FRAMING IDENTITY IN/OUT
Text: Marc Schoonderbeek

*'But the past cannot give us what
the future has failed to deliver.'*[1]

— I

The renewed interest in the spatial disciplines of the last fifteen years, which is currently labelled as the 'spatial turn',[2] has been influenced to a high degree by the sequence of historical events within that particular time frame. The end of Soviet Communism with the subsequent fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe, the ethnic wars in former Yugoslavia, followed by the al-Qaida terrorist attacks, constitute the three most crucial of these influential historical events. The political, ethnic or religious conflicts from which they originated have had a profound influence both on the development of the particular cities in which they were enacted, as well as on the discourses concerned with space and the city and its territory.

Moreover, the 'End of Communism', the 'Balkan Wars' and '9/11' have also been exemplary for the gradual shift in scale and size by which borders are spatially manifested in the course of conflicts: from state-oriented (mostly within the context of larger collectives), via the dissemination of a former federation, to the literal invasion of urban space itself. This process of downscaling is fundamental to the understanding of the contemporary spatial workings of borders. The current emphasis that different cultures put on the particularities of their history have added to this growing attention to borders. This historical 'obsession' has resulted in the establishment of an articulated, yet fabricated, cultural heritage that tries to safeguard both the collective and the individual from becoming submerged in an ever-increasing global network of relations, whether social or economic.

The emergence of the 'boundary' and the 'other' as significant objects of study seems to be the logical outcome of this process: the border not only spatially frames a collective or group, but simultaneously excludes the alien, the outsider. If time and space have come to be regarded as fragmentary and relative concepts, the involvement with memory is encouraged as the necessary stronghold in an evermore ephemeral and insecure society. Floating on the waves of time, with social relations that are on the fringe of instability, living in a space where speed and hardness coexist alongside tranquillity and mystery, the excessive preoccupation with history and identity is seemingly a logical transition phase. The subsequent political, economic, religious, ethnic, social and even psychological differences find their clearest spatial expression in the urban, in the 'divided' city, namely in the border zones which are a result of the spatial implementation of disagreements.

The urban transformations that have taken place since the aforementioned historical events, combined with the developed consequential political strategies and administrative decisions, and the social tensions they still produce, have led to the emergence of a wide range of very specific spatial conditions within the contemporary city. Today, there are quite a number of cities that form the 'typical examples' of such spatial conditions. Berlin, for instance, is a typical, formerly divided city that still bears the traces of its divided past. The former Wall zone,[3] specifically, contains constituent differences that reveal a remarkable mix of emptiness, tabula rasa, real estate development, remnants of social housing (both their ideals and the factual realizations of a less noble, if not straight-out banal, quality), temporal demarcations and traces of use, where nature is both extremely diverse and aimed at the immediate satisfaction of needs, ad-hoc solutions that await a final decision. This zone frames perfectly the fragmented nature of contemporary urban space and the way one is nowadays accustomed to the display of a wide variety of spatial practices of use,

1 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 27.

2 In *The Spatial Turn; Interdisciplinary perspectives* (edited by Barney Warf and Santa Arias [London and New York: Routledge, 2009]), several scholars discuss the 'spatial turn' in relation to, for instance, new theories connected with space and emerging new cartographies.

3 See, for instance: Kim Bouvy, *Niemandsland; Berlijn zonder de muur/Berlin ohne die Mauer* (Amsterdam: De Verbeelding Publishing, 2002) or Kenny Cupers and Markus Miessen, *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Wuppertal: Verlag Mueller + Busmann, 2002).

BORDER CONDITIONS
CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS
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appropriation, consumption and even detached observation.

The Berlin Wall zone can also be considered a typical example of contemporary urban space where the fragmentary nature of its spatial elements can be seen as different forms of debris.[4] This debris forms 'flotsam',[5] which is somehow never present as a nuisance, but rather as a trace of the past that entails the promise of tomorrow. Here, destruction literally forms the basis for construction, as an almost inevitable ecological food chain. This presence is manifest in a 'proper' form, not as decay caused by a lack of maintenance, but simply as a necessary element of time, the result of all processes of building and rebuilding; transformation and (re)construction.

