The Worker as Revenant

Imagining Embodied Labor in Contemporary Visualizations of Migration

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The immediate concern of this essay is with the ways of visually representing the bodies of workers as they move across international borders. In particular it addresses how illegalized labor migration is represented in two distinct kinds of images. I first consider a set of images that are produced as a consequence of the surveillance of international transit in a conscious attempt to detect the presence of illegalized migrants in places where they have been excluded and where they cannot readily be seen. In reading these images I give specific attention to the ways that they circulate in the popular media and note how this contributes to their ability to represent certain dominant narratives about the nature of contemporary migration. However, I also note that such images contain certain aesthetic features that can be seen to disrupt these narratives. The technological methods of producing these images mean that the bodies that they bring to light are imperfectly visible, possessing a semitranslucent quality that leads them to resemble ghosts. If this quality troubles the ideas of presence and visibility that these images purport to represent, it also places the body of the migrant amid global transportation in ways that make the body and freight hard to disentangle. In the reading of these images that follows, I speculate about how far this visual entanglement disturbs an opposition between the free movement of goods and services on the one hand and the free movement of workers on the other. I then turn to look at a set of images produced by contemporary artists, which use a range of techniques to depict the movement of illegalized migrants in ways that

Social Text 111 • Vol. 30, No. 2 • Summer 2012
DOI 10.1215/01642472-1541736 © 2012 Duke University Press

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similarly evoke the idea of the ghost. My particular interest is with the way that these images seem to concentrate upon the question of what is visible and what cannot be shown as a means to interrogate the role of surveillance in structuring global economic relations.

In terms of transportation and of state borders especially, the distinction between the treatment of commodities and of laborers is central to these economic relations. The mobility of commodities lies at the very heart of neoliberal conceptions of a free market. This is abundantly clear in the World Trade Organization's *Understanding the WTO*, which insistently explains its role in removing taxation, quotas, and barriers between markets.[1] However, strikingly, while the regulatory barriers to trade are systematically removed, physical barriers restricting the movement of people are rapidly being constructed. Since signing the North American Free Trade Agreement, successive US administrations have complemented the robust policing of the US-Mexican border by reinforcing the physical barriers that run along its length.[2] Similarly, in 2005 the Indian government began the construction of a barrier along the entire 2,500-mile border between India and Bangladesh in an effort to limit the illegal entry of Bengalis into India.[3]

At the level of political governance, the construction of physical barriers to limit migration alongside the simultaneous liberalization of trading borders for goods and services might confirm Didier Bigo's interpretation of the "securitization of immigration." Bigo asserts that the control of migration serves as the totemic expression of governmental efficacy within the context of declining government control over trade. He also notes that this has been encouraged by the development of new surveillance technologies that promise to restore political control over the permeable trading barriers of the modern global economy.[4] At a conceptual level, however, Marx's widely referenced account of the fetish-like character of the commodity notes that commodities are a form of labor altered by the processes of exchange. The "mysterious" quality of the commodity originates from the fact that "the social character of men's labour" is "stamped upon" it "as an objective character."[5] From this perspective, the divergent treatment of mobile commodities and mobile workers represents an even greater contradiction. In the form of the commodity, labor power is objectified and is free to perform a kind of labor migration while, at the same time, the embodied laborer remains trapped within the confines of national borders and subject to the discourses of illegality. Yet Marx also observed that labor reemerges "whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products," noting that this act also equates "the different kinds of labour expended upon them" even if "we are not aware of this." In this process "the products of labour, so far as they are values, are but material expressions of the human labour spent in their production."[6] In glossing Marx's theory of commodities, Jacques Derrida translates Marx's observa-

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tion into the language of the specter by claiming that "these ghosts that are commodities transform human producers into ghosts."[7] What I take from Derrida's interpretation is the suggestion that the laborer whose labor has been commoditized disappears from our immediate view, which is focused on the commodity itself, yet remains present in the form of the *revenant*: the spirit which is also the return. This idea of the ghostly return is important for the present work, but in attempting to apply it to the visual images of migrating labor in contemporary visual culture it is necessary to modify Derrida's emphasis on temporality in order to think about this return as a more immediate act of spatial transgression.[8] Where Derrida sees the spirit as an expression of "anachrony," the slippage between past time and the promise of future realization, I am tantalized by the visualization of the otherwise invisible inner spaces of global logistics that allows subjective or embodied labor to emerge repeatedly within the visual frame of migrating labor in its objective form as the commodity.

My use of the term *embodied labor* is crucial to my analysis because, as illegalized migrants, workers are more than merely personified labor power. In the images that I analyze it is the body of the laborer rather than the act of laboring which encroaches upon the rationalized lines of global transportation. As I emphasize in relation to Melanie Jackson's work below, the infrastructures of contemporary logistics are organized precisely to eliminate the spaces where the laborer's body might legitimately appear. Yet the attention to labor's embodiment seeks to indicate that, when work and workers do appear in circumstances where work and workers are debarred from the visual terrain, the appearance of the embodied subject is itself a transgression. Indeed, it is a transgression so great that the full force of the legal and technocratic apparatus of the state must be called upon to mark the body as the site of criminality. The illegalized laborer is not illegal because of the work that she or he performs; it is her or his embodied presence that constitutes the crime.

