

ARTICLE

The Crossroads of Power: Michel Foucault and the US/Mexico Border Wall

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ABSTRACT: This paper draws on the work of Michel Foucault in order to analyze the constellation of political strategies and power at the US/Mexico border wall. These strategies, however, are incredibly diverse and often directly antagonistic of one another. Thus, this paper argues that in order to make sense of the seemingly multiple and contradictory political strategies deployed in the operation of the US/Mexico border wall, we have to understand the coexistence and intertwinement of at least three distinct types of power at work there: the sovereign exclusion of illegal life, the disciplinary detention of surveilled life, and the biopolitical circulation of migratory life. By doing so this paper offers an original contribution to two major areas of study: in Foucault studies this paper expands the existing literature on Foucault by analyzing the crossroads of power particular to the US/Mexico border wall, which has not yet been done, and in border studies this Foucauldian approach offers a unique political analysis that goes beyond the critique of sovereignty and toward an analysis of coexisting strategies of power.

Keywords: Borders, Mexico, power, environment, biopower.

Introduction

This paper draws on the work of Michel Foucault in order to analyze the constellation of political strategies and power at the US/Mexico border wall.¹ These strategies, however, are incredibly diverse and often directly antagonistic of one another. Thus, this paper argues that in order to make sense of the seemingly multiple and contradictory political strategies deployed in the operation of the US/Mexico border wall, we have to understand the coexistence and intertwinement of at least three distinct types of power at work there: the sovereign exclusion of illegal life, the disciplinary detention of surveilled life, and the biopolitical circulation of migratory life. I believe that Foucault's work provides us with some of the methodological and conceptual tools to help us clarify some of the more complex relationships of power operating

¹ I would like to thank the *Critical Genealogies Collaboratory* at the University of Oregon for an incredible year of reading, research, and debate on the work of Michel Foucault that contributed to the writing of this article. In particular, I would like to thank Colin Koopman, Greg Liggett, Nicolae Morar, George Furlas, and Vernon Carter for reading a first draft of this article and providing valuable feedback and direction for the final version.

at the US/Mexico border wall. In doing so this paper offers an original contribution to two major areas of study: in Foucault studies this paper expands the existing literature on Foucault by analyzing the crossroads of power particular to the US/Mexico border wall, which has not yet been done, and in border studies this Foucauldian approach offers a unique political analysis that goes beyond the critique of sovereignty and toward an analysis of coexisting strategies of power.

The official reason given by the Department of Homeland Security for building the estimated 49 billion dollar border wall is to “stop” unwanted human migration from Mexico into the US. However, in addition to the fact that the US government’s own records indicate no conclusive reduction in non-status migration since the wall’s construction,² similar government reports have found that a variety of other “secondary” phenomena have been much more successful: 1) **migrant deaths**: “since 1995, [the year after NAFTA and Operation Gatekeeper³ went into effect] the number of border-crossing deaths increased and by 2005 had more than doubled”;⁴ 2) **incarceration**: “of the detainee population of 32,000, 18,690 immigrants have no criminal conviction. More than 400 of those with no criminal record have been incarcerated for at least a year”;⁵ and 3) **excessive costs**: “despite a \$2.6 billion investment, it cannot account separately for the impact of tactical infrastructure.”⁶ Given the clear disjunction between the discursively expressed primary goal of the wall, “to stop all migration,” and the strategically expressed secondary effects of the wall (increased migrant deaths, incarceration, etc.) how are we to understand the continued existence and function of the US Mexico border wall? Is it a discursive failure or a strategic success? Furthermore, how are we to reconcile the failed strategic aims of the state to “stop migration” with the economic aims of those who employ non-status migrants and benefit from their precarious labor, which may further clash with the aims of the private security contractors whose aim is to make as much profit as possible from the efficient “catch and release” of migrants?

Political discourse about the US/Mexico border wall is important to examine but cannot be fully understood without looking at the vast network of practical strategies that support and even conflict with statements like those above, and with each other as well. The point of

² US Government Accountability Office, “Technology Deployment Delays Persist and the Impact of Border Fencing Has Not Been Assessed” (2009), accessed March 15, 2011.

³ The US government under President Bill Clinton dramatically increased border security in 1994 with Operation Gatekeeper and the first stretch of fence between San Diego and Tijuana.

⁴ US Government Accountability Office, “Border Patrol’s Efforts to Prevent Deaths Have Not Been Fully Evaluated,” (2006), 3, accessed March 15, 2011, www.gao.gov/new.items/d06770.pdf. “The Border Patrol’s policy of ‘prevention through deterrence’ has resulted in the purposeful displacement and diversion of migrants into more treacherous and dangerous zones to cross such as deserts, rivers, canals, and rugged terrain, which from 1993 to 2008 resulted in more than 5,000 deaths along the US/Mexico border, a doubling in the number of deaths of border crossers.” Maria Jimenez, “Humanitarian Crisis: Migrant Deaths at the US-Mexico Border,” *The American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego* (2009), 5, www.gatekeeperproductions.com/Resources/ACLU%20Humanitarian%20Crisis%20Report.pdf

⁵ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, “Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Tracking and Transfers of Detainees,” (2009), 2.

⁶ US Government Accountability Office, “DHS Has Faced Challenges Deploying Technology and Fencing Along the Southwest Border,” (2010), 10, accessed March 15, 2011.

analyzing the aim of “stopping all unwanted migration” is thus not to discover if this claim is true or false. Much of the critical work in border theory points to the demonstrable failure of the US/Mexico border wall on this point. Raising this internal contradiction has changed nothing. In order to avoid the stalemate of contradiction between what is said and what is done, what is required instead is an analysis of the coexistent, intertwined, and often-conflicting network of political *strategies* that make up the concrete functioning of the situation. By undertaking a strategic analysis that does not presume the homogeneity of power (and thus the critique of its contradiction), it may be possible to resist in a way that does not merely oppose power, but constructs a strategic counter power.

Thus, if we want to understand the concrete strategic conditions for the continued existence of the US/Mexico border wall, we should be careful not to merely react to the “failures” and repressive techniques of the border wall, a critique of which presumes that power must be consistent or logical in order to function. The opposite is true: power functions primarily in and through its breakdowns, conflicts, and instabilities. This paper thus proposes a different type of analysis. Where a merely abstract critique locates the so-called “secondary” or “negative” effects that demonstrate the “failure” of the border wall, I argue instead that these “failures” are precisely where we see the wall’s most successful functioning. In other words, the Foucauldian point here is that there are not intended and unintended effects, there are only effects of power. The important question then is, “what kinds of power are at work, and how do they function?” Thus, drawing on Foucault, this paper demonstrates that there are at least three distinct but coexisting and intertwined political distributions of power at work in the case of the US/Mexico border wall that can help us understand its strategic consistency—opposed to its “contradiction,” “repression,” or “failure.”

