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**Davis, Fischer-Hornung,
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**Aesthetic
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In Memoriam

Juan Bruce-Novoa

Cherished Friend—Distinguished Scholar

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Introduction

Aesthetic Practices and Politics in Media, Music, and Art

*Rocío G. Davis, Dorothea Fischer-Hornung,
and Johanna C. Kardux*

Current cultural practices invite us to consider the representation of migration beyond written texts. A decade into the twenty-first century, media culture has become a prime driving force in politics, culture, society, and everyday life. We can argue that the media—readily accessible to everyone—provide models for cultural perspectives and positions, and new forms of identity. In many ways the media have become today's dominant culture, with visual, aural/oral, and digital forms of media culture increasingly replacing book culture among large sectors of the world's urban population, requiring a fundamental revision of the notion of literacy. Media have also become prime constituents of socialization, with social-networking sites, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, and other similar vehicles shaping our lives in significant ways. Indeed, as Douglas Kellner maintains, media culture is more crucial than ever as a force that shapes our worldview:

Radio, television, film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture also provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of 'us' and 'them.' Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories and images provide the symbols, myths, and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today.¹

Simultaneously, our world has become more transnational than ever: migration marks the experiences of increasing numbers of the world's population. Migration, with its attendant deterritorialization, has become one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary world. Innovative forms of media and art—movies, television series, television commercials, the Internet, art installations, photography, and comics, for example—suggest that the performance of migration in contemporary media, art, and music have become multilayered cultural products that demand renewed theoretical

frames for interpretation. However, as Russell King and Nancy Wood point out, the richly interdisciplinary fields of media studies and migration studies have rarely been studied together.² Given the overlaps between issues of (im)migration and media, we need to address how their interconnection has become part of our understanding of the world's global cities and, more important in the context of this volume, the paradigms through which we think about ethnicity and nation. If cultural representations intervene in collective beliefs, then art, media, and music clearly influence the ways the experience of migration is articulated and recalled, and thus directly and indirectly impact the development of public policy. These discourses not only present experiences and attitudes, but also create values that operate in shifting cultural and political environments.

Wood and King suggest that the media intervene in the migration process and its representation in three ways: (1) through the images transmitted from the destination country or by the global media, which then serves as a source of information for potential migrants; (2) media constructions of migration in the host country affect the kind of reception, the experience of inclusion or exclusion, migrants encounter; and (3) because of new global distribution strategies, media originating from the home country play a dynamic role in the increasingly transcultural identity and politics of diaspora communities.³ This invites us to think of how art, media, and music support processes of what might be considered a form of cosmopolitanism, understood as a way of imagining and forming communities across national borders and cultural boundaries. As a way of envisioning and representing migrants and their histories, these artistic products become iconic strategies of multilayered image making.

In the introduction to their volume *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call for "polycentric media studies" and suggest we think in terms of "comparative or transnational multiculturalism, of relational studies that do not always pass through the putative center" of U.S. media.⁴ In this volume we would like to take up this challenge and move beyond concepts of the monocultural, illustrating how groups, not only in the U.S. but also in countries like Canada, Germany, Spain, Brazil, and India, to name a few of the areas covered in this volume, construct ethnic identities—the implications of being 'foreign' or 'alien,' the notions of homeland and hostland, the value of memory and meaning in the country migrated to and from—through media that are simultaneously local and global. The global flow of cultures, images, and capital elicits transnational, transcultural, and transdisciplinary approaches, which often also include battles over the control of cultural politics and capital. Images of imagined multicultural or transcultural communities are often packaged in mass-media tropes, thereby eliciting intense identification or goading equally intense resistance. These kinds of border crossings occur not only across nation-state borders but across disciplines as well, in texts and contexts within and across nation-states, cultural and

social borderlands. It is, as Mary Louise Pratt has demonstrated, in the contact zones between cultures that an enriching struggle among cultures enables a continuing process of cultural recreation and innovation.⁵ Concepts such as hybridity, *métissage*, and creolization, among numerous other cross-, inter-, and transcultural conceptualizations, attempt to account for what Homi K. Bhabha has called the "third space" of the circulation and transformation of culture—some emphasizing more the transformed object that is the product of cultural migrations, and others focusing more on the dynamic tension among the given elements entailed in the process.

