Boundaries present themselves to us as the edge of things, as the spatial and temporal limit between the here and there, in and out, present and future. The boundary in all its manifest forms – wall, façade, gate, fence, river, shore, window – appears as a discrete separation between alternate sides of its magical divide; things are dispersed and ordered in space. Yet for postmodern urban space, in which architects assay the wrapping and layering of space, and urban managers increasingly review its representation and control, nothing could be farther than the truth; boundaries are not finite, but zones of negotiation.

The more thoughtful theoreticians of architecture have always understood buildings as possessing this kind of boundary-negotiation when considering the mechanical and servicing elements.

The array of different reservoirs in buildings is defined by a multitude of boundaries. These boundaries may be the metal pipes and ducts of servicing systems; they may perhaps be the different material boundaries to damp air passages in lofts; they may also be the faces of masonry walls, where the solid material acts as reservoir for heat energy; and they may be defined by material content: timber has to have a moisture content (MC) above 20% to support fungi, so that the MC level in effect becomes a boundary to fungal action. There are also grain boundaries.

They are also aware of the differential nature of boundary effects.

Some boundaries are opaque to one entity, but transparent or permeable to another (i.e. semi-permeable): dry rot or radon can pass through brickwork, whereas pet budgerigars cannot.
Yet this is not always evident in the treatment of social boundaries, where we must remember that, as Henri Lefebvre points out, the segregation of classes, ethnic groups and peoples of all kinds does not come from a clear set of rules and precisely demarcated boundaries, nor from a uniform strategy of enforcements, but from a variety of tactics and procedures, at once voluntary, spontaneous and fully programmed.⁴

Power never allows itself to be confined within a single logic. Power has only strategies – and their complexity is in proportion to power’s resources.⁵

It is impossible to say how often one pauses uncomfortably for a moment on some threshold – the entrance of a church, office or “public” building, or the point of access to a “foreign” place – while passively, and usually “unconsciously,” accepting a prohibition of some kind. Gates and railings, ditches and other material barriers are merely the most extreme instances of this kind of separation.⁶

Thus while dominant boundaries between social groups may now be disappearing, they are also being replaced by new scarcely visible limits demarcating centres of power.⁷

Clear Blue Water

On London’s Kingsway in Holborn sits the church of Holy Trinity. A theatrical inwardly-curved façade grandly enfolds a smaller semi-circular portico, but beyond splendorous Edwardian aesthetics,⁸ Belcher and Joass’ baroque design also provides a kind of public micro-retreat from the couriers, buses and taxis on the Kingsway. As a church, Holy Trinity offered an embracing welcome to its visitors, drawing them off the Kingsway first onto the ambiguous stage defined by its façade, then into the codified doorway of its portico, and onwards to the interior within. Forsaken by 1991 as a place of worship,⁹ the church rapidly became a focus for the many homeless and street-people of Holborn, a semi-permanent place for sitting and sleeping away from the more exposed doorways around the corner in the Strand. It was now a stage set of a different kind, an

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appropriated piece of urban space, at once open to the public domain and private to those seeking shelter, defensible space and their own form of “illegal real estate.” Clusters of homeless recomposed a niche space from many layers of clothes, cardboard and classical architecture.

Except that a line has been drawn: a plane of wood, painted a striking resonant blue and three metres high. It spans the full length of the Holy Trinity front, so that the semi-public stage set becomes, like the interior, shut off from the street and divorced from passers-by. Yet, of course, it is not really that the building which is being shut off from people, but that people – and particularly the homeless – are being shut off from it. To the more artistic cognoscenti, the screen may suggest a Christo-esque device, or even allusions to Derek Jarman’s reductive film screen “Blue,” and certainly it does insert a startling colourist disjunction to the grainy grey of Holborn. But for the new owners of the church, the Post Office, this is a far more considered attempt to keep architecture as things and space as the distance between objects. For in protecting their new purchase, they have created a boundary of exclusion, a brutally frontal relation which physically repels the unwanted and the unwashed from the site. It is the architecture of separation, of clear blue water between spaces and peoples.

I learned much of this from a man called Bob, a small geordie with a flat cap and weathered lines from decades of life on the streets of London. To him and the other former residents of the Holy Trinity portico, this is indeed a pure boundary of separation, demarcating the now uncrossable chasm between ownership and use, public and private, recent history and immediate future.
Architectural boundaries like this have finite social effects on the ground which cannot be denied.

