

## False color/real life: Chromo-politics and François Laruelle's photo-fiction

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### Introduction

Responding to a journalist's demand to justify the amount of violence in *Pierrot le fou* (1965), Godard insisted that there was no blood in his films, just the color red.[1] His remark draws the line for approaching color not only through questions of its representational properties, but through the realism of its non-representational politics. Blood and redness are not interchangeable; redness is not the same as the blood of real violence.

What is 'real' in relation to what is 'red' is a question that has long traversed the disciplines. In philosophy, color has posed ongoing metaphysical questions on the nature of 'physical reality', of experience, of the mind, limitations of the factual, and transgressions of the empirical. What is present in film and media theory, and different than the traditions of other disciplines, is not only the question of the metaphysics of color and reality, or what is 'real' versus what is the subjective experience of color, but also how color relates to the realness of violence and death – the real of the socio-political world. With the tradition of cinematic realism, theoretical discourse has always incorporated socio-political realism at the same time that it has incorporated questions of ontology of film and the metaphysics of reality. Early film and media theorists thus argued at the intersection of the metaphysics of color and violence, color and death, color and the corpse. As Godard points out above, whether or not red is a property of the object of blood itself is less at issue. What is at issue is whether redness and the blood of violence can be drawn together or not.

The question of drawing things together or not, between the real and the world, has long been at the heart of the work of François Laruelle. In the decades-long project of non-philosophy, he critiques that philosophy has always posed philosophy as claiming Truth, but only as a false claim for describing the Real. For Laruelle, philosophy has used any and all material as the object for its discipline of Truth, except for itself. Thus the method of non-philosophy includes the concept of radical immanence, and changes the method of philosophy and hence the methods of claiming ‘truth’. In other words, in Laruelle’s work radical immanence *is* real and thus, as Ray Brassier points out, ‘the object of nonphilosophy is not the real, which is never an object, not even an unthinkable one, but the philosophical specularization of real objects’.[2] Laruelle’s work is therefore a type of film theory of philosophy. As John Ó Maoilearca points out in his film-philosophy book *All Thoughts Are Equal*, non-philosophy denounces the method of what is considered philosophical ‘truth’, while it also opens the door for other methods of thought, including filmmaking and other artistic forms as thought.[3]

I therefore turn to look again at the notion of color and realness, within cinema and media imaging technology, from surveillance to photographic art, and the manner in which they do not remain positioned on separate planes of Truth versus Fiction. Alongside non-philosophy and Laruelle’s concept of photo-fiction, I look at how ‘truth’ versus the real has been falsely colorised in both historical and contemporary media images, and claim that photo-fiction offers a theory for re-thinking photographic color praxis. I first trace the connections of color, realism, and death as tied to social realism in earlier film and film theory, and then turn to look at how Laruelle’s non-philosophy offers a way for approaching the chromo-politics of a contemporary practice of photographic colorisation: thermal images.

## Early film: False color, realism, truth

Just as with philosophy, color and realism have been tied to questions of the metaphysics of the real. ‘True color’ since early film theory intertwines questions of the nature of the physical world and the experience of the subjective. Bela Balasz’s writing on early color films from the 1920’s illustrates the two sides of the perpetual argument around the presence of color and its metaphysical quagmires. Speaking of Emil Leyde’s additive color technique, Balasz explains,

Leyde has invented color cinematography, even before the problem of ordinary color photography was solved [...] The three primary colors are photographed separately out of nature's mixed color image and produce a red image, yellow image, and blue image. [4]

In his description, the images of the three filtered colors are of the same scene, and are taken and separated from nature's true and wholly mixed color image – a philosophical orientation that bolsters that nature has a true colored totality. It is *film* that does not possess the ability to capture nature's true colors. On the other hand, Balasz continues on a few sentences later to further explain that it is the eye of the beholder that produces the realism of the color image of the natural scene, and thus it is not needed that the film itself captures all of nature's colors because the eye will reproduce it. Balasz here provides an example of the manner in which film theory reproduces philosophical questions of whether or not color is a part of nature's 'true scenery' or is within the human eye, of asking questions of an outside reality or one constructed in the mind.

