

Uppsala Rhetorical Studies **U R S**

S R U *Studia Rhetorica Upsaliensia*

ENGAGING  vulnerability

**CAN A PERSON BE
ILLEGAL?**

Refugees, Migrants
and Citizenship in Europe

Philippe Caumières

Closure of meaning:
border of the political

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meaning: border of the political —

Political borders entail the closure of meaning

It is surprising to realize that the notion of border, understood as “a dividing line between two countries, or States” is still very often apprehended through the binary opposition nature / artifice. According to the Robert dictionary a border can be either artificial or conventional, when it corresponds with an arbitrary limiting line, or natural, when it corresponds with a natural barrier. So, we can understand why the same dictionary defines geopolitics as “the study of the interrelationship between the natural data of a country and its politics”. The inference is clear: geopolitics is said to be a discipline – some even consider it as a science – which enables stable entities to be formed so as to make long-term peace possible. Everything would be fine in a world where liberal democracies could assert themselves.

The question is not so much to denounce such an approach, – which considers geography as based on natural data only, as if there was no cultural or ideological dimension to it, reducing politics to geopolitics – as it is to try to understand why it is still upheld. Obviously, resorting to nature as the justification for a border tends to rule out conflict. As modern societies want to be democratic, they cannot make arbitrary decisions. Consensus is all the stronger when grounded on the recognition of a necessity.

Thus, the very notion of border becomes an institution – and this is the meaning which Castoriadis gives to the word – but a denied institution; one which, more than an ideology, reveals that modern societies tend to conceal some facts from public debate, thus breaking the rule of democracy. Referring to the notion of natural border and using the word geopolitics both lead to a reflection which, far from being confined to the disciplinary fields they usually concern, questions the very notion of society.



I. The border: a denied institution?

1. *The binary opposition national / artificial borders is still upheld*

Strange as it may seem, the binary opposition between natural and artificial borders is still in use, both in informal and formal speech. Geographers Emmanuel Gouyon and Frederic Lassere note that *Le Monde*, the well-known French daily, from 1997 to May 2003, released 115 articles in which the phrase “artificial borders” was used.¹ Law dictionaries as well make a great use of this classification, as for example le *Lexique des termes juridiques (Lexicon of Law Terms)* published by Dalloz, whose sixteenth edition is dated 2007. Looking up the word “border”, one can read: “line limiting the territory of a State. Artificial border: ideal line between two determined points; natural border: formed by a geographical obstacle like a river, lake, sea or mountain”.²

The same opposition can be found in Agnes Gautier Audebert’s work entitled *Droit des relations internationales (International Relations Law)* published by Vuibert in Paris in 2007. She contends that borders, legal boundaries between countries, are either natural borders like a sea, a river or a mountain, or artificial borders made by man after bilateral or multilateral agreements between States, which have a common frontier. And Paul Quiles, the well-known French politician, cited her work in a report on energy and geopolitics issued by the Foreign Affairs Commission he was chairing.³

And yet it has been clearly shown that borders are an invention aimed at bolstering the development of the Nation State. The French geographer, diplomat and essayist Michel Foucher conducted the necessary investigation in his book *Fronts et frontières (Borders and Borderlines)*.

He reminds us that the concept of natural border was invented by the Girondists and the Convention to legitimize the French new foreign policy. It was a policy that aimed at defining the outlines for France and showing that France “is a self-sufficient whole”, the very words of L’Abbé Grégoire in 1792. The latter didn’t hesitate to justify his view by claiming that Nature itself endowed France with natural barriers which “exempt it from outgrowing them”.⁴

However, that territory which was naturally destined to France still remained to be conquered at the time. So, in January 1793, Danton, deputy for Paris at the Convention, declared to the Assemblée, that “the boundaries of France are defined by Nature and will be reached on all four sides of the horizon, all the way down to the Atlantic Ocean, the Rhine river, the Alps and the Pyrenees”.⁵

But how can we possibly think that Nature may of itself separate some people and unite others? Think that it can separate the French from the English, the Spanish, the Italians or the Germans while bringing together the people from Brittany, Provence or Picardy?

