

THE MICROSCOPE AS HAMMER: Mapping Border Conditions Text: Marc Schoonderbeek

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'Every passion borders
on the chaotic...'
Walter Benjamin,
'Unpacking my library'

'A critique seeking to go beyond
the spectacle must *know how to wait*.'
Guy Debord, *Society of the
Spectacle*, statement 220

In Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Nostalghia*, the character Domenico, after finishing his talk with protagonist Gorchakov and on their way to the taxi stand, moves through his house amidst pouring rain and debris, and through a door whose frame is not supported by walls. This memorable film sequence forms a perfect representation of the contemporary architectural domain. Whatever impoverished impression this space might convey, its basic characteristics of decay and fragmentation simultaneously evokes the ambiguous feeling of 'home' and the sense of displacement. The scene captures several relevant spatial characteristics at once: a troublesome relationship with nature, a form of dwelling that only manages to host the human body in a slightly distorted, almost perverse manner, a setting where the uneasy feeling of displacement lingers even while being 'at home', an uncanny atmosphere, a space filled with accumulated paraphernalia. Significantly, in a later scene of the film, Domenico sacrifices himself atop the equestrian statue on the Campidoglio in Rome, the space that was originally conceived as the 'Centre of the World'. In their attempt to 'save' the world, Domenico sets himself on fire, while at the same time Gorchakov wades across the Bagno Vignoni, endeavouring to keep a candle continuously lit. Whether the act of either one of the characters actually has any tangible effect on the present is irrelevant; what they achieve is a personal transgression, in both cases through a form of self-sacrifice.

In architecture, transgressions are inevitably linked to borders, territories, boundaries, and thus to spatial conflicts. The condition of the border is currently a widely discussed and investigated phenomenon since global events, such as 9/11, have resulted in a renewed interest in the space of conflict and the conflict of space. The metaphorical use of borders in everyday language, the emphasis on protective entities in politi-

cal discourse and the border as a factual device for division and segregation are common occurrence in contemporary discussions. Whether it is the 'clash of civilizations', the 'politics of occupation' or the 'deterritorialization of theory', contested space, metaphorically or factual, has created a number of new borders that call for a spatial investigation. The border is a highly problematic entity in our globalized world, not only because it obstructs global flows of goods, information and people, but also because it seems to be contradictory to our increasingly nomadic existence. Borders, in other words, are a fiercely debated topic, although they are almost always, unfortunately, seen as objects of obstruction and elements that need to be demolished. What is absent in these discussions is the inevitability of the presence of borders in our lives and their performance as a space of encounter.

The seventh chapter in Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* ('the border') contains a wonderful passage that describes the invisible, yet always immediately present, border within one's life. This metaphorical line is maintaining the subtle divide between sense and madness in a person's life, and transgressing that boundary means the descent into the void of nothingness. The secret of human life, writes Kundera, is based on whatever unfolds in the immediate proximity of this border. Perhaps the origins of *Border Conditions* can be located here, or perhaps they might also be found in a beautiful bar in Porto, where some years ago several discussions on architecture, space and time resulted in a few, probably somewhat hazy, ideas about an architectural research and design programme. Truth is that *Border Conditions* was born within a strange context that produced both distress and hope. What had started out as an intuition and a vaguely formulated common ground, developed significantly through discussion, debate and simply 'doing', and evolved into an architectural research trajectory that could never have been fully comprehended from the onset. The outcome is a dense tableau in which theoretical positioning, urban exploration, mapping and architectural design have come together in a setting that might be able to produce a new perspective, short of naming it a paradigm shift, within the architectural discourse.

Areas of Conflict and Tension

The condition of the border within contemporary urban spaces has its most obvious 'realization' in the thresholds that surface when conflicts, whether religious, nationalist, ethnic or economic in nature, have a direct impact on the city. Within these areas of conflict and tension, divisions are established by the erection of borders, frequently accompanied by neutral zones, or zones in which a third party is asked to simultaneously maintain the status quo of the conflict and allow limited border crossings. These zones show divergent urban development, since different spatial policies and tactics influence their spaces, constituting the conditions for transformations that will leave lasting marks on the city. Even the attempts, for example, of the Berlin city council to erase the traces of the former Wall zone, nearly overnight, have clearly failed to meet their objective. Once implemented, divisions tend to be difficult, if not impossible, to remove. In general, these urban divisions can be categorized into two broad groups, namely those that divide the cities themselves, and those cities located in close proximity to a national or continental divide. In Europe, divided cities have evolved into a particular type of city, for example Berlin, Nicosia and Belfast, while the conflict-related division between countries and continents have Gibraltar-Ceuta and San Diego-Tijuana as contemporary examples. Ceuta is, for instance, not only a place where 'Fortress Europe' is being 'attacked' by those seeking prosperity, but also exemplifies the conflicting interests within a unified Europe.