This task is divided into three sections. The first section of this paper argues for the use of a methodology inspired by Foucault’s work: an intertwined analysis of sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical strategies in the same situation. The second section of this paper argues that we can see the coexistence of these three types of political power at the US/Mexico border wall and its milieu. The third section argues that these different strategies are not only coexistent but are also intertwined in mutually enforcing *and* conflicting relationships. Finally, in a brief concluding section I suggest where one might begin to look (in future research) for some of the emerging counter-strategies to these three kinds of strategic power.

I. Power and Method

Taking Foucault’s political typology as a methodological inspiration offers us two unique analytical contributions. First, it allows us to examine a much wider spectrum of political phenomena than what is traditionally defined as “political” e.g. citizens, state, political representation, freedom, etc. The three types of power Foucault outlines (sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical) are not restricted to a single type of categorical content: race, class, gender, space, machines, plants, animals, humans, etc. Rather, Foucault’s concepts allow us to focus on strategies or techniques of power across all content categories. This type of methodology thus does not fall easily under the rubric of any particular discipline or area study. I take this to be one of the strengths of this methodology: using a typology of power allows for greater theoretical flexibility regarding possible objects of inquiry. Foucault’s conception of sovereign, discipli-

nary, and biopolitical power thus has a dual contribution: to include as objects of political inquiry classically non-political phenomena like air, water, animals, and plants, while also expanding the limits of ecology, statistics, economy, sociology, law, etc. as one locates strategies of power common in all of them. Insofar as all of these phenomena are effected by power, they can be analyzed together through such a method.

The second analytical contribution offered by Foucault's political typology that I find useful for an analysis of the US/Mexico border wall is that it offers us a way to understand the relationships between very diverse sets of political strategies that would otherwise seem contradictory: like a border wall that was built to stop illegal migration, and has objectively failed to do so, yet continues to receive funding and political support regardless. Is the border wall a manifestation of inclusive/exclusionary sovereign power as Agambenians have argued?⁷ If so, why is there so much effort on mobilizing migrant labor both legally and illegally? On the other hand, if we have moved beyond the age of sovereignty altogether and are now in an age of biopower, why do we see such a clear revival of sovereign power at the border and such a vast network of disciplinary institutions within the territory? If we read Foucault as arguing that there was once an age of sovereign power in the 17th century, which gave way to an age of disciplinary power in the 18th century, that was then replaced by biopower in the 19th and 20th centuries, we cannot possibly reconcile what are clearly strategies from each of these ages in the present case of the US/Mexico border wall. While it is true that Foucault sometimes casts his typology in such epochal terms,⁸ he is nevertheless quite clear in the first lecture from *Security, Territory, Population*, that

there is not a series of successive elements, the appearance of the new causing the earlier ones to disappear. There is not the legal age, the disciplinary age, and then the age of security. Mechanisms of security do not replace disciplinary mechanisms, which would have replaced juridico-legal mechanisms. In reality you have a series of complex edifices [*d'édifices complex*] in which, of course, the techniques themselves change and are perfected, or anyway become more complicated, but in which what above all changes is the dominant characteristic, or more exactly, the system of correlation between juridico-legal mechanisms, disciplinary mechanisms, and mechanisms of security.⁹

However, I think it is an overstatement to say as Steven Collier does, that this passage, spoken by Foucault in 1977, indicates a "radical break" from his earlier "epochal" and "totalizing" claims about modern power found in the *History of Madness* (1961) through to *Discipline and*

⁷ Mark Salter, "When the Exception Becomes the Rule: Borders, Sovereignty, and Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2008), 365–380.

⁸ Paul Rabinow and Nicolas Rose, "Introduction," in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (New York: New Press, 2003), 46–7.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977–1978*, edited by Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 10; idem. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 8. From here on (where both French and English pagination is cited) I cite the French first, followed by the English.

Punish (1975).¹⁰ On the other hand, Colin Koopman's straight-forward adoption of Foucault's epochal language of "classical age," "modern age," etc. is perhaps not nuanced enough on this point.¹¹

It seems reasonable to me to say that each of these types of power could "strongly characterize" their age without totalizing or representing all forms of power during that time. Thus, there is a mix of political strategies that even vary between different disciplines in every age: science, art, politics, etc. Often one style of political strategy will take over and appear stronger than others (discipline in the eighteenth century, for example). Accordingly, I take this to be the strength and importance of analyzing the exact constellation of strategies in their varying degrees, in specific cases. A robust diagnostic of any political situation thus requires an analysis of all three types of power at once along with their degree of intensity, mutual relations of overlap, and antagonism.

Following the conclusions from the above passages regarding the "mixed" nature of power and the coexisting "arts of government," scholars have offered fascinating contributions to the domains of psychology,¹² the study of advanced forms of liberal governmentality,¹³ insurance and risk management,¹⁴ and ecological governance.¹⁵ Governmentality studies have thus made numerous contributions by analyzing the sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical economies of power suggested by Foucault.¹⁶ The present essay is a continuation of this methodological approach insofar as it shares a similar commitment to a political analysis based on a coexistent, confluent, and conflictual theory of power. But this paper is also an original expansion of this method to border politics and to the US/Mexico border wall in particular: something that has not yet been done. This typology thus offers us a way to understand the positive relationships between highly diverse sets of political strategies that would otherwise seem contradictory or unrelated. To be clear however, this methodology is not the mere application of universal concepts to empirical phenomena.

¹⁰ Steven Collier, "Topologies of Power: Foucault's Analysis of Political Government Beyond 'Governmentality,'" *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 26, no. 6 (2009), 78–108.

¹¹ Colin Koopman, "Revising Foucault: The History and Critique of Modernity," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 36, no. 5 (2010), 552.

¹² Nikolas Rose, *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹³ Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Pat O'Malley, "Globalizing Risk?," *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2002), 205–222.

