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From the *limes* to the *limen*. Space-theoretical Remarks on the Concept of Boundary.

Life is a Train Journey

The international proverb “life is a train journey,” which appears in several languages, metaphorically points to the uncertainty of the destination, the coming and going of fellow travelers/life encounters, and the importance of the journey itself rather than the arrival. However, the metaphorical potential of this expression is not fully exhausted: following the parallel to life, a train journey also provides insight into *how* passengers share an existential journey and *under what conditions* they travel in the same train.

“Sitting in the same carriage” may have a different meaning from “sitting in the same boat,” because a train has *compartments*. Through these compartments, people are brought into a semantic relationship both *in terms of possessing certain characteristics and in terms of being situated in distinct, separated spaces*. The metaphorical figure of the train compartment thus metaphorizes a very particular concept of community.

Let us, as a brief thought experiment, assume that in a hypothetical train, people with the attribute “first-class passenger” are separated and distinguished from second-class passengers by spatial boundaries (like doors, walls). Moreover, these two groups of people, each endowed with two different attributes, are also separated from all other groups of people outside the train by yet another boundary – the one that physically constitutes the train and its body. A first-class passenger is, so to speak, “internally” separated from a second-class passenger (since the train’s compartments differentiate all passengers from one another), while all passengers are at the same time separated from the set of “externally located,” non-passengers. Such a trivially described principle of compartmentalization suggests the metaphor of a community enclave within which classifications of attributes are made valid and visible through spatial partitions. In addition, further differentiations could be addressed

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that follow a similar logic – such as the separation of driver and conductor compartments, or dining cars or service compartments, and so forth. These forms of compartmentalization would follow the same principle described above. Finally, outside the train and its respective property-based divisions remain all those other, unspecified people who stand as an opaque, thematically irrelevant mass beyond these considerations.

A dynamic of inclusion and exclusion such as the one described through the metaphorical figure of the train compartment is evidently based on a particular *concept of space* – namely, *space as a container*. A train compartment is also a bounded, enclosed space that contains and houses people. This conception of space can, in many respects, be subjected to critique, for example in a critical analysis of space as a container in contemporary spatial theory (Dünne/Günzel 2006). The inadequacy and obsolescence of the container concept of space within spatial theory may provide yet another indication for adopting a critical perspective on the related notion of community. Compartments, after all, concern communities understood as groups of people endowed with different attributes and situated within spatial containers.

Jean-Luc Nancy hints at the inadequacy of such a concept of community – and not coincidentally does so by drawing on the metaphor of the train compartment:

To begin with, the logic of being-with corresponds to nothing other than what we could call the banal phenomenology of unorganized groups of people. Passengers in the same train compartment are simply seated next to each other in an accidental, arbitrary, and completely exterior manner. They are not linked. But they are also quite together inasmuch as they are travelers on this train, in this same space and for this same period of time. They are between the disintegration of the “crowd” and the aggregation of the group, both extremes remaining possible, virtual, and near at every moment. This suspension is what makes “being-with”: a relation without relation, or rather, being exposed simultaneously to relationship and to absence of relationship (Nancy 1991, 7).

Communities that are constituted by boundaries such as train compartments and the spatial logic associated with them would, in this respect, amount merely to a being-alongside one another – people who are situated only “accidentally” within the possibility of a relation (in the present example, for the purpose of traveling). Train-compartment passengers could thus be understood as strangers situated in the same enclosed place yet isolated from one another (and not as actors of community). Even on a real train, one sits among strangers, each staring autologically at their iPhone or another device.

Although Nancy uses the metaphor of the train compartment as an example of such an inauthentic being-with (a being-alongside in the same

enclosed space), he does not, however, offer a more detailed phenomenological analysis of that. For this reason, the figure will be examined more closely here, for it concerns nothing less than a boundary.

Walls and Boundaries

Let us begin with a concrete exposition of the figures which are involved by Nancy's short text. A train compartment is firmly structured by walls. A wall – and this also applies to the partition wall between compartments – is generally conceived, in a privative and partly misleading way, as a boundary (between two compartments).

