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Framing/Unframing Space: But Where Is the Frame? *“Border Art” as a Vehicle to Think Inclusion*

Cadrer/Décadrer l'espace : mais où donc se situe le cadre ? L'« art de la frontière » comme outil pour penser l'inclusion

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Abstracts

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The paper analyzes what framing and unframing mean from a geographical point of view, that is by questioning the spatiality of the frame. We consider that the frame is more than a line drawn around a set of items and build our demonstration on the analysis of a corpus of “border art” works. In a first part of the paper, we work on definitions of framing/unframing, showing how they vary depending on who is responsible for the act of framing/unframing on the one hand, and on the other hand, to whom the framing/unframing gesture is addressed. In the second part, we explore the different possible shapes that borders can take in the geopolitical process of framing/unframing space. The text concludes on the impossibility to proceed with framing/unframing operations when those remain exclusive in their manners of obliging people to be in or out. Building on border thinking, we offer to continue exploring the frame not only from the inside, as it traditionally stands, but from all its possible outsides.

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[cadre](#), [cadrage](#), [décadrage](#), [frontière](#), [citoyenneté](#), [art de la frontière](#), [inclusion](#)

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[What is framing \(at least for a geographer\)?](#)

It is always interesting to try and debunk our assumptions and for that purpose, questioning the algorithms that nowadays underlie most of our choices may appear as an interesting option. For that purpose, I once tried to look up my favourite keywords in the most famous search engine of the internet asking for images rather than “general results”. The result was very surprising and interesting in what it suggests about the prejudices with which we envision our environments. In this case, my interest was also to work on the variation of imaginaries according to languages. I thus searched for the French word *frontière*, and saw a great deal of walls, especially of the US-Mexico divide, appear on the first pages. As far as the German *Grenze* was concerned, many derelict checkpoints appeared, with signs alluding to the former Iron curtain and to the Cold War separation between the two Germanies. When I turned to the Spanish *frontera*, all geopolitical images were replaced by that of the SUV (sport utility vehicle) bearing that very name. But the biggest surprise of all came under the English *border*: the screen filled with stylized images of frames, either for printing or embroidering. Decorative ornaments had totally erased the political dimension that I initially put into that very same word. One must acknowledge that, even with a VPN, my computer is identified as French and francophone and that the same experience would probably have different outcomes with other machines. Yet, maybe for the first time this made me realize that the term that I was interrogating under very scientific protocols in the academic realm had a totally different life in everyday speech, underlying the very diverse scalarity¹ of framing gestures and postures.

This anecdote is useful to insist on the weight of the implicit subtext in the idea and action of framing. A lot of our human activities indeed consist in framing things and ideas, but we seldom wonder how this process develops. The acts of framing and unframing are absolutely multi-dimensional and concern all types of limits. In this paper, however, I wish to discuss framing/unframing processes through a discussion of political borders, justifying that choice by the fact that I consider borders as limits endowed with meaning. Borders as international lines of divide are made of three pillars: an institution that designs and manages them, practices around the line that both reinforce and challenge it, and representations that justify both practices and lawful meaning. The border never exists for itself, its invention is made possible by this triangulation. Inventing the border means both proposing that a line could part

human groups and delineate spaces and being able to enforce this on the ground (milestones) and on paper (maps). Going to the border without a map (and nowadays without a GPS) may expose one to be unable to find it, even at the top of a mountain (Amilhat Szary 2013). In an expedition to South Africa to try to identify and understand what the borders of the former Apartheid Homelands looked like, we could not do without such tools either: in some cases the landscape had been used very differently on both sides and the limit was self-evident, but this was far from being the case everywhere (Amilhat Szary & al. 2017).

We seem to be moving away at high speed from the classical definition of frontiers used in international law, of which this extract from the 1989 arbitration on the Guinea-Bissau/Senegal maritime boundary²—placed as an epigraph on the website of the French National Council for Geographic Information, is a great illustration. It runs as follows: “An international border is the line formed by the succession of the farthest points marking the domain of spatial validity for a state’s judicial norms” (“Une frontière internationale est la ligne formée par la succession des points extrêmes du domaine de validité spatiale des normes juridiques d’un État”, personal translation). The border here appeared as a totally peripheral object. Today, that political object bears a spatial translation: it becomes more and more “mobile”, notably with the outsourcing of border management prior to the line crossing, together with the prolongation of border checks within sovereign territories (Amilhat Szary and Giraut). Many have insisted on the processual nature of borders (Van Houtum, Kramsch, and Ziefhofer), which means that we face a border that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere (Robinson)!