Believing this implies denying the cultural differences, first of all the language differences, existing inside the national territory. No wonder then that L’Abbé Grégoire was so concerned about doing away with regional dialects and making the French language universal.⁶

It is no use expatiating on the criticisms, which can be levelled at such geopolitics. Suffice it to recall the formula that was in vogue in France in the nineteen fifties at the time of decolonisation: “the Mediterranean Sea is as much a part of France as the river Seine is a part of Paris”.

The notion of natural border must be taken for what it is: no less than a construction of the mind with no legitimacy whatever!

2. *Are artificial States on the wane?*

Nevertheless, history continues its course and ends up endorsing natural borders. Did not Algeria finally gain its independence? Who nowadays, whether in Toulouse or Amiens, would claim himself first and foremost from Occitanie or Picardy rather than from France? Regionalism is no winner anymore and while regional dialects still get taught in the schools of the Republic, they are no match for French.

The states, whose borders can in no way be said to be natural, as is the case for those stemming from post-colonial divisions, are those for which difficulties arise.⁷

The opposition nature / artifice in use for geographical borders could be justified if only it was defined again.

A famous study by three American academics – “Artificial States” by Alberto Alesina, William Easterly and Janina Matuszeski – released by the *National Bureau of Research* in 2006 and revised in 2008, highlights the vulnerability of what the authors call “artificial States” by suggesting that there is a link between the natural or artificial character of the borders of a State and its economic development.⁸

The study points out that artificial borders get defined following international agreements, usually when the former colonists leave the country. They neither take into account the topography of the land nor its social or ethnic context.⁹ These borders are usually straight lines that divide homogeneous human groups. Natural borders, on the contrary, because they are defined by the native populations, follow the natural lay of the land.

Calculations based on the theory of fractals enable us to differentiate the two types of borders: the more akin to a fractal the design

of a border is, the less artificial it will be thought.¹⁰ The study shows that a country’s artificial boundaries tend to stymie its economic growth.¹¹ A State with artificial borders does not thrive.¹²

We are not going to comment on the economic growth mentioned here,¹³ but as is stressed by geographer Juliet Fall on the teleological view of history developed in this study on *Artificial States*, illustrated by examples which testify to a relentless pull towards ethnic homogeneity and the re-emergence of naturalised nation states, as was the case when USSR imploded.¹⁴

The geographer goes so far as to denounce what she calls “naïve realism” because based on the delusion that geographical space is a fact that cannot be changed and which can be determined scientifically. She also mentions with much insight that this study resorts to another geographical myth when striving to justify how straight the border between Canada and the U.S is – and it could well be interpreted as a counter example of their thesis - by saying that it was drawn across a quasi-unpopulated area.¹⁵

Thus, one may legitimately be surprised by the general acclaim that the study met even if it is probably due to the renown of its authors. William Easterly, who wrote a book hailed by Armatya Sen, *The White Man’s Burden*, teaches in New York while the two other writers are professors at Harvard, Alberto Alesina chairing the department of economics. According to Juliet Fall, the success the book met is due to the fact that “the study seemed to be in accordance with the spirit of our times”: “when territorial and ethnic divisions are advocated to solve conflicts and bolster peace”,¹⁶ so such a work putting forward the advantages of natural borders was bound to seduce a large audience.

3. *The sacred dimension of the border*

Even if what it says is true, Juliet Fall's study does not go far enough, as it merely reiterates criticisms made a long time ago. The question is to understand why the notion of natural border is still in use, even though it was proved to be a myth a long time ago.

The answer to the question is to be found in one of the presuppositions of the study on *Artificial States* that Juliet Fall does not mention and which establishes that populations wish to live on a clearly defined territory. By saying that borders can be said to be natural when they were defined by a country's inhabitants, the authors of the study pinpoint the question of peoples' self-determination,¹⁷ which in its turn raises the problem of the identity of a social group, hence of its origin.