In the first chapter of this book, entitled 'Zone', territorial strips, formed either as an in-between space along divided entities or as linear areas of exceptions within a continuous territory, are perceived as places where border conditions become visible. In the opening text, Teddy Cruz explains such developments through his ongoing involvement with the San Diego-Tijuana region. Cruz focuses on the increase in the global North-South movement of people, goods and waste. He illustrates how the attempt to smoothen and obstruct these flows constitutes the actual and global 'zone of conflict'. Furthermore, he provides compelling evidence that radically new spatial practices originate specifically from such zones of conflict and, furthermore, that these practices gain significance if they are implemented on the scale of the neigh-

bourhood rather than the city. In a series of photo collages, Cruz examines the spatial practices in Tijuana and the way in which they can be considered to have been influenced by experiences, examples and products from San Diego.

Oscar Rommens and Sebas Veldhuisen investigated the different divisions implemented in the Gibraltar-Ceuta region. They looked into the various properties of the territory and related national ownership claims, examined the specific importance of the waters, and traced the subtle, sometimes temporal, lines of division within this area and their spatial consequences. This inventory has been summarized in a map showing the complex mechanisms that work within the territory as well as the delicate overlaps and gaps that exist within the elements of division and separation. Their interpretation of both cities as 'exclaves as appendices' demonstrates the incompleteness and imperfection of such territorial divisions: the border functions as a filter, as a device that has to endorse malfunctions and malpractices. Furthermore, the investigation proved that it is inevitable that border zones within areas of conflict need certain temporary states of exception in order to be able to function.

The ensuing chapter on 'Framing' deals with the issues of identity and space. Framing is used as a conceptual tool to define objects of investigation as well as a means to distinguish differences and similarities in contemporary urban spatial practices. In other words, the act of 'Framing' enables description that can lead to formulating an interpretation and thus facilitates the construction of meaning and identity. Within urban areas of tensions and conflict, border elements form particular objects of inscription and communication, since they are expressions of the demarcation of territories. But even cohabitation, as such, is a spatial construct of different social relations, the result of which is a complex system of appropriations, adaptations, divisions, separations, exclusions, etc. Whether from a personal perspective (i.e. reflecting one's own constructed identity) or a collective perspective (in which personality is mirrored by the social context), any identity is dependent upon the framing of its correspondent territory.

In their 'Snapshots of Disaster City', Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene describe the emergence of a new type of city.

Their apocalyptic description of the 'end of the city as we know it' introduces the following argument: whereas the city used to be the node of commerce and exchange, nowadays it has become the place of exclusion. Economic prosperity, once intrinsically linked to the urban environment, is nowadays 'outsourced' as goods are developed and produced in the endless slums of the mega- and hyper-cities. These places have become sources of extraction, causing a global spatial asymmetry to emerge. The tensions between the global North and South, and this discussion can be viewed as an extension of Teddy Cruz's argument, have become so extreme that De Cauter and Dehaene argue for a reverse perspective on the city. The contemporary city is no longer the safe local place surrounded by a 'global' territory, rather it is the enwalled global centre, a spatial 'island', surrounded by endless localities. It is thus the 'original' city that is bound to disappear under the influence of global forces.

Since this new urban reality has emerged, spatial demarcations have become important in order to protect and preserve national and local identities. My own contribution to this chapter deals with the rising paradoxes related to this urban reality, such as the need for increasingly open networks of exchange within a streamlined globalized economy. This need is, at present, seemingly contradicted by the growing attention to national identity and history. This contradiction results in a growing concern regarding the clarity in demarcation of the (national) borders. The borders within Belfast and Nicosia, the peace lines and the green zone, are the case studies of these processes of division and framing of identities. The acceptance of the border, as a frame that at the same time excludes and includes, leads to the conclusion that the state of exception to be found in the 'ban' constitutes in fact the place where one is simultaneously excluded and free.

