Steadfast in Versatility
*The substrate of a multi-modal practice*

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of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Veronika Valk

31 August 2013
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I Preface and Acknowledgements

What is it to be Public, to produce Publicness in Public Space in Estonia at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

The Local Context

Making my usual photo-shoot tour at the Tallinn seashore on a crisp, cold January morning in 1998, I walked from the city centre to the Linnahall concert hall, further west towards the heat-plant which was still in operation at the time, to the Soviet-era Patarei Prison (also still functioning as a prison at the time), and to the hydroplane hangars. These were all in the closed-off zone, reminiscent of the military regime, and I was imagining what the waterfront might look like in the future. The hydroplane hangars were guarded by a grumpy old man who nevertheless always allowed me to enter the territory, and to take photos of the structures on the waterfront.

Upon entering through the gate, I froze with fear as a giant black dog came around the corner, but then I made it safely around the three-dome structure. I took the photos I needed and, as the sea was covered with fairly thick ice, I thought I would make a shortcut back eastward across the ice to the prison. The prison was walled off with heavy barbed-wire fences – also from the bay side. Walking on ice and continuing to take photos, there was suddenly the sound of a safety-catch released, accompanied by a shout from the watch-tower: “Straljaju” was the only word I could make out (“Shoot!” in Russian) across the ice.

Patarei had been a political prison during the Soviet occupation. There is hardly a family in Estonia that did not have someone who suffered in this building during the Soviet regime. The area around it, the Kalamaja neighbourhood, was an upper middle-class residential area before World War II. The two-storey wooden apartment buildings had well-kept courtyards in between the buildings, with 2–3m-high fences to block the lush greenery from the street. Many young police officers had an apartment here during the first independence of Estonia, yet when Russification commenced and the Estonian policemen were deported to Siberia or executed, many members of the Russian military were assigned to live here.

Kalamaja was ‘nationalised’ because the notion of ‘private property’ did not serve the communist ideology. During the 1960s, fences around the gardens were taken down and the former oases between those fine timber houses were made into public ‘brown space’, a no-man’s-land where nobody took care of the gardens any longer. Furthermore, people who were released from the prison gained rooms here as part of the ‘rehabilitation’ program. Kalamaja turned more and more criminal. The energetic inhabitants moved to newly-built ‘commieblock’ areas. The local population in Kalamaja aged, contributing to a downward spiral and degeneration.

In 1991, when Estonia regained independence, the vast process of re-privatisation began, giving property back to the offspring of the former owners of the property. Yet generations had passed in between. Now in the post-Soviet era, many people could not properly work out what to do with it – how to maintain Kalamaja, for example, restoring the former gardens and developing the neighbourhood. The second republic brought with it an entirely new publicness, with new challenges – firstly in terms of a change of mindset.

The idea of public and private space needed to be re-invented in Estonia, as it was simply not possible (and, I suggest, also not desirable) in the instant of independence to eradicate the Soviet period’s impact on the living environment and Estonians’ perceptions of the built artifacts that had been introduced by the Soviets (Linnahall is a specific example, discussed in Section II).

In the face of the Soviet occupation and nationalisation, followed by the wave of re-privatisation at the beginning of the 1990s, the loss of Estonian publicness has been critical. It was – and still is – critical in terms of the future sense of publicness in Estonia, especially regarding architecture, urbanism and various aspects of public life, which are full of ‘leftovers’ from the Soviet era, as well as in terms of the absence of a traditional notion of Estonian publicness that was destroyed by World War II, and during the subsequent Soviet era which completely re-invented notions of the private ownership and ‘occupation’ of space – or, in a single phrase, the notion of Estonian publicness.

It was simply not possible to revive the Estonian culture to what it had been prior to the Soviet period, therefore the tactic of re-invention was and still is critical. I tell these stories not for melodramatic effect but to bring the reader into the world of the concerns that consume my practice. What is at stake here, in the light of those quite dark stories? Mine is the ultimate act of distraction? How do you ‘spread’ technology? This research does not investigate being everywhere, it does not investigate being everywhere, its main goal is to bring the reader into the world of the concerns that consume my practice.

The Not-So-Local Context

In response to the situation described above, there are other, more global questions that have captivated me as a designer, yet that at first glance seem to lie outside the framework of the practice-based thesis. For reasons of clarity, I will mention briefly some of those puzzling questions that continue to motivate my work. In Section II, I dismiss the vast majority of them, referring back to those issues in Section III.

I wish to point out that this research endeavour over the past three years has been undertaken by a person who is interested in a whole spectrum of individual, future-oriented questions. However, during the PhD process it became clear that those questions cannot be dealt with directly. Thus, I held them back when describing the body of work in Section II. Yet I am unapologetic about the grandness of those questions, as the designer should never hide from such issues. Therefore, please bear with me until Section III’s ‘Findings’. In the next few paragraphs I outline a few of the questions that motivate me and have fuelled my work. All these questions are related to this research in the sense that they are important and interesting to me, but are not essential to the research itself. They may be likened to a borderland cloud of questions that influence my work through directly motivating it, although the body of work itself cannot be described through those questions.

Esprit of Technological Cultures

When I approach speculative ideas about the future, I am not interested in utopias – or indeed in a life where everything is perfected. In such sterile conditions, there is the danger of people’s lives ending up being blank and uniform. What if those who have access to advanced technology start to subvert their own cultural systems? When do you intervene, when do you ‘help’? When do you cause a war? When do you stop the war? What if the perfect city is in fact a walled city, an exclusive enclave? How do you ‘spread’ technology? This research is not asking how one gets people to accept the new technologies. Nor is it asking what happens to somebody who chooses not to conform.

Global Financial Crisis. The question here for my practice is: how can we, as architects, design our way out of this? How do we design public space and publicness in such a context?

Designer of the Future

Perhaps it is indeed up to architects and designers to start to design the future. What are we probably looking at is a shift in what an architect does: what counts as architecture? Practitioners might be more conscious than most about the future and what is emerging. What if the notion of emergence is that of ‘guiding’ the processes without instrumental intervention? It is up to architects and designers to recognise this potential and guide it in a resilient way. Architects and planners are researching what the future city would look like, with every designer envisioning a different future – yet how do we arrive at that moment or space in our environment where we recognise that the future is around us itself? The product someone’s imagination?

The work at hand does not interrogate what ‘work’ or ‘education’ might mean in 2049. We, as architects and designers, could pose questions to a future policeman: what kind of challenges do you face in an urban setting in 2149, as opposed to contemporary cities? Do you find similarities in terms of domestic violence, alcohol problems, transport infringements? Or is there a completely different system of social welfare, pensions and economies? Furthermore, current trends in transhumanism point towards programming bodies and processes – what about the possibility of artificial ‘viruses’ incorporated in our bodies? And so forth.

Espirit of the Body in the Familial Urban Realm

What does the new city hold for traditional family values? How are these new technologies affecting our lifestyle? Do we, as humans, interact one-on-one anymore? Or has the new city somehow replaced this? We are entering an era in which virtual communication collides with the real. If Facebook is a ‘neighbourhood’, then do neighbourhoods exist in the future? These are all intriguing questions.

Even though the research addresses to a certain extent very basic human delights and the enjoyment of sensorial experiences, it does not investigate being trapped within the body as though within a space capsule, looking at how to design the body as an amusement park. Is one really one’s own mood-moderator? When replacing parts of brains via advanced technologies to enhance intellectual capabilities, then where does artificial intelligence come into the picture? How do you ‘spread’ technology? This research is not asking how one gets people to accept the new technologies. Nor is it asking what happens to somebody who chooses not to conform.
versus biological instincts? In 2149, is there still a notion of ‘slow’, or is that gone? If life is eternal, or almost, then what is ‘life after death’? What happens to ‘spirituality’? Do we have eternal beauty? If we do, then how do we appreciate it? These and hundreds of ever-more intriguing questions are not the focus here. Nor even are those that tether with programming the (urban) space: what about the expanding urban agglomeration becoming increasingly attractive to a growing number of people, some of whom might try to challenge and subvert those processes? How would the control mechanisms of the society deal with that?

This research is not directly tackling questions that belong more to the social sciences – for instance whether we, as architects and designers, could start to have an answer as to what happens to notions of ‘age’. The lifespan of future generations is an interesting question for an architectural practice, as is the impact of extended lifetimes. What is going to happen along the way in terms of population control? Yet an overlapping point here, which directly refers to this research, concerns speaking of a person ‘getting old’: one possible response I might have is that the first sign of a person getting old is her giving up her curiosity and/or creativity.

To the Heart of the Research

Of all the questions I mentioned here, the one that most informs my work concerns ‘creativity’. Creativity and its neighbouring concepts – curiosity, propensity to explore, etc. – take centre stage. Stepping out of the realm of those questions, I will now give you an idea of what comes in the next section. Thus, the following paragraphs, which constitute the core of my research, must to a large extent be set in contrast to the questions highlighted above. The questions I have outlined above float through my research, be set in contrast to the questions highlighted above. The questions I have outlined above.

My ‘creativity agenda’ will find a new way to be articulated in aspects of how to channel creativity as a practitioner, embedded in my practice (discussed in Section III). The body of work to be presented offers ways for architecture as behaviour to accommodate and recognise a species of architect – that is, the architect as initiator – who for certain specific reasons occasionally refuses to follow some prescribed protocols or to fall into prescribed categories. Such a practitioner might have been defined in various circumstances as ‘a visionary’, ‘a utopian’, ‘a radical’, ‘an activist’ or even ‘a terrorist’. This is because, quite often, my practice manifests itself as an initiative.

A closer look at completed work reveals how, with each sample provided, the practice first takes a ‘position’ (=conception) at an architectural or urban scale. It then gives in to a multiplicity of professional ‘obsessions’ studying the feasibility of the concept in order to further convince the stakeholders, by forming and utilising a multiplicity of instruments (legal entities, mass media, etc.). By blurring traditional discipline boundaries and using accessible ‘devices’, initiatives tend to unveil alternative ways to tackle obvious challenges.

I regard my specific ‘research findings’ in Section III as at least a partial contribution to a culture of criticality, offering some open-ended ‘protocols’. In that sense, ‘architecture as initiative’ has provided fertile ground for me, enabling certain open-ended ‘protocols’ to emerge, as many of their complex, multi-layered strategies and tactics generate unique opportunities for unobvious cross-disciplinary ambitions to synchronise their activities for a period of time. As a freeform collective or swarm, the engaged individuals are acutely aware of the nature of the invention, yet unaware of the exact result. Architecture as initiative occurs in a loosely-defined transdisciplinary intersection that emphasises open-source knowledge through sharing. Thus, as the authors offer an exploratory journey through a venturous practice that builds upon architecture as initiative. Venturous practice is a term originally coined by Richard Blythe and is used here to refer to those practitioners who are adventurous enough to want to step beyond current practice boundaries – in other words, those practitioners whose work will change the practice, the discipline and knowledge. The venturous practitioners are often the venturous researchers among us.

Yet one thing tends to be common across the rhetoric: venturous practice walks on the borderline of fiction and reality. Our curiosity is what enables us to learn. Our ability to dream fuels our actions. Hence, architecture that triggers our curiosity about the world and fuels our imagination, and manages to do it in a playful yet resilient way, is probably the way ahead.

As my practice resides predominantly in Estonia, gradually becoming more international as its collaboration network expands over the years, I commence the PhD document with an overview of the context and an outline of the motivations of my practice. Section II provides a series of different perspectives and considerations of ‘samples’ (completed projects) or examples of projects through which the research has been undertaken. It is through these projects that the ‘discoveries’ have been made, articulated in Section III and accompanied by conclusions that outline implicitly what has been discovered.

The research process itself has consisted of three main activities. Firstly, it has been about looking back at an existing body of work and reflecting on the practice as it has emerged (‘reflection on’ or ‘R-o’). Secondly, the reflection has taken place while continuing to practice, thus I have also been immersed in a reflection in my current practice (‘reflection in’ or ‘R-i’). Thirdly, throughout the research activities, I have kept my eyes on the future, thinking toward future practice (‘reflection for’ or ‘R-f’).

How do I intend the reader to engage with this catalogue? I am well aware that the structure of the document may cause some readers initial difficulties in perceiving the work, since there is often a tendency among readers to first look for overarching topics or themes that might help to clarify the messiness of the actual practice and which binds it together in a seamless whole. Indeed, I have taken care to confront myself again and again with the very idea of a hierarchy of themes – with the temptation to arrive at a level of abstraction that could assist in constructing a single narrative.

However, after much reflection and discussion of how to structure and deliver the outcomes ahead of my research, I concluded that, despite my appreciation for the benefits of providing a clear conceptual statement, in this case any ‘tidying up’ would not convey the actual nature of my practice – it may even prove an unfortunate and misleading outcome. I have thus constructed a space of insight that does not follow the usual conventions of presentation (for example, with a hierarchy of ‘notions’ whereby one or two are highlighted as ‘prime’).

I hope that the readers of this catalogue will notice the multiplicity of layers, assemblages, impulses that are present in this practice and that I aim to uncover in this document – ultimately, I hope that I have been able to convey the nature of my practice successfully.

One might even call the entire catalogue an experimental laboratory: because quick and familiar hierarchical structures would not properly represent the questions of the practice. I have made my best effort to ensure that this catalogue renders the character, essence and profile of the practice as naturally and authentically as possible.

The aim of the catalogue is to bring to the fore the simultaneous activities, parallel lines of thought, triggers and outcomes. In order to counteract the attendant problems that can arise from a non-hierarchical document, I begin by presenting a ‘manifesto’ of ‘architecture as initiative’ as a navigational device to guide the reader in understanding the intentionality of my practice. How to engage with the manifest? This is not to be taken as an overarching narrative – it is instead intended to reveal the specific undercurrents of my approach, evident in some of the ‘samples’ in Section II.

1 Byrte, R 2011, ‘Slide: design, indeterminacy and the specificity of the contingent’, Journal of Artistic Research [online]. Available at: http://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1027. See 0021.11. “To be clear what I am interested in when I talk about design research is the part of design that you might describe as being venturous – that is to say, the kind of designing that changes the way we think about our world and the ways in which we practice designing itself.” Venturous practice builds on ‘venturous Australia’, a phrase coined by TerryCutler in 2008.


Abstract

When practice’s activities propagate through a multiplicity of expressions (simultaneous drawing, model-making, installations, construction supervision, texts, and so on), the set of ‘devices’ with, upon and within which the designer operates could be called the practice’s substratum (substrate). To evolve a practice, is it necessary to transform its structure, purpose or agenda, or is it a question of how to renew its substrate? The work evidences certain ‘joyful’ approaches to publicness in design activity, in which the search for functional realities not only incorporates but immerses itself in and builds upon other disciplines as well as on institutional, ideological and structural processes. A closer look at an existing practice reveals how a practice’s substratum might shift in response to a contextual change. A multi-modal versatile practice bears within it the capacity to facilitate (positive) or to resist (negative) societal change.

Acknowledgements

Even though my community of practice is understandably and quite properly tied very much to Tallinn and Estonia, then the PhD process could not possibly have arisen out of that context. It is only due to the invitation to participate in the RMIT University School of Architecture and Design’s ‘practice-based research’ model, led with profound experience, diplomacy and resolve by Leon van Schaik who has played the decisive role in setting up the Melbourne ‘laboratory’, that I have been so fortunate to be guided through the process.

RMIT University’s School of Architecture and Design offered me a fee-exempt fellowship as part of Richard Blythe’s initiative to bring their practice-based research model from Melbourne to Europe. The EU program was set up by him with support from Leon van Schaik, SueAnne Ware and Martyn Hook, and in the last two years by Marcelo Stamm, followed now by Pia Ednie-Brown. Johan Verbeke, the former head of the Sint-Lucas School of Architecture (today LUCA, as part of KU Leuven, Belgium), also played an important role in making this happen. He and Richard Blythe devised the way in which the RMIT PhD was offered in the EU first through Sint-Lucas and now extending to other architecture schools across Europe. Thus, I am a happy pioneer of this process.

My gratitude goes to my supervisors Richard Blythe and Marcelo Stamm for their encouragement and insight.

I am much indebted to Pia Ednie-Brown, who invited me to contribute to the AD volume ‘The Innovation Imperative: Architectures of Vitality’, issued in 2013, in which the manifesto reproduced in Section IV of this document was first published. It was also Pia Ednie-Brown who led to my intrigue in synthetic biology and introduced me to Oron Catts.

Throughout the entire PhD process I felt such strong support from the RMIT academic community at the Practice Research Symposia (PRS) held at LUCA in Ghent, Belgium, which were conducted first by Martyn Hook, and later by Marcelo Stamm. The vivid discussions, helpful advice and general support at each PRS have become precious memories: truly inspiring, crystallising and catalysing to say the least. Not to mention, I am immensely grateful to my family for their endurance.

I am grateful to the editor Ellen Jensen for her commitment, curiosity and attention to detail.

A big THANK YOU to all the others from around the world with whom I have worked. Every project described below was born in collaboration, thus it is my turn to dedicate this work to you.
Architecture as Initiative (a Manifesto)

The practice Zizi&Yoyo was founded by Yoko Alender and I in 2005, and between 2007 and mid-2012 Helene Vetik took over Alender's share in the partnership. Over this time and through various practice constellations, we have gradually been developing an approach that might be called 'architecture as initiative. This 'manifesto' draws on the research we have undertaken as Zizi&Yoyo, and develops the idea that practices of initiating (or generating 'the initiative') offer potentially open and affirmative ways to approach innovation through architecture.

What is an Initiative?

An initiative is the smallest unit of vitality in living environments – similar to the biological cell in the living organism. All change is catalysed by an initiative, from single concepts such as a shelter or stage (see Mikrousoi), to complicated urban developments such as our cities, which are formed by multiplicities of initiatives.

In its role as the basic catalyst for change, an initiative might be considered as a relatively simple collection of components in a process, gently 'tick[ing] over' to maintain itself and occasionally propagating new initiatives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Each and every initiative, from the simplest to the most complicated, is a self-contained ideas factory, like the molecular factory of the cell "working frantically throughout every minute of its lifespan." This is how we can think about formations such as the Weimar Republic and the Bauhaus School (1919–31), avant-garde architectural groups like Team X (the 1953 C.I.A.M. Congress), Archigram (the 1961 pamphlet), Superstudio (the 1966 'Superarchitettura show'), and others. A 'frantic' effort is needed to self-maintain, to nurture and to evolve not only the initiative itself, but also the day-to-day activity of one's community by initiating new ways to value (art)work that is produced in an unauthorised way. This can happen via seemingly simple architectural moves. The 'Pleiades' of contemporary initiatives might drive its carriers (as through carriers of an idealistic – even somewhat fanatic – virus) to self-commissioning and mobilising diverse resources, among other things.

How Else Might Contemporary Initiatives Look?

Initiatives, when driven by curiosity about spatial concepts, might involve actual design and construction, manifest, and elaborate public debate. At a more complex level, they might start to look a lot like accelerated curating, launching explorative phenomena (Yalgusfestival-like), promoting active involvement in emergent digital ecosystems and fund-raising, or implementing an array of skills in spatial arts and collaboration.

How Can We Be Initiators Today, and Tomorrow?

Taking on many different roles during the day, our practice has both internal structure and 'unstructuredness'. We need to think across scales, drilling into structural barriers with initiatives like the symbiotic arts and sciences mobile lab 'Pleiades'. This project aimed to provoke communities by initiating new ways to value [art]work that is produced in an unauthorised way. This can happen via seemingly simple architectural moves. The 'Pleiades' could ideally go around the world forever, as if a 'perpetuum mobile' of some sort, and as an innovation hub still maintain its capacity for surprise by being adaptive to changing locations and their microclimates. It strives to be simultaneously temporal and permanent, posed with the question of whether we can ever escape the imperative of continuous 'progress' (which neither post-capitalism nor post-humanism seem to have achieved).

We need to remain cautious about scenarios driven by efficiency and by automatic processes. Concentrating on presence, we can look for the present moment, for intimacy, and for the previously invisible 'and/or' ambivalences, but can also retain the condition of waiting. We can cultivate decency and guide creativity by avoiding repetition and unlimited desire. For example, the 'piano stairs' project (see the Lasva Water Tower conversion) started for us with the proposition of a playful concept structured around fun, but acquired resonance among locals for its humility and simplicity.

Similar to installing a 35-storey hotel (see Smotiel) in the 85m-high Kultuurikatel chimney, we may need to redefine our vocabulary to reach the public. Finding alternative ways to communicate and reach as many people as possible, with whatever means and technologies are available, gives us an opportunity to shift the way we think and operate together. When we trigger and support initiatives that fascinate many through strong relevance and contagious humour, people will want to spread them on their own.

Ultimately, practicing – and even approaching – 'architecture as initiative' requires channelling the resourceful current underlying the spatial arts' potential to forge meaningful connections between people, places and attitudes. This is the vitality that architecture can generate, and the architecture generated through vitalising initiatives. Contagious, alive and able to self-assemble, once 'released' – that is, realised as the built/living environment – our actions inside the life of the initiative continue to matter.
Section II presents projects from a tiny to an urban and even a regional scale: proposals for the coast of the Baltic Sea and for the Tallinn waterfront; completed buildings and a monument outside of Tallinn (in Suure-Jaani, Tartu and Lasva); an account of a variety of installations (each presenting a different collaboration setup), as well as observations from festivals of contemporary culture as tools to guide urban planning processes. The ten samples also vary from singular projects to ‘bundles’ of endeavours.

My practice is tightly wedded to the complexities of Estonia: its geopolitics, coastline and local microclimate. The chosen projects aim to display a specific ‘joyful’ and ‘playful’ approach in my work; to present the plasticity of the practice; to weave a certain agenda through crossed contexts and to show how a family of ideas is evoked in those crossed contexts. Finally, the samples are chosen to explain what ‘architecture as initiative’ could look like.

What the ‘sample’ texts are not...

I do not want the ‘sample’ texts to be read as an objective account of data, but rather for the reader to keep in mind that they have been written by a practitioner who has immersed herself for years in different endeavours, thus developing a very personal and subjective insight into the matter. The ‘samples’ are as thorough documents, stories, movie-scenes – being coloured vividly by my own personal agenda and thus not claiming any objectivity. In a sense, no work by an author can claim uncontested, self-evident authority. The ‘samples’ are as though documentaries, immersed herself for years in different endeavours, thus being written by a practitioner who has

...and what they are instead

What I do want to achieve with Section II’s ‘samples’ is to provide certain kinds of insights which support the evidence in the ‘Findings’ in Section III. I have to stress that throughout the PhD process I have looked back at a much larger number of my projects than can be incorporated into this Research Catalogue, observing their targets and outcomes, their processes and their impacts, and dissecting the essence of this research in Section III’s ‘Findings’. The samples are rich with description so that the interventions can be encountered and subverted in ways relevant to the PhD research. However, so as not to bore the reader with the lengthy descriptions of a hundred projects, I have carefully ‘pipetted’ the few that contribute most convincingly to the arguments of the ‘Findings’, approaching them from a variety of angles.

The samples can be read in ‘bundles’. The constellations of samples can, of course, be assembled in multiple ways. I am certain that they could very well be grouped in other ways, yet here I insist on one line which reads directly into the ‘Findings’ in Section III. Some of the samples themselves constitute a constellation of sub-projects which in turn can be associated with sub-projects from another ‘sample’. (For example, Samples 8 and 10 have been assembled as a cluster of similar endeavours.) Here, I offer a sequence in which all the projects should be considered as if taking place simultaneously. They inform and influence one another, as the practice itself is usually engaged in a variety of parallel activities.

For instance, Sample 1 (the Tallinn Waterfront) could be bundled with Sample 2 (Kultuurikatel) as well as with some sub-projects described in Samples 8 (Festivals of Contemporary Culture) and 10 (Linnahall as a monumental Soviet building). Samples 3 (the Suure-Jaani Sports Centre) and 5 (the Lasva Water Tower), together with the sub-projects of Samples 2 (Kultuurikatel) and 10 (Linnahall) target buildings. Samples 4 (the Eduard Tubin monument), 6 (the so-called ‘roof-top’ shelter), 7 (Mikroun) and 8 (installations) deliver architecture as ‘set design’, emphasising the city as a stage for human action. Each sample concludes with references to Section III (‘Findings’) as well as to other samples. All of the samples target ‘architecture as initiative’ in Section IV.

I have tried my best to subdivide the ten samples as much as possible, for the ease of the reader as well as for clarity, yet have discovered that there is no way I could subdivide them further. The reason is very simple, namely that they would cease to exist as actions or observations on their own. To subdivide the sample further would mean to pulverise them completely. On such an atomic level, they become details or elements of insights from which other endeavours might be generated or accelerated, giving birth to future projects emerging from the ‘substrate’ of the practice, as discussed in Section III: ‘Findings’. I have considered a variety of scenarios for orienting the reader throughout the material – for example, as previously mentioned, reconstructing a linear narrative or clustering the projects in such a way that the sequence of structural moves would prove misleading. I have deliberately run the risk of the document hinting in a multiplicity of directions simultaneously. That risk enables me to reveal the omnipresent indiscernence in my work, and admittedly leads to a certain elusiveness. But how to read the ‘samples’?

My practice – its operational profiles, ‘devices’ and outcomes – has always been tied to nuance and detail, rather than a conceptual monolith of linear argumentation. I therefore offer detailed accounts of my projects in this catalogue, not because of a wish to construct an artificial abstraction of the practice, but in order to discuss the practice as close to reality as possible. I hope this account helps to re-invigorate the experience and thus help the reader to better comprehend the reflections in Section III, ‘Findings’.

The strategy for the level of detail offered in this section is therefore as follows: while one might assume that the practices are narrative-driven and that the practitioner is driven by this very narrative, the question may then arise whether there is a latent hidden hierarchy in the body of work and samples provided.

However, here I must stress that none of the works described should be viewed as a goal or an end in itself, nor should they be confused with an infinite perpetuation of themselves – the practice evolves constantly and none of the projects is likely to recur in the future. This means that the samples do not constitute the practice per se, but that my observations in this section provide another kind of evidence, that of the multitude of parallel streams of interconnected activities which have a direct impact on the practice’s design outcomes. Section III, ‘Findings’ engages further with my observations about the multilateral, intertwined influence of those parallel activities and experiences.

The samples are arranged according to their dimensions – from those that are fairly large to those that are quite small. They begin with Sample 1: The Tallinn Waterfront and the Baltic TurnTable, and the consequent mergers can be viewed in two groups: one is more inclined towards the agenda of the ‘manifesto’ (Section I – ‘architecture as initiative’) and the other towards the ‘playful and joyful’.

The accounts of the projects have been curated in such a way that each one differs experimentally as far as possible from the previous sample. This is intended specifically to define the particular scope of activities undertaken during the course of the practice and to give the reader an idea of the ‘versatility’ discussed. The samples can be viewed in two groups: one is more inclined towards the agenda of the ‘manifesto’ (Section I – ‘architecture as initiative’) and the other towards the ‘playful and joyful’.

II Samples
The coastline of Estonia is long and intricate; yet the ongoing privatisation of the shore – with signs stating that the land is privately owned – is somewhat similar to the situation during the Soviet times when the coastline served as a military border zone, owned by the state and denying access to locals.

More than half of the border of Estonia is the shore of the Baltic Sea. For centuries this has determined the lifestyle, culture and identity of Estonians, and has also influenced the country’s geopolitical and economic development. The planet’s youngest sea, at less than 10,000 years old, the Baltic is unique in that it was formed after the last ice age. It is also one of the world’s largest bodies of brackish water. The shallowness of the Baltic and its unusual mix of freshwater and marine species mean it is also especially vulnerable to environmental changes. Nowadays the Baltic Sea is considered one of the planet’s most fragile and polluted seas. Meanwhile, the Baltic Sea is one of the most researched and yet polluted marine environments in the world. Thus, the BALTIC environment is a one of the most researched and yet polluted marine environments in the world. Thus, the BALTIC environment is of particular interest to the Tallinn waterfront. The Baltic Sea is a unique cultural heritage site and an architectural and natural monument.9

The Baltic: Riviera About to Be Born

Here is a catch: what if global warming might be good news for some parts of the world? Global warming indeed puts large parts of the world at risk from the Biblical threats of famine, flood and disease but, in Northern Europe, agriculture will become more productive and the climate will improve. Amazingly enough, there were certain plans in progress on a regional level to investigate such future scenarios. For example, the Baltic TurnTable (BTT) was a 2006–2007 initiative set up by research and cultural institutions around the Baltic Sea that had the ambitious goal to highlight the potential of the Baltic coastline as the ‘leisure landscape’ of tomorrow. It included players from Tallinn, Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Kaliningrad.

