

# The Mask of the Border

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## Introduction

*Infinity is the original fact. What has to be explained is the source of the finite.*  
(Nietzsche, my translation)

From my home in Nijmegen it is about a quarter of an hour by bike to Germany. The perception of that time travel in this borderland is very special, because I not only leave Nijmegen, I leave the Netherlands. It is hence a bicycle tour 'abroad', to a foreign country. In perception however, Germany lies much further away than a quarter of an hour. The one day trip feels like the beginning of a holiday. Physically, the border is not obviously present. A sign with 'Willkommen in Deutschland', an old, expired customs office, an artistic border monument and an occasional police van, these are the physical remnants of the political border. What dominates in this inner borderland of the European Union is the void, the disappearance. The vagueness of the morphological border may be striking, yet this is not to say that the border actually disappeared. The border is not present, yet it is not absent. Maybe imperceptible to the untrained eye, but vividly present and mentally powerful, there is still a border between the Netherlands and Germany. Once one has crossed the border, one does *de jure* and *de facto* enter another country. Crossing a border makes one from a human from the interior into a human from the exterior, a foreigner, someone from them over there. The opening-not-disappearance of borders in the European Union after 1993, it is clear that the border in the European Union, is still filled with meaning, and internalized in everyday practices, institutions, conventions, acts and mentalities. It is clear that this certainly holds for borders that are not as open as is the case of the European Union. Hence, it is safe to say that despite a strong rhetoric of global world, as we saw in the '90s, borders continue to play a persistent part of the daily lives of human beings. This contribution deals with the question why and how in general borders are socially produced and/or reproduced Why do we border ourselves and at with what gains and at what price for ourselves and others? And if we do accept that borders are indeed human constructs, does that mean that it is possible to reconstruct the border, to give it another meaning? I will argue that the void of the border in terms of its morphological absence should not be interpreted

as a symbolic void. The borderland may be emptied of the border proper; the head of the borderlander is not emptied. Although indeed the heads may be full, and some may be more full (of themselves) than others, this does not mean that the function and mentality that we still implicitly attach to borders, even if these have been opened as is the case in the European Union, could not be deconstructed and reconsidered ontologically. It is that deconstruction which opens the way for a new dynamism in this time and age, in order to make it possible to ontologically reinterpret this persistent phenomenon called the border.

## A border is a verb

*Let no one who cannot think geometrically enter.*

(Inscription at the door of the Platonic Academy)

When people talk about territorial boundaries, often first attention is given to their physical appearances. That which is most visible is given the most attention. Admittedly, heavy armed border guards or a high stone wall does catch one's eye. But there is no ur-border in terms of its morphological appearance. A barbed wire, a wall, a gate, a door, a barrier, a line on the map, a river, a line in the sand, it can all be borders. A border has no original model, it is a simulation of a model. It is as the French philosopher Baudrillard would argue, a simulacrum, a manifestation of a copy, but with its own reality. That reality of the border then is created by the meaning that is attached to it. A line in the sand is not always a limit, as well as a border is not always a line in the sand. A line is geometry, a border is interpretation. The objective form of the border does not necessarily equal the influence of the border. Obviously, the Berlin Wall was more difficult to cross by foot, car or bike than an average linguistic border, but the influence of the material reality of the border is independent of the force and interpretation of the border. A door may be a border for some and a passage for others. And a wall may be a 'protection' against the pernicious influence of others behind that wall for some and to others mostly a place to spray graffiti on. A border can spatially be drawn everywhere. It is the symbolic meaning attributed to the appearance of the line which must be seen as constructor of the normative form. A border should thus be more broadly interpreted than as an object alone. A limited perspective of the border as a line or object, often leads to the often heard, but unfounded claim that we live in a global village, borderless or flat world in which borders no longer matter. What is important to the study of the ontology of borders is hence not the item of the border per se, but the objectification process of the border, the socially constituent power practices attached to a border that construct a spatial effect and which give a demarcation in space its meaning and influence.

