

***Architecture and Coexistence:
The DMZ as Site.***

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0. Opening

These notes arise from a specific context – a set of exchanges between philosophy and architecture within the context of an architectural design studio.¹ While they are in part positioned within what might be understood as a reflection on architecture's current predicament, (a reflection that brings disciplinary and professional concerns together²) they are also taken to provide the setting for an engagement with a specific architectural site. Yet what counts as a site is not straightforward., requiring a clear definition of site before proceeding.

Site is the transformation of the ground into a locale of design. As an abstraction this definition is exact. And yet, ground conditions are already organized. There are dominant organizational logics that are always already at work. Dominance, however, does not have a unique or single expression. It can be understood as that which sustains the unfettered logic of capital and its interarticulated presence with the climate crisis and thus the attendant centrality of carbon; it can involve the creation of divisions between regions, sectors and even nation states. It can thus involve differing modalities of bordering within differing geopolitical configurations. It can assume already determined relation between human and nonhuman animals.

The already determined nature of any ground, in other words, the presence of the ground as resulting from a specific form of territorialization, can mean that site creation is no more than the reiteration of that specific form. And yet, a question arises, it is moreover the question that orientates how one might approach a contested site, such as the case study we will consider here – the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North Korea and the Republic of Korea. The question is straightforward: Is it possible to deploy mapping projects, conceptualization of spatial arrangements and the development of particular architectural instruments to create openings resulting from the suspension of the dominance of already present organizational logics? If dominance in all its forms creates a set of measures that organizes both site creation and attendant economies of design, then what is at stake in thinking the *counter-measures*?

While the suspension of dominance and the creation of openings is a project maintaining the constellation of architecture and philosophy and can take importantly different forms, in the context of the DMZ it was considered that two concepts – *coexistence* and the *border condition* – might play a vital role in site creation. Thinking however is not mere ratiocination. Architectural drawings and mapping projects – thus the preliminary moves within design – are themselves loci of thought. Understanding this, the notes below were formulated and tested in the context of a design studio at the University of Technology School of Architecture in 2020, some work from which illustrates these notes.

1. *Coexistence and Border Condition*

Coexistence as a concept describes sets of relations; be they between individuals, groups, states or species. The position to be outlined here is that *coexistence* precisely because it is a relational term and is constrained to be thought within the confines of a relational ontology necessitates, equally, that consideration be given to limits and thus to a set of conditions that establish borders.³ Borders are neither arbitrary nor contingent additions. Limits within relations and limits that delimit are both borders. Relations entail what can be understood more generally as the *border condition*. Equally, of course, the concept of the *border condition* – a setting that involves fundamentally different configurations of the border, e.g. its presence either as an exact line of separation or as a thickened condition in which lines of separation are subject to negotiation – has itself to be understood as necessarily interarticulated with the concept of *coexistence*. This accounts for why the DMZ has been identified as the case study. One cannot be thought without the other. Borders more cannot be naturalized. Indeed, following Mazzarda and Neilson borders have to be ‘making a world rather than dividing an already-made world’.⁴ This is a position that plays out as much within the political and the philosophical as modes of thought and analysis as it does within both mapping and architectural projects understood as practices of site creation and design.

As a beginning it should be noted that taken on its own the concept of *coexistence* has, at the very least, a double register. In the first instance it is marked by the copresence of its defining elements. The ‘co’ with its link to the Latin *con* and *cum* incorporates forms of simultaneity, presence and collectivity. These elements combine creating a specific constellation of concepts. This is the constellation that has to be thought. (Remembering, of course, the reach that thought has here; from the

2. *DMZ as Site*

In general terms the Demilitarized Zone, or DMZ is located only 39km north of Seoul. As an area of land, it looms large in the minds of all Koreans given its operation as both a symbol and a locus of contestation in what is legally an ongoing war. In the 67 years since the armistice was signed, the DMZ has become home to an almost countless number of land mines. While there are paths that attempt to create ways through the zone, an essential part of its territorialization involves the insertion of mines. The earth itself is a locus of militarization. Moreover, on the North Korean side, any landscape not destroyed in the war, during which this area was the major battlefield, has been erased of trees.

