

# CROSSING AND READING: NOTES TOWARDS A THEORY AND A METHOD

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Here I wish to propose a theoretical basis for a border poetics by thinking through the border not in its static and mapped configurations, but from the processual and embodied perspective of the border-crossing narrative. I will be suggesting a set of seven processes involved in the act of crossing a border, implicating in turn a model of five border planes with which to organize a border reading.<sup>1</sup> I will also be discussing the implications of these processes and planes for reading such crossings in literature and other narrative. The numbers seven and five must be taken as tentative; I have yet to find any secure argument justifying these divisions beyond that of experience with different border readings. Indeed, what follows takes as its premise that the border and thus the border crossing can only be seen from particular, embodied viewpoints and are ultimately unmappable. Crossing over into the realm of border theory is like any other border crossing: marked by the crossing, we both enter a new realm and cut ourselves off from it by bringing the border with us. In our negotiations, the border is liable to shift and change; and entering into border theory, we must allow for the possibility that our conception of the border may be transformed and that any particular theory or principle of the border may lose its meaning.<sup>2</sup> It has been argued that all border studies are implicated at some point in a politics of power, and it seems to me imperative not to lock such efforts into a formation not open to revision.

These proposals and reflections take as their departure point a minimal narrative of the border which may be formulated as follows: *The crossing of the border involves the passage of the border-crosser from one territory to another, and the passage is marked by the border.* For example, the novel *Cysgod y Cryman* (1953; trans. as *The Shadow of the Sickle*) by

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<sup>1</sup> The seven processes as presented here represent a further development of a set of nine principles proposed in my dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> These notes are thus definitely work in progress. Please feel free to send comments and suggestions to the author at [johan.schimanski@hum.uit.no](mailto:johan.schimanski@hum.uit.no).

Islwyn Ffowc Elis has a scene involving the passage of an Englishman, Paul Rushmere, from England to Wales (39-43).<sup>3</sup> Rushmere, an individual human subject, is the border-crosser and England and Wales are the two territories involved. The Welsh border marks his crossing. However, as suggested below (see process 4), such a minimal narrative is exactly a departure point and may only be a useful fiction, based ultimately on the common, but by no means fixed understanding that a border is first and foremost a form of barrier which may be crossed. Even if the minimal narrative is accepted as such, it must be treated as an idealized set of definitions. Firstly, it is clear that border poetics not only has to deal with passages, but also with hindered passages, with unsuccessful border crossings, where the potential border crosser is turned back. Also seemingly successful topographical border crossings may be called unsuccessful, on another symbolic plane. Rushmere, for example, may be said in a sense never actually to cross the Welsh border. Political geographer David Newman writes on immigrant border crossings that 'physically crossing the border often turns out to be the easy part of the crossing process. [...] One border (the physical) has been crossed while a new one (cultural) presents itself which may never be crossed successfully in their lifetime' ('Borders and Bordering' 178). Secondly, it is by no means a given that a border-crosser is an individual human subject. Many border crossings involve more than one person, and many forms of border studies deal with very large numbers of border crossings. I would argue that in cases involving more than one person, one may reduce the border crossing to a set of multiple individual border crossings (cf. Newman 'The Lines that Continue to Separate Us' 12). Ultimately, a border poetics must also be able handle border crossings made by things which are not human subjects: Rushmere's car, the smuggled jewellery in Veza Canetti's 1932 story 'Geduld bringt Rosen', the dead uncle in Fatih Akin's 2000 film *Im Juli*, etc. The work of literature might itself be said to partake in a border crossing, when it is translated from one language into another, or through the very act of interpretation.

Both these qualifications highlight the role of the subject in the border crossing. Border crossings tend to complicate and redefine the

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed reading of this scene, see Schimanski, 'A Poetics of the Border'.

concept of the subject, often idealized as a human individual and an active agent. The sentence *the border-crosser crosses the border* implies grammatically that the border-crosser is an active subject. Yet border crossings often invert this relationship, producing situations in which, metaphorically, *the border crosses the border-crosser*. Firstly, the border may take up the role as an active agent, especially in those cases that it represents human institutions such as the law, the state, etc. Often these institutions are given human representatives in the form of border guards, customs officials, etc. In some narratives, either the physical border, its guards, or the institutions it represents will take on the rôle of antagonist to the border-crosser; this is the case in unsuccessful border crossings. Rushmere in *Cysgod y Cryman*, a forcefully active subject in his fast car, does not meet any border guards or physical barriers when he crosses the Welsh border, but he does look upon the border sign as an antagonist, and half-realises that he is locked in the terms of a cultural conflict over which he ultimately has little control.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, sometimes border-crossers are forced across borders, either by other border-crossers, or through expulsion, exile, ethnic cleansing and the like. Sometimes the border literally moves across a *stationary* border-crosser, as when borders and frontiers move in war (as in Roy Jacobsen's 1999 novel *Grenser*, 'Borders') and in colonial expansion, with the border-crossers remaining stationary, but at the same time psychologically dislocated. In some, but not all border crossings where the border or other agents take an active role, the border-crossers will be passive.

