

From semantics to the ontology of the border, in *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera: An Approach from Jean-Luc Nancy's Theory of the Body* .

De la semántica a la ontología de la frontera, en *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera: un enfoque desde la teoría del cuerpo de Jean-Luc Nancy*.



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Abstract.

This paper ontologically explores the 'being' of the U.S.-Mexico border, investigates the mechanism that enables the coexistence of the two countries, and proposes the communal attitude necessary to better coexist around the border. The central objective is to review how the U.S.-Mexico border is represented in three texts. The central objective is to review how the US-Mexico border is represented in three texts of Luis Humberto Crosthwaite's *Instructions for Crossing the Border* (2011), in an analysis that goes from the semantics of the border to the ontology involved. As a Mexican native from a border region, the author shares his experiences of living near the border and witnessing border crossings. Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of 'between' explains our world and history through the corpus or body; his premise that all bodies move towards each other and are already in contact with each other, which we will make explicit through the analysis of two American films, applies to literary texts about the border as we will demonstrate in the analysis. Such an application will allow us to look at both countries as a world of bodies, rather than considering them through the discourse of the Other. With this analysis, the limitations of border semantics are accepted and overcome by 'writing the border-body'.

Keywords: Luis Humberto Crosthwaite. Border literature. Mexico-US border. MEXICO-US BORDER. Ontology of the body.

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Abstract:

El presente artículo explora ontológicamente el 'ser' de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, investiga el mecanismo que permite la coexistencia de los dos países y propone la actitud comunitaria necesaria para coexistir mejor en torno a la frontera. El objetivo central es revisar cómo la frontera México-EE. UU. está representada en tres textos de *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera* (2011) de Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, en un análisis que va de la semántica de la frontera hacia la ontología implicada. Como mexicano originario de una región fronteriza, el autor comparte sus experiencias de vivir cerca de la frontera y de ser testigo de cruces fronterizos. La teoría de 'entre' de Jean-Luc Nancy explica nuestro mundo y la historia a través del corpus o cuerpo; su premisa de que todos los cuerpos se mueven hacia otros y que ya están en contacto entre sí, la cual explicitaremos mediante el análisis de dos películas estadounidenses, se aplica a textos literarios sobre la frontera como demostraremos en el análisis. Dicha aplicación permitirá mirar a ambos países como un mundo de cuerpos, en lugar de considerarlos a través del discurso del Otro. Con este análisis, se aceptan las limitaciones de la semántica de la frontera y se consigue superarlas 'escribiendo el cuerpo-frontera'.

Keywords: Luis Humberto Crosthwaite. Literatura fronteriza. Frontera México-EE. UU. Ontología del cuerpo.

Introduction

Luis Humberto Crosthwaite's short story collection *Instructions for Crossing the Border* (2011) deals with the border as the line that must be crossed when someone moves from Mexico to the U.S. The book was published in 2002, with a second and third edition published in 2011 and 2020, respectively. The first 2002 version is comprised of thirteen short stories; eleven after the one with the subtitle "Recomendaciones" that serves as a prologue, plus "Ambiente de fiesta en la playa" as an epilogue. The second version of 2011, referred to in this article, was augmented with a new section, "Bonus track" subtitled "Border Mass", which is a collection of several additional texts. The stories deal with the difficulties that add to the language barrier, discrimination and the memory of their homeland. This book is reportedly based on the author's own experience. Luis Humberto Crosthwaite was born in 1962 in Tijuana, Baja California, a region in northwestern Mexico bordering the U.S. The fact that the author was born in Tijuana, a city of historical and geopolitical importance, contributes significantly to the interpretation of his literary texts. Influenced by his time living in a

representative border city,¹ Crosthwaite has produced several novels and essays that express the complexity and difficulties of living on that border. Her writing often explores life in the region, capturing the experiences and challenges faced by its inhabitants.

This article considers three stories from the collection. It will demonstrate, first, that the borders comprise a specific area by drawing on the microhistory of the border zone described in "Recommendations" and "The Row." "Recommendations" serves as a prologue to the book and empirically and demonstratively depicts how arduous the process of crossing borders is. "The Line" describes in daily detail the spectacle of people waiting in line to cross the border. The analysis of these two texts focuses -relatively- on the semantics of borders. In the next section, the main section of this article, the ontology of borders will be addressed, focusing on "La silla vacía" (The Empty Chair). Although it is a story, it is composed entirely of dialogues and contains a character's honest confession about the 'border', which is also embodied by one of the characters.