If many borders can be defined as “relatively self-evident things placed in the landscape by political authorities to mark territory” (Green 67), their materiality is not as plain as it appears. This play on the materiality and immateriality of the border is presented by S. Green as an anthropological condition, if we acknowledge that such play frames our lifestyles. She underlines the fact that borders are more than geometrical lines, because they have a volumetric existence on the one hand, and because they also extend in time: framing processes, she underlines, are multi-dimensional. I would also add that these processes of bordering and debordering interplay with multiple regimes of visibility that bear a highly significant meaning. As demonstrated by A. Mountz, contemporary borders are neither visible or invisible, but abide by simultaneous regimes of high visibility (walls) and corresponding invisibility (detention centers on isolated islands). The “security fence” that divides Jerusalem does correspond to this idea that the border should impose itself to convey fear of the authority that built it. However, that wall is so sinuous that it becomes very hard to tell which side is which from a distance, and it has also been shown that this device is partially there to concentrate international attention while exactions are being undertaken in its shadow (Latte Abdallah and Parizot).

This duality installs a feeling of spatial confusion which becomes political terrain for competing narratives on who can be on the inside or needs to be maintained outside. Discussing the conditions of inclusion within mobile frames is the objective of my text. Understanding where processes of framing and unframing occur may help us to debunk the political intentions at work in the framing/unframing process, which appear all the more complex as the borderlines are no longer an external continuum. S. Mezzadra and B. Neilson warn us about the fact that we need to work in that complex perspective, since “[i]solating a single function of the border does not allow us to grasp the flexibility of this institution” (Mezzadra and Neilson 7).

I concur with S. Green in asserting that time is as important as space in understanding the border, which I define as “space-time that materialize norms” (Amilhat Szary 2020, 99). She relies on the reflection developed by Derrida on the trace to suggest that, in a context of spatial hyper versatility, “[t]he trace shows the work of time by providing a locus which redefines the ‘who’ and ‘what’ questions into a ‘where’” (Taylor and Winquist 404; quoted by Green 76). It thus provides us with the possibility of representation of the constant framing and unframing. This is why in this text, I chose to build my analysis on works of visual arts and their specific spatiality.

The question of the separation of what is inside or outside constitutes of one the pillars of Western art history. One may mention, to contrast them, Fra Angelico’s 1426 *Annunciation* and one of Yves Klein’s works, be it his early monochromes of the 1950s or the famous *Le Saut dans le vide* (a performance from 1960 which he documented in a facsimile of a newspaper as “*Un homme dans l’espace! Le peintre de l’espace se jette dans le vide!*” [*A man in space! The space painter throws himself into the void!*]). Through this performance, Yves Klein challenges the validity of all previous framings of art (notably that of the canvas or the gallery). What Fra Angelico did in this 1426 painting was to represent the Virgin within a loggia separated from the surrounding garden by two sets of arcades. The construction of this building follows the oblique lines of perspective that were just being invented. However, that framing is closed, or almost: the background is grey but not totally blind, as the scene opens onto a second room at the back. There is, however, a ray of (divine) light that crosses the scene obliquely to accompany the kneeling angel in conveying the news of her exceptional fate to Mary. Since this image contains the making of framing conventions in the Western history of the gaze, it was an interesting point of reference to compare the “border art” works that form my corpus.

It is not easy to circumscribe such a genre. We have an example of what it may or may not be through an anecdote unintentionally prompted by the then US President, Donald Trump. In 2018, he decided to accelerate the building of the wall along the southern border of the country, in the context of his crusade to keep unauthorized immigrants out. He thus opened a call for tenders and asked candidates to submit their projects for a border at a site outside San Diego—which they did, showcasing different types of would-be border panels in diverse shapes and materials. And in so doing, he might have unintentionally become an artist: at least, this is what the Swiss Icelandic artist Christopher Hill ironically suggested, as he drew attention to these eight prototypes of border barriers that looked like pieces of conceptual art, especially in the photos that circulated on the internet. He therefore argued that they should be designed as a national monument and started an online petition. Citing an *Antiquities Act* of 1906 which protects significant natural and cultural features on federal land, he began offering tours of the site which all sold out. So where border art begins and ends is of course an essential question (Masala) raised by that performative and media operation, but what it does reveal is that framing/unframing gestures can have a huge impact, even when they are envisioned on a small scale.

