



Article scientifique

Article

2006

Accepted version

Open Access

This is an author manuscript post-peer-reviewing (accepted version) of the original publication. The layout of the published version may differ .

Embodied geographies, naturalised boundaries, and uncritical geopolitics in La Frontière Invisible

Fall, Juliet Jane

How to cite

FALL, Juliet Jane. Embodied geographies, naturalised boundaries, and uncritical geopolitics in La Frontière Invisible. In: Environment and planning. D, Society & space, 2006, vol. 24, n° 5, p. 653–669. doi: 10.1068/d3704

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:667>

Publication DOI: [10.1068/d3704](https://doi.org/10.1068/d3704)

Fall, Juliet (2006) Embodied geographies, naturalised boundaries, and uncritical geopolitics in *La Frontière Invisible*. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24 (5). pp. 653–669.

Embodied geographies, naturalised boundaries and *uncritical* geopolitics in *La Frontière Invisible*

Juliet J. Fall, Geography Discipline, The Open University¹.

Abstract

This article explores embodiment and spatiality by discussing the example of a conflict between competing representations of landscapes and the female body in the two volumes of the comic books *La Frontière Invisible* (Schuiten & Peeters 2002 & 2004). This piece of fiction deals specifically and explicitly with a reassessment of the gaze in the production of knowledge by examining maps as tools of power, control and colonisation. However, despite an apparent desire to reject reactionary political approaches, the authors seem to associate the naturalised (female) body with (naturalised) geopolitical scenarios by fetishising the body through complex discursive transcodings between women and nature. In contrast to this, this paper suggests considering the body as a site and space of resistance to (political) imposition. Drawing on both feminist geography and critical geopolitics, it suggests an alternative way of considering the consequences of embodied geographies for cartography by examining the links between naturalised bodies and naturalised political boundaries. The main argument is that the body, by posing an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to regular ways of producing cartographic knowledge entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription of spatial discourses and the creation of an alternative, more ethical cartography. This ethical cartography is rooted in embodied recalcitrance to imposed inscriptions associated with hegemonic positions.

Key words

Body, boundary, embodiment, feminism, geopolitics, map, natural boundary

Introduction and argument

This article contributes to the ongoing debates about embodiment and spatiality (Blunt & Rose 1994; Rose 1993; Longhurst 1997), exploring the links between embodiment that is “discursively produced, as inscribed, and as representation” (Longhurst 1997) and its links to mapping and cartography. As bodies are explicitly hidden in the production of geographical knowledge, the constitutive relationships that exist between bodies and places have become objects of study, building links between political geography and feminist perspectives (Staeheli, Kofman, Peake 2004), working towards connecting what Hyndman has called “two solitudes within the discipline” (Hyndman 2004 : 184). I draw on the literature on embodiment and critical geopolitics by discussing an example of a conflict between competing images, implying contests of power and concurrent resistance to represent the materiality of physical geographical objects but also the “equally material force of discursive borders between an idealized Self and a demonized Other” (Ó Tuathail 1996 : 15) and its consequence

¹ This piece was written during a postdoctoral fellowship at the Department of Geography, University of British Columbia.

for cartography. The conflict centres on the representation of landscapes and the female body in the recent comic book *La Frontière Invisible*, written and illustrated by the Belgian pair François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters (Schuiten & Peeters 2002 & 2004). This piece of fiction deals specifically and explicitly with a reassessment of the gaze in the production of knowledge by examining maps as tools of power, control and colonisation, illustrated by the story of Roland de Cremer, a young cartographer. These themes are linked to a complex discursive transcoding between women and nature, as well as with different specific ways of experiencing, seeing and representing space.

At first glance, this book appears to question what counts as legitimate knowledge, contrasting disembodied cartographies to embodied experiences of space. A closer reading, however, reveals many apparent paradoxes in how these themes are treated. This text has therefore been chosen specifically because it is messy, contradictory and at times inconsistent. By exploring these interstices, the discursive borders are teased out between embodiment / disembodiment, as well as the gendered mind / body dualism (Longhurst 1997) in order to suggest an alternative way of considering the consequences of 'embodied geographies' for the practice of mapping. In order to do this, the body is taken seriously as a site and space of resistance to imposition (Gregory 1994 in Longhurst 1997 : 493), focussing on practice and action rather than simply on representation. The paper is structured in four parts, starting with the story of *La Frontière Invisible* which sets the scene for the subsequent discussion. This is followed by the context and debates that have existed around the book, using extracts from interviews of the authors that appeared in a variety of newspapers to complement and contrast the themes appearing within the book itself. A discussion of the four maps that appear within the book then explores how each is linked to a particular character within the story reflecting and embodying different practices of cartography. The final more theoretical section builds on existing literature in order to lay out further paths for exploring embodied geographies and cartographies, examining more critically the link made between naturalised bodies and naturalised political boundaries.

The main argument developed throughout is that the body, by posing an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to regular ways of producing cartographic knowledge entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription of spatial discourses and the creation of an alternative, more ethical cartography. This ethical cartography is rooted in embodied recalcitrance to imposed inscriptions associated with hegemonic positions. However, if embraced unproblematically, such an approach risks associating the naturalised (female) body with (naturalised) geopolitical scenarios by fetishising the body. Thus rather than suggesting alternative political scenarios, such a position becomes politically reactionary and counterproductive.

The story

The narrator and main character in the story is Roland de Cremer, a young cartographer struggling to make sense of his new job at the *Centre de Cartographie*, a large spherical building in the middle of an empty desert, drawn to suggest a globe. Roland is a young, inexperienced cartographer, roped in to work before having formally finished his studies, taking on the job his great-uncle used to hold. Traditional methods represented by old Monsieur Paul, the main curator of maps, are slowly being replaced by 'modern technology' in the shape of large buzzing machines that automatically and 'scientifically' produce maps. The story begins with Monsieur Paul showing Roland the huge three-dimensional model of the border region of their country, the Grande Sodrovnje, that is being constructed in one huge room.

This model is the end result of the interpretation of thousands of landscape photographs, lovingly analysed one by one. Roland is welcomed by Monsieur Paul as the perfect successor, learning how the model ritualistically inscribes and constructs the ‘true’ contours of the country, through painstaking attention to detail. As each tree, each hill and more importantly each political artefact are built on the model, drawing from the meticulous work of the cartographers poring over photographs and archival material, knowledge of the ‘authentic’ borders of the country is inscribed and materialised. This huge project is however being slowly jeopardised, replaced by forms of cartography serving military might. “Interpretation! ... But that is precisely what we have to get rid of. It is high time for us to attain objective measurements by avoiding all unnecessary intermediaries”¹, says one character (Schuiten & Peeters 2002 : 32). For in the background, the pseudo-Slavic Maréchal Radisic, the leader of the country, is covertly enacting expansionist ambitions, planning to spread out the boundaries of the country. The *Centre de Cartographie* is crucially important in carrying out his political propaganda, by ‘modernising’ and replacing the old guard like Monsieur Paul with a new generation of cartographers, including Roland, as well as new machines producing maps automatically.