The BTT project, a dream of the future Baltic coast, was an example of venturous environmental thinking. What makes an initiative such as the BTT extraordinary is that it established a working structure to develop an urban planning tool, bringing politicians, grassroots designers and local inhabitants to the same table. As stated, the Baltic Sea environment is one of the most researched and yet polluted marine environments in the world. Thus, the BALTIC environment is of particular interest to the Tallinn waterfront. The Baltic Sea is a unique cultural heritage site and an architectural and natural monument.9

Talent City? Tallinn?

The predominant memory of Tallinn’s construction boom is that there are many new buildings going up. However, due to an economic slowdown and the EU’s regulatory pressures, more and more thought is being given to the energy efficiency of buildings and to integrating renewable energy solutions, as well as to opening up the real estate market to foreign designers. The Tallinn waterfront years to mean something to Europe, and even to the world.

Indeed, certain unique structures distinguish the Tallinn seashore from the waterfronts of other capitals in the region. For example, an event organiser could test his or her inventiveness by hosting a conference in the Tallinn City Concert Hall, Linnahall.10 Future plans have envisioned Linnahall as the largest conference centre in Estonia; however, the whole structure was abandoned in 2009. It is a pity, since the premises of Linnahall, located next to Tallinn’s main passenger port, would serve as a public venue of official prominence.

The city also awaits an investor with a sense of diplomacy and a sensitivity towards history to renovate Patarei Battery, a former powder magazine that is a unique cultural heritage site and an architectural monument.11 The Hydroplane Hangars – the first reinforced concrete domes in Europe, built in 1916–17 and representing the engineering genius of the time – have, on the other hand, already been refurbished as a Maritime Museum.

Furthermore, Tallinn held an enthusiastic competition for the waterfront’s new Town Hall, won by the Bjarke Ingels Group from Denmark. However, the spirit of the Baltic Riviera has not truly been present in any of the above. Developments outside Tallinn tend towards ‘tidying up’: selling the land and setting up villas (in between former Soviet border-guard stations, no less…). Perhaps the scale of things – the scale of the new Baltic Riviera – is in details, in disruptions of the everyday, and in the very local.

On a larger scale, the BTT initiative later gave birth to the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,12 launched by the European Parliament and coordinated by the European Commission. Additionally, the European Union’s Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007–2013 was born, promoting regional development through transnational co-operation in which partners from 11 countries around the Baltic Sea work together to find joint solutions to common problems. But to explain how I got involved in the BTT initiative, we must go back a few years to 2000, when the Tallinn city government held an urban ideas competition for the Tallinn waterfront.

The mainland’s coastline length is 1,242 km, with that of the islands totaling 2,551 km (including the biggest island, Saaremaa, with 854 km). Estonia has approximately 1,500 islands and islets.

The official total trawler length is 149,022 km, with a sea border of 706.8 km and a land border of 681.6 km.

The building of Linnahall was supported by the EU’s Cohesion Fund. The building was opened in 2010.

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The building of Linnahall was supported by the EU’s Cohesion Fund. The building was opened in 2010.
Authors of the winning entry of the Tallinn waterfront’s urban ideas competition in 2000: Veronika Valk, Villem Tomiste (image in upper left-hand corner)

Further programming scenarios for historic structures and public transportation along Tallinn coastline were introduced in the print media (Eesti Päevaleht, Postimees, Eesti Ekspress, etc.) between 2000 and 2008.

The Baltic TurnTable (BTT)

What if global warming might be good news for some parts of the world? Global warming indeed puts large parts of the world at risk from the Biblical threats of famine, flood and disease – however, in northern Europe, agriculture will become more productive and the climate will improve. The Baltic TurnTable (BTT) is an initiative set up by research and cultural institutions around the Baltic Sea that has the ambitious goal of highlighting the potential of the Baltic coastline as the ‘leisure landscape’ of tomorrow. The BTT project, a dream of the future Baltic coast, is an example of visionry thinking taken seriously enough by the scientific arena.

The Baltic Sea environment is one of the most researched and yet most polluted marine environments in the world. This idea is not only about creating ‘the new Mediterranean’ but, more importantly, is an effort to rescue the region from environmental hazards and to point towards a happier ending, focusing on enhancing the region’s quality of life.

The first sign of Tallinn’s booming construction was that there were many new buildings appearing. However, due to the current economic slowdown, the scenery of Tallinn’s urban planning and design activities has finally started to grow not just in quantity, but in quality. Wishful thinking? Tallinn’s waterfront is something for Europe – and for the world – to keep an eye on.

The Baltic Riviera only comes to life if the concept finds fertile grounds on a local scale among municipalities and the coastline’s dwellers, and has the help of landscape and urban designers who are willing to take on the challenge.

Looking from Estonia, then, our hopes lie largely with Tallinn’s ‘catalyst’ powers...
The Tallinn Waterfront

My colleague Villem Tomiste and I won this competition with an entry that linked up the seaside through a coastal tramline. The new tramline did more than merely connect different clusters in various parts of the city. It claimed an emotional quality, racing through a landscape of diverse urban events—an opera hall, a conference centre, a passenger terminal, Patarei (the former fortifications and prison), the hydroplane hangars, parks, and so on. The idea was simple: that the real estate projects linked by tram and thus integrated into the city fabric would be much more vibrant right from the start than they would be on their own, without public transportation to provide access to the new developments.¹³

Novel programs were offered, emphasising the originality of the landscape and fully revealing the potential of the area. For example, the former heat-plant was to be developed as a culture hub (currently developed as Kultuurikatel); the Admiralty Basin was supposed to become a ‘plaza on water’ with a new Town Hall on its quay; the new Opera was planned for the currently closed-off port area; Patarei was designated as a specific hotel; a yacht harbour was added to the Linnahall venue, while we were proposing that the hydroplane hangars become a museum (today they are refurbished as the Maritime Museum).

The entry stressed the importance of breaking up monofunctionality and aimed at a mix of dwellings, leisure, business and production. We considered it equally important that the industrial flair of the area be somehow retained, but that the out-of-proportion and polluting industries of the Soviet era be replaced with resilient small workshops and production facilities, tied to the activities of the people who move to the area. Those businesses which required closed-off premises and posed threats to the environment were to be relocated outside the city centre.

The project also addressed housing issues and suggested that the housing should be developed together with the landmarks—either literally incorporated into the structures or planned right next to them. Later, I developed the concept of a Tallinn University campus (namely its student housing units) tied to the tramline and the landmarks, but I will come back to this proposal further on. First, we should look at the context of the competition and whether its outcomes—especially the winning entry—might still have relevance today.

The aim of the competition was to establish a coherent plan for the Tallinn waterfront and to derive guidelines that would then be elaborated in the urban planning proposal to be implemented in the waterfront development. After the winners were declared, a committee was formed by the municipality to discuss the winning proposal with different stakeholder institutions and city departments. Later on, many of the guidelines became the basis for future plans, yet the municipality’s dedication to addressing the waterfront development in a visionary, holistic way has been hectic and discontinuous due to prevailing political ‘dramatics’ that tend to sweep politicians quickly in and out of office. This leads to one of the examples of the Kafkaesque explained in Section III.

In 2005, the mayor of Tallinn, Tõnis Pärts, declared the importance of the Sea Promenade in opening up Tallinn to the bay, and called me in to consult the project. In the following years, this strategy became the backbone of the European Capital of Culture 2011 agenda. Throughout this process, my goal has been—as an architect and as a planner—to invent spatial strategies that nurture the accumulation of the grassroots initiatives on the waterfront, as well as to focus broader public attention on the importance of asking not only ‘when’ and ‘why’ we need to open up the city to the water again but, more specifically, ‘how’ we might do it in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to future generations.

Tallinn grasps the bay like a small crab: the sea connects most of the urban districts, from Roosa-Al Mare to Merivälja. Stroomi, Pelgurand, Kopli, Kalamaja, the city centre, Kadriorg and Pirita are all different city areas by the waterfront. Nothing seems to have changed much when taking a walk or a photo, yet it is evident that a slight mind-shift has occurred in the way locals think about the waterfront, looking at the same site with perhaps different eyes, or through another lens—hopefully a sharper one. But the physical situation is largely the same, even for infrastructure and connections. In professional circles as well as on a political level, the locals are discussing the same agenda over and over again.

Years ago, the city made plans for extremely wide traffic routes, such as the Northern Bypass which would cut off the city centre from the seaside. Surprisingly and sadly, these plans found funding from the EU—just when a majority of successful cities are instead transforming their vehicular arteries into ‘green rivers’ or putting them underground. The local activists, as well as the professional community, have been in a continuous and rigorous fight for smarter solutions. Therefore, the waterfront tramline from the 2000 competition and the rest of the ideas presented in that entry might still prove relevant even now, some 13 years later.

Sample 1 Conclusion

I must point out that this sample targets most of the aspects of ‘Immersion’ discussed in Section III: ‘Findings’. Here, the ‘immersion’ in the work takes on a certain colour in terms of cultivating the later predominant urge to ‘disrupt the ‘machinic’, as elaborated in ‘Findings’. Sample 1 should be considered together with Samples 2 (Kultuurikatel), 8 (Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture, especially 8.2. Velgufestival) and 10 (workshops, especially 10.2. the Linnahall workshop).

¹³ It has a permanent naval exhibition, including the icebreaker Suur Tõll and the submarine Lembit, while the cupolas offer spectacular acoustics for musical events.
¹⁴ http://eu-baltic.net
¹⁵ The main invention of the winning entry was a new high-speed tramline on the seashore. The tramline was partially adjacent to the green bastion belt around the Old Town, creating the possibility to extend the tramline all around the historic centre (a ring-route around the Old Town). As a result, a continuous green passageway was formed, connecting the main existing buildings—unique landmarks—on the waterfront, enabling their further development according to their historic features and contemporary societal demands.
¹⁶ The development of the Tallinn seaside has been a burning topic throughout the history of the city, right from its birth. The harbour was a source of wealth for the Hanseatic Old Town centuries ago, while today some 7 million tourists arrive annually by sea, which is a number making even Helsinki jealous of our potential. As stated, practically all of the bayside was a military zone during the Soviet regime, with strict restrictions of access.
¹⁷ As a curator, one can think of performances or art shows which have been staged in Kultuurikatel (a ‘creative industries incubator’, according to the Ministry of Culture). At the ‘sea-gate to Estonia, Kultuurikatel had the ambition to become an entrepreneurial model for the country’s ‘creatives’. The NGO assumed the role of the developer, which means dealing not only with the planning, programming and architectural design, but also with the legal issues and financial scheme of the project.
¹⁸ Already in the winning competition proposal from 2000, I had suggested that this location become a creative hub.
¹⁹ As a curator, one can think of performances or art shows which have been staged in Kultuurikatel (a ‘creative industries incubator’, according to the Ministry of Culture). At the ‘sea-gate to Estonia, Kultuurikatel had the ambition to become an entrepreneurial model for the country’s ‘creatives’.
²⁰ The particular location of the Caudron was drawing plenty of attention since the new Tallinn City Hall was to be constructed on a neighbouring plot. The controversial Linnahall, a grandiose concert hall from the 1980s, is also located in its immediate vicinity.
Kultuurikatel was set up as an initiative for catalysing development on the Tallinn waterfront, as well as a laboratory of the contemporary, with its three main ‘operating tools’ – the triple ‘S’: 1) developing Synergy, 2) Symbiosis and 3) Synchronisation of the creative fields. The 10,000 square metres would host outdoor and indoor spaces, both experimental and experiential, for tacit learning and performance – a multitude of facilities for the arts and the sciences. Upon reconstruction, Kultuurikatel was conceived as an open study-book on emergent resilience: the built environment learns from natural phenomena and the built environment becomes in itself a learning tool, to be explored, studied and evolved over time. This sample resonates most strongly with the ‘manifesto on “architecture as initiative”’ in Section IV.

Kultuurikatel as an Initiative

A project in a nutshell, Kultuurikatel (‘Culture Cauldron’) is an old thermal power station being transformed into a multipurpose cultural centre. Without a doubt, the building has great potential. It has plenty of interesting spaces, including a 20m-high main hall. Naturally, the starting point of the project was the year 2000, when Villem Tomiste and I won the open ideas competition for the waterfront. In our plans, the thermal plant had been nominated as the future cultural centre. When the Tallinn mayor of the time, Tõnis Palts, termed the key development area ‘cultural space’ (2005), the ideas were reacti- vated and more people became interested in the topic.

This is how the idea of the Culture Cauldron took the form of an NGO.

The project was led by an inventive and energetic NGO that I called together in spring 2006 and that had plenty of grand ideas for how to make the concept work on the premises; however, no major financing for their implementation was as yet on the horizon. The thermal power station (heat-plant) was situated at a focal point of Tallinn’s transforming waterfront: the northern side of the Tallinn Old Town, at the address Põhja Road 27a/35. The size of the main building complex of the heat-plant was 10,000m² and there were another 10,000m² of unused structures right on the plot. The property was and still is owned by the City of Tallinn.

What triggered the whole initiative? I saw Kultuurikatel as a catalyst for urban change: the thermal power station is perfectly situated within Tallinn’s transforming waterfront, and is a stepping stone from the centre (and the Old Town) to the waterfront, with proximity to both. How the waterfront should be developed – and what the city could or should do about it – is a major planning question in Tallinn, even today. Since the urban development in Tallinn is to a great extent led by private developers, the Culture Cauldron represents quite a dis- tinctive project, focusing on the development of public space and being a clever grassroots initiative for a place of creation, not just of consumption.

The city was slowly and unwillingly coming to terms with our arguments, thanks to our extensive lobby work and pressure through repeatedly expressing the NGO’s opinion in the mass media, thus popularising the idea and gathering public support for the concept of Kul- tuurikatel. Having a ‘creative council’ of 25 of the country’s most prominent culture professionals gave the proposal credibility and broadened its agenda, its rigour and its relevance in the society. Soon it could no longer be overlooked or neglected. After 2011, the Culture Capital organisation Foundation 2011 (a municipal administra- tive entity of project managers) was reformed into Foun- dation Kultuurikatel.

Financing the Initiative

The NGO envisioned four sources of income. Firstly, we saw the Cauldron developing as a ‘creative industries’ incubator (which could pave the way for EU creative indus- tries funds). Secondly, developing the property was supposed to provide rental incomes. Thirdly, the NGO considered the Cauldron as a project-based educational institution focusing on creative entrepreneurship and art education. Fourthly, the NGO had ambitious ideas to de- velop renewable energies on the site. However, in 2005 the premises were in need of major investment, as a ma- jority of the complex was troubled by an asbestos prob- lem, which increased the projected costs of renovation.

The asbestos removal has been completed, and various concerts, events and theatrical performances have been arranged in the building. However, as a non- comprehensive, step-by-step renovation project, the undertaking remains in a continuous phase of prepara- tion. Currently, renovation works are still in progress. The building has three kinds of spaces: bigger halls that could be rented out on hourly/weekly/monthly bases; cross- use/workshop spaces that could be scheduled between theatres and private users; and smaller units (rooms) that scale from more public to more private space.

How did the project eventually receive funding? From the NGO’s perspective, we argued that the City of Tallinn should invest in the Cauldron, potentially holding the central position in the European Capital for Culture (2011) program. Even more so, because the building is the city’s property, the place is a key point in the water- front redevelopment, and a major development project of public space on the Tallinn scale. It was also emphasised that there is no other project of such immense scale in creative industries in the country. And, indeed, we were progressing the discussion of creative industries in Esto- nia.

Background

Historically, the first buildings in the west wing of the Tallinn Electricity Station complex (the machinery build- ing, the boilerhouse and an office block) were completed in 1912–13 according to architect G. Schmidt’s project. Simultaneously, a brick chimney was built by J. Russ- wurm’s engineering office. In 1923 the town govern- ment decided to use oil shale instead of peat for heat pro- duction. This brought much trouble for the neighbouring inhabitants, namely smoke from the burning of oil shale polluting the surroundings. Refurbishing the furnaces and heightening the chimney did not solve the problem.

The appearance of the area was altered by a 75m-high metal chimney with a diameter of 2.75m, which was produced in the factory Ilmarine in December 1934. The air became considerably cleaner; however, the whole com- plex suffered during World War II, with the metal chimney being destroyed. The current red-brick chimney, built in 1947–48, was initially 102.5m high (today slightly over 80m). As the heat-plant continued to burn oil shale, the chimney needed such height to guide the smoke as far as possible from the inhabited areas.

The Anomaly

Smotel, planned inside the chimney, had a round floor- plan with a diameter of 10.5m at the foot of the chimney, decreasing by half at the top of the chimney. The height of the structure would allow the building of at least 35 storeys of hotel rooms, one room per floor. Or it would
Kultuurikatel (transl. ‘Culture Cauldron’), in the former heating station on Tallinn’s waterfront, is becoming public space in the best and broadest sense of the word, because the industrial complex is currently being converted into Estonia’s biggest creative industries incubator.

Situated in a key location (that of the meeting point between the UNESCO-listed Old Town and the Tallinn seaside), it exemplifies the controversy of Estonia’s historic and ideological legacy. The Tallinn waterfront was previously a secluded border zone – however, it is now undergoing vast and rapid transformation with parts of the seaside, which used to be cut off from the city, now being given back to locals.

Installing the 35-storey Smotel in an 85m-tall disused chimney, as part of the Kultuurikatel redevelopment of the old Tallinn power-plant complex on the waterfront close to the Old Town and the passenger harbour, is about re-defining the architect’s vocabulary in order to reach the public.

Finding alternative ways gives us an opportunity to shift the way we think and operate together.

Kultuurikatel is an entrepreneurial model to catalyse the development of the waterfront as well as a laboratory of the contemporary, with its operating tools developing synergy, symbiosis and the synchronisation of the creative fields. At the Sea Gate to Estonia, it comprises the 10,000m² of a former heating station that is to be reconstructed as a renewable energy power-plant. An environmental education centre, in combination with performance spaces and art facilities, is implemented in close collaboration with partners from the public and private spheres. Upon construction, Kultuurikatel provides an open study-book on sustainability: the history of the heating station, contemporary energy efficiency solutions used in reconstruction, and integrated renewable energy technologies are on display for local schools and visitors of all ages. The environment itself becomes a learning tool to be monitored, studied and upgraded over time – as a curator, one can think of staging a performance or opening an art show in Kultuurikatel, the creative hub on the waterfront.

Founding members of NGO and current board members: Veronika Valk, Andres Lõo, Maria Hansar, Peeter-Eerik Ots. This ‘bottom-up’ venture was taken over by Tallinn City in 2010.

Architectural concept, programming & preliminary design: Veronika Valk
Idea: 2000
Formation of NGO: 2006
Graphic designer: Helene Vetik

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Architectural concept, programming & preliminary design: Veronika Valk
Idea: 2000
Formation of NGO: 2006
Graphic designer: Helene Vetik
Kultuurituli showed the way (literally!) in January 2006, with a powerful 250m light-beam emitted from its 82.5m-high chimney, which was visible all over the city.
also be possible to divide the floors in half, allowing for two rooms per floor. This would allow double the number of rooms in the hotel. The floor area varies from 21.5m² at the foot of the chimney, to 11.0m² at the top of the chimney.

The ground-floor was designated as a lobby and as communal spaces. The hotel would not need to accommodate restaurants, meeting places or other facilities since these are offered by the adjacent Kultuurikatel. Thus, the hotel rooms could be similar to the ones in a Japanese capsule hotel, equipped with the absolute essentials such as bedrooms and bathrooms. Windows are created as if by ‘punching’ bricks out of the wall, offering a 360-degree view (thus the windows are somewhat hidden).

It is clear that, despite the small size of the rooms, the hotel would be unique and attractive for a variety of international visitors with a certain aspiration for the ‘peculiar’ and a fascination for anomalies. Perhaps Kultuurikatel’s guests (artists, performers, lecturers) could be accommodated here. Please do not tell this to anyone, but I promised the top floor of the hotel always to the current mayor (they shift each year), Smotol has the potential to allure. The red brick chimney (the premises have three chimneys in total) is a prominent feature on the elevation drawing, as if without any recognisable pattern-logic.

Building on-Site

The sports centre is on Vambola Street, with its main entrance at the corner of Vambola and Tallinn Streets. The plot is large enough for a future swimming pool (dimensions 37.2 x 28.5m) and for student housing (dimensions 14.0 x 28.5m). The new sports centre took this into account, leaving abundant options for the coming years, such as for new annexes that could encircle an inner courtyard. The lobby is designed in a way that it can also serve in the future as the main entrance to the complex.

The L-shaped foyer along the building and parallel to Vambola Street leads to the outdoor stadium at one end and to the school building (the existing classrooms), the dining room and the courtyard at the other end. The courtyard acts both as a casual extension of the interior as well as a festive gathering space with a flag-pole and a canopy for protection during rainy or snowy weather. The poles that hold up the cantilevered canopy roof function simultaneously as a bike rack. All the existing vegetation on the plot has been respected and preserved as much as possible. The floor of the sports hall lies 3.30m below ground level. The foyer is, in fact, an open balcony to the sports hall.

The benefit of such a solution is that the foyer is the viewers’ space during public sports competitions. The courtyard side of the sports hall is additionally equipped with removable telescopic tribunes. I suggested keeping the stands open also in summertime, since the whole of the glass façade towards the inner courtyard was intended to be openable. It would make perfect sense for a school in a rural setting to have its interior blended with the outside environment.

The Fight

However, the issue of the glass façade caused one of the main quarrels with the construction company (almost resulting in a physical fight between me and the site supervisor on the day of ‘topping-out’, with both of us standing on the newly-poured roof plate while the client’s representatives looked up at us from the ground, betting on which one of us would throw the other off the roof). The construction company was otherwise very supportive of the project and novel solutions were proposed, yet in this instance they argued that if the façade were open then the ventilation system would break down.

In essence, the construction company wished to install a cheaper ventilation system and did not want to take chances with warranty repairs. Against my will and without my approval, the construction company installed a fixed glass wall, with just two emergency exit doors that could be opened only occasionally. This solution does not support the original concept of the sports centre’s interior having a continuous flow into the courtyard – and vice versa of the feeling of playing sports outdoors even when inside the building.

On another note, one of the main challenges of the project was its acoustics. The noise from the sports hall had to be kept away from the classrooms, offices and other spaces that needed quietness. This issue was solved by a suspended felt ceiling in the sports hall, invented specially for this project. Another topic was the joining of the old school building with the new annex; here, an ‘in-between’ space with Skylights was created, with no functional designation. It became the favourite recreation space of the students.

The building is made predominantly of reinforced concrete. The surfaces emphasise the natural features of the materials. The façade is covered with elements of Siberian Larch, which run mainly horizontally all along the façade. The skylights are placed at random intervals and, on first glance at the elevation drawing, as if without any recognisable pattern-logic.
According to locals, a ‘vegetable soup’ has emerged in literally the ‘middle of nowhere’ – the rural town of Suure-Jaani in southern Estonia.

A playful, neo-pop, brightly-coloured sports complex features open-plan ball courts with sponge-like walls and felt panel ceilings for acoustic comfort.

Children are thrilled by its fully-climbable façade – concrete slabs covered with a perimetral ‘ladder’ of untreated Siberian Larch. The canopy’s slim steel supports that separate an inner courtyard from the street are, in fact, a bicycle rack.

The interior design is full of integrated solutions, for example cupboards as drawing boards and exterior lighting giving interior illumination via glass cupolas.

Address:
Lembitu tee 42
71502 Suure-Jaani
Estonia

Photos: Veronika Valk, Arne Maasik, Jõgimar Mussikus
The Most Beautiful School

The Most Beautiful School was visited by Karin Paulus, one of the editors of Eesti Ekspress, the main weekly in Estonia which has an occasional fascination with architecture. She wrote: “It is a school where every child wants to study. There is no other school environment in Estonia as comfortable as this. And it is not located in Tallinn or Tartu [two main cities in Estonia], but in Suure-Jaani. The director of the school, Peeter Sadam, admits the small size of his hometown and says... that the existing school building typology from the 1980s already needed an extension a long time ago.”

The competition for the sports centre took place in 2000. However, it took several years for the school to acquire the necessary funding to build the project, although it is a central school in the region, with students flocking here from the neighbouring counties and towns. During the construction, we also tragically lost two of the project’s main supporters, with both mayor Rein Valdmann and vice-mayor Peedu Voormans passing away.

But the project was realised, the design emphasising an appropriate scale to the small town as the sports hall is sunk partially into the ground. The ‘load-bearing holes’ in the interior walls create a play of shadow and light. The director’s office overlooks the roof, to respectfully greet the children who have climbed joyfully up on the ladder-facade. The felt ceiling created a ‘flying’ pose, truly conducting the inspiration of coming generations.

According to the press, the site has become something of a destination of pilgrimage among locals. Within this interactive light- and sound-installation, visitors can hear fragments of Tubin’s music by knocking on the gongs of the back wall, then sitting back and relaxing on a field of black ‘rubbery-feel’ concrete seats, which emit light from underneath onto wide ground and wall surfaces.

French sound designer Louis Dandel from Diasonic used a variety of Tubin’s musical phases for pre-programming. Four rows of speakers create a waving soundscape on a grassy slope between the theatre and the river.

Sample 4: The Monument for Composer Eduard Tubin

by Veronika Vaik (architect), Alii Vahtrapuu (sculptor) and Louis Dandel (sound engineering), is designed as an interactive outdoor musical experience.

This monument (completion in 2005) in Tartu, Estonia, honours composer Eduard Tubin’s 100th anniversary.

It emerged from an architectural competition held in May 2004, won by Veronika Vaik (architect) and Alii Vahtrapuu (sculptor). Sculptor Alii Vahtrapuu set Tubin in a ‘flying’ pose, truly conducting the inspiration of coming generations.

According to the press, the site has become something of a destination of pilgrimage among locals. Within this interactive light- and sound-installation, visitors can hear fragments of Tubin’s music by knocking on the gongs of the back wall, then sitting back and relaxing on a field of black ‘rubbery-feel’ concrete seats, which emit light from underneath onto wide ground and wall surfaces.

French sound designer Louis Dandel from Diasonic used a variety of Tubin’s musical phases for pre-programming. Four rows of speakers create a waving soundscape on a grassy slope between the theatre and the river.

The Drumming Set

Although a small-scale project, it is located in a very prominent spot in a city of 100,000 inhabitants and has acquired an important role in the citizens’ daily lives.

Ever since its opening in June 2008, I have been going there ‘undercover’ to document how people use the site. The photos attached are not posed, and reveal a strange phenomenon: the monument resembles a giant drumming set, where one sees people joyfully dancing back and forth ‘playing’ the gongs, ignoring fragments of Tubin’s music. As a result, an on-site, real-time choreography of young and old, students and office workers, unfurls.

The bronze figure of the composer has his back to the city as the sculpture faces the theatre instead, conducting an imaginary orchestra on the round black seats. These seats offer music teachers an opportunity to explain to students where the violinists, percussionists, etc. find their places in the orchestral setting. Just as the local teachers are invited to hold music or history classes at the monument, the site now offers locals a place to rest, have a snack, and play with Tubin’s music in this ‘pocket’ of light and sound that is inscribed into the slope.
This monument operates as an interactive soundscape installation in front of the city’s main theatre. The monument resembles a giant drum set, where visitors can knock on the round black steel gongs on the back wall in order to hear excerpts of Tubin’s music. Such activity often results in people joyfully dancing back and forth, truly ‘playing’ the gongs.

The spontaneous choreography of visitors highlights the interactive nature of the monument, aiming also to improve the outdoor learning opportunities for the students from adjacent schools and offering teachers an inspiring public space as an urban ‘study book’.

Three rows of speakers are installed along the sloping site in a way that allows one to produce a spatially ‘wavy’ urban soundscape, as the pre-programming of musical fragments incorporates slight delays. An array of 36 round black concrete seats in front of Tubin’s figure can host an orchestra, as if to be conducted by the sculpture.

Location: in front of the Vanemuine Theatre in Tartu, Estonia.
The conversion of an existing Soviet-era water tower in southern Estonia into a performance space, visitor centre and art gallery has helped the historically desolate rural community next to the Russian border to invigorate its daily life. Its newly converted water tower has become a landmark and an attraction for visitors. Estonia as a country is struggling with an ‘emptying-out’ of its countryside, and Lasva, which lies in the proverbial ‘middle of nowhere’, is no exception. The local municipality has realised, among other measures, the potential of design to address this negative demographic trend. To date, the water tower has received warm recognition on a national level for its regional awareness-raising capability, its minimalist outlook and its brave and inventive interior design.

The number of guests is greatly surpassing the parish’s normal visitor numbers. The locals have thus enlarged their WiFi broadcast area throughout the municipality, so that foreigners feel ‘at home’ and connected to the rest of the world while they are in Lasva.

