeal, any more than it is semiotic; it is *diagrammatic* (it knows nothing of the distinction between the artificial and the natural either). It operates by matter, not by substance; by *function*, not by form" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 163-164).

This short passage contains almost all important theoretical details about abstract machines, namely, their independence from any form of content or of expression, their diagrammatic behaviour and the vitality of function in their operation.

A function, in a mathematical sense of the term, refers to a process whereby given a set of variables, a range of outputs or effects are produced. This definition can be seen from two mathematical points of view, namely, from the point of view of algebra and that of calculus. The former defines functions only in terms of its inputs and outputs and has no regard for the processuality of functions.<sup>5</sup> Calculus, in addition and in contrast to algebra, defines functions in terms of their differentials, that is, their variations. Accordingly, it is not so much the outputs that define a function—the value  $y$  in  $y = f(x)$ , where  $x$  is the given input and  $y$  the produced outputs. Rather, it is the rate of changes of those outputs in relation to the inputs,  $dy/dx$ , that tells us a lot more about a function, i.e. its capacity to make a difference or in mathematical terms, its *differential*. It is in this sense that abstract machines are said to be operable by function. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari push this mathematical definition to an extreme, in the sense that they entirely discard the relevance of any outputs for a the functionality of an abstract machine. With Deleuze and Guattari, abstract machines become pure differentials irrespective of what effects and outputs they produce. It becomes “the aspect or moment at which nothing but functions and matters remain” (1988, 164).

Next, a diagram, for Deleuze and Guattari is defined similar in manner to their redefinition and radicalisation of ‘function’. As Kamini Vellodi surveys in a comparative study of the concept of diagram as used by Deleuze (but not Guattari) and Peirce, a diagram is “the agent of a construction that involves a destruction of existing ‘givens’ and the production of the ‘new’”(2014, 85). They are constructive agents who break entirely free from representation and reproduction. A diagram “does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality” (1988, 164). In this way, Deleuze, as Kamini rightly points out, radicalises the concept of diagram, which he had adapted from Peirce to begin with.

Whilst Peirce’s diagrammatic thought expands thought beyond what is *immediately* self-evident to it by constructing mediated possibilities on the basis of what is *inherently* possible for thought, Deleuze’s diagram is a construction of new possibilities that explode that which inheres in thought, explode thought as a form of inherence, and forces thought on a “line of flight” with the “outside” (the intensive “outside” of pure difference). (Kamini 2014, 86).

So far, functions and diagrams, with a bit of word play: ‘diagrammatic functions’. This is only one aspect of abstract machines. These diagrammatic functions, moreover, draw on material

undercurrents to be operational. They are materially situated although they do not rely on any formalisation thereof. They are coextensive with and immanent to matter in unformed processes of becomings. In short, one aspect of abstract machines has to do with ‘differentials’ while the other draws from and is immanent to intensive and unformed matter.

The main issue remains unresolved, that is, how can the concept of abstract machine be thought of in the field of art and media? This concept has been triggered by many scholars in the field (Zepke 2014; Zepke and O’Sullivan 2010; Barret and Bolt 2013). In spite of some minor differences in definition and adaptation of the concept, abstract machines have been understood mainly in terms of their creative capacities. Art theorist and visual artist Barbara Bolt observes these explosive capacities in painting (Bolt 2010, 3-10). Similarly, Stephen Zepke explores the breadth of this concept in Venetian painting of early Renaissance, in Francis Bacon’s works in conjunction with Deleuze’s *Logic of Sensation* and in Jackson Pollock’s paintings (Zepke 2014, 117-150). Katve-Kaisa Kontturi traces it through the concept of ‘strata’ in relation to two paintings by Susana Nevado (Barrett and Bolt 2013, 17-27). Jondi Keane, similarly, works with the concept of diagram in analysing a diagrammatic rendition of Edgar Alen Poe’s *Eureka* by Madeline Gins and Shusaku Arakawa (Barrett and Bolt 2013, 41-62)

In all these activations within the field of visual media, both aspects of abstract machines are shown to operate within the selected works of art: matter and function. For Bolt it is both about the matter of painting, the very paint and canvas as well as the “performativity of the image” (2010, 1-10), i.e. the function of painting understood in terms of its capacity to change. Both the corporeality and incorporeality of painting become vital for what a painted image can do to the viewer. For Kontturi it is through the deliberate choices of the artist with respect to her materials that brings forth that capacity of eruption and explosion. For Keane, again, the operation of abstract machine can be observed in both the materiality of the screen upon which the poem is written and the functionality of the arrows that the Gins and Arakawa tactically draw from one bulk of words to another (Barrett and Bolt 2013, 54).

More specifically, Zepke’s comments on the simultaneity of corporeality and incorporeality in Pollock’s paintings opens up the concept of abstract machine to visual media, and vice versa. He states that the “materialism of Pollock’s paintings is not ... simply defined by their materiality, but by their material vitalism, by the expression of the abstract and inorganic forces from which they are constructed” (2014, 149). He emphatically points out that “it is this vital element that turns the celebrated thickness of Pollock’s paintings haptic, a transformation that has as its condition our implication in the paintings’ abstract machine, our part in its ongoing process” (2014, 149). Zepke is particularly interested in painting but his arguments can be very well extended onto other forms and configurations of visual media. Accordingly, we can very well think of the same “material vitalism” in other media forms insofar as the agency of matter be

understood as not just the *materiality* of a certain medium but also, and more crucially, its *technicity*,<sup>6</sup> which Zepke dubs as the “abstract and inorganic forces” that contribute to the construction of the media images.

Technotactics refer to diagrammatic operations within the technical and aesthetic domain of media production that are capable of changing an assemblage by pushing it to its material, structural and functional limit. They underscore the capacity to intervene into the technical domain by means of certain tactics. The term tactic is chosen to pronounce the nature of the choices made within a technical domain as situated in and immanent to the material backdrop of the field. Tactics are choices one makes *within* a given field, as opposed to strategies, which are choices that are made from *without*, imposed and enforced on it from a point of view external and transcendental to the field.<sup>7</sup> Tactics, in this sense, refer to what Mieke Bal dubs as “operational moves” within the technical and material domain of art and media. These moves are characteristically incorporeal, evanescent and as such ‘invisible’ although they feed on the material and the technical domain and ultimately make certain forces or activities ‘visible’:

art opens up the possible visibility of situations, issues, events, and people and leaves it to its viewers or readers to enact that visibility; to answer its call by seeing. Art is neither didactic nor apodictic but only proposes possibilities. In other words, art proposes, the audience disposes. Thus, art exercises its agency on a level that is itself invisible. (2011, 14)

This comes close to Zepke’s formulation of “abstract and inorganic forces” that, as he implies, reverberate throughout works of art. These are operations that are themselves invisible and incorporeal, yet can never do what they do without resorting to the material and the technical domain. They are themselves invisible but ultimately make visible that which eludes our habituated perception. Given this take on the (in)visible operability of art, the term tactic is adapted and conjoined with ‘technics’ to convey this intertwinement on the level of both viewing and making images.

*In sum, media technotactics refer to choices that viewers, artists and designers make in relation to certain technical and aesthetic domains, which include, but are not limited to, technical objects—such as an image or a camera lens—technical literacies and technical capacities.*

The term technotactics will be used throughout the rest of this thesis in order to clearly specify how media imagery operates in the European migrant crisis. However, this term is still lacking a major conceptual component, namely, the ‘migrant’. So far, the term technotactics have been developed in relation to media materiality and technicity. There remains the other vital component of the assemblage, namely, the migrant. How should the term of migrancy be

understood as part and parcel of this assemblage? The next section prepares a conceptualisation of this element so as to make possible the analyses in the proceeding chapters.

## **Migrancy: the Locus of the Expelled**

In this text, the term migrancy is used in a strictly technical sense of the word inasmuch as it derives from an ‘intensive’ type of movement. To be able to understand migration within an assemblage, one has to first cast aside the formulation of migrants’ movement in terms of simple transportation or translation from one point to another, and opt for a more process-sensitive understanding. Assemblages are fundamentally process-based. Their machinic aspect does not stand for a mere *arrangement* of objects but of processes and relations that also *dispose* those objects towards certain expressions.<sup>8</sup> Hence, a point-based formulation of movement would eventually fail to explain migrants’ experience within an assemblage. In the light of this understanding, the present text defines migration primarily in terms of an intensive movement.

Thomas Nail, in his book *The Figure of the Migrant*, following on Henri Bergson, defines the intensive movement of migrants as “not simply from A to B but” as “the constitutive condition for the qualitative transformation of society as a whole” (2015, 13). In this sense, movement is understood more as transformation and less in terms of transportation or translation from one state to another. It is a qualitative rather than a quantitative event. Moreover, it is defined against the backdrop of ‘society’, which should be in turn understood as a web of relations and processes. This understanding of movement has an immediate effect on Neil’s conceptualisation of the migrant, which this thesis also adheres to. According to this conception, the migrant is a figuration rather than a particular political or cultural identity. While the latter is defined by its extensive coordination in a certain politico-cultural time-space, the former is described in terms of indivisible and intensive qualities.

Migratory figures, thus conceptualised, should be taken as ‘positions’ or ‘loci’<sup>9</sup> in an intensively arranged assemblage, instead of points, identities or objects in a coordinated time-space. In this sense, as Neil asserts, a migratory position could virtually give rise to various types of migrants such as the ‘nomad’<sup>10</sup>, the ‘barbarian’ and the ‘vagabond’, which are defined in terms of their specific movements that are potentiated by certain positional and figurational conditions. This amounts to a concern for what he terms “kinepolitics”, which takes as its subject matter “regimes of motion” instead of static points or states (Nail 2015, 21). The kinepolitics that this thesis draws from, narrows down its focus on those movements that can be characterised as a traumatic expulsion from one’s habitat. In this light, the migratory locus that this text focalises is the ‘figure of the expelled’. It can be a war refugee, an activist in exile, or even an economic migrant who could no longer survive in the economic territory of his/her own habitat. The so-

called migrant crisis, in the light of this conceptual choice, is taken here as the crisis of the expelled, the crisis of the traumatically and forcibly displaced.

This is in no way a generalising or homogenising gesture. There are certainly irreducible identitarian complexities in today's migrant crisis. An Iranian writer who is in exile in Amsterdam is of course radically different from a Syrian shoemaker waiting for his residence status to be affirmed in Utrecht. This sociopolitical complexity and heterogeneity can never be flattened. However, they are simply not the point of interest for this thesis. This text aspires to focalise the condition of becoming a certain type of people instead of the condition of having a certain type of personality; a bare condition that defines a particular experience instead of the actual people who would undertake that experience, or in more concrete terms, the condition of being expelled instead of the actual expelled. In this lens, this thesis takes the first component of 'migration crisis' as this figurational and positional locus and the second part as primarily a crisis of that figuration, irrespective of the specific instances that might derive from it. This choice allows my thinking to circumvent the all-too-restraining issue of political correctness without risking oversimplification. From this point of view, we can still think about migration in concrete terms without specifying the national or cultural identities of migrants.<sup>11</sup>

In the light of all these conceptual lenses, the figure of the Syrian child (fig. 1), to put my example in perspective, cannot and should not be reduced to any of the individual components of migrant-image assemblage. It is as much connected to media and transportation technologies as to migratory figurations and the crisis therein. It is as much embedded in the machinic of media and migration as in the expressivity of media images.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage has been adapted and readjusted as the migrant-image assemblage. Four ordinates of this assemblage have been recognised and described. It was stated that the vertical ordinate will be foregrounded in this thesis. The term technotactics was then coined as an adaptation and readjustment of the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of diagram, function and abstract machine within the field of media and art theory. The tetralogical ordination of migrant-image assemblage was further elaborated by adapting and modifying the concept of the 'migrant' drawing from Thomas Neil's political philosophy. The locus of the migrant has been specified as that of the expelled, that is, the one who is made to flee his/her habitat by force. In this way, a theoretical and conceptual playing field has been set up for the proceeding chapters. The analyses that follow, make extensive use of the concepts that were developed in this chapter, especially technotactics and migrant-image assemblage.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Manuel DeLanda explains, properties such as length and area are extensive by virtue of being divisible quantities. Those that cannot be divided, like temperature and pressure, are intensive properties (DeLanda 2013, 26).

<sup>2</sup> In a collection of essays edited by Russel King and Nancy Wood titled *Media and Migration* (2013), this theme is studied with respect to some contemporary cases of migration. This collection studies how migrants choices are affected by Western media and how they develop high expectations through encounters with various Western media images such as satellite TV programmes and films.

<sup>3</sup> The term assemblage is the English translation of the French word *agencement*, which should bring to mind a sense of 'arrangement' and 'disposition' (*Larousse Dictionnaires Français*).

<sup>4</sup> A function, for instance, could be confused with a deliberate and purposeful act that necessarily results in a concrete outcome. A machinic arrangement might be confused with a mechanism or a mechanical device. A diagram might be confused with the visual arrangement of geometric elements and the chain of mis-conception or rather ill-defined concepts could interminably go on. It is therefore necessary to carefully define them as they operate within a given field.

<sup>5</sup> This is also the sense computer science, as a theoretical discipline in academia, defines functions (Davis et al. 1994, 17-32).

