Border Work in Precarity and Boundary Play in Communicology

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Abstract

This essay considers borders as symbols of precarity and the possibility of re-framing them through boundary play. While borders were historically installed as military defenses they are now chiefly used to prevent and control migrants. My argument is against the either-or thinking that prevails in *bordering* and *othering*. Prominent social science perspectives are considered. By focusing on the semiotic phenomenological relations of homeland, homeworld, and lifeworld the possibilities of play at the boundaries of conscious experience are revealed. My disciplinary perspective is communicology, the human science of embodied discourse.

Keywords: homeland, homeworld, lifeworld, play, semiotic phenomenology, Plessner, communicology

1. Introduction

The genesis of this paper is an interest in precarity and particularly concern for migrants marginalized by political borders. I concur with the sentiment that "we need to change the way we think about borders to openly acknowledge their equivocal character" (Agnew, 2008, p. 176). By discarding conventional either-or thinking entailed in border work we open an opportunity to play with boundaries. My thesis is that creative boundary play may be employed to re-frame the over-determination of conscious experience by political borders. I advance a phenomenology of the border symbol grounded in abductive logic at the boundary of conscious experience. This is an essay about place and play.

According to Standing (2011, p. 24) "most denizens are migrants of one kind or another." Migrants are fenced in as well as out by border walls, which are physical structures in their obvious and overt expression. However, borders are ubiquitous and assume many forms, with some of them nearly invisible. Borders function as normative restrictions on human experience and behavior. Of course, the most powerful constraints are those that are culturally acquired and self-imposed pre-consciously. While it is widely recognized that borders are symbols, this dimension warrants further exploration from a semiotic perspective.

I approach the topic as a philosopher of communication working within the human science discipline of communicology. For context, I mention some walls that have historic, political and symbolic significance. My starting point is that the general rationale for borders has dramatically shifted from military defenses to overt control of the movement of populations. It is not an overstatement to suggest that borders are now weaponized. As such, they have warranted increased attention by social and political theorists over the last couple of decades. I summarize some of their salient findings. Then, I pick up the discussion where they often end, which is on the border as a symbol. This takes me ineluctably from the semiotics of border situations entailed in the very nature of *human being*, an ontological issue, to the phenomenology of the boundary situations entailed in *being human*, an epistemological issue. The question of being has a long history in philosophical anthropology, though the problem is expressed in a style reflecting pre-feminist consciousness. Heidegger (1949), Jaspers (1970/1932) and many others ask, "What is man?" and directly relevant to my present concern, Rhinelander ponders the question, "Is man incomprehensible to man?" (1973) This second phrasing of the existential question brings us into communicological territory. Rhinelander begins his book with the identical title of this question by citing Camus who makes the poignant comment, "If men cannot refer to a common value, recognized by all as existing in each one, then man is incomprehensible to man" (no page number). We are obligated to ask ourselves whether border walls symbolize successful human communication, our failure to communicate, or perhaps a *cleft habitus* (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 103) at the very roots of our concept of humanity. And if it is the latter as some human scientists suggest, we may well ask whether this is a natural or unnatural condition of being human.

I focus on borders and boundaries as semiotic and phenomenological discursive constructions. My purpose is to reflect on the sign "border" as a primary marking of place in human relations but also an important object for play in conscious experience. While much has been said about boundaries and borders the topic has yet to receive adequate attention from the perspective of communicology, the human science of embodied discourse. My discussion is divided into three subsequent parts, the first of which is labeled Border Work in Homeland Precarity. Walls mark the *Umwelt* or experience of the environment and immediately come to mind when borders are mentioned. As physical presences, walls serve seemingly obvious objectives and, of course, many of them give historical testimony to intergroup adversarial relations.

Part two is entitled Border Labor in a Precarious Homeworld. Here, I review some of the prominent social science perspectives on the logic of borders as social constructions and as schemes for the imposition of rules for intergroup social interaction.

I call part three Boundary Play in the Lifeworld. I trace our conception of borders to a positivistic understanding of personhood. Rather than starting from the usual view of the person as positivity in the form of a presupposed subjectivity, an alternative is a de-centered self that acts from a negative position on the basis of its "eccentric" condition. Plessner argues that human beings reside in a cleft habitus of being *centric* and *eccentric* at the same time. *Being* a body and *having* a body is the natural ambiguous situation in which we humans find ourselves. It is because of this ontological ambivalence that we attempt to create ecology in our bodily-worldly relations, a relatively balanced habitus. With Jaspers, Huizinga, and Fink I argue that play is central to this enterprise. The eccentricity of the bordered human condition necessitates boundary play. Inhumane and humane treatments of others are possibilities as we navigate within the semiotic matrix.

