

# THE SCARRED SKIN OF CYPRUS: Water as an Intervening Infrastructure for the Housing Condition along the Green Line of Cyprus

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*Our contact with the world takes place at the boundary line of the self through specialized parts of our enveloping membrane. Skin is the mediator that integrates our experience of the world with that of ourselves. My body remembers who I am and where I am located in the world. My body is truly the navel of my world, not in the sense of the viewing point of the central perspective, but as the very locus of reference, memory, imagination and integration.*

*Juhanni Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin<sup>1</sup>*

The Buffer Zone of Cyprus was established primarily by a British army officer, General Peter Young, in 1964, when he drew a cease-fire line across a map of Cyprus in green grease pencil.<sup>2</sup> In this project, the cut line is studied in parallel to a line drawn on the skin prior to a cut by a scalpel—and water, perhaps similar to blood, is treated as an intervening infrastructure in understanding the resultant border conditions. The project suggests four architectural gestures that speculate on the relation of water to the line and the direction of the flow. The encounter of the pencil with the land is metaphorically exemplified as a surgical incision (in Kokkina), an open wound (in Avlona and Akaki), a stitched wound (in Nicosia), and the remaining scar (in Pyla).

The Green Line is a double-drawn line that cutting across the entire island comprising two “forward defensive position” lines which are separated by a Buffer Zone of 112 miles in length and of varying width.<sup>3</sup> In the report of 1976, the Secretary General indicated that neither side could exercise authority or jurisdiction beyond its own forward military line.<sup>4</sup> This resulted in creating a no-man’s land within the zone along with polarized national identities towards the North or the South. The Green Line constructs four states in Cyprus: (1) the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, currently in control of the northern part of the island; (2) the Republic of Cyprus, currently in control of the southern part of the island; (3) the UK Sovereign Base Areas, in control of ninety-nine square miles of the island; and (4) the 11,280-mile-long UN Buffer Zone covering around 134 square miles or three percent of the island.<sup>5</sup>

The translation of a line drawn on a paper map to a palpable landscape with its topographical, gravitational, and land division and ownership has created an intertwined collocation at the intersections of geography, cities, and walls. The “invasion of walls inwards into the city, or outwards around the city”<sup>6</sup> has created a range of variances in inhabitation of these divided singularities between the North and the South. The divisive line, drawn by forces greater than topography or demography, cuts through the water current at certain locations. This is dissimilar to the conventional division of

segregations, which used to be along the current of the stream. Conforming to rules of liquidity, water is one of many entities that follow their own rules of permeability.

Considering an infrastructure that takes the scarcity of water as its focus, this project proposes a series of large-scale installations to examine the relation of the physical landscape and the formation of social life to the built structures. The following four interventions, running from west to east of the Buffer Zone (in Kokkina, Avlona-Akaki, Nicosia, and Pyla), illustrate the mediation of water in designing landscape and architecture settlements through which the meaning of borderscapes is unearthed.

### **1) Kokkina Exclave: The Case of a Bleeding Incision**

Kokkina Exclave is a coastal exclave surrounded by mountainous territory, with the Morphou Bay on its northern flank.<sup>7</sup> Arching from coast to coast and occupied on its concave side by the Turkish Army's military camp and on its convex side by Greek Cypriots, it further confounds the habitual situation.

Estimations demonstrating that desalination in Cyprus could satisfy the water demand despite climate change have initiated the development of the last intervention. In farther west at the Mediterranean Sea as the bleeding cut is drenched under the water, it permits the ocean water to enter a drainage system through the structure that runs from coast to coast along the double partition. The water becomes desalinated at multiple locations to supply housing settlements along this area. Affected by low and high tide in the daytime and at night, the structure becomes recurrently visible and invisible, while there is always water flow underneath (Figs. 1–3).