A border is not a military defence alone. To create a border is essentially the creation of an Innerspace of reflection, a narcissian centripetal orientation, a truth in which one can find pleasure and ease. Drawing borders, the making of a nation, is as philosopher Sloterdijk has recently argued in his book *Spheres*, the making

of a national self-portrait. This act of mirroring is a continual space-fixing process which according to philosopher Zygmunt Bauman gives the *impression* as if it is a physically identifiable entity with objective and unchangeable borders. No border is built for a short term, a border is built for eternity. Knowing at the same time that there is no border in history that has not disappeared, the creation of a border is hence, as philosopher Peter Sloterdijk argues in *Spheres*, precisely this, a big NO against the death of the nation. It is a testament of the desired eternal life. The border gate as a gate to heaven on earth. The Law of the territorial border is a faith, a belief. A border is an ideology that is believed in, with the walls acting as the fundament of the own temple. It is a belief in the presence and continuity of a spatial binding power, which is objectified in our everyday social practices. The spatial separation that a border represents is goal and means at the same time. The power of this belief is determined by the interpretations and consequential (violent) power practices of those who construct and help to reproduce the border. The border makes and is made. Hence, a border is a verb. As argued together in an article with Ton van Naerssen in 2002, we should speak of *bordering* (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002). This active and vigorous understanding of the ontology of a border leads to an ambiguous picture of the supposedly limitless world. It could be argued that the stronger ideologically is believed in the utility and importance of the protection of what is seen as own, the greater the difference is made by the border.

### A border is a fabricated truth

*I have kept in mind the idea that the earth is in effect one world, in which empty, uninhabited spaces virtually do not exist. Just as none of us is outside geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.*  
(Said 1993, 7)

A border can serve the interests of a territorial power, a gang, a democratically elected political representation, an academic discipline, a self. The list of border makers is endless. Common to the border makers is that the practice of the border making, of *bordering*, confirms and maintains a space, a locus and focus of control. The world outside the domain-making border will be instrumentalized by representing it symbolically as a foreign country, the competitor, the enemy, the other, or chaos, against which the unique consistent and uniform cultural identity and tradition of the own unity will be mirrored. In so doing, a window on the world is represented, an invented reality, an appealing truth. For many, what they see as their border, however defined and wherever drawn, is the start as well as consequential culmination of the image we have of the world. In mirroring the world, most classically, maps are used that depict and aim to represent the power division. We have travelled a long way since the first maps of the world and the

first borders were drawn and published. Yet, still, an average map is used and seen as cartographically ordered power-logic with lines and colours and points that delineate the borders of territorial-differential sovereignties. Rather than a process of discovering truth, a border as well the map that represents it, is making truth. A map not only re-presents the world, it also is productive, it fabricates an image, a lens on the world. It serves the geo-political goal that a state is imagined and believed to be different and distinct from other cities. Using a map for political purposes is what could be called carto-politics, drawing-table politics. A map of a border is therefore *active*: it represents space which facilitates its domination and control, it communicates a truth, it actively *constructs* knowledge, it silences the unrepresented, it exercises power and a map can be a powerful means of promoting social change. As Harley (1989) argues, it is no wonder that in modern Western society maps quickly became crucial to the maintenance of state power – to its boundaries, to its commerce, or its internal administration, to control of populations, and to its military strength. Mapping soon became the business of the State. Yet, the making or adjusting of borderlines and dots on a map, how good its intentions may be, border and orders not only spaces but also people. And where borderlines and dots become dominant, people are erased. Hence, carto-politics in its core is cartographic cleansing. It consciously silences what is not represented and it dehumanizes the landscape. The signifier of the map is not the world as we know it, the signified, as philosopher Foucault already argued discussing the work of the surrealist painter René Magritte (*ceci n'est pas une pipe*). The map of a border is *sur-real*, *it is not a border*. What a map of a border creates is a gap, a difference. Representing is making a difference. It is a image of reality, a truth outside truth itself. The border represented on a map colonizes the free and constantly ontologically reinterpreted space that truth necessarily is. The border demarcates, represents and communicates truth, but it is thereby not truth itself. The consequence is that a border, just like the map of it, is inescapably a fabricated truth. Borders are the construction of a reality and truth in a certain context, and in certain spatial entity. What is seen as truth in one domain can be a lie in the space and/or eyes of an other. And what conventional reality is in the own domain can be a doomed image or fantasy in the domains and/or eyes of the other.