In some stories we may also find the roles of protagonist and antagonist reversed, so that we see the border-crossing scene from the viewpoint of a border guard, as in the 1999 story 'STILLE. mich. NACHT' ('SILENT. me. NIGHT') by Terézia Mora. David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1994) begins with the description of a man crossing the fence from the Australian outback into a white settlement, seen from the viewpoint of three children belonging to that settlement who take on the rôle of 'border guards' (1-3); later in the novel, the

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<sup>4</sup> It is possible that A. J. Greimas' theory of narrative actants could be used to describe border crossings in a more detailed way. Cf. Reinhold Görling's suggestion that all border crossings involve gifts.

same scene, as seen from the viewpoint of the man himself, is recounted (32-33, 36).<sup>5</sup>

Also, by marking not only the passage of the border-crosser, but also the border-crosser, the border highlights the defining limits of the subject itself as unstable and redefinable. The border crossing may be an important part of the life-narrative central to the border-crosser's identity, and the borders of that identity may be crossed at the border crossing. Thus the juridical right to one's own body, the principle of *habeas corpus*, often breaks down at the border (cf. Görner on *habeas corpus* as a bodily border). Rushmere in *Cysgod y Cryman* countersigns the border in a way which reaffirms his identity; ultimately however, his very identity is destroyed by a later, similar border crossing, as he meets his death in a car-crash on the way from England into Wales (in Elis' 1956 sequel *Yn Ôl i Leifior*). This is a circumstance which must certainly be taken into consideration where multiple or collective border crossings are concerned, for these may involve intersubjective dynamics and subjectivities which are not reducible to individuals (cf. Lichtenberg-Ettinger).

Taken together, these problematizations of the concept of the 'subject' are in fact arguments for retaining the centrality of the subject in a border crossing, for they imply that the 'subject' is a large and flexible enough concept to cover all the cases mentioned above. But the relationship between border and subject can also be inverted in a more radical way. The sentence *the border-crosser crosses the border* presupposes both the border-crosser and the border. Yet border-crossers only become border-crossers by crossing the border, and psychoanalytical theory suggests furthermore that subjects become subjects by crossing or being crossed by different kinds of borders (most explicitly in the work of D. W. Winnicott on 'transitional objects', though borders and their equivalents in the form of developmental stages and the division from the mother play an important rôle in the theory of subject formation from Sigmund Freud onwards<sup>6</sup>). Even Rushmere, who does not face interrogation by border officials, is forced to identify himself – to himself – upon crossing the

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<sup>5</sup> For a reading of the borders and in-between spaces of Malouf's novel, see Egerer.

<sup>6</sup> In the discussion of borders which introduces his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha invokes the image Freud found for the alternating presence and absence of the mother in the child's play with a toy accompanied by the words *fort* (away) and *da* (there).

border. One must also be open to the possibility that the border itself is also the product of the border crossing or brought into being by border-crossers. Taken at face value – or rather, taken *only* at face value – the sentence *the border-crosser crosses the border* reveals a Cartesian view of space which may be superseded by concepts of space as a social construct or as part of a mode of being founded upon interpretation. The sociologist Georg Simmel, while allowing for the fact that spatial borders can often have effects on social relationships, writes that ‘The boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially’ (142).<sup>7</sup> For philosopher Martin Heidegger, ‘The boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding [sein Wesen]*’ (356).<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault writes: ‘The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows’ (34).<sup>9</sup>

### Seven processes

1. *The border is split when crossed. Its status as a barrier is compromised; it reveals itself as a passage. The border is both affirmed and denied.* In Rushmere’s case in *Cysgod y Cryman*, this ambivalence is transferred to the border sign rather than staying with the border itself: He doesn’t see the point of the border sign when it’s so obvious that the Welsh are different. But the fact that his own reflections about the difference between the Welsh and the English always end in indeterminacy, reveals that he is unable to cross the border fully even when he does so physically. He thus *de(-)limits* Wales, denying and affirming its border at the same time. This kind of ambivalence is a major threat to

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Die Grenze ist nicht eine räumliche Tatsache mit soziologischen Wirkungen, sondern eine soziologische Tatsache, die sich räumlich formt’ (Simmel, ‘Soziologie des Raumes’ 141).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Die Grenze ist nicht das, wobei etwas aufhört, sondern, wie die Griechen es erkannten, die Grenze ist jenes, von woher etwas *sein Wesen beginnt*’ (Heidegger 155).

