

The Demilitarized Zone: Redrawing the 151-Mile Border Between North and South Korea

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THE DEMILITARIZED ZONE

The demilitarized zone between North and South Korea is “one of the most closed and tightly controlled borders of the world” (Wastl-Walter, 4).

The Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a 4-km-wide (2.5 mile), 250-km-long (151 mile) military buffer zone between North and South Korea. The DMZ is the first main case study

of my larger ongoing research titled “border as urbanism.” The current form of the demilitarized zone was established after the Korean War Armistice was signed between the United Nations and North Korea with China, some 60 years ago on July 27, 1953.¹

WHY IS THE DMZ AS A CASE STUDY?

The primary justification of the DMZ being the central case study in exploring the notion of “border as urbanism” is that it is one of the most extreme cases of a tightly closed and controlled border. In addition, it is one of the most heavily militarized borders in the world, one that withstood the fall of Communism and the end of the Cold War (Gelézeau, 325, 327). Despite this extreme impermeability, the DMZ’s inherent flows, processes, and reciprocities, over time clearly prove that borders are never static or fully closed. Furthermore, because of this extreme condition, the DMZ becomes the best illustration of comprehending the inherent porosities and malleability of borders.

The second rationale of the DMZ as a case study is related to it being a representation of a conflict that is common among many nation-state border territories. Furthermore, this abrupt establishment of the DMZ as a social construct rather than as a manifestation of a natural element or accumulation of distinctive culture or geography² is in line with one of the ten characteristics summarized in the *‘Conditions and trends in contemporary*

borders,'³ described in my research *Border as Urbanism: Redrawing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) Between North and South Korea* (Kim, 2012).

Third, the DMZ became an ideal case study despite the perception of the DMZ as seemingly static. It is also a site of transition that mutates and facilitates transgressions over time, like all other dynamic borders mentioned by numerous border scholars, but one that operates at a very different pace and logic (Gelézeau, 327-328). This third and last reason allows this notion of a border "construction-operation-deconstruction" mechanism to be specifically understood, which further helps understanding "border as urbanism."

In addition to this case study contributing to the overall discourse of border territories, the study also benefits the subject—the DMZ itself. This process helps define new ways of interpreting the DMZ in Korea, challenging the dominant hegemonies and binaries that have been persisting for the last half century.


Furthermore, this Derridean deconstruction aspect of the research that constantly questions the notion of border and its studies, alludes to the frames that Vaughan-Williams refers to as what we use to "make sense of global politics and project these reflections into our analyses" (Vaughan-Williams, 159).

In the context of design discipline discourse, this act of redrawing the DMZ also draws affinity to James Corner's notion of mapping, where he states, "agency of mapping is most effective when its capacity for description also sets the conditions for new eidetic and physical worlds to emerge" (Corner, 1999, 214). Correspondingly, the act of re-describing, mapping and redrawing the DMZ engenders the "...irrigati[ng] of territories with potential"⁴ [...that] sows the seeds of the future possibility, staging the ground for both uncertainty and promise" (Corner, 2006, 31). Likewise, Corner states, "the map 'gathers' and 'shows' things presently (and always) invisible, things which may appear incongruous or untimely but which may also harbour enormous potential for the unfolding of alternative events" (Corner, 1999, 225).

The postulation of understanding "border as urbanism" aspires to explore Corner's notion: "Thus, mappings do not *represent* geographies or ideas; rather they *effect* their actualization" and to expand designers' agency in the border "construction-operation-deconstruction" cycle (Corner, 1999, 225). Through this, not only is a deeper understanding achieved of border territories as a result of spatial negotiations, reflective of multiple forces in action, but also the extreme conditions of border conflicts uncover the fundamental desires and forms of spatial negotiations that ultimately can inform spatial negotiations in urbanism.

