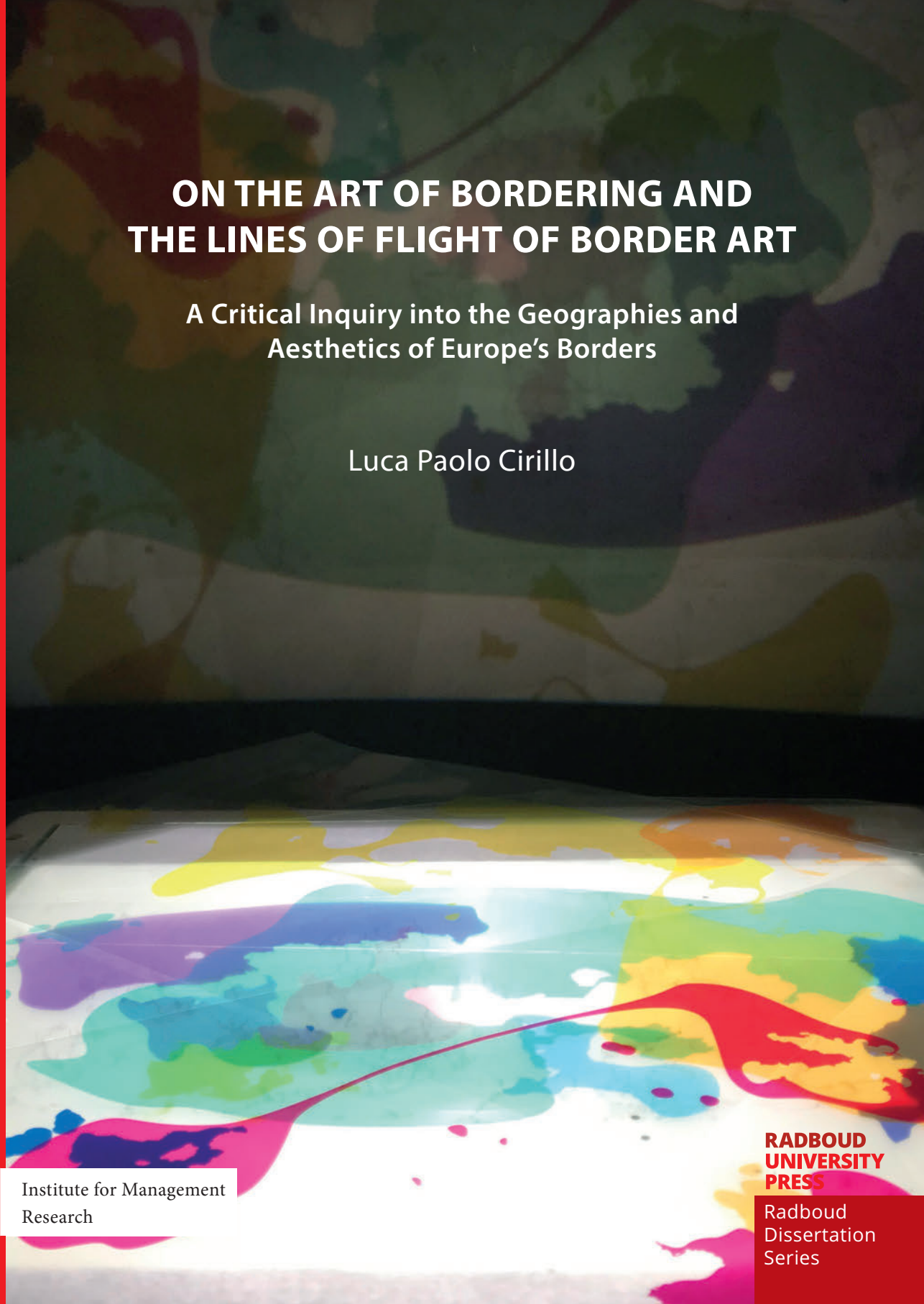




ON THE ART OF BORDERING AND THE LINES OF FLIGHT OF BORDER ART

A Critical Inquiry into the Geographies and
Aesthetics of Europe's Borders

Luca Paolo Cirillo

Institute for Management
Research

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of Europe's Borders**

Luca Paolo Cirillo

This research was conducted under a joint agreement between the University of Naples L'Orientale (Department of Humanities and Social Sciences) and Radboud University (Department of Geography, Spatial Planning and Environment), and was funded by both institutions.

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Thursday, June 4, 2026
at 2.30 pm

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SUMMARY

This thesis explores the art of bordering and the lines of flight of border art as a critical inquiry into the aesthetics of Europe's borders. It starts from a simple yet demanding assumption: borders are not fixed entities but ongoing processes. They are not things, but doings. Rather than lines on a map or walls in space, borders are to be considered through what van Houtum and van Naerssen defined as "bordering processes" — dynamic, relational, and deeply embedded in everyday practices, imaginaries, and power structures.

Building on critical border studies, the thesis conceptualises the border as a verb, a method, a spectacle, and a *dispositif*. As a verb, the border shifts from a static object to a mutable and negotiated process of differentiation, where bordering, ordering, and othering practices operate simultaneously. As a method, it becomes an epistemic viewpoint through which contemporary society can be read, dissected, and challenged. As a spectacle, it reveals its aesthetic and performative dimensions, exposing how borders are staged, narrated, and made visible. Finally, as a *dispositif*, the border is understood as a mobile assemblage of discourses, institutions, and practices, traversed by tensions and, crucially, by possibilities of escape — what Deleuze calls "lines of flight".

From this perspective, the thesis moves away from an exclusive focus on state power and territorial enclosure, redirecting attention toward people, subjectivities, and acts of trespassing. Borders do nothing; people do. They are produced, experienced, and contested through collective perceptions, desires, and imaginations. It is precisely within this aesthetic and experiential dimension that the research finds the locus of its core.

In this sense, the thesis engages with border art as both an object of analysis and a methodological apparatus. Border art is approached as a confrontational, processual, and extra-disciplinary practice that operates at the intersection of art and politics. Emerging from the US–Mexico borderlands and later becoming a global phenomenon, border art is understood here as a "space of critical imagination and creative resistance". It does not simply represent borders; it interrogates, disrupts, and redesigns them, offering alternative narratives and sensibilities.

The European context provides the empirical and conceptual ground for the investigation. Despite narratives of openness and integration, contemporary Europe is characterised by a proliferation of borders and increasingly discriminative

bordering practices. These include visa regimes, externalisation policies, and forms of necropolitical governance that normalise death and exclusion, particularly along specific migration routes. This “discriminative borderism” operates both externally and internally, producing not only exclusion but also fear, self-repression, and a sense of border complacency.

Against this backdrop, the thesis asks: what can border art reveal about contemporary Europe? What imaginaries does it mobilise, and what forms of dissent does it enable? To address these questions, the research adopts a naturalistic and interdisciplinary approach, combining qualitative methods with art-based and visual methodologies. It deliberately moves across and beyond disciplinary boundaries, insisting on a dialogue between art and science, practices and theories.

The empirical core of the thesis is developed through two case studies. The first investigates border art practices in post-1989 Europe, tracing their emergence and evolution in a context marked by both the symbolic fall of borders and their simultaneous resurgence. Rather than offering a linear or exhaustive account, this analysis unfolds as a disnarrative journey through artworks, performances, and artistic interventions that engage with Europe’s shifting borders. It highlights how border art in Europe retains a confrontational edge, exposing contradictions, amplifying marginal voices, and reimagining spatial and political orders.

The second case study moves from working on border art to working with border art. It presents a co-research project, *What I mean by Europe (wimbe)*, developed in collaboration with visual artist and cartographer Guido Picardi. This experiment investigates border art as a method, exploring its epistemological potential within academic research. Through a four-phase process — design, execution, exploration, and reflection — the project translates theoretical insights into a collective, visual, and spatial practice. In doing so, it challenges the privileging of written knowledge and opens up alternative modes of inquiry and representation.

Across both case studies, the thesis argues that border art provides access to dimensions of borders that often escape conventional analysis — affective, sensory, and speculative layers that shape how borders are experienced, imagined, and thus produced. By engaging with these dimensions, border art not only critiques existing bordering processes but also enables the articulation of new ones.

Ultimately, this research is an exercise in mediation. It operates across different fields, scales, and languages, inhabiting a subjective space of constant transformation

— what Chicanos call *nepantla*. Within this space, the thesis brings together critical geography, aesthetic theory, and artistic practice to propose a renewed understanding of borders. Not as fixed lines, but as contested and creative processes of becoming. Not only as instruments of exclusion, but also as places of possibility.

In a context where borders increasingly organise life and death, rethinking their meaning becomes a matter of urgency. This thesis suggests that such a rethinking cannot occur without engaging imagination and aesthetics. In this sense, border art is not only an object of study, but a way of knowing — and, potentially, of change.

Questa tesi esplora l'arte del confinare e le linee di fuga della *border art*: si tratta di un'indagine critica sulle estetiche dei confini d'Europa. Prende avvio da un assunto semplice ma impegnativo: i confini non sono entità fisse, ma processi in atto. Non sono cose, ma pratiche. Piuttosto che linee su una mappa o muri nello spazio, i confini vanno considerati attraverso ciò che van Houtum e van Naerssen hanno definito "processi di confinamento": dinamici, relazionali e profondamente radicati nelle pratiche quotidiane, negli immaginari e nelle strutture di potere.

Muovendosi nell'ambito dei *critical border studies*, la tesi concettualizza il confine come verbo, metodo, spettacolo e dispositivo. Come verbo, il confine si sposta da oggetto statico a mutevole processo di differenziazione, in cui pratiche di *bordering*, *ordering* e *othering* operano simultaneamente. Come metodo, esso diventa un punto di vista epistemico attraverso cui la società contemporanea può essere letta, scomposta e messa in discussione. Come spettacolo, rivela le sue dimensioni estetiche e performative, mostrando come i confini vengano messi in scena, narrati e resi visibili. Infine, come dispositivo, il confine è inteso come un assemblaggio mobile di discorsi, istituzioni e pratiche, attraversato da tensioni e, soprattutto, da possibilità di fuga — ciò che Deleuze definisce appunto "linee di fuga".

Da questa prospettiva, la tesi allontana l'attenzione dal potere statale e dalla chiusura territoriale, reindirizzando lo sguardo verso le persone, le soggettività e gli atti di attraversamento. I confini non fanno nulla; le persone sì. I confini sono prodotti, esperiti e contestati attraverso percezioni collettive, desideri e immaginazioni. È precisamente in questa dimensione estetica ed esperienziale che la ricerca esprime il proprio contributo principale.

In questo senso, la tesi si confronta con la *border art* sia come oggetto di analisi sia come apparato metodologico. La *border art* è qui intesa come una pratica confrontazionale, processuale ed extradisciplinare che opera all'intersezione tra arte e politica. Nata nelle terre di confine tra Stati Uniti e Messico e successivamente divenuta un fenomeno globale, la *border art* è considerata "uno spazio di immaginazione critica e di resistenza creativa". Non si limita a rappresentare i confini; li interroga, li sovverte e li ridisegna, offrendo narrazioni e sensibilità alternative.

Il contesto europeo costituisce il terreno empirico e concettuale dell'indagine. Nonostante le narrazioni di apertura e di integrazione, l'Europa contemporanea è caratterizzata da una proliferazione di confini e da pratiche di *bordering* sempre più discriminative. Tra queste rientrano i regimi dei visti, le politiche di esternalizzazione e le forme di governance necropolitiche che normalizzano la morte e l'esclusione, in particolare lungo specifiche rotte migratorie. Questo "confinismo discriminativo" opera sia verso l'esterno sia verso l'interno, producendo non solo esclusione ma anche paura, autorepressione e una sorta di compiacenza confinaria.

In questo contesto, la tesi si interroga: cosa può rivelare la *border art* sull'Europa contemporanea? Quali immaginari mobilita e quali forme di dissenso rende possibili? Per rispondere a queste domande, la ricerca adotta un approccio naturalistico e indisciplinato, combinando metodi qualitativi con metodologie artistiche e visive. Essa si muove deliberatamente attraverso e oltre i confini disciplinari, insistendo su un dialogo tra arte e scienza, tra pratiche e teorie.

Il nucleo empirico della tesi si articola in due casi di studio. Il primo indaga le pratiche di *border art* nell'Europa post-1989, tracciandone l'emergere e l'evoluzione in un contesto segnato sia dalla caduta simbolica dei confini che dalla loro riemersione simultanea. Piuttosto che offrire un resoconto lineare o esaustivo, questa analisi si sviluppa come un viaggio disnarrativo attraverso opere, performance e interventi artistici che si confrontano con i confini mutevoli dell'Europa. Essa mostra come la *border art* in Europa mantenga un carattere confrontazionale, mettendo in luce contraddizioni, amplificando voci marginali e reimmaginando ordini spaziali e politici.

Il secondo caso studio compie un passaggio dal lavorare sulla *border art* al lavorare con la *border art*. Presenta un progetto di co-ricerca, *What I mean by Europe (wimbe)*, sviluppato in collaborazione con l'artista visivo e cartografo Guido Picardi. Questo esperimento indaga la *border art* come metodo, esplorandone il potenziale epistemologico nella ricerca accademica. Attraverso un processo in quattro fasi

— progettazione, esecuzione, esplorazione e riflessione — il progetto traduce le intuizioni teoriche in una pratica collettiva, visiva e spaziale. Così facendo, mette in discussione il privilegio del sapere scritto e apre a modalità alternative di indagine e di rappresentazione.

Attraverso entrambi i casi studio, la tesi sostiene che la *border art* consente di accedere a dimensioni dei confini che spesso sfuggono alle analisi convenzionali — livelli affettivi, sensoriali e speculativi che plasmano il modo in cui i confini vengono esperiti, immaginati e quindi prodotti. Confrontandosi con queste dimensioni, la *border art* non solo critica i processi di *bordering* esistenti, ma rende possibile un'articolazione diversa.

In ultima istanza, questa ricerca è un esercizio di mediazione. Essa opera attraverso diversi campi, scale e linguaggi, abitando uno spazio soggettivo di trasformazione continua — ciò che i Chicanos definiscono *nepantla*. All'interno di questo spazio, la tesi mette in dialogo geografia critica, teoria estetica e pratica artistica per proporre una rinnovata comprensione dei confini. Non come linee fisse, ma come processi negoziati e creativi di divenire. Non solo come strumenti di esclusione, ma anche come luoghi di possibilità.

In un contesto in cui i confini organizzano sempre più la vita e la morte, ripensarne il significato diventa una questione urgente. Questa tesi suggerisce che tale ripensamento non possa avvenire senza coinvolgere l'immaginazione e l'estetica. In questo senso, la *border art* non è soltanto un oggetto di studio, ma un modo di conoscere — e, potenzialmente, di trasformare.

Deze thesis verkent de art of bordering en de vluchlijnen van border art als een kritisch onderzoek naar de esthetiek van Europa's grenzen. Het vertrekpunt is een even eenvoudige als veeleisende aanname: grenzen zijn geen statische entiteiten maar voortdurende processen. Ze zijn geen dingen, maar praktijken — structureel herhaalde handelingen. In plaats van lijnen op een kaart of muren in de ruimte moeten grenzen worden beschouwd als wat van Houtum en van Naerssen definieerden "borderingprocesses" — dynamische, relationele en diep ingebedde praktijken in het alledaagse, in verbeeldingen en in machtsstructuren.

Voortbouwend op de kritische grensstudies conceptualiseert de thesis de grens als een werkwoord, een methode, een spektakel en een dispositief. Als

werkwoord verschuift de grens van een statisch object naar een veranderlijk en onderhandelend proces van differentiatie, waarin bordering-, ordering- en othering-praktijken gelijktijdig opereren. Als methode wordt zij een epistemisch gezichtspunt van waaruit de hedendaagse samenleving kan worden gelezen, ontleed en uitgedaagd. Als spektakel onthult zij haar esthetische en performatieve dimensies en toont hoe grenzen worden geënceneerd, tot een narratief worden gemaakt en zichtbaar worden gemaakt. Ten slotte wordt de grens als dispositief begrepen als een heterogeen assemblage van discoursen, instituties en praktijken, waarin verschillende spanningen samenkomen, inclusief — en dat is cruciaal — mogelijkheden van ontsnapping, wat Deleuze “vluchtlijnen” noemt.

Vanuit dit perspectief verlegt de thesis de aandacht van een exclusieve focus op staatsmacht en territoriale insluiting, naar mensen, ‘subjectiviteiten’ en praktijken van grensoverschrijding. Grenzen doen niets uit zichzelf; mensen doen dat. Ze worden geproduceerd, beleefd en betwist door collectieve percepties, verlangens en verbeeldingen. Het is precies binnen deze esthetische en ervaringsdimensie dat het onderzoek zijn kernbijdrage plaatst.

In die zin richt de thesis zich op border art als object van analyse en als methodologisch apparaat. Border art wordt benaderd als een confronterende, processuele en extra-disciplinaire praktijk die opereert op het snijvlak van kunst en politiek. Ontstaan in de VS-Mexico-grensgebieden en later uitgegroeid tot een mondiaal fenomeen, wordt border art hier begrepen als “een ruimte van kritische verbeelding en creatieve weerstand”. Zij representeert niet louter grenzen; zij ondervraagt, verstoort en herontwerpt ze en biedt alternatieve narratieven en sensibilititeiten.

De Europese context vormt de empirische en conceptuele grondslag van het onderzoek. Ondanks narratieven van openheid en integratie wordt het hedendaagse Europa gekenmerkt door een proliferatie van grenzen en steeds discriminerender wordende bordering-praktijken. Hierbij horen visaregimes, externaliseringspolitiek en vormen van necro-politiek die dood en uitsluiting normaliseren, vooral langs specifieke migratieroutes. Dit “discriminative borderism” werkt zowel extern als intern en produceert niet alleen uitsluiting, maar ook angst, zelfonderdrukking en een gevoel van border complacency.

Tegen deze achtergrond stelt de thesis de vraag: wat kan border art onthullen over het hedendaagse Europa? Welke verbeeldingen mobiliseert zij en welke vormen van dissensus maakt zij mogelijk? Om deze vragen te beantwoorden hanteert het onderzoek een naturalistische en interdisciplinaire benadering die kwalitatieve

methoden combineert met kunstgebaseerde en visuele methodologieën. Het beweegt zich bewust over en voorbij disciplinaire grenzen en benadrukt een dialoog tussen kunst en wetenschap, tussen praktijken en theorieën.

De empirische kern van de thesis wordt uitgewerkt in twee casestudies. De eerste onderzoekt border art-praktijken in post-1989 Europa en traceert hun opkomst en evolutie in een context die gekenmerkt wordt door zowel de symbolische val van grenzen als hun gelijktijdige heropleving. In plaats van een lineair of uitvoerig verslag ontvouwt deze analyse zich als een tegen-narratieve reis door kunstwerken, performances en artistieke interventies die zich engageren met Europa's verschuivende grenzen. Zij toont hoe border art in Europa haar confronterende scherpte behoudt, contradicties blootlegt, marginale stemmen versterkt en ruimtelijke en politieke ordeningen herverbeeldt.

De tweede casestudy verschuift van werken óver border art naar werken mét border art. Zij presenteert het co-onderzoeksproject *What I mean by Europe* (wimbe), ontwikkeld in samenwerking met de visuele kunstenaar en cartograaf Guido Picardi. Dit experiment onderzoekt border art als methode en verkent haar epistemologisch potentieel binnen het academisch onderzoek. Via een vierfasig proces – ontwerp, uitvoering, exploratie en reflectie – vertaalt het project theoretische inzichten naar een collectieve, visuele en ruimtelijke praktijk. Daarmee daagt het de bevoorrechte positie van geschreven kennis uit en opent het alternatieve wijzen van onderzoek en representatie.

Over beide casestudies heen argumenteert het onderzoek dat border art toegang verschaft tot dimensies van grenzen die vaak ontsnappen aan conventionele analyse – affectieve, sensorische en speculatieve lagen die bepalen hoe grenzen worden ervaren, verbeeld en dus geproduceerd. Door zich met deze dimensies in te laten, bekritiseert border art niet alleen bestaande bordering-processen, maar maakt zij ook ruimte voor nieuwe.

Uiteindelijk is dit onderzoek een oefening in bemiddeling. Het opereert over verschillende velden, schalen en talen en neemt een subjectieve ruimte in van constante transformatie — wat Chicanos *nepantla* noemen. Binnen die ruimte brengt de thesis kritische geografie, esthetische theorie en artistieke praktijk samen om een vernieuwd begrip van grenzen voor te stellen. Niet als vaste lijnen, maar als betwiste en creatieve processen van worden. Niet alleen als instrumenten van uitsluiting, maar ook als plaatsen van mogelijkheid. In een context waarin grenzen in toenemende mate leven en dood, insluiting en uitsluiting organiseren, wordt

het herdenken van hun betekenis een urgente kwestie. Deze thesis suggereert dat een dergelijk herdenken niet mogelijk is zonder verbeelding en esthetiek daarin te betrekken. In die zin is border art niet slechts een object van studie, maar een manier van weten – en, potentieel, een manier van verandering.

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Figure A - *One Flew Over the Void (Bala perdida)*, by Javier Téllez, 2005, performance (partial view), inSite_05. Courtesy of INSITE Archive.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the discourse on borders is more vibrant than ever. Over the last few decades, on a global level, we have witnessed an intense “proliferation” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013) of borders and discriminative “bordering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002), a practice made of barbed wire and bricks, as well as of ideas and understandings (van Houtum, 2012). Quoting Balibar, borders have moved from the “margins of the territories” to the middle “of the political space” (2004: 109). At the time I am writing the 2016 Donald Trump’s slogan for “a big fat beautiful wall” is still a shared mantra for many political forces all over the world (van Houtum, 2021), while Fukuyama’s borderless world (1992) is a quite vintage image, like a 2-D video-game — borders are an “imprint” of contemporaneity (van Houtum, 2021). In recent years, scholars have conceptualised these phenomena through various approaches and analytical metaphors, examining the multiplication and heterogenisation of borders from diverse angles. In general, from the early 2000s onwards, “bordering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002) became among the most discussed themes on a global level, and I think the motivation is that there is an urgent need to “create” (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 312-324) a new discourse and shared understanding of such experiences.

In Europe, illustratively, contemporary border and migration policies daily reproduce a variety of deadly and self-repressive borders and “bordering/ordering/othering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002) and, most important, people are used to them: rescue squads are used save lives and count cadavers in the Mediterranean, as much as politicians are use to campaign while the same people are still floating the water: it is an absurd daily-routine. This lethal “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021) has also been referred to as “necropolitics” (Mbembe, 2003) and “thanatopolitics” (Murray, 2006), i.e., the creation and maintenance of institutions that consider the lives of certain people more valuable than others. And this “apartheid” logic (van Houtum, 2010b), like every border, is Janus-faced: while operating centrifugal “blacklisting” (Ibidem), it also instills centripetal self-repression (van Houtum, 2011), making of the EU a large gated-community (van Houtum & van Pijpers, 2006) inhabited by “dividuals” (Deleuze, 1992) in “fear” (Bauman, 2000) and “panic” (Cohen, 1973), i.e., a Europe “devouring itself” (Bueno Lacy, 2020) and “against itself” (Weller, 2021). In this context, re-imagining the border, creating a new discourse and shared understanding of it, is therefore “a matter of survival” (Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015) for both of its faces – but how to engage with such a work?

My research on borders started a long time ago. My master's thesis was a qualitative work aimed at analysing contemporary relations between walled borders and nation-states. Grounding the theory within poststructural and postmodern discussions of power and space, I have investigated border walls at the margins of nation-states as hyperbolic icons of the dissolution of sovereignty. In my framework of references, the studies of Brown (2010), Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), De Genova (2002, 2005, 2012), and van Houtum (2002, 2012, 2021), among others, have primary importance, as their works move beyond the analysis of the political character of bordering to revitalise visions of politics that are fundamentally dependent on the very act of bordering itself. Moving from this, in this manuscript I suggest considering borders as *dispositifs* (or "apparatuses"), bordering apparatuses, where the definition of *dispositif* is a "thoroughly heterogeneous set of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws and administrative measures, scientific theories and philosophic, moral and philanthropic speculations" (Foucault, 1980, p. 194). According to Deleuze's reconstruction of this Foucauldian concept, *dispositifs* are made of different kinds of "lines" and, primarily, in the following pages I propose a work on "lines of flight" (or "lines of subjectivation"), as those are strictly connected to the dimension of the self and provide every *dispositif* with permanent escapes (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 340-344). Hence, comparing this study with my master's thesis, it is possible to quickly realise how I approached this research after a fundamental perspective shift: instead of focusing on states and enclosures, my interest here is in people and trespassings. In this sense, throughout my PhD course, I have tried to redirect my attention from the extreme visibility of national border walls toward a variety of "spaces of otherwise" (Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015), escape journeys, and subjects in shadow. While some years ago I was extremely fascinated by the violent materiality of the new walled-borders growing up all over the globe, nowadays I have an increasing interest in the aesthetics dimensions of borders and bordering processes, as I am persuaded by the fact that borders become "meaningful" and "only legible" through collective "sensory perceptions" and "aesthetic sensitivity" (Rossello and Wolfe 2017: 5). In a sense, borders do nothing; people do. They are far more than walls or lines in the sand, and should therefore be conceived as sets of ideas, sensitivities, and imaginations.

Therefore, here I present a work of "border art" (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gómez Peña 1991, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1996; Berelowitz 1997, 2003, 2005; Prieto 1999, 2017; Dear & Leclerc, 2003; De Chiara, 2005; Amoore & Hall, 2010; Sheren 2011, 2015; Amilhat Szary 2012, 2016; Parizot et al., 2014; dell'Agnese & Szary, 2015; Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015; Guilló, 2016; Masala 2019, 2019b; Bacci, 2022). Together with the

“proliferation of borders” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013) and “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021), over the last few decades, on a global level, there has been a real multiplication of artworks and performances in borderlands, on the borders themselves, and about “bordering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). What I mean by border art is a “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999), processual, and subversive artistic practice focusing on the border as a site and a subject, as a place and a metaphor — a space of “critical imagination and creative resistance” (Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015). Conceptualised in the 1970s and 80s across the border between Mexico and the US, it is nowadays an artistic practice well-rooted in the sensitivities of many people and places worldwide (Sheren 2011, 2015). In recent years, many artists have explored border art practices in Europe as well, questioning its space from many points and different perspectives, making efforts to re-conceptualise its borders and impact their production: as long as borders have invaded spaces and imaginaries, lines of flight have multiplied. Although only a few studies have discussed the issue at a European level, and the literature on border art as a critical research apparatus remains fragmented and dispersed. Therefore, through a “naturalistic inquiry” (Beuving & de Vries, 2015) using a mix of traditional methodologies (literature surveys, informal talks, semi and unstructured interviews, observations) and art based and visual methodologies (visual content and aesthetic analysis, installation-space analysis, creative cartography, photography), the initial destination of my research path is contributing to achieve a more sturdy understanding about the border art practices in Europe — a journey through moments, networks, shared narratives and imaginations — a task I carried on in my first case study investigation (Chapter 5). In particular, looking at post-1989 Europe and the paradoxical proliferation of borders happening just after the symbolic fall of the *Iron Curtain*, I ask: What is there of the “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999) border art and its “political edge” (Gómez Peña cited in Berelowitz 1997: 80) in post-1989 Europe? What imaginaries does it work with? What aesthetics does it offer? And what does border art tell us about contemporary Europe? And this is because, while the art of bordering lies within the *dispositif*, border art may evade it, i.e., thanks to such an inquiry, I believe it is possible to achieve findings that are hardly obtainable through other means. By investigating border art practices, it becomes possible to grasp aesthetic, affective, and speculative dimensions of borders that often escape conventional forms of analysis. Border art provides access to imaginaries, counter-narratives, and symbolic forms of resistance that would hardly emerge through other methods, and it is precisely this capacity to exceed the *dispositif* that makes its study a valuable tool for understanding contemporary Europe.

Hence, borrowing again from Michael Foucault, in my study, resistance comes first (Deleuze, 1988). This does not mean bypassing the deadly exercises of power imposing ever-increasing discriminative “bordering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002) across the globe. Instead, it suggests that, to read/understand those exercises, we also need to consider the various narratives and forms that resist them. Furthermore, as highlighted by the antiAtlas manifesto, working with the arts allows the emergence of “transgressive contents” within research on borders and bordering processes, as the dialogue between art and science generates “cognitive gains made of mutual insights, transfers, and examples” which may enrich the analysis both in theoretical and methodological terms (Parizot et al., 2014). On the same note, Dina Krichker wrote that the “missing piece” in border studies is often “imagination,” as it shapes how borders are constructed (2019). In this sense, I explore border art narratives at a European level as a fundamental platform for the articulation of new border imaginaries, searching for narratives of “defamiliarisation” (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2013) and “interruption” (Chambers, 2017) that counter-voice the increasingly discriminatory and deadly EU-driven border regime. It is important to note that geography is the body of science to which I mostly refer, preferring its critical and radical lectures (dell’Agnese, 2005; Dematteis, 1996; Farinelli, 2003; Ferretti, 2019, 2020; Harvey, 2001; Lacoste, 1976; Lefebvre, 2018; Thrift, 2007). Thus, I look at borders from an activist, confrontational perspective; i.e., my research is oriented, as are any others (even if they are not meant to be). At the same time, my study goes beyond geography to reach the other domains, crossing theories with “un-discipline” (Parizot et al., 2014) and “indiscipline” (Rancière, 2006), i.e., a confrontational attitude towards knowledge compartmentalisation and instrumental distribution, and trying to explore the potential of a variety of qualitative visual and art-based research practices (Rose, 2001; Bignante, 2010; Hawkins, 2014 and 2021, Amilhat Szary, 2016). Also, throughout my writing, I insist on the necessity of a renewed dialogue between art and science, practice and theory. Building on this, my second case study (Chapter 6) is a border art experiment I carried out in co-research with cartographer and visual artist Guido Picardi, addressing the borders of Europe. To quote Bignante on art-based research methodologies: if Chapter 5 is a work “on” border art that translates over the Atlantic its critical research apparatus, Chapter 6 is a work “with” border art (2010) testing the apparatus: What can border art bring to academia in terms of epistemology? Through a four-phase process — design, execution, exploration, reflection — Chapter 6 investigates the borders of Europe through a co-research study located at the intersection of art, community engagement, and science. It examines border art from an epistemological perspective and discloses the benefits of adopting it as a method.

To conclude this introduction, after my PhD journey, I can say that most of my work has been mediation work: between theories and practices, global narratives and local representations, geographical approaches and calls to undiscipline. My thesis crosses different research fields and engages diverse bodies of knowledge in dialogue. The choice to work with two apparently distant case studies is also due to a methodological infrastructure that requires multiple scales, more contexts, and other points of view. Hence, my research happens in the highly subjective *nepantla* I have been able to recognise within those tensions and mediations, inhabiting “a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 276).

I have organised my dissertation into six chapters. The first three chapters discuss the theories that underpin my arguments, positioning my work within contemporary academic debates on borders (Chapter 1), border art (Chapter 2), and Europe (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 represents the threshold between the theoretical framework and the case studies, outlining the approach, methodologies, and research questions. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 engage with two case studies.

Chapter 1 — The art of bordering

In Chapter 1, I position myself within the contemporary discourse of critical border studies and explicitly articulate my perspectives on borders. I explore borders as a verb instead of a noun, thus moving the focus from a fix and linear border to mutable and daily-negotiated “bordering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002) and “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021); I investigate their epistemological potential, that is the “border as method” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013); I introduce the concepts of “border spectacle” (de Genova, 2002, 2005, 2012) and “border aesthetics” (Gómez Peña, 1991b; dell’Agnese & Szary, 2015; Rossello & Wolfe, 2017; Schimanski, 2019). Finally, I suggest looking at borders as *dispositifs* (“apparatuses”), recognising the necessity of understanding and exploring the different “lines” that constitute and escape them (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 338-348).

Chapter 2 — On border art

Chapter 2 is dedicated to border art. Working on the literature developed mostly on Mexico-US border art (Gómez Peña, 1991, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1996; Berelowitz, 1997, 2003, 2005; Prieto, 1999, 2017; Dear & Leclerc, 2003; De Chiara, 2005; Sheren, 2011, 2015; Amoores & Hall, 2010), I provide an overview of the critical discourse on the issue, individuating some of the border art’s distinctive features and characters (i.e., extra-disciplinarity, confrontational stance, processuality), and showing how

an insite and local phenomenon became “nomad” (Berelowitz, 2003), “portable” (Sheren, 2011, 2015), and global. A recent study carried out by Cristina Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro defines border art as a fundamental “space of critical imagination and creative resistance” (2015) — in Chapter 2 I explore this space, looking at border art narratives as “lines of flights” (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 340-345) bringing a surplus value to border research, not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a methodological one.

Chapter 3 — In dialogue on Europe’s bordering

Chapter 3 is about Europe and depicts the context in which my study moves and develops. In the first stance, I provide a critical geo-historical and visual reconstruction of the idea of Europe by exploring its main cultural sources, highlighting a chain of centrism and suprematism as its constant triggers (Levy, 1999; Weller, 2021). Secondly, I shot a picture of Europe today, introducing my research problems — “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021), border “necropolitics” (Mbembe, 2003) and “thanatopolitics” (Murray, 2006), visa apartheid (Krakat, 2018; van Houtum & van Uden, 2021; Surak, 2021), murky border externalisation practices (Bialasiewicz, 2012a, 2012b; Amato & Iocchi, 2019; Pacciardi & Berndtsson, 2022), “liquid fear” (Bauman, 2000) and “moral panic” (Cohen, 1973) — and defining the time and the space of my research.

Chapter 4 — Approach, design, methods and questions

Chapter 4 represents the threshold between the theoretical framework and the case studies. It is about my approach, the methodologies I use, and the design of my case studies. Also, in Chapter 4, I express and reason on my research questions and populations. In the first stance, I engage with the contemporary discussion on inter-, trans-, pluri-, and multi-disciplinarity, explaining why I decided to move toward “indiscipline” (Rancière, 2006) and “un-discipline” (Parizot et al., 2014). Secondly, by drawing on the “naturalistic inquiry” methodological infrastructure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Beuving & de Vries, 2015), I design and motivate my two case study investigations.

Chapter 5 — Border art in post-1989 Europe

In Chapter 5, I arrange an un-comprehensive, non-linear and disnarrative journey into what I define as border art in post-1989 Europe. Taking into account the development of border art in Europe over the last three decades, it contributes to filling a profound literature gap by translating over the Atlantic the discourse on border art as a critical research apparatus. What is there of the “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999) border art and its “political edge” (Gómez Peña cited in Berelowitz,

1997, p. 80) in post-1989 Europe? And what does it tell us about contemporary Europe? Going beyond a mere overview, this chapter also presents the findings of a two-month research field trip I conducted in Berlin during the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Iron Curtain (Nov - Dec 2019).

Chapter 6 — Border art as method

Chapter 6 is a co-research study at the intersection of art, community engagement, and science. It tells the conceptualisation, development, and public disclosure of a border art project named *What I mean by Europe (wimbe)*, which I carried out in long-term collaboration with visual artist and cartographer Guido Picardi. Unsettling the privileging of written language and argumentation, Chapter 6 takes the form of an installation (photos and videos of the installation are available at: guidopicardi.com/portfolio/wimbe/). Overall, it relates to the methodological objectives of my research, i.e., to seize border art from an epistemological perspective, and discloses some of the benefits of adopting border art as a method. Furthermore, it provides a visual inquiry into Europe's borders, offering a variety of insights into new representational possibilities.

CHAPTER I

THE ART OF BORDERING

The art of bordering is a demanding title. At a very first glance, it already introduces some important themes of my overall investigation. First of all, it reveals that, in my conceptualisation, borders are to be considered as processes, i.e., my study happens after denominating the border and addresses it as a verb instead of a noun, as van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002) have coined it (see also van Houtum, 2021). Second, the title of my first chapter suggests that bordering is an art, and art requires a maker and an audience alike.

Before exploring the theories and visions that underpin my arguments, I think it is important, in this introduction, to reflect on the term “border” itself and, in particular, on how it intersects with my Italian mother tongue. Since the beginning of my PhD journey, I have decided to work on “borders” as I write my thesis in English. If I were writing in Italian, my keyword would have been “confine”. I need to point this out because, notwithstanding the Italian geographical tradition translates “border” with “frontiera” and “boundary” with “confine”, I think that, in truth, in the Italian language we do not have a precise translation for the contemporary meaning “border”, i.e., I live in constant trouble. I think border meanings in Italian are still harassed by the Latin words *finis* and *limes* and the spatial-linguistic binarism they impose. Therefore, when indicating a border, in Italian we speak of “confine”, a word that comes from the Latin words *con* and *finis*, i.e., “with” an “end”, or we speak of “frontiera”, a term that instead indicates a contested space designed on the *limes* concept. In the English language, we can find the exact translation of both terms, which are “confine” and “frontier”, not “border”. For instance, the 2013 work of Mezzadra and Neilson *Border as Method* has been translated into Italian and published in 2014 with the title “Confini e frontiere” — a brilliant way out for the publisher to avoid the issue, but also a poor translation, as the authors pointed out in the introduction to the Italian version. Indeed, translating “border” into Italian as “confine” is also widely accepted, but misunderstandings are endless. Almost every time I have to translate a border into Italian, I ask myself, is it more into a confine or into a frontier? With all this said, the first time I saw the provisional title of my project (*Geography and Aesthetics of EU's borders*) translated from English into French as *Géographie et esthétique de la frontière européenne*, I felt completely misplaced. And after that, I started using “bordering processes” instead of “border” also in the provisional title of my thesis, something I already had in mind since the very beginning, and that became clearer and clearer during the research path, not only for lexical motivation. Although, going again against the Italian geographical tradition, I would translate “bordering processes” in “processi di confinamento” — and this is because, notwithstanding I think we move into a post-Westphalian global order, the meanings borders imply are still very tied to modern topography

and its political creation *par excellence*: the state. It is with the birth of the modern state in Europe (1648) that, through the *con*, we started to label “confine” a certain kind of *finis*. *Con* indicates sharing: to have a confine, there must be at least two orders recognising one another over a given space — empires have frontiers on their extreme margins, states have confines. It is in this perspective that I work on “bordering processes” and “border art” as “processi di confinamento” e “arte del confine” (and vice-versa), i.e., the state is inevitably present in my research. And, digging to the next layer, are not the most permeating concepts of the modern doctrine of the state secularised theological concepts? That is, being the secularisation of the Westphalian state mostly carried on by Christian believers (Weller, 2021), to recognise that the border, *il confine*, roots its meanings in a variety of theologies and mythologies that precede the state, in a lifelong path of symbolism I am going to uncover throughout my text partially.

Within the variety of approaches that characterise the current research in border studies, the concept of border has been examined from a range of disciplinary perspectives, resulting in heterogeneity of theories and agendas. From the early 2000s onwards, attention has gradually shifted from linear and fixed border forms toward dynamic and delocalised “bordering-ordering-othering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002; van Houtum, 2021). By denominating the border and transforming it into an active verb, the processual turn has emphasised the border as a continuous (re)production and never-ending transformation. To a large extent, this processual turn and its triadic approach has set the stage for most interesting further extensions: seeing the border as a “method” and an epistemological standing point (Mezzadra & Nielsen, 2013); deconstructing the state-empowered “spectacle” of bordering (De Genova, 2002, 2005, 2012); and asking attention for the visual and aesthetic dimension of bordering-ordering-othering processes (Larsen, 2007, dell’Agnese & Amilhat Szary, 2015; Schimanski, 2019).

Going beyond a mere literature overview, in the following pages I try to functionalise a small number of studies relevant to my understanding of borders and to the elaboration of my case studies, in a literature-review journey that is not comprehensive but selective. Overall, I suggest that bordering is an art we continuously deploy in the personal and collective spheres, a never-ending activity of differentiation pervading all fields of life. Also, I argue borders should be addressed as *dispositifs* (Foucault, 1980; Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze et al., 2006).

1.1 The border is a verb

Since the 1970s, post-structuralism and post-modernism have had a huge impact beyond scientific fields and disciplines, actually problematising fields and disciplines themselves, seen as division lines compartmentalising knowledge through colonial boxes and hegemonic mind-sets, a discussion that, in line with Miguel Mellino, I think it is still “urgent” and “under-addressed”¹. Speaking of geography, authors such as Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and Edward Said, among others, were not geographers. Yet, their writings opened new frameworks for geographical approaches, most of which are still in exploration. In line with this, in the last decades, many efforts have been made to make geography a field of knowledge addressing mutations, movements, and processual changes — the so-called “mobility turn” or “new mobilities paradigm” being the trigger of this process since the early 2000s (see Sheller & Urry, 2006). As I already said, at the moment of writing, this discussion is very actual and ongoing. For instance, in September 2021, I participated in the XXXIII Congress of Italian Geographers. The theme was “Moving Geographies”: deconstruction and exploration of power through language and discourse analysis, critique of structural binarism (us and them, East and West, North and South, developed and undeveloped, democratic and totalitarian, center and periphery), attention to address space instead of time, critic to the so-called view-from-nowhere, attitude to question and explore representations — all these post-structural and post-modern heritages were still on the table.

As I said in the introduction, critical geography is the body of literature I mostly refer to, but I try to navigate the box, feeling free to leave it and come back whenever I need to. Actually, my interest is the transformation of a field that is slowly moving from geography to “geographing” (Ó Tuathail, 1996) and from *geografia* to *geo-(gra)fare* (dell’Agnese, 2015), as this renovated dynamism produced fundamental changes in border studies, i.e., the migration of the border concept beyond the merely visible state-border-lines, toward a more complex scheme of b/ordering-othering processes and dynamics (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). Nowadays, this movement is considered a fundamental step in approaching border studies – in this perspective, which is also mine, borders are “ongoing, mutable, non-linear, and daily-negotiated” processes (Ibidem).

¹. Miguel Mellino at the seminar “Migranti, spazi urbani e mutamento sociale”, organised in Naples by the Mobility and International Migration Studies Centre of the University of Naples L’Orientale on October 15th 2021.

