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CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF BORDERS:

INTRODUCTION TO THE DOSSIER

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Abstract

The cultural production of borders can be as read as referring to part of the economy, as an aesthetic site of creativity and border negotiation, and a cultural factor in the bordering process. The need to understand these cultural dimensions of borders and borderlands has led to interdisciplinary interest in narratives, aesthetic forms, and cultural memory. Border poetics and related forms of spatial poetics can provide fruitful approaches to specific literary texts, films and other artworks, as well as to bordering in general. This special dossier for the Journal of Borderlands Studies presents papers from the 2008 ABS European conference in Kirkenes, which had “Cultural Production and Negotiation of Borders” as its theme and which brought together a wide range of researchers from both the social sciences and the humanities, raising questions about the role of culture in borderlands and also focusing on borders in Sub-Arctic Europe. The following selection of papers addresses films, poetry, novels and cultural heritage connected to specific topographical borderlands.

Cultural production and negotiation

As philosopher Jacques Derrida reminds us, the word *culture* derives from a word having to do with farming. One of the founding figures of cultural studies, Raymond Williams, goes a step further when he tells us that in English the word's development is related to that of a similar word, *coulter*, meaning a ploughshare (Williams 1976, 77); an implement used to divide the earth.¹ Both Derrida and Williams were sceptical about a unitary conception of culture; Derrida specifically asks us to shift our focus to a conception of culture based around difference, division and borders (Derrida 1992, 7-11). The image of agricultural production through ploughing is however particularly apt in a description of a world of culture(s) often criss-crossed by and criss-crossing very material borders and borderlands. It appears that culture thrives in dialogue

with these borderlands, as the current crop of films, literary texts and artworks dealing with borderlands shows.

This is our first argument in making this special dossier for the *Journal of Borderlands Studies*: that borderlands are places of cultural production, and that in a very economical sense, borderlands can be the origins of many different forms of culture. This also goes for culture produced in the national or imperial metropolises, which may also use the border as a motif or metaphor. This is a reading of cultural production as a quantifiable form of capital at the intersection of art, media and society.

Our second argument is that in order to understand how this works, we must read the concept of *cultural production* not just as the production of culture, but also as production *through* culture. Culture can be a creative and performative force in the activity of bordering; it is a site of creation, also in the context of borderlands. People engaged in cultural production can negotiate borders by providing new visions of what they may be, or even of what borders should not or cannot be. Their cultural and aesthetic practices can disrupt expectations of what borders are, through the creation of imagined and imaginary borderlands.

Alongside these economical and what we would designate as aesthetic understandings of the term *cultural production*, there is of course a third, more general understanding gradually gaining ground within border studies, and this is that borders are not only the products of political conflict and negotiation, but are also determined by cultural factors. Within a more constructivist paradigm, borders are seen as cultural constructs generated, circulated, and interpreted within various forms of discourse, even though they often have very physical, material or violent effects. Our claim here in putting together this dossier with its strong focus on film, literature and the heritage industry is that one specific level of discourse, the aesthetic, has a special role to play in the production and negotiation of borders.

Constructing border aesthetics and border poetics

Borders are a well-established field of study in the social sciences, in particular

within border or borderlands studies in geography and related fields. Recently, social and political geographers working with topographical borders have increasingly been calling for cultural and narrative perspectives on the way in which borders are perceived by state actors, borderland populations, and border crossers such as migrants (Newman 2006). More and more social scientists working within borders studies are using words like “story” (e.g. Strüver 2005, 2003). This tendency is part of an increased emphasis on discourse within the frame of a “post-modernist” paradigm of border studies (Berg and Houtum 2003; Kolossov 2006; Paasi 2005a, b). In literary and cultural studies, but also in sociology, the border concept is often used for more symbolic types of border, such as the borders between cultures, genders or classes. Such symbolic borders contain within them a spatial dimension; they are manifested as spatial borders either within the real, topographical world, or within a mental map, an imaginary geography (Said 1991) or a more intimate topology of, for instance, the body (Benthien 2002; Christensen 1992).