DEMILITARIZED ZONE: PREHISTORY AND ITS "CONSTRUCTION-OPERATION-DECONSTRUCTION"

1. A Military Demarcation Line shall be fixed and both sides shall withdraw two (2) kilometers from this line so as to establish a Demilitarized Zone between the opposing forces. A Demilitarized Zone shall be established as a buffer zone to prevent the occurrence of incidents which might lead to a resumption of hostilities. (United Nations Command, 237)



Before Korea's Japanese colonial period (1910–1945) and long before the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was established as a result of the Korean War (June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953) the 38th parallel was discussed as a proposed line for delimiting Russian and Japanese influence in the peninsula as far back as in the late nineteenth century. Polarized political ideologies in Korea following its independence from Japan brought the Korean War, which was one of the first examples of proxy wars between the superpowers during the mid-twentieth century.

Ultimately the ideological contest between communist China and Soviet Union, and the Free World led by the U.S., left behind this demilitarized zone, which is 243 km (151 miles) long by 4 km (2.5 miles) wide and 972 km² (240,186 acres) in area. This area accounts for about 0.5% of the Korean peninsula and one and a half times the area of South Korea's capital, Seoul. To this day, the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) runs through the center of the DMZ and divides the communist North from the capitalist South.

Technically, the two Koreas are still at war, and are only under a temporary armistice. Given the DMZ's relative isolation from human intervention in the past 60 years, it has become one of the most bio-diverse areas in Korea, perhaps in the world. Starting in the early 2000s, many calls and proposals have been made to conserve and preserve the area as a national or international peace park. The DMZ, however, is not free from other depredations: according to a United Nations Environment Programme report, multiple burn scars linked to military surveillance in DMZ have been revealed through NASA's Landsat 7 satellite.⁵

Furthermore, several organized DMZ tourist operations offer access to multiple sites on the South Korean side. Beyond the existing history, security concerns, and ecologically themed tourism and other moneymaking ventures, what more can the DMZ do and/or become? Can it be a more productive landscape and harness energy, or become a cultural asset that creates more value for both North and South Korea? Likewise, how can it foster collaboration between the two Koreas? Or to put it differently, what should the DMZ *not* be? Ultimately, redrawing the DMZ through understanding "border as urbanism" and the framework of "four lenses" allows an alternate future to be speculated transforming, the DMZ as barrier to an asset.

FOUR LENSES: HISTORY, BARRIER, FLOWS, AND GLOBAL SCALE

The intention of setting up the methodology of four lenses is to set up a discursive framework that allows for an active dialogue between theorization and practice of border implementations. This framework also helps us to reinterpret and challenge the binary views and hegemonies in spatial negotiations.

The reciprocities between empirical inquiry and theory gains more traction as Sayer (1992) states that "the role of theory for the organization of facts and empirical observations should be a secondary one and the key aim of theorization should be to conceptualize the directly and indirectly observable elements of the research objects" (quoted in Paasi, 2011, 19). On that note, Paasi argues that:

correspondingly, theory is not a separate realm that should be freely circulated as such, but it should inform concrete research practice, which should in turn help to shape the theory. On the other hand, while such conceptualization should be contextual, it should not be bound only to a specific local context but should be related to broader social and cultural theory. (Paasi, 2011, 19)

Thus, this framework of the four lenses, elaborated later, seeks reciprocal relationships between the empirical and the theoretical knowledge that creates a discursive framework within which it can operate.

The central role of the case study is also an attempt of what Howarth describes as “producing new *interpretations* of empirical objects, either by rendering visible phenomena previously undetected by dominant theoretical approaches, or by problematizing existing accounts and articulating new interpretations” (Howarth, 26). In essence, producing new interpretations must go beyond merely the inclusion of new facts or descriptions, but should challenge the deep hegemonic and binary practices embedded in the understanding and representation of the DMZ, to reveal what Corner refers to as “setting the conditions for new eidetic and physical worlds to emerge” for the DMZ, and further for other similar contested border conditions.

The empirical component of the research was fulfilled in two ways. The first was through a heuristic field trip to the demilitarized zone in Korea, which I conducted in May 2011.⁶ The second component engages a plethora of firsthand and secondary research materials accumulated over the years by others on the demilitarized zone. Through this heuristic process of digesting the empirical components of the DMZ, I have developed the four lenses—history, barrier, flows and global scale—as a primary framework to understand “border as urbanism,” one which reveals the border’s complex spatial negotiations over time.

