

Estonian Academy of Arts
Contemporary Art Curriculum

NON-PLAYGROUNDS

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Contemporary Art

by Sidney Lepp

Supervisors:
Kristaps Ancans, Mark Dunhill

2021

Copyright Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. the present Master's thesis is the result of my personal contribution and it has not been submitted (for defence) earlier by anyone else;
2. all works and important viewpoints by other authors as well as any other data from other sources used in the compilation of the Master's thesis are duly acknowledged in the references;
3. I give consent to the Estonian Academy of Arts to publish my Master's thesis in the repository thus making it available for the general public by means of the Internet.

Pursuant to the above, I state that:

- I as the author of the thesis am the sole owner of the individual copyright of the present Master's thesis and the works included and/or described within the thesis and the disposal of the proprietary rights related with the Master's thesis is subject to the procedures in force at the Estonian Academy of Arts;
- as the Master's thesis published in the repository may be accessed by an unlimited number of persons, I presume that the readers of the thesis comply with laws and other legal acts and good practices in good faith, in a fair manner and with respect to and consideration of the rights of other people. The copying, plagiarising or any use of the present Master's thesis and the works included and/or described within the thesis that infringes the copyright is prohibited.

(date)

(the name and signature of the author of the Master's thesis)

The thesis complies with the Master's thesis requirements:

(date)

(the signature of the Master's thesis supervisor, academic or research degree)

Abstract	5
Abstract in Estonian	7
Tactics	8
Non-Place	8
Social Sculpture vs. Post Vandalism.....	10
The Legacy of Soviet concepts of Public Space and its Heritage as Experienced in Tallinn.....	14
 Other Players' Strategy	16
 My playgrounds	26
“Banana Tree” 2020, Tallinn	26
“Roadwork Grave” 2020, Riga	27
“Geil Studio Parking Space Exhibition” 2020, Tallinn	28
“Tic-Tac-Toe” 2021, Tallinn.....	30
“Yellow Cover Layer” 2021, Tallinn.....	32
“Swings” 2021, Tallinn	34
 Bonus level	36
Reflection On Experiments	36
A Pandemic Affects the Space	38
Playing in the City	40
 Summary	42
 Bibliography	44
Books	44
Articles	44

Abstract

I have been interested in seeing space from different angles ever since I began skateboarding on the streets around 2001. From the age of 11 to 21, that was part of my everyday life. Back then I used the skateboard mostly as means to interact with a space — finding city spots where skateboarding was possible, starting from pavement curves to empty water reservoirs. By exploring these spaces I began to understand the freedom I had as a kid and the freedom which was provided (or not) by the city as in many places skateboarding was illegal. It was an activity I could share with my friends while getting the most out of the city and my skills physically. At the same time it was making me think more creatively about space and gave me a chance to step out of the role of a regular pedestrian. Around the same time I got interested in another phenomena of the streets — graffiti. I now had even more places to look for while going for regular walks or bike rides. It is interesting how looking for walls changes the perspective of the city; one starts paying attention to and thinking about the security, blind-spots, surveillance cameras, fences to cross and so on. This mindset has stayed with me until this day. It is about engaging with an object in an urban environment.

It is hard for me to see the other artists' journey to understanding freedom, but when I find something in their work which is comparable with my methods then I can believe that there was something similar in their journey. Everyone has their own story according to their surroundings and environment. That's what makes every artist special and interesting in their own way. It is possible to follow the path of someone else or step out of the routine and make mistakes of your own. This is the way how children learn to cope with their surroundings, but as we get older we tend to see ourselves from a perspective and rely on past experience. All of the artworks I discuss in this thesis deal with space in a playful way — in a way a child would approach the space. It means trying to deal with it without the routine which might be applied in many of the spaces or environments.

In the thesis I explore these aspects of space and experience in a way that I haven't explored before. There will be many different aspects which are constantly changing in these figurative materials and that's what I will be playing with. For example, the pandemic which has had an effect on everything since March 2020. Considering the

pandemic and the restrictions that were enforced accordingly, it is hard to see the city as a playground, but that's what makes it interesting and challenging.

Abstract in Estonian

Analüüsini erinevaid praktikaid, mis võiksid suhestuda minu praktikaga. Läbi selle saan aru sarnastest meetoditest ja panen need tööle oma varasema ja tuleviku praktika analüüsimiseks ja kujundamiseks.

