On The Maintenance of Humanity: Learning from Refugee Mobile Practices

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It is a great pleasure to introduce CARGC Paper 5, "On the Maintenance of Humanity: Learning from Refugee Mobile Practices, by Mimi Sheller," who delivered it on September 7, 2016, as the 2016 CARGC Distinguished Lecture in Global Communication.

Mimi Sheller is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Mobilities Research and Policy at Drexel University. She is a founder of the "new mobilities paradigm," founding co-editor of the international journal *Mobilities*, and a President of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility. She has held Visiting Fellowships at the Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University (2008-09); Media@McGill in Montreal, Canada (2009); the Center for Mobility and Urban Studies at Aalborg University, Denmark (2009); and the Penn Humanities Forum (on Virtuality) at the University of Pennsylvania (2010-11). She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Sociology from Roskilde University in 2015.

Mimi Sheller embodies CARGC's core values. Much of her work is grounded in the Caribbean but has global purchase and implications. She performs high-theory scholarship while emphasizing its relevance to public discourse. Her scholarship is comparative, inclusive, and innovative, committed at once to academic excellence, social justice, and sustainability. It is also impressive in its wide range, spanning sexuality, race and class in the Caribbean, technologies and trajectories of mobility,

and the contribution of aluminum to North American modernity. She is the author and editor of many articles and books, including *Democracy After Slavery* (2000); *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003); and *Citizenship from Below* (2012), and most recently *Aluminum Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity*.

In this paper, professor Sheller presents an ongoing project with the Artistic Lab organized by the Mobile Lives Forum (Paris) based on an art commission and collaboration between Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, French curator Guillaume Logé, and herself, the social scientist of the team. In the midst of the current refugee crisis, Ai Weiwei's vivid images of people using, charging, and assembling around phones while they cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe's borders remind us of the fragility of the connections and larger systems we all depend on to make life work every day, but often take for granted. Sheller argues that we can use these images to explore urgent issues of humanitarianism and connection in the midst of the global refugee crisis. Mobility seems to always be wedded with communication capacities, almost as if without communication we would cease to be able to move.

We hope you find CARGC Paper 5 insightful and informative. Please follow us at @AnnenbergCARGC for updates on future events, publications and developments, and share this paper widely.

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On The Maintenance of Humanity: Learning from Refugee Mobile Practices

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INTRODUCTION

This CARGC Paper presents an ongoing project with the Mobile Lives Forum in Paris.[1] The Mobile Lives Forum is an independent and non-profit organization founded by the French Railway Company (SNCF), focused on "preparing the mobility transition." In addition to extensive support for research activities supporting transitions toward sustainable mobilities, the Forum also brings together researchers, practitioners and artists to work together through an online platform called the Artistic Lab. In this paper I will focus on the Refugee Project by Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei. In 2015, as part of his wider project on refugees, the Mobile Lives Forum commissioned Ai Weiwei to pay particular attention to how the latter use their smartphones in an emergency context. The first photos and videos – accompanied by the analyses of this author and art historian Guillaume Logé – can be found in the Artistic Lab section of the Forum's website. New photos, videos, guided tours and analyses will be published on The Refugee Project webpage, in the Artistic Lab section, throughout the course of this year.[2]

Since December 2015 Ai Weiwei has been exploring how refugees communicate, get their bearings and travel using their smartphone. For many, the latter has become their most valuable asset. As a rule mobility today seems to go hand in hand with the ability to communicate – as if, without mobile communication, we were somehow incapable of organizing our own movement. This increasingly intrinsic overlap between physical and virtual mobility likewise questions our reliance on the infrastructures that make these new forms of communication possible.

For refugees, these questions are crucial: what if the ability to locate relatives, send out a distress signal, receive money, organize the next leg of the journey or simply figure out which route to take depended on this mobile connection? While theories of migration have long spoken of the "double absence" of migrants (both from their country of origin and from their host country), certain researchers now allude to the "double presence" made possible by ICT and notably smartphones. This phenomenon occurs from the beginnings of their perilous and uncertain journeys, by allowing refugees to stay in touch with their families and organizing their arrival in Europe. With smartphone use they are able to reassemble their social ties from a distance.

