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Andreas Rutkauskas's *Borderline* Project: an Intermedial Mapping of the Canadian-American Border

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Gwen Cressman

- 1 Greg Curnoe's *Map of North-America* (1972) plays with and disrupts the codes of map-making and the belief that maps offer a neutral, objective, and truthful representation of reality. By erasing the United States from the map and having Canada and Mexico colonize that space, the Canadian artist invites the viewer to imagine a world in which geopolitical relations, as we know them, are upended. Central to Curnoe's piece is, of course, the border. Although the painting suggests the annexation by Canada of several Northeastern states (Maine, New-York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts), the imaginary Canada-Mexico border, however, has Mexico occupying the quasi totality of American soil. The disappearance of the United States, graphically orchestrated by Curnoe, resonates with Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye's oft quoted question "Where is here?" (Frye 1970) and interrogates the place held by the Southern neighbor in the way Canada and Canadians have defined themselves historically. The forceful even if elliptical American presence in Curnoe's map nevertheless shows the power it and the borderline hold over our imaginaries. By invisibilizing the powerful and rewriting the geopolitical relations at the Canadian border, Curnoe claims the power to decolonize (Akerman) the map and our imaginaries.
- 2 Whereas the U.S.-Mexico border has drawn considerable political and media attention, the border with Canada is commonly taken for granted and deemed essentially unproblematic. Almost half a century after Curnoe, I will investigate how photography and video artist Andreas Rutkauskas, invites us to look at Canada's border with the United States. In this first extensive photographic survey of the border since the publication of *Between Friends. Entre Amis* in 1976 (Monk), the *Borderline* (2016) project sets out to document what is typically known as the longest undefended border in the

world.¹ If harmony and friendship remain important values in the border discourse, the photographer reminds us that the border site is now extensively scrutinized through the use of various technologies, such as surveillance cameras, thermal imaging and ground sensors. The photographs shown in the project were taken in 44 different locations along the entirety of the border and are presented in geolocalized form on an interactive Google map. One can either click on a location in the sidebar on the left or directly onto the map. This brings up the name of the location, its description as authored by the photographer, and the several photographs associated with the location. The viewer can navigate the border by zooming in at street view level or by zooming out on a global scale.

- 3 Thanks to the mediation of new mapping technologies such as aerial photography and satellite imagery, Google Maps and Google Earth, were both launched online in 2005. In 2007, Google released a version of Maps with “do-it-yourself mashup capability” (Crampton 28) allowing anybody to add locations, data and content and to save and share maps, which may also be visualized in Google Earth mode. With its promise to “Experience and Create Stories About the World” (Google), Google Earth produces the fantasy of a world made entirely available to us, an earth for all, a world without borders. As Denis Cosgrove has pointed out “Google Earth offers an illusion of total synopsis and truthful vision, and can easily blunt critical responses and obscure significant continuities in cartographic culture”(Cosgrove 156). Along the same lines, Jason Farman argues that the “scientific objectivity” within which GIS (Geographic Information System) technologies are typically situated, tends to obscure the fact that they are the product of a “technological gaze of aerial and satellite imagery [...] [which] has a long history with war and imperialism” (Farman 876). In this respect, Google Maps are no different. Critical geography has long established that all maps seek to pass social constructions off as natural (Wood 9) or as transparent reflections of reality. If Google Maps is, just like other more traditional forms of cartography, far from neutral, as an interactive or “participatory” mapping device it moreover “blurs the traditional boundaries between map user and map maker” (Dora 2012, §20) and poses further challenges in terms of accessibility² and user agency (Farman).
- 4 Beyond these limitations, however, many artists have contributed to what Emilio Vavarella has termed “*media-flânerie*” defined as “a particular intertwining of the politic with the poetic across new mapping technologies of order and control, [...] and through novel creative subversions based on the exploitation of the creative possibilities enabled by mapping technologies” (Vavarella 143). If the *media-flâneur* fully participates in the age of data collection and surveillance, “*media-flânerie* is also characterized by an appreciation of gaps, errors, ruptures and instabilities, as if these offered a way of escaping the capturing devices of media-capitalistic systems” (Vavarella 144). Or, as Salari puts it, *media-flânerie* artists “react to Google’s claims to organize the information (and the representation of the world) for us by opposing its detached and indifferent look with a personal collection and a human point of view” (Salari 2020, §27). The projects discussed by Vavarella, Salari and Farman are concerned with the glitches and errors that reveal the inner workings of Google Maps and Google Earth. Through processes of appropriation and remediation, artists collect, reorganize and fabricate found images online thus contributing to heterogeneous forms of counter-mapping.³