I begin, then, with a reminder of the worldly significance of walls.

2. Border Work in Homeland Precarity

Herein, I use the term homeland to designate a human *Umwelt*, and specifically the borders drawn on land that signify a space with which a person identifies and-or by which this person is identified. Importantly, "the inevitability of borders is simply assumed" (Agnew, 2008, p. 177). Moreover, we tend to regard borders as things, which diverts us from serious reflection on their real purposes and how they actually function, what they *do*. The symbolization of space authorizes bordering, the determination of the position of the habitus in its semiotic matrix (Catt, 2017). Ironically, naming empties the border of its symbolic origins, the embedded *logos* of discourse that brought us to construct a wall. We may forget that those populating each side of a wall may or may not have had a pre-existing identity, that instead the border wall constructed these identities or radically changed them. Subsequently, we are obedient to the application of normative rules for conceptions of self and other as occupants of two sides produced by a line. The result may be a lapse of political imagination because we think in terms of territories rather than inalienable human rights.

The alienable wall may be constructed in the larger context of nationalism and demagoguery. Fear mongering precludes both rational thinking and moral ideals. As one scholar (Agnew, 2008, p. 182) insightfully puts it, "the perpetual instability of the border is precisely what gives it such symbolic power in the minds-eye of the nationalists who favor/challenge it." The wall is almost always codified through a security lens on the not irrational presumption that some who pose as refugees are on the run from crimes they committed in their former homelands or are dangerous threats to security because of their malevolent intent. However, the fact is that the vast majority of those who immigrate do so to escape horrendous ravages of war, pestilence, and economic depravity. They seek a better life for themselves and their children. As for security, claims are often hyperbolized. As Agnew (2008, p. 185) notes, "the overwhelming majority of terrorist attacks around the world have involved legal visitors from 'friendly' countries or local citizens." The persistent and vivid portrayal of isolated incidents suggests a larger migrant criminal problem than exists in reality.

Borders designate homelands and thus identify people. Physical walls are one among many possible expressions of borders. It is likely impossible to name all types of borderlines capable of being drawn by human minds, hands, and instruments. Lines are fundamentally intended to straighten things out, to lend order to chaos. There is at best a remote probability that we will ever see a straight line drawn by nature. Nature may be said to express itself complexly and ecologically, though it cannot truly speak. The task of speaking is both boon and bane to humans who exist in and experience the world, being within it and distanced from it at the same time, condemned to making sense of this precarious situation by drawing *on* nature even while drawing *upon* it.

Importantly, a cartographer's art is political rather than an innocent mirror reflection of a preconceived reality. National borders are artificial lines drawn typically through power brokering. The use of naturalized borders such as rivers and mountain ranges merely hides the arbitrariness of bordering acts. Our planet does not come ready-made and divided into states and no aspect of its topography requires or desires a name. Our symbolic capacities repress the fact that we cannot stop time nor forestall the inevitability of death by means of asserting dominion over nature through ownership of land. In the end, no person keeps anything.

Of course, our marks upon the earth are not limited to outlining *terra firma*. Naming the other of discourse often serves analogous purposes of asserting dominion and control. Classic lines marked territory to signify the farthest reaches of power, as regional designations of customs, languages, cultures, belief systems, economic zones and a host of other group identifiers. They served above all else to express a message, which was ownership of territory and the intent to defend it. Let me mention only a few examples from which I draw relevant conclusions.

Here are some historic borders that were rationalized for defensive purposes. The French constructed the famous Maginot Line along the German and Italian borders before WWII (Lee, 2012, pp. 1-6). In the movie of the same name George C. Scott's character *Patton* sums up the efficacy of fixed fortifications by declaring them "monuments to the stupidity of man." Today many of the bunkers on this line are ironically re-purposed, one of them is a disco. The Iron Curtain speech is among the most famous examples of twentieth century oratory. In 1946 Churchill drew an imaginary line to designate the influence of communism and the reach of Soviet military might in Eastern Europe. This symbol of a wall had profound impact on conceptions of the cold war. Ronald Reagan is frequently remembered for having demanded that Russia's Leonid Brezhnev tear down the Berlin Wall. Reagan's speech is frequently enlisted in political mythology as a heroic and effective act of brilliant and forceful diplomacy. A much more credible argument is made by semiotician and cultural critic Blonsky (1992, p. 3) that the wall came down for economic reasons and proved the effectiveness of advertising. Citizens of East Berlin and in fact all of East Germany could see on television the goods and services available to people residing on the other side of the wall, and they tired of doing without. The Soviet Union, in its paternal role with the former East Germany, justified the wall on the basis of the bad political-capitalist influences it ostensibly kept at bay, whereas it was notorious for the people that it imprisoned, some of whom made their escape to the West—others died trying. The wall symbol was destroyed, according to Blonsky, to enable fulfillment of a desire for consumption.