1.1.1 From borders to bordering processes

The turning point in the conceptualisation of borders as verbs was a 2002 article by Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, which has since become a cult classic and a must-read for border theorists and critical thinkers. The authors' key insight in this contribution is synthesised in three simple letters, -ing, suffixed after the word border: *border-ing* (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002, p. 126). The necessity of italic or parentheses [i.e. *border(ing)*] vanished in a few years: "Stressing the dynamic and multilayered construction process of borders" (van Houtum, 2021, p. 36), this approach is nowadays dominant among border scholars and social scientists at large (Brambilla, 2021; Paasi, 2021). Before going further, it is already clear one thing: a verb requires a subject.

Moving from a noun to a verb, i.e. denominalising the term "border" into an active -ing form, not only means to make the border a processual happening in never-ending transformation, but also, from the perspective suggested by van Houtum and van Naerssen, the process of bordering entails the "co-shaping" and "co-demarcating" of the naturalised social order (ordering) and its non-naturalised strangers (othering). Therefore, in their vision, "Bordering processes do not begin or stop at demarcation lines in space. Borders do not represent a fixed point in space or time, rather they symbolise a social practice of spatial differentiation. Semantically, the word 'borders' unjustly assumes that places are fixed in space and time, and should rather be understood in terms of bordering, as an ongoing and strategic effort to make a difference in space among the movements of people, money, and products. In democratic societies borders are not 'made from above', rather they represent an implicit, and often taken for granted, agreement among the majority of people" (2002: 126).

As the authors pointed out, the triadic bordering-ordering-othering should be understood as social practices that symbolise spatial differentiation. These processes work simultaneously, as noted, since they are contextual happenings, and I think they echo the three basic meanings of the Schmittian *nomos*, i.e., appropriation, distribution, and production (Schmitt, 2006). With bordering processes is meant the concrete geopolitical and territorial differentiation driven by diverse actors (laws, barriers, visas, biometric scans, border patrol, maps, etc.) (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). Bordering processes imply i) ordering processes, that is, the social construction of the We-community and its naturalised order; ii) and othering processes, that is, the chronopolitical, geopolitical, biopolitical, and/or cartopolitical antagonisation of Others, the Them (Ibidem).

A fundamental assumption underpins this conceptualisation: walls, lines, and other fixed, eternal representations are “misleading” designs when thinking about borders (van Houtum, 2021, p. 35). And they are misleading because i) also in the case of physical border-barriers, displayed and told as though as iron and stones, borders are mostly made of mobile hyper-technological fencing and built on see-through architecture models, as highlighted also by Brown (2010) and Weizman (2007); ii) most of the filtering actions attributed to the border, are instead implemented by visa policies and other kind of “paper walls”, i.e. “non-spectacular” pre-border and post-border processes producing people *sans papiers* and scattering borderscapes and waiting-zones at margins as well as in the core of rich nation-states territories and their communities (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020; van Houtum & van Uden, 2021).

Going further — and this is as easy as mind-blowing! —, van Houtum and van Naerssen’s conceptualisation of borders helps recover a fundamental aspect for the analysis of such phenomena: borders are made by people, i.e., without people enforcing and trying to cross them, “they would be only physical impediment for linear movement [...] In a way, it is the amalgam of people living close to the border barriers, the borderlanders as well as the people crossing it, the business people, commuters, tourists, and migrants who together construct and shape the significance and interpretation of the border” (van Houtum, 2021, p. 35). In other words, according to the authors, most of the time border theorists under-value or take for granted a fundamental constitutive layer of borders and bordering processes: people. Borders are indeed much more than walls and lines in sands and, therefore, they should be addressed as sets of ideas, sensitivities, and imaginations, across time and space, which we all produce and reproduce every day and everywhere — they are “a practice, a relation, an imagination, and a desire” (van Houtum, 2021, p. 41). As I already said, borders do nothing; people do. This aspect is a fundamental trait of my understanding of borders, a feature I will functionalise throughout the following pages.

1.1.2 From bordering processes to discriminative borderism

Almost 20 years after the inception of the processual shift in *Border Studies*, in 2021, the TEGS (Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie) published a special issue revisiting the 2002 van Houtum and van Naerssen article to encourage further developments of the bordering-ordering-othering triadic frame.

In the two decades in between, on a global scale, bordering has been a priority for worldwide politicians and governments, the displays of walls and fortresses

have multiplied, and migration issues, like never before in history, are strictly tied to matters of international security and terrorism. As I already said, a widespread “discriminative borderism” is nowadays an “imprint” of contemporaneity (van Houtum, 2021). In this sense, the 2002 article was issued just after 9/11, but, in linear time, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the openness, “creative freedom, anarchy, and techno” it brought, were just a few steps away². What I mean is that, in 2002, the political and socio-cultural atmosphere in Europe was probably still riding the waves of the fall of the Iron Curtain, when a strong (re)bordering process was spreading globally and needed to be framed as a process. Nowadays, the picture is completely different: visions of a borderless world are very residual, and I think they are generally perceived as highly utopian/dystopian depending on the interlocutor. In a way, the wide-spread “discriminative borderism” conceptualised by van Houtum (2021) I think it is daily bread for my generation, i.e., a global taxonomy of human beings based on a “blacklisting” logic (van Houtum, 2010b) allowing a variety of national and international institutions to stop, beat, detain, and violently push back certain people simply because they moved from the wrong countries (in the case of the EU, roughly of the planet is blacklisted³) and do not have enough money to buy a visa in advance.

In recent years, all over the world, we have seen many thousands of people on the move lose their lives. Still, at the moment, national governments and international conglomerates seem to enjoy widespread immunity on the issue: nobody is neither responsible nor accountable. And, indeed, I am not the one responsible, are you? The legacy of immunity reproduces at both the government scale and among ordinary people. As highlighted by Bueno Lacy and van Houtum (2020), dissecting the EU’s border regimes into “non-spectacular” pre-border and post-border processes is also meant to immunise the variety of ethical concerns related to human dignity, i.e., to repress the “foundational ethos of the EU” and build on “ever less porous, inhumane and deadlier borders” (Ibidem).

The upcoming challenge is therefore trying to confront “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021) and to look beyond the “politics of fear” characterising our times (Brambilla, 2021). In this endeavor, humanising the border not only means finding those responsible of the severe consequences of “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021) in terms of death and human rights violations, but also, being a matter of people, it also provides this “apparatus” with permanent “lines of flights”,

² I refer to an exhibit I have visited in Berlin in Nov 2019: “Nineties Berlin: the fall of the wall, creative freedom, anarchy and techno”

³ See van Houtum 2010b

i.e., the possibility to evade it and imagine a different one (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 340-345). Finally, by highlighting the fact that borders are continuously made and disrupted, built and torn down, in an ever-going, non-linear and mutable process, the work of van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002) helps escape the discursive trap and simplifications of linear and invincible border-walls, moving the focus from imaginative eternal and fixed forms toward bottom-up and daily-negotiated bordering practices.

1.2 The border is a method

Another fundamental set of literature backing my arguments concerns borders' epistemological potential (Said, 1978; Anzaldúa, 1987; Mignolo, 2000, 2011; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; de Sousa Santos, 2014) — as Mezzadra and Neilson pointed out, the border is a “method” (2014). Looking at the contemporary “proliferation of borders”, Mezzadra and Neilson insist that “the border has inscribed itself at the center of contemporary experience” as nowadays “we are confronted not only with a multiplication of different types of borders but also with the reemergence of the deep heterogeneity of the semantic field of the border” which, going beyond modern simplification which has reduced the border to a line, help rediscovering its “complex symbolic and material implications” (2013: vii). And, in framing such phenomena, I think they add some disruptive perspectives, which I further elaborate on here.

1.2.1 A epistemic viewpoint

Quoting Mezzadra and Neilson, the border is not “a mere object of analysis, even as we recognize the necessity to specify and analyze the empirical characteristics that pertain at any border or point along it. Rather, [...] the border is for us *a method*. By this, we mean not that the border provides an abstract methodology that can be detached from its material contexts and applied generally across any number of empirical situations. We understand method to emerge precisely from the material circumstances at hand, which, in the case of borders, are ones of tension and conflict, partition and connection, traversing and barricading, life and death. Border as method thus entails not only an epistemic viewpoint from which a whole series of strategic concepts as well as their relations can be recast. It also requires a research process that continually accounts for and reacts to the multifarious battles and negotiations, not least those concerning race, that constitute the border both as an institution and a set of social relationships” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2008).

According to Mezzadra and Neilson (2008, 2013), therefore, the border is more than a research object or a semantic field. As they suggest, the contemporary proliferation and heterogenisation of borders and bordering practices make the border a thorough epistemic lens for observing and intervening in the functioning of contemporaneity. Also, they remark that borders are increasingly “essential to cognitive processes, because they allow both the establishment of taxonomies and conceptual hierarchies that structure the movement of thought” and, in this sense, they can even “describe a general — perhaps one could even say a universal — dimension of human thought” (2013: 16-17).

Looking at these perspectives for the sake of my argument, first of all, I realised how my curiosity toward borders and bordering processes was also driven by the fact that, as well as in my perspective, they are epistemic viewpoints to look at contemporaneity, i.e., a wide spectrum for the analysis and the understanding of a large variety of issues traversing contemporary societies (going beyond disciplinary divisions). As I already said, I believe nowadays borders are an “imprint” of contemporaneity (van Houtum, 2021). Therefore, I am also persuaded that looking through borders is a highly fertile research activity, enabling (and forcing) the inquirer to peer into a wide range of topics. Moreover, by highlighting the necessity to investigate and commit with border struggles critically, the work of Mezzadra and Neilson furtherly guided my research to look at the border as a ever-changing set of social practices and human relations, helping moving the focus toward daily practices of “differential inclusion” (2013, pp. 131-166) and the relative struggles resisting and contesting to those discriminative processes.

1.2.2 Filtering, benching and translating

Mezzadra and Neilson insist that the contemporary “proliferation of borders” plays fundamental functions in the reshaping of the capitalist market system, toward an articulation of the global space that is functional to capital hegemony (2013). As labour is the only good inseparable from humans, from their perspective, borders have a crucial role in the configuration of labour-power markets (and vice versa), suggesting that nowadays bordering is primarily the art of filtering people in accordance with the needs of contemporary capitalism.

In essence, *Border as Method* (2013) encourages us to see borders as active tools that structure the world in ways that benefit certain groups while marginalising others. Mezzadra and Neilson argue that capitalist delocalisation requires a labour space that goes beyond the North/South, centre/periphery, and three-worlds models, i.e., the pillars on which political economists built the space of the International

Division of Labour (2013). These needs create overlaps between apparently distant realities, as well as new methods to modulate these (un)foreseen connections — a “*fabrica mundi*” which is increasingly open to the flow of capital and goods but increasingly closed to the movement of people (2013, p. 27). In this sense, they introduced the concept of “differential inclusion” (2013, pp. 131-166) to highlight that contemporary borders do not exclude; rather, they process, regulate, and exploit cross-border mobilities by operating through highly differentiated filtering actions. On the same note, Steffen Mau has also argued that borders in the era of globalisation are not disappearing but rather are being reconfigured as “sorting machines” that selectively control movement and belonging, creating a global hierarchy of mobility (2022).

The idea of intrinsic relations between labour and space (De Genova 2010, 2012) is a shared framework for Mezzadra and Neilson. According to De Genova, labour is a fundamental dimension connecting “bare life” (Agamben, 1998) and institutional powers, and space is the terrain on which they dispute through mobility quests and border enforcement practices (2012). Building on Marxist perspectives, being “the veritable source of all value, [...] labor-power is the premier commodity in the global circuitry of capitalist exchange” and, therefore, it is fundamental to read the contemporary proliferation of borders as a capitalistic attempt to redesign global space in accordance “the radical chain of migrant labour”, in which the exploitation is not exception but the rule (De Genova, 2012, p. 143).

More than blocking, therefore, contemporary borders filter and differentiate according to purely economic features – they actively contribute to the production of value, allowing the extraction of surplus-value and the maintenance of labour hierarchies and economic wealth. As Mezzadra and Neilson wrote: “In the many instances of this proliferation of borders that we analyze in our research, ranging from Africa to China’s internal borders, from the ‘external frontiers’ of the EU to the US-Mexican border, from Australia’s ‘Pacific solution’ to the Bengali borderland, we trace differential regimes of filtering and stratification that function as means of stratification and control of migrant labor. With this mobility and proliferation of borders, the divisions and hierarchies that are a necessary feature of the organisation of labour under capitalism acquire an unprecedented intensity and diffusion” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2008).

These perspectives help rethinking the temporal dimension of bordering, and this exercise is useful for critically addressing the presumed linearity of migration routes, creating space to investigate interruption, discontinuity, and waiting as common

experiences among voyagers. As they explain, the contemporary “proliferation of borders” creates worldwide-scattered “decompression chambers” (149), i.e. waiting zones (like migrant reception centres) in which people workers are benched before being integrated into the labour market (see “benching” in 2007’s Xiang Biao).

Finally, the last fundamental inheritance of *Border as Method* is the necessity to investigate struggles, counter-narratives, and border-crossings; i.e. to rediscover the fundamental character of borders as a place of “translation” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, pp. 270-276). The same as van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002), Mezzadra and Neilson also insist that borders are not made from above; they are the result of daily interactions, negotiations, and struggles – it is the agency of people who enforce and challenge borders every day that gives them their meanings. As I already said, these perspectives further guided my research in setting the focus and committing to the variety of practices and discourses that resist and contest contemporary discriminative bordering processes. After all, as De Genova pointed out, drawing on Marxist stances, I am also persuaded that scientists need to experiment with the “dire nexus between struggle and science, between combat and critique” (2012, p. 131).

1.3 The border is a spectacle

According to the Bible and its billions followers, the history of humankind started with Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden: this means that, at the very beginning of the saga, people were sent back beyond the line, to “the dust of the ground” they were made from — the initial step of humankind coinciding with a highly symbolic forced-return cross-border operation. Born European and not American, carrying an Italian passport and not a Dutch one, named Luca and not Mario, introduced to the community by means of a blue birth ribbon and not a pink one: roughly, I think we move our lives being daily harassed, at stake, by a system of symbolic enclosures and overtures modulated by different forms of power.

Indeed, borders and symbolism share a lifelong path (see Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988; Lewis & Wigen, 1997). Notwithstanding, it is a common perception that nowadays the discourse on borders is more vibrant than ever. Thus the symbols they convey are more appealing to power and permeant to people. In line with this, over the last decades, many studies have focused on a variety of bordering dimensions which are strictly connected to the symbolic function borders play and display (Nevins, 2002; Davis, 2009; Brown, 2010; Szary, 2012; Bueno Lacy, 2020). The idea

of a “border spectacle” (De Genova, 2002, 2005, 2012, 2013; Cuttitta, 2012; Mazzara, 2019; Bueno Lacy & van Houtum, 2024) has gained increasing attention in the variety of knowledge bodies it encompasses, shedding light on the multifaceted interplays between border enforcement, identity construction, and media and art representation.

After recognising borders as a verb (1.1) and methods (1.2), in the current subchapter, I argue that they are symbolic stages and performative spectacles which are foundational to power, their art of playing and displaying being priceless for emperors, kings, institutions, and whoever is in charge, as well as to resistance narratives and expressions of dissent.

1.3.1 “A big fat beautiful wall”

As I already said in the introduction to this book, nowadays borders have moved from the “margins of the territories” to the “center of the political space” (Balibar, 2004, p. 109): a borderless contemporaneity is a quite vintage utopia, while the 2016 Donald Trump’s slogan for “a big fat beautiful wall” is still a shared mantra for many political forces all over the world (see van Houtum, 2021). In recent years, border walls have multiplied worldwide (Brown, 2010; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), together with the enforcement of less visible but more lethal apartheid-like visa policies in the majority of the wealthier countries of the world (Kratat, 2018; Surak, 2021; van Houtum & van Uden, 2021; Cirillo & Piretti, 2024); the discourse on migration is increasingly discriminative and xenophobic (Cohen, 1973; Bauman, 2000; van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2019).

As Carl Schmitt explains in his *Political Theology* (1922), measuring the land and keeping the border are symbolic acts through which the *rex* removes the land from chaos and makes it correspond to the cosmos. In this sense, walls show clear certainties to whoever wants or needs them: borrowing from Martin Heidegger, Brown wrote that they produce a “reassuring” image of the world (Brown 2010, citing Heidegger 1952: 154). Hence, according to Brown, the main duty of the US-Mexico *big fat beautiful* border wall is symbolic, being it mostly meant to perform power like linear, highly visible (even from the airspace), and tough as stone (ibidem). In her work, she questions the assumed insurmountability of border walls by highlighting their hierarchical porosity, as “we confront not only barricades, but passageways through them segregating high-end business traffic, ordinary travellers, and aspiring entrants deemed suspect by virtue of origin or appearance” (Brown, 2010, p. 20). Moreover, going further, by standing on their proven incapability in complying with their containment expectations, she finds that the

main duty of border walls is to display power, with demonstrative and symbolic effects that exceeded the letter of the material ones: “Officially aimed at protecting putatively free, open, lawful, and secular societies from trespass, exploitation, or attack, the walls are built of suspended law and inadvertently produce a collective ethos and subjectivity that is defensive, parochial, nationalistic, and militarised. They generate an increasingly closed and policed collective identity in place of the open society they would defend. Thus, the new walls are not merely ineffective in resurrecting the eroding nation-state sovereignty to which they respond, but they contribute new forms of xenophobia and parochialism to a post-national era” (Brown, 2010, p. 40).

Drawing on these perspectives, *big fat* border walls mostly concern power management: they are “hyperbolic” performances (Brown, 2010), i.e., the less harmful way of doing nothing while showing that something *big* and *fat* has been done. In fact, border walls “function theatrically, projecting power and efficaciousness that they do not and cannot actually exercise” (Brown, 2010, p. 15), playing a “theatricalized and spectacularized performances of sovereign power at aspirational or actual national borders” (Brown, 2010, p. 26). As remarked also by Henk van Houtum (2021), nowadays we witness the rise of “narcissistic vanity walls”, “the revenge or renaissance of largely grounded borders, spectacularized, and shouted through the narrow and narrow-minded tubes of social and biased traditional media” (2021). Although, as van Houtum remarks, the focus on material border-barriers may reveal itself to be foolish, and actually may reproduce the idea that borders are walls (*quod non*) and that walls are firm and strong (*Ibidem*). Instead, it seems fundamental to focus on the interplay between power and symbolism *at the border*, i.e., to look beyond the physicality of border walls and consider their performative and aesthetic dimensions.

1.3.2 The border spectacle

Over the last decades, the concept of “border spectacle” has gained increasing attention, shedding light on multifaceted interplays between border enforcement, identity construction, and media representation, and encompassing the various ways in which borders become sites and metaphors of complex social, political, and cultural performances (De Genova, 2002, 2005, 2012, 2012b, 2013). One of the central aspects of De Genova’s “border spectacle” is the performative nature of border control. Border enforcement agencies, through their actions and technologies, create a spectacle of control that aims to display authority and deter unauthorised crossings. This spectacle often includes border checkpoints, walls, surveillance systems, guards — as remarked by De Genova, it is “a spectacle of

enforcement at ‘the’ border, whereby migrant ‘illegality’ is rendered spectacularly visible” (2013, p. 1181).

By drawing on Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1995), De Genova insists that the “border spectacle” involves the representation of identity, both individual and collective — it is a stage where individuals and communities negotiate their identities (2013, p. 1184). And, in these continuous negotiations, the media play a crucial role. According to him, the “material practices of immigration and border policing are enmeshed in a dense weave of discourse and representation, and generate a constant redundancy of still more of these languages and images” (Ibidem). In recent decades, media coverage has increasingly focused on border-related events, with images and stories of border struggles shaping public opinion and political debate. In this sense, the term “spectacle” underscores the cultural, medial, and aesthetic dimensions of borders, i.e., the fact that borders are more and more depicted, communicated, and consumed through media, art, and other forms of representation, becoming “a constellation of images and discursive formations” (Ibidem).

In one of his writings, Mike Davis focuses on the US-Mexico border wall using quite similar reasoning. By analysing the 1994 *Gatekeeper Operation*, i.e., the securing of San Diego under Bill Clinton and his administration, he affirms that the new iron triple-fence installed between San Diego and Tijuana was mostly intended to serve as a stage for a political power able to respond promptly to border priorities (2009). Davis explains that, notwithstanding tackling migration has never been a priority for US Democrats and their electorates, the new establishment needed the *Gatekeeper Operation* to take and share some pictures of toughness in a highly symbolic spot (Ibidem). On the same note, Joseph Nevins wrote that actually the 1994 *Gatekeeper Operation* started the extreme mediatization of the border, producing highly symbolic and discriminative differentiation processes and, with it, what he defined as “the rise of the illegal alien”, i.e., the criminalisation and violent exceptionalisation of people on the move (2002).

Similar processes happen at the EU’s external border. According to Paolo Cuttitta, for instance, over the last decades, the island of Lampedusa has been transformed into a “theatrical stage” where the “spectacle of the border” goes on stage every day (2012). In his 2012 contribution, the author explains how Lampedusa has been slowly transformed into a border, and how this border has become a theatrical stage, through a series of processes that have highlighted the “borderness” of the island (Ibidem). He explains how the dominant discourse on Lampedusa

operates through fluid language and narrative switches: militarising the island and transforming it into a frontier while setting up the stage for humanitarian tells and “bare life” (Agamben, 1998) photo-shoot, this constant alterna(rra)tion producing an artificial frontier taken for granted, as well as the stage for long-lasting political telenovelas (Cuttitta, 2012).

I think Lampedusa, like Calais, Ceuta, Tijuana, and many other places around the world that are highly affected by bordering processes, is nothing but a stage (or venue) hosting a variety of power spectacles and symbolic performances. As I already said, while some spectacles can serve to reinforce authority and control, others provide opportunities for resistance and subversion (see Rancière, 2004, 2007, 2010; Brambilla, 2015b; Mazzara, 2019; Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017). About this, Anne Laure Amilhat Szary has extensively written on border art and the “politics of art display” (2012), recognising and navigating the multilayered diversity of power narratives using borders as preferred stages. She insists that border artists have the capacity to disrupt the mainstream border spectacle, challenging dominant narratives and advocating for change (see also Szary 2012b and 2016). In this context, borrowing from border art is probably the fairest way to express the critical potential of the border spectacle concept, i.e., the possibility of intervening in and altering it.

1.3.3 On border aesthetics

As highlighted in the previous subchapters, with the processual turn in border studies (Paasi, 1998; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002), the emphasis on the construction process of borders opened room for new methods and lenses, as well as other perceptions and imaginaries, to stress the multiplicity and collective fabrication of borders. The realisation that borders are permanent collective constructions unleashed the focus on their endless process of becoming and, in this sense, borders are “a constellation of images and discursive formations” (De Genova, 2013, p. 1184) in a ever-going negotiation mediated by perceptions and imaginations, forms and tells, narratives and representations, which are not detached from territory, but are the territory itself.

In this light, together with the idea of the “border spectacle” (De Genova, 2002, 2005, 2012, 2012b, 2013), over the last decades, a relevant number of studies has focused on the sensorial and aesthetic dimension of bordering processes (Larsen, 2007; dell’Agnese & Amilhat Szary, 2015; Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017; van Houtum, 2024). In particular, in the contemporary critical discourse on borders, an ever-increasing interest is emerging around the concept of “border aesthetics” (for a lexicon, see Schimanski

2019). The label was first introduced by the performance artist Guillermo Gómez Peña, who used it in 1991 to identify a specific aesthetics that expresses the conditions of the US-Mexico borderlands (dell'Agnese & Amilhat Szary, 2015; Schimanski, 2019). Since 1991, and especially in the last decade, these conceptualisations have developed into a broader concept and academic field addressing “not only the cultural production related to geopolitical borders around the world, but also the aesthetic dimension of borders of all kinds and all scales, and of the boundaries involved in all aesthetic processes” (Schimanski, 2019).

The development of the so-called border aesthetics studies has been encouraged by different factors. First and foremost, it has been growing hand-in-hand with the worldwide emergence of border art. According to Elena dell'Agnese and Anne Laure Amilhat-Szary, what we are witnessing is a “cultural turn” in border studies, which emerged as it became clear that borders were the themes of considerable cultural and artistic production worldwide, and that bordering had a fundamental aesthetic dimension (2015). On this point, Svend Erik Larsen indeed makes a point when, referring to the aesthetic dimension that bordering processes imply, he assumes that it is fundamental to “sense” the border for it to have meaning (2007). On the same note, Rossello and Wolfe wrote that actually “there is no such a thing as a non-aesthetic figuration of the border”, but they actually become meaningful and only legible through sensory perceptions and aesthetic sensitivity (2017, p. 6).

Broadly speaking, the before-mentioned cultural turn and, as well, the so-called “aesthetic turn” (Moze & Spiegel, 2020), which I will examine in-depth in Chapter 2, refer to the introduction of a variety of conceptual and methodological features introduced in border studies to integrate border perception and imagination into analysis, this way moving “beyond the modernist idea of clear-cut national territories” (dell'Agnese & Amilhat Szary, 2015, p. 5), making “visible” the “invisible” (Schimanski, 2017), recognizing struggles and multiple resistance strategies traversing borders (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), creating the space for new political and social forms (Brambilla, 2015b). In this framework, as highlighted by Johan Schimanski, contemporary art and other forms of cultural production have to be considered in light of their productive power. Beyond being illustrative processes, aesthetic representations of borders actually make the border (2019, p. 2). He builds on the idea, also suggested by van Houtum (2021, 2024), that our times are marked by a specific border aesthetic or imprint, continuously reproduced and displayed both on border walls and in micro counter-narratives, artistic interventions, and other cultural production and discursive formations (2019).

In a nutshell, the suggestion by Schimanski is to investigate borders through the lens of aesthetics, since “aesthetic analysis of the border allows us to grasp both de-and re-bordering processes” (2019, p. 2). As Jacques Rancière also argued (2004, 2010), aesthetic practices have multiple entanglements with politics: while some reproduce dominant forms of power, others offer fundamental counter-modes of sensing and perceiving that could provoke unexpected change within the border (2004, 2010). And precisely because of this that I am convinced that border studies could profit a great deal from further practical and conceptual engagement with aesthetic analysis, especially working with border art and its productive power, i.e., the capacity it has to “create difference into our ideologically fixed versions of reality” (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2013, p. 241) – a task I am aiming to fulfill in the coming chapters.

1.4 The border is a *dispositif*

At a certain point of my research, I realised that some of the pillars on which I was basing my ideas were, at the same time, antennas for my thesis construction, positioned both in the sand and on the rooftop, working to stabilise the inner structure while simultaneously reaching outward. Remodulating these thoughts and situating them within the framework of my PhD journey, I am finally able to recognise a circle of Foucauldian materials in which my overall ideas and approaches keep bouncing.

Foucault’s essay *Des espaces autres* (2011) represents the threshold through which I discovered most of the literature that now informs my theoretical framework. At the very beginning of the text, Foucault notes how the obsession with time and history, which characterised the 19th century, was slowly shifting toward space. Actually, he affirms that the contemporary era should be addressed as the space era (1984: 22). This sentence inceptioned my master’s thesis research on walled borders. Therefore, with this last subchapter, I feel like I am closing a small circle, returning to Foucault by using his *dispositif* (1980) to refine my conceptualisation of borders and bordering processes.

In a famous interview, *The confession of the flesh*, answering the question *What is a dispositif?*, Foucault replied: “What I am trying to identify with this name is, in the first place, an absolutely heterogeneous whole that implies discourses, institutions, architectural structures, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic speculations, in short: both the said and the unspoken [...] The dispositive itself is the network between

these elements". Furthermore, he insists that: "Among these elements, discursive or not, there is a kind of game, of changes of position, of modification of functions that can, too, be very different" (1980, p. 194). Therefore, saying that the border is a *dispositif*, in addition to creating a need for a study-method that somehow resembles Foucault's archaeological approach, it means recognizing "the game", "the changes of position", the suddenness of the change or, at least, it invites us to do so. As well, it means to look at borders as a "heterogeneous whole" bringing together the visible and the invisible, "the said and the unspoken" — moving toward a work on different "lines", i.e., "machines that make one see and talk" (Deleuze et al., 2006, p. 339). Deleuze uses this expression to synthesise Foucault's idea that power and knowledge operate through systems that both produce visibility and generate discourse (Ibidem). As he explains in *Foucault*, "visibility is not what is seen, but what renders something visible; discourse is not what is said, but what renders something speakable" (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 52-53). These "machines" are therefore not mechanical devices but dynamic configurations of practices, institutions, and statements that determine what can be seen, said, and ultimately known (or not) within a given historical formation (Ibidem). They do not merely describe reality but actively participate in its fabrication, making the "real" through what they render "visible" and "articulable" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 47). Thus, to think of the border as such a "machine" means to understand it as a field of production — of gazes, narratives, and regimes of truth — rather than as a mere line of separation.

1.4.1 From borders to *dispositifs* — back and forth

Before proceeding with my conceptualisation of borders as *dispositifs*, I need a brief space to deepen my understanding of this Foucauldian concept and to explain why, in my view, it is highly relevant to border studies. To comply with this task, I decided to borrow from Gilles Deleuze and let his writing on the issue guide the following pages.

According to Deleuze, the *dispositif* for Foucault, "first of all, it is a skein, a multilinear whole. It is composed of lines of different natures. The lines in the apparatus do not encircle or surround systems that are each homogenous in themselves, the object, the subject, language, etc., but follow directions, trace processes that are always out of balance, that sometimes move closer together and sometimes farther away. Each line is broken, subject to changes in direction, bifurcating and forked, and subjected to derivations. [...] Untangling the lines of an apparatus means, in each case, preparing a map, a cartography, a survey of unexplored lands — this is what he calls "field work." One has to be positioned on the lines themselves; and these

lines do not merely compose an apparatus but pass through it and carry it north to south, east to west or diagonally" (Deleuze et al., 2006, p. 338).

Lines are the basic trait of every apparatus. Deleuze distinguishes different types of lines, including, but not limited to, lines of visibility, lines of utterance, lines of force, lines of flight, lines of fracture, lines of newness, lines of sedimentation, and lines of actualisation (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 338-348). Here, I briefly explain the meanings of these line types, approaching them in two steps.

In the first stance, according to Deleuze, apparatuses are made of lines of visibility, lines of utterance, lines of force, and lines of flight. Lines of visibility impose a certain "regimen of light" (339), creating presence and shadow, the visible and the invisible, forming ever-changing shapes (as ever-changing is the *dispositif*). The lines of utterance enforce an enunciation regime creating difference: "a literary genre or a state of laws or a social movement are precisely defined by the regimes of utterances they engender" (339). Lines of visibility and lines of utterance are both defined as "curves", and curves are rectified by lines of force, which represent the dimension of power, "interior" to the *dispositif*, and "variable" with the *dispositif*. (339-340). Finally, lines of flight (or lines of subjectivation) are strictly connected to the dimension of the Self. "The Self is not knowledge or power", and therefore this type of line has to be considered like a "surplus value", there to remind us that *dispositifs* "could not be circumscribed by an enveloping line without other vectors passing above and below" (341).

Going further in this exploration, always according to Deleuze, another fundamental trait for every *dispositif* is made by lines of fracture, these dismantling the universal and making unique each one of them: "Each apparatus is therefore a multiplicity where certain processes in becoming are operative and are distinct from those operating in another apparatus" (342). Also, Deleuze tells us that every *dispositif* presents lines of newness that change its "orientation, turning away from the Eternal to apprehend the new" (344). Finally, lines of sedimentation and lines of actualisation — "We belong to these apparatuses and act in them" —, these lines representing histories and archives (lines of sedimentation), as well as their production in contemporaneity (lines of actualisation) (345).

With all this said, what does it mean to affirm that the border is a *dispositif*, or better, that borders are mostly bordering *dispositifs*? At the time of writing, and probably so when my thesis is already published, this question remains open to me.

Notwithstanding, I already have some ideas in mind. Affirming that every border is a unique and ever-changing bordering *dispositif* for sure it means that:

- a) *Borders impose regimen of light* (through lines of visibility) – I think that when Cuttitta speaks of the “theatrical stage” (2012) in Lampedusa, it is very much in this sense, as is De Genova’s notion of “border spectacle” (2013): both seek to intercept, investigate, deconstruct the regime of light and the visibility lines of a certain bordering *dispositif*.
- b) *Borders differentiate through enunciation regimes* (through lines of utterance) — The *big fat wall, Prima gli italiani*: Henk van Houtum’s definition of borders as “exclamations” (2021) I guess it works in this sense, as well as the performance art pieces of Gómez Peña’s in Spanglish and Gringoñol: borders are languages and discursive formations. On this, for instance, the recent discussion of the EU’s communication guidelines on calendar secularisation (i.e., using “Happy holidays” instead of “Happy Christmas”) has provoked vehement reactions among right-wing Catholics, a topic bouncing across TV screens across Europe.
- c) *Borders express and are expressions of power/space relations* (i.e. the lines of force) — That is, each border expresses and is an expression of formal and informal, dis-narrative and modular, highly differentiated, and always contingent forms of power.
- d) *Borders always present lines of flight* (or lines of subjectivation) – This dimension is strictly connected with people (individuals), i.e., Foucault’s research on the “technology of the self” (1992). As Deleuze pointed out, Foucault began to work on lines of flight in the latest part of his overall investigation, but, in a sense, this segment of research has the potential to provide the *dispositif* with permanent “lines of flight” (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 340-345). Not being knowledge or power, as I already said, those lines run on different levels than a hypothetical line encompassing the *dispositif* (Ibidem). This means that, in every bordering *dispositif*, we can find lines of flight that offer a surplus-value. From the perspective of my thesis, for instance, I see border art’s confrontational narratives and subversive border aesthetics as lines of flight: thought-vectors that help me move further.

Finally, this exploration of borders as *dispositif* not only helps me recognise and relocate some of my fundamental references but also informs my research methodologies, questions, and goals. First, thinking in terms of lines of fracture helps me solve my *confine/frontiera* spatial-linguistic dilemma, i.e., I call them borders, since each one is different from the other anyway. Second, if borders are *dispositifs*, Deleuze tells us that present borders already contain the traces of future borders (Deleuze et al., 2006, p. 344), and, in line with Dominik Gerst

and Hannes Krämer's 2024 study, I think this dimension is quite underestimated in contemporary research on borders and bordering processes. Therefore, the necessity is to keep working on archives (lines of sedimentation), at the same time recognising the chance to intercept and impact on lines actualisation, i.e., the lines of the near future, of the present, and of becoming.

1.4.2 From the art of bordering to border art

So far, I have been speaking of borders as i) as active verbs, introducing the processual turn in border studies and engaging with the deconstruction of the wall which, as said, is mostly made of people; ii) as methods, that is conceptualising them as epistemological vantage-points where it is easy to recognise discriminative market-driven filtering actions as well as translations practices and social and cultural struggles; iii) as spectacles, by highlighting their capacity to play and display power, producing preferred political stages, dissimulating weakness by displaying hyperbolic metaphors of toughness and linearity, navigating the cultural and aesthetic turn in border studies. Finally, by looking at borders as *dispositifs*, I suggest an all-encompassing perspective on borders at multiple levels of meaning and understanding, opening a research space that is constantly traversed by lines of flight, i.e., personal experiences, desires, and imaginations.

Overall, in Chapter 1, I have built a literature review that is functional to a work on borders that, in the first instance, is a work on people and, in the second instance, is a work on struggles, exploring personal and collective forms of dissent. In my perspective, therefore, border art narratives, which I discuss in Chapter 2, are lines of flight bringing a surplus value to border theory and border research, not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a methodological one — while the art of bordering lies within the *dispositif*, border art may evade it.

CHAPTER 2

ON BORDER ART

Chapter 2 is dedicated to border art. It investigates the so-called “cultural turn” (dell’Agnese & Szary, 2015) and “aesthetic turn” (Moze & Spiegel, 2020) in border studies, as well as the ongoing dialogue between border theorists and border artists. Starting to work on the literature developed mostly on Mexico-US border art (Gómez Peña 1991, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1996; Berelowitz 1997, 2003, 2005; Prieto 1999, 2017; Dear & Leclerc, 2003; De Chiara, 2005; Sheren 2011, 2015, Amoores & Hall 2010), in this chapter I explicit what I mean by border art, providing a reconstruction of the contemporary critical discourse on the issue, individuating some of the border art’s distinctive features and characters (i.e., extra-disciplinarity, confrontational stance, processuality), and showing how an insite and local phenomenon became “nomad” (Berelowitz, 2003), “portable” (Sheren 2011, 2015), and global. A recent study carried out by Cristina Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro defines border art as a fundamental “space of critical imagination and creative resistance” (2015) — Chapter 2 explores this space, looking at border art narratives as “lines of flights” (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 340-345) bringing a surplus value to border research, not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a methodological one.

2.1 Sensing the border

With the processual shift allowing borders to be viewed as dynamic social processes and practices of spatial differentiation (Paasi, 1998; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002), scholars in the 2010s developed new concepts and methodologies to explore the multifaceted spatialities and temporalities of contemporary borders. As I already said in the previous chapter, according to dell’Agnese and Amilhat-Szary, a “cultural turn” in border studies followed, as it became clear that borders and bordering processes were themes of considerable cultural and artistic production worldwide and that bordering had a fundamental aesthetic dimension (2015). Indeed, in recent decades, an increasing number of contributions have examined the role of aesthetics in reproducing and subverting borders (see Brambilla 2015b; Mazzara, 2019; Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017; van Houtum, 2024). In this sense, Chiara Brambilla pointed out that over the last decade, border scholars and critical thinkers have been able to unlock a series of issues concerning the study of the border, thereby liberating researchers from the territorialist trap and reaching the domain of experience and imagination (2015: 113). Francesco Moze and Samuel J. Spiegel speak of an “aesthetic turn” (2020).

Broadly speaking, the “cultural turn” (dell’Agnese and Szary 2015) and “aesthetic turn” (Moze & Spiegel, 2020) refer to the introduction of a variety of conceptual and

methodological features introduced in border study that, at least partially, refer to Foucauldian “regimen of light” and “lines of visibility” (Deleuze et al: 339). Also, Jacques Rancière’s contributions to the discussion of the relationship between aesthetics and politics are fundamental to this literature (2004, 2007, 2010). For Rancière, the “political is inherently aesthetics” (2007: 13). He refers to the “distribution of the sensible” as the anti-democratic and anti-political aesthetic regime of what is possible (to see, to feel, to sense, to think), being aesthetics “the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience” (2004: 13). In a historical moment in which the aestheticization of politics has reached unlikely levels, Rancière argues that aesthetic practices have the capacity to intervene in and dissent to the distribution of the sensible, opening up new spatialities and temporalities – although some of them may help power to reproduce, others offer modes of sensing and counter mapping which could provoke a structural crack within the border (Rancière 2004, 2010). As also Iain Chambers points out, the multiple languages of the arts are like eagles across the Iran-Pakistan border, or a coyote living in the borderlands between Mexico and the US: they are “unredeemed by their diverse linguistic and national denominations”, and, “in proposing configurations of time and space, [they] establish the places of another critical cartography” (2012: xvii).

Quoting Brambilla, “aesthetic language defends a crucial position in the articulation of the transformation of social imaginaries. They mirror, oftentimes calibrate, and sometimes also re-route the process by which borders materialise in the real world. Therefore, analysing different aesthetic productions can give us a chance to reconstruct new border imaginaries that are able to adequately respond to the challenges posed by cultural phenomena in a time of globalisation and transnational flows” (2015b: 114). Accordingly, over the last few decades, an increasing number of scholars have critically rethought borders through the lens of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. In particular, within the discourse on the aesthetics turn in contemporary Border Studies, the Border Poetics / Border Culture Research Unit has given discerning contributions to the development of this research segment. Beyond doubts, the 2017 publication *Border Aesthetics. Concept and Intersections*, edited by Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe, is a fundamental work within the field. In my opinion, the perspective they suggest can enable a comprehensive gaze at the impact of the cultural and aesthetic turns on contemporary border studies, providing the pillars for a new literature flow that addresses the aesthetic dimensions of bordering processes.

In the introduction to the 2017 volume, written by Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe, the authors provide the basic notions to approach this field:

- a) "Border aesthetics is about people who die trying to cross a border", that is, before even trying to define what is meant by "aesthetics", highlighting its relationships with the political (4).
- b) "A border that is not sensed by someone or something is not a border", that is, reconnecting to the Greek *etymon* of aesthetics (to perceive, to feel, to sense), thus recognising that borders need to be "sensed" to function (5).
- c) "There is no such a thing as a non-aesthetic figuration of the border", that is, highlighting that borders become "meaningful" and "only legible" through "sensory perceptions" and "aesthetic sensitivity" (6).
- d) "Borders and aesthetics rub against each other and change each other accordingly", that is, considering that "signifying practices of the border" are continuously negotiated by "creator and audience alike" (6).

As the authors remarked, border aesthetics is the starting point of a broad interrogation. Aesthetics, as understood by the members of the Border Poetics / Border Culture Research Unit, is the "language that articulates the subject's sensory perception of a given world" (Rossello and Wolfe 2017: 5). The work on border aesthetics is therefore a work that needs to consider two crucial aesthetic aspects of bordering processes: "visibility" and "representations" (Ibidem). Indeed, borders worldwide share a high level of visibility that goes beyond the five senses, organising difference far beyond the borderline — through (material and symbolic) visibility, borders are sensed and thus become meaningful. The other crucial aspect concerns "representations" of borders and bordering processes, i.e., "the process by which the social meaning of spaces is negotiated among individuals and groups through literary creations, visual and verbal images, and tropes (metaphors or rhetorical gestures) in other media" (15). Borrowing from Immanuel Kant, the need to engage with border aesthetics in paintings, film, music, literature, as a "space of constant production", is because artworks are considered as fundamental mediators "between the world we experience and the ideal world to which we aspire"(5). In this perspective, focusing on how borders are represented in signifying practices means recognising the fundamental role of artistic interventions in the sphere of the sensible, i.e., art's capacity to "create difference into our ideologically fixed versions of reality" (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2013, p. 241). Schimanski and Wolfe also highlighted that, not only do artworks aestheticise the border, but they also help to recover the idea of the border as an aesthetic construct, being designed itself (Ibidem). Through what they call "defamiliarisation" — likewise an "interruption" (Chambers, 2017) — artistic representations of the border, therefore, open a room for negotiating social and political imaginaries, i.e., they actively take part in the process by which people relate to real and conceptual borders, rethinking the space they live in and through which they move (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2013; Rossello & Wolfe, 2017).

