Divided Nicosia. De-scripture of liminal spaces.  

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FROM THE LIMIT OF THE CITY TO THE LIMITS WITHIN THE CITY: Space and communities.

This research starts from a series of general questionings about the concept of limit in the field of contemporary cities.

The consequence of this analysis has been the choice of a context, the capital of Cyprus, Nicosia, in which the theoretical enquiry features were to be found in an extreme form. What we would like to point out in this research is the role of the urban analysis in a context, such as that of a strong physical limit, in which there is apparently no space for any kind of intervention. Observing such extreme conditions leads us to push the enquiry about an architecture that, nowadays, needs more and more to deal with a saturated and “already built” environment in which the social conflict seems to be unmanageable. In such a context, what is it still possible to produce in terms of theoretical-architectural reflection? Which can be the position of urban intervention facing the controversial relation between space and communities?

The two fundamental theoretical questions that cross the whole work facing the subject of limit are of two kinds. One, from a ontological point of view, concerns the meaning of the liminal space: what a liminal space can be in the context of contemporary cities? How can we define and categorize different types of liminal spaces? What is their function?

The second, from a methodological point of view, is about the description of the liminal space: how can we approach this kind of socially and physically unstable/rigid objects? Which kind of instruments can we build to describe them? How is it possible to depict them?

The starting point of this reflection has to focus on the evolution of the contemporary city in the last two centuries taking the assumption that, in the actual urban context, the notion of the limit of a city is subject to transformation. The passage from the classic city, as a civitas, to the contemporary metropolis, as a globalised hub, opens the necessity of rethinking the relation between urban identity and the role of limits in the urban context. If, for centuries, the identity of the city was entrusted to the construction of its limits in the form of protective fortifications, then what happens then when the city gets rid of its walls? The great urban expansion in the latest fifty years has structurally changed the life of the cities. To quote Richard Ingersoll: “sprawl can be identified as a geographic and morphological phenomenon that has physically affected the landscape, but it must also be understood as a phenomenon that has triggered anthropological mutations” (Ingersoll, 2006). The counterpart of this uncontrolled growth of cities is to be found in the heightening of social segregation through economical and physical devices, which configure more and more a city made of socially and functionally separated fragments.

The global deterritorialization and the new forms of migration create original forms of intolerance and pressure in urban politics. In this sense, if on one hand what we face today is the disappearing of the classic relation between territory and collective identity (de Biase, Bonnin, 2001), on the other hand, as a kind of compensation of this detachment, we look at the development of an “utopian effort of a “public pacification” through the obliteration of everything that can disturb “social security”” (Zanini, 1997). Even if the loss of a strong and stable urban identity is a classical characteristic of modern metropolis, we can still see some differences with the city of the 20’s analyzed by the sociologists of the Chicago school. What changes is maybe not the composition and formation of social segregations, but rather “the openness with which government supports the maximization of private business claim on city land and city infrastructure” (Marcuse, 1995). The urban policies based on displacement and the rhetoric of “stranger” practices as something to heal, make way for a worsening of the social conflict and the creation of internal divisions.

So, what changes in the actual condition comparing to the classic specialization in parts of cities and to the post-industrial ghettoization, is the fluidity of movement of the internal limits due to a constant and increasingly stronger conflict for the conquest of the space. And if homogenization, privatization and thematization (Hajer,Reijndorp, 2001) can be the seen as the
physical expression of this phenomenon of boundaries proliferation; exception, exclusion and extraterritoriality\(^1\) are to be pointed out as its social causes.

In parallel, an extreme form of this discourse can be seen in the appearance, in the last two centuries, of politically divided cities and their spread in the latest fifty years. Always in the idea of an evolution of city boundaries, we can say that “in this context divided cities do not present an exception to the rule of urban development, but rather offer a variation on the theme of urban fortification” (Calame, Charlesworth, 2009).

But, in order to comprehend the phenomenon of divided cities, we have to extend our view from the scale of the urban to the scale of nation-states geopolitics. If at the city scale we can see the emerging of a social segregation as a counterpart of the loss of coherent urban identity, looking to the transnational field we can see how, after colonialism and the fall of Berlin Wall, the appearance of new kinds of subjects, which define identities and communities beyond the national ones, creates new forms of ethnicity and regionalism. In this sense, the loss of national identification in favor of a global/transnational vision of the world, has as counterpart the fear of the loss of cultural identity. This provokes the creation of new, stricter, collective identities not simply based on the belonging to a territory, but rather originated from an idea of natural ancient roots.

