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# BOUNDARIES

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## THE TWO SIDES OF THE BORDER

When we say border, the first thing that comes to mind is a line – a thin line on a map. But the moment you try to cross that line, you understand: a border is not a line, it is an experience. It leaves its mark on the body, is transmitted across generations, changes the path of water, rewrites the memory of the land. The border is not merely geographical; it is simultaneously legal fiction, military apparatus, economic machine, psychic wound, identity category, and bodily experience – all at once.

Movement along borders is not equally distributed. Some move freely – visa privilege, the mobility of capital. Others are impeded or criminalised – migrants, the poor, racialised bodies. The question is always the same: Who moves? Under what conditions? With whose permission?

"My grandfather was exiled. My father became a refugee. I grew up with a fear I could not name. Borders passed through bodies, through generations."

To understand border politics, one must first ask what a border does. Who drew this border? Is it real, or imposed? What does this border make possible, and what impossible? Borders do not only restrict movement; they determine who and what something is. A "border citizen" is a different kind of being from an unbounded subject. Borders produce categories – refugee, migrant, citizen, Other.

Every narrative of border-crossing reaffirms the border itself. "I crossed the border" or "I was stranded at the border" – both consolidate the reality of the border. But what if we spoke of the commons instead? For thousands of years, people lived on shared lands. It is only in the last fifty to five hundred years that these lands have been nationalised, fenced, bounded. When we say "migrant," we are speaking of people whose commons have been stolen – people who are fundamentally displaced. To recover the memory of what was common before borders disrupts their naturalness.

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## THE RAIN PRAYER AND JUSTICE

Someone who speaks of the limits of journalism takes us somewhere quite different: to the drought-stricken villages of Anatolia. What she finds while researching the tradition of the rain prayer is far more than a meteorological ritual.

"Food is gathered, cooked together, brought to the poorest family in the village. An elder says: 'Perhaps for the sake of these small animals, God will accept our prayer.' This is justice not as a concept but as lived practice. The sacralisation of mutual dependence."

The rain prayer is in fact a border practice – it stands at the border between the visible and the invisible, the scientific and the spiritual, the individual and the collective. The person researching it discovered the ritual while practising climate journalism. She exists somewhere between professional journalism and activism, between gathering clear information and living with uncertainty. She cannot remain within the professional borders of the media world; because what she is narrating overflows those borders. She collects clear information about walls, dams, conflicts – but carries a permanent ambiguity about what to do with that knowledge.

In moments of crisis there is clarity – a wall, a dam, a conflict; visible, documentable. Crisis generates projects. But in times outside of crisis, ambiguity covers everything and the feeling of dispersion grows. How does one stay with that ambiguity? The absence of resolution, if it is not paralysis, is perhaps a field of possibility. One must resist the urge to resolve too quickly. Moving with ambiguity – but by including others, preventing ambiguity from turning into paralysis.

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## REMAINDERS AND WITNESSING

Someone who practises video activism explains that documentation is not a simple act of recording. While working with migrants, she began to concern herself with remainders – those who remain behind, those who are not counted, those excluded from the official narrative. Remainders, beyond their status as an economic concept, represent the people, stories, and experiences that are rendered invisible.

"At a certain point, we were no longer documenting borders – the borders crossed us. The gap between the filmed image and the lived experience became the actual material. We became what we were working on."

Documentation participates in the act of world-making. It renders erased actors visible. But documentation itself also draws a border – between this side and the other side of the camera. Who speaks? Who listens? In whose interest? These questions constitute both the power and the ethical responsibility of witnessing.

The concept of "remainders" here is far more than an economic term. It is every experience, every story, every person left outside the official narrative. The act of collecting – archiving, redistributing – is a practice carried out without any claim to authorship. To be a collector is not to possess but to transmit. And this transmission is itself a border violation: it tests the border of what is counted as valuable, the border of what counts as news, the border of who has the right to speak.

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## INVERTED MAPS

An artist speaks of the effect of turning the world map upside down. Africa at the top, Europe at the bottom. The same geography – a different response from the nervous system. This visual inversion exposes how artificial our normalised divisions are.

"White feathers at the entrance – softness, care, beginning. Black feathers at the exit – intensity, ending. Visitors moved through the feathers towards the stars. The cosmic perspective made borders absurd."

Artistic practice is not the illustration of concepts. It is a mode of producing knowledge that cannot be reached by other means. Inverted maps, feather installations, breath recordings – these are not aesthetic preferences but epistemological interventions.

For an artist who comes from a refugee family, the border has never been an abstract concept. She grew up in Izmir but was never quite "from there." The inherited experience of displacement within the family is a constant reminder of the bodily dimension of the border. In her work *Strange Fruit* – the title borrowed from Billie Holiday's song – she turns the world upside down. The southern hemisphere above, the north below. It is the same planet, but when the perspective changes, the nervous system goes into shock. Our normalised hierarchy is nothing other than a cultural choice encoded in the Mercator projection. Working at the border between different modes of thought: walking, breathing, collecting-witnessing, inverting.

All ask the same question: when borders shift, how do we know differently?

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## WHAT IS CALLED A SECURITY DAM

Someone who walks the Northern Forests defence line follows the traces of quarries to track the city's expanding borders. The more stone is extracted, the further the boundary retreats. We are all complicit in moving that extraction line.

"In the Şırnak–Hakkari border zone, eleven dams have been built – dams with zero function as water management infrastructure. Entirely military. The concept of 'security dam' does not exist in world literature. We invented it by accident."