- 5 By resorting to the Google map as the material and institutional framework / surface onto which his photographic and textual investigation at the border are displayed and with which they interact, Rutkauskas challenges our social, political, and cultural expectations and imaginaries about the Canadian-American border (Rutkauskas and McManus). If *Borderline* is not primarily concerned with the inner workings of Google Maps's seamless surface, the interactions between the Google map on the one hand and the photo-text combinations on the other should not be overlooked. As the viewer navigates the map, hopping as it were from one border site to the next, the *media-flânerie* reveals not so much the technological glitches of aerial and satellite imagery and their broken promises of a seamless navigation, but rather draws our attention to the disjunctions between the map and the photographs. Rutkauskas invites us to look through the cracks which the disruptions that the juxtaposition of border discourses generate. The rupture between the seemingly seamless Google Maps border and the photo-text configurations of various locations along the line offer unexpected and idiomatic glimpses into the border. It opens up interstices or cracks through which to peer at the border beyond the line and to reflect on what that line has meant for Canadian-American relations and Canadian identity.
- 6 If intermediality may be defined after Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl as the confrontation between "established visual practices" and "alternative, locally situated knowledge" (Neumann and Rippl 13), the confrontation of the Google map and the photo-text combinations in *Borderline* invites us to explore what one could call, after Clifford Geertz, a "thick" border (Geertz). One that takes on infinite guises, sometimes confirming hard-border imaginaries of barriers and border posts but mostly delivering idiomatic glimpses into a border that never ceases to surprise us in its porosity, impermanence and complexities beyond the straight line. The intermedial quality of the *Borderline* project both reveals and draws the viewer into the border's technological gaze. Beyond the somewhat abstract and vertical gaze active at the border and its divisive politics, Rutkauskas's photo-text configurations produce knowledge about the lived border in its banal and contested forms. If *Borderline* undoes the map of the border, as such it constitutes an invitation not only to explore but to perform the border, a performance which at once confirms and erases the border in its technological guises and offers to decolonize the map and our imaginaries.

Looking at the border

- 7 According to Denis Cosgrove, historically, "there has been a progressive shift away from the individual human body as a reliable agent for recording spatial information, towards dependence upon instrumentation as the guarantor of accuracy and objectivity in survey data" (Cosgrove 159). If the emergence of aerial photography offered a new way of knowing the territory which would profoundly influence Canadians' geographic imagination (Dyce 81), feminist theorists, in particular, have underscored that "technologies of seeing and visualizing from a distance reflect a landscape of power" (Dyce 81), thus reinforcing the authority of the map through what Donna Haraway has described as the "God trick" (Haraway 581). Google Earth presents the globe as a seamless patchwork of satellite and aerial images which allow the user to zoom in from the global to the topographic scale (Dora 11). As one zooms in and out, one tends to forget that "the satellite's 'all-seeing' perspective is an illusion" (Salari 9).

Whereas satellite vision offers only “an abstract vision and no real point of view” (Salari 9), Cosgrove has pointed out that aerial photography and satellite vision “have not wholly replaced the sensing body” (Cosgrove 160) and that “ground truthing” [...] “remains necessary to ensure the instrumental accuracy of remote sensed maps” (160). By way of contrast to the multiscalar and vertical visualization offered by Google Earth and Google Maps, Rutkauskas’s texts and photographs reintroduce “the subjectivity of embodied observation” (Cosgrove 161). The choice to embed *Borderline* in Google Maps invites the viewers to go back and forth between the software’s technological gaze, which is both distant and vertical, and the photographer’s subjective and horizontal observation in the field.

- 8 Rutkauskas differentiates two types of photographs in the *Borderline* project. On the one hand the 44 “primary views” associated with the 44 locations pictured and geolocalized on the Google map, and “behind” these photographs, several others which the photographer refers to as his “field notes” (private email). The staging in several “field note” photographs of the surveyor’s attributes such as the camera, the tripod as well as the maps and GPS instruments on a car seat clearly indicate that the photographer conceives of his trip along the border as fieldwork. If the interaction between the map and the photo-text combinations stands as an invitation made to the viewers to take part in the act of surveying the border, the staging of the surveyor’s attributes is also a reminder that the border is a site of surveillance. As Lee Rodney reminds us, if the terms survey and surveillance do not share the same etymology, they share “important connections [...] within an emergent logic of visibility that informs a modern lexicon of policing” (Rodney 48). *Telephone Reporting Booth, Angle Inlet, Minnesota* (fig. 1) offers a case in point. Three photos are associated with this location. Viewed sequentially, they gradually uncover additional information about the site itself as well as the documentary work at hand (fig. 2a, 2b, 2c). If one returns to the text associated with the location, one discovers rather unsuspected aspects of the border. Besides exposing the outmodedness of the surveillance method at this border post—the telephone reporting booth—the text also points to the geographical oddity of the location. At the end of the short text describing the location, Rutkauskas humorously writes “Exactly where the officers I spoke with were located remains a mystery”. The telephone reporting booth signals that border enforcement is “there” and yet nowhere to see. This unexpected and archaic form of remote surveillance adds to the oddity of the situation and acts as a powerful reminder of Foucault’s discussion of Bentham’s panopticon (Foucault). While the map naturalizes the border, the photo-text combination in *Telephone Reporting Booth* reveals active power relations. Just as the inmates interiorize the watchtower’s gaze in the panopticon, the border viewers may interiorize Google Map’s technological gaze as it invisibilizes the principle of border surveillance, which is the more powerful as it is unseen.

