

## **Crisis of Boundaries, Notes on the Suburban *Novum***

Session 19.3 “In-between” and “postsuburban” forms

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### **Abstract**

Boundaries and boundary-drawing, a classic geopolitical and urban practice, finds itself in a state of crisis. Boundary-marking as both an administrative and cultural exercise is more fraught in contemporary politics. Boundaries as interfaces and social situations challenge the definition and identity of suburbs, creating a situation in which not only does suburbia lose identity but the divisions that distinguish the urban and rural are undermined.

### **Preamble: Defining Borders**

For the purposes of my argument, the term **border** (from Portuguese and Spanish via the Old French *bordeure* - ‘edge’) presently denotes territorial or material cases - at least in English, the word refers to a state border, the border of a diagram, a flowerbed planted along the edge of a property. In contrast, **boundaries** mark a border or edge. A marker stone (*bourne*), a line on a map, or even the result of an equation mark the ‘bounds’ of an area. If borders are material, boundaries are semiotic. They describe a broader set of distinctions that can be either material or virtual (ie. immaterial) – although the term is often used synonymously with ‘border’ (*Grenze*) and to describe edge-conditions (*Rand*) more generally. ‘Boundary’ originates from the Medieval Latin *bodina* via the Old French *bodne*. In everyday usage depending on local circumstances, these two terms are differently weighted in contemporary experience. In places such as the southern United States, ‘the Border’ - the US-Mexico border - with its fence and crossing points is a specific thing and a place which takes precedence over notions of cultural boundaries.

Boundaries include the limits of phenomena, fields and classes. They are part of the intellectual apparatus of distinctions between foundational categories such as nature and society, human and technological, rational and irrational and so on enshrined in modernity. For thinkers such as Ulrich Beck, as the status of these distinctions between value spheres has been eroded such that the characteristically ‘modern’ is changed into a ‘reflexive’, ‘re-modernising’ or ‘second’ modernity (Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003; Latour 2003). Similarly, for Bruno Latour, this is a qualitative shift, although for Beck a matter of substantive change. The status of borders and boundaries, is negotiable. North American society operates with

the existence of boundaries whose artificial character is freely recognised, but which are

recognised as legitimate [not ironic] boundaries all the same...reflexive modernity exists to the extent that fictive as-if boundaries are institutionalised into systematic procedures that affect everyday life (Beck et al., 2003: 20).

This is not a matter of a suspension of boundaries and borders; rather, inviolable borders become harder to maintain. In the context of political and economic challenges to the sanctity of procedures for generating trusted knowledge, challenges to the authority of experts, and to the legitimacy of institutions of governance, the enforcement of borders and boundary-marking becomes more fraught. Hypothetically, 'There is instead a multiplicity of inclusionary and exclusionary practices, and, according to context, a multiplicity of ways that things are bounded off' (Ulrich Beck et al., 2003: 24). Boundary-drawing is more obvious and less taken-for-granted. Thus, it is more likely to be renegotiated and to be contested.

### **Territorial Borders and Border zones**

A border is a line, a limit and an edge. It is also therefore a border zone with a border culture that acts as a focus for anxieties. Borders are marginal spaces: zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability, where contradictory discourses overlap, or where discrepant kinds of meaning-making converge (Lownhaupt-Tsing 1994:279). In the 1990s, the border culture of the US-Mexico *frontera* defining Chicano ethnic identity was theorised in terms of linguistic marginality (Anzaldua 1987:57). This internal life is performative, virtual, and determines the actual operation and effects of borders. But there is a longstanding history to this border-as-virtual space: consider the burlesque image of Charlie Chaplin in the film *Gold Rush*, in which, at one point he zigzags along the Mexico-US border, pursued by the police on one side and bandits on the other. This surreal image of the border as the only safe territory hints at the different semiosis within the border-as-interface. It derives something of its surreal power from the impossibility of actually inhabiting a border line itself. It is instead a virtual 'reality'. Borders are normatively defined as 'to-be-crossed', not travelled along. If they are followed, their status changes into virtual, interstitial, or liminoid spaces of 'inter-action'. Surreality prevails when the border-as-interface reveals that it is a sort of virtual and semiotic force field which translates, connecting and disconnecting the codes of adjacent systems and forms willy-nilly. How does the reflexive modernisation thesis deal with semiotic marginality and liminality of dynamic, interactive borders?