The level of contestation symbolized by the DMZ has also had material consequences. The clarity of the Armistice Agreement is absent on the ground. Despite the clear establishment of a 4km wide zone for the DMZ, both sides have moved their line over the past decades such that at some points the total width of the DMZ is as low as 2km. The critical Military Demarcation Line (MDL) that marks the absolute border between the two Koreas is marked by 1,292 posts but with a lack of clarity that makes it possible to encounter enemy units around the MDL – despite the fact that it is forbidden to cross it. While the Republic of Korea’s (ROK) bases are located on hilltops resembling a series of medieval fortifications, the North Korean posts are less visible and are connected by an access tunnel that forms an “underground great wall” 200km in length. Four additional (known) tunnels traverse under the DMZ to the ROK side, monuments to failed plans of surprise invasion, reconfigured as tourist attractions. The coastline adjacent to the DMZ is also ambiguous, with a project of artificial reefs claiming both territory and access to valuable fish stocks. A “bridge of no return” that connects to the two sides is so named due the impossibility of coming back once one

conceptual to the drawn.) The other component comprising *coexistence* also needs to be incorporated, i.e. 'existence'. Existence with its link to both the Latin *sistere* and *existere* marks the interplay of standing and being. Existence is therefore the continuous relation between a form of location, thus being-in-place, hence 'standing' (*sistere*) and its definition in relation to being present. At its most abstract this means that being is always being-in-place. What this means, while demanding, is that human being is always positioned within modes of territorialization. Place is marked in advance by relations of power. Placed being occurs within and as a part of that setting. *Coexistence* has therefore a clear connection to the problem of how such a presence – a co-being occurring within processes of territorialization – needs to be taken up. The second register dates from the 20th century in which, at least within the English language, *coexistence* is taken to describe a set up in which nations are at peace. The term *coexistence* takes on a particular connotation during the Cold War. At that time *coexistence* was predicated upon sufficient distribution of nuclear weapons that the possibility of what was called at the time MAD (mutually assured destruction) was taken to ensure peace and thus peaceful relations. (Again, it is essential to underscore the inherently relational quality of *coexistence*.) The presence of this double register is significant. The central elements comprising that significance need to be identified.

There are two elements that are key here. The first concerns the relationship between an ontological state and a temporal state. The state of being together, of existing together, defines both a territorialized setting and the processes that maintain it. In temporal terms these processes define a specific 'now.' The second concerns the relationship between the history of *coexistence* and the history of peace. In regard to both of these terms – 'coexistence',

chooses to be expatriated to the other. On the southern side, General Outposts exist just beyond the DMZ forming another line occupied by regiments forming a front line of defense, or attack, as the occasion may be. Behind this lies a Civilian Control Zone consisting of small villages, occupation of which still invites the risk of death or disablement from an encounter with an unidentified land mine, while in the northern equivalent are a series of theatre-set villages, one of which includes a constant broadcast of the achievements of the North and boasts of the world's highest flagpole adjacent, on which flies a huge North Korean flag. If this multiplicity of fragmented and adjusted lines, fuzzy edges and tunnels was not enough, the military personal that patrol both sides of the MDL do so in open contravention of the Armistice through participation in another piece of theater whereby they are costumed and thus rebadged as "police" who are allowed to be in the zone. Police as a named presence and policing as an activity play an essential role with the way the DMZ as it is currently territorialized. Policing is already a measure.

The importance of this account of current conditions is that site creation – the transformation of the ground into a locale of design – necessitates that already present modes of territorialization be understood. (Figure 1) In turn, the development of counter-measures can only occur with an understanding of the differing way modes of territorialization have occurred. Mapping and remapping are an essential part of this project. Mapping, analysis and the emergence of a site presuppose and create knowledge.

It needs to be remembered that the *border condition* is a term that identifies different configurations of bordering. As a beginning the question to be addressed concerns the relationship between a specific modality of the *border condition* and its relation to hospitality. While their concerns

‘peace’ – it is not as though either has an essential quality.