<sup>9</sup> ‘La limite et la transgression se doivent l’une à l’autre la densité de leur être: inexistence d’une limite qui ne pourrait absolument pas être franchie; vanité en retour d’une transgression qui ne franchirait qu’une limite d’illusion ou d’ombre’ (Foucault 237).

the border as a pre-given entity, making it impossible to determine whether it in fact functions fully as a containing or a hindering line. The dichotomy of the border is a recurrent theme in border studies, repeated in different variations of a split between the border's function as a division and a join. Usually, the second term, the border as a join, is emphasized, to counteract the common impression that borders only function as divisions, and that to get rid of divisions we only need to remove borders. Those who see borders and border crossings as mutually dependent entities will tend to see the border-crosser as the maker of the join or as the join itself.<sup>10</sup> On the dynamic and processual level of the border-crossing narrative, an ambivalence about the border as being either a divide or a join often becomes the object of interpretation or reading.

2. *The affirmation and denial of the border may make the crosser unsure whether the border has indeed been crossed, again causing the crosser to hesitate on the status (real/unreal) of the territory bounded by the border.* If the border is viewed primarily as a barrier, its status as a border will be seen as threatened by any ambivalence or dissemination. That is to say that its ontological status – does it exist, or does it not exist? – will be threatened, creating a hesitation in its interpretation. Thus the very common intrusion of the fantastic in its different forms in border-crossing narratives, expresses doubt about the existence of the border, or about whether the border has been crossed. Again, the importance of an interpretative or epistemological element in the border crossing must be emphasized.

Much has been said about the *other* in connection with interpretation, and it is clear that the ontological status of the 'other' or unknown territory is often a point of focus in those cases in which the border-crosser identifies with the territory which he is leaving. In his *Universe of the Mind*, semiotician Jurij Lotman builds on his comments on borders in the earlier *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, where he establishes their status strictly as impenetrable divides between regions of differing structures. In the later text, he begins by

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<sup>10</sup> Edgar Platen, in privileging relations and connections rather than oppositions, does so with respect to a continual process of border crossing/transgression (*Grenzüberschreitungen*), border erasure (*Grenzauflösungen*), and the drawing of new borders.

positioning the border first and foremost as the similarly asymmetrical boundary of the known and the 'own', within what he terms the semiosphere (131). At the end of his discussion of boundaries there however, he admits that semiospheres always join onto other semiospheres, providing the basis for equalization and exchange (142). This leaves the question of what happens when the border itself becomes the other. In Rushmere's case, ontological doubt is either associated with the border sign rather than directly the border itself, or with the mystical Welsh and his Welsh object of desire, Greta Vaughan, who has 'ryw hud Celtaidd o'i chwmpas [some Celtic enchantment around her]' (40; my translation).<sup>11</sup> If however we read the border sign and the boundaries set around Greta as displacements of or figures for the border, it becomes apparent that it is not only the other which is ambivalent and fantastic, but also the border itself.

*3. There is a reflective moment in the crossing of the border which reproduces the crossing and its splittings on different levels. As the border-crosser crosses the border, new narrative borders are created and crossed in the crosser's own story, and in the story of the border itself. The border crossing alters, reaffirms, or even constitutes the identities of both the border-crosser and the border itself by creating temporal borders in the historical narrative of the border and the biographical narrative of the border-crosser. Alongside the spatial movement of the border-crosser across the border, both the border-crosser and the border move from one condition to another: a temporal boundary is crossed. In many cases, this temporal border is not a particularly interesting border; it divides merely between a time when the border hasn't been crossed and a time in which the border has been crossed. However, there is often a strong potential for a border crossing to function as a marked boundary between two different states of being. In biographical terms, important divisions between life stages, or between life and non-life (at the borders constituted by birth and death) are often marked by topographical border crossings. These temporal borders are an important concern of literary scholars, who often deal with life-stories as described in novels and stories. They are*

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<sup>11</sup> For a reading of similar 'magic circles' around objects of desire in Nadine Gordimer's 1990 novel *My Son's Story*, see Schimanski, 'Genre Borders in a Border Novel'.

also of interest to anthropologists and folklorists, who often deal with the ritual spatialization of important transitions in life: initiations involving removal and readmittance into society (as described by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner); marriages involving the carrying of people over thresholds and honeymoons; funerals involving burial in marked-off spaces. It is clear from *Cysgod y Cryman* and its sequel that border crossings mark Rushmere's transition from single to married life and also his death.