The first volume of the book, published two years before the second, seemed to offer a promisingly subversive slant contrasting with the opposing approaches to cartography and territorial politics represented by Monsieur Paul and the Maréchal. In parallel to these divergent cartographies, Roland meets Shkōdra, a prostitute and refugee in the city, when visiting the local *Club* with a colleague, a place designed for the pleasures of men. His fascination with her body seems to reflect a different approach to space and territory, an intimate connection to embodiment. She is presented as both an initiator and muse, as well as a mysterious object to be appropriated and conquered. As he explores her body – and as the authors draw increasingly languorous pictures of the naked woman – Roland is seen to change, haunted by a mysterious birthmark on her back that looks deceptively like a map, fascinated by what seems like a much more sensual approach to the world than his technical training prepared him for. Roland fleetingly grows aware of the political dimension of spatial knowledge and the corresponding responsibility of a cartographer.

Back from leave, he discovers that the *Centre* is being turned upside down: the old generation is quite literally excluded, institutionally and spatially, as Monsieur Paul is confined to going increasingly mad in the cellars. The army is controlling the *Centre*, and soldiers suggest the running of it should never have been left to civilians. As chaos takes over the Cartographic Centre, Shkōdra’s former prostitute colleagues are employed as a last resort to replace discarded former employees. In a strange atmosphere of paranoia, Roland comes to believe that faced with the wicked Maréchal’s ambitions of annexing his neighbours, Shkōdra’s body holds some sort of incarnated original essence and truth. The lines appearing on her body closely echo one of the old maps that Roland salvaged after the forced take-over in the Cartographic Centre. Shkōdra’s personal history of displacement and implied forced prostitution, her position as a victim of aggressive territorial politics, seems to contrast with an almost Messianic role as carrier of truth. Following impending chaos and the destruction of all the old paper maps Monsieur Paul took such pride in, her body is considered by Roland to be the sole remaining clue to the ‘real’ boundaries of their country. In the face of Roland’s confusion about what is going on, the Maréchal declares: “As to your stories about boundaries, I fear you haven’t realised to what extent they are anachronistic. You are still stuck at the wall, aren’t you? (...) The boundary is constantly moving, it is changing so fast as to become invisible”² (Schuiten & Peeters 2004 : 67).

Roland plans to escape the political upheavals and convinces Shkōdra that she is in mortal danger if she stays in the city, compromised by the map on her body. As they flee from the Maréchal, passing through parts of the country Roland only knew from the comfort of his office, he realises that the errors present on the model have translated into human tragedies on the ground. The border, rather than a cartographic convention, has turned into an immense impregnable wall displacing terrified people. The model and ‘reality’ have merged, something that Roland only realises when he is trying to escape, coming up against a huge wall slicing towns into two. During their flight, Roland uses the country as his map in order to escape, decoding the landscape as he passes through it. In a transgressive twist, they flee along the top of the wall, using it as an escape route. When they are finally caught, Shkōdra is undressed and humiliated in public by Roland in order to show her birthmark to the Maréchal. After this violent act, she refuses to speak to him, telling the Maréchal not to listen to Roland: “I am just the first woman he has known... He is inventing things”³. Instead of repenting, Roland’s main worry is that he has ruined his career.

Like Adam, led astray by a woman, he is banished. Roland regrets that during his time at the *Centre*, he only saw points, lines and border posts, while the reader sees only reflections of the female body in the drawings: the landscape takes on feminine forms as hills echo breasts, arms and hips. This theme of embodied landscape seems to build on the idea of Roland’s initiation into cartography as a double rite of passage, additionally exploring the hidden territory of the female body. The tale ends with Roland heading off into the distance, wondering if one day he might actually become a cartographer, having finally learnt how to look.

The context and debate around *La Frontière Invisible*

The interest of the bande dessinée format – basically a cartoon book for grown-ups, some of which attain cult-status – is that it is able to construct text on various levels, combining drawings, maps and the written word, as well as both dialogue and internal narrative. In *La Frontière Invisible*, maps hold centre stage, both as a subject of the story and as aesthetic objects, beautifully drawn and incorporated into the narrative, title pages and chapter headings. The tale abounds with spatial and cartographic metaphors, invoking real and imagined places.

It is commonplace to suggest that the nature of fiction allows it to be used as a tool of political critique, particularly by blurring ‘reality’ and representation by suggesting alternative political and spatial scenarios. Utopic and dystopic fantasy comics are of course classic examples of this negotiation of a fluid boundary between ‘facts’ and fiction. Ismail Kadaré, an Albanian author Schuiten has cited as an inspiration for *La Frontière Invisible* (Schuiten in Herbez 2002; see for instance Kadaré 1991, 2000), is clear in explaining the advantage of this, starting one book by saying that while “the events mentioned here have nothing to do with literature directly, they can only be understood from the literary point of view. No other perspective will give a clear picture, just as a pair of eyeglasses picked up at random will rarely suit the eyes of the person who tries them on” (Kadaré 1991 : 7). This blurring of the boundaries and the corresponding choice of point of view – explicit in the eyeglass metaphor – was even further explored and reinforced on publication of the second volume of *La Frontière Invisible*. The book was sold with a free folding-out map of the (imagined) Grande-Sodrovnje drawn by the authors but published and produced by the (very real and official) French *Institut Géographique National* (IGN), using its formal layout, format and logo. The book was considered by the IGN to be a tale that recognised the unique role of cartographers and was therefore worthy of celebration by a state institution – particularly as the map featured, in one corner, the (real) name of the city where the IGN’s main administration was located.