Arguments about whether color film or black and white film reveals the 'trueness of nature' have extended also to discussions on the true nature of what film captures – social reality, life, and death. For André Bazin, color film was about crafting the ultimate realism of a 'total cinema' that mimics the 'real world' in totality, stating it would be absurd to think that the silent film was 'a state of primal perfection [...] forsaken by the realism of sound and color'. [5] For Roland Barthes, color performed the opposite role; it was not totalising but damaging and false. For Barthes, black-and-white photography was a realism of the social world, the truth of mourning, while color photography removed the means that enabled it and instead involved painting a facade upon the dead – 'color is an artifice, a cosmetic (like the kind used to paint corpses)'. [6] While contemplating the black and white photograph of Alexander Gardner in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes famously claimed, 'he is dead and he is going to die'. [7] Despite their opposing view of color and artifice, or color and the real world, Barthes' and Bazin's stance on death and the realism of film aligns. Bazin claims that

[b]efore cinema there was only the profanation of corpses and the desecration of tombs [...] nowadays we can desecrate and show at will the only one of our possessions that is temporally inalienable: dead without a requiem, the eternal dead-again of the cinema. [8]

Bazin posited cinematic specificity, like Barthes, as inherently intertwined with thinking about the dead, arguing ‘death is surely one of those rare events that justifies the term [...] cinematic specificity’.[9] For Barthes and Bazin, the realness of film is found in its true connection to death, regardless of its coloring.

Sergei Eisenstein notes that color had been there all along:

the black, grey, and white hues in the films of our best cameramen were never regarded as colourless, but as possessing a colour scale. [10]

Richard Misek’s work on color film history resounds this, stating that,

[e]arly cinematography also embraced light of all colors: throughout the black-and-white era, directors and cinematographers freely mixed different colored lights, knowing that they would all appear on screen in shades of gray. [11]

Color from the point of view of cinematographer or filmmaker inhabits a more radical position, as it is not a quality of a photographed object, nor the rendition of the mind of the observer, but instead as Eisenstein claims ‘the power of colour [is] the basis of representation’.[12] Eisenstein gives us a further radical position that sees color as both a symptom and as an act of practice, containing the possibility for real interventions. In looking to the work of Van Gogh, Eisenstein sees the painter’s palette not as manipulation of color, not artifice, but instead at how it shows us Van Gogh’s own mental deterioration. Where Barthes looks at the black-and-white photograph and says ‘he is dead’, Eisenstein might be said to look at the paintings of Van Gogh and say ‘he is deteriorating’. The color *is false*, but Van Gogh is *not lying* to us. It is the real, lived experience of Van Gogh that comes through in his strange use of color, and it is the color of a Stranger to us, as he does not give meaning to it. As Katerina Kolozova writes of Laruelle’s notion of the Stranger, ‘[p]hilosophical truth has always aspired to re-create the Real via “meaning” seeking to fix its status of “being real” by way of “legitimizing” it as the Real (via Truth).’ A self that does not attempt to affix meaning in the philosophical sense of Truth is what Laruelle calls a Stranger, a theorising of self that ‘overcomes the dualistic split created by the dyad of the “Real” and the “Subject”’.[13] Similar to Laruelle’s Stranger as overcoming the dualistic split between real and subject, in his late writings, Eisenstein speaks similarly of the artistic use of color as a ‘chromaturgy’, calling this ‘a non-duality of the artist’s self and color.’ He tells us that the first step is ‘catachresis’, or a purposeful

misuse of color. Like the misuse of a semantic meaning, or a purposeful malapropism, color can be a real interventionist tool. Chromaturgy is furthermore always with the artist inserted, or from the experience of the artist, as with Van Gogh.[14]

Of Van Gogh, Eisenstein further says, 'it is a mistake to take the crazy, wriggling outline of what he is depicting as drawing in our sense of the word', and in

a magical operation it is sufficient to reproduce a symptom, a distinctive trait for the evocation of the entire object. If we say that rosy appearance is a sign of good health, then it is sufficient to paint someone with rose colour to restore him to health. [15]

Like Barthes, Eisenstein here describes color as something that can be painted on a body, not only a corpse, but a sick person. This is not seen as negatively artificial, as with Barthes. When purposely applied, color itself is an intervention. It is possibly even a medicinal force in some cases, as in the above scenario. Chromatic applications, for Eisenstein, are the basis of representation, and therefore a form of real power. While Eisenstein frames chromaturgy in the sense of the act of implementing the creative use of color as a filmmaker, we can also look at film history with this notion in another way: as a chromo-politics of colorisation practices and their socio-political consequences – or when truth claims are made with color film as if it is the real world.