¹⁵ Timothy Luke, "Environmentality as Green Governmentality" in Éric Darier (ed.), *Discourses of the Environment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 121–151. Paul Rutherford, "Ecological Modernization and Environmental Risk," in Éric Darier (ed.), *Discourses of the Environment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 95–118. Sebastien Malette, "Foucault for the next century: eco-governmentality," in S. Binkley and J. Capetillo (eds.), *A Foucault for the 21st Century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and Discipline in the New Millennium* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

¹⁶ Colin Gordon, Michel Foucault, Graham Burchell, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Instead of arguing that the universal concept of biopower forms “the key to the historico-political destiny of the West” as Agamben does,¹⁷ I follow Foucault in beginning with an analysis of the mix of concrete strategies in a particular situation that may or may not reveal the operation of certain concepts. Perhaps biopower does not appear in some cases, or perhaps only weakly so, etc. Concepts like sovereignty, discipline, and biopower, for Foucault, function only as part of a more general archaeological and genealogical methodology that begins with the empirical. Concepts for someone like Agamben, however, tend to play a more foundational function, but this is precisely what Foucault cautioned against in his 1979 course lectures.¹⁸ While a more sustained critique of this type of ahistorical universalization of Foucauldian concepts is offered elsewhere,¹⁹ Koopman still fails to see a third methodological option between the ahistorical application of Foucauldian concepts on the one hand and the *historical* genealogy of their emergence on the other: an analysis of political strategies in the present. This is the method I intend to employ.

One may object here however, that the problem with Agamben is not that he uses ‘universal’ or ‘ahistorical’ concepts, but that he is a reductionist i.e. he claims that all power relations can be understood through the single concept of sovereignty, which itself implies and contains biopower.²⁰ This is a fair criticism as well, but there is also a key methodological distinction to be made: Agamben *begins* his method with a universal concept (the so-called “destiny of the West”) and then locates concrete historical expressions of this concept. Foucault on the other hand, begins with the empirical and instead locates the common trans-historical strategies, which produce the concepts of discipline, biopower, etc. Perhaps the difference between ahistorical and trans-historical is subtle (top down vs. bottom up), but I think it is an important one to make.

Thus, instead of beginning with the supposed universal applicability of Foucauldian concepts, or with the rich nineteenth century genealogical origins of contemporary border politics, the following analysis offers a description of the assemblage of concrete strategies or deployments of power that compose the *present* situation at the US/Mexico border wall. This is a different approach, because it provides an analysis of a relatively fixed layer or stratum of *recently sedimented power* taking place in the present—and not of a fixed stratum of *historical knowledge* that took place in the nineteenth century, as in *History of Madness*. My goal is thus to look at the constellation of “behavior[s], struggles, conflicts, decisions, and tactics” at the bor-

¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 182.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France, 1978–1979* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 191–192; idem. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, edited by Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, translated by Michel Senellart (Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 186.

¹⁹ Colin Koopman, “Two Uses of Michel Foucault in Giorgio Agamben and Ian Hacking,” Presentation at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Oct. 20th, 2011, Philadelphia, PA.

²⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 20–21.

der wall and to offer, as Foucault himself claims to offer in his own analyses, tactics for the “conditional imperative” [*impératif conditionnel*] of struggle against such phenomena.²¹

II. Border Crossroads

Sovereign Power

In examining this constellation, the second section of this paper argues that we can see the co-existence of at least three different types of political strategy operating at the US/Mexico border wall. Several common features characterize the first group of political strategies I want to look at: juridical suspension, binary exclusion, territorial rule, and the physical punishment of “invasive” migrants. The common features of these strategies are also the features that Foucault uses to define the concept of sovereign power. Let us thus begin by examining to what degree this first set of strategies is deployed at the US/Mexico border wall.

The Secure Fence Act of 2006 authorized the Department of Homeland Security to “maintain operational control over the entire international land and maritime borders of the United States... [including the use of] unmanned aerial vehicles, ground-based sensors, satellites, radar coverage, and cameras; and physical infrastructure enhancements to prevent unlawful entry by aliens into the United States.”²² More than just legal discourse, this was actually the strategic result of the SFA, and the DHS succeeded in accomplishing all of the above except of course for “preventing all unlawful entry by aliens.”²³ The political strategies of the DHS literally took “all actions the Secretary determines necessary and appropriate... [in] the prevention of *all* unlawful entries into the United States.” [my italics]²⁴ In order to build the wall the secretary of Homeland Security used the unlimited power of this act to waive over 30 environmental regulations including the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act.

Despite such unprecedented juridical suspensions, however, the Government Accountability Office’s own 2009 report found that the wall has been breached 3,363 times and concluded that the office found no way to determine whether the fence is helping to halt illegal immigration.²⁵ What has the wall accomplished strategically then? For one, the creation of the US/Mexico border wall is responsible for the dramatic rise in migrant deaths. The more walls emerge along the border the more migrants both human and animal are forced to cross the border at more remote wilderness areas where food and water are scarce. The risk of human migrant death was thus 1.5 times higher in 2009 than in 2004 and 17 times greater in 2009 than

²¹ To be clear, this is not a normative claim for the imperative of struggle against the border wall. Although one might make such a claim. Rather my own method, following Foucault in this paper, is to provide a descriptive analysis of the crossroads of power and the tactics deployed such that *if one wants to resist*, these would be the tactics and crossroads one would want to struggle against. This non-normative notion of tactical analysis for conditional struggle is further developed in Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 5/3.

²² Secure Fence Act of 2006, HR 6061, 1–2, <http://thomas.loc.gov>

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ US Government Accountability Office, “Technology Deployment Delays Persist and the Impact of Border Fencing Has Not Been Assessed,” (2009), accessed March 15, 2011.

it was in 1998.²⁶ Since 2004, the bodies of 1086 migrants have been recovered in the southern Arizona desert alone.²⁷ The wall has blocked migration corridors, destroyed vegetation, blocked waterways, filled in estuaries, and increased pollution and noise by forcing migrants and border patrol into wildlife habitat. According to the Mexican government's report, there are more than 4,000 effected plant species across the border area and the fence negatively affects 85 endangered species of plants and animals.²⁸

In all of these governmental strategies we can see the characteristics Foucault attributes to sovereign power. "Sovereignty," Foucault says, creates a "territorial pact, and guaranteeing borders [is] the major function of [it]."²⁹ Sovereign power is then "exercised within the borders [*limites*] of a territory."³⁰ Since the sovereign *creates* law and order, the securing of border and territory is accomplished by a paradoxically non-legal law: the creation of law itself cannot, by definition, be a legal act (thus providing the grounds for future legalized suspensions of this law). The Secure Fence Act, I am arguing, is thus a contemporary re-articulation of what the Mexican government has accurately termed an essentially "medieval political strategy."³¹ To create the law and the land the sovereign must act above or outside of it "so," according to Foucault, "no tiny corner of the realm escapes this general network of the sovereign's orders and laws."³² This suspension of law in the name of emergency and securing the national territory is also used to create a "binary division" Foucault says, between those who are included in it and those who are excluded. In the case of the US/Mexico border wall a binary division is created between native-born plants, animals, and humans and foreign-born invasive migrants.

