



Inhabited Territories On Mapping Crisana's Borderscape

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2024, Léa Delessert

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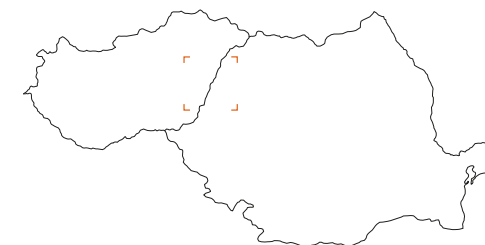
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Prologue

As long as I can remember, I've spent every summer of my childhood in Crisana, a region stretching from the undulating Pannonian plain of Hungary to the edges of the Carpathian foothills of Romania. At my grandparents' house in the small village of Biharkeresztes, these summers were a return—a reuniting with family and a reconnection to rhythms of life that felt timeless. The days were filled with laughter, running barefoot through dusty streets with my cousins, and exploring fields that stretched endlessly. This village, nestled near the border, seemed a world of its own, complete and undivided.

My first encounter with the border disrupted this simplicity. I was thirteen, traveling to Oradea, just across the Romanian side. I remember my grandfather's steady hands gripping the wheel as he approached the checkpoint with calm precision. The uniformed men inspected our car while I stared out the window, absorbing the unfamiliarity of the scene. A large billboard caught my attention—it advertised my favorite childhood snack, Túró Rudi. Yet the words below were unreadable. What had once been familiar now seemed distant, cloaked in another language. It was an interruption, a sudden shift in the landscape of my understanding. The Transylvanian mountains were still there, their contours unchanging, yet the air carried a different rhythm; the signs told a different story. Familiarity coexisted with confusion.

The questions that began to form that day stayed with me, reshaping how I saw Crisana. It was no longer just a region; it became a threshold, a liminal space where borders were not abstractions but lived realities. What do borders reveal, and what do they conceal? How do they create distinctions, not only between nations but between ways of seeing, belonging, and remembering? What lies within the space of the border itself, between what divides and what connects?



Hypothesis

The term *borderscape* draws an analogy with *landscape*: just as a landscape provides land with a cultural framework, a borderscape captures the culturally constructed, dynamic, and ever-changing nature of borders. In this work, the concept of borderscape serves as both a methodological and conceptual framework, offering a nuanced and multidimensional understanding of borders. This approach, as articulated by Chiara Brambilla in her work *Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscape Concept*, considers not only the diverse geographical locations where borders are observed and experienced but also their socio-cultural, political, economic, legal, and historical dimensions¹. Within this framework, borders are seen as dispersed phenomena, unfolding across social and spatial domains where they are enacted, negotiated, and contested.

In *Mapping Traces*, the collective Calypso36°21 draws on Arnold van Gennep's concept of liminality, as articulated in his work on rites of passage (*Les Rites de passage*, 1909), to describe the Mediterranean Sea in the journeys of migrants bound for Europe². It is a space of transition, suspended between departure and arrival, hope and uncertainty. When applied to borderscapes, liminality highlights the border as more than a simple dividing line; it becomes a threshold. In these liminal spaces, conventional categories dissolve, giving rise to new and hybrid configurations. The boundaries between inclusion and exclusion, visibility and invisibility, and object and subject become porous, allowing for an intricate interplay of identities and social formations. Each crossing, each encounter carries faces and places, marking individuals with histories and patterns of belonging that differ across contexts and locations.

This work aims to dismantle these simplistic binaries to uncover Crisana as a space of liminality where contradictory sets of memories and identities overlap and intermingle, each boundary a palimpsest of lives lived in motion. To delve into this region is to engage with the intricate temporal and spatial layers that shape its borderscape. These layers reveal the border not as a fixed line but as a dynamic and inhabited space, where people, materials, and ideas negotiate their

1
Chiara Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept," *Geopolitics* 20, (2015), 25.

2
Zoé Le Voyer and Justine Daquin (co-founders of Calypso36°21), "Mapping Traces," virtual lecture, February 12, 2022, by Jan van Eyck Academie.

presence and continuously reconfigure their meanings³. The border emerges as a site of interaction and transformation, defying static representations. Henri Lefebvre, in his seminal work *The Production of Space*, provides a critical framework for examining this complexity. Space, he argues, is not a passive expanse but an active production—an unfolding process shaped by layered dimensions. This production is articulated through a tripartite structure: conceived space, perceived space, and lived space. These layers do not stand alone; rather, they intertwine in a dialectic, each layer adjusting, reshaping, and responding to the others. In this view, space becomes a nexus of evolving relations, where temporal and spatial dynamics leave their traces upon one another⁴.

Central to this thesis is the creation of a map that will integrate these layers, offering a new perspective on the territory. This map functions as a methodological and analytical tool, showcasing the evolving and dialectical nature of borders. It is not merely factual or observational but positions the border as a dynamic system of relations shaped by flows, ruptures, and adaptations. By synthesizing these dimensions, the map seeks to make visible the complexities of Crisana's borderscape and to reframe how we perceive such spaces.

3
Chiara Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept," *Geopolitics*, no.20 (2015), 27.

4
Lefebvre Henri, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (England: Blackwell, 1991), 39.

Methodology

James Corner, in his work *The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention* makes an important distinction between mapping and tracing. He explains that mapping does not simply replicate what already exists; it does not just trace the physical forms of the world. Instead, it delves into the underlying forces and dynamics that animate and often disrupt space¹. By mapping, we reformulate these elements, uncovering potentialities that may otherwise remain hidden. The act of mapping, then, becomes a means of reinterpreting, of visualizing relations and tensions within space. This approach is reflected in works like *This is Not an Atlas*, where the maps blend uncertainties with aspirations and visions, embracing contradiction and contingency with openness². Central to this practice is the acknowledgment of relationships over isolated objects; it is the connections between elements within space, rather than the physical entities themselves, that shape the map's significance. Taking inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome (Mille Plateaux, 1980), Corner illustrates mapping as a dynamic, interconnected network that unfolds unpredictably, without a defined starting point or endpoint³. In this light, the purpose of the map is not merely a visual output; it is an invitation to engage with the world's latent, ever-shifting complexities. Mapping becomes an active, unfolding process that seeks to actualize rather than finalize. Here, the map emerges as an ongoing activity, a tool in constant development rather than a closed, finished product. It is not solely about what the map says but about what the map does: an expression of fluid relationships within space. In this work, the map is an integral part of the research process. It bridges praxis and theory, becoming a space where these two dimensions meet and confront each other. The map materializes this interaction by connecting the work carried out on the field—interviews, walks, photographs—with theoretical exploration. It unfolds as a dynamic cycle—praxis feeding into theoretical abstraction and, in turn, flowing back into concrete application.

1
James Corner, "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention," in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (Reaktion Books, 1999), 231-252.

2
Kollektiv orangotango+, eds., *This is not an Atlas* (Transcription Verlag, 2018), 13.

3
James Corner, "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention," in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (Reaktion Books, 1999), 244.

This exchange challenged me to remain reflexive by aiming to situate the project within its broader context while also underscoring my integrity and accountability. Moreover, it extends to a critical engagement with the documents and sources used, acknowledging their origins, limitations, and the ways they may shape the understanding or representation of the subject at hand. This aspect also applies to the translation of the interviews conducted during fieldwork. In the 53rd issue of the magazine *The Funambulist*, Leopold Lambert discusses the concept of translation, emphasizing that when we think through and with language, it becomes evident that our reflection differs depending on the language employed⁴. This observation resonated deeply as this work evolved across four different languages: Hungarian and Romanian for fieldwork, followed by discussions in French for certain segments and English for others. Each phase was enriched by diverse contributors providing their input into the translations. The challenge, then, was to remain as faithful as possible to the original meaning while navigating between linguistic and cultural nuances. Certain terms, especially those steeped in local idioms or context, required elaboration to preserve their essence. Thus, this work adopts a practice of annotation, incorporating explanatory notes to ensure that the translations, along with the documentation and source material, remain accurate and faithful to their original context.