## **False color as chromo-politics, photo-fiction as intervention**

The politics of colorisation practices in film, posed along realism or verisimilitude, has long been at issue in film history and in cultural and critical race studies. False colorising of film has clear connection to the history of colonial violence, anti-blackness, and false representations of blackness since the beginning of cinema. As Valerie Smith points out in her introduction to *Representing Blackness*, that D.W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation*, considered by many the origin of American cinema,

established codes of narrative film practice and circulated as truth a range of black stereotypes for record-breaking audiences [...] Moreover, not only was *Birth* con-

structured as conveying the truth about race relations in nineteenth-century U.S. culture, but it also had a direct impact on contemporaneous race relations [...] and enhanced tolerance of racial, especially Klan, violence. [16]

As Smith makes clear, it would be an oversight to speak along the line of false-color practices in film history without looking at the construction of racial codes as 'true', and the resulting reproduction of real social racial violence – a social realism that is not only a depiction *in* film, but includes an effect of film practices. I turn to look at both false whiteness colorisation practices, in addition to false blackness, connected to the practices of false colorisation on the level of the film strip and its use.

In the work of Richard Misek, who charts the history of color film, he points out the aims of the Technicolor company: 'color needed to dislodge black-and-white as the perceived index of reality, so that instead of requiring a reason to film in color, producers would require a reason not to film in color'. [17] Misek here describes the manner in which Technicolor directly aimed to affect the 'perceived index of reality' in order to make their color film technology profitable. He points out that the company thus advertised 'Technicolor is Natural Color'. [18] At the same time that it touted such truth claims, color film had already been technologically developing toward contrasting white and black skin – a purposeful color practice or 'intervention' that favored the details of producing white skin as more in depth than black and brown skin. As Misek points out, the industry claimed that color film was best exposed to white light, and puts forth that this was not technologically but racially motivated. He further states that in

classical cinema it was common practice to expose film for white faces so that all darker skinned faces flattened out into underexposed blackness [...] Perhaps white light too served to reinforce this polarization. [19]

He further explains that under different colored lights, skin tones look more similar on camera, whiteness is no longer white:

colored light blurs pigmentary distinctions. Under yellow light, all faces appear at least partially yellow [...] Perhaps the true horror in classical Hollywood was in fact not a green face, but a yellow face or a pale brown face, a face whose 'true' whiteness or blackness was obscured by colored light. [20]

Thus, constructing whiteness as contrasting blackness was purposely produced as 'true whiteness', not solely as an effect of film technology, but as a latent political goal. Lorna Roth likewise points out this goal, looking at the

discursive constructions of the technological apparatus of colorisation in still photography. She examines the history of the 'Shirley Card', a color chart for photographers for rendering white skin tone, 'in which a norm reference card showing a "Caucasian" woman [...] used as a basis for measuring and calibrating the skin tones on the photograph [...] [as] the recognized skin ideal standard', and traces how these practices continue to produce whiteness as the dominant norm on the technological level of color, including current digital imaging technology and machine vision standards.[21] Chromatic processes and historical coloration in film and media practices have therefore not been unintentional nor apolitical in their use of white light or colored light and their productions of white tones as a 'natural' basis for photographic color schemes.