Born in 1957, Ai Weiwei shares his time between Beijing, Berlin, and his studio on the island of Lesbos, in Greece. His work takes a variety of forms, including video, photography, installations, sculpture, architecture, curating, publishing, blogging, music and happenings. An important part of his work is now about the migrant crisis in Europe and the Middle East. By following peoples' journeys, Ai Weiwei says that he sought "to record and analyze the impact of the human conditions that we face today." There are an estimated sixty-five million people

who are today forcibly displaced from their homes, more than at any time since World War II and over ten thousand migrants perished trying to reach their destinations in 2014 and 2015, according to a 2016 report from the Geneva-based International Organization for Migration (Brian and Laczko 2016).

In Europe, Ai Weiwei created several installations in 2016, including in Prague where he wrapped bronze animal heads depicting the traditional Chinese zodiac in emergency thermal blankets; in Germany where he wrapped the columns of the Berlin Concert Hall in the defective life vests used by migrants crossing the Mediterranean; and in Vienna where his work *F-Lotus* placed 201 floating rings of five life jackets in the baroque pond of the Belvedere Palace a part of a larger installation "translocation-transformation" that examined "the metamorphosis provoked by expulsion, migration and deliberate change of location."[3] His works have been controversial, especially when "he recreated the tragic image of the drowned three-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi, whose lifeless body washed up on a beach near the Turkish town of Bodrum in September 2015."[4] In New York in October 2016 he opened four simultaneous related gallery shows at Mary Boone (uptown and downtown), Lisson, and Deitch Projects.[5]

While all of this work has generated heated media commentary, here I will not focus on this debate about the merits of his work, or discuss its interpretation as art, but instead concentrate on one aspect: focusing on the use of mobile communication devices by refugees. Ai Weiwei himself writes:

> Within this larger project, I take a conscious interest in the ways displaced people communicate and connect with smartphones. To the men and women in refugee camps or on the path from their homelands to a safer place, the smartphone is the most important source and communication channel. Even when everything else is lost, they would keep their phones safe. When the refugees cross dangerous seas, they wrap their phones in plastic to protect them against the water. When the boats seem to sink, they use their phones to call their loved ones or send distress signals for rescue. During their long journeys, many also use their phones to cover what they've seen and heard.[6]

In the following I will explore the image world that Ai Weiwei has created, and consider the ways in which it intervenes in the visual field around the refugee crisis.

With his studio he gathered photos and short videos of refugees using smartphones, which are now displayed online in The Artistic Lab, as part of an ongoing comprehensive endeavor to preserve historic records of the refugee crisis. As artist Ursula Biemann says in an interview for the Artistic Lab, "the visual terrain is largely dominated by news journalism. By integrating... a more thoughtful reflection of image-making, art can productively intervene in the visual field and come up with a radically different image world that speaks to the strong desire for mobility today" (Biemann 2016, n.p.). In the following I will explore the image world that Ai Weiwei has created, and consider the ways in which it intervenes in the visual field around the refugee crisis.

THE REFUGEE PROJECT

CARGC's director Marwan M. Kraidy has made an important intervention in the debate about uses of social media in the Middle East in his book *The Naked Blogger of Cairo*, arguing that "technology and social media are not the key to understanding these political movements, but rather far more important are the actions and representations of the body" (Kraidy 2016). Here, though, I focus on a far more mundane use of phones, not as media for political mobilization and public spectacle, but as small acts of mobile communication that also, I will argue, gather bodies and form mobile publics that can complicate our understanding of the refugee crisis, or what might better be called a border crisis and a humanitarian crisis.