If transnationalism can be defined as the processes by which populations on the move forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link their societies of origin to those of settlement, it is the media, music, and art that often play a defining role in building social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. 'Transmigrants' frequently develop a vacillating concept of home, referring with changing emphasis to a sometimes more and sometimes less removed country of origin or to a sometimes less and sometimes more welcoming country of reception.⁶ Moreover, the successive images of the countries that these transmigrants consume—in advertising, television, or the Internet—lead them to continually revise previously accepted or remembered versions of their countries of origin and those of the present country of migration. Importantly, because of the democratization of many forms of media, they in turn increasingly participate in the continuing artistic dialogue that multiplies perspectives or visions of places, positions, and possibilities.

In imagined worlds distributed around the globe, according to Arjun Appadurai, social structures like birth, kinship, work, and leisure act as stabilizing factors in human experience but are also themselves affected by human mobility. Often it is within mediated representations of these very categories that 'global neighborhoods' of a transnational character develop. Several of Appadurai's paradigmatic concepts are particularly fruitful in the analysis of the relationship of migration and media: the "ethnoscape" defines the particular landscape of moving persons who constitute the shifting world; the "technoscape" marks out the structures of global configurations of technology, moving at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries; and "mediascapes" delineate the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information, making large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes available to viewers throughout the world.⁷ Appadurai goes on to demonstrate how these new forms of electronically mediated communication are beginning to create "virtual neighborhoods," beyond and across national borders within large-scale media and data networks.⁸

Thus, an "alternative cartography of social space," of transitory migratory circuits, is created, resulting in transnational spaces envisioned as multisided imagined communities—very much in Benedict Anderson's sense⁹—the boundaries of which stretch across borders.¹⁰ In this context,

media are often a source of agency, with migrants not only changed by the country to which they migrate but also in turn producing changes in the receiving country. In Kellner's words, "As the human adventure enter[ed] a new millennium, media culture continued to be a central organizing force in the economy, politics, culture, and everyday life."¹¹ Further, media in combination with global migrancy offer forms of resistance and transformation. As several essays in this volume attest, migrants often strategically use mass media, such as film and television, and the visual and performance arts to claim cultural space, social visibility, or a political voice. To understand, thus, the way our global world is being shaped and how these images further influence the way we understand or articulate our experiences, beliefs, positions, and policies, we need to consider the structural strategies and possibilities of the media.

Earlier versions of the chapters in this volume were originally presented at the 2008 biennial conference of the Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and the Americas (MESEA), held at the Leiden University in the Netherlands. The conference theme, "Migration Matters: Immigration, Homelands, and Border Crossings," elicited a significant concentration on arts- and media-related presentations, testifying to the importance of reading new forms of the arts and media as complex artifacts that reflect processes of personal creativity in the context of the particular social and political discourses within which they are produced and received. Indeed, as the chapters show, the media and arts become a vital part of the dialectic of the production of these artifacts as they construct images that establish paradigms of symbolic representations. These paradigms are later reproduced and circulated, subjected to further revisions, enabling new forms for representing issues related to migration. In different ways, the chapters widen the ways these representations may be analyzed: attending to how issues of migration are performed in the context of political discourse; reading the enactment of nostalgia in trans- and interdisciplinary ways; inviting us to discuss how globalization and transnationalism make us rethink traditional borders between nation-states and disciplines; suggesting renewed definitions of notions such as 'home,' 'homeland,' 'exile,' 'migration,' 'immigration,' 'identity,' and 'ethnicity' within globalized and simultaneously localized ethno-, techno-, and mediascapes.

The chapters in Part I of this volume, entitled "Border Crossings and (Trans)nationalism in Film," discuss the ways in which, from the 1950s to the present, movies have performed migration in their representation of migrants and their histories of border crossings and attendant interethnic and interracial interaction and conflict. Whereas the earlier movies are produced within the context of the immigration nation (predominantly the U.S.) and represent the receiving culture's often ambivalent or conflicting responses to immigration, from the 1990s on filmmakers from the migrant communities or in the migrants' homelands have utilized film to intervene into the process of image making and contribute to the processes of

cultural transformation to which migration gives rise. Though their underlying ideological and political agendas regarding cultural and ethnic mixing may differ, the aesthetic practices of many of these movies foreground the cultural hybridization to which geographical and metaphorical border crossings give rise.

In the opening chapter, Juan Bruce-Novoa illustrates how early science fiction movies allegorically played out contemporary problems such as immigration. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing from Another World*, two now-classic movies that were both released in 1951, offer opposing paradigms of U.S. attitudes toward immigration. While *Day* portrays the desirable aliens who contribute positively to the melting pot, *Thing* presents immigration as disastrous dehumanization through foreigners bent on undermining U.S. culture. In *Thing*, alien migration portends increased vigilance and reinforced borders, whereas in *Day*, the future belongs to marginal peoples who traverse borders to receive the alien's message of global cooperation. *Thing* communicates jingoistic nationalism; *Day*, idealistic internationalism. Although these movies were a response to international and post-World War II issues such as U.S. policy toward the human rights of migrating peoples and capitalist industry's demands for both cheap and highly skilled foreign labor, the opposing attitudes toward immigration that they portray still persist today.