An important aspect of this schizophrenia is that the same logics that claim the mobility and interconnection of the whole globalized world, from another angle claim to a specific belonging to a really particular cultural or ethnic identity. In terms of political conflict, this generates processes of revivification of forms of autochthony and needs of separation but also sets off new forms of nationalism and racism.

The spatial consequences of these social features are multiple. If on one side we see a process of the disappearing of the anthropological place with the onset of non-lieux (Augé, 1992), at the same time this sublimation of spatial references creates a new kind of rigid objects such as camps (Agier, 2008) and transnational separation walls. Political exception becomes the rule of this ephemeral equilibrium between the global network spaces and the enclaves of political segregation.

Divided cities are some of the most multiform objects in this discourse because this mixture of symbolical and political meanings gets in contact with the complexity of the urban everyday life.

In this shift from the walled city to the city of walls, we believe that it is important, for urban studies, to comprehend and analyze internal boundaries and in-between spaces, germination and movement within the cities.

What is interesting in the case study of Nicosia is that there we can observe all these features at the same time. The two separated parts of the historical walled centre, with its intact rounded Venetian walls, work as a segregated space in relation to the rest of the two cities even if they are object (with different dynamics) of a slow social transformation in terms of use and habitat. At the same time this perfect circle is divided in two parts by the UN buffer zone, a second element of segregation in the sense of a political separation creating complex relations between the cities. In this sense two different kinds of social conflict play on the ground of this historical centre, in its public spaces: the economic/global and the political/exceptional.

The hypothesis we would like to consider in this work is that urban limits and boundaries represent, under certain conditions, the space in which the friction of the urban conflict can be expressed and sublimated. In this sense we consider the border both as the physical expression of the exclusion and also the place of claim for the right of urban space appropriation. Nevertheless the nature of the “cold” political conflict in Cyprus does not create strong tension in actual urban life. This produces a peculiar mixture of different kinds of spatial interactions with the separation that allow us to face the effects of the influence of liminality and try to categorize a series of possible declinations of it.

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\(^1\) As developed by Michiel Agier in 2011 during in his seminar “Places, déplacements, frontières. Le décentrement de l’anthropologie” at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes de Sciences Sociales (Paris).
The ethnic conflict which is the origin of the actual division of the island starts in the second part of the ‘50s with the birth of the two nationalist forces: the Greek-Cypriot EOKA (Εθνική Οργάνωσης Κυπρίων Αγώνων) claiming for the union to the mother-land Greece, and the Turkish-Cypriot TMT (Türk Mukavemet Teskilati) claiming for the division (taksim) and the union to the mother-land Turkey. When the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) obtains, in 1960, the independence from the colonial British Empire, the ethnic conflict explodes. At the same time the strong influence of Greece and Turkey in the process of independence creates a form of “neo-colonial insurance system” (Costantinou, 2008) in which three external forces (Britain, Greece and Turkey) have the possibility of intervene collectively or individually as guarantor powers.

The conflict starts to exacerbate when the archbishop and president of the Republic, Makarios III, proposes a revision of the Constitution and declares still possible the annexation by Greece. During this part of the conflict Turkish-Cypriots start to shelter from violence and discriminations in military protected enclaves. In 1963 the British general Peter Young draws with a green pencil a double line in order to establish a provisional cease fire line. That line of 180 Km that crosses the whole island from north-west to south-east dividing in two parts the capital Nicosia still exists after forty years and is still called the “Green Line”. The land which remains between the two lines is immediately put, under the pressure of the Great Britain, in charge of a peacekeeping force of the UN: the UNFICYP. The management of this 345 Km² land dividing the island is, since then, under a military regime.

In 1974 a coup d'état from the EOKA supported by the Greeks dictators provokes the reaction of Turkey which, in name of the defense of Turkish-Cypriots, invades 37% of the island without finding a strong resistance from the Greek-Cypriots. After some doomed talks between the two opposed leaders, in 1983 the Turkish-Cypriots declare the independence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) which is immediately recognized from the Turkey but not from the rest of the international community.
Since the beginning of the separation the solution to the conflict has been identified in the formation of a “bi-communal federal state”² and various plans of reunification have been proposed. The most relevant is the one written by Kofi Annan in 2002 which was the object of a failed referendum. Further hope of normalization was the entering of the RoC in the European Union in 2003 with the consequent decision from the TRNC of the opening of the first crossing point in the Green Line. Since then, other crossing points have been opened, the last one in 2008 in the historical centre of Nicosia (Ledra Street), but the recent economic crisis and a new wave of nationalism (in reaction also to the strong flux of immigrants from the eastern Europe over the last ten years) have again stalled the peace process.