In my reading of visual texts that depict embodied labor I consider how the body emerges as a consequence of, but also in spite of, the technical and bureaucratic restrictions upon seeing migrant labor. Yet in reading these images as depicting the spectral appearance of labor I argue that the appearance of the human producer of commodities as a revenant constitutes a way of resolving a difficulty posed by Ursula Biemann in her account of her video artwork *Sahara Chronicle,* which attempts to visualize the process of illegalized migration from Africa to Europe. Biemann notes that undocumented workers must, necessarily, achieve certain kinds of invisibility in order to effect their movement across national borders and that the value of invisibility means that illegalized migration must be represented through its absences just as much as through its presence. Biemann describes the "interstices between" the various videos that make

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up *Sahara Chronicle* as the space inhabited by activities which are "most invisible to the eye."[9] While this usefully introduces the theoretical value of invisibility for thinking about the visual representation of illegalized labor migration, her resolution of this problem is different from the images that are examined here. One reason for this is the entwining of trade and labor migration identified above. When the body of the laborer inhabits spaces intended for labor-as-commodity it becomes possible to visualize the concealed body of the laboring subject in more tangible ways than in Biemann's work. What is visually interesting about these images is the extent to which the conceptual haunting of the spaces created for goods is matched at a visual level because of the technological and bureaucratic limitations on representation which structure the visual depiction of embodiment in these contexts. Though some of the visualizations that I discuss below resort to imagining this spectral presence as a form of absence, in a fashion similar to Biemann, many others are constructed by the necessity to bring the worker's body to light. Nevertheless, while embodied labor does appear in these images, its appearance remains only partially embodied, imperfect, spectral. It remains an important question whether the spectral presence of embodied labor is capable of resisting the rationalization of labor migration in these images. Certainly I try to argue that the form of their appearance heightens a connection between the revenant workers and the locations for their apparition. Given Marxism's concern with the sublation of the worker from the labor process, I suggest that the appearance of the spectral worker mobilizes notions of presence and visibility which allow embodied labor to contest its exclusion from the discourses of trade freedom.

Surveillance Photographs

In recent years, newly developed x-ray technologies have made significant advances in the surveillance of international transportation. Where traditional x-rays measure radiation as it passes through or is absorbed by an object, new backscatter technologies measure and interpret levels of radiation which are scattered from an object subject to x-ray. As a consequence these technologies make it possible to visualize organic matter such as human soft tissue and to produce images that more closely resemble the human form even when the visualized body is hidden inside physical structures that make it invisible to the human eye. Nevertheless, since the instruments for recording these images measure successive layers of objects and transform the three-dimensional space of containment onto the flat surface of the image, the visualized body in these images appears partially translucent. This translucence gives the body a ghostly quality which is frequently remarked upon. Perhaps the most recognizable use of such technology has been in airports where full-body scanners are

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gradually being introduced at passenger security. In 2003 the head of the US Transport Security Authority, Susan Hallowell, demonstrated the potential of this technology, and the images produced when she posed for a scanning machine were widely distributed. Many of the responses to these images in the media and on Internet blogs and discussion forums remarked on the similarity of these images to ghosts, and this seemed to be a common response to the representational imperfection of these images. Indeed, when the UK's Manchester Airport conducted a trial of new "imaging technology" in October 2009, the imagery of ghosts was deliberately employed in their promotional material. Seeking to allay fears about passengers' privacy, they claimed that "the image produced is a black and white, ghost-like outline of an individual's body without any distinguishing features such as hair or facial features, making it impossible to recognise people but simple to detect concealed threats."[10]

This language of ghostliness was repeated widely in the media reporting of this trial and reemerged with calls for greater use of this technology following the failed attack on the Northwest airlines plane on Christmas Day 2009. Yet, if the idea of ghostliness is employed to reassure the elite migrant in the face of intensified border surveillance, the rendering of illegalized migrants as ghosts seems to do something rather different.

When these technologies are employed to surveil freight rather than passenger transportation, the level of concealment is arguably more total. Correspondingly there is a greater emphasis upon the claim that these images make visible that which cannot otherwise be seen. In this context there is also a lack of consent by the bodies being visualized and, arguably, this lack of consent constitutes an important element in the meaning of the images that it produces. The pictures that these technologies produce are visualizations rather than an unmediated expression of what the human eye might see. The images are constructions of technology and also the product of a decision about how to render information into an image readable by the human observer. As such, the representation of surveillance in the form of an image — especially as an image that circulates via other kinds of media — constitutes a type of spectacle whereby power mediates information to confirm dominant ideology.[11] Although the preeminence of the panoptic model of surveillance has been challenged in recent writing, its relevance to the monitoring of borders continues to be apparent.[12] The investment in high-technology surveillance of the national borders undoubtedly involves the kind of visible expression of power that Foucault associates with the Panopticon, and it is hard to align with the more voluntaristic kinds of surveillance that are often cited to question his model, even if surveillance does involve varying degrees of consent.[13] Nevertheless, the importance of spectacle to the apparatus of these surveillance technologies does call for a modified understanding of the panoptic role.

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In line with Jonathan Crary's suggestion that Foucault underestimated the extent to which the Panopticon utilized both spectacle and surveillance, it is possible to see how the panoptic function of contemporary surveillance images depends upon their mediation as spectacle.[14] This dependency makes pressing the interrogation of surveillance images as images in order to challenge their presentation of embodied migrating labor as outside the discourse of free trade.