A border constitutes space as territory. As such, borders are usually conceived spatially from within a jurisdiction, and are conceived functionally as limits when a jurisdiction, phenomenon or category ends. Even where their precise location is arbitrary or subject to negotiation, borderlines are a location and locus of political certainty arbitrarily imposed on an often-recalcitrant topography. Without borders, there is no territory (Shields 1992). To the extent that borders are inelastic, they establish the fixity of this shape. To the extent that they are porous to different flows, they establish the degree to which a territory is exclusive (see also Paasi, 2002: 140).

There has been a broader tendency to contrast territorial borders as part of spatial assemblages of ‘places’ against immaterial and dynamic ‘spaces of flows’ (cf. Castells, 1996; Sassen, 2002). But geographers recognise that borders are not just material or *concrete* (see Table I; Paasi, 2003) but a combinatory - physically traced on the land and in juridical texts, governmental practice and cultural symbols. The intangibility of borders must be recognised for they may be moved and may be marked, reinforced or signaled in different material ways but they remain the borders of this or that state or territory. Borders may be erased, even superseded in a manner that erodes their relevance even in abstract theoretical terms (Shields, 1997). But if not forgotten, a border retains a (2) *virtual* existence which holds the potential to be actualised in the future.

### Registers

Borders are assemblages with four registers. They are technologies. The border is an abstract, material and virtual interface, a membrane that consists as much in fences or riverbanks as it consists of *abstract* concepts and political rhetoric, of ways of operating detection equipment, verifying passports, and maintaining databases. These allow the border to close or open against particular flows.

	<b>Real</b>	<b>Possible</b>
	:	:
<b>Ideal</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Virtual (2)</i></p> <p>Status Interface, Intangibles, Knowledges of Citisenships, Identities Sense of (In)security</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Abstract (3)</i></p> <p>Rhetoric, Representations, Theories and concepts of the border, Information flows</p>
	:	:
<b>Actual</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Concrete present (1)</i></p> <p>Fence, Gate, Actions, Bodies, Goods Danger...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Probable (4)</i></p> <p>Percentage outcomes, trends Risk...</p>

**Table I. Ontology of the Border**

	<b>Real</b>	<b>Possible</b>
<b>Ideal</b>	: <i>Virtual (ideally-real)</i> Dividing effect Categorical division	: <i>Abstract (possible-ideal)</i> Concept, Indicator, Cartographic convention...
<b>Actual</b>	: <i>Concrete present (actually-real)</i> Line on a map, Marker, Welcome signage	: <i>Probable (actual-possibility)</i> Predictable limit

**Table II: Ontology of Boundaries<sup>1</sup>**

As algorithms borders are technologies that produce tendencies and respond to risks which are understood in *probabilistic* terms (such as recognising citizens, screening invasive plants and organisms).<sup>2</sup> These various aspects respond to, for example, flows of abstract data, tangible and intangible bodies which pass through or are turned-back at the border-interface. Borders are thus more than material and involve more than conceptual abstractions. They are also virtual and probable (see Table I).

### **Porous-ness**

Early in the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin characterised the City of Naples as having multiple entry points, penetrated by many openings that rendered the city like the porous volcanic *tufa* it is built on (Benjamin and Laci 1925 []; A. Benjamin 2005) Borders as zones of entry may be dispersed throughout a territory as a continuous set of interfaces with an outside or

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1 This four-part ontology is a framework through which the internal dynamics of complex objects can be described. Each aspect or ‘register’ is a spatio-temporal mode. Some highlight past tradition; others are oriented toward future effects even while their functionality in the present moment is paramount. ‘Over-dimensioned’ in time and space, borders cannot be sufficiently analysed in Enlightenment terms such as real versus ideal - or even more narrowly, material versus abstract. However, the categories making up these old dualisms - such as material versus abstract can be usefully reset into a broader framework if this is also understood to be dynamic. This allows aspects to be juxtaposed, to be understood as co-present ‘registers’ which may undercut or negate each other and affect the functioning of the border or of a boundary drawing projects or discourse.

