

Introduction

This study is based on the premise that in an increasingly globalised world, mobility and cultural contacts are both common aspects of everyday life and complicating factors with respect to national, regional, cultural and communal identities and notions of belonging. Millions of people are migrating, and even those who have never left their homeland are affected by the restlessness of our contemporary world.¹ Paul Virilio has pinpointed the urgency and enormous consequences of recent migration:

A billion people moving over half a century – that's never been seen before. All this calls into question – what? Sedentariness, the city, the fact of being here and not elsewhere, the fact of being settled in a region, in a nation ... So the question for us is: how will we cope with this perpetual motion, the perpetual motion of history in motion?²

Migration, understood as the movement of people and cultures, gives impetus to globalisation and the transculturation processes that the interaction between people and cultures entails. Important facilitators of transcultural connectivity throughout the world are, of course, the media – broadly understood here as diverse modes of communication across time and space by technological and other means, one of them being contemporary art, the subject matter under discussion here. This book explores the transformative impact of migration and transculturation through the lens of contemporary art and the distinctive perspective it can provide on how notions of identity, belonging and community change with migration and globalisation.

These processes also affect the politics and aesthetics of art itself. The days are gone when the art world could be conceived of as a closed system endowed with an integrity that enabled works of art to function as autonomous objects within, yet at the same time independent of, the social, economic, political and media systems of the societies that encompass it. Today, art should be seen, rather, as an open system, increasingly entangled in global 'financescapes' and 'mediascapes'³ – in the former, given art's role

as a crucial sphere of capital investment and ‘a vector for the flight of global capital’;⁴ and in the latter through art’s growing visibility on the Internet, and the contribution that has been made to the general aestheticisation of everyday life and lifestyles through design, spectacle, staged events and cultural tourism, etc. Yet, the art world still constitutes a particular field, a virtual space of discursive and sociological separation produced by a generalised community of artists, curators, collectors, critics, scholars and associated institutions and professionals.⁵ Despite this relative separateness, representations of migrants and migrancy have become common, to some extent, in contemporary art, while the art world’s modes of production, distribution, reception and institutionalisation have themselves been transformed by the increased mobility of people, goods, information, images – and works of art. Thus, the causes of the art world’s transformation should also be sought ‘outside’ the art field, and an appropriate place to start is in the social sciences.

In the 1990s, a so-called ‘mobility turn’ began in the social sciences in response to the realisation of the historical and contemporary importance of movement to individuals and societies. Historically, the conceptualisation of place and movement in the social sciences has been dominated by a dichotomisation between sendentarism and deterritorialisation, i.e. the tendency to perceive human beings as either static, and dwelling in a specific place, or as placeless nomads – and to take the locational stability of sendentarism to be the norm. The mobility turn opposes this dichotomy and testifies to the ongoing attempt to chart and understand how international migration and other mobilities – such as tourism and travel mobilities, for example – have profoundly reformed societies and politics in recent decades, and how the transporting of people and the communication of information and images increasingly converge and overlap through the recent digitisation and extension of wireless infrastructures.⁶

In acknowledging that after the Second World War cardinal events around the world have increasingly involved international migration, sociologist Stephen Castles and political scientist Mark J. Miller famously called their leading book on the subject *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*.⁷ The phrase ‘the age of migration’ does not imply that migration is something new, as human beings have always migrated. However, the character of migration changed with the beginnings of European colonial expansion in the sixteenth century. This reached a peak between the mid-nineteenth century and the First World War with the mass migrations from Europe to North America. While this period was mainly one of transatlantic migration, the movements of people that began after the Second World War, and which have increased dramatically from the 1980s onwards, have involved all regions of the world. In this phase, political and

cultural changes, as well as the spread of new transport and communication technologies, have made migration easier, and international migration has, in turn, become 'a central dynamic within globalization' and an issue of major importance in domestic and international politics.⁸ The increased frequency of travel also contributed to eroding the old dichotomy between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving states, as more and more countries experienced both emigration and immigration (although one or the other often prevails). At the same time, some nations have taken on a crucial role as transit zones for migrants, including the irregular (also known as undocumented or illegal) migrants whose numbers, according to Castles and Miller, have probably never been greater than today.⁹ This development puts new pressures on the sovereignty of nation-states, especially on their ability to regulate the movements of people across their borders, while the ensuing enforcement of borders and 'gates' regulating movement also creates immobilities and social exclusions as well as jeopardising the lives of migrants. The horrific number of migrants drowning by the thousands in the Mediterranean Sea over the years this book was being written is a tragic reminder of the fatal consequences of European border and asylum politics, which have reflected a global tendency among affluent nations to fortify their borders against the destitute displaced from their homeland by war, persecution, climate change or other disasters.

In addition, 'transnationalism' poses cultural and political challenges to nation-states. As migration becomes technically easier and travelling quicker, many migrants, and their descendants, develop vital and durable relationships in two or more societies. The ties can be social and cultural, political or economic, or all of these. Transnational ties are often believed to undermine the undivided loyalty traditionally perceived to be paramount to sovereign nation-states that are also concerned about irregular migration. Thus, for decades, 'immigration' has been one of the most contested issues in the political debates of Western societies, and has provoked a range of critical responses. Scholars from the social sciences and philosophy, from the more specialised fields of study of migration, diaspora, postcoloniality and transnational citizenship, and from cultural and literary studies, have launched trenchant critiques of the bounded categories of nation, ethnicity, community, place and state that have dominated political debates. Instead, they have foregrounded displacement, disjuncture, dialogism, hybridisation and belonging as basic conditions of migrant subjectivity. By highlighting acts of 'homing',¹⁰ 'regrounding'¹¹ and 'togetherness-in-difference',¹² writers such as cultural studies scholar Ien Ang and sociologists Avtar Brah and Mimi Sheller have made a convincing case for the complex and dynamic interplay between 'travel and dwelling, home and not-home'.¹³

Global art

Concurrently with this increase in and broadening of scholarly interest, the issue of migration has also sparked the imagination and critical engagement of contemporary artists and attracted the attention of professionals from 'the art world'. The mobility turn in the neighbouring social science disciplines has also been brought to bear in a number of significant ways on the material, social, intellectual and institutional practices belonging to the visual arts¹⁴ – from works of art that are preoccupied conceptually with geographical movement and transnational issues, to the creation of hybrid aesthetics and the debates on the globe-trotting that artists and their works participate in. Globalisation and the intensified multi-directional migration of recent decades have also profoundly changed the structures and practices of the art world. As Pamela M. Lee has pointed out:

the art world is itself both object *and* agent of globalization, both on structural grounds (its organization and distribution) and in workaday practice. Indeed, in responding to the geopolitical and transnational preoccupations of the work of many contemporary artists, the art world enlarges at once its geographically overdetermined borders and its conventionally Eurocentric self-definitions in the process.¹⁵

The most telling sign of how profoundly the mobility turn has affected the visual arts is perhaps the spread of the term *global art* in the discourses on art, where it is often used as a synonym for internationally circulating contemporary art. The notion of a global production of contemporary art gained ground in connection with the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette in Paris. The exhibition's curator Jean-Hubert Martin sought to go beyond the ethnocentric and hierarchical division between 'the West' and 'the rest', between artists and artisans, and Western 'international' art and non-Western ethnographic artefacts or 'primitive' art, which had until then structured the discourses on modern and contemporary art.¹⁶ The inclusive designation of the participants as 'magicians' of the Earth was chosen for the Paris exhibition to avoid protests by Western art critics. The show was the target of some severe criticism, but it was also praised as the first truly global exhibition of contemporary art. Since 1989, the interest has largely centred on the question of 'how to deal with the fact that modern international art had lost its geographical frontiers, or home base, and had now ended up in *global art*'.¹⁷ Ethnicity had always been a concern in ethnographic discourses, but not in the Western discourses on modern art. Around 1989–90, it became an integral part of a new concern with identity politics and 'difference', even among those who presented themselves as 'post-ethnic' (e.g. as artists from India, instead of 'Indian' artists). As Hans Belting

has pointed out, *Magiciens de la terre* functioned as a rite of passage, a transitory and profoundly transformative event:

The project would have been impossible before, and was no longer possible afterwards when globalization had opened up a new territory of art ... The *Magiciens* project led into no man's land where we still are and where we navigate with the help of provisional terminology ... It now seemed that *inter-national* art, an art between nations, thought to be sure Western nations, had been an affair of the modern age and that the term no longer covered a polycentric map where cultures took over the former distinctions of nations.¹⁸

The emergence of new art regions with a transnational character, such as the Asian region, or Latin-America or the Middle East, testifies to the formation of specific regional art worlds where art encounters different conditions and cultural traditions.¹⁹ The clearest example of this is the Asian region. In recent years, it has seen transnational forums and discourses involving art schools, universities, museums and art exhibitions, in particular the biennials and triennials that have proliferated in the region and which have contributed significantly to the development of a distinct focus on art from Asia. Australian art historians Caroline Turner and Jen Webb have pointed out that while the major cultures of India, China and Japan, along with Western colonialism, have exerted a significant historical influence, there are also cross-cultural interconnections between the Asian nations in the modern era which have been numerous and complex.²⁰ For centuries, Europeans regarded Asia as an 'imitative' periphery whose artists were destined to follow the lead of Western artists if they were to become truly *modern* artists. As Asia is now well on its way to becoming the global centre of economic and artistic activities in the twenty-first century, there has been a significant shift in the nature and reception of Asian contemporary art. As a result, critical thinkers have begun to reposition the art of this region, leading to the emergence of the distinct field of art historical enquiry called Asian contemporary art.²¹

It is important to keep in mind that the notion of global art is far from a modernist conception of international art, just a broader and larger one. In its own definition, global art is contemporary and 'in spirit postcolonial' in that it seeks to replace the centre and periphery scheme of a hegemonic Western modernity with a notion of coexisting regional art worlds that interact as well as compete within the framework of an overall global art system and late capitalist globalisation.²²

People on the move

The term 'migration' captures the dual nature of the migrant experience: every immigrant who arrives as a newcomer from the point of view of the

receiving country is, at the same time, an emigrant from the perspective of those who stayed behind in the home country. Notwithstanding its advantage of relative impartiality and dual reference to im- and emigration, the term 'migrant' is simply too broad to allow for sufficient analytical precision. There is a whole family of terms for people on the move and for those who reside temporarily or permanently as an immigrant in a country other than that where they hold citizenship: tourists, migrant workers, asylum seekers, expatriates, terrorists, business people, refugees, exiles and members of other diasporas, or of the armed forces, etc. Not all of them allow for voluntary migration and self-willed acts of becoming (within the limits set by social, economic and historical determinants), and not all are relevant and heuristically useful to this study.