<sup>6</sup> On the explanation of the use of the term technicity see Appendix I.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction I make between tactics and strategies comes very close to Michel De Certeau's distinction between 'strategy' and 'tactic' as explicated in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). He understands 'strategy' as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment'" (xix). On the other hand, a tactic for De Certeau does not rely on such abstractions. It "insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (xix).

<sup>8</sup> This process-based understanding comes close to Deleuze's concept 'objectile', which as Mark B. Hansen explicates, amounts to a reconceptualisation of the very notion of 'object' as that which

enters into a much more intimate contact with the flux of matter that it "objectifies": rather than capturing matter in a static form, as a "spatial mold" that temporarily transcends or suspends the temporal flux, the object becomes a process that continuously indexes the material flux and, in so doing, offers a perspective on variation. (2015, 35)

<sup>9</sup> Drawing from geometry, a locus is defined here as a set of locational or positional conditions. For example, for a circle in the Euclidean space, it is defined as the condition of having the same distance from one point. It is important to notice that loci are not a set of actual points, but of conditions that potentiate a specific shape, line, curve, or surface. (Bourbaki 1998, 26).

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that Neil's conception of nomad is slightly different from Deleuzoguattarian formulation. For the latter, migrants and nomads are inherently different on the basis of their respective orientation against the State (1988, 260). This distinction should not pose any problem within the scope of this thesis since the concept of nomad will not be used in this text.

<sup>11</sup> This does not mean that I do away with describing the context in which migration crisis takes place and from which it emerges. This becomes clear in the third chapter, where the Lebanese civil war will be described as the context in which Mroué's art takes shape. The point is to avoid focusing on individualistic and identity-wise description and instead strive for a more panoramic view of the phenomenon.

# **Chapter II:**

## **An Underwater Graveyard: the Deterritorialisation of the Dead and the Becoming-Lens**

## In Context

This chapter focalises, as its theoretical object, an embedded video in one of the featured stories of Reuters' *Migration Machine* webpage. The story is titled "Gamble in the Mediterranean". The video had been captured by the Italian State investigation team before it was provided to the Reuters through certain juridical procedures. It is recorded in the context of migrant shipwreck near the Italian Lampedusa Island, in which more than two hundred migrants died in October 2013. I will first give a general description of this video in close connection to its material and textual undercurrents. Second, I will analyse the framing operations and organisations of meanings in this video. Then I will read the video from a technotactical point of view, exploring the ways this video can function against or in spite of the framing operations. Finally, I will conclude by a comparative analysis of the case with a similar but much older example.

The embedded video clip shows several cut-scenes from a video footage taken by one of the divers of the rescue team. First it shows a long shot of the ship lying on the seabed. Then it cuts to a few closer shots of the deck and the side manifolds of the ship, where we can see a couple of bodies stuck in and curled around hatches and metal rods. This takes only twenty seconds of the two-minute-and-31-second video clip. Consecutively, a few more cut-scenes follow showing a long shot of a crane unloading two wooden coffins on the deck of a massive state-owned ship, its name visible in the image, *Nave Tremiti*. We can see two men, moderately geared-up in protective equipment, receiving the coffins. This cuts to the next scene in which a woman wearing a pair of jeans, a red shirt and a half-wrapped hijab is shown lying prostrate on one of the two coffins, crying. This is the last footage, almost half a minute into the whole clip. In addition, during this thirty seconds, on the foreground of the video footages, the following account appears on the screen sentence by sentence.

On Oct. 3, 2013, a boat carrying nearly 500 refugees sank near Lampedusa, Italy, killing 366 on board.

This audio is extracted from a 30-minute phone call intercepted by Italian prosecutors nearly a month later.

Speaking are two alleged smugglers accused by Italian authorities of organising the journey.

The men are discussing the disaster. Both are wanted by Italian police. ("Gamble in the Mediterranean.")

And when this ends along with the sobbing-woman scene, we hear the two smugglers talking in Arabic while we read them in English against the black screen. The name of one smuggler, John Mahrays, is titled on the top left and appears along with the first voice. That of the second, Ermias Chermay, appears a few seconds later on the top right corner. They are talking about the

shipwreck and are both worried about the consequences of having had not provided the migrants with life jackets. We can even hear Ermias use the word ‘regret’ in his conversation with John Mahray.



Fig. 4. A snapshot from the first few seconds of the video. Source: Reuters.

Both smugglers are said to be based in Libya. This geographical location proved to be crucial to the shipwreck and, and in extension, to Europe’s migrant crisis. According to a hyperlinked report to the one in which this video was embedded, titled “The Land of Opportunity”, Libya is represented as the haven for a variety of smugglers, kidnappers, Islamic State militants and many other types of outlaws who have been thriving in this region after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi and the concomitant break-down of the state. This narrative is articulated by means of a chronological interactive timeline which accentuates one or two important event(s) in a month. Through this narrative framework, Libya is shown as a geo-tactical place for migrants, human trafficking networks, Islamic State radicals and any other groups who would venture to take advantage of the lack of any central power. According to certain organisationally-retrieved information, the report claims that in the wake of Gaddafi’s fall, Libya began to sink into anarchy. Accordingly, the sack of Gaddafi’s regime, far from proffering liberty and economic prosperity, heralded a series of opportunities for a very wide range of groups, the most prominent effect of which would be, of course, Europe’s migrant crisis. Put differently, the report traces the effect of migrant crisis as directly linked to the underlying material, logistical and strategical relations capacitated by the sack of Gaddafi’s regime. A hyperlinked report to this timeline reads:

Weak border controls and a small army lacking training and equipment have turned Libya into a weapons smuggling route for al Qaeda in sub-Saharan countries and a transit route for Islamist fighters heading to Syria's civil war.

People traffickers also use the remote desert borders with Egypt, Sudan, Niger and Chad to smuggle refugees into Libya from where many try to reach Europe by boat. ("Land of Opportunities")

And immediately following after this item in the interactive timeline, a quote by a "people-smuggler" named Tuareq reads, "you can do what you want. Smugglers, drug dealers, Al Qaeda, anyone who wants can come. There is no police". These items are followed by photos showing Italian coast guards patrolling the sea, occasionally rescuing a boat or two. At other times it goes into the details of migrants' condition on the boat upon their arrival at the Italian ports. In short, the lack of proper equipment and life jackets, the rescue operations and the vices of the smugglers are the prominent issues addressed in this report.

The report lays out a multilayered description of how migrant crisis is materially situated. It takes into account the situated-ness of the crisis in an actual and real geographical area and the material/logistical embedded-ness of their journey across the Mediterranean sea. This is the report's technotactical sensibility, which will be detailed later on. In addition to this, the report performs a great deal of ordering and organising in both its textual and material fabric. How does this framing work? How can its process of meaning making be described and analysed?

In the video, certain narratives and meanings are being generated for the viewer. The caption specifies the context of the image—the migrant crisis, Libya, Lampedusa etc. The information given in the video foregrounds the smugglers' conversation—an element which is not necessarily significant only on the basis of the smugglers' logistical role in the shipwreck scenario. Through a set of cut scenes, it frames certain contrastive figures: the figure of the *liable* smugglers and that of the *responsible* authorities. Moreover, the first scene, which shows a long shot of the ship with yet no dead body in sight, subtitles in large font "Warning: Graphic Content", and only then does it cut to a dead body hanging over a ladder. It is in this sense that the report operates according to the logic of framing. How are these processes of putting in perspective and acts of framing operate? How can their capacity to shape and change our perception and conception of migrant crisis be explained in terms of both the textual fabric and the material undercurrent of images? In short, how can the performativity of these images, to draw on the theoretical backdrop of this thesis, be explained as part of the migrant-image assemblage? In the next section I will unpack further the interplay between the acts and processes of framing and putting in perspective in the imagery of Reuters' video clip in order shed light on these questions.

## The Pictoriality of the Video

W.J.T Mitchell in his seminal essay *What is an Image?* makes a crucial distinction between pictures and images. He prefers to associate images as “likeness” rather than as pictorial representation. By tracing the etymology of the word ‘image’ and by referencing to the use and mutation of the word, he suggests using the word ‘image’ in a strictly “non- or even antipictorial notion” (1984, 521). Elsewhere, in his book *Picture Theory* (1995, 4), he touches upon this distinction again associating the word image with the uncertain, multichannel, ‘automatic’, and undecidable process of *imagination*.<sup>1</sup> Distinguished from images and imagery, he defines pictoriality as a ‘deliberate act of representation’, which seeks to determine, pin down, order and *frame* the working of imagination. Mitchell goes even further than just recognising this distinction using the phrase “the tyranny of the picture” (1984, 524) to point out to the specific ways pictures operate within our realm of image. It is interesting to notice that Mitchell points out to the fact that this tyranny has as its origin the invention of ‘artificial perspective’. In this way perspective is used by Mitchell as a trope that sought to order human visual and perceptual capacity. In the next section, drawing on Andre Bazin and Ron Burnett, I will argue how perspective can capacitate human perception to break through this ordering machine of pictoriality. In this section, the pictoriality of the Reuters’ video clip is under scrutiny.

Drawing extensively on Wittgenstein’s philosophy, Mitchell argues that pictures cannot illustrate reality in its entirety, i.e. cannot ‘depict’, “just as a sentence cannot describe its own logical form but can only employ it to describe something else” (1984, 526). Pictures, in this sense function as an act of display, that is to say, a formal arrangement that bounds the image to certain organising principles. Through the implementation of these principles, frames limit the processes of visualisation, perception and imagination within the act of viewing.

We can recognise these organising principles in Reuters’ highly stylised video clip. The very first scene with the warning label already signals a great deal of coding. An experienced viewer could easily guess that what is about to come will probably contain imageries of unrestrained and life-threatening violence, or of actual and real dead bodies. Considering all the pretext that the viewer might have seen or read elsewhere, this simple label could very well anticipate a large portion of the ‘likeness’ of Lampedusa shipwreck, with only a long shot and a three-word subtitle.

Furthermore, it carries out its framing techniques by means of the enforced narrative—a ship capsized; see the dead bodies; see the coffins landing on a shipwreck while two men are carefully and respectfully guide it down; see the woman sobbing; and finally hear the smugglers’ voice summoned up in a quasi-judicial scenario convincing the virtual jury that they truly regret having not given migrants lifejackets.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to notice that the video comprises of several disparate video-images put together. The first portion of this clip is particularly curious. This footage, as was touched upon

earlier, is an official product made not by photo journalists but by a State-controlled investigation team. It was then handed out to the Reuters' for the first time. But before it gets the chance to freely roam around the various territories of our mediascape, this footage undergoes a series of adjustments and modifications by Reuters' editors to such an extent that it might appear quite alien to its original ontological status as a video-graphed image. The editors mutilated the images into a succession of cut-scenes only remotely associated with certain peripheral and contextual information—the men receiving the coffins and the woman mourning over one of them. The editing, moreover, superimposed an audio recording of the smugglers' conversation along with its transcription on the screen. Reuters' journalism, in this way, transformed this image and made it appear as a sternly contrived picture.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the raw video footage of the dead bodies under the sea could not function appropriately within the restraints, standards and expectations of a news agency. Perhaps it was decided in Reuters' editorial team that to upload the full-length video footage provided by the state investigation team would possibly disturb the viewer. Or perhaps, from the very beginning, the state provided precisely this cut-scene video and Reuters' had never had access to the original one. In any case, there must have been certain restraints, either on Reuters' or the State's part, to transfigure, contract and fragment the video. According to this logic, only a few short scenes, less than 20 seconds, suffice to convey the message. The next two minutes of the video shows us the transcribed text of the smugglers' conversation in white font on a black background.

It may appear that two separate logics are at work in this video imagery. On one hand, we see the video footage of the dead sunken ship, captured by a video recorder. On the other hand, we read and hear the superimposed audio. One proffers a linguistic logic while the other portends a visual one. On the relation between words and images, Mitchell writes

Why do we have this compulsion to conceive of the relation between words and images in political terms, as a struggle for territory, a contest of rival ideologies? Because the relationship between words and images reflects, within the realm of representation, signification, and communication, the relations between symbols and the world, signs and their meanings. We imagine the gulf between words and images to be as wide as the one between words and things, between (in the largest sense) culture and nature. The image is a sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as ... natural immediacy and presence. (1984, 529)

In this rather long quote Mitchell suggests that the two linguistic and visual significations should be read in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, one another. In other words, the visual layer of the image is loaded with as many signifying processes as is the linguistic one. They are

fundamentally and ontogenetically woven together. It is perhaps in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari find it

difficult to analyse semiotic systems in themselves: there is always a form of content that is simultaneously inseparable from and independent of the form of expression, and the two forms pertain to assemblages that are not principally linguistic. (1988, 129)

According to this formulation, in the analysis of this video clip, we should opt for a semiotics that considers the operation of a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic signs. We need to think of ways that take into account the forms of *both* content and expression. According to fig. 3 shown in the first chapter, we need to consider both the right and the left side of the horizontal axis at the same time: the machinic assemblage of bodies in affective relations to one another, which would amount to different forms of content; and the collective assemblage of enunciation, or the incorporeal and textual 'surface effect' of the assemblage, which would amount to various forms of expression. Only then can we speak of a signifying regime for the images under scrutiny.