Interestingly, the term “boundary” was also used in the context of certain military units that were designated precisely as “border divisions”. Among the most important historical prototypes of boundaries that also fulfilled a military function was the Roman *limes*. A cursory look at depictions of the *limes* – such as that from the time of Emperor Hadrian – reveals, beyond the grandiose power of an empire that through its expansionist ambitions was able to conquer a territory comparable to present-day Europe, North Africa, and the Near East, a boundary functioning as a relatively clear line of distinction. On this side of the boundary lies the red-marked, heterogeneous “Roman sphere,” consisting of Rome, the empire, the provinces, and military zones, while the grey-marked area depicts an undifferentiated “non-Roman sphere”:

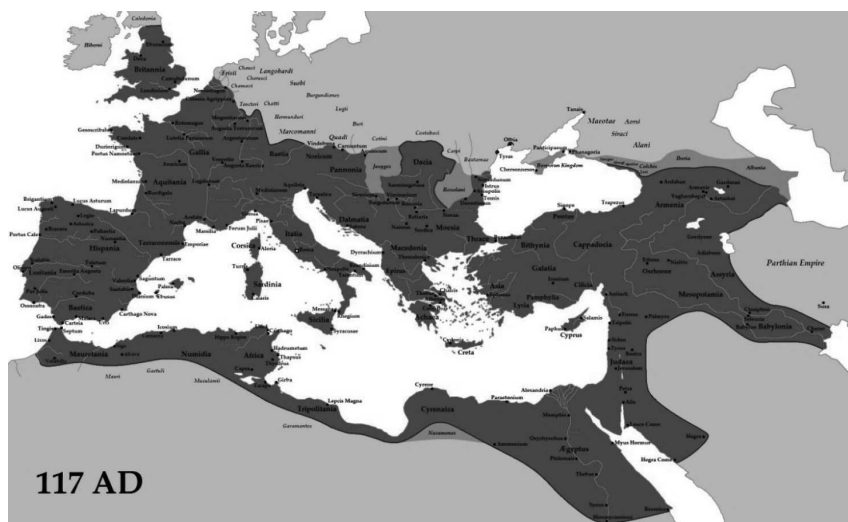


Figure 1: Roman *limes* in the year 117 A.D., in https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limes_romano

The image represents a snapshot of the Roman Empire. At this historical peak, however, the Roman Empire was in fact confronted with a great diversity of peoples who were categorized as non-Roman by means of the *limes*. What we see here is evidently a form of subsumption that obscured the differences within the non-Roman sphere, for the various non-Roman populations were not perceived in terms of their respective, differentiated specific characteristics; rather, the boundary produced the unified and leveling attribute of the enemy to be conquered. Only after the conquest of a particular people did Roman policy initiate the process of incorporating the foreigners – a process that involved, among other things, recognition and, in certain cases, even the preservation of particular characteristics of the conquered population. But before non-Roman territories were annexed by the Roman Empire, the *limes* functioned as a frontier – a demarcation line at which Romans and non-Romans stood opposite one another in an asymmetrical relation (Koselleck 2004, 155-191). In this respect, the Roman *limes* designated what stands opposite (*frons*) by means of an unequal, binary, and asymmetrical differentiation, in a manner similar to the way in which the internally differentiated passengers of a train are separated from an indeterminate totality of non-train-traveling people. The *limes*, in this regard, was thus permeated by an asymmetrical logic of binary opposition.

Yet an interesting additional dynamic becomes visible in the case of the *limes* – one that constitutes the essential difference between a boundary and a mere compartment wall. The *limes* is, of course, a *cum-finis* (Italian *confine*: boundary), that is, a *shared end*. Beyond this – and this is not immediately apparent in the visual depictions of the *limes* – there is the mobility of the *limes* itself, or what can be defined as the extension potential of a boundary: the *limes* was a boundary capable of expansion, for it belonged to its very nature that it was continually pushed forward. Boundary and transgression stand in a close relation: “The latent temptation toward transgression thus becomes the boundary’s constant companion. [...] To repeatedly reach the limits of one’s own potential for expansion belongs to the fate of the human being” (Mayer-Tasch 2013, 44; translated by the author).

Such an extension potential of the boundary always goes hand in hand with its function of *connection*. By being displaced, the boundary turns what was previously beyond the boundary into what lies on this side of it. This becomes clearer when one focuses on a segment of the *limes*, the Upper German-Rhaetian *limes*:

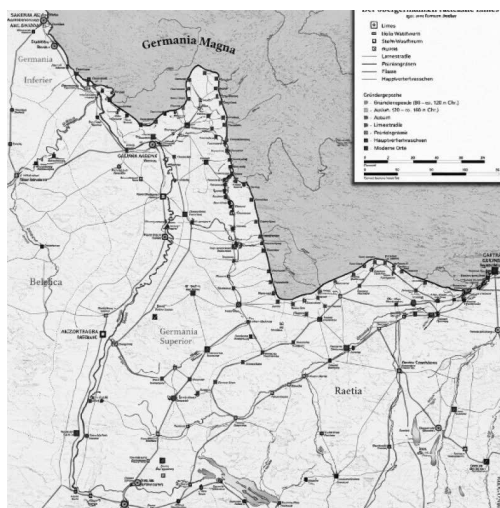


Figure 2: Upper Germanic – Raetian Limes (ORL), in https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obergermanisch-Raetischer_Limes

The legend illustrates different degrees and stages of annexation: several territories that were previously non-Roman are transformed into Roman territory by a movable boundary line that pushes forward, including through regular Roman city foundations. Such a frontier therefore is not limited to functioning merely as a demarcation line between the heterogeneous and the homogeneous (from the decidedly Roman, one-sided perspective), for the concept of the boundary as a *frontier* also entails a vectorial element in the form of mobile expansion. Such an asymmetry is furthermore both spatial and conceptual. Bernhard Waldenfels speaks of the “asymmetry of inside and outside”:

The relation of inside and outside, which emerges from processes of inclusion and exclusion, is in its concrete initial form asymmetrical and irreversible. [...] Waking and dreaming, health and illness, youth and old age, life and death, feudal and bourgeois society, the expeller and the expelled are not simply excluded *from one another* like two rooms separated by a wall, or two fields divided by a ditch – and this is so because, for someone standing on both sides, the threshold would become meaningless.

This asymmetry entails that an instance which excludes the foreign also simultaneously excludes everything that it itself signifies for foreign instances (Waldenfels 1990, 33; translated by the author).

The comparison of the train compartment wall with the *limes* highlights the clear difference between a movable boundary and a

rigid barrier. Both boundaries and barriers, first, separate groups of people with different attributes from one another (first-class passengers are distinguished from second-class passengers, just as imperial Romans were distinguished from Hispania within the empire); and second, people endowed with different attributes are differentiated from undifferentiated, attribute-less people (tariff-differentiated passengers vs. the rest of the non-traveling population, heterogeneous Romans vs. mere non-Romans). However, the nature of the boundary goes beyond the nature of the barrier insofar as the boundary, in its expansion, creates new territories and thus new groups with specific attributes – e.g., Roman provinces. To invoke an established political-philosophical conceptual pair, the boundary is a displacing structure of *order/orientation* (Schmitt 2006): it annexes new spatial territories in which human groups are endowed with new inclusionary attributes. Historically, the *limes* should also be understood less as a single continuous wall than as a complex frontier system consisting of fortifications, watchtowers, roads, and military settlements. In many regions it functioned as a zone of interaction rather than a purely impermeable barrier, facilitating trade, cultural exchange, and controlled mobility between Roman and non-Roman populations. This historical complexity further illustrates the ambivalent character of boundaries, which simultaneously separate and connect different political and cultural domains.

The *limes*, however, remains an inadequate example of a communally understood boundary, precisely because it represents a unilateral political-military boundary, where the imposition of new attributes occurs through one-sided external enforcement and often causes the destruction of numerous identity attributes of the subjugated populations (primarily freedoms). Nevertheless, the example of the *limes* initially serves to illustrate a first significant distinguishing feature between a boundary and a barrier – the former's mutability and capacity for inclusion. In defining the phenomenon of the boundary and for the purpose of semantically clarifying its authentically communal essence, it is worth lingering briefly on this topic.

Demarcation, Inclusion, and Exclusion

A first, fundamental misunderstanding regarding the concept of the boundary can be traced to the coarse semantic reduction of this term to the idea of a barrier and the concomitant act of delimitation. In this private understanding, a boundary is conceived as an insurmountable limit, as something that blocks access. In everyday usage, people tend to under-

stand “boundary” in the sense of a barrier, blockade, or insurmountable wall, thereby fundamentally reducing the concept of the boundary to the idea of separation.

The idea of separation is indeed contained in certain etymological and spatially related facets of the concept of the boundary:

The German word “*Grenze*” is borrowed from the Polish *granica* and gradually replaced the older term “*Mark*” over the course of the early modern period. But even for “*Mark*”, what initially also remained characteristic of “*Grenze*” applied: namely, that it refers both to a boundary and to the broader territory within which people distinguish themselves from one another. [...] The *frontières* of a state are the borders that must be defended. In the 17th century, the new term displaced the old ones (*fin*, *confin*), though *limites*, likewise formed from Latin, survived and in turn displaced *limitaciones*. [...] Accordingly, Italian has *frontiera* – formerly also *confin* – for the border territory, and *confin* – formerly also *fine* – for the demarcation line, as well as *termini*; Spanish has *limite* and *confin* (Zill 2014, 138-139; translated by the author).