In other cases, crossings across national boundaries are in themselves important events in the life of a person, as is often the case in economically or politically-forced migration and exile. The initial projection of a topographical border crossing onto a temporal axis can however bring with it an act of interpretation which in itself is part of the narrative of border crossing. Rushmere's life story becomes part of his border crossing in *Cysgod y Cryman*, in an act of internal reflection in which he considers himself – he creates the narrative of his life in connection with the border crossing (cf. Certeau). In other cases, the interpreter may not be the border-crosser him or herself, but another character or the narrator. In any case, protagonist or narrator becomes the first in a chain of interpreters including the receiver of the narrative (in literary examples, the reader). As interpretation itself becomes a temporal and narrative act, the border crossing finds itself reflected and refracted on many planes.

4. *The inevitable multiplication of the border crossing in its reflections means these split statuses, directions and readings apply to all the entities involved in the border crossing (territories, crossers, signs).* The continual reflection of the border crossing onto different narrative planes is further complicated by multiplication of border effects on many different identities and planes, bringing with it ambivalences and splittings to all the entities involved. The Welsh border in *Cysgod y Cryman* is both a join and a barrier; Rushmere is both somebody who has crossed the border and not crossed the border; as becomes clear from his reflections, Wales is both dirty and cleansing, both irritating and desirable, both a nation and a people, both a territory and a culture, both obvious and secret; the border sign is both superfluous and arbitrary, both obstinate and knocked a bit to the side. It is difficult to say where this complication would end; or even where it may begin,

for it is always already present in the border itself. Complication is indeed the *re*-complication of a convenient fiction about a minimal crossing of a unitary and clear-cut border by an individual border crosser, showing that the situation was not that simple to start off with. It would also be presumptuous to assume that this endless reflection onto different entities and planes is a unproblematic process of simple mimesis within a straight-forward economy whereby signifieds are exchanged for signifiers which in turn become signifieds, again to be exchanged. There is in all likelihood an element of play in the system; given one instance of an entity or plane, one cannot simply reconstruct all the others.

5. *The discrepancies between these crossings cause the border to splay into several borders, to lose its nature as a unitary border, to be disseminated as new borders inside the territories it divides.* As the border is split in its ambivalent status and reflected on all kinds of different planes (in Rushmere's case biographical, interpretative, territorial, cultural, textual, etc.), it becomes apparent that it is made up of a multiple set of borders existing on different planes.<sup>12</sup> These borders are more or less overlaid, juxtaposed, bundled together, when seen from the perspective of any one of these planes. From such a perspective, smaller or larger discrepancies will become obvious. Hélène Cixous comments in a reading of border crossings in Jean Genet's 1949 *Journal du voleur* (*The Thief's Journal*): 'We are always either early or late as far as the construction of the passage is concerned' (138). Thus, while Rushmere only once crosses the Welsh border in the discussed episode, on the discursive level of the text, the border is crossed several times, creating folds in the text. Discrepancies between the territorial and more symbolic, cultural borders of the Welsh nation potentially makes the border arbitrary or dislocated. The theoretical implications of such a *dissemination* of the border include the idea that the border is a zone rather than a simple line; in which case the border becomes not only the division between two territories or places, but also a territory or place in itself (with its own borders). They also include the idea that the external borders of a territory can be reflected in the form of its internal borders; to take a practical example, the

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<sup>12</sup> For a multilayer model of borders as developed within the social sciences, see Schack.

border control air travellers pass at an airport situated far from the nation's external borders is an infolded variant of those external borders (Virilio 10; Löfgren 262-66; Newman 'Borders and Bordering' 178). Dissemination also implies a progressive emptying of signification, if we are to follow Jacques Derrida's use of the term, in which he plays on the idea not only of 'spreading' or 'proliferation', but also the 'dis-semination', the 'removal of meaning'. The risk is here that the border becomes so spread-out that it no longer can be called a border. There is however nothing to prevent us from attempting to identify different borders as connected, as foldings of the same, underlying border, or even as hierarchically related (primary and secondary borders), though it would be preferable if we could retain an awareness of the different ethical implications of such a strategy in every case.

