

Disruptive borderlands. Unpacking the innovative potential of transbordering practices, imaginaries and policies

(4-6 Sep 2024)
Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg)

THEMATIC SESSION:

Borderlands inside out. Trans-disciplinary conceptual and methodological dialogues across the social sciences and humanities

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In recent critical border studies, inter and trans-disciplinary approaches are often stressed as pivotal analytical perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding of border(ing) dynamics. Notwithstanding, the substantial contributions in this direction by social sciences, humanities and border studies themselves are often limited to a theoretical and conceptual layer. The increasingly mobile, de/territorialized, and processual dimension of contemporary borders requires a further step. We are, indeed, still lacking adequate and updated trans-disciplinary methodological instruments to 'operationalize' our sophisticated theoretical knowledge of the complexity of b/ordering processes. What functional 'tactics' could be elaborated as a response to this necessity? How can scientific and artistic disciplines actively cooperate towards more effective trans-disciplinary investigations and analysis in border regions?

With the aim of answering these questions, the panel introduces and develops the main objectives of the recent research project "BorderArt(E)Scapes. Contemporary Art, Anthropology and Borderscapes: from the late nineteenth century to the 2000s, reading contemporaneity and experimenting with new research practices". The latter is, indeed, meant to develop new applied research methodologies, in which anthropological and geo-political tools interact with art-historical approaches in front of different typologies of borderlands and border(art)scapes from diversified spatio-temporal contexts.

Not limiting itself to this project's experiences, the panel aims to amplify this discussion and to move towards a de/re/territorialization of the "borderland" concept, in order to expand and highlight its practical potentialities. We, therefore, invite to work in, around and together with borderlands and borderlanders by means of trans-disciplinary dialogues based on anthropological, art-historical, geographical and literary perspectives. By taking advantage of these disciplines' methods to establish new approaches, it will be possible not only to gain a more comprehensive understanding of borderlands, but also to include borderlands' and borderlanders' gazes towards a complex epistemic horizon.

Keywords: Borderlands; BorderArt(E)Scapes; interdisciplinary methods; de/re/territorialization; art-historical and anthropological dialogues

ABSTRACTS

SPEAKERS:

- **Andrea Masala** (Università di Genova, Université Grenoble Alpes, Università di Bergamo)
- **Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary** (Université Grenoble Alpes)

The “Border arting” proposition: a new instrument to navigate borderlands?

Not by chance one of the most relevant scholars connected to the concept of “borderland” — Gloria Anzaldúa — used to combine her intellectual, writing, and activist practices with visual arts. Artistic and visual expressions, in fact, do not represent just a result of the hybrid culture developing in borderlands, but also a way to investigate, fight, and subvert diversified and multilayered socio-cultural dynamics developing in there. Generally classified under the definition of “Border Art”, these artworks nowadays constitute a fertile and globally recognized artistic genre. By looking at different case-studies produced at, on, from, against, and about numerous international, and diversified typologies of borderlands, we aim at challenging, on the one hand, the very definition of “Border Art”, and, on the other, the main territorial and geo-political dimensions of the “borderland” concept.

More specifically, we consider artworks distinguished by different levels of social agency, political impact, and participatory dimension in order to question if and how Border Art pushes towards a subversion of the concept of “borderland”. What kind of political interventions can be conducted in such multi-linguistic and multi-cultural spaces as borderlands and with what kind of impact? If artworks in borderlands cannot be encapsulated within the production of artworks with a value on the market, how do we characterize them? Our endeavor to navigate borderlands through art represents a starting point to challenge the very practice of definition making and to question the status of defining practice in a post-modern world. In response to the need to conceptualize borderlands as interconnected and interrelated set of practices that are not necessarily rooted in a tangible space, we propose to speak of “border arting processes”.

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SPEAKERS:

- **Astrid Fellner** (Saarland University)

Disrupting Riverine Borders in the US-Mexican Borderlands

How can borders be undone and borderlands be disrupted? How can the watery surface of riverine borders shift solid demarcations and contribute to an undoing of borders? In which ways can cultural practices that bridge rivers constitute powerful counter-formations to the view of borders and border regimes as infrastructural events or technological operation, that is assemblages of various human actors, technology, and surveillance apparatuses? Taking into account the importance of border processes in the 21st century, this talk highlights new border epistemologies and trans-disciplinary research practices and methodologies that draw on the creative potential of riverine borders to undo fixed lines. Focusing on the subversive potential of a series of selected artistic border practices (by e.g. Yosimar Reyes, Cherríe Moraga and Sandra Cisneros) through the concept of bordertexturing, this contribution zooms in on instances of overlapping, crisscrossing, merging, layering, and clashing of riverine borders.

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SPEAKERS:

- **Eva Nossem** (Saarland University)

Bordertexturing as a Disruptive Research Perspective for Sensing/Making Sense of Borderlands in Times of Perplexity

My paper proposes *Bordertexturing* as an approach to examine the complexities of borders and bordering processes. Departing from and disrupting conventional perspectives, I aim to transcend conceptual, methodological, and theoretical frameworks by delving into epistemic/ological aspects of the border. Inspired by the need for pluriversal engagement, I advocate for a transdisciplinary approach that not only embraces diverse perspectives from different academic disciplines but breaks out of the tight corset of Western knowledge production. This implies the need to embrace a de-centered, anti-normative, and decolonial approach and to make room for the lived experiences on and of the border. Through the lens of bordertexturing, I explore the intricate interplay of discursive, practical, material, and bodily threads in the fabrication of the border, with a particular focus on the experienceability/senseability in sociogenic (cf. Wynter; Fanon) border figurations. By challenging established epistemological hierarchies and instead by engaging with ontological dynamics, bordertexturing seeks to unravel the multifaceted nature of borders and offer new insights into their contemporary complexities. Ultimately, bordertexturing helps us in making sense of and sensing the border in current times of border perplexity (Fellner & Nossem 2024; Konrad 2024).

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SPEAKER:

- **Jopi Nyman** (University of Eastern Finland)

Exploring Mediterranean Borderlands in Mid-Twentieth-Century Travel Writing

This project examines the role of the borderland/borderscape in the context of Western and Northern European travel writing in/to the spaces of the post-World War II Mediterranean before the emergence of mass tourism. What this construction of Mediterranean spaces as travel destinations involves is their transformation into borderlands involving diverse crossings (national, ethnic, racialized, gendered) that de/reterritorialize borderlands and relocate them in mobile geographies. This paper concerns the work of the Finnish art historian and travel writer Göran Schildt. Published during a career extending from 1948 to the 1990s, Schildt's texts cross borders in diverse ways and generate multiple borderspaces and borderlands. Schildt's writing, photography and films exemplify the period's from the gloomy realities of the North by crossing into various borderlands and new sites of identification. In constructing the Mediterranean, as a borderland, Schildt encounters and crosses various borders (including history, religion, class, and race). Although the travel writing of the period is rooted in the colonialist baggage of anthropology and civilization theory, often seen in the representation of its contemporaneous population, Schildt's work negotiates such polarizations in the narrator's emotional attachment with and corporeal insertion into the Mediterranean. Navigating the maritime borderland, Schildt's texts and photographs address its double function as a Janus-like site of admiration and inferiority. In this presentation I will focus on one episode in his *The Sea of Icarus* (1959) telling of his 1954 visit to the monastic community of Mount Athos in Greece, crossing a temporal and geopolitical border. In addition to discussing the textual representation of this European borderland, I will also address its visual images as included in this volume and a larger

selection of his images of Athos in *Göran Schildt: A Humanist as Photographer* (2006) to link border theory with artistic production in this spatiotemporal context.