As a location, Lasva lies off the beaten track. The traditional path for young people born in these outlying regions would be to move to a nearby urban centre, then to the capital and maybe to a wealthier city as part of the survival strategy. Those who do not wish to follow that route miss out on opportunities to present their talent and to receive attention even on a national level, much less internationally.

Thus, the Lasva Water Tower seeks to turn this logic upside down and to create a ‘wormhole’ effect from here to the rest of the world, by means of architectural design.

The main attraction of the building is its piano staircase leading up to grass roof – stairs which can be played like piano.

The barrier consists of steel trusses, varying in thickness and length, equipped with small wooden hammers set in motion by footsteps, thus giving each step its own tone.

In addition to analogue sound, the stairs also use electronics and prerecorded sound samples (for example, an opera singer, wild animals from local and exotic forests, and so on), and one can thus alter the soundscape according to one’s wishes.

On the upper level, the existing water-tank is converted into an acoustic space: three oval doorways cut out from the rusty steel tank found re-use as outdoor benches for summer performances.

On the ground level, a ‘mirror well’ is covered by a glass plate, so as to extend the verticality of the interior.

The white brick exterior wall with its red-and-blue ethnic pattern contrasts acutely with the dark matte-black interior. The black colour blurs the scale of space and extends the horizon for a more immersive spatial experience.

One is embraced by the building’s performative atmosphere as if in a theatre or a cinema, so as to focus on the art on the walls or on an ongoing sound performance on the stairs, and to strengthen one’s sensitivity to the aerial views from the upper level and the roof terrace.

Although the tower is tiny in scale and in terms of the footprint that it occupies, was built with the absolute minimum construction budget available, and has a capacity for just 20 visitors at a time, it has nevertheless paved the way for playful architecture as well as for integrative multifunctional and performative design in a rural context, for an experiential approach in problem solving, and for delightful ways to invite the artistic community to join forces to fight negative demographics.

It has prompted the locals to consider modern technologies as an asset and to have greater trust in novel ideas.

When looked upon as a prototype, it illustrates the potential of alternative design strategies for Europe’s furthest periphery.
Sample 6: The Lasva Water Tower by Veronika Valk (architect), Kadri Klementi, Kalle-Priet Pruuden (sculptor), Kalle Tikas (sound engineer), Peeter Laurits (artist). This project features stairs which can be played like a piano.

The conversion of the Lasva Water Tower into a performance space, a visitors’ centre, an info-point and an art gallery in southern Estonia (project in 2006, completion in 2009) has helped this formerly desolate rural community next to the Russian border to make a difference to the whole countryside of Estonia. The main attraction of the building is its piano staircase leading up to a grass roof. Besides analogue sound, the stairs use also electronics and prerecorded sound samples.

On January 16, 2010, Zizi&Yoyo received the Annual Award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment for outstanding architectural design in the category of small projects for its conversion of the Lasva Water Tower into an art gallery. Located in a desolate and yet culturally distinct part of rural southern Estonia, the design is distinguished in its capacity for raising regional awareness, its minimalist outlook and its brave and inventive interior design.

The Playful – Piano Stairs

The main attraction of the building is its unique staircase leading up to the grass roof – stairs that can be played like a grand piano. The barrier of the stairs consists of steel trusses, varying in thickness and length, which give each step its own tone. In addition to the analogue sound solution, the stairs are also equipped with electronics and prerecorded sound samples (of wild animals, of opera singing, etc.), making it possible to alter the acoustics and to play a theme according to a user’s own wishes.

The Operational – Potential for Versatility

On the upper level, the existing water tank is converted into a performance space, a visitor centre and an art gallery. Located in a desolate and yet culturally distinct part of rural southern Estonia, the design is distinguished in its capacity for raising regional awareness, its minimalist outlook and its brave and inventive interior design.

Emergent Protocol – A Prototype

The Lasva Water Tower lies somewhat ‘off the beaten track’. The traditional route for young people born in this peripheral area are on the outskirts of Europe would be to move to a nearby urban centre, then to the capital and maybe onto a wealthier city in order to survive. People who did not wish to follow that route have missed out on opportunities to present their talent and to receive attention in a national context, much less internationally. Therefore, the Lasva Water Tower seeks to turn this upside-down and to create a ‘wormhole’ from here to the rest of the world by means of architectural design.

The Lasva Water Tower’s performative piano stairs have brought national attention to this place: TV and radio programs have been here to capture recordings of the stairs and to conduct interviews with the locals. The number of guests who are eager to see the tower is surpassing by far the parish’s normal visitor numbers. This has prompted the locals to develop exhibitions and information panels on the tower’s gallery walls, to seal their roads, to hold classical concerts by an adjacent parish church, to build a strengthened sensitivity to the fresh, open views from the upper level and the rooftop terrace.

Although the tower is tiny in scale and in terms of its footprint on the land that it occupies, and although it was built with an absolutely minimal construction budget and has the capacity for only 20 visitors at a time, it has opened people’s eyes to playful architecture, to the potential of multifunctional and performative design in a rural context, to an experiential approach toward problem-solving and to delightful ways in which the artistic community may be invited to join forces in order to fight negative demographics. It has brought the locals to consider modern technologies as their best friend, to have greater trust in novel ideas and to feel dignified as ‘design guides’ for the rest of Estonia, ever prouder of their home.

Although the idea was presented and the project documentation started in 2006, and although construction commenced in 2008 and the majority of construction work was finished in 2010, enabling the opening of the building to visitors, the project is still somewhat incomplete and is awaiting additional funds for outdoor lighting, for renewable energy systems and for a telescope to be installed on the rooftop platform.

Yet when looked upon as a prototype, it exemplifies the potential to make a difference to those who need it – people among the impoverished and struggling rural communities on the outskirts of Eastern Europe. The Lasva Water Tower has made a difference to the lives of locals, yielding a capacity to become a ‘lighthouse’ for a certain courageous architectural design approach, turning the tables in terms of development perspectives for Europe’s furthest periphery.

Sample 5 Conclusion

As one of the most significant samples of the research, this case study resonates with all the ‘Findings’ in Section III, except for the ‘disruption of the ‘machinic’ and the ‘Kafkaesque’ – for here, the collaboration with the local municipality took place in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and appreciation. In that sense, and in terms of the design and construction process, this sample is very similar to Sample 3 (the Soure–Jasni Sports Centre), even though I pointed out the confrontation with the construction company in Sample 3. It is certainly one of the key projects for my practice and, even though it is not directly touched upon in the ‘Findings’, it is included in the ‘manifesto’ in Section IV.

40 Estonia is struggling ever harder with the ‘emptying-out’ of its countryside, as the rural population is migrating to nearby urban centres. The Lasva parish, in the ‘middle of nowhere’ in southern Estonia, is no exception: the local municipality has realised, among other measures, the potential of design to reverse this negative demographic trend. The Lasva Water Tower conversion into a performance space, a visitor centre and an art gallery has helped the historically desolate rural community next to the Russian border to invigorate the whole parish. Lasva has a population density of 10 people per square kilometre, with 37 villages; archeological findings from the ninth century, and a captivating vastness of magical virgin wilderness. Today, it also has its newly-converted Water Tower, which has become a landmark and an attraction for visitors from across the county borders.
A lightweight mobile tent in the shape of a flower and performing as a catapult aims to inhabit the rooftop landscapes of spread-out cities. Made of sail battens and bright yellow mosquito net, it catapulted ‘seeds’ (urban self-help guerilla guides) into the city and fished for answers from local inhabitants on how to take over the city.

Venue: City On A Roof (COAR) workshop in Groningen, Netherlands
Sample 6: The Catapult shelter, by Veronika Valk (architect), Tõnis Ajus, and Niek Schutter (designer), considers inhabiting the rooftop as a ‘second skin’ of the existing urban fabric, exploring the urban rooftop ‘headroom’ as a domain for innovation. The Flower Catapult, made of sail-battens and bright yellow mosquito net, not only catapulted ‘seeds’ (i.e., it ‘fertilised’ the city with ideas and scenarios), but fished for answers from local dwellers, triggering their minds and expanding their imaginations as to how to take over the city. This lightweight mobile tent in the shape of a flower, performing as a catapult, was designed and constructed on the rooftops of the Pudding Factory in the city of Groningen in Holland, on the occasion of the City On A Roof (COAR) 44 workshop in August, 2006. Together with the catapult structure, an ‘Urban Self-Help Guide’ 42 was designed around further possibilities to domesticate public space.

The Phenomenon of ‘Roof-Topes’

COAR was embarking on an experiment to explore the so-called ‘roof-topes’. The brief stated: ‘Just as the mind has a special place, so the attic of the city or roof could provide a special space. Many cities have not really understood this dimension and most of the high-cost real estate quite naturally is on the ground leaving upper floors often under-utilised, and then there is the roof, a wonderful potential for creativity.’ The workshop coincided with the public events of the Noordezon Festival in Groningen.

The workshop promoted an ‘open’ creative city, not a closed one that benefits only large players. Thus, the organisers emphasised that it would be more beneficial to create a domain for creative innovation that can encourage multiple benefits for many, many individuals and organisations so that they may grow and thus benefit the city as a whole. It aimed to generate a ‘collective wealth’ of creativity.

Sample 6 Conclusion

This sample targets the ‘Findings’ of Section III such as ‘operational profiles’ and versatility, ‘substrate’ and ‘multi-modality’, and also ‘disrupting the machinic’ to a certain extent. This sample bears resemblance to installations presented in Sample 8 (Festivals of Contemporary Culture), although this sample introduces an additional set of ideas related to Sample 8. As it presents the framework of a workshop, it is related to Sample 10. However, Sample 10 speaks about workshops that have been initiated by my practice, whereas here the focus is on the participation in and outcomes of a framework that was set up by my Dutch colleagues.

41 The workshop was a week-long ‘do and think’ cultural experience during the summer of 2006. COAR addressed rooftops as the hidden domain of the city, offering unexpected qualities and possibilities. The COAR foundation invited architects, designers and artists to explore this headroom for urban development. On the rooftops of the Groningen Pudding Factory, participants explored the urban rooftop environment as a new domain for creativity and innovation. Each team built structures and spaces (‘hardware’) that helped to generate and enable their own creative activity and industry (software). The workshop was organised by Schildt COAR, with the help of Pavlov Medialab, S255 Architecture–Urbanism, Esthetican Projectadvies and Vlasbond Projectontwikkeling BV.

42 This ‘guerrilla’-design ‘self-help guide’ was designed as a manual for everyone, young or old. The toolkit aimed at inspiring locals to implement simple interventions, providing action mechanisms to arm the citizens with the weaponry of ‘upgraded democracy’, according to the motto that nothing could stop the dweller from taking over public space in order to improve the quality of urban life from the perspective of the inhabitants.

43 COLINA achieved this through bringing the quality of urban life from the perspective of the inhabitants. What is COLINA?44 The ‘Collaboration in Arts’ international platform was set up as a playground for different art fields, a place for ‘contamination’ between specific languages, aiming to reflect and reinvent the very idea of the ‘artistic object’ in our times. In a fast world, the arts are in a constant evolution. Creative ideas follow the pace of change and adjust to new developments, mostly in city environments. Time is short for reflection and those cities that generate outstanding inputs and inspiration are more likely to create a framework that ‘safe havens’ exist for artists that allow for new ideas to be developed.44 COLINA achieved this through bringing the power of some of Europe’s most established production centres together with the inspired vision created by Rui Horta.

In other words, I felt literally like a tourist in my own hometown for two weeks when the COLINA Tallinn Lab brought together artists from Portugal, Germany, Denmark, France, England, Estonia and other countries. The Tallinn Lab was curated by Silke Bake, and COLINA had previously taken place in Newcastle, UK (2006), in Düsseldorf, Germany (2008), and in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal (2004). After Tallinn, another lab was scheduled to take place in Marseille, France.

The project started among a group of partners who introduced a curator and then created an extensive network of communication with organisers, numerous artists and partner institutions. A team of organisers, artists, technicians, video-documenters, a scribe, and guests then gathered together in a theatrical space. The entire team was confronted with many questions, from very simple and basic ones to more complicated and artistic ones. In the end, this set-up system had generated a sort of community, something of a ‘theatre’ (This makes one again think: what is theatre, what is contemporary theatre? – the artwork, the institution, the representation of it?) In Silke Bake’s words:

‘...creating a project like COLINA is similar to building up a theatre and its program. But here we are missing the representative part of it, the final and presented product. Because COLINA is a laboratory project. We do not have the obligation to explain why we are working for two weeks without heading towards a product, why we keep it closed (with around 40 people being involved) and why we are not necessarily searching for an audience. The project is funded only because somebody made the effort of verbalising why this would be a good idea. [...] Usually the process of working in performing arts has no real place. In most of the existing institutions the conditions for a creative work fail to serve and do not correspond to the needs of a dynamic process. This would ideally include research and the exploration of performing arts. The variety of possibilities for creation is seldom part of the institution called THEATRE. Generally, the entire system of organising the production, financing and co-producing it is mostly focused on the final product, and less on different aspects of the process of creation. [...] Using research
MIKROUUN (‘microwave oven’ in Estonian) is a theatre set, invented at the COLINA cross-cultural workshop in the Kanuti ZAAL performance centre in Tallinn. It has been presented by Zizi&Yoyo at three other venues: firstly, as the set for Chekhov’s Seagull in Endla Theatre in Pärnu, Estonia; secondly, at the symposium ‘Urban Legacies: The New Babylon’ in Cardiff, Wales, and thirdly, at the Fête des Lumières festival in Lyon, France.

This pneumatic architectural form as a mobile urban ‘breathing animal’ provides space for workshops, for a 3D videodrome, for shows, and for other experiential events. Functioning as a ‘stage’, it is an invitation to play. Its aim is to offer both performers as well as audiences the possibility to configure the structure’s behaviour, so that MIKROUUN functions as a so-called ‘social sculpture’ or participatory performance environment.

MIKROUUN aims at architecture being an inventive process that attempts to break through into the world of performing arts with novel possibilities for a mutual exploration of creative expression, orchestrating contemporary audiovisual (technical) possibilities in synthesis with low-tech solutions.

Project & completion: 2006-2007
as a means to widen ones perspectives and the scope of knowledge is not situated in this THEATRE, because it is fundamentally separated from the space of a final product. A theatre production is cut away from its traces, it does not echo the work of all the people involved on its long journey from an initial idea to a product. Contemporary performing arts are fuelled by the doubts of its protagonists – doubts about their own field and questioning of their own practice. These doubts lead to looking into other art forms, practices, and aesthetic strategies that could be learnt about and adopted. In COLINA Tallinn the artists involved are from visual and performing arts, some who are also authors, writers, but who do not make a distinction between being a practitioner or a theoretician. There is probably no need for labeling oneself anyway because everybody has to find and create his or her position in every collaboration. ‘Collaboration’ is a central term in any work of contemporary performing arts, and this cannot be separated from a social involvement and social practice. 

The project is about sharing a certain time, space and consciousness. The people involved have not met each other previously. They are throwing themselves into a situation where they have to connect, make, negotiate and find ways of collaborating. As contemporary performing arts are continuously less concerned with differentiating between discourses and more about joint practice, this work will explore the possibilities of transferring artistic approaches and perspectives. The encounter is based on a principle that artists are freeware. It is really captivating how artists from diverse disciplines really try to understand each other’s methods of work and to see what those are based on. And more importantly, they try to position themselves as ‘the other’. This gives self-confidence. Many things that previously seemed impossible have now become conceivable. There is less fear towards the indefinite. [...] In COLINA ideas are as if flying on the hot stove of a sauna forms. On the other hand, this test falls down again. This is also called ‘the distillation of ideas’. Have you ever been to sauna? Well, then you should understand. Being in a sauna is comfy, warm and a bit tight, but still very cosy. COLINA is a sauna. The moment water lands on the hot stones breathing begins to fade and a need for a cigarette creeps in. A theatre production is cut away from its traces, it does not echo the work of all the people involved on its long journey from an initial idea to a product.

Andres Lõo writes about this experience: “Already after the fourth round the energy to talk begins to fade and a need for a cigarette creeps in. A moment after that myself and Jens, a Danish musician and video artist, rush towards a nearest window in another room with chairs in our hands. Jens mentions something about breaking the rules. This triggers my thought. Breaking the rule has a progressive nature, it is a form of displacement, that brings to an initiation of something like a project. Crossing the borders is one of the ideas behind COLINA.”

If ideas are freeware and COLINA is a melting pot, then at some point the Colineers started to introduce their ideas to one another. The scribes continued in their blog: “In the evening meeting artists proposed three smashing ideas. Two of them from Veronika Valk. At first she wants to start working on a transparent black box, and next week she will engage people with her project of a catapult. Davis Freeman’s idea was to walk around the block.” [...] The Colineers have a fairly clear understanding about the kind of work they want to do – or at least they have an idea where to start.

COLINA operated on the principle that artists are not working towards a result – ‘a product’ – unless they choose otherwise. However, not everyone went along with other people’s initiatives. Some expressed joy when they were specifically approached to participate or to have an in-depth discussion about a developing idea. All this is part of getting to know each other as artists, and getting used to each other’s working habits, and finding a rhythm for the day. The artists concentrated on finding spontaneity, and avoiding falling into self-repetition and automatism. Lõo continued: “Before falling asleep I started thinking about COLINA as a children’s playground. And of course, performing artists and artists in general always appreciate playfulness. But today, on the fourth day, there is a big bright atmosphere of cooperation, and the mood is something like children building a sand castle. [...] COLINA Tallinn is a playground: someone wants to ride a horse, others sing, dance, play hide-and-seek and a detective game, there is also a masquerade...creating general confusion for the tourists on the streets. Playfulness is expressed in these child-like and joyful ways. On the other hand this does mean that the so-called ‘serious projects’ could not prevail in the coming days. [...] The child’s work is play, but the artist’s work is not only play but life. Play and positively distorted reflection. [...] The fourth day has proved to be more serious and to an extent more resourceful in ideas. Now that Veronika Valk’s ‘Drumming’ is still a work in progress but has already been through a recording session it is crucial to decide on the next step and the outcome of this wild recording. Should she focus on the arrangement, composition or the aspect of installation and participation? Many projects are still pushing into the city space. Katrin Essenson’s ‘Detective Game’ attempts to engage random people from the streets involving them in an extended version of Chinese Whispers where everyone who finds a notebook has to write in it and then place it somewhere else,secretly. A social sculpture [...]”

Veronika Valk and Maria Goltzman’s research on the ‘trace in the fog of spray-paint’46 to the sounds created by Jens Mönsted. [...] I was suddenly struck by Katrin Essenson’s realisation that ideas have begun reappearing in different projects, and their origin has become blurred. Once again, ideas are freeware. It is really captivating how artists from diverse disciplines really try to understand others’ methods of work and to see what those are based on. [...] The moment everyone agrees, they try to position themselves as ‘the other’. This gives self-confidence. Many things that previously seemed impossible have now become conceivable. There is less fear towards the indefinite. [...] In COLINA ideas are as if flying on the hot stove of a sauna forms. On the other hand, this test falls down again. This is also called ‘the distillation of ideas’. Have you ever been to sauna? Well, then you should understand. Being in a sauna is comfy, warm and a bit tight, but still very cosy. COLINA is a sauna. The moment water lands on the hot stones breathing begins to fade and a need for a cigarette creeps in. A theatre production is cut away from its traces, it does not echo the work of all the people involved on its long journey from an initial idea to a product.

On Day 6 all we COLINA participants – the ‘Colineers’ – met for the first time in our lives. Almost. Some were still on their way; others were stuck in Frankfurt. Soon an exercise took place in a room with 24 chairs: 12 of those who sat down facing the window had to ask questions and 12 of those who sat down facing the wall would answer... seven minutes, seven changes of chairs and positions, lots of talking. If somebody had entered this room, which was full of sunlight though very little air, they would have probably taken this for a bizarre sound installation. But in fact this mathematical configuration gave us the chance to get to know each other. The topics were everything from politics to cooking, and from edible plants to the history of the hula-hoop. The project is about sharing a certain time, space and consciousness. The people involved have not met each other previously. They are throwing themselves into a situation where they have to connect, make, negotiate and find ways of collaborating. As contemporary performing arts are continuously less concerned with differentiating between discourses and more about joint practice, this work will explore the possibilities of transferring artistic approaches and perspectives. The encounter is based on a principle that artists are freeware. It is really captivating how artists from diverse disciplines really try to understand others’ methods of work and to see what those are based on. And more importantly, they try to position themselves as ‘the other’. This gives self-confidence. Many things that previously seemed impossible have now become conceivable. There is less fear towards the indefinite. [...] In COLINA ideas are as if flying on the hot stove of a sauna forms. On the other hand, this test falls down again. This is also called ‘the distillation of ideas’. Have you ever been to sauna? Well, then you should understand. Being in a sauna is comfy, warm and a bit tight, but still very cosy. COLINA is a sauna. The moment water lands on the hot stones breathing begins to fade and a need for a cigarette creeps in. A theatre production is cut away from its traces, it does not echo the work of all the people involved on its long journey from an initial idea to a product.

On Day 5 we ‘Transparent Black Box’ was growing hour by hour, and even though it faced some difficulties in sustaining its form, choreographer Oksana Titova and many others had already begun thinking what kind of a performance could take place inside and outside this alternative ‘black box’. On Day 8 it became absolutely clear that trying out and playing around with ideas is one of the main principles of COLINA: this laboratory is an opportunity for the artists and we should not forget that how the artists use the opportunity is completely up to them. On Day 10, Lõo commented: “The biggest bubble of the day turned out to be the return of the ‘Transparent Black Box’ by Veronika Valk and her brave assistant Kadri Klementi. The spiral plastic tube was inflated and once again it took a quadrant form. But helping hands were needed to keep it standing, and those were plenty as nobody wanted to miss the inception of this miracle. Even the artistic director Raud turned up. As the wall was arising it was clear that the tube of the black box should be manually controlled in order for it not to collapse. A jolly action indeed! It was like witnessing the creation of the world. [...] Somewhere deeper, however, the day is spiced with a kind of discussions. For instance, why do Colineers need a more serious conflict for co-operation, in order to achieve more intricate results? Some of us feel that the environment is too ‘nice’ and placid. And because of this the core of ideas is not reached or the most intriguing topics uncovered. Jens, Sofie, Patricia and Nelson vote for ‘conflict’. Siret votes for ‘discussion’.54”

On Day 12, Rui Horta arrived in person.

Take Two: Card??
As part of the conference 'Urban Legacies II: Another New Babylon' in Cardiff, Wales, a selection of young artists was asked to make special artwork commissions on the theme of the talks. Marjetica Potrč from Slovenia and I were specially commissioned to exhibit artworks alongside work by Welsh artist Anthony Shapland. Potrč constructed an urban farm made up of a vertical hydroponic garden through which people would be able to pass and purchase fresh vegetables grown in Cardiff Bay. The steel structure that was erected in one weekend included, for example, Lebanese architect Bernard Khoury. Metaphorically speaking, we were building a trajectory of light through Europe. We set out to do this via poetic public events, as well as through scientific research on street lighting innovation and energy efficiency. Historically, the Hanseatic League had been a route for merchants and merchandise throughout the continent. Hansaflux therefore offers a platform to further facilitate networking, collaborations, artistic approaches, agendas and so on. All of them possess a similarity in that they are laboratory settings for immediate discoveries – offering exposure to the broader public and instant feedback, which are vital to develop a practice as part of a society.

8.1. Biost Festival
Borrowing its name from the vintage Estonian washing powder Biost, the festival introduced a new generation of Estonian artists and performers to New York City in 2011. The inaugural edition began at the waterfront area of Dumbo in Brooklyn and from there moved to Manhattan with events at Scandinavia House and the Alvin Alley American Dance Theatre. In addition to two musical world premieres by Ensemble U, the edition held screenings of rarely-seen vintage Estonian films, a solo performance by Mart Kangro and a photography exhibit by Ulvi Tii. The festival was co-ordinated by New York-based Estonian curator Karin Laansoo.

8.2. Valgusfestival (the Tallinn Festival of Light)
‘Festivals of light’ are celebrated around the world among many cultures and religions. Traditional religious festivities featuring special light activities include Hanukkah, Christmas, Diwali, Loy Krathong and St Martin’s Day, while Scandinavia celebrates St Lucia’s Day, the ‘festival of light’, on December 13. Some of the internationally-known festivals of light focus on photography, while others offer a platform to further activate and enliven a city’s nightlife. The Tallinn Festival of Light in Estonia, however, is a reaction to the lack of daylight during the winter time.

Today a proud member of the International Network of Festivals and Exhibitions of Lights in Art and Design (INFL), with partner cities such as Lyon, Varna, Torino, Glasgow, Lisbon, Eindhoven, Helsinki, Geneva, Lisbon, and others, Valgusfestival’s longest and closest collaboration is with the Helsinki Valon Voimat Festival in Finland. Between 2006 and 2008, we – the Valgusfestival team – were happy about the Hansaflux process, i.e. an exchange of light-art first between the cities of Lyon and Tallinn. To set up this project, I visited Lyon in 2005 – the cornerstone was laid through an exhibition of architect Benoit Fromentin’s work in Tallinn the following winter.

Hansaflux
For Hansaflux 2007, Valgusfestival sent five Estonian artists to Lyon, whose projects were displayed in Lyon in December 2006. Within the framework of Superflux, the team of Gallery Roger-Tator selected five French artists to work in Tallinn in January 2007. The Hansaflux name is inspired by the historic ‘Hansa’ or Hanseatic League, an old network of harbour-cities across Europe to which Tallinn belonged. Our international collaboration aimed to allow young and talented artists to work in other contexts of production, arranging artistic encounters in the field of light and links with foreign artists.

Metaphorically speaking, we were building a trajectory of light through Europe. We set out to do this via poetic public events, as well as through scientific research on street lighting innovation and energy efficiency. Historically, the Hanseatic League had been a route for merchants and merchandise throughout the continent. Hansaflux therefore offers a platform to further facilitate networking, collaborations, artistic approaches, agendas and so on. All of them possess a similarity in that they are laboratory settings for immediate discoveries – offering exposure to the broader public and instant feedback, which are vital to develop a practice as part of a society.

Sample 7: Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture.
The resource potential of urban festivals is revealed by their ability to challenge the status quo of a city.

- They fascinate in an immersive way.
- They create memorable multisensorial experiences.
- They offer a potential to transform experiential living qualities.
- They comprise the idea of urban space as speculative public forum.
- They focus on arts, sciences, (architectural) design, urbanism simultaneously.
- They are based on the relevance of human biological need(s).
- They are not about more experiences, but smarter ones.
- They offer an experimental way to deal with and sustain change.
- They help to discover future ways.

This is another lengthy sample (for obvious reasons) as the framework of urban festivals allows the investigation of the correlation between the temporary and the ‘permanent’, the experimental and the conventional, the ‘playful’ scenarios and the often hostile microclimate – to name a few. This ‘sample’ is a dense cluster of a multiplicity of events, actions, installations, networking, collaborations, artistic approaches, agendas and so on. All of them possess a similarity in that they are laboratory settings for immediate discoveries – offering exposure to the broader public and instant feedback, which are vital to develop a practice as part of a society.

Sample 8: Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture.
The resource potential of urban festivals is revealed by their ability to challenge the status quo of a city.

- They fascinate in an immersive way.
- They create memorable multisensorial experiences.
- They offer a potential to transform experiential living qualities.
- They comprise the idea of urban space as speculative public forum.
- They focus on arts, sciences, (architectural) design, urbanism simultaneously.
- They are based on the relevance of human biological need(s).
- They are not about more experiences, but smarter ones.
- They offer an experimental way to deal with and sustain change.
- They help to discover future ways.

This is another lengthy sample (for obvious reasons) as the framework of urban festivals allows the investigation of the correlation between the temporary and the ‘permanent’, the experimental and the conventional, the ‘playful’ scenarios and the often hostile microclimate – to name a few. This ‘sample’ is a dense cluster of a multiplicity of events, actions, installations, networking, collaborations, artistic approaches, agendas and so on. All of them possess a similarity in that they are laboratory settings for immediate discoveries – offering exposure to the broader public and instant feedback, which are vital to develop a practice as part of a society.