By no means should we say that borders are merely negative, because they enable sovereignty, which is useful to unite people, establish laws, assure shared social benefits, and foster trade of ideas and materials. There are many groups in the world that aspire to create new nation-states, often within territories that already have boundaries marking perceived ownership. It might be tacitly presumed, then, that states arise organically from culture. That may be said, for example of Germany, but it worked in reverse order in France where according to Bourdieu the state gave birth to culture (2014, p. 351). Most modern borders are the result of historic colonial European and later American influence as the West imposed a model of the nation-state on colonized territories of occupation (Agnew, 2008; Jones, 2016; Rhee, 2016). The nation-state model was inflicted on the Middle East after WWI, and was famously but futilely opposed by T. E. Lawrence. The world witnesses the results nearly every day on the evening television news. The legalistically rationalized concept of borders goes against the history of nomadic peoples who identify on the basis of values, beliefs, religion, and language, not maps and certainly not the nation-state, a model of sovereignty that is completely foreign to their long history. An important example of the founding of a nation-state on disputed territory is the constitution of the state of Israel in 1948.

Note, as we move from historic border walls to the present a change in bordering logic occurs. Recently, Israel constructed a West Bank Separation Barrier on Palestinian land, billing it as a “security fence,” while the Palestinians view it an “apartheid wall” or the “colonization wall” (Rhee, 2016, p. 4). Israel’s fence may be taken as a paradigm case of bordering for a different reason than simply military defense—to keep denizens out. This justification is also distinctive because of the underlying economic and political motivations involved. An unintended effect has been a dramatic increase in Palestinians populating Jerusalem (Henley, 2013, p. 3). The fence is illegal according to the International Court of Justice. Botswana’s electric fence on the border with Zimbabwe was initially rationalized as a means to stop the spread of anthrax. Zimbabwe, however, sees it as an economic barrier preventing their citizens from migrating in search of employment (Lee, 2012, p. 10). Barbed wire and concrete separate India and Bangladesh for a planned distance of over 12,000 miles. This border marks a very poor country, separating it from a modern democracy that, despite its own indigenous poverty, is considered a successful state. India’s border patrol has a policy of shoot on sight. Over 900 Bangladeshian lives have been lost to violence at this border, including the killing of children (Lee, p. 11).

The United Nations Security Council constructed a barrier the length of the border separating Kuwait and Iraq and maintains it with a variety of military forces (Lee, p. 12). Recall that this border has primarily to do with the control of oil, and oil separates the haves from the have-nots throughout the Middle East. The precariat there are restless and dangerous, and violence is inflicted in several directions from a multitude of tribal sources. From a naive western point of view this is a chaotic and senseless never-ending battle over sand. The point of view of those directly involved may be that their lives have been defined far too long by western mythologies. A barrier of concrete, earth, stone, towers and armed guards separates Pakistan and Iran. Iraq sees economic consequences to a wall built by Iran along their 3-mile border, because their people are denied access to a much more stable economy within eyesight (Lee, p. 16). India and Pakistan provide yet another example of states outlined by a western colonial power. India built a wall along its historically disputed border with Pakistan (Lee, p. 18), perhaps to justify Lord Mountbatten's wisdom. Gunfire is not infrequently exchanged between soldiers on both sides of the wall. This is not just a battle over territory; economics and mythologies are at stake. The Moroccan Wall, also called The Berm, divides the Western Sahara. Six walls have successively claimed more land for Morocco on this once contested terrain (Lee, 2012, pp. 20-22). Again, the have-nots are perpetually at risk in the definition of boundaries. Perhaps the so-called Arab Spring has not realized its idealistic aspirations for the common people who would escape from tyrannical rule.