As Roth further points out the manner in which digital practices continue from its base of whiteness as standard in digital media, she calls for a technological intervention on the level of design, and thus practice. Roth's point is not only 'to challenge the vestiges of our neo-colonial approach to visual representation and chip away at the remaining resistances to normative, institutional, and economic changes in the social and political apparatus', but to de-center 'Caucasian-ness' in order to bring forth the chromo-politics as such. In other words, Roth calls for a foregrounding of color politics in a manner that is apparent rather than latent, and 'at all levels of discussion and design of the apparatus'.[22] Roth seems to aim to bring forth a chromo-politics as the process, a chromaturgy, rather than to simply critique it, 'to explore the history and current possibilities for the foundations of a collective, anti-racist common sense to guide the (re)design of our technologies and products of colour'.[23] While Eisenstein saw the possibilities of interventions with color, such as restoring health with the chromaturgy of filmmaking, self-color representation is the artist's self and color without being represented by another's color. Stated differently, we can take Eisenstein's claim literally in the work of Roth: that there is actually power in the 'non-duality of the artist's self and color' in the practices of colorisation.

Looking at false color as a realism of social violence, from early black-and-white film to the Technicolor argument for 'natural' color, and Roth's work on the history of designed color exclusions, we can say: false color has always been a political axis alongside photography. Filmic colorisation, as both 'artificial' and real, can be critiqued further as a practice – not only of technology but of thought, via Laruelle's photo-fiction. I connect Roth's design proposition and Eisenstein's thought of 'a non-duality of artist-self and

color' here to the philosophy of Laruelle's notions of radical immanence and non-photography. For Laruelle, philosophy has claimed authority or claimed Truth from its position, as if it is separate from immanence, rather than realising its position in the Real as merely what it conflates with Truth. In his work on non-photography and photo-fiction, François Laruelle gives a critique of photography that is parallel to his critique of philosophy. In his concept of non-photography, Laruelle aims to describe photography as though from within the act of photographing, not separate from it. Non-photography is a practice of being aware of oneself positioned as photographer, rather than a critique looking at photographs or looking at the world through a camera. The 'Photographic thought' that he argues for is a different practice of photography. While the cinematic arts and philosophy has not viewed it as such, for Laruelle, the photographer 'as far as flesh is concerned [...] knows only that of his own body' and thus he attempts to remove the relation of any knowledge of 'truth' between the photographed object and the photograph that 'supposedly represents it'. [24] 'Vision force', and not representation, is the manner in which Laruelle reframes the mode of photography.

Laruelle's concept of 'vision force' relates to a position, a place of seeing. He states that the human is a 'postural being' and that 'position and posture are two different manners that the human being makes a philosophical "decision," i.e., a claim to "Truth"'. [25] Laruelle's concept of vision is not related to only the technological and scientific practices of vision, but also all philosophical representational thought as part of a regime that claims Truth from a position or posture. In other words, all philosophy has been photographically conceived, conflating its camera position and filmic color as an outer Truth without accounting for its position or chromatic bias. As Ray Brassier describes, in Laruelle's world, there is therefore a radical erasure of the relationality between external versus internal; every position is non-relational, and includes even that which has never been visualised 'externally.' This is perhaps more clear in his work on photo-fiction and non-photography, where he says that technological vision is merely 'the search for simple transcendence as macroscopic'. [26] As John Ó Maoilearca points out, according to Laruelle, where philosophers question technological visions in terms of being of the image, Laruelle

wishes to incite a 'new experience of visual representation', with the photographic process understood through its immanent 'cause' in the idea of posture [...] *posture* means 'to be rooted in oneself, to be held within one's own immanence. [...] If there



is a photographic thinking, it is first and foremost of the order of a test of one's naive self. [27]

It is in this way that Laruelle is not only critiquing philosophical, photographic, and technological modes of thought, something that he aligns as 'orientalizing' thought practices, but is proposing a new thought practice of photography rooted in a self-position.[28]

Laruelle seems to want to think as an artist, rather than as a philosopher, while simultaneously philosophising *within* an embodied and self-aware (non-'naive') vision practice. His photo-fiction is therefore a *purposeful* production or a design practice of a vision system – a design that is aware of its politics in the sense of one's self-position. In one of his experimental texts, he seems to propose the exact opposite of early film colorisation practice. White light is not the standard for Laruelle, but rather the

essence of color is not colored: it's the black universe. Metaphysical white is a simple discoloration, the prismatic or indifferent unity of colors. Phenomenal blackness is indifferent to color because it represents their ultimate degree of reality, that which prevents their final dissolution into the mixtures of light. [29]

In Laruelle's terms, unlike Kodak or Technicolor, a metaphysically conceptualised and falsely constructed pure 'whiteness' *is* what constitutes a discoloration practice. I therefore connect Laruelle, Roth, and Eisenstein as each proposing critiques and practices of the artist self and color, albeit from different entry points.

