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Grenze | Granica

Art on the German-Polish Border after 1990



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GRENZE | GRANICA

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BÖHLAU

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I Introduction

Oh, the leaky boundaries of man-made states!
How many clouds float past them with impunity;
how much desert sand shifts from one land to another;
how many mountain pebbles tumble onto foreign soil
in provocative hops!
Wisława Szymborska¹

The history of twentieth-century Europe is littered with major displacements of borders.... These new boundaries include ... the Oder-Neisse line, the work of the planning departments of several foreign ministries and the participants of major international conferences from Tehran to Yalta and Potsdam.
Karl Schlögel²

The idea of a simple definition of what constitutes a border is, by definition, absurd: to mark out a border is, precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it. Conversely, however, to define or identify in general is nothing other than to trace a border, to assign boundaries or borders.... The theorist who attempts to define what a border is is in danger of going round in circles, as the very representation of the border is the precondition for any definition.
Étienne Balibar³

1 SZYMBORSKA 2016, 201. This poem by Wisława Szymborska, written in 1976, and translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh, continues as follows:

Need I mention every single bird that flies in the face of frontiers / or alights on the roadblock at the border / A humble robin—still, its tail resides abroad / while its beak stays home. If that weren't enough, it won't stop bobbing!

Among innumerable insects, I'll single out only the ant / between the border guard's left and right boots / blithely ignoring the questions 'Where from?' and 'Where to?'

Oh, to register in detail, at a glance, the chaos / prevailing on every continent! / Isn't that a privet on the far bank / smuggling its hundred-thousandth leaf across the river? / And who but the octopus, with impudent long arms, / would disrupt the sacred bounds of territorial waters?

And how can we talk of order overall? / when the very placement of the stars / leaves us doubting just what shines for whom?

Not to speak of the fog's reprehensible drifting! / And dust blowing all over the steppes / as if they hadn't been partitioned! / And the voices coasting on obliging airwaves, / that conspiratorial squeaking, those indecipherable mutters!

Only what is human can truly be foreign. / The rest is mixed vegetation, subversive moles, and wind.

2 SCHLÖGEL 2016, 107–108.

3 BALIBAR 2002, 76.

Is it excessive to start a book with three quotes – and such different ones, at that? We are of the opinion that precisely the diversity of the quotes we have selected – sourced from text by, in order, the Polish poet and Nobel literature laureate Wisława Szymborska; Karl Schlögel, the well-known German historian of Eastern Europe, including the Oder region since World War II; and the French political philosopher Étienne Balibar, who has spent years analysing the condition of borders – aptly reflects the complexity of our theme. Szymborska uses a language rich with natural imagery to create a work that may be classified as border poetics, in which she shows emphatically that borders are construed by people for people, and are thus relevant only to the human world; Schlögel stresses the historical and geopolitical context of border shifts, making reference to the specific example of the German-Polish border that will be our focus in this book; and Balibar addresses the ontological dimension of the border as an elusive phenomenon that defies simple definition. These three different approaches mirror our interest in the border as a processual, dynamic, multiple, and complex phenomenon, which, precisely in view of its complexity, provokes artists to create border art.

In this book we set out to analyse a selection of works by international contemporary artists that directly reference the German-Polish border, and to draw attention to artworks created since 1990 which examine the historical shifts of that border from the angle of lost homelands, expulsion of people and new political orders. These pieces reference narratives of expulsion and the fluid, spectral, and aesthetic nature of borders through sensory and somaesthetic perception. As our research framework, we adopted border studies theory and border art studies, which by their very nature mandate a transdisciplinary methodological approach. In fact, the works we examine here are particularly fruitful in providing a positive answer to the following question posed by Elena Dell’Agnese and Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary: “Can cultural production be more than a side-issue in border studies?”⁴ Thus, the function of the visual in borderscaping processes pertaining to the Oder-Neisse line in border art is a crucial field of our inquiry.

In view of our field of study, the title of the volume: *Grenze | Granica. Art on the German-Polish Border after 1990*, employs this juxtaposition of the German and Polish words for “border” in order to draw attention to both the language barrier and – paradoxically – the similarity of the term in both languages. Indeed, the two words for “border”, the central concept of this book, have a shared etymology: the German word “*Grenze*” is a borrowing from Old Polish and comes from, or is an elided version of, the word “*Granizza*”. As such, the border has its etymological origin in the language of the Other from beyond the present-day state border. In addition, the shared word indicates shared origins (of the languages). The term “*Granizza*” was first used in 1262, and moved westwards over the next 300 years. In this context, it is important to be aware of the role

4 DELL’AGNESE / AMILHAT-SZARY 2015, 4.

of translation as active intervention giving meaning to what has been expressed. The word “translation” has a double meaning: “A translation” is a work translated from another language. “Translation” used alone, without an article, denotes the process, and hence the procedure, by which “a translation” is created.⁵ “Translation” as the activity cannot be understood only as the act of rendering words in another language; it is “translation *from* and *between* cultures”,⁶ i. e., a practice that necessitates a sensitivity to other modes of thinking and to different ways of seeing the world.

Nonetheless, dictionaries are important tools in translation. They show what equivalents exist in the other language, what words are available to convey written or spoken content into other language realms. Whether in analogue or digital form, dictionaries offer structure and guidelines that can support the individual in forging their path through a foreign language.⁷ The binary structure of bilingual dictionaries in particular visualizes the divide. The eye has to overcome, or bridge, the space between the columns to get from one language to the other. In this respect, bilingual dictionaries highlight the borders, or boundaries, between two languages. Yet precisely the words “*Grenze*” and “*granica*” testify to shared origins, to kinship, to proximity rather than distance. Such gentle transitions between languages can offer an impulse for a different understanding of border regions as blurred and fluid, one that is also important for this book.

1.1 A FLUID HISTORY: THE ODER-NEISSE BORDER AS “TROUBLED WATERS”

The 442 kilometres of the shared border divide Germany from Poland, stretching from the Baltic Sea in the north, through the river port of Szczecin, to the Czech Republic in the south (fig. 1). This geopolitical division, defined by the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers and the border area on and around their banks, foregrounds the shared history and present of the two nations. In 1945, both rivers were designated the border rivers between Germany and Poland. The establishment of the German-Polish border along the Oder-Neisse line created an artificial bisection of the Oder region. Beata Halicka stresses:

On the one hand, the Oder region is viewed in its geographic dimension, but as a research subject it is above all a social forum, a linguistic and cultural forum shaped by the many

⁵ See BELLOS 2011, 21.

⁶ BACHMANN-MEDICK 1997, 1. See also KRAPOTH 1998, 1. Unless otherwise noted in the bibliography, all translations from Polish and German into English are by the translator of this book (Jessica Taylor-Kucia).

⁷ See BELLOS 2011, 94.



Fig. 1 The German-Polish border now (—) and before (-----) 1945.

different accretions of time, but whose supergenerational structures seemed to collapse in the period of exponential acceleration of events that was World War II. With the population exchange it was constructed anew.⁸

Halicka's opinion is echoed by the theses of Anna Barcz, Petra Buchta-Bartodziej, and Anna Michalak, who stress that: "changes in national borders mean that cultural sources may belong not only to linguistic but also to regional heritage, which the example of Poland and Germany evidences so clearly".⁹ Karl Schlögel has dubbed the Oder variously "river of Europe's fate",¹⁰ "current between times",¹¹ and "waterway on the edge of

8 HALICKA 2013, 10.

9 BARCZ / BUCHTA-BARTODZIEJ / MICHALAK 2018, 264.

10 SCHLÖGEL 2007, 21–46. – SCHLÖGEL / HALICKA 2007, 9–19.

11 SCHLÖGEL 2001, 252–271.

the map”.¹² The issue of the Polish-German border, which in terms of international law had been pending since 1945, was finally settled by the German-Polish Border Treaty of 1990. The unification of Germany in the same year made possible the final ratification of this border.¹³ Thus it is 1990, and not the collapse of communism in 1989, that is in this context the key date for the chronological framework adopted in this book. Most recently, Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004 transformed the Oder-Neisse line from a hard border into a soft one.¹⁴ Since 2015, however, the soft status of this border has, for a variety of reasons, repeatedly come under pressure. During the vast refugee movements in the summer of 2015 and the following years, Germany, under federal chancellor Angela Merkel, opened its borders to the hundreds of thousands of fugitives from the war zones in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In Poland, heated media debates raged, while islamophobic and xenophobic political campaigns and anti-refugee demonstrations created an atmosphere of hostility to this alleged foreign “infiltration”.¹⁵ In 2021 the Belarusian ruler Alexander Lukashenko orchestrated the “delivery” of migrants from Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Iraq to the border between Belarus and Poland. Their subsequent attempts to penetrate this, one of the EU’s external borders, led to massive conflicts between Poland, Belarus and the EU. Most of the migrants were unable to cross the border, or were driven back with the use of violence; in subsequent months, pushbacks were frequent.¹⁶ Those who did manage to reach Poland then attempted to travel on and across the Polish-German border, which prompted a German federal police presence in the border region and triggered debates about border controls.¹⁷ The previous year, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had also engendered restrictions on movement between Germany and Poland: the introduction of mandatory quarantines on crossing borders, border controls, and border closures.¹⁸

This brief look back at the condition of the German-Polish border space since 2015 shows clearly that border regimes and policies can change with little forewarning in response to crises. These temporary adjustments, which have given ID papers and passports an unexpected renaissance, are the most recent continuation of the *longue durée* of bilateral relations between Germany and Poland over the past decades. The relationship conducted across the Oder and Neisse has repeatedly been reset.

12 SCHLÖGEL 2000, 11–30.

13 KAMUSELLA 2010, 120–143.

14 MOSTOV 2008, 79–97.

15 VETTER 2015, n. p. n.

16 Cf. HRECZUK 2022, n. p. n.

17 Cf. RICHTER 2021, n. p. n.

18 Cf. STEFFEN 2020, n. p. n..

Uwe Rada wrote about this in his book *Zwischenland. Europäische Geschichten aus dem deutsch-polnischen Grenzgebiet*:

When people in Germany think about the area along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers, they refer to it as “the end of the world”, while in Poland it is the “wild West”. Nowhere else are Germans and Poles as close to each other as there: doing shopping and using fuel stations, studying, and working. The German-Polish border area is the yardstick of German-Polish relations.¹⁹

One might say that since 1945, German-Polish neighbourhood has evolved through all the categories identified by sociologists: from isolated, through conflicted and co-existing, to an integrated neighbourliness²⁰ in which a key role is played by the category of *sharing*. The notion of *sharing*, then, relates to two main categories of those relations, with all of their ambiguity – this is the region where Germans and Poles share geography, climate, and the natural environment. In this context, the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers cannot be seen solely as a border that divides but, paradoxically, also as a bridge.²¹ People living in border areas are exposed to similar, possibly shared experiences of separation, fleeing and expulsion, and can look back on myths and narratives associated with those experiences. At the same time, the border divides two nations into two different political, linguistic and cultural spaces, which draw on their own attitudes to the past, the present and the future. However, the boundary line between them is constantly being crossed: on the one hand by people who travel daily from one country to the other to work, and by so-called shopping tourists, and on the other – and this has been the subject of heated debate – as the result of an incompatible refugee policy and the permeability of intra-European borders. The perspective from which borders are perceived is a function of the observer’s position; this statement is already clear from the fact that the German-Polish border is located in the far west of Poland, while for Germany it marks the eastern frontier. However, the terms “West” and “East” are always imbued with both variant and similar semiotic, symbolic, and semantic meanings. It is in border areas that the Other and the Alien are both distant and a part of each other, because facets of life such as topography, climate and concepts are shared/separate. The border region abutting the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers can be perceived as symbolic of lost territories, expulsions, expropriations, and the crimes of the National Socialists. It is through these aspects that it accumulates the history and traumas of German-Polish relations. The more traumatic a region is, the more intensively it acts as a literary text²² – or, we might add, any other artwork.

19 RADA 2004. Cover text.

20 KACZMAREK 2011, 85.

21 SIMMEL 1983, 407 f.

22 MARSZALEK / SASSE 2010, 7–18.

In the words of Schlögel:

All that said, it would be silly to dispute the existence of borders and boundaries... they *were* drawn with a ruler, and yet they are cogent and recognized boundaries that no one would describe as violent, artificial, or imposed, even though no river, ocean, or mountain ridge inspired them.²³

Nonetheless, as recently as in the 1930s and 1940s, borders along rivers or mountain ridges, or determined by oceans or deserts – i. e. closely bound up with particular physical properties of the landscape – were considered “natural”.²⁴ This deterministic view has since been superseded by a sociological approach, which fostered a recognition of borders as human constructs: the creations of politicians and the geographers commissioned by them. The landscape along the Oder and the Neisse is a landscape shaped by power; it “together imposes and represents a visual order”.²⁵

The Oder bridges also illustrate dramatic stories from German-Polish history. Uwe Rada, a German journalist with a longstanding interest in the Polish-German border region, writes: “Although there are not yet 100 bridges over the Oder and the Neisse again as there were before the war (...), of the 34 border crossings between Germany and Poland, 30 are over bridges.”²⁶ Of those hundred bridges that existed before the war, some have vanished without trace, while others still stand as ruins. Not everywhere, then, as Newman stresses, can a border zone be transformed into a transition space:

Not every trans-border region results in the meetings of minds, nor do they necessarily bring about a form of transitional hybridity consisting of a mix of characteristics from each side of the border. Not all peripheral regions can, or want to be, transformed into transition regions.²⁷

This is especially true when there are no bridges, or the bridges that spanned the Oder before the war, and recall the region’s former identity as a cohesive unit of space, now stand in ruins.

In his book *Die Oder. Lebenslauf eines Flusses*, Rada asks: “Is there such a thing as ‘the Oder’ at all? Or is this the construct of a river whose landscape is more the sum of its

23 SCHLÖGEL 2016, III.

24 NEWMAN 2006A, 174.

25 ZUKIN 1991. – MITCHELL 1994.

26 RADA 2004, 63.

27 NEWMAN 2006A, 181.

parts than a cohesive cultural space?”²⁸ For Nobel literature laureate Olga Tokarczuk, the Oder is not only a topos constantly full of conundrums and unexpected reverses, but also a realm of memory for Germans and Poles alike.²⁹ In one description of it, she also notes that “state borders” often seem “unpredictably movable”.³⁰ To quote Schlögel again: “The boundary is the privileged site of a historiography set in time-space.”³¹ And among these processes are works of border art that call into question the claim regarding the natural character of the Oder-Neisse border, and designate it as the central feature of a collective memory.³² In this context, both rivers have a profound symbolic dimension and may be perceived – after literature scholar Anna Barcz³³ – from an aquacritical perspective, i. e. with a focus on the links between them as subjective entities with their own history and culture.

Rada writes aptly that the river can serve as a symbol “for the history of German-Polish relations ... – or, more accurately, of German-Polish relational conflicts”.³⁴ The Oder and Neisse, once displaced from memory, are perceived as tangible actors with an important role in Polish-German relations. They are Polish-German realms of memory.³⁵ As described by the author of this term, Pierre Nora, realms of memory are all practices undertaken with the intention of sustaining and stimulating memory of the past.³⁶ The phenomenon is defined slightly differently by Krzysztof Pomian, who writes that “lieux de mémoire” may be “places, either material or imagined, where collective memories gather with particular intensity”,³⁷ and this is precisely the case on the banks of these two rivers. The Oder-Neisse’s location on the historically and politically contested yet soft border between two nations makes it a site especially well suited for artists’ interest in what they perceive in these rivers as “troubled waters”: “Alongside the continual movement of water flowing throughout the borderland is the conception of place, and of identities, as fluid and unfixed, not static and unchanging”.³⁸ Borders are dynamic, and this is a source of great inspiration to artists.

28 RADA 2009, 12.

29 TOKARCZUK 2003, 7–10.

30 TOKARCZUK 2012, 124.

31 SCHLÖGEL 2016, 113.

32 BAUER / RAHN 1997, 8.

33 BARCZ 2017, 221–235.

34 RADA 2009, 106.

35 HALICKA 2012, vol. 3, 72–92.

36 NORA 1989.

37 POMIAN 2008, 4–11.

38 HOLT 2019, 2. This sentence, based on the metaphor “troubled waters”, is a paraphrase of Holt’s thesis about the River Tweed, which marks the border between England and Scotland.

1.2 ART ON THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER AFTER 1990 – THE STATE OF RESEARCH, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since 1990 many artistic and curatorial initiatives addressing the German-Polish border itself have been undertaken on both sides of that border. To date, however, they have not been analysed either within the framework of German or Polish art history or from a perspective which would bring together both sides of the coin. This historiographical and methodological gap is acutely evident. The current state of research is extremely rudimentary. There are no monographs on the subject, and publications on German-Polish relations in art focus only on earlier periods. What is particularly striking, however, is that in the case of area studies and border studies, the aspects of rendering the border “visible” through contemporary art and the experience of sharing/separating (both the German *teilen* and the Polish *dzielić* can mean both “to separate, divide” and “to share”) have not to date been addressed. The words *teilen/dzielić* designate the primary categories of our research. For Germans and Poles *share* the same geography, climate, and vegetation in these border regions. At the same time, the border *divides* the two nations into separate, and different, political, linguistic, and cultural spaces, which have separate, different, approaches to the past, the present, and the future.

One of the most relevant publications in this field is the exhibition catalogue *Tür an Tür. Polen–Deutschland. 1000 Jahre Kunst und Geschichte*,³⁹ published in 2011, in which, nonetheless, only one brief section is devoted to contemporary art in the two countries. The starting point of that section is the question of what elements – and these are different in each case – in works by German and Polish artists constitute a particular point of reference for the violent history of World War II. In principle, neither the border itself nor the borderlands are discussed in this publication. By contrast, the catalogue *Der Riss im Raum. Positionen der Kunst seit 1945 in Deutschland, Polen, der Slowakei und Tschechien*,⁴⁰ which has an accompanying volume of essays (both published in Berlin in 1994), draws attention to art after 1945, but does not address relations between German art and artists and their eastern neighbours, including Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Both these projects were primarily given over to issues of neighbourhood, and did not concentrate to any extent on art tackling the subject of borders since 1990.

In 2016 and 2019, however, two volumes devoted to art in Poland’s western and northern regions were published. The first, edited by Anna Markowska and Zofia Reznik, encompassed the period 1945–1981, and the second, whose editors were Markowska and Regina Kulig-Posłuszny, the period from 1981 until the present.⁴¹ The thematic

39 EXH.CAT. BERLIN 2011–2012b.

40 EXH.CAT. BERLIN / WARSZAWA / PRAHA 1994–1995.

41 MARKOWSKA / REZNIK 2016. – MARKOWSKA / KULIG-POSELUSZNY 2019.

spectrum of both volumes is unusually broad – not only in the chronological sense, with its coverage of the entire period from the establishment of the border on the Oder and the Lusatian Neisse to the present, but also because it interprets the role of art in these “Recovered” and Northern Territories in the context of many diverse issues. The authors of the contributions pose questions on matters including colonization, recovery or construction of identity, realms of memory, and dismantlement or redefinition of modernity. They also profile the work of selected art institutions and individual artists. Borders are not a theme in and of themselves, though their phantom presence is, naturally, a discernible constant, whether in the work of the artists discussed, the work of exhibiting institutions, or the interpretative strategies adopted by the contributing authors themselves.

Catalogues of exhibitions and artistic projects relating directly to the subject of borders since 1990 were particularly important sources for this project. One key publication is the catalogue of the exhibition *Dialog Loci. Kunst an einem verlorenen Ort/Dialog Loci. Sztuka w zagubionym miejscu/Dialog Loci. Art in a Lost Place*,⁴² published in 2004. The exhibition was staged in the ruins of the Kostrzyn fortress. Its curators, the participating artists, and the invited authors emphasized the role of art in the public space, making reference to concepts such as borders and border areas. Most of the artworks were created especially for the project, and addressed the 1945 border shifts and those of their consequences that remain perceptible to this day. In her curatorial text accompanying the exhibition, Aneta Szyłak outlined the context of the undertaking thus:

The border – as a cultural *topos*, as a symbol of separation and neighbourhood, as a practical economic and political barrier existing in the immediate vicinity of the fortress – is an important point of reference for understanding the project. The border divides the space into “here” and “there”, making one think about difference, dissimilarity, fear and hostility; about “being side by side” and “being with”; about coexistence.⁴³

In this context it is worth mentioning the book *Between Dresden und Prague*,⁴⁴ which profiles the project *German-Polish Frontier – Changes After the Maximum of the Last Glaciation* by the Italian artist Bernardo Giorgi. This was realized in 1999 during Giorgi’s residence at the International Studio Program, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, in Berlin. The publication includes short but interesting essays by German, Italian, and Czech curators and philosophers. However, these texts are formulated from poetic or psychoanalytical perspectives (borderline).

42 EXH.CAT. KOSTRZYN 2004.

43 SZYLAK 2004, 151.

44 GIORGI / KOLEČEK 2003.

This overview of the current state of research thus reveals the lack of a thorough, comprehensive analysis of contemporary artistic and curatorial strategies that would take account of the context of border art from the perspective of art history and border (art) studies in relation to the cultural policy of Poland and Germany. The year 2019 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the political breakthrough after which post-communist Poland ceased to share a border with the German Democratic Republic, and gained the united Germany as its neighbour instead. This significant gap in German and Polish art history is yet to be brought to light and defined in accordance with the objectives set out in this book. It would, however, be an omission to pass over the interdisciplinary activities carried out by the Viadrina Centre B/ORDERS IN MOTION in Frankfurt (Oder). Nonetheless, though the centre identifies borders as its leading area of study, this research is not focused on art history. In the area of border studies in the context of the Polish-German border, the publications by Jarosław Jańczak⁴⁵ are probably the most important, yet they likewise make no mention of art.

This book, which is a tangible product of Polish-German cooperation and a bilateral research project, is a response to the lack of materials outlined above. The dichotomy of the border's function as at once a divide and a joint cause also appears in this context as a metaphor for cross-border cooperation, which produces new perspectives on the border and border regions. Within the realm of artistic activity, we will be examining Europeanization processes, culture and knowledge transfer, the effects of the German-Polish Border Treaty (1990), changes in norms and values, memory ("lost homelands"), reconciliation (Ger. *Versöhnung*), (everyday) migration, and multilingualism, all of which have an immediate relevance to the German-Polish border. We will facilitate the discussion of a number of questions: How do artists and curators address the border in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Cultural Cold War?⁴⁶ What are the multiple accesses of art on the Polish-German border? What has been the impact of Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 on the perception and status of the border? Do artistic and curatorial strategies unfold counter-narratives to the official cultural policy of both countries? What is, from the perspective of the arts, the significance of the actions of individual actors and what is the role of institutions (top-down and bottom-up forces in bordering processes)? What aspects of history and memory are the primary foci? What is the relationship between the Polish-German border and the construction of identities with regard to nation, language, history/histories, gender, or sexual orientation? How dynamic are the border processes? Do border narratives exist? Could border art promote a redefinition of the 'aesthetic regime' of the border – that is to say, according to Jacques Rancière,⁴⁷ the way the border

45 JAŃCZAK 2011. – JAŃCZAK 2016.

46 BARNHISEL 2015.

47 RANCIÈRE 2004, 12–19.

is seen, felt, and experienced? Could art be defined as an object and tool by which the spatiality of the border can be apprehended, and which can reveal what the border is and how it evolves through time? How are the former East and former West faring at present?

This book addresses – as do many of the artistic projects studied here – the double meaning of the terms *Teilen/dzielenie*, understood as both separating and having something in common. Other key aspects are the figures of the frequent border crosser and the cross-border worker, the shopping tourist, and the other types of residents who live and work on both sides of the demarcation line. These actors in local border traffic constantly play roles in artistic projects. Current political developments have drawn attention to the German-Polish border in relation to the issue of European refugee policy and, indirectly, have rendered it an object of artistic reflection.

Contemporary art – not only from Germany and Poland – addresses all these issues in their capacity as typical of and topical for the border region. It also tackles such issues as Germany's changing cultural policy towards Poland, and Poland's towards Germany, from the national and local perspectives, and as enacted by border regions, municipalities, or individual towns and villages. Both Poland's and Germany's foreign policies have been important factors in culture transfer. Therefore, the book will also ask questions about the interfaces between art and official cultural policy, as well as about the subversive dimension of artistic activities which address taboos and arouse controversies, thus formulating alternatives to politically correct narratives. In this sense, art on the border is a question about top-down and bottom-up ways of constructing historical and political discourses, and about the efficiency of art in the context of relations between residents of border zones.

1.3 A CONCEPTUAL TOOLBOX FOR BORDERSCAPING THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER SINCE 1990

In view of its complexity and transdisciplinary character, border art requires an equally transdisciplinary methodology that can take account of the multiple and diverse links between border and aesthetic, and in which the border and border regions are perceived as realms of innovative cultural production and development of aesthetic phenomena.⁴⁸ The book sets out to devise precisely such an innovative, transdisciplinary methodological model based on art history and visual culture studies, within a political, historical and sociological context.⁴⁹ This approach is necessary to analyse the political dimension of artistic and curatorial strategies; the relationship between art, politics, history, and

48 FELLNER 2021, 436–456.

49 PIOTROWSKI 2003. – BRYSON 1992.

daily life in border areas; the nature of subversive elements of this art field; and relations between structural factors and the frequently contingent activities of individual actors in transfer. The core work in art history, itself a fundamentally transdisciplinary field, will thus be supplemented by methodologies from the following areas: sociology, philosophy, cultural anthropology, and political sciences such as border studies, border art studies, migration studies, memory studies, and area studies, so as to facilitate a multifaceted, comprehensive analysis of artistic and curatorial activities. Some of these methods have already been intimated in the section given over to a brief history of the German-Polish border, which features the book's central proposition: that political borders are "drawn" and constructed, not natural, and that they are made by humans/actors.

The works of art analysed in this book engage the unique identity of the German-Polish border as varied, movable, and endlessly in flux, which correlates perfectly with the processual shift in border studies from border to bordering and thence to borderscapes, critical border studies,⁵⁰ and the processual ontology of borders.⁵¹ Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman, proponents of border studies, write: "National territories are not static backdrops to nationalist discourse and politics but, rather, are contingent and dynamic entities."⁵² Thus we recognize such qualities as the dynamism, processuality, and fluidity of borders as inherent aspects of their nature, and perceive them as key to our selection of methodological tools and to our analyses. For ultimately, border art is created in the tensions that arise between the wanderings and migrations of populations, and the phenomenon of the meandering of borders themselves.⁵³

We also take into account the multiplicity shift and complexity shift recently diagnosed by Christian Wille in critical border studies.⁵⁴ These are evidence that the field now not only focuses on processuality but also understands and implements concepts such as borderscapes, borderwork, and bordertextures. Wille stresses that while within the framework of the processual shift the border is defined as social production, and the relevant methodological principles in this case are decentralization and processualization, in the context of the multiplicity shift the border is construed as a multiple process, and the appropriate methods are multidimensionalization and multilocalization.⁵⁵ The complexity shift, in turn, uses a definition of the border as a complex formation, for which the optimal methodologies are texturing and relationing. Most broadly speaking, the main thrust of these critical revisions of the potential of border studies is to accent more strongly the diversity of border-related social practices engaged in by a multitude

50 BRAMBILLA 2015, 14–34.

51 BRAMBILLA / LAINE / SCOTT / BOCCHI 2015.

52 JONES / MERRIMAN 2012, 941.

53 BÖS / ZIMMER 2006, 153.

54 WILLE 2021.

55 *IBID.*, 116.

of heterogeneous actors, agencies, and institutions.⁵⁶ Border art often outruns the theory shifts in this field because artists, like sensitive barometers, have long been drawing attention in their strategies to this multiplicity and complexity in relation to the social practices that are enacted at borders, the German-Polish border being no exception.

Thus, the following methodological concepts will be included in the toolbox: spatial and relational conceptualization of space and borders,⁵⁷ borderscaping,⁵⁸ the critical potential of assemblage,⁵⁹ hauntology,⁶⁰ the phantom border,⁶¹ geopoetics,⁶² limitrophy,⁶³ critical limology,⁶⁴ the aesthetic regime,⁶⁵ the cartographic impulse⁶⁶ and strategies of mapping space,⁶⁷ and art as a medium of memory.⁶⁸ Establishing borders is the intellectual production of meaning in relation to one's own identity, shaped as an inversion of the image of the Other, located outside the border.

Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe emphasize, in turn:

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.⁶⁹

Thus, the methodological perspective adopted in this text is a consequence of the spatial and topological turns, within which space is interpreted as relational and dynamic. According to Doreen Massey, space should be seen as a cut through the myriad stories in which we are all living at any one moment. In this perspective, space and time become intimately connected. Places are processes with multiple identities. Massey encourages

56 *IBID.*, 110.

57 MASSEY 2005. – LÖW / WEIDEHAUS 2017.

58 RAJARAM / GRUNDY-WARR 2007. – BRAMBILLA 2015. – BRAMBILLA / LAINE / SCOTT / BOCCHI 2015. – SCHIMANSKI / WOLFE 2017. – SCHIMANSKI / NYMAN 2021. – HOUTUM 2021. – BRAMBILLA 2021.

59 SOHN 2016.

60 DERRIDA 1993.

61 JAŃCZAK 2016, 211–227. – HIRSCHHAUSEN / GRANDITS / KRAFT / MÜLLER / SERRIER 2015.

62 MARSZALEK / SASSE 2010.

63 DERRIDA 1993.

64 NAIL 2021.

65 RANCIÈRE 2004.

66 REDER (ED.) 2012.

67 CASEY 2012.

68 ASSMANN 1999.

69 SCHIMANSKI / WOLFE 2017, 9.

us to perceive space as “a creative and participatory phenomenon that exists not just around us but also inside us”.⁷⁰

Any spatial sociological conceptualization of the notion of borders has implications not only for inquiry into the various arrangements that shape spaces, for example into networks, regions, topologies, scales, or territories,⁷¹ but also for the research questions posed in respect of border art. This relational understanding of space takes us beyond landscape to an intersection with the memories and imagination of the viewer. In this context, borders themselves should be interpreted as relations between spaces,⁷² and treated as socio-cultural and discursive processes and practices.⁷³ These aspects of spatializing the history of modernity are strongly related to the aesthetic and material aspects of border structures in border art. This relationalism triggers the cultural studies perspective in border research.⁷⁴

The artworks which address the German-Polish border are works of border art, a current defined in the mid-1980s to describe artistic practices on the U. S.-Mexican border:

Border art didn't become a category until the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF). Starting in 1984, and continuing in several iterations through the early twenty-first century, the binational collective transformed San Diego – Tijuana into a highly charged site for conceptual performance art. The BAW/TAF artists were (...) the first to *export* “border art” to other geographic locations and situations.⁷⁵

Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary refers to this phenomenon using expressions such as “art on the border”, “art born from the border”, and “art against the border”.⁷⁶ Thus border art is art rooted in its geo- and socio-political context, and addresses issues such as the status of borders; surveillance; nationality; migrations and identity; and religious, linguistic, cultural, social, and economic difference and diversity. It is not connected with any one particular medium, and makes full use of the whole gamut of means of expression developed by contemporary art, including conceptual practices and activism. From the perspective of border art, the German-Polish border is a regional border rather than a hotspot like that between the U. S. and Mexico or that between Israel and Palestine.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the artworks that address this particular borderscape

70 ZAIDI 2014, 150.

71 LÖW / WEIDEHAUS 2017, 557.

72 *IBID.*, 561.

73 BRAMBILLA 2015, 14.

74 STRÜVER 2005. – DELL'AGNESE / AMILHAT-SZARY 2015.

75 SHEREN 2015, 23.

76 AMILHAT-SZARY 2012, 213.

77 GUINARD 2019, 164.

prove that cultural production and border art can be more than a side-issue in border studies. Art can certainly transform landscapes into borderscapes and artscapes,⁷⁸ and in so doing, draw attention to the dynamic of the border, which is in a constant state of flux. The contemporary German-Polish borderscape is an assemblage of any number of heterogeneous elements, brought together by their implications in the production of border effects.

The concept of borderscape and its version underlining processuality, borderscaping, are naturally crucial to interdisciplinary analyses of works connected with the Oder-Neisse border. According to Schimanski and Wolfe, “[t]his 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.”⁷⁹ The concept of borderscaping could be used as a conceptual and analytical tool for understanding the dislocated, fluid, and dispersed nature of the Oder-Neisse border, which is related to differentiation processes that are continuously stimulated by human interaction. To paraphrase Massey’s thesis on places from the perspective of borderscaping, we could say that borders should not be perceived as lines on maps, but as integrations of space and time, as spatial and temporal events,⁸⁰ where the border is a discursive landscape of competing meanings.⁸¹ Borderscaping is primarily about shaping the border not on the ground, but in people’s mindscapes. It permits the establishment of a powerful connection between processes of social and political transformation, conceptual change, and local experience.⁸² In her analysis of the concept of borderscaping, Chiara Brambilla shows a way in which border experiences can be linked to border representations in border art by redefining borders as a function of the relationship between politics and aesthetics. In the opinion of Anke Strüver, “the construction of borders ‘takes place’ through representations, through performative acts, through acts of narration, visualization, and imagination including their interpretations – and can be conceived as borderscaping”.⁸³ What interests us, then, is the border construed as a “complex choreography of border lines in multiple lived places”,⁸⁴ and this approach treats the performative, participatory and sensuous dimensions of borders as self-evident. Thus, through the lens of borderscaping, it is possible to grasp the dynamic, mobile and multidimensional character of the Oder-Neisse border in space and time.

78 AMILHAT-SZARY 2012, 216–218.

79 SCHIMANSKI / WOLFE 2017, 7.

80 MASSEY 2005, 131.

81 RAJARAM / GRUNDY-WARR 2007, XV.

82 BRAMBILLA / LAINE / SCOTT / BOCCHI 2015.

83 STRÜVER 2005, 167.

84 GIELIS / VAN HOUTUM 2012, 797.

The term assemblage, proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari⁸⁵ in 1987, is close to the concept of borderscaping. According to Christophe Sohn:

[a]ssemblages are heterogeneous and open-ended groupings of material and semiotic elements that do not form a coherent whole but that allow us to explain how different meanings derived from various actors (and thus not only the state) may interact and endure in a contingent and provisional way.⁸⁶

Their critical potential makes it possible to trace the de-territorialization of a border and various practices which connect and disconnect, placing borders within the process of unfolding and becoming.⁸⁷ Borders, including rivers, can play not only a material, but also an expressive role.⁸⁸ Assemblage theory also provides tools for analysis of border art in the context of the designation of the Oder and Neisse as border rivers, a decision that qualitatively changed the established order.⁸⁹ This historic event can be identified as a “far-from-equilibrium attractor” and a bifurcation point (i. e. a threshold).⁹⁰

As border art, then, it can provide an opening for discussion on the potential of art in respect of history, politics, memory, and the aesthetic regime in the German-Polish borderscape. Tools for the interpretation of individuals’ memories and cultural memory provided by memory studies have been inspiringly proposed by Aleida Assmann as part of her thesis on the mediatization of memory.⁹¹ In order to become visible, memory needs media – art media and the exhibition medium.

Assmann’s theory will also be complemented by Jacques Derrida’s hauntology,⁹² which will add to our methodological toolbox instruments that will help to interpret sensitive border narratives in spectral categories. This book sets out to examine examples of artistic activity that have tackled the theme of the Oder and Lusatian Neisse as border rivers, and so it must also discuss the spectres of the past that are so inextricably bound up with the German-Polish border. After Derrida, these spectres are interpreted as phenomena that, while they can manifest themselves, cannot achieve full, saturated, convincing presence, and remain permanently on the verge of disappearing. They thrust their heads and their silhouettes into our world in order to draw attention to themselves, but no sooner have they

85 DELEUZE / GUATTARI 1987.

86 SOHN 2016, 184.

87 *IBID.*, 186.

88 *IBID.*, 185.

89 *IBID.*, 188.

90 *IBID.*, 187.

91 ASSMANN 1999, 149–342.

92 DERRIDA 1993. In this text the term “spectre” is used after Derrida’s concept of “hauntology”. Compare ASSMANN 1999, 171–178, 314–322.

done so than they dissolve into thin air, leaving us changed and disturbed. These spectres “always appear in groups, forming companies and communities, hordes and herds”⁹³ that call forth border narratives,⁹⁴ which in turn bring to light sensitive, unprocessed aspects of mutual relations, both present and past. “A specter is never autonomous; it is above all a trace, more an expression of something else than an independent, separate, discrete entity.”⁹⁵ And, as philosophers have acerbically observed: “The specter is not clear, not sharply defined, and is comprehended only approximately, without clarity; as such, it cannot demand conceptual, fully accessible representation.”⁹⁶ As border rivers, the Oder and the Lusatian Neisse see many such spectres of the past emerge. And artists attempt to conjure these spectres, lend them some form of accessible representation, whether visible or tangible. In the context of Derrida’s hauntology, in relation to art on the German-Polish border since 1990, other terms that should be mentioned include “invisible border” and “phantom border”, which aptly describe the condition of this shifted border and the *Nachleben*⁹⁷ of the line of the pre-1945 border. According to Piotr Piotrowski:

There are also invisible borders inside the “new” margins, which have an even more aporetic character. Since such borders are not stable: they both exist and do not exist simultaneously. We can cross them and at the same time cannot cross. They are very flexible, dynamic, unstable and much more multi-faced in relation to the other margins, such as geographical and cultural margins.⁹⁸

The term “phantom border” also suggests the continuing presence of borders that have been abandoned or shifted. Scholars of this phenomenon emphasize:

Old territorial divisions, like phantoms, seem to brand the contemporary societies of east-central and southern Europe even today. The newly created term – or metaphor – “phantom

93 MARZEC 2015, 2012.

94 NEWMAN 2006b, 152.

95 MARZEC 2015, 132.

96 *IBID.*, 133.

97 The notion of “*Nachleben*” (lit. “afterlife”) may be traced back, via the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, to cultural studies scholar Aby Warburg. As a counter-figure to the chronology and order of a timeline, *Nachleben* represents an unordered image of time beyond persistencies, and follows a temporal and spatial logic of its own. In Warburg’s work, relics or traces from antiquity unexpectedly reappear in the image worlds of later ages, and are reassigned meanings, shredded, and replicated, as Didi-Huberman in his study of Warburg formulates it. Didi-Huberman asks whether there is a time for ghosts or a phantom time in the sense that Warburg meant, in which images return, and the past can live on as unfinished and uncompleted. On Didi-Huberman’s engagement with Warburg, see DIDI-HUBERMAN 2017.

98 PIOTROWSKI 2003.

border” should help to pose the question of the historical conditionality of regional differences or specifics from a renewed perspective. However, it is not only borders, but also regions, that should be called into question as potential “phantoms”.⁹⁹

Further, scholars pose questions as to how defunct borders continue to exert influence, on what actors, and how their continued presence evolves, which seems immensely interesting from the aspect of the artistic strategies adopted in border art. Artistic initiatives on the theme of the German-Polish phantom and (in)visible border inevitably produce narratives alternative to the officially binding version. This is politically engaged, narrative art, and the artists operate like critical geographers, mapping the terrain and redefining the aesthetic regime, taking account of the constant influence of the phantom border. Among the fundamental roles assigned to these art projects are the creation of subversive approaches and the contradiction of existing and officially established historical and personal narratives. Furthermore, particularly works that are created *in situ* and evince a local character pose new questions challenging received scientific and academic theses. By making reference to the fact that political borders are always artificial entities and not naturally occurring phenomena – like rivers, mountains or seas – art can also draw attention to the notion that borders (like nations) are imagined.¹⁰⁰ This is all the more applicable that, as David Newman shows in his texts on the transdisciplinary character of border studies, border regions are in a constant state of flux, which artists find extremely inspiring. A border region affects those living on both sides of the border very strongly; such communities tend to experience it as bridge and forum for interaction rather than in its traditional role as barrier. In the words of spatial semiotics scholar Martin Nies:

Twenty-first-century spatial semiotics no longer focuses ... solely on binary opposite concepts (“own” vs. “other”, “centre” vs. “periphery”, etc.) On the contrary, spatial semiotics ... is expected to be equal to describing all types of space and border constructs in their multiplicity and dynamics, and hence also in respect of their transition and their hierarchy, and in light of the powers that impose those borders.¹⁰¹

But even border art itself is not immune to a certain ambivalence. Pauline Guinard writes that aside from its potential to question or even deny the existence of borders, art of this nature is ambiguous because it can also be a factor in creating borders, or increasing the impact of existing ones, by heightening their reality or raising their visibility.¹⁰² Cristina

99 HIRSCHHAUSEN / GRANDITS / KRAFT / MÜLLER / SERRIER 2015, 7.

100 See ANDERSON 2016.

101 NIES 2018, 9.

102 GUINARD 2019, 163.

Giudice and Chiara Giubilaro argue that borders are not only transformed by these forms of art, but also generated by them (art of *dis-bordering*).¹⁰³ The artistic strategies that play out on, in respect of, and in opposition to borders thus bestow upon them the roles of actor and actant whose presence is indefeasible. One situation of this type, which goes to the extreme of ‘awakening’ the border to intense self-revelation, is described by Jacques Derrida:

Limitrophy is therefore my subject. Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what feeds the limit, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Everything I’ll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply.¹⁰⁴

Though Derrida is here using the term and concept of limitrophy in the context of the status of animals in contemporary philosophy, and is referring primarily to the interspecies boundary, his remarks are inspiring in relation to the notion of borders in general. They show that the purpose of limitrophy is not just to understand and criticize the reasons why borders exist, but also to look carefully at refiguring these borders. It is crucial to understand that deconstruction does not seek to erase or efface the border; its aim is rather to reveal the processes inherent in borderscaping. The most important goal for limitrophy, then, is to move away from the traditional philosophical approach of trying to reduce the differences between two opposing binaries, such as the two sides of a border, in favour of perceiving the border as a dynamic and ambivalent phenomenon.

An analogous ambivalence – if on a different level – is evinced by the border itself: “what demarcates excludes; what separates connects; what is contiguous is always also at a distance: a paradox we cannot escape”.¹⁰⁵ Borders have a binary character: they are both a consequence of historical and political processes, and originators of social order.¹⁰⁶ As the philosopher Tufan Acil has noted, the simultaneously dividing and uniting function of borders was recognized as early as antiquity.¹⁰⁷ Acil also pithily summarizes a further paradox of “natural” borders: “A river, for instance, that flows between two countries, is not a border *in itself*. It only becomes one as a result of a series of historical and social practices (e. g. wars, or political or economic treaties).”¹⁰⁸ This view is described from the

103 GIUDICE / GIUBILARO 2015, 83.

104 DERRIDA 2008, 29.

105 SCHLÖGEL 2016, III.

106 EIGMÜLLER 2006, 55.

107 ACIL 2017, 38.

108 *IBID.*, 71.

sociological perspective by Newman as follows: “As in the case of geographical boundaries, there are no ‘natural’ borders as such – all borders are social constructions, delimited and demarcated by people.”¹⁰⁹

Most of the abovementioned aspects of border studies function within the methodology proposed by Thomas Nail, termed critical limology.¹¹⁰ Within this concept, Nail proposes that borders be perceived as being in constant, recurring movement, in what he terms “patterns of circulation”. He also draws attention to the importance of finding a third way between the currently dominant research trends: critical limology “represents a third methodological approach between a universalist border ‘theory’ and the strictly empirical examination of specific borders.”¹¹¹ To paraphrase Nail’s words, art created in respect of, on, and in opposition to the German-Polish border – in our critical limology-inspired analyses of it – should not be presented either as universal in the context of border art in general, or solely as reduced to its individual attributes:

Critical border studies examines the formation and composition of such historical structures of border preservation without either laying claim to constituting a universal border theory or, conversely, reducing borders to their constituent features.¹¹²

Furthermore, the assumptions of geopoetics as proposed by Kenneth White are essential points of departure for the project methodology. White sets out to describe our attitude to the land and the terrain in which we live. He asks how territory interweaves with thinking and intellectual operations. As White emphasizes, in order to apply geopoetics in scientific research, it is necessary to have a “nomadic mind”, which helps in the interpretation of very specific conditions in border regions. The idea of geopoetics, which now means much more than what White originally proposed, can be applied efficiently in the context of border art studies.¹¹³

One example of this is the term “Auto/bio/geo/graphy”, which comes from the same field, and in relation to contemporary art can function as an effective methodological and interpretative tool.¹¹⁴ Imagined cartographies by artists and curators lead to reflections on cultural mappings beyond the national. Our project also makes reference to methodological research assumptions linked to transculturality. “What arises from the meeting of both (or more) cultures always has some elements of both (or more) cultures but is also

109 NEWMAN 2003, 17.

110 NAIL 2021, 475–489.

111 *IBID.*, 475.

112 *IBID.*, 476.

113 Border art studies is a relatively new field of research; see, most recently, the publications KALLER 2020 and BACCI 2022.

114 RYBICKA 2013, 7–23.

partly different from them and has its unique new characteristics.”¹¹⁵ Transculturality is only noticeable at the point of reception of the work by members of external cultures.¹¹⁶ The aim here is therefore to juxtapose the understanding of the border as a divisional entity, which itself initiates its crossing and perforation, with other categories that would expose more clearly the creative potential of experiences related to this phenomenon, in order to show how artists take up the challenge of shared/separated cities, and shared/separate memories, history, and languages; how actors move into the artists’ field of vision as they cross the border every day; and how various state policies on refugees are reflected in the micro-universe of border regions.

Studies on emigration and migration often also focus on borders and cartographies, just as art historical migration studies enforce new migratory cartographies.¹¹⁷ Historical and contemporary migration routes chosen by migrants and refugees draw attention to the importance of transnational and transcultural research concerning crossing borders and changing places of residence.

We would also echo Ioanna Wagner Tsoni, the author of the book *Affective Borderscapes. Constructing, Enacting and Contesting Borders Across the Southeastern Mediterranean*, in asserting that “the role of affective practices in the modulation of the borderwork undertaken by a variety of actors has been overlooked in public and political discourse, while remaining under-researched”.¹¹⁸ Wagner Tsoni defines the notion of affective borderscapes as follows:

Grounded in border studies, affective geography, migrant liminality and critical mobilities, the notion of affective borderscapes constitutes this study’s original contribution to knowledge. They are conceptualized as liminal, overlapping landscapes which function as contact zones and as charged fields of interaction and affective transmission between shifting configurations of animate and inanimate actors and the powers, politics and imaginaries that permeate them.¹¹⁹

We thus strive to view the borderscape around the German-Polish border as a phenomenon imbued with the affective practices of diverse actors, such as seasonal workers, Polish women seeking abortions in Germany, or travelling artists gaining experience in the border region. Our focus, however, is the way in which the affective character of the borderscape is reflected in the art which takes as its subject this particular border, a

115 ORTIZ 2002, 260.

116 STANIOS 2012, 48.

117 DOGRAMACI 2019, 24–32.

118 WAGNER TSONI 2019, V.

119 *IBID.*



Fig. 2 Burcu Dogramaci, Marta Smolińska, Anne Peschken and Zbigniew Czarnuch in Witnica, November 2019, photo Marek Pisarsky.

border often perceived, stereotypically and superficially, as a line dividing the so-called West from the so-called East. Crossing this border entails deeply affective and embodied consequences; it is motivated by emotional drivers.¹²⁰ Art is a barometer for these emotions and effects that medializes the borderscape as spaces impacted by the generation and transmission of affect.

Our own journey along the German-Polish border, between 2019 and 2022, had an affective dimension, while at the same time fitting well with the methodology of geopoetics and spatial mapping (fig. 2). We travelled the length of the demarcation line, crossing it multiple times and comparing the character of the border assemblage on both sides. We visited towns and cities on it – among them Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice, or *Stubfurt* (fig. 3) – as well as sites such as the ruined fortress of Küstrin/Kostrzyn (fig. 4), observing the heterogeneity and palimpsestic character of this borderscape which has inspired so many artists, not only Germans and Poles.

120 BOCCAGNI / BALDASSAR 2015. – CARLING / COLLINS 2018.



Fig. 3 Burcu Dogramaci with Michael Kurzweily in Słubfurt, photo: Marta Smolińska.



Fig. 4 Anne Peschken, Marek Pisarsky and Burcu Dogramaci in the ruins of the fortress and town of Kostrzyn/Küstrin, November 2019, photo: Marta Smolińska.



Fig. 5a–b Burcu Dogramaci and Marta Smolińska in Frankfurt (Oder), June 2022, photo: Marta Smolińska and Burcu Dogramaci.

Our journey was made in relation to this as a soft border, within the Schengen zone (fig. 5a–b). A painfully stark difference was palpable in the course of a research trip along the U.S.-Mexican border (from San Diego, California, to El Paso, Texas), which is one of the most strongly articulated and powerfully presented hard borders in the world. Moreover, the policy of Donald Trump in all certainty did nothing to support the activity of artists engaged in border art, which made that borderscape all the more depressing.

Perhaps, however, as Brambilla suggests, border (art) studies offers a chance to pursue a politics of hope, and for alternative border futures,

through which people can effectively change the “terms of recognition” within which they are generally trapped, opening up new political spaces of subjectivation and agency that disrupt the hold that borders – deprived of their human complexity and reduced to divisive static lines imprinted on space – have over people’s lives and move towards alternative forms of political arrangements, beyond the contours of present political categorisations.¹²¹

The methodologies outlined above operate in the background throughout the book, and constitute its transdisciplinary theoretical base layer. Border art strategies are construed as tools for constructing the message of politically, anthropologically, and socially

121 BRAMBILLA 2021, 16.

engaged art. Each chapter showcases art on the German-Polish border from a slightly different perspective, however, so that in addition to the methodological tools listed above, the various analyses also adopt individually selected theories which are of relevance in the interpretation of particular artistic strategies. We believe that border art has the potential to play the role of ambassador of the politics of hope, because it has the capacity to create counter-narratives and alternative border futures.