Investigating Spatial Conditions within the Contemporary City

In architectural education, the basic objective is to be able to offer a systematic body of knowledge, combined with a set of instructions that can 'ground' a potential architectural design approach. Architectural theory is the proper means to develop such a consistent way of thinking and working. From a historical perspective, the importance of

relating systematically developed knowledge into design is, of course, already present in the classical theoretical treatises or, during the Enlightenment, in the attempts to provide the scientific basis of architecture, based on principles of reason. In recent decades, however, research has become an alternative to theory in providing another, distinct, rather specific and almost unrelated, set of knowledge feeding the design process. The fundamental question whether architecture is an artistic or scientific practice, has been expanded to a discussion on architecture's societal, cultural and economic role. Especially the economic debate is related to the critique on architecture's (in)ability to be rendered 'applicable' for the purpose of directly amending society. Where nowadays theory is still engaged with a certain level of autonomy of the architectural discipline, and thus finds its 'raison d'être' within the limits of the discipline itself, contemporary architectural research tries to connect architecture to general societal developments, almost desperately seeking its legitimation outside its own discourse.

Perhaps one could see a direct link between the 'return to history' in postmodern architecture and the contemporary fixation on research related to architectural design. The rediscovery of historical origins and relationships, typical of the post-modern phase in architecture, meant a renewed theorization of the specific knowledge, 'language' and methodologies of the architectural discipline. This investigation into the 'presence of the past' was followed by the subsequent phase of deconstruction, which, in a way, extended this investigation into the essentials of architecture but abandoned the limited perspective of autonomy and opened the disciplinary debate to the plurality of discourses. The 'outside' of architecture offered a rich collection of historic, philosophical, literary, musical and other sources for the architectural project, either as reference or for straightforward appropriation.

Within this interpretive logic, the engagement of the architectural discourse that evolved in the 1990s, with investigations into 'the city' (and despite its late-modern mentality), can be seen as a further extension of this development. The theoretical clarification of disciplinary knowledge and tools is followed by the clarification of the field in which it is supposed to operate. The urban conditions,

which had emerged in late-capitalist societies, offered an intriguing collection of spatial phenomena that became the main reference point in terms of architectural production and thus formed the basic material for architectural design practices. The proposed interventions were based on, or even an extension of, descriptive investigations, which meant their relevance was measured by their direct effect on complementing 'reality'. Inevitably, the last decade has seen an exhaustion of this inquiry into the 'present' while simultaneously a critique on the project of criticality emerged. This 'project of post-criticality' called for a greater proactive engagement of architecture, though this call was unfortunately almost exclusively limited to the practice of design.

The contemporary investigation into the presence of borders, even within zones of conflict, is indeed in need of a more participatory engagement. By exploring the border as a space of encounter and by including bodily and sensorial readings, such an investigative focus would treat the border as an imperfect space of 'becoming', where differences exist in a non-hierarchical setting. In order to avoid one specific, restrained interpretation or understanding of the border, a transdisciplinary framework is needed, one that is guided by an intention to comprehend the nature of the contemporary state of affairs, without reducing its heterogeneous, even eclectic, nature. This research project would require a set-up that treats the border as a complex spatial device within territorial fields of great diversity, and focus on the spatial practices that unfold around borders, while maintaining distance from the discussion of moral, ethnic or simply ideological preconceptions and prejudices and, simultaneously, remaining equally sceptical of 'architecture as remedy'.

Marginal Urban Areas

Within the context of the contemporary architectural discourse, which has become immersed in issues of fragmentation, complexity and multiplicity, resulting in enumerations and taxonomies of a nearly endless array of spatial phenomena, the current discussion of borders might indeed be considered as being too obvious, too un-nuanced, or perhaps too locked into non-architectural considerations. How, then, to get out of the undifferentiated debate of borders as lines of division, as

political zones of separation? How to avoid polarization and dialectic reasoning when discussing divisions? And, in more practical terms, where to find the borders that are both visible and invisible, in a space of endless differentiation? How to address, from a theoretical perspective, issues of fragmentation, complexity and multiplicity with respect to spatial investigations? Some of these difficulties can be negotiated by concentrating on at least two aspects: firstly, an expansion of the theoretical discussion of borders and, secondly, the development of specific tools with which to describe the spatial workings of a border. As a consequence, one of the methods employed in the investigational projects of Border Conditions concentrated on the notion of the 'marginal' (which is, as stated previously, also the place of the 'ban'), and were opened up to more diversified approaches of 'mapping' as the specific tools with which to describe and measure these spatial conditions. In the second chapter of this book, the place of the marginal is described in the chapter titled 'Edge', while the practices that, consciously or not, test the limitations of the border are discussed in 'Transgression'. The edge deals with the boundary of a surface or field, describing left-over spaces, while transgression deals with the other side of the boundary, the line that one is not supposed to cross.