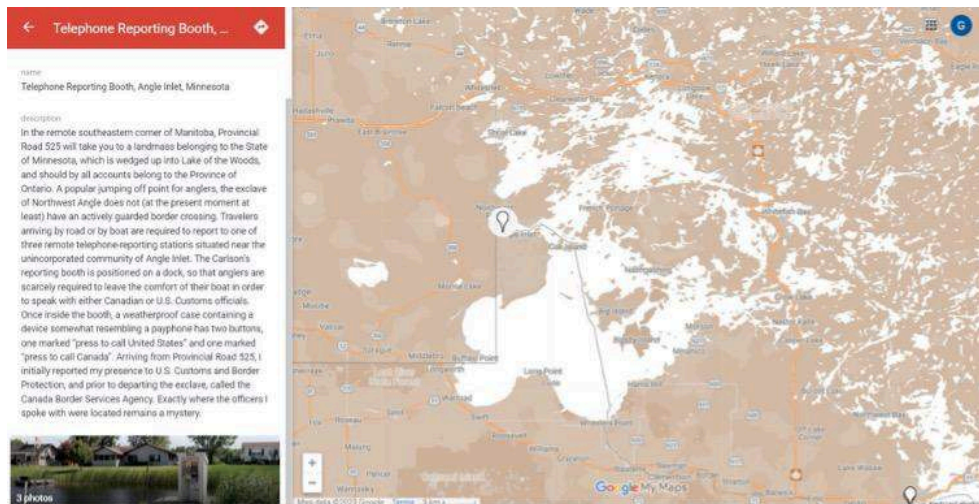


Fig. 1. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Telephone Reporting Booth, Angle Inlet, Minnesota*. *Borderline*. Screenshot (August 5, 2024). https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Z0d9ZrbMHskM28JijGIIQ9WipGk&hl=en_US&femb=1&ll=49.352316%2C-95.081201&z=18, last accessed 25 March 2025.



Figure 2a. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Telephone Reporting Booth, Angle Inlet, Minnesota*. *Borderline*. 2016. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2b. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Telephone Reporting Booth, Angle Inlet, Minnesota. Borderline.* 2016. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2c. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Telephone Reporting Booth, Angle Inlet, Minnesota. Borderline.* 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

- 9 Rutkauskas's fieldwork approach privileges a horizontal, rather than vertical take on the border. It is an invitation to look at it as accessible and unspectacular, as a phenomenon that requires not only distance but also proximity in order to be understood. Alongside the photographer, the viewer embarks on a heuristic journey along the border where they may leaf through the photographic archive and adjust their distance and angle to the object under study (Méaux 2019) by resorting to the act of zooming in and out of the map. To embed the photographs and texts into an

interactive map online increases exponentially the directions in which the viewers can take their research, discovering the photographs as so many layers in the border strata, uncovering ground truths which the map conceals. The photographic borderscapes, all taken from the height of a standing man, invite the viewers to pay closer attention to the hard, powerful, hypervisible and all-seeing border as well as the fragile, mobile, porous, impermanent and invisible traces the borderline has left on the land. The interaction between the long distance of satellite and aerial photography and the ground truthing operated by Rutkauskas invites us to think some more about our position at the border as we get in closer to perceive more detail. If satellite images' absence of point of view impregnates Google cartography, the technological gaze is never neutral. The photo-text combinations, by way of contrast, claim an embodied point of view. They offer idiomatic glimpses into a lived or "thick" border, thus reminding us that maps and the border they represent are always ideological constructs.

Placing the border on the map

- 10 In 1976, the National Film Board (NFB), under the auspices of the Canadian government issued a book of photographs entitled *Between Friends. Entre Amis*. The book was coordinated by Lorraine Monk, then director of the NFB, and given as a gift to the American people in celebration of the bicentennial anniversary of the American Revolution. In its short foreword, then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau defined the book's contents as follows:

This book is about people – about the Canadians and the Americans who live in close harmony close to that long thin line known as the International Boundary. It is about the boundary itself, which both links these people and helps to define their separate national identities. (Monk)

- 11 Despite the idea that the book will, according to the Prime Minister, help define what makes Canadians and Americans different, there is not much in the collection of texts and photographs to assuage "the profoundly Canadian anxieties" that there may, in fact, according to Scott McKenzie, "be no difference" (McKenzie 59). One of the captions to the photographs reads as follows:

