

LA RICERCA CHE CAMBIA

Venezia, 1-2 dicembre 2022

Atti del terzo convegno nazionale
dei dottorati italiani dell'architettura,
della pianificazione, del design,
delle arti e della moda

A cura di Luca Velo

Giunto alla terza edizione, il convegno *La ricerca che cambia* (Venezia, 1-2 dicembre 2022) si è tenuto presso la Scuola di Dottorato dell'Università Iuav di Venezia e ha inteso mettere in dialogo i metodi, gli approcci e le questioni della ricerca con la comunità dottorale nazionale nei campi dell'architettura, della pianificazione, del design, delle arti e della moda (SSD: ICAR/10, ICAR/11, ICAR/12, ICAR/13, ICAR/14, ICAR/15, ICAR/16, ICAR/17, ICAR/18, ICAR/19, ICAR/20, ICAR/21, L-ART/03, L-ART/04, L-ART/05, L-ART/06) al fine di monitorare i cambiamenti in corso e di contribuire a interpretarli nel lungo periodo.

Gli atti costituiscono una testimonianza che si pone in continuità con le esperienze precedenti del 2014 e 2016 e provano a restituire, anche se solo parzialmente, come nei decenni recenti la ricerca dottorale italiana abbia attraversato i grandi cambiamenti sociali ed economici. La ricerca dottorale ha permeato nuovi e rinnovati modi nel rapporto tra teorie e pratiche, adeguandosi ad agende, sempre più numerose, che impongono spesso i canali di finanziamento, rapportandosi alla conoscenza tecnica e riscrivendo continuamente gli statuti epistemologici e semantici del fare ricerca nell'ambito dell'area 08 dell'ANVUR.

Gli atti del convegno si organizzano di cinque parti, coinvolgendo diverse voci, includendo chi dirige o partecipa alla riforma del sistema dottorale italiano, i docenti appartenenti ai collegi dottorali, i dottorandi e i giovani dottori di ricerca: 1. Fare ricerca dottorale in Italia, 2. Cambiamenti in atto, 3. Dottorati dell'area 08 e L-ART 02-06, 4. Le parole come luoghi del confronto, 5. Verso un *Osservatorio della ricerca dottorale in Italia*.

In questo scenario di trasformazioni dell'assetto e dei ruoli dei dottorati e dei dottori di ricerca, i contributi di chi ha partecipato attivamente al convegno e gli esiti dell'*Osservatorio della ricerca dottorale* (curato da Lucilla Calogero, Cristiana Cellucci e Matteo Basso) convergono nell'obiettivo di monitorare le trasformazioni in atto e di restituire il complesso quadro dell'organizzazione delle strutture dottorali, i temi e le forme di una ricerca in costante cambiamento.

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Ambiti di ricerca coinvolti

Sono stati coinvolti dottorandi afferenti a corsi di dottorato italiani nelle seguenti aree di ricerca: composizione architettonica e urbana, architettura degli interni e allestimento, architettura del paesaggio, urbanistica, tecnica e pianificazione urbanistica, architettura tecnica, produzione edilizia, tecnologia dell'architettura, storia dell'architettura, restauro, disegno, design, moda e arti per i seguenti settori SSD: ICAR/10, ICAR/11, ICAR/12, ICAR/13, ICAR/14, ICAR/15, ICAR/16, ICAR/17, ICAR/18, ICAR/19, ICAR/20, ICAR/21, L-ART/03, L-ART/04, L-ART/05, L-ART/06.

I paper presentati al convegno e qui di seguito pubblicati sono esito di una selezione, secondo procedura blind review, sulla base delle 270 proposte presentate alla call for papers destinata ai dottorandi e ai giovani dottori dal XXXII al XXXVI ciclo.

LA RICERCA CHE CAMBIA

ATTI DEL TERZO CONVEGNO NAZIONALE DEI DOTTORATI ITALIANI
DELL'ARCHITETTURA, DELLA PIANIFICAZIONE, DEL DESIGN, DELLE ARTI
E DELLA MODA. VENEZIA, 1-2 DICEMBRE 2022

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4.2 CONTESTI

4 · 2 · 3 LIMINAL
ARCHITECTURE:
BLURRING A
LIMITATION
INTO A DESIGN
RESEARCH
PERSPECTIVE

Contesti

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XXXIV*

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ICAR/14*

▣ ARCHITECTURE ON BORDER(LAND)S

In the last decades architectural discourse and practice have increasingly concerned around borders and borderlands. Although the encounter between architecture and borders might seem fictional, recalling the notorious inquiry on “The Berlin Wall as Architecture” (Koolhaas, 1995, p. 216), the role of both spatial analysis and architectural design in approaching border spatial configurations and narratives could arise.