2The discovery and mathematical exploration of the probable is one of the most significant contributions of the social sciences to civilisation, but all the while the Virtual was not only neglected but mis-recognised as Abstract. The result: understandings of the Actual improved, but understanding of the Possible was bifurcated and knowledge of the Ideal and of the Real (these are not opposition) were both impoverished.

an alter. The case of wireless virtuality foregrounds exactly this issue where the significant limits of the city are not so much a periurban edge as they may be between the lived spaces of the city and its communication space of internet devices.

in the Porous City the fast and the categorical demarcation between inside and outside, between private and communal life, between the skin and the body, begins to blur....

Porosity, moreover, is a psychocorporeal boundary of space, expressive of the fragile state of the body. As Victor Burgin remarks, this image of space is latent in all of us: "The pre-Oedipal, maternal, space: the space, perhaps, that Benjamin and Lacis momentarily refound in Naples. In this space it is not simply that the boundaries are 'porous', but the subject itself is soluble. This space is the source of bliss and terror, of the 'oceanic' feeling, and of the feeling of coming apart; just as it is at the origin of feelings of being invaded, overwhelmed, suffocated." (Burgin cited in A. Benjamin 2005 online).

### **Border memory and claims**

Borders and nations are lived, intangible-but-real 'things' (Conversi, 1995; Rose, 1995). Ontologically, such immaterialities are virtual, in the strictest sense of the term (Shields, 2003) which are performatively actualised via embodied behaviours and concrete objects.<sup>3</sup> More simply put, the soft operational culture of a border, the habitual routines of boundary-drawing are the real 'meat' of this subject, not the concrete exo-skeleton of gates, fences, signage or border posts. This is a level of detail that is essential to develop the reflexive quality of borders or boundary-practices which evolve and as technologies, are able to learn from mobilities and relations that cross them. This points to a certain memory capacity of borders and boundaries which goes beyond demarcation between zones or categories, for example, the scarring graffiti or bullet marks on a Berlin Wall.

If the 'truth' of an object lies somewhere within a dynamic of defining registers which are abstract, virtual, concrete and even probabilistic, what of boundaries - 'signs' of borders? These are even more strongly virtual, and by no means merely abstractions or representations. The significance of a dotted line on a map is not its own inky materiality. It abstractly represents a border somewhere. But the history of colonialism is full of examples where lines drawn on maps were figured on the ground only much later. Such lines are more than representations or boundary-marking; they are virtual borders which prefigure concrete lines on the landscape (Shields, 1997). As will be argued below, *boundaries can be understood as both spaces and also*

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3 Strictly speaking, the term virtual denotes an intangible object - 'real but not actual, ideal but not abstract' in Proust's memorable turn-of-phrase. Only since the mid 1980s has it been widely used to refer to computer-mediated communication and digitally-generated simulations. The recent usage revives the older meaning of virtual, with its roots in the Latin *Virtu*, but it obscures the wider importance and history of these phenomena, even as digital technologies returned the virtual to the agenda after being repressed by dualisms contrasting the concrete and the abstract obscured (see Shields, 2003).

*as infinitely thin dividing lines (bifurcations)* between radically different states –folds in a plane -- between the ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’, to give one example. The fold is the most basic of topological transformations. Like a folded piece of paper, as entities cross the vertice they are precipitously reoriented in a different geometry of relationships even though they continue on and in the exact same surface and set of flows. These edges are topological in the sense that they deal with transformations that occur without fundamental ruptures or divisions between, for example, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.

If boundaries have any difference from borders, it is their greater abstraction and virtuality as signs whereas borders are strongly material edges. Boundaries may consist of abstract economic distinctions or lie between value spheres, or socioeconomic groups (bands of income or age to suit the purposes of analysis). Or, boundaries may be virtual: cultural distinctions of taste, affiliation and status. As virtualities, these are not known directly, but through their effects or the effect of transgressing them (Shields, 2003).

We know boundaries through their effects.

This virtual character – something known through its effects -- is of seminal importance to any border or boundary: the border is not of interest merely as a line but as a line with effects. Without an ontology which includes the virtual, these effects – the changes in status etc. – can only seem to be supernatural, for the scale of their effects goes well beyond what one would credit to a social construction, such as an ideology, a representation or a social convention. Recall that virtuality means ‘real but ideal’ – we are dealing not with flimsy abstract ideas but something of the durability of an institution or culture. And of the same flexibility: for it is the virtual quality of a boundary that raises it to the stature of more than mere ink or a division in a herb garden, that allows it to be repositioned yet remain ‘the same’ boundary, and allows it to evolve in its functionality yet remain ‘the same’, giving borders and boundaries the sort of historicity that is being claimed in reflexive modernisation theses. I am not positing an abstract quality, an essence, Platonic Idea, or spirit of boundaries but acknowledging an aspect of the *reality* of borders and boundaries.

