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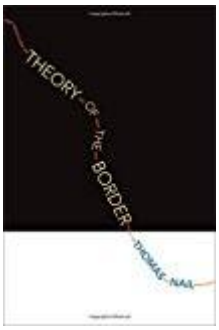
Thomas Nail. *Theory of the Border.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 288 pp. $99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-061864-3.



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In *Theory of the Border*, Thomas Nail summons up history to solve a present-day contradiction—the fact that globalization, which is characterized by the increased flow of capital, goods, culture, and people through different parts of the globe, is concomitant to the multiplication of borders. Nail succeeds in unraveling this conundrum by reconceptualizing the nature of borders. Instead of fixed entities created to prevent movement and insulate closed spaces, borders become part of a process of "social division" whose goal is to control movement. Borders are, in this way, technologies of bifurcation redirecting the social and material flows that define human societies.

If this reads as too abstruse, it is because Nail chooses a fluid-dynamics metaphor to understand borders. To avoid framing human societies as primarily static entities, Nail analyzes them as "regimes of motion." Social flows are subject to being redirected and reorganized—but never entirely stopped—by borders. The interaction between social flows and the borders that affect them is what he calls "kinopolitics." The subject of this book is, therefore, the study of power as it diverts and affects the movement of people and resources through border technologies.

Studying societies through their "politics of movement" allows Nail to perform three interventions on the literature of borders. First, Nail overcomes the statism that dominates the study of borders by focusing on a broader process of social bordering that goes beyond the nation-state. Second, the focus on the control of social movement, and on the material technologies employed in this process, offers a response to the problem of finding borders everywhere in society. In Nail's book, not everything is a border, only the technologies that bifurcate the flow of people and resources. Third, in Nail's genealogy borders are not created by the advent of nation-states in the nineteenth century. Rather, it is the border itself, by introducing different technologies of social bordering, that establishes the conditions for the creation of the nation-state.

Theory of the Border introduces a taxonomy of four different bordering technologies as they appear in the history of Western civilization. The first border technology to arise was the ***fence***. Nail dates the appearance of the fence as concomitant to the agricultural revolution. As a material technology the fence is characterized by a pit dug into the earth combined with vertical structures that rise above the ground. As a regime of social motion, the fence is centripetal, diverting flows of people and resources from the periphery to the center. One example was the corral technique utilized by earlier human hunters to herd game animals into a central point for slaughtering. The outcome of the fence is the creation of a territory and a center, which are not preexistent, but rather the result of the process of bordering.

The fence is followed by the appearance of the ***wall***, which emerged with the first cities around 3000 BCE. Different from the fence, the wall as a border technology is based on the creation of what Nail calls "bricks"—unities of similarly shaped material and social flows. Bricks can be actual bricks, but they can also be soldiers, or anything based on the formation of a central state that emanates a model of material and social organization to the periphery. Indeed, the creation of the wall demands the creation of the state, as "it was not political society that builds the border, but the border wall that is the kinetic condition for the existence for political life itself" (p. 65). Also, unlike the fence, the wall is a centrifugal border regime that redirects previously centralized social and material flows outward in the form of armies, roads, and city walls.

The last border regimes, the ***cell*** and the ***checkpoint***, expand the understanding of borders to other aspects of social life. First appearing in medieval times, the cell is a regime of social motion based on the enclosure of people and their linkage to juridical contracts. It creates new technologies such as the passport, the monastery, and the prison cell, which allow the subdivision of social life and the emergence of the individual. The checkpoint, on the other hand, is a product of the global European empires of the eighteenth century. It generates a series of technologies that transform flows of social movement into data—separate points in continuous flows. Like other kinetic border technologies, the checkpoint in its different iterations (such as the police, private property, the nation) aims not to stop movement but rather to promote it by correcting and rebalancing its flows.

If *Theory of the Border* follows a rather conventional Western-civilization narrative, it does so to build a refreshing reconceptualization of borders as a broad human phenomenon. Thus, in the last section of the book, Nail studies the deployment of these four technologies in the contemporary example of the US-Mexico border. Nail concludes that present-day border technologies like the ones employed by US border authorities are ultimately hybrid. They are "composed of mixtures and fragments" of the four basic types of border technologies that had previously emerged in time—fences, walls, cells, and checkpoints (p. 165). He utilizes his theory to offer a new understanding of the US-Mexico border, not as a "fixed, spatial, or even temporal entity" but as a technology of social circulation that is both in motion and directs motion (p. 166). The US-Mexico border reappears as a series of junctions selecting and diverting movement to and from themselves.

The chapters on the US-Mexico border may comprise the least interesting part of the book, as much of the information presented by Nail has already been treated in detail elsewhere. Nevertheless, *The Theory of the Border* will be obviously interesting to anyone studying borders and borderlands. However, I believe Nail's main contribution goes beyond the field of borderlands, as its theoretical work provides a crucial intervention in the understanding of how society is shaped by the movement of resources and people. Indeed, Nail's book could prove itself essential for scholars en-

gaged in the "spatial turn" in the humanities, as its method of kinopolitics opens a new avenue for the understanding of the interaction between space and society.