4
Léopold Lambert, "Le Fil des Traductions," *The Funambulist*, no.53 (2024), 29.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis adopts a tripartite structure, grounded in Henri Lefebvre's framework of conceived, perceived, and lived spaces¹. Each of the three chapters corresponds to one dimension of this triad, systematically building a conceptual and visual map of Crisana's borderscape. The map itself evolves dynamically throughout the thesis, reflecting the intricate and multifaceted nature of borders.

Complementing the core chapters, the booklet *Voices from the Field* bridges theoretical discourse with lived realities. Featuring three interviews conducted during field trips, it grounds the abstract dimensions of the thesis in personal narratives and practical insights.

In this way, the thesis weaves together theory, mapping, and fieldwork, proposing an evolving narrative of Crisana as an inhabited borderscape.

1

Lefebvre Henri, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (England: Blackwell, 1991), 39.



Crisana

Scale 1:200 000

North ↑

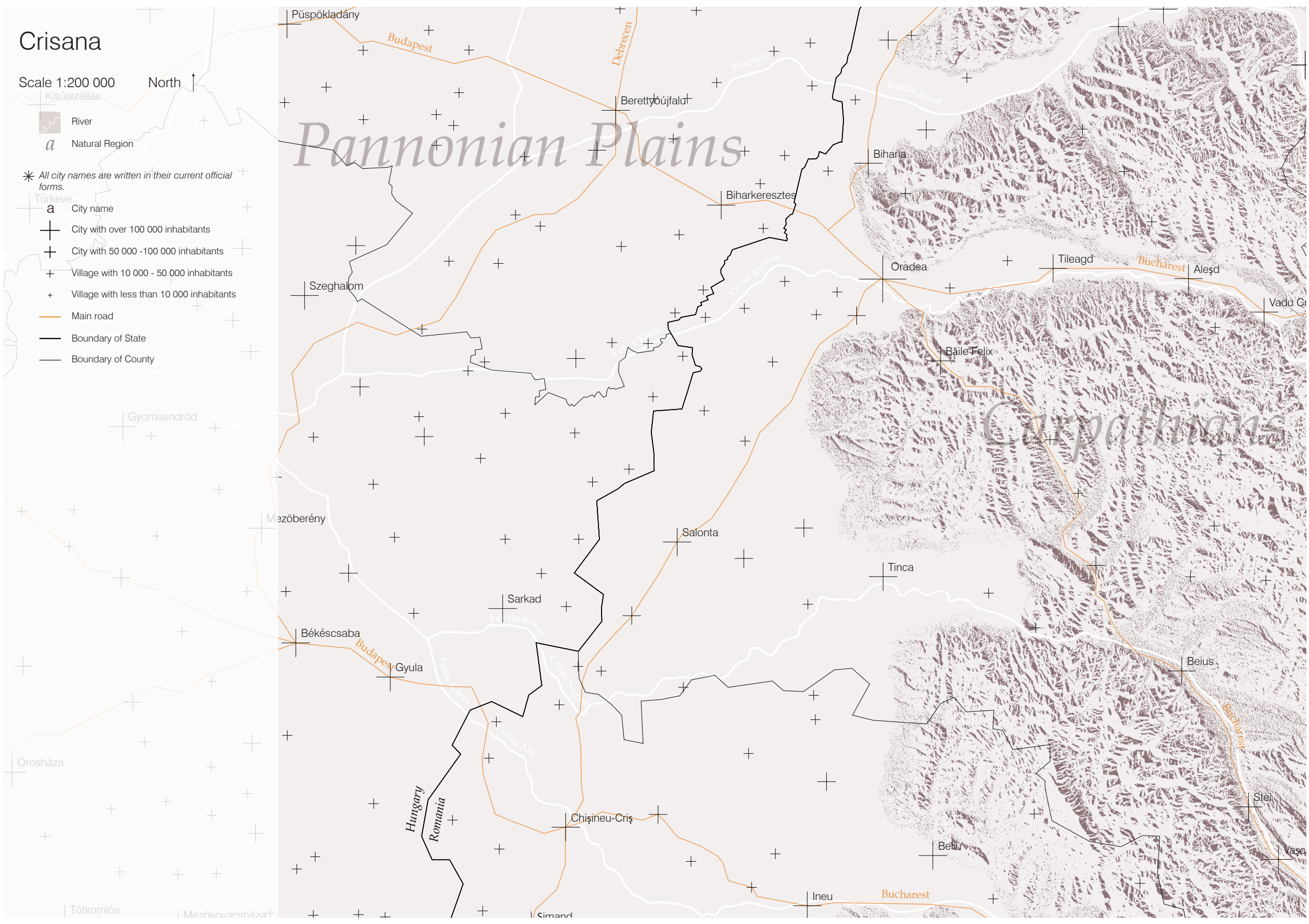
-  River
-  Natural Region

* All city names are written in their current official forms.

-  City name
-  City with over 100 000 inhabitants
-  City with 50 000 - 100 000 inhabitants
-  Village with 10 000 - 50 000 inhabitants
-  Village with less than 10 000 inhabitants
-  Main road
-  Boundary of State
-  Boundary of County

Pannonian Plains

Carpathians



The drawing of a line

In this chapter, the focus is on the notion of space as a construct shaped by the intellect. Henri Lefebvre's concept of conceived space brings together disparate elements into a cohesive mental image that we recognize as space. Here, space aligns with the dominant social conventions, dictating connections and exclusions¹. These conventions are never static; they remain fluid, shaped by negotiation, contestation, and the discursive frameworks within which power circulates. Conceived space takes form through representation, embedded within language and codified systems of knowledge. Such representations materialize as descriptions, scientific models, maps, and plans. This chapter examines the ways in which borders are conceptualized, interrogating the role of representation in defining and perpetuating their presence. It aims to uncover the contradictions inherent in these depictions: while borders are often portrayed as fixed and immutable, their historical trajectories reveal their fluid and transient nature. Each section of this chapter explores a distinct fragment of Crisana's history. Through the lens of this history, it critically examines the dynamics that sustain this line on the map, unraveling its broader implications. In doing so, it invites the reader to reconsider the ways in which space is made, unmade, and remade.

