

FRONTIERS

saraiREADER 07

The Sarai Programme  
CSDS, Delhi

December 2007



SARAI READER 07: FRONTIERS

Produced and Designed at the Sarai Media Lab, Delhi

Editors: Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Jeebesh Bagchi, Ravi Sundaram

Associate Editor: Smriti Vohra

Translations: Shveta Sarda

Design: Mrityunjay Chatterjee

Editorial Collective: Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Jeebesh Bagchi, Ravi Sundaram, Ravi S. Vasudevan, Awadhendra Sharan + Geert Lovink

Cover Design: Mrityunjay Chatterjee

Back Cover Images: Mogas Station

Published by

The Director

Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

29 Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054, India

Tel: (+91) 11 2394 2199; Fax: (+91) 11 2394 3450

E-mail: [dak@sarai.net](mailto:dak@sarai.net)

[www.sarai.net](http://www.sarai.net)

Delhi, 2007

ISBN 81-901429-9-2

Any part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of the publishers for educational and non-commercial use. The contributors and publishers, however, would like to be informed.

Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers: <<http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/07-frontiers>>

Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers is part of the documenta 12 magazines project

<<http://www.documenta12.de/magazine.html?&L=1>>

Printed at Impress, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi

600 pages, 14.5 cm x 21 cm

Paperback: Rs 350, US\$ 20, € 20

# C O N T E N T S

**At Frontiers - Editorial Collective - v**

## **FRONTIER SCOUTS AND BORDER CROSSERS**

- Narrating the Frontier: Perspectives from Kachchh - *Farhana Ibrahim* 2  
 Chromatic Boundaries - *Paolo Novak* 12  
 A Politics of Sensitivity: Ambiguity and Exceptionality along the India-Bangladesh Border  
 - *Jason Cons* 20  
 At That Insurmountable Border - *Sucharita Sengupta* 30  
 Wagah/Wagha: India Meets Pakistan - *Amar Kanwar* 40  
 Transit Visa: An Essay on Code - *A.J. Sood* 43  
 A Strange Feeling of Familiarity - *Lamia Joreige* 56  
 Abkhazia: A Broken Paradise - *Georgi Derlugian* 65  
 Desire, Fear and Death... - *Samir Chakrabarti* 83

## **UP CLOSE AND IMPERSONAL**

- Counterfeit Consciousness and the Joy of Abandonment - *U. Kalpagam* 90  
 ... And Nothing but the Truth, So Help Me Science - *Lawrence Liang* 100  
 Unofficial Secrets Act: The Administration of Certainty and Ambiguity  
 - *Shuddhabrata Sengupta* 111  
 Dead Man Walking: Sovereignty and the Supreme Court in the Age of Terror - *Mayur Suresh* 121  
 The 'Law' of the Police - *Anuj Bhuwania* 134  
 The Fuzzy Logic of National Frontiers or a Frontier Nation: Reflections on the Multi-Purpose  
 National Identity Card Scheme in India - *Taha Mehmood* 144

## **SCALING WALLS, BREAKING FENCES, CROSSING GATES**

- All in All, It's Just Another Hole in the Wall... - *Jiti Nichani + Aarti Mundkur* 160  
 An Interview in the Emergency Room: A Cure in Three Stages - *Aman Sethi* 167  
*El Siluetazo* (The Silhouette): On the Border between Art and Politics - *Ana Longoni* 176  
 Locating Torture in Jammu and Kashmir - *Warisha Farasat* 187  
 Borderless Bodies - *Pramod K. Nayar* 199

## **NEW CARTOGRAPHIES/OLD BOUNDARIES**

- From Music to Painting: The Strange Yet Not-So-Strange Tales of Pardhaans  
 - *Udayan Vajpeyi* 212  
 Ancient Geographies – New Frontiers - *Anthony Acciavatti* 221  
 The Folly of Maps - *Jeremy Hight* 229  
 Smart Borders - *Guido Cimadomo + Pilar Martínez Ponce* 232  
 Glamour as a Form of Culture in Post-Soviet Russia - *Keti Chukhrov* 236  
 One Biennial, Two Triennials, Three Interventions and Research for a Retrospective  
 - *Ruth Sacks* 249

## **THE EDGE OF THE FRAME**

- Betrayed Borders: Double Agents and the Crisscrossing of Conflicts  
 - *Manuel Ramos Martínez* 256  
 Framing Frontiers: The Suspended Step towards Visual Construction of Geopolitical Borders  
 - *Saayan Chattopadhyay* 264