My short list of walls is intended to prompt thinking about borders, but has not included the many tangible and intangible barriers recently put in place all across Europe to impede the flow of migrants. For the last 70 years "the West" has been the collective name for countries united around democratic principles, advanced social progress, collective defense, shared trade, openness to immigration, and open mindedness about ethnic differences. Granted, the principles are not always realized, but the latest rise of nationalism risks the end of a cooperative epoch rich in ideals. Of course, this is not the only time in history that the western world has faced these forces. Eastern Europe experienced ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and nearby states less than a quarter century ago. Moreover, Europe is not unique because the rise of radical isolationist politics is taking place nearly everywhere in the Pacific, Africa and the United States. The rise of the far right is largely nourished by anti-immigrant and xenophobic views. Fascism has always made its case by means of the rhetoric of enemization. More walls are in sight.

Granted, not every wall exists for the exclusive purpose of precluding human movement and we should not expect rationalizations of securitization to be the universal justification for building walls. Regardless, the border symbol is most definitely motivated. It might be argued that border walls are a commonplace in history. However, this is not actually the case. Let us consider the facts. "At the end of WWII there were fewer than five border walls in the world" (Jones, 2016, p. 1). When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 there were 15. As of 2016 there were nearly 70. Accordingly, "in the era of globalization, the purpose of borders shifted to preventing the movement of unauthorized civilians" (Jones, 2016, p. 4). Moreover, in a decade alone "the number of people forcibly displaced grew by 71 percent—reaching 65 million in 2015, up from an estimated 38 million in 2005." Two million more have been added since then. In the present context it is important to remember that walls are not merely physical constructions. They appear in various forms and are often invisible even after their effect is felt. These effects are profound and have motivated research that supports ever-growing calls for social justice.

In sum, the concept of borders has changed. The border has become a universal symbol arising from and promulgating a discourse of "othering" based on fear and justified as necessary securitization. Increasingly, the migration of human beings is prevented or at least obstructed by border walls, fences, controlled passage points, regulations, documentation requirements, and ubiquitous surveillance. Borders are now instruments that inhibit bodily movement, presumably a fundamental freedom. Borders are now divisions and measures of human worth. Bordering is now itself a weapon perpetrating unrelenting human misery through atrocities of physical and semiotic violence (Smith, 2016).

Let me conclude part one of the paper by commenting that borders are political consecrations both uniting and separating homelands and homeworlds. Border work doubly inflicts denizen migrants who have lost one homeland and are not accepted in a second one. In precarity the sense and meaning that a homeland ordinarily brings to consciousness is diminished. We may say that homeland and homeworld are bifurcated by the diasporic border symbol.

3. Border Labor in a Precarious Homeworld

Denizens of border work must labor under its yolk in precarious diasporas. In the history of phenomenology there is a virtual identification of the terms homeworld and lifeworld, but I use homeworld to designate the felt experience of place in space. By place I refer to the *Eigenwelt* or interpersonal-intrapersonal experience, because the sense of self would be unknowable absent consciousness of positionality. I have associated homeland with the *Umwelt* and, so far, discussed it from an objective point of view. However, the bifurcation of homelands and homeworlds is concretely experienced in precarity. We should not be surprised, then, to find social scientists interested in the implications of borders to society. Their analyses are based in broad theories of lines, boundaries, and borders that are then applied to the migrant issue as a particular case of territorial boundaries. Interest in these matters increased dramatically in recent years. The work cuts across several disciplines including but not limited to "anthropology, history, sociology, political science, social psychology and sociology" (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 167). Luckily, a couple of broad surveys of the research literature have been published that make a review much easier than it might otherwise have been. I draw pertinent themes from their representative research.

The first study of interest is a meta-analysis by Lamont and Molnar (2002) who summarize the literature and categorize it along these themes: "social and collective identity, class, ethnic/racial, and gender/sex inequality; professions, knowledge, and science; and communities, national identities, and spatial boundaries" (p. 167). They also remind us of the historical foundations of this broad research agenda in Durkheim, Marx, and Weber. The authors seek to integrate research because it is fragmented among many researchers in several social sciences who are often unaware of each other's work. Two important related themes emerge from the review and are suggested as ideas around which work could coalesce. These are symbolic boundaries and social boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are defined as conceptual categories social actors use to "categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (p. 168). "Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifest in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and immaterial) and social opportunities" (p. 168). These typologies are respectively understood as necessary and sufficient conditions as well as being intersubjective and causal. The focus on boundaries is considered among a social scientist's "most fertile thinking tools" because "the notion points to fundamental relational processes at work across a wide range of social phenomena, institutions, and locations" (p. 168).

