

How the world is not a map: Forensic and humanitarian angles in the visual culture of migration

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Abstract

The expansive and proliferating field visualizing global migration encompasses traditional and new media forms, institutional and amateur producers, high and low cultural objects, and circulates among communities across the globe. On one end, forensic mapping, including data regarding points of entry, drownings at sea, migrant demographics, asylum claims; on the other, humanitarian accounts of singular, iconic, stories of human drama. I argue that this tension between the forensic and the humanitarian organizes the visual field of the migrant crisis, and—depending on where one is located on the continuum—delimits the character of the ‘crisis’. This paper will discuss how the image operations at play in visualizing migratory movement are supported by platforms, institutions and broader operations of power of border regimes. They trigger strong public responses, mobilize civil society, alternately organize networks of support and lobbying for refugee rights, or animate nationalist and protectionist responses. I end by examining activist and artistic uses of migrant movement data that challenge the models of surveillance and control in operation by national and para-state organizations.

Biography

Krista Lynes is Canada Research Chair in Feminist Media Studies, Professor of Communication Studies, and Director of the Feminist Media Studio at Concordia University in Montreal. They are the author of *Prismatic Media, Transnational Circuits: Feminism in a Globalized Present* (2013) and co-editor of the open access anthology *Moving Images: Mediating Migration as Crisis* (2020). Their current research project, *Greenhouse Effects: The Mediation of Life and the Migration of Labor*, seeks to explore how greenhouses have been a central infrastructure for the movement of humans, plants, animals and knowledge over the last several centuries and today.