But what is the socio-spatial nature of this boundary? Architecture has too often been conceived as the product of design intention, from which social effects simply follow. The “second nature” of capitalism and its architecture is thought to be simply the artificial replacement for the old Nature, and so to operate in the same way. Space, as both first and second natures, is the pre-given space or condition to which people come, and which they respond to without being active in its reproduction. But this view of space ultimately offers little more than what Edward Soja has termed the “illusion of opacity:”

[S]patiality is reduced to physical objects and forms, and naturalized back to a first nature so as to become susceptible to prevailing scientific explanation in the form of orderly, reproducible description and the discovery of empirical regularities . . . geographical description is substituted for explanation of the social production of space and the spatial organization of society.  

Since the 1970s, a socially- and politically-minded approach to architecture emerged in some areas of architectural history, and space here certainly began by implication to take on more of the character of the social. These discussions still, however, tended to focus on alternatively one of two things: either the notion of function, in which the building remains primarily a designed object, and the social activities of users are seen as simply being signed in the design and particularly in the plan of the building; or, the notion of social history, whereby the building is conceived of as a pre-given space, an architectural back-drop to the drama of everyday life. In either case, the essential inter-relation of buildings, spaces, culture and people is reduced to a false dualism between designed object and social use.  

In contradistinction to this dualism, a more strain of architectural thought conceives of architecture and space as active constituents of social relations, rather than as pre-given entities.
or produced objects. Taking their cue from sources as diverse as the anthropologist Marc Augé, urban geographers Edward Soja and David Harvey, historian Michel Foucault, and, in particular, the philosopher Henri Lefebvre, architectural historians and theorists are reconceptualising architecture as a space of flows – not as an object in space, but as the product of, and inter-relation between, things, spaces, individuals and ideas. Bernard Tschumi is the most persistent architectural theorist in this movement.

Can one attempt to make a contribution to architectural discourse by relentlessly stating that there is no space without event, no architecture without programme? . . . Our work argued that architecture – its social relevance and formal invention – could not be dissociated from the events that “happened” in it.16

And as Adrian Forty remarks of the “Strangely Familiar” project,

[T]he moment in history when the building was finished . . . is the very point at which the historian’s work should begin . . . [A]rchitecture, like all other cultural objects, is not made just once, but is made and remade over and over again each time it is represented through another medium, each time its surroundings change, each time different people experience it.17

Architecture is both produced and reproduced, designed and experienced, and is at once social, spatial and temporal. Architecture is a medium and not a message, a system of power relations and not a force, a flow and not a line.

So how can we can conceive of the boundary? Nearly 70 years before Lefebvre’s most spatialised writings, Georg Simmel noted that social and urban boundaries make social orders more concrete, more intensely experienced, and clarify conflictual relations.18 They stand in contrast to the purely physical and arbitrary boundaries of nature in that they are indeterminate in themselves, their significance being the interaction on either side of the line. For Simmel, the “boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially.”19
Boundaries do not cause sociological effects in themselves, but are themselves formed by and in between sociological elements.

The blue screen of the Holy Trinity shows this sharply. While the immediate, physical effect of the boundary on those who experience it is very real, we must consider that its social effect not only changes the historical nature of that boundary, dislocating its significance away from the object itself, but also that this effect is simultaneously an attempt by an institution to control the relation between people and property. In particular, while the ownership of property is ultimately a social relation between people, the Post Office is seeking to render that relation into one of objects and things, and negotiating the relationship between itself and the homeless by erecting a physical screen which both hides — metaphorically and literally — its own concerns; in experiencing the screen we should then remember with Debord that such things are also spectacles, and thus “not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.”

The experience of the blue screen purely as object is, then, a false one, both in terms of its social effects and its social grounds. But there is also another way in which the boundary is a socio-spatial one, and that is through the materiality of its implementation. The obvious function of the blue screen is to keep the undesirable off the stage-space beyond, and the height and smooth texture of the surface provide a strong deterrent to this end. This much accords with its role as a hindrance to the movement of the human body, preventing the vertical and, in particular, horizontal transition from one space to another. Apart from this, the blue screen offers another, more pervasive control over the space and time of the would-be-invasive body. In front of the stage-set space is a low wall, of the right depth and height to sit upon and, potentially, to sleep upon. For this reason, the vertical sweep of the screen makes a sudden 45° deflection, so that instead of resting just behind the low wall it rests half-way across its depth, leaving only 150 mm of wall clear in front. The condition produced
is both subtle and important; through the precise control of the screen and wall in relation to the thickness of the human body, the low wall is no longer deep enough or sheltered enough for a person to sleep upon, nor comfortable enough for anyone to sit upon for any length of time. Many similar edge-hardenings have also begun to sprout up around London, where spiked window-sills, 45° “decorative” railings, concrete wedges, studded flower-planters and automatic sprinkler systems which come on in the middle of the night to “clean” shop and office doorways are being used to repel the public from the edge of the street.