To illustrate the above, the Netherlands exists because the highly engineered and constantly redefined and reinvented truth is believed that a private domain called the Netherlands exists, that is uniquely different and can be rightfully disentangled and separated from other countries. The space with the name the Netherlands is seen as jointly owned. Foreigners are seen as guests, aliens, strangers, visitors, tourists, migrants, or foreigners, in any case as people originally not from here. What original means and to which imagined unity in the past it refers to, nobody precisely knows in this context, but it is clear that they are not Dutch. These non-Dutch must ask for permission to enter this domain called the Netherlands, as if a country was a house in which one united family would live. In the case they wish to stay longer than we had originally allowed for, they must ask for our permission to do so, as if this imaginatively separated country was a club with membership cards and privileges. The Netherlands thus makes a difference in space. It marks

and demarcates a threshold, a gated house, and membership in space. It politicizes space. Famously, Benedict Anderson speaks not in terms of family or a club but of an imagined community (Anderson 1991). The idea here is that we can not all know our fellow citizens, but we believe and narrate to each other that we have something in common.

In the attempt to give meaning to the national identity, nations often define themselves in comparison with the immediate neighbour-landers but also increasingly with people from abroad. To illustrate, in the narration, reinvention and redemarcation of Dutch symbols, maps and citizenship rights, it is typically imagined that fellow Dutchmen are different and better than the non-Dutch. One of the most favourite others for the Dutchman was until recently the big neighbour, the Germans, the post-World War II followers of the Belgians, who were the big other before during and after the Belgian-Dutch war. Today, after the terrorist attacks in the US and the consequent War on Terror that was launched in 2001, and the consequent advent of right-wing populist politicians like Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders, increasingly, the *allochtoon* (he/she who comes from another (*allos*) ground (*chthonos*)) has taken over the role of the other. The *allochtoon* is thereby often reduced to the Muslim. The Dutchman does not want to be German, nor Belgian, nor *allochtoon*, but what the 'Dutchman' then is remains unclear. Precisely because national identity is not something that one can hold in one's hands, imagined as it is, the Dutchman is being reinvented everyday. The national political rhetoric and strongly nationally oriented focus of the printed media help to ordering and anchoring a belief in the Netherlands as *our* own historical land and *our* own destiny. Through the use of both symbolic unifiers (flags, hymn, number plates, signs) and educational unifiers (language, geography and history education) the Dutch border is daily reproduced in space. Especially, national politicians, elected to represent the own nation, do not seldom consciously invoke the national pride and identification. The promotion of national identification is mostly done from the perspective of social bonding and cohesion. In international perspective usually the desired image and international aspiration to be an important country plays an important motivation. In doing so, national politicians explicitly stress the vision of the Netherlands as one community, as a 'we' and 'here'. As such, national borders are being reproduced and reconstructed on a daily basis.

One of the most striking forms of the manifestations of the Dutch bordering and ordering of a place and identity in space is the admission policy with regard to foreigners. The Netherlands admits immigrants for a period longer than three months (the time period of the tourist *via*) only if their presence serves an essential Dutch interest, if they are entitled to live here under an international agreement (such as Family Reunion), or if there are compelling humanitarian reasons for admitting them (asylum). In practice this means that foreigners who do not belong to the highly welcome group who are of direct Dutch essential interest (such as investors, entrepreneurs and high-skilled labour) and are entering the Netherlands only get a residence permission to stay for longer than three months after they have been 'appropriated' by the state of the Netherlands. That is, after they have learned basic Dutch and have accepted the norms and values of Dutch society. All this is tested preferably before they are allowed to come, in a civic integration

