

# BORDERS

## This is the fifth edition of the UOU Journal. This time our theme is **BORDERS**

The C-19 pandemic has subsided and the world can now sit back and take time to reflect upon just how quickly a virus can spread with scant regard to international borders. The events of the last three years have brought home to us the wisdom in the words of the poet John Donne (1624) who wrote:

*'No man is an island,  
Entire of itself;  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.'*

So, whilst we might divide up the spaces we inhabit, those spaces (both tangible and intangible) are always part of something bigger. And, in the disciplines of architecture and urbanism nothing is more true. Our ideas, our approaches to thinking about space and place and our contributions to contemporary discourse in these fields needs to be, as Donne put it, a 'part of the main': a shared conversation and resource; shared across borders, and certainly not constrained by borders.

As designers of places, we are inherently concerned with time and space. The concept of separating space has been with us ever since humans settled down, laid out cities and built. We define those places we design by scale and the key concepts behind the separation of space can be easily transferred between national, urban and building scales.

At their most strategic level, the concept and theories of this spatial separation are international in scale from the fluid, outward looking, ancient Greek idea of οἰκουμένη (ecumene) - signifying the moveable edge of the known world - to the fixed inwardly looking constructions of the ancient Roman

'limes' (limit) - marking the edge of the Empire and, indeed, the edge of the house (lintel). But also, they are present at the urban scale. City walls and gates (intra and extra muros), contemporary ring roads (Périphérique, Ringstraße) and green belts (suburban and metropolitan) divide the city up according to the forces acting upon the contemporary production of space. And of course, at the building scale, as we cross the symbolic 'threshold' we enter a series of interior spaces and rooms (fixed or fluid) that have been planned and laid out using separation as a key design tool. These dividing mechanisms have agency. They affect how we read, experience and use space.

But, borders are also a record of how space changes over time. Borders, frontiers and thresholds and the divisions, and separations they imply, evolve over time, gaining and losing spatial agency as time progresses. Yet their traces might remain, still playing a curious role in the built and inhabited realm. Places of heritage, history, nostalgia and influence.

The multi-disciplinary literature, from fine arts to social sciences and on to pure sciences that concerns itself with the subject of borders and frontiers reveals and asks questions around ideas of: entry, exit, control, defence, binary, the known and unknown, exclusion, intrusion, contact, membership, cultural belonging, physical presence, precision, transformation, exchange, peripherality, porosity, marginality, temporality and dynamism to name but a few.

And whilst we can look at and consider 'borders', 'thresholds' and the like as physical elements in the creative process that make up places across many scales we can just as equally reflect on them as intangible contributors towards a *genus loci* and a new reading of space. What is more, it is not now just a question of tangible and intangible. Today, and in the near future, we face the simultaneous emergence and merging of new borders between our world and

another parallel 'artificial' one (whatever we mean by 'artificial') in the form of augmented reality (AR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). All of which makes for a rich seam of discussion to be mined in this edition.

Traditionally, borders could be seen as lines on a plan (dividing up countries, regions, cities and buildings). But that is too simplistic. Many of the narratives around 'borders' present us with intangible notions and concepts that are very difficult to map. Exactly because traditional borders and frontiers are often presented as a *fait accompli* in a simple Cartesian representation of space, alternative ways of looking at them are now required. And, that is why Giudice & Giubilaro (2015) argue that the reducing of the border to a single line on a map hides its complexity and that there is a need to understand the border to understand the place. As Richter and Peitgen put it: "The fascination of boundaries lies in their ambivalent role of dividing and connecting at the same time." (1985, p.571-572). So, to capture that fascination and to address this shortcoming, visual artists, poets, novelists, architects, urbanists and many others engaged in considering the places and spaces we build have more recently been provoked into a response far more nuanced and sophisticated than simple mapping.

In this edition we are tasked with considering the questions that surround the concept of a 'border' and how we address it in architecture and urbanism. That is why the call for this edition invited contributors to consider this idea of the border widely: tangibly, intangibly, large scale, small scale and as conceptually and intellectually as appropriate, bringing new thinking to the fields of architecture and urbanism. And, the response has been appropriately far reaching and far thinking.

To present that response for this edition the contributions have been divided into four sections although, of course, these overlap to a large extent.

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## SECTION 1 /

## 'OBSERVING THE BORDER'

we have a wide range of submissions that pick up on some of the main suggestions of the call.

In 'Learning from Gevgelija' we start our investigation of the border at the wide international scale as Ioannis Orlis, Evelyn Gavrilou, and Aspasia Kouzoupi from the University of Thessaly draw parallels between 'Learning from Las Vegas' the 1972 seminal work of Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour and the present Greece-North Macedonia border condition. Through a method that involves immersing themselves in the ritual of border crossing and activities either side they observe the 'farmer-gambler' as a product of the unique conditions either side of the line.

