Bodies and Borders

Towards a More Holistic Approach to Migrant Body

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the concept of the "migrant body" through theatre pedagogy, proposing a holistic, embodied approach to navigating the tensions between "bodies" and "borders". Drawing on the researcher's personal experience of migration and interdisciplinary frameworks, including anthropology of borders, critical geography and postcolonial theory, the study reimagines borders as dynamic, affective, and relational processes that are specific to the migrant experience. The "migrant body" is therefore conceptualised as a unified field in which cognition, emotion, and corporeality are inseparable. This builds on the work of educators and theorists such as E. Anttila, J. Varto and the artist Trinh T. Minh-ha.

The research questions explored in this study are: What kinds of pedagogical and artistic encounters emerge when engaging with borders? What methods does theatre pedagogy offer for articulating embodied migration experiences? Adopting a post-qualitative research framework influenced by poststructuralism and new materialisms, this study views research as an open, process-oriented endeavour. It considers knowledge to be relational, emerging between the researcher, participants, materiality, and the world, rather than an objective reflection of them.

The research is grounded in a practice developed through the Bodies and Borders workshop series, which was held at Uniarts Helsinki between November 2025 and March 2026. These workshops provided spaces for collective enquiry in which co-creators explored how borders are experienced, negotiated and transformed through somatic practices, body mapping, object-based work and performative exercises. When reflecting on this practical work, particular attention is given to somatic practices and object-based pedagogy as tools for engaging with the bodily dimensions of migration. The findings suggest that these approaches enable co-creators to reflect on their position within new social contexts and reconsider notions of belonging throughout the process. Interaction with objects in performative settings supports the reinterpretation of lived experience.

Key words: migrant body, border, embodied learning, somatic practice, post-qualitative research, situated knowledge, new materialism.

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The incident with the ladle. Instead of an introduction

I remember an incident that happened to me a few months after moving to Finland. It was a very mundane situation — I needed to ladle out some soup, and I couldn't find the ladle. It wasn't in the cutlery cup, or in the drainer, or in the dishwasher, or on the tables. I remember frantically rushing about the kitchen, in some kind of frenzied dance, losing control of myself more and more. If I were asked to describe my emotions, I wouldn't have known what to say. Despair? But despair seems too strong a word for a situation involving an ordinary ladle. Perhaps the exclamation "Have I gone mad?!" It would be more accurate. I didn't find that ladle — it turned up the next day, somewhere in plain sight. Later, I returned to this situation several times; it had left a strangely deep impression on me. Now, having distanced myself from it by four years and thus risking a slide into autofiction, I shall nevertheless venture to suggest that that silly ladle pushed me out of the everyday and into a rupture. This rupture/gap — between my past, that familiar and cozy world where I could reach out and mechanically grab a ladle from the shelf. And the new, unfamiliar world where I know nothing and where, as it seemed to me, I had no control over anything; a world that has shrunk to the boundaries of my own body, which feels defenseless.

The Russian anthropologist and folklorist Svetlana Adonyeva writes that "it is impossible to perceive the meaningful order of everyday life if you are immersed in it. It is also impossible to see everyday life as a distinct order if you are involved in only one life-world, if you have not experienced the 'bursting of the bubble' in your own life[1]" (Adonyeva et al., 2017, p. 21). The experience of the destruction of the "first life-world", the "home", is, of course, not unique to emigration. A friend moving in, or even a new flatmate, or the arrival of a child also creates a break with past experience. Yet a life-changing event as multifaceted as migration (both emigration and immigration), which is associated with a change in… everything, from language and communication structures to the climate, makes this rupture particularly intense. By changing our place of residence and context for a new one, we sever the entire system of habits and

[1] Here and throughout, the translation is mine.

connections that bound us to the world, not only on an individual level, but on a broader, social one. Pierre Bourdieu called the social structure formed by habits "habitus". "As a product of history", writes Bourdieu (2001), "habitus reproduces practices, both individual and collective <…> It ensures the active presence of past experience, which, existing in everyone in the form of patterns of perception, thought and action in a more reliable way than any formal rules <…> guarantees the identity and consistency of tactics over time" (p.23). Of course, I am not equating pouring soup with "habitus". But to me, this small episode seemed to reveal all the tension involved in breaking with the past and embracing the "new order" that had descended upon me. It was the body that reacted first to the rupture, performing its macabre dance in the kitchen.

Starting from a distance, I am drawing ever closer to the theme of my work: Bodies and Borders. This introduction is necessary to explain the perspective from which I view the constructs of the border and of the migrant body, and why it is so important for me to speak of these here and now. In the first part of this paper, I trace how an initially broad understanding of "body" and "border" was gradually refined towards a research question. This process began as individual work, shaped by reflections on my own experiences, discussions with my supervisor, and engagement with the literature, and later developed into collective engagement during the practical phase of the research—a "Bodies and Borders" workshops series. The second part outlines the preparation for this practical phase and describes its main stages. The third part reflects on selected moments and processes that emerged during the workshops.

1. Diving into the borders and bodies topic. Context and sources

1.1. Border / boundary / edge

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the changes at the Russian–Finnish border felt almost as shocking to me—after 35 years of living in Saint Petersburg—as the events unfolding on the front lines. Each new legislative change, each subsequent cancellation (of trains, planes, then buses, the construction of a fence and the closure of borders, etc.) dragged me into a vortex of depression. I continued my travels to Saint-Petersburg to visit my relatives via Estonia, crossing the Narva–Ivangorod border, where Russian-speaking expats from all over the world had also flocked, eager to see their own families. The physical experience of the transition and the many hours spent standing at the border were etched into my body. This physical and emotional involvement in border politics, which became part of my life, sparked my interest in borders as a broader concept and as an epistemological problem.

In English, there are three words — border, boundary and frontier — for a concept that is expressed in Russian by a single word: граница. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary "border" is the line that separates two countries or areas, and the land near this line (Oxford University Press, n.d.) while the "boundary" is a real or imagined line that marks the limits or edges of something and separates it from other things or places; a dividing line (Oxford University Press, n.d.). If the word border denotes a real, visible line or political boundary, then boundary is a more abstract or conditional border that is not necessarily physical.

Sara Ahmed (2000), whose work I will discuss below, uses the word border when talking about skin (skin as "a border that feels"). In this piece, I will also use the word border most frequently – specifically in the context of personal boundaries. It is important to me to emphasise the physical aspect of the border; it is also my way of politicising the border.

I find the British word "frontier" very interesting — also "border territory", it is used to denote the "frontier of development", such as the boundary between "savagery" or wildness and "civilization". The word edge, which arises in this context as a continuation of the discussion of the etymology and synonyms of the word border, is

also a peculiar variation of this concept. In English, we find words such as “edge” (the edge of the forest), “margin” (the margin of the page/the margin of society), “rim” (the surrounding edge of a volcano), “fringe”, “limit” and “perimeter”. In Russian, most of these words incorporate the word край (edge), which, in addition to its figurative meaning (крайний случай /extreme case, крайняя мера/extreme measure), carries a clear symbolic meaning. One of the most popular Russian folk lullabies goes like this:

Баю-баюшки-баю, не ложися на краю.
Придет серенький волчок и укусит за бочок.

Lullaby, lullaby, don’t lie on the edge.
A little grey wolf will come and bite you on the side.
(traditional Russian lullaby; translation mine)

The concept of the edge — as a division between the safe “own” and the dangerous, incomprehensible “alien” — is literally absorbed from birth and embodied through the from the rocking rhythm of the cradle.

Thus, the language shows how the lived, embodied experience from the early childhood experience of crossing and confronting borders transforms them from a purely geopolitical reality into a deeply personal, affective and epistemological framework through which notions of border, boundary and their variations can be critically re-examined.

1.2. The border as a line

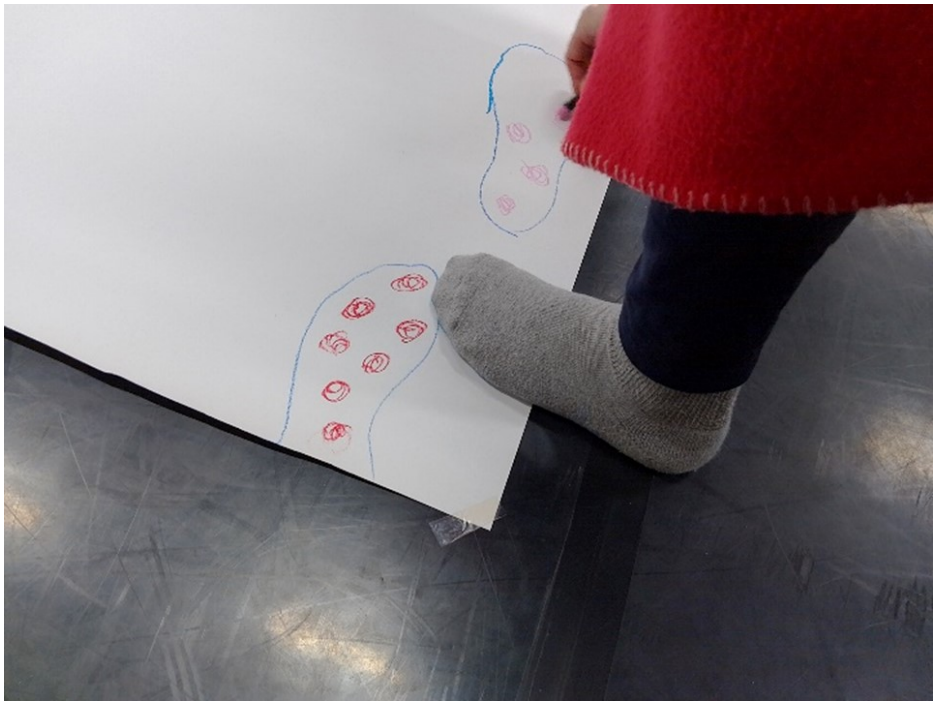
It is fascinating to observe what sparks the birth of knowledge. External events. My own physical experiences. Other people’s remarks—even passing comments—can influence an entire research project.

I remember how, at one of the seminars towards the end of our first year of the Master’s programme, I was talking about art projects created on the US-Mexico border and showing pictures of that border. Taneli Tuovinen, who was leading the seminar, drew attention to the beauty of the borderline. It was as if my eyes had been opened: indeed, the picturesque folds of the hills and mountains, the line of the fence winding between them, the stunning golden light, as if deliberately emphasising the marvellous pattern of this landscape. Having read so much about the horror and pain accumulated within this border, I had paid no attention at all to its aesthetic dimension. If one

decontextualises the border and reduces it to an object, then that object possesses aesthetic qualities. One can say, it is beautiful. Or at least its representation looks beautiful.

Of course, as an educator working with the materiality of theatre (objects, materials, space, time, body…etc.), this discovery made me reflect deeply. The inertia of thought is such that it compels us to perceive the border as a line. That was my starting point too. But how else might one conceive of a border?

This is discussed, in particular, by Sarah Green, who specialises in the anthropology of borders and location. It is noteworthy that in her book Borderwork (2013), co-authored with photographer Lena Malm, the researcher analyses the border as processes woven into the everyday practices of people living in demarcated zones. By 2018, Green examines in detail the idea of the line as a border and remains dissatisfied with it. “Borders thought of as lines are never intended to mark multiple, fluid, networked, rhizomatic, and constantly shifting differences or relations,” she notes, which leads to “confusion between political ideology and ontological reality” (Green, 2018, p. 71). By allowing ourselves to conceive of borders as lines (as suggested, for example, by the Oxford Dictionary quoted above), we invite ideologies into this field that simplify all border-related processes and adapt them to their own ends. To oppose the idea of the line, the researcher proposes “traces” and “tidemarks” as figures that allow us to “think of the entangled relation between symbolic, material, and legal forms” (Green, 2018, p. 70) of the border. In this context, a tidemark combines a line and a trace, making it possible to link the materiality and processuality of the border, creating new forms not merely of border infographics, but of thought — border-ness.



Mapping the body/border line workshop. November 11th. 2025. Photo: M.Risku.

In dialogue with such figures in anthropology as Tim Ingold and Merilyn Strathern, Green discusses ever-new possibilities for thinking about borders. Borders as “cuts” in the potential endlessness of networks or rhizomes (Strathern, 1996, cited by Green, 2018, p. 74) or “meshworks” instead of networks (Ingold, 2007), where “curves” and “tangles” prove to be more important and precise for describing the phenomenon of the border than “points” or “lines”.