## **The Order of Meaning**

Following on Deleuzoguattarian versatile semiotics, this analysis starts by distinguishing a set of signs in Reuters' video. The signs are chosen from the point of view of both content and expression, both text and matter have been accounted for. In this experimental semiotic analysis, the signs will not be treated as constituting a bilateral reciprocity between a signifier and signified, as Ferdinand de Saussure would have it. Instead, each sign is selected and understood as being materially and textually interlinked and embedded within their environment. This aspires to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics in that the sign is not only syntactically and structurally arranged but also 'pragmatically' implanted in a given context (T.L. Short 2004, 228). A decent semiotic analysis is, however, beyond the purview of this thesis since it would require a thorough implementation of Peirce's architectonic semiotics. The analysis that I undertake here is much more modest in approach. I intend to show how the signs are both materially and textually related to one another. I will then continue with distinguishing certain patterns within these relations. The aim of the analysis that follows is not to lay out all the semiotic complexities in the video but to recognise the operation of the signifying regime and distinguishing certain patterns within it.

I will list these chosen signs and then elaborate the ways in which these signs cooperate in the migrant-image assemblage. It should be noted that this list is by no means comprehensive. It is only a selection of an infinite set of signs within this assemblage, only those that can help us understand better the framing procedures.



- The Italian prosecutors: this sign is present in every single scene of the video, permanently shown on the top right corner of the screen, and often mentioned in the scripts. This sign functions as one of the major gravity points. The Italian navy, called *Nave Tremiti*, and the European design of the coffins are similar instances of this sign.
- The capsized ship: the ship under the sea is shown in the first few scenes. As a sign embedded materially and pragmatically, the ship relates to migrants' crossing of the Mediterranean sea, to the political and governmental instability in Libya and to Europe's migrant crisis, just to name a few prominent contextual elements. At the same time, the sign as a syntactic element relates to other formal elements of the video imagery, that is, to the dead bodies, the coffins and the sobbing woman.
- Dead bodies: migrants' dead bodies lying on the sea floor, sticking out from the wrecked ship and surrounded by fish can also be taken from both material and textual point of view. Syntactically, they relate to the smugglers' conversation, to the crying woman and to *Nave Tremiti* according to the internal logic of the video-montage. At the same time, they relate to the materiality of the context in the same way as the capsized ship does.
- The smugglers: from a material point of view, they are only indirectly related to the capsized boat—being among the many causes of this incident. From a textual point of view, they are almost literally framed as the convicts, syntactically tagged in the video through the explicit use of linguistic signs on the screen.

All these signs constantly refer to one another. They exercise their meanings by means of this perpetual referral to each other. This procedure can be called inter-referentiality: the smugglers can only signify in relation to the capsized ship. The capsized ship, in turn, can only be meaningful in relation to the migrants' dead bodies and the interlinkage between these signs can go on ad infinitum. The effect of this inter-referential relation is the conception of a very specific signifying regime of signs, one that abstracts off a set of organising principles and provides a framehood for the image-signs. The infinite referrals and deferrals, furthermore, do not happen haphazardly. There must be certain regulating forces and gravitational fields that sustain these exercises. This is ensured by the frequency of certain keywords both in the text of the whole report and within the very video clip. The word 'Europe', for instance, is used 20 times in the report referring synecdochically to European state apparatus—not to the geographical land called Europe. The report, moreover, contains 16 different phrases to refer to the Italian State: "Italian authorities", "Italian politicians", "Italian prosecutor", "Italian navy", and so on. In addition, in case one misses this frequency, the use of the phrases "Italian prosecutors", "Italian authorities" and "Italian police", within the very beginning of the video, reminds us of the presence of these

crucial forces. This sign reverberates throughout other scenes as well. More subtly in the scene where two coffins are landing on the deck, we can recognise the Western design of the coffins, which suggests that a Western state is lurking somewhere through the image. It is due to the forces within this gravitational field that the video is labeled with the warning tag, “Graphic Content”, and the smugglers’ name tags later on. The inter-referential operation within this gravitational field of signification, in this way, induces a certain way of perception, one that gives rise to a conception of the migrant vis-à-vis the State power-figure.

This figure, as such, cannot be readily localised or even embodied in any of the actual signs mentioned. The Italian navy, qua a sign within the image, does not embody the State power figure. Instead, it refers to and gravitates toward it. The power figure coexists with the signs as the limit of their signification. It is not simply the Italian state or the Italian prosecutors per se. It is the idea of the State, invisible and locally dispersed yet operative within every sign. In short, it is a powerful gravitational field that draws, to some extent, the referrals and deferrals of all signs toward a limit. The effect of this attraction is the semblance of a centre. This is Deleuze and Guattari’s spiral schema of signifying regimes (1988, 157). According to this schema, “there is not much to say about the centre of ‘signifiante’<sup>4</sup>, or the Signifier in person, because it is a pure abstraction no less than a pure principle; in other words, it is nothing. Lack or excess, it hardly matters” (1988, 133). As Deleuze and Guattari expound, there is, first and foremost, a centre that regulates the inter-reference of signs. This referring of signs to one another is, furthermore, abiding, that is, it never ends at any particular sign. Moreover, The spiral figuration of this signifying procedure suggests that the centre remains elusive and can never be concretely grasped (see Appendix II).

This gravitational force, however, does not function alone in the video clip. There are certain signifying processes that cannot be easily subsumed under and dissolve into this gravitational force; for instance, the smugglers. While it takes only 30 seconds to subsume the migrants’ dead bodies and the ship under the sway of the State, it demands two full minutes to attend to the smugglers’ situation within this system. Immediately after the video footages end, the background goes black and the verbal information begin to appear on the screen while we hear the conversation between the two smugglers. What happens in this part of the video is a radical shift in the dominant signifying regime. The signifying regime operative in the first part of the video can be schematically displayed by Deleuze and Guattari’s spiral diagram. The second part of the video, however, does not conform to the inter-referentiality of the scheme. There is no longer any mention of the signs like ‘navy’, ‘police’ or the any material realisation of the state. It seems that the video requires an additional operation within its signifying regime to attend to the smugglers’ undetermined situation. Theirs is the only sign in this entire system that presents a challenge for the state signifying regime.

In a sense, as was suggested earlier, this is *the* raison d'être of Reuters' *Migration Machine*, that is, to reveal the operation of these unknown aberrant agents. The problem with these agents is their different orientation against the states. Both the smugglers and migrants break European laws. However, the former has no regard for protection and citizenship. That is why it is necessary to devise a different strategy to account for these elusive targets: scapegoating. This comes very close to how Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise the scapegoat:

In a signifying regime, the scapegoat represents a new form of increasing entropy in the system of signs: it is charged with everything that was "bad" in a given period, that is, everything that resisted signifying signs, everything that eluded the referral from sign to sign through the different circles; it also assumes everything that was unable to recharge the signifier at its centre and carries off everything that spills beyond the outermost circle. (1988, 135)

It is precisely in line with this strategy that the video takes two minutes to convince the viewer that the culprits have indeed been held accountable. A neat and minimal court is set up for them with a virtual jury. Each is given a chance to speak their concerns, while the Italian police is still searching for them in actuality. In sum, there are two modes of framing at work in this video. One sustains the inter-referential relation of signs with respect to the gravity field of the State. The second one operates by reaching out for those signs that do not fall under the reign of that gravity. Both of them ensure the stability and supremacy of the 'despotic' signifying regime.

### **The Becoming-Lens of the Video-Image**

Andre Bazin in his seminal essay *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* traces the realist turn in the plastic arts around the "decisive moment" of the discovery of perspective. This was the moment, according to Bazin, when the old regime of visual representation began to digress from its concern with 'spiritual expression' and became 'psychologically' inclined to imitate the three-dimensionality of reality as it is optically perceived through the eye (1960, 6). This should be understood as a technical metamorphosis in the histories of plastic arts, which according to Bazin includes not only painting but also cinema and photography. In other words, Bazin understands perspective as a technique. As such, this technique underwent a transformation from the medium of painting to that of photography. In the course of this transformation, the threshold of that psychological tendency to reduplicate reality as exactly perceived through the eye was surpassed. In this light, owing to the technological capacity that photography ushered in, human's ability to mimic the three-dimensionality of reality changed radically. From painting to photography,

certain technicalities evolved, as the result of which the relationship between perspective and all the visual media changed irreparably.

In achieving the aims of baroque art, photography has freed the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness. Painting was forced, as it turned out, to offer us illusion and this illusion was reckoned sufficient unto art. Photography and the cinema on the other hand are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism. (Bazin 1960, 7)

Bazin implies that perspective as a technique of visual manipulation and production, had a certain technical limitation. It was always bound to a certain techno-human physical restriction—the painting tools, the hand and the eye. It was, moreover, limited to human ‘subjectivity’—to his/her psyche and aesthetic values (1960, 7). The development of perspective qua a technique, as Bazin implies, is made possible due to the intervention of a new agent into this techno-human arrangement: the lens-based technology. It is due to the radically different objectivity<sup>5</sup> of the lens, as distinct from that of human eye-hand, that photography extricated human visual and representational techniques from their centuries-old “obsession with realism”.

There will remain of course a lot more to say about the ways in which photography and painting have been changing one another since the discovery of perspective and the invention of the camera obscura. But within the theoretical extent of this text, it suffices to bear in mind the fundamental role of the lens. This is also attested to by the early twentieth-century American photographer Edward Henry Weston in his essay *Photography—not Pictorial*:

So the camera for me is best in close up, taking advantage of this lens power: recording with its one searching eye the very quintessence of the thing itself rather than a mood of that thing—for instance, the object transformed for the moment by charming, unusual, even theatrical, but always transitory light effects. Instead, the physical quality of things can be rendered with utmost exactness: stone is hard, bark is rough, flesh is alive, or they can be made harder, rougher, or more alive if desired. In a word, let us have photographic beauty! (1930, 314).

This lens-based aesthetics, furthermore, should be understood and actuated as a techno-human composite. Given the inherent co-relation between humans and their technics (see appendix I), we can infer that what has come to be called ‘artificial perspective’ does not necessarily yield a stupefying effect on humans. It does not occlude the latter’s creativity but pushes it toward certain techno-human limits, makes it pass through a certain technological threshold and transforms it

in co-relation to its environment. In this sense, perspectivity is no longer bound to a frigid technical definition. It is not merely a technical *mechanism*. It is perhaps better formulated as a ‘technogenetic’ becoming-lens, a becoming that runs its course irrespective, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, of the content and expression proper to an assemblage, even though it always draws from and runs through them. It is a becoming that functions in cinema and photography as well as in painting and theatre. It is not only a set of technical pieces and techniques. It also includes certain tactics in activating and assembling them. Lens-based perspectivity is not only technical but also tactical: techno-tactical.

This understanding has a very important consequence for the working of signifying regimes, and in extension for the operations of framing. As Weston remarked in his celebratory tone about the power of photography as primarily a lens-based piece of technology, the lens renders the “quintessence of the thing” visible, as distinct from “a mood of that thing”. This does not mean that it simulates, mimics or reduplicates ‘a thing’. Quintessence is not the essence of a thing, if it ever had one. Neither is it the appearance or the semblance of that thing. It is the *aether* that the Greek gods breath, the fifth element that was considered in Greek mythology as the void-medium through which light could pass (Morford and Lenardon 1999). It is in this sense that Bazin considers a certain “objective character” for photography, that is, objective to light.

### **The Technotactics of the Lens in Migrant-Image Assemblage**

Attending to the theoretical object again, the question is now how does the lens of the underwater video recorder function in the migrant-image assemblage? (How) could the images be approached in terms of processes of *setting in perspective* rather than *acts of framing*?

In order to bring the processes of putting in perspective to the fore, we need to abjure the realm of framehood. This should leave us with the bare minimum of the video-imagery, i.e. the becoming-lens of the diver shooting the dead bodies. This theoretical exercise is indeed possible within the confines of the video-image thanks to the very first six seconds of the video, in which the framing acts are yet to come and order the image. During these few seconds, we see the capsized ship while we can clearly hear the diver breathing behind his camera. It is this breathing lens that we should follow within the entire duration of the images, shutting down everything else that we see or hear from the video-picture.<sup>6</sup>

This viewing transforms the image into an extraordinary perspectival arrangement. Along with this human-lens hybrid, we see a few bodies protruding from the ship and a few more lying on the seabed. This bare minimum is indeed far from the ordinary and more familiar images that populate the mediascape at large. From the point of view of a viewer who is fairly accustomed to news-journal imageries, the images of these dead bodies might strike him/her as being quite odd. These imageries are not frequent in news-journal mediascape and are, most often than not,

peripheral to the main archive of journalistic photography. But one may ask how are photos chosen and how do they circulate within journalistic mediascape?

Zeynep Devrim Gürsel in her book *Image Brokers: Visualising World News in the Age of Digital Circulation* answers to this question. In one part of her empirical research, she recounts her observation of Global Views Inc. (GVI), one of the most widely known and the largest photo providers worldwide, during its operation in covering the Iraq war (2016, 81). In her close contact with GVI working environment, she describes in detail the ways in which this agency collects and archives news images. According to Gürsel, one of the main factors that determines what should be photographed for a news journal is the re-usability of the photos in the future. In other words, it is important for both the photographers and the news agency to be able to re-sell their photos in the future (2016, 81). This imparts a necessity for them to “anticipate” the effect of a photo in the future, “capturing the futurepast: anticipating which images might be asked for tomorrow to ensure that they are taken today” (2016, 82). This strategical concern amounts to the rise of a certain paradigm in photojournalism conceptualised and termed by Paul Frosh in his book *Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry*, as “stock photography”. According to him,

stock photography represents an exemplary standardization and systematization of photographic practices on quasi-industrial lines, and a consequent abstraction of photographic images as exchangeable signs and cultural commodities. (2003, 7)

This ensures, and also explains why, journalistic photos follow a certain ready-made templates and deal with much-too-predictable themes.