Ruumiga suhestumine on olnud minu jaoks oluline alates lapsepõlvest; eriti tähtsaks pean perioodi kui alustasin rulasõiduga aastal 2001. Sellest sai minu igapäeva reaalsus umbes kümneks aastaks. Vaadates tagasi saan aru, kuidas ma kasutasin rula kui materjali ja ruumi kui lõuendit või galeriid, kus minu teos saab võimalikuks. Otsides asukohti linnas, kus on võimalik rulatada, alustades könnitee äärtega kuni tühhade veereservuaarideni, sain luua enda jaoks kuvandi sellest, mida tähendab vabadus ja kompisin selle piire, läbi rulasõidu. Juhtumid, kus turvatöötajad ja politseinkud tulid meie tegemistesse sekkuma, suutsid tuua pinget ja adrenaliini igapäevaellu. Rulatamine oli tegevus, mis lõi kogukonna ja arendas mind nii füüsiliselt kui ka vaimselt. See pani mõtlema ruumist ja tõi mind välja tavalse jalakäija rollist.

Samal ajal tekkis minu huviordiiti veel üks avaliku ruumi fenomen, milleks on graffiti. See avas veel ühe külje, mis aitas vaadata linna teise nurga alt. Seeläbi suutsin hoida üleval huvi ja näha linnaruumis piisavalt interaktsioone, mis panid mind käituma ja liikuma loomingulisemalt. Põhilised huvipunktid linnas minu jaoks olid turvakaamerad, pimekohad, kõrvaltänavad jne. See mõtteviis ja suhestumine linna keskkonnaga on püsinud minuga siiani.

Oma lõputöös heidan ma nendele aspektidele ja kogemustele ruumis värske pilgu, kasutades oma tegevusi kui materjali või tööriistu ja linnaruumi kui lõuendit või galeriid. Ma mängin nende kujundlike ja muutuvate materjalidega muutuvas keskkonnas. Eriti aktuaalseks on saanud need tegurid ja keskkond alates 2020. aasta märtsist, mil rakendusid piirangud seoses Covid-19 pandeemia levikuga, see pakkus mulle omakorda lisaväljakutset ja –pinget.

Tactics

I discuss some strategies or tactics which have been used for play in the urban space. I look at different practices which I consider relatable to my work in order to understand practices similar to mine. Opening up on some ideas that came to me, while reading the writings of the anthropologist Marc Augé and the works of the theorist and artist Joseph Beuys about the city space and the artist's role in it. I introduce some terms that have recently gained more of my attention, considering public space. I also take a look at the idea of the post Soviet industrial city and try to figure out my relation to the heritage of the Soviet regime.

Non-Place

Non-place is a neologism introduced by Marc Augé to refer to anthropological spaces of transience which do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places"¹ and where human beings remain anonymous. Non-places could be motorways, hotel rooms, airports, and shopping malls. The perception of a space like non-place is subjective. For instance, an airport is not a non-place for the airport staff.

Usually a place amplifies one's identity, it's where one can meet people with whom one shares social experiences. The non-places, on the contrary, are not meeting places and do not build common ground for a group. Finally, a non-place is a place we do not live in, it's where the individual remains anonymous and lonely.

As I am looking at the city scape, I automatically look for places that have more potential or different possibilities in terms of what they are used for. There are many ways to interact with a space and the goal of my practice is to see those opportunities and activate them. I think that non-places have actually many layers, making the spaces very special. For example, there is the idea of a space that doesn't have identity, it could be seen as a clean page of a document which doesn't have any writing on it yet. There is some history behind it, but it feels like it is waiting for something more to happen in it. In addition, these spaces tend not to have a specific owner or a committed person who would take care of it. There are city officials or workers who pick up trash from the ground, but they do it because they get paid for it. There are some features that could possibly become part of the

¹ Augé 1992; 122.

place when making small interactions. This, for me, is very interesting to see because when people or the space adapts to changes, it means that something has been done right. In other cases, if the space or people repel the interaction or installation, then it could direct your work either in the direction of attractiveness or more annoyance. In the case of annoyance it would work in a critical way towards people's understanding of the city and make them more interested in developing it in a way which would improve it.