I am not sure that, at this stage of my research, I have managed to move far from the concept of the line. The ideas of Green and the researchers she draws upon provide a direction for the development of the research, rather than merely reflecting its current state. Nevertheless, in asking myself how to anchor in the body a more complex, yet truer, picture of the border than the conventional line, I believe that the attempt to work with the red rope, to which one of the chapters of this work is devoted, was useful.

Moving from an understanding of the border as a line — to its more complex derivatives, traces and trademarks — I continued to think of the border as a relation or “relative location” (Green 2018, 69), amidst the bewildering variety of forms in which it manifests.

1.3. The border as a mechanism of power

The text that introduced me to the issue of borders from the perspective of critical geography was the article: Borders Re/make Bodies and Bodies are Made to Make Borders: Storying Migrant Trajectories (Chattopadhyay, 2019).

Being a migrant herself, Sutapa Chattopadhyay seeks to present an analysis of the situation of migrants from the Global South in Europe through their voices, using feminist methodology. Taking a bold and activist approach in her research, the author presents a variety of theories and concepts in this text which, when considered together, provide a comprehensive overview of the issue of borders. According to Chattopadhyay (2019), it is not feasible to fully analyse the complete range of issues that define the expanding field of border studies, nor to grasp the dynamic ways in which borders are conceptualised. Nevertheless, we can say that, in addition to "lines on maps", borders are present in our lives as "mechanisms that have arisen as a result of the struggle for resources in occupied territories due to colonial-imperial relations and settler initiatives" (p.151). Borders can thus be seen as social factors that divide and control people; more specifically, they are, as noted Balibar (2002), "everywhere selective mechanisms of control are created" (p. 84).

For example, in my case, being described as a person of "foreign background" in Finnish statistics (Statistics Finland, n.d.) marks both me and automatically my child who grows up here as "foreign". What does it mean? Is my body a border that separates my daughter from being Finnish? Could it really be that my very existence is the reason why she is not "counted" among those who belong here?

Borders are related not only to politics and classifications, but also to identity, memory and representation. I understand that 24 February 2022 marked the beginning of a long period of being perceived as a "Russian". Now, my passport is my main "border". It is the framework through which strangers check me and the state determine whether I can buy property, travel or work in certain places (like Kela), for example.

Any manifestation of state control is therefore my trigger. In this respect, the border area and the border itself are the most tense and complex places of all the policing zones. The material, physical embodiment of inspection practices effectively establishes borders. For me, crossing the physical Finnish-Russian border is also associated with a fear of being in Russia. As an emigrant from Russia, I now experience invisible constraints in the form of distrust of Finland on the one hand and fear of the Russian

repressive machine on the other. Neither of these is visible to people and institutions on the other side of the border. This is “situational knowledge” (Haraway, 1991) that emerges when you are between these two states. “Borders are ubiquitous and imprinted on human bodies, which carry and create borders” (Chattopadhyay, 2019, p. 159). My question is: how does my body carry this border between Russia and Finland? What boundaries does it create by being present in both contexts?

1.4. The border as an existence “in between”

Against the backdrop of the above mentioned experiences and reflections on border/boundaries, I was surprised and hopeful to “stumble upon” an epigraph from M. Heidegger in Homi K. Bhabha's book The Location of Culture (1994): “A boundary is not that at which something stops, but rather, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins to be presencing” (p.1).

By turning the concept of a boundary on its head, Bhabha seems to look hopefully at the other side of it. He argues that cultural identity is not fixed and cannot be understood as something “pure” — for example, “European” or “Indian”. Instead, it emerges in the process of interaction, in the space between cultures. He calls this intermediate space “the Third Space” — a symbolic space where different cultural codes, meanings, and identities collide and interact. Even the word displacement, which is vague in literature, takes on a positive connotation for him. According to Bhabha, in the current era of global emigration and post-modernism, post-colonialism, etc., modern human is constantly displaced between cultures and is not fully rooted in any one culture. Thus, displacement becomes part of hybridity and “the Third Space”. Here, we can observe the mobility and fluidity of the modern world. “It is in the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference — that cultural difference is negotiated”, he notes (Bhabha, 1994, p.186).

I am moved by these words: displacement, dislocation, transition. What place do we leave behind when we cross borders? What do we trans -it/form in the process? Our bodies? Our skills? Our past? ... How can we determine the degree, extent and direction of this displacement? What does it give us?

The book Elsewhere, Within Here. Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event (2010) by artist and writer Trinh T. Minh-ha has been my main guide and inspiration on the way to this project. Minh-ha introduces the concept of the “Wall Event” — a

moment or process in which a border is not just a division, but an active force that creates belonging or non-belonging, inclusion or exclusion. The process I am experiencing of establishing relations with the constantly changing physical, symbolic and political border between Russia and Finland, in Minh-ha's terms, is a relationship within the framework of a “Wall Event”. This concept inspired me to create one of the workshops for the practical component of my research. But what influenced me even more was the artist’s language. The poetic, figurative language of the book elevates the journey itself to the territory of this special knowledge — the knowledge of “in-between” — and to the realm of poetry. “Although living in two dualistic worlds (here versus there) is still acceptable to the rational mind, living in two or more non-opposing worlds — all of which are located in the same place — inevitably inscribes silence. Not from elsewhere, but more specifically, from elsewhere within here" (Min-ha, 2010). This idea is important to me — while remaining outside the realm of rational knowledge, the state of “between” can be conveyed through art. Perhaps, I would add, through empathy and collective social imagination.

I also believe that physicality can be a source, in Min-ha's terms. Our place of birth instils certain physical patterns in us, such as the body’s relationship to temperature and physical habits in relation to physical activity and everyday habits. These patterns change and hybridise as our places of residence change.

So what is this hybrid “migrant body” existing in a network of borders and restrictions but with a certain vision “from elsewhere within here”?

1.5. The migrant body from a holistic perspective

The concept of the migrant body is interpreted extremely broadly in the literature. It is a multifaceted term used in academic research, art and the media to describe the physical, emotional and political experiences of migration. It focuses on the body as a site where borders, emotions, gender, sexuality and violence intersect. A surge of interest in the topic of migration and migrant studies occurs during periods of migration crises. This was the case in 2015–2016, and we are seeing the same thing now. Not being deeply immersed in the academic context of migrant studies, I was surprised to find that the topic of corporeality is relatively new to this field. Thus, in the summer of 2025, migration researchers affiliated with IMISCOE, the largest migration research network, discussed at a roundtable titled how to “use the migrant body as an entry point

to decentre migration studies" (Bastia et al., 2025) as a strategy to "move beyond dominant theories and understandings of migration" (Bastia et al., 2025), which are primarily produced by affluent countries of the Global North. This discussion was followed by the organisation of a conference on the migrant body, which took place in December 2025 and was a unique event that focused entirely on the theme of migrant body.

For art education, however, the body and corporeality are fundamental categories. I believe that it was precisely my immersion in educational theory and practices that envisage a more embodied approach that made me reflect: what is happening to my body? How does my entire experience affect it?

In my work, I approach the migrant body through the notion of the "holistic", a concept developed by the Finnish philosopher Juha Varto, who conceptualises the human being as an integrated entity in which experience, knowledge, and action are inseparable and always embodied and situated in the world. His work emphasises the inseparability of subject and practice, arguing that all activity constitutes a "first-person practice" (see Varto, 2017, for more) in which thought, body, and world are intertwined. Varto introduces the concept of "first-person practice" when discussing the artist's role in artistic research to explain why artists cannot be external observers of their own work. However, this position is grounded in a broader phenomenological framework, as all human activity is inherently "first-person". We always act as embodied, situated subjects rather than abstract observers. In this context, the "holistic being" can be understood as a dynamic unity of experience, body, language, and situation rather than as a self-contained essence.

This perspective is reflected in the ideas of the professor, the ideologist of embodied education Eeva Anttila, who identifies embodied learning as central to understanding artistic practice. She suggests "understanding the learner as an integrated, holistic being, and seeing each person as part of a community and culture. This means that all artistic activities involve the entire human being: the organic level, the pre-reflective level, and the reflective level." (Anttila, 2015, 376) "In my view, — she writes, — embodiment is a focal concept in understanding the phenomenon of learning in the arts" (Anttila, 2015, 372).

In my approach, I acknowledge that the experience of migration (both emigration and immigration) also involves the whole human being. In exploring ways to work with the

theme of migration, I fully agree with Eeva when she says that she is “interested in investigating the relationship between embodiment and meaningful, constructive experiences” (Anttila, 2015, 372). I believe that embodiment is perhaps the most effective and sensitive way of working both at the organic level and at the pre-reflective level with such an intense experience as migration.

1.6. Migrant body as a stranger body

Sarah Ahmed’s book Strange Encounters (2000) had a profound effect on me, shedding light on much of my current state of mind. In the Finnish space (physical, legal and discursive), my body is now associated with a larger body — the Russian Federation — on the basis of citizenship, language, roots and perhaps elements of social behaviour. In her book Ahmed introduces the principle of such an association as metonymy, whereby the part is defined by the whole. From 2022 onwards, Russia was unequivocally labelled an “aggressor” and a “terrorist” state in the Finnish public sphere. One can trace how the media rapidly transformed it into “uninhabitable”, “unliveable” zones of social life, to use Ahmed's terms (Ahmed, 2000, p. 50). Although Ahmed does not think in terms of borders, she does speak of distinguishing between different “types” of “others”. This distinction occurs during an encounter. According to Ahmed (2000), borders are formed through affects — fear, disgust, desire, etc. — which reinforce the distinction between “us” and “them”, whilst simultaneously producing these categories. In this context, borders function as effects of the circulation of bodies and signs; it is precisely movement and collision that create the sensation of their presence. Ahmed demonstrates that the “other” does not precede the encounter but emerges within it, revealing the predetermined nature of borders and their historical and political conditioning. Thus, borders are fluid mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, constantly constructing subjects and collective identities in a postcolonial context and regulating them through everyday practices and discourses. Ahmed discusses how “strange bodies”, or bodies that cannot be assimilated into a given social space, are already recognised through histories of determination in which such bodies are associated with dirt and danger (pp. 50–51). I am recognised as Russian even before anyone learns anything about me. (Oh, the paradox of Ahmed! Can a stranger be recognised?) And this “russianness” is something that, from the moment of encounter on, cannot fail to define me.

Amidst the chaos of these “ruptures”, in the labyrinths of borders and spaces — geographical, temporal, discursive — I feel a distinct need to rest. To catch my breath. Is that not why I began this project?

2. Practical part of the research: rationale

2.1. Structure and method

The logic of my writing appears to mirror the logic of my research. Although I am asked to write more simply to help my reader, what can I do if my thoughts keep getting stuck and I generally take the hard route?

So, that's where we are now: drawing on my personal experience, I realised that I could not ignore it and immersed myself in reading the literature about borders. It became clear that, of the academic approaches with which I resonate, anthropology of borders (Green, Ingold) is distinctly present. Here, a border is understood not as a line, but as a process and a network of relationships embedded in everyday practices and "traces".

Secondly, critical geography and postcolonial theory (Chattopadhyay, Balibar, Bhabha, Ahmed and Minh-ha) are important to me. Here, the border is viewed as a mechanism of power and colonial legacy, as well as the production of "the other". The migrant's body is seen as bearing these political and discursive tensions.

Finally, the embodiment approach in art education and phenomenology (Anttila and Varto) has clearly become part of my professional DNA. Here, the body acts as a centre of knowledge and experience, enabling exploration of the border through affects, memory, trauma and artistic practice.

The question remains: how can I, a theatre educator, be of use amidst all this diversity?

2.2. Research questions

As this thesis is only a small part of a larger life-shaping research project, questions constantly arise. I have already posed quite a few above, and there will be more to come. As a research question, however, I will highlight the points from which the practical research for this thesis developed, namely the series of workshops entitled Bodies and Borders.

My research questions are as follows:

Question 1: What artistic and pedagogical encounters can arise when working with the theme of borders?

By “pedagogical/artistic encounter”, I refer to moments when something happens: moments of the body, moments of communication and perception that have the potential to transform.

Question 2: What theatre pedagogy methods and tools can I use to explore, recognise and articulate my personal and group processes related to the experience of borders?

2.3. Structure of the Bodies and Borders workshop series

The titles of the workshop series listed below attempt to answer these questions. Here is the final schedule for the series. Classes that did not take place due to a lack of participants are marked with a strike-through.