— II

The specific nature of contemporary urban spaces and, especially, the way they are used and experienced, has been highly influenced by another, rather paradoxical, development within contemporary society as well. This development is caused by the seemingly contradictory tendency to simultaneously emphasize both the individual and the idea of the collective.[6] On the one hand, capitalistic democracy focuses on the importance of the individual as the object of consumption, an object that needs to be constantly addressed on an individual basis: individual needs, individual taste, individual habits, etc. On the other hand, the emergence of mass culture has introduced a sense of collectiveness that has become an inevitable part of everyday urban life. Nowadays, the experience of the collective is no longer restricted to commemorations or cultural festivities in 'group' context or the need to protect or defend the group's territory. Rather, mass culture has introduced large-scale gathering in urban spaces on a regular basis where the experiences of collectivism and the emergent global culture go hand in hand.

The problems surrounding the individual occupying 'a' space was radically theorized by Emmanuel Lévinas using Youri Gagarin[7] as the protagonist for the clear plea for a nomadic conception of space. As the literal 'odd one out', Gagarin is the personification of the one who has left 'the Place' and could thus start thinking beyond spatial occupation. No longer limited to earthly matters, the cosmonaut had been repositioned in a homogeneous space, and by going beyond this horizon, actually managed to be placed outside the traditional dichotomy between natives and strangers. For Lévinas, Gagarin is a constant reminder of the fact that, even on the scale of the individual, the physical occupation of space on earth always means a form of exclusion: the territory one occupies is inevitably not accessible to the other. This makes the spatial practices of demarcation highly problematic in terms of co-habitation.

To occupy a space, to live in a space (both of which are, in essence, unavoidable) means to initiate a conscious attempt to live by inhabiting a place while simultaneously territorializing one's existence. In the act of using space, whether it is public, private or somewhere in between, the appropriation of space is a fundamental and inevitable act of 'being'. However, if the claim of space by individuals is already considered problematic, leaving aside the essentially human aspect of co-habitation, then the collective claiming of space forms an even more contentious act in terms of its legitimacy and eligibility. In fact, the claiming of space by a collective not only establishes and consolidates spatial demarcations, most notably in the form of the border, but destabilizes these demarcations of space or territory as well. The reason is that identification is about denominating characteristics of a collective, and this identification inevitably suffers from the inherent lack of clarity of group identities.

The establishment of territorial demarcations means connecting the establishment and/or founding of space with the framing of an identity. Elisabeth Grosz states that any frame cuts into a milieu or space: 'This cutting of the space of the earth through the fabrication of the frame is the very gesture that composes both house and territory, inside and outside, interior and landscape at once and as the points of maximal variation, the two sides, of the space of the earth.'[8] In other words, the emergence of the frame creates a border. Grosz continues: 'This is why the frame's most elementary form is the partition, whether wall or screen, that, projected downward, generates the smoothness of a floor, that "rarefies" and smooths over the surface of the earth, creating a first (human) territorialisation.'[9]

The border is the straightforward physical object used for demarcating territory and/or property. As a cultural phenomenon, the construction of borders almost always entails an element of communication. This communication can never be treated in a utilitarian manner alone, as even in its most extreme minimalist appearance (the object being solely itself) the construction of border devices incorporates symbolic elements of identity. Warning signs, propaganda, signs of profundity and religious purpose, or simply the indication of property and legislative lines: border elements, signs and devices are profound manifestations of cultural practices and habits. In the process of identification, border elements are used to distinguish the one from the other (with exclusion or segregation being part of this process), as well as to express the manifestations of cultures themselves. Even temporary occupations of places tend to be 'expressed' by way of demarcations of territory.

— III

The spatial manifestations of ethnic, religious or political conflicts always contain components of identity and thus history and memory. The collective, as it manifests itself in the construction of spatial boundaries, needs a common formal/architectural language to be able to delimit its territory and communicate its exclusiveness to outsiders. History is made present through these shared characteristics of collective identity. Since the 1960s, the excessive increase in globalization has simultaneously resulted in a shift 'in the scale of world conflict from international to intrastate'.[10] The increase in relations within the collective world economy has simultaneously resulted in an increase in the need for local identities, whereby the need for drawing borders has also risen. This suggests that the spatial has become intrinsically connected to the political. Andreas Huyssen argued that this connection means a turn to history: 'In an era of ethnic cleansings and refugee crises, mass migrations and global mobility for ever more people, the experience of displacement and relocation, migration and diaspora seems no longer the exception but the rule. [...] The faster we are pushed into a global future that does not inspire confidence, the stronger we feel the desire to slow down, the more we turn to memory for comfort.'[11]