Of relevance here is Lamont and Molnar's discussion of territorial boundaries. The Mexico-USA border is described, effectively, as a paradigm case of cultural interface that gave rise to a vocabulary used to describe a variety of identities including "Latino," "Hispanic," "Chicano," and we should add "Mexican-American," against the previous dualism of Mexican and American. Although there are many substantive issues at this border the main one is, as usual, the flow of people. This is of course the very same issue with which British, Scandinavian and European countries have struggled in recent years. The authors conclude that symbolic boundaries are used in support of social boundaries, but also that social boundaries can be used to reframe symbols and create new symbols. This sounds less virulent than Guy Standing's claim that the precariat may become a new, though dangerous social class.

Another empirical example of the interrelationship of symbolic and social boundaries is provided by McKee (2013, pp. 4-15), who conducted an ethnographic study of how a wall constructed in West Las Vegas cut off an African American community from the central city. As part of an interstate expansion project, the other side saw the wall as a way of hiding a blighted part of the urban area from tourists. The wall symbol effectively *othered* two communities, cutting off interaction between them, a barrier to social discourse and an institutionalized division of the larger community. The wall then served to shape human action and animosities increased on both sides. The wall is a symbol of "sides."

Magyar-Haas (2012) updated the review of social science research on borders a decade after Lamont and Molnar's study. She notes the "coercive and arbitrary nature of political borders" (p. 1) as they function as instruments of "demarcation, dissociation, and exclusion," creating a feeling of estrangement in a person's homeland (p. 1). We create a foe through this process of enemization as words and deeds produce what may be called "iron curtains" and localized "cold wars." Social isolation is a result of discourse that emotes indifference and ambivalence about the lives of others. In consonance with Lamont and Molnar and McKee, Magyar-Haas emphasizes that material and discursive borders are "mutually dependent" (p. 2). She argues that scholars should focus on the conditions that produce the borders.

Importantly, the body becomes the ultimate border that is not only disciplined from the outside but also learns through cultural pedagogy to self-discipline according to the pre-constituted categories of communal perceptions that codify conscious experience.

Because body-knowledge is social, a communicative ontology is implicated. This view is consistent with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (Macke, pp. 25-26) who writes of the chiasm of the flesh, with Butler (Chinnery, 2015, pp. 1-10) who recognizes the "up-againstness" of being in precarity, and Plessner (Dobeson, 2018, pp. 36-54) who explicates existence as both the ontology of boundary conditions and epistemology of borders. The body is itself a border of the cultural and personal in the social realm.

To sum up part two, the border symbol is taken in the research literature as a two-sided phenomenon. I have framed it as a second duality, following on the bordering of homeland and homeworld, *Umwelt* and *Eigenwelt*; we have an anti-ecological boundary situation. It is now appropriate to consider the relationship of homeland and homeworld as experienced in the lifeworld, which is simultaneous with the *Mitwelt* or experience of communication with others.

4. Boundary Play in the Lifeworld

The diaspora is not a playground. Border work separates homeworld from lifeworld in precarity. While homeworld designates the feeling of being at home in a homeland, the lifeworld signifies particularly being with other people in discourse, the *Mitwelt*. It appears that the natural ecology of *Umwelt* and *Eigenwelt* in the *Mitwelt* is decimated by either-or logic in precarious experience. This however depends on whether we subscribe exclusively to idealist philosophy. There is another way of understanding the ontology and epistemology of personhood.

In her excellent review, Magyar-Haas (2012) makes two points on which we might linger. She mentions, "Some interpretations seek to link the two apparently mutually incompatible theoretical approaches of phenomenology and post-structuralism" (p. 4). Bauman (2016, p. 100) makes a similar suggestion in a recent book on migrants, "to find the bridge between Thought and Action, one needs to focus on the field occupied by sociology (or social psychology) and the art of dialogue." Communicology is a viable disciplinary name for this bridge. Semiotic phenomenology is an appropriate synthesis, especially because communication is an essential problem of being in precarity. By communication I mean a phenomenological experience of signs, or simply, *semiosis*, the action of signs in discourse. By definition signs are boundaries. I think I have established that borders consist in the experience of political limitations that impose constraints on existence. The first level of this problem is a duality of homeland and homeworld. Plainly put, it is difficult to feel at home in the house of a stranger or with strangers in one's house. A second level of the problem is a duality of homeworld and lifeworld. Plainly put, it is difficult to lead a desired life with others in a house that is not a home. Even given successful assimilation, a sterile existence is probable from being in a house on land that can never really be embodied as one's own. Such an ironic homelessness is agoraphobic in its own way. It is experienced as *hysteresis*, a gap between what is expected and what can be performed. Taking the phenomenon of power into account, this is less a problem of individualism than a problem of *individuation*. Historic responsibilities assumed by the community are now expected of the individual, who cannot achieve alone what people accomplished by acting in concert through the civilizing dynamics of communication (Ehrenberg, 2010). Lacking a homeland, the homeworld is threatened, and in an anxious homeworld, persons are individuated, an impoverishment of the lifeworld. The triadic relations of *Eigenwelt* and *Umwelt* in the *Mitwelt* are indeed out of ecological balance. At best, a cleft habitus occurs wherein the lifeworld is not experienced as authentic (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 100). A migrant person is successful by repressing a desired life, living the expectations of a homeland belonging to someone else, housed in a homeworld lacking the warmth of a hearth and fire, living what amounts to a life of ambivalence rather than personal fulfillment.