Lines on a map

The border dividing Crisana between Hungary and Romania was born under the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, following the aftermath of World War I. It significantly altered the territorial structure of Central Europe, redistributing over two-thirds of Hungary's pre-war land to neighboring states, including Romania. This line, enacted by the Allied Powers, resulted in more than three million Hungarian citizens finding themselves outside Hungary's borders, though they had not moved from their homes². Crisana was among the regions profoundly affected by these changes. The redefinition of the border disrupted long-established networks of economic, cultural, and administrative ties. Communities near the newly drawn

1
Christian Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, trans. Zachary Murphy King (Verso, 2022), 277-281.

2
Zombory Máté, *Maps of Remembrance - Space, belonging and politics of memory in eastern Europe*, trans. Richard Robinson (L'Harmattan, 2011), 143.

boundary faced new challenges: once connected to Oradea, the regional center, they were now peripheral both to their own country and to the infrastructure of Hungary. At the heart of the process of drawing the new border was a collision of ideologies. The border was drawn to reflect not just ethnic majorities but also economic imperatives and strategic considerations. This line carried with it the weight of political and symbolic significance. It became a tool for consolidating power, legitimizing authority, and shaping the identity of the new nation-state. Romanian claims to the territory were bolstered by arguments of demographic predominance, yet these claims were themselves shaped by selective interpretations of ethnicity, language, and cultural identity³. The technicality of border drawing—employing surveys, statistics, and cartographic models—masked the deeply subjective nature of the process. The decision to include or exclude a village, to align the border with a river or a railway, was not merely technical but inherently political. For instance, the integration of industrial hubs like Oradea into Romanian territory reflected the strategic need to secure economic resources. The border also materialized broader power dynamics, with the Allied Powers dictating its contours in ways that reflected their strategic interests⁴. Hungary's marginal role in the negotiations⁵ underscored its diminished sovereignty, as the border was drawn more to satisfy the geopolitical concerns of the victors than to reflect the lived realities of the inhabitants, whether they were Hungarian or Romanian. In this process, the map became not only a representation of space but a mechanism of control. By reducing land to coordinates and boundaries, cartography served as a crucial instrument for the consolidation of state power⁶. Yet, even as maps claim objectivity, they remain deeply subjective artifacts. Their lines and symbols do not merely reflect the world but construct it, encoding assumptions and agendas that shape how landscapes and societies are perceived and organized⁷. Their significance lies in the ideologies they encode, reflecting the cultural, political, and

3
Anders E.B. Blomqvist, "Economic Nationalizing in the Ethnic Borderlands of Hungary and Romania" (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2014), 187.

4
ibid., 197.

5
ibid., 198.

6
Lucía García de Jalón Oyarzun, "Excepción y cuerpo rebelde: lo político como generador de una arquitectónica menor" (PhD diss., Brunel University London, 2017), 211.

7
Léopold Lambert, "Cartography & Power: Introduction," *The Funambulist*, no.18 (2018), 1.

economic frameworks that produce them⁸. This process reveals the profound duality of maps. As tools of abstraction, they distill the complexities of space into measurable and comprehensible forms. Yet as agents of power, they impose order, reshape realities, and encode ideologies into the fabric of the land. The Hungarian-Romanian border stands as a testament to this duality, a line that reflects not only the intentions of its makers but also the tensions and contradictions of modern spatial practices⁹.

One state, many communities

In his seminal work *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner draws a comparison between the ethnographic and political maps of the modern world and the paintings of Modigliani¹⁰. These maps present themselves as smooth, flat surfaces delineated by clear, unambiguous borders, reflecting the principle of one nation equating to one cohesive community. Such representations lend legitimacy to political units through the lens of a seemingly natural alignment of culture and territory. The sociologist Máté Zombory, in *Maps of Remembrance*, extends Gellner’s critical analysis of the nation’s ontology, asserting that nationalism does not emanate from the nation but rather constructs it. This process, deeply rooted in specific historical and social contexts, envisions the nation-state as the only legitimate form of governance¹¹. It simultaneously eradicates the inherent multiplicity of identities and cultural intersections. Through symbolic, institutional, and sometimes violent means, this vision materializes. An example is the imposition of a “national language,” a policy that marginalizes regional dialects and minority languages. The interplay of language and national identity has historically fueled debates in the nationalization policies of Hungary and Romania. Each nation employed strategies—be it through education, legal frameworks, or access to information—to establish and propagate a unified linguistic standard. After the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, a process of Romanianization unfolded over the following decades,

8 Patrick Jaojoco, “Spatial Historiographies: The Decolonial Mapping Toolkit,” *The Funambulist*, no. 18 (2018),35-43.

9 Anders E.B. Blomqvist, “Economic Nationalizing in the Ethnic Borderlands of Hungary and Romania,” (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2014), 187-198.

10 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Blackwell Publishers, 1983), 140.

11 Zombory Máté, *Maps of Remembrance - Space, belonging and politics of memory in eastern Europe*, trans. Richard Robinson (L’Harmattan, 2011), 12.

employing a range of strategies to reinforce this vision of linguistic and cultural homogenization. In 1924, Romania’s legislative apparatus crystallized these efforts through the Primary Education Act, which dictated that “citizens of Romanian origin who have lost their mother tongue may not send their children to any school, public or private, other than a school in which instruction is given exclusively in Romanian.”¹². Further embedding this principle, the creation of the “Cultural Zone” sought to cement Romanian cultural identity in ethnically diverse border regions¹³. As Constantin Angelescu, the Minister of Education, articulated, this initiative aimed to “fortify our frontiers not only by soldiers but also by men of learning who work upon the mind.”¹⁴. This policy encompassed an extensive incentive system: teachers relocating to these regions were awarded a 50% salary increase and 10 hectares of land¹⁵. Such measures illustrate not merely an educational strategy but a deliberate cultural campaign, redefining the contours of identity and national belonging. These endeavors underscore the paradox of homogenization—a process that, while proclaiming unity, systematically excludes and marginalizes diversity, reducing the complexity of human identity into an artificially cohesive national narrative.

A porous line

Susan Banki, in her article for the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, investigates the concept of border porosity, approaching it as a contingent and dynamic phenomenon rather than a static division. Her analysis extends into the temporal, directional, and socio-political dimensions of permeability. Temporally, borders react to periods of conflict or peace, shifting their openness as circumstances dictate. Directionally, the asymmetry of movement—easier exportation versus restrictive importation—emphasizes the complexity of border flows. Socio-politically, policies, international relationships, and cultural perspectives converge to modulate the permeability of these boundaries, illustrating their intricate responsiveness to external pressures¹⁶.

12 Anders E.B. Blomqvist, “Economic Nationalizing in the Ethnic Borderlands of Hungary and Romania” (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2014), 229.

13 League of Nations, *Hungarian minorities in Romania - Petition of 2 September 1930 from the Parti hongrois en Roumanie* (United Nations Library & Archives Geneva, 1931), 4.

14 *ibid.*, 5.

15 Anders E.B. Blomqvist, “Economic Nationalizing in the Ethnic Borderlands of Hungary and Romania” (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2014),230.

16 Susan Banki, “Porosity on the Thailand-Myanmar border: before and after Myanmar’s 2021 coup,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, no.51 (2024), 526-45.

From the Second World War to today, the border between Hungary and Romania embodies this porous reality, challenging the impermeable line often depicted on maps. Far from being a definitive barrier, this border has evolved in response to shifting political frameworks, redefining who is excluded and who is permitted entry. After the Second World War, Hungary's western border was heavily guarded, and even neighboring communist countries had limited exchanges. Border crossings and trade became even more restricted under Ceausescu's regime (1965–1989), with barbed wire and watchtowers making the border difficult to cross¹⁷. After 1989, with new agreements between the two countries, movement across the border became much freer, reflecting political changes in the region¹⁸. Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004 and its integration into the Schengen Area in 2007 put a damper on the growing fluidity of the Romanian and Hungarian border. With Hungary's EU membership, stringent border regulations were introduced to align with the Union's security protocols. For instance, from November 2003, Romanian citizens, who previously renewed their stay in Hungary monthly, were restricted to a visa-free stay of 90 days within a six-month period¹⁹. These measures disrupted fluidity across the border, a critical aspect for the Hungarian minority residing in Romania's border regions. Hungary implemented policies such as the "national visa" in 2005, granting multiple-entry permits valid for five years to citizens of neighboring countries²⁰. These measures sought to preserve cross-border kinship ties without breaching EU standards. Yet, the border's role as a filter intensified again during the 2015 migration crisis. As a primary gateway to the Schengen Zone, Hungary's borders became a focal point of geopolitical tension²¹. The government elevated migration to a profound existential threat with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's increasing xenophobic tone. A questionnaire was distributed to all Hungarian citizens, which sought opinions on how the country should address undocumented migrants. The questionnaire notably drew several associations between immigration and the threat of terrorism, reinforcing a narrative of fear and insecurity²².

