Migratory Aesthetics: Double Movement / Mieke Bal

Migratory Aesthetics is a concept I have developed over the past five years, and recently given shape to in an exhibition co-curated with Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro (Murcia). The exhibition *2MOVE: Migratory Aesthetics* has travelled from Murcia to Enkhuizen (The Netherlands), from Oslo (Norway) to Belfast and Navan (Ireland). It constituted an attempt to make the concept concrete in an exploration of the interaction between two forms of movement: video, as a much-practiced form of the moving image, and migration and the social movement of people. The longer-term project began when I could not find what I sought to understand about the contemporary Western European cities in the library.[1]

The site where migration and its aesthetic, in other words, "migratory aesthetics" is most conspicuously present, albeit in *de facto* invisible form, is, indeed, in the inner cities, those places where William Labov discovered story-telling as a "natural" activity.[2] The question I began to consider was how the "look" of cities in recent years had become more aesthetically pleasing – livelier, "colourful" if you like. This aesthetic can also be phrased as "interesting", provided this word understood as a genuine interest, and as "engaging", as in making us interested, in opposition to a Kantian disinterestedness. The absence of scholarship on this aspect is a bit unnerving. However, when you think of it, it makes sense: a city's "look" is hard to pin down, let alone document and analyse. This recognition brought me to consider a different form of analysis, a mode that would, as anthropologist Johannes Fabian puts it, "perform" the analysis "not *about*, but *with*" the people concerned.[3] The closest I was able to come was through the medium of film, as film is a tool for making visible that which is there for everyone to see, but which remains unseen, because it does not have a form that stands out.[4]

This is why I have recently embarked on filmmaking as a way of exploring the way things look – as distinct from, for example, explaining why they look that way. And the experience of filmmaking has, in turn, compelled me to bring together a variety of video

works that, in many different ways, engage that (in)visibility of migratory culture. What made the exhibition different from most is that it was not unified around a theme, e.g. "migration," but, on the contrary, diversified with the very diversified migratory culture as a model.

Take Roos Theuws' seminal work in the exhibition, *Gaussian Blur*. Theuws' video flickers with points of light, often looking like blisters on the video's skin. Layers of pastoral images and of violent storms threatening the peacefulness of the landscape simultaneously stream slowly through the frame. The video hesitates between still images reminiscent of impressionist painting, and exceedingly slowed-down moving images of real people and animals. This work tells us that there are things to see that are difficult, demanding, that don't surrender to the lazy eye. Instead, they ask us to engage with the surface of light and only then do they offer a much-coveted access. A kind of near-but-not-quite timelessness infuses the undeniable but exceedingly slowed-down movement. While the viewer is physically aware of the external temporality of his or her body – an awareness increased by the points of light that prick us with a very different pace – another temporality reaches out, interferes with ordinary haste, and insinuates slowness into the sensation of looking.