The imperfection of the images these technologies produce is key to such a reading because it allows the image to position embodied migrants within a series of discursive structures. One effect of the imperfect visualization of the body is to efface the particularity of the migrants who are depicted — refusing to personalize undocumented workers so as to conform to narratives of crime and civic decay. This ideological narration is enhanced by the videolow aesthetics of the images, with its associated implications of authenticity. Such a presentation acts as a screen for the videohigh characteristics (high capital, high technology, and high power) which are required to produce them.[15] Through a resemblance to the aesthetic imperfections and democracies of consumer technologies, these images masquerade as videolow in order to appear as a form of impromptu testimony. In so doing they work to conceal their connection to the powerful apparatus of the state and of capital whose interests they serve. Arguably, too, the resemblance to CCTV images encodes criminality upon the image and a presumption of guilt upon the bodies that they depict. In circulation, these authoritarian implications are often further emphasized by the association of the image with the police or legal state functionaries who are frequently identified as the authors or originators of the images themselves. An example of this was made widely available in Britain at the end of 2005 when the Metropolitan Police distributed a photograph of a truck carrying hidden migrants. This image (fig. 1), which has been widely reproduced in the British press, displays many of the features which I wish to identify as paradigmatic.[16]

The bodies in this image are typically haunting figures who sit somewhere between invisibility and full embodiment. If this presentation colludes with the criminalization of the embodied worker, their spectrality also offers a way of resisting this dominant interpretative structure. A key feature of the image is the way that it positions the bodies of the migrants amid the truck's freight. The line of bodies appears in hatched boxes, marked out by the pallet length of the cargo which surrounds them and which, in the version of the image used by the Metropolitan Police, has a shadowy substance barely distinguishable from the people who inhabit its cavities. The geometry of this relation and the tonal similarities between body and cargo suggest a confusion of subject and object; the bodies in the picture seem to have become freighted goods. In this respect, the bodies

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Figure 1. Migrants hiding inside a truck photographed by x-ray surveillance equipment. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Police, London, UK

themselves inhabit a boundary between object and subject; they are both curiously bodily, stripped of clothing and hair, yet also ghostlike in ways that suggest their dematerialization. The poor quality of the image used by the Metropolitan Police results in a rough pixilation and tonal homogeneity which seems to superimpose the bodies and the freight upon each other so that the people in the picture form a haunting return of embodied labor imbricated into labor in its commoditized form.

Read in this way, the bodies in this picture are more than the self-congratulatory evidence of successful technological surveillance, though they are also this. The picture certainly does stand as evidence of the surveying eye, claiming to be able to visually capture that which cannot be seen. The idea of *capture* is central to the meanings that this image conveys because the depiction of bodies in a space where bodies are forbidden preempts a legal process, inaugurates their containment, and reverses their migratory potential. However, conceptually, the bodies in this picture function as the eruption of embodied labor into the spaces of free trade—an eruption that triggers the anxieties which beset the infrastructure of global transport by becoming the uncanny manifestation of labor's commoditization. The easy separation of goods and labor, to which this infrastructure aspires, is ruptured by their conjoining in the visual frame. To that end, it may be worth noting how the circulation of this image contributes to its attempt to forestall such anxieties by demonstrating that the impertinent presence of labor can be contained by surveillance. The image claims to

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make visible transgressive invisibility, and its rigid lines further emphasize this visual containment by ordering the body along the lines of the legitimate cargo. This image of captured migrants also seems to confirm Crary's modification of Foucault when he suggests that in order to make power "visible" it must become spectacle. Although this photograph may induce "a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power," its effect as surveillance depends upon its circulation in the mass media as the visual proof of the efficacy of its technologies.[17]

The fact that the Metropolitan Police used an image from Mexico in connection with a British police operation suggests the crucial role that spectacle plays in the image's effectiveness. However, a review of other images of this kind suggests that this use is characteristic. Some telling examples are provided by American Science and Engineering, Inc. (AS&E) on their promotional website. As developers and retailers of the new x-ray technologies, AS&E is keen to indicate the benefits of these new modes of surveillance, which have been credited with reductions in the number of illegalized immigrants crossing national borders. The efficacy of this technology is clearly beyond the scope of this essay, but what interests me is the visual significance of the images that are produced to support this claim. Certainly, taken as a whole, the AS&E website might be read as endorsing familiar discourses of illegality in relation to migration. Their image library contains several pictures of concealed drugs and weaponry which, when read alongside the images of undocumented workers, aligns the illegalized migrant with the threatening assault on national civility.[18] Yet, the presentation of its technology, and the images of hidden migrants themselves, do seem to offer an alternate reading which disrupts the certainty of this discourse of securitized globalization.

