Border as Method

Alexander Alberro
Barnard College, Columbia University

ABSTRACT
My paper explores ways contemporary artists address the effects of the current deepening of capitalist relations on national borders. I show that while some practitioners produce artworks that reflect on borders in witty, ironic, and poetic ways, others make art that concentrates more intensively on border crossing’s toll on those most in need of relocation. I conclude with a discussion of artists who focus on transport and communication’s logistical coordination across vast landscapes, arguing that their productions make visible economic globalization’s processual and infrastructural operations across the world’s national borders.

KEYWORDS
Contemporary Art; Borders; Economic Globalization; Migration; Infrastructure
Neoliberal deregulation and financialization have profoundly transformed the twenty-first-century lifeworld. The effects of these processes have included not only capital's fluid flow into new markets but also more flexible professional classes, digital communications systems, and labor markets that work against durable personal and professional arrangements. The comfortable mobility that power requires and confers is one of the most discriminating factors around which a new kind of international class segregation and privilege distribution is taking shape. As sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello observe in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), the more versatile professionals and their services become, the lighter they travel, and the fewer ties they have to older unities such as family, class, and place, the greater their chance of getting ahead. (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 361-370). Neoliberal regimes have developed faster and less expensive travel infrastructures to accommodate a vital component of these new economic conditions, which have vastly extended social relations across space. These developments have made modernity more liquid, according to some, and enabled capital flows to circulate just about anything.²

Paradoxically, the same flows of global movement have led to a proliferation of borders, security systems, checkpoints, and physical and virtual frontiers. Today, every nation-state at once seeks to maximize the opportunities the circulation of people, resources, and information creates and yet close its doors to the migration forms these elements stimulate. As a result, countries are becoming increasingly vigilant about their borders' defense. A form of neoliberal nationalism has drawn up no-go buffer zones and constructed armored boundaries to restrict cross-border migration. The Berlin Wall and what it represented may have come down, but, as philosopher Étienne Balibar explains, the era of economic globalization, in its need to discriminate "between the two extremes--between those who 'circulate capital' and those 'whom capital circulates,'" has rendered nationalism pernicious. (Balibar 2002: 83) It has prompted stricter laws against refugees and asylum seekers, the ruthless eviction of economic migrants, and the erection of more fences and walls between nation-states than ever before.
Artists have addressed the new conditions of national jurisdiction in several ways. Some have turned borders into performance spaces, ludically traversing, circumnavigating, or accentuating them. Christian Phillip Müller’s *Green Border*, 1993, a witty intervention carried out in the context of the Austrian pavilion at the 45th Venice Biennale, addresses the porosity of borders and the affective dimensions of nationality and state identification at the twentieth century’s end. To make the work, the artist donned local costumes and illegally hiked across Austria’s national boundary at eight different locations (the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Germany). In the process, he questioned the practice of defining borders between segregated national entities through drawings on a map. The artwork casts the border not as a line at which one stops but as an indefinite area in which to proceed. It renders the border a mobile and uncertain metaphor for the performative, socially constructed, and contingent aspects of identity, which creative artists are exceptionally well-poised to negotiate. National boundaries, Phillip Müller suggests, are only social constructions and are often more imagined than real.

Other practitioners have accentuated the rigidity of borders or turned them into thought experiments to draw attention to their absurdness. Santiago Sierra’s *Wall Enclosing a Space*, 2003, exhibited at the Spanish Pavilion of the 50th Venice Biennale, turned the building into a firm boundary that separated what was inside from the people outside. It functioned as a barrier to movement. The artist covered the word “España” on the edifice’s facade with black tape and closed off access to the pavilion’s primary entrance. Directions sent visitors to the back door, where security guards requested identification and permitted entry into the pavilion’s empty interior only to those with valid Spanish passports. The guards locked out foreign visitors ineligible to travel to Spain without a visa. The implication was that Spain’s current political situation emphasizes reactionary notions of ethnic roots and fixed places, especially for the border and who gets to cross it.