Sample 7 Conclusion
This sample forecasts directly into many ‘Findings’ in Section III, predominantly into techniques to invent ‘playful’ and ‘joyful’ approaches as a designer, which is liberating to the extent that it might become the key to overcoming the ‘Kafkaesque’ (elaborated in ‘The Opportunistic in the ‘Machine’), due to its impact on the ‘Dynamics of Immersion’ and its ability to morph the ‘substrate’ of the practice (and I must admit that the experience described in this case study has had a fundamental impact on the collaborative aspect of my practice). All of the pointers mentioned here are at the core of the discoveries described in Section III.
in the field of ‘light art’ in former Hanseatic towns, to find ways to establish an international collaboration network.51 Later on, the INFL was born as an informal network of curators and producers, artists, lighting designers and architects, researchers and technicians, organisers and sponsors, and was without any institutional backup.52

The aim of such international collaboration is to encourage the emerging artists to ‘export’ their work, while facilitating the circulation of works in areas where the local artistic scene is not well developed. The dynamics of exchanges dealt with socio-cultural structures on the very local and site-specific urban level, as well as on the European level, by broadening the scope of the INFL’s activities and research.53

Microclimate

The INFL partner festivals vary according to their local context and microclimate. For people in a Nordic country, both natural daylight conditions as well as artificial public lighting affect everyday life.54 Almost half the population in Estonia suffers from SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). Little daylight, loneliness and reduced physical activity have negative impacts on the local people’s minds and bodies. It is thought that psychological depression, alcoholism and suicide rates skyrocket in winter. These affects are noticeable in both rural as well as urban areas. For years, the Tallinn Light Festival has been striving for a happier wintertime for the whole population.

But before going further, I would like to remind you of one of the many questions about the future that I posed in the introduction to this PhD: how might we architects and designers start to have answers to questions pertaining to ‘age’? How long will the life-span of future generations be? Imagine the semi-zombified of the Nordic lands may suffer through not 80 but 150 years (or more) of Seasonal Affective Disorder due to age-enhancement technologies that may be available in the future...

The Curator Position

My contribution as curator was to use the festival events as an urban planning tool, in order to push the festival concept further. My aim was to focus on town planning projects that draw attention to activating and reinviving different areas of the town, as well as sitting down with the city officials and politicians to help the town achieve a common purpose: for example, channelling public attention toward several under-used parks and spaces, especially with a view to promoting the seaport and opening it up for the public – which also happened to be one of the priorities of the Tallinn Cultural Capital 2011 agenda.

The art of light not only deals with aesthetic improvements in the bleak mid-winter, but also aims for positive impacts on health: street lighting might help to put a smile back onto people’s faces during their winter blues. I took it as my task to trace the ‘trajectory of light’ onto the map of Tallinn, so that the artists are in contact with the public, taking the citizens literally by the hand and guiding them through the city, opening their minds to alternative scenarios for ‘terrain vague’ and giving new meaning to the dark and sombre winter months.

As the artistic director of Valgsfestival between 2005 and 2008, I managed to make a few installations myself, as well as helping to produce others. A key ambition was to test resilient, low-cost, natural materials and low-tech solutions for urban design. For example, we built the vault of an ‘igloo’ by pouring powdered snow onto a meteorological balloon. All in all, Valgsfestival suggested that the streetscape of a Nordic city become as social and lively and thus as ‘warm’ as those of southern climates. My work included preparations for Hansalite from 2005–2008 and an analysis of similar undertakings in other cities. An important aspect of this work was the Hansalite 2004 workshop, described in Sample 10.

Hansalite 2005’s installations included, among others: ‘G-LOV(IE) BOX’ by Micromax Architects and Benjamin Jacquet-Boutes and Caroline Wattindail (France); ‘De Pong GameTM’ by Benjamin Gaulon (France); ‘Breathing Shadow’ by Yoko Azukawa (Japan); ‘Open-air Living-room’ by Teemu Nurmelin (Finland), and ‘Air-Light’ by Margus Mekk (Estonia).

Hansalite 2008’s installations included, among others, ‘Shining Field’ by Cecile Babiolo with the help of Interface Z, Ernesto Geaey and Luc Lamor, France; ‘Pelotas’ by Anastasia/Reflections by Liisa Kyroenepa (Finland); ‘The Smile of My Girlfriend, the Wind’ by Roaul Kurvitze (Estonia); ‘Long Streets for Short Stories’ by MDOV architects and artist Miguel Faro (Portugal); ‘Light, Color and No Sound’ by Pedro Cabral Santo (Portugal); ‘Gymnastique lunaire’ by Catherine Garrett (France); ‘Lucrime’ by Selja Raudas (Finland) and ‘Lighthouse’ by the Estonian Academy of Arts (EAA) architecture students (co-ordinator Katrin Kool, Estonia).55

It started in the end of 1990s as a very small event, and was initiated by Indrek Leht and Yoko Anderer who were inspired and supported by the Valo Vomait Light Festival in Helsinki. Valgsfestival allowed the combination of various different events under the same name and motto: light.

For example, during the Middle Ages the city of Braunschweig was an important centre of trade, one of the economic and political centres in Northern Europe and a member of the Hanseatic League from the 13th century to the middle of the 17th century. By the year 1660, Braunschweig was the seventh-largest city in Germany. And it also happened to be the location of an innovative ‘light art’ trail – Lichtpavillons – in the year 2000, continuing the tradition of the harbor district. The old city of Braunschweig is quite similar to that of Tallinn; however, Braunschweig is surrounded by water. Thus, the water is crossed by bridges and those bridges were the sites for lighting installations by internationally known artists and designers. The usual street lighting was dimmed down in the surrounding park area, to heighten the effect of the artworks. I remember crossing the park in complete darkness, with the sound of my shoes varying according to the surface I was walking on... and then catching a glimpse of light between the trees: “It must be one of the installations!” Each artwork was augmented by the reflections on the water; some installations cleverly playing with the contrast of artificial light and natural daylight conditions.56

Interestingly enough, the INFL still does not have a website. The communication is based on a mailing list and depends on the activities of the partners: the designer, educator and curator Bettina Pelz.

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The workshop was successful in engaging both the Estonian Academy of Arts as well as the municipal authorities. It resulted in an exhibition of projects and a Design gallery also in Valgsfestival.57 It started in the end of 1990s as a very small event, and was initiated by Indrek Leht and Yoko Anderer who were inspired and supported by the Valo Vomait Light Festival in Helsinki. Valgsfestival allowed the combination of various different events under the same name and motto: light.

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63 Public space in Nordic cities is not often considered the normal scene of everyday life. The trees’ shadows created another atmosphere of presence in the cities, or they provided guidance to discover an unseen or reaction to its design process, and how nature in urban settings might set in. In January, night falls at around 4.30pm and lasts about 16 hours, with the sun not rising again until about 8.30am.58

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Originally developed for Valgusfestival (the Festival of Light) in Tallinn, Estonia, where in the wintertime the nights last for about 16 hours, the installation as a mobile hotel aims for a brighter and happier winter period by changing the appearance and use of public space in an aesthetic and joyful sense. The insulated, super-sized white hammocks are illuminated with the light of infrared lamps and are an open invitation to spend some more time outside. The installation was also presented at the GLOW festival in Eindhoven, Netherlands.

Festivals as hybrid urban laboratories are inspiring tools to guide urban emergence. Urban festivals further the idea of urban space as a public forum. They focus simultaneously on a variety of disciplines, such as arts, sciences, design, urban planning and architecture. They offer an experimental way to welcome change in urban space. They help to suggest tenable urban futures. They enable us to take the existing parallel urban initiatives further as synchronised activities, mutually benefitting from and contributing to one another.
urban landscaping in the public spaces of contemporary Nordic cities – a mixture of intimate and open, in constant flux. 44 The artwork came with instructions whereby, should a visitor suffer from SAD, he or she was invited to breathe in light. Similarly to an artificial breathing machine, this artwork presented a light-breathing machine. According to the artist, people from the Nordic countries as well as from the Baltic lands, Russia and Canada need light to survive as much as they need air; to sustain them through the winter. 45 This installation in Kultuurikatel was an environment of sound and light, evoking the science fiction-like activity of an imaginary airport. Invisible yet pervasive, it carries our imagination to the crossroads of the Nazca geoglyphs of the Incas and the runway of the UFO in Close Encounters of the Third Kind. The installation was located in Kultuurikatel main hall, shrouded in darkness. On the floor, there was a carpet of LEDS, some reacting to aerial sounds, others blinking in their own signal patterns. 46 This was later invited to trek out along an elevated runway, crossing the exhibition space to arrive at a vista-point with a panoramic view of the urban environment which is dark at night. The idea of the installation was to offer a huge light source and a great moving reflector in the dark place, to give a sense of security and also beauty in the darkness. In Finland and Estonia, reflectors are very common and important articles attached to clothing. They are therefore used especially during the dark season of the year, when the pedestrians are requested to use reflectors primarily for visibility in traffic. Since every reflector has hundreds of little prisms inside, the reflectors used for the installation functioned during daytime by projecting reflections of sunshine into their surroundings. 47 The object belonged to a series of wind-sculptures by the artist, playing with the fact that the wind is invisible and yet we are aware of its presence. The wind is moody and unpredictable, bringing pleasure but also trouble.

This installation allowed for a series of narratives to inhabit public space, involving the passers-by along the street’s entire length. Pikal jalg and Lühike jalg, two emblematic streets of Tallinn, hosted the first demonstration, presenting a love-and-death story brought to life from quotes of two antagonistic ‘rule-breaking classes’: plastic artists and criminals. 65 This installation in Kultuurikatel was an environment of sound and light, projecting reflections of sunshine into their surroundings. The visitor was invited to trek out along an elevated runway, crossing the exhibition space to arrive at a vista-point with a panoramic view of the urban environment which is dark at night. The idea of the installation was to offer a huge light source and a great moving reflector in the dark place, to give a sense of security and also beauty in the darkness. In Finland and Estonia, reflectors are very common and important articles attached to clothing. They are therefore used especially during the dark season of the year, when the pedestrians are requested to use reflectors primarily for visibility in traffic. Since every reflector has hundreds of little prisms inside, the reflectors used for the installation functioned during daytime by projecting reflections of sunshine into their surroundings.

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This was installed in a shop window and is an homage to American poets Adrienne Rich, Bob Kaufman, Amiri Baraka Ka’ba and T.S. Elliot, who have in common the capacity to create multisensory atmospheres and metaphors in art history. During the daytime, the work was visible as a joyful way. It is an open invitation to spend time outside and to pay attention to the social dimension, exposing injustice, poverty and exclusion. Conceived in 2004 and presented for the first time in Lubuc, 2006, ‘Light, Color and No Sound’ throws a dynamic light onto the urban environment, presenting the scrolling verses of the poets in a set of coloured bars – but there is no sound, just colors, light and poetry.

Who has not dreamt of going to the moon? As a distortion in space, a project in Kultuurikatel could offer this dream to those who are denied the chance to fly. The installation was a mobile hotel that aims for ‘outdoor camping’: 60 This ‘hot’ installation was originally developed for the Festival of Light – Valgufestival – in Tallinn (2006), and was additionally presented in Eindhoven, Holland, at the GLOW festival (2007).

In wintertime Estonia, the nights last for about 16 hours. As a mobile hotel, this installation aims at a brighter and happier wintertime by changing the appearance and use of public space in an aesthetic and joyful way. It is an open invitation to spend time outside despite the cold, wintery weather.

8.2.1. The Swinging in the Light installation by Veronika Valk consisted of insulated super-sized white hammocks which are illuminated with the light of infrared lamps. This ‘hot’ installation was originally developed for the Festival of Light – Valgufestival – in Tallinn (2006), and was additionally presented in Eindhoven, Holland, at the GLOW festival (2007).

In wintertime Estonia, the nights last for about 16 hours. As a mobile hotel, this installation aims at a brighter and happier wintertime by changing the appearance and use of public space in an aesthetic and joyful way. It is an open invitation to spend time outside despite the cold, wintery weather.

8.2.2. The IGLOO shelter by Veronika Valk (in collaboration with Valgufestival team members Kalle-Pritt Puured – sculptor, and Helene Vetik – graphic designer) used the natural material of snow, pouring it into a concrete-casting formwork (steel moulds). Notes that I wrote “after a night spent in the igloo” (alone) on February 25, 2006, reveal the experience of an inhabitable shelter made of natural material, and its potential for a ‘hotel’ or for ‘outdoor camping’:

“...morning, as promised, spent the last night in my igloo. Stepping into a taxi just 10 minutes ago watched the railway station vagabonds and thought how I had slept in such extremely gorgeous conditions, similarly *homeless*. ...observations for the next winter's igloo village -- it is actually feasible to rent them out for a night as hotel suits, but the security issue is huge. overheard graffiti scribbling onto the igloo all throughout the night. drunk russian youngsters aggressing, as they were desperate to see what's inside the igloo. *why can't we?* without a security guard(ess) in a car in front of the entrance of the igloo i would've been dead. of course there was also an estonian madame who called down on her mate: *come take a look before they yell at us!* (then pulling the cover and noticing my toes and an edge of my sleeping bag: *look there's a corpse as well!?) all in all -- the danish king could put them on. lesson learned -- sponsorship from decent sleeping manufacturers needed + somewhere must be an air and sealable box for clothes and boots. ...and a DOOR must be designed! this hanging plastic joke has to be the last time :) a reverse effect happened when street lighting was switched off at 7.30am -- normally one switches the lights ON when waking up in the dark on a winter morning, all nightly enchantment swept away in an instant, but woke me up indeed.

Team: Veronika Valk (architect), Kalle-Priit Pruuden (sculptor), and Helene Vetik (graphic designer)

Idea & completion: 2006

IGLOO Hotel prototype

Highlighting eco-friendly, low-cost natural materials in contemporary architecture, the IGLOO suggests the streetscape of a Nordic city becoming as social, lively and inviting as those of warmer climates. IGLOO offered its ten thousand visitors a place to rest and to drink hot tea.

Venue: Valgusfestival at Tornide väljak
8.2.3. The Kultuurituli installation by Veronika Valk showed the way in January 2006, with a 250m-high light beam pointed towards the clouds from Kultuurikatel's 85m-high chimney, visible across the city.

Kultuurikatel (transl. ‘Culture Cauldron’), in the former heating station on the Tallinn waterfront, is becoming a public space as the industrial complex is being converted into Estonia’s biggest creative hub. It is located at the meeting point of the UNESCO heritage-listed Old Town and the Tallinn seaside, which was previously secluded as a military zone. However, the waterfront is now undergoing a vast transformation, with parts of the seaside, which used to be cut off from the city, now being given back to city-dwellers.

This sample is closely tied to Sample 1 (the broader context of the Tallinn waterfront) and to Sample 2 (the Kultuurikatel initiative). Beyond the description, it is important to point out the underlying course of thoughts and the cultural climate at the time, hence the following paragraphs refer firstly to the discourse of the smaller regions has grown tremendously. A small investment is directly connected to the capability to experiment with different sources of lighting.82

A Light-Year Closer

“A Light-Year Closer” was the motto aimed towards the realisation of the Kultuurikatel concept, and a crisp January weekend witnessed the inauguration of Kultuurituli. It looked as if there were smoke coming out of the chimney, yet in reality we (the Valgusfestival team) had dragged a xenon4 beam into the chimney and pointed the beam into the sky. The beam5 was powerful enough to reach 250 metres and to project an impressive sight, symbolic in many ways. Namely, he suggested that 'talents' as photons, activated throughout the year?

In Estonia, the event reverberated with the creative cities’ agenda. The well-known urban theorist Yoko Alender (Zizi&Yoyo), Winy Maas (MVRDV) and Rogier van der Heide argued that the concept was to create a reflective medium upon the city which lit from underneath so as to resemble an ethereal self-illuminated cloud. The event provided a perfect setting for local government officials to discuss with artists and designers the potential of ‘architectural light-therapy’ as a mood-moderator in public space.81

The balloons and smoke clouds were tested separately as well as together, and there was also experimentation with different sources of lighting. Depending greatly on the weather, all atmospheric phenomena present were integrated into the process. From a social point of view, the aim of this unprecedented light installation was to bring some joy to the people amidst the dark winter period in northern Europe. The Light Dome aimed not only to make aesthetic improvements to Tallinn in the bleak mid-winter, but also to have a psychological effect. It was an art project that literally and in a cultural sense enlightened the old city centre during this winter week, integrating the public image of the city, cheering up locals and attracting tourists.

The Light Dome was crafted with an ambition beyond Tallinn’s borders. The ideology of a Light Dome is “the worse the weather, the better!” as the lighting effects intensify enormously in fog, smog, rain and other substantial atmospheric phenomena – thus, all cities with climatic conditions similar to Tallinn could prospectively benefit from this knowledge. An excellent proposal came from Alain Sayeg, Secretary General of the Architects' Council of Europe in Brussels, who also visited Tallinn during the event. Namely, he suggested following the line-up of European Capitals of Culture and to have a Light Dome in each of them.

84 Xenon is used in flash lamps and arc lamps, and as a general anaesthetic. The first excimer laser design used xenon dimer molecule (Xe2) as its lasing medium, and the earliest laser designs used xenon flash lamps as pumps. Xenon is also being used to search for hypothetical weakly-interacting massive particles (WIMPs) and as the propellant for ion thrusters in spacecraft.
85 This was borrowed from Aare Baumer, the head of Energiakeskus, a science-centre, and lighting manufacturers, working towards a resilient strategy to illuminate the public space. Indeed, the administration of Tallinn City was very keen to discuss street lighting and city illumination at an adjacent seminar.
86 Philips Arena Visions and theatre lighting solutions.
A semi-permanent art installation was lit over the historic centre of the city of Tallinn, Estonia, making the dark and wintry Tallinn awash with light.

Arup Lighting worked in collaboration with MVRDV in order to help Zizi&Yoyo bring to life the idea of a ‘light cupola’ above the city. Winy Maas of MVRDV interpreted the cupola as a foggy cloud above the city that could radiate light downward during the dark winter days.

White meteorological balloons (each 2m wide and with 'smoke' diffused around them) were used to create a light-reflective fog. This concept created a reflective medium up above the city when lit from underneath and resembled an ethereal self-illuminated cloud.

The Light Dome was not just an aesthetic experiment, but had a direct biological influence: almost half of the local population in Estonia suffers from SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), thus the Light Dome was an example of architectural light-therapy in urban public spaces as a mood moderator.

Location: Town Hall Square
Tallinn, Estonia
URBAN FLORA

This giant propelling flower installation, made for the Tallinn Old City festival, sprinkled the Town Hall square with ‘sunny bunnies’. Recycled pirated CDs collected from black markets during police raids were woven into the reflective fabric of the blossoms which would spin in the wind.

Location: Town Hall Square in Tallinn, Estonia
The Old Town Days Festival,83 by Veronika Valk in collaboration with Kavakava architects, featured a space of 27 cubic meters. It took an entire day to load them at the central police by the police during raids on black markets over the years. Well, I thought, the propelling force would be wind…and I “By what magic do you sprinkle sunnybunnies onto city ‘sunnybunnies’. City officials laughed skeptically, asking: ‘eventing’ through exploring the sensual qualities of architecture and of nature, incorporating friendliness and intrigue. “This sample offers an abundantly detailed description of an almost anecdotal process of production, and is worth keeping in mind in terms of the ‘joyful’ and the ‘playful’ that are at the core of this research.

We – the Kavakava architects – wanted to create a new kind of urban nature with the aims of abundant experiences (more reasons for local residents to come into the city); of visual effect (the Old Town Days Festival becomes an event of the info-flowers ended up in our office and, of the info-flowers). One of the info-flowers‘ modal’ and ‘versatile’ operational profiles discussed from the observations of the above.

Sample 8 Conclusion

This cluster of samples points directly to the ‘multi-modal’ and ‘versatile’ operational profiles discussed in Section III, ‘Findings’. This bundle is an account of a large part of the practice, observing its ‘substrate’ shift in crossed contexts. It also marks a fundamental ‘immersion’ in related topics from Samples 1, 2, 6, 7 and 10. I could even say that everything in the conclusions is – at least to some extent – closely tied to the insights from the observations of the above.

83 Tallinn is an old Hanseatic city with an extraordinarily well-preserved old town, parts of it dating back to the thirteenth century. The Old Town is the main tourist attraction in Tallinn, and the Town Hall Square in its centre is also a well-known meeting point and the location of the main Christmas tree in winter. Due to our geographic location on Nordic latitude, we Estonians have four distinct seasons (even though the majority of the year we enjoy simply busy, skier weather – autumn, winter and spring are cold, rainy, cloudy and muddy). Statistics show that of the approximately 400,000 residents of Tallinn, 42.5% have experienced symptoms associ- ated with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and 65.2% have at some time suffered from excessive cold whilst outside during the winter. This dictates our way of life, except for the two or three brief summer months. The Tallinn Old Town Days Festival typically takes place during the first weeks of June. This event marks the beginning of summer for Tallinn residents and is most likely the first summer festival, which is why the event is extremely popular. As far as Kavakava is concerned, summer is sun, air and flowers. In other words, we sought opportunities for amplifying these three elements in synergy between themselves in Estonia's most dense urban environment.
Sample 9: The Pleiades design proposition for a symbiotic mobile arts and sciences lab, by Veronika Valk, consists of six shipping containers, aiming to act as an agent between art and science in the public realm. It is important to point out that this proposal has not yet progressed beyond the design stage, yet its agenda and line of thought is closely related to the Synthonia workshop described in Sample 10.1.

The structure was meant to be an experimental learning space: a tool for the hybrid curricula of arts and sciences, for both of them to follow the same creative process. Four shipping containers constitute the main structure and two additional containers serve as a reception and an outdoor exhibition area. The containers are cut into two parts, and the resulting eight cubicles are assembled in a flexible way such that they allow for site-specific adjustments and adaptations to local conditions throughout the whole itinerary of the SANA campus. Clean laboratory spaces provide work tables, shelving, storage and equipment to carry out bioArt and other projects, to experiment with and to test cross-disciplinary ideas.

Versatility

This low-cost biological laboratory was meant for artistic and scientific research and exhibitions where outputs could range from bioartworks (for which the design provides dedicated gears), to nanoArt, digital art, math-art and the CAVE environment for non-stop programming via cost-efficient Mirror Dome technology (for an immersive exhibition experience located in one of the two extra containers), and to interactive games for science learning. The reception area was located in one of the two extra containers, connected via an entrance and display area with an office adjacent to an ICT lab, with seminar and exhibition spaces via a shelf-wall for a small library with sci-art references, equipment manuals, etc.

The design accommodated for seminars to be taking place in both the laboratory spaces or in the exhibition rooms, depending on the need: during the intense ongoing workshop phase the labs are a restricted area, only later converted into publicly-accessible showrooms. The design utilised recyclable, lightweight, easy-to-maintain finishes such as Corian, which is an advanced blend of natural minerals and acrylic polymer. Besides Corian, the design integrated a variety of advanced materials from SentryGlass to Kevlar to Teflon, depending on the function of the space. The design also integrated ICT solutions into the partition walls between seminar spaces and exhibition spaces, and enhanced the exterior/interior interactivity via intelligent OLED technology for lighting and displays.

An Agent

The ‘Pleiades’ laboratory had the ambition to act as an agent between art and science in the public realm and to further the understanding of diverse methodologies of production from both sides. PLEIADES had the goal to provide grounds to influence and challenge the actual relevance of science in contemporary culture, by offering a symbiotic environment, in which art is used to showcase the personal or human relevance of science and to improve the understanding of science as a body of knowledge.

Sample 9 Conclusion

On a broader scale, both this sample – the ‘Pleiades’ project – as well as the ‘Synthonia’ workshop (presented in Sample 10.1) address hybrid practices, crossing the borders of arts and sciences. Therefore, although this particular case-study points predominantly to the ‘manifesto’ in Section IV, it also relates to the ‘operational profiles’ discussed in ‘Findings’ in Section III, namely from the ‘versatility’ point of view.

84 The 8 cubicles are insulated lab spaces, fitted with stairways, windows, doors, electricity and a water supply, and are ready for the installation of relevant furniture and lab equipment. ‘Pleiades’ could be set up both outdoors (attached to an existing building, in a park, on the roof, etc.) and indoors (large exhibition/fair hall, auditorium, theatre stage, interior plaza, etc.). The ‘Pleiades’ design emphasised efficient packing possibilities: it had to be lightweight, durable, and with integrated equipment. It was an extendable structure which could be unfolded into a multiplicity of forms. The clean laboratory spaces provided work tables, shelving, storage and equipment to carry out bioArt projects, to experiment with and to test the ideas of workshop participants. The stationary equipment was fixed and secured onto the containers to reduce the risk of harming the equipment during transportation and use.

85 An EU application was submitted but the project was never funded, which is the reason why it is still unrealised and ‘on-hold’.

86 ‘Pleiades’ was an ideas project that had an ambition to build a mobile (caravan) laboratory space for cross-inspiring mixed curricula for teachers of both arts and sciences, aimed at the true symbiosis, synchronisation and synergy emerging in the society of tomorrow, a society on its way towards ‘creative, life-long learning’.
Sample 10: Architecture Workshops for research and concept development.

1031. The *Synthania* workshop on synthetic biology, by Veronika Valik in collaboration with the Estonian Academy of Arts (EAA), the Tallinn University of Technology (TUT) and Tartu University (TU), explored how the rapid advancement of the field of synthetic biology may significantly alter our perception and inhabitation of the living environments of tomorrow.

This sample refers back to the ‘Pleiades’ proposal presented in the previous chapter. More importantly, the agenda of the ‘cell’ that is highlighted in this sample resonates with the manifestos presented in Section IV. Furthermore, the discussions on developmental biology that start with this sample are further observed in Section III, under ‘Tagged’.

The cell is a biological computer and ‘living materials’ offer a new approach to building materials. The workshop investigated whether it is possible for our future buildings to share some of the properties of living systems. Leading scientists in the field of the biotechnologies provided elaborate presentations on the topics of algorithmic architecture, scale and structure, synthetic genomics, morphogenesis and visualisation techniques. The lectures were accompanied by hands-on laboratory practice, through which master’s- and doctoral-level students of architecture, design and new media proposed ideas and projects for evaluation.

The Chair of Jewellery and Metal Arts at the EAA was the first person whose eyes were to glow when I said that I would like to organise a workshop on synthetic biology. I was asked whether the architects would also be interested in the workshop. It turned out that they were, was the new media department. And so a synthetic biology workshop – Elmäräid (‘Signs of Life’) – took place in January 2012 at the TUT Institute of Chemistry and at the Competence Centre of Food and Fermentation Technologies (CCFFT®) laboratories.

About a week of lectures and laboratory experiments offered architecture, design and new media students the opportunity to take a look at the latest biotech line of thought, which had fascinated me for years – an opportunity to gain insight into some of the questions that I posed in the introduction to this thesis. The world speaks of *Synthia* and of self-reproducing machines. Biological engineering (BEM®) competitions are held at MIT. Synthetic life is focused on the construction of cells with a completely new set of properties. Unwittingly, mankind has reached not only transhumanism, but also the era of posthumanism, where in the coming years it is precisely synthetic biology that might make possible an intersection of the synthesis of organisms similar to creatures from the wilderness.

Nanotechnology, the predecessor of synthetic biology, brought new thinking, which treats atoms and molecules like ordinary affairs that are used in various technologies in order to achieve self-replicating machines and products. The synthesis of new cells from chemical components on the one hand, and nanobots and bionics developments on the other, sets us upon a threshold in the world of science and technology, in an era when synthesising bacterial DNA and getting it to work is technically a great piece of art, then the true construction of the new cell is an even bigger challenge.

To unlock the common points shared by synthetic biology and architecture, Martin Mieloranski spoke in his lecture at the beginning of the week about algorithmic biology. Subsequently, Professor Raiivo Viilu gave an introduction to biomolecules and cells. He has, together with his young adherents, experimented for years with constructing living cells,25 engineering cells by optimising them as though chemical plants – developing the foundations of metabolics. The engineers at CCFFT try to make self-replicating nanobots from components of cells.

**The Cell**

‘Cell’ as used here means a self-replicating microscopic bubble reactor that performs a variety of particular tasks and consists of biopolymers. Although a eukaryotic cell’s size is of the order of 10μm and a prokaryotic cell (for example, bacteria) is 1μm, it is today possible to explore and understand the role of all the molecules in a cell factory. Without exaggeration, the future of biotech in Estonia is in the hands of Professor Viilu.

One important point where art, design and biology can meet is that of visualisation. During the workshop Pille Säläik, the TU Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology’s (TÜMRI) developmental biology researcher, explained the ways to make the cells visible. Using different types of microscopy as tools, with specific software assets, it is possible to understand how cells attach (to, say, a surface or structure) and move about, as well as how the cell structures operate during cell reproduction.

**Synthetic Genomics for Architects**

TÜMRI Professor of Molecular Biotechnology Arts Kurg had been asked to open up the world of synthetic genomics for us. He spoke of genes and their synthesis with art, giving a good overview of the ‘ABC’ of genetics and what one can do with genes today – covering topics from both natural and synthetic organisms, to synthetic genomes. Synthetic Genomics does not necessarily use genes from the wild, but rather series of base pairs with a special design. In that way, we can build long and accurate chains of base pairs cheaply, quickly and in large quantities. Therefore, great potential lies in the research, especially when we consider the help of protein compression models.