17
Stéphane Rosière, "Contribution à l'étude géographique des frontières : le cas de la Hongrie," *Revue Géographique de l'Est*, no.38, (1998), 165.

18
ibid., 167.

19
Györgyi Barta, "Hungary – the New Border of the European Union," *Discussion Papers*, no.54, (2006), 46.

20
ibid., 58.

21
Tamás Bodoky, "The Symbolic and Material Walls of Viktor Orbán's Nationalist Politics," interview by Léopold Lambert, *The Funambulist Podcast*, 2015, 1-2 min.

22
"Hongrie : « Immigration et terrorisme », le questionnaire de la peur," *Le Monde*, 2015.

In practice, these narratives justified extensive border fortifications. Beginning with a fence along the Serbian border, Hungary later expanded this barrier towards Croatia and contemplated extensions to the Romanian border²³. This securitization agenda highlighted the symbolic and practical redefinition of Hungary's borders as shields against a largely perceived threat. Media aligned with the government perpetuated images of 2015's migrant influx to sustain a climate of fear, despite Hungary's role being predominantly that of a transit nation rather than a final destination²⁴. The permeability of this border further fluctuated in response to global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and Romania's anticipated accession to the Schengen Area in 2024. The lifting of internal EU border controls will likely reinvigorate the porosity of the Hungarian-Romanian border. Through these dynamics, the Hungarian-Romanian border reveals its inherent flexibility, reflecting broader tensions between national sovereignty, regional integration, and transnational identity.

23
Tamás Bodoky, "The Symbolic and Material Walls of Viktor Orbán's Nationalist Politics," interview by Léopold Lambert, *The Funambulist Podcast*, 2015, 15 min.

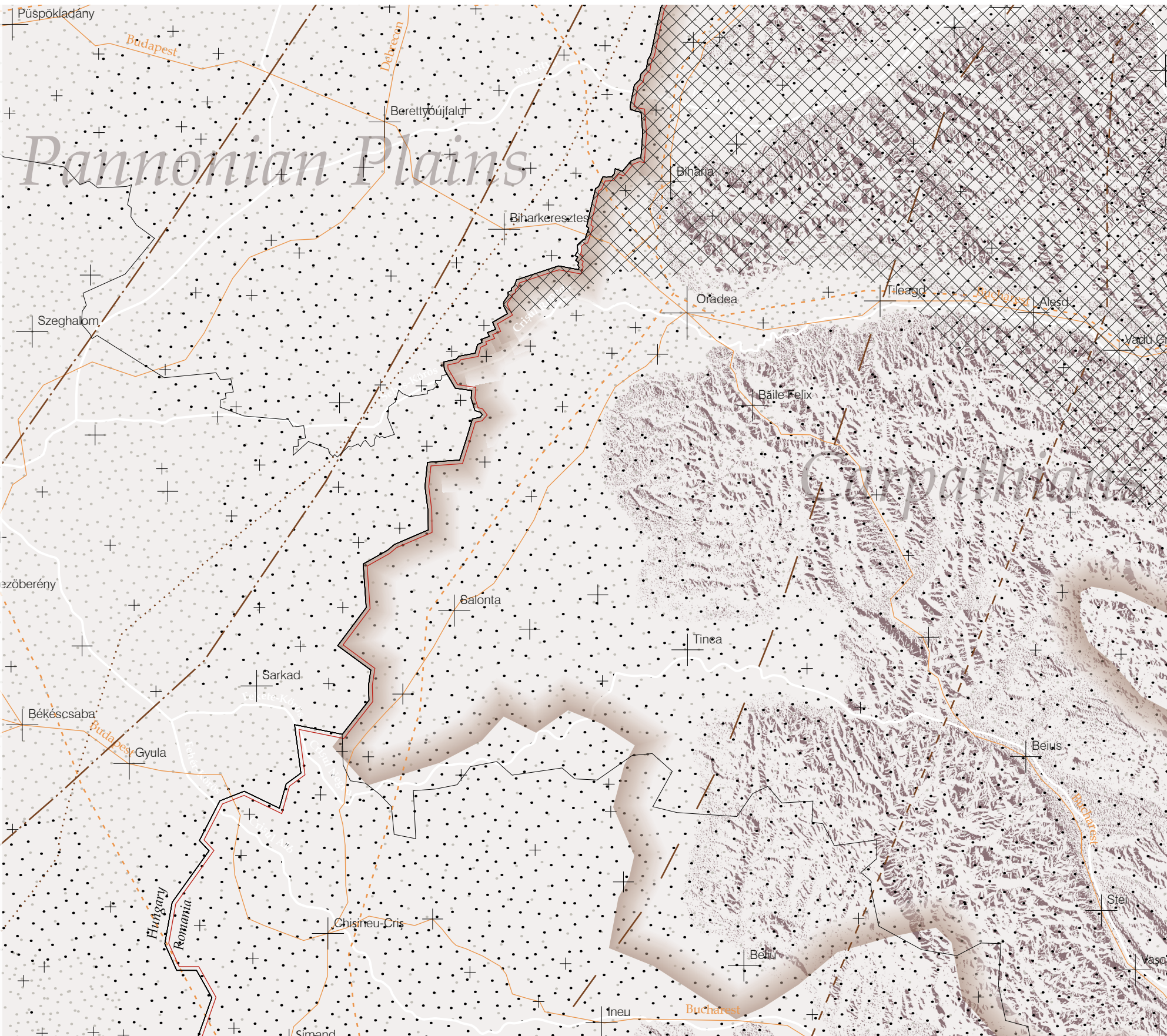
24
ibid., 10 min.

The drawing of a line

Scale 1:200 000

North ↑

- River
- a* Natural Region
- a* City name
- City with over 100 000 inhabitants
- City with 50 000 - 100 000 inhabitants
- + Village with 10 000 - 50 000 inhabitants
- + Village with less than 10 000 inhabitants
- Main road
- Boundary of State
- Boundary of County
- * Border proposal by the Allied Powers in 1919
 - Border proposal of Romania
 - Border proposal of France
 - Border proposal of Britain
 - Border proposal of Italy
 - Border proposal of the USA
- Railway (as of 1918)
- * Between 1938 and 1944, Hungary experienced annual territorial expansions. The country's boundaries underwent significant transformations during this period, with borders within the Carpathian Basin fluctuating annually, largely due to German intervention. In 1940, the Second Vienna Award transferred part of Transylvania back to Hungary. After World War II, the border between Hungary and Romania reverted to the line drawn during the Treaty of Trianon.
- Territorial gains for Hungary (1940–1944)
- * The geoinformatics data used for the administrative boundaries of municipalities has been supplemented with population data (1910) based on mother tongue. Each dot represents one hundred citizens.
 - Hungarian as mother tongue
 - Romanian as mother tongue
- Cultural Zone
- Border of Europe until 2007





Line in matter

As the border solidified into a physical and administrative reality, its abstract origins became obscured. It began to shape the daily lives of those it divided, enforcing new routines, identities, and allegiances. Villages once linked by economic and social ties found themselves separated by checkpoints and regulations. The border's presence reconfigured the landscape, transforming it into a space where the abstract line on the map converged with the tangible reality of the border¹.

