The antiAtlas of Borders, A Manifesto

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Abstract

The *antiAtlas of Borders* is an experimentation at the crossroads of research, art and practice. It was launched in 2011 at the Mediterranean Institute of Advanced Studies (Aix Marseille University), and has been co-produced by the Higher School of Art (Aix en Provence), PACTE laboratory (University of Grenoble-CNRS), Isabelle Arvers and La compagnie. Since then, it has gathered researchers (social and hard scientists), artists (web artists, tactical geographers, hackers, filmmakers, etc.) and professionals (customs, industry, military, etc.). The encounter of people coming from these different fields of knowledge and practice aims to create a radical shift of perspective in the way we apprehend both 21st century borders and the boundaries separating fields of knowledge, art and practice.

Why an AntiAtlas?

Atlases, as map collections, have instructed populations and delighted book lovers for centuries (Cosgrove 1999, 2008, Besse 2010). Atlases are valuable objects because they appear to provide a science-based representation of territorial divisions and present a unifying glance at the world as a whole. The powerful aesthetic aspect of their maps and graphics also contributes to their widespread appeal. Spatial sciences such as topography, geometry, geography, have shown constant concern for precise maps, graphs and diagrams at various scales. The modern history of border drawing consists mainly of static and formal outlines of division lines, giving little account of the fluidity of social experience.

Setting the world in (right) order through maps is both a social and political process. Maps have always been political objects par excellence, their top-down view establishing a dominating representation of political interactions (Farinelli 2009). The process through which current borderlines have come into being is indeed directly related to their mutual recognition in international treaties.

However, in the wake of the deep changes that have been affecting borders over the last 20 years there is a need for a radical shift of perspective. At the beginning of the 21st Century, the functions of State borders have changed. Borders are losing their territorial container aspect, increasingly overflowing spaces, districts and jurisdictions (Taylor 1995, Balibar 1996, Sassen 2008, Balibar 2009). Borders cannot be reduced anymore to their linear aspects as they are becoming more mobile and diffuse (Amilhat Szary and Giraut 2011, Popescu 2011). Border-making actors have also multiplied substantially. In addition to states, new stakeholders such as international institutions, corporations, and NGOs have emerged as actors of border management (Cuttitta 2007, Brown 2010). The ways in which mobility is controlled are more and more diversified and differentiated (Bigo and Guild 2005, Money 1999, Steinberg 2009). Crossing borders, people and goods have to pass through multiple networks and complex identification devices. Making sense of these mutations requires

sustained in-depth analysis as well as a wide range of modes of inquiry, critical methodologies, and interdisciplinary engagements, that can open the path for creative research (Rumford 2007, Van Houtum et al. 2004, Wastl-Walter 2012, Wilson and Donnan 2012).

While atlases express stability, or rather give the illusion of it, the antiAtlas wishes to reintroduce borders˘ dynamic nature and complex manifestations, and to provide a critical approach to border representations. We assert that systematic graphic visualization of space is neither the most acceptable nor the most desirable way of understanding borders. This does not mean that we disqualify the traditional map, as we do not contest the usefulness of maps as knowledge tools. What we claim is that maps˘ systematic compiling does not provide an adequate understanding of the complexity of borders. Maps are not only political but also epistemological devices. They are not simply representations of territories and borders, but they also contribute to their production. Border making is intrinsically linked to map drawing, as maps make the border conceptually as well as practically possible. Maps are models that determine the forms of their production and lay the conditions to produce relations in space.

The study of territorial shape is less essential today than examining borders˘physical inertia, their contextual materialization and dematerialization, as well as their social construction and highly technological nature. Increasingly, borders appear as evolving devices with electronic and biological characteristics that function as bases for mobile control and surveillance. At the same time, they shape exchanges, generate formal and informal rules, and produce random definitions of what is legitimate and what is not. What is at stake, thus, is to understand the border as a perpetually changing process, using an alternative set of representations that do not reify power positions the way atlases do. In this sense, we prefer the path of multiple investigations to unearth the multifaceted nature of border-making processes. Beyond their topography, borders address sociological, psychological, anthropological and ontological issues. This means that we need to pay attention at the same time to their locations, forms and shapes, as well as to their modes of existence, constitutive processes and imaginaries.