In the case of the Holy Trinity screen, even the “respectable” pedestrian is discouraged from stopping. Beside erasing temporary resting space, the clear blue surface of the screen is a smooth space devoid of exactly that detail interest and tactility that Merleau-Ponty sought to reassert against the domination of vision. It deflects attention away, presenting a blank no-thing to the interrogative eye. There is no occasion to linger, to observe or to inspect.

What appears to be a simple, planar boundary, is, therefore, quite different; the blue screen discloses the boundary as a zone of negotiation, in which vision is just one of a series of body-centric architectural devices and cultural signs. The space of the body is used to control its inter-relation with the screen and, by extension, the socio-spatial influence of the screen is projected beyond its surface to the pavement in front. Passers-by continue to pass by, discouraged from stopping to rest by the screen’s materiality. The boundary is not a surface but a thick edge, a five metre deep in-between zone in which social relations are challenged, controlled and formed through architectural materiality.

Rights of Passage
If the blue screen of the Holy Trinity offers frontal control over property and social relations through its physicality, what of the boundaries that control space and property in a more ambiguous manner? What of those new urban spaces – the shopping mall, the forecourt and the rail concourse – those “creative paradoxes” at once public and the private?  

One of the most famous of these new privatised-public spaces is the Broadgate office development, constructed for the post “Big Bang” (October 1986) deregulated financial centre in the City area of London. Developed by Rosehaugh Stanhope in conjunction with British Rail over the lines and concourses of Liverpool Street and the old Broad Street train station, the 29 acre Broadgate site offers 4 million sq ft of high quality office space and three internalised urban squares to the City. Large floor plates of over 30,000 sq ft, generous atria, multiple vertical cores and a high technical servicing capacity meet the demands of modern office and trading activities.  

But Broadgate is also an area which works very hard to define its social character, and the dominant presence of well-salaried and besuited office workers is reinforced by a number of different measures, including high salaries, frequent pay rises and bonuses beyond the comprehension of most other kinds of urban workers. This particular aesthetic enclave within the fragmented postmodern city contains Americanised “fashion effect” architecture designed by Arup Associates (Stage 1, 1984-88) and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (Stage 2, 1988-91), yielding a general ambience prestige and wealth. This is what Lefebvre calls the model of the “New Athens,” where new centres of decision-making incorporate the managerial “new Masters” who enact control over all those who work there.

Coercion and persuasion converge with the power of decision-making and the capacity to consume. Strongly
occupied and inhabited by these new Masters, this centre is held by them. Without necessarily owning it all, they possess this privileged space, axis of a strict spatial policy . . . Around them, distributed in space according to formalized principles, there are human groups which can longer bear the name of slaves, serfs, vassals or even proletarians . . . Subjugated, they provide a multiplicity of services for the Masters of this State solidly established on the city.29

Lefebvre’s comments here were made about the role of the State in the 1960s. Broadgate, of course, like other development projects of its era, was constructed in the context of diminishing State power, or perhaps more properly of a increasing reluctance on the part of the State to intervene in matters of space, and hence Broadgate had to assume the role of the State itself, managing not just built structures but social structures and relations, behavioural patterns and conflicts, interiors and boundaries. Correspondingly, there are no “fringe,” “festival,” “marginal” or “liminal” spaces at Broadgate,30 and none of the crowded conflicts of pedestrians and pavement cafés to be found in Soho to the West.31 “They have eliminated all participation . . . The centralized site is going to take charge of the forces that reject it and, in essence, contest it.”32 Carefully demarcated shops, golfing emporia, health clubs, Japanese restaurants and champagne bars cater for senior-executive tastes and business-account pockets, while displaying signs barring entry to those not in “smart” dress. The Broadgate Broadsheet business community newspaper provides a booster guide to news and events, such as the much-publicised “Broomball” contests on the Broadgate Arena ice rink – a hideously stage-managed version of ice hockey. During the summer the ice rink is converted to a performance space: events in 1994, for example, funded by office service charges and private sponsorship, included displays of sumo wrestling, Spanish horses, rollerblading and a dog show.33 There is, then, an apparent diversity here, but it is a diversity based only on image and appearance, where the logic of vision is used to stand for historical truth.
The predominance of visualization . . . serves to conceal repetitiveness. People look, and take sight, take seeing, for life itself. We build on the basis of papers and plans. We buy on the basis of images. Sight and seeing, which in the Western tradition once epitomized intelligibility, have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social space, diversity may be stimulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sign of transparency.  