HISTORY LENS

The first lens is the “historical,” which is the timeline cataloguing the political and geopolitical events related to the DMZ. This lens allows one to understand the DMZ at a longer time scale, which Gelézeau describes as,

the process of border formation is much more complex and has to be understood at a longer time scale that also identifies Korean roots during the colonial time and the anti-Japanese guerrilla fighting which radicalized local conflicts between political parties. (Gelézeau, 327, 328)

This view helps one to understand the historical context at which a particular border is operating, further assisting the comprehension of certain transgressions and deformations over time in a more nuanced manner. For example, the way in which the border frontiers shifted in the Korean War is highlighted in the map to illustrate the highly dynamic nature of borders over time.

BARRIER LENS

The second lens illustrates the DMZ as a “barrier.” This mapping accentuates the performance of the border as a barrier, identifying how the DMZ



operates as one and how it is perceived as such. On the ground, issues such as the wide-spread two-million landmines across the DMZ and the non-physical issues such as the North Korean military GPS jamming operations that interrupt the South Korean GPS systems are visualized. Furthermore, the military tensions, conflicts and negotiations, such as the infiltration tunnels, are emphasized with their spatial manifestations and impacts.

FLOWS LENS

The third lens, “flows,” allows mapping of processes of overcoming the border as a barrier. Furthermore, it visualizes how these processes of overcoming (i.e. flows and reciprocities) reveal a particular kind of urbanism, economy, politics, and social effects that are closely related to the notion and the understanding “border as urbanism.” This understanding of the spatial negotiations in such extreme circumstances directly related to survival in border territories reveals fundamental human desires. This in turn also informs how spatial negotiations materialize in urbanism.