The totalizing language of the SFA is as impressive as it is paranoiac: "to prevent *all* unlawful entries, by *any* means necessary." The enforcement of sovereign law in this case ex-

²⁶ Jimenez, "Humanitarian Crisis: Migrant Deaths at the US-Mexico Border."

²⁷ Jennifer Mills, "The Long Graveyard," *New Matilda* (2008), accessed May 23, 2011. <http://newmatilda.com/2008/08/15/long-graveyard>

²⁸ Roig-Franzia, Manuel, "Mexico Calls US Border Fence Severe Threat to Environment," *The Washington Post*, Nov 16, (2007), accessed May 23, 2011, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/15/AR2007111502272.html

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits, tome 3* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 385. Originally from, "Michel Foucault: la sécurité et l'État," *Tribune socialiste*, November 24-30, 1977.

³⁰ Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 13/11.

³¹ I thank one of my anonymous readers for pointing out that it is not obvious that this observation by the Mexican government is accurate. "Most scholarly treatments of sovereignty use the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) as the start of the system of sovereign national territories familiar today. The medieval world by contrast is transected by transnational religious and economic lines of shifting and localized power." This is an interesting point, although I interpret the relevance of this comment by the Mexican government to be about the politics of medieval walled cities and not about medieval geopolitics more broadly. Paul Virilio's observations on this phenomena are particularly relevant. "What differentiates the ancient fortress from that of the Middle Ages in Europe, despite their apparent similarity, is that the latter, thanks to the architectural organization of its internal spaces, allows one to prolong combat indefinitely, with its slits, its projections, its trenches, its high walls... The fortified enclosure of the Middle Ages creates an artificial field, makes this field a stage on which physical and psychological constraints can be imposed." (Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, translated by Marc Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), 35-36)

³² Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 15-16/14.

presses the direct and unmediated violence characteristic of sovereign power. "Punishment," as Foucault says in *Discipline and Punish*, "is a ceremonial of sovereignty; it uses the ritual marks of the vengeance that it applies to the body of the condemned man [*le corps du condamné*]; and it deploys before the eyes of the spectators an effect of terror as intense as it is discontinuous, irregular and always above its own laws, the physical presence of the sovereign and of his power."³³ The ecology of sovereign power is the filling in of estuaries, the bulldozing of waterways, the herbicides sprayed in wilderness areas, the migrant corpses found floating in the rivers, and the hundreds of unidentified skeletons in the desert. The deaths of over 5,000 migrants and the potential extinction of the last Ocelot, American Jaguar, and Mexican Grey Wolves on the planet are the tortured bodies upon which the truth of the territorial-state is directly marked and visibly displayed. Sovereign border power creates and secures a territory, a border, and displays the truth of its strength on the condemned migrant bodies as well as the body of the earth itself.

The analysis of sovereign power presented here may sound familiar, but in the next two subsections, I would like to move beyond this and complicate it with two other forms of power rarely analyzed in tandem with sovereign power. In particular, critical border philosophies rarely extend their analysis beyond the examination of the concept of sovereignty and often define it, as Agamben does, as the same thing as biopower.³⁴ Even Foucauldians, when they address border issues, surprisingly fail to see the coexistence of sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical strategies at work in border politics.³⁵ Thus, in the next two sub-sections I

³³ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 133; idem. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan as 1979 (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 130). Again, I thank one of my anonymous readers for raising the following point. "It is unclear whether the violence unleashed by sovereign power in the case of migrants is really specular in the sense that Foucault elaborates e.g. at the start of *Discipline and Punish*: migrants are left to die in the desert, or herded like cattle into trucks and shipped to the border." This is true, but only because the technological conditions of the specular have changed quite a bit since the seventeenth century. While only a few, or perhaps none at all, are there to watch the condemned migrant die in the desert, the chilling media images and public announcements (via journalists, T.V., the internet, and government reports) are our contemporary specular analogues. More importantly, it is the *wall itself* that is the specular of sovereignty "the physical presence of the sovereign and of his power" literally above and outside the 37 laws suspended in order to build it.

³⁴ Alistair Welchman, "Biopolitics, Sovereignty, and the US-Mexico Border Wall," presentation at the *Canadian Society for Continental Philosophy*, Oct. 15th–17th, 2009, King's University College, London, ON, Canada. See also Peter Fitzpatrick, "Bare Sovereignty: Homo Sacer and the Insistence of Law," *Theory and Event*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2001) and Mika Ojakangas, "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power," *Foucault Studies*, no. 2 (2005), 5–28 for the debate concerning Agamben's so-called "correction" to Foucault's concepts of sovereignty and biopower.

³⁵ In her book, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* Wendy Brown is clearly aware of other types of "powers that possess discernible logics" operating in addition to and often against sovereign power. Yet the thesis of her book adopts entirely the perspective of sovereign states in arguing that "rather than resurgent expressions of nation-state sovereignty, the new walls are icons of its erosion." This analytical perspective does not preclude the analysis I offer here (I am sympathetic to many of her points), but her perspective does frame the phenomena of "walls" as sites of power in largely negative terms i.e. these other powers "lacking political form or organization" exemplify the "erosion" or "waning" of sovereignty. Private contractors, transnation-

would like to expand this critical border analysis beyond the parameters of sovereignty and look at two other types of strategies that intersect with it.

Disciplinary Power

Several common features can also characterize the second group of political strategies I want to distinguish: detention, surveillance, and the training of migratory life. The common features of these strategies are the features Foucault uses to define the concept of disciplinary power. Let us thus continue examining this next set of strategies in action.