Here you can see the links to developments in biobiotics, and from here on it is important to think about what synthetic genomics can offer in terms of the future of bioenergy, biomass and biofuels. Thinking about cells as the raw material for self-replicating nanobots, we must have knowledge about cell cycles, and this was the topic of the TÜMRI Director and Head of the Department of Cell Biology, Professor Toivo Maimets. Cell-death is a genetically well-orchestrated process, which ensures that the death of cells does not upset the organism as a whole.

The role of genes – and what is decided by random variability in gene expression – is probably necessary information for architects, designers, and other shapers of the environment. In other words, it is a question of how much the environment affects the development of an organism – that is, how does the biochemical lesion (from the environment) impact the cells and the cell cycle? I must admit that architects should be better informed about the concurrent research directions in developmental biology in Estonia today, especially given that TÜMRI is a globally-recognised centre of excellence in the field.

**Bioethics for Art and Architecture**

Upon reaching the topic of ‘stem cells’, it is no longer possible to get around the issue of bioethics. Synthetic biology as an emerging branch of science is gathering relevance all around the world and is an engineering paradigm which promises us new (construction) materials, medicines, fuel and chemicals not found in nature. These can have a profound impact on how we perceive, use and shape the world around us. Is a synthetic cell alive? What are the scientific community’s agreed-upon ‘signs of life’ today? The emergence of a synthetic life-form in laboratory conditions, and its spread from the laboratory into the world, faces us with significant ethical issues.

Biohackers, spontaneous DIY labs and bioterror are particularly prevalent themes in the US, but also increasingly in Asia and Europe, where the history of religion plays a role in developing taboos in relation to these endeavours. Professor Raiivo Kelmenees, the head of new media at the EAA Fine Arts Department, introduced the word ‘biomedia’ in his lecture. His examples in bioART presented how engineers, artists and scientists share a similar mindset when it comes to experimentation: What is the role of ‘testing’ as an inseparable part of daily creative activities? How are discoveries born? Can the artist contribute to the development of science?

**Hands-On**

Parallel to the lectures that were held during the week, a laboratory practice was set up to reinforce the knowledge gained at the lectures. Synthetic biology often uses bacteria as modified machines, so that the ordinary petri-dish can serve as a simplified biosensor through turning the invisible into the visible. The laboratory work began by explaining the basic rules of seeding and incubation, and what colony growth patterns look like.

In subsequent trials, it was also tested how (human) DNA can be extracted with simple tools. Thanks to Tartu researcher Signe Värv’s energetic guidance, the students gained an idea of how a gel electrophoresis machine works, a machine that is known to the art world as ‘Paul Vanouse’s tool’ because of his work ‘Lateral Figure Protocol’ (2007). A comparative crystallisation experiment was conducted, continuing the discussion about the ‘signs of life’. Additionally, the ‘machine’ was tested against the sensorial values of a human being (the sense of smell in recognising certain molecules).

Essentially, all participants of the workshop acquired a new biochemical beginning and a fresh viewpoint to reflect upon ‘life’.

**Synthetic Evolution**

The new challenges for architecture and design emerging from synthetic biology lie primarily in the material technologies, where a number of architects and researchers have already successfully experimented with the so-called ‘protocol’ technologies. ‘Synthetic life’ (cell) design and construction techniques are aimed at enabling new functionality with classic engineering strategies – standardisation, differentiation, abstraction.

It is thus necessary to adjust the preconceptions of the predictable and reliable, in order to get used to the so-called cell (biological modularity) language.

Such ‘synthetic’ or directed evolution is...
committed to the optimisation of systems, using ‘cell colonies’ (metazoa) and individual cells (single cell organisms) as tools of abstraction. Conceptualising biological systems can help to analyse the novel assembly variants of biological molecules and to discuss their application possibilities in everyday life. Discoveries in the 1960s about the mathematical logic of gene regulation (e.g. prokaryotes, and the lac operon (Monod and Jacob, 1961))95), and the predecessors of artificial DNA in the 1970s, have pioneered today’s synthetic biology that studies the full potential of genes and their products, and therefore has much in common with systems biology, which analyses biological organisms as a whole.

91 CCFFT and TUT Institute of Chemistry, Chair of Biotechnology.
94 Synthetic Genomics Inc., J. Craig Venter, synthetic yeast Mycoplasma genitalium

10.2. The Linnahall workshop on gentrification in post-ideological urbanism was conducted in collaboration with Oaas Architects. Participants included BA- and MA-level students from design, architecture, film, scenography and the social sciences. (The future scenarios for Linnahall have captivated me since my thesis project at the EAA in 2001). The workshop was conducted in collaboration with Oaas architects Maria Puik and Ivar Lubjak.

The workshop ‘Dream. Sense. Adapt. Feed. Five Visions for Linnahall’ asked the participants to imagine that the building is not just part of the information society, but part of a dream society characterised by reverie and a constant thirst for dreams. While postmodernism and deconstructivism attempted to satisfy the intellect, today we place more importance on the visual, spatial and tactile senses. Every individual – just like a building – may adapt to its environment within the constraints of its hereditary traits. Adaptation is the primary process in bioevolution. Participants proposed adaptive re-use scenarios for the Linnahall Concert Hall. The building’s future genetic code depends directly on today’s memes. The workshop asked: what protects structures such as Linnahall from their own ideological legacies?

This 10.2 sample is significant as the workshop delves into the problems of Linnahall, discussed in this research from the first introduction to the final conclusions. The results of the workshop were included in the Estonian Pavilion (Padiglione di Estonia) at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition (13. Mostra Internazionale di Architettura) in Venice in 2012.36 The Pavilion asked, “How Long is the Life of a Building?” and was searching for the contestable futures of the modernist architectural legacy. The focus of the Estonian exposition was precisely the case study of Linnahall: a monumental Soviet-era proto-postmodernist complex under metamorphic pressure for change, but also under heritage protection through the DODMOMO initiative, in its key location in Tallinn.37

On one hand, the exposition investigated the deterioration of remarkable buildings, as everything man-made that is not in use breaks apart. To preserve a building, is it necessary to transform it? If so, then how do we renew its purpose? A historic building is a work of art, and yet is our common ground. On the other hand, this posed the question of the ‘dignified ageing’ of the built environment. As the spine of the society’s physical identity, how can the existing structure accommodate a constant thirst for dreams. What would happen if we ‘opened up’ simultaneously all of the identities of different generations and cultural backgrounds, which are nurtured by shifting times, memories and tacit accumulated knowledge? And how can it still prove desirably ‘profitable’ in neoliberal terms?

Use Value

The exposition highlighted the values of adaptability and flexibility in this building’s functionality, contrasting undocumented case studies of abandoned modernist architecture in Estonia and Eastern Europe with the currently predominant patterns of reformist thought. Such nonconformist architectural icons require re-evolution of the term ‘use value’, which is of worldwide urban concern. This ‘futurespective’, as well as retrospective, aimed to evoke the sense of the responsibility of critical thinkers within a broader international community, in order to enable reflection on possible links between the socio-economic paradigm of ‘deregulation’, and the emergence of the post-capitalist condition. How is the art of negotiation benefitting the creative reuse of an aging pile of stones – gracefully?

Recorded moving images – rejuvenating ‘best-of’ flashbacks of the story of Linnahall, including interviews with designers and end-users – became instrumental devices, inviting the visitor into an exploration of inner sensations – intimate human contact – evoked by ‘ageless’ architecture, in order to unlock memories of one’s own familiar settings, home context, and similarly abandoned yet dignified and extraordinary buildings and places. The exposition aimed to evoke the sense of the responsibility of critical thinkers within a broader international community, in order to enable reflection on possible links between the socio-economic paradigm of ‘deregulation’, and the emergence of the post-capitalist condition. How is the art of negotiation benefitting the creative reuse of an aging pile of stones – gracefully?

Dream, Sense, Adapt, Feed. Five Visions for Linnahall.

The workshop itself was set up on the sequential process ‘Dream, Sense, Adapt, Feed.’ whereby the participants from different fields (architecture, design, sociology, landscaping, urban studies and so on) produced altogether five narratives for Linnahall. The opening session, ‘Dream’, asked the participants to imagine that they are not just part of the information society, but of a dream society characterised by reverie and a constant thirst for dreams. What would happen if we ‘opened up’ simultaneously all of the identities of different generations and cultural backgrounds, which are nurtured by shifting times, memories and tacit accumulated knowledge? And how can it still prove desirably ‘profitable’ in neoliberal terms?

1920 There were
The fourth session, ‘Feed’, stated that every individual (and, in the metaphorical sense, also some buildings) may adapt to its environment within the constraints of its hereditary traits. Adaptation is the primary process in bioevolution. Participants proposed scenarios in which the Linnahall was a power station – a conduit for currents like a hibernating ‘smart building’ where the processes of healing and growth take place during sleep as they do in other living organisms.155 Linnahall was seen as the catalyst for events and for eventlessness. Or, as a giant canvass and jaws that s’entice creative people from everywhere. One of the proposals saw Linnahall as a zoo and/or columbarium and/or refugee camp (‘a Guggenheim with a twist’).

The third session, ‘Adapt’, stated that every individual (and, in the metaphorical sense, also some buildings) may adapt to its environment within the constraints of its hereditary traits. Adaptation is the primary process in bioevolution. Participants proposed scenarios in which the Linnahall was a power station – a conduit for currents like a hibernating ‘smart building’ where the processes of healing and growth take place during sleep as they do in other living organisms.155 Linnahall was seen as the catalyst for events and for eventlessness. Or, as a giant canvass and jaws that s’entice creative people from everywhere. One of the proposals saw Linnahall as a zoo and/or columbarium and/or refugee camp (‘a Guggenheim with a twist’).

The fourth session, ‘Feed’, said that Linnahall’s future genetic code depends directly on today’s memes. What protects Linnahall from its own ideological baggage? Pipelines, ‘S’entices’ or bioenergy?156 Participants A. Staskievits, G. Nii and J. Penjam concluded that Linnahall is a magnet for which the surrounding city fabric aligns itself. Various urban power vectors converge in the multi-layered network of public areas, but they do not open up to reveal themselves completely. Linnahall could develop into a separate city within-a-city. The city and Linnahall are kept together by unique tactics whereby the complex offers space for streets and plazas, locations for film shoots, coastal meadows and jungles – space where recording studios, meeting rooms, cafés, nursery schools, and government departments are all intertwined. It is a place for a multitude of experiences: romantic, nostalgic, dramatic, ecstatic...

The exhibition was commissioned by the NGO Estonian Centre of Architecture (commissioner: Ülar Mark) and curated by interior architect Õsja-Kristin Võmma. Exhibitors included Jüri Vakalo, Jege Vakalo, Maria Pukk, Ivar Lübijak and myself. The exhibition was supported by the Union of Estonian Architects and the Estonian Ministry of Culture.

The jury of the Estonian exhibition competition selected this concept due to its integration of a clear message and intricate contexts, but also for its potential to produce an experiential spatial atmosphere in the Venice Arsenale exhibition space. Furthermore, Linnahall is controversial in its historic and ideological legacy, likely to invoke a multiplicity of associations for viewers. Completed in 1980 when the Moscow Olympics yacht races were held in Tallinn, the building won a Grand Prix from the Interarch 1983 World Biennale in Sofia and, in 1984, a Soviet Union State Award. Linnahall, originally named after Lenin, succeeded in reconnecting the city with the sea – a half-kilometre away, where absolute artificial silence reigns. Thus, Linnahall becomes an acoustic instrument.

103 K. Kljavin & Merlin Jüürmets suggested leaving Linnahall as a spatial perception theatre: a large toy, a spinning striped top, secure in its interior, able to be silent. The top is given colour by the parallel worlds within it, of which some are in the 1980s ESSR, others in the 1990s, and a third perspective are questioningly inapposite. They are united into a whole by the meshwork of disintegration and dreaming, known as ‘nostalgia’.

104 According to participants Artur Staskievits, Gloria Nii & Joan Penjam, cities develop on landscapes – and they disappear from landscapes. Linnahall as a landscape building at the meeting of land and water is no ordinary building. The huge layout of rooms has been stretched out over a large parcel of island to make the skin covering the structure traversable, thus connecting the sea and city. The city and Linnahall are a rich matrix of urban culture in space-time.

105 Participants Eve Kõmp & Ilmioo Võmma offered that there could be two atmospheres sensed through sounds. Inside Linnahall: silence, abandonment – only cracking circuit box sounds cut through the gloom. Outside, however, there could be a rich medley of colours. Each side of Linnahall could have sound-generating sites of different nature – the port, traffic, the sea. The inner and outer spaces do not meet.

106 K. Kljavin & Merijn Jüürmets suggested that, in terms of its form, Linnahall is a structure that bounces people around. Those who climb over it are ‘s’enticed’ or they are cast smoothly over the building into the sea. They are ‘s’enticed’ – that is, sensitised and enticed – into the building, the walls bounce the visitor from smaller rooms to larger spaces, from rectangular ones to round ones and from dark to light. By closing one door or opening others, the visitor on the journey can experience the space in a surprisingly independent way. Under, atop and next to the hall at the heart of Linnahall, are long corridors and endless spaces that proceed around a so-called deep hall, ‘s’entiscent’ visitors into itself, spinning around into the visitor’s sense of space and place in a playful way.

107 K. Kljavin & B. A. Võmma came up with three scenarios: 1) the open ‘developers’ camp’ takes shape. The city has found the long-awaited suitor who do not burden others are the ones that survive. If Linnahall became a business centre. 3) Linnahall is sold to a chain of aid organisations operating in Tallinn from the air

108 Participants Keiti Kljavin and Brett Astrid Võmma offered an architecture for viewers. Completed in 1980 when the Moscow Olympics yacht races were held in Tallinn, the building won a Grand Prix from the Interarch 1983 World Biennale in Sofia and, in 1984, a Soviet Union State Award. Linnahall, originally named after Lenin, succeeded in reconnecting the city with the sea – a half-kilometre away, where absolute artificial silence reigns. Thus, Linnahall becomes an acoustic instrument.

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Expectations and Outcomes

As one of the results of the workshop, the landscape architecture studies at the EAA started to plot more thorough research on light, especially on aspects of natural light. However, the background of the Hansalite 2004 workshop was broader: it aimed to establish a collaborative design network between former Hanseatic cities who were interested in light-art and interventions in street lighting. Young Estonian architecture offices were invited to participate and they contributed worthy proposals.

What does street lighting in the ‘contemporary Hanseatic city’ look like? The workshop asked the participants to analyse current trends in street lighting and experimental projects in outdoor lighting, and to come up with a proposal for Tallinn’s future street lighting. The participants were asked to suggest illumination strategies and methods with a strong environmental agenda, reducing the maintenance costs of lighting systems and increasing energy-saving in street lighting. This workshop relates directly to the issues raised in Sample 8, in which I talk about festivals of contemporary culture.

Regier van de Heide from Arup Lighting kindly conducted a follow-up event in which one of the proposals was realised as an urban installation around the Town Hall Square in Tallinn. Upon many tests, various ‘light domes’ were created with diverse special effects depending on the weather conditions, while natural light cupolas were also formed by fog, snow, etc. Experimenting with different sources of lighting, almost all atmospheric phenomena present were integrated into the process. The results of the workshop have proven valuable for similar festivals of light events in other cities.
In one week, students of landscape architecture, forestry and biology built two nest-shaped structures. The shelters were not ‘built’ in the traditional sense of construction, but rather the technique involved using living brushwood or trees as pillars onto which the cut-down brushwood lumber was ‘woven’.

First, methods of bending smaller beech trunks were studied closely, and then ways of fastening were investigated. Local beavers inhabiting the surrounding virgin forest proved to be a source of inspiration, as their nests exhibit a great deal of sophistication in terms of smart and efficient ways of construction.

Finally, the structures emerged using participants’ bare hands and natural weed-ropes from a nearby factory. One shelter opens up towards the sky in a bowl-like manner, and can withstand the weight of at least 20 people. The other is introverted and provides a sleeping place during the colder, windier and rainier seasons of the year.

The whole process was filmed by Dutch graphic designer and filmmaker Peter de Kan.

Location: Kütioru Open Studios
Haanja Nature Park
Estonia
III Findings

“Luuavarrest võib ka paauk tulla.
A big bang can come from a broomstick.”
Lia Rajalo, 1984

The following has surfaced through the RMIT PhD process, the Practice Research Symposia (PRS) events and interactions on this front with my supervisors and the panel members at the presentations, as I looked closer not only at the sample works presented in Section II but reflected especially on the development of the practice as a whole, as a collaborative multi-instrumental process. One of the first observations was that there is something anomalous about the various roles that I have taken on throughout the years to produce the work. It also became clear at the very first PRS that there is a specific undercurrent of ‘joyful’ and ‘playful’ evident in the projects.

Yet what puzzled me was that, in actual practice, the general ambience – the struggle to pull off the work – resembled for me the Kafkaesque. The first contribution of the PhD process itself, in relation to my practice, was that it helped me to see more clearly how these different attributes – the versatility, the ‘joyful’ and ‘playful’ and the Kafkaesque – are intertwined and interdependent in my practice. Furthermore, as I was listening to the presentations and witnessing the progress of other candidates, it became very clear that I was not alone in this ‘agony’. Since these observations did not occur in isolation, the PhD process gradually made me realise what I can do now, that I could not do when I began the PhD.

Thus, to start from what I consider the beginning of my practice, the second prize in the Väike-Munamäe ski-centre competition in 1998 came as a huge surprise. Little did I know that there were more of those ‘bangs from a broomstick’ ahead. A year later I was part of a small team which won the Rakvere town centre urban planning contest, and in 2000 I co-authored the winning entry for the Tallinn waterfront’s urban renewal. Estonia was fast-forwarding into an economic boom, and taking part in national open competitions became a way of life: straight out of school, I went headlong into ‘sprinter’-mode during these competition years.

As expected, some of the winning proposals began to be realised, and works were being built. The rhythm of the practice switched from ‘sprinter’ mode to that of a ‘marathon runner’. 24/7 workdays were soon split between detailed drawings, site visits, project management meetings, budget discussions, software issues, and everything else that we consider a usual part of any contemporary architectural practice. This period coincided with the co-founding and partnership of the Kavakava architectural ‘girl band’, and it began to gain public recognition.

Co-founding the Zizi&Yoyo office in 2005 helped to evolve the practice’s scope of activities and shift its agenda, setting up a framework that added curatorship and event-making to the previous modes. Still taking part in design, architecture and urban planning competitions, as well as completing buildings and actively participating in the Council of the Union of Estonian Architects, the practice was closely involved with Valgusfestival (the Tallinn Festival of Light) and with initiating Kultuurikatel (the proposal for a creative hub in an abandoned industrial complex on the Tallinn waterfront).

In parallel to the above, more than a hundred essays on architecture, urbanism and contemporary culture have appeared in Estonia’s main dailies and weeklies, as well as in professional architecture, design and art magazines. Even though a majority of completed projects and installations are recorded in the specialist media of Estonia and abroad, I have always been driven to communicate the underlying architectural and urban issues of societal relevance to practitioners from other fields – to learn from response, to discover allies, to push the practice further and to reach beyond disciplinary borders.

A closer look at my work reveals how, with each sample provided, the practice first takes a position (=conception) on an urban or an architectural scale, thereupon giving in to a multiplicity of professional obsessions studying the feasibility of the concept in order to further convince stakeholders, and forming and utilising a multiplicity of instruments (legal entities, mass media, etc.). The following interrogates what potential there is for some specific protocols to arise from these observations.

In the following subsections I will go through the observations of the operational profiles, aspects of versatility and multi-modality, and the dynamics of immersion in topics and projects – altogether, the very ‘substrate’ of the practice itself. I will make an observation about how my practice is perceived in my community and its closest vicinity in Estonia and conclude with the essence of my main struggles with the machinic and the Kafkaesque, offering – I hope! – some ideas about how
to liberate the practice from the Kafkaesque and how to disrupt the machine.

The reader of this document might expect the work itself – the very act of designing that occurred, and my reflections on it – is full of traces of ‘theorizing’ in very particular ways. I have aimed to explore the act of designing – the practice – as a place of manifestation of a very different sense of theorizing. This embedded and manifest theorizing is very different from speculative thinking targeted at some general abstraction or historical derivation, in that it is oriented at the absolute specificity of the situation of a project.

In other words, the design practice research is in fact a different paradigm in which ‘theorizing’ is embedded within the activity of designing. Furthermore, the historical framework also does not help much in proper ‘design practice research’ as such, even though knowledge of history is in my opinion a self-evident prerequisite to practice architecture.

I am also aware that there might arise a request for greater clarity in terms of the apparent ‘lack of narrative’ in this section. The ‘narrative’ here is a different one – it is the narrative of parallel, coinciding streams of activities, tools and methods used. My catalogue is in fact not about one clear central concept, but is rather a cloud of notions that feed into each other and that have helped my practice to produce certain outcomes that are, in some sense, all in fact material theories.

Forcing the work into pointing toward a single clear ‘intent’ would result in a catalogue that would be removed from the reality of the practice, a document that would not be authentic but would become excessively artificial. Designers theorize in the mode of the concrete, the actual – the actual site, the actual construction, the actual detail.

How to engage with this Section? Since hierarchy or lineage would be misleading, the cognitive journey here may not satisfy readers who are looking for underlying narratives, concepts and primary motivation. Forthefections on it – is full of traces of ‘theorizing’ in very particular ways. I have aimed to explore the act of designing – the practice – as a place of manifestation of a very different sense of theorizing. This embedded and manifest theorizing is very different from speculative thinking targeted at some general abstraction or historical derivation, in that it is oriented at the absolute specificity of the situation of a project.

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I am also aware that there might arise a request for greater clarity in terms of the apparent ‘lack of narrative’ in this section. The ‘narrative’ here is a different one – it is the narrative of parallel, coinciding streams of activities, tools and methods used. My catalogue is in fact not about one clear central concept, but is rather a cloud of notions that feed into each other and that have helped my practice to produce certain outcomes that are, in some sense, all in fact material theories.

Forcing the work into pointing toward a single clear ‘intent’ would result in a catalogue that would be removed from the reality of the practice, a document that would not be authentic but would become excessively artificial. Designers theorize in the mode of the concrete, the actual – the actual site, the actual construction, the actual detail.

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Operational Profiles: Versatility

Regarding the first profile discussed here – versatility – most of the samples in Section II can claim relevance, as the vast majority of them evidence my parallel engagement in multiple initiatives which have required adhering to different roles (an architect, a curator, a columnist, etc.).

However, there are a number of prime examples in which the versatility of my practice plays out in the most instructive ways. My roles as a developer of urban scenarios, an architect, and a designer and a collaborator, as well as that of a promoter of an urban and cultural agenda in the media, were essential in the Tallinn Waterfront and Baltic TurnTable projects that feature in Sample 1.

In the Suure-Jaani High School project of Sample 3, I highlight my role as the principal architect at the construction site while at the same time publishing articles in daily media.

Sample B (Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture) contains cases in which I played the roles of an artistic director, a curator, a producer of installations, and also a media campaigner and fundraiser, among others.

Methods of how (or in what way or to what extent) theventurous practice conceivably contributes to the production of new knowledge are best evidenced by their ways of enhancing urban environments, designing public scenarios, an architect, a designer and a collaborator, as well as promoting an urban and cultural agenda in the media. It might be highly important and appropriate to adhere to roles other than the architect and thus exhibit a degree of operational versatility. This in turn poses the question of the boundaries of the profession and the need to consciously restrain or liberate oneself in assuming certain roles.

I have come to realise this as being not a formal requirement of restraint or freedom at an operational level but, rather, the strategic requirement of being fully aware of, and constantly reflective upon, the role’s spectrum and its expansion. This is crucial in regards to retaining a strong relation to the core of the practice so as to sustain its consistency and coherence.

While the variety of roles that the practitioner could assume is in principle unlimited, the way that versatility pans out will be bound by her skills and capabilities, as well as by her curiosity to expand those skills and capabilities to venture into new fields. The overlaps with other disciplines on the fringes of the profession of architecture (or urbanism) are full of potential for experimentation and venturous exploration.

The open-endedness of this feature is both at operational level as well as in terms of outputs directly related to the core motives of our investigation as they are centred around the ‘disruptive’, the ‘joyful’ and the ‘playful’ as notions that point toward deliberately crossing boundaries on several levels.
Substrate

The findings presented under the heading ‘Substrate’ – the spectral diversity in multi-instrumentalism and simultaneous use of ‘tools’ or modes of expression – draw heavily on Sample 1, which showcases a set of ‘devices’ that include drawing, event-making, writing etc., utilised for the Tallinn waterfront and the Baltic TurnTable projects.

The configuration of the ‘substrate’ is also central to Sample 2, in which the set of ‘devices’ at issue includes the formulation of urban regeneration, architectural design, the founding of an NGO, the calling together of a Creative Council to set up the Kultuurikatel initiative, and so forth.

When investigating Sample 7 (Mikrouun), creative collaboration techniques together with ‘installation art’ and ‘set design’ tools come to the fore.

Sample 10 articulates into this subsection in a different way as it adds (among other ‘devices’) educational tools, discourses in hybrid arts and sciences, and ‘round-tables’ and seminars for an enlarged circle of interest groups to conduct architecture workshops.

Despite these more specific scenarios, the insights that sit with the idea of a ‘substrate’ refer back to the entire pool of samples as they present my parallel engagement in multiple initiatives where it became necessary to invoke a variety of ‘tools’ and different ways of expression – from construction drawings to organising events – while at the same time adhering to and being faithful to the role of an architect and my architectural and/or urban agenda.

When a practice’s activities propagate through a multiplicity of expressions (for example, simultaneous drawing, model-making, installations, construction supervision, texts, and so on), the set of ‘devices’ with, upon and within which the designer operates could be called the practice’s substrate (substratum). To preserve and develop a practice, is it necessary to transform its structure, purpose or agenda, or is it a question of how to renew its substrate? While scientists know that their structure, purpose or agenda, or is it a question of how and develop a practice, is it necessary to transform its ideas, yet I happened to be part of the curatorial team together of a Creative Council to set up the Kultuurikatel initiative, and so forth.

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In that essay, I offered ideas for the future of Linnahall, excluding its demolition. The underlying message was that every problem that Linnahall has can be solved, and that the solution is not destruction. The solution is in an ‘explosive urban mix’ of multilayered use and symbiotic synergy between various programs or, in other words, a mix of multiple views of the world (dwelling, business, life). I thereupon described how the business street is formed, how the internal transport system would function, where the housing units could be located and what kind of atmosphere they would carry.

But, more importantly, I suggested that we could accommodate the local music and ballet schools in Linnahall – particular schools that have been looking for ways to relocate for several years now. Many architecture competitions have been held yet no productive solution had been discovered by 2004. Both Linnahall as well as the schools would need public funding for their development. Yet by moving the schools to Linnahall, the public sector could achieve multiple aims with one stroke, renovating Linnahall and offering the schools more spacious new premises with a proper concert hall and rehearsal spaces.

To verify my suggestion, I drew up full-plan drawings to see whether the schools would fit into Linnahall. They would fit easily. The community of musicians would create a social ‘safety-net’ for Linnahall, while the schools could also operate autonomously from the concert hall. Yet all space could potentially end up in cross-usage which enhances the chance for the survival of the Linnahall complex as a whole. Since Linnahall also has an ice-rink, then the added bonus could be that all Estonian musicians would be extraordinary skaters in the future.

The continuation of this line of thought was presented a few years later, in 2007–2008, when I
brought the topic up again, though in a shifted context. In those years, the Estonian National Broadcast was searching for a new building and, again, an architecture competition was set up, though it did not eventually lead to a feasible result. Here, I suggested that Linnahalli could accommodate the National Broadcast facilities. The logic was the same – to find ways to collide two aims in one project – while also considering the options for integrating renewable energy sources for heat production.

Eventually, all the agendas presented here as well as earlier in the ‘samples’ (the Tallinn waterfront; Kultuurikeskus; Linnahalli; synthetic biology; light-art; festivals as tools to guide urban planning, and so on) might resurface in my practice again in the future in a variety of ‘joyful’ and ‘playful’ ways, in parallel with new research agendas surfacing overnight. Renewing the practice’s substrate happens sideways, on multiple levels simultaneously, as the contexts shift while ideas develop and cross-fertilise one another. One of the keys here is to stay open-minded to novel ideas – curiosity!

For this reason, biomimicry is not going to help. The scale difference is here the major issue to overcome. Thus, I can be but an incurable optimist, even though we are suffering from the mindset of the Anthropocene era. The new generation of Estonian architects shares a commitment to opening up the discipline and making it part of the wider public. In that sense, I see Estonia as a precious hive-mind, although it is struggling amid global turbulence. Yet my participation in the ‘2030+’ energy strategy also pointed out that Estonia certainly needs an integrated spatial strategy – an inclusive one, engaging the wider public.