This is a major point, which enables us to understand the link between the border and the sacred. Remember that the word "sacred" comes from the latin verb "*sancire*" which means "surround, delimit, determine" but also "forbid". Similarly, the word "sanctuary" refers to a sacred space, like a temple, which derives from "*templum*", a term, whose first meaning was "a part of the sky delimited by augurs so as to observe and decipher the messages of the Gods". In Greek *temnion* means *carve, cut out*. On the one hand the sacred, on the other the *pro-fane*, what is in front of the *fanum*, the enclosure reserved to the cult.

If the border is sacred, it is probably because its function is to maintain the cohesion of a group, to stick together. There is no unity without division though. This is the reason why the purpose of a border is not only to regulate the stream of people going into a country but also, and maybe above all, the stream of people going out. Once you realize the link between sacredness and security, you understand why Régis Debray says that "most nations, those

who have kept their souls at any rate, have a quasi-sacred emotional relationship with their borders".¹⁸

It is starting to become clear now: understanding why the opposition natural / artificial is still in use when talking about geographical borders entails a reflection on the very nature of the social.

II. The social institution

1. *Society as an irreducible totality*

We have just seen that the notion of border partakes of the sacred, and that is probably the reason why it is believed to be natural, although it is a myth. This is due to the fact that the border always brings about issues of identity and origin of the society it delimits. And, as the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Castoriadis has made clear, societies respond to these essential questions concerning their identity and origin by referring to a transcendent cause. They present themselves as the result of divine will or as deriving from the natural order. Even if it is a very efficient way of preventing their order from being questioned – how can you possibly question what is natural or has been willed by a divine essence? – Castoriadis insists that there is no negative intention because it stems from society itself, the "anonymous collective" it represents.

Principles of separation or border within a social order are always instituted, even when they are based on elements from the natural order. So, it is wishful thinking to try to find raw facts at the basis of society, because the latter is an irreducible totality. It does not stem from anything else, it is self-created, according to Castoriadis. This needs to be explained.

When talking about self-creation, Castoriadis does not contend that society comes out of the blue. He knows that society institutes

itself, in an environment which it does not create, and which can be considered as a stratum which supports it or props it up.

But in so far as what supports society gets altered from the very propping up, the passage from natural to social finds its expression in the emergence of a new order. A society cannot be apprehended as a series of pre-existing elements being put together, whose combination would produce new or extra qualities from the whole, since such elements stem from society itself and are created by society.

So, geography as such cannot serve as a foundation for a border. Historian Daniel Nordman makes it clear in a work dedicated to the borders of France, *Frontières de France*: “The natural border of a country is never the cause, but the result, of a policy”.¹⁹ A border is always an institution.

2. *The self-institution of society*

Let us also stress that everything relating to the social sphere is an institution in the full sense of the word, that is to say a social creation. But an institution of what? The institution of meanings, which structure society and give it its identity.

“Every society creates its own world, when creating the meanings which are specific to it”, says Castoriadis,²⁰ for whom these meanings are to be understood as belonging to the collective imagination. “Why call them imaginary? Because they are neither rational – they cannot be formed logically – nor real – they cannot be derived from the world of things; they do not correspond to rational ideas, or to objects of nature”.²¹ They spring from “radical imagination”, which can create what never existed before.

It has nothing to do with individual imagination. History shows that “nobody nor anything ever wanted or guaranteed the unit that society stands for”.²² Men no doubt act consciously to reach ends

but “the effective results of men’s actions in history are hardly ever what they had in mind”.²³

The meanings we are talking about are human creations, but they cannot be assigned to specific human beings, they are the result of the anonymous group which society stands for. They are society’s collective imagination.

Any society, being a structured whole, invents imaginary meanings which give it coherence and enable to define it as a particular society. These meanings give men access to the world, to a certain extent, because they enable men to make sense of the world, by structuring the representations they have of the world, to begin with of their own territory.

These meanings say what is right, what is wrong, what is done or not, the limits which are not to be overstepped, the codes which are to be respected, and so on, and so on... “They establish the kinds of affects which are typical of a society”, says Castoriadis, stressing how difficult it is to account for this. However, we cannot deny that Christianity gave birth to faith, an affect that was hitherto totally unknown from the Ancient Greeks, or that the sense of honour belongs to aristocracy much more than to a Bourgeois society.