The present study draws on the theory of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy to argue that the border between Mexico and the United States is a 'body'; to do so, we will examine the ontology of the body that Nancy developed in his work *Corpus* (1992) and explore the border's motif of being a body by considering its premise. In the first paragraph of her book *Corpus*, Nancy declares that all of Western civilization originated from the ritual phrase "*Hoc est enim corpus meum*" (This is truly my body; Nancy, 2000, p. 7). Throughout the book, he explains a world as the world of bodies (p. 36), which relate and are in contact with each other according to their own ontology of the 'between'. The hypothesis put forward in this article is that Nancy's ontological approach shows how the U.S.-Mexico border, which she discusses "is a world of bodies in contact with each other" (p. 36). It is hypothesized that Nancy's ontological approach shows how the U.S.-Mexico border, which is the subject of Crosthwaite's "The Empty Chair," exists and operates as a body. Furthermore, that the coexistence of the two countries can be approached from an ontological understanding of the border, hereafter referred to as the border between

¹ The author currently lives with his family in the neighborhood where he was born (Angulo, 2024).

Mexico and the United States. The ontology of the border, suggested in Crosthwaite's texts, will be the object of analysis considering in parallel two films that will help to make Nancy's premise more explicit, which will allow us to deduce diverse social implications.

The microhistory of the border in "Recommendations" and "The Line".

In "Recommendations" and "The Line" of *Instructions for Crossing the Border*, the author provides the semantic understanding of the border, showing how people live and act around the border zone. In "Recommendations," it is explained that crossing the border requires many precautions. Immediately after, in "La fila" (The line), the everydayness and repetitiveness represented by the continuous line of people crossing the border on a daily basis is revealed. According to the descriptions of life in the border zone in these two texts, the border is an obstacle to be overcome and a persistent challenge for Mexicans; this obstructive (semantic) characteristic of the border is perceived as permanent.

According to the "Recomendaciones", as challenging as it is to cross the border, there are certain precautions briefly summarized in vignettes by the narrator, who has crossed the border numerous times, that the characters should keep in mind. The narrator explains how the line forms and how arduous the process can be. By car or on foot, there is endless waiting and people are part of a line "without beginning or end" (Crosthwaite, 2011, p. 15. We will quote for this edition). Therefore, it is necessary to stand in that endless line with patience, with ID and a clear reason (even if fictitious) that allows you to answer the questions of the guards: "Therefore, if you cross to perform a job as a dishwasher, garbage collector, waiter, maid, clerk, cashier, writer, etcetera, you must carry a fiction to tell them, no matter if it is the same each time" (p. 14). Being a minority of Mexican (Latin American) origin is a handicap to transversality. The narrator tells the implied reader to simply accept the fact that the border guards are invincible: "What is more appropriate is to be convinced that they are omnipotent beings, deities, capricious Caesars capable of throwing you out of their empire" (p. 16). While waiting in line, Mexicans are humiliated in various and strange ways. Accordingly, the text advises in a calm tone that they should not feel ashamed even if

they experience such humiliation: "Don't feel humiliated if the dog urinates on one of your tires. Don't feel like it, either" (p. 15). The narrator lists the above facts for them to memorize, in a direct tone and without any particular emotion. His detached attitude ironically emphasizes the difficulty of crossing the border. These sites play a role in reproducing and transmitting the meaning of borders to the next generation.

In the story that follows, "The Line," the author depicts more clearly as an image the experience of migrants waiting alienated to cross the border. Everyday but significant moments in this process are highlighted. The narrator-character presents his observations and reflections as he waits in line inside his vehicle, along with others. The narrative captures the monotony, tension and interactions that take place in this liminal space, offering a glimpse into the complexities and realities of border crossings. It also includes the human aspects of this often challenging bureaucratic procedure.

The text begins by emphasizing that this process is routine, that it happens every day: "I'm standing in line, standing in line, standing in line to get out of the country. It's a natural thing, an everyday thing. [...] We are going to leave the country and it is something natural, an everyday thing" (p. 19). Even if one waits too long, the line does not shorten and people cannot move forward accordingly. In the story, the protagonist repeatedly complains that the line does not get shorter: "No avanza" (p. 20), "La fila no avanza" (p. 21), "No avanza" (p. 24). Moreover, in this endless line, the character shows an attitude of uncertainty and anxiety: "I am not sure" (p. 21). The protagonist places all his existential concerns on the border: "Then I understand that without lines in my hand I have no destiny, I have no life or death, nothing to hold on to, only this line, this longing to reach the border, to cross, to leave this nation, to enter the other" (p. 24). For the protagonist, the border has always been an object to be overcome and transcended. During this process, numerous auditory images are used; chaotic and confusing noises are superimposed and augmented, further disturbing the emotional state of the characters. There are many disorienting descriptions based on sounds: the sound of gringo music, the whistling that spreads between drivers, the horn, a girl's cry,

screams. The disorientation reflects the familiarity of those who have become accustomed to the violence of this current situation, denouncing the abnormality of the phenomenon.

In this way, "Recomendaciones" and "La fila" present the characteristics of the border zone through the behavioral patterns of migrants with respect to the border crossing. This point of view focuses on the semantic meaning that the border has for the people it surrounds and how it is represented in society as a sign. From the semantic approach to borders, in both texts, the border is a space where the characters remain in an attempt to pass. Within this vast space, individuals form a third group called 'transversal population', a group that in waiting to cross forms a community with its own culture around that region, different from Americans and Mexicans. This group develops new lifestyles, leads and spends its life there. Violence and absurdity are accepted as natural in their daily life, and the members of this new group live with this pain as a social, cultural and political minority.

