3 Thinking and Researching Political Borders

In the introduction to this study, I have already noted that the methodological uncertainty that one encounters when researching an external EU border is further complicated by the spectral character of any border. This spectral character refers to the phenomenological indeterminacy and fuzziness of borders in general. This is to say that there is no phenomenon of a border *as such*. Consequently, borders are only tangible and experienceable by their proxy or representation (cf. Cremers 1989: 38; Vasilache 2007: 38-47). The methodological uncertainty of the concrete case – the EU external border – is thus further complicated by an epistemological uncertainty concerning the study of political borders in general. In the following, I will explicate what I term 'the spectral character of a border' and ask, in a second step, about the methodological consequences of researching the EU external border(s). This section thus explores the relation between thinking and researching political borders.

3.1 THE SPECTRAL CHARACTER OF ANY BORDER

Spectral is an attribute attested to phenomena which cannot quite be grasped, the presence of which could be contested or doubted due to constant volatilization. A ghost is present as one or many apparitions, rather than as a reality. To a certain extent, the thought of it is more powerful than its materiality.

Can this attribute aptly be applied to political borders? Political borders concretize in walls, fences, surveillance gadgetry, border guards or lines of demarcation. These appearances are quite manifest, immovable, adamant, obtrusive, and sometimes hardly surmountable. Their legal-administrative decisiveness, their constructional strength and robustness bestow a concreteness, objectivity, and durability – and, in parts, also irreducibility – to political borders. At first glance this may contradict the notion of spectrality. Borders are not wafts of mist or phantasmagoric shadows through which one could pass or march through. They

are rather accurately measured, clear-cut, and brutally real. And yet, we do not encounter the border *per se*, but the official enforcing it; we do not touch the border *per se*, but a wall of bricks or barbed-wire fence; neither do we cross the border itself, but the line of demarcation or the physical installation of the border-post. That which appears to us as political border is but its abstraction, representation, or appresentation (Husserl): while the cartographic border-line *abstracts* and thereby epitomizes the course and the grounding of borders,[1] the border guard *represents* what Dimitris Papadopoulos and colleagues have described as "double-R axiom," namely the simultaneous definition of "positive rights and representation within the national territory, and the non-existence of rights and symbolic presence *beyond* the nation's borders" (2008: 6, original emphasis). Finally, different material border installations – fences, flags, gates or chicken feathers attached to a bar (the examples are Cremers's 1989: 36) – appresent and thereby make visible, define and mark territories so that they become socially perceivable and effective (Cremers 1989: 29-37).

Like a specter, which "*appears* to be present itself during a visitation" (Derrida 2006: 126, original emphasis), the border appears to be present itself during the encounter between border guard and border crosser, during the study of a map, or during the contemplation of the Israeli West Bank barrier. And yet, if a researcher joins or observes these situations, contemplates the wall, or studies mapmaking, she does not study the border itself, but its apparitions, its proxies, its phantom objects. Whatever the substance of the border, it is socially available and effective via its proxies. In turn, the expectation, imagination, and belief that there is *more* – that there is, in fact, *something substantial, a valid system* behind or beyond these appearances, contributes to the relative stability and validity of a given political border. The thought of a border indeed seems more powerful than its materiality. How is this real (and by no means ephemeral) power of the border constituted? What is the substance or fabric of the border, if not its measurement, ground; the guards, or the brick in the wall?

1 Only few authors have analyzed the processes and epistemological premises that go into the drawing and interpreting of a line. Two notable exceptions are first, the Swedish geographer Gunnar Olsson (1991), who distinguished between three concepts of the line: the equal sign (=), the slash (/) and the dash (–) which he takes as representations of three different epistemologies, namely realism, dialectic, and signification (cf. Pickles 2004), and second, Angus Cameron (2011), who in his essay publication "Ground zero – the semiotics of the boundary line," provided a comprehensive discussion on the graphic figure of the boundary line.