The Balkan-sounding names and the expansionist politics may invoke recent histories, yet the authors were at pains when promoting the books and during interviews not to reduce their tale to recent Yugoslav events. The non-specific geographical setting led many reviewers to jump to conclusions, comparing the character of the Maréchal to Slobodan Milosevic (Libiot 2004), and the location to Bosnia-Herzegovina (Herbez 2002) or Albania (Marcelli 2002). Shkōdra, the name of both the main female character and a divided town in the book, is equally a real place in Albania. Such choices were not innocent, as the tale was constructed explicitly as a political critique. In interviews, the two authors referred not only to Balkan history but also to the political context within Belgium, their own country. Other names conjured up existing cities (Porrentruy, Brüssel, Pahry) and imagined ones, some of which feature in other books in their series *Les Cités Obscures* (translated as *Cities of the Fantastic*). “Belgium’s tensions [were] created by sometimes arbitrary divisions. This [book] allows us to show how boundaries are constructed and destroyed within offices or military headquarters, far from realities on the ground”⁴ (Schuiten, quoted in Herbez 2002). Understanding this critique of the arbitrariness of boundaries is crucial to grasping the argument developed here: that while the authors seek to replace the arbitrary boundaries with more ‘appropriate’ ones, they in fact return to reified, politically-conservative approaches to space and place. They suggest that “our approach to boundaries is metaphoric: we emphasise the fact that divisions are often abstract rather than cultural. I am thinking for instance of the way in which Africa was carved up with a knife with terrible arrogance. The delimitation of boundaries is incredible. Yet despite that, maps remain a reference. In that way, the Cartography Centre is sort of the navel of the world”⁵ (Schuiten quoted in Marcelli 2002). Their fundamental idea is that there are ideal ‘cultural’ boundaries that, once identified, divide people appropriately. The terrible irony here, of course, is that this is presented by Schuiten and Peeters as a critique of geopolitics, as an alternative to aggressive nationalism. Yet this discourse on boundaries is perfectly in tune with spatial strategies of naturalised, reified boundaries and the naturalisation of partition. Furthermore, it is fully “consistent with the historical observation that partition is a colonial practice, one always made at third-party intervention and which fosters the violence it seeks to ameliorate” (Campbell 1999 : 398). These themes are well-known and well-rehearsed (Ó Tuathail 1996; see also Staeheli & Kofman 2004 for a critique of their gender-blindness). What is less commonplace and worth exploring is the link Schuiten and Peeters weave between such reified boundaries and female bodies, as they link women, nature and spatial politics.

Maps and mapmaking: four different maps

Cartography and map-making are central themes in the book, as four different sorts of map are interwoven in the tale, respectively mainly identified with one character. In this section, the four different maps are explored regarding their use of representation, bodies and scale. Building on Campbell’s earlier comment about mapping and colonial practices, the assertion that “maps were graphic tools of colonization, themselves colonizing spaces perceived as empty and uninscribed” (Blunt & Rose 1994 : 9) is considered in the light of four different cartographies: the old paper maps, the quasi life-size model, the automatic maps produced by machines and the map on Shkōdra’s body. While there is formally no strict hierarchy between the maps, they are presented here in the order they appear in the narrative. The distinct feeling of evolution, and the assumption that Shkōdra’s map holds some sort of original truth, is maintained by this idea of circularity: a return to an almost-forgotten essence. In this analysis, the embodied nature of the maps and their explicit links to the people or processes having created them is stressed.

The **first** maps are made up of a collection of old paper maps, parchments and photos, assumed to have quasi-magical qualities, representing a sort of objective ‘truth’. They are barely present, reduced to remnants floating around or fragments in discarded drawers, always at risk of being destroyed. In the second part of the story, when the army takes over control of the *Centre de Cartographie*, they are thrown away and only small bits can be salvaged by Roland. It is not clear who actually drew them in the first place, although Roland’s legendary great uncle is repeatedly invoked as part of the lineage of illustrious cartographers to have worked in and created the *Centre*. These maps therefore take on a quasi-legendary status: they reflect the ‘original’ essence of the country, the ‘true’ boundaries, constantly threatened. At the same time, they are almost immaterial and disincarnated.

The **second** map, initially identified with Monsieur Paul, is much more material, yet built from the information contained in the first maps. It consists of the large-scale model of the country, housed within the main room of the *Centre de Cartographie*. It constitutes the body of the building in a seemingly endless array of corridors, like a labyrinth. Built up of endless small parts slowly assembled with loving attention to detail, it was designed to be the embodiment of a careful, rational, scientific gaze on the world, enshrining materially once and for all the layout and boundaries of the country. Yet in line with the ironies of the geopolitical tradition, the so-called objectivism that emerges has its origins and works to serve deeply committed nationalists and imperialists. For the model allows the Maréchal to exercise his geopolitical gaze physically, deploying what Harley called the all-seeing eye that pervades cartography: the “spatial panopticon” (Harley 1989 : 8), “the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity” (Haraway 1991 in Hyndman 2004 : 174). He is able to stand above the model and survey it all. This will to power is akin to traditional geopolitical approaches such as those of Halford Mackinder, Nicolas Spykman and Karl Haushofer – as well as more recent ongoing nationalisms, including of course those of the recent Balkan wars. Monsieur Paul is thus an unwilling instrument of the Maréchal’s ambitions, allowing him to exercise Cartesian perspectivalism and its illusion of a detached viewing subject surveying a worldwide stage.

This figure of the large-scale model is of course nothing new and implicitly refers to a number of well-known fictional precedents, each playfully taking on the metaphor of the model on a scale of 1:1. In 1893, for example, Lewis Carroll penned the following dialogue, turning map-making on its head for the second time⁶:

“What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?”

“About six inches to the mile.”

“Only six inches!” exclaimed Mein Herr. “We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to a mile!”

“Have you used it much?” I enquired.

“It has never been spread out, yet”, said Mein Herr: “the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well” (Carroll orig. 1893, reprinted 1965 : 609).

This quotation is one of many examples of maps of the absurd, such as that later developed by Jorge Luis Borges who described the destiny of an alleged Map of the Empire, designed to be coextensive with the empire itself (Borges 1946)⁷. This map ends up abandoned, exposed to the wind and sun, floating around in shreds. In direct reference to this, the opening pages of *La Frontière Invisible* introduce Roland, struggling with his suitcase towards his new place of

work in a desert landscape surrounded by debris of maps. Likewise, Umberto Eco's delightful pastiche of Borges, also explores the link between 'reality' and representation in attempting to examine the scientific feasibility of designing such a map⁸:

*"The Empire carries out its most secret dreams of becoming invisible to outside enemies; although it also becomes invisible to itself. We would therefore have to imagine an empire that would become self-aware in a sort of transcendental ignorance of its own classificatory functions; but this would imply the existence of a map imbued with self-awareness that (were it possible) would transform it into the empire itself, as the empire would transfer all its power to the map"*⁹ (Eco 1996 : 98).