The ontology of the U.S.-Mexico border. THE ONTOLOGY OF THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER.

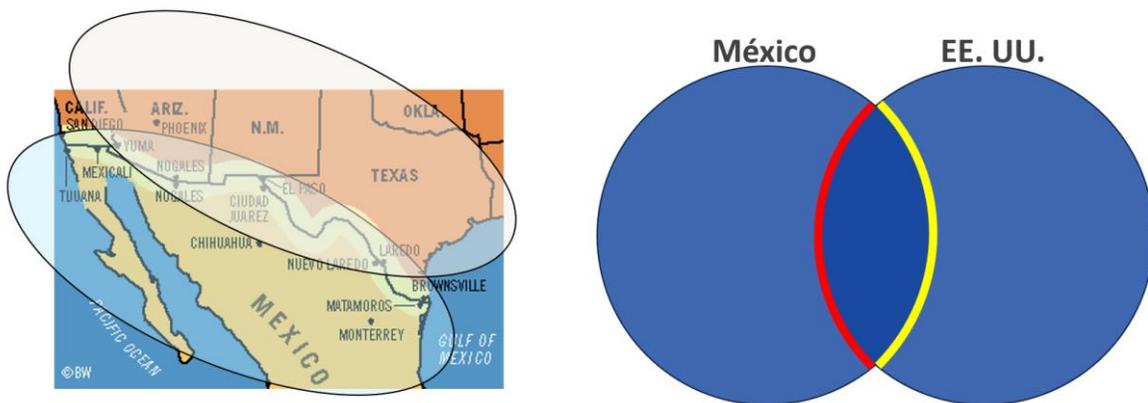
Jean-Luc Nancy, in his work *Corpus* published in Paris in 1992, presents his philosophical proposal of the body, developing an ontology of the body and, in particular, his thesis that we do not have a body, but that 'we are it', to then expose the concept of the subject as exteriority and infinite exposure, as a body turned outward.

According to Jean-Luc Nancy, the body is spacing (*espacement*; Nancy, 2000, p. 31) and opening; each body moves outward and it is here that self-difference arises. Thus, the body, which already exists as outside (*ex-istence*; p. 117; only 'ex' with italics in French), is always 'ex-posed' (*ex-position*; p. 117) to the outside and is open in such a way that bodies touch each other. Bodies that are open to each other have an empty space, a gap. The body is 'ex-scribed' (*s'excrit*; p. 20) from within and inscribed into another body. Thus, the part of self-difference that is distinct from itself also acts as a part of another being. Thus, in every body there is a void that cannot be signified. Therefore, the part that is not 'I' is within itself, making the absolute 'I' impossible; but at the same time, that part becomes the condition of

existence. As this 'infinitely finite' or "in-finite" (p. 97) space also opens up infinitely, so bodies open up to each other and create a world.²

In the following paragraphs, we will attempt a deeper ontological approach to the border, which seems to share many of the characteristics of the body proposed by Jean-Luc Nancy. We will start from the following images (diagram 1), where we show that the arrangement of Mexico and the United States is consistent with Nancy's concept of the body:

Diagram 1. The outline of the border between Mexico and the United States.



Source: Own elaboration.

The concept of the body from Nancy's theory can be represented as a series of semi-superimposed circles. For the sake of clarity, two circles can be assumed that represent each nation, A and B. The boundary of A is both part or interior of B and at the same time exterior or boundary of A. As previously indicated, the boundary of A has the property of coming out of the body of A. In both cases, it opens one to the other by putting itself outside of itself.

The images schematically represent Mexico and the United States, simplified as circles. As can be seen in diagram 1, the two circles clearly overlap, and that part would be the border between Mexico and the United States: the boundary of Mexico penetrates into

² Marking prefixes with hyphens or parentheses is a characteristic Nancy notation and reads as a method of superimposing two seemingly contradictory words, rather than linguistic interpretation based on traditional dualistic semantics.

the interior of the United States, and vice versa. This characteristic of the border is clearly shown in "The Empty Chair," the ninth story in *Instructions for Crossing the Border*.

In that story, the idea that the border is a body is represented by an ambiguous character in "The Empty Chair" who is referred to as the 'fnt (border)'. It is composed entirely of dialogues including monologues, without a narrator. From the first chapter to the tenth, there are apparently three characters: aaa, zzz and fnt. The role of fnt is the object of role swapping by zzz. The character aaa proposes to zzz to become fnt and respond to the accusations he held previously. Here, fnt evidently represents the border between Mexico and the United States, and zzz symbolizes the Mexican who can - but at the same time cannot - cross that border. In the interrogation led by aaa, zzz confesses his thoughts about fnt and, following aaa's instructions, zzz identifies himself with fnt to directly answer the questions he had posed to fnt. In this process, fnt (border) is described as a female entity because the feminine personal pronoun is used. The story ends with the unfinished conversation between aaa, zzz and fnt. Table 1 shows the participants in the conversations and the possible recipients of the monologues in each chapter:

Table 1. The order of the story and characters in "The Empty Chair".