Canadians are generally indistinguishable from the Americans, and the surest way of telling the two apart is to make the observation to a Canadian. Richard Starnes, United States journalist, quoted by Gerald Clark in *Canada: The Uneasy Neighbor*, 1965. (Monk)

- 12 The book has no historical pretensions, nor does it seek to offer an overview of Canadian-American relations at the border overtime. Rather, this intermedial collection of over 200 photographs, maps of the borderline, quotations, and descriptive texts shows people and landscapes in an attempt to document the specificity of life at the border from the Atlantic seaboard to Alaska. Yet, as Scott McKenzie points out "in looking at the images collected by the National Film Board, it is impossible to tell which images are of Canadian farmers, bars and snowdrifts and which are of their 'American friends'" (McKenzie 59). While the American public expressed very little interest in the book at the time, several Canadian reviewers, on the other hand, were critical of the publication and underlined the paradox of a border that seemed to lack cultural, sociological or even topographical substance. Contrary to *Borderline's* seemingly uninhabited borderscapes, *Between Friends* relies mostly but not exclusively on portrait

photographs of Americans and Canadians, most often indistinguishable, getting on with their daily activities in the border area.⁴ Despite some occasional reminders of a borderline, most photographs downplay the border presence while insisting on the anecdotal or even the ordinary that makes places what they are.

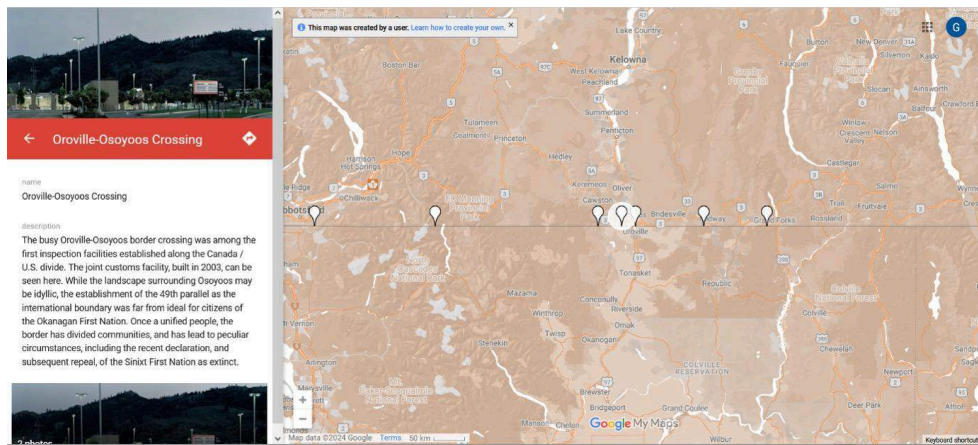


Fig. 3. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Oroville-Osoyoos Crossing. Borderline*. Screenshot (August 5, 2024) https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Z0d9ZrbMHskM28JijGIIQ9WipGk&hl=en_US&ll=49.001769%2C-119.463239&z=18, last accessed 25 March 2025.

- 13 Many of Rutkauskas's shots resonate with the 1976 project in that they depict a highly permeable, sleepy and quasi-invisible border. If, in *Between Friends*, the interest in the vernacular and the eventless serves to resist the spectacle of a border otherwise characterized by images of walls, barbed wire, and border patrols, the border narrative in Rutkauskas's project draws on more complex material. The text under the "description" heading left of the photograph plays an important role in supplementing the image with elements that neither map nor the photograph necessarily convey. The "description" associated with the *Oroville-Osoyoos crossing* (fig. 3) located on the Washington State-British Columbia border, for example, proceeds to uncover the deeply colonial values and assumptions that are embedded in the map:

While the landscape surrounding Osoyoos may be idyllic, the establishment of the 49th parallel as the international boundary was far from ideal for citizens of the Okanagan First Nation. Once a unified people, the border has divided communities, and has led to peculiar circumstances, including the recent declaration, and subsequent repeal, of the Sinixt First Nation as extinct. (Rutkauskas)



Fig. 4a. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Oroville-Osoyoos Crossing*. *Borderline*. 2016. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 4b. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Oroville-Osoyoos Crossing*. *Borderline*. 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