2025

15 Nov, 18:00–20:00: Mapping the body/border line (in Russian)

20 Nov, 18:00–20:00: Mapping the body/border line (in English)

1 Dec, 18:00–20:00: (Object)isation: matters of borders (in English)

~~5 Dec, 18:00–20:00: (Object)isation: matters of borders (in Russian)~~

11 Dec, 17:00–19:00: Migrant body in change

2026

26 Feb, Thu, 17:30–20:00: Migrant body in waiting and exhaustion (embodied reading)

~~12 Mar, Thu, 17:30–20:00:00 The Wall Event (interactive research on the Finnish - Russian border)~~

26 Mar, Thu 16:00–19:00 Migrant Body in Borderwork #1 (a short role-play game on radical empathy)

All classes took place on the University of the Arts campus in the dance studios. The “Migrant Body in Borderwork #1…” class also took place partly outdoors in the sculptors' studio.

The themes of the sessions illustrate how the understanding of the process in this work evolved. When devising the concepts for the 2025 masterclasses, I drew on the notion of the border, but based my approach largely on working methods and tools. In the open call for 2025 series, I formulated this idea as follows: “Each session will be devoted to one of the media through which we will explore the complex and

multifaceted concept of border: the body (November 2025), objects (December 2025), dramaturgy (January 2026) and real-time role play (February 2026)". (Dunaeva, 2025a)

In "Mapping the body | border line", I therefore focused primarily on the body, structuring the class around bodily practices. Drawing on my experience of dancing with a ladle, I likened migration to contracting one's habitus to the limits of one's own body. In the third part of this thesis text, "Processes", I detail my motivations for selecting the tools used in these initial workshops. However, it is fair to say that, at this stage, I was primarily driven by associations and intuitions stemming from my recent learning experience.

The question of language is also interesting in the planning of these workshops. In this case, it was a matter of dividing the audience. Initially, I thought it would be best to separate the Russian-speaking audience from the non-Russian-speaking one. This is not a division between those who have and have not experienced migration, but rather an attempt to separate contexts. However, after the second workshop, it became clear that multilingual classes would be more suitable for the themes of "borders" and the "migrant body" that we are discussing. This creates an opportunity for the exchange of experiences and the intersection of very different experiences.

I would describe the class on 11 December, "Migrant body in change", as transitional. Originally intended to familiarise the examiners with my process, it was planned in just a few days and became an opportunity to delve deeper into the bodily practices begun in the previous classes, as well as trying something new. Here, for the first time, I developed a practice based on the theoretical concept — change — thus building a bridge to the classes of the following year.

The 2026 workshops were already fully formed from ideas accumulated in the previous year. In my case, there was no initial plan for the entire research project. Although I had thought through and set the conditions for the workshops in advance, I had no hypotheses and was not striving for a specific outcome. From the moment the workshops began, it became impossible to speak of "my" research — the research had become a collective endeavour. The themes, ideas, and images that emerged in the initial workshops continued into subsequent ones. Theoretical concepts voiced in reflections on past practices formed the basis of new ones.

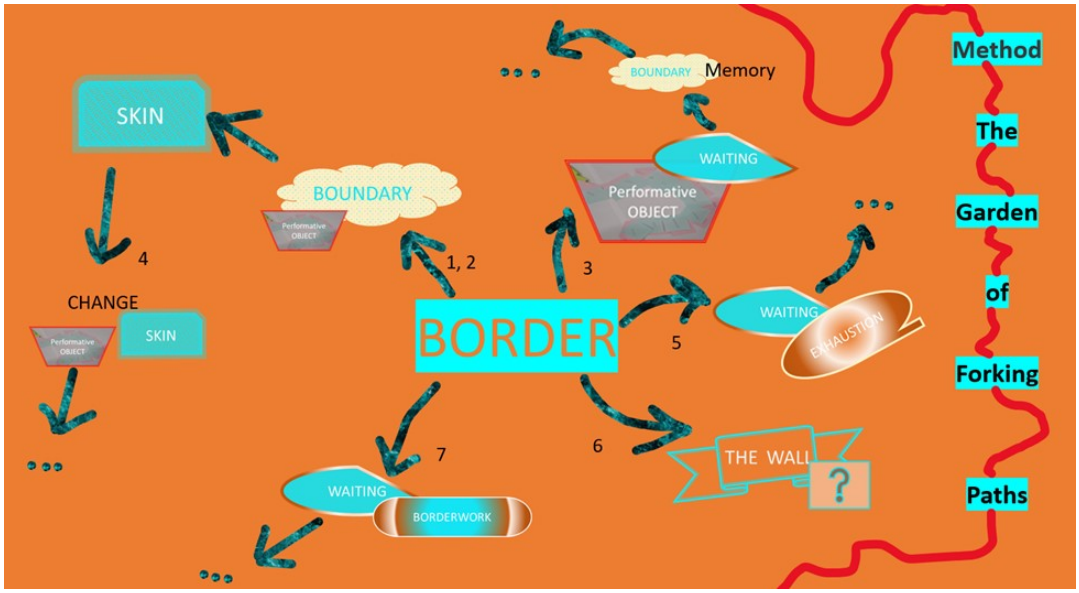
2.4. Methodology

Thus, the methodology of my practical research took shape in this way—open-ended and unpredictable. Whilst the initial workshops were entirely my own creation, the themes and methods of subsequent ones evolved from the previous ones. Often, these ”building blocks” were concepts that emerged during the sessions and remained suspended in their own unspoken nature.

This is precisely what happened with the last three classes. Of the many ideas that we developed with the participants in the first November–December workshops, “waiting” emerged as a particularly distinct category. It was this (and its derivative, “exhaustion”) that the spring sessions were devoted to.

Notably, the only workshop I had planned by myself (for myself?) from the outset, dedicated to the wall and inspired by the concept of “The Wall Event”, did not take place. The participants voted against it by their absence, and I accepted that.

I called my method “the garden of forking paths”, referencing a story by Jorge Luis Borges. The diagram below is an attempt to illustrate this.



Method visualization. By A.Dunaeva[2]

[2] The numbers on the diagram indicate the workshop numbers: № 1, 2 denotes November15th Mapping the Body/Border Line. № 3 is December 1st, (Object)isation: Matters of Borders (in English). № 4 is December 11th : Migrant Body in Change. № 5 — February 26: Migrant Body in Waiting and Exhaustion (Embodied Reading). № 6 denotes March 12th, The Wall Event (interactive research on the Finnish–Russian border, did not happen). № 7 — March 26, Migrant Body in Borderwork. #1 (a short role-play game on radical empathy).

The intertwining of theory and practice is another distinctive feature of my approach. Practice gives rise to theory. When theory is inspiring, it naturally seeks to translate itself into the practical realm, to be brought into the classroom as a practical proposal.

I am concerned that my approach to theory in this work may appear frivolous. I employ a wide variety of approaches to conceptualise our practices, and at times I myself feel that I am not sufficiently critical of the literature I draw upon. I suspect this stems from the fact that the creation of academic knowledge is not my primary objective. My source of pain and inspiration are the categories of "body" and (linked to it) "border", highlighted in the title of this work, and I eagerly seek out whatever allows me to understand them better and to be more effective in working with them. As Annemarie Mol says of her approach to working within ANT[3], "anything could be a source of inspiration, but at the same time no single source was good enough on its own" (Mol, 2002, p.9).

A specific working method and corresponding theoretical framework were developed for each workshop. In some cases, the basis was the social somatic approach (in the spirit of Staci Haines and Jill Green), which is aimed at understanding bodily experience and social structures through the body. In others, body mapping practices and work with materials and objects were employed to allow for the visualisation and exploration of embodied experience. When working with objects, I also drew on performance-based pedagogy (see Saastamoinen, 2019), whereby knowledge is formed through action and performativity. In the final class, I used role-play incorporating elements of LARP (Live Action Role-Playing) to create an immersive situation in which participants could explore and experiment within an improvised scenario of waiting at the border.

In academic terms, I operate within the framework of post-qualitative research — the approach that views research as an open, process-oriented and theoretically rich endeavour. Drawing on the ideas of poststructuralism and new materialisms (see Barad, 2007, for more), I view knowledge as emerging from the relationships between the researcher (participants are also researchers/co-creators in the process), the material and

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3 Actor–Network Theory (ANT) is an approach that has been developed since 1970th within Science and Technology Studies that examines how both human and non-human actors form networks that produce social phenomena. Associated with scholars such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, John Law, ANT treats agency as distributed across these heterogeneous networks rather than located solely in individuals or structures.

the world, rather than as an objective reflection of them. This concept aligns closely with Donna Haraway's idea of situated knowledges (1991), which rejects the notion of an objective, neutral perspective. Instead, according to Haraway, knowledge is produced from a specific, partial, and embodied position. Haraway connects objectivity not with an abstract and neutral perspective, but with acknowledging one's own location and bodily involvement in the process of knowledge.

In this sense, the deeply personal tone of this text is an attempt to situate my knowledge and could also be understood as the methodology. The creation of knowledge is inseparable from my personal context, which is highly emotional and messy. That is why I like the fact that the text being uneven, even messy. My intention, again, is to create not a “good” academical writing, but a space for empathy and possible dialogue.

2.5. Research material

My main material is the processes that we experience together with during the meetings. Attempts to document it include:

— the resulting sketches, collages and bricolages that we create together,

— photographic materials documenting the process,

— my notes during and after classes,

— my later notes about my first notes,

— feedback from participants written on the paper in the end of the workshops,

— feedback from participants that they sent me after the workshop in a form of emails and text messages.

2.6. Research ethics

When developing this series of workshops, I considered how to make them as accessible as possible to the audiences I had originally targeted — that is, adult artists of diverse backgrounds, members of the Uniarts community (students, lecturers, and anyone else interested), and Russian speakers with experience of immigration.

As mentioned above, I decided not to work with teenagers, and this decision was also driven by ethical considerations — until the method has been developed, I do not feel I have the right to work with minors.

Accessibility, alongside the safety of participants, became a priority for me. Fortunately, the Kookos campus of the Uniarts, where the classes took place, has an accessible environment. I designed the classes in such a way that no special skills were required to take part.

But such openness can lead to different situations. For example, two young men who had been drinking turned up for the first workshop. One of them had signed up for the class and brought a friend along; they'd been to a bar beforehand. I had to refuse them entry, as it might have made the other participants feel uncomfortable. I made this decision myself and doubted whether it was the right one, but later, when I told the participants about the incident, they agreed with me. And yet I still wonder: was I right? How would the workshop have gone if those lads had taken part?

Documenting the process was also a challenge for me. Documentation is a significant intrusion into the process, especially when it comes to such intimate gatherings as ours. I decided on my own not to document certain sessions. For example, the workshop on 11 December, involving the examiners, initially seemed difficult to document. Uniarts' rules, however, required it to be filmed as a practical part of the research. This class was conceived as two half-hour sessions of physical improvisation. I couldn't imagine asking the participants to work with a camera simply because the bureaucratic process demanded it. I took the liberty of rejecting this idea despite the rules, and the participants agreed with me, whilst representatives of my programme supported this decision. A workshop summary proved sufficient.

In those workshops where documentation was possible, we also tried to proceed with care. When working with data, I follow the Uniarts data protection policy and procedures (Uniarts Helsinki, n.d.-a), as well as the guidelines on personal data processing in thesis projects or study achievements (Uniarts Helsinki, n.d.-b). Naturally, before each class, I explained that the session was part of a research project and provided a detailed update on the current status of the research. I also explained in detail what information I was asking participants to provide and how it would be stored and used. My fellow student Milla Risku kindly agreed to help with documenting the processes; during the second and third workshops, she devoted all her time to carefully

taking photographs, whilst the rest of us were able to immerse ourselves in the practice. With Milla we agreed that we would not take photographs when people had their eyes closed. (There are such shots from the very first class, which I documented on my own. I check separately with the participants regarding the possibility of including these photos in conference presentations or my thesis.)

I would like to highlight another important ethical point: it was of fundamental importance to me to pay Milla for her documentation work during my classes. A freelance artist should not work for free, even if she is my friend and is happy to help. It was a great joy for me when Uniarts agreed to pay Milla a fee for her work. I am grateful to all parties who made this documentation possible and appropriate.

In my case, a particular point of reflection concerned the co-presence of Russian-speaking participants from Ukraine and Russia in the process. I took it upon myself to invite two wonderful artists from Ukraine to take part in the workshops, assuming that this theme might be important to them. I discuss the risks in advance in as much detail as possible (the open registration process, the unpredictability of the participant mix). I am deeply grateful that they agreed to come.