The second chapter stresses the status of the Oder and the Neisse as border rivers; the third concentrates on the role of ruins and remains, but interprets those remnants and vestiges in the context of the future; the fourth addresses border-mapping strategies and travelling practices. The fifth draws attention to the penetrability of the border in respect of migration and language; the sixth focuses on performative actions and re-enactment, in order for us to be able in the seventh to ask about the possibility of “queering”¹²² the border region. Whatever perspective is adopted in a given chapter, the point of departure is always artworks and artistic or artistic strategies that take as their theme the German-Polish border. Some of the works, projects, or performances could have fitted into several of the chapters, but the decision to include them in a particular place in the book was dictated by the thrust of interpretation, requiring emphasis of one aspect more than others.

We hope that this book will initiate intensive debate on the role of art on the German-Polish border and beyond. Our postulate: that the border be perceived as a dynamic phenomenon in humorous form has already found stage form in a routine by the Berlin cabaret outfit Klub Polskich Nieudaczników/Club der Polnischen Versager [Polish No-Hoppers’ Club], which showed a series of visualizations depicting the line of the border between Germany and Poland starting to shift first one way and then the next, annexing areas of territory either side. The border “comes alive”, becoming an actant, and gaining agency independently of politicians’ decisions. It frolics insouciantly now westwards, now eastwards, so drawing attention to the fact that its current position is not innocent, and any attempt to revise its course would entail inconceivable consequences.

Our narration in this book is thus rooted at least partly in our conviction that our subject is delicate and complicated, not to say controversial and imbued with diverse affects, and as such, art history should be practised without any overtones of assuredness. For this very reason, the language of poetry seemed to us especially appropriate for posing questions about borderscaping processes in respect of issues where methodology sometimes appears helpless. Since we began this introduction by quoting poetry, then, we will also end it with a poem – this time *The Border: A Double Sonnet*, by the American poet Alberto Ríos (b. 1952):

122 ZEBRACKI 2017, 442–446.

The border is a line that birds cannot see.
 The border is a beautiful piece of paper folded carelessly in half.
 The border is where flint first met steel, starting a century of fires.
 The border is a belt that is too tight, holding things up but making it hard to breathe.
 The border is a rusted hinge that does not bend.
 The border is the blood clot in the river's vein.
 The border says *stop* to the wind, but the wind speaks another language, and keeps going.
 The border is a brand, the "Double-X" of barbed wire scarred into the skin of so many.
 The border has always been a welcome stopping place but is now a stop sign, always red.
 The border is a jump rope still there even after the game is finished.
 The border is a real crack in an imaginary dam.
 The border used to be an actual place, but now, it is the act of a thousand imaginations.
 The border, the word *border*, sounds like *order*, but in this place they do not rhyme.
 The border is a handshake that becomes a squeezing contest.
 The border smells like cars at noon and wood smoke in the evening.
 The border is the place between the two pages in a book where the spine is bent too far.
 The border is two men in love with the same woman.
 The border is an equation in search of an equals sign.
 The border is the location of the factory where lightning and thunder are made.
 The border is "NoNo" The Clown, who can't make anyone laugh.
 The border is a locked door that has been promoted.
 The border is a moat but without a castle on either side.
 The border has become Checkpoint *Chale*.
 The border is a place of plans constantly broken and repaired and broken.
 The border is mighty, but even the parting of the seas created a path, not a barrier.
 The border is a big, neat, clean, clear black line on a map that does not exist.
 The border is the line in new bifocals: below, small things get bigger; above, nothing changes.
 The border is a skunk with a white line down its back.¹²³

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123 Ríos 2015, 63.

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We sincerely hope that this research and publishing project of ours will set an example for close future cooperation between Polish and German scholars. For us, the *Grenzel/ granica* theme offered an opportunity to build important bridges and initiate meaningful dialogue.

124 We delivered the following contributions at conventions and workshops, presenting themes from our book: conception and moderation of a panel discussion, and delivery of a paper at the international conference *B/Ordering Cultures. Alltag, Politik, Ästhetik* (6th Annual Convention of the Kulturwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft e. V.) at the Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), 08–10. 10. 2020 (panel participants: Jarosław Jańczak, Marcel Bleuler, and Anne Peschken); lecture at the conference *Un/Sichtbarkeit. Die polnische Kunstgeschichte und Deutschland* at Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich, 06–08. 04. 2022; lecture as part of the lecture series *Ruinen aus der Sicht der Kulturwissenschaften. Materialität im Verfall – Nachnutzungen – Umdeutungen* at Hamburg University, 06. 05. 2021; lecture presented on the workshop *Borders – Grenzen und Grenzregionen in Kunstproduktion und Kunsttheorie der Gegenwart*, convention hosted by AG Kunstproduktion und Kunsttheorie im Zeichen globaler Migration des Ulmer Vereins, Berlin, College of Fine Arts, Berlin, 24–25. 11. 2022; lecture as part of the conference *Trauma, Memory, and Counter-Culture. Borders and Border Transgressions in the (Post-)Communist Europe* at the University of Oslo, 01–02. 06. 2023.

125 SMOLIŃSKA 2021. – DOGRAMACI 2022.

2 Border as River – River as Border: The *Fluid* Condition of the Oder-Neisse Border (Art)

Borders and rivers – for rivers in themselves are not borders – at once divide and unite. This paradox becomes particularly pronounced in the context of border rivers, which are phenomena that stimulate the meta-critical discourse on the *fluid* nature of the border itself. As American poet Alberto Ríos writes in one line of the above-mentioned poem *The Border: The Double Sonnet*: “The border is the blood clot in the river’s vein.”¹ The status of this “river’s vein” on becoming a border changes as drastically as if a blood clot had appeared in it, blocking its free-flowing current.

In the 2003 feature film *Lichter/Światła*, directed by Hans-Christian Schmid and set in Frankfurt (Oder) and Stubice, we witness two days in the lives of people for whom the Oder is a border river: a cigarette smuggler, petty traders, lovers, *Gastarbeiter*, migrants from Russia and Ukraine... (fig. 6). For some of them it is a border that they are constantly crossing back and forth; for others, it proves an impenetrable barrier, which relativizes its status as a border river. The Oder is shown several times as the film’s protagonists are crossing it: from the window of a train travelling over the railway bridge, or from the perspective of people trying to cross it illegally, chest-deep in the fast-flowing current and close to drowning, or stepping with trepidation onto the ice-bound river to reach the other bank. The film visualizes the fact that for some the Oder is a soft border, while for others it is a hard border, though one which nonetheless offers the promise of a better life. Among the characters in the film *Lichter/Światła* are migrants from the East. This prompted us to cite the following thesis mooted by Natalia Babina, a Belarusian journalist and writer of Ukrainian nationality – a thesis which, though it originally referred to the river Bug, is no less pertinent for the Oder: “It is not the river that divides, but people.”² It is not only by demarcating borders, e. g. along rivers, that people divide, however, but also in the policies that they then create in respect of those border rivers, which can thereafter become impenetrable barriers despite their banks being connected by bridges.

The bridge, like the border itself and the river, is ambivalent in character. Georg Simmel summarized this as follows:

Only man, as opposed to nature, has the faculty of binding and unbinding, and in this specific manner: that one is always the presupposition of the other. (...) The achievement

1 RÍOS 2015, 63.

2 BABINA 2011, n. p. n.



Fig. 6 *Lichter/Światła*, directed by Hans-Christian Schmid, 2003, screen shot from film.

reaches its zenith in the construction of a bridge. Here the human will to connection seems to be confronted not only by the passive resistance of spatial separation but also by the active resistance of a special configuration.³

These aspects are addressed as themes with reference to the Oder bridges in the project *Brückenschlag/Mosty* (2022) by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art) (fig. 7a–d). This involved the two artists photographing and filming those of the Oder bridges that have been affected by the complex German-Polish history. To paraphrase Simmel's words, one might say that the bridge has now become an aesthetic value in itself, because it not only effects the connection of what has been separated in reality and for practical purposes, but also renders it visible. The two-channel video projection shows that the bridge can constitute an aesthetic value, and that it is a tangible illustration of this phenomenon of dividedness and union. The registration (by drone camera) of the present state of conservation of those bridges on the Oder, the very visual reporting of their ruined condition and unsuitability to serve their intended function of connecting the two banks, is sufficient to convey symbolic meanings relating to the shift of the border, and to launch critically-oriented borderscaping processes. The two-channel projection is constructed in such a way as to offer dynamic – sometimes bird's-eye, other times close-up – views of these broken-off bridges or damaged, bullet-riddled concrete structural elements standing abandoned and isolated mid-river, bereft of their connecting arches. The video *Brückenschlag/Mosty*, then, is ostensibly nothing more than an inventory of the status quo, but the fragmentary state of the ruined bridges at once prompts questions about the Oder as a border river and, after the thesis of Gloria E. Anzaldúa, about the archetypal status of bridges in relation to borders: “Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways,

³ SIMMEL 1994, 407–408.

conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal spaces between worlds”.⁴

Thus the Oder bridges illustrate dramatic stories from German-Polish history. Rada writes: “Although there are not yet 100 bridges over the Oder and the Neisse again as there were before the war . . . , of the 34 border crossings between Germany and Poland, 30 are over bridges.”⁵ Of the hundred bridges that existed before the war, some have vanished without trace, while others still stand as ruins, and it is these that interest Peschken and Pisarsky the most. The bridge in Gartz, blown up in April 1945 by the Germans, was never rebuilt. All that remains are its abandoned piers and the approach road, which ends abruptly. It is these motifs, which testify to the lost function of connection between the two banks of the river, that are captured in the video *Brückenschlag/Mosty*. The approach road is broken off on the riverbank, visualizing eloquently the severed connection and the impossibility of reaching the other side. Not everywhere, then, as Newman stresses, can a border zone be transformed into a transition space:

Not every trans-border region results in the meetings of minds, nor do they necessarily, being about a form of transitional hybridity consisting of a mix of characteristics from each side of the border. Not all peripheral regions can, or want to be, transformed into transition regions.⁶

This is especially true when there are no bridges, or where the bridges that spanned the Oder before the war, and recall the region’s former identity as a cohesive unit of space, now stand in ruins. Peschken and Pisarsky’s video thus reflects the Oder’s status as a border river of problematic character in the historical perspective.

The images of the bullet-riddled remains of the bridge in Fürstenberg, a municipal district of Eisenhüttenstadt, likewise recall the connection that once existed with Kloppitz, today the Polish village of Kłopot. The vestiges of this monumental construction, which was also blown up by the Germans at the end of the war, tower above the Oder as if still waiting to be rebuilt. Tina Stroheker’s words about the razed Lange Brücke in Forst would also seem applicable to the Fürstenberg bridge: “The ruin has survived all these years, as if waiting for something (a border-free age, perhaps).”⁷ Despite Poland’s accession to the Schengen zone – a kind of world without borders – neither has been rebuilt, however. The video made by Peschken and Pisarsky transports the viewer to a vantage point from which they can almost physically experience, above all, the loss of

4 ANZALDÚA / KEATING 2002, 1.

5 RADA 2004, 63f.

6 NEWMAN 2006/a, 181.

7 STROHEKER 2003, 13.



Fig. 7a–d Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *Brückenschlag/Mosty*, 2022, two-channel video installation, courtesy of the artists.



the bridge's fundamental function: connecting the two banks of the river. The topos of dividedness/unity described by Simmel is not applicable to these bridge ruins; division is unequivocally dominant here.

Bridges over border rivers have strategic, military, and political significance. While European Union funds have in recent years financed cycle bridges as a way of encouraging free crossing of the border in order to promote tourism in the Oder region, in the same period, which has been marked by migratory crisis and the separatist politics of the Law and Justice (PiS) government, initiatives of this type in Poland have become increasingly rare. The Oder is often instrumentalized in political repartee between Poland and Germany, for instance in the context of the recent ecological disaster in 2022. The ideologically motivated instrumentalization of this border river by both nations has a long tradition, which was addressed – chiefly from the German perspective – by Uwe Rada in his book *Die Oder. Lebenslauf eines Flusses*, above all in the chapter entitled “Der nationale Fluß. Die Ideologien der Oder”.⁸ Rada, writing the “biography” of the Oder in the late 2000s, was still counting on the development of a common policy on the river by both countries, and ended his disquisition with a relatively optimistic look into the future. He expressed his wish that the Oder might become not a border river but “the Oder as a narrative space in which people tell their stories – stories of war and expulsion, of suitcases finally unpacked, of wishes for the future”.⁹ That future was to unfold differently, however: referencing the separate and contradictory reports on the causes of the ecological disaster on the Oder, one reporter for the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* described current Polish-German relations as “poisoned”.¹⁰ He outlined the Polish government's constant escalation of the ideologization and political instrumentalization of the river, and its very poor relations with its German neighbour. The article also cites opinions printed by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which the *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalist summarizes as follows: “[The *Süddeutsche Zeitung*] compares the state of the [German] Oder to the condition of the poisoned relations between the PiS government and the Polish opposition.”¹¹ Thus the Oder has become a touchstone of not only Polish-German but also Polish-Polish relations.

In this chapter we set out to analyse a selection of initiatives by contemporary artists that directly reference the Oder-Neisse border and draw attention to the two rivers as border rivers. These artworks, among them artworks by Michael Kurzweil, Paweł Althamer, Massimo Bartolini, Hans Hs Winkler, Marc Tobias Winterhagen, Götz Lemberg, Roland Stratmann, and the art duo Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art), focus on

8 RADA 2009, 101–124.

9 RADA 2009, 21–22.

10 KOWANDA 2022, n. p. n.

11 *IBID.*

the fluidity of history, which in 1945 brutally transformed the river that had been the backbone of the Oder region into the border between Germany and Poland. They also take a critical look at the issues of national identities and memories, and the fact that the “ideologically spiked discourse of the PRL [the Polish People’s Republic – translator’s note] Polonized rivers, among them the Oder, designated the ‘natural’ border between Poland and Germany”.¹²

The works of art analysed in this chapter have been divided into three groups: works of subversive cartography; works of border(land)scape mapping, which record the palimpsestic nature of the borderscape; and those that show artistic strategies for crossing the river as border and the border as river. Thus the function of the visual and somesthetic in processes of borderscaping the Oder-Neisse border in border art is a crucial field of inquiry.

2.1 ART AT THE BORDER AS RIVER – RIVER AS BORDER: A NEW METHODOLOGY

The works of art analysed in this chapter engage the Oder and Neisse rivers’ unique identities as non-human agents: various, fluid, shifting, and endlessly in flux. Our methodological tools must therefore be appropriate to their nature and address the question of how art can reflect the condition of river as border or border as river. According to Slovenian historian Marko Zajc: “Rivers were not invented by people. They are natural phenomena with their own dynamics, and can never be completely controlled. However, border rivers are different: they are social and political concepts that people ‘assign’ to natural rivers.”¹³ This scholar stresses that border rivers, like all other borders, are a social fact, but are essentially defined by ‘natural’ rivers: “Due to natural fluvial processes (changing river beds, floods, drying up), border rivers function ‘on their own’, ‘speak for themselves’, and their ‘activities’ have social consequences. On the other hand, human activities influence rivers as well.”¹⁴ It would thus be fair to say that from Zajc’s perspective, rivers, including border rivers, are active agents and non-human actants. This is especially true of the Oder and the Neisse in the processes of borderscaping the Oder-Neisse border. It is also visible in artistic strategies that take into account the socio-political and historical contexts of the German-Polish border assemblage.

Community and environmental sociologist Samer Alatout, in turn, analyses the question of the transformation of river into border river using the example of the Jordan. He

¹² BARCZ 2017, 223.

¹³ ZAJC 2017, 45.

¹⁴ *IBID.*

posits a strong thesis: “that the Jordan River had the misfortune of becoming a *border* ... By turning the river into a border, water became a territorial object.”¹⁵ The consequence of these transformations is the redefinition of “water as a matter of national security”,¹⁶ and this opens up possibilities for the exploitation of the river that often lead to its degradation. Every river that has for political reasons been *designated* a border river “makes apparent the politics of boundary making”.¹⁷ And, we would add, this is a question that is extremely inspiring for artists with links to the border art current.

In turn, referencing a concept devised by theoretician Jouni Häkli, who recasts the border river as “a source of boundary objects that help build trust among the participants of cross-border cooperation”,¹⁸ the Oder and Neisse can also be seen as boundary object(s) with the potential to contribute to building transnational trust. Häkli, studying the Swedish-Finnish borderland, observed: “It is this socio-cultural landscape of (mis) trust, embodied by the Tornio River as a natural boundary, that presents challenges to cross-border cooperation between Haparanda and Tornio.”¹⁹ If we substitute the names of the Oder and Neisse rivers for the Tornio, and the country names Poland and Germany for the names of the Swedish and Finnish towns he mentions, the term “boundary object” can also be employed as a useful, efficient methodological tool in the geographical and political context that interests us here. As Häkli emphasizes: “Besides being a watercourse ... as well as a ‘natural boundary’ marking the edge between two societies, the river is also an intersection of multiple heterogeneous actors, objects and meanings – an interface between two relatively distinct socio-cultural systems ...”²⁰ In this light, the river is seen as a source of boundary objects in cross-border cooperation. In the same context, Häkli comments thus on the theses of Susan Star and James Greisemer,²¹ who introduced the phenomenon of the boundary object:

According to them, boundary object is any concrete or abstract element that people can use as a point of reference in their interactions. This sets two simultaneous demands for boundary objects. First, in order to facilitate common practice between the cooperating parties they have to maximize communication across differences. Second, in order to retain significance and attractiveness they must also maximize the autonomy of the cooperating parties. In practice, boundary objects have to be specifiable through refinements in the context of particular locations and practices without altering the underlying consensus.

15 ALATOUT 2014, 307.

16 *IBID.*, 308.

17 *IBID.*, 310.

18 HÄKLI 2011, 24.

19 *IBID.*, 25.

20 *IBID.*, 26.

21 STAR / GREISEMER 1989, 387–420.

Boundary objects are, thus, both ambiguous and clear at different moments for different purposes.²²

During the terrible floods of 1997, the Oder was catapulted into the role of a border object: at this time of crisis, it suddenly reunited the two nations and generated a role for transnational players. Indeed, old German maps of the Oder region were even consulted in order better to understand the nature of the river, and so to optimize the safety of both banks in the future. The experience of the difficult past created by the Oder river border still plays a role in mutual Polish–German cooperation.²³

Consequently, as border rivers – together defined as boundary object and realm of memory – the Oder and Neisse also play two significant roles: they are presented and represented in such a way that they serve as “a means of overcoming the dividing function of the border”,²⁴ but they are also in fact “a national boundary in the symbolic border landscape”.²⁵ A border river, therefore, functions as boundary object twice over: it can be defined as a forum that is both physical and representative, but also symbolic (“as a two-fold boundary object: as a representational and symbolic space”²⁶). Both these forms of visibility are great sources of inspiration in the creation of artworks and projects that bridge the Oder and Neisse and connect the two populations.

Human-environment geographer Kimberley Anh Thomas argues that the phenomenon of border flows has not been critically analysed in border studies as deeply as the concept of the border itself. She thus proposes “the *river-border complex* as a conceptual framework for reconfiguring international rivers and borders as synergistic and interdependent”.²⁷ Although her theses were developed within the field of human-environment geography, they may be adapted for use in border art research methodology, because they stress the dynamic, fluid historical and political character of the river as border and border as river, as the artistic strategies examined in this book show. Thomas’s words below – formulated in the context of water management issues – bring this propinquity yet more sharply into focus in correlation with Christophe Sohn’s border assemblage concept referenced in the preface:

The river-border complex is a malleable concept for facilitating analyses of international rivers not as watercourses that cross national borders but as synergistic interactions of rivers and borders. This concept applies equally to transboundary rivers in all their forms, in the

22 *IBID.*, 25–26.

23 *BEST 2007*, 37–79, 98–264..

24 *HÄKLI 2011*, 31.

25 *IBID.*

26 *IBID.*, 34.

27 *THOMAS 2017*, 36.

recognition that rivers and borders may intersect once, or multiple times, or even coincide. Instead of employing straightforward definitions that portray international rivers as an unproblematic fact, my goal is to reveal the processual, constructed and contested nature of international rivers by tracing the historical events and political decisions that produce these features.²⁸

Thus rivers incontrovertibly function as meaningful objects in the context of day-to-day borderscapes practices, and the Oder and Neisse are no exception. Their role as fluid demarcation line is reinforced by means of certain symbolic undertakings (whether conducted orally, recorded in writing, or enacted); by the same token, however, their significance in this respect can equally well be undermined by other practices. How, then, are border rivers, or rather the whole complexity of the river-border complex, interpreted by artists: as a border, or rather as a boundary object, a channel of communication, a realm of memory for both Germans and Poles, a privileged place for writing history (of the Future)? The meta-critical potential of border rivers is summarized accurately and succinctly by Thomas: “international rivers cannot exist without national borders. That international rivers are conditional on the existence of a border compels the question: What is a border?”²⁹ Border rivers thus constantly stimulate the formulation of questions regarding the nature of the border itself, which is why they are so intensely inspirational for artists in their profound examination of the essence of the border.

2.2 BORDER ART AS SUBVERSIVE CARTOGRAPHY OF RIVERS AS BORDERS

From a borderscapes perspective, the river-border complex and assemblage theory, the mapping of issues surrounding de-territorialization, and the “where” of the Oder-Neisse border are very relevant. De-territorialization, in contrast to territorialization as the historical process by which an assemblage gains stability, refers to an intervention that destabilizes an assemblage.³⁰ The actions of artists like Joan Giroux, Michael Kurzwelly, and Roland Stratmann, who may be called subversive cartographers, can be seen in terms of such interventions. Questioning the ‘where’ of the border draws attention to its shifting and changing location,³¹ which is particularly striking in their subversive practices connected with maps visualizing the German-Polish borderscape. In the borderscapes

28 *IBID.*

29 *IBID.*, 35.

30 SOHN 2016, 186.

31 BRAMBILLA 2015, 19.



Fig. 8 Joan Giroux, *The Relentless Presence of Absence*, 2001, installation, photo Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

process, these artists bring to the fore hidden geographies,³² and de-territorialize the Oder-Neisse border assemblage. These micro-narratives stress the character of this border as a human construct, and attempt to re-establish or re-de-territorialize the Oder region as the undivided whole that can be seen on old maps.

In this context we use “subversiveness” to mean this “takeover” or “usurpation” of cartography, and its modification, to produce an imagined geopolitics that includes visible and invisible histories and contested memories. The etymology of the word “subversion” suggests criticism: it speaks of deliberate action directed against its object – its “overturning”, “transformation”, or even “destruction”.³³ Subversion rocks existing hierarchies and calls the binding b/order into question. Eva Holling,³⁴ in turn, notes that subversiveness is always the domain of the weaker, and is deconstructivist in character.

As part of the exhibition series *Dialogue of Things* staged in the regional museum in the Polish town of Myślibórz in 2001 and curated by the artist duo Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, American artist Joan Giroux created a site-specific installation entitled *The Relentless Presence of Absence* (fig. 8). She gathered old and new maps of the German-Polish border region and stacked them in a glass display case. On top of the case she laid a number of axes that she had found in the museum’s collection. The

32 BRAMBILLA / LAINE / SCOTT / BOCCHI 2015.

33 RONDUDA 2006, 9.

34 HOLLING 2012, 26 f.

older maps showed the Oder region as an undivided whole, in which the Oder was not depicted as a border river. This was Giroux's visualization of the concept of the "Oder region" – a concept that has since fallen into oblivion, because with the course of history it has ceased to describe what was once the essence of its meaning. The axes symbolized the point at which the region was bisected, and the political forces that with one blow violently split it, catapulting it into a state of far-from-equilibrium. In an interview with Uwe Rada, Pisarsky stressed that the public's reactions were unequivocally negative: "People were livid; even local dignitaries were incensed ... Evidently Mysłibórz was not ready to see the theme of border demarcation portrayed in this way."³⁵ The unveiling of this work in the German-Polish border region in 2001 set in train all kinds of processes related to borderscaping and revealing the processual nature of the border. Processuality is particularly characteristic of the German-Polish Oder-Neisse borderscape, which was long viewed as insecure and temporary by the residents of these "Recovered Territories" of Poland, as they were sometimes known. Giroux's work laid bare the merciless presence of the absence of both the Oder region and the people who had inhabited it before 1945. The artist herself studied the constantly changing character of the borderscape precisely in order to call forth hordes of spectres. Her intention was that visitors to the exhibition, in dialogue with these spectres, would develop their own, individual angle on the region's history, free of stereotypes and antipathy towards the Other from across the border. Guinard³⁶ stresses that border art has the potential to become a new medium for cartography and geography; as Giroux's installation showed, however, geography in this form can often be very delicate, challenging long-held taboos.

Although the Oder region in its historical form no longer exists, several alternative and subversive cartographic initiatives have been undertaken to revive the memory of the unity that once existed between the river's two banks. One such was Michael Kurzwelly's founding of *Stubfurt* (fig. 9a), a town straddling the border, encompassing the Polish town Słubice and the German Frankfurt (Oder): "Słubfurt is the first city worldwide being located halfly [sic] in Poland and halfly in Germany. The city has been created in 1999. Since 2000 it is registered in the European City Index (ECI)."³⁷ Kurzwelly is aware of the fact that: "Divided cities are the wounds of history. The large ones cause suffering in the consciousness of the world, like the once-divided Berlin and the divided Jerusalem; the small ones only worry their neighbours."³⁸ It is with and for these neighbours that the artist launched the initiative to found *Stubfurt*.

35 RADA 2004, 214.

36 GUINARD 2018, 175.

37 KURZWELLY n. d.; SŁUBFURT E. V. n. d./d. [sic!]

38 JAJEŚNIAK-QUAST / STOKŁOSA 2000, 9.

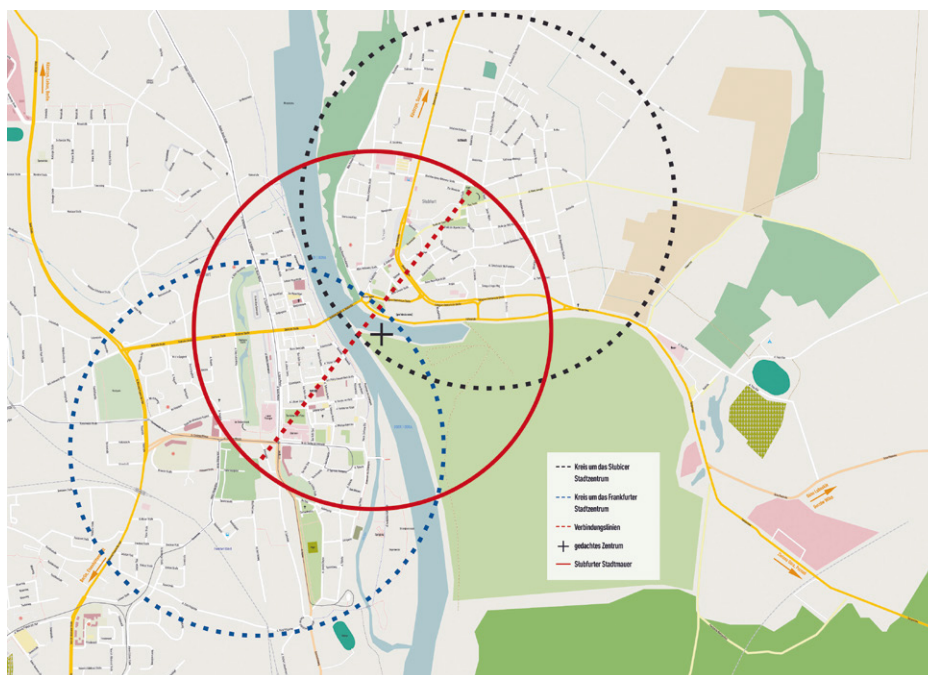


Fig. 9a Michael Kurzwelly, *Map of Stubfurt*, 1999 ongoing, courtesy of the artist / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

This fictitious town has its own parliament, language ('Stübfurtisch'),³⁹ municipal coat of arms, newspaper – *Profil*,⁴⁰ and even founding charter, drawn up by students at the European University Viadrina.⁴¹ In the city's official history, in the section tellingly entitled *Erased Border* (Ger. *Ausradierte Grenze*, Pol. *Wymazana granica*), we read:

Back in 1999, a few farsighted citizens of both towns realized the immense potential to be had from giving Frankfurt and Stubice a new future, one that would both tackle the crises of identity of those living on both sides of the Oder and restore to both towns a 360-degree scope of action. They developed the bold plan to restructure the two towns as one joint one.... This means that Stübfurt is the first town anywhere in the world to be growing out of the future into the present, so to speak, and hence also to be changing its view of the past.⁴²

39 See also chapter 5 in this volume.

40 SŁUBFURT E. V. n. d./a.

41 KURZWELLY 2019.

42 SŁUBFURT E. V. n. d./b.

In this context, the Oder is no longer a border river, and as a current between times is more present- and future-oriented.

Kurzweily defines *Stubfurt* both as a construct of reality and as “the utopia on the Oder”.⁴³ He sees the river as the city’s backbone, as what binds it together rather than what divides it. For Jouni Häkli, it functions as a boundary object that activates transnational communication and acts as a medium by which the divisive function of the border can be overcome. Tim Wiese of Deutschlandfunk Kultur, who interviewed Kurzweily in November 2019,⁴⁴ believes that this fantasy town has brought a great deal of civil engagement to the border region. In this context, the Oder bridge in *Stubfurt* takes on particular significance, because it no longer plays the role of national border, but is a key artery of communication and interaction between the two halves of this fictitious, idealistic city, more a phantom border than a barrier, because a remarkable microclimate flourishes in the space between the cultures there.⁴⁵ As an artist and curator, Kurzweily holds the firm conviction that art is the best medium for initiating borderscapes and producing multidimensional border effects on the Oder border. Through his artistic practice, he reveals the water’s social and spatial dimensions, initiating a “hydrosocial cycle”⁴⁶ with differentiated encounters. Since 2010, *Stubfurt* has been the capital of *Nowa Amerika* – another of Kurzweily’s constructs of reality (see fig. 42), “which has made it possible to gain new space on both sides of the Oder and the Neisse”.⁴⁷ The Oder, and its extension the Neisse, thus functions as the backbone not only of *Stubfurt*, but also of the wider *Nowa Amerika*, a federation comprising four states: “Szcztetinstan”, “Terra Incognita”, “Lebuser Land”, and “Schlonsk”. Throughout this territory, as in *Stubfurt*, the Oder is seen not as a river border, but rather as a boundary object that binds the borderscape together across national divides, and supports mutual socio-cultural communication between diverse actors. The border itself is thus deliberately blurred.

“The demise of one world and the inception of another is always a time of maps. Map times mark the transition from one order of space to another.”⁴⁸ The Oder on Kurzweily’s maps is an epistemic focal point,⁴⁹ conceived by those in power after World War II as a border river, and reconceived by the artist as subversive cartographer as a river flowing through the de-re-territorialized border assemblage. Even the flag of *Nowa Amerika* features a blue, biomorphic line that can be identified with the Oder and the Neisse.

43 KURZWELLY 2019, n. p. n.

44 *IBID.*

45 SLUBFURT E. V. n. d./d.

46 HOLT 2019, n. p. n.

47 SLUBFURT E. V. n. d./c. On *Nowa Amerika*, see also chapter 4 in this volume.

48 SCHLÖGEL 2016, 62.

49 GÜNZEL / NOWAK 2012, 3.

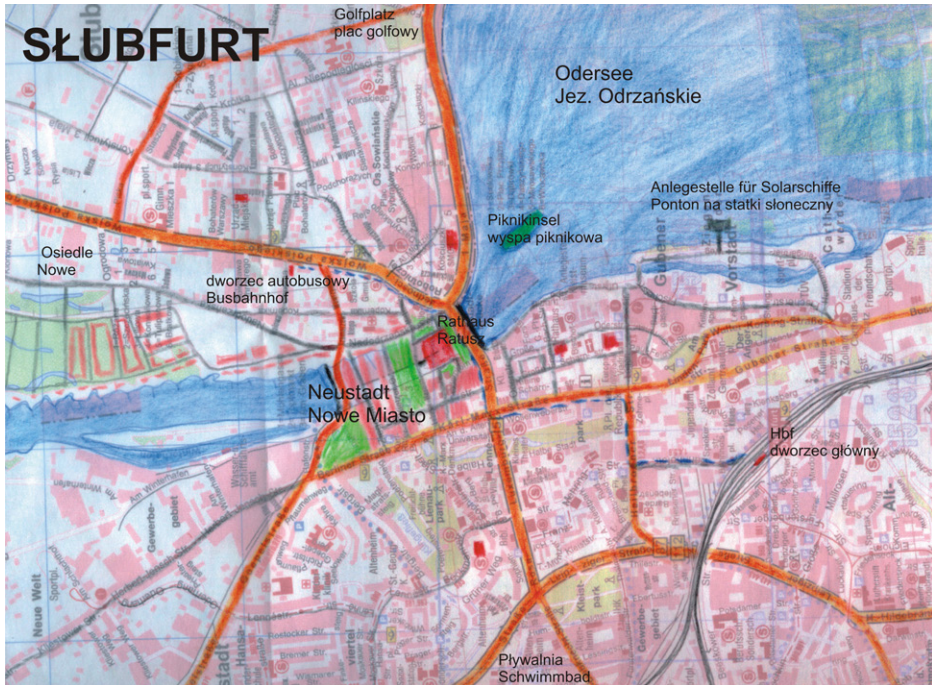


Fig. 9b Michael Kurzweily, *Urban revitalization plan for the town of Stubfurt*, 2020, courtesy of the artist / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

Both *Stubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* are shown on maps displayed in locations such as the websites of the two utopias. Kurzweily became a cartographer and mapped these fictitious, idealized spaces in great detail, thinking up new geographical names for them. In his artistic strategy he developed a subversive mode of cartographic thinking⁵⁰ – a narrative form of art in which he acts like a critical geographer mapping the border assemblage, questioning the “where” of the border, and, as Jacques Rancière would say, redefining the aesthetic regime. In this borderscaping process, he subversively visualizes a new, better world, one in which the Oder is no longer a border river.

For 2020, Kurzweily planned a revitalization of *Stubfurt*, and recorded his vision on a revitalization plan.⁵¹ (fig. 9b). He paid most attention to the Oder as border river and to the bridge over the Oder: the bridge on the map was very wide, culverting a large area of the river’s surface within the town. He envisaged a new quarter, designated “Neue Siedlung” on the revitalization plan. *Stubfurt* town hall was to be sited on this widened bridge, alongside other buildings and green spaces. In his vision, Kurzweily

50 Cf. REDER 2012, 10–13.

51 SLUBFURT E. V. n. d./e.

the subversive cartographer thus bound the two banks of the Oder even closer together, and created yet more shared spaces than there are today. The extended surface of the Oder bridge would replace the existing narrow bridge and activate the Oder as boundary object more intensively: as a stage for transnational communication and for German-Polish exchange.

Moreover, in his cartographic work, Kurzwelly refers to the cultural memory of the region's inhabitants as it is inscribed in maps. The cultural theorist Aleida Assmann avers that memory needs media for self-presentation, and to allow itself to be narrated.⁵² She lists the media of memory as writing, image, bodies, and places. We would say that Kurzwelly as the founder of *Stutfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* employs all these media of memory; the map is an image that shows places and contains writing. Behind it there are also bodies: that of the artist himself, who altered the maps as a form of provocation, and those of the residents of both utopias. Thus this is not only a project addressing the question of “What would happen if the Oder were no longer a border river?”; these are fluid assemblages and river-border complexes that are even portrayed on maps as borderscapes of competing meanings, connecting different communities.

Roland Stratmann, in contrast, in his 2020 video piece *Land/Kraj* (fig. 10), makes poetic reference to the Oder-Neisse borderscape, playing with a metaphor employing land surveyors. The following text is displayed first in Polish, then in German, and finally gradually dissolved in water:

It is neither Oder nor Neisse that divide us,
 It is the mothers and fathers
 Of the eternal land surveyors.
 Our children wade nimbly into the wet;
 but the constant current saturates the bodies
 and divides them up into homoeopathic doses.

These six poetic lines are written in red paint on a light background, and as the water ebbs and flows, the letters dissolve in the liquid and become illegible. One feels as if it were blood staining the water, and as though the words were written on one of the banks of the Oder or the Neisse. The dated expression “Landvermesser” instead of “Geodät” for “land surveyor” – who is, moreover, described as “eternal” – and the reference to previous generations (the “mothers and fathers”) all convey an impression of a temporal palimpsest. Stratmann may be said to have shown the Oder as a current between times. He also intimates the role of cartography and of the land surveyors who measured and mapped the processes of the border shifts. The Oder and Neisse saturate

52 ASSMANN 1999, 149–339.



Fig. 10 Roland Stratmann, *Land/Kraj*, 2020, video, screen shots, courtesy of the artist / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

the bodies and divide them up into homoeopathic doses – human bodies are fragile and have no chance of withstanding the violated history that was enacted and officially confirmed by land surveyors on maps in 1945: “space *per se* was to be wherever land surveyors shifted it to”.⁵³ The visual and semantic force of Stratmann’s video piece lies in the figure of the Oder-Neisse border, which has been a witness to the complexity of

53 KEHLMANN 2009, 115.

German-Polish neighbourhood since the end of World War II. The trauma caused by this bifurcation point in the border assemblage is shared by both nations, but water also has the power to heal – and perhaps such power in the Oder is discernible in the video piece *Land/Kraj*. It is the spectres of the past that still divide the Poles and the Germans, not the border rivers themselves; these, as boundary objects, also have the potential to unite the two countries. Cartographic imaginations can have performative force and are able to create a counter-hegemonic borderscape not only on the map, but also in people’s mindscapes.

Giroux displayed real maps in order accurately to question the “where” of the border, and used these maps as far-from-equilibrium attractors. Kurzweily and Stratmann, in turn, created alternative histories and maps as forms of intervention with which to defamiliarize the borderscape. In this borderscape they find a variety of actors and myriad stories. According to Brambilla and Pötzsch, “[m]aps were instrumental to the process of occupation through the inscriptions of borders, functioning as cartographic in(ter)ventions ...”.⁵⁴ Thus subversive cartography as a strategy of making the Oder-Neisse border in/visible offers a critical angle on German-Polish history, stressing the possibility of perceiving these “troubled waters” as an interface resulting from the transformation of a hard border into a soft border.

2.3 THE PALIMPSESTIC CHARACTER OF THE ODER BORDERSCAPE

“The story of the river reflected through layers of human and ecological history is a palimpsest – yet without the erasure – which allows glimpses of past mantles that the land has inscribed on its skin.”⁵⁵ The palimpsestic character of the Oder landscape is visualized in three very diverse photographic projects: *Land ohne Übergang – Deutschlands neue Grenze* (*Land sans Transition*) by Joachim Richau (1990–1991), *Odra_Rhein_Oder_Ren* (*The Oder_The Rhine*) by André Köhler (2004–2006), and *O_D_E_R-Cuts. Portrait einer Grenz.Fluss.Landschaft* (*Portrait of a Border.River.Landscape*) by Götz Lemberg (2019–2020).

Richau embarked on a journey along the German-Polish border with his camera directly after the fall of the Berlin wall. His photographs, taken in the years 1990–1991, were published together with texts by Wolfgang Kil in the book *Land ohne Übergang – Deutschlands neue Grenze*, released in 1992 by ex pose Verlag (fig. 11a–e). They are consistently black and white, and focus above all on elements of border staffage: posts in the colours of Poland or Germany, signs warning of the border between the two

⁵⁴ BRAMBILLA / PÖTZSCH 2017, 69.

⁵⁵ SPRINGETT 2019, 91.

countries, fences, barbed wire, and the Oder and Neisse as border rivers that divide more than they connect. Bridges stand in ruins, and their state, as shown by the work *Brückenschlag/Mosty* (2022) by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art) analysed above, has not changed since World War II. Richau also looks at the network of railway tracks that once connected the whole of the Oder region but have now been dismantled, concreted over, or become overgrown with weeds. He selects his motifs and frames his stills in such a way as to depict the Polish-German border as the eponymous *Land ohne Übergang*, a place whose fences, locked gates, blockades, and wire mesh-connected posts are designed to act as deterrents, and which is branded with the presence of the Oder without bridges to connect its two banks. Furthermore, Richau's camera picks out amid this heterogeneous assemblage vestiges of military architecture, and a plethora of roads abruptly broken off, since the delineation of the border on the Oder-Neisse line now leading nowhere at all. On many of the shots, the framing places viewers uncomfortably close to the photographed objects, which produces the impression that one might injure oneself on the barbed wire, or find oneself in a situation with no way out, forced up against a fence, a locked gate, or a bullet-riddled concrete bridge pier. This is a visual border narrative oriented towards the past, one that registers the status quo in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 watershed, in which the leading role was played by all manner of elements serving the staging of the border and the reinforcement of its presence in the landscape. Richau shows a borderland palimpsest in which those means and strategies of manifesting the power of the border are superimposed on nature: border markers stand in a field, a fence extends out into the sea, a sign is overgrown with reeds, a mesh wire fence stretched between concrete posts drowns in a field of cereal and leans as if bowing to the ears that ripple in the wind. There is no sun; the sky is overclouded, grey, and menacing. Otherwise, the border zone remains empty, or rather abandoned, because human figures – such as the one visible in the distance on the bridge in Schwedt – are rare. Everyone keeps away from the border zone. In the GDR period, as Kil⁵⁶ mentions in his texts accompanying Richau's photographs, it was consistently termed the *Oder-Neisse-Friedensgrenze* – which at the same time served to mythologize it as a place of danger: “Anyone who passed the posts on their way down to the water might reasonably worry whether they weren't already doing something illicit. Only the ducks, the grebes, the storks and the herons had no idea of politics.”⁵⁷ These non-human actors, who crossed the border back and forth freely, are not visible on Richau's photographs, however. These focus more on reflecting the mythologization of the German-Polish border as a place of danger, as a demarcation line beyond which is the Other.

⁵⁶ KIL 1992, 26.

⁵⁷ *IBID.*, 27.





Fig. 11a–e Joachim Richau, *Land ohne Übergang – Deutschlands neue Grenze*, 1990–1991, photographs, courtesy of the artist.

Kil contrasts the Oder and the Neisse with the Rhine:

The Rhine is fine; the Rhine has made it. (...) The Neisse and the Oder have a different reputation. Do they have a reputation at all? For the West Germans, these two rivers have not to date even featured in their domestic geography. The Oder and the Neisse? Even for those who lived in the far-flung exclave of West Berlin they were “on the other side”, somewhere in the misty infinity of the East.⁵⁸

58 *IBID.*, II.

And so Richau and his camera plunged into that misty zone, but studied less what was beyond the border than the border itself as an embodiment of the mythology of danger. In his texts accompanying Kil's photographs, he employs metaphoric language, writing that it is still only a thin skin that has grown over the wound left by the war,⁵⁹ adding: "On the Oder and the Neisse, the state of emergency was never really lifted. Perhaps here it was even easier to comprehend that small but decisive difference: Not peace, only a ceasefire."⁶⁰ The atmosphere in Richau's photographs seems to reflect this tension in the air, this "ceasefire", and the name *Friedensgrenze* (*peace border*) sounds completely absurd in this context.

Richau kept to the German side of the border, as evidenced by the precise information on the names of the places where the various photographs were taken. This project is not even about looking towards the Other or the Alien, or towards the *terra incognita* on the other side of the Oder and Neisse border rivers, but above all about examining the absolutely tangible course of the border itself. After 1989 it was at last possible to get up close to it, touch it, perform the affective act inherent in the strategy of critical borderscaping. Although the infrastructure reinforcing the demarcation line is in numerous places in poor condition and the border seems "unsealed", the force of its presence in the landscape is still striking. The impression of a protracted lack of contact between Germany and Poland is further intensified by the presence of the ruined bridges and lack of actors that might bring life into this dead zone. On Richau's photographs, the border assemblage is not a transit zone, a conduit, but a place as if frozen in time, full of melancholy, and oppressive in its mood. The bifurcation point that was 1989 did little to alter this – this is the border narrative developed by Richau, who focuses consistently on myths, whether founded in the collective or the individual memory, on the impossibility of crossing over onto the Polish side, and even on fetishizing the architecture of the border and its markings.

Köhler, by contrast, accompanied as photographer the *Odra Ren 2004 – granice na rzece* [Oder Rhein 2004 – Borders on the River] (fig. 12a–b) literary cruises organized by the Heinrich von Kleist Museum in Frankfurt (Oder) to mark Poland's accession to the European Union.⁶¹ Later, fascinated by the subject of river borders, he travelled alone, photographing the Oder and immersing himself in the layers of history recorded in the palimpsestic fluvial landscape. He compared the places he visited with their former appearance as known from postcards dating from the 1920s and 1930s, when the Oder was a constitutive feature of the region. Köhler kept to the riverbanks, and the road and rail bridges linking Poland and Germany are a frequent subject of his work. There are no people to be seen on his photographs, which seem melancholy, empty, and abandoned. Their monochrome poetics further heighten this effect. In the words of Felix Ackermann:

59 *IBID.*, 58.

60 *IBID.*, 59.

61 WYRWOLL 2011, 8.



Fig. 12a–b André Köhler, *Odra Ren* 2004, 2004–2005, photographs, courtesy of the artist.

“The German-Polish border is a natural accumulation of melancholy.”⁶² Other favourite motifs that he employs are ruins, empty buildings, and idle post-industrial sites. These are places where the presence of spectres from the Oder’s past as a border river is palpable. As Esther Kinsky stresses in her text *Szlakiem rzeki, szlakiem granicy/Flussweg, Grenzweg*, Köhler’s photographs taken by the Oder “are striking and moving in the emptiness that wreaths the river, and the landscape of abandonment”.⁶³ Renata Wyrwoll, in turn, posits that Köhler’s project is not about travelling in time; on the contrary, she avers: “these photographs are suffused with an absence of time, regardless of whether they show empty riverbank landscapes, architecture, or large-scale industry”.⁶⁴ It is impossible not to take issue with this statement, however, because the Oder landscape is imbued with temporality by its very palimpsestic character. Moreover, Köhler depicts the river as a realm of memory which concentrates within itself the memory of the expellees, of whom all that remains is this sense of abandonment. The traces of their past presence are still perceptible and recognizable, and the Oder’s time as a boundary object has clearly not yet come.

Lemberg, in turn, travelled by boat from Eisenhüttenstadt to Szczecin, every kilometre making a photographic “cut” into the landscape on either side of the river. He also took a few photographs of the borderscape, in order to create and present a full image, or portrait, of the Oder region beyond its banks, and to expose how different meanings emanating from a range of actors can interact in the processes of borderscaping (fig. 13a–c). According to Ysanne Holt:

rivers prompt considerations of time and memory, of local, regional, and national identities and, crucially here, of the bioregional – referring to those areas with similar plant, animal, and topographic features that define them over and above the politically organised regions of countries, nations, etc.⁶⁵

Schimanski and Wolfe (2017) suggest that borders can have a life of their own, producing border effects after their original installation. Lemberg shows the Oder-Neisse assemblage’s own life as time-space compression, tending to focus on the unity of bioregional and topographic features, and avoid emphasis of the Oder’s role as a soft border river. Most of the frames depict water, the horizon, and the sky; the rest portray landscapes, small towns, and villages on both sides of the river. Several of the photographs show some of the 30 bridges that connect the two banks, making day-to-day border crossing possible. He does not take photographs of the bridges that still stand as ruins, in order

⁶² ACKERMANN 2009, n. p. n.

⁶³ KINSKY 2011, 85.

⁶⁴ WYRWOLL 2011, 9.

⁶⁵ HOLT 2019, 3.



Fig. 13a–c Götz Lemberg, *O_D_E_R-Cuts. Portrait einer Grenz.Fluss.Landschaft*, 2019–2020, photographs, courtesy of the artist/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.



Fig. 13b



Fig. 13c



to familiarize the borderscape for viewers. He avoids calling forth spectra, which could call into question the “where” of the border.

In some places, Lemberg deliberately blurs the far-from-equilibrium attractors and the differences between the Polish and the German sides; elsewhere, however, he focuses instead on the marked contrasts in appearance of the Polish and German border markers, assiduously underscoring the river’s character as border. If he photographs signs marking the border, he often shows them as abstract compositions of white and red, or black, red, and yellow geometric figures. This artist thus attempts to deconstruct the border as a product of symbolic differences and territorialization.

In his photography, Lemberg maps the Oder region in visual form as boundary object and as a whole artificially bisected by the line of the river which at once divides and unites it. He investigates borders not as frozen entities exclusively connected to the territorial limits of nation-states, but as relational, mobile, contested sites, thereby exploring “alternative border imaginaries *beyond the line*”.⁶⁶ The photographer takes advantage of the spatial turn and observes the space as artistic material, working *with* it and not merely *in* it. His genre is geopoetics and the phenomenology of space; he surveys the region of the Oder as a heterogeneous border assemblage, and recognizes aspects that others including Schlögel have characterized:

What was once Germany’s east was in a single historic second recast as Poland’s west. The homeland lost by one community became the homeland for another that had itself lost its own homeland further east. Landscapes with pasts such as these have dramatic stories to tell. Of course, one has to be capable of reading them and giving them voice. For this, an immense sensitivity is necessary, in order to do justice to radically diverse experiences, and the senses must be trained in order to render such places transparent and open them up... The result is not banal local, provincial stories, but large-scale history in miniature, micro-histories from the territory of German-Polish relations.⁶⁷

Lemberg listens and looks with great sensitivity into the Oder landscape, and is alive to the myriad dramatic stories it has to tell. These are not legible from the photographs themselves, however, because the disparities between Poland and Germany are not always discernible at first glance. Nonetheless, this is a region where the two nations meet and the phenomenon known in border studies as the “cross-border citizen” has been described.⁶⁸ Borderscapes are spaces of differentiated encounters. This is confirmed by the many bilingual signs on the photographs in the O_D_E_R-Cuts cycle. The border

⁶⁶ BRAMBILLA, 2015, 17.