Water knows no borders, but borders define water. As dams alter the flow of water, they also redefine the living conditions of every creature in that region. Ecological boundaries precede and structure political ones. You cannot separate water, geology, and ecology from political borders – borders reshape ecosystems. A water laboratory project travels across different regions, bringing together local actors – farmers, engineers, activists, researchers – around questions of water. The facilitator role matters: not to be the expert, but to create the space for different people to think together about shared water problems.

The walking route becomes a monitoring tool. Participants' photographs become a collective document of urban transformation. Participatory walking against expert planning – the democratisation of knowledge production.

But water is not only Istanbul's problem. Another voice, engaged in environmental justice mapping, speaks of a global network: India, Latin America, Africa, the Balkans. Which communities carry the ecological cost of economic growth? To whom do the resources belong? Who profits, who suffers? Maps themselves generate dialogue – activists enter data, reframe their own struggles as part of a global pattern. This work is consciously oriented from North to South and from South to South – it is not extractive research imposing Northern categories. Researchers do not study communities; they help already-organising communities articulate their own analyses. Knowledge production shifts from academic extractivism to a movement-centred practice.

## POSITIONING ONESELF AS STARDUST

Someone who relocated to Mardin begins her account with the story of the locust. In shamanic tradition, the locust's leap signals a life change – good or bad, uncertain. She stays four years. The leap still moves her.

"In the associate professorship examination, the question was asked: 'How do you position yourself?' The most honest answer emerged: 'I position myself as stardust.' My practice refuses fixed positioning, remaining scattered and at a fundamental level."

This dispersal is not an escape but an ethical stance. She researches the difference between collective mourning and living the mourning – different languages, different contexts, different peoples. Where words prove inadequate, she begins to collect the sounds of breath from people who have lived through trauma. But using others' breath recordings is at first not ethical. The solution: first to record her own breath while speaking of her own losses with a psychologist. Only then does the right to work with others' sounds arise. Danger, discomfort, the crossing of limits – necessary for growth. Childhood dives, working through trauma through breath, learning to live in unfamiliar places, refusing the separation between art/life/knowledge – these are all parts of the same movement.

This person who left a private school after Gezi to go to Mardin Artuklu University to found a Faculty of Fine Arts describes the fear of detaching from Istanbul through the metaphor of a fish out of water. But in Uganda, in Rwanda, in the back of a bus without suspension, feeling the ground directly, witnessing post-traumatic recovery, she feels most "at home." This "discomfort" is more authentic than a security-based sense of belonging. She makes coded maps but never completes them – while conventional maps show coordinates, her maps show how a place reveals itself through gaze, through bodily attention.

On the border between Eskişehir and Yenişehir, she draws a large rock face for eight hours while Erdoğan's speech plays on the radio above. The drawing becomes a map: in which direction each point faces, what is visible in each

direction — electricity lines, an old Armenian cemetery, a fortress open to some and closed to others. Pressing too hard with the pen opens a hole in the paper — the physical metaphor of how attention can damage.

## DOCUMENTATION OR REPAIR?

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This is the most striking question of the session: are we only documenting, or is repair possible? Perhaps only self-repair is possible — but a collective self-repair requires an evolutionary leap. Documentation is not passive — it renders erased actors visible, participates in the act of world-making, carries the risk of transforming what it records. But to move beyond documentation, to advance towards remaking the world — what that looks like is not yet clear. The question remains open, and perhaps it must.

"Animals know no borders — water flows under walls. If we restructure ecology with borders, we transform everything."

In open discussion, a voice proposes stopping the celebration of border-crossing and instead questioning the border itself. Narratives of border-crossing re-legitimise the border. The real issue is to remember what was common before the border — water, land, practices. This historical memory work disrupts the naturalness of borders.

Another voice speaks of gender functioning as a border. A model who stops shaving her legs receives rape threats. When you cross certain borders, you encounter the power that protects that border. Power wants you to remain "legible," to be comprehensible within existing categories. Bodies become border markers; refusing compliance is an act of refusing categorisation.

The voices that came together in this session, though arriving from different disciplines, converge on a common question: how can we understand borders without naturalising them? Without romanticising border-crossing, without idealising borderlessness, while acknowledging the reality that borders both protect and restrict. Some borders protect us, some allow us to think, some restrict us unjustly. The distinction between imposed borders and chosen ones matters. The researcher draws analytic borders in order to understand — but does not confuse these analytic borders with lived borders. Distinguishing which is which is an ongoing practice.

"I felt alone. This session breaks that solitude and shows that parallel work is being done across different disciplines. We do not have to do this alone."

A voice speaks of the desire for collaboration: the excitement of combining what has been collected in dispersed form with what others have collected in different forms, and of transforming these collections together. Another wants to open a dialogue about how state power operates through water and dams. Another asks how internalised borders shape what we consider possible. Each voice presents its own practice as a proposal — not as an answer, but as an invitation to think together.

The energy of the boundaries session is the energy of productive ambiguity — oriented not towards resolving questions but deepening them, not towards writing prescriptions but remaining with curiosity. Participants express the relief of finding others who ask similar questions in apparently distant fields. No discipline is sufficient alone. To understand boundaries requires bodily, artistic, activist, academic, and affective modes simultaneously.

The ethical commitment underlying the work is clear: to render visible, to witness, and to sustain a practice of solidarity across borders — while attending to how our own documentary practices may be rewriting the very borders we seek to understand.