Standing (2011, pp. x-42) identifies the experience of precarity as one of alienation, of not being able to trust anyone, of being stigmatized, humiliated, ashamed, experiencing low self-esteem, and not having a voice. External borders are internalized, incorporated as hexis, affecting communicative experience and behavior. We are fated to coexist with millions of migrants in a newly realized cosmopolitan environment. Precarity, however, has become a mode of life, an unfortunate means of dealing with others by codifying them as deficient in humanity. Bauman describes the frustrations, animosities, and hostilities that arise when the precaritized attempt to communicate with those who objectify them and who hold themselves at a lofty distance from them. The former's petitions and demands go unheeded. "Most of their subjects are cut off from communication - and more and more of them have lost, or are fast losing, all hope of sensible conversation with the powers-that-be" (Bauman, 2016, p. 62). The experience of bordering thus signifies boundaries of consciousness. Possibilities of phenomenological experience, of the imagination, of Eros in general, are stymied and become quite limited semiotic probabilities.

However, recall that Magyar-Haas allows room for hope by suggesting that social boundaries may be used to re-frame symbolic boundaries or to create new symbols. By combining the concepts habitus and play we may venture an explanation of how this may occur. Phenomenologists Plessner and Fink may be enlisted in a response to border precarity framed by boundary play. Rather than exclusive reliance on idealist philosophy this involves a degree of materialist philosophy and bodily play with symbolic borders. As a preface, however, let me turn to Jaspers.

Jaspers (1970) describes life as a loving struggle with communication at the center of it. “The process of existential communication is a struggle caused by concern with intrinsic being, and in the process that being becomes a reality” (p. 212). Boundary situations contain the possibility of non-being that are existential experiences. Life is lived on and within these boundaries; they define us. The permanent boundary situations from which we cannot escape are “that I am always in situations; that I cannot live without struggling and suffering; that I cannot avoid guilt; that I must die—these are what I call boundary situations. They *never change*, except in appearance” (Jaspers, 1970, p. 178). This insight is another way of emphasizing the semiotic phenomenology of consciousness where existence encounters experience continuously. Signs that both constrain us and open us to possibilities mediate life.

Plessner offers the important distinction that we are born into homelessness. One of the original phenomenologists who advanced philosophical anthropology, Plessner is a German scholar whose work remains mostly un-translated into English. He offers a philosophy grounded in gradual, rather than categorical distinctions in the physical, natural and animal worlds. As for nature, he remarks, “Plants, water, clouds, stones are moved but do not move themselves. Their habitus is passive; they give no hint of anything we could call behavior” (Plessner, 1970, p. 85). On the other hand, like biologist von Uexkull, Plessner argues that animal organisms are to be understood by how they relate to their given boundaries. There are species-specific relations between forms of animal life and their boundaries. Animals realize their boundaries and their positionality in regard to them and exercise a degree of autonomy accordingly. They are centric beings. By contrast, the threshold of human being is signified by an *eccentric positionality* that is an inherently ambiguous relationship with the environment. This unique on-going situation has both confining and productive dimensions. I am my body and I objectify my body, being and having are always essential to my autopoietic felt-agency. Plessner (1970, p. 17) stresses “that man’s [sic] existence in the world is determined by the relation to his body, that the understanding of human nature is bound to the possibility of expression as a unity of intellectual, affective, and physical components.” He elaborates this semiotic theme (Plessner, 1970, p. 43):