So the Cyprus Green Line, is not a wall but a strip of land whose width varies from 3,3 m to 7,4 Km along its course, generating different exceptional situations. Among the most relevant we find for example the Kokkina/Ereknöy² enclave, which used to be a Turkish-Cypriot enclave during the conflict and is today a Turkish-Cypriot territory inside the RoC. Then we have Varosha/Maraş, a Greek-Cypriot city, which has been evacuated during the invasion and then occupied and isolated from the Turkish military in order to be used as an object of exchange during the negotiations. Nowadays this city, which used to be an important tourist spot during the 70’s, is only accessible to military and is a veritable ghost town. Pyla is the only inhabited village inside the Buffer Zone. Legally, it is administrated by the RoC and its population is mixed Turkish and Greek-Cypriot. Its exceptionality stems from the fact that the village did not participate in the conflict between ’63 and ’74 and it has been protected from the UN since the division. Despite its isolation, the village took a great advantage from its position before the first openings of the wall, selling contraband products to the north part⁴.

³ The different names are given, when necessary, in the following order: Greek/Turkish
⁴ The TRNC is under the embargo of the RoC
Another element of exception are the two British military bases which had been created in 1960 after the colonial independence letting Great Britain keep the control of this strategic position in the Mediterranean. The bases host 14000 people including civilians and troops and occupy around 3% of the island. The existence of these bases had never been called into question as part of the “Cyprus problem” until 2008.

What we find interesting in this history of exception is how it configures a peculiar kind of space on the island. Looking at this geography gives us the possibility to understand which are the recurrent characteristics of the Cyprus border at different scales such as the permanence of provisory measures which tend to become rules. This seems to be an important issue in order to comprehend, not only at the national scale, how the process of conflict and division sets up in the logic of a permanent “state of exception” (Agamben, 2003).

Nicosia is the central and the most relevant of these exceptional places. The city was founded around 85 BC along the Pedieos river at the crossing of ancient Hellenic settlements. During the Byzantine domination (390-1191AC) and the Lusinian one (1192-1489AC), the city becomes the most important centre of the island. Around a strong agricultural feudal system various churches and monasteries are built and the city is furnished with fortifications. In 1489, the island is conquered by the Marinar Republic of Venice which aims to give more importance to the portal cities and decides to narrow the limits of Nicosia building new fortifications. The model of these protection walls is one of the classic models of the Italian renaissance⁵: a circle of a diameter of 7Km interrupted at regular 260m intervals by eleven bastions of the same size and form. These fortifications are still perfectly preserved nowadays.

After the battle of Lepanto, the island passes under the domination of the Ottoman Empire. This is a period of great expansion in which the city takes the form of a modern capital. The axes of Ermou Street, which used to be the bed of the river Pedieos (deviated outside the walls by the Venetians), becomes the fulcrum of city life where the bazaar takes place. The presence of various ethnic populations configures a very complex situation in which the city is composed by twenty machalla (districts) each one with its own religious centre.

After the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Cyprus becomes a British colony and Nicosia experiences a great expansion outside the city walls. The modernization of the city changes the asset of the walls with new openings and new commercial axis are created inside the centre (Ledra Street). When the city is divided after ’64, the Green Line invades the urban tissue enclosing buildings, streets and agricultural fields. The line follows Ermou street, not only the place were the river used to be, but also the most lively part of the city until that time. The material which composes the “wall” here are the abandoned structures and the barrels that close the narrow streets together with the vegetation which erodes this “Dead Zone”.

In 1979 the mayors of the two parts of the divided city, under the aegis of the UN, work for the construction of a common sewage system. This is the pretext for the formation of a bi-communal team which in 1980 designs a common Master Plan for the two Nicosia. Still today this is the only true point of reference for the urban expansion of the city from which all the urban plans of the two sides take reference.

The description which follows analyzes the city through the spotting of social and spatial fragments. The aim is to build an interpretation of this context which gives us the possibility to visualize the social frictions in terms of spatial movement inside the city. This reading will aid the comprehension of the zones of pressure inside the walled centre and is the base for understanding the interaction within the city and the liminal spaces along the border.