I will turn to T. J. Demos's *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* for a typology that not only enables me to make the necessary distinctions between major types of migration but also makes it possible to map a shift in priorities in the visual arts and some historical differences in the manner in which artists have addressed migration. As Demos observes, recent decades have seen a movement in the visual arts away from the category of 'exile' and its associations with empires, tragic banishments, severe penal sentences and predicaments of unbelonging and yearning for a lost 'homeland'. In most of the twentieth century, the figure of the exiled has also served as a model or metaphor of the alienated individual, engulfed in 'the psychic disequilibrium of traumatic *unheimlichkeit*' and suffering from what philosopher György Lukács diagnosed as 'transcendental homelessness'.²³ Kobena Mercer noted that modern uses of the term 'exile' have often imbued it with 'an aura of dissidence and opposition to oppressive regimes'.²⁴ Nowhere is this truer than in the spheres of art and politics. Demos argues that a shift of historical perspective from modern to contemporary art presupposes a terminological move away from 'exile' to the cluster of concepts associated with 'migration', among which Demos selects three concepts common in the humanities as well as the social sciences: *diaspora* (referring to a geographical dispersal in the collective sense); *refugees* (referring to victims of persecution, disasters or forced displacement); and *nomadism* (which Demos uses with specific reference to 'artistic nomadism' and the representation of unbounded movement in art). In his introduction to *The Migrant Image*, Demos discusses these categories in relation to different decades – the diasporic art of the 1980s, the nomadic practices of the 1990s, and the heightened attention to forced migration, refugees and camps since the 2000s. Demos insists that the shifts of emphasis are not clear-cut, nor is his chronological periodisation definitive. As the categories often overlap, they should be treated therefore rather as genealogical categories.²⁵ However, the growing concern about forced migration should also be seen

as a response to a historical moment of crisis. It reflects the fact that (civil) wars and political, religious and ethnic persecution, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, have resulted in the greatest number of refugees and the deepest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. Thus, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR's) annual global report from 20 June 2016 registered the highest level of worldwide displacement ever recorded, with a total of 65.3 million people forcibly displaced at the end of 2015 compared to 59.5 million a year earlier and 37.5 million a decade ago.²⁶ In addition, in 2015 only 201,400 refugees²⁷ were able to return to their home countries.

In *The Migrant Image*, Demos focuses primarily, although not exclusively, on artistic representations of forced migration and refugees. In contrast, this present book explores diasporic and nomadic migration, in addition to forced migration, as some of the forms in which geographical mobility can manifest itself under the pressures of globalisation and neo-liberal capitalism. As interconnected forms in the same historical time-space, these different types of migration are juxtaposed in a reflection on some of the differences emerging as a result of migration, and on migration itself as plural and riven by inequalities. On a more utopian note, I hope that by drawing on art's ability to put things in a different perspective and its sensitivity to the complexities of human relations, this book may contribute to the development of a more empathic, respectful and reciprocal understanding of the conditions of migrants in receiving countries, and help expand our knowledge of how migration contributes to profound and often conflictual transformations of society, as well as to its overall plurality and cultural richness.

Politics and the political

There is not first the thought and then the image. The image is itself a modality of thinking. It does not represent, but rather proposes, thought ... This is the unhomely insistence of the artwork, its critical cut, its interruptive force.²⁸

Taking my cue from postcolonial scholar Iain Chambers' remark on the 'critical cut' of art, I would like to propose that what has emerged in the first decades of the twentieth-first century is not merely a remarkable proliferation of representations of migration and migrants – that is to say, a consolidation of a new theme in art (although it is also that). Nor is it a new 'art of migration' or 'diasporic art', both problematic terms suggesting a definable, coherent aesthetics historically belonging to 'the age of migration'. What does, in effect, seem to be happening is that a significant number of contemporary artists have invested their creativity in transforming artistic practices into *critical modalities of thinking about migration* in order to question – or, as Chambers

would have it, ‘interrupt’– orthodoxies about migration and propose alternative and often unsettling perspectives on the workings of migration and the conditions of migrating in a globalised world. This formulation does not define art solely as an object, i.e. a representation or ‘a work’ of art, but also as a *politically charged action*. It suggests that art should be understood as a performative process of engagement and critical reflection which is undertaken by artists and audiences alike. Thus, the incorporation of the problematics of migration into the visual arts includes the invention of new ways of visualising and theorising the decisive role of international migration and mobilities ‘in constellations of power, the creation of identities and the micro-geographies of everyday life’.²⁹ With regard to the critical gesture of art, political theorist Chantal Mouffe is even more radical than Iain Chambers as she defines critical art as an art that instigates dissensus by making visible what hegemonic discourses obscure, and by ‘giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony’.³⁰ Mouffe’s insistence on art’s ability to give a voice to the excluded is pertinent to the topic of this book, as is the underlying conflation of art and politics.

Linking migration to politics and the political in the context of art and aesthetics, as this book does, necessitates some clarifying distinctions. Firstly, that between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’: here, I turn to political theorist Yannis Stavrakakis’s useful distinction between *politics*, as a separate sphere of activities, structures, ideologies and institutions, and *the political*, as ‘the ontological moment, the ontological horizon, of every shaping/ordering of social relations, of every social topography’.³¹ Stavrakakis’s understanding of the political in art is based on discourse theory and Chantal Mouffe’s understanding of every social order as fundamentally political, which also implies that the fields of art and politics mutually constitute each other. As Mouffe has explained, there is an aesthetic dimension in the political, as well as a political dimension in art. Hence, the real issue is not whether art is political or not, but concerns the possible forms of *critical* art, i.e. the various ways in which artistic practices can contribute to challenging the dominant consensus and bring to light what it tends to obliterate.³² If art is intertwined with political discourses, as Mouffe argues, one cannot take for granted that an artwork is necessarily more enlightening, trustworthy or politically neutral than, for example, a political speech or a news broadcast. It is important to bear this in mind when studying artworks related to a vexed issue such as migration. Works of art may also reproduce ethnic stereotypes and binary oppositions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, stigmatise migrants or nourish the fear of strangers. As Stavrakakis notes, ‘As a complex articulation of truth and untruth, conservatism and radicalism, artistic practices, in their constitutive impurity, can intervene in the public space in a variety of different and conflicting ways, both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic.’³³

Secondly, it is important to differentiate between migration and the politics of migration. *Migration* is, among other things, about the experience of geographical movement, emotional attachments, living hybridities and what sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis has called 'a mode of relational state of emotion and mind'.³⁴ It involves a multi-layered and multi-territorial process of losing one's sense of feeling 'at home' in one place and, in most cases, regaining a sense of personal, social and political belonging elsewhere through an ongoing process of 'regrounding'³⁵ or '*getting-back-into place*'.³⁶ Broadly speaking, *the politics of migration* comprise political projects aimed at defending or denying the rights of the freedom of movement and negotiating the position, recognition, identity and representation of migrants in society. As W. J. T. Mitchell has noted, on the level of politics, the issue of migration is thus 'structurally and necessarily bound up with that of images'. Not only do images move from one environment to another, making the 'migration of images' fundamental to the ontology of images and visual cultures as such; images also 'go before' the immigrant and the first encounter with the receiving country: 'before the immigrant arrives, his or her image comes first in the form of stereotypes, search templates, tables of classification and patterns of recognition'.³⁷

Accordingly, it is helpful to introduce a third analytical distinction between two of the typical ways in which 'mobility' can manifest itself in works of art. Reflecting on the connections between images and migration, Mitchell has distinguished between *migration as a thematic in the visual arts* and *the migratory nature of the visual forms themselves*, i.e. 'images themselves as moving from one environment to another, sometimes taking root, sometimes infecting entire populations, sometimes moving onwards as rootless nomads'.³⁸ The latter is fundamental to the life of images, the way they are used, the meanings they produce and the effects they have on people. It is almost impossible to define the nature of images without attributing to them the capacity for migration, circulation, reproduction, relocation and cross-cultural translation. Later in this introduction, Danh Vo's art project *We, The People (Detail)* (2011–13) will make it clear that the two modes of mobility can intersect in art in many ways, meaning that artworks often require a consideration of both aspects.

In summary, there are two basic dimensions always to be considered when exploring migration through art and aesthetics. On the one hand, the life-changing experience of migration tends to become internalised, in that the act of migration is usually followed by some kind of everyday life in another place where the migrant experience becomes an integral part of everyday practices and the social life and identity of the subject. In this sense, migration and artistic representations of migrants' lives unfold within the encompassing socio-cultural framework of *the political*. On the other hand, when migration

becomes an object of *politics*, it becomes an issue in some way – whether in national legislative and administrative immigration policies; in the ideological debates about multiculturalism and the recognition of minorities; in the image politics of news broadcasts about immigrants; or the strategies of cultural institutions vis-à-vis artists with a migrant background. Recognising the deep entanglement of these two dimensions, politics and the political, this study will address aspects of both the representation of the experience of migration and the politics of migration in contemporary art.

Migration into art

The title of this book cannibalises the title of Kenneth Clark's classic study *Landscape into Art* about the history of the landscape motif in art, first published in 1949.³⁹ Although my study does not map the rise and historical development of a genre, as Clark's does, it shares its ambition to explore how artistic representations contribute to shaping structures of knowledge. In *Landscape into Art*, Clark examined how art has contributed to and changed ideas of 'nature' through the centuries; *Migration into Art: Transcultural Identities and Art-making in a Globalised World* explores how artistic imagination is currently contributing to shaping ideas of migration and the closely related notions of belonging and identity. Like Clark's *Landscape into Art*, this book is based on the premise that art is about the world, and that art marks the changes in our conception of the world and the ways in which human beings position themselves in it. In Clark's understanding, it was not until the seventeenth century that artists began to cultivate landscape painting for its own sake and tried to systematise the rules of the genre. Only then did landscape come 'into art' as a dominant genre of Western art with a new aesthetics 'of its own'.⁴⁰ I wish to propose that in recent decades, and under different historical circumstances, migration has come 'into art' as a thematic and a condition that many artists are engaging with. Their attempts to articulate 'migration' as a topic and experience have sparked a diversity of aesthetic responses that cannot be contained within the boundaries of genre such as Clark's 'landscape'. In a discussion of what the distinguishing features of black British art in the 1980s might be, Kobena Mercer has suggested that 'British blackness' should be placed in 'the bigger picture of diaspora aesthetics in twentieth century art as a whole'.⁴¹ This formulation not only invokes the breadth of 'diaspora aesthetics', or 'migratory aesthetics';⁴² it also makes it clear that the category of genre cannot encompass it. As the overarching topic of this book, 'migration' must thus be understood broadly, but to ensure precision it is necessary, in the book's chapters, to distinguish between different kinds of migrants and between varying conditions of migration and transculturation.