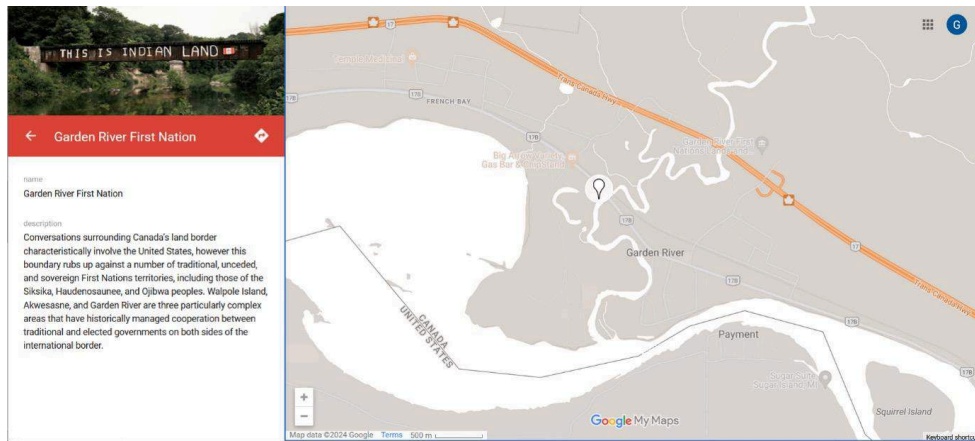


Fig. 5. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Garden River First Nation. Borderline*. Screenshot (August 5, 2024), https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Z0d9ZrbMHskM28JijGIQ9WipGk&hl=en_US&ll=46.54275400000001%2C-84.157552&z=18, last accessed 25 March 2025.

- 14 The photographs associated with this location (fig. 4a and 4b) underscore the plural facets of the border and suggest a more complex narrative than the neighborly sameness put forward in *Between Friends*. The close-up shows a border in its divisive and impersonal guises on the one hand, while the view from a distance erases the border and insists on aesthetic and topographical continuity.⁵ The *Garden River First Nation* photograph (fig. 5) with its graffiti in block letters sprayed across the bridge reading “THIS IS INDIAN LAND” offers a further example of a contested vision of what forms the “Canadian” territory at the Canada-US border. The letters scrawled on the rusty rail bridge are evocative of the transcontinental history of railway networks in North America and its attendant appropriation of Indigenous lands (Smith 268). The photograph engages with the map’s colonial effacement of First Nations territories, thus supplementing the history of dispossession that the map conceals. Photographs and texts invite the viewer on a cartographic journey that is both investigative, decolonial and imaginative. By undermining the authority of the map and its binary expression of the border, the photographs and texts remind us that the map is *not* the territory.
- 15 Beyond the abstract space of the map, the places which emerge from Rutkauskas’s *Borderline* project gain in depth as the viewer is invited to dig beneath the surface in the manner of the archaeologist revealing what the cartographic conceals. In the *Abandoned Crossing, Houlton, Maine* set of five photographs, the layers of paint peeling off the walls inside the border post are evocative of changing border practices over time and of an archaeological investigation which eventually finds its expression in the reproduction and exhibition of the border artefacts found on the premises. The photographic and textual layering at work beneath the surface of the map reveal memory places and untold narratives which suggest that the border needs to be understood not as an abstract space but as lived places. As Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl put it, “word-image configurations [...] help to reassess critically the working of archives and ratified narratives of the past, thus opening the way for telling other stories, stories of an unofficial nature that grant recognition of colonial pasts and what has come in their wake” (Neumann and Rippl 31). As the layering at work beneath the surface of the map undermines its authority and its capacity “to adequately represent

the world” (Frodsham 185-186), the memory places and the untold narratives it reveals also suggest that the *Borderline* retains an opacity that requires deciphering.

- 16 Rutkauskas’s project clearly resonates with *Between Friends* in the choice of media, associating maps, photographs and texts. Without breaking completely with the narrative of brotherhood and friendship between the two countries put forward in the 1976 edition, many *Borderline* locations reveal competing border discourses. While the map tends to invisibilize power relations and contested territories as well as the borderline’s evolution over time, the image and text combinations also draw on the indeterminacy of the 1976 border discourse. Just as the promise made by Trudeau in the 1976 edition that the book will help “define [...] separate national identities” (Monk) does not appear to hold, *Borderline* refuses to operate along neat inside / outside, permanent / impermanent binary categories. On the contrary, as the viewer is invited on a decolonial, imaginative and investigative journey, the intermediality of the project creates a space that promises an enhanced documentary form, and yet, one is left with the sense that what is being documented escapes the space of representation. By undermining the authority of the map and its binary expression of the border, the photographs and texts complicate the border story and invite us to think some more about the border narrative and our positioning at the border.

Performing the border



Fig. 6. Andreas Rutkauskas. *Climax, Saskatchewan. Borderline*. Screenshot (August 5, 2024), https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Z0d9ZrbMHskM28JijGIIQ9WipGk&hl=en_US&ll=48.999576000000005%2C-108.387787&z=18, last accessed 25 March 2025.