Raqs Media Collective’s video installation, *Undoing Walls*, 2017, ruminates on the rationale for national boundary lines. The animation loop
shifts from what initially reads as an architectural structure to the collapsibility of a fluttering textile. In a distant echo of philosopher Angela Davis's reflection that "walls turned sideways are bridges," the artists based their thought experiment on the premise that an imagined "dysfunctional" wall structure could productively reimagine the function of borders. (Davis 1974: 137) The group proposes creating "a 'welcoming' wall" that can operate as an alternative to human segregation in the context of the extra-juridical position of migrants. The wall will enable contact and interaction rather than divide communities. It will "become the site where counter-narratives are inscribed and resistance" to capitalism's exclusions can take place. "Can we play the system from within the system but according to its own rules?" the collective asks. "Can a wall become a conduit, as opposed to a divide, by rethinking its structure? Can we imagine a wall that is intentionally permeable? Or even a self-destructive wall that conjures against its own intentions?" (Raqs Media Collective 2017) By rethinking walls as ephemeral, porous, and fluid entities, the collective undermines their politically oppressive power and casts them as dynamic thresholds.

Sierra's and Raqs Media Collective's projects present borders as politically and culturally contested sites of belonging and not belonging. Sierra's Wall Enclosing a Space flaunts and reenacts these borders, and Raqs Media Collective's Undoing Walls tries to reconceive their operation. The two mischievously encourage spectators to contemplate the relationship between borders and contemporary art, especially the latter's increasingly transient conditions. At the same time, the artists marshal the contradictions and complexities of national boundaries and walls as metaphors to explore cultural, political, and artistic boundaries. They recognize that even border walls have boundary aspects and are as variable as the performative acts through which legal discourses construct them. Their stability relies on the process of perpetual articulation and rearticulation.

Some artists have pictured the border security apparatus and marshaled disembodied evidence of clandestine migration in aesthetic ways to evoke national borders' toll on those most in need of relocation. A case in point is Richard Misrach and Guillermo Galindo's project "Border Cantos,"
2004-16, which addresses the unseen human reality of the highly militarized U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Misrach’s medium-format photographs focus on areas marked by human presence: the security-industrial complex, alternative infrastructures of mobility, and remnants of human movement. The pictures depict the dark reddish-brown border wall as a paradoxical structure: physically menacing on the ground against startlingly beautiful (considering the subject) landscapes devoid of people. In some images, such as Wall, East of Nogales, Arizona, 2014, the corrugated steel border fence cuts through the landscape’s rolling hills like a road or river, blending with pathways along which humans have long moved. In others, such as Wall, Los Indios, Texas, 2015, a solitary 36-slat segment of free-standing barrier looms uselessly atop a small patch of grass in a dirt field crisscrossed in tire tracks, resembling more a preserved relic or a museum piece than a functional element of a security apparatus. The carefully framed compositions repeatedly use perspective to dramatize the relationship between the border wall and the land.

Misrach also symbolizes the migrants’ struggles by photographing objects found along the border. The items index migrant movement. The possessions are ambiguous. Abandoned under unknown circumstances, they point to the unknowable crossings of the people who desperately depended on them. Artifacts Found From California to Texas Between 2013 and 2015, 2013-15, presents a sampling of these artifacts: garments, glass and plastic bottles, cigarette packs, empty food tins, toiletries, books, backpacks, and children’s toys shot in situ covered in dirt. Set in a forensic grid, each of the work’s forty-eight photographs is a mystery that indexes the particular difficulties of undocumented migration; together, this long horizontal arrangement of frames makes up an abbreviated lexicon of border zone objects, from junk to keepsakes. Misrach’s visual evidence approach acknowledges the limitations of the objects’ symbolic power. The migrants’ journeys are embedded in the finds, though there is no easy way to transcribe them.