In Henri Lefebvre's terms, perceived space constitutes the dimension of space experienced through sensory engagement²—the visible, tactile, and material structures that configure how individuals interact with their environment. This material dimension of the border, however, is neither static nor passive. Through spatial practice, these elements are woven into dynamic configurations that influence how space is lived and experienced³. The border emerges as an active mechanism regulating flows—of people, goods, and information—while embedding routines and restrictions into the daily lives of those who inhabit its periphery. As Chris Rumford observes in *Seeing Like a Border*, the concept of the border has evolved, shifting from a fixed entity to a process of bordering⁴. This perspective raises critical questions: How are borders constituted, especially when viewed as ongoing processes rather than static lines? Where do these borders materialize in the physical landscapes? And who enacts these practices of bordering?

¹ Anders E.B. Blomqvist, "Economic Nationalizing in the Ethnic Borderlands of Hungary and Romania," (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2014), 187-198.

² Lefebvre Henri, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (England: Blackwell, 1991), 33.

³ *ibid.*, 39.

⁴ Corey Johnson, Reece Jones, Anssi Paasi, Louise Amoore, Alison Mountz, Mark Salter, and Chris Rumford, "Interventions on Rethinking 'the Border' in Border Studies," *Political Geography* 30, no. 2 (2011), 68.

A device of surveillance

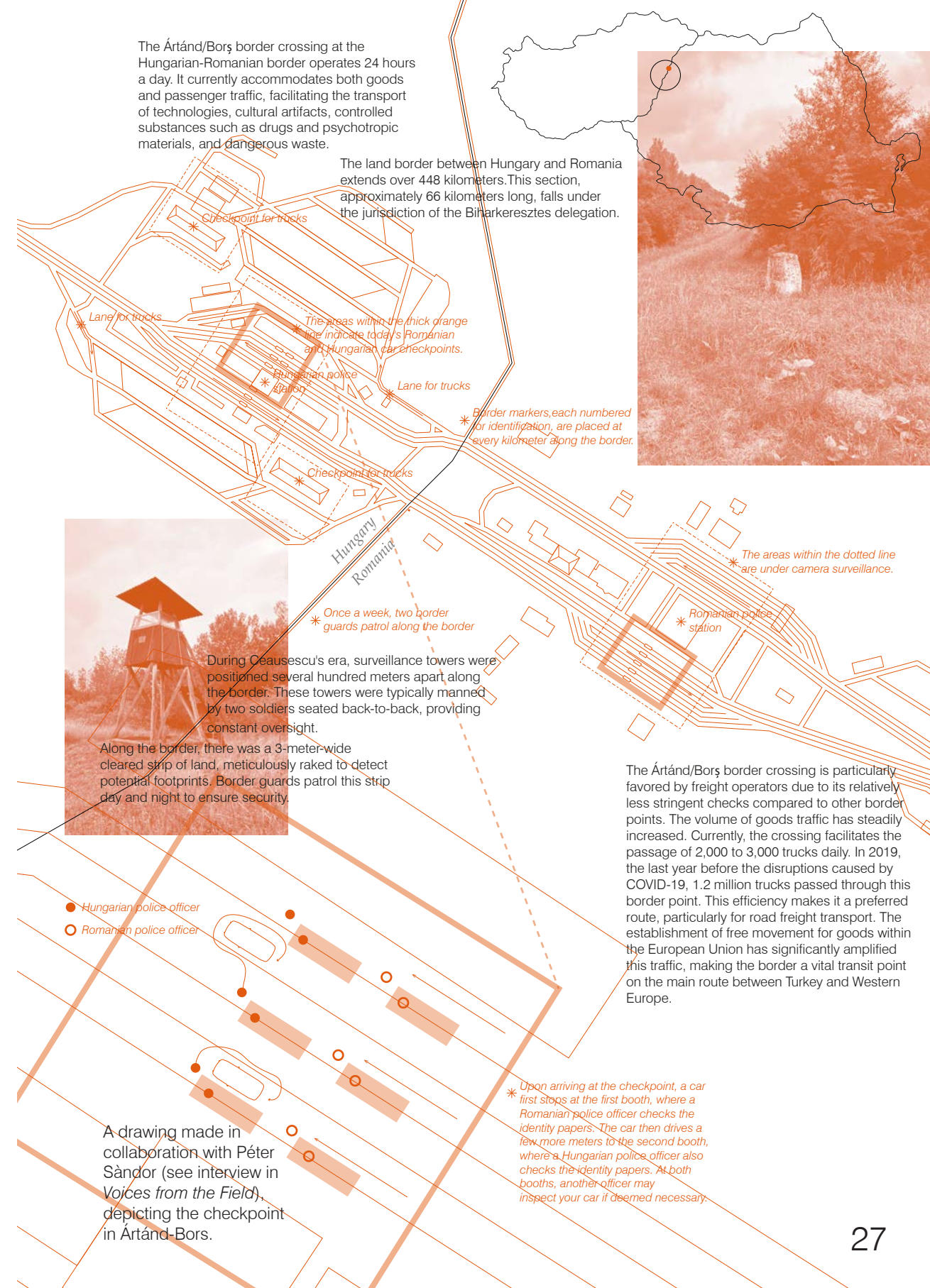
In *Theory of the Border*, Thomas Nail examines the multifaceted nature of bordering processes, critiquing the tendency to attribute the act of bordering solely to the state. Instead, he emphasizes that borders are deeply embedded within the social fabric, illustrating how mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion extend beyond the purview of sovereign authority. The power of borders emerges from a complex interplay of social dynamics, including the everyday management of border technologies, the collective social responses—whether acceptance or resistance—to their presence, and the subjective decisions of individuals tasked with their enforcement⁵. As such, bordering processes are shaped by a broad spectrum of societal forces, far exceeding centralized control. The techniques employed in border regulation derive their efficacy not only from technological or institutional frameworks but also from the degree to which they are legitimized and reinforced by societal consent and practices.

Rosi Braidotti, in her essay *Faces and Places: Nomadic Subjects in Pictures*, explores the duality inherent in the mobility of people, images, data, capital, and information in the modern era. While digital networks promise connection and fluidity, this mobility stands in stark contrast to the lived realities of social segregation, migration, and surveillance⁶. Borders serve as intersections where this duality becomes most palpable. Braidotti underscores the materiality of these interactions, where bodies encounter the weight of border infrastructures, often clashing with the seemingly immaterial promises of a globalized digital world⁷. The checkpoint exemplifies this friction—literally, as delays and barriers to movement, and figuratively, as a site of power negotiation between those enforcing borders and those navigating them. This layer explores the border's materialization as a dispositif of control in the Crisana region. It examines the specific practices, challenges, and power dynamics at play. By situating these insights within a broader theoretical framework, it highlights how local bordering processes both reflect and reshape the interplay between state authority, social forces, and individual experiences.

5
Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 5-6.

6
Rosi Braidotti, "Faces and Places: Nomadic Subjects in Pictures," in *Nomadic Subject: Female Identity Through the Images of Five Italian Women Photographers*, ed. Vittoria Pavesi (NERO, 2020), 23.

7
ibid., 23.