The border wall is not merely a physical barrier on a territory that kills migrants, although it does do this. The border wall is also part of a series of behavioral technologies within a wall–prison–workplace system designed to create an obedient, docile, permanently surveilled, and “criminalized” body. Despite the fact that being in the US without authorization is a civil infraction and not a criminal one, migrants are surveilled, arrested, processed, and detained for long periods of time “as if” they were criminals and through this are *actually* criminalized.³⁶ Legally unauthorized migrants are not criminals, but become so as an effect of disciplinary strategies. This is one of the differences between sovereign strategies and disciplinary ones. The multiple attempts made by migrants to cross the wall are also part of a process of disciplinary training. The success rate of illegal migration, on the second or third try, is upwards of 95 percent, according to immigration scholar Wayne Cornelius.³⁷ The wall thus continues to exist precisely because it is a vital part of the production of the model migrant: persistent, obedient, quiet, and able to endure hardship and danger. As George W. Bush put it “family values do not stop at the Rio Grande. Latinos enrich our country with faith in God, a strong ethic of work, community, and responsibility... Immigration is not a problem to be solved, it is the sign of a successful nation.”³⁸ Immigration is not a problem for disciplinary strategies it is an *opportunity* for disciplinary strategies! It is an opportunity to train a nation of docile and obedient bodies.

al capital, non-status migrants, and the disciplinary production of docile hard-working migrant bodies function only as the negative backdrop under which sovereignty is “failing.” To focus on sovereign failure like this, I am arguing, only disguises the positive ways in which walls and sovereignty act as productive parts in a much more complex assemblage that includes disciplinary and biopolitical strategies that are just as political and organized as sovereign power. (Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 24)

³⁶ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, “Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Tracking and Transfers of Detainees,” (2009), 2.

³⁷ Daniel Wood, “Billions for a US-Mexico Border Fence, but is it Doing any Good?,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September, 19 (2009), accessed May 23, 2011, www.csmonitor.com/USA/2009/0919/p02s09-usgn.html

³⁸ “Latinos come to the US to seek the same dreams that have inspired millions of others: they want a better life for their children. Family values do not stop at the Rio Grande. Latinos enrich our country with faith in God, a strong ethic of work, community & responsibility. We can all learn from the strength, solidarity, & values of Latinos. Immigration is not a problem to be solved, it is the sign of a successful nation. New Americans are to be welcomed as neighbors and not to be feared as strangers.” (Speech in Washington, D.C. Jun 26, 2000 Bush) Accessed online at http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/George_W_Bush_Immigration.htm

The wall with its steel and concrete, its miles of barbed wire, check points, border patrol, array of flood lights to maximize visibility, cameras, and sensors for permanent and constant supervision, mirror many of the techniques of the prison and migration detention center, which again mirror the increased security, supervision, and prison-like workplace conditions that often employ undocumented workers. It is thus no coincidence that the Secure Fence Act, Operation Catch and Detain, and Immigration Workplace Enforcement were all proposed to Congress at the same time. They are three prongs of the border wall itself: sovereignty, discipline, and biopower.³⁹ Build a wall, discipline the bodies of those who cross, and make a profit from deporting the rest.

Crossing the physical border wall marks an incorporeal criminal transformation of the migrant. It marks the migrant's exit from one set of institutions (the system of poverty, violence, exploitative labor conditions, and other results of N.A.F.T.A in Mexico) into a network of other institutions (the detention camps, work place and school raids, and the racism of the US).⁴⁰ The wall, the prison, and the workplace thus function as part of a single carceral series intensifying the criminality of that one brief misdemeanor, "unlawful entry," that now requires their infinite retraining through detention, surveillance, and disciplined behavior in the precarious shadows of US institutions.

Migrants cross the **wall** one or more times. This has two effects: it creates a "criminalization" in both material and discursive senses⁴¹ and it produces subjects who are persistent and can endure hardship. As criminalized, migrants enter a **work-place** system where their daily movements and actions are surveilled and orchestrated by their bosses, but they also endure the additional disciplinary condition of institutionalized precarity: their perpetual deportability.⁴² The constant threat of deportation creates a fear, docility, and psychic instability that aids in the effective management of bodily labor. Every minor labor infraction or deviant behavior could result in detention and deportation. Consequently, migrants also fill detention centers, **prisons**, and deportation facilities. In these facilities their daily movements are controlled (meals, commissary, exercise, lights out, etc.); they are under constant surveillance; they often wait months or years in jail without conviction, and they often have difficulty communicating with legal representatives or with immigration officials due to both language

³⁹ Immigration Workplace Enforcement is biopolitical insofar as it operates as a set of laws whose enforcement has been historically highly *flexible*. In 1999, the United States initiated fines against 417 companies who employed undocumented workers. In 2004, it issued fine notices to three. Companies often hire undocumented workers and when payday comes the companies report the workers and claim they only just found out about their status. Immigration enforcement waits outside the factory or field to check I.Ds and make arrests. Interestingly, these companies are rarely fined based on IWE laws. Biopolitics is the statistical manipulation of an unpredictable and temporary population toward the ends of "optimal" management. In this case the "optimal" management of these flexibly applied laws means profitability.

⁴⁰ David, Bacon, *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Nicholas De Genova, "The Legal Production of Mexican Migrant "Illegality," *Latino Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2004), 160–185.

⁴² Talavera, et al. (eds.), *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

differences and access. This whole group of technologies creates a distinct kind of subjectification.

The border wall has also turned desert wilderness areas on the border into ecological prisons. By fortifying the walls around urban areas and leaving less fencing in wilderness area migrants, smugglers, and border enforcement are funneled into these precarious areas. Cabeza Prieta, in southern Arizona, is the third largest national wildlife refuge outside Alaska. It is now a grid of about 400 miles of illegal roads, 800 miles of unauthorized foot trails, hundreds of miles of security cameras, motion sensors, construction workers, garbage, and border patrol agents in SUVs. Border issues now take up to 75 percent of all park operations.⁴³ Biologists working in the desert at night have to be accompanied by law enforcement officers and Border Patrol has built a one-acre officers barracks within Cabeza Prieta that includes roads, fuel tanks, space for 10 officers, and a helicopter pad. "It's a war zone here," one ranger says. "We're into triage in deciding what to sacrifice in the environment to achieve border security."⁴⁴ The park is transformed into a high security prison and ecological migrant life must be detained, apprehended, tagged, counted, constantly monitored, and trained to obey this new infrastructure: its pollution, noise, 24hr flood lights, cameras, and unpredictable night traffic.