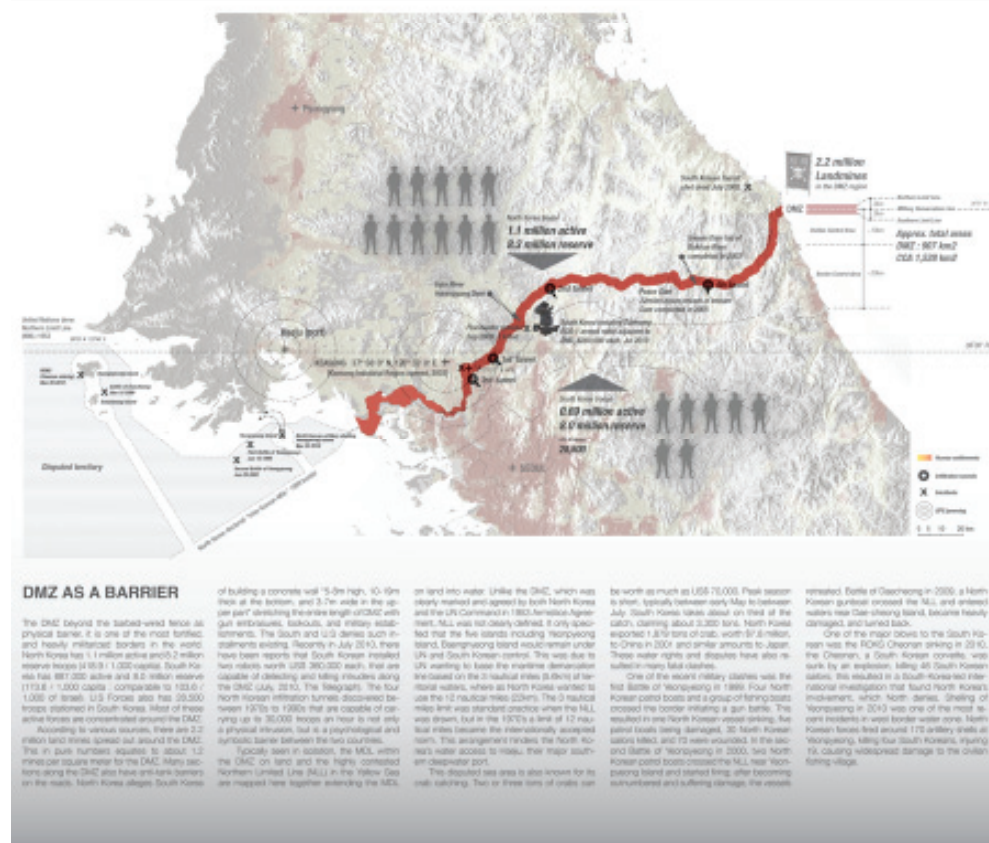
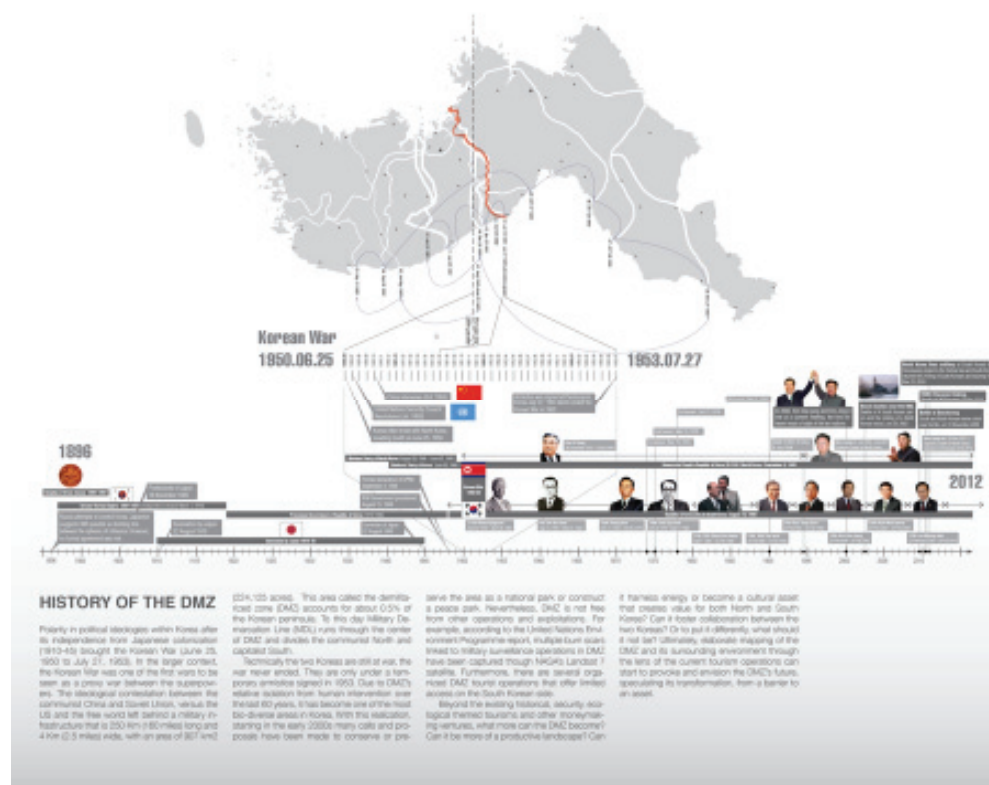
Moreover, as this notion of flow, processes, and reciprocities over time is fundamental in understanding “border as urbanism,” this lens is further expanded and is elaborated in the chapter, “The Demilitarized Zone: Cataloguing Mutations,” in *Border as Urbanism: Redrawing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) Between North and South Korea* research (Kim, 2012). This chapter catalogues the mutations that emerge through a variety of transgressions that clearly elucidate border territories as a dynamic process that is manifested as a result of spatial negotiations over time. To clearly help this important aspect, a few examples from the extensive list of catalogue are presented here in the following paragraphs.

MIGRATORY BIRDS: ECOLOGICAL FLOWS

One of the many flows that have been identified, one obvious example is the ecological flows of migratory birds that overcome the border as barrier. By mapping its flows and operation, the transgressions and mutations of the border are uncovered as a process. This helps deconstruct the border in such way that facilitates emergence of latent possibilities.