Boundaries have a range of significance as limit-objects (*boundaries*). But a boundary was once a material limit which marked ‘the edge’ beyond which civilisation ceased to exist, or beyond which sailing ships did not return, and perhaps even ‘fell off’ the world. The terror of these absolute limit-boundaries persists in the popular imaginary. They are routinely tapped by disaster movies: beyond a certain point, lie catastrophic phase changes, unmapped spaces, and formless monstrosities. By contrast, abstract natural divisions are the centerpiece of contemporary culture. In these cases, measurements indicate bifurcations at which systems shift from one state to another state of dynamic equilibrium - from solid to gas or from one crystalline geometry to another. Boundaries have their own historicity as aspects of all-encompassing cultural formations of spatio-temporal practice, cognition and imagination (Shields, 1999;

Lefebvre, 1991).

An example of these different boundary topologies in suburbia can be found in the case of boundaries which are constructed by giving a social significance to geographical barriers such as freeways, rivers, farmland and greenbelts. These may define suburbs, however perceived divisions such as major roads equally allow any neighbourhood to function as an enclave. For suburban youth, for example, residence in a given neighbourhood is an easy basis of both social affiliation and identity. Futrell and Simi refer to these as 'prefigurative spaces' of 'small, locally-bound, interpersonal networks where members engage in political socialization, boundary marking, and other cultural practices' (Futrell & Simi, 2004 p. 17). That is, material and perceived boundaries in the landscape support local 'boundary marking, and other cultural practices [that] allow members to participate in relationships that 'prefigure'" their desired vision for social life and the city on a broader scale (Futrell and Simi 2004 p. 16 cited in [Culton & Holtzman, 2010](#) p.275). These boundaries are as much identifications around a specific area as they are boundaries against dominant culture or subordinate groups. The extreme example would be the geographies of exclusion created by gated communities and 'condominos' ([Sibley, 1995](#)).

Boundary drawing is spatial and visual semiosis which describes an encompassing vision of a set of elements or an area or expanse, with a particular stress on the limits of these sets. Boundary drawing is a matter of deciding on what or where is included and what is excluded. It is an aspect of relational, aesthetic reason (in the Kantian sense) and a form of judgement and discrimination or distinction in Bourdieu's terms. Beck and Latour include examples such as gender, race and the nation-state to give examples boundary-drawing as a canonical gesture of modernity. Such boundaries and categorical distinctions are foundational moments to any social order that would be understood as such through the lense of Euro-American social sciences. However, this is also to say that boundaries are less 'modern' than social - what matters here are processes for boundary-drawing, which may be ritual, derived from tradition or a charismatic leader, and/or may be the outcome of institutional processes. This suggests a general shift in not just the legitimacy of borders but in the authority and semiotics of boundaries as discursive entities.

In the discourse of reflexive modernisation, border and boundary are not only interchanged rhetorically to relieve the reader. Each term is used in ways that accentuate and blend different internal registers, sliding between them in each sentence - just as we do in everyday conversation to convey the vividness of things. We can see this in a comment that 'fictive as-if boundaries are institutionalised into systematic procedures that affect everyday life' (Ulrich Beck et al., 2003:20). Abstract 'fiction' is realised in virtual objects (if you permit me to figure 'boundary' as such in this case) and is actualised in concrete practices and 'procedures'. Their probable effects on an idealisation - 'as if boundaries' - which combines virtuality (banal routine) and abstraction (everydayness is a theoretical construction) is presented rhetorically as an actual

impact on a concrete thing, 'everyday life'.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, there is a suggestive 'virtual abolition of borders' (Ulrich Beck et al., 2003:17).