Having this conception in mind, the video-image taken from the dead bodies of migrant, if taken away and seen beyond its frame-hood, presents very different imagery from the ones that the ‘standards’ and ‘systems’ of stock photography demand. In short, the bare images of the dead bodies cannot sell according to the logic of the news-image market. It cannot fit into the archive of re-usable photos. This can be empirically validated by observing the fact that the majority of news-images refrain from showing actual dead bodies in their photos.

It is in this way that the video footages of the victims of Lampedusa tragedy function perspectively in that they bring into focus, through the operation of the lens, a view that is out of the ordinary from the beginning. It allows the viewer to see, through the becoming-lens of the image, a scene that could not be perceived with the naked eye, nor could it be perceived within any of the existing contemporary mass media imagescape. The lens intervenes, not only in the actual environment in which the ship was capsized but also and more importantly, in the standardised and systematised order of journalistic photography. It ruptures the prepared and

formalised templates and cuts through the commodified photographic practices of news agencies. It is in this way that the becoming-lens of the video-image breaks free from the signifying regime of framing and opens up a perspective within the image. We have here a becoming-lens of the diver, that of the video-image and ultimately of the viewer.

These becomings, it should be noted and emphasised, have no necessary ontological connection to the digital media. The digital media is only active in the process of circulation and dissemination of the photos across various outlets targeting the complex and wide range of digitally situated consumers and viewers. A very similar example taken from pre-digital photography can make this argument clearer.

### **The Becoming-lens of the Sonderkommandos<sup>7</sup>**

The technotactics of the lens-based technologies is perhaps best exemplified in the Sonderkommando's daring photography in Auschwitz, theoretically and acutely recounted by the contemporary French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman in his book *Images in Spite of All: Four Images from Hell* (2008). These photos have certain affinity with the Reuters' video clip, which will become clearer later on in this chapter.

According to Didi-Huberman, a group of camp prisoners known as Sonderkommandos, took four photos from Auschwitz, four extremely unclear low-resolution and compositionally unbalanced photos. As Didi-Huberman tells their story, these Sonderkommandos had to smuggle a camera into the camp by hiding it in a bucket (2008, 11). The person who operated the camera had to find a safe location to set it up and had perhaps only a few seconds to shoot the photos. 'In spite of all' the odds and risks, he managed to take four photos from the camp. The first two photos show a few men standing on top of a corpse-scape blurred by smoke, probably carrying out their duties as cleaners. The other two photos are taken on the run. The cameraman took these two photos while he was probably walking or running by a squad of naked victims who are just about to be executed in the gas chambers. The first shoot could capture only two naked human figures in that death-squad. The second one, however, fails to capture anything on the ground. It shows some tree branches against the white background of the sky (2008, 14-15).

Huberman points out to the unique functions that these photos performed in the context of Nazi's secret operations in Auschwitz. The photos, as Huberman proclaims, were "four *refutations* snatched from a world that the Nazis wanted to obfuscate, to leave wordless and imageless" (20). It was an intervention into the signifying regime of Auschwitz, which had the gas chambers as its 'temple'. Sonderkommando's very act of photography, even if their photos had not survived to our era, was an act of absolute deterritorialisation against the signifying regime of Auschwitz. It is in this sense that the lens of the camera functioned for Sonderkommandos as technotactical interventions. By taking these photos, Sonderkommandos, sliced a portion off their traumatised

condition and preserved it on certain photographic substance, howsoever blurred and visually unappealing. These photos, as Huberman observes, relied on the most analogue means of circulation, which consists in the actual transportation of the photos across the Polish borders reaching the Polish Resistance in Krakow.

To conclude, the lens is a vector-line that departs from the content and expression within a given assemblage and becomes independent of both of them. The lens in the example of Sonderkommando's photography departs from a certain infrastructure that provides the condition of possibility of the photos—the camera, the film, the transportation of the film across Polish borders and so on. At the same time, it acquires a certain meaning owing to the contextual, subtextual and paratextual codings—the bodies signify the victims, the smoke and the men standing by the corpses refer to the gas chamber, the World War, Nazi Germany and so on. But from the perspective of the camera it appears that both of these two sides are redundant to the image. The perspectival capacity of the video-image, or in other words the becoming-lens of the video-image, punctures our perceptual field, it affects the eye without necessarily engaging the viewer with any of the forms of content and forms of expression, from which it must have departed to begin with. It has a capacity to “prick” and “wound” the viewer, as Roland Barth puts it in *Camera Lucida* (1981), irrespective of his/her “culture”.

A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points*. This second element ... I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). (1981, 27)

It is through the lens that this function is made possible, the lens qua a becoming, which does not cease to become after the shot is taken or after the video is recorded. It continues to run through the image and affect the eye, irrespective of its subjectivity, its psyche or its technological situated-ness. This specific function of the lens cannot be reduced to the form of technology through which it operates, or to the textuality/form of expression that it enunciates—although it draws from them to begin with. Digital or analogue, the lens is capable of performing this technotactical intervention, giving rise to processes of arranging in perspective surpassing the constraint of the frame.

The comparison between Reuters' video and Sonderkommandos' photography recapitulates the distinction between the two operations of framing and perspectivising. The Reuters' video



positioned and coordinated the dead bodies in such a way that they could mean one and only one thing: the victims of Lampedusa tragedy. The viewer had to make an additional analytic effort to break through the framehood of the video-picture, imagine a different scenario and have a different perceptual experience. Whereas, Sonderkommandos' photographic endeavour put the figures of the victims in perspective, triggering the viewer's imagination and allowing him/her to make sense of the image in a less fixed and coordinated manner.

Moreover, it should be reminded that both regimes of framing and putting in perspective operate in both cases. However, while framing predominates over the former, perspectivising is paramount in the latter. Correspondingly, the textuality of the video can be traced in the conspicuous narrative structure imposed by media editing strategies. That of Sonderkommandos' photography comes down to the story that Didi-Huberman recounts. As for the materiality of the images, there are certain infrastructural logic, embodied functionalities, informational processes and compounds of technical objects that operate in both images in tandem with and as 'extensions' of the human body (see appendix I). They all converge on a very specific technical object, the lens. This technical primacy amounts to what I have termed the becoming-lens. It refers to the perspectivisation of the image, that is, the transformation of the image beyond its meaningfulness. It is a becoming that cannot be reduced to any individual element inside or vis-à-vis the image. It is not the lens itself, rather, an arrangement between the lens and the human eye—whether embodied as the viewer or as the photographer. It triggers multiple processes of imagination with respect to every element that endures within the image. The becoming-lens functions and is situated within an assemblage: machinic and technical on one hand, meaningful and affective on the other. As such, its function is technotactical. It gives way to a different perceptual experience, a new reality, or an alternative stroke of imagination.

## **Summary**

This chapter focused on a video clip uploaded on one of the reports in Reuters' programme *Migration Machine*. First, the video was analysed in terms of its framehood. Drawing mainly on Mitchell's conceptualisation of image, it was shown how the video functioned dominantly as a picture. Then, on a semiotic level, the signifying procedures of the video-picture was analysed by minimally drawing on Peirce's distinctions between symbols, icons and indexes. Third, by drawing on André Bazin's explication of perspective in relation to painting and photography, it was argued that that the image can be seen beyond its framehood by resorting to a bare minimum of perceptivity supported by the lens-based technology of video recording. This led to the conception of the video technotactical capacity: the becoming-lens.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I owe this reference to Mitchell to Prof. Bleeker in her essay “Performing the Image: Rabih Mroué’s Lecture Performance” (2012, 182).

<sup>2</sup> I use the term virtual here, not imaginary, to specify that there could potentially exist a court who would pursue this case in search of the culprits. In other words, they could very well be real in the context of twenty-first-century international law, not imaginary or fictional.

<sup>3</sup> The movements within the pictures are all secondary to the pictoriality and the primal stasis of the scenes. For this reason I use the terms pictures without worrying about the movements inherent in the video.

<sup>4</sup> Distinct from significance, signifiante denotes the operation of a certain order of meanings in a given system. It refers to the state of being semiotically arranged and ordered. I adhere strictly to Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term signifiante throughout this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Bazin uses the term ‘objective character of photography’ to underscore, the techno-human aspect of photography. This should be more convincing if we consider the original French term *objectif* for lens, as the translator notes in the English version of the text (1960, 7).

<sup>6</sup> Following on Mitchell’s distinction between image and picture, I use the term video-picture to underscore the pictorial aspect of the video, that is to say, its framedness. I reserve the term video-image to refer to the video in a broader sense.

<sup>7</sup> Sonderkommandos were a special group of prisoners, often Jews, who were forced to work in the camp. Their main duty was to orderly dispose the dead bodies.

# **Chapter III:**

## **The Technotactics of Making Images: An Analysis of Rabih Mroué's Visual Art**

In the previous chapter I have shown how technotactical interventions could function in the twenty-first-century migrant-image assemblage. These interventions into the framehood of journalism remained only within the confines of certain possibilities of viewing. The viewer *could* be empowered by the becoming-lens of the diver and of the image to view the dead bodies of migrants beyond its signifying regime. Put differently, the technotactical capacity of the image delineated the confines of the viewing and did not extend to the act of making it. In this chapter, I will explore the ways such interventions function in the very act of image making by analysing a set of works by Rabih Mroué.<sup>1</sup>

Rabih Mroué works with a variety of media materialities and practices, ranging from video and photography to choreography and lecture-performance (Mroué and Martin 2012). Mroué gets his materials from newspapers, magazines, online or televisual video archives and journalistic photography. He edits them, alters them, cuts them from one medium and glues them to another forming complex collages. In a sense, he directly interferes with the existing orders of representation in the visual media available to him. His exhibition in Hamburg relies mostly on this interventionist technique of collage but also draws on innovative designs of optic technologies.

Born and raised in Lebanon, his works and experience might seem, at first glance, irrelevant to the current migration crisis in Europe, especially given the fact that most of the current refugees come from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. However, as was touched upon in the first chapter, the crisis of migration is not so much about migrants' ethnicity, race or national identity as it is about the type of experience that they go through. From this standpoint, the only geo-cultural limitation for this thesis has been the choice of 'the Middle East'. Lebanon, as will be shown in more detail later on, provides an appropriate case for the study of current crisis for at least two reasons. First, emigration from Lebanon has been a fairly older phenomenon than that from Syria and Iraq. Hence, exile has been experienced by many Lebanese people for quite a few decades. This suggests that the case of Lebanese migration can be productive with regard to migration from the Middle East. Second, just like more contemporary immigrants to Europe, Lebanese migrants have always preferred to migrate to Western developed countries. This, again, should reinforce the claim that the study of Lebanese migration can shed light on the experience of migration crisis in Europe by Syrian, Iraqi or Afghan migrants, insofar as their imagination of the West and their experience of a failing or oppressive state is concerned. In fact, the majority of migrants coming from the Middle East, share a great deal of similarity in both their traumatic experience and in their imagination of a life in a better place.

In this chapter, I begin by laying out a concise context in which Mroué's works are textually, materially and theoretically embedded. Then I will describe the theoretical objects that this chapter focuses on, outlining briefly their technological and visual features. I will then

analyse in detail how Mroué's technotactical interventions operate in the images. The core argument of this chapter is that Mroué's technotactics work on two levels. First, he disturbs the stability of the signifying regime of frame-hood by means of collage. Second, he interferes with the very act of viewing the images by developing a unique optic design that cuts through the framehood and gives way to a perspectival viewing.

### **In Context: Materiality, Textuality and Theory**

The Lebanese artist established his stature as an artist in the 1990s following the official end of Lebanese civil war (Costinas and Hlavajova 2012). His works are mostly concerned with the political and psychological aftermath of Lebanese civil war since the 1970s. He belongs to a generation that found itself in a decade that was still recuperating from the civil violence while at the same time indulging in the prospect of a life elsewhere. This generation witnessed and/or experienced one of the most populated exodus in its national and pre-national history, which has given rise to uniquely complex diasporic communities abroad. In fact, as Laurie A. Brand investigates in her historical study of the Lebanese expatriates and emigrants (2006), the history of Lebanon has always been closely interwoven with issues of emigration, exclusion and expulsion since mid-19th century. According to her account, Lebanese emigrants have had a peculiar relation to their homeland, in that, their emigration has never fully disavowed, and could never fully extricate itself from Lebanon's state's affairs (2006, 135). The diasporic communities dispersed throughout the world, specially those resettled in and integrated into the Western developed countries, continued to influence and share certain interests in the configuration of the state. This historical point is specially important since it might suggest that the Lebanese migration case does not fit into the study of twenty-first-century predicament of migrants, i.e. the mass migration from the north African and Middle Eastern countries such as Libya, Somalia and Syria. In spite of this issue of political correctness, Lebanese 'figures of migrant', borrowing from Neils as discussed in the first chapter, do in fact overlap with that of the Syrian, Somalian, Iranian and Libyan insofar as their expulsion from their homeland is considered. These figures share certain similarities that support this claim: they both use the same transportation means to flee their land; they both rely on smuggling networks (Brand, 136); and both have the same passion for Western countries—the more developed and Western, the better. Owing to these similarities, the study of Lebanese migration can very well tie to twenty-first-century migration crisis.

