



## Science / art explorations at the border. An Introduction

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# INTRODUCTION: SCIENCE-ART EXPLORATIONS AT THE BORDER

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**Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, Jean Cristofol and Cédric Parizot**

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Cédric Parizot is Researcher in Anthropology at IREMAM (CNRS UMR 73101). He is initiator and coordinator of the antiAtlas of Borders project. His most recent publications are: *Israelis and Palestinians in the Shadows of the Wall. Spaces of Separation and Occupation* 2015, Ashgate (co-edited with S. Latte Abdallah) and *"Marges et Numérique/Margins and Digital Technologies"*, 2015, *Journal des anthropologues* 142-143 (co-edited with T. Mattelart, J. Peghini and N. Wanono).

Translated by Caroline Mackenzie

Keywords: antiAtlas, science-art, co-production, critique, experimentation, introduction mediation, performativity, politics, reflexivity, subjectivity, technology.

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Trevor Paglen, Open Hangar; Cactus Flats, NV; Distance ~ 18 miles; 10:04 a.m., 2007

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# I.

## Introduction

- 1 Creating a journal is a challenge. Launching the antiAtlas-Journal is a double challenge: it assumes that the web offers new and different formats for combining texts, images and other media and that this will renew our approach to borders. Borders are at the center of our enterprise because, for us, they constitute an excellent opportunity for understanding the complexity of contemporary issues. Even though it has been scientifically established that borders are opening and closing at the same time, the most common representation of borders remains a line! Long perceived as a reality that is peripheral to our territory, they now constitute complex networks sorting and regulating flows and they profoundly intersect and influence our lives. More than any other political object, borders simultaneously place and procedures that must be taken into account when analyzing globalization and building up critical thought.

In order to better understand how borders operate, the antiAtlas of borders<sup>2</sup> collection has, over recent years, sought to problematize the frames and formats we use to understand and study borders. Talking about an antiAtlas does not mean that we deny maps as a way of accessing the world, rather we envisage maps, like any other dispositif, as techniques sustaining specific techniques of representation. Constituted over a particular period of history and in a European-centric context, this knowledge has strongly contributed to the construction of the reality that it pretends to grasp and depict: space, territory, borders, etc. Confronted with what we have identified as a crisis of representation, we need a radical and critical rethinking of our representation of borders in the spaces we inhabit (seminars, performances, conferences/exhibitions, Internet site) where researchers in the human and hard sciences, artists, experts and inhabitants can confront their practices and experiences.



Affiche colloque et exposition antiAtlas des frontières, Aix-en-Provence 2013, conception graphique Myriam Boyer, d'après les travaux de Alberto Campi et Forensic Oceanography.



Exposition antiAtlas des frontières #2, La Compagnie, Marseille, 2014, photographie Myriam Boyer

## II. An exploratory digital space

- 2 Our journal seeks to extend this initiative by offering an exploratory editorial space will allow authors and readers to share epistemic reflections on science experimentations in a dialogic manner. Establishing a corpus that brings together te images, video, sound, etc. will produce emotions and extend the performativity of structures we conceive. We position ourselves as part of a process that sees aesthe dissensus<sup>3</sup> as a method for achieving political emancipation.

The creation of the antiAtlas-Journal is also motivated by the mitigated observation: have developed in the field of border studies. Over the last twenty years, an increa number of academic publications and the creation of major journals (Journal of Borderl Studies, Geopolitics - the first issue of which, in 1996-97, was called Geopolitics

International Boundaries, L'Espace Politique, etc.) have contributed to the development of a very rich field of research and has also encouraged multidisciplinary initiatives, the convergence of several epistemologies on a single object, though this has also generated borrowings and displacements between and within these various disciplines. Recently, new publications have sought to renew reflections within this field which is undergoing scientific consolidation. This is the situation for *Movements*<sup>4</sup>, a new journal that takes a very critical approach bringing migration and flows at the forefront of border thinking. Throw out disciplinary categories, they will come back and hit you in the face. These new approaches to border studies are calmly circumscribing themselves institutionally.

Finally, the confrontation of contrasting productions, approaches and practices of researchers in humanities (anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, economic geographers, historians, jurists, etc.), in exact and experimental sciences (biomedicine, artificial intelligence, etc.), of artists (net.art, hackers, tactical geographers, artists, etc.), of experts (customs officers, industrialists, etc.) and of inhabitants (migrants, etc., not, since borders cut through everybody) as carriers of a non-expert discourse, is all the more necessary as borders have become increasingly complex technological, political, economic and social objects. In other words, in addition to offering a critical reflexive space, the antiAtlas-Journal aims to build on, and benefit from, the complementarity of knowledge and practices.



