

## 2. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to Borders, Spaces and Identities

---

*Wilhelm Amann, Christel Baltes-Löhr, Brigitte Batyko, Elisabeth Boesen, Till Dembeck, Martin Doll, Fabian Faller, Sylvie Freyermuth, Johanna M. Gelberg, Frank Hofmann, Markus Hesse, Sonja Kmec, Elena Kreutzer, Heike Mauer, Agnès Prüm, Rachel Reckinger, Gregor Schnuer, Gianna Thommes, Lucie Waltzer, Christian Wille*

### 2.1 ESTABLISHING, CROSSING AND EXPANDING BORDERS

*Martin Doll and Johanna M. Gelberg*

What first comes to mind when faced with the abstract notion of the ‘border’ is a line that separates at least two areas or spheres from each other, thereby introducing a differentiation. The notion can also imply something zonal, as a number of etymological studies have shown (see e.g. Böckler 2007; Eigmüller 2007; Lask 2002). Here the border not merely appears as a line but is perceived as a threshold, a liminal space, enabling all kinds of interactions. In addition, a border can be concretized on various levels: as a territorial border, marked by turnpikes and custom controls; as a social border that can be expressed via status symbols or consumption patterns; or also as an aesthetical border, which can be staged paratextually or museologically. Depending on the specific concretization, different approaches lend themselves to different scientific disciplines: the border is of key importance not only to geography and social sciences, but also to research in cultural studies and history (see Faber/Naumann 1995; Lamping 2001; Audehm/Velten 2007; Roll/Pohle/Myrczek 2010). Thus the border is *per se* a concept used across boundaries of disciplines. A striking example for this are the border studies which see themselves as an interdisciplinary field and are (increasingly) less concerned with the nature of spatial or social borders, but rather with the social, political, economic and cultural processes which question, shift or institute borders of whatever nature (see Walter-Wastl 2011). Since the 1990s this social-constructivist perspective of bordering that is concerned with

social practice has become firmly established in social and cultural studies (see e.g. Albert/Brock 1996; Newman 2001; Houtum/Naerssen 2002).

The interdisciplinary approach to the concept of 'border' also reveals its complex profile. There are not only varying levels of concretization of the border, the respective features of the border and the dynamic processes that occur along it also diverge. The studies presented in this volume generally take a praxeological perspective on these dynamics. The focus is on the 'social practices' performed on the border and in the border region, i.e. "[...] behavioral routines that are dependent on know how and held together by a practical 'understanding'" (Reckwitz 2003: 289)<sup>1</sup>, which should be seen as material in the broadest sense and which contribute in shaping border, space and identity.

This section offers an overview of various concepts of the border. The studies in this volume, which have on the geographical level for the most part Luxembourg and the bordering regions as their subject, examine different types of boundaries that however should not be seen as merely duplicating national borders. In addition, the abstracting overview of various concepts of the border explicitly encourages their application to further concretizations of the border, for instance in the realm of media. Drawing on Benjamin Bühler's overview of the history of the ways in which the border has been theorized, we can distinguish the following three structurizing differentiations: the "establishment of the border", the "crossing of the border" and the expansion of the border to an "unmarked area of the in-between"<sup>2</sup> (Bühler 2012: 34).

### 2.1.1 Establishing the Border

Borders are not a given, natural fact. On the contrary: they are established – and established over and over again. If the creation of a so-called 'European area' conveys the impression that stable borders that have always existed have now been overcome, a brief glance at history already tells us that stringent boundaries are actually only the result of certain historical developments – e.g. the emergence of nation states. Seen from a diachronic perspective, historical maps also provide sufficient evidence of the temporal variability of borders.

Besides revealing the changeability of borders, the historical perspective offers us a second important insight: that the materiality of the border *line* is a fiction. It seems self-evident that it is only on the drawing board that the border can take the form of a perfect line. Until the end of the 18th century borders tended to be conceived "as a margin, a broad strip that acted as a contact space and zone of

---

<sup>1</sup> | Personal translation of: "[...] *know how* abhängige und von einem praktischen 'Verstehen' zusammengehaltene Verhaltensroutinen."