Overall, as I already said, I believe the growing attention to this approach is generating a fertile niche of theories, methodologies, and research practices that I aim to explore in depth in the following pages and in my two case studies. Quoting Cristina Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro again, I believe “art can affect the border, producing unexpected change within it”, displaying a space of “otherwise” (2015: 80). According to them, border art transforms borders into symbolic and interior landscapes, thus allowing us to confront hegemonic discourses and produce a different border. Hence, questioning border art becomes a “matter of survival” (Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015, p. 93), a method for allowing and exploring the production of borders under the new “regimen of light” (Deleuze et al., 2006, p. 339).

2.2 The border and the work of art

Given the framework through which my arguments move, the aim 2.2 is to focus on border art as a conceptual and artistic practice that addresses borders as both a site and a subject, as both a place and a metaphor. In particular, this part traces the evolution of border art practices, returning to the emergence of Chicano art as a fundamental starting point. How have artists intervened in the aesthetic regime, creating presence and shadow, visibility and invisibility, at the border? Indeed, with their questions, border artists allow us to sense borders in alternative ways — they provide us with escape lines from established reality, which could act as the base for the production of another one.

The theme of borders and bordering is, of course, not new to art. However, “border art” became a recognised conceptual artistic practice during the 1980s (Prieto 1999, 2017; Berelowitz 1997, 2003). As highlighted by Antonio Prieto, the turning point of this process was the Border Art Workshop / Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF): founded in 1984 across San Diego and Tijuana, the BAW/TAF was a bi-national group of activists, journalists, and scholars who self-consciously conceived themselves as border artist and aimed at tackling the increasing tensions at the Mexican-American border (1999). Therefore, the works of artists like Guillermo Gómez Peña, Victor Ochoa, and David Avalos intentionally assumed a confrontational stance toward both the US and the Mexican governments, bringing the Chicano claims to a higher conceptual level and making border art a worldwide known approach (Ibidem).

Moving through the writings of Jo Anne Berelowitz (1997, 2003, 2005), Marina De Chiara (2005), Antonio Prieto (1999, 2017), and Ila Nicole Sheren (2011, 2015) from the late 1960s to our days, it is possible to distinguish some fundamental

moments in border art evolution. Starting from the reconstructions provided by the aforementioned scholars, I intend to discuss and integrate them with the more recent analysis of border art, and to move the focus from early manifestations addressing the US-Mexico border to contemporary works of art contesting border regimes worldwide. From purely site-specific, bi-national, iconographic, and self-deterministic works of art, so it was Chicano border art, in the following pages, I propose a research journey that gets to contemporary border art practices and research, expressing the peculiarity of such an approach and navigating a variety of stories and pieces that made it a global affair.

2.2.1 Chicano art

The roots of what is now known as border art lie in the Chicano Movement and the cultural and artistic expressions associated with it (Berelowitz 1997, 2003; Prieto 1999, 2017; Sheren 2011, 2015; De Chiara, 2005). Mostly composed of Mexican American and Mexican migrants, during the 1960s, the Chicano Movement became a fundamental platform of resistance against structural and institutionalised racism in the United States, encouraging the rejection of the assimilation logic, i.e., the process through which a minority group produces its identity to resemble the majority group (Berelowitz 1997, 2003; Prieto 1999, 2017). Indeed, from the 1960s onwards, the question of race became central to the political, social, and cultural discourse in the United States, and the border emerged as a fundamental element of that discourse, moving from the political periphery to the centre of the community's struggles and senses. It became the preferred spaces of the Movement, as well as its aesthetics: the early border art stemming from the Chicano Movement could be defined as a reaction to racism, violence at the border, the exploitation of migrant workers, and deportation practices (Ibidem).

At its core, it seems that the Chicano art of this period expresses a profound need for the community to communicate and represent itself, to get loud and visible: as long as the Anglo majority highly stereotyped Mexicans, Chicano artists started to feel the need to self-represent, to tell their stories, and to re-design their representation (Berelowitz, 2003). During this time, posters and murals in the streets were widely used as a form of open communication to raise awareness of Chicano issues and create space for community recognition. According to Jo Anne Berelowitz, the imagery on these murals relies on symbols and narratives that overstated the Mexican and pre-Hispanic American-Indian past, working intensively with iconography (2003: 145). In their battle to recreate and reimagine their community, Chicano artists included symbols of Mexican culture, intentionally exacerbating differences and acting through paradoxes (Ibidem). As said, the general idea

was to create a space for Chicano identity to develop, in a context in which the intertwining of the Chicano movement with the Black Power movement (see Mantler 2013) and the feminist movement (see García 1999) was multiple. Chicano art was bicultural and bi-nationalistic: while relying on Mexican symbols, Chicano artists included the US in their narrative, developing its poetics in accordance with this dualism (Berelowitz, 1997). Finally, Chicano art was site-specific: the border was a highly important terrain to struggle on; Chicano artistic resistance, therefore, was bound up with the site, and, somehow, it would have changed its meaning if localised elsewhere (Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015). The Centro Cultural de la Raza, founded in San Diego in 1970, has played and continues to play a fundamental role in the Chicano struggle for self-determination (centrodelaraza.com).

Overall, what matters to me here is to recognise a fundamental connection between the emergence of border art and the Chicano resistance to racism and institutionalised violence. Looking more closely, border art is also a matter of class struggle: it grew hand in hand with the migrant working class's consciousness. Many Chicano artists were themselves members of this class, or closely connected to communities of farmworkers, labourers, and low-wage migrants (Ybarra Frausto, 1989). The conditions of economic exploitation, social marginalisation, and limited access to public resources shaped both their lived experiences and their artistic production. In this sense, border art becomes a vehicle for expressing not only racial identity and cultural pride but also the struggles of workers against systemic inequality (Ibidem). As Tomás Ybarra Frausto notes, "rasquachismo codifies all Chicano cultural production, including theater, literature and plastic arts," reflecting a "view from los de abajo" that combines inventiveness with a survivalist attitude. At the base, therefore, border art is a question of race, class, and a specific border, where the physical and symbolic borders intersect with social and economic hierarchies, making the artwork both a form of cultural resistance and a critique of structural oppression.

2.2.2 Multiculturalism and hybridism

During the 1980s, the border art became a defined conceptual artistic practice (Berelowitz 1997, 2003, 2005; Prieto 1999, 2017; Sheren 2011, 2015; De Chiara, 2005). As I said in the introduction, the turning point in this process was the *Border Art Workshop / Taller de Arte Fronterizo* (BAW/TAF) (Prieto, 1999). Operating across San Diego and Tijuana, the BAW/TAF aimed to tackle the increasing tensions in the US-Mexico borderlands, at a time when the NAFTA debate and the initial planning of the separation wall were highly affecting politics in the region (Ibidem). According to Jo-Anne Berelowitz, all members of the BAW/TAF were middle-

class, had activist experience, and viewed art practice and political engagement as a seamless continuum (Berelowitz, 1997). In this sense, Antonio Prieto uses the word “confrontational” to describe the attitude of these early border artists toward explicitly addressing political, social, and cultural issues to create dissent (Prieto, 1999). As he remarks, the cultural production of the México/U.S. borderlands has been very diverse and prolific throughout history; however, the emergence of an art that deliberately addresses political issues, or even of art as a “political strategy”, is relatively recent in the region (Ibidem). According to Prieto, up to the 1970s, culture of the borderlands could be classified as basically “popular”, that is, culture usually produced and enjoyed by the working class — at the borderlands many folk traditions — basically from México — have thrived since the beginning of this century, from the *corridos* (ballads) to the popular theater forms of *carpa* (Ibidem). It was not until the early 1980s that art emerged at the borderlands that explicitly addressed border politics (Ibidem). Unlike folk artists, the new generation belongs to the middle class, has formal training, and self-consciously conceives itself as a producer of border art (Ibidem). Their art is “politically charged” and assumes a “confrontational stance” *vis-à-vis* both Mexican and U.S. government policies (Ibidem).

The BAW/TAF generation was directly influenced by the Chicano artistic production of the seventies (Berelowitz 1997, 2003; Prieto 1999, 2017). In fact, the group was mostly formed by formally-trained artists who were committed to the Chicano Movement, which was fighting institutionalised racism and denouncing police brutality and violence against Mexican-Americans and immigrants in border towns since the 1960s (Ibidem). Jo-Anne Berelowitz describes the Chicano movement as a counter-hegemonic “praxis of resistance against the mainstream Anglo culture and an affirmation of Mexican and indigenous roots”, and it is actually the base on which the BAW/TAF developed (2003: 145). Chicano artists were concerned with a variety of issues connected to identity, and so were the BAW/TAF members, although, the BAW/TAF operated after a fundamental conceptual shift, i.e., having unlocked the border as a field of becoming (Ibidem). In fact, while Chicano art is an art of self-determination, the BAW/TAF engages with ideals of multiculturalism and hybridism (Berelowitz 1997, 2003). According to Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc, this was a fundamental break from the preceding tradition: rather than focusing on the social and cultural strengthening of the Chicano identity and its Mexican roots, the BAW/TAF artists engaged in the production of hybridities, locating in the border — both site and discourse — a huge potential for transformative resistance (2003: 27).

As conceptual artists, the members of the BAW/TAF refused to represent the border as a dividing barrier. Rather, they concentrate on the border as a zone of

transformation, a “casa de cambio”, the “Temple of Instant Transformation”, a space where “everything can take place” and “anything can change into something else” (Gómez Peña, 1991). According to Gómez Peña, instead of breaking the border, the work of the BAW/TAF was aimed at exploring it and subverting its design: from a dividing line to an area of openness and intersectionality, “a space where it is possible to produce every imaginable change” (Ibidem). In this visionary context, as Marina De Chiara pointed out, interdisciplinarity was the only possible answer to the hybrid nature of the Mexico / US border: to achieve their goals, BAW/TAF artists used overlapping techniques, mutable communication strategies, and a variety of media such as performance, video, installation, book art and radio (2018: 34). In general, the idea was to focus more on the intellectual process behind a work of art than on the object's aesthetic qualities (Prieto, 1999).

Thanks to this artistic wave addressing the border, throughout the 1980s, the dividing line between San Diego and Tijuana became an open laboratory for social, cultural, and aesthetic experimentation, where the “revolutionary dream of a borderless world of mutual respect and peaceful cooperation [was] imbued with belief in the transformative power of art” (Berelowitz, 1997, p. 71). As Cristina Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro pointed out, according to the BAW/TAF model, border art is an “art of place” in the sense that producing and reproducing the border in artworks, does make the border (2014: 81). About the power of the arts in making “reality”, Iain Chambers is extremely punctual: “For we are invariably taught to consider the text, the printed page, the performance, particularly of subaltern cultural formations, as the social and cultural mirror of reality (however complicated the reflection), and hence as a relatively stable object of study and attention. Yet language as literature, as transformative poetics, as sound, is itself a reality that invests us with the imperative to reconsider and review the very terms of aesthetic and ethical sense; that is, to rethink the very conditions of “reality”. This, to propose a Deleuzian figure, is a “line of flight” that permits the escape of postcolonial art and literature from the perpetual cycle of cultural representation, repression, and resistance. It is to transform the noted Bahabian concept of a “third space” into a dynamic, unfolding vector in which the very terms of inherited understanding are exposed to a questioning they have neither foreseen nor authorized. At this point, the literary, the poetical, the artistic provide the cardinal points of a new critical compass: one that promotes a diverse navigation of a planetary, but differentiated, modernity.” (Chambers, 2012: xv).

According to the BAW/TAF model, “the artist is a social interventionist, a binational diplomat, a broker between communities and cultures, a border-crosser” (Berelowitz,

1997, p. 70). By looking at identity and culture as fields of becoming, the BAW/TAF border artist goes beyond bi-nationalism to spread visions of hybridism and multiculturalism (Ibidem). Surfing Gómez Peña's imagination, for instance, the border is a zone and, paradoxically, comes to be the only borderless one, a space with a huge political and cultural potential (1991). As the same Gómez Peña was writing, "in this utopian cartography, hybridity is the dominant culture; Spanglish, Franglé, and Gringoñol are *linguas francas*; and monoculture is a culture of resistance practiced by a stubborn or scared minority" (1996: 7). In this visions, the border is a "great and intercontinental zone, a place in which no centers remain. It's all margins, meaning there are no "others," or better said, the only true "others" are those who resist fusion, *mestizaje*, and cross-cultural dialogue" (Ibidem). Different from Chicano art, therefore, the border art of this period is delocalised, hybrid, and highly utopian (Berelowitz, 1997). Site-specificity remained a fundamental trait of many artworks and performances, but in the 1980s, symbolic and metaphorical encounters with the border became increasingly relevant (see the next sub-chapter). Indeed, for the artists of the BAW/TAF, the border was a mobile and elastic concept rather than a site-specific geopolitical demarcation; it represented "a link in the chain of mobile signifying system" (Berelowitz, 2003, p. 155) and a deterritorialized form of subjectivity (167).

From its founding in 1984 to its dissolution in 1989, the BAW/TAF staged sixteen performances-installations that proposed a polymorphous, polyglot, and hybrid border subject, creating lines of flight capable of challenging dominant diagrams of power (Berelowitz, 2003: 168). The BAW/TAF group broke up in 1989 for various reasons, among them the strong commodification of border art (Ibidem). In 1991, in response to the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art's growing interest in border art, Guillermo Gómez Peña published an article titled *Death on the Border. A Eulogy to Border Art*, arguing that: "In 1989 everyone went border. Our difficult experiment in collaboration between Anglos and Latinos was turned into an open invitation for major institutions and opportunistic artists with no track record whatsoever to jump on the Aztec high-tech express. Border art left the trenches to become a specialised exercise in grant writing and institutional self-promotion. [...] A movement that began as an attempt to dismantle Anglo-Saxon patriarchal authority ends up being appropriated, controlled, promoted and presented by Anglo-Saxon patriarchs [...] The border as metaphor has become hollow. Border aesthetics have been gentrified and border culture as a utopian model for dialogue is temporarily bankrupt [...] The border remains an infected wound on the body of the continent, its contradictions more painful than ever." (Gómez Peña 1991b).

Again, the issue of race seems fundamental. The question of border art being allegedly colonised by Anglo-Saxon patriarchs seems to exacerbate the pain of the “infected wound” that Gomez Peña, like other migrants, carries on his body. Is border art then only for people who have experienced border crossing? Not exactly. However, according to Gómez Peña, the commodification of border art, which indeed became a hallmark of the 1990s, as we will see in the next subchapter, bears multiple complications as he viewed border art as a practice of resistance against the racial discrimination perpetrated by European people since “Cristobal Culón”, “el indocumentado”, touched America with his feet in 1492 (Gómez Peña 1993 cited in De Chiara 2005: 33). Anyway, about this issue, in a written 1997 correspondence with Jo-Anne Berelowitz, he explained that he wrote the 1991 article as a “hyperbole” for “cholo chic” border art, recognising the ever-increasing interest around border struggles and resistance: “I never thought border art was dead. In that article, I was trying through the hyperbole to describe the phenomenon of border art having become cholo chic, fashionable, grantable, losing its political edge and currency, becoming institutionalized — which also happened to multiculturalism. Artists are producing incredible art about the US/Mexico border, which remains more than ever an extraordinary hotbed for political activity. So by no means do I think that border art is dead” (Gómez Peña cited in Berelowitz 1997: 80).

As we will see in the next subchapter, over the following decades, border art became a well-established artistic practice in many places around the world. However, anyway, what nowadays I define as border art still echos the “political edge” that Gómez Peña wrote about (Gómez Peña cited in Berelowitz 1997: 80). Losing definitively the bonds with a single and specific space, the Mexico / US border and context, does not mean bypassing the confrontational attitude developed during years of struggle across the Mexico / US border. The bonds between art and activism, aesthetics and politics, are a fundamental trait of the border art, as well as the direction toward which I point my attention in the following pages: Is it possible to recognise artworks that, as happened at the Mexico-US border, have contributed to the emergence of border art on a global level? What imaginaries does it work on? What aesthetics does it offer? Are there other symbolic places or preferred hubs for art?

Indeed, the experience of the BAW/TAF is the starting point of my exploration. This group of artists is not only important because it is considered the hub in which border art has been conceptualised. The BAW/TAF has unique relevance in this field of study because its impacts have gone beyond the value of its proposal, actually opening up new fields of study. As I said in the previous chapter, the label

“border aesthetics” was first introduced by the same Guillermo Gómez Peña in 1991, to identify a specific aesthetics expressing the conditions of the US / Mexico borderlands (dell’Agnese & Szary 2015: 4). As well, the concept of “borderscape”, which contributed to opening the door to the integration of aesthetics into the analysis of bordering processes (Brambilla, 2015a), were introduced by the BAW/TAF artists Guillermo Gómez Peña and Roberto Sifuentes in 1999 (dell’Agnese & Szary 2015: 4). Nowadays, these two theoretical features are widely used in border studies and have been explored by many scholars, from different perspectives, and applied in multiple contexts. It is possible to say that the BAW/TAF initiated a reflection, beyond disciplines and scientific fields, which is still ongoing today.

2.2.3 “What kind of dirt do you need?”

Since the early 1990s, pieces of the Berlin Wall have been exposed in various locations around the world (Kaminsky, 2014). Large parts of the former barrier have been placed in symbolic locations in many cities, from Berlin to Los Angeles and Seoul, and have reached 140 countries and all continents (Ibidem). As I already argued on previous pages, alongside the postulated “end of history” imposed by globalisation (Fukuyama, 1992), the world enjoyed an artistic and cultural ferment characterised by openness and post-national claims in the last decade of the millennium. As Néstor García Canclini pointed out, the 1990 installation *The World Flag Ant Farm* by Yanagi Yukinori is one of the most significant pictures to explain this context (1999: 34)⁴. It was a large-scale installation made of 180 national flags, i.e., the members of the United Nations at that time (Ibidem). Each flag consisted of a plastic box filled with sand, and all boxes were connected through tubes. Yanagi Yukinori thought of the entire installation putting life into it: ant colonies (Ibidem). The insects, slowly, through their work and tunnelling, scratched national flags and mixed the sands, creating more blurred, ambiguous flags (Ibidem). The nomadic and diasporic sand movements provoked by the ants reveal the highly contingent framework in which notions such as nationhood, race, and identity are produced (Ibidem). According to Canclini, this installation is iconic of the impact of globalisation on borders and on the way people perceive them (Ibidem). In 1991, it was exhibited for the first time in Los Angeles; in 1993, the installation was hosted at the 45th Venice Biennale, and the author was awarded as an emerging artist (Ibidem).

During the 1990s, border art, as a conceptual artistic practice confronting borders and bordering processes, became a world-spread phenomenon, crossing the Atlantic to reach Europe, moving away from the “specifics of the U.S.-Mexico border (..) towards a more universal kind of symbolism” (Sheren 2011: 142). According to Jo

⁴ yanagistudio.net/catalog/yanagi-yukinori-the-world-flag-ant-farm (last accessed: October 2024).

Anne Berelowitz, globalisation has impacted border art and border artists, making them move toward a “nomad” and “flâneur” approach. Indeed, the border art of this period is no longer (strictly) site-specific (Berelowitz 2003: 171). Her arguments tell us about the ever-changing relationship between art and politics: borders began to be conceived as expressions of delocalised global powers; therefore, artistic resistance developed *vis-à-vis* this new understanding of space (Ibidem).

As Nicolas Bourriaud (2014) pointed out, considering the impacts of globalisation on the art world is a complex task. He argues that globalisation has been widely examined from sociological, political, and economic perspectives. At the same time, instead, very little work has been done to explore it through the lens of aesthetics (2014: 9). According to his vision, since the 1990s a new “global altermodernity” started to emerge, marking a profound break with postmodernism and opening to an age of “globalised state of culture” based on “translations, subtitling, and dubbing” (1). In this altermodernity, artists engage in the production of “journey-form”, consciously accepting their status as “semionauts”, i.e., semiotic explorers, “nomads gatherers of signs” (39). Bourriaud defines altermodernism as an “exodus” of “polyglot” artists and thinkers who open the trajectories, but not the destination, of new aesthetics, translating the 20th into the 21st century (43). In this endeavour, the “artist becomes the ‘homo viator’, the prototype of the contemporary traveller whose passage through signs and formats refers to a contemporary experience of mobility, travel and transpassing. This evolution can be seen in the way the works are made: a new type of form is appearing, the journey-form, made of lines drawn both in space and time, materialising trajectories rather than destinations. The form of the work expresses a course, a wandering, rather than a fixed space-time” (1).

In this cultural context, as highlighted by Ila Nicole Sheren (2011, 2015) and Andrea Masala (2019, 2019b), 1990 is a fundamental year for the evolution of the border art. The BAW/TAF group participated in the Venice Biennale, exposing their work, *Colón Colonizado - Tutto è Mio - ¿De Quién?* — so the issue was to recreate a specific border aesthetics in a context far away from the original (Masala, 2019, p. 236). Masala reveals that, in the planning phase, the BAW/TAF artists asked the Venice Biennale offices, among other things, for dirty materials to insert inside the pavilion (Ibidem). Indeed, the Biennale’s response was iconic: “What kind of dirt do you need? In any case, no smelling dirt”⁵. The BAW/TAF artists asked for a

⁵ To read all the correspondence: San Diego (CA), University of California in San Diego, Geisel Library, Special Collections & Archives, Michael Schnorr Collection of Border Art Workshop/ Taller de Arte Fronterizo Records, MSS 760, Box 13, Folder 8, The New Museum exhibit notes and correspondence, 1990.

type of dirt that recalled the land of the desert, to stimulate the touch and hearing when walking on it, and performing such techniques was meant to re-create the natural landscape into the white cube (Ibidem), i.e., to make the border “portable” (Sheren 2011, 2015). Therefore, drawing on Sheren, Masala insists that in 1990 “BAW/TAF made the border portable not only in concrete terms, as shown with the installations, but also in conceptual and mental terms” (2019b: 86). It not only “managed to bring the border first to museums and then to international contexts such as the Venice Biennale, South Africa and Australia” (113), but make of border a “fluid” concept, “applicable to multiple contexts” (87), “creating site-specific works even off site” (85)⁶.

According to Berelowitz, during the 1990s, the border, “having become a metaphor for a condition of deracinated subjectivity, has been disembedded from a literal connection to a site-specific border, and has in fact become a theme in art world discourse” (2005: 341). Ila Nicole Sheren pointed out it was a slow process: “Rather than instantly spreading across the world, art and artists traveled to regions experiencing similar issues of cultural contact and migration. European nations such as Germany and France, as well as Canada, Australia and the U.S. interior were among the first places to embrace border art. Rather than retreating to the physicality of the border and reasserting the primacy of the region, artists insisted upon expanding the concept, bringing their art and the issues it addressed to the attention of those outside the art world. This portable border art would concern itself not only with regional politics and the immigration debate, but with large-scale international conflict, ethnic and cultural difference, and the social changes brought by late-twentieth century globalization” (2011: 127). In this sense, indeed, the InSite festivals (1992, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2013, 2018) are symbolic projects (see insiteart.org). As remarked by Berelowitz, while still operating at the border (the first five editions were hosted in the San Diego - Tijuana border region), they also contributed to the internationalisation, commodification, and white-cube-adaptation of the border art, as part “of a globalized art world in which sponsoring institutions fly in artists from many different points around the globe and from the many different (but also similar) international biennials where they have installed their work and established their reputations” (2005: 340-341). On a similar note, Sheren wrote that “the entire apparatus of InSite, complete with its funding and distribution channels, manufactures art projects and performances ready made for mass consumption. In the guise of sponsoring art that sought to remake the border region, InSite turned border art into a brand (Sheren, 2011, p. 164).

⁶ Masala's writings are in Italian. Translations from Italian to English are mine.

As said, from the 1990s onward, it seems border art has been exposed to a multiplicity of processes (globalisation, commodification, mediatization, branding, delocalisation), which have made it a “portable” (Sheren 2011, 2015) and marketable practice. Losing the bond with the Mexico-US border region, according to Dear and Leclerc, border art became “an aesthetic of the in-between spaces” expressing an ineluctable “postborder condition” of contemporaneity (2003: 14). In this sense, the 1997 artwork of Marco Ramirez (ERRE), *Toy an Horse*, explains well the aims of the so-defined “postborder art” (Ibidem). Commissioned for InSite 1997, the installation consisted of a ten-meter-high wood sculpture of a mythological Trojan horse, two-headed (embodying the indifference of both countries as well as their co-dependence), positioned amidst the traffic jam at San Ysidro, one of the most crowded international border crossings in the world⁷. As remarked by Louise Amoore and Alexandra Hall, by interrupting the routine of the thousands of people crossing the border as a daily business, *Toy an Horse* was able to disrupt the perception of the border, making it visible and questioning its normalised checking and security rituals, rendering strange what previously was familiar, distracting border crossers from their routine to let them pay attention to what would have otherwise slip away from their view (2010: 300). Therefore, differently from the previous decades, the border in the 1990s became a routine, and this explains why Dear and Leclerc refers to border art from the 1990s as “postborder art” (2003): the meaning of the *post*, as for Postcolonial theory, indicating something that comes chronologically *after* the border, while signaling the persisting impacts of the “infected wound” (Gómez Peña, 1991).

2.2.4 The Trump effect

So far, my journey into border art: helps recognizing the roots of such phenomenon, getting back to the Chicano movement and recovering race as fundamental terrain for border artist struggles (2.2.1); sheds light on the defining of border art as a conceptual artistic practices, thanks to the work of the BAW/TAF collective and its political engagement and utopian aesthetics (2.2.2); delves into the impact globalisation had on the work of art and, in particular, in the making the border a “portable” (Sheren 2011, 2015) and commodified subject, navigating the worldwide *ouverture* border-art lived in the 1990s (2.2.3). Before moving my focus to Europe (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5), in this last part of subchapter 2.2, I bring back my “portable” border (Sheren 2011, 2015) to contemporary US-Mexico borderline locations, ending my border art journey in the places I initiated it before translating it over the Atlantic.

⁷. See marcoserre.com/toy-an-horse/ (last consultation April 2022)

While in the 1990s border art lived a worldwide *ouverture*, as I showed in the previous pages, Prieto argues that during the 2000s the discourse on border art has been somehow neglected, and forcefully returned to the scene only in the second decade of the new millennium, when Donald Trump started campaigning for the 2017 USA presidential election (Prieto, 2017). Due to the so-called “Trump effect”⁸, from the name of the former president of the USA, Donald Trump, a contemporary mix of voices started calling for a renewed engagement with border art. During his presidency (2017-21), Trump became the idol of a renewed populist desire for border walls – his “narcissist” slogans for “a big fat beautiful wall” have been, and still are, a shared mantra among many politicians worldwide (van Houtum, 2021). And it is exactly for this reason that, according to Guillermo Gómez Peña, Trump’s presidency has gifted border art with renewed dynamism.

In a recent Gómez Peña’s performance piece, “We are all Aliens” (2020), which I have assisted to during the 2020 Venice International Performance Art Week, Gómez Peña actually starts his monologue by thanking Trump in all the possible ways, for the big challenges he launches to artists and activists, for the strength he gives to the emergence of a renovated border art movement and production, for revitalizing a variety of networks of activist and artistic resistance. During an informal talk, answering to my (colloquial and perhaps too vague) question *How is border art doing nowadays?*, Gomez Peña replied that he does not know how it is doing, but what is certain is that it is more necessary than ever, underscoring that contemporaneity offers particularly fertile terrain for ever-new border struggles.

In the same year, 2020, the border art collective *La Pocha Nostra* (Gomez Peña is among the founders) published a new manifesto, in which it renews its engagements. In one of the paragraphs of this “living, ever-changing open literary system”, they wrote: “No homeland, no fear, no borders, no patriotism, no nation-state, no censorship. In the Trump era, we stand strong under these same principles: We are matriots not patriots, “Americans” in the Hemispheric sense of the term, with a devotion to land and people and not to the leaders of governments and corporations. Now more than ever *La Pocha* needs to reinvent and reenergize itself under these principles in order to remain raw, relevant and present in our troubled contemporary times”⁹. The use of “raw”, “relevant”, and “present” is indeed a fantastic indicator to understand the edges of this approach, as I think the terms

⁸ From “La Pocha Nostra Manifesto: for a post-democratic era 2020”. Available at: docs.google.com/document/d/1iPd9mmrmITUBecRLDceMsclTg_pS97qs114pl4b68SA/edit (last consultation April 2022)

⁹ (Ibidem)

highlight the unfinished, ongoing, and everchanging face of the border art, its “ever-morphing strategies and core ideas”¹⁰.

To conclude this journey, these reflections on the “Trump effect” or the “Trump era” help me reposition border art quests in the contemporary. They evidence how the discourse on border art is more vibrant than ever nowadays.

2.3 What I mean by border art

Building on subchapters 2.1 and 2.2, in this final subchapter, I offer a preliminary definition of the distinctive features of border art. Then, as I did in Chapter 1, I close this Chapter recognising a circle of grounding materials for the overall argument of my study. In particular, I go through Gilles Deleuze's essay titled “*What Is the Creative Act?*” (2007: 312-324) to express my sense of border art, i.e., what I mean by border art.

2.3.1 Confrontational, processual, and extra-disciplinary

I think it is possible to identify three fundamental constants in the evolution of border art. In my eyes, before being any other way, I find that border art is confrontational, processual, and extra-disciplinary. Of course, this generalisation, like any other, can fade away if well-stressed. Regardless, this categorising helps me fully comprehend and explain the fundamental role of border art in counter-voicing hegemonic narratives about borders, in producing alternative spaces of otherwise, and in better individuating and defining my sense of border art, i.e., what I mean by border art.

First of all, I agree with Prieto in defining border art as a “confrontational” practice (1999). In this sense, what I mean is that border artists have explicitly confrontational attitudes towards institutions and other forms (and formations) of power — BAW / TAF artists, for example, conflicted with the governments of the United States and Mexico (Ibidem). As Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe state, border aesthetics refers, in the first instance, to people dying all over the world trying to cross a border (2017: 4). Indeed, I am not trying to distinguish between political and non-political art; it would be foolish. I am only trying to un-shadow the confrontational positionality of border artists in their attempts to create “lines of flights” (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 340-344), “interruption” (Chambers, 2017), and “defamiliarisation” (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2013). I will bring on this argument in Chapter 5.

¹⁰. (Ibidem)

The second feature that I consider fundamental to understanding border art is its processuality. I think border art is processual in the sense that the main artist's focus is on the process rather than on the aesthetic qualities of the final product (Prieto, 1999; Berelowitz, 1997, 2003; De Chiara, 2005). From early 1970s Chicano murals to contemporary tactical media, engaging the community in long-term artistic projects has been a widely used practice (Ibidem). In line with this, in Chapter 6, I engage with a cartographic experiment I have carried out in co-research with visual artist Guido Picardi and the community of l'Asilo¹¹ cultural centre (Naples), making sense of this border art feature through practice.

Finally, I think border art is extra-disciplinary in the sense that it "precedes" art techniques (Guilló, 2016). Border artists stand for the impossibility of dividing art practice by techniques (De Chiara, 2005). BAW/TAF performances and artworks, for instance, were always hybrid showcases, works composed through multiple languages and techniques – Marina De Chiara pointed out that the overlapping of techniques was the only possible answer to the very nature of borders (2005). It is still the case today, as we will see in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.3.2 To create is to resist

As I already said, as I did in Chapter 1, I close this Chapter recognising a circle of grounding materials in which the overall argument of the preceding pages keeps on bouncing. In particular, I refer to Gilles Deleuze's essay titled "What is the creative act?" (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 312-324).

According to what Deleuze tells us in this essay, "I have something to say to someone else in the name of creation" (2007: 315). Therefore, in its fundamental meaning, to create is to communicate, in a framework in which to communicate means to transfer information, and to inform means to make certain keywords circulate (2007: 319). In a nutshell, creative acts make certain keywords circulate.

¹¹. From l'Asilo official website, my translation from Italian to English language: "The Asilo, former headquarters of the Forum of Cultures, has been an open space since 2 March 2012 where a shared and participatory management practice of a public space dedicated to culture is being consolidated, in analogy with civic uses: a different use of a public good, no longer based on assignment to a specific private entity, but open to all those who work in the field of art, culture and entertainment who, in a participatory and transparent manner, through a public assembly, share the projects and cohabit the spaces." For more information: exasilofilangieri.it/chi-siamo/ (last accessed October 2023). See also Pinto, M., Recano, L., & Rossi, U. (2022). New institutions and the politics of the interstices. Experimenting with a face-to-face democracy in Naples. *Urban Studies*, 60(11), 2176-2194.

This essay is relevant to my investigation of border art because, at a certain point, Deleuze makes a fundamental distinction between information and counter-information, and he also explores these categories in relation to the work of art. In this perspective, he suggests, information is a fundamental feature of the “society of control”, but, at the same time, he recognises the existence of a counter-information, which instead is there to generate dissent and, to be effective, needs to evolve into an “act of resistance” (2007: 322). In this context, the work of art is seen as strictly connected to the act of resistance (and thus to counter-information), while it presents no connection with communication (and thus to information): this is the perspective from which I look at the border art.

As for BAW/TAF artists, when I use the words “border art,” I mean a creative work whose aim is to generate counter-hegemonic narratives of resistance and dissent to the current global apartheid operated through discriminative bordering processes. The bond between art and resistance is a fundamental feature of my approach: “Every act of resistance is not a work of art, even though, in a certain way, it is. Every work of art is not an act of resistance, and yet, in a certain way, it is” (2007: 323). Without this bond, I would work on communication, and it would be another research project.

CHAPTER 3

IN DIALOGUE ON EUROPE'S BORDERING

As we have seen in the previous chapters, in recent years research on borders has moved from the study of static geopolitical lines to a variety of never-ending processes (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002), going through a “cultural turn” (dell’Agnese & Szary, 2015) and an “aesthetic turn” (Moze & Spiegel, 2020), and becoming “a constellation of images and discursive formation” (De Genova 2013: 1184) and an “imprint” of contemporaneity (van Houtum, 2021). Over the last decades, border scholars have developed a variety of new conceptual and methodological tools to address the aesthetic and sensorial dimensions of bordering processes, and nowadays “border aesthetics” is considered a fertile research niche (Schimanski, 2019). In this research context, the discourse on border art is both interesting and articulated, and, in recent years, it has shifted from the site-specificity of the Mexico-US border to a global struggle against discriminative enclosures (Sheren 2011, 2015).

At this point in my study, I thought of Chapter 3 as expressing the context of my research, i.e., where I locate my quests: Europe. And, being Europe a multi-scalar and ever-changing concept, I felt the need to reconstruct and search for it before inhabiting its time and space with my ideas and questions. Indeed, focusing on Europe is not a merely geographical or institutional choice, but a political one. Europe today represents a paradigmatic site where bordering practices are materialised in their most contradictory forms: while the EU celebrates the free circulation of goods, capital, and certain categories of people, it simultaneously produces and normalises lethal exclusionary mechanisms. Here, “bordering/ordering/othering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002) are enacted daily through physical, bureaucratic, and symbolic borders, turning the Mediterranean into a necropolitical space (Mbembe, 2003) and transforming Europe into what has been described as a “gated community” (van Houtum & Pijpers, 2006). The tragedy is not only in the recurring deaths at sea or in the violence of migration deterrence policies, but also in the collective indifference that accompanies them: rescue missions, media narratives, and electoral campaigns have all assimilated this violence into the routine of everyday life. Such “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021) is double-edged, producing both external exclusion and internal self-repression — a Europe “against itself” (Weller, 2021). Therefore, to re-imagine Europe’s borders means to intervene in this self-devouring logic (Bueno Lacy, 2020) and to envision alternative modes of existence that go beyond the EU’s “auto-immunity” disease (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020). In this sense, Europe becomes not only the spatial context of my research but also its intellectual battlefield.

In the following pages, I divide my arguments into two subchapters. The first subchapter, 3.1, is a critical geo-historical, visual and iconographical search for Europe through the exploration of its main cultural sources: starting from Greek mythology

and getting to the Modern representations of the world, I consider the development of the idea of Europe by highlighting the chain of centrism and suprematism as its constant triggers (Levy, 1999; Weller, 2021). In the second subchapter, 3.2, I shot a picture of Europe today, introducing my research problems — “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021), border “necropolitics” (Mbembe, 2003) and “thanatopolitics” (Murray, 2006), visa apartheid (Krakat, 2018; van Houtum & van Uden, 2021; Surak, 2021), murky border externalisation practices (Bialasiewicz, 2012a, 2012b; Amato & Iocchi, 2019; Pacciardi & Berndtsson, 2022), “liquid fear” (Bauman, 2000) and “moral panic” (Cohen, 1973) —, and defining the time and the space of my research.

As for Jacques Levy (1999), the impossibility of defining Europe *a priori* is the trigger of my argument in Chapter 3 (as well as in Chapter 6). Europe exists way beyond its location, and at the same time, it has never existed beyond the will to build it functionally: it has been constantly created and re-created in accordance with each historical period’s power configuration (Bialasiewicz, 2012a; van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2015). Indeed, as we will see, the idea of Europe is necessarily political, but also geographical, religious, economic, ethological, philosophical, literary, and cultural in the wider sense (Levy, 1999; Weller, 2021). Thus, the result of my investigation is an analysis in which many features overlap or contradict one another, and different scales operate simultaneously.

3.1 Searching for Europe

According to van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, Europe is first of all a “geopolitical arbitrariness” (2015: 477). What is at the very foundation of what we refer to as Europe? Indeed, this question has no single answer. In his 1999 investigation, Jacques Levy constructs the meaning of “Europe” by deduction, and so do I in the following pages. Starting from Greek mythology and earliest representations of the world, I move my step through Europe’s geo-history considering its main cultural sources (i.e., Greeks, Romans, Judaism, Christianity, see Levy 1999) to highlighting the conceptual chain supporting the development of Europeanisation, from the ancient myth, into the highly discriminative form of geopolitical bordering practices we experience in current days¹². I think such a work is fundamental to recovering

¹² Undoubtedly, the cultural sources are not limited to those mentioned by Jacques Lévy in his 1999 work. Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and, more broadly, all the cultures that have crossed the Mediterranean have had a significant impact, as has the Russian element. In this context, for the sake of argumentative clarity, I limit myself to following Lévy’s map.

the understanding of a variety of discourses, tales, symbols, and iconographies that lie at the very foundation of Europe and continue to influence its contemporaneity.

3.1.1 The myth

In Greek mythology, Europa was the name of the princess of the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre, in the Eastern Mediterranean (Calasso, 2009; Graves, 2015; Ovid, 2016). According to the widely known reconstruction in Book II of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Zeus fell in love with Europa and, to seduce her, turned into a docile white bull (Ovid, 2016, pp. 161-167). Seeing that the bull let himself be caressed, Europa got on the back of the bull, who suddenly threw himself into the sea and led her to Crete (Ibidem). Then Zeus turned back into a god and revealed his love (Ibidem). According to Robert Graves, Zeus and Europa had three children: the first, Minos, became king of Crete and gave birth to the Minoan civilisation (2015: 174), which is described by Will Durant as "the first link in the European chain" (1939: 21). Europa's father, Agenor, sent his three sons to find Europa, telling them not to return without their sister (Graves, 2015, pp. 174-175). Cadmus, Phoenix, and Cilice looked for her everywhere, but none of them went to Crete, so Europa was never found again (Ibidem). Faithful to the promise made to their father, the three men did not return to Tyre without their sister, and in their peregrinations they founded new cities, becoming the progenitors of new populations in the northern and the western shores of the Mediterranean (Ibidem). As reported by Enciclopedia Treccani, the name Europa, from the abduction of Agenor's daughter, and the consequent migration of his ancestry, indicated the lands located north of the Mediterranean Sea¹³.

Artistic representations of the abduction of Europa are abundant throughout history, tracing a line from Greek frescoes and Roman mosaics to modern and contemporary interpretations. The myth is an allegory of the Hellenic colonisation of present-day Europe, starting with Crete (Graves, 2015, p. 176). The bull that crosses the sea to kidnap Europa is a metaphor for the Hellenes' raids in the Mediterranean (Ibidem). In Indo-European cultures, the bull is usually a metaphor for fertilising power, referring to the concept of populating new lands (Rice, 1998). As highlighted by Johan Fornäs, Europa's "encounter with the bull is full of pleasure and desire, bearing traits of a passionate romance, which may also contain an element of transformative self-abandonment and persuasive power play. Instead, her liberation from inherited family bonds may be read as a metaphor for the passage to adulthood and forming one's own destiny on a new territory, away from parents and siblings — all through the intervention of passionate relation with a foreign Other, in this instance Zeus as bull." (2012: 10).

¹³. [treccani.it/enciclopedia/europa_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/europa_(Enciclopedia-Italiana))

Indeed, Crete has been subjugated by the bull myth: not only the Minotaur, but the bull was present and honoured in the *taurokathapsia*, a bull-leaping ritual in which the athlete had to jump and spin on the back of a running bull, symbolising the fact that intelligence and civilisation can master the most animalistic and primitive instincts (see Zimmerman 1964: 168). As the beginning of the Minoan civilisation is dated to 3500 BCE, we can say the bull survived more than five hundred years of history. Among its contemporary interpretations, the back of the Greek two-euro coin is particularly representative, as are Botero's, Dalí's, and Picasso's interpretations of the myth.

In general, understanding the myth of Europa is fundamental to this research because it embodies, in symbolic form, many of the dynamics that still define contemporary Europe's identity and its bordering practices: it functions as an interpretative matrix through which to understand the aesthetic, political, and ethical implications of Europe today. The myth represents both the birth of Europe and the beginning of its contradictions — between seduction and violence, openness and domination, desire and possession. Thus, revisiting the myth means questioning the genealogies of European identity, unearthing the entanglements of mythology, geography, and power, and exposing how Europe's "civilising" narrative has always been rooted in an act of abduction — both literal and symbolic. Furthermore, understanding the myth of Europa also means deconstructing the visual and discursive architectures that sustain the contemporary EU's geopolitical imagination. For this reason, the following section examines how the myth's visual heritage has informed the cultural and cartographic imagination of Europe, from ancient iconography to modern representations of the world.

