

Undoing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ): The Agency of Architectural Intelligence

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This playful work-in-progress portmanteau contains raw ingredients and instruments that stimulate stakeholders of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to creatively reimagine its alternative futures. It further equips us to explore productive potentials latent in the heavily militarized 155-mile-long, 2.5-mile-wide border zone that has bisected the Korean Peninsula since 1954. The portmanteau consists of three main parts. These three parts elucidate how the two Koreas constructed the DMZ, how we can interpret it, and how we can envision it through “architectural intelligence.” These distinct individual parts imply the past; the present; and the future of the DMZ. Furthermore, when these three components are combined, they illustrate dynamic changes inherent in border zones. More importantly, it highlights architects’ agency in understanding, interpreting, and shaping the DMZ.

The first part of the portmanteau includes the reduced replica of the 1953 “Armistice Agreement Volume I-Text” written and signed in Korean; English; and Chinese. It also includes the nine “Armistice Agreement Volume II-Maps” that clearly illustrate the DMZ’s Military Demarcation Line; the Northern and the Southern Boundary of the DMZ. These documents are authoritative primary sources that precisely describe and illustrate how the DMZ was formed. It also demonstrates how the vast DMZ originated from these thin black lines on a map.

The second part of the portmanteau include studies produced by the author based on primary sources. It includes a pocket-sized travel journal “The Demilitarized Zone: Redrawing the Border between North and South Korea beyond Tourism” that documents the author’s visits to the DMZ, which critique its tourism-dominated spaces (2011). The second study is author’s research thesis, “Borders as Urbanism: Redrawing the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea” (2012). Completed at the Harvard GSD, it investigates how exclusionary bordering practices could be deconstructed to reveal existing flows and transgressions that occur despite the border performing as a watertight barrier. The third study is a snapshot summary mapping of the mentioned thesis and a precursor to a research animation “A Construct the Koreas (Never) Made Together Deconstructing the DMZ For the Imaginary.” It was part of the Golden-Lion award-winning Korean Pavilion’s “The Crow’s Eye View” exhibition at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale which deconstructs the DMZ for further analysis. These interpretive analytical materials as a collective position the author’s work within the present DMZ discourse and start to project DMZ’s alternative futures.

The portmanteau’s last part includes traditional architect’s instruments suggesting architects’ role in facilitating future transformations of the DMZ. Color pencils placed next to a triangular architect scale rule, and a yellow tracing paper roll signifies the particular capacity of “architectural intelligence” to project DMZ’s future through visual and experiential means. Against these professional instruments, colorful house shaped components—similar to Monopoly’s hotel pieces—with labels denoting landmarks such as the Panmunjom become a playful medium that enables architects to facilitate creative conversations with stakeholders provoking alternative unlikely yet possible futures of the DMZ. These three parts combined make up—the portmanteau—a tangible spatial platform that facilitates articulation of the rapidly deconstructing DMZ.