This study aims to contribute towards a more nuanced debate about art's entanglement and critical engagement with processes of migration and globalisation; the resulting art provides a key source of improving our understanding of how these processes transform identities, cultures, institutions and geopolitics. Its contribution to the debate can be found where the complexities of contemporary art and cultural identities meet the paradoxes of globalisation and the transcultural experience of migration as structured by mobility and settlement, longing and belonging, identification and disidentification.

Migration into Art: Transcultural Identities and Art-making in a Globalised World centres on three interwoven concerns that run as connecting threads through the chapters. Firstly, it is concerned with *identity* and *belonging*. This thematic relates to the artist's own identifications and sense of belonging, as well as identity and belonging as a topic in art. Identity is a key issue here because migration unsettles and challenges the identities of the people who migrate, but also of those who stay behind, and indeed of the communities where migrants settle. It thus involves a complex set of questions regarding identification, estrangement, in- and exclusion, decolonisation (in a broad sense), recognition, and more. What does it mean, for instance, to 'belong'? And how do experiences of globalisation, transculturality and transnationality shape belonging? How important is cultural and national identity for an artist's self-understanding and the reception of the artist's work? (See Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.)

I bring in the idea of transculturality, most notably developed by philosopher Wolfgang Iser as a necessary cosmopolitan corrective to ethnocentrism and xenophobia.⁴³ Transculturality indicates a certain quality (of an idea, an object, a self-perception or way of living) which joins a variety of elements indistinguishable as separate sources. The prefix *trans* signals a turning away from the essentialist definition of 'cultures' as homogeneous ethnic, religious or national entities. As an analytical perspective, transculturality permits a more dynamic designation of culture as constituted by boundary-transgressing mobility and ongoing processes of transformation.⁴⁴ While traditional notions of acculturation and homogenisation stress uniformisation and adaptation to a dominant culture or majority, a transcultural perspective allows an examination of local and non-conforming modes and protagonists of cultural (ex)change, thus sharpening our awareness of the intermixing processes and heterogeneity of the cultural phenomenon in question, and bringing our attention to its local as well as its cosmopolitan affiliations.

The first set of issues invariably leads to the second, which revolves around *visibility* and *recognition*. Here, I am concerned with the potential of art to highlight migration-related issues and 'represent' particular groups

of migrants, but also with the visibility and recognition of migrant artists. What impact do increased mobility and migration have on the art world and the careers and works of artists? As the structures of the art world have been profoundly transformed by globalisation and migration, a book on art and migration must also be attentive to how the discursive, institutional, economic and structural changes have paved the way for the 'global art' paradigm and undermined the art world's 'geographically overdetermined borders'.⁴⁵ In other words, it must reflect on how artists with a migrant background can be made institutionally visible as an expression of society's recognition of migrants' art and transcultural practices. However, in the discourses on art and art institutional policies, categorising an artist as 'migrant' is a double-edged sword. It can be a precondition for recognition and for the inclusion of cutting-edge artists from formerly marginalised minorities and peripheries; but it can also become a straitjacket that leads to the exclusion of some artists from being recognised 'on equal terms' by reducing them to 'ethnic artists'. A study of connections between art, artists and migration must also consider this compelling dilemma (see Chapters 1, 2 and 4).

Thirdly, this study is concerned with the more encompassing question of the interrelations between *aesthetics* and *politics*. The issue of the intertwining of aesthetics and politics in contemporary works of art is a contentious one and has already generated much debate. Any study that explores artistic engagement with a politicised topic such as 'migration' needs to consider how the political issues are articulated. 'Aesthetics and politics' must, therefore, be a component in this book, but it does not seek to fully explore the relationship between aesthetics and politics as a theoretical problem. Instead, it engages with the notions of politics and the political on an analytical level, using specific discourses and works of art as entry points (see Chapters 1, 4 and 6).

The topic of migration is permeated not only with political but also with ethical urgencies. Thus, it requires sensitive handling and involves dilemmas of representation. In Chapter 6, this has led to considering the meta-question of how to triangulate and balance aesthetics, politics and ethics when creating or writing about artistic representations of migration, especially forced migration. Queries as to the political effects of artworks open up the question of the social field that the work constructs and of which it is also a part. This has to do with the possibilities of reception that the work engenders, which the discourse of ethics can help unpack. As philosopher Alain Badiou writes, for the ancient Greek philosophers ethics concerned the search for a good way of being and a wise course of action.⁴⁶ Today, the word is often used in a non-distinctive way and designates 'a principle that governs how we relate to "what is going on", a vague way of regulating our commentary on historical situations (the ethics of human rights), technico-scientific situations (medical ethics, bio-ethics), "social" situations (the ethics of being together),

media situations (the ethics of communication), and so on'.⁴⁷ Ethics thus provides a perspective that may enable us to explore how artists seek to 'move' audiences, and thereby operate directly upon the world in which the work is situated.⁴⁸ An ethical perspective is not premised on representation but enacts a shift from a hermeneutic approach, which emphasises decoding, to a consideration of the means by which the work creates certain conditions of reception; or, as artist and writer Walead Beshty explains:

The central concern of an ethical analysis is not whether the work can be evaluated positively or negatively in ethical terms, but instead resides in the more complex question of the aesthetic manifestation of the ethical dimension of the work of art, i.e. its proposal of a modification to the social contract, with the artwork acting as the signification of this modification. So, if an artwork is understood as affecting or generating relations among viewers, how is this negotiation with the ethical dimensions of an artwork manifested in aesthetic terms (i.e. how are these aspects of its social existence manifest in the appearance of the work itself)?⁴⁹

This study adopts Beshty's definition of ethical analysis. Accordingly, I am not concerned with the present attempts to engender normative ethico-political responsibilities and outlooks among artists and scholars.⁵⁰ Rather, I wish to investigate the ways contemporary artists have represented migration as a world-transforming force, because, as Marsha Meskimmon has argued, 'as a mode of ethical agency, art's potential is particular, not general and over-arching'.⁵¹ It is my contention that close readings of artistic representations of migration and migrant identities can help us understand and develop adequate ways of responding to some of the challenges arising from the complex experience of entanglement and 'togetherness-in-difference'⁵² which has become a general condition of living in twenty-first century societies.

Migration of ideas through art

I would like to substantiate this claim that contemporary art can provide us with deep insights into the many ways in which intensified migration and globalisation have changed lives, cultures and societies in recent decades by way of three instructive examples that also indicate the transnational scope of this book's empirical field of study. As regards its three interwoven concerns, the first work to be considered, by Danh Vo, relates to all three, while the second, by Thukral & Tagra, and the third, by Emily Jacir, primarily engage with the first set of issues, i.e. identity and belonging, although it should be emphasised that Jacir does so in a highly political manner. In the case of Danh Vo, the kind of belonging and identification at stake is primarily the national self-identification as a 'we', or 'the people', whereas the works of Emily Jacir and

Thukral & Tagra are more concerned with attachments to an ethnic group or a homeland and with what 'belonging' might mean, or what it might become, in the diaspora.

Danh Vo was born in 1975 and spent his early childhood in Vietnam before his family fled the country in the wake of the war between North Vietnam and the US. Eventually, he came with his family to Denmark where he grew up and later enrolled at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. He left this institution to finish his studies at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, and then settled in Berlin. A profound interest in issues of cultural identity, displacement and exchange pervades his work and figures prominently in a number of sculptural works that involve the transposition of artefacts from one context into another. Some include objects relating to his own personal or familial narratives, others to the political history with which his own story is interlinked.⁵³ He often chooses symbolically charged objects that he then deconstructs conceptually (as well as physically), thereby creating complex poetic systems of meaning which are meant to bring silenced or wilfully forgotten aspects of political history to light.

In *We the People (Detail)* (2011–13) (see figure 0.1), Vo adopted this conceptual and deconstructivist approach with the French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi's *Statue of Liberty*. The project is quite explicit with respect to art's role as an integral part of the transactions and ideologies that produce political behaviour. *We the People (Detail)* effectively refutes the common assumption that art is separated from the social sphere, or, at best, merely reflective of it.⁵⁴ Given in 1876 as a gift from the French people to the US to mark the anniversary of the latter's independence, the *Statue of Liberty* became for generations the ultimate symbol of freedom and democracy, as well as a part of the iconography of American identity and power. It was intended as a tribute to the two countries' contributions to the republican principles of equality and democracy and as a commemoration of American independence. Since it was dedicated in 1886, the *Statue of Liberty*, standing 45 metres tall on Liberty Island in New York Harbour, has also symbolised the hopes of a better life for the refugees and new immigrants arriving in New York. For millions of people, Lady Liberty has been a welcoming symbol of the 'golden door' to the land of opportunities and the 'American Dream' of geographical and social mobility, prosperity and the freedom of individual independence. In *We the People (Detail)*, Danh Vo has appropriated this key emblem of Western political ideals, which has also provided him with a textbook example of art's ability to furnish political ideologies with cognitive and emotional resonance. The artist produced a full-scale replica of the statue, but abstracted it by *not* assembling the approximately 250 sculptural parts into one piece. Instead, the replica remains split into fragments that are not immediately identifiable as pieces of the *Statue of Liberty*. The artist thus



Danh Vo, *We The People (Detail)*, 2011–13. Installation view from the exhibition at Statens Museum for Kunst (the National Gallery of Denmark), 2013. Copper, dimensions variable. Recreation on a 1:1 scale of Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty's copper exterior, produced in approximately 250 individual pieces near Shanghai, China, and meant to be exhibited individually or in small groupings. © Danh Vo. Photograph: Anders Sune Berg, courtesy of the artist.

0.1

visually and metaphorically dismembered the figurative sculpture of *Libertas*, the ancient Roman goddess of freedom. Since 2011, the individual elements have been shown in changing constellations and circulated in exhibitions across the world. When Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel put on the first exhibition of elements from the project in October 2011, Vo named it *JULY, IV, MDCCLXXVI*.⁵⁵ The title refers to 4 July 1776, the date of the signing of the US Declaration of Independence from Great Britain. Vo took the writing in Roman numerals from the tablet that the figure of New York's *Statue of Liberty* is holding in her left hand. Accordingly, the exhibition title highlighted the issue of political independence and democracy.