I always explain the options for self-care within the class – opting out of an exercise or practice, leaving the class, or staying in the room but not participating actively. In cases where I realised that people particularly vulnerable to the issue of borders were taking part in the workshop, I would explain the content of the practices to them in advance so that they could decide how acceptable it was for them.

What helped us to be together during the classes was a sense of shared responsibility. It wasn't just me who was responsible for the process; we were all there for one another. This is the approach I emphasised at the start of the classes, but it wouldn't have worked if everyone hadn't shared it from the outset.

2.7. Co-creators

Reflecting on the process of co-creating during the workshops fills me with gratitude. Working alone often slows my process down and makes it feel complicated and fragmented. In contrast, working together brings a sense of momentum—our shared time feels dynamic, full of events and discoveries.

When planning how to reach participants in the very beginning of the project, I initially focused on individuals with migration experience. At the same time, I wanted

to develop the project artistically, so I also invited artists interested in exploring the theme of borders. I shared information about the first series of masterclasses (November–December 2025) through the Uniarts community and via Globe Art Point newsletters, an organisation supporting artists from diverse cultural backgrounds in Finland. In addition, I reached out to Russian-speaking immigrant communities through thematic online chats.

The November masterclasses showed that I had not yet succeeded in attracting fellow students or a broader group of artists. However, by spring 2026, more participants from the arts sector joined, likely due to the same communication channels, and I am deeply grateful for this shift.

Russian-speaking participants, by contrast, responded enthusiastically from the very beginning. I found it especially meaningful when people joined without fully understanding the format of the masterclass—arriving with trust, curiosity, and openness, and choosing to stay.

Initially, I organised sessions separately for Russian-speaking and English-speaking participants. By November 2025, however, it became clear that mixed groups — bringing together people with and without migration experience from different contexts — created the most productive environment. These groups fostered dialogue, humour, and mutual support, allowing participants with difficult personal experiences, as well as those engaging with the topic more indirectly, to interact comfortably.

We worked exclusively with adults. Based on my previous experience with Russian-speaking teenagers who had undergone forced migration or refugee experiences, I was cautious about introducing them potentially traumatic topics. However, I am now increasingly interested in how this practice could be adapted for younger participants, and how to develop an appropriate and sensitive language for discussing borders with them.

Workshop groups were typically small, ranging from four to seven co-creators. Although I initially worried about this, I soon recognised that the intimate scale helped create a genuine and trusting creative atmosphere. A turning point came in January 2026, when two participants expressed a strong commitment to attend all remaining sessions. At that moment, I realised we had formed a small “flock”—a sense of continuity and collective belonging that gives me hope the project can continue beyond my direct involvement.

Despite this, my experience of collaboration remains ambivalent. I often feel isolated, as though I am carrying much of the process alone. Yet, drawing on the ideas of Olli Pyyhtinen (2012), who analyses artistic production through the lens of actor-network theory, I remind myself that this project is inherently collective. The "participants" extend far beyond those of us present in the workshops: they include teachers, whose feedback shaped the project; friends and acquaintances; material objects that influenced processes; and institutions such as Uniarts, the border services of Estonia and Russia, etc. All of these actors contribute to the ongoing formation of the Bodies and Borders project.

3. Practical part of the research: praxis

In this section, I will focus on analysing only part of our process. My attention is centred on the masterclasses that took place in 2025, namely:

15 Nov, Mapping the body/border line (in Russian)

20 Nov, Mapping the body/border line (in English)

1 Dec, (Object)isation: matters of borders (in English)

11 Dec, Migrant body in change

The concepts behind almost all of these classes, with the exception of the last one, originated largely from me, more so than those held later. I see these earliest classes as the impetus for the start of the research, an invitation to explore the topic. In this paper, I will attempt to describe my intentions and how I put them into practice in the classroom. I will also discuss those "moments" that arose during the sessions and proved significant for the further development of the process.

3.1. The Skin as a Border

"For if the skin is a border, then it's a border that feels," I read in Sara Ahmed's work (2000, p. 45), and my own practice was revealed to me in a completely new light.

It wasn't that I consciously started with the skin — rather, it was intuitive.

Starting from my own personal trigger topic, the Finnish-Russian border, and through reading literature, I discovered a wide range of possible interpretations of the theme of the border. And, to be honest, at some point I felt a bit lost.

"Where the sense of being lost lead you/ your process? what did you do with the sense of loss?" — asks Maryam, my supervisor. Well, if I were to answer that question, I'd say: first, frustration and silence, and then other people. When it started to feel as though there were borders everywhere and I couldn't extricate myself from this web on my own, I thought it would be easier together. Every problem is need to be walked with step by step; you just need to know where to start.

So, in the practical sessions, I looked for ways to contextualise the border, to focus on the more specific aspects of this theme that interested my fellow participants. My attempt was to start the research involving experimenting, together, with different ways of describing or discussing the border, in the hope that this would help to "narrow down" the topic and provide an impetus for developing specific strands of it.

3.1.1. Feeling through bodily border

Whilst preparing my first class as part of this series, Mapping the Body | Border Line, I asked myself a number of questions, not all of which we were, of course, able to address:

— The subjectivity and border (What does the concept of a border even mean to me? How do others view the issue of border?)

— Embodied knowing of border (How do other people experience and make sense of different kinds of borders?)

— The pedagogy and border topic (Can my field of study help answer these questions in any way?)

It is interesting that the idea of exploring my immediate physical boundaries as borders struck me as an internal dialogue with them and with the environment they separate me from. It was only later that I realised that the border I had been talking about all along was, in fact, my SKIN.

During the practice, I gave the sugestions for practice along these lines:

Starting with the border between the feet and the floor. What is it like?

Direct your attention to where the feet meet the surface; notice that they are not flat, that these two surfaces form a complex pattern. Try to feel it. You could rock back and forth, wiggle your feet, feel it, and mentally picture how this pattern changes.

Shift your attention from the feet to the top of the foot, the shins, the kneecaps, and the popliteal fossae.

You can move, or you can stand still — the important thing is to keep your attention on the surface of your body.

Imagine, how the air touches the surface of your body. But the skin breathes. These borders are permeable too.

As the practice went on, I suggested an image of how the air “flows around” the body, touching its various surfaces. But gradually I added details that created a sense of conflict regarding the borders. This was not my original intention, but it happened naturally. Now I would say that these details contained potential impulses for development and sensation. Potential for expansion (deepening?) in the sensation of one’s own boundaries, and even having the potential to change the “genre” of how these boundaries are perceived. As an example, just by speaking about the permeability of the

skin, by saying this (originally written down on paper, intended to be spoken) aloud at the first workshop, surrounded by my co-authors, I myself realised for the first time the colossal significance of what had been said. The skin as a fragile, breathing, "sensing" border. Ahmed quotes Anthony Smith's disconcerting definition of skin: "The only unprotected tissue which has the living body on one side and the outside world on the other" (1974, as cited in Ahmed, 2000, p. 45). Ahmed emphasises that in our consciousness, skin appears as a surface that cuts off and opposes the world. I, however, am struck by the idea of the permeability of the skin as an organ, a surface—and this is on the condition that there are fragments of the body's surface where the skin becomes even more fragile.

During the class we didn't talk about the genitals, and for some reason I even forgot about the mouth. But I did pay attention to the ears — the complex internal structure of the auricle seems to resist the idea of ears as an "open", unprotected surface. Even without touching one another, we are already interacting, if only because the sound of my voice penetrates their bodies. After the class, one of the participants, an art therapist by profession, told me that for the first time they had thought about the auditory boundaries of their body and how these boundaries affect their state of being. This was very important to me and made me reflect on the possibility of integrating practices of inclusive/ecological listening into bodily practices related to the theme of borders.

Whilst prompting (providing images and impulses) for reflection on the fragility and permeability of the skin as the body's covering, I also drew attention to its elasticity. During the practice I described above, I reminded participants that one kilogram of air exerts pressure on every square centimetre of skin. This is an astonishing, yet undeniable fact. We bear 15–20 tones atmospheric pressure every second of our existence.

These moment-impulses — permeability and elasticity, holding pressure — were noted by Kenneth Siren, who took part in the second (English-language) class on mapping borders, and they also were my practice supervisor. In fact, the idea of "moments" came to me from Kenneth. Can these moments be called "affects"? Or "impulses", as I called them above? I wouldn't want to decide right now how to label these moments. It seems to me that the answer is not as simple as it appears. And by giving this answer, I am affixing a label of belonging to a certain theoretical approach onto moments that are precious to me. And for the time being, I would like to preserve

them (illegally, so to speak, bypassing any theory), for us, those who took part in those practices. In any case, these were moments of potential, the unfolding of which may lead to new discoveries.

Kenneth advised setting aside extra time for these moments — to give participants time to "be" in the sensation of lightness vs heaviness, weight-ness and permeability; and, separately, time to dwell on the awareness of the body's surface resisting this natural and imperceptible, yet such powerful, pressure. I followed Kenneth's advice and tried to allow extra time for these "moments" in my demonstration class on 11 December. I think I continue to work on the wording of these moments. In their conflict-filled union, they seem charged with liberating potential. If such a fragile surface resists such a burden every second, then how astonishing and powerful our body is, what elasticity our boundaries possess — the thought of this is truly inspiring.

Another aspect of the practice that the participants noticed—and which I myself had been pondering whilst preparing the class—is the body's resistance to conceiving of itself as a line or even a surface. "How, — I asked the participants during the practice, — will the air envelop your fingers? Each one individually? Or will it be like cosy mittens?" And when it comes to hair, all is lost. How are we to "feel" every single hair? The body, by its very nature, naturally resists being confined. Kenneth suggested we linger on this moment too — to dwell in the sensation of mitten-like hands, in the sensation of "cocooning" (that's my own word), a puffy spacesuit pulling my body upwards; or a sleeping bag in which it's so pleasant to sleep. All these amusing images, which I had already been mulling over following the first two workshops, but which were born in those fleeting shared moments of inspiration right there, gave a new, funny and even absurd twist to my reflections on boundaries—one I hadn't expected at all.

The paradox is that, whilst trying to focus on "personal" boundaries and limit physical interaction with others, we were still in a situation of intense interaction.

Ahmed expresses a remarkable idea, very close to what I believe we arrived at in our practice, though we did not put it into words: "The skin allows us to consider how boundary-formation, the marking out of the lines of a body, involves an affectivity which already crosses the line" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 45). In other words, "allows us to think of how the materialisation of bodies involves, not containment, but an affective opening out of bodies to other bodies" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 46). By focusing attention on

the skin, working with it as a border, we are in fact working on the process of the body's materialisation and the strategies/ways of opening the body up to the world.

It is true that Ahmed (2000) notes that this affective interaction occurs "in the sense that the skin registers how bodies are touched by others" (p. 46), with which I am prepared to agree, bearing in mind not only, and indeed not so much, physical touch.

Thus, by "feeling out" with my inner vision the outer border of my own body (and immediately the question arises: is it really outer…?), noting its permeability, vulnerability, yet at the same time its power, I seek to reconfigure, to dematerialise my mode of being here and now, in relation to the Other. "The skin is not simply a matter of place," remarks Butler, with whom Ahmed is in dialogue on this matter, "but rather involves the process of *materialisation* [my quotation marks — Aleksandra]" (Butler, 1993, p. 9)

This complex and intense process raised a host of practical pedagogical questions for me. Giving an example, the participants in the first (Russian-speaking) class reacted to my guidance in this exercise in a way that surprised me. Most of them laughed, giggled, chatted amongst themselves, or played with another participant who was working intently with their eyes closed. I should mention that whilst I did mention the option of keeping one's eyes open or closed, I did not impose a ban on talking. This was not a deliberate strategy, but rather a shortcoming in the instructions for the practice. It simply didn't occur to me that people would want to talk. On the spot, in the classroom, I was somewhat flustered, but I didn't impose a ban on talking, merely clarifying that it was possible, if one wished, to work without resorting to words. In my notes following the class (written the evening after it ended), a hint of irritation occasionally shines through. In one place I write that the participants "were talking, drifting off into their own topics … quite unceremoniously invading the space of the fourth person, who was working with their eyes closed" (Dunaeva, 2025a). Should I have interrupted the conversation? Later I thought that this mood was quite natural. If I myself don't fully understand exactly what I'm offering the participants, how could they possibly understand? Of course, it took time. The general mood of the class on 15 November evolved over time from light-hearted and playful (a gathering of friends) to serious and quiet. One person later gave a detailed account of their feelings:

> This is how it went: I closed my eyes, tried to listen only to myself and visualise my boundaries. I hadn't expected it, but after a while I saw them. They didn't

> exactly match my body; it was as if they were slightly wider in some places and slightly narrower in others, and they changed shape as I moved. But the boundary itself was by no means always a smooth, thin line; sometimes the line was broad and blurred. Interestingly, my sensations partly coincided with S.'s. My boundaries were sometimes very clear, with a straight outline, and sometimes completely blurred or even absent, for example, around the knees. The shapes seemed to "flow" and change slightly. My hips would sometimes become narrower, sometimes wider. My glasses always fell within my outline. (Dunaeva b, 2025)

This detailed documentation, which is very valuable to me, links the "boundary" with a "line" rather than with any other figure or a surface. It is curious that for A., who wrote this text, as well as for me, the medium of "skin" as a border had not been articulated at that point. Starting from the word "boundary", I was thinking precisely in terms of the category of the line, as if in a 2D format.