<sup>2</sup> | Personal translation of: [das] "Einsetzen der Grenze", [das] "Überschreiten der Grenze" [und die Ausdehnung der Grenze zu einem] "unmarkierte[n] Bereich des Dazwischen."

transition, frequently leading to conflicts and shifts of these marginal regions”<sup>3</sup> (Kaufmann/Bröckling/Horn 2002: 12). This zonal character of the border also becomes apparent in the passport system established since the 15th century which enabled the control of travellers along the border margins; however, these controls did not occur at an exact border line, but preferably in the interior (see *ibid.*: 14). With the formation of modern nation states the notion of the border as an imagined line increasingly took root, while the border itself never completely lost its zonal and marginal character. The establishment of the border (as a line) here first of all occurs as a gesture of domination.

At the same time, the border is also established as an implementation in a bottom-up direction. Borders are confirmed or shifted through social practices. Actions performed along a territorial border result in the practical establishment of a specific space. Hans Medick summarizes:

“Borders shape the structure and dynamics of the societies whose margin they form. The border opens up latitudes for action for the individuals and communities living in their vicinity; but as a space controlled in a special way by sovereign authority, it also produces special patterns of behaviour”<sup>4</sup> (Medick 1995: 223).

Thus (politically effective) latitudes for action open up at the border both on the side of those governed and the side of those governing. Very much in the sense of Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality (see sections 2.3, 3.1 and 5.1) there is at the border an encounter between political government and technologies of the self; the result of this encounter is the constantly repeated establishment of borders.

What marks the establishment of a border is its power of differentiation. Every demarcation is an act of differentiation, which implies the constitution of meaning, just as every definition is based on the principle of bordering. The border differentiates, categorizes and hierarchizes and puts the differentiated units into relation with each other (see Audehm/Velten 2007: 18). The establishment of borders is therefore of paramount importance for forming symbolic and social orders. It is through borders that units are determined as supposedly homogenous units and also put in relation to other units (see Kaufmann/Bröckling/Horn 2002: 16). According to Pierre Bourdieu, a social field can be structured through differentiations; the “fine differences” then manifest themselves as “lines of social

**3** | Personal translation of: “[...] als Saum konzipiert, als ein breiter Streifen, der als Kontakttraum und Übergangszone fungierte, wobei es dabei häufig zu Streitigkeiten und Verschiebungen dieser Randgebiete kam.”

**4** | Personal translation of: “Grenzen prägen die Struktur und Dynamik der Gesellschaften, deren Rand sie bilden. Die Grenze eröffnet den in ihrer Nähe lebenden Individuen und Gemeinschaften Handlungsspielräume; sie bedingt aber als ein in besonderer Weise herrschaftlich kontrollierter Raum auch besondere Verhaltensweisen.”

distinction without an expansion of their own”<sup>5</sup> (Parr 2008: 29) and enable the subject to be situated in the social field. The act of establishment of borders and of differentiation is of equally elementary significance in the context of identity-constructing subject constitutions (see chapter 5).

Drawing on Jacques Derrida, differentiations and thus the establishment of borders can also be considered semiotically. Meanings and relations created through borders then need not be fixed as clear-cut and permanent, but can be described as ambivalent. In contrast to Bourdieu, (linguistic) differentiations do not signify unchangeable social distinctions<sup>6</sup> for Derrida, but rather open up a performative area in which constant differentiation processes occur and shifts of meaning are made possible. Kathrin Audehm and Hans Rudolf Velten translate these considerations to social and cultural contexts and conclude “that differences should be understood as results of discursive and social processes that possess a performative latitude, and not as hierarchic essences from whose fixed structures borders emerge”<sup>7</sup> (Audehm/Velten 2007: 24). Differentiations or distinctions that produce meaning are therefore *per se* performative acts that enable ambivalences; both aspects conflate in the dynamic process of the establishment of the border.