examination. If a foreigner wishes to acquire more than just a residence permit and also wants to become 'truly' Dutch, he/she will have to go a 'naturalization' process (*nomen est omen*). To be naturalized means that one gets the same status as a person who is born 'naturally' in the Netherlands. The nation therefore is in its wording still seen in terms of blood and soil. To be born in the nation (nation comes from *naissance*, birth), is still seen as *natural*. All this is at a price obviously, which is an extra effectual border. The exam, a visa, or a residence permit, or the naturalization process will soon already cost a foreigner a few hundred euros, or more depending on what precisely he/she wants/needs. Foreigners who wish to become 'naturally' Dutch often first have to strip off, have to lose, their old 'natural' nationality, they have to become naked again as it were, like with a real birth. After this, if he/she complies to the criteria that are set out to become a natural Dutch, such as he/she is already legally in the Netherlands for five years, is well integrated in Dutch society and has a residence permit, he/she will be appropriated by the Dutch state and will be given the status in a naturalization ceremony. The foreigner is then 'born again' as a Dutch citizen.

### The national mask

From a totally different perspective also international football is an important as well as beloved signifier and producer of national borders and national identities. In a time in which the football industry is heavily determined by commercial and media interests that do not respect national borders, and the international labour market for football players is increasingly becoming a normal labour market without exploitation and slavery, a competition based on national representation is a strikingly archaic phenomenon. It is still seen, by many, as an honour to represent the nation on an international championship. Sports, and especially football, that battle between players from two nations on a green field, has become a simulation of the heroic symbolism that used to be attributed to fights on that ur-battlefield, the war field. The fight for the national honour, the taste of the sweet sensation of a victory and the bitter drama of a lost match all have become more important in football over the last decades, not less. The symbolism and semiotics, although usually fortunately with a carnivalesque intention, gives the individual supporter a feeling of togetherness, of solidarity, of a common and just cause and community. The Dutch are by no means an exception to the rule of the growing patriotic circus that international football games have become (van Houtum and van Dam 2002). Yet, largely due to the missing of the feeling of a historical shame when it comes to nationalism, such as in Germany, Austria or Belgium, and probably because of the possibility to be proud of and be internationally recognized as a small country in a sports that is so widely played, the Dutch nationalism, the 'Orange feeling', is remarkably strong and vivid. Be that as it may be, the extravagant and ecstatic enthusiasm with which people dress up as the stereotypical national icons and colour their hairs and paint their faces with the national colours, this seemingly unquestioned moral conformism to represent and

perform the nation, never stops to amaze me every time a new international football match, let alone championship, is beginning.

In a sense, the metaphorical carnivalesque Orange mask that Dutch people put on during international football games and championships on a massive scale, is not an exception, but a magnification. We increasingly live in the time of the mask. Quite literally, cities, regions and nations nowadays mask and brand themselves with slogans and fitting flags and emblems that mean to showcase the city as unique and attractive. In the imagined rat race between cities, regions and nations it is apparently more important how the own territorial domain is marketed and showcased than what the actual contents is behind the slogan and the branding. The exterior, the shape is becoming more important: the mask of the own identity. The Dutch Orange mask that Dutch people metaphorically put on during every international championship, fits in this trend of wishing to outcompete the other and showing the branded, stereotypical image of ourselves to each others. It is striking that we play along with this national masked ball so obediently. The Dutch philosopher Erasmus wrote in his joyful and mockery '*Lof der Zotheid*' (In Praise of Folly) that foolishness works as a fantasy that softens the pain of the everyday life. The mask covers the emptiness, the void, the eternal shortage in us, the Nothingness. The mask gives a sense of belonging, a sense of rootedness; it gives one a face in the crowd. In this context it is illustrative perhaps that today's word 'person' is derived from the Latin *persona*, which means mask.

If masks become dominant, then a city or a nation becomes a theatre, a spectacle that is exploited politically and commercially and which is full of nothing. To use the words of a play of Shakespeare, it becomes *Much Ado about Nothing*.

