

Living on the Line

Passersby encountering Linda K. Johnson's transient dwelling on a busy weekend in Riverside Park may wonder what it's doing there. That's exactly her point.

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The View From Here: Finding, Marking and Living on the Line

Riverside Park, Clackamas, 242-2330.

Sunrise Friday, July 16, to sunset Saturday, July 17. Free.

To get to Riverside Park, take I-205 to the east Clackamas exit (Highway 224), then follow SE Evelyn Street to SE Water Avenue.

Johnson will repeat the performance at six other locations.

Linda K. Johnson is camping, but instead of getting out of the city, she's living on the edge of it.

Sticking out among the picnic huts, baseball diamonds and boat ramp of Riverside Park in Clackamas, Johnson's 100-foot-square structure of muslin and cedar looks more like a small home than a tent. A front porch holds a scrawny plant and two chairs. Despite the minimal furnishings, Johnson is an image of domesticity: reading the paper, drinking coffee, chatting with visitors.

"If someone hasn't seen performance art," says Johnson, "they might not know I'm performing."

From a distance, Johnson's 36-hour occupation of Riverside may look like a cross between a sit-in protest and upscale homelessness. On closer inspection, though, the artistic purpose of the temporary bivouac becomes clear. On the porch sit a comment book, stories from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and information about Portland's urban-growth boundary, a section of which lies 20 feet away from Johnson's abstract abode.

To Johnson, the UGB is a symbol of community identity. While she sees the boundary as a progressive idea, she's disturbed by what's within its borders: a surge of modular, homogeneous housing units stripped of personality and dictated by developers. Her public art project on the edges of the UGB raises questions of how Portlanders want to live in the future.

"The urban-growth boundary is a complex issue affecting the next 20 years of the Portland metropolitan region," Johnson says, referring to the requirement that the boundary enclose enough land for two decades of development. "It preserves the quality of life, agricultural land and recreational land we value. Who wants urban sprawl?"

While the boundary defines our common space, Johnson notes that it remains an abstraction for most. "Most people don't know what or where it is," she says. "The boundary isn't like the Berlin

Wall. It follows natural pathways like creeks. It's a mutable, invisible map that settles over the metropolitan area. I wanted to live on the line, and the river is the line."

Johnson's excursions to the boundary's edges revealed contradictions in its function as a land-preserved. "The irony of making space and reducing traffic is that it's completely a driving-based culture," she says. "You have to drive on the freeway or through complex suburban subcultures to get to the natural line." The line skirts a maze of mini-malls and housing developments that, in Johnson's words, are "frightening in their banality." Johnson extrapolates that visual landscape to a social one. "We've built a habitat to be safe, controllable and accessible, but instead of being authentic, it's uniform," she says.

Every few hours, Johnson will tear down and reconstruct her collapsible residence into different shapes. "I'm manipulating the structure to invite reflection about the regularity of the building process," she says. "We can look at the same environment from many points of view. Portland's urban-growth boundary is held as a model for its vision of long-term growth. We should be proud of it. But we should also take pride in our visual environment, how we create it, what it looks like. Our desires shape the outcome, but the outcome also shapes our desires.

"My piece isn't neutral," says Johnson, "but I hope it's reflective. I want it to inspire reflection about the visual environment we're creating and will continue to create."