As Palsky has noted (Palsky 1999), Eco must have been aware of Carroll's earlier text quoted above, since he later reused images of angry farmers objecting to the sun being dimmed when the map was folded out. Since the function of conventional cartography is to transform space into a legible, ordered territory, these delightful pastiches turn this principle on its head, creating confusion by saturation. Like Kadaré, Schuiten and Peeters, these authors use fiction to tease out elements for serious critique. Carroll's, Borges' and Eco's maps all use scale – the reduction between the real measured distance on the ground and the represented distance (Ferras & Hussy 1991 : 209) – to make their points about the illusions of objectivity. Maps, it has been said many times, are cultural texts, not mirrors, which construct the world rather than reproduce it (Harley 1989, 2001, see also Woods 1992 in Paasi 1996 : 20) – even in cases when the whole point is to rebuild the world 'accurately' on a different scale. Yet for Monsieur Paul, accuracy is everything. When the employees are rushed to finish the model before the Maréchal comes to visit, Monsieur Paul is horrified to see that the building is being done hurriedly, with women filling in the model with random objects to make it look nice: "Mountains and bits of forest are being stuck any old where, just like that, in order to fill it in!"¹⁰ (Schuiten & Peeters 2002 : 48). The irony, and latent critique, is that this illusion of reality ends up being produced specifically to permit the imperialist gaze, the so-called objective view from nowhere.

The **third** set of maps, associated from the start with the Maréchal, are produced by the automatic machines. The wicked expansionist ambitions of the Maréchal are reflected in his use of technology: these are machines directly serving personal ambition. These are presented as being the ultimate unethical maps, in which – to use Harley's words – "the cartographer is relegated to becoming a robotic arm of an institution or commercial patron" (Harley 2001 : 204) creating a design masterpiece that is merely "a projection of an unethical landscape in whose making we have no part and for whose social consequences we have abrogated responsibility" (Harley 2001 : 205). The loss of critical observation and interpretation (Schuiten in Herbez 2002) are recurrent themes in the book, as confusion and political opportunism take over and machines go mad, producing incorrect information that is nevertheless used while all the old maps are thrown away. The two authors mentioned in several interviews (Herbez 2002; Marcelli 2002) that they identified personally, as graphic artists, with the fate of cartographers overtaken and replaced by inappropriate technologies, as well as with the corresponding loss of a critical informed vision [*regard*] on the world. These automatic maps directly address this issue, endlessly churning out alternative, expanded representations of the imperialist ambitions of the Maréchal. The image, however, is hardly new. It suggests a rather banal tale of Promethean fear, with old maps attaining near-legendary status, incarnating 'truth' as the transition to 'modernity' takes place.

In contrast, the **fourth** map, on Shkōdra's body, is much more intriguing. Throughout the book, the ideal of maps as the result of rational and largely disembodied practices of (male) science (Longhurst 1997), as expressed in the Maréchal's panopticon and automatic machines, is nuanced and contrasted by the materiality and physicality of the map on Shkōdra's body. Unlike the other women in the Club, Shkōdra initially does not willingly take off her clothes. When Roland is finally able to undress her, he is entranced by the map etched on her lower back that appears to show the Northern section and corresponding boundary of the Grande-Sodrovnie. When he finds the corresponding paper map in the *Centre de Cartographie*, its title is *Mysterium Magnum*, echoing Roland's loss of innocence in his discovery of the female body: his coming of age both as a cartographer and as a man. It is a classic tale illustration of geographies of passages: "a journey through time and space, (...) a journey of personal discovery" (Teather 1999 : 1). In direct contrast to his professional training, Roland de Cremer discovers a more intimate, physical way of experiencing the world. There is however some doubt about the nature of this map: it is referred to as lines (Schuiten & Peeters 2002 : 45), as a map (Schuiten & Peeters 2002 : 61), as a tattoo (Schuiten & Peeters 2004 : 66) or as strange spots (Schuiten & Peeters 2004 : 23). There are also clear indications that Monsieur Paul intimately knows Shkōdra, (Schuiten & Peeters 2002: 59; Schuiten & Peeters 2004: 31&37), and that the acquaintance is distasteful to her, not only because he is a very old man but specifically because, like Roland, his physical interest in her revolves around the marks on her body: "We are really the same, my dear little Roland, we are cartographers to the tips of our fingers"¹¹ (Schuiten & Peeters 2002 : 59). In the following section, the ambiguities of this map are explored in the particular context of feminist and political writing about bodies, maps and imperialism. This implies taking the body seriously since, quite literally, "the 'space' of our body is encoded with 'maps of desire, disgust, pleasure, pain, loathing, love' (...) bodies make statements, involuntarily and/or through deliberate choice" (Teather 1999 : 7).

Embodied geographies: the implications of the fourth map

The dualism between geopolitical, disembodied mapping and embodied experience, rather than being emancipatory, risks being profoundly reactionary by respectively associating men and women with each approach. However, to discard this book solely on the basis of suspected misogyny would be a mistake. Instead, this section takes the idea of embodied geographies seriously by following up on Eco's earlier flippant suggestion that a rigorous landscape map on the scale of 1:1 would have to be "imbued with self-awareness" (Eco 1996 : 98) in order to resist imposed inscriptions, suggesting and performing alternative cartographies. Subsequently, the political risks associated with a fetishisation of the body and embodiment are explored.

The crux of any analysis of *La Frontière Invisible* rests with the status attributed to the map on Shkōdra's lower back. The messy ambiguity of this map illustrates the paradoxes of the embodied recalcitrance that characterises Shkōdra. On one hand the map can be thought of as an embodiment of Roland and Monsieur Paul's cartographic and sexual fantasies. If so, it is a quasi-colonial imposition on a body portrayed as native and passive. In this case, "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (Butler 1993 : 2). This is a conservative reading of Butler, yet she herself suggests, more intriguingly and echoing Michel Foucault (1976), that bodies need not be subjugated to coercive power but can be in themselves objects of resistance. Thus, Butler's approach to embodiment is also more liberating and subversive if Shkōdra's body, far from being that of a violated passive

victim, is seen to reflect “a notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (Butler 1993 : 9). Thus on the other hand her body can be taken to be a dynamic “site of performance in [its] own right, rather than nothing more than [a] surface for discursive inscription” (Dowler and Sharp 2001 in Hyndman 2004 : 174; see also Grosz 1990 : 64). The map has not been grafted onto her by some unseen force – or perhaps even by Monsieur Paul in some distant past – but instead emerges in a dynamic process in which she holds an active part. The boundaries of the map, like the boundaries of her own body, are part of this process, consequence and cause of her own identity and spatiality. Where the first interpretation sees her as no more than a blank surface awaiting inscription, this second interpretation grants her autonomy and voice, both of which she appears to lack in the narrative. It also grants her power, instrumentalising the ambiguity of the map as a way of controlling the men in the story. She does, after all, bring about Roland’s downfall. Thus, her body “is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint, it is also because the body and its energies and capacities exert an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organisation. As well as being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus also a site of resistance, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways” (Grosz 1990 : 64). It therefore allows, to return to the image suggested Eco’s pastiche, all the empire’s power to be transferred to the map (Eco 1996 : 98).