The origin of this attempt to articulate the border as both topographical and symbolic is to be found in sociologist Georg Simmel’s work on the border, first published in 1903, where he famously argues that ‘[t]he boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially’ (Simmel 1997: 142). Svend Erik Larsen (2007) has used this idea of spatial form or manifestation as an argument that borders are essentially aesthetic as well as symbolic phenomena. Borders are thus constituted and expressed on the plane of the senses (as in the original, broader meaning of the word *aesthetic*), as signs, or within a more deconstructive paradigm, as traces (cf. Görling 2007).

Taking these different kinds of border, topographic and symbolic, together, one may trace a complex circulation of the border concept from one register to another. Any one of the registers – national territory, cultural difference, gender, and so on – can be mapped onto one of the other registers, in allegorical transfers of meaning (Schimanski and Wolfe 2007). It is this kind of circulation which constitutes the historicity of the border concept, allowing the border concept to change and develop in different cultural and historical contexts. Taking territorial borders as a departure point, feudal territorial borders

were quite different from those of modern nation states, being conceived of as wildernesses rather than as dividing lines (Warnke 1994); global borders towards the end of the 19th Century were formed around colonial zones based on a racial differentiation between the European self and non-European others which has become increasingly temporalized with the introduction of theories of evolution (Frank 2006); after the First World War, the dissolution of empires and the Wilson doctrine caused territories and borders in Central and Eastern Europe to become increasingly multi-layered and fragmented (Robinson 2007); today we are living with discourses of globalization and hybridity which have paradoxically created both an illusion of a “borderless world” and a world in which borders have multiplied as they are folded into nations, in the form of refugee camps, detention centres, urban enclaves, walled communities, and tourist spaces. They are even folded into the identities of individual subjects.

Such a historical sequence of border concepts in both topographical and symbolic registers cannot, however, be taken only at face value. New borders overwrite older borders. The landscape is based either on the repetition or negation of a previous landscape. The border or the border zone is a place of memory, of remembering or forgetting, to the extent that it is perceived as a place. As a place, it is made up of traces of previous borders and bordering activities. Border crossing can also involve acts of remembering or forgetting. Typical cases of the articulation of borders through memory would be that of a border-crosser who brings with her a souvenir to/ from the other side (Castillo 2007), or of the use of historical photos in analyzing memories of erased borders (Meinhof 2002). Borderings involving state and legal power are ultimately built on the idea of the trace, as borders are made legitimate by an appeal to a precedent that is to be found in the form of evidence, be it in archives, maps, folklore, storytelling, old markers or even the physical landscape itself.

Representations of borders in novels, short stories, poems, films, plays, videos, artworks, museums and the like are very often traces in the sense that they are historical. They can be narrated/enunciated in the past, and they can be narrated as being the past. Various kinds of aesthetic narratives and figurations can function as remembering practices that bring past historical layers of border spaces and border concepts to light. Just one example would be Sophie Calle’s

artwork based around the ritual *eruv* border and its use in present-day Jerusalem (Vest Hansen 2007). Each border carries within it an archaeology of previous borders, and this archaeology can play an active part in the renegotiation of borders if it is opened to new border concepts or used to construct a deconventionalizing perspective. Thus the aesthetic dimension emphasizes the affective dimensions in our reactions to the border and ethical considerations of the type already examined in psychoanalysis (Lichtenberg-Ettinger 1994), existentialist philosophy (Jaspers 1956), international relations (Williams 2006), and political philosophy (Agamben 1998, 2005).

