Borderscapes

1   Thinking on the Margins

> CyberVato: Our presence here is a foreshadowing of the inevitable future. The global Mextermination Project is an example of the future official hybrid culture. Our performances/installations present real-life posthuman specimens as well as unique archeological artifacts, which are both residues of our dying Western civilization, and samples of an emerging Nueva Cultura, a culture in which the margins have fully occupied the center. Enough.[1]

These words end the performance interview by Chicano artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes, which was broadcast in New York during a radio show in May 1998. The artists were interpreting three futuristic fictional characters. Each character embodied a series of stereotypes of the threat that Mexican culture would incorporate the American one, outlining a hybridised future of a "Nueva Cultura." Through these provocative characters, Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes aimed at stimulating radio listeners to intervene and express their hidden opinions about Latinos and border-crossers. At the time, the artists were working on different projects on the border area between Mexico and the United States.

In one such projects, which culminated in 1999 in the theatre performance *Borderscape 2000: Kitsch, Violence, and Shamanism at the End of the Century*, the term "borderscape" seems to appear for the first time.[2] In the context of the year 2000, the beginning of a new millennium, the word could not but seem futuristic. Indeed, Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes's borderscape was a virtual space that drew from the real. It was futuristic, being rooted in the spirit of the dawn of 2000, yet it also linked to the traditions of their Mexican origins. It was an "aztechnology" (to use Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes's term)[3] The work they developed retraced Latinos' myths and traditions and then incorporated the

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1   Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes in Jones et al., "The Body and Technology," 39.

2   The border between Mexico and the United States had been a testbed for many scholars in border studies, as well as for artists; see Dell'Agnese and Szary, "Borderscapes"; Brambilla, Laine, and Bocchi, *Borderscaping*.

3   Jones et al., "The Body and Technology."

contemporary Latino stereotypes and took them to the point of paradox, thus questioning the "pure" Mexican and North American cultures in relation to the hybrid Chicana one so aptly described by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderland/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, written in a mix of Spanish and English as a *mestiza*. This hybridisation contrasts sharply with the clarity of most border maps, where territories appear to be precisely divided.

Starting in the 2000s, while there was a proliferation of artistic artefacts on borders and on bordering processes, the term 'borderscape' began to be used in academia, especially by scholars in geopolitics and geography dealing with national boundaries.[4] The word came to identify a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of borders, adding to other conceptualisations of borders developed within the multidisciplinary field of border studies. Such studies focused on classifying borders and describing their physical and territorial features, just as they incorporated the nation-state necessity to understand how to draw and control borders.[5] Later, scholars tried to develop other conceptual frameworks to overcome this "territorial trap," giving rise to antecedents of the term borderscape, namely border conceptions with a less state-centric perspective.[6] The terms borderland and border landscape are the two ways of conceptualising borders that more clearly share a common root with borderscape at the etymological level.

The term borderland was already used at the beginning of the twentieth century in the work of English geographers.[7] At first, geographers and historians studied single borderlands, focusing on their administrative, economic, and international relations-based issues; later they moved towards comparative frameworks.[8] Today, a borderland is usually defined as a region crossed by an international boundary line which generates a set of dynamics and relationships for the populations that inhabit the nearby areas so that a complex network of people, identities, and formal and informal exchanges enmesh the territory.[9] In this networked, conceptual view of border areas, it was more important for researchers to focus on those people inhabiting borderlands and their role in constructing or deconstructing borders, beyond the agency

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4　Strüver, *Stories of the "Boring Border"*; Dolff-Bonekämpe and Kuipers, "Boundaries in the Landscape"; Dell'Agnese, "The US-Mexico Border in American Movies."

5　Wilson and Donnan, eds., *A Companion to Border Studies*; Gaeta, *La Civiltà Dei Confini*.

6　On the concept of "territorial trap" see Agnew, "The Territorial Trap."

7　Thomas Holdich had already employed it in a study conducted on the north-west Indian border in 1901, while it later appeared in the 1920s in North America. See Holdich, *The Indian Borderland 1880–1900*; Turner, *The Frontier in American History*.

8　An example of such is the study by Oscar Martínez, *Border People*.

9　Wilson and Donnan, *A Companion to Border Studies*.

of the nation-state. Thus the notion of border landscapes was introduced in the 1980s.[10] For example, John William House's notion of border landscape focused on the dynamic nature of borders, accounting for their generative character through an operational model of study based on transaction flow analysis and the core-periphery concept. In 1991, the book *The Geography of Border Landscapes* acted as a catalyst for research on border landscapes. It underlined the now multidisciplinary nature of border studies by collecting contributions from a variety of different disciplines.[11] The book highlighted the need to focus on symbolic elements that emphasised political and social meanings of borders, beyond their physical artefacts. As an example, it mentions the ritual social practices in territories of contested borders such as the Orange walks in Northern Ireland.

The concept of borderscape thus follows the lead of these attempts to develop less state-centric conceptual frameworks, but does not begin with a unique definition and remains difficult to define today. At first, there were at least three different meanings: identifying border circuits of images and flows, as in the use of the two Chicano artists; pointing to physical landscapes characterised by the presence of a national boundary and their subsequent characteristics; or portraying something similar to larger border regions.[12] In 2007, Suvendrini Perera first spoke of a borderscape in terms that reflected both its representation and its bodily construction, providing a key reading of the concept: "Against the flat and static representation or 'tableau' of the modern map as described by Michel de Certeau," she wrote in an article about migrations in Australia, "the notion of a borderscape is multidimensional and mobile, drawing on de Certeau's discussion of 'spatializing practices' that encompass 'geographies of actions,' histories of place, and the itineraries of moving bodies."[13] Here the border is understood as a fluid and continuously changing entity, so that practices such as those associated with control and surveillance of migration, which are often dislocated in territory far beyond the boundary line, are considered to be producing new borders through their displacement. Hence, this definition takes into account superimposed "temporalities" and "emplacements."