It is against this backdrop that Mroué makes his visual art. As Hlavajova and Costinas write in an introductory note to a collection of his writings, "Mroué's work can be seen as a constant exploration of the artist's responsibility and position both in artistic frameworks limited by traditional conventions and in political circumstances that are based on principles of

exclusion” (Mroué 2011, 79). The majority of his works have as their main motif, a ‘responsibility’ to interfere with the dominant and organised forms of representation. As Hlavajova and Costinas recount, Mroué strives to ‘forget’ his history by actively disturbing the given regimes of representation. His interference “is an active process of coming to terms with, and refusal of, the implacability the consequences of war and a rejection of a permanent state of exception” (Mroué 2011, 80). It is with this passion and decisiveness that he engages with his material.

Most notable in his visual works of art, one can mention *Three Posters* (2000), *The Inhabitants of Images* (2009), and *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012). As a visual artist one of the main themes of his practice has to do with the performativity of images. He is preoccupied, almost obsessed, with the ways in which images affect us and ‘do something to us’.

Maaïke Bleeker, media and performance scholar, in her analysis of Mroué’s *The Inhabitants of Images*, points out to Mroué’s preoccupation with images, one that is loaded with distress and unease at what they could do to our ways of seeing the world and how they could change our perception in the most insidious manners.<sup>2</sup> She writes:

this fraught relationship to images is a recurring motif not only in *The Inhabitants of Images*, but more generally in Mroué’s practice overall, because much of his work is, simply put, about images. It explores what images show and do not show, what they do, and how they perform. (Bleeker 2012, 181)

According to Bleeker, Mroué’s art renders visible the performativity of images. She argues that images should be considered beyond what they put forward as signs—that is, in terms of what an image might refer to, signify, denote, designate or represent. Drawing on the notion of ‘dispositif’<sup>3</sup> and on Mitchell’s image theories, she suggests that images be considered as arrangements that provide possibilities for perceptual and conceptual “participation”, instead of close systems of representation and signification. She writes:

a dispositive is a formation that opens up possibilities of contact, participation, and even play, and this is what Mroué shows images to be. The image proposed by the photomontage in *The Inhabitants of Images* quite literally sets the stage for an encounter. ... the image gathers a variety of lines of thought and allows these to branch out in different directions. (Bleeker 2012, 192)

Although Bleeker’s argument revolves around Mroué’s lecture-performance, it can be as well meaningful in the context of his visual exhibitions. The important theoretical point in her argument, at least as far as this text is concerned, is the conception of image as a “multilinear

ensemble” (Bleeker 2012, 192), which is a rephrasing and re-appropriation of Deleuzoguattarian concept of ‘assemblage’. The image, in this sense, should no longer be seen only from the point of view of what it signifies or tries to ‘depict’, but instead from the point of view of performativity. In this sense,

Mroué puts images on stage in a way that quite literally turns them into actors. He interacts with them and makes space for their performativity to emerge and become part of the performance, to indeed become the performance itself. (Bleeker 2012, 198)

It is precisely this performativity of the images that is the focus of this chapter. While Maaike Bleeker draws on the concepts of performance and performativity to investigate the ways in which Mroué’s images operate within their unique material and textual arrangement, I activate the concept of technotactics to that end. I argue that it is through certain technotactical choices that Mroué’s images perform upon the stage of the gallery.

### **Description: Through the Lenses of the Black Box**

Mroué’s exhibition in Hamburg comprises of five sets of (audio) visual installations. In this chapter, I have chosen to analyse only one of the five installations, namely *Black Box I-X* (2006-2016). In *Black Box*, Mroué sets up ten small wooden boxes with a set of headphones plugged to each of them. Predominantly made by means of collage, an image is encased within the boxes. The image is visible only from the front side of each box through a concave lens. For a viewer to see the images, s/he has to bring his/her face at a tangent to the lens and look perpendicular to it. The boxes allude to an almost extinct optic technology for viewing perspective print, namely zograscope, invented in mid-18th century in Europe (Koenderink 2013; Chaldecott 1953). This optical device, in contrast to the more familiar stereoscope, makes use of only one picture and one lens, i.e. a monocular viewing arrangement. Owing to the capacity of the concave lens used in the construction of this device and given the proper distance from the lens, a picture imparts an illusion of depth for the viewer. In this way, the technicity of the lens, as used by Mroué in this setting, results in an astigmatic effect if the viewer deviates from the proper distance of viewing.<sup>4</sup>

Given these technical specifics, each box demands a certain distance from the viewer’s eye to be properly viewed. Moreover, for each box an audio track plays in loop and can be heard optionally by the viewer. The ten zograscopic images share similar themes, figures and compositions (fig. 5). The figures of airplanes and ships are predominant in the images. Almost all the images contain at least one figure of a ship—sinking, exploding, wrecked or rotten—or one figure of a crashed airplane. Other blatantly visible percepts in the images include building ruins,



mass of people filing into or away from the ruins, rising streams of smoke and fire, artilleries, and of course prostrate human bodies.



a.



b.



c.



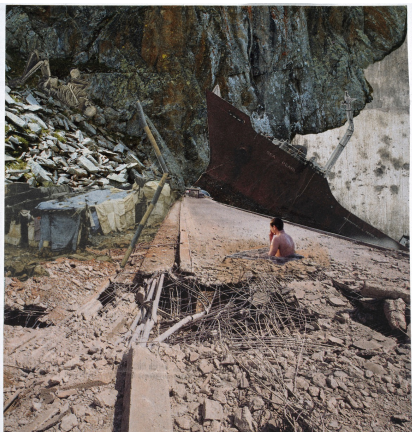
d.



e.



f.



g.



h.



i.

Fig. 5. a-h. 8 of the 10 photo-collages used in the setting of *Black Box I-X*. i. The optic design of the boxes. Source: *Sfeir-Semler* gallery website, with permission.



In all the ten works, Mroué breaks through the framehood of media images<sup>5</sup> by means of two technotactical modes, both operative at the same time within the images. First, it is by means of collage that the signifying order of the images are disturbed. The ship, for instance, is no longer a sign that acquires signification by virtue of its referral to other signs, or at least not predominantly so. There is no sea, no crew, no contextual or material logic that can safely impart what the figure of the ship should mean. It is a ship sinking into sand and ruin, and as such only *resembles* a ship. It does not refer to a ship as a signifier, by virtue of a signifying convention—no visual grammar, no semantic. A figure is sticking its head out of a destroyed bridge. A set of other figures, clad in clerical costumes are standing on a row of barrels with a blown-up shoe lying on the ground. The images verge on the nonsense, or rather aspire to an ‘asignifying’ material arrangement.

On the second mode, Mroué performs a different intervention in the framing acts. He encases each image by a box and exposes it only through a concave lens, which imparts an illusion of depth upon the image. In this way, he interferes with the act of viewing and makes possible the becoming-lens of the image and the viewer. In sum, the operation of these two modes transform the signs in such a way that they “do not ... appear as signifier or as representations, but as particular assemblages of material forces and functions stratified into relations of content and expression” (Zepke 2014, 121).

## **The Technotactics of Collage**

In this section I will look into the ways in which technotactical interventions operate on the level of the collage. How does Mroué make these interventions into the framing regimes of signification? What processes are taking place within the images and how do they (re)shape migrants’ figures?

Fig. 5.a shows a collage of a boat pasted against the background of an ex-urban mess. The boat is fully occupied by migrant figures, some wearing lifejackets, a few already in water walking toward the land, and some are waiting for the right moment to jump off the boat. The effect of this collage brings the migrant boat back to the very ruins from which those migrants must have fled. We can also see a bird flying high aloft next to an intact residential building, which stands oblique to the boat’s landing line. In the background, we can see a destroyed building. Upon closer look we can also recognise a small placard hanging on a scaffold, which reads in Arabic “Jami’ato-Alsadeq”, meaning literally, “The Honest Community”. These elements are certainly significant on many levels. It would be a mistake to assume that this image does not mean anything, or does not trigger any semiotic system and functions absolutely free of any type of signification. The boat, with all the visual elements that surround it and fill it up, certainly brings to mind some associations. But evidently these associations are different from an image

like Reuters' video. In fig. 5.a, the boat, qua a sign, acquires some degree of signifi-ance by referring to the figures that are attached to it—the lifejackets, the people who are covering the entire surface of the boat and the children's faces looking out the windows. The figures of the migrant, those standing or crouching on the boat, in turn, draw their meanings from the boat, the ruins and the two Arabic words written on the placard behind them. The ruins, on its own accord, relate to the wider context in which the image is set up, i.e. the Lebanese civil war and emigration crisis. The signs refer to one another and are gravitating toward a common denominator, that is, toward the ruins and the war.

Similarly, in fig. 5.c, we can see the ruins again in the middle of the image with black and grey smoke in the background. The throng of people can be seen on the foreground. There is also a torn-apart airplane lying on the ground to the right side of the image. These themes of the ruins, the smokey tones of the colours and the overwhelming presence of wrecked vehicles can be clearly seen in all the ten images. In fig. 5.d, another ship is sticking out of the ruin from the depth of the image. In fig. 5.g, the prow of a ship is collaged behind the vanishing point of a ruined bridge. And finally, in fig. 5.e, another ship is struggling amidst the ruins underneath the Mullahs' standing line. This might suggest that the ruins, or a range of similar associations that they could bring to mind—such as the civil war, the precarious Lebanese state and/or the refugee crisis— function as a gravity point in Mroué's images. This is not to say that Mroué's imagery is all about the ruins, or that they signify only in relation to such motif. The question is simpler at this phase, namely, how do the *signs* function within the images? In other words, the ruins, the state and the conflict are not approached in this context qua the theme, the motif or the mood of the images. The concern is primarily on the signs within the images and the ways in which they operate within the fabric of the image. The ruins, in this way, will be analysed according to the ways they function qua signs and the question will be how do the signs become what they are in the image and what do they do to the image and to the viewer?

If we were to strictly follow Deleuze and Guattari's spiral diagram, we should be able to argue that at least one of the functions that the ruin-signs have in the images is to generate the illusion of a centre by the perpetual inter-reference of signs (see Appendix II).

According to this scenario, a migrant figure in the image can only signify insofar as it refers to other signs in the image, that is, to the boat, the wrecked airplanes, the barrels, the Shia clerics, the men in suits and all the different sorts of ruin-objects. If we were to follow only the spiral diagram, we could argue that it is due to this inter-referential relations that the illusion of a centre of signifi-ance is generated. But this should prove to be inadequate to explain the operations of signs in Mroué's images. If the signs only followed the logic of the signifying spiral, we would expect the images to give rise to a more visually stable composition, or a more stable syntax and semantics. We would expect to perceive, just like in Reuters' video clip, a neat

construct that constantly ensures the stability and safety of the signifying regime—*look at these bodies under the sea; they are dead we know, but do not worry dear citizens of Europe! They have been nicely coffined and respectfully buried. Do not feel insecure for we have also detected the culprits behind this tragedy and they will be put on trial.*

There is clearly an unequivocal, yet ‘unlocalisable’, presence in Reuters’ video-picture. In contrast, Mroué’s images of dead bodies and ruins, far from assuring any stability and safety, disturb the visual and signifying order of his imagescape. His images are equivocal in that there could be various centres functioning at the same time in the image. His signs are evasive, in that they do not follow a clear and predictable logic.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, no assemblage can be found that only follows the signifying logic (1988, 136). There are other regimes that always intermingle and ‘mix’ with the signifying regime inasmuch as the resulting regimes cannot be clearly isolated from one another (1988, 156). This raises certain complications for the ways assemblages operate on different semiotic levels. This complication for Deleuze and Guattari is informed by the most sophisticated semiotic theory to date, namely, that of Charles Sanders Peirce. Accordingly, there are three types of signs in general: symbols, indexes and icons. Moreover, no sign can be considered from only one point of view. A sign should be always formulated as simultaneously a symbol, an index and an icon.