And one more observation. One of the participants, in the middle of the practice, ran to their notebook and began jotting down thoughts. Later, during the discussion, they said that the practice "triggered many thoughts that quickly scattered", and the others agreed with them. (Dunaeva a, 2025). It seems to me that we managed to enter the realm of the bodily — knowledge arising within the body, which is difficult to put into words, "escaping" the possibility of being fixed. The anthropologist Mary Douglas, describing the process of perception, spoke of how in this process we construct, accepting some things and discarding others. The things that fit best into the image we are constructing are accepted most readily. The ambiguous tends to be understood in such a way as to harmonise best with the other parts of the image. "That which does not fit is most likely discarded." (Douglas, 2000/ 1966, p. 66-67). "Scattered", fleeting thoughts are therefore a valuable discovery. That very "ambiguity" which finds no place within the familiar categories dictated by everyday experience. There are only a few seconds—literally a moment—to give them form, before they "escape", before we discard them. Perhaps it is with these pre-reflective (!) moments, with these sensations that do not align with the past and are therefore new, that we must seek ways of working. "To complete perception," writes anthropologist Svetlana Adonyeva, "it is necessary to recognise the set of sensations occurring here and now as a *coherent object* [My italics —Aleksandra] and bring it into the field of one's experience" (Adonyeva et al., 2017, p. 89).

In an attempt to capture these fleeting moments, I chose body mapping as the method I was most familiar with.

3.1.2. Body-mapping

I first encountered the mapping of bodily impulses/sensations and movement as a method of dance pedagogy during a series of workshops led by Tuire Colliander for our Teak MA course in the autumn of 2025. We also worked with this method at one of the seminars during the CAPRA conference, where we mapped bodily sensations without even getting up from our chairs. Finally, on an interdisciplinary course where I, as a theatre educator, worked alongside dance, music and art teachers, the latter suggested mapping the rhythms of the participants, translating them onto paper in the form of drawings.

Having initially viewed this method rather critically, I subsequently became very interested in it. As a theatre scholar, I have spent a great deal of time working on and reflecting upon 'translation' between different artistic systems. From literature into theatrical material, from a theatrical text into prose or music. Mapping interested me precisely as a method of translation that incorporates elements of empathy and play. We turned our own bodily movement patterns into simple, often humorous sketches during Tuire's class, and then tried to recreate those movements ourselves. After that, we shared our sketches with participants from other groups who didn't know us, and they attempted to reproduce the movements in their own sessions. In turn, we did the same with the sketches they had created.

This surprising, playful way of getting to know and understanding others through the reproduction of sketched body patterns led me to consider the possibility of using body mapping in my class. The idea was to move from 'feeling' the surface of the skin — my most obvious, as it seemed to me at the time, physical borders — to attempting to visualise these borders together on a large sheet of paper, and then to moving within the pattern of these drawn borders, both others' and my own. Moving directly on the sheet. That was my idea.

Now, as I delve into the literature, I am beginning to understand the roots of body mapping better. Having apparently emerged in the wake of the search for new methods of qualitative analysis in the 1970s (such as participatory research), mapping developed actively as a form of non-verbal research in the social sciences, as well as a therapeutic

method. In their detailed review of body mapping, de Jager, Tewson and others highlight the advantage of visual methods, which lies in "avoiding the imposition of a particular cultural understanding onto others, thereby excluding their definitions … and to overcome language barriers between researchers and participants" (de Jager et al., 2016). Similarly, visual methods have been found useful when working with children and adolescents, the authors add. A visual, extra- (or supra-) textual language of interaction proves useful where verbal communication limits access to meaning. Devoting a chapter to the strand of body mapping that interests me — "examining people's embodied experience in relation to the physical world" (de Jager et al., 2016) the authors note that mapping is "not often utilised for this purpose" (de Jager et al., 2016), which strikes me as surprising and is likely explained by the particularities of the academic environment in which I find myself.

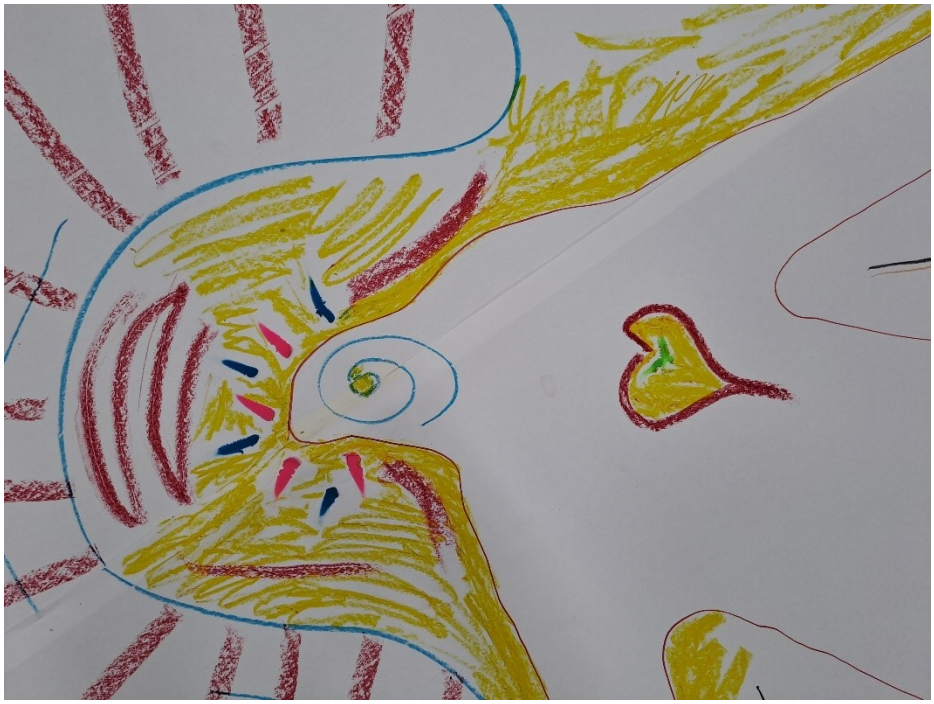
It seems that such a shift in the production of knowledge would not have been possible without an expansion in the understanding of "meaning". Following Maria Letsiou an art pedagogue from Greece, I am ready to exclaim: "I am particularly intrigued by the ways in which contemporary creative strategies produce meaning" (Letsiou, 2016, 123). On her own or with her students, she created aesthetic maps, exploring environments in various regions of Greece—in particular, she "created aesthetic mapping of the traits that triggered specific emotions." (Letsiou, 2016, 124) Nowadays, such maps are sometimes called "emotional maps". When sharing the collages she produced in her article, she does not seek to decipher them—their meaning requires no translation. The researcher defines the knowledge she seeks to capture as "idiosyncratic" and refers to her research method as "living research".

Did I succeed in creating a situation for the participants in which new potential moments and meanings could emerge, linking boundaries and corporeality? — I ask myself.

Reflecting on this now, I see it as a process full of inaccuracies and misunderstandings. Misunderstanding also permeates the feedback the participants wrote for me on slips of paper at the end of the classes, and my own memories of our conversations during the classes—conversations I could not and did not want to record. "What were those balls for?" wrote one of the participants about the fitness balls that had appeared in the space during the practice. "The mapping task is unclear. What are we depicting?" I write in my notes. Indeed, what?

During our first, Russian-language class, I asked the participants to depict their own borders, drawing on their experiences and the practice (described above) that we had just shared. To a large extent, it was the practice itself—that is, my guidance—that dictated the images that emerged on the paper. But did it not limit the participants? Plus, the paper itself, its two-dimensional nature. I brought some modelling clay to go beyond the plane, but nobody used it. (See Appendix 1.)

What can I do to avoid limiting participants with my own narrative?



Mapping the body/border line workshop. November 15th, 2025. Fragment of mapping. Photo: A.Dunaeva.

On the other hand, it was they, the participants in the first group, who chose to speak in such detail about personal boundaries. In my notes, taken immediately after the class, I wrote that I find such interest in this topic surprising. I hadn't expected it. Obviously, I was more concerned with the triggers affecting boundaries (and my own trigger, the Finnish-Russian border, which I find so hard to stop thinking about).

And, of course, it was a revelation to me that boundaries can be perceived positively.

"Why is a boundary a trigger—and a negative one at that—for one person, whilst for another it's about creating peace and comfort?! And in some other ways, we were very much alike, absolutely identical — yet different in exactly the same way?" (Dunaeva, 2025a) wrote of co-creators, adding: "I'd like Sasha's focus on borders (between states) to shift to the boundaries that create a sense of safety and comfort." (Dunaeva b, 2025).

Thus, what I had truly hoped for when planning the workshop came to pass: the focus shifted in a direction I hadn't anticipated. Defining and establishing personal boundaries proved important for the participants and sparked discussion and reflection.

The main difference in the approach to mapping between the Russian-speaking class and the second, bilingual class was that I tried to clarify the task. This time, I suggested co-creators to depict their own boundaries in relation to the triggers that influence them. Take a look at this documentation. (Appendix 2) I don't think I'm ready to talk about it yet, but this is the kind of lived experience that Maria Letsiou describes as "living inquiry" and which "is the process that settles into the space between the roles of artist, researcher and teacher" (Letsiou, 2016, 124). In other words, these images are still doing their work within me, establishing connections between different facets of my experience.

My desire to speak about triggers reveals, of course, my own limitations in thinking about borders. I can only think about them by anchoring my thoughts to a material object or a specific phenomenon – a stimulus. My co-authors' reflections and the images they create help me to see these limitations.

Ahmed (2000), with whom I am in dialogue, argues that, in essence, we cannot conceive of ourselves, "our body" (as the term "my body" in its singularity), other than through an encounter with other bodies. And not merely an encounter as a meeting, but an encounter as an event. Embodiment, she writes, we need to understand through (she introduces the term) "inter-embodiment" (p. 47). But what if, I wonder, we are not talking about the human body, but about any body? A non-human body? Why is "social experience", embodiment, only the experience of perceiving oneself through other bodies? And not, for example, through surfaces and environments?

3.1.3. Patterns of the surface

I initially conceived the practice of "feeling out" or "probing" borders as a warm-up. It was only in the open class in December, when we dared to give ourselves more time to dwell in different moments of the body, that this "warm-up" grew into a meaningful part of the process for me. In the very first two sessions, which focused on mapping boundaries, I was eager to introduce an object or surface into the exercise as soon as possible.

Why was I in such a hurry? What is it that frightens me about stopping and simply being in my own body? Why do I need to seek support in the external manifestations of the material world and define my boundaries through them?

During the sessions, after exploring bodily borders, I offered a new practice:

As you move around the room, pay attention to the patterns and landscapes that form in the gaps between parts of your own bodies (arms and waist, hips, hair and neck), as well as between your body and other surfaces.

This idea still fascinates me. The concept of "in-between spaces" has become a commonplace in the social sciences, but what if we were to "ground" it, to live with the sensation of these in-between spaces, quite literally. "The gaps (hollows)," remarked one of our co-creators, "between parts of the body, for example, where the arm meets the body—they have 'floating' contours, but inside they're just white, as if a colored shape had been cut out and placed against a white background. In short, I didn't experience any creepy or unpleasant boundaries at all :)" (Dunaeva b, 2025).

I suggested this practice of bodily reflections on the in-between space at each of the three workshops mentioned above—the cartographic ones and the open one in December. And I find it hard to understand what the others thought of it — at the very least, discussing this practice wasn't a priority for them. However, during the December 11th session, I myself experienced a moment (yes, that very moment, the one brimming with potential) that I still think about to this day.