Recent migrants arriving at the borders of the European Union, as well as those in refugee camps such as Kakuma in Kenya, or Zaatari on the Syria-Jordan border, have been described as highly connected via mobile technologies, though by no means all are. At least some refugees from the wars of the Middle East and North Africa are well-equipped and have flexible skills in using mobile technology. Ai Weiwei observes that:

> Having survived perilous escapes from war and reached the shores of Europe, the first thing on the refugees' minds is to call home and tell their loved ones that they are safe. ... The same devices allow them to seek help and exchange information with other refugees. Important decisions are made when they communicate with smugglers over texts or phone calls, when they discuss with others about their next moves. At every camp, charging stations and cafés with power outlets are the liveliest places, where people chat and share news. At the Idomeni camp near the Greek-Macedonian border, the refugees have even developed their own network to make announcements, share information and even find their families.[7]

Celebrities like Cate Blanchett, speaking in her role as Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees describes driving into UNHCR's Zaatrari camp:

> I couldn't quite work out what I was seeing. There were bodies pressed up really close to the wall and huddled figures, heads bent, and they were looking into their cupped hands. And then I noticed the thumbs and I realised what was holding the focus of nearly every single one of these, mostly teenagers, was their bloody phones... showing great resourcefulness. They were tapping into UNHCR's base camp Wifi. There were kids trying to connect with family back in Syria, they were WhatsApping with former classmates now spread across Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and further afield, downloading news and trying to get information to relay back to others in the camp.[8]

Today refugee flight is mediated by mobile phones, not only for calls and text messages, but also as emergency beacons, location-finding devices, cameras and portable photo albums. As Blanchett puts it "It's quite literally a lifeline. So the need for these people to connect is not a luxury, its an absolute necessity," especially, under inhumane conditions of war and exile, but also the inhumane conditions of border regimes.

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The use of social media by refugees is not simply about technology, but also more importantly about the social practices of mobile communication through which refugees gather bodies and devices, assemble people and places, and create new kinds of mobile public space and moments of privacy.

The making of a portable public realm, and as part of a politics of infrastructure that has implications for how we all reassemble the social under conditions of secured borders.

Following from this, understanding the use of social media by refugees is not simply about technology, but also more importantly about the social practices of mobile communication through which refugees gather bodies and devices, assemble people and places, and create new kinds of mobile public space and moments of privacy. In this paper I want to argue for the use of mobile phones by refugees as part of *the making of a portable public realm,* and as part of a *politics of infrastructure* that has implications for how we all reassemble the social under conditions of secured borders. As Ursula Biemann explores in her project Sahara Chronicles, "It also highlights how the trajectories of artists, journalists, NGO workers, tourists and social scientists on their field trips interweave with these other forms of mobility of people on their quest for a better life. Together with migrants we constitute this intense space of mobility" (Biemann 2016). Here I consider how refugees are also part of this intense space of mobility and mobile communication, and what kinds of artistic and social scientific interventions this might generate. How can we imagine these interactions across spaces of mobility and mobile communication, as well as photography, art installation, and social science, as sites of action in which new kinds of public discourse might emerge, and perhaps influence public policy?

REASSEMBLING THE SOCIAL: THE PORTABLE PUBLIC REALM

In the midst of the current refugee crisis in which more than thirty-eight hundred people have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean so far this year, making it the deadliest year ever,[9] Ai Weiwei's vivid images of people using, charging, and assembling around phones while they cross the sea to reach Europe's borders remind us of the fragility of the connections and larger systems we all depend on to make life work every day, but often take for granted. I want to reflect on these images, therefore, in order to explore urgent issues of humanitarianism and connection in the midst of the global refugee crisis. In a photograph captioned "Refugees gathering around a table, charging their phones, going through photos, playing games," taken in Tempelhof, Berlin, on February 10, 2016, we are reminded of the complex assemblages needed to maintain communication while on the move.

A phone call seems like a simple thing, but imagine how hard it is while on the move as a refugee to have a working phone, with the numbers you need to call, a charged battery, power cords, converters and the right SIM card. What do we carry with us, how do we find our way and stay in touch when we move? What of our humanity do we have to leave behind when crossing borders? Mobility was always wedded with communication capacities, but today it is almost as if without it we would cease to be able to move. How would we find our way, our mode of travel, our destination, if we were unable to communicate? What if your survival depended on it, your ability to find your loved ones, to get money, or to plot your next move? In the past, for migrants like my own great grandparents, such constant contact was unthinkable. Now at least some refugees can stay in touch, send photos or money, adding a different kind of poignancy to separation, but also a new kind of connectivity. Ai Weiwei's images remind

us of ourselves not only as travelers but also as what Sarah Pink and Larissa Hjorth (2014) call "digital wayfarers:" we engage in both digital co-presence and physical movement that interweaves local and global, online and offline, immediate and distant environments. But for refugees the gap is more extreme, the dangers of social disconnection more acute.

