



Introduction

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Ecology, Imaginary, Invisibility, Palimpsests, Sovereignty, Waiting: what do all these concepts have in common? We present them to our readers as the conceptual tools that have helped us approach borders from a perhaps counterintuitive angle: that of aesthetics.

Our book is a contribution to border studies, a vast and thriving field that makes sense of the widely different, sometimes incompatible and constantly changing definitions of the border. Our six concepts intend to highlight the constantly evolving state of this research area which reaches into many disciplines. We know that no single discourse of mastery will exhaust our understanding of borders: they belong to the topographer, to the geographer, to the lawyer, to the philosopher, or to the mathematician, and it is clear that we do not intend to cover all these fields of expertise. Our specific point of entry is based in the disciplines currently recognized as the humanities and social sciences (philosophy, film studies, literature studies, narratology, history and geography). Yet our challenge was to find an interdisciplinary approach that would both acknowledge the existence and validity of those discourses and interrogate what those disciplinary borders do to the different types of borders that we have chosen to analyse. In short, we treat borders as methodologies (Boer 2006) and objects of study.

At the same time, the term ‘object of study’ must be nuanced because we wish to remember that the border cannot be reduced to academic and professional fields. The concepts that we deploy in this book have helped us structure the chapters in a way that recognizes that borders exist both within and outside of discourse, but also have shaped the subjectivity of those subjects who encounter borders in their everyday life. When we reflect on borders, we write as subjects who were formatted very early on by our experience of borders. The contingencies of birth will have determined to some extent at least whether a subject internalizes national borders as serious, dangerous or non-existent obstacles. If you were born within the EU with an EU passport after the Schengen agreements, you may have to learn to imagine how

an East Berliner after the Second World War or a refugee trying to enter Fortress Europe conceptualizes borders (Balibar 2004). But it may also be different to theorize borders depending on how you perceive your body, or more specifically the relationship between your bodies and categories of gender, able-bodiedness, health and racialization (Higonnet 1994). Psychoanalytical approaches, which define the construction of the subject in terms of the recognition or refusal of borders, have taught us to be sensitive to the way in which bodies react to, are shaped by and create borders.¹

That approach is in synch with the spatial turn which, within the field of cultural studies, aims to connect topographical spaces with the medial spaces of culture especially through the use of discourse analysis.² Local, urban, intimate and subjective spaces are now just as important as geopolitical national boundaries. Consequently, the border-crossing narrative (as manifest in travel writing, exploration narratives, captivity narratives, autobiographical writing, migration literature, etc.) can thus be apprehended as performative renegotiations of nations and their narration, as well as the border itself.

A focus on the performativity of borders goes hand in hand with a questioning of which comes first: the border or its performative engendering. According to Georg Simmel's 1997 [1903] dictum, '[t]he boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially' (Simmel 1997 [1903]: 142). In his view the border is a product of symbolic differences, even if it is also a spatial dimension. A form of classification or a way of making and marking distinctions, borders not only separate however, they also imply interactions. The separation axiomatically generates a connection between the separated entities. In Judith Butler's terms, 'the boundary is a function of the relation, a brokering of difference, a negotiation in which I am bound to you in my separateness' (Butler 2009: 44). And Marilyn Strathern argues that borders are able to generate zones of interchange and trade across differences by providing a means to translate and transact (Strathern 2004: 46–47). In arguing that borders integrally involve relations as well as separations, Butler and Strathern also imply that the identity of each part depends upon a relationship, either of separation or of separation and a potential exchange, with the different parts. We suggest that borders can have a life of their own, producing border effects after their original installation or statement; they can reinforce the symbolic difference that created them, or even cause changes in these symbolic differences; they can continue to have effects after the symbolic differences that caused them have disappeared or lessened. Border formation can include an element of unpredictability and uncanny effects coming from the border itself.

What does Studying Border Aesthetics Mean?

At this point, we would like to explain why we have chosen to focus on 'border aesthetics', why we think it is urgent and important. We also wish to clarify what we mean by 'border aesthetics'. As we suggested above, bordering processes influence everyone's way of being in the world. Knowing up to which point one may travel safely without a passport or a visa is not something anyone can afford to ignore. Neither is it possible to blunder across conceptual (legal, propriety) borders without getting into serious trouble.³

Border aesthetics, however? Will you follow us there? Aren't we staking our flag at the hypothetical intersection between borders and aesthetics that readers might find less immediately relevant? To be fair, we are precisely less interested in 'staking a flag' than in inviting our audience to notice and question the metaphor we just (almost) smuggled into our text. We wish to alert you to the ease with which cultural subjects may be tempted to 'understand' a thought without questioning the values (here associated with conquering) that make a point legible through a spatial metaphor. And with the word 'point' (like the word limit, or field) we have already begun to participate in a logic of bordering that is historically, geographically and socially aestheticizable (Saunders 2010). As we shall see below, one of our contributions to the discussion of borders is the interrogation and recognition of the imaginative actions of generative and receptive representation that are taking place within a particular discursive and generic formation: an essay, a narrative, a film, a map, or a painting (Mukherji 2011: xvii–xxvii, Görling 2007).