Fig. 1. Kokkina Exclave, Collaged photograph and Drawing

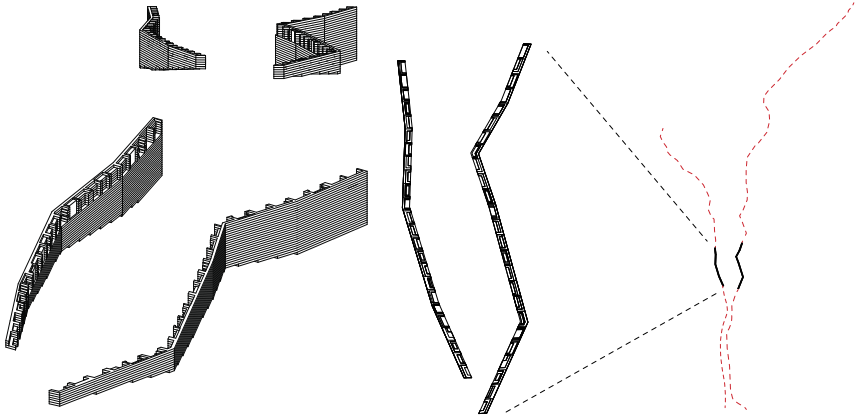


Fig. 2. Kokkina Exclave, Design Proposal Drawings



Fig. 3. Kokkina Exclave, Prototype Model on Milled MDF

## **2) Avlona, Akaki: The Case of an Open Wound**

Avlona (in the North) and Akaki (in the South) are two villages located on either side of the double-lined Buffer Zone. They both share the water provided by the Akaki River, which runs from the foothills of the Troodos Mountains.

Here the stream of water dissents from the permeability of the Buffer Zone in alienated borderlands. This has created a ground for intervention where the partition, water, and villages meet. A walk-through bridge that purposefully connects the North to the South punctures the Buffer Zone at two points: these are the locations that it branches off from to direct water towards various points in each village where the purifying systems are located. These systems provide drinkable water to adjacent residences for both sides (Figs. 4–6).



Fig. 4. Avlona-Akaki, Collaged photograph and Drawing

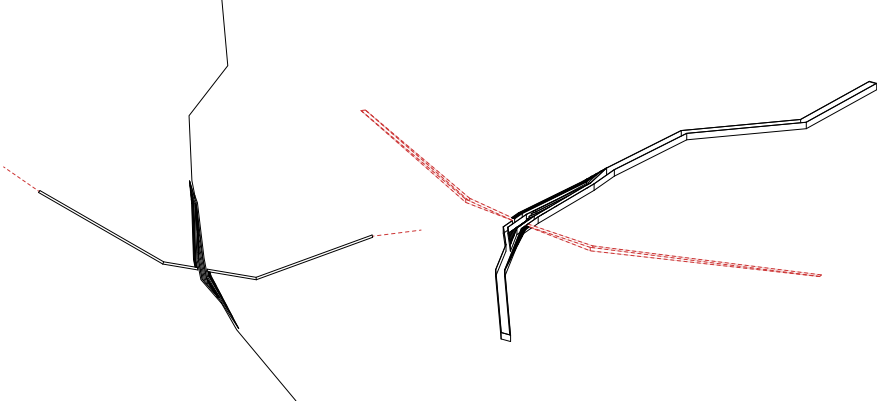


Fig. 5. Avlona-Akaki, Design Proposal Drawings

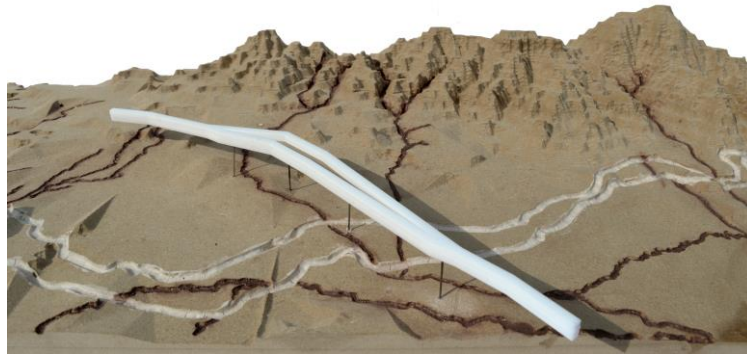


Fig. 6. Avlona-Akaki, Prototype Model on Milled MDF

### 3) Nicosia: The Case of a Stitched Wound

Nicosia is divided above ground but unified below. This is due to gravity and economics having conspired to prevent the duplication of water and sewerage infrastructure. The underground connection of the water sewage system transcends the city's regional topology; it is a network space in which proximity is not metric and where inside and outside are not objects or attributes that lie within a set of boundaries.<sup>8</sup> A different topology is created: the fluid topology for network spaces. This emphasizes a fluid spatiality of the social in which entities are in a state of transformation and can be distant, different, and at the same time similar in different places or at different scales.<sup>9</sup>

The proposed storm-water management system stitches the double partition line from North to South and from South to North. This is to represent entities that are connected, although invisibly and through an underground system. The structures run across the wound where its grooved surface catches the storm water and directs it sideways to the North and South. The structure collects and directs the water farther, to the underground reservoir underneath each housing unit or multiple-unit dwelling, where a further purification and supply system is incorporated. The excess water could then be directed to the existing system that runs below the city (Figs. 7–9).