3.1.2 A wide gaze

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, a widespread hypothesis makes the term "Europe" derive from ancient Greek Εὐρώπη (Eurṓpē), from the elements *eurys*, meaning "wide", "broad", and *ōpós*, meaning "eye", "face". Hence, according to this first reconstruction, the word "Europe" would mean "broad face" (etymonline.com) or, in other terms, "wide gazing". Another option ties the meaning of the term "Europe" to the Semitic *erebu*, meaning "to go down" or "to set", referring to the sun (Ibidem). A third hypothesis, instead, relies on the Phoenician word *ereb*, meaning "evening", hence "west" (Ibidem). As it is possible to evince, all hypotheses have spatial sense. However, they are all far from certain, and the origin of the name "Europe" continues to fuel debate among scholars (see Levy, 1999; Fornäs, 2012; Weller, 2021) — a common phenomenon with ancient geographical names.

Going beyond the myth, the first recorded reference to Europe as a space is found in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*, dating from the late seventh or early sixth century BCE¹⁴. As explained by Shane Weller, in the description provided by Homer, Europe indicate the flat lands of the northern Aegean, a meaning built in contrast with the Peloponnese region, and only in a second moment the meaning of “Europe” expanded to include all the lands north of the Mediterranean (2021: 16). In fact, the earliest cartographical representation of the world provided by Anaximander of Miletus (610-546 BCE) and furtherly elaborated by Hecataeus of Miletus (550-476 BCE) shows two landmasses divided by the Mediterranean Sea at the centre: the northern half is called “Europe”, the southern half “Asia” (see Fig. 3.1). The chart is circular and shows the known lands of the world grouped around the Aegean Sea, at the centre, and all surrounded by the ocean. Europe is bordered on the south by the Mediterranean Sea, and the separation from Asia (which included “Libya”) is carried out through the Black Sea and, further East, by the Phasis and Tanais rivers. According to this definition of space, Philip II of Macedon (382-336 BCE) defined himself as the first king of Europe, and so he named one of his daughters (Fuschino, 2023). During this period, as highlighted by Weller, the debate on Europe played a significant rule in ancient Greek culture — it was highly relevant theme for Herodotus, Hippocrates, and Aristoteles, among many others classic thinkers (2021: 17). Indeed, the meaning of “Europe” was built in relation and opposition to that of “Asia”, the cultural comparison serving the clear purpose of affirming the superiority of European civilisation over the non-European (Ibidem).

As Franco Farinelli pointed out, with Anaximander we cross the edge of “cartographical reason”, i.e. the knowing of the world based on “representation” and “reduction” (Farinelli, 1992). Farinelli remarks the violent nature of this process: Anaximander was accused of impiety, according to some, for having dared to look at the world from above, thus assuming a divine and not a human point of view; according to others, for having arrested the continuous flow of nature with an immobilised and fixed representation that contravened the philosophical principle of perennial movement, the *panta rei* of Heraclitus (2003: 78). However, in Anaximander’s representation of the world we have a first “geographic image” of Europe (Ibidem). As highlighted by Federico Ferretti, the central novel and intuition of Anaximander was the attempt to reduce the entire known world to a single representation (Ferretti, 2014, pp. 13-16). And only after four centuries did Eratosthenes of Cyrene (276–195/194 BCE) introduce a new and more detailed cartographic description of the known world (Ibidem). In Eratosthenes’s representation, Greece is at the centre of the world, while Europe is one of the three peripheries, the one located north-west, in opposition to “Libya” located south

¹⁴. etymonline.com/word/Europe (last accessed March 2023)

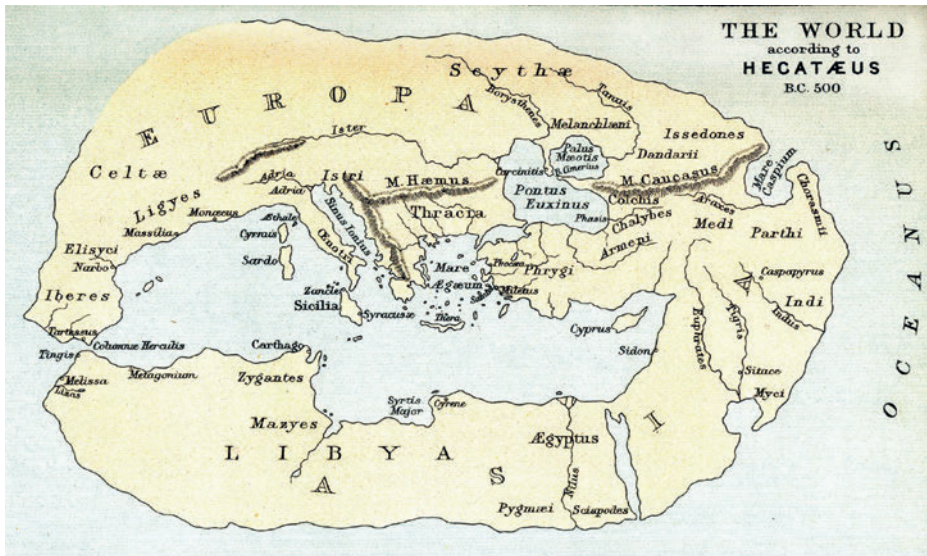


Figure 3.1 - Map of the world, 500 BCE (19th-century reconstruction based on Hecataeus of Miletus). Retrieved from Granger Historical Pictures Archive.



Figure 3.2 - Eratosthenis Werlds Karta (World map of Eratosthenes), ca. 1803, engraving, National Library of Israel, Eran Laor Cartographic Collection. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

and “Asia” in the east (Fig. 3.2). Differently from Anaximander’s, in Eratosthenes’s chart Libya is not anymore considered an Asian sub-continent: it was the first representation of the three-continents configuration bordering the Mediterranean incepted by Herodotus (Ferretti, 2014, pp. 13-16).

Indeed, Anaximander and Eratosthenes’s maps were functional to Greek appropriation, division and production of the space (Weller, 2021, pp. 19-20). When Greek civilisation collapsed and, contextually, Rome emerged as a regional power, new maps of the world were produced in accordance with Roman needs (Ibidem). First of all, as highlighted by Shane Weller, Roman cartography fused the continental European and Mediterranean worlds, especially after the conquest of Gaul in 58-50 BC (Ibidem). Despite the word “European” had largely fallen into disuse — as the Roman Empire conceptualised itself through the universal categories of *imperium* rather than through the geographically limited notion of Europe — the myth of Europa took on its full geopolitical charge during the early years of the Roman period, playing a fundamental role in establishing Rome at the centre of Europe, again in contradiction with Asia and Africa (Ibidem). In this process, authors such as Ovid, Horace, and Strabo, among others, made an effort to valorise Europe over the outside (Ibidem). So, notwithstanding the Roman imperial vision of the world, which did not allow space for European citizenship, Weller suggests that Eurocentrism and Euro-supremacism had already been established by the first century CE (Ibidem).

3.1.3 The divine legacy

With the Western Roman Empire declining, during the first centuries of the new millennium, the work of building Eurocentrism and Euro-supremacism began to be carried out on a different dimension: religion (Weller, 2021). Indeed, to comprehensively reconstruct the impact of (Judaism and) Christianity on the idea of Europe is not my task. In the following lines, I am only tracing a line through fundamental moments of “fracture” (Levy, 1999, p. 29) because, as I already said in the introduction, I am convinced that such a work is fundamental to recover the understanding of a variety of discourse, tells, symbols, and iconographies that lie at the very foundation of Europe and keep influencing it in contemporaneity.

As highlighted by Weller, in the Jewish and early Christian traditions, the meaning of Europe is strictly tied to the *Genesis* book and, in particular, to the life of Noah and his sons: Shem, Japheth and Ham (2021: 20). In Chapter 9, Noah curses Ham for having looked at him while he was naked and drunk. As painted by Giovanni Bellini (1515), Shem and Japheth do not direction their gaze toward the father – the only



Figure 3.3 - *Drunkenness of Noah*, by Giovanni Bellini, ca. 1515, oil on canvas (103 × 157 cm), Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

one who is staring and laughing at Noah is Ham, the one at the centre (Fig. 3.3). For this motivation, Noah declared that Ham's son, Canaan, will be a "servant of servants" to Shem and Japheth; as well that God "shall enlarge Japheth" (Weller, 2021).

As for the abduction of Europe, drunkenness of Noah's representations are abundant throughout history. According to Weller, even though there is no direct mention to Europe in the *Genesis*, the story of the drunkenness of Noah is foundational for what nowadays we address as Europe (2021: 21). She finds that the work of some Jewish authors were fundamental for the interpretation of this part of the *Genesis*: Flavius Josephus (37–100 CE) and St Jerome (347–420 CE) among the others (Ibidem). In a sense, Flavius Josephus was the first to spatialize the meaning of this story, locating Shem in Asia, Japheth in Europe, and Ham in Africa (Ibidem). On this model, three centuries later, St Jerome identified Shem as the originator of the Jews and Japheth of the Gentiles (meaning the non-Jews), associating Europe with the latter, while the sons of Ham (Africans) were to be considered as servants (Ibidem). As Weller remarked: "This conception of the world as tripartite – Asia, Europe, Africa – and as figured in terms of the inheritance of the sons of Noah, was repeated throughout late antiquity, by, among others, St Eucher, Bishop of Lyons, in the mid-fifth century, as well as by Isidore of Seville, in his *Etymologies*, in the early seventh century. By that time, the hierarchical idea of Europe as the home of the Gentiles, the Greeks, and the Christians, in contrast to Asia as the home of the Semitic peoples, and Africa as the home of slaves, was firmly established. Alongside the classical Greek idea of Europe as superior to Asia, it constituted the second ideological foundation upon which a long Eurocentric, and indeed Euro-supremacist, tradition would be built. In the thinking of Europe, classical and early Christian views would in time come together to generate an idea of Europe as in every respect superior to the non European" (Weller, 2021, p. 21).

Notwithstanding this divinely authorised subdivision of the world, the christianisation of Europe was a slow process, and, as I already said, according to Jacques Levy, it was made by moments of "fracture" (1999, p. 29). After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the term Europe reappeared with renovated relevance only during the eighth century, in opposition Umayyad conquest of Hispania (711–718 CE) (Weller 2021: 22). As reported by Weller, in the Battle of Poitiers (732 CE) Charles Martel's Frankish forces were identified as the "Europeans", and it was in the wake of the victory of Tours that the idea of Europe was strongly refashioned in its full geopolitical meaning (Ibidem). In fact, Charles Martel's son and successor, Charlemagne (768–814 CE), became the emperor of *Europa Occidens*, a title coined in opposition to the Eastern Roman Empire and to Muslim rule in Hispania (Ibidem).

Indeed, the Battle of Tours was a fundamental moment in the christianisation of the idea of Europe, as well as in the light of its foundational meaning for the coming Holy Roman Empire, which will fully deploy the ideological nexus between the Roman, the Christian, and the European for almost ten centuries (Levy, 1999, p. 29). Although, according to Levy, Europeanness and Christianity were not synonymous until the 1454 Fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and the subsequent siege of Vienna in 1529 (Ibidem). With the Fall of Constantinople, Pope Pius II began mobilising an army to defend a “Christian Europe”, also using “European” as an adjective to describe it (Weller, 2021, p. 27). Certainly, from the 11th to the 13th centuries, three centuries of crusades had an impact on the process of christianisation. However, both Levy and Weller stress that the idea of Europe as a Christian geopolitical entity reached its peak again in relation to an external threat, an enduring pattern inherited from the past that will persist in the centuries to come.

3.1.4 *Europa Regina*

Between the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire in 1453 and the siege of Vienna in 1529, a fundamental historical event occurred: the unexpected landing in the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492. From this date on, the encounter with the American people became a theme in the cultural production of the time, and, for the most part, the comparison was made to justify the subsequent colonisation: Europe became synonymous with civilisation, and Eurocentrism and Euro-suprematism the episteme of modernity (Lander, 2005; Ferretti, 2014). Jaques Levy refers to “Renaissance/Reform/Enlightenment” as the “fifth block” in the geo-history of Europeanness, the one that selectively assembles the heritages of the four major European “cultural sources”: Greeks, Romans, Judaism, and Christianity (1999: 55-56). According to him, the new relationship with the world can be summarised in a general orientation consisting of a division of the mental territory to the detriment of the divine and to the advantage of the human: “God as the creator of the past rather than the engineer of the present” (Ibidem).

As Rodrigo Bueno Lacy and Henk van Houtum highlighted, the fifteenth century marks the beginning of what they define as “the cartopolitical scramble for Europe”, i.e. “when Europeanisation first appeared as the imperial geopolitical strategy we know today” (2015: 477–478). During the early Modern era, the need for new maps made cartographic and iconographic publications proliferate and, in a way, the image takes over the word in the telling of the world (Ibidem). Probably one of the most representative works of the time is *Europa Regina* by Johannes Putsch, i.e. the first anthropomorphic map of Europe as a queen, published in 1570 Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia universalis* (Fig. 3.4). Representations of a crowned Europe



Fig. 3.4 - *Europa regina* (Europe as a Queen), by Sebastian Münster, 1570, woodcut map, originally published in *Cosmographia*, Basel, Switzerland. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

became a popular theme in art, just as the classical myth of Europa, which was revisited by Titian (1560-62), Paolo Veronese (1578), and Rembrandt van Rijn (1632), among many others (see Fig. 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7).

In their analysis of Europe-making as a geopolitical strategy, Bueno Lacy and Van Houtum make evident that, since the beginnings of modernity, maps have occupied a fundamental position in the functional storytelling of Europe (2015: 477– 478). Indeed, as remarked by Franco Farinelli, if in the world of Marco Polo things last, in that of Columbus, dominated by space-time abstraction, they extend — the effect of Columbus's enterprise was exactly the opposite of what is still often believed today: it did not make spherical the image of the earth that was previously supposed to be flat, but instead it transformed the whole earth, as spherical that it was and believed, in a flat cartographic table (2003: 19). As also Franco Ferretti makes clear, the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), separating the globe in two hemispheres of influence, is conventionally indicated as the beginning of globalisation not because the sphericity of the earth was not previously known, but because power begins to function globally (2014: 39-40). By default, the reduction of the world to mathematically calculated projections is a process always serving a specific purpose (Ibidem). To transpose a spherical surface onto a plane, it is necessary to perform a reduction, but, through projection, a mathematical procedure, it is possible to maintain at least one aspect (surfaces, lengths, or angles) that is more or less proportional to reality (Ibidem). In Mercator's chart (1569), considered the first and most influent planispheres of the modern era, this choice falls on an ideal line that leads from Northern Europe to the West Indies, in which the angle between the sea route plotted on the planisphere and the meridians would be the same as that which a navigator would detect at sea with his compass — an eminently practical, commercial and at the same time imperial choice (Ibidem), as also Henk van Houtum has underlined in his 2024 *Free the map*.



Figure 3.5 - *The Rape of Europa*, by Titian, ca. 1560-1562, oil on canvas (178 × 205 cm), Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, United States. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 3.6 - *The Rape of Europa*, by Paolo Veronese, ca. 1581-1584, oil on canvas (245 × 310 cm), Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 3.7 - *The Abduction of Europa*, by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1632, oil on panel (ca. 64.6 × 78.7 cm), J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, United States. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

Together with the rise of the so-called New World, other cultural productions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries drew attention to the internal challenges facing Europe (Weller, 2021, p. 33). In particular, during this period, the idea of Europe began to emerge as a plan to end the Wars of Religion, which began with the Protestant Reformation in 1517 (Ibidem). In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia broadly resolved the conflicts by recognising three separate Christian traditions in the Holy Roman Empire: Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism (Ibidem). The *Allegory of the return of peace* painting by Theodoor van Thulden (1657) symbolises this moment with the encounter of Eirene, on the left, with Europa, on the right (Fig. 3.8). Eirene is accompanied by cheerful putti playing music (on the left), while other putti destroy arms and armour on the right. On the top right, Janus brings the change: the passage from chaos to a renovated peace.

According to Weller, the context emerging after 1648 is completely different from that of previous centuries (2021: 33). The Peace of Westphalia was based on the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*, meaning “whose realm, his religion” (Ibidem). Therefore, it is possible to evince how, in the seventeenth century, the idea of Europe as Christendom left space to a more secular conception in which religion is no longer central, as the emphasis fell upon establishing peace between the emerging European nation-states – the religious conflict was overlapped and replaced by a clash between rival powers understood as sovereign states.

While putting an end to the idea of a Christian Europe in the form of a universal monarchy gravitating around the Rome-House of Habsburg binomial, the discursive trigger of peace among emerging European States has served as the basis for the development of the Enlightenment idea of Europe (Weller, 2021, p. 33). The Europe envisioned by Pieter Paul Rubens in 1637-38 — a woman who, handed the crown and sceptre to a putto, throws herself into the fray, in the extreme attempt to put an end to the Wars of Religion (Fig. 3.9) — by the end of the seventeenth century, will be endorsed by several significant publications (Ibidem).

In particular, as reported by Weller, the idea of a future “European Parliament” that would settle conflicts without resorting to war was first proposed in 1693 by Quaker William Penn in his *Essay towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe* (Ibidem). Soon after, in 1712, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre (1658–1743) published his *Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe*, in which he advanced not only the idea of “European Society,” but also that of a “European Union” (Ibidem). And this purpose was strictly related to the exploration of America: the need for internal peace was the base upon which initiating the systematic exploitation of non-European territories and



Figure 3.8 - *Allegory of the Return of Peace*, by Theodoor van Thulden, 1657, oil on canvas (135.4 × 140 cm), Noordbrabants Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 3.9 - *The Consequences of War*, by Peter Paul Rubens, 1637-1638, oil on canvas (206 × 342 cm), Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

people, together with renovated forms of Eurocentrism and Euro-suprematism, evolved into Euro-universalism, i.e., the idea that European civilisation should be the model for the entire human civilisation (Ibidem). Therefore, as with Cadmus, in modern times, Europe, as synonymous with a superior civilisation, has been the justification for the conquest of new lands located overseas — an endless circle of imperial materials in which the building of Europe keeps bouncing.

3.1.5 The echoes of Cadmus

The echoes of Cadmus are the echoes of colonisation: from 3500 BCE, their reflections still traverse contemporaneity. As I proceeded with my research on the idea of Europe, I realised that perhaps what counts in the myth of Europe is the migration of Agenor's ancestry across the sea. As I mentioned earlier, after the abduction of Europa by Zeus, Agenor, king of Tyre and Europa's father, sent his sons to look for her (Graves, 2015, pp. 174-177). According to Graves, Phoenix moved towards Libya, as far as Carthage would later arise, and there he gave birth to the Punics — after Agenor's death, he moved back to Tyre and became the ancestor of the Phoenicians (Ibidem). Cilice moved toward Anatolia, where he founded new cities and became the progenitor of the Cilicians (Ibidem). Cadmus moved towards the north of the Mediterranean and, in his wanderings, founded the city of Thebes, in Boeotia (Ibidem). In a way, it is evident that the search for Europa has been a creative justification for the Indo-European colonisation of the northern and western shores of the Mediterranean basin.

The legacy of Cadmus is important in both the modern and contemporary ideas of Europe (Calasso, 2009). According to Ovid's Book II of *The Metamorphoses*, in his search for Europa, Cadmus asked the oracle of Delphi where he could find his sister. However, the oracle advised him to stop searching and to found a new city (2016: 165-166). He followed the oracle, but in the place destined to become Thebes, a dragon was protecting the source of water and attacking anyone who tried to get close to it (Ibidem). In *Cadmus slays the dragon* (1617), therefore, Hendrick Goltzius (1573–1617) tells again the endless struggle between passion and reason, primitivism and civilisation — brute force, lack of reason, and pure instinct are defeated by courage, which is nothing else than fear governed by intellect, i.e., by the ability, which arises from reasoning, to choose the right moment to point and hit (Fig. 3.10). For killing the dragon, Cadmus is considered among the heroes of Greek mythology: the beast is a metaphor of man's atavistic desire to live irrationally without laws, and killing it opens the possibility for civilisation to set and prosper also in the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea (Peri, 2018). As Roberto Calasso remarked, after the dragon's death, the marriage of Cadmus and Harmonia was the last banquet



Fig. 3.10 - *Cadmus Slaying the Dragon*, by Hendrick Goltzius, ca. 1573-1617, oil on canvas (189 × 248 cm), Statens Museum for Kunst (on deposit at Koldinghus), Denmark. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

attended by humans and divinities side by side: it marks the passage from the history of gods to the history of women and men (2009: 390).

Indeed, I do not think it is a coincidence that the Cadmus myth was refashioned in modernity. As already said, the modern search for Europe was largely carried out through cultural productions that affirmed Europe's superiority over the non-European world, with the revisitation of Greek and Roman sources as a method (Said, 1993; Weller, 2021). It was in this perspective that, for instance, Goltzius illustrated Ovid's *Metamorphosis* in 42 engravings¹⁵. According to Orenstein, Goltzius considered painting as the summit of achievement in the arts, a technique much more prestigious than engraving (2003). In fact, he painted *Cadmus slays the dragon* only at the end of his life, once he was a famous artist all over Europe, and, compared to the engravings, the number of Goltzius's paintings is way smaller (Ibidem). All these observations suggest that the story of Cadmus slaying the dragon was selected from the 52 engravings and turned into a painting because it was considered relevant in the modern re-functionalisation of the classical heritage. Therefore, I think that, in the intention of Goltzius, *Cadmus slaying the dragon* also represents the encounter between the Europeans and the American continent, to justify massacres and genocides for the sake of reason and a superior civilisation. As said, the composition itself stages the confrontation between civilisation and savagery — the heroic figure of Cadmus, embodying reason, order, and divine mission, set against the monstrous dragon, a recurring emblem of chaos, wilderness, and the unknown. And this dichotomy mirrors the moral geography that structured early modern colonial imaginaries, where the “civilised” European self was defined through the subjugation and destruction of the “barbarous” Other. Moreover, the act of slaying the dragon — followed, in the myth, by the sowing of its teeth to create new men — resonates with the colonial logic of conquest and re-creation: the violent erasure of existing worlds to populate and “civilise” them anew. Through such imagery, Goltzius's painting can be read as visual propaganda for a Europe that, by reinterpreting classical myths, sought to legitimise its expansionist ambitions and the genocidal rationalities of modern colonialism.

Contrary to the 1657 representation of *Allegory for the return of peace* by Theodoor van Thulden (Fig. 3.9), today we can say with certainty that the weapons and armours destroyed by van Thulden's putti were, in truth, only moved outside of Europe, towards the colonies. Especially after the Peace of Westphalia, the modern idea of Europe developed in a peculiar form of suprematism, i.e. “the assumption that

¹⁵. All 52 engravings are available at: limes.cfs.unipi.it/goltzius/le-incisioni/ (last consultation: April 2022)

European civilisation is in every way superior to non-European civilisations, and that the latter should be either plundered, incorporated, or obliterated" (Weller, 2021, p. 5). As Edward Said remarked, colonialism is the process which, throughout Modernity, led European States to control 67% in 1878 and 85% of the earth's surface in 1914 in the form of colonies, protectorates, possessions, dominions and commonwealth: no other form of empire has ever been so vast, so thoroughly dominating, and so unequal in power balance (1993: 33-34). He suggests viewing colonial imperialism as an omnipresent metadiscourse in the cultural practices and representations of the period, a common experience between coloniser and colonised, intrinsically linking the development of European identity to its own constructions of the exotic, i.e., to a particular perception of non-Europeans (Ibidem).

The discussion of colonialism brings us to the first antithetical tension characterising modern and contemporary debate about Europe: the hope for an internally peaceful union and the export of war beyond its borders. While the cultural trigger for a "perpetual peace" within Europe — in a chain that ties together the Abbé de Saint-Pierre with Voltaire and Immanuel Kant, among many others — was indeed a discursive pillar of modern Europe, at the same time, the use of violence in the colonies gradually escalated (Weller, 2021, p. 14). From the 17th century onward, the racial theories not only justified a deadly colonial enterprise, but also planted the seed for the "genocidal policies" that, for instance, the Nazis would deploy in the first half of the twentieth century (Ibidem). This tension between an internal hoped-for peace and the export war beyond the border, I think, still affects the contemporary idea of Europe, as well as the debate on today's most relevant Europeanising force, i.e., the European Union (EU). As we will see in the next paragraph, in the post-WWII context, the European integration process was, again, strictly related to matters of peace, while the same states were also waging war all over the world to repress decolonisation struggles. I think contemporary EU's border externalisation policies can be framed within this tension too.

The second antithetical tension characterising modern and contemporary debate about Europe concerns the ongoing negotiations between national enclosures and global overtures. Since the seventeenth century, national confines have been increasingly challenged by global flows, and I think this tension between localism and universalism still thrives in the contemporary political debate in many EU countries and about the idea of the EU itself.

A third antithetical tension characterising modern and contemporary debate about Europe can be found in religion and its impact on institutions. If, on the one hand,

during modernity we witness the progressive development of an idea of Europe that is increasingly secular, on the other hand, as highlighted by Weller, the proponents of this idea were most often Christian believers: the Abbé de Saint Pierre himself, i.e., the first to write about Europe as "European Union", was precisely an abbot. Quoting Carl Schmitt, the most pervasive concepts of the modern doctrine of the State, i.e., the institution that has dominated the European political scene from the modern age to the present day, are none other than secularised theological concepts (2005). Secular institutions designed through confessional lenses: I think this short-circuit characterises much of the modern production on Europe, in a chain that passes through the centuries and, for instance, gets to contemporary struggles for abortion and euthanasia rights.

Finally, a fourth tension concerns the distinctions between humans and citizens. While the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* is considered as the core statement of the French Revolution and a fundamental step in regards to human rights, it is the same document that remarked the distinction between humans and citizens, i.e., between people entitled to enjoy such rights and people who were not (Weller, 2021, p. 59). It is not the case that, for instance, the 1789 statement is named *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, since women were not included (Ibidem). In the text, this distinction between humans and citizens was carried forward through the concepts of active and passive citizenship: those deemed to hold these political rights were called active citizens (Doyle, 1989). According to William Doyle, the concept of passive citizenship encompassed those excluded from such rights: women, enslaved people, children, and foreigners (1989: 124). To understand this distinction, it is important to note that the first formal ban on the slave trade took effect in 1807 (the *Slave Trade Act* in Britain) and, in any case, about 30% of the total volume of the Atlantic slave trade occurred after 1807 (Lovejoy, 1994). I think this tension between man and citizens remains fundamental to the contemporary conception of individual rights and freedoms in Europe. Today's EU's border politics clearly show the exclusionary logic of the distinction between the human being and the citizen, together with the racial structure it embodies.

With all this said, we can indeed look at Europe as a Janus-faced idea, in which peace and war, localism and universalism, faith and secularism, rights and repression not only coexist but are mutually functional. And, probably, it is precisely because of these two-faced interplays that, for instance, Shane Weller talks of an Europe against itself (2021: 247), or Rodrigo Bueno Lacy, drawing on the myth of Kronos, tells us about a European Union devouring itself (2020).

3.2 A sister never found

Ever since the fifteenth century, the process of storytelling of Europe flourished — as Henk van Houtum and Rodrigo Bueno Lacy highlight, it is the moment when Europeanisation first appeared as the imperial geopolitical strategy we still experience today (2015). Fact is that, as remarked by Jaques Levy, during modernity we assist to the selective re-organisation of the main cultural sources of the idea of Europe, a framework which is still common in current times (1999: 55). By using a caesura and breaking the rhythm of the previous sub-chapter, in 3.2 I bring the focus back to today's Europe: we jump from modernity to postmodernity. Beyond the practical benefit of this metric, i.e., restoring the synchrony between research and researched that has characterised my text up to the previous paragraph, other reasons finally convinced me to use caesura. As I said in the previous subchapter, the modern idea of Europe moved its steps through a series of antithetical tensions, most of them still thriving contemporary debate, i.e., the conditions of the development of the modern idea of Europe allow many parallels with the contemporary context: a hoped-for peaceful internal union exporting war out of its borders, national enclosures increasingly challenged by global overtures, secular institutions designed through confessional lenses, women and men struggling to become citizens. After the first paragraph, in which I try (or I wish) to relocate Europe in postmodernity, the rest of the sub-chapter is about post-1989 Europe, as it represents the core period of my investigation, i.e., the moment in which the ideas of the Abbé de Saint Pierre become (almost) reality. As I already explained in the introduction to this Chapter, the focus on post-1989 Europe is particularly significant because it is the historical juncture when the EU consolidates as a political, economic, and symbolic space, while simultaneously reinforcing its borders through legal, material, and discursive practices. It is in this period that the tensions described in the previous paragraph become systematically institutionalised, producing the daily routine of border violence, bureaucratic control, and socio-political self-repression that characterises contemporary EU-driven Europe. Therefore, in postmodernity, following the two World Wars, the EU becomes the primary engine of the Europeanisation process. Thus my research context and research problems — “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021), border “necropolitics” (Mbembe, 2003) and “thanatopolitics” (Murray, 2006), visa apartheid (Kratk, 2018; van Houtum & van Uden, 2021; Surak, 2021), murky border externalisation practices (Bialasiewicz 2012a, 2012b; Amato & Iocchi, 2019; Pacciardi & Berndtsson, 2022), “liquid fear” (Bauman, 2000) and “moral panic” (Cohen, 1973) — are strictly related to the EU's functioning and its scopic regime (Bueno Lacy, 2020, pp. 48-54).

3.2.1 The EU-driven Europe

From the mid-twentieth century onward, the idea of Europe has inevitably come to be tied to that of the European Union (EU) and the post-war project it embodies — Europe being abducted by the EU (Boedeltje & van Houtum, 2008). As it happened with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the post-WWII European integration process was driven by the will to quickly complete the reconstruction of Europe and avoid the possibility of new, future conflicts between its members — “the war/peace = past/future formula” being at stake of Europe’s self-defining (Bialasiewicz 2012b, citing Wæver, 2005, p. 9). Indeed, after two world wars, Europe was very divided, the alterity between Western Europe and Eastern Europe marked by the hyper-symbolic Iron Curtain: as Carl Schmitt remarked, after WWII, from being “European”, and precisely “German”, he suddenly became “Western”¹⁶. Although his perspective was that of a Nazi catholic bigot, I think the point that Schmitt raises makes us understand how, in the aftermath of WWII, Europe loses its centrality, crushed by the emergence of two poles — the USA and the Soviet Union — that will gradually split his hoped-for unity into spheres of influence.

In this context, the EU emerged as western project: the Western Union (or the Bruxelles Treaty Organisation), established through the Treaty of Bruxelles (1948), is usually considered as a proto EU alliance (Diez & Wiener, 2019); the 1957 Treaty of Rome, i.e., the first significant formal step toward the EU as we know it today with the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC), was signed by six western European states, namely: Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany¹⁷. The idea of “West” seems rooted in Greek and Roman legacies, and in modernity it has been constructed to justify European imperialism and the colonisation of the “East” (Said, 1978). In particular, according to Edward Said, this distinction — between the “West” (rational, modern, civilised) and the “East” (irrational, traditional, exotic) — was not natural or objective, but rather, drawing on the ancient Greek-Persian and Rome-Byzantium oppositions. This construction served the purposes of modern imperialism (1978). As a result, in the 20th century, and especially after WWII, the idea of the “West” has increasingly been associated with the model of liberal democracy with a free-market economy (Ibidem). The Iron Curtain was precisely the symbol of the tensions between this model, on the west side, and the statist model, on the east side — installed in 1945, it only collapsed with the “end of history” in 1989 (Fukuyama, 1992), i.e., the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was part of the Iron Curtain and initiate its overall dismantling, moving Europe toward a presumed borderless postmodernity.

¹⁶. Carlo Galli quoting Schmitt at “Festivalfilosofia sulla Comunità 5 2009”, Carpi, 20/09/2009. Available online at: [youtube.com/watch?v=I9C9ZBncueM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9C9ZBncueM) (last consultation April 2022)

¹⁷. From the EU official website: european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59_en (last consultation: April 2022)

In the context of my research, 1989 inevitably serves as a reference date, as it marks a fundamental moment of change for Europe, with renewed territorial, political, economic, social, and cultural equilibria. Not just the fall of the Berlin Wall, that of course was the most iconic pick of this change. 1989 marks the geo-history of Europe as the moment when efforts toward European integration rapidly increased in determination and intensity, culminating in the official birth of the European Union with the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty, signed by 11 member states, in 1993¹⁸. From 1993 onward, the EU became the main force behind the Europeanisation process: over the decades, one has witnessed the constant expansion of the EU-driven Europe toward a unity built through treaties, agreements, and special accords¹⁹. By 2004, the EU counted twenty-four member states, with the entry of post-Soviet countries into the integration project²⁰. Nowadays, the EU's member states are 27, with 7 other states having submitted applications to join the union²¹. At the same time as the building of the EU, the entry into force of the Schengen Agreement in 1995 started the design of an area within Europe with mutually abolished border controls²². Originally, the Schengen Area operated independently of the EU, but in 1999 the agreement was incorporated into EU law by the Amsterdam Treaty, thereby comprising twenty-six European countries today²³. During the same decades, the creation of Europol in 1999²⁴ and Frontex in 2004²⁵ led to the establishment of the first European apparatus for security, intelligence, and border patrol.

As explained in the previous line, post-1989 Europe and its power overlaps represent the core of my research context. In the following lines, I highlight a series of dynamics that I find relevant and need further investigation. Overall, the fundamental reference for the following arguments is Henk van Houtum's critique of the EU border regime, elaborated over the last two decades (2002; 2009; 2010; 2015; 2020; 2021). As it is clear by now, the work of van Houtum is a seminal reference for my study and, in this subsection, I elaborate on what he defines as the EU's "gated community"

¹⁸. From the EU official website: european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1990-99_en (last consultation: April 2022)

¹⁹. Ibidem

²⁰. From the EU official website: european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-countries_en

²¹. Ibidem

²². From the EU official website: european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1990-99_en (last consultation: April 2022)

²³. Ibidem

²⁴. From Europol official website: europol.europa.eu/about-europol/history (last consultation: April 2022)

²⁵. From Frontex official website: frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/who-we-are/tasks-mission/ (last consultation: April 2022)

(van Houtum & Pijpers, 2006) operating through “apartheid” logics and “human blacklisting” (van Houtum, 2010b). With the collapse of the Iron Curtain (1989) and the Soviet Union (1991), the creation of the EU (1993) and the entry into force of the Schengen Agreement (1995), the political and cultural atmosphere in Europe during the 1990s is pervaded by the feeling of openness and creative freedom²⁶. After three decades, we can say with certainty that this was not the case. Quoting Etienne Balibar, after 1989, borders in Europe do not disappear, but rather they move: if, with the Fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe thought to access a borderless postmodernity, almost at the same time it found itself constructing apartheid walls all around its space, both at national and pan-European level (2004; 2005). Indeed, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, together with the internal borders’ openness guaranteed by the Schengen Agreement, we have witnessed a massive fortification of the European space, both at the centre and at the margins of its extension: the implementation of the Ceuta and Melilla border fences, for instance, started 1991 (Ferrer, 2008, p. 140). A 2022 report by the European Parliamentary Research Service finds that: “In the past two decades, the number of border fences at the EU/Schengen borders has risen from 0 to 19. By 2022, 12 EU/Schengen countries have built fences at one or more sections of their borders”²⁷. Indeed, this fortification of the EU is not merely a matter of external borders. Ironically, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the European space has been strongly affected by the raising of a variety of new bordering processes i.e., with the post-9/11 proliferation of security infrastructures and architectures in every city, mobility hub, and borderland (Chebel d’Appollonia, 2012); with the borderisation of the national and international political debate (Gómez Peña, 1996; Balibar, 2004); with the adoption of an increasingly discriminative visa policy (van Houtum & van Uden, 2021; Surak, 2021); with multiple humanitarian crisis in Calais and Lampedusa, in the Greek islands and all along the so-called Balkan route. In the 2000s, the term “Fortress Europe” *was widely used* to describe this phenomenon of re-bordering, but, as we will see in the following pages, it was also improper. Sure is that, in the last three decades, day by day, the Mediterranean Sea has become a great mass grave, in the indifference of the two shores: from 1988 to 2016 almost thirty thousand people died trying to access Europe through the Mediterranean only²⁸; from 1993 to present day, another set of data, instead, tell us about fifty-two thousands people are missing for the same motivation²⁹. At the moment I am writing this, I feel that daily shipwrecks are taken

²⁶. I refer to an exhibit I have visited in Berlin in Nov 2019: “Nineties Berlin: the fall of the wall, creative freedom, anarchy and techno”

²⁷. From EU parliament official website: [euparl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733692/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733692_EN.pdf](https://euparl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733692/EPRS_BRI(2022)733692_EN.pdf) (last accessed: June 2023)

²⁸. fortresseurope.blogspot.com (last accessed: April 2022)

²⁹. unitedagainstrefugeedeaths.eu/about-the-campaign/about-the-united-list-of-deaths/ (last accessed: April 2022)

for granted — collateral damage — by people and institutions at all scales. About this issue, drawing on a series of Foucauldian materials, Achille Mbembe has been talking about “necropolitics” (2003) and, on a similar note, Stuart J. Murray has extensively written on “thanatopolitics” (2006), i.e. the creation and maintenance of institutions that prioritise the life of certain people as more valuable than others.

3.2.2 Paper borders and golden visas

Although over the last few decades we have witnessed the progressive fortification of the European Union's borders, Europe is not a fortress because of those material barriers. The reason why people still die in the Mediterranean or on the Balkan route today is the impossibility of obtaining a visa legally, i.e. because of “pre-borders” or “paper walls” (van Houtum & van Uden, 2021). The invention of visa is relatively new, dating to the beginning of the twentieth century; according to John Torpey, it was a temporary measure intended to regulate migration flows after the First World War (2000). Notwithstanding, this temporary instrument of bordering has gradually turned the EU into a “locked-in” normality, a process needed to secure economic interests (van Houtum & van Uden, 2021, p. 21). In his 2010 article, Henk van Houtum suggested the idea of the EU's border regime as a “global apartheid” machine operating through a “human blacklisting” by country of origin. Indeed, discrimination by nationality was and still is a fundamental practice for contemporary EU visa policies, but nowadays, what I think really matters is to go beyond nationalities and get to the core of discrimination: money. It is fundamental, when speaking of contemporary visa policies, to understand how much this debate relates to a global form of a renovated class conflict (Cirillo & Piretti, 2024). In light of the growing golden visa market, i.e., the commercialisation of passports, which allows rich people to quickly obtain citizenship in a country by making investments there, we can definitely say that EU visa policies are deadly paper walls only if you are poor (Ibidem).

While in the last three decades, more than fifty thousand people have died in their attempt to access the EU through illegal means³⁰, wealthy individuals have at their disposal a wide range of legalised opportunities to get in through Citizenship-By-Investment (CBI) or Residency-By-Investment (RBI) programmes. These programmes have redefined the acquisition standards of citizenship rights by disrupting its classical paradigm based on the three key mechanisms of *ius sanguinis* (also called Law of Blood, inherited from parents), *ius soli* (also called Law of land, tied to the country of birth at the time of birth), and the long, pitfall-filled path of naturalisation (Spescha, Bolzli, & Kerland, 2020). As explained by Surak, CBI and RBI programmes

³⁰. unitedagainstreugeedeaths.eu/about-the-campaign/about-the-united-list-of-deaths/
(last consultation June 2023)

are the result of a process of “exchanging mobility for money [that] has become normalised” (Surak, 2021, p. 16), a legal framework facilitating the attraction of foreign investments and entrepreneurs; in his own words “as long as participants park their cash in the country, they can freely enter and reside” (Ibidem).

What does the world look like if you are a High-Net-Worth Individual (HNWI) traveller? You can check the different options. With a quick online search, it is possible to find an infinite number of agencies offering citizenship-by-investment (CBI) and residency-by-investment (RBI) programmes. The agency La Vida Golden Visas advertises the CBI service this way: “Freedom to travel. Ability to live, work study — Citizenship by investment programmes will grant immediate citizenship to applicants and their families [...] In Europe, the programmes of Cyprus and Malta mean citizenship not just of those countries but the European citizenship benefits that come with it, meaning the ability to work, travel and study anywhere in Europe”³¹. The website of the company Immigrant Invest advertises CBI/RBI programmes with the slogan “Creating Cosmopolitans” and the subtitle “99% applications approved”³².

According to the Hungarian start-up Citizenship Shop, CBI programmes have existed since the 1980s. Still, they only became popular in the US and Canada by the 1990s, and in Europe after 2012: “The demand for CBI/RBI schemes has increased in recent years, making it a \$15 billion dollar industry annually, with some 20 golden visa schemes and 12 CBI schemes actively running as of 2019 [...] The CBI/RBI industry is set to expand to \$20 billion and already sees significant competition and more and more players are entering the market [...] In 2018 Malta became the first country to announce citizenship tests for robots and Saudi Arabia became the first country in the world to grant citizenship to Robot Sophia. We also believe citizenship will extend to space in about 100 years”³³. Although the concept of EU citizenship extending to alien life sounds very futuristic, the perspectives that Citizenship Shop offers on golden visas as a growing market seem quite realistic. As Henk van Houtum and Annelies van Uden have highlighted, this commodification of passports has been seen by some economists as the most efficient and egalitarian way to select would-be migrants, at the same time creating extra national profit (2021: 22). Of course, this extra profit has not to be measured in the cost of the investments only. In a recent interview, I spoke with a golden visa agent based in Portugal who works for the Chinese market³⁴. He told me that the really appealing

³¹. From La Vida Golden Visa website: goldenvisas.com (last consultation June 2023)

³². From Immigrant Invest website: immigrantinvest.com (last consultation June 2023)

³³. From Citizenship Shop website: citizenshipshop.com/about-us/ (last consultation June 2023)

³⁴. Interview conducted in September 2019, in Lisbon. The interviewee prefers to remain anonymous.

part for a Chinese client buying a Portuguese passport is the long-term perspective to bring his capital out of China. Therefore, from the European side, this dynamic could be extremely compelling, which is why the number of European countries allowing CBI/RBI programmes is quickly growing.