The ambiguity here, of course, is that the reader cannot choose between either of these interpretations specifically because Shkōdra is ascribed to categories (women / prostitutes / migrants) whose members are “neither full authors of their actions nor mere dupes of external power relations” (Hyndman 2004 : 174). She is barely allowed to speak and basically bullied into going away with Roland: “you want to abduct me, is that it? You are afraid that other people will touch me?”, she says as he coaxes her to flee through a window, “I suppose I don’t have a choice”¹² (Schuiten & Peeters 2004 : 26). The link between sexual control and cartography is crucial in specifically understanding the particular claims of territorialized knowledge that appear in the context of the fourth map.

Much of the work by feminist geographers on this topic concerns colonial contexts. While *La Frontière Invisible* does not deal with colonialism as such, but rather with expansionist political subjugation and imperialism (Watts 2000 : 93), many of the conclusions are very useful. Trinh Minh-ha wrote in particular that colonialism rests on a particular positioned assumption: “I am in the midst of a knowing, acquiring, deploying world – I appropriate, own and demarcate my sovereign territory as I advance – while the ‘other’ remains in a sphere of acquisition” (Trinh Minh-ha in Blunt & Rose 1994 : 15). This could have been written about Roland and Shkōdra, locked together yet barely communicating. As the story progresses, she speaks less and less, and is granted progressively less autonomy, despite formally ceasing to work as a prostitute and being employed to work at the *Centre de Cartographie*. This assumption of women’s bodies as land to be colonised is explored in detail by Blunt and Rose (1994), as they discuss the incorporated sexual imagery that was used to create and sustain the heroic stature of male colonizers who conquered and penetrated dangerous unknown continents. Likewise, Nash explores examples of representations of bodies as maps, as the land “explored, described, altered, and controlled is a female body” (Nash 1994 : 230). Bodies were controlled, conquered through technology; and crucially native women were “biologically linked to the natural landscape” (Nash 1994 : 238), a point that is further discussed in the last section.

Although Roland is not presented throughout the book in a positive light, appearing confused most of the time, the reader is caught up in his fascination with Shkōdra's map. This confusion is maintained by the authors who have repeatedly said in interviews that the key to the tale rests not only in the narrative, but also in the pictures themselves (Marcelli 2002). Pictures, of course, are intrinsically ambiguous, as Nash points out in her work on male nudes created by female artists. "The 'messy' ambiguity of the meaning of an image, produced through 'structures of feeling' that occur across multiple relations between authors, texts and readers (...) make representations themselves and attempts to judge their political effects both more undecidable and more effective" (Nash 1996 : 152). Attending to artistic intention and meaning production, other than by relying on the creator's comments during interviews, is of course fraught with difficulties. Recognising that interpretation is intrinsically messy is helpful – particularly in a work such as *La Frontière Invisible* where the story is narrated by a confused anti-hero. This means that Roland's approach to space, landscape and the body cannot be directly confused with that of Schuiten and Peeters. However, this is not to say that no critique is possible. Instead, the following section deals more specifically with one aspect of the book that remains problematic: the link made between women and nature and the naturalisation of political boundaries that is hinted at by the link made between the female body and the body of the nation.

Space as a woman¹³: *Uncritical geopolitics and natural boundaries*

Writing about bodies and celebrating the bodily has been done very effectively, yet in many ways the ambiguity of the literature and the internal debates that have existed between constructionist and essentialist approaches (Longhurst 1997), though often sterile, have reflected the latent danger of fetishising the body. This section further explores the paradoxes and discordant discourses suggested by the map on Shkōdra's body, and the political consequences of considering bodies not as inscribed performances but as holders of truth. In contrast to some of the more radical themes that the narrative suggests and that are discussed above, one particularly disturbing theme stemming from this fetishisation is far from benign. It is also fundamentally in tune with the geopolitics the authors apparently seek to criticise. This is linked to a specific gendering of the bodily, and the essentialising association of women with bodies: "Woman *is* the body. She remains stuck in the primeval ooze of Nature's sticky immanence, a victim of the vagaries of her emotions, a creature who can't think straight as a consequence" (Kirby 1992 in Longhurst 1997 : 491).

It is of course often tempting to lash out at popular culture with obtuse complicated critiques that bear no relation to the author's intentions. However, in the case of Schuiten and Peeters, such an assumption of political innocence would be misplaced. When a journalist reminded them of Michel Foucault's parallels between what was inscribed on the body and what was inscribed on society, as well as the imposition of power on the body (Marcelli 2002), Peeters picked up the comment and further referred to Gilles Deleuze's text on Foucault entitled '*Un nouveau cartographe*' (Deleuze 1986). These gentle acknowledgments of a wider critical context are important, indicating to what extent the authors are aware of the wider political implications of their work. Schuiten and Peeters comment, quoted earlier, that Belgian's problems stem from 'inappropriate' (unnatural?) boundaries is to be set in his context. Just as geopolitical maps justify being objective by referring to their 'natural' rootedness, to their adherence to natural features, rivers, mountains, topography, so the boundaries appearing on Shkōdra's body are implied to be natural, rooted, superior to 'arbitrary' political ones. In this reading, the boundaries of the country are presented as inscribed in her flesh, as reassuringly

natural, unquestionable and unquestioned. This is of course in tune with the many examples of parallels drawn between the human body and the body of the nation (Pile in Teather 1999 : 7; Sundberg & Kaserman 2005). This contrasts with more radical ideas that “the cartography of the nation, the national map, is no longer an appropriate metaphor. It no longer offers the support that the idea of a homogeneous, discrete, and socially integrated island did, prior to the realization of continued division, difference, and inequality in the postcolonial state” (Nash 1994 : 246).

The question raised by the book is whether the idea of embodied recalcitrance helps to transcend the geopolitical heritage present in cartography, whether it helps to set aside the historical process of reifying maps as explanatory representations and icons. The map on Shkōdra’s body suggests an intimate spatiality, bringing into being one construction of space by simultaneously removing another: a stylistic choice meant to contrast with that of the Maréchal. As Campbell argues on the subject of maps of partitioned Bosnia, “importantly, these performative practices of representation do not simply ‘imagine’ one assemblage of identity; they also un-imagine another” (Campbell 1999 : 401).

