

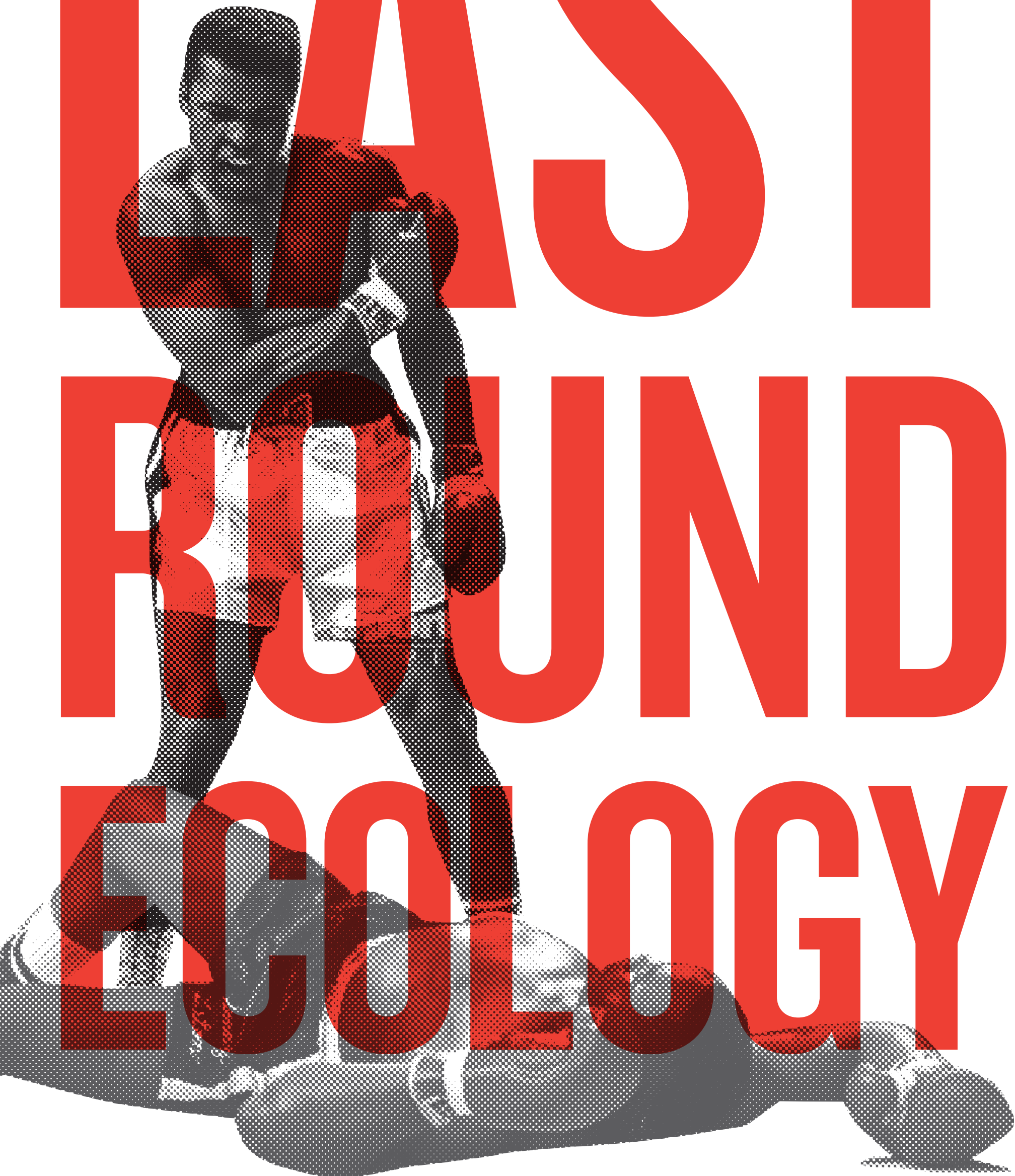
SLUM Lab

Sustainable Living Urban Model / Fall 2011

LEAST

FOUNDED

ECOLOGY



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TUNNEL RETROFIT



If it happened only once, it might be a coincidence, but if it happens again, you begin to wonder. The excitement of walking for the first time through an abandoned tunnel (be it a civil or military infrastructure) speeds up your thinking: you realize that you cannot undo such a violent intervention into earth and rock, nor build in accord with it. The challenge lies in inventing another purpose, another future for a now useless condition. Your will is suspended by the overwhelming size and self-contained nature of tunnels. You're disinclined to add to or otherwise change the structure.

At a time when everything seeks exposure and vies for attention, our tunnel projects in Italy and Albania are huge, introspective, and invisible. They do not appear on Google maps and satellite images, yet they are deeply connected to place, people, and memory. The language of their transformation has to be learned on site and the character of their new destination invented on the spot.

In Italy, our project consists of a major realized segment and an ongoing research component. Two disused highway tunnels in Trento have been transformed into an exhibition and event site that remains in use, but two landscape gardens are yet to be realized. They address both ends of the tunnels and mediate between a dramatic geographic/geological site and the old town of Trento, as well as between infrastructure and a post-industrial landscape.