Perhaps it is about inviting the public at large to play and work on the project, using third-sector initiatives and research platforms as ‘living-cell enriched materials’ in a metaphorical sense, to invent techniques in order to treat urban matter differently – to treat it in such a way that it starts to fire up certain processes that work with ‘enzyme-based cellular structures’, like (grassroots) societal initiatives.

For instance, the practice might occasionally delve into a seemingly new terrain. As an advisory board-member of the ‘Estonian Long-Term Energy Strategy 2030+’, I became more aware how recent developments in the transdisciplinary hybridisation of the arts and sciences are forcing the contemporary technological culture to rise up out of its self-deception, in which it has been deluding itself about the extent of its eternally positive impacts. Instead, it should take up more honest and more critical positions with regard to its overall weakness in addressing broader issues. It is time to exit the last page of the ‘humanities-versus-real-sciences’ battle. It is time to bring the community of practitioners in the arts and sciences together.

I have been trained to model the world for the better. Thus, I can be but an incurable optimist, even though we are suffering from the mindset of the Anthropocene era. The new generation of Estonian architects shares a commitment to opening up the discipline and making it part of the wider public. In that sense, I see Estonia as a precious hive-mind, although it is struggling amid global turbulence. Yet my participation in the ‘2030+’ energy strategy also pointed out that Estonia certainly needs an integrated spatial strategy – an inclusive one, engaging the wider public.

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My practice evidences the potential gains from a parallel utilisation of a variety of ‘tools’ or ways of expression, be they construction drawings or the organisation of events. It is of particular importance to contextualise this operational ‘polyphony’ in relation to the agenda of ‘architecture as initiative’, since this very agenda requires handling a multiplicity of simultaneous tasks, often asking one to go beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture or urbanism. At the same time, my prerogative has been to remain faithful to the core role of the architect and to adhere to my architectural and urban agenda.

Key factors in addressing this challenge are the practice’s ability to fully grasp the potentials of novel ‘devices’, but also to be prepared to venture into innovative ways to use tools beyond their first or primary intended application.

Nevertheless, I regard it as essential to retain a balance between the means and the ends, which also means keeping the focus on the specific ‘architecture as initiative’ at hand and not getting lost in or entirely absorbed by the abundance of attractions or distractions presented by the ‘tools’ at issue.

Multi-instrumentalism is not the target per se here, but should be seen as a means to a further end: it thus requires the practitioner to keep a close eye on her overall endeavour (concept) and agenda.

184 Linnahalli tassüünd plahvatava kokkiriiks, Eesti Päevaleht 18.03.2004

An Open-Ended Protocol in ‘Substrate’?

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An Open-Ended Protocol in ‘Substrate’?
The subsequent observations and findings pivot around the notion of 'multi-modality' and derive predominantly from Sample 3 (the Suure-Jaani High School); Sample 4 (the Eduard Tubin monument); Sample 5 (the Lasva Water Tower); Sample 6 (the Catapult shelter); Sample 7 (Mikrouun) and Sample 8 (Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture). This subsection builds on those samples' constructive duality and seeming polarity within their multi-modal approach.

For example, the mutual impact of a careful consideration of the microclimate, alongside offering the 'joyful' and 'playful' approach to publicness through design; the balance between the global and the local; internationalisation and feedback from the immediate community; the pragmatic and the poetic; the efficient and the artistic; large-scale urban scenarios set in motion through small-scale initiatives; the building of 'insides' through disruptions on the surface, etc.

The focus of the samples provided in Section II is on specifically "joyful" approaches to publicness in design activity. These approaches aim to enhance public space, concentrating on the mutual impact of microclimates and playfulness. The search for functional realities – which not only incorporate but immerse themselves in, and build on, other disciplines and institutional, ideological and structural processes – guarantees that a multi-modal architectural practice becomes versatile.

The benefits of a versatile practice come forward in the physical implementation of (design) ideas, (architectural) concepts or (urban) scenarios: in the practice's ability to tease visions into tenable, physical existence.

A closer look at the samples reveals how a practice's substrate might shift in response to contextual change and how a practice maintains or continually re-invents itself to maintain its authenticity in those crossed contexts. Critical links between the socio-economic paradigm of "deregulation" and the emergence – as well as the erosion – of the post-capitalist condition, point to the "the scientific spirit of adventure — the adventure into the unknown, an unknown which must be recognised being unknown, to be explored."

To begin to illustrate this point in very simple terms, when the constructors were first faced with my façade proposition for the Suure-Jaani Sports Centre, they absolutely refused to mount such a façade, as the randomness of coloured cubicles appeared to them completely illogical, complete nonsense, even though I had produced detailed drawings with proper measurements for all the positions of the colourful cubicles. Yet the phenomena of having no standardisable lineage or logic to mount the façade seemed incomprehensible to the workers.

To solve this problem, I invited the workers to imagine themselves as artists: I asked them to take the position of an artist in placing the cubicles on the façade. The cubicles came in orange, yellow and green, thus the first rule was that no two cubes of the same colour could be next to one another. The second rule was a certain distance variation from one cubicle to the next. The rest was left up to the workers. Soon enough they started to send me pictures taken with their phones: "Look what I made! Does this work?" they said, feeling proud of their artistic endeavours.

From an idealist position, as was pointed out already in the previous chapter, "Substrate", the practitioner is trained to model the world for the better. Provided samples of architectural interventions might help the end-user to identify with the place, the scale and the milieu of a daily living environment, as the priority is given to projects' relevance in crossing contexts and shifting microclimates. A multi-modal versatile practice possesses the capacity to facilitate (positive) or resist (negative) societal change, situating and in fact rooting the architecture practice deep in a wider (global) and yet specific (local) political, economic, cultural and demographic context.

My experience with Valgusfestival evidences that it is possible to use the framework of a 'festival' as a tool to guide urban planning. For example, it is possible to locate events in certain strategic locations. By locating the French installation 'Valguskuup' by French architect Benoît Fromentin in Kultuurikatel in January 2006, it was possible to highlight the idea of Kultuurikatel in the context of Tallinn's urban development, but also to draw attention to the desolate state of the waterfront and the rundown condition of the buildings.

We mounted 'Valguskuup' in freezing minus-30°C weather. As the cold had completely come through the walls, the whole interior of the main hall was covered with an amazing, glittering frost. Visually, it was a gorgeous sight, yet it reminded me that these buildings had never been built to be used by humans but simply for the production of heat: these buildings were meant for machinery. Thus, such design processes are not only targeted outward – for the communication of certain ideas to the larger public or to politicians – but they also catalyse internal reflection and contribute to tacit knowledge.

Underneath the frost, asbestos sat silently,
posing a problem which was eventually solved through the help of many financiers and parties from the city to non-profit organisations. Altogether, ‘Valguskupa’ was the first effort to draw wider public attention to the complex and the premises, with all its joys and troubles. Other festivals (film, jazz, etc.) could ideally make other similar efforts to the premises, with all its joys and troubles. Other festivals (film, jazz, etc.) could ideally make other similar efforts to the areas around it, and they are also examples of how to activate and enliven different parts of Kultuurikatel over the years, as Kultuurikatel offers a great variety of spaces with various typologies – from the chimney to the main hall, from the gallery to the fuel-storage building, and so on.


At the centre of the notion of ‘multi-modality’ as it is discussed here is the idea of an approach that is inclusive of a variety of angles that are invoked simultaneously from the outset. To argue for such a multi-modal approach not only as optional but as strongly recommended addresses the complexity of the design tasks at stake. The multi-modal approach enables the practitioner to respond to or to explore the task at issue with a higher degree of sophistication; it also allows the practitioner to arrive at more comprehensive proposals or solutions that consider multiple concurrent perspectives. In my case, multi-modality has played out in illuminating ways: for example, with regard to the collision of the microclimate and the ‘playful’, or to the tension between large-scale urban scenarios versus small-scale initiatives.

However, as regards the notion of open-endedness at issue in this summary, it is important to bear in mind that the setup and unfolding of angles, of concrete modal perspectives, and of polarities and dichotomies (seeming or actual) at work not only vary quite obviously from project to project, but also vary significantly within the community of practice, from one practice to another. ‘Openness’ here also means that it is up to the individual practitioner to find her own unique methods and strategy to construct, work with, leverage or dismantle the angles and polarities as needed in crossing-contexts.

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Immersive to the Point of Ephemeral

The prime group of samples from which the following insights have been derived, regarding the degree of immersion, include Sample 8 (Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture) and Sample 10 (Architecture workshops).

While the ‘immersion’-principle is of course operative throughout the entire sample pool, these two samples are particularly instructive with regard to a specific dynamics of immersion. They show how an idea or initiative might at first be generated by an individual or by a small group of people, yet might then be promoted to the point at which a larger community of ‘believers’ is forged through inclusive social immersion and a process of participation that supports the advancement of the concept and its implementation. Such communal ‘ownership’ (for example, of intellectual property) can reduce and even minimise the workload of the initial catalyst.

The two samples specifically chosen here also evidence how the collaboration with a number of professionals from other fields on a topic of overlapping interest may lead to a deeper degree of immersion, i.e. may allow the practitioner to plunge deeper into the subject or task at stake, as supporting tasks are addressed by the extended community of practitioners.

Aiming towards a practice’s (instrumental) efficiency, project tasks are often delegated to the society – to the extent that the practitioner is able to streamline the practice in such a way that it might end up relying on only a few lean means of communication. In some ways, it can be considered a reference to Buckminster Fuller and his note on ‘ephemeralisation’ – that is to say, ‘how to do more and more with less and less, until eventually you can do everything with nothing’.

“The design of something small in an urban space is like the work of a jeweller: the body is given (the volume of the buildings along with the street space between them), and the question is in the accessories – in their sensitivity, precision, mood and variety. In practice, the relationship between something small and its users becomes important because it is on a scale that is more similar to the human body. Social factors are ultimately what accepts, subverts, pisses on or leaves ‘something small’ unnoticed in an urban setting. [...] One way or another, the design of ‘something small’ in urban space is a continuous process, formation and dialogue. The keyword is variety in terms of both geography and time. Christmas decorations have to be something entirely different from the design of the Old Town Days Festival and you cannot use the same devices in Lasnamäe as you can in Nõmme. ‘Something small’ is by nature short-term and thus it is a better idea to create it as constantly changing social art and not to design finished final products.”

The coldest and the darkest season in Estonia lasts from November to February. To alleviate the population’s Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), Valgusfestival has learned from the experiences of our Scandinavian colleagues who have invited artists to challenge the winter condition in public space. Hence, Valgusfestival has for years focused on events and projects that use light, sound, fire and performances to offer inspiring experiences during the most depressed time of the year. In doing so, Valgusfestival has targeted contemporary art practices to simultaneously influence urban planning processes in Tallinn.

Following the principles of openness to experimentation and novel solutions, a long-term collaboration with the Valon Voima festival in Helsinki since the end of the 1990s has enabled Valgusfestival to engage both international know-how as well as local talent and students at the EAA who have ambitious ideas and the firm enthusiasm to build their projects in public space. Via the Hansaflux collaboration framework, Valgusfestival exchanged light-art projects with the Lyon program Superflux in both 2007 and 2008. On each occasion, the focus was on urban matters, enlivening the ambiguous marginal areas in the city – areas that are nevertheless full of potential and intriguing in their ambiguity.

These efforts have proved that the sophisticated allocation of public art events has an impact on the local population and might instigate the urban development of the neighbourhoods. In Tallinn, Hansaflux marked the trajectory from the historic centre to the waterfront with light-art installations and thus led a person by the hand to the sea, emphasising the urban potential of the waterfront in all its vernacular poetics. In Lyon, our partner Galerie Roger Tator is based in Guillotière – a once-forgotten and yet spectacular locality that is today full of artistic activity.

The collaboration was born upon my preliminary visit to Paris in 2006, where I saw Galerie Roger Tator’s Superflux program. In the same year I proposed to exhibit the installation ‘Valguskupa’ by Lyon-based architect Benoît Fromentin in Kultuurikatel in Tallinn. At the same...
time I also made the installation ‘Swinging in the Light’ on Lindanek Hill in Tallinn. This installation of super-sized warm, hanging hammocks caught the eye of Bettina Pelz, curator of the GLOW festival of light in Eindhoven, Holland. Thus, ‘Swinging in the Light’ was also taken to the Netherlands, to the first edition of GLOW in the city which has the headquarters of the lighting company Philips.

Simultaneously, all of the activities were presented to LUCI, the international association of street light operating in Lyon. In 2007, I visited Lisbon’s festival of light, Luzboa (meaning ‘good light’ in Portuguese) and, since I greatly enjoyed the quality of work produced, I invited the Portuguese artists, designers and architects to contribute to Hansafest 2008 in Tallinn. Hence, step-by-step, via personal contacts and through the exchange of artworks, doing ‘everything with almost nothing’ and with more and more agents joining the movement, the International Network of Festivals of Light (INFL) was born.

Yet, considering the Synthonia workshop described in the samples of Section II, the immersive aspect becomes more complex. Joe Davis, hosted in Estonia by the Plektorum festival in September 2011, has been one of the most brilliant examples of an ‘artist-in-laboratory’ (in ‘Microvenus’, presented at Ars Electronica 2000, he inserted the human genome into bacteria that was flown into space). Interest in ‘synthetic aesthetics’ is common among both artists and architects, who are simultaneously intrigued by the applications of advances in materials sciences and of developments in biotechnology, as well as in the new simulation and visualisation techniques. The impact of bioArt on today’s culture and tomorrow’s (wished-for) developments will be revealed in the works of the students who participated in the workshop, in their subsequent endeavours in the fields of biopoetics and biomedia.

Just think of Terreform’s environmental visionary Mitchell Joachim and his project for a home that was grown from muscle tissue, ‘In Vitro Meat Habitat’, which probably meets the requirements of the so-called ‘passive housing’ better than today’s conventional ‘energy efficient building’. Or take the example of British architect and urban planner for the ‘energy efficient, for the design solutions to be easily maintained, and so on. In my practice, I have demanded from myself far more than that: I have searched for ways to integrate the ‘playful’ and the ‘joyful’ into buildings (e.g. the Saure-Jeans Sports Centre), in public spaces (e.g. composer Eduard Tubin’s monument and urban installations for festivals of light) as well as in my teaching and my curriculars, and so on. I call it the ‘embodied generosity’ of practice, something that inherently increases the quality of solutions for a built environment that is not only ‘profitable’ in neoliberal terms. The nonconformist architectural icons require a re-evaluation and an evolution of the term ‘use value’, which is of worldwide urban concern.

Using architectural interventions to create space for emergent cultural meaning that one creates ‘disruptions’ in the surface of everyday experience – disruptions that are unpredictable in that they are synthetic.
has much to do with venturing into public space. What kind of promise can our urban environment make: does it magnetise social capital? If so, then when and how does it become a catalyst for collective creativity? Who takes care of public space in a market-driven (rather than a culture-driven) condition? The market has only one value – or demands, at least, that all values are subservient to economic value. This is an artificial condition. My work is in the attempt to revoke this condition. All four characteristics above are evident in my writings for the main dailies and weeklies in Estonia. Yet the interventions have been nurtured by a cross-fertilisation of the concepts with ideas from other fields of culture. For example, the COLINA experience was a ‘leap into the unknown’, facilitated by the fact that in the beginning the fellow Coliners expressed their confusion and uncertainty. A professional choreographer, for example, said: “I am very much seduced by theory... but still dance”, while a film-maker stated: “I don’t have a background. I can just say that I’m young and fresh.” We all began the journey together. To be honest, I broke the ice by prompting: “I will try to turn you all into architects – I have tried this on my cat.”

Speaking of trying certain ideas out on other creatures, I have been taking my students along some unexpected paths. Thanks to the Linnahall workshop and other endeavours (such as the Maribor 2112A project led by Tom Kovac), students at the EAA – for the first time in the history of the academy – had the opportunity to participate actively in the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale, which is by far the most important professional event in the field. It happened that my students from the fields of architecture, design, new media, urban studies, etc. were simultaneously engaged with two national pavilions – the Estonian and the Slovenian. This was certainly of symbolic relevance for the Faculty of Architecture at the EAA, as well as sparking a venturous practice (informing the substrate of the practice) from one project to another, in developing different levels of immersion. In my experience as a practitioner, the more immersive the process, the less remains eventually on the shoulders of the practitioner, since at a certain point the community becomes involved in the process to the extent that the initiative takes on a life of its own. It might even be the ultimate goal – to initiate, yet in the end to let go – for the initiative to keep on evolving.

An Open-Ended Protocol in the ‘Heuristic Dynamics’?

For the practice to remain dynamic in its ‘ways of searching’, I claim that it is vital to nurture the practice’s flexibility at all levels. A prerequisite would be for a practice to be able to adapt to shifting contexts and thus to respond to situations and challenges with an acute awareness and ‘openness’ to prospective process but also to foster and to consciously stimulate one’s own curiosity.

To translate this agenda into the quest for a venturous practice means to enhance and cultivate a specific ‘fearlessness’ – the readiness to break boundaries and dissolve problem-solving routines in favor of a heuristic protocol that actively reaches out for uncharted ground. Where such a heuristic helps to catalyse ‘architecture as initiative’, to set forth spaces of inception and provide impulses that may evoke ‘disruptions’, such a protocol is by its very nature open-ended.

The potentially ‘disruptive’ nature of the work can be seen as a key heuristic in altering the routinised perceptions that have been ingrained by a legacy of ideological bias, and that are under the spell of historic traumas. How such designed ‘disruptions’ pan out in their own right is essentially open-ended. The idea of

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an open-end in the practice’s heuristic extends also to the inclusion of collaborators and the ongoing search for ways to invite others into the creative process.
If we were to compare Tallinn’s relevance for my particular practice, of phenomena, I have gradually learned to extract its intuitions concerning the phenomenon of being ‘tagged’. The observations and claims made in this subsection are derived from the experience of how the practitioner is potentially perceived by the society at large and by his or her immediate community. This research perspective is particularly interesting in regards to practice, on which this investigation is directly based, as the questions of ‘perception’ and ‘tagging’ run potentially counter to the divergent roles central to the creative practice at issue, as described in ‘Operational Profiles’.

Should the habitual perception and conventional tagging be challenged (if not fought)? ‘Tagging’ or labeling can be expected when a variety of ‘tools’ are used by the practitioner to implement the projects, as described in the ‘Substrate’. ‘Tagging’ may arise due to the shifts in agenda as described in ‘Multi-modality’, or due to the varying collaboration networks as described in ‘Immersion’. ‘Tagging’ issues may accumulate when all factors discussed occur together, or when they recur with a certain frequency and rigour.

Sample 10 (architecture workshops) serves as the main source (but not the sole one) that lends itself to insights concerning the phenomenon of being ‘tagged’. The observations and claims made in this subsection are derived from the experience of how the practitioner is potentially perceived by the society at large and by his or her immediate community. This research perspective is particularly interesting in regards to practice, on which this investigation is directly based, as the questions of ‘perception’ and ‘tagging’ run potentially counter to the divergent roles central to the creative practice at issue, as described in ‘Operational Profiles’.

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Receiving the Young Architect Award 2012 was the highest national recognition of my practice. Yet in Estonia, I have been referred to more often as an ‘independent thinker’ or a ‘futuristic visionary’ than as an architect. Indeed, I have persistently become involved in different disciplines – from biology to performing arts – that are able to inform architecture, and to expand the field’s range of interest. I have been tagged with ‘creativity’, with ‘boldness’, and with ‘proactiveness’, that are evidenced by my organising of international events where the cell doubles and then divides into two daughter cells.

A number of Nobel Prizes were awarded in the first years of the 21st century precisely to scientists who studied the mechanisms of cell division and death. In 2001, the Prize went to Leland Hartwell, R. Timothy Hunt and Paul Nurse, who determined which molecules trigger cell division – the cell cycle – and what mechanisms control it. The cell cycle – in other words the cycle of cellular division – is a chain of events where the cell doubles and then divides into two daughter cells.

A year later, Nobel honours went to Sydney Brenner, H. Robert Horwitz and John E. Sulston for their contribution to the study of mechanisms that cause cell death. It turns out that cell death is genetically a precisely orchestrated process that ensures that cell death disrupts the organism at
large as little as possible. This type of controlled cell death is called 'apoptosis' and it is extremely important for the development of the organism in forming various structures and eliminating damaged cells. If apoptosis does not work as it should, cells damaged by radiation or chemicals will not be cleared from the organism. Their cell cycle no longer is subject to control by the body, and the result may be uncontrolled proliferation of cells – a cancerous tumour.

And yet it is pretty much self-evident that all living organisms die. In the case of cities or buildings, the sustainable thinking ethics is extremely reluctant to accepting that some city, or a part of a city or a building, will simply disappear or die... Even though they are under constant economic, social and cultural pressure, they must be cared for, used and lived in to keep them alive. The human body – its internal organs, tissues and cells – is covered by skin: we know how to protect ourselves from certain dangers. Compared to cities and buildings, living organisms– thanks to evolution – seem to be in quite a well-defended state.

But in fact, cells constantly live in a fairly hazardous environment. On one hand, there is the ever-present danger of being exposed to radiation such as that favourite of the sunbathers – ultraviolet radiation from the sun, which damages cells and the DNA within cells. Exposure to harmful chemicals is another possibility. And even if we were in a completely sterile and protected environment the whole time, there would still be no escape from the oxidising effect of free radicals – a result of our consumption of oxygen. That is the price we pay for our distant evolutionary ancestors gaining more mobility and better reaction time due to the switch to aerobic respiration.

Thus, cells are in constant danger and from time to time their DNA structure becomes damaged. But DNA is, as we know, the medium of heredity in cells, to be passed on to heirs in unchanged form. DNA contains much of the programming for cells, and is clear that if the instructions are incorrect, the behaviour of cells will also be flawed. The result can again be a cancerous tumour.

The current development logic of urbanisation is reminiscent of that of cancerous cells. It is logical that a cell goes through a certain number of cycles, but it is often presumed of architecture, especially in Europe, that it will last forever. Is there any phenomenon in nature or in the laboratory where cancer cells could be used by a body to gain some benefit?

I think so. In the early phase of human development, where we are embryos consisting of only a few hundred cells, reproduction of cells very much resembles the type seen in cancer cells – rapid, undifferentiated, divergent and uncontrolled. Like small children. Later on, these cells will be increasingly constrained into a framework, with checks placed on their activity and reproduction.

The extent of randomness and information (noise) in urban construction and architecture is often so great that it contributes to the inception of a certain playfulness. One encounters unexpected, downright paradoxical manifestations next door to each other in cities – so-called anomalies that help us generate new associations, occasionally leading to exploitive development, directional changes, surprising outcomes in urban construction. What role do ‘randomness’ and ‘noise’ have in cellular development?

In recent times, more attention has been turned to randomness in genetic expression. Scientists such as Max Delbrück were interested in it already sixty years ago. The randomness of how genes are expressed is an important evolutionary resource that does not depend (at least not at first glance) on the boundaries laid down by DNA or the environment. Randomly arising differences in phenotype may become favoured by natural selection. And finally it is very likely that random expression processes play an important role in the foetal development of organisms – here, too, cells with very different functions and structure must somehow develop from cells that are genetically completely identical. Many biologists have started studying the reasons for randomness, in co-operation with mathematicians and physicists, and there is no doubt that the future will bring new unexpected and interesting results on this front.

Such cross-disciplinary collaboration requires one to have a certain sense of the big picture. It is becoming increasingly complicated to plan an adequate integral picture at all once, in the form of an integral organism developing in time and in space. The tendency in urban construction is to envision a human community as a set of individual buildings, streets, blocs and activities, rather as we are used to explaining complicated urbanist processes in the language of ever-smaller objects.

Any biological system processes, interprets and selects information. It is clear that without information (DNA) there is nothing to interpret, but we can also interpret information as the question about life only by asking how the transformation of the information (resources) into life actually works. The most elementary level of organism in nature is the cell. If we want to ask fundamental questions about the nature of life, we can technically reduce things to a subcellular level, but we must not forget that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In the last few decades, a leap forward has been made in the field of methods for studying the entire cell, such as fluorescent techniques and some microscopy solutions that are in principle completely new. Thanks to this, we can study ‘randomness’ and ‘noise’ in the processes of development of individual cells.

Steve Rose, a well-known English scientist who studies molecular mechanisms related to brain activity and is an enthusiastic popular science writer, writes the following (2005): “Science asks questions about the world, but the questions we ask and the answers we accept as being meaningful to us obviously reflect our cultural expectations...” I think that even reductionism is tied to our traditions. We see the world as consisting of parts and the function of science is to explain very complicated processes in the language of much smaller things.

In this manner, we want to explain life using the terminology of cells, molecules and ultimately even atoms. This is a reductionist approach. The roots of reductionism go back to the 19th century, to the days of the Industrial Revolution, when it was very necessary to reduce the world to its constituent parts and quantify them so that everything could be measurable and reducible to numbers on some consensual scale.

What are today’s ‘cultural expectations’ in one get essential answers to our questions of science? What should we focus on instead?

We could deal more with processes and dynamics than concrete elements... For instance, more and more data are being gathered about hereditary effects not encoded in DNA. It’s possible that one day DNA-based genetics will prove an exception to the general genetic theory, just as Newton’s model of the universe turned out to be an exception in physics.

In architecture and urban construction, strategic design and urbanism as well, there is talk of environments being in continual transformation, in a process where the orientation should place the user in the centre. The needs of users themselves are constantly transmuting, just as the everyday needs of inhabitants change with the ageing of the population or other demographic processes. For us, the changes seem to take place extremely slowly, as baby steps. Architecture based on a specific spatial function – even urban construction – has turned out to be an exception in the general context of urbanism, considering that the changes in social system have led to the fact that our current way of life cannot be forced into a monofunctional space in the same extent as was possible in the 18th century during the Industrial Revolution... What would be the dynamics of the 21st-century Linnahall cycle as a process?117

How does ‘tagging’ influence the practice? Delving into other disciplines that might not even appear to border on what is traditionally considered architecture reveals certain threats of distraction and diversion from the main goal (for instance, an architecture project). However, such excursions into other fields are necessary for two-way communication. It enables the practitioner to simultaneously communicate an architectural or urban agenda to other disciplines, while mapping out potential points of overlapping interests or possibilities for a future collaboration with other fields. As long as the practitioner is aware of the risks and is able to return more informed to the main issue (e.g. an architecture project), the ‘tagging’ enhances rather than obstructs the practice... the ‘tagged’ practitioner is more likely to be approached by professionals from other fields, to discuss potential novel forms of research and collaboration.

An Open-Ended Protocol in ‘Tagged’?

Given the versatile nature of the practice and its multi-modal approach, it becomes self-evident that such a practice might be perceived by both the society at large and the immediate community as something else – something that is not traditionally considered to be architecture or design. My claim against the cliché here is that the task at issue is not primarily to disrupt or eradicate the perceptual convention and tagging habit but, rather, to turn it to one’s advantage. Thus, the key here is to acknowledge such ‘labeling’ and even the perception that it rests upon with an open – venturous mind and to be opportunistic in the best sense of the word by using specific ‘tags’ and ‘labels’ to the benefit of the practice and its endeavours within the ‘architecture...
The Opportunistic in the ‘Machinic’

The claims and insights related to the quest for opportunism with regard to what we call the ‘machinic’ are predominantly derived from the three samples in the pool: Sample 1 (the Tallinn Waterfront and the Baltic TurnTable); Sample 2 (Kultuurikatel) and Sample 8 (Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture).

The three samples have been chosen as they allow for particular insights into the nature of the struggle of the practitioner when immersed in practice. The specific struggle at stake that can be foregrounded in the selected samples calls forth an attitude not dissimilar to the one discussed in the previous sub-section that looked at perceptions and tags.

The main perspective here, however, relates to challenges of the broader societal and political system within which the specific practice is operating and into which particular projects are launched. The samples partly feature scenarios of the ‘fate’ of such projects, including the situations in which bottom-up initiatives are eventually taken over by the authorities.

The horror and allure of the machinic lies in the concept of the Kafkaesque, a term inspired by the writings of the German-Jewish author Franz Kafka. The Kafkaesque denotes concepts and bureaucratic situations in which people are overpowered by the system – by the (manmade) machine. Kafka’s characters appear in a surreal, nightmarish milieu that evokes feelings of senselessness, disorientation and helplessness, and of lacking a clear course of action to escape the situation. We encounter Kafkaesque elements today in real-life occurrences and situations that are incomprehensibly complex, bizarre or illogical.