This exhibition combines a theme or motive with a theoretical reflection. The two aspects are merged, so that the theme is theorised and the theory embodied. It is a juxtaposition in the literal sense: put one thing next to another and see how they begin to merge, converse, or oppose each other. In other words, the specific angle of the exhibition, the way video can help articulate migratory culture and vice versa, compels a theoretical framework within which the individual works make sense and to which, conversely, each of them contributes. Theuws' light-writing or visual writing in her videographic experiment, suggests four key concepts. These concepts – movement, time, memory, and contact – will clarify with increasing specificity how video and "the
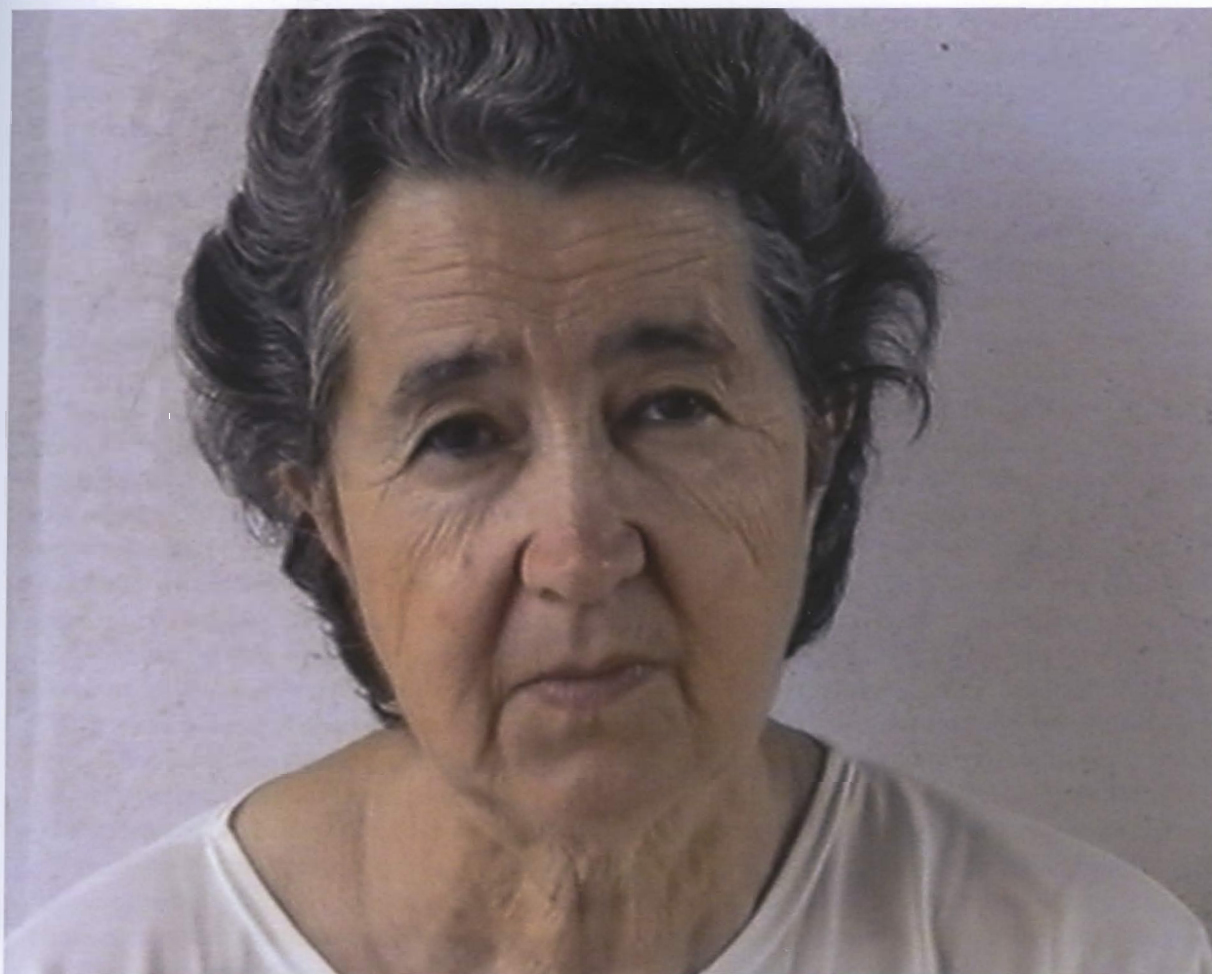
Célio Braga. *Dalice*, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

migratory" can illuminate each other, and together, embody the concept of "migratory aesthetics".

Movement. Movement, the essential but by no means exclusive property of video as a medium, is also the basis of migratory culture. Not the movement itself but the way it is de-naturalised begins to demonstrate a specific bond between video and migratory culture. Thus, movement becomes itself a medium. This de-naturalising process, performed in different ways and with different thematic emphases by all these works, is due to the *superposition* of the two terms of the title of the project – "aesthetics" and the "migratory". I use "aesthetics" here not so much as a philosophical domain, but rather, according to its traditional meaning, as a term to refer to an experience of sensorial binding, a connectivity based on the senses, and the "-s" at the end of the word is meant to indicate the plural form, not the "science of" or meta-meaning. "Migratory" does not claim to account for the actual experiences of migrants, but instead refers to the traces, equally sensorial, of the movements of migration that characterise contemporary culture. Both terms are programmatic: different aesthetic experiences are offered through the encounter with such traces.[5]

Gaussian Blur is without doubt the most "difficult" work in the exhibition, and the least thematically related to migration. Theuws' work, on one level, is simply a beautiful depiction of figurative tableaux, almost but unsettlingly not quite still: children, a horse, grass, trees. But due to her layered, experimental editing, the video is clearly "abstract". Although, I hasten to add, it depends on how we define abstraction. Instead of a resistance to form, hence, the opposite of figuration, abstraction, here, is the opening up, even within traditional forms, of the potential for new, not-yet invented forms.[6]

The prominent tool to open form up to the as-yet unformed, is surface. The blistered skin of the video not only makes the images less readable, it also makes them richer, each layer offering its own form, not quite visible but most surely ready burst open, ready for the viewer to see if they is willing to abandon perceptive mastery. What Theuws' video and Delany's prose have in common is that they open the door to a mode of looking that I see as both "abstract" and *thereby* "political" in four ways.