On that day, I suggested extending this "in-between-world" not only to the surfaces we can find in the classroom, but to focus our attention on the space, for example, between my skin and the wall of the house on the other side of the Hämeentie. Although I was rearranging objects and unable to immerse myself deeply in the practice, the exercise resonated deeply within me physically. This "stretching" of my personal cocoon over hundreds of metres felt like a leap across an abyss. What was it? The word "absorption" comes to mind—the absorption of space. But why do I feel that I am "absorbing", connecting, when I myself, suggested concentrating on the gaps? The anthropologist Svetlana Adonyeva, whom I mentioned earlier, spoke in her lectures about how village healers often did not focus on treating the body of the person who came to them, but rather on restructuring that person's connections with other members of the community and with the world. This restructuring (a kind of traditional form of therapy organised through various bodily practices) — re-ordering, re-organising —

was the “healing”. To heal in a traditional society, a healer needed the talent to see not an isolated body, but to sense the collective, social body and, even more broadly, the connections between people, plants, livestock and natural phenomena.

I am very interested in this state of “absorption”, because it is close to the sensation of being dissolved into the world. The word entanglement (in the world of bodies and objects?) also strikes a chord within me. It resonates with the ideas of Juha Varto discussed above. The subject does not exist as an autonomous, separate entity, but is always already embedded within a network of relationships and processes. Following this logic, Rosi Braidotti (2011) speaks of the “subject-position” as a position arising within these connections, rather than outside them. To my understanding, the subject simultaneously part(i)sipates, belongs, and is always part(ial), incomplete, and conditioned by context. This contrasts with the idea of being apart — the illusion of a distanced, independent observer. Thus, the subject is not an observer “external” to the world, but always a “part of” a dynamic, mutually constitutive reality.

3.1.4. Migrant body in “distributed imagery”

I was surprised to find out that the state very close to what I describe as a moment of “absorption”, of existing, as it were, between environments, half-dissolved within them—the state very close to this is described in the works of Russian visual anthropologist Ilya Inishev as a historically established mode of vision.

Inishev explores how we perceive materiality in historical perspective. In particular, he distinguishes four modes of materiality: object, sign, surface and screen. It is the third mode, “texture” or “surface”, that interests me. Here, materiality is dense and multisensory; we do not interpret or classify objects but remain in tactile, embodied contact with the space in general. This mode involves a feedback loop between subject and material, subtly shaping behaviour and intensifying our relation to the environment. The fourth and most new mode, “generative” matter or the “screen”, produces a perceptual space that immerses the subject and continuously stimulates affective engagement, often reducing deliberate control. Based on these modes, Inishev (2020) describes a shift toward a new type of perception—"distributed imagery”. This is a horizontal, non-hierarchical, multisensory form of perception that does not prioritise meaning or discrete objects but engages with textures and environments, generating its own space-time and carrying broader social and political implications.

It is an interesting thought that this moment (or regime as a new word for it?), in which I found myself, was born of the advent of the screen and the oversaturation of the material environment around me. It is a regime of "defocusing", a performative gliding in/between real and virtual environments. In such a mode, concentrating on the body's presence "here and now" requires an incredible effort, yet at the same time, it holds the potential to overcome the automatism of perception. It is a "horizontal" mode of seeing and feeling that creates no hierarchies between objects. It offers incredible freedom to choose one's own perspective, yet demands a responsible attitude towards one's own gaze.

I like to think of the potential of that moment as the potential for my body to be transformed, to borrow from Braidotti (2011, 2013), into a "nomadic" body or even a "posthuman" body. For my migrant body, this suggests a different mode of belonging: not identification with a fixed political territory, but a process of territorialisation (in Deleuzian terms) within a liminal space—where the contours of my own borders begin to dissolve into the boundless patterns of the world.

3.2. The Red Rope

The idea of singling out an object, of making it a distinct tool for research, arose from a question posed by my thesis supervisor, Maryam:

"What do we trans-fer/mit/port across borders?" she asked.

Indeed, what?

Things, experiences, knowledge, pain, and more things… — all of which mean something to us. Or perhaps it doesn't, but it does, in one way or another, influence the situations we find ourselves in?

An object as a way of giving form to experience and, through that form, making sense of and accepting that experience — that was my original intention in turning to the object within the framework of my topic. The short journey I have managed to make so far suggests (as might be expected) that the role of the object in the art education process is more complex and multifaceted. And although there are still more questions than answers, I have made one valuable discovery.

In this chapter, I attempt to trace how the red rope became my partner and, to some extent, the focal point in a series of workshops on borders and bodies.

3.2.1. The red rope is making itself known

It seems it all began when Kenneth once suggested I try improvising with red ribbons. An image of elastic red ropes immediately sprang to mind; I imagined we had used them once in one of our sessions. That was exactly what I was looking for. But what I found was a thick, scarlet, round, slightly clumsy and completely inelastic rope, about one cm in diameter and three meters long.

Below, I will briefly describe how I used the rope and other objects in a series of workshops, and then I will attempt to systematize and theorize this experience.

Although I had originally conceived the first workshops as object-free, built exclusively around the body, even here it proved difficult to do without objects. The rope first appeared in our first class, “Mapping the body|border line” (in Russian), as an object with which I invited the participants to improvise. In fact, there were three ropes: a red one, as well as a thin black and a thin white clothesline; however, they did not attract as much interest as the red one. According to the workshop structure, we first had to warm up (the “feel through” practice of our boundaries, the development of which from class to class I have described in detail above), and then improvise on the theme of boundaries using the ropes. Finally, in the third part of the class, we sketched (mapped) the borders of our bodies on large sheets of paper, drawing on the experience of the previous exercises (my reflections on this part are also recorded in the previous chapter).

The second workshop (“Mapping the body|border line”, guided in English) followed the same structure. A warm-up without props; the introduction of a prop, improvisation; mapping. I noticed that when the rope appeared in the room, it drew attention to itself like a magnet; it was impossible to ignore it. Although I didn’t expect it, from the improvisation section, the rope moved into the mapping section and became part of someone’s boundary reflection bricolage.

In the third workshop, “Object(ification): questions of borders” (a bilingual Russian-English session), which was methodologically conceived as an “object-based” workshop—that is, one dedicated to an object and structured around it—the rope also took center stage, although there were plenty of other objects present. In this workshop, I planned to move from the general to the personal experiences. To begin with, I suggested various ways of engaging playfully with objects. For example, inventing additional, fantastical functions for them. Or improvising together, striking various

poses in a staged composition where the object takes centre stage. In this exercise, which I adapted from Riku Saastamoinen's training on performance-based pedagogy (Saastamoinen, 2019) the central object of the composition, around which the participants were to build their stories, was a suitcase. A rope separated our improvised "stage" from the "audience area" — but it, too, imperceptibly became part of the game.

In the third part of the same class, Iproposed the participants to create installations at various points around the room. I had asked to bring an object from home that they associated with crossing a border or with a border in the broader sense in advance. They built their compositions around these objects. If they wished, the participants could present their own figure (bricolage? sculpture?) and talk about it. Well, the rope turned out to be part of one of the compositions here too.

I filled this "object-based" workshop with items associated with borders — a suitcase, keys, a passport, papers… The participants brought their own visions and images — a toy, a stone, an axolotl… In the object-based workshop, every installation was, of course, profound and meaningful, but across the entire cycle, as I see it, the objects had varying creative potential and infused the process with different energies.

In the next workshop, held in December, which I had planned to focus on change and anticipation, it was the rope that defined the layout of the space in which the activities took place. The central part of the workshop consisted of two long improvisations, each lasting half an hour. The first explored working with personal boundaries (as described in the previous chapter). The second exercise, however, was new and focused precisely on the idea of change. During this exercise, I altered the space, regardless of the participants' wishes. These were perhaps naive or technical changes, but I really wanted to offer our small group this experiment — to listen to their bodies at the moment of changes in the environment, however insignificant. I changed the background music, adjusted the lighting (switched off the overhead light, lit electric candles, drew the curtains); I altered the physical surroundings. I stretched a rope between the curtain rail and several objects – stable enough that the rope wouldn't sag, yet movable. By adding new chairs or objects to the space and securing the rope to them, I shaped a space that could function simultaneously as both an obstacle and an invitation to action. During the practice, I was partly occupied with rearranging things and partly immersed in my own process, but what I did manage to see were striking moments of choreography, often structured precisely along or around the red rope. During the discussion,

participants spoke of how the very appearance of the objects and the interaction with them and with one another through them were what mattered most to them. “Take rope, share the playful journey of our creatorship with me. It’s all about Relations*”* — from workshop final feedback (Dunaeva, 2025b).

Migrant body in change workshop. December 11th, 2025. A glimpse of the room after the class has ended. Photo:A.Dunaeva

Perhaps the rope’s moment of glory came during the final session, Migrant Body at Borderwork, when it fully fulfilled its role in front of an audience. This event was subtitled A Short Role-Play for Radical Empathy and consisted of several stages. After the first part, which included introductions and a presentation of the research and the game, I led the participants “to the border” or waiting area – the setting for the game, where we subsequently spent 50 minutes. The walk itself to the venue became part of the action – I organized it as a theatrical promenade. Wearing a Roman legionnaire’s helmet, I led the participants on a string, just as small children were once led to nursery school, through the corridors and staircases of the Theatre Academy, and then the Academy of Arts. The participants carried props with them – suitcases and bags – which they were to interact with later, during the game. Of course, this “string” on which I was “pretending” to lead my participants to a destination unknown (to them) was that very red string. Upon arriving at the venue (the action took place in the sculptors’ studio within the Academy of Arts, KUVA), I laid the string on the ground. Whilst the participants were carrying out the tasks written on the cards for each of them, I changed the pattern of the red line lying on the ground three times. By the end of the game, this pattern had turned into a closed circle. As some tasks involved interacting

with the red line, the participants were forced to keep returning to it — and found it in different places around the venue. Thus, throughout the action, the "pattern" of the border was constantly changing — in a symbolic sense, this "grounded" it, providing a tangible equivalent (at least as I saw it) to the idea of the boundary's fluidity, its mutability. At the same time, it served as a reminder of its presence.

Why did the rope, in my case, prove better than, say, a suitcase? A suitcase is also a highly expressive object, both tactilely and visually, filled with allusions and meanings. And even more so—filled with history (it is a real object and was surely once used by people for its intended purpose).

Why do some objects work more intensely in the process than others? And why, in my case, did this particular object prove so influential?

This question can be further developed: how does an object in artistic-pedagogical practice become something more than just an object? How does a sense of kinship arise with non-human, inanimate participants in a situation—what actor-network theory calls actants?

3.2.2. A rope, an umbilical cord and a madeleine biscuit. An attempt at theorization

One might say: your shift on the rope is a mere coincidence. A matter of choice. Some object had to become part of the process—and this one did.

One could refer to the visual associations linked to the object. A border as a line is a basic association dictated by the inertia of thought. The colour red adds a triggering element to it. Associations with red as the colour of blood, danger and prohibition are rooted in everyday life and culture. However, this explanation seems insufficient to me. It takes into account only the visual aspect of the object and ignores its physicality — its tactile qualities, its ability to draw one into action, to create interaction.

There are several perspectives close to my heart that help me better understand my little rope friend.

Of course, when reflecting on interactions with the material world in research, it is impossible to ignore the ideas of actor-network theory, specifically those of Bruno Latour. His ideas about the thing as an actant — an active participant in a situation, on a par with a human being. In one of his most famous examples — the example of the

Berlin key (Latour, 1992, 256-258) — Latour shows that material objects can perform social functions delegated to them by people. A key with its special construction is capable of more effectively guiding and restricting people's actions in relation to it (more specifically, forcing them to close the door of the building when they leave it) than any rules, prohibitions or threats of fines from the receptionist. The key, therefore, acts as a full-fledged actor in social interaction.

Among the proponents of ANT, however, I feel closer not to Latour but to the medical anthropologist Annemarie Mol. According to Mol, an object does not possess any kind of static individuality. A single object always conceals a multitude of objects, shaped by the practices that are built around it. Thus, as an example from one of Mol's texts a sleeve pump may be a sacred object for villagers in Zimbabwe, yet it remains an engineering object and a commodity traded between the Northern countries and Africa (de Laet & Mol, 2000).