Ultimately the refugee is a dis-located person for whom the mobile phone is a locational device that maintains their connection to the world, and in some ways therefore to their own (and to our) humanity. Locating oneself is what allows us to recover ourselves and "reassemble the social." In another black and white photo, a lone woman stands under a sign that says "Assembly Station C," and to the left a smaller sign points toward the Agora – the original assembly point of Greek democracy – but also the "Internet Corner" – the new assembly point of mobile modernity. In a recent essay called "Mediating the Mediterranean," Huub Dijstelbloem writes about the emergence of a "portable public realm." He draws on Hannah Arendt's insight that the public sphere "arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be" (Arendt 1958, 198; cited in Dijstelbloem 2015, 114). This convergence of Agora and Internet Corner in the hands of a Syrian refugee on a Greek ferry underlines the fleeting precarity of the public sphere.

Dijstelbloem suggests that "the political aspect [of mediating the migration process with photographs, video, and cellphones] is not only that undocumented migrants claim a position in the public sphere but also that their very actions *create* a public sphere" (ibid). Yet thinking about these photos we might also add that such actions also create a momentary private sphere, for as Arendt taught us the protection of a private sphere and the meeting of basic needs, which these refugees have lost, is a basic precondition for human freedom and for coming together as a public.

What topographies of electronic space are people on the move traversing and transgressing? How, where, when and with whom do refugees assemble and converge through their phones?

Dijstelbloem is especially interested in the ways that non-governmental organizations and humanitarian groups make use of digital photography, video recording, and geographic information systems in efforts at counter-surveillance within the "digitized landscape of mobility management" organized by the state (ibid, 115). But we could also consider the more mundane activities of refugees simply staying connected by mobile phone as a kind of counterpoint to state practices of visualizing, tracking, capturing data, and listening. What topographies of electronic space are people on the move traversing and transgressing? How, where, when and with whom do refugees assemble and converge through their phones? Are they speaking with family at home to tell them they are safe, or to those at a hoped for destination? Are they arranging for money to be sent to human smugglers, or sending text messages, playing games or just reading the news? Do they own these latest mobile models or are they borrowing or renting minutes from others?

On the ferries and at the camps people stretch their power cords high to the sockets above their heads – as if reaching towards the "Hertzian space" of cell towers and satellites. In an image captioned "Refugees gathering around a charging station" taken at Camp Moria, Isle

of Lesbos, Greece, on December 31, 2015, men and boys assemble around chargers, every space taken by a phone. People stand, perch, and sit on plastic chairs in temporary formations. The phones must be kept going, charged, working, if human lives are to be maintained both within a personal private realm and a potential public realm. From once mundane everyday objects, the iPhones and Samsungs suggestively emerge here as lifeline, beacon, ticket, identification, meeting point, fetish object, gift exchange. Those precious mobile devices the people in these photos carry are almost all that remains of their civil realm on the move, allowing anyone to assemble a pocketable private space and a portable public realm.

THE POLITICS OF INFRASTRUCTURE

The social requires more than just people and language: it also relies on background infrastructures such as phones, plugs, electricity, satellites, data plans, metal mines, energy grids, and all the other equipment that we use to assemble our social worlds and make them portable. Since Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's (1999) early work on information infrastructures, there has been a renewed focus in science and technology studies, media studies, cultural geography, and mobilities research on the technological and material side of communication and media. One of the quirks of information infrastructures is their visibility only upon breakdown, highlighting their fragility, but also their dynamic re-configuration especially when life must be lived on the move. In an image captioned "At an NGO tent, a volunteer showing solar-powered charger with cable compatible with multiple devices," taken at Camp Moria, Isle of Lesbos, Greece, on January 26, 2016, we can imagine that rescue arrives in the form of a solar-powered multi-functional charger – a remediated lifeline. Emergency relief is not just a shoreline, a thermal blanket and a temporary shelter; today it is also the capacity to make a phone call, to recreate one's networks, to carry connections to friends, family, news and the public realm on a portable device.