Benoit Tadié, conférence-exposition antiAtlante delle frontiere, Festival Internazionale, Ferrara, 2014



Myriam Boyer, Ateliers de recherche antiAtlas, IMéRA, Marseille, 2012

### III.

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- 3 The antiAtlas-Journal will seek to promote this transdisciplinary approach at two levels. Our journal will first give priority to contributions offering a critical reflection on sciences/arts explorations that relate to the mutation of contemporary borders in order to renew the ways we construct and think (geo)politics and to engage us in transforming our own methodologies. Throughout the editing and publication processes, we will prolong these experiments through the involvement of an artist whose work focuses on the confrontation of media and digital publishing: Thierry Fournier.

His involvement here draws on his experience as both artist and designer. Our intention is to establish a dialogue in the process itself of developing the journal, by not seeing graphics as a secondary feature for illustrating texts. The publishing process constitutes a significant initiative, creating an interplay of images, sounds and writing that will produce not only new forms, but also new meanings. Our objective is to give space for meanings to circulate, without deciding beforehand the institutional keys of interpretation or the hierarchy between texts and images, artworks and commentaries. This implies that the articles' authors, the editorial team and the artist/designer will enter into a debate at the end of which the artist/designer will assemble the journal as a complete layout, proposing a gesture that responds to the elements he has been given. Our intention therefore is that these efforts will make it possible to produce innovative publication formats for human and social sciences.

In brief, each publication will constitute an editorial unity articulating text and media in order to generate creative disruptions. This confrontation of text, image and sound will contribute to the denaturalization of practices of representation in social sciences. The result will be performative in that it will extend the experimentation process between researchers and artists by the invention of a novel publication. The mediation of a third party, reader or spectator, to which this work is presented, will become a constitutive element in the dialogic construction of gaps between points of view, discourses and forms.

**The result will be performative in that it will extend the experimentation process between researchers and artists by the invention of a novel publication.**

By articulating texts and images, the antiAtlas-Journal will also open up further



possibilities for writing and collaborating on articles. Co-signing an article of antiAtlas-Journal implies different kinds of collaborations. It is the case, in seminal issue, of the article on "Research art and video games: Ethnography of an interdisciplinary exploration" produced by both Cédric Parizot and Douglas Edric Stanley. former wrote the text as a first-person narrative in order to talk about his personal experience, while the latter concentrated on producing and editing images, videos and an interactive scenario. This type of contribution questions both the attribution of authorship within sciences-arts practices and the fact that the collaborative procedure demonstrated in each issue of antiAtlas Journal will often involve more people found in the complete list of one paper's authors. Our articles respect peer review requirements in order to guarantee the quality of the journal's contents, but our desire to remodel formats and styles will certainly require us to embark on a long-term reflection on this practice too!



Amy Franceschini, Finger Print Maze, exposition antiAtlas des frontières, Musée des Tapisseries, Aix-en-Provence, 2013, photographie Dominique Poulain



Ken Rinaldo, Paparazzi bot, exposition antiAtlas des frontières, Musée des Tapisseries, Aix-en-Provence, 2013, photographie Dominique Poulain

## IV.

# Pursuing the reflexions and experimentations carried out in the frame of the antiAtlas of Borders

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- 4 This first issue of our Journal, Explorations and practices in sciences-arts at the border seeks to demonstrate the heuristic interest of interactions between artistic practice research in border studies. By bringing together contributions from authors participated in our Collective's activities, it extends the reflections and experimentations that we have initiated over the years of companionship through the seminars conferences/exhibitions of the antiAtlas of Borders. Later issues will of course open the antiAtlas journal to external contributors. The objective for everyone is to challenge research in terms of its formats and in terms of those through which experience is shared as a sensitive and meaningful reality.

The three first contributions offer a general reflection, making it easier to situate the role of sciences-arts interactions in the history of research and of art. They provide a variety of viewpoints, their authors being researchers and/or artists: each in their way bears witness to the fact that they have crossed this institutional border. Furthermore, they seek to deconstruct this dichotomy between sciences/arts, arts/sciences, in order to rethink the way that these relationships have evolved. Reading them gives a much nuanced vision of these collaborations and a better perception of different issues that these crossings and displacements represent. Altogether, we are ourselves better equipped for perceiving the political dimensions involved in the establishment of this type of relationship.