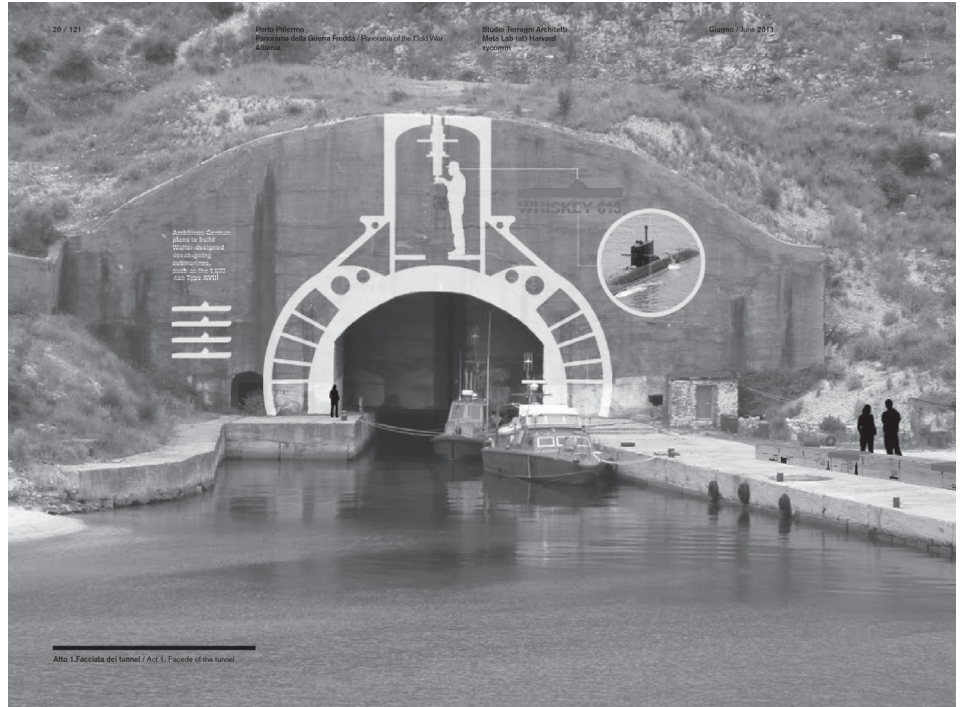


While traffic no longer cuts off a part of town on the western embankment of the Adige River, the large left-over areas, now subtracted from vehicular use, call for re-integration into the landscape and the town. The dilemma is all too familiar: what had originally been severed in the name of efficiency and expediency, now calls for restoration to a meaningful state. A state that never existed before and therefore needs to be invented.

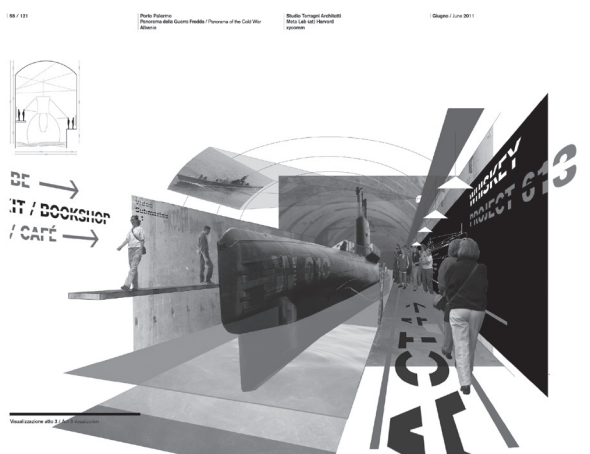
The tunnels at Trento mark a first major passage through a mountain massif well before travelers reach the Brenner Pass, one of the main alpine transit routes in Europe. In the opposite direction downriver, the highway leads to the Mediterranean basin, the favorite destination of holiday makers from the north.

What we are proposing at Trento is a kind of *transport* via landscape interludes: northward, the disused highway breaks up and rises to an alpine garden; to the south, by contrast, a gently sloping parterre blends into the southern sky. In a word, these two areas north and south of the tunnels stand in anticipation of landscapes travelers have not yet reached. As bookends of the travel route, they buttress the local divide in a narrow stretch of the valley, while linking up with the nearby townscapes and dramatizing the passage through the narrows.

"The dreams of every citizen, without exception, will be interpreted, classified and filed in the archive," that is the metaphor invented by Ismail Kadare, the Albanian writer, to describe the secret workings of his country's regime. As a pawn in the power-play of the Cold War, the Albanian dictator Hoxha had the country strewn with hundreds of thousands of pillboxes and an entire peninsula undercut by a tunnel. Here, torpedoes and submarines were stored in an eerie cavern some 2000 ft in length. Like the Tabir Saraj, Kadare's palace of dreams that everyone knew but nobody approached, the military structure of Porto Palermo or, in sailor's parlance, Panorma Bay (Gjiri i



Clockwise from bottom left: Trento, exit north, night and day, Team: Elisabetta Terragni, Jeffrey Schnapp; Panorma Bay, mouth of the Tunnel. Team: Elisabetta Terragni, Jeffrey Schnapp, Daniele Ledda; Panorma Bay, visitors view inside the Tunnel. Team: Elisabetta Terragni, Jeffrey Schnapp, Daniele Ledda; Panorma Bay, entrance to the Tunnel. Team: Elisabetta Terragni, Jeffrey Schnapp, Daniele Ledda;



Panormes) was known to exist but nobody ever saw it, except military personnel and the prisoners that built it. The military site is a symbol of madness and subsequent emargination. It is a real paradox that this disturbing structure lies in a pristine part of the coast that has escaped devastation by another contemporary madness, unregulated new construction.

We are proposing to make this highly guarded site accessible as a museum of the Cold War, providing for exhibitions along an elevated passage through the tunnel and a ride back onboard a glass-bottomed ferry from which visitors will glimpse the faces of those who built the tunnel. In this way individual lives reemerge, as if in a dream, and the archive of recollections is tapped as the aquifer of a culture. Seeking access to the nation's archives and bringing daylight into the secret lair will give a voice to the fears and anxious memories of an entire country.