Peirce’s sign system is based on a triadic relation between what he called ‘representamen’, ‘object’ and ‘interpretant’ (T.L. Short 2004). As philosopher and media theorist, Chiel Kattenbelt describes in his essay “The Triad of Emotion, Action and Reflection: a Sign-pragmatic Approach to Aesthetic Communication”,

the representamen is the sensory perceptible carrier of the sign, the object is the material or the immaterial entity (an object, an event, an action, a thought, an idea, et cetera) which the sign vehicle refers to, and the interpretant is that which the perceived representamen brings about c.q. evokes. In any case, a sign is only a sign when it is interpreted as a sign. (2004, 125)

From the point of view of this tripartite basis, a sign can function symbolically insofar as it stands for its object according to certain conventions and regulations used by the interpretant. It can also function indexically insofar as it refers directly to its object without any mediation or intermediary. It can, moreover, function iconically insofar as it displays the object according to similitude, resemblance or similarity (W. Burks 1949). And more importantly, a sign can function in all these three modes at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

The ships in Mroué's images, to put this theoretical dilemma in perspective, can be symbolic insofar as it is considered as such according to a pre-given context, a set of linguistic conventions or visual grammar, that is to say, insofar as it refers to any real ship in the context of Lebanese migration. At the same time, the same ships can function iconically in the images insofar as they are considered as such by virtue of resemblance, that is to say, insofar as they look like real ships in any context whatsoever. We can see how one sign can function, at the same time, iconically and symbolically. But this mere functional simultaneity is not enough to explain how and why these signs differ from those in Reuters' video clip. The difference between the two lies in the *degree* to which a sign functions iconically, symbolically or indexically. It also depends on the reading/viewing of the image: one may privilege the iconic function of a sign while another may opt for a symbolic reading.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the signifying reading of the images would fall under the category of the symbolic, while undermining the indexicality and iconicity of the images. For them, in a signifying regime

the sign has already attained a high degree of relative deterritorialisation; it is thought of as a *symbol* in a constant movement of referral from sign to sign. The signifier is the sign in redundancy with the sign. All signs are signs of signs. The question is not yet what a given sign signifies but to which other sign it refers. (1988, 130)

In other words, the signifying regime relies predominantly on a convention, a set of rules and regulations to make meanings. It is in this sense, that a migrant becomes a symbol in Reuters' video-image, in that it is designated and denoted as such by virtue of all the contextual information that is fed to the image, a context that defines and informs the image with certain political correctness, media norms and regulations, and State's propriety of behaviour.

In contrast, there are numerous clues in Mroué's images which might suggest that the signs are not predominantly symbolic. Something is at work in these images that de-stabilises the order of meaning. If Reuters' video was able to sustain its despotic reign over the relations between the signs, it was due to the fact that all the other kinds of regimes had been subsumed under the signifying one. Its only limit was the smugglers' aberrant locus which, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, was, at the end, brought into order within the confines of the video-picture. In contrast to Reuters' video, Mroué's images allow for other regimes of signs to inhere within the images and mix with the signifying regime without any hierarchy. From this standpoint the question becomes how are these other regimes manifested? What patterns can be recognised in their operations? How are they changing and affecting the signifying regime?

In fig. 5.a, the Arabic compound of “Honest Community” provides the first clue as to think about these other-than-signifying regimes of signs. The placard must have been taken from a photo printed in an Arabic newspaper. This is evident from the typed Arabic texts recognisable through the semi-transparent white background in a number of images (fig. 5.a and fig. 5.b). This suggests that the collage-pieces were taken out of newspaper and composed together. In this way, Mroué lays bare the material undercurrent of his works, and moreover, provides clues for reading the images in different ways. In this way, the compound “Honest Community” must have meant something entirely different within the context from which it was extracted. It might have referred to an NGO-type organisation that had marked its territory by setting up a placard. It might as well have been used to refer to a religious community adherent to a very strict faction of Shia Islam.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the sign must have been used predominantly symbolic, in that it must have denoted something by virtue of certain conventions—the consensus of a group of people naming their NGOs or the historical consensus over the role of Imam Sadeq in Shia Islam. Whatever the original context might have been, the appearance of this sign in Mroué’s image, right behind the migrants’ boat, extricates its signification from the grip of the symbolically-driven signifying regime and opens it up to a more complex semiotic, one that allows also iconic and indexical readings of the sign; a semiotic that cannot and should not be conceived as purely textual, structural and/or compositional, but always materially grounded: the ‘paper’ of a newspaper.

The sign “Honest Community” does not mean anything by virtue of referral to other signs, for at least two reasons. First, it is a-signifying owing to the fact that it is disentangled from its original context and therefore is unable to signify anything semiologically. Second, it cannot function inter-referentially due to the fact that its material groundedness—its being cut out from a newspaper or a magazine—is made visible in the image, hence bringing to mind the media materialities of the image instead of a sign or a textual element. The result of this technotactical twist is that the phrase “Honest community” can function iconically, in that it can only resemble certain Arabic alphabets. It functions as an adjunct to the throng of people on the boat, suggesting that their situation has something Arabic in the background. Or, it can function indexically, in that the signs labels the people as literally honest, a direct link without any contextual, ideological or linguistic logic.

In sum, the new regime takes off from the signifiante of the signs and takes up a different logic of operation thenceforth. This means that the sign is now functioning against, or irrespective of, the original signifying order. It does not necessarily negate the signifying order, and more importantly, does not function completely independent of it. In short, it changes its relation to the signifying order without completely abandoning it.

This observation can be made in other images and other signs as well. In fig. 5.g, the ship, qua a sign, is as well extricated from its signifying order. We can clearly read the name tag on the ship, “Sea Pearl”, which, according to a quick and superficial Google search, is a cargo ship used for inter-continent transportation. Mroué might have found this image in a magazine or a newspaper article, or from his personal documents—we know that he draws from an archive that has been collecting over more than two decades of his practices (Mroué 2011). But now in the collaged image, it is put in the background, disturbing the vanishing point of the ruined bridge. The boat in the image does not signify by virtue of any linguistic, societal, ideological or organisational convention, or at least, it does not solely function according to a signifying regime. The boat-sign in the image has something more to say, something that cannot be considered only from the point of view of signifiante.

### **Detour: the Turning Away of the Migrants and the State**

In order to clarify further these complex processes between signs, we need to think outside of the confines of imagery and focus a bit more on the ‘migrant’ part of the assemblage. As was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Lebanon has had a long history of emigration from mid-19th century to the present day. Throughout this history, several waves of migration took place as the result of poor economic condition, famine, political instability and war (Brand 2006). These waves of emigration were always entangled with a form of state—the imperial state of Ottoman empire in late 19th century, modern French colonial state in between the two world wars before Lebanon’s independence and the precarious state of post-independence. In all these eras, as Brand shows in her concise study of Lebanese emigration, the migrants and the state are polarised in relation to one another. In the pre-independence era, for instance, the authorities were not so much in favour of emigration and would even discourage people from fleeing the country (2006, 136). At the same time, emigrants who have already been integrated into their host countries would prefer to give away their Lebanese citizenship and enjoy the safety of their Western new homeland. In the years following the independence of Lebanese state, this mutual resentment between the two underwent some major transformations. Some factions of the state began to develop interest in the Lebanese living abroad. Counting on their economic investment in the country, the state’s interest was materialised in the early years of the 1960s by the establishment of the World Lebanese Union (WLU) (Brand 2006, 143). This is under the presidency of General Fu’ad Chehab who

called upon the participants to set ambitious goals for economic, cultural and social development from which both the mother country and the country of residence would

benefit, and to strengthen the ties of friendship between Lebanon and the host countries. (2006, 143)

However, the ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MFAE), which had been established a few years earlier than WLU, continued to pose problems for the Lebanese abroad (2006, 143). In this way, The relation between Lebanese emigrants and the state continued in such carrot-and-stick type scenario. The expatriates and the state treat one another as friend and enemy, at the same time. The state calls upon the expatriates; the two turn their faces and look at each other; but ultimately they avert their faces and drift apart.

This is further complicated by the civil war in the 1970s, which disturbed the balance between the Maronite Christians, the Sunni and Shia muslims. As a result of this, it became extremely difficult to maintain a unified strategy toward the expatriates and emigrants without upsetting one of the theocratic and political groups. This intensified the relation between the state and the expatriates, bisecting even further their paradoxical relation.

The Lebanese exodus, in this way, theoretically comes close to *the* Exodus of Jews from Pharaoh's imperial territory. Their movement, disposition and inclination are marked by the same 'turning away' from the centre of power, which could no longer follow the logic of the spiral movement within the gravitational field of signifiante. As Deleuze and Guattari show in their conceptualisation of postsignifying regimes of signs<sup>8</sup>,

There is no longer a centre of signifiante connected to expanding circles or an expanding spiral, but a point of subjectification constituting the point of departure of the line. There is no longer a signifier-signified relation, but a subject of enunciation issuing from the point of subjectification and a subject of the statement in a determinable relation to the first subject. There is no longer sign-to-sign circularity, but a linear proceeding into which the sign is swept via subjects. (1988, 148)

It is exactly this process of subjectification that functions in conjunction, and at odds, with the spiral logic of signifiante, exemplified and embodied by the expelled migrants in both cases of exodus, i.e. that of the Lebanese and of the Jews. Deleuze and Guattari draw a different diagram for this regime (see Appendix II), one that follows a very different logic of movement. It should be noted that this diagram will not be used in this text as a framework to be applied upon the case under study. It will function only as a limit to this analysis. Inspired by these diagrams, I will think through the case in my own terms while keeping an eye on them only to validate my analysis. Therefore, I will not complicate my theoretical undercurrent any further by introducing yet another highly advanced and complex concept of subjectification.<sup>9</sup> Suffice it to mention that

this process follows a different logic than that of the spiral system. How is this process different and how does it operate in the images? I will unpack this issue by thinking along Mroué's imagery.

## **Back to the Images**

In fig. 5.a a transformation of signs take place in regard to the image of the boat, the boat-icon.<sup>10</sup> As was touched upon before, the migrants' boat is collaged back to where they must have fled from. This collage-wise trick reverts the turning away of the migrants from their troubled homeland. This brings to mind the migrants' problematic relation to the state. The two had turned away from one another before the image is expressed. Now, they are embracing each other—we can see three figures of men on the right side of the image walking toward the depth of the image, to the cityscape, back to Lebanon.

In fig. 5.e, we can see the clerics standing on the barrels looking down, as it were, where a broken ship is sinking into cement blocks. On the level of signifiante, the mullas refer to the state, at least to part of it. They are clad in Shia costumes and can therefore be considered as referring to part of the problem with the state. Their looking down to the broken ship, however, cannot be reduced to this signifying relations. There is something in between the two, between the clerics and the ship, that escapes the referential regime. This might become clearer if we draw again on Brand's study. She observes that both WLU and MFAE had to compromise their plans for re-integrating and bridging to the expatriates because it would upset the muslim community (Brand 2006, 143). This has been due to the fact that the majority of Lebanese emigrants have been, and still are, from the Maronite Christians. In this light, the looking down of the Shia clerics to the sinking ship, brings to the fore this problematic relation, which no longer signifies anything by virtue of the inter-referencing of signs, as was the case with the spiral logic, but takes off from the signifiante of the image and seeks an escape route from it.

In fig. 5.d, this is most evident in the juxtaposition of the ruins/refugees at the bottom and a row of faceless figures on the top. On the top, we can see a set of upside-down figures, with their faces blackened. The black-faced men are shown wearing suits, which might suggest that they belong to the Christian faction of the state. On the bottom, a dense collage of rubbles and refugees cover the image. Similar to the image with Shia clerics, this image, too, must have been taken from a news article of some sort, in which the authorities are shown standing in a neat line, commemorating an event, opening up a ceremony or initiating a governmental project. By putting them upside down and defacialised, Mroué intervenes in their normal and conventional signifying regime. He interferes with the inter-referencing of the signs and hinders their all-too-lubricated relations. The top row of defacialised figures and the bottom mess of refugees and ruins are both foregrounded, while the middle part of the image, in contrast, is pushed to the depth. In



the bottom messy part of the image, we can clearly see people's faces, all African. Here, Mroué extends his artistic articulation beyond the geography of Lebanon and creates expressions that traverse the political correctness of the migrant crisis. On the top, however, the faces are all omitted. In the middle, toward the depth of the image, a ship is sticking its nose out of the ruin with a stream of fire collaged on it.

The defacialised figures on the top, once again, point out to the inherent problem between the state and the expelled figures. Deleuze and Guattari would have called this problem a “double turning away” or the “averting of faces” (1988, 143). This condition should *not* be understood as a metaphor. The turning away of the migrants from the state and that of the state from the emigrants should not be taken as a sign standing, metaphorically, for the conflict between them. The ‘turning away’ itself is part and parcel of the conflict. At the same time, it cannot, and should not, be considered literally, that is, as an *index* of the conflict. This would reduce the conflict to a comedic turning away similar to when two kids fight and turn away their faces from one another. The act of turning away, in other words, should not be taken as a sign of rift between the two. This turning away, instead, should be taken conceptually as the most abstract way of describing the operation of a specific regime of signs that breaks through the signifying regime. This turning away should be seen as a machine, or in a more Deleuzoguatatrian fashion, an abstract machine.<sup>11</sup> This turning-away machine operates according to certain functionality, not according to any specific form or substance. And as such, it can be traced everywhere in the assemblage of migrant-image. Its operation can be traced not only in Mroué's image but also in migrants' experience in relation to their homeland. To put this theory in the perspective offered in the first chapter, this abstract machine of turning-away is a function that operates irrespective of any form of content or of expression, even though it always draws from and runs through them. Mroué's technotactical collage, to sum up this section, intervenes in the operation of this function of tuning-away by changing the nature of the signs from symbolic to iconic. This amounts to the transformation of the dominant signifying regime to a mixed interplay of signifiante and subjectification.<sup>12</sup>

## **Optical Technotactics**

Mroué's interventionist practices do not end on the level of collage, in that he makes further technotactical choices as to affect the very act of viewing the images. This is most evident in the special optical arrangement of the boxes. As was briefly touched upon in the beginning of this chapter, the images can only be seen through a concave lens that impart an illusion of depth to the images. This implementation has different effects on different images. In fig. 5.d, for example, the defacialised men on the top and the messy refugee-wreckage on the bottom stand on the foreground while the illusion of depth pushes the middle part of the image far into the vanishing

points. However, the illusion of depth is not the only effect that this arrangement brings about. To understand how exactly this optical arrangement operates and how it changes the images and the viewer, I will make another theoretical detour, this time drawing from optics.