In Gangwon-do, South Korea especially near the Cheorwon Plains, is a popular destination for the migrating red-crowned cranes that fly to and from Siberia through the Korean peninsula (Yi, 2008, 59). In addition, wild geese in late September, red-crowned cranes in early October, and eagles in mid-November arrive and rest near the Cheorwon plains. The Han River Estuary is also part of this larger migratory network. Islands in the Han River Estuary uninhabited by civilians, such as Udo, Seokdo, and Bido Islands, become refuge for the migrating birds (Choi and Park, 199). The Red-crowned crane, with only 3,000 surviving in the wild, is one of the rarest birds in the world (Wagner). This ecological fact also initiated inter-Korean collaboration projects such as the ‘Restoration of Red-crowned Cranes’ led by the ‘DMZ Forum’.⁷ This is a clear illustration of aerial transgression over the DMZ that overcomes the border as a barrier, which deforms the static DMZ line on a map to something much more complex.

Figure 1: History and Barrier lens



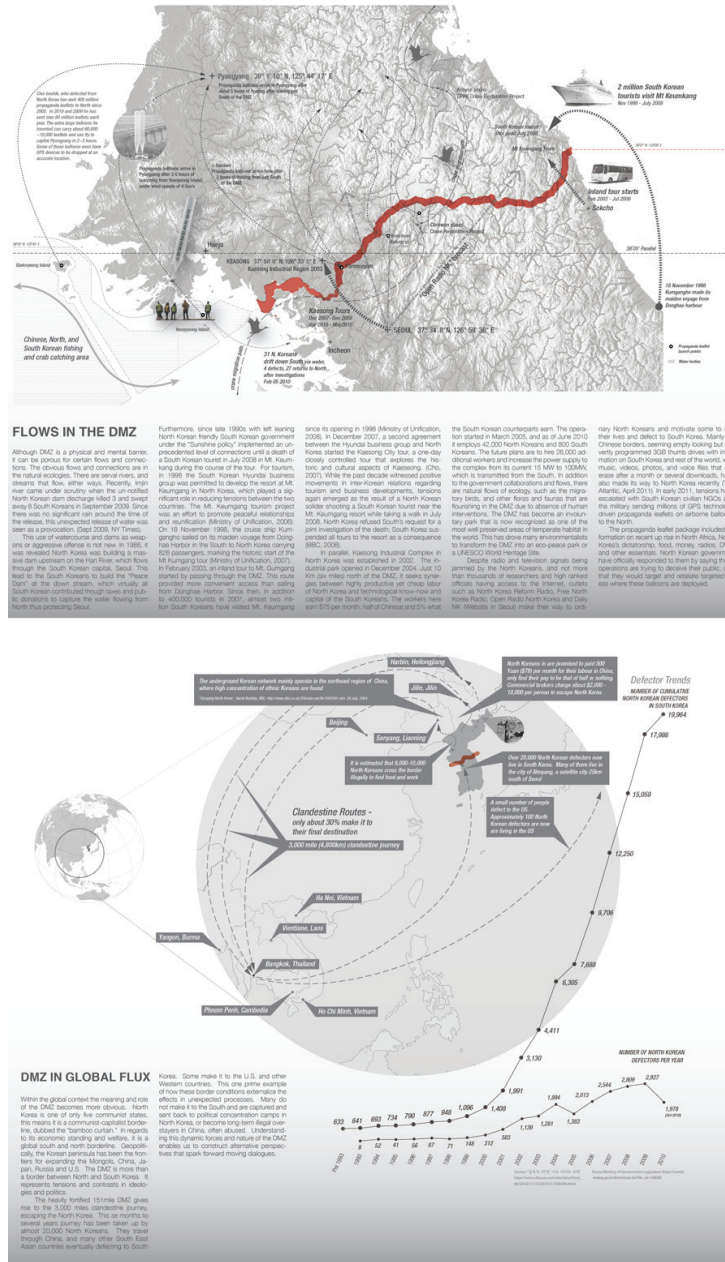


Figure 2: Flows and Global lens

Part of these operations was led by Lee Man-Bok who defected from North Korea. He has sent over 400 million propaganda leaflets to North since 2005. In 2009 and 2010 he sent over 80 million leaflets to North. The extra large balloons he invented can carry about 60,000 to 10,000 leaflets per balloon, and it can fly to Pyongyang, capital of North Korea, which is about 200km in about several hours. Many of these balloons are equipped with GPS devices to be dropped at precise locations (Choi, 2011).

