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*Envisioning the culture, politics
and space of the DMZ*

Architecture as a Visionary Beacon

The goal of the thesis is to envision the future using architecture as the argument. It is not an exercise of fantastical illustration or a utopian daydreaming. Instead, the thesis aspires to Le Corbusier's 'The City of To-morrow' or Lebbeus Woods's 'San Francisco Bay'-- visions that were rooted in the problem-solving and enrichment of society. Debate over the feasibility or practicality will be expected and encouraged as is with any vision. Through my understanding of architectural discretion as well as history and current world-wide events providing context, this thesis will act as a visionary beacon--experiments of potential solutions--to the discussion of our future.



SITE



The site under study is the span of the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which poses as a buffer of “No Man’s Land” between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The Military Demarcation Line (MDL) runs relatively along the 38th parallel, splitting the Korean Peninsula in halves since the end of World War II. Since then, the Koreans have been in stalemate with heavy military investment on both sides of the border. The DMZ has been described as the “scariest place on Earth”

**Exposition to narrative: Diagram/Timeline of History leading up to the division of Korea*

Areas of Interest:

1. Joint Security Area / “Truce Village”

-Located within the village of Panmunjom, it is the only portion in the DMZ where ROK and DPRK physically connect. It is the site of diplomatic engagements.



2. Daeseong-dong / Kijong-dong

-peace villages of ROK and DPRK respectively. Daeseong-dong is the only civilian habitation within the Southern borders of the DMZ. It is an agricultural town held in high regards from the ROK government. On the other hand, Kijong-dong is referred to as ‘Propaganda Village’ as it is believed to be an uninhabited prop.

3. Kaesong Industrial Region

-Located in DPRK, this industrial center acts as a place of collaborative economic development between the two Koreas. It has a direct road and rail access to South Korea, with Seoul being only an hour’s drive.

**Map highlighting areas of interest*



PROGRAM



PROPOSAL

This issue is important to me, personally. My parents tell me that at a very young age I told family and friends that I would be the one to reunite the Koreas. Even at a young age, I recognized the unfortunate state of a cultural group divided by war. Now, after having lived in the U.S. most of my life, this issue is still at large to me, but perhaps from a more objective (international) perspective. I wish to re-imagine the possibilities of filing in the void (DMZ) as the steps to reunification.

2 Stages of Proposal:

Architecture as Rehabilitation: The first part of the project would study how architecture could act as a mediator between spatial and political conflict. The program for such architecture is yet to be determined, but spatially it would still divide the two countries like a wall. Similar to how the Berlin Wall stood as a tangible symbol of the division of Germany, this wall would represent the physical acknowledgement of the division of Korea (while bringing the issue to an international platform). The first step to rehabilitation is to heal the scars (the no-man terrains of the 38th parallel). The DMZ presents many challenges such as the undocumented tens of thousands (if not millions) of mines and uninhabitable land that stretches 160 miles. Although the program of the Wall is yet unclear, its primary purpose is to promote dialogue between the two countries. There are still many families whose members were separated during the Korean War. Perhaps this wall provides an opportunity of meeting/seeing each other, etc.

Architecture as Reconstruction: The second part is to consider the role of the DMZ after a reunification. Again, the architecture in this space will have to account for a gradual reconnection between two countries that have developed at different economic rates during the last 60 years. The main idea is that the architectural components used to construct the Wall will be re-utilized to construct a Bridge/City(?). This architecture would ultimately integrate to the war-torn terrains of the 38th parallel and provide secure connection for the north and south.

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