When the National Gallery of Denmark exhibited approximately 100 elements from the project in 2013, they were displayed under the title *We the People (Detail)* that has since become the title of the work. This title caused a subtle shift in emphasis to issues of nationhood and peoplehood. Throughout the period of the exhibition, new parts of the sculpture were added regularly while other parts were moved around or sent to other destinations.⁵⁶ Nonchalantly distributed in the spacious indoor 'Sculpture Street',

some rested on dollies or wooden pallets, reminding visitors of a warehouse with goods ready to be shipped abroad. By choosing to show *Libertas* dismembered and scattered on the floor, Vo created what could be read as an impressive metaphor for the failure of the world's state leaders to actualise the high political ideals symbolised by the statue, whose original title was *Liberty Enlightening the World*. *We the People (Detail)* also reflects on the dramatic shift in the economic power structure of the world. Like the original, Vo's replica was fashioned out of copper sheets, but the gigantic sculpture was not produced in Europe but in China, in collaboration with a team from Basel's Kunstgiesserei. As curator Mirjam Varadinis has noted: 'In view of the questionable financial and legal situation of workers as well as the political regime in China, this relocation of production is extremely ambivalent and, in fact, almost cynical when coupled with the "freedom" symbolized by the *Statue of Liberty*. On the other hand, it might be read as unabashed honesty in exposing economic dependencies.'⁵⁷

Contrary to the 'sedentary' statue on Liberty Island, Vo's exhibitions were characterised by a constant flux of the replica's *disjecta membra*, which were really only passing through the respective venues. The artist was, thus, deliberately highlighting *circulation* – of goods (including artworks), of images, political ideologies and people – as a feature of today's globalised world. The work's very mode of being became a telling index of how the forces of globalised capitalism radically transform the conditions of producing and distributing artworks. Despite the huge weight of the copper fragments, the whole project was geared towards mobility, and consequently also towards highlighting the migratory nature of art and images. As Vo declared: 'Let her travel, let her be spread around. Let it just be this fluid mass that travels and becomes something very different from what the one in New York is.'⁵⁸ The physical scale of the work will never be fully visible, due to the geographical distribution of the separate elements across many exhibition venues, nor will the distances involved in its widespread reach ever be known. Yet, precisely because of their weight and greater than human scale, the elements of *We the People (Detail)* conjure up an imaginative space that invites viewers to recognise what would otherwise remain invisible to the eye: the ungraspable scale of global circulation and the potentially worldwide reach and impact of migratory images and ideas.

Although the artist contrasts the immobility of the *Statue of Liberty* at Liberty Island with the mobility of his own work (and with this repeats the outworn sociological dichotomisation between sedentarism and deterritorialisation), *We the People (Detail)* can be read as an allegory of the mobility of the *Statue of Liberty* in New York as *image*. This highly symbolically charged image has travelled all over the world and been subjected to various kinds of local appropriation and contestation. Issues of globalisation, migra-

tion and dislocation are thus critical to *We the People (Detail)*, but it would be misleading to conclude that it is only or primarily about the migration of people and images. *We the People (Detail)* is, I contend, first and foremost a work about the migration of a particular set of Western political ideas: political freedom, democracy, nation-state and peoplehood.

'We, the people' are the first three words of the Preamble of The United States Constitution from 1787,⁵⁹ a phrase that articulates the national ethos of the US which is rooted in the 1776 Declaration of Independence and its proclamation that 'all men are created equal' and 'endowed by their creator with certain inalienable Rights' including 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'.⁶⁰ By appropriating the famous opening words of The United States Constitution as the title of his fragmented, circulating and internationally distributed copy of the *Statue of Liberty* (that was made in China), Danh Vo spotlights how the 'nation-state' has itself become a circulating cultural form adapted worldwide to different kinds of societies. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has explained how the accelerated speed and spread of the Internet and the parallel growth in travel, cross-cultural media, global advertising and the outsourcing of work have resulted in a significant increase in the global flows of cultural forms: 'this current period – approximately from the nineteen seventies to the present – is characterised by the flows not just of cultural substances, but also of cultural forms, such as the novel, the ballet, the political constitution, and divorce, to pick just a few examples'.⁶¹

Appadurai argues that what is appropriated is primarily a matter of forms, idioms and techniques rather than specific, substantive content. Circulating cultural forms generate diverse interpretations in different local contexts. The local is, therefore, never merely a mirror image of the global. To Appadurai, the nation understood as an 'imagined community', with strong bonds of identity and claims to statehood and territorial belonging, is a particularly useful reminder of these mechanisms of cultural appropriation: 'Thus the nation form represents a more vital circulating ingredient than any specific ideology of nationalism ... The idea of "the people" is more important than any specific populist ideology. The idea of a foundational legal document for a national polity outweighs this or that particular constitution.'⁶²

By invoking the Preamble of The United States Constitution in a context of global circulation, *We the People (Detail)* points out the document's status as a generic symbol of the voice of the people and the constitutionalised national polity. As philosopher Benjamin Lee has observed, the global cultural economy of colonialism has been transformed into a system of nation-states by what he, referencing Appadurai, describes as new 'cultures of circulation'.⁶³ According to Lee, cultures of circulation are produced by the forms that circulate through them, and which also provide the 'building blocks' needed for the creation of the new social imaginaries that are so vital to the development

of modernity. Social imaginaries are ways of imagining the social which themselves mediate collective life. For an example of cultures of circulation, Lee refers to historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson's influential historical analysis of how nationalism emerged as a product of interactions between certain cultural forms, such as novels and newspapers, and their circulation enabled by a globalised print capitalism. According to Anderson, this resulted in a new social imaginary and cultural formation centred on the idea of a constitutionalised peoplehood.⁶⁴ An important example of the cultural performativity of circulation is, in effect, the creation of a new form of 'we' identity, that of 'the people' which is at the core of many modern social imaginaries.⁶⁵ The printed textuality of The United States Constitution allows it to be perceived as springing from the people in general and not from any particular individual, group or state legislature, argues Lee. 'We, the people' is a 'form of self-creating collective agency', a rhetorical figure that gives voice to 'the people' of both nationalism and identity politics.⁶⁶ In other words, it functions as a performative utterance, creating what it names:

Each reading of a 'nationalist' text creates a token instance of a *we* that subsumes the narrator/character/reader in a collective agency that creates itself in every act of reading. These token *we*'s, when aggregated across acts of reading, become the basis for the imagined community of *we-ness* at the heart of nationalism ... Anderson's imagined community of nationalism is created through narratives that embrace the narrated-about characters as referents, the author/narrator as the sender of the narrative event, and the readers as the narrated-to addressees.⁶⁷

According to Benjamin Lee, 'We, the people' is thus a product of large circulatory processes and, at the same time, a constitutive agent of these processes. As a performative utterance, the rhetorical figure articulates the 'we-ness' of 'the people', thereby creating a semiotic space for nationalistic forms of collective agency. Bearing Lee's argument in mind, it is easier to see just how ambiguous Danh Vo's *We, the People (Detail)* actually is. From one perspective, it serves as a reminder that, in a political context, art can function as a floating signifier into which political groups can read whatever serves their interests and beliefs.⁶⁸ The fragmented statue functions not only as a symbol of the downfall of Western notions of freedom and democracy, as Mirjam Varadinis has suggested.⁶⁹ The scattering of the elements across spaces, institutions and borders can also be read as a metaphor for the dissemination, cultural translation and resulting transmutation of the very same ideals of democracy and notions of nationhood and peoplehood to which the rhetorical figure 'We, the people' is foundational. In this context, it is also noteworthy that Vo has chosen to cite the constitution of a country that perceives itself as a multicultural nation and officially celebrates and recognises the historical influence of immigrants of

all backgrounds. Coinciding with the exhibitions of Danh Vo's *We the People (Detail)* across the world in 2013, President Barack Obama confirmed this perception of the US as a proud nation of immigrants in his annual presidential declaration on Constitution Day and Citizenship Day:

America's Constitution has inspired nations to demand control of their own destinies. It has called multitudes to seek freedom and prosperity on our shores. We are a proud Nation of immigrants, home to a long line of aspiring citizens who contributed to their communities, founded businesses, or sacrificed their livelihoods so they could pass a brighter future on to their children. Each year on Citizenship Day, we welcome the newest members of the American family as they pledge allegiance to our Constitution and join us in writing the next chapter of our national story.⁷⁰

Recapitulating W. J. T. Mitchell's distinction between migration as a thematic in the visual arts and the migratory nature of the visual forms themselves, one might infer that *We, the People (Detail)* combines a consideration of migration as a multi-layered and politicised thematic with an exploration of the migratory nature of images and ideas, in which sculptural elements – the fractured replica of a static monument – are deliberately staged as being on the move and circulating, like transnationally distributed luxury goods in an exclusive art circuit. As Mitchell remarks, it is important to differentiate between the neutral notion of images in *circulation*, i.e. moving freely 'basically without consequences', and the notion of *migration*, which is 'fraught with contradiction, difficulty, friction and opposition' – but, one might add, also invested with agency, hope, dreams and a genuine potential for transformation. Danh Vo's project demonstrates that images can be migrants, too, arriving from elsewhere whether bidden or unbidden. Fraught with 'contradiction, difficulty, friction and opposition', they may seem alien and can sometimes have alienating effects, as for example when, like Vo's *We the People (Detail)*, the image becomes a 'returning migrant': the work returns (from China), a key symbol of (primarily) Western ideals, (primarily) to the West, where it appears utterly strange in its new shape(s), familiar yet completely alien.

Dreams and inequities of mobility

The following juxtaposition of the Indian artist duo Thukral & Tagra's installation *THE ESCAPE! Resume/Reset* (2012) and Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir's project *Where We Come From* (2001–3) is deliberately contrastive and is intended to gesture towards the impressive breadth of contemporary artistic approaches to migration as a thematic. Migration, as a topic, is too wide-ranging to be described empirically here within the

constraints of a single volume. Yet, as a thematic, in particular the actual act of migrating, it can be said that it exists in a field of tension between a receiving country and a home country and between memory and imagination. It also frequently entails a tension between, on the one hand, migration as involving expectations of gain and change, and, on the other, as tied to an experience of loss, although the positive and negative experiences are not necessarily linked to the different countries of attachment in any straightforward manner.

