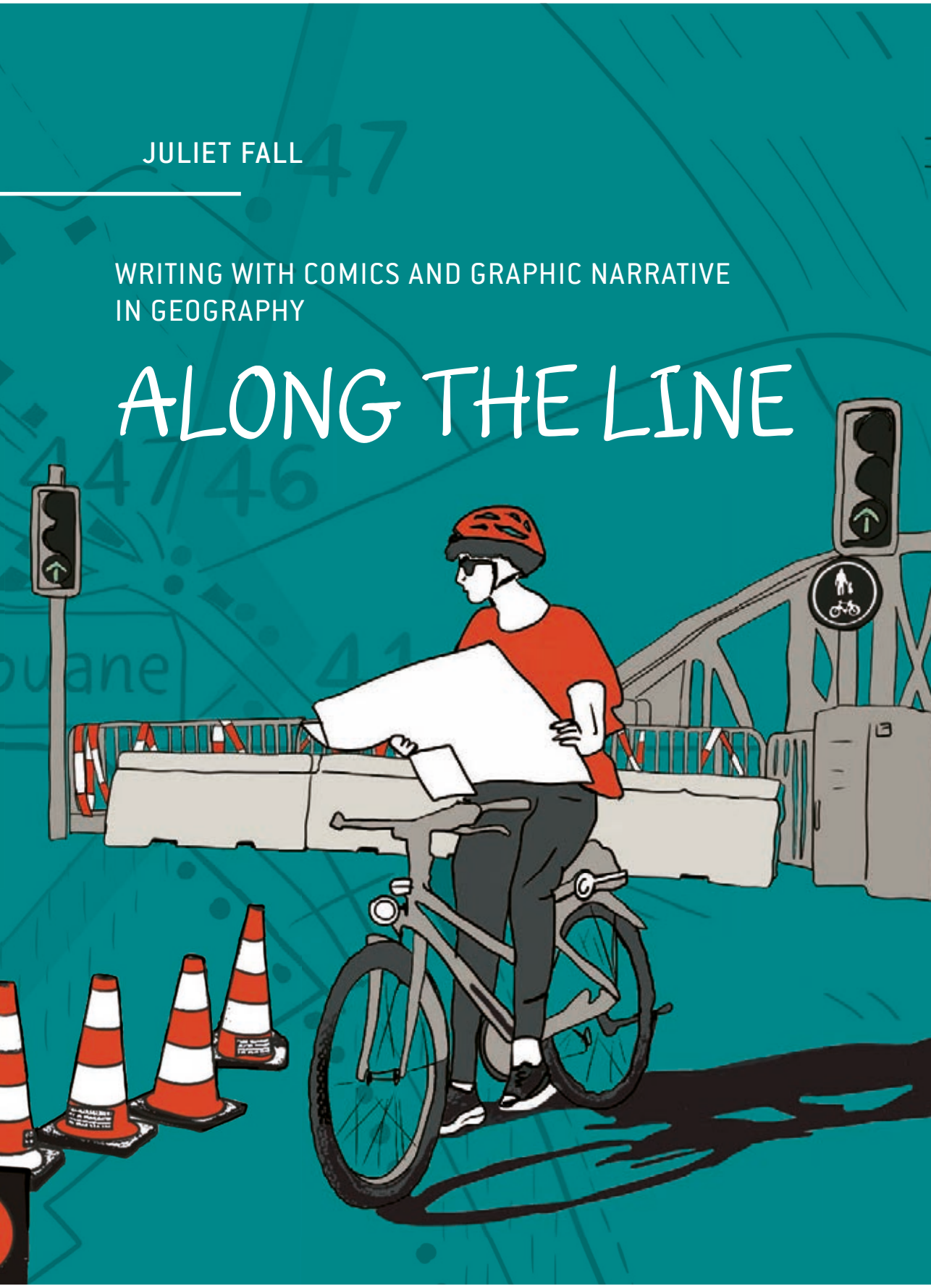
JULIET FALL

WRITING WITH COMICS AND GRAPHIC NARRATIVE IN GEOGRAPHY

ALONG THE LINE



ALONG THE LINE. WRITING WITH COMICS AND GRAPHIC NARRATIVE IN GEOGRAPHY

March 13, 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic spreads around the world. Taking this event as the starting point for her reflections, Juliet Fall sets out with her family by bicycle to retrace the physical traces of the border separating France and the Canton of Geneva, step by step, following the border stones and boundary markers. Over the course of a three-year quest, the author explores what borders are, and our relationship with this invisible line that impacts both our bodies and our imaginations, looking back at the long and eventful history of its construction, evolution and maintenance. This graphic essay is the result of a new kind of social research, which moves away from academic standards, giving as much space to words as to images.

"*Along The Line* invites us to slow down and look closer. Like the author on her sojourns looking for 19th century border stones, I found myself peering metaphorically and literally at the various boundaries that composed our social life during Covid-19. Her sketches and political geography theory equally illuminate a period we all lived through but have struggled to assimilate. What a gift."

Jason Dittmer
Professor at University College London



Preface by Joëlle Kuntz

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Cover: montage from drawings by the author.

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Preface

The global intimate according to Juliet Fall

The human body, geography and the state, long acquainted by hearsay, met in real life on 16 March 2020 in Switzerland. Luckily, Juliet Fall was there. I say luckily because, as a professor of geography at the University of Geneva, she had the means and tools to observe, record and comment on the event. This book is her testimony. The evidence is drawn across its pages.

16 March 2020 was the day the Swiss government declared a public health emergency under Article 7 of the Federal Pandemic Act. Covid 19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) had already infected 3,700 people, around a hundred new cases were being detected every day, 34 people had already died and hospitals were bursting at the seams. The situation was similar or worse in Switzerland's neighbouring countries. Authorities closed borders. Schools and public places were closed and their users placed under house arrest, with varying degrees of severity depending on the country. The author of this book realised the spatial shockwave that was taking place. She, her two children and her husband were now four bodies, deprived of their usual geography, subject to hygiene regulations and instructions dictated by the state in the name of public health. Bodies confined to an intangible national territory and subject to strict administrative discipline.

Juliet Fall wants to see this up close. She wants to understand what it was like to be suddenly subject to a border whose discreet existence seemed to have erased its usefulness, if not its meaning. She takes her bike, her camera and her children to test the effect on bodies and minds of a customs barrier erected between Switzerland and France, in the middle of a familiar road. Stunned? Yes, but why? That evening, she draws a picture of the barrier with her children in front of it. A family fenced in. There is a lot to think about.

"If the bodies of the people closest to me represent the main threat of contagion, why close international borders?" asks Juliet Fall in a speech bubble at the foot of a red traffic light flanked by a barrier. She suggests that this is a "spectacular staging" designed to discipline us. Yet she complies, "almost gratefully", she says, because she finds the scene "reassuring".

By means of the sophisticated, old and constantly updated infrastructure along its territorial border, the state deploys its function of protecting "its" population against a virus, as opposed to an external enemy. It literally "cements" its own concept of security. In poetic terms, it "casts fishing nets across the landscape to catch a virus". It devotes itself to the peremptory representation of geography entrusted to it by treaty (Vienna, 1815).

This geography of the state, which has power over vulnerable bodies, is far from self-evident. We know that its borders are not natural, having been constructed over the years by a series of military, social and political circumstances. We know that it inspires a particular geographical imagination, shaped by the upheavals of international history. There are two sides to the border for everyone, and these are more or less connected, depending on circumstances of peace, war or, from 2020, global public health. Nevertheless, across and despite this dividing line, daily life is lived along and across the border, combining work, consumption and leisure. This inspires Juliet Fall to use the lovely phrase "global intimate", a way for bodies to fit around and make sense of geopolitical demarcations. And in so doing, they themselves shape the existing contexts. "I'm trying to understand, slowly, step by step, how humans have carved out a place for themselves in the landscape," she writes.
Once the pandemic is over and the children have returned to their schools, the geographer spends two years walking along the 135 km that delimit the canton of Geneva and France in order to "make the territory real, inscribing the past and present in our rambling bodies". She draws, photographs, takes notes, consults archives and old maps, and draws up summaries that she shares in articles and on social networks. The border becomes her place. She delves into its memory, its aesthetics, its furniture and gets a feeling for the crowds of workers dedicated to crafting its past, present and future. She collects postcards showing buildings or border guards. Her fascinated gaze misses nothing of the border.
She has the idea that this complex line, which created "lives and deaths, friends and foes, all created by the border we maintained", also "shaped us too". This idea, specific to constructivist epistemology, leads Juliet Fall to produce a hand-drawn graphic narrative, in other words shaped through bodily investment, as if to ignite the senses of her readers. If a boundary line shapes us to the extent that we behave in accordance with it, perhaps a drawn line has the power to provoke a lively, unprogrammed intellectual response in the reader?
Because it is physical, this verbo-visual language brings down to earth the abstract geopolitical purpose of the border. Writing itself becomes space, allowing, says Fall, the double perspective of author and reader, geographer and cartoonist, researcher and artist. Drawing thus escapes the prepotency or authoritarianism of an academic position. Thanks to digital technologies that provide additional tools, the author has taken the liberty of drawing on a wide range of documentary resources to illustrate her point. The result is a collage of erudition and emotion, knowledge and playfulness, which makes the border a surprising and original object of attention.
At this point, bodies and geography stand face to face. The State has temporarily withdrawn, keeping a watchful eye on the stone blocks and warning signs that could be used again if a coronavirus were to once again disrupt the intimate lives of border populations.
As a discipline of knowledge, geography is branching out. It is discovering and analysing spaces that it did not previously frequent, such as those inhabited by women. A feminist geography detects the spaces produced by past bellicose patriarchal regimes and proposes them for de-gendered social use. Fall's book bears witness to this context of research by approaching the Franco-Genevan border, laid out two

centuries ago by Napoleon's victorious great powers, as an accepted fact of history that local bodies are taking back for themselves with the force of a tide. The accumulation of details about the landscape and buildings along the border reveals its social and cultural productiveness. Yet the full-page drawing of a barrier with its "temporary closure" sign also points to the fragility of the place. In border zones, the intimacy of bodies is not left to its own devices. All it takes is a virus or some other unforeseen global event to force it to obey the history of war.

Joëlle Kuntz



Introduction

In February 2020, the small town of Vo' Euganeo in north-eastern Italy was the first European toehold of an infectious disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), often referred to as Covid-19, in reference to the year of its identification in China. As people became sick, restrictions of movement were quickly introduced, sealing off the area. Italy offered a premonition of what other countries in Europe would soon experience: a dystopian version of what was to be our daily life for a few months. Soon after, many other restrictions impacted everyday mobilities. The rapid international spread of this novel virus led the World Health Organisation to declare a pandemic on the 11th March 2020. Mobility was discouraged, except for trips considered strictly necessary to go to work, visit the pharmacy, or the grocery store. International borders were progressively closed. People used to free movement were suddenly restricted: encouraged or forced to stay in their homes and severely limited in their ability to cross international borders. The pandemic became an event which, extraordinarily, was shared in people's lives around the world (Paasi *et al.* 2022).

Like many other residents in the Canton of Geneva, surrounded by the border between Switzerland and France within a city-region, my family felt the impact of the pandemic. In March 2020, as Covid-19 cases surged, the Swiss Federal Council implemented a nationwide lockdown, resulting in the closure of international borders for all non-essential travel and imposing restrictions on both entry and exit from the country. Although Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, it participates in the Schengen Area, facilitating free movement among its member states. Starting from 13th March 2020, Switzerland enforced border controls at its land borders with Italy, later extending them to France, Germany, and Austria on 16th March. Additionally, restrictions were applied to Swiss air borders with Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and Spain from 18th March. On 25th March, Switzerland expanded these controls to include air borders with all Schengen countries except Liechtenstein (Carrera and Ngo 2020).

On the morning of Monday, 16th March 2020, a state of emergency was declared, prompting the closure of schools, non-essential shops, and the cancellation of all public events, effectively initiating a nationwide lockdown. Anticipating the measures, I hurried to my university office on Saturday, grabbing a computer and a few bags of books. Unlike neighbouring countries, which employed police enforcement of emergency rules, Switzerland opted for a semi-lockdown approach. While individuals were allowed to leave their homes and move freely within the country, hosting parties or

events was prohibited. Many border crossing points were closed, redirecting traffic to the limited open *postes frontière*. Various roads leading to the border were barricaded with concrete blocks, metal fences, and police tape. In an unprecedented move since the Second World War, conscript soldiers were mobilized and assigned to various tasks, including guarding state borders.

The landscape around my home on the outskirts of Geneva suddenly seemed to shrink. Seeing the rapidly-assembled *ad hoc* border infrastructure appear so close to home, at a time of heightened global anxiety, made it personal in a way that affected me deeply. I first became aware of the extraordinary *mise-en-scène* of the border closures during a bike ride with my partner and our two children. We had heard about them from my father-in-law who lived a short distance away, but who we now only spoke to on the phone. It is hard to think back to those baffling and scary early days of lockdown. The photographs on my computer bear witness to the creeping presence of fences, blocks and tape observed during our bicycle rides. Their number increased over the days, rapidly displacing the usual jumbled images of children and cats that usually haunt my personal visual archives. It seemed important to witness these incongruous places, and to show them to our children. I felt we were living through a particularly unusual historical moment. I had no idea for how long it would last.

As I grew obsessed with visiting these improvised border closures, I became aware of how my relationship to my own body was changing. It was hard not to feel vulnerable[1]. My family and I diligently learnt how to scrub our hands, stay away from others, blow our noses safely and evaluate social distance. I was aware of how much the state's injunctions was creeping into my intimate life. I didn't resent this[2]. Bodies, sick or healthy, had become the central focus for state power operating at larger scales. Our fragile bodies were the sites upon which the new ideas, ideologies, and the territorial politics of the pandemic were being performed and made meaningful, from handwashing to border closures. Somehow, putting words and theories to make sense of the changes to how space was enrolled into fighting an invisible enemy seemed to help me. It connected back to the geographical theories that I had written about and was familiar with. It made sense to put words to the poetic absurdity of bits of tape and cement being enrolled to fight a virus. The new border fences only began to make sense when viewed as curiously temporary, haphazard and intrinsically visual performances of state security. They illustrated how sovereignty, rather than being a natural expression of state power, needed to be endlessly re-enacted and made visual to be believed. States, especially when surrounded by blocks of cement, were exposed as fundamentally fragile human creations.

This personal, bodily, and lived experience of border-making through different scales needs to be taken seriously. In everyday thinking, we often think of geographical scales as a series of nested boxes, one inside the other. From big global to little local, like Russian dolls. Yet, in common with colleagues whose work I present in more detail later, this caricatural understanding of scale that couldn't be mapped onto real places made little sense to me. How could somewhere actually be global ? Or uniquely and exclusively local ? In other words, rather than thinking about national and international politics taking place at one scale, and daily life taking

place at another, we should have considered how human bodies allow and mediate processes that operate across spaces and scales. It made sense to understand how global forces haunted and shaped all places, including the intimate spaces of individual bodies (Massey 2005; Pratt and Rosner 2012; Paasi 2022). This connected to efforts by scholars to bring non-state political actors, including activist groups, local communities and associations, women, global and international social forums, and non-governmental entities, into discussions about politics, security and vulnerability, broadening the understanding of each (Enloe 1989; Dalby 1994). Shifting the analytical focus beyond states introduced a more nuanced and multi-scaled understanding of what constituted the international, connecting the global and the intimate (Mountz and Hyndman 2006). This meant that the body was taken "as a scale and site upon which ideas, ideologies, and politics are performed and made meaningful" (Mountz 2018: 762) and where sovereignty was performed and claimed.
I realized geographical theory was helping me process and make sense of a shifting personal world in lockdown, stepping back from the immediacy of crisis, and reconnecting with my professional identity. My circumstances and expertise had not allowed me to write anything useful about the pandemic in those early days. I had been rather suspicious of colleagues who were writing and quickly editing books, feeling that there was something rather unsavoury and slightly opportunistic about it. There were some hints of disaster voyeurism. Did we really need insights from social scientists eager to centre themselves when we had no idea where this was going, and when other people were putting themselves at personal risk caring for others, often despite inadequate protective equipment ? In any case, I had no ability to concentrate or write, and I had a family at home all day to care for, so my uncharitable thoughts might just have been envy (Castree 2020; Dodds 2020; Gamba 2020; Sparke and Anguelov 2020). The best I could do was organise the day's photographs on a tablet, roughly sorted thematically as well as chronologically.
After a day of bike touring in the fresh air in the eerily empty lockdown landscapes, I started to play with images on my tablet, slowly building a visual account, creating a narrative scrapbook using a comics-making app. I had been writing and teaching about comics and geography for several years (Fall 2006, 2014, 2015) but hadn't authored one. I was familiar with the work of Giada Peterle (2019, 2021), a remarkable geographer-illustrator. By the end of April 2020, I had a first draft. I sent it to Luiza Bialasiewicz and Joe Painter, editors of the journal *Environment and Planning C*, with the following message:

I hope you are keeping well — or at least alive — in these very odd times. We've been struggling, like so many others, with homeschooling, remote teaching, ageing parent care, and all that. But, basically, we have the incredible privilege of living in a house with a terrace and a tiny vegetable patch that has kept me sane. Plus, Switzerland still lets us out for exercise. But still: this is week seven (or eight ?) of lockdown, and it's starting to seem impossible and stressful to ever open up anything again. But, supposedly, schools will reopen for our two in two weeks. It seems daft.
To keep myself sane, and because my truly academic brain is not really able to write, I have put together a comic based on the photos of borders that I've taken around Geneva, in implicit response to two recent papers: one by Joe Sharp (2021 in PiHG) and a collective effort by Jackman *et al.* (2020 in *Political Geography*). I've also got a (real !) paper in press with Political

Geography that also develops this intersection of feminist geopolitics and security studies. But this, at the moment, is just a comic.
So now I can either try to find it an 'official' home in a welcoming journal or perhaps the online version or blog of one, or just chuck it 'as-is' onto Twitter. Before I do that, I wanted to ask you — as editors of *Environment & Planning C*: Politics & Space but also as friends and mentors — whether you think it might be worth submitting it somewhere ? So far, I have not tried to write a short 'framing' paper to go with it, but I suppose I could imagine doing this.
It's 17 pages (A4) long.
Thank you so much for your advice, if you have the time.

I had expected push back or wariness against the unusual format. I was therefore impressed and incredibly grateful for their kind and generous responses a few days later, despite knowing that they also juggled fraught personal circumstances. Perhaps the extraordinary times we were living through created the conditions for stepping outside our academic habits ? Or were we all so bored of depressing news that something a bit different was a welcome change ? In any case, I too was jumping on the pandemic publishing bandwagon, losing my moral high ground. To my excitement, the comic was published a few weeks later as a guest editorial, with much help from Eugene McCann as managing editor, and after revisions, ethics reviews, and negotiations with the journal publisher about colour and format (Fall 2020a). In the following months, buoyed by the unexpected joy of getting a comic in print, I published two more on other topics (Fall 2020b, 2021a), still in scientific journals, as well as visual book reviews (Fall 2021b, 2024). One of the comics, on a controversial 19th Century public figure celebrated by my university, first appeared in shorter form in French in *Le Courrier*: a local newspaper, accompanied by framing articles (Mounir 2020; Bach 2020). Although getting my comics published was easier than I had expected, the visual result wasn't ideal when these were downloaded, even if they were designed in black and white. Scientific journals hadn't caught on to the technical potential of webcomics and were still bound by the limitations of page layout.
Beyond my narrow academic world, I was especially touched by the kind feedback to these comics from people outside my usual circle of readers. My mother's friends. My in-laws. Neighbours. Journalists. This was exciting and pointed towards a different way of doing research right from the outset, rather than using comics only to communicate research after the fact, as outreach. I was caught up in the creative potential of thinking through and from images and wished to find a format that reflected the potential of this medium to transform how we wrote. I had thought of my comics as *scientific comics or graphic narratives*, for want of a better term, because they had been published in scholarly venues. But I began to think that it might be time to step outside such familiar spaces. If the promise of comics was to participate in shaping new voices and writing for academics, then finding suitable formats, as well as new audiences, was part of the challenge.
The long-form comic *Along the line / Bornées* is the result. It builds on these critical storytelling experiments started during the pandemic and continued since. Published as a stand-alone paper and online comic book and crafted in 2023-2024 from a visual corpus collected since 2020, it is designed to be accessible to a non-academic audience. The English-language version of the comic is included here and should be

read in parallel to or independently of this written framing text. The text is a sort of whispered *making of* background to the comic, setting out the theoretical, methodological, and practical conditions of its crafting. Methodologically, it focuses on the uses and transformative potential of visual methods, building upon and contributing to the broader so-called *creative turn* in the social sciences. Theoretically, it responds to the call by Jackman and others to diversify approaches to the key concepts of territory, borders and security by infusing them with feminist perspectives to disrupt, unsettle, and even rewrite practices, discourses, and scholarly contexts to provide accounts of the world closer to the lived realities of "messy, muddy, multiple and lively territories and terrains that have thus far remained all too neat and tidy" (Jackman 2020: 10).

Chapter 1 starts with a discussion of the practicalities of this project, laying out how it took shape, and what steps I took to set up the ensuing discussion chapters. It presents the project designed during a crisis, exploring how this grounding of the research in variously gathered visual material can be connected to slow scholarship. It ends with a call to think of political borders as infrastructure, thinking of them as collective, social, and spatial.

Chapter 2 lays out why it matters to think visually about territory in our fractured and fragile world, and why the discipline of geography has useful theories, tools and methods, specifically coming from critical geopolitics and feminist political geography. It uses three examples to discuss how thinking territory through infrastructure enriches the concept and reveals its fragility and tenuousness.

Chapter 3 moves on to explore how the creative and visual turn opens innovative avenues for thinking about the nature of territory and infrastructures, focusing on using comics and graphic narratives to write open accounts of the world that suggest interpretations, leave things open and nuanced, rather than advance explanations carved in stone. This openness, I suggest, allows those encountering our stories to connect them to their own experiences, not as a way of making everything anecdotal but rather as a way of crafting empathetic and shared accounts of social life in difficult times.

[1] Such a statement requires some careful nuance. The vulnerability was multi-faceted: but fear of sickness and fear of crossing the political border, getting into trouble for breaking confusing new rules and laws are not the same. The latter requires clarification: geographers studying the connections between bodies and borders often study life-threatening encounters of undocumented and vulnerable people attempting to cross borders (Pallister-Wilkins 2022; Del Biaggio 2023; Vives 2017, 2023). This is clearly not only a very different situation, but also a very different take on the vulnerability of borders and state power. My intention is neither to trivialise such true lived vulnerability, nor create unhelpful parallels from my own position of white middle-class privilege, living in a stable and safe country. Instead, I am interested in the connections between security and scale and what they tell us about how territory is always already inscribed into the body, as I further discuss in the next chapter.

[2] Perhaps a distinctive feature of Swiss political life lies in the perception that the state fundamentally belongs to its citizens rather than being positioned as something external or superior to them. So

far, this perspective largely persists despite recent attempts by populist political provocateurs to incite unrest against purportedly out-of-touch elites, or critiques of the number of state employees. Predictably, as the pandemic unfolded, diverse conspiracy theorists emerged, especially once vaccines became available, attempting to sow discord. Nonetheless, the authorities' approach to managing the pandemic enjoyed broad support, not only during the lockdown but also beyond. This was evident in the referendum held on 18th June 2023, regarding the extension of the Loi Covid, which outlined the legal framework for pandemic-related actions. The results showed that 61,9 % of voting citizens supported the extension.

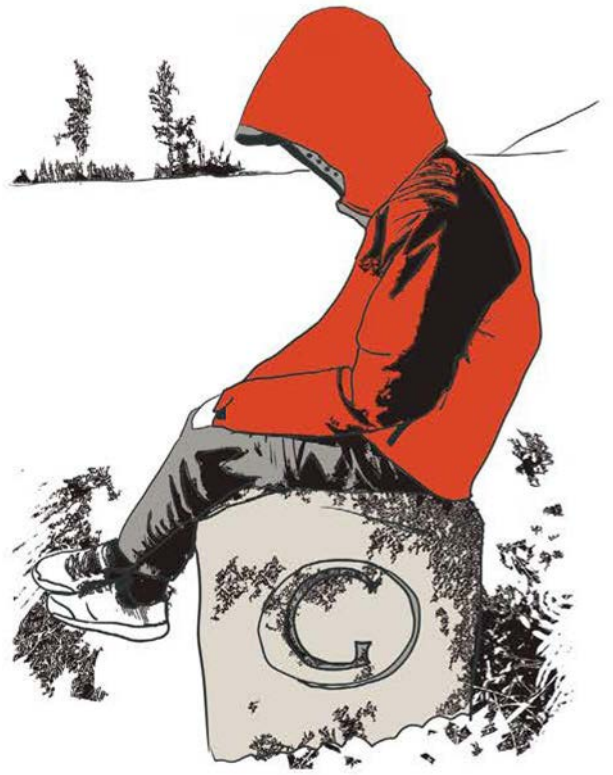
Procès verbal de Délimitation

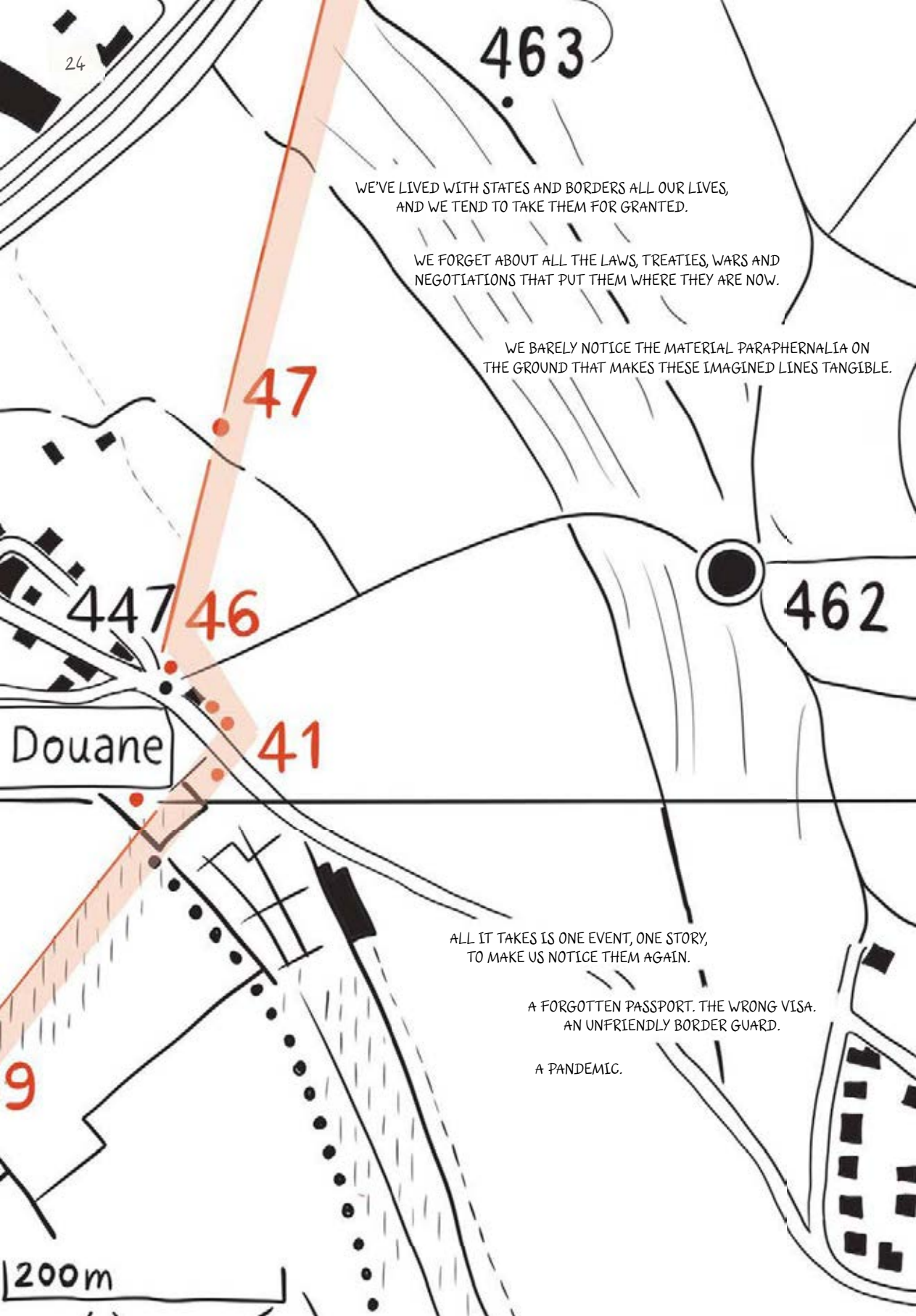
entre le Duché de Savoie et le Canton de Genève, en exécution du Traité de Turin du 16. Mars 1816.

Le Cinq du Mois de Juin Mil huit cent Seize. Nous soussignés nommés Commissaires pour la Délimitation du territoire, en exécution de l'article XXII du Traité de Turin du 16 Mars dernier savoir, pour Sa Majesté le Roi de Sardaigne, le Chevalier Louis Provana de Collegno, Conseiller de S. M., Commissaire Général des Confins de Ses Etats; et pour la Confédération Suisse et le Canton de Genève, le Conseiller d'Etat Charles Pictet de Rochemont, après nous être réunis à Lancy près de Genève, y avoir échangé nos pleins pouvoirs, annexés au présent procès verbal, et les avoir trouvés en bonne et due forme, nous étant munis des plans Topographiques extraits des Mappes, pour les portions de territoire où la nouvelle limite doit passer, Nous avons entrepris la reconnaissance générale de la ligne de démarcation, en portant particulièrement notre attention sur les endroits où cette ligne n'est point marquée par des limites naturelles, ou par l'ancienne délimitation qui doit subsister.

L'examen des points par lesquels la ligne nouvelle doit passer, ainsi que des questions à résoudre pour déterminer la Direction de cette ligne sur toute la frontière, à partir

1. LOCKING THE LINE





WE'VE LIVED WITH STATES AND BORDERS ALL OUR LIVES,
AND WE TEND TO TAKE THEM FOR GRANTED.

WE FORGET ABOUT ALL THE LAWS, TREATIES, WARS AND
NEGOTIATIONS THAT PUT THEM WHERE THEY ARE NOW.

WE BARELY NOTICE THE MATERIAL PARAPHERNALIA ON
THE GROUND THAT MAKES THESE IMAGINED LINES TANGIBLE.

ALL IT TAKES IS ONE EVENT, ONE STORY,
TO MAKE US NOTICE THEM AGAIN.

A FORGOTTEN PASSPORT. THE WRONG VISA.
AN UNFRIENDLY BORDER GUARD.

A PANDEMIC.

THIS IS A LOVE LETTER TO INVISIBLE LINES,
TO TRANSGRESSION AND BELONGING.

A LOVE LETTER TO HOME, COMPANIONSHIP AND EXPLORATION.

A VISUAL STORY ABOUT WHERE WE LIVE, WHO WE ARE,
AND HOW STATES STRUGGLE TO MAKE US BELIEVE THAT
WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT THEM.

IT IS A STORY THAT CRAFTS
A GEOGRAPHY COMMITTED
TO WRITING ABOUT THE WORLD
FROM THE GROUND UP,
IN IMAGES AND WORDS.

A STORY ROOTED IN OBSERVATION
AND ARCHIVAL RESEARCH,
BUT SHAPED, INTERPRETED
AND CRAFTED.

ALL GEOGRAPHIES ARE FLAWED,
IMPERFECT, NEVER-FINISHED.
THIS ONE IS NO DIFFERENT.

IN SHARING THIS TALE OF BORDERS,
I HOPE TO LET LOOSE OTHER
STORIES AND WHISPERED TALES,
OTHER MEMORIES FOR THOSE WHO
TAKE THE TIME TO LOOK
AND LISTEN.



I COULD CHOOSE TO BEGIN THE TALE AT MANY DIFFERENT HISTORICAL TIMES,
STARTING WITH THE ANCIENT DAYS OF THE ROMAN GOD TERMINUS,
PROTECTOR OF BOUNDARIES AND SACRED GUARDIAN OF BOUNDARY STONES.

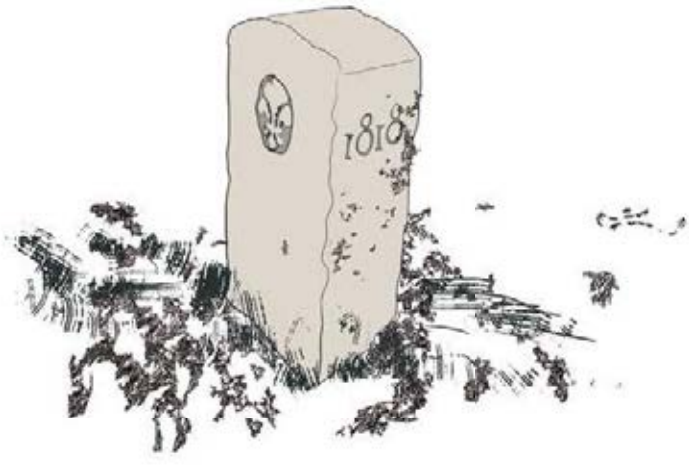
I COULD CHASE TALES OF IMAGINARY LINES
AND TERRITORIES THROUGHOUT THE YEARS,
AS OTHER SCHOLARS HAVE DONE.



INSTEAD, I WILL START CLOSER TO HOME WITH
A PERSONAL TALE, ROOTED IN OUR CONTEMPORARY
WORLD STILL HAUNTED BY TERMINUS
IN NUMEROUS WAYS.

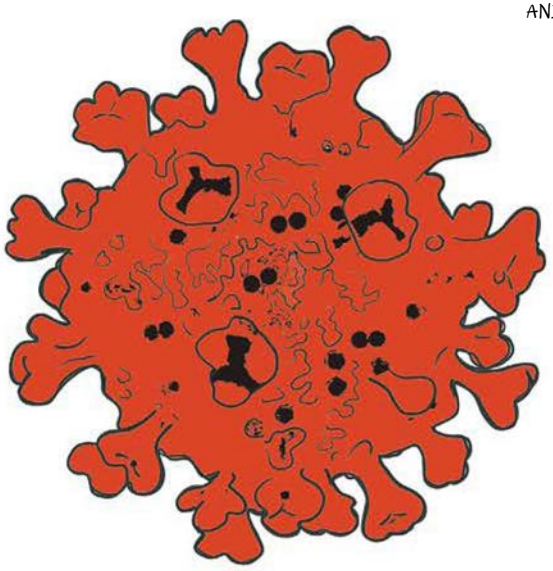
A WORLD PARADOXICALLY OBSESSED WITH
GLOBALIZING WHILE RESTRICTING HUMAN MOVEMENT.
A WORLD AWAKENING TO NEW POPULISMS
AND EXCLUSIONS. A WORRIED CHANGING WORLD
OF GLOBAL CHANGE.

THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW SOME BORDERLINES WERE BORN, HOW THEY CHANGED
OVER TIME, AND WHAT THEY MIGHT MEAN. IT IS ABOVE ALL A PERSONAL
ACCOUNT, SET AGAINST A BACKDROP OF GLOBAL POLITICS.



THE STORY BEGINS WHEN ONE TINY VIRUS SHOOK OUR LIVES AND CHANGED HOW WE THOUGHT AND RELATED TO OUR NEIGHBOURS, OUR HOMES, OUR BODIES AND THE LINES ON THE MAP.

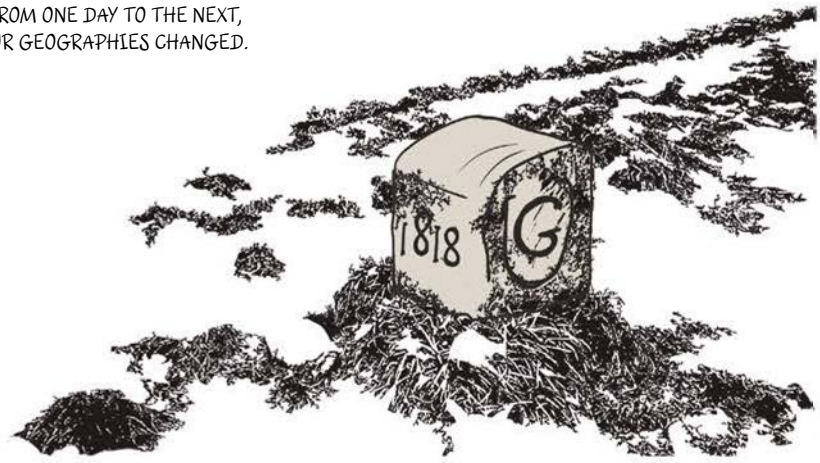
A LITTLE SPECK OF TROUBLE, THREATENING HUMAN LIVES AND SHAPING NEW GEOGRAPHIES.



A COUGHING, WHEEZING, SNEEZING AND CHOCKING THREAT, WEAKENING, SPARING OR KILLING US.

IN MARCH 2020, AS HUMAN CASES OF THE NEW CORONAVIRUS COVID-19 CASES SOARED ACROSS EUROPE AND THE WORLD, THE SWISS FEDERAL COUNCIL IMPOSED A LOCKDOWN ACROSS THE COUNTRY, CLOSING THE BORDERS TO ALL BUT ESSENTIAL TRAVEL.

FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT, OUR GEOGRAPHIES CHANGED.



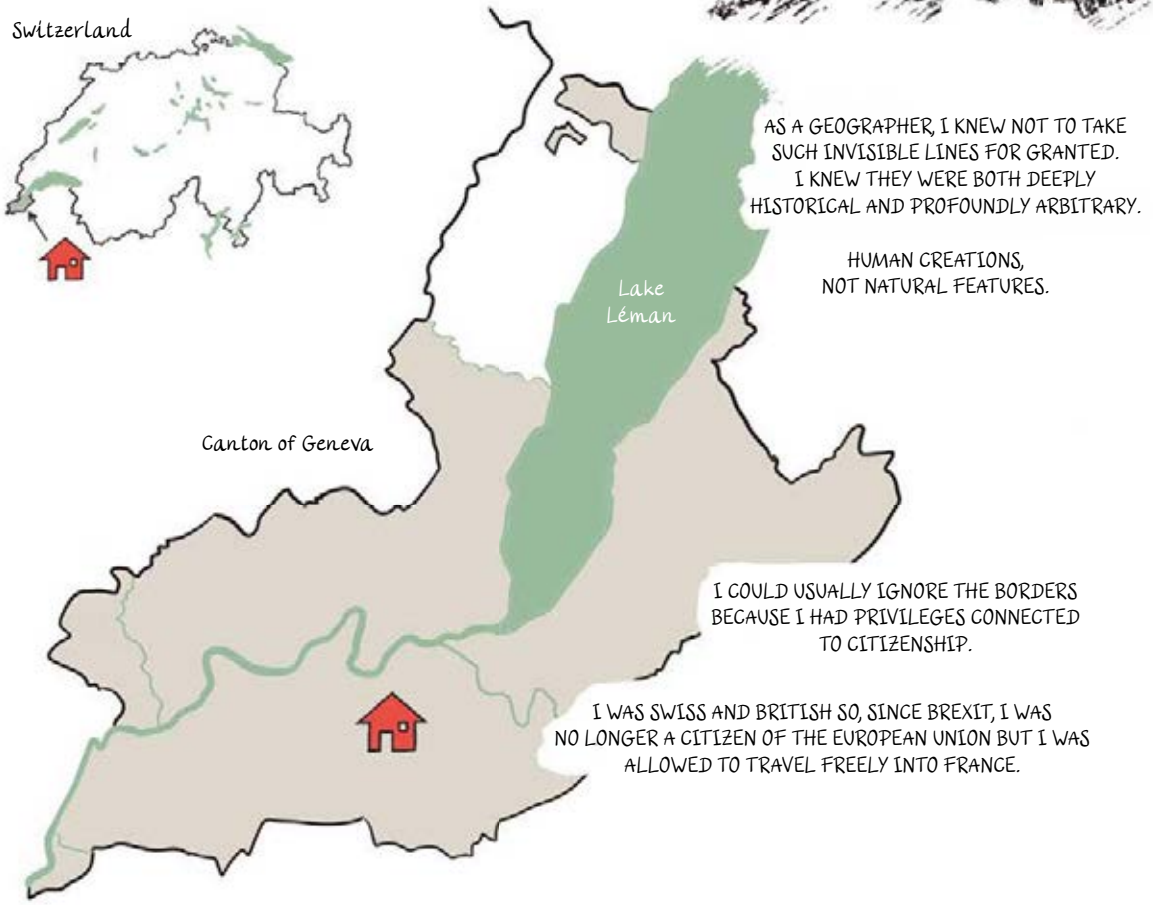
GENEVA IS A SMALL CANTON IN WESTERN SWITZERLAND, ALMOST ENTIRELY SURROUNDED BY FRANCE.

I LIVED IN A VILLAGE AT THE EDGE OF THE MAIN URBAN AREA OF THE CITY.

FOR YEARS, THE BORDER SEEMED TO BE SLOWLY FADING AWAY.

IT HAD BEEN SHIFTING ELSEWHERE, TO THE LIMITS OF THE SCHENGEN AREA THAT ALLOWED FREE MOVEMENT, TO THE EDGES OF OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.





AS A GEOGRAPHER, I KNEW NOT TO TAKE SUCH INVISIBLE LINES FOR GRANTED. I KNEW THEY WERE BOTH DEEPLY HISTORICAL AND PROFOUNDLY ARBITRARY.

HUMAN CREATIONS, NOT NATURAL FEATURES.

I COULD USUALLY IGNORE THE BORDERS BECAUSE I HAD PRIVILEGES CONNECTED TO CITIZENSHIP.

I WAS SWISS AND BRITISH SO, SINCE BREXIT, I WAS NO LONGER A CITIZEN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION BUT I WAS ALLOWED TO TRAVEL FREELY INTO FRANCE.

THE ONLY HASSLE WAS CUSTOMS LIMITS WHEN SHOPPING IN FRANCE. TOO MUCH MILK, MEAT OR WINE COULD GET ME INTO TROUBLE.

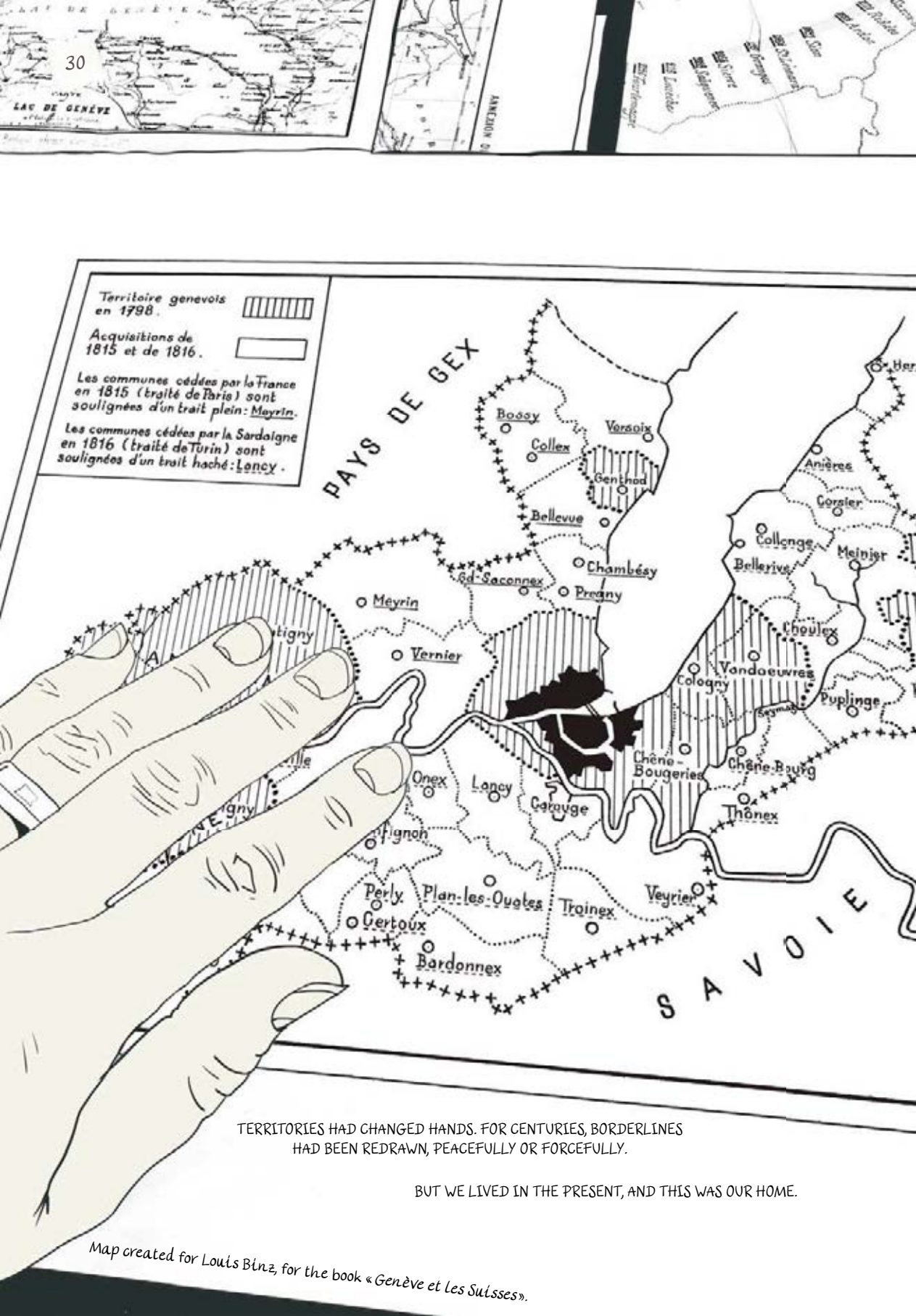
SIMPLE, ADMINISTRATIVE CONSTRAINTS OF A MOSTLY PEACEFUL LIFE.

I KNEW IT WAS ONLY THE LATEST POLITICAL AND TERRITORIAL ARRANGEMENT IN THIS CORNER OF THE WORLD.

OUR LANDSCAPES HAD DEEP MEMORIES, INSCRIBED IN PAPER AND STONE.



Map from D. von Escher, 1817



TERRITORIES HAD CHANGED HANDS. FOR CENTURIES, BORDERLINES HAD BEEN REDRAWN, PEACEFULLY OR FORCEFULLY.

BUT WE LIVED IN THE PRESENT, AND THIS WAS OUR HOME.

Map created for Louis Binz, for the book « Genève et les Suisses».

IN THE SPRING OF 2020, EVERYTHING SEEMED TO CHANGE.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ARRIVED ON OUR DOORSTEP, AND SUDDENLY EVERYBODY WAS SPEAKING ABOUT BORDERS AGAIN.

THE LINES DIDN'T MOVE, BUT THEY WERE ENROLLED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST A NEW SICKNESS NOBODY REALLY UNDERSTOOD.

ITALY, TO OUR SOUTH, WAS HIT VERY BADLY. PEOPLE WERE DYING. IT SEEMED VITALLY IMPORTANT TO THE SWISS AUTHORITIES TO CONTAIN THE CONTAGION.

DANGER CAME FROM ELSEWHERE. OUR WORLD OF CONNECTIONS, OF RAPID TRAVEL AND EXCHANGES WAS THREATENING US. OUR BORDERS WOULD KEEP US SAFE.

Chancy, border stone 24

Quelques chiffres

sur les repères sur la frontière nationale franco-genevoise :

207 repères sur le tracé Genève – Ain, numérotés de 1 à 182

268 sur le tracé Genève - Haute-Savoie, numérotés de 1 à 219bis

17 sortes de bornes

1 borne tous les **~235** mètres

124 millésimes différents, selon les périodes :

- de 1816 à 1818 : 311 bornes frontières
- de 1896 à 1950 : 87 bornes frontières
- de 1950 à 2000 : 178 bornes frontières

OUR WORLD LOCKED DOWN. THE DRAW-BRIDGE WAS RAISED. WE STAYED AT HOME.

From a photo of a sign at Sentier des Bornes in Dardagny.



IN OUR STRANGE NEW WORLD OF LOCKDOWNS, OUR FAMILY OF FOUR HAD BEEN GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES INSIDE AT HOME, DAY AFTER DAY.



I'D BEEN FINDING IT HARD TO CONCENTRATE, LEARNING NEW ONLINE TEACHING SKILLS. MY PARTNER HAD BEEN EQUALLY GLUED TO HIS SCREEN.



THE CHILDREN, THEN AGED 11 AND 13, HAD BEEN STRUGGLING WITH THEIR WORKLOADS, FREE TIMES AND LACK OF SOCIAL LIVES.

WE ALL SWUNG BETWEEN EXTREMES, FEELING AS IF A WAVE COULD SWEEP US AWAY ANY MOMENT.

ONE WEEKEND, WE TOOK OUT OUR BICYCLES, LUCKY TO LIVE IN A COUNTRY HAVING CHOSEN ONLY SEMI-LOCKDOWN.



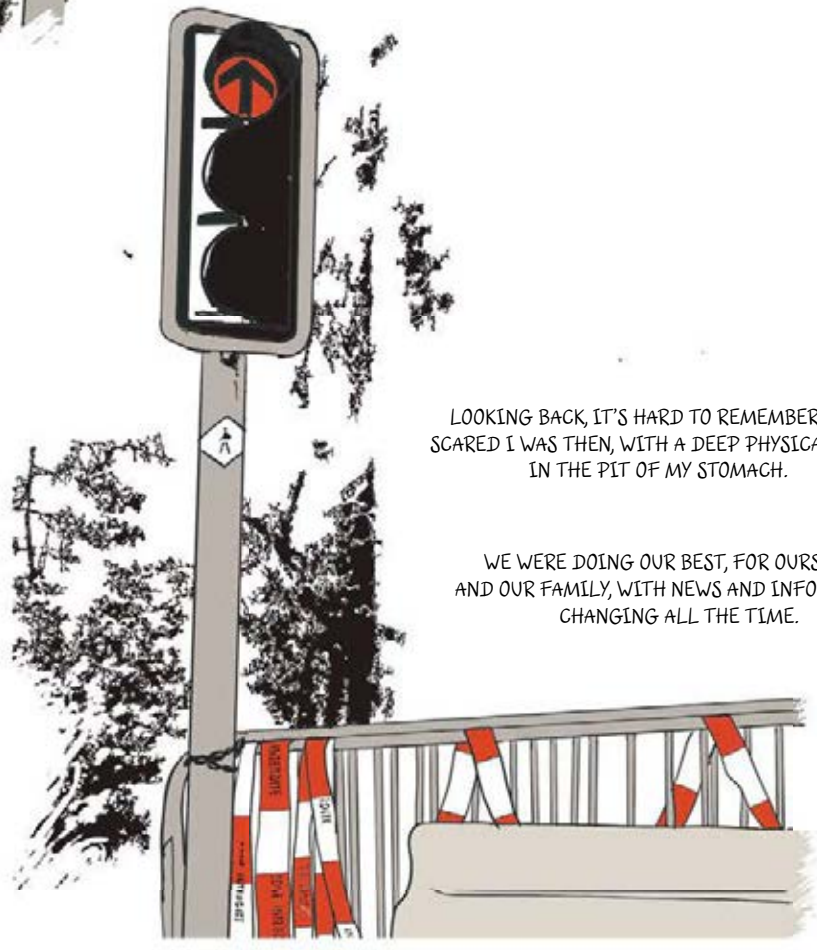


A BIKE TOUR PROMISED SOME FRESH AIR AND EXERCISE. A WELCOME CHANGE OF PACE AT THE END OF A DAY. BUT THESE WERE NOT ORDINARY TIMES. DAILY CHOICES SEEMED FRAUGHT WITH RISK.

WE CHOSE OUR ROUTE TO AVOID MEETING OTHERS, NEWLY MINDFUL THAT ANY SICK BODY, CLOSE TO OURS, COULD HARM US MOST. A FRIEND. A NEIGHBOUR. A PASSER-BY.

DANGER COULD COME FROM THOSE CLOSE ENOUGH TO TOUCH OR SNEEZE ON US. WE CARRIED HAND SANITIZER AND HOMEMADE MASKS.

MAGIC TALISMANS THAT MIGHT KEEP US SAFE, EVEN IF WE NEVER USED THEM.



LOOKING BACK, IT'S HARD TO REMEMBER HOW SCARED I WAS THEN, WITH A DEEP PHYSICAL FEAR IN THE PIT OF MY STOMACH.

WE WERE DOING OUR BEST, FOR OURSELVES AND OUR FAMILY, WITH NEWS AND INFORMATION CHANGING ALL THE TIME.



Bardonnex

THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS HAD CLOSED A FEW DAYS EARLIER. I CAN REMEMBER TELLING THEM TO TAKE AN EXTRA BAG TO SCHOOL ON THE FRIDAY MORNING, JUST IN CASE THEY NEEDED TO BRING THINGS HOME. THEY HAD LOOKED AT ME SCEPTICALLY.

IT ALL SEEMED SO UNLIKELY.



I HAD BEEN READING THE ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS ONLINE. OUR CLOSE NEIGHBOURS WERE ALREADY LIVING ON ANOTHER PLANET.

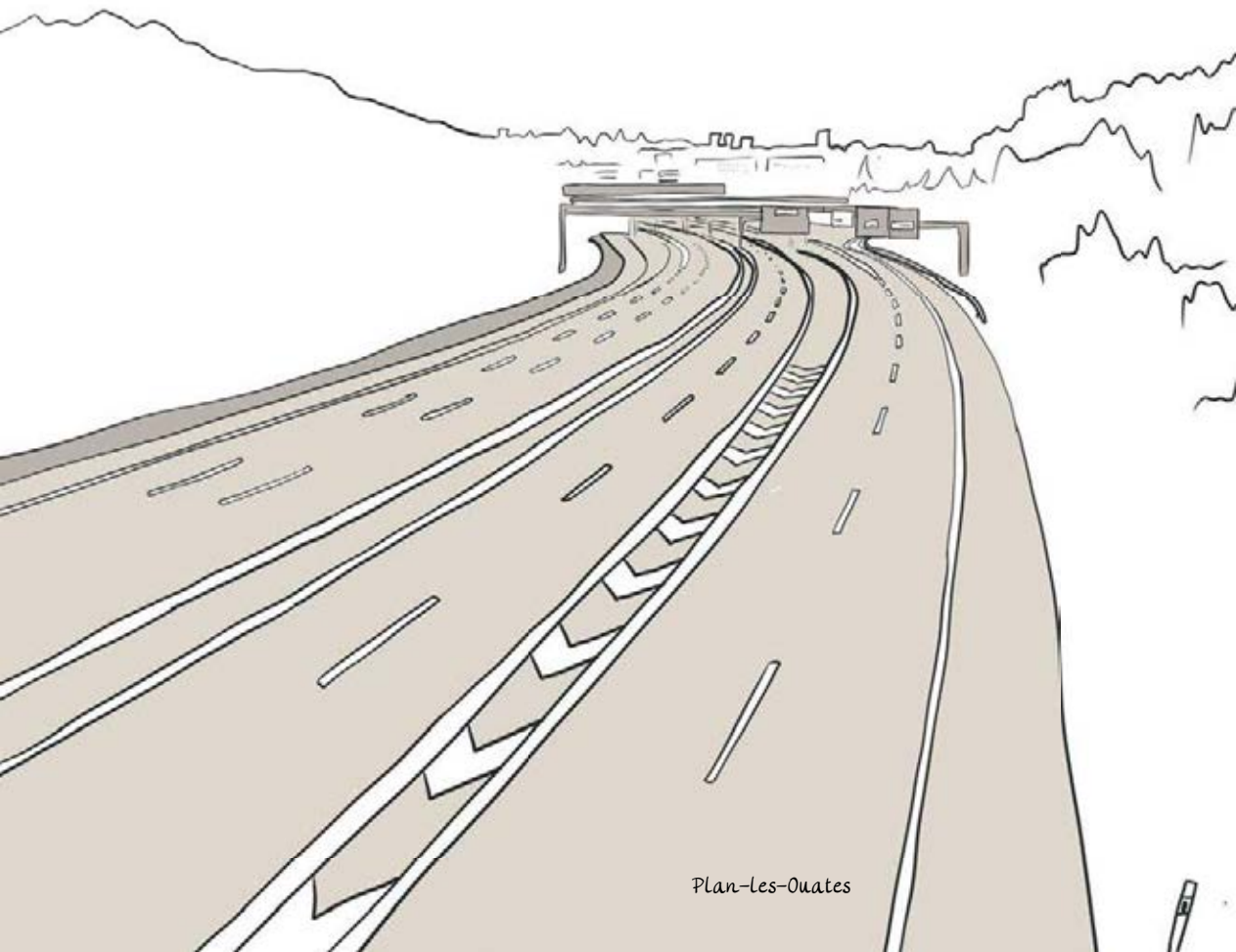


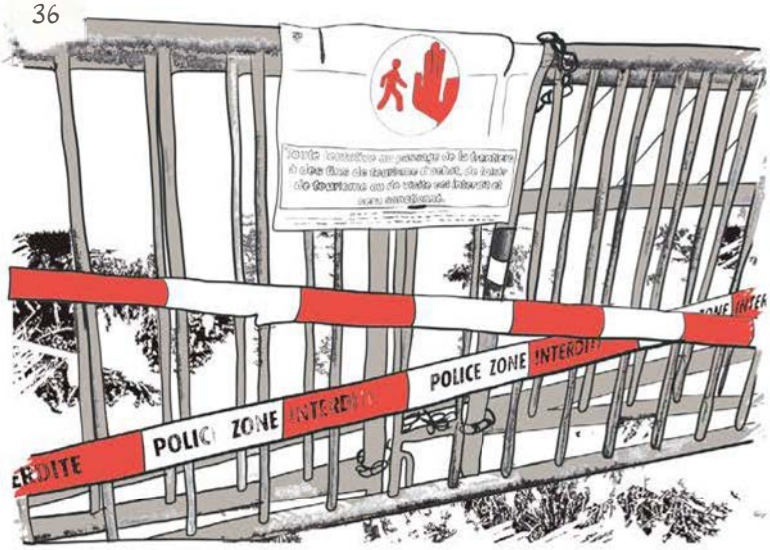
WE LIVED BARELY TEN MINUTES AWAY FROM FRANCE, BY BIKE. THE SUN WAS SHINING.

WE STOPPED TO READ THE MAP UNDER A SURVEILLANCE CAMERA, CLOSE TO A LARGE BORDER CROSSING. I WAS FEELING ODDLY NERVOUS.

THE MOTORWAY WAS SPOOKILY EMPTY, AS THOUGH THE WORLD HAD ENDED.

WE THOUGHT WE'D TAKE A BRIEF DETOUR TO LOOK AT THE BORDER. WE KNEW IT WAS MEANT TO BE RESTRICTED TO ESSENTIAL TRAFFIC.





Bardonnex

AS WE CYCLED ALONG AN EMPTY FIELD, ON A ROUGH TRACK, WE SAW A METAL FENCE ALONG THE BORDER BLOCKING OFF A SMALL PATH ACROSS A BRIDGE THAT CONNECTED TWO EMPTY FIELDS.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN PUT UP IN A RUSH, FOLLOWING A QUICK DECISION. I WASN'T EXPECTING THAT.

IT LOOKED BOTH OFFICIAL AND IMPROVISED: AN ODD MIX OF FENCES, TAPE, CHAINS, PRINTED SIGNS AND REFERENCES TO EMERGENCY LAWS.

"NO CROSSING OR ATTEMPTED CROSSING ALLOWED FOR SHOPPING, LEISURE, TOURISM OR VISITING."



Bardonnex, border stone 64

THE BORDER WE USUALLY CROSSED WITHOUT THINKING WAS SUDDENLY COMPLETELY SHUT TO US. WE WERE FENCED IN.

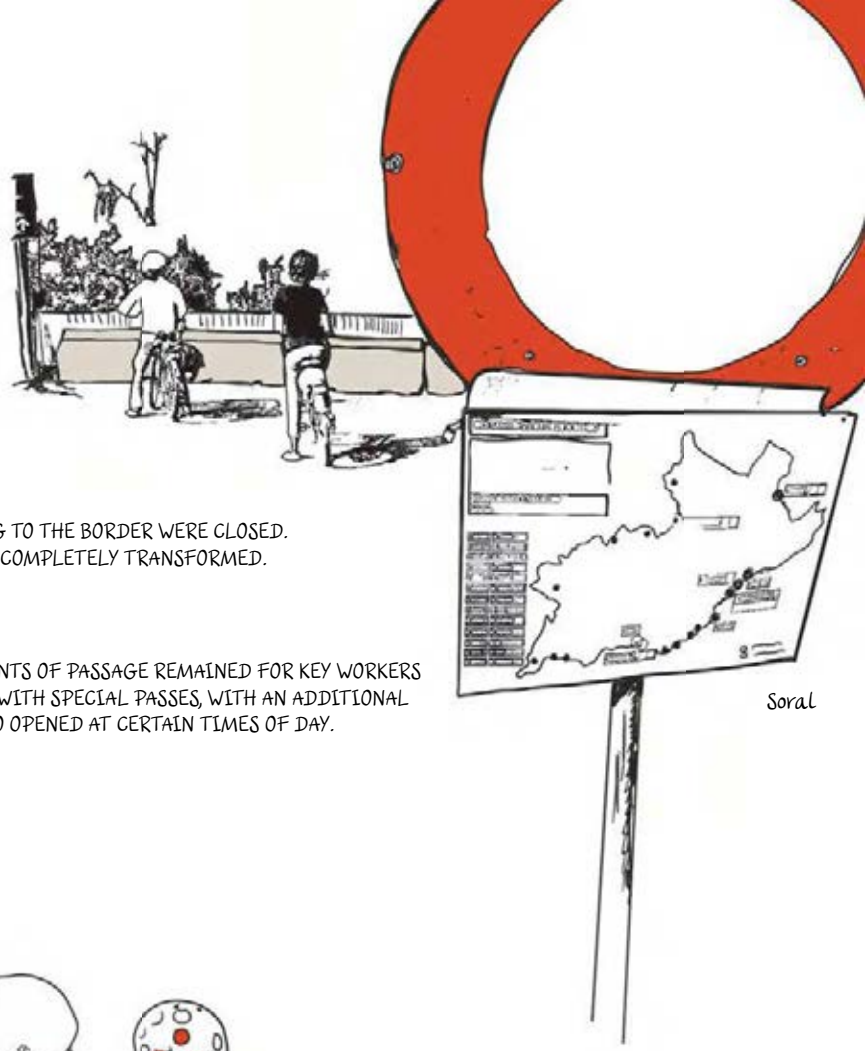


Bardonnex

THE SCHENGEN AGREEMENT, ALLOWING FREE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE, WAS SUSPENDED.



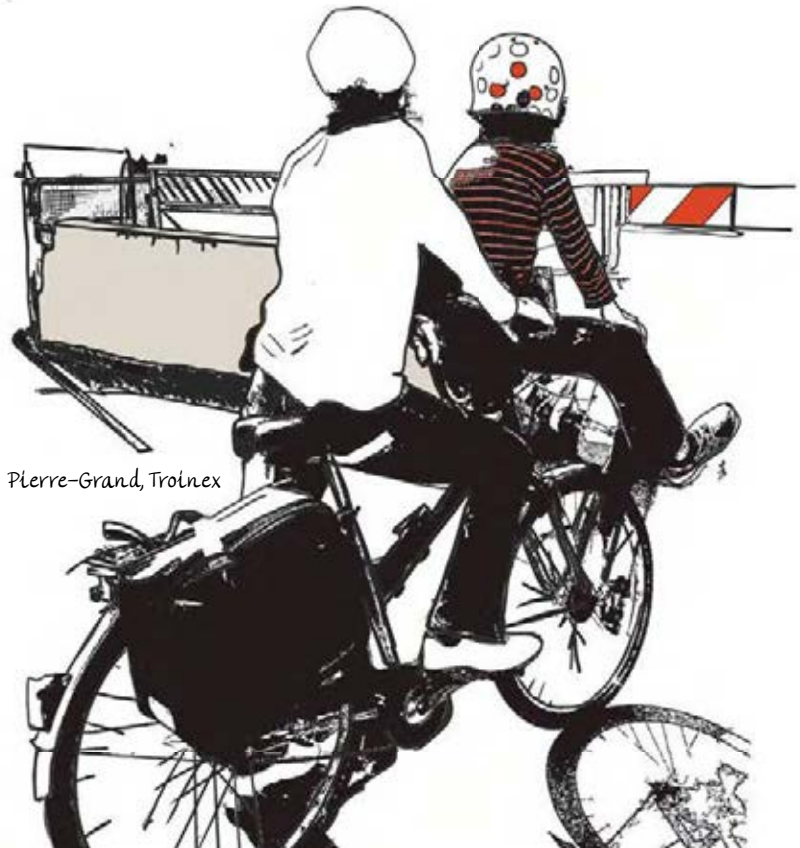
Croix-de-Rozon



OVERNIGHT, ALL ROADS LEADING TO THE BORDER WERE CLOSED.
OUR PERMEABLE BORDER WAS COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED.

