

Inbetween: spaces for border –thinking

Cover image

Alex SELENITSCH

flotsam & jetsam block, 2007

12 pieces

balsa wood, miscellaneous objects and fragments

each balsa piece 3.5 x 4 x 9cms plus variable object

Photograph: Robert Colvin

Fabrications 25:3 on border-thinking was inspired by several art projects by Alex Selenitsch who has interrogated what might be described as border scenarios through projects on Cowra, Bonegilla, Checkpoint Charlie and the immigrant house. The model-image reproduced on the cover is from his exhibition *flotsamandjetsam* (2012) conceived by Selenitsch after a visit to the commemorative heritage site of the Bonegilla immigrant reception centre near Albury, Victoria; a onetime gateway to post-war citizenship. Responding to a comment on a film clip at the visitor information centre, which described displaced immigrants as the flotsam and jetsam of Europe, Selenitsch interpolated the rigid geometries of the barracks buildings with miscellaneous found objects: the mixed memories and dreams brought to the buildings by immigrant populations.

Selenitsch's aesthetic process embodies many characteristics of these borderline socio-spatial experiences. His creative use of scrap material left over from design studios and the dialogic social process through which he builds his artistic series fittingly conveys the residual and relational materialities of immigrant emplacement. The model of the balsa wood sheds pierced by miscellaneous fragments serves as a metaphor for the methods encountered in this issue. The main challenge for writing about borders is the instability of the archive and reliance on extra-archival sources. Thinking about borders from a discipline anchored in material and physical realities is a substantial risk.

Contributions to this issue are admitted departures from the journal's usual fare. They test our historical reliance on permanent structures and comprehensive visual records. The impermanency of border architecture, the indeterminacy of associated identities and the lack of coherent architectural methodologies for examining such scenarios have forced interdisciplinary borrowings. Such investigations are challenged with bridging the gap between abstract spatial analyses and concrete materialities without the comfort of textual genealogies. Yet they have resisted aesthetic mediation or speaking for these social problems, which is an equally troubling disciplinary trend. However, the resultant outcomes are refracted through the narrative lenses of journalism, political theory or geography that are preoccupied with such topics. Anchoring them in physical and material realities is a critical and difficult task.

This is unsurprising since, as clearly demonstrated at the past 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, the modern profession and nation reinforced each other imaginatively and ideologically. Whether during the nineteenth century in Europe, following decolonisation of Europe's colonies or their polemical redefinition during the Cold War, the collaboration of statesmen and architects provided an impressive physical archive of modern national ambitions. There was much to be claimed for 50 years of national production. And yet, the Biennale's presentation of *Monditalia* at the Arsenale, showcasing the host nation, Italy, began with a radical interrogation of these very parameters of migration, citizenship and border controls. The pavilion drew together Italy's divergent histories of ancient imperialism, didactic modernism and porous territoriality as co-constitutive, mercilessly deconstructing a national journey that was self-consciously objectified in other pavilions. In an interview after the event, Rem Koolhaas attributed these surprising curatorial responses to the youthfulness of many curators for whom a borderless Europe was simultaneously a geographical enigma and an everyday reality. The pavilions of Canada, Israel, Hong Kong and Korea likewise engaged with border politics. The nationalistic or veiled imperialist narratives of others were comparatively pedestrian. Brazilian artist, Vik Muniz's 45-foot paper boat at the 2015 Venice Art Biennale reiterated this stance.

Viewed against the backdrop of a provocative curatorial brief and an affirmation of national progress across aesthetic borderlines this journal issue is an incipient effort at deterritorialising architectural discourse. It offers five approaches to border-thinking in which institutions, camps, streets, fortifications and living rooms become objects of analysis. The border-scenarios that animate these space include the kinds of spatial violence that have preoccupied geographers in the recent past, largely through focus on European and Middle Eastern conflicts. Indeed the majority of the papers presented here reflect this dominant trend, provoked by the dissolution of European economic borders and political unification across the former Iron Curtain. But as Paul Walker demonstrates, the political currents of border thinking can be applied in diverse ways, for example, for the reinterpretation of canonical views of ornament in relation to cultural representations and monumental architectures. When borders are taken literally, as discussed by Sean Anderson and Guido Cimadomo they can be hazardous terrestrial and liquid boundaries, policed by the nation state and ideologically imbued with divisive political objectives. They can be neglected borderlands for stateless citizens. Anderson expands his interpretation to include varied forms of habitation, including the body, the boat and the detention centre. Cimadomo examines the transformation of borders due to European unification after the Cold War. They work with limited social data on the experiential impacts of these border conditions and depend on material published or available in the public domain. Anderson counters this lack through a more philosophical interpretation of liminal conditions at Lampedusa, while Cimadomo focuses on the changing urban planning strategies for border cities Gorizia-Nova Gorica and Gibraltar-La Linea de la Concepcion. In contrast, Nikolina Bobic and Mirjana Ristic, who focus on the Balkan conflict, perhaps the most provocative example of European national fragmentation of the late twentieth century, provide intimate insights into the war and its aftermath. They both explore the reception of and subjectivities related to sustained spatial violence, Bobic by examining the instrumentationalisation of media and technology during NATO's Operation

Allied Force and Ristic by studying the ethnic inscription of the borderzone between Sarajevo and East Sarajevo. The securitisation of military data on the conflict, in such cases, prompts alternative analyses of cultural knowledge and local insights. The border is operationalised via media representations of ongoing violence and is ethnically coded in the spaces of the post-war city. Urban texts, newsmedia, mobility, speed and public protests become resources for spatial analyses.

This third annual issue of Fabrications offers us the space to take risks, test the boundaries of our disciplines and examine gaps in scholarship, enabling greater engagement with forces of historical change. It provides a more reflexive platform for architectural interrogation, particularly in terms of extending the discipline's capacity and scope. Consequently much of the material in this issue persistently escapes the traditional boundaries of architecture and its associated spatial disciplines plotting a discursive trajectory somewhere in-between.