This mode of looking, I contend, is characteristic of the potential of video as a medium, at least, this is what the works selected for this exhibition, installed collectively, convey. Theuws' work explores that fourfold abstraction and thereby writes, by means of light, the heart of the *Migratory Aesthetics* project. The first mode engages movement on the dual level of the images and its figures, as well as between these. They are moving out of sync. As a result, the expected is veiled, so that the new comes to visibility. Forms of life not yet visible are "looked into existence" through this tool of movement for the political. Second, more specifically, this work solicits a way of looking because it is abstract in the sense of showing glimpses of possible new forms, in terms of a splitting or doubling of time, through a "techniques of time" that overlay fast (flickering) and slow (dreamy). Temporalities that are ordinarily distinct mingle uneasily.

Third, looking at (moving) images is steeped in memory, guided by acts of remembering and forgetting. Here, memories of paintings seen, and of childhood experiences of pleasure and danger. Memory and the veil of forgetting that inevitably obscures or contradicts it, is another key to migratory experience and its traces in the aesthetics of the migratory world. Memory in video often concerns someone else's past or memories, which as a viewer, you cannot recall at all. These memories happen for the first time. Yet, they are inalienably anchored in the alter-memory or hetero-memory that the exposure to the work stages for us. Developing and encouraging such hetero-memories contributes to a more coherent social fabric; hence its political potential.

Last, but not least, this is emphatically and self-consciously a work of art. This aspect carries it own politicising form of abstraction. Fourth, then, by means of iconographic references but, much more importantly, by mood and lighting, as well as tensions between these two, *Gaussian Blur* invokes and thus, reactivates cultural memories of exciting aesthetic moments, as well as of moments of looming or actualised natural disasters that confront us with their own beauty, as if staging – but barely visible in the background – the

Kantian opposition between what can solicit the experiences of the beautiful and the sublime.

This work solicits an abandoning of visual control that gives access to what might be termed unconsciousness, or perhaps a social, physical, unconsciousness of the visible. What we cannot see, through the images we do see, is what matters most, what teases us to make new forms. The work engages the act of viewing on a sensual, tactile level that offers the possibility of an intimacy hitherto deemed impossible, indiscrete, and even voyeuristic. It solicits such an engagement on the basis of a mutuality and bodily appeal that does not yet exist but comes into being at the moment of looking. And it does this by means of its "look" which, far from being itself intimate, is cold, sharp, sometimes violent. Behind the veil of that surface look is the object of ocular desire. In this sense, the work plays hard to get.

The first form of abstraction emerges from experimenting with movement on the edge; movement, that is, dressed down to its bare essence. Since one of the instruments used is extreme slow-motion, the second abstraction resides in the experimentation with temporality that video as a medium allows. The third comes from the uncontrollable figurations, the sensation of the inadequacy of our routine templates and narrative fillers. The fourth is best characterised as an entirely new, sensorial production of surface as skin. That the flickers of light look like blisters is no coincidence. They hurt; they touch us; they make contact, but not an easy, self-evident contact. The cuts from clip to clip, "behind" the skin of the video, are significantly sharp, never mitigated by smoothing transitions. The flickering points of light as blisters are the skin of the visible, kinetic world.

The second term of the exhibition's title – and the second movement – is derived from, but not to be conflated with migration. Migration is the movement of people with often undetermined destination and duration. While I do not wish to circumscribe the migration from which migratory is derived, with ontologically dubious definitions, it is not the same as tourism – voluntary travel with a return ticket. Nor can the experiences I will not explicitly distinguish here, of exile and diaspora, or of politically or economically-driven displacements, be conflated in our understanding of those experiences. In the context of this project, however, I consider the traces of migration of all these kinds together, as traces of the movement of people.

For those who perceive these movements, the people called migrants constitute, so to say, a moving image. Like video, they form images that move, and that move us emotionally. William Kentridge's endless stream of shadow figures, in *Shadow Procession*, walking and walking, some of them carrying household furniture on their backs, present such an image of migration, of people on the move. Using the technique of a Brecht-derived puppet theatre, the work shows movement relentlessly. Here, realistic representation is again cast aside in favour of a form of presentation that leaves to the viewer the option to flesh out in what mood to watch these rows of displaced people, figures with their burdens, their stacks, including a miner dangling from the gallows, including workmen carrying entire neighbourhoods and city-scapes. This ambiguity of mood – or, from a different perspective, freedom – accounts for the visual and musical discourse of vaudeville, a merry entertainment that hits the viewer with its sudden moments of a "cruel choreography of power relations".[7]