In his article, Jean Cristofol emphasizes that, until recently, sciences-arts interactions were seen as marginal adventures or hazardous speculations without any real impact. The development of information and communication, and notably digital technologies over the last thirty years has given them an acute importance. And with good reason, since, combined with economic, social, cultural and political transformations, these technologies have not only challenged artists and scientists by confronting them with new mediums, they also have radically modified interactions between the domains of industry, science and culture.

From his perspective, the question we must answer, through our studies of the relation between arts and science, is not so much what role art can play within scientific practices and reciprocally, but rather how these interactions reflect new configurations and link between domains that our cultures had, until recently, set as separate fields. The changing role of artists in society and their relationship with technique and sciences was already observed by several philosophers (e.g. Paul Valéry, Walter Benjamin, and John Dewey) and artists (e.g. Moholy-Nagy) during the first half of the 20th century. In revisiting their writings and some more recent works, Jean Cristofol re-examines the resolutely exploratory nature of artistic practices, which "engage our experience of an environment that has profoundly transformed, appearing now as more technological driven and mediatized."<sup>5</sup>





**James Bridle et Einar Sneve Martinussen, Drone Shadow 002, Istanbul, Turquie, 2012.**  
**Peinture blanche de signalisation des routes, 15 x 9 m.**

- 5 To illustrate this point, Anna Guilló demonstrates how, over the last twenty years, art have become massively involved in cartography as an area of research and of express building up a novel relational place. Focusing on the connexions between space and bor she shows how Border art, in the same way as experimental geography, has led t redefinition of the limits of art as well as of the figure of the artist. Through recurrent motifs of the map and the limit in contemporary art, she deflects attention from the dominant plastic rhetoric and the ways in which artists, through their creati question the status of the visible and the invisible and through which authors posi themselves both internally and externally with regard to their work. She also expl these contradictions in the works she has herself created on these very themes and w punctuate her text. Inspired by the proposal made by the critic Brian Holmes, she sugg resorting to the sometimes misleading notion of 'extra-disciplinarity'. This is inde tool that Holmes has made available to artists so that they can achieve their potential emancipation that is offered by theoretical contribution. Accepting that art criticism longer stands apart from creation allows art to challenge the borders that institutions markets expect them to respect: these are the stakes involved in this term. Using it is all the more interesting in that social sciences can easily adopt it more or literally. Nevertheless, from an artist's point of view, this proposal raises the ambig issues raised by open cooperation: working with concepts taken from other contexts collaborating with the concept-makers themselves does not lead to the same processes.

In "Claiming the critical potential of arts-/social sciences experimentations. Portrai the researcher as an artist", Anne Laure Amilhat-Szary discusses the sciences-arts dyna In reviewing the specificity of collaborations between artists and social sci researchers, she questions the now self-evident outcomes expected from so-called ' science' companionships. Denouncing the quest for innovation and its distortion by ma dynamics, she attempts to demonstrate the aesthetic and scientific modalities for poten partnerships between these fields. She explains that it is high time for us to move from an artificial binary (historically situated) view of arts and sciences and instea question together, the status of research and thus succeed in producing a strong propo that the researcher can claim the status of an artist. Quite apart from questions a medium and conditions for a production, an opus, and a text, the key issue is to pro the need for a reflexive component at the heart of production of knowledge. Social scie focus on topics that are not external to them and the concepts they create car

potentially used and transformed by the people they describe: for these reasons, they now face up to the limits of their subjectivity. Approaching this theme via the notion of border, and in particular a mobile border, undoubtedly allows us to understand possibilities available in the relationship that can exist between the worlds of art and science. Escaping from the reciprocal instrumentalization of arts by sciences and sciences by arts allows us to produce together emancipatory devices that incite the audience to act through the sensitive relationship that they generate and their capacity to transmit fair ideas.



## V.

**Ina Wudtke, *Portrait de l'artiste en Chercheur* (A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher), installation, MuHKA, Anvers, 2006, photographie 414vzw, avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste.**

- 6 The three following contributions adopt a more empirical approach, since each reviews the process of developing sciences-arts productions by treating the question of borders through three different mediums: an ethno-fiction film (Nicola Mai), a collection of participatory maps on paper and fabric (Sarah Mekdjian and Marie Moreau) and a video game (Cédric Parmentier and Douglas Edric Stanley). These investigations were led either by a researcher/artist (Nicola Mai) or by a collective of researchers and artists, i.e. through co-production.

Although their objective is to explore new formats for modeling research results, the authors do not however envisage that these mediums are more efficient than the dominant schemes used in social sciences or artistic practices today. Their commitment to these techniques is resolutely problematized. By playing on creative disruptions and on displacements due to these experiments, they invite us to reflect on the interest that these new forms of research and creation really offer, while at the same time providing a critique of the formats currently dominating their disciplines and practices.