Galindo’s sound sculptures reanimate the found objects and materials visually captured by Misrach. He transforms the detritus into musical
instruments and sonic environments. The installations and performances render percussive rather than melodic sounds, evoking fear, drama, and pathos along the border. Many suggest the movements of people walking briskly or running, the pitter-patters, rhythmic clangs, and other beats bringing anxious but determined footsteps to mind. Galindo uses bottles and beverage cans as wind instruments and fills jugs and jars with gravel or golf balls and spent shotgun shells to make shakers and rattles. A Border Patrol guard’s flashlight becomes a trumpet. Liquid drips from a pierced, former water station barrel, resonating on a metal plate below. In Teclata, 2015, a wooden, piano-like hammer mechanism created with Border Patrol ammunition boxes activates empty cans, bottles, and a plastic cup. Zapatello, 2014, includes a shoe and glove that pound a rawhide-strung drag-tire like a drumhead. The shapes of the machine’s cranks mimic the Border Patrol targets pictured in some of Misrach’s compositions. The found elements in Huesocordio, 2012, a wooden, five-string instrument, are limited to five vertebrae while also incorporating three wind-up toy roaches. Based on haunting photographs of scarecrow-like effigies constructed of found migrant clothing pilloried on agave-stalk Xs Misrach discovered in the desert, the “arms” and “legs” of Galindo’s Efigie are hollow and the wood resonant. Two steel cables stretch between the figure’s outstretched arms, and thirteen more cross the tattered jacket’s front. Galindo’s instruments are documents of peoples’ passing (literal and figurative) and memorials to those we may never see. As the composer says, the instruments enable the invisible victims of migration who might have survived the experience or perished in the crossing to speak through their belongings. (Misrach and Galindo 2016: 193) Micro-Orchestra, 2014, is perhaps the project’s most chilling piece. Rendered from a plastic toy scorpion, a child’s comb, and a small toothbrush, the makeshift instrument sounds off a spine-tingling cacophony of high-pitched screeches and scrapes that evokes the cries of unaccompanied minors crossing the perilous boundary zone.

The power of these sounds and their connection to the objects’ physicality, history, and relation to the border is undeniable. Although Galindo’s and Misrach’s works could stand alone, their proximity enriches
both. Misrach’s high-definition archaeological images are eloquent in their silence; Galindo’s instrument-objects are poignant in making charged materials and landscape sing. Together, these artists transform the border’s liminality into a multi-sensorial and multi-dimensional landscape. “Border Cantos” bears witness to the complexity and magnitude of the concerns and encourages a humanitarian perspective on the plight of migrants. It roots border politics in the context of individual human lives and reflects on an international order in which an accident of birth secures or loses the right to travel.

Other artists and art collectives have employed different narrator positions to address border crossing and mobility-related traumas. Their works are considerably less witty and ironic and more strictly political than Phillip Müller’s, Sierra’s, and Raqs Media Collective’s, and arguably less poetic than Misrach and Galindo’s “Border Cantos.” For example, the Milan-based art collective Multiplicity produces project works that evoke the gulf between who can and cannot travel at will because of political and economic reasons. Its productions intertwine border politics and the migration crisis that has been at the center of worldwide attention in recent years. The group’s The Road Map, 2003, explores the spatialization of the West Bank’s occupation and that territory’s dynamic, constantly shifting, ebbing, and flowing boundaries in vivid terms. “The territories of the West Bank,” the group explains, “are almost completely covered with enclosure and fences. They are war zone barriers, bypass roads, military zones for the Israeli army, Palestinian villages and cities, refugee camps, areas with no jurisdiction, networks, and infrastructures. They are all arranged on top of each other like a giant web.” (Multiplicity 2005: 172)

The Road Map’s multimedia installation compares the time it took a person holding an Israeli passport with that of a resident of Palestine to travel the same seventy-kilometer distance through the area’s charged and complex geography. In 2003, three members of Multiplicity, with their European Union identification papers, accompanied an Israeli citizen from Kiriat Arba to Kudmin (two Israeli colonies in Palestinian territory). They made a similar trip from Hebron to Nablus the following day, with someone holding a Palestinian
passport. The two routes start and end in the same latitude and even overlap at some points. But from a topographical point of view, the Israeli government has splintered the West Bank's infrastructure by a network of fast bypass roads, bridges, and tunnels that weave over and under one another to link the colonies and bypass Palestinian villages. (Multiplicity 2008: 71) The concentration of enclosures, fences, checkpoints and controlled corridors regulates the space. According to architect Eyal Weizman, “the bypass roads attempt to separate Israeli traffic networks from Palestinian ones, preferably without allowing them ever to cross. They emphasize the overlapping of two separate geographies that inhabit the same landscape. At points where the networks do cross, a makeshift separation is created. Most often, small dust roads are dug out to allow Palestinians to cross under the fast, wide highways on which Israeli vans and military vehicles rush between settlements.” (Weizman 2002) As a result, the Israeli citizen's journey was a hassle-free one hour. By contrast, the Palestinian traveler, subjected to a vast array of security checkpoints, inspection stops, and other impediments, spent five-and-a-half hours commuting the same distance. Regulated by military roadblocks and security control, the tentative and arbitrary borderlines, in this case, function as daily reminders of the misery and hardship the ongoing conflict imposes on a large section of the area's population. Strict regimentation of territory and the splintering of space “into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable, and removable barriers” that “shrink and expand the territory at will” operate to define who matters and who does not. (Weizman 2017: 6)