For example, and not exhaustively, recent critical design perspectives such as Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman’s (2017) “Unwalling Citizenship” or Ronald Rael’s (2017) manifesto *Borderwall as Architecture* have been capable of making visible the “mutual processes of ‘shaping’” (Buoli, 2015, p. 83) and re-shaping between geopolitical construction, its representation, and the local everyday experience of the border.

The global multiplication of boundaries and borders offers an urgent field for architectural investigation, generating the quest for operative concepts and the ground for methodological experimentations able to contribute to the dialogue with other disciplines.

The increasing pressure of the migratory flows crisis, anthropogenic climate change and the recent Covid-19 pandemic crisis are challenging the *stasis* of contemporary boundaries, which are continuously exposed to forces blurring them.

Several design approaches reclaim the centrality of architecture and its tools to frame, investigate and even design border conditions, highlighting the potential of architecture to cope with the materiality of the bordering processes and reveal the contradictions of its immaterial realm in terms of spatial representation, perception and imagination.

The inspiring research project *Italian Limes* by Studio Folder addressed the question of instability and dynamicity of the political border, examining

anthropogenic climate change as an architectural problem (Ferrari, Pasqual & Bagnato, 2019). By questioning a moving border – namely the watershed line of the shrinking Alpine glaciers shared between Italy, France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia – Studio Folder demonstrated how the border seems more a complex system in evolution whose physical manifestation coincides with the terms of its representation, rather than a static and fixed condition (Ferrari, Pasqual & Bagnato, 2019).

2 AND YET IT MOVED. A MOVING BORDER

The research *Liminal Architecture. Enduring Experimentation on the Threshold of the Moving Border* (Rodani, 2022) focuses on a specific case of dynamism and instability of the political border, that is the area between the Upper Adriatic and the eastern Alpine arc, which today corresponds to the borders shared between Italy, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia.

Observing the Italian-Slovenian border, Studio Folder stated that this border does not correspond to the moving border case due to “the absence of glaciers along the [watershed] line” (Ferrari, Pasqual & Bagnato, 2019, p. 43). Whereas the absence of the glacier is evident, the Italian-Slovenian border, as a “genetic case of dynamism and instability of the political border” (Valussi, 1972, p. 23), seems almost never to stop moving. Indeed, as acknowledged in the geographical discourse, this moving border discloses a laboratory and observatory on the dynamism of boundaries and their multiple representations (Valussi, 1972; Biondi et al., 1995; Selva & Umek, 2013). This aspect has already been examined from the angle of urban studies (Basso, 2010), but it seems that the perspective of architecture and design practices still needs to be addressed.

Facing a moving border requires a virtually static point of observation, which this research establishes in Gorizia and Nova Gorica. The relevance of this standpoint is that here the errancy of the border – shifting in short time intervals and producing discontinuities and ruptures between a territorial status and a new one – deeply affected the place and the way architects dealt with its transformation, proposing a challenging *limit condition* for architecture to deal with.

Architecture, generally understood as solid and permanent, must negotiate with the counterintuitive impermanence of its status, which moves between one nation and another, from one legal and cultural framework to another. Therefore, by focusing on the perspective of design and aesthetic practices, this field may offer specific lenses through which to observe the architectural reaction to instability, uncertainty, and crisis.

3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The research hypothesis assumes that this specific case of moving border may be a laboratory to investigate architecture’s fundamental affairs, boundaries and their representation, questioning architecture’s role in spatial delimitation as well as exploring architecture’s potential and possible strategies that may challenge, contest and subvert the representation of

boundaries or may produce and trigger alternative design imaginaries and perceptions.

4 ON METHOD. THE THICKNESS OF THE LIMIT

The research introduces two Latin terms, *limes* and *limen* to frame the condition of a moving border from the perspective of design and aesthetics practices.

The Latin term *limes* was initially understood as a line of contact and connection, meaning originally *via traversa*, a path or byway; only later did it start to signify a zone, approaching the modern understanding of the term *frontier* (Elden, 2019). The Latin term *limen* designates the transverse stone of the door, both the lower one trodden with the feet and the upper one, meaning a threshold. Differently from “the French term *frontière*, the Italian *confine* and the German *Grenze* [which] tend to be similar to the English boundary ...” that is commonly understood as a line that divides (Elden, 2019, p. 52), both terms *limes* and *limen* suggest a width, having a thickness.