For us, border aesthetics is a familiar territory, almost a home. The book you have in your hand began as the final part of a large project in Border Aesthetics sponsored by the Research Council of Norway, 'Assigning Cultural Values' KULVER research programme from 2010 to 2013. The project was centred on a core of eight researchers at UiT The Arctic University of Norway (previously the University of Tromsø) and a network of seven external partners (Kirkenes and Bergen, Norway; Amsterdam and Nijmegen, Netherlands; Düsseldorf, Germany; Joensuu, Finland; and Bergamo, Italy), which included literary scholars, media scholars, a political geographer, a folklorist, an urban planner and a social anthropologist. Twelve of these scholars participated in this book project. The collaborative structure and goals of the book project were developed over three weekend workshops in Rome (2011), Tromsø (2012) and Oslo (2013) and through web and internet conversations.⁴

From there many of the authors have published essays using a border aesthetics framework in books and journals on questions arising from the border, geo-cultural and geo-political case studies of border zones and border crossings in contemporary Europe; in public policy debates on immigration,

migration and the refugee crisis; and in cultural studies journals.⁵ The impact of our work has been noted in a 2015 issue of the journal *Geopolitics* edited by Elena dell’Agnese and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, who argue that the study of border aesthetics for the border studies researcher is ‘another way of expressing the relational dimension of socio-spatial interfaces and of questioning their political component’ as well as opening ‘the ground for questioning the positionality of the investigator’ (12–13). All the recent studies referenced throughout this introduction have had an impact on a number of different academic communities who focus on actual social processes at specific borders, or for border theory, where borders are studied in a largely metaphorical and conceptual manner (Brambilla 2015: 3).

For us, border aesthetics has a specific definition and a purpose: before we even set out to define what we mean by border aesthetics, we wish to emphasize that aesthetics, as we understand it, is not an abstract and de-politicized academic field. We care about border aesthetics because it has everything to do with the proliferating and dangerous borders of our globalized world. Border aesthetics is about people who die trying to cross a border.

Chiara Brambilla has written about the hundreds of migrants who drowned in their attempt to reach Lampedusa and were then granted posthumous Italian nationality (Pop 2013). She studies the Lampedusa Festival and the border and migration nexus centred on the island and insists that the creation of alternative border imaginaries has crucial political implications for the Euro/Mediterranean border space within the aesthetic activities on the island during the festival (Brambilla 2015: 111–122; see the chapter on Invisibility in this volume). On the evening of 3 October 2013, when 368 people and one unborn child drowned, the migrant/refugee crisis and the border/boundary crisis became intertwined and for the past few years have been at the centre of worldwide attention. The event was immediately and has been continually anesthetized. Francis Stonor Saunders recently called such borders ‘the creation of a death zone, portals to the underworld’: despite being half a mile from Lampedusa in Italian territorial waters, the boat was crossing the common European border, ‘only to encounter its own vanishing point, the point at which its human cargo simply dropped off the map. *Ne plus ultra*, nothing lies beyond’ (Saunders 2016: 7). Border aesthetics helps us confront such volatile and potentially dangerous configurations of border as Lampedusa, and provides us with an orientation in the already interdisciplinary field of border studies.

As used in this book, the term aesthetics refers to a set of theories that scholars invoke primarily to interpret works but also to identify what will count as ‘works of art’. In terms of disciplinary recognition, they form the branch of philosophy that addresses notions such as the beautiful and the ugly, the grotesque and the sublime. Our claim is that aesthetics is essential whenever we

need to recognize and appreciate the criteria that define borders (inside and outside, threshold spaces and in-between zones, classification and control, legitimate denizen, resistant border-dweller or undocumented migrant).

We understand aesthetics as the language that articulates the subject's sensory perception of a given world, including what counts as art or politics, true or false, beautiful or ugly. It participates in the apprehension of a border through sensory perceptions. This definition of aesthetics connects to the word's etymological root, a Greek verb meaning 'to perceive, feel, sense'. Borders must have a sensible component in order to function as borders (these arguments are developed in the chapters on Imaginary and Invisibility). One most evident aesthetic aspect of the border is its statistically high level of visibility: we view fences, markers, gates or contours in a landscape as what constitutes a boundary. A border that is not sensed by someone or something is not a border (Larsen 2007). The sensing of borders goes well beyond the visual or even the five basic senses when they organize symbolic differences and separations between neighbourhood or communities, but also the limits between 'safe' and 'dangerous' areas of a city, or 'the difference' between Finland and Russia. Borders become meaningful through sensory perception and can only be legible, understandable via forms of aesthetic sensitivity that we learn as geo-political subjects. Here we propose to rely on theories of 'sensuous cognition' or *cognitio sensitiva* as Alexander Baumgarten called it in the book that gave its name to the discipline (Baumgarten 1983 [1750]). Jacques Rancière makes a similar point about the 'distribution of the visible' in politics: 'Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (Rancière 2004: 13).

The other crucial aspect of aesthetics has to do with how one distinguishes between objects that may or may not fall under the category of aesthetic representations: we observed our responses to how painting, film, music, literature represent borders as spaces of constant production.⁶ These borders are lived in through images and symbols whose aesthetics cannot be taken for granted or ignored. For they are also generated by the social and cultural performances of border subjects whose lives are traversed by boundaries. At times, the border is reduced to a memory whose survival is guaranteed by individual and collective memories (a memandscape). When borders are 'traces' they present themselves as attempts to hold on to historical figures and figurations within a social-political landscape, or a symbolic landscape presented in previous representations, such as a poem, story, essay, artwork, or an ideological formation. As the chapter on Palimpsests shows, each border carries within it the archaeology of previous borders, enabling an analysis of their figurative representations to function as a community of practices or a style.