From territorial control to flows and risk management

The transformation of borders is intimately connected to the ways globalization has altered spatial interactions of all kinds, such as production chains, communication and defense systems, work and culture (Appadurai 1996). Freedom of mobility has been conceived through an economic perspective (Peck 2010, Amable 2011). Contemporary public policies that are usually qualified as `neoliberal�met have been over-discussed and reinterpreted (Hilgers 2012), but it is widely admitted that they have promoted national reforms that include `free trade� and labor flexibility (Jacoby 2008, 2011), while promoting altogether on a global scale accounting standards (Mattli and Büthe 2005, Richardson and Eberlein 2011), banking prudential norms (Goodhart 2011, Young 2012), and fiscal consolidation (Kleinbard 2012, Hebous and Zimmermann 2013, Blanchard and Leigh 2013). At the same time, there are new strategies which aim at containing migratory pressures through the selective filtering of human flows (Shamir 2005).

These transformations have resulted in a contradiction between economic practices that increase unequal global development and the need to implement sustainable and fair global development (Sassen 2008). There is also a gap between national governments˘ policies, which are limited by their sovereignty, and the need to

regulate transnational processes through global governance frameworks (Kramsch and Hooper 2004, Ba and Hoffmann 2005).

To address these contradictions, national governments have assigned state borders the function to guarantee peopleˇs security in a world characterized by transnational mobility of people, capital, goods and ideas. In other words, borders are supposed to allow a high level of mobility while protecting against social, economic, political, and public health risks the mobility of people generate.

While state borders are clearly more and more represented as legally intangible, it becomes increasingly problematic both for analytical purposes (Steinberg 2009, Johnson, Jones et al. 2011) and in terms of securitization (Brunet-Jailly 2007) to locate the border control within specific and stable places. The lines between domestic and external security have become blurred to such extent that these domains are difficult to separate clearly. Yet, the role of borders does not decline. What is declining is the relative share of controls implemented at borders compared with the forms of control prior and after the border crossing. This share is declining due to the difficulty to distinguish between internal and external origin of migrations, terrorism, economic and financial flows, software piracy and pollution.

In this context, border control is conceived and implemented in a selective and individualized manner. Seen in terms of risks, human, commercial and information flows become targets of surveillance, and border control becomes a form of risk management (Beck 1998; Aradau and van Munster 2007). Because these movements overflow the national space, security strategies now have to be conceived on a global scale and are heavily reliant on digital technologies that collect and store vast amounts of data about cross-border flows (Muller 2008; Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero 2008).

The main objective of border security policies is not so much to stop these flows as it is to improve the mechanisms to filter and channel them. Consequently, borders are functioning today as firewalls, aiming to facilitate legitimate traffic while containing unwanted people and commodities perceived as security risks (Walters 2006). For example, borders could be very porous to capital, but not to workers with low levels of formal education. The implementation of this new logic of control has led to an unprecedented process of integration of technology-based surveillance systems, such as, biometrics, numeric and satellite networks, RFID, drones, robots, radars, CO_2 detectors, and others, used to embed borders into bodies and flows in order to detect, identify and follow their movements. In this way, flows can be monitored continuously along their entire journey (Popescu 2011). The main rationale for this convergence is based on the misplaced belief that technological automation will, inevitably, strengthen border control capabilities by reducing enforcement costs and eliminating human error.

Following these developments, border security is more concerned with the prediction and the management of the effects of risks rather than with their actual causes. This logic is in accordance with neoliberal thinking that sees addressing the root causes of various issues as more costly than dealing with their effects (Agamben 2014).

In addition, the ːdataficationˇ of human and goods mobility and practices, as well as the emergence of the ːbigdataˇ paradigm, have further reduced the focus on causes and meanings of processes we observe. Given the amount of data that can be collected and processed by computers, it becomes easier to analyze an event and what is linked to it in order to find out regularities and probabilities, than to understand the factors determining it (Cukier and Mayer-Schönberger 2013). This shift of focus in border control practices and representations could explain the actual convergence of free trade policies on the one hand, and growing security control apparatus on the other.

Shifting forms of mobility and changing border regimes

Keeping flows under surveillance today means that border controls managed by police, custom services and private companies get partially redeployed away from the formal state borderlines and inside the national territory as well as inside other States˘ territories. Customs may manage extraterritorial operations (Baldaccini 2010). Visa checks are carried out in the country of migrants˘ origin, not only in embassies but also in private offices (Infantino 2010). Simultaneously, check points are multiplied in order to track people and providers of goods who have managed to circumvent surveillance systems. Lastly, in order to exclude certain categories of flows, special zones such as detention centers, staging areas in airports, or free zones have been created on uncertain juridical basis (Marc 2009, Bigo 1997, Mountz 2011, Clochard 2012, Rahola 2007). These facilities have proliferated as they generate a highly lucrative business (Rodier 2012).