Since the semantic spectrum of the two is remarkably complex, far from restricting it deterministically, the tension between them is conceptualised and explored by introducing the category of the liminal, understood as the *betwixt and between*.

The term *liminal* was introduced into the anthropological discourse by van Gennep's (1909/2019) work on *The Rites of Passage* and further developed as *betwixt and between* by Turner (1967; 1982; 1986), who expanded its understanding in the field of performing arts, becoming a category of experience. Turner (1982) describes the liminal as a “passage from one social status to another, [that] is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another ... [as] a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold ...” (p. 25).

The liminal has been imported into the architectural discourse and practice by van Eyck (1959/2008) with his notion of in-between, influencing a trajectory transversed by Herman Hertzberger (1991) and Georges Teyssot (2008), among others.

The understanding of the threshold by Hertzberger (1991) as the “... key to the transition and connection between areas with divergent territorial claims and, as a place with its own right, it constitutes, essentially, the spatial condition for the meeting and dialogue between areas of different orders” (p. 32) seems relevant to stress in the aforementioned field of investigation.

Thus, the liminal understood as *betwixt and between* has both a temporal and a spatial dimension (Thomassen, 2009). Temporally, the transition between different statuses may differ in duration. It may be a brief moment, a marginal period or lasting through decades and epochs.

Spatially, the liminal presents a varying thickness. In fact, the spatiality of the threshold may be very thin, as a doorstep, it can extend into a path, a corridor, a passageway or a bridge, or it can be thick, expanding into a margin or zone.

The category of the liminal thus simultaneously addresses the temporal dimension, which is informed in this research by the movements of the border and corresponds to phases of transition between two territorial statuses, and the spatiality of the threshold, with its varying thickness.

The selected case studies are architectural projects and aesthetic practices in which architects and artists interfaced with the shifting border, being immersed in the phases of the bordering process, coping with its spatial and psychological effects, or dealing with its representation and perception. The selected case studies are examined by questioning the varying thickness of the threshold space. Hence, the threshold space may be analysed how in terms of “spatial definition, spatial sequence, spatial structure, spatial situation [and] spatial design ...” (Boettger, 2014, p. 58).

Since liminality takes place and can be experienced at the thresholds, and so at the interstitial *betwixt and between*, it may be observed how architecture, during a transitional period, may embody, react to, behave and act under liminal conditions, generating design strategies and proposing design imaginaries and representations.

5 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

The dissertation is structured in three parts, recognising the reversed relationship between the observer and the threshold. From the virtually fixed point of observation in Gorizia and Nova Gorica it is possible to observe the border approaching, crossing, and fading.

The first part *Approaching* collects case studies as Leonardo da Vinci's *Serraglio mobile* facing the demand to weaponize the rivers Isonzo-Soča and Vipava-Vipacco to flood the Goritian plain (1500); Simeon Goldmann's twofold painting *Prospectus of Trenta Valley* and *Prospectus of the Austrian and Venetian Friuli Plain from Gorizia to the Sea* (1778-79) revealing the failures to represent the *limes* as a zero-thickness *limites*; and Antonio Lasciac's *Plan for [the garden] Gorizia [of tomorrow]* (1913), dealing with the discursive and rhetorical polarization of the city-countryside spatial relation.

The second part *Crossing* explores case studies as Max Fabiani's *Reconstruction plan for the Villages, Burgs and Towns of the Isonzo-Soča Basin* (1917-22), reading his project for *Villa and Garden Ferrari* (1920-35) as a programmatic design manifesto and questioning the emergence of the (un)natural frontier in the immediate aftermath of World War I (Treaty of Rapallo, 1920-Treaty of Rome, 1924); or the proposals for the *Conceptual design of Nova Gorica* by Edvard Ravnikar, Marko Zupancic and Božidar Gvardjančič just after the Paris Peace Treaty came into force in 1947. From the other side of the white line, Max Fabiani conceptualised a design imaginary corroding symbolically the Iron Curtain through the *Adriatic-Black Sea Waterway* and the *Transkarsic Channel* (1947-54), an idea that will be included in the Treaty of Osimo signed in 1975.