When we talk about ‘border aesthetics’ then, we do not restrict our analysis to what would be aesthetic or aestheticizable about a border. We do not wish to aestheticize already existing borders by turning them into fiction or art. Nor do we pretend that all borders can be reduced to stories, or fictions, or complex narratives. A border represented within a work of art, however, is just as real as a check point even if the reality it belongs to invites different sites of encounters and other practices: watching a documentary about a refugee/beekeeper (*Der Imker*) or a film about detention centres (*Illégal, La Forteresse*) is not the same as surviving, day after day, in the Jungle of Calais. We hope to have avoided the obvious trap of giving the impression that it is possible to collapse the two forms of border work while still questioning the practices that turn some realities into fictions and some fictions into prescriptions. In other words, while acknowledging a difference (a border) between the work of art that represents the border and the border ‘itself’ we also wish to question the assumptions that produce and police that type of border because we suspect that the ‘itself’ of the border is a product of the aesthetic laws that format the realm of the social and the political. We do not avoid such objects of study that are already recognized as works of art, but neither do we treat them as more obvious sites of inquiry, nor do we wish to limit our study to such already acknowledged representations. Our theoretical starting point is precisely that there is no such a thing as a non-aesthetic figuration of the border. We have resisted opposing border art (the installation of a door in the middle of a field on the US-Mexican border – Richard Lou’s 1988 ‘Border Door’) and political or media discourses that talk about a border as if we all agreed that it is a porous membrane, an impenetrable wall, a natural obstacle or a contact zone. Both border art and the apparently non-self-reflexive metaphorical representation of borders constitute examples of what we call here border aesthetics.

The social and institutional practices that manage (inter)national and regional borders involve or rely on cultural productions. It is crucial to study the complex workings of border aesthetics because once the relationship between borders and aesthetics solidifies, we can interrogate how certain types of borders or border practices remain visible, or legitimate, or acceptable.

We do not ask whether or not representations of the border are aesthetic but in which ways they all are. And the fact that aesthetics and borders are always in each other’s pocket does not liberate us from choosing a lens, a reading grid and a focus: border aesthetics is our theoretical starting point, not the topic of a book. What we specifically want to focus on here is the way in which border aesthetics reflects and creates friction and change when borders and aesthetics rub against each other and change each other accordingly. The signifying practices of the border are not created passively or all at once but take place over time and are often over-written and reinterpreted by creator and audience alike (Brambilla 2015: 114).

Borderscapes and Border Aesthetics

The chapters in this book address these questions and speak to the imaginative power of the border as a productive space for asking how art represents, explores and negotiates border experience. Regardless of which point of engagement we have with borders, we have to reckon with hegemonic or minoritized representations. Our interest in the border as dynamic zone and process helps us privilege concepts such as borderscape, borderland, border culture, *la frontera*, or b/ordering words that suggest that we care more about what one does with or around the border than about what the border is.

We are aware that the kind of cultural work that demarcation lines used to perform still exists. Just as we pointed out earlier, when national boundaries are the dominant object of study, border zones still proliferate unacknowledged. We also recognize that the border as linear obstacle and impenetrable division is far from having disappeared from the domains of the real or of the imaginary. Think for example of the way in which artists have denounced what goes on along the US-Mexico border or between Palestine and Israel by 'hacking' the walls that symbolize the partition.⁷ Nor does it mean that when lines become 'zones', the situation on the border necessarily becomes more utopian, liberal or liberating.

On a less concrete, but nonetheless crucial plane however, the connection between borders and various regimes of power is made through the constant transport of the border through representations (maps, images, etc.) throughout state territories, and by the principals of legal sovereignty itself. We are indebted to scholars who are mapping what they have called the borderscape (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007; Strüver 2005; Brambilla 2010). This neologism, inspired by Arjun Appadurai's theory of 'scapes' (1990), denotes a net of signs and versions of the border stretching out from its concrete site and insinuating itself into a multiplicity of fields and locations, involving in effect everything taking part in the bordering process. A borderscape is the result of processes of differentiation that are continuously challenged by human interaction, as David Newman argues (2006). These processes of bordering produce spatial effects that do not begin or end at demarcation lines drawn on maps. All the actors involved in that process contribute to its aestheticization by accepting or resisting pre-existing narratives, visions or myths and creating others. To recognize oneself as a border-crosser, one must already envisage the border as something that can be crossed (rather than ignored, or simply inhabited as a zone). To be a legible border control agent, one needs to believe in and impose the idea of illegal and legal crossings. The 'agent' may be hired by a state (and position him or herself vis-à-vis the official directives) or imagines him or herself as a committed patriot who substitutes him or herself

to a failing authority (as is the case on the United States border to Mexico, for example [Doty 2007]).

Consequently, the word ‘borderscape’ is one of the concepts that enabled a productive understanding of the dislocated and dispersed nature of borders, their regimes, and the assemblages of practices which now constitute the ‘complexity and vitality of, and at, the border’ (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007: x). Borderscapes are a ‘zone of varied and differentiated encounters’ that are often ‘invested with a certain aesthetic and moral value’ (xxx–xxxiii). The term allows us to analyse a set of represented practices in a particular way, especially political and aesthetic practices. The potential is to see community ‘as disconnected from the rigid territorial spatialities of the nation state ... [while] forming new, irregular, and fluid spatialities and communities as it operates’ (xi–xii).

As Anke Strüver reminds us, a borderscape is a way of representing/perceiving the area around the border:

A borderscape ... brings together the two dimensions of representations ... it relies on narratives, images and imaginations as imagined realities of the border which are constitutive of its meanings and effects, including the practices with relation to the border ... The borderscape – shaped through representations of all kinds – implies borderscapes as practices through which the imagined border is established and experienced as real. (Strüver 2005: 170)

The following chapters start from that perspective and link it to two very specific aspects of aesthetic experience at a border. First they analyse the performative nature of the border through an analysis of practices of constituent communities within a border zone or on a border. Then they work at ‘deforming’ the border in art works, video installations, staging festivals at the border, and literature of the border. In their study of the role of aesthetics in the negotiation and functioning of borders and borderscapes, Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (2013) assert the significance of the sensible in general, and artworks in particular, for processes of bordering. Drawing upon the thought of Victor Shklovsky (1965 [1916]), they argue that the work of art has the inherent potential to insert ‘difference into our ideologically fixed versions of reality, partly by delimiting art from the everyday, partly by deforming experience’ (241). According to them, ‘[t]his defamiliarisation gives it [art] its critical potential’ (241) and enables a political role of cultural expressions also in relation to contemporary regimes and practices of bordering.