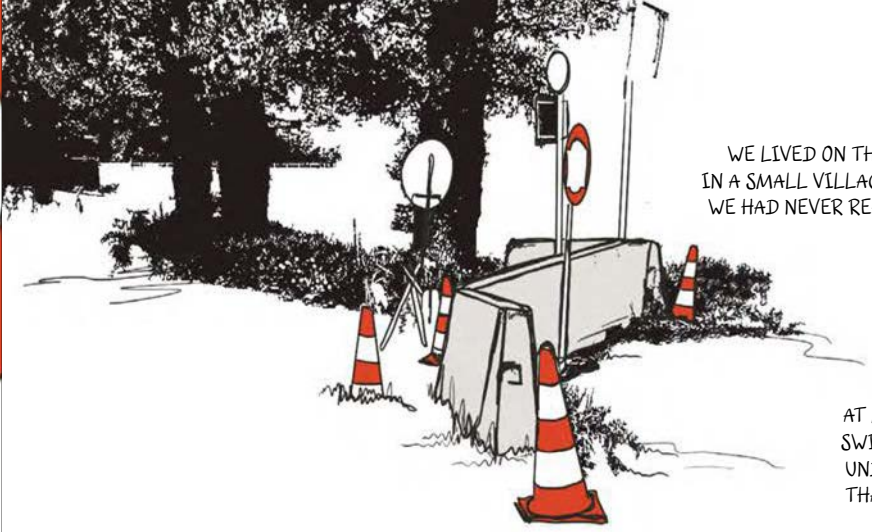
ONLY SIX POINTS OF PASSAGE REMAINED FOR KEY WORKERS
AND THOSE WITH SPECIAL PASSES, WITH AN ADDITIONAL
TWO OPENED AT CERTAIN TIMES OF DAY.

Soral



Plerre-Grand, Troinex

BUT BEYOND THE CHANGING RULES,
THE LANDSCAPE ITSELF WAS
TRANSFORMED.



WE LIVED ON THE EDGE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, IN A SMALL VILLAGE. THE BORDER WAS VERY CLOSE. WE HAD NEVER REALLY TAKEN MUCH NOTICE OF IT.

AT MOST, WE SMILED WHEN OUR PHONES SWITCHED TO FRENCH NETWORKS IN OUR UNDERGROUND GARAGE, REMINDING US THAT OUR NEIGHBOURS LIVED CLOSE BY.

SUDDENLY, EXACTLY WHERE THE BORDER LAY SEEMED IMMENSELY IMPORTANT.



IT WOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN MUCH TO CROSS, AS POLICE OFFICERS AND BORDER GUARDS WEREN'T EVERYWHERE IN THE ROLLING COUNTRYSIDE, BUT WE STOPPED SHORT.

IT WAS ALL SO VERY STRANGE.



WE CONTINUED OUR TOUR BUT SOMETHING HAD CHANGED. THE REALITY OF THE PANDEMIC AND OUR HOME COUNTRY'S RESPONSE TO IT SUDDENLY BECAME REAL BEYOND OUR OWN CHANGED DAILY LIVES.

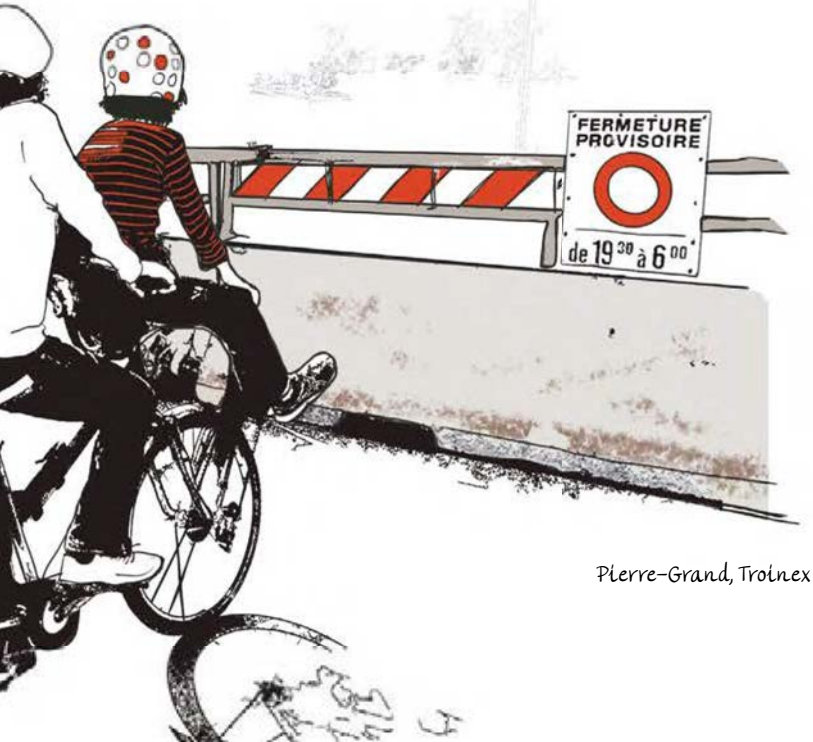
IN THE PAST SIX WEEKS, HOME HAD BECOME OUR SANCTUARY. A PLACE OF REFUGE AND SAFETY.

I'D BEEN SO FOCUSED ON THE CHANGES TO OUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES THAT I'D FORGOTTEN TO THINK ABOUT HOW MUCH THE WORLD OUTSIDE HAD CHANGED.

IN MY ACADEMIC LIFE, READING OTHER GEOGRAPHERS MADE ME THINK ABOUT HOW GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSES WERE ALWAYS GROUNDED IN PRACTICE AND IN PLACE.

BUT SOMEHOW I HADN'T CONNECTED THIS TO HOME, TO NEWLY HARDENED AND CLOSED BORDERS.

I HADN'T LINKED THE REPRESENTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL BORDERS AND PANDEMIC THREATS TO THE NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF MY DAILY LIFE.



I HADN'T TAKEN THE TIME TO THINK ABOUT HOW BODIES, THE NATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL MIGHT BE CONNECTED THROUGH BORDERS TO OTHER EMERGING PRACTICES OF SECURITY, UNTIL SUDDENLY MY OWN FLESHY INTEGRITY WAS AFFECTED.

SLOWLY, SOME OF MY ACADEMIC READING MADE CONCRETE SENSE.

Pierre-Grand, Troinex



Soral

AS WE CYCLED EVERY DAY IN THE DRY LANDSCAPE, WE SAW THAT NEW FENCES AND WALLS HAD BEEN BUILT ALL ALONG THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER, OFTEN PUT UP OVERNIGHT.

WE COULD LOOK AT THEM. WE COULD PHOTOGRAPH THEM. BUT WE CERTAINLY WERE NOT AUTHORIZED TO CROSS AND LEAVE THE COUNTRY.

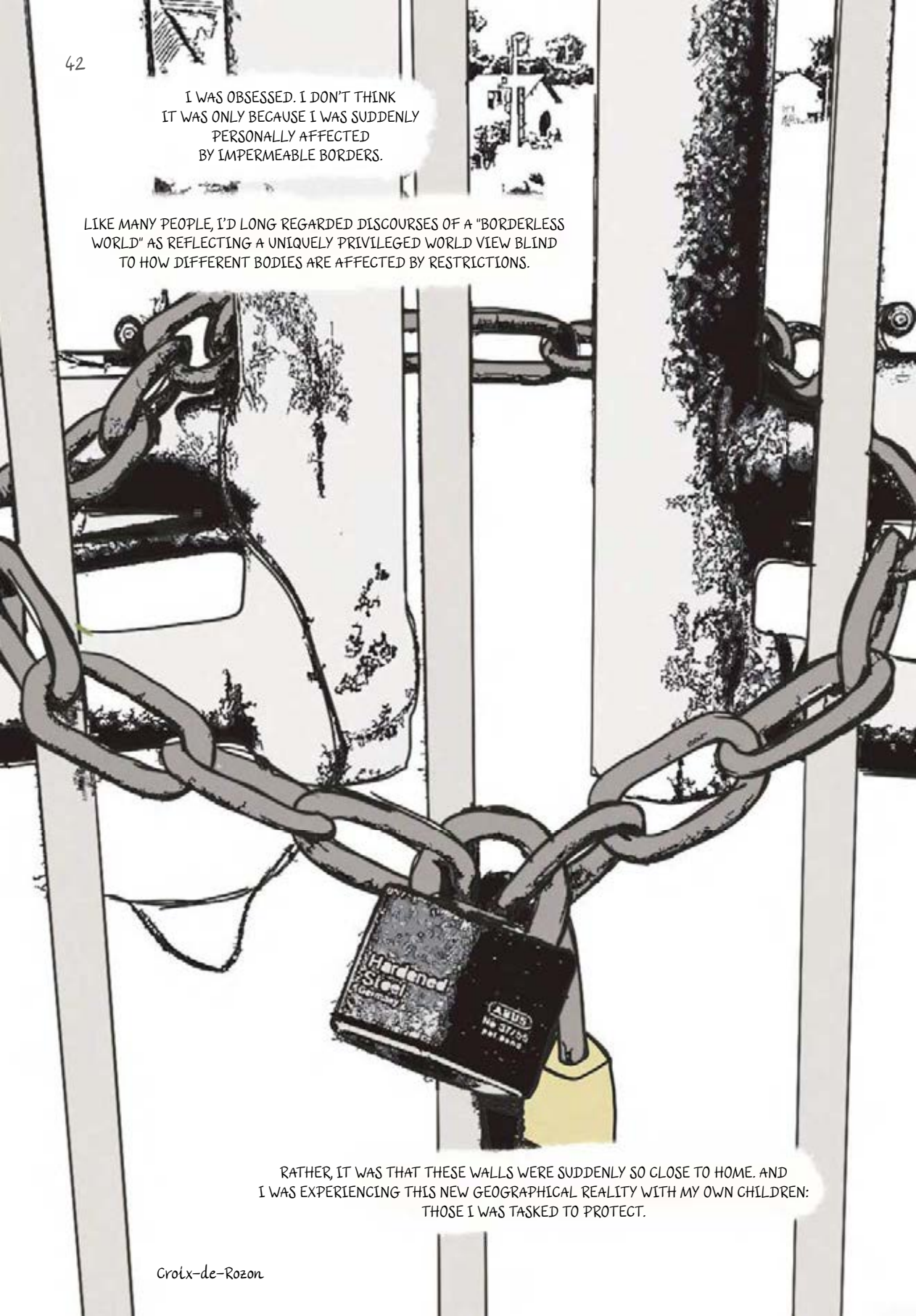
I WAS MESMERIZED, FINDING REASONS IN THE FOLLOWING DAYS AND WEEKS TO RETURN TO THESE PLACES ALONG THE BORDER, VISITING AS MANY DIFFERENT SITES AS I COULD.

«COME ON CHILDREN, LET'S DO ANOTHER BIKE TOUR!», I'D SAY. MY PARTNER WAS ALWAYS GAME, HAPPY ABOUT MY APPARENT NEW LOVE OF EXERCISE.

THE CHILDREN WERE PLEASED TO HAVE SOME FRESH AIR, DESPITE A FEW GRUMBLES. "I LIKE THESE TRIPS TO THE BORDER, BUT... WELL... SEEN ONE, SEEN THEM ALL, RIGHT?", SAID MY DAUGHTER.



La Rippe

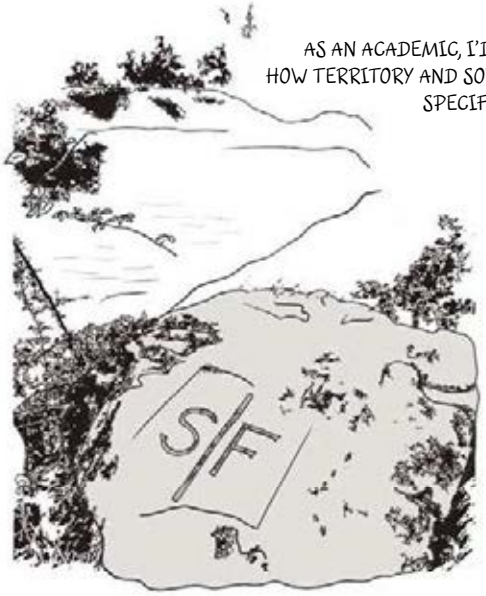

I WAS OBSESSED. I DON'T THINK
IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE I WAS SUDDENLY
PERSONALLY AFFECTED
BY IMPERMEABLE BORDERS.
LIKE MANY PEOPLE, I'D LONG REGARDED DISCOURSES OF A "BORDERLESS
WORLD" AS REFLECTING A UNIQUELY PRIVILEGED WORLD VIEW BLIND
TO HOW DIFFERENT BODIES ARE AFFECTED BY RESTRICTIONS.
Hardened
Steel
ABUS
RATHER, IT WAS THAT THESE WALLS WERE SUDDENLY SO CLOSE TO HOME. AND
I WAS EXPERIENCING THIS NEW GEOGRAPHICAL REALITY WITH MY OWN CHILDREN:
THOSE I WAS TASKED TO PROTECT.

AS AN ACADEMIC, I'D BEEN INTERESTED FOR YEARS IN HOW TERRITORY AND SOVEREIGNTY WERE DISCUSSED DURING SPECIFIC SECURITY CRISES.

ARE BORDERS NATURAL, SELF-EVIDENT AND NECESSARY, OR ARE THEY JUST A HISTORICAL INVENTION BORN OF POLITICS, WARS, AND NEGOTIATIONS?



Satigny, border marker 131.5



La Laire,
border stone with no number

I'D LONG BEEN FASCINATED BY THE EVERYDAY ASSUMPTION THAT STATES WERE NATURAL, AND THAT THEREFORE THEY COULD HAVE IDEAL OR 'NATURAL' BOUNDARIES.

I'D WRITTEN ABOUT HOW POLITICAL BORDERS WERE INVESTED WITH MEANING, TAKING ON MYTHICAL QUALITIES WORTH DYING FOR.

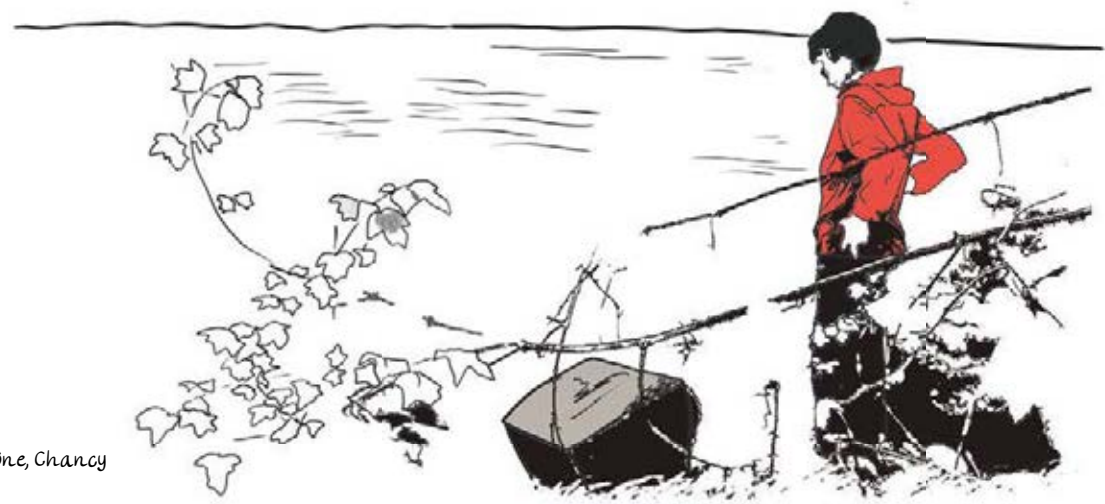
I HAD STUDIED HOW EUROPE HAD BECOME ENGULFED IN TERRITORIAL WAR ONCE AGAIN, SHOWING THE MATERIAL AND HUMAN CONSEQUENCES OF TERRITORIAL STRUGGLES. I'D DISCUSSED HOW THESE CONNECTED TO IDEAS OF PERSONAL ENTITLEMENT.



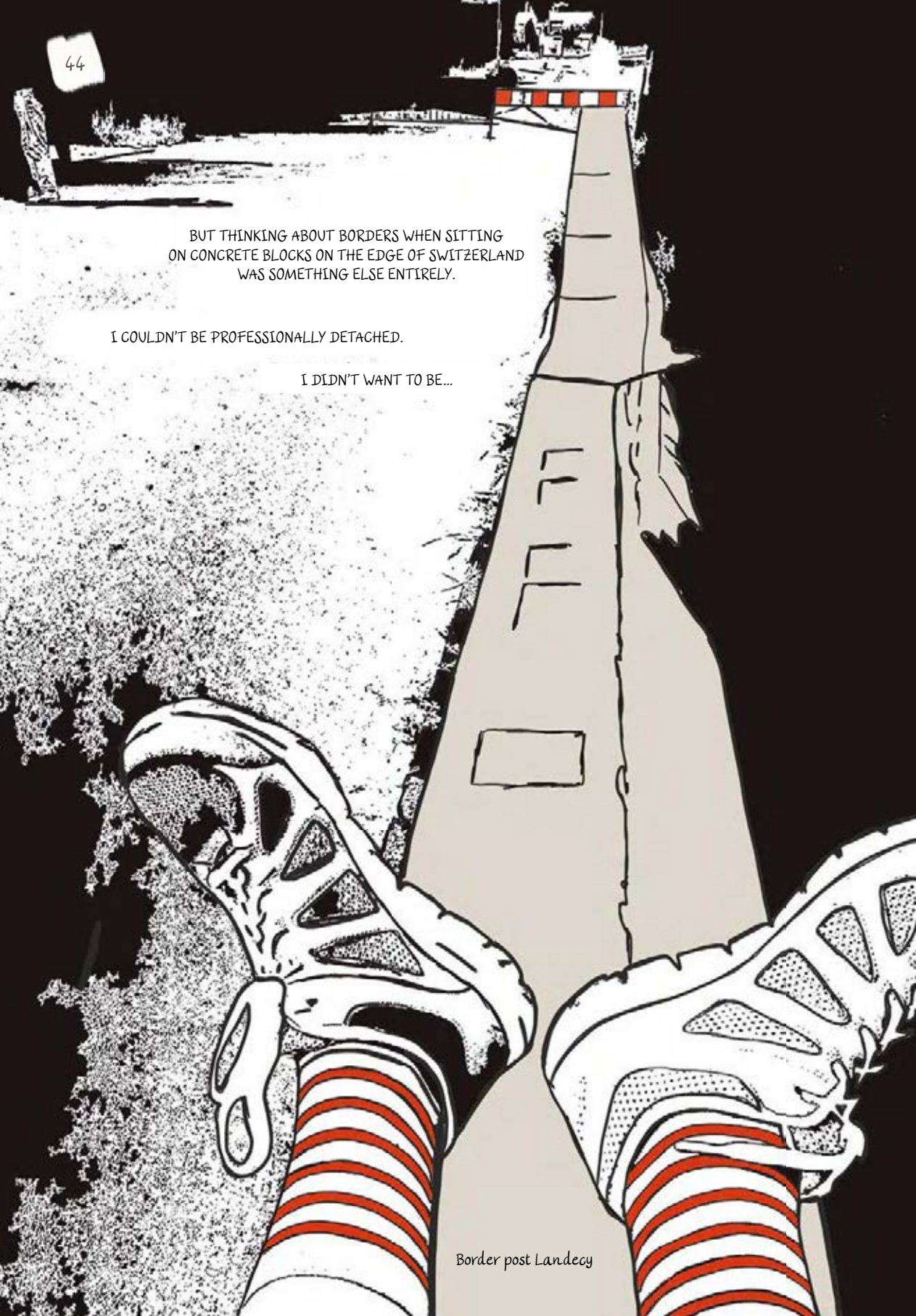
Ukraine, 2014

I HAD NEVER BELIEVED BORDERS WERE ANYTHING OTHER THAN FASCINATING HUMAN INVENTIONS.

THEY WERE NEITHER SKIN NOR SPELL, EVEN IF I OFTEN FELT A LITTLE TINGLE IN THE PIT OF MY STOMACH WHEN I CROSSED ONE.



Rhône, Chancy



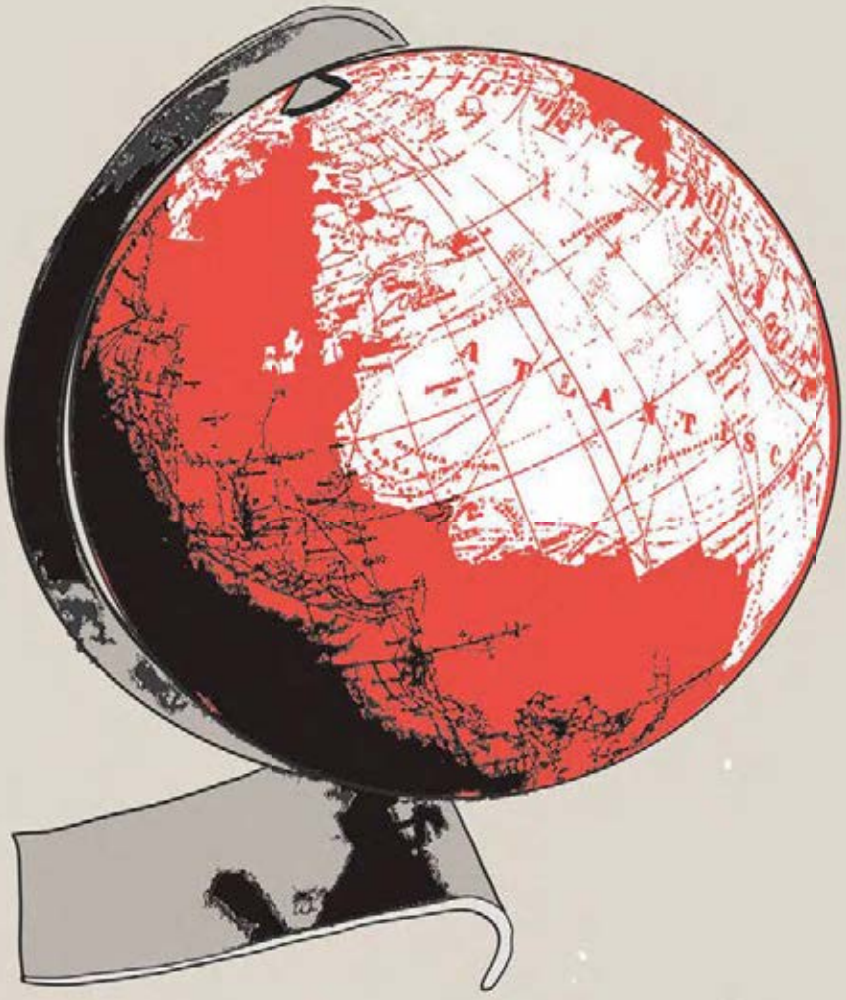
Border post Landecy

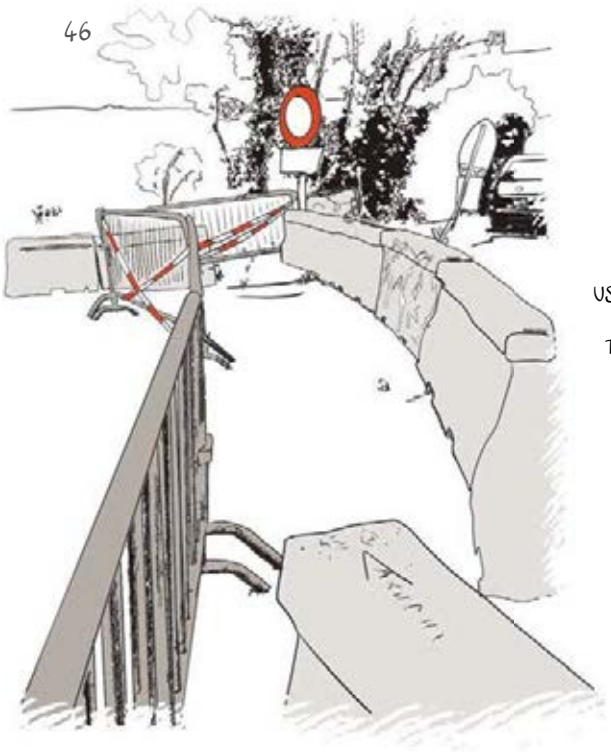
THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN JUST ANOTHER EXCELLENT EXAMPLE TO FILE AWAY AND LECTURE ABOUT.

GEOGRAPHERS LOVE TELLING GOOD STORIES.

BUT IT WAS MORE THAN THAT. IT WAS RAW. IT HURT.

AND IT MADE NO SENSE AT ALL.





Soral



Border stone 46 Soral

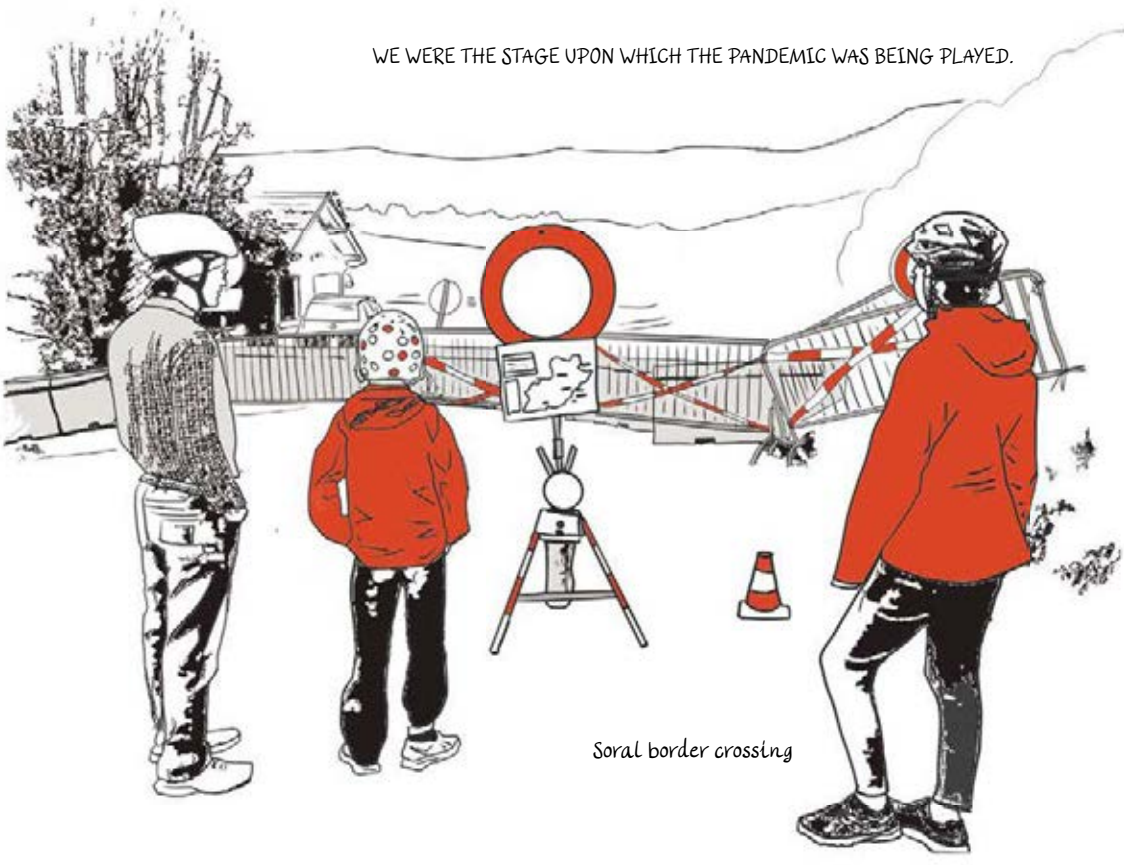
GEOGRAPHERS HAVE TAUGHT US HOW OUR OWN BODIES ARE SITES AND SPACES FOR CONNECTING THE GLOBAL AND THE INTIMATE.

I REALISED THAT MY COMPULSION TO WITNESS THESE NEW BORDER WALLS, AND WATCH THEM CHANGE A LITTLE EACH DAY, WAS AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS.

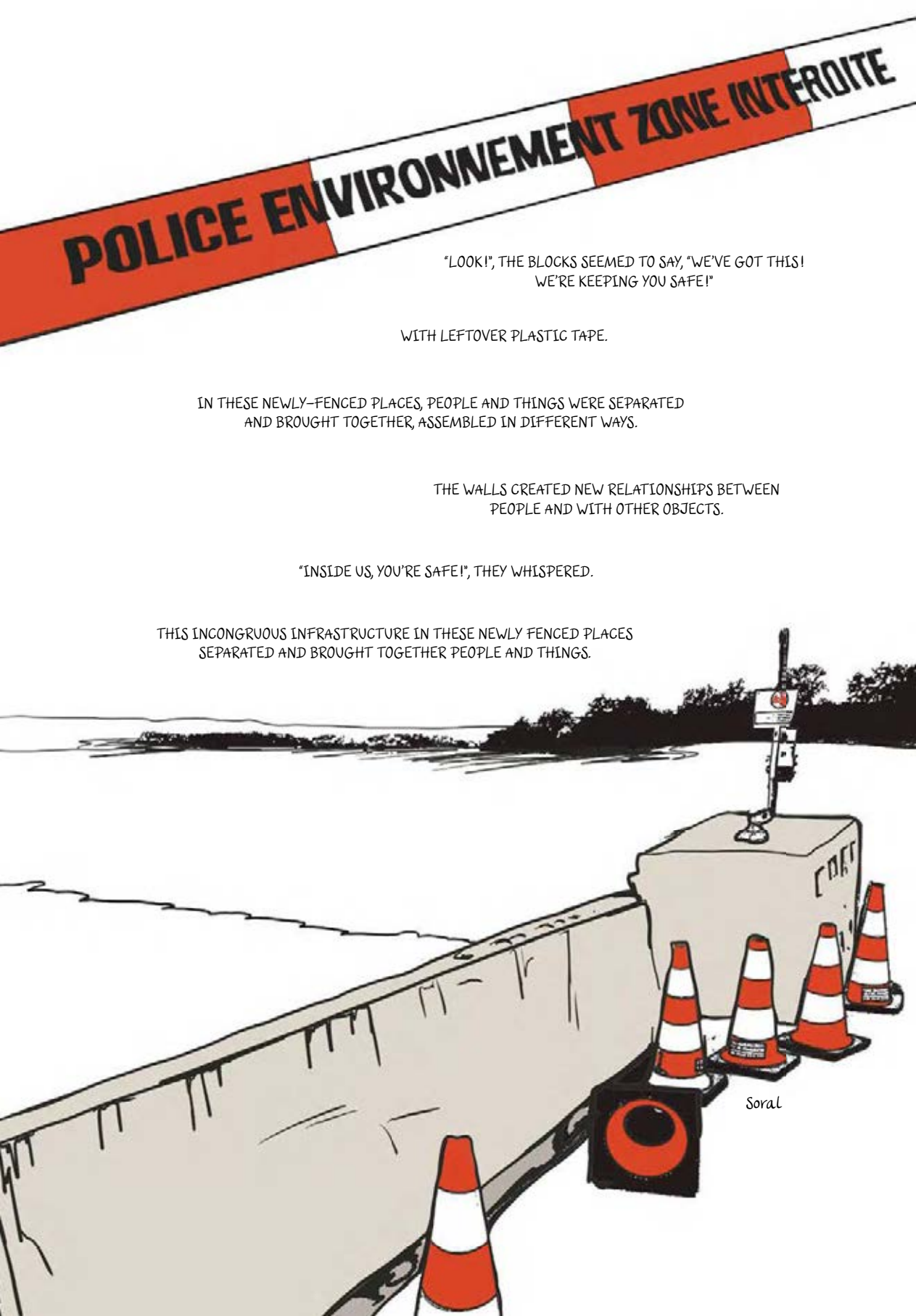
MY BODY AND THOSE OF MY CHILDREN WERE THE SCALE AT WHICH POWER OPERATING AT LARGER SCALES COULD BEGIN TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

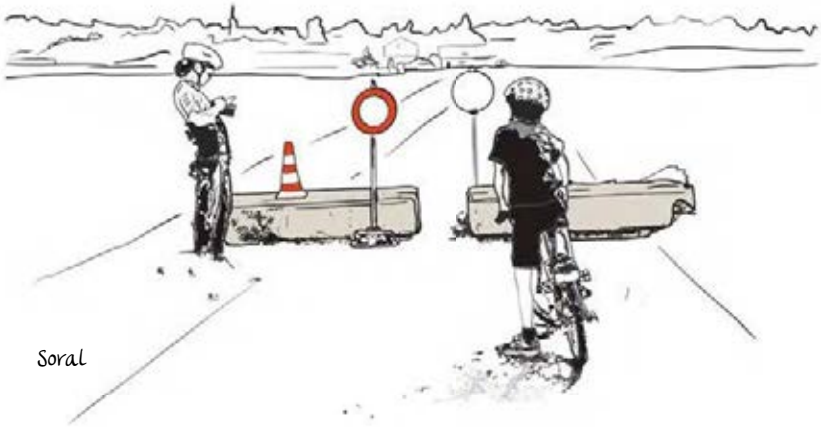
I TRIED THINKING THROUGH OUR BODIES AS THE SITES UPON WHICH THE NEW IDEAS, IDEOLOGIES, AND POLITICS OF THE PANDEMIC WERE BEING PERFORMED AND MADE MEANINGFUL.

WE WERE THE STAGE UPON WHICH THE PANDEMIC WAS BEING PLAYED.



Soral border crossing

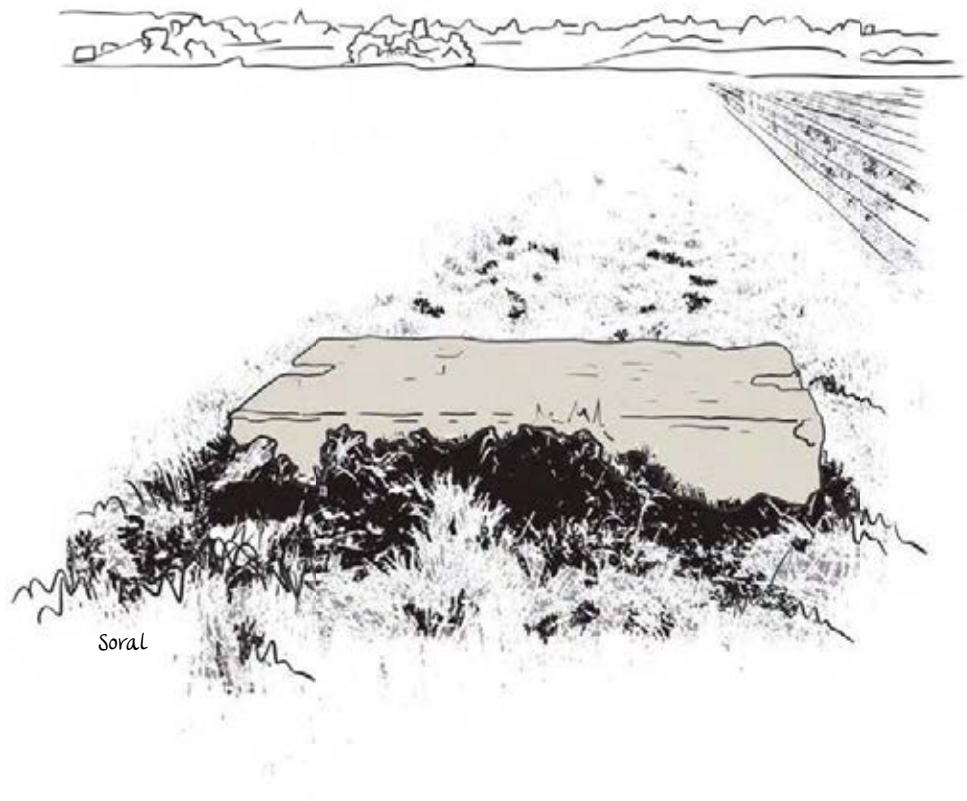

POLICE ENVIRONNEMENT ZONE INTERDITE
"LOOK!", THE BLOCKS SEEMED TO SAY, "WE'VE GOT THIS!
WE'RE KEEPING YOU SAFE!"
WITH LEFTOVER PLASTIC TAPE.
IN THESE NEWLY-FENCED PLACES, PEOPLE AND THINGS WERE SEPARATED
AND BROUGHT TOGETHER, ASSEMBLED IN DIFFERENT WAYS.
THE WALLS CREATED NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
PEOPLE AND WITH OTHER OBJECTS.
"INSIDE US, YOU'RE SAFE!", THEY WHISPERED.
THIS INCONGRUOUS INFRASTRUCTURE IN THESE NEWLY FENCED PLACES
SEPARATED AND BROUGHT TOGETHER PEOPLE AND THINGS.
Soral



AS OUR CYCLING TOURS CONTINUED,
I STARTED TO FIND THE ABSURDITY ALMOST POETIC.

IN RURAL AREAS, THE AUTHORITIES SEEMED TO BE
TRYING TO MAKE THE INVISIBLE BORDER REAL.

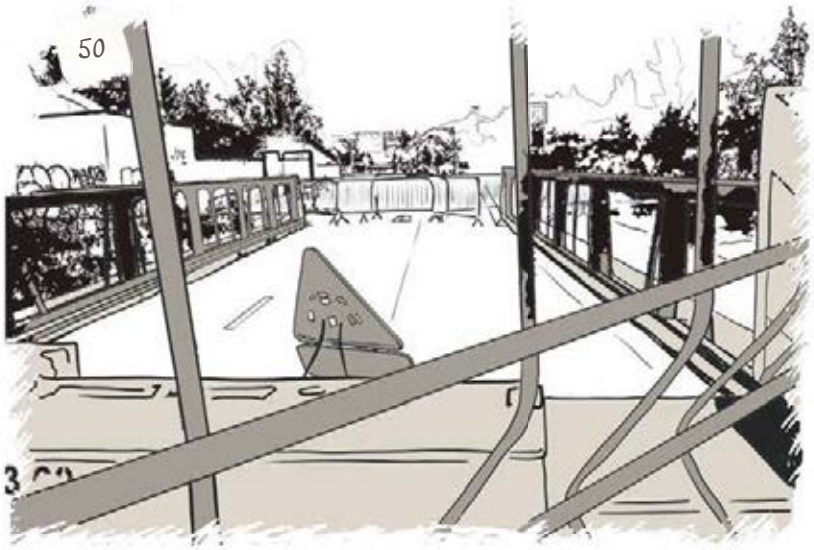
HELPLESS AND FUTILE ATTEMPTS TO IMPOSE SOMETHING.



THEY WERE BUILDING SHRINES IN THE
MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, WORSHIPPING A VOID.



Soral

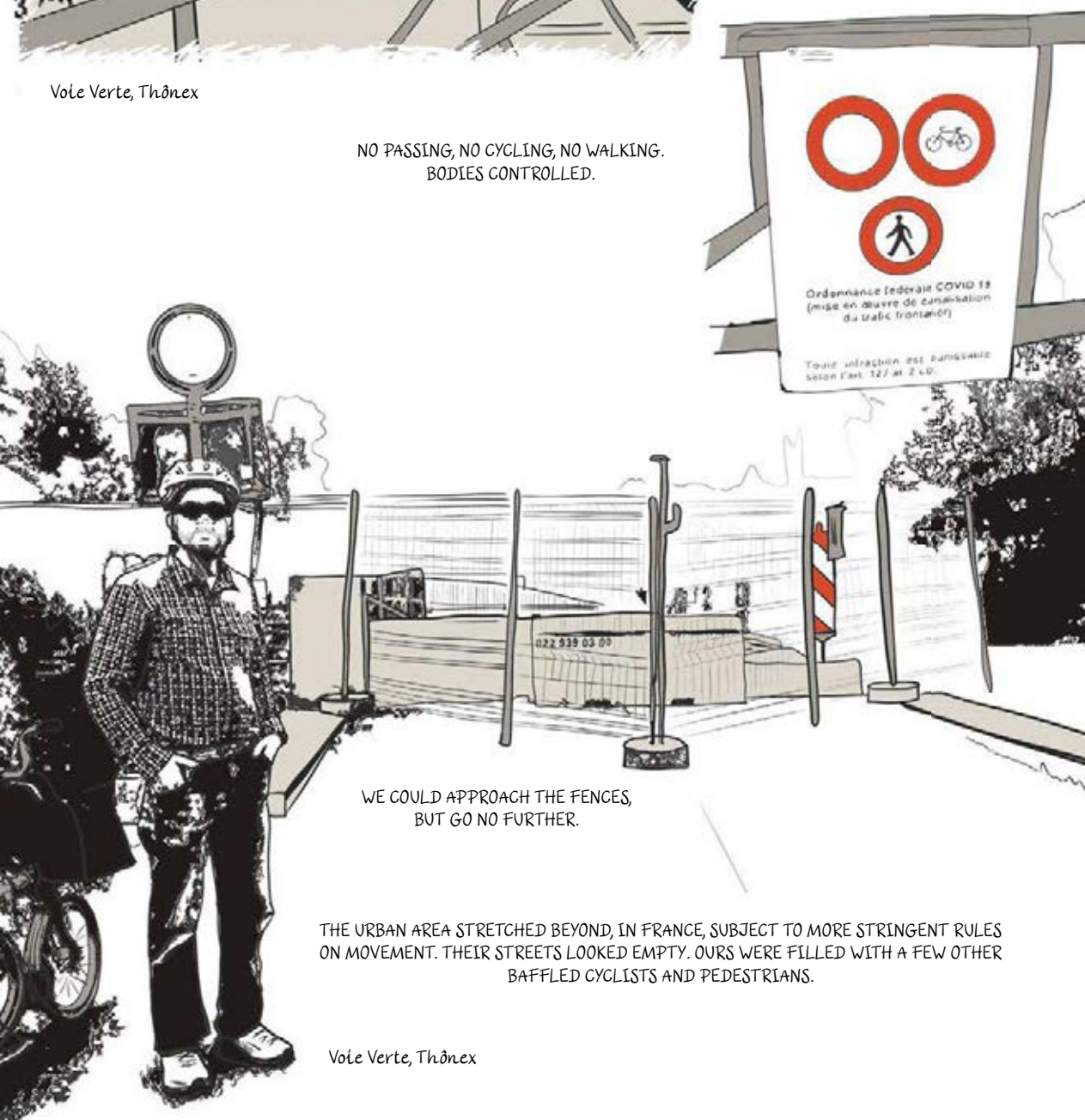


BUT IN THE CITY, THE BORDER WAS MILITARIZED.

IT LOOKED LIKE THE EARLY DAYS OF A DIVIDED BERLIN, BEFORE THE WALL WENT UP.

Voie Verte, Thônex

NO PASSING, NO CYCLING, NO WALKING. BODIES CONTROLLED.

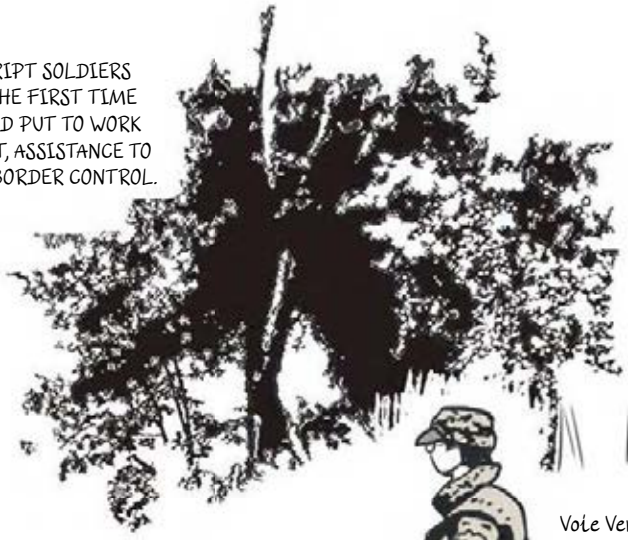


WE COULD APPROACH THE FENCES, BUT GO NO FURTHER.

THE URBAN AREA STRETCHED BEYOND, IN FRANCE, SUBJECT TO MORE STRINGENT RULES ON MOVEMENT. THEIR STREETS LOOKED EMPTY. OURS WERE FILLED WITH A FEW OTHER BAFFLED CYCLISTS AND PEDESTRIANS.

Voie Verte, Thônex

IN MARCH 2020, CONSCRIPT SOLDIERS WERE MOBILIZED FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE WORLD WAR II, AND PUT TO WORK FOR LOGISTICAL SUPPORT, ASSISTANCE TO THE HEALTH SECTOR AND BORDER CONTROL.









Voie Verte, Thônex

AS WE CYCLED UP TO THE LINE, WE SAW BORED EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLDS FIGHTING AN ERSATZ WAR.

THEY WERE STOPPING ANYONE ATTEMPTING TO CROSS THE CLOSED BORDER POSTS.



ARMIES WERE JUST AS ILL-EQUIPPED AS WE WERE, BUT THEY WERE TASKED TO PROTECT US, TRAINED TO IDENTIFY ENEMIES COMING FROM OUTSIDE.

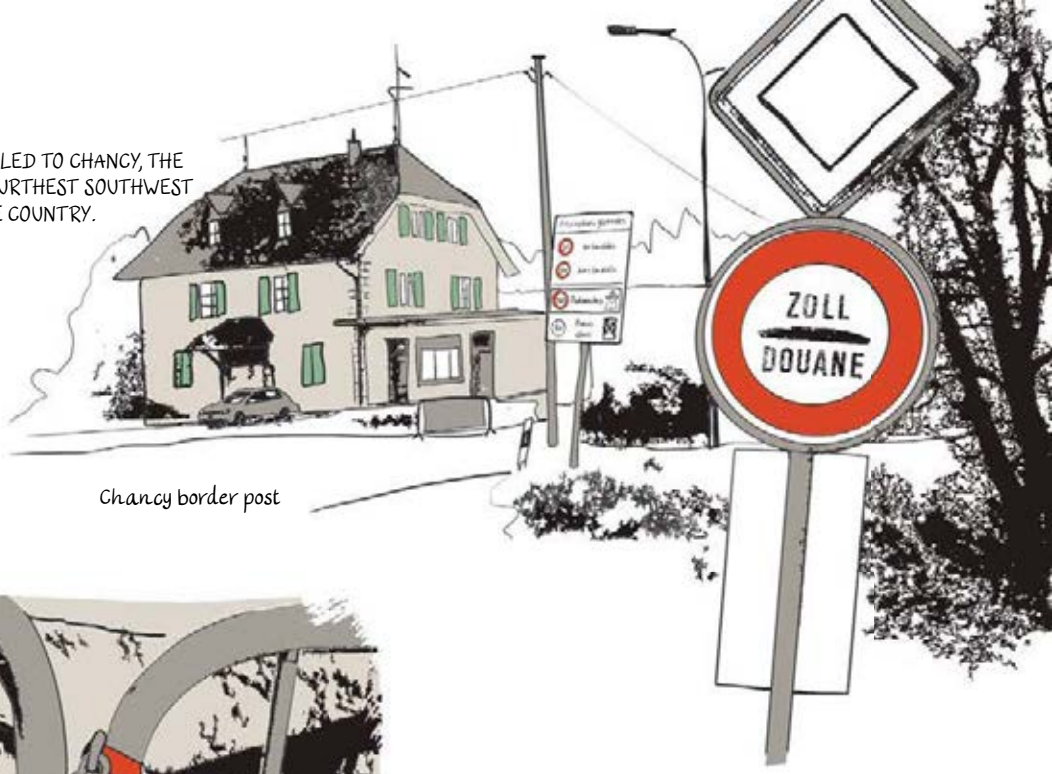
CONSIDERED AT LITTLE RISK, WE LEARNT LATER THAT MANY SOLDIERS GOT SICK DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF THEIR TRAINING, AS ONLY THEIR TEMPERATURE WAS CHECKED WHEN THEY WERE CALLED UP.

EVERYONE WAS IMPROVISING.



Thomas Süssli, Head of the Swiss military

ONE DAY, WE CYCLED TO CHANCY, THE BORDER POINT FURTHEST SOUTHWEST IN THE COUNTRY.



Chancy border post



THE BORDER CROSSING WAS USUALLY BUZZING WITH COMMUTERS. INSTEAD, IT FELT LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD.

DESERTED. FAR FROM THE CITY.

WE FELT ALONE.

IN THE ABSENCE OF ANYONE CROSSING THE BRIDGE, IT WAS DEADLY QUIET. THE END OF THE KNOWN WORLD.



Pont de Chancy

THE RHÔNE RIVER, PASSING UNDER THE BRIDGE, COULD FLOW ALL THE WAY THROUGH FRANCE TO THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA.

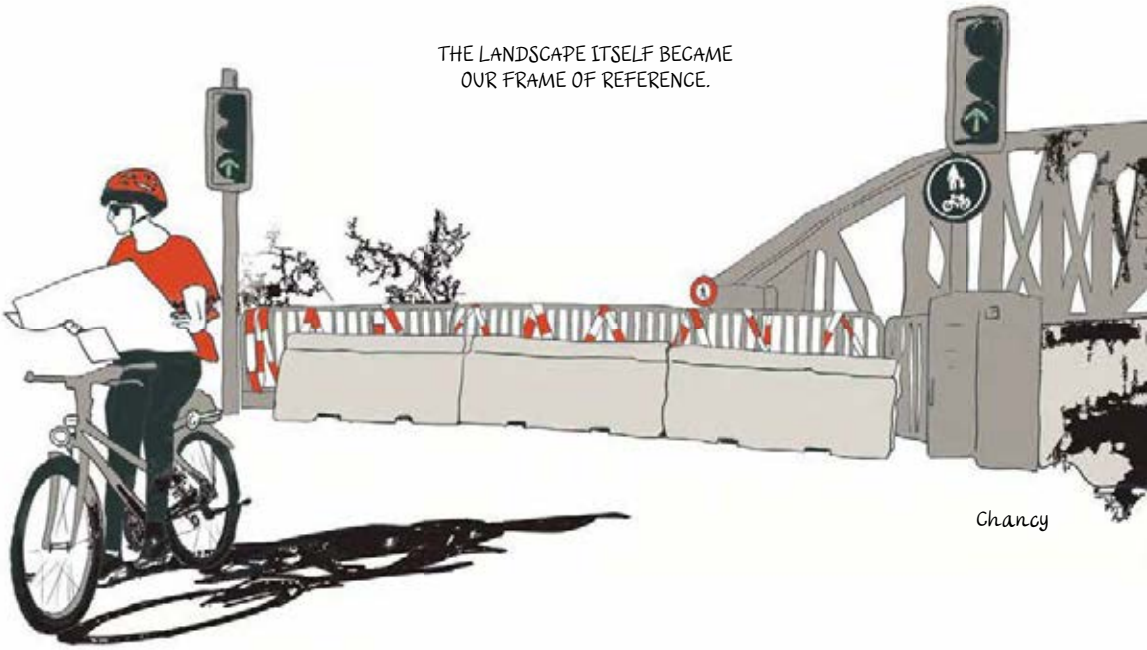
WE WERE STUCK AT THE BORDER.



Bridge of Chancy

NONE OF OUR MAPS MADE SENSE ANYMORE, UNLESS
WE ONLY USED THEM UP TO THE BORDER.

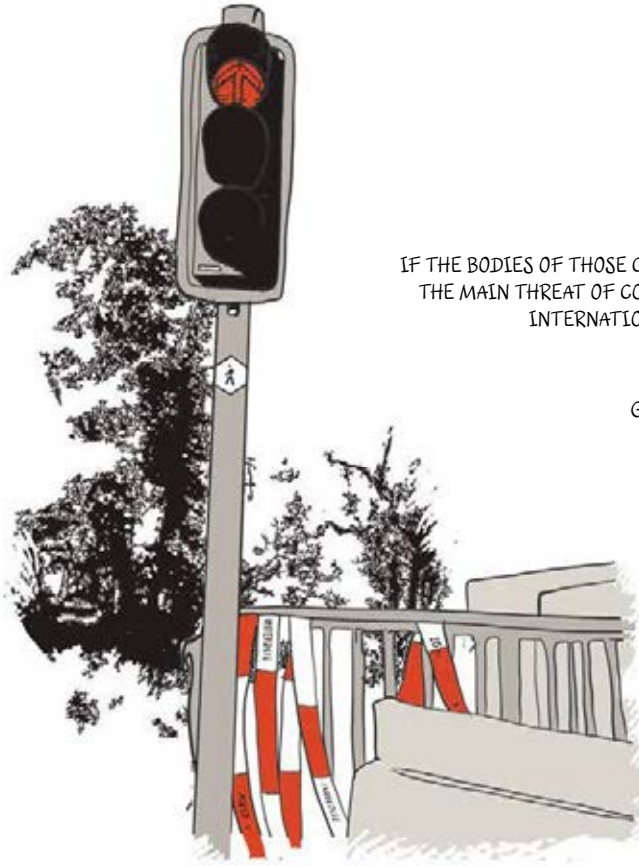
THE LANDSCAPE ITSELF BECAME
OUR FRAME OF REFERENCE.



Chancy

AS WE ROAMED AROUND INSIDE OUR BORDERS AND
REPEATEDLY REACHED DEAD ENDS, I TRIED TO MAKE SENSE
OF A FUNDAMENTAL DISCONNECT.





IF THE BODIES OF THOSE CLOSEST TO ME REPRESENTED THE MAIN THREAT OF CONTAGION, THEN WHY CLOSE INTERNATIONAL BORDERS?

GEOGRAPHICAL SCALES NO LONGER MADE ANY SENSE.

FACED WITH CRISIS, THE NEED FOR A SPECTACULAR STAGING SEEMED PARAMOUNT.

DESPITE BEING HIGHLY PERPLEXED, I QUICKLY ADAPT TO THESE NEW RULES, ALMOST GRATEFULLY.

AS I WRESTLED WITH THESE PARADOXES, I GOT GOOD AT SPOTTING LITTLE STORIES PLAYING OUT ON THIS SHIFTING GEOPOLITICAL STAGE.

SHORT EPISODES OF SOCIAL BAFFLEMENT, AS OTHERS REDREW THEIR OWN MAPS.

IN CHANCY, A CAR DREW UP. THEY SAW THE BLOCKS, THE FENCES, THE CLOSED BORDER. THEY TURNED BACK.



Chancy border crossing

IT WAS GOING TO BE A LONG WAY ROUND TO THE NEXT OPEN BORDER CROSSING IF THEY REALLY WANTED TO GET ACROSS, ASSUMING THEY HAD THE RIGHT PAPERWORK.

MY TASK AS A PARENT WAS TO KEEP MY CHILDREN SAFE, ALL THE WHILE KNOWING THAT I MIGHT BE THE ONE TO CONTAMINATE THEM WITH THE VIRUS. I'D BEEN FOCUSSING ON GETTING MY MIND AROUND THAT.

MEANWHILE, THE SWISS STATE HAD BEEN PUTTING UP CEMENT BLOCKS, LITERALLY MAKING CONCRETE ITS OWN UNDERSTANDING OF SECURITY.



Vallard



Veyrier

AGAINST THIS BACKDROP, WE WERE ALL STILL LIVING OUR SINGULAR LIVES, DOING OUR JOBS FROM HOME.

BUT MANY PEOPLE WEREN'T SO LUCKY.

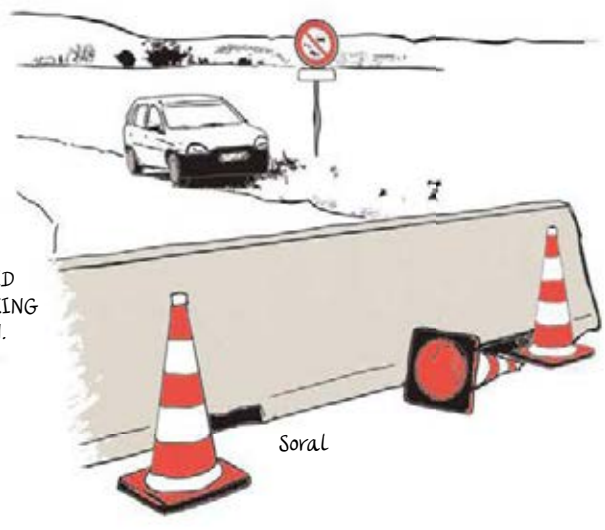
WE SAW TRACES OF THEM ON THE LANDSCAPE. SMALL CLUES WE LEARNT TO READ.

DID THAT FRENCH CAR BELONG TO SOMEONE WHO WORKED IN SWITZERLAND? WAS IT PARKED THERE SO THAT THEY COULD CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY BY BIKE?

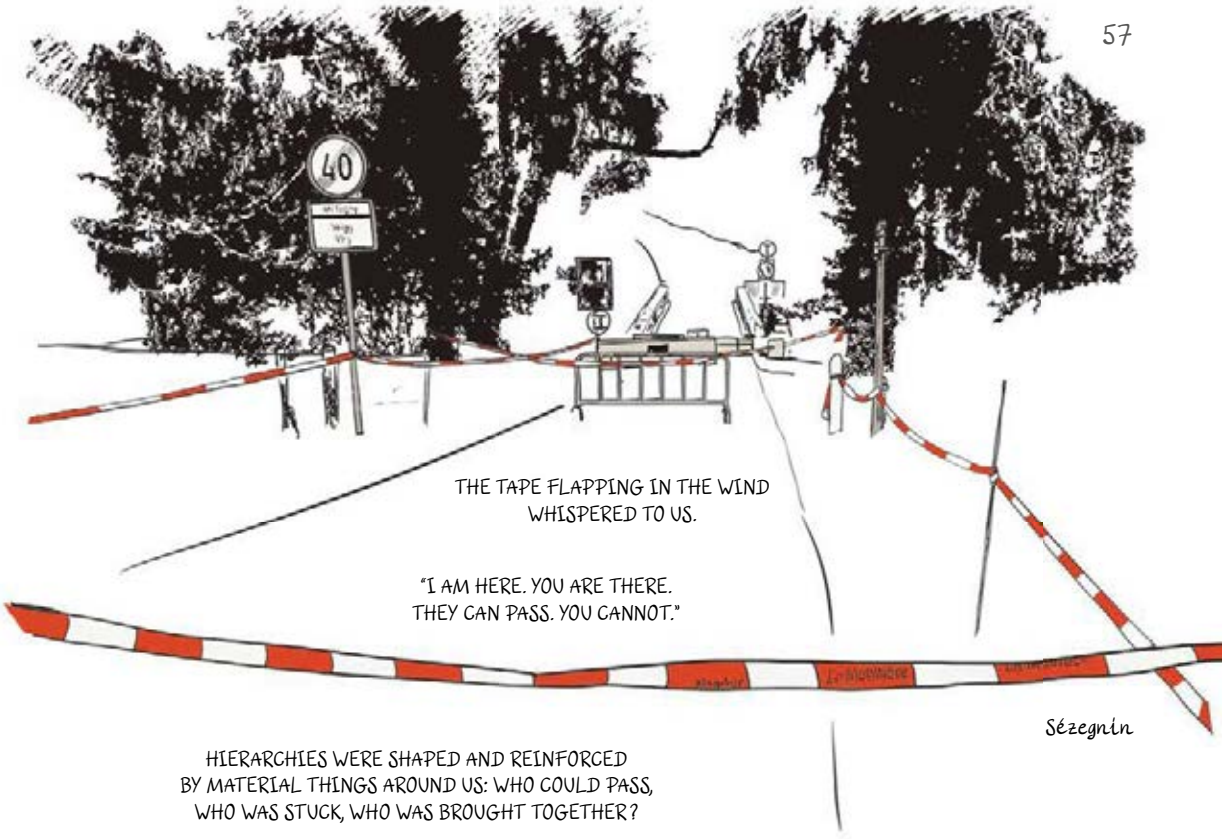
WERE THEY ESSENTIAL ENOUGH TO BE ALLOWED IN?

WE COULD FOLLOW NEW RULES AND DISTANCING BUT COULD THEY? WERE THEY SAFE WHEN THEY TRAVELLED AND WORKED?

PEOPLE'S LIVES AND VULNERABILITIES WERE ENCODED IN THESE LANDSCAPES. THEIR NEW AESTHETIC WAS MAKING REAL THE TERMS AND LIMITS OF POLITICAL ACTION.



Soral



THE TAPE FLAPPING IN THE WIND
WHISPERED TO US.

"I AM HERE. YOU ARE THERE.
THEY CAN PASS. YOU CANNOT."

Sézegnin

HIERARCHIES WERE SHAPED AND REINFORCED
BY MATERIAL THINGS AROUND US: WHO COULD PASS,
WHO WAS STUCK, WHO WAS BROUGHT TOGETHER?

WE WERE EXPLORING OUR CHANGED LANDSCAPE AS A FAMILY,
CLOSE TO HOME. IT FELT INTIMATE.

IT FELT PERSONAL.

GEOGRAPHERS HAVE LONG ARGUED THAT WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND
HOW THE GLOBAL AND THE INTIMATE CONSTITUTE EACH OTHER
THROUGH GEOGRAPHICAL SCALES.

GLOBAL PLACES ARE ALWAYS SOMEWHERE LOCAL.

HERE, I WAS WITNESSING HOW THIS CRISIS
WAS RELYING ON INTERWOVEN GEOGRAPHICAL
SCALES TO REDEFINE SECURITY.

THESE SCALES WERE WOVEN INTO
ORDINARY MATERIAL OBJECTS, IMBUED
WITH NEW MEANINGS.



Soral

ONE DAY, WE MET UP WITH MY FATHER-IN-LAW:
THE CHILDREN'S BELOVED OPA. I HAD ALWAYS THOUGHT OF
HIM AS A TOWER OF STRENGTH. AN EXPERIENCED ALPINE
WALKER AND INTREPID TRAVELLER.



NOW WE WERE MADE TO RECONSIDER
OUR SHARED VULNERABILITY. THE RISK
OUR BODIES POSED TO HIS, AND TO
MY MOTHER-IN-LAW BACK HOME.

NO HUGS. NO TOUCHING.
SOCIALLY-DISTANCED CYCLING.

HE'D LIVED HIS WHOLE LIFE IN GENEVA.
HIS INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LANDSCAPE
HAD ALWAYS GUIDED US THROUGH SECRET BIKE
PATHS AND WOODED LANES.

HE KNEW EVERY CORNER
OF THE CANTON, AND EVERY
MOUNTAIN BEYOND.

BUT EVEN HE DIDN'T HAVE THE
KEYS TO UNLOCK THIS LANDSCAPE.



IT REALLY DID FEEL AS IF NOTHING WOULD EVER BE THE SAME AGAIN.



PLACES WERE WHISPERING NEW STORIES TO US, MAKING US NOTICE AND SEE THINGS WE MIGHT HAVE USUALLY IGNORED.



PEOPLE ADDED THEIR OWN WORDS TO THESE CHANGED LANDSCAPES, TELLING THEIR OWN STORIES TO OTHERS.

FOR ONCE, WE HAD TIME TO LISTEN.

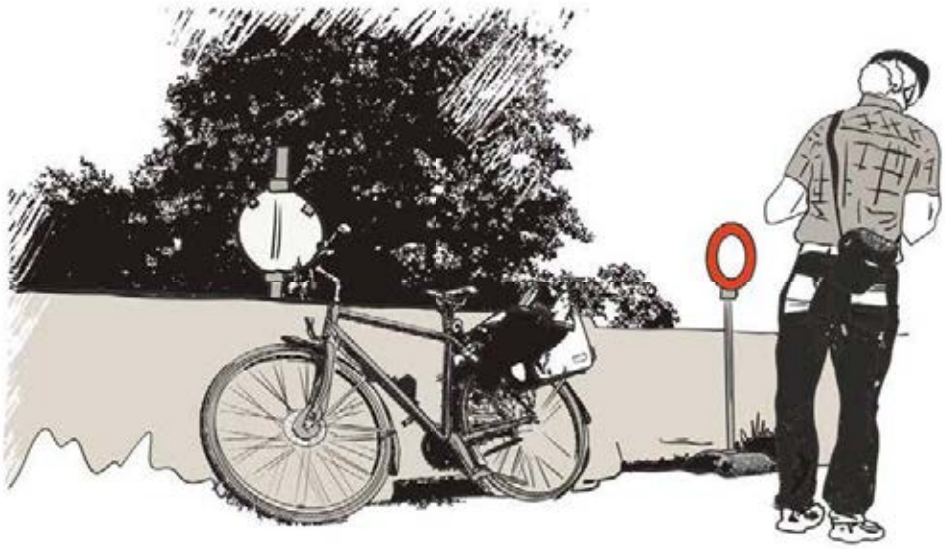


AS I MOVED THROUGH THESE CHANGED TERRITORIES, I TRIED TO MAKE SENSE OF THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE SCALES OF SECURITY BEING PLAYED OUT.

I REALIZED THAT I NEEDED TO DOMESTICATE MY THINKING: TO MAKE SENSE OF THE WAYS IN WHICH THE DIVISION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WAS BEING INSCRIBED AND ENTANGLED IN THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE.

THE INTIMATE BOUND UP IN THE GLOBAL.

TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS, I NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND THE DIVISION BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND PUBLIC BY LOOKING AT THE MUNDANE STAGING OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IN FRONT OF ME.



BY ERECTING NEW BORDERS, THE STATE WAS REMINDING ME THAT ITS PROTECTION REACHED FROM THE INTIMATE SPACES OF CONTAGION TO THE INTERNATIONAL SPHERE.