In a later article on the critical potential of the borderscape concept, Chiara Brambilla argued that the notion of borderscape links the representations and the experiences of the border "by rethinking borders through the relationship

10   House, *Frontier on the Rio Grande*.
11   Minghi and Rumley, *The Geography of Border Landscapes*.
12   Dell'Agnese and Szary, "Borderscapes."
13   Perera, "A Pacific Zone?" 206.

between politics and aesthetics," pointing to a nexus between politics and aesthetics that drew upon Jacques Rancière's ideas on the distribution of the sensible.[14] This nexus outlines the tension between policing a particular distribution of the sensible—what is visible, what can be said and by whom—and the continuous struggle of subversive redistribution regarding what is visible and sayable, a role that can be played by aesthetics. In addition, Brambilla stated that border studies should consider borders as fluid and mutable locations to show the interrelation between the permanence of old borderscapes and the multiplications of new ones. This idea of fluidity, already present in Perera's writing, also characterises the most recent contributions that employ the notion of borderscape, which now range from border studies, cultural studies, and political geography to urban and regional studies and visual arts.

Since 2014, scholarly contributions based on the notion of borderscape have increased. Among the various topics addressed, migration is the most common. Some scholars address issues related to surveillance, conflict, and violence towards migrants.[15] Others focus on creative forms of resistance put in place to resist border restrictions.[16] Still others consider how migrations are narrated and represented, often investigating the presence of alternative narratives to the hegemonic ones.[17] Border narratives and images appear as an emerging topic within the field, consolidating into a kind of border aesthetic. Beyond migrants' self-narrative practices,[18] other works focus on narratives from literary texts and novels,[19] movies or documentaries,[20] or contemporary art.[21] Some consider representations by more institutional actors, highlighting the symbolical choices of migrants' invisibilisation recently put in place by authorities.[22]

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14   Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential," 27; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.
15   Wemyss, Yuval-Davis, and Cassidy, "'Beauty and the Beast'"; Brambilla and Pötzsch, "In/Visibility"; Brambilla and Jones, "Rethinking Borders, Violence, and Conflict."
16   Schneidleder, "Discreet and Hegemonic Borderscapes of Galilee"; Bhattacharjee, "Gendered Technologies of Power"; Pellander and Horsti, "Visibility in Mediated Borderscapes"; Teunissen, "Border Crossing Assemblages."
17   Vanhaelemeesch, "Tracing Borderscapes"; Mazzara, "Subverting the Narrative of Lampedusa Borderscape"; Horsti, "Temporality in Cosmopolitan Solidarity"; Scott et al., "Between Crises and Borders."
18   Horsti, "Temporality"; Mazzara, "Subverting the Narrative"; Brambilla and Pötzsch, "In/Visibility."
19   Nyman, "Sonic Borderscapes"; Schimanski, "Working Paper 12"; Trillo and Paül i Carril, "Una Reflexión."
20   Vanhaelemeesch, "Tracing Borderscapes"; Mendes and Sundholm, "Walls and Fortresses"; Deiana, "Re-Thinking Border Politics at the Sarajevo Film Festival."
21   Giudice and Giubilaro, "Re-Imagining the Border"; Pötzsch, "Art Across Borders."
22   Ferrer-Gallardo and Albet-Mas, "The Borderscape of Punta Tarifa."

FIG. 2.1   Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Census at Bethlehem*, 1566. Oil on canvas, 116 cm × 164 cm. Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium
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Yet the notion of borderscape has been used in different ways and still maintains all the ambiguities of the two separate words from which it derives.[23] Like the culture delineated by Gómez-Peňa and Sifuentes, the term borderscape is itself a hybrid, a fusion of the word border and the suffix -scape. The latter is often combined with other words, as in the book *Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology* (1996) by Arjun Appadurai. He names five different cultural dimensions crossed by global flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes.[24] Having a shifting nature, the five scapes "are deeply perspectival constructs," the "building blocks of imagined worlds," that is, the worlds created by the imaginations of the people inhabiting the globe, which can sometimes detach or subvert the official imaginary worlds around them. In the scholarly literature that deals with the notion of borderscape, the suffix -scape is often traced back precisely to Appadurai's use. Considering the border as a sixth scape would mean thinking of the border as something procedural and increasingly de-territorialised.

At the same time, the suffix cannot but recall the very word landscape. The etymological roots of the suffix -scape connected to landscape reinforce its relation to a matter strictly related to representation, to the visible and the invisible, to the representation of a territory and the governing of that territory, something linked to the dual meaning of landscape as both an entity and a pictorial genre. Retracing these meanings is useful to better understand what a borderscape is.

2   Scape as Political Aesthetic

The painting *The Census at Bethlehem* (1566) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525/1530–1569) shows a Flemish village in winter. In the snow that covers the ground and the roofs of the houses, people are portrayed performing the most varied tasks: transporting wood, killing livestock, working the land, and playing with snowballs. In the foreground, a crowd gathers in front of a tavern where tax collection is taking place. While these small moving figures entirely occupy the central plane of the painting, the background shows an accumulation of buildings. A barge is stationed on a frozen river in the left of the scene, while the red disc of the setting sun is on the horizon line. Based on the biblical story narrated by Luke (2:1–5)[25] of the census of Quirinius, the painting

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23   Dell'Agnese and Szary, "Borderscapes."
24   Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes."
25   King James Version.

uses the religious episode as a chance to show the contemporary reality of the sixteenth-century Low Countries, as happens in other of Bruegel's paintings.[26] Joseph and Mary are crossing the village, moving to Bethlehem for the census before the Virgin gives birth. A blue cloak covers Mary, who is sitting on a donkey. Rather than emerging from the scene, the two figures blend with it. This is precisely a *landscape* painting, because it intercepts some of the different meanings that are normally associated with the term.

The birth of the pictorial genre of landscape in the Low Countries is usually associated with the work of Joachim Patinir (ca. 1480/1485–1524). With his views from above depicting religious or classical subjects, Patinir has been described as "the innovator in painting landscape for its own sake," as "all the foremost Flemish artists of the early time were skilful painters of landscape," but "until Patinir's appearance the landscape was secondary to the figures."[27] A few decades later, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, together with his family of painters, continued in the development of landscape painting. The census episode was produced at a turning point of political crisis; the date 1566 was a momentous one in the Low Countries. The area was part of the empire of Charles V, who had applied a harsh taxation policy to the territory, a policy extended by his son Philip II.