The aim of my essay, therefore, will be to question the complex spatialities of the framing operation and their political consequences. I will address this by first analyzing the point of view of the framing and that of the framer, and by examining for whom and by whom the frame is traced. Secondly, the demonstration will focus on the frame and question the complexity of its spatiality, once it is admitted that the border is “more than a line”. These issues will be addressed through the reviewing of works of art that deal with the border, either because they are produced on and about borders. The choice of artworks is subjective, based

on a selection of “border art” that I have collected over more than ten years and put together as a sort of imaginary museum. This endeavor has been carried out within a collective called the antiAtlas of borders,³ aimed at blurring boundaries between science, art and activism.

1. The act of framing: by whom and for whom?

Framing is an interesting gesture, both literally and metaphorically, in as much as it is a positional act. To do so, one must have an idea of what the frame encompasses and what it leaves outside, as well as the point from which the gesture is both initiated and performed. The most familiar way of framing is from the inside (i.e. from the center) or from the outside. It is a much rarer attitude to position oneself on the line itself.

Framing from the center: can the European vision of division be challenged?

The European idea of the modern border that emerged in the seventeenth century is a new technology of power because of its conceptual dimension. What was invented at the end of the Thirty Years’ war with the famous Westphalia treaties (1648) is the idea of a stable balance of powers whose distinctiveness can be borne by a line. Even this geopolitical equilibrium comes out of power relationships and war: the frontline can become a boundary only if the remote decisional center agrees to use it as such. That is why the European border model is often criticized as artificial, even when the border line is based on a topographical accident such as a river or a mountain. Indeed, in the more traditional relationships to landscapes, those elements of relief represented places of exchanges. The framing of the new nation states responds to an inside/out dialectics: foreign armies push the line that national soldiers defend, until a remote center of decisions (often the capital city) releases the order to stabilize the border. This political framing is simultaneous with the emergence of a scientific thought that builds on the differentiation between categories (Descartes’ dualism in 1637, Linné’s classification of species in 1735). Framing is an act of power, exerted by the center. In Europe, it was first characteristic of the progression of the nation state, then of the colonial expansion which exported this model of territorial management. The map is, *par excellence*, the tool that both expresses and performs this appropriation (Branch; Debarbieux). The examples of these visual expressions of framing are numerous and have become self-evident, notably in school books where maps help to frame the national identity (Perrier Bruslé).

It is interesting to see how that framing process is also at work on other scales. The *œuvre* of Teddy Cruz, who now partners with Fonna Forman in their common architecture studio, deals precisely with this external framing. In their workshop entitled “Political Equator” and held in 2006 and 2007, he offered to reflect upon a fact that he did not feel to be a coincidence. Indeed, most fenced borders that were at the time just beginning to be erected, seemed to be connected by their latitude: the US-Mexico divide, the Palestinian-Israel one, but also the Indian-Pakistani or Indian-Bangladeshi borders all seem to be related between themselves, as if forming a line that he labelled a “political equator”. In so doing, he was making evident that the securitization of borders was not “just” a political decision but also the materialization of the largest income gaps on the planet. From the center to which he belonged, as a US citizen,

he was underscoring how the North was fencing itself off from the Global South and illustrating the globalization of borders.

This territorial delineation process is very effective because once a line is drawn by a center on the edges of its territory, the memory of this gesture then haunts the imagination even if that limit is ephemeral (Amilhat Szary 2020). Strangely, we witness the confirmation of this process through the emergence of phenomena that do not obey center-periphery dynamics, such as climate change, the COVID pandemic, etc. These produce flows that cannot really be controlled by borders (circulation of air or germs), however the panic they induce often leads to the reinforcement of territorial rules, without any proof of impact on their management. Ursula Biemann, a video-artist who was one of the first to screen the border in her visual essays, notably with the 1999 *Performing the Border* video, has more recently switched to an art that tries to capture the ineffectiveness of framing efforts when centers lose their regulating capacity. The *Deep Weather* project (2013) thus compares aerial views of sand tar extraction in Northern Canada with close shootings of Bangladeshi people fighting the rise of the sea level by piling up hand-filled mud bags. It questions the scales of framing when centers are dispensed with that function.

Enacting the line

Although we have noted that framing/unframing is rarely performed on the spot, on the line itself, the site of the border is a place of intense research and creation for contemporary artists who invest it as a way of questioning the bordering process. Some of the highlights from the conceptual art movement are indeed about enacting the line. It is important to evoke here two of Dennis Oppenheim's performances that took place on the same location in 1968, entitled *Boundary Split* and *Time Pocket*. The action takes place on the Saint John River, which marks the border between the US and Canada and the limit of a time-zone difference, which freezes in the winter, making it possible to cross by foot and to reunite the political landscape made even under the snow. The artist cuts through the ice in geometrical patterns to make the divide apparent again and evidence the artificial and intentional gesture of border-making.