- Transitions, Transactions: Bollywood As a Signifying Practice - *Pooja Rangan* 273  
Art without Frontiers? Satyajit Ray and the Constraints of Universality - *Chandak Sengoopta* 286  
*Miss Frontier Mail*: The Film That Mistook Its Star for a Train - *Rosie Thomas* 294

#### TEXTS AND MARGINS

- The "Frontier" Revisited - *Cédric Vincent* reads *Lawrence Alloway* 310  
Up for Auction: A Devoted Communist's Labour of Love - *Abhishek Hazra* 316  
Frontier's Virgule/Virgule's Frontier - *K. Narayana Chandran* 325  
The *Mahimandala Gita*, Chapter 66, by Arakkhita Das: Notes towards a Translation  
- *Sailen Routray* 332  
Bhudev's Uchronia: The Temporal Exile of the Colonised - *Ritwik Bhattacharjo* 339  
"It's Raining Aliens!" Coloured Rain in Kerala and the Fuzzy Frontiers of Science  
- *Shiju Sam Varughese* 348  
"We Want No Flats...!" *Bauwagen* Culture and the 'Desired' Urban - *Stefan Canham* 359

#### BETWEEN, ACROSS, BELOW, WITHIN, OUTSIDE

- Notes on the Frontiers and Borders of the Postcolony - *Angela Mitropoulos* 372  
Across (B)order and Back: The Everyday Reality of Kolkata's "Flyings" - *Swati Ghosh* 380  
Between Queer Ethics and Sexual Morality - *Naisargi N. Dave* 387  
South Asian "Adda" in Barcelona - *Sameer Rawal* 396  
Long-Distance Nationalism: Constructing 'Indianness' in American Kitchens - *Ekta Ohri* 404  
Following the Black Block: Pragmatic Depression, Action and Aftermath - *Sam Gould* 417  
Walking for Nandigram - *Moinak Biswas* 422  
The Logbook - *Sreejata Roy* 428

#### THE URBAN FRONTIER

- Ghevara Diaries - *Cybermohalla Practitioners* 438  
At the Frontier of the Urban Periphery - *AbdouMaliq Simone* 462  
Harmless Fraud: Pyramid Schemes in Andhra Pradesh - *S. Ananth* 471  
Tophane: The Closing In of an Istanbul Neighbourhood - *Pelin Tan* 484  
Moscow: Fortress City - *Irina Aristarkhova* 490  
A 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Urban Landscape: The Emergence of New Socio-Spatial Formations in Gurgaon  
- *Seth Schindler* 499  
Looking Outwards, and Outwards - *Gauri Gill* 509  
Frontier Town: Marking Boundaries in a Delhi Resettlement Colony 30 Years On  
- *Cressida Jervis-Read* 516  
Moving Cities: Life on the New Frontier - *Bert de Muynck* 527

#### ALT/OPTION

- Occupancy Urbanism: Ten Theses - *Solomon Benjamin* 538  
No One Is Illegal!  
- *Steve Cohen, Harriet Grimsditch, Teresa Hayter, Bob Hughes, Dave Landau* 564

Contributors 574

Acknowledgements and Image Credits 582

Rokovoko - *Mogas Station* inside back cover

## At Frontiers

Frequently at frontiers we are asked, "Anything to declare?"

The wisest thing to do when faced with the scrutiny of a border official is to say that you have "nothing to declare", and quickly move on. Crossing borders usually entails an effort not to say too much, or at least to get by with saying very little. A degree of reticence is the mark of the wise and experienced traveller.

*Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers* seeks to turn this ethic of reticence on arrival at a boundary, at any boundary, on its head. This year, the Sarai Reader considers limits, edges, borders and margins of all kinds as the sites for declarations, occasions for conversation, settings for the staging of arguments, debates, recounting and reflection. Our book invites you to consider the frontier as an open door, a chute into something new, or the rediscovery of that which has been obscured, a covert infiltration of opacity, a porous membrane of liminal potential, a zone of contact and contagion. We want to think of the frontier as the skin of our time and our world, and we invite you to get under the skin of contemporary experience in order to generate a series of crucial (and frequently unsettling) analytical and narrative possibilities.

For us, the frontier is a threshold waiting to be crossed, a space rife with the seductive aura of transgression.

The feeling of being on the edge of something has persisted for most of our lifetimes. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was an exhausting journey into a receding future, and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> continues to entrance us with the allure of what seems to be forthcoming forever. We are all pioneers now, chasing and being chased by the shifting border-posts of the frontiers imposed upon us by history. Yet our efforts to break new ground do not necessarily carry any longer the confidence of self-proclaimed 'avant gardes'. As scouts, our task is to survey and report back in detail on the territory of uncertainty. And our ongoing despatches chronicle not our conquest of, but our continuing bewilderment about, the complicated times we inhabit.