Propaganda leaflet packages typically include information on North Korea's dictatorship, messages of South Korea's economic superiority, food, money, radios, DVDs, and other essentials. These propaganda leaflets recently also included news on the latest uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. The North Korean government officially responded by saying these operations are trying to deceive their public, and that they would target and attack the areas where these balloons were being deployed (McDonald, 2011a & 2011b), (Chosun Ilbo, 2011a & 2011b).

Mapping these flows expands the transgressions and negotiations into the aerial territories above the DMZ. These operations also allude to other air-borne processes, such as the South Korean radio emissions that are illegal to listen to in the North and that sometimes inspire North Koreans to escape the inhumane dictatorship.

NEGOTIATING SPACE: MORPHING BORDERS UNDER MILITARY AGGRESSIONS

Made of concrete post and steel plate, the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) Post No. 1 is located in the far west, near Jungdong-Ri, Jangdan-Meyon, Paju-Si, Kyounggi Province. The last 1,292nd post is located near the east end of the peninsula, near Dongho-Ri, Gansung-Eup, Kosung-Goon, Kanwon province. These MDL posts become the basic reference point for the MDL and the DMZ, which are offset by 2-km on both sides. The posts are placed every 200 meters (656 ft) according to the agreement. North Korea and China are responsible for maintaining 596 MDL signs (1 to 596) and the U.N. and South Korea are responsible for the other 696 (597 to 1,292) (Choi and Park, 71, 73, 77).

Unlike Post No. 90 which is still intact, near the Bridge of No Return near Panmunjom, many of these signposts have been destroyed in fires related to military surveillance in the DMZ and are often covered by natural vegetation that make them almost impossible to identify or locate, thus invisible. Military personnel from both sides also illegally relocated many of them as part of their attempt to expand their territory. The intriguing fact is that the MDL posts, which are the first physical manifestation of the "line on a map," installed initially with the DMZ has now faded away and lost its physical presences after 60 years. Nevertheless, ironically, the effect of this rather fading ephemeral line has become more visible and tangible than ever.

In this context, although the DMZ is imagined as a perfect zone that is 2 kilometers offset from the MDL on both sides, military aggressions in the DMZ have deformed it into a much smaller footprint. These military aggressions and confrontations are not only part of occupying strategic military

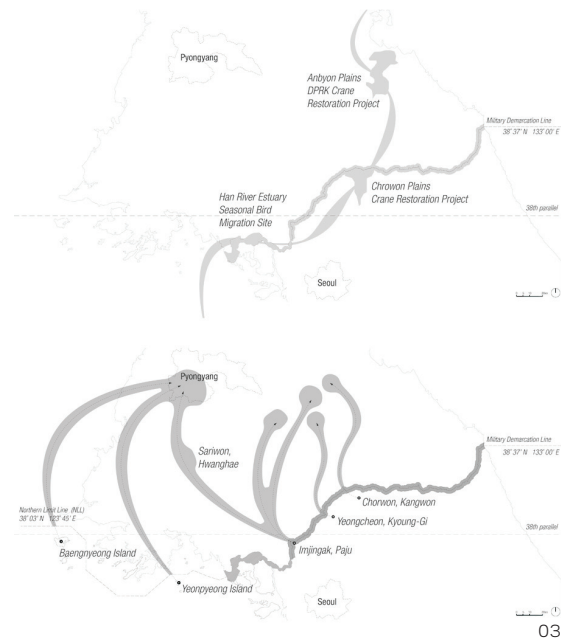
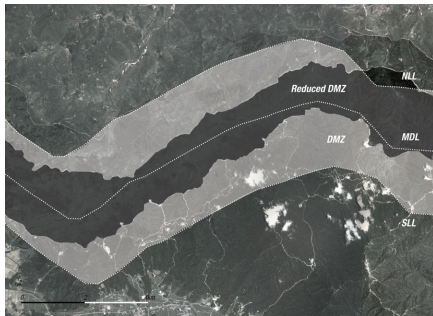


Figure 3: Ecological and political flows

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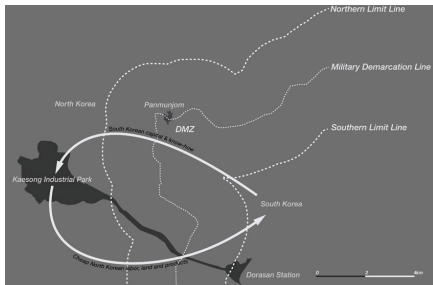