The term *border poetics* has been suggested by various scholars and writers during the last fifteen years (Görner 1999; Karahasan and Jaroschka 2003; Schimanski 1996; Tygstrup 2000; Sidaway 2005). In broad terms, it is the study of how territorial borders are given form through narrative and symbolic presentations.² An initial specificity is called for in face of the wide use of such a highly applicable term as border – along with boundary, threshold, limit, crossing and transgression – in many different contexts. Several studies have suggested the usefulness of such an approach in the practice of literary analysis, without necessarily using the term border poetics (Aguirre 2006; Cixous 1993; Ette 2001; Henderson 1995; Hicks 1991; Koschorke 1990; Lamping 2001; Wolfe 2006; Liet 2008). Some (Moretti 1998; Schimanski 2001, 2003; Bal 2006) have specifically referred to an ongoing discussion of national spaces as rhetorically formed constructs (Anderson 1991, Bhabha 1994, 139-170) and to postcolonially inflected discussions of hybrid identities and third spaces (Bhabha 1994, Anzaldúa 1991). Other work, including that based around research projects at Potchefstroom and Madrid, has focused on the relationship between liminality and narrative, a powerful connection which stresses the need to think through the temporal aspects of border crossings (Benito and Manzananas 2006; Viljoen and Merwe 2007).

Larsen, mentioned above, argues that borders have a key role to play in the discussion of the arts as a central part of the production of culture (Larsen 2007). He is however aware that aesthetic objects within the field of culture are themselves structured by various kinds of borders. The aesthetic manifestations of borders are likewise bordered in their medial manifestations, either in their

framing, in their compositional divisions or in the hermeneutic relationship between perceiver and object. More specifically then, border poetics is an investigation of a specific element (the border) in the relationship between spaces *represented* on the one hand and the spaces *of representation* (e.g. the literary text as a spatial object) on the other (cf. Bakhtin 1981, 252-253; Schimanski 2006). Bordering thus not only involves symbolic and topographical registers, but also textual or medial ones. It is significant that one important contribution to the theory of borders in general takes place in an essay on textual genre (Derrida 1980), and Simmel himself likens the border to the frame of the artwork (Simmel 1997, 141). Representations of topographical borders can also be associated with certain genres and even specific rhetorical tropes. It has been claimed, for instance, that borders are a site of raised figurality (Moretti 1998, 45-47).

In recent discussions in the humanities and cultural theory, the rhetorical and narrative construction of borders and borderlands has centred around terms such as contact zones (Pratt 1992), spaces of negotiation (Bhabha 1994, Boer 2006) and rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Borders, and border subjects' experiences of them, are increasingly seen as sets of interlinked processes or formations through which traces are sedimented in border narratives and within a mental and physical landscape. Border poetics as we envision it also belongs properly to the study of a *poetics of space* in general, already well established in literary and cultural theory (Bachelard 1994; Bakhtin 1981, 259-422; Frank 1963; Lotman 1977; Miller 1995; Moretti 1998, 2005; Tygstrup 2000; Friedman 2005). This poetics of space is in turn related to the wider field of *spatial studies* in the human sciences, underpinned by the work of social scientists and cultural theorists such as Certeau (1984), Lefebvre (1991), Virilio (1986), Massey (1994, 2005) and Soja (1989).

In the last ten years, there has been a realization that changes in the borders that have traditionally fenced the fields and practices of the social sciences and the humanities are connected to changes in the nation state, global shifts in migration, post-colonial wars, struggles to create new nations, and the creation and renewal of multinational institutions. In the humanities and the social sciences these changes have produced an interdisciplinary terrain often focusing on refigurations and crossings of those boundaries which have been

central and critically important to the creation of border studies itself. Increasingly, scholars emphasize the theory and practice of working in the “space between” as they focus on the processes of negotiating the border within the intersections or folds which have been recently exposed in bordering processes themselves.

The 2008 ABS European Conference in Kirkenes

The articles we are presenting were all first given as papers at the 2009 European Conference of the Association of Borderlands Studies, held in Kirkenes in Northern Norway, September 11- 13, on the borders of the Arctic and in the Finnish-Kven-Norwegian-Russian-Sámi borderland. The conference was arranged by Border Poetics research group (<http://uit.no/borderpoetics>) at the University of Tromsø, in close cooperation with the History Department and the CEPIN (Citizenship, Encounters and Place Enactment in the North) research school there, the Petrozavodsk State University and vitally, the Barents Institute in Kirkenes itself. Various policy and cultural groups were also involved, such as the Kirkenes cultural production outfit *Pikene på broen*, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, the Borderlands Museum, the Akademisk Kvarter bookshop, the Pasvikturist tourist agency and Samovarteatret.

