

**THE BORDER SEMINAR - CALL FOR PAPERS**  
**March 15, 2017**  
**Institute of English and American Studies, University of Gdańsk**  
**Organizer: dr Grzegorz Welizarowicz**

*Today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture. ... The border is all we share. (Gómez-Peña 1990 96)*  
*We live therefore we cross. (Gómez-Peña 1996 138)*

How to describe a border? To some, it is “*una herida abierta* [an open wound]” (Anzaldúa) always bleeding as worlds/cultures grind against one another. To others, it holds a utopian promise of a healthy contagion, of hybridizing what is held to be pure. Still others want to see it only as a line of protection against the threats to monocultural security-state in liquid times. The border can stand for historical loss, as well as national glory; for both contamination and impermeability; it announces POWER to censure and invites transgression. For some, it is the end limit, for others an endless horizon. Today, is it anywhere in particular or has it become a ubiquitous feature of our most intimate worlds? The border comes in many guises. One thing is certain: it is a contested notion, the most real and the most elusive.

One way of thinking about the border was suggested in 1989 by Chicano performance artist/writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who, discussing multiculturalism, proclaimed that American culture was undergoing “borderization.” Seeing that the “colonized cultures are sliding into the space of the colonizer ... redefining its borders and its culture” (93) he envisioned border-crossings as everyday practice which would inevitably lead to what he called “gringostroika,” a transculturation of the dominant paradigm of U.S. culture. Soon he would proclaim the arrival of the “New World Border – a great trans- and intercontinental border zone, a place in which no centers remain” (7). In this vision, “hybridity is the dominant culture” (7) and the dominant sensibility is that of an exile. This promise of regeneration through diversity was embraced by many commentators. Ishmael Reed declared the United States “the first universal nation” (in Gray 528) which, by accepting a diversity of epistemologies, would create a “new, inclusive ... common culture” (Reed xxvi). Robert Elliot Fox optimistically discussed the possibility of “post-whiteness” which, he hoped, would aid “in the erosion of fixed categories of ‘color’” (15). In short, there was not long ago an unprecedented expectation for borders to be dismantled as we began to see the humanity of the Other.

In parallel, conservatives launched their own battle of retrenchment. They spoke of the clash of civilizations (Huntington), of detrimental consequences of cultural hybridization. With the recent rise of Donald Trump and other right-wing movements these fears have become mainstream. The fatigue of social problems facing the First World subjects is now blamed on excessive inclusiveness. Historical complexities are brushed aside. Diversity has come under attack while nativism, ethnic pride and xenophobia are on the rise. Surveillance and borders are represented as solutions to most

of our problems.

The border is a malleable concept, fluctuating between the dialogic and monologic, prone to being recruited at the service of conflictive world-views and imaginaries. Epistemology and axiology matter at the border. Today, at the moment of border crisis we are hungry for theory of cultural encounters, for models of border phenomena and border ethics. What affects are mobilized at the border? What is the condition of exiles, nomads, local communities under “siege,” post-exile communities under ethical obligations? But the notion of the border can be discussed in other than geo-political or transcultural contexts. Historical, semiotic, aesthetic, psychological, urban, ecological, erotic, auto-ethnographic and other types of analysis are equally important. Investigations of the border require both specific case studies and explorations in analytical theory.

The seminar is planned to launch a border studies research initiative – what we can provisionally call the Borderlands Studies Center @ the Institute of English and American Studies. Its first task is to rehearse a variety of perspectives on the notion of the border. We are in search of areas of inquiry, methodologies, conceptual topographies. Our hope is to stimulate an open dialog across disciplinary “borders.”

Submissions should explore any issues related to the phenomenon of the border in a variety of contexts including, but not limited to, literary theory, theater/performance studies, ethnic studies, cultural geography and geography, linguistics, psychoanalysis, history, social science, philosophy, fine arts and sound studies, etc. Presentations may be up to twenty minutes long and can come in any style or format.

**Please send your proposal for consideration to [grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl](mailto:grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl) by January 31, 2017.**

**We can explore, for example:**

Borders and their diachronic, cartographic shifts

Borders as anthropocentric division lines in the world of plural ontologies.

Borders as a zones of interaction, liminality, transgression.

Borders as porous and hermetically sealed

Encounters with ontological and epistemic Other

Border as material scars where simulacra end & borders as endless horizons of simulacra.

How do borders morph from the implaced and specific to rhizomatic, all-encompassing networks?

Borders of perception, the conscious, the subconscious, the unconscious, .

Distribution of privilege and anxiety in cases of strategic border-identity passing

How are identities reformed and what mechanisms contribute either to a transformation or ossification of borders?

What identities function as buffer zones in a society to prevent other conflicts to erupt?  
 How is our sensory apparatus engaged in our encounter with the border, what senses and how are they to be mobilized to effect a counter-border imagination?  
 What does eroticism have to do with colonial encounters?  
 How does eroticism as well as gender belong to the border?  
 Environmental protection movements at the borders of global, extraction-based civilization  
 How do the indigenous as well as the immigrant/refugee become equally foreign?  
 When is the dominant culture productively “borderized”?

**Some areas of interest** (in no particular order): periphery, contact zones, thresholds, biosphere, semiosphere, liminality, hybridity, recycling, liquidity, liquid times, the clearing and the wilderness, imbrications, overlaps, misunderstandings, portals of perception, cognitive glitches, syncretic art forms, polyglot poetry, transnational pop, cultural exiles, border crossers, nomads, the American frontier and the Southwest, colonial gaze, ocular-centrism and its consequences, lineality of visual representation v. sound as a relational phenomenon, cartography of the border, fetishization of the border, border and violence, border and sacrifice, post-whiteness, time v. space, spatio-temporality, racial passing, signifying, Modernity/coloniality, Cartesian skepticism, colonial divides, ontological and epistemic divides, palimpsests, clairvoyance, synaesthesia, state of exception, the underworld, excrescence, language games, zeugma, the Other, relationality, landscape, soundscape, *mestizaje*, conflict and symbiosis, the unconscious, the uncanny, the erotic, etc.

### **Works cited:**

- Fox, Robert Elliot. “Becoming Post-White.” in *Multi-America: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*. Ishmael Reed, ed. New York: Penguin, 1998. 6-17.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. “Border culture: the Multicultural Paradigm.” *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, 93-103. Exh. cat., Los Angeles and New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Studio Museum of Harlem, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems and Loqueras for the End of the Century*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1996.
- Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Reed, Ishmael. “Introduction” in *Multi-America: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*. New York: Penguin, 1998. xv-xxviii.