The frustration with the high taxes, the lack of political autonomy, and the religious persecutions in the context of the opposition between Catholicism and Calvinism led to some sparks of revolt in 1566.[28] About two hundred nobles, known as the Beggars, went to Brussels to make specific requests to the regent of Philip II, after which the iconoclastic fury of the *Beeldenstorm* took place, during which some Calvinists destroyed religious paintings. The following year, the repression of non-Catholics by the Duke of Alba began, which continued in an eighty-year war and led to the division of the Low Countries between the south and the north. Although it cannot be considered among the first landscape paintings, *The Census at Bethlehem* (1566) is particularly interesting for reflecting on the meaning of land-scape, precisely for being located within this harsh political climate.[29]

The very definition of landscape is controversial. Reflecting on the difficulties of converging toward one definition of landscape, Ziady DeLue noted that "this [is] in part because we do not know exactly what we are looking for … we

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26   Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel*.

27   Wilcox, "Joachim Patinir," 420.

28   For the historical reconstruction presented here and in the following sentences, I rely on Martin Gayford, "Climate Change, Bruegel-Style"; also see Keilo "The Coat of Arms."

29   On the political significance of Bruegel's work in relation to the Spanish domination of the Low Countries, see Kunzle "Spanish Herod, Dutch Innocents."

have seen way too much of it already … or because landscape … is both our subject and the thing within which we exist. … It is almost impossible to see something as not landscape."[30] Trying to define landscape means clashing with a series of paradoxes.[31] First, the fact that landscape is neither measurable nor objective poses a set of problems regarding its verbal and visual representation. Second, in different European languages the term denotes both the thing itself and its representation. On the one hand, landscape is a region—a piece of land inhabited by people—on the other, landscape is the view of a region—the representation of a piece of land, hence a painting genre. This dual meaning already appeared in Doctor Johnson's dictionary in 1755, where he defines landscape as

1.   A region; the prospect of a country;

2.   A picture, representing an extent of space, with the various objects in it.[32] Interpretations regarding which of the two meanings emerged first seem to differ depending on whether we look at Germanic-Dutch or Romance language etymology.

According to Germanic-Dutch etymology, the German *Landschaft*, the Dutch *landschap* and the old English *landscipe* associate land and people in a process of reciprocal shaping.[33] *Land* points both to the physical features of a place and to the people living there. The suffix -scape is associated with the idea of shaping, in relation to the German verb *schaffen* or the Dutch verb *scheppen*, which means to create, model, or give shape.[34] The participle of the Dutch verb, *geschapen* means created, as in the English shaped.

The suffix -scape also means association and denotes general qualities of community living, such as in the English words friend*ship* or partner*ship*.[35] Retracing the etymology of the proto-Germanic *skap-ja*, which corresponds to the German *schaffen*, "to create," Elmar Seebold connects the term to a group of words used for "hew, cut, hit," with possible combinations such as "cut and create."[36] He adds that it could also come from another root, associated with "emasculate, blend" and "ax for hewing." Thus the meaning "create" would

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30   DeLue and Elkins, eds., *Landscape Theory. The Art Seminar*.

31   Jakob, *Il Paesaggio*, chapter 3.

32   Quoted in Olwig, "Performing on the Landscape versus Doing Landscape," 81. According to Olwig, only later on did the English dictionary erase the meaning of landscape as a portion of land, linking it only to a view that could be enjoyed by sight. Such a simplification came about for purposes of clarity, which the dictionary editors looked for.

33   DeLue and Elkins, *Landscape Theory*.

34   van Houtum and Eker, "BorderScapes."

35   Olwig, "Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape," 633.

36   Seebold, *Vergleichendes Und Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 470.

originally be linked to a technical design, predominantly with wood, which implies human work. The combination of the two roots *land* and *schap* hence came to indicate a portion of land shaped by people that conversely shaped the people, intended as a community of people living together, sharing a common body of laws and customs. Only later would the term landscape start to identify a genre of painting by Flemish painters in which the environment, with the people in it, is the subject of the picture. The hypothesis that the etymological origin of "scape" in Germanic languages is linked to anthropic space is also supported by the fact that the term *landa-skapaz* means only "region" or "land" in proto-Germanic.[37]

French-Italian etymology also outlines the twofold meaning of landscape. The first root of the French term *paysage* is related to the *pays*, the village, coming from the Latin term *pagus*, stick/pole, and the verb *pangere*, to place a stick, hence to delimit a space or a territory. The *pays* is a village whose spatiality is defined by the founding action of the human hand.[38] The second root, *-age*, is related to sight, hence to landscape as an open view which can be enjoyed by sight. According to Michael Jakob, the use of the term *paysage*, linked to a pictorial genre came first, then the term had a literary transliteration from landscape painting to landscape itself. Here the origin of landscape painting is traced back to the humanism of the Italian Renaissance and to the painting *La tempesta* (1506–1508) by Giorgione.[39] The view presented in the painting shows not only a natural and rural environment but also a piece of a city.

In this framework, it seems that the idea of landscape emerged when humans became aware of the existence of nature in relation to urban flourishing. In the sixteenth century, the city prevailed over the countryside and became a "subject," after the dynamics of proto-industrialisation and urbanisation that characterised both Italy and Flanders, while the subject of landscape also arose.[40] The concept of landscape was born when people became aware of the existence of a human space in relation to something else, namely the 'natural' space.[41] Indeed, Italy and Flanders were at the time prominent mercantile societies within pre-modern Europe.[42] In the painting *The Census at Bethlehem*, different elements of nature are present at once, such as trees

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37   Vladimir Orel reports the noun *landa-skapaz*, corresponding to Old Nore *land-skapr*, "region," and Old High German *lant-scaf*, "land"; see Orel, *A Handbook Of Germanic Etymology*, 235.

38   Jakob, *Il Paesaggio*.

39   Gombrich, "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape," 121.

40   Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 271.

41   Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential."