The Road Map highlights the relational dimension of border zones. It reveals that what comprises those spaces for some, enabling fluid circulation, may impede others. The artwork also calls attention to politics' spatialization along racial, ethnic, and religious lines. For large numbers of people, this form of politics has everyday life implications. Borderlines regulate their daily existence. They generate their social and political conditions. Their discriminations of inclusivity and exclusivity underwrite an everyday violence. So does the border security industry, which has thrived under neoliberalism.² The Road Map's chart of Israel/Palestine's contested territory
through travelers' politicized movement reveals much more about daily life's conditions in this contested geopolitical space than any abstract map ever could.

Political theorists Sandro Mezzandra and Brett Neilson argue in *Border as Method* that economic globalization's new infrastructure has made national boundaries central to the heterogeneous organization of space and time. (Mezzandra and Neilson 2013) The new infrastructure loosens borders in contexts of economic expansion when there is a need for additional sources of labor and tightens them when the economy contracts. Keyed to a system that allows migration to flow because of structural changes in the economy, the borders of physical locations become boundaries that constantly assume new morphologies. They map the contemporary world's fragmented contours, generating tensions and conflicts well beyond the geopolitical line of demarcation between states. These contours function as neither endpoints nor starting points. Instead, they operate as mechanisms that propel daily life. In such a scheme, that which is human becomes the limit zone, and borderline lives grow exponentially.

Bouchra Khalili's *The Mapping Journey Project*, 2008-11, powerfully takes up this topic. The multiscreen installation explicitly traces migratory routes to probe the diverse ways national borders function today. The "project" addresses what we could call, with the authors of *Border as Method*, a politics of "differential inclusion." (Mezzandra and Neilson 2013:163-166) In their theorization, Mezzandra and Neilson contend that rather than providing no space for actors to decide on their own migration or acting as a mere limit on already-formed subjects, borders "are productive of subjectivity." (Ibid.: 268) They operate dynamically, as much a means of inclusion as devices of exclusion. *The Mapping Journey Project* emphasizes that we can only correctly understand borders today in terms of circulation.

Comprising eight single-channel video projections focusing on economic globalization's labyrinth of migration regulations, *The Mapping Journey Project* draws attention to internal bordering practices neoliberal states use to assert control over global mobility. It relates the stories of eight individuals forced by political and economic circumstances to travel illegally.
across frontiers throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Khalili encountered her subjects by chance in transit hubs across Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Following an initial meeting, she invited each to narrate their journey on camera and trace it in permanent marker on a regional map. The project investigates how individuals resist arbitrary boundaries of identities and nation-states. The stories the subjects tell are harrowing. An array of nebulous figures regularly rob, beat, and arrest the travelers—distinctions between smugglers, gangsters, border guards, and police ebb away. As a result, the characters’ routes become a critical element in each’s story, casting the cartographically delineated frontiers as sites of struggle.

*The Mapping Journey Project*’s videos feature the subjects’ voices and hands articulating and sketching their trajectories across the surfaces of maps. The videos unfold in one long shot with no cuts. As the figures draw their trips on the maps using a thick-tipped marker, they obliterate the existing borderlines, alluding to their arbitrariness. The characters, whose faces remain unseen, perform their own identity and story as they author their narratives. Khalili avoids depicting humans as simply at the mercy of the state or of corporate power, emphasizing instead the extent to which, despite all odds, people exercise agency and transform their world under these conditions.

At the literal level, *The Mapping Journey Project* links migration to economic opportunity and perilous escape from regions mired in destitute poverty, violence, and environmental disaster. It casts the North African exodus toward Europe as a phenomenon induced by historical conditions and local privations. Khalili explores how clandestine migration produces transnational micro-geographies interwoven with international border politics. But in another register, the stories of the individuals Khalili follows highlight the shifting terrain between legality and illegality that increasingly characterizes national boundaries. Borders do not just restrict the inclusion of citizens and the exclusion of non-citizens. As Mezzandra and Neilson show, today’s borders “differentially include (some) non-citizens,” even if only temporarily, “as intensely subordinated labor power through legal categories
(such as ‘illegal’).” (Mezzandra and Neilson: 159-166) The rights of these individuals are severely limited. When cheap labor is no longer required, the employer can easily and legally cut them from the payroll with little fear of reprisal. As a result, the migrants are perpetually susceptible to exploitation and constantly in fear of punishment or deportation. The Mapping Journey Project deconstructs the false line of “interior” and “exterior” that national geopolitical boundaries organize and presents these boundaries as material relationships often regulated by law.