The map on Shkōdra’s body is taken as fundamentally accurate because the lines-as-boundaries are inscribed in her flesh, just as mountains or rivers are presented as inscribed in the landscape as uncontroversial and opportune political boundaries because of their intrinsic biophysical materiality. She is – at least to Roland and Monsieur Paul – a myth made flesh: an image with overt religious overtones. The idea of a natural inscription of political boundaries is indeed nothing new, as it passed down from Antiquity, re-emerging in the 17th Century: the position and limits of each State was predetermined by Providence or Nature. The French Revolution popularised the idea, offering a vision considered more egalitarian than the former ‘unjust’ historical and hereditary boundaries, marking the return to a proto-historical, pre-royalist worldview, as found in such Revolutionary slogans as ‘Freedom knows no boundaries’ (Bodénès 1990 : 19, see also Zanini 1997 : 19). In such approaches, natural elements were associated with boundary definition and delimitation, linked to a particular vision of the nation-state, bound up with military might and strategy. The only difference in *La Frontière Invisible* is that topography is joined by the female body, taken as a (literal) incarnation of ‘nature’. In the closing pages, as the landscape is redrawn to suggest limbs, genitalia and breasts, this allegory is pushed even further, as the female body and the landscape become inseparable, bound up in naturalised metaphors. Rather than a offering a conception of identity and boundaries that avoids the essentializing of masculinist and colonialist discourse, and that would build on feminist and postcolonial relationships to place (Nash 1996 : 238), this conclusion suggests a rigid association between the naturalized body of the state with the naturalized body of women. Although this could be discounted as simply ‘Roland’s’ point of view, the authors’ comments quoted earlier about Belgian and African boundaries seem to suggest otherwise. Women, instead of holding the key to liberation from geopolitical reductionism, find themselves no more than humiliated instruments, reduced to simple objects – and incompetent ones at that, if the image of the women brought in to complete the maps and models hurriedly is to be believed. Mixing coming-of-age, alienation and political manipulation, the tale finally becomes victim of its own confusion by falling into the obvious trap of being politically reactionary, seduced by the idea of natural boundaries inscribed in the flesh as an alternative to political ones – suggesting the former were value-free. Instead of repenting, Roland’s main worry is not about betraying Shkōdra’s trust: it is that he has ruined his career.

Thus despite an apparent critique of the geopolitics of territorial expansion, the book dissolves when attempting to reconcile the metaphorical images of naturalised and embodied boundaries with a condemnation of political opportunism. Faced with the ever-tempting idea of natural boundaries, literally inscribed and incarnated in the flesh, the critique of the geopolitical eye is lost. As embodiment and disembodiment intermingle, the alienation of the characters is mirrored in conceptual confusion. For in this case it is not so much the binary itself that is questioned, rather one representation, one map, that this chosen over another. It is not a critique of maps *per se* so much as a choice between real (objective, careful, correct) and unreal (incorrect) maps. It is not a reflection on the ethics of maps, as suggested by Harley who calls for “principles and rules that would support moral judgments in particular cartographic circumstances” (Harley 2001 : 203), but simply yet another call for a science that is accurate and objective. As he noted, the fundamental problem is this confusion about what the ethics of mapmaking consists of: “it is this positivism, fuelled by recent technological developments, that is beckoning cartographers away from the very ethical issues” (Harley 2001 : 203). The authors suggest that Shkōdra’s map is more factually correct rather than any other: it reproduces the lost old maps while the new ones made by the machines are inaccurate. Yet the authors are in fact confused by their attempt to deconstruct the language of maps, confused by what an alternative cartographic ethics might look like. The map, and Shkōdra herself, have become “invisible to [themselves]” (Eco 1996 : 98) through subjugation. However, if the implicit ranking of the four maps were discarded and replaced with a much more careful attention to Shkōdra as an active character, rather than as a passive victim with the name of a violated divided city, a much more interesting basis for an ethical cartography would emerge. This respatialization of the body “conceived as surface, as active, as full and changing, as many, as depth, as random and indeterminate, as process” (Gibson-Graham 1996 in Longhurst 1997 : 495), entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription of spatial discourses and the real basis of an alternative, ethical cartography. This ethical cartography would be rooted in Shkōdra’s embodied recalcitrance to imposed inscriptions associated with the hegemonic positions of the men within the story.

Exchanging spatial metaphors

Another Borgesian rhetorical image might be a more promising place to start exploring what this ethical cartography might look like, instead of the map on the scale of 1:1. It is certainly an interesting alternative to the ‘view from nowhere’. In a separate text to the one quoted earlier, Borges explores an alternative spatial figure:

“On the back part of the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance. At first I thought it was revolving; then I realised that this movement was an illusion created by the dizzying world it bounded. The Aleph's diameter was probably little more than an inch, but all space was there, actual and undiminished”
(Borges 1945).

This surprising figure, the “only place on earth where all places are – seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending” (Borges 1945), the secret and conjectured object whose name is common to all men but which no man has looked upon – the unimaginable universe” (Borges 1945) is a twist on the previous spatial image of a map superimposed on the surface of the earth. While the first figure was coextensive with the objects it purported to represent, this second spatial figure is simultaneously both self and other at one time and in one place. Soja used this image to call for “a discursively different way of thinking about space that has long been obscured by exclusive fixations on illusive

materialist and /or idealist interpretations; and second, as an all-inclusive and radically open mode of defining the limitlessly expandable scope of the spatial imagination: the envisioning of social space as Aleph” (Soja 1996 : 65). But rather than simply being a way of considering different ways of thinking about space, the Aleph is also a different way of constructing space itself. Rather than only “counterspaces”, spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning” (Soja 1996 : 69), the figure of the Aleph also supposes a direct dynamic link between the figure and the outside world, between what is represented and the representation itself. Pushing the image to its limits, and suggesting the body itself as an Aleph, helps to understand this circularity. If “what is mapped onto the body is not unaffected by the body onto which it is projected” (Grosz 1990 : 74), then the recalcitrance of the body itself is truly transformative.