In the international football arena of today, the players are well paid club actors and the coaches their temporary 'entertrainers'. When playing for the national team, they perform, they act nationality. The nation itself is increasingly becoming a dated one-dimensional mask of a multi-layered multiplicity of identities and club interests. Increasingly, players and coaches are born somewhere else than the nation they represent. At the last European Championships in Austria/Switzerland there were 16 national teams playing to each other, but the players were of in total 33 nationalities. A coach like Guus Hiddink, a hero and example for many, has become a national marionette as no other coach. He has coached teams of the Netherlands, Australia, South-Korea, Russia and currently Turkey. He wears the national mask of the team and plays the patriot of the team that hires him, no matter what flag he has to plea allegiance to and what national hymn he has to sing. Also the spectators of the international championships increasingly play multiple roles. Instead of being only spectators, they have become actors themselves as well. As argued above, they dress up in the national colours and put on the mask of the nation and in doing so, they are also co-producing the national theatre as mercenaries of the nation. But this spectacle of the national theatre cannot disguise that the desire will last. Because the desire of he/she who puts on the mask of the collective is never fulfilled. Wishing to reach that imagined and utopian ecstatic endpoint, at which we all would be proud collectively of the boys on the field, is addictive and endless. There will always be a next match. The void cannot be filled forever.

## Self-repression

The examples of the immigration policies and national football games explained above exemplify that a national border is a symbolic demarcation of an appropriated space, an imagined Truth, that carries its own name and that is being reproduced symbolically, semiotically and formally every day in time and space. The question that becomes pertinent then is the following. If the national border is intrinsically and inescapably an imagined or fabricated truth, why do we believe in this fantasy? Because demarcating and symbolic reproduction of the border can only be successful if those who are subject of these strategic border (re)productions also have an interest (see also Foucault 2007). So the border must be believed as a truth. But why would people who live in a certain land on the globe, where the political borders of that land are neither natural nor self-evident and where the political borders have been established by unpredictable historical coincidences, believe in the self-evident truth of these borders (see also Fromm 1942)? Especially because as I have shown above, social construction of a national identity is also social self-repression. Why do people tend to be self-repressive? Identification with a social environment and a community, and to call that our own, apparently gives an important sense of value of oneself. Even though it is often realized that the nation is an imagined community, a fantasy of the collective, it is still seen as a necessary one. The self gains a collective value, the personal identity becomes part of a national identity. One becomes part of a powerful and meaningful national narrative; one gains a national belonging, a membership in the socios. Through the nation, the self gets a roof above its head, the roof of the national house that is constructed and maintained by a community of which the self is one. The fact that this national identity that is constructed is of a collective makership, for many it is only furthering the importance of the self, since he/she is a co-creator, a co-maker, which is seen as a meaningful function. In addition to the feeling of being part of meaningful collective and having co-makership in the collective outcome and direction of the common narrative, constructing and demarcating a spatial unity feeds into the desire to have spatial beacons and priorities in daily life. To demarcate a border is in fact saying: keep your distance. A border is a distance. A national border creates a distance with the world outside. It creates a national home, a refuge with doors that can be closed. To take refuge, to take shelter behind a collectively constructed window on the world that produces a collective frame and view on the world, a distance is created to what is outside the shelter, that which is exterior, foreign. The other that is herewith constructed is constitutive for the own identity. One recognizes oneself best in the reflection of the eyes of the other. This b/ordering of worldview and identity potentially gives one ease, comfort and security. This may help to explain why in this age of globalization, shifting borders and migration, there is so much longing to nostalgia for the imagined loss of shared values and norms, and why there is so much emphasis on the control and protection of borders. To many, the openness feels as an intruder. It clouds and troubles the comfortable mental b/ordering of the world and with the imagined purity of the own (com)unity. Helping to uphold the borders of the nation – be it



in active terms such as the reporting of co-arresting of unwanted border crossers by some American civilian groupings in the borderland of Mexico-United States, the fanatical cheering of the national football team – or in more passive terms such as the accepting of restrictive border controls or the accepting of civic integration examinations for immigrants – maintains the national ordering and purification. By definition, borders are partial, selective and opportunistic, in their representation as well as in the interests that they wish to serve. Borders close in some areas and some people and exclude other areas and people. The ordering and purification of the own space and own identity works as a drug. The constitution of a shared space, with a shared narrative, and fantasy, a shared truth create an immediate satisfaction, it masks and covers the void, the emptiness in us for a short time, but the consequence is a long-term desire for new appropriation and control of the own truth when this truth is perceived to be threatened. The desire, the wish for the (comm)unity of tomorrow, the dream of the national utopia is never-ending.