42   Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea."

and the river; of the rural environment, through the agricultural activities; and of the urban environment, with the buildings in the background. The arched entrance in the upper right corner of the scene could be the gate of a city. The buildings surrounding the arched gate, which seem to be made of red brick, could be a representation of a portion of Amsterdam, which Bruegel the Elder had visited in 1562 and which he had already sketched in some drawings.[43] Part of these are in ruins, something that could have an allegorical meaning, alluding to the remains of Judaism or Catholicism.[44]

Understanding landscape as the territory to which humans give form, inhabit, and design, means identifying the scape as a sort of political space or polity. While reflecting on the substantive nature of landscape, Kenneth Olwig has noted that the *Landschaft* came about in northern Europe at a time of transition between customary law and written law.[45] Regarding customary law, Olwig points out a set of laws which were originally memorised and only subsequently written down. The transition from memorised to written came about with the progressive definition of the nation-state, since previously feudal ties to the land were based on interpersonal agreements not necessarily codified into written documents. Later the term *Landschaft* became attached to a kind of painting that provided an insight into the custom of the time, both rural and urban, by showing how customary law was "inscribed and memorized in the material fabric of the *Landschaft*."[46]

An example of an activity related to customary law was how grazing sheep created pathways that were then routinely used by both shepherds and sheep. These itineraries, sometimes random and sometimes conditioned by the morphology of the territory, made it possible to acquire land-related rights and to develop a sense of belonging to a land: By periodically passing, shepherds gained the right to walk specific paths, sometimes even defining the boundaries of the fields. Interestingly, the Dutch word *schaap*—which means grazing sheep, with *schapen* being sheep—is also close to the suffix -scape. The *landschap* denotes that sheep are in the land, linking the shepherds' activity to the landscape: Perambulatory practices were a way of performing landscape as they actually shaped ("scaped") the landscape.[47] As customary obligations began to govern the rights of allocation and the duties of maintaining fields, the *Landschaft* that Olwig refers to becomes the landscape of the polity, or the

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43   Bianconi, *The Complete Paintings of Bruegel*; van den Brink, *L'entreprise Brueghel*.
44   Fogel, "Bruegel's The Census at Bethlehem and the Visual Anticensus."
45   Olwig, "Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape."
46   Ibid., 634.
47   Olwig, "Performing on the Landscape."

political space first of a rural community and later of an urban one. Similarly, Tim Ingold traces the landscape concept to the medieval period, as connected "originally to an area of land bound into the everyday practices and customary usages of an agrarian community."[48]

Such activities are evident in Bruegel's paintings, which display in an almost diagrammatic way "the logic of the activity" and not only "the logic of the terrain."[49] In *The Census at Bethlehem*, we see some farmers who transport wood, an action that is bound to customary law because it implies the definition of the rights of property and economic exploitation of the forest, the obligations to maintain its edges, and the possibility of using some roads to carry the cut branches. There are many examples of customary law-related activities in other Bruegel paintings, especially in five paintings of the renowned *Six Seasons for a Dining Room* (1565). In the census painting, we also see the activity of collecting taxes in front of an inn, where one person is giving his money to a man who is perhaps a tax collector, while another compiles a register. On the wall hangs a sign with the red Hapsburg coat of arms. Coats of arms were not simply decorations on the walls, but also, from a semiotic perspective, displays of powers.[50] In light of the presence of this coat of arms, some interpret the scene as a complaint about the high taxes imposed during the Spanish domination of the Low Countries, particularly objected to during the harsh winter period of the 1550s.[51]

Thus the scene portrayed in *The Census at Bethlehem* would allude to political criticism related to Bruegel's contemporary panorama. The political dimension of landscape, which emerges in Bruegel's work, is highlighted by Olwig, in opposition to a more aesthetic idea of landscape, for which he develops a critique by relating the reification of landscape-as-scene to the birth of the nation-state and the alienation of land rights.[52] Since the advent of the nation-state, land rights have been progressively transferred from people walking and working the land to the state.[53] The loss of rights "makes one an alien, or foreigner, in the land."[54] The alienation from land rights is a condition that also belongs to some of the people moving across a border, such as cross-border workers or undocumented migrants.[55] The very word "alien" is

48   Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?"

49   Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting*, 12.

50   Keilo, "The Coat of Arms."

51   Delevoy, *Bruegel: Historical and Critical Study*.

52   Olwig, "Representation and Alienation."

53   Also see Di Fiore and Meriggi, eds., *Movimenti e Confini*.

54   Olwig, "Representation and Alienation," 31.

55   The topic is further addressed in chapter 5 of this book.

sometimes used in European law to identify the latter.[56] Studying the etymology of the suffix -scape thus shows that the concept of landscape combines both a customary root and an institutional one.

The second meaning of landscape is the vision of a territory, its aesthetic fruition and representation, relating the suffix -scape to an open view or to scenery. Elaborating on landscape as connected to pictorial representation, Denis Cosgrove states that the origin of the landscape idea in general could reside in the way the social group of Italian bourgeois framed itself in relation to the land and to other social groups, through the use of the new visual technology of linear perspective.[57] Thus "landscape represents a way of seeing—a way in which some Europeans have represented to themselves and to others the world about them and their relationships with it, and through which they have commented on social relations."[58] Such an account of these first sceneries would link landscape to a notion of control. Cosgrove considers perspective as a technique that showed a new order not only in drawing but also in society. The new order passed through the geometric, measured, linear, and organised space proper to a new urban and rural territoriality, around which humanistic culture was established. This geometric space was the basis of cartographic mapping techniques of the territory, which were first and foremost a way to take possession of it, something later connected to the methods used for drawing borders.

Bruegel's paintings present a more intuitive and less rigid compositional arrangement compared to the rigorous Italian perspective of the time, because he built his landscapes in layers, moving from the back to the foreground.[59] The fact that a perspective representation of a street can be found in the painting *Children's Games* (1560) shows that he knew the perspective technique, and it suggests that its non-use was a deliberate choice. Given this premise, *The Census at Bethlehem* still presents some elements that relate to the idea of scape as scenery. First, the viewpoint is a high and distant one, in contrast to one embedded in a man moving on the ground. Yet, "we look from a high but not transcendental point."[60] Secondly, the view is large, showing a multitude

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56   See for example the definition of smuggling of migrants in Article 1(1) of Council Directive 2002/90: "intentionally assisting a person who is not a national of a Member State to *enter*, or *transit* across, the territory of a MS in breach of the laws of the State concerned on the entry or transit of aliens," https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2002/90/oj.