⁶⁷ SCHLÖGEL 2008, 13.

⁶⁸ HAECKEL / POELZL 2017, 8–15.

region affects the people on both sides of the border greatly – but as bridge and forum for interaction, in contrast to its traditional role as barrier. This is evident in Lemberg’s images. Rada asks rhetorically: “But are rivers not always something that not only divide people and landscapes, but are also shared by people and landscapes?”⁶⁹ Lemberg’s photographs therefore focus on bilingual shop signs and advertisements, which in this ‘gentle’ way point to the palimpsestic, multidimensional, and heterogeneous nature of the border assemblage. They tend to focus on the moment, with birds and clouds passing over the river, completely ignoring the existence of the national border.

While the Oder borderscape functions in this project as a single whole, then, it also surprises viewers in its division and fragmentation. This ambivalence arises not only out of the motifs featured in the photographs, but also out of the non-mimetic modes of expression used by Lemberg, while the semantics of the title – *O_D_E_R-Cuts* – references incisions, fragments, and details, and the formation of this hybrid, artificial word further emphasizes these aspects. According to Brambilla, such a dynamic way of looking at borders could be defined as both *kaleidoscopic* and *double*:

It is a gaze that, just like the lens of a kaleidoscope, is able to grasp the ‘variations’ of borders in space and time, transversally to different social, cultural, economic, legal, and historical settings crisscrossed by negotiations between a variety of different actors, and not only the State.⁷⁰

It offers a portrait of the borderscape and of the Oder as border river that bisects the Oder region, while paradoxically also lending it a common identity and uniting it into a whole, if not a coherent one. Lemberg offers a visualization of the phenomenon of the German-Polish border assemblage described by Schlögel also as the political fragmentation of the region. Rada asks: “Is the ‘spirit of the Oder’, then, one of advanced inner discord? Its song an unfinished composition devoid of inner harmony and without an audience that might – at least shyly – have applauded it?”⁷¹ In his photographs, Lemberg might seem to be playing with this fragmentation and inner disharmony, but he is also attempting to bestow some harmony on the composition and to invite an audience that would perceive the Oder region as a poetic palimpsestic assemblage. This is why his work incorporates panoramic compositions created out of individual images of the Oder, the bank, and the sky above it. The white gaps between the photographs mark the time that passes between the individual frames taken at one-kilometre intervals. This creates a mesh that, like the Oder itself in its role as border river, both dissects the borderscape and

69 RADA 2004, 242.

70 BRAMBILLA 2015, 25.

71 RADA 2009, 17.

binds it together. These – to all appearances neutral – photographs therefore represent not a landscape by the river, but a borderscape, and thus offer us a stimulus by which to rethink borders through the relationship between the politics and aesthetics in which the Oder borderscape is cast. Thus, Lemberg makes border photography, although his photographs do not show “walls, barriers, fences, gates, lines cut in the forest, watch towers, spotlights, stop signs, soldiers and strict faces”.⁷² The artist uses the camera subjectively to visualize “overcoming the socially constructed imaginations of belonging to a certain place and of the need for a spatial fixation”.⁷³ In the photographs in the O_D_E_R-Cuts cycle, however, one can sense the power of the invisible, soft border, which becomes apparent in small details like bilingual inscriptions or border posts. Lemberg’s project thus differs exponentially from the border narratives proposed by Richau and Köhler, which went so far as to celebrate the visibility and oppressiveness of the border and the severed connection between the two banks of the Oder. All three projects, nonetheless, created as they were at important junctures in history – in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 watershed, at the moment of Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004, and contemporarily – show the processual ontology of the German-Polish border as a discursive landscape of competing meanings.

Shortly after 2000, two Polish artists, Paweł Althamer and Artur Żmijewski, had had a similar idea to Lemberg’s: to sail the Oder by ship and photograph both its banks (telephone conversation with the authors, November 2020). Although they found a boat and a captain for it, however, they never put their idea into practice. It was to have been a voyage of discovery, in the course of which they, accompanied by an anthropologist, hoped to fill in a blank space on the map, like Marco Polo or other explorers. The adventure-seeking Althamer and Żmijewski planned to treat the Oder as a river flowing through an unknown region, and to research both banks, the natural surroundings, and the local people and their languages as part of their expedition. In this way they had intended to make a subversive and somewhat facetious comment on the traditional perspective adopted by white ethnographers on their forays into terra incognita and the “wild natives” who lived there. Their tasks on the trip were to have been drawing and photographing. The role of the Oder as border river between Poland and Germany was deliberately to have been ignored. Presumably, the question they had planned to raise was exactly who the “natives” were that inhabited the region, given the history of forced migrations and population exchange there. And Althamer and Żmijewski would probably have encountered more spectres from the past than real residents of the divided Oder region. The project would have demonstrated that the Oder at once divides and unites.

72 RISTOLAINEN 2014, 109.

73 HOUTUM / STRÜVER 2002, 142.

2.4 ARTISTIC STRATEGIES FOR CROSSING THE RIVER AS BORDER AND BORDER AS RIVER

Artistic strategies referencing the Oder and Neisse as border rivers very often also thematize the (im)possibility of crossing them. A superb “laboratory” for projects of this type is *Stubfurt*; another is the bridge connecting Frankfurt (Oder) with Słubice; and the same is true of any of the other bridges over the river. For one of the everyday practices connected with borderscapes is crossing the border and coming up against its institutional character. This has changed over time: after 1989, after Poland’s accession to the EU, and again after 2007, when Poland became part of the Schengen zone. Border art, sensitive as a barometer to those changes, has registered them in the form of the actions of the artists listed below.

As an artist and curator, Michael Kurzwelly holds the firm conviction that art is the best medium for generating this remarkable border-region microclimate. Every year, therefore, he invites artists to *Stubfurt*, and poses them the deceptively simple question of how they might (re)define the common space. And since 1999, many “art stations” and artworks on the theme of the Oder as border river have indeed been created. One issue taken up very frequently in the course of such work is that of crossing the Oder as a border and operating within its border assemblage.

One of the first artists he invited to take part in this project, back in 1999, was Paweł Althamer, who went to *Stubfurt* to lead a workshop for students of the municipal high school in Frankfurt (Oder) (fig. 14). Althamer’s idea was that he and the young people would build a raft measuring about 10 m² out of recycling materials, and attempt to instigate a “ferry service” to Słubice. The project also encompassed the construction of two mooring-places and the submission of the necessary applications to the relevant authorities, in order to investigate the feasibility of the idea and any obstacles. The project was conceived as a stimulus to deal with the theme of borders and the topic of the Oder River as border river.

Althamer and the students collected the recycling materials and constructed the raft. Their encounter with the official procedures and bureaucracy surrounding the issue of crossing the border showed them what the Oder as border river in fact is: a barrier, and, in the context of the political system at that time, still a relatively hard border. Nonetheless, Althamer was firmly intentioned to transform it from a border river into a boundary object with the capacity to initiate transnational communication.

On that occasion the authorities did not permit the raft to sail to Poland, and this cast the Oder’s role as a national border into even sharper relief. Althamer and his group of seven students were only allowed to sail out to the midpoint of the river, and they then had to return to the German bank. The young people were so keen for adventure, however, that the raft crossed the border. Kurzwelly, standing on the Polish bank, urged



Fig. 14 Paweł Althamer, *Ferry*, 1999, courtesy of Michael Kurzwelly.

them not to make an illegal border crossing, and to return to the German side, and eventually they did so.

Nonetheless, this project, which brought together the Polish artist and the German students in the spirit of adventure, demonstrated quite clearly that the Oder is no ordinary river, but a border. It also whetted the appetite of the young German residents of *Stubfurt* to reach and explore the Polish side. Their work with recycling materials, which they had found lying near the river bank, drew their attention to the fact that from the ecological angle, the river not only divides the two nations but is also shared by them. The photographic documentation of the undertaking was displayed in the Marienkirche, and on the photographs the Oder is described as a boundary object with the potential to bring together a diverse range of actors from both banks.

Since 2004 this German-Polish town is far more closely integrated than it used to be. Every day, on the hour, between 7 a. m. and 7 p. m., a cockcrow is to be heard on the Oder bridge. One might assume that it is the voice of the rooster that features on the town's coat of arms and emblem, standing on an egg. But that is not the case; in fact, it is the result of an art project conducted by an Austrian artist, Hans Kropshofer, who in February 2005 organized the first *Stubfurt* audition for animal noises.⁷⁴ The competition was won by a *Stubfurt* high-schooler, Damian Mielczarek, and it is his voice that can be heard at hourly intervals on the Oder bridge. The cockcrow unites the two sides of the river both acoustically and symbolically. This was a bid by Kurzwelly and Kropshofer to conjure the spectres of the complicated German-Polish past, to make those who cross the bridge believe that *Stubfurt* is one town on the Oder.

In 2005 another Italian artist, Massimo Bartolini, was invited to perform an artistic intervention in *Stubfurt*. He chose as his focus the Oder, and sent Kurzwelly a sketch as the basis for his installation, *Portrait of Mr K* (fig. 15). In Bartolini's words:

⁷⁴ KURZWELLY 2005, 3.



Fig. 15 Massimo Bartolini, *Portrait of Mr K.*, 2005, installation, courtesy of Michael Kurzwelly.

an agrarian irrigation installation, set up so as to water the river, produces the concept of the river as earth, as inhabitable potential, rather than as border or tension zone. The jet of water, pumped into the river against the current, causes the same water to flow over the same point twice.⁷⁵

And so it was that an agrarian irrigation system was installed on the river and the water circulated in such a way as to realize, to a certain extent, Karl Schlögel's metaphor of the Oder as a "current between times".⁷⁶ The same water passed over the same place twice, as if time had been turned back.

Bartolini's absurd idea to irrigate the river can also be seen as a kind of polemic with Heraclitus of Ephesus, showing his most famous words – "Ever-newer waters flow on those who step into the same rivers" – not always to be true. This installation by the Italian artist played with the same water, and metaphorically transformed the surface of the Oder as boundary object into inhabitable earth, to enable the residents of *Stubfurt* to live closer to one another.

75 SZAREK 2005, II.

76 SCHLÖGEL 2001, 252–271.

The title of the installation, *Portrait of Mr K.*, is a reference to Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*, which is usually interpreted as a critique of self-perpetuating, inhuman bureaucracy. At that time, the Oder in its function as border river, was still beset by such bureaucracy, and every resident of *Stubfurt* could legitimately see themselves as Josef K., constantly confronted with the might of the System – above all on the Oder bridge, if they wanted to cross the German-Polish border. This situation only changed in 2007: with Poland's accession to the Schengen Group, the hard border became a soft border.

As performance artist and activist, in 2008 Kurzweilly staged an Olympic Games in *Stubfurt*:

Stubfurt played a pivotal role in the organisation of the Olympics of the frontier zone. Nation states all over the world have discovered that sport and especially the Olympics can play an important role in promoting identification with the nation. (...) We have made use of this psychological phenomenon and it acts on the inside as well as on the outside: As soon as the soccer team consisting of players from Słub and Furt sets eyes on the opposition from Gubia, the Stubfurt team is united as one.⁷⁷

The Olympic teams competed in two competitions, both of which addressed the theme of the Oder as border river and boundary object: cigarette pack throw and golf tee-off across the Oder. The first of these was a reference to the cigarette smuggling then endemic to the Oder bridge: competitors had to throw cigarettes from the bridge onto the promenade in order to evade the border and customs controls. The Olympic discipline did not involve throwing packs of real cigarettes; an oversized fake cigarette was used. The golf tee-off competition, by contrast, was designed to highlight the mutual proximity of the two banks of the Oder. Thus the river was portrayed as a barrier that is not impermeably sealed, and can be crossed by actors of all sorts, as a bridge of communication with a reservoir of memory, including stories and everyday experiences shared by both nations.

Artists have not restricted their attention to the Oder bridge in *Stubfurt* or to Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice; other sites selected for interventions include the bridge between Kostrzyn and Küstrin-Kietz. In 2004, when Poland celebrated its accession to the EU, a site-specific project was underway in the former fortress of Küstrin, entitled *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place*, designed by the artist duo Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art) and curated by Aneta Szyłak. As part of that project, Hans Hs Winkler staged a car crash exactly at the mid-point of that bridge. This performance, entitled *Granizza*, was an enactment of a collision involving a Polish car and a German one on the busy Oder bridge, precisely on the line of the border (fig. 16). The police and the insurance companies on both sides of the border were at a loss as to which regulations

⁷⁷ KURZWELLY / STEFAŃSKI 2021, 74–75.



Fig. 16 Hans Hs Winkler, *Granizza*, 2004, performance, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

took precedence exactly on the border: the Polish or the German. In this way, the artist succeeded in drawing attention to the very crux of the issue, and to the theme of the border as such, by casting light on its at once peculiar and problematic status. Beneath the bridge, the Oder as border river was visible, and down its middle, an invisible, abstract line suddenly became perceptible.

The Oder as border river is also a river in which many people have lost their lives in attempts to cross it. Many refugees and illegal migrants have drowned in their bids to swim across in the quest for a better life on the other shore.⁷⁸ As part of the 2011 group exhibition *Es mag unterschiedlich sein – Leben(s)(Wege) in der Grenzregion*, in Słubice's SMOK cultural centre, curated by Justyna Ryczek, Marc Tobias Winterhagen showed an object entitled *183 Meters* (fig. 17). He wrote:

What I actually wanted to do for my work was to find out exactly how many victims have lost their lives crossing the Oder. After lengthy research and calls to various police and border police stations, however, I learned that there is no exact number of such deaths. The reason for this is the volatile history of Poland and Germany. I cannot remember exactly all the statements by the border police, but this changed my project completely. Originally I had planned to make one knot in a 3-cm rope for every victim. My work was to have been

78 RADA 2004, 142.



Fig. 17 Marc Tobias
Winterhagen, *183 Meters*,
2011, installation,
courtesy of the artist.

a memorial and a warning. Ultimately, I decided to shorten the rope to 183 m (I had a full, 220-m roll). This length is equivalent to the breadth of the Oder at the Oder bridge between Frankfurt and Stubice. The 183-m long rope weighs approximately 70 to 80 kilograms. I had to puzzle over and experiment with the form of the rope in the exhibition for a long time. I knew what effect I wanted to achieve, but I didn't know what form the rope should take. The final form was to be reminiscent of a limp (dead) body, i. e. ultimately to represent all the Oder's victims.⁷⁹

Winterhagen's work thus highlighted the fact that, as a border river, the Oder can be a hazardous barrier, and for some a hard border. Even after the fall of the Berlin wall and German reunification, refugees continued to drown in the river; for them, the Oder was not only the Polish-German border, but the border between East and West. In this

79 WINTERHAGEN 2020.

work, Winterhagen revived the memory of all the victims of the Oder who have lost their lives in the river in its role as border river. He “uses here a rope, of the type that is used on ships and for saving people. This project draws attention to the physical danger of a large river, but focuses on the river as border, and is also a reflection on the dividing line.”⁸⁰ Paradoxically, Winterhagen also stressed: “To me the Oder has always been a natural border between Germany and Poland. Even now that the border is open and there are no controls, the river remains, and plays the role of a border.”⁸¹ The installation *183 Meters* nonetheless showed unequivocally that the Oder as border river is an artificial, sometimes even fatal phenomenon created by those in power. For migrants from Asia and Africa, the border controls on the Oder are – to use an expression proposed by Steffen Mau – like a “sorting machine”, which stabilizes the global policy of “sealing” borders, without regard for the cost in human lives:

The border as sorting machine is a complex arrangement nowadays, one that subordinates mobility to a security paradigm, functions by means of a complex system of interconnected control rooms, creates circulation zones, is oriented towards the social figure of the trustworthy traveller, and produces a global hierarchy of unequal mobility rights. The border of globalization is at the same time a border at which inequality is generated and entrenched.⁸²

This sense of inequality before the border as “sorting machine” is further reinforced by the fact that Winterhagen was not even able to establish how many people had drowned in the Oder in the age of globalization and since the fall of the iron curtain, attempting to circumvent that complex system of interconnected control rooms. Even though we do not have a hard and fast figure, however, we still know that every border retains traces of its history which convey echoes of the human memory.⁸³ And those echoes, in turn, inspire artists to initiate critical borderscaping processes, which in this case take the form of commemoration of the victims of the Oder as border river.

2.5 COUNTER-CURRENT TENDENCIES AND CONCLUSIONS

As part of the project *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place*, Dominika Skutnik proposed an intervention on the Oder. She wrote that her suggestion was to take the form of a procedure to alter the flow of the river:

⁸⁰ RYCZEK 2011, 47.

⁸¹ *IBID.*

⁸² MAU 2021, 22.

⁸³ KAMPER 1997, 81.

The effect, produced by pumps, will be visible from the bank (...). It will be a clearly discernible rectangular area of contraflow (ca. 2 × 3 m in size) on the surface of the river, in which the waves will move against the current. (...) The force of the waves' counter-current can be varied; they can gradually be reduced in strength and subside, and then revived to fight the main current with renewed vigour.⁸⁴

The intervention, titled *Counter-Current Area*, and unfortunately not realized for technical reasons, was to have been linked figuratively to the idea of the fortress, as a metaphor for resistance and rebellion. Aside from Skutnik's own intentions, the concept of "counter-current" can also be interpreted with reference to the Oder and the river-border complex. The Oder itself in this intervention would have flowed against its own current, as if this was the present-day river's way of protesting against the course of history. If observers on the bank had been able to observe this rectangular area of counter-current, it might have called to mind alternative historical conditions in respect of the Oder that never came to pass. The Oder as a "current between times" might sometimes have flowed in the opposite direction, as was achieved in part in the installation by Bartolini described above.

While the works of Giroux, Kurzweily, and Stratmann, interpreted here as examples of subversive cartography, have critical potential regarding the "where" of the border, and radically discuss its fluid history, Lemberg's *O_D_E_R-Cuts* series focuses on the river and its surroundings without particularly emphasizing its role as German-Polish border river. In these photographs, the Oder's status as border only "shines through" like a layer of writing in a palimpsest. Giroux merely had to recall the course of the pre-1945 border to cause anxiety among the current residents of the so-called "Recovered Territories". Stratmann emphasized poetically that this border was established as a result of the actions of political forces, while Kurzweily and the artists he invited to Słubfurt have consistently been pursuing the utopia on the Oder since 1999 in order to build close relations between the inhabitants of both banks of the river. Since 2004, when the Oder-Neisse border became a soft border, border art projects have focused more on what unites rather than what divides the two countries. Artists such as Kurzweily and Lemberg emphasize the present, although they are well aware of the palimpsestic nature of the borderscape that is the subject of their actions and artworks. In contrast, Winterhagen and Peschken and Pisarsky point more to the condition of the river as a border and the border as a river that cannot always be crossed.

All the works analysed in this text reveal the paradox inherent in border art, which both questions the existence of the border and produces border effects, thus reinforcing the visibility of the border. Not only do they reveal how contemporary artists use their

84 SKUTNIK 2003, n. p. n.

works to manifest conceptual change in thinking about borders, but through them, we can also diagnose that the Oder-Neisse border is still a product of symbolic differences. Through the connection of border experiences with border representations, border art discloses the strength of the relationship between aesthetics and politics of memory. As theme and motif of border art, the Oder and Neisse seem to constitute a spectre in and of themselves: on the one hand they display their character as border rivers, while on the other they remain bodies of water at the heart of the Oder region. Working with imagination, cultural and individual memory, and the creation of alternative spaces, the artists challenge dominant representations and hegemonic discourse, transforming the border into a site of resistance and struggle.⁸⁵

Poland's current official historical policy remains in opposition to German memory, and hence border art which "blurs" the Oder-Neisse border is still a source of unease for many parts of Polish society. Jasper Klomp avers that we are confronted with the "haunting" effect of the Oder-Neisse line because this current border is burdened with its own past.⁸⁶ Thus, within this assemblage, different meanings derived from various actors interact, initiating borderscaping processes and constructing counter-current or counter-hegemonic narratives. According to Sohn, the multiplicity of border images essentially signifies that a given border represents different things to different people.⁸⁷ Border art that thematizes the Oder-Neisse border and takes a relational approach to borders reveals these varied meanings perfectly.

One recent event that has cast these differences into particularly sharp relief was the ecological disaster that unfolded on the Oder in the summer of 2022.⁸⁸ Polish media repeatedly pointed the finger at Germany as the perpetrator of the river's poisoning, which once again demonstrated that this border river divides the two nations more than it is shared by them. Thus the role of ecology in border aesthetics is becoming increasingly important, since ecology has the potential to "make it more obvious that the definition of what is bordered must change at least as much as the traditionally bordered territories if borders are to be more democratic".⁸⁹ One project that has proven significant in this context is Razem dla Odry – Gemeinsam für die Oder, the brainchild of Justyna Budzyn, a member of the eco-feminist artists' collective Siostry Rzeki [Sister Rivers],⁹⁰ founded in 2017 by the Kraków artist Cecylia Malik. Budzyn, who in the collective represents the river Myśla in the Lubus lands, presented the German ecological activist Manuela Pieper with a plaque inscribed with the word "Oder", thus welcoming her into the

85 GIUDICE / GIUBILARO 2015, 92.

86 KLOMP 2019, 347–368.

87 SOHN 2016, 185.

88 See: NAZARUK / KORZENIOWSKA / UHLIG 2022. See also LÜDEMANN 2022; SAWICKI / RICHTER 2022.

89 ROSELLO / SAUNDERS 2017, 37.

90 See this organisation's blog: <https://siostryrzeki.wordpress.com/>, [last accessed 24. 04. 2023].



Fig. 18 Justyna Budzyn, *Our Lady of the Oder*, 2022, ceramic, courtesy of the artist.

Siostry Rzeki community. This symbolic act establishing Polish-German cooperation in the face of the ecological catastrophe on the Oder was staged on the Europabrücke Siekierki – Neurüdnitz bridge, which was officially opened at the beginning of September 2022. At the opening ceremony, Budzyn also presented representatives of both the Polish and the German local authorities with ceramic shrines to Our Lady of the Oder (fig. 18), which she had made herself by hand, featuring a skull with empty eye sockets in place of a face, and holding a dead fish. She stressed that the custodians of both banks of the border river were being given the artefact so that they would remember what had happened, and, as those in authority and in possession of the relevant instruments, would take better care of the shared Oder. The newly built bridge is part of an international cycle route that is a major attraction of the Lower Oder Valley region – whose central river is currently dead....

In turn, the ruined bridges that are still standing, which Peschken and Pisarsky address in their art, testify to the importance of remains, remnants, and vestiges for the perception of borders. It is they that are the media of the memory of brutal border shifts, and prevent the memory of the divided, divisive Polish-German history from falling into oblivion. This is why ruins, as a phenomenon that superbly facilitates medialization of memory, while at once looking into the future, function as an invitation to contemporary artists to initiate such border-aesthetic palimpsests.

3 History of the Future: Ruins, Remains, and the Border-Aesthetic Palimpsest

Vegetation has crawled for miles towards the cities. It is waiting.
Once the city is dead, the vegetation will cover it, will climb over the stones,
grip them, search them, make them burst with its long black pincers;
it will blind the holes and let its green paws hang over everything.
You must stay in the cities as long as they are alive,
you must never penetrate alone this great mass of hair waiting at the gates;
you must let it undulate and crack all by itself.
Jean-Paul Sartre¹

These lines by Jean-Paul Sartre from his novel *Nausea* (*La nausée*, 1938) fit well with the situation of the fortress and town of Kostrzyn/Küstrin, which after 1945 seemed to have been left for dead, its vegetation finally able to take over the devastated landscape unhindered. The Oder's character as border river strongly affects the status of the land along its banks. The ruins of Kostrzyn/Küstrin and its fortress are an absolutely special place in this respect, which is reflected in Uwe Rada's description of them as "the Prussian Pompeii".² While this may not be entirely apt as a metaphor, given that the ancient Italian city was laid waste by the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius in 79 A. D., whereas Kostrzyn was bombarded during World War II, it does stir the imagination. "All that is left of the former fortress city of Küstrin is the streets and foundations, a few of the city gates, and the mighty bastions: just like a lost Pompeii", wrote blogger Michael Bartnik in a 2020 travel review.³ The aura of this remarkable border assemblage attracts not only tourists and travellers, however, but also artists, who interact with the ruins and remains, and, by addressing questions around its present and future status, create multi-layered border-aesthetic palimpsests. The borderscaping processes that they activate in the ruined terrain medialize the memory of the history of this border zone, and touch on the issue of the phantom border, at the same time drawing attention to the fact that Germany and Poland at once share and are divided by the historical events recorded in the successive layers of this "Prussian Pompeii". Against the backdrop of these ruins, artists call forth spectres of the past, so perpetuating the phenomenon of hauntology

1 SARTRE 2007, 156. Though Sartre is referring to a French city, his words would seem to be of universal relevance for any cities ruined and "taken over" by nature.

2 RADA 2001, I-II.

3 BARTNIK 2020, n. p. n.



Fig. 19 Aerial view of the exhibition area *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place*, 2004, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

as described by Jacques Derrida,⁴ which has the potential to build bridges between the present and the past, deconstruct aesthetic regimes imposed from above, and create counter border narratives. The ruined site of the fortress and town of Kostrzyn/Küstrin also fit perfectly the category of “*Geisterort*” proposed by Aleida Assmann: “Anywhere where all traditions are broken off, ghost towns are created that are abandoned to the free rein of imagination or the return of all that was suppressed in them.”⁵

In this chapter we analyse the artistic and curatorial projects, most of them site-specific, that have been staged in the ruins of the fortress and town of Kostrzyn/Küstrin. Our first focus will be the activities of the Swedish artist Hanna Sjöberg, who became fascinated by this place shortly after the collapse of communism, in the early 1990s. Next, we will examine two exhibitions: *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place* (fig. 19), from 2004, created after a concept developed by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky of the Urban Art duo, and curated by Aneta Szyłak (participating artists: Mirosław Filonik [PL], Bernardo Giorgi [I], Krescenty Głazik [PL], Elżbieta Jabłońska [PL], Grzegorz Kłaman [PL], Michael Kurzweily [D], Hester Oerlemans [NL], Arturas Raila [LT], Carina Randløv [DK], Susken Rosenthal [D], Jadwiga Sawicka [PL], Roland Schefferski [D], Zbigniew Sejwa [PL], Urban Art – Peschken/Pisarsky [D], Hans Hs Winkler [D], Georg Winter [D], Markus Wirthmann [D], and Julita Wójcik [PL]); and *Memento Kostrzyn*,⁶ from 2012, under curator Christoph Tannert (participating artists: Roland Boden [D], Hubert Czerepok [PL],

4 DERRIDA 1994.

5 ASSMANN 2009, 21.

6 See: <http://archiwum.muzeum.kostrzyn.pl/GALERIA/MK/mk.html>, [last accessed 12. 06. 2023].

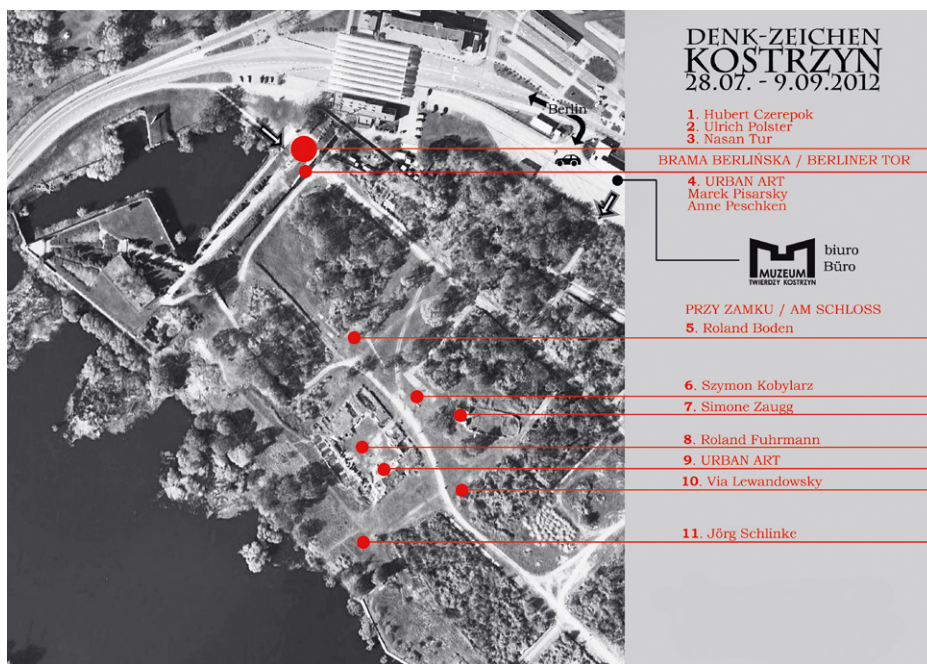


Fig. 20 Aerial view of the exhibition area *Memento Kostrzyn*, 2012, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

Roland Fuhrmann [D], Szymon Kobylarz [PL], Via Lewandowsky [D], Ulrich Polster [D], Jörg Schlinke [D], Nasan Tur [TR/D], URBAN ART [Anne Peschken/Marek Pisarsky, PL/D], and Simone Zaugg [CH] and *Memento Kostrzyn* (2012) curated by Christoph Tannert (fig. 20). In order to understand the critical character of these projects, however, it is first vital to gain an understanding of the history of the Kostrzyn/Küstrin fortress.

3.1 THE LAYERS OF GERMAN-POLISH HISTORY IN THE KOSTRZYN/ KÜSTRIN FORTRESS

Kostrzyn fortress, begun in the fifteenth century and extended by stages, grew particularly rapidly in the sixteenth, when the town was capital of the province of Neumark/Nowa Marchia. In 1730, following his foiled plot to flee the country, the prince later to be known as Frederick II, or “the Great”, was imprisoned there.⁷ On the orders of his father, King Frederick William I, the young prisoner’s close friend, Hans Hermann von Katte, was executed there before Frederick’s eyes on 6 November that same year, on suspicion of

⁷ BLANNING 2016, 27–49.

being in intimate relations with the prince. Almost a year later, the traumatized Frederick, having submitted to his father's will, left the fortress.⁸

Its vicissitudes remained equally complex and turbulent in the ensuing decades of the eighteenth century and in the centuries that followed:

The fortress was put to the test in 1758, during the Seven Years' War, when the Russian army besieged Kostrzyn. The artillery did not help the Russians take over the fortifications, but it did destroy the city. At the behest of Frederick the Great, Kostrzyn was rebuilt. When in 1806 Napoleon's troops approached the fortress, the memory of the catastrophe half a century earlier led to the decision to surrender the fortress to the French without a fight. The French occupation lasted until 1814. In 1813, the Prussians cut the fortress off from the outside world. After several months of the blockade, due to hunger and disease inside, Kostrzyn had no choice but to capitulate. In 1872, Kostrzyn – with Toruń, Poznań, Königsberg and Spandau – was among the most important German strongholds in the eastern part of the empire that were subject to expansion.⁹

After World War I, the fortress was partly demolished, but in 1945 it was remilitarized and prepared for defence. As Kari Jormakka wrote in the catalogue accompanying the *Dialog Loci* project:

The garrison town of Kostrzyn/Küstrin on the river Oder, poised between Poland and Germany, was not destroyed in the Nazi *Blitzkrieg* at the beginning of the Second World War in 1939; it was practically erased from the face of the earth only at the end of the war in 1945 as the Germans hopelessly tried to resist the advance of Soviet troops into Berlin.¹⁰

Hitler's orders were that Festung Küstrin was to defend itself to the last soldier. "As the fortress fell on the last day of March, only ten percent of the houses were still standing. In the late sixties, they were finally pulled down and the usable building material recycled for the reconstruction of Warsaw."¹¹

And thus it became an empty space, an abandoned no-man's land on the border. Jan M. Piskorski emphasizes that:

[t]he Old Town in Kostrzyn, which fell to Poland after the war, was not restored. Not because it had been particularly badly damaged. People rebuilt places where not even one stone was

8 *IBID.*, 50.

9 <http://turystyka.kostrzyn.pl/en/artykul/150/fortress-kostrzyn>, [last accessed 28. 05. 2023].

10 JORMAKKA 2004, 161.

11 *IBID.*, 161.

left on top of the other. They rebuilt patiently and many times over the centuries, but there must be a need. This time there was none. The German inhabitants of Küstrin fled, or were evacuated, and the remainder were resettled. They could not return, because in Potsdam it had been decided that the new border would run along the Oder, and furthermore, that all Germans should leave Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary.¹²

It is, therefore, a border assemblage of unusually heterogeneous character. There can be no doubt that places such as Kostrzyn are key pressure points, bifurcations, which mirror the state of contemporary German-Polish relations. What is more, Rada goes on, the Polish-German borderland is exceptional because it is described using many different, often contradictory terms. For some it is a living transit zone; for others a “transit wasteland”, a *Verwerfungszone* [fault zone], a “problem zone”, a wild zone, or a “peripheralization zone”.¹³ To employ the nomenclature of John House, it would even be possible to claim that it is a zone of double peripherality, a region on the geographical peripheries of a country, close to its border, whose residents suffer also from political, economic, and social peripherality due to their geographical and social distance from the decision-makers.¹⁴

The paradox of this place is thus that the Kostrzyn/Küstrin fortress has over time ceased to belong to anyone: abandoned, and situated in a border zone from which after the war those who might have remembered its lively pre-1945 face were, on both sides of the border, gone. Moreover, as Uwe Rada remarked in a 2004 commentary: in the border zone between Germany and Poland, memory is still suspect,¹⁵ and a shared river does not extend to a shared perception (the flood was the same for both sides, but it was perceived quite differently).¹⁶ In the fortress itself, grass is gradually growing over history, and this empty, ruined place gives wings to the Germans’ imagination of the birth of Prussian might. Rada claims that nowhere has history been so deeply buried as here.¹⁷ He also raises the question of whether Kostrzyn lies on the Polish side or on the German, adding that in this region, there are no more border towns, only towns on the border.¹⁸ As Rada remarks in his text for the catalogue to *Dialog Loci*, quoting Adam Kotula:

Through the western displacement of the Polish border as a result of the conferences of Yalta and Potsdam, as well as the settlement of refugees on both sides of the Oder-Neisse border,

12 PISKORSKI 2004, 154.

13 RADA 2004a, 157. Rada is here also referencing scholars including Regina Bittner, Peter Haffner, Adam Krzemiński, and Ulf Matthiesen.

14 HOUSE 1980, 456–477.

15 RADA 2004b, 80.

16 *IBID.*, 48.

17 *IBID.*, 34.

18 *IBID.*, 9–10.

the region lacks a mature, cross-border neighbourliness stretching back generations. The lack of minority populations on both sides intensifies the already stark language barrier ... What is missing in the German-Polish border zone ... is a tradition of lived neighbourliness.¹⁹

This thesis correlates with the observation of David Newman, who suggests that if a border is opened or changed by force, the residents of the border regions subsequently have no desire for mutual interaction and integration.²⁰

Ruins can inform us of the “distinctive historicity”²¹ of a place, which is rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and border narratives, and these we must conceptualize and understand in relation to the history of the German-Polish border. It was this spectral, haunted landscape of ruins, remains, vestiges, overgrown by vegetation, that these artists selected, deaf to Sartre’s warnings that such places should be avoided and allowed to undulate and crack all by themselves. Artists, with their interventions and site-specific works, are superimposing the next layer on this border-aesthetic palimpsest.

3.2 RUINS, REMAINS AND SPECTRES OF THE BORDER-AESTHETIC PALIMPSEST: TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY

One interesting assertion that stands out in relation to border art and borderscaping among the many theories on the symbolism of ruins is the opinion of German art theoretician and aestheticist Bazon Brock, who perceives ruins as forms that speak of the tension between fragmentation and totality.²² If totality stands for the system, ruins, which are fragments, automatically become its antithesis: the anti-system. In light of this theory, ruins and remains may be seen as the vestiges of that system, which may have disintegrated either as the result of historical aging, or as a consequence of chance or deliberate acts of violence.²³ In the case of the Kostrzyn/Küstrin fortress, the latter is the case. According to Brock, within the space-time structure, the various fragments and remains that constitute a ruin can enter into mutual formal relations, though these may not necessarily generate bonds with the fragmentarized whole. In the context of this German theoretician’s theses, the ruins of the Kostrzyn/Küstrin stronghold may thus be perceived as an anti-system in respect of certain historiographical systems: first the heroic history of Prussia, then the historical narration relating to World War II and the

¹⁹ RADA 2004a, 53.

²⁰ NEWMAN 2006a 173.

²¹ MBEMBE 2001, 9.

²² BROCK 1984, 124–140.

²³ *IBID.*, 125.

“Recovered Territories”. The potential of these ruins on the Oder to elaborate counter border narratives has been recognized by percipient artists, who in their projects have employed them as speaking elements of installations or as bases or reactive foils for their works. Ruins and vestiges are fragments as *pars pro toto*.²⁴ They are physical objects, but can also be perceived as a sign that references something absent and functions in the process of perception as an index of something that is missing.²⁵ The aesthetic of ruins as fragments

is based on the dialectic of the whole and parts, which treats the fragment as a non-autonomous part and the whole as an irretrievable context. In this optic, the fragment becomes a hypothesis for the whole, and at once a statement on the impossibility of attaining it; but the reverse is also the case: the fragment shatters the whole and shows that for whatever reason it has become undesirable.²⁶

In the case of the Kostrzyn fortress, this undesirable whole is its history, or, more accurately, its histories, written from the Prussian and Polish – later German and Polish People’s Republic – perspectives, which led to the site becoming a no-man’s land. The system does not tolerate contradiction, but the ruin as a vestige and a fragment in its very essence coruscates with contradictions – it crystallizes at once as a part and as a whole. This makes it possible to break out of the system and go beyond what is established and ordained, to overcome and verify stereotypes, opening up possibilities for subversive borderscaping.

The artistic interventions “superimposed” on the ruined landscape of the Kostrzyn fortress are like successive layers of a palimpsest, a “border-aesthetic palimpsest”. This term was convincingly adapted from the theory of literature for the field of border art studies by Nadir Kinossian and Urban Wråkberg, who emphasized that: “The cultural palimpsest is based on an analogy with the original concept of palimpsest as a palaeographic object created by the recycling of scarce parchments of vellum used for writing books in the medieval period.”²⁷ The notion of palimpsest thus has the potential to serve as a useful methodological tool not only in relation to text, but also as a metaphor,²⁸ and to make reference to all multi-layered phenomena in which the ur-layers “shine through” those added later. Palimpsests are phenomena in which each successive phase overlays the one before and intertwines with it into an inseparable whole, thus producing a heterogeneous and hybrid identity for the palimpsest. The cultural anthropology

24 DÄLLENBACH / HART NIBBRIG 1984, 15.

25 LICHTENSTEIN 2009, 120.

26 CZAPLIŃSKI 2003, 16–17.

27 KINOSSIAN / WRÅKBERG 2017, 90.

28 See NYCZ 2012, 34–50.

researcher Aleida Assmann uses the figure of the palimpsest in reference to cities and their histories: as in a medieval parchment manuscript, the scratched-out, extinguished text is still visible beneath the overwriting.²⁹ Historian Reinhart Koselleck used related terminology when he spoke of *Zeitschichten*, “layers of time”,³⁰ which, superimposed upon each other, testify to the plurality of history.

The ruined Kostrzyn fortress contains several of these *Zeitschichten* and is one such palimpsest in itself, its freshest layer being the artistic strategies developed in and in relation to it. The essence of the palimpsest triggers a shift in perception and makes the process of perceiving into ‘something woven’, as Sarah Dillon so astutely described the phenomenon. Dillon noted that in concepts of the palimpsest, the objective is not merely to uncover the original, almost illegible layer, but in fact to interpret all the superimposed, “inextricably entangled and intertwined”³¹ layers. Kinossian and Wråkberg propose the notion of “a palimpsestual aesthetic”, emphasizing that “the succession of layers always mirrors the broader context of historical change”.³² This is precisely why

the palimpsest can shed light on interactions between the past and the present. Historical layers are often perforated, with underlying layers shining through later sediments. Although the layers may not be connected, the emerging picture is ambiguous and contradictory, and provokes further thoughts about possible linkages, interdependencies and continuities between them.³³

The usefulness of the palimpsest concept within the framework of theories of the semiotic and symbolic experience of time has also been noted, particularly in relation to history and social and individual memory.³⁴ As Polish literature scholar Ryszard Nycz writes:

In this process of terminological expansion, one might say that the term “palimpsest” itself reveals its palimpsestual nature, in which its literal meaning connected with writing becomes effaced (or marginalized) in favour of the exposure of model attributes of formal semantic organization.³⁵

The Kostrzyn fortress and the artistic projects undertaken there may also be described using a term taken from the field of archaeology: as a cumulative palimpsest,³⁶ because border art enters into an interaction with the pre-existing ruins not in an attempt to

29 ASSMANN 2009, 151–157.

30 Term taken from KOSELLECK 2000, 19–27.

31 DILLON 2007, 83.

32 KINOSSIAN / WRÅKBERG 2017, 91.

33 *IBID.*, 91.

34 NY CZ 2012, 35.

35 *IBID.*, 35.

36 KINOSSIAN / WRÅKBERG 2017, 93.

damage or destroy them, but rather with the intention of consolidating and cumulating their symbolic meanings binding the present with the past. A border-aesthetic palimpsest, or a palimpsestual aesthetic, is thus a relatively new methodological tool at the disposal of border art studies, one which can be used to undertake percipient research into the memoryscapes of the Kostrzyn fortress on the Oder. Kinossian and Wråkberg propose the term “palimpsesting”, which correlates very well with the processual shift in border studies and the notion of critical borderscaping: “the process of palimpsesting is limited neither to historical artefacts nor to still functional material structures, but applies also to ideology and the accumulation of knowledge”.³⁷

Such a palimpsestual landscape, perceived as a tangle of sedimented histories, may be haunted by spectres. Jacques Derrida's hauntology theory described in the introduction to this book is particularly well suited to the aura of the Kostrzyn fortress. Spectres, though they are not fully present, allow themselves to be called forth through art and enable us to see into the crux of our own position.³⁸ They also show that

the present is not such a solid, unified, self-sufficient, cohesive, compact construct as it might originally have seemed. Spectres stratify and undermine the stability of ‘now’, revealing the anachronism of reality and the heterogeneity of time: the past does not want to depart, nor the future approach.³⁹ I

It is these aspects that render palimpsesting so inspiring in the context of border art research in these ruins on the Polish-German border haunted by the spectres of the Kostrzyn fortress's complicated history.

3.3 REMAINS AMONG THE RUINS: HANNA SJÖBERG'S *EIN TISCH FÜR KÜSTRIN*

In the still wintry aura of March 1993, Swedish artist Hanna Sjöberg, who had just moved to Berlin, took a trip to the recently opened German-Polish border. On that occasion, following Christian Graf von Krockow's book *Fahrten durch die Mark Brandenburg: Wege in unserer Geschichte*, published in 1991, she discovered Kostrzyn/Küstrin.⁴⁰ In 1997, in her diploma dissertation written at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin, Sjöberg was to recall: “I found my way to Küstrin after reading *Fahrten durch die Mark Brandenburg*. The

³⁷ *IBID.*, 107.

³⁸ DERRIDA 1994, XVII–XVIII.

³⁹ MARZEC 2015, 193.

⁴⁰ VON KROCKOW 1991.

quotation from this book by von Krockow begins with the sentence: ‘The old Küstrin is no more’, and I eventually took this as my point of departure for my work – a lost place.”⁴¹ She stresses that her intention was not to reconstruct the non-extant fortress and city, or to bring them back to life, but to show that they once existed and can serve as a kind of universal example of the terrible consequences of wars, forced border shifts, and ruthless population expulsions. Strolling around the overgrown, rewilded site of the razed town of Küstrin, Sjöberg drew a comparison of its situation with the then contemporary condition of Vukovar, which had shortly beforehand been destroyed during the war in the former Yugoslavia. She thus came to see Kostrzyn/Küstrin as a symbolic site referencing the consequences of the merciless drawing of borders and resettlements of entire populations.

In her text, Sjöberg further emphasized the spectral atmosphere of the abandoned place, where in 1993 no digs had yet begun, so that any traces of the former town were in fact invisible, concealed under a thick layer of vegetation. She wrote that the first element to attract her attention was the head of a cheap rubber doll that had been trodden into the sticky earth, with yellow painted hair, blue eyes, and a round hole for a mouth, awaiting a bottle with a teat. It was this *objet trouvé*, this vestige and remnant, that was the first thing to be photographed, and so in her eyes it became a meta-image for the bordertexture of Kostrzyn/Küstrin. Thus we could fairly say that in this way Sjöberg set in train the processes of borderscaping and palimpsesting this abandoned, forgotten place, by attentively studying its unique character as a heterogeneous border assemblage and posing questions about the possibility of universalizing this particular story in relation to border narratives typical for post-expulsion regions.

In the course of this first mapping of the overgrown terrain, where no paths delineated by the topography of the former town were visible, the artist also noticed numerous porcelain shards of shattered crockery lying scattered in the grass. Only on bending down to inspect them did she realize that she was tramping over brickwork grown over with luxuriant weeds. She likened her collecting of these ceramic shells to gathering mushrooms – morels and chanterelles – an activity motivated by the same collector’s instinct that motivates mushroomers. She was at once fascinated by this bordertexture and shaken by the consequences of the border shifts and expulsions that had led to such total eradication of what had once been a lively town. It was this gathering of remnants in the ruins, remnants unearthed like an almost illegible layer of the site’s palimpsest, that was the inspiration for her conception for an installation entitled *Ein Tisch für Küstrin* (fig. 21a–b), composed of objects, excerpts from fifteen texts selected by the artist, and photographs, some archival and others taken by her in 1993. Sjöberg planned that all these elements should function on the same level, and that a visual, textual, and spatial border narrative be built, calling forth the spectres circling over the abandoned site.

41 SjöBERG 1997, n. p. n.

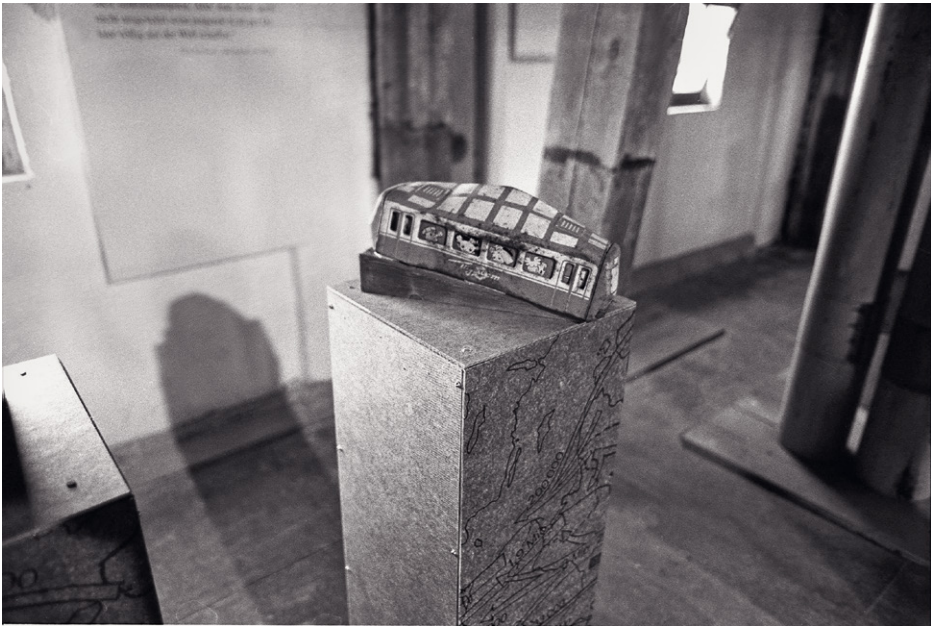


Fig. 21a–b Hanna Sjöberg, *Ein Tisch für Küstrin*, 1993, installation, courtesy of the artist.

As part of her exhibition at the Kunstspeicher Friedersdorf in the spring of 1997, Sjöberg put these porcelain shards on display in their tangible form, rendering them a *pars pro toto* of everyday life in Küstrin. In this way, she was inviting her audiences to ask questions, on the basis of their contact with the vestiges unearthed from the ruins, about the whole from which those fragments came, and about those who had used those objects in their non-extant houses. These porcelain shells became media of both individual and collective memory, initiating reminiscences and confronting viewers with the consequences of borders shifted pursuant to political decisions. Among the objects which became receptacles for such tragic border narratives there was also a rusty pre-war pot, a propaganda children's book published by the Nazis, and a buckled toy bus, clearly dating from after the war. Sjöberg produced a palimpsesting of Kostrzyn/Küstrin that took account of the sedimentation of its history. Her method also shed clear light on key bifurcation points that had led to a border assemblage of this particular constitution on the German-Polish border.