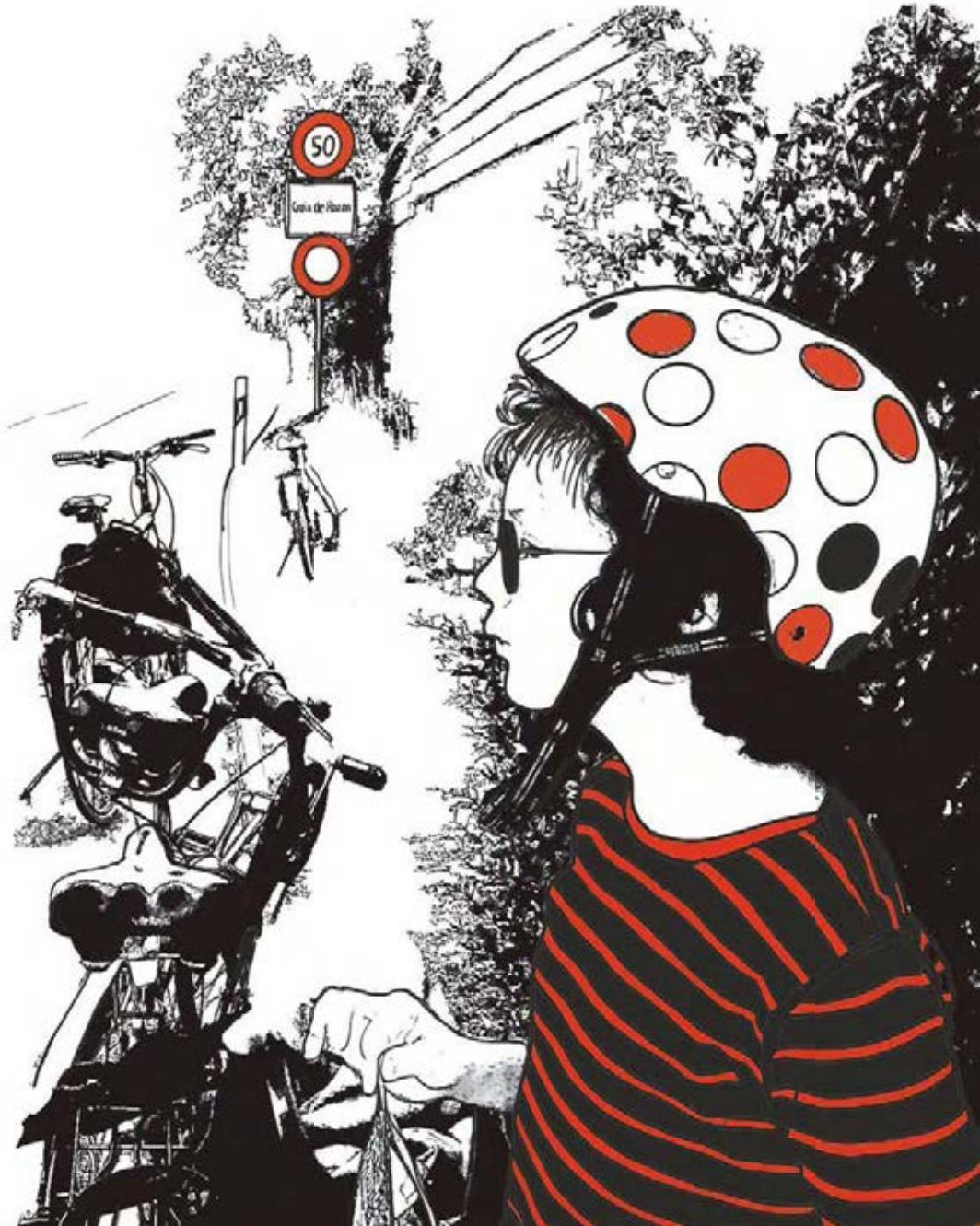
I BECAME AWARE OF HOW GEOPOLITICS, AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF BORDERS, EXTENDED INTO MULTIPLE SPACES AND PROCESSES USUALLY CONSIDERED NONPOLITICAL.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCALES AND SPACES WERE ALWAYS ENTANGLED.

HOW DID CARE WORK ALLOW SOMEONE FREE PASSAGE?

HOW DID SOME WORKERS BECOME 'ESSENTIAL'?

WHY FIGHT AGAINST A VIRUS WITH CONCRETE BLOCKS AND A MACHINE GUN?



THE CLOSED BORDERS WERE MAKING US FEEL THAT WE WERE LIVING ON AN ISLAND, SURROUNDED BY THE UNKNOWN, BY MONSTERS.

TERRA INCOGNITA BEYOND THE BORDER,
ALL FAMILIAR REFERENCE POINTS LOST.

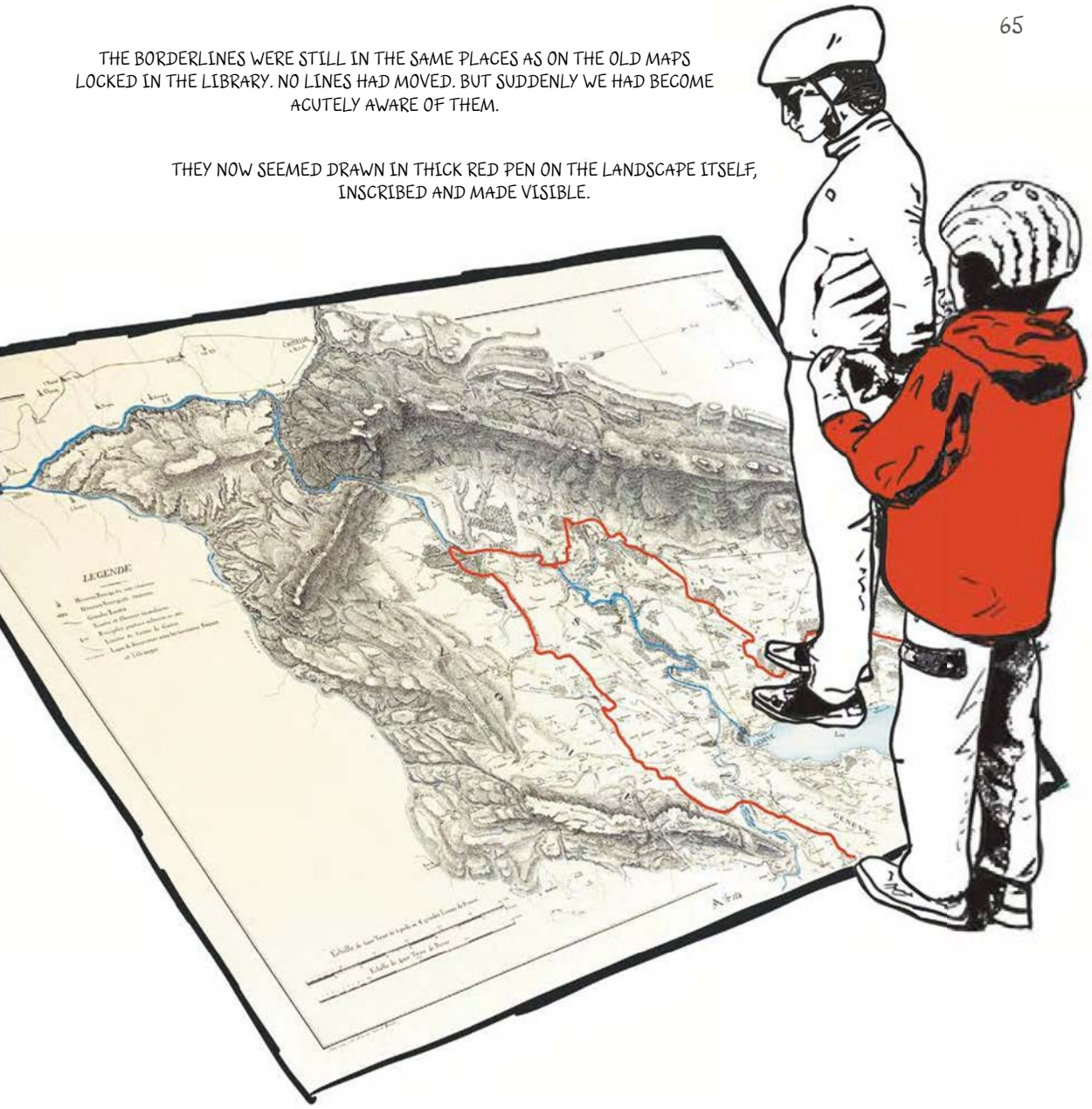


WE WERE DISORIENTED.

The map shows the only border passage points left open from 21.03.2020 until 20.04.2020

THE BORDERLINES WERE STILL IN THE SAME PLACES AS ON THE OLD MAPS LOCKED IN THE LIBRARY. NO LINES HAD MOVED. BUT SUDDENLY WE HAD BECOME ACUTELY AWARE OF THEM.

THEY NOW SEEMED DRAWN IN THICK RED PEN ON THE LANDSCAPE ITSELF, INSCRIBED AND MADE VISIBLE.



THE OLD MAPS SHOWED WHAT HAPPENED BEYOND THE LINE, BUT IT MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN FILLED WITH DANGEROUS DRAGONS.

WE TRIED TO READ OUR NEW WORLD FROM THE GROUND UP, REMAPPING IT AS WE REPEATEDLY REACHED APPARENTLY INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES ON THE GROUND.

HOW COULD WE REASSEMBLE THESE GEOGRAPHICAL PUZZLES? HOW COULD OUR WEAK BODIES BE EXPECTED TO WRESTLE WITH INVISIBLE MONSTERS?

Adapted from a map by A.F. Bontems (1782–1864), drawn in 1815

AS WE CYCLED, WE SPOTTED NEW SIGNS APPEARING ON THE ROADS HEADING OUT OF SWITZERLAND.

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC SPACES SEEMED NEWLY INTERTWINED, THROUGH LAYERS OF ENFORCED ENCLOSURE.

"Restricted exit to Germany, France, Italy, Austria"



"WE ARE KEEPING YOU IN FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!", THE SIGNS WHISPERED.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, A NEW VISUAL LANGUAGE OF DOMESTICITY FLOURISHED, WITH IMAGES OF HOME ASSOCIATED WITH SAFETY AND PROTECTION.

"Stay at home, even when the weather is pleasant. Now more than ever."

FLYERS AND POSTERS CONJURED UP A SOCIALLY-CLOSE, PHYSICALLY DISTANCED COLLECTIVE, PROTECTED AND INSIDE.





DOMESTICITY AS IMPOSED PROTECTION.

OUTSIDE AND ABROAD AS EQUALLY HOSTILE AND DANGEROUS.

STATES TURNING THEMSELVES INSIDE OUT.



LOOKING BACK ON THIS TOPSY-TURVY, INSIDE-OUT WORLD, OUR FEW DAYS OF "CONFINEMENT CAMPING" IN THE SITTING ROOM TAKE ON A DIFFERENT MEANING.

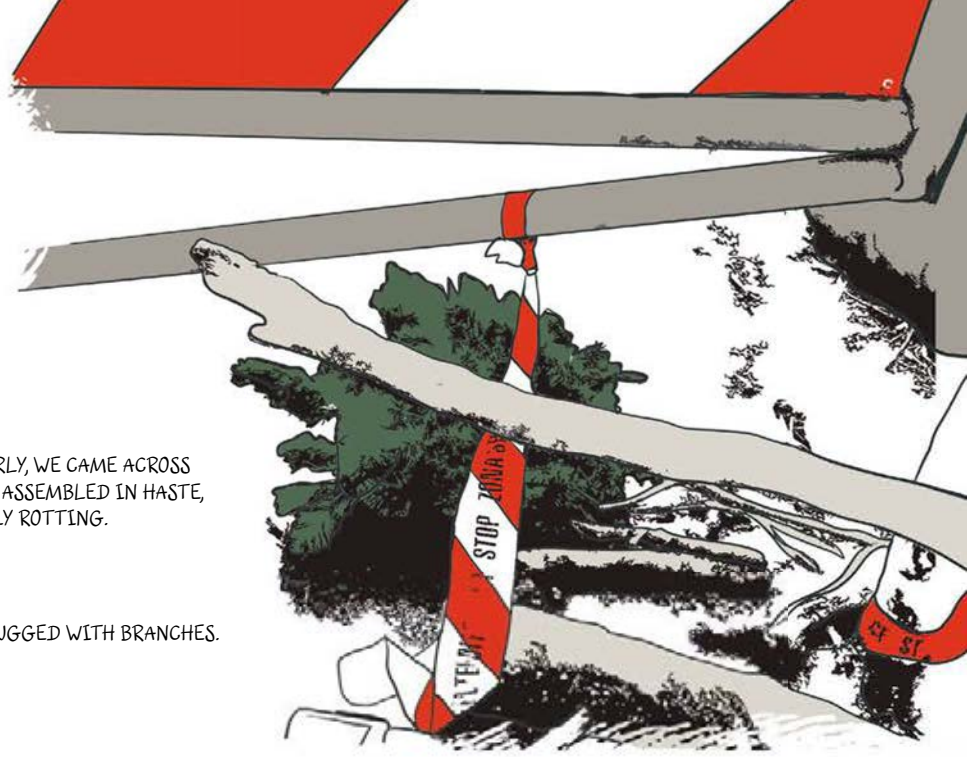
AT THE TIME, IT SEEMED LIKE SOMETHING FUN, SAFE AND A BIT DIFFERENT: A PLAYFUL WAY OF FILLING UP LONG DAYS INSIDE WITH A MINI ADVENTURE.

CAMPING MEANT SUMMER HOLIDAYS AND ESCAPE.

BUT MAYBE WE WERE ALSO TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF THESE CHANGING PATTERNS OF HOME AND SECURITY? PLAYING OUT AND TAMING SOME OF OUR FEARS?





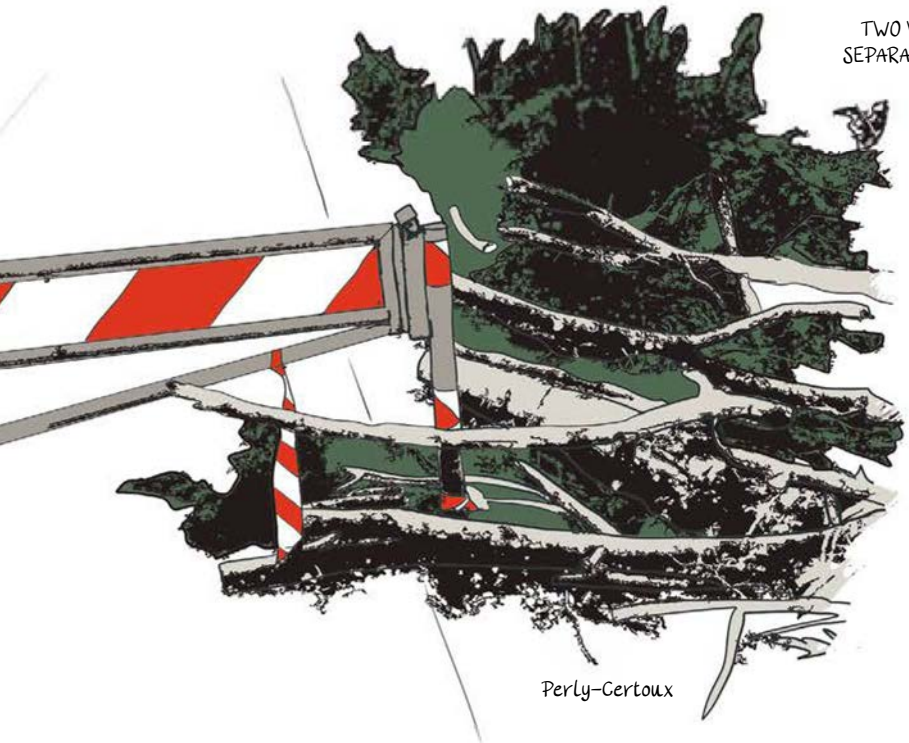


ONE DAY, IN PERLY, WE CAME ACROSS
AN ODD BORDER, ASSEMBLED IN HASTE,
SLOWLY ROTTING.

GAPS PLUGGED WITH BRANCHES.

IMPROVISED BARRIERS OF STICKS AND STONES.

LIKE A CHILD'S INTERPRETATION OF WHAT
A NATURAL BORDER MIGHT BE.



TWO WORLD WERE CREATED,
SEPARATED BY PILES OF TWIGS.

Perly–Certoux

OUR CHILDREN OFTEN BUILT DENS IN THE WOODS
DURING FAMILY EXCURSIONS TO THE MOUNTAINS.

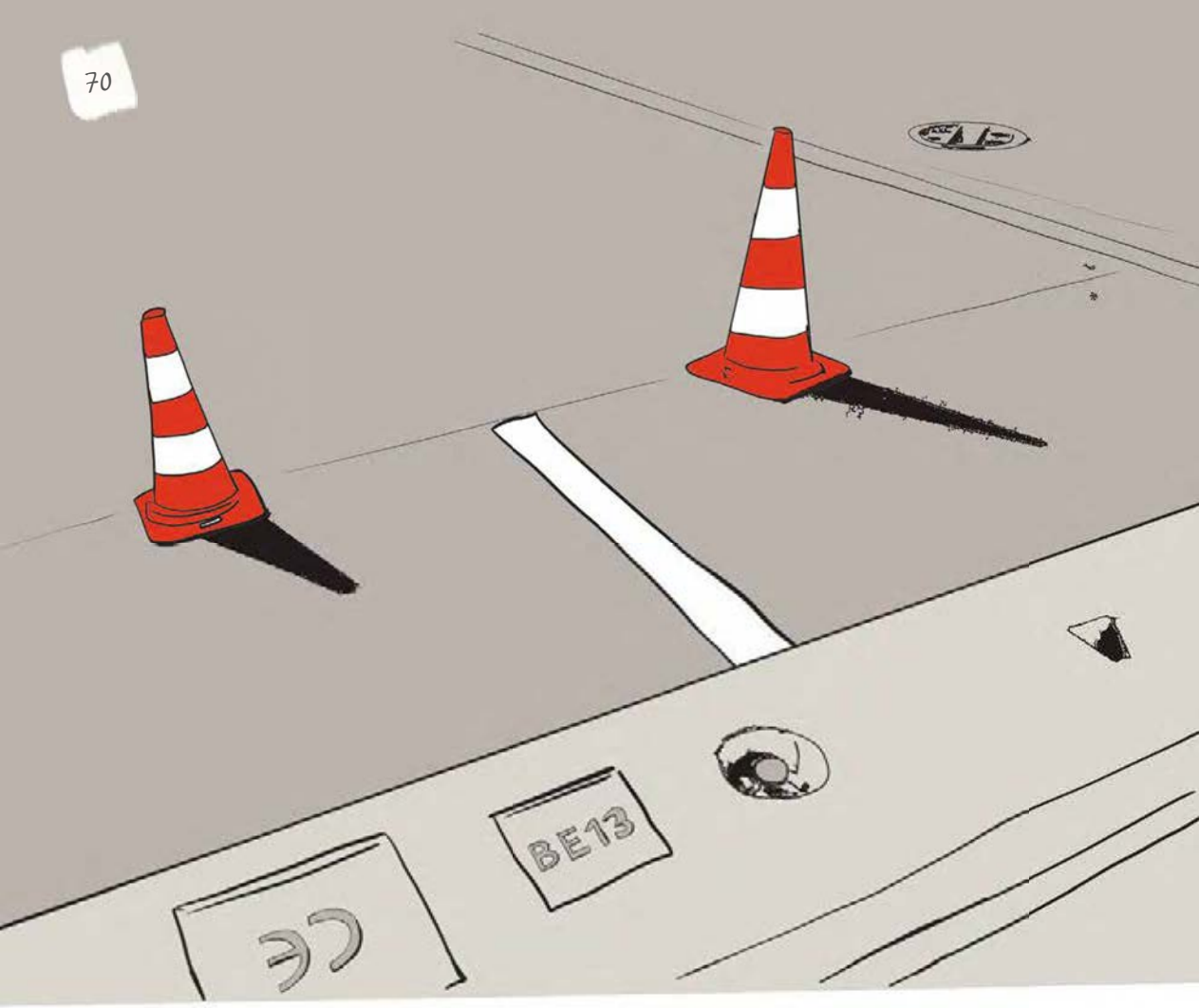
ENROLLING BRANCHES, STICKS, MOSS TO BUILD A HOME.

ASSEMBLING THEIR OWN REFUGES FROM AN ADULT WORLD.

THE SWISS STATE WAS NOW
DOING THE SAME.



Perly-Certoux



WHAT DID THIS CEMENT BLOCK DO BEFORE BEING MOVED HERE? WAS IT USED TO CLOSE ROADS TO STOP TERRORIST LORRIES FROM HITTING CROWDS?

IN THE PAST YEARS, WE HAD QUICKLY GOT USED TO NEW ARCHITECTURAL SHAPES IN CITIES. BLOCKS SUPPOSED TO KEEP US SAFE.

THE CEMENT BLOCK HAD NOW BECOME A TALISMAN AGAINST A VIRUS.



Thônex

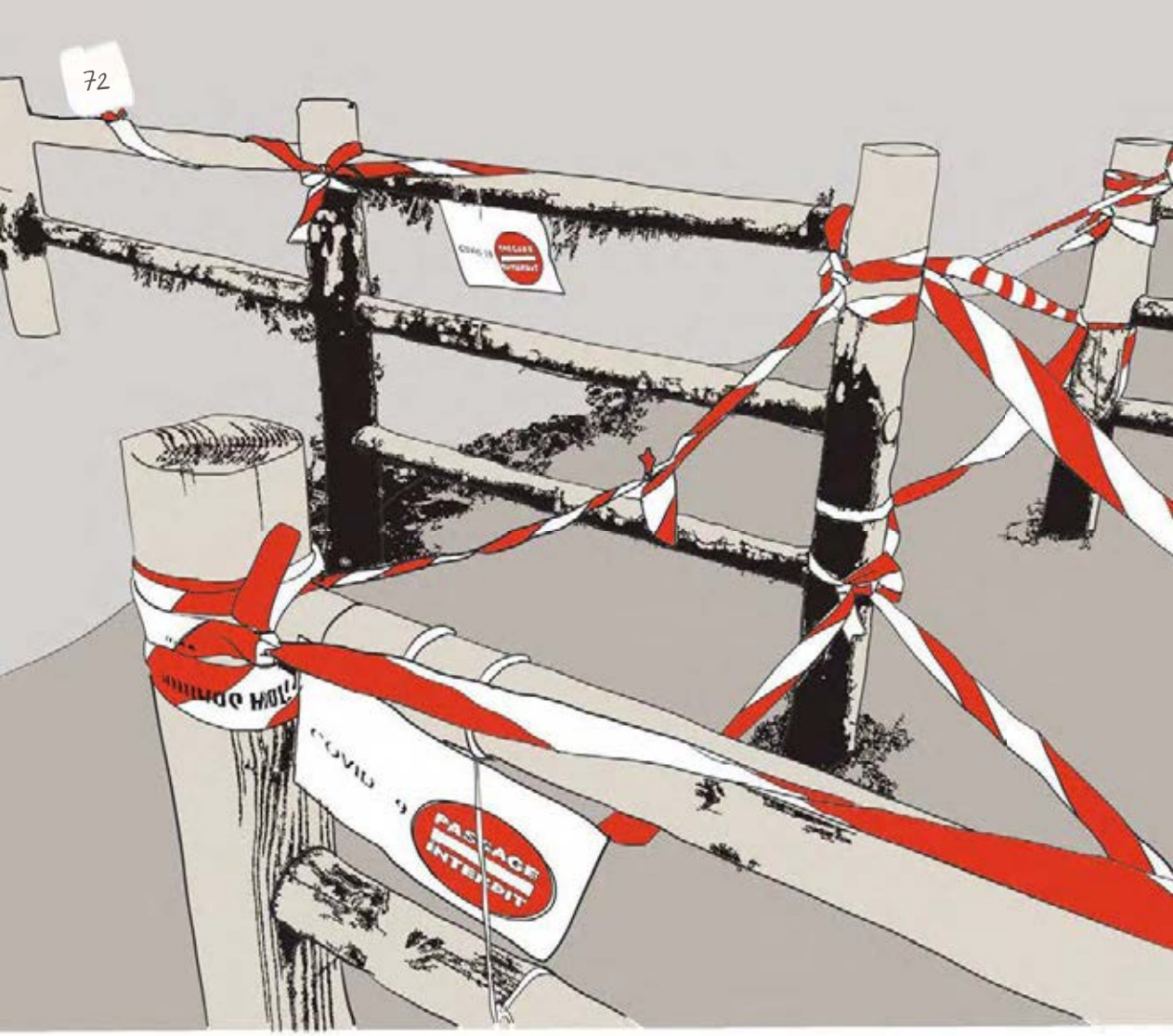
OUR WORLD WAS BEING SHAPED AND REMADE BY THESE BORDERS OPENING AND CLOSING IN PARTICULAR SPACES, AT PARTICULAR TIMES.

THESE NEW GEOPOLITICAL SPACES WERE GROUNDED IN HOW USEFUL PEOPLE WERE SEEN TO BE, AS WELL AS BY THE HEALTH OR SICKNESS OF THEIR BODIES.

SPACES WERE REMADE BY WHO HELD THE KEY, BY WHO MOVED THE BLOCKS, BY PEOPLE DECIDING WHO COULD PASS AND WHO STAYED PUT.

ASSEMBLAGES OF RULES, THINGS AND PEOPLE BLIND TO THE FACT THAT THE COVID-19 VIRUS WAS EVERYWHERE, ON BOTH SIDES OF THE HASTILY-ERECTED FENCES.

THESE GEOPOLITICAL SPACES WERE ALSO SHAPED BY OUR BODIES, WITH HANDS MADE RAW FROM TOO MUCH WASHING.



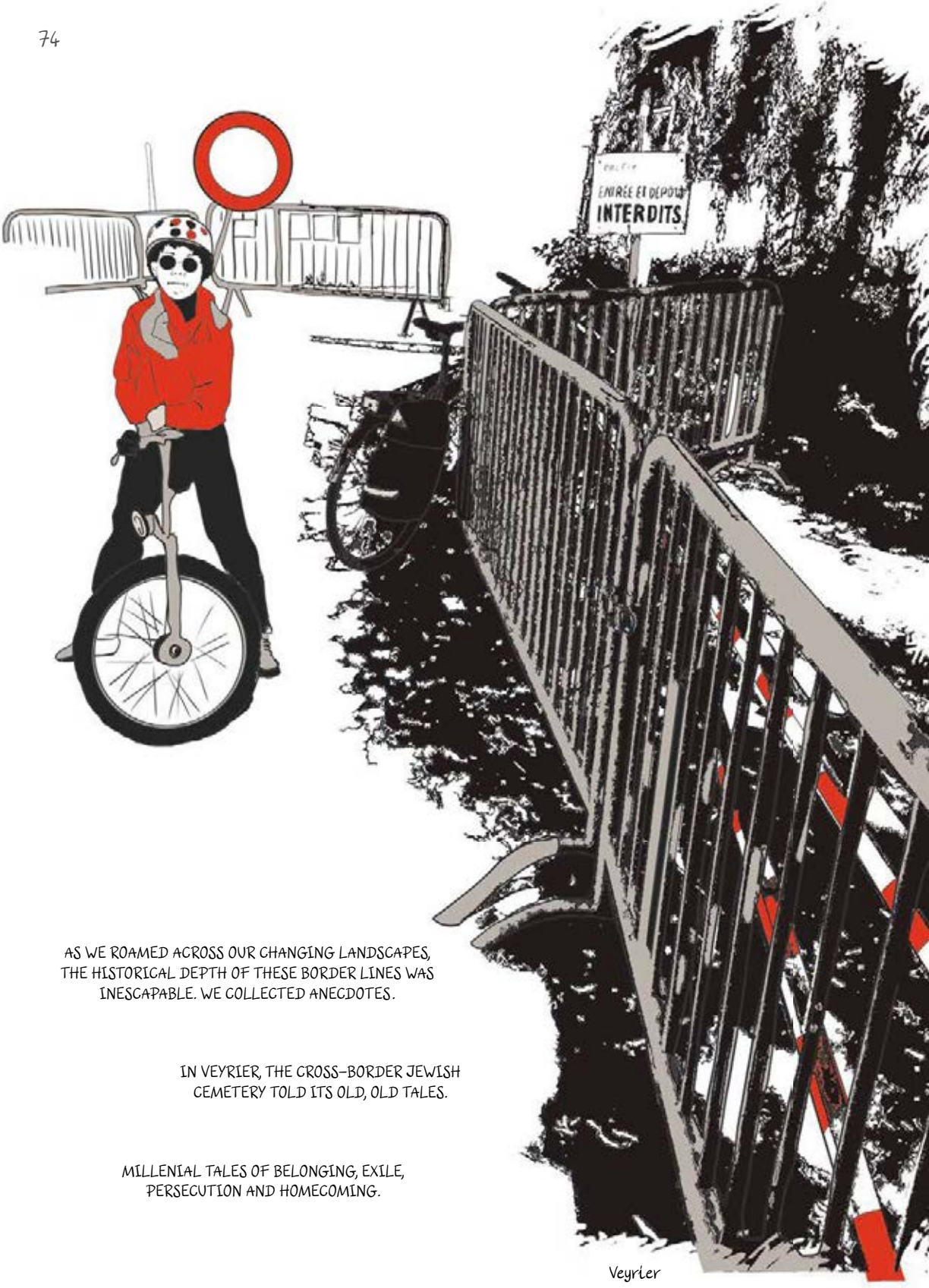
La Rippe

THE STATE WAS CASTING FISHING NETS ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE TO CATCH A VIRUS.

MOSQUITO NETS PROTECTED US ALL FROM INVISIBLE PREDATORS.



Croix-de-Rozon



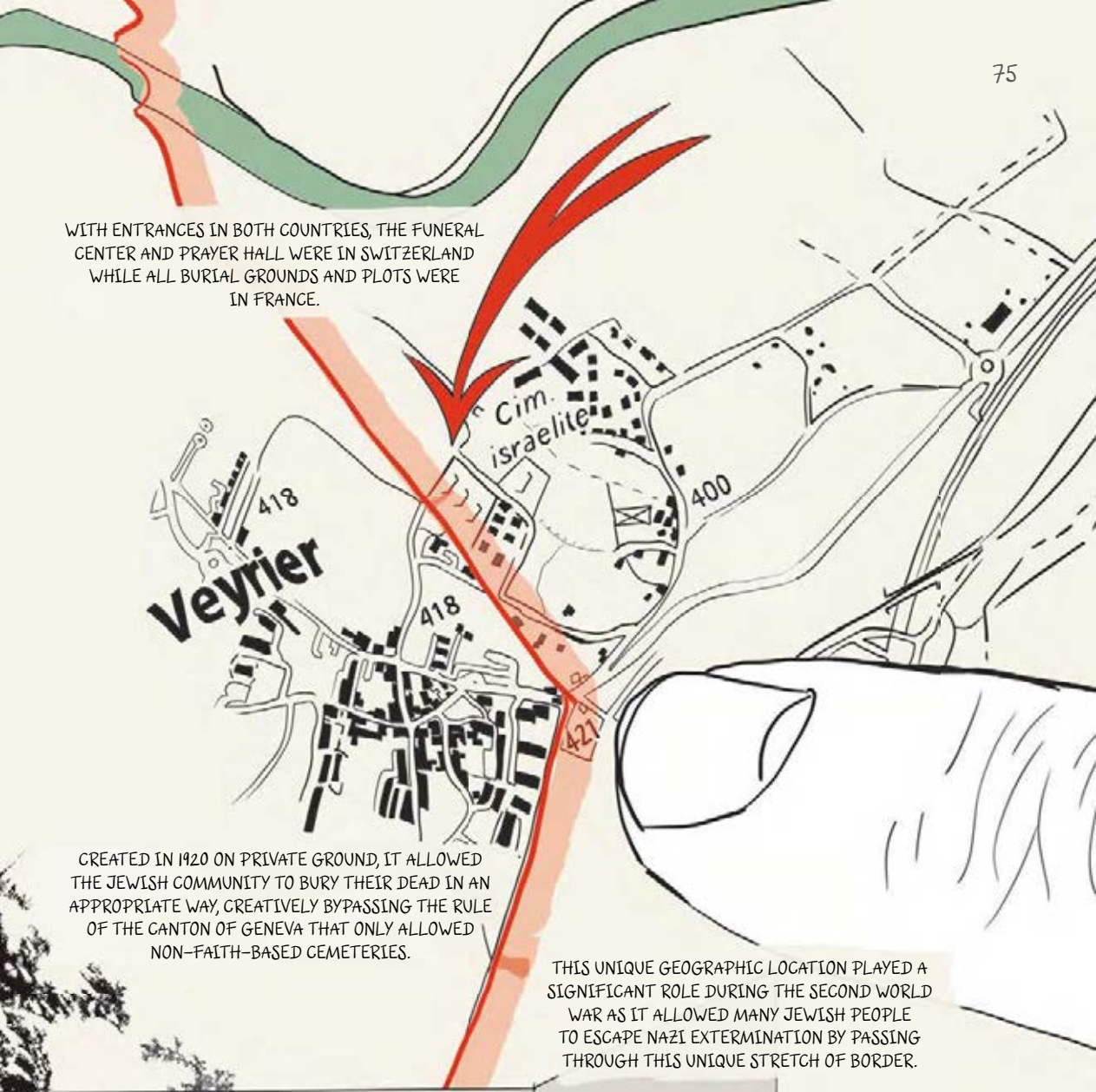
AS WE ROAMED ACROSS OUR CHANGING LANDSCAPES, THE HISTORICAL DEPTH OF THESE BORDER LINES WAS INESCAPABLE. WE COLLECTED ANECDOTES.

IN VEYRIER, THE CROSS-BORDER JEWISH CEMETERY TOLD ITS OLD, OLD TALES.

MILLENIAL TALES OF BELONGING, EXILE, PERSECUTION AND HOMECOMING.

Veyrier

WITH ENTRANCES IN BOTH COUNTRIES, THE FUNERAL CENTER AND PRAYER HALL WERE IN SWITZERLAND WHILE ALL BURIAL GROUNDS AND PLOTS WERE IN FRANCE.



CREATED IN 1920 ON PRIVATE GROUND, IT ALLOWED THE JEWISH COMMUNITY TO BURY THEIR DEAD IN AN APPROPRIATE WAY, CREATIVELY BYPASSING THE RULE OF THE CANTON OF GENEVA THAT ONLY ALLOWED NON-FAITH-BASED CEMETERIES.

THIS UNIQUE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR AS IT ALLOWED MANY JEWISH PEOPLE TO ESCAPE NAZI EXTERMINATION BY PASSING THROUGH THIS UNIQUE STRETCH OF BORDER.

AN EXTENDED FIELD, BOUGHT SUBSEQUENTLY, WAS CONNECTED TO THE MAIN SITE BY AN UNDERGROUND TUNNEL.



Israelite cemetery of Veyrier

IT WAS AN EXTRAORDINARY PLACE, CUT-THROUGH BY HISTORY, FAITH AND GEOPOLITICS, FINDING A DEEPLY PRAGMATIC SOLUTION TO A THORNY ISSUE.



PERHAPS IN TESTAMENT TO ITS HISTORY, OR TO ITS STATUS AS PRIVATE LAND, IT REMAINED OPEN. NO FENCES STRETCHED ACROSS THE BORDER WITHIN THE PERIMETER WALLS.

WE CAUTIOUSLY WANDERED AROUND, UNSURE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE DID ACTUALLY CROSS THE INVISIBLE LINE, REACHING THE TOMBSTONES, IN FRANCE.

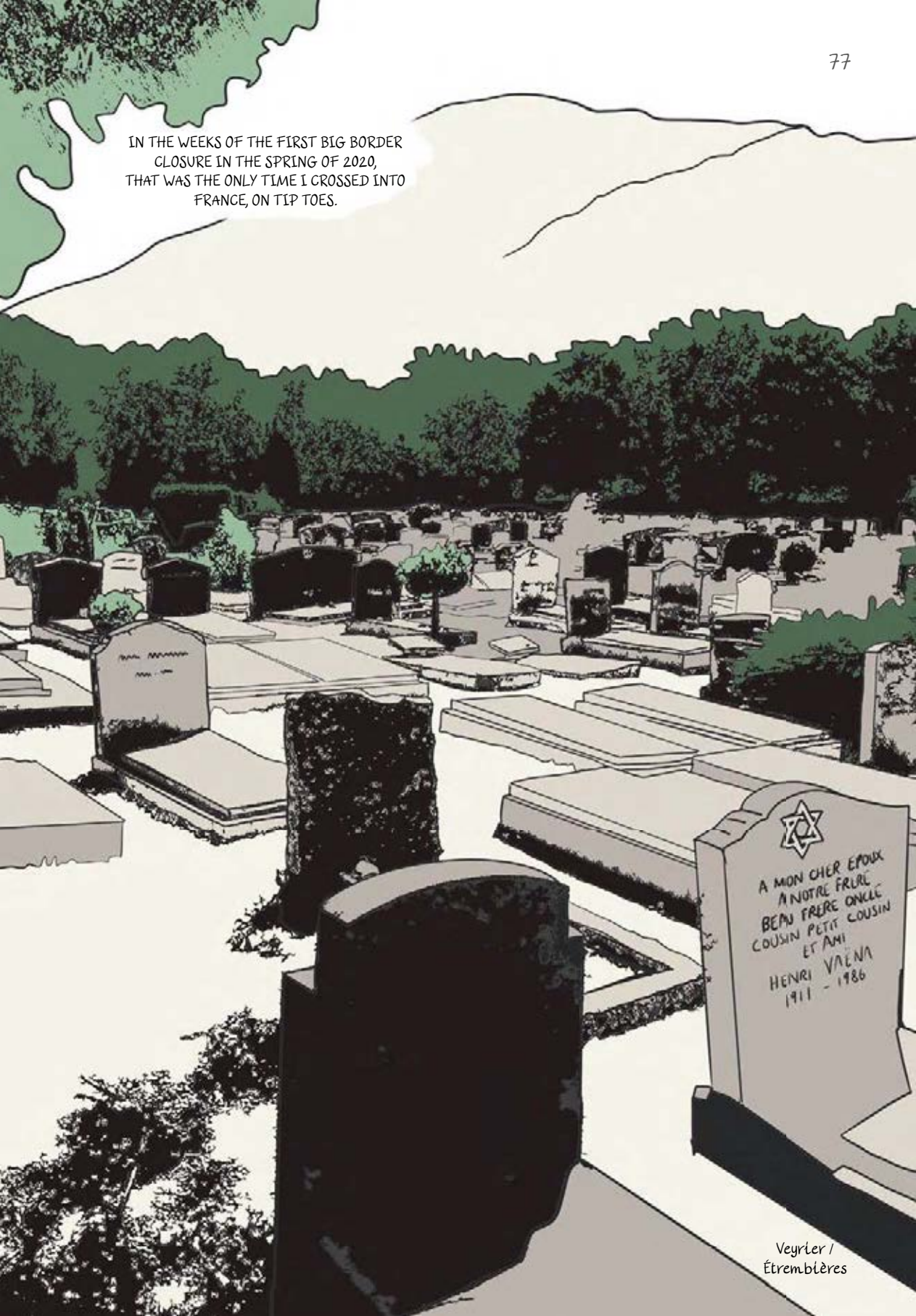
SOMEHOW, HERE, WE FELT REMOVED FROM THESE ABNORMAL TIMES. HOSTED BY A PLACE THAT HAD ONCE OFFERED REFUGE AND HAD PROVIDED SAFE PASSAGE IN TROUBLED TIMES.

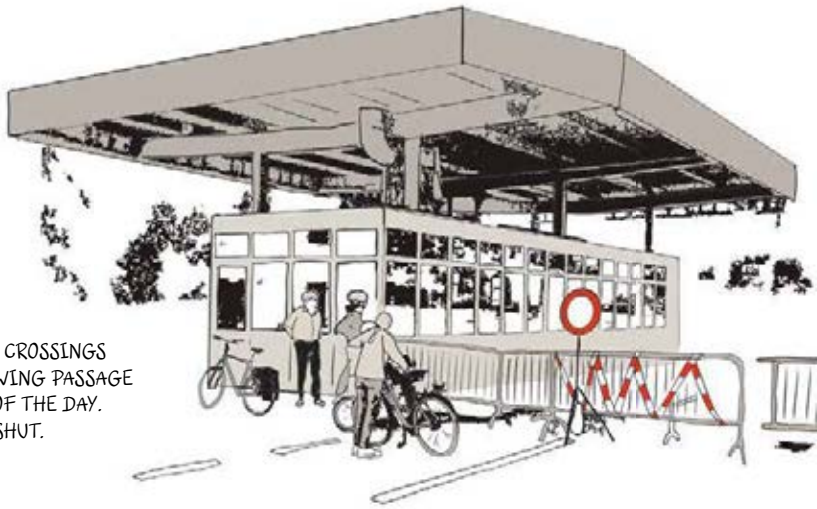
Israelite cemetery of Veyrier



A REMINDER THAT BORDERS DIVIDE, BUT ALSO SAVE.

A REMINDER THAT TERRITORIES ARE WHAT WE CHOOSE TO MAKE THEM: PLACES OF EXCLUSION OR OF SAFETY.


IN THE WEEKS OF THE FIRST BIG BORDER CLOSURE IN THE SPRING OF 2020, THAT WAS THE ONLY TIME I CROSSED INTO FRANCE, ON TIP TOES.
A MON CHER EPOUX
A NOTRE FRERE
BEAU FRERE ONCLE
COUSIN PETIT COUSIN
ET AMI
HENRI VAENA
1911 - 1986
Veyrier / Étrembières



AS THE DAYS PASSED, SOME BORDER CROSSINGS STARTED OPENING, OFTEN ONLY ALLOWING PASSAGE IN ONE DIRECTION, AT SET TIMES OF THE DAY. OTHERS REMAINED FIRMLY SHUT.



ACROSS THE LINE, THE FRENCH POPULATION WAS STILL STRICTLY CONFINED, NEEDING JUSTIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATES TO LEAVE HOME.

BODIES, BORDER POSTS, NEW LAWS, BARRIERS OPENING AND CLOSING, IN NEW PLACES, AT SPECIFIC TIMES: ALL OF THESE TOOK PART IN MAKING NEW INFRASTRUCTURES OF POWER, IN CHANGING LANDSCAPES.



Veyrier border crossing



IT WAS DIFFICULT TO KEEP UP TO DATE WITH ALL THE CHANGING RULES. WE WERE BOMBARDED RELENTLESSLY WITH INFORMATION.

ALL THESE INSTRUCTIONS SHAPED NEW SPACES OF SECURITY, BY HINTING AT DANGER BEYOND THE BORDER.

OUR TRIPS WERE CONSTRAINED AND CONTROLLED.

WE COULD ONLY GAZE AT THE CABLE CAR ON THE SALÈVE MOUNTAIN IN FRANCE. IN PREVIOUS TIMES, WE'D THOUGHT OF THIS AS PART OF OUR HOME.

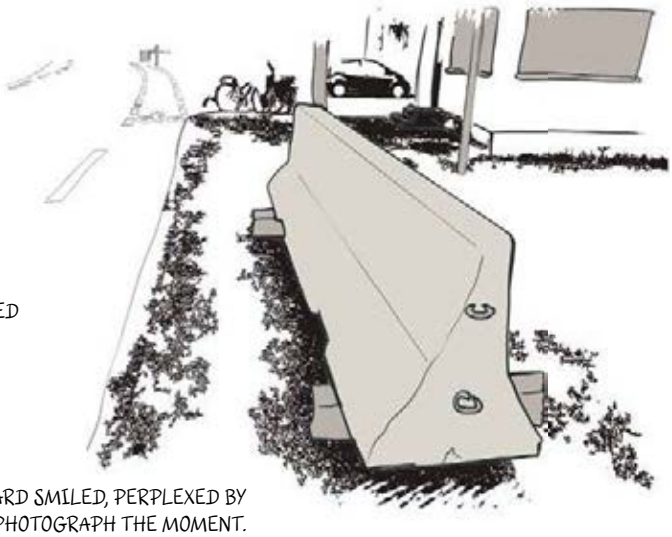
Veyrier border post



Soral II border crossing
April 19th 2020

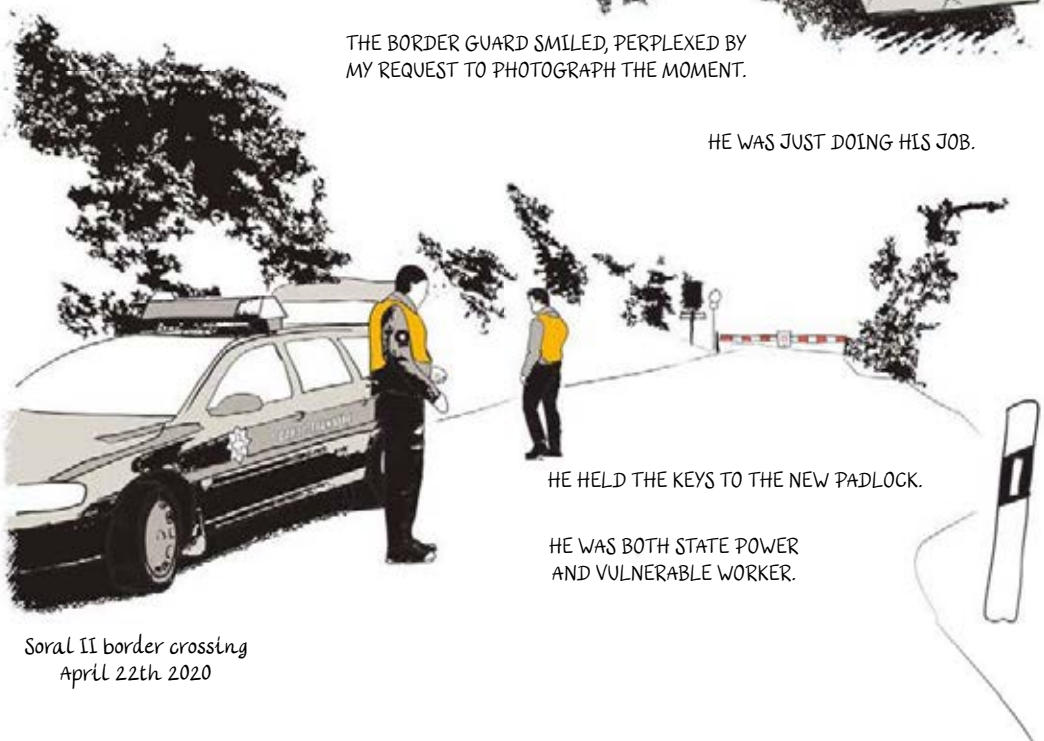
ONE MORNING, WE RUSHED TO THE PARTIALLY-REOPENED BORDER IN SORAL, TO WITNESS ITS CLOSING AT 9AM, AFTER ESSENTIAL WORKERS HAD BEEN ALLOWED THROUGH.

THE CEMENT BLOCKS HAD BEEN MOVED TO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.



THE BORDER GUARD SMILED, PERPLEXED BY MY REQUEST TO PHOTOGRAPH THE MOMENT.

HE WAS JUST DOING HIS JOB.



HE HELD THE KEYS TO THE NEW PADLOCK.

HE WAS BOTH STATE POWER AND VULNERABLE WORKER.

Soral II border crossing
April 22th 2020







WE WERE STILL OUT OF BREATH FROM OUR BICYCLE RIDE WHEN THE LOCK WAS PLACED ON THE GATE.

A CAR APPROACHED ON THE FRENCH SIDE, TWO MINUTES LATE.

IT TURNED BACK.



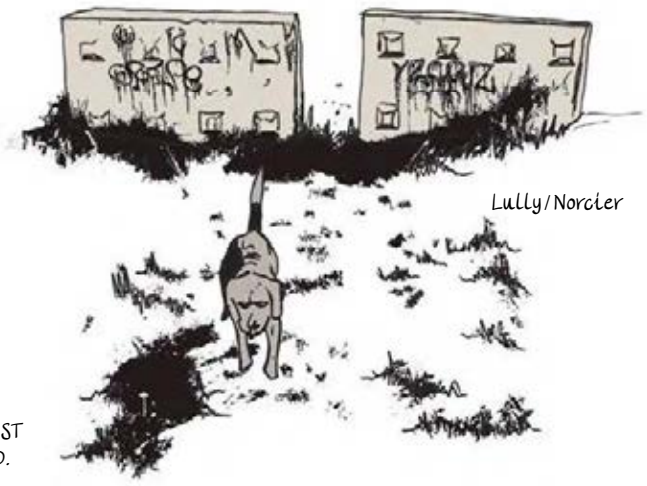
TIMETABLES WERE SACRED HERE.

Soral II border crossing

DURING OUR TOURS, WE STARTED TO NOTICE SMALL TRANSGRESSIONS.



A DOG, SNUFFLING ACROSS THE BORDER.



Lully/Norcier

I GREETED HIM LIKE A LONG-LOST FRIEND FROM ANOTHER WORLD.

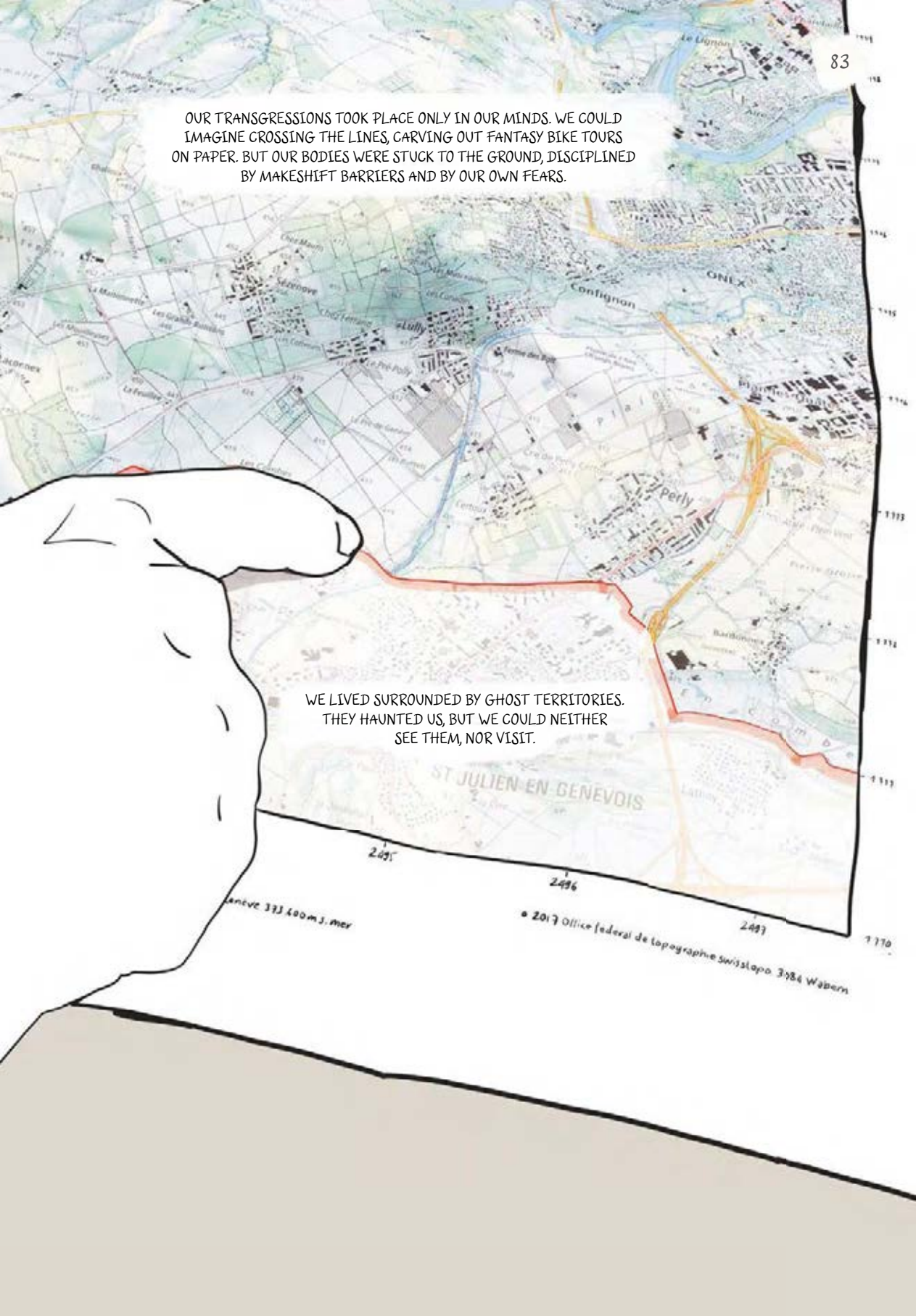
MAYBE HIS OWNER WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TRACTOR TIRE MARKS PASSING AROUND THE BLOCKS, FLATTENING THE GRASS?

POETIC TRANSGRESSIONS.



ONLY LATER DID I NOTICE THE DOG'S PIN-CHIPPED COLLAR.

HIS MOVEMENTS, LIKE OURS, WERE BEING MONITORED.


OUR TRANSGRESSIONS TOOK PLACE ONLY IN OUR MINDS. WE COULD IMAGINE CROSSING THE LINES, CARVING OUT FANTASY BIKE TOURS ON PAPER. BUT OUR BODIES WERE STUCK TO THE GROUND, DISCIPLINED BY MAKESHIFT BARRIERS AND BY OUR OWN FEARS.
WE LIVED SURROUNDED BY GHOST TERRITORIES. THEY HAUNTED US, BUT WE COULD NEITHER SEE THEM, NOR VISIT.
Confignon
Perly
ST JULIEN EN GENEVOIS
2495
2496
2497
Genève 373 400 m ü. mer
© 2017 Office fédéral de topographie swisstopo 3'984 Wabern

AS WEEKS PASSED, WE NOTICED
NEW PATTERNS EMERGING.

THE BORDER FENCES WERE NOT ONLY
PLACES OF DIVISION.

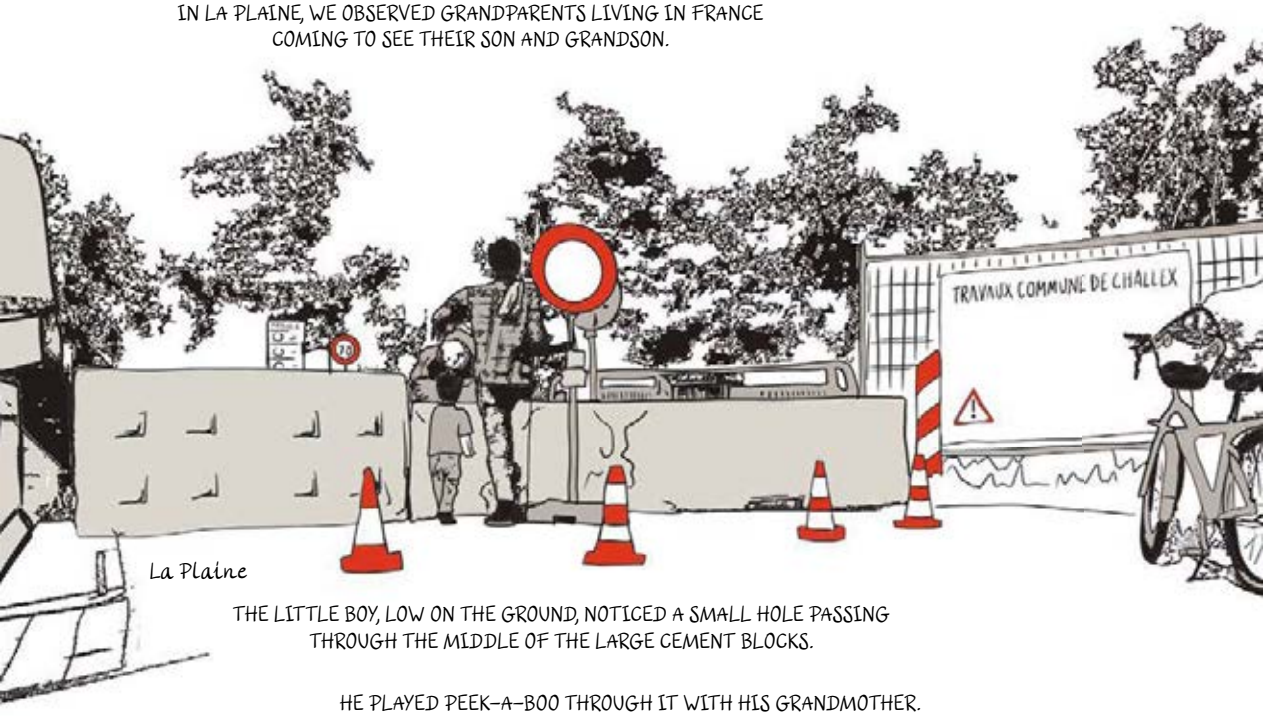
THEY WERE ALSO IMPROMPTU
SOCIAL SPACES.



SPOTS FOR ENJOYING SNACKS AFTER DILIGENTLY
CYCLING AROUND CHASING GHOSTS
AND CEMENT BLOCKS.

PLACES TO REFUEL THE SEMI-WILLING
PARTICIPANTS OF THEIR PARENTS' NEW
OBSESSION.

IN LA PLAINE, WE OBSERVED GRANDPARENTS LIVING IN FRANCE COMING TO SEE THEIR SON AND GRANDSON.



La Plaine

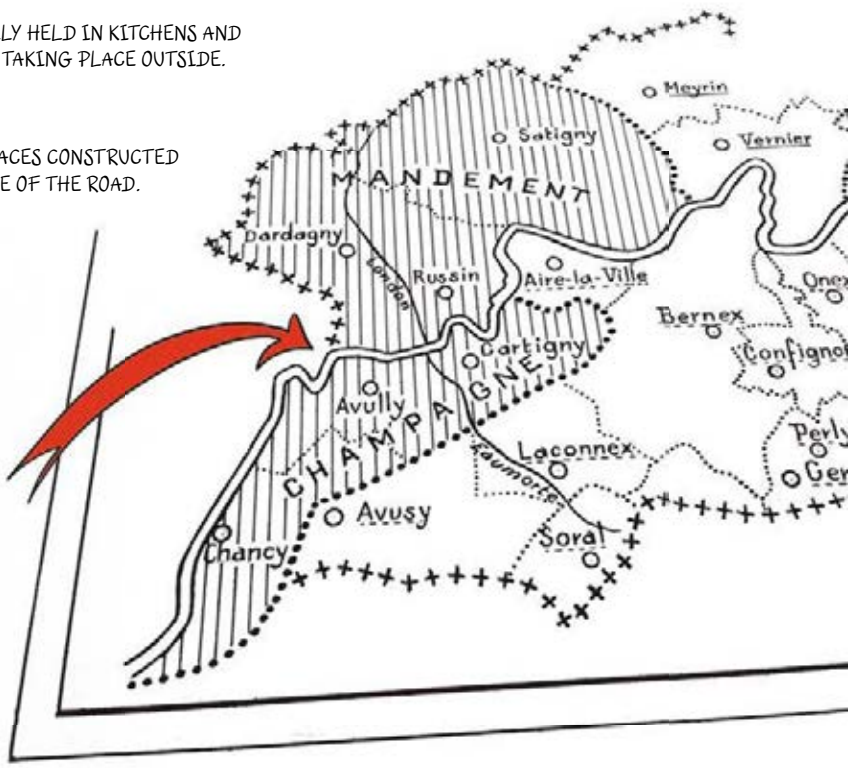
THE LITTLE BOY, LOW ON THE GROUND, NOTICED A SMALL HOLE PASSING THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF THE LARGE CEMENT BLOCKS.

HE PLAYED PEEK-A-BOO THROUGH IT WITH HIS GRANDMOTHER.

THE WALLS WERE BECOMING PLAYTHINGS, NEW INTIMATE SPACES, TERRITORIES WITH NEW MEANING.

FAMILY REUNIONS, USUALLY HELD IN KITCHENS AND SITTING-ROOMS, WERE TAKING PLACE OUTSIDE.

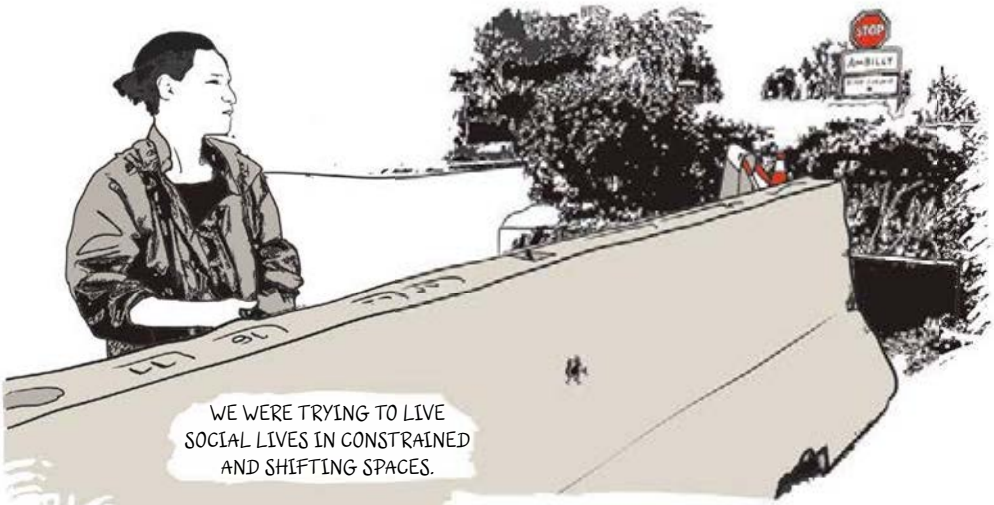
NEW DOMESTIC SPACES CONSTRUCTED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD.



From a map drawn by Louis Binz

ONE AFTERNOON, I MET UP BRIEFLY WITH A FRIEND WHO LIVED ACROSS THE BORDER, ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY.

SHE HAD TO FILL A FORM TO JUSTIFY LEAVING HER HOUSE.



WE WERE TRYING TO LIVE SOCIAL LIVES IN CONSTRAINED AND SHIFTING SPACES.

BUT EVEN IF WE KEPT A SAFE DISTANCE, OUR CHAT WASN'T RELAXED. WE WEREN'T MEANT TO BE MEETING.

OUR CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE UNDER THE GAZE OF A YOUNG SOLDIER.

A FEW DAYS LATER, SHE TRIED TO MEET FAMILY MEMBERS THERE. BUT THEY WERE ORDERED TO DISPERSE.

SHIFTING RULES WERE INTERPRETED DIFFERENTLY.

Thônex, Route d'Ambilly

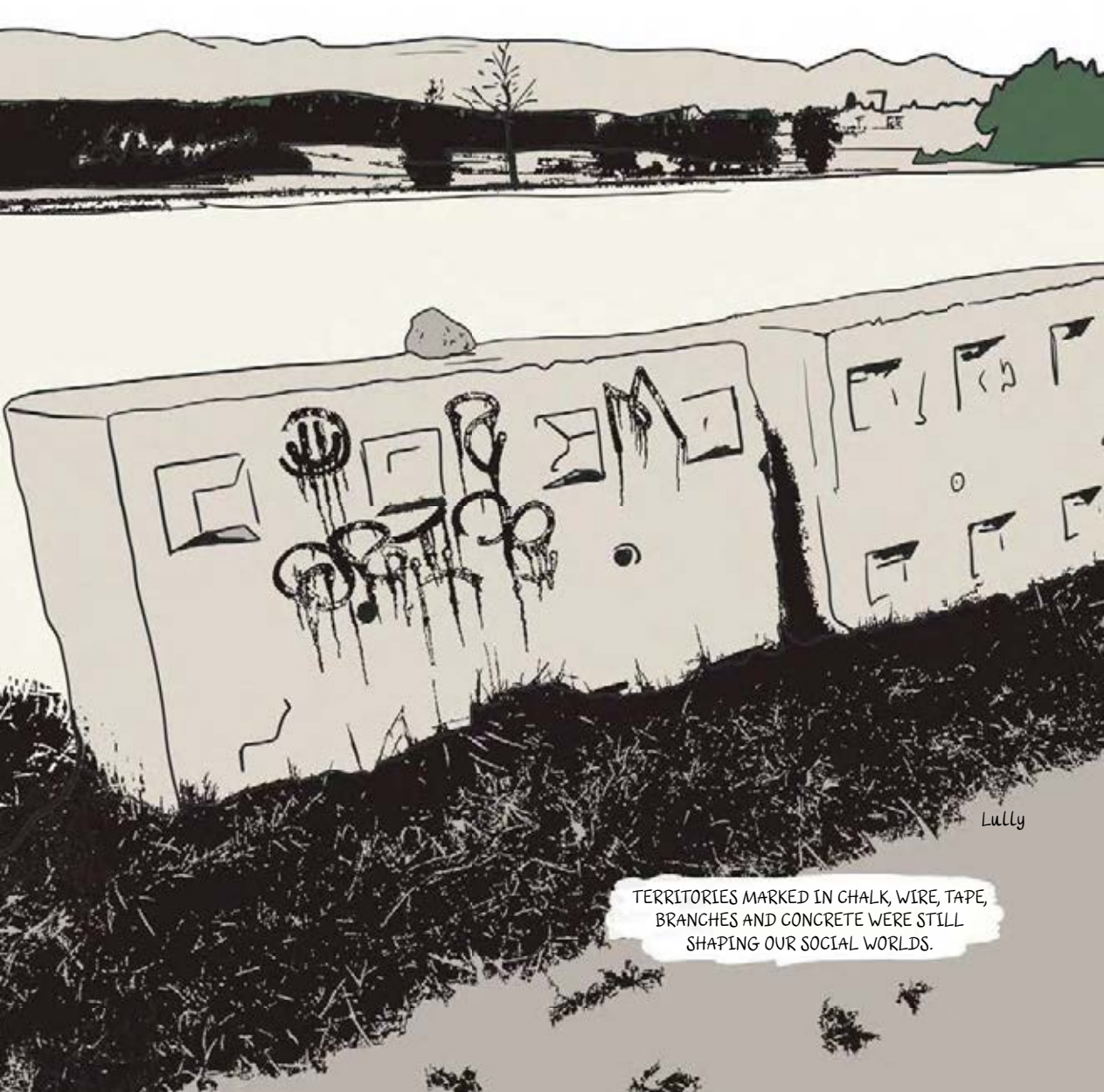

STOP
AMBILLY
Ville fleurie

AS THE WEEKS ROLLED ON, THERE WERE WELCOMING SIGNS OF CHANGE.

