

# Borders in all shapes and forms

This conference is the eighth edition of Young Researchers Days in Human Sciences & Arts. They are opened to presentations of international Masters students, PhD students, post doctorates, and young professors. This edition will be the first one to feature presentations in English. We use an interdisciplinary approach, and we welcome scholars in every field to participate so as to create a scientific exchange around cross-disciplinary objects of study.

After seven successful editions which have all been published<sup>1</sup>, we are proposing to question “Borders in all shapes and forms” in 2016. The conference will take place in Nancy (France) on **October 20<sup>th</sup> and October 21<sup>st</sup> 2016**.

In general, a border is defined by a criterion which allows to distinguish objects according to their qualities and separate them into groups. As an object under scrutiny, to cross a border is to see one of its qualities being altered so that one leaves an entity for another. For an observing subject, borders allow the distinction between objects; without them, these objects could only be seen as one heterogeneous ensemble. Borders do not in themselves alter objects, but structure the way they are perceived. Thus they allow the naming, categorization, qualification, and consequently the interaction with objects or the use of them.

Borders can be absolute, at the foundation of a binary categorization (visible or invisible, alive or dead, individual or social, natural or cultural, wild or domesticated, including or excluding, material or symbolic, same or other, etc.) but they can also be qualified as progressive. In such a configuration, they place objects on scales, making them porous or blurry.

The act of classifying, in social life just as in sciences, is both recurrent and ambivalent: if it helps us understand our environment, it also carries the risk of developing the intent of creating a hierarchy and relations of domination. The border is thus the scene of conflicts and tensions between objects or individuals. A place of crossings and transitions, this zone of antagonism distributes statuses, resources, or the power of one over another, participating to its instability, and redefining where the border stands.

The conferences will be structured around five topics: spatial borders, culture borders, human borders, magical, religious and scientific borders, and work borders.

## Spatial borders

Space imposes itself as an object of research when the notion of border is treated. Whether they are administrative, political, judiciary, material, or intangible (symbolic, imaginary, mythical), borders organize, classify, and rank spaces from a local to global scale. Sometimes presented as self-evident, borders have an origin, a history; they evolve in time and space. The fact that borders are notably constructed by institutional and political definitions and decisions implicate that they are not always coherent with the perception and experience of its inhabitants, which can contribute to the categorization and stigmatization of these people (Dupré, 2005). As an example, the territorial reform of August 7<sup>th</sup> 2015, which has recently reshaped France’s regions, sparked off reluctance from several

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<sup>1</sup> “Criticism in all shapes and forms” in 2007, published by the Éditions du Portique, “Social Action in all shapes and forms” in 2008, “Gender in all shapes and forms” in 2009, “Care in all shapes and forms” in 2012, published by the Presses Universitaires de Nancy, and the latest edition which focused on “Culture in all shapes and forms” in 2014.

representatives and inhabitants who felt connected to the -questionable- idea of a cultural identity of these territories.

Moreover, the limits characterizing spaces may be porous and in perpetual movement: as an example, it is uneasy to set the limit between the countryside and the city, which borders have rapidly evolved in Western Europe within the past few years. Setting apart what we call natural and anthropised landscapes seems to become gradually complex. The clear distinction between nature and culture - wild and domesticated - brought by Western societies is not uniform nor shared universally (Descola, 2004). The perception of nature and space is highly fluctuating and dependent on the degree of urbanization and rurality, as well as on the social and cultural background of the individual: the French countryside is perceived by some as a reserve of natural resources meant to be domesticated, and by others as a living environment or a place close to the “wild” (Perrier-Cornet, 2002).

Carrying issues, tensions, and even conflicts of social, religious, cultural, ecological, or political dimensions, spatial borders breed subjective experiences, practices, and representations. The contributions that analyse their construction and their evolution, the consequences of their creation, their transformation and porosity, are welcome to be presented in this topic.

## **Culture borders**

If culture alludes to the crops and soil as much as to physical or intellectual activities, feelings, goods, moral values, skills, or the possession of knowledge (Tylor, 1876-78), if it relates to one person as well as a group, a field of knowledge or a civilization, it is essentially defined by its borders (Agier, 2013). As a zone of contact, cooperation, confrontation, or trial, borders are passageways between the inside and the outside, the Self and the Other, just as with linguistic borders.

The current tension surrounding the subject of migration and national identities which would be jeopardized by overly “open” borders, is linked to how we define cultural borders. Yet, environmental and social concerns for sustainability uncover cross-disciplinary issues, as well as processes encompassing and redefining borders; they call for a global answer, overlooking cultural differences.

Relating the meaning of culture to art, borders put into question the separation between the work of an expert recognized by an institution and the work of an amateur, produced within one’s job, leisure, or scientific researches. These borders also interrogate good and bad taste, what is beautiful and what is ugly, as well as the limits of monstration. As exhibitions deemed choking are stigmatized, and works of art get vandalized, the borders of art and culture seem especially confused and surrounded with issues, which allows us to rethink them. / to rethink them once again.