A notable feature of AS&E's description of its technology is the claim that it creates "photo-like X-ray images."[19] The phrase *photo-like* is used on a number of occasions, and the relegation of these images to a simile of photographic verisimilitude highlights the conversion of particular electromagnetic signals into an image capable of signification. In itself, this allusion to the processes of mediation does not undermine the message that attaches to these images, but it does seed a significatory delay which demands that the images should be subject to interpretation. This interpretative injunction is reinforced by the fact that the images on the AS&E website often look as though they have been staged. The illustrations of the "Gemini" system, which utilizes two kinds of x-ray technologies simultaneously, seem obviously mocked up to illustrate the benefits of this technique. In terms of the images of migrants on the website, their status is ambivalent because, although they often appear to have been staged, they are tagged with descriptions that suggest otherwise. It is notable that such labeling

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is oblique, hidden in the background of the HTML code as rollover tags rather than as a title on the page itself. This suggests that their purpose is principally to serve as ornaments, engaging the browser by appealing to a desire for visual pleasure, while clearly also advertising the capabilities of the technology. An instructive instance of this is the picture which appears on the "Site Map" page of the AS&E website, which is unrelated to the explicit page content and is, therefore, readable more fully in visual terms alone. Repeated attempts to acquire permission to reproduce this image have been ignored by AS&E though it is freely available on their website.[20]

The image possesses obvious similarities to the Metropolitan Police picture. Notably, the bodies of the surveilled migrants are offered up as ghostly fragments or remnants of subjects. The bodies remain hard to locate in terms of gender, age, or even physique; they seem to bisect and combine with each other. This actively depersonalizes the bodies, stripping them of the markers of subjectivity beyond the category of "illegal immigrants" and constituting them as a group incapable of separation or individualization. Yet, here again, it seems hard to deny that this image is haunted by traces of another narrative of globalization, a narrative which centers on the idea of subjective labor. If the bodies in this picture are depersonalized, several of them appear to look directly toward the equipment which has rendered their image. They seem to look back at the technology that has detected them, to interrogate it just as it searches out their presence. Just as important, the semitransparent quality that characterizes these kinds of images renders the unseen only partially visible so that embodied labor is ghostly rather than fully corporeal. The result of this is to infuse the lines of the truck with the haunting images of the migrants' bodies. Again, the insubstantiality of the imaged body sees embodied labor imprinted or stamped upon the infrastructure of global transportation, an infrastructure that is otherwise designed to facilitate labor's commoditization.

By entangling freighted goods with the spectral presence of embodied labor, this image can be seen to simultaneously strip away two kinds of invisibility. Its intended purpose is to make visible embodied labor in the confines of freight transportation. However, such transportation has been crucial in removing consumption from the locations of production by contracting the distances between markets.[21] This defeat of distance has facilitated a second form of invisibility by spatially distancing consumers from the manufacturing labor that serves them. What is really striking about the AS&E picture is its suggestion that, for the technologies of surveillance to perform their function of revealing migrating illegalized labor, they must mark supposedly legitimate forms of labor migration (in the form of the commodity) with the bodies of subjective labor that they seek to debar. By visually superimposing embodied labor onto commodities

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this image reestablishes a link between commodities and the laboring bodies which have produced them. The limitations of the imaging technology are crucial to establishing this connection. What seem like imperfections in the technology's ability to depict migrant workers fully free from their surroundings become the means of reading the economic role of labor in its embodied form. The ghostly rendering of the body through technology is *not* imperfect as a means of representing the relationship between embodied labor and capital. The technical limits make possible a representation of this embodiment which would otherwise remain hidden or invisible. By stripping away labor's invisibility *im*perfectly, these technologies reveal labor's relation to capital with unintended clarity.

Michael Winterbottom's *In This World*

The claims I want to make for these images are clearly at odds with their intended purposes. Nevertheless, it does seem clear that their visual aesthetics challenge the distinction between commodities and workers which are foundational to the implementation of contemporary free-trade regimes. Key to these aesthetics is a blurring of subjective and objective labor through the visualization of embodiment. This tendency is central to my reading of works of art that represent illegalized migration. In examining Michael Winterbottom's *In This World* and Melanie Jackson's *The Undesirables*, I suggest that both works explore the way that the technological and bureaucratic governance of migration limits the possibilities for visualizing illegalized labor migration.[22] Correspondingly, both works produce images that resemble the surveillance photograph. However, because these artworks aspire to commentary rather than governance, and because the artist's access to the border zones is purposeful rather than structural, the images that they produce more clearly interrogate the interconnections between the ideas of visibility and freedom. In both texts the questions of what is visible, and to whom, are much more prominent, forming part of the denoted meanings of the visual representation. To that end, the visual similarity between these texts and the images of surveillance forms part of their capacity to interrogate the relationship between different forms of labor.

In This World is shot almost entirely on location from Pakistan through Iran, Turkey, Italy, and France en route to London, using handheld digital video cameras. The method of filming complements the subject matter, which seeks to tell the story of two Afghan refugees from Peshawar, Pakistan, who attempt to make the passage to London in search of work. In a commentary accompanying the DVD release, Winterbottom and the writer, Tony Grisoni, talk of the many difficulties they faced obtaining visas for their actors or of filming in the Kurdish border regions of Turkey

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Figure 2. Enayat hidden. From *In This World* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2002). Courtesy of The Works International

and Iran. Such difficulties partly shape the images that the film is able to include and contribute to its symbolic language. For instance, the use of handheld cameras exaggerates a sense of motion which is arguably fitting for representing the modern migrant who is defined by movement rather than any clear state of belonging. Similarly, the film frequently uses only found light, so that many of the images, such as in a scene where two migrants travel in the undercarriage of a goods truck through the Channel Tunnel from France to England, are dependent upon the light produced by the infrastructures of modern travel. Such scenes emphasize the technological limitations on any attempt to visually capture undocumented workers and implicitly reference the technical problems which the new x-ray technologies seek to resolve.

