

Border Thinking and Border (as) Culture

Seminar Wintersemester 2018/2019

MA Medienkulturanalyse

Heinrich-Heine Universität Düsseldorf

Wann: Mittwochs von 12:30 bis 14 Uhr

Wo: Raum 2621.01.36

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Hinweis: diese Veranstaltung findet in Englischer Sprache statt! Aufgaben dürfen aber auf Deutsch geschrieben bzw. präsentiert werden.

In this seminar we will interrogate and intervene on the political and cultural implications of borders, articulated through a decolonizing approach. By understanding the materiality of the border as a zone of exclusion (of bodies, subjectivities, experiences), fundamentally entangled with the colonial project of modernity, together we will explore the idea of the borderlands as a liminal space of enunciation of different pasts, challenging presents, and pluri-versal futures.

This seminar takes two routes: the first unravels from the notion of thinking from/through the border, taking into account plural worldviews from alternative modernities in order to assemble an ontoepistemological approach to Cultural Studies. The second route will lead us through an exploration of border(ed) spaces, from colonial histories to the contemporary ubiquity of border work, be it through technological divides or the so-called “migration crisis” of Europe. Our approach to these border(ed) spaces will make use of border thinking as a framework of inquiry, meaning that our investigation of the cultural entanglements of borders will be necessarily enunciated from a decolonizing place.

The main theoretical framework for this seminar stems from Latin American and Caribbean thinkers; by giving such a strong focus on these places of knowledge production, we already begin our journey in border thinking by positioning ourselves with and within a geopolitical space. This is important for this class and will be discussed in detail with you throughout the semester.

By the end of the semester you should:

- be familiar with contemporary discourses in decolonial ontoepistemologies, ‘border thinking’ amongst them;
- understand and exercise more experimental and/or poetic approaches to the production of knowledge;
- develop a critical approach to Eurocentric methods in and for Cultural Studies;
- acquire and develop a critical engagement with borders as sites of conflictual and violent cultural entanglements, and the power relationships that emerge from them;
- be able to apply concepts of border thinking to your own practice.

Syllabus

This course is designed to take 15 (fifteen) meetings, from October 10 to January 30. We meet every Wednesday from 12:30 to 14 at room 2621.01.36. The following is a **rough** plan of subjects I would like to tackle together with you over the semester; these are subject to (minor) changes, according to attendance, as well as your own pace and interests.

The Seminar is divided in two parts: on the first we will discuss border thinking as an ontoepistemology/heuristics for Cultural Studies; the second takes the framework we discussed in part one and applies border thinking to historical and contemporary border spaces and its many articulations. While the first half of the Seminar will be mostly focused on lectures (with the exception of the midterm discussion), the second part will be discussion-led, and done so by the students themselves. This means that from a certain point on, each week we will have a different group preparing questions and weaving connections — of course with my help if needed.

Every Wednesday afternoon starting right after our first meeting on October 10, I will post on the Semesterapparat a short list of required and recommended readings for the upcoming week. You are required to engage with that material throughout the week, and send **one to two discussion-based questions** pertaining the reading material and its relationship with the theme of the upcoming class **by no later than Tuesday 12:00** to a shared GoogleDoc file . I will then use these questions for guiding the discussion.

Week 1, October 10 2018

Class Introductions

General Introduction to the class, and the themes we will be dealing with throughout the semester: modernity/coloniality, decolonization, border thinking. Syllabus outline, assignments overview and general Q&A to kickstart our class.

Reading and in-class discussion:

- Kilomba, G., 2007. Africans in Academia: Diversity in Adversity.
- Carlos Jackson — “Abolish Borders as Revolutionary Futurity,” discussing the work of Xicana Cultural Worker and Artist Gilda Posada.

Week 2, October 17 2018

An other thinking

What is “border thinking”? What are the preconditions for the emergence of such a proposition?

Required reading:

- Anzaldúa, G., 1987. Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. ed. Aunt Lute Books, Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Recommended Reading:

- Mignolo, W.D., 2000. Local Histories/Global Designs. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., Introduction.

In-class discussion:

- Frida Kahlo — Self portrait along the boarder line between mexico and the united states (1932)

Week 3, October 24 2018

Poetics, Processes, Borderlands (pt. 1)

How do we relate and make sense of that which is not immediately revealed to us? How are other knowledges possible, and how do we break away from notions of “disembodied voices” that produce said knowledges?

Required readings:

- Anzaldúa, G., 2015. Geographies of Selves: Reimagining Identity. In: Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality. Duke Univ Pr, Durham, North Carolina.
- Glissant, E., 1997. For Opacity. In: Poetics of Relation. Univ of Michigan Pr, Ann Arbor.

Recommended reading:

- Anzaldúa, G., 2015. Gestures of the Body — Escribiendo para Idear. In: Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality. Duke Univ Pr, Durham, North Carolina.

Week 4, October 31 2018

Poetics, Processes, Borderlands (pt. 2)

How do we approach this making-sense of the world as a process of Relation, of approaching and distancing, and of relaying and relinking?