Drawing on the first sociological definition of border by Georg Simmel, the substance of the border itself is not to be found in its materiality or location, but based on social relations and their interactions (Ger.: *Wechselwirkungen*)[2]. Socio-political relations as well as the collective psyche coagulate and objectify in the border. Using the example of the line of demarcation, Simmel illustrates "the incomparable firmness and clarity which the social processes of demarcation receive from being spatialized" (1997 [1908]: 144). He writes:

"Every boundary is a psychological, more precisely, a sociological event; but through its investment in a line in space, the relationship of reciprocity attains a clarity and security in both its positive and negatives sides – indeed often a certain rigidity – that tends to be denied the boundary so long as the meeting and separating of forces and rights has not yet been projected into a sensory formation, and thus as it were always remains in a status nascens." (Simmel 1997 [1908]: 144)

As "psychological" (Ger.: *seelische*) or as Simmel emphasizes "sociological events," borders result from interactions and imaginations. However, these social processes of demarcation remain events during which rights and forces compete and are negotiated, until they are "projected into a sensory formation"; until they are invested "in a line in space" or stabilized via materialization. The "relationship of reciprocity" only turns into a sociological fact when it appears as border. Drawing on Simmel, Natalià Cantó Milà underlines that "the projection of demarcation onto space strengthens the border and perpetuates it" (Milà 2006: 192). Here the emphasis lies on an aspect which has mostly been neglected in the reception of the Simmelian border definition: the coagulation, or hardening (Ger.: *Gerinnung*) of the social processes to a thing which itself becomes part of interactions.

In the course of the spatial turn, Simmel's border definition regained prevalence. His dictum that the border "is not a spatial fact with sociological effects, but a sociological fact that forms itself in space" (Simmel 1997 [1908]: 144) was often quoted to deessentialize and denaturalize the concept of the territorial border. This has corresponded to a general trend in border studies since the 1970s: borders are no longer described and analyzed in terms of geomorphological pat-

2 A central concept throughout Simmel's work is that of interaction. The German term "Wechselwirkungen" denotes reciprocity, reciprocal interrelations, reciprocal effects, mutual influence, without causal explanations. The English translation "interaction" does not satisfyingly transport these conceptual implications.

terns, but as social processes, practices, and imaginations. The central research interest in border studies has thus shifted from the *Where?* of borders to the *How?* of bordering (van Houtum/van Naerssen 2002; Newman 2006a, 2006b; Rumford 2006).

As a result, border studies are no longer dominated by geographers, but have become an interdisciplinary research field, in which Simmel's relational thinking has turned into an epistemological consensus. Furthermore, Simmel's definition was considered empirically bidden. Lena Laube, for instance, sees that Simmel's 1908 definition "has never had greater validity, than under the conditions of globalization" (Laube 2013: 292). In the reception of the Simmelian border definition, what can be traced in different fields since the spatial turn is the deessentializing impetus stressed by the relational character of phenomena. This has occurred to an extent so that the concept of boundedness has been awkwardly avoided, as Jeff Malpas (2012) has criticized and countered. Just as the spatial turn has fostered a proliferation, if not diffusion, of what counts as spatial, relational thinking in border studies, it has diffused what constitutes a border (Johnson et al. 2011: 61). Likewise, globalization is quoted as the empirical condition to an epistemological premise, an argument which confuses epistemological perspective and empirical finding. But this allegation cannot duly be advanced toward the Simmelian border conception. Even though Simmel did stress the socially produced character of borders, his relational thinking also acknowledged the "physical force" and the "living energy" of material products. Simmel acknowledges the material, the built environment as part of the interactions.

> "once it has become a spatial and sensory object that we inscribe into nature independently of its sociological and practical sense, then this produces strong repercussions on the consciousness of the relationship of the parties. Whereas this line only marks the diversity in the two relationships, […] it becomes a living energy that forces the former together and will not allow them to escape their unity and pushes between them both like a physical force that emits outward repulsions in all directions" (Simmel 1997 [1908]: 143).

It is at this point that it becomes spooky, that the border reveals its spectrality. Not only because borders are based on social relations, which, as grounding reasons are neither tangible nor visible but rely on objectified proxies. Even more, the objectified border, the proxies, come to life and are, as borders, endowed with a "physical force," a "living energy," and a certain amount of actorness or agency. Simmel, who gave particular attention to the small things from the handle of a cup to the ruins of a castle, attested a living energy and social quality to them. As objects these things are inscribed into the environment and act independently from the sociological and practical processes that brought them about.