Like the images examined above, Winterbottom's work repeatedly places migrants and freight in visual relation. This particular correspondence has fatal consequences in the narrative, when a group of migrants are hidden within a goods container on a boat journeying from Turkey to Italy. Deprived of air, all but two of the hidden migrants perish, including Enayat, one of the central characters. The treatment of workers as freight in the film is not isolated to this incident, and its deadly outcome is perhaps anticipated by its earlier visual representation. In a scene where the two main characters are concealed in a lorry amid crates of oranges we see Enayat initially resist this concealment, but having been persuaded to acquiesce, he is gradually hidden by crates of fruit that are piled around him (fig. 2). The filming of this scene offers the viewer a double perspective: the camera captures Enayat as he is gradually confined but, as the light around him is blocked out by the accumulating freight, we are given

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some sense of his viewpoint as the image fades toward darkness. In this way, the film uses light to convey the characters' perspective and resists turning the migrant's body into spectacle.[23]

The attempt to connect the film's visual aesthetics to the perspective of the migrant seems repeatedly to highlight the visual implications that result from the technical and bureaucratic limitations that shape the work. This is exemplified in a key scene in which the protagonists are led over the Ararat Mountains by a young Kurdish boy to cross the border between Iran and Turkey at night, during a snowstorm. Turkish authorities denied permission to film in eastern Turkey, and it is possible that the limited use of lighting here is a consequence of the bureaucratic restrictions on filming openly. It is certainly the case that the limitations of the film equipment are critical to the aesthetic qualities of this episode and that they emphasize the social relations between migration and political authority. For much of this scene it is difficult to pick out the figures against the background. The poor quality of the light and the technology of the DV camera break down the landscape and the human figures into rough pixels so that they are barely distinguishable. Even when the characters are filmed with a medium shot using a handheld light they are difficult to discern, and, once again, the depiction of embodied labor turns the figure of the worker into something resembling a ghost (fig. 3). These kinds of images have received some comment as a formal choice, usually in reference to realism.[24] However, in the present context, it seems worth noting their connection to migration as the symbolic core of the film. As David Farrier implies, the technical limits of the film are already entwined in its conceptual frame because the notion of the limit is central to its understanding of migration and asylum.[25] Significantly, however, while the film is ostensibly about refugees, the central characters are clearly also understood and represented as labor. Jamal, the central character, begins and ends the film at work: in a brick factory at the start of the film and, finally, as a dishwasher in a London café. Furthermore, the journey from Peshawar to London contains moments of labor when Jamal must work in order to pay the costs of his passage. The implication of this is that Jamal's journey, which comprises most of the film, has merely transformed the location of his labor rather than substantially altered the nature of his social relations.

With this in mind, the film's representation of the difficulties that Jamal and Enayat face when crossing national borders can be directly linked to the uneven treatment of embodied and commoditized labor within global systems of trade. This connection helps us to read their frequent visual alignment with mobile commodities but is equally significant for thinking about their ghostly appearance in the mountain scenes. The odd bleaching of the body in figure 3 strongly recalls the x-ray images of

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Figure 3. Crossing the mountains. From *In This World* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2002). Courtesy of The Works International

the new surveillance technologies whose purpose is to bring hidden labor migration into plain sight. The technical limitations of digital video repeat the aesthetics of surveillance in rendering the human figure only partially visible, but they also invert the significance of these aesthetics. By filming in darkness Winterbottom reverses the effect of the technologies of surveillance by making the discernible body *less* visible. In doing so, he uses the limitations of video to draw attention to the policing of the border, which requires a surreptitious representation of the transgressive migrating body. This is given added poignancy by the fact that the narrative rationale for the scene is the characters' attempt to evade the technologies of surveillance. The ghostly appearance of the actors is both aesthetically and structurally connected to a more general representation of embodied labor as revenant, whose return is an indictment of the systems of exchange and mobility within a global free-trade economy.

Melanie Jackson's *The Undesirables*

The immediate focus of Melanie Jackson's installation *The Undesirables* is the global movement of goods rather than the movement of people. The most prominent feature of her composite work is a series of paper models and etched drawings which depict the grounding of the MSC *Napoli* on Branscombe beach in Devon, UK, at the start of 2007.[26] The grounding of the *Napoli* prompted controversy because it had previously run aground in Singapore, it was too close to the shoreline and traveling at speed in hazardous waters, and the weight of much of its cargo was misreported in an attempt to evade regulation on total weight and excise duty.[27]

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The ship's history speaks of both the regulatory structures for free trade and the systematic attempts to evade such structures in a manner comparable to the attempts of undocumented labor to cross national borders.