LEFKOŞA_

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6 One of the popular names of the UN Buffer Zone.
The north part of Nicosia doesn’t look like a lively capital, the big roads, the casinos and the residential districts in the suburbs seem to talk more about abandon. The true “periphery” of the capital is the historical centre, this semi-circle rounded by walls and moats where Anatolians, Curds and Gypsies find refuge often occupying abandoned houses (sometimes Greek-Cypriot properties) and building barracks. They are the undesirables: in the media discourse they are the ones sent by the Turkish government to vote against reunification, and, as far as the Law is concerned, they’re the ones who don’t have access to the south because unsupplied with a Turkish visa. A big part of the historical centre is the realm of lively street life where children play next to the military zone showing little care for throwing their balls at the “Forbidden zone” panels.

With the recent opening of the Ledra Street passage inside the centre there’s a new enclave which takes place: the one of the tourist circuit. The visitors arrive generally from the south with guided tours and stay only a few hours. Even if this part of the walled centre is the richer in monuments, tourists are discouraged to buy and stay here because of the political condition of the country and also because of the Greek-Cypriot monopoly of this economy.

Gentrification here is a really slow process. The restoration of buildings founded by the UN Habitat have been often restricted to the facades while the houses inside remain really poor (as in the Arabhamet district in the west part).

If on one side the official discourse of the TRNC has always been about the division being the only solution of the conflict, what we can see today is a feeling of exhaustion about the political and economical segregation and a jealousy of the richer south.

The south part of Nicosia is a city aimed at a very occidental/global model of modernization. Outside the historical centre the directions (as frequent in Arab countries) are given through the

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7 Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus and, consequently, in Turkis territory Greek-Cypriot embassies are not present.
names of the shops which occupy the blocks’ low grounds instead of using the streets’ names and the suburbs are patterned on the model of the occidental sprawl. The walled city centre presents an exception within this system, a kind of ghetto for tourists and migrants. But in recent years a new kind of appeal is formed by the opening of the Ledra Street check point and by the revitalization projects of the Master Plan. However, the obtrusive presence of the Green Line tends to push away the great investors and attracts more foreign visitors and young people looking for a place where to express an alternative culture.

While the official position of the RoC government as regards the conflict has always been strongly about reunification with a rhetoric on the golden past were Turkish and Greeks-Cypriots used to live together, today the impression is that the citizens care much less about the conflict and see it as a dead weight which slows down the process of modernization. Without forgetting the frequent manifestations in favor of reunification, we can say that this concerns, in Nicosia, a limited part of the population belonging to a certain generation and culture or involved with the NGOs and extraterritorial institutions present on the island.

BUFFER ZONE_

The last piece of the mosaic which composes the city of Nicosia in this narration is the Buffer Zone. This space is composed of three main layers: the Turkish-Cypriot military zone, the UN zone and the Greek-Cypriot military zone. This complex system of military presence creates also different interfaces of the border on the two sides and at the check points. These differences are also influenced by the different aptitudes that the two governments and the respective populations have regarding the conflict (which, as we saw in the precedent paragraphs, are not really corresponding).

The north part presents a rigid military border. The wall here is almost always clearly signalled with panels and bare concrete walls with barbed wire and the control of the outpost is permanent. In spite of this apparent rigidity, the city which interacts with this interface, as we

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8 For example the project of Eleftheria Square committed to the archi-star Zaha Hadid in 2005.
saw, is a city full of life which faces the border colonizing every little bit of space and surface and, when it is possible, hiding its presence with colorful elements.

The south of the military border seems often to be an abandoned backyard. The wall here is composed of barrels and disordered barbed wire with a strong presence of an invading vegetation. It is not rare to see empty outposts and ambiguous zones with no clear pertinence. This porosity permitted by the lack of military control opens the way for informal activities to corrode this space colonizing the accessible abandoned buildings inside the Buffer Zone.

The check points are the only places where the core layer, the UN one, is visible. Inside the walled centre we have two check points of a different nature. One is the Ledra Palace check point, at the extreme west, and the other is the Ledra Street passage. While the first one is a large passage which gives access to various activities related to the UN (as the former Ledra Palace hotel which is used as a residence for soldiers and a place for conferences and meetings), the second one is a really small crossing which works much more as a control device. What we can find in both parts is anyway the complete suspension of any kind of possible interaction which the passer-by can have with the space. Even with different degrees of control, the overall impression of the buffer zone is that of a lived experience of a “Dead Zone”, a frozen portion of the city in which silence is the sole protagonist.