## **The pseudo-color of the thermal image & contemporary chromo-politics**

Although it is still an emerging technology in the arts and in cinema, the thermal camera's imagery is a familiar presence. The technology of thermal photography has been used in surveillance systems and in environmental and other tracking systems for many years. The images were perhaps first made popular in the cultural imaginary by the film *Predator* (John McTiernan, 1987) and the thermal images from the POV of the alien's vision.



Fig. 1: Film Still from Predator of alien POV thermal vision.

It was also made widely visible in the public's sight with night vision photography used during news broadcasts of the first Gulf War. Since then, we have seen the silhouettes of thermal images of bodies of light in surveillance images, crime shows, and now through false-color filters on smart phones and Apple laptop cameras. The images range from ghostly and strange, colorful and bright, haunting and terrifying. What appears as a soft shape of light on a dark road is in actuality a body that is being surveilled or tracked. Such can be seen in the images of national borders taken by surveillance systems, or by police systems, as with the Jinan Hope Wish Photoelectronic Technology Company's ad depicting the Chinese border (Fig. 2), or the image that circulated widely online by the Boston police from the thermal image camera of the Boston marathon bombing suspect hiding inside a boat (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2: Jinan Hope Wish Photoelectronic Technology Company, product image of example border surveillance use with their Long Range Handheld Thermal Camera product.



Fig. 3: Image of thermal tracking camera used by Boston police to find Boston terror suspect, released publicly by Massachusetts State Police (2013).

Thermal cameras capture, instead of the visible spectrum of light, the temperature and the infrared light spectrum invisible to human eyes. The heat of bodies below the human perceptual threshold is then often colorised with what is called ‘pseudo-color’. Similar to early film, the heat map data is falsely colored. Often, it is colored as shades of black and white. However, even without the additional pseudo-color of reds, yellows, and greens we can still call the color values of white and black pseudo-colors applied to the heat data. The whiter parts of an image are often arbitrarily related to the warmer parts of the thermal data, and the darker to the cooler. Thus, humans and other similarly heated forms appear as white light, while cooler parts appear as dark. The pseudo-color of the heated body is not the representation of a natural scene known to the eye. The color and the black and white values are a placeholder for something that we will never be able to see. In this way, the thermal camera’s pseudo-color performs at the outset Eisenstein’s chromaturgy, a purposeful misuse of color, while simultaneously claiming to be a truth. It is not a metaphor but a stand-in for life – a claim of truth. ‘Pseudo color’ and thermal imagery is thus a chromo-politics par excellence. It tells us at the outset that its hues are not the real color of the scene it portrays, that it has been added, but that it represents the truth of what we cannot see and is an image of the real heat of living bodies. This is how thermal camera imagery also reconstructs exactly what Laruelle claims that philosophy has always done: it conflates its position in the Real (the inability to see heat) with its decisional manner for approaching this position (the pseudo-color of heat) as the truth.

Thermal imaging colorisation practices, like the false color of cinema and photography, has also always been connected to a social realism – to surveillance and the threat of a predatory violence. It is not representation of death, but the supposed true image of life; a photo of life as white light and the simultaneous threat of predation. What is different about the thermal image is that, more than other forms of photography, it occludes its orientaling and predatory vision as tied to its philosophical ‘truth’ claim of what is life and how this is attached to its false colorisation practice. Thermal imagery fully entails a colorisation process that we are supposed to accept as a false vision but nonetheless a true image. This is a conflation of its specific colorisation practice and its philosophical truth claim of life.