We are not talking only of actual, physical borders (though of course we are interested in literal and political borders) that are usually the residues of war, but also of the borders between different temporal registers, between languages, between different modes of action, between different bodies of thought and conviction.

Looked at this way, a frontier is more a condition than a site, more a way of being and doing than a constellation of fixed markers circumscribing a domain.

The DMZ of the present, straddling the recent past and the immediate future, is the most striking frontier of all, inviting us to consider the continuities and ruptures, revolutions

and restorations that, like bunkers and watchtowers on either side, litter the landscape of all our histories.

We could also consider the borders between faith and doubt, between technology and technique, between history and memory, between art and science, between literature and reportage, between the empirical and the speculative...

We are interested in all forms of expression that straddle these spaces, especially in those that make forays into zones of confinement, such as prisons, detention camps, institutions of remand and quarantine. Here we see power relentlessly producing states of exception in a way that constantly redefines the boundaries of what might be considered normal. With each passing day, the normal condition of the world comes to resemble yesterday's state of exception, and today's state of exception seeks to lay the foundations of tomorrow's normality. This tension between the exception and the rule is another kind of frontier that we hope will provoke new investigations.

Today, we live in cities that expand by evacuating people from thriving centres and relocating them onto empty hinterlands. The shifting topos of infrastructural renewal in megacities constantly generates new urban boundaries. In these spaces that resemble maps and grids more closely than they do actual spaces for habitation, the question of what it is to have an urban identity in the time of civic dispossession, upheaval and appropriation, is asked with a violent, daily urgency.

The Reader goes to press at a time when the world observed from the Northern Ridge in Delhi (where this text gets made) seems to resemble a concentric circular maze of successive borderline conditions. Delhi itself, riven by a recent geometry of judicially mandated sealings, demolitions and evictions, is crisscrossed by different trajectories and ecologies of legality and illegality. Further away, to the east, the villages of Nandigram in West Bengal witness a reinscription of lines of force. Hope and despair take positions on the streets of Kolkata. The people of Bangladesh negotiate a repeated destiny, braving cyclones and the wrath of undeclared army rule. Still further east, Myanmar shivers in the icy grip of an amoral junta, and the walking monks of Yangon etch their own cartography of protest in the streets of their city. To the west, in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, a military dictator tries on new costumes even as he performs a script of democracy while sustaining a state of emergency. In the wider world, the invisible strings of money and power raise the price of oil here, manipulate interest rates there, and aggravate the temperature of already seething conflict zones. Battle lines are drawn, erased, recharted. People extend themselves in extraordinary acts of defiance and generosity, and then close in on themselves in exhaustion.

The texture of twilight seems to invade each hour of night and day. Everything everywhere is contingent. The margin infiltrates the centre. The core expands to the periphery. Our streets oscillate between anarchy and sullen calm. Sometimes the journey across continents still leaves us occasionally with the feeling that we haven't come very far

– and yet, in the short walk across the road to a news-stand, we may instinctively, intuitively, negotiate a dozen frontiers...

*Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers* invites you to become an adventurer at the fringes of your experiences, speculations, memories and histories. We have always viewed the Reader as hospitable to new and unprecedented ideas, as a space of refuge where wayward reflections can meet half-forgotten agendas, where the 'disappeared' of Buenos Aires can come upon the missing people of Nandigram. This is why we imagine Reader 07 as setting the stage for a productive encounter with the demand for an account of the limits, verges and thresholds of our times.

Welcome to these frontiers. They're a little wild, but the horizons ahead of us are wide and open.

The Editorial Collective  
Delhi/Amsterdam, December 2007

*See file  
Am 4/5 Jm*

*EXTRACT from an Office Memo: No. 2086, dated Simla, the  
21st October 1865, from the Secretary to the Government  
of India, in the Foreign Department.*

---

With reference to the docketts from the Home Department regarding Mr. Johnson of the Great Trigonometrical Survey, who is understood to have proceeded to Khotan, the undersigned is directed to state, that no persons should ever be allowed to go beyond British territory, and more particularly, into wild and dangerous tracts, without specific sanction conveyed through the Foreign Department.

---

**CIRCULAR NO. 81-5174.**

---

GENERAL DEPARTMENT.

*Dated, Lucknow; the 31st October 1865.*

Copy of the above forwarded to  
for his information and guidance.

J. REID

*Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Oude.*



# FRONTIER SCOUTS AND BORDER CROSSERS