

Interview 3:
Unique

L2: Whose
borders?

Exhibition text:

In the Unique interview, the main theme that surfaces is "Whose borders?". The interviewee, a border scholar, raises how borders can be decided by both decision makers and become inherent in people, while also dividing or keeping us in or out of a place. As per the excerpts, we see how different concepts of borders have changed throughout the decades. It is also noticeable how a border can also mean "out of sight, out of mind", and keep us ignorant to the real world as if in Plato's allegory of the cave.

- L1: Border shift (05:07-05:40)
- L1: Border as divider (06:02-06:53)
- L1: Border as divider (14:04-14:53)
- L1: Racial borders (10:18-10:56)
- L1: Border as a dome (13:20-13:41)

Of course, arriving in England and especially although now you can buy anything anywhere. At the time, as a child I certainly developed a sense of there are things that I can have in the United States, and there are things that I can have in England and I cannot have Cadbury chocolate in the United States, but I cannot have peanut butter in England, and you know all kinds of realms of life. So, that's the kind of boundary that's essentially gone because of the world market now.

I ended up working on the German-Polish borderland. So the experience of border for those people was really an experience of craziness that is people far away and high up, suddenly just changing where the borders were and doing this over and over and over again in their history and on the basis of that, expelling half the population, and regulating the use of language, and throwing people in jail, and in camps, and it was an experience for them of just not just severe violence, but real this is nuts, this is crazy. You know, what are we supposed to make of the fact that yesterday we were German citizens and now we are Polish citizens?

My entire childhood and into my adult life was Cold War. So my first really smack between the eyes experience of border was actually when I was fifteen, I became an exchange student in Germany and they took us to the German-German border, and I had never seen a border like that and I was very deeply impressed by just the impermeability of that border and being told: "okay, the fence is there but they have made the fence inside East German territory so they can legally shoot anyone who crosses. So, the actual border is right here, and you are not to go up to that fence, it's dangerous".

As you may know, the United States has utterly failed to overcome its history of segregation, and Chicago is generally known as a so-called hyper-segregated city, and, as a University of Chicago student I got a job tutoring which in German is Nachhilfeunterricht geben twenty blocks south. So, I would take the number six bus and precisely at 61st Street, after 61st Street I was the only white person on the bus.

Borders do make it clear who is responsible, but then who is responsible in a world like the one we inhabit now? And if we cannot think beyond those borders, we're in trouble, because a major portion of the world is in dire poverty.

Comment:

In this excerpt, the interviewee highlights a big change that was noticed in terms of borders and what they bring. In this case, a border of going to another country meant that some things could only be consumed there, while now, these borders are not so clear anymore as the world market changed and, consequently, so did the "product" borders. This relates to "what is borders" in delving in one of the layers that borders can signify. Whose borders? Here also shows an impact of power: there are no "product" borders in the world market for those with access and means. Those who cannot afford it, might not have the same products, consequently having additional borders to face.

Comment:

This excerpt is a good example of different borders as dividers in different contexts. It brings a lens of looking at the same concept of border in the past, present, and its reflections as citizens. It also relates to current world issues such as the Ukraine-Russia war and Israel-Palestine wars in its questions of oppression and changing of borders

Comment:

Here, while relating an experience with a historical border, the excerpt connects to the general exhibition by portraying a way in which a border can divide people, and it can cause fear. A border, as previously seen, is not just what is inherent in people, changing in the world market or keeping us inside, but it was (and is, in some places) a way to violently divide families and nations.

Comment:

Although this is very contextual, this excerpt brings the concept of racial (and invisible) borders. Borders that are there, but unsaid, such as a racial border of segregation. Many borders discussed throughout the excerpt are put in place by decision makers, and although this one is also a consequence of decisionmakers' attitudes, it shows that people replicate those borders. It became inherent in a society.

Comment:

"Out of sight, out of mind" is the perfect way to understand this excerpt. It can connect to the general exhibition as borders are also chosen to keep people in (or out!), the same way that "mind borders" can make us ignorant to what is happening out of our eye reach.