According to the EU website (Report A9-0028/2022), twelve EU countries currently have implemented CBI and/or RBI programmes (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain)³⁵. The difference between CBI and RBI programmes is that, in the case of CBI, the applicant obtains the citizenship as his/her application comes to be accepted; for RBIs the applicant obtains a residency permit as his/her application comes to be accepted and, at the end of the residency permit, the possibility to apply for citizenship (Kratat, 2018). Being national legislations, all countries have their own regulations and, using Henley & Partners' vocabulary, offer specific "key-benefits". On Henley & Partners' website, a list of the different citizenships they trade is available. For instance, RBIs to Italy and its "great works of art and architecture" cost 250 thousand euros, CBIs in Montenegro and "its magnificent and unparalleled natural beauty" cost 450 thousand euros³⁶.

According to the aforementioned EU Report A9-0028/2022, in 2022, the highest price was paid to become Dutch (1,25 million euros), while the lowest was paid to become Latvian (60 thousand euros). In the same report, the European Parliament "considers that schemes granting nationality on the basis of a financial investment (CBI schemes), also known as 'golden passports', are objectionable from an ethical, legal and economic point of view and pose several serious security risks for Union citizens, such as those stemming from money-laundering and corruption" and that the "Union citizenship is not a commodity that can be marketed or sold and has never been conceived as such in the Treaties"³⁷. In the long-standing debate over national enclosures and global ouverture, the real point is that the EU accuses its member states of indirectly selling EU citizenships through their national CBI/RBI programmes. As it is reported in the "explanatory statement" of the Report A9-0028/2022: "Union citizenship is a bit like the surprise one finds in the BBC Antiques Roadshow: a seemingly worthless object turns out to be extremely valuable. Most Union citizens are unaware of the treasure sitting in their attic: Union citizenship. It is highly coveted not just by many across the world dreaming of working in the Union, but also by some of the world's richest people.

³⁵. europa.eu/eu-portal/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0028_EN.html (last consultation June 2023)

³⁶. From Henley and Partners website: henleyglobal.com/countries (last consultation June 2023)

³⁷. europa.eu/eu-portal/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0028_EN.html (last consultation June 2023)

Governments of Member States quickly recognised a business opportunity: by joining the Union, the value of their national passports suddenly skyrocketed. Even the trade in fast-track procedures to citizenship via residency, or acquiring citizenship of a third country that offers visa-free travel to the Union, proves to be very lucrative. In essence, governments are selling what is not theirs to sell: Union citizenship. [...] Although the schemes selling 'golden passports' and 'golden visas' are euphemistically called 'Citizenship by investment' (CBI) and 'Residency by investment' (RBI), in reality applicants have no genuine interest to invest. [...] The contrast with the treatment of refugees or labour migrants, or of Union citizens with dual citizenship born in the Union, is staggering. [...] Thus far, the Member States have been reluctant to address the matter, to the point of refusing to engage in talks"³⁸

The point is that, beyond the ethical concerns and the "staggering" difference between CBI/RBI and asylum programmes, this golden visa market opens a profound crisis in the debate on borders and bordering processes, overcoming the fortress and its deadly border regime. In this case, borders are smooth, first-class business trips (money to be paid), and perhaps this could serve as the starting point for a renewed reflection. Although critical border studies are connected with Marxist or post-Marxist theory, I think that, paradoxically, critical border scholars are increasingly missing a fundamental dimension of analysis: class. The prevailing focus on poor border crossers in border research prompts a fascination with this unconscious neglect (an attempt to find ethnography addressing wealthy border-crossers yielded no satisfactory results). In this regard, it is significant to recall the parallel migration stories portrayed by Ollie Williams in his 2020 investigation into wealthy Nigerian migration, in which he traces the migratory routes and methods of two Nigerian men of roughly the same age and holding the same passport, but from vastly different social standings³⁹. One story features Dapo, a wealthy Nigerian in his thirties, who obtained Maltese citizenship through a minimum investment of 800,000 euros, allowing him to relocate to Malta permanently at any time. Contrastingly, Kingsley, a few years older than Dapo and sharing the same birth passport but with significantly lower social and financial status, reached Europe only after perilously crossing the Sahara and the Mediterranean. These mirroring stories highlight not only the ethical controversies of citizenship trade practices but also the necessity of returning class-based analysis to our toolbox, renovating the engagement between border research and a radical critique of the global

³⁸. Ibidem

³⁹. From Al Jazeera website: [aljazeera.com/features/2020/12/10/wealthy-nigerians-buying-citizenship-overseas](https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/12/10/wealthy-nigerians-buying-citizenship-overseas) (last consultation June 2023)

hierarchies. Therefore, I argue that the real point of alterity and discrimination nowadays is purely economic. The emergence of the gated-communities model is reshaping the urban world, and in doing so, it has become a praxis also adopted by institutions at national and EU levels.

3.2.3 The border crossed us

The EU is not a fortress because, beyond its citizenship being on sale, its borders keep moving. Another fundamental dynamic in which my study happens and moves is the implementation of a series of EU border externalisation policies since the 1990s, i.e., the signing of a series of strategic agreements so that non-EU countries could curb migration by accepting the responsibility of tracing, blocking and criminalising people moving towards the EU without a visa (Bialasiewicz, 2012a, 2012b). After intense political negotiations, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004 to help the EU support and foster stability, prosperity and security in its closest neighbourhood — border controls being the fundamental common interests, especially for the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), as the region is the most (in)famous migration hotspot worldwide (Ibidem). Therefore, while the idea of a fortress and walls gives a picture in which the EU is safely stuck, protecting itself on the right side of the border, the reality is once again quite different.

Roughly, to externalise the border means to partially transfer the authority of border control to so-called third countries so that travellers without a visa get stuck way before arriving at the border of Europe — as Luiza Bialasiewicz put it, since the early 2000s, “EUrope’s neighbours are, in other words, becoming EUrope’s policemen” (2012a: 847). According to Fabio Amato and Alessio Iocchi, especially after 2005, an acceleration of border externalisation practices has been registered with a multiplicity of agreements being signed, this acceleration leading to the Europe-Africa Summit of November 2015 and the consequent establishment of a EU emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa), and to the 2016 accord with Turkey the following year (2019). This “change of paradigm” has been clearly expressed in the 2020 EU’s New Pact on Migration, through which the “EU will seek to promote tailor-made and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries” in order to tackle “migrant smuggling” and “help develop legal pathways”⁴⁰. However, in truth, up to now, practices of border externalisation to third countries like Libya, Morocco, Niger, Tunisia and Turkey have only shown harmful results, both in terms

⁴⁰ ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_20_1706/IP_20_1706_EN.pdf (last consultation June 2023)

of human rights violations and criminalisation of migrants (Amato & Iocchi, 2019; Bialasiewicz, 2012a, 2012b; Pacciardi & Berndtsson, 2022).

Among the EU's externalisation practices is its collaboration with Libya. In December 2007, Italy and Libya signed a series of bilateral agreements to implement EU-funded joint patrols along the Libyan coast, thereby allowing Italian institutions to operate in Libyan waters (Bialasiewicz, 2012a, pp. 852-854). In August 2008, the same parties signed the Treaty of Friendship and Co-operations, a fundamental step in the reconciliation between Italy and its former colony (Ibidem). On this legal base, in 2009, the Italian parliament approved a new push-back policy, allowing the Italian coast guard to intercept irregular boats and ferry them back to Libya (regardless of their nationality or country of origin), without assessing passengers' asylum claims, notwithstanding such practice was in staggering contrast with the obligation of the European Convention on Human Rights (Ibidem).

The collaboration between Italy and Libya is probably the dodgier one within contemporary EU border externalisation practices. Gabriele del Grande was writing about the deportation of migrants from Libya to Niger already in 2007, noting how the massive expulsions created new exploitation chains: as most of the deported were in complete poverty, unable to reach Europe as well as to go back home, they got stuck in places like Agadez, being ready to accept inhumane working conditions to feed themselves. After the 2011 conflict and the NATO intervention, the EU's efforts to stabilise Libya gradually increased, with 2017 a fundamental moment in this process (Amato & Iocchi, 2019). By cooperating with Libyan fractionalised government and private militias, the EU have funded a series of human rights violations in the name of its border externalisation policy: as Human Rights Watch has amply documented, deportation, illegal detention, torture and beating have been ordinary practices for people on the move toward Europe in 2013⁴¹, 2014⁴², 2015⁴³ and 2016⁴⁴. Notwithstanding, as highlighted by Amato and Iocchi, on the 2nd of February 2017, Italy and Libya sign the "Memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the fields of development, the fight against illegal immigration, human trafficking and fuel smuggling and on reinforcing the security of borders between the State of Libya and the Italian Republic" (2019). The day after, on the

⁴¹. [hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2013_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2013_web.pdf) (p. 580) (last consultation June 2023)

⁴². [hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/01/HRW%20World%20Report%202014.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/01/HRW%20World%20Report%202014.pdf) (p. 578) (last consultation June 2023)

⁴³. [hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2015_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2015_web.pdf) (p. 361) (last consultation June 2023)

⁴⁴. [hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2016_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2016_web.pdf) (p. 381 e 386) (last consultation June 2023)

3rd of February 2017 the same Memorandum was endorsed by EU leaders and led to the Malta Declaration, which states that EU's "efforts to stabilize Libya are now more important than ever" and that the EU is "determined to take additional action to significantly reduce migratory flows along the Central Mediterranean route"⁴⁵.

In a recent article, Agnese Pacciardi and Joakim Berndtsson have examined the "migration industry" emerging from EU externalisation practices and raised a series of transparency and accountability concerns (2022). As they highlighted, since the early 2000s, the collaboration between Italian and Libyan authorities has financed detention centres, police training, deportation schemes, and a variety of military equipment to tackle migration (2022: 4016). This "commercialisation" and "outsourcing" of the EU's border-work attracts "local authorities, private security companies and militias. In this sense, private companies greatly benefit from border business, which elevates them to the role of border security experts and awards them remunerative contracts for the provision of both equipment and services. At the same time, the Libyan militias and armed groups that gravitate in a more or less official way around the authorities, make profit either from smuggling migrants and enlisting them in their armies, or by being recognised as legitimate interlocutors" (Ibidem). Although their results are specific for the Libyan case, Pacciardi and Berndtsson observed how similar dynamics could replicate elsewhere, for instance in Tunisia and Morocco, which also have been major beneficiaries of EUTF for Africa — "whenever migration management its outsourced, the EU is likely to contribute to the creation of several (sometimes overlapping) migration industries, each with different degrees of complexity" (4022). On the same note, Fabio Amato and Alessio Iocchi have found in Niger a thorough "laboratory for the management and control of mobility flows", mostly funded by the same EU funding (2019).

From the perspective of my studies, I think there is no better way to synthesise EU border externalisation policies than by re-fashioning the sentence: *We did not cross the border, the border crossed us*. According to McCaughan, the change of paradigm envisioned by this sentence has been used many time to describe the aggressive border politics of the US toward Mexico, in a chain that, since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ties together indigenous stolen land to the contemporary Chicano Movement claims – it is a reminder of how, progressively, US border policies "turned Mexicans into immigrants and the continent's indigenous communities into oppressed minorities in a colonized nation" (2020: 7). Making another step, it is important to note how, in the context of contemporary Latin migration toward the

⁴⁵. consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/02/03/9-malta-declaration/ (last consultation June 2023)

US, nowadays Mexican authorities deploy increasingly lucrative functions of border patrol in its southern border with Guatemala, like the 2014 *Programa Frontera Sur*, aiming at stopping people on the move toward the US and funded by the same US (Wilson & Valenzuela, 2014). In a way, I think that the EU's contemporary practice of border externalisation needs to be read in a very long-term perspective to see the parallel I am trying to draw. If we think of the EU as the 1957 six-member geopolitical nucleus that signed the Treaty of Rome and compare it to the contemporary EU's border-control offshoring and outsourcing, it is possible to recognise the EU's expansion and imperial growth. With the refashioning of the sentence *We did not cross the border, the border crossed us* in the EU's enlargement process discourse, I attempt to open an "epistemology of the south" that could provide a new basis for understanding the transformation occurring in contemporary European societies (De Sousa Santos, 2014).

3.2.4 Xenophobia and border complacency

As I explained in Chapter 1, borders and bordering processes are "a practice, a relation, an imagination, and a desire" (van Houtum, 2021, p. 41). In this sense, I think that over the last decades, Europe has witnessed a strong refashioning of an extremely discriminative EU/non-EU binarism, i.e., an exclusionary and nativist logic pervading all fields of life at both personal and societal levels. Focusing on Europeans, border theory has shown how external bordering relates dynamically to internal bordering: a process largely constituted by discourses (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1994; Paasi, 1998; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002; van Houtum, 2021). Also, according to Brown (2010), borders theatricalise powers, with demonstrative and symbolic effects that exceed the material letter. Therefore, for instance, what are the impacts of the EU's discriminative border policies on Europeans? How do they affect the production of the EU's imagined community? From what I can see at the moment I am writing this, the impacts of these processes are slowly transforming Europe into a gated-community-like space and mindset (van Houtum & van Pijpers, 2006), money-driven, hyper-technologically fenced, and inhabited by "dividuals" (Deleuze, 1992) whose freedom and repression emanate from the same machines.

In my opinion, quoting Zygmund Bauman, nowadays European societies live in a state of "liquid fear", i.e., a fear without apparent source, a kind of derivative state resulting from the perception of an insecure and vulnerable world (2000: 3). Such condition of liquid fear is a shared reality in Europe, even in the absence of a real threat, and often produces extreme reactions for presumed dangers — as Bauman put it, it is a "self-propelling capacity" and is used by institutional power to exchange obedience for protection (Ibidem). Using different words and referring to other

contexts, Stanley Cohen was addressing quite the same phenomenon by defining it as “moral panics”, i.e., a form of unjustified collective panic over a presumed danger (2002). It occurs when a “condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (2002: 9). According to Cohen, this phenomenon is often caused by distorted media stories, when people get disproportionate exposure to a real or fictitious danger (*Ibidem*).

The storytelling of new external border-walls protecting the EU, the criminalisation of non-HNWI migration, the ever-increasing aggressive border controls and externalisation practices, the securitisation post 9/11 of every city and borderland, I think all this have fuelled, over last decades, the nourishing of fear and extremism in many EU regions, a political, social and cultural flow shaping an increasingly rigid and bordered EU identity in which, unfortunately, racism and xenophobia not yet pertain to a “culture of resistance practiced by a stubborn or scared minority” (Gómez Peña 1996: 7). A survey by Istituto Cattaneo shows how, for instance, in 2016 the perception of immigrants in Italy (24%) is way far from reality (7%). The perception percentage rises to 32,7% among right-wing participants. If, according to Anssi Paasi, borders exist through boundary-producing discourses and practices (2011), the so-called myth of invasion affecting the EU not only produces deaths at the external borders, but I think it also instils high flows of xenophobia against migrants and minorities at personal and community levels. Indeed, this absurdity in the data proposed by Istituto Cattaneo must be read in light of decades of systemic disinformation and misrepresentations: a socio-cultural understanding of borders and migration dynamics shaped by a variety of economic and political factors. In this sense, I think European citizens are daily exposed to fake news, propaganda, and partial views: it is also by campaigning on the lie of invasion and ethnic substitution that, for instance, in recent years, extreme right-wing political parties became majoritarian in Hungary, Italy, Poland, and the Netherlands.

In the Italian case, the right-wing coalition won the 2022 Italian election, driven by the success of the extreme-right party Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi), which alone received about 26% of the total vote⁴⁶. Fdi's ideology is a mix of sovranism, nativism, authoritarianism, and euro-scepticism (Donà, 2022). In about 5 years (from 2017 to 2022), the party increased its share of preferences from 4% to 26%, also by exploiting the rhetoric of justice and protection in relation to migration issues (Pellegrino, 2021). In Italy, at the moment, it seems that people enjoy a sort of border complacency. The protective rhetoric of a borderist right convinced one

⁴⁶. I took the data from: ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2022-10/Elezioni%20politiche%202022_le%20analisi%20ipsos%20post%20voto.pdf (last consultation: June 2023)

in four Italians voters: by border complacency, I mean a voluntary and welcome renunciation of democratic institutions, because of an emergency, and therefore the will for a strong sovereign who takes care of *Italians First*. I think this nationalistic and isolationist stance, echoing Donald Trump's slogans, has pervaded the Italian public debate since migration has turned into an instrumentalisable spectacle, making the myths of invasion and ethnic substitution profitable sources of votes.

As described by van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, the myth of the invasion is also fine-tuned through a series of "cartopolitical" strategies (2015, 2019, 2019b). In one of their articles, they engage with the deconstruction of undocumented migration cartography made by Frontex, the EU's border agency, and they find that, rather than a scientific depiction of the migratory phenomenon, Frontex's cartography is to be considered likewise propaganda, i.e., cartographical representations bearing xenophobic distortions (2019). As they wrote: "It takes but a rapid glance at the Frontex map to realize that the colour, direction and shape of its arrows constitute an allegory alerting the viewer about multitudes of "unwanted bodies" invading the EU and bringing with them unspecified threats" — a connotation that splices into the prevalent xenophobic discourse that portrays asylum seekers as a "security, economic and hygiene threat" for European populations" (2019: 201). They argue about structural biases, in particular referring to some cartographical features widely used in contemporary migration cartography, like the "propagandistic" and "crimson arrows", highlighting their influence in the political debate on the EU's borders and identity (Ibidem). In fact, as they remarked, the "visual design" of Frontex cartography, "does not pursue scientific accuracy but rather the schematic efficiency of an oversimplified diagram to deliver a simple message: an existential confrontation between friends and foes" (Ibidem). And this rhetoric of friends and foes, based on "an imagined, gigantic, imminent and violent conquest of Europe by global masses of undocumented migrants" (202), fuels an increasingly racist, xenophobic, and aporophobic political debate in a variety of EU countries, in which values like solidarity are increasingly criminalised.

What matters here is recognising that nowadays the European experiment is at risk: a community based on values that are crushed every day. I think there is an urgent need to restructure visions and agendas on EU borders and migration management, as the actual situation is absolutely at odds with the values that, for instance, the EU pretends to defend and represent. As described in the previous pages, contemporary EU-driven "discriminative borderism" (van Houtum, 2021) is not only lethal thousands of people on the move, but also self-threatening (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020) and self-repressive (van Houtum, 2011): on the one

hand, transforming the Mediterranean into a new “black Atlantic” (Gilroy, 1993) and disseminating *chuchillas* and death on the Balkan route and around the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla; on the other, making of the EU a large suprematist gated-community in which discriminations by class, race, nationality, gender, age, and religion are still daily businesses.

3.2.5 A scopic regime

Up to now, we have seen how the idea of Europe has developed through a series of political, social, economic, and cultural overlaps. From ancient Greek mythology to the contemporary EU-driven Europe, the storytelling of Europe has always been functional to the needs of a specific power, creating a discriminatory chain of centrism and suprematism that, from the Indo-European colonisation of the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, has arrived to the present day. Surely, throughout the centuries, different actors have created and re-created spatial and cultural ideas of Europe according to their own political agendas, and, in this process of Europeanisation, as we have seen, visualities have always played a fundamental role, from ancient Greek cartography to Frontex's contemporary representations of migration. In the final paragraph of Chapter 3, I try to conclude my arguments about Europe while also opening new research paths within Europe.

As Rodrigo Bueno Lacy wrote: “Among the tools of Europeanisation, visually evocative language has always occupied a privileged role. The collection of these visual expressions has created a visual discourse on Europe, *ocularcentric* assemblages that we could call *scopic regimes* — i.e., systems of images, either visual or metaphorical — which, fuelled by our desire to see, mislead us into believing that what we see is not a representation of the world but the world itself. [...] Scopic regimes create worlds in our heads, i.e., imaginary geographies or scopic geopolitics, whose order and meaning we learn not so much from direct personal experience as from the eyes of others [...] Behind the innocent, indisputable, disinterested and ultimately real appearance of [Europe's] representations there are interests, machinations, prejudices, violence and mis-understandings” (Bueno Lacy, 2020, pp. 46-48).

As I said in Chapter 1, through lines of visibility, bordering apparatuses impose a “regimen of lights” (Deleuze et al., 2006, p. 339), defining what is visible and what is not. Defining the EU as a scopic regime is an enunciation that, if nothing else, moves in the same sensory field. According to Bueno Lacy, the “assembly line” of a scopic regime presents three fundamental passages: fragmentation, representation, assemblage (2020: 51). The “unknowable world” and its “geographical complexity”

is fragmented into “small parts”, then these parts are “represented and transmitted through all kind of channels”: the scopic regime is the “assemblage” of these representations, which “become substitutes of a world too vast for us to directly experience” (Ibidem). It is in this perspective that I thought of my research: investigating EU’s scopic regime, i.e., the “regimen of light” (Deleuze et al., 2006, p. 339) that EU’s bordering *dispositifs* impose, and the counter-narratives and lines of flights offered by a variety of “criminal” border artists (Gomez Peña, 1993, p. 182). Quoting again Gilles Deleuze, I think there is an urgent need is to “create” (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 312-324) counter-narratives within EU’s scopic regime, to produce and share new representations for such assemblage — “dislocating and destabilizing the EU’s imagined boundaries may allow us to re-imagine Europe and inspire refreshing ways of thinking about its borders” (Bueno Lacy, 2020, p. 87). In this endeavour, as we have seen in Chapter 2, indeed critical arts play a fundamental role, allowing new border imaginaries to emerge and impact: the capacity to challenge the dominant colonial and EU-driven “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021), I think, is strictly dependent on the capacity to listen to critical art and critical artists, which is not an easy task in the “society beyond contents” we all move through⁴⁷. Such a task is fundamental because, if anything about Europe is clear, it is the fact that Cadmus’ search has not ended yet: Europe is a sister never found, and never to be found — the meaning is in the search. As Massimo Cacciari was writing: “Europe has always been a term that designates what Europe will be, or would like to be, or should be. The figure of Europe has historically always been a task” (2006). On the same note, Zygmunt Bauman defined Europe as “an unfinished adventure” in the title of his 2004 publication; Reinhart Koselleck, “comunitas in itinere” (2002). Indeed, this perspective offers renewed motivation for my research: altering the assemblage that the scopic regime proposes to us and producing a new Europe is not only possible but precisely how it has worked since the bull crossed the sea. It is high time that we recognise that the EU has kidnapped Europe, much like Zeus once did (see Boedeltje & van Houtum, 2008). The EU’s institutional apparatus, with its bureaucratic, securitarian, and exclusionary logic, has appropriated the myth, transforming the promise of encounter into structures and practices of control. The same narrative that once symbolised openness and transformation now manifests as self-enclosure and fear. As van Houtum and Bueno Lacy have observed, Europe today suffers from a form of “auto-immunity” (2020): in defending itself from an imagined external threat, it turns its protective mechanisms inward, attacking the very values — openness, hospitality, plurality — that once defined it. This dynamic is evident in post-1989 Europe, where the EU consolidates as both a political and

⁴⁷. Guillermo Gomez Peña at Ted Talk. Available at: youtube.com/watch?v=x1KkjVpc5Go&t= (last access: 9-2-23)

symbolic space while simultaneously reinforcing external borders, producing the everyday realities of discriminative borderism, border necropolitics, visa apartheid, and murky externalisation practices. To alter the assemblage, then, is to reclaim the possibility of Europe as a living, unfinished project, capable of reinventing itself beyond fear, enclosures, and selective violence.

CHAPTER 4

APPROACH, DESIGN, METHODS AND QUESTIONS

With Chapter 4, I reach the midpoint of my manuscript — it marks the threshold between the literature review and my case studies. Up to now, I have been carrying on my arguments through very diverse disciplinary fields and, in the first stance, here I explicit this choice by making a fundamental reference to the call for “un-discipline” (Parizot et al., 2014) and/or “indiscipline” (Rancière, 2006), i.e., a confrontational attitude toward the compartmentalisation of knowledge. Another topic of this chapter concerns the design and methodological infrastructure of my case studies. I make a specific mention to the “naturalistic inquiry” and to what is defined as the “artisanal core” of doing qualitative research (Beuving & de Vries, 2015, p. 19). I introduce the research questions and population for my two case studies. Finally, the last part of Chapter 4 is dedicated to art-based and visual research and analysis methods.

The decision to situate the discussion of methodological choices and case studies design in Chapter 4, rather than at the beginning of the manuscript as is customary, stems from the fact that these reflections were developed and refined in direct response to the exploration of sources and the literature review undertaken in the preceding chapters and the findings emerging from the preliminary research questions thriving those chapters. If borders are *dispositifs* and border art narratives are lines of flight that may evade them, then working on border art addressing contemporary EU bordering processes may be the right approach. In other words, the methodological approach to my case studies emerged as a necessary step only after engaging deeply with the conceptual frameworks and scholarly debates that informed the previous chapters. Thus, Chapter 4 functions as a threshold, marking the transition between the conceptual and theoretical work already conducted — the “what has been said” of the literature review — and the empirical work to follow in Chapters 5 and 6, where the case studies are presented and analysed. Positioning methodological reflections at this midpoint allows the reader to understand them as inseparable from the conceptualisations elaborated earlier, highlighting their responsiveness to the questions, populations, and epistemological challenges identified through the review of scholarship. In this sense, Chapter 4 is not only preparatory but also reflective: it makes explicit the artisanal, context-dependent, and exploratory nature of the research process, emphasising that methodological choices are embedded in and contingent upon the intellectual terrain charted in the chapters preceding it.

4.1 Moving toward indiscipline

Throughout my PhD journey, I have been asked many times: What is your discipline? What is your scientific field? From my point of view, answering this question is not easy. Before doing so, there are a series of complexities to consider; the first concerns the Italian scientific-disciplinary sectors system, which does not include border studies, splitting its knowledge body into a variety of sectors that often communicate poorly with one another. So, although the questions may sound obsolete for the anglophone approach to the *studies*, they are not, for instance, in Italy, where I feel border scholars still have to struggle with the compartmentalisations of knowledge established during modernity⁴⁸.

As I said in Chapter 1, research on borders has the capacity/necessity to question different bodies of knowledge, and nowadays, it is a common attitude to consider border studies as an interdisciplinary field. Actually, not only inter-. In the last decades, many prefixes had preceded “disciplinary,” such as inter-, trans-, multi-, pluri-. In a recent article, Anna Guillò also considered work on borders and, specifically, on border art, as an “extra-disciplinary” endeavour, aiming to break through the impasse of the prefix (2016). However it is, this shift toward the crossing of different bodies of knowledge is not confined to the niches of border scholars only, but extends to all disciplines. And, in my opinion, the ambiguities created by the different prefixes are generating a mere void of sense in respect to what I see, instead, as a fundamental achievement of contemporary research, making it an empty, redundant must-have.

Beyond this prefix issue, it is important to consider another fundamental complexity. As I said in Chapter 1, I see disciplines themselves as colonial boxes and hegemonic compartmentalisation. As Miguel Mellino keeps saying, anthropology, for instance, developed its methods in close relation to the pragmatism of colonial administrations⁴⁹. Indeed, the same discourse applies to geography (see, among

⁴⁸. The compartmentalisation of knowledge established during modernity has been widely discussed by many critical theorists. Among the others: Foucault (1970) analysed the formation of disciplinary epistemes; Latour (1993) questioned modern divisions between nature and society; Wallerstein (1996) traced the institutional fragmentation of the social sciences; Mellino (2005) and de Sousa Santos (2014) exposed how modern epistemic divisions are inseparable from colonial and racialised power structures; Rancière (2006) critiqued the ways in which regimes of knowledge reproduce social hierarchies and exclusions.

⁴⁹. Miguel Mellino, intervento al convegno “Migranti, spazi urbani e mutamento sociale”, organizzato dal Centro di elaborazione culturale Mobilità, Migrazioni Internazionali (MoMI) dell’Università “L’Orientale” (15/10/2021)

others, Ferretti, 2019, 2020). The colonality of the disciplines through which contemporary scholars move their steps is quite astonishing.

Another point that makes my relationship with disciplines complex is plurilingualism — I have read literature and carried on informal talks and interviews in English, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic, which inevitably produce slippages in meaning and knowledge clusters. I have been interrogating myself about many translation issues and have had to make compromises with many definitions.

Finally, the interdependency of my research with the arts is a fundamental point of this discussion. As I explained in Chapter 2, a “cultural turn” (dell’Agnese & Szary, 2015) and an “aesthetic turn” (Moze & Spiegel, 2020) in border studies emerged as it became clear that borders and bordering processes were the subject of a growing body of artistic production worldwide. In this research context, the necessity to go beyond “the apparent simplicity and lack of imagination with which borders and bordering practices continue to be treated” (Vaughan & Williams, 2012, p. 7) has led a growing number of inquirers to seek critical visions in dialogue with the arts. And, quoting the antiAtlas manifesto, this dialogue generates a fertile “un-discipline”, opening the doors to “cognitive gains made of mutual insights, transfers, and examples” (Parizot et al., 2014). Calling for more interdependence among diverse disciplines, as well as between science and the arts, and among theorists and practitioners, the work of the antiAtlas group has been a fundamental reference and has strongly influenced my approach. From the manifesto: “The dialogue between art, science, and practice has generated cognitive gains made of mutual insights, transfers, and examples. At the same time, this dialogue has gone far beyond using one discipline as a vehicle for another. Art, which is not a discipline in the sense of specialization and institutionalization of knowledge, has helped give a transgressive content to this enterprise. Such potential of art-science explorations certainly resides in its call for un-discipline, since the inscription of research within specialized disciplines may invalid or make unthinkable questioning that could precisely come out of the refusal of objects and methods that disciplines acknowledge” (Parizot et al., 2014). I am convinced that, as said by Chiara Brambilla, border scholars need to overcome the “modern oppositions between [...] theories and practices”, and focus instead on their “interplay” (Brambilla et al., 2015, p. 3). On the same note, for Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary (2016), the transformative power of art has to be explored through personal and long-term crossings between researchers and artists, in order to use the disruptive potential of art-based research fully.

Building on this, I have worked on my literature review and regard my case studies as an attempt to move toward the aforementioned “indiscipline” (Rancière, 2006) and “un-discipline” (Parizot et al., 2014), i.e., adopting a confrontational attitude towards knowledge compartmentalisation, enabling the free roam through diverse disciplines, interrogating what is relevant without getting stuck by departmental forms and trajectories, installing a fluid dialogue with art practices and practitioners. In the previous three chapters, I have approached my literature exploration by focusing on issues such as the border, the arts, and Europe. Therefore, within my hybrid bibliography you can find sources that are *mostly* geographical (Elena dell’Agnese, Franco Farinelli, Federico Ferretti, Henk van Houtum), other that *belongs* to aesthetic philosophy (Jaques Rancière, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Nicholas Bourriaud), some of the foundational literature for cultural studies and socio-spatial theories (Gilles Deleuze, Michael Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Said), different studies on Europe (Jacques Levy, Shane Weller, Luiza Bialasiewicz), a variety of authors specifically working on border art (Gloria Anzaldúa, Guillermo Gómez Peña, Jo-Anne Berelowitz, Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary, Marina De Chiara, Chiara Giubilaro, Cristina Giudice, Johan Schimanski). Of course, I see all this knowledge as strictly interdependent — bodies crossing one another — and so I approached it, selecting information to build my own research space. In this endeavour, Jacques Rancière’s concept of “in-discipline” has been another important source of inspiration (Rancière, 2006). Speaking of sociology and other knowledges considered scientific disciplines, he wrote: “Disciplinary thought says: we have our territory, our objects and the methods which correspond to them (2006: 11). This is what sociology or history, political science or literary theory, says”. He defines disciplines as “knowledges [*savoir*] who are certain of their methods”; and advises us that those methods “are weapons in a war; they are not tools which facilitate the examination of a territory but weapons which serve to establish its always uncertain boundary” (Ibidem). Going further: “There is no assured boundary separating the territory of sociology from that of philosophy or that of the historians from literature. No well-defined boundary separates the discourse of the woodworker who is the object of science from the discourse of science itself. After all is said and done, to trace these boundaries is to trace the boundary between those who have thought through this question and those who have not” (Ibidem).

So, to answer the initial questions, my discipline is mostly “un-discipline” (Parizot et al., 2014) or “in-discipline” (Rancière, 2006): finding the roots and then cutting them off. What is sure is that my study happens in the constant tensions between two dimensions: on one hand, my findings are built in dialogue with the many local and international artists I have been meeting during my research, and the art labs

and expo spaces I have visited in the last years (see the following Chapters); on the other, I had to adapt my investigation in order to navigate diverse academic boxes and disciplinary matryoshka(s). Therefore, as I anticipated in the Introduction, my research takes place in the highly subjective *nepantla* I have been able to recognise within those tensions, inhabiting “a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 276).

4.2 Crafting research

Short story: “Crafting research, crafting research”. I was in Nijmegen, at the Radboud University, the course of Qualitative Methods of Research and Analysis led by professor Hans Marks was just over, I kept on repeating these words while biking home: “Crafting research, crafting research”. A few minutes before, he had told us about the “naturalistic inquiry” (Beuving & de Vries, 2015). This subchapter belongs to that experience, as Joost Beuving and Geert de Vries’s 2015 work has become a seminal reference for my work. Instead of searching for universal principles (like positivistic approaches), the “naturalistic inquiry” looks at society as “emerging from the actions and perspectives of its members”, being it subjective, multiple, and collectively produced (2015: 27), and I am persuaded that these methodological assets perfectly adapt to the needs of my investigation, allowing me to continuously fine-tune my approach in order to explore the singularities of an ever-changing research scenario. Overall, during my PhD, I have moved my steps back and forth on the “arc” devised by Beuving and de Vries, which has also been a fundamental feature in the selection and development of my case studies.

4.2.1 The basics of naturalistic inquiry

As the authors say in the first sentence of *Doing Qualitative Research. The Craft of Naturalistic Inquiry*, “humans are an inquisitive social species” (Beuving & de Vries, 2015, p. 15). Indeed, asking questions is part of everyone’s daily life, an activity we continually engage in. Also, asking questions is the very core of research. In the first stance, Beuving and de Vries build on the idea that “naturalistic inquiry is not something special: it is something that we do all the time” (16). Pioneered by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this approach challenges the positivist tradition’s assumptions of control, objectivity, and replicability. Instead, naturalistic inquiry focuses on understanding human experiences from the perspective of those who live them (Ibidem).

The foundational assumptions of naturalistic inquiry include the existence of multiple constructed realities, the interactive nature of the inquirer and the subject, and the contextual nature of knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These assumptions give rise to methodological characteristics such as emergent design, purposive sampling, prolonged engagement, and inductive data analysis. Methods commonly used include participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, all designed to gather thick, rich descriptions (Patton, 2015).

According to Beuving and de Vries, conducting a naturalistic inquiry is to study “people in everyday circumstances by ordinary means” — observing daily activities and interactions, taking notes, listening to stories, and considering a variety of subjective points of view. In their words: “It is an effort to get back to what has been lost through mechanization, standardization, digitalization, and other forces of modernization. ‘Social research’ nowadays too often consists of conducting surveys via the Internet, transforming answers of so-called respondents into ‘data’, applying advanced statistical techniques to those data, and reporting the outcomes in specialist journals that few ordinary people can read. Naturalistic inquiry aims to bridge the gulf that has emerged between social scientists on the one hand and the rest of humanity on the other hand” (15).

Beuving and de Vries insist that inquiring naturalistically may result in a series of insights that cannot be gained otherwise, because of the non-standardised nature of reality, which is indeed more “complex and messy” than any attempt at encompassment (19). Interpretivism is the “intellectual home” of naturalistic inquiry, that is, the assumption that reality is subjective, multiple and socially constructed (27). This approach is opposed to positivism and its methods: rather than searching for universal principles, naturalistic inquiry views society as “emerging from the actions and perspectives of its members” (Ibidem). Positivist researchers’ attitude of always being in control of their research situations is a point of bias according to the naturalistic inquiry approach, “because it engenders the creation of an artificial situation” (Ibidem). On the contrary, a naturalistic inquiry “begins and ends with situations as they naturally occur and unfold in people’s lives” (Ibidem).

A fundamental aspect of naturalistic inquiry is the recovery of craftsmanship. According to Joost Beuving and Geert de Vries, inquiring naturalistically is non-standardised and cannot be learned in classes (17). However, at the same time, a good naturalistic inquiry is not obtained through the “romantic myth” of “pure artistry”; it is a matter of “learning, practicing, appropriating, exercising, fine-tuning, and combining the various competences that together make up a craft” (24).

The question of craftsmanship is quite relevant and interesting. As the authors say, their book “is not a book of recipes. Instead, it aims to stimulate your ingenuity and creativity in coming to terms with the challenges by presenting experiences and solutions” (16). This means that, as Charles Wright Mills already advised in 1959, to inquire naturalistically, each researcher must be his/her own methodologist, continuously fine-tuning the approach to the singularities of an ever-changing research scenario.

Beuving and de Vries consider the naturalistic inquiry as the “artisanal core of qualitative research” (20). As you can see in Fig. 4.1, it encompasses ethnography and all the other kinds of qualitative research. According to the authors: “Qualitative research thus is a generic approach in social research covering ethnography, anthropological fieldwork, qualitative sociology, organizational fieldwork, interpretive research, oral history, narrative research, and so on. Although each of these has its own tradition, usually linked with the history of a particular social-scientific discipline (anthropology, sociology, organizational and administrative science, social history, linguistics), we feel that they all belong to the same family” (20).



Figure 4.1 - *Social research scheme*, by Beuving and de Vries, 2015. Courtesy of the authors.

In this perspective, as a craftsman has his tool-kit and uses the right tool at the right time, so does the researcher. As Beuving and de Vries put it, it is like “using biological ingredients according to local recipes in cooking” (15). Usually, naturalistic inquirers employ very diverse empirical materials, and they “draw on all of them at the same time”, carrying on the “simultaneous use of different data collection methods” (17). In this endeavour, triangulation becomes a fundamental activity of the naturalistic inquiry process, i.e., “confronting the same empirical situation with different research methods” (43).

Finally, to conclude this brief overview of naturalistic inquiry, three other aspects need to be considered. The first is that naturalistic inquiry is an “unobtrusive strategy” (16), i.e., it tries not to manipulate situations. As written by the authors: “Naturalistic research is qualitative research by ordinary means into everyday situations, aiming to disturb these situations as little as possible. It strives to blend in, respecting people in their everyday lives, taking their actions and experiences seriously, and building on these carefully” (20).

The second concerns reflexivity. Inquiring naturalistically requires researchers to make an effort to think about their own thinking, i.e. “to reflexively understand both society and their own participation in it” (18). This means that a naturalistic inquiry requires a marked self-critical attitude. Researchers are not impartial observers of society: each holds their own particular views about it. Instead of ignoring this aspect, the naturalistic inquirer is conscious of his or her views and makes them explicit and available (Ibidem). Finally, the last point of discussion concerns the “mosaic”. As the authors say, “the naturalistic researcher must ask herself how her contribution relates to the canopy as a whole, how it fits in with the larger mosaic”, i.e., connecting to the large variety of studies other researchers conduct at the same time on the same topics and establishing a fluid dialogue with them (19).

4.2.2 The arc of naturalistic inquiry

Relying on philosophical pragmatism, i.e., looking at society as an intricate net of interaction and meaning — if humans commonly perceive the sky as blue, then the sky is blue —, Joost Beuving and Geert de Vries proposed a draft for “naturalistic inquiry” (2015). As you can see in Fig. 4.2, the arc of naturalistic inquiry consists of a “series of hermeneutic steps” (192).

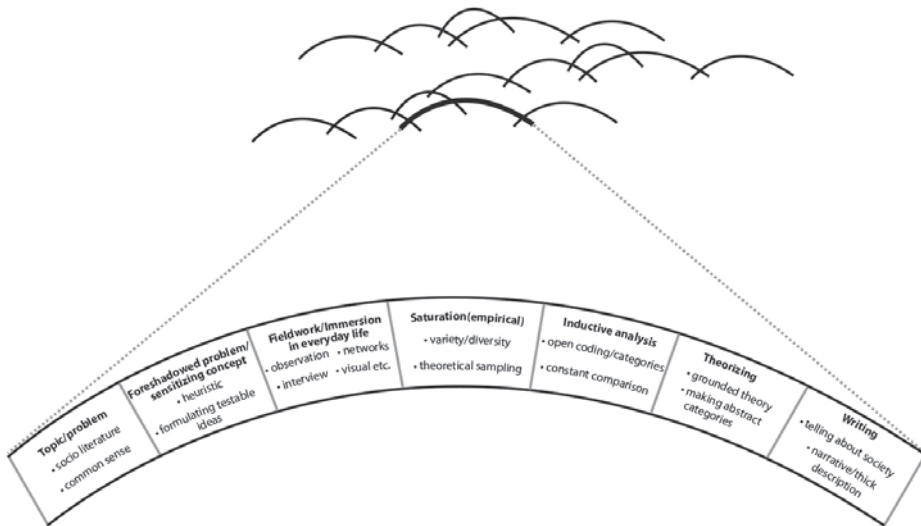


Figure 4.2 - *The arc of naturalistic inquiry*, by Beuving and de Vries, 2015. Courtesy of the authors.

According to the authors, a naturalistic inquiry usually begins with a “loose collection of ideas, often a combination of ideas from scientific literature and common sense acquired” by the researcher in the course of his or her life (192). “These ideas coagulate into a foreshadowed problem” and then are explored through diverse case-studies (Ibidem). About the process, as the authors wrote: “A naturalistic research project usually begins with a relatively open question that merely points at a particular problematic or ‘foreshadowed problem’. As you proceed, questions tend to become more focused up to a point that you reach saturation: new questions do not result in additional understanding. The process itself is done by making observations of everyday-life social practices; by carrying out qualitative interviews based on asking open or semi-structured questions; by collecting and studying available texts, images and things people produce; by exploring networks (of kinship, friendship, work, sex); by systematically comparing various interpretations and explanations; and last but not least by writing a text that ties everything together and solves the initial problem in a convincing way — the most convincing way, given the materials gathered” (15).