A world without outside

Historically, borders have represented the edges of sovereignty, marking the limits of a state’s jurisdiction and leaving beyond them an undefined outside ripe for exploration, conquest, or exile⁸. However, in the contemporary world, where every expanse is claimed, mapped, or governed, the notion of an outside has collapsed. In this transformed landscape, borders are no longer simply edges of territory but dynamic thresholds where the state’s sovereign power engages with perceived threats, anomalies, or exceptions within its realm⁹. Lucía García de Jalón Oyarzun, in her thesis *Exception and the Rebel Body: The Political as Generator of a Minor Architecture*, explores this tension as one not merely of demarcation but of control and inclusion¹⁰. Drawing from Michel Foucault, she explains that this evolution signifies a shift from expelling threats beyond borders to internalizing and governing them through biopolitical mechanisms (The History of Sexuality, 1976)¹¹. The disappearance of an external outside reflects the intensification of control within the state’s boundaries. Spaces once characterized by their ambiguity and resistance to governance—such as no-man’s-lands—have been replaced by a seamless grid of property and jurisdiction. Every fragment of the globe is absorbed into a network of ownership, leaving no room for unclaimed space. This reconfiguration does not eliminate the concept of exclusion; rather, it transforms it into a localized and internalized operation. Borders become tools for managing flows—of people, goods, and information—within an interconnected, globalized framework. With no territorial outside left to exile the unwanted, contemporary governance redirects exclusion to the internal margins. These margins, however, are not purely geographical. They are socially and politically constructed spaces, such as urban fringes, refugee camps, or even digital exclusion zones, where sovereignty enforces its limits indirectly through neglect or over-surveillance¹².

8
Lucía García de Jalón Oyarzun, “Bodies as borders” (Class Lecture, Border Forensics, Ecole Polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), February 28, 2024).

9
ibid.

10
Lucía García de Jalón Oyarzun, “Excepción y cuerpo rebelde: lo político como generador de una arquitectónica menor” (PhD diss., Brunel University London, 2017), 175-177.

11
ibid., 175-177.

12
ibid., 175-177.

Through fieldwork and interviews, the notion of internal outsides emerged in varied and tangible forms. For instance, the environmental degradation caused by a chemical industry spilling toxic waste near a border in Biharia illustrates how the materiality of borders manifests differently¹³. Another example is the deportation of Romani families, who were offered homes along the border by the state. Abandoned houses in villages near the border were purchased, then given to these families¹⁴. Such practices highlight the ways borders materialize and operate—not just as physical demarcations but as tools of socio-political stratification, shaping exclusion and inclusion in multifaceted ways.

A place of asymmetry

Borders, seen alternately as barriers or resources, highlight the inherent asymmetries between neighboring regions, shaping interstitial spaces ripe for reinterpretation and exploitation. Legal, economic, and administrative discrepancies act as fractures, carving out zones of both tension and opportunity. Within these spaces, the actions of local actors reveal the intricate interplay between systems divided by the border. The geographer Michel Foucher captures this dynamic, noting that disparate regimes do not merely coexist—they actively reshape human behavior and spatial logic¹⁵. At the Crisana border, for example, residents cross daily to access lower taxes, higher wages, or more lenient regulations, showcasing the adaptability that defines such regions. This pattern of cross-border commuting follows a rhythm of predictable unpredictability—ever in motion, yet deeply rooted in the structures that shape its flow. Beyond the visible asymmetries, these zones often nurture complementarity, a phenomenon that Andrzej Jakubowski identifies as central to cross-border economic growth. Rather than reinforcing divides, disparities can spark symbiotic relationships¹⁶. When flexible regulations align with entrepreneurial ideas, whole industries grow by taking advantage of the legal gaps at borders. These zones become

13
Information gathered during the interviews

14
ibid.

15
Michel Foucher, *L’obsession des frontières* (Perrin, 2007), 24.

16
Andrzej Jakubowski, “Asymmetry of Economic Development of Cross-Border Areas in the Context of Perception of Near-Border Location,” *Regional Barometer. Analyses & Prognoses*, no.16 (2018), 125.

magnets for delocalized activities—outsourcing, tax havens, and logistics networks designed to navigate or exploit these structural differences¹⁷. The interplay between asymmetry and complementarity in border economies underscores their resilience, as they adapt to shifting policies and regulations, fostering a dynamic interdependence between the systems they connect.

Maria, a restaurant owner near the border, embodies the dual forces of opportunity and challenge that define these spaces. Her business, drawing customers from both sides, thrives on the permeability of the border. Yet, this same fluidity is fragile, dependent on ever-changing regulations from Hungary and Romania, as well as the asymmetries between them¹⁸. Her story echoes the themes of Wolfgang and Christoph Lauenstein's short film *Balance*, where shifting weights destabilize a shared platform¹⁹. The film, a metaphor for interconnected territories, reminds us that these spaces are far from static. They demand constant negotiation, adaptation, and equilibrium—a notion that resonates with the broader understanding of borders as dynamic sites of convergence and divergence.

To inhabit the amplitude of borders is to embrace their contradictions and possibilities. These regions defy conventional notions of fixed spaces, acting as prisms that refract the latent asymmetries of national systems. Borders simultaneously define and dissolve, challenging us to reconsider their potential as spaces of agency, adaptation, and coexistence.

17
Michel Foucher,
L'obsession des frontières
(Perrin, 2007), 24.

18
Detailed interview in *Voices
from the Field*, 5-7.

19
Christoph Lauenstein
and Wolfgang Lauenstein,
dir., *Balance* (GHK Kassel
Hochschule für Bildende
Künste Hamburg, 1989).