Defining non-space by its characteristics from my point of view. As I look at the city like an everyday commuter from home to work to meet friends at the park or at someone's place, I try to find non-places which would correspond to the largest number of participants like me. When interacting with the space as an artist I realise that I do not experience the same effects as I would if I were a mere viewer. I will be in the role of the artist who is installing the game in a performative way. When people are viewing this installation in the making, they are already part of the audience.

Factors which have made me choose the places are usually:

1. People don't spend more than 15 minutes in the place;
2. There is a chance for strangers to meet in the place;
3. There are on average more than 5 people passing by in 10 minutes;
4. The place is meant for a short stop (ex. bus stop, road crossing traffic light);
5. It is not a regular meeting place where people arrange meetings.

Social Sculpture vs. Post Vandalism



Joseph Beuys, "Unschlitt/Tallow" Atrium of the Landesmuseum 1977, Photo: LWL / Rudolf Wakonigg, <https://www.skulptur-projekte-archiv.de/media/cache/7e/2b/7e2bbad8146bd1039efb07320b21817c.jpg>

The idea of the social sculpture arose in the 1970s. The theory is based on the concept that everything is art, that every aspect of life could be approached creatively and, as a result everyone has the potential to be an artist². 1973, Joseph Beuys published a statement:

Only on condition of a radical widening of definitions will it be possible for art and activities related to art [to] provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the death line: to dismantle in order to build 'A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART'... EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who – from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand – learns

² TATE, Art Term.

to determine the other positions of the TOTAL ART WORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER.³

I understand his statement in a large scale applied to the whole social system, but actually this system consists of smaller groups within. Beuys was known to use very symbolic and loaded material in his projects. It is particularly interesting how he made the materials communicate or reflect on one another. For example the artwork “Unschlitt/Tallow” (1977) where he used honey, beeswax, fat, felt and copper to interact with a unused pedestrian underpass ramp of a university lecture hall.⁴

As I have been making public interactions like “Tic-tac-toe” or painted metal constructions, I see them as similar pieces of work directed to the concept of social sculpture as well as post vandalism. They give an opportunity in the public space for locals to interact with an object alien to them. Many of the interactions stop at the visual level, but they already give an idea to the viewer of what it is for or what could it be used for. The viewer has an idea of interaction in the public space that is referring to something different than it was before this action.

It is interesting how these kinds of ideas are formed during the times of spreading viruses when people are trying to keep distance from one another. They are forced to act in a more individualistic way than they are used to in the public space. The freedom that art can give in this situation is a chance to see that it is possible for an individual to change something in the public space. It can give hope for a better future or make a person think critically about the idea delivered by the interaction.

One of the more interesting interactions from recent times could be post vandalism. It is a way to interact with space using its features. There are many examples of artists who are using this technique to work in urban space. It relates to a form of anti-social behaviour while restoring its independent, expressionist aspects and making use of its tendencies and techniques to make a statement on our culture, economy and society⁵. For example: an artist called Oliver Kosta Théfaine⁶, who is working with “lighter graffiti”. This is a technique where people use the soot of the

³ Tisdall 1974; 48.

⁴ Uptmoor, “Skulptur Projekte Archiv”.

⁵ Adam Mickiewicz Institute, ”Hooligans as Artists”.

⁶ Kosta-Théfaine, “Olivier Kosta Théfaine”.

lighter to leave marks in the ceiling, usually of apartment building staircases. He has said that he loves how using these materials are so evidently relating to real life. As using this type of method has already a strong context and background where it is coming from, it is perfect for addressing the questions about contemporary culture, property, and freedom. Théfaine manipulates the structure of the visual language and presents another, usually poetic reinterpretation of it⁷.

Another way an artist has approached issues in public space using post vandalism is in the example of the Italian artist called Vlady. In 2020 he performed an interaction called “DIY crossing”⁸ in the city of Stockholm. The action consisted of him carrying a pedestrian crossing sign on wheels across the road in a random place on the road which was not officially meant for crossing, sending powerful signals of the sign to the drivers.

No matter how to define these ways of approaching, both of them are powerfully interacting with their environment. Both tactics are used to direct focus on something that is important to the artists. By seeing these interactions and analysing them, a firm parallel is drawn out and more ways of reading or relating to them developed.

⁷ Underdogs, “Olivier Kosta-Théfaine”.