Both these kinds of aesthetic representations attempt to de-familiarize through exaggeration, parody, overstated ambiguities of purpose and intention. They confirm a modernist and formalist aesthetics of difference. This defamiliarization has a critical potential. Moving or performing the border

off site or moving border posts into an installation not only aestheticizes the border, it also reminds us that the border was already an aesthetic construct. The appealing colours of the border posts, the overstated uniforms of the 'border guards' at airports, the monumentality, and the ten-foot high border fences or walls are not purely utilitarian: they are designed (Schimanski and Wolfe 2013).

Two writers in this collection, Holger Pötzsch (2015) and Johan Schimanski (2015), have examined elsewhere aesthetic representations in the Barents region with this ambiguity in mind. As they have persuasively demonstrated, the Barents region emerges as a complex borderscape where identities, connections and divisions are constantly negotiated in and through not only economic and political performances, but equally by means of cultural expressions. The material regimes of borders and the practices of in/exclusion they invite are enmeshed in a cultural domain and vernacular day-to-day performances that inherently reinforce, or challenge and subvert, border mechanisms and procedures at the border. The Northern borderscape, as such, becomes conceivable as 'a network held together by strategies of rhetorical, symbolic and discursive signification' that enables exclusionary division as well as inclusive cooperation – 'the borderscape can be an ambivalent space of both power and resistance' (Schimanski 2015: 41–43).

This collection would like to invite readers to interrupt their daily activities, to 'redistribute the visible', and to make something visible. That something is not extraordinary; rather it was always there, as an on-going process: it is the border itself. That entails an awareness that the border concept is itself being constantly negotiated in many fields – including the aesthetic, theoretical, political and ethical – and that this negotiation involves a constant interplay amongst these fields. Such negotiations, we suggest, also reveal what changes affect the border concept. The new ways of conceptualizing borders are never innocent. When borders are extended as borderscapes reaching far from the outer borders of nations, when borders are redefined as spaces, dynamic spaces of bordering, this leads to a broad shift in this already interdisciplinary field, from political and social geography towards anthropological and cultural sciences, and simultaneously from the macro relations of 'hard' geopolitics and economy to the micro narratives of borderland communities and border-crossers.

These changes affect the determination of who can speak and who is visible in borderland populations. Borderland populations counter perceived marginalization and trauma with newly formed narratives, and in doing so, they must relate to established narratives of state and nation that are enacted in metropolitan centres, that is, often at a distance from the borderland. Refugees and migrant minorities also resist dominant narratives while living inside metropolitan centres, often very aware of the contingent nature of

the boundaries placed around them or their communities. But representatives of dominant metropolitan cultures who find themselves in the periphery can also create representations of the borderland or of minority populations from within the majority discourse. Sometimes the border faces – or folds – outwards instead of inwards, such as when prospective immigrants are placed in a waiting zone outside the border (see the chapter on Waiting).

In these cases, we usually meet with some sense of ambivalence or paradox in the aesthetic representation of the border. Foundational discourses of the nation are challenged by minority discourses, which risk becoming foundational in turn. Metropolitan cultures attempt to represent and give voice to that which is different within them, but often end up not doing this adequately, as they are ultimately unable to mediate that which is other to them. Borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Henk van Houtum writes that the border catches us between a ‘schizoid’ and a ‘paranoid desire’ for borders (Houtum 2010). Each chapter must thus speak to the generative and receptive power of the border as a creative engine and productive space in art and literature; or as a space of ideological formation and maintenance where social thinking and aesthetic imagination are negotiated.

Michael Bakhtin’s work on ‘chronotropes’ has taught us that genre is another strong operator when it comes to analysing the aesthetics of the border as a spatial phenomenon. The theorist has clearly linked literary genres to a sense of space and time (Bakhtin 1981). Our question would be: what specific genres fit border zones, urban border spaces, national border crossings, or other spatial configurations in the new borderscapes of the nation, or transnational border processing places? Each of the chapters works with specific genres: half are literary while the others are a mixture of interdisciplinary medial expressions that have attempted to represent a border in both theory and or praxis. As border scholars will tell you, in northern European popular culture many border tourists going from Norway into Russia re-enact the road movie, moving through a landscape often perceived as barren, and often exposed to law enforcement agents dressed as border guards (see the chapter on Palimpsests).

Contemporary literary and visual artists create alternative histories and alternative maps as forms of intervention with which to defamiliarize the borderscape in which they find themselves and which forced migrants and refugees have to negotiate. Participatory video is a genre being used by migrant filmmakers to visualize Euro-African borderscapes. Border *corridos* and concept albums are musical and narrative genres that can be appropriated and used to remember an erased Mexican neighbourhood or to remind listeners of alternative ways of living together. All these aesthetic genres adapt to a lesser or greater extent to the constraints of the borderscape, and sometimes offer a liminal way of seeing. Not unlike classic discussions of the hierarchy

of the arts, border aesthetics poses the question of which genre works best or which genre or mode is privileged in a given national or transnational context.