A zograscope is an optical device invented in mid-18th century. It was exclusively used to view a printed picture in perspective. The device, similar to stereoscope, imparts a certain depth to the given pictures. This illusion of depth, as Harold Schlosberg observes, was more associated for the general public to stereoscope. In a stereoscope, there are two almost identical photographs, each taken from two angles only slightly different from one another. This arrangement required a binocular viewing for the illusion of depth to take effect. A zograscope, in contrast, creates the same type of effect, except using only one photo and relying only on a monocular viewing. This latter technology had been forgotten rather swiftly in the West in spite of the fact that, as Schlosberg argues, its pictorial effect was much stronger than that of stereoscope. In any case, both technologies could change the 'flatness' of a picture. Schlosberg explains this phenomenon of bringing the image into depth as follows:

One may see a picture as either (1) a picture representing depth, or (2) an actual object deployed in depth. In the first perceptual condition one remains aware of the flat nature of the picture, but under the second set he gets the plastic effect. Depth, then, is not merely something added to a picture in various amounts, but rather a way of perceiving. (1941, 602)

This suggests that the optical technology of zograscope does not affect the photo in isolation from its potential viewer. It changes the very viewing itself. Mroué's black boxes confirm this theoretical point. For a viewer to see the photos inside the box, s/he has to come very close to the lens and look right through it. And even then the photo does not appear fully in focus. There remains certain elements in the photos that elude the eyes, and to view them as well, one has to constantly change his/her eye movements and resize his/her pupils as to find the focal point of other objects in the photos.

In another study of monocular viewing, Koenderink et al. also observe the same traits in this optical device. They describe the techno-human arrangement of zograscope using a few technical terms from optics.

The optical system is not fixed, but changes as the observer changes fixation. Observers typically make minor corrective eye movements, and (depending upon age) accommodation changes, small enough not to count as physiological cues, but enough to cancel various imperfections of the optical system. This renders the full analysis of the zograscope a

surprisingly complicated problem, rather more complicated than that of many sophisticated, multicomponent optical systems such as camera lenses. (2013, 195)

This complication is crucial to the zograspic viewing of the photos. Due to the interdependence between the viewer's eyes and the lens in any zograspic viewing, the photo could be effected by what is called in optics 'chromatic aberration'—a term referring to the state in which the different colours of light are refracted differently upon passing through the lens and fail to converge on the same plane hence resulting in a blurred image. In this way, it is, to some extent, up to the viewer to align his/her eyes properly so as to perceive the photo clearly.

The insertion of the lens in between the viewer and the photo changes both the photo and the viewer. The two fuse together in the act of viewing through the interfacing of the lens. The lens changes the way the photo affect and is affected by the eye.

This becoming-lens of the viewer and the image is quite different from the becoming-lens of the video-image, the diver and the viewer discussed in the previous chapter. Mroué's becoming-lens directly influences the viewer and changes his/her perception by interfering with his/her field of vision upon the very encounter with the photos. Moreover, the concave lenses compensate the lack of lens-based perspectivity in the collaged images by technologically intervening in the optical arrangement of the images. In fig. 5.d, the middle section of the image, with the ship and the ruined buildings in smoke is pushed to the depth by the operation of the lens. Were it not for the lens, the image would appear flat, which is how we see it in printed in fig. 5.a-h. Fig. 5.i shows the entire optic device through which the photos can be viewed. Without the lens, the image would become simply a picture, clearly framed and composed. But owing to the zograspic viewing, the image goes beyond the frames, or even better, it makes the issue of framing irrelevant to the viewing. Upon viewing the image through the zograspic lens, the viewer can never distinguish where the image ends. There is literally no frame line around the image. One can only notice that towards the edge of the boxes, the image gets blurry and out of focus.

## **Summary**

To conclude, in contrast to the photographic becoming-lens of the video-image discussed in the previous chapter, Mroué's imagery relies on a zograspic becoming-lens. It must be noted here that throughout this analysis, the auditory aspect of this installation has been bracketed in Mroué's (audio) visual installations. For each box there was a different track played out in loop mode. Some of the tracks were short recordings of refugees talking about their traumatic experiences, some in Arabic and some in English. A few of them were themselves audio collages comprised of interviews and news reports. And a few others were recordings of a few singers unknown to me. Although they were important elements of the installation, they have not been

included in the analyses of this text because I could not make sure that they are conceptually and theoretically well explained.

In sum, this chapter started with situating Mroué's practice in a geo-political context. After describing his work, *Black Box I-X*, two modes of Mroué's craft have been detailed and analysed. First, on the level of collage, it was shown how his choices changed the nature of the visual signs and consequently brought about a new semiotic order. Second, Mroué's use of zoographic optic technology was analysed. It was shown how this technological intervention in the physical act of viewing brought the viewer into an active participation with respect to the perception of photo-collages and ultimately obliterated, quite literally, the framehood of images

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> These works have been selected from his solo exhibition in Hamburg, April 2016, which I have visited personally over the period of two entire days. The following chapter is therefore not an analysis of Mroué's work mediated by digital distribution platforms or by scholarly works about Mroué's work. The text that follows is the result of a close encounter with the very physicality and materiality of Mroué's works, an encounter that has been nevertheless informed by certain conceptual lenses.

<sup>2</sup> Mroué's *Inhabitant of Images* is part of one of Mroué's lecture-performances performed at BAK, Basis voor Actueel Kunst, Utrecht (Bleeker 2012, 179). In this lecture-performance, he talks about a poster he saw in Beirut, which showed two political figures—Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian president of 1960s and Rafiq Hariri, the Lebanese Prime Minister of the 1990s— in the same picture.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of 'dispositif' has been used by many philosophers and theorists. Frank Kessler, media historian, surveys the use of this word by Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Giorgio Agamben and Francois Lyotard, among a few other major scholarly figures in his well-known essay "Notes on Dispositif" (2006). Bleeker summons up Kessler's discussion and opts for a Deleuzoguattarian conception of dispositif and links it to the concept of image.

<sup>4</sup> An astigmatic effect in optics refer to the blurriness of an image due to the non-convergent light rays that pass through the lens.

<sup>5</sup> These frames has to do with those operative in print media such as newspaper and magazines. This is evident from recognising Arabic typed texts through the semi-transparent white background in a number of images (fig. 5.b and fig. 5.a). This suggests that the collage-pieces had been taken out of newspaper and were composed together afterwards.

<sup>6</sup> As is evident from my references, I am drawing on Peirce's theory of signs rather indirectly here. As T.L. Short observes in his essay "The Development of Peirce's Theory of Signs", Peirce's theory had undergone major transformation in the course of Peirce's scholarly career. This imparts a certain 'architectonic' quality to his theory, in the sense that each phase of his theory relies on what has been developed prior to it. This makes any reference to his works problematic since a proper Peircian semiotic analysis, if it ever existed, would require a thorough knowledge of Peirce's thought processes and transformations. For this reason, I have only minimally, and indirectly, drawn on his theory by focusing on how symbols and icons should be distinguished from one another so as to make my own argument clear. A more detailed semiotic analysis of the images would of course require a closer reading of Peirce's texts and theories.

<sup>7</sup> The name 'Sadeq' as a proper name, is the name of one of the twelve Imams in Shia Islam.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari map out four different regimes of signs: presignifying, countersignifying, signifying and postsignifying (1988, 143). Since each of these regimes has very complex logics, I have decided to keep them in the periphery only to validate my own thoughts in the process of analysis of my case.

<sup>9</sup> As I touched upon in the introduction, under the rubric of “problem with Deleuze and Guattari”, one cannot do justice to their concepts by isolating them from their rhizomatic thought processes. This is a common compromise by many writers and scholars, which could be called provisionally “application fallacy”. An analyst, in this way, extracts a concept from Deleuze and Guattari and applies it to his/her favourite case. In contrast, I have tried in this text to keep Deleuze and Guattari at a distance, or even better, as the limit of my own thinking. I have developed my own terms and concepts, only inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, rather than the application of their concept. In this way, I will gladly point out to those moments in which my thought touches upon Deleuzeoguattarian concepts, but I will not treat those concepts as transcendental or universal units that can be readily applied to any case whatsoever.

<sup>10</sup> The boat, qua a sign, becomes iconic insofar as it does not refer directly and/or conventionally to its object, but by virtue of resemblance.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze and Guattari do not directly talk about this double turning away in terms of an abstract machine. Rather, they prefer to approach it via the concept of faciality and the abstract machine thereof.

<sup>12</sup> On the operation of this latter regime, regime of subjectification, Deleuze and Guattari draw another diagram. This diagram takes off from the spiral diagram of signification and proceeds infinitely in finite segments (1988, 159). The details of this diagram would be beyond the size of this thesis. However, the term ‘turning away’ has been adapted from this diagram without explicitly referring to the working of the regime of subjectification.

# Conclusion

This thesis approached the contemporary issue of European migration crisis through multiple tracks of analyses of two modes of media visualisation. The questions were *how do media images and media materialities operate in shaping and changing the perception and conception of this contemporary crisis*. By adapting the concept of assemblage from Deleuze and Guattari and developing the theoretical term *media technotactics*, two (audio) visual works were analysed. In the second chapter, the framing acts of Reuters' journalism were discussed and detailed. In the third chapter, the creative visual choices and optical innovations in the works of the Lebanese artist, Rabih Mroué, were the focal points of the analysis.

The phenomenon of migration in our contemporary world is inherently tied to the working of media. It is no longer a naive exaggeration to assert that owing to the ubiquity of media and communication technologies, almost every person in the world—citizen or non-citizen, literate or illiterate, from urban or from rural background—is capable of imagining a life elsewhere in high resolution. This has direct consequences for migratory movements, especially for those that aim at ending in European countries. This is already a complex relationship which gives way to a range of whys and hows, questions that can provoke thinking about Europe's past, its technological genealogy, its colonial projects and, above all, its institutional and aesthetic power in contemporary image production. The crisis of migration in the past few years, from this point of view, cannot and should not be seen as only the result of instability and military mayhem in the Middle East and neighbouring regions, or the economic underdevelopment of the global south. Economy does not adequately explain the desire of migrants to come to (Western) Europe. They are less attuned to the flows of money than to those of images. This is why Appadurai asserts that:

electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination. Together, they create specific irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. (Appadurai 1996, 4)

This complex circulation of migrants and images is at the core of contemporary crisis of immigration to Europe. As such, its complexity asks for an apposite conceptual formulation. In this thesis, I have drawn from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage to address this complexity. This concept allowed my analyses to take into account not only the textual aspect of the migrant-image relations, but also the material ones. The migrants' desire to immigrate to Europe is only partly visible through the narratives that contemporary media creates. This was shown in detail by means of the analysis of Reuters' video of Lampedusa tragedy. On the textual level, it was shown that the narrative framed the migrants in certain stabilising manner. Ultimately, by framing the smugglers as the culprits, put on a kind of audio trial, the video

sought to resolve the issue and bring it to a safe end. In short, we get a full-fledged story, a text. Having in mind the machinic aspect of migrant-image assemblage, however, this text-based perception fails to notice that it is the very media materialities and logic that produce the text which, at the end, determines who migrants are and how they should be conceived. What can be said about these materialities?

It was shown that it is the technicity of the lens that accounts for the intermingle of the text and its material ground. Put more emphatically, it is the lens that creates the condition of possibility of any relation between migrants and images. However, in the case of Reuters' video, this condition remains latent and could be only activated by a third viewer, an 'interpretant', whose becoming-lens can lead to a new conception of what and who migrancy and migrants are. In a word, the symbolism of Reuters' video could only amount to a latent technotactics. Could there be an active intervention? Could there be a way for the migrants themselves, more directly and more immediately, to be engaged with images? These questions were addressed through the analysis of Rabih Mroué's works of art.

Rabih Mroué himself functions as the migrant in the assemblage, although he might not have experienced migration as traumatically as many others. It was shown in this thesis that his works are exemplary of active technotactical interventions. Every image that he creates, every visualisation that he actualises, is an act of meddling with the hyphen between migrant-image assemblage. In between Lebanon and Europe, and cultivated through a personal archive taken from a variety of media forms, his collages create new forms of expression that exceeds the textual semiotic of his 'landscape of images', or to coin a different term from synthesising Appadurai and Deleuze, the *territoriality of his images*. In a sense, the creative choices he makes with respect to his works of art are examples of 'functions of deterritorialisation', an intensive movement along the vertical axis of the assemblage, diagramming from territorialities towards new realities, one that explodes the framing orders.

By destabilising both the text and the technics of reading/viewing images, Mroué enacts a certain (audio) visual act. Through this headphonic and zograsopic dispositif, the migrant and the image are deliberately fused together. There is no longer any representation of the migrant nor is there any perception of the image. The two blur into one another effacing the necessity of a third agent to interpret the images, hence eliminating the visual symbolism to the benefit of icons.

