

(SAS2019-10762) - ANIMATING THE BORDER UNDERGROUND

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Abstract

Both the blockbuster film *Fast and Furious* (2009) and the videogame *Call of Juarez: El Cartel* (2011) feature an underground border tunnel at pivotal junctures within their diegesis. Characters navigate the unknown geography rendered by computer generated animations, which provide granularity and texture to otherwise inaccessible locales. These media tunnels are not only animated but also animating: presenting extravagant structures which the audiences encounter with a mix of dazzlement and reticence. Because these animations expand, exaggerate, and warp the functions of the border tunnel, I argue, they also reveal key insights about the symbolic work that this figure performs in the popular imaginary.

In this paper, I illustrate how animations of border tunnels become sites for “plastic orientations” that enable new cognitive mappings of transnational connections. Engaging scholarly work on the border as an epistemological intervention, I argue for the border tunnel as a malleable figure capable of instigating epistemic shifts. This paper brings together close reading and technical analysis of tunnel animations with theories of plasticity and animation as forms of relating to the world. I conclude that, in their capacities to suspend disbelief and foreground artificiality, animated renderings of underground spaces fosters a cognitive plasticity that upends not only the purpose of border tunnels but also the role that borders themselves play in the social imaginary.

Palavras-chave : borders, videogames, tunnels, geography, plasticity