THE SCHOOLS REOPENED. IN HOSPITALS, LESS PEOPLE WERE DYING.

OUR BODIES WERE GETTING STRONGER FROM ALL THE CYCLING. OUR SKIN WAS GETTING USED TO THE ENDLESS HAND WASHING.

BUT OUR LANDSCAPES WERE STILL HAUNTED.



FIELDWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Chapter 1

This chapter lays out the project design during a crisis, how this led to grounding research in diverse produced and collected visual material, and how this connected to slow scholarship. It ends with a call to think of political borders as infrastructure, thinking of them as collective, social, and spatial.

Lockdown and beyond

Some research projects appear to be mapped out on design boards, with carefully crafted budgets and timelines, numbered work packages, milestones, calendars and deliverables. They seem to be born fully formed, with neat bibliographies and laid-out hypotheses, before being evaluated by thoughtful peers, approved and funded. This was not one of those. Instead, it was an exercise that started with blind wonder about the world, steeped in confusion and multiple questions, and with me struggling with them for months and months. It was time spent working out exactly where fieldwork began and ended, and whether it ever did, from the doorstep of home to dusty archives, from meandering walks outside in muddy fields to waiting for the bus. It was an exercise in working out slowly what the research question was and what the results, if any, might have been. Perhaps more than anything, it was also an opportunity to dwell once again on the delight of research: the excitement, the bafflement, the confusion, the joy, and the drive to understand something. To sit with the pain and difficulty of reducing the complexity of the world into neat narratives, as if one should. Just as there wasn't a neat start to the project, there probably wasn't a clear end. This book was just one more stepping stone. But looking back, it wasn't just one long process. Different phases took place. A turning point happened around the first Covid-19 lockdown, in the Spring of 2020.

As our two children set off to school on Friday the 13th March 2020, I remember suggesting that they take an extra bag to carry home as many school books as possible. I had been reading the Italian newspapers online, and suspected we were also about to enter some sort of lockdown. A few days earlier, Switzerland had banned all large events of more than 1'000 people[1]. That evening we all sat in front of the television, listening to President Simonetta Sommaruga speak to the nation during a special programme, flipping between languages as she explained the decisions taken. In an emergency meeting, the Swiss Federal Council[2] had chosen to take extraordinary measures[3] and granted itself full powers, rather than consult the

parliament. Until at least the end of the following month, events with more than 100 people were banned. Restaurants, bars and discotheques could no longer accommodate more than 50 customers. Older and vulnerable people were not supposed to go into shops. All schools and higher education institutions were closed until at least the 4th April 2020. Entry into Switzerland from Italy was restricted. We were left reeling from the implications of her statement. I photographed the television screen, sure that this was a moment I wanted to remember. Our lives were about to change. The lockdowns that were imposed on our cities, cantons and states as a response to the pandemic were extraordinary state-sanctioned spatial interventions, in terms of scale and scope. However, as Laketa, Gökarıksel and Fregonese (2023) remind us, these were not unprecedented security measures. Similar policies have longer political histories connected to domestic safety, public order, health or even warfare: "be it as a result of war, terrorism, natural disaster, or pandemic – lockdown is more than an intervention in physical space and infrastructure alone. It is also an intervention that mobilizes, and often relies on, the sphere of the intimate along different and often unequal geographies of vulnerability" (Laketa 2023: 1495). As the pandemic unrolled on our screens and in our sitting room, these connections between broader geopolitics and the intimate space of the home were inescapable. (I return in detail to these interlocking geographical scales and territories in Chapter 2.)

Switzerland was not part of the European Union. But Switzerland and France were both members of the Schengen area, normally allowing free movement without being subject to border checks. From early March 2020, as the virus started to spread, Schengen Area countries temporarily reintroduced border controls between member states. They also restricted intra-EU travel using entry bans and the shutting down of international passenger transport: "The so-called EU travel ban – the closure of the EU's external borders and restriction of entry into the EU from third countries" (Carrera and Ngo 2020: 16). These travel bans and entry restrictions were implemented through additional conditions, requirements, or obligations that prevented people or groups from entering a country, including but not limited to entry bans and mandatory quarantine. "Switzerland became the third Schengen country to reintroduce internal border controls owing to Covid-19. From 13 March 2020, Switzerland applied border controls at its internal land borders with Italy. This was subsequently extended to its land borders with France, Germany, and Austria from 16 March, and to Swiss air borders with Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and Spain from 18 March 2020. On 25 March 2020, Switzerland further extended its internal border controls to its internal air borders with all Schengen countries except for Liechtenstein" (Carrera and Ngo 2020: 21). In this case, the term 'internal' refers to borders within the Schengen area, not within the country: unlike some other European countries, Switzerland never limited travel between regions or cantons, nor placed formal restrictions on mobility.

From 16th March, with 3'700 Covid-19 cases detected in Switzerland, including more than 1'000 new cases that day, 34 deaths, and hospitals looking as though they might be overwhelmed, the Swiss Federal Council declared a state of health emergency throughout the country ("*Situation extraordinaire*" according to Article 7 of the Federal law on epidemics[4]), giving it power to take exceptional measures to

deal with the epidemic. All public and private events were banned, and the closure of almost all establishments open to the public was imposed: shops, restaurants, entertainment and leisure venues, hairdressers, and beauty salons. Only food shops, transport, hotels, banks, post offices and takeaway restaurants could remain open. The army and civil protection were deployed to support the healthcare system and to assist with border control[5]. By 24th March 2020, 8'838 people had tested positive. In April 2020, during the first wave, the epidemic peaked in Switzerland with more than 25'000 new cases detected in total, including up to 1'300 in a single day. There were to be many more waves of the pandemic. Although other restrictions and workplace closures were ordered, none were comparable to that first big lockdown, our *Grand Confinement*.

While the progression of the virus was largely comparable in France, our closest neighbour, as was the strong pressure on the health system, the official response to policing internal movement was very different. On the 17th March, a generalized travel ban for purposes other than work, essential purchases, health or family reasons, and short trips related to personal physical activity was imposed, with an additional restriction a few days later on short trips, limited to one hour a day within a maximum radius of one kilometre of home and linked to personal physical activity, up until the 10th May 2020[6]. In the following months, a series of different rules and regulations were imposed limiting movement, often to within a certain defined distance of each person's home[7]. While we enjoyed freedom of movement within Switzerland during these times, once it was possible to cross the border again several months later, we were indirectly also subjected to the changing regulations of our closest neighbour. Most Schengen countries started lifting their national border controls from around mid-May 2020, but France kept these in place for longer.

Researching during a crisis

How can scholars continue to work when the world stops and territories lock down ? When the Covid-19 pandemic took over our lives, I was familiar with some of the literature on territory that I discuss in the next chapter. I had just finished a paper analysing international diplomatic discourse and territory (Fall 2020b), making use of feminist approaches to territory. In the whirlwind of events that followed the beginning of the first great lockdown these and other readings were set aside. Overnight, in different ways around the world, people's lives changed. Like so many others, I focussed on adapting to life semi-confined within a family of two grown-ups, two children and two cats. In Switzerland, we were incited to stay home, schools closed. My partner and I worked and taught online from home. A new visual language appeared around us, trying to make the new and confusing rules tangible. (fig. 1, next page)

As our curiosity about our new world took over from the initial sheer panic of those first few days, we started to venture outside on long bike rides in the countryside. I started to connect my professional background as a geographer to this new reality. My family lives in a village outside the city of Geneva, part of what is officially known as the Republic and Canton of Geneva. It is a mixture of old village houses and new housing



1. POSTER OF COVID REGULATIONS, 28.04.2020.

developments, with some commercial and light industrial areas, on the urban outskirts. Agricultural fields stretch beyond, part of the green belt. Although well connected by tram to the urban core, it also takes less than ten minutes by bicycle to reach the international border with France. This is a land of confines, of transitions. A space in between here and there.

In those early days of lockdown, I can remember my partner speaking on the phone to his father who lived close by, and who we purposely didn't see in person. The Swiss rules on social distancing were only recommendations, but we took them seriously. My father-in-law spoke of concrete blocks and barriers close to his home, placed along the international border with France. We decided to see these for ourselves during one of our daily family excursions in the fresh air. Armed with water bottles and sunscreen, we set off on our bikes in the glorious weather of that odd Spring. We stopped close to the large motorway border passage point in Bardonnex, usually chock-full with commuter traffic. It was eerily quiet, with barely a car on the road. There, the state border was open, although very few cars had the right documentation to pass. In the Canton of Geneva, a territory practically surrounded by France, only six border passage points out of the usual 32 border posts were still open, with an additional two allowing passage for a few hours a day. All others were sealed completely shut, the roads closed by cement blocks, fences or gates. We had read about this in the local newspaper. We could understand that it made sense in these exceptional circumstances. What we hadn't anticipated was what was done to seal off all the other border passage points, the smaller roads and footpaths that usually almost seamlessly connected the landscape on both sides of the border.

As we cycled along, we came up to a field that stretched along the border. At the edge of it, where the footpath crossed a stream into France, a haphazard assortment of

2. TO LEFT, SIGN AT THE CLOSED BORDER CROSSING AT SORAL, INDICATING WHICH PASSAGE POINTS WERE STILL OPEN (PHOTO 19TH APRIL 2020).

3. TO THE RIGHT, THE FIRST CLOSED BORDER WE ENCOUNTERED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE NEAR BARDONNEX (PHOTO 5TH APRIL 2020).





metal fences and tape blocked the way. They looked both official and improvised: an odd mix of road fences, tape, chains, printed signs and references to emergency laws. "No crossing or attempted crossing allowed for shopping, leisure, tourism or visiting," said the paper sign, enclosed in rough plastic. The border we usually crossed without thinking was suddenly completely shut to us. We were fenced in (Fall 2020a). It was the first of many such improvised installations we were to observe that day, apparently put up overnight by the local gendarmerie and police officers to close off habitual passage points. I had not expected to see the normally invisible line made so tangible in the landscape. I was both horrified and fascinated. (fig. 2-3)
Our subsequent cycle tours were mapped increasingly to visit as many of these curious border zones as possible, observing the closures, and taking stock of the spectacular yet almost pathetic attempts to seal off two halves of an integrated territory. I wanted to see and photograph these strange temporary spaces. I needed to witness them directly; to show them to my children who had no personal experience of closed political borders. So, day by day and week by week, we started exploring our new bounded environment, paradoxically visiting many places along the border that I had never been to. When you can go everywhere, you often don't. Make something impossible, then testing and tasting the limit, seeing how far you can go and head-butting against the forbidden becomes distinctly attractive. We started touring our closed world, beating the bounds of our lived territory.
During that first lockdown, we never willingly crossed into France, except once very briefly within the cross-border Jewish cemetery in Veyrier. Not crossing the border seemed very important. It suddenly mattered to know exactly where the invisible line was. From 21th June 2020, when rules changed, our trips included visits on the French side of the border zone, in accordance with the ever-changing legal requirements imposed at different times. Sometimes we were allowed to travel in France only 30 km from our home, even if this was across the border from Switzerland, as two different sets of national geographical rules collided. We cycled in France holding our Swiss electricity bills to prove our home address. When two of us caught Covid-19 in March 2021, we didn't leave the house at all for more than 15 days. Our home was divided into contaminated and uncontaminated zones. The cats wandered between the two, confused and frustrated to find all inside doors firmly shut.

Beating the bounds

The expression "beating the bounds" refers to an ancient custom, observed during the Middle Ages, sometimes beyond, in parts of England, Wales and Germany, that involved touring local landmarks and swatting them with branches or sticks to maintain a shared mental map of parish boundaries (Tratman 1931). During such an event, a group of citizens from a community, parish or political community, would walk along the geographic boundaries of their locality in order to share, reconstruct and maintain a mental memory and map of the precise location of these boundaries. In some locations, such traditional ritual walks are still held, imbued with new meanings (Darian-Smith 2002; Hindle 2008). While contemporary surveying and cartographic

methods have changed and such customs are no longer required to preserve political divisions, this geographical experience of walking that builds a shared sense of community remains relevant. It was certainly a term and practice that haunted the back of my mind as I explored the backstreets and paths of my home along the international border.

The Swiss political border is unique in that it is completely and painstakingly demarcated materially, using large boundary stones or smaller brass pegs. Each marker provides precise information on the direction and location of the border, situated at each change of direction of the line. These objects must be durable and visible along the entire borderline. The maintenance and financing is meant to be carried out jointly by the two States concerned[8], but the Swiss seem particularly invested. Perhaps being a small federal and relatively recent state makes it more necessary to invest emotionally in holding it together materially ? Or perhaps it just fits well with national ideals – and stereotypes – of careful precision ? In the case of the Canton of Geneva, Swiss only since 1815, such a state investment might particularly resonate. The border is therefore painstakingly demarcated, laying out an extraordinary necklace of stones along the entire line. (fig. 4 to 7)

In the case of monumental rectangular border stones, opposite vertical sides indicate the respective political jurisdiction, either with a name, initial or crest; one side shows the number; and the last side usually indicates the date the stone was laid or moved. The numbers are placed so that someone walking in ascending order first sees the number as they approach. The top shows the change of direction of the line, or gives specific indications, such as when the line follows a river from that point on. These









[FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT]

4. BORDER STONE NUMBER 52 IN SORAL, SHOWING THE LARGE "G" FOR GENEVA ON ONE SIDE.

5. BRASS BORDER MARKER LAID INTO THE ROAD, SHOWING THE CHANGE IN DIRECTION OF THE LINE.

6.THE END AND THE BEGINNING OF CANTONAL LINES, IN VERSOIX: GENEVA BORDER STONE NUMBER 1 LAID IN 1818, NEXT TO THE LAST BORDER STONE, NUMBER 309, FOR THE CANTON OF VAUD LAID IN 1824.

7. BORDER STONE NUMBER 39 IN SORAL, LAID IN 2000 FOLLOWING THE BORDER RELOCATION, SHOWING THE CHANGE IN DIRECTION OF THE NEW BORDERLINE. THE "S" IS FOR SAVOIE, REFLECTING THE OLD NAME USED IN THE STONE IT REPLACED.

stones hold historical memories of the line, showing the crests of dissolved imperial powers or ghostly neighbouring states that have either disappeared or changed location. There still are border stones standing around the Canton of Geneva that reflect that the City and Republic of Berne, the Duchy of Savoie, the Kingdom of France, the Kingdom of Sardinia, or the Helvetic Republic were once neighbours (Cavaleri 2014: 41-55). These were sometimes carved anew to mark that the French Republic (F) and the Canton de Vaud were the current neighbours, but not always.

Today, joint demarcation committees for the Swiss/French border (*Commissions mixtes d'abornement*) are responsible for implementing bilateral agreements, normally with five people from each country tasked with identifying necessary work and distributing expenses equitably. In Switzerland, the Federal Council (*Conseil Fédéral*) nominates permanent delegates at a cantonal level. For the Republic and Canton of Geneva, this task is delegated to the Cantonal Surveyor (*Géomètre Cantonal*) attached to the *Service de la Mensuration Officielle*, part of the *Direction de l'Information du Territoire*. Frequent French ministerial restructuring made it a little harder to trace who exactly was a member of this commission in recent years[9]. Up until recently, the French delegation was composed of members from the *Délégation aux affaires internationales et européennes* from the *Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-Mers* which led the French delegation, organised travel and managed the annual budget allocated by the Ministry; as well as members from the *Ministère des affaires étrangères* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); the *IGN – Institut national de l'information géographique et forestière* (the National Geographic Institute); the *Douane* (customs); and the *Ministère de l'équipement*. The latter was replaced in 2022 by the *Ministère de la transition écologique et de la cohésion des territoires* (Ministry for Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion). Joint demarcation commissions are meant to be held alternately in France and Switzerland, annually or as needed.

Historically, having the two countries agree on the coordinates for precise points on maps wasn't always easy because topographic calculation methods differed. Border markers and border stones were therefore particularly important and were faithfully maintained by the two states. The situation eased in 2015 when differing Swiss and French coordinates were replaced by unique digital European coordinates. These enshrined the official borderline, rather than the stones themselves.

But all borderlines are by nature temporary. In the case of the Franco-Swiss border, this is quite literally the case: diplomatic negotiations and territorial exchanges are ongoing. Recent exchanges of territory include a substantial exchange in 2000 with land changing hands in Soral (CH) / Viry (F); Bardonnex (CH) / Saint-Julien-en-Genevois (F)[10]; and in 2002 between Satigny (CH) / Saint-Genis-Pouilly (F); Chancy (CH) / Viry & Valleiry (F); Soral (CH) / Viry (F); and Jussy (CH) / Veigy-Foncenex (F)[11]. A short stretch of the international border along the *Foron* river is still not officially delimited between the two countries (Niggeler 2023, *pers. comm.*[12]) although progress was made in 2024, awaiting approved from Paris. In Switzerland, private funding initiatives largely took over paying for the maintenance of border stones a few years ago, considered as much part of local historical heritage as a surveying issue[13]. Nevertheless, all official work during border changes is still carried out and funded by the state.

While these institutions were responsible for tracing and maintaining the borderline itself, other state bodies were enrolled in making it material and real. I return to these below, when I lay out what visual material was collected during this project.

Exploring, photographing and documenting the border zone visually

States build all sorts of different infrastructure to make invisible lines tangible. Here, I lay out how I carried out a visual ethnography of the lockdown crisis at the international border, and how this subsequently turned into a broader geographical research project that led to the writing of the comic *Along the Line*.

In the early days of the first lockdown, my family and I used pedal-powered bicycles and, sometimes, a child-adapted tandem to move around the Canton, travelling to the border from our home on the outskirts of the city of Geneva. The total duration of each of these tours was usually about two hours, designed to include several stretches along the Swiss/French border, looping back home.

The curious political context at the outset of this project explained why I focussed so much on *things*, on material infrastructure and on the visual performances and manifestations of borders. In those early days, when we couldn't really speak or meet with new people, it would have been impossible – or at least extremely unwise – to carry out interviews with people beyond my immediate family. Although the lockdowns were affecting people differently, and my situation was unusually privileged, I didn't have access to relevant and objective information. I considered trying to carry out phone interviews with key informants such as border guards, cross-border workers, or my own colleagues, but everyone – including me – was wrapped up in their own crises. It didn't seem to make sense to pursue it.

In parallel, changing regulations and procedures on research concerning humans were in debate at the University of Geneva. It was ambiguous whether I would need official clearance from a centralized ethics committee before speaking to anyone. Norms based on life sciences were being applied to the social sciences, making my colleagues and myself uneasy and concerned. In a situation fraught in multiple ways, working with *things* offered multiple advantages: I could gather visual field information and impressions, I carefully avoided photographing people, and took time to work out whether this was leading me anywhere. Although not ethically neutral, this approach seemed at least safe enough. I could honestly feel that I wasn't harming anyone, putting vulnerable people in danger, or bringing my university into disrepute[14].

As a result, I am convinced that I saw things that I might not have noticed otherwise. By *de facto* editing out participants or interview partners, my gaze was drawn to the places, the infrastructure, the material manifestations on the border. Rather than produce a study on cross-border workers or the violence of migration, I looked at the macro material manifestations of power. I recorded the tiny details that made the abstraction of borders visible. I followed in the footsteps of the extraordinary state investment and of institutions that buttress them. I also looked inwards, in a sort of spontaneous auto-ethnography, producing a form of *autographic*, a visual

auto-ethnography: the author, through their autobiographical avatar, could be a particularly active, visible participant in crafting their own selfhood (Whitlock 2006; Whitlock and Poletti 2008). If at times it seemed that I was observing the world after all humans had fled, it paradoxically felt rather appropriate to those extraordinary times. Perhaps scholars needed time relearning social skills after those odd weeks ? It certainly changed how I did research and freed me to try something open-ended. This focus on things continued when our immediate world opened up again. Once movement and travel restrictions were lifted after the first big lockdown, we continued to haunt the border area following the ebb and flow of changing rules. These were often difficult to keep up with, particularly in a borderland such as Geneva. Changing rules were often substantially different on both sides of the international border. Our excursions evolved from witnessing the crisis of closure into a desire to walk, observe and photograph peaceful stretches along the entire international border between the Canton of Geneva and France, variously haunted by the emergency closures.

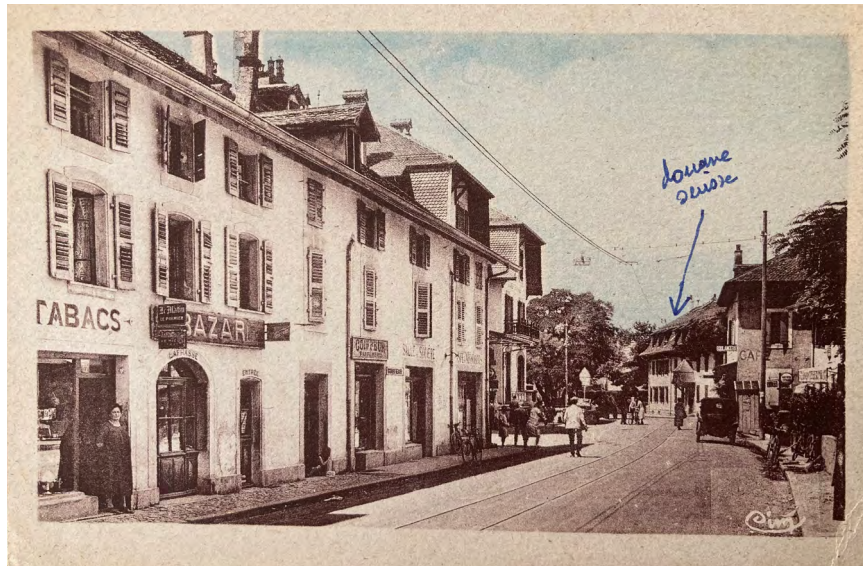
From February 2022 to March 2024, on a whim, my partner and I decided to walk the entire 105,2 kilometres of land border between the Canton of Geneva and France[15] in a series of looping walks each lasting two to four hours. What started as an unplanned and improvised family experience during the first lockdown, capturing images of places within family snapshots, distinct from any pre-approved research method or framework, transformed into something closer to visual ethnographic and geographical research (see Chapter 3). These walks were almost always taken with my partner, less frequently alone or with one or both of our children or with friends and extended family. We planned our routes using paper maps[16] and subsequently, when I had a new phone with European data roaming, also using the *Swisstopo* App that accurately showed individual border stones. We sometimes consulted the French phone App IGN Rando but frequently found it less accurate on the ground. The guidebook *Histoire de bornes: les frontières de Genève* by Cavaleri (2014) was invaluable in helping us locate and identify added border stone curiosities. A local historical atlas (Barbier and Schwarz 2016) answered our many questions about past political authorities and territories.

During these different excursions, I recorded aspects of the places visited using digital photography. Until November 2021, I used a clumpy iPad to take pictures, then a smaller iPhone with georeferenced positioning. Between March 2020 and March 2024 when we completed our walk, I took over 3'000 photographs showing areas on both sides of the Geneva border. These reflected the changes in these landscapes, as the cement blocks and fences of the acute phase of the pandemic were moved aside. They also reflected my change of focus. I increasingly sought out the mundane infrastructure underpinning the border, rather than only the spectacular fences of lockdown: searching out not only most of the border stones that demarcate and inscribe each change of direction on the ground, but also the assorted buildings connected to customs and control along the line. I looked for the small details. The only people photographed were my immediate family, or the people walking with us. This formed the first corpus of visual material that I drew upon to write the comic. Subsequently, all the walks were narrated in a series of short online

posts (on *Twitter*: February 2022 – November 2022; then on *Mastodon*: December 2022 – March 2024). I used this public journaling as my main visual notebook and archive. These were later extracted as PDF files from the online social media sites respectively using *Thread Reader* and *Mastodon Thread Renderer*.

The second set of visual material, in paper and digital formats, was collected from map and visual state archives. Over several months, I consulted and photographed documents with permission from the following collections: the *Archives d'État de Genève*, in the *Ancien Arsenal and the Terrassière depot*, in particular from their remarkable collection of maps and original treaties; *the archives of the Service de la Mensuration Officielle* of the *Département du territoire*; documents and photographs from the *Office du patrimoine et des sites* from the *Service de l'inventaire des monuments d'art et d'histoire*; maps, photographs and postcards from the *Centre d'Iconographie Genevoise*; and maps and postcards from the *Archives départementales de la Haute-Savoie*, in particular from the *Fonds de cartes postales anciennes, semi-modernes et modernes* (1890-2000). Wherever possible, and even if documents were available in digital format, I consulted and photographed the original paper copies, assembling a rich corpus to assist in drawing the comic. I also gathered a personal collection of over 40 postcards connected to the Swiss and French border, mainly early 20th century photographs of border posts and connected landscapes around the Canton of Geneva, bought from online vendors. Some held snippets of personal stories that were not used in this project, but that would offer potential for future research. Researching the circulation and content of postcards is an expanding and dynamic field (Ferguson 2005; Reverseau and Nachtergael 2022) but was beyond the scope of this project. (fig. 8)

Je vous écris auprès d'une cascade bruyante, en contemplant l'Arve impétueux qui file à toute allure vers le Rhône, dans un petit bistrot où on ne sert la bière qu'en canettes d'un litre alors



8. A POSTCARD OF THE BORDER POST IN MOILLESULAZ, HAUTE-SAVOIE, WITH HAND-DRAWN INSCRIPTION "DOUANE SUISSE".

je déguste lentement, mais je m'apprête à attaquer le Petit Salève, c'est à pic et au moins 10 fois haut comme la Côte des 2 amants. Je ne crois pas que j'irai en haut. Je suis descendu à Annemasse avec l'espoir de Genève mais je suis arrêté à la frontière à 4 km de la terre promise. Je dois partir ce soir pour Thonon (mon 5e verre de bière).

The date on the card, handwritten, was ambiguous: was it 08.04.1942 or 08.04.1947 ? I read it as 1942 the first time, but then I doubted. The significance of the text, depicting the dream of crossing into Switzerland, described as a promised land, was very different in each case: was this a war-time border covered in barbed wire held by occupying soldiers or not ? Was this written by a person seeking sanctuary, fleeing for their life, or just a tourist ? There was no name, and no address.
Such personal narratives were fascinating and endlessly touching, when so much was left unsaid or was merely suggested, in micro-stories with little context. In some postcards that I encountered, individuals sent a series of cards to the same person, providing a short epistolary series. Such promising written material was not included nor analysed. Instead, I used them only as indirect evidence that told stories about past landscapes and hinted at changes and permanence. The commercial production of a substantial corpus of early 20th century postcards of sites and buildings connected to the border, produced, printed and sold in Switzerland and in France, and their acquisition and use by ordinary people could be taken as an indication of the relevance of these sites in the construction of a broader sense of place. It would be something worth returning to for a subsequent project.
I repeatedly visited and photographed the sites present in all these collected images, often with the postcard in hand: to observe, experience, capture and draw these haunted places. Rossetto writes about the embodied nature of this process of tracking down places featured in old photographs, in a project revisiting First World War cemeteries:

> When a rephotographer tracks down a location depicted in an old photograph, the details of the environment that match up with the old photo serve as reference points, or "time-bridges" [...] between two temporal planes. These are details from the present scene that match the existing photograph. These time-bridges may be spectacular or very modest [...]. These time-bridges are survivors that have materially witnessed the event depicted in the past image. Present in both the photograph and in physical reality, they become gateways for the past to encroach on the present [...]. Repeat photography is based on those physical matching points, on those non-human time-bridges. Through the rephotographic technique, the body-subject, which is always situated in space and time thereby inhabits not only another's body, but also another's spacetime. This situation emerges through the co-existence of the subject's flesh and the flesh of the (past and present) physical world, thanks to the work done by the material objects that function as time-bridges. While it is a process governed by the intentional subject through his or her rephotography project, it always also involves an unpredictable exposure to alterity. (Rossetto 2019: 132)

I enjoyed playfully finding the correct vantage point to reproduce old photographs and postcars, building time-bridges in place. Some frames could be reproduced almost identically, with buildings still standing although their purpose had often changed, in other cases the landscape was unrecognizable. Capturing the right angle sometimes meant standing in the middle of extremely busy roads, when past photographs showed only light or no traffic ! But despite the inevitable landscape changes,

the places captured couldn't escape their singular location on the borderline. I wanted all my sketches to be rooted in observation, giving them ground-proofed credibility. Like a doubting Thomas, I wanted to have seen things before believing them. Likewise, I wanted my readers to understand that the comic was rooted in careful fieldwork, not speculation or only second-hand material. I assembled a great number of images, only using a small representative selection in the end product, either because the boundaries of the project were redefined or because choices inevitably had to be made. This always happens with qualitative research, but even knowing that didn't make renouncing the use of some images any less agonizing.

In taking these photographs, I was mindful of using photography as a mode of observing, mediating my experience of place through the use of a specific technology, trying to *educate* my attention as Ernwein puts it (2020). Because I needed photographs at specific scales and angles to produce my subsequent sketches, it changed how I encountered the field, making me observe things differently and more slowly. Many of my photos show my partner away in the distance, continuing his walk as I stayed back, focussing on tiny details. Walking with someone doesn't mean that both people share the same experience (Rabbiosi 2021).

Open visual research design and slow scholarship

The rich visual material assembled provided the basis for drafting the stand-alone visual graphic narrative. In this section, I explain the project design choices that grounded this project of developing visually sensitive scholarly writing. In Chapter 3, I explore further how writing in comics and graphic narrative changes geographical research.

Because I did not set out with any specific pre-established theory or research object, this visual assembling helped frame the boundaries of the topic. I formulated ideas and hypotheses from the material assembled over several years. These observations didn't start from an entirely blank theoretical slate. As a geographer, I had been writing on territory and borders for many years (Fall 2005, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2020c; Fall and Domingos 2020), although I had focussed on other topics before the pandemic broke out. These prior studies made it easier to connect my observations in the field to existing scholarship. My short comic produced in the middle of lockdown (Fall 2020a) was a first attempt at formulating ideas in graphic form, suggesting interpretative possibilities rather than secure arguments.

The distinction often made between inductive and deductive qualitative research – between research questions and theoretical frameworks considered and chosen before or after empirical fieldwork was carried out – was frequently rather artificial. Was mine an inductive project ? Or did the inductive phase simply last longer than usual, stretching over several years ? The perimeter, timeframe, purpose and nature of the research were certainly far from pre-defined. These emerged not only during observation but also while writing and drawing the comic. Such an open-ended approach to research design was relatively unusual for me, particularly in the current climate of pre-approved project funding and increasingly codified research ethics

that scholars have been describing and analysing for many years[17] (Collignon 2010; Burton-Jeangros 2017; Riom 2017).

Far from the unhelpful stereotype of an Ivory Tower, contemporary academics have many competing and contradictory demands on their time. In a co-authored paper, scholars noted:

> The difficulty juggling the standard academic triad of research, teaching, and service; we recognize not only that different institutions prioritize these differently, but that they need not be mutually exclusive. Rather, our concern involves the ever-increasing demands of academic life: the acceleration of time in which we are expected to do more and more. The "more" includes big tasks, such as teaching larger classes, competing for dwindling publicly funded grants that also bring operating money to our universities, or sitting on innumerable university administrative committees. It also includes the constant stream of smaller requests demanding timely responses, such as quarterly updates to funding agencies, annual institutional review exercises, and pressure on us as knowledge workers to stay on constant alert through the demands of social media. We find that these often overwhelming demands exact an isolating psychic and physical toll that is neither reasonable nor sustainable. (Mountz 2015: 1237)

This is a stark portrait of what can be perceived as a privileged profession, particularly when holding a permanent position. Nevertheless, the need to rethink how we work and write resonated deeply. I was drawn to their suggestion to develop "a feminist mode of slow scholarship (that) works for deep reflexive thought, engaged research, joy in writing and working with concepts and ideas driven by our passions" (Mountz 2015: 1253). Claiming time, building shared time into everyday life, and buffering each other and ourselves from unrealistic and counterproductive norms that have become standard expectations seemed particularly important to me after the crisis caused by the pandemic.

Verteuil (2022) suggested that this desire to slow down worked well with unhurried methods in visual research. He suggested that engaging with the mundane in cities by broadening the visual apprehension of the city ultimately produced better and more careful research practices (Verteuil 2022). Capturing slow changes, taking time-series photographs that represented small details of change almost randomly, with no fixed plan at the outset, created counter-visual productions through embodied and experiential processes. For him, recording visual change over decades, creating long time-lapse sequences of places allowed something different to be made tangible. My own observations of the border during and after crisis were different in scope but did share a commitment to crafting visual narratives of change rooted in place.

It was a phase fed by joy, by the pleasure and companionship in cycling and walking with people I love, blurring work and life boundaries. The danger of such muddling is that work risks dripping into every aspect of our lives, with little respite. During the first lockdown, when home became the workplace of so many people, this muddling was particularly acute. Paradoxically, reintroducing independent scholarly thinking into my daily routine at that time was a way of making sense of the intense situation: a balm rather than a bane. Once normal work rhythms and places were re-established, the creative aspect of writing the comic avoided the project becoming overwhelming, even when an increasing number of family weekends were taken up with walking along the border. This long inductive phase, based on observation,

photography and the slow constitution of a multi-faceted visual archive was followed by more deductive research, largely carried out from and with the visual corpus. I will return to this process of grounding research in and writing from visual material in Chapter 3.

As the deadline with my editor loomed and was moved back several times, I wondered if this supple approach to research design would work. Was this really, in the common understanding of the term, a research *project* ? I was juggling writing a comic, walking along the border at the weekend, assembling visual and bibliographic material, and pushing back the drafting of this methods volume: avoiding what I still thought of as the *real writing*. None of it was funded, and I paid for the postcards that arrived regularly in the post using personal funds. As the balance between the written narrative and the graphic narrative shifted towards taking the latter seriously, I started to feel that this was, indeed, a research project. I might be doing things differently, but I was also producing something that I could be proud of. I felt invigorated every time I spoke to others about my slow progress[18]. The unconventional calendar, the lack of imposed boundaries allowed the graphic narrative to blossom and take centre stage. It became the site where research questions were shaped in a way that was intellectually rewarding. I was writing through comics, using the slow walking, slow drawing as sites for making meaning. The writing was truly grounded in the visual material, emerging out of it.

Observing and researching infrastructure

As mentioned earlier, I chose to focus on the international border zone in a way that risked making it appear empty of people. I did not look at the effects of the border on the lives of inhabitants or migrants. The multiple practices that made and held the line were considered only to the extent that they fashioned border infrastructure. Although this approach was partly the result of the conditions in which the project started, it was something that I had wanted to do for a long time. I can remember, speaking about wanting to write a biography of borders during the interview for my first permanent academic job at the Open University in 2005. Perhaps this project was one step on the way of finally doing that ?

Such a focus on the social dimensions of materiality, and specifically on the connections between what have been called socio-material-affective assemblages, have inspired many geographers (De Landa 2016; Anderson and MacFarlane 2011; Ghoddhousi and Page 2020; Dittmer 2022). Although sympathetic to much of this writing, I got frustrated with some of the ways of writing about *affect* that seem to reinvent, in complicated terms, what feminist geographers had been doing for years, a point clearly made by Kinkaid (2021a, 2021b). Instead of drawing on assemblage theory, and in parallel to the writing by feminist geographers that I engaged with in Chapter 2, I found greater inspiration from studies of infrastructure in science and technology studies:

> Between their familiarity and their unannounced, unexplained presence, infrastructural systems are easy to see but just as easy to ignore, unless we bring our conscious attention to bear on them. Once we do, we begin to see that we are surrounded by networks, made visible

> not just by colorful squiggles but by sewer grates, telephone poles, mailboxes, access covers, transformer boxes, fire hydrants, railway lines, and on and on and on. The contrail of a jet airplane makes the invisible air travel corridors in the sky above us temporarily visible, just as spray paint does for underground ducts. Survey markers and street signs remind us that all of these networks were made possible by the centuries-long project of measuring the world, first with maps, then with clocks, and now with modern satellite mapping, which entangles the two. Even if the networks themselves are buried or intangible, we can visualize them by connecting the traces that we can see, knitting together people, buildings, and the world around us, in our home neighbourhood or across the planet. These visible markers show us not only the extent of these networks in space but also how they extend through time. Every marker, whether it's an imposing monument or a scrap of fabric, is there to send a message from the past to the future. Infrastructural networks are enduring, and that endurance shapes the way that new systems build on top of – or underneath, or alongside – the older ones. (Chachra 2023: 6)

For Chachra, infrastructure was all the *stuff* that we didn't think about, its presence and characteristics taken as given. This meant thinking about it only partly as an engineering problem since infrastructure was above all a physical, cultural, and institutional process that provided an ever-changing function. When deployed, infrastructural systems "create enduring relationships not just between the people who share the network but also between those people and place, where they are in the world and the landscape the network traverses" (Chachra 2023: 13). Seeing infrastructure not as an engineer might but instead as "revealing of social relations, rather than merely as objects of techno-scientific study in their own rights whose efficiency, precision, accuracy or functioning needs to be optimized through technical interventions" (Kanoi 2022: 2) allowed the different kinds of forces and social relations at work in particular sites to be made tangible. These authors clarified what they meant in stating that infrastructure was technically social in two senses: as a technical system illuminating the social; and as fundamentally social, where humans themselves become part of the infrastructure. In this way, infrastructures mediated exchange over distance, bringing different people, objects, and spaces into interaction and forming the base on which modern economic and social systems operated (Larkin 2013).

Infrastructure was therefore boring, or at least mundane, because the best possible outcome was nothing happening, or at least nothing unexpected or untoward, due to "sufficient attention, specialized care and unceasing oversight" (Chachra 2023: 17). Thinking about political borders in this way helped me understand how they "are the political determinants of where our physical bodies may be located. To the extent that infrastructural systems embody sustained relationships, borders set the terms of who gets to be in them" (Chachra 2023: 133). Seeing borders as technological systems that we might interact with as individuals but that are inherently collective, social, and spatial, helped understand how our material world was constructed socially, piece by piece, border stone by border stone.

[1] See Ordonnance sur les mesures destinées à lutter contre le coronavirus (Covid-19) du Conseil fédéral suisse, 28 février 2020.

[2] The Swiss government comprises the seven members of the Federal Council. The president is elected for a one-year term of office and is regarded during that time as 'Primus inter pares', or first among equals.

[3] See Ordonnance 2 sur les mesures destinées à lutter contre le coronavirus (Covid-19) (Ordonnance 2 Covid-19), 13 mars 2020.

[4] See RO 2015 1435, *Loi fédérale sur la lutte contre les maladies transmissibles de l'homme (Loi sur les épidémies, LEp)*.

[5] See (Willi 2020) for details of the specific uncertain and experimental forms of governance of the pandemic adopted by the Swiss Federal Government and Cantonal autorities; and Mavrot and Sager 2023 for analysis of blame-avoidance and the fragmented crisis management in Switzerland.

[6] See for example *Décret no2020-293 du 23 mars 2020 prescrivant les mesures générales nécessaires pour faire face à l'épidémie de covid-19 dans le cadre de l'état d'urgence sanitaire*, as well as subsequent declarations.

[7] Wikipedia pages provide good tables summarizing the confusing number of changes in the rules and regulations on movement during the pandemic, for example https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pand%C3%A9mie_de_Covid-19_en_Suisse and https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pand%C3%A9mie_de_Covid-19_en_France.

[8] See *Accord entre le Conseil fédéral et le Gouvernement de la République Française concernant l'abornement et l'entretien de la frontière*. More generally, see also the *Ordonnance sur la mensuration officielle (OMO) du 18 novembre 1992* (État le 1er janvier 2024); and the *Ordonnance du DDPS sur la mensuration officielle (OMO-DDPS) du 24 août 2023* (État le 1er janvier 2024).

[9] For the latest French governmental structure, see https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/lhistoire-des-ministeres.

[10] See https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000763874?isSuggest=true.

[11] See https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/fga/2002/669/fr and https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000782255.

[12] See also https://www.geneve.ch/themes/culture/bibliotheques/interroge/reponses/le-foron-est-il-entierement-francais-ou-certaines-petites-portions-sur-territoire-suisse-semblent-indiquer-certaines-cartes.

[13] These include the *Fondation Re-Borne* set up as part of the celebrations marking the bicentenary of Geneva's entry into the Swiss Confederation. Its primary aim was to enable the restoration of the boundary markers on the national border of the canton of Geneva. It was financed entirely by donations, including a highly successful sponsorship project of individual border stones.

[14] See Chapter 3 for additional comments about research ethics.

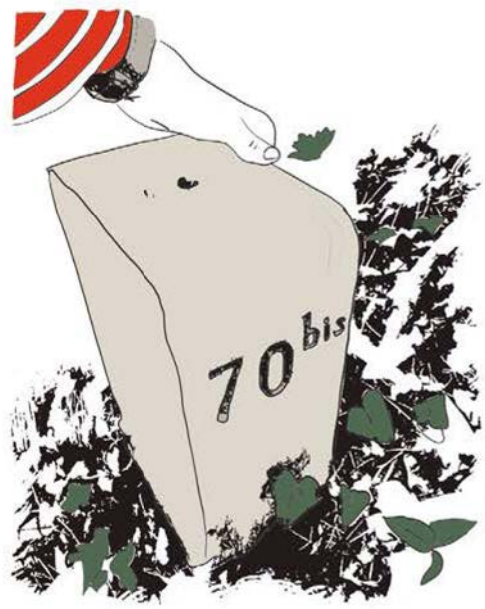
[15] The land border with the Canton de Vaud (Switzerland), including the enclave of Céligny, would be an added 18,2 km. The lake border of the Canton of Geneva with France is 3,5 km, and that with the Canton de Vaud is an additional 10,8 km https://ge.ch/sitg/donnees/chiffres-cles.

[16] Maps 1281; 1300 and 1301 published by the Office Fédéral de la Topographie (Swisstopo), showing footpaths, were invaluable.

[17] As of 1 January 2021, mid-way through this project, the *Commission de réflexion sur l'éthique de la recherche* of the Geneva School of Social Sciences, the Faculty I am attached to, was no longer authorised to evaluate projects. This assessment was centralised for the University of Geneva at the level of the CUREG (*Commission Universitaire pour une Recherche Éthique à Genève*, CUREG2.0). Although this project was not subject to this formalised process, it would change how research projects such as this could be carried out in future. I return to this point in Chapter 3 in a section on research ethics.

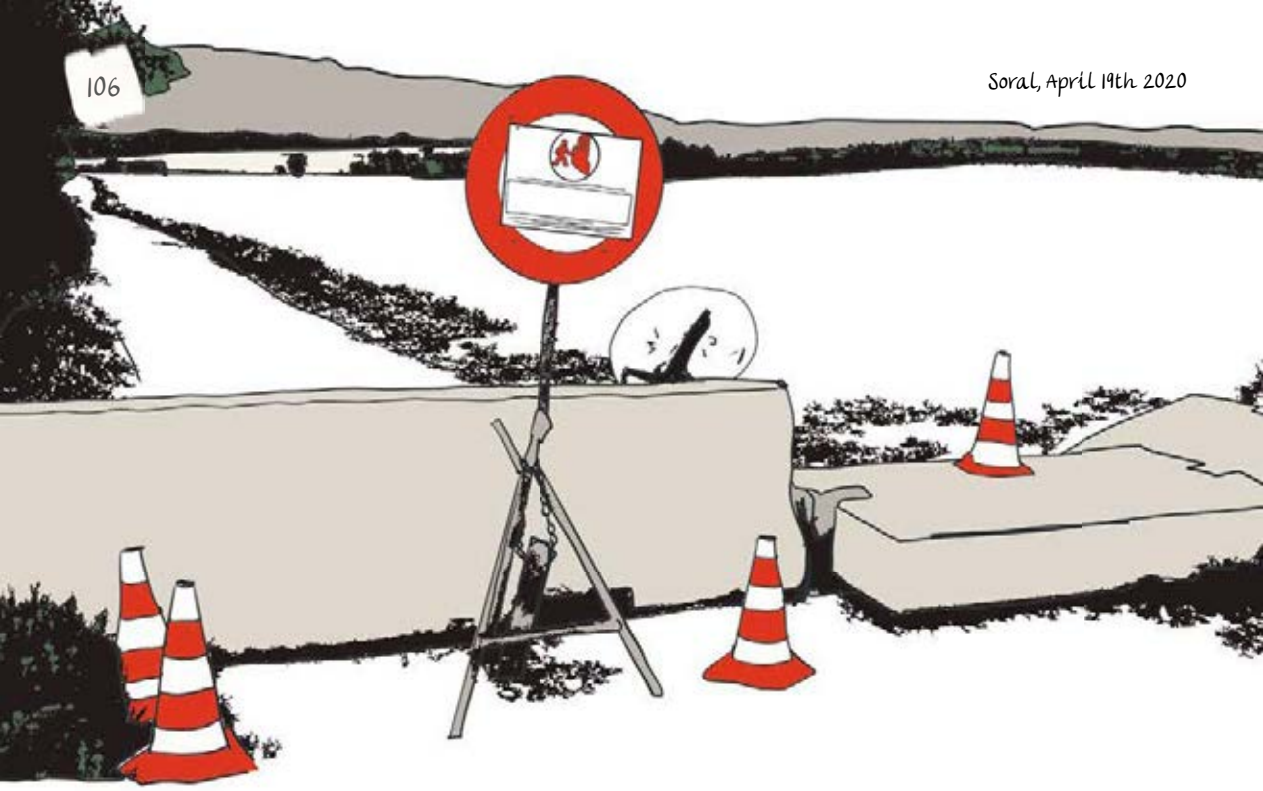
[18] Preliminary versions of the comic were presented as "Beating the Bounds", 9th International Ethnography and Qualitative Research Conference, Trento (Italy) June 2023; "Beating the bounds: visual political geographies for difficult times", Lecture des AK Politische Geographie, Deutscher Kongress für Geographie, Frankfurt (Germany), September 2023; "Auto-ethnographie en images dessinées: figurations visuelles de l'instance autoriale", Séminaire conjoint Département de géographie / IGEDT, Université de Genève (Switzerland), January 2024; as well as part of courses taught at the Università degli Studi di Cagliari (Italy) and the University of Geneva.

2. MAKING THE LINE



Bardonnex

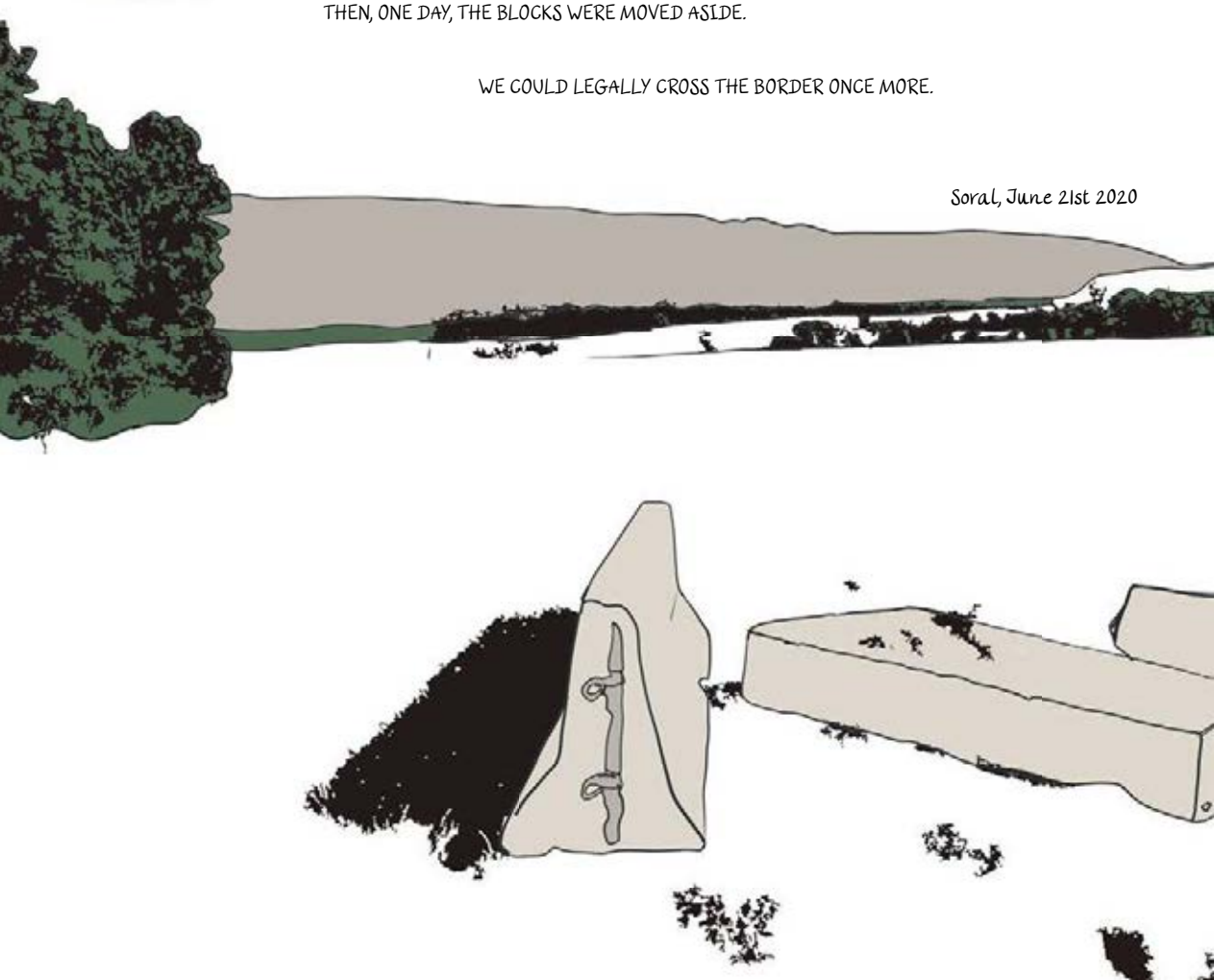
Soral, April 19th 2020

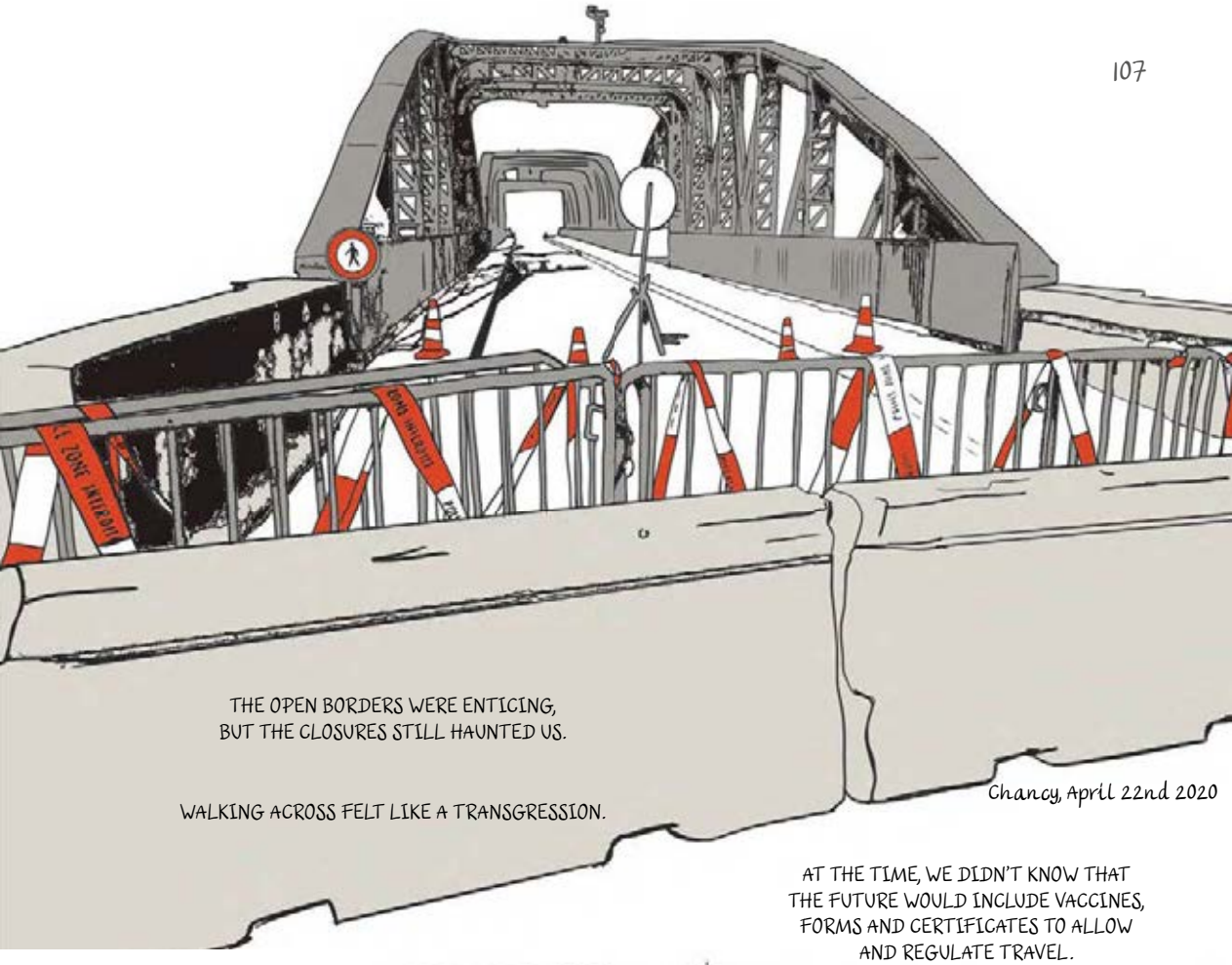


THEN, ONE DAY, THE BLOCKS WERE MOVED ASIDE.

WE COULD LEGALLY CROSS THE BORDER ONCE MORE.

Soral, June 21st 2020





THE OPEN BORDERS WERE ENTICING,
BUT THE CLOSURES STILL HAUNTED US.

WALKING ACROSS FELT LIKE A TRANSGRESSION.

Chancy, April 22nd 2020

AT THE TIME, WE DIDN'T KNOW THAT
THE FUTURE WOULD INCLUDE VACCINES,
FORMS AND CERTIFICATES TO ALLOW
AND REGULATE TRAVEL.

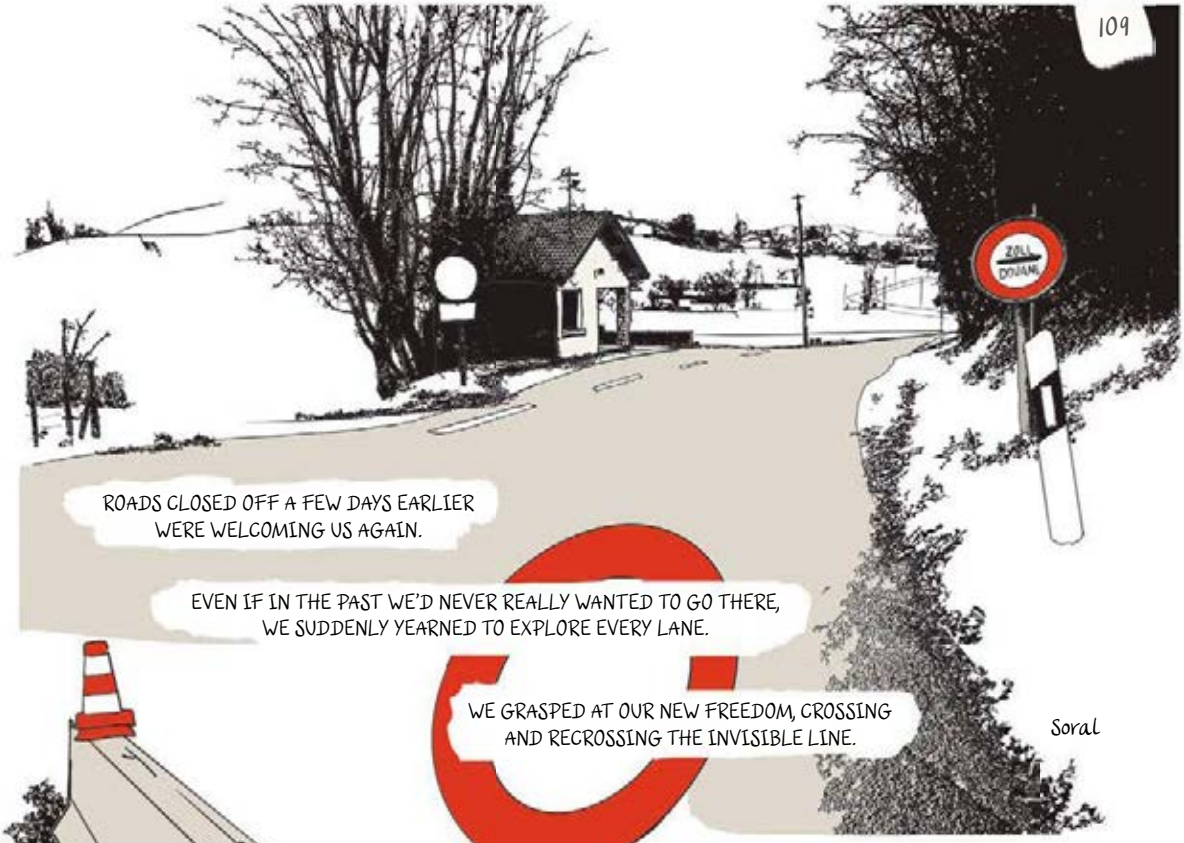
Chancy, June 23nd 2020



THE BLOCKS WERE PILED UP BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.

THEY LOOKED READY TO POUNCE AGAIN, REMINDING US THAT WE WEREN'T SAFE YET.

HAUNTING US AND ALMOST TEASING. I DIDN'T KNOW IF THEY WERE OLD FRIENDS OR NEW FOES.



ROADS CLOSED OFF A FEW DAYS EARLIER WERE WELCOMING US AGAIN.

EVEN IF IN THE PAST WE'D NEVER REALLY WANTED TO GO THERE, WE SUDDENLY YEARNED TO EXPLORE EVERY LANE.

WE GRASPED AT OUR NEW FREEDOM, CROSSING AND RECROSSING THE INVISIBLE LINE.

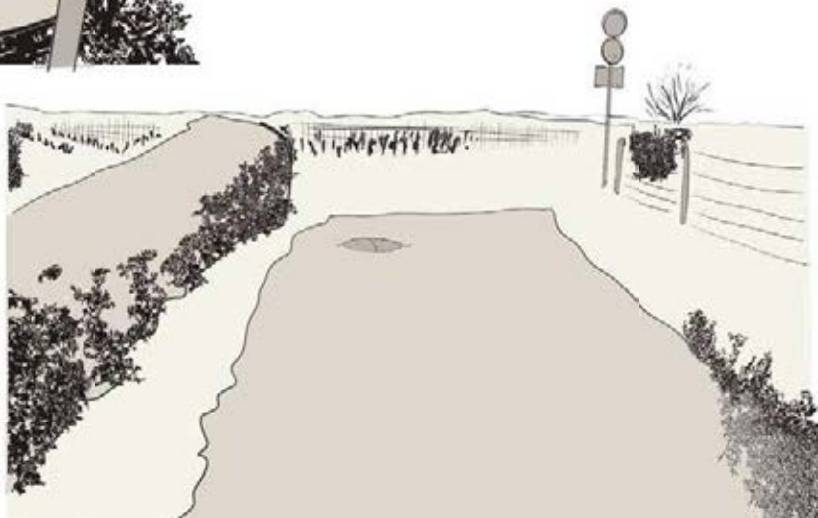
Soral



THE LANDSCAPE MIGHT BE OPEN TO US, BUT THE MEMORY OF THE CLOSED BORDER WAS EVERYWHERE.

I CYCLED ACROSS WITH A MIXTURE OF EXHILARATION AND FEAR. OUR WORLD HAD SHRUNK SO MUCH BUT IT HAD KEPT US FEELING ODDLY SAFE.

Soral



ROADS WERE OPEN AGAIN BUT THEIR OPENNESS NOW SEEMED ODDLY UNFAMILIAR.

Soral

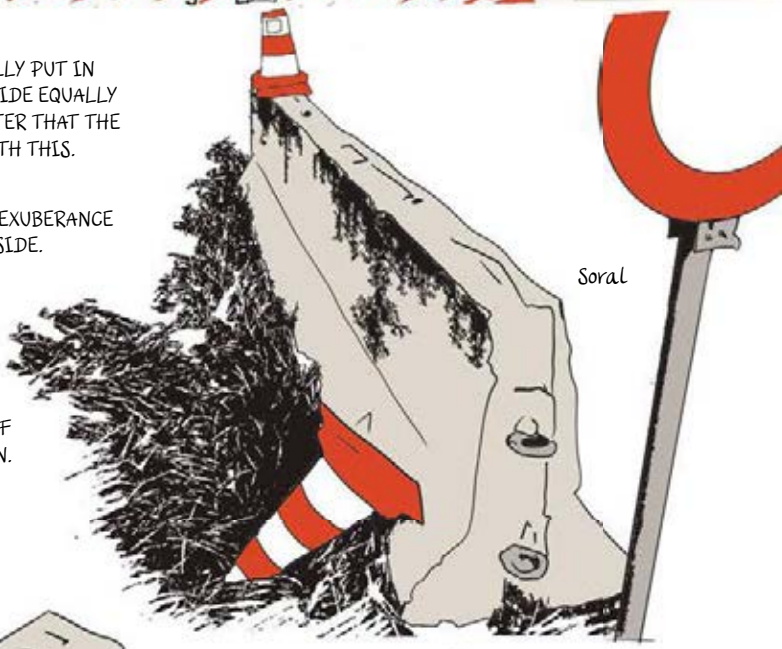
THE CEMENT VESTIGES OF THE FIRST GREAT PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN WERE LITTERED ALL AROUND THE CANTON OF GENEVA. I IMAGINED IT TO BE THE SAME AROUND OTHER SWISS BORDER CANTONS.



Soral, November 2020

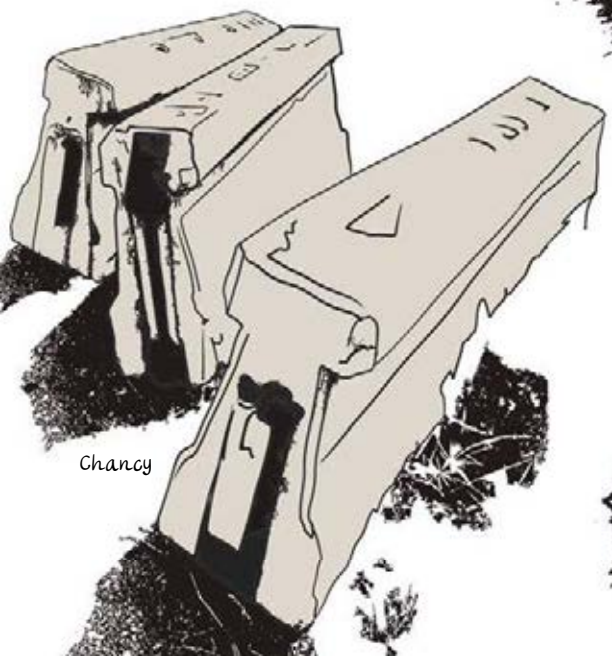
JUST AS THESE BLOCKS WERE ORIGINALLY PUT IN PLACE OVERNIGHT, THEY WERE MOVED ASIDE EQUALLY QUICKLY BY FORCES UNSEEN. I LEARNT LATER THAT THE GENDARMERIE HAD BEEN TASKED WITH THIS.

I FELT A STRANGE SENS OF BANAL EXUBERANCE AT SEEING THEM MOVED ASIDE.



Soral

THEY STOOD GUARD AT THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, ALL ACROSS THE CANTON. WAITING. WATCHING.



Chancy





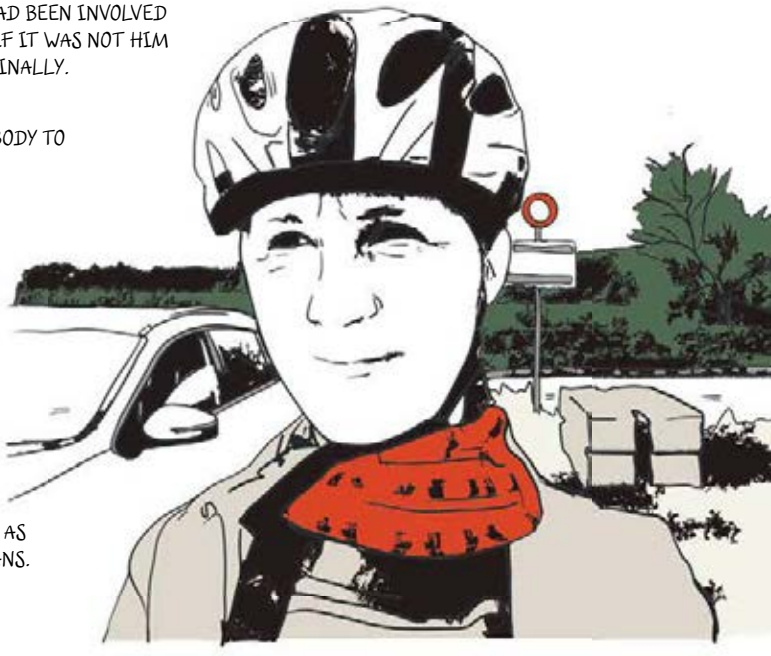
Soral, November 2nd 2020

ONE MORNING, AS I WENT BACK TO VISIT AN OPEN BORDER PASSAGE POINT CLOSE TO OUR HOME, I NOTICED A WHITE CAR AND A MAN WITH A TABLET.