While there are accounts of both peace and coexistence that assume identity and universality thought as simple abstractions, in the context of a place such as the DMZ there needs to be different conception of peace and thus *coexistence*; ones that functions as a *counter-measure* to the set up in which abstractions function hegemonically. Here a beginning can be made with Kant’s 1795 text *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Perpetual peace. A Philosophical Sketch). This short though important text incorporates within it the argument that the peace between nations and thus by extension their *coexistence* is not guaranteed by the ‘suspension of hostilities’. Peace and thus *coexistence* are only possible between free republican states in which there is ‘universal hospitality’. The latter incorporates as integral to its definition the position that individuals cannot be refused entry from one county to another since in Kant’s terms:

All men are entitled (*allen Menschen zusteht*) to present themselves in the society of others by virtue of their right to communal possession of the earth’s surface (*vermöge des Rechts des gemeinschaftlichen Besitzes der Oberfläches der Erde*).⁵

While Kant’s arguments are essential if the presence of the refugee were to figure as an integral part of understanding what *coexistence* might mean today, what the argument reinforces is the position that *coexistence* as a term has to contain differing modalities of separation and connection. In other words, any thinking of separation and connection, which would be the precondition for any thinking of the possibility of hospitality, entails taking up in greater detail what has already been identified as the *border condition*. Reciprocity figures insofar as any thinking of the border is already a thinking of modes of

were not directly architectural in 2015 a number of American feminist activists working with counterparts in both Koreas created a group known as Women Cross DMZ. Meetings, encounters and visits took place. What came to be known as *A Peace Walk* was then established. A specific configuration of relations was set in play. Any mapping of their places of discussion, points of departure and arrival, and the overall movement would have already mapped out a form of reunification. As a result, in Suzy Kim’s formulation, their entire project brought a rethinking of the border into play. Kim argues

In the same way that peace is not simply the cessation of hostilities, reunification cannot remain an abstract term that anyone can appropriate as politically expedient. It requires an active crossing of borders, the acceptance of difference rather than sameness, and unity through embracing difference rather than homogeneity. Reunification should not be about the restoration of a prior whole, but about moving forward to be inclusive of differences, whether these are ideological, political, class, ethnic, national, racial, or sexual.⁹

Kim’s position is that peace in such a context involves what she describes as ‘an active crossing of borders’. The question to be asked concerns the possibility of such an activity within the DMZ. (A question whose pursuance would be one way of construing the DMZ as a site.) While it is true that one configuration of the *border condition* can divide absolutely – the border that has to be thought in relation to the continuity of policing and thus the continuous presence of the actual police – what the presence of this project indicates is the possibility of rethinking the border as a locus of hospitality. Hospitality once freed from the hegemony of sameness and thus an insistence on identity thickens borders. Inclusivity,

coexistence. An essential element of Kant's argumentation – argumentation tempered by a type of realism – is that war can only be avoided if states adopt forms of internal regulation in which law is tempered by morality. While pursuing the details of Kant's argumentation would complicate the position, nonetheless the claim concerning the relationship between law and morality can be understood as the concession that relationality – remembering that relationality also operates across a range of scales – is itself always already the locus of differentials of power. As a result, the problem of sovereignty moves from one setting to another. In the first instance, sovereignty in being external singularizes. In the second, it pertains to elements where disputes involve modes of relationality occurring within a configuration that is equally determined by the copresence of law and morality.

The presence of law and morality is signalled by Kant's use of the formulation: 'All men are entitled' (*allen Menschen zusteht*). The import of this claim is that it establishes a ground of judgement. Hospitality assumes therefore both the presence of a specific governmental organization – republicanism and legal equality – and a claim that connects human being to a particular mode of territorialization. The latter is clear when Kant links 'right' to 'the earth's surface' (*der Oberflächens der Erde*). What this means is that relationality occurs in a setting in which the interplay of right and this particular mode of territorialization have normative force. There is an implicit *counter-measure* in this formulation in the precise sense that what is displaced in the process is not just the sovereignty of forms of external abstractions but equally a conception of the political defined by the relation between friend and enemy.⁶ Again it should be clear that this distinction also operates at range of scales. The friend/enemy distinction may be assumed as much at an interpersonal or group level as it may be taken to describe the relation between states. The modalities

thought in terms of the suspension of the hegemony of identity, demands negotiation. If there were to be a definition, then we could assert that negotiation is a relation that demands and sustains differential identities. It allows for the continuity of peaceful coexistence.