In pedagogical practice, I believe, an object is always seen "fluid" and multiple. The power of its impact is determined by the potential of this multiplicity — each of the manifestations of the multiple object exists on an equal footing with the others in a shimmering unity. The important question is: In that case, what is the teacher's task? To reveal this multiplicity? To manage it, based on the tasks the group sets for itself?

In my view, it may be productive for theatre pedagogy to supplement Mol's concept with the ideas of performativity put forward by the German researcher Erika Fischer-Lichte. I assume that what "mobilise" the object's multiplicity may be the "presence" here and now in "performative" situation.

Erika Fischer-Lichte seeks to understand how a theatrical performance creates a specific environment capable of generating "presence", that is, enabling a unique and potentially transformative experience. She links this environment to the concept of performativity, which is shaped by what she terms the materiality of the stage. However, this materiality is understood in a paradoxical way: it does not refer to objects and bodies as such, but to the energy that emerges through the interaction between space, actors, and audience during the theatrical event.

In this context, Fischer-Lichte draws on the concept of "atmosphere" developed by Gernot Böhme. Atmosphere—distinct from "aura"—arises in the in-between, between the qualities of the environment and the human condition. Within this framework, objects do not simply possess properties; rather, they "radiate" them into space, exerting

an influence upon it. Böhme describes this as the "ecstasy of the thing": the capacity of an object to transcend its own boundaries, extend into the surrounding environment, and fill space with tension and presence. In this sense, his concept disrupts the traditional subject–object dichotomy and challenges classical ontology by rethinking the limits of the thing. Crucially, the effect of an object is not reducible to its function or symbolic meaning; it operates through form, volume, colour, and texture—through the way it is present. Fischer-Lichte establishes a connection between this "ecstasy of the thing" and "presence", suggesting that objects, by acting upon the surrounding space, produce an impression of intensified presence (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 122). Atmosphere, then, can be understood as an excess: something that exceeds what is directly perceived. As Böhme writes, a thing "radiates into the surrounding environment, displaces the homogeneity of space and fills it with tension and a suggestion of liveliness" (Böhme, 1993, p. 120). Atmosphere emerges where the "spatial" subject and the "radiating" thing come into contact—not necessarily through direct physical touch.

From this perspectives, the object in the theatrical process is not stable but constantly in a state of becoming. It manifests multiplicity (cf. Annemarie Mol), acts and organises action (cf. Bruno Latour), and exerts influence (Böhme), thereby contributing to the production of "presence" (Fischer-Lichte).

"Presence" is a central concept in the aesthetics of performativity and can be seen as the most intense mode of theatrical perception in Fischer-Lichte's framework. She argues that presence is generated, first and most, through the actor's energy and transmitted to the audience via an autopoietic feedback loop. This raises the possibility that similar conditions of "presence" might be cultivated in other contexts—for example, in teaching, including through the use of objects.

What is the mechanism of "presence" in performative situation? According to Fischer-Lichte, presence involves the performer's "living presence" and the capacity to unite the physical and the spiritual (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 81). When the performer overcomes the culturally embedded dichotomy between body and mind, the effect of presence emerges and is conveyed to the audience. As she writes, when the actor's presence allows spectators to experience themselves as "embodied spirits", this can be felt as a moment of happiness unavailable in everyday life (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 83). Importantly, despite this terminology, Fischer-Lichte's analysis remains non-religious and pragmatic. Her work examines how such states of "radical presence" are produced,

drawing on examples including Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Marina Abramović, and Romeo Castellucci. For Fischer-Lichte, being present is not a gift but a skill—a technique. Her project ultimately explores how to "mobilise" the energy of performative space in order to enable both performers and spectators to be fully present in the here and now.

Can an object "reconcile" the body with the "spirit", dissolve the subject-object dichotomy, even if we do not use specific techniques of movement, speech, or rhythm (such as, for example, ritual dance)?

I think the moment described in the previous chapter of my personal "dissolution into the pattern of the world" can also be explained in terms of what Fischer-Lichte calls presence. There were, however, other important moments where we were together with the participants. For instance, during the object-based (third) workshop, when the participants were constructing their sculptures (installations, bricolages) and presenting them, the classroom was filled with that very dense silence—so precious to me—which I would describe as "something important is happening".

In this case, I would associate presence with activating of memory and the participants' deep associations through the object. I was struck by a comment from one of our co-creators. She said that, for her, the red rope was an umbilical cord connecting her to her homeland. She also said that when the rope was rolled up, she felt a sense of relief (Dunaeva 2025a). The association with the umbilical cord was completely new and unexpected; it took me by surprise. As a mother who has seen a real umbilical cord, this image deeply moves me with its sincerity and profound poignancy.

I would like to continue thinking about the object in performative situation, about the density of the environment in theatre-pedagogical practice, and the ways of creating this density and its transformations. The choice of object(s) for the workshop is, of course, the direction of the "event". Fischer-Lichte writes that liberating an object from a given context intensifies its impact (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, 135). The object ceases to be part of a narrative and begins to be perceived as a phenomenon—through its materiality. Its tactility, smell, form, and the ways of interacting with it can immerse one in certain states. However, the object's meaning does not disappear. Rather, a balance emerges between its "pure form" and its symbolic potential. By placing an object within a specific framework, we do not fix its meaning, but create a field in which that meaning can emerge. In my case, the rope often functioned independently of other objects, but as

the workshop was devoted to bodies and borders, it fell within the framework of this theme and thus existed in a flickering unity with it.

One might say that an object does not merely evoke associations, but produces them in the process of interaction. Here, once again, I am drawn to Mol and her concept of "enactment"—where an object does not reflect a pre-existing meaning, but produces it in action (Mol, 2002). Thus, through the practice-play, the rope revealed itself to N. in such an unexpected, intimate and physiological form: the form of an umbilical cord.

Returning to Maryam's question: "What do we trans-fer/mit/port across borders?", I am becoming less and less certain that it is possible to answer it. Perhaps, to borrow the words of Trinh Minh-ha, whilst being "somewhere within here", I am unable to transfer anything at all. But what I can do is re-create my experience to imbue my hybrid state with new meaning. Just as in Proust's famous example of the madeleine biscuit[4], a memory is not retrieved from the mind, but is assembled in the moment of experience. The images that emerged in our workshops did not exist beforehand. They were born into presence from a combination of bodily experience, situation, time and interaction. And so the rope — just like Proust's madeleine — does not merely reinforce memory, but creates it. More precisely, it creates one of many possible versions — among a multitude of others.

4 This refers to the famous scene from the first volume of the novel, "In Search of Lost Time", in which Proust's protagonist dips a madeleine biscuit into his tea, and the taste of the biscuit transports him into a flood of memories.

4. Conclusion

Having experienced immigration and integration courses in Finland myself, and having been surrounded by people with migration experience, including refugees and forced migrants, since 2022, I have gradually come to the conclusion that a more holistic approach is needed to understand the concept of the "migrant body" (the embodiment of a person with migration experience). I would not dare to engage in a discussion about the effectiveness of integration training in Finland, however, I found a recent study on this topic, based on twelve interviews with teachers working with immigrants, to be significant. The study shows that the system is struggling due to the diversity of students, lack of resources and lack of alignment of learning objectives. I was surprised that, despite operating with scientific categories throughout the report, the authors' conclusions and recommendations focus on such "ordinary", i.e. seemingly non-scientific, issues as a lack of understanding:

> The lack of understanding of immigrants and what expectations authorities can rightfully place on them leads to a lack of understanding of what they need to integrate properly and what integration means to them as individuals, […] In light of this, it becomes evident that the reality of the situation does not live up to the well-intentioned acts and policies meant to guide integration (Taylor et al., 2023).

The authors argues that, in light of this, it becomes evident that the reality of the situation does not live up to the well-intentioned acts and policies intended to guide integration.

The term "holistic" is key in the authors' recommendations: "A holistic/ecological approach to addressing the challenges is required to support integration and inclusion better" (Taylor et al., 2023), — they conclude.

So the message of my text relates to this statement. I think that the experience of migration should be understood holistically — as a total experience that includes all levels of the human being, starting with the organic level. Accordingly, when working with concepts such as "integration", it is necessary to consider all these levels.

In the first part of this paper, I attempted to provide several possible perspectives on the concepts of "border" and "migrant body", which resonate with my vision. These perspectives form the general framework for the research undertaken in this thesis work process.

The word “border”, which features in the title of my research, in this context conveys the meaning of the complex of triggers, obstacles and irritants that influence people with migration experience. Of course, these triggers include individual characteristics. However, I am interested in the specific experience that is present in everyone who has had to move to a new place: the experience of passing through border control, the experience of waiting (waiting at the border, waiting for legislation, waiting for documents, etc.), the experience of fear of repression, the experience of finding oneself in a new culture and climate; the experience of being, as social science says, in-between, and I would add, to be “somewhere within here” (Min-ha, 2010). This experience can be more extreme and traumatic (in the case of refugees or forced emigration for political reasons, for example) or less so. But this is a special, situational knowledge — the very "partial perspective" according to Haraway that "promises objective vision" (Haraway, 1991, p. 190).

At this early stage of my research, I have attempted to understand how theatre pedagogy and my own specific physical experience can be beneficial to people with migration experience. In order to be as specific as possible, I formulated the research questions in such a way that the search for answers would lead to the creation of methods, or at least processes, which can subsequently be developed in different directions (applied training, research, artistic work). I will remind you of these questions: 1) What kinds of artistic and pedagogical encounters arise when working with the theme of borders, and 2) Which methods and tools of theatre pedagogy can facilitate the exploration and expression of personal and collective experiences related to borders?

Taking on such a topic is impossible without the support of others. In the second part of the work, I describe the preparation for the practical part of the research and the strategies I relied on. One important point that I would like to emphasise again is the laboratory and collective nature of the research. While I provided the initial impetus, the project subsequently evolved organically, driven by the interests and contributions of the participants. Without a specific goal, but with a powerful impetus of living experience and people interested in the topic, I started moving forward using the skills I acquired during my studies in theatre pedagogy at postgraduate level. My first questions — perhaps naive, but ultimately giving me the courage to act — can be summarized as: what if?

What if we try to explore the embodied experience of migration through somatic practices?

What if objects become our guides in exploring the theme of borders?

In the third, main part of this work, I attempt to reflect on a small part (unfortunately only two aspects) of the work we have done during workshop series “Bodies and Borders”.

Firstly, I am interested in the potential of somatic practices and mapping (transposing experience onto paper) in relation to the “migrant body”.

In search of answers to this question in the text, I attempted to trace and theorise what I call “moments” in our work. These moments cannot be fully predicted or controlled. They may arise as an intensification of sensation, a sudden image, a shift in the quality of attention, or a collective silence that fills the space with a sense of density. Sometimes they manifested through confusion, laughter, or resistance. In other cases, they manifested through stillness, concentration or an unexpected emotional reaction. What unites these diverse manifestations is not their form, but their effect: they disrupt habitual modes of perception and interaction, even if only for a moment. This opens up the possibility of transformation.

In our body-based practice, these “moments” manifested as sensations, which I defined as “absorption”, “entanglement” and “dissolution”. Exploring the skin as a border shifted our understanding of boundaries from fixed lines to permeable, sensitive surfaces. The body appeared not as a closed entity, but as something constantly touched by air, sound, and the presence of others. Even when focusing on personal boundaries, the experience remained deeply relational (in Braidotti's terms, 2013).

The border was both a rupture and an opportunity; it became a site of inter-embodiment where the distinction between “me” and “the other” was constantly re-examined. Thus, beyond visualising and reflecting on current experience (i.e. attempting to situate oneself in relation to the other and trigger-borders), I see a broader potential. Through the lens of visual anthropology, I have attempted to demonstrate how our classes offer a perspective on somatic methods of working with borders/boundaries. In the case of the migrant body, these methods have the potential to engage with the category of belonging — inscribing oneself into a new life order at various levels. This ranges from the local (“I am in this space”) to the global (“I am an equal part of this world”).

In the section devoted to the red rope, I reflected on how objects in theatre-based educational work can become our allies and co-creators. I traced how the red rope, initially presented as a simple prop, gradually became an active participant in the process. It drew attention, organised the space, shaped movement and generated relationships. Drawing on E. Fischer-Lichte's theory of performativity and her and G. Böhme's concept of "atmospheres", I attempted to describe how objects generate presence. Thus, the rope did not merely mark a border; it embodied it. When pulled taut, it divided; when moved, it transformed; and when encountered, it provoked a reaction. Thanks to this interaction, the border became tangible and dynamic. It could be crossed, bypassed, followed, or reshaped. It was no longer an abstract concept, but a living, performative phenomenon.