HE TOLD ME THAT HE WAS LISTING AND MONITORING THE CEMENT BLOCKS THAT HAD BEEN MOVED ASIDE A FEW MONTHS EARLIER.

I WAS PLEASED TO TALK TO SOMEONE WHO HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN TRANSFORMING OUR LANDSCAPES, EVEN IF IT WAS NOT HIM WHO HAD LAID THEM DOWN ORIGINALLY.

IT PUT A FACE AND BODY TO THE STATE.



BUT THE LIST OF MATERIALS HE WAS MAKING TOLD A DEEPER STORY: SOMEONE NEEDED TO KNOW WHERE THEY WERE IN CASE THEY WERE NEEDED AGAIN.

COVID-19 CASES WERE ON THE RISE AGAIN.

THE BLOCKS CONTINUED TO SERVE AS BEACONS AND WATCHFUL GUARDIANS.

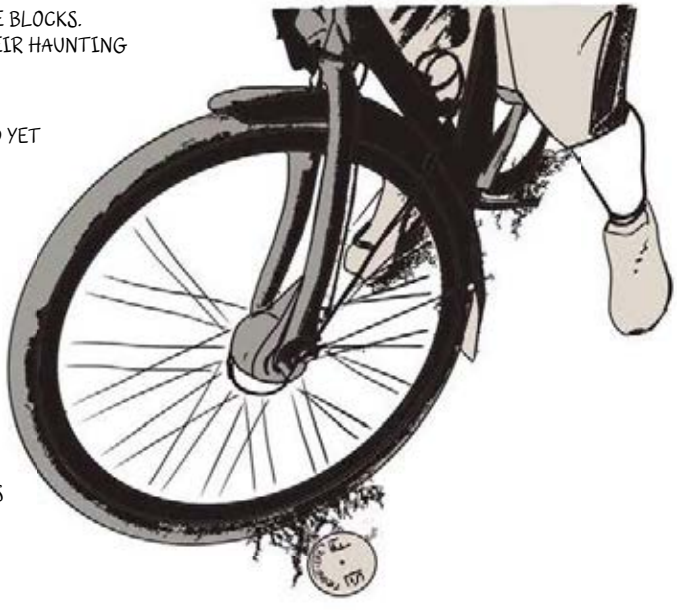


I HAD AN ODD RELATIONSHIP WITH THESE BLOCKS.
I CONTINUED TO TRACE AND PHOTOGRAPH THEIR HAUNTING PRESENCE.

I FOUND THEM ABSURD, TERRIFYING AND YET DEEPLY FASCINATING.

THEY KEPT POINTING TO OTHER INFRASTRUCTURES THAT CARVED OUT INVISIBLE LINES IN OUR LANDSCAPES.

THEY MIRRORED THE LONG-STANDING STATE PROJECT OF MAKING THE IMMATERIAL LINES SOMEHOW REAL.





Veyrier, border stone 88
One of the original
Treaty of Turin stones, slowly
sinking into the mud

UNLIKE THE TEMPORARY CEMENT BLOCKS PLACED ON THE SWISS SIDE OF THE BORDER, THE PRECISE BORDERLINE WAS MARKED BY LONG-STANDING STONE VIGILS.

BORDERS WERE DEFINED IN THE WORDS OF TREATIES, DELIMITED ON MAPS, AND SOMETIMES DEMARCATED ON THE GROUND, I REMEMBERED.

445 BORDER STONES WERE PLACED ALL AROUND THE CANTON, MARKING EVERY CHANGE OF DIRECTION OF THE LINE.



Dardagny, border stone 156
A carved eagle, hidden
in brambles, looking more like
a chicken

THIS EXTRAORDINARY STATE PROJECT CREATED A VISUAL AND MATERIAL ARCHIVE IN THE LANDSCAPE. EACH BLOCK TOLD A STORY, LAYING OUT A MATERIAL MEMORY OF THE LINE.



Collex,
border stone 25

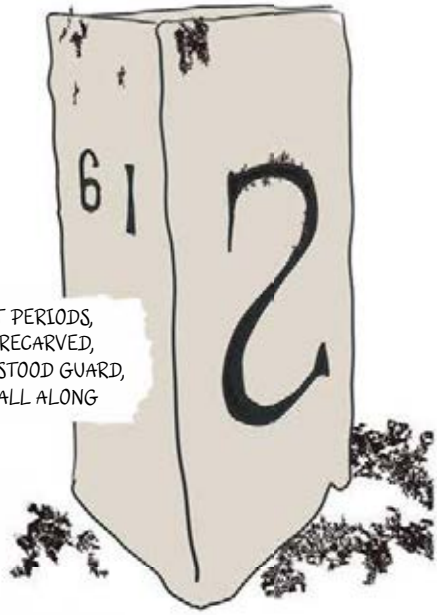
ANYONE COULD BEAT THE BOUNDS, HOPPING FROM STONE TO STONE, EVEN WITHOUT A MAP.

Perly, border stone 61
An "S" for "Savoie" carved
backwards and not corrected



NO LONGER IN USE AS THE OFFICIAL DEMARCATION SINCE DIGITIZATION TOOK OVER IN 2005, THEY WERE STILL MAINTAINED AS OBJECTS OF HERITAGE.

DATING FROM DIFFERENT PERIODS, SOMETIMES CARVED AND RECARVED, OCCASIONALLY MOVED, THEY STOOD GUARD, LIKE ODD STONE JANUSES ALL ALONG THE LINE.



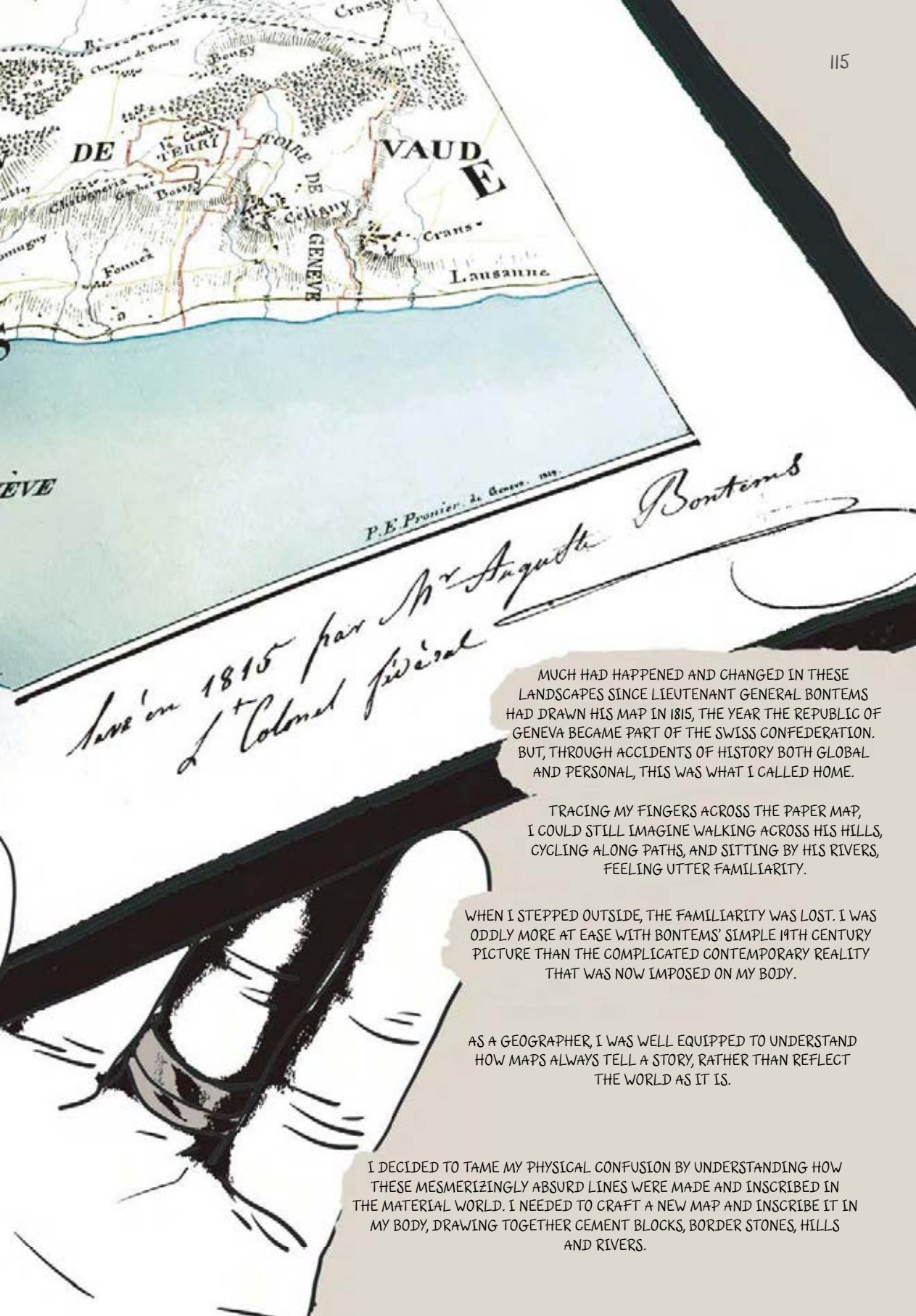
Croix-de-Rozon, border stone 70

THE STONES AND THE OLD MAPS, SAFE IN THE STATE ARCHIVES, MIGHT HAVE OFFERED REASSURANCE: THE BORDER LINES HAD BARELY MOVED IN A LITTLE MORE THAN 200 YEARS, EVEN IF THEIR EFFECTS HAD HUGELY CHANGED THROUGH THE CENTURIES.

BUT NO MAP NOR BORDER STONE COULD HELP US ORIENT OURSELVES IN OUR NEW REALITY.

AS WE CYCLED AROUND, IT WAS HELPFUL TO REMEMBER WHERE THESE IMAGINARY LINES CAME FROM: NOT NATURE BUT HUMAN HISTORY. CONSTRUCTED SLOWLY THROUGH TENTATIVE TALES OF HOME-MAKING THROUGH THE YEARS, SHAPED BY WARS, CONFLICT, NEGOTIATION AND HOPE. I'D BARELY EVER THOUGHT ABOUT THEIR BIOGRAPHIES.

Extract from a map of A.F. Bontems (1782–1864), drawn in 1815



MUCH HAD HAPPENED AND CHANGED IN THESE LANDSCAPES SINCE LIEUTENANT GENERAL BONTEMS HAD DRAWN HIS MAP IN 1815, THE YEAR THE REPUBLIC OF GENEVA BECAME PART OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION. BUT, THROUGH ACCIDENTS OF HISTORY BOTH GLOBAL AND PERSONAL, THIS WAS WHAT I CALLED HOME.

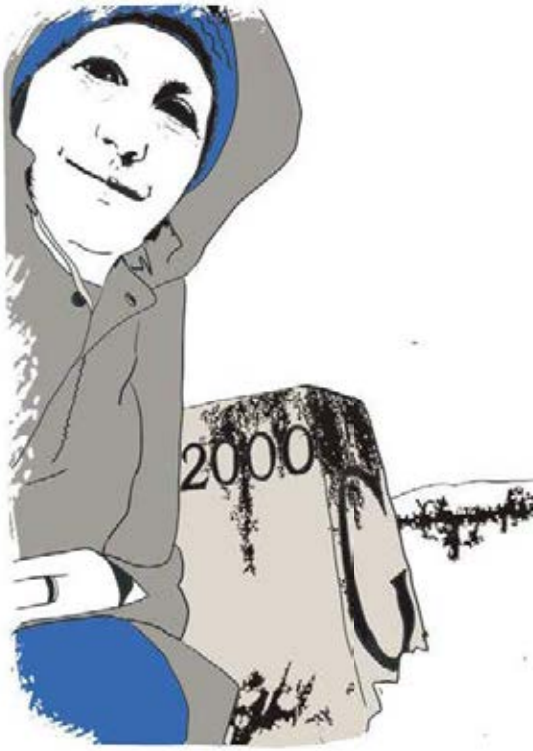
TRACING MY FINGERS ACROSS THE PAPER MAP, I COULD STILL IMAGINE WALKING ACROSS HIS HILLS, CYCLING ALONG PATHS, AND SITTING BY HIS RIVERS, FEELING UTTER FAMILIARITY.

WHEN I STEPPED OUTSIDE, THE FAMILIARITY WAS LOST. I WAS ODDLY MORE AT EASE WITH BONTEMS' SIMPLE 19TH CENTURY PICTURE THAN THE COMPLICATED CONTEMPORARY REALITY THAT WAS NOW IMPOSED ON MY BODY.

AS A GEOGRAPHER, I WAS WELL EQUIPPED TO UNDERSTAND HOW MAPS ALWAYS TELL A STORY, RATHER THAN REFLECT THE WORLD AS IT IS.

I DECIDED TO TAME MY PHYSICAL CONFUSION BY UNDERSTANDING HOW THESE MESMERIZINGLY ABSURD LINES WERE MADE AND INSCRIBED IN THE MATERIAL WORLD. I NEEDED TO CRAFT A NEW MAP AND INSCRIBE IT IN MY BODY, DRAWING TOGETHER CEMENT BLOCKS, BORDER STONES, HILLS AND RIVERS.

PERHAPS THE OLD STONES HELD THE ANSWER, STRUNG OUT ALONG THE BORDERLINE? AFTER ALL, THEY HAD BEEN THERE LONGER THAN THE COVID CEMENT BLOCKS.



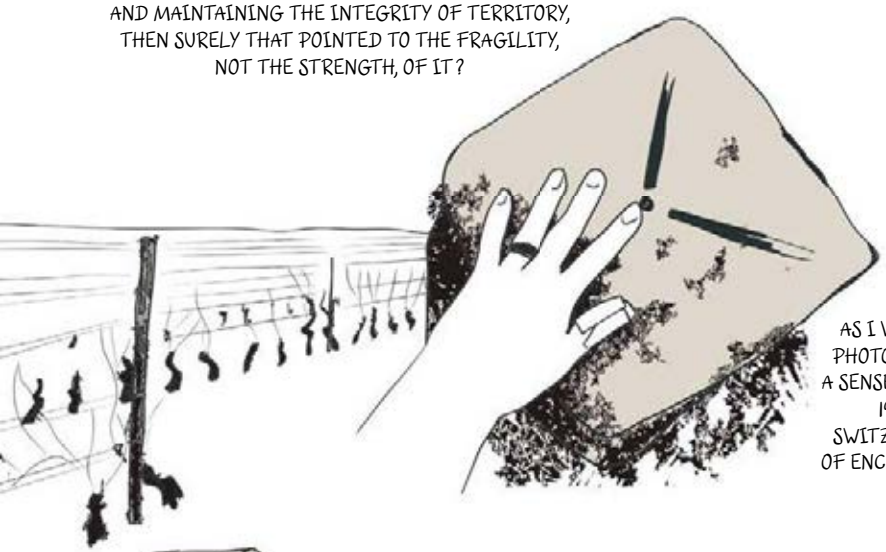
Soral

IN A RATHER HAPHAZARD WAY, IN OUR NEWLY-OPENED LANDSCAPES, I STARTED FOLLOWING THE BORDERLINE, FROM STONE TO STONE, IN A SERIES OF WALKS ALONE OR WITH MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY.

I WASN'T LOOKING FOR ANY TERRITORIAL TRUTHS, OR INESCAPABLE HISTORICAL GROUNDING, BUT RATHER JUST TRYING TO MAKE SENSE, SLOWLY, STEP BY STEP, OF WHY AND HOW HUMANS CARVED OUT BELONGING IN A LANDSCAPE.

A WANDERING GEOGRAPHER.

IF STATES NEEDED TO INVEST SO MUCH IN CLAIMING AND MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF TERRITORY, THEN SURELY THAT POINTED TO THE FRAGILITY, NOT THE STRENGTH, OF IT?



AS I WALKED, FINDING, TOUCHING AND PHOTOGRAPHING EACH STONE, I GAINED A SENSE OF THE SINGLE LINE, STRETCHING 1935 km AROUND THE STATE OF SWITZERLAND – GIVE OR TAKE A COUPLE OF ENCLAVES – JOINING US TO FIVE OTHER COUNTRIES.



Soral

IF I WANTED TO FOLLOW IT AS IT PASSED AROUND THE CANTON OF GENEVA, I WOULD HAVE TO PASS THROUGH ALL SORTS OF INACCESSIBLE PLOTS, FORESTS, RIVER BANKS, PRIVATE GARDENS, AND DEAD ENDS.

A MINI-ADVENTURE ON THE DOORSTEP.

THIS BECAME SOMETHING OF A SHARED PROJECT, WITH VARYING FAMILY MEMBERS. THEN, PROGRESSIVELY, JUST TWO OF US, AS THE NOVELTY WORE OFF.

Dardagny, border stone 177

AS OUR WALK PROGRESSED, WEEK BY WEEK, STRETCH BY STRETCH, THE COVID BLOCKS THAT HAD TRIED TO SEAL THE BORDER IN AN ABSURD BUT POIGNANT PERFORMANCE STARTED TO CRUMBLE.

Dardagny, border stone 168

THEY STILL HAUNTED OUR LANDSCAPES BEYOND THE ACUTE PHASE OF THE CRISIS.

WERE THEY THERE IN STAND-BY, WAITING TO POUNCE AGAIN, OR ONLY AS FAITHFUL BUT FORGOTTEN GHOSTS SLOWLY TAKING ROOT?



Collex, border stone 39

OUR RULES WERE SIMPLE: WALK THE LENGTH OF THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE LINE, IN A SERIES OF CIRCULAR RAMBLES.

FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS, WHENEVER WE FELT LIKE IT, WE WOULD SET OFF, OFTEN PICKING UP WHERE WE HAD LAST STOPPED. AT OTHER TIMES, WE JUST CHOSE SECTIONS ON THE MAP TO SUIT THE WEATHER, OUR ENERGY LEVELS OR FREE TIME.

WE SOON LEARNT TO CROSS FIELDS WHEN HARVESTS WERE DONE, OR WHEN THE GROUND WAS FULLY FROZEN. TO AVOID RIVER BANKS WHEN RAIN HAD BEEN FALLING. TO PICK URBAN AREAS WHEN WE JUST WANTED A SHORT EXCURSION, SPENT MOSTLY TRYING TO GET ROUND OBSTACLES, NOT FITNESS WALKING.

WE OFTEN SPENT AS MUCH TIME HUNTING DOWN BORDER STONES IN UNLIKELY PLACES, SEARCHING IN BRAMBLES AND HEDGES, AS ACTUALLY WALKING.



I PHOTOGRAPHED EVERYTHING OBSESSIVELY, SHARING THE STAGES IN SHORT POSTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, CREATING AND SHARING A VISUAL JOURNAL OF OUR WALKS.

WRITING UP EACH STRETCH WAS A WAY OF KEEPING A JOURNAL, ATTACHING WORDS TO IMAGES, AND MAKING SLOW SENSE OF THE POETIC ABSURDITY OF BORDERS.

INITIALLY, AS DURING OUR LOCKDOWN BIKE TOURS, WE USED PAPER MAPS.



WE HAD A GUIDEBOOK THAT SUGGESTED SOME WALKS ALONG THE BORDER, SPECIFICALLY LISTING BORDER STONES. WE CARRIED IT, BUT OFTEN IGNORED IT. THERE WAS SO MUCH TO OBSERVE AND EXPERIENCE, THAT THE PAGES SOMEHOW GOT IN THE WAY.

ONCE WE UPDATED OUR PHONES AND DEVICES, REPLACING PREPAID PHONES WITH MOBILE DATA PLANS, WE USED THEM TO LOCATE HARD-TO-FIND BORDER STONES, RELYING ON A FREE APP MADE BY THE SWISS FEDERAL OFFICE OF TOPOGRAPHY.

THE FRENCH EQUIVALENT WAS OFTEN LESS ACCURATE IN THESE MARGINAL PLACES.

WE GOT LESS LOST AS A RESULT. BUT PERHAPS WE ALSO STARED MORE AT OUR SCREENS, AND LESS AT CLUES IN THE LANDSCAPE?

ALL THESE OBJECTS AUGMENTED OUR SENSES, HELPING US DETECT WHAT OUR EYES OR BODIES COULD NOT INTUIT. WE WALKED WITH OUR TECHNOLOGICAL COMPANIONS, LIKE WANDERING CYBORGS.



Bossy, border stone 16

THE WALK BECAME A WAY OF MAKING THE TERRITORY REAL, INSCRIBING THE PAST AND PRESENT IN OUR RAMBLING BODIES. IT TOOK US TO SO MANY NEW PLACES, WITH AND WITHOUT PATHS.





WE BECAME ATTUNED TO SPOTTING INDIRECT SIGNS OF THE BORDER: ELECTRICITY PYLONS AND ROADS SKIRTING THE BORDER ON THE FRENCH SIDE; SIGNS FOR GAS PIPELINES LAID WITHIN SWITZERLAND; SLIGHT CHANGES IN TARMAC OR ROAD PAINT.

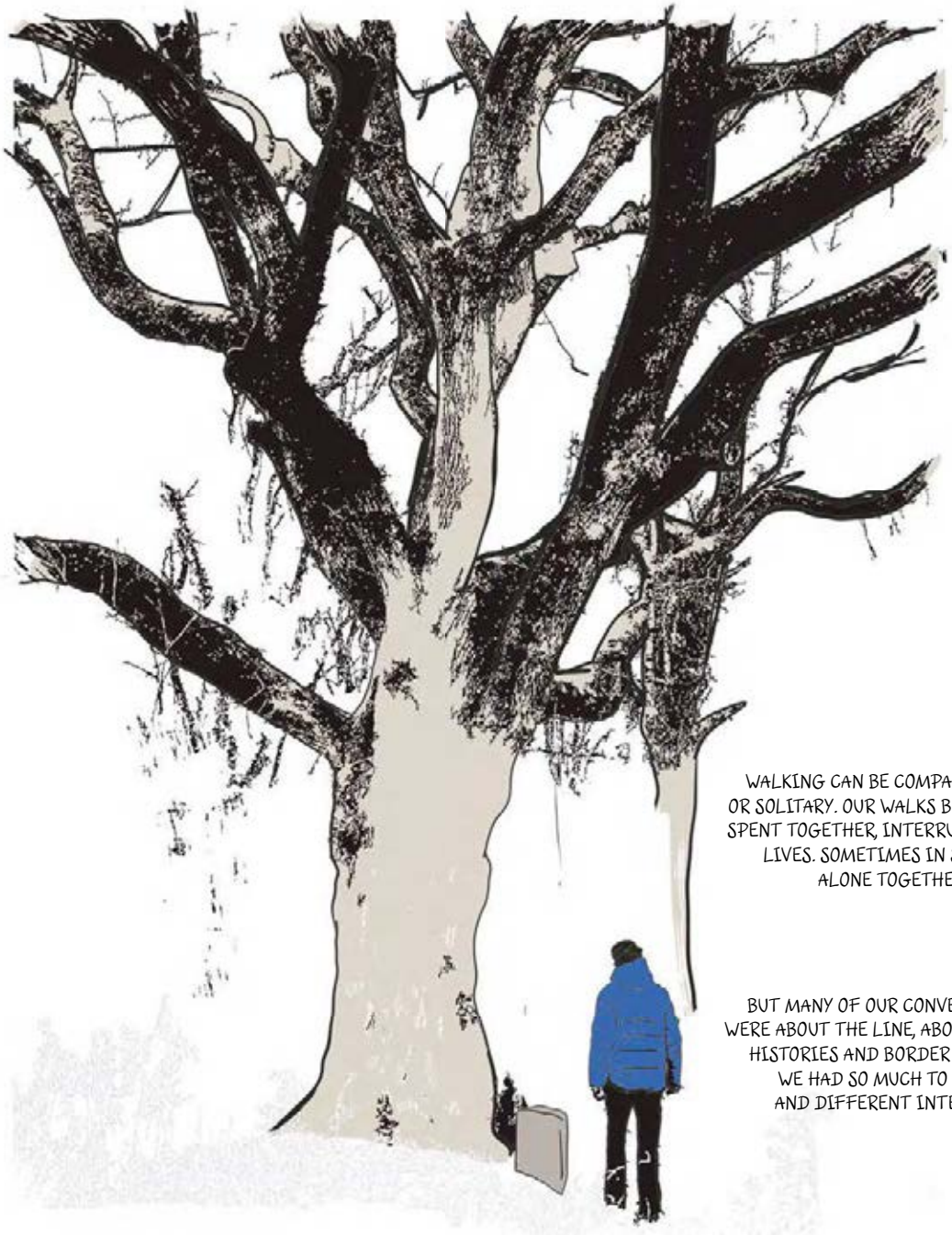
EACH STRETCH WAS INVESTED WITH OUR OWN MEMORIES, AS OUR ZIG-ZAGGING FOOTSTEPS IN THE SNOW OR THE MUD BECAME JUST ONE MORE SIGN OF WHERE THE LINE LAY.

WHEN THE BORDER FOLLOWED RIVERS, STREAMS OR DITCHES, WE DEBATED ON WHICH BANK TO WALK. OFTEN WE CHOSE NOT TO GET STUCK, AND FIXED OUR ROUTE TO ALLOW US TO GET EFFICIENTLY BACK TO OUR STARTING POINT.

THOSE DAYS, GENEVA FELT LIKE AN ISLAND, SURROUNDED BY WATER. WE TRIED NOT TO GET SHIPWRECKED.



Collex, border stone 37



WALKING CAN BE COMPANIONABLE. OR SOLITARY. OUR WALKS BECAME TIME SPENT TOGETHER, INTERRUPTING BUSY LIVES. SOMETIMES IN SILENCE, ALONE TOGETHER.

BUT MANY OF OUR CONVERSATIONS WERE ABOUT THE LINE, ABOUT THE DEEP HISTORIES AND BORDER CHANGES. WE HAD SO MUCH TO LEARN, AND DIFFERENT INTERESTS.

THE BORDER STONES OFFERED CLUES. DATES. FLAGS. CHANGING BELONGING AND LOST KINGDOMS, REPUBLICS AND EMPIRES.

TREES, HOUSES, BRIDGES, BUT ALSO THE GHOSTS OF PATHS, BRIDGES, SPRINGS AND ROADS POINTED TO MOBILE, SHIFTING TERRITORIES.

ABANDONED BORDER POSTS, BURIED STONES, SAWN OFF POSTS AND SEALED GATES.

I NEEDED TO DRAW MY OWN MAPS TO TAME THE GHOSTS WE HAD ENCOUNTERED.

THE GEOPOLITICAL TALES OF STATE METAMORPHOSIS WERE INSCRIBED IN THE OLD MAPS AND FADED MANUSCRIPTS HOUSED IN THE NONDESCRIPT BASEMENT OF AN ANNEXE TO THE MAIN CANTONAL ARCHIVES.

A LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION FROM THE DIRECTOR ALLOWED ME AN AFTERNOON GAZING AT ORIGINAL MAPS AND TREATIES.







SOME OF THESE WERE SCANNED AND AVAILABLE ONLINE. BUT, TO ME, THERE WAS ADDED EXCITEMENT TO SITTING DOWN, ORDERING THE BOXES AND ENVELOPES, AND WAITING THE REQUIRED TIME FOR THEM TO APPEAR IN A MUSTY BASEMENT.



BEAUTIFULLY PRESERVED IN CUSTOM-MADE BOXES, WITH PARCHMENT-PAPER LABELS ALMOST TOO FADED TO READ, THEY CONTAINED EMERGING SHARED WORLDS.

MULTITUDES OF PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS HAD WORKED TO CONSTRUCT AND PRESERVE THESE GEOGRAPHICAL MEMORIES: FROM SURVEYORS, TO MAP-ARTISTS, PARCHMENT-MAKERS, INK PRODUCERS, TO CIVIL SERVANTS WHO DILIGENTLY PRESERVED, CATALOGUED AND RETRIEVED THE PRECIOUS SHEETS WITHIN STATE ARCHIVES AND DUSTY BASEMENTS THAT CLAIMED TO CONTAIN TRUTHS ABOUT TERRITORY.

SITUATION FROM 1601 TO 1748

(Franche-Comté became French in 1678)

FRANCE

SWISS CANTONS

Rolle

Nyon

Divonne

Gex

Thonon

Douvaine

Nyon

St Genis

Genève

Annemasse

SAVOIE

St Julien

Cruseilles

I STARTED SORTING OUT THE LAYERS OF THE PAST ON PAPER, CONNECTING IT TO OUR WALKS.

Slight changes took place from 1748, during Geneva's Siècle des Lumières, until the substantial border modifications brought about by the French Revolution in 1789. Geneva's territory shown in red.



Dardagny, border stone 156 dated from 1752

Morges

Rolle

Nyon

Evian

Divonne

Gex

Thonon

Douvaine

Ferney

St Genis

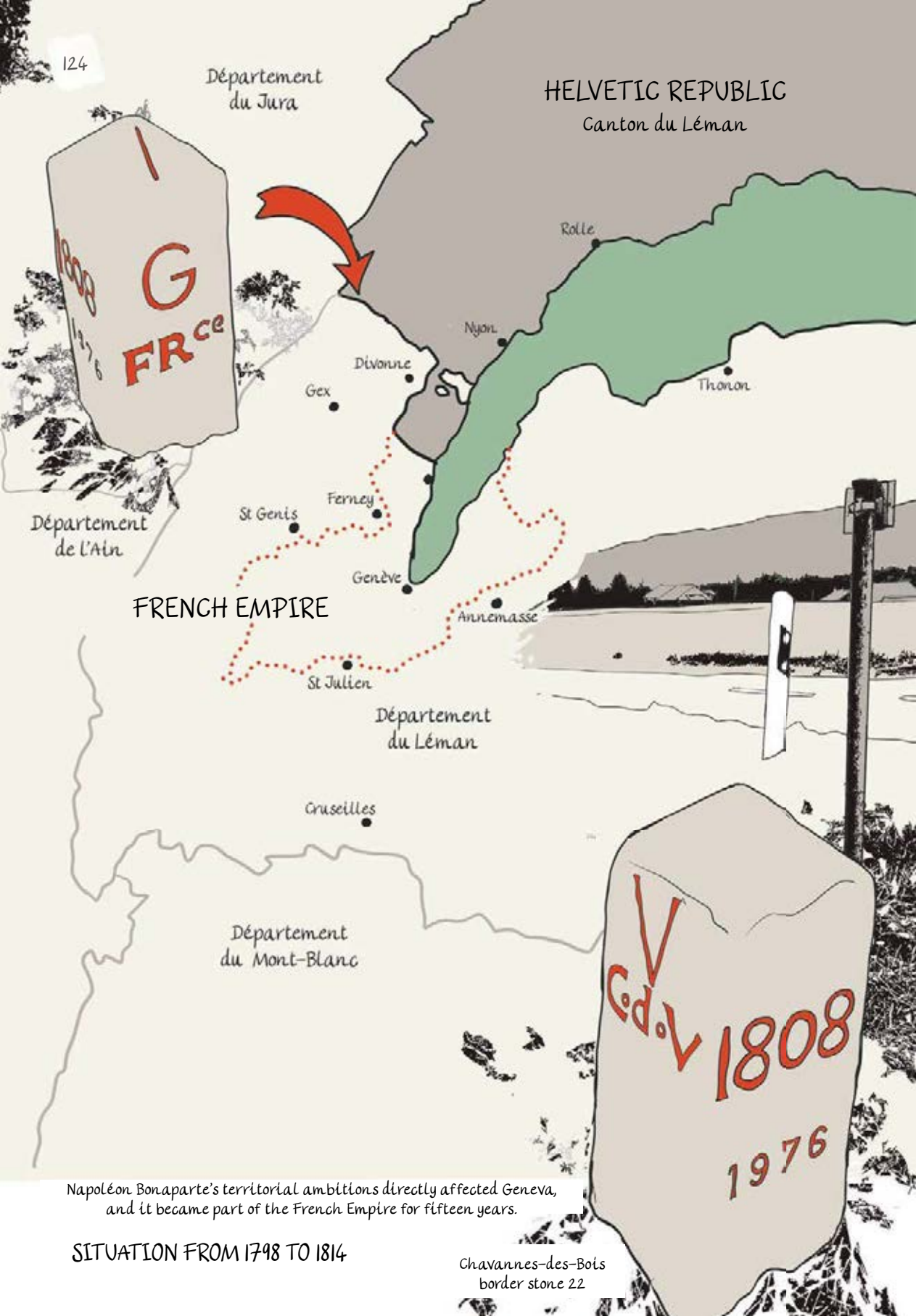
FRENCH REPUBLIC

SITUATION FROM 1793 TO 1798

Genève

Annemasse

St Julien



Napoléon Bonaparte's territorial ambitions directly affected Geneva, and it became part of the French Empire for fifteen years.

SITUATION FROM 1798 TO 1814

Chavannes-des-Bois
border stone 22



Geneva Old City

AS NAPOLEON'S TERRITORIAL CONQUESTS WERE PUSHED BACK IN 1813, THROUGH HIS ARMIES' DEFEAT IN RUSSIA AND ELSEWHERE, AUSTRIAN TROOPS ADVANCED ON GENEVA.

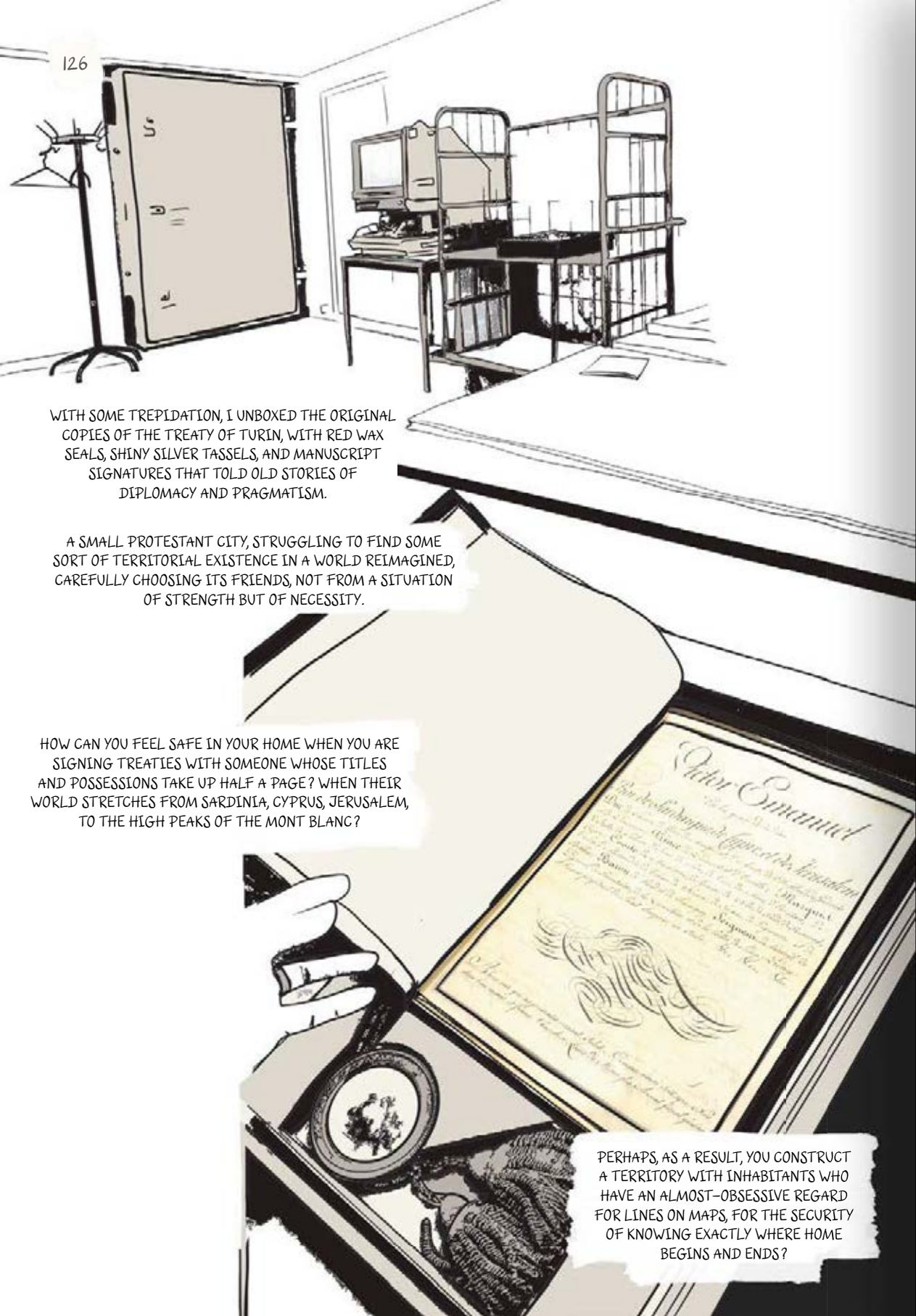
THE MAPS TOLD OF TWO YEARS OF HIGH INTENSITY, AS GENEVA WAS FACED WITH HAVING TO CHOOSE WITH WHOM TO JOIN FORCES. ROYALISTS, CLERGYMEN, REVOLUTIONARIES, AND GREAT POWERS FOUGHT OVER THE SPOILS OF IMPERIALIST WARS.



PICTET DE ROCHEMONT, A MEMBER OF THE LOCAL GENEVAN "CONSEIL PROVISOIRE" WAS SENT TO PARIS, THEN SAVOIE, TO NEGOTIATE.



DIFFERENT TERRITORIAL SCENARIOS EMERGED, SLOWLY BUILDING A NEAR-CONTIGUOUS TERRITORY THAT ENDED UP TYING ITS DESTINY NOT TO NEIGHBOURING GREAT POWERS BUT TO THE NEUTRAL SWISS CANTONS.


WITH SOME TREPIDATION, I UNBOXED THE ORIGINAL COPIES OF THE TREATY OF TURIN, WITH RED WAX SEALS, SHINY SILVER TASSELS, AND MANUSCRIPT SIGNATURES THAT TOLD OLD STORIES OF DIPLOMACY AND PRAGMATISM.
A SMALL PROTESTANT CITY, STRUGGLING TO FIND SOME SORT OF TERRITORIAL EXISTENCE IN A WORLD REIMAGINED, CAREFULLY CHOOSING ITS FRIENDS, NOT FROM A SITUATION OF STRENGTH BUT OF NECESSITY.
HOW CAN YOU FEEL SAFE IN YOUR HOME WHEN YOU ARE SIGNING TREATIES WITH SOMEONE WHOSE TITLES AND POSSESSIONS TAKE UP HALF A PAGE? WHEN THEIR WORLD STRETCHES FROM SARDINIA, CYPRUS, JERUSALEM, TO THE HIGH PEAKS OF THE MONT BLANC?
PERHAPS, AS A RESULT, YOU CONSTRUCT A TERRITORY WITH INHABITANTS WHO HAVE AN ALMOST-OBSESSIVE REGARD FOR LINES ON MAPS, FOR THE SECURITY OF KNOWING EXACTLY WHERE HOME BEGINS AND ENDS?

SITUATION FROM 1816

THE TREATY GAZED AT TOLD HALF THE STORY.

THE TREATIES OF PARIS (1814 & 1815) AND TURIN (1816) FIXED THE BORDERS OF THE NEWLY-CREATED CANTON OF GENEVA, AS PART OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION.

HELVETIC CONFEDERATION

Canton de Vaud

Nyon

Divonne

Gex

KINGDOM OF FRANCE

Douvaine

Versoix

Ferney

St Genis

Genève

Canton de Genève

St Julien-en-Genevois

KINGDOM OF SARDINIA

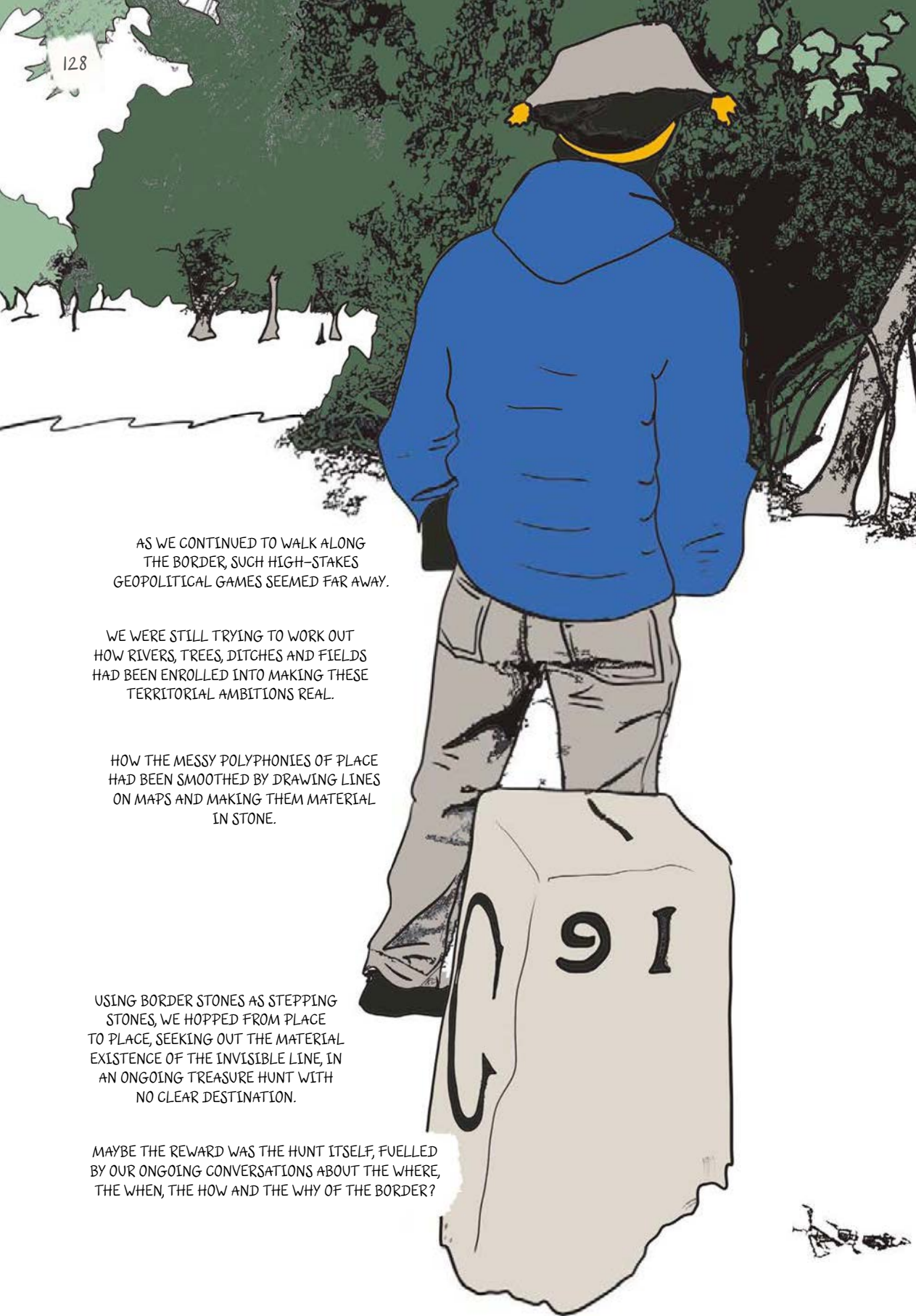
DESPITE A BACKDROP OF EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS, THE STATE BORDERS REMAINED LARGELY UNCHANGED FROM THEN ON.

IN 1847, CIVIL WAR BROKE OUT BETWEEN SWISS PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC CANTONS. A NEW CONSTITUTION RATIFIED IN 1848 BROUGHT LASTING INTERNAL PEACE.

IN 1860, SAVOIE WAS ANNEXED BY FRANCE. THE SWISS FAILED IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO OBTAIN MORE TERRITORY, HAVING TO BE CONTENT WITH VARIOUS DUTY-FREE ZONES.



National Monument, Jardin Anglais, Geneva



AS WE CONTINUED TO WALK ALONG THE BORDER, SUCH HIGH-STAKES GEOPOLITICAL GAMES SEEMED FAR AWAY.

WE WERE STILL TRYING TO WORK OUT HOW RIVERS, TREES, DITCHES AND FIELDS HAD BEEN ENROLLED INTO MAKING THESE TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS REAL.

HOW THE MESSY POLYPHONIES OF PLACE HAD BEEN SMOOTHED BY DRAWING LINES ON MAPS AND MAKING THEM MATERIAL IN STONE.

USING BORDER STONES AS STEPPING STONES, WE HOPPED FROM PLACE TO PLACE, SEEKING OUT THE MATERIAL EXISTENCE OF THE INVISIBLE LINE, IN AN ONGOING TREASURE HUNT WITH NO CLEAR DESTINATION.

MAYBE THE REWARD WAS THE HUNT ITSELF, FUELLED BY OUR ONGOING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE WHERE, THE WHEN, THE HOW AND THE WHY OF THE BORDER?



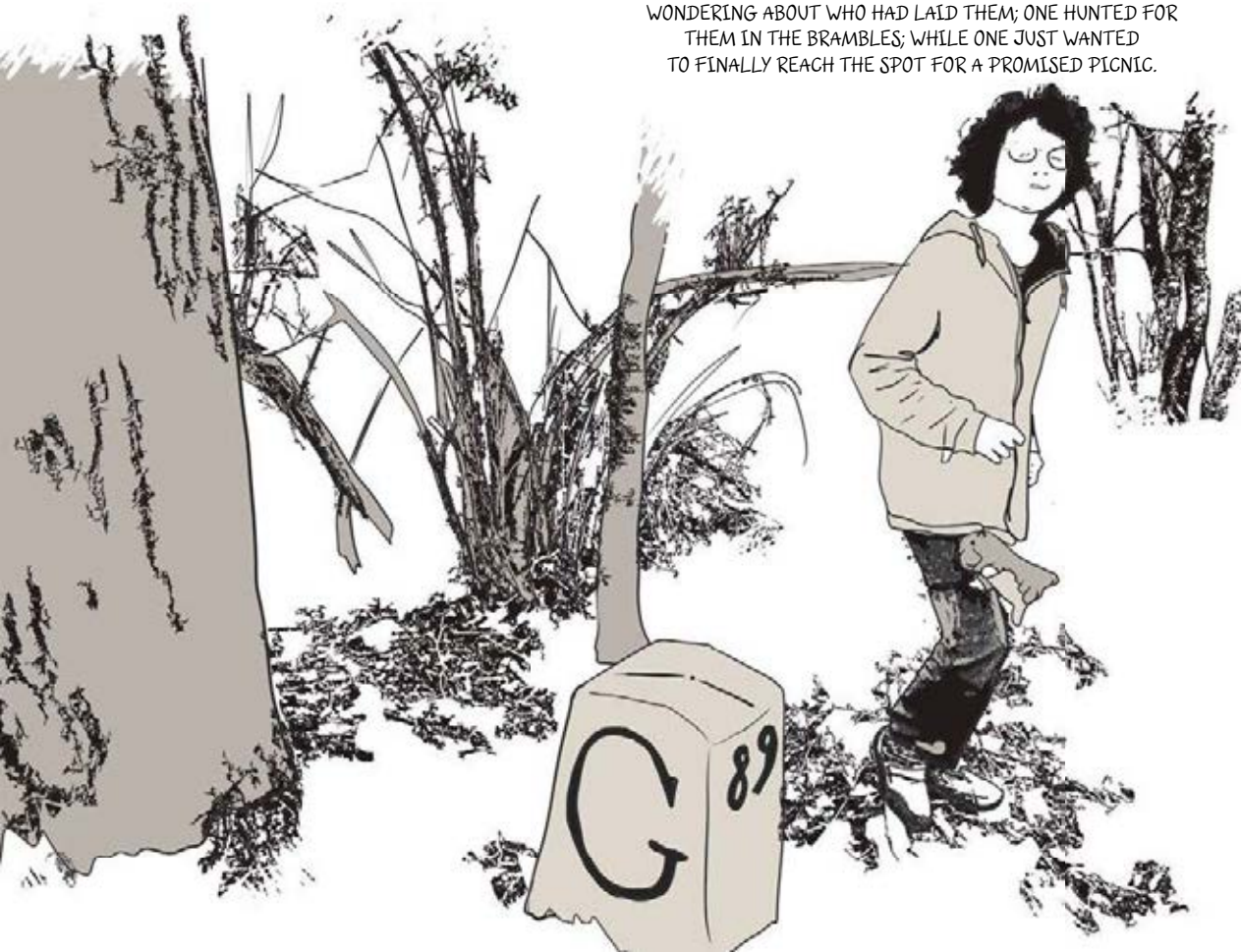
EACH WALK PRODUCED MORE TALES
TO TELL AND RAISED MORE QUESTIONS.

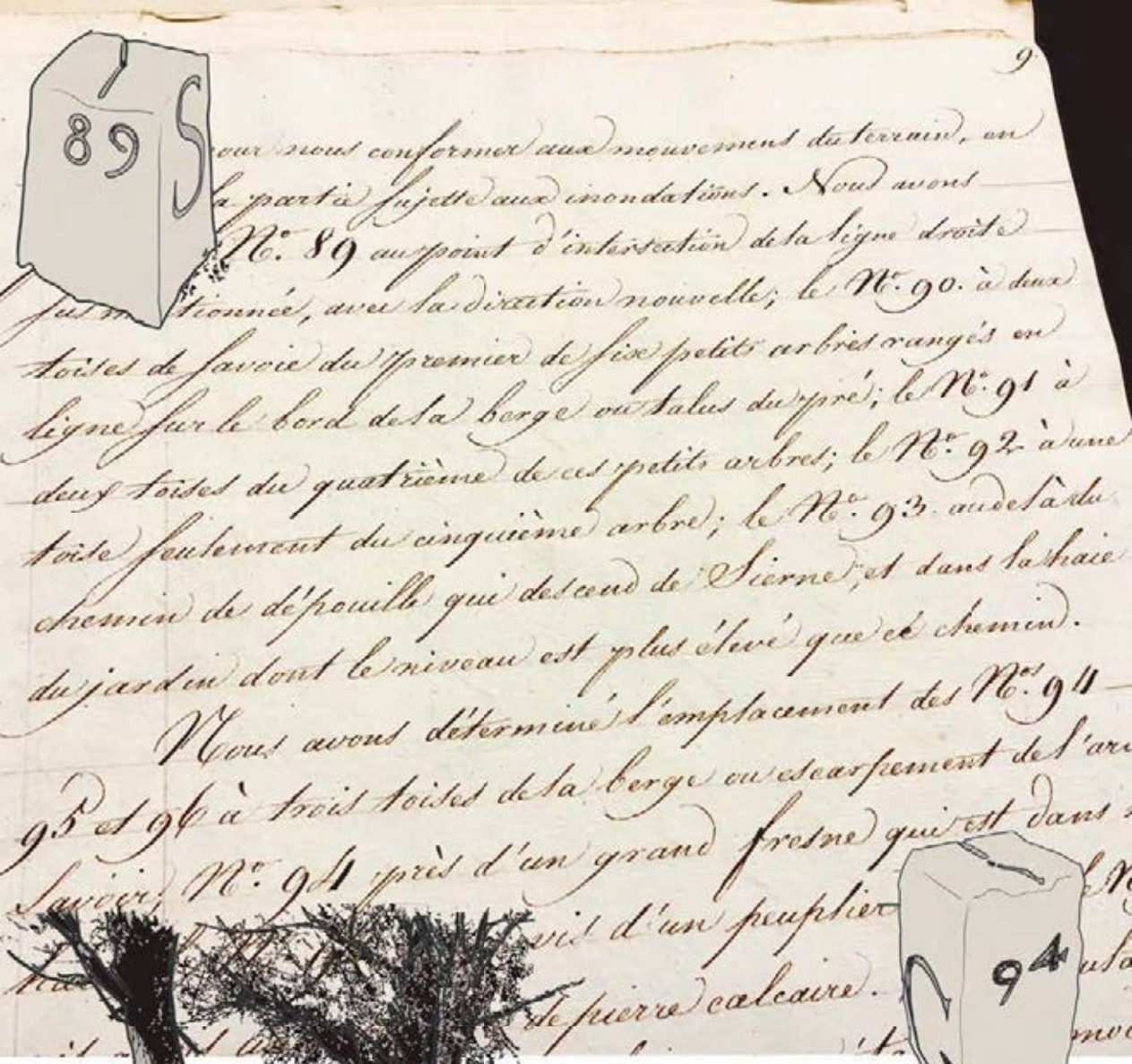
PARTICIPANTS CHANGED, AND WITH
THEM RYTHMS AND DYNAMICS.

EACH OF US HAD DIFFERENT CONCERNS AND INTERESTS.
WALKING TOGETHER BROUGHT FORTH DISTINCT
PERSPECTIVES ON THE INFRASTRUCTURE STRETCHING
ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE.



ONE PUZZLED OVER THE LOCATIONS OF THE STONES,
WONDERING ABOUT WHO HAD LAID THEM; ONE HUNTED FOR
THEM IN THE BRAMBLES; WHILE ONE JUST WANTED
TO FINALLY REACH THE SPOT FOR A PROMISED PICNIC.





ON THE 16TH MARCH 1816, A TEAM OF MEN HAD WALKED THE SAME LINE, LAYING THE STONES, MAKING SMALL ADJUSTMENTS ON THE GROUND TO FIT THE TEXTUAL DELIMITATION IN THE TREATY OF TURIN TO THE REALITY ON THE GROUND.

I ONLY FOUND THIS DOCUMENT IN THE STATE ARCHIVES MONTHS AFTER WE'D STARTED OUR WALK.

IT ANSWERED SO MANY OF OUR QUESTIONS, EXPLAINED THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF A LINE THAT COULD ONLY MAKE SENSE IN RELATION TO MATERIAL ELEMENTS NOW LOST.

GHOST TERRITORIES.



FAR FROM THE COSY SALONS OF THE CENTRES OF POWER, BORDERS WERE MADE ON THE GROUND BY MEN ARMED WITH MEASURING TOOLS, A DOSE OF PRAGMATISM, SOME LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, AND SOLID SHOES.

"1. As the bed of the Arve has changed since the topographical plan was drawn up to serve as a guide for the plenipotentiaries responsible for the Treaty of Turin, it follows that the straight line between the two above-mentioned points reaches the Arve seventy-four toises higher than the water intake of the mill and then leaves the bed of the river near the point indicated.
2. In a space of seventy toises, this straight line passes through low-lying land, flooded every year, and often several times, by the waters of the Arve, up to a height of three feet, according to the report of inhabitants of Sierne and Veirier.
3. From the appearance of the locality alone, and according to the spirit of the Treaty of Turin, which favours the mutual convenience of the two governments and ease of communication, it is obvious that this delimitation has been determined in such a way as to leave open the possibility of building a bridge or a track on this point, which is the only suitable one, because the river is sufficiently contained in its course (...)."
(Procès-verbal de Délimitation entre les États de S.M. Le Roi de Sardaigne et le Canton de Genève, 1819)

FOLLOWING THE WALK, AND THE DRAFTING OF THE TEXT, MAP-MAKERS GOT TO WORK. PAINSTAKINGLY PAINTING TREES WITH TINY SHADOWS, RIVERS WITH STONY SHORES, AND PRECISE FIELD AND STATE BOUNDARIES.

CALCULATIVE PRACTICES TO IDENTIFY, ADMINISTER AND REASSURE.

CROSS-BORDER TERRITORIES CONSTRUCTED IN THREE DIFFERENT UNITS.

ONE MORNING, AS WE WALKED ALONG HOLDING MAPS AND PHONES, A SMALL BOY POINTED US TOWARDS THE BACK GARDEN OF HIS HOUSE. WITH HIS HELP, WE FOUND ONE END OF OUR LINE IN THE DAMP UNDERGROWTH.

THIS WAS AN OLD STRETCH OF THE LINE.

"Under the terms of the treaty of 1815, the border between France and the canton of Geneva will follow the middle of the natural course of the Versoix, from the point where the boundary of the canton of Vaud leaves this river, one hundred and fifty metres upstream from the Grilly watermill, to the mouth, in this same river, of the ravine or Nant de Rebatière (...) . This boundary will be established by the testimony of the mayors, country wardens, guides, land registry indicators and by the plans and reports of the land registry."
(Procès-verbal de la Délimitation entre le territoire du Royaume de France et celui du Canton de Genève, le 20 juillet 1825. Personal translation)

THE BORDER, DEFINED BY THE TREATY OF PARIS OF 1814, WAS DELIMITED ON A PRECISE MAP A FEW YEARS LATER. IT CONNECTED TO THE MUCH OLDER BOUNDARY OF THE CANTON DE VAUD DEFINED BY THE TREATY OF LAUSANNE IN 1594.



Sauverny, border stone I



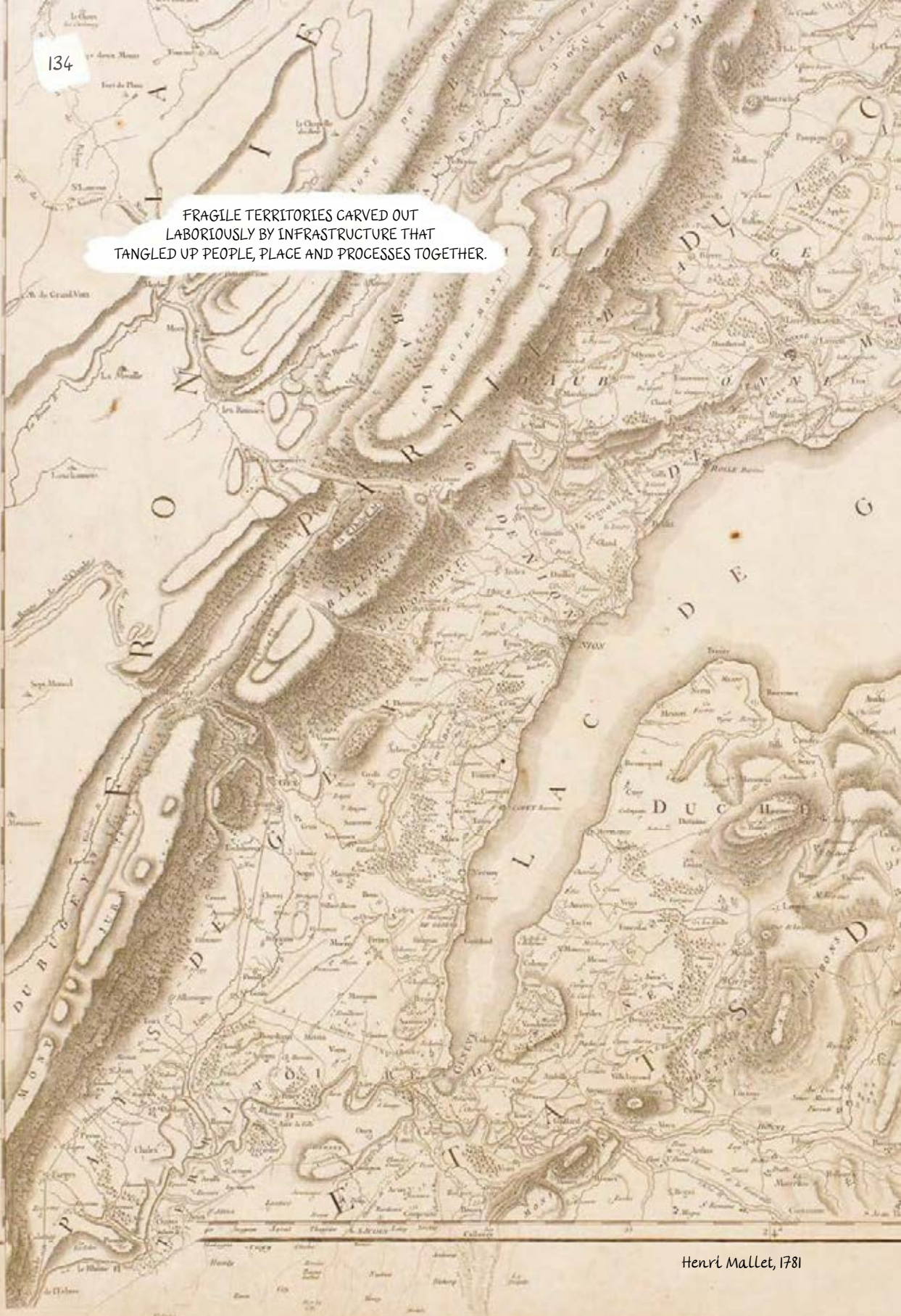
Border stone I of the Canton of Geneva and border stone 309 of the Canton de Vaud.



Collex, border stone no. 20

UNDERNEATH THE STONES DEFINED BY TREATIES, DELIMITED BY POWERFUL PERSONS, AND DEMARCATED ON THE GROUND BY OFFICIALS, LAY THE LABOUR OF PAST LOCAL WITNESSES, CONTEMPORARY PROFESSIONALS AND ADMINISTRATORS, CANTONAL AND FEDERAL OFFICES, VOLUNTEERS AND CLEANERS. TEAMS OF PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS HOLDING THE LINE.

FRAGILE TERRITORIES CARVED OUT
LABORIOUSLY BY INFRASTRUCTURE THAT
TANGLED UP PEOPLE, PLACE AND PROCESSES TOGETHER.



Henri Mallet, 1781

This chapter lays out why it matters to think visually about territory in our fractured and fragile world, and why the discipline of geography has useful theories, tools and methods, specifically coming from critical geopolitics and feminist political geography. It uses three examples to discuss how thinking territory through infrastructure enriches the concept and reveals its fragility and tenuousness.

Fragile territories

Etymologically, geography tries to *write the world*: to tell stories about our human lives and the places we inhabit. It is, at its most basic, an attempt to understand how we live in the world and how we make sense of the absurdity, ugliness, contradictions, and loveliness of territory. This chapter is grounded in three examples of living in such fragile territories: experiencing the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in Switzerland; observing the short lockdown of the city of Geneva during the Biden-Putin summit in 2021; and walking along the complex infrastructure that underpins the international border in the Canton of Geneva. These three examples are connected by their ability to shed light on the paradox that hefty infrastructure needs to be constructed and maintained to make us believe in the evidence of territory. These illustrate how thinking and writing about territory visually captures something of the fleshy nitty-gritty of the concept, but also its fragility. Before developing these, I review scholarship on territory, taking time to lay out some of the pitfalls of writing about materiality in connection to borders.

Territory is a fundamental historical and geographical concept. In its everyday understanding, territories order the world politically and spatially through sovereignties that structure how states behave on economic, strategic, legal and technical issues. Geographical scholarship has examined the multifaceted, historically contingent and fluid nature of territorial arrangements in the context of global politics in great detail (Agnew 1994; Elden 2010, 2013; Sassen 2020; Jackman 2020). I will not repeat these reviews here (Paasi 2022). There have been longstanding complaints about how disconnected scholarship on territory has been between relevant fields, such as between political geography and mainstream international relations (Agnew 1994; Jones and Clark 2020; Kadercan 2015, 2023) or between political geography and feminist geography (Hyndman 2007; Jackman 2020).

In the case of political geography and international relations, and despite internal diversity, the two fields evolved almost in total isolation from one another: "the interaction between IR scholars and political geographers over the study of territorial conflict has been minimal so far. Scholars from one discipline, apart from notable exceptions, tend to either ignore or dismiss the research carried out in the neighboring discipline. Even more likely, many IR scholars and political geographers may not even be fully aware of the research on the other side of the disciplinary fences" (Kadercan 2023: 33). Likewise, historical connections between feminist geography and political geography have been described as "two solitudes within the discipline" (Hyndman 2007). Since the early 2000s, there has been increased traffic and a degree of intellectual engagement across geography with feminist thought. The coining of self-identified fields such as *feminist geopolitics* and *feminist political geography* have been interesting outcomes of such exchanges that resonate strongly with this project, the contributions of which I weave through this book.

In addition to being a disciplinarily situated concept, territory has had multiple genealogies in different national traditions. In its English-language conception, it has mainly been thought of as "a bounded space which there is a compulsion to defend and secure – to claim a particular kind of sovereignty – against infringements by others who are perceived to not belong" (Cowen and Gilbert 2008: 16). In the social sciences, such an understanding of territory implied a complex political and social construct, not a narrow legal framework of territoriality. Territory was always a situated concept: it took on different connotations and referred to different literatures in its many linguistic variations. The French-language *territoire* or Italian *territorio* referred to different fields of scholarship that were only partly connected[1].

In a recent book on the origin of territorial conflicts, Kadercan (2023: 2) took a similar resolutely constructivist view to connect writing in international relations and political geography, "we may think of territory as an 'object' and equate it with the basic tenets of physical geography (e.g., defined in terms of geographical coordinates or geographical markers such as rivers and mountains), but that approach is misleading. For territories to exist in any meaningful sense, human groups need to think of them in the first place, and then act upon these thoughts. Put bluntly, territory is what states and societies make of it." He argued that for something like a given state to exist, Switzerland or France for example, different ideas about what constituted each of these territorial entities had to be brought together:

> We often think of territory as a self-obvious term or a mute, physical object. When we think of state territories, more precisely, we usually focus on the location of borders, or the 'lines' in our political maps. However, territory is far more than just lines on a map. Territories, especially the lines on the maps, are social and political constructs, fuelled by particular ideas about the relationship between the society, space, and politics. These ideas are reified by institutional practices. The direct implication is clear: territory is, and has always been, what states and societies make of it. (Kadercan 2023: 19)

One of these recurring ideas concerned the links between material and the political worlds. While there was nothing natural about territory, ideas of *natural* borders continued to haunt our world. Claims about natural political borders were made over the centuries, disappearing and reappearing again in different guises, based

on the assumption that political scenarios were inscribed in the material physicality of the world by God, Providence, Fate or Nature (Fall 2006, 2010). If I wanted to understand how borderlines came to be invested with power, grounded in extraordinary infrastructures, then I needed to grapple with the material, social and political infrastructure that gave them substance and legitimacy. It was useful to return to the critiques made of natural borders because these *primordialist* and *essentialist* perspectives were deeply embedded in common sense understandings of the world (Penrose 2002). I needed to ensure that I was not unwittingly suggesting that taking materiality seriously led to a fetishized conception of natural borders.