In the recent work of Irish photographer Richard Mosse, the project *Heat Maps* and the accompanying video *Incoming* uses a military thermal camera to trace and photograph the journeys of refugees and migrants from Syria,

Iraq, Afghanistan, Senegal, and Somalia. The camera that was used is a military surveillance device that is classified as a weapon under international law due to its use with long range weapons, and is designed to detect body heat from a distance of over 30km. The photographs are printed as large scale tableaus, and the video is projected on three large curved screens (Figs 4, 5). It has been described as showing ‘the white-hot misery of the migrant crisis’, where one is ‘transported to a world both alien and familiar [...] humans appear as ghostly figures, their faces glowing eerily as the camera records traces of sweat, saliva and moisture’, and that ‘it takes a while to adjust to the disorienting otherness of *Incoming*’.[30] It is posed by Mosse that the subjects in his work are ‘made both more anonymous and more human’ because ‘all that’s left to them is the biological fact of their birth – a thing foregrounded by the camera, which depicts the human body as a radiant glow of biochemical processes such as respiration, energy production, hypothermia and warmth’.[31] On the one hand, Mosse claims to present ‘the biological fact’ of some people’s lives while also claiming that his photographs are showing generic ‘life’ without the representation of specific identity, a minimal recognition of the foundations of life. While indeed, any body that emanates heat, any warmth, triggers the thermal camera as a fact of the universal heat of humans, at the same time, in Mosse’s work it is clearly not any body that is photographed, but the bodies of black and brown migrants and refugees.



Fig. 4: Richard Mosse. Heat Maps (2017).



Fig. 5: Richard Mosse. *Incoming* (2017).

The obviously problematic aim to erase particulars of identity, especially through military technology, is co-mingled with the claim that Mosse makes of the thermal camera as a philosophical and photographic truth. The thermal sensitivity of the camera could hypothetically capture all humans and all nonhumans that emanate heat in the similar spectrum of human body heat. However, such is not its use by design. The promise of an egalitarian image is not the design intention of the color practice of the thermal camera's vision. It is not one, as Roth puts forth, that incorporates a practice of chromo-politics at all levels of its design. It is designed instead to specifically track bodies through its false color of invisible light – a militarised vision of predation – and it therefore produces the marked bodies of 'others' by design. The aesthetics of Mosse's images are thus tied to their predatory design in its military origins, as Paul Virilio has pointed out of most of our 'vision machines'.<sup>[32]</sup> However, there is something more in the chromo-politics of the images of Mosse's project. It is not the project's use of military technology that is violent, but the positioning of its images as a truth of life as a light we cannot ever see. The invisible light of the heat of human life is brought forth into view, albeit it is done while simultaneously taking a position as if along enemy lines. The film title alone, *Incoming*, reveals its position of looking through a device on a specific side of a line, for the tracking of only specific humans from very specific countries. Despite his claims, Mosse's camera emphasises a thermal camera that looks only at 'others' while proclaiming the definition of what their 'life' is, a position of here versus there, and 'us' versus 'them'. It is not

the generic humanity of the pseudo colors of heated and living bodies that the project promises. More than an image of generic life, they are images of a predatory Othering color practice posed as the truth of an invisible light.

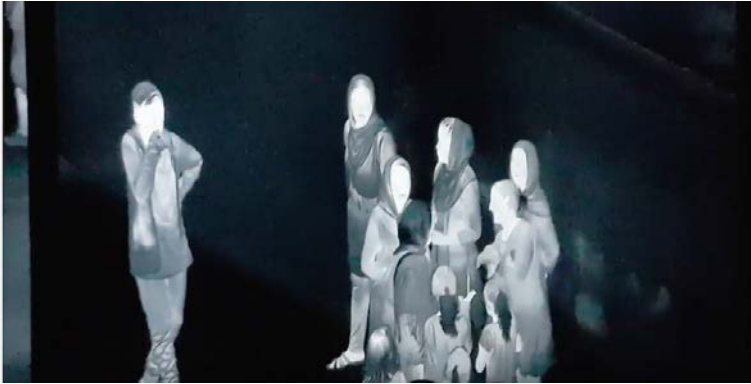


Fig. 6: Richard Mosse. *Incoming* (2017).