The 'six monsters' Jennifer Bloomer discusses in her contribution all relate to an 'edge condition'. Monsters appear at the edge of the map, indicating the places that are either unknown or undefined. These monsters can be viewed as the indicators for fear of the unknown. Bloomer introduces the notion of the curling edge as an alternative to the cutting edge, and as a metaphor or figure for architectural probing. The curling edge is the gesture that allows imagination to come into existence. Moreover, it forms the very surface onto which to project a mapping of that imagination. The overcoming of the border as a line of division is mentioned by Bloomer as a necessary phase in acknowledging the border as a line drawn in sand: constantly in motion, under influence of forces of erosion and erasure, ephemeral and hard to describe or draw with exactitude and precision.

This chapter concludes with a piece by Klaske Havik discussing the particular edge conditions in Tallinn, Estonia. This Border

Conditions research started by drawing a relationship between Helsinki and Tallinn, followed by an investigation of the spatial characteristics of both cities. In Tallinn, the examination of the level of fragmentation within the urban tissue led to two clear conclusions. Firstly, that most spatial qualities were to be found precisely in the edge conditions of the city and, secondly, that, in the last decade, the public spaces had been neglected to such an extent that their absence started to have a noticeable effect on the city. The conclusive proposal to 'activate' new public spaces using the edge conditions of the city marks the end point of an investigative process that contained sequences of reading and misreading, reflecting and re-writing, and that tried to unfold the potential within this 'city as an allegorical work'.

In his introduction to the chapter on transgression, Gil Doron discusses the basic characteristics of transgression within the architectural discourse. Starting with the philosophical perspective, the three key references with respect to transgression (Bataille, Foucault and Tschumi) are discussed, as well as a clarification of the relation between borders and transgression. Doron defines the border as a spatial entity that is difficult to circumscribe precisely, yet always creates a 'no-man's land' that no one is claiming. Doron is keenly aware of the impossibility of architecture's engagement with these areas, as putting them 'to use' would actually mean the annihilation of their specificity. The absence of a theory for handling such places should actually be considered a blessing in disguise: one is thus forced to develop a strategy that is based on an exact reading of each unique place and its particular circumstances.

Wim Cuyvers concludes this chapter with a description of his personal involvement with the conditions of the border, particularly in cities that had recently become the stage of an intense conflict. Referring to his research in Sarajevo and Kinshasa/Brazzaville, Cuyvers emphasizes that when exploring the city it is imperative to work with a protocol that is specifically not a method, since such protocols will force one to concentrate on other, less obvious, or more marginal, aspects of the urban environment. The true border condition, according to Cuyvers, is something that needs to be physically experienced. He concludes that collective research in these very specific areas is, in fact, impos-

sible. True 'Border Conditions research' can only be conducted and executed alone, as an individual investigation, not limited by any kind of hierarchical set-up, be it an institutional or a social hierarchy. In other words, a border condition can only be properly experienced in solitude, a Nietzschean 'good' solitude.

Research as an Open-ended Exploration

On the back cover of the *Mutations* book, a simple statement reads 'WORLD = CITY'. Besides this being a typical example of the aphoristic slogan culture dominating the architectural research practices of the late 1990s, this statement stands in stark contrast to the most basic groundings of the Border Conditions research programme. In fact, the reverse of that statement could describe Border Conditions specific interest in the city, as it considers the specific, and at times emergent, spatial conditions found in the contemporary city to be a rich field in need of exploration and, ultimately, comprehension. In other words, the recognition that there is an abundance of potent, yet little understood, spaces that are in urgent need of corresponding theories. Of course, the book jacket statement mainly refers to the fact that, by now, almost half of the world's population is living in cities, giving conclusive evidence of the fact that the urban condition will be the main objective of research for years to come. Yet, precisely the descriptions and analyses of the factors that make up the contemporary urban condition need to be revised and nuanced. To this end, Border Conditions focuses on the observation, description and investigation of emergent spatial conditions within cities by emphasizing the relationship between space and social practices. These practices constitute the events of everyday life and range from daily rituals to social tensions to anomalous approaches to space. Border Conditions object of investigation is the entire array of spatial phenomena and conditions, from the banal, the extraordinary to the idiosyncratic, in an attempt to understand contemporary spatial practices that shape the urban context.