The arc of naturalistic inquiry represents the whole research process. It is symbolic of two dimensions: it shows the “distance the naturalistic inquirer travels” during the research path, as well as symbolising that at the end of the path “the naturalistic inquirer returns to her initial problem, but not at the same spot upon which she

started" (18). Beuving and de Vries stress the idea that the naturalistic inquirer "regularly shuttles back and forth along the arc" and describe the naturalistic inquiry as an "'iterative' process, rather than a linear one" (19).

Indeed, naturalistic inquiry draws heavily on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In particular, the third hermeneutic step of the arc (interpretation), inductive analysis through constant comparison and open coding, is actually the procedure around which grounded theory is built (Ibidem). In a nutshell, inductive reasoning is the process of drawing broad generalisations from specific observations, and, to carry out such research, open coding and constant comparison work are always carried out simultaneously (Beuving and de Vries, 2015, p. 24). Open coding consists of "identifying small building blocks of data and creating abstract categories from them" (Ibidem). About constant comparison, "it is a comparative method, meaning that each piece of evidence (an observation, or an interview fragment, or some other shred of information) is compared to material already collected" (43). Overall, regarding inductivism, Beuving and de Vries wrote that, rather than applying theory to data, it means discovering theory "in and from them — a process comparable to making wine from grapes and distilling cognac from wine" (162).

To conclude, the last consideration is about "transparency". According to the authors, "naturalistic inquiry, with its commitment to incorporating the emic viewpoint of society's members *and* adding an etic or explanatory insight to that, is particularly well equipped to provide transparency" (192).

4.3 Research questions, population and case studies

Taking into account the perspective I suggested in the previous subchapters, in 4.3, I returned the focus to my research arguments. In particular, standing on "un-discipline" (Parizot et al., 2014) and "in-discipline" (Rancière, 2006), and building on the assets of "naturalistic inquiry" (Beuving & de Vries, 2015), in this subchapter I introduce my two case studies, i.e. the way I decided to functionalise my literature recognition and methodological positioning into two field investigations.

4.3.1 Research questions and population

It is not a lie to say that my PhD path started with a loose collection of ideas about borders, art, and Europe. Indeed, it was a mixture of scientific readings and personal experiences. As I said in the introduction, my engagement with borders started with my master's thesis research. In the conclusion of the manuscript I submitted,

about borders and sovereignty in postcoloniality, bridging the findings toward new research possibilities, I was arguing that, beyond all that has been said, it would be interesting to study how contemporary visual artists deal with the dominant discourse on borders, as well as to investigate the aesthetic dimension of bordering. This assemblage of borders and arts evolved into the proposal I submitted for my doctoral research. The missing piece, Europe, comes from a personal experience: I have been working as a cultural mediator and interpreter for a variety of NGO and associations, stepping into EU migration management, asylum procedures and all the deadly apparatus it mobilises — the formula borders, arts and Europe was then served.

Indeed, beyond this short story, I went through a long period of literary excavation that began long before the submission of my PhD research proposal. As I already said in Chapter 2, when searching for keywords, I quickly realised that literature on borders and artistic production is quite abundant, but also mostly located at the US-Mexico border. Therefore, in the initial phase of my research, I started to build on this gap, trying to translate over the Atlantic a series of critical quests and (re)locate them in the European context. In a way, while inquiring into what has been defined as border art by significant number of scholars and art practitioners working at the Mexico-US border (Gómez Peña, 1991, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1996; Berelowitz, 1997, 2003, 2005; Prieto, 1999, 2017; Dear & Leclerc, 2003; De Chiara, 2005; Sheren, 2011, 2015; Amoores & Hall, 2010), I developed the first set initial questions in relation to Europe: How do contemporary artists deal with borders in Europe? How do they confront and alter them? Which techniques and materials do they use? Where do they attack the border? How do they develop strategies?

As I explained in the previous chapters, together with the wide variety of bordering practices affecting Europe, in the last three decades we have also witnessed a multiplication of artworks and performances in the borderlands, on the borders themselves and about bordering processes (dell'Agnese & Szary, 2015; Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015; Schimanski, 2019). In recent years, many artists have explored border art practices, questioning the European space from many points of view and making efforts to re-conceptualise the border and to impact its production (Ibidem). Although only a few studies have discussed the issue at the European level, and the literature on this critical research apparatus remains fragmented and dispersed. Therefore, walking back and forth “the arc of naturalistic inquiry” (Beuving & de Vries, 2015), and using a variety of art based and visual methodologies (Rose, 2001; Bignante, 2010; Hawkins, 2014, 2020), the initial destination of my research path has been contributing to achieve a more sturdy understanding about the

border art practice in Europe — a journey through moments, networks, shared narratives and imaginations — a task I carried on in my first case study (Chapter 5). In particular, looking at post-1989 Europe, I ask: Is it possible to recognise artworks that, as happened at the US-Mexico border, have contributed to the emergence of a European border art? What imaginaries does European border art work on? What aesthetics does it offer? Are there symbolic places or preferred hubs for European border art? And further: when trying to translate the meanings of “border art” in post-1989 Europe, which artists are worth mentioning? Which collectives? What interventions? Investigating the way contemporary artists deal with borders and bordering processes in Europe, thus how they alter and subvert those processes, in order to search for alternatives to the current hyper-fenced landscape and spatial imaginary: as art practices play a “crucial position” in the articulation of imaginaries (2015b: 114), to carry on such a task, as I explained in Chapter 2, I think it is “a matter of survival” (Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015).

To keep the pace of such research, during my case study investigations I have been visiting museums, exhibitions, festivals, cultural centers; I attended border art in-site events and performances; I investigated art and research collectives and networks working on border art at an European level, I shadowed and/or interviewed a large number of art workers and partitioners during their daily work, I carried on a co-research action working at the crossroad between art, activism and science (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). Indeed, artists are a significant part of the research population in my study: I met makers across Europe (and beyond) and got to know them through informal talks and unstructured interviews. Also, I met curators, collectors, critics, experts, and other figures of the art world, as well as security officers, border-dwellers, and migrants — my research is based on artists, but not limited by this definition.

A second set of questions concerns the methodological objectives (or internal aims) of my research, i.e., examining border art from an epistemological perspective: What can border art bring to academia in terms of epistemology? My second case study investigation (Chapter 6) addresses these questions and reveals some of the benefits of adopting border art as a method.

4.3.2 The case studies

Given these questions, my case studies emerged naturally as my research developed and was shaped by the opportunities offered by my research context. As suggested by the antiAtlas manifesto, I preferred the “path of multiple investigations” (Parizot et al., 2014), thinking of my case study outcomes like some tesserae into a big

“mosaic” (Beuving & de Vries, 2015, p. 19). Quoting the antiAtlas manifesto: “What is at stake, thus, is to understand the border as a perpetually changing process, using an alternative set of representations that do not reify power positions the way atlases do. In this sense, we prefer the path of multiple investigations to unearth the multifaceted nature of border-making processes” (Parizot et al., 2014). Therefore, I built my research on two apparently distant yet highly connected case studies. In the following lines, I provide a brief abstract for both.

Chapter 5 — Border art in post-1989 Europe. In Chapter 5, I arrange an uncomprehensive, non-linear, and disnarrative journey into what I define as border art in post-1989 Europe. It contributes to filling a profound literature gap by translating over the Atlantic the discourse on border art as a critical research apparatus. Farther than different kinds of literary and visual sources, I build on the findings of a two-months research field-trip I carried on in Berlin during the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Iron Curtain (Nov - Dic 2019), going beyond a mere overview and functionalising some of my research questions: What is there of the “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999) border art and its “political edge” (Gómez Peña cited in Berelowitz, 1997, p. 80) in post-1989 Europe? And what does it tell us about contemporary Europe? Chapter 5, therefore, takes into examination the development of border art in Europe during the last three decades (1989-2019), investigating some of the tactics and visions counter-voicing the increasingly discriminative and deadly EU-driven bordering apparatus, a journey-form investigation that moves its steps through the visual and aesthetic analysis of a variety of artworks.

Chapter 6 — Border art as method. Chapter 6 discloses the findings of a co-research study situated at the intersection of art, community engagement, and science. It details the conceptualisation, development, and public disclosure of a border art project named *What I mean by Europe* (wimbe), which I carried out in collaboration with visual artist and cartographer Guido Picardi throughout 2019 and 2020. Unsettling the privileging of written language and argumentation, Chapter 6 takes the form of an installation (photos and videos of the installation are available at: guidopicardi.com/portfolio/wimbe). Overall, it relates to the methodological objectives of my research, i.e., to seize border art from an epistemological perspective, and discloses some of the benefits of adopting border art as a method. Furthermore, it provides a visual inquiry into Europe's borders, offering a variety of insights into new representational possibilities.

As said, my case studies came up naturally. My visit to Berlin was not planned in my initial research proposal. And Chapter 6 is mostly a transposition of endless

conversations with Guido Picardi, who, before being the artist and cartographer I collaborated with, is a friend. Adapting to contingencies means recognising what is relevant in an ever-changing research context and what can add to the search journey. In general, I let my intuition drive most of my choices, letting it grow or fade based on preliminary findings. For instance, the idea of building my first case study through the lens of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall (Chapter 5) became an asset only when I realised that, during that period (October to December 2019), Berlin had become an international hub for border art. Therefore, going to Berlin for the 30th anniversary of the fall of the wall was not a pretextual choice to visit the city and walk along what remains of the Iron Curtain, but rather a profitable chance to intercept the huge wave of border art(istry) and a multiplicity of lines of flights traversing the city. From a methodological perspective, in my case studies, I consider border art as the informant and the vehicle of my qualitative research. This means that, roughly, I approach border art in two ways: making sense *of* it, and making sense *through* it (Bignante, 2010). To make sense *of* it, through unstructured interviewing and informal talks, observations, and visual content analysis. To make sense *through* it, going beyond the written text, I have been drawing maps and creating an installation from an art-research action. Why make a large use of visual and art-based methods? Because I believe they allow the exploration of marginalised, controversial and disruptive perspectives, arriving where traditional methods cannot: i) stimulating co-production processes; ii) capturing different kinds of information; iii) going beyond academia; iv) making our outcomes more accessible and effective (Rose, 2001; Leavy, 2009; Hawkins, 2014, 2021).

CHAPTER 5

BORDER ART IN POST-1989 EUROPE

In Chapter 5, I try to arrange an uncomprehensive, non-linear, and disnarrative journey in what I define as border art in post-1989 Europe — a path among different moments, shared narratives, and imaginations. In the following pages, I continue my exploration of the border art by translating it over the Atlantic, from the Mexico-US border to contemporary EU-driven “bordering processes” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). Farther than different kinds of literary and visual sources, I build on the findings of a two-month research field-trip I carried out in Berlin during the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Iron Curtain (Nov - Dec 2019), going beyond a mere overview and functionalising some of my research questions. As noted in the Introduction, this translation work is one of the core efforts of my PhD: contributing to fill a profound gap by implanting the discourse on border art in Europe (wherever it starts and ends) as a comprehensive critical research apparatus. What is there of the “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999) border art and its “political edge” (Gomez Peña cited in Berelowitz, 1997, p. 80) in post-1989 Europe? And what does it tell us about Europe?

5.1 Translating over the Atlantic

As I already said in Chapter 2, in the initial phase of my research, I quickly realised that literature on border art is quite abundant, but also that it is mostly located at the Mexico-US border. Notwithstanding, in recent years, a multitude of border artists have made efforts to re-conceptualise EU-driven borderings and impact their production processes, I think only a few researchers have discussed the issue comprehensively, and I find that the literature on border art as a critical research apparatus, at a European level, is still fragmented and dispersed. Therefore, from the very initial steps of my investigation, I sought to help fill this gap and to engage in the translation over the Atlantic of a series of critical quests in order to (re)locate them in the European context.

Indeed, it is by working with a comparative approach that I developed my initial set of questions. While inquiring into what has been defined as border art by a significant number of scholars and art practitioners working at the Mexico-US border, I start wondering: How do contemporary artists deal with borders in post-1989 Europe? How do they confront and alter them? Which techniques and materials do they use? How do they develop strategies? It is not a lie, therefore, saying that Chapter 5 come out of the simple curiosity to know what is there in Europe of the border art I wrote about in Chapter 2, letting this thriver slowly grow and evolve into increasingly specific questions: Is it possible to recognise artworks that, as happened at the Mexico-US border, have contributed to the emergence

of border art in post-1989 Europe? What imaginaries does it work on? What aesthetics does it offer? Are there symbolic places or preferred hubs for border art in Europe? Which artists? Which collectives? What interventions? By reasoning on these thoughts I slowly came to design this case study as a translation work: in literary terms, searching for the same meanings in different artistic languages, and in physical terms, translating over the Atlantic the space of my quests: What is there of the “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999) border art its “political edge” (Gomez Peña cited in Berelowitz 1997, p. 80) in post-1989 Europe? And what does it tell us about Europe?

Engaging with such questions, working on a variety of literary and visual sources, I propose a subjective mapping of the border art in Europe, a work similar to what Jo Anne Berelowitz (1997, 2003) and Antonio Prieto (1999, 2017) did on the Mexico-US border, which I think it is useful to get used to the new coordinates. It is a personal attempt to reconstruct and examine the development of border art in Europe over the last three decades, investigating some of the tactics and visions that counter-voice the increasingly discriminative EU-driven bordering apparatus, a journey-form investigation that moves through the visual and aesthetic analysis of a variety of artworks. I said ‘a personal attempt’ because I am conscious of the inevitable imprecisions/mistakes that such a work implies. Although, I still think such a work is fundamental: on a practical level, to situate the discussion about border art in European context, providing an overview of about this phenomenon which is useful to approach this body of knowledge and critical research apparatus; on a conceptual level, to contribute to the production of alternative border imaginaries, in which the EU-driven deadly border regime is not taken for granted anymore.

Furthermore, in this Chapter, I explore the findings of a two-month research field trip I conducted in Berlin during the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Iron Curtain (Nov - Dic 2019). As I already mentioned in Chapter 4, the idea to look through the lenses of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain was not a pretextual choice to visit Berlin and walk along the wall, but rather a profitable chance to intercept the huge wave of border art and a multiplicity of lines of flights traversing the city. For this occasion, Berlin hosted several academic conferences, public talks,

and discussions, as well as many art expos and exhibitions⁵⁰. Indeed, the transversal focus of all these events was on borders: from the Iron Curtain to contemporary multi-situated and heterogeneous bordering processes and practices. In this context, through unstructured interviews, informal talks, observations, and visual content analysis, I focused on the materials constituting the border in some of the installation artworks I had to observe during my staying, which most of the time were transparent, shadowed, or even non-material (among the others: *All along the watchtower* (2012-2019) by Nadia Kaabi Linke and *Sculptural Study, Six-parts Construction* (1980/2019) by Fred Sandback). About border art in Europe, as we will see, one of the most significant artworks of the previous decades is *Shibboleth* by Doris Salcedo (2007). The installation was hosted at the Tate Museum in London in 2007, and, in a few simple words, it consisted of a visible gash in the floor of the museum dividing the space into two sides: a huge crack in the middle of the room showing a hard border made of jagged stone right in the middle. From jagged stones to transparent borders: by investigating the gap between those two representations, I argue that contemporary EU bordering processes are increasingly creating what current German language defines as *mauer im kopf*, literally: “wall in the head”, i.e., the discursive, aesthetics, and imaginative bordering practices that, notwithstanding its material fall in 1989, the Iron Curtain keep on implementing in the minds of German people (see: Gook, 2015; Hamborg, 2020).

Finally, throughout the text, I build on a series of scattered encounters I had over the last few years, among which was an informal talk with Guillermo Gómez Peña (Venice, January 2020). In the context of research on border art, having a long conversation with Guillermo Gómez Peña — a pioneer in the field — was particularly significant. His reflections offered firsthand insight into the artistic, political, and performative strategies shaping border art, providing perspectives that cannot be fully captured in literature alone. Engaging with his experience allowed me to connect theoretical frameworks with lived artistic practice, enriching the interpretative lens I apply to my case studies. Therefore, what follows is once again the results of multiple traces I followed simultaneously, a subjective place for discussion that provides a personal synthesis of a collective phenomenon.

⁵⁰. Here is a list of the events I attended during my research trip:

- *Free to contact* (at Stiftung Kunstforum Berliner Volksbank, Berlin)
- *Germany becomes one: dismantling the inner German border* (at Kulturbrauerei, Berlin)
- *90s Berlin: the fall of the wall, creative freedom, anarchy and techno* (at Alte Münze, Berlin)
- *Of people and walls* (at Schloss Biesdorf, Berlin) *The Berlin Wall and the border strip 1989-1990* (at Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer, Berlin)
- *The End of Freedom* (at Halle 14, Leipzig)
- *The open wall* (French Institute, Berlin)
- *UnWall: East to West and North to South* (at Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin)
- *Walking through walls* (at Groupius Bau, Berlin) You can find more info about all these events at: mauerfall30.berlin and berlin.de/en/events/30-anniversary-fall-of-the-wall

5.2 Border art since 1989

As I explained in Chapter 2, during the 1990s, border art, as a conceptual artistic practice focusing on borders and bordering processes, became a world-spread phenomenon, crossing the Atlantic to reach Europe, moving away from “the specifics of the U.S.-Mexico border (...) towards a more universal kind of symbolism” (Sheren, 2011, p. 142). While according Guillermo Gómez Peña in the early 1990s border art was already “dead”, it is in the same period that it became a world-spread phenomenon, i.e., while the commodification of border art was slowly expropriating the “Aztec high-tech express” from its communities (Gomez Peña, 1991b), border art became a practice of “deracinated subjectivity [...] disembedded from a literal connection to a site-specific border and [...] a theme in art world discourse” (Berelowitz, 2005, p. 341). Therefore, what is there of the “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999) border art and its “political edge” (Gomez Peña cited in Berelowitz, 1997, p. 80) in post-1989 Europe? In what follows, I argue that an abundance of productions is keeping these characteristics alive, also in the European context. Going on a journey similar to mine, Giorgio Bacci has recently published an interesting essay in which he engages with some of the best-known border art pieces from the last few decades (2022). It consists of a research into contemporary art that, starting from the 1960s, traces a path among a variety of thematic hubs (home, lines, nets, language, wall, borderscape, identity) to reconstruct a kind of visual genesis of artistic expressions related to borders (Ibidem). On a different note, I keep the journey-form, but I prefer to design an investigation through moments, combining different historical contexts and aesthetic sensitivities, a work similar to that of Berelowitz (2003), which also inspires the title of this sub-chapter.

5.2.1 Borderless utopias and rebordering processes

I think there is no better way to introduce the cultural and artistic waves traversing Europe during the early 1990s than by mentioning an exhibit I visited in Berlin in November 2019. The name of the exhibit is *Nineties Berlin: the fall of the wall, creative freedom, anarchy, and techno*, — it consisted of a multimedia journey in the life of the city after on November the 9th 1989, i.e., the moment of the fall of the Iron Curtain, when its stones turned from a symbol of exclusion to a paradigm of freedom and possibility spotted in museums and other cultural spaces all around the world (Kaminsky, 2014). Through a variety of documents and testimonies from the time, the *Nineties Berlin* exhibit provided multiple interpretative keys that were particularly useful for capturing the many changes traversing the city’s cultural and artistic spheres during the 1990s, conveying the image of an open, lively, and turbulent city. Despite narratives that were sometimes too mythologising, *Nineties*

Berlin offered glimpses of the Berlin moment that would soon become worldwide icons of freedom. In this sense, images of people tearing down the cement barrier and crossing it while dancing became a manifesto of a new Europe, and a shared asset of the 1990s border imaginary among Europeans. And *Nineties Berlin* narrated these moments through the voices of the protagonists, allowing visitors to grasp its cultural and artistic ferment, with a specific focus on the Love Parade, which perfectly pictured how the struggle for the re-appropriation of space was carried out also through techno music and a series of creative and artistic strategies.

As Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath pointed out, “the early years following the fall of the Berlin Wall were awash with the bold promise of a world without borders, of a pluralistic sphere where societies celebrate and thrive on diversity, where the notion of a homogeneous nation state was increasingly perceived as a nostalgic fiction” (2019: 11). Beyond the artwork I mentioned in Chapter 2 (*The World Flag Ant Farm* by Yanagi Yukinori, 1990), there is a variety of artworks that well represent this moment, among which, for instance, *The Lovers* by Marina Abramovic & Ulay (1988), when the two performers walked the Great Wall of China from opposite ends to meet in the middle after three months.

Although, as remarked by the same Bardaouil and Fellrath, “old habits die hard” (2019: 11). While the climate of openness and will for unity pervaded the early 1990s, it is exactly in the same period that a strong rebordering practice spread on a global level and needed to be framed as processual. In Europe, citing Etienne Balibar, it becomes apparent that after 1989, borders did not vanish but rather shifted (2004). Despite the initial perception that the fall of the Iron Curtain would lead to a borderless postmodernity, Europe found itself constructing apartheid systems almost simultaneously, at both national and pan-European levels (Ibidem). Shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain, along with the internal border openness ensured by the Schengen Agreement, a substantial fortification of the European space began — the implementation of the Ceuta and Melilla border-fences, for instance, started in 1991 (Ferrer, 2008, p. 140).

In the early 1990s, therefore, I think border art in the European context was a sound halfway between the borderless techno-utopias of the aforementioned Love Parade and the class-based rage of *Posse* rap. A bitter-sweet contrast between debordering work and the sudden realisation that a multitude of (more-than-material) rebordering processes were actually taking place. This contrasting interplay is

well sensible, for instance, in Sibylle Bergmann's photography⁵¹. Documenting the dismantling of the Iron Curtain in 1990, Bergmann shot a photo of a dog peeing on the perforated stone of the Berlin Wall ruins: an iconic image that underscores the finiteness of every border and makes it a past experience, precisely a ruin⁵². At the same time, as if to clarify, she also photographed some graffiti on the Berlin Wall that said *Weg sind ein paar stücke beton es bleibt mauer zwischen hautfarben und kulturen*, i.e., "A few pieces of cement are gone, but a wall remains between skin colours and cultures", highlighting the fact that, notwithstanding the erasure of the physical wall, there is still a lot of debordering work to be done.

These contrasting narratives perfectly frame what I see as a constant tension within early-1990s Europe border art discourse, between a celebratory rhetoric of openness and a variety of new material and symbolic apartheid practices taking place. I am not speaking of an opposition, but of a co-presence of debordering and rebordering imaginaries and practices. If the fall of the Iron Curtain generated a powerful visual and affective repertoire of openness, mobility, and transgression, artists were simultaneously sensing the rapid rearticulation of borders elsewhere — externalised, racialised, and increasingly diffused. In this sense, rather than celebrating the life or death of borders, much of European border art of the 1990s significantly operates by holding together these two movements, exposing their simultaneity and mutual implication.

5.2.2 European/non-European: an old new binarism

As I explained in Chapter 3, by the end of the 1990s, a strong refashioning of the suprematist European/non-European binarism — i.e., an exclusionary and nativist logic pervading all fields of life, at personal and societal levels — had become a sturdy phenomenon and a profitable rhetoric⁵³. Especially after 9/11, bordering became a priority for EU politicians and institutions, and migration management turned into a matter of international security and anti-terrorism strategies, leading to a proliferation of spectacular border infrastructures and practices, at the margin as well as at the core of the European space (Balibar, 2004; Chebel d'Appollonia, 2012; De Genova, 2013). While getting out of the bipolar world, a few years after

⁵¹. I have seen her photographs at the exhibit "Walking through walls", hosted at Gropius Bau (Berlin) in November 2019.

⁵². See the photograph at: archive.ostkreuz.sodatech.com/cms_detail.php?pic_id=2704 (last accessed Dec 2025).

⁵³. As I explained in Chapter 3, the activation of a suprematist European/non-European binarism has been a constant of Europe's evolution: since Europe was kidnapped by the bull, it has been cyclically sharpening, serving a specific political purpose each time.

the fall of the Berlin Wall, in step with the EU integration process, people find themselves caged in an (EU-driven) old-new European/non-European binary trap.

This refashioning of the European/non-European binarism has been framed perfectly by the public installation artwork *EU/OTHERS* (2000) by Šejla Kamberić (Fig. 5.1 and 5.2). The installation was hosted at the third edition of Manifesta – European Biennial of Contemporary Art, held in 2000 in Ljubljana, with the title *Borderline Syndrome. Energies of Defence*⁵⁴. As explained by Giorgio Bacci, the title of the event was a metaphor of contemporary Europe, “caught between the end of a bipolar division of the world, which had led, after 1989, to the collapse of the post-Second World War ideological systems, and the establishment of a free and liberal market, openly capitalist, which had sharpened social and economic differences in a horizontal sense (between different nations) and vertical (within individual populations)” (2022: 53-54). The borderline syndrome of the title of Manifesta 3, therefore, referred to these transformations and the reactions of Europeans, at both collective and individual levels, pointing to their sense of displacement and building on the interplay between “curiosity” toward others and a variety of symptomatic defence mechanisms (Ibidem). In this context, the installation artwork *EU/OTHERS* by Šejla Kamberić, on the one hand, highlights the sturdy discrimination and segregation against non-EU citizens (which the artist felt at a personal level, being Bosnian and therefore, at that time, other from the EU), and, on the other hand, questions the border and tries to stretch it. Šejla Kamberić uses EU border signage, which, in 2000, divided border crossers into two categories: EU citizens and other travellers. In fact, during the 1990s, EU member countries placed two light-box signs at their borders: “EU citizens”, blue, indicating the gate for those who have been granted access, and “OTHERS,” black, indicating the gate for non-EU citizens who need a visa to pass through. In 2000, Kamberić installed those two light-box signs on a famous Tromostovje bridge in Ljubljana (Slovenia being not yet a EU member at that time), moving EU-driven segregation and discrimination system from the margins of the Slovenian territories to the centre of the its space, so that “casual passer-by who are crossing the bridges will be in the same situation as those who are crossing a real country borders. Both will be divided into those who are belonging to the EU and those who are OTHERS.”⁵⁵ At the same time, by putting different signs on different sides of the bridges, Kamberić highlights the paradox of such a situation as “coming from different direction one will be ‘member’ of the EU or

⁵⁴. m3.manifesta.org/

⁵⁵. Declaration of Šejla Kamberić taken from: *Borderline Syndrome. Energies of Defence. Manifesta 3. European Biennial of Contemporary Art. Ljubljana, Slovenia*, exhibition catalogue, ed. By F. Bonami, O. Bouman, M. Hlavajová and K. Rhomberg, Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana 2000 (p. 98-99).



Figure 5.1 - *EU/OTHERS*, by Šejla Kamešić, 2000, installation / photographic work, installation view (1), Tromostovje (Triple Bridge), Ljubljana, Slovenia. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5.2 - *EU/OTHERS*, by Šejla Kamešić, 2000, installation / photographic work, installation view (2), Tromostovje (Triple Bridge), Ljubljana, Slovenia. Courtesy of the artist.

an OTHER"⁵⁶. I think Kamberić's installation artwork *EU/OTHERS* emphasises exactly the violence and the fallacy of the European/non-European binarism that, by the end of the 1990s, became the new identity trap of the coming decades. In particular, Kamberić exposes the arbitrariness of these distinctions, highlighting how the imagined divide between Europe and its Others is both constructed and enforced, rather than natural or inevitable.

Going further, two 1999 border artworks help us grasp all the complexities of the period. The first one is *Again and Again* by Sislej Xhafa (Fig. 5.3): a chamber orchestra whose musicians play with their faces covered by balaclavas (Bacci, 2022, p. 91). As argued by Bacci, Xhafa's work is a direct provocation against the clichés and preconceptions that underlie the conception of the others, and, in particular, of the migrants (Ibidem). The image produced by *Again and Again* is destabilising; it generates fear and anxiety, and the contrast with classical music is staggering and misleading. However, as remarked by Bacci, it would be enough to remove the balaclava (the clichés) to overcome fear and anxiety of the others (Ibidem). The second 1999 border artwork is Mona Hatoum's installation artwork *Impenetrable* (Fig. 5.4). Mona Hatoum is a prolific artist. Throughout her artistic journey, she has expressed and confronted issues of confinement in many ways. I think *Impenetrable* is indeed an indicator of the atmosphere of that time. As explained by Lauren Hinkson, from "a distance, *Impenetrable* appears to be an ethereal cube levitating in the gallery. When approached, the work reveals a menacing aspect: the cube is composed of hundreds of barbed wire rods dangling from fishing wire. Like many of Mona Hatoum's installations since the early 1990s, *Impenetrable* takes the form of a grid. Yet the austere geometric form, which recalls Minimalist sculpture, also harbors a psychological charge. The steel latticework appears to be as delicate as it is threatening, and the barbed wire evokes architectural forms — fences, prisons, camps — designed both to confine and repel [...] a cube of space partitioned by wire, which spectators may view but never penetrate"⁵⁷.

^{56.} Ibidem

^{57.} guggenheim.org/artwork/30304 (last consultation: October 2023)



Figure 5.3 - *Again and Again*, by Sisley Xhafa, 2000-2019, C-print, performance in collaboration with Orchestra Solistas de la Habana, conducted by Iván Valiente, Havana; exhibition view, *Rosa azul*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Cuba (October 19, 2018 - February 25, 2019). Photograph by Néstor Kim. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua.



Figure 5.4 - *Impenetrable*, by Mona Hatoum, 1999, installation view, IVAM - Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain, 2021. Photograph by Miguel Lorenzo. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

At the beginning of the new millennium, therefore, the borderless global utopias generated by the fall of the Iron Curtain definitely melt into what slowly will become a renovated “locked-in normality” (van Houtum & van Uden, 2021, p. 21). In 2000, Serbian artist Tanja Ostojić denounced the exclusiveness of EU migration laws with her provocative art project, *Looking for a Husband with a EU passport* (Fig. 5.5). In this sense, another iconic work is indeed the 2002 Hatoum’s installation *Grater Divide*, a two-meter-high iron food grater that, as Ali Smith remarks, “On the one hand, it’s laugh-out-loud funny. On the other, it’s lethal”⁵⁸. Mona Hatoum is certainly a central figure in the contemporary discourse on border art. Her work is often discussed in relation to her own life as a Palestinian exile. However, I think it goes far beyond her personal biography and resonates in a multitude of other stories. Iannicello and Quadraro highlight how Mona Hatoum is capable of “drawing always new path, glimpse new routes, tracing maps with imprecise borders, exceed straight lines through her own diversity” (2015: 131)⁵⁹. In fact, while *Grater Divide* may express a hyper-bordered, deadly border landscape, it is, at the same time, a displacing artwork, deceptive and misleading. The two-meter-high grater, being a kind of kitchen utensil for giants, is a familiar yet unfamiliar subject, which allows for the emergence of a critical “interruption” (Chambers, 2017).

In the same year, 2002, the Multiplicity collective presented *The Ghost Ship* at Documenta XI, a two-room video installation that investigated the controversial 1996 tragedy of Porto Palo, in which 283 people were drawn into the Mediterranean water due to a maritime accident⁶⁰. In 2003, the English music band Asian Dub Foundation released the song “*Fortress Europe*,” the lead single from the album *Enemy of the Enemy*, which criticises EU border policies and migration management. A few years later, in 2007, the Tate Modern of London hosted what I think it is one of the more significant border artworks of the decade: *Shibboleth* by Doris Salcedo (Fig. 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8). In a few simple words, the installation consisted of a visible gash in the museum floor, dividing the space into two sides: a huge crack in the middle of the room, showing a hard border of jagged stone right in the middle. Salcedo literally cracked the pavement of the Turbine Hall: using Anzaldúa’s vocabulary, her installation is *una herida abierta* (1987) on the body of one of Europe’s most famous modern art museums. As the author explains, “*Shibboleth* is a piece that refers to dangers at crossing borders or to being rejected in the moment of crossing borders” – it is a “reminder”, a “question mark”, and a critical “disruption”

⁵⁸. tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-37-summer-2016/never-take-anything-what-it-appears-be-ali-smith-on-mona-hatoum (last consultation: October 2023)

⁵⁹. Translation from Italian to English language made by myself.

⁶⁰. documenta.de/en/publications/documenta-11-katalog



Figure 5.5 - *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport*, by Tanja Ostojić, 2000-2005, participatory project / combined media installation, installation view, *Gender Check*, MUMOK, Vienna, Austria, 2009. Photograph by Tanja Ostojić. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5.6 - *Shibboleth*, by Doris Salcedo, 2007, installation view, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom. Photograph by Nuno Nogueira (October 19, 2007). Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

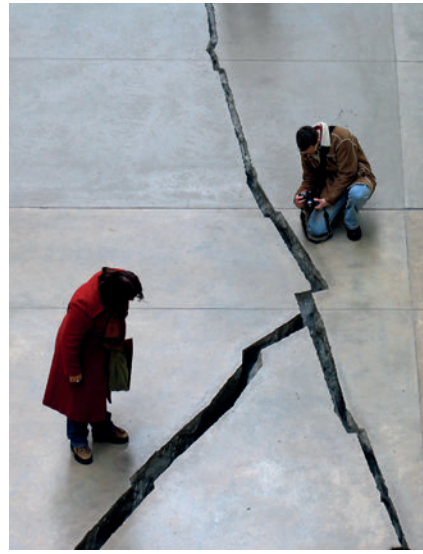


Figure 5.7 - *Shibboleth*, by Doris Salcedo, 2007, installation view, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom. Photograph by Gilberto Dobón (December 22, 2007). Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 5.8 - *Shibboleth*, by Doris Salcedo, 2007, installation view, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom. Photograph by Cris Geatchy. Retrieved from Flickr.

into the “everything is well we are happy” societies of rich countries⁶¹. The ravine in the floor of the Tate Modern expresses migrant experience in Europe, facing a state of permanent racial segregation and confinement, i.e., the condition of the others, of the non-European. As reported by Giudice and Giubilaro, the “work involved the observers in a real way, because a few of them, inattentive, stumbled and got hurt, and took legal action against the museum” – Salcedo’s border hurts, it provokes pains, and thus becomes the “touchable sign of divisions and deep wounds of our world” (2014: 90).

2007 is also the year of *Western Union Small Boats* by Isaac Julien⁶². It is a three-screen video installation in which “silver body bags lie near bathers on a southern Italian beach. [...] Dead black bodies in the pleasure zones of Europe [that] not only emphasise the negated destined for the anonymous deaths of racial capitalism in the Black Mediterranean” but also propose “a world that exceeds the categories we Europeans have prepared for it”, unleashing an “unauthorised telling of European culture” (Chambers, 2025). As reported on Julien’s official website, the installation was “produced at a time of debate about immigration policies and [...] traces the effects of trauma, not just on people but also on buildings, monuments, architecture and life”⁶³. It is a sensorial journey revealing the legacy of colonialism into the EU-driven migration policies of the last decades, and highlighting the nexus between the migrant condition and the “juridical space once occupied by the enslaved” (Chambers, 2023).

Both Salcedo’s and Julien’s 2007 artworks are installations that echo the crucial question of colonialism and racism. In particular, the question of race, as it did for the border art produced across the US-Mexico border, plays a crucial role in the European context as well. Moving from the “black Atlantic” (Gilroy, 1993) toward a “black Mediterranean” (Robinson, 1983; Di Maio, 2012; Proglia, 2018), Iain Chambers highlights the “brutal consistency of colonialism in the haunting racism that produces the violent grammar of inhospitality” we have been used to in the last decades (2023). Border artworks like the above-mentioned installations by Salcedo and Julien mine this colonial legacy and expose its contemporaneity through the physical and symbolic scars of *Shibboleth* and the bodies that await at the gates of Europe in *Western Union Small Boats*, showing “the limits of European humanism and its vaunted universal rights” (Chambers, 2025).

⁶¹. [tate.org.uk/art/artists/doris-salcedo-2695/doris-salcedo-shibboleth](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/doris-salcedo-2695/doris-salcedo-shibboleth) (last consultation October 2023).

⁶². Photographs and videos of the installation are available at: isaacjulien.com/projects/western-union-small-boats (last consultation December 2025).

⁶³. (Ibidem).

The theme of waiting at the border is a fundamental concern in Adrian Paci's artworks as well. In particular, it emerges strongly and poetically in his video artwork (2007)⁶⁴ and photo collection (2009), *Centro di permanenza temporanea* (Fig. 5.9). According to van Houtum and Wolfe, "to a large extent a border can be considered a waiting act" (2017: 129). And, as they remark, being the border a Janus-face, also the "waiting consists of two categories which are mutually enforced": on the one hand, the wait through which "citizens are included and being made ('citizenizing')", and, on the other hand, "the exclusionary waiting practice as authorized" by state law (Ibidem). In Paci's 2007 video installation mentioned above, it is possible to feel both conditions. A group of people walk the open-space asphalt of an airport runway, in order and silence, proceeding towards the stairs leading to the entrance of the plane. But there is no plane. The stairs lead nowhere. So people stay there, on the stairs, waiting. The video lingers on the faces of the protagonists, investigates their expressions, focuses on their attitudes and micro-movements, creating an aesthetic of suspension that reminded me of the concepts of "definitively-temporary" (Rahola, 2003), "benching" (Xiang Bao, 2007), and "differential inclusion" (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). As Bacci remarks, using video techniques, Paci melts the spatial and temporal dimensions, bringing out the paradoxes of an immobile mobility (2022: 96).

Drawing from these experiences, it is possible to say that, unlike in the previous decade, during the 2000s, border art in the European context shows an increasingly hard and harmful European border, exposing its violence as well as its fallacies and paradoxes. Imagining it as sound, I hear the aggressive bass and dub returns of the piece *Fortress Europe* by the Asian Dub Foundation, mixed with the creakings of *small boats*, the breathing of the sea, and the noises of a body passing through Mona Hatoum's installations *Impenetrable* (1999) and *Grater Divide* (2002). Once again, it would be a weird sound, halfway, incomplete, looking for. In fact, as I also remarked in Chapter 2, I think border art needs to be understood in terms of an unfinished and "ever-morphing"⁶⁵ fieldwork, of which race and class struggles keep on being a fundamental trait.

5.2.3 A few notes about Schengen border art

In this short paragraph, I share a few notes about the so-called "Schengen border art"⁶⁶. In particular, I juxtapose the narratives of two selected artworks – the 2013 photographic project *After Schengen* by Ignacio Evangelista (Fig. 5.10 and 5.11) and

⁶⁴. vimeo.com/41969513 (last consultation October 2023)

⁶⁵. From "La Pocha Nostra Manifesto: for a post-democratic era 2020". Available online: docs.google.com/document/d/1iPd9mmrmITUBecRLDceMscLTg_pS97qs114pl4b68SA/edit (last consultation April 2022)

⁶⁶. "Schengen border art" is a project by professor Ruben Zaiotti addressing art on, about, and against Schengen borders (more info at schengenborderart.com).



Figure 5.9 – *Centro di permanenza temporanea*, by Adrian Paci, 2009, framed photograph (120 × 140 cm), Collezione Giuseppe Iannaccone, Milan, Italy. Courtesy of the artist and Collezione Giuseppe Iannaccone.

the 2014 doc-movie *On the bride's side* by Antonio Augugliaro, Gabriele Del Grande, and Khaled Solomon Al Nassiry (Fig. 5.12) —, in order to evidence the selective discriminative and functioning of Schengen Agreement and its impact on Europe's internal borders.

As I explained in Chapter 3, the 1995 Schengen Agreement was a milestone in the EU integration process, creating an area where border controls were abolished — but was it really so? And for whom? The process of corrosion of the internal borders in the EU has often been associated with the creation and enforcement of an EU-driven external border, as well as with increasingly shared border externalisation practices. Although, once again, I think border scholars miss a crucial 'piece' of the border: people. The gap between Ignacio Evangelista and Augugliaro, Del Grande and Al Nassiry's artworks helps recover this fundamental dimension.

After Schengen (2013) by Evangelista is a fascinating artwork. It consists of a series of photographs of old border-crossing points in Europe, pictured in a "quasi-archaeological ruins" state⁶⁷. The work offers a sense of the arbitrariness of borders, examining states and their (architectural) border performances, as well as the power imbalance between those arbitrary architectures and the ordinary people who traversed them. As the author wrote, the old border crossing-points "currently appear as abandoned places, located in a space-time limbo, out of use and out of the time for which they were designed, as these states have opened their borders to the free movement of people"⁶⁸. In Evangelista's photographs the internal borders of Europe are "slowly disappearing", they are a "presence of the past that lies dormant in the present"⁶⁹. I sense the entire work as a kind of happy funeral. I think it perfectly pictures the narrative of EU internal borders corrosion, although I find it too celebratory of a fictional openness. Have Europe's internal borders really disappeared after Schengen? Disappeared for whom?

One year after Evangelista's work, in 2014, Antonio Augugliaro, Gabriele Del Grande, and Khaled Al Nassiry released *On the bride's side*, which tells a different story. I think that *On the Bride's Side* (2014) is a fundamental contribution to the border art debate at the European level, as its "political edge" (Gomez Peña cited in Berelowitz, 1997, p. 80) traces a line that goes back over the Atlantic and reminds of early border art performances like Guillermo Gomez Peña's *Border Walk* (1979)⁷⁰. Augugliaro,

⁶⁷. ignacioevangelista.com/arte/after-schengen/ [last consultation October 2023]

⁶⁸. Ibidem

⁶⁹. Ibidem

⁷⁰. guillermogomezpena.com/works/#border-walk [last consultation October 2023]



Figure 5.10 - *After Schengen (Portalet E-F)*, by Ignacio Evangelista, ca. 2013, photograph, Spain-France border crossing. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5.11 - *After Schengen (Rattersdorf-Kőszeg A-H)*, by Ignacio Evangelista, ca. 2013, photograph, Austria-Hungary border crossing. Courtesy of the artist.

Del Grande and Al Nassiry propose the direct filming of an on-the-road trip from Milan to Stockholm that took place from the 14th to the 18th of November 2013, in which the authors turn themselves into smugglers and organise a fake wedding party procession to help a group of Syrian and Palestinian migrants to bypass the Dublin Treaty⁷¹ and Europe's internal borders in order to reach their destination. As described by Sandra Ponzanesi, *On the Bride's Side* (2014) is a brave and poignant documentary, a road movie across Europe with a visionary message: 'no one can stop a bride at the border'" (2016: 152).