As mentioned before, borders are excellent devices for demarcating space, yet their spatial presence in general does not easily offer a form of stability. Rather, borders seem to emphasize differences, collecting a specific discourse around them that concentrates on making these differences and disagreements visible. Whether apparent in forms of segregation, practices of exclusion, the emerging of identity-based violence, or even conclusive displacement and exile, borders are the spatial manifestations of these processes. And they are indeed 'swiftly internalized once established'.[12] Moreover, spatial demarcation is always an incision that will inevitably leave scars; their beginnings are casual, their obliteration almost impossible. These inscriptions into the territory constitute a human sense of space and form a measurement of the site as well. This measurement

4 Walter Benjamin's reading of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* still offers a beautiful metaphor for historical progress.

5 Raoul Bunschoten uses the metaphor of flotsam to describe the emergent phenomena in the general flux of urban life and events. [...] Flotsam is made up of fragmented bits and pieces that are apparently unrelated but in fact belong to some larger whole.' See: Chora/Raoul Bunschoten, *Urban Flotsam; Stirring the City* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2001), p. 24.

6 The paradox between individualization and experiences of collectivity has also been extensively discussed by Guy Debord in his *Society of the Spectacle*. Debord states that the principle of separation working within contemporary, 'spectacular', society, forms the very basis of conflict.

7 Emmanuel Lévinas, 'Gagarin, Heidegger and us', in: Hilde Heijnen et al. (eds.), '*Dat is Architectuur'; Sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2002), pp. 347–349.

8 Elisabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art; Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 13.

9 Ibid, p. 14.

10 Scott A. Bollens, *On Narrow Ground; Urban Policy and Ethnic Conflict in Jerusalem and Belfast* (Albany/New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 5.

11 Andreas Huyssen, op. cit., p. 25.

12 Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes & Rada Iveković (eds.), *Divided Countries, Separated Cities; The Modern Legacy of Partition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. VIII.

1.2 FRAMING

BELFAST — NICOSIA

is not limited to size, but is rather framed by what we sense and envision, as the possibilities of the relationship of space with meaning. Since 'the frame is what establishes territory out of the chaos that is the earth',[13] there can be no territory nor space without frame or boundary.

The frame brings together, but, somewhat like a Debordian détournement, the frame also simultaneously separates. It selects and thus includes and excludes. According to Bernard Cache: 'The frame selects because it eliminates the tendency for evasion. And what holds true in physics also holds true in society.'[14] But both frame and framed also change as soon as something new is either included or excluded. The nature of the frame and its content inevitably change, in part, their properties and identity. If one would extend Debord's discourse and attempt to formulate a 'technology of separation',[15] it could be stated that separation not only individualizes, but re-socializes as well; it not only de-colonizes a territory, but re-colonizes it as well.[16] In short, the law of the existence of partition is its own reproduction through the spatial enforcement of a distinctive collective identity. Therefore, the institution of partition 'attracts the light of nationalism that hides it'.[17] A short discussion of the basic characteristics of two typical cities of conflict, Belfast and Nicosia, might exemplify several of these issues.

— IV

Belfast is not a divided city in the classical sense, a city divided in more or less two halves. Abstractly, it can be described as a city consisting of a central, neutral zone connecting the northern harbour, the commercial centre, with the university district in the south, surrounded by wards that are islands of religiously segregated neighbourhoods. The peace lines separating these wards are walls with various characteristics, both protecting directly and separating symbolically.

These sixteen small-scale physical partition walls, however, never seclude: they are simply a line that keeps the two conflicting parties apart and can always be circumnavigated. These peace lines 'are not the causes of ethnic conflict in Belfast, but rather are ugly reflections of the emotion-laden urban geography of fear and territoriality'.[18]

In the entire religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics, space and image are closely connected: not only is the extent of each ward, in terms of urban planning, considered as a *fait accompli*, they are the scene of an extreme pictorial competition as well. On an urban planning level, the wards are considered so contested by both Republicans and Nationalists that any development within these neighbourhoods, despite contrasting demographics, needs to be solved within the ward itself. As Scott Bollens stated: 'The reactive and neutral posture of urban policy in Belfast has sought containment and abeyance of conflict. Yet the intended neutrality and community-reflective nature of urban policy appears insufficient to effectively address the complexities presented by ethnic compartmentalization. The ability to restructure the city in a normative and positive sense is foreclosed as government works only within the territorial blinders of its sectarian communities.'[19] This has, in fact, caused the emergence of two cities.