In the book 'A Field Guide to Getting Lost', Rebecca Solnit quotes Edgar Allan Poe to describe the relationship between knowledge and losing oneself: 'All experience, in matters of philosophical discovery,

teaches us that, in such discovery, it is the unforeseen upon which we must calculate most largely.' Solnit is surprised that Poe 'is consciously juxtaposing the word "calculate", which implies a cold counting up of the facts or measurements, with "the unforeseen", which is precisely that which cannot be measured or counted, only anticipated'. So can one, in matters of research, actually 'calculate upon the unforeseen'? In *The Post-modern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard argued the need for paradoxes in developing and extending existing knowledge through imaginative new concepts of thought. Lyotard introduced the term 'paralogy' as the principle with which to describe the nature of contemporary research. In 'paralogical' research, conflict is considered crucial for any scientific development because only through conflict will new meanings of deeply grounded, old and established significations become visible. Border Conditions similarly aims to achieve this by deliberately creating an investigative environment with: a sense of conflict, in order to test established knowledge; a sense of confusion, in order to critically question the investigative tools applied; and a sense of openness, in order to be able to adjust knowledge and incorporate new findings and unexpected insights.

Experimental research starts with an open-ended question, which, to a certain extent, guarantees the incorporation of the state of uncertainty regarding the object of study and the process of investigation itself. It requires a strategy that is rigorously open to the possibilities of 'becoming', of imagination, of the crystallization of meaning, of experience. An open-ended research strategy constructs knowledge through a 'bottom-up' process, rather than implementing knowledge in a 'top-down' manner. In fact, opening up the discourse to the emergence of the possible, to an unleashing of potential, might be reminiscent of Robert Musil's 'sense of possibilities', which he proposed would replace a 'sense of realism' in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Fundamentally, such an investigational strategy would not even pretend to be able to govern the current processes within the city, nor would it pretend to offer solutions to straightforward problems. Rather, the attempt is to give insights into the spatial workings of the territory by clarifying the processes that occur and the agencies that act. The urban context

becomes a *terra incognita* of in-between conditions, a territory where discoveries occur by paying attention to the non-apparent.

Systematic Urban Explorations

The investigative exploration of contemporary urban spaces is particularly challenging when the outcomes are meant to inform or purposefully 'ground' contemporary architectural practices in the urban context. Urban spaces are, nowadays, diverse and changing, dynamic and ephemeral. Their investigation calls for a strategy of urban drifting (the so-called 'dérive') that incorporates a certain degree of improvisation and allows for deviations and intuitive decision-making. Dérives have neither preconceivable outcomes nor predetermined objects of investigation as they rely on an overlapping of experienced spaces and encountered events, alongside hunches and prior knowledge, to form an ad-hoc reading of the city. In *The Principle of Disorientation* from 1974, Constant formulated this potential of the drift with wonderful precision: 'straying no longer has the negative sense of getting lost, but the more positive sense of discovering new paths'. The third chapter in the Border Conditions book, on 'Navigation', deals with the specifics of systematic urban explorations, which are considered systematic simply because they start with a given set of rules, a predetermined procedure or a speculative trajectory through a site.

In the opening essay of this chapter, Francesco Careri discusses the importance of navigation in the contemporary practice of the urban drift as a conceptual tool for investigating urban contexts. He positions this practice in a wider, historical context and at the same time extends the idea of the dérive by including the procedural techniques of navigation with its counteract, the act of stopping. In discussing the origins of sailing in ancient societies, Careri considers the encounter with 'the Other' as crucial for the drift to succeed. The act of navigation measures the world based on the characteristics and the inhabitants of the territory. The journey is initiated with the aim to explore, but it needs a 'stopping' in order to meet. The goal of the drift transforms into the possibility of an encounter in a territory more distinct than familiar. As proof of the importance of this attitude, Careri describes the process of building a house for the Roma of

Rome, which the Stalker collective initiated and executed during the summer of 2008.

Extending this plea for drifting and navigating the city, Oscar Rommens contributes to this argument by discussing the neglected side of navigation. Navigation has become, with the rise of easily accessible and available instruments such as GPS, TomTom and Google Earth, a means of getting quickly to a certain destination. Rommens pleads for the exploratory dimension of navigation by taking up the crucial role of navigation as a means of exploring the world, specifically through the act of walking. Referring to artists such as Richard Long and Francis Alÿs, four different frameworks of navigation are developed: the linear, circular and open-ended navigation, and the drift. In all of these typical forms of navigation, one could single out the issue of estimation of one's position, the 'dead reckoning'. Aiming at the projection of one's previous knowledge and speculations about the field of influences without exact information, in order to be able to determine the future course of events, this 'dead reckoning' transforms the navigational path into a journey of discovery that entails external forces and possible trajectories of thought.