I el diálogo entre aaa y zzz ①	II el monólogo de zzz (dirigido a fnt)	III el diálogo entre aaa y zzz ②	IV el diálogo entre aaa y fnt	V el diálogo a tres bandas entre aaa, zzz y fnt
VI el diálogo entre aaa y zzz ③	VII el diálogo a tres bandas entre aaa, zzz y fnt	VIII el monólogo de fnt (dirigido a zzz)	IX el diálogo entre aaa y zzz	X el diálogo entre aaa y fnt

Source: Own elaboration.

The plot of the ten chapters is as follows. The character aaa asks zzz what he sees, zzz denies saying that he sees nothing and finally answers that he sees an empty chair; aaa asks him insistently about that chair. Then, zzz reveals that she feels that her life is oppressed by a barrier: "zzz: ...that life presses on me, that I feel a barrier, a Border that delimits me." (p. 84, text capitalization). Then, aaa makes zzz speak to the Border directly; zzz tells him that they

knew each other since childhood and adds that he wanted freedom, but that he could not achieve it because of the Border's authority. Immediately, aaa tells zzz to switch roles with fnt to respond to the accusations he just spoke about. fnt says that zzz's claims are unwarranted, that the border only exists because there is a need to cross it. This moment in the story is crucial to our hypothesis. And she adds that they knew each other before they were born and that they were born to the same mother, at the same time. In the next chapter, zzz accuses fnt of keeping changing shape and always moving so that he could not cross her. In response, fnt claims that zzz invited her first. Contrary to zzz's claim, he has actually crossed her several times, only zzz doesn't remember. At the climax, zzz says she can't take it anymore and gives up on further dialogue, since even if she were to talk more, fnt would refute it anyway. Character aaa concludes by saying that they will talk next week. Finally, zzz is silent, but fnt talks some more with aaa; he declares that what he will tell him is a secret and aaa tells him to tell it to the empty chair. The story ends and everyone is left without knowing the secret that fnt would tell, the border.

The mode of existence: duality

There would be two approaches to assert that borders are a body: duality and suspension. First, the border exists in a dual mode. Its mode of existence is not based on the sequence of a first closed and then open state, but involves a simultaneity of opening while closing. Thus, it is as open as it is closed. The border does not follow an order of opening and closing based on the unidirectional flow of time, but has a physiological rhythm. The body functions as an entrance, in a mode of 'coming/going, swallowing/spitting, breathing in/out, opening and closing'.³ The rhythm possesses an indeterminacy that does not conform to rules or fixed patterns, as each moment is a unique and new event.

Considered individually, the opening of the border allows the transit of people and the transport of goods, while its closing blocks such movement and fulfills the function of

³ "Le corps est la topique de tous ses accès, de ses ici/là, ses fort/da, ses va-et-vient, avale-et-crache, inspire/expire, écarte et ferme" (Nancy, 2000, p. 50).

delimitation and demarcation. Mexico's boundaries face outward (in the direction of the U.S.), and the U.S. boundaries also face outward (in the direction of Mexico). Consequently, the border as a boundary of Mexico penetrates into the interior of the U.S., and vice versa. The border exists, then, as a gap that opens to the other, and this constitutes the empty space between Mexico and the United States. Thus, the border makes them neither one nor two.

Although the testimony of zzz and fnt in "The Empty Chair" captures a conflict, in fact, it represents the border's dual mode of operation. According to zzz, fnt used his authority to oppress zzz and prevent him from crossing. However, according to fnt's rebuttal, fnt let zzz cross several times and zzz simply does not remember. The confusion caused by these discrepancies in testimony reveals the complex nature of the border, which is difficult to understand from conventional thinking. Here, we can see that the border plays a dual role: allowing people to cross and at the same time preventing them from crossing.

The border, which widens the gap between Mexico and the United States, is not an exclusive part that only corresponds to each country, but becomes the exterior and the limit of the neighboring country; the body from Nancy's theory does not manage to be a whole with only its own parts and these are always the exteriors of another body simultaneously.⁴ Likewise, the body entails a movement that continually expands outward (p. 109), without a fixed identity or essence of its own, because it transforms incessantly without an established interiority. The body or the border, in this case, pushes its limit to its extreme. The following dialogue in Chapter VI of "The Empty Chair" reveals the outward movement of the U.S.-Mexico border:

zzz: I have tried to reach it. I've wanted to have her. Nothing is possible with her. It leaves, it moves away, it changes its shape. It moves when I least expect it. It changes.

aaa: How does your Border do that?

zzz: I don't know, it moves. I can't transcend it if it's constantly moving. I can't transcend it if it is constantly growing: it expands.