57   Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*; Cosgrove and Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape*.

58   Cosgrove, *Social Formation*.

59   Van den Brink, *L'entreprise Brueghel*.

60   Fogel, "Bruegel's The Census," 3.

of details and fragments, so that it is almost impossible to describe and analyse each of them. Moreover, there are scenic elements with allegorical meanings and a richness of human figures in a larger environment. Nearly two hundred people animate the village winter scene.

If, in the Italian painting of the time, peasants were often portrayed with grace, as would please the upper and middle classes for whom the paintings were intended, Bruegel does not sugarcoat the workers and villagers.[61] He appears to be disconnected from Italian bourgeois ideology, which many Italian paintings of the time related to. In fact, Cosgrove's thesis on landscape as a way of seeing outlines a nexus between landscape and ideology, where the landscape emerges as a discourse which manifests a specific way of both representing and governing the world.[62] But even Bruegel's painting could be read as a reflection on governing the world, translated into different scenic choices. The census concerns counting the population, a somewhat unusual theme among religious paintings. The effect of this count has repercussions for territorial governing, for example on taxation. Considering how the painting lends itself to the more abstract reading of a "meditation on different modes of population thinking," Aaron Fogel focused on the iconography of the multiple-spoked wheels present in the scene.

The Census at Bethlehem is organised by groupings.[63] Groups of cross shapes can be found both in the arrangement of the bars of the barrels and in the lines of figures walking in the background on the frozen river: "By one reading, then, the action of the painting's lines is cruciform."[64] This would refer to Catholicism. However, "it's equally possible to find the many different wheels in the painting, each with somewhere between twelve and seventeen spokes, as indicative not of crosses but of multiplicity or radiating grouping."[65] Of all the things that can be enumerated and counted in the scene, the spoked wheels are the most prominent. Hence, "the primary design or action of the painting is both that of the cross and of a more generalised and multiplicitous circular radiation outward, as if fusing Catholicism and Protestantism."[66] Particularly relevant is the wheel abandoned in the snow in the geometric centre of the scene, which recalls Bruegel's painting *The Procession to Calvary* (1564), with the fallen Christ in its centre. If Piet van Meeuwen connected the wheels to

61   Delevoy, *Bruegel*.
62   Also see Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*.
63   Fogel, "Bruegel's The Census," 10.
64   Fogel, "Bruegel's The Census," 5; also see van Meeuwen, *Elias Canetti Und Die Bildende Kunst*.
65   Fogel, "Bruegel's The Census," 5.
66   Ibid., 5.

the cyclic-natural world which would continue after the fall of Christ, Fogel develops an "economic" reading of them:

> All the wheels *are* collectively, or as a multiplicity, the negative emblem of the radial problem of the counting of persons … This is the materially conscious sign for Bruegel's own multiplicitous, unstable, but not anarchic distributions of people and things into groupings of groupings, with a much stronger feeling for classes than our contemporary demography … It is the sign … of his own self-aware "population thinking": but it's also part of the history in art and poetry of what could be called "negative demography," or anticensus, or the attempt to do counts that are not quite those of the officials or the state.[67]

This anticensus is developed not through numerology or statistics, but rather visually, making the painting a "visual anticensus." Just as scenery can incorporate the authority's vision, it can also include a different one, or scenically overturn authority's view. It may be not only an aestheticisation of the dominant class land*scape*, but also a visual response that comments on its political authority.

   After the Reinassance, the idea of landscape as scenery developed into the tradition of the sublime and the picturesque.[68] The picturesque was again a way of seeing: The landscape was observed pictorially, while the perception of nature changed. Nature was seen as wilder, and perhaps in this context, the meaning of landscape as a representation fully took over that of landscape as a region. The tradition of the Grand Tour from northern Europe to Italy also contributed to the affirmation of the picturesque. Interestingly, Bruegel himself had travelled to Italy in the 1550s. He produced several study sketches during this trip, some of which portray the Alps, such as *Alpine Landscape with Deep Valley* (ca. 1555).[69] The presence of the Alps crossed on the journey to Italy in Bruegel's sketch is fascinating in a transnational framework since today the Alps are the sediment of different national boundaries. Those same mountains appeared as a background in some of Bruegel's subsequent paintings set in the Low Countries, thus making his paintings a kind of transnational/European landscape, because the scenes brought together the geographies of northern

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67   Ibid., 5.
68   Gombrich, "The Renaissance Theory of Art."
69   "Alpine Landscape with a Deep Valley from The Large Landscapes," *The Met,* https://www .metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/415703 (accessed 27 January 2024).

and southern Europe and highlighted the existing exchanges between different cultural milieux.[70]

The conceptualisations of scape as polity and scape as scenery appear at times opposing and irreconcilable. The problem in reconciling the two may lie in the uneven conjugation between labour and vision, the shaped and the seen, that scape historically brought about.[71] Both interpretations of scape also present the limitation of considering a uniquely human perspective and agency, something which should be reconsidered in light of the recent debate engaging with more-than-human epistemologies.[72] To overcome the contraposition between the visual and the laboured, it might be worth considering the importance of landscape as an expression of "environmental relations."[73]

Bruegel the Elders's works explicitly confront the division of time, often developing an epic or bucolic dimension.[74] Temporality emerges in his paintings through scenic elements that refer to the performativity of actions in the environment, something also linked to the phenomenological aspect of the landscape and embodied experience, perceivable in "the sensation of practice: the bodily and tactile doing of landscape" that the figures in the environment suggest.[75] His paintings' temporal dimension is often related to the seasonality of practices. *The Census of Bethlehem* shows winter activities because it is set in winter, like other paintings such as *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565), part of the cycle of six paintings dedicated to the seasons known as the *Months* (1565).[76]

In the *Months* cycle of paintings, Bruegel takes up the medieval tradition of the Labours of the Month representing human work activities in relation to the calendar.[77] The cycle of the seasons is "cosmic in scope" because it shows how the human world is subject to the laws of nature that influence the rhythm of agricultural activities.[78] Piero Bianconi argued that the motif of the red disc of the setting sun and of killing the pig, both present in *The Census at Bethlehem*, would also come from the traditional medieval miniatures illustrating calendars.[79] The red disc of the setting sun is thus a scenic and a cosmic element, framing with a specific aesthetic the rhythm of the human tasks

70   Wolfgang Stechow, as an example, mentions the painting *Hunters in the Snow* (1565), completed almost ten years after Bruegel's travel to Italy; see Stechow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder*.