According to Castoriadis, in so far as “the instauration of these three dimensions – representations, ends, affects – goes hand in hand with their realization by all sorts of specific mediating institutions”,²⁴ one must admit that analysing a society entails accounting for the meanings it carries around.

3. *The closure of meaning*

Acknowledging that society, or the socio-historic dimension, derives from nothing and cannot be reduced to anything but itself, leads us to stipulate that it institutes itself: society finds in itself

the resources for its institution or creation. That's why Castoriadis refers to radical imagination, or primary imagination.

The veritable dimension of institution can be grasped at this stage: if it is the institution that creates meaning, it is because the World or rather the Being (with a capital B) is fundamentally devoid of meaning. Society's ultimate function is to conceal the Chaos or Abyss from which it proceeds, which is also called Being (with a capital B).

But what does it mean exactly, except that nothing justifies a given social order? When describing Being as Chaos, I am stressing the fact that it cannot be understood as a norm imposing order to society, that all social organisation is contingent, and nothing prevents it from being different from what it is.

We know that society institutes itself, we are beginning to understand what it implies: it implies that no principle, no way of being or acting, no organisation can be justified as being necessary.

It is always social meanings that define what is right, what is wrong, what is forbidden, what is valued in a society. "Meaning emerges to cover Chaos, giving birth to a mode of being which denies Chaos. However, Chaos manifests itself through the very emergence of meaning in so far as that meaning has no justification whatever".²⁵

Hence, we understand why all societies tend to conceal their origins and claim extra-social sources: forbears, God or Nature, so as to make their institutions intangible. Institution is denied: society conceals its instituting dimension and only admits having been instituted by some Other (with a capital O), which has nothing to do with meaning since the meaning comes with the society. Once men ponder the origins of their society, they find answers to all their questions. That's why Castoriadis alludes to a closure of meaning, in so far as the questions, which could not be solved in and by the social imagination, are a mental or psychic impossibility for the members of that society.²⁶

Let's consider the question of God. We understand it as a meaning belonging to the social imagination, but the believer does not share this view; he or she believes that God exists as such, independently from society. Such a belief is not neutral because it imposes a specific way of relating to the world, the social world, which it becomes impossible to question. How can we possibly question God? If everything was made by God, so were social differences; in that case, they should not be regarded as unfair but hailed, as is the case in the famous Anglican hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, dated 1848.

The same goes with Nature when it is considered as the foundation of society, whether geographical nature, as in the case of natural borders, or biological nature, as in the case of racism or sexism. How can we possibly protest against gender discrimination and the way women are treated if it is nature that confines women in female roles? How can we protest against social discrimination if some social hierarchy is thought to be necessary because stemming from nature?

Once you find out that society comes from collective imagination, you must admit that it institutes its own mode of being, which is the instituted, a specific social order. But as a matter of fact, societies tend to ignore that they have the power to create themselves, to model themselves, and they tend to pose an entity as their origin instead of unfathomable collective imagination.

They claim some extra-social origin and this leads them to propose meaning to individuals while preventing them from seeing beyond the order that has been instituted, and beyond lies the primordial, bottomless Chaos.

Societies take refuge in heteronomy: they think social order and law (*nomos*) come from the Other (*heteros*). We must admit nevertheless that heteronomy is not universal, since we are discussing it. The specificity of our society is precisely to have started to realize that

it has no other foundation but itself, which is the very condition of a possible emancipation. For a society to steer towards political autonomy, it must want to disengage itself from alienation first. The question is: have men enough of a grip on their future to carry out such a task?

III. Towards autonomy

1. *Heteronomy vs autonomy*

We have just seen that any society tends to protect the order, which structures it by throwing a veil on its real origin. Responsible for itself, it presents itself as coming from a transcendent source such as God, Nature, the laws of the market, and so on. By doing so it inscribes itself in heteronomy since that transcendent source remains out of the reach of the power of men, so that the social meanings which structure it tend to look like what they are not: intangible truths. Hence, social heteronomy does not only mean that men deprive themselves of their own power to give it to a group or an individual, it means something much more profound: it means that society denies its instituting power.

