Reflection
Fringe Fictions: The Case of La Linea Verde

Within in the setting of the Italian port city of Genoa, the Architecture and Public Building studio theme for this year is "Spaces of Accumulation". My initial fascination started with the city itself as a site of accumulation, or rather the intermediate boundary defining this condensation. My attention was at an early stage drawn to the concept of *La Linea Verde,* a planning tool introduced and implemented in the municipality master plan of 2011. In praxis it marks the boundary beyond which the city cannot expand; allowing no new urban settlements or development of supporting infrastructures to be planned. In reality, the line passes through a heterogeneous landscape where what lies *within* or *without* the boundary is not immediately recognizable. Translated 'the Green Line' it is essentially an adaptation strategy to deal with the current shrinking state of the city and the aftermaths of its accumalitive tendencies during the 1960s and 70s. This shift in growth has resulted in an abundance of legally and socially abandoned sites mainly appropriating the perimeters of the city but also, due to Genoas unique topographical conditions, creating gaps within the urban fabric. Besides the economic incentives of limiting the municipality's area of responsibility, *La Linea Verde* is also meant to operate on an environmental level. The post-war period of haphazard growth of mostly low-cost housing largely contributed to the 'cementification' of the hills framing the city, turning the seasonal torrential rains of the region into severe floods, immobilizing lower-set neighborhoods of Genoa. It's coloured epithet thus points a finger towards the future, a wish to mitigate the environmental impact that the city's former relation to its territory has for its citizens today.

My design project figures in an envisioned future where the city has imploded further, distancing itself from its set boundary. Like the traces of tidal water left on a coastal landscape, the offset demarcation from La Linea Verde would create a zone, a sort of fringe landscape with the status of at once being internal and external to the city.
Historically whatever could not be accommodated within the strict limits of the inner-city community, or that could be considered offensive in a moral or symbolic sense, would reside and flourish in close vicinity to the city wall. In this sense, the edge also provides the vantage point of both looking outward and inward and to more easily recognize and evaluate issues at the center. These potentials, the liberties of the margins and the critical view from the edge, have been the driving forces when deciding upon programme. In a wider perspective this has also given me room to add a political dimension to the project and to question certain conventions regarding the 'how' and 'why' of the built environment and the profession of architecture.

To a great extent, my msc3 research attempted to place *La Linea Verde* within the larger context of the typology of the city frontier, whose original function was to mark the boundary between the controlled society *within* and the autonomous wilderness *without*. The city wall's function as both

a separative, regulative and accumulative device, lends it a physical and intellectual thickening and my ambition has been to translate these forces into an architectural 'programme' without the negative connotations of the smeared out 'field' that is commonly addressed in contemporary discourse. In line with the studio, the site here serves as the point of departure, not as a given, but as a construct, to be considered as a material entity and a field condition.

A tripartite project gradually materialized from this topic and was divided and initially motivated as follows:

(a) a Field Guide for *La Linea Verde* mapping out the grammar of the boundary.

A field guide is a book designed to help the reader identify wildlife (plants or animals) or other objects of natural occurrence (e.g. minerals). It is generally designed to be brought into the 'field' or local area where such objects exist to help distinguish between similar objects. It will typically include a description of the objects covered, together with paintings or photographs and an index.[1]

As opposed to an extensive mapping of a line fixated in time and space, a field guide would, in my opinion, serve as a more flexible tool for identifying these peripheral field conditions.

(b) an Architectural Compendium of possible strategies for how to intervene/act in the situations described in the Field Guide.

(c) in a final stage the Field Guide and the Architectural Catalogue will serve as a guideline for a site-specific architectural intervention. The aim is thus to create a proposal that acts as a gateway between the city and it 'natural' surroundings, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the all-encompassing anthropogenic landscape we currently find ourselves in. Belonging within the zone the design should: accommodate public space that recognizes and refines the intrinsic qualities of the fringe; be prone to open-endedness and organized to support an indeterminate and unknowable range of future uses over time; and, finally, suggesting a sense of humility towards its found ground condition.

In hindsight the three elements have all been followed through but perhaps not executed in the manner or with the linear process that I had first envisioned. This is especially true of the first two, were they took on a more ethereal character than the "hands-on" handbooks I first had in mind. The field guide, for which I initially used sampling as a method, proved to have a more documentary outcome than serve as the analytical tool that I had first anticipated. This was further enhanced by the fact that the sampling occurred at a distance, relying on information found online from maps and literature as opposed to personal findings and observations on site. This resulted in a form of cataloguing that became both time-consuming and an end on its own. In order to move

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[1] "Field Guide" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_guide#cite_note-1

on it became clear that I needed to approach the task from another angle. Only when I abandoned sampling for regional scale GIS-mapping was I able to extract certain data useful to make a proper analysis. Nonetheless, the two methods complemented each other, and the conclusions made from the macro-mapping were supported by hypotheses posed while sampling.

Alongside the study of the larger network of the *La Linea Verde* comes the architectural intervention. Following the P2 a series of 'outcast fictions' were constructed along the Green Line as an exercise in exploiting the full potential of the zone and to the test the strategies developed in the architectural catalogue.