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The photos therefore point toward the potential for breakdown not only of communication, but of social connection itself, by showing how tenuous our connections may be. For "A man sitting in front of a house container, checking his phone" photographed on February 21, 2016, at Camp Eleonas in Greece, this phone may be his only connection to the outside world. The temporary building is packed with boxes, a space of movement and emergency logistics. Communication media in such a context are not just about sending messages, but also can be thought of in terms of articulating order and disorder, stabilization and flexibility, maintenance and repair.

Recent work joining communications theory with the new mobilities paradigm can enable us to think about how mobile media is involved in the ways people, objects and information move together when each has been uprooted from place and then reassembled on the move. As Giuseppina Pellegrino puts it in her introduction to the book *The Politics of Proximity*: "Mobility depends on sociotechnical processes that make artefacts increasingly convergent, multi-

functional and pocketable. Technological mediation of mobility is... embedded in complex infrastructures based on sociotechnical networks" (Pellegrino 2011, 6). Pellegrino argues that the "portability and transferability of data and information across large networks" is characterized by four contemporary trends and I want to think about how these are applicable to the refugee situation: convergence, saturation, hybridity and ubiquity.

Convergence is "the trend toward uniformity of technological platforms and systems," which also has to do with "miniaturization and portability" (Pellegrino 2011, 7). As Ai Weiwei observes, the refugees are using their phones for many different purposes, and their portability and multifunctionality makes them crucial. Saturation is "the web of interoperability on which infrastructures are built up and linked to each other," which makes the mobile phone a seemingly "ubiquitous technology," and "increases expectations of continuous availability" (ibid)." As in the photograph captioned "A young Syrian uses two telephones to make a call, while showing a view of the deck of the ferry," taken Aboard the ferry Hellenic Seaways from Lesbos to Athens on February 20, 2016, we see the great efforts that go into a hoped for convergence and saturation of technologies, networks, and infrastructures, even if not always easy to achieve.

Hybridity is "the constant interlinkage of human and nonhuman components," which "provide affordance to mobile practices" that are "integrated, mingled and portable within the body and the surrounding environment" (Pellegrino 2011, 8). In this condition of hybridity, argues Pellegrino, "the body is increasingly empowered through technology; communication cannot be conceived of without mixtures of media and assemblies of sociotechnical devices" (ibid). Ubiquity, finally, is an "aspiration towards omnipresence through simultaneity and instantaneity," it is about "being anywhere anytime" and "the mobile phone is par excellence an example of such a ubiquity because of the constant availability it makes possible" (ibid, 7-8). These qualities might seem unimportant for the refugee, just trying to survive, and yet today they may be crucial to survival and especially to social being.

In another photograph, "Two men taking selfies on ferry deck," from the same ferry ride, we now wonder if they are maybe sending photos to friends and family, normalizing the experience of leaving one world for another. Yet something in this act suggests a strange new form of "dark tourism" with a "mobile gaze" (Urry and Larsen, 2011) into the phone screen on these Mediterranean ferries. We, as the audience gazing at these photos, feel we too might be engaging in a kind of tourism of disaster unfolding in a place that is otherwise used for leisure and pleasure. The mobile ship combined with the phone-camera affords another kind of ubiquitous mobile gaze and digital wayfaring.

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The convergence, saturation, hybridity and ubiquity of these refugee mobile practices also hint at the notion of "attainable reach," developed by Kjell Engelbrekt as an extension into a more mobile context of Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann's 1973 study *Structures of the Lifeworld*. If the time horizon of social relations is being transformed by the intermingling of co-present and distant connections, as John Urry argues (Urry, 2007), there is Engelbrekt says, a "sense of connectedness even though the persons participating in the dialogue live many time zones

apart" (Engelbrekt 2011, 33). Whereas once refugees would have felt very much alone, now they might engage in forms of imaginative travel, virtual travel, and communicative travel, as they physically traverse space and cross borders. The mobile device brings attainability to "the world of potential reach" (ibid, 39), creating what I have elsewhere referred to as "connected mobility in a disconnected world" (Sheller, 2016).