⁴ This mode of disassembly is called "*parts extra parts*" (Nancy, 2000, p. 33); a mechanism that shows the exposure of bodies to the outside.

aaa: Could you clarify?

zzz: You don't understand me. Of course, I don't understand myself. It is complicated.

It's just a Border. It may not even be that (pp. 99-100).

As can be seen in the dialogue, zzz states that the border between Mexico and the United States possesses an expansive characteristic, and this continuous movement driven by such expansion generates a self-difference; it is not a point that remains fixed in one place while it is closed, but a line that expands. For zzz, fnt is a complex entity that cannot be signified nor converted into discourse, due to its constant movement and expansion. Therefore, for the Mexicans represented in zzz, the border would be a void that cannot be understood or conceived as knowledge.

As zzz points out, the border can be 'a border', at the same time that it might not be. In the dual thought of Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology, existence is not conceived as an opposition between form and non-form, but as something that exists in non-form (*non-form*; p. 67).⁵ In this double conception, form and non-form are intertwined like the two sides of a coin. They oscillate between being and non-being, they open and close. It is not a fixed point locked in place, but a line that expands, that is formed through opening and manifestation, without a pre-existing entity. Therefore, it cannot be said to be simply present or absent. Existence is not an embodiment in which a transcendental entity is introduced into the body, but a movement of openness in which beings differentiate themselves from themselves (p. 32). Thus, the border exists in such a way that openness and closure, being and non-being, overlap. The border of the story extends outward and penetrates the other country, and this expansion transforms Mexico and the United States into a 'one and two' entity.

The condition of existence: suspension

⁵ As argued in the chapter *Aphalle et acéphale (Aphallus and acephale)*, since the body is not understood as meaning, it exists only as a possibility or a spacing (*espacement*), without essence or substance (Nancy, 2000, pp. 14-18).

In this section, it would be appropriate to begin with the following questions, what are the necessary conditions for the existence of the border and how does the border relate to us today? To understand the establishment and origin of the border between the two countries, it is necessary to recall a first level of delimitation, associated with the birth of the States, when an administrative border was established between the two countries, in 1848 and in 1853,⁶ which constituted the true demarcation that embodied both concordance and separation.

One might consider that this history is not written from a diachronic perspective, but from Walter Benjamin's 'messianic instant' (1989, p. 191), or the 'here and now'. It does not exist as a complete whole with a beginning and an end, but as a possibility in itself (Nancy, 2000, p. 15). The delimitation of the border did not acquire its meaning through order and sequence, but was simply born as a being thrown there. Moments like that - in which meaning stops - accumulate to form history, understood as a sequential and continuous space-time, which cannot exist without these points of discontinuity, instants in which meaning is suspended. Such moments, understood as historicity and as events, allow progress through suspension, just as we can only keep our eyes open for a lifetime because we blink. The 'historical poetics of the instant', in Kairotic terms, has no purpose (*télos*), no end, nor does it imply progress. It is not the Kantian synthetic experience, but the experience of shock, the experience of the event, that constitutes history (Kim, 2006, p. 93).

It can be said, then, that history is also a body. Body that is 'event' and 'experience' that suspends linear representation. War, in particular, is a representative example of the cubist shock that is experienced as a fragmented event (Kim, 2006, p. 94). Thus, the fragments are not simply particularities, but open themselves up to each other. Therefore, the suspension allows for the 'embrace' between them. At the moment an event occurs, we are unaware that it is a knot and a suspension, but then it is recovered and re-signified in the form of reminiscence. History, although inevitably inscribed in the real world in chronological

⁶ The key treaties in terms of border delimitation between two countries are those of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and La Mesilla (1853), which marked the current limits (Piñera, 1989).

order, the writing of history only reaches our horizon of understanding through the signification that reminds us of its impossibility and limits. This process of 'rewinding' is not simply going against the flow of diachronic time, but is about Proustian involuntary memory impacting units of events (Son, 2015, p. 295). The book *Corpus* also argues that history manifests itself through the sacrifices and wounds of bodies (Nancy, 2000, p. 70), since openness is not an object of knowledge, so we are not aware of it. Chapter IV of "The Empty Chair" reveals an incident that provokes a halt in that sense. It occurs when fnt, speaking to aaa, reveals the specific moment when zzz began to call her 'Border':

fnt: It's complicated.

aaa: ...

fnt: There were happy times between us. There were... But he [zzz] changed.

aaa: Just him?

fnt: Calling me Frontier, that's recent. He started calling me that when he realized that his life was not working. (p. 96)