The borderline and the discrepancies between the power of the norms that it embeds on one side, and the apparently benevolent uniformity of the landscape that it crosses on the other is a recurrent source of inspiration for contemporary artists.

The Decolonizing Architecture collective developed a very interesting project in this respect, entitled *The Lawless Line* (2010),⁴ whereby the artists explored the discrepancy between the borderline as traced on the map and its spatiality on the field. In this case, they were interested in the splitting of the Palestinian West Bank into three kinds of territories (zones A, B and C) through the 1993 Oslo agreements. The boundary of C zones having been traced in red on the official treaty map with a heavy ink pen would appear to have a ground width of more than 5 meters, respecting the scale of that representation. They then set to the field to discover what was actually covered by the thickness of that map to question the status of that space. Being the frame itself, it did not abide by any of the rules on either side and thus offered a very interesting potential for the claiming of political rights.

One can also evoke Francis Alÿs' two works to discuss this point. His most famous performance consists in his rambling through Jerusalem with a pot of green paint to point at the materiality of the armistice line which the Israeli urbanization does not respect (*Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can*

become poetic,⁵ 2006). The work he did earlier at the US-Mexico border, entitled *Loop*⁶ (1997), may be even more interesting. In the framework of the INSITE transborder biennial, he decided to travel between Tijuana and San Diego by air, going all round the world, without actually crossing the line. In a sense, he also enhances the multiple scales of framing in this case and underscores the complexity of the process.

Embodying the line

In the preceding examples of border art, the artists, mainly male protagonists, do need to personally go to the border to enact their questioning and claiming of the framing process. They do not however endanger themselves in the doing. The case of the performance by Maria Adela Diaz and documented in a video called *Borderline*⁷ (2005) is one example of how artists can use their body to document the stains and pains that borders inflict on the people who do not have the rights to cross them. The Guatemalan artist locked herself in a wooden box figuring the containers that allow goods to travel the world in a standardized manner. And she asked to be set at sea, and then navigated into the ocean for 45 minutes, as if she could, with this effort, contribute to overriding the rigid legislation on border crossings. In an interview about her performance, she claims that “I use my body as the canvas where I expose the work. [...] I am interested in pushing myself to those limits. To find out that there is more to push is like touching the untouchable. It connects me to my own self and perhaps with others. Each performance empties my body to be filled up later with what I want to say”.

She was in this respect following the path of the performance artists who set the way for border art, notably Guillermo Gómez-Peña (and the partners of his first intervention, Emily Hicks and Coco Fusco). This genre is indeed the other very important pillar of art produced at, on and about borders. This artist born in Mexico and who came to the US in his twenties put his body at stake in his numerous interventions on the layered meanings of what borders can be or do. He used the fears and fantasies projected onto his Mexican-looking body to render political contradictions about identity, immigration, but also gender and ethnicity, very vivid. From his first public performances in 1979, he has put his body at risk to challenge common views of borders and border crossers. One may recall the *Loneliness of the Immigrant at the Los Angeles Elevator*, where he packed his own body as a strange package and stayed on the floor of a public elevator for 24 hours. This happened in Los Angeles, stressing the fact that for him, the border is indeed wherever it is embodied. All through his very intense artistic and political career he has totally made his the famous poem by the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa, entitled *To live in the Borderlands means you*, which reads as follows: “In the Borderlands / you are the battleground [...] / you are at home, a stranger [...] / you are wounded, lost in action [...]”; “To survive in the Borderlands / you must live *sin fronteras* / be a crossroads” (Anzaldúa 194-195).

In many ways, these artists have taken to its extreme consequences the Chicaxs claim that “*We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us*”. They have paved the way for postcolonial framings in border theory that all demonstrate how bordering processes are implemented through their differentiated embodiment. The coining of the expression “borderities” (Amilhat Szary and Giraut) expresses both the complex spatial and the human conditions deriving from the politics of mobile borders and answers this need to stress the fact that geopolitical divides are not experienced in the same manner according to the different statuses of people who cross them (citizenship playing with class, gender, race at this interface). Framed to protect people, contemporary borders tend to place people in contact with the violence of globalization. This was the conclusion of my 2015 book (Amilhat

Szary 2015). Pushing the argument further and reflecting on the deadly impact of borders where corpses accumulate, Achille Mbembe shows how “bodies-borders” (“corps-frontières”) make do with the central elements of what he calls brutalism (Mbembe). In his view, these are not only the bodies and corpses of people suffering from the traps and traumas of migration, but they make up a fringe of humanity that, rejected by the first world, is in his view a front for resistance to the dominating model imposed by globalization. The “bodies-borders” (“corps-frontières”) are indeed moved by a positive energy to go beyond what is imposed upon them.