Thukral & Tagra's coupling of pop art and social messaging is often thought to embody the spirit and voice of Indian youth and the way young Indians reshape their identity and dreams under the pressure of hyper-commercialisation and globalisation. Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra are both of Punjabi origin; they live and work in Gurgaon, a swish suburb of Delhi with gigantic shopping malls and large houses built in an eclectic style known as Punjabi Baroque, and consumerism and hyperbolic eclecticism feature prominently in their works. Travelling abroad several months of the year for their art projects, Thukral & Tagra are also fascinated by the phenomenon of the emigration and eventual repatriation of Punjabis in India, the subject of several of their works. *Artificial Strawberry Flavour* (2008), for example, couples capitalism and migration: it is composed of a swarm of recycled ketchup and chocolate syrup bottles decorated with hand-painted miniature portraits of young Sikhs from Punjab in streetwear – a human product to be shipped abroad. Thukral & Tagra are more concerned with the ways in which the imaginary shapes emigration than the facts of migrants' living conditions. In their works, the imaginary is articulated in two ways: in the escapist form of their fantastic, eclectic and multi-coloured universe; and in their preoccupation with the aspirations of migrant and socially mobile Indian youth.⁷¹

The duo's large installation *THE ESCAPE! Resume/Reset* (2012) (see plate 1) was realised at Arken Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. The installation revolves around the emigrant's imagined idea of a better life elsewhere and comments on today's migratory world society.⁷² Thus, it can be read as a reflection on the dream of creating a new identity for oneself, of becoming another kind of person belonging to a different kind of world. In this polymorphous interactive installation, Thukral & Tagra cross the boundaries between graphic and interior design and between painting, video, sculpture and installation. They deploy a flexible nomadic aesthetic that ignores the rules and limits of the particular media involved, 'focusing on content as it flutters between contexts'.⁷³ On an overall level, the installation reflects a perception of India in the first decade of the twenty-first century as what Mumbai curator, writer and gallerist Peter Nagy has called 'an over-stimulated place, over-whelmed by its multiple pasts and possible futures'.⁷⁴ Even before entering *THE ESCAPE! Resume/Reset*, the synthetic beeps from the classic Super Mario video game can be heard. Once inside what turns

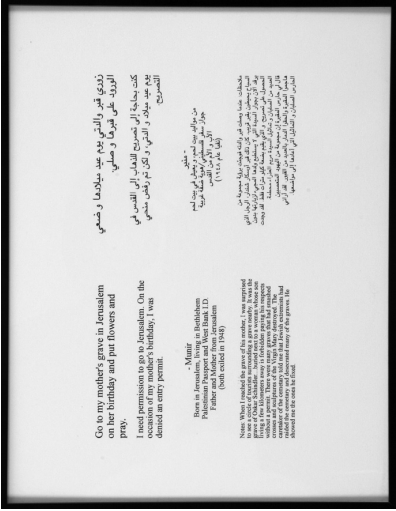
out to be an aircraft cabin, living room and games arcade in one, the visitor discovers that the aural backdrop is matched by a bewildering amalgam of visual elements competing for the visitor's attention: the walls are papered in a pattern of aeroplane-window ovals, casino chips and stylised drips of colour. The *Artificial Strawberry Flavour* work is also included in the installation: the bottles with their miniature portraits of fortune seekers who have emigrated are scattered across the wall like family portraits, enhancing the spurious homely atmosphere created by the thick carpet and the Indian airline seats upholstered in a range of cosy-looking cotton print fabrics, and the two kitsch angels in sneakers holding a crystal chandelier adorned with sports trophies. Yet sensations of homeliness flit through this hybrid space, which is dominated by seats arranged to mimic an airline cabin in flight, with hand luggage scattered everywhere and shirts and saris draped over some of the seats. The ambiguity of this ambience unsettles the classical dichotomy between the sedentary and the migratory as it suggests a more complex interrelationship between travel and dwelling, and between feelings of freedom and belonging. Using anthropologist James Clifford's evocative formulation, the installation evokes a sense of 'traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling'.⁷⁵

Despite the allusions to domesticity and dwelling, a sense of precariousness pervades the room. On the wall with the iconic portraits, a sign made of Indian lamps spells out '\$O\$': Save Our Souls. On the opposite wall, a series of eight paintings with detailed representations of subjects from classic pinball games addresses the question of life opportunities from the perspective of gaming, loudly backed up by the sound of the Super Mario video game. Within the overall narrative of the installation, the pinball game functions as a metaphor for migration as a kind of gambling for a better life, in which the subject is thrown hither and thither by life-changing circumstances, the imperatives of consumer culture and blind chance. But it also refers to the 'disoriented and fluid life conditions of Indian youth' as well as 'the artists' own childhood, when India still constituted a closed economic system'.⁷⁶ In the pockets on the seat backs, one can find a pamphlet with short stories about travelling as well as a boarding pass with gaming coupons printed on the back that read 'Limited time – unlimited chances', strengthening the work's association of the migrant's journey with gambling. Several of the seat backs have iPads mounted in them, with an app featuring Indian music videos and documentaries. There are also short stories about people who had recently migrated to Canada or the Middle East, perhaps, or who dreamt of doing so. Each story is presented next to a portrait designed as a playing card. The visitor, now seated as a fellow traveller, can swipe the upper or lower part of the card to piece together a new story and portrait, different from the previous one, but expressing a similar desire to go abroad. The latent movements that this interactive installation suggests could only be triggered, in some instances, by the active and self-reflective

participation of the visitors, while other elements function like traditional pictorial representations. Although the pinball game paintings are framed by blinking lights, their imagery is fairly traditional, often centring on a symbolic representation of home as a floating hot-air balloon, trailing clotheslines like moorings for temporary anchorage. Despite the heterogeneous character of the material presented in *THE ESCAPE! Resume/Reset*, the installation clearly centres on the young generation's desire to emigrate to fulfil their optimistic dreams of education, a successful career and a wealthy lifestyle. However, its disturbing amalgam of the transit space of an aeroplane, a living room and a commercial gambling venue also suggests that there is a dark side to migratory life: 'to escape' through emigration also means to be exposed to precariousness and confronting the difficulties of developing a new sense of belonging and anchorage elsewhere.

Emily Jacir's neo-conceptual project *Where We Come From* (2001–3) (see figure 0.2) also deals with uprooting and belonging, but seen through the lens of exile and homesickness.⁷⁷ Using her ability to move relatively freely within Israel with her American passport, Jacir promised to fulfil some of the wishes of Palestinians living in exile or who are either forbidden entry into their homeland or have their movements in it restricted by the Israeli authorities. Crucially important to the project was that, at the time, more than half of the participants were living and working either in Israel or inside Palestine – in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. The actions that her work documents were based on the following question: 'If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?' The artist thus exploited her own freedom of movement (still not devoid of danger) to realise the desires of exiles, as far as it was in her hands to do so. The project comprises a series of texts written in plain black lettering on white panels that describe the various requests in Arabic and English. Colour photographs presented next to the framed texts testify to Jacir's fulfilment of them. Most of the wishes are humble and relate to family ties and everyday life: 'Go to Haifa and play soccer with the first Palestinian boy you see on the street', reads one plea. Another says 'Drink the water in my parents' village', while another asks Jacir to 'Do something on a normal day in Haifa, something I might do if I was living there now.' In her documentation of the wishes and the fate or status of the people who expressed them, Emily Jacir also adds a note on what she did in order to fulfil each wish.

A man named Munir expresses the wish: 'Go to my mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and put flowers and pray.' The text tells the viewer that Munir lives only a few kilometres away in Bethlehem, but the Israeli authorities have denied him access to Jerusalem so he cannot visit his mother's grave on the anniversary of her death. The accompanying photograph shows Jacir's shadow cast over the tombstone as she carries out the task.



Emily Jacir, *Where We Come From*, 2001–3; detail (*Munir*), American passport, 30 texts, 32 c-prints and 1 video. © Emily Jacir. Photograph: Bill Orcutt; courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.



The image is cropped so tightly that it conveys only minimal information: a relief of a Christian cross and a fragment of the engraving in Arabic on the tombstone identifies the graveyard culturally. A bit of barren, sun-drenched soil is all we get to see of the Middle Eastern environment. Chromatically, the photo is reduced to a ghostly greyscale. Approximating a monochrome, the documentary photograph evokes an acute sense of absence that is amplified rather than mitigated by the artist's shadow. As T. J. Demos has observed in his perceptive analysis of Jacir's work, she exposes the visual absences of the Palestinians who responded to her query, those who were either forced out, or are prohibited from moving around within the Occupied Territories. She also exposes the deprived political status of the Palestinians, dictated as it is by Israeli law and enforced by means of militarised borders, walls and checkpoints.⁷⁸

For the viewer, the transition from text to image, which are placed in proximity to each other, seems easy: a mere shift of the eyes is enough. Mentally, it will also not be difficult for most people. Visiting family, friends and the place where one grew up are activities usually taken for granted, but for those caught up in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has driven many Palestinians into exile since 1948, the gap between the wish expressed in the text and the photo's actualisation of the wish cannot be overcome.⁷⁹ According to Demos, Jacir's text-image pieces operate by fulfilling three different kinds of desire. Jacir meets the exile's request, thereby also revealing 'the privations exiles suffer over things that most of us take for granted'. By enacting the requests, Jacir also seems to fulfil her own desire 'to reassemble the splinters of diaspora into a single place, into some form of narrative continuity, into an interconnected history'.⁸⁰ Moreover, since *Where We Come From* does not act as a substitute for the basic rights of access denied to those in exile, it also makes plain 'the absences that Jacir's service cannot fill'. As viewers read their way through the stories, *Where We Come From* inculcates viewers with a yearning for some sort of resolution or answer to the inequities of movement outside of the work.⁸¹ Experiencing the work, it could be said, also creates a strong sense of the tenacity and emotional power of feelings of belonging.

In many ways, these two works mark opposite ends of the spectrum of contemporary migratory aesthetics: Thukral & Tagra's installation seems to celebrate an ideal of universal freedom of movement, whereas Jacir draws critical attention to the real inequalities of mobility and the injustices they entail. The Indian duo focus on migration imagined as gain and fulfilment of a dream of a better future with open opportunities of a glorious homecoming. Jacir, on the other hand, engages with migration, or more precisely exile, experienced as a loss, fraught with painful memories of a homeland whose borders are closed and can no longer be crossed. Thukral & Tagra's work is an immersive installation that literally bombards the visitor with

visual, auditive and tactile impressions. By contrast, Jacir's work consciously exploits conceptual art's aesthetic of sensory restraint, bordering on deprivation. *Where We Come From* is basically a documentary work and thus oriented towards history and reality. Thukral & Tagra's work is phantasmagorical and transports the viewer to a world of fantasies about what life could become through mobility. Jacir voices a critique of the forced displacement of the Palestinian people and makes an indirect plea for a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. On a more general level, her piece is concerned with what Jacir calls '(im)mobility': the inequality between those who can and cannot enjoy the rights of moving freely across borders.⁸² Among the requests, there are also those pleas that reveal a strong desire for a return to Palestinian land, figured as a connection to the land, to family and to memories of cherished places. Yet, Jacir's work does not suggest an imaginary or utopian escape from the oppression and restrictions of occupation.⁸³ This point should be stressed, because today there are multiple reasons why it would not be possible to make *Where We Come From*: Gaza has been sealed off, so that it is no longer possible to access the area in either direction; Palestinian towns in the West Bank have been surrounded by multiple walls, effectively isolating them from each other; and the 'freedom of movement' that made this project possible is no longer granted to American and European passport holders, such as Jacir.⁸⁴

Thukral & Tagra's installation, on the other hand, envelops the visitor in an intoxicating escapist fantasy. Their installation presents itself as a homage to unrestricted social and geographical mobility and a set of ideals historically associated with the American Dream. Just as Danh Vo staged the return of the dream of liberty and democracy (embodied by the *Statue of Liberty* returning in fragments from China) to art institutions primarily in Europe and the US, so Thukral & Tagra staged (in a European art museum) the return of the American Dream, reconfigured and hybridised by an Indian migrant perspective. Despite their different perspectives on migration, these three examples show significant similarities. They are about the historical world and invite their audience to reflect on how they resonate with contemporary political issues; they also uncover how deeply patterns of life, cultural forms, political and legal systems, and so on, have been affected by various kinds of migration since the mid-twentieth century.

