

Doctor of Media and Communication Studies

Glitches In The Spectacle: Three Articulations of Hybridity and Fictionality  
in Migration Visual Culture.

Giacomo Toffano

Supervisors: prof. Kevin Smets, PhD and prof. Elisabeth Bekers, PhD

Abstract

This dissertation examines the intersection of hybridity, fiction, and migration in contemporary visual culture, focusing on how artistic practices challenge dominant narratives and aesthetics of the "border spectacle." By analysing cartographies, films, and video art from 2014 to 2024, it explores how hybrid media forms disrupt hegemonic representations of migrants, borders, and migration. The study employs a multilayered methodological framework, integrating analyses of intermedial, generic, and rhetorical hybridity to critique and reimagine migration narratives.

The research demonstrates how hybrids can destabilize canonical modes of migration storytelling by blending factual and fictional rhetorical elements, reworking traditional genre conventions, and experimenting with intermedial forms. Through in-depth case studies of spectral figures in cinema, fictional cartographies, and migration essay films, it reveals how hybrids can subvert the reductive "truth-telling mode" prevalent in migration narratives. These works emphasize alternative sensory and emotional engagements, challenging conventional storytelling frameworks that reduce migration to suffering or victimization.

By examining how hybrid works reframe migration through strategies of exaggeration, sensory engagement, and innovative intermedial configurations, the research highlights their ability to resist simplistic and canonical portrayals. These approaches not only dismantle traditional mimetic realism but also invite audiences to critically engage with the affective and dissensual dimensions of migration.