In a modification of the Marxian wooden table as commodity that is more than wood, one could say the following about the objectified apparitions of political borders: once a fence, the Rhine or the Mediterranean acts the part of a political border (Ger.: *tritt auf als*) "it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness" (Marx 1976: 163). As a commodity, the table is no longer merely made out of wood, but it is product and perpetuator of the societal relations of production. Borders, fences, gates, rivers and information systems are no longer merely made of barbed wire, bricks, water, and information, but are products and perpetuators of the selection and prioritization of societal relations.

These interrelations are constantly fixed – in the sense of being repaired, maintained, and iterated – by all of the border's proxies. Similarly, the social relations that are regulated and expressed via passports, databases, migrant vessels, fences, visa or asylum applications synthesize into the space of a legitimate border, which is valid *qua* itself. That which is socially produced comes into life as a border – as a thing. Not only does it structure the relations between individuals, but the products also relate among each other.

Thus, the spectral character of a border does not stem from its liminality. It is rather the "living energy" and "physical force" of a border's proxies which renders the political border an odd thing. Proxies are endowed with a quality that Marx (1976 [1867]: 128) termed "ghostly/phantom objectivity" (Ger.: *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*). The living relations and interaction that produced it – in Marx's case the commodity; in the case of this study, the border – are dead. Its constituting forces and its reasons are atrophied and obliterated. What remains is the border, with the insistence to be maintained and its claim to be vital to sociation (Ger.: *Vergesellschaftung*). In other words, what remains is the material presence of the border's proxies, their objectivity, which claims to be vital on its own. This isn't to say that its existence was independent from human production; however, it is stressed that its existence continues without the iteration of the process of production. The border continues being, remains there, physically bearing a lively energy.

The spectral character of any border implies that border objects and their proxies are of a ghostly objectivity. *Qua* the border object, a quality of the relations between people and a mode of interaction turns into an imperative that drives their relations. Once objectified, the thing requires to be purchased, obtained or protected; social interactions are redirected toward that purpose. Subsequently, the malleable character of societal relations disappears from view. This phenomenon that "a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity,' an autonomy that seems so strictly rational

and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people," has been described as reification by Georg Lukács (1976 [1923]: 83). Just as the commodity has been interpreted as the ideological statue (Ger.: *ideologisches Standbild*) of the societal relations of production (Marchart 2013: 84), the border can be interpreted as the ideological statue of the societal relations of inclusion and exclusion.

The interrelations with the proxy turn into primary interaction. The border is protected and subverted; it is torn down, climbed and defended. The social relations that crystallize in and at the border are hardly straightforward. Relations are mediated by the manifold proxies that make up a given border. Ultimately, the spectral character of borders encompasses two aspects. First is the paradox intrinsic to reification, and second is the manifoldness of possible material manifestations and symbolic representations in apparitions. Reification is based on the paradox that "a relational social structure is objectified" (Ger.: *verdinglicht*), and that thereby "its processual character is quiesced and shut down" (Marchart 2013: 84). This is traceable for the case of the territorial border that has been reified and indeed naturalized to the extent that its relational and processual character is hidden from view.

Methodologically, the paradox intrinsic to reification prompts the question whether it is more strategic to research process or product, machine or performance, relations or object. The second aspect of the spectral character of a border lays in its manifold apparitions. Jacques Derrida has described this spectral contextual reference in interpretation of the Marxian analysis of commodity fetishism in the following way: "One represents it [the specter] to oneself, but it is not present, itself, in flesh and blood" (Derrida 2006: 126). Proxies, that is, the representations (of the border) that one presents to oneself, are an expression of how a political border is "presumed, reconstructed, [and] fantasized" (ibid: 24).