The establishment of the border basically always defines a situation that is subject to specific organizational principles: the border can, following Erving Goffman, also be understood as a situative “frame” (Goffman 1974: 10f.). The situations thus established – whether as cultural events, socio-cultural patterns of behaviour or historical occurrences – follow particular rules. The specific situation is not only defined from within, but it is notably the relationship to the bordered exterior that is also regulated. Goffman emphasizes the major significance of the interplay between the spaces created through the differentiations, the interior and the exterior. Crossing the border as a frame reinforces it by reproducing it at the same time. Goffman’s frame analysis therefore implicitly puts the focus on the performative aspect of the establishment of the border and at the same time points to the fundamental interplay between the border and its crossing.

### **2.1.2 Crossing the Border**

Every border implies its own surmounting. As a process, the establishment of the border depends on confirmation and reproduction. The border can only be reproduced following a temporary questioning, its crossing. According to

---

**5** | Personal translation of: “[...] feinen Unterschiede” [zeigen sich dann als] “Linien sozialer Distinktion ohne eigene Ausdehnung.”

**6** | This criticism is shared by recent research drawing on Bourdieu (see e.g. Warde 2005; Warde/Martens/Olsen 1999).

**7** | Personal translation of: “[...] dass Differenzen als Ergebnisse diskursiver und sozialer Prozesse zu verstehen sind, die einen performativen Spielraum besitzen, und nicht als hierarchische Essensen, aus deren feststehenden Strukturen Grenzziehungen emergieren.”

Goffman these crossings are however subjected to specific rules determined by the establishment of borders itself. These rules for crossing do not neutralize the border but rather confirm it. This regulated form of crossing is structurally affirmative.

Besides the regulated crossing there is also the unplanned border crossing, the border violation. This non-regulated form of crossing is structurally subversive. Here, instead of an affirmative reproduction of the border, a transformation of the border is enforced. The interplay of border and crossing, whether affirmative or subversive, thus becomes more complex and clearly shows that the establishment and the crossing of the border are mutually dependent.<sup>8</sup>

In their study on figures who pass as well as test the border, Kaufmann *et al.* note that borders “only exist *in actu* as technical mechanisms and social arrangements of exclusion and inclusion as well as opening”<sup>9</sup> (Kaufmann/Bröckling/Horn 2002: 7). Every establishment of a border requires a specific border regime that controls or limits its crossing or decides who is authorized to cross the border or not. Particularly in the light of this situation specific power structures and border regimes become visible in the differentiation between the allowed or sometimes even desired cross-border commuting and the illegitimate violation of borders<sup>10</sup> – always related to particular identity inclusions and exclusions, particularly along the external borders of the EU: “Borders not only produce nationals and foreigners”, the editors write, “but also border violators” (ibid.: 7). In crossing it, the border may be subverted or simply ignored; the power of the border’s linear demarcation, the mechanism of exclusion, is questioned in either case. However, questioning the border by crossing it should not be equated with its dissolution. Crossings can in fact stabilize borders. The violation of a border in the sense of an unauthorized crossing can result in its tighter control. Similar mechanisms are at work when so-called white hat hackers access computer data to reveal security loopholes that can then be closed. Kaufmann *et al.* conclude: “Crossing does

**8** | See also Dieter Lamping’s study: “In this sense the border is not only the place of distinction and demarcation, but also the place of passage, approach and mixing. It is at the same time beginning and end, creating its particular dialectics [...]” (Lamping 2001: 13). (Personal translation of: “Insofern ist die Grenze nicht nur der Ort der Unterscheidung und der Abgrenzung, sondern auch der Ort des Übergangs, der Annäherung und der Mischung. Sie ist Anfang und Ende zugleich, und daraus erwächst ihre besondere Dialektik [...].”)

**9** | Personal translation of: “[...] nur *in actu* [existieren], als technische Vorrichtungen und soziale Arrangements des Aus- und Einschließens wie des Öffnens.”

**10** | Audehm and Velten thus warn against “[...] equating cross-border commuting in every instance with transgression” (Audehm/Velten 2007: 26). (Personal translation of: [Grenzgängertum] “[...] in jedem Fall mit Transgression gleichzusetzen.”)

therefore not only lead to perforation, but also to an ever more perfect securing of the border”<sup>11</sup> (ibid.: 10).