Required readings:

- Glissant, E., 1997. Distancing, Determining. In: Poetics of Relation. Univ of Michigan Pr, Ann Arbor. pp. 141–157
- Glissant, E., 1997. Relinked, (Relayed), Related. In: Poetics of Relation. Univ of Michigan Pr, Ann Arbor. pp. 169–179

Recommended listening:

- <https://voca.arizona.edu/readings-list/417>
Anzaldúa, Gloria E. Readings at the Poetry Center of the University of Arizona, Wednesday, October 23, 1991.

In- and/or post-class discussion:

- Monira Al-Qadiri — Wa Waila (oh torment) (2009)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wtDdFVjuSI>
- Fatima Al-Qadiri — Asiatisch (Hyperdub, 2016)
https://fatimaalqadiri.bandcamp.com/album/fatima-al-qadiri-asiatisch-hdbcd024*

*probably also available in Spotify.

Week 7, November 21 2018

Midterm Discussion, part 1

We will watch and discuss, in class, the work “The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid”, by Heba Y. Amin (2016).

Week 8, November 28 2018

Midterm Discussion, part 2

We will discuss, in class, the work “The Repellent Fence/Valla Repelente”, by Postcommodity (2015).

In-class discussion:

- The Repellent Fence Story, as Told by Postcommodity
- Suturing the Borderlands: Postcommodity and Indigenous Presence on the U.S.-Mexico Border, by Matthew Irwin

Related material:

- Guillermo Galindo and Richard Misrach — Border Cantos (2004–2016)

Week 9, December 5 2018

Border Thinking as Method, part 1

Coming up from our discussions and engagements with how certain knowledges are re/produced and validated, we will now begin to shape a contingent, provisional mode of “border thinking” for helping us in the next steps of our Seminar.

Required reading:

- Walia, H., 2013. Undoing Border Imperialism. AK Press, Oakland, CA. Pages 81–94 (i.e. the second collection of “Defiant Voices” in the book) the chapter Journeys Toward Decolonization (Pages 247–276), plus the Epilogue (Pages 277–284).

Week 10, December 12 2018

Border Thinking as Method, part 2

Coming up from our discussions and engagements with how certain knowledges are re/produced and validated, we will now begin to shape a contingent, provisional mode of “border thinking” for helping us in the next steps of our Seminar.

In this class we will also have a briefing for those requiring an *Abschlussprüfung*, So please let me know by then should you decide to have one from this Seminar.

Required reading:

- Anzaldúa, G., 2015. Now let us shift.... In: Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality. Duke Univ Pr, Durham, North Carolina.

Recommended reading:

- Mignolo, W.D., Tlostanova, M.V., 2006. Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge. European Journal of Social Theory 9, 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431006063333>

The next four meetings are all student-led discussions.

Week 11, December 19 2018

Border work: Geopolitics

Week 12, January 9 2019

The Museum as Borderwork

Week 13, January 16 2019

Border work: Ubiquitous and Technological Borders

Week 14, January 23 2019

Border work: Transitional Spaces

Week 15, January 30 2019

No class on this day (re-scheduling TBD).

Grading

In order to successfully conclude this Seminar (i.e. have a *BN Schein* from it), all you need to fulfil is: assiduity both in class and sending questions in, plus leading a discussion class with your group, in your assigned date. I also expect an active engagement and overall respectful attitude in classes in which you are not presenting anything.

In case you'd like to have an *Abschlussprüfung* from this Seminar, you will need to fulfil the above requirements, plus develop an expanded piece of work as a result from our class. This can take three possible formats:

- A) an "Audio Paper" (an experimental format having sound as its main conductor);*
- B) a "Video essay" (artistic/academic short film, preferably a combination of both); or
- C) a written, 3500 to 5000 words-long position essay.

Possible themes may range from a more in-depth look into the theme you were responsible for discussing in class, but also any other theme of your interest — provided it relates to the Seminar and we have agreed upon beforehand. Due date for that is TBD with you case-by-case.

**I will go through with you in detail about the "Audio Paper" format on Week 10.*

Class policies

This is a class in which we will potentially discuss sensitive political topics that may or may not challenge your preconceptions about the world and the production of knowledge in and about it. Therefore we want to create an environment in class that allows students to exchange ideas and discuss positions, all the while

making sure that a respectful relationship is constructed amongst you, as well as with myself. **Long story short: racist, sexist, xenophobic, transphobic comments will not be tolerated.** Please let me know should you want to be addressed by a pronoun that is different from the one you are registered with.

Students are responsible for handing in questions and assignments in due time. If you cannot come to class please let me know in advance per e-mail; same goes if you cannot deliver an assignment on time, and require a different due date – I will try to accommodate that depending on the urgency of your absence. Needless to say, academic integrity is expected from you in relation to plagiarism, originality, tone, and content of your participation both in-class and in assignments.

In case I am late to class, I will try to communicate that to you in due time. If that is not possible, please allow for up to 30 minutes before leaving and use this time to catch up with readings and questions. If it turns out that I may miss the class completely, I will do my best to notify you in advance.