> Expression is a fundamental trait of *mediated immediacy* and, like the instrumentality of the body or the objectivity of knowledge, corresponds to that tension and entwinement which we are always having to adjust, between being a body and having a body. Expressivity is a fundamental way of coming to terms with the fact that man [sic] occupies a body and yet is a body. (my italics)

Clearly, the basal human relation to the *Umwelt* as *Eigenwelt* is communicative, which makes the *Mitwelt* of defining significance. Because of this, Plessner describes social roles in a way not dissimilar to G. H. Mead. We engage with one another and play with masks, a metaphor for face-work (Kruger, 2009, pp. 196-197). Our relationships are always indeterminate, so we depend on others operating within spheres of trust by means of artificial (semiotic) mediations of reality. Our openness enables us to accept differences and embrace diversity, but the boundary is always problematic. The recurring and ineluctable question we face in every social encounter is whether we will be able to achieve communication, with and despite the artificiality of our symbolic means. As Jaspers indicates, this is a loving struggle but also remains an existential question at the boundaries of situations and in light of our inevitable fate to die alone. Non-being is a perpetual and ongoing possibility of being. Eccentricity means that experiences originate in our duality; our natural condition is precarious.

What enables us to re-frame symbols and create new symbols? According to Plessner, we invent technological, symbolic and cultural extensions of our bodies, putting them to use as ways of coping with our eccentric duality. I interpret this perhaps optimistically as a capacity to actuate a habitus that is not determined by political border work, an ability to re-contextualize bordering by means of creative boundary play. As I have explained (2017) the habitus is flexible, not merely because the rules of culture and society could never be purely incorporated as bodily knowledge, but also because the pre-dispositions of the *Eigenwelt* are continuously confronted with boundary situations. In light of the *never changing* boundaries identified by Jaspers, coupled with the transient social circumstances of the moment, codified life lessons must meet the message of the present with an eye toward prospects for a future. Thus, the unique human relations entail a capacity for conversion of borders by means of boundary play.

The natural split of humans into being and having a body is not a Cartesian duality. The two aspects are not separately experienced, but the one compensates for the other in a vital unity. Order is brought to bear on disorder. This is where play comes into the picture. In his famous study, *Homo Ludens,* Huizinga (2009, P. 10) recognizes that "play creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection."

However, inhumanity is always a possibility as unconditioned absolutes are constructed from incoherent relations of the lived body and the body-lived. Lost as we are in the confinements of borders we may well repress our capacity to re-imagine, re-think, and re-frame the meaning of symbols. Huizinga answers that (2009, p. 211) play originates the formation of institutions and civilized society. He comments "real civilization cannot exist in the absence of a certain play-element for civilization presupposes limitation and mastery of the self, the ability not to confuse its own tendencies with the highest goal, but to understand that it is enclosed within certain bounds freely accepted." Rules are necessary in play for the reason that play is inherently intersubjective. Therefore, play is moral activity and it is the "moral content" of play "that makes it serious" (p. 210). Huizinga reminds us that, "true civilization will always demand fair play" (p. 211).

Borders are moral boundaries.

An objective study by a former CIA analyst (Sterling, 2009) dared to convert Frost's poetic assertion into a question: "Do fences make good neighbors?" His history lesson is that we need to focus on what the border *does*. This requires a conversation that is motivated by an understanding of bordering ethics, which is no doubt why Bauman concludes his book *Strangers at our door* with reference to Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy of communication and play.

According to Fink's (2016, p. 243) phenomenology, "the world itself is interpreted as play." Play is a world symbol for Fink and therefore may be

> used as a model for understanding the total process of the world's movement as the emergence and demise of all things, as the foreground of the coming into appearance and as the depth of the concealed essence, as the interpenetrated play of opposites, as the removal of temporal demarcations and of the boundaries between life and death, as the rendering of nugatory modalities, when everything becomes actual and everything actual becomes possible. (pp. 243-244)

Clearly, boundary play is distinguishable from border work. Hope may be found in the remembrance and recovery of the human capacity to play. Choice of boundaries may be recovered and borders re-contextualized through play. Play is serious business (Eicher-Catt, 2016).

As we know, science is based on error beginning with curiosity, the posing of hypotheses, tests, and public evaluations, followed by repetition of this cycle. Peirce used the word hypothesis in two senses, one of which involves formal science. The other related use of the word is in reference to abduction, the logic of best guesses grounded in experience (Catt, 2017, see chapter 9). Human science is serious play from this point of view. Furthermore, human science may be seen as a playground that replicates the normative activity of having a conscious experience by means of abductive inferences.