In all of these strategies we can see the characteristics Foucault attributes to disciplinary power. Since the nineteenth century, Foucault says, "'legal detention' [was] entrusted with an additional corrective task... an enterprise for reforming individuals [*une entreprise de modification des individus*]."⁴⁵ The penal system, he continues, "merely reproduces, with a little more emphasis, all the mechanisms that are to be found in the social body."⁴⁶ Similarly, the goal of the wall-prison-work system is not merely deterrence or detention, but correction, supervision, and training for the next enclosed institution. The task of this discipline Foucault says is to impose "a partitioning grid [*de quadriller littéralement*]"⁴⁷ within the interior of the territory established by the sovereign and produce bodies that are both "docile and capable... of having their bodily movements directed."⁴⁸

Although the initial journey to the wall itself does not in every way follow the close temporal articulation of bodily movements that Foucault discusses in nineteenth century prisons, the actual process of crossing the wall does to some degree. The way one must dress, look, speak, etc. when presenting a false I.D. is extremely precise, one must *become* "normal" and "legal." Even when one crosses the wall outside of town or in the desert there is a very carefully orchestrated activity of waiting in silence for the time in the middle of the night between when the *coyotes* have dug a new hole in the wall and when the border guards have patched it.⁴⁹ Disciplinary power in the case of the border wall-prison-work system enforces a

⁴³ Jeffrey Cohn, "The Environmental Impacts of a Border Fence," *BioScience*, vol. 57, no. 1 (2007), 96–96, www.bioone.org/doi/pdf/10.1641/B570116

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, 235/233.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 11/10.

⁴⁸ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, 301/294.

⁴⁹ Although there are more ways to pass the wall than these (and perhaps not all of them will be as disciplinary as these), the point is merely that discipline exists to some degree *at* the physical wall itself.

conformity to the following normalized model of subjectivity: you will be prepared to be deported at any time, you will be potentially watched under lights and cameras 24hrs a day, you will be hardworking enough to cross the wall multiple times, endure detention and abuse, and be silent in your endurance. These are the “signs of a successful nation of migrants” conducted by the wall-prison-work system.

After the US government had waived environmental laws and built the border wall, they went back in 2009 with \$50 million to “assesses, restore, and mitigate” the environmental damages of the wall. The Army Corps of Engineers detained, tagged, replanted, and monitored, various species of life. The presence alone of Army Corps, border patrol, and migrants, prepares the ecology of the desert and the behaviors of the animals to be continually damaged, monitored, and then restored to a new normal. The most notable physical behavior is restricted movement, decreased food and water sources, but the wildlife is also being trained to adjust to humans that bring food as well as food that is dead human bodies. Where there is “virtual fence” the animals, and even rain, often set off the motion detectors that bring border patrol from miles away to verify the “unlawful entry.” Without actually being arrested animals are performatively criminalized in their daily movements across the border. While “criminalized” animals at the border are not arrested and put before a court of law, they are captured, detained, transported, relocated, surveyed, and perhaps even shot at. Thus, strategically there are many similarities between human and animal migrants in relation to disciplinary power. Criminalization is not merely a legal determination made by a judge or human court of law, criminalization also includes a set of disciplinary and carceral strategies. Insofar as many of these strategies also affect animals and other ecological entities, they are criminalized migrants.⁵⁰ Every motion in the desert is now being trained to deal with border patrol, constant surveillance, and intervention: the body of the desert is being disciplined.

Biopower

The third group of political strategies I want to look at are also characterized by several common features: optimal circulation, probability, and the security of mobile or migrant life. The common features of these strategies are also those that define, for Foucault, the concept of biopower. Let us examine this final set of border strategies in more detail.

The border wall is not merely a physical barrier, or even just part of a disciplinary series, it is also part of a larger process of managing uncertain populations and effectively enforcing transformations in the built environment. The task of eliminating “*all* unlawful entry, by *any* means necessary,” as we saw during Michael Chertoff’s six years as Secretary of the DHS, is as financially irresponsible as it is physically impossible. The biopolitical problematic thus begins instead from the presupposition of the impossibility of total control over migration and its surveillance. Rather, it tries to achieve an optimal outcome in the most efficient way possible through the statistical control of the environment.

⁵⁰ I do not mean to suggest that animal subjectivity is the same as human subjectivity, only that *in relation to disciplinary power*, human and animal migrants are treated in some specific ways as similar objects of the same disciplinary apparatus.

This is achieved through the following strategies. Three major contractors were hired by the US government to help secure the border. While the government agenda may have been to try and stop migration, this is not the structural condition and function of for-profit private companies. Private companies are defined by the structural necessity of profit. If they do not make a profit, they will not be competitive in a capitalist economy. Thus, profitability is not necessarily the psychological “intention” of any person or persons secret or explicit. Profit is the structural determination of the “optimal” functioning of private companies in a capitalist economy. The function of private contractors is thus primarily to generate profit, not necessarily to keep *all* migrants out of the US. Ending migration would in fact destroy the security market. Thus, the question is not how to stop migration but how to optimally (a.k.a. profitably) manage the “security environment” through the circulation of what is structurally an unpredictable and unstoppable flow of migrants.

The Boeing Corporation was contracted to build a “virtual fence” for \$850 million including vehicle barriers, radar, satellite phones, computer-equipped border control vehicles, underground sensors, 98-foot tall towers with high-powered cameras (including infrared cameras) and unmanned aerial vehicles.⁵¹ G4S/Wackenhut was contracted for five-years at \$250 million for the daily transport of thousands of migrants using 100 secure motor coach buses with state of the art confinement systems, on-board digital/video surveillance, GPS tracking and over 270 armed security personnel.⁵² Finally, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and the GEO Group, Inc. two of the largest Private Prison Corporations were contracted to build and house immigrant detainees, charging the government up to \$200/a day per bed.⁵³ The flourishing of these companies relies on and ensures the permanent circulation of migrant bodies from one side of the border to the other and back again, and from one institution to the next; each time extracting a profit. Undocumented migrants cross the border, are captured, detained, transported to contracted prisons or detention centers, transported back across the border and released in a remote location, and then cross again. The death or permanent detention of migrants is not nearly as profitable or as possible as their optimal circulation through a secured environment/economy that profits from the perpetual “catch and release” of such “floating populations [*populations flottantes*].”⁵⁴

Where sovereignty acts on the territory, discipline on the individual, biopower, Foucault, says, acts on the population as a whole to maximize positive elements in a “multivalent and transformable framework [*cadre*].”⁵⁵ In the case of the border environment, we can see this in the clear and active management of the environment or milieu itself and its natural giv-