However, this aspect by no means exhausts the complex, medial nature of the concept of the boundary. Immanuel Kant, for example, outlines a distinction between boundary (*Grenze*) and limit (*Schranke*), in which he characterizes the limit as *something negative*: a limit merely negates, it is a simple *limitation*, whereas the boundary is understood as positive, since it possesses a “linking function” and thus serves a mediating role:

for in all boundaries there is something positive (e.g., a surface is the boundary of corporeal space, yet is nonetheless itself a space; a line is a space, which is the boundary of a surface; a point is the boundary of a line, yet is nonetheless a locus in space), whereas limits contain mere negations (Kant 1997/2004, 105).

The boundary is also identity-forming, because a boundary initially determines a *quality*. Hegel highlights this aspect in the context of the problem of change (which cannot be addressed here) through an illustrative distinction between qualitative and quantitative boundaries:

In Being-there-and-then, the negation is still directly one with the Being, and this negation is what we call a Limit (Boundary). A thing is what it is, only in and by reason of its limit. We cannot therefore regard the limit as only paternal to being which is then and there. It rather goes through and through the whole of such existence. The view of limit, as merely an external characteristic of being-there-and-then, arises from a confusion of quantitative with qualitative limit. Here we are speaking primarily of the qualitative limit. If, for example, we observe a piece of ground, three acres

large, that circumstance is its quantitative limit. But, in addition, the ground is, it may be, a meadow, not a wood or a pond. This is its qualitative limit (Hegel 1892, § 92, 173).

At this point it should be emphasized that the present comparison between Kant and Hegel does not imply a strict conceptual continuity between their respective philosophies. Kant's distinction between *Grenze* and *Schranke* operates within a transcendental framework concerned with the limits of cognition, whereas Hegel's treatment of limit belongs to the dialectical logic of being and determination. The juxtaposition here therefore serves only to highlight structural analogies in the way both thinkers attribute a constitutive role to boundary, while their systematic contexts remain fundamentally different.

Numerous motifs resonate within this understanding of the boundary, including the *ὁρίσμός*:

Only things that are locations in this manner allow for spaces. What the word for space, *Raum*, *Rum*, designates is said by its ancient meaning. *Raum* means a place cleared or freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary. Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds (Heidegger 1972, 152).

It should be noted, however, that the Greek conceptual pair *peras* / *horismos* and the Roman notion of *limes* belong to different historical and cultural horizons. While the Greek understanding of boundary often refers to an ontological determination of beings within a cosmos structured by form and limit, the Roman concept of *limes* primarily emerges within a geopolitical and administrative context. The present discussion therefore does not aim to collapse these semantic traditions into a unified concept but rather to juxtapose them heuristically in order to illuminate different dimensions of the phenomenon of boundary.

What matters in our historical-philosophical excursus on the concept of boundary is the fact that the boundary that determines the essence (the "being") of a property through qualitative negation is thus not an attribute of being; rather, the limitation imposed by the boundary constitutes the determination of the essence itself, where the term designates not merely the external end of being, but the property itself. In other words, an object – however this term may be understood – is constituted only through its boundaries. The essence of an object is defined by its boundary.

Boundary as Threshold

Another indication of the identity-forming nature of the boundary is the fact that it also reveals gradations of identity within domains of objects, provided the corresponding boundaries are unstable. In this sense, the term “boundary” acquires a semantic refinement as “threshold”: boundary or threshold experiences cannot be clearly understood or categorized, because their limits cannot be precisely determined:

Yet beyond this there are boundaries one *crosses* by entering another order and thereby altering oneself, as though leaping over one’s own shadow. These are thresholds that do not shift with us like the boundary-lines of our horizons. They are border zones in which we linger, at which we hesitate, from which we shrink back, or which we overstep. Exclusion gives rise to a distinction between this side and the beyond. What beckons and frightens on the far side of the threshold no longer belongs to the play of one’s own possibilities, but signifies a challenge to one’s freedom by something alien, something that finds no place within the order presently in force. We are dealing with *heterotopias* and *atopias* whose “elsewhere”, as something extraordinary, slips away from the ordinary nature of our respective order.