As a consequence, emancipation implies the recognition that, to begin with, that nothing which concerns society cannot legitimately be questioned. Emancipation expresses itself in and by the will to be autonomous that is to say in and by the will to master one's life as much as possible. Autonomy is freedom well understood, not confined to its negative dimension, which is so dear to the hearts of liberals, but it demands that one feels and wants to be responsible for the collective future.

But how is this possible if one lives in a society, which has closed meaning? This points out how tricky the issue is because there are

necessary social conditions for autonomy to be possible. Only individuals living in an autonomous society or partially autonomous society can manifest a desire to be autonomous.

The latter belonging to the realm of *social* imagination, as such it escapes from any causal explanation since it may only come from society.

However even if we cannot account for its origin, we can try to understand what it entails from an analysis of the social context it has emerged from.

2. *Breaking the closure of meaning*

Autonomy started to appear clearly at the end of the Middle Ages, when modern society sprang up.

Let us recall briefly that at the time the Christian Western World lived through a deep crisis which resulted in the New World, the Renaissance period and the religious Reform. That was when a “finite world turned into an infinite universe” to echo Alexandre Koyré's beautiful phrase, a phrase which signals that the paradigm had changed, the representation of the world was different.

Whereas the old world was based on the idea of a *cosmos* – a closed hierarchic whole, regulated by a transcending principle which made man the centre of a system whose meaning could be understood by whoever knew how to read “the great book of the world”, the modern world lies within a limitless, homogenous, autonomous universe – a universe forsaken by God whose “eternal silence of limitless expanses” awes those who, like Pascal, see its reality.

Experiencing the tragic dimension of human condition can be understood as a *break* in the closure of meaning: it paves the way for an existential and political questioning which enabled men to assert their will to master their collective lot.

That modern break in the closure of meaning was not the first one historically-speaking though: it echoed a more fundamental break, which had taken place in Ancient Greece. By saying that it was when politics and philosophy appeared, Castoriadis allows us to understand that it marked the loss of the sacred dimension and the appearance of dialogical reason.

The loss of the sacred dimension can be fully grasped when one reads about the tragic plight of Orestes as it is related in Eschyle's play *The Eumenides*. Son of Agamemnon, chief of the naval army that fought against Troy, he had to revenge his father who had been killed by his wife. Thus, Orestes became his own mother's murderer. When he turned to Athena to know what punishment he deserved, the latter told him that she could not pronounce herself and offered to appoint a tribunal. Isn't this the proof that "Greeks did not trust their Gods", as Heidegger and Fink both put forward as an explanation. At least they felt responsible for themselves and knew they had to take responsibility for justice, and more broadly-speaking, for public matters. Which shows that the loss of the sacred goes hand in hand with the appearance of a public space for discussion.

So Castoriadis is right to establish a consubstantial link between politics and philosophy: if the former expresses itself through protesting institutions, the instituted order, the latter consists in questioning generally-accepted ideas and opening endless discussion.

Their common condition for existence can be found in the break of the closure of meaning which is made possible by discovering, in the full sense of the word, *discovery* – "*disobturation*", would say Castoriadis – of the Abyss, the Chaos which is the very element of Being.

This experience goes along with becoming aware of the fatal risk there is in letting Chaos rule public matters and it requires recognizing that a society can't live without institutions.

So, doing away with heteronomy entails both putting an end to the belief that the instituted social order – which is only a specific contingent creation - is intangible, *and* recognizing the necessity of instituting an order. This twofold condition for autonomy requires that society should constantly claim responsibility for society – which is the way political action, according to the understanding of Castoriadis, should work.

3. A multiple transnational public sphere

We have just seen that autonomy implies recognizing the tragic dimension of existence, which, at the level of individuals, means accepting death in full awareness.

This explains why the will for autonomy is so much at risk, because it is constantly endangered by the unconscious desire for power.