To what extent can any of us keep a hold on our place in the world, without the digital media through which we keep our lives "going," whether on the move or residing in place? And to return to the Arendtian-inspired idea of the "portable public realm," what mobile devices do we rely on now to continue "acting and speaking together"? Can we leverage the portable public realm to make more humane spaces for refuge and asylum, where more of us might act and speak together across the borders that separate us? The politics of infrastructure suggests that we not only need to repair connections that have been severed by war, and to help refugees maintain mobile connectivity, but also that we need to find ways to make our own public realms more inclusive.

Can we leverage the portable public realm to make more humane spaces for refuge and asylum, where more of us might act and speak together across the borders that separate us?

BORDERS, WARFARE AND SUBJECTIVATION

Finally, I want to reflect on some wider issues of borders and war reflected in this project. In one of the most striking photos, a heroic looking woman speaks into her phone framed by a golden sunset with seaweed engulfing her ankles, a deflated boat and flotation rings behind her. The photo is captioned "In front of a punctured rubber raft, a woman making calls on the beach with a smartphone" and was taken on the Isle of Lesbos, Greece, on February 17, 2016. The phone call this woman places is ironically based on the military origins of the networks and satellites that support communication, the very same ones that enable warfare, GPS targeting, or drone attacks – i.e., the very same ones that create refugees. War is both the ultimate destroyer of infrastructure, yet paradoxically the *raison d'etre* for its existence and maintenance in the competition for logistical superiority. Weaponry, today coupled with advanced communication technologies and flexible mobile infrastructure, is the mover and the moved, the agent of removal and the enforcer of borders. Refugees are not only caught in the crossfire, but must also cross a zone of weaponized communication technologies.

The growing militarization of immigration and border enforcement, non-citizen detention and deportation, and migrant incarceration, deeply erodes human rights and the right to asylum.

In another striking image, "Newly arrived refugee making phone calls on the beach, a rescuer bringing warm drinks to a woman wrapped in a foil blanket," taken on January 28, 2016 on the Isle of Lesbos, a rescuer hands out hot drinks to a woman wrapped in a thermal blanket, but another man wearing camouflage pants is immersed in his phone screen, not even looking up. His hands catch our attention in the center of the image; the ground looks unstable and tilting; gold facets of the blanket catch the light like a robed Madonna, strangely out of place. The refugee system itself has broken down, when border enforcement drives people into dangerous risky crossings, and humanitarian systems meant to protect those fleeing war are failing. These are the people who made it, while thousands others have drowned. The growing militarization

of immigration and border enforcement, non-citizen detention and deportation, and migrant incarceration, deeply erodes human rights and the right to asylum. Just as on the US-Mexico, US-Caribbean and Pacific Ocean borders, there is a "long-standing connection between US military operations abroad and US immigration at home," with military bases long being used "to police the mobility of migrants and asylum-seekers" (Loyd, Mitchel-Eaton, and Mountz 2015). The technology of the border also depends on the violence of "databases involved in surveillance" and what Jansen calls "the capture of personal data" as part of the new "apparatus of border control" (Jansen et al. 2015, xxi).

In the image "Just arriving Lesbos, a young man makes calls at the beach still carrying his baggage," taken on February 17, 2016, a young man on the shore of Lesbos smiles into his red phone with seeming relief. In contrast to the anonymous counts of refugee numbers, the mass media spectacle of the refugee as either passive victim or threatening flood, and the social media figuration of the dead child as humanitarian crisis, these photos humanize refugees as individual people, depicting them not as bedraggled survivors in an acute situation of near death, as has become common in the media, but as normal people making their way on a difficult journey. The people-on-phones in these photos encapsulate order in a world of disorder, stabilization in the midst of flexible arrangements, and above all humanity in the midst of inhumanity. Ai Weiwei's photos, therefore, intervene in the media spectacle of "the refugee crisis," offering a different handle for envisioning human agency.