Following this logic of visualisation, and in contrast to the Broomball and other activities that take place in the radiant bath of arc-lights, service workers like the many office cleaners and maintenance staff are kept out of sight, hidden beneath the surface in dark, subterranean undercroft of access roads and maintenance circuits.  

In a similarly Disneyfied scopic regime, undesirables are rapidly escorted off the scheme, litter is instantly removed, and in a bizarre extreme fight against dirt, hawks are brought in weekly to scare away pigeons. Social difference within the 20,000 working population is accommodated, but only within a class, gender and race framework based on the middle-class Oxbridge-educated businessman.  

There is also a logic of time at work here, for, as Lefebvre notes, the “New Masters” have the especial privilege to possess and control time. In particular, where time in nature is inscribed in space as season, diurnal change and generation, in capitalism time comes to be measured only on clocks, lived only as carefully demarcated periods of work and leisure. Space, and economic space most evidently, now comes to subordinate time, treating it as a political threat and hence as something to be evacuated.  

The primacy of the economic and above all of the political implies the supremacy of space over time . . . Our time, then, this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is
consumed, exhausted, and that is all. It leaves no traces. It is concealed in space, hidden under a pile of debris to be disposed of as soon as possible; after all, rubbish is a pollutant.

At Broadgate, time, hence, is highly circumscribed, ranging from the economic time of property development instilled into highly complex lease arrangements, the ultimately-private ownership of the land protected by one-day-per-year complete closures of the site (under British law long periods of uninterrupted access would lead to the establishment of public rights of thoroughfare, so Broadgate is normally closed on Christmas Day), to, perhaps most telling of all, the “public” toilets at Exchange Square being open only for a few hours of the day – at the lunch-time period to cater for the sandwich-eating office workers out to enjoy a few moments of fresh air. Pervading through all this is an attitude of efficiency that is at once functional (quick service dry-cleaning booths, Espresso vendors, newspaper stands and Sushi bars) and symbolic (clocks in coffee bars showing different global time zones, escalators that transport the neck-tied worker direct from train to office foyer). Time is money, time is for investment, time is for work not play. Time is, like space, to be controlled, allowing minimal confrontation of the Other, and hence minimal distraction from the business at hand.

Various kinds of subterranean flow therefore exist here – some literally underground, some socially and temporally hidden – but which are left undisclosed by the resolutely positivist architecture. In turn, as Lefebvre notes, we render our own bodies and lived experience into fetishised abstractions, and have no critical thoughts. Because the space is classified, we tend to accept it at face value. We play Broomball, at the allotted time and in the allotted space, instead.

There have, of course, been some kinds of threat which even the City of London has been unable to ignore: the IRA bombs of 1992 and 1993, both within 400 metres of Broadgate, and the later attack on the Docklands and Canary Wharf in 1996, causing serious injuries, a
number of deaths, widespread devastation and, perhaps most importantly, an absolutely heart-gripping shock to the confidence of the financial sector. Even here, however, Broadgate itself was able to maintain its smug assertion of “no problem” — indeed, in the post-bomb aftermath its letting agents had the busiest weekend on record, rapidly off-loading large tranches of remaining office space that was suddenly and dramatically in urgent demand. Nonetheless, given the scale of bomb damage, it might have been expected that the scheme would follow the financial centre as a whole in adopting a series of measures to toughen the outer walls of its enclave — and certainly some buildings such as 1 Appold Street have strengthened their telecommunications rooms and used perforated metal blinds to reduce personal injury from flying glass. Individual buildings have also adopted a range of measures to control access both from outside and internally between departmental “Chinese Walls:” techniques like identity cards, electronic audit trails of internal movements, CCTV, turnstiles and biometric finger recognition are complemented by qualification and reference checks on workers, ever intrusive surveillance of working patterns and performance,\(^{43}\) and immigration and passport checks on foreign workers. Yet, because of these internalised building-boundaries, and because the “Ring of Steel” armed road-checks and the 24-hour “Camerawatch” CCTV networks organised by the City of London police have successfully (for the City) redirected both terrorism and armed robbery to other parts of London, in terms of the project’s overall boundaries Broadgate’s managers are content to rely on their own extensive system of private security guards and surveillance cameras.\(^{44}\)