EXPERIENCING THE LIMIT: liminal imaginary.

In order to introduce the following work of mapping we would like first to define and give an interpretation of the concept of liminal space. Liminality (from the Latin *limes* = limit) is a concept belonging to the field of anthropology which concerns the state of suspension typical of the rites of passage. People who live in this condition are, in traditional cultures, belonging to an alternative social structure for all the period of the ritual as this permits the subject to absorb and accomplish their passage. Quoting Victor Turner, this alternative social structure can be seen as “a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner, 1969). He defines this state of marginality as *communitas* because, in it, the official hierarchies are not present and this gives space to a regime of equality and incertitude.

In the spatial field, liminal spaces can therefore be intended as those places where a condition of dissolution of identity takes place and the experience of community is brought to its extremes. In order to better understand this condition we would like to refer to Carnival as a useful metaphor that can give us the idea of the liminarity potential. The romantic philosopher Florence Christian Rang, in a short essay on Carnival, offers an interesting historic interpretation of this festivity (on whose origins still there isn’t a shared interpretation). Rang reads the Carnival through history as a ritual that, far from being a simple inversion of reality, represents a cathartic moment of disillusion for societies in which the moment of legal absence of rules opens new insurrectional instances. He brings back up the origin of Carnival to a festivity of the Babylonian calendar which supplied an intercalary period in order to adjust the disconnection between actual solar time and the calendar itself. This festivity used to be a time of decadence of the old gods and coming up of new ones, “a pause, interregnum between an abdication and a royalty accession” (Rang, 1983). This moment of absence of divinities consequently becomes, through inebriation and rituality, the possibility of experimenting new identities and relations. In this sense, the political value of Carnival resides also in the fact that “they offer the possibility to evaluate not only social changes, but, above all, the meanings carried out by those social changes” (Agier, 2001).

What we intend for liminal space so, is not simply the condition of the border, but the special situation in which the limit creates an available field for new interpretations of society in terms of contradictions, insurrections and political claims. If the limit is a place connected and influenced by two confining realities, it is true that, not belonging to neither of them, it can become a zone of tolerance in which an alternative organization of life and mixed identities are admitted.

Consequently, inside the city the liminal space can be seen as the context of negotiation of social conflict. Experiencing the limit here means to be delirious (in its etymologic sense of passing the line, *lira* in Latin), to abandon our identity and be disposable to the change. Studying liminal conditions, as for the Carnival, gives us the possibility to understand and highlight both the heightening and negotiation of social conflict in a context where change is always potential. This kind of approach can be a tool for looking at urban life from a privileged point of view in which it is possible to get rid of static interpretations in order to reconstruct a more complex picture of urban imaginaries.
MAPPING

The survey is focused on the Green Line border inside the walled centre. The first objective has been to reconstruct the actual profile in the plan of the Buffer zone updating the old maps and trying to understand which buildings are included or not inside the military zones. In fact official maps often synthesize the zone in one simple line and the municipality ones are based on old cadastral surveys. This part of the work includes also a photographic complete survey of the border. Following the winding path of the border, a series of relevant element have been highlighted. Some of them are just orientation points, while the others constitute the liminal situations. The six liminal situations (three in the north and three in the south) have been used to build up the definition of this spatial category with the help of a seventh counter example (the Ledra Street check point).

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DEFINITION

If architectonic space in general is considered as a defined, functional element, the liminal space can be distinguished for its ambiguity: it does not distinguish an inside from an outside, it can be a dangerous place, is apparently dead, does not have a clear function and is undetermined.

Its value inside urban systems seems to be its capacity to bring a meaningful density through contradictory factors. The concept of density, in this sense, is not based on function but on complex relations between conflicting elements.

The typology of space, and the consequent experience that is engendered, seem to be linked to the definition of a condition of suspension. Physically this can be determined from a barrier

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9 The photographic survey is published in the blog dividednicosia by Federica Gatta at the web-page: http://dividednicosia.wordpress.com/2010/09/11/bordersurvey/
which apparently is not possible to pass but in fact is surmountable at the cost of a transgression\(^{10}\).

**SUBCATEGORIES.**
The liminal situations are divided in two subcategories depending on the side where they are found. This distinction results from what we mentioned about the differences in control management between north (less flexible with more intense uses) and south (more flexible with less intense uses).