### The price of the fabricated truth

*What are your lines? What map are you in the process of making or rearranging? What abstract line will you draw, and at what price, for yourself and for others? (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 203)*

The drug that is the nation has a price. Addiction to the own unity can be threatening to others. At this moment, the EU is very active in intercepting those people who wish to get to the continent without papers. Non-EU travellers without a residence permit or those who stay here without the proper papers will be expelled or deported. Over the last decade or so, many migrants have died on their way to the EU. It has become abundantly clear even in the case of the often praised so called soft power and benevolent union that the price of exclusion can be extremely high. What makes this even more macabre is that the selfishness of the collective that is the EU is legitimized by the capitalistic logic that has been implemented politically. Serving the private interest has become a public task. Controlling the borders is thus largely serving a commercial interest: comfort. Borders therefore are not only relative in the sense that they reflect and constitute the other, but they are also moral. The maintenance of borders can uphold comfort, preserve a self-productive ease and maintain the narrative of certainty and the just order, but a national border can also be immoral against those who are excluded. Making a domain exclusive, brilliant, a brandable shining precious diamante for the included, also implies an exclusion of those who are believed or narrated to make the own order dirty, filthy or less valuable. Who this other is, who is defined to be a 'barbarian' to the civilized world is decided and narrated by every b/ordered 'civilization' differently. As explained above, an important group of non-natives in the Netherlands are the Germans. But these non-native inhabitants of the Netherlands, these *allochtonen*, are almost totally neglected in the debate on immigrants in the Netherlands. The Germans are still seen

as a 'favourite enemy' that the Dutch like to beat especially in football or economic competition, but the politicization of enmity and fear is now focused on the Muslim. Here not the spirit of a sportive battle is politicized, but a kind of 'Unheimlichkeit', a fear to lose the own identity, and to lose the control over the own space and undividedness. This is a fear that touches upon the existence itself, a fear for the void in oneself, for the missing of the difference, a fear for open space, a space without a refuge, a borderless world. This existential fear for some migrants reaffirms old or produces new borders. Some even incline to close the borders totally for these new 'barbarians'. But borders are not like eyes that can be shut. The other, however defined and targeted, is necessary for the constitution of the own order and identity. The reflection in the eyes of the other through which one can identify oneself, can only be done with open eyes. By closing the borders, closing the eyes, the fear for the other will not be shut off. The uncertainty will only be greater. With eyes closed, the other will become a fantasy, a ghost, a monster, an invader, an illusion reigned by distrust. Not the forest outside is fearful, but the stories that is told about it. It is the border of the forest that as an entrance to another world – a world of the darkness, the chaos, the wild, the barbaric – is cultivated and reproduced by the stories about it. Hence, a border may be a necessary distance, but to distantiate the world outside does not only produce comfort and ease. The stronger the border is closed, the more imaginary and whimsical the stories and the larger the unease and uncertainty. A closed community with closed borders in the end does not trust a single strange element. Increasingly, this fear together with ongoing process of globalization has lead to a radical diffusion of borders. The border, once a territory's beginning and end, has crawled and crept itself into many spaces and has taken many forms, such as the borders of and in airports, detention centres, and camps. In addition, increasingly, our eyes and fingerprints are scanned and our bodily movements in public space traced and tracked (see also van Houtum, 2010a). Our bodies have become the passports and maps that we carry. So, as Freud already has argued, paradoxically, a severe border control and self-repression, goes together with heavy sacrifices in terms of personal freedom. Hence, the paradoxical result is that the strong border believers have become trapped in a spatial matrix of codes of their desire of and plea for more comfort, security and freedom for themselves.