Negotiation is not a static term. Equally, it is not just a set of activities. Negotiations are, of necessity, sited. They demand an architectural resolution in the precise sense that they necessitate the creation of sites that are themselves predicated on the suspension of already present organizational logics. These logics, while operating at the geopolitical level, register locally. What that means is of course that negotiations necessitate a particular understanding of site. Site names the places in which activities sustaining difference – e.g. negotiation – can be carried out. If it can be argued that negotiation and site creation are inextricably linked then what are created is not just locales of hospitality, but ones predicated on the suspension of that conception of the political that takes the friend/enemy distinction as both fundamental and definitional. As such, another conception of the political emerges, one in which a radically different configuration of the *border condition* would then have to appear. While it is always possible that such a position remains merely philosophical here this is not the case. There is an opening to design. The link between negotiation and site entails that design emerges both as a necessity and as a demand.

Design however need not be linked just to architecture in the strict sense of the term. The presence of negotiation always needs to be staged. Moreover, the creation of settings in which the North and the South are brought together plays an important part in contemporary Korean cultural production. In Tae-Sok Oh musical *My Love DMZ* (2002–10) the question of agency receives an important repositioning. Not only does a Shaman figure within the

of the *border condition* delimited by coexistence though in terms of the friend/enemy distinction involves is the presence of sets of lines that both yield and secure identities. Moreover, understood generally it is a conception of the border that cannot be disassociated from violence. Identities – again at a range of scales – may have been constituted by violent acts, they may be maintained by actual violence or its threat or held in place by violence’s symbolic presence. In sum, the border as a policed line is a necessary presence when modes of relationality and thus *coexistence* are thought in terms of a conception of the political defined by the friend/enemy distinction.

It needs to be noted that specific determinations of the *border condition* situated within the forms of externally regulated hegemony noted above as well as the friend/enemy distinction – while they stand in need of great elaboration – are, nonetheless measures whose counter can be thought in terms of modes of hospitality. This is a claim that while initially philosophical in orientation gives rise to the question of what on the level the architectural would be its correlate?

While the Kantian definition is, in the end, too restrictive it creates the setting within which to begin. Kant writes that:

Hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory (*auf dem Boden*)⁷

Hospitality necessitates a conception of relationality that is not based on the mere suppression of either war or hostilities. Thus, it assumes modes of coexistence and equally the modalities of the *border condition* entailed by them. Hospitality stands as the *counter-measure* to hostility. And yet, precisely because there are different forms of hostility – between states, groups, individuals, species, etc., – there have to be

work, some of the animals that now populate the DMZ play pivotal roles. In Catherine Diamond’s term’s

The play proposes how the two Koreas might resolve their infamous border – protecting its sanctuary status in perpetuity. Oh allows the animals and soldiers to tell their stories and plead with the spectators, especially young people who know little of the war, not to forget them. He resorts to staging ancient ritual to find a solution, and insists that the voice of artistic imagination be considered in determining the DMZ’s fate, suggesting its transformation from an unintentional to an intentional sanctuary.¹⁰

While the presence of the Shaman and thus the introduction of a figure that complicates historical time by giving force and actuality to the mythic is an important device to undo any insistent presentism, what is important for these concerns is the role of animals in the musical. The presence of the border as sanctuary within the play is not just the precondition for peace, and thus the provision of a place for nonhuman animals, a place holding the human and the nonhuman in place, thus in reterritorializing their relation, recalls the possibility of the sanctuary city. Such a city is not one given in the opposition between the City of God and the City of Man. The sanctuary city is the place of negotiation. It is the place in which differences are not resolved; on the contrary, they are lived out. To go further, the argument is that the possibility of coexistence between the Koreas is almost predicated on what could be termed a peaceful coexistence between human and nonhuman animals. Such a possibility depends on a mode of relationality that does not demand the commodification of animals as meat. It is not surprising in this regard that the sanctuary is linked to what Derrida identifies as the ‘city of refuge’ which as Bauder has argued ‘entails new forms of