If instead of falling for the classic trap of natural boundaries, Schuiten and Peeters had explored the *Aleph* as alternative cartographic and spatial figures, then Shkōdra’s birthmark might have taken on another meaning. Rather than being reduced to incarnating ‘nature’ and original boundaries, she might have been a figure embodying and questioning what it means to be both self and other, free from the apparent tyranny of sorting embodiment from disembodiment, free from the ghost of positivism. No longer a victim, she would have been an empowered, embodied constructor of both her own body and her space. As Soja has noted, this draws attention to “lived space as a strategic location from which to encompass, understand and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously” (Soja 1996 : 68). Transcending sterile geopolitical gazing, transcending embodied / disembodied maps, gives meaning to space through enactment and transgression. Maps would no longer be taken as something that intrinsically contain certain values – avoiding spatialist mythologies like those evident in the geopolitical approaches – but rather as something that gains meaning through the inscription of embodied and disembodied choices. In such a context, using the boundary wall to escape, and negating Roland’s interpretation of her map, take on other more liberating potentials. Such approaches imply considering maps and bodies no longer as backdrops for political ambitions or as territories to be conquered but as active participants in the reinvention of space itself. This implies questioning what counts as legitimate knowledge in cartography by moving beyond the dualism: it is not a question of choosing one map over another, it is not a question of having to choose between fetishised embodiment or objectivised disembodiment. Schuiten and Peeters have become the victims of Kadaré’s metaphor of the eyeglass: they have come to believe not in multiple, situated truths, but in the myth that only one perspective will give a clear picture, only one map can be correct. If instead of this, they had focussed on the mutually constitutive processes of embodied and disembodied practices that shape the production of maps, a new ethical cartography could have been made to emerge. *La Frontière Invisible* is a visually pleasing book. What it would have looked like if Shkōdra had been allowed to design some of the maps can only be imagined. What is clear is that it would have had a very different ending.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Geraldine Pratt for her input, support and invaluable comments, Stuart Elden for his insightful thoughts on a first draft of this text, as well as the participants of the *Ordering the World: Political Geographies of War and Peace* conference in Durham in August 2003 for their questions and comments. My grateful thanks also extend to the four anonymous reviewers whose comments and careful suggestions were instrumental in reworking this text.

References

- Aldhuy, J, 2000, "Borges et le géographe" *Borges Studies on Line*. J. L. Borges Center for Studies & Documentation, Accessed June 2004,
<http://www.hum.au.dk/romansk/borges/bsol/aldhuy.htm>
- Blunt, A, and Gillian R, 1994, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies. Mappings: Society / Theory / Space*. Eds. Michael Dear, Derek Gregory and Nigel Thrift. New York & London: Guildford Press
- Bodénès, S, 1990, *Théorie Limologique et Identités Frontalières: le Cas Franco-Genevois*, Thèse de Doctorat, Département de géographie, Faculté des Sciences Economiques et Sociales, Genève, Université de Genève
- Borges, JL, 1945, *The Aleph*, Translation by Norman Thomas di Giovanni in collaboration with the author, <http://www.phinnweb.com/links/literature/borges/aleph.html>
- Borges, JL, 1982, first published in Spanish 1946, *De la rigueur de la science. L'auteur et autres textes*, Paris, Gallimard, 3rd edition, p.199
- Butler, J, 1993, *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York & London, Routledge
- Campbell, D, 1999, "Apartheid cartography: the political anthropology and spatial effects of international diplomacy in Bosnia", *Political Geography*, 18 (395-435)
- Carroll, L (Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), 1965, first published 1893, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, *The Works of Lewis Carroll*, Ed. R.L. Green, Hamlyn, Feltham, pp. 535 – 698
- Carroll, L (Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), 1965, first published 1876, *The Hunting of the Snark*, *The Works of Lewis Carroll*, Ed. R.L. Green, Hamlyn, Feltham, pp. 731-754
- Couvreux, D, 2004 "La frontière dans la peau", *Le Soir en ligne*, Bruxelles. 28 April 2004, <http://www.lesoir.be>
- Crampton, JW., 2001, "Maps as social constructions: power, communication and visualization", *Progress in Human Geography* 25(2): 235-252
- Debarbieux, B, 1999, "Le territoire: histoires en deux langues – a bilingual (his-)story of territory", *Discours Scientifiques et Contextes Culturels : Géographies Françaises et Britanniques à l'Epreuve Postmoderne*, Bordeaux : MSHA, 33-46
- Deleuze, G, 1986, *Foucault*, Paris : Les Editions de Minuit
- Di Méo, G, 1999, "Géographies tranquilles du quotidien : une analyse de la contribution des sciences sociales et de la géographie à l'étude des pratiques spatiales", *Cahiers de Géographie du Québec*, Vol. 43 (118), 75-93
- Eco, U, 1996, first published 1963, "De l'impossibilité d'établir une carte de l'Empire à l'échelle du 1/1", *Pastiches et Postiches*, Paris, Messidor, 95-104
- Ferras, R, Hussy, C, 1991, *Les concepts de la cartographie: leur rôle dans la recherche géographique*, Ed. A. Bailly, *Les Concepts de la Géographie*, Paris: Masson
- Foucault, M, 1966, *Les Mots et les Choses : une Archéologie des Sciences Humaines*. Paris, Gallimard

- Foucault, M, 1967, first published 1994, "Des espaces autres", *Dits et Ecrits*, pp.1571-1581, first published, 1984. Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 mars 1967, *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, No.5, octobre 1984, 46-49
- Foucault, M, 1967, "Of Other Spaces, Translated by Jay Miskoviec", *Diacritics*, 16.1 22-27
- Foucault, M, 1976, *La Volonté de Savoir, Histoire de la Sexualité, Tome I*, Paris, Gallimard
- Foucault, M, 1966, *Les Mots et les Choses: Une Archéologie des Sciences Humaines*. Paris, Gallimard,
- Grisson, L, 1998, "L'espace et son double", *Mappemonde*, No. 52, Belin-Reclus, www.crdp-montpellier.fr/ressources/frdtse/frdtse41g
- Grosz, E, 1990, "Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representations and the Corporeal." *Feminine Masculine and Representation*. Eds. Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 62-74
- Harley, JB, 1989, "Deconstructing the map", *Cartographica* 26: 1-20
- Harley, JB, 2001, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, Ed. P. Laxton, Baltimore & London, Johns Hopkins University Press
- Herbez, A, 2002, "Cités obscures: sur les frontières", avec Benoît Peeters et François Schuiten, *Le Temps*, Genève, Accessed 17 August, www.letemps.ch
- Hyndman, J, 2004, "The (geo)politics of mobility", in Eds. LA Stacheli, E. Kofman, LJ Peake, *Mapping Women, Making Politics : Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, New York & London, Routledge, 169-184
- Kadaré, I, 2000 (original 1998) *Three Elegies for Kosovo*, translated by Peter Constantine, The Harvill Press, London
- Kadaré, I, 1991, *Albanian Spring : The Anatomy of Tyranny*, Translated by E Capouya, Saqi Books, London
- Lefebvre, H, 1974, *La Production de l'Espace*, Paris, Anthropos
- Libiot, E, 2004, *De nouvelles voies*. *L'express*, online edition, Accessed 17 August, <http://livres.lexpress.fr>
- Longhurst, R, 1997, "(Dis)embodied geographies", *Progress in Human Geography*, 21 (4) 486-501
- Marcelli, S, 2002, *L'internet a été inventé en... 1895*, Accessed September 2004, *L'Interdit*, <http://www.interdits.net>
- Marcelli, S, 2002, *Le futur antérieur des Cités obscures*, *L'Interdit*, Accessed September 2004, <http://www.interdits.net>
- Nash, C, 1994, "Remapping the Body/Land: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender, and Landscape in Ireland." *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. Eds. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose. *Mappings: Society / Theory / Space*. New York & London: Guildford Press, 227-50
- Nash, C, 1996, "Reclaiming Vision: Looking at Landscape and the Body." *Gender, Place and Culture* 3(2) 149-69