But lest the shadowy performance of the migratory be taken strictly thematically, we must look at another kind of shadow procession. This one shows a de-naturalised movement of people who populate Jesus Segura's installation *I Can Be You*. The shadowy figures on New York's Fifth Avenue, moving in one direction on one side, in another on the other side of the installation, slow and semi-transparent, demonstrate two aspects of the movement of people, although these people are more likely to be shoppers than migrants. But such categories can change; between migrants and shoppers, "I can be you" holds. This is, indeed, the visual point this installation makes. It concerns a theoretical reflection on subjectivity that is timely in the face of migratory culture. On one hand, "I" can indeed be "you", as in the linguistic exchange that produces subjectivity. This happens here literally, since the opposite directions of the two screens give

the viewer the option to join one stream or the other, walking forward or backward from the corner. On the other hand, each shadow overlays more substantial figures, as if clinging like a parasite to our illusory autonomy, only to undermine it. These shadows are ghosts indeed. But the (Western) subject cannot shake off this shadow. Instead, "I" can become "you" and enrich the texture of my subjectivity by that exchange that, as we have known all along, is inevitable for the formation of subjectivity to begin with.

This is just one example of a more general situation. The mixed societies that have emerged as the result of migration have benefited enormously from the arrival of people from many different cultures. Cities have become more heterogeneous ("colourful"), music and cinema have been enriched, and philosophy gratefully uses the potential offered by thinking along the lines of – and through metaphors and concepts relating to – migrancy. These metaphors can be questioned for harbouring an appropriation and idealisation of the condition of migrancy. On the receiving end of the migratory culture of today, then, this exhibition embraces the enrichment that newcomers bring, but at the same time attempts to avoid such hastily positive gestures.[8]

Meanwhile migrants also change, so that their double relationship to host and home country produces an aesthetic in and of itself, which, in turn, further contributes to changes in the host countries and their cultural expressions. This project is about the aesthetics – plural – that emerge from this situation, not, or not necessarily or exclusively, about the theme of migration itself The "I"/"you" exchange that is the model for the articulation of aesthetics with the migratory, exemplified in Segura's installation, suggests an over-determined relevance for installation as a practice.

In the context of this project, these two features merge. It is the movement that makes the images impermanent, again in the double sense of moving along the frame, or screen, and of displaying the movement resulting from the migratory aspect of culture. Everything changes constantly, the look of space as well as the look of the collectivity that constitutes the population of cities, sports events, restaurants, and streets.

The bi-directional but asymmetrical movement of migration is aesthetically elaborated in Mona Hatoum's pioneering work *Measures of Distance*. This work elaborates on video's potential in ways that integrate the double movement of migration. In her mother's letters, there is a movement from "home" to the far-away place where the daughter ended up; the other movement takes place in the memories of the daughter. These memories are presented through multiple layers, of the voice, the lettering, the body in the shower.

One key aspect of this work for migratory aesthetics is the particular way the epistolary character of the work is elaborated, with its layers of writing and voice. Indeed, the epistolary elaborated with great complexity and poetry in Hatoum's work has become a topos in migratory video. In this sense, Hatoum's work harbours the most significant characteristics of video as a moving medium in the double sense. In this respect it is important that the movement is constructed, made, not recorded. Stills blur into one another. The movement is only that of the surface, the screen, not of the figures "in" the image.

Hatoum's work, layered like Theuws', makes the surface of the screen opaque, and only slowly reveals the mother's body. First covered by the opaqueness of the shower curtain so that it looks abstract, then by water, and throughout by the Arabic lettering of her own words, the mother is not given over to the viewer without several layers of protection. The transition from one still to the next, the rapid Arabic spoken followed by a slower English voice, make time a multifaceted experience; what I will term below, a heterochrony. The delayed temporality of epistolary contact, moreover, is another layer that complicates visibility.

Heterochrony. One such meeting point is the politics of time. Video is the medium of our time, available to many, and put to many uses. It is also the medium of time; of time contrived, manipulated, and offered in different, multi-layered ways. Migration is the situation of our time. Although there has never been a world without migration, suddenly it seems as if the whole world is on the move, but not as in mass tourism. In contrast to these freely undertaken trips with a return

blue just like the Mediterranean.