A border, therefore, does not exist. It is never "present, itself, in flesh and blood," but finds expression in how we construct its proxies. The border thus appears in a variety of material and symbolic forms. It assumes concrete appearance, it falls into place as proxy. In its etymological proximity to spectrum, 'spectral' also refers to the arbitrariness of the form through which the societal processes of demarcation manifest themselves. This has also been expressed by Balibar's characterization of borders as heterogeneous or vacillating, which always appear here and there in different forms. Here it is again clear that Balibar didn't describe the new geographical locations or positions of borders, but rather new apparitions. These new apparitions, however, couldn't emerge without the specification of a place. "Appearance requires an openness that allows emergence, but appearance, as it is always the appearance of some thing, is always a

taking place, which is to say that it is always the establishing of a certain *there*" (Malpas 2012: 237, original emphasis).

The manifoldness in appearances in possible representations of the border demands that the selection of the object of investigation (the one object that is researched out of many) may be justified with regard to the objectives of a study. Calling on the spectral character of any border effectively means readjusting the researcher's spotlight: the border is not socially produced, but its proxies are. In other words, if a border only appears as *some* thing, if it is only available and experienceable via its proxies, this has consequences for the research process. Proxies are the concrete and material manifestation of that which is imagined and believed to be the reason, the ground, the ought-to-be of the specter. It is the production and construction that is available to research. Hence we must ask, what status do the different proxies have in the research process? What weight should be attributed to selected border objects when researching the empirical example of the EU external border? And which research objects and research sites should be selected in the first place? The following sections address these methodological questions. I will argue that the Latourian distinction between intermediary and mediator allows for a research perspective that works through the paradox of reification.

3.2 MEDIATED BORDERING AND THE TERRITORIAL BORDER AS INTERMEDIARY

Realizing that the political border of interest is only available in the form of proxies, a researcher readjusts the spotlight shedding full light on a border's proxy. What does she see? Well, a proxy; in the case of this study, it could be a gate, a wall, a situation, a practice, a database, an administrative line of demarcation, a refugee camp. Yet, the central question at this point is less: *What does one see?* but rather: *How does one look at it?* How does one interpret the *relation* between a given proxy, for example the database of the Schengen Information System and the object of investigation – that is, the EU external border? Acknowledging the spectral character of any border, a researcher cannot tackle the proxy as a representation or abstraction of societal demarcation, but might realize that what she is looking at is a construction site through which a social thing is mediated. The proxy mediates a certain aspect and quality of the object of inquiry.

What has been described as proxy so far, has been termed "mediator" in the works of Bruno Latour (cf. particularly Latour 1993: 79-82, 2005: 37-42, 106-120). According to the French philosopher, mediators "transform, translate, dis-

tort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour 2005: 39). That which is carried, the social thing, the actor-network, or in the case of this study the border, is garnered by many mediators which each contribute their fabric and functioning to the apparition and social effectiveness of an EU external border. The mobilization, relation and interplay of many mediators allow the border to appear, and stabilize the demarcation iterated via the manifold mediators. At the same time, each mediator has its own mode of being produced and being appropriated. The durability of social relations – and a border is a cardinal example for a relation being perceived as durable (robust, natural and lasting) – is yielded by material artifacts, technologies, maps or legal items which condense interactions and resolve conflicts among humans. In fact, "whenever we discover a stable social relation, it is the introduction of some non-humans that accounts for this relative durability" (Callon/Latour 1994: 359). These non-humans are the proxies, the items, the representations, sites or mediators available to research. Now, how to go about these proxies; how to turn them into research sites?

When investigating political borders, the researcher deals with a phenomenon that is often perceived to be quasi natural or primordial. According to Latour these phenomena are thought of as intermediaries, that is, as things that are 'out there,' ready-made. Intermediaries do not appear to be socially produced, but rather does it seem as if they have, in fact, produced, shaped, and constituted society. These intermediaries appear to be at the bottom of things. Moreover, certain phenomena are not only *thought of* as intermediaries, but indeed *behave* as such, as a "black box counting for one" (Latour 2005: 39). These intermediaries are extremely autonomous. They are not in the mix, but set the terms. These intermediaries "transport meaning or force without transformation" (ibid); they define, without being defined.