Fig. 7. Nicosia, Collaged photograph and Drawing

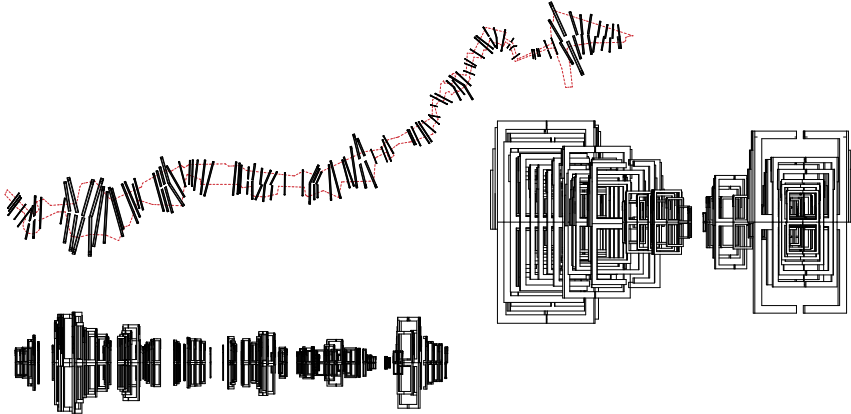


Fig. 8. Nicosia, Design Proposal Drawings



Fig. 9. Avlona-Akaki, Prototype Model on Milled MDF

#### **4) Pyla: The Case of a Remaining Scar**

Pyla is one of the five inhabited villages within the Buffer Zone. The pinnacle of the United Nation's Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus's success has been this village. It is the only mixed village that remained in Cyprus after 1974–75: despite its location inside the Buffer Zone, its inhabitants were neither directly nor indirectly forced to flee. In this town, the jurisdictional claims of the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot regimes are neutralized by UN authorities. This is to avoid tensions that replicate the ups and downs of the Cyprus conflict. Pyla is thus often idealized as the normal state of “being” in Cyprus, how Cyprus without the conflict should be or would have been.<sup>10</sup>

In this intervention, a rainwater harvesting system is accommodated under the outdoor space of each housing unit. The infiltrated water enters the drainage system in the street that runs towards the water reservoir located centrally to the system and to the town. The structure of the reservoir steps down to reach its lowest point at the core. Its surface is paved with porous material and allows for water storage through the edges to sink down to the water table. After entering the water table, the collected water could be consumed through wells or pumping systems and returned to housing communities. (Figs. 10–12).





Fig. 10. Pyla, Collaged photograph and Drawing



Fig. 11. Pyla, Design Proposal Drawings

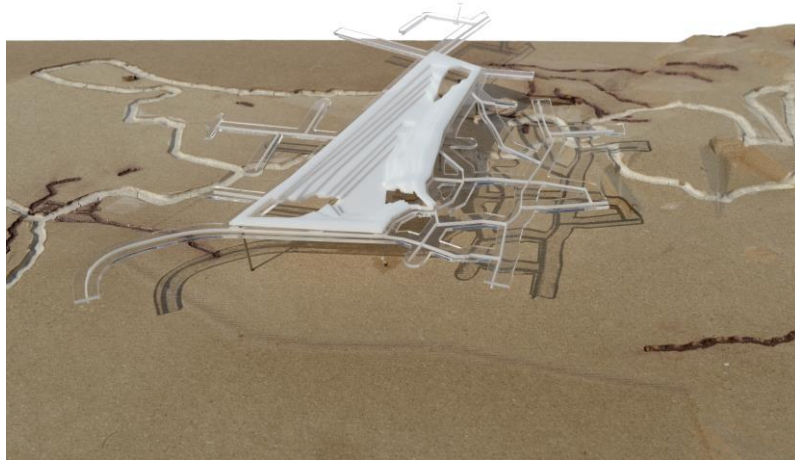


Fig. 12. Pyla, Prototype Model on Milled MDF

### Conclusion

While the double-drawn line of the Buffer Zone may not afford the inhabitation and growth of humans in a literal sense, it did provide for growth of two marginalities of a divided skin. Shifting movements of territories, people, and dwellings, along with the movements in subjectivities and their accompanying complexities, has created asymmetrical nationhood in towns and villages within, along, or across the Buffer Zone of Cyprus, whereby the North and the South no longer inherit their embedded geographical meanings.