The uniqueness of a boundary is that it is a line which not only divides but which, if crossed, induces a sudden or extraordinary change in the traversing body or object. Any line can be 'drawn in the sand'. But the significance of boundaries is that they mark out two distinct areas of qualitative difference. A small movement in space, across the borderline or boundary, is associated with a change much greater than would otherwise be expected from such a minimal movement. A minimum of effort results in a maximum of distinction (O'Connor 1997). Crossing boundaries, sudden transitions occur in bodies which might otherwise be unexpected. Bodies move from being insiders to outsiders or foreigners; objects go from being produce to being contraband (Shields 1996). As an interface or 'junctural zone' (Van Loon, 2000), boundaries are not only spatial but are experienced as temporal instants which have a unique and special status: they are the critical moments of opposed situations, spaces, territories and states. Borders and borderlines share this virtual quality as events that 'happen' in the crossing. Since the space traversed in the interface or 'inter-action' (or the space between the different actions) is infinitesimal (approaching the limit or degree-zero), the distinctions that are generated by this *leap across the boundary* are virtual and qualitative (i.e. different in kind) rather than concrete and probable (quantitative, i.e. different in degree or measure). Crossing a border, my status changes far more than my weight!

Yet in the equivocal semiotics of the interface, infinitesimal distance exists only to suddenly increase (explode or rapidly expand) into infinitely large liminal distances/differences or situations charged with ambiguity. Different states of bodies or objects are required as they pass through the boundary-as-interface<sup>5</sup>. Beyond the liminoid and the marginal, this raises questions of the syncretic and of boundaries as indicators of 'translations.' Borders are active translation technologies which mediate between phases, states. If a dynamism describes concrete mobilities that traverse the boundary as an interface, there is also a virtual, internal dynamic which operates on its own semiotic terms. In other words, interfacial boundaries have their own specific rules and semiotic orders, distinct from the fields or systems which they lie between. How might the

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4 Rather than dignifying this as a critique, this rhetorical performance is banal. It reflects the strategies we have at hand for communicating vitality of our world and tactics by which we attempt to not only understand but to 'get ahead' of the flow of events - on anticipatory power see O'Connor, 2003; Anderson, 2002.

5 Deleuze refers to this as a '*skeleton-space*' because so much significant seems to be missing, like a skeleton where organs and flesh are missing. There are, 'missing intermediaries, heterogeneous elements which jump from one to the other, or which interconnect directly. It is no longer an ambient space [of flows] but a vectorial space, a vector-space, with temporal distances. It is no longer the encompassing stroke of a great contour, but the broken stroke of a line of the universe, across the holes. The vector is the sign of such a line. It is the genetic sign of the new action-image, whilst the index was the sign of its composition....' (Deleuze, 1989:168; Shields 1997b).



reflexive modernisation thesis accommodate this approach which sees the boundary as a interface, rather than as like a border - only marginal edge or effect of a more significant system? The internal logic of borders and boundaries is revealed through stressing their virtuality and probabilistic registers. This takes us beyond mere claims that borders are cultural, political or that they have their own historicity.

The inter-dependency between actual material and ideal cultural boundaries is that between barriers in the material landscape and divisions between categories. Lefebvre grants the material pre-eminence in a trialectic between material practices of space and phenomena, narrative discourses on space and the framing quality of imagined spaces of possibility ([Lefebvre, 1991](#) p.357). However, in so far as a neighbourhood is an imagined space it has identification and performative qualities. In practice, this can yield a boundary breakdown between the ideal and actual or the discursive and material that makes the suburb much less easy to define by drawing boundaries in one register or in one classificatory schema. Boundary breakdowns means that suburbia becomes monstrous (formless, *monstrere*): a cyborg (cf. [Haraway, 1990](#)).

Are suburbs boundaries or borders -- and as such, are they peripheries or edges? And of what? the very possibility of defining and thereby reflecting on our experience of suburbanism and the phenomena of peri-urban environments is dependent on the construction of suburbia as a category and its contrast with other environmental and spatial categories. Heidegger and others argue that boundary drawing is constitutive in categorization. 'A boundary is not that a which something stops but, ...the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing (Heidegger, 1975 p.155). Boundaries are acts of differentiation and identification (Latour, 1988 p.169) that allow us to establish the terms of relationships between identities (Derrida, 1986; Law, 1994; Shields, 1991). These edges understood as Euclidean geometric surfaces.