71   Demos, "The Scopic and the Scaped: Anthropocene Landscapes," 191.

72   See for example Kohn, *How Forests Think*.

73   Cosgrove, "Introduction," 35.

74   Gaignebet, "Le Combat de Carnaval."

75   Olwig, "Assessments," 167.

76   Iain Buchanan, "The Collection of Niclaes Jongelinck."

77   Stechow, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder*.

78   Bianconi, *The Complete Paintings of Bruegel*; Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel*.

79   Bianconi, *The Complete Paintings of Bruegel*.

shaping the landscape and offering an eco-systemic view of the laboured land-scape. The presence of time in this painted landscape can ultimately allude to the agency of nature, or the environment, as more than a background.

This understanding of Bruegel's painting shows not only that the suf-fix -scape combines at least two realms of meaning—the political and the aesthetic—but also that this ambiguity is not at all to be resolved in favour of one or the other meaning. While the historical visual roots of landscape are undeniable, landscape is not only a purely scenic text or a simulacrum. The landscape duplicity is an original and authentic part of its meaning, which can be translated into the notion of borderscape and contemporary forms of rep-resenting scapes. As suggested by Franco Farinelli, it is precisely this ambiguity that makes the concept of landscape so fertile.[80] The fact that the representa-tion of the landscape is part of its meaning reflects the crisis of our model of knowledge, what we can know and how we can represent it. Thus, precisely from the landscape, and here from the borderscape, our models of knowledge must start again. I propose to consider the meanings of scape in today's bor-ders, moving from early landscape painting to contemporary photography, as an artistic form of representation that can play a role in the de-construction of borders as sheer facts on the ground.

3   Between Representation and Experience

US photographer and writer Allan Sekula's *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* (1983) is a photographic work developed in and around a borderscape. *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* stems from a concern about the where of a border, the US one, that Sekula experienced as a citizen of its political community.[81] The work deals, in fact, with the military presence of the United States in West Germany during Reagan's presidency, in the context of the Cold War. The work is the first and shortest part of a trilogy that the author described as a "conjec-tural comparison of imaginary and material geography in the advanced cap-italist world."[82] The second part is *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* (1983), and the third is *Fish Story* (1995). In an interview with Jack Tchen, Sekula recounts the conditions in which he began the work on the East German-West German border, recalling how in the 1980s he developed an interest in border

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80   Farinelli, "L'arguzia Del Paesaggio."
81   The entire work is visible in Sekula, *Photography against the Grain*, 233–255.
82   Sekula, *Photography against the Grain*, 69.

art,[83] including the Border Arts Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo, which developed projects on the border between Mexico and the United States.[84] Gómez-Peña, the first to use the term borderscape, was one of its founders. In the same interview, Sekula says that

> by about 1983 in the context of the reheated cold war of Ronald Reagan's first term, I got very into geopolitics and thinking about the flashpoints of global contestation between superpowers. Oddly enough, from that I began to think of Canada and the US as two allied countries with a border that Margaret Atwood once described as "the longest undefended one-way mirror in the world." I began a series of works on the East German/West German border and the flashpoints of the folded gap.[85]

The work *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* comprises nine photographs shot in West Germany, namely in Hesse and northern Bavaria, close to the city of Fulda. While today Fulda is located at the centre of Germany, at the time the area was on the border facing East Germany. In addition to the fieldwork images, the series includes two still frames of an US television programme showing a large military board game set in Germany, plus some quotes from US newspapers and politicians inserted at the beginning of the series. Through the layers of meanings emerging from the images and the texts, Sekula composes a representation of this borderscape imbued with local practices, symbols, personal memories, geopolitical strategies, and traces of invisible presences. The borderscape here emerges as an entity composed of different interacting elements that are not only materially present, but also culturally constructed.

As with Bruegel's painting, knowledge of Fulda's geopolitical framework is essential for understandinging Sekula's work. A text accompanying the photographs, written by the author himself, provides some information. The use of contextual information is not unusual for Sekula, who believed in the indexical and relational meaning of photography: "a photograph communicates by means of association with some hidden, or implicit text; it is this text, or system of hidden linguistic propositions, that carries the photograph into the domain of readability."[86] A key reference for Sekula was Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's notion of historical materialism helps clarify Sekula's practice as

83   Sekula, "Interview."
84   Gómez-Peña and Hicks, "The Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo."
85   Sekula, "Interview," 157.
86   Sekula, *Photography against the Grain*, 4.

something deeply embedded in his specific socio-political context.[87] Sekula, like Benjamin, scrutinised the social, political, and economic elements of reality not as sealed realms all separated from each other but rather as overlapping layers interacting in a dialectical relation that ultimately shapes history.

Sekula's critical text introduces *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* and guides us into the territory of the Fulda region. The area was a poor farming territory whose location near the East German-West German border made it strategic in the geopolitical panorama of the time. The quotes from US newspapers and politicians, placed at the beginning of the work, demonstrate a belief spread across the US political spectrum, which contended that the Soviet Union was preparing for the conquest of Western Europe. The threat of Soviet expansion thus justified the ongoing race for nuclear weapons, while the East-West border region was strategic for preventing possible trespassing. In the 1980s, the US Army was both an economic and technological presence in the Fulda region. This presence was explained by the need to defend the outpost. In the text that accompanies the project, Sekula describes the material and visible evidence of the US presence, such as the brothels frequented by US soldiers in Fulda, or the military convoys which routinely moved in the streets. Although the reality of this borderscape at that time was permeated by the in/visible hostility between the two political blocks, the memory of the landscape was still connected to episodes of the Second World War, and even to the Celts' ancient presence in the territory.