All these chapters in some way posit that borders become liminal zones that not only separate but also connect divided entities and identities. As Pötzch has written, it is a 'potentially disruptive alternative state of being on the border, in-between divided entities, or as the ability to cross borders and access both sides on equal terms'. Being disruptive, 'liminality interrogates division' (2012: 72). Liminality carries the subversive potential to posit a relationship and a separation simultaneously or, as Homi K. Bhabha writes, 'liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities'. It is a 'third space' enabling a cultural translation, denying essentialism. Liminality displaces 'the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives' (Bhabha 1990a: 210–211; this is further developed in the chapter on Sovereignty). Liminal space should also be considered as a location of contact, the negotiation of cultural values and of relational identity as we argued above.⁸

A relational identity is not reducible to borders. Nor is it relegated to a temporal limited transition outside daily life as in narratives of liminality or rites of passage. Rather, it is an aspect of the conscious and contradictory never-ending experience of contacts among cultures, at both the external and internal borders of a state. Today's complex apparatus of bordering and ordering regimes are obsessed with a verifiable and then verified identity and wish to ignore the fact that identity is produced in the chaotic network of relations and not simply by filiation.

Border Aesthetics within Contemporary Border Studies

In the first decade of the new millennium, a series of books and collections of essays appeared, all focusing on cultural expressions of border-crossing practices in literature, film, museum exhibitions and art installations on significant border sites throughout the world. Academic critics and practicing artists found questions of identity, belonging, community, nation and narration, and diasporic community best posed at national and transnational borders, or at borderlines, or in locational spaces of conflicted sexualities, ethnicities and genders, and communities. Narratives from the margins also moved to what used to be imagined as the 'centre' of literary and cultural studies (Ponzanesi and Merolla 2005; Ponzanesi and Waller 2012). Migrant or diasporic voices are now set in historic 'homelands', gritty or futuristic 'cultural borderscapes' or in an interstitial space beyond centre/periphery dichotomies (Mercer 2008). These border-crossing narratives depict individuals and communities

negotiating with placelessness, language, ethnicity and sexualities in hybridized discourses of resistance and ambivalence. We recognize that it is clearly urgent to address territorial and symbolic borders, as cultural forms of production that political and social science discourse may not consider as their primary case studies.

Several anthologies of analyses have brought together border crossings and literature, film and art (Schimanski and Wolfe 2007; Viljoen 2013). Several monographs have focused on literature and borders in Europe and North America (Robinson 2007; Sadowski-Smith 2008), and on questions of borders and postcolonial identities (Boer 2006). The need for work on cultural production and aesthetics in relation to borders has been strongly emphasized in articles appearing in special issues and in two recent major Readers on Border Studies (Walter 2011; Wilson and Donnan 2012).

Today, border studies scholars are fascinated by the continual process of bordering that creates categories of difference or separation (Rumford 2008, 2014; Houtum 2002; Houtum, Olivier and Zierhofer 2005; Newman 2006; Pötzsch 2010; Popescu 2012). Bordering is ordering, othering and negotiating difference:

The process through which borders are demarcated and managed are central to the notion of border as process and border as institution. ... Demarcation is not simply the drawing of a line on a map or the construction of a fence in the physical landscape. It is the process through which borders are constructed and the categories of difference or separation created. (Newman 2007: 35)

For us, one of the obvious consequences of this process is that narrative and figural representations are a central element in border formation. Terms such as allocation, antecedence, subsequence, superimposition, reconfiguration, removal, disappearance, construction, opening and closing create different narratives of what we would call border formation. Moreover, these processes have a dynamic involving both institutional, top-down management of borders and bottom-up negotiations of borders and in border zones. Border formation is not only a top-down process in the hands of power elites: currently a more dynamic view of bordering allows for the possibility of bottom-up agency. As Bhabha suggests in his description of national identification processes, the border is a product of a tension between the pedagogic and the performative (1990b: 145). By extension, it comes about as a product of the grand narratives (border formation) but also of performative minor narratives about day-to-day border crossing.

At the same time, another group of writers from political, cultural and geo-political geography and other social sciences have focused on developing a new vocabulary to interrogate and remap national borders and the national

and international institutions that supported legal forms of bordering and ordering. We have heeded the repeated calls to pay more attention to the study of cultural productions through the analysis of art works, architecture, festivals, installations, exhibitions, literature and film. Here we are indebted to Robert J. Kaiser and Anne-Laure Amihah-Szary who have studied the performativity of art works and their relationship to bordering practices, both in historical and contemporary situations (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2006, 2008; Amihah Szary 2012, 2014).

None of these books, however, focus on the aesthetic issues raised by the uses of permeable national and international cultural languages and aesthetic forms. In this book, we set out to bridge two very important fields of research on borders that do not necessarily dialogue with each other: research connected to cultural studies and postcolonialism, whose focus is on identity, law and sovereignty (Kuortti and Nyman 2007), and, within the last five years, theoretical works on aesthetics grounded in social and political issues (Rancière 2004, 2010). Our book addresses questions of aesthetics and borders in a more systematic and theoretical way.

We are also suggesting that border aesthetics will help us recognize new borders and new narratives which will emerge simultaneously. Thus we follow Claudia Sadowski-Smith who has suggested how important it is to take account of specific aesthetic devices in border fiction. She insists on the unexplored connection between borders and genres such as magic realism; she highlights the need to research specific border figures such as the trickster; and she invites us to observe the way in which novels acquire composite characteristics. We also argue in a number of the chapters that border fictions change dominant conceptualizations of who inhabits and can speak for the border. We agree that such fictions cannot and should not be easily equated with a specific ethnic or national tradition and origin, and we do not assume that border fictions are necessarily aligned with a given politics or ideological commitment. We also acknowledge the need for comparative studies that take account of 'distinct histories of settlement, colonization, contact, and subordination in different nations' with a trans-hemisphere and international focus (Sadowski-Smith 2008: 10–11).