The modern territorial border can duly be regarded as an intermediary. It claims irreversibility for itself and the state it demarcates. Moreover, borders and territory seem only to be definable in mutual reference to one another. In modern politics, the French legal theorist Paul Alliès critically notes that "territory always seems linked to possible definitions of the state; it gives it a physical basis which seems to render it inevitable and eternal" (Allies 1980: 9). In fact, the territorial border is the type of political border that is reified and naturalized to the extent that despite contemporary globalization theories and the proliferation of flows it is often perceived as the last landmark, and an almost cardinal point of orientation. Despite being engaged by discussion on globalization theories and spatially sensitive sciences as well as their traps and turns, and despite vehement

countering of substantialistic take on borders, the territorial border maintains an explanatory status. In fact, it seems that the territorial border even trips the spatial turn and globalization theories. By providing data on cross-border movement, for instance, territorial borders paradoxically function as an indicator and a place of measurement for the space of flows. Concepts of exclusion, fixity, and the topographical imagination of surface, which have been critically assessed in the works of the spatial turn, are reinserted into border studies through the type "territorial border" (Elden 2010a: 801; Painter 2010).

Moreover, together with the spatial turn and its deessentializing and denaturalizing impetus, there is a general unease among social scientists when taking the borders grounding or material presence into account. At times, researchers appear afraid of buying into a substantialistic take on borders. For instance, the Italian scholar Paolo Cuttitta, rejects the distinction between territorial and social borders, argued for by David Miller and Sohail Hashmi (Miller/Hashmi 2001) stating that their distinction was misleading, since it would suggest that territorial borders were not socially produced. However, what Cuttitta rejects is neither the concept of territorial border nor of social borders. He finds fault with the allegedly misleading contrasting juxtaposition, as he apprehends a conclusion by analogy between territory and an essentialist conception of borders. In his own works, however, Cuttitta finds that the strength of territoriality from which the border profited as a means to define and secure a socio-political entity, is now penetrating social, political and legal practices globally (Cuttitta 2006: 38, 2007). What strength does he have in mind, which does not stem from physical terrain or material installation? And did this strength then change materiality?

When dealing with an object of inquiry that behaves as intermediary, deconstructing it as social product counters essentialism, however, it does not explain the strength, quality and effectiveness of a political border. This is why in the aforementioned example territory maintains its somewhat ghostly strength despite being denounced as socially produced. Moreover, with emphasis on social construction borders are by implications evoked as volatile and up to change by (subversive) practices.

The methodological consequence of this perspective is to study the border as practices. However, borders are neither produced nor reproduced 'bottom-up' on a daily basis; it is not border guards who produce the border through their patrolling routines, nor is it border violations which shape its constitution. Also, political borders are not as volatile as an emphasis on bordering practices might suggest. In the case of this "rare exception," Latour notes, in which a phenomenon behaves as intermediary, it "has to be accounted for by some extra work – usually by the mobilization of even more mediators" (Latour 2005: 40). This quota-

tion elucidates why things that behave as intermediaries are so powerful, even to the effect of naturalization or sacralization: due to many, many mediators; no phantom strength or mystical force, but countless material mediators, each contributing to the stability of a social relation while at the same time leaving its individual qualitative mark. As

> "most of the features of what we mean by social order – scale, asymmetry, durability, power, hierarchy, the distribution of roles [and also the international state system with its political borders] – are impossible even to define without recruiting socialized nonhumans. Yes, *society is constructed, but not socially constructed.*" (Latour 1999: 198, original emphasis)

Therefore, neither the production of borders nor its reconfigurations should be analyzed from the perspective of social practices. For the case of borders, and other intermediaries that behave as such, it makes sense to actually start the analysis with the sites, proxies, items that mediate them, and explore how it does what it does, and how this doing came about.

In sum, territorial mediation has been so successful for the case of the political border that the territorial border behaves as intermediary and provides an intermediary imagination of the international system. Acknowledging the spectral character of a border does not imply that the political border in question was not real only because it is constructed via proxies. It rather implies that something as durable as a political border is mediated. In fact, it even has to be mediated in order to acquire durability. Nevertheless, albeit from the ethnographic perspective, things and apparitions can be effective as intermediaries, the researcher should neither consider his object of investigation readymade nor counter it as a fetish. He is rather asked to decipher the many mediators that support the intermediary imagination. The spectral character of any border reminds the researcher that her object of inquiry is only available to her in terms of proxies. These proxies can be *observed* to behave *either* as mediators *or* as intermediaries. However, when *analyzing* them, the researcher must take them as mediators. "At the level of observation, intermediaries are an integral part of the empirical phenomenon and must therefore be taken into consideration; as prefaces of the observer, however, they are theoretical artifacts which must be avoided as far as possible" (Schulz-Schaeffer 2008: 149).