The previous video segment was
two minutes and twelve seconds long.
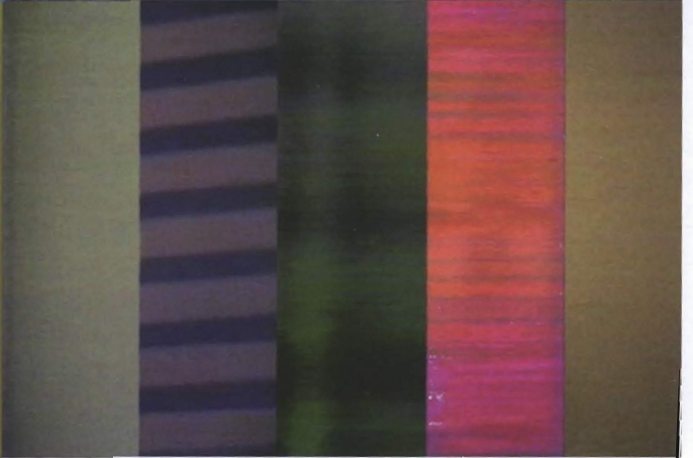
ticket, the movement is relentlessly urgent and goes in one direction only, as Kentridge's *Shadow Procession* drives home. Migration is also the experience of time – as multiple, heterogeneous. The time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling present not sustained by a predictable future. The phenomenon I call *multi-temporality*; the experience of it, *heterochrony*. Multitemporality seems overruled by the predominance of measurable, linear time in the organisation of social life. Heterochrony is something one can be afflicted by, suffer from. You can "have" heterochrony as you can have the flu. When multi-temporality becomes a problem, an inhibition, and paralysing contradiction, you "have" heterochrony. But it may also lead to a pleasurable sense of fulfilment, when the multiple temporal strands in a day make that day particularly intense or meaningful. Both video and migratory culture intensify the experiences of heterochrony. In both aspects, then, the exhibition in its double focus on video and migration is timely, and works with its own and its works' timeliness.

The layerings, tensions, and incongruous encounters of different temporalities alert us to the simple but oft-forgotten fact that time is not an objective phenomenon. Although our lives are regulated by a relentless clock and the fixed schedules it prescribes, obviously someone who is bored experiences time differently from the hard worker who never quite manages to do what needs to be done. Some people are always in haste; others are not. People in situations of migrancy are often torn between haste and standstill. This simple experiential discrepancy is compounded by political and economic temporal multiplicities in the post-colonial era.

Imagine the everyday life of someone who is waiting for legal residency, or for much-needed employment permits, or for news from a far-away family. At the same time, the clock is ticking. That person needs to earn money to support his family "back home" and thus justify the tearing apart of his family, his life. In such situations, the hectic rhythm of social and economic life, always too fast, contrasts sharply with the time of waiting, always too slow. Although temporal discrepancies and disturbed rhythms

occur in all human lives, it is easy to realise that multi-temporality is specifically tangible in the life of someone who is permanently, as the saying goes, on the move.

Heterochrony is more than a subjective experience, however. It contributes to the temporal texture of our cultural world and thus, our understanding and experiencing it is a political necessity. This texture is multi-temporal. Video is technically able to make multi-temporality visible, and the experience of heterochrony tangible. Theuws' *Gaussian Blur* captures the profound and physical sensation of a multi-temporality that entails the experience of heterochrony in its bare essence. There is a relentlessness about the slowness, an insistence on the ongoing quality of time, precisely due to the almost unbearably slow pace. Meanwhile, the flickering of points of light keeps us aware of the fleeting fastness of time "outside" these slow movements. The time of the surface is disjunctive from the time of the images it covers. This disjunction determined the visual experience of this work. It trains the viewer to be sensitive to this aspect of temporal disjunction in people's lives.

Time made so dense, contradictory, and non-linear first sharpens, then overcomes the opposition between "still" and "moving" images. The importance resides in the affective impact of the resulting slow-motion. For, through this, it also overcomes the gap between an object and its affective charge; between the object perceived at a distance and the viewer whose act of viewing affects them. That is *Gaussian Blur*'s proposal for an aesthetic. Among the consequences of this paradoxical "state" is a complex relationship, not only with representation and figuration – the work with the human form – but also with another aspect of "human nature", the one of existing in time. The different aspects of temporality are an important site where the aesthetic and the migratory intersect: heterogeneous time, slowing down, the past cut off from the present, and the need for active acts of looking in actuality.

Memory. If heterochrony disrupts the traditional linear narratives onto which routine responses and images are grafted, it offers temporal shelter to memories. And memories are themselves heterogeneous, multi-

sensorial. The most important and perhaps counter-intuitive thing to realise about memory is that it takes place in the present. Memory is not a passive recall, a kind of invasion of the mind by the past. It is neither passive nor past-based. People perform *acts* of memory, and they do so in their present moment. Without memory there can be no present. Without a position in the present one cannot "have" memories. Without agency, happenings can affect, even destroy people's lives, but they cannot become memories. This is why traumatic recall can't be equated with memory. The unwanted and repetitive invasion of earlier horrors escapes the subject's agency. In times of political and social hardship in the present, acts of memory become indispensable for psychic survival and a comforting allure of a privacy one can fall back on.