The site that was finally chosen has historically, literally, been a space of accumulation, mainly due to the resources provided by the stream that runs through the valley. Today the ruins of past layers of uses reside on the site, mainly a collection of large scale industrial sheds and retaining walls. My intervention lies in the intersection between what is defined as the city and countryside, according to *La Linea Verde,* and stretches out as a gradient in both directions. The choice of site also carries a social dimension, the neighbourhood surrounding the valley has the lowest average income in the municipality despite its central location. Deficient infrastructure, mainly due to the fenced off and now disused military compound dividing the neighborhood, has been brought forward as a main contributor to this as well as the poor quality of the built environment and public services in general. Demographically, the residents form a heterogenous group, there is an even mix of generations and large diversity in terms of nationalities. My design intention has been, by choice of programme and spatial composition, to improve the mobility of the area; internally by connecting the two valley sides and reinforcing the accessibility towards the city; and externally creating a gateway and spatially intriguing transition zone towards the mountain park landscape in the north. The area of intervention lies on a south facing slope within 'the zone', just in the pivot point of where the mountain turns into a valley. Although architecture as infrastructure has been one of the main themes throughout the project the programme is chosen to act as a catalyst of change for the neighborhood and perform as a center of accumulation, regulation and separation.

The fiction I chose for the site revolves around food culture and is both locally anchored and globally connected as well as futuristic and nostalgic in its character. The themes of *the soil, the table, the kitchen* and *the market* have accounted for the programmatic division and together they form an ecosystem on the site with extended arms towards the *within* and the *without*. These symbols are materialized in the form of a 'Fringe Food Lab' and are integrated in a terraced landscape housing a surplus food market, an agricultural laboratory, a culinary art school and a small scale anaerobic biodigester facility to close the loop.

The interweaving landscape, literally and figuratively, constitutes the public part of the programme. Architecturally, the intervention is a reflection of the material culture of the region and plays on the different surface treatments of the built environment found within and without the city boundaries. As the design could be seen as a inhabited pathway connecting the valley to the mountain, its main features is its two faces (facades), one revealed when approaching the site

from the valley and the other only visible from the mountain. This janus-faced character of architectural composition is also extended to the assembly of elements.   In a wider architectural context, this project's relevance lies in how it deals with uncertainty, a common problem in architecture today. Having looked at different ways that buildings can be flexible, in terms of use, structure or form, I opted for a design that emphasizes the contrast between the forces of geological and civic time, or the notion of permanence and ephemerality. Approaching the zone from the city one is confronted by a terraced sequence of dry stone walls typical for the region and traditionally used in order to cultivate the land. These stereotomic walls form the self-sufficient spine of the design and conceal spaces that through their materiality and configuration could be used over a long period of time and functions, onto which parts could be added as necessary if necessary. Dry joint timber pavilions scattered over the terraces, constitute the second opposing face, seen from the mountains. Lightly anchored to the ground as canopies or attached to different programs in form of hovering roofs, they're lifespan is shorter but equally speaks to a more nomadic sort of permanence. The structural logic easily allows them to be dismantled, reassembled and to settle on places without the need of major land operations .

To study a situation from a far, only having basic knowledge of the language of the country encourages you to take alternative paths when assembling the bits and pieces necessary to build a case. It forces you to listen — for me, this meant diving into to the forces that has formed Genoa, its geology and the material culture of the region — but sometimes also to project. In retrospect the idea behind the Field Guide and Compendium of strategies reflects exactly this, a taxonomists attempt to understand through categorizing. The studio's emphasis on encouraging the students to take a clear position has in my case been helpful in regards that temporary design 'knots' have been less disencouraging. On the flipside, by blindly sticking to the direction of the compass one also risks hitting a tree. Student projects have the liberties and burdens of being semi-detached from reality. In projects briefs with few preconditions I tend to make up my own limitations in order to have a point of departure. In exaggeration, this could lead to dogmatic tendencies and this has been a point of feedback I have received, mainly concerning the level of respect towards the found site and in the limited kit of elements and assembly rules I set up for myself regarding building technology. The advice, to liberate myself from the site, was followed through with a certain unease as I felt that adopting a *tabula rasa* viewpoint would undermine the main arguments of my research. This attitude is perhaps symptomatic for my generation as a reaction to a world formed by ideas responding to another time and reality. Yet, the experiment proved to be fruitful and I believe that getting out of my 'comfort zone' was largely beneficial to the outcome of my project and the design decisions I was able to take because of this.

During my architectural education, writing has commonly figured as an integral part in my design process, and this has also been the case in my graduation project. The observations I made and position I took during the msc 3 research thesis was therefore highly instrumental in the translation phase between research to design. Principles regarding the relation to the site, what kind of program and the nature of the architectural intervention were all elaborated in the thesis. I believe that the project has now reached a stage where research and design have synthesised and that the

period to come should be used to further enhance the architectural detailing of the intervention and allow myself to explore and visualize the fiction of the fringe.

An urban ruin is a place that has fallen outside the economic life of the city, and it is in some way the ideal home for the art that also falls outside the ordinary production and consumption of the city. [...] With ruins a city springs free of its plans into something as intricate as life, something that can be explored but not mapped.[2].

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[2] Solnit, Rebecca *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* New York: Viking Books 2006