At her next exhibition, held in the autumn of 1997 in the orangery of the Pückler-Stiftung, Sjöberg did not use the physical presence of such traces and vestiges, showing instead photographs of them and thereby conveying their tactile physicality through the medium of image. In so doing, she rendered them even more spectral, thus adding a new layer to the palimpsest and opening up a still more intense possibility of perceiving the particular situation of Kostrzyn/Küstrin in universalizing terms. In this way she also confirmed the thesis mooted by the theoreticians of the border-aesthetic palimpsest, Kinossian and Wråkberg, who aver that the palimpsesting process is limited to neither historical artefacts nor still functional material structures, but also extends to ideology and the accumulation of knowledge. In eschewing material structures (the porcelain shards) she focused attention even more sharply on the ideologies behind the official Polish and German border narratives. We also believe that this gesture on the artist's part may have been connected to the dynamic changes taking place in the border zone on the Polish side. These were such that by 1997 the structure of the ruined town and fortress had been laid bare, dug out from beneath the layer of vegetation in order to reveal the history of the "Prussian Pompeii". The border crossing itself had also begun to teem with life, accenting the changes compared to March 1993, when Sjöberg had first set foot on the Polish side of the border.

Among the textual quotes used in the two *Ein Tisch für Küstrin* exhibitions were excerpts from the letters of Walter Benjamin drawing attention to the inseverable bond between the past and the present, to the creation by them of heterogeneous constellations, and to the impossibility of capturing an image of the past, which begins to fade even as it blazes forth; quotes referencing Küstrin itself from the abovementioned book by von Krockow; reminiscences of expellees from the town juxtaposed with memories of liberated inmates of concentration camps; Max Frisch's words describing the ruined Warsaw, which he visited in August 1948; excerpts from Polish propaganda texts enthusiastically

encouraging settlement of the “Recovered Territories”; remarks by German historians on Polish history and the delicate Polish-German relations; and personal texts by writers such as Adam Zagajewski and Peter Weiss, relating their own experiences connected with the brutality of war. Through this constellation of texts, Sjöberg tries both to show the Polish and German stances, and to draw attention to Kostrzyn/Küstrin at once as a specific place and as an “every-place”, i. e., a universal example of a town annihilated by war and not rebuilt due to a shift in borders, and thus necessitating the creation of new border narratives for the post-war residents of the “Recovered Territories”. In her review of the first, Friedersdorf *Ein Tisch für Küstrin* exhibition, published in the *Oder-Journal* on 4 April 1995, Silke Müller quoted the speech delivered at its opening by von Krockow to stress the significance, in the context of its subject, of the fact that the artist is Swedish: “From his point of view, it was an advantage that the subject had been tackled by a *neutral Swede* [emphasis ours], Hanna Sjöberg. A German or a Pole would have been biased even before undertaking the research.”⁴² This assertion shows clearly that the border narratives of both the Polish and the German sides in this period were ideologically spiked: the Polish side consistently effaced German traces in border regions, allowing the ruins of the fortress and town of Küstrin to become totally overgrown with weeds. The Germans, for their part, focused on the situation of the expellees who had lost their homes. In her installation, Sjöberg proposed a counter border narrative, and carried out a borderscaping that in the end effect did not reference either the Polish or the German positions, but showcased the condition of the ruined locality as a universal example with a lesson for both contemporary and future generations. For the same reason, she also mentioned in her commentary to the installation *Ein Tisch für Küstrin* the famous figure of the Angelus Novus from the 1920 watercolours of Paul Klee, masterfully described by Walter Benjamin⁴³ as flying into the future, but facing the past and looking down on the ruins.

What is of particular importance in the context of Sjöberg’s installation, however, is the following quote from a speech by Winston Churchill delivered on 15 December 1944:

For expulsion is the method which, so far as we have been able to see, will be the most satisfactory and lasting. There will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble A clean sweep will be made. I am not alarmed by the prospect of the disentanglement of populations, nor even by these large transferences, which are more possible in modern conditions than they ever were before.⁴⁴

42 MÜLLER 1995, 5.

43 BENJAMIN 1969, 257.

44 Winston Churchill, speech delivered on 15.12.1944, POLAND. HC Deb 15 December 1944 vol. 406 cc1478–578: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1944/dec/15/poland#S5CV0406Po_19441215_HOC_44, [last accessed 23. 05. 2023].

The English sentence “A clean sweep will be made” translates into German as *Man wird reinen Tisch machen*, literally: “we will make the table clean”. It was this aspect that inspired Sjöberg to exhibit the eponymous table as empty, rather than placing on it the porcelain shards as media of memory and material elements of the border palimpsesting process.

The installation *Ein Tisch für Küstrin* also includes photographs: a collection of post-cards portraying life in the town from around 1900 until the war, and a set of black-and-white photographs taken by Sjöberg herself in 1993. This is a confrontation of two diametrically different situations, which triggers the critical borderscaping process by prompting questions as to what happened in the fateful time *between*, which is not shown on the photographs. It is an *empty place*, within which every viewer can look upon the cumulative palimpsest and memoryscape of Kostrzyn/Küstrin to develop their own counter border narrative.

Sjöberg’s work thus demonstrates clearly that all the layers of the border palimpsest are inextricably intertwined, and together testify to the historic changes linked to the wartime bombardments, the establishment of the German-Polish border along the Oder-Neisse line in 1945, and the Polish post-war propaganda surrounding the alleged history of what was referred to as the “Recovered Territories”. In Kostrzyn/Küstrin, the heterogeneous, often opposing and changing strategies of constructing official border narratives and border images are brought sharply into focus, provoking the creation of border art works that open up the potential for critical borderscaping and for such “distribution of the sensible”⁴⁵ that can bring about changes to aesthetic regimes.

3.4 BORDER ART EXHIBITIONS AS PALIMPESTING OF HIDDEN HISTORY IN THE FORMER KOSTRZYN/KÜSTRIN FORTRESS

Where the Swedish artist Hanna Sjöberg in 1993 began to work with *objets trouvés* from the site of the ruined Kostrzyn/Küstrin fortress, the artistic duo Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art), who have also been operating in the border region since the early 1990s, proposed the concept of treating the ruins as the backdrop for two site-specific exhibitions: *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place* (2004) and *Memento Kostrzyn* (2012). The ruins, vestiges, and remains, as well as the vegetation that has overgrown them, thus became non-human actors and actants in both collective exhibitions, which, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, attracted participants from Poland,

⁴⁵ According to Jacques Rancière the “distribution of the sensible” refers to a regime of what is possible and acknowledged: the felt, heard, seen and perceived within this space, implicated in particular familiar patterns, inclusions and exclusions. See: RANCIÈRE 2004, 7–45.

Germany, and beyond. The exhibitions themselves may be seen as further layers in the border-aesthetic palimpsest, layers which, by interacting with this sedimented history, demonstrate the heterogeneity of this specific borderscape and memoryscape, and initiate processes of confrontation between German and Polish border narratives. 2004 was the year in which Poland acceded to the European Union, and the cultural policy of both neighbours, particularly Germany, was focused on supporting⁴⁶ precisely such dialogic initiatives as *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place*. In 2012, in turn, the *Memento Kostrzyn* project was undertaken in cooperation with Kulturland Brandenburg e. V., the Kostrzyn Fortress Museum, Kulturland Brandenburg e. V., and Künstlerhaus Bethanien GmbH. At present, under the Law and Justice (PiS) government on the Polish side of the border that is the focus of our interest, the cultural and historical policy is intent on escalating tensions between the two countries, and is no longer conducive to critical and subversive borderscaping projects of this nature.

The conception of Peschken and Pisarsky, curated in the first case by Aneta Szyłak and in the second by Christoph Tannert, may also be interpreted as palimpsesting and an attempt to call forth all the various spectres that circle above the ruins of the fortress and the old town that was never rebuilt, drawing attention to the most significant and delicate aspects of Polish-German relations over the centuries. In order to enter into dialogue with these spectres, however, what is needed is not a metaphysical investigation or essentialistic inquiry, “but to learn to talk with that which is always found in the indecision between ‘to be or not to be’. A spectre has no established definition: it is fond of indefinition, operates by making forced entries, and is always an intruder (*sans-papiers*), so asking it for its papers is in vain.”⁴⁷ Their curatorial strategies thus had to be founded on this incomplete presence emerging from the various layers of the palimpsest, many of which are inhabited by hordes of spectres representing several historical periods. Their intrusions into the present – as in the case of the Angelus Novus – have made it possible to look upon the past and the ruins in such a way as to move forward into the future. The border narratives revealed have laid bare delicate, still unprocessed issues in mutual relations connected with both the past and the present.

It was issues such as these that the artists participating in the *Dialog Loci* and *Memento Kostrzyn* projects had to tackle. Spectres representing particular layers of sedimented history cannot achieve full, saturated presence within a palimpsestual border aesthetic, however. Their role is merely – and actually – to make themselves manifest, while

46 The organizations that supported the project are listed in the exhibition catalogue as follows: “Supported by the Federal Cultural Foundation, the EU, the Foundation of German-Polish Collaboration, Kulturring e. V., the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Berlin, the Danish Arts Foundation and the City of Kostrzyn nad Odrą. In cooperation with the German Federal Agency of Political Education.”

47 MARZEC 2015, 206–207.

constantly remaining on the verge of vanishing. To slip their heads and silhouettes into our world, make their presence felt, and then disappear into thin air, leaving us changed and haunted. Perhaps this is precisely why projects on the site of the former Kostrzyn fortress were so ephemeral. Perhaps they themselves – especially viewed from our present-day perspective, several years on from their staging – were spectres in a way?

The archaeology of memory is also immanently corporeal, however, and memories need a medium in order to leave a trace. According to Aleida Assmann, individual memory is perspectival, because it is derived from the perspective of a particular person and their experiences, is fragmentary and ephemeral, and is also connected with other types of memory, one such being cultural memory.⁴⁸ Thus the spectres gliding through our museums of imagination and the abysses of our memory require medicalization; to reveal, or “display” themselves, they need bodies, which they temporarily haunt. And the works of the artists taking part in *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place* and *Memento Kostrzyn* briefly became those bodies: the artists staged conversations with the spectres that were neither easy nor pleasant. This state of suspension, this curious *suspense* between the multilayered past and a future that has still not really revealed itself here, was brought into focus with immense intensity by the presence of art in the “Prussian Pompeii”. In the border zone, then, Poles and Germans are divided also by these spectres, which, like the baggage of (un-)shared experiences, are constantly driving the two nations apart.

The complicated history of the Kostrzyn fortress outlined above, and its problematic, or strategic location on the current border of Poland and Germany, at the confluence of the Warta and the Oder, has inspired artists and curators to examine the vicissitudes of the place from a contemporary perspective. The purpose of *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place* and *Memento Kostrzyn* was to initiate an understanding of the concepts of *teilen/dzielenie* not as dividing, but also as sharing in a history that, however problematic, is common to both. David Newman, cited above, suggests that a border region exerts an extremely intense influence on people on both sides of the border itself, because it is there that the nature of the border as bridge and place of interaction comes out most strongly, in contrast to its traditional role as barrier.⁴⁹ In its very title, *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place* gives notice of its dialogic premise and its intention to “demystify” this symbol of Prussian militarism by means of the art appearing in this lost, forgotten place, and the border that runs close by is treated as a central mark of collective memory.⁵⁰ Although it is supremely present and visible because it runs along a river, and is lent a further theatrical quality by the border posts and signs, it also has something of the

48 See ASSMANN 2013, 130–143.

49 NEWMAN 2006b, 8–10.

50 BAUER / RAHN 1997, 8.

phantomlike, because before 1945 it ran much further west, delineating the Oder region as a cohesive territory.

As Aneta Szyłak stressed, the Kostrzyn fortress

finds itself “at the frontier” – where principles and methods lose their definition, undergo change, submit to distinctness. In considerations about the fortress, history, nations, contacts, there appear layers of time, shreds of space, and layers of senses. History falls apart into subjective histories reflecting the justice of the importance of individual experience in art and history.⁵¹

She referred to the artists participating in her exhibition as “architects of ruins”, thus showing how they developed their own layers within this critical palimpsesting of the lost space.

Georg Winter’s intervention was to introduce into what he dubbed this “socio-toxic terrain” a population of common toads (*Bufo bufo*), which adapt very well in spaces abandoned by humans. Winter planned to offer homoeopathic doses of the psychoactive substances excreted by the toads’ glands as a means of activating a journey into the past, in particular to the bifurcation point, or “far-from-equilibrium attractor”, of the bombardment of Kostrzyn/Küstrin. In this intervention, entitled *Bufo Bufo Transmission* (fig. 22a–b), a substance called bufotenin was to cause in those who took it hallucinations such as light flashes and flitting flames: “Flames and drastic overexposures in 1945 led to the current state of the terrain”,⁵² which in the 1990s was still littered with shattered vessels.

While Hanna Sjöberg posed questions about what her found vessels had looked like when they were whole, Zbigniew Sejwa focused on the households in which that porcelain had been used. His idea was simply to install doors in places where there were steps leading to nowhere, which had once led to inhabited houses (fig. 23). He found no walls, so he gave physical presence to the doors, in order to draw his audience’s attention to the fact that this spectral town was once teeming with life. In Georg Simmel’s opinion, “it is the fascination of the ruin, that here the work of man appears to us entirely as a product of nature. The same forces which give a mountain its shape through weathering, erosion, faulting, and the growth of vegetation, here do their work on old walls.”⁵³ This philosopher and sociologist furthermore suggests that “the ruin expresses peace for us”.⁵⁴ His theses do not hold up in the case of the Kostrzyn/Küstrin fortress, however: here, the

51 SZYŁAK 2004, 152.

52 WINTER 2004, 103.

53 SIMMEL 1959, 261.

54 *IBID.*, 263.



Fig. 22a–b Georg Winter, *Bufo Bufo Transmission*, 2004, installation, performance, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

ruins are the effect of the ruthlessness of History, and as such, the sight of them in this abandoned place can bring no peace. The doors installed by Sejwa add further unease, forcing a powerful question about the absence of not only whole houses, but also their residents. “Precisely because it can also be opened, [the door’s] closure provides the feeling of a stronger isolation against everything outside this space than the mere unstructured wall. The latter is mute, but the door speaks”,⁵⁵ Simmel wrote in a different context. In

⁵⁵ *IBID.*, 172.

Fig. 23 Zbigniew Sejwa, *Doors*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.



Sejwa's work, the message of the doors was all the stronger for the walls not being there. What was essentially a simple gesture allowed visitors to the exhibition to stand on the threshold outside the door and take hold of the handle, to set their own thoughts on the multilayered memoryscape in train.

Roland Schefferski's installation *Enklave* (fig. 24), in turn, enabled viewers to look inside a non-existent home – as if one of the doors installed by Sejwa had opened up to the *Dialog Loci* visitor. Behind it stood a wall cabinet and a table with four chairs, but the space was devoid of knick-knacks, devices, crockery, or books. Schefferski conjured a whole horde of spectres just by posing the simple yet fundamental question of who had lived there and why they had disappeared. The whole was accompanied by recordings of everyday life in a Polish family with a little daughter and a dog, and a German family with a small son. Significantly, both families really do live here, and now, either side of the border, not in the Küstrin of the past. Their conversations reference contemporary life (e. g. the conversation in the Polish family about fiscal cash registers).



Fig. 24 Roland Schefferski, *Enklave*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.





Fig. 25 Krescenty Głazik, *View out of the Window*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

Music also has a role to play: among the songs Schefferski selected for the soundtrack was an excerpt from one by singer-songwriter Mirosław Czyżykiewicz, entitled *Tańcz! – Parlando* [Dance! – Parlando], which talks about tribes disappearing from the face of the earth: “Tak się ustala każdą skalę, ludzkie cierpienie zna swą miarę, w tym sensie, mój ty słodki Jezu, w Twoim imieniu po plemienu ‘jakimś tam’ nie został dziś najmniejszy ślad – tańcz!” [And this is how every scale is established, human suffering knows its limits, in that sense, my sweet Jesu, in your name no trace is left today of tribe “whatever” – dance!]. Everyday conversations, the clatter of household appliances, music, chatter about food and work, and stories read to children function like yet another layer of the border aesthetic palimpsest, this time on the audio plane. The past, the present, and the prospect of the future were thus combined in the installation *Enklave* into a whole, suggesting just how heterogeneous the border assemblage connected with the German-Polish border is.

The absent inhabitants of Küstrin surely looked out of their windows onto the river. This was the experience called forth by the installation of Krescency Głazik entitled *View out of the Window* (fig. 25), which towered over its surroundings, and was connected with a periscope through which the viewer could observe the Oder. Thus the artist placed his audience in a situation of wondering who had observed the current before them; it is a well-known truth that one cannot enter the same river twice. Głazik was also thematizing the river itself as a border that after 1945 had drastically cleaved apart a region previously constituting a whole, the Oderland. As we showed in Chapter 1 of this book, there are no “natural” borders as such: all borders are social constructs delineated by people. Thus the symbolic view from the window through the periscope framed the issue of the Oder’s status as a border that had once been a river, and not a border river. Such a border creates differences and becomes an institution governed by its own set of internal rules and regulations. In the Kostrzyn fortress, the proximity of the Polish-German border is palpable; the installation *View out of the Window* further visualized, medialized, and realized it like the presence of a spectre that cannot attain full representation.

Two works with a strongly oppressive character were *Borders – Limitations* by Elżbieta Jabłońska (fig. 26) and *Run* by Jadwiga Sawicka (fig. 27). Jabłońska erected a fence, thus cordoning off a street and preventing passage along the line of the road. This barrier reared up in the ruined, overgrown space, creating a theatrical road block. For borders tend to be invisible, no more than symbolic lines that often cannot even be seen in real space, and so they need a whole arsenal of theatrical “armaments”.⁵⁶ A border may be signaled by signs, texts, obstacles, barbed wire, and instructions on how to proceed, but obstacles to crossing it can also be regulated in the sphere of power over affect and memory, by intimidation derived from rituals of control – and in extreme cases even by symbols of threats (arms, mines, or guard towers).⁵⁷ Jabłońska’s fence was at once literal and intimidatory, an ostentatious and uncompromising barricade, a barrier. Sawicka’s signs with the instruction “Run”, displayed at various points throughout the site of the former fortress, further amplified this unease. Run from whom? Where to? Those mounted on the ruins and the border posts took on particular eloquence, suggesting that whatever had caused the ruination of the city was still casting its shadow over the present. They strongly intimated that this abandoned site had a highly unpleasant, spectral aura. As in any encounter with spectres, then, the present disintegrated, giving way to the instable, heterogeneous nature of time so typical for critical borderscaping.

⁵⁶ BAUER / RAHN 1997, 8.

⁵⁷ IBID.



Fig. 26 Elżbieta Jabłońska, *Borders – Limitations*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.





Fig. 27 Jadwiga Sawicka, *Run*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

Another work of a spectral character was *Morgenthau* by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art) (fig. 28). This proffered a suggestion of what Germany would be like had the plan to demilitarize and deindustrialize it completely, devised by Henry Morgenthau, American finance minister and advisor to President Roosevelt, been implemented. Morgenthau – the word displayed in neon lights – thus was not merely a reference to morning dew [the literal meaning of the German word “Morgentau” – transl. note], but was an allusion to that political vision, given physical form by the artists, who erected a wooden platform on the ruins of the former command centre and placed live animals on it. This represented a treatment of the fortress, symbol of Prussia’s military might, and defended during World War II to the last soldier, in accordance with Morgenthau’s conception. Yet the presence of this bucolic agrarian tableau could not tame the ruins and recast them as peaceful. On the contrary: nothing fitted together. The manoeuvre merely gave physical form to another spectre, which unerringly highlighted issues related to cultural memory and tacitly attributed to the layer of the palimpsest connected with World War II.

Sometimes, however, even spectres conjured in places such as the Kostrzyn fortress had a certain “lightness”: Julita Wójcik, for instance, contributed an installation called *Castle Reconstruction* (fig. 29), which was composed of delicate metal structures and coloured balloons describing in their arrangements in the air the helmets of towers and the lines of walls. The ethereality and ephemerality of this intervention, however, is read as a signal that neither the castle nor the Kostrzyń fortress as a whole can realistically be rebuilt. They have to remain ruins, for life in the border region has moved on, and no longer reaches to this site, which has become a museum in the border zone – a museum to which none of the groups of people living there is able to attach their own memory, whether individual or cultural. And so the balloons have to be taken by the wind, or burst, one by one, so that only the air is left, haunted by herds of demons, whose stories no-one wants to share, because they divide too sharply.

The installations by Grzegorz Klaman, Carina Randløv, and Bernardo Giorgi, in turn, were set firmly in the quotidian of Kostrzyn ca. 2000. In Klaman’s interpretation, the Kostrzyn coat of arms was reduced to a schematic blue-and-white sign, which had entered into a form of interaction with the McDonald’s logo in the background, thus connecting the historical and ruined with the new, and greedily annexing the borderlands beyond the ruined site of the fortress (fig. 30). Randløv and Giorgi took a different approach, opening up stalls in the lively border bazaar, drawing attention almost casually to the dynamic border processes celebrated every day by actors such as the traders and buyers from both sides of the border. The Danish artist offered “Remnants, Souvenirs & More...” – in other words, products imitating real historical finds, and so reminding those visiting the bazaar that in their immediate vicinity was the ruined Kostrzyn/Küstrin fortress (fig. 31). The Italian Giorgi, in turn, invited those strolling around the



Fig. 28 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *Morgenthau*, 2004, installation, courtesy of the artists.





Fig. 29 Julita Wójcik, *Castle Reconstruction*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

bazaar to sew items of clothing and accessories, such as bags, themselves, using patterns from the handicrafts magazine *Burda* and incorporating elements made from maps of the ruined Kostrzyn/Küstrin (fig. 32). Thus his customers might have a collar or cuffs with cartographic motifs representing the non-extant town, or a plan of the fortress in its golden age. This gave rise to a mapping of the space immediately against human skin, so physicalizing memory and braiding in an earlier layer of the palimpsest with that most alive and contemporary. In the context of the realizations by these artists, the border came alive as a complex choreography of border lines in multiple lived places.



Fig. 30 Grzegorz Klaman, *Logo*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

Another artist who set himself the task of combining these two levels was Michael Kurzwelly, who did so on two planes: that of imagery and that of space. His idea was to superimpose photographs of contemporary Kostrzyn on views of old Küstrin, and to label these visual palimpsests with quotes from the words of witnesses to history. He displayed his works, entitled *Parallel Worlds* (fig. 33), in the space between the ruins and the border bazaar full of vendors and buyers, thus showing that the devastation of the town and the relocation of the border had also contributed to a shift in the centre of life there.

In 2012, the exhibition *Memento Kostrzyn*, which was again held on the site of the fortress, or rather its increasingly dilapidated ruins, brought together eleven artists displaying works referencing ways of re-de-constructing the history relating to the age of Frederick II (the Great), and the period of his imprisonment in its walls. *Memento*



Fig. 31 Carina Randløv, *Remnants, Souvenirs & More...*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

Kostrzyn may thus be interpreted as a bid to reach down to a deeper layer of the border palimpsest, one dating from the eighteenth century, and to effect its critical borderscaping from a contemporary perspective. In tackling this sedimented history, the artists showed how different, and often opposing, are the notions held by Germans and Poles about the figure of Frederick II today. Unfortunately, this event was not accompanied by a publication.

Works that addressed the ambivalent perception of the Prussian ruler and the differences in assessment of his political activity, determined by the Polish or German national interest, were a particularly interesting aspect of this exhibition, curated by Christoph Tannert. In his conceptual document,⁵⁸ Tannert stressed that contemporary art displayed in a place as overtly controversial as the ruined *Kostrzyn* fortress contributes to recovering that place from oblivion, and thematizes individual experience and perception of

⁵⁸ We are grateful to Christoph Tannert for giving us permission to study the conceptual document.

Fig. 32 Bernardo Giorgi,
Pattern Kiosk, 2004, installation
at the bazaar, courtesy of Anne
Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.



history. He thus tasked art with moving between the past and the present and bringing forth into the light layer after layer of the border-aesthetic palimpsest that had been concealed below the surface. The *a priori* site-specific installations created by these artists thus had a motive role to play in relation to the neighbourly relations between Poland and Germany, which were still full of prejudices, founded as they were on clichés that required de(con)struction.

These historical vicissitudes were measured up by a kind of sundial, with a rusty flag-pole as its gnomon. This was an installation by Roland Fuhrmann, *300 Years in a Day* (fig. 34), which summarized and condensed key events from Polish-German history in the form of inscriptions on round plaques like the hours on a clock face. Partitions, war, territorial divisions – all these events could be traced by following the shadow cast by the mast, from which no flag now flies because the course of history has reduced the Kostrzyn fortress to a no-man's land.



Fig. 33 Michael Kurzweily, *Parallel Worlds*, 2004, installation at the bazaar, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

As Peter Carstens has noted:

The present-day residents of Kostrzyn are themselves often from far away, having themselves been exiled and resettled from what were once regions of eastern Poland, which after the war fell to the Soviets. When the Friends of Küstrin had the idea to re-erect the old Johann memorial, they met with all kinds of resistance. The restored plinth was unveiled four years ago, but Johann himself has still not returned to this day.⁵⁹

On this vacant plinth (which had once borne a statue of Johann von Brandenburg, the originator, in the sixteenth century, of the idea to build the Küstrin fortress), in a polemic with the idea of a bombastic classical monument, Szymon Kobylarz installed a curious bust of the Prussian ruler, composed of several mismatched fragments of his face,

⁵⁹ CARSTENS 2017, n. p. n.



Fig. 34 Roland Fuhrmann, *300 Years in a Day*, 2012, installation at the bazaar, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

hands, and military boots (fig. 35). The resultant image of the ruler was thus atomized, incomplete, incohesive, and optically unstable – it looked like a hybrid which might fall to pieces at any moment, an impression that correlated with its ruined surroundings. It was designed in such a way that circling the plinth and surveying Kobylarz’s work from various angles heightened that effect, so perceptibly translating the varying historical views on Frederick into visual form. German history tends to see him chiefly as “the philosopher of Sanssouci”, friend to Voltaire, man of letters, broadly educated humanist, art lover, and tolerant, enlightened servant of his state, while from the Polish perspective he is viewed as one of the prime movers in the partitions and collapse of the Polish Commonwealth.

These divergent interpretations of the image of the Prussian king were also referenced by Hubert Czerepok, whose work, titled with one of the aphorisms penned by the “philosopher of Sanssouci” – *In my state everybody may pursue their happiness* – is a flawless copy in wood of the German coin commemorating Frederick released by the state mint in Berlin in 2012 (fig. 36a–b). With this piece, Czerepok is addressing the issue of the counterfeiting of Polish money by the Prussian ruler, who engaged in this practice both to finance the wars he waged and, by releasing the forged coins into circulation, deliberately to weaken the Polish economy. Frederick himself is reported



Fig. 35 Szymon Kobyłarz, *Frederick the Great*, 2012, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.



Fig. 36a–b Hubert Czerepok, *In my state everybody may pursue their happiness*, 2012, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky.

to have been wont to say that rulers played for provinces, and people were the chips with which they paid...

The work *Les jeux sont faits (Das Spiel ist aus)* by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art), in turn, concentrated on de(con)structing the positive image of Frederick unceasingly perpetuated by German history, etched into the collective memory at least in part by the 400 pen-and-ink drawings executed by Adolph von Menzel from 1839 as illustrations for Franz Theodor Kugler's biography of the king (fig. 37). Peschken and Pisarsky's contribution was a video alluding to the painting *The Third of May 1808* by Francisco de Goya, showing two soldiers – significantly – in Polish uniforms, firing on glass plates featuring motifs by Menzel. The vision of Frederick as glorious ruler and lover of art reinforced by the German painter cracked, sprouted fissures and holes, and shattered into tiny pieces, thus suggesting the impossibility of upholding the iconography glorifying the king. Visitors to the exhibition *Memento Kostrzyn* could take away with them pieces of the glass plates with details of Menzel's prints, representing traces of historical narratives which, dependent on the viewpoint of who, when and for whom they – or rather their interpretations – are constructed, disintegrate over time. Peschken and Pisarsky warned that the shards could cause injury, a caution that incorporated a metaphorical dimension if the *Memento Kostrzyn* project was read as a cathartic wound inflicted by border narratives to facilitate the exploration of deeper layers of the border-aesthetic palimpsest and to bind them into the present.

Jörg Schlinke and Roland Boden addressed the question of the young Duke Frederick's relationship with his father, who understood neither the prince's artistic predilections



Fig. 37 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *Les jeux sont faits (Das Spiel ist aus)*, 2012, installation, courtesy of the artists.

nor his sensitive soul. *Queer Piper* is an object reminiscent of a flute, but in its title also alluding to the ambiguous words of Frederick William I to his son regarding the latter's fondness for both music and members of his own gender. Boden's installation *Fridericus' Rabbit Friend's Story of Joy and Despair Given at the Camp of Bunzelwitz* was an allusion to an allegedly fictional anecdote about the duke's emotional bond with his pet, which was taken away from him by his despotic father, and whose paw the future ruler of Prussia reportedly carried with him all his life. It comprised a cuboid plinth, and atop it an oversized white rabbit, its forepaws resting on its belly, gazing down from its height upon the ruins, and here symbolizing the tense relations between father and son. Ironic accents connected with interpretation of Frederick II's youthful traumas are perceptible in both Schlinke's and Boden's works. This aspect was also addressed by Ulrich Polster in his video *ICD-10 F60.8*, a compilation of looped images referring to the execution of Hans Hermann von Katte, whose body was left long enough for the imprisoned duke to observe it from the window of his cell. In the same context, Via Lewandowsky proposed the laying of a foundation stone for a gigantic monument dedicated to the duke's executed friend: a 173-metre-high structure housing a whole plethora of infrastructure, including shopping malls, churches, and even an astronomic observatory (*No Offence – Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony for a Katte Memorial*). This he presumably intended as a commentary not only on history, but also on the overweening initiatives of both Polish and German local politicians, who have repeatedly announced initiatives to rebuild the fortress and the old town.

Paradoxically, however, despite his traumatic experiences, the future Frederick II followed in his father's footsteps and gained the epithet 'the Great' as a result of his transformation of Prussia into an impressive military power. He became a warrior icon, an infallible, ruthless, victorious leader. This inspired Nasan Tur's oversized Prussian *Uniform of Frederick the Great* (fig. 38), which, empty inside, but haunted by the ruler's spectre, articulated the quintessence of his position both in history and in the border-aesthetic palimpsest.

Simone Zaugg's installation *Time is Back* (fig. 39), on the site where the church once stood, was a tower housing a mechanism emitting a recording of bells ringing every hour. The repetitive sound rhythmicized and suffused the forgotten space of the border assemblage, on the one hand giving an impression of returning life, but on the other all the more strongly exposing the presence of the vacuum and the silence of the ruins. On the site of the Kostrzyn Fortress Museum, in the brief description under this installation, this was expressed as follows: "It is unclear, however, for whom and why the bell tolls."⁶⁰

60 <http://archiwum.muzeum.kostrzyn.pl/GALERIA/MK/mk.html>, n. p. n., [last accessed 30. 05. 2023].



Fig. 38 Nasan Tur, *Uniform of Frederick the Great*, 2012, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

The site of the former fortress, transformed into a forum for artistic activity, also prompted a surge in activity on the local political scene, which in the border zone is still highly charged. The museum's website displays a report on who spoke and what they said:

Mr Martin Gorcholt (Minister of Science, Research, and Culture for Brandenburg) stressed: *today, we want to link up in a network of common European institutions. I nonetheless think that regardless of their historical baggage, Poland and Germany will continue to draw closer to each other (?) I hope that this exhibition will create something of a tradition of closer cooperation between the museum and the ministry.*⁶¹ ... At the end, the exhibition's curator, Mr Christoph Tannert, encouraged those present to stroll around the exhibition with some Polish sausage, so inviting the 200 or so people gathered there to take advantage of the buffet.⁶²

61 *IBID.*

62 *IBID.*



Fig. 39 Simone Zaugg, *Time is Back*, 2012, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

Feasting, even in places with such complex and multi-layered history as the Kostrzyn fortress, always brings people together and alters the flavour of (un)shared heritage. The *Memento Kostrzyn* project thus showed the German-Polish border as a discursive landscape of competing meanings, and enabled borders to be seen as a function of the relationship between politics and aesthetics.

3.5 THE PALIMPESTING OF THE RUINED BORDER ASSEMBLAGE

These artistic projects in the weed-occupied “Prussian Pompeii” are a model example of a border-aesthetic palimpsest and of critical limology. A work that set out to rediscover and examine the multi-strata character of Kostrzyn/Küstrin was the installation by Markus Wirthmann *Ground Air Exhaust*, shown as part of the exhibition *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place* (fig. 40). This piece was based on methods of physical ground analysis and contamination examinations. Wirthmann thus treated this palimpsest not only as a metaphor, but also as a physical object, whose layers could be studied using specialist equipment that could suck out the air “poisoned” by the past.



Fig. 40 Markus Wirthmann, *Ground Air Exhaust*, 2004, installation, courtesy of Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

Hanna Sjöberg’s installation and the two projects *Dialog Loci – Art in a Lost Place* and *Memento Kostrzyn* shed light on just how many aspects and complexities there are to consider in sharing a border that is still relatively young in comparison with the history of the ruined fortress. As Markus Bauer and Thomas Rahn write: “The border can be metaphorized as an incision, i. e., as a *subtle operation* that produces an effect, but is not itself perceptible.”⁶³ In the case of the Polish-German border, neither the incision nor the operation were subtle, a fact that to this day continues to impact upon the curious status of the “Prussian Pompeii”, which suddenly found itself on the wrong side of the Oder. Art that appears in such a place sets in train all manner of processes related to border narratives and bordering processes, drawing attention to the very nature of the border as process.⁶⁴ What particularly engaged artists not only from Poland and Germany in

⁶³ BAUER / RAHN 1997, 7.

⁶⁴ NEWMAN 2006b, 10–12.

this heterogeneous border assemblage was its constantly changing character, which they listened attentively to in order to call forth hordes of spectres, and, through dialogues with them, to stimulate an individual perception of history in every viewer, free of stereotypes and antipathy towards Others from across the border.

David Newmann stresses that borders are barriers that have always been crossed⁶⁵ – and that art is sure to be able to support that process inspiringly, the more so that the border zone is by its very nature conducive to the mingling of cultures and the emergence of hybrid identities,⁶⁶ hopefully at least in part independently of the flagship cultural and historical policies of a given state. In the case of the former Kostrzyn/Küstrin fortress, however, the paradox is that the historical and political complexity of the region long remained deeply hidden, which, as the projects outlined in this chapter show, lends it an absolutely remarkable aura akin to that of a literary text, inspiring artists to initiate critical borderscaping and to immerse themselves in its bordertextures. Remnants and ruins become dynamic, relational backdrops against which human and non-human actors play out their diverse roles, interacting with one another and initiating borderscaping processes. The artists acted a little like Erazm Kuźma considered Jacques Derrida to have done in his famous book *Margins of Philosophy*: on Derrida's declared intention in writing the book to be the deconstruction and questioning of "the limit", Kuźma comments: "though as always in his work, everything will be ambiguous, because he wants to both abolish the border and preserve it, to 'be on the border', sit astraddle it."⁶⁷ Like every palimpsest that forms part of the processual ontology of borders, one of the characteristics of Kostrzyn/Küstrin is that it must constantly remain "in process" and open to change, in order to weave the current in with the past and facilitate an orientation on the future, treating the border as a spatial and temporal event. This *sitting astraddle the border* facilitates the adoption of a position akin to that of the Angelus Novus in the watercolour by Paul Klee, poetically described by Walter Benjamin⁶⁸: even looking at ruins and rubble it is possible to move towards the future. This movement within the realm of the border assemblage may also be treated literally as travelling and as phenomenological mapping of the German-Polish border, as shown by the work and works of the artists showcased in the following chapter.

65 NEWMAN 2003, 14.

66 NEWMAN 2006b, 150.

67 KUŹMA 2008, n. p. n.

68 BENJAMIN 1969, 257.

4 Mapping the Border: Artistic Journeys and Practices in Border Zones

It is not only at historic watershed moments that there is a great need for maps. Maps support the experience and comprehension of spaces, and offer reassurance and guidance in unfamiliar terrain.¹ When borders are shifted, the desire for orientation is particularly strong. And there is a broad spectrum of cartographic products to choose from, because whether digital or analogue, maps can focus on diverse aspects of the areas they cover. One lexical entry under the headword “maps” defines its subject as “minimized representations of larger sections of the earth’s surface”, and continues:

Maps may be categorized into many departments, depending on how they are ordered, whether according to their main content, or their specific purpose, or their execution, or according to their tapered scale.²

Distinctions are drawn between mountain maps, geological maps, physical maps (featuring phenomena specific to the earth’s water surface, such as tides, flows, and currents), natural history maps, ethnographic maps, and political maps, which visualize states. This shows clearly that even something as substantive and apparently objective as a map has meanings to yield. Maps devoted to nature and natural phenomena highlight the fact that mountain ranges, rivers, and forests extend across state borders; natural and political spaces are not identical. Likewise perspective – the point from which the world is viewed – and the section of terrain that the map shows are meaningful. Maps, irrespective of whether they show a region, a city, a state, or a continent, are spatial representations of relations and connections.³ They also simplify, reduce complexity, and focus pragmatically on partial aspects, thereby modelling the view of a terrain.⁴ They exclude ‘the disorderly, the dirty and the distant’ in order to provide orientation. At the same time, their image-based argumentation conveys objectivity by means of keys – schematized visual representations (e.g. state borders as lines). This “visual structure bringing order to communication”⁵ strengthens the authority of the material and its author.

1 On the interrelationship between maps and upheaval, see SCHLÖGEL 2016, 56–62.

2 Cf. MEYERS GROSSES KONVERSATIONS-LEXIKON 1905, 108.

3 SCHMIDT-LAUBER / ZECHNER 2018, II.

4 Cf. HOLTORF 2018.

5 MICHEL 2015, 212.

Mapping then, is also a mental and cognitive activity⁶ – Michel Foucault, for instance, saw himself as a cartographer.⁷ The map itself in cartographical thinking is treated as a symbol, an aesthetic object, which comprises elements both of the imagination and of text. According to the semiotic categories conceived by Charles Peirce, the map is at once an image, an index, and a symbol – in our reading of it, we ignore all the discrepancies between these categories of signs: we lose sight of its semiotic character entirely. We carry out what is known as a cartographic conversion, a process which involves the exchange of the symbol for what it describes.⁸ By virtue of its open character, in contact with reality, the map is oriented entirely toward experimentation:

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation.⁹

In maps, then, poetic eloquence and travel as a state of mind come up against topography ruthlessly and unempathetically created by rulers and politicians; on paper it is so easy to shift a *limes*, and a heavily policed border looks like a gleaming white, unviolated ribbon of paper.¹⁰ Elżbieta Rybicka, in turn, notes that the map is “an itinerant concept that circulates between scientific disciplines (geographic cartography, history, art history, psychology, and sociology) and artistic practices”.¹¹

Artistic mapping can challenge this ostensible neutrality and authority in official mapping, and record state borders as made, alterable, and not forever. In geoscience, one of the notions encapsulated in the concept of mapping is the indexing of an area of terrain using field research.¹² In art, the map and mapping are both the end product of the work and the research, and the method itself. Mapping is a research and performative activity in the present which provides insight into the historical theme. In contemporary art practices, it is a research method that contributes to the preparation of site-specific works and the establishment of position and situation within given circumstances.¹³ Mapping is a practice that can be both grounded in historical knowledge and imaginative;¹⁴ it reacts

6 JAMESON 1988.

7 REDER 2012, II.

8 WAGNER 2012, 464.

9 DELEUZE / GUATTARI 2005, 12.

10 See SCHALANSKY, 9.

11 RYBICKA 2014, 142.

12 Cf. MÜLLER / ROSENBERGER 2001.

13 See MÖNTMANN 2003–2004, 16 f.

14 Cf. SCHMIDT-LAUBER / ZECHNER 2018, 15.

to what is already present, but also adds meaningful new creative content. Works of art that employ cartographic motifs take us on a virtual journey into the unknown. They make reference to both cultural and individual memory, often also laying bare delicate socio-political contexts and initiating borderscaping processes. Projects involving travel along a border make that border a place, “plucking” it out of abstract space, as human geographer Yi Fu Tuan¹⁵ would put it. He considers the difference between place and space to be that the former is branded by human presence and meanings that arise out of that presence, while the latter is abstract in character. Places along the border are defined pieces of space with a value that is bestowed on them by the artists who map them. Places where artists spent time during a project mapping the German-Polish border start to evoke emotions. For a place to be created, there needs to be a person – a person who, on arriving in a given area of space, gives it meaning. Phenomenological anthropology holds that places are always constructed by humans on the move. This is because human perception, partly for evolutionary reasons, is not founded on perception of things from a single, privileged, static perspective, but is more linear, like a trail: as if the perceiver were walking around the object of their interest – or, in this particular case, travelling along and crossing the border. Artists mapping a border render it a place of note, lent currency by their being in motion.

Hal Foster has coined a further term that is well suited for describing with greater precision the position of artists working with ethnographic methods: he terms their visualization of their own artistic position in relation to the individuals or communities on which they are working “framing”.¹⁶ Framing is also significant in the artistic projects that will be addressed in this chapter. Travelling to a border, or along a border, places the questing individual in a relationship with both the place they visit as it is in the present and the traces of its past. Many of the projects examined here also follow the artists’ own reminiscences, for instance of the time before 1989 or before the Schengen Agreement, when crossing borders always involved controls. In this respect, artistic mapping is also always linked to the subject or the subjective experience of those doing that mapping.

In the classic mapping process, borders are transformed from spatial and temporal events into lines on paper. These lines do not reflect the character of borders as a complex choreography of boundary zones in multiple lived places. In their simplified form as transferred onto paper according to current cartographic principles, they are a challenge for artists, who, when studying the lines representing borders on maps, feel provoked into experiencing those spaces phenomenologically with their own bodies in reality. These lines drawn by human hands provoke the pursuit of geopoetics in practice, mapping in motion, and questions about borderscaping and the character of particular border

15 TUAN 2001, 85–100.

16 FOSTER 1996, 203. Cf. also MÖNTMANN 2003–2004, 17.

assemblages on the ground. For only on the ground does it become visible that borders are a discursive landscape of competing meanings created by a variety of actors, both human and non-human. Karen O'Rourke, who analyses the fusion of the strategies of walking about and mapping currently underway in the field of contemporary art, notes that artist cartographers touch on both the performative and media-related aspects of maps and political issues.¹⁷ A travelling artist is also a witness to Otherness, and that experience of Otherness is especially intense while travelling along borders and mapping them phenomenologically. As Rebecca Solnit,¹⁸ the author of the book *Wanderlust. A History of Walking*, emphasizes, traversing space is rarely innocent; it often has the character of an aesthetic, philosophical, or political act. In the context under consideration here, it is likewise not without an agenda: it activates the borderscaping process and initiates critical limology. The art of travelling and mapping is inextricably bound up with the formulation of questions about the landscapes passed through.

In his introduction to a "mapping of the urban space", Christian Hanussek suggests a "zoom and perspectival shift":

Mappings begin with the sketching of the geographical position, dimensions, access routes to and delimitations of the site [...]. As these various elements cannot be represented on a single classic map, changing perspectives should be adopted. In order for details to be described more precisely, they are shown separately alongside the map itself in larger scale. Individual elements can also be explained with words or sentences written down during the mapping process. The inscription of subjective impressions on the map begins at this early stage, at the level of the material mapping of a place.¹⁹

While political maps reproduced in atlases, school books, and lexicons are designed to give as factual and objective an impression as possible, which is communicated by means of the keys and their comparable presentation, artistic mappings can be unconventional. Their subjective approach reveals their author's subject.

4.1 NEW CARTOGRAPHIES: ARTISTIC MAPPINGS OF POLITICAL SPACES

The following addresses artists' mapping strategies, and looks at a range of practices and media that deal with the assimilation of border zones. Mapping can take the form of drawing, sculpting, film, or painting; it can be visual or auditive. It offers a context

¹⁷ See O'ROURKE 2013.

¹⁸ SOLNIT 2014.

¹⁹ HANUSSEK 2017, 94.

within which to reflect on, look anew at, and artistically remap the old and new courses of borders.

The variability of country or world maps is just one act of annulment and transference in the work of the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers. He had an artistic interest in double semantics and reassigning the meanings of words. In 1968, he took a school political world map printed in France, a *Carte du Monde Politique*, struck through the “li” with ink, and replaced it with an “é”. With this unequivocal gesture of annulment, a “*Carte du Monde Politique*” was transformed into a “*Carte du Monde Poétique*”. This intervention by the artist was also an act of deconstruction levelled at the might of prevalent systems of order and their form of notation and visualization. After Roland Barthes we might say here that the individual letter is innocent, and that “the Fall begins when we *align* letters to make them into words”.²⁰

Broodthaers continued his critical contestation of systems of order in his 1975 *Atlas. La Conquête de l'espace. Atlas à l'usage des artistes et des militaires*. This was a miniature book measuring 38 × 25 mm – thus no bigger than a matchbox – in a slipcase. In this way, Broodthaers was making a stand against the traditional size and weight of conventional atlases, whose appearance alone is intended as a declaration of their importance as quantifiers of the world. At the same time, his mini-atlas calls to mind the miniature soldiers and military equipment used by political leaders and military personnel to enact and plan battle strategies on maps.²¹

Broodthaers' tiny pocket atlas contains the sketched outlines of 32 countries in alphabetical order. The print sheet for this miniature atlas, which reproduces every page of the finished atlas, looks like a classification diagram that offers, or seems to offer, an overview.²² Each country is shown on a separate page, in the same size format, “so that the actual functions of cartography – the true scaling and the creation of geographical connections – are lost”.²³ The selection of countries seems arbitrary, though there is a predominance of those on the European continent, and the artist has portrayed them merely as silhouettes that, as the title of the work purports, can be used both by poets and for military purposes. The way in which the atlas visualizes its subjects, however, precludes any form of orientation regarding the territorial, political, or military “size” of a given state (Australia and England, for instance, are depicted as the same size); Broodthaers' atlas demonstrates that these are in the eye of the beholder.²⁴

20 BARTHES 1985, 119.

21 Cf. CHAFFEE 2016, 249.

22 Marcel Broodthaers, *Atlas. La Conquête de l'espace. Atlas à l'usage des artistes et des militaires*, 1975, offset printing, 38 pp., in a slipcase, 38 × 25 mm, Herbert Foundation, Ghent.

23 FOLIE / MACKERT 2003, 104.

24 Marcel Broodthaers' work *Carte du Monde poétique* was discussed in the catalogue for *documenta X* (1997) by Catherine David. The front cover of the catalogue features the word “POLITICS”, with a large

Like Broodthaers, from 1967 Alighiero Boetti also addressed the political connotations of borders, for instance by defining political power relations or crises on the basis of cartographical drawings. Over the period 1971–1992, he commissioned Afghani women to embroider his *Mappe del mondo* (World Maps),²⁵ thereby creating a link between a handicraft associated with women, and geopolitical power relations and bids that were in that period predominantly regulated by men. On the *Mappe*, Boetti uses national flags as a vehicle for visualizing the dominance of the various powers – the USA in the west and the Soviet Union in the east. This also explains why he had the maps made in Afghanistan, a country whose fate it was to serve as a theatre of negotiation for global geopolitical conflicts, and which is to this day being battered by a decades-long war. Another striking feature of the map is that Europe seems relatively small – no common European identity is recognizable on the basis of the fragmented method of identification by the system of individual national signs. Poland is indicated in the 1972 *Mappa* in white and red, corresponding to the colours of its flag, but the red flows seamlessly into the colour of the Soviet Union.

In his later world maps dating from the early 1990s, Europe seems to gain in significance in relation to the superpowers. With the collapse of the former eastern bloc, from which Russia emerged as rump state, the European continent seemed to “grow” by comparison. Boetti’s *Mappe* show clearly that maps, as order systems, offer a view of the world (and hence also of Europe) that is subordinated to the semiotic system they use. In Boetti’s maps, the world as a natural space is of no importance; indeed, the seas are not even coloured blue. Instead, the continents are playthings of political interests, with borders marking theatres of power.

The shifts in borders within Europe are the subject of Simona Koch’s video *BORDERS / Europe* [*GRENZEN / Europa*], an animated pencil drawing from 2010. (fig. 41a–c) Her work emphasizes that state borders are constantly changing. In the twentieth century, European states were repeatedly reshaped, borders shifted following wars or the demise of political systems, and new countries appeared on the map – only to disappear again. Maps of Europe are thus relationally bound up with space-time, and the dates of their creation offer important contexts.²⁶

On the basis of historical atlases and maps that Koch found in libraries, at flea markets, and on the internet, she traced the borders of European states over the course of their history with a pencil. She copies the changing borders of countries such as Germany, which morphed repeatedly over the twentieth century, from the Wilhelmine Empire,

red italic “E” set behind the “LI”. Inside the catalogue, this overprint is expanded and transcribed as “Politics-Poetics”. See DAVID 1997.

25 Cf. ALIGHIERO BOETTI 1998, 60–62. Alighiero Boetti, *La Mappa del Mondo*, 1972, embroidery on canvas, 180 cm × 220 cm, on loan from the Austrian Ludwig Foundation since 2001, inv. no.: ÖL-Stg 398/0.

