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A Conclusion

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The background of the cover is a dark, textured map of the world. Overlaid on the map are various geometric shapes and symbols: a large, light gray circle, a smaller white circle, and several smaller circles of different shades of gray. Some of these circles contain symbols like stars, triangles, and lightning bolts. The map itself is rendered in a light gray tone, with some areas highlighted in a darker gray. The overall aesthetic is modern and academic.

Architectures of Resistance

Negotiating Borders
Through Spatial Practices

Angeliki Sioli, Nishat Awan,
Kristopher Palagi (eds)

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NEGOTIATING BORDERS THROUGH SPATIAL PRACTICES: A CONCLUSION

Angeliki Sioli, Nishat Awan, and Kristopher Palagi

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
—Leonard Cohen, “Anthem”*

The book you hold in your hands did not try to describe what borders are. As discussed in the introduction, our focus from the beginning was on the ways we can resist borders through spatial practices. We approached borders firstly from their political and social perspective—and the types of spatial relations they produced—and only then, if necessary, from their physical dimensionality. For us this is an epistemic position that emerged from our own interest in the topic but also from the personal involvement of many of this book's contributors with the borders they describe. The majority of scholars in this book have lived the borders they study. They have experienced them at an intimate scale and they have felt their impact in their everyday lives, even before acquiring the skills to study them. For many, this engagement with borders is both *situated* and personal. We believe that such an approach, when it manages to overcome biases and political propagandas, can create new ways to negotiate borders: as places of meaningful adjacencies, where fruitful osmosis can overturn their dividing role.

When students of architecture, who personally experience segregation and division in their everyday life, study critically the *where, why, what, who*, and *when* of border conditions, they understand the multiple perspectives that are involved in any conflict negotiation. They resist long existing racial biases in space. When citizens, researchers, and historians look closely at aesthetic expressions of political agendas, as in the form of graffiti, they bring to the foreground what might hinder a deep understanding between the communities involved. They resist superficial architectural readings of space. When architects study fictional lives of people caught in situations of harsh spatial exclusions, they can feel in their skin, even if they have never experienced them

themselves, the unfair conditions their defensive or protective walls may create. They resist thinking of borders from a theoretical and detached perspective. When refugees and immigrants are asked to look at official representations of borders and question them by prioritizing their personal understanding of them, architects can see that walls and borders have a much wider spatial impact than that depicted by drawings and maps. They resist believing in maps and official spatial representations of division. When architects and spatial practitioners consider borders and the displacement of people not only through their immediate effects but within longer temporalities, they begin to find new moments of intervention. They resist understanding architecture's role as merely humanitarian. When architectural educators connect their courses to the political and spatial realities of real-life borders, bringing the students in direct contact with them and teaching them to look thoroughly at both (or at all) sides, they teach an approach to design that attempts to implement equal opportunities and create spaces of acceptance instead of exclusion. They resist an apolitical approach to architectural education. When historians look at the details of how different borders came into being and how they have transformed over time, they remind us loudly that borders are just a human construct that can embody diverse and contradicting political agendas. They resist the propagandistic readings of official historiography. When artists use their humorous, sensitive, and unconventional gaze to shed light on border conditions, they give voice to the real protagonists of these conditions and let their stories be heard. They resist conforming to the realities of real-life border situations. When academics provoke with their theoretical writing on borders, territories, and mapping, they expose borders as places of simultaneity that cannot be read only in black-and-white. They resist the conventional discourse on borders and become intentionally polemical. When policymakers care that the "right to the city," as Lefebvre advocated for, is offered to groups of people that are usually in the margins, they shape cities and public spaces to include the needs of all citizens, offering them the space for a shared future. They resist creating urban spaces for the privileged few. When landscape architects look into the history of design policies and go beyond their aesthetic characteristics, they reveal agendas of division hidden in zones of greenery and nature. They resist looking at spatial situations through the dominant logic of power. Lastly, when researchers share their own ethical concerns or even shame, for working with those most affected by borders, they awaken us to the fact that beyond theories, books, articles, and chapters borders displace, hurt, and kill people on a daily basis. They resist being naive or inconsiderate about the actual realities of borders.

These are the many ways in which the chapters in this book have shown us how spatial practices of resistance at borders can help mitigate divisions. Yet this book is also about the ways in which resistance and negotiation work together in and through spatial relations, and here the contemporary context within which this text has emerged is of consequence. This book began with a conference at the School of Architecture at Louisiana State University in 2019, and we are wrapping up this manuscript at the end of 2023. In the intervening years, the world has changed in so many different ways; we already mentioned the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the introduction. As we write these final words, the war on Gaza continues. These events have called into question our own humanity and so nothing can ever be the same, including the role of spatial practices in questioning borders. And so we end here with a formulation that we have been thinking about for quite some time but had discarded along the way: the notion of a fissure, or a crack in the wall, as a way of imagining how borders can be transcended. The moments of resistance expressed above can also be understood as forms of spatial practice able to create cracks and fissures in the many visible or invisible walls that only seem to be multiplying across our planet.

At a geological scale, fissures are the product of the movement of the earth's plates over the ever-churning magma below. Here fissures are a kind of insurance and reassurance; they allow the plates to move and to withstand pressure from below, accommodating small-scale resistances without breaking apart. In this reading, fissures are not only too small: crucially, they are fundamental to the survival of edifices, allowing them to weather the bigger storms brewing below. But what is particular about a fissure in a wall is that there is often something external or alien that creates the opening—it could be moss settling into mortar or it could be moisture entering into the brickwork. Slowly and surely through processes that are neither obvious nor accounted for, something changes, and what felt like an indestructible edifice begins to crumble. That these processes start at a molecular scale, invisible to many of us, is important. That they occur only when relations move beyond binary understandings is also crucial. The sense of erosion working on a temporal scale much longer than we are used to also seems important. Which reading of fissures is more useful in our world of proliferating borders? Leonard Cohen's lyrics in the epigraph to this conclusion are helpful in realizing that as with all things, fissures too are what we make of them. Some will only help the workings of power, but others will let light in, and the more fissures there are, the higher the chances of producing a different kind of change.