

Land&ScapeSeries: Landscape +  
100 words to  
inhabit it

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## **Border**

When we mark out a border, we establish a distinction. This is the presumption that found it. In distinguishing, we discriminate between what we decide belongs to the entity we are attempting to define (whether it is spatial, social or political, and so on) and what instead remains excluded. In this way, a special trait of our physiology is partially reflected on the cultural level of vision which, in order to extract (that is, to know) something from the mass of worldly things, tends to work on the outlines, emphasising them with respect to everything else round about. In other words, a border takes shape from the need to underline a variation in sensitivity, to mark a difference, to ritualise a transition – by staging it. It is a place that demand attention, a cultural signal that according to very different reasons and ways marks the beginning or the end of something, in any case an event ; something that arouses the intimate part of a person or that of a community. It is a way to organise (and control) the experience of reality in which one live. Culturally and historically every society produce its own variety of borders, which often have a more or less visible reflection in the landscapes that accompany it. Although their course, that is, the way defining their content, may change their literal and above all symbolic tracks over time, they rarely disappear completely, settling in the territory or in the intimacy of the individual or group living there. Sometimes this course may reappear unexpectedly or in unforeseen forms. (See Happening-Defining) At the same time, a border is a common place (*cum-finis*) that can become a passage (for

example, the *viae agrariae* that divided one agricultural property from another were borders): a threshold that permits both pausing (a threshold is “base, foundations, ground” and also “house, village”) and relating. The boundary area between an inside and an outside, between us and the world. A place capable of placing us – in the sense of putting us, positioning us but also giving us – in a particular condition for thinking about how we are in the world. In the words of a poet like Andrea Zanzotto, landscape becomes precisely this: “a great offering, an immense gift”, as wide as our own horizon and as necessary “as the breath of our psychic presence, which would implode into itself if it did not have this corroboration.” It is something that lives and changes, which “pricks and again pierces us and of which we are only a sort of bobbin, turning on itself, sewing; or something that cuts.” Landscape leaves a mark: it becomes impressed inside us. It receives our signs, our marks. It is essential for drawing the complex weft of our existence. The horizon is then the limit – “to sight” and “of sight” – that constitutes us: we are the border, with our body and the entirety of the places we are made of. In this sense, the attention we pay to landscape (as relation with the world we inhabit) and the attention we reserve for the borders that we produce (as relations between different worlds) are, at the same time, a measure of the attention we have for ourselves, as human beings.

Piero Zanini (2004)