The ghosts of natural borders

The idea of natural borders emerged in the Middle Ages and remained influential in the 18th and 19th centuries: "to their advocates, natural boundaries were seen as the only real borders, because they were written and drawn in nature – and sometimes assumed to be legitimised by divine providence, and under the premise of natural law acquiring a perpetual and indelible character" (Rankin and Schofield 2004: 7). This discursive figure was a fundamental building block in the institutionalisation of the state as a territorial construct, serving as a mythical and foundational reference. It created an inevitable link between a conception of the nation and its spatial inscription, doubly powerful for being rooted in the realms of both reason and feeling[2].
This material dimension of territory was often overlooked, as space was instrumentalised differently in the shift to modernity: from a geographical expression of cultural identity into the most fundamental basis for group and individual identities (Penrose 2002; see also Elden 2007). Focussing on the 18th century writers, Penrose (2002) opposed Herder's primordialist view of nations as natural phenomena to Rousseau's conception of nations as products of state formation. He stated that:

> Seas, mountain-ranges, and rivers are the most natural boundaries not only of lands but of peoples, customs, languages, and empires, and they have been, even in the greatest revolutions in human affairs, the directing lines or limits of world history. If otherwise mountains have arisen, rivers flowed or coasts trended, then how very different would mankind have scattered over this tilting place of nations. (Herder 1784)

For Herder, the geographical distribution of the nation therefore defined the boundaries of the state, as the purpose of the state was to protect the nation rooted in the soil. Rousseau, on the contrary, allowed for boundary changes and the migration of people (Pounds 1954; Rosière 2006). Notwithstanding the non-prescriptive nature of natural law, he suggested an ideal size of nations: "the lie of the mountains, seas and rivers which serve as frontiers for the various nations who people it [...] seems to have fixed for ever their number and size. We may fairly say that the political order of the continent is, in some sense, the work of nature" (Rousseau, quoted in Pounds 1954: 53). French revolutionary ideas offered a territorial vision based on nature's designs considered more egalitarian than the former unjust historical and hereditary boundaries. This pre-royalist worldview was expressed in Revolutionary slogans such as "Freedom knows no boundaries" (Bodénès 1990). From the middle of the

18th century, Philippe Buache, together with his disciple and nephew Buache de la Neuville, argued precisely that expertise was needed to reveal the concordance between physical geography and politics, to bring about peaceful coexistence. In 1752, Buache presented an essay in physical geography, accompanied by maps of France and of the world, showing how the Earth was divided into hydrological basins and mountain ranges (Debarbieux 2001). Buache wrote that these natural divisions were timeless. Using them to define states would stop all territorial conflicts and bring peace to all people for ever: physical geography determined the shape of nations (Buache in Nordman 1998).

In 1795, William Eden (1795: 49), writing in England during the Napoleonic Wars, published a damning put-down to such French claims to natural boundaries. He argued that "the French answer to these reasonings, that nature has pointed out the Alps, and the course of the Rhine and of the Lower Meuse, as the eastern and northern boundaries of the French Empire: if by nature is meant Providence [...] there is neither religion, nor sense, nor modesty, nor morality in such a pretension; it might with equal propriety be said, that nature has pointed out the Baltic and the borders of Siberia". Meanwhile, in Germany, Herder's ideas were being picked up by Fichte, replacing what Pounds (1954: 57) called "the shaky logic of the French with a vague mysticism about *Volk*", suggesting that true natural boundaries were those defining languages.

The institutionalisation of geographical expertise

At the end of the 19th century, reflecting a growing institutionalisation of political geography as an academic discipline in Germany and beyond, Friedrich Ratzel – from one of the first Chairs in geography – reviewed the relative merits of coasts, mountains, deserts and lakes as possible boundary lines. He stopped short of suggesting that all political boundaries should necessarily follow biophysical elements. Instead, he argued that nature provided a series of suggestions that could subsequently be chosen as a basis for defining a political boundary, as there were cases where nature had divided space along lines that could be transformed into boundaries (Ratzel 1897). Similarly, in 1907, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, former Viceroy of India, argued for a broad distinction between "Natural and Artificial Frontiers, both as generally recognised, and as scientifically the most exact" (Curzon 1907; see also Semple 1911), distinguishing boundaries which were dependent on, or independent of, physical features. Despite carefully qualifying his argument historically, he was much attacked on the grounds that all boundaries were artificial. The implication of his term *natural* was that such boundaries were intrinsically more appropriate than boundaries not based on the physical landscape (Prescott 1978).

Yet, as mentioned earlier, proponents and critiques continued to coexist. A few years later Albert Perry Brigham, in his *Principles in the Determination of Boundaries*, published a direct response to existing distinctions "between 'natural' boundaries as 'good' and 'artificial' boundaries as 'bad'" (Brigham 1919, in Minghi 1963: 408). Minghi (1963) mentioned these in his review of boundary studies in the 20th

century. He suggested that there were many discussions of good or bad boundaries in the period between the two World Wars. The debate continued with Hartshorne (1933: 198), who wrote about "naturally marked boundaries, or boundaries marked in nature", suggesting in his typology that while state boundaries may follow natural features, the latter did not determine the former. Many reviews of such ideas were produced by academics, geographers and others since then (Bourdieu 1980; Fall 2010; Demetriou and Dimova 2018).

The longstanding and surprisingly resilient idea of natural boundaries rested on a deterministic view of the influence of topography on political organisation, feeding on the extreme value given to linear configurations. Invocations of topography as the grounding for political divisions and political unity drew on the legitimacy and immutability that the concept of nature bestowed (Penrose 2002). "They are literally impositions on the world. This is not to say that borders are somehow simply metaphorical or textual, without materiality; lines on a map rather than a set of objects and practices in space. It is more that borders are never transcendental objects that systematically secure spaces in which identities and interests can go unquestioned." (Agnew 2008: 181; see also Debarbieux 2017) While these weren't specific to sovereign borders – geographical objects such as gated communities or prisons also made use of bordering infrastructure – borders led to the rise of historically distinct social entities such as the State or the nation. Individuals internalized these entities subjectively when considering their connection to each of them. Borders participated in constructing specific social imaginaries of space: they constituted a necessary condition for constructing these entities, grounding social belonging in place (Debarbieux 2017; Raffestin 1980, 1992).

First example: pandemic territories

During the first wave of the Covid-19 lockdowns across Europe, when everything seemed open to question and certitudes trembled, many ordinary, everyday things became problematic. Meeting others, teaching face-to-face, carrying out interviews and doing fieldwork, or spending time in our workplaces: things taken for granted were suddenly much harder or impossible. Our home lives bled into our professional worlds; our bedrooms became meeting backdrops; and we saw pictures of suffering and dying bodies at their most vulnerable on the screens that offered glimpses of a new reality, global and threatening. The world was turned upside down and inside out. At first, some of these changes seemed to offer hope of lasting positive change, as new solidarities, simpler lifestyles, and care were given centre stage. In the following months, as practically everyone was exposed to the new virus that entered our homes and bodies, and unsustainable lifestyles were embraced once again, dreams of positive change fizzled. My utopic hopes were replaced by a deadly dread as populist discourses exploited yet another convenient crisis. We hadn't imagined another world: perhaps we'd simply got used to new threats in our old one ? In these strange times, controlling the global and local movement of bodies quickly became a focus of concern. Where drawbridges would have been raised in previous

plagues, strangers locked out from cities, our modern world invented new lockdowns (Laketa and Fregonese 2023): forms to be filled, phone apps to be used, dashboards to be consulted, biometric borders implemented through algorithms, with temperature monitors and facemasks used or resisted (Everts 2020; Amoore 2021; Lupton 2021; Sharp 2023; Laketa 2023). In the early days of the pandemic, many authors discussed how the "international dimension to public health is shot through with colonial, postwar, Cold War, and contemporary neo-liberal geopolitics" (Cole and Dodds 2021: 171), and noted that "reactions to the pandemic have been informed and inflamed by ethno-populist framings that fuel exclusionist language, racist violence, and propel forward extraordinary measures of deterrence and detention" (Cole and Dodds 2020: 172). Geographies had always been situated and unequal, and those that emerged from the pandemic were no different. We were surprised when new fractures emerged, as online echo chambers mirrored diverse fears and hopes. All across the world neighbours, friends and families made different choices about masks, mingling and medicine.

Geographers explored how the management of disease consistently involved social and spatial dimensions, as authorities aimed to enforce quarantine protocols or tried to limit the pathways of transmission. Diseases were made through a complex interplay of both human and non-human elements within specific spatial and environmental contexts (Rose-Redwood 2022)[3]. Scholarship was quickly produced exploring the territorial and geopolitical dimensions of the pandemic (Castree 2020; Sparke and Anguelov 2020; Cole and Dodds 2021). This was connected to writing on the geographies of terror (Amoore 2006; Elden 2009), biopolitics (Meloni and Vatter 2023; Skoglund 2023), topologies (Murphy 2022), emotional geopolitics (Pain 2009), and feminist approaches to bodies and territory (Sharp 2023; Laketa 2023).

Responses to diseases often revolved around socio-spatial policies, where authorities enforced quarantine measures or controlled the spread of disease vectors. The conventional understanding of disease management historically involved the need to allocate and control space, implementing measures such as quarantine, exclusion orders, and strict regulation (Cole and Dodds 2021). Militarised metaphors of health, illness and individual bodies 'fighting' against sickness were connected to more global discourses of global fights, battles and wars against a virus, with a parallel belligerence in the governmental narrations of the "war against an invisible enemy" (Chapman and Miller 2020; Laketa and Fregonese 2022). Feminist geopolitics were particularly attentive to the gendered nature of such discourses, taking their material consequences seriously to understand how such geographical imaginaries were made concrete in everyday life. The refusal to wear facemasks was, for example, analysed in connection to toxic forms of masculinity, entwined with populist arguments about freedom and, in a North American context, with gendered nationalisms (Agius 2020) and the right to bear arms (Sharp 2023).

The most stimulating of these studies connected across geographical scales, bringing the global down to the scale of vulnerable bodies:

> The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to attention two things. First, that we are embedded within material assemblages, something evident to me living in the UK, in the reconfiguration of private spaces to avoid contact with an invisible virus, the constant estimation of 2m distance





1. TO THE LEFT, POSTER ON BORDER GUARD BUILDING IN THÔNEX ABOUT COVID HYGIENE PRESCRIPTIONS, 1ST JUNE 2020.

2. TO THE RIGHT, POSTER ON BUILDING AT THE RUE DE L'ÉCOLE DE MÉDECINE: "WEAR YOUR MASK. ALL OF YOU. REALLY", 25 NOVEMBER 2020.

when I am out, and in my conscious awareness of the touch of a mask but not of friends or family. And, second, that in these assemblages, bodies are marked and placed and valued differently. At the heart of the current pandemic is a politics of the body, made and remade through the entangled geographies of: the most intimate politics of care, protection, illness and hygiene; state politics of health, regulation and vaccine nationalism; and international politics of transmission, geopolitics and trade. Thus, Covid-19 has brought to unavoidable prominence what feminist geopolitics has long insisted, namely that the global and the intimate are always, everywhere, already entangled. (Sharp 2023: 1653)

This intermeshing of individual, national and global identities and processes offered a more nuanced and multi-scaled understanding of what constituted the international. Feminist geographers had coined useful terms such as the *global intimate* (Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Pratt and Rosner 2012) or the double-helix (Pain and Smith 2016), with bodies taken "as a scale and site upon which ideas, ideologies, and politics are performed and made meaningful" (Mountz 2018: 762). The concept of *global intimate* stemmed from a feminist analytics of scale that tried to think the global through the intimate and the intimate through the global (Mountz and Hyndman 2006). Territory and state sovereignty were also made on, by and through bodies. (fig. 1-2)

These relationships between the intimate and the geopolitical during the pandemic response connected everyday fears and experiences of insecurity and vulnerability to globalized accounts of health, risk and emergency governance (Laketa 2021, 2023). This geographical understanding of intimacy considered three intersecting sets of relations that worked simultaneously rather than separately:

First, intimacy is a set of spatial relations, stretching from proximate to distant; in this regard, much feminist research has emphasised the household or the body. Secondly, intimacy is a mode of interaction that may also stretch from personal to distant / global; for example, recent work on emotions highlights how subjects reflect, resist or shape wider power relations. And thirdly, intimacy may involve a set of practices, again applying to but also connecting the body and that which is distant; for instance, relations of care frequently traverse the interpersonal, institutional and national realms. (Pain and Staeheli 2014: 345; Pain and Smith 2016)

This geographical conception of intimacy connected the geopolitical world to the intimate in complex ways: it "does not sit in a dichotomous relationship to the global as 'the local' ostensibly does. It therefore avoids false opposition, allowing us to

consider the co-constitution of scales and spheres of (re)production" (Barabantseva 2021: 346).

As illustrated in the first section of my comic, this conception of the *global intimate* underpinned my thinking about the first lockdown. Holding that in my mind helped me think through the odd happenings around me, as people deemed non-essential workers were invited to stay home when the global pandemic gripped the country. Home became a sanctuary, a place of refuge and safety, curled up on the sofa with the children and cats, or frantically pretending to exercise to online videos. This was, of course, not to be taken for granted for all (Lyons and Brewer 2022; Kersten 2023). But I'd been so focused on the changes to our personal and professional lives that I'd forgotten to think about how much the world outside had changed. As the days passed, the global geopolitical discourses of safety, care and threat were grounded in the new practices and places being made by the disease, as borders shut and travel was restricted. Connecting these outside threats, these hardened and closed borders, with life at home initially took some mental gymnastics. Yet the scholarship mentioned above showed me a way of thinking about how our own bodies are sites and spaces for connecting the global and the intimate, once I was calm enough to think it through. My own fragile body and those of my children were a scale at which power operating at larger scales could begin to be understood. This went some way to making sense of my unexpected compulsion to witness and photograph the new improvised border fences popping up around the Canton and watch them change a little each day.

As we wandered and cycled around in a heightened state of anxiety about other people, I tried thinking though our bodies as the site upon which the new ideas, ideologies, and politics of the pandemic were being performed and made meaningful. This wasn't easy because while I tried to cultivate some sort of attentiveness to political representations and to the new practices emerging, I had to get my mind around a fundamental disconnect: if the bodies of those closest to me represented the main threat of contagion, then why close international borders ? Our task as parents was to keep our children safe – as well as ourselves and ideally vulnerable others too – all the while knowing that we might be the ones to contaminate someone with the virus. I'd been focussing on getting my mind around that, rigorously and slightly maniacally implementing handwashing, social distancing and, later, masking with hand-sewn masks. These geopolitical spaces were also being shaped by our bodies, with hands made raw by too much washing. I had never worked at my sewing machine with such a sense of global purpose, sending masks through the post to distant friends as though sharing magical amulets.

There was a strong sense that getting sick wasn't only bad for one individual person but might provide a host body for the virus to mutate into something worse. We were enrolled in a global fight, part of a global body politic. Our own bodily integrity and safety mattered for others. Meanwhile, the Swiss state was also reinventing its own practices, putting up concrete blocks, making material its own understanding of security. These new border fences only made sense as curiously temporary and haphazard visual and material performances of security, illustrating how territory was fragile and needed reaffirming to be believed. It suddenly mattered to

know exactly where the borderlines were, as if this ritual geographical object could somehow keep us safe. In these newly fenced places and landscapes, people and things were separated and brought together, in new infrastructural assemblages that created new relationships between people, policies and objects. People's lives and vulnerabilities were encoded in these new material forms. I was witnessing how this crisis was redefining security through and across these interwoven scales, as the divisions between public and private were being inscribed and entangled anew on the political landscape. Our vulnerable lives entangled with distant others, our intimacy bound up in the global pandemic.

The concrete blocks carving up our landscape became visual symbols of these entanglements. These were sometimes placed in the most unlikely places, such as alone in the middle of a field on a muddy footpath. The interplay of domestic and public spheres were made tangible within these curious performances of global politics, made material on the international borders. By erecting new borders, the patriarchal state was signalling that its protection reached from the intimate spaces of contagion to the international sphere. Just as we'd been trying to keep the children safe, the Swiss state seemed to be doing the same. Not through militarised law enforcement, as in France, where people had to fill in forms simply to leave the house, but through soft mind control: nudges more than punishments, in line with my own style of parenting. Such famously passive-aggressive *contrôle social* grounded much of Swiss social life: from dustbin collection to laundry room rotas, and sometimes to less noble denouncing of others for often trivial social transgressions. (fig. 3)

This focus on entangled scales highlighted the significance of other supposedly non-political spaces and processes that made global geopolitics, including the enforcement of borders and security. International and domestic spaces seemed



3. CEMENT BLOCK IN THE MIDDLE OF A FIELD, NEAR SORAL, 4 MAY 2020.

newly intertwined through layers of enforced enclosure, like curious shape-shifting Russian dolls. Signs on our motorways said that exit was restricted to Germany, France, Italy and Austria, informing us that we were kept in for our own good. Used to the unquestioned privileges of our own global mobility, this seemed somehow more chilling than telling us that nobody else could come in. Simultaneously, new visual languages of domesticity flourished, with cartoon images of home associated with safety and protection. Flyers and posters in various bright colours and clear graphics conjured up socially close but physically distanced individuals, protected and inside. There was sometime rather chilling about these, reminiscent of posters aimed at women telling them to get home early not to get assaulted, rather than informing predators not to attack. But we complied, prepared to believe that outside and abroad were equally hostile, insecure and dangerous.

These new geopolitical spaces sorted people into different categories, marking them as more or less useful, and therefore more or less vulnerable to getting sick. We had the right to stay home. Others did not. Like several other Swiss border cantons, the Canton of Geneva was highly economically dependent on cross-border commuter labour, recording 120'608 cross-border commuters in the fourth quarter of 2019 (Willi 2020). Ensuring the mobility of these doctors, nurses and other health workers was particulary crucial. Due to the increased difficulties in crossing the borders in the early days of lockdown, key workers living in France due to the availability of cheaper housing were provided with special priority travel *macaron* (Wagner 2020). When they went home, they had to comply with the French rules governing mobility, filling out more forms. In the Canton of Jura, one border passage point was entirely reserved for health workers (Wagner 2020). These new geopolitical infrastructures determined who could pass the border and who stayed put at home, reshaping social and political collectives, despite the presence of the virus on both sides of the hastily erected fences.

Several months later when the disease came to our household, brought back by one of the children attending school, we were confined again to home. Two of us were sick in mandatory quarantine; two others were in isolation for ten days to avoid further contaminations. We became aware that the new infrastructures stretched out to





4. TO THE LEFT, MY MOTHER ENTERING INTO A VACCINATION BOOTH SET UP IN A PARKING LOT, YVERDON, 15TH FEBRUARY 2021.

5. TO THE RIGHT, SHOPPING BAGS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE FROM ONLINE DELIVERY DURING FAMILY QUARANTINE. 9TH MARCH 2021.

rooms full of students and volunteers with phone headsets, checking up on us every day. Their calls were partly to offer basic medical advice and partly, we assumed, to make sure we stayed home. We remained well away from the doorstep when our groceries were delivered, saluting the supermarket employee who we newly considered heroic. (fig. 4-5)

This crisis shaped new material infrastructures that reshaped fragile territories by connecting individual bodies with global geopolitics in extraordinary and mundane ways. This *global intimate* of the pandemic was observed through careful consideration of new visual languages and practices, as well as to the material enactments of security taking place across the landscapes we inhabited.

In my second example, building upon this idea of emerging infrastructures of security, I discuss how state territory was reworked through fragile bodies, revealing the vulnerabilities and tenuousness of both.

Second example: bodies, territory and entitlement

On June 16, 2021, a year after the first pandemic lockdowns, the City of Geneva was transformed to allow American President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet in a luxurious villa in a park for a couple of hours, accompanied by their trusted advisers[4]. Hundreds of meters of barbed wire were unrolled in the preceding days, 900 police officers were brought in from across Switzerland, and the Swiss military moved into pop-up camps with armoured vehicles. The entire area around the lakefront in the heart of the city was sealed off in a Red Zone. For Geneva, this was an unprecedented urban *mise-en-scène*, distinct from the diplomatic comings-and-goings that habitually take place in this pocket-sized global capital, home to the United Nations, embassies, consulates and international organizations. Although many drew parallels with the historic meeting of 1985 between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev held in Geneva, the security *dispositif* on the ground, in the air, and in cyberspace were very different. This was an important moment both for the Swiss government and for the city to show off its diplomatic hospitality. Downtown neighbourhoods were transformed into an oversized, securitized geopolitical stage, crafted with spectacular sites and vistas for the media. All local inhabitants were asked to stay away for 24 hours. Disciplined by the pandemic and perhaps also by our pride at seeing our city chosen as host for an important event, we complied. We didn't know at the time how futile this performance of hospitality was, nor that, a few months later, hundreds of Russian tanks would be involved in yet another terrible display of military power, invading a sovereign neighbour. (fig. 6-7, p. 152)

In the days leading up to the Biden-Putin Summit, as the rolls of barbed wire were being unravelled around the perimeter, and the concrete blocks previously used to seal the border during the pandemic were laid out on the streets, I felt that I was watching the birth of a geopolitical theatre. Ironically, after the pandemic months of shuttered cultural venues, cinemas and concert halls, the city of Geneva was transformed into a stage. It did not seem real, even after a year in which normal daily life had shifted so radically. "If a simple conversation between two men



ON JUNE 16 2021, A YEAR AFTER THE FIRST COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWNS, THE CENTRE OF THE CITY OF GENEVA WAS CLOSED OFF.

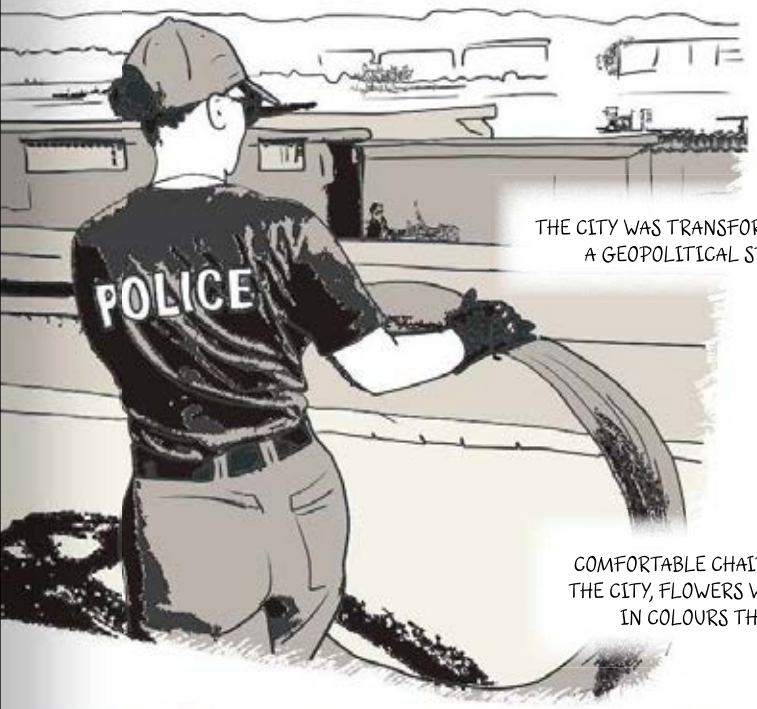
PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN AND PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN WERE HAVING COFFEE IN A PARK, DISCUSSING SECURITY IN EUROPE.

POLICE MUNICIPALE

THE TWO MEN WERE PROTECTED BY ROLLS OF BARBED WIRE AND STIFF PROTOCOL, PRETENDING TO BE STRONG.

HUNDREDS OF METERS OF BARBED WIRE WERE ROLLED OUT, AND 900 POLICE OFFICERS WERE BROUGHT IN FROM ACROSS SWITZERLAND. THE SWISS MILITARY MOVED INTO POP-UP CAMPS WITH ARMOURED VEHICLES.

ALL LOCAL INHABITANTS WERE ASKED TO STAY AWAY FOR 24 HOURS. DISCIPLINED BY THE PANDEMIC AND PERHAPS BY PRIDE AT SEEING OUR CITY HOST AN INTERNATIONAL EVENT, WE COMPLIED.





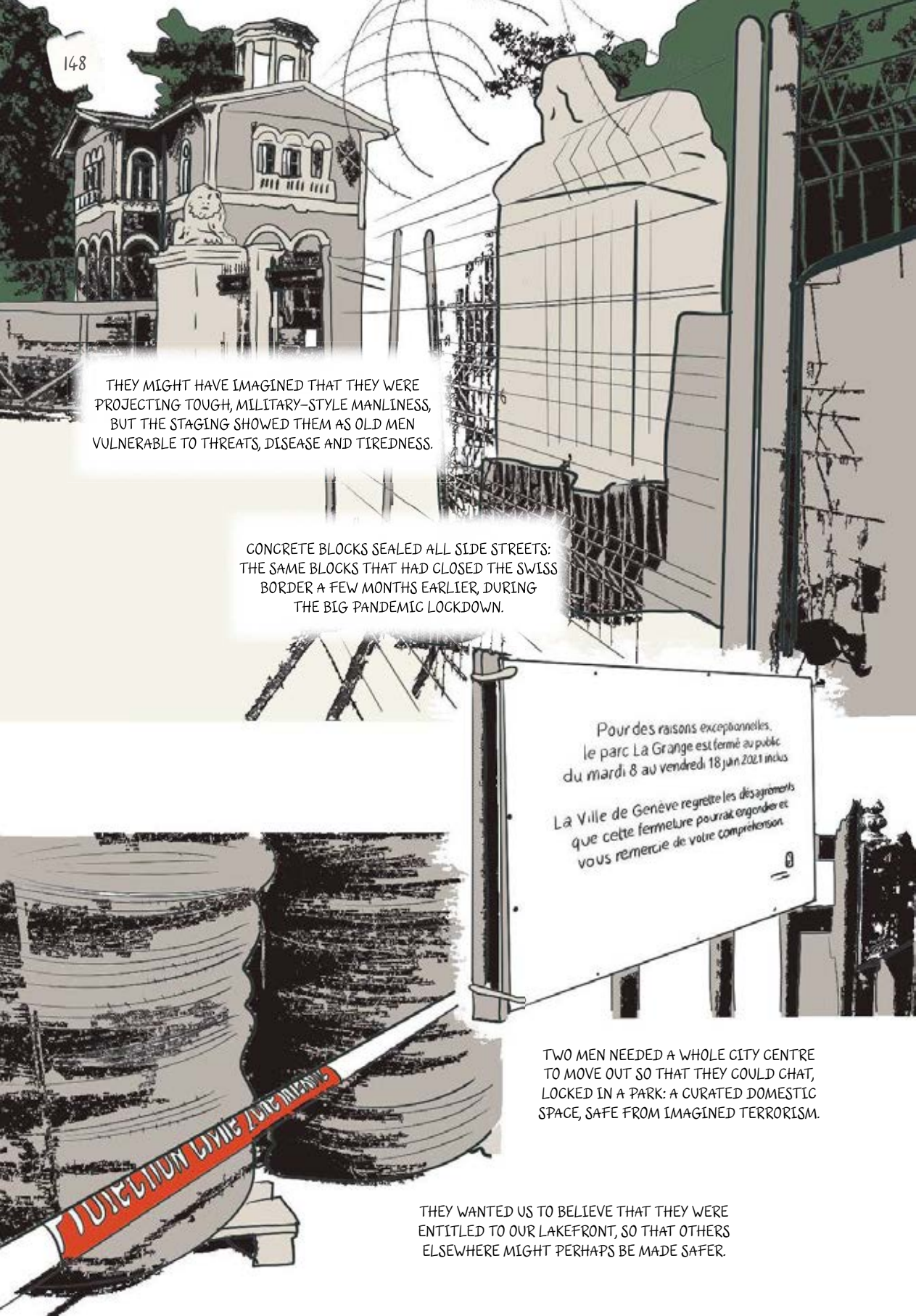
THE CITY WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A GEOPOLITICAL STAGE.

COMFORTABLE CHAIRS WERE MOVED ACROSS THE CITY, FLOWERS WERE CAREFULLY CHOSEN IN COLOURS THAT DIDN'T OFFEND.





TO BE SAFE, THE TWO PRESIDENTS NEEDED OTHERS TO PUT THEMSELVES IN DANGER, SURROUNDED BY BODYGUARDS, TRACKED BY MILITARY INTELLIGENCE, PRECEDED BY TASTERS SAMPLING THEIR FOOD.



THEY MIGHT HAVE IMAGINED THAT THEY WERE PROJECTING TOUGH, MILITARY-STYLE MANLINESS, BUT THE STAGING SHOWED THEM AS OLD MEN VULNERABLE TO THREATS, DISEASE AND TIREDNESS.

CONCRETE BLOCKS SEALED ALL SIDE STREETS: THE SAME BLOCKS THAT HAD CLOSED THE SWISS BORDER A FEW MONTHS EARLIER, DURING THE BIG PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN.

TWO MEN NEEDED A WHOLE CITY CENTRE TO MOVE OUT SO THAT THEY COULD CHAT, LOCKED IN A PARK: A CURATED DOMESTIC SPACE, SAFE FROM IMAGINED TERRORISM.

THEY WANTED US TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE ENTITLED TO OUR LAKEFRONT, SO THAT OTHERS ELSEWHERE MIGHT PERHAPS BE MADE SAFER.



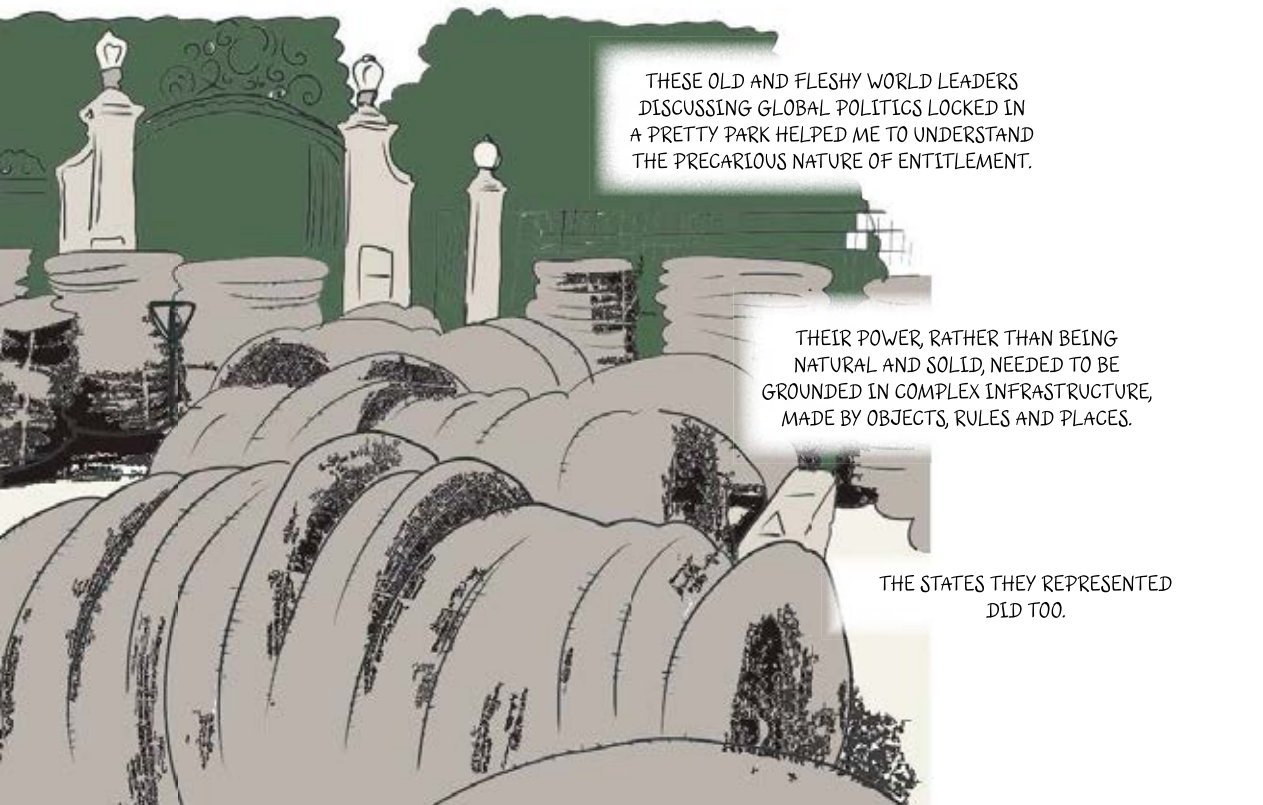
MANY OF US HAVE MET PEOPLE,
MOST OFTEN MEN, WHO RADIATE
PERSONAL ENTITLEMENT.

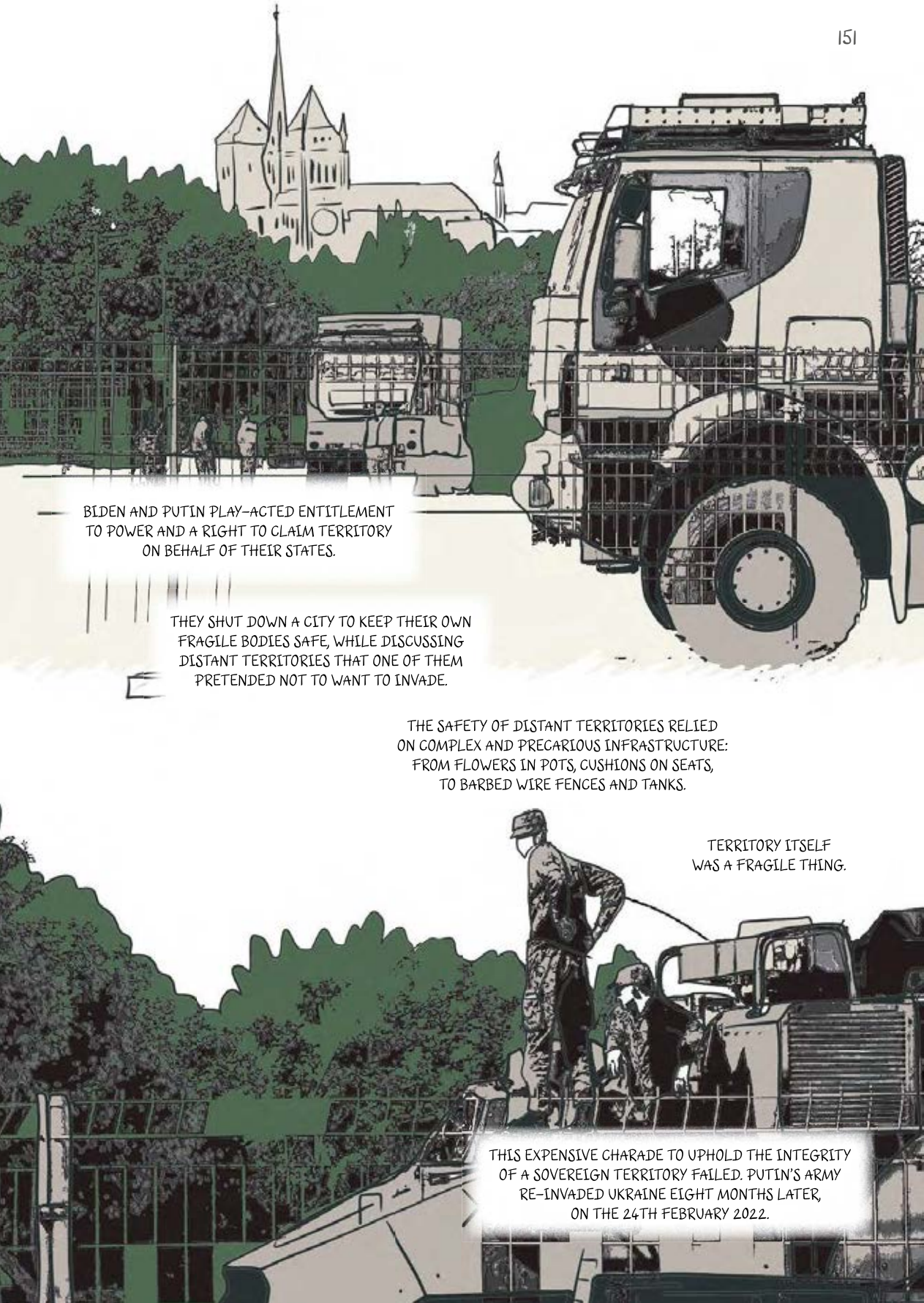
PEOPLE WHO TAKE UP TOO MUCH SPACE
ON THE BUS, SPEAK LOUDLY, INTERRUPT,
AND USE BODILY LANGUAGE TO INTIMIDATE
AND OCCUPY TOO MUCH SPACE.

PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY ARE TOUGH, BUT
WHO BY TRYING TOO HARD TO PROJECT
STRENGTH, REVEAL THEIR INNATE
INSECURITIES.

AS I WANDERED ALONG THE FORTIFIED
LAKESIDE, ONE DAY BEFORE THE SUMMIT, I
THOUGHT THE LANDSCAPE ECHOED
A SIMILAR KIND OF ANXIETY.


TO MAKE US, AND EACH OTHER, BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE STRONG, THEY NEEDED FENCES, BARBED WIRE AND HELICOPTERS OVERHEAD.


THESE OLD AND FLESHY WORLD LEADERS DISCUSSING GLOBAL POLITICS LOCKED IN A PRETTY PARK HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND THE PRECARIOUS NATURE OF ENTITLEMENT.
THEIR POWER, RATHER THAN BEING NATURAL AND SOLID, NEEDED TO BE GROUNDED IN COMPLEX INFRASTRUCTURE, MADE BY OBJECTS, RULES AND PLACES.
THE STATES THEY REPRESENTED DID TOO.


BIDEN AND PUTIN PLAY-ACTED ENTITLEMENT TO POWER AND A RIGHT TO CLAIM TERRITORY ON BEHALF OF THEIR STATES.
THEY SHUT DOWN A CITY TO KEEP THEIR OWN FRAGILE BODIES SAFE, WHILE DISCUSSING DISTANT TERRITORIES THAT ONE OF THEM PRETENDED NOT TO WANT TO INVADE.
THE SAFETY OF DISTANT TERRITORIES RELIED ON COMPLEX AND PRECARIOUS INFRASTRUCTURE: FROM FLOWERS IN POTS, CUSHIONS ON SEATS, TO BARBED WIRE FENCES AND TANKS.
TERRITORY ITSELF WAS A FRAGILE THING.
THIS EXPENSIVE CHARADE TO UPHOLD THE INTEGRITY OF A SOVEREIGN TERRITORY FAILED. PUTIN'S ARMY RE-INVADED UKRAINE EIGHT MONTHS LATER, ON THE 24TH FEBRUARY 2022.





6. TO THE LEFT, ROLLS OF BARBED WIRE IN FRONT OF THE PARC DES EAUX-VIVES, 11TH JUNE 2021.

7. CONCRETE BLOCKS COLLECTED IN FRONT OF THE PARK, READY TO BE DEPLOYED, 11TH JUNE 2021.

could bring lasting political change to an insecure world, why couldn't it take place over Zoom ?", I joked with my colleague Julie de Dardel. Surely, this event was about more than reopening fraught diplomatic channels. Viewed on live TV worldwide, the diplomatic staging of the summit seemed as much about upholding old-style patriarchal statehood and masculinity as it was about endorsing militarily imposed global geopolitics. This was not a new dawn of global politics, but the old guard sharpening its claws: global security, reincarnated and made man(ly). The instrumental deployment of hypermasculinity was made material in the scenography of the Geneva Summit, and involved the muscular equation of self, state and international security. This was performed through an exaggerated set of masculine cultural norms intended to create legitimacy and power itself, benefiting both men. Our own self-effacing but exceedingly traditional Swiss President Guy Parmelin, whispered a quiet welcome and stepped back to leave the big men to chat, having performed his supporting role. Masculinities were diverse and hierarchized.

Feminist geographers taught us to recognize framings that center militarized masculinities and that associate statecraft with manliness. Violence and domination were analysed as intrinsically patriarchal, androcentric and heteronationalistic (Enloe 2014; Slootmaeckers 2019). These framings relied on elevating some masculinities over others, and over all femininities. Masculinity, like femininity, was an identity tenuously constructed through time and space, fashioned through repeated acts. In our patriarchal cultures, political authority was bolstered by gendered statements, symbols and actions, often reinforcing and legitimating nationalistic discourse. Feminist writers drew attention to moments after political crises when remasculinization took place, with visual representations of leaders carefully crafted. Riabov and Riabova (2014), for example, argued that in Russia, this meant explicitly conjuring up an image of charisma and virility for Vladimir Putin. The same could be said of aviator-glasses-wearing Joe Biden speaking tough in his press conference in Geneva, playing the part of the strong but wise patriarch after a Trump presidency punctuated by ignorance and hubris. (fig. 8-9)

Ironically, though, while these two men surrounded by barbed wire might have imagined they were projecting hegemonic militarized masculinity, they were also





8. TO THE LEFT, ARMOURED VEHICLES ON THE QUAI IN FRONT OF THE CATHEDRAL, 11TH JUNE 2021.

9. TO THE RIGHT, ARMOURED VEHICLES IN FRONT OF THE JET D'EAU, 11TH JUNE 2021.

revealing their agedness and fragility, with bodies vulnerable to disease, tiredness and threats. Masculinities that relied on an entire city being shut down to be made visible were *fragile* rather than *strong*. They needed others to put themselves in daily danger to keep them safe, constantly surrounded by bodyguards, tracked by military intelligence, preceded by tasters sampling the very food they put into their ageing bodies. They needed a Swiss *Cheffe du Protocol* to choose flowers in colours that would not upset them or cause a diplomatic incident. They needed comfortable seats to be moved across town to sit on. They needed a whole city to move out so that they could chat, locked in a park in a curated domestic space, safe from imagined terrorism. They needed concrete blocks to seal side streets: the exact same ones that closed the Swiss borders during the pandemic.

Just as this Summit called attention to the connections and juxtapositions of spaces, it also confounded the tidy conceptions of scale that informed political and academic discourse. Contrary to what the heroic staging seemed intended to project, Biden and Putin shaking hands were no more and no less incarnations of an abstract global scale than were the bodies of onlookers. One of the justifications of holding the meeting in person was precisely to have their bodies touch and experience being next to each other, even in a socially distanced manner. Yet this expensive charade carried out to uphold international peace failed, and Putin's army re-invaded Ukraine eight months later, on the 24th February 2022.

Drawing attention to the fleshiness of these global leaders' bodies, as well as to our own, helped understand how scale was a leaky category. During the covid emergency, "scalar interrelations were in a moment of radical flux" (Linder 2022: 1). The pandemic altered our intimate, relational and even political perceptions of scale: while the domestic scale was reaffirmed, other broader scales felt even more distant, sometimes unreachable. The changing mobilities that accompanied hardened borders called for a more experiential understanding of scale that placed sensorial and emotional matters at the centre (Linder 2022). There was not one scale of international politics, and another of domestic daily life. Scale was fluid and contingent, with public and private – or political and non-political – spaces seen as fundamentally overlapping. The global and the intimate constructed each other: they did not inhabit separate spheres or bounded subjects (Mountz and Hyndman 2006).

Feminist geographers argued that many studies of territory and boundaries that centred on issues of sovereignty and security, including some of those cited above, considered gender irrelevant (Staeheli and Kofman 2013; Jackman 2020). Thinking of territory and sovereignty as fundamentally gendered concepts might have seemed counterintuitive, but it was intellectually stimulating, as Dalby (1994: 603) noted: "sovereignty is often practised in terms of surveillance and power over precisely demarcated spaces; modes of rule that are quintessentially masculine, in terms of their claims to objective knowledge of territory, technological modes of power projection, and detached 'scientific' surveillance as the essential prerequisite to policy action" (Hancock 2004). Symbolic and linguistic associations of territory with gender were seen in the use of connotated terms such as rape, violation, penetration and intervention, used to describe territorial phenomena[5]. Invoking Anderson's use (1991) of the term *fraternity* in his classic book *Imagined Communities*, Slootmaeckers (2019: 243) states that "if the nation is conceived as a club of men, it is not a far stretch to argue that the process of defining boundaries is framed in masculine terms". But how did these fleshy world leaders, locked in a pretty park discussing global politics, help us understand the fragile nature of territory ? How could we take the spatially complex concept of *global intimate* one step further ?
Like *feminist geopolitics* mentioned earlier, *feminist international relations* emerged in the 1990s from a critique of the realist and rationalist IR canon and diversified considerably (Prügl 2012). This scholarship also put gender issues back into the global picture and discussed how the international was fundamentally constructed as gendered (Sjoberg 2009, 2010; Prügl 2012; Shepherd 2014), heterosexist and masculinist (Beasley 2013). One of the important contributions of this field was to broaden the analytical focus beyond states, and to introduce a more nuanced and multi-scaled understanding of what constituted the international. These innovations were important because mainstream approaches were rather different:

> For analytical purposes, scholars of International Relations (IR) tend to treat the state as if it were a person. It is assumed to have 'interests' and 'intentions', said to 'act' (and often to 'act rationally'), even allowed to experience 'death'. In the most extreme cases of anthropomorphization, the state is explicitly given 'a body' and 'a life'. (Wadley 2009: 38)

In his classic work on diplomacy written nearly a hundred years ago and reedited many times, Satow (2017: 23) stated that "under international law a State is a legal person with legal rights and obligations [...]. Its status is based on the exercise of effective control over a population within a defined territory which has been recognized and given effect in international law; and it is international law which determines its capacity as a legal person, its competence, and the nature and extent of certain rights and duties." In a field where so much was contested, this naturalization of the personhood of the state was one of the few things mainstream IR scholars agreed on or took for granted (Wendt 2004; Wadley 2009). For some, this personhood of states was little more than a useful fiction, metaphor or analogy, rather than something that had true ontological reality; while for others, the attribution of personhood to states worked so well in helping make sense of the world that states 'must be people too', real from the inside to themselves (*see debate between* Wendt 2004; Jackson 2004; Neuman 2004).

Mainstream International Relations scholars, wherever they fit on the spectrum of considering the state-acting-like-a-person-or-really-being-one, broadly seemed to assume that it was an ungendered entity. Yet much feminist scholarship showed that when something was considered ungendered "this should set off alarm bells" (Wadley 2009: 38), since masking gender usually meant elevating the masculine to the status of universal, masking partiality through claims to universality. Political arenas were saturated with gendered meaning, with states and associated state actors cast as variously 'masculine' or 'feminine' through a system of symbolic meaning that created social hierarchies. Failing to consider the role of gender did not make theory gender-neutral, nor did conceptualizing the state as a generic, non-gendered actor (Wadley 2009). Leaders, states, international organizations all acted in accordance to gender norms and categories, albeit in different ways at different times (Wadley 2009), notwithstanding the internally fragmented nature of such categories. Studies of crisis revealed how states and their leaders were further gendered through wars: heroic militarized masculinity was directly associated with power; patriarchal protectors gained power not through a repressive show of force but from an apparent willingness to sacrifice themselves to protect their families (Enloe 1989; Young 2003); discourses of masculinist protection relied on images of hostile outsiders, including within the state itself (Slootmaeckers 2019); and figures of motherland as nurturing and worth dying for abounded. Patriotism played a specific emotive function in constituting a single state-as-body as a coherent whole, grateful to the leader who vowed to protect it, making dissent not only dangerous but also ungrateful (Young 2003).

If the state could be a (gendered) person, the opposite was also true: people could 'be' states. This role was not only played by heads of state, such as Biden and Putin, but also by diplomats: the individuals tasked with representing a state in its relations to others (Aggestam and Towns 2019). They were trained professionals, part of a diplomatic body, who literally embodied the state (Satow 2009), and were subject to specific privileges. Understanding diplomats as representatives of states was part of a productive cycle where the state constitutes diplomatic agents that in turn constitute the state:

> By performing its presence, beholding the state's presence is possible because of its embodiment in the diplomat, enabling the state to make representations of Self and Other that are credible due to diplomacy's presence and voicing of the state. (Orellana 2020: 4)

The notion of *entitlement* helped to understand how these geographical scales mutually constituted each other, grounding and maintaining territories. Historically, territory was connected to sovereignty and ownership through legal geographies of property (Blomley 2016). Ownership was linked to property law: land was held through a title that was a bundle of rights held either by individuals or by different parties. From this notion of holding a title to a piece of land, the English language coined the term *entitlement*: a polysemic and spatial concept that would be difficult to translate[6]. Entitlement described someone's right to something, whether actual or perceived; something to which one was entitled; the power or authority to do something; or the legal obligation of a government to make payments according to criteria set in law. It stemmed from a model of ownership that defined the right of

owners, be they individuals or states, to do what they wanted within a geographical entity, as long as it did not impinge on others' rights. By connecting the two first meanings (i.e. the right to something and the thing itself), we could explore empirically how they were linked through notions of territory, bodies and sovereignty.
As Biden and Putin outmanned each other in the park, they were both performing entitlement in multiple ways: their own bodily entitlement to power and their right to speak on behalf of their state; their entitlement to shut down a city to keep their own fragile bodies safe; their supposed entitlement to distant territories. Remaining aware of how such discourses of personal and state entitlement were connected to the concept of territory, helped me to think further of it as fragile. Territory relied on complex and precarious infrastructure: from flowers in pots, cushions on seats, to tanks and barbed wire fences. Territory, rather than being something natural and solid, needed to be constantly remade through infrastructure, mediated through bodies and places.

Third example: borders as infrastructure

In this third example of thinking about territory in connection to the global intimate, I turn to the example developed in the comic of the border as infrastructure, in the section that relies on walking methodologies. In all those walks along the Franco-Swiss border, through mud, sun, snow and wind, I pondered what exactly I was walking around. Scholars tried to capture something more of this materiality of territory by writing about *terrain*, seeing in the latter something more three-dimensional and voluminous. I was not sure we really needed the additional term *terrain*: territory could itself be thought of as voluminous, rather than narrowly two-dimensional. As Jackman (2020: 1) wrote, accounts of territory "increasingly recognised both the geophysical properties of terrain and the materiality of territorial power as that which can be experienced and inhabited in multi dimensions, weaponised for military gain, or apprehended as a resource that can provide value to those surveilling, inhabiting, or moving through it".
This built upon Elden's (2013) conception of territory as a political technology that emphasized the ways in which the legal and the technical interacted, similar to the concept of infrastructure mentioned earlier (Chandra 2023), despite different genealogies. This focus on infrastructure to understand borders drew attention to the specific materiality of the processes, revealing the complex ecological field conditions and pre-existing social relations that clashed with ideal geometric fantasies. Matson's study of changing stakes and border posts used to affix empire in place linked border studies with insights from infrastructure studies effectively and revealed how "the grid of points that forms the underlay for the colonial occupation of North America is obscured, weakened, and supplanted by the thickening of these alternative relationships between people, the land, and one another. These field conditions trouble the assertion of the border, drawing attention to the multitude of forces that territorialize, appropriate, claim or reclaim land." (Matson 2017) Conflicts inevitably arose between ideal geometric scenarios and actual conditions on ground. Attending to

such underlying infrastructure and the strategic labour required to survey and demarcate borders, helped to understand how these underpinned the construction of states. Likewise, Thomas (2021) explored such processes of bordering, focussing on the borders' inherent recalcitrance to fit in with material conditions.

While fantasies of natural boundaries had long been discredited, as discussed earlier, the borders we encountered did use features of the landscape, rivers, coastlines, mountains, and so on, to etch their legal-political line onto the physical terrain. In the case of Geneva, as we stepped across yet another marshland, and waded through more streams, we felt at times that we were walking around an island surrounded by water.

> If the geophysical landscape is increasingly malleable, then this malleability complicates the ways in which states might fix their boundaries that mark the edges of their territories. They can also feature in terms of the internal aspects of the territory of states, rather than just at their borders. (Elden 2021: 177)

Walking around the Canton of Geneva, it was very apparent how physical processes substantially tested solid territory:

> It is obvious to say that rivers meander, that glaciers melt, mountains erode, coastlines change, that islands can be submerged, that deserts can shrink and grow, that deltas, swamps, and marshes complicate a simple land/sea divide. And yet, so many of our theorisations of political-legal territory mask these factors. (Elden 2021: 177)

The watery materiality of the world offered up resistance to precise mapping. As we walked along riverbanks, we often discussed and fantasized about what would happen if we helped the flow of water to break through yet another meander in the rushing *Allondon*, *Arande*, *Chambet*, *Drize*, *Hermance*, *Foron*, *Laire*, *Tuernant*, *Rhône* or *Versoix* rivers. Would Switzerland gain some territory, when the treaties defined the border as the middle point of the river ? Or, horror, would France ? In many places, we noticed the subtle constructions, the dikes and walls, holding back the earthy and pebbly riverbanks of this post-glacial landscape, ensuring no territory was lost. 18th Century fantasies about ideal river borders still haunted our landscapes and infrastructures; while 20th Century engineering made sure riverbeds were suitably disciplined, notwithstanding new environmental enthusiasm for rewilded water channels.

When scholars wrote about borders and infrastructure, it was often in connection with crisis points, and the violence encountered by diverse groups seeking to migrate across militarized borders. These technopolitical accounts of borders (Amoore 2006, 2021; Dijstelbloem 2021) described the development and transformation of contemporary borders as the rise of an infrastructure. Dijstelbloem (2021) identified four crucial characteristics of these: first that border infrastructures connected large-scale networks with local situations; second that these included and excluded migrants through specific forms of selection; third that (in)visibility interacted with action in complex ways; and lastly that the location of these border infrastructures shifted and moved, following changes in policies. Studying borders as sites of violence, understanding how these filter desirable and undesirable bodies, was extremely fecund, particularly in showing how power was inscribed into place. Infrastructure, underpinned by new technologies of surveillance, had the power

to kill or save. Important research on European borders took these characteristics seriously. Likewise, but adopting a quantitative typology, Gülzau and Mau (2021) attempted to survey the world-wide border infrastructure, in a context of hardening borders, suggesting a classification that rather than there being more border walls, it helped to distinguish the material expression of borders from no-man's-land, landmark borders, checkpoint borders, barrier borders to fortified borders. Although these and other studies linking borders and infrastructure have been authored in recent years, grounded in different theoretical frameworks, from critical geopolitics and political geography (Amoore 2006, 2021; Paasi 2022; Vives 2017, 2023; Del Biaggio 2023), to actor-network or science and technology studies (Dijstelbloem 2021), all pointed to power encoded into the places, policies and politics.

My project, however, was more modest. Instead of looking at the policies and the people impacted or killed by them, it started with everyday places. I aimed to make visible the extraordinary state investment in the idea of defining, delimiting, demarcating and holding a line, not to negate or minimise the violence but rather to understand all that had to be done, all that had to be constructed historically and maintained to allow us to believe in the concept of state territory. I purposefully did not study the flashpoints, the crises, the boats and the deaths, the places in the news and the wire fences. Instead, I stumbled upon a border close to home than seemed so mundane that people, or at least those with privileged passports and privileged bodies, almost forgot existed, until a pandemic carved it back into the landscape. It was only then, when I tried to actually experience exactly where it was, step by step, that I started to think about what it took to make it real. Territory started and ended in my humdrum backyard, pouring over a map most Sunday mornings, wondering where we were going to walk next. Territory was made real for us as we plodded along the peaceful border, searching out the invisible line, slowly getting acquainted with its histories and geographies, from the ground up. As we walked, we learnt to identify all the diverse pieces of infrastructure that wrote it into the landscape.

Walking as research method

There were an increasing number of scholarly studies making use of walking as a research method in geography and the social sciences (Anderson 2004; Pierce and Lawhon 2015; Macpherson 2016; Careri 2017; Robinson and McClelland 2020; Rabbiosi 2021; Springgay and Truman 2019, 2022), as well as some examples specifically within political geography (Mason 2021, 2023; Paasche and Sidaway 2021; Hubbard 2022). In a collective article, Mason (2023: 2) and colleagues argued that:

> We posit that the embodied aspects of walking can enable a creative and critical relationship with nature, place, politics and space, reengaging key concepts in political geography such as territory, borders, and the state, establishing bridges to concepts more commonly featured by cultural geographers, notably landscape [...]. Critical attention to walking in political geography thus draws on these cross-disciplinary accounts and reconsiders what counts as political, who walks, and how walking may investigate political geographies of place. Walking has the potential to unpack public and private politics, engaging with place and local knowledge and terrain.

In one of such studies, Hubbard walked along the Kent coast, a section of the United Kingdom's border that looks over onto France, shortly after Brexit. While he walked almost 180 km in five days – spectacularly faster than we ever were along our Franco-Swiss borderline ! – he suggested in a thoughtful text that "walking methods promote an attentiveness to the construction of national identities by encouraging an embodied encounter with the affective forces that congeal around the sites and bodies that constitute the 'borderscape' [...]. The contemporary political borders of the UK are of course both everywhere and nowhere, existing in an electronic space of flows but also at airports, train stations and ferry terminals (both in the UK and overseas)." (Mason 2023: 5) He noted that walking was central as a mode of becoming knowledgeable about a landscape, with accompanying practices of note taking and photography used to disclose traces of defunct temporalities and technologies.

Just as we noticed dozens of border posts and sought out hundreds of border stones, Hubbard encountered relics that emphasized the territory's geological, political, economic and cultural separation, in his case from continental Europe, across the sea. These were "Tudor castles, Napoleonic-era sea forts, Martello Towers, World War Two tank traps, hidden pill boxes and abandoned airfields. But I also found the persistent traces of connection. As well as ferry terminals at Dover and Ramsgate, and the now-defunct, weed-enveloped hoverport at Pegwell Bay, I stumbled upon the infrastructures that brought a transmanche region into being during the period of EU membership. Most important here is the Eurotunnel, and the vast 350-acre terminal for passengers and vehicles located near Folkestone, but also the high-voltage electricity convertor stations [...] and numerous undersea connections that transmit power and knowledge across the seabed." (Mason 2023: 5)

Like us, there was no single moment of profound revelation during his walk, but a quiet unfolding and understanding of the process of bordering that came into view via various technologies and infrastructures as he walked along the coast.

The two geographically distinct examples of the Kent coast and the Canton of Geneva illustrated how state territories were not only made through deadly military might, but crafted and maintained through technologies, practices and infrastructure, despite changing political climates. In Geneva, the current territory was the result of a multitude of former territorial scenarios: an almost contiguous territory that emerged as a result of broader forces – Empires clashing, Revolutions collapsing, neighbours allying – as well as through the work of multiple skilled individuals. Jean-Paul Wisard, former *délégué permanent à l'abornement* for the Canton of Geneva (see Chapter 1) wrote that the canton's ultimate political autonomy was made material in a bounded territory that diplomats negotiated and states duly ratified. With no clear orographic or hydrographic boundary to support the resulting territory's delimitation and only uninterrupted stretches of identical landscape on either side, Wisard (2008) suggested that these borders of ink and paper needed stones to be laid so that what politicians had decided was made tangible and visible to all. The story of how the territory of Geneva was born coud be told in words or in maps. Wisard summarized the many convoluted episodes, focusing on the shape of things, since the fall of the Roman Empire:

Once the Roman Empire had collapsed, the Burgundians settled in the area and then, from the High Middle Ages (1030), the town fell under the authority of the local bishops (the key of Saint-Pierre on the municipal coat of arms refers to this period), who also owned 'mandements' small annexed territories in the countryside around the town. Land belonging to the Counts of Savoy separated these pieces of territory under episcopal authority. The Reformation (Calvin was resident in Geneva) marked the end of the period of clerical administration in 1536. The city proclaimed itself to be a free Protestant republic (république libre et protestante), and remained so until the French Revolution. Geneva's possessions were divided into five distinct parts: Geneva city, Satigny-Chancy to the west, Gy-Jussy to the east, and Genthod and Céligny on the north shore of the lake. In 1754, a first treaty was signed in Turin between the Republic of Geneva and the Savoie, involving land exchanges designed to reorganize a territorial situation that had become extremely complex. Around 40 years later, France annexed the area and made Geneva the capital of the Département du Léman. In 1815, with the Treaties of Paris and Vienna that divided Europe following Napoleon's defeat, the Canton was born and asked to join Switzerland. The situation created a problem: a fragmented territory with no connection to the rest of Switzerland. It was decided to create strips of land linking the various pieces (except for Céligny, which was already landlocked in the canton of Vaud). However, Geneva, anxious to ensure access to enough agricultural land for food production, demanded and obtained more than these simple 'servitudes de passages'. To ensure territorial contiguity with the rest of Switzerland, France, which owned the Pays de Gex, ceded the commune of Versoix on the north shore of Lake Geneva. Only the town of Saint-Julien-en-Genevois, initially attached to the canton, was ceded back to the Kingdom of Piémont-Sardaigne in 1816 (to which Savoie belonged for another forty years), as the latter considered the road linking the Châblais to the Vuache, passable all year round, to be of strategic importance. This 1816 border did not change thereafter. At least more or less. The result is a unique geographical feature: Geneva, a small canton of 283 square kilometres, has a 110-kilometre border with France… and only four kilometres with its counterpart in Vaud, which links it to the rest of Switzerland. (Wisard 2008: 34, own translation)



10. DETAIL FROM THE ORIGINAL OF THE MAP ANNEXED TO THE TREATY OF TURIN, HELD IN THE GENEVA STATE ARCHIVE, SHOWING WATERCOLOURS PAINTED LITTLE TREES. PHOTOGRAPHED 5TH DECEMBER 2023.

This narration focused on the calculative practices, as though seen from above. As Jackman (2020: 2) and colleagues reminded us, "the history of territory as a practice and idea is often told as a history of (predominantly 'western') imperial, military, and economic pursuits and struggles. Within Anglo-scholarship it is told and retold as a story of control enabled by calculative technologies, most notably cartography, which reduced space to quantifiable abstractions that could be bounded, divided, and governed from a centralized position. In such accounts, territory and terrain are narrated, known and navigated in terms of their geometric qualities." But if territory was made officially by diplomats and political leaders in cosy salons, enshrined in treaties, it was also made by map makers, land surveyors, mayors, forest wardens, guides, land registry surveyors, artists, and archivists: everyday people whose accounts told varied and infinitely more embodied stories[7]. Some of these stories have come to us visually, through the brushstrokes of artists who painstakingly painted hundreds of little green trees on a map that, when viewed from the right angle, appeared to be growing out of the page. Territory had its own visual poetries: on the map and in the field. (fig. 10)

If the Treaties materialized the calculative practices we associated with territory, the minutes (*Procès-verbal*) of the delimitation of the border on the ground that often took place several years later told a different story. This was closer to our own lived experiences of making sense of the abstraction of territory from the ground up. As we walked along the border, week after week, we trod in the footsteps of these people charged with making the maps and the landscape speak to each other, through small arrangements and thoughtful pragmatic decisions. A territory of care, not of guns.

Conclusion

The varied visual archives consulted during this project, and the three examples discussed, illustrated the fragile nature of territory. In the first example, I explored how material infrastructures shaped fragile territories by connecting individual bodies with global geopolitics in both extraordinary and mundane ways. The *global intimate* nexus of the pandemic was observed through new visual languages and practices, made tangible within material enactments. In the second example, I discussed how discourses of personal and state *entitlement* were connected to the concept of territory, pointing again to its tenuousness and fragility, relying on complex and precarious infrastructure from the mundane to the military. Territory, rather than being something natural and solid, needed to be constantly remade through infrastructure, mediating relations across scales through bodies. In the third example, instead of finding belligerent stories amongst the Treaties, I uncovered tales of civil servants painstakingly rambling along invisible lines, working out the best places to anchor border stones, and visual tales of loving encounters with place and landscape. These fragile territories were crafted in mundane offices by cohorts of office workers, in tatty paper files in archives carefully managed around the city, in stones carefully placed by artisans, in imaginary lines referenced in databases, in old postcards stored in family archives, and on maps scanned into online depositories.

In all these examples, territory was so provisional and fragile that it needed constantly remaking through careful and repeated practices; made material through specific infrastructures; marked out by rolls of barbed wire and concrete blocks moved around the city; grounded in multiple practices of care. These left traces that could be followed, clues that could be decoded, shadows that all together revealed something of the nature of territory, as much about society as about physical space. Beyond calculative practices of definition, delimitation and demarcation, and theories about appropriate proximity, size and shape that assumed territories were frozen frameworks where social life occurred, I walked through fragile territories, made and remade through social and individual actions.

[1] See Fall (2007) or Debarbieux (1999) for some discussion of differences between Anglophone and Francophone traditions or Minca and Fall (2013) for a discussion of Italian critical geographical traditions.

[2] Further discussion of natural/artificial borders and the corresponding idea of natural / artificial states can be found in Fall 2010, from which this section draws. There have been many other excellent critiques of natural boundaries. These share a desire to map, document and critique the obsession of revealing links between topography and states or boundaries – between nature and politics – through scientific and geographic expertise.