Mapping as an Index of Possibilities, Past and Future

Apart from a specifically defined object of investigation and an inventive research methodology, one also needs to develop and construct the specific tools with which to conduct such research. Border Conditions embraces methods of mapping in order to make the immanent spatial conditions accessible, while at the same time remaining faithful to the complexity and multiplicity of the phenomena and properties at hand. Special attention is given to the development of specific cartographic techniques enabling the registration and interpretation of these urban processes. Mapping is considered exceptionally relevant to this end, for the map becomes in many ways a distilled territory – a nearly tangible place. As Denis Cosgrove stated in his book *Mappings*, the map is 'the most sophisticated form yet devised for recording, generating and transmitting knowledge'. In a mapping process, the territory is measured, circumscribed and demarcated. The mapping is a representation of a social construct within a spatial frame and offers a means to navigate the space it represents.

The mappings that have taken shape in the Border Conditions programme have tended to two distinctly separate, yet interrelated aspects: the mapping of the dérives and the mapping of a certain spatial condition. The objective of mapping is to start incorporating experiences, processes and events of the exploration into the investigation of the urban condition. The difference with respect to the original intentions of the dérive is that the mapping of the dérive is not only aimed at changing the personal experience of the individual that executes the urban drift, but it also serves as an investigative tool developed to re-think the object of investigation. More specifically, if one combines the urban exploration with a systematic consideration of a notation system that tries to 'capture' the urban drift, a mapping emerges that not only traces a factual journey, executed in the past, but opens the findings of the trip to a future modification of these notated (i.e. translated) findings. This instrument makes it possible to connect the spatial experiences with the observations and translates them into comprehensive notation systems. Additionally, and most importantly, this mapping process includes the observer as part of the territory that is being mapped.

Nowadays, the visualization of information has evolved into a specific field of expertise. In the architectural discourse, statistics and data analysis, many times expressed in terms of alluring graphical mappings, have seen a surge during the past two decades. Figures and data are considered efficient ways to quantify certain developments, and several architectural practices – most notably OMA and MVRDV in the Dutch context – have attempted to legitimize their work on tendencies implicitly expressed in such information-scapes. It may be important to clarify how mappings differ from these graphical statistics. Maps are complex entities containing layered information that exceeds any intended message. Meanings emerge from maps via engaged acts of reading, extracting possible multiplicities and vitalities from the field of represented relations. A map has the power to reveal, whereas information-scapes often have a predetermined 'agenda', thinly cloaked in carefully selective statistical figures. Mapping permits the imagining of other places, places where alterity is expressed and where potentials are probed.

Mappings compose an index of future possibilities as they are receptive to interpretation: A mapping offers a small-scale reading that turns an act of 'measuring' into an 'exploration'. Ambiguity, complexity and openness are key to the category of mapping that studio Border Conditions has been exploring. Even though mapping has been discussed at length in the past two decades, conspicuously absent in these discussions are the relationship that mapping might actually have with architectural design, not only as a supporting tool, but rather as an integral part of the design process. There are numerous examples of urban analyses that have been part of, or incorporated in, the design process, but the findings of these urban investigations hardly constitute guiding design principles for an architectural intervention. To formulate the proposition slightly differently: contemporary architectural discourse emphasizes the urban context of architecture either via the collection of information or through an analysis of its formal principles, but what remains absent is both a theory and a design strategy that connects these two.

Mapping Trajectories, Interfaces and Fields

The chapter on mappings presents examples of these practices. The mappings are ordered according to the phenomenon they describe: the trajectory, the interface and the field. These three topics construct the interpretation of the urban environment in terms of the agencies or forces that create, mould and transform it. If a line indicates a boundary, a trajectory transforms the static line into a dynamic movement across that territory. The trajectory introduces a continuous, sequential spatial experience and its mapping is based on the inscription of traces. The interface is an exchange field between two entities and its mapping can be described as a way of mediating between complex, visual information and abstract thought. The field, to conclude, refers to urban space as an eclectic field containing an extensive amount of possible entities. The urban artifact or event becomes an indicator of diversity, multiplicity and complexity and its mapping does not investigate an over-complex chaos but rather a series of anomalies that constitute the contemporary city. In the fourth chapter of this book, the mappings of trajectories, interfaces and fields are juxtaposed with

two distinctive discussions: in the first place with a historic positioning of the 'mapping of the limens' (Avermaete) and a contemporary practice of 'liminal bodies' (Bunschoten) and, secondly, with a specifically poetic reading of cities that are considered exemplary for the profound challenges posed by contemporary spaces (Bisa and Ganchrow).

