

Limits, Borders, Boundaries and Edges

A conversation between
the Editorial Committee members

Alvado Bañón, Joaquín¹; Carrillo Andrada, José Antonio²; Nobile, Maria Luna³; Morales Beltran, Mauricio⁴; Devereux, Mike⁵; Aleixo, Sofia⁶

¹Alicante University, Spain.
joaquin.alvado@ua.es

²AUD American University in Dubai.
jcarrillo@aud.edu

³UMA Umeå University, Sweden.
maria.nobile@umu.se

⁴Yaşar University, Türkiye.
mauricio.beltran@yasar.edu.tr

⁵UWE Bristol, UK.
mike.devereux@uwe.ac.uk

⁶Universidade de Évora, Portugal.
saleixo@uevora.pt

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MD With settlement comes a limitation, a border, an edge that demarcates space and place. Since Uruk, Memphis, Harappa and Liangzhu such edges define cultures and their consequent urban patterns, the like of which are still our concern today wherever we are. They express a sense of belonging that manifests itself physically. At its largest scale, the Great Wall of China, but also in the city wall and in the house – the very word ‘limit’ signifies at once the extremity of a territory but also the stone over a doorway - a lintel. Urbanism and architecture are beholden to the limit, the feature that separates and defines one space from another. Without the limit, the border or the edge would there be architecture? Would there be urbanism? The boundary defies scale. For Pyramus and Thisbe the wall was both the limit of the room and the edge of their world. A physical threshold that separated and divided their lives. But, as they knew, such a barrier was not just tangible, it was, at the same time, intangible. And so, hence the importance of the border. It is a tool through which architects and urbanists shape space, and importantly the way we feel in that space. What the parents of Pyramus and Thisbe used to divide we must use as a tool to celebrate difference, to learn and to unite. Architecture and urbanism as disciplines and in the way they are taught in our universities have to do that.

SA It is interesting that you, Mike, call on a Babylonian love story to address the topic of this UOU scientific journal on Borders...after all it was a question of communication between two people enclosed in each one's space, and therefore, presenting the space as the physical limit of the soul, the walls as the edge of love, or, in another words, architecture as limiting the free expression of being. If in architecture the concept of Temporality, perceived as “the condition of lasting for short period of time” is in opposition of Permanency, perceived as durable, immutable, and therefore stable, then it may be assumed that architectural limits are fixed, and therefore independent of or unaffected by time. However, as Pyramus and Thisbe have demonstrated, this non-temporal existence falls apart when love come to play. The indisputable relevance of this UOUsj number in terms of discovering new frontiers, new borders in innovative architectural territories, seems somehow to induce the link to the next UoU sj on Temporality, as borders may not be indefinite, triggering the merging of different realities and producing new and unknown lands, such as Peter Pan created the Neverland. And is this not an exciting image when teaching architecture? When establishing briefs with challenges that also promote positive thought, responsibility, mutual help and friendship?

JA The edge (An experiment)

As Mike suggests, we must use architecture as a tool to celebrate difference, to learn and to unite. My proposal for the way to teach in our universities is related to experiment the edge.

Despite the proliferation of Institutions such as Universities, architectural Associations and large scale exhibitions can't, on their own, define the legitimacy of contemporary architecture today. Architecture nowadays, is a constellation of public spheres as narratives of autonomous subjectivity. Working on the architecture edge enact the multidisciplinary direction through which architectural practices and processes come most alive. In the studios, a constitutive map of contemporary knowledge circuits: art, theory, science, culture, ecology, and politics collides. Urban systems and meta-territory experience on the edge open to freedom openness and changes.

As Rem Koolhaas wrote in his Manifesto "Content":

"Architecture is a fuzzy amalgamation of ancient knowledge and contemporary practice, an awkward way to look at the world and an inadequate medium to operate on it... Architecture is too slow. Yet, the word "architecture" is still pronounced with certain reverence (outside of the profession). It embodies the lingering hope – or the vague memory of hope- that shape, form, coherence could be imposed on the violent surf of information that washes over us daily. Maybe, architecture doesn't have to be stupid after all. Liberated from the obligation to construct, it can become a way of thinking about anything – a discipline that represents relationships, proportions, connections, effects, and the diagram of everything."

Liberated from the obligation to construct, "The edge" is as an experimental architectural room to discuss about architecture, to unify differences. No disciplines and no hierarchies. The edge as a zone of activity a communicative and practical intersection. Three kind of spaces to understand the function of an interactive atmosphere on the edge: a conflictive space (Ring), a soft space (Love Room) and a leisure space (Karaoke)

The ring.