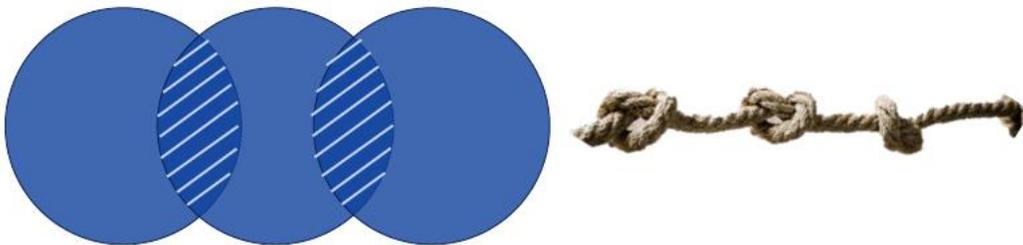
Thus, as an entity capable of crossing the border and with the need and desire to cross it, zzz began to call it "border" only after his life fell apart. In light of history, this significant event can be interpreted as a clash between Mexico and the United States. Prior to this, the physical border between the two countries had always existed, but it was only after the special event of geographic and administrative demarcation that the conditions for the border's existence were established and the function of guarding it began to be performed.

As mentioned, through the gap called border, Mexico and the United States become, then, an element that is neither one nor two. The border is both a line and an empty space. The border is body (*corps*), this body continues to expand and move, as the Mexican border points outward from itself and the U.S. border points outward from itself and the U.S. border points outward from itself. In this process, each country becomes familiar but unfamiliar and unable to possess itself. In opening themselves to each other, the two countries touch; touching is conceptually impossible, but they do so infinitely. In this way,

the two nations exist as "being-outside," and through this they become a "being-to-infinity" (Ramirez, 2017, p. 55).

Moreover, this movement of the body outward creates a gap, which constitutes the event as suspension. History, which is usually understood as progressive and continuous, is actually a set of 'events', of instants in which meaning ceases. These instants of discontinuity move the story forward, as can be seen in diagram 2. The event as testimony and recounting of zzz, which resulted from the interrogation of aaa, is also an example of suspension. The characters in the story approach each other through dialogue and the impact is produced through meaningful utterances.

Diagram 2. A knot as a point of discontinuity that makes historical progress possible.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the story, the experience of the border is not the actual experience of an individual facing the border while standing in line, but rather a shocking event that is then reproduced as a statement by an interlocutor such as a psychologist (aaa), written on paper by the author, and recalled after the fact. While the border always moves at its own pace, these suddenly occurring events become the body and history of the border. This interpretation is consistent with Nancy's interpretation that statements have a space (*espace*; Nancy, 2000, p. 25). Descartes, who preceded Nancy, also claimed in *Ego Sum* that existence or *ego* is the result of the performative act. The act of speaking itself is an actual situation and a spacing (pp. 28-29). That resurgence inscribes the event in history, in the present, and transforms its utterance into the event. Thus, the rupture of language is an actual event. This is a point of clear distinction with the story "The Row." While "The Row" vividly captures the real-time

coexistence of borders and the "I" and renders it on the canvas of the text,⁷ "The Empty Chair" belatedly records the process of memory and production, as a biography of the border itself.

The Other in the United States

Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical proposal suggests that two bodied beings exist as distinct from each other, yet within an indistinction ("*On dira donc plutôt: un corps indistinct/distinct*"; p. 35). They are two 'singular' beings but in contact with each other. Therefore, the action of sharing is what makes distinction and unity possible at the same time. This idea can be applied to the border represented in Crosthwaite's stories. As confirmed in the previous section, the border between Mexico and the United States exists in the way Nancy explains about the body, and such logic would also apply to the two countries.

Ontologically speaking, Mexico and the United States are already inside each other. They cannot close because each is embedded in the other as a rupture that prevents completeness. Thus, it could be argued that Mexicans are embedded in the United States, Americans are embedded in Mexico, and that they are in permanent contact. In this section, we will demonstrate the ontological aspects of the border in two popular *Hollywood* films to expand the understanding of the concept represented by Crosthwaite in his narratives. By identifying additional narrative strategies in the films that highlight or conceal such aspects, it will be possible to draw from them a social implication related to the coexistence of two countries. Films, *per se*, function as places where events or clashes occur, so they could also serve as an effective means to show where semantics stop and where history can be contemplated.

The depiction of the border, immigrants, and aliens in the 1997 Steven Spielberg-produced *Men in Black (MIB)*, along with its 2002 sequel-both of which were huge successes

⁷ The story "La Fila" begins with the phrase "I'm standing in line, standing in line, I'm standing in line to leave the country" (p. 19). The scene captured in real time by an individual waiting in line to cross the border is described using the present or present continuous tense.

at the box office-supports the previous sections in two ways. First, the opening scene of the first film in the series clearly shows the movement away from the border. The film begins in Mexico and presents images of illegal immigrants and aliens crossing the border. Between the two directions of movement, the film focuses on the outward movement of Mexicans. However, as the film progresses, the narrative strategy of otherness is added. A truck carrying them is stopped by U.S. Border Patrol agents as it attempts to cross the border from Mexico. The *MIB* agents join in and intercept the immigrants, capturing and killing the aliens disguised as humans. Thus, the 'illegal' immigrants are not only depicted as non-human monsters, but are also attacked and ultimately violently destroyed. Otherness focuses on the difference and division between two groups of individuals, creating an artificial border between Mexico and the United States. This is apparently an attempt at absolute demarcation, which is in fact impossible, through the reproduction of negative stereotypes about those who cross the border; but this exercise supports the ontological character of the border, as reproduced in the literary work, as the impossibility of completely separating two territories (See **Frames I and II**).