This idea of identifying a moment of spatial change is handled in a more scientific manner by Simona Dolana (University of Ion Mincu) in her paper 'The Administrative-Territorial Boundaries Available for a Multiscalar Analysis of EU Port Cities' that suggests a new methodological approach to defining the administrative influence of the border of port cities that could positively impact on relationships with surrounding areas, new challenges and the way in which stakeholders are impacted by urban policy.

Staying at the urban scale Arturo Romero Carnicero (Karlsruhe I.T) in 'Exploring Metropolitan Borderscapes' asks how 'border' cities like Basel (CH-D-F) employ design to enhance exportability of public space transnationally, concluding that much can be done without losing identity and that the lessons might well be applicable to cities elsewhere that have internal rather than international borders.

Still in section 1, Mónica Dazzini Langdon takes us out of Europe to study the border in Ecuador. In 'Crossing gender and biogeography to rethink the

habitat of a fluvial community in Ecuador' she describes her work in decoding the way in which gender creates spatial borders in the way space is occupied in the wetlands of Ecuador explaining how housing and spatial design are closely linked to economic activity and thereby gender.

Finally in section 1, but still on the theme of water – land borders, Doina Carter's paper on 'Fluid boundaries: architectural tool kits for water-lands' uses the UOU workshop idea as a basis for seeing how communities living on these borders are impacted by changes in weather and how groups of architecture students responded to the challenge of conceiving ways to alleviate problems associated with this. Doina's conclusion that group working produces better results is a testimony to the UOU workshop model.



Poste Douanes F-B.



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## SECTION 2 /

## 'THE URBAN BORDER'

brings us to a slightly more detailed scale and three articles that look in some detail at the (unintended) implications of bordering a space – the creation of residual (marginal) spaces

'Borders. The architecture of street' by Martina D'Alessandro (University of Bologna) explains to us how using an understanding of the void as a concept guides us towards a better grasp of residual spaces. And this, she argues can in turn help us see the street as having architectural value and lead to new design solutions

In a very relevant paper on contemporary borders between cultures and identity in European cities, 'The secret life of urban margins' by Maria Fierro (University of Naples, Federico II), examines a specific community – the Rom(a) – and ideas of settlement and encampment at the edge. The author concludes by suggesting the opportunity of an architecture for unforeseen that responds to the differing needs of such border communities.

Staying with a focus on the border as a place of simultaneous 'settlement' and 'movement' we turn our attention to Paris in Stefano Mastromarino's and Camillo Boano's (Politecnico di Torino and UCL London) piece on 'Makeshift borders in Porte de la Chapelle'. They identify how infrastructure – in this case the Périphérique ring road - generates thresholds and encounters, is the gathering place for refugees and displaced persons, and then is the focus of weak policy that serves to keep alive other more affluent parts of a city.



Tryweryn.



Roman Limes Hadrians Wall.



## SECTION 3 /

### 'THE BORDER AND THE BUILDING'

turns towards the building scale and responses to borders and barriers that impact one way or another on the way we respond.

**'Border conditions of transitional housing: centering the lived experience of residents'** by Donagh Horgan (Erasmus University Rotterdam) and Sonja Oliveira (University of Strathclyde) investigates the frontier of housing uncertainty in the UK as a place of experimentation with new ideas of modern methods of construction. Shortcomings in such an approach are revealed around the balance to be struck between ease of assembly and occupiers' comfort.

Staying on the way in which housing can be considered as a border space for wider cultural and social issues to confront each other, Verónica Amorós (University of Alicante), in a beautifully illustrated paper, **'Enabling: On the dispersion of the nuclear family model. New parameters of the boundary of living'** writes about the need to reconsider spatial divisions in housing design as the dominance of the traditional nuclear family is challenged. Property limits and demarcations re questioned and different potential approaches are suggested.

Sensory constraints as a border is the subject of the paper by Glyn Everett and Emily Annakin (University of the West of England). In their contribution **'How can the architectural design of public buildings be improved for Visually Impaired people?'** they highlight the border that exists for visually impaired and other disabled people in the built environment and especially in public buildings. Their findings suggest how design can help but that the lived experience of those on this border is paramount in finding a successful solution.

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'Gare Maritime' - a memory of the frontier.  
France-UK Border.