Migration's entry into art discourses

Such concerns with the transformative power of 'movement' (in terms of transnational travel and migration) and with cultural translation and hybridisation have also filtered through to academic discourses on art. What follows is a summary literary review that aims to show how the growing attention

to the thematics of migration in art discourses since the 1980s has produced significant, if rather scattered, groundwork of relevance for this study. The remainder of the Introduction accounts for how I am positioned in this field, as well as the theoretical underpinnings and chapter structure of the book.

Since Arjun Appadurai and the sociologist and cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis, at the new millennium, distanced themselves from existing research on migration in the social sciences by stressing the importance of the *cultural* dimension,⁸⁵ there has been a growing interest in examining the connections between globalisation, migration and culture as well as the impact of this nexus on the formation of identities. Important contributions have also come out of cultural studies, particularly since the 1990s.⁸⁶ Another important innovative strand that also gathered momentum in the 1990s proceeds from postcolonial studies.⁸⁷ These partially overlapping fields have contributed considerably to the critical discourse on migration and culture by shedding light on power relations in cultural encounters and multicultural societies, on marginalisation and racialisation, identity politics and the confluent and conflicted nature of transculturation. Nevertheless, sociological and anthropological perspectives have dominated the cultural studies approach – as well as the postcolonial one – to cultural analysis, and, more often than not, these have given prominence to political agendas. As Mikkel Bolt has pointed out, the new kind of ‘culture-oriented’ (post)Marxist theory developing with critical theory, French structuralism, cultural studies and postcolonial studies after the Second World War redefined and expanded the Marxist notion of the political by ‘culturalising’ it, thereby paving the way for new ways of theorising the political.⁸⁸ The critical discourses on ‘migration and culture’ and ‘art and migration’ spring primarily from these theoretical traditions and have contributed to ‘culturalising’ the political.

As a critical response to the tendency of these to evade aesthetics, affectivity and the significance of the formal aspects of cultural artefacts, some of the more recent studies in the visual arts have reintroduced formal analysis as the foundation of the interpretation of the artefact’s social, historical *and* political meaning. I will return later to this resurgence of interest in ‘aesthetics’ which has helped the topic of art and migration take centre stage.

In the field of comparative literature, it has been common since the 1980s to refer to ‘migrant literature’ as a literary category with a related field of specialised research into the historical, political, semiotic and linguistic issues related to writings by and about migrants, including the contestation of the category of migrant literature itself. The fields of art history and visual culture have no such broadly accepted descriptor, nor is there a defined and named field dedicated to researching art and migration. A possible advantage of this might be that categorisations may not be so deeply ingrained, but the downside is that the absence of a common category or descriptor has made it diffi-

cult to delimit studies in art and migration as a field, and led to it being almost impossible to make questions of the methodological and theoretical foundation of such studies a common concern. Yet, the nexus between art, migration and globalisation has begun to attract the attention of a growing number of art historians and other scholars.⁸⁹ Unlike the social sciences, cultural studies, postcolonial studies and literary studies, art history has only recently begun to contribute substantially to the interdisciplinary field of migration studies. This is quite surprising because ever since the waves of refugees provoked in the aftermath of the Second World War, migration has had a crucial impact on the visual arts, both as a catalyst of artistic transformations and as a theme in art.

The rise of the Nazis in 1933 caused the unprecedented forced migration of hundreds of artists within and, in many cases, away from Europe. Books such as Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*,⁹⁰ and especially the exhibition and catalogue *Exiles + Émigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*,⁹¹ have long since established how vital the influx of artists and intellectuals fleeing from war and persecution in Europe was to the development and ensuing temporary 'world leadership' of the American art scene. However, the art world has been slow to recognise the importance of the influx of artists to Europe from former colonies in the wake of decolonisation after the Second World War. Particularly in the early days of identity politics in the art world, in the 1980s and early 1990s, recognition came with considerable reluctance. In the second half of the 2000s and the early 2010s, a number of books on the interrelations between contemporary art, migration and globalisation have been published. Taken together, they might not represent a proper 'turn', but the fact that this nexus has now become the topic of book-length art historical studies certainly testifies to the beginning of a new phase in the formation of a critical discourse on art and migration and its discourse-transforming impact on the wider debates on art. For better and for worse, the art system and the hegemonic discourses on art are gradually assimilating the discourse on art and migration – a process subjected to closer examination in Chapters 1 and 2. This change evidently includes both the risk of domestication, i.e. that the discourse on art and migration loses its 'critical cut' (Chambers), and the lure of profoundly changing the art system and its dominant discourses from within.

Among the single-authored books, T. J. Demos's *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* stands out because it is as much a cultural critique as a study of the ways in which contemporary artists have transformed documentary practices in their representations of refugees, migrants, the stateless and other mobile lives. Cultural critique is also at the heart of Nikos Papastergiadis's *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*, in which he explores how a new cosmopolitan imaginary is developing in the arts

under the impact of global processes, first and foremost migration, and what roles artists can play in reclaiming conditions of hospitality and imaginative engagement with 'the other' in the cultural climate of 'ambient fears' which has spread in the West after 9/11.⁹² Marsha Meskimmon, in *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, also pursues the idea that art shares in the discourses on cosmopolitanism, globalisation and locational identity. It is particularly relevant to the present study because most of her examples are artworks that engage with questions of migration, identity, belonging and 'homing'. In the overall scheme of things, it seems that, outside of the US, it is in Britain that the transformation of the multicultural art scene through migration has attracted the most sustained scholarly attention. This impression is substantiated by the publication in the 2010s of Leon Wainwright's *Timed out: Art and the Transnational Caribbean*⁹³ and artist and writer Eddie Chambers' *Black Artists in British Art: A History since the 1950s*.⁹⁴ There are also monographs on transculturation resulting from other histories of exchange, such as Siobhán Shilton's study of contemporary art from a Francophone space, *Transcultural Encounters: Gender and Genre in Franco-Maghrebi Art*,⁹⁵ and Caroline Turner and Jen Webb's monograph *Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts*. The latter explores how the interplay between local and global forces has changed the art scene in Asia, and how artists from this region have engaged with human rights issues and the plight of refugees and immigrants as part of the artists' endeavours to help build more equitable societies and develop cross-cultural approaches to world-making and making art. A specific focus on refugees is found in *Counter-Memorial Aesthetics: Refugee Histories and the Politics of Contemporary Art* by Veronica Tello, who explores how artists have taken part in the production of images and narratives of refugee experiences and histories. Through close readings of selected works, Tello traces the emergence of 'counter-memorial aesthetics' characterised by a conjunction of heterogeneous signifiers and voices and images from many times and places.

The social, economic and institutional effects of globalisation on the whole art system are by now well documented by some essential publications, such as Charlotte Bydler's *The Global Art World Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art*,⁹⁶ Lotte Philipsen's *Globalizing Contemporary Art*⁹⁷ and Pamela M. Lee's *Forgetting the Art World*. Substantial empirical research and further critical discussions have been added by, among others, *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*. Co-edited by art historian Hans Belting, curator Andrea Buddensieg and artist, curator and media theorist Peter Weibel, this comprehensive volume (which accompanied the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1984*) reaps the fruits of the research project GMA (Global Art and the Museum), which was initiated by the Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany, and concludes a series of anthologies.⁹⁸

A number of significant anthologies and co-authored works have also added fresh perspectives to the discourse on contemporary art and migration. *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers* is the last anthology in the groundbreaking four-volume series of historical studies, 'Annotating Art's Histories', edited by Kobena Mercer. It combines postcolonial and art historical approaches to shed new light on the role of estrangement and displacement in late twentieth-century art and to foreground the multi-directional patterns of cross-appropriation shaping the century's artistic practices.⁹⁹ Another anthology that should be mentioned is art historian Burcu Dogramaci's *Migration und künstlerische Produktion. Aktuelle Perspektiven* ('Migration and Artistic Production: Current Perspectives'),¹⁰⁰ which reflects the latest stage of research into migration and the arts in German art history and cultural, media, literary and urban studies in the 2000s. A rethink on art history's largely Eurocentric framework has been undertaken in Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza's edited volume *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*.¹⁰¹ Coming from various disciplinary and theoretical backgrounds, the contributors propose ways to reorient the field and rewrite some of its basic narratives. Like Casid and D'Souza's anthology, Saloni Mathur's edited volume *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*¹⁰² is based on a conference at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and published in the series 'Clark Studies in the Visual Arts'.

With its focus on the theme of migration as a rising subject matter in art and a factor shaping the conditions of art, the aims of this present publication are more in line with Mathur's anthology, which has served as an important source of inspiration and provided me with valuable insights as well as models of how to approach the topic. At the same time, I am indebted to the publications resulting from a European collaborative research project on the interrelations of migration and the arts for giving me a sense of direction in the early phase of conceptualising this book. Chapter 1 will return to this project that was spearheaded by the feminist art historian Griselda Pollock and cultural theorist and video artist Mieke Bal, who also coined the project's core concept of migratory aesthetics. The publications resulting from this project have not only provided me with a critical theoretical concept but also set a standard for how to balance my dual interests in the aesthetic and the political aspects of art's relation to migration.

Situating this book

A remark on the situated perspective that structures the way this book frames the exploration of art and migration is needed. My perspective is inevitably shaped by the fact that I am a white woman scholar from Scandinavia who trained as an art historian, has been dedicated to studying the impact of

migration on contemporary art since 2009 and doing interdisciplinary work in the interstices between art history and the wider field of cultural studies for even longer. In recent decades, my home country Denmark has experienced a significant increase in immigration from non-Western countries. As in other affluent Scandinavian and European countries undergoing similar transformations, this has unsettled the hegemonic monocultural notion of national identity. It has challenged the whiteness of Danish culture and created a whole range of struggles over minority rights, identity politics and racism as well as nourishing fears about immigrants, especially from Muslim majority countries. It has resulted in a repeated tightening of the rules on immigration and integration and fuelled hostile anti-immigrant, nationalist discourses. But civic counter-movements have also come into being, such as *Venligboerne* – a network of local groups of volunteers to help newly arrived asylum seekers settle in, which, in the wake of the rising numbers of asylum seekers since 2014, has spread to more than a hundred Danish cities.¹⁰³ So, even if this book is not about art from Denmark, the local circumstances and need to develop a more empathic and appreciative understanding of migrants and migratory culture has had some bearing on this author's perspective and exploration of a wider world.