Frame 1. *Men in Black I*



Source: Spielberg, 1997.

Frame 2. *Men in Black II*



Source: Parkes *et.al.*, 2002.

Secondly, the film makes sure that the two countries are incorporated into each other, inevitably touching each other. The second film (2002) shows how many entities are deeply contained within the other society. For example, in *MIB II*, alien immigrants settle into different parts of American society and successfully fulfill their roles. In the frame above, an alien has integrated into human society and uses his eight arms to perform jobs with extraordinary strength. The aliens, who were portrayed as foreign immigrants at the beginning of the first film, had initially been rejected, but soon adapt well to American society and, moreover, become the foundation of that society, symbolizing the real contribution of immigrants to that American society.⁸ The description of aliens active in places that are not easily accessible is reminiscent of the "strange foreign bodies" by the presence of the Other of self that Nancy explains ("*étranges corps étrangers*"; p. 10). Mexicans, who are marginalized as the undesirable Other in the United States, turn out to be a familiar

⁸ Significantly, Latinos in the U.S., who represent about 20 percent of the population, contribute approximately 30 percent of the growth in Gross Domestic Product (Alvarado, 2025).

population well integrated into U.S. society without their realizing it. The presence of Mexicans in the neighboring country creates a self-difference of the United States, making its own body (as a country) seem familiar and at the same time strange. It is worth recalling Freud's (2007, p. 241) concept of the ominous or sinister (*das Unheimliche*), which is expressed when someone encounters something that is unfamiliar to them but would, in fact, be inherently familiar to them even if they do not perceive it as such.⁹ Similarly, there is no absolute Other, but rather Americans and Mexicans in the context of U.S. society would exist in a relationship of equality as they depend on each other. Consequently, we can 'embrace' the singularity and plurality of existence based on existential communitarianism (Son, 2015, p. 301) and accept, paradoxically, the unity achieved through distinction. The narrative of the second film, which addresses the sinister of the U.S. body, reiterates the difficulty of distinguishing the strange, the alien, and the non-human between beings from both countries and seeks a healthy coexistence between them.

From Nancy's philosophy of 'between', one could understand that the 'I' that has entered the other being and the other being that has entered the 'I' are different, resulting in an 'I' that is already different from the primordial 'I'. In this way, one would interpret the otherness and the ominous in MIB as strategies to hide the false, the 'not-self' that results from self-difference. However, as Julia Kristeva says, "[t]he other is my (own) unconscious" (Kristeva and Vericat, 1996, p. 360). According to the psychoanalytic interpretation, the Other that a person has created is actually the projection of himself and a double image that he carries deep within himself. Therefore, logically there cannot be an Other as a substance that exists independently outside of itself. Just as zzz, each character exists as a body, including fnt (the Border); there is only the movement of things within its gap expanding outside itself. The body, from its very existence, is first and foremost and always already the Other: "Un corps est toujours ob-jecté du dehors, à moi ou à autrui. Les corps sont d'abord et sont toujours autres" [A body is always objected from outside, to me or to others. Bodies

⁹ "This ominousness is not indeed something new or alien, but something familiar of old to the soul life, only alienated from it by the process of repression" (Freud, 2007, p.241). This term can be interpreted as a psychological phenomenon of "disturbing strangeness" (Kristeva and Vericat, 1996, p. 359).

come first and are always others]. (Nancy, 2000, p. 29). Even 'I' is different from 'self' because of the self-difference caused by the gap, so the logic of demarcation that rejects the Other by emphasizing the difference between 'I' and 'what is not me' is no longer valid. Establishing boundaries between 'I' and the Other is as absurd as insisting that an 'I' is the only 'I'. In the end, what is important is not whether it is 'I' or the Other, but the fact that everything and every singular entity are bodies, and that this is how our world is shaped, in particular, the text of "The Empty Chair" which in the adjective of the title is trying to signify the whole ontological problem we have tried to elucidate with our analysis.