## SECTION 4 /

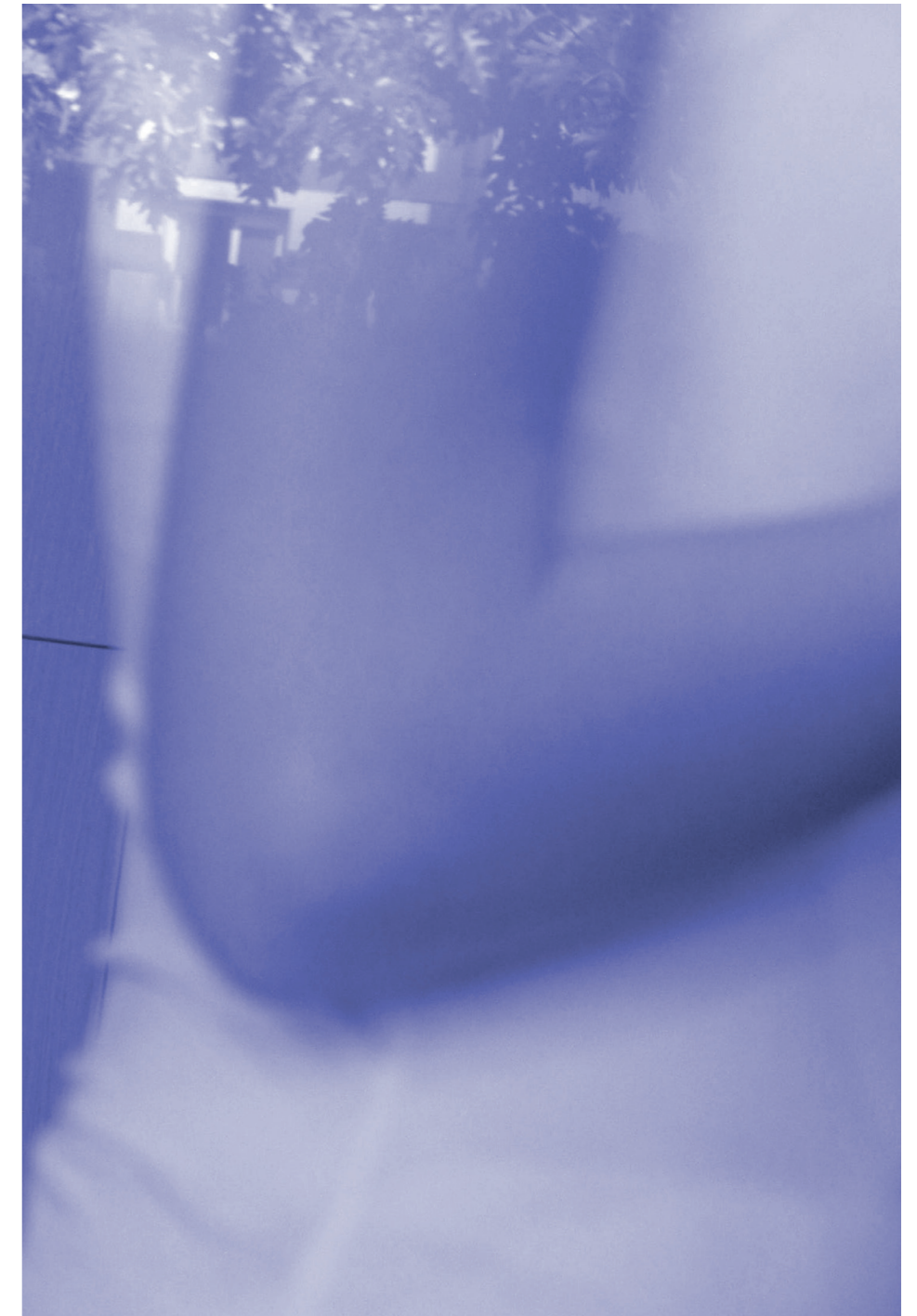
### 'THE BORDER AS IMAGE AND THOUGHT'

takes us on a journey into new ways of looking at the border. We have three articles here, but I also draw your attention to the essay by Matt Reed elsewhere in this edition that, in an eloquent and thought provoking way, explores some of the contemporary debates surrounding AR.

In her article **'IRL Re-engaging the physical within liminal landscapes'** Sarah Stevens (University of Brighton) explores the liminal space between the digital and physical. She identifies a 'new' world where time can be reversed and truth re-written. Working with students, Sarah has explored this territory, asking if we can create architecture that blur these boundaries. She emphasises the need for designers to be storytellers and concludes there is potential for this new liminal world to contribute to more sustainable future.

Artificial Intelligence is the subject of David Serra Navarro's (University of Girona) paper, **'Cartographies and limits through the accumulation of imaginaries.'** The author looks at questions around the use of AI technology from an artistic point of view. He draws together notions of borders from open source materials and with the intervention of AI presents a series of resulting images. He reminds us of the implications for research in architecture and urbanism of this new tool.

Memory and time transcend a border between a space we now occupy and a previous one. Tülay Zivali (Samsun University, Turkey) explores a case from the Balkans in the paper: **'A Battle of Memory and Image: War Tourism as Reconstruction Strategy in Sarajevo.'** The city works with this intangible border and uses it as a tourist attraction. The memory of war and the passage of time are such that they now serve as an economic driver for the town. They



Crossing at the Border.

now create a new image for the future, crossing a temporal border from past to present.

This rich variety of interpretations of the border as a condition, tangible and intangible, presented by all contributors has been exciting to read and thought provoking to reflect upon. My thanks to them all.

(All images M. Devereux).

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