The subsequent chapters in this section discuss a wide variety of films that use the crossing of geographical boundaries, particularly the paradigmatic U.S.-Mexican border, to explore psychological, cultural, and metaphysical 'borderlands.' Taking Orson Welles's *A Touch of Evil* (1958) with its depiction of the U.S.-Mexican border as a place of corruption and violence as a touchstone for all later borderlands movies, Page Laws argues that even in the work of liberal American directors such as Welles and, more recently, the Coen brothers in their 2007 movie *No Country for Old Men*, the act of migration and the hybridization to which it gives rise are surrounded by racial and sexual ambivalence. Even the Mexican-born writers and directors Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo Arriaga in their 2005 movie *Babel* produce problematic self-images that hegemonic U.S. culture has subtly instilled in Mexican consciousness. As Laws points out, the real borders in these films are not geographic: *A Touch of Evil*, *Babel*, and *No Country for Old Men* are philosophical films about the permeable boundaries between, and consequently the mixed nature of, good and evil, humanity and inhumanity, free will and fate, honor and dishonor, godliness and godlessness.

Focusing on the metaphors of border crossing, Cathy Covell Waegner argues that bodies as such become complex borders in the six recent feature films she discusses, including *Bordertown*, *The Last King of Scotland*, and *Lone Star*. Developing film critic James Monaco's notion of the cinematic trope further in the light of postcolonial theory on hybridity and border crossing, Waegner argues that in these movies, both geographical borders

and the body as metaphorical border do not only divide, but also function as what Waegner, following Homi K. Bhabha and Mary Louise Pratt, calls "third-space contact zones."¹² In Waegner's interfilmic reading, the torn, marked, exchanged, or transformed bodies from the various movies reflect struggle and mutual interaction among cultures, nations, and ethnicities. The camera lens and the cross-section viewing developed in Waegner's chapter offer sharp and complex cinematic perspectives of body-border crossing that grant insight into the complexities of migration in the contemporary world.

The last two chapters in this section focus on films that narrate the experience of migration from the migrants' perspective. Whereas the science fiction films Bruce-Novoa discusses view migrants literally as 'aliens,' *Gegen die Wand* (*Head On*), a 2004 film by the eminent German Turkish filmmaker Fatih Akin, takes an inside perspective on the migrant experience of alienation. In her essay, Tessa Lee shows that the movie, which was both an international box-office and critical success, rejects the social-realist genre of earlier so-called migrant and minority cinema in Germany, while simultaneously moving beyond a simplified, multiculturalist celebration of diversity and hybridity. Whereas earlier ethnic cinema tended to reinforce and perpetuate binary oppositions and stereotypes by portraying the migrant as either an exotic/erotic projection or as helpless and oppressed, *Gegen die Wand* initially uses stereotypes and the ethnic gaze only to subsequently dismantle them. Set in Germany and Istanbul, the movie features border-crossing protagonists who experience cultural and linguistic alienation in both places. Challenging the notion of essentialized difference between what is considered 'German' and 'other,' the movie opens up transnational spaces in which identity and alterity have to be negotiated, thus positing not only a hybrid, but also a *new* German culture.

Looking at Bollywood's reaction to 9/11 through the concept of life writing, Mita Banerjee suggests that the 2006 Bollywood film *What If?* uses the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the ensuing global 'war on terror' to exorcise what may be India's own skeleton in its closet: negative Hindi perceptions of the Muslim minority, depicted in the film as cocaine addicted, morally misguided, and deeply Westernized. Contrasting the film with the life writing of Indian American poet and critic Amitava Kumar, who has himself become the target of anti-Muslim hate speech, Banerjee's chapter exposes and criticizes the logic of the Hindu nationalist undercurrent of the film. What seems at first a straightforward story about migration and cultural hybridity, depicting Hindu and Muslim characters who appear to move effortlessly between India and the U.S., in fact masks a deeply troubling Hindu nationalism. While seeming to celebrate multi-ethnicity, Banerjee argues *What If?* aims to contain the threat of Muslim infringement on Hindu culture.

In Part II, "Migrant Adaptations in Television," the focus shifts from film to television as a mediascape in Canada, Catalonia (Spain), and Brazil.