Our understanding of the Self, projected into the future – our comprehension of the future ‘human’ – is an elongation of the yearning and rigorous search of past decades for a revolution of (human) sensibilities. Yet, no matter which way this ‘human’ is being reshaped, we still seem to be perplexed by the common deterministic and mechanistic view of both end-users and of design (architectural, urban) within the ruling system. The ways in which art, architecture and film have envisioned, critiqued, or challenged this ‘new human’ have not entirely helped us to overcome the Kafkaesque.

Films like Mon Oncle, Play Time and Trafic by the French comic and film-maker Jacques Tati have frequently ridiculed the Western consumer culture’s obsession with commodities that lends superficiality to its social relationships. Tati’s criticism attacked the nature of space-age technology and design, which is brought to us as entirely impractical and inhumane, as if the futuristic is meant for someone other than the human being. Or, in Cedric Price’s words from 1979: “Technology is the answer, but what was the question?”

Kafka was born in Prague, and today’s emerging democracies in Eastern Europe provide an intriguing case study of societal transformation from the former Soviet regime to the capitalist market-driven system, and its implications on architectural procedures, urban planning and design rules and (de-)regulation. Today more than ever before, those emerging democracies witness the impact of the Kafkaesque of both systems on our living environment; however, the way out of the current situation has not yet been fully addressed by practitioners and researchers in the field of architecture, design and urban development.

The innovations of recent decades within cognitive imaging, computer interfaces, communication technologies, surrogate natures, sensory mediators, and global tracking are mere disruptions on the surface if they do not reach deeper into the redesign of the societal system as a whole, offering a way out of the Kafkaesque. The practitioner engaged in design innovation, able to pose the critical questions, has the capacity to envision and empower an alternative collective model organism – in other words, an organisational model for (parts of) the society. But can the ‘embedded practitioner’ (the designer embedded in practice) do so from within the system?

‘Economic crises, debt crises, floods of refugees, climate change, and terrorism. Every day the media reports on crises, catastrophes, and global hazards. Given such media-driven and real threat scenarios, there is a diminishing sense of trust in the capacity of governments to act. Political control mechanisms are apparently insufficient, and political alienation is growing. The result is a feeling of powerlessness. The powerlessness of a society can lead to dictatorships and wars. Individual responses range from internal withdrawal to political radicalization towards the left or right.”

Kultuurikatel provides an example of overcoming this ‘feeling of powerlessness’. As our NGO and I were to a large extent pushed aside from the further progression of the project, the following is an account of how the initiative took on a life of its own in the hands of the municipality. Thus, it is the direct result of our initial input.

119 Professor Toivo Maimets (b. 1957) is a developmental biologist. He has worked as an engineer and as a scientist at Tartu University. He was the Estonian Minister of Education from 2003–2005.
117 Linnahall as part of a cell cycle: http://issuu.com/vaikla/docs/how_long_is_the_life_of_a_building
Due to the proposal documentation that we delivered to the Tallinn Cultural Heritage Department (the owner of the real estate), there are today several European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grants linked to this project: 120

- investment in the Cauldron (City Space at Cultural Cauldron): €601,448
- investment in neighbourhood development (opening up Tallinn to the sea — spatial plans for the neighbourhoods of Cultural Caldron and Linnahall and construction of the first phase): €1,157,120
- creative industries content activities: €86,887
- Tallinn City’s contributions to the investment projects are respectively €273,767 and €204,198
- other funding from Tallinn City: approx. €6 million
- the estimated total cost of the Cauldron’s development is approximately €137.3 million (first phase approx. €7 million)

There are three points that make it a good idea in the eyes of the City. First of all, Kultuurikatel is not simply about renovating a physical space, but the concept was generated as a platform to stimulate partnerships, knowledge-transfer, collaboration and a broad European network to create synergy between various cultural trends and organisations as well as between creative industries and businesses.

Secondly, the renovation of old industrial factories into cultural factories often ends up creating a closed space used only by the tenants. In such a case, little ‘creative mixing’ happens between the tenants. Kultuurikatel aims instead to create an open space for the general public — it aims literally to be public space in the best sense of the phrase. Thirdly, it is an excellent example of cultural development based on inclusiveness. The project idea and initiative in developing and pushing it forward came from the creative community itself.

The idea is to divide the space into three parts as follows:
- 1/3 of the space: 24/7 open public space with a roof
- 1/3 of the space: tenants and residents, who basically ‘pay’ through the value of their very presence (and have to cover the costs of their own activities)
- 1/3 of the space: commerce (cafés, ticketed events, art galleries, etc.)

On the ‘smart’ side, Kultuurikatel aims to enhance synergy between various cultural trends and organisations as well as creative industries and businesses. The platform includes a wide range of partners (e.g. Contemporary Art Promotion Centre, Design Centre, Architecture Centre, New Media Prototyping Centre, etc.). It is certainly remarkable for the city that the idea of Kultuurikatel surfaced from a group of just 4–5 people at the beginning of 2006. This NGO, called MTÜ Kultuurikatel, was dedicated to the development of a cultural hub in the area of the Cauldron, serving Tallinn and the wider region. The background of the initiators (the members of our NGO) was diverse, from architecture and urban planning, to theatre, education, and more. We took the job of communication extremely seriously, publishing articles and lobbying various decision makers and stakeholders, as well as the local cultural leaders.

The city agreed in principle that a cultural centre should be located in the Cauldron and at the end of 2006 the NGO became an official partner of the city. In spring 2007 the NGO presented its approach to the Cauldron’s development in the so-called ‘black book’. The city requested from them a more detailed technical and financial analysis. In 2008 the NGO presented a feasibility and profitability study (phase I) which was put together by several partners, including one from the Netherlands.121

The project was funded as one of the 13 projects of the (even the tamest Nordic) creative industries development program which is managed by Enterprise Estonia and funded by the ERDF. It received the maximum amount of support. The selection was made by the program committee whose members included representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication, Enterprise Estonia and the Estonian Development Fund, as well as some experts from creative industries.

The management and steering of the project has changed over the years. Initially, the team that ran the project consisted of NGO Kultuurikatel and the city’s Cultural Heritage Department. The leadership role and the ‘smart side’ activities were undertaken by the NGO. The latter was advised by the Creative Council. The city did not finance these activities, yet because the city owned the building it was the final say regarding the direction in which the Cauldron was going to move.

Afterwards, when the construction part became more important, the Foundation 2011 took over the project’s management. It is a pity that in the Foundation there is only one full-time project manager (responsible for the construction) and fewer than 10 people working in the Tallinn Creative Hub Development Centre, which is in charge of (among other things) the ‘smart’ side of the Cauldron. Even though their activities are undertaken in partnership with many different actors, there are no long-term co-operation agreements and the ‘smart side’ is regressing instead of progressing.

The Kultuurikatel Creative Council included at different times between 25 and 40 top leaders from Estonia’s cultural arena. Among them there were theatre directors, designers, architects, artists, curators and critics, several heads of universities and colleges, members of Parliament, performers, and directors of festivals, as well as municipality officials alongside heads of community organisations in the field of culture. Yet certain truly innovative ideas in the Estonian context have not been taken on board. For example, in terms of the actual reconstruction of the buildings, there was initially a plan to refurbish the complex into a powerhouse (literally), with annual productions of solar power totaling 195MW and of wind power totaling 67,800kWh, according to our NGO’s calculations.

Yet the important part of the whole process is that the city finally acknowledged that the innovative aspects of the project were initiated by the creative community itself, namely the Kultuurikatel NGO. The city has also admitted that it was novel that both the idea of the initiative as well as its public promotion came from the NGO. The NGO played the key role in developing the project, which is a fact that this kind of project had an advisory body, a so-called Creative Council, bringing together experts and representatives from a wide range of organisations and fields (e.g. universities, several associations of artists, business community, architects etc.). No other projects taking a similar approach have been initiated in Estonia.122

An example of an unforeseen problem and how it was overcome lies in the case of a kultuurihesas (‘culture factory’) that was needed for new space and was trying to ‘smarten up’ the Cauldron’s profile. In order to solve these ownership problems, it soon became clear that there would not be enough funds to properly build and maintain such a place with this kind of agenda. At the same time, since the NGO was in close contact with the Ministry of Culture, it became very clear that there was an increased interest in the emergence of creative industries in Estonia, with correlated EU funds opening up. It was in the public interest for the project to become financially sustainable in the long term. The economic crisis has impeded the realisation of the project, thus Kultuurikatel has taken longer to implement because the city’s budget capacity decreased. Nevertheless, the project still has multiple strengths that support ‘smart growth’ in Tallinn and Estonia.123 Kultuurikatel had a rather spontaneous start with creative people themselves initiating the process. But soon the NGO was confronted with a dilemma in producing a business plan: Kultuurikatel was morphed into more business-oriented and self-financing centre, under the threat of the city dumping the idea altogether. We chose to enter the ‘more challenging business game’.

The Kultuurikatel team has considered it crucial to develop a strong educational component, including programs of informal education and tacit learning as well as innovation-oriented features. But the main target is to still bring life and people back to the former industrial neighborhood and to the seashore. It is an important link in the development of this strategic area in Tallinn that is growing in importance and will hopefully catalyse other new hubs. To make it all happen, the project has been developed by engaging a wide range of partners and it will continue, with hope, to build on its strengths. The public interest is expected to generate additional private investments in new small businesses.

The project has struggled enormously with finding a good (administrative) project manager and a suitable institutional (municipal) framework that would suit the novel concept. I never intended to run Kultuurikatel or to become its director — however, there were still and are still capable colleagues in our NGO who could have taken on this position. But the city never allowed this to happen, as the mayor who was in my time (and still is for no obvious reason) considered political. Thus, a good management system is still to be discovered.

One of the most difficult tasks of such a job is that it is usually difficult to communicate the new concepts in the ‘old’ language (language that is familiar to the authorities, administration, municipality, etc.). The NGO team has kept up its active communication work and has been continually promoting and explaining the idea over the years. It must be emphasised that it is utterly important to keep the dialogue open, to make sure the people in key decision-making positions change and the message tends to transform over time if it is not repeated in its original form.
To conclude, Kultuurikatel as an initiative — from its inception to its current state of affairs — is an example of overcoming the Kafkaesque. The first of the initiative’s set of five success-factors is its openness, though this does not necessarily mean entertaining every idea from every interested party. There was an initial screening of ideas and a synchronisation of agendas before welcoming those parties to participate. In that sense, Kultuurikatel has been a carefully curated initiative. The project has had its obstacles and difficulties with changes happening in the city management, with the economic recession, with increasing construction prices and with legal cases, but its openness has maintained the broader community’s support for the project.

Without this support the project might have been abandoned by now, yet people have connected with the original idea thanks to publicity, endless communication and the careful orchestration of the Creative Council: the people involved felt part of some larger and more important project, and felt that they were serving the greater good. This has guaranteed the support and enthusiasm of the public even after so many years. It is important to keep in mind that good communication has played an important role in achieving this.

Secondly, it is clear that every old building has a legal owner. For a city administration it might seem easy and obvious to have the owner (in this case, the Culture and Heritage Department) running the project. However, the owner may not have the right knowledge, skills, incentives, etc. to run this kind of novel urban development project. Thus, in essence, the city has acknowledged that the project manager must not only be a good administrator, but also a visionary leader.

Thirdly, Kultuurikatel has emphasised its international dimension from the very beginning, as culture is not solely a local phenomenon but involves the international community, helping to create the necessary leverage for financing and making the project more attractive for potential creative and funding partners.

Fourthly, it is not often that such a large area in a great location is available for development. This ‘window’ opening was reinforced by excellent timing: the cultural sector was looking for this type of opportunity. For example, in the idea-generation phase there was already more interest in tenancies than there was space available.

A final factor is the flexibility of the platform, as Kultuurikatel needs to keep on developing even after the renovation is finished. For the Cauldron, being ‘ready’ would mean being out-of-date and losing its edge.

A difficulty is that the construction usually takes up a majority of the funding, requiring systematic long-term planning, yet it is the ‘pouring concrete’ part that is most learned by trial and error. One reason is that there is a risk that the ‘hard’ side may take over the project and its requirements may push the ‘smart’ side into the background. Even small cutbacks can have a big impact on the progress of the project: politicians and public officials are often under pressure to cut the funding of ongoing projects. The underlying assumption in such situations is often that cutbacks can be made linearly (i.e. we will cut 10% of the funding, you will do 10% less). However, even small cutbacks may well require a re-thinking of the concept, of the construction or, in the worst-case scenario, of the whole project.

It is equally important that the procurements are carefully planned: when dealing with larger projects, it is often tempting to proceed with the construction and procurement in phases, before all plans are properly finalised. With complicated projects like Kultuurikatel, certain unexpected obstacles may emerge during the construction period that eventually have an impact on the progress and costs of the work. Therefore, the procurement rules must allow for flexibility. Original initiatives tend to lose some of their ‘edginess’ along the way. New ideas are often evaluated as risky, or are found to be hard to grasp by people who are not familiar with the specific topic. This can have two consequences: firstly, decision-makers might pursue their own understanding of the novel concept — a less ‘risky’ one. Secondly, they would prefer to be reassured by some established institution taking over the project management, as they tend to think that an NGO might not have the capacity, skills and authority to lead a large-scale construction project.

An Open-Ended Protocol in ‘Opportunism’?

The cases discussed here profile a practitioner who is immersed in the practice and is thus challenged in different ways. On the one side, she may be struggling ‘to be heard’, so the struggle might mainly be one of communication facing certain systemic, societal and political constraints. On the other side, she may be struggling to protect the project from being taken over by the ‘machinic’, the ‘Kafkaesque’, the automation-driven, or the pragmatic and efficiency-seeking ‘common sense’ which often overlooks or disregards the original authenticity of a project that is born from a local context, yet driven by global concerns. While this cannot always be avoided, the projects under consideration here evidence how the course of events can become an important learning tool for further action; practice-based research that looks also at actual project-lineages provides extremely valuable insights here into how such project-experiences lend themselves to crucial strategic adjustments in relation to new projects and allow reflection upon the open-ended nature of the process of ‘lesson-learning’ and the dynamics inherent in ‘lessons learnt’.

Architect: Veronika Valk
Graphic designer: Katri Kikkas

PATTERNS
Created for the Svetoobra Gverila (the Festival of Light in Ljubljana, Slovenia), the installation builds on the world of patterns being an endless, perfect world with exciting laws.

For every new project, the designer creates a new pattern: he or she creates a balance and an order between the elements, and sets them on a specific location based on their structure, which often the designer alone can comprehend. In a sense, it is like reduction in mathematics, in which minimalisation takes place until one is left only with primary numbers.

‘Patterns’ is an installation that relies on ancient Estonian mitten patterns, using contemporary materials. It reutilises old handicraft techniques, emphasising the cycles of nature and life: old is new.

Our great-grandmothers’ pattern is today not only a mitten pattern from a tiny locality, but a cross-culturally appealing and visually binding tool for spatial intervention.

Venue: The Svetoobra Gverila Festival of Light encourages the artistic creation of lighting objects and re-examines the position of the artist at co-designing urban space and consequently improving the quality of living.

118 Price, C (1979), Technology is the answer, but what was the question?, London: Pidgeon Audio Visual.
120 Kadri Kuusk, Kultuurikatel case study, May 2012.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 ‘Smart growth’ is an urban planning and transportation theory that concentrates growth in compact walkable urban centres to avoid sprawl. In the EU terms, ‘smart growth’ means improving the EU’s performance in: 1) education (encouraging people to learn, study and update their skills); 2) research/innovation (creating new products/services that generate growth and jobs and help address social challenges), and 3) digital society (using information and communication technologies).
The following subsection suggests itself as a natural follow-up to the considerations and insights summarised in the previous subsection related to opportunism, and also suggests ways of working ‘with’ a system.

Here, however, and evidenced interestingly through the same set of samples – namely, Sample 1 (the Tallinn Waterfront and the Baltic TurnTable), Sample 2 (Kultuurikatel) and Sample 8 (Urban Festivals of Contemporary Culture) – the focus is on strategies of ‘disruption’ rather than of assimilation. The fact that the same set of samples is operative in this subsection of my practice-based research reflection signals that these two considerations – the opportunistic and the disruptive – are by no means mutually exclusive (beyond the idea that ‘to disrupt’ may be regarded as an opportunity).

What needs to be carved out here, however, are how the examples chosen manifest specific strategies to overcome a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the ‘machinic’ or the ‘Kafkaesque’. I claim that ‘the system’ at large is marked by gaps that need to be identified by the architect – a feature of opportunism as discussed previously – and the architect can then take advantage of these gaps in order to evoke certain ‘disruptions’ in the system, using the gaps as entry points.

Working on projects for the Tallinn seaside, I began to realise the practitioner’s position in shaking-up and subverting the underlying machinic. Estonia regained its independence in 1991 and has since witnessed an ongoing privatisation of the coast, resulting in a spatial situation somewhat similar to the one during the Soviet occupation. The coastline had then been serving as a military border zone, owned by the state and denying access to locals. An important obstacle to its efficient development is that the years of independence have also been marked by rapid political rotation (as an example, Tallinn has had 13 different mayors since 1991), which has been accompanied by a lack of continuity in coastal management. The coastline had then been serving as a remote, parallel) mechanisms for urban interventions that ‘to disrupt’ may be regarded as an opportunity).

What needs to be carved out here, however, are how the examples chosen manifest specific strategies to overcome a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the ‘machinic’ or the ‘Kafkaesque’. I claim that ‘the system’ at large is marked by gaps that need to be identified by the architect – a feature of opportunism as discussed previously – and the architect can then take advantage of these gaps in order to evoke certain ‘disruptions’ in the system, using the gaps as entry points.

In the eyes of an architect, certain unique structures distinguish the Tallinn seashore from waterfronts in other (European) capitals. The winning entry for the Tallinn waterfront urban ideas competition (2000), by my colleague Villem Tomiste and I, tied the area’s historic buildings together with a tramline along the coast. However, the winning scheme was never fully implemented due to the collision of two different types of the machinic.

One of these was reminiscent of the Soviet era, which saw the waterfront as a hopeless ‘brownfield’ area whose land was still owned by the state (not by the city or by private developers), hence it was taken for a ‘collective’ common ground, a ‘no-man’s-land’ that was uninteresting to develop. The other mindset – the market-driven way of thinking about the city as a set of commodities – disregarded the idea of a variegated seascape with a tramline along the coast as it was seen to be potentially non-profitable, though it required a substantial investment from the city, both in financial as well as operational terms. Neither of the two mindsets was at the time able to recognise the waterfront as a gateway to the country, not to mention appreciating it as an inherent part of our original culture, built on our co-existence with the sea, and thus full of potential for a meaningful rehabilitation and re-inhabitation of the coastal landscape. Such a situation urged me to ask whether it would be possible to find alternative (unofficial, remote, parallel) mechanisms for urban interventions on the Tallinn waterfront, regardless of the prevailing system.

An initiative born outside the machinic might become lucrative to the system to the extent that it wants to get hold of its concept or its design, to swallow it, to make it part of the system. The paradox is of course that no initiative is in fact ‘graspable’ by the system without altering it, morphing it to fit that system. Yet the elegance of submission (e.g. of an initiative to an authority) is revealed in the initiative’s (or, more specifically, its design’s) potential to rework the system from within. Other ways of successful subversion might involve ‘reverse-action’ – for example, engaging with a public commission and offering a solution that reworks the assignment: one that disrupts the brief.

Equally intriguing are the urban festivals of contemporary culture as platforms for immediate interventions. For example, Valgusfestival is precisely such an initiative that is born outside the machinic of the municipality, yet is nevertheless appetising for the city to take over. Valgusfestival addresses the social qualities of streetscape, aiming for a brighter and happier wintertime by changing the appearance and use of urban space in an aesthetic and joyful way. It constitutes an open invitation to spend time outside despite the cold wintery weather and has hence become truly popular among the locals.

Altogether, the resource potential of such initiatives like Kultuurikatel or Valgusfestival – both laboratories for contemporary culture – is revealed by their ability to challenge the status quo of a city, especially when they fascinate in an immersive way, creating memorable embodied experiences. When they...
are venturous and further the idea of urban space as a speculative public forum. When they focus on various disciplines – arts, sciences, (architectural) design, urbanism – simultaneously. When they are based on the relevance of the ‘human’. When they are not about more experiences, but smarter ones. When they offer an experimental way to deal with and to sustain change and thus help to formulate the ‘futuristic’.

An Open-Ended Protocol in ‘Disruption’?

One of the claims to emerge within the set of research results discussed here is that the feeling of powerlessness in the face of the ‘machinic’ or the ‘Kafkaesque’ can be addressed through communication and through the practitioner’s publicness. It seems to be of particular importance to observe here that the practice under scrutiny responds to the ideological challenges embedded in the ‘machinic’ and the ‘Kafkaesque’ precisely not through a counter-ideology at the same level, as this would represent a closed circle. Rather, the idea of an open-endedness resides in the responsive leap, namely into the ‘joyful’ and ‘playful’ as ways of reinventing publicness, if necessary. Once it is understood that ‘disruptions’, the practitioner may develop ways to exploit those gaps in highly innovative and resilient ways. As soon as such a dynamic has been installed, the practice’s interventions and impact potentially have the chance to spiral up as they draw from and feed back into the social and cross-disciplinary relations on which they are built.

The quest at stake here, however, is how to stimulate a culture of asking critical questions which push creative practice further.

In many ways, artists today seem a long way ahead of architects in finding ways to fight against mechanisms impeding life. It is one thing to evolve the vision and experience of an individual practitioner or evolve her future practice; it is another matter to understand and act upon the urgent need to focus on possibilities for collective (rather than individual) adventures that are able to gather spatial intelligence and strategic (design) thinking, so as to set up a society less absurd than the present system. In order to invent the future, today’s practitioners may be faced with the task of disrupting the present in specific ways, which are discussed in this research.

A Concluding Reflection on the Observations and Findings

My investigation has reached a point of conclusion, discussing a set of protocols derived from and evidenced through a select set of samples. My aim has been to probe each protocol put forth in relation to its open-endedness, and not only for operational reasons. As I have stressed before (Preface, ‘To the Heart of the Research’), I see these protocols as considerations that articulate directly into the wider notion of creativity at large. The emphasis on the actual practice has allowed me to chart a way to unpack the multi-faceted notion of ‘creativity’ in more meaningful ways than would have been possible had I launched only into a detached discussion around creativity. As I have emphasised in the Introduction, I regard my specific research findings at least as a partial contribution to a culture of criticality that is willing and able to ask ‘big’ and possibly ‘hard’ questions at a larger scale.

The paradigm in which this research took place – namely research by practice – has allowed me to make discoveries in an important sense. They deserve readily to be called ‘discoveries’ because they have been made in the course of the PhD, as I was observing the practice and investigating the projects from multiple perspectives. My insights were not ‘up-front’ research questions that I had formulated in order to be tested. Rather, they emerged only gradually as possible aspects of my enquiry during the process of ongoing observations, arising through deliberately approaching the body of work without a preset agenda of interrogation. I started making observations regarding the switching modes of my practice, which made me aware of how the practice had grown more complex over time, adding to the versatility of the practice’s profile. The Practice Research Symposia (PRS) then prompted me to look back at the very beginning of the practice – how the ‘sprinter’ years turned into a ‘marathon’ and what this shift brought with it.

The contributing findings were connected to the effort to capture the very nature of the versatility of my practice – the interdependence of an array of simultaneous activities on one side, and the subtle relationships between projects that overlap with or follow one another on the other side. I started to become acutely aware of more than one way to draw connections, so as to see the potentials operating. On a metaphorical level, I started to compare such a multi-instrumental practice to the complexity of the Estonian language, seeing the versatility of my practice as resembling the phenomenon whereby a word is spoken through a variety of ‘cases’. I likened my practice to such word-usage science. As I have emphasised in the Introduction, I regard my specific research findings at least as a partial contribution to a culture of criticality that is willing and able to ask ‘big’ and possibly ‘hard’ questions at a larger scale.

The response lies often in a constructive multi-modal approach, building on the ‘joyful’ and the ‘playful’, utilising a variety of ‘devices’ and adhering to different roles as a practitioner, while evoking ‘disruptions’ in the system, using the found ‘gaps’ as entry points. Furthermore, the venturous practice can be opportunistic in the best sense of the word by using its substrate and its endeavours to catalyse and evolve the ‘architecture as initiative’.

The thread of participation at the PRS events throughout the PhD process also added to the clarity of what constitutes my community of practice. The final section of this document – ‘Architecture as Initiative (a manifesto)’ – was first published in an AD issue on ‘The Innovation Imperative: Architectures of Vitality’. The manifesto is repeated here in the final section of this Research Catalogue, Section IV, since it was integral to my wider PhD enquiry and represents an attempt to explain my practice. It made me investigate more closely whom the other practitioners were whom whose work could be called ‘architectures of vitality’, and to ask in a critical way how their practice(s) may potentially impact upon, or vary from, my practice. While my direct and actual community of practice is understandably and quite properly tied closely to Estonia, there has been a second, virtual layer of communality to be discovered, in which I might learn from other practitioners who ‘share’ my concerns in more oblique ways.

The perspective of looking at my actual community of practice brought forth important differentiations. Admittedly, there are plenty of other Estonian ‘disrupters of the machinic’, both younger and...
older, from architect-artist Leonhard Lapin, Group b210 and some city architects to the leaders of the Union of Estonian Architects (Preface, ‘The Local Context’) and the Estonian Centre of Architecture, to name but a few. In general, Estonian culture is distinctive due to its numerous and extremely vibrant ‘creative unions’: in addition to the architects’ union, we have at least a dozen more organisations – for artists, designers, sculptors, actors, theatres, cinema, writers, composers, and so forth. They all voice their opinions actively in the media. Similarly, it is clear that the new generation of Estonian architects shares a commitment to open up the discipline and make it part of the wider public. As a general observation, the voicing of opinions and public leadership has become more and more institutionalised – yet this has also led to better synchronisation and co-ordination in recent years.

However, I see in this context an important factor that sets my practice apart from my actual community. Other individual practitioners do not engage in the media in the same way or on the scale that has been characteristic of my practice to date. This may be partly due to the fact that both the older as well as the younger generations of architects in Estonia have been raised according to a specific code of conduct, whereby speaking up is considered to be a form of ‘marketing’, which in general has been considered a taboo among architects in Estonia. Certainly fellow practitioners and peers do offer their views in the media; however, the majority of them do so to a much lesser extent and less frequently, or in other cases perhaps with less personal engagement, and less passionately.

If I look at the community of practice at an international rather than a local level, I must point out the impact of the work conducted at SymbioticA under the guidance of Dorn Catts and Ionat Zurr at the University of Western Australia in Perth. As the first research laboratory of its kind, SymbioticA enables artists and researchers to engage in ‘wet biology’ practices
developed within a biological science department. It also hosts residencies, workshops, exhibitions and symposia. With an emphasis on experiential practice, SymbioticA encourages a better understanding and articulation of cultural ideas around scientific knowledge at large, and an informed critique of the ethical and cultural issues of life manipulation.

SymbioticA opens up new means of artistic inquiry where artists actively use the tools and technologies of science not only to comment on each other but also to explore further artistic possibilities. For me as an architect, and from the ‘architecture as initiative’ point of view, it has been inspiring to compare my practice to SymbioticA’s and to seek ways to evolve my practice as an architect, as well as an enquirer in which my colleagues and I actively use the tools of design and public engagement not only to produce buildings but also to explore the possibilities of ‘architecture as initiative’. What is different, however, is that SymbioticA has a strong affiliation with its host university, whereas I have made a conscious effort to keep my practice away from institutionalisation.

### On Protocols and Open-Endedness

The specific contribution of this research arises from the statement in the introduction (Preface, ‘The Local Context’) in which I referred to the fact that it was simply not possible to revive the Estonian culture to what it had been before the Soviet period. Therefore, my practice’s strategies to reinvent an Estonian publicness were and still are offering a critical yet constructive basis for open-ended protocols. In the ultimate act of resistance, as my personal context has been caught in the very difficult territory of a post-war, post-modern, post-Soviet and even (considering the Russians as colonists) post-colonial condition, the suggestions in the ‘protocols’ are open to reinterpretation as to how we, as practitioners, can design our way out of this complex situation, in which the identity of the ‘local’ is in constant redefinition.

These ‘protocols’ offer certain unique ways of designing public space and publicness in such a context where the practitioner is embedded in a problematic ‘ideological’ environment. I have looked at ‘ways out’ from the point of view of an individual practitioner, emphasising that I have deliberately kept my practice from becoming institutionalised. However, in terms of the open-ended protocols to emerge from this research, it would be interesting to follow it up by investigating the potential for an ‘institution’ in Perth – for instance, working in a ministry, a publishing company, a local administration, or an SOE (State-Owned Enterprise) – acting as a catalyst for generating ‘architecture as initiative’. However, as stressed in the ‘protocols of disruption’, the matter at stake here is how to stimulate a culture of asking critical questions that push creative practice further. It is vital to do this not only among individual practitioners (the private sector) but across the whole discipline – across sectors.