26 See in this context above all SCHLÖGEL 2016, 60, where he writes: “Maps have their own periods of aging and decline.”

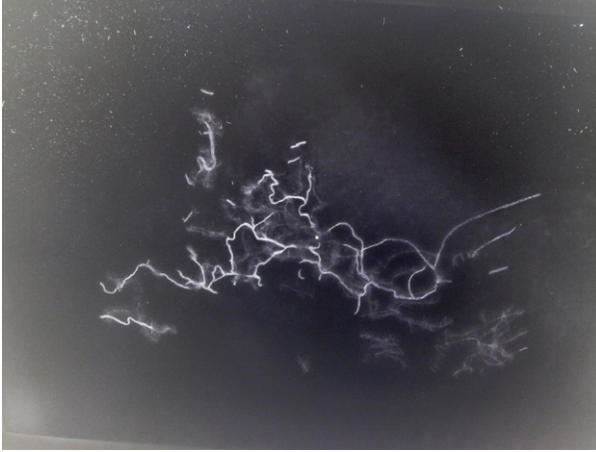
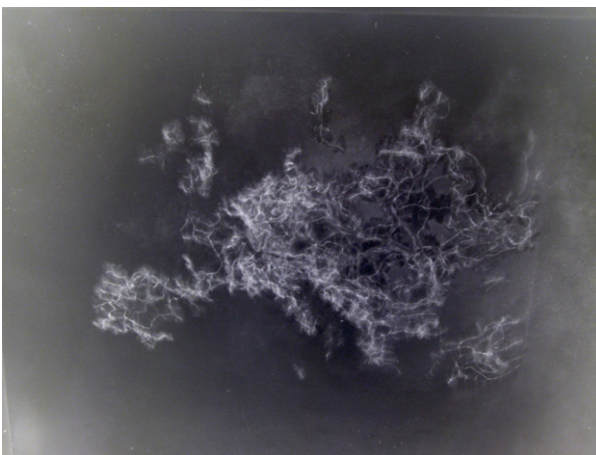
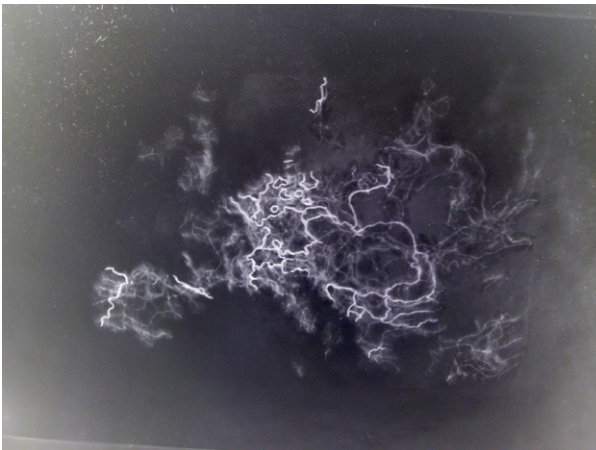


Fig. 41a–c Simona Koch, *BORDERS / Europe*, 2010, animated pencil drawing, HD film, 4:3, color, mute, 01:40 min./loop, © Simona Koch.



through the Weimar Republic, to the National Socialist dictatorship, into the FRG and GDR, and on into its present form as the reunited Germany, its territory shrinking and swelling with each successive state system. Likewise, Poland, which before 1918 had been divided up between three states, and then became independent, has over the course of its history seen multiple changes to its borders in both the east and the west. Changes to the state affiliation of various regions are ingrained into the context of the European continent, so that Koch's video is an animation composed of constantly changing lines. In her work, then, borders are portrayed as decidedly artificial: just as her pencil, wielded by her hand, materializes as lines on the support that are again and again erased in order to make way for new border-lines, so too humans, by means of settlements, expulsions, military clashes, and peace or strategic treaties, have repeatedly shifted the boundaries of their territories. *BORDERS / Europe* is a formulation of the historical instability of borders using the medium of film as an animation, in which these border shifts, time-compressed, flow into one another, are eradicated, and reappear. In addition, the drawing is shown in negative form and the visualization is not subordinated to any chronology: pencil strokes show as white on a dark background, and disappearing lines leave light shadows behind, so the old–new–old border movements remain visible as in a palimpsest.

In formal terms, these three works by Broodthaers, Boetti, and Koch follow mapping processes from a bird's-eye perspective, thereby adapting methods of visualization common in political cartography, which portrays the structure of states in broader contexts.

Projects such as the above themselves provide context for Michael Kurzwelly's *Nowa Amerika*, which is an imagined mapping of the Oder region. (fig. 42) Kurzwelly, the creator of *Stubfurt* and the "Stubfurtisch" language discussed in other chapters of this book,²⁷ works with a group of other artists and theoreticians (including Karsten Wittke and Joanna Kiliszek), as well as residents of the region, to design maps on which the Oder ceases to be a border river:

Nowa Amerika is a backbone amoeba formed by the two rivers Odera and Nyße. Nowa Amerika is a federation composed of Szczettinstan, Terra Incognita, Lebus Ziemia and Schlonsk. This new space in between expands towards the East Pole and the West Pole and the size of the space is determined by the origin of the players. The capital is Stubfurt, the metropolis New Szczettin.²⁸

The name "Nowa Amerika" itself harks back to a project implemented by Frederick II, who in the later eighteenth century brought new settlers into the region and exempted them from taxes:

²⁷ We write about *Stubfurt* and the "Stubfurtisch" language in chapters 1 and 5 of this book.

²⁸ <https://nowa-amerika.eu/project/art-saves-the-world/>, [last accessed 03. 01. 2023].

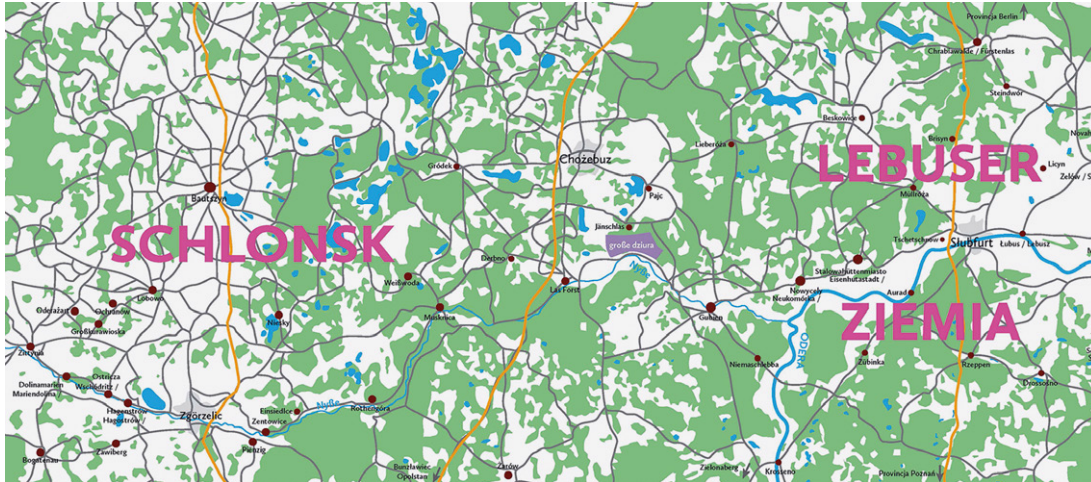


Fig. 42 Michael Kurzwelly, *Map of Nowa Amerika*, 2013, © Michael Kurzwelly/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

For several generations they were exempted from paying taxes so they felt like real pioneers and the region was officially named New Amerika. New villages with promising names emerged, such as Pennsylvania [sic!], New Hampshire, New York, Florida, Maryland, Jamaica and Sumatra. On today's map, some villages have disappeared again and Jamaica became Jamno. Only Malta has remained. This most unusual aspect in the history of the region inspired us to call our newly gained space *Nowa Amerika* – a borderland united by the separation of the border between Germany and Poland, a land for pioneers hungry for freedom, who want to shape this new area according to civil society values and see it as their promised land. In a clandestine meeting on the 20th of March 2010 *Nowa Amerika* was founded.²⁹

Moreover, Kurzwelly has declared that the boundaries of *Nowa Amerika* are fluid, and that in time they will extend even as far as Berlin and Poznań: “Its size depends on the number of people who believe in *Nowa Amerika*.”³⁰ In order to augment the number of “believers”, he has published a guide to *Nowa Amerika*, which can also be downloaded from the project website as a PDF file.³¹ This guide includes several maps that lend a new structure to the German-Polish borderland region. Significantly, Kurzwelly reaches far deeper into history than the establishment of the border on the Oder and the Lusatian Neisse in 1945. In so doing, he creates a subversive cartography and a kind of new nation:

²⁹ <https://nowa-amerika.eu/nowa-amerika-3/>, [last accessed 28.01.2023].

³⁰ *IBID.*, [last accessed 28.01.2023].

³¹ <https://nowa-amerika.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PrzewodnikNowaAmerika.pdf>, [last accessed 28.01.2023].



“Nowa Amérikan”, for whom divisions into German and Polish, formerly German and formerly Polish, are of no import. The foundation of *Nowa Amérika* – even as a utopia on a map – is thus redefining the identity of residents of this border region, proposing a method of processing its complicated history from a contemporary perspective. Kurzwelly tells its story in order to help work through the myths and stereotypes that have divided Germans and Poles for decades:

Some stories are passed on from one generation to the next and accepted without further reflection. Sometimes stories serve to reflect power relations or to seduce us. Stories can also serve to open up new spaces for thoughts and actions, remove the boundaries in our heads and start new relationships. *Nowa Amérika* is such a space. Here are the Germans, over there are the Poles – this dichotomy no longer exists in *Nowa Amérika*. We are *Nowa Amérikan* with post-Polish, post-German and many other migration backgrounds. We have founded a new space in the space between the two and this new space removes the dialectics between two national societies. As *Nowa Amérikan* we are bound to this common sense of belonging and thus we no longer participate in the German-Polish act of shaking hands.³²

As the length of the excerpts of text from the *Nowa Amérika* website cited above suggests, Kurzwelly’s brand of cartography is not only subversive but also descriptive. The maps and commentaries, as well as the undertakings organized in the region, are mutually supplementary, so as to bring the fluid-bordered utopia on the project maps to life in the mentality of its residents. Even the flag of the region is a map: running through the

³² <https://nowa-amerika.eu/nowa-amerika-3/>, [last accessed 28.01.2023].

middle of it is the blue line of the Oder. *Nowa Amerika* is thus a kind of metaphorical bridge connecting the regions on either side of the Oder. It is a place for processing history and calling stereotypes into question. The mapping strategy in this context is a vital instrument of future-oriented critical borderscaping processes designed to create new border narratives.

4.2 MAPPING IN MOTION: TRAVELLING ARTISTIC BORDER PRACTICES

The mapping projects discussed below tend to prefer the perspective of the pedestrian or motorist, and get physically close to the German-Polish border. This is the best vantage point from which to undertake critical limology³³ in practice and observe borders as being in constant, recurring movement, in what Thomas Nail terms “patterns of circulation”. The performative character of a map depends on its legibility,³⁴ and the borders on maps are marked particularly clearly – almost as if inviting its reader to travel along them and cross them. Artists translate what they have seen and experienced in artistic media: they take journeys, stage mobile exhibitions, and, after their return, work further on the pieces they have created. As the authors of the monograph *Mapy świata, mapy ciała. Geografia i cielesność w literaturze* [Maps of the world, maps of the body: Geography and coporeality in literature]³⁵ stress, mapping the spatial order and playing with topography are practices that always (in)directly relate also to creating maps of one’s own body and understanding oneself. Works based on the aesthetic of travelling are in every case a corporeal practice, and as such the aspect of mediation of the landscape using the artist’s body is also significant.

The process of artistic mapping in border regions is closely bound up with movement. It is through movement that the mapped space is first captured and recorded. Artistic practices in the field – drawing or sound recording, for instance – correlate with the visual, auditive, and haptic experience of the environment. Artistic mapping of the border is not necessarily always transposed into classic map form; the focus is far more likely to be multiperspectival and deconstructivist, with the creation of audio and video recordings, images (photographs, drawings, and paintings), diaries, and other writings. The medial disparity shows once again that art is leaving the classic “language of maps” – the reliably possible interpretation of “planes, lines, signs, and symbols”³⁶ – behind it, and complicating things. Artistic mapping must be understood as a complex practice that captures

33 NAIL 2021, 475–489.

34 WAGNER 2012, 464.

35 JASTRZĘBSKA 2014.

36 SCHLÖGEL 2016, 70–79.

borders in their manifold meanings (for the people in their direct vicinity, for political orders, for nature and landscape). The artist's subject is present in every newly created image, object, and text, and no longer disappears behind the cartography. The category of "situated knowledge"³⁷ introduced by Donna Haraway – the knowledge accruing to the individual – can also be adapted for artist cartographers. Their perspectives and experiences determine the structure and output of their projects, but also their actions at the place of their interventions. Tom Holert brings this "situated knowledge" together with the "site specificity" of art when he writes:

The site of the art is moreover inseparable from the position in which and from which the actors take their aesthetic action. [...] Nonetheless, reflection on the unique positioning or positionality in respect of the social, political, economic, sexual, or ethnic standpoint from which they speak and act is one of the vital conditions for every artistic practice to which the predicate of site specificity is applied.³⁸

For the works of art under study in this chapter it is not only the knowledge of the artists that is of significance in border-related pieces, but also that of the people they meet, with whom they talk, and whose experiences and reminiscences are injected into the body of artistic work as it develops.

For her project *Outlines*, in 2020 und 2021, Heike Gallmeier travelled around Germany's entire external border in a converted transporter van (in several stages, interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic). This "mobile art space" was at once her means of transport, her mobile atelier, and her exhibition space.³⁹ In this way, Gallmeier took not only her production base but also her exhibition with her on her travels, thus making her artistic work mobile, and performing the acts of presenting and showing in situ – in the border spaces that she visited during the weeks of her journey.

While the front part of her van served as her living and sleeping space, the cargo space functioned as her atelier and white cube. Her route took her along Germany's external border, through the Czech Republic, Poland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, France, Switzerland, and Austria. Herself brought up in Bavaria, on the German-Czech border, she has tackled the theme of borders and border crossing repeatedly – for instance in 2015 in her on-the-road project *Vertigo*, for which she drove her transporter from Berlin to Northampton, not taking the most direct route, but

37 HARAWAY 1988. In her feminist essay on "situated knowledges", Donna Haraway assumes that research is limited and does not come into existence "objectively". Rather, it is the social circumstances, experiences and contexts within which action takes place that determine thinking and acting.

38 HOLERT 2018, S16.

39 For more on the project, see the website www.mobileartspace.net.

using only national roads, which took her a more meandering way to her destination.⁴⁰ The practice she had cultivated during *Vertigo* – working in the field with *objets trouvés* – was something she pursued in *Outlines*. She also took photographs, which she termed “*trouvailles*”. These formed a photographic diary in which Gallmeier collected and documented colours, shapes, and structures, and also kept a record of the temporary installations in her transporter.

Unlike in *Vertigo*, in *Outlines* it is not the route from a starting-point to a destination that interests Gallmeier: here, it is the journey itself, along Germany’s external borders, whereby the routes she travels are on the “other” side of the border, in the respective neighbouring country. In each case, then, Gallmeier examines and investigates a binational transit zone:

I found it interesting that it [the border] is on the one hand invisible but on the other very palpable. The border forms a line that one sees on the map but not in the landscape. What interests me is the interstitial spaces and transition zones between the countries.... Day after day I try to wind my way along as close to the border as possible. I drive through the localities that are situated on the border. En route, I take photographs or work on temporary installations. My devise is thus basically always: follow the line, and you cannot predict what will happen along the way.⁴¹

The work in situ follows a regulated principle: the destination must be reached early in the day, so that the installation can be created in the van, and photographed before dusk. Gallmeier works with *objets trouvés*, which she combines with painting in the white cube of the cargo space to create temporary installations. For *Outlines*, Gallmeier again took a route along small streets, through residential areas, and out-of-the-way places, picking up items lost, discarded, or forgotten at roadsides. Finally, the transporter was photographed with its cargo doors open, in the context of the immediate surroundings. This represented a kind of localization, in which Gallmeier reacted in formal terms to the site where she happened to be, reflecting its colours or horizons. The resultant photograph is at once the proof, the evidence, of the installation, which was at the end of the day then taken down or apart, and destroyed.

Gallmeier was thus working with objects that she found in particular places; she painted and ordered them under the impact of the landscape and border zones through which she travelled, and the traces of her journey adhered to her transporter – in other words, the successive border zones left residues in palimpsestual form on the vehicle. The climatic conditions, the weather, the light, hospitality or hostility all left

40 HEIKE GALLMEIER 2018.

41 OPPENHEIM / GALLMEIER 2021.

their marks, framing and imprinting the work she produced. Above all, however, the journey in the van was an important precondition for the specific circumstances of this mapping project. In cultural studies, driving is accorded a dimension of experience all its own, in respect of the velocity of movement, to name but one aspect. Since Gallmeier not only travelled but also slept in her vehicle, it is justifiable to speak of a co-agency of vehicle and driver; in cultural theory approaches, this refers above all to “the various ways we have of living in the car, understood to be ‘profoundly embodied and sensuous experiences’”.⁴² The transporter was involved in Gallmeier’s project in a multitude of ways; it was part of her border-zone experience – indeed, was one of the key facilitating factors in that experience: it permitted her to act independently and guaranteed her flexibility, gave her protection, and provided exhibition space. At the same time, for Gallmeier it was in itself a “liminal experience to live and work in a relatively unprotected, very small space, at the mercy of the environment”.⁴³ Over the course of the journey, in parallel to her driving and discovering, she kept a visual diary, which recorded more permanently her “*trouvailles*”, what she saw and experienced. It becomes clear that artistic work is conceived as processual activity in motion and in exchange with the surrounding space, activity that also creates spaces and comprehension of those spaces.⁴⁴

Poland was Gallmeier’s destination on the first stage of her journey, in early September 2020, via the Czech Republic. She crossed the border at Hradek, and thereafter followed the Neisse and the German-Polish border through small villages. Her travel diary records her observations, which are formulated from her vantage point as driver. Gallmeier saw ill-frequented or empty market stalls, and passed technical storage depots (fig. 43). In the divided city of Zgorzelec, across the river Neisse from the German city of Görlitz, she photographed a leisure centre and collected a few abandoned pieces of pallets (fig. 44).⁴⁵ Her presence in her white transporter van, and the fact that she was taking photographs, was also registered with scepticism by local residents.⁴⁶ Random encounters developed into conversations, however, and she won trust, so that she was

42 LAURIER 2011, 70.

43 Heike GALLMEIER, personal communication with the editors, 02. 10. 2022.

44 While the leitmotif in Gallmeier’s project is driving and the motor vehicle, another artistic project on the Polish border, that of Ula Ziober in 2016, uses the bicycle as mode of transport. Ziober writes of it: “Because you can get everywhere on a bike. Because a bike reduces the distance between the traveller and the people they meet along the way. Because the speed at which a cyclist travels enables them to notice everything that goes by too fast when travelling by car, bus, or train. A bike gives you a sense of freedom, and allows you to stop anywhere.” <http://ulaziober.com/project/rowerowy-dom-kultury/>, [last accessed 03. 01. 2023].

45 GALLMEIER 2022, 10 (Day 9, 04. 09. 2020, Radomierzycze, Zgorzelec, Leknica, Nove Czaple).

46 GALLMEIER 2022, 6 (Day 7, 02. 09. 2020, Děčín, Novy Bor, Hradek, Sieniawka, Bogatynia).



Fig. 43 Heike Gallmeier, *Outlines, Trouvaille*, Sieniawka, 2 September 2020, photograph, © Heike Gallmeier.



Fig. 44 Heike Gallmeier, *Outlines, Trouvaille*, Radomierzyce, 4 September 2020, photograph, © Heike Gallmeier.



Fig. 45 Heike Gallmeier, *Outlines*, temporary installation, Stolec, Polen (8 September 2020), N53.52352/E14.32064, photograph, © Heike Gallmeier.

repeatedly able to conduct interviews with people living in the immediate vicinity of the border, for instance with children, a mushroomer, and a woman working in the tourist industry.⁴⁷

In Kostrzyn, too, Gallmeier travelled via border crossings where traces of historic, violent, and economic issues were all present in palimpsestic form; she passed a war cemetery in which 2,000 Polish soldiers are buried, then drove past a market where Polish vendors still sell their wares even though the infrastructure has already been dismantled.⁴⁸ In Stolec (day 13, 08.09.2020) she made the only one of her installations from the German-Polish border: in her open transporter on a small street by a building site, she arranged construction materials and pieces of pallets she had found (fig. 45). She wrote in her travel diary:

I am trying to create a space by letting one colour run over several levels. The effect of the paint varies and changes depending on the materials beneath. It is not easy to reach a conclusion

47 Gallmeier documented these interviews on video. As she speaks no Polish, she used her telephone as a translation aid.

48 GALLMEIER 2022, 13 (Day 12, 07.09.2020).



Fig. 46a–b Heike Gallmeier,
Outlines, Trouvailles, top: Sieniawka,
2 September 2020, bottom: Babigoszcz,
9 September 2020, photograph,
© Heike Gallmeier.

in the short time available, though. Because before I drive on, I have to dismantle it all again. One colour reference for me is a photograph of buildings that I took in Zgorzelec: pink, grey, and green tones. Here in the landscape there is also a connection to the brown tones of the earth.⁴⁹

As Gallmeier describes, the wooden elements were stacked by size to create a three-dimensional effect in the white interior of the vehicle. The paint, which created associations with previous impressions from the trip, and at the same time referenced the immediate environment, ran down over several of the elements, binding the various individual pieces together. Afterwards, the installation was photographed and dismantled. The next day, Gallmeier left Poland and took the ferry from Świnoujście to Sweden. Not only was the entire production situation mobile; the art was repeatedly overwritten, only displayed for a brief moment and recorded photographically. The word “border” (*granica*) is visible on some of the photographs taken by Gallmeier in and around liminal or border situations (fig. 46a–b). At the same time, the border is also a condition that lends the project a framework.

The images were produced in confrontation with the places and people that Gallmeier encountered on her journey. Just as political maps are of their time, and borders come into being and fall within the context of events and timescales, so in Gallmeier’s work the place of production and the time of her travel are bound up with each other in a unique way. One idea with which Gallmeier engaged in parallel with her road trip was Rosi Braidotti’s theory of the nomadic subject: here, the individual is conceived of as a “mobile entity”⁵⁰ and relational actor who is constantly redefining their relationship with their environment:

It is rather a faithfulness [to oneself] that is predicated upon mutual sets of inter-dependence and inter-connections, that is to say sets of relations and encounters. These compose a web of multiple relationships that encompass all levels of one’s multi-layered subjectivity, binding the cognitive to the emotional, the intellectual to the affective and connecting them all to socially embedded forms of stratification.⁵¹

Heike Gallmeier’s *Outlines* was a personal voyage of discovery whose parameters to some extent determined her experiences: as a female solo traveller in a converted van, taking photographs and making installations in her vehicle, she frequently attracted the interest

49 GALLMEIER 2022, 14 (Day 13, 08.09.2020, Szczecin–Lubiesz–close to Stolec–Szczecin).

50 BRAIDOTTI 2006, 135.

51 *IBID.*, 135f. On her journey, Gallmeier read the German edition of Rosi BRAIDOTTI’s essay “The Ethics of Becoming-Imperceptible” quoted here, published by Merve-Verlag (Rosi BRAIDOTTI, *Politik der Affirmation*, Berlin 2018). She also mentions Michel DE CERTEAU’s book *Kunst des Handelns* (Berlin 1988) as an important reference for her own understanding of the project. Cf. OPPENHEIM / GALLMEIER 2021.

of other people, from residents to other travellers at camp sites, and this, as described, had the potential to lead to conversations about her in-situ works and experiences of the border situation.

Gallmeier's road trip may be compared with a trip taken by the artist Elka Krajewska in 2006. While Gallmeier travelled around the German border, Krajewska spent three months driving the Polish border in a van which she, like Gallmeier, had fitted out for sleeping and working in. She set off from Warsaw and headed eastwards, moving anti-clockwise.⁵² She took with her audio and video recording equipment, and also built a headpiece with which she could project her own existing video works (fig. 47). Krajewska, then, was interested in both recording and projection, in broadcasting and saving. She, too, stopped repeatedly on her journey to talk to residents of the various border regions along the Polish border. The task she had set herself was to talk to people, get into conversation with them, and play her films to them. Krajewska writes:

My awareness that I was about to spend three months on the road, driving in one direction, tracing the border of Poland and showing up unannounced at people's door, this was my buffer, and also my justification for unbridled impulsiveness. It was important to me that I stake out a new territory out there, that I tear myself from all recycled experiences and hit upon a radically new work method.⁵³

On her return, Krajewska set about evaluating her recordings. She covered her studio walls with maps of her routes, noting on them where she had made stops. The materials that either belonged to, or had been found or recorded during those stops (such as objects, photographs, or drawings) were matched up with them. Newspaper clippings and books – media that she had acquired during her journey – were laid out on the floor aligned with the maps. This installation was thus effectively a multimedia travel diary, and provided a point of departure for the film *Plany Mela for Dome (90 Seconds and 10 Minutes)*, which was compiled in 2007 from the recordings she had made on her travels. Six years later, Krajewska collated her material for an exhibition in the Galeria Arsenal in Białystok. The archive of objects had grown in the interim, because Krajewska had remained in contact with many of the people she had met in various places along the border, who continued to write her postcards and letters.

These meetings were a central element of her artistic travel concept: Krajewska spoke to people with the intention of showing them her films, which she projected with her headpiece onto the wall behind her, mostly in the entrance areas of the homes she was invited to enter. She writes:

⁵² See KRAJEWSKA / DRĄGOWSKA-ROMASZKAN 2013, 10.

⁵³ KRAJEWSKA / DRĄGOWSKA-ROMASZKAN 2013, 11.

Fig. 47 Elka Krajewska,
Local Field, Włosień, 2006,
photo, courtesy of the artist.



I wanted to listen, collect, to scrupulously note every step, stroke, piece of news and change of heart, so that everything would leave some kind of trace. I had to remember to keep the projection equipment on me at all times and to keep the batteries charged. I had to take care not to brush aside any minor moments, and to strike up conversation with absolutely anyone willing to look at the films projected from my head, even if only for a glimpse [...]. I'd usually set up the projection right past the doorway of the home, in the foyer. The projector encased in the headpiece would cast the image onto the wall directly behind my head. This forced a powerful confrontation. It forced the "viewer" to pay attention; I left no opening for escape.⁵⁴

Via these screenings of her videos, Krajewska came into conversation with the people she met, which gave rise to the collection of new impressions and objects, or the creation

⁵⁴ *IBID.*

of new works – photograph, drawings, or audio-visual documents. The road trip along the border was hence the precondition for reflection on existing works, and at the same time a point of departure for the creation of new ones. The present time of the journey is in this sense a transit space between yesterday and tomorrow, and the border something that is permeable, that provides the framework and at once the potential for artistic production. Through her encounters with people on the border, Krajewska could see her own works in a new light. In the course of her own movement in the car, a new work developed.

In its focus on dialogic situations, Elka Krajewska's project shared common ground with Bernardo Giorgi's *German-Polish Frontier Changes after the Maximum of the Last Glaciation* (1999). Giorgi chose the Oder-Neisse region, the "natural" border between Poland and Germany, for his plans. He conducted interviews with people living on both sides of the border and recorded them on video. He thus created a work which brought the two languages into dialogue and put questions to people from both countries.

Giorgi's project expresses an extended construal of the notion of "travel", which beyond tourist practices is also etymologically related to the word "travail". Caren Kaplan draws attention to this semantic relationship: "Thus, in addition to the more commonplace meaning of taking a journey, travel evokes hard labor (including childbirth) and difficulty."⁵⁵ Travelling can thus be a form of scientific and artistic exploration, of site-specific work, and a way of generating relationships – with places and border zones, with people, and with landscapes. It was in connection with Giorgi's project that Michele Dantini wrote: "The main connotation of the project 'Borders' is, primarily, trying to return, once more, to the planning role of artists and to experiment with the fluidity of roles and languages: artist, curator, critic, interpreter, intellectual."⁵⁶ It is the visit and the questioning by the artist that creates a shared space for his interviewees – the exhibition space.

His 1999 *German-Polish Frontier Changes after the Maximum of the Last Glaciation* is a two-channel video projection: when there is one person speaking on one side, a landscape comes up on the other screen (fig. 48a–d).⁵⁷ Giorgi goes into local authority offices and private homes to talk to residents of the border zone, and at the same time shows the Oder as border river again and again. In this two-channel project, static frames are often shown alongside dynamic ones, most of which show the border landscape as seen from a car or train travelling at high speed. Thus constructed, the visual narrative in this video gives the impression of travelling, being on the move, and mapping the

55 KAPLAN 2002, 33.

56 Michele Dantini, private communication with Bernardo Giorgi, n. d. See also the project website: <http://borders.de/bordersproject/bordersis.htm>, [last accessed 03. 01. 2023].

57 GIORGI / KOLEČEK 2003, 217.



Fig. 48a–d Bernardo Giorgi, *German-Polish Frontier Changes after the Maximum of the Last Glaciation*, 1999, mixed media, installation views, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin © Bernardo Giorgi.

German-Polish border through the physical presence of the artist. It is an impression in which we meet actors participating in borderscaping processes and contributing to the creation of the processual ontology of the border. These are not only people, but also animals, border posts, and signs. The installation establishes a relationship between people and their environment. It is also a vehicle by which these new narratives, most of which do not yet have a place in the historiography of German-Polish border relations, can be brought to a public.

Giorgi's work shows a border assemblage as seen back in a period when the border itself was still visible, and in order to cross it one had to show documents to border guards. Giorgi shows both the points of control and the symbols of both states, and completely neutral places which become part of the border narrative solely due to their physical proximity to the border. With his camera, he accompanies people crossing the Oder bridge, partly tramping through the grass along the riverbank, as if tracking the

presence and proximity of the border in the landscape and life of the residents of the area. As he does so, he presents a comparison of the two languages, Polish and German, by listening to the stories of both Poles and Germans with the same neutral approach. These narratives chiefly address aspects of life on the border and potential German–Polish cooperation. Some people even postulated the creation of a joint Polish–German region in which all residents would have similar registration plates. The Oder is depicted as a river that at once divides and connects. This was a time of pro-integration policies, prior to Poland’s accession to the EU.

Significantly, Giorgi’s video starts with a view of a map of the world, and then zooms in dynamically for a close-up of the German-Polish border line. The subsequent frames are woods and the river shown from a train travelling at high speed. Thus the map becomes a specific territory, and the line on the map denoting the border materializes into a particular landscape.

The historian Karl Schlögel compares cartographers with storytellers and historiographers:

[M]aps have authors or authorial collectives; maps are bound up with a time and a place; maps reflect perspectives and choices of focus; maps are no more unbiased and no less entangled in issues of objectivity, subjectivity, and partiality than is historical scholarship; maps are products of ideology as well as science; mapmakers must face the question of the ‘relevance’ of their work no less than do historical raconteurs and historiographers; cartography has a share in the ideological complex, in power.⁵⁸

Artists as cartographers bring new stories, different voices, and to some extent residents themselves into view and into hearing. Their mappings relate borders to people, landscapes and cities, and to buildings, streets, and transportation; the artists listen in, see, record, and produce. The products of their border works lay a trail, which nonetheless does not lead directly to a site. Antje Schneider argues for a complex understanding of the notion of “image as lead” (or object as lead):

In respect of reading the traces, this is less about being able to work out what the trail is suggesting, and far more about what it testifies to in the present. What is to be explored is the fact that there is something in the past or the future that is questionable and uncomprehended in the present situation. Neither the past nor the future are accessible. They remain shrouded in the dark.⁵⁹

58 SCHLÖGEL 2016, 67.

59 SCHNEIDER 2015, 96.

This is also what makes the striking difference between political or geographical maps and artistic mapping clear: maps offer direction, are an aid to orientation; they help to find a particular place or site, or to pinpoint a boundary or border. Artistic mapping projects offer a variety of possible ways or routes toward development, whereby none of them need necessarily lead to a destination. In many cases, contradictions are articulated, or connections produce conflicting opinions, such as when actors on both sides of the border are interviewed. In the 1999 project *German-Polish Frontier Changes after the Maximum of the Last Glaciation*, Giorgi took a meandering journey, mapping the German-Polish border and creating trace images as he went – not only filming, but also photographing and making cartographic collages. Over photographs depicting residents and the dynamics of their daily life, prostitutes in mini-skirts, border markers – red-and-white and black-red-gold posts, the river, signs with wording in both languages... – the artist placed tracing paper, and made drawings on that. He drew outlines around certain of what he considered the most important trace images on a given photograph, applying critical limology in order to “write” border narratives. Giorgi often also grafted maps onto the faces and figures of the people he encountered and photographed, thereby creating with his drawings on tracing paper a kind of physical psychogeography and cartographic geopoetics.

At the exhibition in the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin that constituted the culmination of his project, visitors could lift up the tracing-paper drawings to see the original photographs without Giorgi’s alterations. This strategy may be interpreted as a clear indication of the point at which subjective cartography begins in the work of an artist who travelled along the border activating borderscaping processes. The tracing paper forms a “misty veil”, and the drawing made on it is in effect Giorgi’s signature. He was not heading for any specific place, nor was he proposing any particular thesis. He was simply mapping the border ten years on from the fall of the Berlin wall, proffering a humorous answer to the question: “Why does an Italian deal with German–Polish problems? Since the last glaciation (to avoid the overstressed term ‘break of the German wall’) the Polish frontier is coming nearer to Italy. Poland comes in sight for Italians.”⁶⁰ Giorgi also made reference to the complicated history of the German-Polish border in the forms of other works he created as part of this project: maps resembling dressmaking patterns, and arbitrarily composed cartographic collages. Both these strategies of visualizing borders incorporate in their very forms allusions to “cuts”, which in the context of border mapping symbolize sudden changes in the courses of borders, and, for him, this “coming nearer” to Italy.

Yet another layer is also superimposed onto Giorgi’s subjective border narrative, however: that of his audience’s interpretations. Borders and their meanings are in the eye of

60 GIORGI / KOLEČEK 2003, 216.

the beholder, are dependent on personal experiences, on past incidents, and on notions that project into the future. From a present-day perspective, *German-Polish Frontier Changes after the Maximum of the Last Glaciation* seems to take us back in time to the period before Poland's accession to the EU and the signing of the Schengen treaty. It is a story that is still situated somewhere between a hard and a soft border.

4.3 REVISITING BORDER AREAS: ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS AND IMAGINATIONS

The experience of European border regions has evolved in recent decades with the fall of the iron curtain, German reunification, and the Schengen Agreement. Many artists have had personal experience of these new connotations of border zones. The changing European borders and the consequences of Schengen are the point of departure for the multimedia project *Nach der Grenze*, undertaken by Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel in the years 2008 and 2009.⁶¹ From 1985, with the Schengen Agreement, the interior borders between EU member states began to open up. This international treaty provided for the abolition of stationary border controls on the interior borders of the states parties. This made it possible to cross borders without identity papers: the Schengen Zone was born, taking in nations including Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, and Germany – and, from 2004, Poland, with the abolition of border controls to Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Lithuania in 2007.

Markefka and Vogel's artistic research studied relics and traces at former German border crossings. In their work, they interwove their own childhood and teenage experiences of border crossings (both of them were born in the 1970s) with their contemporary impressions of these now meaningless sites formerly imbued with all the trappings of state sovereignty. In one of the texts they wrote to accompany their work, we read, moreover:

Border traffic, border controls, border crossings – these are all formative memories from our childhood. On the other side was another country, the holiday, often with a different language or a different currency. But one had to brave the crossing: one's identity was verified, one was assessed, suspected. Harmless as it was for West Germans, the border was nonetheless a childhood adventure, food for the imagination, a classic. Now, they are gradually disappearing, being demolished, or simply going to rack and ruin.⁶²

61 See also chapter 5 of this book, in which Nikolai Vogel's audio piece *Nach der Grenze* is analysed. This builds on his joint project with Silke Markefka.

62 MARKEFKA / VOGEL 2010, 6.



Fig. 49 Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel, installation view: *Sunday, 17 May 2009, border crossing between Ahlbeck and Świnoujście (Swinemünde), German-Polish border Swinemünder Chaussee (D)/Wojska Polskiego (PL)*, painting, Silke Markefka: acrylic on canvas, 50 × 70 cm, 2009, recording, Nikolai Vogel, 2009: Grundig Cassette Recorder CR 550 (5 × C 1.5 Volt) / Cassette: BASF Chrome Super II 90/ca. 45 min. (closer to 47). Border sounds on side 1. Set on a stone between the Polish border post and the German border sign. Recording started at 9.09 a. m. Device size: 15.5 × 5 × 24.5 cm, © Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

In 2008 and 2009, then, paintings, photographs, and sound recordings were created on roads at German border crossings. Some of Silke Markefka's paintings are of medium format, 60 × 80 cm or 70 × 50 cm, but others are large-format canvases, of 140 × 140 or 200 × 180. The thinned-down paints are applied streakily rather than pastily; the brushstrokes are clearly discernible. The grey colour palette and the drip marks evoke melancholy weather and dismal views of boring places where houses are arranged around an empty centre. Arrows, terms, and pictograms testify to border traffic to be regulated, but that is now merely a faded memory. The buildings seem unused, abandoned, grim, presumably no longer remembering their original purpose; a sign reading "*Landesgrenze*" stands crooked in a wood. Sometimes, altitude markers, state emblems, and schematic eagles still offer an indication of the routes of national borders which have had to make way for the European dream of common external borders.

Markefka and Vogel turned their attention to German-Polish border crossings precisely twice over the course of their series. On 17 May 2009 they visited the border crossing between Ahlbeck and Świnoujście. With a Grundig cassette recorder set on a stone between the Polish and German border markers, Vogel recorded the border soundscape, which was later used in an audio piece (fig. 49). Markefka painted the border crossing at the Swinemünder Chaussee / ulica Wojska Polskiego. The German and Polish border posts stand on a sandy road against a background of vegetation. They look like separated friends, as though seeking their distance, and seem bereft of their original function. The German post is slightly skewed, as if reeling. The two relics of the former border times appear lonely and useless.

At the Pomellen border crossing, on the motorway near Szczecin, between Penkun and Kolbaskowo, Markefka painted the soaring vaults of the glass roof of the customs building (fig. 50). The blue-painted structures recall the important functions of the past: this was where customs controls used to be carried out. Markefka portrays the roof as merely a relic in the picture. It is incomplete; its massive proportions are but hinted at. The large format of the work, 180 × 140 cm, stresses the former size of the customs building. Vogel set his Telefunken cassette recorder down on the blue metal seats to record the sounds of the border (fig. 51).

In addition to their paintings and recordings, there are also photographs showing Markefka and Vogel at border crossing points such as Bad Bentheim (on the border between Germany and the Netherlands), Neuhaus/Bargen (at the German-Swiss border) and at Pomellen (fig. 52). In these photos, taken using the self-timer function, the two of them seem to assimilate the very existence (but complete lack of functionality) of the border posts and their fixtures and fittings. Vogel explored these and other border crossings acoustically. With analogue recording devices – tape recorders, dictaphones, or cassette recorders – he recorded the sounds at the former border posts. The devices themselves dated back to a time when the crossings were still active, when controls were



Fig. 50 Silke Markefka und Nikolai Vogel: *Sunday, 17 May 2009, border crossing Pomellen, between Penkun and Kolbaskowo (motorway border near Szczecin), German-Polish border on the E28 – A11 (D)/A6 (PL)*, painting, Silke Markefka: acrylic on canvas, 180 × 140 cm, 2009, recording, Nikolai Vogel, 2009: cassette recorder: Telefunken MC 510 Stereo (6 × C 1.5 Volt) / Cassette: Maxell XL II 90/45 min. of border sounds on side 1. Set on a blue wire seat directly outside the border building, on the side coming from Pomerania. Recording started at 13.53. Device size: 31.5 × 7 × 20 cm, © Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.



Fig. 51 The recording device set down by Nikolai Vogel at the Pomellen border crossing, 17 May 2009, © Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

still carried out, when people were either permitted to cross or turned back. Since the digital revolution in storage media, the recording systems used by Vogel have become old and outdated – exactly like the border crossings, they have been superseded by new ideas.

Heilpflanzen im Todesstreifen (2021) by Sven Johne is also the product of a revisiting. From the perspective of a former GDR citizen, this artist and his family undertook a hike from south to north along the former German–German border. Johne’s step-father was company commander of a border guard unit, and as such was responsible for the security of the GDR’s border.

The work itself, which comprises 25 collages, brings together large-format colour prints and smaller black-and-white photographs showing Johne’s children exploring the former border zone. In most of them, the children are shown from behind: at Priewall in Schleswig-Holstein, in Hötensleben in Sachsen-Anhalt, or at the Sattel Pass in Thuringia. The landscape is dotted with structural vestiges of the past, such as walls, watchtowers,



Fig. 52 Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel at the Pomellen border crossing, German-Polish border, 17 May 2009, photograph taken using the self-timer function, © Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

and memorial wreaths, which stand as reminders of the hawkishly monitored border. The black and white of the photographs may be read as a reference to history, which is still being written today. The colourful plants, which have curative properties, bloom in former death zones, i. e., in place where people were once prevented by the use of arms from crossing the border.

Although Johnne's project does not focus directly on the German-Polish border, it does address a number of salient themes: in these border zones, the present is undeniably connected with the past. Nature is a tacit witness; the relics of the watchtowers and walls recall a time when the border posts were still active, when crossing the border entailed great difficulties and was fraught with danger. And at the same time, Johnne was travelling the border region in times when hermetic borders were once again being thrown up in the heart of Europe – in the context of the movements of refugees through the Balkans towards Central and Western Europe, as *cordons sanitaires* in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and due to political tensions such as those between Poland and Belarus.⁶³

⁶³ For more, see the website of the 12th Berlin Biennale, at which Johnne exhibited his work. <https://12.berlinbiennale.de/de/artists/sven-johne/>, [last accessed 12.05.2023].

Deadzone is also the title of a work by Vadim Zakharov and Niklas Nitschke from OBAMAINBERLIN. In the early 2010s, these two artists worked in the Polish-German border zone on the Oder, between the towns of Gubin and Frankfurt (Oder), which they perceived, from the perspective of contemporary art, to be a dead zone. In the form of what Zakharov and Nitschke call “visitations”, accompanied by friends, they carry out various activities (“movements”) involving the use of pre-prepared props (“supplementary objects”). The conceptual statement explaining the idea specifies the following principles:

the site is sought, found, or missed, re-assigned; the prepared movement carried out in accordance with the circumstances *in situ*, using these in turn as the basis for improvisations, in parallel with which observations are documented leading to post-produced objects, videos, i. e., to an artistic product in the most familiar sense.⁶⁴

Visitation 2, used here as an example of the “movements” performed, took place on the Polish side of the Oder at the site of the remains of the Fürstenberg Bridge on 6 November 2011 (fig. 53). The site was selected by Nitschke, who also took with him a table and tablecloth, chairs, and utensils for a picnic. Zakharov took a seat, while Nitschke described the painting *Pèlerinage à l'île de Cythère* by Antoine Watteau, integrating with his description film, literature, and cultural history references to the work. Nitschke was kitted out with vampire teeth and fake blood, while Zakharov measured the bridgehead on which the scene was being played out with a pair of compasses set to twice the body length of the film director Orson Welles (3.74 m).⁶⁵

This complicated and apparently absurd experimental set-up, which was followed by many further visitations, is not set in an area described as a “dead zone” without reason. The two artists approach the region like a *tabula rasa*, to be rewritten; it becomes the foil for their artistic interventions, which consequently lead to a new mapping of the area with reference to their anti-Cythera mechanism.⁶⁶

The works discussed in this chapter all have in common that they visit a region that was for a long time a toxic zone. For decades, border crossings were only possible under tortuous conditions. Those regions have found it hard to recover from their status as border zone. Heike Gallmeier’s photographs show desolate localities, silent landscapes, former border posts. In the works by Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel, the customs buildings, the houses, and the border markers have been robbed of their function, significance, and worth. They have been decommissioned, and only reassigned their old

64 <https://www.obamainberlin.com/deadzone>, [last accessed 12. 05. 2023].

65 See <https://www.obamainberlin.com/visitation-2-german>, [last accessed 12. 05. 2023]. For *Visitation 2*, see also: Vögel 2016.

66 <https://www.obamainberlin.com/visitation-3-content>, [last accessed 12. 05. 2023].



Fig. 53 Vadim Zakharov and Niklas Nitschke, *Deadzone, Visitation 2*, Bridge Fürstenberg, 6 November 2011, © Vadim Zakharov/Niklas Nitschke.

meaning as controlled border-crossing points in extreme situations such as the refugee movements of the years 2015/2016 or the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The status of these border regions as transit zones is legible in their utilitarian architecture – markets, warehouses, and brownfield and greenfield zones. For Sven Johne this revisiting also has moments of healing through encounter, though the ghosts of the past still occupy the border landscapes. With their artistic interventions, which follow established conceptual premises, Vadim Zakharov and Niklas Nitschke reactivate an area that they perceive to be an artistic dead zone, though their activities barely react to the lived history in situ, to those who live there, and to their experience of the border. In Bernardo Giorgi's project, by contrast, border witnesses were able to participate, and hence to contribute to an artistic historiography in the German-Polish border region.

5 Border Passages: Artistic Reflection on Travelling Workers and Migratory Languages

The German-Polish border is crossed daily by vast numbers of people, many of whom live on one side and work on the other, thereby rendering the border region a divided labour zone. This uncomplicated vocational border traffic, made possible by the abolition of border controls at the end of 2007, functions according to logics and rhythms of mobility all its own. Not until 2011, with the opening up of the German labour market, was the right to free movement of workers fully extended to the citizens of East-Central Europe – seven years after Poland’s accession to the EU.¹ Temporary labour migrants and seasonal harvest hands above all often travel great distances, and also move between workplaces. Cases like these, when working does not mean a daily commute, but, as in the case of seasonal labour, leaving one’s own country for longer periods of employment – in major centres of tourism, for instance, or in the countryside at harvest time – add a broader dimension to what we call the border region.

Border regions can thus also be conceived on a much larger scale. These extended spaces can be encapsulated in the concept of “ethnoscapes” developed by Arjun Appadurai. This notion recognizes that the dynamics of migratory movement and travel can create new landscapes which perforate and penetrate state borders, extending from the point of departure to the (temporary) endpoint of a relocation. In his book *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai writes:

The suffix *-scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international styles. [...] Indeed, the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part from their own sense of what these landscapes offer [...]. By *ethnoscape*, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.²

Greater distances can be understood as elements of such “ethnoscapes” also in respect of Polish-German migratory movements, and this thus includes in the concept seasonal

1 SIEBOLD 2014, 264.

2 APPADURAI 2010, 33 (emphasis Appadurai).

workers who are temporarily active on the German agricultural market at considerable distances from the actual border. Their labour is often performed entirely outside the living environments of their consumers: in many cases, the vegetables harvested by Polish or Romanian seasonal workers in rural regions reach end customers in urban milieus who do not (want to) know how or by whom their groceries are produced. By drawing their attention to this often overlooked labour, the artists and photographers who are the focus of our attention here render its impact visible, even if primarily only in the context of art. The remarks that follow reference audio and visual artistic concepts which focus on the infrastructures of border crossings, and on migratory sounds, languages, and people.

5.1 ON THE SOUNDS AND LANGUAGES OF BORDER TRAFFIC IN ART PROJECTS

Nikolai Vogel's radio piece *Nach der Grenze* (2011, premiere broadcast on the radio station Bayern 2) was created as a deliverable from an extensive multimedia project of the same name that Vogel undertook with the artist Silke Markefka in 2008/2009.³ Their journeys around border crossings of the Federal Republic of Germany gave rise to paintings, photographs, and sound recordings.⁴ Vogel used the analogue recordings he had made on their voyage for his audio work, which comprises sounds, reminiscences, and border transcripts from many different border crossing points. Twenty years on from the implementation of the Schengen Agreement, these complexes had lost much of their political and national relevance. By the late 2000s, the border crossings between Germany and neighbouring countries such as Luxemburg, Austria, and Denmark no longer had either control or monitoring functions. Vogel's audio describes in terse sentences what he saw and experienced there, making reference to state emblems, demolished border crossing points, and abandoned border posts, against an audio background of traffic and weather noise. Analogue recording devices are used to explore the moods, atmospheres, and impressions of these sites.

At minute 42:35, the final section of the audio piece begins, devoted to the German-Polish border at Ahlbeck/Świnoujście (Swinemünde), which Vogel visited on 17 May 2009. Once again, there are descriptions of the buildings and self-service restaurants, and border-crossing infrastructure that has seen better days.⁵ Border supermarkets and taxi

3 Cf. MARKEFKA / VOGEL 2010.

4 See also chapter 4 of this book.

5 Alina Fedoryszyn describes how trade and infrastructures at the Ahlbeck / Świnoujście border changed after the German reunification: "Directly after the transformation, market stalls sprang up along the street leading into the centre of Świnoujście like mushrooms after rain [...]. The market did a roaring



Fig. 54 Recording device set down by Nikolai Vogel at the border crossing between Ahlbeck and Świnoujście, 17.05.2009, © Silke Markefka and Nikolai Vogel/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

drivers have lost their custom since the border was opened in 2007; previously, people crossed the border on foot and travelled on from Świnoujście by taxi. Vogel's voice is repeatedly drowned out by birdsong, passing vehicles, and horse-drawn carriages. The striking contrasts between the two border towns are echoed in the different noises made by the vehicles on the asphalt on the German side and the cobblestones in Świnoujście; a sandy border strip leads down to the sea. Vogel recorded the sounds on the border between Ahlbeck and Świnoujście with an analogue Grundig cassette recorder on a BASF cassette: "47 minutes of border sounds on side 1 [...] placed on a stone between the Polish border stone and the German border sign",⁶ with a view of the sea, where the state territories dissolve into vagueness (fig. 54). "Every State has the right to establish the

trade as a paradise for German bargain hunters [...]. Thousands of people found jobs there. In the early '90s, Świnoujście was one of the richest towns in Poland." FEDORYSZYN 2003, 81.