Moreover, the presence of images in the city forms a strange complementary presence in the wards. In the entire city, the texts, slogans, graffiti and murals have a rather ambiguous function. They work as simple demarcations of territory, comparable to the LA gang territory markers,[20] but then again: what to make of the need for parallels on both sides where they align themselves with other conflicts in the world? The 'banality' (or insignificance) of the conflict for an outsider seems almost acknowledged by two parties siding, or sharing similar 'objectives', with other parties in conflict (for instance, the

Republicans with the ETA or PLO, the Nationalists with the Israelis, etc.). The projection of the Northern-Ireland struggle onto other conflicts is strange as it eliminates any, extremely obvious, differences. This is in no way remotely similar to the ETA presence in Spain or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neither in its religious aspects and territorial claims, nor in its political history. One might be intrigued by the almost boy-scout-like presence in the city, with painted kerbstones and flag posts, but can the IRA be compared to the PLO? And do the Nationalists/Protestants have an alliance with the Israelis? One similarity can immediately be countered by a vaster amount of differences.

In fact, the use of colours and spatial demarcations goes beyond this point. These are not simply superficial messages; they have a rather specific form and place within the urban environment. Their function is one of historical storytelling. This historio-graphic function is rather unique as it commemorates events that are deemed important as crucial events in time, in the struggle for freedom and self-determination. This is a somewhat rare urban phenomenon: there are few urban conflict sites that have developed this particular tactic in their fight for independence. As the graphics occupy very specific places, they also have a spatial function. The pictorial dimension of the murals and their aesthetic aspect are quite significant. With reference to Huyssen, these representations are walls of reflection: not places to engage with, but simply a constant reminder of the struggle existing alongside other signs, colours and texts in the city.

— V

In the case of Nicosia (Cyprus), the division of the island has resulted in a border that is a direct representation of mentalities, and thus meaning, of the forced separation. The two border 'systems' reflect the political position of each country involved. In other words, the

spatial practices reflect the specific take on the exact significance attributed to the border: while the Greeks are still in a conscious and deliberate state of denial regarding the division of the island, providing only for the minimalist and most temporary of structures to guard the border, the Turks have been making a physical statement about their intent to remain present on the island. After all, if they are there 'to stay', this should literally be objectified in the urban landscape.

The instalment of a UN buffer zone between the two parties has created a very odd sequence of borders: the almost non-existent threshold from the Greek side, easily slipping into the UN Zone, which is strictly prohibited for any member of either side. This non-visible presence of the border is interrupted, and thus made visible, only at very strategic points in the city, where shabby army control points have been erected in the most improvised of ways. As the UN Zone has been in operation for more than 30 years, during which maintenance of the urban fabric has not been on the agenda, the result of this division is the emergence of a sort of ghost town, a collection of buildings and infrastructure slowly decaying and eroding, like a wonderful ode to the Zone of Stalker. The Turkish border is a very different phenomenon indeed.[21] The Turkish army has created a parallel zone that allows the military to traverse the border and impose complete control over it. The border has therefore shifted inward. The border is, in contrast to the Greek side, a hard divisional wall, creating cul-de-sacs in the city; streets simply end when 'encountering' the wall. The urban fabric seems to be moving away from the 'other half' as the division is supposed to be permanent, at least from a military perspective.

A remarkable fact is that both mayors of Nicosia have been maintaining contact ever since 1974, ensuring that the future plans for the divided capital will remain fully compliant with those of the other side. Still, the 'liberation of the Turkish Cypriots' has come at a high price. The economic isolation of the island, as a result of imposed international sanctions, has caused the suffocation of the city itself: the lack of prosperity and economic opportunities have turned the city centre into a decayed urban fabric that starts to resemble the state of the UN Buffer Zone. Since the late 1990s, critical

13 Elisabeth Grosz, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

14 Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves; The Furnishing of Territories* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 59.