Already included here are those recurring experiences of transition such as parting and reunion, falling asleep and awakening, falling ill and becoming well, which perforate the fabric of our everyday life. One does not *go* into sleep but *falls* into sleep, as in *to fall in love* or *tomber malade*. The inbreak of the alien and extraordinary occurs all the more in irrevocable caesuras of life such as sexual maturity, entry into a profession, or the failures of old age; in incisive personal experiences such as the metamorphoses of love or the reversals of religious and political conversion; in upheaving public events such as natural disaster, the outbreak of war, or revolution; and finally in limit-experiences such as birth trauma and the expectation of death (Waldenfels 1990, 31-32; translated by the author).

The concept of the threshold will be revisited below. It should be noted that a boundary understood in this way proves to be an aporetic “instrument of knowledge”, whose application extends far beyond the spatial realm:

In this sense, the idea of the boundary is more than merely a stroke or a line that separates (and thereby at the same time connects) two places or spaces; it is rather a genuine instrument of insight, a concept without which the world cannot be intellectually disclosed (Mayer-Tasch 2013, 42; translated by the author).

Boundaries are in this respect “ambivalent phenomena, and by no means only in the world of states and politics” (Mayer-Tasch 2013, 59;

translated by the author). A boundary is a transition, an opaque transit that “gives contour,” whose contour is simultaneously shaded – not entirely classifiable, deferrable. In this paradoxical way, the boundary produces identity. A boundary is also the phenomenon connected with ὄρη, with the drive to act:

The concept of the boundary plays a significant role not only in political theory but also in the anthropology and ethics of Aristotle. It is the boundary that moves human beings to act: “No one would undertake anything, were he not intending to arrive at a boundary” (Meyer-Tasch 2013, 48; translated by the author).

Finally, experiences of boundaries are everyday experiences:

Limit-situations are often situations of distress, in any case situations of exception. Boundaries and boundary-experiences, however, are something everyday. Everywhere, over the course of their lives, human beings come up against boundaries: the limits of their abilities, limits of understanding, of insight, of patience, limits of what is permitted, of what can be expected, of what can be borne. Over the course of their lives, people learn to live with such boundaries and with the experiences of distress that are not seldom bound up with them. Yet they also learn that not all boundaries are to be heeded: whoever draws boundaries for others must justify the act, must give reasons for the boundary. Those upon whom boundaries are imposed have a right to know why this is happening, and at times – out of their own distress – also the right to ignore, to overstep, or even to destroy boundaries that are unnecessary or unjust (Meyer-Tasch 2013, 56-57; translated by the author).

“Boundary” thus emerges as a superordinate category of experience. Far from merely addressing the political or spatial, this conceptual category pertains to the most diverse phenomena of human existence. It is no coincidence that the τιμή, the domain of Hermes, the god of boundaries, is the broadest among the gods. On one side, Hermes is

the lord of the ways. Along the paths lay the cairns (ἑρμαῖον) from which he received his name. [...] The “herms” too stood chiefly along the roads, at the entrances of cities and houses, at market boundaries and the frontiers of the land. A series of epithets honors Hermes as the god of ways and entrances, as guide and signpost (Otto 1987, 145-146; translated by the author).

But on the other hand, he is also a “versatile one” and the “most benevolent of the gods” (Otto 1987, 132; translated by the author). The god of boundaries and transit is also the most versatile of gods. From this, one can recognize that the category of the boundary is extremely comprehensive for human life. It touches upon numerous, diverse funda-

mental dimensions of human existence as a transversal figure. Boundaries, thresholds, transit, transition, and their related phenomena gradually acquire, upon closer examination, a significant and complex existential-philosophical importance, to which the authentically communal nature of the boundary is connected. It is this aspect that we shall now pursue further.

Boundary as Medium

So far, it has seemed clear that the boundary functions as an (albeit problematic) identity-forming element. However, the question of identity involves two elements, much like two states at a geographical boundary. For example, the geopolitical territory of the Federal Republic of Germany is distinguished from that of Austria by the boundary, while the two territories nonetheless adjoin one another – that is, in a certain sense, they are connected through their separation, in a manner similar to the bridge banks discussed by Heidegger – for an analysis of such a medial character of the “thing” in Martin Heidegger, see Tidona 2014.

The boundary thus produces identity through its medial function of separation and connection. The boundary is a medium in a similar way to a window, which separates the interior from the exterior of a dwelling, or like our skin, which separates the internal body tissues from the environment.