Both Goffman and Kaufmann *et al.* point to the enormous significance of crossing as an essential border dynamics. Whether potentially affirmative or subversive, there is a fundamental consequentiality inherent to the crossing (see Audehm/Velten 2007: 26ff.); the unity of border and crossing thus has the potential for transformation – whatever its specific nature may be.

The elementary interdependency of border and crossing is emphasized by Michel Foucault particularly succinctly: “The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows” (Foucault 1998: 73). The crossing of the border therefore constitutes neither its dissolution nor the questioning of its validity, but rather the fundamental mode for experiencing the border and its transformative potential. Only in crossing it, can the border become tangible and understandable. If Foucault in this context speaks of the space of the transgression and characterizes the crossing also as a “passage”, as a “trajectory”, then the border itself is spatialized, i.e. can be experienced in its expansion as an ‘in-between’ (ibid.: 72). In a much-cited passage from the first notes of the ‘The Arcades Project’ Walter Benjamin describes such “zone[s] of transition” (Benjamin 1999: 856) as thresholds.<sup>12</sup> These expanded border zones are of particular interest in this volume. They offer, as phenomena that are effective in more ways than one, the possibility to reflect in multiple perspectives space, region and identity in the context of the border.

### 2.1.3 Expanding the Border

Envisaging borders as thresholds, i.e. not as lines, but as areas with an expansion of their own, opens up a broad range of analytical approaches. If we remind ourselves again that it is an essential part of borders to make distinctions, i.e. to separate at least two spheres from each other, the notion of threshold in particular offers the possibility to ask how the two units, which are connected and separated at the same time, relate to each other. This question has been answered in different ways by theorists from various disciplines. This is because thresholds are multidimensional entities that show themselves in a different light depending on the perspective adopted. For instance, one can ask how a threshold divides the

---

**11** | Personal translation of: “Überschreitung führt so nicht nur zur Perforation, sondern auch zur immer perfekteren Absicherung von Grenzen.”

**12** | Even though Benjamin, without explaining himself, insists that “the threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary” (Benjamin 1999: 494), we will in the following consider the border as threshold. For a concise summarization of Benjamin’s polyvalent use of the image of the ‘threshold’, see Parr (2008).

features of the realms between which it is situated and how it shares them at the same time: that is, whether, first, it forms an additional independent element; whether, secondly, overlaps occur between the spheres or subsets through superimposition; or, thirdly, whether it literally represents an in-between state and, as a fuzzy fringe and through a nuanced cross-fade of different spheres, generally makes it unclear where one sphere ends and the next begins.

If one considers 'threshold' in the first sense, it forms a clearly delineated area of the 'in-between' with a quality of its own. Then it can be understood as a place of passage which necessarily connects two adjoining separate spheres and mediates between them, in the way that one can for instance step on a door sill (see Audehm/Velten 2007: 14).<sup>13</sup> If it is understood spatially, there is an in front and behind, an exterior and an interior. Understood in terms of time, there is a before and an after.

Drawing on Arnold van Gennep's observations on rites of passage (*rites de passage*<sup>14</sup>), Victor Turner has placed thresholds into a processual and praxeological context, and related them to particular structural features: in the rites of passage that accompany incisive changes – e.g. when individuals within a society undergo a change of social status – van Gennep identifies three phases, namely separation, transition and incorporation. The intermediate phase, also designated with the Latin word for threshold, *limen*, is to be understood as a transformational phase – as a phase of antistructure, of ambiguity, of a blurring and a levelling of differences – because, while passing through it, specific socially valid structures liquify, enabling new structures to form (see Turner 1982). The (temporal) change of status is frequently accompanied by a (spatial) passage, whether it be the crossing of a door sill to a temple, a long pilgrim's journey or moving to another domicile, another area (see *ibid.*: 24f. and 27f.).

Returning here once more to the question of how the threshold relates to the characteristics of the before and after, one should observe that the transformational phase, in terms of structures, does not adopt all structural features of the before but rather has only a few elements in common with the previous structures: liminality thus essentially consists in opening, within this orderless antistructure – this betwixt-and-between as a neither-nor –, the possibility of both adding to the existing, accustomed elements of culture new ones and enabling a “free or ‘ludic’ recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird” (Turner 1982: 28). In this kind of no-man's-land of indeterminacy, a society releases its creative potential, not only for its analytical (critical) self-reflection, but also for its own

---

**13** | Drawing on Erika Fischer-Lichte, the authors emphasize that in contrast to borders that attempt to prevent their crossing, thresholds – in their function of actually inviting passage – lose the subversive potential of crossing (see Audehm/Velten: 2007: 15).