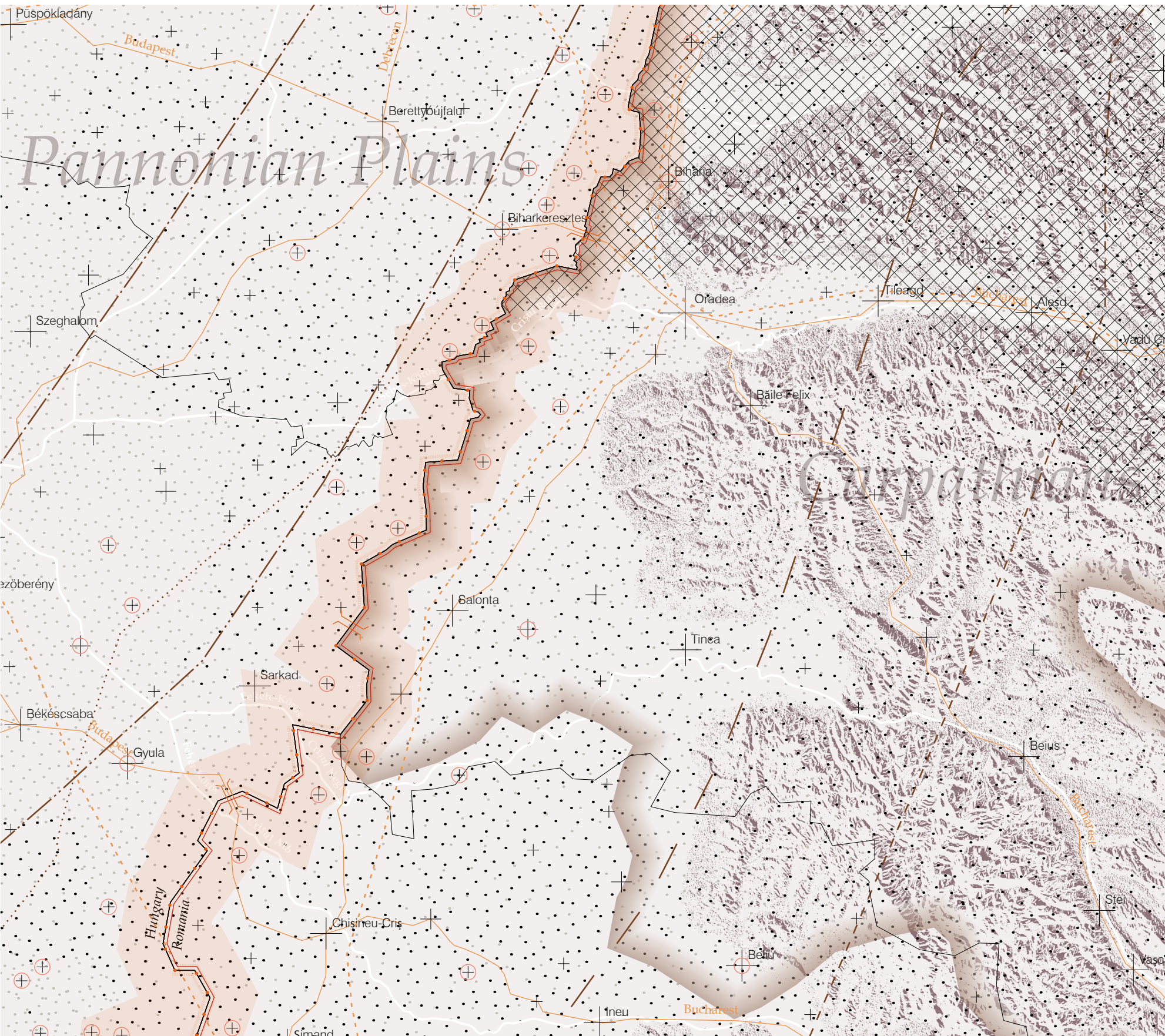


Line in matter

Scale 1:200 000

North ↑

- River
- a* Natural Region
- a** City name
- City with over 100 000 inhabitants
- City with 50 000 - 100 000 inhabitants
- + Village with 10 000 - 50 000 inhabitants
- + Village with less than 10 000 inhabitants
- Main road
- Boundary of State
- Boundary of County
- Border proposal of Romania
- Border proposal of France
- Border proposal of Britain
- Border proposal of Italy
- Border proposal of the USA
- Railway (as of 1918)
- Territorial gains for Hungary (1940–1944)
- Hungarian as mother tongue
- Romanian as mother tongue
- Cultural Zone
- Border of Europe until 2007
- Checkpoint
- Dike
- Boundary Marker
- * Under Article 41 of the Schengen Convention, police officers can chase someone across the border into another Schengen country if the two countries share a land border.
- Scope of the Article 41 of the Schengen Agreement
- * One of the interviewees cataloged the villages and towns where the Hungarian or Romanian state purchased houses or land allocated them to Romani communities (1960–1980).
- City or town with allocated housing for Romani citizens



Stories of the line

The border, in its multiplicity, encapsulates a semantic richness that extends far beyond the mere delineation of space. Terms such as “boundary” and “frontier” evoke not only the material and political dimensions of division but also a spectrum of symbolic, social, and epistemological meanings. Beyond its geographical rigidity, the border emerges as a site of negotiation and transformation. In *L’obsession des frontières*, Michel Foucher reminds us that the French word “frontière” originates from the adjective derived from the noun “front”. To go to the frontier meant to position oneself where the enemy was expected to appear¹. By definition, the frontier is an open space for expansion, a mobile “front” in continuous formation. In Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad, lived space encapsulates this symbolic and experiential dimension. It is the realm where the abstract intersects with the material, and where everyday practices imbue places with cultural and emotional significance². Lived space resists rigid theoretical categorization; its meanings emerge in the subtle, often unquantifiable ways it is experienced. At the border, this dimension becomes particularly charged, as the border operates simultaneously as a marker of separation and a site of interaction. It is a place where narratives collide and intertwine, reflecting the tensions and possibilities inherent in the border itself. These narratives do not merely describe the border; they actively shape how it is perceived and lived. Through stories, symbols, and memories, borders are transformed into spaces of belonging, exclusion, and identity. By foregrounding these lived experiences, the chapter seeks to unravel the complex interplay between the border’s symbolic resonance and its material reality.

What is a border?

The notion of the border, when studied, unfolds as a complex and layered construct, as explored in Etienne Balibar’s *Politics and the Other Scene*. Balibar identifies the border’s polysemic essence, asserting its varying significances depending on individual interactions. A border, therefore, is

1 Michel Foucher, *L’obsession des frontières* (Perrin, 2007), 19.
2 Christian Schmid, *Henri Lefebvre and the Theory of the Production of Space*, trans. Zachary Murphy King (Verso, 2022), 283-291.

never universally identical³. For some, borders function as a mere formality, a privilege of mobility, to be crossed without hindrance or resistance. For others, however, it morphs into a barrier, a zone of perpetual return and expulsion. Here, the border operates as a static spatiotemporal threshold, serving not solely as a divider but as a mechanisms that actively differentiate individuals according to class, status, and mobility. This differentiation is enforced not only by legal systems but also through the political, economic, and social power structures that shape the border’s function⁴. The same border that signifies freedom and mobility for one individual can, for another, represent exclusion, confinement, and systemic violence. Tatiana Bilbao’s reflections in *Where is the Border?* provide a compelling framework for understanding these dynamics. Through an interrogation of the Mexico-US border, she demonstrates how transborder networks challenge the rigidity of territorial demarcations⁵. Her visualization, which reimagines borders as fluid and multi-dimensional, is inspired by Guy Debord’s *Naked City* (1957), emphasizing the importance of centering the body and its trajectories as essential to the experience of space. Bilbao emphasizes the embodied experience of space, suggesting that borders, like cities, are lived spaces etched with memory and narrative. This chapter adopts a similar approach, reexamining the border’s essence through fragments of interviews conducted during fieldwork. These testimonies encapsulate the border as a site of dynamic and subjective realities. Interviews and cartographic elements converge, revealing the border not as a fixed entity but as a terrain where social, political, and economic vectors collide. The resulting layer on the map, akin to Bilbao’s method, invites a reading of the border as a continuum, shaped by individual trajectories.

3 Balibar Etienne, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner (Verso, 2002), 77.
4 ibid., 80.
5 Bilbao Tatiana and Ayesha S. Ghosh, “Where is the border?,” *e-flux Architecture*, (2020).

“A pale star points to Zágon, on whose crest
 The snow-wreaths rest;
 Beyond the mountains Transylvania lies,
 Whither spring flies
 In all her pomp of bud and blossom drest.
 And, like a gold-winged butterfly, my thought
 Those flowers hath sought,
 On pinions of sweet memory; wherefore
 Unto that shore
 Could not time bring me, that those blossoms
 brought?”

József Lévy, “Kelemen,” in *Magyar Poems*, ed. and trans. Nora de Vallyi and Dorothy M. Stuart (E. Marlborough & Co., 1911), 89.

Homeland

The relationship between territory and identity is constructed through the interplay of many factors such as history, geography, and cultural imagination. In the case of Transylvania with Hungary and Romania, this relationship is acutely visible, shaped by centuries of shifting borders, political upheavals, and national narratives that have tied identity to the land. The concept of national belonging in this context is deeply tied to the landscape, which has been aestheticized and imbued with symbolic meaning⁶. The physical characteristics of a state’s territory—its mountains, rivers, and plains—transcend geography, evolving into a “national landscape” that embodies the nation’s identity, as illustrated in József Lévy Kelemen’s poem⁷. In this transformation, the land is elevated to the status of a homeland, a sacred space where natural beauty is intertwined with the nation’s history, struggles, and victories. This relationship is not just historical but emotional, as the land becomes a repository of collective memory and cultural pride⁸. Hungarian national discourse often frames Transylvania as a sacred part of the homeland, where historical narratives of Magyar conquest and settlement merge with cultural achievements⁹. This elevation of the land to a romantic ideal is seen in depictions of its landscapes as inherently Hungarian. These elements are celebrated not just for their beauty but for their supposed embodiment of the Hungarian spirit. Maps, literature, and art depict Transylvania as an irreplaceable piece of the nation, its mountains and plains serving as metonyms for the Hungarian homeland. This process is evident in the map-as-logo phenomenon, where the shape of Greater Hungary is used as a symbol of national unity and loss. The territory, stripped of its geographical context, becomes a reproducible emblem of the nation, reinforcing the idea that the land and the nation are inseparable. Romanian narratives, however, emphasize the region as a cradle of Romanian identity, celebrating its Dacian roots and its historical continuity as part of the Romanian state. The physical landscape becomes a symbol

6
Olivier Gillet, “L’histoire de la Transylvanie: le différend historiographique hungaro-roumain,” *Revue belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, no. 75 (1997), 458-463.