The people in the photographs are not just passive victims of "traffickers" or hordes fleeing warfare; rather it is they who traffic through their own communicative agency. Carmelo Buscema describes indigenous Mixteca people crossing from Sinaloa to San Diego:

> Migrants themselves become able – which means 'relationally' able – to organize their journeys, figure out when, how and where to migrate, for how long, etc., by handling relational resources (namely, information, new languages and vocabularies, social contacts and spaces, ability to handle novel communication media), by using such relational machines to keep in touch with the recruiters, their co-workers, with the 'coyotes' for crossing the border, etc. (Buscema 2011, 55).

They get, share and process information for themselves, actively implementing mobile communication technologies during and after the migration journey. Thus mobile technologies "function as a means of 'subjectivation' – namely, the process of becoming subjects and active actors" (ibid, 56). In this sense Ai Weiwei's photos help us to see refugees as subjects, using relational machines to mediate their own journeys.

They also echo the border arts project called the Transborder Immigrant Tool created by the Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 at University of California San Diego. Ricardo Dominguez and his collaborators envisioned an inexpensive GPS-enabled cell phone that used a "Virtual Hiker" algorithm to help people in the Tijuana/San Diego border area to locate routes and find water caches in the remote desert, while also sending them text messages with poetry to help

re-humanize the border zone. Designed in 2007, the project caused a political uproar when it was demonized by Glenn Beck and led to a University inquiry and an FBI investigation in 2010. Envisioned in the midst of a major escalation in the use of so-called "smart technologies" and militarization of the US-Mexico border, "The Transborder Immigrant Tool would add a new layer of agency to this emerging virtual geography that would allow segments of global society that are usually outside of this emerging grid of hyper-geo-mapping-power to gain quick and simple access with a GPS system" (Vukov and Sheller 2013; Duarte 2015).[10]

In earlier work on "mobile borders," with Tamara Vukov, I have considered how recent border-making processes in North America and Europe have transformed borders into flexible mobile technologies redeploying older technologies such as passports and databases for surveillance, tracking, filtering and exclusion (Vukov and Sheller 2013). New digital, biometric and physical sensor technologies are reshaping the geography of the border by securitizing flows rather than just securing the fenced-off borderline as a hard edge, which is generally considered unworkable (despite Donald Trump's recent calls for a huge, "beautiful wall"). The shifting border regimes that are emerging around the world are redistributing and intensifying border checkpoints through a range of different registers, using new visual, physical, informational and haptic technologies and techniques in border security and surveillance.

Like the Transborder Immigrant Tool, the use of smartphones by displaced people around the world points toward an electronic disturbance of the technology of the border, a reappropriation of mobile locative technology for human agency, for safety, for making a temporary space of privacy and for taking action in a mobile public realm. It is indicative that the border zone is a saturated hybrid space not only of physical mobility, but also of mobile mediality. Who is able to "appropriate" the potential for mobility is both a political question and an ethical question: what rights to mobility exist in a particular context, and how are they exercised and protected? And what capabilities of mobility are valued, defended, and extended to all?

CONCLUSION: KINOPOLITICAL MEDIATION

In concluding, I want to connect my reflections on these photographs to some wider issues around mobility, mediation, and migration, which can be brought together under the rubric of kinopolitics. Philosopher Thomas Nail describes "kinopolitics" in the operation of all states and borders, expressed through the various forms of fence, wall, cell, and checkpoint that mediate circulation (Nail 2015, 2016). Nail describes the checkpoint as "the control over information points within a large and continuous flow of people and things" (2016, 114), and it includes the police checkpoint, the security checkpoint, and the information checkpoint.