Migratory experience exemplifies the presence of the past within the present. This is what, in my video installation *Nothing is Missing*, the mothers of migrants reiterate all along their talk about the missing child. Time is foreshortened to the extent that it is distorted, so as to reverse the black hole of linearity.

Video, in this sense, is an anti-monumental medium. Rather, in those works where events of the past underlie the work's descriptive thrust, the fugitivity of video work is relevant. The short duration within the slow pace turns this fugitivity itself in the most literal sense into a site for brief flashes of memory, barely perceptible acts of remembrance – necessary and urgent because of the ephemerality within which they must be performed. Only with such flashes is the figure able to muster the energy for the painstaking effort of carving out space for his body. Slowing down, in art, has political ambitions in itself. Beyond the everyday bombardments of fleeting images, art seems a suitable place for us to stop and invest the events from people's past they carry on their shoulders (Kentridge) or that resonate with the epistolary reminiscing of Hatoum's mother, with cultural duration. Theuws' work makes the point of temporal fore-shortening "explicitly". It thickens time to the extreme *without entirely freezing it*. The world in which migratory aesthetics circulate is one that juxtaposes pleasure with all sorts of other experiences, many of which emerge from forms of violence. For my argument, then, I suggest that social

violence – the violence of ignoring, of contempt, of refusing to engage – transforms temporality. Both violence and pleasure pertain to the political without being reducible to it. Violence makes the experience of time not only corporeal but also heterochronous: its breaks the continuity, not only between present and past, but also among different presents.

Violence produces extreme heterochronies. It makes time immeasurable, extending it, slowing it down, cutting it off from any quantifiable series of instants. The instant in which victims of colonial or military violence became victims – their lives torn apart, their intimacies shattered, their communities scattered – is, qualitatively, radically different from any instant in which our belated anxiety, fear, hurt, or pain, all heteropathic and powerful, occurs.

I do not mean to argue that the political can be reduced to violence, nor that all aspects of violence should be understood in political terms only. However, if "political" means anything beyond the powerless passivity and indifference to which the present war reduces our participation in the world, we can translate Kantian "disinterestedness" as "detachment from particular interest", into an ethics of non-indifference. Only then can the aesthetic experience return to its old task of sensorial, *corporeal binding*.

Contact. Beginning as an accommodation for art that erupted beyond the physical confines ordinarily associated with the picture frame and the pedestal, the video installation collapses the distinction between painting (images presented along a wall) and sculpture (images standing free of those walls and commanding space and air), between interior and exterior, present and future.

In addition to the attempt to articulate intricate relationships between video as a medium of movement *with* time, and migration as a social phenomenon of movement *through* time, the exhibition is also a collective installation; a work as a whole that brings artworks together in one space, which have never before been installed together.

Dalice by Célio Braga is a portrait. A beautiful portrait of a middle-aged woman. A close-up against a white background that leaves no opportunity for

distraction. Just a face. The portrait, classically believed to be the genre that requires our presupposition of the reality of the sitter and their identity to the image. There are two of these portraits, two identical videos positioned opposite each other, so that the viewer must stand between them. Stand, not sit. They are at eye-level, on dark body-sized pedestals. One wonders why this video is presented as an installation, rather than as a simple one-screen film.

I contend that the installed videos produce an architecture of a qualified, disenchanted intimacy that enables an ethical engagement with the migratory "otherness within" contemporary culture. This argument is based on the architecture, or, in terms of theatricality, setting of the installation works and by extension, the exhibition as a whole; the inevitable mirroring that insinuates itself when one moves through a space with multiple video screens; and the specific sense of space that emerges from the combination of these motives.

With a hand-held camera Célio Braga has filmed his mother's face, in her own home. He filmed her during the long minutes he observed her inward-turned grief, her loneliness while engrossed in the task of absorbing the horror of her daughter's death. The son witnessing his mother's grief, is grieving himself, and yet, all he can do is film that silent face, himself invisible. The hand holding the camera is visually holding his mother.