### **Categorical Divisions**

The association of borders with boundaries risks oversimplifying discussions of boundaries and appeals mainly to the constitution of territorial states and individuals' bodies (Ulrich Beck et al., 2003:17). It does this by invoking a physical discourse of 'drawing', 'making' and 'building' - terms which are more often understood in relation to territorial borders.

The emphasis on unstable boundaries repeats well-known spatial descriptions of postmodernisation and globalisation as involving both continuities and discontinuities in the 'cognitive mapping' and spatial practices of advanced capitalist societies (Jameson, 1984; Flitner & Heins, 2002). Boundaries are socially-constructed as shorthand representations. Borders actualise virtualities such as sociocultural divisions. Both borders and boundaries are therefore intimately connected to the epistemological politics and to the disposition of knowledges (Sibley, 1995). What we need to know is what registers shift within specific aspects of cultural boundary-marking and within liminoid, 'interfacial' practices.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Elsewhere I consider the changeable and unstable quality of 'boundary objects'. See Keil and

Categorical boundaries are often associated with territorial borders in a form of spatial shorthand (Shields, 1991: Ch. 7). Foundational to modernity is not just the drawing of boundaries but the *association* of this practice of spatial division with specific cultural significance such as the border of the nation state. Culturally, borders once established geographical and historical forms of inclusion and exclusion which correlated the local with insiders, presence and the known while the distant is correlated with outsiders, the foreign and absent (Shields, 1992). In modernist spatialisations, borders are thus part of a set of metaphoric and metonymic boundary structure. This allows extended literary conceits to work back and forth in culture. Thus, inside and near have been to outside and distant as inclusion is to exclusion.<sup>7</sup> The entanglement of the spatial forms of inside-outside and near-far with the absolute binary of presence and absence (existing and nonexisting) is akin to the mixing of notions of boundary with a border. This spatialisation makes boundaries into limit conditions which are ideal for founding fixed categorical identities and thereby stabilising the dynamism between the different ontological registers of border and boundaries in an equilibrium.<sup>8</sup>

Especially significant has been the division between nature and society. This is a constitutive part of the institutional order of modern societies. He casts the changes in this boundary as a question of ‘diminishing the efficacy of the pure nature/pure culture boundary’. This extends from developments in the biological and life sciences to micro-technological interventions in the human body. Distinctions are not only de-naturalised and have to be worked-up or are the matter of explicit choice and struggle, ‘More exactly the hard *labour of boundary making* between the two will become highly visible - as visible as the building of a fence around a park to make it “wild”...’ (Latour, 2003). ‘Efficacy’ signals a situation not unlike a child’s sand wall built at the beach: continuous building is necessary as waves eat away at it. However, Latour emphasises human - social - agency of ‘boundary making’ and doesn’t do the hard labour of inquiry into the causitive powers of the boundary-as-interface. Beck presents a broader discussion, and differentiates between borders and boundaries when he hypothesises that these become ‘not boundaries so much as a variety of attempts to draw boundaries. In a similar manner, border conflicts are transformed into conflicts over the drawing of borders’ (Ulrich Beck et al., 2003: 17). What are the implications of a shift out of equilibrium to more dynamism in the exchanges and mobilities between the ontological registers? It would appear correct to highlight the

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Shields, Suburban Boundaries in *Suburban Constellations* forthcoming.

7 Presence and absence are no longer so strictly spatialised and actualised as near and far, and thus no longer fit so perfectly (if they ever did) with inside and outside. Instead, forms of the virtual reappear, such that virtual presence is now not only technically feasible but culturally acceptable, prompting political debates over virtual membership and partial inclusion.

8 This entanglement dates back to the Latinisation of Parmenides and of Aristotle’s discussions of presence (*parousia* - e.g.. Aristotle, 1970 IV:§222a). As Derrida notes, in the Latin *presentia* it becomes ‘impossible to distinguish rigorously between presence as *Anwesenheit* (presence here) and presence as *Gegenwärtigkeit* (presence now)’ (1970:90-1). Truth becomes a form of presence. Heidegger’s analyses mark perhaps the high point of this metaphysical tradition.

internal dynamism between registers such as the performative actualisation of the virtual in the concrete. Hypothetically, boundary-drawing is not just 'more fraught', borders less legitimated: the internal dynamism of both borders and boundaries is heightened, bringing their less tangible registers to our attention.