different conceptions of hospitality. What that means is, of course, that while in terms of the relationship between morality and law it is possible to argue for the presence of unconditional hospitality as there on the side of morality and which allows for the judgement of law, where law can be equated with statute. It needs to be added that it is also true that actualization involves points of genuine particularity. Derrida refers to this set up in terms of a ‘law of an unconditional hospitality offered *a priori* to each and every other, to each and every arrival (*à tout autre, à tout arrivant*)’.⁸ The offer – its setting and the modalities of exchange that are envisaged have a necessary determinacy and contingency; a contingency that depends on a *prior* nature of unconditionality.

Hospitality has to be understood as a mode of relationality. Thus hospitality names a modality of *coexistence*. The modality that is, as was mentioned, the *counter-measure* to equation of *coexistence* with the friend/enemy distinction. Thus equally it is the *counter-measure* to the conception of the political demanded by that distinction. Of equal significance is the fact that hospitality is an activity. Hospitality is offered. Offering is an act whose continuity figures as a form of potentiality whose actualization is envisaged. Hospitality is not just the suspension of hostility, its presence as an offering means that it is a spacing. To offer is to open; offering and opening are modes of space creation. Hospitality is inherently spatial. And yet, precisely because it is spatial and incorporates the necessity of the unconditional and the contingency of pragmatic conditionality there will always have to be the inscription of limits. These limits however become lines of separation and connection within the spatialization of hospitality. Moreover, they are lines that provide different configurations of the *border condition*. That condition will now no longer demand lines of pure separation necessity policing regulated by externalities which exert hegemony. The border is now a thickened condition incorporating openings,

urban politics beyond conventional modes of belonging and membership that frame urban politics today.¹¹ In other words, it is an urban politics that takes hospitality and coexistence as organizing motifs. At work here is of course an emphatic reworking of the border that separates human and nonhuman animals – transformed in the process is what is meant by the forms of life proper to each. The reworking of the border, the occasioning of other lives, is what allows it to become a sanctuary. It is, moreover, an instantiation of the *border condition* that suspends the role of policing and thus it stands counter to policing and thus an architecture of wire, border posts and militarization. The suspending of that border and its architecture is the precondition for the emergence of an architecture of negotiation.

While it is not stated directly, it is not difficult to see similar modes of argumentation in Dongsei Kim’s detailed engagement with the creation of the DMZ as a locus of design. The importance of Dongsei Kim’s work is that he links other possibilities within the *border condition* to the project of design. For example, he argues that

Depending on how we imagine, use, and experience a border, it becomes a means to “include” or “exclude”, which defines “us” and “them”. Consequently, designers should be crucially aware of how their actions are complicit in constructing, maintaining and deconstructing borders. Despite the profound need to understand borders, spatial design disciplines’ border thinking at the scale of the nation-state remains focused on framing borders as an object, essential as a static line on a map.¹²

His interest is not with objects but with understanding the border in terms of an urban condition in which there is the

offerings, space of negotiations. There are to be accommodated within and as part *coexistence* thought in terms of hospitality. To the extent that the *border condition* is present in terms of the spatialization of hospitality – thus defined by openings and offerings – lines become *counter-measures* in their own right. The drawing of those lines becomes therefore the *counter-measure* as a design practice. Furthermore, the mapping of the interplay of offerings and openings create other openings which carve out and create still further spatial configurations. The question for design then concerns its own relation to that which is staged by hospitality as a form of spatiality; a form holding both *coexistence* and the *border condition* in play.

presence of a set of lines marking a form of complexity. His invocation of urbanism is the argument that the border is a set of complex relations rather than the presence of a single line. If there is a limit to his approach then it can be found in his use of what is ultimately a reductive opposition between the simple and the complex; the object versus the urban. What is left out of consideration is the need to recognize that any one configuration of the *border condition* is already a mode of territorialization. In the case of the DMZ, in its actual configuration, this is the mode of territorialization that sustain the politics of friend/enemy and thus which necessitates the architecture of militarization. What has to occur is a reterritorialization of the ground and thus another transformation such that it is a different locale of design. Such a move would enjoin both another politics and another architecture.