We are also indebted to Shameem Black's important book *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late-Twentieth Novels* (2009). In her introduction Black outlines an 'ethics' of border-crossing fictions that has a very strong emphasis on the border as the space in which contemporary writers interrogate otherness and ethical dilemmas in their own national histories.

The chapters in this collection do not focus exclusively on one form of cultural expression. Each chapter is set on the shifting ground of in-between zones and threshold spaces of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially those upon which a political or social conflict is being played out. The

argument of each chapter does not follow the inevitability of inside/outside oppositions but most are shaped as a parabolic structure with a mirroring effect inclined to allegory and parable in some cases, while finding imaginative means to represent borders through ‘constructed projections, pictures, phantasms that are wholly aesthetic in nature’ (Welsch 1997: 21). We argue, following Welsh, that aesthetic representations are now produced through a refusal to confine the border to a knowable location or form, thus ‘estranging or de-familiarizing’ the border space and scape, either as a place and scape of ‘transformation and difference’; or of translation and encounter (Black); or, to borrow Bhabha’s formulation, ‘a third space where the negotiations of incommensurable differences create a tension peculiar to border-line existences’ (1994: 218).

Book Structure

The chapters in this book form a collaborative interdisciplinary monograph. Each of the six pairs of authors has provided one keyword that they find crucial to the ongoing debate on the role of the arts in persistent contemporary border situations. The keywords are tools designed to explore both a border concept and an aesthetic problem. Once the key concept is elaborated, the authors focus on an analysis of one or two examples to explore the aesthetic characteristics of the examined bordering process/concept. This leads to a discussion of the specific relationship between the concept and practices that address the relationship between borders and aesthetics. The chapters are also to be read as echoing one another and re-configuring the continuing discussion of borders and aesthetics in flux throughout the book. Thus the chapters intersect with each other through the use of a common set of strategies, and the insistent examination of the aesthetic dimensions of borders which will reveal their complexity and differentiation.

Throughout we use two analytical strategies: the first is to pay close attention to the planes onto which the concept of borders can be projected in cultural texts: topographical, symbolic, temporal, epistemological and textual. Topographically, the border divides and unites spaces (between nation states for example). Symbolically, the border distinguishes between values (right and wrong, good and bad). On the temporal plane the border separates time zones (the past and the present, old and new). On the epistemological plane it splits the known and the unknown. Finally, textually, the border organizes the different parts of the text and distinguishes between what is in or out of the textual unit.

The second strategy is to pay attention to the aestheticization of each type of border: how is the border represented within different generic signifying

practices for example? And here, by representation we mean 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. The chapters challenge the representation of territorial and symbolic borders, asking how they acquire significance and which values they are assigned. For example, in recent artistic exhibitions centring on migration, diasporas, and the relation between traces and processes in bordering/ordering practices, artists and writers have created places within the borderscape in which representations and multiple perspectives emerge that would otherwise remain invisible (cf. Mercer 2008; Carey-Thomas 2012; or see the work of Mona Hatoum, the Black Audio Film Collective [1982–1998], or Rosalind Mashashibi). These spaces themselves are often defined by their transience, mobility and contingency, functioning as ‘passages’ through discrepancies in gender, ethnicity and national identities.

Our central objective is to investigate how aesthetic activity participates in the processes by which people relate to the real and conceptual border regions in which they live, work and through which they move. We wish to develop and interrogate the notion of a new globalized aesthetics of place that emerges from and responds to the co-existence of migrants, minorities and trans-national identities within borderscapes and zones – places where borders are being encountered and crossed, formulated and negotiated in their material and figurative manifestations, but also spaces in which the lived experiences of people cause a proliferation of aesthetic responses: cognitive, critical, linguistic and representational to the border.

There follow six chapter summaries which provide a preview of the signifying practices and key generative and receptive representations of borders in the book.

1. Ecology

This first chapter addresses the strong hold which conceptions of nature and the natural have on how both borders and aesthetics are configured. Conceptions of borders and aesthetics formed on natural models imagine the boundary as an obstacle to be respected and treat border-crossers, whose crossings alter and form the unstable terrains they cross, as the irrelevant exception or the disturbing or disruptive dissident. To highlight the flawed ideological circularity that constructs nature and borders as co-dependent, the chapter takes the example of Johann Winckelmann and Friedrich Schlegel’s metaphorical descriptions of Roman and Hellenistic art to show how some aesthetic forms are blamed for having transgressed natural habitats. It then points out that even borders literally set in stone (such as a range of mountains) can, just as easily, be erased as borders by a historical myth. The naturalization of borders

legitimizes divisions between inside and outside, us and them, instead of allowing borders to function as contact zones, making border-crossers into unsuccessful transplantations. Roman conceptions (especially in the *Aeneid*) of nature as strong outer border creating unity, erasing internal boundaries and allowing for the multiplicity of empire, are precisely subject to the criticism that nature provides a new absolute boundary to the state and its empire.

The question is, what can challenge and transform traditional, nature-based conceptions of territorial and aesthetic borders into more democratic institutions? Interestingly, one of the 'natural' sciences, ecology, provides an alternative to nature, by providing a vocabulary which is much more geared to the dynamics of migration and a more self-reflective and critical conception of borders. Bruno Latour's concept of a 'political ecology' transcends the divisions between culture and nature. It ditches the risk-free natural units of conventional models, replacing them with 'tangled objects' caught in networks of concern, requiring a recognition of incompleteness. A careful evaluation of the potential issues involved in a Latour-based border aesthetics, especially as it might apply to the ongoing European experiment with its internal multiplicity and 'reappearing' borders, reveals the possibility of ecology just becoming another ultimate frontier in which natural territorial borders are done away with, to be replaced by natural temporal borders. Border-crossers become belated subalterns in a neo-imperial global system. The chapter concludes that in order to account for ways in which border-crossers and their art transform the terrain, we must instead entangle the various border ecologies discussed, in a process that produces different types of community.