Crossing the frame to shape it anew

If border art cannot be identified with migration issues, a lot of the works that can be related to this genre engages with the line as it relates to the (im)possibilities of its crossing. This can be done in very many material and immaterial ways, which all tend to subvert in their own ways the traditional rules of passage. In one of the first cross-border art events held at the Tijuana-San Diego border called INSITE in 1994, the artist Silvia Gruner designed an installation that has had a long-lasting impact, called *The Middle of the Road/La mitad del camino*.⁸ In the Tijuana neighborhood called Colonial Libertad, the artist proceeded to hang on the very border wall (as it existed at the time, i.e. built from metal sheets repatriated from the Iraq war by the US army) a series of small statues that represented replicas of the Aztec goddess Tlazōlteōtl, who traditionally protects separation, another essential border of human existences. She meant to send a comforting sign to the people who went through this place, “in the middle” of their migration journeys, where regeneration was possible for them. The success of the work outdid her plans when border patrol officers crossed the fence illegally to rob some of those statuettes.

One can link this work to the project developed in 2002-2003 by the net artist Heath Bunting called *border.Xing* which consisted in making apparent the possibility of subversion of passage through the documentation of “walks that traverse national boundaries, without interruption from customs, immigration, or border police”.⁹ The project was carried out in Europe, in parallel to the possibility of easy border crossings under the Schengen regime, to underline the fragility and inequality of this scheme. It had a double dimension, both on the field and on the web. The concept was to document the crossings online, through a website to which access had to be granted by the artist under certain conditions, thus reversing the control process over borders. Navigating the limits of legality, the performance was undertaken under commissioning by the Modern Tate Gallery.

It is also interesting to see how art works can deal both with the enclosure produced by border demarcation and with the flows and networks that constantly cross them. If much attention is dedicated to migration issues, to the point of inventing a new genre of “migration art”, especially since the geopolitical crisis of 2015, Reena Saini Kallat’s work called *Woven Chronicles*¹⁰ plays a special role within border art. Presented in 2016 at the Museum of Modern Art as part of its *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter* exhibition, it consists in a *mapamundi* hung on the wall, composed of electric wires of diverse colors, conveying the idea of a dynamic map, that is, in her own words, as “ever changing, streaming and transferring data with the global flows of energies and people, as the courses of these travelers intersect”. Her map appears as a colorful design hanged on the wall, where countries and their borders appear submerged by the connections between them. The strength of the installation lies in the fact that the wires are functional and contribute in distributing sounds that form an aural landscape in which the gallery spectator is immersed.

2. The shapes of the frame, the role of forms

Once the complexity of the framing/unframing processes at work on and at borders has been unveiled, it is essential to shift scales and to have a closer look at the shapes that frames take. The diversity of forms that frames take indeed reveal even more intensely the dialectics of the act of framing.

The border standpoint

Even if we have seen that the roots of border art are anchored in long and complex aesthetic and political traditions, the claim to the first “artistic border in the world” (according to the online media Swissinfo.ch) was made under other latitudes, on August 17, 2006. This happened in Switzerland, concomitantly with the establishment of the Schengen area of free movement in Europe. In this case, the proposal was indeed to replace a separation fence between Switzerland and Germany with a group of sculptures, erected by a German artist, Johannes Dörflinger, in a context where the endeavor would be coordinated with the mayors of the two cities concerned, Konstanz (Germany) and Kreuzlingen (Switzerland)—but nevertheless presented as participatory. The artist, a native of the region, himself proposed this work to the two cities, thanks to a contribution of funds from the foundation that bears his name. This work, called “Grossen Arkana” consists of 22 steel sculptures, painted in stainless red, 6 meters high: they are inspired by the figures of the tarot game, thus speaking of chance and necessity at the crossing of a border which is only seemingly open. The documents produced at the time specify that cameras have taken over the barbed wire to monitor comings and goings across the line. In this case, the art of border making is extremely explicit and self-referenced.