6 VOGEL 2011, 46:43 min.

breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles, measured from baselines determined in accordance with this Convention”,⁷ runs the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Everything beyond that is in this respect stateless territory. Nonetheless, even in such cases, territorial demands do arise, as evidenced by the conflicts between Greece and Turkey, and in the South China Sea.⁸

In ending his radio piece on the former border crossing points of the German Republic at the Baltic coast, or with a view of the sea, Vogel is directing his attention towards a region that represented transition, a place where boundaries fell away – a potential forum for border conflicts, but also an escape route; many GDR citizens chose routes across the water to reach the West, some of them, indeed, while on holiday in Poland.⁹ The radio piece *Nach der Grenze* is also a repository for such stories from a past when border posts were still formidable obstacles and political systems locked horns – even though those stories remain tacit. At the same time, Vogel also harks back to the everyday life of these border zones as it used to be, comparing it with how it is today. He uses an auditive vehicle, letting the sounds of the border tell its story. Even the visual description of these border zones is conveyed orally, so that the listener has to use their imagination to call forth an image of the border in their mind’s eye. In Vogel’s audio piece, these former border zones are not only transition zones between states that have been reduced to symbolic significance, but represent striking fault lines between languages, myths, and histories. Inevitably, the question is also raised as to whether the abolition of the borders – back in 2011 we are still in the period before the large-scale refugee movements and the pandemic – really is leading to a single Europe, and hence whether the national has become obsolete simply because there are no longer any barriers?

Stubfurt is a project developed by Michael Kurzwelly that proposes a symbiosis between languages and thereby an (artistic) opportunity for negotiation in border zones. Frankfurt (Oder) and Stubice form one of 60 double cities on European borders that are directly adjacent to one another but belong to two different states. The delineation of the Oder-Neisse border in particular divided 50 village communes and 7 towns and cities; 3 of these are double cities.¹⁰ As in Frankfurt (Oder) and Stubice, in all of these cases, the river forms the border. The metaphor of the bridge as connection is also of

7 <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2009/416/de>, [last accessed 19. 05. 2023].

8 See <https://www.dw.com/de/griechenland-erweitert-seine-seegrenzen/a-56282382>; https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-07/china-philippinen-den-haag-schiedshof-suedchinesisches-meer?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F, [last accessed 19. 05. 2023].

9 See, for instance, the story of the Gutheil family, who in 1980 defected by yacht across the Baltic from Gdańsk. <https://www.zeitzeugen-portal.de/zeitraeume/jahrzehnte/1970/flucht-in-den-westen/2-vKQ8qjWU>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

10 OPIŁOWSKA 2011, 154.

significance in the context of contemporary Realpolitik: in 1945 the bridge over the Oder was blown up before Germany's capitulation; thereafter, the river was bridged initially with a temporary structure, and then in 1949–1953 with a more permanent one, which was in 2002 replaced with a new steel composite construction by the engineering company Schüssler-Plan.¹¹ From 1972, passport- and visa-free traffic was permitted on the border between the GDR and Poland, which Opiłowska often calls “the miracle on the Oder”, describing the consequences of this move as follows: “The inhabitants of the divided town had the chance to learn the meaning of neighbourliness. And they showed considerable interest in it: in the years 1972–1979, Polish and German citizens crossed the German-Polish border over 100 million times.”¹² Even since Germany's reunification and Poland's accession to the EU, the bridge over the Oder has remained a structure of symbolic value. In 2021 this was given expression in the form of its illumination at night with green and blue lights, the colours of the towns of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice, as a sign for a united, common Europe.¹³ But what happens in such double towns situated immediately on borders, where crossing backwards and forwards is a natural, organic process within the urban unit, but where clear linguistic boundaries remain in place?¹⁴ What new spaces of opportunity can be created by an artificial language such as “Nowoamerikanisch”, the language initiated by the artist Michael Kurzwelly in this German-Polish border region as part of his *Nowa Amerika* project, itself an extension of the artistic initiative *Stubfurt*?¹⁵ At the heart of *Stubfurt* is the idea of growing together as an alternative to cordoning off: a double city becoming one city. *Stubfurt* was founded in 1999 from what were termed the “former” towns of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice, as a city that was half in Germany and half in Poland. The natural extension of this idea was the creation of an artificial, or artistic, language, synthesizing Polish and German. This is a divided but shared language, the linguistic equivalent to the shared division of the border. The linguist Christoph Goro Kimura demonstrates the self-conception of “Nowoamerikanisch” using the example of the national anthem, which runs: “To [This] *ist nasz* [our] *Land*, *zrób* [make] *es bekannt* / *Napisz* [write] *es na całym* [on the whole] *Wand*. *An der Odera-Nyße entlang*, / *ciągniemy* [we are pulling] *an einem Strang* / *śpiewamy razem* [we are singing together] *den Gesang*.”¹⁶

11 KRUMBEIN 2003.

12 OPIŁOWSKA 2011, 163.

13 <https://www.rbb24.de/panorama/beitrag/2021/11/bruecke-zwischen-frankfurt-und-slubice-leuchtet-gruen-und-blau.html>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

14 Fedoryszyn writes: “The border between Germany and Poland is a clear-cut linguistic border.” FEDORYSZYN 2003, 80.

15 See chapter 4 in this book.

16 KIMURA n. d.; Gesamte Hymne in: KURZWELLY / STEFAŃSKI 2021, 103.

“Nowoamerikanisch” thus uses individual German and Polish words and phrases, but also creates “intralexical combinations (combined neologisms),”¹⁷ hybrid words such as “Stubfurt” [from Stubice and Frankfurt] or “Nyße” (a synthesis of the German “Neiße” and the Polish “Nysa”). It is a new language with equal components of Polish and German, and in this respect in and of itself tackles the issue of integration of the Other – as seen from both sides of the state border: the German language integrates the Polish, and the Polish the German, and in so doing they are transformed into something new. This means that the artificial language is more open to the new than languages with a long tradition, which lay claim to being unchangeable. Yet language assets are a gauge for integration: “Language has become political: it is the measure of whether integration is succeeding or failing. In times of societal and political change, language serves as a plane of projection for Own and Other.”¹⁸ As “Nowoamerikanisch” has no past, the malleability of the language lies in the present and the future, and is also open to those who previously lived elsewhere. “Nowoamerikanisch” is thus a hybrid language, like a creole, described by Édouard Glissant as:

[a] composite language formed out of contact between diametrically different linguistic elements. The francophone creoles of the Caribbean were created from the contact of seventeenth-century Breton and Norman dialects with a syntax whose genesis is not known precisely, but is presumed to constitute a kind of synthesis of the languages of western Black Africa.¹⁹

A creole, however, is the product of exchange between unequals and of the imbalance of power between colonizers and enslaved. This history of violence is markedly different from the background of “Nowoamerikanisch”, which is founded on the laws of equality, and mutual recognition and appreciation of the other language and culture. There is nonetheless potential in comparing the creolization method with the way in which Kurzwelly’s “Nowoamerikanisch” is formed, since it is likewise a form of generating contact and exchange between different cultures.²⁰ These laws of recognition and equal treatment extend not only to Germans or Poles, whether on one or other side of the border. *Stubfurt* has its own parliament, with its seat in an old gym hall close to the Oder, whose deputies, since 2014, have also included refugees and asylum seekers. In this way, the city demonstrates its openness to new incomers.²¹ Belonging is not a function of

17 *IBID.*

18 RAMADAN 2018, 7.

19 GLISSANT 2013, 81.

20 *IBID.*, 81. It is certainly no coincidence that creolization as Glissant describes it is taking place in “Neo-Amerika”.

21 SCHLÜTER 2017, 25.

citizenships; political participation is always possible. Thus migration is not an exception to the norm, but has always been an intrinsic aspect of the city.

While Michael Kurzwelly's project is based directly on the border, the mobility of seasonal labour extends the radius of movement far beyond the immediate border region. In the section that follows we look at works by artists who examine precisely this broadening of the border zone.

5.2 HARVESTING AS SEASONAL WORK: VISUAL HISTORIES OF BENDING DOWN

On 3 May 2021, the portal *agrار.heute* reported a COVID-19 outbreak on an asparagus farm in the state of Lower Saxony, Germany, with over 100 employees testing positive for the virus. This led to a tightening of the protection regulations and further testing among the farm's 1,200 employees.²²

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany in March 2020, similar mass infection situations have occurred repeatedly on asparagus farms and in slaughterhouses. This has foregrounded the precarious living and working conditions of Eastern European seasonal workers – here mainly Polish and Romanian – who have been working in agriculture and meat-processing plants (as well as in construction) for decades: the high infection rates and the threat of asparagus harvest losses have attracted media attention. In March 2020, the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* published an article on the German government's COVID-19 policies. Although contact restrictions to control the pandemic would be maintained until May 2020, it reported, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Agriculture had approved the entry of 80,000 Romanian harvest workers with special permits in order to secure the asparagus harvest. The article mentioned the unhygienic accommodation and poor sanitary facilities these labourers had to endure in mass shelters (Jacobs 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare substandard living and working conditions worldwide, particularly among the most vulnerable: low-income workers who cannot work from home and who live in cramped conditions. Research from the pandemic period has confirmed this inequality. In February 2021, the Robert Koch Institute published a report entitled *Social Differences in COVID-19 Mortality during the Second Wave of Infection in Germany*, which stated that mortality in socially disadvantaged regions was 50–70% higher than in less deprived regions. The basis for the analysis was the reporting data of the German Index of Socioeconomic Deprivation (GISD) for 401

22 KRENN 2021.

districts and cities.²³ Although this study cannot be directly extrapolated to seasonal work, the “Corona Special Instructions for Farms with Seasonal Workers” distributed on the webpages of German agricultural associations with reference to the entry and quarantine obligations of Polish seasonal workers, points to a correlation between labour conditions and the infection situation.²⁴

We have taken these observations of the media, and the social and political attention paid to seasonal workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a starting-point for our reflections on the visibility and invisibility of agricultural workers and temporary labour migrants in German agriculture – the majority of whom come from Poland, with smaller numbers from Romania and Bulgaria.²⁵ Although art and photography have engaged with seasonal work for some time, this congruence only recently came into the public eye with any force, as a result of the pandemic. Media reports rarely look at the actual people who become infected, criticizing only the companies, their subcontracting practices, and the collective accommodations.²⁶

We are interested in artistic and photographic perspectives on the subject of seasonal labour and labourers, their working and living conditions, and the way in which debates on these issues are formulated in media-specific terms. What approaches and methods are chosen, and what is the relationship between the artists/photographers and the actors they observe?

In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the artist Andrea Büttner travelled from Berlin to several asparagus farms in Beelitz in Brandenburg, where harvest workers, mainly from Poland (but also from Romania and Spain), are employed. Beelitz is about 125 kilometres and 75 minutes by car from the Polish border at Frankfurt (Oder), making it a popular destination for seasonal migration.

The use of seasonal labour performed by Eastern European agricultural workers has been an integral part of German history since at least the nineteenth century.²⁷ Migrant workers from what is now Poland in particular used to help out on a seasonal basis at harvest times. The advantage of this arrangement for the farms was that the workers did not have to be employed permanently, particularly not in winter, but were hired and paid only for the harvest season.²⁸ As early as the nineteenth century, the deployment of seasonal workers was carried out by professional agents, most of whom themselves

23 ROBERT KOCH INSTITUTE 2021.

24 See, for example, the information provided by the Rheinischen Landwirtschafts-Verband (RLV), <https://www.rlv.de/der-rlv/corona-aktuell/saison-aks/>, or the website of Landwirtschaft, Forsten und Gartenbau (SVLFG), <https://www.svlfg.de/corona-saisonarbeit>, [last accessed 08.05.2023].

25 WAGNER / FIAŁKOWSKA / PIECHOWSKA / ŁUKOWSKI 2013, 10–11.

26 VERSCHWELE / WERNICKE 2020.

27 WEBER-KELLERMANN 1988, 317.

28 *IBID.*, 377.



Fig. 55 Andrea Büttner, *Skizzenbuch Spargelernte in Beelitz* (sketchbook asparagus harvest in Beelitz), 2020, pencil on paper, 30.2 × 21.5 × 2.3 cm, photo: Roman März, © Andrea Büttner/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.



Fig. 56 Andrea Büttner, *Skizzenbuch Spargelernte in Beelitz* (sketchbook asparagus harvest in Beelitz), 2020, pencil on paper, 30.2 × 21.5 × 2.3 cm, photo: Roman März, © Andrea Büttner/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

came from the harvest workers' home countries. Having a go-between increased the depersonalization of the employment relationship between farmers and labourers. A mutual bond could hardly be built up, since the primary contact person was the agent, the intermediary to the landowner, who at the same time served as the workers' foreman. The seasonal hands often had to sign strict contracts, and the agents sometimes enriched themselves with supplies and food, while the conditions in the accommodations provided were pitiful.²⁹ Büttner does not actively negotiate this history of foreign labour and its consequences into the present, but it does form an invisible context for her examination of the asparagus harvest in Beelitz.

In her sketchbook, Büttner drew pencil contour lines of the harvesters bending down to pick asparagus (fig. 55). Sometimes only the rear of a head and a rounded back can be seen; sometimes the outstretched arms or hands are also visible. The drawing, reduced to a few strokes, accentuates this posture, which is a condition of harvesting. In her sketchbook, the perspective opens up across two double pages, revealing a view of the field. The seasonal workers each work separately, their bodies distributed across the field at regular intervals, forming a pattern (fig. 56).

Büttner translates the act of harvesting into drawings of the seasonal workers devoid of markings of individuality, reduced to the outlines of their bodies and their gestures. In these drawings, the artist explores the essence of the physical labour which is a prerequisite for the consumption of asparagus. These drawings are at the beginning of the work; its further parts employ a range of techniques, both woodcuts and etchings. In the red, blue, and green woodcuts, the pencil strokes are replaced by white outlines that stand out against the coloured background (fig. 57). The large format – 188 × 113 cm – lifts the harvesters into the picture in life size, yet they remain flat, faceless bodies. In the etchings, Büttner focuses on the hands, which reach out towards the asparagus (fig. 58). The content of the picture shows a symbiotic relationship between hands and working tools, between the tools and the asparagus. Woodcuts and etchings are, as David Khalat writes, “craft printmaking techniques that are often considered inferior art forms in contemporary art”.³⁰ This alludes to the value of what is produced, in terms of both the art and the vegetables. What is the relationship between the physical labour of harvesting and the economic return on the sale of asparagus? How does the value of the harvested produce relate to that of the physical labour?

For the 2020 exhibition Studio Berlin at Club Berghain in Berlin, Büttner contributed the double projection *Kunstgeschichte des Bückens*, which also derived from her artistic exploration of seasonal agricultural work and had its point of departure in these images of asparagus harvesting. This “history of bending over” juxtaposes pairs of images

29 *IBID.*, 377–379; HERBERT 2003, 38.

30 KHALAT 2021.



Fig. 57 Andrea Büttner, *Erntende* (Harvester), 2021, woodcut, 188 × 113 cm, photo: Andy Keate, © Andrea Büttner/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.



Fig. 58 Andrea Büttner, *Asparagus Harvest*, 2021, etching, 70 × 100 cm, photo: Eva Herzog, © Andrea Büttner/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

from art history that show activities for which bending over is a prerequisite – such as harvesting and gathering kindling: activities that are addressed, for example, in works by the Impressionists. Work in the fields and the physical labour connected with it are thus important points of reference for premodern and modern art, and a focal point of artistic seeing and working *en plein air*.

Büttner writes:

But I was also confronted with the question – which I tried to pursue in this historical work – of how we in our time look differently at graphic representations of harvesting, at representations of the work of others, of others bending over, as portrayed by artists who do not work documentarily or as activists. And I wanted to examine and cross-check my own approach, so to speak, within the horizon of historical representations, and also to reflect or critique current representational regimes.³¹

31 BÜTTNER 2022.



Fig. 59 *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (F 2000), 82 min., director: Agnès Varda, still, <https://www.filmwerkstatt-duesseldorf.de/les-glaneurs-et-la-glaneuse/>, [last accessed 10.05.2023].

In her work, the spheres of the drawing and the drawn remain separate, referencing the practice of artists in history who drew on location but lived at a (social) distance from their models.

Bending over is an ambiguous posture; it can be read as a moment of submission or subordination, but it is also a bodily movement vital to many forms of gathering. Here and in her interest in art historical iconography, parallels can be found between Büttner's work and *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) by director Agnès Varda. This film is dedicated to gleaning, the agricultural tradition of allowing outsiders to gather fruits and vegetables left over from the harvest (fig. 59). The filmmaker closely follows the movements of gleaners, both in the countryside and at grocery markets and supermarket dumpsters, who gather what has been discarded. In an almost ethnographical style, the film also addresses the legal aspects of these forms of collecting leftovers. While traditionally this practice is tacitly tolerated and legitimized in the countryside,³² gleaners in cities can be prosecuted for taking vegetables that have been left lying around on marketplaces or for searching through bins for expired and discarded food. Varda's film repeatedly brings the posture and gestures of the pickers into the picture: the stooped posture with outstretched arms when something is picked up from the ground. Varda also finds this body language in nineteenth-century paintings featuring agricultural harvesters by Jean-François Millet and Jules Breton.³³

Varda references the art history of the harvest, which is often also a history of stooping or bending over. In her film, the images and sounds have an equal relationship. The cinematic gaze is mitigated by the intimacy she achieves by putting herself and her interaction with the gleaners into the frame, herself becoming a gleaner (the "*glaneuse*"

32 BONNER 2013, 494.

33 See CRUICKSHANK 2007.

in the title) of images, and listening very carefully to what her subjects have to say. The soundtrack in particular gives the gatherers she visits an opportunity to speak about their backgrounds and motivations for gathering (need, hunger, rebellion, activism).³⁴ The sound overcomes the boundaries imposed by the camera as detached observer. As for the gleaners Varda encounters in the course of her journey through France, they cannot film back, as they have no cameras, but they respond and interact through their words. At the same time, the visual argumentation creates the possibility to understand gleanings not only as a peripheral activity of the marginalized, but in the broader (art) historical and social context.

Erz. 7139 is a photographic project by Irina Ruppert featuring seasonal farm workers in Dannstadt-Schauernheim (Rhineland Palatinate). A six-month stay in this rural region as part of the itinerant art and culture project Matchbox raised Ruppert's awareness of the question of who harvests the vegetables for supermarkets, and of the potential for forging links between consumers and harvest workers, who are otherwise little discussed and barely visible in public. For her project, Ruppert sought contact with seasonal workers who had come from Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria to do physically demanding labour for which it is almost impossible to find domestic harvest hands. Ruppert herself took a job as a harvest helper for a local farming family and was thus able to make contact with other farmers, whom she asked for permission to take photographs.

Ruppert's models pose directly at the edge of the fields in their work clothes (fig. 60a–b). A woman stands upright in front of the photographer with her head turned to one side. There is soil on her tanned arms and hands, her trousers, and her rubber boots: traces of the work she has just done. Another harvester has bared his upper body; he, too, is looking out of the frame (fig. 60b). A third is holding a knife. She is looking into the camera. All the subjects pose in front of sheets showing various countryside motifs in black and white, fastened with clips. These motifs were taken from photographs which she had sourced through appeals to the local population, and which showed a time when the farmers still worked in the fields themselves; she enlarged the photographs and printed them on fabric to use as backgrounds for the series (fig. 61). In this way, Ruppert works in the tradition of historical studio and itinerant photographers, who isolated their models from their respective everyday context and captured them against an imagined, often idealized, backdrop. This historical practice was continued from the mid-twentieth century by the German photographer Stefan Moses, who placed his models for his photo series in front of a monochrome/grey cloth and thus created a neutral background that was always the same, whether he was portraying dying professions, for example, or an entire nation.³⁵

³⁴ Cf. BONNER 2013, 494.

³⁵ For Moses' series, see DOGRAMACI 2016, 47–60.



Fig 60a–b Irina Ruppert, *Erz. 7139*, 2018, © Irina Ruppert.

Ruppert's reference to itinerant historical photography connects the migratory practice of camera art with the status of those being photographed as temporary migrants. The theme of mobility and migration has been inherent in photography since its invention in 1839. Travel photography was one of the popular genres of early photography, even though cameras were heavy at the time. The mobile, portable studio expanded the professional field of the photographer by making portrait photography possible even where no photographic studios existed, for example in rural areas or theatres of war. By placing herself in the history of the medium, Ruppert makes it clear that mobility is not a special case in history but a widespread phenomenon that affects people as well as professions, practices, and objects.

The choice of local historical photographs as backgrounds for these contemporary portraits of seasonal workers also creates an embeddedness in the region (fig. 62). It reveals interrelationships between historical image production and agricultural work, and contemporary work and photography. This approach addresses the foreignness of the workers: acculturation of seasonal labourers is rarely possible, as they live in groups comprising people of their own ethnicity, and their everyday life is shaped by their work in the fields and residence in collective accommodations. These groups barely participate in the life of the local community due to the high turnover of individual workers, who therefore almost never live on site for extended periods.

Irina Ruppert overcomes this isolation, at least at the iconographic level, by integrating the workers into the history of agricultural work in the Dannstadt-Schauernheim



Fig. 61 Irina Ruppert, *Erz. 7139*, 2018, printed background, © Irina Ruppert.



Fig. 62 Irina Ruppert, *Erz. 7139*, 2018, © Irina Ruppert.

region. Incidentally, the title of the series, “*Erz. 7139*”, refers to the number of one local producer (*Erz.* is an abbreviation for “*Erzeuger*”, meaning “producer”), the Jotterts family, for whom Ruppert herself first worked as a harvest labourer.³⁶ She set up the backdrop for the photographs at the edge of the fields she herself worked in. Any of the seasonal workers who were interested could come to the setup and have their picture taken. Ruppert’s language skills – she speaks a little Romanian, Bulgarian, Russian, and Polish – helped her to make contact and communicate with the workers.

The local context was also the background for the special exhibition of the portraits created, which took place literally in the field³⁷: the larger-than-life prints were displayed in a field in Dannstadt-Schauernheim, and were thus accessible to the local population (fig. 63). The large format of the photographs lent the models a heroic appearance, emphasizing their self-confidence and presence on “their” land, and drew attention, through their size, to these societal actors who are otherwise barely noticed, or usually only attract attention in problematic contexts (for example, in connection with a virus and its spread).

36 GERSCHWITZ 2018.

37 <https://www.matchbox-rhein-neckar.de/vergangene-projekte/detail/veranstaltung/feldausstellung-erz-7139/>, [last accessed 10.05.2023].



Fig. 63 Irina Ruppert, *Erz. 7139*, field exhibition, Dannstadt-Schauernheim 2018, photo: Giorgio Morra, © Irina Ruppert.

The idea of exhibition in the field also addresses a problem related to the social orientation of photography: what happens to photographs of seasonal workers when they are transferred to the art context and shown in a museum or gallery? Who then looks at these people, and to what extent do they become objects viewed by an audience that possibly or probably comes from other social contexts?

With this exhibition practice, Irina Ruppert addresses the boundaries between photographer, photographed, and audience that are inscribed into field photography. The exhibition in the field does not eliminate this boundary, but it creates a different degree of accessibility outside the art institution. Ruppert says: “The seasonal workers were very proud and took a lot of selfies. I don’t think they would have come to a gallery.”³⁸

In a subsequent series, *Vegetabilien Fotogramme* (Vegetable Photograms), Ruppert worked with the vegetables harvested in the fields (fig. 64). When she was working in the fields herself during her project *Erz. 7139*, Ruppert was told that the outer leaves of the lettuces, herbs and cabbages had to be removed so that the vegetables would sell better in the supermarket.³⁹ Ruppert collected about a hundred of these leaves considered unappealing, dried them, and then exposed them on photographic paper in the

38 RUPPERT 2021.

39 ZIMMERMANN 2020.

Fig. 64 Irina Ruppert, *Vegetabilien Fotogramme* (Vegetable Photograms), *Feldsalat* (Lamb's Lettuce), 2020, © Irina Ruppert.



darkroom. The results reveal finely veined herb and vegetable leaves whose outlines and shape stand out in their differences in an extremely artistic way. The photographs, produced solely by the shapes and impressions of the leaves, the presence of light, and the light-sensitive paper, lend their subjects – otherwise considered waste products – a special, even precious aura.

The photogram as a camera-less image production method was a technique already widespread in the nineteenth century, when the vegetable was also a valued subject.⁴⁰ Just as photography was read as a “pencil of nature”⁴¹ – that is, as painting with light – the photogrammed natural object can also be interpreted as “made” by nature. This artistic output is thus attributed to nature.

40 STEIDL 2019, 189–259.

41 See the book *The Pencil of Nature* by William Fox Talbot, published in 1844, which outlined his photographic process, called calotype.

In the series *Vegetabilien Fotogramme* and *Erz. 7139*, then, it becomes clear that marginalized labour, bodies, and actors, as well as what is usually declared waste and rejected, take on a different visibility and ennoblement in photographic form. The vegetable photograms, which show the harvested vegetables as precious objects, also invite a revaluation of the work done in the field, which produces something of value.

Büttner's artistic practice is the result of her visits to Brandenburg asparagus farms frequented by Polish harvest workers. She drew what she saw in the fields. Ruppert presumably developed a different form of proximity through her own labour on the land. Perhaps her work could also be described as ethnographic research or fieldwork in the broadest sense, as it is less a form of covert participant observation, i. e. operating undercover,⁴² than a clear positioning as an external photographer who observes the work in the fields for a limited period of time, photographs it according to a specific concept, and communicates with the actors in the form of conversations and interviews. Ruppert's series *Erz. 7139* also references the tradition of travelling photography – a migrant or mobile medium itself, designed for exposure and exhibition. In other words, display in the field is a genuine component of the project, and the showing of the resulting images is conceptually planned from the outset in Ruppert's work.

Andrea Büttner's work, in turn, is closely linked to the French painting genre depicting agriculture and field work to which Jean-François Millet's farmers belong, much like Agnès Varda's film *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*. In his essay "Millet and the Peasant", the art theorist and philosopher John Berger describes what motivated the French painter to create his images of agricultural labour, a central theme of his work. Millet addressed the peasant as an autonomous subject and a new object in the tradition of oil painting in the mid-nineteenth century in order "to introduce previously unpainted experience"⁴³ and to make urban viewers in particular aware of the hardships of everyday peasant labour: "Most of the public who went to look at paintings in the Salon were ignorant of the penury which existed in the countryside, and one of Millet's conscious aims was 'to disturb them in their contentment and leisure'."⁴⁴

Millet's pictorial repertoire included potato harvesting, another agrarian task that requires a stooped posture. So when Andrea Büttner works in awareness of this art history – and this is how the double projection of "the art history of bending over" that she has put together can be understood – she is locating herself in the tradition of drawn or painted work. Her drawings and prints condense what numerous artists before her also practised: the transfer of the observed labour, for which the eye scanned not only landscapes but also movements, onto paper or canvas, by hand, and

42 WAGNER / FIAŁKOWSKA / PIECHOWSKA / ŁUKOWSKI 2013, 12–13.

43 BERGER 2009, 77.

44 *IBID.*, 78.

the search for a form for it. This is how Berger describes Millet's quest for what were new artistic formulas and solutions with his untypical subject of hard peasant labour in the fields.⁴⁵ In Büttner's work, the depiction of the subject is greatly reduced, and landscape and narrative approaches are rejected, so that only an artistic translation of the physical labour is left, as if a substrate of a visual history of farm labour were being formulated.

In the art context, both Büttner and Ruppert have contributed significantly to the visibility of marginalized work that is neither socially acceptable nor visible; that is, the conditions of this value creation are barely thematized, and the economically positive contribution of seasonal workers to the process is not appreciated. At the same time, the dividing line between the models and their photographer or artist seems to remain untouched. We draw attention to this with a view to the vital question of agency, especially in the context of marginalized actors: How clearly do these seasonal workers actually formulate their concerns? Can the medium of photography or drawing succeed at all in making them more visible? Unlike in audiovisual, or even purely auditory projects, in which the voices of the actors become audible, or participatory interventions, which might give the participants themselves the opportunity to express themselves artistically or photographically, in the works presented above, their objectification as models is not suspended. Nevertheless, an analogy is formulated – between the practice of drawing and the practice of harvesting, for example: both are manual labour, and both require a tool that is directly connected to the hand. These parallels between the manual work of artists and the manual work of harvesters also raise questions of material and nonmaterial value and of appreciation.

Neither Büttner nor Ruppert show the social milieu or living conditions of the workers; nor do they explore the migrants' poorly equipped accommodation. In their artistic and photographic practices there is no focus on a specific (for example, Polish or Romanian) ethnic or cultural origin. Rather, the focus is on the physical labour in the field and those who perform it. While Ruppert photographs her actors as individuals in front of a historical backdrop during a break from work, Büttner distils archetypal gestures and postures from what she sees. Both artistic processes of appropriation allow a story to emerge from the vegetables, one that is inherent in every product but remains invisible to the consumer. In their artistic production, both women make reference to the processes that turn harvested produce into consumable food. Consumption is therefore revealed to be conditional upon the back-bending labour of the unseen harvesters.

45 *IBID.*, 83–84.

5.3 BORDER PASSAGES AND AESTHETICS

In the foregoing observations, several artistic approaches to the theme of boundary and border crossings and border zones are discussed. Auditive and visual methods of addressing these issues are analysed: the perception of the sounds of border traffic on the island of Usedom in the work by Nikolai Vogel, and the artistic and artificial hybridization of language in border regions as practised by Michael Kurzwelley in the *Nowa Amerika* project. Drawings and photographs of seasonal labour and the conditions in which it is performed are also examined. The drawings and prints by Andrea Büttner may be classified as iconographies of bending over, while Irina Ruppert addresses the tradition of itinerant photography and in-situ exhibition. Although neither of the two latter artists worked in the immediate vicinity of the German-Polish border, their chosen subjects fall within an extended border region defined by labour migration.

All the projects described above may be understood within the context of border aesthetics. Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe define “aesthetics” in the context of their research approach as follows:

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.⁴⁶

Their understanding of the “imaginative power of the border as a productive space for asking how art represents, explores, and negotiates border experience”⁴⁷ can also be adapted to apply to the pieces of art examined in this chapter. Altered borders and their sounds, languages, people as border-crossers, labour migrations, and state borders are the central themes in these works. The border, the border region, and the border crossing are in this respect understood as fields of reference for art which address their subject with media-specific artistic means.

Arjun Appadurai’s theoretical concept of “ethnoscapes” outlined at the beginning of this chapter has also been taken up by border research. Adaptation of Appadurai’s idea in this field has produced the concept of “borderscapes”,⁴⁸ which encompass language, things, people, forms of labour, and places as mutually interacting elements of equal significance. In these borderscapes there is room both to look into the past and to examine the present, but also to imagine a tomorrow.

⁴⁶ SCHIMANSKI / WOLFE 2017, 5.

⁴⁷ *IBID.*, 10.

⁴⁸ *IBID.*, 7.

6 Embodied Imagining of a Possible Past: Performativity and Re-enactment as Borderscaping Strategies

In 2009, in his preface to the book *Native Land: Stop Eject*, Paul Virilio drew attention to one significant issue relating to migration and the unprecedented scale of border crossings: “A billion people moving over half a century – that’s never been seen before.... So the question for us is: how will we cope with this perpetual motion, the perpetual motion of history in motion?”¹ This question not only has socio-political, economic, cultural, and existential aspects, but also correlates with the condition and potential of images and the visual arts within the border art aesthetic. We already know from Paul Ricœur that “the return of a memory can only take place in the mode of becoming-an-image”.² In this case, the image in question must be a particular type of image: one that can not only show this “perpetual motion of history in motion” and present it in narrative form, but also convey the dynamic of history, itself becoming a processual phenomenon, in constant motion – even at a level inscribed into the medium itself. Our thesis is thus as follows: the border as space-time process, when presented in visual art form, infects the medium itself with that processuality.

In this chapter, we will show, as examples of images of this type connected with population migrations in the latter twentieth century that have recorded this motion, action, and process in their medium itself, part of a cycle of photographs by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky (Urban Art) entitled *East Side Story. A Photo Research on Migration and Arrival Stories* (2019 ongoing).³ We will focus in particular on a series of photographs called *East Side Story I: Mysłibórz*, which were the first in that cycle (fig. 65–76). Their subject was Poles settling in the “Recovered Territories” after the end of World War II and the establishment of the border between Poland and Germany on the Oder and the Lusatian Neisse. The artists themselves wrote:

East Side Story deals with the psychological technique of so-called family constellations in order to create a space for reflecting on migration and its effects across generations. Arrival stories and the topic of making one’s home in a new environment are the main focus of the project. The re-enactments of old photographs found in private family albums are shot

1 VIRILIO 2008–2009, 7–8.

2 RICOEUR 2000, 7, 44–55.

3 See the project description on the artists’ website: <https://urbanart-berlin.de/en/Works-Projects/East-Side-Story>, [last accessed 05.05.2023]. All other quotations and references to individual photographs – unless otherwise stated – refer to this link.



Fig. 65 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślubórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 1. Story: *On the Wagon*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.

with a pinhole camera. A contradiction in terms! Long exposure times require the persons re-enacting the old photograph to freeze – thus heightening the concentration necessary to take up the positions of their ancestors in the historic image.⁴

East Side Story I: Myślubórz comprises eleven colour photographs characterized by the blurry quality typical for photographs taken using the pinhole technique. In a paper presented at the conference *Photo Albums' Twisted Meanings: Between Nostalgia and Trauma*, Peschken distinguished three types of photographic collections which they encountered in the process of selecting the photographs to be recreated – wherever possible – with the participation of descendants of the individuals shown on the originals:

4 IBID.



Fig. 66 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślībórz. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 2. Story: In the Front of the House*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.



Fig. 67 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślíbórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 3. Story: *On the Combine*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.

The first one was a chocolate box full of old photographs deliberately left behind in a house that was sold. The second was a well-kept photo album with written comments that told the family history before and after the migrational re-start. The third was a collection of photos handed over to the local museum with no reference of the photographer. I would define these collections as the amnesic, historiographic and the preserving approach. Of all three categories we found at least two examples.⁵

5 “*East Side Story* by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky” – paper presented online jointly by Marta Smolińska and Anne Peschken on 25.11. 2021 as part of the international conference *Photo Albums’ Twisted Meanings: Between Nostalgia and Trauma*, organized by the CVF Photography Research Centre at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague.

Fig. 68 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślubórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 4. Story: *The Walk*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.



In activating these borderscaping processes, Peschken and Pisarsky worked not only with family albums and museum archives, however, but also with photographs that had never existed, and functioned only as imagined or reminisced images in the memories of Myślubórz residents, so corroborating Hans Belting's thesis that the living body is a medium and locus of images.⁶ Their strategy also drew attention to the fact that the photographs themselves also migrated and were constantly in motion, being abandoned in old chocolate boxes like unnecessary memory ballast, or finding their way into the collections of the Myślubórz Lakes Museum, where they remained, anonymous, for subsequent generations, but no longer necessarily in a cherished family album. We analyse individual examples below, attempting to bring out the unique aspects of every border narrative connected with a given photograph whose unfolding has been transformed into the very medium of the photographic image by the artists.

6 BELTING 2014, 37–61.



Fig. 69 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślibórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 5. Story: *Whitewashing*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 70 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślubórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 6. Story: *On the Field*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.



The fact that the project *East Side Story. A Photo Research on Migration and Arrival Stories* was begun at a time when the waves of migration sweeping the world are peaking and Virilio's question is not only losing but in fact gaining currency is of considerable significance. As such, the undertaking not only has a historical dimension, but constitutes an effort on the part of the artistic duo Urban Art to think more broadly about the potential of the image of migration and the migration of images. Peschken and Pisarsky have for years lived and worked in Berlin and Myślubórz, going back and forth between Germany and Poland in their artistic work focusing on the German-Polish borderland and the phantom border, which, in spite of the westward shift of the actual border to the Oder-Neisse line in 1945, still seems present in the mentality of the residents of the "Recovered Territories", who continue to perceive this region as "formerly German". As Peschken stressed, it was no coincidence that they began work on the cycle *East Side Story* when they did: "In 2015 a new massive migration forged its way to Europe in the wake of the Syrian war. Public and governmental reactions to this crisis were in Germany and Poland



Fig. 71 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślubórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 7. Story: Fishing, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.

diametrically opposed. We wondered why.”⁷ The motivation of the duo was thus political, and the project a classic example of critical border art. The two artists took as their point of departure the assumption that for the residents of the region known as the “Recovered Territories”, the experience of expulsion, migration, and arrival in new, “alien” territory that had to be assimilated and made “home” is written into their family histories, which at a universal, existential level gave them a connection with the migrants of the 2010s.

Peschken and Pisarsky thus launched *A Photo Research on Migration and Arrival Stories* among their own neighbours in Myślubórz, and created the cycle *East Side Story*, which we consider worth examining from the angle of the processuality, motion, action, and

7 “*East Side Story* by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky”—paper presented online jointly by Marta Smolińska and Anne Peschken on 25.11.2021 as part of the international conference *Photo Albums’ Twisted Meanings: Between Nostalgia and Trauma*, organized by the CVF Photography Research Centre at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague.



Fig. 72 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślībórz. A photo research on migration and arrival stories*, 8. *Story: Mother and Child*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.

embodiment inscribed into the very medium of the photographic image in relation to the processuality of the border. Our methodological toolbox in this chapter will incorporate the following theories and concepts: border art studies and the concept of the phantom border; anachronism, anachrony, and the temporalization of photography after Georges Didi-Huberman and Jacques Rancière; Hans Belting's anthropology of the image; memory studies and the background concept of the medialization of memory (Aleida Assmann); the semantic potential of re-enactment as repetition and difference in the Derridian and Deleuzian sense; the semantic saturation of the blurring in images taken with a pinhole camera; the medium as *infrastructure of mobility* after Rosalind E. Krauss; Arnold Berleant's re-thinking of aesthetics with the concept of embodiment, embodied perception, and embodied knowledge; and performativity in the context of embodied architecture as conceived by Yannis Hamilakis. The landscape of the "Recovered Territories" itself we treat as an active agent, inseparably bound up with History, and demonstrating an incessant *Nachleben*: the still perceptible presence of the phantom Polish-German border as it



Fig. 73 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślubórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 9. Story: *At the Fountain*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.

was before the war. We shall also enrich our toolbox with methodology from the field of sociology, drawing on concepts such as “borderscaping” and “border assemblage”. These will help us to underscore the processual character of the Polish–German border itself and to forge close links between its dynamic character and the perpetual motion of history in motion – including the motion inscribed into the medial characteristic of the photographic images from the *East Side Story* cycle.

6.1 PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE CYCLE *EAST SIDE STORY* AND THE PHANTOM BORDER

The conferences in Yalta and Potsdam produced the greatest population transfer in the history of modern Europe, forcing the residents of regions taken by the Soviet Union to migrate westwards to lands including the “Recovered Territories”, from which in turn the

Fig. 74 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślubórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 10. Story: *On the Seesaw*, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.



hitherto resident Germans were expelled. In the 1950s and 1960s – well into the second decade after their resettlement – the new arrivals were still trying to “assimilate” their “new-found-land” of the border assemblage in their photographs.

The eleven photographs from the cycle *East Side Story* by Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky may be divided into four thematic groups in terms of the motifs shown on them: work (fig. 67: 3. Story: *On the Combine*; fig. 70: 6. Story: *On the Field*), everyday life (fig. 65: 1. Story: *On the Wagon*; fig. 68: 4. Story: *The Walk*; fig. 71: 7. Story: *Fishing*; fig. 72: 8. Story: *Mother and Child*; fig. 73: 9. Story: *At the Fountain*; fig. 74: 10. Story: *On the Seesaw*; fig. 75: 11. Story: *Cheers*), taking possession of formerly German houses (fig. 66: 2. Story: *In Front of the House*), and effacing the traces of Germanness in the “Recovered Territories” – the latter two categories each being represented by just one photograph (fig. 69: 5. Story: *Whitewashing*). Nonetheless, work on the land and motifs from everyday life were not such neutral categories as they might seem at first glance, because the strategies were being played out in the “Polish Wild West”, i. e.,



Fig. 75 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślubórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 11. Story: Cheers, 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.

in lands that the new migrants had only recently settled following their arrival from entirely different regions. This meant sowing fields that only recently had still been “foreign”; harvesting using a combine harvester – gathering in the crops from land that they had only just started to cultivate. A family posing on a cart before driving out of a yard that they were only slowly and mistrustfully starting to treat as their own; a fishing trip in a motor car; strolls about town with the baby in a pram; playing on the seesaws in the park; posing by the fountain in fashionable dresses; or raising a toast at home: all these were strategies for assimilating the new surroundings, captured on camera as if in response to a need to authenticate their presence there through the images. Anne Ring Petersen, who studies the relationship between visual culture and migration, believes that taking such photographs is a way of confirming identity, belonging, visibility, and recognition.⁸ This thesis is close to the theory advanced by

8 PETERSEN 2017, 9.

Hannah Arendt that appearing in the public realm gives the individual a feeling for reality.⁹ In her opinion, everyone has the need to be seen and heard: “[A]pppearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality... The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves.”¹⁰ When we appear in the public realm, Arendt says, we are observed by witnesses and an audience, who in their turn transform our actions and words into a narrative:

“[O]ur feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence.”¹¹ This is why the newly arrived migrants in the “Recovered Territories” felt the need to photograph themselves and create galleries of their own internal images: “Our internal images are not necessarily personal in nature, but even when they are collective in origin, we internalize them in such a way that we come to consider them as our own.”¹²

Moreover, their manifestation of having settled in and of their carefreeness were in fact staged for the benefit and in defiance of the phantom border and their fears and uncertainties surrounding the possibility of a return of the German expellees. How and on what actors do vanished borders impact, and how does their presence evolve in the present time of the German-Polish borderscape? The “Recovered Territories” are a phantom in and of themselves, created as a result of the shift of the Polish-German border which conditioned the life of the new residents resettled into the region and influenced the character of the private photographs they took. The actors affected by the presence of this phantom border are not only those who themselves came to the region in the immediate aftermath of World War II, however, but also their descendants, whom Peschken and Pisarsky engaged to recreate and repeat selected photographs. These next generations, the successors to those who first arrived there, are redefining in their day-to-day practices the condition of the phantom border and the status of the “Recovered Territories”, which are perceived as a phantom in themselves. The presence of the second-generation incomers on the photographs from the cycle *East Side Story* is consistent with the findings of the authors of a publication on the nature of this phenomenon:

In situational terms, phantom borders are construed neither as immutable structures nor as purely discursive constructions, but as the outcomes of the variable influences of three intertwined levels: phantom borders are imagined at once in mental maps and discourses;

9 ARENDT 1998, 51.

10 IBID., 50.

11 IBID., 51.

12 BELTING 2014, 16.



Fig. 76 Anne Peschken and Marek Pisarsky, *East Side Story I: Myślībórz*. A photo research on migration and arrival stories, 12. Story: *On the Wagon* (with a family of Ukrainian war refugees), 2019 ongoing, photos from the resettlement period (1940s to 1960s), pinhole photography, courtesy of the artists.



they are experienced and perceived by their actors, shaped by day-to-day practices, constantly updated, and implemented by planned political and administrative interventions. They are context-dependent, and hence phantom in nature.¹³

They are – significantly – thematized in relation to family albums and the type of photography that may be defined as vernacular. Contemporary research into photographs showing everyday practices and into photograph albums, which draws on the theses of Henri Lefebvre,¹⁴ treats vernacular photography as a lens through which individuals negotiate significant political decisions that regulate their life, their self-representation strategies, and their resistance or conformity to political and social regulation. Thus although Peschken and Pisarsky's subject is not the propaganda photographs commissioned after the war in these regions by the Polish authorities¹⁵ but family photographs, these can likewise not be perceived as a neutral medium for representing reality. They would be more accurately described as actively mediating constructs; an imagined version of the present designed for reception by a future beholder. This, then, is how the situations on the photographs that are the starting-point for *A Photo Research on Migration and Arrival Stories* should be viewed – for only when we ask about the relationship between vernacular photography and visual culture from a critical perspective, implicating the political, ideological, and social contexts, will these ostensibly commonplace photographs tell us more about human behaviours and social behaviour patterns.¹⁶ This perspective thus permits us to take account of the presence of the phantom border, which is perceptible in relation to a particular social group: these new arrivals to the “Recovered Territories”. Through the cycle *East Side Story*, Peschken and Pisarsky activate critically and subversively those aspects of their lives that at first glance appear merely quotidian, conventional, and banal, but are in reality a strategy for assimilating the Polish-German borderland that had been entirely *remade* after the war and is perceived by these artists as a complex choreography of border lines in multiple lived places.

In photographing themselves at work on the land, the new arrivals were revealing their need to rediscover a stabilizing *source* of identity, which, as Wojciech Michera stresses, involves seeking a world that would be similar to their homeland from their autochthonous myth.¹⁷ The selection by Peschken and Pisarsky of photographs depicting the sowing and harvesting of crops would thus seem very apt in relation to the question

13 HIRSCHHAUSEN / GRANDITS / KRAFT / MÜLLER / SERRIER 2015, 9.

14 See LEFEBVRE 2014.

15 These include the photographs taken by Jan Bułhak for the seven-volume monograph *Ziemia Odzyskana* [The Recovered Territories], publication of which was only completed in the mid-1950s. See SZYMANOWICZ 2022, 56–75.

16 Cf. CAMPT / HIRSCH / HOCHBERG (eds.) 2020.

17 MICHERA 2017, 125.

of the process of arriving in and settling the “Recovered Territories”, and making them home. As Michera goes on:

The subjective “I” inscribed into this model, like a doppelgänger seeking their lost first form, is forced ... to fictionalize their autobiography, to constantly rework the “stitching”, the staging of notions of themselves, to don theatrical masks, to refer to themselves as “they”, which (as Roland Barthes has noted) “may mean: I speak of myself as one a little deceased”. For all identity, from this perspective, can no longer take the form of “living presence”, or even “living memory”, but can only be forced by that original, “castrating” incision of re-construction, re-creation into becoming an “image”.¹⁸

The new arrivals to this region fictionalized their biographies in a similar way, sensing the presence and influence of the phantom border. They systematically performed that work of stitching together, and presented themselves on their photographs in such a way as to look as though they felt at home, and as though they had the right to sow and harvest the crops from that land. This aspect of creation of an identity and a past by means of an image was brought out with particular eloquence by the *East Side Story* project, which involved the restaging of these staged photographs to draw attention to the processual character of the image and its potential to record and store the becoming of borders and the dynamics of the border assemblage.

Peschken and Pisarsky’s project falls into several key categories connected with border art, one of which is creation of narratives alternative to officially binding versions. As such, it is politically engaged, relational art, and the artists work in the borderland like critical scholars redefining aesthetic regimes, treating vernacular photography like a lens through which significant historical sociopolitical conditions are negotiated, and strategies for the new arrivals’ self-representation and negotiation of their identity are constructed.

Two key concepts in the context of analyses of the project *East Side Story: A Photo Research on Migration and Arrival Stories* and the question of happening encapsulated in the images themselves are borderscape and the version of it that emphasizes processuality: borderscaping. The concept of borderscaping may thus be applied as a conceptual and analytical tool for understanding the shifted, fluid, dispersed character of the borders of the region known as the “Recovered Territories”. This is a discursive landscape of competing meanings. The dynamic, processual nature of the borders visualized in the individual photographs from the *East Side Story* series, in turn, is connected with the processes of differentiation that are constantly being stimulated by human interactions, including contemporary waves of migration. It is thus primarily about the shaping of the border not on the ground, but in the mindscapes of the borderland residents.

18 *IBID.*

Borderscaping helps to establish a strong connection between the processes of social and political transformation, conceptual change, and local experience,¹⁹ in this case connected with the historically tortuous construct named the “Recovered Territories”.

Peschken and Pisarsky combine border experiences with representation of borders by redefining borders as a function of the relations between politics and aesthetics. The artists constructed *East Side Story: A Photo Research on Migration and Arrival Stories* in such a way as to constantly address the tension between the politicization of these images: ostensibly innocent photographs from family albums. Their project is thus a model example of borderscaping, since through the perspective of the borderland it allows the viewer to glimpse the dynamic, mobile, multidimensional character of both the Polish-German phantom border and the present-day border on the Oder and the Neisse in space and time.

In the context of the conceptual grid used in critical border (art) studies, two photographs from the series *East Side Story I: Mysłibórz* seem particularly intriguing, namely number 2, described by the artists as *2. Story: In front of the house* (fig. 66), and number 5, *5. Story: Whitewashing* (fig. 69). Both of these shots taken by Peschken and Pisarsky thematize the “bifurcation point” and the “far-from-equilibrium factor” that were, respectively, World War II and the shift of the borders, both of which contributed to gigantic migrations and triggered border processes involving the complete and violent exchange of the region’s population. In the background of both these visual narratives, issues related to borderscaping and the critical potential of the term “border assemblage” are activated, which thus place the *East Side Story* series in a relation to the de-territorialization of the border and the often completely surprising roles of the actors involved in these dynamic transformations.