*6. Internal differences are always also infolded external borders. Internal divisions may reinforce just as much as they destabilize identity; external divisions may destabilize just as much as they reinforce the same.* Because border-crossers never completely cross the border, they often bring the border with them, folding it into the inner space of the territory they have entered. Rushmere in *Cysgod y Cryman* is still very English when he visits the Vaughan family home in Wales, and his Englishness is reaffirmed when he creates a border inside that home between (English) cleanliness and modernity and (Welsh) dirt and belatedness. This image of Wales as divided between Welshness and Englishness is answered in the novel as Greta Vaughan enters into the Welsh culture of Liverpool upon their marriage and her move to England, creating a corresponding division between Welshness and Englishness in England. The obvious implication of the folding of the border into the territory it delimits would be that the border threatens the identity of that territory. Where nations are concerned, their ideal horizontal homogeneity is threatened by foreign, heterogeneous elements. But this argument may be reversed: if the internal border is seen as a product or variant of the external border, it may reaffirm the identity of the territory. Indeed, nation theory makes clear that nation-builders often make use of internal difference in order to bring into being national unity (cf. Sommer; Bhabha).

7. *The border-crosser is caught on two trajectories with regard to the bounded territory, both inside and outside, both belonging and participating without belonging, both naturalized and suspended. The border-crosser approaches the territory on a double trajectory. The border is folded into the territory in the border-crosser's uncertainty: the border-crosser is caught between on the one hand facing up to the other and entering into it, and on the other skimming above the other, keeping outside. In the one case, the border-crosser is placed beside the other, looking and moving on a horizontal plane; in the other, the border-crosser watches as if suspended from above. It is the border-crosser's uncertainty which makes the border crossing into a question of reading, and the border-crosser's double trajectory (facing/skimming) is very similar to that of the reader of a book, who is also moves on a double trajectory (reading progressively through the book and reading from a totalizing, external perspective). Uncertainty and the double trajectory make it possible to treat the territories involved in a border crossing as texts, and thus to call this provisional theory of the border a *poetics* of the border.*

### **Mappings**

With the processes of a crossing-orientated theory of the border in mind, I turn now to the theory and practice of a border poetics proper. Border poetics can be defined as any approach to texts which connect borders on the levels of *histoire*, the word the text presents to the reader, and of *récit*, the text itself, a weave of rhetorical figures and narrative structures.<sup>13</sup> In other words, it attends to two kinds of space, the *presented space* (the world in the text) and the *space of presentation* (the text as part of the world). In both these spaces we may find borders of a topological or topographical nature, either they be national borders or the borders between chapters in a book. The connection between the spaces may of course also take place in other media than the text: all kinds of representations – be they narrative, artistic or non-aesthetic – involve this kind of spatial doubling.

Such acts of connecting presuppose that borders always have a spatial element. However, one of the first problems any theory of the

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<sup>13</sup> I use Gérard Genette's terms, well-established in narratology, though corresponding terms developed by Boris Tomashevsky such as *sjuzet* and *fabula* are still popular, as are a standard translation of Genette's terms, *story* and *discourse*.

border meets is the broad applicability of the term 'border'. Even limiting oneself to literary studies, borders are very often invoked, especially in discussions of transgression and identity. What quickly becomes apparent, at least within the context of a border theory proper, is that the word 'border' is often used where alternatives could have been just as useful: words like 'difference' and 'opposition', for example, depending on what is intended. Thus at the 'Gendering Border Studies' conference arranged by the Centre for Borders Studies at the University of Glamorgan in 2005, while many of the papers dealt with gendered and gendering practices taking place on or across national and other topographical borders, a large number of papers addressed gender itself as a form of border. The problem with using the term 'border' instead of terms such as 'difference' or 'opposition' is that it tends to territorialize difference, even if only within an imaginary mental landscape. One runs the risk of homogenizing bordered-off areas in this landscape, and repressing in the process more network- or rhizome-like models of the world. However, this reductive use of the term 'border' – common and unavoidable as it is – is the bread and butter of border theory. Border theory regularly returns to such questions as how difference is made into borders, how networks are refigured as territories, and what kind of borders are the end-products of these territorializing processes. As Simmel suggests, it may be that the symbolic difference comes before the border, and indeed that the 'topographic' is only a way of mapping spaces which are in our lived experiences more a question of symbolic meaning than of Cartesian co-ordinates. This would imply that the border between England and Wales is primarily a line in a mental landscape, and only secondarily a line in a physical landscape. Even more radically, it might imply that topography never actually escapes the conceptual sphere, that it is just another symbolic framework, this time involving such categories as near and far, inside and outside, East and West, visible and invisible – rather than categories such as Englishness and Welshness or feminine and masculine.