Canadians and the Dutch, Dutch Canadian fiction writer and scholar Arietha van Herk argues, share a peculiar reticence about performing or acknowledging their cultural heritage. Van Herk frames her argument about the 'invisible ethnicity' of Dutch Canadians by analyzing two popular television advertising campaigns. Exploiting national clichés and exposing Canada's cultural dependence on the U.S. while adamantly decrying them, Canadian beer company Molson's famous "My Name Is Joe! And I Am Canadian!" television ad ironically erases Canadian identity in the process of proclaiming it. Similarly, the popular Canadian ad campaign of the Dutch Internet bank ING Direct exploits what Van Herk (quoting Canadian writer Douglas Glover) calls the "cultural blankness" that the Dutch share with the Canadians to sell the bank's product, an Internet savings account. The invisible ethnicity of Dutch Canadians is not only an asset to business that makes the Dutch a model minority in Canada, but as Van Herk concludes, the seeming lack of a distinct cultural identity shared by Canadians and the Dutch may also be read more positively as a mark of generative tolerance and cosmopolitanism.

While Van Herk analyzes commercial television ads in Canada, Klaus Zilles studies two Spanish government-commissioned media campaigns on Catalan public television (Televisió de Catalunya) that are designed to encourage the use of the Catalan language in intercultural contexts. These campaigns try to dissuade the local population from the widespread practice of using Castilian Spanish by staging foreign-looking and foreign-sounding people who, for example, are encouraged to speak Catalan or are shown to have mastered the language. Although Televisió de Catalunya deploys these promotional strategies to destigmatize and empower subordinate groups in an intercultural environment, Zilles uses Althusser's theory of the Ideological State Apparatus to demonstrate that some of the messages conveyed in the television broadcasts serve to "interpellate," that is, to hail "autochthonous" media audiences and to constitute them as subjects within the prevailing ideological structure. Thus they reveal an essentialist concept of national identity in the guise of an interculturalist message.

Drawing on Appadurai's concept of the mediascape, Gundo Rial y Costas analyzes the ways migration has been represented in the popular Latin American genre of the *telenovela*. The few Brazilian *telenovelas* that deal with migration concentrate on earlier European migrants to Brazil and ignore or marginalize contemporary migrants within Brazil or emigration from Brazil. Narrating tales of social ascent, these productions participate in the project of nation building. The *telenovela América* (2005), the main focus of Rial y Costas's chapter, however, tells the story of a young Brazilian girl who realizes her 'American Dream' by migrating to the United States, where she joins a migrant community. While other *telenovelas* contribute to a national Brazilian imaginary and consolidate the nation-state, *América* portrays and evokes sympathy for the marginalized lives of illegal migrants and transmigrants in the Latino diaspora.

The chapters in Part III, "Traveling Sounds: Music and Migration," serve as a reminder that, as people migrate, music and song are among the cultural productions that travel with them, contributing to the construction of memory and identity as well as bearing witness to change and transculturation. In her prize-winning chapter, Maria Boletsi studies the migration of cultural objects and the fight for their 'ownership' through the journey of a popular song in the Balkans.¹³ In her documentary film *Whose is This Song?* (2003), Bulgarian filmmaker Adela Peeva travels across the Balkans in search of the purported 'owner(s)' of the song, which appears in all Balkan countries in different versions. Each nation or ethnic group claims the song as theirs and rejects the possibility of its importation from other nations. In her chapter Boletsi examines what happens to notions of self and home when what is unmistakably 'ours' proves to carry traces of alterity and migration. The song's performance throughout the Balkans can be interpreted as a sign of commonality in the cultural identity of Balkan peoples; however, cultural similarities in the region are covered up and recast as differences. The sound of the other's song is perceived as a disquieting cacophony, Boletsi concludes, precisely because it sounds strangely familiar.

The connection between song and national or political identity is also evident in Nicolás Salazar-Sutil's chapter. During Augusto Pinochet's military rule in Chile from 1973 to 1988, much of the state-sponsored violence fuelled an antimilitary protest culture that was creatively and powerfully orchestrated in song and chant. Voicing protest against the disappearances of opponents of Pinochet's regime, the Chilean singer Victor Jara's song "El Aparecido" ("The One Who Appears") became the opposition movement's anthem after Jara was imprisoned and executed in 1973 for his political activism. As Salazar-Sutil argues, the song shows that the loss of life or rights by violent repression does not necessarily amount to the nonappearance or complete effacement of an individual or group. In fact, the power of Jara's song depends upon the tragedy of loss and absence, and the performance of disappearance can be read as a refusal to accept death, a fugitive existence, and political exile.