We will call **pauses** the public spaces analyzed in the north side where a strong character of suspension is due to an explicit and invasive presence of the border. This suspension here is created by the presence of a sudden height change or by an unexpected closure inciting a moment of reflection about coming back or the curiosity of looking through.

In the southern part, we will define the abandoned structures inside the military zones as **frames**. These are places formally belonging to the Greek-Cypriot army but informally and partially accessible by civilians. Here the suspension is defined by the ambiguity created by the formal prohibition and the actual possibility of entering, and also from their status of empty architectures opened to continuous modification by natural and human concealed intervention.

The third subcategory is the **counter example** representing the antipode of liminariness. If the liminal space is a border, a place where to pass or act without following clear rules, the counter example is the boundary, a place where to pass without stopping under the restriction of rigid and prohibitive rules.

**DESCRIPTIVE CRITERIA.**
The three descriptive criteria used to read the liminal conditions are: relation, uses and times, and spatial configuration.

The **relation** is about the type of connection that the place has with its context. The predominant characteristic of this places is to propose themselves as a third hybrid element of exception between two different contexts\(^{11}\). The structure will be determined by the degrees of pressure that the two confining elements make on them.

The **uses and times** are related to the special relation which those spaces have with the flow of time. Generally we found some temporary physical elements which persist as a bridge between past and present uses permitting an overlapping of ephemeral and stable elements. The memory here seems to be crystallized and remains unelaborated while new uses come to profane this interstices and give them new meanings.

The **spatial configuration** and the physical devices define the spatial links which are fundamental to define the category. Each of the analyzed situations present a series of devices which, in different scales, are the base to define the suspension of the element.

**DESCRIPTIVE CRITERIA.**
Every descriptive criteria is elaborated working through the construction of a semantic constellation of key words.

For the relation, we will have key words concerning the **dialectics** (the contradictions present in the relation), for uses and times we will define the **experience** (determined by the users), and for the spatial configuration we will have **space typology** (the main spatial characteristic). This cloud of words coming up from the three levels of analysis are the base to the definition of a second degree of interpretation represented by a series of drawings in the form of atopic\(^{12}\) projects.

Here the project come in contact with the impossibility of intervene, in this kind of context, as a solving action. We find ourselves obliged, in this sense, to reflect on the shift of sense to which the built space is subject nowadays: from an object of intervention, to an autonomous entity with an independent life. Coming back to the initial assumption, what we would like to stress is how, in a context of strong social conflict, the space becomes an active actor itself that has to be questioned as a key subject and not only as an object of transformation.

In the context of Nicosia, where transformation is impracticable today, instead of projecting the space in an unknown future in which intervention will be possible (but whose conditions are still

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\(^{10}\) We do not intend transgression only in legal terms but also in terms of social permission as can be the idea of entering in a place where we’re not welcome or we’re not supposed to be.

\(^{11}\) In our case between the city and the military zone.

\(^{12}\) In the sense of the greek ἄτοπος = out of place.
undetermined), we decided to try to understand the project which is within the places. The liminal spaces reveal themselves as expressions of new possible geographies and the design gets rid of its function of solver action in order to become the vehicle for new questionings and problematic. The proposed drawings are a deforming lens for the existing place that tries to highlight both projective and conflictive elements and build a new view on this crystallized limit revealing its inner life. Understanding the limits means, in this sense, to go deep into the contradictions that it can produce. If inside the depth of the limit different imaginaries find place depending on the point we look at it, what we tried to do is to work with these different imaginaries and give them the form of a new open question.

METHODOLOGY
The process of analysis proposed in the research is based on the enquiry of liminal space definition both as a social and a physical device. What we highlight here is how the Buffer Zone border inside the walled centre of Nicosia produces a series of situations and a complex stratigraphy of spaces where, next to control devices, insurrectional practices find place. Understanding the present, in our point of view, does not only mean to explain and reveal the existent, but also to comprehend and try to render the potential of porosity which those spaces of suspension create in their interaction with the city.

The method, which has lead this work, tries to build an evolutionary approach between different attitudes (theoretical, architectonic, anthropological) in order to define, for each step, the appropriate tool (photography, mapping, design, text). From interviews and commented walks with inhabitants, to observation, semantic deconstruction and design, we sought for the recomposition of a mosaic which could express the complexity of the space and give voice to the actual meaning of the border.