My own argument here would be that the border is a dynamic phenomena which has no primary essence we can enthrone as its ultimate 'signified'. The border, as Reinhold Görling has suggested, is not a sign but a trace. This would imply that all borders have a topographical and a symbolic aspect; they all 'topographicalize' or

‘territorialize’ symbolic differences, and at the same time ‘symbolize’ or ‘conceptualize’ topographical and territorial differences (cf. Newman ‘Borders and Bordering’ 183). Because of the inevitable recomplication of the border, these forms of projection or mapping take place on different planes, such as the plane of presented space and the plane of the space of presentation, both mentioned above. From these recomplications, and the recomplication of recomplications, the main types of border central to a border poetics are produced. From experience with various readings of border-crossing narratives and building on the seven processes describes above, I have identified five main types of these which are useful to deal with in a border poetics reading. All border-crossing narratives may thus be examined for their *textual*, *topographic*, *symbolic*, *temporal* and *epistemological* dimensions; I will be discussing each in more detail below.<sup>14</sup> In using these categories, one will inevitably be faced with the recomplications inherent in border crossing. If all borders have a spatial element (at the very least), it becomes possible to talk about the topography of a text, about a symbolic mental landscape, about a temporal progression, or about a field of knowledge. This means that the borders above tend to be recomplicated at the very point at which they have taken their proper places as elemental denominators in an analysis. A person crossing from one territory into another crosses a topographical, but also a temporal border; and this temporal border, in being designated a border, figures time as an imaginary topography.

### **Five planes**

1. *Textual borders* may take the form of punctuating segmentations or of more or less marked shifts between different themes, episodes, styles, modes, etc. These are the borders which the reader meets when she reads the text, and they constitute temporal borders in the story of her reading. A text is delimited by its beginning and its end, but reading introduces other phenomenological dimensions to the text; thus the outer border of the text may just as well be figured by the

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<sup>14</sup> For a textual reading where these categories are used and illustrated, see Schimanski, ‘The Postcolonial Border’. For an alternative set of dimensions or planes connected to a way of reading borders in aesthetic works, see Larsen, who also includes illustrative readings.

border between the reader and the text, a both textual border, and an epistemological border central to hermeneutics. The text itself is a temporal border in the sense that it divides the life of its reader between a time when it had not been read, and the time afterwards, when it has been read; the beginning and ending, or the outside and inside of a text may thus also be described as the outer edges of the text figured as a border zone. Texts may also be put into categories, implying symbolic borders between genres, or between literature and non-literature. Part of the job of border poetics is, I propose, to show the connections between internal, external, and categorical borders.

Textual borders are of course a variant of *medial* borders, and are thus partly dependent on media-specific material constraints (I write 'partly' because most media seem fairly efficient in creating simulacra of other media, and thus escaping these initial material constraints). Thus they may be treated also as a variant of topographical border, involving another such variant, the bodily borders of the reader/perceiver. Being in writing, texts are rich in the means to represent borders indirectly, through the figurative power of language. It may seem that they can only map borders *directly* by using the graphical potential of textual limits, divisions and punctuation. However, because words and figures call upon the reader to read and interpret, they constitute, in their materiality, a topographical border between the reader and the world of the text.

2. *Symbolic borders* (also called *conceptual borders*) are in one sense not real borders, since they belong to the human imaginary – though ultimately, this could be said of all borders, if we accept that space, time and borders are categories of perception. As suggested above, even topographical borders of the most banal type build on symbolic oppositions and differences: the English-Welsh border is a mapping of the difference between English and Welsh Territory. However, many more abstract differences – metaphysical, mathematical and social – are less easy to map as topographical borders, though we do so all the time, either in imaginary diagrammatic landscapes (if we are so inclined), in graphic representations, or in the form of geographical and other kinds of physical borders. As Lotman suggests, borders, as part of a 'language of spatial relations', are central to a 'spatial modeling of concepts which themselves are not spatial in nature'. He

held modelling as being 'extremely important for art' (218; see also 229).

Other kinds of symbolic borders are imaginable. While some researchers on globalization tend towards representing the world as a world of flows, others have become concerned with the development of new kinds of seemingly non-territorial borders in the symbolic space of the internet (Newman 'On Borders and Power' 3). These borders, often involving a process of membership (Jordan and Duvell), seem very unlike traditional topographical borders, yet they can be said to involve an action of crossing. They are a new variant of the disseminated, often internal border produced when the symbolic opposition between inside and outside is shifted away from the topographical border to some other site; typical examples are that mentioned earlier of the border control post passed in an airport far from the outer national border, or the inner urban borders between ethnically marked spaces which in other contexts may be manifested by the outer national border (Newman 'On Borders and Power' 7).

In literary texts, I propose to use the term 'symbolic border' mostly about differences concerning the lived life of humans and other agents, either in its social aspects (*gender, religion, class, ethnicity, hegemony, etc.*), in its individual aspects (*being, body, psyche, etc.*), or in the in-between of interpersonal relationships. Literature to a large extent deals with precisely the crossing or the transgression of such symbolic borders.