## The Janus face of the border

*...everything was on the lines, between the lines, in the AND that made one and the other imperceptible, without disjunction or conjunction but only a line of flight forever in the process of being drawn, toward a new acceptance, the opposite of renunciation or resignation- a new happiness? (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 206-7)*

A socially constructed border is a form and manifestation of self-repression. It suppresses the total potential of personal mobility and freedom by constructing

a sphere of trust inside and a fear for what is out there, beyond the self-defined border. Yet, at the same, the world outside that is constructed by a border also expresses a desire, a wish, the longing to be somewhere else (see also van Houtum 2010b). It is the desire to experience and live the personal freedom despite or thanks to the fear for the unknown, the non-routine. That is the desire to turn to the other, the desire to cross the line. The unknown, the stories about the exotic and the mythical, the adventure, the wild or the culturally different, can work like the Siren song on our ears. A border therefore also reflects liberty, the desire to de-border oneself, to become stranger oneself. The desire to leave behind what is familiar, to close the door behind, to turn the key and to leave – into the world, or in the words of philosopher Rudi Visker – to become strange and to stay strange (Visker 2005).

A border is hence much more than a protection wall behind which one hides or takes refuge. It is also a threshold to an other world. The border is a Janus face, named after the Roman God Janus of the end and the beginning, of the passage, of the guard between upperworld and underworld. Janus has two faces, the centripetal, inward oriented and the centrifugal, the outward oriented face. The desire to escape from one's home, one's self, to de-appropriate one's home and one's self, is of all ages and has many shapes. The most well-known is of course holiday, vacation, that expresses a desire to stay and be home away from home in the land of the other for a few weeks, to be a stranger oneself for a few weeks. Some people wish to be a stranger longer and buy a second home in the land or the place of the other. Others decide to migrate for ever and to exchange one's own house and home for the house and home in the land of the other. Whether with that the desire to be a stranger sometimes, to long for the other side stops, remains dubious.

## Border(e)scape

*Are we certain enough to love without the right to possession? Need we always divorce when we turned our eyes? Would our trust allow us to be waves, rising and falling, rolling up the sand and seeping back, leaving moments of patterns...? (Reichert 1992)*

If the border is on the one hand indeed a fabricated truth, an art of self-repression and on the other hand a departing means to lose oneself, the art of self-denial, where do we position ourselves on this Janus-continuum (see also van Houtum 2010b)? Do we dare to de-border ourselves, do we dare to embrace the untamed freedom but with preservation of certainty, comfort and ease? Do we dare to cross the border of the imagined dark forest out there and enter the forest without fear, or does the forest precisely exist because of our stories about it? Is a road to a familiar openness thinkable, dreamable? Is there a space for an agora at the level of an inter-polis or even cosmo-polis? According to geographer David Harvey, more than ever before, we now live in a time to start the change, to formulate an alternative vision without lying anymore to ourselves:

*There is a time and place in the ceaseless human endeavour to change the world, when alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change. I believe we are precisely at such a moment. Utopian dreams in any case never entirely fade away. They are omnipresent as the hidden signifiers of our desires. (Harvey 2000)*

I started this chapter with my account of a cross-border bike trip in the borderlands of Germany and the Netherlands as an illustration of the persistence of borders. In the academic road trip that followed in the form of this chapter I have made clear that it is highly unlikely that the spatial b/ordering of our self-interest to increase our own comfort and to diminish the fear of loss of control will ever end. But that does not mean that we unwillingly and uncritically need to reproduce our own borders or that we are forced to close our eyes obediently. We are not only victims of the border, but also the producers of it. Making a border, demarcating a line in space is a collaborative act. And so is the interpretation of it. The interpretation and meaning of borders is always open for reforms and transforms. De-bordering, searching for ways for a cross-border dialogue and using the public in between-spaces of the Interpolis/Cosmopolis is therefore also in our own hands. The world of tomorrow will have a different we, different barbarians, different here and there's. In other words, a border is and can never be an answer. It is a question. The imperative geo-philosophical border question of our time is how and why we create a just border for ourselves and thereby for others. In this sense, we have all become borderlanders

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