15 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press), p. 95.

16 Ranabir Samaddar, 'The Last Hurrah that Continues', in: Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes & Rada Iveković (eds.), *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 23.

17 Ibid.

18 Scott A. Bollens, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

19 Ibid, pp. 269–270.

20 See, for instance: Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

21 The BC group, which visited Nicosia in 2004, had the good fortune that several border crossings between the Greek and Turkish sides had been opened a few weeks prior to their visit, allowing the group to research both sides of the border in the old city centre.

1.2 FRAMING

BELFAST — NICOSIA

BORDER CONDITIONS
2 MARGINAL URBAN AREAS

voices have started to emerge from within Turkish society, questioning the invasion, asking who really has benefited from this intervention, and raising doubts about the division's future impact on the island. Ahmet Altan, for instance, addressed the important absence of the island's Turkish inhabitants in political decision-making and relates it to the historical absence of violence in the island's internal ethnic struggles.[22]

— VI

Huyssen[23] stated that national traditions and historical pasts are increasingly deprived of their geographic and political foundations and are re-organized in the processes of cultural globalization. This may mean that these foundations are written over, erased and forgotten, or it may mean that they are being renegotiated in the clash between globalizing forces and new productions and practices of local cultures. The palimpsest,[24] a notion particularly associated with the architectural discourse of the 1980s, has been used as a metaphor for describing and understanding the processes of urban transformations, in which layers are stacked on top of each other, generation after generation. In this process, acts of erasure, magnification and preservation have resulted in a complex tissue of which the fragmentary nature forms the fertile grounds for intervention. The result of this process is a *bricolage* of both historical and contemporary elements, where perfect forms or deformed bits and pieces play an equal role.

Still, it is clear that without some form of clear agreement a border remains highly contested and can never settle into more than a temporal, ephemeral spatial manifestation. Furthermore, the lack of clarity about group identities, or even contradictions within, will only contribute to the confusion surrounding the framing of collective territory

and the drawing of its borders. Any kind of conflict in contested urban areas is, after all, 'ultimately about sovereignty...',[25] and the issue of sovereignty becomes even more complex when the contested area is 'claimed' by more than just two collectives. According to Andreas Wimmer, the importance of the border in framing territory and identity is a result of the emergence of the modern nation-state. Wimmer declares that modern state formation, as part of the processes of modernization, means the nationalization or ethnicization of a collective. Whether one deals with forms of democracy, where 'the people' exercise power within the state by means of an elective procedure, or citizenship, where 'the people' are equal citizens of the state; or nationality, where 'the people' have a collective (ethnic) identity, a process of spatial inclusion and exclusion is taking place. Based on this, Wimmer concludes 'the nation-state appears as modernity's structuring principle *par excellence*'.[26]

Consequently, architecture, regarded as a spatial discourse, is not only intrinsically connected to the political but actually to the juridical as well. However, in a last détournement, Giorgio Agamben corrected this reading of sovereignty emerging out of the nation-state: it is precisely in the ban, the state of exception, that political relation originates from. This calls into question '...every attempt to ground political communities in something like a "belonging", whether it be founded on popular, national, religious, or any other identity'.[27] In fact, the simultaneous presence of the individual and the collective, the confusing amalgamation of the political and the juridical, have resulted in these indispensable characteristics of contemporary urban space: temporary, ephemeral, contested and in constant flux. Today's urban dwellers have become once again, or still are, nomads living in displacement.

22 Ahmet Altan, 'Lies of the Island: Cyprus', in: Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes & Rada Iveković (eds.), *Divided Countries, Separated Cities; The Modern Legacy of Partition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 112–114.

23 Huyssen, *op. cit.*

24 A palimpsest is a piece of re-used parchment of which the top layer has been removed for a new text.

25 Scott A. Bollens, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

26 Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict; Shadows of Modernity* (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.63.

27 Giorgio Agamben, *Home Sacer; Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 181.

2.1 EDGE
2.2 TRANSGRESSION

TALLINN
NICOSIA
BENIDORM
ROTTERDAM
TALLINN
BERLIN
LIÈGE
SINGAPORE
ISTANBUL
MAASTRICHT
MARSEILLE