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13 In this regard we would like to mention a reference, the methodological interdisciplinary approach of the Laboratorire Architecture/Anthropologie of the ENSA La Villette of Paris: http://www.laa.archi.fr/spip.php?article37
LIMINAL SPACES

The following images show the seven spaces analysis with the corresponding seven drawings. We decide to describe in detail here one pair of images for each subcategory.

FANEROMENI_

Relation _ The building in the Faneromeni district of Lefkosia is a frame, a building partially inserted in the Buffer Zone. It is in a city fragment subject to a strong gentrification process. While a big part of the parcel is being renewed, this small corridor remains abandoned in the military zone. This space is also near to the place of alternative culture and youth aggregation and it is occasionally appropriated by them.

Dialectics _ Signified/Signifiable

Uses and times _ The “corridor” used to be a trench and its access today is filtered by the presence of a workshop and a small military outpost that is often empty. Its use is open to passers-by that enter illegally but undisturbed and it has also been used for theatrical performances.

Experience _ Discover, pass through

Configuration _ This frame represents a prototype of an initiatory path in which the discoverer is guided by traces of recent and past uses going from a progressive estrangement from the reality through the founding of an archeology available to new and free interpretations. The relation with the outside is filtered by loopholes in the windows, which are filled with sand bags and the passage through the rooms is made by breaches in the walls created by the soldiers.

Space typology _ Sequence
Holzwege _ The drawing reinterprets the space through the reproduction of the key word logic. It is an infinite enfilade disposable to be colonized from different users and uses. The title is a quotation from a Heidegger text written in 1950\(^{14}\). Holzwege means “the path in the woods” and it was a metaphor used by Heidegger to express the impossibility, for human thought, to comprehend the whole knowledge. In this sense, for Heidegger, thinking can only proceed through continuous deviations and wanderings. We understand here this concept as the necessity for the project\(^{15}\) to go on through progressive steps without determining its final effect and a solution, but opening new visions of the reality.

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\(^{15}\) We would like to refer to the etymology of the word project: from the Latin projectus = the action of throwing ahead. In this sense the project does not know which is going to be its effect but just opens new ways.
Relation _ This pause in the north side is a municipal market. It appears like a detached island inside the flux of tourism by reason of the invasive presence of the Buffer Zone inside it and the low attractive of the sold products for foreigners. The entrance is often marked by the presence of a strong local life and boxcars, which close its view and emphasize its different character comparing to the surrounding monuments.

Dialectics _ Accessible/Screened

Uses and times _ Tourists stay here just enough time to take few pictures. The lack of respect for European hygienic rules (which the TRNC is not obliged to follow), and the customs restrictions of taking milk and meat products in the south part, are one of the major reasons that Greek-Cypriot tour operators give to discourage buying here. Nevertheless the market is always highly frequented by people living in the residential parts of the historical centre, predominantly people living in the immigrant “barracks” district.

Experience _ Estrangement

Configuration _ The building from the 1932, is a basic concrete structure with a small mosque inside. The final part of it is completely inserted in the buffer zone and is not used very much and is partially abandoned. The three entrances are all in the north side. The terseness of the bad preserved structure, with minimal light coming from the roof skylight, is brightened by the strong colors of food and textile products, which are sold inside.

Space typology _ Enclosed
Stultifera Navis. The drawing, starting from the idea of the estrangement (both of the tourist entering in the structure and of the local passing through the tourist flow to get inside), elaborates the second degree of interpretation of the place through the image of the ship of fools. *Das Narrenschiff* (Stultifera navis in Latin) is a satire from 1494 by Sebastian Brant with engravers by Albrecht Dürer about the medieval trope of foolishness. Michel Foucault\(^\text{16}\), referring to Brant writing, gives a historical interpretation of the marginalization of fools in medieval age through the fact that they were often put in custody to supply ships. The resin floating structure, whose entrance is permanently filled with water, is a brothel whose room proportions are inspired by the Pompeian *lupanare*.

Relation_The counter example is the Ledra Street check point created the 3rd of April 2008, the fifth and most recent passage opened after the breaking of the Buffer Zone in 2003. This road has always been an important commercial axis with Ermou Street and its opening has been cheered by the international community as a symbolic step for the peace process. Far from being a useful passage for the Cypriots (whose passages from one nation to the other are anyway few), this check point has represented an important point of development for the tourist routes and it is effectively a tourist attraction itself.