**14** | Benjamin also begins his observations on liminal experiences with van Gennep's *Rites de passage* (see Benjamin 1999: 494).

innovation. Seen in this way, *antistructure* appears as *protostructure* (see *ibid.*: 32 and 42).

In contrast to this model, which, while allowing for cyclically recurring processes, sees them as unidirectional, other theorists understand thresholds as zones of mutual overlappings. This in turn leads to two conceptual patterns that can be distinguished analytically: namely, as already mentioned above in second and third place, a superimposing and a cross-fading. The former evokes more the image of an intersection, i.e. a multiple affiliation of the involved elements, the latter more the image of their blending and interlacing, connected with indeterminacy.

These two modes are for instance underpinned by the concept of overlaps and fuzzy sets to overcome thinking in terms of binary oppositions, of either-or logics. With the introduction of these terms, Vilém Flusser has questioned the border as a stable demarcation line and conceived it in its expansion as a border region – even though he does not use the term threshold. This clearly de-emphasizes the separating aspect in favour of the “relational and connective dimension of borders”<sup>15</sup> (Guldin 2011: 45): according to Flusser, borders are to be understood as areas in which regions have a particular relationship with each other (see Flusser 2009: 244). In the case of the overlap they intersect and form “grey zones, in which fields superimpose each other”<sup>16</sup> (Flusser 1996: 62), as Flusser explains citing, significantly, the example of Luxembourg:

“The whole of Luxembourg is a question of borders. Granted, there is a specific Luxembourgish language, but in actual fact at the same time French and German are spoken in this border region. There one refers to regions in which cultures are superimposed”<sup>17</sup> (*ibid.*: 93).

In the case of the fuzzy set, on the other hand, “one of the regions penetrates deeply into the centre of the other and vice-versa”<sup>18</sup> (*ibid.*). Here it is of particular importance not to principally negate differences, but place them in a multidimensional field of complex relationships. For only because the spheres remain distinguishable can they interact, intersect and mesh in the border regions: Flusser accordingly emphasizes that the areas “do not merge with each other, also not superimpose

---

**15** | Personal translation of: “[...] Beziehungs- und Verbindungsdimension von Grenzen.”

**16** | Personal translation of: “[...] graue Zonen, in denen sich Felder überdecken.”

**17** | Personal translation of: “Ganz Luxemburg ist eine Frage von Grenzen. Es ist wahr, daß es eine bestimmte luxemburgische Sprache gibt, aber in Wirklichkeit wird in diesem Grenzgebiet zur selben Zeit Französisch und Deutsch gesprochen. Man spricht dort von Regionen, in denen Kulturen aufeinanderliegen.”

**18** | Personal translation of: “[...] dringt eine der Regionen tiefgreifend ins Zentrum der andern ein und umgekehrt.”

each other, but rather become fuzzy sets”<sup>19</sup> (ibid.: 246). This thinking in “fuzzy sets” makes it possible to analyse gradual affiliations, also prove that an element can not only be attributed to multiple, incongruent spheres but also that this occurs in varying, not clearly delineated degrees of affiliation (“slightly”, “strongly” etc.<sup>20</sup>) (Guldin 2011: 40f.).