2. *Imaginary*

The next chapter formulates a critical reflection on aesthetic and changing social imaginaries seen as the implicit frameworks in which borders have been figured. In what ways can cultural tropes deviate from accepted imaginaries and move toward new imaginaries? Taking an example from the first chapter, how might we transform nature into ecologies? Borders are here seen as emerging through processes of prefiguration within the three dimensions constituted by institution, tradition and the imaginary. To examine this is to understand how borders both confirm and interrogate their own structuring.

Aesthetics becomes a question of border encounters between imaginaries – our own and those of others, old and new. In addition to carrying representations of borderings, aesthetics carries an ethical dimension which enables reflections on and evaluation of those representations. Central to this ethics of aesthetics is the interplay between the social imaginaries which provide the glue to our everyday existence and social communities, as elaborated

by thinkers such as Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor and Cornelius Castoriadis, and the more radical, incomprehensible and monstrous imaginaries which Jacques Derrida envisages as being presented by the future. Derrida's monsters are here a figure of the incomplete, as proposed in the chapter on Sovereignty.

This chapter focuses on Robert Frost's famous border poem 'Mending Wall', with its idiomatic phrase that carries its force – 'Good fences make good neighbors'. The poem provides the basis for a discussion of the etymological and social connection between tradition and treason. Tradition is not only a form of cohesion, but also a transmission highlighting the treacherous difference between sender and receiver. Dag Solstad's central novel of the Norwegian post-war imaginary, *Comrade Pedersen*, questions the possibility of a radical imaginary and an ideology which might have come into being – 1970s revolutionary communism – against the background of a social imaginary defined by a separate, prosperous, marginal and peaceful nation. Moving to a society more typically characterized by a clash of imaginaries, Paul Muldoon's avant-garde play on words in the poem 'Quoof' is seen as introducing a linguistic monster, a new terminology which could be the basis of a new social imaginary in Northern Ireland and a new border aesthetic.

3. *In/visibility*

Whereas in Chapter 2, 5 and 6 art becomes a way of negotiating and changing social imaginaries, as well as examining how aesthetics as sensory cognition contributes to the formation and negotiation of borderscapes and the politics of borders, this chapter focuses on the visual and the aural as dominant senses that help define the 'distribution of the sensible', which Rancière sees as connecting the aesthetic to the political. Following Hannah Arendt and Rancière, the aesthetic is seen as framing which lives, which subjectivities are to be seen and heard, which are relevant and which irrelevant, which are visible and which are invisible, or even 'invisibilized'. Illegal migrants and other border-crossers referred to in our first chapter on ecology are typically, as Marieke Borren states, publicly invisible and naturally visible, i.e. made pervasively visible in terms of their natural traits while having no role as public actors. Two pressing examples are examined, one hegemonic and the other counter-hegemonic, of how regimes centred around borders can bolster or help to transform the very terrain in which border-crossers move: the dehumanizing strategies of drone warfare and the redistributory effects of migrant self-representation in participatory video. As in Chapters 1 and 2, solutions are offered that indicate how politics may be thought of as an open and incomplete process, rather than being reduced to 'politics as police' (Rancière), namely through an epistemology of seeing.

4. *Palimpsests*

This chapter interrogates the regimes of visibility discussed in Chapter 3 in border landscapes, examining how concepts of palimpsest and symbolic layering may inform aesthetic borderscapes – especially after the specific, geo-political transformation of communities represented by regime change. Here transformation is approached retrospectively, rather than being opened as a future possibility as in the previous chapters. Post-Soviet and post-Cold War borderscapes provide an obvious geo-political example involving regime change and pressing questions of social contrast and development. Despite radical social and economic change, the contemporary cultural landscape of Russia and Eastern Europe contains more or less modified Soviet infrastructure and monuments of the Soviet past that by their aesthetics convey various overt or neglected political meanings. Blended together with new symbols, they produce an ambivalent picture where elements compete, interrupt and contradict each other. The palimpsest on which the emerging world is inscribed reveals the new processes locked within the previous territorial divisions and inherited authoritarian political structures. Although the emerging socio-economic systems bear only partial similarity to their predecessor, they relate by denial or adoption to its cultural symbols. This chapter explores the meaning of post-Soviet spaces in contemporary Russia as part of a cultural and physical palimpsest and compares them with post-Soviet and obsolete Cold War structures in northeastern Norway and the Lithuanian city of Klaipeda. Palimpsests reveal the on-going conflicts between attempts to eradicate, deny or reuse spatial structures and their ideological meanings under new economic dynamics that manifest themselves in radically changed borderlands, as expressed aesthetically through contested city spaces and architectural symbolism.

5. *Sovereignty*

This chapter focuses on the relationship between the sovereign and the border. Today in public discourse, sovereignty has become associated both with a nation's right to self-determination and with the violent defence and transgression of borders. It is, however, haunted by the figure of the sovereign, which involves everything associated with it – be it subjects, full/bare lives, camps, etc. – in an economy of binaries and hierarchies. The sovereign is in turn haunted: while he or she claims to be independent of all Others and rules unconditionally, the sovereign is in fact dependent on his or her subjects and is as caught up in the economy of the sovereign as they are. How are we to escape this economy and transform our conceptions of citizenship so as to avoid these border binaries and economies, so as to accommodate border-crossers and other subjectivities?