[3] Since 2020, there has been a multiplication of special issues of scientific journals on Covid-19, too many to mention here, as well as virtual special issues, i.e. online collections of already-published articles reassembled in a collection: one way for journals with slow article processing to respond quickly to contemporary issues. Thoughtful geographical ones include Aalbers, Beerepoot and Gerritsen 2020, for *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* and Rose-Redwood 2022, for *Dialogues in Human Geography*.

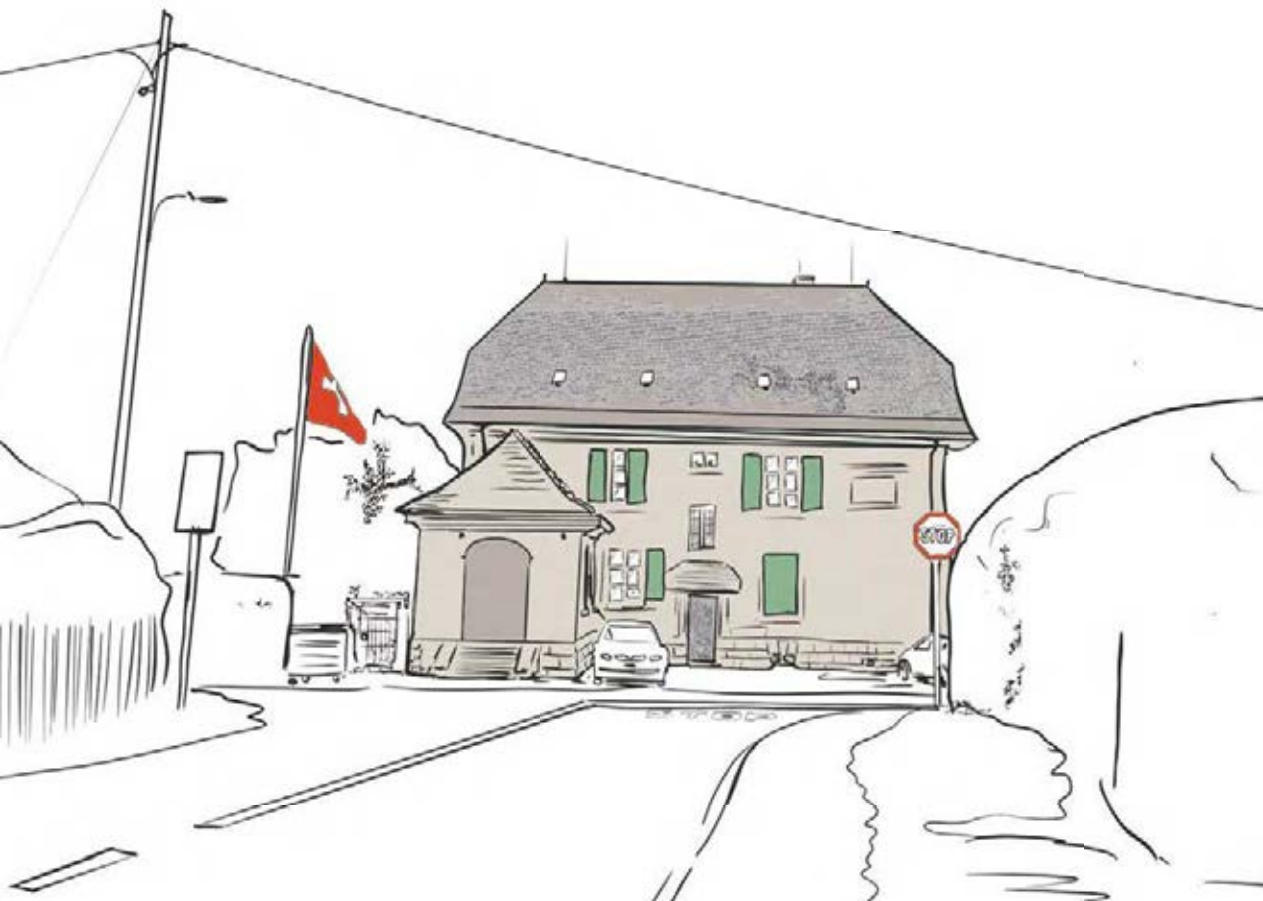
[4] This section draws from the guest editorial published in *Political Geography*, co-authored with Julie de Dardel and rewritten with her permission (Fall and Dardel 2022). In it, we compared the summit between Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin to the almost-simultaneous *Geneva Feminist Strike (Grève des Femmes*, Grève Féministe*: the asterisked 'Femmes' signaling trans and non-binary inclusivity) that brought together over 15'000 people in Geneva, exploring the diverse and distinct understandings of security and safety deployed and performed visually.

[5] There have been other interesting studies on the gendered language used by leaders during the pandemic, suggesting for example that Trump and Putin instrumentalised hierarchical gendered identities to enforce security policies in connection to Covid-19. Both leaders drew heavily on projections of gendered power to maximise the effect of their policies, and mobilised diverse gendered narratives, imageries, and practices to construct threats (Kuteleva and Clifford 2021; see also Dada 2021).

[6] Translating the polysemic meaning of *entitlement* into French would land somewhere between *droit* (*à la terre, au terrain*, etc.) and *privilege*, neither of which are particularly helpful in expressing the unpleasantness of entitled behaviour.

[7] See for example, in the State Archives, the "Procès-verbal de Délimitation entre les États de S. M. Le Roi de Sardaigne et le Canton de Genève", 1819; or the "Extrait du Procès-verbal de la délimitation entre le territoire du royaume de France et celui du canton de Genève", 1825.

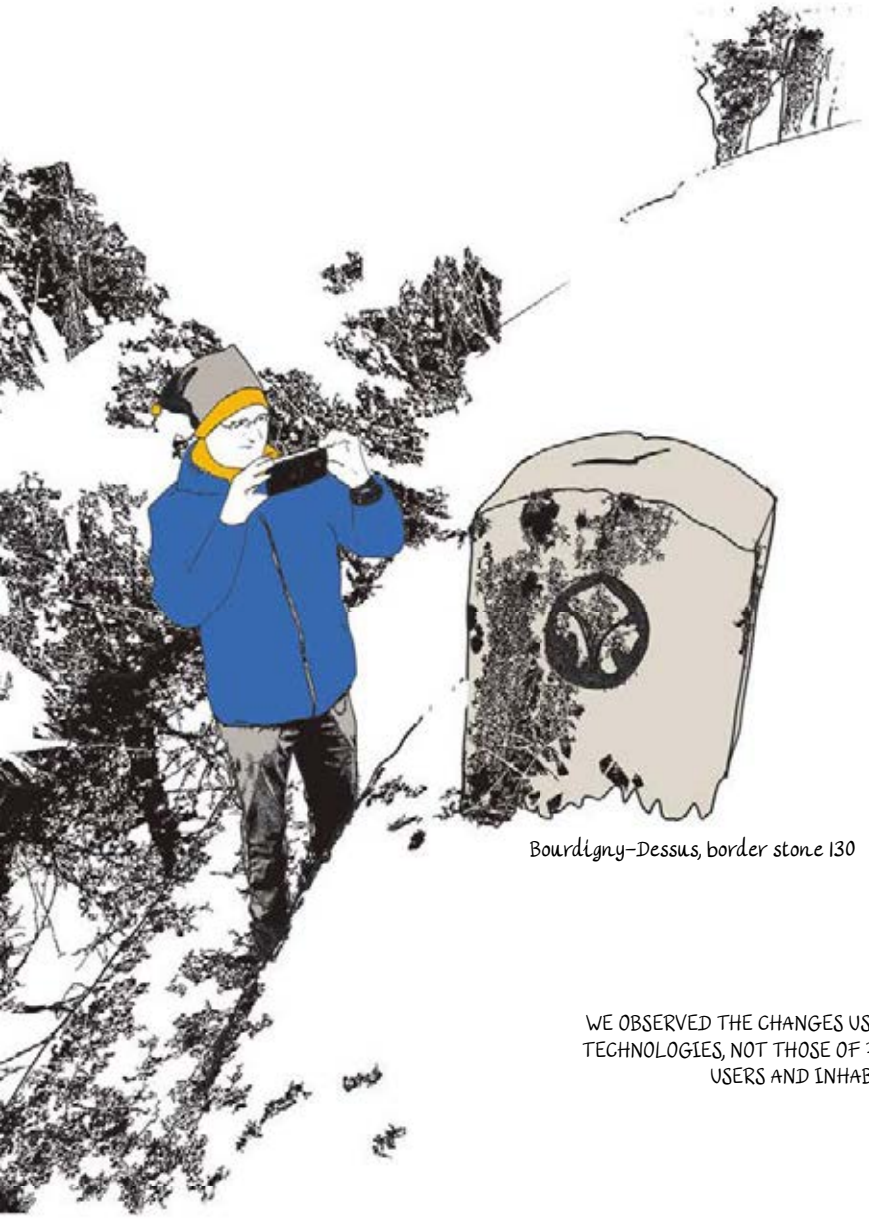
3. HOLDING THE LINE



SURVEYORS, GEOMETERS, PLANNERS AND TECHNICIANS HELD THE LINE WITH MAPS AND DIGITAL DATABASES.

SINCE 1816, ADJUSTMENTS TO THE LINE WERE MADE TO ACCOMMODATE URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AIRPORT EXTENSION, OR ROAD BUILDING.

EACH TIME, INTERNATIONAL TREATIES NEEDED TO BE SIGNED. CHANGES HAPPENED AT THE SPEED OF POLITICIANS, NOT OF BUILDERS.



Bourdigny–Dessus, border stone 130

WE OBSERVED THE CHANGES USING OUR OWN VISUAL TECHNOLOGIES, NOT THOSE OF PLANNERS BUT OF LAY USERS AND INHABITANTS.

ANY EXCHANGE INVOLVED TRANSFERS OF LAND OF EQUAL SURFACE, AS THOUGH EACH SQUARE METRE OF TERRITORY WERE SACRED.

AS WE WALKED ALONG, VIEWING THE LINE ON OUR SCREENS AND EXPERIENCING IT WITH OUR BODIES, I UNDERSTOOD THAT HOLDING AN INVISIBLE LINE MEANT STONE MASONS, HEAVY MACHINERY, GOOD WEATHER CONDITIONS, AND SKILLED TECHNICIANS.

AS WE SCRAMBLED IN BRAMBLES, WE SAW THAT THE FOUR METER CLEARANCE ZONE AROUND BORDER STONES WAS NO LONGER MAINTAINED.

WE SOMETIMES NEEDED SATELLITES TO FIND THE LINE.





IN GENEVA, THE "OFFICE DE LA MENSURATION OFFICIELLE" WAS IN CHARGE OF KNOWING EXACTLY WHERE THE BORDER LAY, TRACKING AND NEGOTIATING CONTEMPORARY SMALL CHANGES ON BEHALF OF THE SWISS STATE.



SINCE 1845, EVERY CHANGE OF EVERY BORDERLINE FOR ALL THE PLOTS OF LAND ACROSS THE CANTON WAS LOVINGLY RECORDED.



THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE BORDER STRETCHED TO THESE CAREFULLY MAINTAINED FILES.

THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER WAS JUST ONE LINE AMONG MANY.

"PRIMUS INTER PARES": FIRST AMONG EQUALS.



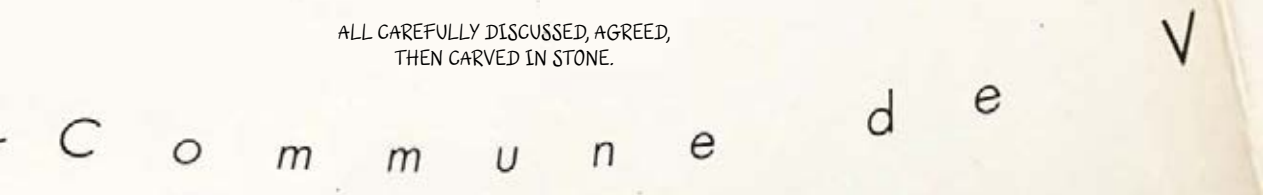
ABSTRACT LINES ON MAPS WERE MADE
AND MAINTAINED NOT BY MILITARY MIGHT BUT
BY CENTURY-LONG RECORDS OF CARE.


WE LEARNT TO READ THE LANDSCAPE, ALONG THE LINE.
WE SPOTTED THE CHANGES, THE DECISIONS, THE LINKS BETWEEN THE STONES AND THE MAPS.
Douane Zoll Dogana
Passage de la frontière autorisé
avec documents de voyage reconnus et valables
uniquement avec des marchandises dédouanées et/ou des effets personnels
Informations gratuites : 0800 222 040
WE LEARNT THE GRAMMAR OF THE STONES AND THE MEANING OF THE SIGNS.
OUR LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE LANDSCAPE MADE THE LOVINGLY-MAINTAINED LINE REAL TO US. WE BELIEVED THE STORIES TOLD BY THINGS.
1816
F



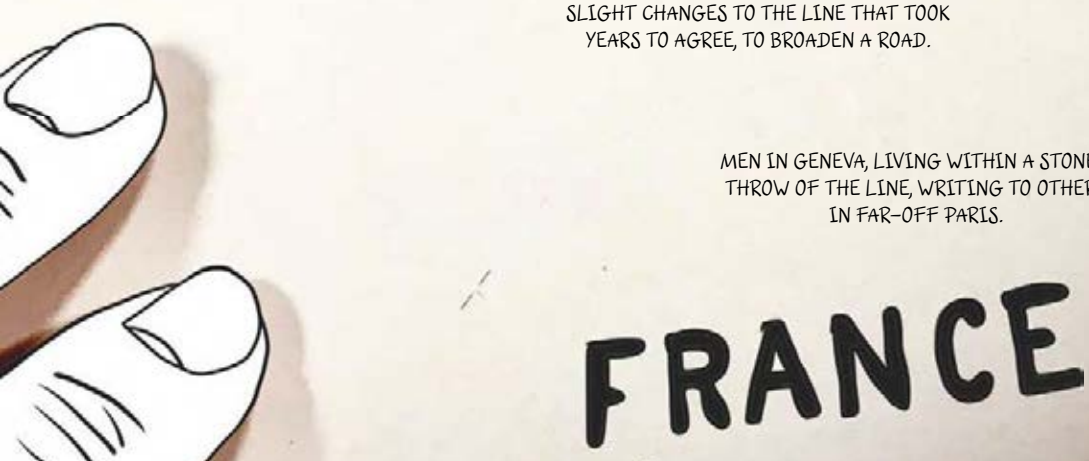
THE SMALL CHANGES, MINUTE ADJUSTMENTS,
PROGRESSIVE SHIFTS.

ALL CAREFULLY DISCUSSED, AGREED,
THEN CARVED IN STONE.



SLIGHT CHANGES TO THE LINE THAT TOOK
YEARS TO AGREE, TO BROADEN A ROAD.

MEN IN GENEVA, LIVING WITHIN A STONE'S
THROW OF THE LINE, WRITING TO OTHERS
IN FAR-OFF PARIS.



Delimitation along the road from Soral to Viry
between BP 31 and 46, cadastre Genève 1973.





OTHER FORCES WERE ALSO AT PLAY
TO TRY TO SHIFT THE LINE.

STREAMS AND RIVERS DIDN'T ALWAYS WANT
TO BE DISCIPLINED. THEY DIDN'T WANT
TO HOLD THE LINES STEADY ON THE MAPS.

WE WANDERED THE WATERY MARGINS,
ADMIRING THE ONGOING STRUGGLES
TO FIX THE STATUS QUO.

EVEN THE DIKES, WALLS AND FENCES
NEEDED TO BE DISCUSSED, NEGOTIATED
AND PAID FOR.

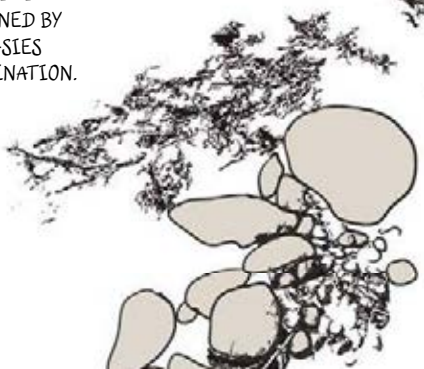






Allondon, Arande, Chambet,
Drize, Hermance, Foron, Laire,
Tuernant, Rhône, Versoix

RIVER BORDERS MAKING OUR HOME
AN ISLAND SURROUNDED
BY WATER, AS IF ORDAINED BY
18TH CENTURY FANTASIES
OF POLITICAL PREDESTINATION.

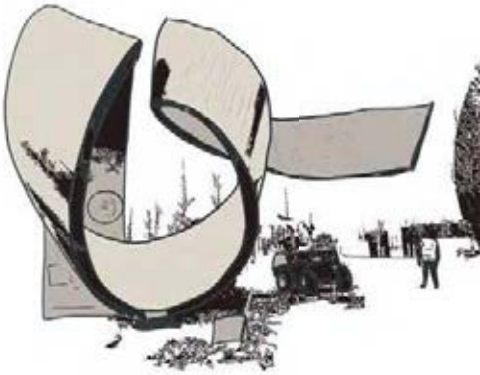


Laire river,
near Soral



HOLDING THE LINE TOOK ONGOING WORK, MAINTENANCE, INFRASTRUCTURE BUILT THROUGH FORMS, MAPS, LETTERS OF AGREEMENT, CONCRETE AND STEEL.





CERN: European Council for Nuclear Research

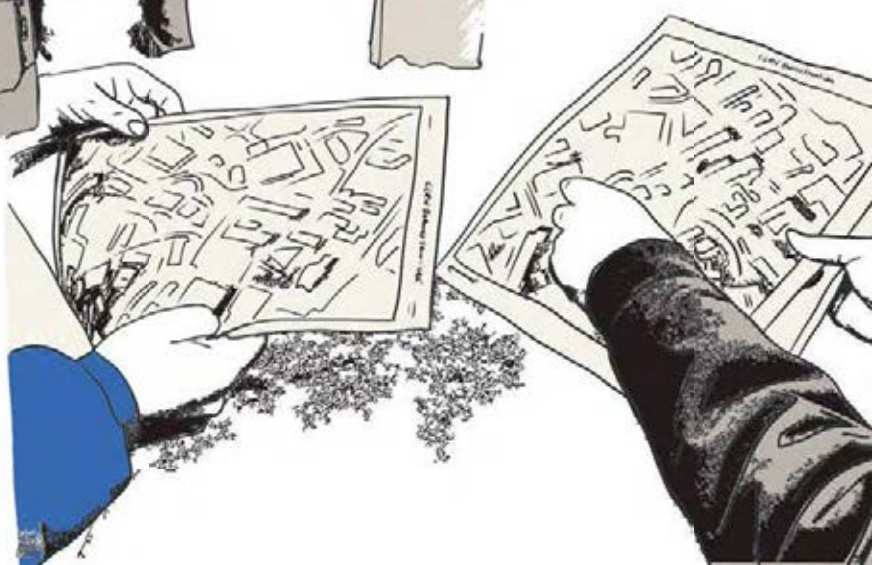
ONE DAY, HAVING SECURED ACCESS BADGES FROM UNIFORMED PRIVATE GUARDS, WE WALKED THE STRETCH OF BORDER WITHIN CERN, SITED ON A CROSS-BORDER CAMPUS.

THE TEAM REFEREE FOR TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOMATICS TOOK US BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS DEVOTED TO CUTTING-EDGE FUNDAMENTAL PHYSICS' RESEARCH, SEARCHING FOR 19TH CENTURY STONES.



PARTICLE ACCELERATORS SPUN SUB-ATOMIC PARTICLES ACROSS THE BORDER, IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST AND MOST COMPLEX SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS: THE LARGE HADRON COLLIDER.

LAYERS OF HISTORY ON COLOURED MAPS AND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS.





IN WHAT SEEMED LIKE AN ENGINEER'S JOKE, HOLDING THE BORDER IN PLACE HAD TAKEN SOME DOING WHEN A SMALL PARTICLE ACCELERATOR WAS BUILT ACROSS THE BORDER.



ONE STONE WAS RAISED UP ONTO A GRASSY BANK ABOVE THE TUNNEL, STANDING TALL ABOVE THE ATOMS ZOOMING PAST BELOW CLOSE TO THE SPEED OF LIGHT.



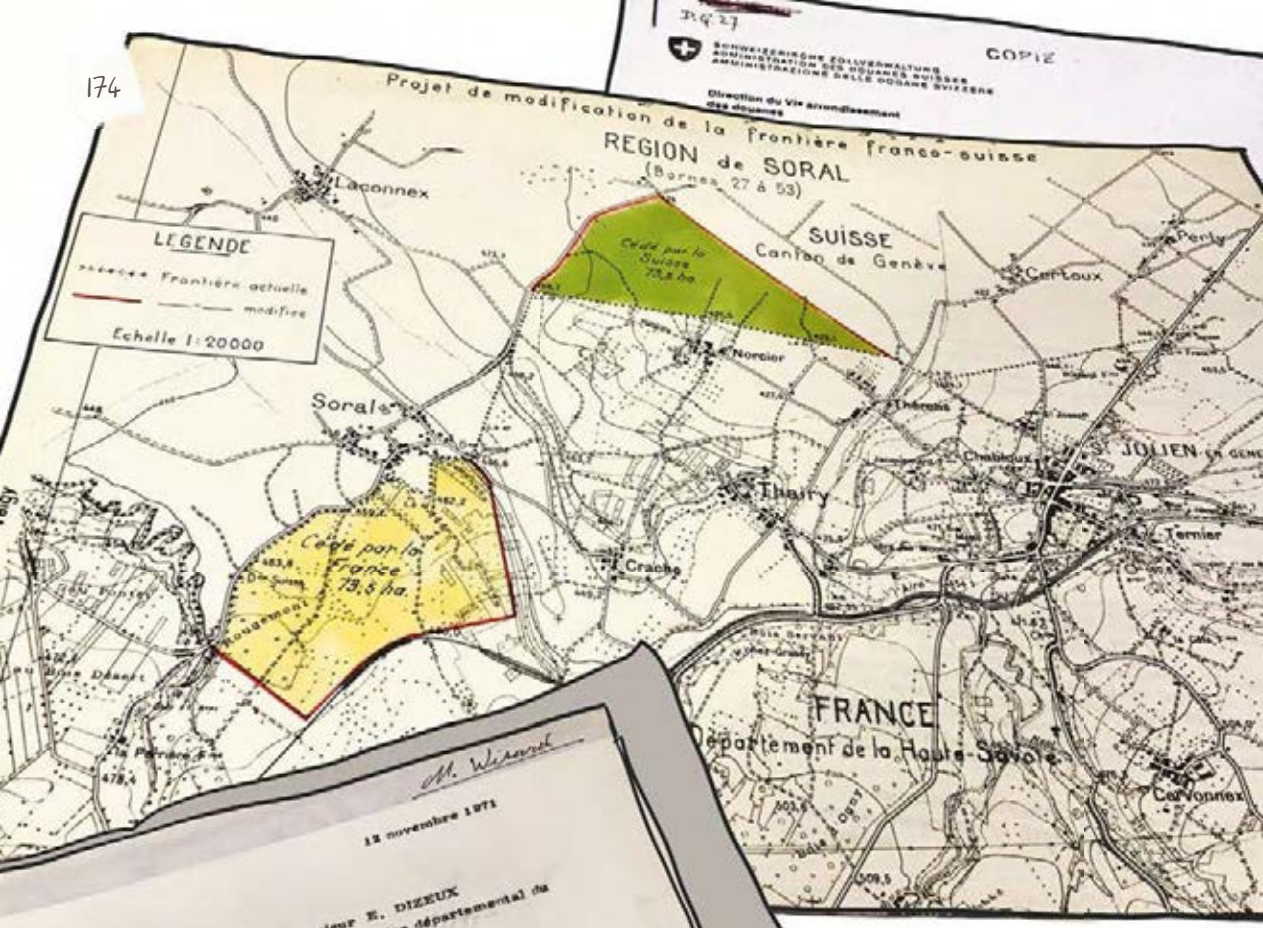
ANOTHER STAYED EXACTLY WHERE IT HAD FIRST BEEN LAID, WHEN THE ROAD WAS RAISED OVER IT.

IT HELD THE LINE INVISIBLY, ONLY ACCESSIBLE THROUGH A SECRET POTHOLE.



TOPOLOGICAL BORDER POETRY IN A PLACE BUILT FOR SCIENCE, THAT REMINDED US THAT TERRITORY WAS THREE-DIMENSIONAL.

ESPECIALLY WHEN CAREFUL BUILDERS SHOWED CREATIVE FLAIR AND SOME HUMOUR.



Abandoned scenario from 1953 for land exchange.

THE ARCHIVES OF THE SERVICE DE LA MENSURATION OFFICIELLE TOLD OTHER STORIES: PLANNED CHANGES TO THE BORDER WHICH MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT.

IN SORAL, IT TOOK 50 YEARS FOR BOTH PARTIES TO AGREE TO A NEW SCENARIO.

IT WAS NEITHER COUNTRY'S PRIORITY FOR A LONG TIME, EVEN WHEN LOCAL INHABITANTS HAD BEEN COMPLAINING SINCE THE 1950s ABOUT THE COMPLICATIONS OF LIVING IN A RURAL VILLAGE CUT THROUGH BY A BORDERLINE.

M. Wisard

12 novembre 1971

Monsieur E. DIZEUX
Chef du service départemental du
CADASTRE
Cité admini-trative
74 - ANNECY Haute-Savoie

ED/po

Monsieur,

A la suite d'un remembrement foncier d'une partie de la commune suisse de SORAL, le Cadastre va faire procéder au lever du nouvel état parcellaire.

En conséquence, nous avons fait une inspection des bornes frontières limitant cette commune des communes françaises de VIRY et de SAINT-JULIEN. Nous avons constaté que :

- la borne 40 penche; est à redresser
- la borne 44 est cassée; est à bétonner
- la borne 47 penche; est à redresser
- les bornes 35 et 36, coupées à raz du sol, ont leur gravure à compléter.

Nous allons procéder à ces travaux de réfection et sommes à votre disposition si vous voulez y assister.

Par ailleurs, vous serait-il possible de nous remettre un extrait des plans cadastraux sur lesquels figurent les bornes frontières no. 27 à 49; cela nous permettrait de voir s'il y a des divergences entre les cadastres français et suisse dans le tracé de cette frontière et de les corriger si nécessaire.

Dans l'attente de vos nouvelles je vous prie, Monsieur, mes salutations empressées.

E. DERIAZ
délégué à l'abornement
de la frontière

FRONTIERE SUISSE - FRANCE

ECHANGE DE TERRAINS

BARDONNEX - SAINT-JULIEN
SORAL - VIRY

CONSECUTIF AUX TRAVAUX DE L'AUTOROUTE
NIA - A401

Plan de situation, échelle 1:5000

Annexe à la convention entre la Suisse et la France concernant une rectification de la frontière, du

Suisse
Canton de Genève
Commune de Bardonnex
" Soral

France
Département de la Haute-Savoie
Commune de Saint-Julien en Genevois
" Viry

Le délégué suisse

Le délégué français

re Genève, le 23 février 1993



THEN, FROM 1975, GENEVA AND FRANCE STARTED TO PLAN A NEW MOTORWAY JUNCTION NEAR BARDONNEX.

GEOMETRICALLY COMPLICATED DUE TO TOPOGRAPHY, THE ROAD NEEDED TO LEAVE SWITZERLAND ABOVE A GORGE, ONLY TO RETURN TO SWISS TERRITORY A FEW DOZEN METERS LATER. IT WOULD BE EASIER TO GIVE THAT SMALL FIELD TO FRANCE.

LONG DISCUSSIONS STARTED UP IN SORAL ABOUT WHAT PLOTS COULD BE TRANSFERRED FROM FRANCE IN EXCHANGE.



A DECISION WAS REACHED AFTER PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS IN 1996. FINAL RATIFICATION INSTRUMENTS WERE EXCHANGED IN 2000.



Soral, border stone 48

THE LINE COULD BE MOVED.

FRONTIERE

RECONNAISSAN
DE LA NOUVELLE FR
le 23 août 2000

BARDONNEX – SAINT-JUL
SORAL – VIRY

CONSECUTIF AUX TRAVAUX DE L'AUT
NIA – A401

INTERVENANT			
Nom	Prénom	Qualité	OBSERVATIO
DUPANZ	Gaston	Maire	
[illegible]	[illegible]	Maire	
JOUBERT	HENRI	MAIRE	
BUET	[illegible]	MAIRE	
CA MAGRA	[illegible]	Maire	
[illegible]	[illegible]	Directeur cadastre GE	
CARLAIN	[illegible]	Agriculteur GE	
FREHIN	[illegible]	Délégué cantonal F	
WISARD	[illegible]	Délégué cantonal F	

Le 23.08.2000

GEOMETRES ASS

Seize hectares passent la frontière. Genève y gagne deux maisons*

Après la construction du viaduc autouroutier de Bardonnex, il a fallu franciser huit hectares de parcelles situées sous cet ouvrage. En contrepartie nos voisins ont cédé à Genève une surface identique du côté de Soral. Une opération complexe et rarissime.

ardonnex perd du terrain au rofit de la France... Soral en Ça y est, après quatorze ans ociations, un accord définit d'intervenir entre la et la Suisse pour rectifier ontières! Cette modifica- odue nécessaire par la ion du viaduc de Bardon- bientôt effective. Mer- ier en effet, l'ambassa- ias Krafft, directeur de du droit international mbassadeur de France ernard Garcia, ont si- vention destinée à rec- ntière franco-suisse, ordement des auto- Bardonnex et Saint- vois. Il faudra tou- ue les parlements nt cet échange.

uanières

ion cède ainsi rés pris sur la ardonnex en face, identique donne sur les ien-en-Gene- et Viry. Du genevoise le huit hec- deux mai-

t dicté par et poli- le que les riaduc au- e franco- é que le français. nève ne s le voi- ait à So- e ligne a fron- ations

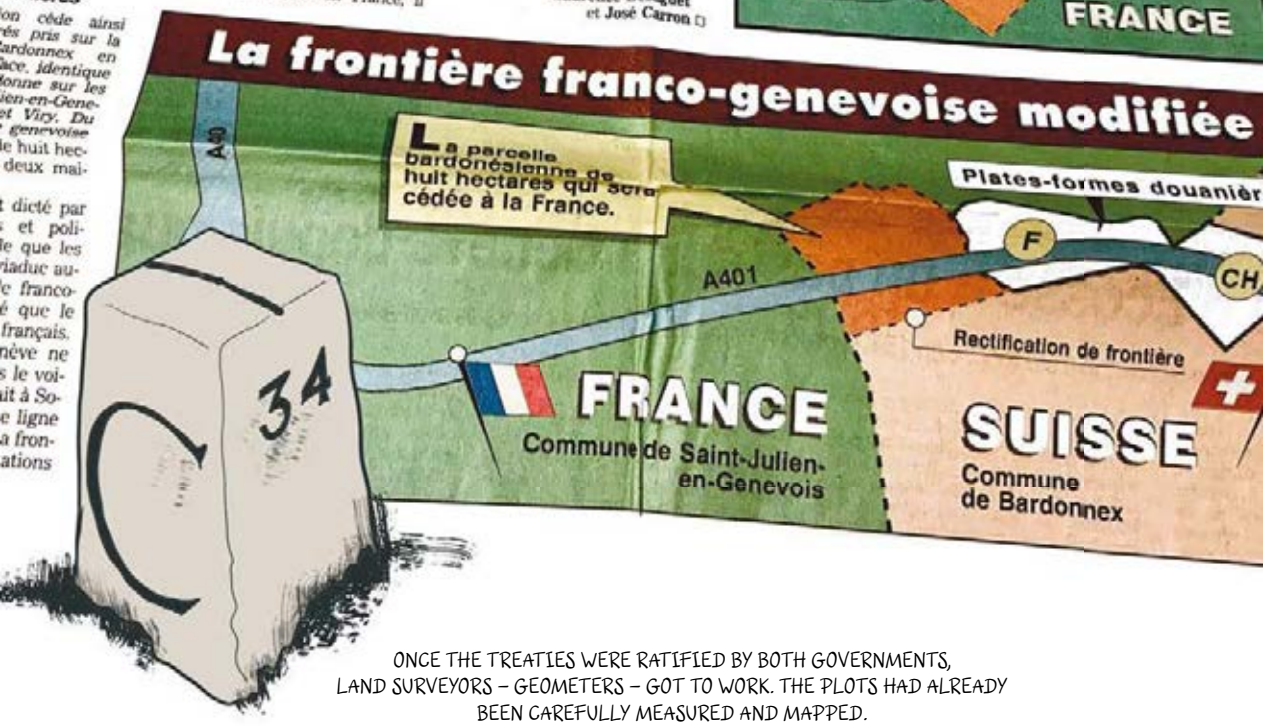
L'échange de territoire qui modifiera la frontière ne s'est pas fait sans mal. «Pour en arriver là, que de péripéties. Pas moins de quatorze années de négociations ont été nécessaires. Je pourrais écrire un livre sur le sujet», plaisante Arthur Harmann. Invité à commenter l'échange de territoire qui va modifier la frontière franco-suisse, l'ingénieur cantonal du Département des travaux publics en charge du dossier se remémore une foule d'anecdotes parfois hilarantes qui ont émaillé les discussions entre Français et Suisses. «Une fois, alors que je participais à une réunion côté France, les participants en sont venus à évoquer la guerre 39/45, c'est vous dire! Du point de vue administratif, les choses sont relativement simples en Suisse. En France, il faut en revanche obtenir l'assentiment de plusieurs ministères pour une affaire comme celle-là. Le ministère, sont concernés les ministres des Affaires étrangères, des Finances et de l'Intérieur», relève Arthur Harmann.

Sans compter que l'accord est non seulement franco-suisse, mais aussi franco-français, car Saint-Julien et Viry ont dû s'entendre sur leur contribution respective. Pas facile!

Quoi qu'il en soit, la toute fraîche convention règle l'échange de territoire prévu par un accord signé le 27 septembre 1984. Quant au pont situé près de Bardonnex, il est intégré au réseau autoroutier français et fonctionne déjà depuis 1993.

Laurence Bézaguet et José Carron □





ONCE THE TREATIES WERE RATIFIED BY BOTH GOVERNMENTS, LAND SURVEYORS – GEOMETERS – GOT TO WORK. THE PLOTS HAD ALREADY BEEN CAREFULLY MEASURED AND MAPPED.

THE NEW TERRITORIES THEN NEEDED TO BE INTEGRATED INTO THE EXISTING LAND REGISTRY – THE CADASTRE.

A MOTORWAY NEEDED TO BE BUILT BEFORE SOMEONE'S GARDEN, ELSEWHERE, MADE SENSE.

* Sixteen hectares change side along the border. Geneva gains two houses.

TO MOVE THE LINE, SURVEYORS NEGOTIATED WITH COMMUNITIES AND LAND OWNERS; MEASURED AND MAPPED; DELIMITED THE NEW PLOTS; INTEGRATED THEM INTO THE CANTON'S LEDGER WHILE REMOVING THE OLD ONES.

PRACTICES OF CARE, CARRIED OUT WITHOUT FANFARE.

THEN, WHEN ALL WAS DONE, THE LINE WAS MARKED BY STONES AND BRASS TAGS.



Bardonnex



FINDING SKILLED ARTISAN STONE MASONS WAS NO LONGER EASY, WHICH CREATED OTHER ISSUES.

MOVING THE HEAVY STONES TO RURAL OR INACCESSIBLE LOCATIONS WAS OFTEN LOGISTICALLY FRAUGHT.

THESE WERE HEAVY OBJECTS, SOMETIMES TWO METERS HIGH. THEY COULDN'T BE INSTALLED IF THE GROUND WAS WET OR MUDDY.

THEY NEEDED TO BE LAID AND ADJUSTED IN EXACTLY THE RIGHT PLACE, WITH THE CARVED LINES ON TOP FACING PRECISELY IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

SHIFTING THE LINE MEANT MOBILIZING TROUPES ON THE GROUND: NOT SOLDIERS BUT CAREFUL PROFESSIONALS, ENROLLED TO MAINTAIN COMPLEX INFRASTRUCTURE, MAKING ABSTRACT TERRITORIES REAL.



(From photos of the "Service de la mensuration officielle" archive)



THE MEMORY OF THOSE BORDER CHANGES LAY IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE LAND REGISTRY.

BUT VISUAL MEMORIES WERE ALSO SAVED ELSEWHERE.

THE "CENTRE D'ICONOGRAPHIE GENEVOISE", THE CANTON'S COLLECTION OF LOCAL MAPS, PHOTOGRAPHS, POSTCARDS, AND OTHER VISUAL MATERIAL, ALSO HELD TRACES OF THE BORDER.

CAREFULLY CURATED ALBUMS OF PHOTOGRAPHS, GIFTED BY LOCAL PEOPLE, COMMISSIONED OR BOUGHT.

HAPHAZARD DRAWERS OF POSTCARDS, SORTED BY GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION.

HAND-DRAWN MAPS DATING BACK CENTURIES.

DRAWERS FULL OF OLD POSTCARDS SORTED BY LOCATION.

VISUAL STORIES OF A SMALL TERRITORY, HELD IN SMALL ROOMS STAFFED BY DEDICATED PROFESSIONALS IN THE CENTRE OF THE CITY, OPEN TO ALL.

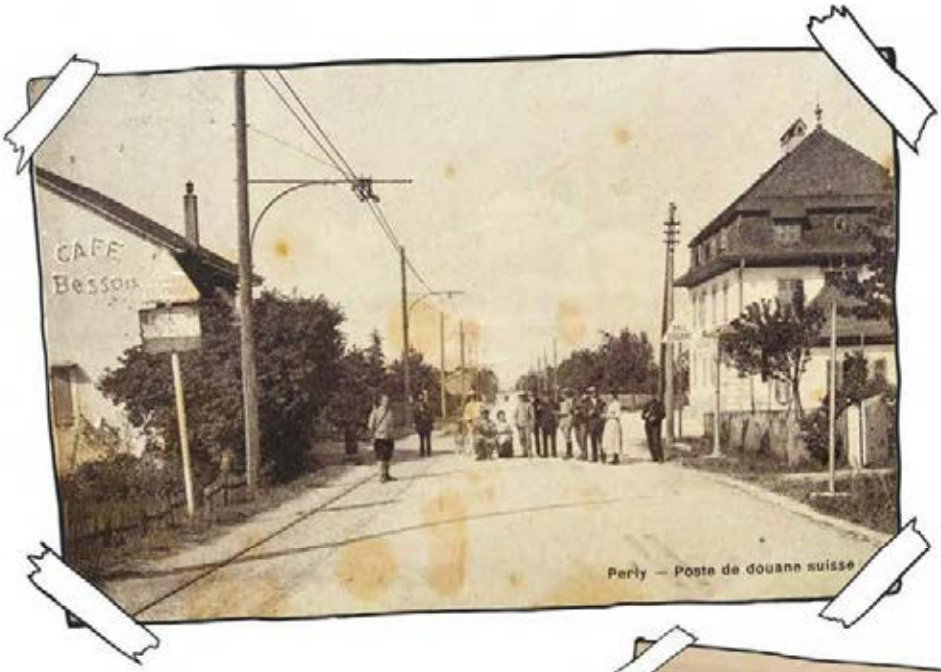




POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE OF ONE WORLD
AND THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER, PRINTED AND
SOMETIMES SENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

AN AGE BEFORE MASS-PRODUCED CAMERAS OR SELFIES.

A TIME WHEN BORDERPOSTS WERE PART OF THE NATIONAL IMAGERY,
WORTH SENDING TO FRIENDS OR FAMILY.



I ENJOY LOOKING FOR TRACES OF PAST INFRASTRUCTURE AS I WALK, MATCHING IT TO WHAT I CAN SEE.

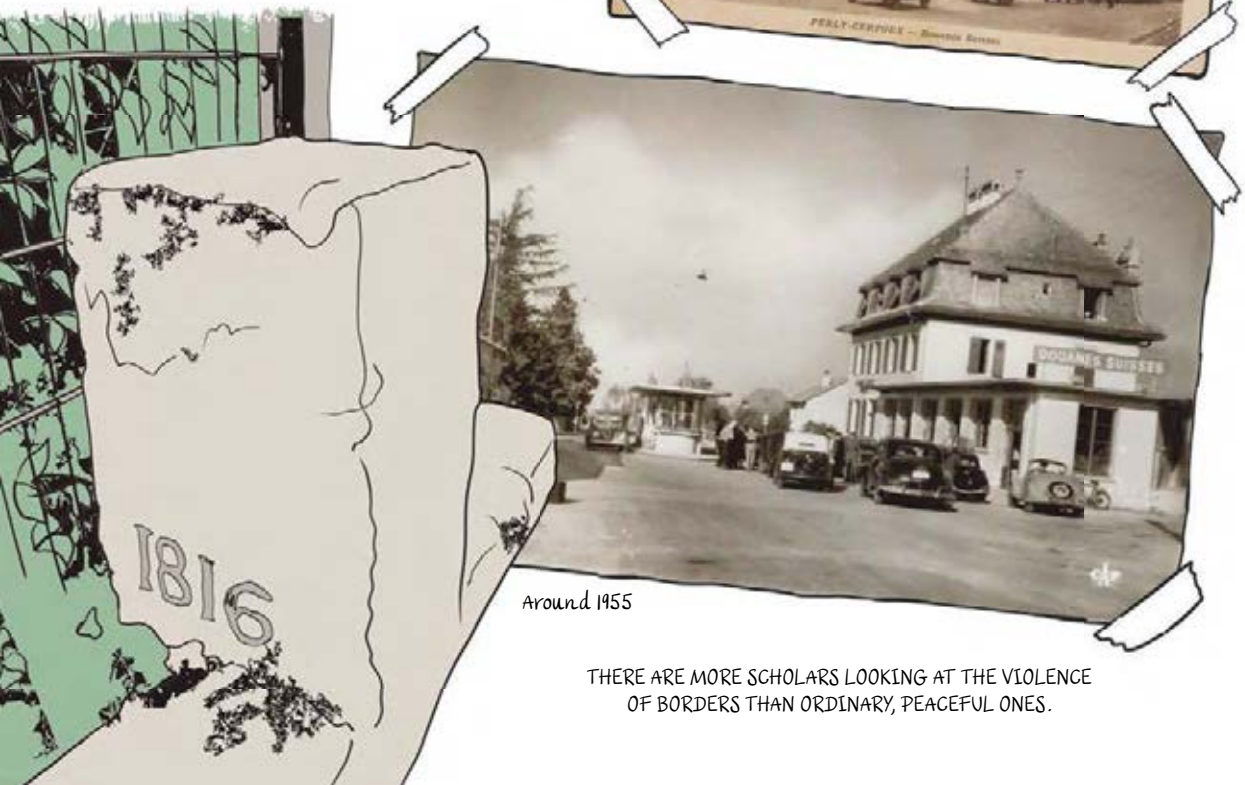
Postcard sent in 1921

THE SAME BORDER POSTS WERE PICTURED THROUGH THE YEARS, MAKING IMPROMPTU PHOTOGRAPHIC TIME-SERIES.

Around 1930



THESE PICTURES REMIND ME THAT THESE ARE LIVED LANDSCAPES. MY RESEARCH BORN OF A PANDEMIC IS NOT AN ORDINARY PROJECT IN SOCIAL SCIENCE. I SPEAK TO THINGS MORE THAN PEOPLE.



Around 1955

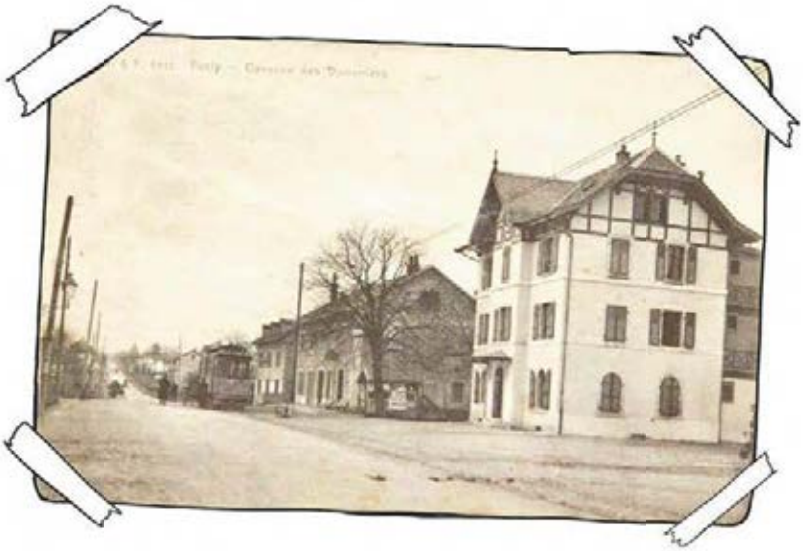
THERE ARE MORE SCHOLARS LOOKING AT THE VIOLENCE OF BORDERS THAN ORDINARY, PEACEFUL ONES.

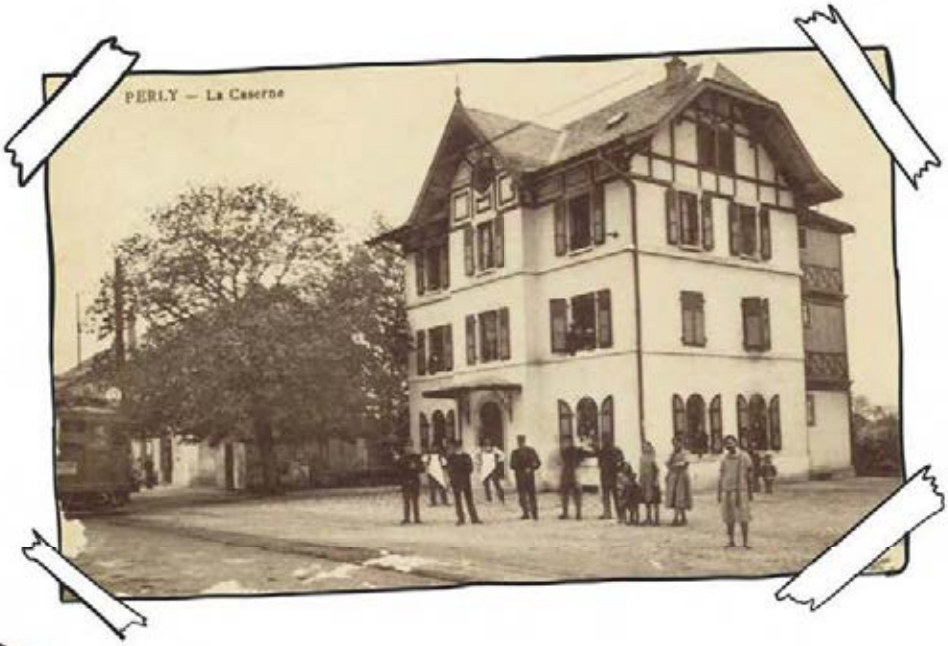
I NEVERTHELESS FIND MEANING IN MY MORE MUNDANE STUDY,
FAR FROM GEOPOLITICAL FLASHPOINTS. I DIG OUT LAYERS OF PRACTICES
AND IMAGINARIES THAT CONSTRUCT AND MAINTAIN THESE PLACES
THAT STRETCH ACROSS TWO WORLDS, ONE STEP AFTER ANOTHER.



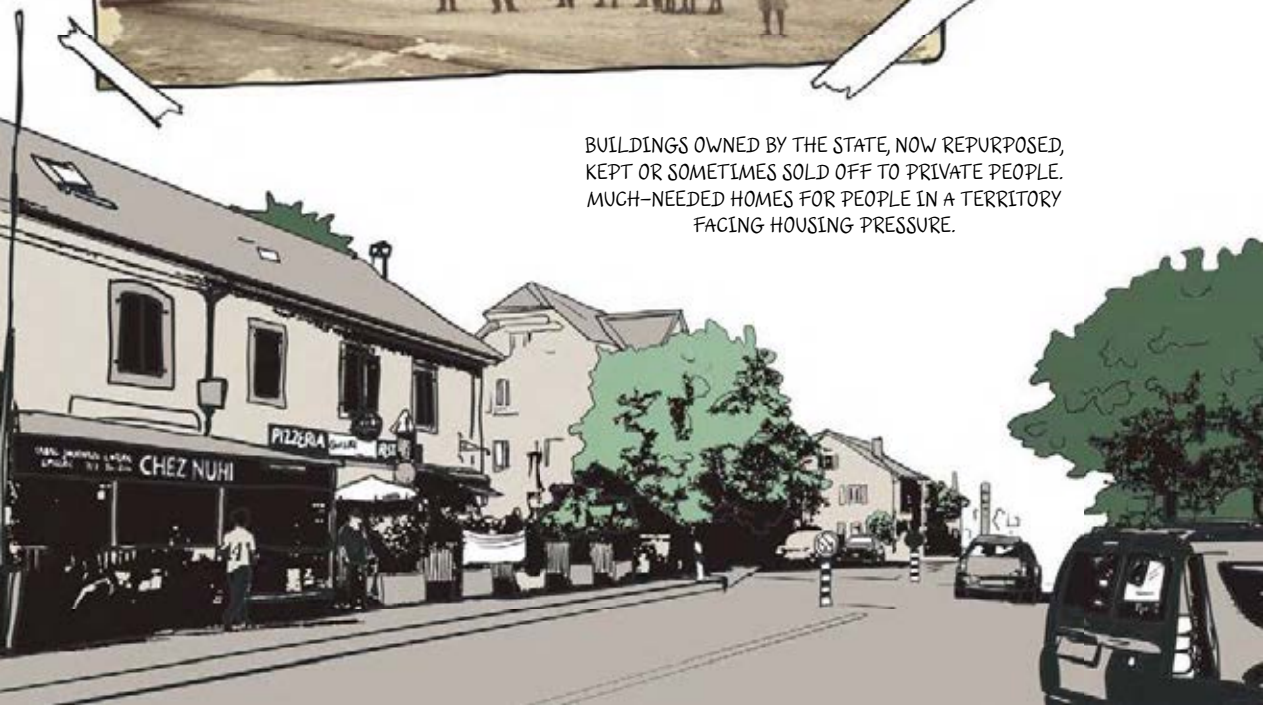
THE IMAGES SHOWED INFRASTRUCTURES BUILT TO HOUSE SOME OF THE PEOPLE WORKING TO HOLD THE LINE.

HOMES FOR BORDER GUARDS – DOUANIERS AND GARDES-FRONTIÈRES – AND THEIR FAMILIES. PLACES TO LIVE, WORK, BUILD LIVES.





BUILDINGS OWNED BY THE STATE, NOW REPURPOSED, KEPT OR SOMETIMES SOLD OFF TO PRIVATE PEOPLE. MUCH-NEEDED HOMES FOR PEOPLE IN A TERRITORY FACING HOUSING PRESSURE.



I DREAMT OF ENTERING, EXPLORING ALL THE HIDDEN CORNERS, LOOKING OUT TO THE INVISBLE BORDER FROM THE WINDOW.



Border post

Staff housing

ALL THE PLACES AND BUILDINGS CONNECTED TO THE BORDER WERE PAINSTAKINGLY RECORDED WITHIN THE BROADER INVENTORY OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF THE "OFFICE DU PATRIMOINE ET DES SITES".



TO MY SURPRISE, THESE SITES WEREN'T VALUED OR PRESENTED AS A COHERENT WHOLE. YET, BY EXPLORING ALL THE HIDDEN CORNERS OF THIS SINGULAR ENSEMBLE, IT INCREASINGLY SEEMED TO ME THAT THEY CONSTITUTED A QUITE UNIQUE COLLECTION.

A SMALL NECKLACE OF ROUGH PEARLS ALL ALONG THE LINE, STRETCHING ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY.

IN THE CANTON OF GENEVA, A REMARKABLE PART OF THE BUILDINGS DATED BACK TO THE 20TH CENTURY, AND WERE DESIGNED BY ONE SAME ARCHITECT.

MARC CAMOLETTI (1857–1940), BORN IN CARTIGNY, ALSO DESIGNED THE FAMOUS ART AND HISTORY MUSEUM IN GENEVA. BUT IT WAS HIS MORE ORDINARY BUILDINGS THAT CHARMED ME THE MOST, PUTTING A VERY RECOGNIZABLE VISUAL STAMP ON THE LANDSCAPE.

Kennel



THE OLDEST REMAINING BUILDING DATED BACK TO 1807: A RURAL BUILDING REPURPOSED AS A BORDER POST IN SATIGNY. THE MOST RECENT WAS A BUILDING IN VEYRIER, CONSTRUCTED IN 1983.



Telephone center

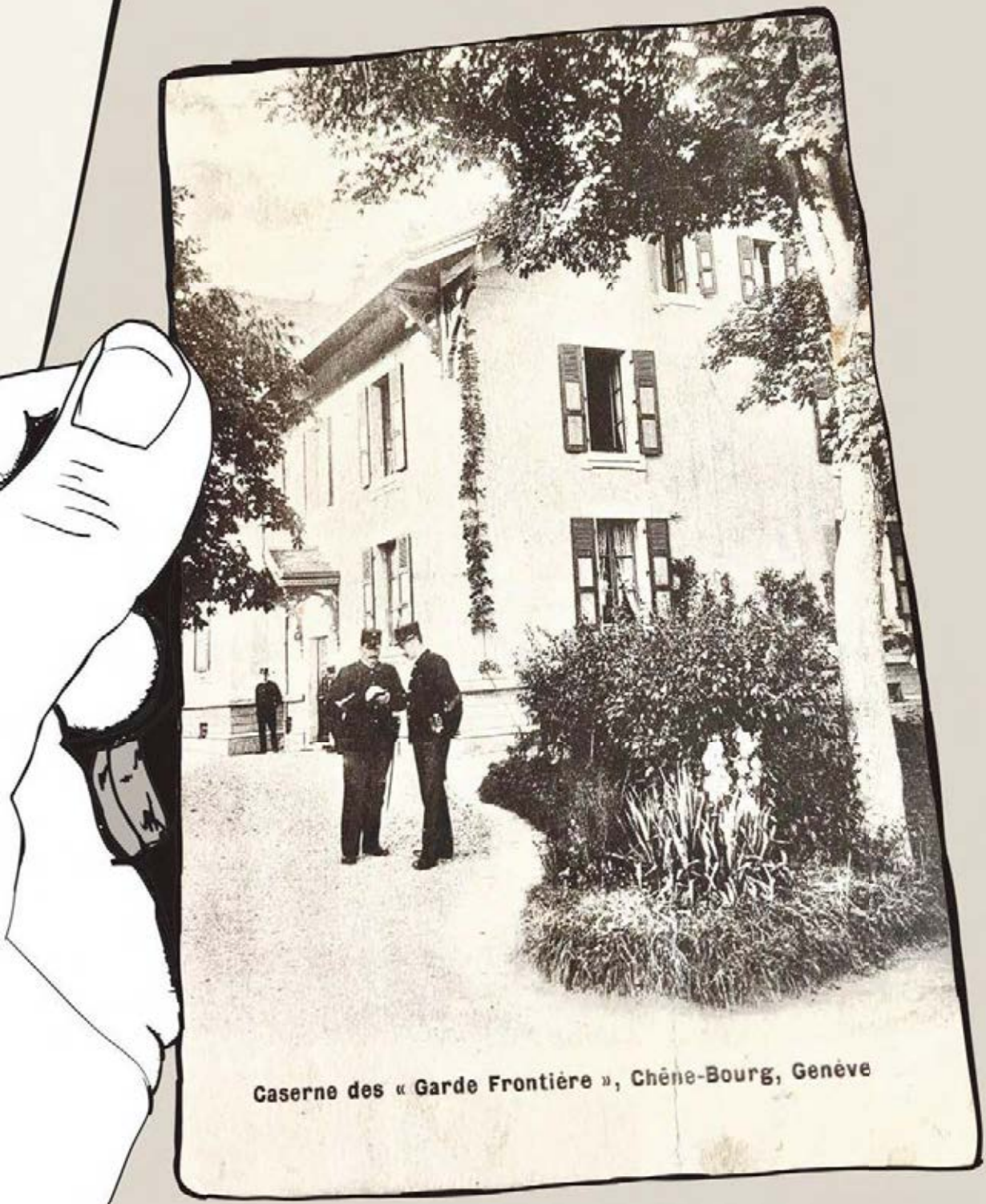
THEIR CONSTRUCTION DATES INDICATED HOW REGULARLY AND CONTINUOUSLY THEY WERE ESTABLISHED AS A SERIES, WITH MANY COMPLEXES ENLARGED, TRANSFORMED AND MODIFIED TO SUIT THE STATE'S CHANGING NEEDS.

IF ALL WERE NOT CONSIDERED VALUABLE ACCORDING TO THE CRITERIA OF THE CANTONAL ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE SURVEY, THE OLD AND NEW BORDER POSTS OFTEN SOLD OFF TO PRIVATE OWNERS UNDENIABLY SHAPED THE BORDER LANDSCAPE. I FOUND THEM FASCINATING.

Construction dates for the border posts and former sites connected to the border in Geneva:

Anières: 1892; 1902; 1958
Avusy: 1900
Bardonnex: 1810; 1896; 1929; 1929
Bernex: 1914
Chancy: 1907; 1913; 1949
Collex-Bossy: 1900; 1982
Corsier: 1909; 1931
Dardagny: 1875; 1901
Gy: 1908
Hermance: 1952
Jussy: 1902; 1956
Meyrin: 1899; 1899; 1917; 1931
Perly-Certoux: 1852; 1905
Presinge: 1900; 1903; 1948
Puplinge: 1948
Satigny: 1807; 1900; 1922
Soral: 1818; 1919
Thônex: 1953; 1971; 1975
Troinex: 1892; 1914
Versoix: 1896; 1962
Veyrier: 1911; 1983

SOME IMAGES SHOWED PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES WERE ENROLLED IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE BORDER, LIKE BORDER GUARDS: THE DOUANIERS WHO CHECKED GOODS AND PASSPORTS, AND SEARCHED FOR CONTRABAND AND ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES CROSSING THE LINE.















OTHER POSTCARDS ABOUT LIFE ON THE BORDER
WERE PRINTED AS FICTIONNAL SERIES, LIKE SHORT
EPISTOLARY COMICS.

STORIES OF HEROIC FRENCH BORDER GUARDS
INTERCEPTING SMUGGLERS FROM SWITZERLAND. TODAY,
THE STEREOTYPES WOULD PROBABLY BE REVERSED.

IF SOMEONE SENT THEM SEPARATELY, DID THEY REACH
THEIR DESTINATION IN THE RIGHT ORDER?

I ENJOYED HUNTING FOR THESE PICTURES,
PUTTING BODIES BACK INTO MY QUEST.



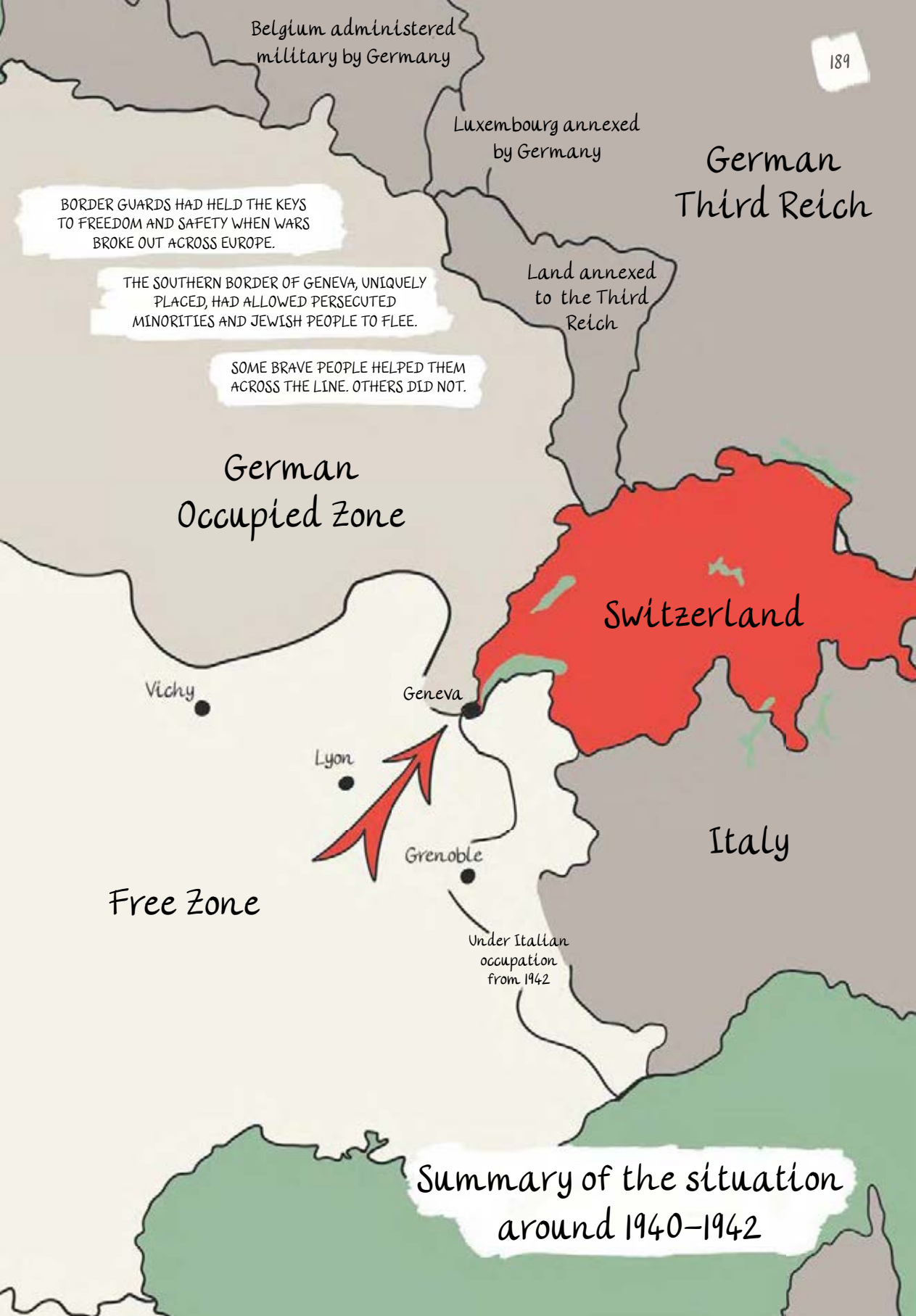


THESE BORDER LANDSCAPE HELD MEMORIES OF CARE BUT ALSO OF VIOLENCE.

IMAGES OF MILITARIZED SURVEILLANCE: ALL-SEEING, ALL-KNOWING MASCULINE GUARDS, WATCHING FROM ABOVE LIKE CARICATURES OF GEOPOLITICAL VIEWPOINTS, PART OF INFRASTRUCTURES OF FEAR.

THIS WAS A LINE THAT HAD BOTH KILLED AND SAVED.





Summary of the situation around 1940–1942



IN SUCH EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES, SOME LOCAL PEOPLE CHOSE TO USE THE BORDERLINE FOR GOOD.

WE ENCOUNTERED SOME OF THEM AS WE WALKED.

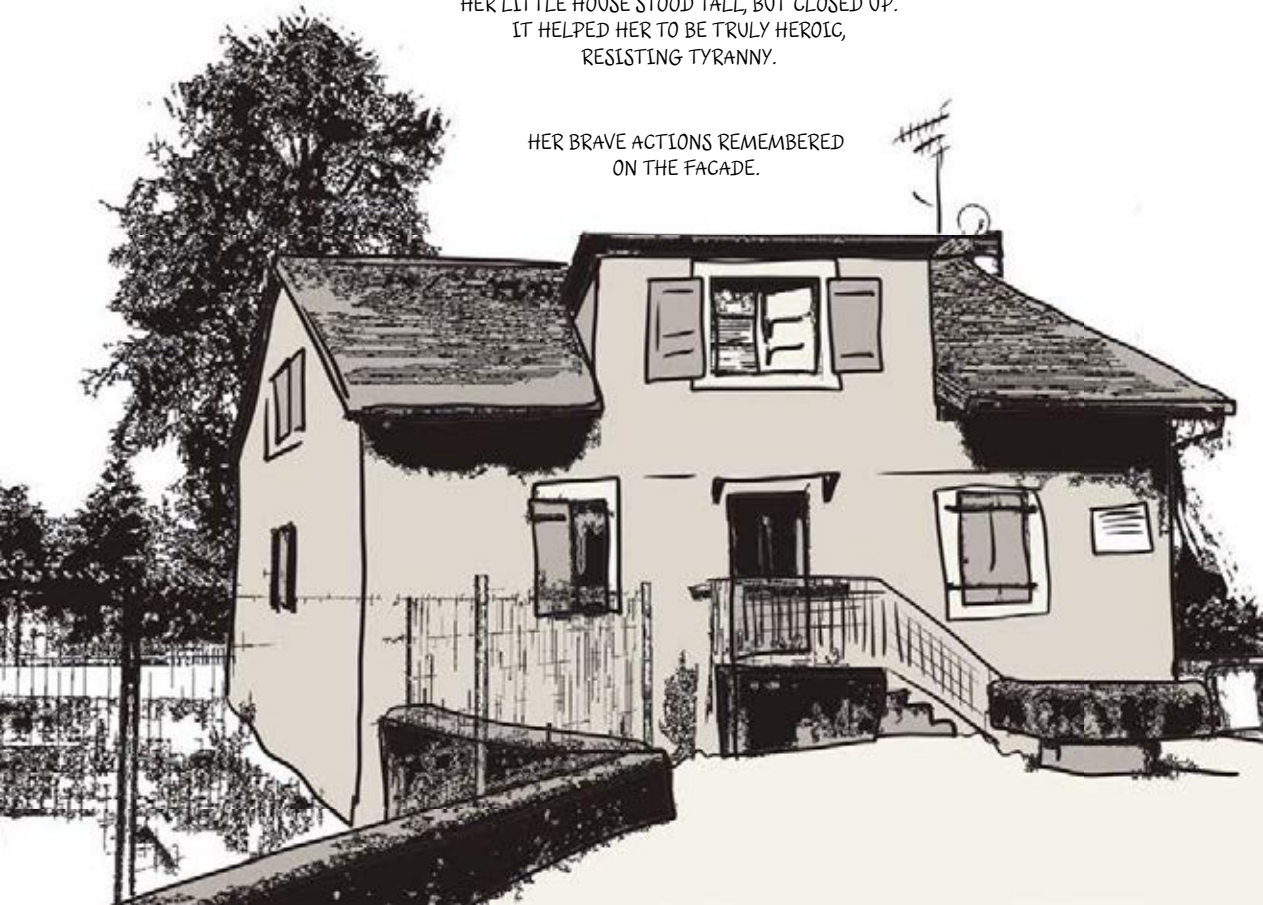
IRÈNE GUBIER WAS ONE SUCH REMARKABLE PERSON, MAKING USE OF HER HOUSE LOCATED ON THE BORDER TO PASS VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND CRUCIAL INTELLIGENCE.

