About the cover art  This photograph was produced using Z Backscatter x-ray technology, which is now in use by authorities along several international borders. Made by American Science and Engineering, Inc., Z Backscatter equipment generates x-rays and then measures the different levels of radiation that objects scatter. Z Backscatter technology detects organic matter, creating translucent, ghostly images of the human beings or materials that are captured.

The cover photograph has been described by several sources, including the stock photography agency Photo Researchers, Inc., as showing migrant workers being smuggled into Guatemala with a shipment of bananas from Chiapas, Mexico. However, in 2005 the Metropolitan Police in Great Britain released the image to the media as part of an announcement of a successful raid on a European people-smuggling network. As a result, many news outlets reproduced the image with a caption saying that it depicts illegal immigrants at a British channel port. Since then, the image has obtained the status of spectacle without a proper referent.

For more information about the use of x-ray technologies for border surveillance, see “The Worker as Revenant: Imagining Embodied Labor in Contemporary Visualizations of Migration,” by Liam Connell, in this issue of Social Text.


