Borders and Border Transgressions in (Post-)Communist Europe (Oslo, 1-2 Jun 23)

Department of Literature, Area Studies, and European Languages, University of Oslo, Norway, Jun 1–02, 2023
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Trauma, Memory, and Counter-Culture: Borders and Border Transgressions in (Post-)Communist Europe.

Borders are central to our understanding of societies that are either affected by unfreedom of speech or traumatized by repressions and war experience. In the context of the Eastern Bloc, for example, their effects shaped several levels of society and culture and led, among other things, to individuals and groups not being able to act or articulate themselves freely. Given that marginalized groups, as Hannah Arendt has pointed out, are often unable to actively participate in social and political life, they remain invisible also in public space and public discourse. In response to imposed constraints, subversive efforts to overcome, destabilize, and problematize them often go hand in hand – thus turning members of the respective societies into border crossers. With the collapse of the Communist Bloc, many borders may have fallen in territorial and consequently also in symbolical terms. Yet, they have remained highly topical on the levels of memory and trauma, as they are an integral part of coming to terms with experiences of terror, repression, or war.

In the more than 30 years since the disintegration of the Communist Bloc, culture and society in its respective parts have generated widespread interest in various fields of the humanities. The multilayered, often overlapping traumas resulting from as well as the memories of the communist era (e.g. Hundorova; Jones; Kratochvil; Lachmann; Sandomirskaja; Sorvari, etc.) and the Yugoslav wars (e.g. Beronja/Vervaet; Jelača; Lugarić/Car, etc.) have therefore become just as much the subject of research as counter practices which had formed in response to unfreedom of speech, censorship, and the doctrine of Socialist Realism (e.g. Giustino et al.; Kliems; Komaromi; Lipovetsky et al.; Zitzewitz, etc.). These studies do not only contribute to a better understanding of culture and society under repressive conditions; they also participate in bringing out of a notorious invisibility those spheres that were particularly affected by the impossibility of individual articulation and the lack of social participation.

This two-day conference at the University of Oslo aims to highlight the specific relevance of Border Studies for better understanding literature, arts, and everyday culture in repressive, transformative and post-war societies. It explores borders and border transgressions in the context of trauma, memory, and counter-culture (in the sense of unofficial culture) and thus on the premise of both simultaneity and posteriority. In this regard, both state-imposed limitations which are consciously drawn and borders triggered in retrospect or by the subconscious are of interest. Unfree-

dom of speech, invisibility and stigmatization are just a few examples of state-imposed, “simultaneous” constraints which, in turn, on the unconscious level show equivalents in the incapability of expression, in blind spots, and in psychological repression.

We want to look at boundaries primarily, but not only, in terms of border aesthetics (Gómez-Peña; Rosello; Schimanski; Wolfe) and are especially interested in borders in the fields of literature, arts, and everyday culture in their sensual, their aesthetic, and their social dimensions. Borders are therefore conceived beyond their geographical dimension, so that, for example, symbolical, cultural, societal, epistemological, generational, semiotic, lingual, temporal, spatial, or medial dimensions are of particular interest.

Given our interdisciplinary scope, we are interested in paper proposals from literature studies, the arts and cultural studies, as well as from related fields. We particularly welcome case studies on often still understudied areas of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe, as for example Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic States.

Paper proposals can, for example, address the following thematic fields:

- How are borders negotiated and how are border crossings produced, represented, or perceived in literary, visual and everyday cultures that arise from a context of repression, unfreedom of speech, and war experience?
- Which approaches and methods towards border and border transgression can be productively employed with regard to repressive and transformative societies and the relating traumata, memories, and counter-culture and implemented in the sense of an interdisciplinary entanglement?
- Which divergences, analogies and particularities can be identified in terms of border crossings in literary, visual and everyday cultures in terms of production, materiality, representation, and perception?
- Case studies dealing with borders and border crossings from the regions in question.

The conference will be framed by a keynote on “Border Semiotics and Empire” by Susanne Frank (Eastern Slavic Literature and Culture, Berlin) and a public lecture on “The Weapons of the Weak. Silent Protest in Russia” by Vera Dubina (Public History, Berlin).

The conference language is English. We ask participants to cover their travel costs. In case of successful additional funding, parts may be reimbursed. If you wish to apply for reimbursement, please indicate this in your proposal.

Please submit your abstract (300 words) including paper title, your name, your affiliation, and a short CV (up to 200 words) by December 23, 2022 to Vera Faber: vera.faber@ilos.uio.no.

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The conference builds on the MSCA-project “Soviet Ellipses. Omissions as Techniques of Border Transgression in Photography, Literature, and Everyday Life” (SOVEL, No 101024131) at UiO.

Organizers
Vera Faber, “Soviet Ellipses” at UiO;
in cooperation with Johan Schimanski, Border Readings research group at UiO.

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