Dialectics _ Homogeneity

Uses and times_ During the claim for independence between 1955 and '59, Ledra Street had been baptized the “Murder Mile” because of the frequent assaults by Cypriots on British military patrolling the zone. After the opening of the check point, 20,000 people passed it, but this number has strongly decreased in the following years. The check point is open 24 hours. In the north, the passage is a veritable immigration check point where, after showing the passport, a special visa is furnished, while in the south identification is more quick but there’s a strict custom control for goods.

Experience_ Crossing, not looking, not acting, getting controlled

Configuration_ The 50 meter passage between the two check points passes through the old buildings of the Buffer Zone which are covered and shored up to avoid accident and not permitting the view of the military zone. The two check points have a visual control of the whole passage and a camera is present above the central part in correspondence with the UN military zone. Photographing and stopping here is prohibited.

Space typology _ Control device
Experience it. This drawing tries to synthesize the characteristics drawn from the observation. The object is a smaller and modernized version of the project for an ideal prison by Jeremy Bentham of 1791: the Panopticon. For Bentham the design of a circular concentric prison in which, from the center, it is possible to control every point or the surrounding structure was also, in a wider sense, the ideal of a transparent social structure.

The drawing shows a device of video control of a plaza that, at the same time, offers an attraction for visitors thanks to its huge modern metal detectors and a shiny interior with the possibility of buying, after the visit, the surveillance video of its own passage.

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CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we can say that looking to the Nicosia conflict through a magnifying glass placed on the limit thickness, wants to be a way of assuming a point of view in which is possible to create new questions through the destabilization of fixed concepts. Coming back to the ontological and methodological features about the liminal space, we would like to point out how this approach can open a room to discourses and subjects which are not included in the official positions.

If those practices of corrosion of the limit don’t really seem to question directly the political problem of the division, their value lays in the capacity to profane what seems to be untouchable, to be the “counter-device which resituate to the human what the sacrifice had divided and separated” (Agamben, 2006). This capacity of corrosion, as we saw in the different declinations, has not the ability to give porosity to the limit in the sense of creating a contact between the two parts, but it works conceptually as a dismantlement of the icons and indexes which crystallize the official relations the two cities have with the division.

In the analysis of fragments we saw how apparently the two city centres reject the existence of the limit and create enclaves of tolerance for the tourist flux around the check point passage of Ledra street. Perceiving the space through this kind of itinerary and through the official interventions of the public urban policies, we have the impression of a city denying the limit and turning its back to it. From this point of view the border is invisible, it can always be avoided and hidden to one’s sight.

But through the analysis of the liminal spaces we are able to look deeper to the parts of the city which in the maps and perceptions are represented as white, blank spaces. Here we find, coexisting closely with the border, all those practices and subjects that are excluded from the official public spaces and that, at their turn, find their place and expression into the thickness of the border which the city tends to obliterate. The colonization of the border reveals a new kind of complexity and what seems to be marginal in the discourse of the city division becomes a central point. Looking at the limits gives the possibility, in our point of view, to build a starting point for a different approach to the city problems, not only concentrated to the relations between the two official communities (Greek and Turkish-Cypriots), but opening questions about new ethnic and political exclusions (concerning the “Turk community” and the “alternative cultures”). In this sense this point of view offers a “normalization” of a possible approach to the city of Nicosia trying to discard the rhetoric of the “divided city” with its frozen relation to the space.

The imaginaries of the limit which are shown want to be, finally, the mirror for an urban life that lives and reprocesses the memory of the division and which is claiming a different appropriation of the public space in Nicosia.
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IMG 3.
Sources for the elaboration of the images (from the upper left to the bottom right):
- "The walled city of Nicosia. Typology study", in Demi, Danilo "The walled city of Nicosia. Typology study" (see bibliography).
- Valegio, Francesco (around 1579), "Raccolta di le più illustri e famose città di tutto il mondo", in Demi, Danilo "The walled city of Nicosia. Typology study" (see bibliography).
- Kirchner, Kapt. H. (1881), "Plan of Nicosia"

IMG 4-5.
The pictures of the two black graffiti stencils (next to the picture column) have been extracted from the pictures of Pafsanias Karathanasis in the article "Street art across the "green line": The geographies of graffiti in the walled city of Nicosia, Cyprus." (see bibliography) as an illustration of the differences between the political official discourses of the two countries and the population feelings and behavior regarding the division.