In the last chapter of the music section, Kenneth H. Marcus examines the involvement of modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg within the circle of émigré artists who fled Nazi Germany and Austria and settled in Los Angeles. Following his immigration to America in 1933, Schoenberg was closely involved with issues of migration and modernism. Exploring Schoenberg's cultural production within the context of the émigré community, Marcus argues that Schoenberg and his fellow immigrants navigated between American support for European artists and an American nativism that distrusted these artists. This juxtaposition resulted in a particularly troubled view of *Heimat* and the reconstruction of 'homeland' in the host country.

The chapters in Part IV of this volume, "Performing Ethnicity and Migration: Cultural and Artistic Practices," call critical attention to

ethnicity and migration as performative, artistic, and aesthetic practices. In his essay on Michael Schorr's film *Schultze Gets the Blues* and Louise Erdrich's novel *The Master Butchers Singing Club*, which both appeared in 2003, Marcus Embry examines the viability of ethnicity as a paradigm in present-day cultural criticism. Focusing on Germans and German-Americans in the U.S., the two works seem to tell a classic ethnic tale and to espouse a multiculturalist agenda. However, the fact that they both end in silence and memory suggests to Embry that ethnic cultural practice is not only becoming increasingly nostalgic, but also that it is moving towards a globalized practice that may eventually subsume and erase ethnicity in the twenty-first century.

Whereas most studies of migration concentrate on material and economic factors in the formation of migrant communities, Olga Kanzaki Sooudi explores the nonmaterial and noninstrumental concerns that motivate many young Japanese migrants to move to New York City. In search of greater horizons for both their creative work and for self-fulfillment, these migrants often prefer an uncertain existence in New York to their more traditional, affluent lives in Japan. For many of these Japanese, Sooudi argues, migrant life is conceived as an artistic life: as one whose primary values are creative self-expression and the pursuit of beauty. Drawing on Georges Bataille's work in her analysis of these migrants' self-narrations, Sooudi argues that everyday culture is a constitutive site for understanding the meanings and value of living as a migrant. Guided by what one could term a higher aesthetic understanding of the everyday, these migrants feel that the diversity and dynamism of New York City offer a more sublime experience of urban life than that attainable in Japan.

Ping Chong's innovative installation artwork *Undesirable Elements/Secret History*, the subject of Roberta de Martini's essay, performs migration by exploring the effects of migration and ethnicity on individuals in each of the specific communities in which the work is produced. In each of the more than forty distinct performances of this installation work in the U.S., Japan, and the Netherlands since 1992, Chong, an American of Chinese descent, collaborates with a group of local people who share the experience of living in a culture different from the one into which they were born, of being 'undesirable elements' in their culture of origin and/or the culture in which they presently live. Applying theories by Marc Augé, Richard Schechner, and Victor Turner, de Martini analyzes the way Chong's ongoing installation work explores specific notions of 'place,' 'belonging' and 'identity' in each of the communities in which the work is performed.

The diverse but intersecting perspectives offered by these chapters on the ways media, art, and music call attention to the current process of immigrant acculturation and transculturation illustrate the ways shifting configurations of our global world are enacted. Issues of resistance and transformation, multilayered claims to cultural space, social recognition, and political visibility become vital when we comprehend the strategies behind these

artistic endeavors. Ultimately, we understand how the multiple permutations of the migrant experience in art and media—acesthetic embodiments of processes of remaking by re-presenting the self—reproduce the contingencies and possibilities of their creators. The unique advantage of reading these media texts from interdisciplinary perspectives lies, to an important extent, in the ways they evince the migrant process of continuous renegotiation of images of the past and the homeland, even as they directly engage the present and create new homes for themselves. As migrants act upon their present contexts, producing and consuming the images that illustrate their positions, they are compelled to revise their memories and narratives of the past. It is in this tension between newly elicited images and idealized memory, the weight of the past and the demands of the present, official versions and personally imagined accounts that we comprehend how, in our global world, migration truly matters.

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NOTES

1. Kellner, *Media Culture*, 1.
2. King and Wood, eds., *Media and Migration*, viii.
3. Wood and King, Introduction, 1–2.
4. Shohat and Stam, eds., *Multiculturalism*, 17, 4–5.
5. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4.
6. Basch, Schiller, and Blanc, *Nations Unbound*, 7–22.
7. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 33–37.
8. *Ibid.*, 193.
9. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
10. Gutiérrez and Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Introduction," 504.
11. Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, vii.
12. See Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 53–56; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4.
13. Maria Boletsi won MESEA's 2008 Young Scholars Excellence Award for this chapter.

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