To invent the future on the level of collective (rather than individual) ventures that are able to gather spatial intelligence and strategic (design) thinking, a merger of the non-institutional ‘initiative’ and the institutional framework might be necessary. This is of particular concern when targeting the broader questions raised in the Introduction (Preface, ‘The Not-So-Local Context’) – the questions that have motivated me and that have fuelled my own work, but that interest many. To allow ourselves to linger in the ‘machinic’ and the ‘Kafkaesque’ in an ideology-driven post-trauma state might mean that, for the majority of society (practitioners among them), life ends up outside the culture, as the members of the society are increasingly surrendered to the automata and the bureaucratic. Therefore, as stressed in the ‘multi-modality’ protocol, the open-endedness means that it is up to the individual practitioner to find her own unique methods and strategies to construct, to work with, to leverage or to dismantle the ‘devices’ in order to overcome the ‘feeling of powerlessness’ in crossing contexts.

In the neo-liberal context, we might be curious about how those who have access to advanced technology subvert their own cultural systems – and how the society arrives at its decisions about when or how to intervene, at both an individual as well as an institutional level. Although the research already interrogates to a certain extent what kind of contributions some specific (bio)technological tools (Sample 10, Workshops: ‘Synthonia’) might bring to the future practice, then the ‘protocols’ point to open-ended possibilities on how to take certain hybrid practices even further. For instance, the core of architecture or design practice is morphing significantly today due to the impact of contemporary technological advancement: CAD-CAM processes and artificial intelligence are already part of the game and the living environment is designed to become more and more responsive (to human behaviour, to climatic conditions, etc.). It would be interesting to investigate how to challenge and subvert those processes, building on the ‘Findings’ of this research.

As evidenced by this research, the multi-modal versatile practice features the capacity to facilitate (positive) or resist (negative) societal change. Architects and designers who have the ambition to design the future need to be aware of the shift at the very core of the profession: this research has provided certain multi-modal ways (instrumentally ‘joyful’, ‘playful’, ‘disruptive’, etc.) to look at what an architect does and what is considered ‘architecture’ in today’s world. As pointed out in the ‘versatility’ protocol, the overlaps with other disciplines on the fringes of the profession of architecture (or urbanism) are full of potential for experimentation and venturous exploration. It is up to every practitioner to recognise this potential for ‘architecture as initiative’ and to use it in a resilient way, as a collective venture, for the benefit of the future venturous practice and its community at large.
Conclusion

This PhD offers an alternative way to research a versatile practice in the realm of 'architecture as initiative'. I have provided an account of what my practice is fundamentally based on, through data as well as through stories about projects, hinting at where such a practice might lead or how it might evolve. I started by providing a more global picture of my driving concerns and of the socio-political and geographical specificity of my work, followed by selected illustrative projects ('samples') in which I showed how my research proceeded and what led to the discoveries and clarifications in Section III. Thereupon, I teased out conclusions and provided a manifesto for future versatile practice.

The core findings are two-fold, since my practice is both vision-driven, whereby I have aimed with every project at a variety of urban or architectural concerns, as well as mission-driven. Before starting the PhD process I was not so aware that, through my practice, I have been (unwillingly) re-inventing an Estonian 'publicness' relevant to those fields of architecture and urbanism. The PhD process helped me to crystallise how I have been searching for opportunities to do this in a 'joyful' and 'playful' way, using a multiplicity of 'tools' to do so; and how I am thus now able to offer back to the discipline an explication of one creative practice's 'joyful' and 'playful' tactics for the reinvention of 'publicness'.

The body of work presented offers ways for architecture (as a field of behaviours) to accommodate and to recognise a species of architect: the architect as initiator. These initiatives tend to unveil alternative ways of tackling challenges, thus blurring some of the traditional discipline boundaries and using accessible 'devices'. These initiatives emerge by creating transdisciplinary spaces of professional collaboration. 'Architecture as initiative' occurs in a loosely-defined (open) transdisciplinary intersection where it can serve as a strategy to strengthen, evolve and expand practice.

The search for functional realities – which not only incorporate but immerse themselves in, and build upon, other disciplines as well as institutional, ideological and structural processes – guarantees that a multi-modal architectural practice becomes versatile. The benefits of a versatile practice surface in the physical implementation of (design) ideas, (architectural) concepts or (urban) scenarios: in the practice’s ability to tease visions into tenable, physical existence. But the research also points out the importance of tools of reflection, such as workshops, carried by "the scientific spirit of adventure — the adventure into the unknown, an unknown which must be recognised as being unknown, to be explored."128

The research reveals how, with each sample provided, the practice first takes a ‘position’ (=conception) at an urban or architectural scale. It thereupon gives in to a multiplicity of professional ‘obsessions’ – studying the feasibility of the concept in order to further convince the stakeholders, forming bodies (for example, legal entities such as NGOs), and utilising a multiplicity of instruments (such as designing, construction, mass media and so forth). The research presents how a practice’s substrate might shift in response to contextual change and how the practice continually re-invents itself to maintain its authenticity in those crossed contexts. Finally, the research points to the potential for some specific open-ended ‘protocols’ to emerge from these observations.

Altogether, the PhD provides insight into ‘architecture as initiative’, through a variety of ‘samples’ (case studies), offering multiple angles on how a multi-modal versatile practice possesses the capacity to facilitate (positive) and resist (negative) societal change.

128 Remarks at a Caltech YMCA lunch forum (2 May 1956), Richard P. Feynman.
Selection of curatorships and artworks

2011 Paris (FR) Liberté/Vabadus Estonian contemporary art group show at Estonian Tonique festival, Chateau d’Asneieres
2010 New York (US) Brooklyn Ad Night screening in public space, PointB worklodge
2010 Stockholm (SE) Building Blocks, Färgfabriken
2009 Tallinn (EE) JOHAN:23 for Tallinn Design Night, with Johan Tali and Sim Tuksam
2009 Ljubljana (SI) Pattern at Svetlobna Gverila festival of light, with Katri Kikas
2008 Beijing (CH) Creating Spaces – art bridge between EU and China / artworks Beijing Tricycle, Creativity Stamp, Scrubber
2007 Pärnu (EE) Set design for Kajakas (The Seagull, by A. Chekhov) at Endla Theatre
2006 Eindhoven (NL) GLOW festival / urban artwork
2006 Cardiff (UK) Urban Legacies II: New Babylon / Swinging in the Light
2006 Lyon (FR) Fetes de la Lumiere: Superflux / indoors
2006 Stockholm (SE) Färgfabriken, “We Did Everything Wrong”. Östersund
2005 Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Arts, Home for Homeless, with the Union of Estonian Architects
2005 Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Arts, Synthonia: synthetic biology
2001 Cork (IE) Every Way Out, Cork Institute of Technology, with sculptor Maud Cotter
2000 Paldiski (EE) tutor at historic fortifications land-art, Kalev factory
2004 Tallinn (EE) Komm On! On the future of food, with MvRdV, Onix and others
2005 Kütiorg (EE) Forestart initiative on Estonian forestry, wood design and construction
2005 Tallinn (EE) Komm On! On the future of food, with MvRdV, Onix and others
2009 Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Arts, “Külaskäik Draakon-Lilli majja” by Veronika Valk, Arhitektuprojekt
2008 Tallinn (EE) Külaskäik Draakon-Lilli majja by Riken Yamamoto, paperback
2007 Valencia (SP) SESAM masterclass From Metropolis to Telepolis: historic centres versus globalisation
2006 Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Arts, Synthonia: synthetic biology
2005 Tallinn (EE) Hansalite street lighting innovation, Estonian Academy of Arts
2005 Kütiorg (EE) Forestart initiative on Estonian forestry, wood design and construction
2005 Tallinn (EE) Hansalite street lighting innovation, with MvRdV, Onix and others
2004 Tallinn (EE) Komm On! On the future of food, with Kolev factory
2000 Paldiski (EE) tutor at historic fortifications landscaping, Estonian Academy of Arts
1999 Tallinn (EE) Ring Teleport future studies workshop on the UNESCO heritage-listed Tallinn Old Town and its surrounding Bastion Belt
1998 Valencia (SP) SESAM masterclass From Metropolis to Telepolis: historic centres versus globalisation

Selection of workshop tutoring

2012 Tallinn (EE) Estonian Academy of Arts, Linnahalli: adaptive reuse of the built environment
2012 Tallinn (EE) Estonian Academy of Arts, Synthonia: synthetic biology
2011 Cork (IE) Every Way Out, Cork Institute of Technology, with sculptor Maud Cotter
2010-2011 Tallinn, Narva, Tartu, Ahtme (EE), City Forums, Estonian Centre of Architecture
2009 Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Arts, „FUUM/RUUM. New Estonian Architecture“. Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Architecture
2009 Stockholm (AU), Parallax, Education in Digital Age, with Dr. Pia Ednie-Brown
2008 – 2006 Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Arts, Arhitektiprojekt
2008 Östersund (SE), Färgfabriken Norr, Östersund at Large
2006 Tallinn (EE), Estonian Academy of Arts, Urban Gue-rilla Design for the Tallinn Waterfront, with the Department of Graphic Design
2005 Tallinn (EE) Home for Homeless, with the Union of Estonian Architects
2005 Kütiorg (EE) Forestart initiative on Estonian forestry, wood design and construction
2005 Tallinn (EE) Hansalite street lighting innovation, with MvRdV, Onix and others
2004 Tallinn (EE) Komm On! On the future of food, with Kolev factory
2000 Paldiski (EE) tutor at historic fortifications landscaping, Estonian Academy of Arts
1999 Tallinn (EE) Ring Teleport future studies workshop on the UNESCO heritage-listed Tallinn Old Town and its surrounding Bastion Belt
1998 Valencia (SP) SESAM masterclass From Metropolis to Telepolis: historic centres versus globalisation

Books and Catalogues

2012 Co-editor of Accessibility for All guidebook (“Kõiki kaasava elukeskkonna kavandamine ja loomingu”) for designers, architects and planners, in collaboration with the Estonian Design Centre, the Union of Estonian Architects and the Estonian Academy of Arts, published by Puudealaes Tabe and Abivahendidite Keskus, www.abivahendikeskus.astang.ee/kaasav-elu keskkond.html
2009 Ed. Pille Epern, “BUUM/BUUM. Uus Eesti arhitektuur” (“BUUM/BUUM. New Estonian Architecture”). Tallinn (EE), the Union of Estonian Architects
2008 ’scape 2008/2. “The Baltic Riviera about to be born”. Wageningen (NL), Blauwdruk publishment BV in co-operation with Lijn in Landschap Foundation
2008 Ed. CM von Hausswolff and Jan Åman for Teleport Färgfabriken, “We Did Everything Wrong”. Östersund
2006 Tallinn (EE), documentary “JOHAN23: Optimizer & Body Planner”, in collaboration with Cube Productions LLC, DVD
2005 – present: animations and videos for various architectural, artistic, research, urban intervention and town-planning projects
Additional Projects

The following projects are as if 'twins' to the examples provided in Section II, 'Samples' – these projects are equally important to the body of my work and they almost made it to the pool of 'samples'. These additional projects support and complement not only the cases discussed in Section II, 'Samples', but each of them also provides further material to evidence the discoveries that are presented in Section III, 'Findings'.

As complementary projects they nuance the potential of the multi-modal venturous practice from the perspective of 'versatility' that has been argued throughout this research. They also further diversify the range of heuristics in the practice. Furthermore, these projects substantially contribute to the 'open-ended protocols' – each of them has led to a certain confirmation of one or many 'protocols' described in Section III, 'Findings'.

Appendix
ZULU

Zulu is a Natal province in South Africa, with a population of approximately 3 million people speaking the language of Kwazulu. Although the Zulu are officially ruled by the government of South Africa, they often act as a dissenting voice against apartheid on both the national and international scene.

ZULU workdaynightclub emphasises the courageous nation’s traditions and beliefs, voicing human rights and the necessity to protect the endangered cultures of the world.

The revolving clock mechanism of the front door to the club evokes ‘Zulu’ time – as though entering a hypothetical timezone. The interior design of the spaces from the basement to the attic follows the biotope layers of the jungle: the emergent layer, being the tops of the tallest trees (i.e. ceiling acoustics and ambient lighting); the canopy layer as an umbrella over the other layers for a sound system and integrated wall graphics; the understorey layer for furniture and wildlife, and the forest floor of an easily-maintained surface for low seating and flood-lighting.

Furniture is predominantly bio-lacquered (exudation of the lacquer tree) veneer, integrating LED lighting which plays with the patterned etchings of glass layers, creating hypnotic animation effects. This project was stopped, yet the design is there, ready for implementation.

Location: Tallinn city centre
Estonia
Architects: Veronika Valk, Leena Tarim
Project: 2004
PARISCOPTER

This project observes the future: the spirit of the Olympic Games is represented through the landmark’s extroverted curiosity and its openness to the public. As a flying machine, it raises the viewer over the rooftops in one instant. As a conjurer, it blurs and distorts the usual tourist-views. Periscopes can be arranged in many ways: some can be developed into kaleidoscopes, or used as sources of artificial light to illuminate the square at night.

Occasion: periscope-forest proposal for the Paris 2012 Olympic Landmark
ROLLER EGGS

A ‘roller egg’ is an urban toy – it triggers playfulness in the cityscape, allowing for new discoveries and promoting synergy between people and the living environment. The roller egg can be covered with a variety of smart materials; it is set in motion by pedalling and the surplus energy is accumulated and used for the head-lights and for a reading-bulb during late hours – thus the egg glows during the night. The frame connecting the wheels is at the same time a seat, with a separate backrest allowing different positions at 15-degree angles. The front wheel and pedals act as footrests when it is in the chaise-longue position. The steering-wheel is replaced by a joystick system that at the same time acts as arm-rests. If one needs to take the stairs, the egg can be mounted as a backpack. Eggs come in various sizes to suit investigative urbanites of all ages.

All the eggs originate from a ‘nest’ – a loop-shaped ‘egg-ramp’. A rented egg can be taken up to the roof-top along the sloping outdoor ramp: the user sits inside and gains acceleration by sliding down. The nest is an urban centre of gravity, capable of enlivening derelict urban areas. The blurring of public and private applies both to the ‘egg’ as well as to its ‘nest’.

boldAGE by Veronika Valk

This integrated accessibility tool aims to empower the elderly, whose share in the society of an aging Europe is growing considerably. Also known as ‘the greying of Europe’, this is a social phenomenon characterised by a decrease in both fertility and mortality rates, and a higher life expectancy. It refers specifically to an increase in the percentage of Europe’s elderly population relative to its workforce. The median age in Europe will increase from 37.7 years in 2003 to 52.3 years by 2050. The elderly are in better health during their later decades, yet they still appreciate integrated accessibility tools – to help them not only to move around freely but also to continue to enjoy life as they did when they were young. boldAGE elongates the investigative lifestyle of the elderly of the future, by offering three modes of utilisation. Firstly, it can be used as a normal, movable (wheel)chair with integrated advanced navigation, lighting and ICT. Secondly, its armrests fold up to form a sunshade. Thirdly, when the chair is rotated 90 degrees onto its back, the ball-bearing system allows the user to navigate the urban landscape in a more adventurous way, as if in a sleigh.
To live and work as a 'Creative' is a challenge for both body and soul, similar to the proposed Acoustic Gym/Gallery space for experimental interactive and performative contemporary theatre. Physical effort is needed to transverse a jungle of rubber bands stretched between the floor and the ceiling, a jungle which is at first glance impenetrable: the experience is designed not only as physical training but also as therapeutic activity.

The 3000 rubber straps are all equipped with metal plates of varying parameters: when tightened and then released, they bounce against a metal plate and create a sound. A visitor affects approximately 100 to 300 rubber straps at any one time, thus evoking a bodily trace, an acoustic echo. Visitors create simultaneous soundscapes in flux.

The installation was presented in the Endla Theatre at Pärnu Contemporary Music Days in 2005, in honor of Iannis Xenakis.


In collaboration with Kadri Klementi. 2006.


Music Centre architecture competition entry, in collaboration with Kavakava architects. 2003.


Narva City Centre urban planning competition (co-author Villem Tomiste). 2001.

Rańdvere school architecture competition, co-author Kaiko Kivi. 2005.

Above and below: street lights for Kiili (Dragonfly) parish. 2004.
A variety of urban projects have addressed habitat growth, learning from natural systems. My ‘400,000 Barcelona Habitatges’ competition entry (2004) looked at the forming of the Earth through glacial retreat, while in my ‘Osaka North Railway Station Area’ competition entry (in collaboration with Leena Torim, 2003) fifty craters were formed by social tectonics. The slopes of the craters are public parks with an open character, whereas the insides are more private spaces – jungles, event stadiums and much more.

The shape of the mixed-use buildings for the Paljassare eco-village (below), inspired by albatrosses, refers to a nearby Natura 2000 area that is famous among ornithologists. The positioning and layout variation of buildings gives the area an air of play, diversity and surprise. Similarly, Kadriorg Park is a link in the continuous walk along the Tallinn coastline: here, two elements – the greenery and the water – provide the most striking experiences of nature. Initially proposed for the ‘Europan 6’ competition in 2001, the housing system is comprised of ‘grass blades’ that blend together at root-level. The rotational arrangement of houses allows for views through the blades. It captures the idea of a shared experience of the local microclimate: exposed yet protected...
In this urban planning proposal formally inspired by icicles, light has a direct impact on our sense of our surroundings: we experience space as 'bright' when it is full of broad daylight. On our latitude, which experiences dark winter periods, the environment should allow for a maximum harnessing of sunshine and natural daylight – but this is a dynamic phenomenon. It is not an easy task to consider coherently all aspects of daylight in urban planning. Direct sunlight adds up to 50% of daily irradiation, the rest being diffused light coming from the sky vault. The intensity of light coming from the sky vault depends on the weather conditions. Tallinn is positioned on a latitude where the trajectory of the sun varies greatly throughout the year.

'Density' is often referred to as a tool of sustainable urban development. In Maakri, we are facing the creation of probably the densest district in all of Estonia. The ratio of floor-area to room-height affects daylight access and views across the city, sky and landscape. The rooftops of lower levels become the terraces of the upper levels. The first three floors are public spaces with a diverse pedestrian environment.

Location:
Tallinn, Estonia
DYNAAMIKA

The eco-village proposal implements ‘passive house’ standards and renewable energy sources throughout the landscaping as well as for the buildings. Inspired by the poetry of sand dunes, the dwellings are arranged into a smooth, waving pattern of shadow and light. Solar insulation simulations reveal a full capacity for autonomous living: maintenance costs are kept to a minimum. The luxury condominium settlement constitutes, in terms of annual expenses per household, low-cost housing.

Row-house units are developed as lofts refurbished according to a client’s wishes. Partition walls between dwelling units accommodate stairs and storage spaces, together with household appliances and equipment from central vacuum cleaners to stoves and fridges. The ‘passive house’ concept is developed into an active energy landscape, facilitating also a kindergarten and sports centre, playgrounds, and public and semi-private pathways. The usual outside wall of the gated community is broken down into a wide ‘health-route’ as a peripheral link to nearby settlements.

Location:
Rae Parish near Tallinn, Estonia
This is a proposal for a cratered landscape of multiple uses in both habitation and tourism: working at home, adult learning, the creative co-existence of elderly and children – all of these allowing for a balance of privacy and social integration. The diffused layout of buildings is pierced with public, semi-public and private courtyards and terraces of multiple heights and dimensions.

**QUILOPODE**

This means ‘centipede’ in Portuguese: such landscaping configuration allows for vehicle access (including access to a regional hospital). Meanwhile, playground craters of different tempos are created from one of quiet meditation to an enthusiastic sports area. The height variation protects people from the wind and offers seating niches, while added greenery catalyses biotope regeneration, as well as presenting a variety of shaded spaces with delicate shadow conditions and hidden spots to nurture plants with edible fruits and berries.

Belvedere parking along the noise barrier is equipped with solar energy outlets, to promote alternative energy use for cars and other private vehicles and light transportation.

The evolutionary urban and architectural design speaks in this context of diffused urbanity.

**Location:** Cascais, Portugal
This village for the disabled, designed according to the ‘universal design’ principles, is an energy-efficient planning model of eight dwellings and an activity centre, which can be located both within an existing rural development as well as apart from other settlements, operating almost autonomously.

Both the circular and linear village typologies utilise passive house standards in construction techniques to reduce maintenance costs, while both provide opportunities for the inhabitants not only to receive guests and spend time with loved ones, but to participate actively in society, starting up micro-enterprises and selling their products and services.

Continuous outdoor landscaping blends the buildings into topography, creating the freedom of endless navigation and a variety of routes, views and experiences.

The wing-shaped configuration of the houses for ten people and a caretaker establishes a subtle differentiation between the private courtyards and the public open space of the village.

The project is in line with earlier kindergarten designs from 2002 to 2007. The design is likely to be suitable also for the retirement concepts of the future.
Below: kindergarten for Kõili (Dragonfly) parish in northern Estonia, in collaboration with Leena Torim. 2007.


This page and the next two pages:

Architect: Veronika Valk
Assistant: Kadri Klementi
Client: Sauga Municipality
Project: 2007
Completion: 2010

SAUGA Open Youth Centre

The design is in line with Zizi&Yoyo's former educational facilities projects.

Location: Sauga parish, Pärnu county, Estonia
Left and below: Siniladva villa in collaboration with Kadri Klement. 2006.

The district has exceptionally clear formalistic planning and construction guidelines. For example, flat roofs and roofs with a slope to one side are preferred.

The outer walls of buildings must be surfaced with one primary material – either concrete, mortar or painted silicate. The permitted shades range from grey to white. No wooden logs, natural rocks, sheet metal or plastic are permitted for the façades. Exterior façade materials of sett, boarding, veneer and ceramic tile (except for shades of white) are not permitted, while roof coverings need to be monotone: rolled materials and smooth sheet metal (dark grey) are preferable.

Bright colours and painted or three-dimensional decorative elements are not permitted.

The room program of the dwelling spirals upward, from shared bath, sauna, pool area and living room through to an office and guest-room in the mid-level, to private bedrooms on the top floor. The cantilevered spiral terrace around the building takes the inhabitant from a ground-level garden to a rooftop terrace.

Location: Merirahu 85, Tallinn, Estonia
Merirahu 69 dwelling

Located in a residential waterfront area in Tallinn, the site is a short trip to the city centre. The dwelling leaves the perimeter of the building as open as possible, allowing for views to the sea and to the trees. The core program is located in the centre of the house, rendering the house permeable, spacious and full of life and light.

Upon entering the building, one finds to the east a sauna with a jacuzzi and showers and to the west a living area with a kitchen, an office (which can also be used as a guest bedroom) and a fireplace. Both eastern and western façades have sliding doors opening onto the terraces and into the garden. The sauna block to the east continues as an outdoor pool in the landscape, which is designed in the same visual vocabulary as the main building, except that it uses natural black stone to contrast with the bright white façades of the buildings. Inside, a wooden staircase with a vivacious metal mesh barrier takes one to the second floor. The interior’s colours complement the light scheme with fresh yellow, light blue, pink and black. The building has a rooftop terrace.

Location: Merirahu 69, Tallinn, Estonia

Despite its quaint medieval heart, which is designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tallinn has actually been a hotbed of technological and design innovations. After all, this hyper-wired town, where citizens easily vote and pay parking tickets online, is the birthplace of the free internet phone service, Skype. And yet, the old informs the new. The new developments and conversions flirt with contemporary styles while trying to maintain the city’s nineteenth-century mercantile character. After centuries of foreign rule, Tallinn was finding itself at a frenetic pace. Edgy galleries, fashionable boutiques, Asian-inspired restaurants and space-age designed lounges lie not far from defensive towers and Gothic churches. Moreover, Tallinn was the 2011 European Cultural Capital. The question was: How can innovation be brought to the Old Town without sacrificing the town’s preservation? Innovative solutions are normally forbidden in districts with historic protection, yet these areas should be vibrant, aiming for people to actually live there and enjoy the proximity of services.

Since there are plenty of uninhabited attics, Zizi&Yoyo interior designs emphasise bright luminous colours and white surfaces together with light-pipes to intensify sunlight: an important way to lift spirits during the autumn and winter months, which are cold and dark at this latitude.

Location: attic in the Tallinn city-centre
The Estonian Film Foundation (EFS) aims to promote Estonian film at home and abroad as well as to support the training of Estonian filmmakers and audiovisual professionals. Zizi&Yoyo was commissioned not only to come up with the EFS premises’ interior design in Tallinn, but also to invent EFS’s new graphic identity.

The interior design respects the heritage protection regulations as much as possible. Inserted floor-lights in the dark-blue and black video library use frames from Estonian animator Rait Siska’s production Raud/Fe. All of the floor space is designed as fluidly as possible, merging formerly-separated private offices.

Location:
Uus 3 Tallinn 10111
Estonia
The landscaping and interior architecture of the Tarvastu Kindergarten in rural Viljandimaa aims to enhance children’s creative skills, inviting them to experience the space both indoors and outdoors with all their senses.

A renovated pirate boat, a ‘sky’ performance hall, textured surfaces for drawing, playing and inventing; all this and much more are designed to trigger children’s imaginations and to raise their curiosity about their surroundings, as well as to provide means for immediate creative expression. One finds bedroom walls as story-boards, game tracks leading to bathrooms, panorama mirrors, curving driveways with traffic signs, and an evergreen maze around an existing fir-tree, which is decorated by the children themselves at Christmas-time.

The architectural design was developed hand-in-hand with the kindergarten’s graphic identity. ‘Naeruvõru’, a newly-invented nickname, means ‘smiley’ in the Estonian language.

Location:
Kooli 8a 69701 Mustla
Tarvastu parish Viljandi county
Estonia
ARKAADIA garden

The main feature of the (partially completed) pedestrian promenade in the small town of Viljandi in southern Estonia is the movement-sensored interactive sprinkler-fountain installation, which marks the former moat around the ancient castle of the Teutonic Order, construction of which started in 1224 on the site of a former hill-fort and which would become one of the strongest castles in Livonia.

Today, the area serves as a car-free recreation area boosting development for adjacent city blocks. Phase 1 reconstruction included pathways, street furniture, lighting, vegetation and playgrounds, while Phase 2 involved the demarcation of the castle’s corner tower to serve as a viewing platform, additional seating along the former castle wall and moat, and a canopy structure to offer rest and shelter.

The 160-metre promenade is a play-area with cafés and a summer stage, where the joyful sprinkler fountains are interspersed with benches, lights, ferns and flowerbeds as well as carousels for children. The pre-war Arkaadia Garden used to be a summer garden on Väike-Turu Street, where people went for dancing and entertainment.

Location: Viljandi City, Estonia

STEINER garden

The Steiner Garden in Pärnu, the ‘summer capital’ of Estonia, is located in the picturesque Old Town and is surrounded by historical buildings. The adjacent music school and the young families from five-storey dwellings nearby take advantage of the site, thus the garden is filled with children for much of the daytime.

The construction process was an experiment in itself: the completion of the project took place in 16 days, from the submission of design drawings to the opening of the garden.

The design emphasises detailed elements, such as playfully zig-zagging trunk-benches that are tinted ash-brown and that separate the grass from a central field of bright gravel, along with uplights inserted into the ground in seating niches, and hanging swinging reflectors on arching steel stems that scatter sunbeams. Moved by the wind, these white reflector plates fling circles of light around the garden, which in winter is calmed by snowdrifts.

The centre of the garden is home to a dozen sculptures, both figurative and abstract, to stimulate children’s imaginations.

The garden was vandalised.

Location: Pärnu City, Estonia
FAMILY IDEA

Children from problematic backgrounds at a childcare centre in Tallinn were asked to draw their idea of a family. Those images were converted into line drawings and scaled up, in order to reproduce them in urban spaces as lightline sculptures over 2 metres high. Welded metal support frames of 5mm rod held the colour LED cables up in the air. The final result had an adorable sense of energy, looking simple and direct.

Ron Haselden has made similar artworks around the world. He says, “Public space is quite scary, because there are no rules. There are just people and our built environment. It isn’t always sympathetic and can even be quite hostile. However, the thing that I like, is that outside, it is always ongoing and unpredictable, a situation that doesn’t always exist in a gallery... galleries are so often just vacuums... whereas outside it is always active and dynamic. So, as an artist, you have to somehow align your ideas or tailor them to accommodate the situation you find yourself in. And perhaps you just need to make the smallest intervention to make a work.”

Venue: waterfront locations in Estonia
open ends ...

... and an open end