The theme of the conference was a wide one: the “Cultural Production and Negotiation of Borders”. This theme was intended as an acknowledgement of the increasing focus which has been given recently by geographers, anthropologists and historians to the role of cultural production and negotiation in social and territorial bordering processes. The ongoing spate of movies, documentaries, art projects, novels, websites, festivals and tourist attractions concerning borders has given this aspect of bordering renewed topicality and economic importance, and has attracted research both in the humanities and in the social sciences. The stories such cultural practices and artefacts tell, and the images they project, give extra weight to questions about the location of borders and of border populations. In some cases, the border itself – a wall, a fence or a bridge³ – becomes a cultural icon of great significance in the media and in everyday discourse. In a world of mobilities and securities, the outer peripheries

of states are clearly linked to their hybridized urban landscapes and even to the bodies of immigrants and other border-crossers themselves. The cultural negotiation of contested borders is a crucial element of ongoing problems of security, freedom of movement, economic differentials, trafficking, fear of the other, etc.; it also promises the possibility of a creative refiguring of borders and cultural border zones into economically and symbolically productive sites of dialogue, crossing, hybridity and performance. All these phenomena are the product of historical processes and take place in a shifting historical landscape which both creates a framework for and is formed by cultural practices. Borders are also a central metaphor in cultural theory, and there is need to reflect over the reasons for this.

The conference was thus envisaged as an interdisciplinary conference which would cross the academic divide between “border studies” in the social sciences and “border theory” / “border poetics” in the humanities. It aimed to examine the ways cultural practices use discursive and semiotic strategies in order to imagine and negotiate the border in its social and historical context and to further our understanding of the role of culture in subjective interactions with the border by border crossers and by border zone dwellers. While focusing on bottom-up perspectives, papers raised questions about the need for localized solutions in top-down policy-making, actualised with the increasing economic significance of cultural production and consumption. They asked who initiates and who benefits from such cultural practices, and what their symbolic effects are for social conditions. They aimed to place cultural processes of bordering in historical contexts and show the role of cultural memory in the formation of borderscapes. They traced the transferability of the border concept to questions of identity, subjectivity and medial exposition as facilitated by cultural practices.

A special focus of the conference was the region in which it is set: the Norwegian-Russian- Finnish-Sámi borderland and the wider contexts of the North Calotte, Barents and Arctic regions. The Arctic is an area in which the borders of the environment and energy production are being changed and are changing the geographical, historical, imaginative sense of place and space. This is a transborder region of a layered, complex border history (cf. Jackson and Nielsen 2005), of pressing social and environmental problems and possibilities

involving many different cultural identities and ways of life, and of high importance today as a political and cultural hotpoint of “Western”-Russian relations within the Arctic and Sub-Arctic context. Kirkenes, an old mining town, lies at a point where the interests of many nations and indigenous / minority groups meet, and has been a place of social, economic, environmental, military and cultural confrontation; now it is a site of economic and cultural creativity involving the aspirations and self-narratives of local, national and global elites in an atmosphere of hybridity (Viken, Granås, and Nyseth 2008). It is centrally placed in relationship to the ongoing construction and contestation of territorial and symbolic borders in the Arctic sea against a background of rapid economic development of oil and gas resources. The conference also included a final summing-up panel made up of scholars working from different perspectives on the Norwegian-Russian- Sámi-Kven-Finnish borderscape.