Referring back to the concept of diagram, in the Deleuzian sense, these images are diagrammatic par excellence, "the agent of a construction that involves a destruction of existing 'givens' and the production of the 'new'" (Komini 85). Mroué's practices are the technotactics of those 'constructions and destructions'. Through their operations, the migrant and the image merge together to the point of indistinguishability: no longer possible to make a distinction



between what and who a migrant and an image is. The image and the migrant become one single experience in our globalised contemporary world. They circulate, travel, and are displaced together. This is perhaps the sense Mitchell has in mind when he asserts in his essay “Migration, Law and the Image: Beyond the Veil of Ignorance” that “at the moment of first encounter, the immigrant arrives as an image-text, whose documents go before him or her at the moment of crossing the border” (quoted in Bayraktar 2011, 155). As Bayraktar expounds on Mitchell’s observation, “images ‘precede’ the immigrant in the sense that before the immigrant arrives his or her image arrives first in the form of stereotypes, search templates, tables of classification, and patterns of recognition” (2011, 155).

In a word, Europe can see, smell and even touch the migrants before they physically arrive. Thanks to the working of the mediascape they inhabit, European citizens can form a perception of migrants without actually seeing any in a close encounter. It is in this sense that the migrant and images are said to be part and parcel of the same assemblage, merged together to the point of indistinguishability. The operations that make possible the formation of such perceptions are exemplified in the framing acts and the latent technotactics of Reuters’ video. As was shown in the second chapter of this thesis, it is through the textual orderings of the video that the viewer’s perception and conception take shape. It is only by the active meddling of the artist in the territoriality of these images that this perception is ruptured. As was shown in the third chapter, it is by means of the artist’s technotactical choices that the order of that territory is destabilised. Rabih Mroué’s works are excellent instances of such interventionist technotactics.

Textual or material, technotactical interventions have the capacity to change an assemblage. This thesis only demonstrated the extent of these operations within the realm of media and art images. The creative power of these tactics can be very well studied in relation to other types of media expression. For one, the technotactics of performance can be developed to theorise the ways in which not only professional performers and theatre makers from both Europe and the Middle East actively respond to the migrant crisis, but also the very bodily interventions that the migrants themselves might trigger to actively interfere with their present condition. This latter aspect is particularly challenging to study since migrants’ interventions, at least for the few years to come, has not and probably will not have been properly documented. It remains moot and mute whether and how migrants of the present decade have actively adapted performative and/or visual technotactics to break through the reality of their predicament and engender new territories. Will they remain the tenth rate citizens of Europe? Or will they succeed in becoming active cultural citizens of their new habitat? Will they be able to push their framehood to its limit and define their own (visual) territory? It remains an open field to be both experienced and studied.

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## **Appendix I: A Short Note on Media Materiality and Technological Determinism**

Throughout this thesis the concept of 'media' has been used rather uncritically without being explicitly situated in theory. The conception of media has indeed very important implications for the use of the terms 'media materiality' and 'media technicity'. These terms have been implicitly influenced by Mark Hansen's theories, particularly his essay "Media Theory". Following on McLuhan and Stiegler, Hansen advocates an understanding of the concept of medium as fundamentally "prosthetic" (299) in that it implicates a co-evolution of human and technics<sup>1</sup> from the start. The two have never been distinct from one another and have always been evolving together. In this sense, as Hansen argues, "human evolution is 'technogenesis' in the sense that humans have always evolved in recursive correlation with the evolution of technics" (2006, 300).

This conception, Hansen concludes, gives rise to a new conception of 'autonomy' in the technical domain. Accordingly, it is no longer clear to what extent the agency in the production of certain media artefacts is human and to what extent technical. For Hansen, this agency

is defined by the double fact that, on one hand, technics enjoys an evolutionary lineage of its own (even if it is one that has always been, and that continues to be, assisted by human intervention), while on the other hand, it is essentially correlated with the human ... According to this conception, rather than operating through causal interference, technics impacts the human being and the human impacts the technical as respective perturbations to the organisation-maintaining (and hence system-preserving) operation of the other. (2006, 302)

If media technicity and materiality, according to how Hansen formulates, consist of such fusion of the human and the technics, or defined in terms of certain 'extensions' of the human body as Hansen's predecessors had it (McLuhan 1994; Simondon 1958), it can be argued that the 'material vitalism' inherent in abstract machines is by correlation techno-human, in the sense that one cannot readily distinguish between the autonomy of the technical and that of the human. It is a vitality that pervades the two and blurs the conceptual and perceptual boundaries between them, if they ever had any to begin with. The diagrammatic functions of abstract machines and the intensity of unformed matter to which they ascribe and from which they draw their forces, in this light, are inherently technical insofar as a 'prosthetic' media artefact is concerned. It is exactly for the salience of this prosthetic technical domain that the term media technotactics is coined in this thesis.

Moreover, in regard to the theoretical importance of the lens in image-based media, it should not be inferred that the media images are only bound to and defined by the technicity of the lens. In other words, lens-based theoretical sensibility should not be confused with technological determinism, in the sense that the agency of the lens should not be taken as an autonomous and automatic process, but rather, as a correlational techno-human process. The misconception of perspective as an artificial tool that can only reproduce and mimic reality has roots in the old ubiquitous problem of binary-thinking diffused in many disciplines including media theory. This misconception presumes that the technical is necessarily non-human, which is in turn contrasted and associated with the idea of 'nature'. On the other hand, 'culture', as necessarily a human performance, stands in opposition to that 'nature'. The effect of this self-imposed dichotomy is further refracted into the terms 'technological determinism' and 'cultural phenomenology'. The former equates the technical with the artificial, whereas the latter assumes an ascendancy of the ideational over the technical and material.

This dichotomy in relation to media theory is discussed rigorously by Mark B.N. Hansen (2006). Hansen maintains that in spite of this semblance of dichotomy, the two cannot be separated from one another:

there simply is no such thing as technical determinism, not because technics don't determine our situation, but because they don't (and cannot) do so from a position that is outside of culture; likewise, there is no such thing as cultural constructivism – understood as rigid, blanket privileging of ideology or cultural agency – not because culture doesn't construct ideology and experience, but because it doesn't (and cannot) do so without depending on technologies that are beyond the scope of its intentionality, of the very agency of cultural ideology. (2006, 299)

He argues that this schism between nature/culture amounts to a bifurcation in contemporary media theory. In his own terminology, this divide has on one side the "experiential dimension of media" and, on the other side, the "technical logic of media" (2006, 297). To bypass and traverse this dichotomy, following on Bernard Stiegler, Hansen argues that humans and technics have always been evolving in co-relation, which encourages the use of Stiegler's concept 'technogenesis' (300) instead of technological progress or technical determinism. Hansen's argument is indeed quite convincing in refuting the so-called problem of technological determinism. As such, it can feed into the Assemblage schema of migrant-image that I have put forward in this thesis. Although Stiegler's concepts and points of view are on many levels at odds with Deleuze's philosophy (Mark Hansen 2015), a technogenetic understanding of human and their technics can function at least as a guiding trope for the thinking process of this text. It can, at least, ensure



that the relation between content and expression in an assemblage will not be confounded with causality, or be deemed as two ontologically incompatible entities.

Accordingly, the lens of photographic technologies should not be conceived as being independent of human cultural interventions. As we have seen with Bazin, lens-based technologies are, at least historically, bound to non-lens media materialities like painting—with perspectival techniques as the common denominator between the two.

This theoretical detour—via Bazin and Hansen, through Stiegler and aiming at Deleuze—was important for this text in so much as it proffers the idea that lens-based perspectivity be understood and mobilised as a concept that exceeds its non-human technicality and gives way to new perceptual and creative techno-human capacities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A short note on the use of the term *technics* is necessary here. Following on the English translation of Bernard Stiegler's *La Technique et Le Temps*, I use the term 'technics', and sometimes interchangeably the 'technical domain' for the French term *la technique* referring to "the technical domain or to technical practice as a whole" (1998, 280). This is also how Hansen uses the term *technics* in his text *Media Theory*. This usage is similar to how the term 'physics' comes to stand for the term *la physique*, qua a scientific discipline. Whereas, the term 'physical' can be used to stand for the French *le physique*, qua an existential quality of having a certain *physic*. In contrast, again following on the English translation of Stiegler's text, I use the term 'technique' to refer to specific and particular use of materials in the technical domain. It is by following these terminologic choices that the term 'technicity' is used in this text and not 'technicality'. The technical is confined to the techniques and is used to refer to that which involves the use of certain techniques. Technicity, on the other hand, is used in relation to the 'technics', or the technical domain. It refers to the state of being arranged and situated in the human-non-human technical realm.

## Appendix II: Deleuze and Guattari's Two Diagrams of Significance and Subjectification

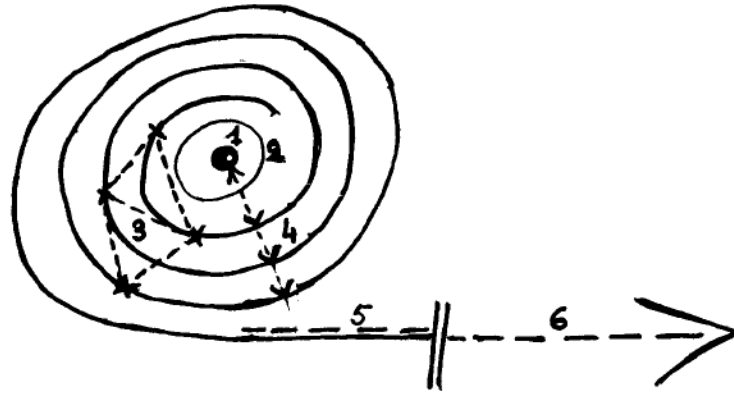
The following diagrams have been implicitly used in this thesis, particularly in the second and third chapter. The schema represented in the first one was shown to be operating in Reuters' video image while it was broken through by the technotactics of collage in Mroué's *Black Box IX*. The second diagram shows a schematic view of the operation of the post-signifying regime, that is, the regime of subjectification. Before these two diagrams become Deleuzo-Guattarian, Deleuze mentions them briefly in "Two Regimes of Madness", passingly referencing to Guattari's effort to come up with his new semiotics (2007, 13). In this text, Deleuze borrows these two regimes of signs from Guattari to explain two types of madness: paranoid and passionate (2007, 14). While the paranoid mind operates in such a way that every sign refers to another ad infinitum giving rise to the delusion of a centre (fig. 6), the passionate mind is always on the brink of breaking free from the circular or spiral regime and taking up a new path away from it (fig. 7). As for the former regime Deleuze writes:

Someone goes out to the street, he notices that his concierge is glaring at him, he slips, a small child sticks its tongue out at him, etc. In the end, it's the same thing to say that each sign is doubly articulated, i.e. that a sign always refers to another sign, indefinitely, and that the supposedly infinite ensemble of signs itself refers to a greater signifier. Such is the *paranoid* regime of the sign, but one could just as well call it despotic or imperial. (2007, 14)

Regarding the second regime, he points out to their difference:

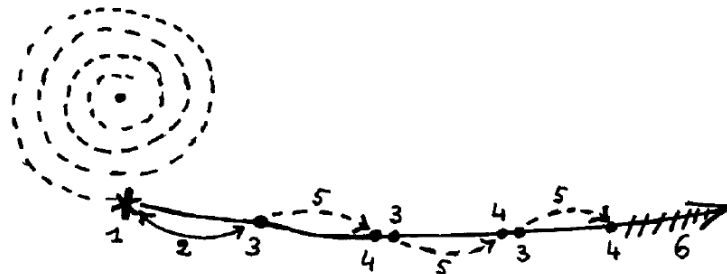
And then there is a completely different regime. This time, a sign, or a small group, a little bundle of signs, begins to flow, to follow a certain line. We no longer have a vast circular formation in perpetual extension, but rather a linear network. Instead of signs that defer themselves to one another, there is a sign that defers to a subject: the delirium comes about in a localised fashion, it is more a delirium of action than of idea, one line must be manoeuvred to the end before another line can be initiated. (2007, 14)

The path that the contemporary figure of the expelled takes has proved to be a complex melange of both of these functions. This is a theoretical point at which this thesis leaves off. It would require an entirely different study to analyse whether and how the contemporary migrants of the present decade become mad as a passionate subject or a paranoid despot.



(1) The Center or the Signifier; the faciality of the god or despot. (2) The Temple or Palace, with priests and bureaucrats. (3) The organization in circles and the sign referring to other signs on the same circle or on different circles. (4) The interpretive development of signifier into signified, which then reimparts signifier. (5) The expiatory animal; the blocking of the line of flight. (6) The scapegoat, or the negative sign of the line of flight.

Fig. 6. Deleuze and Guattari's spiral diagram of signifiante. Taken from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988, 157).



(1) The point of subjectification, replacing the center of signifiante. (2) The two faces turned away from each other. (3) The subject of enunciation resulting from the point of subjectification and the turning away. (4) The subject of the statement, into which the subject of enunciation recoils. (5) The succession of finite linear proceedings accompanied by a new form of priest and a new bureaucracy. (6) The line of flight, which is freed but still segmented, remaining negative and blocked.

Fig. 7. Deleuze and Guattari's operation of subjective lines. Taken from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988, 159).