As written by Del Grande: "The idea surfaced while we were having dinner at our friend Antonio Augugliaro's house, who is a film director and editor. We were talking about Abdallah's story, about smuggling Syrian refugees in Milan and border controls. Then, I suddenly came out with it: "You know who the border guards would never stop? A wedding party! The police would never check a bride's documents! It all started as a joke, until a couple of days later, Antonio Augugliaro called me and Khaled. He told us that he had thought about it and that we had to do it. When I asked him what he was talking about, he replied: "Come on! I'm talking about the bride, of course!" I could hardly believe it. Were we actually going to fake a wedding party to avoid border controls and take a group of war refugees to Sweden to seek asylum?"⁷²

In fact, *On the bride's side* (2014) tells "the staging, performing and filming of a fake wedding to smuggle a group of five Syrian and Palestinian migrants out of Italy in a trip that will take them to Sweden, considered the European mecca for refugees" (Ponzanesi, 2016, p. 152). As Ponzanesi remarks, *On the bride's side* (2014) is an "act of protest and civil disobedience against the regulations of Fortress Europe", combining activism, journalism, and video-art, and "resorting to an unprecedented online crowdfunding campaign to get it financially off the ground" (Ibidem). By flouting immigration and asylum laws, whole crew run the risk of prison sentence (up to 15 years) and this risk "levelled the position between the migrants and the crew" (155).

⁷¹ The Dublin Regulation (currently Dublin III, Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013) establishes the criteria and mechanisms for determining which EU Member State is responsible for examining an application for international protection. Its main objective is to prevent multiple applications by the same individual in different Member States and to ensure the orderly processing of asylum claims. The regulation has been widely criticized for placing disproportionate responsibility on border and frontline states, creating "asylum hotspots," and contributing to the externalisation of migration control.

⁷² aljazeera.com/program/witness/2015/10/20/on-the-brides-side [last consultation October 2023]

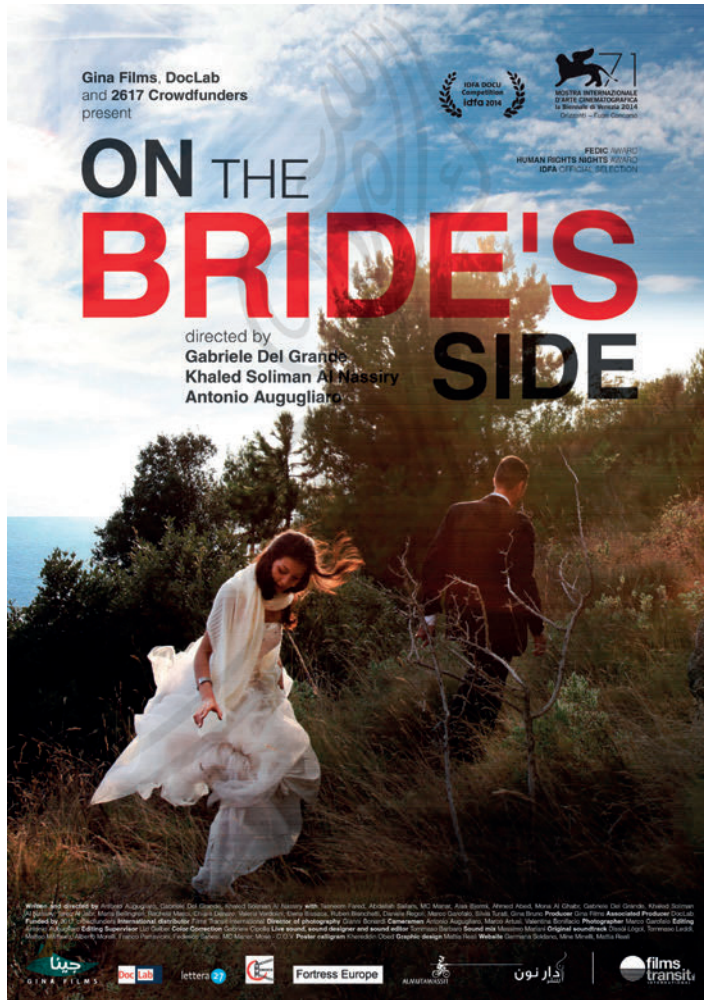


Figure 5.12 - *On the Bride's Side* (film poster), directed by Antonio Augugliaro, Gabriele Del Grande, and Khaled Soliman Al Nassiry, 2014. Photograph by Marco Garofalo. Courtesy of the artists.

During the three-thousand-kilometre journey, the protagonists traverse France, Luxembourg, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. All trip legs were programmed, as long as the choices to pass through this or that 'after Schengen' borders, based on the risk of being caught by border patrols. During the first day, the bride, the groom, and the whole crew dressed as wedding guests, crossed the border between Italy and France on foot by using the so-called "Pass of Death". Watching the film, some aesthetics of the first-day footage remind me of *Western Union Small Boat* by Isaac Julien – bodies awaiting, bodies in transit on Mediterranean shores, like stinging question marks interrogating the audience. The white wedding dress of the bride walking through Mediterranean scrub is a powerful image that creates "interruption" (Chambers, 2017) and "defamiliarisation" (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2013). The rest of the trip is done by car (Marseille, Bochum, Copenhagen, Malmö), traversing four European internal borders (France-Luxembourg, Luxembourg-Germany, Germany-Denmark, and Denmark-Sweden). The anxiety of being caught by the police is palpable throughout the trip; however, the moment before crossing national borders culminates this status, mixed with adrenaline and fear.

From my perspective, I think *On the Bride's Side* (2014) is a bold piece of border art: confrontational, processual, extra-disciplinary. It is not only about denouncing the discriminative functioning of the EU-driven border regime but also about challenging it. The militant stance of the authors perfectly fits the "political edge" (Gomez Peña, cited in Berelowitz, 1997: 80) of the border art approach, as well as its "collective mode of production" (Ponzanesi, 2016, p. 164). *On the bride's side* (2014) is an act of aesthetic disobedience: a wedding party defeats *Fortress Europe*, thereby unleashing a new political manifesto. Not only. By releasing an unauthorised tell of Europe, *On the bride's side* (2014) makes clear that the border-abolished Schengen zone is an elitist layer on the map that does not apply to everybody.

Looking through Ignacio Evangelista's and Augugliaro, Del Grande and Al Nassiry's representations of Europe's internal border, as I already said, it is possible to recover a fundamental piece of the border: people. Therefore, more than wondering whether the Schengen Agreement created an area where border controls were abolished, it is fundamental to go further and add a "for whom" to the question: Abolished for whom? The gap between Ignacio Evangelista and Augugliaro, Del Grande and Al Nassiry shows evidence of the discriminative functioning of Europe's internal openness, fictional and selective, and how its filtering borders remain more than active. If Evangelista's photographed ruins and past, Augugliaro, Del Grande and Al Nassiry's shot the living matter of contemporary "discriminative borderism"

(van Houtum, 2021) and, more importantly, provided a different tell, a “line of flight” (Deleuze et al., 2006, p. 339) of its supposed impenetrable walls.

5.2.4 Death as routine

As I said many times throughout my text, I think what Henk van Houtum defines as “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021) is daily bread for my generation: being used to a global taxonomy of human beings based on a “blacklisting logic” (van Houtum, 2010b) which allows a variety of national and international institutions to stop, beat, detain, and violently push back people simply because they moved from the wrong countries (in the case of the EU, roughly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the planet is blacklisted) and do not have enough money to buy a visa in advance. Especially after the so-called refugee crisis (2013-2015), counting bodies in Mediterranean waters or along the Balkan route became a daily affair for institutions, thus the death of blacklisted travellers became a normalised routine of the EU border regime. Shoes, life jackets, and lost-and-found personal effects have increasingly found a place in the galleries and in the imagery of contemporary Europe. The 2016 exhibit *Call Me by My Name*, hosted at the Migration Museum in London, is an example of this trend⁷³. On the same note, some of the pictures that compose Rasmus Degnbol’s photographic investigation *Europe’s New Borders* (2016), like the astonishing drone-view images of Mediterranean shores fully covered with maritime life-jackets⁷⁴.

Looking at the increasing dialogue between migration and the artistic world, in 2015 Emma Chubb wrote of a “art’s migratory turn” that, celebrating the migrant in its “universality”, reduced migration to that of movements of people from poor to rich countries, creating an unprecedented “migratory orientalism” shaping the dominant imaginary in the representation and analysis of migration in contemporary art (Chubb, 2015). Refashioning Guillermo Gomez Peña’s famous 1991 sentence referred to the commodification of border art, “In 1989 everyone went border” (Gomez Peña, 1991b), it is possible to assert that in the last decade everyone went migration, in the sense that migration themes became one of the leitmotifs of the 2010s art world, also in Europe. And, during my research, I have grasped the effects of this supposed “art’s migratory turn” (Chubb, 2015) at different levels: in artworks like *Our Boat* (2019) by Christoph Büchel (Fig. 5.13), large and cumbersome both from a material point of view (the boat itself) and imaginative (being exposed at Venice Biennial), as well as in intimate artworks, positioned on the margins of the cultural scene and occupying the corner of an informal gallery, such as *Make a boat!* (2018) by Guido Picardi (Fig. 5.14 and 5.15).

⁷³. migrationmuseum.org/exhibition/calaisstories (last accessed November 2023).

⁷⁴. rasmusdegnbol.com/index.php/portfolio-item/europes-new-borders (last accessed November 2025).



Figure 5.13 - *Barca Nostra*, by Christoph Büchel, 2019, installation view, 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, Arsenale, Venice, Italy. Photograph by Jean-Pierre Dalbéra. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 5.14 - *Make a Boat!*, by Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (1), *Il Grande Vento*, l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi. Courtesy of the artist.

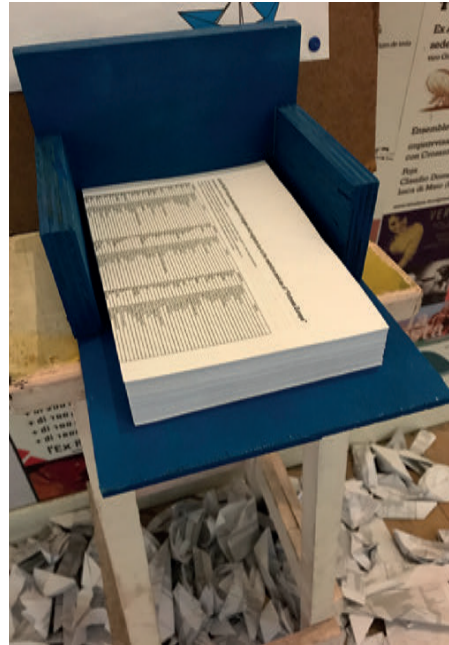


Figure 5.15 - *Make a Boat!*, by Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (2), *Il Grande Vento*, l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi. Courtesy of the artist.

Both Büchel's and Picardi's artworks denounce death as a normalised routine of the EU border regime. *Our Boat* (2019) by Christoph Büchel is a work positioned at the centre of the room, not only from a curatorial point of view but also metaphorically, at the core of the international art world: the Venice Biennial. In a nutshell, it consists of the wreckage of a rusty fishing boat, telling the story of a sinking that resulted in hundreds of deaths. The tragedy occurred on April 18, 2015, after a collision between the boat and a Portuguese container ship that had come to its aid. According to the IOM, over 1000 people lost their lives when the vessel sank, many trapped inside its hull⁷⁵. Büchel's *Our Boat* is a provocative artwork; it sparked the debate among critics at an international level, among recognition and indignation: considered as a fundamental testimony of our times as well as yet another speculation on the skin of migrants, with tourists having selfies with a funny, deadly backdrop (Allmark, 2025). The other artwork I mentioned, *Make a boat!* (2018) by Guido Picardi is, instead, an intimate performance-installation positioned at the margin of the room. It has been showcased only once, in an informal art gallery set up in a squat, l'Asilo, in Naples. From a curatorial point of view, as I already said, the work was positioned in a corner of the gallery, right next to the entrance door, in a space not meant to host any artwork: its placement was weird, seemingly occasional, and in transit. As explained by the author, *Make a boat!* (2018) is an attempt to bring the weight of UNITED's "List of Deaths" data into the material world: "The list was therefore printed, cut (!), accumulated in a ream of A5 sheets that has a tangible thickness, a sensible weight, an in(de)finite number of sheets." On a panel positioned on the top of the A5 ream, the author invites visitors to take a sheet and make a paper boat by following the instructions, therefore to "engage in a material relationship with this list, touch it, fold it, read snippets of numbers, pieces of life and death that fold together" – I felt the entire process as deeply personal expiation path. The user is therefore the motor of this performance installation. Through origami techniques, it acquires embodied knowledge of the "List of Deaths," gaining its human and political sense and moving beyond its data toward an experience of them.

The distance between Büchel's and Picardi's artwork, which I chose precisely as an example, but there are a thousand others, is significant in how Chubb's "art's migratory turn" (2015) was actually a phenomenon that crossed the art world in a transversal way, getting to its main stages as well as to its niches. Migrant deaths became a more and more discussed and explored theme in the border art of post-1989 Europe, and it is possible to say that, especially after the so-called refugee

⁷⁵. italy.iom.int/it/news/dieci-anni-fa-la-tragedia-piu-grave-mai-registrata-nel-mediterraneo (last consultation December 2023)

crisis (2013-2015), artists have engaged with it in myriad ways, not so much to mourn the dead, but rather to drive systemic change. Although, I argue that, in the last decade, European people have increasingly become indifferent to the death of blacklisted travellers. This dynamic is denounced, for instance, in Michael Kvium's *Beach of Plenty* (2017) visual artwork, which I had the opportunity to see live and analyse during my fieldwork in Berlin at the *Walking through Walls* expo. *Beach of Plenty* is a 7.5 by 3 meter painting of a scene of relaxed holidaymakers on a sandy Mediterranean beach staring at a small rubber boat filled with migrants approaching the same beach. Beyond the striking discrepancies between the conditions of the two subjects, I think the fundamental trait of this artwork is its capacity to denounce what seems to be a quite total indifference among holidaymakers toward the people on the boat, even though they are seemingly asking for help. It seems holidaymakers are used to the scene – they keep their holiday mood and do not care whether the people on the boat will survive or not. These overlapping realities make of *Beach of Plenty* a disquieting artwork, confronting the viewer with a spectacle s/he does not want to see. Kvium narrates in his work what, in the last decade, has become routine: I think of tourists in summer at Greek or Italian beaches, on holiday among burnt landscapes and dead people at sea, images repeated on TV every summer. Likewise, as I said before, some of the criticisms made of *Our Boat* struck a similar chord: the indifference of many visitors having selfies with the wreckage without even realising what tragedy lies beyond it, which indeed is yet another consumption of the victims and what remains of them.

What do these border artworks tell us about Europe? I think they help us better grasp the unacquainted loss produced every day by “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum, 2021), transforming it into powerful multiple interrogations. The border artworks I took into consideration in this subchapter tell us of a Europe that resembles one of the characters of Bruno Catalano's sculpture series *The Travellers*, in which the subjects (human forms with strikingly large sections of their bodies missing) are mutilated, incomplete, in loss of something (Fig. 5.16). The void left by the over fifty thousand deaths is nowadays more than visible on Europe's body, as a distinctive sign of its contemporaneity.

To conclude, the recent resemanticization of the artwork *Door of Europe* (2008) by Mimmo Paladino on the island of Lampedusa can be interpreted as symptomatic of the very dynamics discussed above. Conceived as a symbolic threshold of openness, passage, and hospitality — a gateway between Africa and Europe, and thus a space of hope and transit — the work has progressively undergone an unintended



Figure 5.16 - *Le destin du voyageur*, by Bruno Catalano, 2014, bronze sculpture from the series *Les Voyageurs*, Crest, France. Photograph by Lionel Mermoz. Retrieved from Pexels.

semantic shift. In the context of the intensification of migratory deaths in the Mediterranean, particularly after the aforementioned so-called refugee crisis (2013–2015), its collective perception has increasingly moved from that of a “door” to a new life to that of a site of mourning and remembrance. This transformation aligns with the broader normalisation of migrant deaths within the border regime described earlier: its resemanticization, occurring without any material alteration, reflects not only a shift in historical context, but also a wider process through which European societies aestheticise, internalise, and, to some extent, normalise the human cost of contemporary “borderism” (van Houtum, 2021).

5.2.5 *Die mauer im kopf*

In this last subchapter, I disclose some findings of two months of fieldwork I conducted in Berlin and Leipzig, from October to December 2019. I was there during the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. For this occasion, the two cities hosted several academic conferences, public talks, and discussions, as well as many art expos and exhibitions⁷⁶. Indeed, the transversal focus of all these events was on borders, from the Berlin Wall to contemporary delocalised bordering practices — a fertile ground for investigating border art at a European level. I mostly carried on the investigation through visual content and aesthetic analysis, observation of visitors’ interactions, and analysis of the installation space. Furthermore, I conducted a few unstructured interviews and held informal conversations with a variety of artists, curators, and cultural workers who have participated in or organised some of the events I attended. I built up my investigation on a large set of questions, among which: How do contemporary artists deal with EU-driven borders and borderism? How do they confront and alter them? Which techniques and materials do they use? Where do they attack the border? How do they develop strategies?

During my time in Berlin and Leipzig, my attention was gradually monopolised by the materials constituting the border in some of the visual arts, installations, and

⁷⁶. Here is a list of all the events I attended during my field trip in Berlin and Leipzig:

- *Free to contact* (at Stiftung Kunstforum Berliner Volksbank, Berlin)
- *Germany becomes one: dismantling the inner German border* (at Kulturbrauerei, Berlin)
- *90s Berlin: the fall of the wall, creative freedom, anarchy and techno* (at Alte Münze, Berlin)
- *Of people and walls* (at Schloss Biesdorf, Berlin)
- *The Berlin Wall and the border strip 1989-1990* (at Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer, Berlin)
- *The End of Freedom* (at Halle 14, Leipzig)
- *The open wall* (French Institute, Berlin)
- *UnWall: East to West and North to South* (at Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin)
- *Walking through walls* (at Groupius Bau, Berlin)

You can find more info about all these events at: mauerfall30.berlin and berlin.de/en/events/30-anniversary-fall-of-the-wall

performances I had the chance to analyse — more than once, borders were made of shadows, transparencies, projections; they were, in a way, invisible. About border art in Europe, one of the most significant works of the previous decade was, for instance, *Shibboleth* (2007) by Doris Salcedo. As I explained in the previous pages, *Shibboleth* was hosted at the Tate Museum in London in 2007, and, in a few simple words, it consisted of a visible gash in the floor of the museum dividing the space into two sides: a huge crack in the middle of the room showing a hard border made of jagged stone right in the middle. Therefore, I decided to investigate this gap (not chronological, but as a variety) between those representations: from Salcedo's jagged stones to works of shadows and transparencies. Among the works of art I had the chance to take into account in Berlin and Leipzig, I decided therefore to select two of them – *All Along the Watchtower* (2012/2019) by Nadia Kaabi Linke (Fig. 5.17 and 5.18) and *Sculptural Study, Six-parts Construction* (1980/2019) by Fred Sandback (Fig. 5.19) – as they perfectly frame the trend I refer as a kind of dematerialisation of borders. For both artworks, I conducted analyses of visual content and installation space, as well as 6 hours of observations (3 per artwork in 2 sessions of 1,5 hours), taking notes and gathering data on visitors' interactions. Both installations were showcased in one exhibit, *Walking Through Walls*, hosted at the Gropius Bau in Berlin. I also interviewed one of the two exhibit curators, Sam Bardaouil, in January 2021.

Using the words of the author, *All Along the Watchtower* “is an unnatural scene of a shadow without a related source-object, in which time stands still and the space appears as if haunted by a ghostly figure” (Bardaouil & Fellrath, 2019, p. 136). Kaabi Linke's installation appeared like an old border watchtower's shadow stretching across the floor and climbing the corner of the wall of one of the Berlin Gropius Bau museum rooms, in a semi-dark atmosphere. As guests entered the room, some completely overlooked the installation, while most instinctively glanced toward the opposite corner, where they expected to find the source of this shadow. However, the border watchtower's shadow is not what it appears: it is a carefully airbrush-painted illusion, rendered in a shade of grey so precise it mimics a shadow perfectly. Searching for a source object that was not there, the guests found themselves displaced, and their second reaction was to try to interpose themselves between a presumed source object and the light (I saw people literally stretching out on the wall to make yet another unsuccessful attempt). Finally, once the idea of interposing has been abandoned and the painting's deception has been realised, the visitors found themselves caught by a profound sense of anxiety, trapped by an old border watchtower that, notwithstanding its material absence, was inevitably still there, monitoring and surveying each passage. As the author remarks: “We are haunted by this power, always present through its absence, real

but invisible”⁷⁷ – unlike the stones of Salcedo’s *Shibboleth* (2007) and the physical pain they cause, the border that Kaabi Linke proposes is immaterial and works on the minds of those who suffer it. Her work helps us reconsidering the changes in border surveillance apparatuses, letting visitors grasp how some control practices have become increasingly shadowy and immaterial. Not only does it help build a bodily (corporeal) experience of contemporary bordering practices, but it also provides the basis for a renewed understanding of their functioning.

The other artwork I found relevant for my arguments is *Sculptural Study, Six-Part Construction* by Fred Sandback (1980/2019). In general, Sandback’s sculptural artworks have been referred to as “dematerialised sculpture” (Salvatera, 2024) and “sculpture from nowhere” (Park, 2012). Conceived in 1980, *Sculptural Study, Six-Part Construction* was executed for the first time at the Berlin Gropius Bau Museum in 2019, in the context of the *Walking Through Walls* exhibit. As explained by the curators of the exhibit, “dedicating a lifelong artistic practice to an understanding of real and imagined spaces, and the tangible and invisible planes that divide them”, Sandback provides visitors “with a spatial and corporeal experience that could resonate with the jarring divisions that are at play in our world today” (Bardaouil & Fellrath, 2019, pp. 21–22). In a nutshell, *Sculptural Study, Six-Part Construction* consists of a sculpture made through black acrylic yarn dividing the room through six immaterial planes: using the words of the author, the installation was meant to “invent the perfectly ineffectual container” (Sandback notes reported by Bardaouil & Fellrath, 2019, p. 194). As it is visible from the picture (Fig. 5.19), the yarn is set to divide the space so that, in the ecology of space-installation, one of the immaterial planes occupies the centre of the scene and the acme of its tensions – within the context of the exhibition, it seemed to be the wall to walk through in Sandback’s installation. In fact, it was just a void, a non-border. Once again, therefore, I was confronted with an immaterial border subject, ineffectual, mostly constructed by my mind. However, I felt it was hardly penetrable anyway: I walked through the installation many times, and it was only when I left Berlin that I realised I had never crossed the central, invisible plane. As did most of the visitors. From my observation notes, I noticed that very few of them dared to walk through the central immaterial plane border (only 7 of the 79 visitors I observed). Instead, some of the scenes I saw while observing the visitors’ interactions reminded me of Luis Buñuel’s famous surreal movie *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), in which a group of people is unable to leave a dinner party because of an invisible border separating the living room from the rest of the house. In the movie, as in the installation, people approached the border, as if to cross it, but for one reason

⁷⁷. nadiakaabilinke.com/work/all-along-the-watchtower/ (last accessed November 2025).



Figure 5.17 - *All Along the Watchtower*, by Nadia Kaabi-Linke, 2012-2019, installation view (1), Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany. Photograph by Timo Kaabi-Linke. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5.18 - *All Along the Watchtower*, by Nadia Kaabi-Linke, 2012-2019, installation view (2), Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany. Photograph by Timo Kaabi-Linke. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5.19 - *Sculptural Study, Six-part Construction*, by Fred Sandback, 1980–2019, installation view, Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany. Photograph by Mathias Völzke. Courtesy of the artist and the Gropius Bau.

or another, they eventually changed their minds and avoided it, turning back or changing their route. Buñuel's characters were trapped by an invisible and inner unexpected force, or led astray by distraction, and so it was for most of the visitors of Sandback's installation. Some visitors dare to put their arms and hands through Sandback's transparent border (9 of the 79 visitors I observed), approaching it as a kind of stargate, thereby recalling the aesthetics of the namesake famous movie — the 1994 *Stargate* by Roland Emmerich — anyway avoiding the cross.

Kaabi Linke's non-watchtower and Sandback's immaterial border are symptomatic of the profound self-harming and self-repressive effects of contemporary EU-driven "discriminative borderism" (van Houtum, 2021). While Salcedo's jagged stones on the floor of the Tate Museum convey a sense of battle, in the two works I have considered in this subchapter, there are no signs of struggle, as there is no physical contact and cannot be any. Therefore, taking up a famous German expression, some pieces of border art in Berlin address and try to dismantle what appears to be the *Mauer im Kopf*, the "wall in the head". In short, this popular expression means how a series of discursive, aesthetic, and imaginative bordering processes and practices continue to create divisions in Germany, and therefore in contemporary Europe, revealing the legacy of the past divisions and the impact it continues to have on the minds and attitudes of individuals (Gook, 2015; Hamborg, 2020). Thanks to the experiences that Kaabi Linke and Sandback provide visitors with, it becomes clear that much of the debordering work must be done within oneself. Through incorporeal borders, they bring back the focus on human beings. As remarked by Kaabi Linke, the moment we are aware of "the existence and the work of those systems of control" is "also the moment when we — consciously or not —", change "our behavior"⁷⁸. Thus, the sense of anxiety created by *All Along the Watchtower* (2012/2019) sets in motion a process of self-awareness and knowledge mining, which is indeed the first step in the realisation and dismantling of the *mauer im kopf*.

5.3 Conclusions: some tesserae of the mosaic

To conclude the scattered, nomadic, and un-comprehensive investigation of border art in post-1988 Europe, I will summarise the suggestions and findings of the previous pages in a schematic and concise way.

What I did and why it is relevant. As for the aims of my thesis, in this case study, I have built a deeper understanding of border art in post-1989 Europe: through my

⁷⁸. Ibidem

journey-form investigation, I have shed light on key authors, narratives, networks, and significant moments. Not only. In the previous pages, I helped fill a profound literature gap by translating over the Atlantic border art critical research apparatus in order to (re)locate it in the European context. In this sense, my study lays the groundwork for a deeper discussion and understanding of some of the border art's critical quests and subversive practices traversing contemporary Europe. By providing a subjective/positioned mapping of it, it helps to get oriented into what seems to be an underestimated but fertile research niche with practical and applicative implications in a variety of disciplines and scientific fields, among which are border studies, migration studies, aesthetic philosophy, cultural studies, human and cultural geography, and European studies. Finally, by drawing on the artworks I have considered, I have assembled a picture of Europe from a border art perspective, thereby recognising some of the deadly and self-harming aspects of its border regime as well as a variety of aesthetic struggles and subversive narratives that could help to re-imagine it.

Border art in post-1989 Europe. As suggested by the title of this conclusion, thinking of border art in post-1989 as a huge mosaic composed of billions of tesserae, after my research, I can recognise some of them, which I disclose in the following list:

- a) As explained in 5.2.1, it is possible to say that border art in post-1989 Europe has been characterised by tensions between a borderless utopias and rebordering processes: while the climate of openness and will for unity pervaded the late 1980s, with *The lovers* (1988) being indeed among the most famous and evocative testimony of it, it is in the same period that new divisions start growing up elsewhere, in form of physical fences, such as the Ceuta barrier, and in form of *mauer im kopf* (Gook, 2015; Hamborg, 2020). As I explained in the previous pages, Sibylle Bergman's photography provides a plastic representation of this phenomenon, transforming the ruins of a recently fallen wall, the Berlin Wall, from a point of arrival to a point of departure of new border struggles.
- b) Border art in post-89 Europe have worked profoundly on the dichotomic trap European/non-European, denouncing the lethal consequences of this othering processes, such as the case of *Shibboleth* (2006) by Salcedo, showing the fallacies and the paradoxes of such dichotomy, as Kamberić's *EU/OTHERS* (2000), dismantling dangerous clichés and preconception about the others, as in Xhafa's destabilising performance *Again and Again* (1999).
- c) Border art in post-89 Europe offers new perspectives to understand the discriminative processes of border selectivity. In particular, in 5.2.3, I have compared two artworks that address Schengen borders, showing how the same border may be both a ruin and an active fortress at the same time by standing

on the identity of the crossing subject. Furthermore, thanks to artworks like *On the bride's side* (2014) by Antonio Augugliaro, Gabriele Del Grande and Khaled Al Nassiry, it is possible to state that border art in post-89 Europe keeps the confrontational stance that has been a fundamental segment of the inception and development of border art across Mexico and the USA. As I remarked in the previous pages, *On the Bride's Side* (2014) is a fundamental testimony of civil dissent: it shows how the "political edge" (Gomez Peña cited in Berelowitz, 1997, p. 80) is still a non-negotiable trait of border art.

- d) As I argued in 5.2.4, especially after the so-called migration crisis (2013-2015), it is possible to assert that border and migration themes became one of the leitmotifs of the European art world. Chubb described this fact as "art's migratory turn" (2015), and, as I showed, it has been a transversal phenomenon occupying the most popular art stages, such as the Venice Biennial, as well as informal galleries. In particular, after 2015, the issue of migrant deaths has been increasingly central to border art, which has not only asked for systemic change, denouncing death as a normalised routine of the EU border regime, but also highlighted how indifference is slowly killing what remains of European values.
- e) Through the research fieldwork I disclosed in 5.2.5, by focusing on the materials constituting the borders in two selected installation artworks, I suggest the idea that border imaginaries are increasingly losing their materiality, moving from stones to shadows and transparencies. I argued that in the last decade, border art has worked to recognise and dismantle what has been referred to as a *mauer in kopf*, a "wall in the head" (Gook, 2015; Hamborg, 2020), i.e., the discursive, aesthetic, and imaginative border legacy of past divisions and its impacts on contemporary borders and bordering processes.

Assonances and dissonances: a comparative approach to border art. To conclude this chapter, here I share a few comparative notes about the assonances and dissonances of making border art in two different contexts (across the Mexico-USA border and in post-1989 Europe). Thanks to the research journey of the previous pages and the translation over the Atlantic of border art's critical quests and their relocation in the European context, here I highlight some common fields as well as a few peculiarities of border art in post-1989 Europe, which I disclose once again in list form:

- a) As argued in the previous pages, the bond between border art and activism is indeed a common trait and the "political edge" (Gomez Peña cited in Berelowitz, 1997, p. 80) of border art is still a non-negotiable trait both on the border between US-Mexico and post-1989 Europe contexts. The peculiarity of the word "edge", which I interpret as a kind of primary dimension, is coherent with the

works of many artists who in the last decades have produced border art in the post-1989 Europe context.

- b) In line with the previous point, also the “confrontational” stance (Prieto, 1999) seems to be an assonance and a common trait of border art, both on the border between Mexico and the USA and in post-1989 Europe contexts. Tracing a line that ties BAW/TAF artists to Sislej Xhafa and Adrian Paci, the attitude of explicitly addressing political issues is indeed a trait of the post-1989 European context, and the emergence of art that deliberately addresses border and migration issues has led to similar confrontational practices in both contexts.
- c) Quoting Guillermo Gómez Peña’s famous 1991 article *Death on the Border. A Eulogy to Border Art*, in which the author proclaimed the death of border art due to its commodification, also in post-1989 Europe, we have witnessed a moment in which “everyone went border” (Gomez Peña, 1991b). As I argued in the previous pages, especially after the so-called refugees crisis (2013-2015), we have assisted to consistent commodification of border art also in post-1989 Europe context, with migration and border issue becoming the theme of mainstream cultural and artistic events, and border art turning into “a specialized exercise in grant writing and institutional self-promotion” many times (Gomez Peña, 1991b). In this sense, as highlighted by Chubb (2015), after 2015, border art has been increasingly exposed to a sort of “migratory orientalism” that unleashes a dominant imaginary of borders and migration issues that reinforces the *status quo* rather than challenging it.
- d) Although it is possible to find some assonances and similarities, as in the previous points, it is also absolutely correct to state that the inception and evolution of border art in the two aforementioned contexts are hardly comparable. As I explained, in the US-Mexico context, border art has been conceived as a particular struggle of a certain group for a specific border. Then it evolved into many things and finally into what it is nowadays. Instead, border art got to Europe already as a deracinated practice, in a globalised context of “portable borders” (Sheren, 2011, 2015). Indeed, it is possible to argue that this is already enough to make any comparative attempt difficult, notwithstanding the assonances I mentioned earlier.
- e) Another fundamental dissonance is in the themes. While on the one hand it is absolutely correct to say that border art deals, for instance, with race and class struggles in both contexts, at the same time it is important to notice that race and class are concepts that, in a certain sense, get lost over the Atlantic and take on new meaning and connotations – they are a kind of morphing constants.

To conclude, the final remark of this chapter is both closing the present one and opening the next. In light of the previous pages, it is clear that border art provides border research with “lines of flight” (Deleuze et al., 2006, pp. 340-344) and surplus value, not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a methodological one. This issue relates to the methodological objectives (or internal aims) of my research, i.e., to seize border art from an epistemological perspective and to answer the following questions: What can border art bring to academia in terms of epistemology? Is it possible to speak about border art as method? So far, indeed, border art has conducted me to findings that were hardly obtainable through other means and methods, and this is already a huge outcome. In my second case study, which I disclose in the next and last chapter of my thesis work, I address the aforementioned questions through a border art co-research activity-process on Europe’s borders, this way exploring the surplus value of border art through practice, creating new lines of flight to look at Europe, and finally providing other evidences, and other material to work on, on the epistemological possibilities of border art as a method.

CHAPTER 6

BORDER ART AS METHOD

The following text has been intentionally screwed to the bone, as Chapter 6 is in installation form, and sometimes words are superfluous. It tells the conceptualisation, development, and public disclosure of a border art project named *What I mean by Europe* (wimbe), which I carried on in co-research with visual artist and cartographer Guido Picardi throughout 2019 and 2020 (info about the exhibit, maps, legend, photos and videos of the installation are available at guidopicardi.com/portfolio/wimbe). Through a four-phase process — design, execution, exploration, reflection — we have investigated the concept of Europe using a research method at the intersection of art, community engagement, and science. Therefore, this chapter relates to the methodological objectives (or internal aims) of my research, i.e., to seize border art from an epistemological perspective, and discloses some of the benefits of adopting border art as a method. Furthermore, Chapter 6 provides a visual inquiry into the concept of Europe, offering a variety of critical insights and new representational possibilities. Building on the outcome insights of Chapter 3, it is conceived as a practical attempt to alter the assemblage that the EU's scopic regime proposes, by generating new representations that resist institutional capture and reopen Europe to imagination and unfinishedness.

6.1 A series of stains

wimbe is many things: a border art project, a co-research process, a cartographic experiment, an art installation, a representational method, a community engagement exercise, an educational tool, a joke about the arbitrariness of borders, a visual search for Europe, and more. The idea at stake in wimbe is to experiment with border art as a method, thus engaging in a long-term co-research practice that could disclose the benefits of such an approach. This Chapter, therefore, provides an overview of wimbe's conceptualisation, development, and public disclosure and discussion, and addresses the questions that relate to the internal aim of my thesis: What border art can bring to academia in terms of epistemology? Is it possible to speak of border art as method? —, and seizing border art from an epistemological perspective. Furthermore, it offers relevant insights into the debate on art-based methods, co-research and participative approaches, and the discourse on European borders and "bordering processes" (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002) and their visual representation. As said, the will to experiment with the dialogue between scientific and artistic practices was the inception of this case study and the border art project it generated. It is an attempt: i) to overcome what has been defined as the "modern oppositions between [...] theories and practices", and focus instead on their "interplay" (Brambilla et al. 2015: 3); ii) to react to Amilhat Szary's call for long-term collaborations

and crossings between researchers and artists, in order to fully use the disruptive potential of art-based research (2016); iii) to experiment and make use of the surplus value offered by adopting border art as research method; iv) to move from the study of cartography to a practice of critical cartographing.

“A series of stains?” — The idea of attempting to design Europe came out of endless conversations with cartographer and visual artist Guido Picardi, a good friend, and we share an interest in maps and representational methods. We started our inquiry by reciprocally interrogating each other with a very simple question: What do you mean by “Europe”? As explained in Chapter 3, this question has no simple answer. In our synthesis, therefore, we begin to work with Europe as a very ambiguous concept, lying in different shades and defined by overlapping borders, whose complexity poses as an implicit request for new methodologies of representation. Moving from Atlas to Hermes (van Houtum, 2024), we finally decided to identify Europe in a series of colorful stains, thinking of it as a mosaic of physiographical (European continent, Drainage basins of European seas, Eurasian tectonic plate), political (European Union, Shengen Area, Frontex Area, Council of Europe), and cultural features (European ancestry, Latin alphabet, Christian religion, Civil law) – the world projection of the base map being a Winkle Triple. Europe is shown each time as a stain of colour on a blank sheet. The stain is drawn on the world map; after that, the world map layer is turned off, leaving only the colour stain(s) on a blank sheet. Printed on plastic film, the stains are superimposable, thus allowing overlaps and cross-analysis.

So far, wimbe proposes 11 maps of Europe, although they are potentially countless (see 6.2 for the maps’ criteria and detailed descriptions). Also the object of our study is scalable: for instance, we could apply the same process to Africa, Italy, Naples, Atlantide and so on. Features are potentially countless. Therefore, wimbe not only releases a scientific/artistic product, but also an alternative mapping method. Drawing from the traditions of critical cartography and critical mapping, it resonates with a consolidated critique of cartographic neutrality and statocentric objectivity (Harley, 1988; Crampton & Krygier, 2006; Wood, 2010). These fields highlight how mapping does not simply describe the world but actively produces geopolitical imaginaries, exclusions and possibilities. In this sense, wimbe’s stains operate as counter-maps: they abandon the rigid epistemology of the Atlas in favour of the open, relational and mobile perspective evoked by Hermes (van Houtum, 2024), foregrounding subjectivity, multiplicity and process over fixity and enclosure. This approach also aligns with practices of *creative cartography* and *geografare*, which explore mapping as a situated, embodied and imaginative act (Counter-Cartographies Collective, 2012; dell’Agnese, 2017).

In order to implement such a project, we went through a 4-phase co-research process — design, execution, exploration, and reflection — which I explain and disclose in detail in the following pages (in 6.3). Our meeting point has been l'Asilo cultural centre in Naples: the place we worked in, the community we lived with, the space we had to expose and explain. And, as l'Asilo is a self-governed space and an open community of artists and socio-cultural workers, the whole co-research process has been strongly connected to the practice and aesthetics of the site we moved into, as we were continuously exposing our aims to constant exchange and contamination, and to daily community engagement practices and mindsets. Furthermore, it was precisely by inhabiting l'Asilo that wimbe finally became an art installation: in December 2019, on the occasion of the bottom-up art expo *Il Grande Vento*, through the use of an overhead projector, we set up a installation continuously producing and dismantling Europe in a series of colorful stains on a white wall, with ± 500 people accessing the room and ± 75 interacting with the installation (see paragraph 6.4).

Looking back at this whole wimbe project (+12 months of co-research, +11 maps, 1 installation, etc.), we would say that border art as a method works. However, let us proceed step by step: maps criteria and description (6.2), focus on the 4-phase process (6.3), moving from maps to installation (6.4).

6.2 Maps criteria and descriptions

wimbe is an ongoing project. So far, we have produced 11 maps of Europe, but they are possibly countless more. As explained, the world projection of the base map is Winkel Tripel, and Europe is shown each time as a stain of colour on a blank sheet. The stain is drawn on the world map using different datasets. After that, the world map layer is turned off, leaving only colour stains on a blank sheet. Finally, we printed our stains onto A4-sized plastic film, making the maps superimposable and thus enabling overlap and cross-analysis.

wimbe shows three kinds of representations of Europe: physiographical, political, and cultural. The physiographical maps show different ways in which Europe can be defined by prominent geographical and geological features. The political maps represent some relevant European political associations. Finally, the cultural maps show some cultural features common to European people and highlight where else in the world these features persist with a strong presence.

The limits of the stains can be: i) for limits that fall on land: national borders, subnational borders, physiographical features; ii) for limits that fall on regional seas: Economic Exclusive Zones; iii) for limits that fall on oceans: intuitive geographical and aesthetic criteria. On this point, it is important to highlight that throughout our work, we have privileged our aesthetic intuitions rather than always replicating the surgical precision of the aforementioned borderlines. Our aim was precisely to go through a co-research process, opening up an alternative method to visualise Europe, not to replicate this or that line. Therefore, the point is not whether we decided to cut Europe's landmass according to the Urals or to question the in/exclusion of this or that political form instead of another, but rather to look at the overall picture that Wimbe's maps and research process offer us. We will come back to this issue in the next subchapter. For the moment, we provide a detailed description of each map below.

Physiographical maps. These maps illustrate various ways in which Europe can be defined by significant geographical and geological features.



Figure 6.1 - *wimbe 1 — European landmass*

This map shows the shape and extension of the continent generally called 'Europe', including the islands associated with it. The eastern boundaries of the colour stain are formed by the Ural Mountains, the Ural River, and the Caucasus watershed.

Colour: Europe.

Blank: outside Europe.

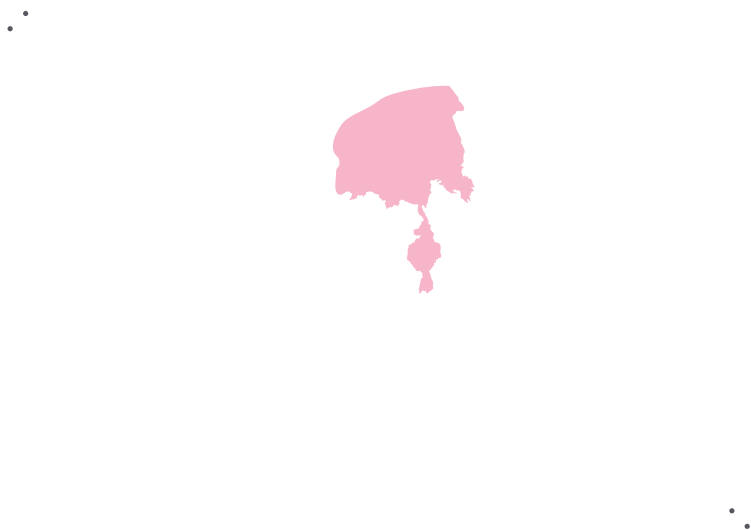


Figure 6.2 - *wimbe 2* — Drainage basins of European seas
This map shows the drainage basins of Europe's regional seas. The colour stain is formed by the whole Mediterranean Sea and Caspian Sea basins, and a portion of the North-east Atlantic Ocean and Arctic Ocean basins.
Colour: water flows in Europe's seas.
Blank: outside Europe.