Of this portrait itself, it can be said that it is gripping, moving, and utterly simple. The woman is impressive, beautiful, but clearly, neither shot nor shown for those features. The only barely visible feature that distinguishes it from countless other portraits is the slight movement, inevitable in hand-held camerawork. This movement, once the viewer is standing there, concentrating on that face because there is nothing else to see, becomes an instance of foreshortened temporality: one can focus on the movement precisely because it is so hard to see – it is slight, slow, and a-centred. While facing itself – looking someone in the face – is centralising, the movement in this video is visible exactly at the edges of the face.

Dalice as it is installed, raises many questions: about the portrait, the medium, the face, and the possibility of empathy, of intimacy. It raises these with some

urgency, because the bare facts alone would easily bring up an unease related to voyeurism. This, in turn, is connected to the issue of "documentarism". The portrait made by a camera is undeniably "occasioned", but how important for this work is that sense of the documentary that this concept implies? The actuality of the occasion could not be more convincing, dramatic: a mother grieving, a week later. But strangely, there seems to be a tension between these two reality factors. The portrait is less a portrait of this woman, Dalice, than of the emotion that weighs her down. And this is where the specificity of video comes in. The near-stillness of the image asks what a video portrait is, as distinct from a photograph. The slight movement of the face that seems to be the only difference between these two mediums of portraiture – eyes blinking, turning upwards – has a companion in the slight movement of the image caused by the hand that holds the camera.

That hand, reduced to its bare essentials through the medium, caresses the face-as-image. When the face moves on its own, the image presenting the face moves. Small, barely visible, secondary movements are the inevitable consequence of hand-held shooting. This produces this double movement and through it, powerfully states the poetics of video in intimacy. It asks if it is possible to read the face, to see grief? It asks if it is possible to empathise with an unknown woman across the gap, first, of her aloneness, second, of her son's absence due to his migration, conflated here with death (the death of the other child); and, third, across the gap of our belatedness, our incapability to make contact. Can we *see* that this face is one of mourning, or do we need to have this intimate knowledge?

This is where, with *Dalice*, the installation aspect specifically comes in. The viewer is forced to stand between the two monitors, the two pedestals that are body-sized. Only then can one face Dalice in the first sense, and witness how she faces her loss. But while facing the woman is enforced on those who wish to see this work, so is turning one's back to her. It is impossible to face her without, uncomfortably, also realising that she is behind you, looking at your back turned to her, as if sending you away from the intimacy

smugglers stringing clothes to their bodies

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**Ursula Biemann &
Angela Sanders.**
Europlex, 2003.
Courtesy of the
artists.

of her home. This double position is doubly moving, then, in the emotional sense of the affect of viewing. It is important to realise that at no time the viewer is trapped. The distance is enough to look away and walk away. But once you decide, freely, to look Dalice in the face, you have to face that you must by necessity also turn your back on her.

The silence of the work adds to this double affect. Especially since the background noise of other works is as audible as street noise would be once the door of the house is closed. The small space is both inside and outside. The viewer-visitor is both admitted as a guest and not asked to stay. Dalice invites you in, and sends you away; she invites the intimacy of the encounter and stipulates the ineluctable strangeness that remains. Due to this installation – as distinct from a single-screen showing – the woman figure is empowered, the face given agency, and the viewer's voyeurism held at bay.

Intimacy also implies physical contact. And the poignancy of the situation of many participants in migratory culture is that the physicality of contact is precisely what is cut off, made impossible. With every subject on the move others stay behind, "back home". Mothers can no longer caress their child before sleep. Husband and wife are separated for years on end. The texture of a child's skin changes as they grow and the father misses out on these subtle changes. Skin, the body's surface, is also the interface between outside and inside, as well as between self and other. It is the surface that, in a difference-phobic society, people decline to engage with. In video, the tantalising quality of the surface is the subject of self-reflexive experiment. The craving for the skin and frustration of access denied underlies many works in their experiments with surface.

Roland Barthes, in Camera Lucida, famously compared photography with the skin as the interface. The glossy surface, he wrote, is "a skin we share" (80-81). "Sharing a skin" can also be considered a kind of activist slogan against the irreducible, if mostly involuntary racism that prevents participants in a culture from fully enjoying the proximity of others. I am talking of such simple acts as looking away, or looking no further once the assessment "foreigner" has been made. Skin, in this context, does not attract, but repels,

and this repellent quality projected on the skin of others is, precisely, the ground of racism and the exclusionary violence it produces. Just visually, just colour-wise.

With gloss on the one hand and the opacity of the other's skin on the other, the status of this largest of the human body's organs becomes a feature of the double movement of migratory aesthetics. It is a frontier between self and other, inside and outside, access to the desirable touch and resistance to the undesired touch. This is even more relevant when we consider the gleam itself as a reflective surface; one that sends our image back to us. In good light (or bad, depending on your aesthetic expectation) the sheen of the video monitor also reflects their own image back to the viewer. Inevitably, then, viewing gleaming surfaces entails a measure of proximity, of inclusion. This is very different from a projected video work, where sometimes the installation compels visitors to walk through the image and thus leave their shadow.

