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Ambiguous Border, Anterior Territory

The project attempts to understand borders as more than abstract projected lines on a map, but places with territorial implications and boundaries that are more ambiguous than we might think. Through examining Svinesund I have discovered that this is not a typical border-crossing but a landscape border that extends far from the line on the map. The interest in this site came with its banal stigma, related to its current cultural identity as a place for cross-border shopping of cheap tobacco, meat and alcohol. Such an important entrance into the country should not only be treated as such, but must certainly have more to offer. Through extensive research of the area I have uncovered a rich and somewhat forgotten history related to the border, which I believe deserves more presence. Out of all the border crossings in Norway, Svinesund is the mothership in terms of complexity, logistics and historical significance.

The project reimagines this border crossing as more than customs clearance, long lines and cross border consumerism, but as an important anterior to the interior that is defined by the beautiful landscape which in this case, is the border itself.

Although quite significant in terms of context, the dynamic condition of the Svinesund border could be seen as a microcosm, comparable to other locations that find themselves in a post military conflict era, often defined by cross border consumerism. Yet by taking a closer look, there are contextual layers that have shaped these territories through time and space. The project proposes that border spaces are defined in character by a dynamic range of factors, the most intensive factors being crisis and conflict which accelerate change. Historically this has resulted in border architecture that manifests itself quite differently depending on what characterises the border at the time. Not only are borders in a constant state of fluctuation due to these factors, but in a globalised world there is a balancing act at play between a need, and often desire, for more control while wanting more freedom.

A question is posed as to whether it is possible to accommodate this balancing act through an architecture that embodies two antonymous meanings simultaneously, such as open and closed or restriction and freedom. Borders are a technology of the state, but can they be utilised for more than control and consumption?

The project acknowledges the territory as a field condition. Not as an endless tabula rasa of flat space, but an undulating topography where architecture either chooses to occupy the valley or the mound. Roads have occupied the valleys and in several instances on each side of the border, have forts occupied strategic points of the topography for purposes of defence during Norway's previous military conflict with Sweden. I have chosen to appropriate this strategy, yet on different terms and with different intentions. As the Svinesund border should be considered a territory, a clear relationship with this has been established through the choice of site.

In a sense the project sees this border territory as a geological process of architectural interventions both permanent and temporal that involve the actions of cutting, filling and imprinting. Although a massive structure, the border station reserves a certain sensitivity to the topography by making as little cuts into the ground as possible. In this way the station becomes a dialogue between landscape and form, which embodies the very essence of border architecture.

The typology of the plateau is used as an architecture that defines space without enclosing it. This space becomes a reserve station where temporal architecture is setup in order to deal with emerging crisis and conflict such as a testing station for the Covid-19 pandemic which currently conditions the border between Norway and Sweden. If one recognises that the border continually fluctuates in character, there is a need for this space to be versatile enough for other purposes and programs when the border is not under significant strain. The proposal then becomes a reflection not only of this fluctuation, but embodies a series of dichotomies such as permanence and temporality, heaviness and lightness, constriction and freedom.