⁸ Vlady, “DIY Crossing”.



Olivier Kosta-Théfaine “Lighter Paintings” 2009 (<https://www.yatzer.com/Olivier-Kosta-Thefaine-and-his-magic-lighter>)

The Legacy of Soviet concepts of Public Space and its Heritage as Experienced in Tallinn

When Estonia was ruled by Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1944-1991), there was no private ownership. Under the socialist regime everything was supposed to be collectively owned. There were no landowners, small businesses, or private property like apartments or houses. Streets were designed to allow labourers to reach their workplaces (usually factories) in a most efficient manner. One example is the city of Orsk⁹, which was developed largely because of the need of metal in the Soviet Union. The conditions were meant to be better for all the citizens.

After the collapse of the regimes, total chaos was ruling. People were given private property and different aspects of capitalism were developed on the bases of the socialistic structure. There are many reminders of the old regime in the contemporary city where I live at the moment. For example we can see large fields in the centre of the city for demonstrating and practicing the unity of the people. These public squares are now in a state where you can notice the chaos of commercial advertising and new developments that are rudely shoved into the interstices of formerly public space¹⁰. The spaces were meant to bring equality, not be the basis for making profits. Most of the factories set up to feed the Soviet regime are now empty and have turned into creative areas or shopping malls. Many places have been turned into car parks or low landscaped parks. This is the most common practice in post-communist countries like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, and so on.

Many places are left like they were built, for example areas around housing blocks or traffic arrangement on the street.

As I was born in 1994, I have no direct relationship with the Soviet reign. I know only what I have heard from other people or seen in documentations. This makes me extra interested in the factories, mills, farms, and other abandoned facilities. Most important to me seems to be these heritages in a city environment and in contrast with modern architecture — how it reflects or is sometimes even contrast to it: ideologically as well as aesthetically. There has been so much experimenting,

⁹ [Historical page of Orsk], [Foundation of Orsk].

¹⁰ Hatherley 2016.

testing and failing in architecture and politics that it has had an inspiring effect on my practice.

By analysing this history I see what kind of importance public space and freedom carries. That is why I like to use elements which are symbolic to contemporary situations and their connection to the past.

Other Players' Strategy

There are different ways to see other people interacting with space. Looking for the context in other artists' work and how they relate to playing has been a great motivation for me to develop my ideas further. I view interactions in the city scape as an invitation to play a game. In this chapter I will analyse some well-known and not so well known artists whose practice has had an influence on me. In terms of context I would refer to this quote: "We are born with a marvellous mammalian brain which instantly reads out these many different codes and produces a sense of the work in which all these factors are represented. Content is a complex and demanding event." ¹¹

¹¹ McEvilley 1991.

David Hammons



David Hammons, Bliz-aard Ball Sale, 1983, photographed by Dawoud Bey. Courtesy: the artists, Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, and Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco (<https://static.frieze.com/files/inline-images/bliz-aard-ball-sale-hammons.jpg>)

David Hammons' interaction "Bliz-aard Ball Sale" in New York, 1983. At the Cooper Square, Lower Manhattan, he is selling different sizes of snowballs organised neatly on a colourful rug. Essentially, the work is about ephemerality. In the documentation we see a portrait of the artist as an anonymous and disreputable pedlar, an absurdist street hustler. There rises the ever-present suggestion of the whole business being a shady scam¹².

During the performance we must take into account the regular passer-by on the street who doesn't have any knowledge about Hammons' intentions or background. Would it be the reaction of seeing abstract products for sale next to other goods which seem normal or would the passer-by recognise the absurd situation of the people who are trying to make money out of nothing? The idea of the American

¹² Theophanidis 2015, "Blizzard Ball Sale By David Hammons".

dream in the head of the pedlar who came to the country to try his luck is probably later applied to the interaction by the critically analysing viewer. These kinds of interactions with urban space and pedestrians are important observations of contemporary society of the time, and in many ways not analysed and studied enough. They can help discover the problems and weak points in the structures that they are made in.