## **Human borders**

The relation between the human being and his body varies across history and cultures. In Western societies, a rationalization of the body has led to its extraction from the unified totality of the living being, thus establishing it as a border (segregated from the community, the cosmos): the body will become the first expression of individuality (Le Breton, 1990). Its material form allows a moral, symbolic, and social argumentation which has conditioned relationships to life, health, disease, and to death along centuries. History is thus marked by the constant redefining of the limit between sane and insane, normal and pathological, pure and impure, collective and individual, identity and otherness, man and machine, the self and the other (notably through the prism of the “boundary object” concept:

Hoeyer, 2010), male and female. Likewise, the unavoidable - but always postponed - aging of the body implicates a permanent movement of the borders of the human being, as well as of those of the norms associated with a given age and a given context.

The body thus becomes the medium of systems of government (Foucault, 1963), of symbols and practices - which professionalization and institutional recognition borders are not always clearly marked - which shape the body and which will determine the limits of the human. However, beyond a double intuition of universality and immutability, the human (as opposed to the non-human) and life (as opposed to death) - the “viable / livable” and the “non-viable / livable” - are defined and circumscribed, through laws and codes that are set institutionally, which vary among countries, and which sometimes become discordant with symbolical, religious, ethical, technical and/or scientific assessments. Studying human borders implies to question their social and historical variations, the criticism and knowledge used to differentiate or grasp them, the controversies - and the struggles - they provoke, or alternatively the social or professional backgrounds within which they are defined or referenced to.

## **Magical, religious, and scientific borders**

Historically, through the prism of theories of evolution and ethnocentricity (Tylor, 1871 ; Frazer, 1881), the borders between magic, religion, and science have been understood in a hierarchical view, each one giving an explanation to the meaning of life on earth. In this triptych, magic (the archetype of exoticism, strangeness, irrationality and pre-logical thinking) is rather dominated ; through some of its aspects, it tends to be considered as close to religion or rather shows the features of a science, a “fallacious science” (Tylor, 1871) constructed on errors and confusions between an ideal world and the real world. These complementary realities refer to different ways of interpretation, but these ways of understanding can also interact, blend or overlap one another, or sometimes be clearly separated. The practices of combinatorial care (Benoist, 1996) illustrate the mingling of magic, religion, and biomedicine in the field of health care.

If modern societies are characterized by the predomination of scientific progress, the generalization of materialist ideas, or a logical way of thinking, the borders between magic, religion, and science invite us to prolong the questioning of the notion of transition and passage between diverse ideologies, representations, and practices. The struggles between these spheres for the understanding of the world and for an explanation monopoly, or for institutionalized recognition, form another interesting piece of this puzzling question.

Under the light of scientific discoveries, and the propagation of materialistic conceptions, presentations could question how impermeable or permeable the borders separating the profane and the sacred, magic, religion, and science (on epistemological and empirical levels) may be ; as well as borders between normal and paranormal and even between sciences themselves.

## **Work borders**

If Western societies are organized around the activity of work<sup>2</sup> (Meda, 2004), today this notion can have different meanings, statuses, or functions.

In constant evolution, it is only after the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the concept of work was understood as a production factor, thus detaching itself from the domestic and the political spheres. For instance, we can observe the professionalization of the housework sector, which was for a long time confined to informal work, has led to a new relationship between professionals and beneficiaries / customers.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of *work* is historically situated, from the latin word *trepalium* which means instrument of torture.

Likewise, the field of individual and political action through volunteering, associative work and initiatives of self-management (or self-production), arising from traditions of political activism and of social economy, now lives alongside the developing of actions such as corporate volunteering and the social responsibility of companies, making even harder to distinguish the clear delimitation between non-governmental organizations (NGO), the public sector and private companies.

Since the 1970s, the recession context and the weakening of the welfare state have redrawn the (blurred) outlines of employment, including precariousness, intermediary statuses and unequal access to jobs and training. According to the *Dictionnaire du Travail* [Work Dictionary] (2012), it is “possible to describe borders within work from a multitude of oppositions: between protected and precarious, men and women, executives and non-executives, skilled and unskilled, manual and intellectual, nationals and foreign workers, young and old, employee and non-employee, market-oriented and non-profit, etc.”

Presentations focusing on this aspect could notably analyze the nature and the porosity of existing borders between professionals, experts, and amateurs or between private, public, and social sectors.

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These topics, as well as the line of questions they raise, are presented as an indication; other subjects and topics could of course be questioned. And the notion of border itself can be questioned, through its semantic and/or epistemological aspects.

## **Terms and conditions of attendance and calendar**

**Type of contribution:** oral (20 minutes) or written (poster). Please include in your proposition the modality you wish to use.

**Application deadline:** April 15<sup>th</sup> 2016

**Decision of the committee:** June 2016

**Presentation of oral and written contributions:** October 20<sup>th</sup> and October 21<sup>st</sup> 2016.

Presentation proposals must not exceed 1,500 characters (including spaces) and must include a title, a summary, and a bibliography containing no more than 5 references. The summary must synthetically present the subject of research and mention the methodological approach as well as the main results of the study.

The proposals must also include the following information: first name, last name, email address, discipline and university of the author as well as the topic to which he/she wishes to contribute. This information will be followed by a short biography not exceeding 400 characters (spaces included).

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