The articles

Careful deliberation has gone into choosing papers for this dossier. The conference attracted 69 registered participants including geographers, literary scholars, historians, philosophers, ecologists, library scientists, tourism researchers, political scientists, media scientists, anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists, economists, artists, and artistic producers. The programme included in all 48 papers, 22 of which dealt specifically with borderlands between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Many of these “northern” papers have appeared in a special issue of the *Journal of Northern Studies* (2009 / 1). Other papers, including Mieke Bal’s keynote lecture, have appeared in a separate dossier, in the open-access journal *Nordlit* (no. 24, 2009). A conference report has appeared in the *La Frontera* newsletter (Schimanski and Wolfe 2009). For the *Journal of Borderlands Studies* we have chosen articles according to our original intention of crossing the academic divide between border studies in the social sciences and border theory or border poetics in the humanities. We have purposefully chosen papers which expose more humanistic concerns and aesthetic themes, partly written within disciplines new to the journal (cf. Pisani, Reyes, and García 2009).

It lies in the nature of aesthetic discourses that their specific forms of intervention, production, and negotiation work through various forms of representational displacement, with the border not always being described in a directly recognizable or transparent way. These displacements include narrative, fictional, and metaphorical reinscriptions of the border. Aesthetic discourses thus make discussion of imaginary and symbolic borderlands necessary, and within a discursive approach to borders it is indeed important to acknowledge the role such displacements have to play in all formation of borders, even territorial borders. Each of the following articles is grounded in the last instance in specific geographical borderlands. We have deliberately excluded papers dealing with symbolic borders not easy to connect to actual borderlands.

We begin by highlighting an article by Timothy Saunders which challenges us to locate our contemporary concepts and diction within a broader historical trajectory. Saunders argues that central terms in the analysis of culture show their origins as spatial metaphors taken from Latin, and that Virgil's poetry connects some of these terms in negotiating the Roman sense of borders and empire.

The two essays on film by Tanya Kudryavtseva and Holger Pötzsch suggest that boundaries are not to be read as lines, limits, or cuts through inhabited worlds, but are liminal spaces in themselves. Indeed, both show how cinema itself is a liminal space, implying that there is a slippage between the concrete borderlands which are represented and the borders of the medium itself. Pötzsch's article challenges us to think of war as creating a specific, highly conflictual and transitional form of borderland, which may have implications for the study of more established borders. Kudryavtseva, investigating Northern borderlands, also makes us aware of the North as a border onto a completely "other" space, at the edge of culture itself.

Kristina Aurylaitė's article addresses the way novels represent the negotiation of collective and individual identities in borderlands, and thus negotiate the border as a cultural construction. Importantly, her example, centred around First Nation reservations in Canada, points to the significance of internal territorial borders in the construction and experience of national and indigenous communities.

All these articles in some way or another touch upon the potential of artworks and cultural products to mediate the historical dimensions of borders and their layering of traces and memories. Our final article, by Maria de Fátima Amante, confronts this topic head on by examining how the heritage industry and local people use cultural memories in different, sometimes conflicting ways in the construction of identity in the Portuguese-Spanish borderlands. A disjunction is revealed between local cultural discourses and actual social conditions, manifested also in a top-down/bottom-up dynamic.

While Amante is examining a more collective form of cultural production involving many different actors, we would claim that this top-down/bottom-up dynamic is also central to the narratives presented in literature, art and film, eminently capable of presenting the lived experience of negotiating borders. However, a culture-orientated humanities perspective, aware of the medial, discursive and aesthetic dimensions of borders, can also provide an alternative set of tools for self-reflection, critical thinking, and evaluating social change in borderlands studies. We hope through this dossier to further put cultural production on the map of border studies and to give continued momentum to a widened interdisciplinary in the field.⁴ We very much regret the untimely death of Tatjana Kudrjajtseva, whose essay appears in this dossier. We will miss a vibrant and valued colleague.

Endnotes

1. One can develop a whole discursive archaeology of the border concept through etymology (Fink 1999; and see the article by Saunders in this dossier).
2. The OED defines poetics as “[t]he creative principles informing any literary, social or cultural construction, or the theoretical study of these; a theory of form”.
3. In many Turkish-German narratives, the Bosphorus Bridge, connecting Europe and Asia, plays a central role (Görliing 2007; McGowan 2000).
4. Some of the ideas for this introduction have been developed in discussions with other members of the Border Poetics group, and we would like to thank them along with everyone else who made the Kirkenes conference possible and successful.

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