Yet even the skin does not separate the body tissues from all elements of the “outside” environment: for example, oxygen penetrates the skin barrier, a biological fact that is essential for life. We want to further explore this separation/connection dynamic.

Let us assume that two flatmates share a wall. Two rooms (and thus two private spaces, with their own furnishings, etc.) are thereby separated from one another. In this case, as in the case of train compartments, one would speak of demarcation and/or inclusion and exclusion of living spaces.

The same flatmates also share a kitchen table. However, in the case of the table, strictly speaking, one would not speak of demarcation, because the flatmates sitting at the same table are, in some sense, *together* (not isolated in rooms separated by walls).

The flatmates sit together (communarily) at the table, yet each has their own place. Seats at the table are allocated according to a division procedure (especially since a table cannot accommodate an infinite number of guests). Each person constitutes their identity – separated from the others – by sharing not so much the table itself but the possibility of sitting at the table. *In separating, the “table” is divided; in connect-*

ing, it is shared. Making explicit this complex logic of the communal object “table” as a boundary concept represents a meaningful extension of Hegelian differentiation.

In the same apartment there are also some windows. A window is a medial boundary between the inside and outside of a dwelling. The outside is separated from the inside and at the same time connected to it, at the location of the glass pane – without the glass, there would be neither inside nor outside; everything would be inside or everything outside. Interestingly, the inside and outside are connected or separated because the transparent glass lets light in from the outside while keeping out the cold. The “apartment” constitutes its identity – which is that of a warm and bright, not cold and dark dwelling – precisely by admitting one element of the outside (light) and refusing another element of the outside (cold). A boundary conceived in this way thus functions like a filter.

In the case of the window, however, such an identity-constituting filter is still one-sided: a window already constitutes the inside, making a living space an authentic, warm, and bright room, but it does not constitute the outside. The outside – the cold and sunny winter street – does not require a window to exist as an outside. Even if the apartment and its windows did not exist, the exterior space would remain an outside, unaffected in its identity. From the perspective of identity formation of the two involved elements or domains, the separating and connecting window is therefore still a one-sided filtering boundary. Georg Simmel also emphasizes this phenomenological point in his comparison of window and door:

On the one hand, the elements of separateness and relatedness meet in the bridge in such a fashion that the former appears to be more a matter of nature and the latter more a matter of humans; on the other hand, both enter human achievement – as human achievement – in more equal proportions through the door. On this rests the richer and livelier significance of the door as compared to the bridge. It manifests itself in the fact that it does not make any difference in meaning in which direction you walk across a bridge, whereas the door with its going-in and going-out function signals a totally different intention. In this respect the door also differs from the window, which in a way is similar to the door – both are a connection of the interior space with the world outside. But the teleological feeling vis à vis the window exclusively goes from the inside to the outside – it is only meant for looking-out-of and not for looking into. The window establishes the relation between the inside and the outside. Because of its transparency it does so – so to speak – necessarily [chronisch] and continuously; but because of the one-way manner in which this relating works, and because of the limitation of the window to being only a path for the eye, the window is granted only a fraction of the deep significance that the door has in principle (Simmel 1994, 410).

At this point, one arrives at a potentially more comprehensive definition of the boundary: a boundary is a separating and connecting filter through which two dimensions assume their identity. The boundary appears to function as a medium for dividing and connecting. This also relates to the existential-philosophical aspect of the boundary, for human beings are primarily the beings that separate and connect:

Because man is the relating being who must go on separating, but cannot relate without separating, therefore we must grasp the mere indifferent being-there of two river banks with our mind as being separate in order to unify them by a bridge. Similarly, the human being is the being with limits who has no limits. The seclusion of his being-at-home achieved by the door means that man severs a piece from the uninterrupted unity-of-being in nature. But just as amorphous limitation finds a shape, so man's being limited finds its meaning and its dignity in what is signified by the door – the possibility of at any moment stepping into freedom and out-of being limited (Simmel 1994, 412).

Humans and Gods

The boundary definition just developed, however, does not fall from the sky; it can be traced back to an old, venerable understanding of the boundary.