The third part *Fading* observes design and aesthetics projects and practices facing the states of transition from the open(ing) frontier to the increasingly porous border becoming an inner European boundary between Italy and Slovenia in the Schengen area. Case studies transverse the *Conceptual design for the Hotel Argonauts* by OHO group and

Niko Lehrmann (1970), the later aesthetics practice of Marko Pogacnik's *lithopunctures* disseminated in the Isonzo-Soča deranged landscape (1975-78; 1997; 2007), and architects Alfonso and Antonio Angelillo and Chiara Menato (1991; 2004) design process synthesised as *Design the border* towards the recent design project blurring the thickness of the borderline in Piazza Transalpina-Trg Evrope in a theatrical square that moves by Baglivo Negrini Architetti (2020).

6 AN OPEN-ENCLOSED EPILOGUE. LEARNING FROM A MOVING BORDER

When design and aesthetic projects and practices face the various phases of the bordering process, be it delimitation, demarcation or border maintenance, and its spatial effects, the project may be severely constrained by the discontinuities that run through the entire design process. Architecture may be unfinished, unbuilt, built by fragments, or even destroyed and damaged.

However, in dealing with this *limit condition*, architecture tends towards offering potential reformulations and transgressions by experimenting with the border understood as a representation and macro-narrative.

In this sense, design and aesthetics projects and practices seem able to interface with the shifting realm of this specific erratic border, generating friction, interrupting its flux and revealing its contradictions. Architecture may generate alternative design imaginaries and representations or trigger amplified perceptions of territorial continuity. Recognising the boundary between different territorial claims, understood both as a physical demarcation and as a representation, architecture uses it as a design material. Furthermore, the architectural project, unfolding in an experimental and intermittent design process also composed of ephemeral actions and events, may become the tool to measure and re-measure the temporal and spatial territorial discontinuity. Finally, architecture reveals itself here as a tool for analysing and designing the territorial construct, able to cope with and challenge how the geopolitical construction shapes the world by informing the experiences of a multiplicity of micro-narratives.

In this sense, the poem *Vrata/Porte* may offer an interesting analogy. As the man who lives on the border could never experience the joy of the whole (Zlobec, 1964/2003, p. 44), neither does architecture. In fact, the design process cannot be unique nor produce a whole. Nevertheless, architecture may embrace the many intermediate values and the infinitesimal discontinuities and changes that in this condition cannot be recomposed into a static or fixed framework. Architecture, before inhabiting, offers itself as a measure, a measuring act, moving experimental steps and fading its own boundary.

Liminal architecture conceptualises a *corpus* of design strategies and tactics able to rethink architecture's boundary by enduringly experimenting with the varying material and immaterial thickness of the threshold space and with the way of doing architecture.

7 ON METHOD. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH TRAJECTORIES

By framing the category of the liminal, this research offers an interpretative grid able to read a shifting border from the perspective of architectural discourse and practice, thus suggesting a particular extension and understanding of the notion of liminality in the architectural discourse.

The definition of the field of investigation and the specific point of observation in Gorizia and Nova Gorica allow the research to offer a fresh perspective on the phenomenology under observation, expanding the understanding of it and highlighting the point of view of architecture and aesthetic practices.

By maintaining the same interpretative grid, it is possible to address several further research trajectories to refine the tool and techniques of analysis and to generalise the key findings.

Firstly, the case studies selection may be advanced by addressing both the temporal selection, which could vary depending on the number, the quality and the media to detect the border movements, and the spatial selection, which may focus on more narrowed phases of the design process. Moreover, it is possible to expand the selection of case studies by collecting multiple virtual standpoints to observe the same field of moving border. These moves may refine the tools and techniques of analysis, offering a cross-border framework to explore, for instance, with the collection of architectural and aesthetics case studies from nowadays Austria and Croatia. This trajectory offers an interdisciplinary framework to examine, collecting contributions from the recent anthropological research on migrations, including spatial practices, or from the field of geography.

Secondly, the collection of multiple virtual standpoints for the observation from different fields of moving border(land)s could enhance the selection of case studies, addressing the broader phenomenon of instability and dynamicity of boundaries.

Thus, the limitations concerning the sources, the multilingualism and the researcher's position may be addressed by offering a methodological background to investigate liminality in a cross-border and interdisciplinary framework.

In conclusion, the research addressed a marginal question regarding the core of the architectural discourse and practice, and it framed the inquiry on an even more marginal field of investigation. Nonetheless, the specificity of this field and the phenomenology under observation offered an interpretative grid able to turn and blur a limitation in a potential design perspective to (be) explore(d).

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