Play is how we deal with error. The essential error of unreflective bordering is that it is based on either-or thinking. A person or group is on one side of the border or the other. Social science risks mirroring this digital reasoning to the extent that it objectifies the border as a symbol representing two-sides. A scholar is either pro-border or anti-border. To reiterate, borders are inherently equivocal boundaries and can therefore be objects of play. A more substantial semiotic understanding of the symbol inherited from Peirce is that it is part of an irreducible triadic semiosis wherein consciousness arrives continuously as an *Interpretant* through the mediation of an object of perception. As a type of sign, the symbol is signifying action establishing beliefs and habits of thought. The logic of habitus results from ethics, which is in turn grounded in aesthetics (Catt, in press). The three parts of the triad are systemic, always appearing together in the process of semiosis.

From this point of view homeworlds are both borders and boundaries. In precarity homelands are bifurcated from homeworlds and homeworlds are simultaneously split from lifeworlds. The enclosed side of the border is experienced as the tacit center, and from this position in space the other is objectified under a territorial minds-eye. Those populating the other side of the border are on the periphery of what is most valued among the presumed like-minded. It is most helpful to recall that mind is always social and the logic of its expression cannot be divorced from the communicative body's positionality in the semiotic matrix (Catt, 2017). Thus, in all bordering activity aesthetic and ethical considerations continuously come into play. Play itself is a source of both stability and change for every habitus. "The study of mind," says philosopher Jesse Prinz, "is fundamentally the study of place" (2012, p. xi).

Our perceptions can be altered beginning with the recognition that boundary play is central to an adequate ontology and epistemology of what it means to be human. The relation of existence to experience is inherently precarious. Borders arise from symbolic activity in discursive fields that may also be understood as playgrounds. Play actuates the habitus, preventing it from succumbing to determinism. The distinctive human threshold is signifying activity that produces symbols through play, but play also relates to symbols reflexively and experiments with the possibilities of signs. A symbol can make us laugh or cry. The eccentricity of *being human* continuously challenges the meaning of *human being* by means of play. That is why we are not definable by our biology, and it is why genetics does not explain human behavior. We are distant from ourselves. This precarious boundary situation is at the heart of our humanity. Our shared vulnerability should lead us to a universal spirit of cooperation under common rules of engagement. After all, we have a common fate; none of us gets out of this alive.

Yet, we commonly perceive the other through a discourse of othering, bordering, and enemization. There are other ways to establish our identities in communication. The alternatives are rooted in our shared phenomenological condition of eccentricity and the semiotic mediations of our situations. Our eccentricity requires mediated immediacy in the social world, and the mediation is essentially boundary play.

Though the borders of life are gradual, we too often treat them as categorical. Instead, we must accept that we are the eccentric life form, that we are by nature precariously situated. Anxiety about our ontological condition too often leads us to a flawed epistemology based in dualistic thinking. We proceed down an anti-ecological path to multifarious inhumane forms of hegemonic precarity. We determine that some lives are worth more than others. Some people are perceived to deserve a decent life while others are thought undeserving of it. We thus rationalize the violence that we render them.

There is hope in play. That this is possible is evidenced by the fact that the physical borders are our invention, a product of our semiotic creativity. This very same capacity can be utilized to re-invent the border symbol. Examples of such boundary play are available. Internationally famed architect Fernando Romero imagines a new future where there are bi-national border cities, and he has drawn detailed plans to build the first of these precisely on the border of Mexico and the United States. It is to be a "multipolar metropolis with several specialized economic centers, transforming walls from a symbol of isolation to a symbol of cooperation" (Rhee, 2016, p. 6). Maurice Hamington promotes a philosophy of care as antinomy to precarity. This is a communicative relational approach to morality based in education. Arnett, Mancino and Karolak (2018, pp. 179-200) offer a rich interpretation of Levinas's semioethics central to which is a concept of social justice originating in responsibility for the other. These authors may be said to argue for a new kind of boundary play with symbols. All are potential sources that may be used to re-frame the border concept as a bridge or crossing to help those in need and for intergroup exchange rather than seeing the border exclusively through the lens of security. An ensuing conversation about borders would focus on what borders do "both for and to people" (Agnew, p. 187). The overarching ethic of such boundary play is intrinsically communicative. Such discourse recognizes that all persons of every origin or persuasion are citizens of the earth who are entitled to a decent life.

It is possible to imagine a future where the border work and labor of precarity is transcended by boundary play. In communicology serious play is not merely tolerated but rather anticipated.

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