In Steven Spielberg's science fiction films, Mexico and the United States appear distinct because of semantic and to some extent superficial differences, but they are not essentially separate, conveying a sense similar to that of the representation of the border in Crosthwaite's literary texts: there is no being that functions as the Other between the bodies. The fact that the two characters in "The Empty Chair" are named "aaa" and "zzz" prefigures both countries bordering each other, Mexico and the United States, which are on the shores, at the extremes of the same environment and, at the same time, in a dialogue where as characters they only have one letter repeated as the name of the same code (alphabet) comprising both Spanish and English. It should be noted that although they are two extremes in the sense that they are the beginning and the end of the alphabet, they also form a union where they touch each other in a circular loop. By the end of the story of "The Empty Chair," the implications for all borders are already at zzz, and the reader senses that aaa is using psychological counseling techniques to bring to light points of which the characters are simply unaware. While the story unfolds with the existence of fnt (border) represented as a corporeal female character, the speech and space of this character is essentially indistinguishable from zzz. This is explained precisely by the concept that the body, from Nancy's theory, contains the Other within itself. Here a speculation about aaa and zzz becomes possible: beyond the 'rupture of boundaries' between zzz and fnt, we could claim that the boundary between aaa and zzz is also non-existent. In fact, it is likely that only the character zzz exists and that all semantic extraction operations come only from zzz. Finally,

the exercise of reading both literary and cinematographic works about the border between Mexico and the United States applying Nancy's philosophy allows us to interpret another aspect of the border, now in its ontological nature, which implies a social sense of mutual recognition and coexistence between two countries.

Conclusion

In this article, we have analyzed how the U.S.-Mexico border exists as an event/an entity that is both open and closed at the same time. Mainly, with the analysis of "The Empty Chair" and from Nancy's philosophical ideas, we have tried to show that both border countries become a 'union' with a gap inside. Through this *post hoc* work of signification, we have confirmed the limitations of semantics and the need for an appeal to ontology to prove that the Mexico-US border is a body. The U.S.-Mexico border is a body.

The exploration of the U.S.-Mexico border, in *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera México-EE*. The exploration of the US-Mexico border, in *Instructions for crossing the border*, has allowed us to compare and analyze three texts in which the border was described only as a space containing landscapes and described as an ontological line. Thus, the need for an ontological understanding of borders has been reclaimed. The border between Mexico and the United States is characterized as being between two countries that are very distant in another sense, if we consider that the border delimits and presents a stark contrast between the core of the First World empire and the periphery of the Third World (Kim, 2015, p. 92). Functionally, the border separates territories and serves a distinctive role between the two sides, but, at the same time, it serves as a conduit for people to enter and exit. Through the border, Mexico and the U.S. touch each other, creating a gap within themselves. In this way, the two countries become a union, rather than two separate nations in that space. This discussion should not be interpreted as a blurring of the borders between the two countries. Rather, it is proposed as a coexistence of separation and unity.

In his book *Corpus*, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy describes a body that pushes its limits further. Mexican writer Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, in his book of short stories

Instructions for Crossing the Border, describes the border from the perspective of a Mexican living near the border zone. He uses his own experiences of crossing it and, in this work, the endless and challenging scenes related to the border are examined in "Recomendaciones" and "La fila". Later, in "La silla vacía", he explores how Mexicans are interpreting the border, from a perspective of domination, examining the conditions of existence of the border as a moment of suspension.

The body exists as an opening to the outside, having in itself a gap that cannot be signified. The experience of infinitely approaching the unreachable indicates that the body is always Other to itself. The U.S.-Mexico border possesses a duality in which the border both opens and closes. Instead of following a unidirectional flow of time, opening and closing coexist with a special rhythm. The U.S. border moves inward into Mexico, while the Mexican border moves inward into the U.S. In the dialogue of Chapter VI of "The Empty Chair," the characteristics of the border expanding outward and moving are apparent. The body that exists as (non)form is one and two at the same time. It is a body that separates and shares, as it is in disjunction and identity according to the text.

The basis for drawing boundaries is found in moments of suspension in history. By writing history as a 'history of moments', rather than understanding it as a continuous progress and development, the body can be accessed as an experience and event that cannot be signified. Disruptive experiences that impact as flashes allow for both openness and 'embrace'. Thus, history is recorded through involuntary recollections of events that are remembered, and this is precisely what constitutes history.

Furthermore, the discussion could be extended to another form of representation: film. Like books, films can emphasize the limitations of semantics while appealing to ontology. In the present article, it has been analyzed how Latin American immigrants, including Mexicans, are portrayed in U.S. society as configured in films, confirming that the mode and condition of border existence are represented both in films and in Crosthwaite's texts. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the films use the additional logic of otherness that confounds the Nancyan way of understanding the border. In this way, we

have shown how Nancy's communitarian theory could play an important role in the interpretation of the coexistence of Mexico and the United States at their border, as well as the ontological understanding of the 'being' of that Other body.

Finally, throughout this article, it has been analyzed how the US-Mexico border is more than just a space where people wait to migrate to the United States, rather it is an event and an experience that exists only as a stop that opens and closes at the same time. A deeper understanding of borders will be possible when we realize that two countries with common borders are like bodies that exist in a union that cannot be avoided, whatever the political and historical circumstances.

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