Therefore, it is no wonder that, even if autonomy is an imaginary meaning which started developing with modernity, it should be still far from being effective. One could even be entitled to think that it may be receding.

We can see this clearly judging from the amount of corruption reigning in the public sphere in Western social democracies. The public sphere is more and more blighted by mercenary ends. The phenomenon is so acute that it does not need to be developed.

Suffice it to say that capitalism comes from another imaginary meaning which structures the modern Western world: the will to master nature and men which finds its reward in the feeling of powerfulness it fosters. Thus, Western social-democracies find themselves undermined by economic norms which impose themselves in every field.

The result is always privileged over the means. Nobody cares about the ways these ends can be met. The end justifies the means.

The real value of what is conveyed does not matter provided it finds a favourable echo. Truth has become an irrelevant matter. No wonder then if such a notion as that of natural border is still in use, included in academic circles, no wonder either if it is still taken for granted the necessity for a hierarchic organisation, both for men and salaries, in the working world or the representation of man as *homo oeconomicus*.

The public sphere has not only stopped playing its role as an educator, but it now promotes the most suspicious theses. In so far as fighting against institutions can't be separated from questioning established representations, defending and promoting autonomy, or to put it differently, the fight for emancipation will not take place without a renewal of the public sphere.

We can agree with the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas to define the public sphere as the locus of production and circulation of a speech which is different both from the State and from the economic sphere; a space of rational discussion between citizens. However, we should as well be able to grasp the limits of Habermas' theory.

Following Nancy Fraser, we need to stress that equal access of all to the public sphere does not only imply a mere forgetting about socio-economic inequalities but abolishing them. How can we possibly do this if we don't start discussing the problem, which also means highlighting these inequalities?

More broadly-speaking, the liberal model needs to be questioned because it imposes borders to the political sphere by trying to give a free rein to the economic sphere, which is supposed to have its own laws coming from a necessity which is akin to that of the laws of nature; or by insisting on the strictly individual dimension of many behaviours, as if racist or sexist behaviours had nothing to do with the social order.²⁷

Thus, the struggle for autonomy leads us to question the borders, which delimit the sphere of the political debate: public places where it is possible for people to oppose and discuss should be opened, as suggested by Oskar Negt. In other words, to follow Nancy Fraser, it should be possible for subaltern counter publics to make themselves heard, which would multiply public spheres, but also build a cross-border trans-national public sphere.



The notion of natural border which aims at making limits seem intangible must be understood as a denied institution: it shows that any society tends to institute itself in the closure of meaning.

And yet, in Western societies, the closure of meaning happens to have been partially breached, allowing the advent of politics, understood as a questioning of the instituted order, and philosophy, understood as a never-ending questioning of meaning.

In such a context, when modern social democracies start taking refuge again in a discourse based on the intangible nature of society, then it shows that democracy is endangered, because the political sphere is shrinking. One of the prior tasks of critical thought seems to be then to redefine a public space, which would be both broader and more inclusive.

Endnotes

- 1 "Une critique de la notion de frontières artificielles à travers le cas de l'Asie centrale", *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, vol. 47, n° 132, déc. 2003.
- 2 Serge Guinchard et Gabriel Montagnier (dir.), (Paris, Dalloz), 2007.

3 Cf. Bénédicte Beauchesne, “Droit et frontières aux confins de la pensée contemporaine”, <http://www.univ-metz.fr/ufr/dea/revue/articles/2011/theme/Benedicte-BEAUCHESNE.pdf>

4 M. Foucher, *Fronts et frontières* (Paris, Fayard, 1991), p. 88.

5 Propos cités par M. Foucher, *Fronts et frontières*, (op. cit.), p. 95.

6 Cf. M. Foucher, *Fronts et frontières*, (op. cit.), p. 89.

7 “Eighty percent of African borders follow latitudinal and longitudinal lines, and many scholars believe that such artificial (unnatural) borders, which create ethnically fragmented countries or, conversely, separate the same people into bordering countries, are at the root of Africa’s economic tragedy” (Alberto Alesina, William Easterly et Janina Matuszeski, *Artificial States*. Article consultable sur la toile: http://williameasterly.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/59_easterly_alesina_matuszeski_artificialstates_prp.pdf, p. 2).