Figure 4: Reduced footprint of the DMZ, near Kwangsam-ri, Korea

Figure 5: KIP: Synergy and mutation in operation

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locations, but also a representation of larger political aggression from both sides of the border. Furthermore, Gelézeau observes, "on the ground, the DMZ has in fact shrunk in many of its portions, resulting from when both North and South tried to push its limits to expand their territories" (Gelézeau, 330). Much of the northern side of the DMZ has been compromised with North Koreans installing fences 500 meters to 1,500 meters in to the south of the Northern Limit Line (NLL). As a counteraction, most of the South Korean fences have also moved 500 meters further north into the DMZ in most parts. These actions result in both parties technically violating the Armistice. Some of the initial 4,000-meter (2.5 mile) buffer zone has dwindled down to a mere 580 meters (1900 ft) at places where Guard Posts (GPs) of the North and South confront each other (Choi and Park, 30). This phenomenon is one of the most significant transgressions on the ground surface that morphs the physical shape of the DMZ.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE AND TOURIST ZONE: FLOW OF CAPITAL, LABOR, AND TOURISM

In 2000, with the 'Sunshine Policy' in place in South Korea, the first ever summit meeting between North and South Korea was held. In this meeting it was agreed to separate economic issues from politics. In this context, Kaesong Industrial Park (KIP) and Kumgangsan Tourist Resort (KTR) were established in 2002 near the DMZ. These became an addition to the existing network of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) of North Korea, near the northern border region, Rajin-Sonbong established in 1991 and Sinuiju of 2002. (Cartier and Gimmel, 17)

The Kaesong Industrial Park (KIP) and Kumgangsan Tourist Resort (KTR) are clear manifestation of global capital flows transgressing into the communist north, which is in desperate need of an economic boost and foreign currency. Formed in 2002, KIP is located just 10 km (6 miles) north of the DMZ, which is only about an hour's drive from Seoul. With a final development near the size of Manhattan, this is where the cheap labor and land of North Korea meets the capital and the technical know-how of the South Koreans. Its synergistic operation started in late 2004 and in 2010, it accommodated 110 South Korean factories, 800 South Korean managers and 42,000 North Korean workers (Yonhap). As of March 2012, there were just over 50,000 North Koreans working for 123 South Korean firms who produced \$400 million worth of goods in 2011 (Kang). **Figure 5**

North Korean KIP workers earn \$75 a month, half of what Chinese earn and 5% of what their South Korean counterparts would earn (AFP). Future plans are to hire 26,000 additional North Korean workers and to increase the electricity supply to KIP from its current 15 megawatts to 100 megawatts, which are all currently produced and transmitted from power plants, located on the south side of the border. South Korean access to KIP border territories from South Korea means the border, and thus the DMZ, is physically pushed into the North, accommodating this transgression. The road that connects KIP and the south is continuously sealed with barbed wire fences and is closely patrolled by soldiers on both sides. The resulting physical form is as if the DMZ were pushed into the North.

One of the most interesting aspects of this synergistic economic operation is its ability to weather often turbulent political and militaristic tensions between North and South Korea. This relative resiliency and indifference to politics and militaristic tensions can be attributed to the direct economic benefit and value it creates for both sides. This clearly speaks to how spatial negotiations become enduring even under a tense political milieu when space creates value, especially when it generates economy and wealth.

GLOBAL SCALE LENS

The fourth and the last lens zooms out to the 'global' scale that is relevant to the particular geography of the border. In the case of the DMZ, the refugees escaping the North Korean regime who take the 3,000-mile-long clandestine detour *because* of the near-impenetrable nature of the DMZ is described and mapped. This clearly illustrates a certain kind of externality the border creates in human migration and how it is a result of ongoing tense spatial negotiations that also has a multi-scalar impact. (See figure 2.)

CONCLUSION

These four lenses become the fundamental foundation in reading the DMZ case study. For example, further expanding the third lens—"flows"—in earlier paragraphs is an attempt to elaborate on and refine these individual lenses. Despite the overall research methodology being discursive, it operates under a mixed methodology, where multiple layers of information from historical studies, maps, drawings, and photographs are collected, categorized, and interpreted through the four lenses.