OFFICIALLY LOCATED IN FRANCE, THE BACK DOOR OPENED OUT INTO SWISS TERRITORY. AT NIGHT, SHE COULD SLIP OUT TO PASS ON MESSAGES.

Moëllesulaz / Moillesulaz

HER LITTLE HOUSE STOOD TALL, BUT CLOSED UP. IT HELPED HER TO BE TRULY HEROIC, RESISTING TYRANNY.

HER BRAVE ACTIONS REMEMBERED ON THE FACADE.





AT THAT TIME, THERE WAS BARBED WIRE ALL ALONG THE BORDER.

IRÈNE CHOSE TO USE THE LINE TO SAVE, NOT KILL.

THAT ONE BRAVE WOMAN RETURNED FROM THE UNSPEAKABLE HORRORS OF THE DEATH CAMPS AND LIVED TO OLD AGE, ALONG THE LINE.

A BORDER STONE SITS AT THE CORNER OF HER HOUSE, LOVINGLY RESTORED.

A SHAMEFUL TIME, TOO EASILY FORGOTTEN.

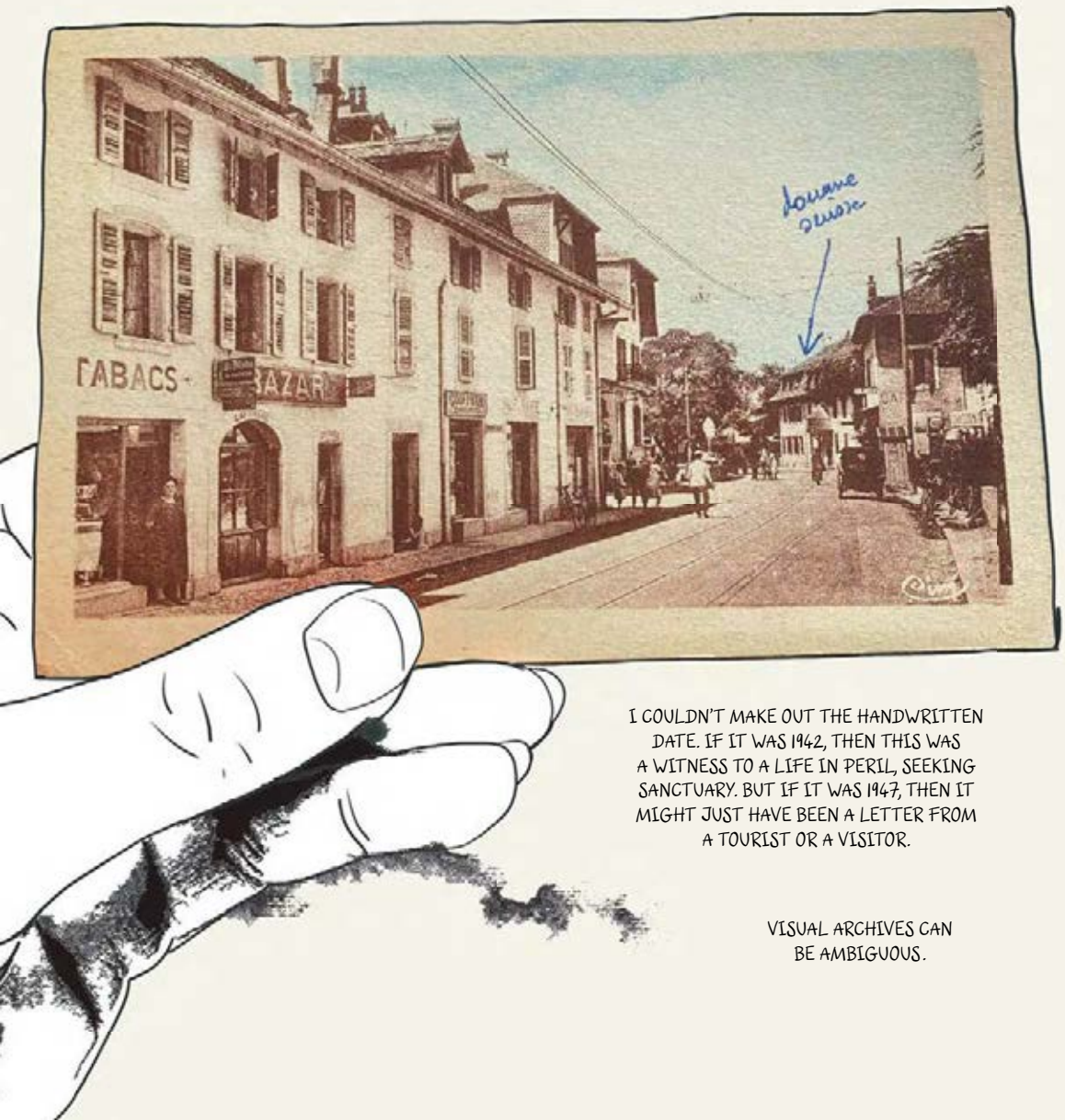


OTHER TALES ENCOUNTERED WERE MORE AMBIGUOUS OR DIFFICULT TO INTERPRET.

A POSTCARD WITH A SHORT MESSAGE AND A HAND WRITTEN INSCRIPTION INDICATING THE BORDER POST, TELLING SOMEONE ABOUT TRYING TO CROSS THE BORDER, BUT BEING TURNED AWAY.

"I am writing to you next to a noisy waterfall, overlooking the raging Arve river that is rushing towards the Rhône (...).
I am staying in Annemasse with the hope of getting to Geneva but I am stopped at the border, 4km from the promised land. I must leave for Thonon." (Personal translation)

THERE WAS NO NAME OR ADDRESS. IT MUST HAVE BEEN SENT IN AN ENVELOPE, NOW LOST.



I COULDN'T MAKE OUT THE HANDWRITTEN DATE. IF IT WAS 1942, THEN THIS WAS A WITNESS TO A LIFE IN PERIL, SEEKING SANCTUARY. BUT IF IT WAS 1947, THEN IT MIGHT JUST HAVE BEEN A LETTER FROM A TOURIST OR A VISITOR.

VISUAL ARCHIVES CAN BE AMBIGUOUS.

THE PLACE LOOKED SO DIFFERENT NOW, WITH TRAM TRACKS RUNNING ALMOST SEAMLESSLY ACROSS THE BORDER. A SLIGHT CHANGE IN TARMAC, ONE OF THE FEW SIGNS VISIBLE ON THE GROUND.

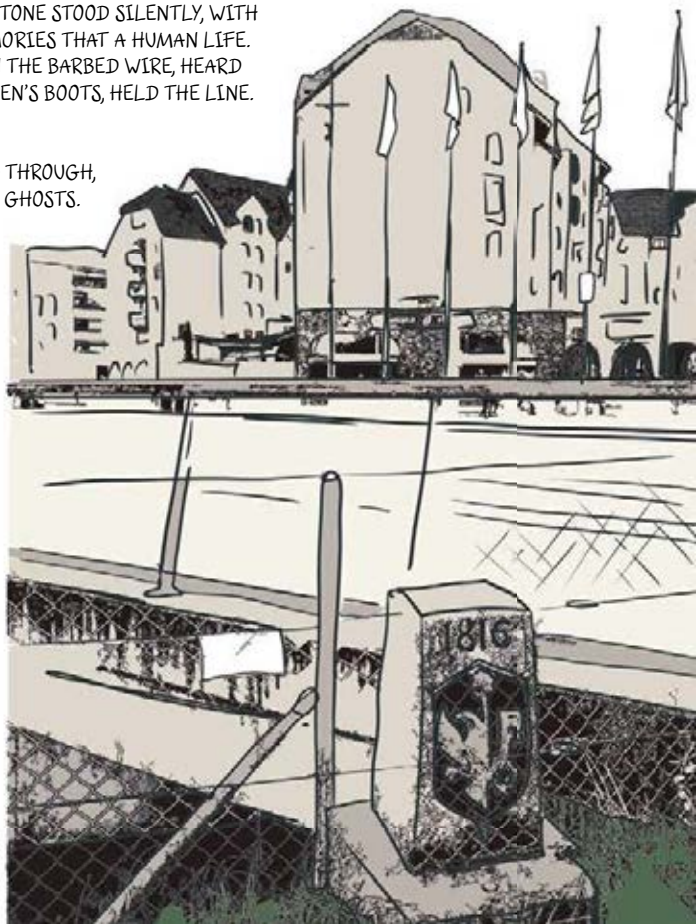
YET BOTH SIDES STILL SPELLED ITS NAME DIFFERENTLY.



THE BORDER STONE STOOD SILENTLY, WITH LONGER MEMORIES THAT A HUMAN LIFE. IT HAD SEEN THE BARBED WIRE, HEARD THE POLICEMEN'S BOOTS, HELD THE LINE.

I WAS JUST PASSING THROUGH, LISTENING TO THE GHOSTS.

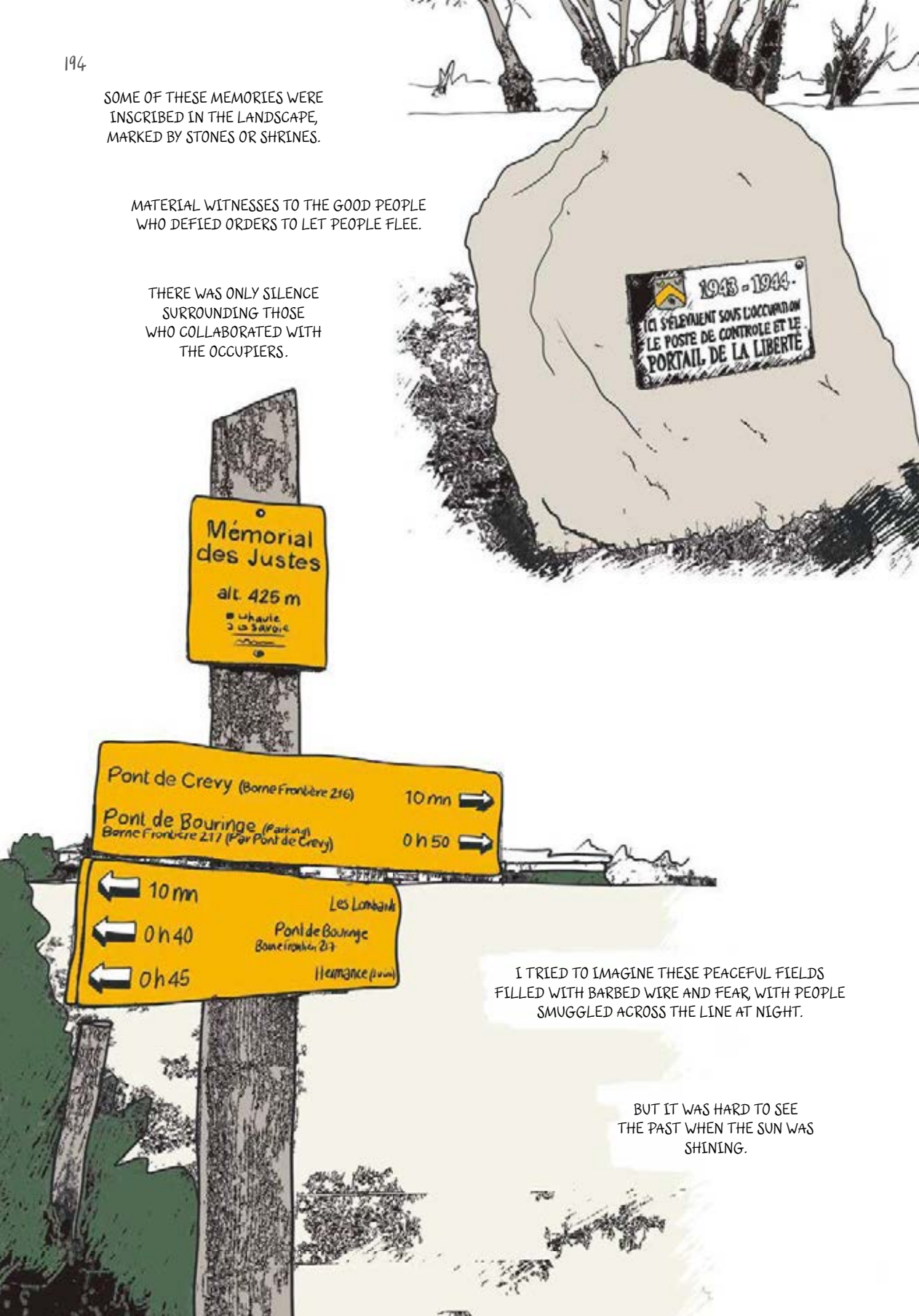




SOME OF THESE MEMORIES WERE INSCRIBED IN THE LANDSCAPE, MARKED BY STONES OR SHRINES.

MATERIAL WITNESSES TO THE GOOD PEOPLE WHO DEFIED ORDERS TO LET PEOPLE FLEE.

THERE WAS ONLY SILENCE SURROUNDING THOSE WHO COLLABORATED WITH THE OCCUPIERS.



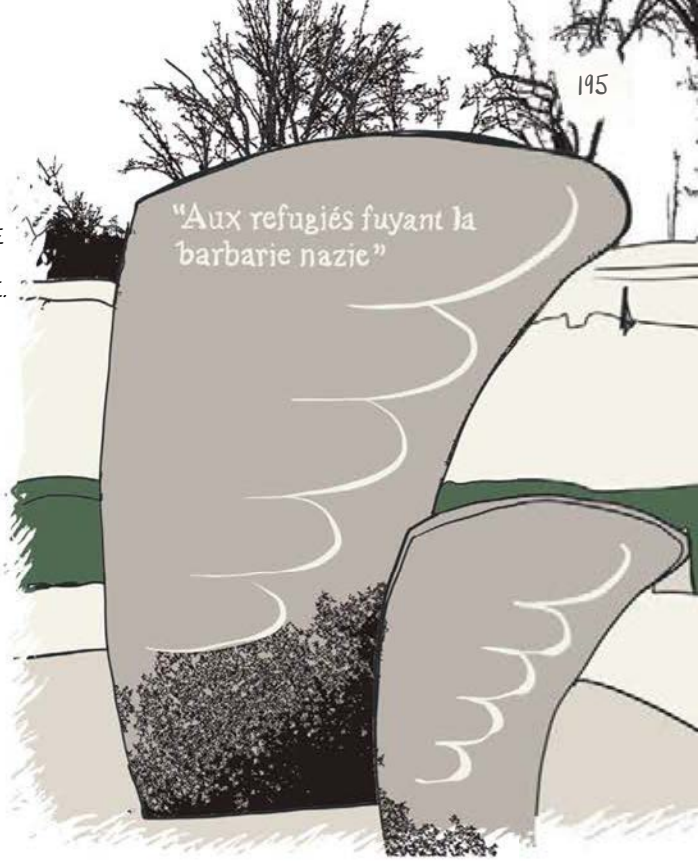
I TRIED TO IMAGINE THESE PEACEFUL FIELDS FILLED WITH BARBED WIRE AND FEAR, WITH PEOPLE SMUGGLED ACROSS THE LINE AT NIGHT.

BUT IT WAS HARD TO SEE THE PAST WHEN THE SUN WAS SHINING.

THE MONUMENTS, MOSTLY ON THE FRENCH SIDE, PRESENTED A SANITIZED, HEROIC VERSION OF THOSE DREADFUL TIMES, WITH LITTLE SPACE FOR THE VENALITY, CRUELTY, OR JINGOISM OF HUMAN NATURE.

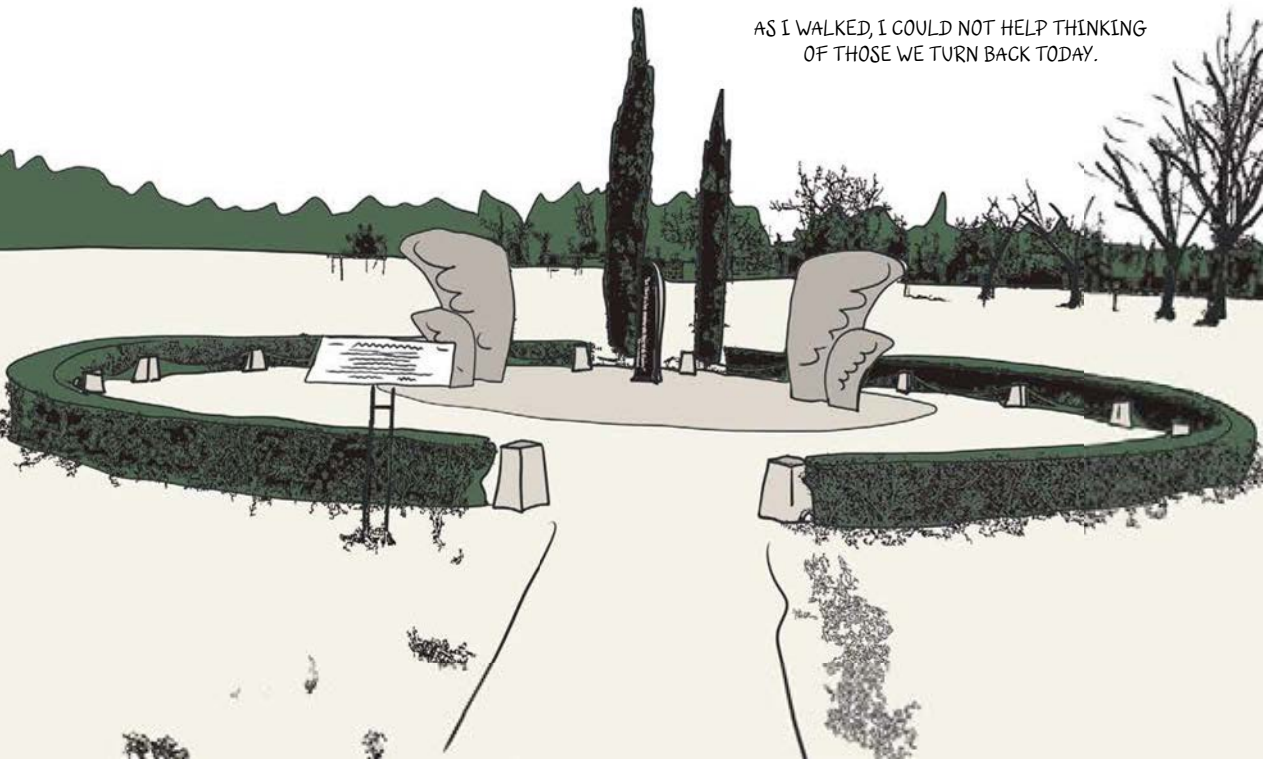
ON THE SWISS SIDE, THERE WAS NO MENTION OF THE CLOSED CAMPS, BUILT ACROSS THE CANTON, WHERE THE DESPERATE REFUGEES WERE HOUSED.

THERE WAS NO SPACE IN THESE LANDSCAPES FOR THOSE WHO WERE PUSHED BACK AND SENT TO THEIR DEATHS.



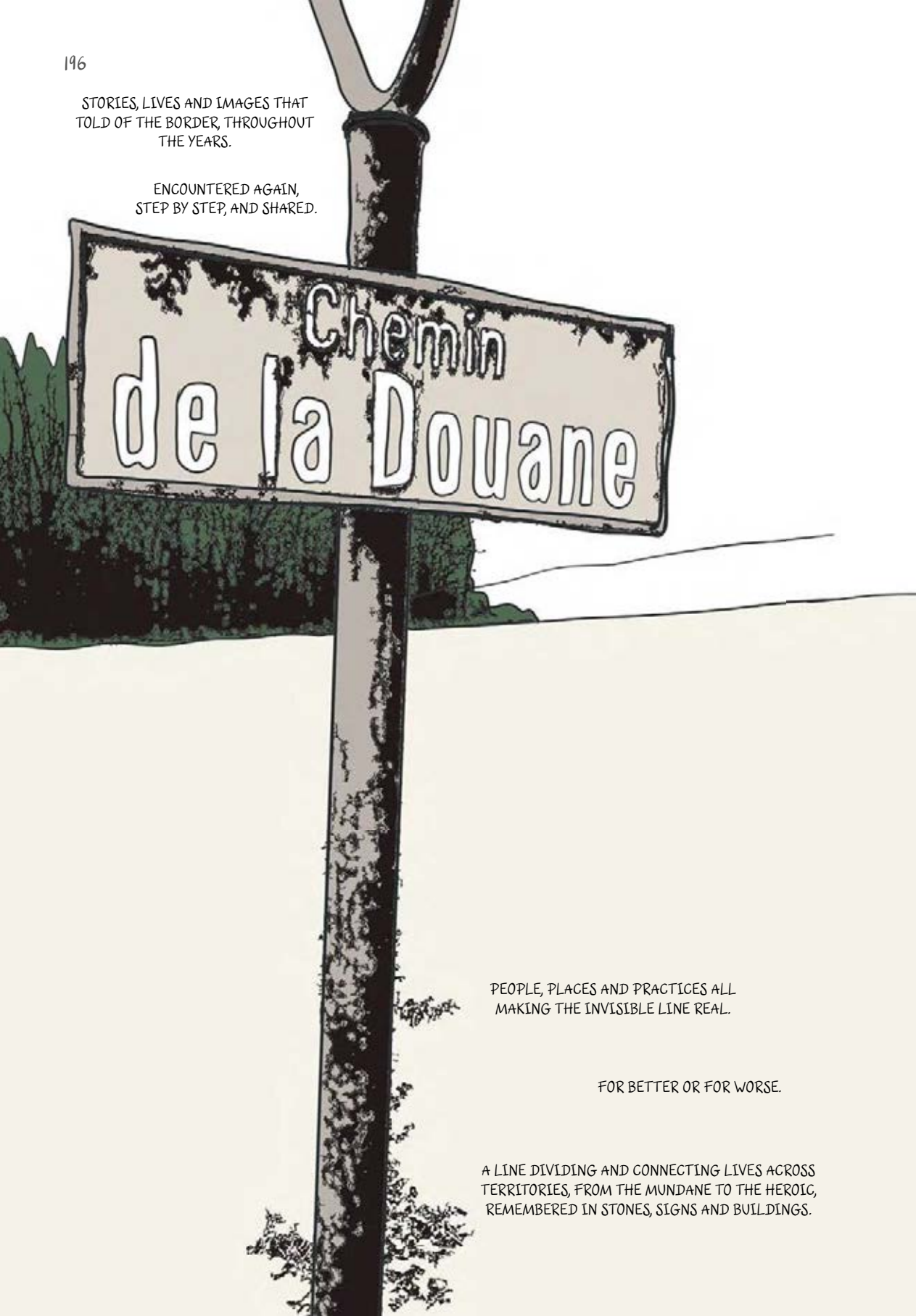
THE STONES ONLY TOLD THE STORIES AND THE PEOPLE WE WISHED TO REMEMBER.

AS I WALKED, I COULD NOT HELP THINKING OF THOSE WE TURN BACK TODAY.



STORIES, LIVES AND IMAGES THAT TOLD OF THE BORDER, THROUGHOUT THE YEARS.

ENCOUNTERED AGAIN, STEP BY STEP, AND SHARED.



PEOPLE, PLACES AND PRACTICES ALL MAKING THE INVISIBLE LINE REAL.

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE.

A LINE DIVIDING AND CONNECTING LIVES ACROSS TERRITORIES, FROM THE MUNDANE TO THE HEROIC, REMEMBERED IN STONES, SIGNS AND BUILDINGS.

WALKING ALONG THE LINE,
ALL THE STORIES EMERGED,
TO BE SHARED AND RETOLD.

LIVES AND DEATHS, FRIENDS AND FOES,
ALL CREATED BY THE BORDERS WE BUILT
AND MAINTAINED.

THE LINE SHAPED US TOO.



Soral



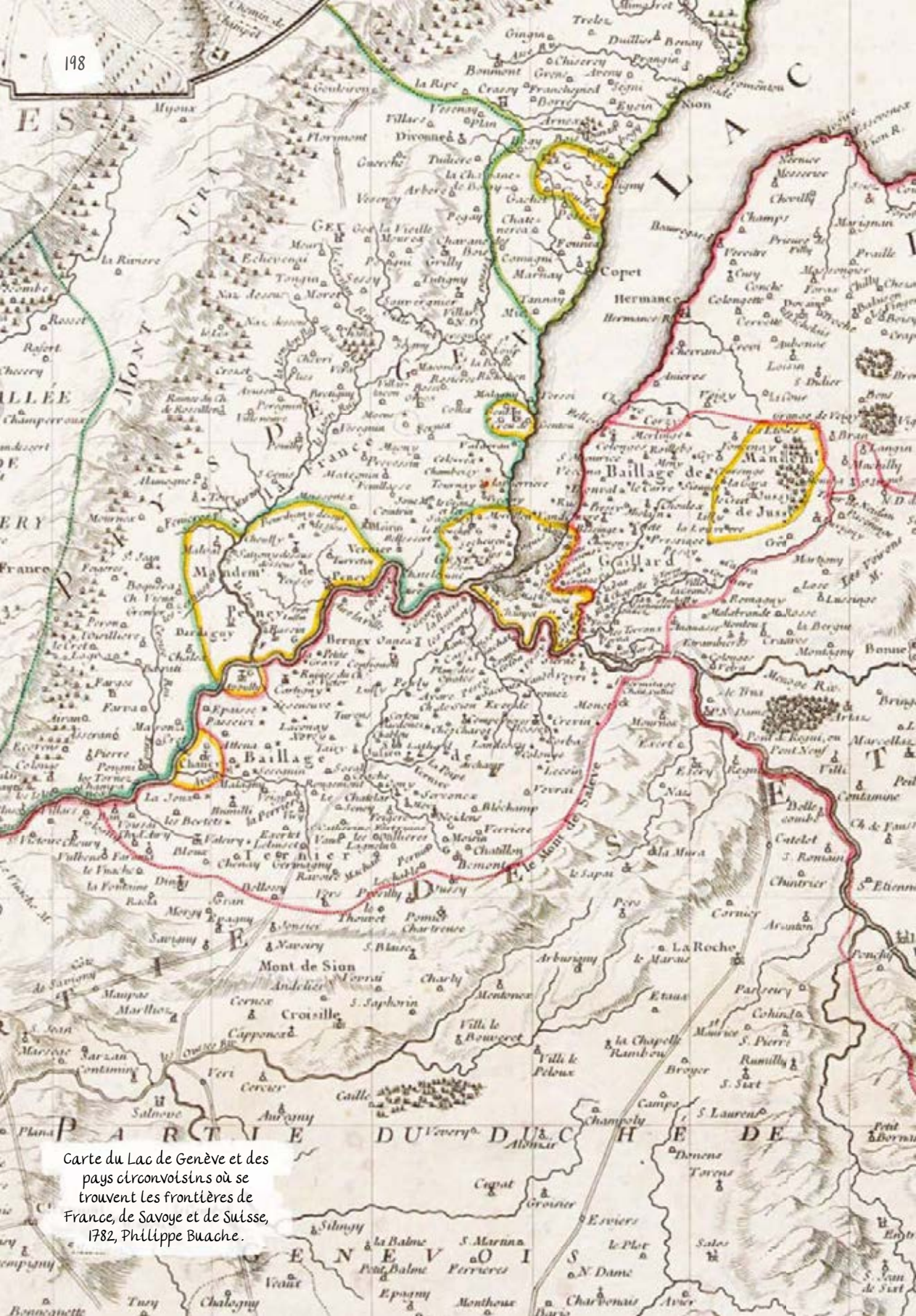
Norcier

AS I WANDERED HOME, WITH WEARY LIMBS,
LONGING FOR A CUP OF TEA, I FELT MORE
CONNECTED TO HOME.

A HOME NEXT TO A LINE, THAT
I NOW KNEW FROM END TO END,
INTIMATELY.

I WILL CONTINUE WALKING.
THERE IS STILL SO MUCH TO SEE.

End.



Carte du Lac de Genève et des pays circonvoisins où se trouvent les frontières de France, de Savoye et de Suisse, 1782, Philippe Buache.

This chapter explores how the creative and visual turn opens innovative avenues for thinking about the nature of territory and infrastructures, focusing on using comics and graphic narratives to write open accounts of the world that suggest interpretations, leave things tentative and nuanced, rather than advance explanations carved in stone. This openness, I suggest, allows those encountering our stories to connect them to their own experiences, not as a way of making everything anecdotal but rather as a way of crafting empathetic and shared accounts of social life in difficult times.

Making sense of complex geographies

When Yugoslavia collapsed into bloody warfare in 1991, my father Merrick Fall was based in the region: one of the many people employed to assist in the international mobilization, working for a Civil Affairs division of the United Nations mission. He loved his life of uncertainty, finding purpose in his daily routines away from his family, thriving on the excitement and sense of purpose while driving around in a white UN pickup truck. Years later, the recurrent nightmares that plagued him after more than a decade in conflict hotspots around the world, and his subsequent mixed feelings about the efficacy and wisdom of such missions, might have contributed to his early death from heart disease. It certainly put years of mental and bodily strain in a different light. But, at the time, I had a loving and brave father who lived in dangerous places and who seemed to make a difference. I adored visiting him, soaking up the experience of seeing him at ease in extraordinary circumstances, aware of the privilege I had of going back to a safe home afterwards.

I first travelled to see him in Bosnia Herzegovina in 1996. He picked me off the train in Zagreb, and we drove together along the flat Sava valley into Bosnia. He was working in Brčko at the time, a former hotspot within the newly-formed *Republika Srpska*, living with a local family. We filled buckets of water to flush the loo, ate a lot of tomatoes, cucumbers and delicious cheesy flaky pastries. I followed him around as he spoke to people in offices and on the ground, constantly assembling material for his political reports sent to the UN Headquarters in New York. A born writer, he took great care with his reporting, although he worried that nobody in those distant offices really read them, nor understood what was taking place on the ground. Daily life in a wrecked country must have seemed rather abstract to technocrats in Manhattan,

however skilled his turn of phrase might have been. A quiet man, my father was also fiercely loyal, and in many ways unsuited to the logics of an international organization staffed by ambitious colleagues. He took pleasure in travel, found meaning in learning languages, making temporary connections before inevitably being moved elsewhere. The frustrations of working for the United Nations were immense, but he enjoyed his life in Bosnia. He was clearly glad to be able to share his life with members of his family, if only for a few weeks. Many of the places he had worked in before had been too dangerous for us to visit. Afghanistan. Somalia.

A few months later, I returned to see him when he was living in Bihać. He was devoted to and reliant on his translator and fixer, Asim, who dreamt of keeping bees. They formed a formidable duo, charging around making sense of life in a broken but new country. Lives crossing for a fleeting time, in extraordinary circumstances. My father picked me up again across the border in Croatia, and we drove back through the Krajina by night to reach his temporary home. I remember witnessing, from the safe shelter of the car, small glimpses of the effects of war as we drove through a vast refugee camp, wide-eyed children's faces pressed up against the glass windows amongst the improvised dwellings. Destruction framed through a window, with us just passing through. Destroyed villages littered the rolling landscape, some flattened next to others standing intact. The random consequences of fierce battles, and the targeted destruction of dwellings belonging to the wrong group. We visited Otoka, where international troops guarded the bridge, speaking to the soldiers and local people. More material for his reports. And a whole mess of jumbled feelings for me, in a town with a name that sounded straight out of a Tintin comic. (fig. 1-2)

The following summer, I planned to spend more time with him in Mostar, his latest posting. Local and national tempers were frayed, despite a peace plan signed in Dayton. Posters stuck to walls depicted local political figures and the Pope: international visual popular culture anchoring local struggles and identities. Living with my father for a few weeks seemed a rare opportunity to write my undergraduate thesis in political geography (Fall 1997). I wanted to understand the life of a city reunited on paper but divided in practice, having been twice on the front line of war. Doubly martyred, Mostar was split down the middle, with Croat and Bosniak communities eyeing each other suspiciously across the town. I set out to try to make sense of this disconnect between what was on the map of the Dayton Plan and the lived reality on

1. TO THE LEFT, JULIET AND MERRICK FALL, OTOKA BRIDGE WITH IFOR TANK, BLACK & WHITE PHOTO, 1996.

2. TO THE RIGHT, POLITICAL POSTERS ON A WALL INCLUDING SUPERMAN, 1997.





the ground. I tracked and photographed graffiti. I observed informal markets taking place along the officially invisible border line. I spoke to officials and soldiers from the various international peace-keeping forces. I spent time in the kitchen of the Croat family we were living with, wordlessly admiring the host's ability to roll thin dough into impossibly delicious pastries.

My reels of black and white and colour film filled with images of foreign car number-plates used strategically by local people to get round the informal restrictions placed on local cars. I photographed goats being exchanged from car boots high up in the mountains on the invisible border line with the Republika Srpska. I wandered around the city, buying cheap postcards from the kiosks along the river still showing the *Stari Most*, the Ottoman stone bridge that now lay in ruins, the large stones at the bottom of the deep gorge. I crossed the Neretva river on the rickety temporary metal bridge, staring down at the deep water below. I collected boxes of visual material that I thought of as purely illustrative: images meant to decorate my textual work based around interviews. We drove up one evening to the top of the hill from which the city had been shelled. The photos I took were like a caricatural depiction of a zenithal point of view, taken from the exact place the guns had fired on bodies below. As I stumbled around, I came across used sardine tins and the remains of hasty meals. Young soldiers had sat there, afraid and hungry while aiming at the city below. (fig. 3)

That summer of 1997, carrying out fieldwork in Mostar would have been impossible if I had not been able to make use of all my father's local contacts. Inevitably, it meant that my interviews were mostly with people who spoke languages that I understood – none of which included anything Slavic. Today, in a very different ethical, legal and risk-assessment academic landscape, such research would probably no longer be possible. Perhaps that is a good thing. In retrospect, this kind of informal rather



3. PHOTO OF MOSTAR FROM A HILL, 1997.

ad hoc approach was hopelessly biased in all sorts of complicated ways, not least because of my implicit and explicit association on the ground with the United Nations and with my father. Even if I explained all this in my introduction, I didn't have the background, awareness, nor training to reflect. But, in the late Nineteen Nineties, neither my Swiss university, nor I, thought there might be anything wrong with an unskilled and naïve young student charging around asking questions in a tense situation, struggling to connect the daily reality of post-war Bosnia with Foucauldian theoretical frameworks on territory, borders and power. If my contribution to science was non-existent, confined to a paper thesis manuscript deposited somewhere in the library of the University of Geneva, consulted and quoted a few times, this experience changed my life. Back then, I had no structured way of processing or making sense of the emotions that I was left with when I returned home. These, it was assumed, needed to stay outside the text. I wrote up my thesis, defended it, and quickly threw myself into another academic degree elsewhere on a different, less distressing topic. I remember making the conscious decision to stop writing about conflict and violence. I hadn't known how to cope with the horrors and memories I was left with; nor did I know how to deal with my guilt about returning to a safe life far removed from war. The box of images, the photocopied and hand-drawn maps, and the rolls of photo negatives got stuffed in the back of a cupboard. I moved on. I moved away. I eventually obtained a PhD thesis in geography, but still only using photography and visual material to illustrate fieldwork.

Years later, when I had miraculously secured a permanent academic job at the University of Geneva, I picked up Joe Sacco's (1993) comic *Palestine* in a local bookshop. I had written about comics as a sort of hobby subject, analysing graphic fiction to tease out geographical themes (Fall 2006, 2014). Sacco's work hit an unexpectedly deep chord. This extraordinary book of graphic journalism narrated his experience of daily life in a geopolitical hotspot. I had read books on the intractable Israel / Palestine situation, but none had drawn me in quite like that. Hooked and intrigued by his ability to narrate a conflict in a sensitive way, I ordered *Safe Area Gorazde* (Sacco 2011) on Bosnia. I was transfixed. Reading it hit me hard. Sacco's skills as a storyteller, his empathy, his careful observation of what it means to witness the lives of others as an outsider, and his ability to share this in an accessible visual format were awe-inspiring. For the first time, I had encountered a book that not only made his experiences tangible, but also allowed me to think through mine.

Reading this comic helped me make sense of what I had witnessed. Gorazde wasn't Mostar. I certainly wasn't Sacco. But reading his comic resonated. Here was a fellow privileged Western outsider who had encountered daily life in post-war Bosnia but crucially, unlike me, had the skills to make sense of it afterwards and communicate this. Reading *Safe Area Gorazde*, I was conscious that my identification was predominantly with the outsider – the observer – not with the observed. Yet the individual vignette biographies he recounted drew me into a unique place. I felt I was getting to know something of the daily lives of people, at a distance. The effect was not unlike what Toal (1996: 171), observing the reporting of the journalist Maggie O'Kane in the same region at the time, called an "anti-geopolitical eye":

> An eye that disturbs and disrupts the hegemonic foreign policy gaze, a way of seeing that, while hardly unproblematic itself, persistently transgresses, unravels and exceeds the frameworks scripting Bosnia in Western geopolitical discourse [...] distinguished by a style of reporting that is direct, personal, moral and angry [...] on the cutting edge of reporting on the human consequences of the Bosnian conflict. (Toal 1996: 173)

Toal was drawing from leading feminist geographers (Rose 1993) who were using standpoint theory (Harding 1986) to examine the question of the gaze; the gendered dimensions of scopic regimes; and challenging the unacknowledged *view from nowhere*. This was the illusion of a disembodied mastering subject who could comprehend the world from a distance, from above, from a position that posited itself as neutral and objective while in fact being shot through with unexamined biases. Feminists and critical scholars had picked this viewpoint apart very effectively and suggested that the solution lay in *strong objectivity* (Harding 2013)[1], i.e. placing the relations between political and social power and knowledge center-stage; stating how knowledge was produced, how questions were framed, and what points of view were considered worthwhile and legitimate while others were discarded; centering lived experiences from the margins. O'Kane provided just such a grounded, embodied and situated account of war, direct and personal, making the personal political in a way that went beyond self-testimony. Although not unproblematic – in particular in spectacularising Bosnia as a land of pervasive violence and castigating Western leaders as morally indifferent – Toal (1996) suggested that her dispatches provided an anti-geopolitical viewpoint that disrupted mainstream framings. But, to me, Sacco did something more with his graphic narratives. He went further than just tell a story like a *gonzo* journalist who used first-person narration. The form was important in itself.

The language of comics combined text and images, multiple viewpoints, voice and affect, facts and artistry, and added another dimension to the stories. How could such grounded, embodied, situated and verbo-visual writing change how we understood the world ? How could comics narrate the fragile territories of discarded tin cans, goats in markets, and menacing bodies standing on invisible urban borders, rather than those viewed through the front sight of a gun ?

Writing in the world, not about it

Joe Sacco was an exceptional author, with a unique ability to use the verbo-visual language of comics, weaving a complex tale that flit back and forth between places and times, narrators, and points of view. His perspective was unashamedly situated, writing and drawing himself into the story. He did not pretend to present both sides of a complex political scenario, but rather simply made clear with whom he had spoken and whose perspectives he had witnessed and chosen to tell. Kuttner and colleagues (2017: 207) noted that Sacco "exaggerates some of his own perceived shortcomings, visually communicating his worries, biases, awkwardness, and emotions and presenting himself as 'a fallible human being, vulnerable to bias and ignorance and error' [...] In this way, Sacco reflects his own role in constructing the narrative, and encourages the audience to critically analyze what they are seeing." Because of

Sacco's skills as an author, because of his ability to draw in readers, and his ability to explain a fraught political context through carefully narrated visual and textual anecdotes, he made the complexities and contradictions part of the story. In an introduction to Sacco's *Palestine*, Edward Said (2011: i) wrote that "as we also live in a media-saturated world in which a huge preponderance of the world's news images are controlled and diffused by a handful of men sitting in places like London and New York, a stream of comic book images and words, assertively etched, at times grotesquely emphatic and distended to match the extreme situations they depict, provide a remarkable antidote". Writing visual counter-narratives held real potential.
Writing was a fundamentally geographical, located and embodied practice. Many people learned the skill as young children. Some people, for all sorts of reasons, never did. It was what academics did, in offices, in cafés, in libraries, in our homes. We wrote emails. We texted. We wrote academic articles. Some wanted to write more each day. Some less. We got ourselves into terrible twists procrastinating about writing anything at all. Some liked to pretend it was easy or innate. I once saw a T-shirt that said "You ought to be writing". Academics often felt guilty if they weren't writing. Frustrated. Or anxious. Sometimes, we wrote only in our heads. Real life got in the way. But in all these practices, how often did we wonder whether we could do academic writing differently ?
Sacco's authorial techniques seemed to point to ways of thinking about writing differently in at least three different ways that resonated with me as a geographer: taking the visual aspect of fieldwork data collection seriously from the start; finding a way of writing that remained open to interpretation rather than affirming anything in a definite manner; and finding ways of presenting research as situated and embodied, allowing readers to understand how and where geographical knowledge was made, beyond abstract or tokenistic statements about positionality and identity. Writing could be done in all sorts of ways, in different places and places. Sometimes, our writing practices went beyond words. Was doodling in the margins of a document a form of writing ? Were emojis ? Was the slow crafting of a comic book writing ? What about editing a film, with fixed and moving images, and sound ? Was that still writing ? Or was writing only words on a page, written to be read aloud or in someone's head ? I was a geographer, not a literary scholar, so answering these questions wasn't really the point. The purpose was seeing what happened to our academic and storytelling practices when we asked them, and tried something different, more in line with the intellectual project of creating truly situated and embodied counter-narratives.
As I mentioned earlier, in 2020, when the world temporarily locked down, I was casting around for a project to make sense of the madness of our daily lives changed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Certainties were removed, everything we knew about daily life changed. We desperately needed to write in a way that reflected the uncertainties, suggesting rather than settling interpretations. I stumbled upon the idea of trying to write in comics, putting pictures together on my tablet, as discussed in Chapter 1.
Writing as a practice has long been written about by literary researchers. Yet, perhaps curiously, few recognised the roles of space and contexts in this practice. As Geisler wrote:

> In order to build more adequate models, then, literary researchers must move away from modelling academic literacy as a single coherent practice that works itself out primarily in the spatial dimension of participants' representations. In these representations, virtual authors are presented as professionalized agents moving with rational purpose toward the progress of the community. Real authors, however, eat, go to the bathroom, worry about their career, and get interrupted by noise in the street. Academic texts never acknowledge these human aspects of their real authors for to do so would jeopardize their claim to timeless truth. But researchers of academic literary cannot afford to make the same mistake. (Geisler 1994, in Canagarajah 2002: 32)

Recognising this fleshy dimension of the practice of writing and taking it seriously was important if we wanted to challenge the creeping *view from nowhere* that haunted the standardised academic writing that we often produced, even when our research methods were critical. In their beautiful review piece on political geography that sought to map out alternatives, Jackman and colleagues (2020: 4) argued that "alongside critical conceptual reflections, further application of and engagement with feminist methods that alternatively and creatively approach, apprehend, witness, capture, visualise, and mobilise, would greatly benefit the deconstruction of territory and terrain". They suggested methodologically reconsidering key geographical concepts in conversation with creative methodologies, developing more creative and performative interpretative strategies, so that "insights can be gained into both corporeal processes and practices that are otherwise difficult to articulate in language and which can express lived experience" (Jackman 2020: 4).

Political geographers produced little scholarship about writing (Fall 2014; Müller 2021), instead often focussing on the writers through histories of the discipline, biographies of key individuals, and contextualised histories of specific books and their circulation (Keighren 2006; Fall 2023). Nevertheless, there were increasing calls for finding alternative, creative ways of writing that aligned with the critical project of providing embodied accounts of territory (Jackman 2020). "Acknowledging the territory of the page as one through which to not only recover, but to recognise, reclaim, re-orient, and seek redress of narratives, encounters, and perspectives too often elided from dominant discourse, remains an important step in disrupting the (re)production of the concepts of territory and terrain" (Jackman 2020: 4). This was not just to tell pretty stories, but to improve research by finding ways of producing and writing knowledge that sat kindly with giving voice to alternative points of view, sources of knowledge, and positions. The task, they wrote, was to "deconstruct how our bodies 'speak in our writing', with the aim of reflecting on how scholarship on territory and terrain can be further accountable and responsible in relation to 'what it says'" (Jackman 2020: 9).

Creative and visual turns

Despite my being sceptical of the many theoretical *turns* regularly announced in geography, often by those hoping to name yet another, the scholarship associated with a *creative turn* provided options to rethink and enrich scholarly writing (Hawkins 2011, 2013). Geography's creative turn saw "scholars across the discipline coming to embrace creative geographical methods – including visual art, image-making,

creative writing, performance techniques – both as the means through which research can proceed and by which it can be communicated and presented" (Hawkins 2015: 247). This offered ways to renew scholarship more broadly, since "we can and should understand the possibilities of the creative (re)turn as an inspiration not just for how it opens up possibilities to do research differently, but also for the resources it offers us to remake worlds, our own academic worlds included" (Hawkins 2019: 979). This partly built upon the *visual turn* that took place in the social sciences at the turn of the century (Chauvin and Reix 2015; Watt and Wakefield 2017), with increased interest in visual materials and research methods in cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, history and geography, drawing as well from film studies, media studies, feminist theory and postcolonial studies (Columpar 2002; Warfield 2017). Multi- or interdisciplinary scientific journals appeared to host such writing in different linguistic contexts, including *Visual Sociology* (founded in 1986, became *Visual Studies* in 2002), *Visual Culture* (2009), or the *Revue Française des Méthodes Visuelles* (2017).

In human geography, Gillian Rose's (2001, 2023 for its 5th edition) agenda-setting book, built on and further crafted engaged discussions on the visual nature and sensitivity of the discipline (Nash 1996; Rose 1993; Rose and Tollia-Kelly 2012; Roberts 2013). These included critical discussions of the empirical, conceptual and methodological consequences of focussing on the visual, in line with an interest in representation, power, identity and place. Geographers gained new tools for critically examining how political worlds were visually constructed, and how such visuality was itself constructed.

While such a geographical interest in visual matters was longstanding, dating back to the use of mapping and cartography as well as slides, panoramas and other visual technologies (Sohier 2019) within geographical circles in the late 19th and early 20th century, this marked a change from studying existing visual material to actually using visual methods as part of research processes, including producing material through photography (Hunt 2014), film-making (Garrett and Hawkins 2014; Ernwein 2020) and drawing (Olmedo 2015; Lilley 2018). In neighbouring political science and international relations, the ground-breaking work of Roland Bleiker and others (Bleiker 2001; Callahan 2015; Steele 2017) gave visual studies early legitimacy, leading to substantial work on aesthetics (Hozic 2017), emotion (Bleiker 2014), and visual autoethnography (Bleiker 2019). Many of these authors explored how visual representations helped stories about the world, people and places emerge, often in a more playful way than mainstream, text-based research outputs. Geographers' interest or perhaps legitimacy in visual language stemmed to some extent from skills acquired through map-making and analysis, field sketching and landscape analysis: practices that were supposed to distinguish geographers from other social scientists. Within geography, critiques of the risk of unexamined biases of visual approaches, and the risk of reproducing stereotypical gazes, came mainly from feminist epistemologies (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Sharp 2011). Like O'Kane's journalism discussed earlier by Toal, these proposals called instead for ground-level, local and embodied sites of moral propinquity or nearness. Hyndman's (2004: 309) invitation to develop a strong feminist geopolitics "to extend the work of arguably disembodied critical

geopolitical analysis by (re)situating knowledge production as a partial view from somewhere" made a lasting impression. In a similar creative and critical veins, an increased focus on popular geopolitics – i.e. on non-traditional, everyday discourses such as those of popular culture including film, fiction and (to a lesser extent) comics – appeared within geography and problematised the question of the gaze. These critiques were important: using visual methods was not a guarantor of creating progressive alternatives to *view from nowhere* representations of territory. Military uses of images were a case in point, with Campbell (2002; *see also* Gregory 2004) for example providing compelling analysis of such gazes when analysing images of concentration camps in Bosnia. To move away from these, and make use of the creative and visual turns to produce alternative visualities, Hughes (2007: 983) – drawing from Haraway (2013) – insisted on the embodied nature of vision in order to "reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere". The challenge was to find visual languages and ways of writing that allowed this and that fulfilled this promise. The next section explores whether the language of comics could go some way in assisting with this.

Writing and reading comics

Can you remember first reading a comic ? Said (2011) wrote of his experience of reading comics as a child, feeling liberated and subversive, knowing that these were not ordinary books. Comics were fun to read. They crept up on us looking innocuous. Reading a comic involved making sense of complex pages, weaving together images and texts in an internal dialogue, meaning that readers had to construct significance actively, in the spaces between the images, in the gutters. Comics were hybrid objects, neither pure image nor pure text, with a specific genealogy that some traced back to the 19th century, born of the hybridization of various traditions of narratives, drawings, *estampes*, press illustrations, caricatures, and chronophotography. Whether one called them comics (McCloud 2006; McKinney 2008; Meskin 2007), sequential narrative (Whitlock 2006), graphic narrative, *bande dessinée* (Groensteen 2007, 2015; Peeters 2010), or *fumetti* (Peterle 2018), whether one distinguished serious comics from more popular genres using terms like graphic novel (Weiner and Eisner 2012) or comic journalism (Sacco 2011), the combination of sequential narratives of image and – most often – text was unmissable. As cultural objects, they were an extraordinary publishing success-story, crowding shelves and topping bestseller lists.

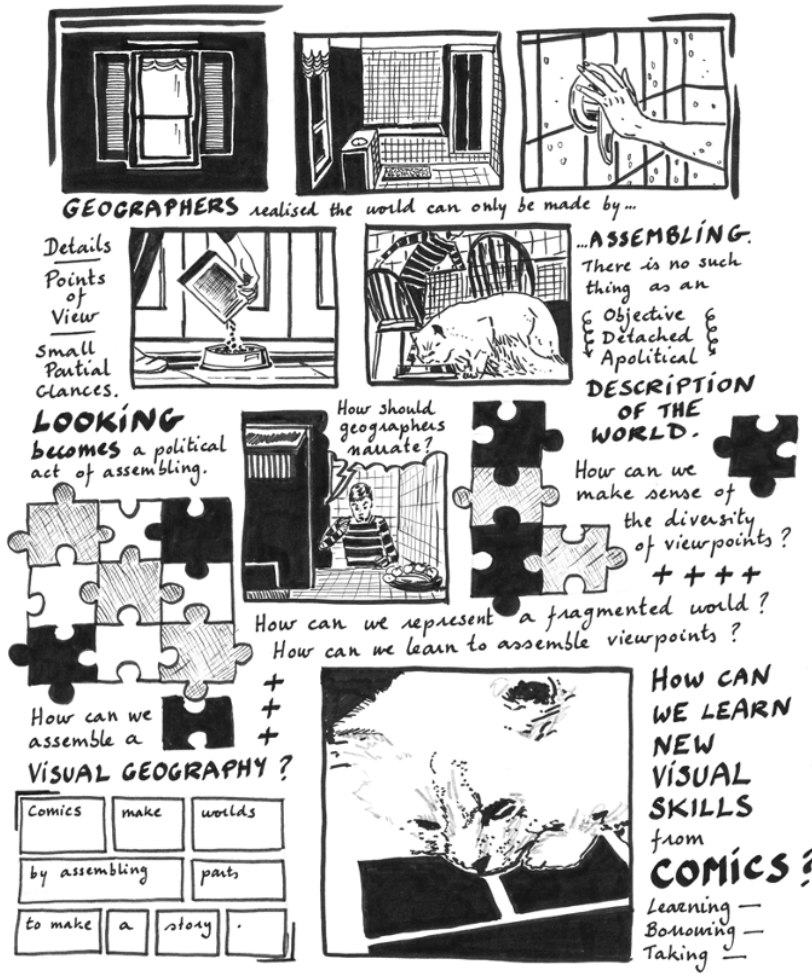
McCloud (2006) noted the power of cartooning to move readers by commanding viewer involvement and identification through distinctive devices, vocabulary and grammar – observing the parts but sensing the whole. Readers were engaged, actively producing meaning in the act of reading (Whitlock 2006). The act of reading comics was a specifically embodied and learnt activity with unique codes and spatial grammars such as, for example, the conventions of reading boxes and text bubbles from left to right, or right to left (see McCloud 2006: 37-39), notwithstanding

that these could be used strategically precisely for challenging such conventions. Reading comic books required internalising a specific visuality in order to translate the spatiality of two-dimensional sequential images into four-dimensional narrative suggesting, as maps that made time visible through the use of static, sequential images (Fall 2006; Dittmer 2010; Peterle 2015, 2017). While these were constructed with the reader in mind, some interpretation was left open to the reader, as the spatiality of the presentation did not entrench a specific reading (Dittmer 2010; Holland 2012).

Comics were not simple amalgamations of texts and images, for the combination of the two led to something uniquely hybrid. Whitlock (2006: 968) noted that "the vocabulary of comics represents figures and objects across a wide iconic range from the abstraction of cartooning to realism; its grammar is based on panels, frames, and gutters that translate time and space onto the page in black and white; and balloons both enclose speech and convey the character of sound and emotion. This grammar makes extraordinary demands on the reader to produce closure." McCloud's beautiful books (1996, 2006) laid out in visual and accessible form the theories and conventions of the genre. Comics were distinctive in that "current practitioners are also its theorists, its historians, and its critics" (Whitlock 2006: 966). The distinctive language of comics was usually identified through its building blocks of bubbles, frames, panels in sequence, and the use of successive pages to construct a narrative. These were characterized by a spatial essence and construction: features that both identified a comic and made it of geographical interest.

Comics could therefore be considered suitable for developing a way of thinking and writing academically (Kuttner 2017; Sousanis 2017) and geographically (Fall 2021), assembling the whole from parts, that led to new and visually creative methods for doing research (Peterle 2021). Sousanis' extraordinary *Unflattening* (2015), a submitted PhD thesis in comics form, showed how research could be written differently. Together with colleagues, he coined the term *comics-based research* to describe this new way of working as: "an emerging field of practice that attracts researchers with diverse disciplinary and epistemological commitments. These researchers may go about research in quite different ways, but they share an interest in the unique semiotic, narrative, communicative, and educative properties of the comics form for their participants, their audiences, and themselves." (Kuttner 2017: 197) Reading back and forth between images and texts made concrete the paradoxical materiality of words and the concurrent discursivity of images. The spatial visuality and potential for research of comics received attention within geography (Dittmer 2010, 2016; Peterle 2021; Fall 2021). (fig. 4)

Trying to push the form further, I crafted a theoretically-ambitious, artistically-modest, comic using pen, ink, scissors and collage to capture what geographers could learn from comics, as a sort of visual *mise-en-abîme*. Peterle (2021: 2), meanwhile, published a beautiful and ground-breaking methods book that "invited geographers to embrace a kind of spatial thinking that focuses on processually registering experience and presenting research, rather than on steadily representing fixed thoughts", writing from "the double perspective of the author and reader, the geographer and cartoonist, or researcher-artist" (Peterle 2021: 3). In reading comics, engaging



4. EXTRACT FROM COMIC WORLDS OF VISION (FALL 2021).

with them and making sense of the locations in which they took place, readers could empathise with the lives of others, and lived experiences were shaped and played out in readers' minds – such as when I pondered my feelings after fieldwork in Bosnia – and helped us to make sense of the world[2].

Some scholars have published comics as part of public outreach, to spread research carried out using mainstream ethnographic or geographical methods with a broader audience or with research partners on the ground, often through collaborations with artists who actually draw the comic. There is now a whole genre of such popularising science (LEROLLE 2024), with substantial commercial successes for some. These research projects themselves may or may not have had underlying visual focus, but often they did not. While these were stimulating, and an interesting sign of academics taking outreach seriously, they did not fundamentally change the research or writing process itself.

Making *Along the Line*

I will not go into detail about the whole processes and steps taken to produce *Along the Line*, beyond what has been said in Chapter 1, other than to say that it was different from my previous visual publications that had variously relied on photo-montage, collage or photography. Instead, I drew all the comic and added all the text directly on each page within a programme called *Procreate*, an iPad-based App used by many illustrators. Visual material could be directly added to a page, in a series of layers, much like cartographic software that builds up layer after layer of information that can be displayed or hidden. This allowed me to assemble each page from photographs, maps, documents and postcards, fully grounding the narrative in the visual material, before drawing the images myself.

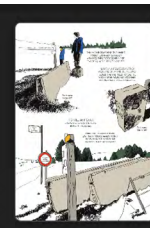
In a review of emerging scholarly comics, Kuttner and colleagues (2017: 205) stated that "comics are unabashedly subjective. The creator's presence is felt in the very lines on the page, whether they come in a brush stroke, a digital vector, or a pen line. Over time, comics artists develop their own unique styles, and it is often enough to glance at a page to identify the artist. According to comics critic Wolk (2007), 'cartooning is inescapably a metaphor for the subjectivity of perception. No two people experience the world the same way; no two cartoonists draw it the same way, and the way they draw it is the closest a reader can come to experiencing it through their eyes'". This subjective dimension of comics holds the greatest potential for changing academic writing. But it also poses a number of questions. (fig. 5)

The first, and most obvious, is that not everybody feels comfortable drawing, or putting visual narratives such as photo essays together. Skill levels vary, and academics are rarely recruited for their drawing skills. But the simple answer to that is that not everyone, obviously, needs to feel compelled to try out alternative forms of writing such as comics. I have stopped counting the number of times people, at the end of a presentation, tell me that they'd love to make comics but cannot draw, sometimes even seeming to suggest that this is some sort of fundamental flaw in the methodology presented. Certainly, even if an academic were interested in exploring the potential of writing in comics, then nothing would compel them to immediately try to author both the narrative and resulting visual form. Co-authoring with artists and cartoonists, for instance, brings other advantages. The second issue is style, and more broadly the question of aesthetics. Assuming that a comic is written, but a reader doesn't like the resulting style – the drawings, the colours, the page layouts, all those choices that make comics more than just words and images and that readers encounter in a very subjective manner – does this matter ? It might be argued that this is the same with all writing: some people write in a way that we might particularly like to read, while others have *une plume*, a style, that we might not appreciate. That is true, but perhaps less so in some forms of academic writing – peer-reviewed papers for instance – where it could be argued that written forms and styles are extremely standardised, particular in Anglo scientific writing. So while ability and style matter, both in the production and the readership, they are factors than cannot really be used to discredit the potential of comics as a form. In many ways, in a world where academic writing is increasingly standardised along an

5. NEXT PAGE, SCREENSHOT FROM PROCREATE SHOWING THE LAYOUT OF PART OF THE COMIC, WITH PAGES BY PAIRS.



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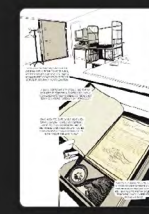
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Anglo argumentative model (Canagarajah 2002), then ensuring a diversity of styles, including in structure, is worthwhile in itself.
In the case of *Along the Line*, the subjective aesthetic choices that I came up with, in using limited colour palettes, distinct in different sections; in creating pages without frames; in integrating some original documents such as maps and photographs directly through collage; in not using text bubbles; in writing as a form of internal monologue in the first person, may or not please some readers. The comic itself was the place where I worked out the narrative, the structure and the theoretical framing, working first on the comic and, afterwards, on this framing manuscript. I wrote it in English, because that is my mother tongue and the language of my internal monologue. I translated it myself into French because that is the language of the people living in the place it describes, some of whom might be interested in reading it. These aesthetic choices worked for me as a geographer, allowing me to do and say what I wanted. I am not an artist and do not pretend to be one. I come to comics as a scholar: not as a trained comics-artist. My limited skills, picked up along the way, inevitably influenced the look of the resulting product. Perhaps that always happens with writing, regardless of the format used ? Perhaps this *voice*, in all its unabashedly subjective nature and limitations, is an advantage rather than a problem ? The handcrafted nature of the resulting comic makes the author explicit, fleshy, embodied. There is no doubt that one specific person drew every line, chose every colour, laid out every page. Its limitations are my own. In a time of debate about authorship linked to the rise of generative artificial intelligence, of text and image, that handmade flavour might be an advantage, not a weakness, in making the position from which knowledge is produced truly explicit.

Ethics and comics in research

The last issue producing *Along the Line* was that of ethics. There were at least two dimensions of ethics connected to the use of comics in research worth mentioning. The first was linked to informed consent and seeking ethical approval more broadly; the second to privilege in using comics as a form of writing.
I mentioned earlier that the perimeter, timeframe and object of the research project were not pre-defined, and neither were the research questions. These emerged during the visual writing phase, through and with the comic, from the assembled visual material. This was a different way of carrying out research than that followed usually, particularly in the current climate of pre-approved project funding, and increasingly codified research ethics that scholars have been describing and analysing for many years (Collignon 2010; Burton-Jeangros 2017; Riom 2017). At the time this project first started, in early 2020, formal responsibility in my university faculty, the Geneva School of Social Sciences / *Faculté des sciences de la société*, for following appropriate ethical processes rested mainly with each individual researcher. There was a formal *Commission de réflexion sur l'éthique de la recherche* should an individual researcher request formal approval or should their relevant funding body (or subsequent publisher) require it. As of 1st January 2021, mid-way through what by then

had become something closer to a true research project, albeit with a team of one, procedures changed. After that date, assessment was completely centralised for the whole University of Geneva at the level of the CUREG (*Commission Universitaire pour une Recherche Éthique à Genève, CUREG2.0*). Although this project was not subject to this new institutional process, it could be argued that this new landscape would radically change how research projects such as this, that evolved organically, could be started and carried out in future.

Nevertheless, despite not being subject to formalised ethical approval, and despite mostly focussing on *things* and places, the issues of ethics and consent were taken seriously. Using hand-drawn images allowed some leeway in representation of people, and some creativity with the question of what and how to show individuals, even within a project where infrastructures were more central than people. Many of the images showing the faces of my children, for example, were altered, or drawn from angles that minimised recognition. But true anonymity was not guaranteed in their case, knowingly and in discussion with them, due to the very nature of the project. That was one acknowledged problem with auto-ethnographic research when other family members were implicitly or explicitly mentioned: "one of the difficulties of autoethnography is that one's life is intertwined with others" (Smith-Shank and Keifer-Boyd 2007). Explicit consent was not sought from some of the few people who appeared represented in this comic – the border guards, the soldier – even if I always obtained verbal consent for taking their photographs in the field. The chosen drawing style guarantees that they were not recognisable as individuals and instead stand in for a sort of generic representation of their professional role. In the case of the CERN employees, who are clearly identifiable but not named, consent was sought and obtained.

But the question of ethics was also broader and concerned the format of the writing itself, connected to the question of privilege. Kuttner and colleagues (2017: 415) asked an important question about comics as research outputs: "Is it ethical to *allow* students to pursue such work ? If – and this is a big *if* – jobs and tenure are harder to achieve when someone is working in a "non-traditional form", what duty do we have to them to warn them (or stop them) ?" I would broaden this question not just to students, but to all early-career scholars. Was it fair and wise to suggest to someone without a tenured or permanent position that at least part of their scientific output could be not in the usual peer-reviewed written form ? This is particularly true if such output uses comics, since in some national contexts these are very clearly identified with trivial or childish genres. Put simply, was I able to take the risk of using up my own limited research time only because of my tenured position, and might I be setting a risky example to others, less secure in their careers ? I had had important discussions about this during several doctoral training programmes, in different national and disciplinary contexts, as well as during scientific presentations in workshops. I didn't think there were any easy or straightforward answers to this question, but they are worth thinking about carefully. These debates are likely to continue if and when more scholars publish comics as part of their core research output.

When discussing the legitimacy of comics to colleagues wishing to pursue an academic career, I always tried to make explicit that it might be wise to ensure

individual publication portfolios contained sufficient high-quality traditional outputs *as well as* more creative publications including comics. Academia is still a curious world and despite the apparent enthusiasm for a *creative turn*, some part of the system sometimes frowns on research that risks making it vulnerable to flippant critique. At a time of raised populist critiques of critical social science, and organised campaigns against social science and humanities research in universities, such concerns need taking seriously. I didn't think that there were easy answers to such matters. But I hoped that readers of this work might think that the risk was worth taking, and that *Along the Line* provided some food for thought *dans la forme et dans le fond*.

[1] For an unusual critique of the view from nowhere, and a call for Hardin's strong objectivity, see Fall's intervention in (MINCA 2015) and the corresponding online Playmobile animation.

[2] This is not to say that comics are always a tool for progressive thought, as Tanca (2022) clearly showed in his review of comics on undocumented migrants which included discussions of far-right anti-immigrant propaganda comics.

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