8 Alberto Alesina, et alii, *Artificial States*. (op. cit.)

9 “In summary, we define artificial states as those that have straight borders and/or a large fraction of their population belonging to a group (or groups) split with a neighboring country” (Alisean et alii, *Artificial States*, (op. cit.), p. 4).

10 “The basic idea is to compare the borders of a country to a geometric figure. If a country looks like a perfect square with borders drawn with straight lines, the chances are these borders were drawn artificially. On the contrary, borders that are squiggly lines (perhaps meant to capture geographic features and/or ethnicities) are less likely to be artificial. Squiggly geographic lines (such as mountains) are likely to separate ethnic groups, for reasons of patterns of communication and migration.” (Ibid., p. 9).

11 “Our goal is to provide measures that proxy for the degree to which borders are natural or artificial and relate these measures to economic and political development.” (Ibid. p. 3)

12 “Our main hypothesis is that artificial states perform less well than non-artificial ones.” (Ibid., p. 9).

13 “We now turn to verifying whether these new measures of artificial states are correlated with economic success” (Ibid., p. 18).

14 J. Fall, “Des états artificiels? Le retour en force des frontières naturelles et autres mythes géographiques et géométriques”, in S. Rosière, K. Cox, C. Dahlman, C. Vacchiani-Marcuzzo (dir.), *Penser l’espace politique* (Paris, Ellipses, 2009). Le texte est consultable sur la toile: <http://www.unige.ch/ses/geo/collaborateurs/publicationsJF.html>

15 “What about the US and Canada? Their border is a straight line for most of its length; are they artificial states? According to our measures, yes; they do score relatively in terms of how artificial they are, which is certainly not consistent with a view of artificial as failed states. One may note that this a case in which borders were drawn before many people actually moved in. In many ways, the same applies to US states: in the West, borders that were drawn when the population density was still extremely low are often straight lines” (Alisena et alii, *Artificial States* (op. cit.), p. 18).

16 J. Fall, “Des états artificiels? Le retour en force des frontières naturelles et autres mythes géographiques et géométriques” (op. cit.), p. 3.

17 “All other borders can be considered ‘natural’, as they were drawn by people on the ground” (Ibid., p. 3).

18 R. Debray, *Éloge des frontières* (Paris, Gallimard), p. 31. Romans used to consider the walls and the doors of their city as sacred (*res sanctae*).

19 D. Nordman, *Frontières de France. De l’espace au territoire. XVIe – XIXe* (Paris, Gallimard, 1999); in: B. Beauchesne, *Droit et frontières aux confins de la pensée juridique*, (op. cit.), p. 3.

20 C. Castoriadis, *La Montée de l’insignifiance. Les Carrefours du labyrinthe 4* (Paris, Seuil, 1996), p. 12.

21 C. Castoriadis, *Une société à la dérive* (Paris, Seuil, 2005), p. 68.

22 C. Castoriadis, *L’Institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris, Seuil, Points-essais, 1999), p. 66.

23 C. Castoriadis, *L’Institution imaginaire de la société* (op. cit.), 66.

24 C. Castoriadis, *La Montée de l’insignifiance. Les Carrefours du labyrinthe 4* (op. cit.), p. 127.

25 C. Castoriadis, *Domaines de l’homme. Les Carrefours du labyrinthe 2* (Paris, Seuil, 1986), p. 375.

26 C. Castoriadis, *La Montée de l'insignifiance. Les Carrefours du labyrinthe 4* (op. cit.), p. 225.

27 As Nancy Fraser puts it, “for liberals, the problem of democracy consists in asking oneself how to isolate political processes from non-political or pre-political processes, for instance, the family, the economy, or informal daily life” (“Repenser l’espace public”, in: *Qu’est-ce que la justice sociale ?*, trad. E. Ferrarese, (Paris, La découverte, 2001), p. 123–124.