

Literatures, geographical areas (spaces?) and the fateful effects of borders

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In 2010, Régis Debray sings the praises of borders.¹ Against the epithet “sans frontières”, he supports “*l'idée décrite des lisières et confins*”.² In his vision, border is then presented as a necessary limit for any society in a logic of organisation and administration, between inclusion and exclusion (Strüver, 2005³ ; Fourcher, 2016⁴, Gerst, Klessmann and Krämer, 2021⁵). This logic raises the question of the determination of (geographical) borders. Which elements of discourse determine or question borders? To what extent do individuals, social groups, cultures, nations or even supranational institutions claim a fate that is brought by borders?

The myth of Hero and Leander, and their forbidden love due to their birth and the geographical distance between them, is a prime example. While the symbolism of water has often been associated with the symbolism of the ‘natural’ and ‘emotional’ border (Febvre, 1922⁶, 1930⁷) and has been particularly taken up by Romanticism and the arts in general, it occupies a special place in popular culture in the German-speaking world. Among others, it can be found in the tale of the ‘Two Proverbial Royal Children’, popularised by the song *Es waren zwei KönigsKinder*. As in the Greco-Latin mythology, water plays the main role of separation and remains the determining factor in the tragic fates of the protagonists. The geographical distance, defined by this natural element, is linked to the story of an unconditional love that seeks to flourish despite geographical and social barriers and circumstances.

These considerations are at the root of geography research, which links space to the circumstances created by man’s relationship with the world. They are at the centre of the concepts of lived, perceived or conceived space developed by Henri Lefebvre⁸ and Armand Frémont⁹ later taken up

¹ Régis Debray : *Éloge des frontières*. Paris : Gallimard 2010.

² Régis Debray : *Éloge des frontières*. Paris : Gallimard 2010, p. 14.

³ Anke Strüver : *Binnen- und Außengrenzen der EU: Zwischen Abgrenzung und Überschreitung*. In: Reuber, Paul/Strüver, Anke/Wolkersdorfer, Günter (Hrsg.): *Politische Geographien Europas – Annäherungen an ein umstrittenes Konstrukt*. Münster: Lit 2005, pp. 141–152.

⁴ Michel Fourcher : *L’Obsession des frontières*. Paris : Tempus Perrin 2016.

⁵ Dominik Gerst (Ed.), Maria Klessmann (Ed.) and Hannes Krämer (Ed.) : *Grenzforschung. Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium*. Baden-Baden : Nomos 2021.

⁶ Lucien Febvre : *La terre et l’évolution humaine : introduction géographique à l’histoire*. Paris : La Renaissance du Livre 1922.

⁷ Lucien Febvre : « Frontière : le mot et la notion », *Bulletin du Centre international de synthèse*, XLV, juin 1928, p. 31-44.

⁸ Henri Lefebvre : *La production de l’espace*. Paris : Anthropos. 1974.

⁹ Armand Frémont : *La Région, espace vécu*. Paris : Flammarion 1976.

by Japanese geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977)¹⁰ from a more sensory perspective. He considers that individual perception and ideas affect our understanding of space.

The overlap between geographical contexts, sometimes hostile and a source of division between peoples, and the human will to unite, has made this narrative structure so productive that it has been received, adapted, modified and recontextualized many times over the course of literary history. This leads us to ask: How do fictions influence the perception of borders? How, moreover, do borders determine cultural, legal or even literary landscapes (Guldall 2015¹¹)? How do contemporary changes in a globalised world contribute to the transformation of physical and symbolic borders (Amilhat-Szary et Giraut, 2015¹²)?

Blaise Pascal wrote in his *Pensées*, quoting and modifying Montaigne : « *Plaisante justice qu'une rivière borne. Vérité au-deçà des Pyrénées, erreur au-delà.* » He brings geographical contexts and legal systems - at first glance scandalously - closer together. This connection has the effect of a hysteron- proteron. But this inversion of the logic of justification can also serve as a starting point for a geographical reading of the *fateful ruptures*. From the moment national borders are established over time, the organisation of the spaces on either side takes divergent directions, as if under the effect of dividing lines of fate that separate; and even when these borders disappear, the *fateful rupture* divide remains obvious, as has been shown in the case of *phantom borders* (von Hirschhausen, 2023¹³).

Bordering processes can be seen as both contingent and necessary, insofar as it is the result of a pre-existing territorial organisation, a balance of political power and an ideal image of what the limits of the State should be - the myth of 'natural borders' is interesting in this respect, as if an element of nature could make a border by *destiny*. That said, the drawing of a border has far-reaching consequences for the fate of separated populations and spaces it separates, because it implies the establishment of largely compartmentalised societal and ideal organisations.

The question of the representation of borders immediately follows (Van Houtum, 2012¹⁴). How can borders and geographical spaces be mapped from these new perspectives? How do we map unity or otherness, or even the haunting of one over the other? These questions lead us to the problems of the actual production of cartographic representations and their supports, as well as to the models of representation that create images of spaces. For these modelled images naturally

¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan : *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minnesota : University of Minnesota Press, 248 p.

¹¹ Jesper Guldall: *The novel and the passport. Towards a literary history of movement control*. In: *Comparative literature* 67-2, (2015), pp. 131-144.

¹² Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary and Frédéric Giraut. Introduction. In: *Borderities and the Politics of Contemporary Mobile Borders*, Amilhat-Szary and Giraut (ed.). Londres : Palgrave Macmillan 2015.

¹³ Béatrice von Hirschhausen: *Les Provinces du temps. Frontières fantômes et expériences de l'histoire*. Paris : CENRS éditions 2023.

¹⁴ Henk Van Houtum : *Remapping Borders*. In : *A companion to Border Studies*, Donnan, H.; Wilson, T. (ed.). Hoboken : Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2012. pp. 405-418.

have a knock-on effect on the object. The Greater Region (Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate, Lorraine, Luxembourg and Wallonia) and the French-German history of this geographical area may well provide an exemplary research subject. (Hamez et Defays, 2020¹⁵).

We invite researchers to contribute to the reflections on the *fate-related* effects of borders from the perspectives of geography, literary studies, cultural studies and history.

We request the submission of proposals (abstracts of max. 300 words and a short biography of max. 200 words) by **January 5 2025** by e-mail to frederique.morel-doridat@univ-lorraine.fr et daniel.kazmaier@univ-lorraine.fr

Contributions can be made in either English, French or German.

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¹⁵ Grégory Hamez and Jean-Marc Defays : Réalités, perceptions et représentations des frontières – L'espace transfrontalier de la grande région Sarre-Lor-Lux. Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve : EME Editions, Proximités Sociologie 2020.