This comparable practice of undocumented freight transportation and undocumented labor migration is perhaps signaled by the visual character of the central diorama which comprises a large model of the *Napoli*, listing at its bow, with a number of cargo containers spilling onto the gallery floor in place of the sea (fig. 4).[28] Though the diorama comprises numerous other elements, it is the ship which visually dominates, not least because it is separated from the other items by a stretch of empty floor. *The Undesirables* was jointly commissioned, in association, for the Port City and Human Cargo exhibitions which ran concurrently in Bristol and Plymouth, in 2007. Both concerned migration and exchange as part of Britain's celebration of the bicentenary of the Abolition of slavery.[29] Appropriately, the depiction of the listing container ship recalls some of the most familiar images of the Abolitionist movement, and Jackson's choice of the *Napoli* was partly influenced by its destination in Africa which serves to update earlier narratives of the Atlantic trade. While Jackson's work makes no literal allusions to the history of slavery, or to its contemporary forms, her representation of the rigid lines of modern container transport underlines continuities in how we imagine the rationalized geometries used for the transportation of capital. In particular, Jackson's model shows the formal lines of the cargo container from above, in contrast to the manner in which they would usually be seen

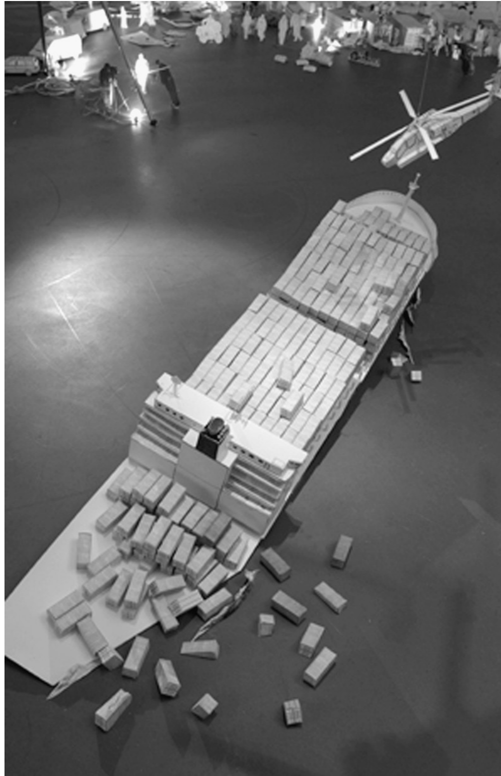

Figure 4. Melanie Jackson, *The Undesirables* (2007), etchings, transcripts, animated sequences DV PAL, sound. Diorama of the grounded MSC *Napoli* in Devon. Installation view, Port City exhibition, September–November 2007, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, UK. Photo: Tony Smith. Copyright Arnolfini Gallery, reproduced with permission

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from alongside. This presentation of the *Napoli* in overview leads Jackson's model to suggest the tightly packed bodies of the famous *Description of a Slave Ship*, published by the London Committee of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1789, without the need to literally repeat this design. In the same way that the *Description* transformed the laboring body into the form of the commodity, through the "uncompromising objectivity" of its architectural geometry, *The Undesirables* shows how modern international trade similarly rationalizes the transportation of labor in the form of the consumerist commodity.[30]

Although the question of labor is addressed only obliquely by the diorama, other parts of *The Undesirables* directly link workers and the objects of consumption. This is most obvious in an animated digital video which is mounted on a wall alongside the diorama and forms a continuous sound track to all of the visual components. Comprising interviews with dockworkers in Bristol, Plymouth, and Southampton, this video narrates the transformation of contemporary trade from the perspective of a group of laborers who facilitate it. For my purposes, it is notable that this narrative emphasizes those elements of modern global logistics which are invisible and that it does so in a manner that draws attention to the bureaucratic regulations governing the port area which makes invisibility a necessary part of everyday life.

The first significant aspect of the video is the sound track of dockworkers' stories. This offers an account of changes to dock work during the working life of a particular stevedore. The dockworker recalls the considerable labor required to unload a ship of open cargo in the late 1960s compared to the pared-down work that is presently needed to remove containerized cargo. This offers a personalized version of the theoretical insights by the likes of David Harvey about the occlusion of labor in the compression of global geographies.[31] Yet the account in Jackson's video also points to the loss of labor in another, more abstract form. One consequence of the containerization of cargo is that labor migration, even in its commoditized form, is visually obscured. Modern transportation veils cargo within anonymously identical containers, and the relaxation of trading barriers allows it to pass across borders largely unscrutinized. The occlusion of origin hides the circumstances of production and in effect conceals labor once it has entered into the circuits of exchange. This obviously links to the main diorama because the underreporting of cargo weight raises uncertainties about cargo manifests which are hidden from proper scrutiny by the visual blankness of containerization.

Other stories in the animation bear picking out because they also address the potential for concealment offered by containerized transport. Unlike the first example, these stories recall the visual depiction of the worker as revenant by recounting moments where embodied labor occupies

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the intended space of objectified labor. One of these recounts an incident where dockworkers find a broken container full of alcoholic drinks. They form an impromptu party and become drunk while hidden by the containers that they are supposed to unload. The potential for concealment that such containers provide is disrupted by a kind of carnivalesque inversion. Workers exercise their subjectivity by secretly withdrawing their labor and using the very technologies which extract value from such labor as a kind of camouflage for their subjective resistance.