I also argued that, in addition to its phenomenological presence, the object generated meanings that were not predetermined. For example, the rope's association with an umbilical cord emerged unexpectedly from the encounter itself. Therefore, meaning was generated through interaction, rather than being attributed to the object. According to A. Mol's understanding, objects are potentially multiple. During interaction processes, multiple object have the potential to carry multiple meanings whilst participating in the creation of performative spaces. When it comes to working with the migrant body in a border situation, this means constantly recreating and "rewriting" experience in the here and now. Would it mean a possibility of changing one's own seemingly unshakeable situatedness?

When reflecting on the results of this research project, I find myself thinking about how much more I would like to explore—how many new paths our "garden of diverging paths" has opened for me. I also realise how much remains undescribed from what has already been done.

One aspect that falls outside the scope of this study is humour. I had hoped to examine how the absurdity of boundaries manifested in our practices in two distinct ways. On the one hand, we recognised the bleak fatalism of Samuel Beckett's notion of "exhaustion"; on the other, we encountered a light, absurd humour that significantly facilitated interactions between people with very different—including traumatic—experiences of borders. I intend to return to this connection between borders, humour, and empathy in the future.

I also did not address how we practised embodied waiting, translating waiting into acts carried through bodies and objects, nor did I explore several other aspects of the work.

However, the research gave me the courage to ask questions that I had previously been afraid to ask myself. These are among them:

What if embodied exploration of one's place in a new life-order upon emigration is not just a whim, but a task that is no less important than learning a language?

What if current statistical characteristics are outdated and unable to describe us and the order in which we exist?

What if I experience the migration as a dance?

What if I have no other choice then being “somewhere within here”?

What if the most significant question is not how to define a border, but how to acknowledge its embodied experience as something, again, that “begin to presencing” (Bhabha,1994)? Isn’t it something that unfolds between bodies and objects, between perception and action, between the known and the unknown?

Isn’t it precisely in this unfolding that the pedagogical and artistic potential of the embodied experience of the “border” is revealed—not as a limit, but as a process of continuous transformation?

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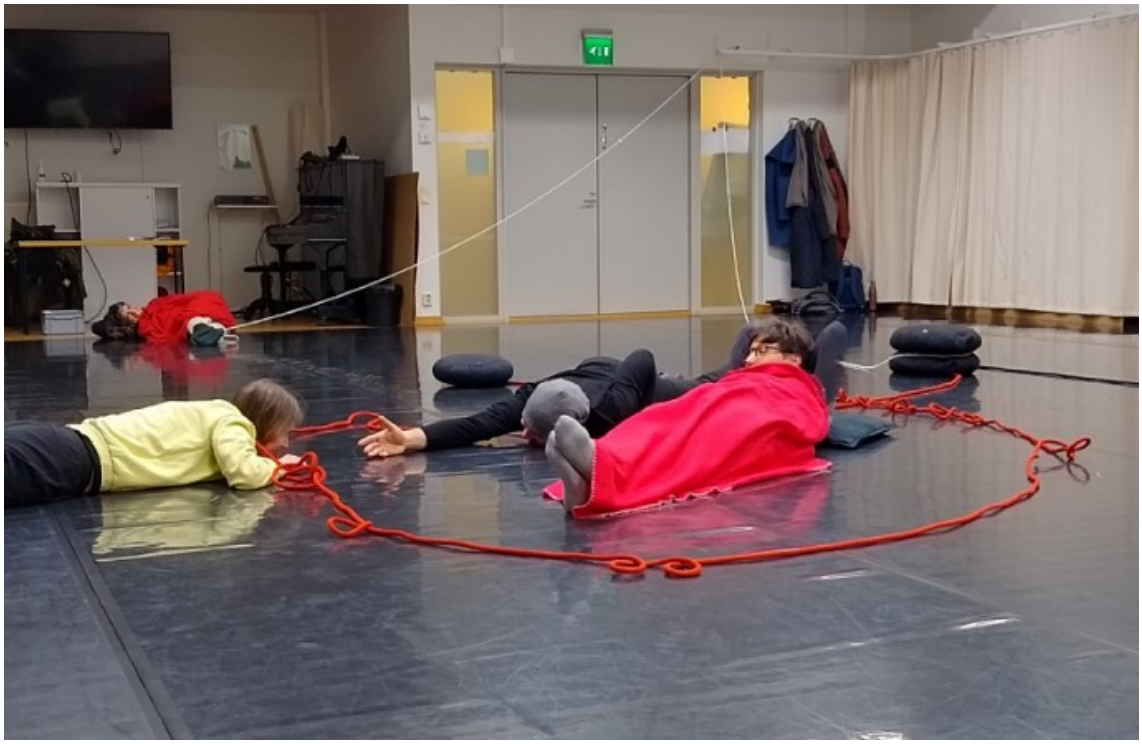
Appendix 1.
Documentation of the workshop: Mapping the body/border line (in Russian) 15.11.2025

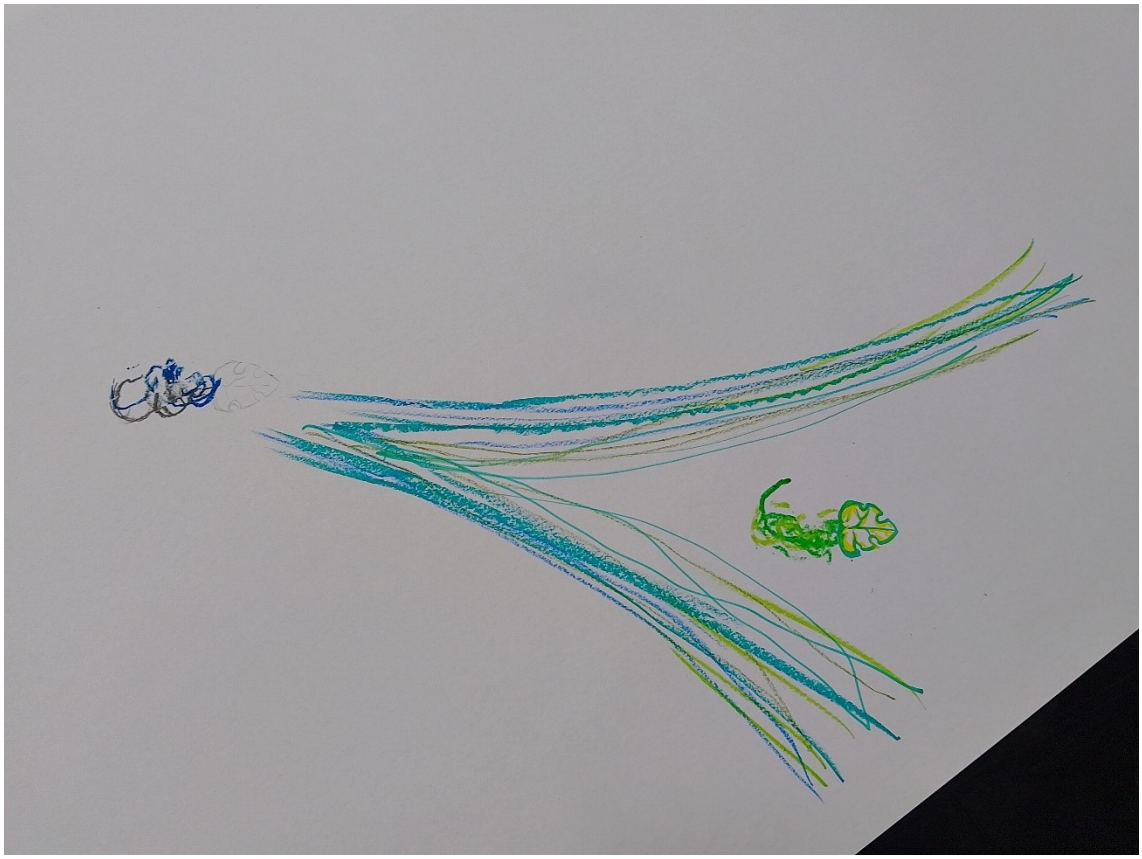
Photos: Aleksandra Dunaeva

Appendix 2.

Documentation of the workshop: Mapping the body|border line (in English and Russian) 20.11.2025

Photos: Milla Risku





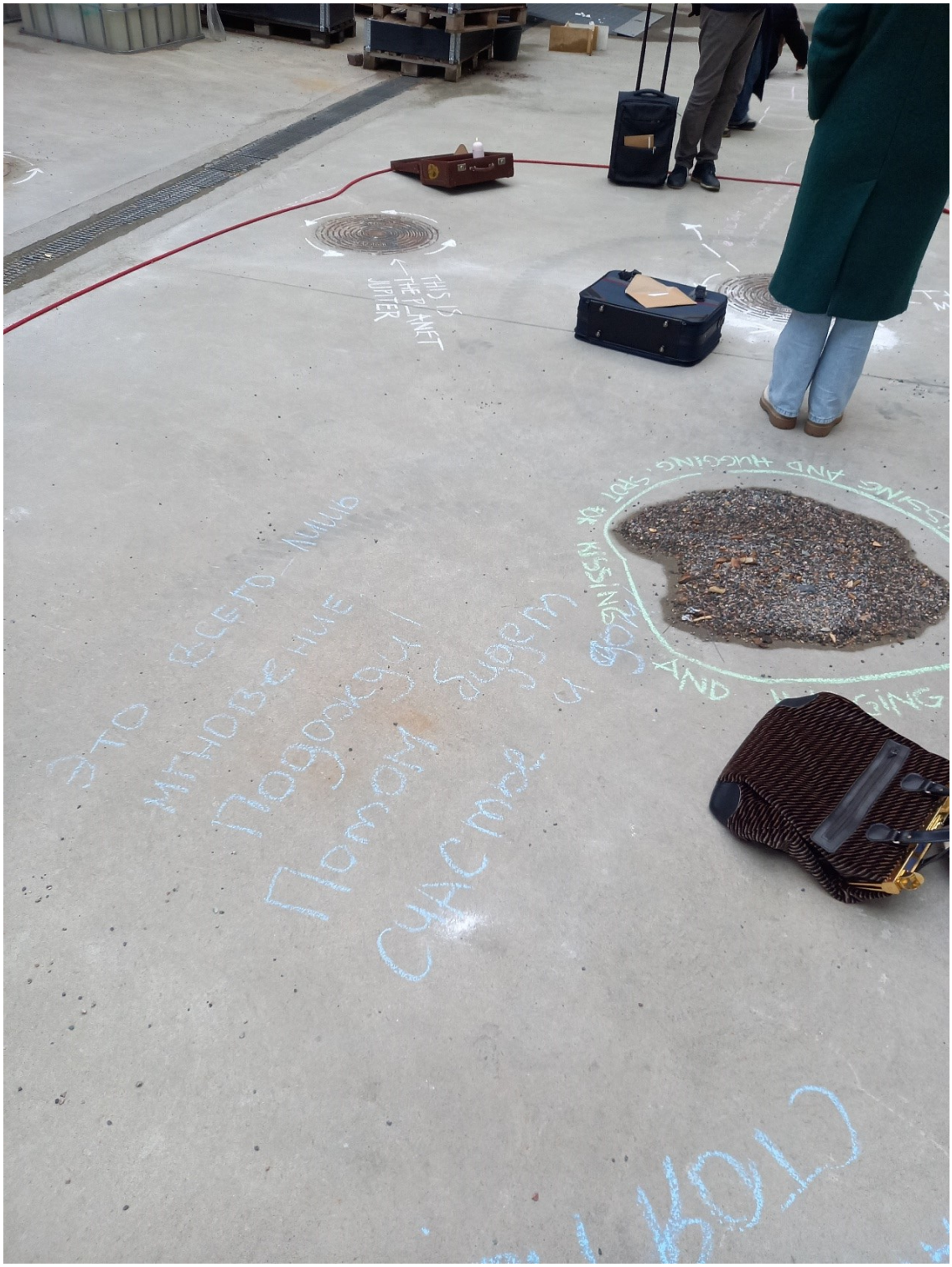
Appendix 3.
Documentation of the workshop: (Object)isation: matters of borders (in English and Russian) 5.12.2026

Photos: Milla Risku

Appendix 4.

Documentation of the workshop: Migrant Body in Borderwork #1 (a short role-play game on radical empathy) 26.03.2026

Photos: Aleksandra Dunaeva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