At the outset of this chapter, Tom Avermaete places the concept of border mapping in a historical and cultural context by referring to the interest in liminality within the era of 'liquid modernity'. Starting with a description of the investigations into the *bidonville* in architectural practices in the Maghreb by such groups as GAMMA and CIAM-Algers, liminality was introduced in Modernist discourse as the locus of appropriate spatial practices in local shantytowns. The interest in these places, underlined with thorough research, gave an insight into the inhabitants' engagement and the subsequently achieved transformations in their living environment. In conclusion, Avermaete emphasizes the importance of mapping as a practice that properly addresses the state of uncertainty within contemporary modernity, yet remains truthful to the acknowledged lack of control or overview of the contemporary city. The idea of getting lost within the complexity and enormity of the contemporary city is not considered a problem, but is properly expressed by mappings of the limens and therefore an appropriate tool for starting to understand the contemporary condition of the urban fabric.

Consecutively, Raoul Bunschoten discusses his ongoing involvement with the Taiwan Strait, a zone where Mainland China and Taiwan are moving towards a common future, in terms of both conflict and cooperation. Bunschoten uses the notion of 'liminal body' to explain the threshold spaces in which tensions and conflict are collected and sublimated towards perhaps not so much a common goal, but rather a certain trajectory of development, the outcome of which is neither stable nor known in advance. He proposes the Urban Incubator as a tool for managing complex processes, providing the necessary urban prototypes for guiding the future of both cities across the Strait. Rather than proposing the outline of development for this area through interventions, Bunschoten developed a strategy that allows for a certain measure of control and management of a

complex process, without wanting to provide an end image of the region, thus leaving the future essentially open and allowing a flexible process of development where gained insights can still alter the trajectory. For Bunschoten, the Taiwan Strait is an experimental incubator of future possibilities rather than the test site for exposing the current state of affairs of architectural and urban solutions.

Sandro Bisa's contribution discusses the essential characteristics of Venice as it was presented in the Venice Atlas project. The underlying idea of this atlas was the acknowledgement of the Venice Lagoon's importance as a territory of related entities. The lagoon consists of a collection of islands whose waters have a pulsating relation with the Adriatic Sea. Venice forms the historical centre of this wonderful collection of water and stone. Referring to the profound character of water as a reflective medium that quickly erases any trace left upon it, Bisa proposes to see Venice as the metaphorical example of how the eradication of language can still produce meaningful places. No longer limiting the view to the city, Venice and its lagoon are seen in this version as the intertwining of entities, where the delicate balance between history and silence, erasure and memory, can constitute the basis for an understanding of an urban form that still communicates. Despite the crisis the practice of languages has been experiencing, the city still produces a writing that is being read on a daily basis.

Raviv Ganchrow's contribution concludes the book by contemplating the particularities of Kaliningrad, Russia. The anomalous nature of this city forms the backdrop for a model of the city's manifestation that is sustained not by its architecture and its past, but by the continuous daily engagement of its inhabitants with a re-reading and re-interpretation of its history and places. The historical roots of this city were, after all, related to the former Prussian city of Königsberg. Ganchrow describes Kaliningrad as the opposite of a *tabula rasa*: with its original urban population re-located, this is a diasporic urban population in an existing, though partly demolished, city. Urban processes in Kaliningrad confront a collective that has no common ground except for being subjected to a political entity and being inserted into a city where the demolition of historical traces has been attempted, but where history is still palpably present. Such distances, created by displace-

ment, can perhaps only be bridged by myths that re-establish this connection. Ganchrow argues that precisely this unique condition has resulted in an urban landscape that offers space to an eclectic array of spatial practices, as well as committing the inhabitants to the city through an involved experimentation resulting in an unprecedented vitality within the city.

Borders within Urban Conditions

The border investigations of studio Border Conditions, presented in this book, demonstrate that the border zones between two countries, continents or parts of cities contain anything but clear lines of division. In fact, what these factual investigations have brought forward is a sequence of complex, layered territories and objects, divided by sometimes blurry and at other times straightforward lines. As a result, a sequence of different entities has come to light, some of which maintain a network of relations, while others are operating autonomously. Sometimes the described borders tend to be clear and apparent, but that seems to be more the exception than the rule. In general, borders are vague. They form zones with uncertain and fluctuating boundaries and fields of influence. The concept of the border is not so much a wall or a fence but rather a filter allowing for selective trespassing. Once one starts to investigate the factual spatial presence of borders, one finds that the clear-cut borders actually consist of several borders. The zones and areas overlap, contradict one another or are the result of different spatial practices or jurisdictions.