Among the many sights that the city of Berlin offers is the Pergamon Museum on Museum Island. In the museum, alongside other historical and architectural artworks of ancient Near Eastern and Islamic art and culture, one finds the world-famous Pergamon Altar:



Figure 3: Pergamon Altar, Berlin, in <https://www.thousandwonders.net/photo/20617>

A discussion of the medial nature of the boundary proves insightful when one looks at the terrace of the Pergamon Altar. In the center of the terrace, there is a closed-off area where the sacrificial offerings took place:

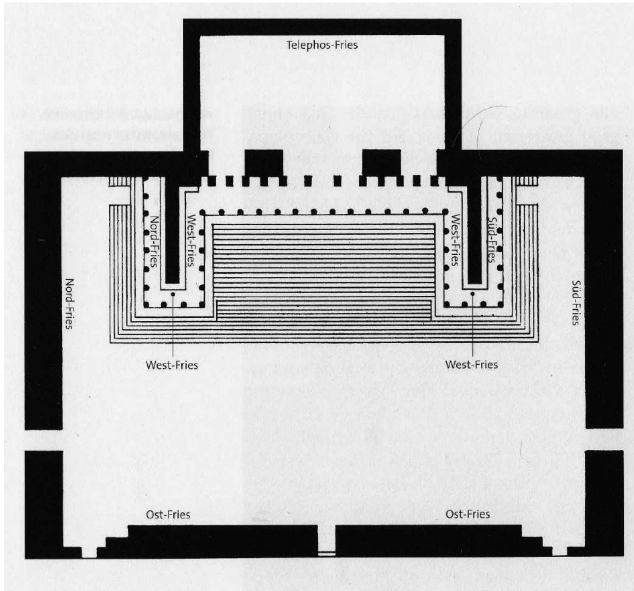


Figure 4: Pergamon Altar, floor plan, in <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grundriss-Aufstellung-Pergamonaltar.jpg>

The area designated for the sacrificial offering can be considered a boundary in many medial respects. First, only priests have access to this enclosed sacrificial area; that is, this space is sacred in the sense of being separated and denied to the other participants in the cult. Belonging to the boundary is the figure of the priest, a communication medium between humans and gods. The priest connects two worlds that would otherwise be irreducible, much like a translator enables speakers of two languages to communicate because he participates in both language systems. This corresponds to the figure of the daemon as “in between mortal and immortal” (Platon 2025, 202 d-e) who can connect humans and gods precisely because he is partly human and partly divine, following a dynamic that will be clarified in what follows.

The sacrificed animal of the offering also plays a similar, medial role. Parts of the animal are burned during the sacrifice. The concrete action assumes a symbolic character, creating identity and differentiation: the flesh of the animal is eaten by humans, while the smoke of the fire is for

the veneration of the gods. Unlike humans, the gods are not bound to the necessities of earthly life, including sustenance, and can thus be honored with the pleasing aroma of the smoke. The necessity of food, which characterizes the transient and corruptible life of humans, is signaled by the need to transform raw flesh into edible meat through fire. An essential distinction emerges in the shared nature of the same offering, which is nevertheless divided into two elements (the edible and the ethereal) (for such classical accounts of the structure and symbolism of Greek sacrificial practice, see Burkert 1985).

The elements of the boundary – the boundary itself as a sacred, separated space, the priest as an ambiguous, daemonic figure, and the divided, twofold sacrificial offering – thus configure themselves as medial figures operating under the sign of polyvalent ambiguity.

The concept of the boundary, however, goes beyond this duality, since its logic is more accurately described as a complex four-value ambiguity dynamic. To illustrate this, one final example of a boundary is presented here:



Figure 5: Beach, by Andrew Stack, in <https://www.pinterest.de/pin/393713192405157243/>

This illustration, by contrast, shows a natural phenomenon that can be considered a boundary. It is the middle area on a beach, between water and sand. In German, this area is somewhat imprecisely referred to as

the *Litoral* or *Uferlinie*. In English, it is similarly, and probably also imprecisely, called the “water’s edge.” The Italian terms for such a natural boundary provide a more nuanced understanding, as this area is called both *battigia* and *bagnasciuga*, the latter being an oxymoron, meaning something like “dry-wetness”.

The oxymoronic designation of the water’s edge reveals the aporetic nature of the *battigia* boundary, which, however, is not exhausted by a dual, ambiguous logic. Upon closer inspection, a *battigia* is not merely “dry” and simultaneously “wet”, but exhibits a paraconsistent logic: on the one hand, it participates in both the water and the sand (it is part of both “territories”); on the other hand, due to its partial involvement with both water and sand, it is neither entirely the one nor the other. In this sense, the *battigia* boundary is simultaneously water and sand, and in another sense, neither water nor sand. The four-valued “paraconsistent” logic of *neither-nor-as-well-as*, invoked here metaphorically, constitutes the essence of this boundary. Thus, the *battigia* boundary is not merely ambiguous but, in this sense, a fourfold intermediary space – even with a pronounced *communal function*, since bathers do not usually meet on the hot sand or on the high seas (in other words, where the natural elements are clear), but on the paraconsistent central strip of the *battigia*.