The extant Broadgate’s boundaries are therefore free to be configured toward more social ends, creating a further but more subtle and social ring of defence within the City’s militaristic frontier, and in this they are close to the concerns identified by Mike Davis in his account of middle class fear and spatial apartheid in Los Angeles.\(^{45}\) Restrained yet distinctive signs mark this inner social cordon. Brass rails let into the pavement signify the edge of
the property line. Richard Serra’s massive 45-tonne public art sculpture “Fulcrum” signals the southern-most entrance to the scheme, while other public performs similar boundary-marking and culture-reinforcing roles: pieces include Jacques Lipchitz, “Bellerophon Taming Pegasus;” George Segal, “Rush Hour;” Stephen Cox, “Ganapathi & Davi;” Barry Flanagan, “Leaping Hare on Crescent & Bell;” Fernando Botero, “Broadgate Venus;” Xavier Corbero, “Broad Family;” Artigas, “Tile Fountain;” and Jim Dine, “Venus.” Various gates denote the transition from public to private realms, while armorial devices record the borough thresholds, and the significance of these latter signs should not be underestimated: the north-west area of the Broadgate scheme originally lay within the London Borough of Hackney, and on April 1st 1994 was transferred into the City of London jurisdiction in a deal whereby Hackney’s loss of future income from business rates was offset by massive one-off compensation payments.46

Illustr. XX.07
“Broadgate Venus,” Broadgate

Foremost among these various kinds of boundary-signifiers are a very curious device north of the Broadgate Arena, marking the northern edge of the first phases of the scheme near to 1 Appold Street. Designed by the artist Alan Evans,47 the “Go-Between Screens” seemingly offer the usual boundary control, being open during the day and closing at night to prevent unwanted access. Except that these are not normal gates, in that even when “closed” it is possible to walk around their sides, a two metre gap being left for this purpose. The boundary here is in fact not closed to the moving body, and operates in a manner other than physical exclusion or control. This feeling is reinforced by the artful materiality of the “Go-Between Screens” which, in contrast to the highly-machined hard granite surfaces of the surrounding buildings, are made of 24 forged mild steel panels, with line forging used to create a “soft” visibly-hammered surface.48 The monolithic granite elements of Cox’s
“Ganapathi & Davi,” just a few metres to the north, further aid in the construction of this artistic turnstile.

What the Broadgate gates do is less prevent the horizontal movement of the body and more challenge the self-perception of the visitor, at the moment they pass through the gate, as to whether they are allowed on to the site. As privatised urban space under corporate control, Broadgate in effect has no resident-owners, and everyone who enters the scheme is either a worker, visitor or trespasser. As Foucault notes of heterotopias, “[a]nyone can enter one of these heterotopian locations, but, in reality, they are nothing more than an illusion: one thinks one has entered and, by the sole fact of entering, one is excluded.”

To control this ambiguity, the combination of hard architecture, soft gates and other boundaries, unlike the blue screen of the Holy Trinity, work not so much to physically exclude the unwanted, but to provoke in their own mind, as they momentarily pass through the thickness of the edge, the questions, “Should I be here, and now? Do I have the right of passage?”

Since the nineteenth century there has been an intensification of self-regulation through social themes – sex, morality, work, the family.

Everyone was his own mentor, responsible for the repression of his own desires, the control of his instincts; the result was ascetism without an ascetic dogma, without anyone enforcing ascetism; the whipping boy and scapegoat being sexuality.

Here, then, is part of the increasing spatial concomitant to that process of self-regulation, wherein architecture asks us to regulate ourselves.

In this context, the temporality of the passage through the gates is also important, as it provides the momentary yet urgent actuality of this questioning process. The gates are not just the space but
the lived time through which the visitors check themselves in relation to Broadgate. As a result, space, temporality, body and identity are mutually confronted and constructed, in a version of Marc Augé’s “non-place as a turning back on the self” and a checking of the contractual relation between the individual and that non-place. More material and mental suggestion than brute physicality, this is the ultimate extension of the Benthamite project of surveillance, in which each and every citizen surveys and disciplines themselves.

What, we might ask, is the architectural mechanism by which this process occurs? The answer lies in seeing the building surface as mirror, for if architectural monumentality previously allowed each member of society an image of that membership, a “recognition effect” produced by a “experience a total being in a total space” and permitting “a continual back-and-forth between the private speech of ordinary conversations and the public speech of discourses, lectures, sermons, rallying-cries, and all theatrical forms of utterance,” then in abstract space such social processes have all but disappeared. Today, just as walking in the city affirms or interrogates the places of the city, making spaces go away and re-appear, the city simultaneously interrogates the walker in a manner analogous to Rachel Whiteread’s conception of the “wall looking back.” Its architecture is a reduction of the “real” to “the flatness of a mirror, of an image, of pure spectacle under an absolutely cold gaze.” Foucault notes of the mirror, that, as the space between the utopia and the heterotopia, it acts both to create the unreal space of the reflection, and to project an effect back on to the place of occupation, causing the viewer to turn back on themselves, “beginning to turn my eyes on myself and reconstitute myself where I am in reality.” The “Go-Between Screens” are thus a form of mirror, by which the visitor is ultimately returned not a view of Broadgate as object but a view of themselves playing a role within it.
What he is confronted with, finally, is an image of himself, but in truth it is a pretty strange image . . . The passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the toll-booth, at the check-out counter. Meanwhile, he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties. The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.60