Circulation and supply chain logistics that streamline distribution systems propel today’s economy. The development of global commodity “networks of production and assembly” blurs the distinctions between fabrication, distribution, and consumption. Components, people, and knowledge move fluidly across frontiers and heterogeneous transnational spaces. The neoliberal order manufactures topographies of work and productivity by identifying industrial locations, zones, and hubs through calculations that balance labor costs against those of transport. Sophisticated coordination and distribution technologies are crucial to global commerce.

While commodity production drove international markets in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, circulation and supply chain logistics that streamline distribution systems propel today’s economy. The development of what historians Terrence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein describe as global commodity “networks of production and assembly” blurs the distinctions between fabrication, distribution, and consumption. Components, people, and knowledge move fluidly across frontiers and heterogeneous transnational spaces. (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986: 157-170) The neoliberal order manufactures topographies of work and productivity by identifying industrial locations, zones, and hubs through calculations that balance labor costs against those of transport. Sophisticated coordination and distribution technologies are also crucial to global commerce. (Cowen 2014; Harney and Moten 2013; Tsing 2009).

The centrality of infrastructure logistics to economic globalization was a longstanding preoccupation of artist Allan Sekula. His Fish Story, 1989-2005, casts circulation, transportation, and systematic coordination across oceans.
as neoliberalism's dominant mode of production. The artwork comprises over one-hundred color photographs organized as seven chapters or sequences, interspersed with twenty-six text panels across several rooms. To these, Sekula added two slide projectors, each containing eighty transparencies shown at fifteen-second intervals. *Fish Story*’s overarching subject is the world’s container shipping industry’s operation, especially its role as global commodity distribution’s unseen bedrock. Long-distance supply chains have defined neoliberal capitalism since the 1980s. It used to be that manufacturing was a rich-country activity. Poorer countries supplied raw materials to rich-country factories and then purchased their exports. But, as economist Marc Levinson explains, in the late 1980s, “the combination of cheaper container shipping, vanishing communications costs, and improved computing flipped the script. Manufacturers and retailers adopted new strategies—arranging, for example, to buy chemicals in Country A, transform them into plastics in Country B, mold the plastics into components in Country C, and deliver them to an assembly plant in Country D. Container ships made it possible to move parts and components from one country to another at low cost, while technology, soon accelerated by the internet, allowed managers to oversee their supply chains from a headquarters far away.” (Levinson 2021) Sekula emphasizes the uniform container’s crucial part in that infrastructure. *Fish Story* explores the transformation of world trade that the standard cargo box facilitated. As Levinson clarifies, two factors drove this change: “One was the lowering of labor costs. The gap between the pay of factory workers in China or Mexico and those in Western Europe, Japan, or North America yawned so wide that even if the low-wage workers accomplished far less in an hour of work, producing in Shanghai rather than in St. Louis made financial sense. The other was economies of scale. Factories serving the entire world could specialize, making a small array of products in enormous volume and lowering the cost of each unit.” (Levinson 2021) The transport vessel’s innovation was pivotal to the emergence of a more expansive form of capitalism that handles greater volume and extends production and trade beyond what was previously possible. “Cold War ‘containment’ sought to limit the expansion of communism,” cultural theorist
Rachel Price observes in comments that address the post-Cold War proliferation of shipping facilitated by the uniform cargo container. “Today all states seem to seek increasing containerization, to ship the greatest number of goods at once.” (Price 2015: 99)

In direct contrast to the prevailing fantasy of a derealized, dematerialized economy newly enabled by electronic instantaneity and the collapse of borders of all kinds, Fish Story tracks the plodding process across space that lies at the foundations of what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls “supply chain capitalism.” (Tsing 2009: 148-176) Mobilizing an abundance of photographs and text, Sekula’s project reflects on the slow, weighty transportation of goods over oceans, and the “isolated, anonymous hidden work, of great loneliness, displacement and separation from the domestic sphere,” aboard ships often registered in countries with few regulations and run by crews that seldom share a language. (Sekula 2002: 582) According to the artist, the uniform cargo containers hitched the stock market and harbor closer together than ever before: “If the stock market is the site in which the abstract character of money rules, the harbor is the site in which material goods appear in bulk, in the very flux of exchange... But the more regularized, literally containerized, the movement of goods in harbors, that is, the more rationalized and automated, the more the harbor comes to resemble the stock market.” (Sekula 1995: 12)