- 7 Nicola Mai, in "Assembling Samira: understanding sexual humanitarianism through experimental filmmaking", revisits his creative work in a video-documentary based on an ethnographic survey carried out among migrants who work in the sex industry. As part of a long survey, his film *Samira* explores in greater depth the case of a person who, at several periods in his life, crosses international borders from one side to the other while, at the same time, crossing gender borders. This is the second film in a trilogy focusing on deconstructing the figure of the victim in sex work. Nicola Mai takes his so-called 'mobile' methods even further by building the film around a verbatim version of interviews he carried out in the field. In this film, as he plays himself, he penetrates his fictional world in order to offer a hybrid auto-ethnography. Accompanied by an iconography that admirably

demonstrates the beauty of Samira, this article develops a complex reflexive question in the ways in which a research project can evolve when the researcher takes on the role of artist. This approach allows him to produce extremely convincing evidence on relationship between body and norms at the border, but also to propose theoretical perspectives on the evolution of the social sciences researcher's physical presence within the structures he puts in place.



**Nicola Mai, Samira (installation), exposition antiAtlas des frontières, Musée des Tapisseries, Aix-en-Provence, 2013, photographie Dominique Poulain**

- 8 In "Redrawing experience: Art, sciences and migratory conditions", Sarah Mekdjian and Marie Moreau's article takes the form of a duet as a homage to travellers, asylum seekers, artistic and scientific collaborators with whom they produced a participative cartographic work. Here again the key issue is not only scientific and aesthetic but particularly political. First, they explain their use of drawing as a tool for meeting in welcoming while sharing information on migratory patterns. The underlying reason for this decision lies in their desire to avoid reproducing the violent situations that asylum seekers experience in their compulsory interviews with administrative agencies during which their stories are checked in order to determine their legal status and their eligibility for the granting of identity papers. In order to engage in this counter-mapping, during which they aimed to stress more fully the fact that migrating cannot be subsumed to a journey across a section of the planet by tracing an arrow on a map, they invited asylum seekers to sketch out their wanderings. Using paper and fabric, the migrants were encouraged to outline not only their travels, but also their emotions throughout the journey: elements of their experience of exile as they lived, understood and imagined them. Sarah Mekdjian suggested that they add a common key to the maps, as a way of linking these experiences. The results are fascinating because they document a multiple reality with so many nuances that stay-at-home citizens have difficulty understanding, and because they partially reinvent classic code migration maps, all the while raising new questions about the status of works produced in these workshops: are these maps? are they works of art? how can we account, in their production, for the asymmetric roles of asylum seekers, free-lance artists, and public paid researchers? Sarah Mekdjian and Marie Moreau present here another map that they have drawn together to describe their experience of co-production. Paradoxically, this last drawing invites us to lose ourselves in the labyrinth of their interrogations, no doubt to draw us into the debate on exploring the limits of art and science from the perspective of individual's commitment.

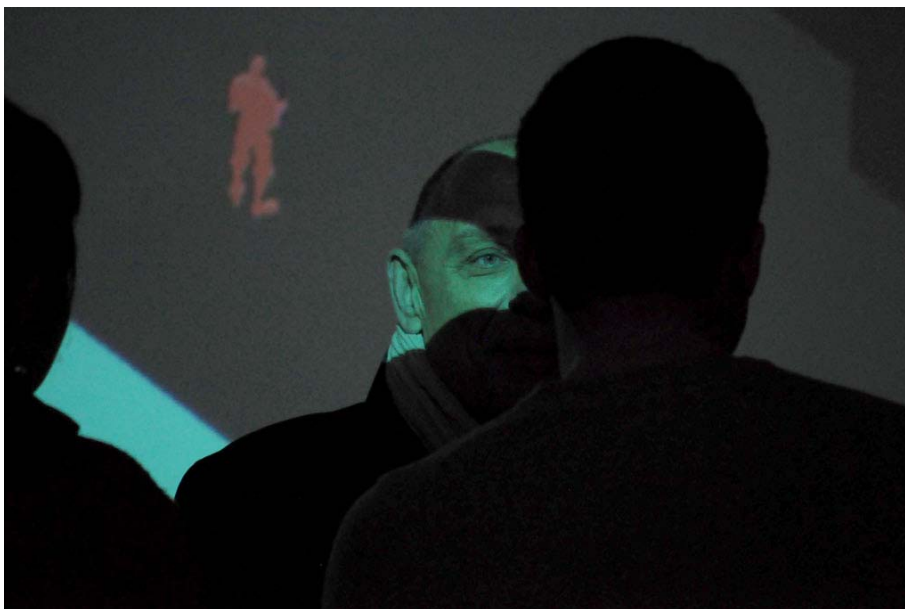


Sarah Mekdjian, Marie Moreau et et Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, *Cartographies traverses*, exposition antiAt des frontières, Musée des Tapisseries, Aix-en-Provence, 2013, photographie Myriam Boyer