Such increasingly selective control implies a diversification of circulatory regimes. Regimes regarding the circulation of goods are increasingly constituted by World Trade Organization agreements on tariffs and trade, whereas the circulation regimes affecting human flows get managed through more or less coercive migratory policies. Border crossing chances are determined by a complex set of factors such as professional status, gender, national origins, ethno-religious stereotypes, economic and linguistic capacities, affiliations, and others. The main outcome is the generalization of negotiated mobility based on contingent arbitration. Creating the conditions for fluidity and interconnections implies increasingly sophisticated overriding clauses that exempt major actors from the formal regulations that should apply. Major transnational corporations, for instance, bargain both accesses and tariffs by providing specialized services to governments such as non-intrusive shipment inspection, trade hubs management, databases and risk management, and certification (of value, quantity or quality), thus establishing themselves as crucial stakeholders in the management of international flows of people and merchandise. In this context, flagrant gaps between hyper-connected spaces or people and disconnected ones have emerged.

Mobility of people, goods and ideas is also shaped by the entrepreneurs, and firms that are not directly involved into border control. Yet, motivated by financial gains, transportation, insurance and communication companies, banks, NGOs facilitate international mobility, settlement adaptation, communication and resource transfers of migrants and their families across borders (Salt and Stein 1997, Hernández-León 2008). While not officially in charge of controlling borders these actors play a more determinant role in structuring international human mobility than it was that it has been acknowledged by migration theory.

The impact of non-state actors on mobility is all the more complex as many operate in informal ways. The increasing number of border controls has encouraged the development of clusters of lucrative businesses such as smuggling and other informal activities in borderlands (Andreas 2000) Tightening controls forces people who live near the border or who must cross it regularly to change their habits, activities, journeys and strategies. Due to their limited resources, they are often forced to call for assistance from individuals and groups who specialize in avoiding physical obstacles (i.e. walls and barriers), surveillance systems (i.e. radar, drones, and biometric systems) and state regulations (i.e. visas, travel permits, and work contracts). Hence, traffickers have gained key positions in the system, as they can ease or obstruct

entrance according to their own interests. They have become unofficial ːregulating authoritiesˇ (Roitman 2005). Formal authorities cannot put an end to their activities and prefer incorporate these informal networks into their own mechanisms of regulation and control (Parizot 2014).

The sophistication of entrance regulations leads to an individualization of controls, particularly on the basis of complex sets of data. People who wish to bypass border biometric control systems are obliged to modify their physical aspect, notably by achieving mutilation and erasure of fingerprints. Borders are now likely to be embedded in the person (Amoore 2006, Popescu 2011). Border management is embodied as it detaches from the national territorial limits and embraces alternative forms of spatiality.

People increasingly move both to escape the stark inequalities and conflicts and to pursue more individualized and economically rewarding lifestyles, often facing the risk of exploitation and abuse. However, filtering people deserving protection away from those awaiting deportation, on the basis of standardized criteria of absolute, thus almost unattainable, victimhood leads to the onset of a de-politicizing humanitarian rhetoric. The complex experiences of increased vulnerability and self-affirmation through migration are systematically denied, setting the background for the emergence of humanitarian mechanisms of migration control (Agier 2010).

Since ever more restrictive policies frame global migrations, access to asylum has drawn a humanitarian boundary throughout the world. Depending on how well they fulfill ːtrue victimˇ stereotypes (Cole 2006) in which the presentation of a suffering body becomes key to arouse compassion and solidarity (Fassin 2005), migrants are granted, but more often denied, fundamental rights. In the process, the certification of individual suffering and vulnerability has become a border control technology through which migrants can or cannot access social support, legal immigration status and work on the basis of asylum and other humanitarian grounds. The process of certification of the credibility of the suffering of the migrants being both helped and controlled acts as a ːhumanitarian biographical borderˇ between deportation and recognition (Mai 2014). The ubiquity of these biographical bordering mechanisms is part of the proliferation of mobile borders and of new moral and spatial surveillance mechanisms and technologies of control.