The first photograph on the project website is accompanied by the following description:

During the advance on Berlin in 1945, soldier K. attached a note on the door of an empty house in the eastern Oder foothills: “Occupied by a Polish soldier”. At the time, his family was still in a Siberian camp, where they had been interned after eviction from their own home in eastern Poland. Soldier K. survived the Battle of Berlin, celebrated the victory over Hitler and then returned to the empty house. His descendants live there to this day. His great-grandson poses for the pinhole camera.²⁰

19 See BRAMBILLA / LAINE / SCOTT / BOCCHI (eds.) 2015.

20 In turn, at the Prague conference already mentioned in footnote 5, Peschken described in more detail the story of the making of this photograph from the *East Side Story* series:

“One of the first photos we arranged was rather an enactment than a re-enactment, because the original photo was at the time missing (part of an amnesic collection). All we had was the vivid memory of our neighbour, who told us the following story: As a young boy, he and his family were in a Siberian camp, where they had been interned after eviction from their own home in eastern Poland. In 1944/45 his father could join the Red Army in a Polish division and took part in the advance on Berlin. During

Peschken and Pisarsky, having listened to the story told by their neighbours about the occupation of the house in the “Recovered Territories” by a Polish soldier, decided to photograph the event, which in fact had never originally been photographed, and existed only as a family legend and imagined image. The story as told by this resident of Mysłibórz also included what was then thought to be a lost photograph depicting his father in uniform, holding a rifle, which he had remembered in great detail. Thus this was, as Hans Belting put it, an internal image that needed externalizing: “[I]nternal (endogenous) images and external (exogenous) Picture, the latter having a technical or made-man body that catches our eye.”²¹ The two artists decided to stage the soldier’s pose from this photograph outside the house to which he had attached his note announcing his occupation of the property. After the pinhole photograph had been taken, the old photograph unexpectedly surfaced in the family’s collections in another city, and it transpired that the artists’ neighbour’s memory as a locus and medium of images had been fallible in only one detail: on the original, the weapon had been held on the opposite diagonal. On the website charting their project, Peschken and Pisarsky displayed alongside each other the slightly worn black-and-white photograph of the soldier, a drawing showing him tacking the note to the house he had selected for himself, and the photograph of the restaging operation with the resolute soldier played by his great-grandson. In addition to the complicated processes of borderscaping, this triad also visualizes the issue of the migration and mobility of images, which, like the original old photograph here, have moved, or function solely in the memory or imagination, as in the case of the family members still living in the house the soldier occupied. The soldier himself, standing proudly with his gun, is an actor caught up in the geo- and socio-political circumstances of his time, renegotiating his own identity by performing an act of self(re)presentation, drawing attention to the de-territorialization of the border, and initiating new practices characteristic for borders in the process of their development and rebecoming.

Another actor active in the border assemblage of the so-called Recovered Territories and struggling with its heterogeneous character was the son of the post-war mayor of Witnica, identified by Peschken and Pisarsky as Mr. Cz. *5. Story: Whitewashing* (fig. 69) was described as follows: “As a young boy scout, Mr. Cz. was instructed by his father, who had recently become mayor of the western Polish town of Witnica, to remove all German signs and inscriptions or paint them over.” He was thus acting in a borderscape

the campaign he came through the eastern Oder foothills. On an empty house, whose inhabitants had fled, he attached a note, saying: ‘Occupied by a Polish soldier’. The father survived the Battle of Berlin, celebrated the victory over Hitler and then returned to the still empty house. His descendants live there to this day. His great-grandson poses for the pinhole camera. When the photo of the great grandfather finally arrived, used, torn and crumpled, we had to realize that the pose he took on – directed by our neighbour’s memories – was laterally reversed.”

21 BELTING 2014, 15.

rich in material and semiotic elements that were constantly activating the presence of the Polish–German border, both the phantom border and that recently *made* along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse. On the project website, this story is accompanied by a black-and-white family photograph of the Cz. family, a sketch showing the youth effacing the German inscription, and a pinhole photograph taken by Peschken and Pisarsky in 2019. This latter shows an inscription reading “Ohne Fleiß, kein Preis” on the brick school building being painted out. Peschken and Pisarsky are here once again referencing a remembered image whose locus and medium was Mr Cz. himself rather than a real photograph. Paraphrasing the words of Anna Markowska and Zofia Reznik, the editors of a volume on Polish art in the western and northern regions of Poland in the period 1945–1981, it would be fair to say that the more flickering and fluid the past as established by history becomes, the more important is memory conceived as “counter-history”.²²

The actions carried out by the son of Witnica’s mayor on his father’s orders were thus intended as a way of removing factors destabilizing the newly achieved equilibrium in the “Recovered Territories” and eliminating the sense of proximity of the phantom border and its semantic, expressive potential. Peschken and Pisarsky selected this particular moment as representative of a whole class of analogous actions taken at that time in the heterogeneous and non-stabilized border assemblage to which Mysłibórz and its environment, including Witnica, belonged. This was a performative act carried out after the war and recreated contemporarily, and represented in the *East Side Story* cycle in order to serve within the borderscaping process as a critical indicator of socio-political practices developed in respect of the border as a space-time phenomenon and not merely a demarcation line in the terrain and on the map. Photograph 5. *Story: Whitewashing* (fig. 69) thus addresses an issue connected with arriving in an alien region, settling it, and effacing the traces of the culture that had previously existed – in this case in the Oder region. This is a testimony to a long-term process of coming to terms “with an alien cultural idiom first by rejecting it entirely and subsequently – gradually – by assimilating it and learning”.²³

The cycle *East Side Story I: Mysłibórz* as an example of border art thus opens up the discussion on the potential of art in respect of history, politics, and aesthetic regimes²⁴ in the landscape of the Polish–German borderland. As Brambilla²⁵ has perceptively remarked, artistic initiatives of this type have the potential to create resistance to dominant political narratives through critical acts of borderscaping, and casting doubt on the official historical policies of both states, which shift in response to the strategies of the parties in power.

22 MARKOWSKA / REZNIK 2016, 14.

23 *IBID.*, 10.

24 See RANCIÈRE 2004, 12–19.

25 BRAMBILLA 2015, 20.

As the editors of the publication *Sztuka polska na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych od 1981 roku do współczesności* [Polish Art in the Western and Northern Lands from 1981 to the Present] Anna Markowska and Regina Kulig-Posłuszny stress in this context: “since the democratic transformations of the state, Polish culture has persistently striven for a muted polyphony, for a critical observation of received discourses, and is incorporating into the field of ‘our’ heritage what was previously defined as ‘alien’”.²⁶ These scholars point in this context to the literature of Olga Tokarczuk and to the phenomenon of “regional cultural memory”, which is conducive to the construction of different pasts and different traditions, and lays bare things previously kept silent, thus affecting the way we see our present.²⁷

The term “borderscaping” and the treatment of borders as space-time events in the geopolitical, historical, and social contexts not only facilitate perception of the “Recovered Territories”, and Mysłibórz within them, as a discursive landscape of competing meanings, but also, via their inherent potential for indicating the fluid, dispersed character of border narratives and of the region as a border assemblage, draw attention to the processuality and happening inscribed into the photographs from the *East Side Story* cycle. To the perpetual motion of history in motion we may also add that it is also the constant motion of politics in motion. This dynamic not only plays out at the level of the overt, often striking narratives themselves, however, but is an immanent element of the order of visibility and strategy of becoming of the images that reveal them.

6.2 BLURRING: THE MEDIUM AS INFRASTRUCTURE OF MOBILITY

The particular multi-aspect order of visibility developed in the *East Side Story* cycle is closely bound up with the potential of pinhole photography, the blurredness associated with it, and the constant reinvention of this medium²⁸ in order to encapsulate the history of migration and the processuality of the German-Polish border not only in narrative but also in image. As Petersen has perspicaciously noted, migration, by influencing politics and aesthetics and revealing itself as a theme for artworks, also activates “the migratory nature of visual forms themselves”.²⁹ In Peschken and Pisarsky’s photographs, this phenomenon functions impeccably, because the medium operates in them as the *infrastructure of mobility*,³⁰ fusing content and form into an indivisible semantic whole.

26 MARKOWSKA / KULIG-POSŁUSZNY 2019, II.

27 *IBID.*, 16.

28 Here I paraphrase the title of the text KRAUSS 1999, 289–305.

29 PETERSEN 2017, I and 9.

30 KRAUSS 2006, 55–62.

In this context, the medium is defined as a recursive structure³¹ that facilitates visibility, hence as both the physical “carrier” of the image and the imaging conventions. It is a combination of the conventions designating the sphere that mediates between physical materials and aesthetic qualities.³² In the area of new artistic challenges, the medium has to be reinvented afresh every time, and always in a polemic context, which can be partly created by its self-critical work in combination with an auto-analytical and self-aware attitude. The medium thus falls into the category of intermediary between beholder and what is presented, and assumes that it is thought of as a medium.³³ It is the “place” to which the visual and visible is transferred. It comprises both form and matter, and it is only done “justice” on condition that it is viewed from both perspectives: as both medium and intermediary, because only then does it reveal its potential for recording processuality, happening, and dynamic – all of which are connected with the migratory nature of visual forms themselves – and present itself as *infrastructure of mobility*. As in painting, in photography, too, the medium does not present itself as a static place or object but invites us to define it in the categories of motion mediating between carrier and convention, as a practice in which its voice comes to the fore in a relationship of constant processual exchange.³⁴ This would seem to be particularly important in the context of the processual ontology of borders and the specific characteristics of the border art aesthetic.

To follow the effect and dynamic of this infrastructure of mobility, the viewer must engage actively with the work; the works from the cycle *East Side Story* will supply the inspiration for perception of their many semantic and formal layers. As the new medium inherited all the foregoing images,³⁵ these are visible from beneath it and, in the case of Peschken and Pisarsky’s pinhole photographs, related not only to photographs found in family albums and archives, or to reminiscences in human memories, but also to the conventions of creating images characteristic for vernacular photography. Thus, the medium is not only the message, in Marshall McLuhan’s words, but also the memory: “The medium is the memory”,³⁶ Krauss adds to his thoughts about mediality, drawing attention also to the fact that this medium of memory, or medium as memory, can only function in interaction with the memory of the beholder.

In drawing on the technique of pinhole photography and its inherent blurring, the authors of the *East Side Story* cycle were trying to capture the flickering image of the

31 KRAUSS 2011, 76.

32 This statement is inspired by the thinking of Timothy Binkley. After: KAZIMIERSKA-JERZYK 2010, 54.

33 Cf. SALWA 2010, 22. Salwa attributes the “bipolar” characteristic of the medium to new media, which we in this text also extend to photography.

34 WETZEL 1997, 24–25.

35 SPIES 2007, 275.

36 KRAUSS 2010, 19.

past from the perspective of the present, as if inspired by Walter Benjamin's famous words: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."³⁷ Peschken and Pisarsky create a strategy by which the present can see itself anew in an image of the past and subversively interpret itself in relation to that image. In this context, pinhole photography and blurring become key non-mimetic means of expression activating the medium as memory and *infrastructure of mobility* within which constant processual exchange occurs between photography as the material medium of representation of migration and arrival, and photographs from family albums as the imaging convention.

As Aleida Assmann, the perceptive scholar of the nature of memory and the relationship between photographs and spectres in contemporary art, has noted, a photograph has a far more powerful relation to reality than a painting or literary work, because as a sign it makes a double statement: what is visible on it once existed; what is visible on it no longer exists.³⁸ The *East Side Story* cycle activates both this "documentary function" (Ger. *dokumentarische Funktion*), proof of the existence of a past that is no longer accessible today, or is part of a cultural archive, and its memorial or commemorative function (Ger. *memoriale Funktion*), which in turn shows that a photograph retains an affective, material trace of an absent or lost thing or person, while at the same time being an element of the individual or collective memory. Assmann distinguishes these functions in respect of the viewer, further emphasizing that the photograph operates between both poles, like a section out of the river of flowing time, which gives it the power to activate memory and draw attention to itself. Peschken and Pisarsky took selected photographs that portray the process of arriving in the "Recovered Territories" and settling there, thus fetishizing them and rendering them representative of absent people, who in turn gain a spectral status, between presence and absence,³⁹ but celebrated in the present.

This status is further heightened in the context of the restaging of these photographs through the use of the digital pinhole camera, because images created using this technique have a magical power of attraction in spite of their technical imperfection, and despite originating in a device that cannot be fully controlled.⁴⁰ As Klaus Honnef goes on in his analysis of this phenomenon, it is precisely this lack of perfection that distinguishes them from photographs published by the mass media, and paradoxically this quality that intensifies their sensual power.⁴¹ Honnef suggests that this technique has a strong

37 BENJAMIN 1940, n. p. n.

38 ASSMANN 2014, 168.

39 *IBID.*, 170. Assmann draws attention to the process of fetishization and the spectral nature of photography.

40 HONNEF 2012–2013, 408.

41 *IBID.*

affective charge. To support this thesis, he formulates the following comparison: at first glance, pinhole photographs produce a less satisfying effect than mass media photographs, the difference being akin to that between a portrait of a child painted by its father and a photographic portrait of the same child taken by a machine. The very choice of this technique by Peschken and Pisarsky thus seems significant in this context, orientated towards activating the affective function of the photographs, which is connected to both its documentary and memorial roles. In Honnef's view, work with the "pinhole" facilitates the transformation of the known into the unknown, offering a different image of the visible world than that which we have assimilated.⁴² These photographs lose the quality of visual clichés because suddenly, from behind the stereotypes, an image shows through that is imbued with temporality, its beauty built on technical imperfection: these are living images, and irritating in the best sense of the word, Honnef maintains.⁴³

We will return to the question of temporality later in this chapter; for now, we shall focus on blurring as one of the fundamental factors in the dynamic of the medium as infrastructure of mobility in the *East Side Story* cycle. The blurred quality is striking, even ostentatiously imposing, because Peschken and Pisarsky place together in a single frame the enlarged, black-and-white, sharply focused photograph that is the point of departure, and its restaged version in colour and blurred. This juxtaposition is irritating in the best sense of the word, because it invites the viewer to pose questions about the migratory nature of visual forms themselves, about the medialization of memory, and about the medium as memory. The contrast between focused and unfocused guarantees a vitality of perception.⁴⁴ The subjects, working in the fields (fig. 67: 3. *Story: On the Combine* and fig. 70: 6. *Story: On the Field*), strolling about town (fig. 68: 4. *Story: The Walk* and fig. 72: 8. *Story: Mother and Child*), or drinking vodka at the table in their own home (fig. 75: 11. *Story: Cheers*), familiarizing themselves with their new territory, populate new, blurred frames, provoking the imagination of those who view them. In his book *Die Geschichte der Unschärfe*, published in 2002, Wolfgang Ullrich avers that blurred photographs make every viewer a detective hoping to discover a secret.⁴⁵ Clear vision connotes authority, possession, while an unclear image calls forth associations with reminiscence, permits the avoidance of literality, and lends distance from the detail-saturated reality of everyday life. The softening, blurring, and pastel quality of pinhole photography act as conveyors of mood, engendering a state between presence and absence, between determinability and elusiveness. These qualities shift the accent in the blurred photographs from what is on the surface onto what is within; one might

42 *IBID.*, 409.

43 *IBID.*

44 HÜPPAUF 2011, 38.

45 ULLRICH 2003, 7.

say that blurred photographs are not superficial, but tend instead towards exploration and “revelation” of what is usually hidden, paradoxically veiled by the sharp, clearly defined – and hence overweening – presence of an object or outline.⁴⁶ Blurring in a photograph thus aspires to the rank of signal of an *extraordinary state*;⁴⁷ it is the mark of a striving to see something else, something more than can normally be seen. In his interpretation of the photographic works of John Hilliard, which are composed of blurred and focused areas, Ullrich notes that contrasts of this type within a single image can serve to regulate the viewer’s attention and to heighten the sense of drama, tension, and mystery.⁴⁸

What *extraordinary state*, then, is shown on the photographs from the cycle *East Side Story*? What meanings do the blurring and sensual, even magical power of the pinhole camera activate in them? The paired photographs initiate a game of perception based on seeking differences and asking questions: Are these the same people? Was this shot taken in the same place? Why is the top photograph sharply defined and black-and-white and the bottom one blurred and in colour? Who “reproduced” these images, when, and why? The stronger the viewer’s detective leanings, the more questions they will have, and the search for answers will enable them to track the proximity of the (phantom) Polish-German border. The large, multigenerational family seated comfortably on the wagon (fig. 65: *1. Story: On the Wagon*⁴⁹) about to drive off their premises, presumably to church or to an event or celebration of some kind, is showing by their very presence that the farm belongs to them, and that they feel at home there. The mood is formal but celebratory, and this is recreated on the pinhole photograph with the participation of descendants of the people visible on the source photograph. The blurring is a form of resistance to the gaze, a demand for concentration,⁵⁰ an invitation to take up the challenge of comparing the faces on the two photographs. As Bernd Hüppauf notes, understanding blurred photographs is not natural; it requires interpretation techniques that have to be learned⁵¹ – the viewer of the *East Side Story* cycle thus has to be familiar with imaging conventions in order to recognize that these blurred images are guiding the perception directly towards the dynamic of the medium as memory and memory as medium.

46 *IBID.*, 7, 9, 70–72.

47 *IBID.*, 79.

48 *IBID.*, 108.

49 In the summer of 2022, Peschken and Pisarsky staged another photograph referencing the scene on the cart, this time with a family of Ukrainian war refugees posing (fig. 76: *12. Story: On the Wagon (with a family of Ukrainian war refugees)*). The family had been taken in by the artists in Mysłibórz for several months, and their image is a continuation of *1. Story: On the Wagon*, drawing attention to the continued relevance of the issue of migration.

50 Cf. Hüppauf 2011, 34.

51 *IBID.*, 42 and 48.

Hüppauf finds that contemporary photography uses in clarity to ask questions about the objectives of the medium, but in a different way than in the early days of its history, when it set out to prove – partly with pictorialism – that it was an art.⁵² Contemporary photography, and the *East Side Story* cycle as one example of it, has departed from its tendency to treat itself as a document in favour of posing questions about the means with which reality is *construed*, by programmatically skewing the rules of imitation and documentation.⁵³ Hüppauf, the German scholar of the “new blurring”, who defines this phenomenon in relation to the painting of Gerhard Richter, asserts that blurring creates an undetermined space from which the asking, seeking gaze of the viewer in turn creates a space for action (Ger. *Aktionsraum*).⁵⁴ On Peschken and Pisarsky’s photographs, these spaces for action are the selected places in the “Recovered Territories”, which give the impression of being at once vintage and contemporary, both concrete and generalized. Pursuant to the theory called *geophilosophy of photography*, advanced by Ali Shobeiri, the medium of photography may offer the awareness that place is never simply presented or established, but exists as something endowed with indeterminacy in respect of its presence in space and time.⁵⁵ We might add that blurring further reinforces these mechanisms of the transformation of physical places into photographed places, so as to temporalize and spatialize them and communicate meanings.⁵⁶ Photograph 7. *Story: Fishing* (fig. 71) portrays the then newly appointed mayor of Witnica with his two sons in 1948, preparing to set out on a fishing trip in a motor car he had built himself. In the photograph staged for *East Side Story*, the role of the then mayor was assumed by his younger son, who, seventy years later, posed in the same place, though it was no longer the same, as it was photographed and temporalized.

With the assumption of this strategy, the images themselves become active and, in their exchange with the viewer, permit the creation of imagined worlds not literally reflected in the individual photographs. Blurring as a constitutive element of the vividness of an image is inventive and creative; it works with the viewer’s imagination, activating their cultural and individual memory connected with arrival in the Polish-German borderlands. In *East Side Story*, as a non-mimetic means of expression, it creates spaces within the image that irritate and tease the gaze, and activate the cognitive system, challenging it and summoning up experiences from two different spheres: connected with subjective selection, and culturally conditioned by imaging conventions. The viewer supplements the underdefinitions by means of their imagination

52 *IBID.*, 34.

53 HÜPPAUF 2006, 254.

54 Cf. HÜPPAUF 2011, 34.

55 SHOBEIRI 2021, 12.

56 *IBID.*, 15.

and emotions: “Blurring sets the imagination in motion and transforms the material surface into an image that causes something.”⁵⁷ The images from the *East Side Story* cycle render the Polish-German border perceptible and active, even though they do not show it overtly anywhere. Hence they have the power to act and, although their blurredness renders identification more difficult, they create a strong emotional bond with their beholders, establishing a profound affective relationship with what they depict,⁵⁸ that is, with the new arrivals working in the field, who are in the process of settling in the “Recovered Territories”.

Moreover, the agency of the camera – in this case a digital pinhole camera – in the photographic act contributes to the creation of rather hazy, “fluid”, or “jogged” images, which give us the sense that we are seeing something universal, not particular: the blurring adds generalization,⁵⁹ thereby prompting questions about the condition of migrants more broadly, and shifting the phenomenon of migration and movement itself into the sphere of imagery. To paraphrase Hüppauf, one might say that the blurring in *East Side Story* removes the concordance of the image with what is depicted on it, and with the image itself. He calls this new blurring a phenomenon that he defines in Richter’s painting as “images after images after images” (Ger. *Bilder nach Bildern nach Bildern*), suggesting that these are series of paintings created one after the other and referring one to the other. In the case of *A Photo Research on Migration and Arrival Stories*, pinhole photography is a research tool that also creates such images after images. According to Hüppauf’s convincing thesis, this new type of blurring, which activates a combination of seeing and the imagination, is an indication of the ambiguity of memory, and also becomes a means for activating the image politics or ethics of ambiguous images.⁶⁰ In the case of *East Side Story*, blurring as an indication of the *extraordinary state* prompts questions about the geopolitical context in which the actors in the various photographs are operating. Indefinition as an essential principle of the image links these scenes with the ambiguity and instability of memory, which, underpinned by the functioning of the imagination and by historical knowledge, dynamically interprets Peschken and Pisarsky’s photographs in relation to their sources found in the “Recovered Territories” and to the potential of the medium as memory and *infrastructure of mobility*.

57 HÜPPAUF 2011, 35.

58 *IBID.*, 37.

59 *IBID.*, 45.

60 *IBID.*

6.3 RE-ENACTMENT, PERFORMATIVITY, AND EMBODIMENT

Another strategy with a central role in activating the dynamic, processual and migratory nature of the visual forms characteristic for the *East Side Story* cycle, alongside the pinhole photography technique and blurring, is re-enactment, which is closely bound up with iterativity and aesthetic experience defined as embodiment. As Gottfried Boehm stresses:

Good descriptions play two roles: they say what there “is”, but they also say how it “works”; they refer to the states of things and to the form of representation used in the image. Without taking account of the factual side, the overt content of the image would be impoverished; without taking account of the processual side, the latencies, the iconic gesture of indication, would be effaced.⁶¹

Addressing the question of re-enactment is thus essentially an attempt to describe how Peschken and Pisarsky’s pinhole photographs “work” and to highlight the processuality connected with the specific strategy of their creation inscribed into their medium. “The sensuousness of the happening of a work cannot simply be separated from the meaning that it brings out”⁶² – in the case of *East Side Story*, this happening is particularly intense, and the traces of the production process become an immanent part of the medium as memory and *infrastructure of mobility*. This is further intensified by the performative activeness of the models posing for the photographs, which is passed on to the viewer, and the various types of practices – individual, social, political, or communicative – connected with the re-enactment strategy.

Every one of the photographs selected by Peschken and Pisarsky for recreation was first analysed in depth and restaged, wherever possible with the participation of descendants of those pictured on the original, preferably in exactly the same place, or one that seemed as similar as possible. Props and costumes were gathered diligently, and the whole re-enactment was performative and processual in character, which also “infected” the image dimension of the photograph. Even though in the case of picture 2. *Story: In Front of the House* (fig. 66) and picture 5. *Story: Whitewashing* (fig. 69) the reminiscences and images staged were intermediated by the medium of memory, not film, the resultant new images have a similar dynamic of happening to all the others. Basing the construction of the *East Side Story* series on re-enactment was an effective way of activating a contemporary look at the migratory past of the region’s inhabitants.

According to researchers of this strategy, it permits negation, and even eliminates distance and the stark division between the present and the past, which is achieved in

61 BOEHM 1995, 32.

62 *IBID.*, 77.

performative terms.⁶³ It is also an expression of a striving for authenticity, and constitutes a type of epistemology which references the body and experiencing via all the senses. Its other key attributes include mediality, because it operates in relation to the visual codes connected with cultural memory.⁶⁴ Re-enactment is also credited with great critical, deconstructive, and emancipatory potential, because it invites us to rethink memory, theory, and history, which always happens as a result of individual motivation.⁶⁵ As scholars of this art form stress, it is becoming increasingly popular because:

Re-enactments repeat archived, historical events; they replace “false” memories (false because they are media-based and therefore always susceptible to manipulation) with individual experiences through direct and often physical experience of history. In re-created situations that are usually “live”, re-enactments make it possible to fully comprehend what the images mean through one’s own physical experience and perception.⁶⁶

Significantly for the *East Side Story* project, re-enactments also prompt questions about what really happened and how history has been medialized⁶⁷ – in this case why the new incomers usually photographed themselves as already at home. Paradoxically, this question is posed by repeating representations of the past, which superbly underscores the strictly intermediated nature of history. Moreover, re-enactments analyse the meaning of the past for the present by activating immersion, embodiment, and empathy.⁶⁸ As artistic undertakings, they differ from pop-culture and mass historical events of the same name in the character of what they recreate: situations that are not affirmative echoings of the received past but often have a traumatic dimension, and cast doubt on binding historical narratives and the aesthetic regimes connected with them. Arns goes on:

artistic re-enactments do not ask the naïve question about what really happened outside of the history represented in the media... instead they ask what the images we see might mean concretely to us, if we were to experience these situations personally. In this way the artistic re-enactment confronts the general feeling of insecurity about the meaning of images, by using a paradoxical approach: through erasing distance to the images and at the same time distancing itself from the images.⁶⁹

63 SCHWARZ 2014, 125.

64 *IBID.*, 125–127.

65 Cf. BLACKSON 2007, 28–40.

66 ARNS / HORN 2007, 7.

67 *IBID.*, 9.

68 ARNS 2007, 41–43.

69 *IBID.*, 43.

This paradox inherent in artistic re-enactments is borne out in the *East Side Story* series, which “enlivens” the photographs and invites the viewer to immerse themselves into that world, a step which assumes a striving to suspend the boundary between the present and the past, while also indicating that these photographs from family albums show a *construal* of quotidian practices, and borderscaping in action along both the phantom and the new, *constructed*, Polish-German border along the Oder and Neisse. It is thus at once a kind of immediate experience of history closely bound up with the intermediation and re-medialization of memory. Arns encapsulates the very essence of this paradoxical strategy when she says that re-enactment renders the optical subconscious visible; at the same time, when she stresses the real character of media images, she is drawing attention to the extent to which the collective memory is founded on such images.⁷⁰ The optical memory of contemporary residents of the “Recovered Territories” incorporates the present knowledge that they are the descendants of migrants, which does not correlate either with the official historical narrative that was binding in the Stalinist period or with the currently dominant vision of Poland as a country unwelcoming to migrants. *East Side Story*, in the performative act of repetition and difference – in the Deleuzian sense – subversively permits the forging of a relationship between the past and the present, and draws attention to some surprising similarities between what are apparently such dissimilar moments of history. For re-enactment is a historiographic and political practice, and the iterativity of things that have gone before is a form of critical consideration⁷¹ that would be impossible without participation and embodiment:

The re-enactment transforms representation into embodiment, distanced indirect involvement into – sometimes unpleasant – direct involvement, and through this turns the passive [...] observer into an active witness or participant. Re-enactments replace the witnesses’ or participants’ existing collective knowledge of the past with direct and often also physical [...] experience of history.⁷²

According to Arnold Berleant’s concept of rethinking aesthetics, direct involvement, which underscores the active nature of aesthetic experience, and participation as a significant quality thereof, features in many orders of action, including the perceptual order, the consciousness order, and the physical and social orders.⁷³ In the context of the *East Side Story* cycle, the models were at once the participants in the re-enactment, and, once the photographs were ready, also became their viewers. When we read the work as a

70 *IBID.*, 63.

71 MUHLE 2016, 121, 124, and 131.

72 ARNS 2007, 59.

73 BERLEANT 2004, 39.

process rather than as a product or object, we perceive it as a network of cooperation between many actors and the relations between them,⁷⁴ which is also registered in the imagistic quality and enables the function of the medium as *infrastructure of mobility*. Participation in the production of such a work means being present at its creation and contributing to its becoming before putting it on show to an audience, and following the guidelines prepared in advance by the artists,⁷⁵ in this case Peschken and Pisarsky, whose use of the paradigm of participation rendered their project a practical application of Berleant's postulate that, rather than making works of art substitutes that remain outside experience, we should hold that art is a constant with experience.⁷⁶

Moreover, he argues, it should be understood as an embodiment, because the body has the power to change the nature of things far more mightily than the mind. Its inclusion in aesthetic activeness, as in the re-enactment strategy, helps us to sense meanings rather than discover them cognitively, even though they also encompass culture, history, and human exposure to events. After Berleant, we try to comprehend meanings with our bodies, literally taking them in in such a way that we feel them physically.⁷⁷ In this way, the processual and performative character of the *East Side Story* series is intended as a way of enabling viewers of these photographs to experience physically migration, arrival, and settling in from a contemporary perspective. In this case, it is not only about the models who posed for the photographs, but applies to all potential viewers in whom, with the activation of the migratory nature of the visual forms themselves and the traces left by the process of creating the photographs in their media and image layer, this embodiment resonates as a perceptual aesthetic experience. According to Belting, both perception and representation have the character of – mutually symmetrical – societal acts, and the media control our experience of the body through the act of examination.⁷⁸

The anthropology of the image holds photography to be a medium of the body that expresses our changing view of the world, and sometimes – as in the case of *East Side Story* – becomes a way of examining our own way of looking⁷⁹ at old photographs from family albums or at images we carry in our memory and our body as a living medium and carrier. Peschken and Pisarsky animate these images in order – as Belting would put it – to launch the process of embodiment and affective empathizing in viewers. The author of *An Anthropology of Images* avers, however, that: “we animate them only when they bring back our own memories. The gazes of two beholders looking at the

74 Cf. KAITAVUORI 2018, 99.

75 *IBID.*, 16–17, 52. In English, Kaitavouri calls this type of participation “material”.

76 BERLEANT 2004, 94.

77 *IBID.*, 83.

78 BELTING 2014, II.

79 *IBID.*, 146–148.

same picture diverge where memory separates them.”⁸⁰ While the re-enactment strategy cannot unify those memories, it does have the subversive power to create a narrative to oppose official aesthetic regimes, one that can become a shared narrative formulated in opposition to the border in the Polish-German borderland region, whose residents will be able to visualize the migratory past of their immediate descendants. “[W]e animate the medium, give it life, in order to get our own images back from it”,⁸¹ Belting says, but in all certainty, these images in the re-enactment process will not be the same, because through embodiment, their history will be comprehended from a personal perspective. In Belting’s view, embodiment takes place in two acts:

As perceived pictures they turned into remembered images that henceforth become part of the archive of our memory. When external pictures were re-embodied as our own images, we substitute for their fabricated medium our own body, which, when it serves in this capacity, turns into a living or natural medium.⁸²

The strategy adopted by Peschken and Pisarsky in *East Side Story* makes this process of embodying images more complex still, by adding further acts to it: in the first and second acts, vintage photographs or memories of important events from the period of the protagonists’ arrival in the “Recovered Territories”; in successive acts, the pinhole photographs created as a result of the re-enactment enter the equation, and these considerably complicate the relationship between disembodiment and embodiment, particularly for the models who posed for them. Embodiment is a profound process, because it entails the internalization of images whose creation the models experienced with their own bodies. The paradox of *East Side Story* thus lies in the fact that the exchange which takes place between the medium of the images and the body as a natural medium does so via the “filter” that is the body of the model involved, playing the roles of his descendants.

Assmann, in her study of the forms and functions of cultural memory, drew attention to the fact that memory constructs the past in a similar way to archaeology, because in delving into its reserves we are acting almost as if we were excavating something from the past or bringing something previously concealed out into the light of day.⁸³ In their cycle of works, Peschken and Pisarsky develop this embodied archaeology of memory, which, according to Yannis Hamilakis,⁸⁴ requires intense

80 *IBID.*, 148.

81 *IBID.*, 168.

82 *IBID.*, 16.

83 ASSMANN 1991, 13f.

84 Cf. HAMILAKIS 2013; HAMILAKIS / PLUCIENNIK / TARLOW 2002.

physical involvement in the material traces of the past in order to initiate multisensory experience. This type of corporeal and sensory archaeology of memory can uncover the lost, suppressed, and forgotten human sensory and affective modality not only in the field of classical archaeology but also, as Peschken and Pisarsky's project shows, in relation to vintage photographs from photograph albums. Hamilakis claims that sensory memory, via the body, can help us to rethink significant issues ranging from "production" of the heritage of our ancestors to major social change. In the context of *East Side Story*, social change would mean acceptance of the fact that many Poles are in reality migrants, which is at odds with the image of Poland constructed both after the war and at present.

The strategies for re-enactment and embodied archaeology of memory inscribed into the image structure of these pinhole photographs introduce into the symbolic order the traumatic experiences of post-war migration, arrival, and settling in by repeating them. A thought expressed by Hal Foster in the context of the status of the avant-garde would seem apt for reflecting this state: "One event is only registered through another that recodes it; we come to be who we are only in deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*)."⁸⁵ This recoding is precisely what happens in the *East Side Story* series, influencing the identity of the present-day residents of the "Recovered Territories" and developing their memory into a multi-layered, dynamic visual narrative. In his analysis of Paul Ricoeur's theory expounded in the book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Mirosław Loba examines this transformation of memory into narrative, which takes place in both the individual, and cultural and institutional fields:

A narrative is vital to a person or entity in order to symbolize their memory and uphold their identity. Yet neither memory nor identity are constants. A narrative identity *se fait et se défait*, creates itself and decomposes, connects with the past and the future, with the project for life that the person wishes to realize; hence this constant dialectic between memory and hope, recapitulation of the past and projection of expectations and intentions [...]. [T]he transformation of memory into narrative is a difficult, delicate process.⁸⁶

In the case of Peschken and Pisarsky's project, this process is difficult inasmuch as it is about the construction of identity by the "postmemory generation", which has to relate to displaced memories of the expulsion, migration, and arrival that was the experience of their parents and grandparents. Marianne Hirsch, the creator of the notion of post-memory, links this closely to the influence of photographs as family memory:

85 FOSTER 1996, 29.

86 LOBA 2004, 297.

In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source *is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation*. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood or recreated.⁸⁷

The *East Side Story* series reveals clearly that certain traumatic experiences – of course, not experiences related to the Holocaust, which Hirsch was referencing in her work – can nonetheless be recreated and re-enacted through the filter of preserved photographs and inner images carried in the memory. As Belting notes, our forebears pass down certain images, and the dynamic processes of their transferral cause changes, forgetting, rediscoveries, and reinterpretation of those images: “Today’s image can be but a temporary answer; it will not satisfy the next generation.”⁸⁸ *East Side Story* poses questions about identity on behalf of the posttrauma generation, developing transgenerational corpographies of memory⁸⁹ which by their very nature are not only embodied but also temporally heterogeneous.

6.4 THE ANACHRONIC DIMENSIONS OF *EAST SIDE STORY*

In blurred photographs taken with a digital pinhole camera, temporality is markedly different than in sharply focused images – the technique itself needs a longer exposure time, and, moreover, avoids linearity and consequences, preferring correlation with the imagination and memory.⁹⁰ The *East Side Story* series is thus an example of anachrony as defined by Jacques Rancière – as the ontological temporality of artworks created using strategies that cast doubt on the obviousness of time.⁹¹ The concept of anachrony not only correlates with history perceived as a process, but is activated particularly intensively in the context of the processuality of the images.⁹² In the anachronistic history of

87 HIRSCH 1997, 22.

88 BELTING 2014, 36.

89 This notion was taken from the title of the conference *Transgenerational Corpographies of Memory*, held in November 2021 at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam. See: <https://arthist.net/archive/35283>, [last accessed 05.05.2023].

90 Cf. HÜPPAUF 2011, 46.

91 See RANCIÈRE 2015, 33–50.

92 Cf. LEŚNIAK 2010, 120.

art as conceived by Georges Didi-Huberman, anachronisms are not only interpretative errors; they are treated as “inalienable elements of interpretation, and even, on occasion, preconditions for the possibility of interpretation”.⁹³ Anachronism and anachrony were also the *sine qua non* for the creation of the *East Side Story* series, in which the past is spoken of from the perspective of an embodied aesthetic experience playing out in the present. We would define Peschken and Pisarsky’s photographs as figures that re-image the past from a contemporary perspective, that record non-contemporary strata of time in their very character as images, making the post-war period of migration and arrival manifest in the *now*, as the Polish-German border starts to be called into question as a soft border by successive waves of migration:

[E]verything past is definitively *anachronistic*: it exists or subsists only through the figures that we make of it; so it exists only in the operations of a “reminiscing present”, a present endowed with the admirable or dangerous power, precisely, of *presenting* it, and, in the wake of this presentation, of elaborating and representing it.⁹⁴

Paraphrasing Rancière’s words, we might say that artists “backcomb” time, setting in train a circulation of meanings – on levels including visibility and the very essence of the image – that prevents contemporaneity from being identical with itself.⁹⁵ Anachrony permits the intertwining of several axes of time. And bound up with non-chronological time, according to the French philosopher, are variant regimes of truth, which in turn permits dominant historical and political narratives to be called into question. If, however, every photograph is a certificate of the present, the process of re-enactment creates an exceptionally strong connection between the *now* of present generations and the *now* of their forebears, who in their photographs staged their settling-in process in the “Recovered Territories”. *East Side Story* is a series of model dialectic images⁹⁶ in which, to use the terminology coined by Benjamin, the now meets the former, and the past and the present reorient themselves in respect of each other, criticizing and transforming each other, thus creating what the German philosopher termed a constellation: a dialectical configuration of heterogeneous times.

Peschken and Pisarsky, taking stock of the tension between history, memory, identity, and politics, and activating the critical potential of borderscapes, transform the landscape of the Polish-German borderland into an anachronistic component of the narrative. The works in *East Side Story*, then, are transgenerational corpographies of

93 *IBID.*, 117.

94 DIDI-HUBERMAN 2004, 38.

95 RANCIÈRE 2015, 50.

96 DIDI-HUBERMAN 1999, 7.

memory which show that migration is a key, inalienable element of Polish history. The series is a visual paraphrase of Virilio's question of how we can cope with the perpetual motion of history in motion. This is a question that the artists tackled not only in the representational-narrative layer, but also in their performative artistic strategy, which incorporates processuality and happening connected with the German-Polish border and its dynamic ontology.

7 Artistic Queer(y)ing of the Border Region

Border regions are often also rural areas. Ecofeminism and queer eco-criticism have called for botany and nature to be rethought and the relationships between nature and humans to be realigned; the “human as norm” principle called into question. Val Plumwood’s ecofeminist thought has the potential to open up new paths in the re-perspectivization of border regions as areas of natural value. She writes, for instance, that it is not sufficient to liberate women from their long-assigned position as “natural” (i. e. from their attribution as emotional, corporeal, reproductive, uncivilized, and animalistic) and reclassify them into the field of culture, civilization, and the rational, because the dichotomy between nature and culture is founded on a tradition-sanctified, white, male, power-centred mode of thinking.¹ She claims that in terms of achieving equality it is relatively unproductive to break down the gender-based categories of differentiation and reach a gender-neutral recognition of women as “humans” if the category of “human” sets itself apart as a “master model” that is exclusive of and dominant over the category of nature. According to Plumwood, nature is not an environment for humans; rather, she would have us see “human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature”.² Film studies scholar Teresa Castro takes these reflections further, writing:

Because queer has never been only human. Because queer can be a way to reimagine what it means to be “human” in the age of man-made ecological catastrophe, as we estrange ourselves from dualistic identities and an oppressive mode of being human. Because queer is a means to push forward the boundaries of our thinking about ourselves in relation to all the meaningful others who share the world with us. Because queer is about identity and inclusion.³

Queering is a starting-point for calling (hetero-)normative conceptions into question; connecting trans-thinking with nature offers the potential for experiencing the latter not (only) as cisgender space and for overcoming the binary model of “natural” (hetero) and “unnatural”. Plants can offer the suggestion that identity goes far beyond gender or sexual identity. Castro has the following to say on this question: “A queer nature made of peculiar, twofold bodies: an aerial body that grows upwards and reaches for the light, and a subterranean body that pushes through the soil and recedes into the darkness.”⁴

1 PLUMWOOD 1993, 20–25.

2 *IBID.*, 36.

3 CASTRO 2019.

4 *IBID.*

In her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa, Chicano writer, feminism activist, and queer, describes the experience of those who live on the “border”:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.⁵

Anzaldúa enriches her analysis of the experience of the Chicanos with the question of gender, sexuality, and queer in the context of the borderlands, and some of her theses – in particular those formulated from an anthropological and philosophical perspective – may also be applied to processes of artistic queering of the German-Polish border region. In her conceptualization, queer, like the very concept of the border, should remain an open category, far from any form of binary opposition: “What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other.”⁶ Francesca Bellei, in her interpretation of all Anzaldúa’s text referencing the condition of borders, proposes the thesis that borders can be read and written as hybrid bodies which demand constant crossing.⁷ The works by selected artists discussed in this chapter confirm the condition of the border as a hybrid body, as much from the perspective of production of meanings from the field of critical limology in border art as from any other. Furthermore, from today’s perspective, Anzaldúa is also categorized as a posthumanist and ecofeminist,⁸ which links her stance to those of both Plumwood and Castro. She goes beyond binary oppositions by articulating difference affectively, and from an ecofeminist standpoint. Thus the book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* universalizes the queer experience, inviting not only queer people of all identity categories, but also all potential non-human actors into this collective consciousness of the borderlands.

For Suzanne Clisby, the editor of the monograph *Gender, Sexuality and Identities of the Borderlands: Queering the Margins*, in turn, queering is a method adopted as a result of profound analysis of people living in a variety of cultural and social borderlands: on the margins of socio-cultural and sexual normativities.⁹ While she takes a metaphorical approach to borderlands, in this chapter the queering process will be applied to the

5 ANZALDÚA 1987, 3.

6 IBID., 19.

7 BELLEI 2018.

8 NÚÑEZ-PUENTE 2018.

9 CLISBY 2022.



Fig. 77 Katarzyna Łyszkowska, *Experiment De-Pl*, video, screen shot, © Katarzyna Łyszkowska.

German-Polish border region as a special sphere of affective relations between diverse actors, human and non-human, who initiate critical borderscapes process. The term “queering” itself will recur in our analyses of selected works of border art as what we feel is a more operative and effective variation on the concept of “queerying”.

“Queerying” is also a method of destabilizing dominant narratives and essentializing forms of knowledge creation, and may be productively adapted to serve examination of border regions and art productions on the border. Martin Zebracki defines “queerying” as “a method for queerly analysing”, and “to question, to ‘query’, the opacities and ambivalences”, “to queery norms and values”.¹⁰

This exhortation not to accept categories, norms, and attributions as givens may be adapted for the theme of the political border, just as gender-specific attributions in respect of “nature” may be questioned. Ecofeminist approaches and queer ecologies can show a way of thinking about sexual, gender-based, or identity-forming transgression, about the crossing of natural and political borders, and about the relationship of bodies to border landscapes and state borders. Concepts such as gender, queerness, or trans lead to a broadening of the perception of border regions, including that between Germany and Poland, where their bilateral relations intensify as if under a magnifying glass. Moreover, it is not only ascriptions to border that can be queered, but the concept of the border itself: in mixed-couple relationships, the German-Polish border also runs right through the middle of the partnership, and is closely connected with a condition

¹⁰ ZEBRACKI 2017, 442.

of constant linguistic bridging, with the differences in formative experiences in the relationship due to the partners' different origins.

Whether German-Polish love is possible was the question addressed by the artist Katarzyna Łyszkowska in her project *Experiment De-Pl*. She asked mixed-nationality couples about their relationships.¹¹ The videos, recorded on mobile phone, are unspectacular and “natural” in the sense of the matter-of-factness with which the border is overcome. People representing a range of generations talk about their feelings (fig. 77). One of the Polish interviewees quotes love poems she herself wrote in her youth, stressing that one feeling central to falling in love is that of being “swept up on a wave”. One of the Polish men, in turn, mentions that his future partner first caught his attention when he was teaching her to row on the trip where they met. Another of the protagonists, a Polish woman aged around 65, stresses that Poles are able to love with imagination, unlike Germans, who are devoid of imagination and seem more down-to-earth than romantic. She nonetheless says of her own German partner that he is not a typical German because he is old-fashioned, by which she also means romantic and helpful. The next statement categorically denies the possibility of love in Polish-German couples because, according to the woman – the only one not to show her face on Łyszkowska’s video – racism is still strong, and Germans take advantage of the fact that Polish women do not really speak German well. This racism, she reports, became particularly pronounced in her German husband when the couple moved to Germany. She complained that after settling in Germany, her husband started to refer to Poles as “pigs”, and to behave like the lord and master of his territory. “I don’t believe in Polish-German love”, this protagonist ends, hugging her young daughter to her. What the next couple have in common is reminiscences from their childhood and youth in socialist countries: he is from the GDR, she from Poland. The woman stresses that in that period she envied children from the GDR their good chocolate. The man polemicizes with that thesis, averring that things were better in Poland, because there, there were electronic watches and marbled jeans. Łyszkowska’s video ends with a quotation from a poem by the woman featured at the very beginning: “Love is the greatest of abstractions.”

Łyszkowska has thus collected words spoken by a diverse range of actors for whom the Polish-German border is a zone of affective transmission, an affective borderscape. It is important to note, however, that she has focused primarily on the perspective of Poles, while for the most part, their German partners were not given a voice. It was probably language that was the criterion for the selection of the protagonists, who then had the privilege of speaking.

In most of these recordings, love between representatives of the two neighbouring nations, men and women, is perceived to be something positive, that brings fulfilment

¹¹ <https://katarzynalyszkowska.com/eksperyment-de-pl/>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

in their relationships. The border here is not a source of insurmountable opposition but a fundamental element of the couples' relationships. Łyszkowska's video offers an understanding of the border as a circumstance between two people that may be surmounted or integrated through love and sexual desire. What would happen if two neighbouring countries such as Poland and Germany could be imagined as a couple in love whose relationship was held together by fondness, love, desire, and ecstasy, but also by conflict, dissent, and dissonance? These latter aspects also come out strongly in Łyszkowska's video, particularly in the account of the Polish woman married to the German racist. Łyszkowska makes no comment on her protagonists' words, allowing them to talk freely and in all their subjective emotions about Polish-German love. All she as the artist does is juxtapose them, creating a collage of diverse views and affective practices that reflects the heterogeneity of the border assemblage, and draws attention to the fact that actors who cross the border out of love and for love are motivated by a range of affects, reminiscences, stereotypes, and expectations. In this case the border is not only a construct dividing two states, but is also shown as a collection of stereotypes and deeply rooted beliefs about how Germans and Poles love. Apt words to describe this situation may be supplied by revisiting the conception of sexual and psychological borderlands as defined by Anzaldúa in relation to the differences occurring on the U. S.-Mexican border: "Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus."¹²

While Łyszkowska's video is a rumination on connection through partnership, the Germany-based choreographer and dancer Amadeus Pawlica in his video *HomoPol* (2021)¹³ looks at the situation of the LGBTQ+ community in Poland. Pawlica forged contacts with LGBTIQ* activists from Warsaw, the twin city of Düsseldorf, and the voguing group Kiki House of Sarmata, also based in the Polish capital. His view from the other side of the border is modelled by the experience of migration: Pawlica was himself born in Poland but has lived in Germany since the age of two. His choreographies refer to his own experiences as a gay artist in Germany and Poland, his observations, and conversations with queer people in Poland about their outings, and the political, societal, and Church repressions they have suffered. As these off-camera stories unfold, to the music of the Polish DJ and activist Avtomat, Pawlica develops a translation into dance, which reformulates the words into movement in space, through gestures, mimic, and costume.

These two video works take a bi-national perspective on themes such as partnership, and sexual and gender freedom, and are situated along the seam running between Poland and Germany. In both works, the border is present not as a territorial or political border, but above all as a concept that encourages viewers to think about the situation in the other country in the context of multiple allegiances. Thus the border is more something to be

¹² ANZALDÚA 1987, 4.

¹³ <https://vimeo.com/539628337>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

understood as a factor in social processes and practices,¹⁴ such as partnerships, societal restrictions and possibilities, sexuality, and gender.

Some of the art projects profiled below do operate in the immediate border zone, or were created in the border region; others, by contrast, look at borders in the context of migration, as in relation to the subject of sexwork. All of the works studied here are concerned with gender attributions, and the constellations of power that these reflect in respect of the specific geographic and political situation in border zones and beyond them. Borders are in these artworks a space in which masculine dominance and views of history are negotiated, and in which the consumption of sex on the basis of plunder and exploitation is possible or becomes visible. But the border region is also a protective space, as for women from Poland who seek out German doctors for abortions. The transgressive potential of artistic work in border regions and crossing borders is the leitmotif in this chapter.

7.1 CHALLENGING MASCULINE MYTHS OF NATURE: GEORGIA KRAWIEC WORKS ON OAKS AND ACORNS

For her work *Des Kaisers alte Eicheln* the Berlin artist Georgia Krawiec has since 2015 been collecting the acorns from 96 German and Polish memorial oaks dedicated to the memory of important figures. These acorns are archived in lockable acrylic glass lettercases, which are lined with photographic paper and constantly illuminated (fig. 78). Some of these acorns come from the German-Polish border region. Krawiec writes on her project:

In the box entitled “The Kaisers old Acorns IX” are Bismarck acorns from Geesow, which is a small place in the Oder valley on the German side. And from Poland and the border region are the acorns in the box marked “Des Kaisers alte Eicheln XII”. These are Crown Prince acorns from the Crown Prince Oak on the Emerald Lake [Jezioro Szmaragdowe, Smaragd-See] in Szczecin, and from the same box, box XII, are the Bolko acorns from the Bolko Oak on the Polish side in Międzyzdroje.¹⁵

Krawiec’s description illustrates the fact that these acorns are all fruits of trees dedicated to male dignitaries from the Church, the military, the nobility, politics, and culture. In her research into memorial oaks, she came across the names of generals (Napoleon acorns, General Taczanowski oaks), representatives of royal or imperial houses (Mieszko I

¹⁴ REDEPENNING 2018, 22.