The boundary is not simply a line separating and connecting two areas, but is *eo ipso* a complex, structured zone – like a line that itself has breadth – whose shifting gradations cannot be subdivided, as the different determinations (sometimes wet, sometimes dry, sometimes dry-wet, sometimes wet-dry) continuously transition into one another. In such a play of determinations alternating within the boundary zone, a clear spatial-conceptual classification of properties is, in principle, impossible.

Limen

It is high time to turn to a new understanding of the boundary: it should no longer be conceived communally as a *limes*, but rather as a *limen*. This is only a change of a single letter, yet it reveals a decisive perspective: in Latin, *limen* is the (door)threshold, the transitional zone that relativizes and shades a mechanically strict inclusion-exclusion dynamic. *Limen* is both inside and outside, separates and connects, brings qualitative differences and commonalities (gods and humans) into relief, and is ultimately shared.

The boundary as *limen* thus configures itself as a particular form of division. The forms of community that develop at the *limen* boundary are communities of sharing, not of partitioning. *Cum-finis*, a shared end. Boundary, offering, and chalk have this in common: they separate and connect.

In the *limen* – and not the *limes* – resides the prototype of communal boundaries, which are therefore not to be abolished but to be realized in their medial nature:

Our ideal should therefore not be a world without boundaries, but a world in which all boundaries are acknowledged and respected, and yet remain permeable. A world in which respect for differences would consist in recognizing that within every enduringly established community, the individuals who constitute that community are respected, regardless of their origin or gender, and in which the intimacy of each individual is respected without requiring them to have a fixed place of residence. This could be the ideal of any education worthy of that name. Two obstacles stand in the way of this ideal. Either the notion of the boundaries becomes hardened and is turned into an insurmountable barrier; or, conversely, it becomes diluted, erased, or denied (Augé 2010, 13; translated by the author).

A necessary prerequisite for understanding the communal is therefore a more precise comprehension of the boundary as *limen*. This is achieved only when, beyond a compartment paradigm of community, one fully apprehends the complexity and existential-philosophical density of the category of the boundary.

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Dal limes al limen. Note di teoria dello spazio sul concetto di confine

Prendendo spunto dalla metafora dello scompartimento ferroviario, questo articolo esplora la logica spazio-teorica, filosofica e fenomenologica del confine inteso come limes e il suo ulteriore sviluppo in limen. Centrali in questa discussione sono le figure del confine e della soglia e la loro complessa e intrecciata relazione nella storia del pensiero.

Attraverso riflessioni filosofiche sui confini con riferimento a loci della tradizione nonché mediante concreti esempi interdisciplinari e distinzioni terminologiche, si dimostra che il fenomeno confine/soglia presenta una profondità storico-semanticamente nella reciproca differenziazione e nell'interazione dinamica dei due concetti. Esso svolge funzioni culturali e mediali ed è caratterizzato da una logica paraconsistente a quattro valori. In questo quadro, il confine emerge come un autentico limen che opera come una cifra in differenti ambiti culturali fino ad assumere un significato etico in rapporto ai paradigmi della comunità.

PAROLE CHIAVE: confine, soglia, teoria dello spazio, limen, medium

From the limes to the limen.

Space-theoretical Remarks on the Concept of Boundary.

Drawing on the metaphor of the train compartment, this paper explores the space-theoretical, philosophical, and phenomenological logic of the boundary as a *limes* and its further development into a *limen*. Central to this discussion are the figures of *boundary* and *threshold* and their complex and intertwined relationship in the history of thought.

Through relevant, tradition-informed philosophical reflections on boundaries, as well as concrete interdisciplinary examples and terminological distinctions, it is demonstrated that the phenomenon of *boundary/threshold* exhibits historical-semantic depth in the mutual differentiation and dynamic interplay of the two concepts. It performs cultural and media-related functions and is characterized by a paraconsistent four-valued logic. In this framework, the boundary emerges as a true *limen*, which, beyond its space-theoretical dimension, operates as a cipher for broader cultural domains and ultimately carries ethical significance regarding community paradigms.

KEYWORDS: *boundary*, *threshold*, spatial theory, *limen*, medium