Harmen de Hoop



Harmen De Hoop, Basketball Court #6 – Amsterdam – 1992. ([https://harmendehoop.com/
wp-content/uploads/2015/12/basketball-court-5.jpg](https://harmendehoop.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/basketball-court-5.jpg))

Harmen de Hoop's¹³ anonymous and illegal interventions in public space usually address the passer-by without using the existing language of the art world. His interactions involve re-contextualizing existing signs or objects, adding them to a location in an unexpected way and by doing so questioning "normality". The works are often about the functionality of materials and objects, or about rules and regulations, and the way people behave in the public domain. Hoop tries to make people look at themselves in a different way, often from a humorous side.

For example, a work called "Basketball Court #6" (1992) in Amsterdam. He painted the lines of a basketball court in a yard though it was cut by a footpath. There was no room for a real-size basketball court in the small park. After a few weeks the local council had set up a basket to play the game in the park.

His objects are suggestions included in a context of varying opinions on the surroundings, without resulting in a final judgement. This gives the audience some room to interpret the works as they like. He is not interested in making works which

¹³ De Hoop, Web Page.

would last forever, it is not his goal to make the works last for hundreds of years. The works are intended for the moment a random person passing by notices them and interacts with them in their own way.

Sofia Hultén



SOFIA HULTÉN, Truckin', Video Still (2015) (<http://www.sofiahulten.de/daten/works/01Truckin.jpg>)

In her artwork called “Truckin” (2015) Sofia Hultén is walking around in the streets of Berlin. She interacts with her surroundings: she finds a pair of used shoes on the street and replaces them with the ones she has. In Berlin there are lot of properties which no longer have an owner. People are used to leaving their used but still usable belongings on the street for the next person to use. I see this kind of work as a perfect interaction with the public space that is surrounding her, questioning ownership, rejection and being at peace with what the environment provides for us¹⁴.

This could be a way to tell your audience about the importance or seriousness of art in a humorous way. With her gesture, Hultén takes advantage of the urban space she is surrounded with and reciprocates by activating the pair of forgotten or

¹⁴ Scrimgeour 2015, Artforum

discarded shoes and making a statement about the current situation in the streets of Berlin.

My interest in this particular artwork is the very subtle interaction with the surroundings, almost like doing nothing. But by doing nothing a great statement is made.

Francis Alýs



Francis Alýs, Railings (Samples II) London 2004, Video Still, (<https://vimeo.com/133003497>)

Interactions with existing objects in public such as architecture or design of elements in an urban environment are perfect ways to activate the space that doesn't have purpose or use the space in a different way from how it is meant to be used. For example Francis Alýs, who in his project "Fitzroy Square"(2004) was walking around one of London's closed gardens in the Borough of Camden, Central London.

In his work he transforms the black steel fences of Fitzroy Square into a xylophone, creating street music by running a drum stick along the fence¹⁵. In the video, rhythms merge with the natural sounds of the city and become part of them. A childish game, directing the audience to think about class barriers separating the rich from the poor, by connecting the systems (materials) provided by the city¹⁶. Another project by Alýs involved him interacting with a new community and

¹⁵ Lotz 2010, "Grasping the Uncertain".

¹⁶ Purlyté 2010, "The Moving Images Of Art: Railings (Fitzroy Square) By Francis Alýs".

environment by painting road markings in Panama in 2008. This was a way to bring something to the community and deliver a political message about the situation at the joining point of the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean. This project has been seen as an act of healing on traumatised territory¹⁷.

¹⁷ Alýs 2008, “Painting/Retoque”.

Philippe Petit



Philippe Petit Crosses Between the Twin Towers. AP Photo/Alan Welner, 1974, (<https://ny.curbed.com/2015/9/30/9916096/world-trade-center-philippe-petit-the-walk>)