Another notable feature of the sound track is its treatment of illegalized migration. The narratives that the animation tells of undocumented labor are contradictory: on the one hand the dockworkers claim that immigration services are "very good" at catching "illegal immigrants"; on the other hand the colorful stories that they tell speak of an excess of migrants who are "running all over the place." The disjunction between these two versions may simply be a response to officialdom which demands sanction for its activities. Alternatively, it may be that the dockworkers are themselves subject to the popular discourses of illegalized migration, which emphasize immensurability and uncontrollable flow, in the face of its actual containment. What is undeniable is that the stories that are told contain narratives of migrants disappearing from the dock with apparent ease; a memorable example recalls a migrant climbing over a wall out of the docks and waving goodbye as he vanishes. One description is particularly relevant to the arguments being made here about the invisibility of such labor and renders the migrant worker in familiarly ghostly terms. Describing how illegalized migrants are usually encountered, a dockworker explains: "They hide everywhere. Normally you come in you find a trailer with the curtain ripped open. You find an empty packet of cigarettes, and some old clothes, and no sign of them, they're just gone."[32]

In this story the representation of the "illegal immigrant" is only possible by tracing their absence. Embodied labor is "visible" in the space that it creates in the containerized infrastructures of global transportation. The disruption of the sleekness of contemporary logistics serves as a testimony to the presence of labor as a component of consumer capitalism. Like the commoditized labor spilt onto Branscombe beach, the embodied laborer has emerged from the geometries of free trade to testify to the presence of labor in the very spaces that it is denied. This last story echoes the dockworkers' account of their disruption of the movement of capital. Like the drunken dockers hidden in spaces of emptiness within the containers, the migrants here evacuate spaces that should contain commoditized labor, the fetishized concealment of their embodied-presence, so as to subvert the intended purpose of international freight.

This account of the *traces* of embodiment varies from the visualized body which enacts a spectral reemergence in Winterbottom and official

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Figure 5. Melanie Jackson, *The Undesirables*, 2007, animated digital video. Footage from the docks at Bristol, Plymouth, and Southampton with degraded visual field to comply with border security. Copyright Melanie Jackson, reproduced with permission

surveillance imagery. Yet it finds its twin in the visual field of the animation, which is characterized by what it cannot show rather than what is actively shown. Jackson was permitted to film in the dock area if she agreed not to use the images that she acquired. In seeking to find a means to make her footage useable she produced an animated film which has radically degraded the visual field. The result of her manipulations of the images is a visual frame that is almost wholly blank. Most of the frames comprise a white screen with rough outlines of the objects being depicted (see fig. 5). Much of what is shown here are trucks being surveyed using the sophisticated electronic equipment designed to detect the presence of illegalized migrants. Jackson's representation of the scanning of the vehicles resembles the kinds of images that this technology produces; delivering visual phantoms which exist at the limits of what is perceptible. When Jackson showed the film to officials in the docks they commented upon its similarity to the images produced by x-ray scanners that are used for dock surveillance.

There is a potent irony in the fact that surveillance technologies designed to produce images of what is invisible operate in bureaucratic offshore environments which demand that these technologies can only be represented in ways that transform them into indiscernible images.

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This is similar to the irony at work in Winterbottom's mountain images, where the evasion of surveillance results in the aesthetic properties of the surveillance-image being reproduced by the technology of film. It is these ironies which mark the points of contrast between those images that surveillance produces and images which depict its apparatus and its effects. That the figure of the specter should feature so prominently in both kinds of images is revealing about the difficulties of depicting embodied labor within systems of transportation which are designed to conceal and deny the role of such labor in the production of value. Yet, it is these very difficulties that result in embodied laborers taking on a spectral quality when they are visualized. In the surveillance image the body is sought out as a site of illegality but its spectrality serves to interrogate global labor relations by collapsing the boundaries between commoditized and embodied labor. In the artworks analyzed here, this conflation of different kinds of labor is repeated, though, here, it is meticulously traced rather than being the incidental logic of the visual process. Moreover, these works offer images *about* surveillance in which the spectral worker highlights the authoritarian exclusion of labor by showing how it causes the body of the laborer to retreat from view. Such images implicitly rearticulate the Marxist critique of the commodity's fetish-like character by highlighting the invisibilities that this involves. The partial disappearance of labor from the visual field simultaneously performs and draws attention to the occlusion of labor. In all of these images, labor remains a presence that refuses to fully accept its sublation to traded goods and that cannot be contained within its apportioned space in the structures of free trade. Its haunting figure stalks the logistical structures and the visual language of neoliberal globalization emerging as a revenant in the very spaces from which it is supposed to have been removed. The value of the ghost as a metaphoric language for describing the visualization of illegalized migration is that it allows us to interpret the conflation of bodies with freight in purposeful terms. It draws our attention to the difficulties of visualization and asks us to be critical about the circumstances that produce these difficulties. In other words, the revenant worker allows us to equate "different kinds of labour" and makes us "aware of this."

Notes

1. World Trade Organization, *Understanding the WTO* (Geneva: World Trade Organization, 2003).

2. Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo: A Journey among Refugees* (London: Vintage Books, 2006), 75; see also Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, H.R. 4437, 109th Cong. (2005); Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006, S. 2611, 109th Cong. (2006).

3. Roland Buerk, "Villagers Left in Limbo by Border Fence," *BBC Radio*,

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26 January 2006, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/4653810.stm.

4. Didier Bigo, “Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease,” *Alternatives* 27, no. 1 (2002): 63–92.

5. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 72.