At one point during *Incoming*, we witness an autopsy as doctors remove the bone of a child whose decomposing body had been washed up on a shore after weeks of being in the sea. While it may seem that the thermal camera will here connect to the realism of this death, the arbitrary pseudo-color map of the thermal imagery has been reversed by Mosse. Whereas in the other images throughout Mosse's video, the white light is used for tracking the life of refugees across camps, in the autopsy scene, the color is reversed. The doctors are shown as dark figures alive, and the child's body, nearly a skeleton, is shown as white light with the details of textures revealed. This further reveals that the thermal camera in Mosse's work is indeed founded on the false coloring of its subjects in order to further track them and specify them – as specimens, not as generically human. The pseudo-color use here is a purposeful false colorisation that specifies 'refugee' in the colorisation rules of its own constructed film reality, contrary to Mosse's claims of the universality of thermal imagery. If indeed all life is rendered the same by the thermal camera by body warmth, why then when looking at the dead child must we see it reversed, so that the child is colorised in the same manner as the other refugees painted in pseudo shades of splotchy white? It seems, rather than life itself, Mosse is specifically coloring all of the bodies of refugees to be the same color, in both life and death, marking them as always in a particular false color palette. Daniel Blight makes the connection of Mosse's work to the

'Kodak conceptualism' of 'accidental racism' in the supposed unintentional whiteness of its color film product to a critique of *Incoming*, stating:

[t]here is little difference in this process, and the methodology of 'conceptual inversion' undertaken by some white artists making work about people of colour. It's just harder to see [...] they instead invert and simultaneously posture a kind of distance from their own work which results in them not addressing what is of the upmost necessity: anti-racist action; anti-racist pedagogy; their own practice in the form of a verb, that is to say, the part of speech, in this case the artwork, that affirms being and action. [33]

The history of false colorisation of otherness is apparent as a latent false-whiteness practice. In Mosse's work when he reverses the colors, the images nonetheless are producing the same spectrum of color for only certain bodies, specifically black and brown bodies, with a colorisation practice that claims to show their 'white hot' reality. It is a social violence in line with the colorisation practices of photography and cinematography that claims itself as merely a technological truth. In Laruelle's terms, we can see this as 'onto-photo-logical appropriation' where 'onto-photo-logy manifests itself in the form of a circular auto-position of photographic technique' and where auto-position signifies 'a vicious self-reflection, an interpretation on the basis of elements that are perhaps already interpretations and [...] on the basis of western onto-photo-logical prejudices that are redoubled and fetishized in the form of philosophies-of-photography'. [34] Mosse both philosophises photography and life as he claims to photograph the real lives of others. Beyond its othering practice, *Incoming* makes a truth claim upon life-images in general, while erasing its own positionality in constructing that 'truth'. As Kolozova points out in Laruelle's criticism, '[t]ruth is that amphibological instance at which thought decides to take the place of the real by being the "truth of it"'. [35] For Laruelle then, the standard photographer is one who knowingly stands apart from the world while taking the supposed world as its object, 'only to withdraw out of shot, withdraw from the essence of the shot'. [36] What Laruelle thus proposes in the practice of photo-fiction is not only the self as embedded in the practice of the shot, but also a self embedded in the camera as well: 'contrary to the indecisive mix that believes itself capable of resolving all its problems by a mechanical decision between subject and object, another form that is no longer that of difference but of the indivisible conjugation of the camera apparatus and the world: photo-fiction'. [37]

To use a photo-fiction is to use thermal camera-thought itself, to practice a non-naive awareness of the living heat of bodies through that of one's own



heat. Stated differently, with the thermal camera, we can know that we are not seeing what is really visually accessible to our perception, while working with the notion of the entanglement of the heat of one's own life and that which the heat camera images. In this way, there is an actual genericity when we understand the thermalness of heat imagery. This is why Laruelle states that, rather than an orientalisng orientation, the 'generic photo is ethically people-oriented [*ethiquement orientee-hommes*], in service of their defense, and passes from the positive photo, devoted to narcissism of the world to the generic photo'.<sup>[38]</sup> This is also the manner in which Mosse fails to actually produce a 'generic photo' in his claim of the thermal image. He does not place himself into the apparatus, but behind it, and thus he is not a photographer of generic humanity. The thermal image here is a philosophical orientation that serves the narcissistic photo, it is always already orientalist, rather than proceeding from the generic stance.