The policing of social margins and controlling everyday life as a means of forcing difference back into clear distinctions between identity and non-identity, social being and nothingness. However, this undermines the efficacy of boundaries by restricting their vitality as active interfaces. It forces a creative socio-geographical dynamic back into a more positively differentiated grid more strongly marked by judgements of presence and absence (of civility, of whiteness, of wealth, of normality). Reflexive modernity is a diagnosis of a situation in which bodies and populations no longer take their identity from their location within fixed borders such that citizenship and belonging are a norm. But it also risks being the academic filigree on a normative project to legitimate new norms of boundary drawing and new border practices. This amounts to an effort to reground the institutional system of the state - a modernist construct. This should be critiqued as a proposal that the virtuality of objects and social arenas be more subtly and microscopically governed, potentially foreclosing areas of freedom and creativity.

### **Suburban *Novum***

The suburb is also an edge in time, an expanding shockwave of the urban which blurs but overwrites the rural in a new relation with the urban: no longer the countryside but the suburban. Suburbs represent relative newness, the sprawl of development into areas with an established organisation of space, such as a forest or a rural area. Suburbs are a border in time with the future and a border in the spatial area of influence of an urban core. The suburban is often associated with the new, with a space-time under construction. While often importuned as static, banal environments, suburbs are zones of great change and activity during their construction and the investment of ongoing labour in cultivation and maintenance of an environment which is, while not densely urban, artificial in character.

A familiar trope of suburbia is that it represents a domesticated and commodified form of utopianism, trying for the best of both the country and the city – and indeed the best of all places in a mix of imported references, household arrangements, pragmatic accommodations and room to breath and pursue hobbies (or just park an RV or boat). This utopian space is a site of the 'not-yet' and the promise of the new, which is identified by Bloch as an essential affect contributing to progressive social change. This *novum* disrupts the ongoing certainty and ontological closure of the present. 'the world has the *novum* in as well as before it, it strains everywhere to the 'more' and 'other' still to come. Because the *novum* stirs and strains now, it undermines the inherited tendency to think of reality as settled and finished' (Hudson, 1983: 120 [Anderson]) It maps potentiality (*dynamis*) and the virtuality of latent futures onto and into the present. As the 'trace' or 'glimpse' of something better, it 'apprehends an incomprehensible future rendered knowable, anticipated, and simultaneously discerned as a 'virtual space – blank, colourless, shapeless, a space to be made over, a space where everything is still to be won' (Hedbridge, 1993: 270 cited in Anderson 2002: 222).

However, suburban utopia is strongly critiqued: it neutralises or expels potentially disruptive forces and is thus accused of stultifying uniformity, its built form supporting limited lifestyle options and frustrating innovative options, and absorbing difference into a cultural unity that mirrors the values promulgated by the mass media. Utopianism is closely related to dystopia and has been catalogued in both literary and cinematic critiques.<sup>9</sup>

Suburbs can also represent a kind of frustrated novum, unrealised futurity, a condition of novelty rather than absolute newness. They are both new (construction) and repetitive and routine, in their form combining the future and present-ness in sprawl of 'more of the same'. Like Walter Benjamin's image of the *Angelus Novus*, the angel of the new, they are propelled forward while turned backward to the past. Lyotard identifies this as a condition of serial novelty masked under the promise of progress and the new (1979; 1983).

As an edge in time, an interface to futurity, suburbs present a dialectic of hope, the affect of Bloch's *novum* and banality, the everydayness of Heidegger. Whether or not they can be recuperated as an event that erupts from the present and realises the promise latent in everydaylife and the present, as Lefebvre suggests remains an open question.

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<sup>9</sup> Including recently: David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), Hal Hartley's *The Unbelievable Truth* (1989), and Richard Linklater's *SubUrbia* (1996). Ten years later, there remains limited sustained work done on the dialectics of the suburban cinematic utopia and dystopia. This is despite the fact that the topic – which has been of obvious interest to Hollywood since the 1950s – exploded during the 1990s to become a staple of contemporary Hollywood and of popular television – with films like *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998), *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), *The Stepford Wives* remake (Frank Oz 2004) and TV shows including *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), *Desperate Housewives* (2004- ) and *Weeds* (2005- ).

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