3.3 RESEARCHING POLITICAL BORDERS: *IN SITU* OR *IN ACTU*?

When researching any given political border the question thus is: How can a researcher avoid getting trapped by an intermediary? How to get around the fact that one does take the observation for the border? Before laying out the notion of "mediated bordering" – which provided the title of this book – I shall illustrate further the difference between mediator and intermediary with reference to three works of site-specific art. All three projects engage with the question of what constitutes, expresses or produces art, while at the same time problematizing and irritating the relation between the 'being art' and the process of 'producing art'; its being made, its being staged and its taking place. These works may bestow a sensibility to the challenge of analyzing mediation, but also to the analytic gaze that the focus on mediation opens up. The following examples are presented as snapshots and serve to play with perspectives, challenging the idea of art, the border appearing *as* something.

3.3.1 Site Specificity

In 1991, a thirty-year-old man got permission to collect species and plants in the rainforest of Venezuela. He spent three weeks in the Orinoco River basin outside Caracas. Once a week, a boat would reach him to pick up transparent boxes containing the pieces of tropical nature, he had collected.

This time it was not an anthropologist who dwelled in the tropics, but the artist Mark Dion, who was working on his exhibition *On Tropical Nature*. Contrary to a scientist's expectation, these boxes were not transferred to a laboratory, where the "various plants and insects as well as feathers, mushrooms, nests and stones" (Kwon 2002: 28) could have been microscopically studied. Instead they were taken to 'Sala Mendoza,' an art institution in Caracas. There, "[i]n the gallery space of the Sala, the specimens […] were uncrated and displayed like works of art in themselves" (ibid). *On Tropical Nature* not only displayed these pieces of nature. The installation also included those artifacts and instruments that allowed Dion to collect, study and display tropical nature. Likewise, a photograph displaying Dion with a butterfly net in the middle of 'nature' turned the artist into an explorer as much as it defined the 'being out there exploring' as a performance of art.[3]

3 The photograph, taken by Bob Braine, has been reproduced in Dion (2003).

The issues raised by Dion's art project *On Tropical Nature* not only concerns the nature of (tropical) nature, thus challenging concepts such as authenticity and originality. Dion also contributes to the debate on cultural interventions and representations with regard to nature. Moreover, *On Tropical Nature* broaches the question of what constitutes a *site*, a prevalent issue in art since the late 1960s. Where is the place, the *site* of things?

Where does one have to go in order to encounter, experience, or study *tropical nature* or, in the case of this study, the *EU external border*? Is it into the jungle or into a museum (for the case of Dion); is it to Lampedusa, the Balkan route or the Frontex headquarters in Warsaw (for the case of the EU external border)? Applied to political borders, generally one could ask further: which piece, which segment of the Cold War does one look at when holding a piece of the Berlin Wall in one's hands? A piece of a political border or a museal artifact? Does radar, does the SIS database or the barbed wire fence in Ceuta reveal the EU's external border? What exactly are we looking for in the search for "tropical nature" or the "EU external border" respectively? Ultimately, Dion's work touches upon ontological questions while, at the same time, pushing the need for a localizable origin and the grounding of essence. In *On Tropical Nature* he dissolved these demands praxeographically – as has been done in border studies when gauging the nature of the border. Does the praxeographic, deconstructivist approach obscure or reveal the nature of nature. Does it obscure or reveal the nature of a given political border?

Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* of 1981 (figure 2), by contrast, emphasizes notions of original and fixed location. Serra responded to the United States Arts-in-Architecture program with a massive curved wall (of 3.65 meter height, 36.58 meter width and 6,5 centimeter depth) built out of corten steel in the middle of the Federal Plaza in New York.