The last two decades have witnessed a series of conflicts. To understand the contemporary architectural space, we need to manage the emergent habitational problems to offer a singular perspective on the limits. Conflictive contemporary situations. Refugees and walls.

The Love Room.

The pop up spaces appear on the edge, everywhere. The ordinary and the emergence and maintenance of manners, customs, and responsibilities are part of the everyday architecture and live.

Soft spaces signal an attempt to understand the implications of relational approaches for spatial planning and interpersonal programs.

Love Hotels in Tokyo with creative names and kitschy façades, often adorned with neon colors, and gaudy decor. Domesticity as the border of the discipline.

The Karaoke.

We propose a leisure space, a space for fun, to enjoy and to spend a good time a space for happiness. Karaoke spaces with color and music, stage and multiscreen television.

Conflicts, domesticity and leisure redefine the boundaries of architecture and prepare us to reinvent constantly the limits.

"Space has no room, time not a moment for us. We are excluded. In order to be included – to help our homecoming- we must gathered into the meaning (we are the subject as well as the object of architecture). Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more. For space in our image is place, and time in our image is occasion". van Eyck (1968).

SA How right you are JA, how important it is to experiment the edge in architecture education...to be on top of the limit between known and unknown, with no safety nets below us, only with the sky above our heads. It is then that Peter Pan comes flying and lets us know that the unknown is the most wonderful feeling in the world! Aren't you all tired of certainties? Is it not the challenge of designing a Cube (the Mukaab) or a Line (the Neom) that makes us aspire to new worlds and new ways of living? Just to imagine the possibility makes me shiver...

MBB I reflect on Mike's question: Without the limit, the border or the edge would there be architecture? Certainly not. The boundary defies scale indeed, yet it also defines it.

Limits in architecture are physical manifestations of a change, of a discontinuity. Before and after the limit there is continuity. In mathematics, the notion of limit is a value to which a definition or progression approaches in function of certain inputs. Interestingly enough, such value —the limit— sometimes is not part of the continuum domain of the function is precisely defining. In architecture, values or points become lines and spaces through experience, through moving in and out, through time; Limits in architecture, hence, define those regions where spaces stop being what they are or stop being perceived in the way they were. If limits are thus regions, borders and boundaries are linear extensions of small changes, which occur at local level. This is what one could assume as an edge: a sharp change that is only meaningful in physical terms, yet it entails semantic constructions as part of a border or a boundary.

Whereas limits are self-referred, i.e., their existence is independent of architectural definitions, the notion of boundary entails the existence of a center, however this may be materialized, and thus the nature of borders heavily depends on how architecture is being conceived and integrated with a specific place. Border and boundaries, therefore, are integrated with the places where they originated from.

SA Again, the topic of the line, as a division....but,... in Neom the line is the unity, the place where people live...will they live there? Will it be livable?

MLN Border, thresholds, boundaries, edges, limits are defined in two dimensions: space and time (as mentioned by you all).

I would like to propose a reflection on the spatial aspect mentioned in the beginning of this conversation: the wall, the fence, the enclosure. For Le Corbusier the act of delimiting the space through a fence introduce the notion of design of our own space, looking at it not it could even be seen as an appropriation of the nature.

"Delimiting (Recintare) is the act of collective recognition and appropriation of a portion of land or physical space; it is the act of its definition and separation from the rest of the world-nature. [...] the enclosure is the shape of the object, the way in which it presents itself to the outside world, with which it reveals itself."

With this definition Vittorio Gregotti introduces the first issue of the monographic architectural journal «Rassegna», in the early 80's, entitled: Recinti / Enclosures. The space, following the relationship that he establishes with the act of delimiting, through the wall, introduces the dichotomy interior/exterior. Furthermore, interior and exterior are considered as topological, imaginary, geometric and technical regions, both equally related to the enclosure itself, which represents the boundary between them. This relationship that the element establishes with the enclosed space is linked to the characteristics of the specific place in which it is inserted, determining the shape of the element itself which in this way reveals itself to the outside world. The wall, as the construction of a place, determines the character of the contained space and consequently of the space that surrounds it. Where does the limit of architecture intervene? When architecture becomes the expression of the power of human beings on the nature? What will be the future?

SA Dear MLN, how exciting it is to have different cultural contexts in this talk. Thank God we are not all equal Europeans, in THAT sense! Of course Italy and its architectural journal «Rassegna» took this topic in the 1980s! Architecture was going through profound changes and change always brings the most relevant topics into the discussion. Post-Modernism: was it a matter of envelope design?