The visitor reconfigures themselves in the normative character of Broadgate, such that, in a resonance with Disneyland’s staff, everyone becomes a “cast-member.”61 Just as people today are no longer expected to be individuals, but are expected to play a role,62 so here they check if they are on the right stage, whether the scenery fits their face, and vice-versa.

We might even consider that if Broadgate’s architecture, as mirror, acts as a kind of Sartrean “other’s look,” conferring spatiality on the viewer, then it too is looked back upon, the gaze being returned.63 This architecture is then absorbed within the self, dissolving the organic space of the body and the social space in which it lives, and entering that “betweenness of place” beyond objectivity and subjectivity.64 As such, the boundary is validated by the anthropological ritual of passing through65 – its presence does not act upon the visitor, but is a projection outward by that visitor considering themselves in relation to the architecture.

But of course there is also a power relation at work here; the visitor cannot, with any accurate political regard to their material positioning, project any presence that they might wish onto the boundary-architecture. Rather, the visitor understands and concedes to the face of abstract space of Broadgate, that face which, just as surely as if an armed sentinel stood guard at its entrance, reduces difference and enforces homogeneity through a configuration of its geometric formants (its reduction of three-dimensional space to two-dimensional surfaces), its optical formants (its dominant logic of visualisation) and its phallic formants (emphasising male power and latent violence).66 Thus where the geometric and the optical tend to reduce architecture to the void of the plan and to the flatness of
the mirror, the phallic enters into that space, filling it with “a plenitude of destructive force.”

The visitor’s body is hence rendered passive, the subject being forced to consider only through their eyes (against the “mirror” of the Broadgate buildings) and through carefully measured walking (via the space-time depth of the “Go-Between Screens”). In those few metres and seconds, the visitor’s body is slowed down at the very point of entrance into the citadel, seeing not just architecture but themselves and architecture together, entering into an unholy consensual agreement about their asymmetrical relation. Finally, the viewer/experiencer takes the architecture into themselves and, in doing so, yields to its impregnation, allowing it to grow inside and control them.

The “object-world” – the world of automobiles and highways, industrial and household goods – invades body and thought with the result that its alienated existence absorbs the alienated “subject.” What becomes of the dimension proper to the mind – that of criticism, refusal, negation? It withers and disappears.

This is not a space that is “read” via Barthian semiology, but which is experienced through the vision and the body in a highly circumscribed manner – a process of interiorisation and exteriorisation rather than of decoding.

Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered. It is produced with this purpose in mind: this is its raison d’être. The “reading” of space is thus merely a secondary and practically irrelevant upshot, a rather superfluous reward to the individual for blind, spontaneous and lived obedience.

Thus while abstract space may be characterised as the space of commodities, state, vast networks of banks, business centres, airports, motorways and information lattices, ultimately, abstract space and places like Broadgate are not defined by certain architectural configurations, by the absence of trees, by commercial centres and plazas, but by its negation of the perceptions of human
subjects and, above all, its negation of the differential space-time which they have the potential, as human subjects, to produce.\(^7\) It is a space of confused power rather than of a single message.\(^7\) It is space where very little is said, and creative life is stifled, and where the subject becomes rendered into a sign.

**Through the Golden Arch**

Boundaries are doubly useful to capitalism. First, boundaries become part of those extensive systems of power delineated by Foucault which enable capitalism to both control social relations and to render them more productively efficient.\(^7\) The two boundaries of the blue screen and the gates operate within this logic.

Second, boundaries aid in the accumulation of capital. History is full of architectures where the old frontal attitude of the boundary toward inside and outside allow this to happen directly—medieval walled cities, toll-gates, customs houses, train stations and so on. The postmodern boundary has a more indirect task to perform, contributing to that insidious process identified by Adorno, Debord, Marcuse and Lefebvre: the further intensification of capitalism into everyday lives through ever more subtle and penetrative techniques.\(^7\) On the hand, public spaces are increasingly being seen simply as opportunities for consumerism, with shops, boutiques and other retail outlets filling up all available space. Rail stations, for example, like airports before them, are now becoming more like shopping malls than places of transport. Through such processes, it always costs more and more to simply exist out of the home.