⁵¹ Brian Bennett, “Government Pulls Plug on Virtual Border Fence: High-tech Boeing Project Beset with Problems,” *Tribune Washington Bureau*, Oct 22, (2010), accessed March 15, 2010, www.spokesman.com/stories/2010/oct/22/government-pulls-plug-on-virtual-border-fence/

⁵² Brenda Norrell, “Privatizing Misery, Deporting and Imprisoning Migrants for Profit: The Hidden Agenda of the Border Hype: Security Guards and Prisons in the Dollars-For-Migrants Industry,” *The Narco News Bulletin* (2007), accessed March 15, 2011, www.narconews.com/Issue46/article2769.html

⁵³ Detention Watch Network, “The Money Trail,” accessed May 23, 2011, www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/node/2393

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 20/18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22/20.

ens, its rivers, marshes, hills, vegetation, etc. to yield certain effects for migrants both human and animal. Security or biopower, Foucault, says, "aims to plan a milieu" as the medium in which circulation takes place.⁵⁶ This is especially true in the case of the Environmental Defense Fund, backed by the Weeden Group, who has proposed several ways to improve the environment *and* secure the border. "Clearing the river corridor to remove dense thickets of nonnative salt cedar," they say "and replacing them with native vegetation, can improve sight-lines and bolster the Border Patrol's ability to enforce the law." "Creating backwater channels (riverine wetlands)," they say, "can help impede illegal border crossings while providing significant benefit to birds and wildlife."⁵⁷ While the discursive aim of these environmental modifications, according to the EDF is to stop migration and aid border patrol, their actions may or may not be having an effect on migration numbers. What is important here, however, is that in addition to whatever optimized (for environmental protection) "deterrence" may be occurring, there is also a political reconstruction of the environment itself. The rivers, trees, birds, etc. have become political mechanisms for the direction or redirection of migrant bodies, and to achieve a maximal or minimal level of migration. These mechanisms do not act directly on the body of the migrant or on the body of the border patrol, but on the milieu in which these bodies will move. The political reconstruction of the environment accepts the uncertainty and inevitability of migrant/border patrol movements. It accepts that border patrol technologies will not be able to stop migration. The question then becomes, "how can we mitigate movement and environmental damage by changing the environmental conditions by which migrants will inevitably move?"

The chosen placement of the wall along the border is another biopolitical strategy. It cuts through precarious wildlife habitat, and the private property of residents without the finances to legally fight it, while carefully building around well financed golf courses. It cuts through public parks, schools, low-income housing areas, industrial parks, and urban and rural watersheds causing flooding. This is not merely a matter of environmental devastation, classism, or racism, etc. it is a productive investment opportunity for new real-estate and the gentrification of the built environment to, as Foucault says, break up crowds and ensure hygiene, ventilation, and commerce.⁵⁸ Without direct punishment, or disciplinary action, the wall is an environmental technology that shapes the natural conditions under which water, plants, animals, and people are allowed to circulate and gather. One way to deter dissent is to break up public areas and privatize them. These are some of the biopolitical strategies that make up the US/Mexico border wall. But these strategies do not simply exist in parallel with sovereign and disciplinary strategies; they also form points of conflict as well as confluence between them.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 22–23/20–21.

⁵⁷ Environmental Defense Fund, "When Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Rare Wildlife Could be a Casualty of Border Security Efforts," *EDF June, 2008 Newsletter, Solutions*, accessed online May 23, 2011, www.edf.org/article.cfm?contentID=7966

⁵⁸ Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, 20/18.

III. The Conflict and Confluence of Border Strategies

The third section of this paper argues that these three types of strategies operating at the US/Mexico border wall not only coexistent, but are also intertwined in mutually enforcing as well as conflicting relationships.

Strategic Conflict

Sovereign types of political strategies such as juridical suspension, binary exclusion, territorial rule, and the physical punishment of “invasive” migratory life, conflict with disciplinary strategies of training and normalization, insofar as sovereign strategies aim to set up a binary territory that excludes and criminalizes the same migratory life that disciplinary strategies are trying to include and normalize into that society. For example, from a disciplinary perspective the elimination of all non-status migration into the US is a misdirection of force that could be used instead to further develop existing institutions and train even more docile and precarious migrant individuals to be “hard workers” without a political voice or right to organize. What is preferable is criminalization or institutionalization without exclusion or death. Concretely, we can see this in the history of temporary migrant worker programs in the US, whose aim is precisely to legally institutionalize migrants without having to offer them political representation or the right to social services and unionization. Similarly, the juridical suspension of environmental laws and the direct destruction of wilderness areas and species conflicts directly with the aims of the disciplinary surveillance and institutionalization of plant and animal life found in tourism, zoos, and parks. These institutions are meaningless without living species to incarcerate, manage, and sell.

Sovereign and biopolitical strategies are also in conflict with one another insofar as the exclusion of migrants or their murder is a highly unprofitable and unsustainable management strategy for such populations. Every murdered migrant is a potential security customer who would have been worth thousands of dollars in detention, transportation, food services, and extradition/release fees charged to the US government. From the perspective of the private security companies that manage the biopolitics of the border, harsh sovereign laws of exclusion and increased migrant deaths conflict with the optimal i.e. most profitable, management of the unstoppable population of migrants. Similarly, it is much more profitable to restore the border environment in such a way that it will help minimize (but not stop entirely) the deaths of migrant humans, animals, and plants that can be profited from given the present demands of the market.

Further, disciplinary and biopolitical strategies conflict with one another regarding where migrants should be directed. A biopolitical management of optimal levels of non-status migration would prefer to keep migrant populations as “illegal” and precarious as possible so that after moving through the most profitable series of securitization, migrants could be deported at any time allowing them to repeat the cycle of crossing, capture, and release. While this is not entirely incompatible with disciplinary strategies, they may conflict insofar as temporary worker programs might legalize and institutionalize migration and remove migrants (to some degree) from the system of statistical securitization and precarity that is required to produce optimally profitable migratory movement. The discipline of migrants does benefit from their deportability, but in some cases it may benefit more from their temporary legalized

precarity (work programs). They may be able to attract more migrants this way, or evade legal persecution this way, or may find it easier to retain (for at least two years) and train migrants with certain desirable skills. Also, "the offer of temporary legality would be irresistible bait to draw undocumented workers into the open where the Department of Homeland Security can identify, tag and monitor them. Far from opening a crack in the Great Wall, it heals a breach, and ensures an even more systematic and intrusive policing of human inequality."⁵⁹ However, if migrants were illegal workers they could receive even less pay, even less benefits/protections, and be deported without pay. Institutionalization and disciplinary training are expensive and time consuming (although sometimes preferred), but biopolitically speaking these are not often as profitable or as flexible. Skilled or trained labor is not as easily replaceable.