Fig. 7: Richard Mosse. *Incoming* (2017).

As Katerina Kolozova writes in *The Lived Revolution: Solidarity with the Body in Pain as the New Political Universal*, for Laruelle

'[p]ain' or 'suffering' are terms which are 'affected by immanence', that is, they work as direct invocation of (the memory of) an experience (of pain or suffering). Identification with the pain or the suffering itself of the Other can serve a basis of political solidarity, one that is far more inclusive than the discursive category of 'humanity'.<sup>[39]</sup>

The thermal image, while promising its showing of the heat of generic 'humanity' through its color, is not generic if only one-sided, if it does not also imply the solidarity of pain of all bodies that have heat. To think of the thermal camera and its pseudo-coloration as generic is simply an erasure of its one-sidedness and continues the illusion of an auto-positional truth founded on an oriental mode of photographic and militaristic predation. False colorisation practice in Mosse's work is thus apt for military surveillance technology, as it knowingly tracks certain bodies only, and as images oriented for the tracking, dissecting, and killing of certain bodies. In a photo-fictional practice of thermography, on the other hand, the thermal images of warm bodies requires the mastery of one's own bodily place, of one's own bodily color, and of one's own bodily pain.

After this mastery of non-philosophical photographic practice, then it is possible to dedicate a photographic practice of heat that we know we cannot see – a photo as if with eyes half-closed. Or rather, as Laruelle calls for photo-fiction not as photography at all ultimately, but of 'taking a photo with one's eyes closed, on the condition that one admits they are closed, which is to say they had been open and more precisely, they are half-closed, the beating of eyelids by which we take excessive measure of the world and through which we master the intensity of its hallucinatory aspect'.<sup>[40]</sup> Only the masters of their naivety and their bodily place of pain in the world are prepared to utilise new practices of color interventions, to take generic photos. To implement a chromo-political design practice is to use a practice of self-thought, of the artist self and color, and a solidarity with bodies as the self embedded in the white hot pain of real life.

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## Notes

- [1] Comolli et al 1965, p.18.
- [2] Brassier 2003, p. 32.
- [3] Ó Maoilearca 2015.
- [4] Balasz 2016 (orig. 1923), p. 583.
- [5] Bazin 1967, p. 236.
- [6] Barthes 1993, p. 81.
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Bazin 2003 (orig. 1949), p. 31.

- [9] Ibid., p.30.
- [10] Eisenstein 1959.
- [11] Misek 2010, p. 123.
- [12] Eisenstein 2010.
- [13] Kolozova 2011, p. 63.
- [14] Ibid.
- [15] Eisenstein 2010, p. 104.
- [16] Smith 1997, p. 1.
- [17] Misek 2010, p. 35.
- [18] Ibid.
- [19] Ibid., p. 36.
- [20] Ibid.
- [21] Roth 2009, p. 112.
- [22] Ibid., p. 128.
- [23] Ibid., p. 127.
- [24] Laruelle 2011, pp. 17, 18.
- [25] Ó Maoilearca 2015, p. 156.
- [26] Laruelle 2012, p. 48.
- [27] Ó Maoilearca 2015, p. 157.
- [28] Cf. Burk 2014, p. 70.
- [29] Laruelle 1988, p. 405.
- [30] O'Hagan 2017a.
- [31] O'Hagan 2017b.
- [32] Virilio 1994.
- [33] Blight 2017.
- [34] Laruelle 2011, p. 5.
- [35] Kolozova 2011, p. 63.
- [36] Laruelle 2011, p. 8.
- [37] Laruelle 2012, p. 51.
- [38] Ibid., p. 53.
- [39] Kolozova 2010, p. 143.
- [40] Laruelle 2012, p. 34.