Sketch for a Geography Lesson relates in different ways to the scape understood as scenery, first of all at the formal level. Among the works presented in *Photography Against the Grain* (1984), a book that brings together Sekula's essays and images, this work is one of the most pictorialist, mainly because of the use of colour, anticipating the approach that would characterise some of his subsequent works. While landscape painting offers a single large view encompassing multiple details, a tableau, the photographic vision develops by means of fragments collected with framing operations. This fragmented vision takes on meaning in the juxtaposition of the different images, and Sekula fully embraces the potential of juxtaposition when working in photographic series. As noted by contemporary art historian Van Gelder, "Sekula's photos always partake in what he calls a larger montage ... every single photo that is part of his body of work relates to the other, even if it is not shown, and it also interacts with his written texts."[88] While the point of view in Bruegel's scenery is from above, in Sekula's photographic work on the East German-West

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87   Van Gelder, *Ground Sea*, 187.
88   Van Gelder, "Photography Today," 175.

German border, it is embedded in the human perspective. However, both Bruegel's and Sekula's approaches are rooted in realism. Bruegel did not refine the peasants he showed in his paintings, and thus took a realist standpoint.[89] Benjamin Buchloh also describes Sekula's practice as a form of realism, a "critical realism."[90]

The photographs of the East German-West German border area offer a view of the material elements that make up the landscape: the trees of a forest, a rural house, the roads. Some of these visible elements clearly point to other invisible ones. In the case of a memorial to the Second World War, a material element in the shape of a cross refers to the place's memory, hence to the immaterial. Sekula photographed it in a way that negates the traditional front view we associate with memorials. The photograph presents a side view in which the head of the cross is cut off, and a sense of institutional representation is lost. The road signs with military symbols indicate the possible passage of tanks, together with a sign stating, "US Army" in front of a border forest.

Another cross appears in a religious icon photographed on the opposite side of the rural house. The numerous religious symbols seem to allude to those pre-national powers that mix here with nation-state ones, suggesting the in/visible presence of different powers. In the text, Sekula notes how while touring this region, which is Catholic, he remembered an image from a children's encyclopedia he had at home. He describes this image in the text: It shows the Madonna above a territory, confronting Soviet soldiers with their feet covered in blood. This image serves for him to display how, in the US political narrative, the presence of fascism in these geographical areas disappeared from historical memory, while only the frightening presences from the East and the Soviet Union remain.

The elements that make up the scenes are inevitably imbued with political connotations. The idea of the scape as a polity, which is given shape through performative gestures of labour and everyday life, can also be seen in the men killing a cow. They will use its blood to make sausages, as Sekula informs us in the text. The scene recalls those customary law-related activities shown in Bruegel's *The Census at Bethlehem*, such as that of characters intent on carrying wood logs or killing a pig. These gestures also refer to the region's rural history. However, it is also possible to associate a symbolic meaning with the blood that can be seen in both the photo in which the cow is killed and the one in which the butchered meat is hanging from a tractor. Here the red stains are even more discernible lying on the white snow. This blood may be an allusion to the Second World War and to the former presence in the area of a

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89   Delevoy, *Bruegel*.
90   Buchloh, "Allan Sekula, or What Is Photography?"

concentration camp, which Sekula mentions in his text. The presence of the camp also emerges in the photo where a woman holds in her hands an image of the concentration camp where it used to be, and where it is now invisible (Fig. 2.3). The woman, the author's widow, is Jewish and hence had a personal connection with the turmoil of the Second World War and its history. Thus, the fights over a previous boundary line emerge. While the border has become a tourist attraction, the locals often ignore this heavy presence from the past.

Beyond the gestures of everyday life, other, different performative actions of power and counter-power contribute to shaping the borderscape, both materially and immaterially. We sense the passage of military vehicles in the traces visible on the roads (Fig. 2.2). Performing checks, the military vehicles embody US power. The two frames that Sekula took from a US television programme are further keys. Taken in his home in Ohio, the photographs emblematically show a war game executed on a German map by two military strategists. One frame opens *Sketch for a Geography Lesson*; the other closes it. Both come from an US cable television show, where spectators could interact with the broadcast of the war game by pressing a button on the remote control to express their preference for either firing artillery or launching missiles. Thus, spectators too could perform an action within the war game. The television frames seem to refer to the role of both the media and the public in the discursive production and re-production of the war.

Lastly, we perceive the presence of the artist himself and his performed research. In the first of the nine pictures taken on the ground, we see two women walking in the forest near the border, Sekula's widow and a friend who lived in the region.[91] Their presence hints at the counter-performance of the artistic practice unravelling there, thus bringing us back to another potential of the borderscape notion. When expressed in the gerund form, borderscaping suggests acts of research on the place and in the place of the border, which develop through performative acts of narration, visualisation, and imagination, that can potentially re-shape borders.[92] These acts always take place from a specific subjective positionality.

In *Sketch for a Geography Lesson*, Sekula's personal standpoint emerges as an American who looks at US influence over another country, an American who is married to a Jewish woman. Sekula noted that he often used "'autobiographical' material, but assume[d] a certain fictional and sociological distance in order to achieve a degree of typicality. My personal life is not the issue; it is

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91   Sekula's widow is Prof. Sally Stein. Sally Stein herself provided this biographical information via email on 30 November 2020. Sekula and Stein had travelled from Ohio, where they were living, to Germany to participate in a conference in the Ruhr region.

92   Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical Potential."