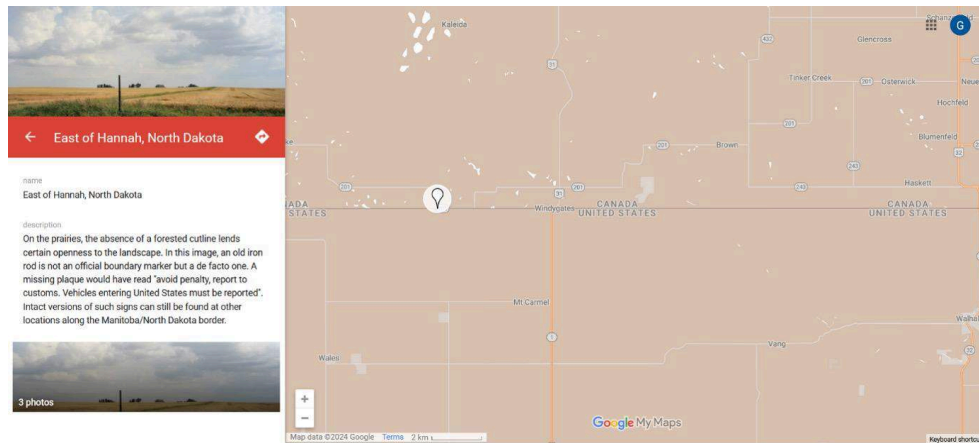


Fig. 7. Andreas Rutkauskas. *East of Hannah, North Dakota. Borderline*. Screenshot (August 5, 2024), https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Z0d9ZrbMHskM28JijGIQ9WipGk&hl=en_US&ll=49.00037009999999%2C-98.47568969999999&z=18, last accessed 25 March 2025.



Fig. 8. Andreas Rutkauskas. *East of Hannah, North Dakota. Borderline*. 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

- 17 If the border is intimately connected to the act of looking and being looked at, the border narrative also requires that we position ourselves, on one side or the other. To this extent, the viewer is thus encouraged to take part in the act of bordering. Through the telescopic use of the Google map and the photo-text combinations, Rutkauskas invites us, viewers, even if only virtually, to situate ourselves at the border in order to gain a better understanding of where we stand. However, as one surveys the borderline, one's sense of place and orientation are constantly challenged. Part of the complexity of the border narrative developed by Rutkauskas lies in the disjunction between the cartographic space of the map and the sense of disorientation that sometimes stems from its association with the photographs. The presence of

barricades, arrows, and official instructions in many photographs of border ports of entry underscore the border's power over the bodies of the border crossers and suggest that there is no escaping the ordering of our movements. Yet, the rickety fence in *Climax Saskatchewan* (fig. 6) or the old iron rod which acts as a *de facto* boundary marker in *East of Hannah, North Dakota* (fig. 7 and 8), undermine the bordering discourse and emphasize a sense of disorientation and porosity. If the map serves, among other things, as a tool of orientation, the photographs' indeterminacy refuses to reveal where one stands at the border and how this defines the identities of those on either side. The photographs problematize the map's ability to tell us where we are, and possibly who we are. In this respect, *Borderline* translates an understanding of the border as an active process which invites a critical performance of the border.

- 18 Even though mapping and photographing are always politically situated processes performed within specific social and political contexts, both maps and photographs tend to be perceived as transparent representations of reality and as deriving their authority from their claim to neutrality and objectivity. For all the limitations posed by these positivist and naturalizing tendencies, geographer Jean-Marc Besse asks whether mapping as a process, as opposed to the map as fixed object, does not, nevertheless, say something about the territory it describes (Besse 24). Just as Danièle Méaux proposes to understand new forms of documentary, not as re-presentations, but as producing the real, Besse suggests clarifying the processes at work in what he calls the "figuration" (Besse 25) of the territory, through an understanding of the map as a tool of "inscription" (Besse 25) rather than a fixed reflection of the real. Rutkauskas's photo-mapping of the border in its "thickness" then seems best understood as cultural production in flux, a performance of the border in a constant process of being re-read, re-written and re-interpreted. If the ambition to document an 8891 kilometer border is in itself Sisyphean in scale, the metaphor of a never-ending writing process could usefully describe the narrative that emerges out of the *Borderline* project.
- 19 Geographer John Pickles proposes to think of maps, not as "readerly texts" (whose purpose is to create readers for already written texts) [but as] 'writerly texts' (whose purpose is to see texts as producing an open series of readings, each of which requires that the reader also be in part author of meaning)" (Pickles 2004, 174). To look at *Borderline* as writerly mapping emphasizes the interconnections that the viewer/writer are brought to make between what they see on the interactive map, on the one hand, and the photographs and texts, on the other. Some photographs presented by Rutkauskas offer views of the official border in its more normalized guises such as border posts, obelisks and various border markers, as well as border monuments which celebrate the official narrative of friendship between Canada and the United States. These views tend to confirm some of our mental images of the border. More often than not, however, the texts and images presented on the left dis-place the gaze by drawing our attention to the border's untidiness, or in other words, the ways in which it contradicts its own narrative of ordering. That gaze is then further dis-placed as one is drawn into the project, zooming in and out of the map, looking for the right distance, and returning to the photographs and texts seeking an explanation or a confirmation which most often is not there. As the viewer/writer engage in an imaginative border performance, they are increasingly struck by a sense of disjunction between the borderline (as it appears on the map) and the borderscape as the photo-text combinations invite us to imagine it. This writerly process and the disjunctions it

produces can be understood within the framework of Rancière's notion of dissensus, which emphasizes the idea that "The practice of fiction undoes, and then rearticulates, connections, [...] it is a practice that invents new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said and what can be done" (Rancière 149).