Strategic Confluence

However, these three types of border strategies not only conflict, they also offer conditions of mutual support for one another. Sovereign strategies, for instance, not only exclude and physically punish migrant life, conflicting with disciplinary strategies of training and normalization, they also establish a territory through an enforcement of borders that is required for disciplinary strategies to function. Once the territory is limited, bordered, and defended, only then can disciplinary strategies subdivide this territory into a grid of ordered and patterned behaviors and laws. The US/Mexico border wall may be a violent and punitive structure aimed at limiting and defending a territory, but it also justifies and allows for a massive network of enclosed institutions that direct and train docile individuals who have crossed the wall both legally and illegally. Such strategies include ID verification, constant surveillance, and a bureaucratic hierarchy of officials paid by the sovereign state to normalize and produce hard-working and obedient migrant subjects. Even residents can be questioned at anytime regarding their native or invasive origins, and be removed.

Sovereign border strategies and biopolitical strategies also offer one another mutual support. While sovereign strategies may in some ways deter optimally profitable flows of migration by killing migrants and destroying the environment, the wall is also largely ineffective at stopping non-status migration. Not only is the border wall itself not continuous from one end to the other, but even where it does exist, it is full of holes. These holes exist in a constant state of flux between the *coyotes* who construct them, in order to charge migrants to pass through, and the border patrol who search for them and patch them the next day. The holes and crossable points in the wall support the regular passage of migrants, but by passing through, migrants undergo a sovereign incorporeal transformation: the misdemeanor of "unlawful entry" criminalizes them. They become alien and invasive. In this way the sovereign strategy of building a physical wall provides the material and spatial conditions for the production of the criminal migrant that can now be profitably hunted down, captured, incarcerated, transported, and released.

⁵⁹ Mike Davis, "The Great Wall of Capital," *Socialist Review* (2004), accessed Nov 9, 2011, www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=8770

Disciplinary and biopolitical strategies also offer mutual support for one another. The biopolitical management of optimal flows of migrants relies on many existing institutions like prisons, detention centers, armored transports, and surveillance technologies, that are rented to private border security contractors. In many cases these technologies are quite basic, but this time they function only as part of a larger apparatus of optimal circulation. From the perspective of biopolitical strategy, the aim is not to incarcerate and train obedient and hard-working docile bodies, but to produce increasingly criminalized, precarious, and mobile bodies that circulate between and outside these institutions. The result of this confluence of discipline and biopower, however, is often that migrant bodies are trained to be docile *and* mobile; hard working and temporary. Similarly, wild animals are normalized around noise, 24-hour flood lights, capture, and tagging as well as analyzed as statistical populations within a built environment made for their optimal circulation in relation to human migrants, tourists, and border patrols.

Conclusion: Resistance

This paper has presented a relatively grim picture of the US/Mexico border wall and its political ecology. In part this is because I have only analyzed the concrete strategies, behaviors, and conflicts that constitute it as a site of power. The purpose of this analysis, however, was not merely to show all the ways, in which power has trapped migratory life in a cycle of punishment, institutionalization, and profitable circulation, although this was also the aim. This analysis is only the first and necessary part of a larger analysis in order to determine (on the basis of these mixed strategies) where there are or could be genuine points of discontinuity and resistance to these strategies. Beyond the points of conflict between these strategies of power, are there points of conflict that allow for the transformation of this system?⁶⁰

However, one place we might look for strategies of resistance to the current crossroads of power at the US/Mexico border wall is the network of “safe houses” and Border Angels who offer food, water, supplies, and shelter to traveling migrants on both sides of the border wall. While this type of resistance is relatively local and hardly addresses the political and economic causes of forced migration (conflicts, natural disaster, poverty, etc.) or the consequences (migrant access to social services, the right to work, and political mobilization), or environmental damage, it does express several key characteristics that are common to the resistance to some of the causes and consequences of forced migration.⁶¹ Distinct from sovereign exclusion, disciplinary institutionalization, and the biopolitical optimization of unpredictable flows, this migrant support network functions through universal inclusion, equality of participation, and a solidarity across borders. In order to fully develop a concept of resistance to the US/Mexico border wall, a future analysis will have to begin by looking at the types of concrete strategies that compose three types of border resistance: resistance to the causes of forced migration in one’s home country, resistance to the blockages of migration across the border, and

⁶⁰ This topic is an important one and in order to do it justice I plan develop it as a sequel to this article.

⁶¹ I do not have the space to discuss them further but forms of environmental resistance might include animal attacks, flooding, insect swarms, weather storm attacks on the wall itself, the heat of the desert, the shifting of its sands that undermine the wall, etc.

resistance to the negative consequences of forced migration in the arrival country. What kinds of struggle have there been and what kinds are there now? How do they work and where else can we see their operation? From a close examination of these three kinds of resistance and their concrete strategies for struggle we can begin to map out their points of conflict and convergence around a common concept (just as we did in the case of disciplinary or biopolitical strategies).

For now however, I must conclude, having laid the analytical ground from which a theory of border resistance may emerge. I drew on the work of Michel Foucault in order to clarify the seemingly multiple and contradictory strategies deployed in the creation and operation of the US/Mexico border wall. By clarifying, however, I have not resolved, but only intensified the conflicts and confluence of such strategies in a way that hopefully helps elucidate the diverse strategies at work. In doing so, I offered an original contribution to Foucault studies and to border theory based on the coexistence and intertwinement of sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical strategies at the US/Mexico border.

In summary, this paper defended three specific arguments. The first section of the paper argued for the political usefulness of a methodology drawn from Foucault's work: an intertwined analysis of sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical strategies in the same situation. The second section of this paper argued that we could see the coexistence of three types of political strategies at the US/Mexico border wall. The third section argued that these strategies are not only coexistent, but also intertwined in mutually enforcing and conflicting relationships. Finally, I briefly laid out the next steps that might be taken toward the development of a Foucauldian inspired theory of border resistance.

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