JAC The term 'limit' carries an inherent sense of something physical, yet our understanding of such concepts is primarily mediated by our perception, deeply rooted in our bodily experience.

Juhani Pallasmaa, in his seminal work, "The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses" (1996), offers a compelling insight into this idea. He posits, "*All the senses, including vision, are extensions of the tactile sense; the senses are specializations of skin tissue, and all sensory experiences are modes of touching and thus related to tactility*" (Pallasmaa, 1996, p.10). This perspective reframes our understanding of spatial limits and borders from merely physical constructs to perceived experiences that resonate on a tactile, sensory level. Much like the architectural envelope, our skin becomes an edge, a liminal space that connects us to and isolates us from our environment. It resonates with JA's proposition of 'The Edge' to unravel the complex nature of architecture beyond physicality, a shared experiential realm that necessitates no disciplines and no hierarchies. Beyond the tactile understanding, our perception of spatial limits is also significantly influenced by our psychological perception of self, our cognitive awareness of our body, its dimensions and its positioning in space. Merleau-Ponty's "Phenomenology of Perception" (1945) posits our body as our primary way of connecting with the world; our body and the space it inhabits are inextricably linked, "*our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.5). This means our perception of limits, boundaries, and edges is shaped by our conscious understanding of our body and its relational dynamics with our surroundings. It echoes MD's emphasis on the need to look beyond the confines of classrooms and studios, challenges the notion of boundaries and borders, and embrace a more fluid, open and inclusive perspective.

Nevertheless, the question arises: How will this relationship transform in the future? As we enter an era where technology and our bodies merge, a point where augmented and virtual reality interfaces are woven into the fabric of our existence, how will our perception of spatial limits and borders evolve? This echoes SA's wonder about the temporal aspect of borders and limits and her anticipation of new architectural territories being ushered in by the change.

Furthermore, these shifts will challenge us to re-imagine public spaces, not as static, physically confined areas but as fluid, interconnected spaces that extend into the virtual realm. Much like the human skin, the urban fabric will serve as an interface for communication, facilitating a complex and dynamic interaction between the physical and the digital, the individual and the collective. This new paradigm will redefine the urban edge, blurring the line between the public and the private, the physical and the virtual, the built and the imagined.

In the context of architectural education, it is crucial to embrace this evolving understanding of limits and borders, not as static and concrete but as dynamic and fluctuating constructs that are molded by our sensory and cognitive experiences. The works of Pallasmaa and Merleau-Ponty, along with emerging research in virtual and mixed reality, offer invaluable insight into this paradigm shift. We must instill

in our students the importance of sensory engagement and cognitive perception in shaping architectural spaces and their inherent limits. The key is to equip them to design not just for the physical but also for the perceptual.

In conclusion, we must acknowledge the complexities and intricacies of the concepts of edge and limit, which go beyond the physical realm and delve into the tactile and the psychological, thus necessitating a more holistic, experimental, and multi-sensory approach to architecture and urbanism. As we anticipate the future and its virtual and mixed realities, we must equip ourselves and the next generation of architects to navigate and shape these new territories and the accompanying shifting perception of limits, borders, and edges, leading to architecture and cities that are genuinely inclusive, immersive, and responsive.

MD The above contributions provoke me to think more about this question of the 'boundary' in architectural thought and practice, and how that then plays out in architectural education. Education needs to come out from inside the border that is defined as the classroom or studio, it needs to dispense with the rigid formality of the curriculum – (not altogether there are necessary constraints and norms for us to follow) - in so far as it can. It needs to be experimental, to unite cultures without subsuming them into one dominant approach to design, it needs to be open and not closed, embrace non-architects and non-urbanists (beyond our professional borders) who have so much to teach us. You all make good and relevant points in the conversation above, including: '*Where does the limit of architecture intervene?*' (MLN); *...the nature of borders heavily depends on how architecture is being conceived*' (MLN); and we have a suggestion of a space – The Edge - to consider such questions in more depth than this conversation allows. "*The edge' is as an experimental architectonical room to discuss about architecture, to unify differences. No disciplines and no hierarchies.*" (JA). And perhaps that discussion will truly questions barriers we face – intellectual, cultural, design, political, social disciplinary etc...'*We must instill in our students the importance of sensory engagement and cognitive perception in shaping architectural spaces and their inherent limits.*'(JAC).

I see the discussion as able to trigger 'the merging of different realities and producing new and unknown lands' (SA). Perhaps these unknown lands will have borders, but not barriers.

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