



BORDERS AND THRESHOLDS IN CULTURAL HERITAGE

LIMINAL SPACES
OF CONFRONTATION
AND CONFLICT

CATANIA

26-27-28

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Call for Papers | CHAIN 2027

Since antiquity, the study of borders has highlighted their strategic role and “productive power” in the construction of the world (Mezzadra-Neilson 2014). Boundary lines drawn to support national claims and establish spheres of influence (Torre 2011) have long narrowed the symbolic scope of the border to a mere territorial limit. In recent decades, however, we have witnessed a profound shift: current scholarship no longer treats the border as a geographical or political line separating territories and identities, but instead recognises it as an ontological space - one that is lived, crossed, and contested, where belonging is negotiated, memories are stratified, and the limits between self and other are continually redefined.

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin draws the sharpest distinction between threshold (Schwelle) and border (Grenze): the former is an intermediate zone of transition and transformation, while the latter is a clear and definite limit (Benjamin 1982). Yet the border — itself a dynamic device of cultural production and a site of negotiation — can become a threshold when the blurring of its edges gives way to the concepts of conflict and confrontation. The threshold is a space that brings two different worlds into relation, particularly in urban contexts, or within degraded and highly dense areas (Rueda 2018).

Through the tension between opposition, rupture, and negotiation, the limit takes on form and meaning. Reflecting on this position calls for a plural approach capable of weaving together geographical, architectural, archaeological, philological, artistic, archival, and performative perspectives, extending to the sciences applied to cultural heritage. From this convergence emerges the need to rethink material and immaterial culture and memory as terrains where conflicts continue to sediment and reconfigure.

At the intersection of these concepts lies a space in which cultural heritage takes on dynamic and at times contradictory facets, where the balance between memory, identity, erasure, and power is played out. This gives rise to real or symbolic frontier zones that reveal themselves as spaces where identities are stratified and memories become contaminated, so that any notion of a single canon, origin, or belonging becomes unstable (Cordin-Franceschini-Held 2002). Here, one encounters plural texts, hybrid traditions, practices of translation, censorship and rewriting, and fragmentary transmission, which become privileged tools for interrogating the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that shape cultural memory. It is in these places that a genuine confrontation can take place - understood not simply as dialogue or comparison, but as a “reckoning” with tradition, questioning what is handed down, what is destroyed, and what is rebuilt after borders have been redefined.

THEMES

The fifth edition of the CHAIN conference invites researchers, doctoral candidates, and cultural sector professionals (both public and private), alongside heritage associations and field experts, to develop a dialogue on these processes, organised around (though not limited to) the following three interdisciplinary macro-areas:

1. Spaces, Thresholds and Representations of the Limit

The concept of the border is not merely a line of separation, but a dynamic device of cultural production, a site of negotiation and crossing. This session welcomes contributions that aim to redefine the concept of the border in Architecture and Urban Planning, by analysing the processes of social transformation linked to the regeneration of degraded areas and the conflicts between built spaces and non-anthropised environments in the context of the climate crisis. In Geographies and Cartographies of the Limit, contributions are invited examining how, in marginal areas, the perception of the border or limit can affect processes of territorialisation and identification; a phenomenon also observed in maps, visual devices, and so-called “frontier texts”. Finally, from the perspective of Archaeology, contributions are welcome that analyse how cultural heritage has been used to define identity and territorial borders from antiquity to the present day, as well as its role as an instrument of soft power and diplomacy in conflict resolution.

2. Exploring Conflict: Memories and New Frontiers of Representation

The theme of conflict can be explored by analysing the tensions that run through archives and cultural heritage. For this session, contributions are invited on archival, philological, and art-historical practices (Anna Maria Marras 2024), aiming to examine how archives function as sites of conflict when their work of inclusion and exclusion generates a selective memory. Contributions are also invited on how local memories, those of frontier communities, and subjective narratives of migration and crossing can be valorised, including through the theoretical and methodological approach of Public History (Cauvin 2016). Further proposals may address solutions for the protection and reconstruction of cultural property threatened in crisis contexts - whether by armed conflicts, fanaticism, or natural disasters - in the awareness that heritage recovery within post-war reconstruction plans constitutes a political and psychological act of identity refoundation and redefinition of limits. Finally, within the context of digital infrastructures applied to heritage, proposals are welcome that investigate the management of conflicts between accessibility, copyright, and the public domain, as well as between original, copy, and forgery within museology and cultural property reproduction policies.

3. Confrontations and Dialogues Across Disciplines, New Technologies and Contemporary Cultural Practices

This session investigates how tangible and intangible cultural heritage activates dynamics of confrontation, boundary, and dialogue between disciplines, languages, devices, and forms of knowledge, redefining technical, aesthetic, relational, and accessibility limits. In particular, the current spread of digital media and generative systems is redefining the thresholds where creative practices meet (theatrical, choreographic, performative, musical and cinematic), reshaping modes of engagement and the management of heritage, here understood as a fluid territory situated between physical presence and technical mediation, local memory and innovation. At the same time, we are witnessing a radical redefinition of authorship and of the relational models between performers, technologies, and audiences. The unstable relationship between works and spectators is regenerated through practices of prosumerism and remix culture, which transform the audience into an active co-creator of the aesthetic experience and redefine the circulation of the works themselves (Tanni 2023; Born 2022). These pressures generate fertile conflicts and dialogues, positioning the performing arts and their related heritage both as spaces of cultural citizenship and safeguarding of intangible heritage, and as sites of tension between historical legacy and contemporary demands for heritagisation, reinterpretation, and innovation of artistic languages. This complexity is also reflected on a social level by decentring ableism and fostering intergenerational inclusion: performance practices and venues are being rethought to overcome physical and sensory barriers, ensuring universal access and a continuous exchange of knowledge in which the discovery of childhood and adult memories intertwine in a shared experience (Balbi-Marasco 2021).

GENERAL INFORMATION

The call is open to cultural heritage stakeholders, such as PhD students, researchers, museum staff, cultural associations, etc. The conference will take place in-person at the Department of Humanities, University of Catania, with the possibility of remote participation. Contributions can be presented as oral presentations or posters. Each presenter will have a maximum of 20 minutes for their presentation. The conference languages are English and Italian. Posters will be displayed in a dedicated area and will be the subject of a dedicated session. The time available for each poster presentation will be 5 minutes.

To encourage dialogue and participation, we strongly suggest presenting contributions in English. The text of PowerPoint presentations must be in English.

Proposals may be submitted in the language chosen for the presentation (Italian or English) and should include the author's first and last name, email address, university or other institutional affiliation, presentation title, 3 keywords, an abstract of no more than 300 words, and a short bibliography. Proposals must be submitted by **10th August 2026** to the following email address: segreteria@chain-conference.com. Authors must indicate whether they wish to participate with an oral presentation or a poster. Each proposal must also include a short bio of each speaker and co-author, in English (max. 200 words per author), written in the third person. Notification of acceptance will be sent by email.

A registration fee is required to participate in the conference and for the publication of proceedings as follows:

- Each speaker (and co-author) attending in person is required to pay a registration fee of €60; remote participants are required to pay €40.
- In-person poster participation requires a registration fee of €40.
- For each co-author not attending the conference in person, a fee of €10 is required.

Details on registration and payment methods will be communicated after the acceptance of submissions.

Updates, schedules, and information on mobility and accommodation will be provided via email, the CHAIN website (www.chain-conference.com), and social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn).

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