There are also other, more indirect forms of taxation on our lives. Advertisements are one of the most common forms of this process, lining the routes and edges of our journeys. The blue screen, for example, quickly became covered with bill posters and other advertisements, while in a re-assertion of the control of the surface the Post Office screened the screen, adding a trellis matrix over the blue in order to prevent even the body of the advertisement from settling on its property. This boundary, once a dividing line
betwixt public and private is now a piece of contested real estate all of its own.

Illustr. XX.09
Blue screen, Kingsway, with advertisements

Illustr. XX.10
Blue screen, Kingsway, with anti-advertisement trellis

Such events serve to highlight the continual search by advertisers to find new sites, new spaces and times in which to shout their message; consequently, we are now well-accustomed to advertisements inserting caesuras in our reading and television viewing, settling on our bodies through Benetton clothes, Nike shoes and Giorgio Armani spectacles, and even turning the sporting body into a pornographically mediated image of itself.75 The British athlete Linford Christie took this to a new extreme in the 1996 Olympics held in Atlanta, USA, wearing contact lenses with the logo of his main sponsor – Puma, the sports shoe company – during media appearances. Instead of the athletes eyes, viewers saw two small Puma cats – the commodification of the eye. The idea here was obviously to cash in on the media sensation these things produced – the sensation of the technological marvel – as much as on their direct effect as advertisements, as the Puma-eyes were not particularly legible except during close-ups. Nonetheless, they point towards an increasing tendency in clothing, and that now threatens to invade the body itself. All these things are indirect taxations on our experience of everyday life.

As the task for capitalism is to find ever new activities and needs to commodify, and ever more sites on which to promote them, Londoners have in recent years become accustomed to exactly this on their daily underground journeys, with advertisements having spread from platform walls, elevator sides and train interiors (and even whole train exteriors) onto the backs of tickets and ticket barriers.
These new micro-hoardings have now been supplemented by an even greater heightening of the capitalist project of intensifying commodification. Appearing first at Liverpool Street and Tottenham Court Road stations in central London, this phenomenon has rapidly spread to any tube station with a nearby McDonald’s. As the traveller leaves the station they are confronted with the commodified staircase, a set of steps on which the risers have been transposed into a wall of advertisements, indicating both the presence and direction of the nearby fast-food burger restaurant. Unlike conventional advertisements, these are only unavoidable, as they must be looked at in order to judge and negotiate the steps safely. As Lefebvre points out in Éléments de rythmanalyse, the rhythm of the body, largely unconscious and unknown to the negotiator of urban space among other rhythms of sound and rumour, becomes briefly explicit whenever acts like crossing a street are undertaken and when “a calculation must be made of the number of steps to be taken.” Here, the body has to pass up and over the advertisement, the paced calculation now necessarily involving consideration of McDonald’s signs. The crucial components here are distance and its negotiation through movement, for it is here that we confront architecture as human creation rather than cold, crystallised form. The commodified steps recognise this movement, and exploit its open dialogue with architecture. At this level, they insert themselves directly into the line of sight, working through the eye/body co-ordination of the traveller as they move around the city. These micro-hoardings are also directly instructive – the golden arches being accompanied by a wall of arrows telling the traveller where to go as soon as they leave the station – and repetitive – telling you over and over again, riser after riser, golden arch after golden arch, that the great American hamburger is but a few metres away.

Illust. XX.11
McDonald’s advertisements, Tottenham Court Road station
Moreover, like the Broadgate gates, they also work through the mind of the traveller and in a particularly subtle manner, as “ambient advertising.” Advertising messages have already been developed into a sophisticated form whereby they seek to avoid being either opaque or boring to the viewer; instead, advertising is explicitly cryptic, in order to provoke a thought in the mind of the viewer. In these McDonalds advertisements, this technique finds its spatial and temporal equivalent, as the exact moment of intrusion is precisely judged in time as well as space, invading the psychology of the traveller at the very moment of decision-making, and in a manner that recalls Foucault’s identification of the “materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals.” Just as they leave the semi-somnambulant passivity of the tube station and escalator journey and make the transition to the decisive activity of the busy urban street, the advert recognises this move, selecting this space and this moment of awakening awareness into which to inject its message. As one manager of Transportation Display Incorporated, responsible for London Underground advertising space, explains, “[t]he intrusive element is a plus point . . . Ambient media effectively means ambush media. People have to walk around a corner and be startled to see it.”