6. Ibid., 74.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 156.

8. See Michael Cuntz, “The Gentle Interruption of the Hereafter in This Life: Jean Echenoz’s *Au Piano* and Robin Campillo’s *Les Revenants*,” in *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Space of Everyday Life*, ed. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (London: Continuum, 2010), 119. When Derrida talks of the “virtual space of spectrality” (Derrida, *Specters*, 11) he refers to the conceptual interstices between “the real and the unreal, . . . being and non-being” rather than a more geographical sense of space as the political rationalization of place.

9. Ursula Biemann, “Sahara Chronicle: Dispersing the Viewpoint,” in *Port City: On Mobility and Exchange*, ed. Tom Trevor (Bristol, UK: Arnolfini, 2007), 28.

10. *T2 X-Ray Trial*, Manchester Airport, 13 October 2009, www.manchesterairport.co.uk/manweb.nsf/Content/xraytrial.

11. Guy-Ernest Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, rev. ed. (Detroit: Black and Red, 1977), library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/pub_contents/4.

12. Sean P. Hier and Josh Greenberg, “The Politics of Surveillance: Power, Paradigms, and the Field of Visibility,” in *Surveillance: Power, Problems, and Politics*, ed. Sean P. Hier and Josh Greenberg (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 15.

13. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1979).

14. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 18.

15. John Fiske, “Videotech,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2002), 387–88.

16. The version of the image that the Metropolitan Police circulated to announce the arrest of a human trafficking ring that brought Turkish Kurds into the UK was of low quality. It can be compared with the higher-quality version of the image reproduced on the cover of this issue of *Social Text*. This version has been identified by the licensor Photo Researchers, Inc. with the caption “37 illegal immigrants being smuggled with a shipment of bananas out of Chiapas, Mexico” (http://db2.photoresearchers.com/search/BD9333 [accessed 3 February 2012]). Staff at Photo Researchers’ Science Photo Library said that their source for the photograph was probably American Science and Engineering, Inc. (AS&E), the manufacturer of Z backscatter technology (e-mail, Science Photo Library to *Social Text* managing editor, 10 November 2011). AS&E declined to confirm this attribution (e-mail, AS&E to *Social Text* managing editor, 18 November 2011). Thus, the exact origin, date, and place of the photograph remain uncertain.

The Metropolitan Police image contains noticeable differences from the Photo Researchers image. Most especially, the cargo is blurred so that it cannot be identified as bananas but appears to be large pixelated squares, there is a blurry contrast between the depicted bodies and the truck itself, and a second row of people is

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indistinguishable from the background of the truck. The presentation of the image in this context led several UK newspapers to report that the image showed migrants at a British channel port (see, for example, "Huge Trafficking Operation Smashed as Yard Holds Suspected Ringleaders," *Guardian*, 11 October 2005, www.guardian .co.uk/news/2005/oct/12/crime).

17. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201.

18. American Science and Engineering, Inc., "Image Library," www.as-e. com/products_solutions/image_library.asp (accessed 29 July 2009).

19. American Science and Engineering, Inc., "Z Backscatter: Power, Effectiveness and Safety," www.as-e.com/products_solutions/z_backscatter.asp (accessed 29 July 2009).

20. American Science and Engineering, Inc., "Site Map," www.as-e.com/ constants/sitemap.asp (accessed 9 October 2011).

21. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 291–307.

22. Michael Winterbottom, *In This World* (London, UK: Optimum Releasing, 2002); Melanie Jackson, *The Undesirables* (installation), 2007, www.melaniejackson .net/projects/theundesirables/index.php.

23. Yosefa Loshitzky, "Journeys of Hope to Fortress Europe," *Third Text* 20, no. 6 (2006): 745–54, esp. 752–53; Alice Bardan, "'Welcome to Dreamland': The Realist Impulse in Pawel Pawlikowski's *Last Resort*," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 6, no. 1 (2008): 47–63, esp. 56.

24. Nick Haeffner, "In This (Mediated) World: Realism, Dialogue, and Pedagogy in Media Studies," *International Journal of Applied Semiotics* 6, no. 1 (2007), www.londonmet.ac.uk/londonmet/library/i27694_3.pdf; Keith Griffiths, "The Manipulated Image," *Convergence* 9, no. 4 (2003): 12–26, esp. 24.

25. David Farrier, "The Journey Is the Film Is the Journey: Michael Winterbottom's *In This World*," *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 13, no. 2 (2008): 223–32, esp. 228.

26. See Jackson, *The Undesirables*.

27. Hugo Swire, "Report on the Investigation of the Structural Failure of MSC Napoli English Channel on 18 January 2007" (Southampton: Marine Accident Investigation Branch, 2008).

28. Jackson described her work as a diorama in a talk at the Hansard Gallery, Southampton, UK, on 17 January 2008 and in an unpublished interview with the author, 7 April 2008.

29. Plymouth City Council, "Human Cargo Response" (2007), www.plymouth .gov.uk/museumhumancargoresponse; Tom Trevor, ed., *Port City: On Mobility and Exchange* (Bristol, UK: Arnolfini, 2007), 8; Trevor, Introduction in *Port City*, 15.

30. Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 25–26.

31. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 285.

32. Jackson, *The Undesirables*.

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