

PENS-318

Border Forensics

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Cursus	Sem.	Type
Projeter ensemble ENAC	BA6	Opt.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	4
Session	Summer
Semester	Spring
Exam	During the semester
Workload	120h
Weeks	12
Hours	4 weekly
Courses	1 weekly
Project	3 weekly
Number of positions	

Summary

The course will introduce students to different forms of violence related to the existence of state borders and social boundaries, focusing on particular situations in Switzerland, and the way spatial, geostatistical analysis and architectural design can be used to document and contest this violence

Content

The idyllic landscape of Switzerland is striated by multiple borders and social boundaries, which particularly affect asylum seekers as well as racialized citizens. This course will introduce students to scientific and innovative spatial methods developed by Forensic Architecture and the Swiss-based agency Border Forensics allowing to document, contest and transform these forms of violence. In particular, we will explore the forms of harm that are inflicted on asylum seekers through the Swiss Asylum Dispositif (Panese 2022). The laws, administrative measures and bureaucratic practices that make up the Swiss asylum dispositif and are mobilised with the aim of selecting people and controlling migratory flux transport and translate borders within the State, "into the middle of political space" (Balibar 2004, 109), along with their "potential for violence" (Panese 2022, 18). While the violence perpetrated by the "borders within" the Swiss territory may be less spectacular than the large-scale deaths of migrants crossing the external borders of Europe, it nonetheless translates into social exclusion, as well as psychological and physical harm. As it will be explored during the semester, these "borders within" complexify the temporalities and embodied experiences of migration, embedded not only in one-off crossings of external borders but also endured in the long term in seemingly non-violent settings, in the mundane aspects of everyday life and in the most intimate spaces and realms of existence. We will further explore the ways in which the social boundary of race affects racialized people's experience of space, subjecting them to the constant threat of racial profiling and police violence. All in all, we will explore the broader theme of how borders and social boundaries materialize in urban environments. In order to encompass these topics, the course is divided into three parts.

- The first part offers a theoretical and methodological introduction to border violence and its documentation. This lays the foundation for a precise understanding of the notions of border, "border within", border violence, as well as the temporalities and embodied experiences they foster. These concepts will be introduced to students along with the counter-forensic approach pioneered and developed by Forensic Architecture to account for and document said border violence, in its various forms and expressions. . We will focus specifically on the research conducted by the teaching team within the Swiss-based research agency Border Forensics.
- The second part will initiate students to the concrete experimentations and applications of those methods while reflecting critically on their use and sometimes ambivalent effects. Students are invited to dive into a rich body of multiscale and transdisciplinary investigative techniques and the practical, ethical and conceptual challenges they entail. This second part is designed to prepare and inspire them for the third and last part of the course in which they have the opportunity to appropriate and experiment with these tools in groups on a selected subject.
- The third part of the course will bring students to focus on specific manifestations of borders and social boundaries

across the territory of Switzerland, and the way they affect the lives of asylum seekers as well as negatively racialized citizens. Students will develop their own investigations in groups and experiment with tools and approaches they encountered in the first and second parts of the class. Anchored in the contemporary context of violence experienced in and produced by the Swiss asylum dispositif, a particular attention will be put on the bridge between research and practice as well as on the potentials for collaborative and participative research.

The course will allow students to address a wide range of questions such as: How political terms such as violence, authority, and border are understood in the context of the Swiss asylum dispositif? How can we understand, document and render visible violence in its many different guises? How does the violence of borders and social boundaries operate and how are geophysical environments harnessed within it? How can we navigate complex regimes of (in)visibility, in which deaths can be hidden but also spectacularized? How does the notion of dehumanization impact the institution's policies and practices, and how does it relate to the survival strategies adopted by asylum seekers in that space? What is the politics of different technologies and methods used to reconstruct cases of violence? How can spatial interventions articulate places of (in)visibility, resistance, coordination and memory? Can these interconnected places become places that question the very process of the city and the built environment? By exploring these questions, the course will equip students with the conceptual and methodological tools to navigate the complexities of research-based spatial practice.

Keywords

Borders, migration, (counter-)forensics, human rights, violence, territory, body, spatial analysis, remote sensing, traces, sentinels, visualization, (im)mobility, (in)visibility, potentialities, solidarity, hospitality, refuge, passing through home

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Discuss contemporary debates and approaches in relation to mobility, borders, social boundaries, spatial practice and the critical forensic approach
- Identify how the production of space shapes violence and how spatial analysis in turn can offer a unique edge in analyzing and contesting it
- Conduct individual and collaborative spatial interdisciplinary research combining humanities and social science methods with creative practice and visual representation
- Discuss critically theoretical, political, and methodological questions in relation to the different tools and methods used to register traces of violence
- Use of Exploratory Spatial Data Analysis (ESDA), and Geovisualization (GVIS) technologies
- Design how infrastructures that enable and/or constrain mobility may be transformed to mitigate border violence and foster mobility justice

Teaching methods

The course is designed to be highly participative, with an active engagement of students with readings, class discussions as well as on the collaborative development of their projects. The teaching team will accompany students throughout the semester, share insights based on their own research projects and investigative practices. Students will build on a rich range of investigative methods, sometimes adapting their analytical and technical skills and know-how to address critically new topics while reflecting critically on their own practices. To do so, they will rely on the methods developed by Border Forensics, as well as on geographic information, spatial analysis. They will also be introduced to qualitative investigative methods used by researchers to document the space and its embodied experience in an ethnographic and auto-ethnographic approach.

Through this, we will focus on the potentialities and possibilities of the border to motivate a process from hostile spaces to niches of hospitality. In the process, we will explore concrete proposals to transform (im)mobility infrastructures operating in the selected border zones to undermine border violence and enable mobility justice.

Resources

Bibliography

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Websites

- <https://forensic-architecture.org/category/forensic-oceanography>
- <https://www.borderforensics.org/>

Moodle Link

- <https://go.epfl.ch/PENS-318>