Despite this self-proclamation, artistic work has been done at borders and espousing the shape of the borders before, and notably on walled lines, where concrete functions as a white page or a canvas, at least on one side of the political divide. Such was the case of the Berlin wall after Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Made in America*’s courageous intervention on it, dating from 1976 (Pugh; Ganivet). That surface is ambiguous since it sets the space both for artistic expression and for its media dissemination: “Functioning partly as art canvass and partly as scandalous tabloid, through the works of these artists the border fence acquires a newfound power of enunciation” (Alvarez 280).

There have been more subtle ways of handling artistically this relationship to the verticality of the borderline, notably the life-long rubbing obsession developed by the Australian artist Ian Howard. Beginning with the Berlin wall in 1974,^{[11](#)} he went on to travel to border sites (Hadrian’s Wall, Northern island urban divides) with a canvas or paper and chalk, to take the imprint of the material surface of boundaries. After the on-site retrieval, he works on the outline that appears on the medium he has chosen to work with and the end-result is a hybrid between the faithful documentation of a material element and an abstract, non-figurative drawing. He considers himself as a land artist in as much as he shares with that group the fact that all preceding negotiations which allow the art work to be carried out are considered as art already. He differs from some land artists since he then takes the site-specific product to other places, and notably to galleries and museums where he exhibits the border.

The concept of the border

In a way, Ian Howard's work can also be categorized as conceptual art, since he tries to deal with the essence of the border process and to capture it. Most conceptual artists however work with letters and semiology. Ron Terada is a Vancouver visual artist who deals with "language as a cultural readymade. His material is often made of various forms of signage, which he repositions both within the gallery and through interventions in the public sphere". In a previous essay, I commented on two of his urban projects, *Entering City of Vancouver* (2002) and *You Have Left the American Sector* (2005), where he used "large highway-type signs which seek to heighten the idea of a border and to suggest a symbolic change within the landscape".¹² *You Have Left the American Sector/Vous Êtes Sorti du Secteur Americain*, is a more provocative project. The billboard, showcasing words from the extremely famous sign that used to be displayed in front of the CheckPoint Charlie which divided Cold War Berlin, undergoes a significant spatial and temporal translation (and loses two of its original languages, Russian and German, in the transfer). The artist transports it to the border between the United States and Canada in Windsor: "Terada's statement echoed as a series of interrogative variations: Have you left the American Sector? Is it possible to do so? And what is an American Sector in an escalating climate of security and remote control?" (Rodney 389).

Initially part of a temporary sculpture exhibition in Windsor's waterfront sculpture park and, as such, funded and encouraged by a number of public stakeholders, the sculpture had to be dismantled five days after its installation by the same city employees because of the controversy it sparked. The sign had become what Lee Rodney called a "representational dilemma". The sign had not been set on the border itself, but sufficiently close to it to appear threatening to the Canada/US relationship. At the time of my fieldwork on that topic, I noted that "the sculpture's story does not end there: the work was bought by a Vancouver amateur who, at the beginning of 2011, set it in his garden in a cozy neighborhood, University Endowment Lands. His neighbors subsequently appealed to public authorities to remove what they referred to as an 'inappropriate structure'. The owner tried to defend the sculpture on the grounds that the sculpture is a significant work of art that has the power to transport with itself the uneasiness of border divides and that of US domination" (Amilhat Szary 2012, 963). The intricacies of Ron Terada's road sign illustrate the fact that the concept of the border remains both potentially global and extremely linked to local issues. When border artefacts travel, they carry with them the space-time of the places where they originate from. In that very case, I concluded that R. Terada's work was a "testimony to the fact that Canadians feel that their relation to the border is no longer based on exceptional cultural proximity to and economic integration with the US, but rather on security frames that define a new global border regime" (964).

The contrasted figures of the border

In the old maps, the territory of a country could be represented in the shape of a body, preferably a female one, symbolic of an organicist vision of the nation whose unity could not be questioned within the limits of its skin. Many representations of the border are still built on this rather deterministic representation where boundaries are conceived as natural, invisibilizing the historic processes at stake in their building. Artists have in many ways challenged the position of the passer-by, the viewer, in accepting or challenging the situation at contemporary borders. Still on that US/Mexican divide that has seen so many artists develop fantastic projects, two projects should be particularly noted.