From scientific exploration to artistic experimentation and back

Initially conceived as an exploratory research project, the *antiAtlas of borders* has become a performance in the artistic meaning of the word. The fact that researchers, professionals of border control, and artists have met for twelve seminars[1] between 2011 and 2013 has of course allowed them to enrich their own approach. Indeed, the first boundary that was crossed was that of our own academic fields of activity as the antiAtlas is a collective whose members are not merely representing their own disciplinary fields. Rather, this companionship has helped them to widen perspectives in order to embrace wider epistemological horizons in a manner that goes beyond traditional inter-disciplinary collectives. The dialogue between art, science, and practice, has generated cognitive gains made of mutual insights, transfers, and examples. At the same time, this dialogue has gone far beyond using one discipline as a vehicle for another. Art, which is not a `discipline˴ in the sense of specialization

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[1] See http://www.antiatlas.net/en/research-seminars/

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and institutionalization of knowledge, has helped give a transgressive content to this enterprise. Such potential of art-science explorations certainly resides in its call for `un-discipline˛, since `the inscription of research within specialized disciplines may invalid or make unthinkable questioning that could precisely come out of the refusal of objects and methods that disciplines acknowledge˛ (Loty 2005 p. 252, quoted by Mekdjian, Amilhat Szary et al. 2014).

Neither artists nor practitioners were summoned at the discussion table to illustrate social science analysis. Instead, by recalling the experimental power of contemporary art (Thompson 2008), the collective has made all of its participants be part of an uncommon journey. The evolution of visual arts since their incorporation of fast changing technologies (starting with photography) has led them to abandon the dream of offering faithful representations of our world and to embrace a re-active position. Contemporary artwork aims to challenge the observer˘ position in the world and to trigger affective experiences that can involve the viewer in the interpretation of the artwork. This kind of aesthetic relationship represents a drastic reversal from a time when a frontal meeting between the person who did the art and the one who received it was the norm. The integration of electronic technologies has led artists to deliver not only visual products, such as 2 or 3 D images, but to encode perception itself in a renewed way.

In the course of the antiAtlas meetings, artistic works have provided the collective with many explorations and experiences of our ambivalent relation to borders ˉ on one hand, what they make of us, of our identity, of our intimacy, and of our body; on the other hand, what we make of them, how we give them material and immaterial visibility or invisibility, how we play with them, either for breaking free of them or for surveying and denouncing our contemporaries. The relations between the rationality of control initiatives and the practices that evade them are perpetually replayed through borders.

In addition, the *antiAtlas* has also led to uncommon productions: the professionals involved in the process have begun to relate to artists as experts; the artists have enjoyed having direct contact with concept making, and the scientists have undergone a change of their epistemic references. This has, most notably, led to the production of hybrid original works, such as an ethno-fiction (*Samira*), a video game (*A Crossing Industry*) based on an ethnographic investigation, as well as participative and mobile maps (*Crossing Maps*), and others[2]. Could such an experience have happened in any art-science workshop? Borders have indeed revealed an exceptionally fertile exploratory laboratory.

The potential of this type of interactions is such that they can benefit all strains of border studies, from the more quantitative to humanities-based approaches. The *antiAtlas* challenges both our routines of border experiences and our understanding and analysis of them. By pulling together a complex set of reflections on the reticular structure of borders and on the conditions for a renewed aesthetic relation to borders, this approach has the potential to make people aware that they are a constitutive part of the production of contemporary borders.

Conclusions
Approaching borders in the 21st century requires us to examine the transformation of spaces, both from space˘s constitutive elements as well as from our common

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[2] For further details see www.antiatlas.net/en

experiences of it. This makes borders a major element to express how the world we live in can be represented and what is our own position in it. The antiAtlas helps understanding how people cross borders and also how borders modify their experience of space. New technologies of network control settle spaces that look less like areas and more like flows, loops, and intersections. While the nation-state territory has long been associated with areas and boundaries, today we increasingly experience daily life shaped by flows and networks. Understanding contemporary borders raises new questions about the way we conceive space and, consequently, about our new experience of constructing social ties and communities. Communities are now provisional and shifting, they lay upon new forms of participation, and they do not encompass our whole lives any more. Such networked forms of social interaction in space imply a deep reconceptualization of the distinction between the public and the private sphere, the individual and the collective, and the real and the virtual.

It is in this context that borders have invaded the spatial imaginaries that artists express as `border art` (Amilhat Szary 2012) or, to put it differently, `art at the border` (Cristofol 2012). By sharing the initial findings spanning its three years of existence, the *antiAtlas* collective wishes to alert the field about the urgent need for transdisciplinarity in order for border studies to bring a more decisive epistemological contribution. We believe that current technologies do not simply consitute one aspect of the border condition, but that the way they decompose and recode our realities are forcing us to reconsider our definition of perception and our ways of expressing it. This is the rationale for a sustained relationship between art and science production at the borders, and for explicitly claiming an experimental status to border studies.

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