Postscript

These notes accompany a Masters Architectural Studio – ***AN ARCHITECTURE OF RELATIONALITY V: Territory, Border, Countermeasure*** – directed by Gerard Reinmuth and Andrew Benjamin taught at the University of Technology Sydney. Work from the studio was exhibited both at the Korean Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale of Architecture (Transborder Project) and the 3rd Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism, also in 2021. The work forms part of an integrated research project on relational architecture. In addition to the preparation of a book, the research involves a four-year studio (2017–2020) that has studied Seoul and the DMZ.

The studio takes as its departure point the assertion that buildings are constituted by and form part of a network of relations. The consequence of such a description is that it then allows any one object – the building as object – to be an after-effect of the relations that pertain within a given conjunction. A key concept here is of the *counter-measure* – an intervention that, while afforded by already determined logics of creation, is not formed or organised by those logics. The *counter-measure* is defined therefore in terms of relations of indetermination. Such relations define (and create) actual openings; openings as an informed interruption and thus as a form of autonomy. As a result, such openings ground, within architecture, the possibility of resistance.

In this context, we ask this year, what happens to a border when its primary aim is no longer premised on reinforcing and policing self-excluding identities? Can the presence of a

thickened border condition open up questions of coexistence and cooperation, both within and across species? Working at different scales, students developed a series of counter-measures—a project in which design and politics intersect—that explore the possibility of any future at the border. These counter measures emerged from research into the various animal populations that have been flourishing in the DMZ, the existence of which places the DMZ in a paradoxical position – peace on the Korea peninsula would lead to their assured destruction.

The work that eventuated made three key contributions to this argument. Firstly, in commencing each project, students mapped the habitat of a selected animal in the context of how their habitat is spread across the Korean peninsula and mapped against the geometry of the DMZ (Figures 2,3). These mappings became diagnostic in nature given the suggestions within in as to the interventions that may be possible to extend upon or protect current animal habitats. Secondly, students used the logics of the animals as they inhabited or migrated across the DMZ in ignorance of the politics underpinning the DMZ, students generated new forms of engagement with and across this zone (Figures 4,5). Finally, some projects took on the current military infrastructure itself, repurposing it to enable counter-measures to the DMZ in terms of incursions by humans across and limit lines and into the border zone itself (Figure 6a,6b). form of a range of meeting and tourism projects.

Notes

² See in this regard Gerard Reinmuth. 'Relationality and Architecture: How Refocusing The Discipline Might Reverse The Profession's Seemingly Unstoppable Trajectory Of Decline', *Architectural Theory Review*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 89-107. 2017

³ The claim here builds on the position set out in Andrew Benjamin. *Towards a Relational Ontology*. SUNY Press. Albany. 2015.

⁴ Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson. Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders. *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(4/5) 2012. Page 59

⁵ I. Kant. Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch. In *Kant's Political Writings*. (Edited by Hans Reiss). Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1977. Page 106.

⁶ The reference here is obviously to Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 2007. While Schmitt argues against the extension of this distinction into what might be described as the private sphere, the implicit contention here is that the opposition has greater reach and thus it can function at different scales. As indeed can the political.

⁷ I. Kant. Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch. Page 105.

⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* Editions Galilée. Paris. 1997. Page 57.

⁹ Suzy Kim. Crossing borders: a feminist history of "Women Cross DMZ". *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Winter, 2016, Vol.40(1), page 147.

¹⁰ Catherine Diamond. Human No-Go Zones: Theatricalizing Unintentional and Intentional Wildlife Sanctuaries. *Theatre Research International*. Vol 45. No. 2. 2020. Page 169.

¹¹ Harald Bauder. Sanctuary Cities: Policies and Practices in International Perspective. *International Migration*. 2016. Page 8.

¹² Dongsei Kim. "Metamorphosis of a Zone." *Topos: The International Review of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design*. 104: 74-79. September. 2018. Page 77.