Furthermore, specific understandings of "border as urbanism" are revealed through a set of morphological studies that deal with these territories' formal organization which highlights specific spatial negotiations under extreme conflictual circumstances and informs the ways in which spaces in urbanism are constructed, operated, and deconstructed over time. Hopefully, this new visualization and mapping engender alternate ways of understanding that could reveal the latent possibilities of these border territories, and activate the agency of design in making these territories.

To conclude, reading "border as urbanism" with the four lenses, presents a new methodology and sheds new light on the conventional assumptions of the DMZ and other comparable contested border territories, such as the Palestinian-Israeli border, US-Mexico border, Indian-Pakistan border to name a few. Designers can understand these border territories with new perspectives, challenging the existing spatial hegemonies, resulting in new ways of recalibrating spatial negotiations over time.

The "four lenses" is not a universal tool, yet it could become a baseline toolkit in which borders can be critically understood and compared across multiple geographies. This will facilitate designers' understanding of borders in which Paasi describes as being "aware of the diverse types of boundary" that "range from the physical and territorial to the social, personal and symbolic" in a holistic way (Paasi, 1991, 200). Furthermore, this new methodology could assist designers in participating in what Paasi describes as the

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ENDNOTES

1. The period of the existence of the Korean DMZ can be compared to the infamous Berlin Wall that separated Germany for 28 years, 13 August 1961 to 19 August 1989. This period represents only about half of the time the DMZ has separated the Korean peninsula, July 27, 1953 to the present, for almost 60 years now.
2. This distinction corresponds with Newman's signification of two types of borders. A border that signifies "the point or line of separation between distinct entities, separating one category from another, in some cases institutionalizing existing differences." While the other creates "the difference where none existed previously." (Newman, 2011, 33) [Existing differences: such as regional, geographical, cultural, political, economic, ethnic, religious, etc.]
3. *10 Conditions and trends in contemporary borders*: 1. Borders are often the subject of conflicts; 2. Borders are a social construct rather than being natural; 3. The notion of a 'borderless' world is not eminent, and borders will persist and proliferate; 4. Border zones can also be seen as spaces of transition, reciprocities and hybridization; 5. There cannot be one unifying theory for borders, yet common themes can apply; 6. Interest and focus in local scale of borders are increasing, without diminishing the importance of the national and international scale; 7. Complexity of borders and its spatial implication on spatial orders makes it additionally important for designers to study them; 8. Increasing differentiation and contradictions at borders are a reflection of the changing wider social context, one that increasingly needs alternative views for the future; 9. Borders are dynamic entities that have a border "construction-operation-deconstruction" cycle; 10. Definition and representation of borders are expanded and contracted contingent upon their reference.
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6. The field trip was supported by the Penny White Award at the Harvard University, Graduate School of Design. This field trip was summarized in the publication, *The Demilitarized Zone: Redrawing the Border between North and South Korea Beyond Tourism*. Cambridge, MA: Blurb (self-published) (<http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/3140245>) 2011.
7. *Restoration of Red-crowned Cranes: Anbyon Plain, DPRK* (http://www.dmzforum.org/whatwedo/Field_Projects1.php)

"new emerging border conditions within the context of the recent interdisciplinary studies of boundaries," (Paasi, 1991, 188).

Finally, this base framework lays groundwork for specific geography, history, culture, and so on, to be explicitly revealed and understood for a particular border condition. This speaks precisely to the persisting and proliferating nation-state borders across the globe, within which this new methodology opens up opportunities for multidisciplinary dialogue that engage the border "construction-operation-deconstruction" cycle between architecture, geopolitics, landscape, and urbanism.

Simultaneously, it expands the designers' agency within this cycle, which provides an insight into the fundamental spatial negotiations and their physical manifestations in urbanism. Last, it reveals borders and their territory as existing beyond a simple static line on a map. "Border as urbanism" framework is uncovered with the four lenses that illustrate border as a set of complex spatial conditions, layered with flows, reciprocities, synergies, and externalities that morph overtime, thus urbanism. ♦