Borders and Borderlands

The Ray Browne Conference on Cultural and Critical Studies
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Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio

Borders are meant to separate. They delineate one from another. Issues of power arise when that delineation creates or exploits a marginalized “other.” Recent debates across the US and the world illustrate the importance of borders to establish and protect concepts of nationalism and safety; the plan for a “transparent” wall on the southern border of the United States, the refugee crisis which led to the limit of free movement in Europe, and the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar are all examples of the rise of xenophobia and global humanitarian crises.

These debates have shed light on the porous nature of geographical borders, forcing citizens to decide who gets to come in and who gets forced out. Because the world is full of such borders, it is also full of borderlands, geographical and cultural areas occupying multiple physical spaces at once. Gloria Anzaldúa uses the term borderlands to refer to the geographical area that is most susceptible to “la mezcla” [hybridity], neither fully of Mexico nor fully of the United States. Those who occupy borderlands frequently occupy multiple geographical and cultural spaces.

Anzaldúa also expands the concept of border, defining it as, “a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland can be a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.”1 In this sense, “border” and “borderland” accommodate people who do not identify with and within established borders, who instead occupy both worlds simultaneously and are expected to abide by compound cultural expectations. Many people occupy multiple cultural landscapes, identifying with all and none. This liminality between nation, bodies, flesh and machine, living and dead, and the fluid spectrum stretching between binaries can be political, geographic, imposed, claimed, and used for pride or marginalization (or both). These liminalities are sites of critical exploration that illuminate what it means to occupy cultural, personal, and spiritual borderlands. There are countless voices that do not bear one identity, but multiple, and those identities are often shifting from moment to moment. Bringing these voices and stories forward is crucial to understanding the relationship between borders and borderlands.

Through examination of cultural representations, treatments, and uses of borders in the arts and social justice movements, we can understand ourselves, our futures, and our relation to one another and to ourselves. The tasks of defining and dismantling concepts of borders have never been more important. Through multiple theoretical lenses and the exploration of popular culture, we can take a critical look at how and why borders, borderlands, and their usefulness as a means of engaging with intersectional identities are emerging as vital areas of study.

We welcome papers, panels, art presentations/installations, and other creative work, including but not limited to the following subject areas:

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Global Borderlands
Cross-Disciplinary Discourses
Liminal Identities
Refugee Crises
Media (film, television, video games, music and music videos, news, comic books, literature, social media, fan fiction, humor)
Imagination and Representation
Alternative Time (dystopian futures, alternative presents, apocalypse narratives, time travel narratives)
Science Fiction (technology, humanity, the Uncanny Valley, cyborg liminality, artificial intelligence)
Material and Visual Culture; and Fashion (trends, vintage, historical styles)
Politics (rhetoric, ideology, policy)
Popular Culture (representations of borderlands in film, television, and popular fiction)
Gender and Sexual Identity (binary and non-binary conceptions of gender and sexuality)
Race and Ethnicity (multi-ethnic identities, immigration)
Disability Studies (neurological spectrums and other binary and non-binary borders)
Digital Humanities
Spirituality and Religious Studies

Abstracts should be up to 250 words and should be submitted no later than December 22, 2017. Questions may be directed to raybrowneconf@bgsu.edu. To submit your abstract, use the BGSU ScholarWorks page for this event at the link below.

http://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/rbc/2018conference/