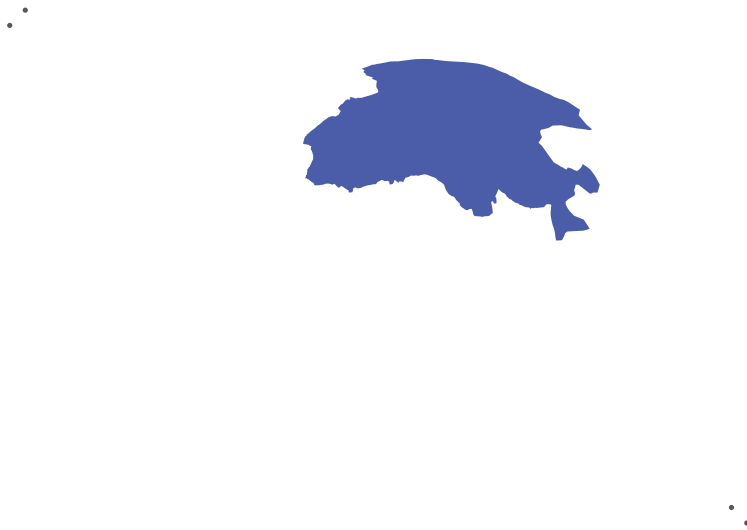


Figure 6.3 - *wimbe 3* — *Eurasian tectonic plate*

This map shows the shape and extension of the Eurasian tectonic plate.

Colour: on the Eurasian tectonic plate.

Blank: on another tectonic plate.

Political maps. These maps show some relevant European political associations.



Figure 6.4 - *wimbe 4* — *European Union*

This map shows the shape and extension of the European Union. The colour stain is formed by the countries which are members of the EU, including their EEZ and 9 outermost regions. The 22 Overseas Countries and Territories of the member states do not form part of the EU, so they are not included.

Colour: EU.

Blank: Not EU.



Figure 6.5 - *wimbe 5* — Schengen Area

This map shows the shape and extent of the Schengen Area. The colour stain is formed by the countries that participate in the Schengen area, including their EEZ. Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, and Romania are legally bound to join the Schengen Area, but various obstacles prevent them from doing so.

Colour: inside Schengen Area.

Blank: outside Schengen Area.

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Figure 6.6 - *wimbe 6* — *Frontex Area*

This map shows the shape and extension of the area controlled by the Frontex Agency.

Colour: inside Frontex area.

Blank: outside Frontex area.

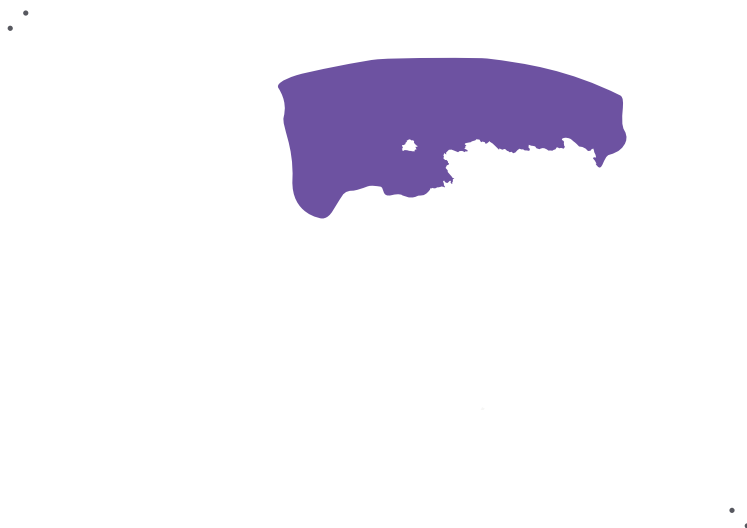


Figure 6.7 - *wimbe 7* — *Council of Europe*
This map shows the member states of the Council of Europe.
Colour: member of Council of Europe.
Blank: not member.

Cultural maps. These maps focus on some of the main cultural features that constitute the concept of Europe and aim to challenge its continental scale by displaying what can be thought of as 'European' across the world. The idea was to identify some cultural structures common to Europeans and to highlight where else in the world they have a strong presence. Also, some European countries, or parts of them, may be left off a map (because they do not show the presence of the specific cultural feature). However, these are considered useful exceptions that can help constantly challenge the meaning of Europe itself.



Figure 6.8 - *wimbe 8 — European ancestry*

This map shows the percentage of the world's population with some claim to European ancestry, as a means of propagating and establishing a certain culture. The colour stain is formed by the so-called 'European Diaspora', which is the result of centuries of emigration, penal transportation and ultimately colonialism.

Colour: more than 30% of the population has some claim to European ancestry.

Blank: less than 30% of the population has some claim to European ancestry.



Figure 6.9 - *wimbe 9* — *Latin alphabet*

This map shows the spread of the Latin script worldwide. The colour stain is formed by countries in which the Latin alphabet is used to write official or widely diffused local languages.

Colour: Latin script is the sole script or one of the main scripts used.

Blank: other alphabets are predominant.



Figure 6.10 - *wimbe 10* — *Christian religion*

This map shows the spread of Christianity worldwide. The colour stain is formed by areas of the world in which Christianity is one of the main religions.
Colour: more than 20% of the population is Christian.
Blank: less than 20% of the population is Christian.



Figure 6.11 - *wimbe 11* — *Civil law*

This map shows the countries of the world in which civil law is the legal system. Countries whose legal system is a mixture of civil law and other kinds of law (common law, religious law, customary law) are not included in the colour stain.

Colour: Civil law is the adopted legal system.

Blank: other legal systems.

6.3 A 4-phase co-research process: design, execution, exploration, reflection

After introducing you to the maps, this paragraph aims to disclose the co-research practices beyond them. As said, we have worked on *wimbe* through a 4-phase process we generally refer to: design, execution, exploration, and reflection. For each part of the process, which we illustrate in detail on the following pages, we also include personal notes and some preliminary findings that may help better understand the potential of co-research and long-term art-science research collaborations.

6.3.1 Design

The first phase of our workflow has been dedicated to abstractly designing the project: What to include in our maps? What to exclude? Are maps going to be printed or not? If yes, on which kind of material? The purpose of this phase was to generate a series of choices through informal conversations and brainstorming. As we already said in the introduction to this Chapter, we finally decided to work with colourful superimposable stains (printed on plastic film), as this way of thinking and showcasing allowed us to set up a visual tell that was aesthetically powerful and very simple and direct.

Then we started to work on our object to map: Europe. From the first conversations, trying to explain to each other what we meant by Europe, we immediately realised that mapping such an ambiguous object would require us to translate our ideas and perceptions of Europe into a common language we could then use for the rest of the project. We then started to decompartmentalise and break down our ideas of Europe, trying to bring out common segments and shared key aspects on which the idea of Europe is based. To avoid building a syncretic map, but rather a visual talk about Europe that was dis-narrative and modular, we started working on three types of representations: physiographic, political, and cultural. As for the physiographic maps, in our deconstruction process, we considered taking Europe to the bone: as mentioned in the previous paragraph, they represent the four elements (earth, water, fire, air). Then we started to break down our political idea of Europe, brainstorming Europe's relevant political associations and organisations, and we finally agreed to decompartmentalise political Europe into four layers: the European Union (EU), Schengen, Frontex, and the Council of Europe. While agreeing on the first three maps was easy enough (European Union, Schengen, Frontex areas), the idea to include the Council of Europe area in our political representations of Europe is indicative of a debate we have been having in the

endless conversations of this wimbe phase, namely the one on Russia, the elephant in the room. At the time we designed wimbe (2019-20), the Council of Europe was probably the most relevant European political association of which Russia was a member (before being expelled in 2022 after the invasion of Ukraine), therefore we decided to include it in our mapping to include Russia at least in one of our political representations of Europe. Finally, the last part of this brainstorming/design phase was meant to deconstruct our cultural idea of Europe and identify some of the main features constituting Europe in our minds and in the collective perception of it, we finally agreeing on focusing on these: European ancestry, alphabet/language (latin script), religion (christianity), and legal systems (civil law). Regarding the idea of representing genetic ancestry, as we already explained on previous pages, although it is not a cultural structure in itself, we considered it a means of cultural propagation and rooting. Hence, we found it interesting to examine its shape and how it interacts with other maps. Anyhow, what we think is one of the most interesting aspects of wimbe's cultural maps is that they challenge Europe's continental scale by retracing the selected features worldwide, highlighting where else in the world the cultural structures that are common ground for Europeans exist with a strong presence.

Overall, once unlocked, this work on segments, which was ultimately for us a gym of imagination, became marginal. Proposing a representation of this or that political form instead of another became, at a certain point, a useless and meaningless discussion when we realised we had finally unlocked the scalable method of representation we had been searching for. In fact, we aimed to imagine a mapping process that could allow us to move the cartography of Europe a step forward, toward a practice of critical cartographing of Europe, and now we had it. Also, we were fascinated by the idea that this layer-based thinking supposed that the superimpositions needed a subject-motor that activated the maps, precisely by leafing through them and superimposing them. In this way, our will to create a dis-narrative and modular visual representation of Europe (or another object) could be satisfied: it is the subject-motor that composes the object at different times, depending on what it is looking for, its own perspective, its own times and interests. In this way, wimbe's maps are potentially countless, or some of the infinite pieces of the same map.

6.3.2 Execution

The second phase of wimbe's co-research process could be defined as exercises of power. With "execution" we mean taking possession of bordering powers and

exercising it centimetre by centimetre across the world map, making our choices operational and thus starting our search for Europe.

Drawing a map is indeed a different task than designing it abstractly, because it materialises choices that, in the abstract, can remain vague, transforming ideas into claims, and making visible the subjectivity, partiality, and arbitrariness of every map. For each of Wimbe's representations, we draw our stain by combining different datasets, but, in any case, we had to deal with the limits and arbitrariness of many choices. One big issue, for instance, has been the question of the seas. While executing Wimbe's physiographic and political map was easy enough, we had long discussions to find a way to deal with the seas in cultural maps, and found it by focusing on people. In the contemporary world, maritime traffic has reached impressive numbers. According to Marine Traffic data (marinetraffic.com), there are almost 300,000 ships at sea every day, with about two million people working on them. Who are those seafarers? What religion do they profess? What language do they speak, and under what legal system do they carry out their duties? In order to provide a visual answer to these questions, on the one hand, we used some data on the nationalities of sea and vessel workers: according to UNCTAD data⁷⁹, 13.5% of seafarers carry a Philippines passport, followed by Russians (10%), Indonesians (7.5%), Chinese (7%), Ukrainians (4%) and Americans (3%), with no other nationality reaching 1%. By interpreting this data, we approximated the percentages of seafarers who were possibly Christian and their language, and based our representations on these approximations. Similarly, using data on ship nationalities (with Panama serving as a flag of convenience for almost 20% of the world's ships⁸⁰), we derived the type of legal system most prevalent at sea. On the other hand, to provide a visual answer to the aforementioned questions, we have used various graphic expedients and semiotic signs, such as, for instance, the stripes in the seas representing some of the passages and the circulation of people and their culture.

Moving beyond the notes on the question of the seas, and instead returning to the process of executing all the Wimbe maps, we can say that starting from the data and then going beyond it has been our *modus operandi* throughout the artistic and aesthetic journey of our border art project. We have adopted the expedient of stripes, in a symbolic sense, both at sea and on land. Similarly, the small spots represent some islands (including Hawaii, Pitcairn, Easter Island, Ascension Island, Saint Helena, Tristan de Cunha, Inaccessible Island; Comoros, Reunion, British

⁷⁹. unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/dataviewer/US.Seafarers (last accessed December 2022).

⁸⁰. unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2022_en.pdf (last accessed December 2022).

Indian Ocean Territories), but they do not respect the real proportions of the emerged land, as they play the role of symbolic reminder for some (not all) of the islands that we have in one way or another tried to map. The same discussion on proportionality also applies to some voids. To be clear, looking at North America on the map of Christianity (8), the voids we find, more or less in correspondence with Utah, represent the Mormons, but more than locating exactly where they are, those voids are a symbol of the discontinuity of the Christian feature.

In general, in the features of wimbe's maps there are all these reflections and questions. Where we could not get there with data, which in some parts of the world is actually very scarce, we got there with personal interpretations and visions. And this is because, we repeat once again, at a certain point in our investigation, for us it was no longer important, for example, whether was more accurate including or excluding Yakutia from the map of Christianity (FYI, in the end we included only its few inhabited territories), but to experiment centimeter by centimeter the arbitrariness of the processes of bordering in the design of a map and to test the cartographic apparatus (in its entirety) that wimbe offered us.

Finally, we share some notes on the last step of this execution phase, namely the removal of the national borders map used (for practical reasons) in the background during the graphic construction of the wimbe maps. At first glance, wimbe's maps may not seem to include traditional cartographic elements; instead, they appear as colored stains printed on a transparent sheet. Removing the national borders map was a political and symbolic act. We separated it and printed it separately, thus making the national boxes map only one of the infinite possible interpretations of the world we live in. Furthermore, as data are often released on a national basis, we perceived finishing the work with the removal of the ruler as an act of emancipation: it embodies our will to overcome the way we imagine and therefore produce space, and to recognise the people around us.

6.3.3 Exploration

What emerged after the execution phase was a new world. We designed the maps abstractly, then drew them and finally printed them. Nevertheless, the sensation we had while looking at the prints for the first time was of holding something alien in our hands. The curiosity they instilled in us led to a long time of exploration, like they were anew, not made by us. A series of notes followed during this process, simple remarks we collected as we explored the maps one by one. Perhaps they might be considered obvious notions (things that are already known), but what is interesting is the capacity of wimbe's maps to make them immediately visible.

Looking at the map of the tectonic plates (3), the first fact that jumped out at us is that Lampedusa lies outside the Eurasian tectonic plate, which includes Beijing. Also, the map of the drainage basins of European seas (2), which inevitably links the Nile basin to Europe, immediately makes visible the connections with a part of the world that today is considered other and distant, but which in ancient history instead represented a zone of contact and translation. Also, looking at the shapes proposed by political maps is interesting for several reasons. First of all, one can seize the expansion of the political borders of Europe through the three-step confinements of the European Union (4), the Schengen area (5), and the Frontex area (6), a progressive expansion of the stain, which never loses territories but always gains them. Another interesting vision is to look at Belarus in the Council of Europe map (7): isolated and isolationist, it represents the only void, the only discontinuity, of the entire area. To finish this very short list of simple remarks, some notes on cultural maps. From the Latin-script map (10), which required more colour during printing, we can see that Ethiopia is the only discontinuity in sub-Saharan Africa, the only void in a totally Latinized area. Another interesting data point concerns the Christianity map (8), which, because of its irregularities and complex patterns, requires the longest printing time. Finally, another fact that catches the eye is the continuity that emerges between the European continent and the Central and South American ones: the wimbe cultural maps make them seem even closer than they already are.

This exploration phase served to metabolise the maps and (re)make them our own. We started playing with superimpositions, moving from one representation to another, and found, in the process, playful and educational elements as well.

6.3.4 Reflection

The last phase of our co-research process consisted of a new series of brainstorming sessions in which we jointly evaluated the results and their applications across different research contexts, identified possible strengths and weaknesses of our approach, generated new questions, and outlined possible lines of development. In particular, the core of our reflections during this phase was to imagine possibilities to activate a collective reflection on and through wimbe. Throughout the whole wimbe co-research process, we have often asked ourselves: What are we really doing, and what is the meaning of all this? As said in the introduction, we have many different answers: wimbe is a border art project, a co-research process, a cartographic experiment, an art installation, a representational method, a community engagement exercise, an educational tool, a joke about the arbitrariness of borders, a visual search for Europe, and more. Most of all, we perceive it as an ongoing personal (almost

intimate) process of scientific, cultural and artistic resistance. However, at this stage, we felt the need to open the box, to activate the maps (find an engine for them), and therefore to ask ourselves: What is *wimbe* for the others? How to show those maps to others? How to share them? How to enhance their aesthetic and performative potential? How can we help others navigate the whole process? Therefore, what was supposed to be the final stage of the process actually set in motion a new experimentation: that of thinking about an installation, to spread the maps and data and observations that we have accumulated (even outside the academy) and, at the same time, to collect a new series of data both on the overall cartographic process-apparatus and on its object (Europe).

6.4 From maps to installation

To make *wimbe* available for open discussions, we decided to set up an installation. We exhibited it for three days during an event called *Grande Vento*, held at l'Asilo in Naples⁸¹. We used these days to conduct interviews and informal talks with visitors, collect notes on visitors' interactions and comments (± 500 persons accessing the room, ± 75 persons interacting with the installation), and take photos and videos of the event.

The installation was positioned inside an empty room with white walls. In the middle of the room is a small table. On the table is a vintage overhead projector. Maps were on one side of the table. Not far, attached to a wall, the map legend, and the following introduction text:

wimbe is an installation addressing the European space.

Where does it start?

Where does it end?

What do you mean by 'Europe'?

Europe is an ambiguous concept, lying in different shades. The multiplicity of the line bordering its space makes it something impossible to be designed with conventional methods; the complexity of its form bears an implicit request for new methodologies of representation.

*Combining cartography and visual art, *wimbe* identifies Europe in a series of alternative maps. It is an ongoing research project: so far, it proposes 11 films showcasing physiographical, political, and cultural interpretations of Europe. Overlappings are countless.*

⁸¹. More info, photos, and videos of the installation are available at: guidopicardi.com/portfolio/wimbe

Through the use of the overhead projector, Europe is continuously produced and dismantled in a series of colorful stains on a white wall. Users come to be part of the aesthetics of the installation, they perform just as much as the maps do.

wimbe is a tool, a test, or better, it is a joke — imagination is the fuel of the whole process. It fosters a radical turn in representational methodologies, toward a more flexible use of the borderline.

Using an overhead projector, wimbe became an installation in which visitors continuously produced and dismantled Europe in a series of colourful stains on a white wall — its aesthetics were vibrant. We decided to exhibit the maps through the overhead projector because it seemed to us the right device for our purposes, allowing works of light and transparency that, reflected through a mirror, project a subjective and translated image of the original prints. Furthermore, the possibility of focusing the projection more or less gave wimbe's maps and superimpositions another possibility: blurring their edges, visualising areas of translation, and making the reality told by the prints even more uncertain. Finally, using an overhead projector allowed us to identify the subject-motor who, precisely by leafing through the maps, placing them on the overhead projector, and superimposing them, activated the maps and their critical aesthetic potential. Therefore, visitors were a fundamental part of the installation: they performed as much as maps did. It should be noted that, most of the time, the subject-motor was conditioned by external elements, as in the case of a couple or a group of people, where often only one person interacted materially with the maps, but collected the input of the others and complied with this or that request: in these performances, we symbolically found the procedural forms and constraints of mapmaking as collaboration and negotiation between various actors.

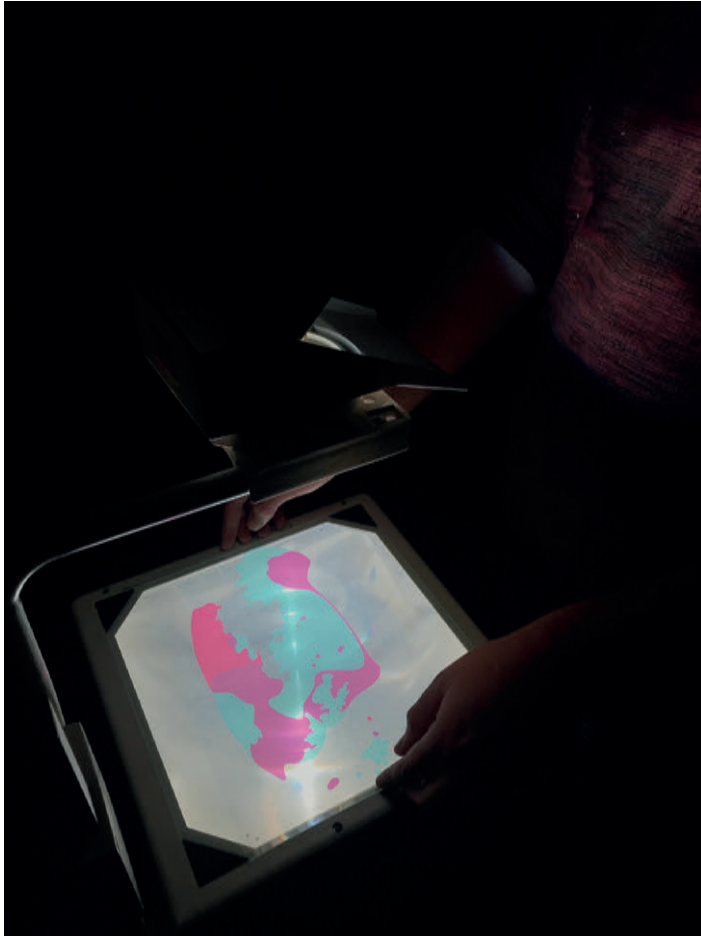


Figure 6.12 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (1), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.



Figure 6.13 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (2), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.

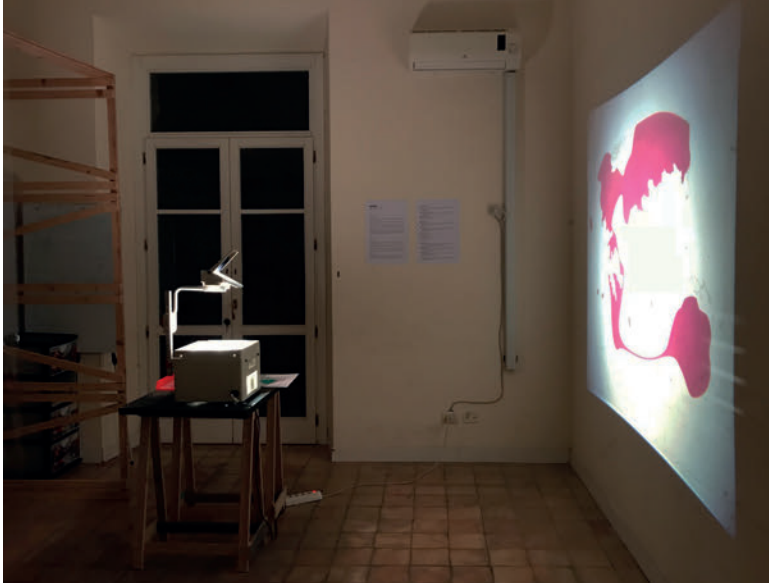


Figure 6.14 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (3), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.



Figure 6.15 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (4), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.



Figure 6.16 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (5), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.



Figure 6.17 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (6), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.

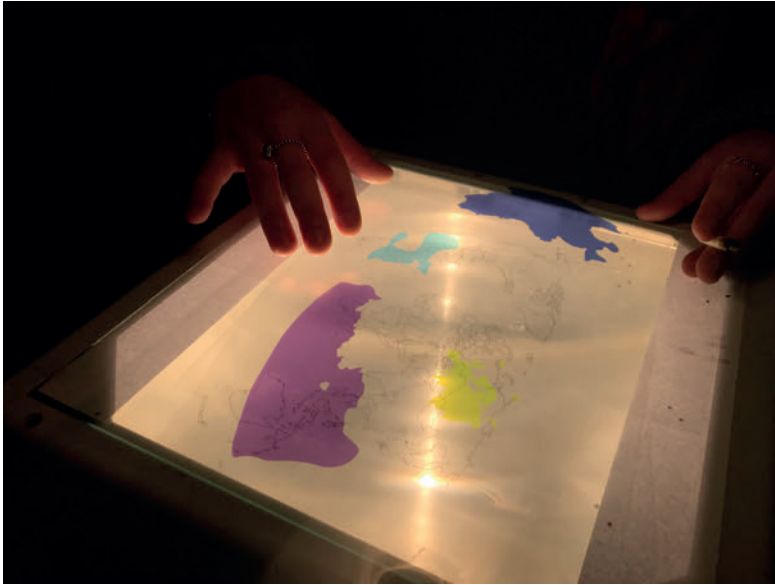


Figure 6.18 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (7), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.



Figure 6.19 - *What I Mean by Europe (wimbe)*, by Luca Paolo Cirillo and Guido Picardi, 2019, installation view (8), l'Asilo, Naples, Italy. Photograph by Guido Picardi.

As mentioned, during the three days of the exhibition, we conducted short interviews and informal conversations with several visitors and collected notes on their comments and interactions with the installation (± 500 persons accessed the room, ± 75 interacted with the installation). In general, the installation had a great response, generating curiosity and lively reactions in a large part of the visitors. In fact, the first insights we feel we should share are precisely what we have summarised in our notes: a will to play more and to understand more. Visitors were keen to engage with the journey the installation proposed, driven by eagerness and fascination. Overall, we had the feeling that *wimbe* was something sought and finally found; this attitude confirmed our hypothesis about the necessity of providing new representations of Europe and imagining new ways to get them. One of the visitors we talked to, immediately after reading the introductory text, commented: "So I am not the one who has ideas of Europe that overlap, but I see that overlapping is precisely the method". This feeling of relief was also shared by other visitors, in a certain sense relieved by the fact of finding a confirmation of their uncertainties: "Four political maps for a single Europe, so I am not the only one to be confused", commented another visitor. Other visitors, instead, reacted to *wimbe* by showing displacement at different levels. One of the visitors, after giving a fast glance at the maps, questioned us: "Where are national borders? I cannot recognise anything without". The demand (and desire) for national borders was a leitmotif of visitors' comments. A second level of displacement concerned, instead, the idea of viewing Europe in pieces, and it particularly affected visitors who took Europe for granted, generating doubts and, consequently, a will to deepen their understanding of the subject. Precisely because of *wimbe*'s ability to generate curiosity and desire to enhance comprehension about Europe and, in general, about cartography, as already mentioned, we began to look at *wimbe* also as an educational tool. Some visitors (middle and high school teachers) invited us to present the project in class. Other visitors (social workers) asked us to reproduce the project with their association, involving students and/or other beneficiaries in the entire process. In September 2022, based on the *wimbe*'s experience, we held two labs at Radboud University on border art and creative cartography (for the Master's course Geopolitics of Borders at the Bachelor's course Borders and Identities in Europe).

Finally, to close this part, we want to make a final consideration on the space that hosted us throughout the *wimbe* project, from the abstract design phase to the installation, namely *l'Asilo* (Naples, Italy). Using the jargon of the space in question, creating an installation was also a way to "give back" to *l'Asilo*, following the logic of what defines itself as a "self-governed and interdependent workshop/laboratory of

culture, with porous walls to the political life of the city, its struggles and conflicts"⁸². During the exhibition phase of the installation, in addition to opening our work to the public, we had the opportunity to engage with those who saw us working on the project for months and often contaminated it, namely the community of l'Asilo, which also gave our project the ritual processuality of a community engagement exercise, marking it with that political edge typical of the border art.

6.5 Conclusions: some notes from the *nepantla* between theories and practices

So, in light of the overall wimbe's experience, is it possible to speak of border art as a method? We can certainly answer in the affirmative, and we argue why. From an epistemological point of view, we are convinced that adopting border art as a method can bring several benefits to scientific research. First, by allowing the researcher to work at the *nepantla* between theories and practices, adopting border art as a method helps challenge traditional academic paradigms and contributes uniquely to knowledge production. It pushes academia to engage with non-verbal and visual epistemologies, unsettling the privileging of written language and argumentation (as for wimbe). As well, it blends disciplines moving scientific research toward "un-discipline" (Parizot et al., 2014) and "indiscipline" (Rancière, 2006), thereby encouraging cross-discipline and hybridity (which is fundamental for border studies), and opening possibilities for out-of-the-box thinking (out of the modern compartmentalisation of knowledge). Furthermore, we believe that adopting border art as a method produces a politically engaged epistemology that continuously urges academics to consider their own positionality and responsibility, thereby raising awareness and mobilising social change. We have experienced all this through wimbe, and so yes, we are convinced that using border art as a method adds value to scientific research that is still too often overlooked.

As for the co-research path, having had the opportunity to experiment with long-term collaboration through scientific and artistic research has certainly been one of the keys that enabled this study to navigate the disruptive potential of border art as a method, and, more generally, of art-based and participatory research methodologies. As it happens with wimbe, we are convinced that collaborations and science-art co-research practices can make scientific research more dynamic, expanding the ways of knowing and inspiring new experiments, allowing for

⁸². From l'Asilo official website, my translation from Italian to English language: exasilofilangieri.it/organismo-asilo/ (last accessed Oct 2023)

more integrative thinking, and making complex data or abstract questions more recognisable to a wider and more diverse audience.

Finally, the last insights of these conclusions are twofold, concerning both the practice and the object of wimbe's mapping – and why they matter. First, wimbe shows that mapping is an active, political, and subjective creative practice rather than a neutral depiction. By using superimposable stains to represent Europe, the project foregrounds subjectivity, multiplicity, and relationality. By emphasising the gesture, layering, and superimposability, wimbe proposes a form of cartography that is both analytical and performative. This exploratory device reveals how Europe is continuously made and unmade through acts of drawing, selecting and imagining. Rather than offering a singular representation, it enacts a methodology for thinking with maps: a critical and creative cartography that unsettles dominant lines of visibility and opens spaces for alternative spatial narratives. Second, regarding the object of the mapping itself, wimbe confirms Europe as a sister never found, where the meaning lies in the search. Its superimposable maps — potentially countless — offer partial, subjective, mutable representation, a Europe continuously produced and dismantled in a series of colourful stains on a white wall, as in the installation, which exists only thanks to and in accordance with the subject-motor's will and constraints. Perhaps, then, it is clear that the idea of Europe cannot simply be entrusted to the EU, with its bureaucratic and securitarian logic that reproduces exclusion and fear. Like Zeus abducting Europa, EU institutions have attempted to seize and define Europe, turning it into a controlled, bounded entity (Boedeltje & van Houtum, 2008). Projects such as wimbe remind us that Europe must remain a space of experimentation and imagination, continually questioned and re-envisioned by those who engage with it — a Europe that resists being captured and codified, alive only through the act of searching, imagining, and performing.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first image I propose in this book, Fig. A, you can see the silhouette of David “Dave” Smith flying across the border between Mexico and the United States of America. It is a photo that offers a momentary and partial view of the border art performance *One flew over the void* (2005) by Javier Téllez (see Fig. B for a full view). Dave has just been “shot” from a giant cannon positioned on the beach of Tijuana beyond the border fence that divides Mexico from the United States. By literally propelling a human body across the Mexico–US border, Téllez’s border art performance not only questions the status quo of the transgressed border but also serves as a powerful visual metaphor, becoming an icon of the fierce desire to transcend imposed limits. Looking at my thesis from the conclusions, I think Figure A, which I chose and placed there only at the end of my work, says a lot about the approach and the epistemology underpinning my research. In the years of work behind this text, I have “shot” myself across borders several times: from UNIOR to RU, from Naples to Nijmegen, from Italian to English (to Dutch and Spanish), from one discipline to another, from theory to practice, from science to art. Each of these movements reflects both a literal and metaphorical crossing — a constant negotiation with limits, translations, and change. The image of Dave flying encapsulates the ethos of my research: to traverse borders not only physically or conceptually, but also epistemologically and methodologically. This movement across borders — geographical, disciplinary, linguistic — is not only the condition of this research, but also its method and its outcome.

Answering research questions. What is there of the “confrontational” (Prieto, 1999) border art and its “political edge” (Gómez Peña cited in Berelowitz, 1997, p. 80) in Europe? And what does it tell us about Europe? In Chapter 5, I provided a positioned mapping of border art in Europe from 1989 to the present, shedding light on key authors, main narratives, fundamental networks, and significant artworks. This mapping enabled a deeper understanding of some of the critical quests and subversive practices traversing contemporary Europe. Through these artworks, Europe emerges not as a fixed or unitary space, but as a contested terrain of power, exclusion, and imagination. Border art in Europe reveals both the lethal mechanisms of the EU’s border regimes and the creative, aesthetic, and political struggles challenging them. By positioning these practices side by side, we begin to see a Europe in perpetual production, where political critique, artistic intervention, and social engagement are inseparable. What can border art bring to academia in terms of epistemology? Is it possible to speak of border art as a method? As discussed in Chapter 6, border art as a method opens multiple epistemic possibilities. It challenges entrenched academic paradigms, destabilises the privileging of written argumentation, and promotes interdisciplinarity in ways

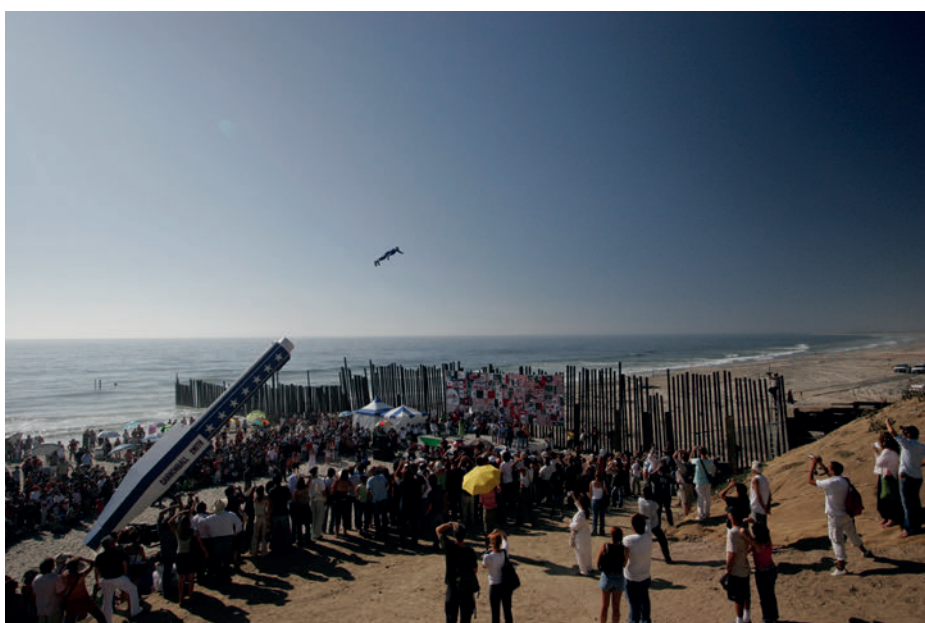


Figure B - *One Flew Over the Void (Bala perdida)*, by Javier Téllez, 2005, performance (full view), inSite_05. Courtesy of INSITE Archive.

that align with “undiscipline” (Parizot et al., 2014) and “in-discipline” (Rancière, 2006). Beyond methodological experimentation, border art forces a reflexive engagement with positionality and responsibility, urging researchers to confront the political, social, and ethical dimensions of knowledge production. In this sense, the method itself is performative: it enacts the crossing of borders and the destabilisation of hierarchical structures of knowing.

Theoretical contributions. The theoretical backbone of this thesis lies in the conceptualisation of borders as bordering *dispositifs*. Building on Foucault and Deleuze, I have approached borders as mobile assemblages structured along four interrelated lines: lines of visibility, lines of utterance, lines of force, and lines of flight (or subjectivation). First, borders operate through regimes of visibility, staging themselves as spectacles and selectively exposing or concealing bodies, practices, and deaths. Second, they function through regimes of enunciation, producing discourses, slogans, and categories that define who belongs and who does not. Third, they are traversed by lines of force, expressing contingent and uneven power relations across space. Finally — and crucially — borders are always crossed by lines of subjectivation. These are not external to the *dispositif* but emerge within it, opening possibilities of escape, resistance, and reconfiguration. Whether material or symbolic, external or internal, borders operate through the same assemblage logic. What changes is their configuration, not their nature. From this perspective, border art can be understood as a practice (a line of flight) that escapes the *dispositif* and produces a surplus-value for border theory and border research. The case studies — and in particular *wimbe* — demonstrate how new lines of subjectivation can be actively produced. Not merely representing borders, these practices intervene in their becoming, opening spaces of otherwise within highly regulated regimes. Overall, my research fills a significant gap by translating literature and practice on the US/Mexico border (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gómez Peña 1991, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1996; Berelowitz 1997, 2003, 2005; Prieto 1999, 2017; Dear & Leclerc, 2003; De Chiara, 2005; Amoores & Hall, 2010; Sheren 2011, 2015; Masala 2019, 2019b) into a European context. It contributes to several strands of border studies: i) borders as “bordering processes” and “discriminative borderism” (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002; van Houtum, 2021); ii) the development of border aesthetics (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017; Schimanski, 2019); advancing the concept of “border spectacle” (De Genova, 2002, 2005, 2012, 2012b, 2013).

Methodological contributions. Alongside its conceptual work, this thesis has engaged border art as a methodological apparatus. Rather than simply analysing artistic practices, it has experimented with working through them. Border art as

method challenges the privileging of written knowledge, destabilises disciplinary boundaries, and foregrounds situated, embodied, and collaborative forms of inquiry. It aligns with an “indisciplinary” approach, where methods are not pre-given but emerge from the research process itself. The *wimbe* project exemplifies this shift. As a co-research experiment, it demonstrates how visual, performative, and cartographic practices can generate knowledge that is not easily accessible through conventional methods. In this sense, border art does not only complement academic research — it transforms it. Engaging in dialogues among art, the social sciences, and border studies destabilises conventional hierarchies of knowledge and fosters epistemic innovation. This approach is relevant not only to border studies but also to any field in which multiple forms of knowledge, practice, and perception intersect. Finally, on a practical level, the research outputs are multimodal — texts, maps, installations, multimedia materials — designed to reach audiences beyond the academy. This dissemination strategy transforms research into a participatory, socially engaged practice, facilitating new understandings and experiences of borders. Dialogue, interaction, and co-research are central: linking institutions, collectives, and communities; bridging literature across different languages; and integrating artistic and scientific research. Collaborative, co-research approaches enhance creativity, broaden epistemic horizons, and make complex phenomena legible to wider audiences.

What next? As I said in Chapter 4, this PhD research was partially inspired by a single sentence in the conclusions of my master's thesis (which, at the time of writing, I consider a minor consideration, seemingly not important) in which I considered the possibility of future research on borders and their aesthetics. Therefore, I want to use this space to imagine, based on my PhD research experience, new lines of research and possible future investigations. One promising avenue is the further development of border art as method. Future studies could expand on transnational collaborations and participatory artistic interventions to investigate questions of migration, mobility, and inequality, producing knowledge that is simultaneously critical and performative. Another important direction concerns the very idea of Europe. As I said many times, Europe cannot be left solely to the bureaucratic mechanisms of the EU, nor should its meaning be confined to technocratic or nationalist narratives. In a way reminiscent of the myth of Europa abducted by Zeus, Europe exists in the act of being imagined, contested, and crossed. Building on this understanding, future research might focus on producing alternative European imaginaries — fluid, mutable, and participatory — in which art and community engagement serve not only as research tools but also as forms of political intervention. A further line of inquiry engages with borders, ethics, and

the notion of auto-immunity as theorised by van Houtum and Bueno Lacy. This perspective invites a closer examination of how Europe's protective mechanisms often generate internal tensions and vulnerabilities, and how artistic and aesthetic practices can reveal, challenge, and propose alternatives to these self-undermining processes. Finally, the hybrid epistemologies explored in this thesis, at the intersections of visual, participatory, and scientific knowledge, suggest broader applications beyond border studies. They encourage experimentation in other fields where creative, cross-disciplinary approaches are necessary, demonstrating the potential of art-based research to expand the ways we know, understand, and intervene in the world. If borders are *dispositifs* in constant becoming, then the question is not only how to analyse them, but how to intervene in their trajectories, moving from critique to transformation, from exposing bordering processes to actively reworking them. This implies engaging more directly with the production of alternative border imaginaries, practices, and infrastructures — not only through art, but through alliances between research, activism, and policy. It also requires paying closer attention to the temporal dimension of borders: not only what they are, but what they are becoming.

Finally, this research has also shown that bordering *dispositifs* are deeply structured by economic logics and class divisions. Visa regimes serve as paper walls for the poor, while golden visa schemes commodify mobility for the wealthy. This dimension remains only partially explored in this thesis and represents a crucial direction for future research.

To conclude, the Téllez photograph reminds us that knowledge, politics, and imagination are inseparable. Border art not only represents or analyses borders: it moves them, subverts them, and allows us to experience their performative power. The act of shooting across borders, whether literal or metaphorical, becomes a method, a symbol, and an ethical imperative: to traverse the known, engage with the unknown, and imagine Europe as a space of possibility, dialogue, and justice. My thesis concludes with an invitation to continue crossing, questioning, and producing — not only in research, but in practice, imagination, and collective creation. And perhaps this is its most radical contribution: not to define what borders are, but to keep alive the possibility that they could be otherwise.

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Borders do nothing; people do. This book explores borders as processes rather than objects, shifting the focus from fixed lines to everyday practices of bordering. Grounding in critical border studies, it advances theory and conceptualises the border as a *dispositif*: a mobile assemblage of visibility, discourse, power, and subjectivation. From this perspective, borders are continuously negotiated, staged, and transgressed. At the centre of the analysis are the aesthetic and experiential dimensions of bordering. Far from being secondary, these dimensions are constitutive of how borders are constructed and made meaningful. It is within this terrain that border art becomes analytically and methodologically relevant. As a confrontational practice, it does not represent borders from the outside but intervenes in their making, exposing their logics and opening to reconfiguration. Through a naturalistic and interdisciplinary approach, and a combination of qualitative methods with art-based and visual methodologies, the research focuses on post-1989 Europe. It unfolds into two case studies: an exploration of border art practices across the continent, and a collaborative project (What I mean by Europe) that experiments with border art as a research method. By engaging sensory and aesthetic dimensions, often overlooked in conventional analyses, this work rethinks borders as mobile assemblages, a matrix of visual and discursive formations, shaped through practices that constantly traverse and rework them. And, therefore, altering the assemblage and producing a new Europe is not only possible but precisely how it has worked since the bull crossed the sea.

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