More recent observations from planning studies indirectly tie in with this ‘fuzzy logic’, namely when referring to ‘fuzzy boundaries’ and ‘soft spaces’. This enables a new, more small-scale mode of planning in regional development, which no longer only operates in the framework of existing rigid political administrative boundaries. Instead, also ‘soft’, functionally conceived planning regions – that at times also diverge among each other – can be taken into account. Regional planning thus becomes an interplay of different, overlapping and interacting levels: in the planning process issues of the existing geography, transport and infrastructure, real estate market, health and education for example are put in relation to each other and evaluated. This can help to reveal overlappings of different types of borders, for instance the fact that specific territorial and sociocultural boundaries are not necessarily congruent or are not stereotypically mapped one on top of the other – as approaches favouring the concept of space as a container tend to do. This interest in new, multiple planning factors has also led to fuzzy professional boundaries of spatial planning, i.e. to an expansion of the disciplines involved in the planning process (see Allmendinger/Haughton 2009: 617f., 620, 625ff.). Here there is an increased emphasis on functional issues and specific social practices and no longer only on a topographically conceived space. This analytical perspective enables in particular in border regions the reconstruction of spatial entities that traverse or cut across national borders and emerge from specific cross-border practices.<sup>21</sup>

Theories of transdifference are connected in a more general way to these modes of incongruence, mixing and indeterminacy. Similar to the approach of ‘overlaps’ and ‘fuzzy sets’, the ‘trans’ of transdifference does not aim to level differences but to use them to develop complementary points of view. The concept of transdifference allows differences to be considered in a novel way in order to investigate elements “of incertitude, indecidability and paradox that are edited out on the basis of binary logics of order”<sup>22</sup> (Lösch 2005: 27). As Britta Kalscheuer has shown, this concept can in turn be connected to spatial configurations: Transdifference makes borders visible not as demarcation lines but rather as

**19** | Personal translation of: “[...] nicht ineinander verschwimmen, auch nicht einander überdecken, sondern daß diese zu fuzzy sets werden.”

**20** | Personal translation of: (“Ein bisschen”, ‘stark’ usw.).”

**21** | A corresponding heuristic framework is provided by the approach “Spaces of the Border” (Wille, 2014).

**22** | Personal translation of: [Momente] “der Ungewissheit, der Unentscheidbarkeit und des Widerspruchs” [...] “die auf der Basis binärer Ordnungslogik ausgeblendet werden.”

zones “of intercultural dialogue”<sup>23</sup> (ibid.: 43), in which conflicting images of Self and of the Other of the participating cultures are negotiated. In this context, transdifference refers to the transient and always ephemeral destabilization of a clear differentiation between an ‘own’ and an ‘other’, between a ‘we’ and a ‘them’, inasmuch as any attempt at a clear-cut and stable establishment of a border can be aborted via alternative borderings (see Kalscheuer 2005: 74; Lösch 2005: 36). This also has consequences for the identity attributions caught in the same complex: they are subject to a continuous repositioning (see Kalscheuer 2005: 75).<sup>24</sup> In this way the border becomes a space of interaction, and, as Klaus Lösch puts it, drawing on James Clifford, cultures become the “product of the *interaction* of systems, whose borders are only established in this process of exchange (and not before) and are continuously revised”<sup>25</sup> (Lösch 2005: 33).

Considering the border as a threshold finally leads us back to the question of how it is at all possible to establish borders – or, more precisely: to mark them and make them visible. A review of historical forms of border administration has already shown that territorial borders as a rule require a ‘margin’, however small, if their effectiveness is to be ensured. Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of Kant’s “Analytic of the Beautiful” from the *Critique of Judgement* suggests formulating this even more radically: every ‘inner order’ enclosed by a border (understood by Derrida/Kant: that which is considered a beautiful object) would then only appear to be independent of the margin marking this border. In effect it could not exist without it, could not be detached from it (see Derrida 1982 [1978]).

It would however require further detailed discussion whether this applies to every kind of border, i.e. whether one always has to presume a form of expansion of the borderline to a threshold. The fact that this question remains unanswered for the time being in no ways diminishes the analytical need to distinguish the above-mentioned three aspects of the border, its establishment, its crossing and its expansion to a threshold. They will be taken up and further elaborated in the contributions of this volume and discussed in the specific empirical studies under the aspect of constructions of space and identity.

---

**23** | Personal translation of: [Zonen]“interkulturellen Dialogs.“

**24** | Kalscheuer here refers to Lossau 2002: 176.

**25** | Personal translation of: “[...] Produkt der *Interaktion* von Systemen, deren Grenzen freilich erst in diesem Austauschvorgang gezogen und beständig revidiert werden.”