Although Scandinavia is part of 'the West', the Scandinavian countries have historically been assigned an ambiguous position on the margins of the global art world. The regional art world of Scandinavia is not in 'the centre' of the Western art world, but neither is it peripheral to the Western metropolitan centres in the same sense as many art scenes in Africa, South America and other 'Southern' regions. I would like to propose that this ambiguous position and the perspectives it enables could best be described as *semi-peripheral*.¹⁰⁴ Like all perspectives, a semi-peripheral perspective is partial, which means that it has certain limitations, but also certain potentialities. Scandinavian scholars are at one and the same time positioned as privileged Western insiders and marginalised outsiders to the cultural and art institutional hubs of the Western art world. We are thus offered a historical opportunity to use this ambiguous position heuristically to develop the kind of double perspective that is needed when examining the interrelations of art and migration in the context of a globalised art world. In my understanding, the semi-peripheral perspective on contemporary art is related to the 'stereoscopic vision' attributed to migrants by Salman Rushdie, because migrants are at the same time insiders and outsiders in society.¹⁰⁵ When a semi-peripheral perspective is coupled with empathy, an ethical move from 'speaking about' to 'speaking nearby' becomes possible. According to the originator of this expression – filmmaker, writer and scholar Trinh T. Minh-ha – 'speaking nearby' is a way of speaking that does not represent the object as if it were distant from the speaking subject but reflects on itself and 'can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it'.¹⁰⁶

My situated perspective is broadened by the theories used to underpin the three principal concerns of this book. The first was subsumed under the categories of *identity* and *belonging*. My concern with the representation of migrants' identities and belonging has led me to the writings of Stuart Hall and Amelia Jones to find adequate redefinitions of the concept of identity as a performative process centred upon *identification* and *representation*. In Chapter 5, I follow Hall and Jones in their endeavours to move beyond the binary Western models of self and other, transmitted through neo-Hegelian philosophy to discourses on the visual arts.¹⁰⁷ As envisioned by Hall, it would be better to leave behind the notion that identity is 'an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent' and think instead of 'identity as a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation'.¹⁰⁸ For Hall, such a rethink on the concept of identity would also entail a reconsideration of the cultural producer/artist as a historical and situated subject; a reconsideration that rejects the post-structuralist proclamation of the 'death of the author', i.e. the idea that the author, together with the intent and the biography of the author, is insignificant because he or she does not structure and control the production of the meaning of the work, which is supposedly generated by the reader's response.¹⁰⁹ This reconsideration would involve addressing questions such as: from which position of enunciation does the cultural producer/artist speak? How is this position articulated in the artist's works? And which historical, cultural and discursive contexts frame the position from which they speak?¹¹⁰

The term 'identification' contains a dual reference. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, identification refers to 'The determination of identity; the action or process of determining what a thing is or who a person is; discovery and recognition'. It can also refer to an instance or result of this, e.g. an image – typically a portrait of some kind, or a documentary means of proving one's identity such as a passport or other signs that can be used to establish who one is. However, the term not only refers to identification of *others* and signs of their identity, but also to *self-identification*, or, as defined by the dictionary, 'The state of being or feeling oneself to be closely associated with a person, group, etc., in emotions, interests, or actions; the process of becoming associated in this way'.¹¹¹ Thus, in psychology, identification can refer to the frequently unconscious adaptation of one's ideas and behaviour to accord with those of a person or group seen as a model.

In any case, identification and self-identification need a medium to materialise; they come into existence through various discourses and modes of representation – bodily, visual, textual, oral, etc. In a world saturated with images, *visual* media play a critical role in enabling representations of identity and according public visibility to individuals and groups. Thus, in a basic sense, the visual arts are intimately connected to the idea of identification as a

generative process, a performative act. As Amelia Jones puts it, 'art is always already *about* identity or, as I will call it, identification in the first place'.¹¹² This means that art is already entangled in identity politics, either explicitly or indirectly, and that viewers are involved, too, since their ideas of identity condition their individual encounters with works of art. Moreover, the artists are also 'identified' through their works as it were. A work of art may activate prejudice about the 'other', but it may also counter and challenge fixed stereotypes, thereby potentially opening up a more sophisticated understanding of identity not as a stable essence but as something that undergoes lifelong transitions and is shaped and reshaped by changing, intersecting identifications and intersubjective encounters with others.

Belonging is central to the question of the formation, and transition, of identities. In the arts, discussions on migrant identity formation have formerly tended to focus on the problems arising out of the experience of displacement and the loss of home. Displacement has often been linked to either the nostalgic longing for a lost homeland, or, in extension to that, the 'task of re-placing' oneself in the receiving country.¹¹³ Instead of seeing the different forms of belonging as pre-given conditions and unchangeable affiliations, it is widely accepted today that they are the result of ongoing renegotiations.¹¹⁴ Studying the works and lives of artists can help us develop a complex and translocal understanding of contemporary forms of belonging. Here, it is productive to turn to cultural geography. In their introduction to *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*, geographers Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta explain how the increasing interest in the notion of translocality has led to a stronger emphasis on local-local connections, situatedness and 'groundedness' during transnational migration, albeit often with a predominant focus on national boundaries. To depart from the national framework, they introduce the notion of *translocal geographies* to draw attention to the interconnectedness of places with a variety of other locales, thereby enabling the examination of migration across different spaces and scales, such as rural-urban, inter-urban, trans-regional and transnational.¹¹⁵ When addressing the question of how people connect to places and interact with new environments, Brickell and Datta thus propose a 'place-based' instead of a 'place-bound' notion of the local to underscore that 'as people become more mobile, so too do locales become stretched and transformed'.¹¹⁶

This change of terminology applies particularly to migrants who often have to negotiate what Appadurai has called 'disjunct registers of affiliation',¹¹⁷ but its scope is much wider because it accommodates a need for change in our general understanding of belonging and 'emplacement'. Western political and media discourses on migration tend to define minority groups in terms of their ethnic background. These discourses perpetuate a problematic and no longer tenable distinction between the cultural figures

of the migrant and the sedentary; between cultures of dwelling and cultures of migrancy, or *diaspora*; and between 'new' and 'old' members of society, those who 'belong' and those who do not 'belong', as if such 'we' and 'they' groups could be easily identified and separated. We are living in a world where migration influences everybody's lives, whether directly or indirectly, and where the possibilities of transnational travel and communication have increased significantly, despite the flagrant inequalities of access. As a result, the interconnectedness of people with different backgrounds and origins has become a common experience. This condition is not only a determining factor for those members of society who have first-hand experience of migration or who are descendants of migrants; it is, in varying degrees, part of the everyday experience of all those living in societies that are shaped by past and current migration. Hence the need to reconsider issues of translocal belonging and transnational and transcultural identity, as well as the visibility and recognition of migrants, along with the aesthetics and politics of representation.

My second concern was signalled by the keywords *visibility* and *recognition*. Several of the scholars mentioned above for their work on the topic of art and migration have underscored the artwork's potential to question the dominant orders of visibility and invisibility in order to 'transform the visual field of politics', to borrow T. J. Demos's succinct words.¹¹⁸ Chapters 4 and 6 in the present volume explore how this potential may be activated to challenge or transform the existing politics of representing migrants and migratory culture. Demos uses Jacques Rancière's theory of the politics of aesthetics as support for his analysis of Steve McQueen's film *Gravesend* (2007) about the victims of globalisation who are usually not represented in the media and political discourses, and are thereby excluded from 'globalization's imaginary' and rendered invisible.¹¹⁹ He refers to Rancière's thoughts on the partitioning of the sensible to show probable cause that art can destabilise the discursively defined border between visibility and invisibility, and that some artists may well have a unique potential to instigate such a disruption because of their professional ability to 'creatively recalibrate representational conditions'.¹²⁰ Demos's and Rancière's understanding that it is the current sensory and discursive regime that determines how and where the borderline between the visible and the invisible is drawn is highly pertinent to my exploration in Chapters 4 and 6 of artists' interventions in museums and some representations of clandestine migration, since they all seek to challenge the dominant order of visibility and invisibility.

According to Rancière, 'the distribution of the sensible' operates as an implicit algorithm governing the sensible order that parcels out forms, places and access to participation in our common world. Rancière understands aesthetics to be a system of forms which determines what presents itself to

sense experience and establishes the modes of perception within which sense experience is inscribed. Accordingly, he asserts that aesthetics constitutes the political by partitioning the sensible, meaning that it discriminates between who can say, hear, make and do what, where and when. Aesthetics 'is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, or speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience'.¹²¹ Aesthetics defines the modes of representation that structure the individual art forms, but aesthetics also transcends the sphere of art because it partitions the sensible within everyday life and in the realm of politics. Aesthetics defines the character of the political in art by determining how the political is articulated with sensory and artistic means, and these means are used differently in different art forms. In 'the aesthetic regime', Rancière's polemical term for the modern art system, the sensible can evade and transgress its common and normative forms. When artworks parcel out the sensible in ways that deviate from the dominant representational codes by proposing another distribution of the sensible, they can be seen as 'political interventions'. According to Rancière, they become political by drawing on their potential to disrupt the conventional ways of understanding the world and bring the previously marginalised, unspeakable or invisible into the sphere of representation.¹²² However, as Mieke Bal and Miguel Hernández-Navarro have pointed out, 'the invisible' may also be what has become so 'normal' as to become non-visible.¹²³ Artworks can draw the viewer's attention to that which is taken for granted or regarded as a self-evident, or naturalised, truth. Making visible people and phenomena willingly or unwillingly overlooked – such as, for instance, refugee camps and irregular migrants or *sans papiers* in detention centres – can be a powerful instrument to raise political consciousness and inspire politically and ethically motivated action, even if the work itself does not appear to be overtly political. As W. J. T. Mitchell has observed: 'The most salient fact about migration in our time is the way it has become, not a transitional passage from one place to another, but a permanent condition in which people may live out their lives in a limbo of illegalized immigration, perpetual confinement in a refugee camp, or a perpetual motion and rootlessness, driven from place to place.'¹²⁴

Rancière's understanding of the political role of aesthetics as a distribution of the sensible brings us to the third concern of this book: the conundrum of reconciling an interest in *politics* with an interest in *aesthetics*, a consideration of 'content' with a consideration of 'form'. The branches of migration studies that explore migratory cultures have close links to cultural studies and postcolonial studies, and share their penchant for prioritising the political. As literary scholars Elleke Boehmer and Sten Pultz Moslund have contended, in these fields it may seem like an unaffordable indulgence, or even a provocation 'to speak of aesthetic approaches to those kinds of art that respond to political

and ethical urgencies, or to histories of violence and suffering. In the eyes of the critics, this would imply a withdrawal from the real world into a depoliticised realm of beauty, harmony, disinterested contemplation and artworks reduced to matters of “pure form”.¹²⁵

However, if one turns away from the traditional Kantian and modernist notions of aesthetic judgement and transcendental art, which often underlie such reservations, and instead adopt Jacques Rancière’s and Chantal Mouffe’s understanding that politics and aesthetics are interdependent, the notion of aesthetics can help us gain insight into the particularity of art’s contribution to the discourses on migration and culture. As already indicated above, I have found theoretical support in the writings of Rancière and Mouffe, both philosophers who have exerted a great impact on contemporary discussions on politicised art and the politics of aesthetics.