By means of the *Tilted Arc*, Serra put emphasis on the uniqueness of a work and its particular relation to its location. As such, he argued that it was non-transferable to another location. Reactions to the *Tilted Arc*, however, were mixed. The ones who worked in the adjoining offices facing the Federal Plaza found it inconvenient to walk around the massive wall at lunchtime or when rushing to the office in the morning. According to city officials, the arc attracted rats, garbage, and crime. Yet, attempts to have *Tilted Arc* removed were fiercely countered by Serra himself, as he considered his work of art in relation to its site, and not a random artifact independent of its environment.

Figure 2: Richard Serra, "Tilted Arc," Federal Place NY, (destroyed)

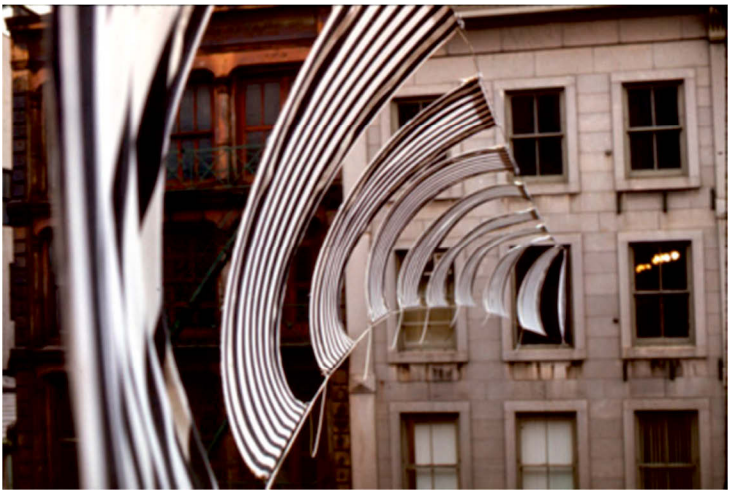
Source: http://art-nerd.com/newyork/site-of-richard-serras-tilted-arch/

"To remove is to destroy" was thus his answer to the different attempts to have his work shifted elsewhere. "As I pointed out," Serra elaborated,

> *"Tilted Arc* was conceived from the start as a site-specific sculpture and was not meant to be 'site-adjusted' or […] 'relocated.' Site-specific works deal with the environmental components of given places. The scale, size and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site." (quoted in Kwon 2002: 12)

In 1989, the *Tilted Arc* was deinstalled and destroyed. In 1989 the Iron Curtain also fell. In the case of political borders, deinstallation is more complicated. This isn't to say that Serra's *Tilted Arc* was no political issue. Still, when border posts were deinstalled as a consequence of the Schengen Agreement, this did not mean that the national borders between France and Germany, for instance, no longer existed. There seems to be a certain 'rest.'

Figure 3: Daniel Buren, "Within and Beyond the Frame," 1973



Source: Souvenir photo, at: https://blogs.uoregon.edu/danielburen/posts/

A third impetus in site-specific art can be interpreted as a critical engagement with institutional frames of art practices and valuation. For example, with *Within and Beyond the Frame* of 1973, Daniel Buren literally crossed boundaries by hanging one half of his installation out of the museum's window (figure 3).

The museum was the conventional frame where art is supposed to be found, and which bestows a sense of art to the things it frames, maybe by means of a spotlight, a signpost, and the very fact that it is placed in an art institution. In a refined manner, Daniel Buren asks for the appropriate place of art, and puts the focus on irritating this meaning: are the rags, which are hanging 'outside' on the clothesline no longer art, as they left the frame of a museum? Is the attribution applied to things dependent on their location? For the purposes of this study: does it make a difference whether a migrant arrives at the airport, is found on a truck, or on a boat off the coast of Lampedusa? In Buren's installation, a decoding and recoding of conventions, a window of emancipation is opened by irritation. Applied again to political borders, our gaze is turned to the institutional setup – to the border *as institution*.