FIG. 2.2–2.3   Allan Sekula, *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* (1983). Two of nine colour
                    cibachrome photographs (11 in × 14 in each), accompanied by two black
                    and white photographs (18 in × 22 in each) and six text pages with inserted
                    colour illustrations (11 in × 14 in each)
                    © THE ALLAN SEKULA STUDIO

simply a question of a familiarity that forms the necessary basis for an adequate representational art."[93] In the same text, he added that only conceiving of cultural work as praxis—as research practice—can help overcome the two opposing tendencies of believing totally in the privileged subjectivity of the artist, on the one hand, or in the objectivity of photographic realism, on the other.[94]

Returning to the initial question on the where of the border, *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* offers a geography lesson right on the border's location, as suggested by the title, and it does so from the point of view of a specific political community. In the two still frames from the war game taken from the television programme, the game is not staged on just any geographical map of Germany, but right on the map of the Fulda area. This television show teaches viewers—presumably US citizens—that the US border extends into the German national space. The geography lesson is that the border can be displaced, that it can be anywhere, as the borderscape idea itself suggests. *Sketches*

93   Sekula, *Photography against the Grain*, 70.
94   Ibid., 74.

for a Geography Lesson also unveils other mechanisms of the nation-state that emerge in the borderscape. In the elections of 1982, the Green Party took 8% of the votes in this region of Germany, coming to represent a counterforce to the project of US interventions related to the nuclear weapon strategy. In the United States, newspapers described the German Greens as an irrational and atavistic party. As Sekula noted, however, the Germans may not have wanted to be drawn into a nuclear war. When they were in Germany, he adds, it seemed to them—namely to Sekula himself and those accompanying him—that the will to control the territory by the United States was driven more by economic reasons than by military ones. That same year, the United States tried to stop the construction of a Soviet natural gas pipeline in order to maintain economic control over European resources.

A close look at *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* thus shows that shifting the dual dimension of the suffix -scape into borders means bringing out the notion of a border*scape* as a political and scenic space that is experienced both subjectively, from a specific (citizenship) positionality, as well as on the field. The suffix -scape outlines a space that is seen, represented, shaped, experienced, and ultimately performed.

In the context of borders, the dimension of -scape as scenery that I discussed in relation to Bruegel's painting *The Census at Bethlehem* (see chapter 1, "Along the Swiss-Italian Border") points to the role played by representation methods in the birth of borders through cartographic representation. At the same time, the realm of representation can also be the place to challenge some predominant assumptions about borders, such as their being fixed and unchangeable entities. This "counter" dimension, which moves out of nation-state institutional representations, is embraced by much border art and by other cultural works about the border. Among these is the Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal literary work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), dedicated to Chicana culture, and still today an essential reference among the vast literature that confronts the idea of undoing borders. Written in a mixture of prose and poetry, English and Spanish, the book is a semi-autobiographical account of borderlands' hybridity, drawing on Chicana culture at the threshold between Mexico and the United States, which Anzaldúa is especially familiar with because she grew up there. Her writing aids an understanding of the border as process and experience. Many of the images that emerge from the literary figures and words of the book in fact refer back to the bodily dynamics of the border, the bodies crossed by the border, and especially the border crossing of female bodies.

The dimension of scape as polity, as the political space of a community of people living together, points in this context to how bordering processes depend on practices dictated by borders and the rules they establish, but also by the bodily gestures of everyday life. The practices connected to border crossings and their control are emblematic in this regard. Such practices are performative because they contribute to constructing borders. However, when they circumvent and contest borders and border rules, these practices also contribute to deconstructing them or revealing their hegemonic dimension. Borders had a specific role in modernity in producing political subjectivity, because borders determine who belongs or not to a specific territory, and which rights one has or has not in a land. Chiara Brambilla aptly argued that moving from borders to borderscapes allows liberating the political imagination from the territorial imperative. This notion has the potential to act on the epistemological, ontological, and methodological perspectives for border studies.[95]

First, thinking of the border as a borderscape introduces the possibility of overcoming the canonical space-time binarisms of the border by looking on the border with a multi-situated gaze. Second, it suggests a view of the border as something actively constructed and always in a state of becoming,

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95   Brambilla, "Exploring the Critical."

depending on human understanding and praxis, as a mobile entity. Third, it recommends a focus on border representations and experiences. The focus on representations responds to the need to address the problem of borders "visibility," in Hannah Arendt's sense: To make something visible means moving it into the public sphere where politics is discussed and enacted. The focus on experience humanises borders beyond strictly the nation-state's needs. When used as a cultural praxis, photography can address both representations and experiences, as shown in Sekula's *Sketch for a Geography Lesson*. The concept of borderscape thus points to the multiple social, cultural, political, and spatial dimensions of borders, outlining the edges of the nation-state as spaces where different identities are negotiated, enacted, and represented, from both hegemonic perspectives and counter-hegemonic ones. Sekula's work ultimately constructs a counter-representation of the German borderscape by alluding to the presence of state violence, not only of the German state—mostly in relation to the Holocaust—but also of the US state in its displaced military presence, a presence supported by a market interest which lies behind the claims of more political intent.

The complex East-West stratification of differing political interests, historical elements, and subjectivities, and the tensions arising from such layering, resonates with the present in the context of the war in Ukraine that broke out on 24 February 2022, in an escalation of the conflict started in 2014. In this case, Russian political discourse claimed that Ukraine was progressing toward NATO membership, which would consequently present an intolerable risk to Russia's national security, justifying a military presence in Ukrainian territory as a form of defence against a possible attack from the west.[96] Thus, Sekula's work seems incredibly timely, if not downright anticipatory. Through the images and words of the work, we come to think of borders re-activated and re-displaced in various media and for various publics. The reflection on the involvement of the public, which in *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* is triggered thanks to the presence of two frames of a US television show, prompts us to ask what is the role of the western public in participating in contemporary wars. It creates urgency for researching today's borderscapes and considering representations that are "not so quite those of the officials or the state,"[97] like Pieter Bruegel the Elder's visual anticensus, or of the mainstream media. With this understanding, we return to the Swiss-Italian borderscape, looking at both its representations and experiences.

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96   See Düben, "The Long Shadow of the Soviet Union."

97   I am referring once more to Aaron Fogel understanding of Bruegel's *The Census at Bethlehem* (1566) as a visual anticensus. See Fogel, "Bruegel's The Census," 10.