¹⁵ KRAWIEC 2022. Bolko oaks are named in honour of Bolko V (1400–1460), who was duke of several dukedoms, including Oppeln, Klein Gloglau, Falkenberg, and Strehlitz.



Fig. 78 georgia Krawiec, *Des Kaisers alte Eichen* (The Kaisers old Acorns), 2021, 12 photographic objects, acorns, acrylic glass, letters, silver gelatine paper, cardboard, 12 × 15.7 cm × 3.5 cm, 4 acrylic glass strips, © georgia Krawiec/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

oaks, Jagiello oaks, Jan Kazimierz oaks), Church dignitaries (Papal oaks, Melancthon oaks, Luther oaks), writers (Goethe oaks, Klopstock oaks), and politicians (Willy Brandt oaks, Konrad Adenauer acorns, Kaczyński oaks, Hitler oaks). Even if not all these oaks are named after specific individuals, sometimes instead being dedicated to a generic group of notables (such as ducal oaks, crown prince oaks, or emperor oaks), in the majority of cases it is clear that it is men that are meant.

The naming of oaks is often also an identifiably patriotic practice. Since the early nineteenth century, the forest has been a vehicle of patriotic and national meanings inspired by the notion of its purported immutability and inherent hierarchy and inequality, which were construed as the antitheses to the aims of the French Revolution: the German forest was cast as “national nature”.¹⁶ Neither the “Hitler oaks” planted under National Socialism nor the oak leaf on the ten-pfennig coin in the FRG were thus the first indications of the appropriation of nature for particularistic world views and of instrumentalization and ideologization of plants.¹⁷

Nonetheless, the oak as a genus has certain characteristics that virtually predestine its appropriation for political ends such as its adoption as a national symbol, whether for the Germans or for the Poles, for the German or Polish homeland. The symbolism of the oak tree, including its spiritual significance, was an important point of reference for the artist Joseph Beuys in his initiative 7000 Eichen, which foresaw the forestation of the city space of Kassel as part of *documenta 7* in 1982. Beuys writes:

I think that the tree is an element of regeneration, which is in itself a concept of time. The oak is particularly so, because it is a slow-growing tree with a truly durable heartwood. It has

16 ZECHNER 2011–2012a, 231. We are grateful to georgia Krawiec for her trust and support.

17 On the symbolism of the oak as a German tree, cf. LEHMANN 1999, 39–41.

always been a form of sculpture, an age-old symbol for this planet, since the druids, who are named after the oak. Druid means oak. They used their oaks to mark their sacred places.¹⁸

georgia Krawiec's binational perspective and her collecting work in the border space open up new viewpoints: of bi- or multinationalism, of similar political approaches to trees, of migrating ideas and ideologies in the border zone. With her artistic research, Krawiec can conclusively demonstrate that the cult and projection of religious, political, and societal thought patterns are not restricted to Germany, but that the practice of naming oaks exists on both sides of the German-Polish border. This reveals, quite incidentally, that it is a shared border, one that, as our book also shows, points up not only divisions but also areas of commonality: in border regions, stories and mythologies are shared. At the same time, the naming of oaks after famous figures from national histories serves the emphasis of the glory and tradition of the Own, the distinction of the national, and the distancing of Others.¹⁹ After 1945, many Hitler oaks in Germany were felled as propaganda symbols; the tradition of planting oaks as memorials or a means of honouring was only seldom continued; one such example was the "peace oak" in memory of the racist excesses in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992.²⁰ In Poland the cult of memorial oaks is very much alive, and is promoted by both Church and state: visits to papal oaks can be commemorated with an achievement badge, and applications to plant "heroes" oaks can be made, and are explained in promotional films and encouraged with lists of heroes that may be honoured in this way.²¹

georgia Krawiec's work throws light not only on national and religious traditions from history and the present, however. *Des Kaisers alte Eichen* is also a critique of masculine appropriations and projections:

This is the appropriation of the public space and thereby also the usurpation of an influence on the reception of history by – barely – a half of the population, and the consequent discrimination of the other half. In the context of other debates on discrimination, this might

18 Joseph Beuys, in: DEMARCO 1987, 16.

19 On the political practice of tree-planting and naming trees after emperors, Luther, or Bismarck, see LEHMANN 1999, 127 f.

20 This peace oak was subsequently sawn down by anti-fascist activists, who saw in the practice of planting memorial oaks a "symbol for Teutomania and militarism". See SCHWARZMAIER 2012.

21 See http://www.msw-pttk.org.pl/odznaki/reg_odznak/pokjp2/reg_pokjp2_2021.html (awards for visiting papal oaks); <https://katyn-pamietam.pl/mediateka/posadz-dab-pamieci-wybranemu-bohaterowi-katynskiemu-animacja#movie> (motivational film); <https://katyn-pamietam.pl/lista-bohaterow?name=&surname=&rank=&status=&page=13> (list of heroes). We are grateful to georgia Krawiec, who passed on this information to us and emailed us the application for planting a memorial oak in Poland on 28. 11. 2022.

sound trivial, but in the case of nature, there is one particular aspect at play that in connection with trees seems to me to be more objectionable and unjust, since the natural realities of the world incorporate a natural justice at first glance, and thereby grow in opposition to discrimination. Unless trees are given names that represent – male – supremacy.²²

Nature-related identification in dignitaries and heroes is connected with one particular type of tree, which symbolizes attributes associated with masculinity, such as strength, power, and assertiveness. The received feminine closeness to nature as formulated for centuries in literature, art, and design, by contrast, is connected with paradigms of reproduction and a lack of interest in culture.²³

georgia Krawiec's *Des Kaisers alte Eichen* queers these models of thinking and ideologically determined notions of nature. Her work contributes to the “denaturalization of normative concepts of masculinity and femininity”,²⁴ as ordained by queer studies. She also offers an artistic contribution to the discourse on the exposure and revision of heteronormative masculine prerogatives on natural spaces that are criticized by transgender studies: “Transgender Studies can create a discourse in which nature is not the cisgender space it has been made [out] to be.”²⁵

By drawing attention to the continued dominance of heterosexual masculinity via the oaks in the German-Polish border region and broader natural space, Krawiec makes the presence of this paradigm visible and the attendant practice of naming trees assailable. This exposes a link between nature and masculinity that is still visible in the present.²⁶ The fact that memorial oaks bear the names of “famous” men is the flywheel for a politics of commemoration that is perpetuated over generations. For the future is written from the knowledge of a past. In this respect, Krawiec's actions correspond with the objectives of critical masculinity studies, which exposes the mechanisms and conditions responsible for the occurrence of masculine exclusivity: the exclusion of non-masculine, non-heterosexual, non-white actors.²⁷ This exclusion is also encountered in the context of the oaks, which are almost never named after individuals who could be identified as female, or are trans.

22 KRAWIEC 2022.

23 Cf. BERGER 1982, 61–73.

24 KRASS 2003, 18.

25 BENDORF 2014, 137.

26 On the connection between nature and heterosexuality, see also: MORTIMER-SANDILANDS/ERICKSON 2010, 22: “Our argument is thus that we should reorient our politics and take on something like a queer ecological perspective, a transgressive and historically relevant critique of dominant pairings of nature and environment with heteronormativity and homophobia”

27 Cf. SÖLL 2019, 614.

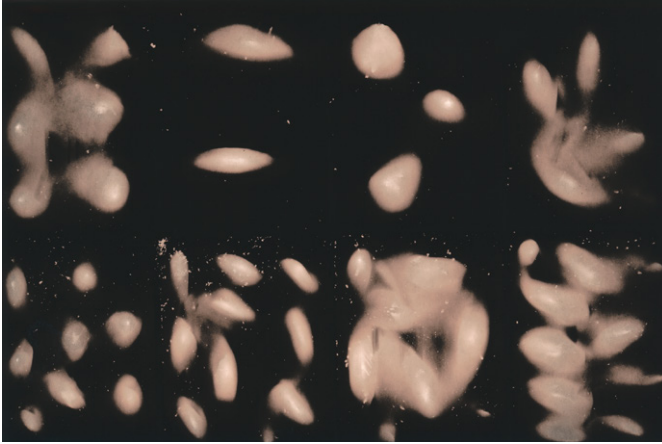


Fig. 79 georgia Krawiec, *Des Kaisers alte Eicheln* (The Kaisers old Acorns), 2022, 12 long-exposure photograms on silver gelatine paper, unique print, 2022, © georgia Krawiec/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.



Fig. 80 georgia Krawiec, *Des Kaisers alte Eicheln* (The Kaisers old Acorns), 2021, 12 photographic objects, acorns, acrylic glass, letters, silver gelatine paper, cardboard, 12 × 15.7 cm × 3.5 cm, 4 acrylic glass strips, © georgia Krawiec/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

The charging of oaks with fame, honour, and tradition, and the nationalization of this tree is deconstructed in georgia Krawiec’s work by the photographic process of long exposure. The photographic paper in the letter cases darkens with exposure, while the acorns stand out white against it and become indistinguishable; it is no longer possible to recognize whether particular acorns came from a tree in Poland or in Germany, or whether it was an imperial oak, a Luther oak, or a Jan Kazimierz oak whose fruits Krawiec gathered and laid on the photographic paper (fig. 79). The acorns are reduced to objects, stripped of their symbolic back stories, divested of their human-endowed histories. This also provides the explanation for the title chosen by Krawiec: *Des Kaisers alte Eicheln* is a reference to the 1837 Hans Christian Andersen tale “Kejserens nye klæder” (The Emperor’s New Clothes).²⁸

28 https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

In this story, a fashion-conscious emperor is duped by two tailors into believing that they can make him unique clothes that are invisible to anyone who is stupid or incompetent. As the emperor eventually parades naked – in his “invisible” clothes – before his subjects, therefore, it is at first only a child who says out loud that the ruler has nothing on. Only after that are the adults emboldened to comment on their sovereign’s nakedness; he ultimately decides to brave the procession out to the end, however. This idea, as conveyed in Krawiec’s work, translates into a connection with appearance and essence. The symbolic significance of representing national characteristics or expressing patriotism that is attributed to the oaks is called into question by the shrunken, wrinkled, dried-out acorns in georgia Krawiec’s collection.

At the same time, she draws attention to the vitality and fertility that are ostensibly inherent to acorns – whose pitiful appearance in the letter cases, however, is a humorous and critical comment on that assumption (fig. 8o). Krawiec is also making reference to a further practice that is common to both Germany and Poland: in both languages the word for acorn has a second meaning: “glans”, the bulbous structure at the end of the penis. In this case, language has been employed as a means of distinguishing, of the masculinization of what is really a genderless plant: the bestowal of men’s names on oaks and the masculine interpretation of their fruits excludes all genders and identities other than male from these imaginary worlds. Krawiec comments on this as follows:

I very much like to work with language, and with acorns it happens to be the case that the term in both Polish and German has the same dual meaning. On top of that, this male exclusivity in naming (in Poland I have not found a single oak named after a woman!) makes an outstanding impact, and I have always found this amusing.²⁹

Furthermore, the honouring of heroes formulated in naming trees after men such as Napoleon, Jan Kazimierz, or General Taczanowski, is an expression of an interpretation of history based on holding up masterful achievements as examples. It is precisely this mode of storytelling that the writer Ursula K. Le Guin criticizes in her essay “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” (1989). She advocates for telling the story of “the becoming of human and culture, after the author Elizabeth Fisher, as [one of] a caring togetherness, not, as is usually the case, as the existential struggle of ‘wolves among wolves’”.³⁰ She offers alternative stories to the violent, power-based hero narratives that are often dominant both in concepts of evolution and in the writing of history and literary history, to the hunters, the fighters, the spear and the sword: in the beginning was the bag. Le Guin writes:

²⁹ georgia Krawiec, e-mail correspondence with Burcu Dogramaci, 14. II. 2022.

³⁰ FERSTERER 2021, 7.

I am an adherent of what Fisher calls the Carrier Bag Theory of human evolution [...]. So long as culture was explained as originating from and elaborating upon the use of long, hard objects for sticking, bashing, and killing, I never thought that I had, or wanted, any particular share in it [...]. The society, the civilization they were talking about, these theoreticians, was evidently theirs; they owned it, they liked it; they were human, fully human, bashing, sticking, thrusting, killing.³¹

“They” here indicates all those who invent, recall, and disseminate masculine hero stories.³² Stories of gathering, and of the bag as tool, are probably less spectacular, but vital to life and to being human. In georgia Krawiec’s *Des Kaisers alte Eichen*, the assiduous, wide-ranging collecting of acorns over many years is contrasted with the heroic oaks. Through her collecting, which is also carried out in border regions, she also challenges the national hero narratives of both sides, and restores the trees to what they in fact actually are: plants growing in natural spaces that of themselves know no political borders, no gender-specific attributions, and no veneration of heroes.

7.2 MY BODY, MY MOTHERHOOD: PHOTOGRAPHIC AND ARTISTIC REFLECTIONS ON SELF-DETERMINATION AND ABORTION IN THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER REGION

Poland has the EU’s most draconian laws on abortion; most recently, a verdict issued by the constitutional court ushered in a *de facto* ban on abortion with only few exceptions.³³ This Catholic country has made most abortions illegal, so that women largely have to seek terminations abroad. The right to abortion in Poland is severely restricted; the procedure can only be carried out if the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest, if the woman’s health is at risk, or if the embryo displays untreatable damage. As the interpretation of these premises is subjective and somewhat vague, not all doctors will perform abortions even with the appropriate indications, as there are harsh penalties for organizations that offer assistance and for physicians who carry out illegal terminations.³⁴

31 LE GUIN 1996, 151.

32 The novel *Annette – ein Heldinnenepos* (Berlin 2020) by Anne Weber is a rare exception of a story of a heroine.

33 See the statement issued by the European Parliament on 11. 11. 2021 regarding the verdict of the Polish constitutional tribunal and the death of a pregnant woman due to an abortion that went wrong, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20211108IPR16844/poland-no-more-women-should-die-because-of-the-restrictive-law-on-abortion>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

34 Cf. KUMMER 2022.

Fig. 81 Anna-Kristina Bauer
No Woman, no Kraj, photography,
 2018. The well-known Polish
 women's rights slogan: "No woman,
 no kraj". © Anna-Kristina Bauer



This severe restriction of women's self-determination rights increases the incidence of back-street abortions and of women travelling to neighbouring countries.

One destination in Germany often chosen by pregnant women from Poland seeking a termination is Prenzlau, close to the German-Polish border. The photoseries *No Woman, no Kraj* by Anna-Kristina Bauer (photographs) is dedicated to women who have sought out medical assistance for pregnancy terminations in Prenzlau. Bauer's photographs were published in September 2018 in the article "Abtreibung in Polen: Mein Körper, dein Land, unsere Rechte" by Kaja Puto in the online zine *Café Babel*.³⁵ Bauer's pictures treat the women with delicacy (fig. 81), showing them from behind, or focusing on a detail: in one, only the hands, legs, and feet of a woman sitting on a bed are visible (fig. 82).

35 <https://borderline.cafebabel.com/de/abtreibung-in-polen-mein-koerper-dein-land-unsere-rechte/>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023]. See also <https://www.profoto.de/portfolio/2019/10/12/no-woman-no-kraj/>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].



Fig. 82 Anna-Kristina Bauer, *No Woman, no Kraj*, photography, 2018. The 30-year-old Kasia is lying on a bed in a bare, white hospital room in Prenzlau, a provincial town near the Polish border. She is accompanied by her husband. She is drowsy and pale; she has just woken up from her general anaesthetic after her abortion procedure. © Anna-Kristina Bauer.

The cannula has already been inserted into her left hand, intimating the operation. Bauer photographed objects such as a curtain, which offers privacy and serves a protective function. She captured the Polish gynaecologist in the hospital in Prenzlau, Dr Janusz Rudziński (fig. 83). His smartphone, visible in his shirt pocket, is emphasized as if it were the attribute of a saint. And indeed, it is an important interface between the doctor and his patients; at the time the article went to press in 2018, he was being contacted up to 40 times a day, and carrying out some 1,000 terminations a year³⁶ – some of them on the chair that takes centre stage on another of Bauer's images. In this photograph it is unoccupied, but nonetheless the angle from which it is taken, from slightly below, suggests that the next patient might come along at any moment. The article also includes photographs from Słubice, the Polish twin town of Frankfurt (Oder). A statue of Mary in a shrine, a crucifix, a few flowers pushing up through the asphalt on the border – all

36 PUTO / BAUER 2018.

Fig. 83 Anna-Kristina Bauer, *No Woman, no Kraj*, photography, 2018. Dr Janusz Rudziński is a star on women's internet forums. Anonymous posters describe him as their "saviour", and as "friend of Polish women". He conducted his clinical practice in this period in the gynaecological clinic in Prenzlau. © Anna-Kristina Bauer.



these may be read as references to the Catholic Church with its religiously determined notions of reproduction and "nature" as reference to the "natural purpose" of women as the reproductive gender. The ecofeminist Val Plumwood writes of such normative notions of the connections between nature and pregnancy:

In terms of the assumptions of nature/culture dualism, women's "uncontrollable" bodies make them part of the sphere of nature. Such an assumption of women's "closeness to nature", where nature is taken as the realm of necessity over that of freedom, is of course extremely problematic for feminists.³⁷

37 PLUMWOOD 1993, 37–38. The dogma or stigma of reproduction has also left traces in art history, for instance when female artists' mental or stylistic creative faculties were gainsaid and they were primarily purported to have reproductive talent. Cf. CHRISTADLER 2006, 259.



Fig. 84 Anna-Kristina Bauer, *No Woman, no Kraj*, photography, 2018. Like many other girls from her region, Natalia from Zielona Góra went to Prenzlau for a termination. Polish women seeking abortions go underground to look for physicians, buy tablets online, or travel across the border. © Anna-Kristina Bauer.

This imputation of reproduction as “natural” is above all problematic for pregnant women who wish to decide for themselves whether or not to carry their foetus to term, yet do not have the power to take that decision if the legislator or Church authorities so significantly curb their autonomy.

The images also give visibility to the protest movements in Poland: Bauer photographed protestors demonstrating against the restrictive abortion laws, and some of the placards and slogans with which they took to the streets against the imposition of these limitations on the rights of pregnant women to self-definition: “My body, my choice”; *No Woman No Kraj* [“*kraj*”, pronounced “cry”, means “country” in Polish – trans. note]; “We can cook, and we’re cooking up a revolution”.

With her photographs, Bauer gives visual presence to abortions in Poland, which often take place unseen and in legal grey areas, and links the issue to specific individuals, places, and objects so as to render it less abstract (fig. 84). The difficult situations of some of the pregnant women who decide to have abortions are communicated pictorially by

the photographs and described in the published article, which also acknowledges the institutions that carry out the abortions and the protest against these restrictions on freedom of choice. In this way the story strips the topic of its taboo. For Polish women who take the decision to terminate a pregnancy, the border zone offers a protective space: here, in German territory, they have access to a doctor who can carry out the procedure without rendering himself liable for punishment under German law.

The border between Germany and Poland is also an important context for Lisa Maria Baier's installation *Kulisse* (fig. 85). In the summer of 2021, on the Friendship Bridge in the border city of Görlitz, close to the Neisse and in sight of the city of Zgorzelec, she erected a dais, with cinema seats on its steps. Metal railings were also installed on the steps leading up to the dais, and coat hangers decorated with coloured ribbons hung from a rail at the back of it.³⁸ The work was originally selected for the exhibition *GörlitzerArt*, and was supposed to have been dedicated to films shot in Görlitz, such as *Inglourious Basterds* or *The Book Thief*. Rather than treating Görlitz primarily as the backdrop to historical film content, however, Baier took the opportunity to manifest her solidarity with the women who were protesting in Poland against the tightening up of the abortion laws there, and added the slogan "*Aborcja Bez Granic*" (Abortion without Borders) to her work.

Since this constituted a change to the concept that Baier had submitted, the city of Görlitz treated it as a breach of contract; the work was seen as a provocation levelled at Germany's neighbour, and it was ordained that it should be dismantled. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote of the matter: "The step has also been justified by the argument that this is not the type of political communication that is conducted with the Polish side."³⁹ The location of Baier's installation was itself interpreted as a provocation, since the piece and the slogan "Abortion without Borders" was oriented in the direction of Poland. The border as context for Baier's work thus adds further significance to the work: the metaphor of borderlessness standing perpendicular to the border between Germany and Poland, facing the opposite bank of the Neisse, which is the dividing line between liberal and more restrictive abortion laws. In this case, therefore, the border marks a difference that has huge consequences for the women affected by it. On the one side of the border, they have the right to a termination only in extreme conditions, while on the other, their rights to determine what happens to their bodies and the unborn life developing within them are better enshrined. Simply crossing the border gives pregnant women from Poland

38 "The symbol of the coat hanger is well known from all kinds of documentaries as the symbol of abortion. Out of solidarity, many women in Eastern Europe have had this symbol tattooed on. Colourful ribbons hung on the coat hangers with very loving wishes for the future from women* in German and Polish on them. Among them were: the right to one's own body and freedom. The metal pipes were intended as footrests." BAIER 2023.

39 NIMZ 2021.

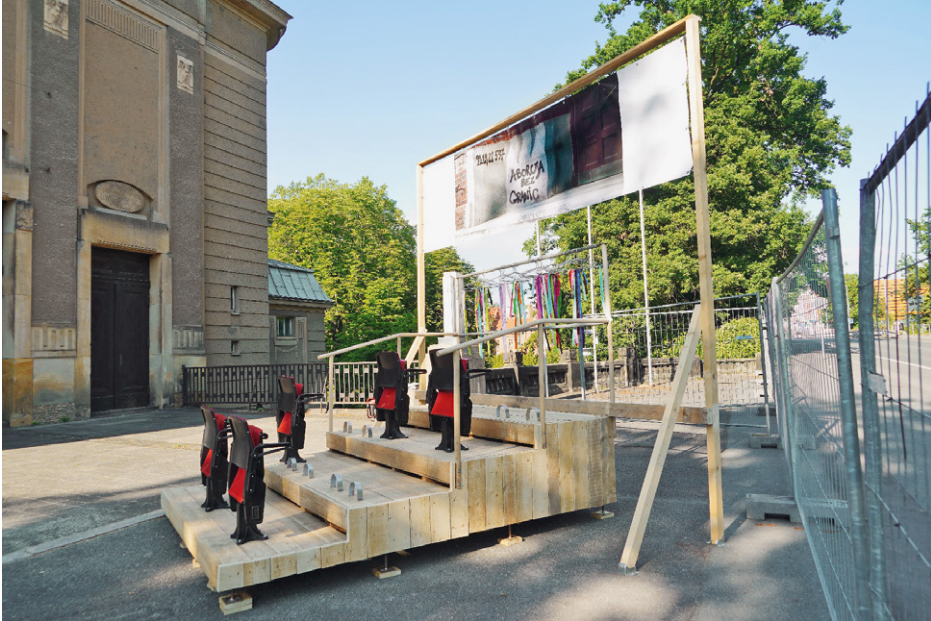


Fig. 85 Lisa Maria Baier, *Kulisse* (Backdrop), 2021, installation, Görlitz, © Lisa Maria Baier, 2021 / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

more extensive options with regard to not continuing their pregnancy. Lisa Maria Baier's installation draws attention to the ethical, medical, and women's rights questions that come up at the German-Polish border in respect of pregnancy termination. And this auto-positioning of that art within the political, social, and religious discussion around the protection of unborn life versus women's reproductive rights led to vehement debates and the official refusal in the case described above. The dispute went to court, and the court ruled that the installation did indeed have to be dismantled.⁴⁰

Lisa Maria Baier's installation and Anna-Kristina Bauer's photoseries, which has the potential to reach large audiences on the internet via the digital zine *Café Babel*, address abortion in the context of the border using a range of artistic media: while Baier's installation takes a more abstract approach to the subject, above all through the slogan "Abortion without Borders" and the positioning on the very border, Bauer in her photographs moves in closer, following pregnant women themselves and showing the German institution that carries out their abortions, though it also looks at Polish border localities and the protests against Poland's abortion policy. In Baier's work, the border

40 <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/streit-ueber-kulisse-von-lisa-maria-baier-goerlitz-darf-installation-abbauen-a-be24e5co-6de6-4388-a49d-754b4c297102>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

is a symbolic place that differentiates, and as such stands for abortion with borders. In Bauer's photographs, the border space is a sphere of negotiation, of protest, of active resistance, of desperation, but also of medical assistance.

7.3 SEXWORK ON THE BORDER AND BEYOND: ROBERT GLIŃSKI'S FILM *ŚWINKI / PIGGIES* AND ANNA NIZIO'S VIDEO *LADIES RING TWICE, GENTLEMEN ONLY ONCE*

In Robert Gliński's feature film *Świnki / Piggies* (Ger.: *Ich, Tomek*, POL/DE, 2009), the border region is a zone of negotiation between youth and adulthood, love and sex, Polish sexworkers and German punters. *Świnki / Piggies* is set in Gubin and tells the story of 15-year-old schoolboy Tomek, who works as a prostitute in order to be able to fulfil his material wishes (or rather, those of his girlfriend). In this border space, the economic diktat rules: the German punters buy the sexual acts that they perform with and upon the young prostitutes for money. School, the home, and the church no longer function as protective spaces – it is a collective failing of society and its institutions that they are not equal to reality; they are unable to recognize the (material and emotional) needs of children and young people, and to react to them.⁴¹

The subject matter of *Świnki / Piggies* is based closely on the realities of the German-Polish border, where sexwork is a booming industry. A survey carried out by the aid organization Dadu among 85 Polish prostitutes in the border region in 2019 revealed that the majority of them turned to sexwork for the money, have largely German clients, are sometimes forced to have unprotected sex, suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, and have experienced violence.⁴² The topicality of the subject of child and youth prostitution in particular is reflected in the fact that around the same time as *Świnki / Piggies*, a second film on the topic, *Galerianki* (Eng. Mall Girls), directed by Katarzyna Rosłaniec, was released in cinemas. This examined the problem of young girls who sell themselves to "sponsors", who finance their cosmetics and fashion needs in exchange for sex. *Galerianki* depicts shopping centres as temples to consumption that, while offering material pleasure, also awaken desires which drive young people into prostitution.⁴³ Where Rosłaniec selects the shopping mall as her place of observation and reference, Gliński's drama *Świnki / Piggies* is set on the German-Polish border (fig. 86). The difference in income levels in this period shortly before and at the time of the EU's

41 On *Świnki / Piggies*, see <https://www.filmfestival-goeast.de/filme/ich-tomek/>; <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/ich-tomek-100.html>, [last accessed 22. 05. 2023].

42 SCHRÖDER 2019.

43 See ZARĘBSKI 2011.



Fig. 86 Robert Gliński, *Świnki/Piggies* (Ger.: *Ich, Tomek*), POL/DE, 2009, Edition Salzgeber, © Robert Gliński.

eastward expansion is striking, and fuels material longings on the one side and sexual desires on the other that are met, respectively, across the border. This asymmetry plays into the hands of the “clients” in this film, though they are only able to satisfy their lust for juvenile bodies because they have the financial wherewithal.

The Polish title of the film, *Świnki/Piggies*, is a reference to the colloquial name given to underage prostitutes.⁴⁴ The clever, highly active young Tomek, who has turned away from church, school, and family, disillusioned, does not remain a sexworker for long. After having suffered extreme violence at the hands of German punters, Tomek tries his luck as a pimp himself, drawing other children and young people into the game. He loses his values, his conscience, and his stability, and learns to shut his emotions away. For a large sum, he allows another youth, once his own closest friend, to get into the car of the same violent clients, where he, too, suffers serious injury. In order to prevent further acts of violence, Tomek attempts to free his ex-girlfriend from the same men, but all those involved are arrested in the process. The ending of the film is ambiguous. Viewers see Tomek beating up the German john, but it remains unclear whether this really happens, or is merely a figment of his imagination.

44 Cf. SCHÄFER 2020.

In the film, the paedo-sexual punters in expensive cars with German number plates are depicted as the only parties who benefit from the young people's desperation and take advantage of it; the most brutal of them is likewise a German. At the same time, however, the only person who shows any willingness to help is also a German – a teacher. In this respect, the film does not take aim at the binary, asymmetrical constellation formed by Germany and Poland, but instead asks above all about the conditions that drive young people under 18 into sexwork. It shows the circumstances that lead to child and youth prostitution; in Gliński's film one of these is consumer pressure. The director writes:

This boy's (Tomek's) problems stem from the fact that he is present in a world in which both geographical, and, more importantly, moral boundaries have disappeared. The reality faced by young people today is devoid of a value hierarchy. Money is becoming more essential in order to lead (your) life – and (these kids) can take a short cut in order to earn it.⁴⁵

He thus sees a link between consumer pressure and the disintegration of “geographical boundaries”. Gliński's film is devoted to a generation of young people growing up at a distance from any large cities, on Poland's peripheries, who, due to a lack of money with which to satisfy their material wishes, only have the choice of emigrating to Germany or selling their own bodies. This is also a generation that grew up in the politically re-ordered Europe after 1989, with the reunited Germany as a neighbour, and experienced Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 and, with Schengen, the abolition of border controls.

In the film, this latter event is celebrated with a night-time firework display, which Tomek, however, barely registers because of his situation. Again and again, there are key scenes set at the border crossing: after the abolition of border controls following the Schengen Agreement, Tomek and his girlfriend go shopping in the nearby German border town, where she succumbs to the temptations of the consumer world, and Tomek has to invest his saved-up, hard-earned money to buy her a pair of trainers.

The pimp is frequently visible, waiting at the border for the punters, who pass that way by car, or return the children there. The transit zone of the border is thus also a place of passage where the children and young people lose their sexual and moral innocence, and are exploited and sold. The term “passage”, after Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage*, is imbued with multiple meanings, and does not necessarily denote only adolescence (though in certain conditions it means this too), which is here bound up with violence and abuse. The ethnological work on the concept of “rites of passage” published by Gennep in 1909 explores rituals of transition, including phases of life, cultic initiation rites,

45 ZARĘBSKI 2011.



Fig. 87 Robert Gliński, *Świnki / Piggies* (Ger.: *Ich, Tomek*), POL/DE, 2009, Edition Salzgeber, © Robert Gliński.

but also spatial transitions and territorial border crossings.⁴⁶ The notion of “crossing” or “road” is thus inherent even in the etymology of the word “passage”.⁴⁷

The border is, however, also a zone in which (German) urges and (Polish) helplessness come together, represented, respectively, by the German vehicles that stop and the sexworkers who wait there. While the boys’ social milieu is shown in detail, the life of the German johns and the goings-on across the border are largely left unarticulated. The only exception is the scene showing Tomek and a second boy at the home of the violent client. The border is thus also a place where not everything is always visible, a danger zone, a forum of injury and of desire – for money and a better life (fig. 87). At the same time, the film *Świnki / Piggies* is a contribution to an artistic borderscaping, because in it, borders are understood and portrayed as socio-cultural processes and practices.⁴⁸ The action plays out on the border between Germany and Poland, and the characters, through their actions, also draw attention to aspects of the border such as economics, adolescence, morality, power and powerlessness, and sexual violence.

In Anna Nizio’s video *Ladies Ring Twice, Gentlemen Only Once* (2003), though the border is a considerable distance away – the work was created in two exclusive Berlin

46 GENNEP 2005, 26. Gennep published his book in 1909, just a few years before the obligation to carry a passport in order to cross borders was introduced, with World War I.

47 GRIMM 1889, 1483.

48 BRAMBILLA 2021, 14.

brothels – it is present in the migratory experiences of the sexworkers. They come from various global regions and continents, including South America, the Middle East and Africa, but also from Poland, which suggests at least one and presumably several, repeated passages across the German-Polish border. In this piece, Nizio concentrates on the women's social community (fig. 88a–b). She spent three years photographing the female employees in the brothel, accompanying them as they dressed, in the reception rooms, and also at the end of their shifts, while they were changing again.⁴⁹ Anna Nizio says of her video: “The work consists of photos and a short video describing a night in a brothel from the moment the female employee enters until she leaves. The work has something of the character of a family album, i. e., people look at the photos together and talk about what is on them.”⁵⁰

The pictures Nizio took, showing the women in conversation and in interaction, are then shown one after the other in the video. The camera is up close to her subjects, showing them with an immediacy that emphasizes the intimacy of the scenes, but also the inclusion of the photographer as a female outsider who is nonetheless tolerated in the brothel. This togetherness, which suggests solidarity and friendship, is commented on by a voice from off-camera in Polish. Wishes, hopes, and longings are addressed. The use of Polish specifically stresses the presence of the homeland of some of the sexworkers portrayed by Nizio, but also points to the trusting relationship between the Polish-born artist, who studied in Gdańsk and Leipzig and lives in Berlin, and her subjects. *Ladies Ring Twice, Gentlemen Only Once* also addresses the themes of labour migration – represented by both the sexworkers and Nizio as photographer – and the circulation of money, as proportions of their earnings are remitted back to Poland to support relatives.

As an artist, Nizio can open up a perspective on the subject of prostitution that is at odds with laws, journalism, or academic surveys, without offering unequivocal answers. Ambivalences are admitted: prostitution *per se* is not judged; it is described merely as self-determined work. Any other themes which might be essential for a fully rounded study on prostitution, such as exploitation, violence, the risk of disease, the misery, drugs, the punters, and those who take a cut from the profits of prostitution, are passed over. Nizio concentrates on foregrounding the possibility of community developing as part of the sexworkers' life, a possibility which can have something to do with their shared migratory experience. The extent to which this solidarity is actually sufficient is not something that has to be answered in this context. Judith Sigmund writes:

49 Cf. ZANICHELLI 2006.

50 NIZIO 2023. We are grateful to Anna Nizio for her support.



Fig. 88a–b Anna Nizio, *Ladies Ring Twice, Gentlemen Only Once*, 2003, video, © Anna Nizio.

It is often artists that develop a sense for the taboo and for what is suppressed or displaced in society. The chances and possibilities of art lie first in its recreation of both prostitution and its suppression by society on the one hand, and its constant clichéd exposure on the other; and second in casting all this into question.⁵¹

Nizio addresses prostitution from the perspective of the women, and gives an insight into life behind the brothel door, without being voyeuristic.⁵² The title of the work is a reference to an insider code for ringing the doorbell: (male) guests ring once. This is the signal for the women in the brothel to prepare themselves, freshen up their make-up, and strike a pose. The female employees and coworkers ring twice; the caterer three times.⁵³ Nizio's empathetic, close-up view was possible thanks to the time she took in making *Ladies Ring Twice, Gentlemen Only Once*. In her three years researching and photographing in the Berlin brothel, she was clearly able to win her subjects' trust, enabling her work to go beyond the superficial and not be exhausted by judgments.

While Gliński's *Świnki / Piggies* tells a fictitious story set on the border, and in so doing seismographically captures the consequences of the massive political upheaval after 1989 for a sociotope on the peripheries, in Nizio's work, transit across the German-Polish border is the precondition for the working life observed in this Berlin brothel. In neither case is prostitution a virulent phenomenon on either this or that side of the border. It is absolutely a cross-border process, with sexworkers, punters, and pimps all constantly travelling back and forth across the political border. Migration is thus closely bound up with both the border and sexwork.

51 SIEGMUND 2006–2007, II.

52 KAISER 2006, I4.

53 NIZIO 2022.

7.4 TRANSGRESSING BORDERS, QUEER(Y)ING THROUGH ART

Queerness and gender are placed on the offensive by the border art discussed here, with gender, sexuality, and reproduction being juxtaposed with borders, the erosion of those borders, transit, and migration as part of the borderscaping processes. Artistic queering of border spaces and challenging of stereotypical notions of borders is visible in all the works. In *Des Kaisers alte Eichen*, georgia Krawiec tackles the heteronormative male usurpation of natural spaces by drawing attention to the fact that commemorative oaks are named almost exclusively after men. In doing so, she points up the exclusion of women, trans people, and queer stories. At the same time, through her collecting, archiving, and artistic processing, she demystifies the hardness, strength, and masculinity ascribed to the oak and its fruits. And finally, she is incidentally also able to demonstrate that these are shared customs; there are commemorative oaks in both Poland and Germany, which points out the irrationality of national ascriptions.

In Anna-Kristina Bauer's work, by contrast, the border is also a protective space for pregnant women who take the decision to have an abortion, and flee the restrictive Polish legislative climate to seek out a medical practitioner in Germany. Lisa Maria Baier formulates her solidarity with these women through her installation *Kulisse* on the border itself, and stresses that women's rights to decide about abortion for themselves should know no borders. In the film *Świnki / Piggies* by Robert Gliński, in turn, the situation on and of the border facilitates the prostitution of Polish youths and adults. Their desire for material goods and prosperity renders them vulnerable to becoming objects of the paedo-sexual desires of johns from Germany. The pimp sets up in business on the border, and profits from free transit between Germany and Poland. Anna Nizio's video *Ladies Ring Twice, Gentlemen Only Once* extends the scope of this practice, panning away from the political and territorial German-Polish border, while retaining it as an implicit yet intrinsic element of the picture, for many of the sexworkers whom she photographed over several years in one Berlin brothel are migrant workers from Poland.

The works examined here show, from a range of perspectives, that art on the border has the potential to offer both new angles on queer and feminist studies and fresh impulses for border studies. The border and the (gender-, sexual-, and identity-based) erosion of borders are not antagonistic, oxymoronic concepts, but notions themselves without firm boundaries that are constantly coming into mutual contact.

8 Conclusions: The Border as Scar, Border Art as Concerning

Our analyses of selected post-1990 artworks and artistic activities relating to the German-Polish border in this book enabled us to answer in the positive the following question posed by Elena Dell’Agnese and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary: “Can cultural production be more than a side-issue in border studies?”¹ Border art is a sensitive seismograph of the socio-political situation in the border zone, one which measures critical borderscaping processes and the processual ontology of the border, automatically becoming not merely an adequate but a fascinating, revealing field of border studies.

For that very reason, the methodological model that we propose is a transdisciplinary one, and draws on methods not only from art history, but also from sociology, philosophy, literary studies, and cultural anthropology. On the basis of premises derived from critical limology,² proposed by Thomas Nail, we sought out a third way between a general, universalizing border theory and detailed analyses of a single, specific border, in our case the German-Polish border. We were thus operating in a space *between*: on the one hand focusing on art related to this particular region, while on the other interpreting that art in the broader context of border studies and the phenomenon of the border in general. We perceived the border as being in constant, repeating motion, in what Nail terms “patterns of circulation”. As these “patterns of circulation”, we selected six themes as categories that we felt are operative in relation to the subject, and into which we ordered the extensive visual material that we amassed. These categories were, in order: the status of the Oder and Lusatian Neisse as border rivers; the condition of vestiges and ruins in the border zone relative to questions about the present and the future; strategies for mapping the border and for cartographic thinking in light of the demarcation line dividing the two countries; the issue of the constant or repeated crossing of borders to carry out labour; performing and embodiment of delicate aspects of history through re-enactment; and queer(y)ing of the border in the context of questions about gender, Polish-German couples, abortion, and sexwork. As our point of departure for our analyses we took artworks, curatorial strategies, and activist undertakings that combine activism with art, and it was these that gave the book its structure. It was always border art that set our course and supplied the impulse to identify and articulate issues connected with the German-Polish border, its phantom character, and its relatively short history. The artworks brought to our attention a broad range of protagonists that are connected

1 DELL’AGNESE / AMILHAT-SZARY 2015, 4.

2 NAIL 2021.

with the border – both its history and its present, and likewise its potential future. And hence our book features human and non-human actors as diverse as the border rivers the Oder and the Lusatian Neisse themselves: ruined bridges, Emperor Frederick the Great, seasonal labourers employed to harvest asparagus, re-enacted archival photographs from the period of settlement of the “Recovered Territories”, women from Poland having abortions in Germany, sexworkers, Polish-German couples....

The examples of border art that we analysed corroborate the findings of border (art) studies to the effect that the border is always a discursive landscape of competing meanings and a function of the relationship between politics and aesthetics. The more than three decades since the treaty on the course of the German-Polish border was signed in 1990 have been rich in art that has registered the state of relations between the two countries with immense sensitivity. The early part of this period was dominated by mutual curiosity laced with a lingering mistrust, while around 2004, when Poland acceded to the European Union, there was a blossoming of bilateral projects and cultural cooperation. This was a time when projects of this nature had strong chances of receiving financing. Thereafter, this enthusiasm gradually waned. After 2015, with the major migration crisis, and for several years now since the conservative party PiS came to power in Poland, that positive atmosphere has steadily cooled. The soft border has once again become a hard border for many people, which could well prompt more and more decisive reactions from artists within the border art movement in the foreseeable future.

Our analyses also show that border art has critical potential, because it calls dominant aesthetic regimes into question and lustrates actors of all kinds who participate in the complex choreography of border lines in multiple lived places. Art can cast radical scrutiny on established perspectives and social norms, and develop unexpected new ways of looking that need not be founded on scientific certitudes. Artists have no inhibitions in tackling delicate subjects, de(con)structing myths and stereotypes, seeking dialogues, and tearing down established barriers. It is not only artists from Germany and Poland, however, who engage in these borderscaping processes; their counterparts from countries for which this border is – ostensibly – of no importance (such as Sweden and Italy) also do so. Their view seemed to us extremely interesting for its “neutrality” and the absence of any immediate involvement in the two countries’ bilateral relations. Nonetheless, they, too, were haunted by the spectres that hover constantly over the German-Polish border.

The works that we selected cover issues ranging from “big” history, through local affairs, to emotionally charged and even embodied personal narratives. This heterogeneous sample of works of border art enabled us to switch our focuses: from the broad historical perspective, via a study of specific places and their individual characteristics, to asking questions about the fates and vicissitudes of individuals. It also influenced our selection of the methodologies for the various analyses, each of which required a different approach and the posing of suitably formulated research questions. And though in

every case we attempted to build our narrative in a manner promoting objectivity, we were also drawn to the emotional, affect-imbued, even poetic style of Gloria Anzaldúa, conditioned by her situated knowledge. She has described the U.S.-Mexican border metaphorically, and extremely vividly, as an “open wound”:

The U.S-Mexican border is *una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.”³

While the German-Polish border can no longer be said to be a bleeding wound, or even a scab, it is certainly still a relatively fresh scar. It is *in, on, and in respect of* that scar that border culture develops, which Anzaldúa describes as a phenomenon in constant flux, saturated with emotions. She goes on: “Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an ‘alien’ element.”⁴ It is not only residents of the border region themselves and their histories of migration, expulsions, and identity changes, however, who swim in this “alien element” on the German-Polish border, but also actors such as the artists who create border art and attempt to comprehend the historical ballast and socio-political factors that shape a place or an area. In each case, their works critically and empathetically confirm that there is no such thing as natural borders; all borders are constructed as a consequence and expression of given power relations.

The metaphor of the scar seems apt in respect of the German-Polish border because a scar is a sign in the most essential meaning of the word; it is an index and a symptom; an ineffaceable mark of pain, injury, or a wound.⁵ It could not have come into being without suffering or an operation. It is an engraving on the skin that tells a story and may be deciphered by a sympathetic or empathetic gaze. As Novina Göhlsdorf has perceptively remarked, the scar draws its strength from the ambivalent position of being *between*: it is at once artificial and natural; it is not congenital, and comes into being only as a result of external action.⁶ We would add: the border, like a kind of *incision*, comes into being on the “skin” of a given terrain, and gradually grows into it, becoming part of its appearance. Göhlsdorf says that a scar is the sign of a wound when the wound is

3 ANZALDÚA 1987, 3.

4 IBID., “Preface” (n. p. n.).

5 GÖHLSDORF, 236.

6 IBID., 237.

no longer there.⁷ Every wound nonetheless takes time to heal; the scar develops over time. She asks at what point exactly the wound becomes a scar. And a similar question could be asked in the context of the German-Polish border: when did it turn from a wound into a scar? In 1990? Or only in 2004? And what happens when the scar fades and is only faintly visible? To what extent is it important to continue to keep the passage of time fresh, and to recall the oppositions and (violent) events in the border zone, even once those who lived through those stories are no longer alive?

Our personal stories, Göhlsdorf says, are stories of scars, and stories live on because the development of every scar is a temporal process. The same is true of the German-Polish border, where critical borderscaping is constantly underway, and this sometimes involves irritating that scar. In Göhlsdorf's opinion, the palimpsest of the scars that we carry is a *historiography* at the intersection of personal experience and universally accessible historical knowledge. The writings of scars do not tell linear life stories, but recount the things that have left marks. This means that scars bear witness to the *depth of experience*, which always has a spatial aspect.⁸ We believe that metaphors referencing the body and the skin may also be applied to the condition of the border, which is explored and registered by border art. Artists working in this current delve deeply into the *historiography* that plays out at the intersection of both individual, often embodied, experience, and large-scale history.

This border-scar not only divides Germany and Poland, but is also shared by both countries and their inhabitants, which should constitute an invitation to both sides to dialogue. We consider the icon of this dialogic quality to be Michael Kurzwelly, the creator of the Utopia on the Oder: *Stubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika*, projects which not only bring together Germans and Poles, but also invite migrants from Africa and Asia into the borderland community. The existence of *Stubfurt* and *Nowa Amerika* renders the border assemblage and its bordertextures yet richer and more multi-layered; more processual and future-oriented. The presence of migrants on Brückenplatz in *Stubfurt* redirects attention from German-Polish history and its thorny moments by asking how to celebrate this scar today in light of these guests who have arrived with an entirely different baggage of experience and a *historiography* of their own scars.

Migrants bring not only their own border experiences, but also the experience of Otherness. As such, they are at first outsiders in new contexts; they know both what it is to be alienated and how it is to be seen as alien. In border regions, the alien takes on a very special meaning: the proximity to another country can encourage intimacy and connectedness, but can also provoke fear, scepticism, and hostility. The other "aliens" are closer than elsewhere; peripheral regions force confrontation with the alien – irrespective of the direction. Migrants and refugees, however, are alien to the alien.

7 *IBID.*, 238.

8 *IBID.*, 238–239.

Scholarly debates on the alien, or “Other”, stress that the Other can only be explained from a knowledge of the Own, and that as such, Otherness can stand for “expression of a relationship”.⁹ In the context of migration, the question arises as to the position from which the Other is viewed. Where Bettina Lockemann writes: “The Other has its place outside the Own. The Own may be understood as an order that is given, and need not initially be called into question”,¹⁰ in respect of migrants we may speak of an order that has fallen into disorder. The ground from which migrants look around them at the alien environment is likely far less solid, because the ego is a product of the individual’s social structure, past, and connection to their space. This is the context in which Flusser’s thoughts on the relationship of émigrés to the residents of their destination country may be read:

The expellee is the other among others. That means, they are other to the others, and the others are other to them. They themselves are nothing but the other to the others, and only this gives them “identification” [...]. When they arrive in exile, their “self” is cracked open and an opening-up to the other begins.¹¹

Migration and flight thus cause a substantial change to self-awareness and the experience of alienness. Michael Kurzwelly, however, has created in *Nowa Amerika* and *Stubfurt* a new place that is a lived utopia with no long tradition, dogmatic myths, or stories, in which a new, blended language is spoken. This lends new arrivals the same status as the locals. Their alienness thus becomes less alien; their familiarity unconditional.

The artist Roland Schefferski played on this interest in and understanding for the others across the border in his 2005 intervention *Das betrifft dich – To dotyczy ciebie* (*That Concerns You*), which was part of the *Stubfurt* city project (fig. 89a–b). He had a coin made that was reminiscent in both size and appearance of a one-euro coin – but was not one. On walks around the sister cities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice, he “accidentally” dropped several hundred of these counterfeit coins. The reactions of those who picked them up were filmed; a panorama of emotions, ranging from delight to irritation, disappointment, rage, and indifference, is visible on their faces. The words of the message printed in two languages on the coin, “Das betrifft dich – To dotyczy ciebie” (*That Concerns You*), are intended to have an impact, and prompt the recipient to form an opinion on the coin, their own expectations, and their situation: “Addressing this message to a single person, he draws one’s attention to the common – resulting from

9 WALDENFELS 1989, 44.

10 LOCKEMANN 2008, 21.

11 FLUSSER 1994, 109.



Fig. 89a–b Roland Schefferski, *Das betrifft dich – To dotyczy ciebie (That Concerns You)*, 2005, © Roland Schefferski.

the past – responsibility which also applies to the present and the future.”¹² By releasing these coins into circulation, Schefferski was acting as a seismograph of sensitivities on both sides of the border, only shortly after Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004, and without the euro having been introduced in Poland.

At no point in history has money ever been merely a medium of trade; it has always also been a visual locus for national self-perception, at least in part in the form of the heroes and politicians, inventors and intellectuals depicted on coins and notes.¹³ The design of the euro coins pays homage on one side to the European idea (in the form of the stars), and on the other offers space for national motifs. Schefferski’s coins, by contrast, address in their communication a community both sides of the German-Polish border, that ought not to be indifferent to each other:

Nothing has ever been so devastating in its consequences as our indifference. I do not know whether I will succeed in sensitizing anyone to this responsibility [...]. But if the finders of this coin are irritated by the unclarity of my message, but nonetheless feel it is in some way addressed to them, then they will feel the need for exchange with the others.¹⁴

Almost twenty years on, Schefferski’s happening has lost little of its relevance, since his question is directed at the border region and its people, their actions and feelings, and challenges their behaviour and activity. For without action and engagement, an empathy that goes beyond borders is impossible. The border art that we analysed in our book, then, is an art of activity, an art that challenges, that leaves no-one indifferent, that affects, provokes, polarises, and demands involvement. Art on the German-Polish border recognizes the scar tissue, sees the possibility of healing old wounds, and refuses to look away.

12 KANIA 2006.

13 See ZILCH 2005, 99–106.

14 Roland Schefferski, *Das betrifft Dich*, 2005, video, 14:07 min., quote 5:12–5:45 min., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYhA1EJ4N9o>.

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