The older one is entitled, *Arrivals and Departures/Llegadas y salidas* and was presented by Christina Fernández at the 1997 INSITE biennial. A twofold installation on both sides of the border, the Mexican section was set in a poor neighborhood of Tijuana (the same Colonia Libertad already mentioned for Silvia Gruner's work), the installation consisting in the display of an old navigation instrument used in nineteenth-century ships placed on top of a concrete basis whose shape recalls the obelisk shape of the official border monuments, a few feet from the barrier wall itself, at a time when it was not so very high. The telescope is set so as to allow the viewer to appreciate the landscape above and beyond the wall. The idea is to endow migrants with an instrument to appreciate the land that, like mariners of the past, they are about to conquer, and to empower them with the monitoring power that usually is on the side of the US Border Patrol agents. The kids in the area have very much enjoyed using it, diverting it from its supposed principle. The interest of this project is to question the American dream and possibly reverse the idea of exploration-conquest in the South/North direction.

The installation set by the Brazilian artist Valeskia Soares at the 2001 INSITE biennial is even stronger in the engagement with the body of the spectator. Ironically entitled *Picturing paradise*, it consisted in hanging mirrors on the wall, in the premises of what was then called Friendship park. This space, split by the boundary line, consisted in an open air venue where families and friends from both sides could gather and talk (in previous times, it had been possible to exchange objects, but a new thinner fence had prohibited this, and control over access to this location on the US side has reduced more and more ever since [Tocilovac]). The large-scale mirrors designed by V. Soares were not only meant to deflect the image of the other side to the viewer, question her or him on their identity and the part of otherness that lay within themselves rather than on the other side... They were also engraved with quotations from Italo Calvino's *Invisible cities*, written in reverse and requiring another mirror to be deciphered, thus also underscoring the fact that cities, and more generally human settlements, build on relations and forms of reciprocity more than on exclusion. Both of these installations work on the line, but with a multi-dimensional perception of the border, whose volumetric existence implies multi-sensorial approaches to grasp, and thus move beyond the oculo-centric regime which dominates geopolitics.

[The un-making and mending of the border](#)

Moving further in this approach of the multiple shapes of the border, we see that artists not only commit their bodies to their interacting with geopolitical divides, they also try to debunk the attitude of the people who view their work, and sometimes are also invited to participate in it. The objective of those performances is to engage the artist's body and beyond, to try to transform the border. I do not have the space to initiate a detailed discussion on participatory art at the border but would like to wrap up this border art panorama by discussing the works of two artists who believe that, according to Chicanx words, "la cultura cura": culture heals. These two works were performed by two women who live in very different countries and did not know of each other at the time of their creation: Ariane Littman, who lives and works in Israel¹³ and Susan Harbage Page¹⁴ who is based between Chapel Hill, NC and Spello, Italy. Both women are visual artists and performers who place the border and its multiple dimensions at the core of their very rich creative trajectories.

It is therefore interesting that two of their performances should take such similar forms, that is Littman's *Sewing the wounded land* (2009-2013) and Harbage Page's *Sewn performance* (2014). The latter is a much simpler setting in which the artist proceeds to mend

a map: the thread that crosses the paper, as the needle goes up and down, usually brings together pieces of textile but, in this case, it takes the shape of a dotted line which represents divide. Littman's work is multilayered, since she began quite early in her artistic trajectory to cut into pieces the official maps that represent the partition of Jerusalem, in order to rearrange them through random pasting. She then proceeded to add a layer of plastered bandages onto the recomposed maps, as if the land were wounded and needed healing. The third step in her work was to sew a green line through her map, made of series of cross-stiches, alluding both to the surgical act of closing a wound and to the famous green armistice line which was signed between Palestinians and Israelis in 1967 but never quite respected. The resemblance between these two works is indicative of the globalization of border imaginaries on the one hand, of the universality of certain gestures such as that of stitching on the other. They contributed in helping us to understand the framing and unframing as on-going and multidimensional processes. Like many of the works that we have analyzed, they hint at one essential question that remains on hold for most artists who tackle geopolitics: what does the enormous diversity of shapes that contemporary borders embody tell us of the polity that they are supposed to materialize? Who is supposed to be concerned by those lines and the sovereignty that they embed? What criteria determine who is in or who is out?

Conclusions, on borders and citizenship: who is in and who is out?

Borders are essential places to discuss what we call inclusion and exclusion, and the principles according to which human beings associate their destinies within ensembles that rely more or less intensely on exclusive territories. This relation between bordering, identity and citizenship is nevertheless too often considered as self-evident, erasing first its historical component and the performative dimension of such social constructs: "The act of cutting in the case of border might even be called an effort at performativity: to declare that the difference between here and not-here is a particular kind of thing" (Green 75). The second element that is often undermined in the dominant narrative on border making is the relationship between framing and appropriation. Everything happens as if, once a line is traced around a piece of land, all that is inside the line becomes the property of the person or institution that has traced that limit. Framing therefore appears as a very efficient method of appropriation of resources of all kinds, both human and non-human.