Histories of liberal citizenship suggest that the right to unhindered mobility of the citizen helped to produce the nation-state, even while it required others whose mobility is "constantly hindered" as Tim Cresswell puts it in the US context: "Arab Americans stopped at airport

immigration, Hispanic Americans in the fields of American agri-business or African Americans 'driving while black'" (Cresswell 2006, 161). Furthermore, as Hagar Kotef elaborates in *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom*: "Liberal democracies have always operated in tandem with regimes of deportation, expulsion, and expropriation, as well as confinement and enclosure, implementing different rationalities of rule to which colonized poor, gendered and racialized subjects were subjected" (Kotef 2015, 10-11).

I conclude therefore with a double selfie captioned "Ai Weiwei takes a selfie with a Syrian man over selfie stick," from December 31, 2015, which presents a doubled image of the two men in the camera screen but also in a reflection on the phone's glass. It shows both a glimpse of the sky and sea behind them, and the people on the deck in front of them. Curator Guillaume Logé notes that "The cellphone screen as a mirror can be considered in the tradition of masterpieces like Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) ... and Diego Velásquez' *Las Meninas* (1656)." The mirrored image presents both ourselves and space itself. It asks us to look beyond the figure of the migrant, to also look at our relation to this space of the refugee crisis, a space that we are part of even as we observe it from afar. Like Van Eyck and Velasquez it relates questions of visibility to forms of power and hidden spaces; capital and circulation; privacy and public space.

Secondly, it demands us to ask what is the relation between the functions of cellular and photographic technologies when used for state-centric policing, locating, tracking, data collection, and monitoring of human circulation across borders, versus the function of the mobile device when used by people on the move to connect, to photograph, to locate themselves, to carve out temporary privacy and to make a public realm. Mobile locational technologies emerge as a new locus for kinopolitical struggles over trans-border mobility and bordering processes, but also over building community and enacting a resilient politics on the move. Mobile communication technologies bring possibilities for gathering data from below, for counter-surveillance, for a new kind of archive of border crossing, and perhaps most importantly for building new kinds of trans-border counterpublics, spaces for reflection and (kino)political action where we too might make temporary infrastructures and re-assemble the social.

Finally, then, it is with this hope in mind that I believe artists, social scientists, and communication scholars, together with migrants, can contribute to remaking an "intense space of mobility," whether it spans the Sahara, the Mediterranean, the Pacific Ocean around Australia, or the deserts of the US-Mexico border. I believe that Ai Weiwei's Refugee Project shows us that all of these sites of migrant deaths can be remediated as sites for reassembling the social through making a portable public sphere.

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Endnotes

2 The Refugee Project can be viewed at http://artisticlab.forumviesmobiles.org/en/the-refugee-project. All images and video referred to in this talk will contain links to this site and are copyright of the artist Ai Weiwei.

3 For reports on these installations see for example:

https://www.belvedere.at/bel_en/exhibition/ai_weiwei

http://blog.brooklynartproject.com/2016/07/ai-weiwei-transforms-vienna/

https://www.yahoo.com/news/ai-weiwei-art-project-berlin-features-refugee-life-145230389.html?ref=gs and https://www.buzzfeed.com/davidmack/ai-weiwei-berlin-concert-hall-refugee-work. All accessed November 7, 2016.

4 https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ai-weiwei-refugee-jacket-installation-vienna-557324

5 http://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccasuhrawardi/2016/11/05/chinese-activist-ai-weiwei-returns-to-new-york-with-four-refugee-focused-exhibitions/#743f6f295ca9

6 http://artisticlab.forumviesmobiles.org/en/oeuvre/the-refugee-project. Accessed November 7, 2016.

7 Ibid.

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M8bokA-oew, Cate Blanchett, global Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, speaking on May 23th, at Google's Zeitgeist talks in London. Posted 27 June 2016. Accessed September 4, 2016.

9 http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/26/world/mediterranean-refugees-2016-record-migrant-deaths/index.html. Accessed November 7, 2016.

10 http://bang.calit2.net/xborderblog/?page_id=2. Accessed September 4, 2016.

11 The artistic origins of the selfie were explored in the exhibition "From Rembrandt to the Selfie" which was shown at the Lyon Museum of Fine Arts in 2016, and travelled to Staatliche Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe and the National Galleries of Scotland.

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