This chapter on sovereignty, as well as the final chapter of the book, construct their arguments in dialogue with literary texts, among them two parables by Franz Kafka; in this chapter it is ‘The Cares of a Family Man’ (1919). The main character or motif in this parable is Odradek, which/who relates to the sovereign family man in an indeterminate, unconditional and ‘insovereign’ way. Odradek is of indeterminate abode, cannot be positioned inside or outside the borders of the house, and inhabits a third space which is not a container and which has no borders to the Other. Odradek’s ‘un-condition’ is that of the border-crosser, the transitional object, the migrant, the traumatized refugees of the First World War. Odradek’s physical and aesthetic appearance is that of being both unfinished and lacking in nothing. This chapter argues that Odradek thus offers us one way of attaining the incomplete being-in-process demanded earlier in the book. Odradek is easily interpreted, as a particularly literary or aesthetic way of writing, and is a way of thinking the aesthetic as unconditional – as well as a source of unconditionality – in its relationship to sovereign power and borders.

6. *Waiting*

This chapter focuses on the practice of waiting at a border. National or transnational states or national institutions of the state such as the Law create borders that require waiting or can even be defined as an act of waiting. The authors provocatively move away from the commonplace assumption that borders are about crossing, reaching the other side, passing and transgressing and counter-intuitively emphasize the other side of the coin. They define the border as what causes a standstill, or a delay: a difference in time and space. We have seen that when border studies scholars point out that the border is not merely a line, object or place that can be fixed in time, they usually wish to point out that activities proliferate on the border, in the supposedly liminal place that they precisely refuse to see as an in-between. This chapter, however, takes a different approach: it argues that the border constitutes a whole symbolic order that creates a state of abeyance, a waiting. Here border aesthetics is an act of narration which has the power to determine who belongs, who can pass through its frontiers, and who will be left waiting within and outside the legal and security structures of the borderscape or the institutions of the state.

This leads us to a state of waiting at the border that is analysed in two works of literature. We return to Franz Kafka’s parables, in this case ‘Waiting for the Law’ (1914–1915, published 1915), which serves here as a companion to John Maxwell Coetzee’s novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). Both texts represent waiting as typical of the b/ordering and othering processes of the border. Waiting is both a symbolic and psychological process of subjectification and internalization as well an act of exclusion through various

aesthetic formulations. In the texts discussed each protagonist is carried to the threshold of his or her own story, as they wait on the edge of a language that will constitute them as subjects within the law, the state, and the story. To be inscribed in the law is to make someone appear 'before' the law, i.e. within a borderscape and within its discourses. In each text these two performances are represented aesthetically through imagery of sight and the act of allegorical interpretation depending upon an outside/inside spatial analogy. Each text moves from these limited analogies, to new presentations of multiple aesthetic perspectives on witnessing and waiting at an ideological or medial border.

Each of these chapters then proposes to make sense of the various and sometimes incompatible or antagonistic ways in which divergent groups aestheticize the border or perceive and represent it from an aesthetic point of view. If borders are set up through theories of the border, then borders will not remain the same kind of entity over time, because the concept of a border itself is subject to change as are the concepts that created it. When people, objects, values and activities inhabit and pass through border zones, they also contest and change uses and inadequacies of current formulations of borders and aesthetics. When a group of asylum seekers sew their lips together at the Christmas Island detention camp in Australia⁹ or when a fictional Russian asylum seeker burns her fingertips on her iron to avoid being identified by the Belgium immigration police,¹⁰ then the violence of a representation that falls under the category of the aesthetic is also a powerful and political argument about how to re-imagine visibility and invisibility, sovereignty and bare life, and about what a different economy or ecology or border could be.

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NOTES

1. See Julia Kristeva’s theories of abjection (1982) and Lacan’s famous analysis of the mirror stage (Lacan 2006). See also Moruzzi (1993).
2. See <http://spatial.scholarslab.org/spatial-turn/>
3. The border between a joke and an injurious comment, for example, is a volatile and delicate border. Sometimes the State controls that border, writing up blasphemy laws or hate speech laws. Sometimes acts of violence mark the contested border between humour and injurious comments. We are thinking here of the worldwide controversies and acts of violence that accompanied the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed first in Denmark and then in Europe and the world wide web.
4. See <http://uit.no/hsl/borderaesthetics>
5. https://en.uit.no/prosjekter/prosjektsub?p_document_id=344772&sub_id=359668
6. We are also indebted to the work of Immanuel Kant on beauty and the value of art. In *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), one of the pivotal texts of modern aesthetics, Kant gave art the role of bridging the sensible world and the ideal world of ethics, God and the self. Not only did he claim that all arts shared a common aesthetic nature, he also placed aesthetics in a crucial position as a mediator between the world we experience and the ideal world to which we aspire. Since then, though, both the arts’ capability to communicate with one another, and their ability to relate meaningfully to the political and social spheres that surround them, have become subject to debate. Our book addresses these questions within the specific contexts of borders by looking at various geographical locations as well as at the historical and political contexts that have contributed to creating them as utopian or dystopian border zones.
7. See Banksy’s ‘hacking’ of the wall between Palestine and Israel in August 2005. See also Richard Lou’s *Border Door* (1988), an installation that consists of a door and a frame placed on the border, in the area of Tijuana (Latorre 2012).
8. Liminality is a complex phenomenon which cannot be confined to a straightforward definition as a rite of passage, a journey or a transitory moment. The study of liminal states, the discourses of limits, and the transgression of limits at thresholds can be potentially liberating, especially when used in border analysis as meaning is generated in the interfaces between established cultural/aesthetic structures and political/gendered/ethnic systems.
9. See BBC report, 9 November 2010, ‘Protesters sew lips shut at Australia asylum camp’, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11795786>. See also Farrier 2011.
10. See Olivier Masset-Dupasse’s film *Illégal*.

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