Fish Story connects the sea, port-side labor, container shipping, and long-distance trade to economic globalization’s unequal and destructive character. It reveals the tremendous damage the recent phase of globalization, in which highly trained employees in advanced economies create physical products to be manufactured where wages are lower, has wrought. It also touches on the extent to which this global marketplace’s impending catastrophe is in its utter destruction of the world’s oceans and Earth’s ecosystem. As the narrator states at the opening of The Forgotten Space, 2010, the important essay film Sekula made with Noël Burch, “The sea is forgotten until disaster strikes. But perhaps the biggest seagoing disaster is the global supply chain, which — maybe in a more fundamental way than
financial speculation — leads the world economy [and Earth's environment] to the abyss.” (Sekula and Burch 2010)

To document the global supply chain’s political ecology as Fish Story does is to follow laborers and resources over oceans and other natural borders, across the boundary lines of nation-states, and through the economic divides that segment the Global North and Global South. It is also to track transport and communication’s logistical coordination across vast landscapes. The operation of long-distance supply chains produces not “things” or “places,” but sets of links or relations among them—an invisible but powerful global infrastructure. Operation here includes the effects of the channel’s “noise” on that which they put into circulation. But it refers primarily to the production of what the authors of Border as Method describe as “the connections, chains and networks that materially envelop the planet enabling and framing the labor and action of subjects well beyond those directly involved in the execution of the operation itself.” (Mezzandra and Neilson 2019: 246) The links Mezzandra and Neilson highlight — the factors that render border a method — establish relations crucial for the capitalist world system’s function today. In probing these links and relations, artworks such as The Mapping Journey Project and Fish Story make visible economic globalization’s processual and infrastructural operations across the world’s national borders.

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Endnotes

1. Boltanski and Chiapello call this the “mobility imperative” (2005: 370) and argue that its assimilation places a premium on constant activity: “[I]n a connexionist world, mobility—the ability to move around autonomously not only in geographical space, but also between people, or in mental space, between ideas—is an essential quality of great men, such that the little people are characterized primarily by their fixity (their inflexibility)” (361)

2. Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 2) reasons that “fluidity” and “liquidity” are “fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity.”

3. Müller’s Green Border comprised eight reproductions of historical prints depicting border areas between Austria and its neighbors. Müller also built a round table-like object using the most common types of wood in Austria and exhibited trees native to Austria alongside information on their botanical migrations in the pavilion’s open space. The timber and trees troubled the national pavement’s territorial divisions. The artist hung the photo series that documented his repeated illegal crossing of Austria’s “green border” on the pavilion walls.
Alexander Alberro

4. Richard Misrach (Kencresase 2016; Mallonee 2018) reasons that “every single one of these personal belongings has an incredible story of a human being.” Each item contains a mystery, a story of hardship and fear.

5. Citing International Organization for Migration’s 2018 report, Peggy Levitt (2019: 214) notes, “in 2018, 244 million people, or 3.3 per cent of the world’s population, were international migrants... This means that, by some estimates, one out of every seven people in the world today is on the move.”


7. As Rob Nixon (2011: 20) observes, “Security has become one of neoliberalism’s signature growth industries, exemplified by the international boom in gated communities, as walls have spread like kudzu, and the marketplace in barriers has literally soared.”


9. Khalili (Schoene 2021) explains the process of encountering the participants in her project: “I would not say that I find the subjects who participate in my projects but rather that I meet them and sometimes they find me, rather than I find them.”

10. Two are in English, two in Italian, and the others in different Arabic dialects. For all the videos that are not in English, subtitles appear at the bottom of the screen.

11. Fredric Jameson (2010: 421-422) argues that the innovations of bit-structures such as the bar code and the uniform cargo container recast global capitalism’s infrastructure. Both shifted power onto the side of retail. They “stand as the mediation between distribution and consumption.”


13. On the origins of the shipping container, see Levinson 2006. Peter Drucker (2007: 28) explains that the uniform shipping container grew “out of a new perception of a ‘cargo vessel’ as a material handling device.” The goal was “to make the time in port as short as possible. But this humdrum innovation roughly quadrupled the productivity of the ocean-going freighter and probably saved shipping.”