Nor is this kind of ambient advertising confined to the boundaries of stations. Other moments of the changing state of body and mind are also being identified and exploited by advertisers. One such campaign for Vaseline underarm deodorant, orchestrated by the Initiative Media group, places its advertisements inside tube carriages during summer months.

We are hitting consumers in exactly the right environment, and at exactly the right time. Tubes are sticky, especially in the summer, and we are catching people just as they reach up for a strap – just the time they will be thinking about body odour.

Other examples have included bus stops that spray “Impulse” perfume at passers-by, advertisements on shop floors and ceilings,
advertisements at eye level over men’s urinals, and others on petrol pump handles, supermarket trolleys, eggs, car park barriers and even inside golf holes. The boundary is a moment as well as a space of commodification, a thought as well as a material presence, a body as well as an object.

Significantly, the nature of the boundary also changes in this condition, mutating from the modernist conception of cross-roads as meeting place to the postmodern interchange where nobody intersects. The crossroads offers a carefully mannered sequence of stops and starts, of movements and waitings, of looking and listening – what Lefebvre calls a “strict harmony” of alternating rhythms. The train station as intersection offers similar rhythms, but they are not coalesced into a single harmonic pattern; instead there is a continual exchange of bodies from one part of the concourse to another, creating a swarm of multi-movements, multi-settlings seemingly devoid of any greater coherence. As such, the advertisement has to exploit this change of rhythm, on the one hand using old techniques aimed at predictable movements and sight-lines (the billboard advertisement near the indicator board) but on the other hand using new techniques to intercept the less predictable, more diverse patterns of the interchange (micro-hoardings of all kinds). Furthermore, because the movements are so diverse, this is also to some extent a remarking, even a creation of a threshold where previously none had existed. This is a commodification of a boundary as an enactment of that boundary qua commodity.

If capitalism brings the boundary into being through the act of commodification then it also, in turn, transposes the human subject from passenger to “customer,” the person defined less because of what they are doing and more because they are a purchaser with money to spend. This is that centrality of the capitalist city where exchange takes over from use, and where spatial practices, ideas and experiences are subordinate to economic logic.

What is said and written, comes before everything else: it is the world of commodities, of the language of commodities, of the glory and extension of exchange value.
It tends to absorb use value in exchange and exchange value.\textsuperscript{85}

Indeed, the abstraction of the purchasing-subject into “customer” further suggests that they are merely an element, a passive human body as mechanism for symbolic exchange, the body-space concomitant of the “McDonaldization” of society which renders everyday life into a form of flexible standardisation,\textsuperscript{86} and so part of Baudrillard’s “genetic code, an unchanging radiating disk of which we are no more than interpretive cells.”\textsuperscript{87} If “money goes through circuits”\textsuperscript{88} there is also a spatiality and corporeality to this circulation: each person becomes simply a flow of money, a return of wages into the circuit of capital; and architecture as boundary becomes a channel of communication along which money surges. In this context, it is unsurprising that equally forceful and unavoidable micro-hoardings have also sprung up in another kind of urban site: the plethora of cards advertising prostitutes’ services that now plaster the interior of every phone booth in central London. Sex reduced to sign, desire next to telephone, bodily need arranged via communication cable — each such boundary-body encounter is a pinprick into the body of blood money, each message/needle releasing a tiny amount of flow.

| Illust. XX.12 | Phonebox with prostitutes’ advertisements, Hyde Park |

Such things are the true postmodern boundary, both controlling and commodifying the urban domain. It is not then, as Paul Virilio mistakenly claims, that “telematics replaces the doorway,”\textsuperscript{89} but that the doorway is being ever developed in new physical forms and socio-spatial configurations. This architecture is that of the everyday, operating at the most quotidian of sites and through the subconscious and conscious spatial decisions of the urban dweller. “A boundary,” stated Martin Heidegger, “is not that at which something stops, but . . . that from which something begins its essential unfolding.”\textsuperscript{90} The boundary emerges as not a plane but a
zone, not physical but socio-spatial, not a division of things but a negotiation of flows. The boundary is a thick edge. So is architecture.
References


This section of the essay has benefited from work carried out by students at the School of Architecture and Interior Design, University of North London, and at the Bartlett, University College London. I am particularly grateful to A. Keightley-Moore, N. Murray, S. Warren and Warren Whyte.


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53. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 220.

54. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 221.

55. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 224.


58. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 287.


60. Augé, Non-Places, p. 103.


67. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 287.

68. Lefebvre, Explosion, p. 27. Lefebvre is here following Herbert Marcuse.

69. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 143.

70. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 53.

71. Lefebvre, Production of Space, pp. 50-1.

72. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 142.


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