Two of the other border types I propose could be said also to be sub-types of the symbolic border, dealing with differences in time and in knowledge:

3. *Temporal borders* are transitions between two periods of time. The transition may be imagined as a topographical border if time is seen as an imaginary landscape ('the past is a foreign country'), or as a spatialized fourth dimension. Literature mostly deals with biographical and historical timescales, though sometimes the latter may be further divided between the properly historical and the mythical/cosmological. Thus temporal borders in literature have mostly to do with the human life cycle (*birth, adulthood, marriage, success, aging, death, etc.*), well-described in psychoanalytical theory, in anthropological work on transition rituals as mentioned earlier, and in

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of chronotopes; or with historical transitions (*genesis, revolutions, conquests, colonisations, wars, national awakenings, migrations, developments, liberations, apocalypse, etc.*). Biographical transitions can often be read as figures for historical transitions. Such shifts in life and in history will be accompanied by transitions from one more abstract symbolic sphere to another (e.g. from being single to having a partner, or from capitalism to socialism), and often also by topographical border crossings of different kinds. All topographical border crossings will be accompanied by temporal border crossings of greater or lesser weight.

4. *Epistemological borders* build on the difference between the known and the unknown. In a positivist, progressive world-view, epistemological borders are seen as expanding, and this expansion is also seen as an all-important social project, in many cases accompanying the topographical expansion of borders through imperialism. Today, cultural and experience-orientated tourists and travel writers continue this movement on an individual level.

Epistemological borders are often placed between home territory and foreign places; the traveller travels into the unknown. The other is often defined as the unknown; and the unknown is often defined as the other. Topographical border crossings are inevitably accompanied by epistemological border crossings or border shiftings, as the border-crosser interprets the other, and the border itself. The textual border crossings carried out by the reader of literary and other narratives also involve epistemological border crossings in their acts of readerly movement and interpretation.

5. *Topographical borders* are as suggested a necessary element in any border crossing: all borders must have a spatial dimension, imaginary or otherwise, or else one cannot cross them. This flexibility of the concept must always be attended to in the practice of a border poetics, though generally an analysis of topographical borders in the text will tend to focus first on those thought of in terms of physical space. The most concrete examples are borders which are reinforced by physical barriers and markers, such as most national borders, land-ownership borders such as fences, architectural borders such as walls, and bodily borders such as skin.

From a geographical point of view, such borders may be described in terms of *scaling*: thus bodily borders are borders on a micro-scale, out of focus for traditional geographers, while national and power-bloc borders are borders on a macro-scale. Part of the theory of scaling is that one and the same border may function on different scales: the wall of house (say in Berlin before German reunification) may be also a land-ownership border, or even a border between nations and even larger power blocs.

Ultimately, textual borders are topographical borders on a micro-scale; an obvious example in the present context would be those constituted by book covers within the topography of a library. When Simmel uses frame of the artwork as a metaphor for the border of a social group, he implicitly contrasts the two in terms of scale and import, but at the same time accepts that they have the same formal function: that of 'closing' the object 'off against the surrounding world and holding it together' (141).<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Lotman considers 'the work of art as an area of space demarcated in some way', even if it should reflect 'in its finitude an infinite object' (217).

### Figurations

The topographies of space, time, text, symbolic structure, and knowledge, while overlaid, are not completely commensurable, causing a sense of slippage when their borders are juxtaposed. This sense of slippage, of the dissemination of the border, will form part of the particularity of any single border reading. The geographical analogy would be the imperfect fits between borders on different levels that provide the potential for border change (Newman 'On Borders and Power' 5). Slippage in border reading has important implications for the work of connecting one level with another. While all types of border entail a process of mapping, this mapping always involves an element of play. To use semiotic terms, there is a difference involved in the mapping of the signifier onto the signified. In rhetorical terms, the different borders we may find in the text may figure other borders, but there will always be a surplus or a discrepancy in these exchanges and substitutions. From the perspective of a minimal model of juxtaposition and slippage, one

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<sup>15</sup> '[...] gegen die umgebende Welt ab- und in sich zusammenzuschließen' (Simmel 138).

may assume that such figuration involves both a metaphorical and a metonymical dimension, a double vector of interpretation. The mode of figuration involved will thus always be of great interest in a border poetics reading.