- 20 In *Borderline*, Rutkauskas invites the viewer to wander with him along a border on the move. As Suzanne Paquet underlines, "Photograph[er]s are mobile beings. They dawdle and amble around, rush, chase after the image, and sometimes travel through some curious places" (Paquet 55). *Borderline* is the fruit of such physical ambling at the border and of our virtual strolling in Google Maps or Google Earth. It promises an experience in what Trevor Paglen has named "experimental geography" thereby designating self-reflective engagements with the map (Paglen 37). The notion of experimentation is useful here because it implies "production without guarantees" and reminds us, as Paglen points out, that "space is not deterministic" (Paglen 37). Along the same lines, other geographers such as Besse or Kitchin have argued that maps are best understood as "mapping practices," thus suggesting that they "emerge in contexts and through a mix of creative, reflexive, playful, tactile and habitual practices; affected by the knowledge, experience and skill of the individual to perform mappings" (Kitchin 9). While Dora has underscored the limits of Google's "cartography for all" rhetoric (Dora §21), Vavarella also reminds us that Google Maps and Google Earth offer a "cartographic ecosystem in which maps are not only representations but an active part of layered operations (e.g., data collection, profiling and geolocation), so that while subjects operate with a map, *that map in turn operates on them*" (Vavarella 138, my emphasis). This could suggest that interactivity and agency are impossible within Google Earth and challenge the idea of experimental spaces and creative agencies. Nevertheless, as Vavarella, or before him, Farman points out: "Despite the fact that boundaries exist [...] we have the ability to 'freely' navigate the [digital] space and ultimately recontextualize the spaces that we inhabit" (Farman 883). Drawing on Claude Lévy-Strauss and Jacques Derrida's writings on *bricolage* and Guy Debord's *détournement*, Farman argues that Google Earth users "can radically recontextualize master representations and discursive structures through the *bricolage* of user-generated content" (884), therefore making it possible to "interact [...] with[in] the existing structures [of online mapping] to formulate a path of resistance" (883). Understanding the *Borderline* project as writerly and intermedial is precisely to recognize that neither the map nor the photographs determine the viewer's understanding of the border. Rather, the countermapping at work encourages the viewers to look through the cracks which the intermedial confrontation between the map's opacity and the indeterminate spaces of the photographs produce. These cracks reveal the limits of a clear divide between an official rhetoric of friendship and identitarian politics. *Borderline* invites the viewer to dig underneath the surface of the map in order to unleash border imaginaries beyond a place/space dichotomy opposing "the authenticity of *place*" and the "abstraction of *space*". Rather, viewers are invited to view the cartographic, photographic and textual imaginations of the border as sites of struggle, just as the geographical imagination is itself a site of struggle.

Conclusion

- 21 Google Earth, activated as it is by its users as they virtually navigate the globe easily lends itself to the illusion of an all-encompassing gaze. If one zooms out sufficiently, a borderless world appears before our eyes. Rutkauskas's set of photo-text combinations affirms the reality of bordering as a divisive process of surveillance and policing as well as a colonial tool in the hands of a national administrative apparatus. But it also forages into the lived border away from official discourses, offering glimpses into the unexpected geographical oddities of the line and how its idiosyncrasies traverse and shape the lives of border crossers. Rutkauskas accepts the necessary incompleteness of this Sisyphean task. If the *media-flânerie* evoked by Vavarella implies uncovering and reappropriating the errors and glitches in the images produced through Google mapping media, Rutkauskas gleans and fabricates embodied images that "fix" the map, reminding us that the space of the border is never abstract and neutral.
- 22 As I conclude this paper, U.S. President Donald Trump's suggestion that the 1908 *Border Treaty* between the two countries and shared water agreements needed to be renegotiated has put the Canada-U.S. border back on the map, perhaps in unexpected ways. If the gulf between Donald Trump's aggressive and imperialistic 2025 rhetoric—evoking the idea that Canada could become the 51st state—and Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's 1976 remarks stressing harmonious cross-border relations is abyssal, it has stunned Canadians into realizing that the border could not and should not be taken for granted. Rutkauskas's project acts, as Karla McManus has put it, to "provoke [...] the viewer to ask what it means to share an environment divided not by ecology, architecture, or ethnicity but by the arbitrariness of national authority" (Rutkauskas and McManus 142). This last episode in Canada-U.S. relations certainly serves to underline the arbitrary, the fraught, and the uncertain nature of the border's cultural and national constructions.