In his reflection on what he calls "border thinking", W. Mignolo stresses the fact that this kind of partitioning cannot be understood outside of the modern and colonial context in which it was set. He thus quotes one of the famous reflections on the rights to own the land in the recently discovered Americas collected in a famous book called *Relectio de Indis* (de Vitoria) and concludes: "Thus, it was no longer the question of thinking of men or human beings (*homines*) but of thinking of different people within a new structure of power and rights: the right to possess, the right to dispossess, the right to govern those outside the Christian realm" (Mignolo 2021). These debates on land ownership were interestingly combined with the famous discussion on the humanity of the newly "discovered" Amerindians (*versus* their consideration as commodities, within the scheme of slavery).

Thinking from the borders implies never to forget the violence of framing operations within societies and the norms that these convey, notably the inferiority of "them" vs "us": "Border thinking or theorizing emerged from and as a response to the violence (frontiers) of

imperial/territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity (and globalization) of salvation that continues to be implemented on the assumption of the inferiority or devilish intentions of the Other and, therefore, continues to justify oppression and exploitation as well as eradication of the difference.”, say W. Mignolo and M. Tlostanova (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, 206). In a more Marxist perspective, S. Mezzadra and B. Neilson address the border and the framing/unframing processes that it embeds as a tool of radical deconstruction of social analysis: “Taking the border not only as a research ‘object’ but also as an ‘epistemic’ angle (this is basically what we mean by ‘border as method’) provides productive insights on the tensions and conflicts that blur the line between inclusion and exclusion, as well as on the profoundly changing code of social inclusion in the present” (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013, X). Their analysis then focuses on the fact that the capitalist system works on the basis of the exclusion of some human beings from access to citizenship, revealing how illegalized migration is an effective means of flexibilizing the work market.

Going further, the renewed postcolonial epistemologies stress the fact that the border is an essential place to understand how the dualism between inclusion and exclusion has lost momentum. Indeed, while international limits have always been presented as “the frame from which it is possible to think ‘inclusion’. [...] Today, silenced and marginalized voices are bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than waiting to be included” (Mignolo 2000, 736). In his sense, inclusion cannot only be a reformative project, as he writes that: “The alternative to separatism is border thinking, the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspectives of people in subaltern positions. Border thinking then becomes a ‘tool’ of the project of critical cosmopolitanism” (736-737). In their 2006 paper, W. Mignolo and M. Tlostanova then conclude: “Border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside; and as such, it is always a decolonial project”.

These thinkers have considerably renewed our perspectives on what framing and unframing means and invite us to consider the frame not only from the inside, as it traditionally stands, but from the outside. The border artists also invite us to stand on the frame, however diverse its shapes might be. Some even invite us to communalize the border, i.e. to consider the borderscape (Brambilla 2014) as a common good. This is what Pierre Delavie expresses in his very powerful installation called *Le Radeau de Lampeduse (The Lampedusa Raft)*,¹⁵ a play on words with the title of the famous *Radeau de La Méduse (The Raft of the Medusa)* painting of a ship wreckage in 1818-1819 and the name of the Lampedusa island which is the setting for so many contemporary migration dramas (Mazzara 2019). He did not just transfer the now sadly iconic media image of a small inflatable boat capsizing, onto a canvas hung in 2017 on the bank of the river Seine, in the historical center of Paris. In the background of the canvas, he also replaced the blue waters of the Mediterranean by the grey chalk stone that is so characteristic of the Paris architecture, and then he also added some characters to the drowning people, clothed like Parisians and looking European, to insist on the fact that “they are us and we are them”. This does not, by all means, relativize context and place, but it stresses the fact that all framing operations have an impact beyond their apparently delimited perimeter. Our increasingly global imaginary of borders should not refrain from thinking of their ever more human impact.

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Notes

¹ Scalarity refers to the characteristics of scale, a notion that can be understood as "the level of geographical resolution at which a given phenomenon is thought of, acted on or studied" (Agnew 1997, 100) and which plays a very important role in the processes of border making, bordering and debordering: "While borders attempt to shape space along state-centred scales of discourse and practice, the socio-spatial context providing the conditions for borders' emergence, existence, and transformation is both situated and place-specific, and it extends across national, transnational, regional, and global scales" (Laine 475-476).

² Arbitration of July 31st, 1989; RGDIIP 1990, p. 253

³ <https://www.antiatlas.net/news/> (accessed 7 November 2022).

⁴ <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/battir-4/> (accessed 7 November 2022).

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