BOOK REVIEW:
STITCHING THE BUFFER ZONE. LANDSCAPES, SOUNDS AND TRANS-EXPERIENCES ALONG THE CYPRUS GREEN LINE

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The launch of the book “Stitching the Buffer Zone” accompanied an exhibition of the same name at the Artos Gallery in Nicosia, Cyprus. Organized by the ARTos Foundation, the exhibition was part of a larger event entitled “Does Europe exist?” which took place from 1–15 November 2012 within the Cyprus presidency of the EU Council. Stitching the Buffer Zone was a collective exhibit which featured the works and installations of architects and urbanists Anna Grichting Solder, Maria Costi de Castrillo, Stephanie Keszi and Georgia Frangoudi and included models, plans, videos and installations illustrating the design scenarios and architectural and landscapes concepts for the future transformation of the Cyprus Buffer Zone.
REVIEW
The product of military and political conflict, a 180-kilometer-long buffer zone has divided Cyprus since 1974. Largely undisturbed, it is an ecologically valuable area with the potential for transformative change. Cyprus became an independent republic on August 16, 1960. Fourteen years later to the day, a United Nations ceasefire came into effect that divided the island in two, following a coup d’état by Greek Cypriot and Greek elements that prompted a military intervention by Turkey and established Turkish Cypriot control over the northern part of the island. As a result, a Green Line Buffer Zone runs for 180 kilometres across the island, covering three percent of the land mass and encompassing abandoned rural villages, fallow agricultural lands, and crumbling stone buildings in the historic capital of Nicosia. Strict adherence to the military status quo in the Buffer Zone, enforced by the United Nations Forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP), has frozen development and, on a more positive note, has allowed this landscape to escape the construction boom on both sides of the Green Line: Meadows have recovered from contamination caused by pesticides and artificial fertilizers, hillside forests have been preserved, and wildlife has been allowed to flourish. Like the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the Green Line is now really “green,” and has become a haven for wildlife and biodiversity.

The Buffer Zone is both a “territorial wound” and a future “space of reconciliation and reconstruction” and has engendered a number of projects that seek to reweave the disrupted spaces and segregated communities of Cyprus. The book - Stitching the Buffer Zone. Landscapes, Sounds and Trans Experiences along the Cyprus Green Line - presents three such projects with various approaches to envisioning or re-visioning the abandoned landscapes of the Cyprus Buffer Zone at different territorial scales.

The first part of the book - “The GreenLineScapes Laboratory: From a Deep Wound to a Beautiful Scar” -presents an on going initiative that seeks to initiate “healing ecologies” in the physical and psychological rift of the Cyprus Buffer Zone - where the untamed forces of Nature have engendered a spontaneous process of cicatrisation - and suggests the opportunity to create a beautiful scar through the creation of an ecological landscape of memory. [A. Grichting Solder]. Structured along three lines and projectual approaches - 1. Third Landscapes and Healing Ecologies; 2. Palimpsest: (Re)Activating Layers of Palimpsests; 3. Co-Creating Ecological Landscapes of Memory – the project and research reflects on how the Cyprus Buffer Zone might be transformed from a military dividing line into a memorial landscape of cultural and biological
diversity, and this through a process that brings together the communities on both sides in a common vision for a peaceful and sustainable future.

The second chapter entitled “The Stitches - Connecting the two Nicosias again” proposes a functional stitch aiming at recreating the broken threads of the City. Sound becomes a tool in the urban context that promotes revival through encounter. Creating common and shared experiences, the project aims at surpassing this zone of prohibition, while preserving the gap in the memory of the city, also seeking to generate more stitches to occur. [M. Costi de Castrillo]

The final chapter, “Trans_experiences” addresses the experience of border crossing, and is an attempt to invent mechanisms that transfer the experience of the buffer zone into a real space in order to redefine the perception of the boundary and to generate new spatial connections and transmutations. Through transient interventions, different elements are assimilated, intermingled and transformed, leading to a new ‘crossing experience’. [S. Keszi & G. Frangoudi].

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