On the level of analysis, Rancière’s understanding of aesthetics and political art is complemented by Elleke Boehmer’s definition of the term ‘aesthetic’ as referring to an interest in form as a determinant part of a work’s content. In Boehmer’s understanding, the term implies attention to the generic and formal aspects of the work and its connotative language, but also a concern not to relate that work only to historical, social and political contexts. Although Boehmer does not refer to Rancière, her approach is in tune with Rancière’s observations on the double effect of political art.

Rancière insists that political art thrives on an inherent paradox that also generates its peculiar double effect. It must ensure the ‘readability of a political signification’ to communicate its political claims on an intellectual, reflective level; at the same time it must produce an aesthetic or perceptual shock caused by ‘that which resists signification’ to move the audience on an affective, sensory and bodily level. Rancière explains that ‘In fact, this ideal effect is always the object of a negotiation between opposites, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning.’¹²⁶ Contemporary artistic imagination often endows the representation of migration, particularly forced migration, with urgent political signification. Yet, the message is communicated with artistic means, i.e. in an affective, non-verbal, equivocal and often unsettling – or, with Rancière, uncanny – manner. In other words, artists have to walk on a razor’s edge to avoid two pitfalls and balance the effects, or reception, their work may produce in an ethically responsible way. On the one hand, they have to steer clear of the untimely aestheticisation of politics and of turning the dispossessed into a merely pleasurable spectacle; on the other, they have to avoid the temptation to communicate an unequivocal political message, thereby destroying the ‘radical uncanniness’ that makes the work artistically interesting and evocative.

An overview

As these theoretical considerations suggest, the three core concerns of this book cannot be separated but will run through the book like interwoven threads rather than constitute thematic divisions between its chapters. Instead, a movement from the general to the particular structures the order of chapters: from discourses on art, to the art institutional structures that determine artistic careers and the status of artefacts, to specific works of art.

Chapter 1 seeks to establish a historical and theoretical framework by relating this study to the current discourses on the relations between globalisation, migration and contemporary art. It gives an account of how 'globalisation' and 'migration' have been articulated in distinct ways in Western discussions of contemporary art since the 1990s, and how the two discourses differ and intersect. It supplements the introduction by mapping the two main discourses that connect the publications mentioned in the literature review to a wider range of texts and ties the texts together as a field of research centring on some common concerns. The unifying aim of Chapters 2 through 6 is twofold: firstly, to examine how contemporary art implicitly or explicitly interacts with socio-cultural, historical and political contexts related to migration; and secondly, to use close readings of selected works and texts to show how, at the same time, art transcends cultural and political determinations. In this book, artists will thus appear in three different roles: as professional labour migrants, as presumed spokespersons for particular groups of migrants, and as individual artists who articulate subjective perspectives on the world by means of aesthetics.

Since the question of how individual and cultural identities are shaped in migration is at the heart of this book, half of its chapters (Chapters 2, 3 and 5) are concerned with the discourse on identity politics in the art world or how artworks can articulate experiences of multiple attachments and evoke a sense of (cultural) belonging. Chapter 2 gives a critical review of the previous debates on identity politics and art institutional multiculturalism, emphasising the dichotomies ingrained in the discussions and the ambiguous way institutional multiculturalism has regulated the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Chapter 3 seeks to move beyond the binaries structuring these debates, exploring how increased mobility has changed the work patterns of many artists and equipped them with dual or plural cultural and national attachments. The chapter concentrates on artists as professional labour migrants and considers the impact of migration and globalisation on artists' career patterns and the conditions of being an artist. It examines the changing role of the artist from the perspective of migration studies and seeks to characterise the social and institutional conditions under which highly mobile contemporary artists live and create their works. In short, Chapter 3 is concerned with a growing artistic nomadism, and its perspective is primarily

institutional and socio-cultural. It seeks to provide a basis for understanding why so many artists are deeply involved in issues of migration on both a personal and professional level by examining a new role for artists which has become more and more common in recent decades: the artist as a migrant worker.

Lurking in the shadows of this topic is the risk of idealising borderless travel while overlooking the barriers and restrictions to the movements of the less privileged. Accordingly, Chapters 4 and 6 shift the focus from artists with a considerable amount of freedom to move socially and geographically, to artistic representations of less privileged migrants – be it clandestine migrants, confronted with the harsh realities of contemporary transnational measures to ‘secure’ nation-state borders, or those who have been ‘integrated’ in Western societies, perhaps for generations, but who have been marginalised and have remained literally invisible in Western cultural institutions. Chapter 4 is founded in a political concern with the recognition and visibility of migrants and their histories in museums, and the need for change in institutional practices, curatorial perspectives and the writing of history emerging with intensified transnational migration. Accordingly, Chapter 4 takes an overall perspective on museums as gatekeepers of history and also touches upon the general issue of the interrelations between aesthetics and politics. More specifically, it seeks to uncover some of the inequalities of mobility and reflects on how artists’ interventions in museums can be deployed strategically to make colonial exploitation and patterns of thought that otherwise have remained invisible, visible. It is important to discuss the (in)visibility of migrant histories in museums, because museums play an important part in shaping the public image of ‘who we are’ and ‘where we come from’ as a society. Through the stories they tell with the exhibits selected for display, and in the way they are displayed, museums and galleries contribute to defining a society’s cultural identity and memory. However, since the encounter with works of art evolves as a reciprocal process between embodied viewers and sensate images, art can also encourage identification on a more subjective level and enable individuals to discover new or other ways of being in the world. Accordingly, Chapter 5 explores how art can be deployed to develop dynamic transcultural models of identity, examining the work of three artists who probe colonial and postcolonial archives of histories and use the ‘hidden histories’ they uncover for an imaginative reconfiguration of traditional models of identity. Like Chapter 3, Chapter 5 aims to overcome dichotomic thinking, but instead of focusing on the artists, it deploys the feminist concept of intersectionality to account for how works of art can act as agents and articulate a complex understanding of identity as intersectional, transcultural and dynamic.

Chapter 6 returns to the issue of aesthetics and politics. It expands on the question of the interrelations between migration politics and aesthetics by

bringing ethics into the equation. At the same time, it shifts the focus from the representation of migrant culture as part of national culture and identity to that of the clandestine migrants who are excluded from the nation-state and denied participation in the public sphere altogether. The underlying issue of Chapter 6 is the politics of representation, and particularly the question of how aesthetics, politics and ethics can be triangulated and balanced when artists seek to make visible the conditions of irregular, or clandestine, migration – and when scholars analyse the solutions the artists produce.

Writing *about* and writing *with* art

In *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*, Marsha Meskimmon has aptly described her textual method as coupling close reading with what she calls ‘writing *with* [art]’.¹²⁷ Meskimmon is admirably consistent and radical in her application of this method, and as such, her book constitutes a category of its own. Yet, her general shorthand description ‘writing *with*’ could fit a number of recent interdisciplinary studies of contemporary art, including Amelia Jones’s *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*, T. J. Demos’s *The Migrant Image*, Nikos Papastergiadis’s *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*¹²⁸ and Mieke Bal’s writings on migratory aesthetics,¹²⁹ as well as the work of many scholars who, like this author, have taken their cue from these leading figures. Close reading is vital to most art historical research, which draws from the specific materials and practices studied. Traditionalist art historians have often contented themselves with this *modus operandi*, writing *about* art within the borders of art history. Writing *with*, on the other hand, uses close analysis of selected artworks to transgress these disciplinary borders. Here, close analysis is used as a bridgehead to developing concepts, interpretations, perspectives and discussions related to wider historical and political issues in a generative interchange with knowledge, perspectives and modes of thoughts that have originated in other academic fields. As regards the present study, discourse analysis, postcolonial studies and migration studies have been particularly useful.

All the artists whose work is discussed in this volume can be characterised as belonging to ‘the global contemporary’ or ‘global art’, because their practices unfold on terms dictated by an art world ruled by globalisation and neo-liberal capitalism, and they show their works around the world. Moreover, they all have a migrant background and/or have developed a nomadic career pattern. The transnational and transcultural expansiveness of this book is, in some ways, an outcome of its consideration of mobility, but it also reflects an underlying wish to contribute to the broader trend of opening up the discourse on art to artists and art scenes outside the West. The principle guiding the selection has therefore been the issues addressed

in the respective chapters. The selection criteria have been that the selected works should address the issue in question and be representative of a larger body of works in which the chosen artist deals with migration-related issues. This study will not pretend to settle the confusion resulting from the proliferation of concepts associated with various kinds of migration and cultural encounters; nor does it aspire to delineate a supposedly coherent aesthetic or a definable genre produced by cultural hybridisation – a ‘migrant art’, to match the descriptor ‘migrant literature’. It seeks instead to avoid the pitfall of such restrictive categorisations. At the same time, it takes seriously the need to think through how the so-called ‘mobility turn’ and the growing awareness of the transforming power of migration have made it necessary to reconfigure our understanding of the many practices belonging to the visual arts, not only in today’s world but since the beginning of history. This must be done with care and foresight because the revision of the visual arts, the art world and the vocabulary and methodologies of art history is only in its infancy. This is why *Migration into Art* examines selected model examples through close readings instead of striving for encyclopaedic coverage. This is why the book cannot merely present writings *about* art; it must aspire to writing *with*.

Notes

- 1 Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 2.
- 2 Paul Virilio, ‘Foreword’, in Paul Virilio *et al.* (eds), *Native Land: Stop Eject* (Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, 2009), pp. 7–8.
- 3 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 33ff.
- 4 Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge, Mass., London: The MIT Press, 2012), p. 22.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 6 Mimi Sheller and John Urry, ‘The new mobilities paradigm’, *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (2006), 207–26, 212.
- 7 Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 4th Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
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- 10 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996).
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