- Ó Tuathail, G, 1996, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space, Revisioning Global Politics*. Eds. David Campbell and Michael J Shapiro, Vol. 6, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press
- Paasi, A, 1996, *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: the Changing Geographies of the Finish-Russian Border*, London, Wiley.
- Palsky, G, 1999, "Borges, Carroll, et la carte au 1/1", *Cybergéo*, 106, 30 September, <http://193.55.107.45/Cartogr/Texte1/jborges.htm>
- Perkins, C., 2003, "Cartography: mapping theory", *Progress in Human Geography* 27(3) 341-351
- Raffestin, C, 1991, *Géopolitique et Histoire*, Lausanne, Payot
- Rose, G, 1993, *Feminism and Geography : the Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Cambridge, Polity Press
- Schuiten, F, Peeters, B, 2002, *The Invisible Frontier, Cities of the Fantastic, Volumes, Vol 1 & 2*, Nantier, Beall Minoustchine Publishing
- Schuiten, F, Peeters, B, 2002, *La Frontière Invisible, Vol 1*, Casterman, Paris
- Schuiten, F, Peeters, B, 2004, *La Frontière Invisible, Vol 2*, Casterman, Paris
- Soja, EW, 1996, *Thirdspace : Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Blackwell, Cambridge & Oxford
- Staeheli, LA, Kofman, E, Peake LJ, 2004, *Mapping Women, Making Politics : Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, Routledge, New York & London
- Staeheli, LA, Kofman, E, 2004, *Mapping Gender, Making Politics : Towards Feminist Political Geographies*, Eds. LA Staeheli, E Kofman, LJ Peake. *Mapping Women, Making Politics : Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, Routledge, New York & London, 1-13
- Sundberg, J, Kaserman, B, 2005, *Cactus Carving and Desert Defecations: Corporealities of Latino Crossings on the Mexico-US Border*. Unpublished manuscript
- Teather, EK, 1999, *Embodied Geographies : Space, Bodies and Rites of Passage*. *Critical Geographies Series*, Eds. T Skelton, G Valentine, London & New York : Routledge
- Watts, M, 2000, *Colonialism*, *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, Eds. RJ Johnston, D Gregory, G Pratt, M Watts, Blackwells : Oxford & Malden
- Zanini, P, 1997, *Significati del Confine : i Limiti Naturali, Storici, Mentali*, Milano, Mondadori

¹ Personal translation from : "L'interprétation? ... Mais c'est avec ça qu'il faut en finir, justement. Il est grand temps qu'on en arrive à des mesures objectives en évitant tous les intermédiaires inutiles..."

² Personal translation from: “Quant à vos histoires de frontières, je crains que vous ne sentiez pas à quel point elles sont anachroniques. Vous en êtes encore au mur, n’est-ce pas ? (...) La frontière bouge sans cesse, elle change si vite qu’elle en devient invisible”

³ Personal translation from: “je suis juste la première femme qu’il a connue... Il se raconte des histoires”

⁴ Personal translation from: “la Belgique avec ses tensions provoquées par des découpages parfois arbitraires. Cela nous permet de montrer comment les frontières se construisent et se déconstruisent dans les bureaux ou les états-majors, loin des réalités”

⁵ Personal translation from: “Notre regard sur la question de la frontière est métaphorique : on met en valeur le fait qu’il s’agit souvent plus d’un découpage abstrait que d’un découpage culturel. Je pense à la manière dont on a pu découper l’Afrique au couteau avec une arrogance terrible. Le tracé des frontières est incroyable. Malgré cela, les cartes restent la référence. Le Centre de Cartographie est en cela un peu le nombril du monde”

⁶ His other well-known map being the Bellman’s famous “complete and absolute blank” that appears in *The Hunting of the Snark* (Carroll 1876).

⁷ True to his playful self, Borges claimed this text was written by Suarez Miranda (allegedly the “Viajes de Varones Prudentes”, Lib. IV, Cap. XIV, Lerida, 1658). Quoting real fakes is a borsonian trait, such as the famous Chinese Encyclopaedia cited in Foucault’s *Les Mots et les Choses* (Foucault 1966), another text to have attained mythical status within the social sciences.

⁸ Grison (1998) noted the subtle irony of Eco writing a fake (his own text) about a *trompe-l’oeil* map (the map of the empire) described in another forged text (Borges’ text) which quotes a fake (Suarez Miranda, presented by Borges as the author)!

⁹ Personal translation from : “L’empire réalise ses rêves les plus secrets en devenant imperceptible aux empires ennemis ; cependant (...) il deviendrait imperceptible également à lui-même. Il faudrait supposer un empire qui prend conscience de soi dans une sorte d’aperception transcendente de son propre appareil catégoriel en action ; mais cela nécessite l’existence d’une carte douée d’auto-conscience qui (si tant qu’elle soit concevable) deviendrait alors l’empire lui-même, si bien que celui-ci céderait son pouvoir à la carte”

¹⁰ Personal translation from: “On colle des montagnes et des bouts de forêts n’importe où, comme ça, pour remplir!”

¹¹ Personal translation from: “On est vraiment les mêmes, mon petit Roland, cartographes jusqu’au bout des doigts”

¹² Personal translation from: “tu veux me séquestrer, c’est ça? Tu as peur que les autres me touchent?” “Je suppose que je n’ai pas le choix”

¹³ The main title of this section is inspired by art historian Best (1995), quoted in Longhurst 1997 : 496.