The establishment of the partition has consumed hundreds of buildings within or adjacent to the Buffer Zone.<sup>11</sup> Remnant architecture has become one of the many materials—among them “sand bags, oil barrels, concrete, corrugated iron, brick, and barbed wire”<sup>12</sup>—that constructed the partition space. Here, by becoming acquainted with the functional characteristics of such materials, the spatial qualities of remnant housing are reduced from a space of inhabitation to a layered space of partition. In spite of the polarized condition and the attempt to seal entire borders, there still remains the permeability not only of physical bodies, natural resources, and wild life, but of traversing of the most prominent “immutable mobile,”<sup>13</sup> the cultural exchange. Here, water, a scarce resource in Cyprus, could be possibly seen as a medium to question architecture (of partitions) where no intervention aims for demilitarization or reintegration but is only suggestive of the dialectics of cultural conditions.

Although border-objects are generally imagined as technical lines drawn as thinly as possible and perhaps reduced in their spatial occupancy so much that they become virtual, such Buffer Zones as the Cyprus Green Line are established in discontinuous thicknesses. This geographical thickening of the laceration of earth over-emphasizes the border space as a place, a dwelling for power relations. Dwelling, as viewed by Heidegger, is a complex relation of embodying the landscape and environment: “Dwelling is not the occupation of a world already built but the very process of inhabiting the earth.”<sup>14</sup> It is the one that affords scope for growth and movement. Life, in this sense, is lived in the open, rather than being contained within the structures of the built environment.<sup>15</sup>

By providing settlements, architecture communicates to its audiences, who are the inhabitants of buildings. Its entanglement with semiotics is therefore inevitable. Architecturally utilizing the permeability of water could intervene in shaping the meanings of the borders. This—although excluding transcendence or regression—could bring subjective interpretations simultaneously, through which the space, time, and habitation of the borders could be reassessed. If the point of reference, the locus of the place, is displaced, if the materialization of the object changes, the skin will no longer be

the borderscape between the self and the selfless. It will become a space of thresholds, with a gradient range of in-between places and no absolute distinction between the outsider and the insider. “Displaced bodies, distant both as foreigners to where they have come to and strangers to where they have come from,”<sup>16</sup> continue to occupy the skin of the earth.

This project was an investigation into threshold spaces in border-zone conditions. Architecture, being an inevitable occupant of these in-between places, performs as a projection of possible conditions that are politically created and socially creative via the delicacy of their occupancy. The United Nations Buffer Zone in Cyprus is one of few border spaces that contains a range of separation and division conditions that extend beyond geographical means of national place making. Similar to other border conditions, the Green Line of Cyprus also evolves towards the formation of social constructs on the outermost membrane of the earth: the analogical skin.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Shellman and Kürsüd Turan, "The Cyprus Crisis," *Simulation & Gaming* 34 no. 2 (2003): 28–291.

<sup>3</sup> Esther Charlesworth, "Deconstruction, Reconstruction and Design Responsibility," *Architectural Theory Review* 13, no. 1 (April 2008): 69–79.

<sup>4</sup> Costas M. Constantinou, "On the Cypriot States of Exception," *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2008): 145–164.

<sup>5</sup> Costas M. Constantinou, 145–64.

<sup>6</sup> Esther Charlesworth, "Deconstruction, Reconstruction and Design Responsibility," *Architectural Theory Review* 13, no. 1 (April 2008, 2008): 69–79.

<sup>7</sup> "Internal Displacement in Cyprus," PRIO Cyprus Centre, <http://www.prio-cyprus-displacement.net/default.asp?id=312>.

<sup>8</sup> Cosmin Radu, "Beyond Border-‘dwelling’: Temporalizing the Border-Space through Events," *Anthropological Theory* 10, no. 4 (2010): 409–433.

<sup>9</sup> Cosmin Radu, 409–433

<sup>10</sup> Costas M. Constantinou, "On the Cypriot States of Exception," *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2008): 145–164.

<sup>11</sup> Costas M. Constantinou, 145–164.

<sup>12</sup> Costas M. Constantinou, 145–164.

<sup>13</sup> Siegert, Bernhard. "Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 48–65.

<sup>14</sup> David J. Gauthier, "Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and the Politics of Dwelling," Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Cosmin Radu, "Beyond Border-‘dwelling’: Temporalizing the Border-Space through Events", *Anthropological Theory* 10, no. 4 (2010): 409–433.

<sup>16</sup> Glasson Deschaumes, and Rada Iveković, "Divided countries, separated cities: the modern legacy of partition," New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2003.