This brings me back to Dalice, the need to both face her, and turn our back to her. When no viewer is present, the two faces face each other, as if consoling the woman in her loneliness by offering, at least, her own mirror image. When the viewer stands between the two monitors, however, the question of the readability of the face emerges with irresistible force. What we see, in the end, is nothing but skin. Skin, a surface that suggests and hides the emotional depth of the woman's grief that, at this moment, makes up the entirety of her existence. A skin that is emphatically present, in the extremely fine grain the loving camera has captured. The skin that bears its age and displays it, as a testimony of time.

Between skin and space, video in installation proposes that there is a bond which grounds the aesthetic of video, and that is, at the same time, the ground of migratory aesthetics. Video installation is a "contact zone", a social space where cultures meet, clash and negotiate.

In conclusion, then, I remind the reader of a conception of space that is just as "natural", but less frequently taken into account than it deserves. Space is what Henri Bergson called a "natural feeling", and not – as in Renaissance perspective – geometrical, and

hence measurable and identical for everyone who perceives it. This natural feeling is heterogeneous, different for everyone wherever they stand. Such space can be neither divided nor measured. Bergson calls this space "extensity". Emanating from the subject, it extends outwards, like the mirror image; hence the term. Extensity is like foreshortening, but in reverse. Foreshortened space extends from the "other" towards the subject, not the other way around; extensity goes outward again.[9]

In *Creative Evolution*, a book devoted to the enigma of life, Bergson wrote something to this effect in the chapter on "The Endurance of Life". In his life-long effort to theorise life, time, and the world in terms of a continuum, he wrote about the difference of what he calls the "real whole": "The systems we cut out within it [the real whole] would properly speaking, not then be *parts* at all; they would be *partial* views of the whole."[10]

As is well known, Bergson revolutionized the current conceptions of time. He replaced measurable, dividable time with continuous duration. The tension between fragment and detail is like that between part and partiality in Bergson's passage. Apply this tension

to time, as Bergson does, and the key to video art emerges; apply it to space, and installation comes to complement it.

Space, like time, is thoroughly heterogeneous. Like time, it is complicated by the subject's position and agency in it. As the link between the individual subject of the culture of migration – migrant or not, transitory or durative – space frames the skin. It gives the skin body, the image depth. Thus, space as what emanates from the skin ultimately completes the specificity of the intricate relationship between video and migratory culture, put into operation in an aesthetic that binds through the senses. This aesthetic takes very different forms. Hence the plural in title of the project: migratory aesthetics.

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1   Vid. *2MOVE: Video, Art, Migration*, Cendeac, Murcia, 2008.

2   Vid. William Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1972. For a thoroughly theorised extension, see Monica Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, Routledge, Nueva York, 1996.

3   Johannes Fabian, *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and theater in Shaba*, University of Wisconsin Press, Zaire and Wisconsin, 1990.

4   This is more or less the conception of vision according to Deleuze's "Bergsonianism." See Paola Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze: Cinéma et Philosophie*, PUF, Paris, 2003.

5   For the old meaning of aesthetics, see A.G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1750, vol. 1, 1758, vol. 2), Olms, Hildesheim, 1970.

6   Ernst van Alphen, "Opgenomen in abstractie", in *Windstil*, M. Breedveld, 2004, 5-25. *Staphorts*, Hein Elferink, based on *A Thousand Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1980.

7   Ari Sitas Sitas, "Procession and Public Rituals", in *William Kentridge* (ex. cat.), MoCA and New Museum, Chicago and New York, 2001, pgs. 56-59. The backdrop of Johannesburg suburbs and the devastated landscape that surrounds them is extremely relevant for the artist's work.

8   For an incisive critique of such gestures, see Inge E. Boer, *Uncertain Territories: Boundaries in Cultural Analysis*, Mieke Bal, Bregje van Eekelen, Patricia Spyers (eds.), Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2006. Paul Patton offers an understanding of Deleuze's use – but not his followers' – of notions such as nomadism and migration as not metaphoric. "Mobile Concepts, Metaphor, and the Problem of Referentiality in Deleuze and Guattari", in *Thamyris / Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race*, 2006, 12: 27-45.

9   *Matter and Memory*, Zone Books, New York, 1994 (or. 1896).

10 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, University Press of America, Landham, 1983.