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NOTES

1. The interactive version of the Borderline project is accessible here: https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1Z0d9ZrbMHskM28JijGIIQ9WipGk&hl=en_US&usp=sharing. Andreas Rutkauskas's website: <https://www.andreasrutkauskas.com/>, last accessed 25 March 2025.
2. "Programs like Google Earth are designed with a very specific user in mind, one who has broadband access and a computer that can handle the graphics requirements of the software." (Farman 881)
3. Some examples: Jon Rafman's ongoing photo project *9 Eyes* <https://9-eyes.com/>, last accessed 25 March 2025; Simon Weckert, *Google Maps Hacks, Performance and Installation*, 2020 <https://www.simonweckert.com/googlemapshacks.html>, last accessed 25 March 2025; Michael Wolf, *asoue (a Series Of Unfortunate Events)*, Peperoni Books, 2010 (2nd edition); Doug Rickard <https://dougerrickard.info/>, last accessed 25 March 2025; Geffer, Philip. "Mishka Henner Uses Google Earth as Muse," *The New York Times*, 28 Aug. 2015, *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/arts/design/mishka-henner-uses-google-earth-as-muse-for-his-aerial-art.html>, last accessed 25 March 2025. Two overviews of counter-cartographic art: Kollektiv Orangetango+ (ed.). *This Is Not an Atlas. A Global Collection of Counter-Cartographies*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2018 and Nephthys Zwer and Philippe Rekacewicz. *Cartographie radicale, explorations*. Paris : La Découverte, 2021.
4. 2 out of 3 Canadians live within 100 km of the U.S. border, Government of Canada, <https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/us-eu/relations.aspx?lang=eng>, last accessed 5 August 2024.
5. By way of contrast with Rutkauskas's descriptions, the texts describing the images provided in the annex in *Between Friends* are more factual, they offer mostly topographical and geographical information, observations about the wildlife or consensual quotations about people living the border.

ABSTRACTS

This article is concerned with the intermedial rewriting of the Canada-U.S. border active in Andreas Rutkauskas's online *Borderline* project. In *Borderline*, the photographer embeds his combinations of short texts and photographs of various border locations within Google mapping tools such as Google Maps or Google Earth, depending on the interface one chooses. The intermedial confrontation of digital mapping with the photographs and associated texts in Andreas Rutkauskas's *Borderline* project invites its viewers to explore visually the line between Canada and the U.S. The border which the viewer is invited to travel along takes on infinite guises, sometimes confirming hard-border imaginaries of barriers and border posts but mostly delivering idiomatic glimpses into a border that never ceases to surprise us in its porosity, impermanence and complexities. Beyond the abstract and vertical gaze active at the border and its divisive politics, Rutkauskas's combinations of texts and images produce knowledge about the lived border in its banal and contested forms. If *Borderline* undoes the map of the border, as such it constitutes an invitation not only to explore but to perform the border in a countermapping performance which at once confirms and erases the border in its technological guises and offers to decolonize the map and our imaginaries.

Cet article s'intéresse à la réécriture intermédiaire de la frontière entre le Canada et les États-Unis dans le projet d'Andreas Rutkauskas intitulé *Borderline*. Ce projet artistique imbrique des combinaisons de textes courts et de photographies de divers lieux frontaliers dans des outils de cartographie Google tels que Google Maps ou Google Earth, selon l'interface choisie. La confrontation intermédiaire de la cartographie numérique avec les photographies et les textes associés dans le projet *Borderline* invite le spectateur à déambuler visuellement à la frontière entre le Canada et les États-Unis. La frontière que le spectateur est invité à parcourir revêt des formes infiniment variées, confirmant parfois un imaginaire frontalier fait de barricades et de barbelés, mais offrant surtout des aperçus inattendus d'une frontière qui ne cesse de nous surprendre par sa porosité, son impermanence et ses complexités. Au-delà du regard abstrait et vertical porté sur la frontière et ses politiques de la division, les combinaisons de textes et d'images de Rutkauskas s'attardent sur une frontière vécue, dans ses formes banales et contestées. Si *Borderline* défait la carte de la frontière, le projet constitue en tant que tel une invitation non seulement à explorer mais aussi à incarner la frontière dans une performance contre-cartographique qui à la fois confirme et efface la frontière dans ses formes technologiques et propose de décoloniser la carte et nos imaginaires.

INDEX

Mots-clés: photographie, cartographie numérique, frontière canado-américaine, contre-cartographie, intermédialité

Keywords: photography, digital mapping, Canada-U.S. border, countermapping, intermediality

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