Simultaneously, it is difficult to imagine a permanent baseline for any concerted act of mapping borders. All baselines, all planes of projection, must be seen as contingent and temporary. Anthropologists and border scholars Hasting Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson write that topographical borders are 'good places to study symbolic boundaries' (16). Likewise, it is certainly a useful exercise to take the physical articulation of the text as baseline, and map topographical, temporal, epistemological and symbolic borders onto this baseline. By doing this one may discover for example that the same border is crossed physically or symbolically several times in a text, although the border-crosser only crosses the border once in the world of the text. One may then identify a crossing in the text which, by benefit of greater sense of juxtaposition with the topographical border crossing, can lay claim to primacy. Other borders, which in the frame of the argument may be called more secondary, can then be seen in relationship to this primary border. Borders on a micro-scale may be read as standing for borders on a macro-scale in a figure of understatement; or vice versa, in a figure of hyperbole.

However, because other planes are involved in this analysis, one has to examine the text from the perspective of these other planes. In doing so, I propose, one will become aware of the above-mentioned surpluses in the figurative exchange. It is these surpluses which give meaning and particularity to the reading. Topographical borders may tell us something we did not know about textual borders; textual borders may tell us something we did not know about topographical borders. Each turn of the allegory leaves a new residue to be reintroduced into the allegorical economy. This residue is a product of the particularity of the different figural resources that are activated at any given turn of the allegory. Thus, the border is subject to various figural representations, such as a bridge, a threshold, or a bend in the road, all of which endow the border with different meanings. Similarly, textual borders are also subject to different figural representations. Thus for example, the ending of a text may be figured as a transition to a blank, empty state. Sometimes, textual and

topographic borders may be figured by images in the text itself – such as walls or skin – and one single such image may be readable as a figure for both a textual and a topographical border in one.

Border figures belong to a possibly endless repertoire of such configurations, though these figures can often show common features, and the repertoire is always expandable. There are various aspects of this repertoire which are central to border poetics. 1. A set of *images*, of figures for the border (line, threshold, coast, seam, the Berlin Wall, the customs official etc.). 2. A set of *paradoxes* which threaten any simply view of the border. Is the border a cut or a link? Does the border belong to the territory it delimits? Is the border a function of what it delimits or is it the other way round? 3. A set of border *effects*, for example infoldings, doublings, splittings, and disseminations resulting in the production of border zones, internal borders, carried borders, and of primary and secondary borders set in relation to one another. 4. A combined *ontology* and *epistemology* of the border in which borders are seen as dependent on the possibility of their being crossed, and in which the border is figured in relationship to the possible crosser, in which the border structures the difference between self and other, home and foreign territory, civilization and barbarity, society and wilderness, known and unknown, reality and fantasy, etc.

Exactly how the various figures in the repertoire endow the border with different meanings is dependent on the particular characteristics of the figures themselves: if they involve one, two, three or four dimensions (including time), what kind of events, processes and states of development and permeability they allow, what constraints they set on topographical form, and which spaces they conventionally divide between. Skin, for example, the outer border of the body, is typically a three-dimensional border which can be subject to events and processes such as piercing, cutting, wounding, infection, healing, decay, peeling, and touching; it can attain a status of being healthy, unhealthy, wounded, covered or naked; it can be crossed by infections, bodily wastes, senses, nourishment, air and words; it envelops, while having openings, signifies culturally through colour, and can function as camouflage; and it divides between the body and the space outside the body, between the body and other bodies and objects, and even between the body and itself (one can touch oneself). In any use of skin as a figure for the border, one or more of these

attributes may be activated as a meaningful connotation of the border.<sup>16</sup>

The particularity which these figures introduce into the allegory and the residues it produces point to the possibility of differentiating between certain kinds of border and certain kind of texts or territory, with their differences hinged onto the protocols met at their borders. In the Rushmere episode in *Cysgod y Cryman*, the border sign points to its own insignificance, and thus reaffirms itself as a marker of a radical difference between England and Wales as entities belonging to two different types of nations. The reversible allegory may also be extended to the territories bounded by the borders concerned. Reading a text in which the border concerned is a national border, a reversible allegorical relationship presupposes that nations involved are subject to various figural representations, that these figures are ways of handling the nation, and that one important metaphor for the nation is the text. It also presupposes the obverse: that the text is similarly subject to various figurations, one of which is the nation. But a border mark has its own textuality, and might differentiate between different kinds of border, not only between the two sides which follow each and every border.

Ultimately, it is this flexible and reversible activity of allegorical reading which is the main work of a border poetics reading. As suggested in my introduction, this work will also have theoretical implications for a border poetics as presented here: figuration and allegory are also forms of border crossings, made by the analyst, and such border crossings will inevitably put into question the stability and unity of the borders between text, space, time, knowledge and the symbolic sphere; and of the analyst herself.

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<sup>16</sup> See Benthien for a thorough analysis.

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