That which might irritate in art not only irritates but confounds political borders. When representatives of a nation's border move beyond their frame – that is, beyond the territorial borders of the nation deploying and mandating said borders, their presence irritates and requires a situational mandate. In application of the distinction between mediator and intermediary, these projects can be de-

scribed as sites of interventions (where art is mediated), as opposed to the site of effects (where art behaves as intermediary, or rather where things behave as art). These engagements with site-specific art bring to the fore a methodological finesse that boils down to difference between researching borders *in actu* or *in situ*.

3.3.2 In Situ or In Actu?

When Stefan Kaufmann, Ulrich Bröckling and Eva Horn write in the introduction to their anthology on border violators (Ger.: *Grenzverletzter*) that borders "only exist *in actu*, as technical devices and social arrangements of inclusion and exclusion as well as of opening" (Kaufmann/Bröckling/Horn 2002: 7, original emphasis), their statement entails a similar tension as described above. Are borders constituted via performance or via machines? Where is the load in this socio-technical hybrid of "technical devices and social arrangements" (ibid)? Should a given border be studied as process or product? While negating the existence of a border as such, the authors deploy a praxeological concept of borders, in which humans not only perform bordering, but also devices and arrangements. They continue:

"No matter how narrow or wide meshed the bordering forces set the filter between inside and outside, they always distinguish between lawful and unlawful crossings, between legal and illegal border crossers. [...] The border regime may change, what remains is the principle of selection." (Kaufmann/Bröckling/Horn 2002: 7)

The border is identified by its filtering function and observed in the devices and arrangements that *perform* this function. It is this performance that is analyzed when gauging the existence of a border *in actu*.

With a somewhat different impetus, although with a focus on bordering practices, too, Sabine Hess and Vassilis Tsianos propose to analyze borders *in situ*, "in the sense of a *doing borders* as a dynamic field of conflict and negotiation between different local, regional, national and transnational actors" (Hess/Tsianos 2010: 248, original emphasis). Their idea is to study the border as it is taking place and more important so, as it is contested, crossed, and violated. They argue for an "inductive praxeographical method" which is able to reveal "the conflicting genesis and implementation of the border regime from the perspective of the many actors involved" (ibid: 256). In this perspective, a given border can only be analyzed in the local or rather situational contexts, where "an enormous gap between theory, 'paper' and practice is revealed" (ibid).

The tension between these two praxeographic approaches reflects the fact that a site of intervention (where the object of investigation is mediated) can be approached from very different points of departure. (1) First, the site can be analyzed in terms of tools and apparatuses. This would center attention on the appropriation of the object of investigation and the translations and mediations inscribed into it. (2) Second, the object of investigation, the site, could be studied by a sort of mini-genealogy, which would investigate how it has been produced, as well as what kind of decisions, beliefs, consensus, rules and beliefs are built into it and have become part of the site (3) Third, a given site can be analyzed in terms of contestations and struggles. All three trajectories are part of a praxeological or rather praxeographic turn; they shed light on different aspects of construction.

The notion of "mediated bordering" is part of that turn and takes on board a specific methodology. Rather than focusing on the performance, on "doing border," the impetus of "mediated bordering" centers attention on the generalizable principle that is stabilized by the iteration and institutionalization of ideas, practices, and obligations. Mediators – as the sites of these iterations and institutionalizations – are studied to understand how stabilization is brought about and made possible. Moreover, they are examined in order to trace and understand the quality of the (larger) thing that is mediated. The distinction between site of effects and site of intervention helps to pinpoint this. The site of effects – in the case of this study: the external EU border – can be examined by assessing the sites of intervention: in this case, different sites where bordering is mediated and thus researchable. According to Knut Ebeling, this (site-specific) methodology reflects the premises that "each site gives away a different visibility or different sight and therefore a different theory of history" (Ebeling 2007: 321). As a methodological approach to border studies, this allows us to pay special attention to the performances, practices and struggles, the artifacts, things, and material installations as well as the frames, rules and institutions that become part of a border's fabric. This kind of approach underlines the notion of site-specificity in the sense that selected research objects, practices, interactions, or sites do not merely 'represent,' 'manifest' or 'reflect' the object of investigation (in this case an external EU border) but rather substantively bring it about. While the border remains spectral, its mediators can be studied, for bordering is mediated.