- 9 Finally, in "Research, art and video games: Ethnography of an extra-disciplinary exploration", Cédric Parizot and Douglas Edric Stanley come back to the process conception and development of a documentary and artistic video game, *A Crossing Industry* which they have developed in collaboration with Jean Cristofol and students from the École supérieure d'art d'Aix-en-Provence since 2013. The objective of *A Crossing Industry* is to give an account of an ethnographic field survey carried out in the south of the West Bank and Israel over several years by Cédric Parizot. By using a game simulator, Parizot and Stanley envisioned the modelization of different types of interaction between a wide range of actors (Palestinians and Israelis) interacting in the shadow of the Wall and influencing each at their own level, the functioning of the separation system imposed by the Israeli occupation on Palestinians between 2007 and 2010. The objective of this article is to analyse how video games can articulate an ethnographic approach together with an artistic approach which is animated by its own aesthetic and poetic stakes. Given that *A Crossing Industry* is still under development, this article does not seek to assess the game's capacity to communicate a message to a specific public, but rather to understand what this form of science-art experimentation means for its conceptual designers. Considering this collaboration through the concepts of artistic dispositive and of critical document, they discuss the issues raised by the gaps between their approaches and propositions and can situate the game's input within this inter-subjectivity (documented by the researchers through a reflexive process which he could only analyse as the project progressed). In fact, this analysis has no real pretensions of contributing to the debates on Games Studies; it is, above all, an exercise in extra-disciplinarity, in the sense defined by Brian Holm (2007) which is of interest, in the first instance, to anthropology and artistic creation.

These three works, *Samira*, *Crossing Maps* and *A Crossing Industry* function somewhat as tactical media: they do not only produce an alternative and critical discourse on socio-economic or political processes at borders, they also encourage us to undertake a critical review of our methods of access and construction of reality, both in the artistic practice and in social sciences research.





Exposition antiAtlas des frontières #2, La Compagnie, Marseille, 2014, photographie Myriam Boyer



Colloque-exposition The Art of Bordering, Maxxi, Rome, 2014, photographie Myriam Boyer

## Notes

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1. Launched in 2011 by the Institut méditerranéen de recherches avancées de Marseille (IMÉRA), this project has led to the cration of a collective of researchers, artists and experts which is supported by the Institut de recherche et d'études sur le monde arabe e musulman (IREMAM, CNRS/Aix Marseille Université), the École supérieure d'Art d'Aix-en-Provence, the PACTE research laboratory (CNRS/Université de Grenoble-Alpes) member of th EU Consortium (FP7) EUBORDERSCAPES, and the LabexMed Project. It published its theoretic manifesto in 2015: The antiAtlas of Borders, A Manifesto, DOI:10.1080/08865655.2014.9833

2. Less used than its antonym, 'consensus', the term 'dissensus' expresses the diversity opinions or of methods of feeling or judging. Identified by social psychology (Moscovici, & W. Doise, 1992, Dissensions et consensus. Une théorie générale des décisions collectiv Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 296 p.), use of the term was to have a great success in the works of J. Rancière which place the aesthetic relationship at the heart

political mechanisms: see in particular *Le Partage du sensible : Esthétique et politique* 2000, Paris, La Fabrique and *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics*, 2010, New York, London Continuum.

3. <http://www.antiatlas.net>

4. <http://movements-journal.org/issues/01.grenzregime>, posted online in 2015, consulted 20/3/2015.

5. Jean Cristofol, article in this Journal, paragraph 3.

6. On the definition of this term, cf. the articles by [Cédric Parizot](#), [Sarah Mekdjian et Marie Moreau](#) and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary.

7. "Although the word 'tropism' adequately expresses the need or the desire to turn towards another object, here an external discipline, the notion de reflectiveness indicates a critical review of the point of departure, which seeks to transform the initial discipline, to take it out of its context, to open up new possibilities of expression, analysis, cooperation and commitment within itself. This two-way movement, or rather this transformative spiral, is what we can call extra-disciplinarity."