7
József Lévy, “Kelemen,” in *Magyar Poems*, ed. and trans. Nora de Vallyi and Dorothy M. Stuart (E. Marlborough & Co., 1911), 89.

8
Zombory Máté, *Maps of Remembrance - Space, belonging and politics of memory in eastern Europe*, trans. Richard Robinson (L’Harmattan, 2011), 27.

9
Olivier Gillet, “L’histoire de la Transylvanie: le différend historiographique hungaro-roumain,” *Revue belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, no. 75 (1997), 458-463.

of endurance and legitimacy, with landmarks such as the Carpathians seen as guardians of Romanian identity¹⁰. These competing claims illustrate how territory is transformed into a symbolic space, where identity is contested and affirmed through the appropriation of the land's natural and historical features¹¹.

Transylvania, a name meaning “on the other side of the woods”, has been referred to by many different names throughout its history. These names, drawn from a tapestry of languages, cultures, and contexts, reveal the complex and layered identity of the region. Each name reflects a perspective, a historical moment, or a relationship with the land, encapsulating the ever-shifting narratives that have shaped Transylvania's story over time. This layer on the map invites us to explore some of these names, as they appear in poetry, literature, and the words of those who live near it.

Otherness

Jean-François Staszak, in his work *Other/Otherness*, emphasizes that the concept of Otherness is less about the inherent qualities of the Other and more about the perspective of the one who perceives¹². The act of defining the Other is rooted in a point of view—a projection of distinctions that serves to delineate and maintain difference. This process of categorization is central to the human experience, as we construct identities through binary logics: the Self and the Other. The creation of Otherness unfolds through the application of criteria that divide and group, forming boundaries between “us” and “them”¹³. The Self and the Other exist only in relation to one another, each defined and reinforced through this dynamic opposition. Borders, in particular, play a crucial role in this distinction. They possess the power to not only maintain but amplify the separation from the Other, legitimizing and materializing these divisions. This power of borders rests heavily on the ability of discourse to impose its categories. However, as Staszak notes, this imposition does not rely solely on the internal coherence or logic of the discourse itself but is deeply tied to the political,

10
Olivier Gillet, “L’histoire de la Transylvanie: le différend historiographique hongaro-roumain,” *Revue belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, no.75 (1997), 458-463.

11
Zombory Máté, *Maps of Remembrance - Space, belonging and politics of memory in eastern Europe*, trans. Richard Robinson (L’Harmattan, 2011), 27.

12
Jean-François Staszak, “Other/Otherness,” in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. Rob Kitchin et Nigel Thrift (Oxford : Elsevier Science, 2009), 1.

13
ibid., 2.

social, and economic power of those who articulate it¹⁴. In this way, borders are both the result and the instrument of power, inscribing difference into the fabric of space and sustaining the binary logics that shape the way we navigate the world.

Building on this perspective, Vanessa Lacaille and Mounir Ayoub explore the notion of otherness within the framework of their project *Orae – Experience on the Border* with Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary. They approach the border as a space where differentiation from the Other occurs as much as confrontation. This duality challenges conventional readings of borders as fixed, impermeable lines of division. Instead, the border becomes a site of negotiation—a liminal space where differences can either be exacerbated or rendered blurry, destabilizing the very categories that maintain opposition¹⁵. Through this lens, the border is neither wholly an instrument of separation nor entirely a place of cohesion; it oscillates between conflict and coexistence. It reveals the potential to be a transformative space—one where the relational nature of the Self and the Other can be renegotiated and reimagined. The ambiguity of the border thus reflects the fluidity of identities themselves: at times, boundaries sharpen distinctions, while at others, they allow for moments of connection. It is in these moments of negotiation, where difference is confronted yet questioned, that the border transcends its binary function. Building on these theoretical perspectives, the insights shared by Irene in her interview are particularly relevant to the notions discussed in this chapter¹⁶. Irene’s reflections delve deeply into the lived experience of borders, offering a nuanced perspective on how these spaces function as sites of both separation and connection. By foregrounding Irene’s voice, we can further explore how borders shape the identities of those who navigate them, embodying the dynamic interplay between the Self and the Other.

14
Jean-François Staszak, “Other/Otherness,” in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. Rob Kitchin et Nigel Thrift (Oxford : Elsevier Science, 2009), 3.

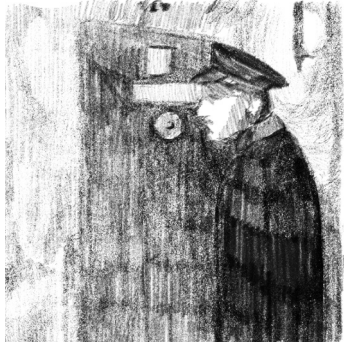
15
Mounir Ayoub, Vanessa Lacaille, Fabrice Aragno and Pierre Szczepski, *oræ – Experiences on the Border Le Guide* (Lars Müller Publishers, 2021), 228.

16
Detailed interview in *Voices from the Field*, 8-10.

Conclusion

Crisana, throughout my research, has emerged as more than a site of division. It becomes a space where binary understandings dissolve, replaced by the fluidity of encounters, crossings, and shared narratives. In the book *Architecture of Resistance*, contributors propose a view of borders as spaces of meaningful overlap, where potential interaction and exchange have the power to subvert their traditional divisive roles. When spatial practitioners engage critically with all sides of the border, a new design methodology emerges—one rooted in acceptance, equality, and opportunity rather than exclusion¹. Borders are spaces that perform power and yet they can become spaces where that power can be resisted, contested, and reimagined. This broader understanding turns borders into tools for exploring contemporary territorial challenges, allowing us to look at the fringes of the world as lenses for larger societal dynamics. What exists at the margins therefore holds the capacity to become a beginning². By rethinking borders as dynamic, relational spaces, we open pathways for understanding their inherent complexities and representations. This perspective enables those who inhabit these zones to reclaim agency and craft their own collective narratives—rooted in both the specificity of place and the connections it fosters. This approach challenges conventional views of borders and instead, it presents borders as a place where the Self and the Other might intersect, blur, and redefine one another.

To close, one might reflect on the snapshots from Jean Genet's *A Song of Love*, where two imprisoned lovers share smoke through a straw passed through a hole in the concrete wall dividing their cells³. The disruption within the thick wall comes as a possibility as its impermeability is challenged. Some of these disruptions perpetuate systems of control—as seen in the gaze of the surveilling police officer (images on the left). Yet for others, it offers a moment of connection and defiance (images on the right). The more such disruptions occur, the greater the potential for fostering change—one that reimagines barriers not as divisions, but as opportunities for collective transformation.



¹ Sioli Angeliki, Nishat Awan, and Kristopher Palagi, eds., *Architectures of Resistance - Negotiating Borders Through Spatial Practices* (Leuven university Press, 2024), 277.

² Mounir Ayoub, Vanessa Lacaille, Fabrice Aragno and Pierre Szczepski, oræ – *Experiences on the Border Le Guide* (Lars Müller Publishers, 2021), 17.

³ Jean Genet, dir., *Un chant d'amour* (Argos Films, 1950).



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GO TIR VIGNETTE VIGNETTE





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