One common denominator of these investigations is that any border actually consists of a sequence of divisions that are unstable both in space and time. The divisional lines are unclear, might overlap or be present only temporarily. In short, borders can be extremely subtle, spatial devices with workings and influences stretching far beyond their localities. Even though borders, urban limits and invisible edges are unstable, they can still be traced. Border research, as the collection of investigations in this book hopefully demonstrates, is extremely diverse, partly because the border is an architectural artefact around which several discourses have evolved: it represents political ideologies, expresses social constructs, exercises legislative practices, etc. Nonetheless, one

proposition that emerges from these collected mappings and projects is the fact that it is extremely important to view borders not only as spatial devices for creating separation and segregation, but rather as specific spaces of exchange, as spatial fields where encounters are situated and framed.

How, then, to navigate this book

Since its inception in 2002, the Border Conditions programme has encouraged experimental architectural research and design projects based on investigations of socio-political contexts. During this period, the research has concentrated on European cities where specific urban border conditions could be discerned: a total of 20 cities have been investigated by means of different strategies for urban explorations and investigations that were specially developed and tested by the studio. This book reflects upon the nature of this programme and its investigations, explorations, mappings, theoretical statements and design projects by offering a structure that allows for multiple readings and multiple interpretations of the findings. Just as this introductory text is an interweaving of the thematic content of the book with the background of the different methodologies developed in the Border Conditions programme, the book is conceived as a constellation of entities whose relationships are neither fixed nor predetermined.

The eight chapters, each presenting a particular take on the 'border conditions' theme, dealing specifically with either types of borders or typical spatial conditions, form the basic structure of the book. Each chapter is introduced by an invited scholar (buff-colored pages), followed by a selection of student projects specifically dealing with that theme. And each chapter is concluded with an essay by one of the studio's mentor-scholars (blue-gray pages), presenting or reflecting upon a specific project or urban investigation. These opening and closing texts form the backbone of the book, while the exemplary student projects are inserted to offer a range of 'found realities' of border conditions. These themes have been framed under the titles of ZONE, FRAMING, EDGE, TRANSGRESSION, NAVIGATION, TRAJECTORIES, INTERFACES and FIELDS.

Other readings of the book, along different lines, are also feasible. For instance, the chronological order of the development

of the Border Conditions programme, according to which the eight main chapters are organized, and which is reflected in the four major themes of the book: from urban research and architectural design proposals related to cities with an explicit presence of borders as a result of CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS, via an interest in MARGINAL URBAN AREAS, to SYSTEMATIC URBAN EXPLORATIONS, and, finally, to MAPPINGS of (peripheral) European cities in which complex characteristics of urban areas and spatial conditions have been investigated. However, this chronological set-up of the book should not prevent the reader from browsing through the pages with a specific interest in mind, either related to theoretical notions, the nature of the project (theory, research or design), specific cities, or certain applied media (texts, drawings, maps, photographs, etc.). Despite the necessarily fragmented nature of the book, an attempt has been made to provide insights into specific characteristics of contemporary spatial practices as well as suggesting strategies and commentary pertinent to the contemporary architectural discourse.

Border Conditions interprets the notion of the border in a deliberately open way. The work of the studio aims to seek new meanings, locations and urban phenomena instead of confirming or testing preconceived and precisely defined borders. All along, mapping has been employed as a technique to register the different realities of the urban conditions, both visible and invisible, and it is simultaneously considered a method to initiate an architectural design intervention at a specific location. Particularly this insistence on the interrelation between urban analyses, via a mapping towards an architectural project, has proven to be an extremely promising Border Condition projects is precisely this *operative* nature of the mappings and research efforts. An attempt has been made to clarify both the results of spatial processes and of what constitutes the rules, methods, and tools of the spatial configuration they project onto the city. The material collected in this book does not seek to offer a new set of investigative rules, nor does it serve a specific ideological purpose. Rather, the material itself is of importance here. These projects expose spaces-of-deliberation that are lacking in messages but teeming with suggestive meanings and unexpected potential.

BORDER CONDITIONS

1 CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS

1.1 ZONE
1.2 FRAMING