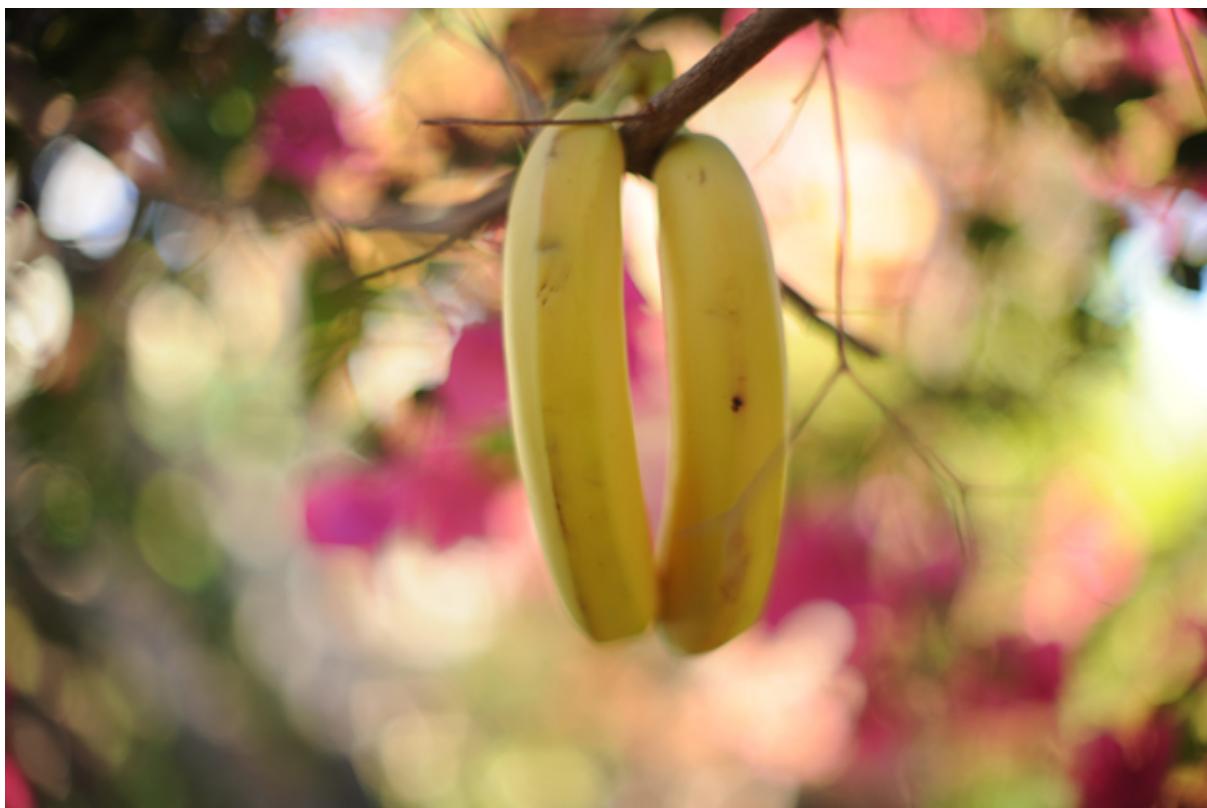
Philippe Petit who is also known as the “Human Spiderman” because of his acts of high-wire walks in significant places like World Trade Center in New York City, 1974 or Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, 1971¹⁸. He is very well known for interacting with the city through his medium. Undertaking the interactions in an illegal manner is his preference and by doing this, he adds even more meaning and depth to his practice. It is also possible to see how some of the great walks would be very hard to undertake in compliance with the rules and regulations and other factors concerning responsibility and security. The artist is taking a major risk in many ways, but it is evident that he is confident in his field of activity. The interesting part of his interactions has been the struggle of setting up the “stage” for himself at the high security buildings. Striving towards the idea of post vandalism is very obvious as there actually is no crime committed.

¹⁸ Grace 1974, "Stuntman, Eluding Guards, Walks a Tightrope Between Trade Center Towers".

My playgrounds

My playgrounds refer to my practice. I discuss some artworks which have brought me to this point in my work and which I have been developing during the last semester at EKA. Games have been a constant feature throughout my MA studies. I was first inspired to explore the theory of games in art when I attended a philosophy lecture by philosopher Eik Herman in 2019.

“Banana Tree” 2020, Tallinn



“Bananas Hanging on a Tree” Copyright: Stefanie Reeb, (<https://chewingthemoon.wordpress.com/2011/08/20/the-day-i-found-bananas-hanging-on-a-tree-and-took-it-as-a-sign-for-making-ice-cream/>)

This installation was made in the spring of 2020 for an online showcase gallery called Showcase International. The work was delivered in an Instagram live format where it was possible to see the installation process. The project was made in collaboration with Kristina Mirjam Villand.

Materials used for this project were 6 kilograms of bananas and the chosen location an apple tree in blossom next to a tram track in the centre of Tallinn. On a sunny

afternoon all the bananas were hung up on the tree in pairs. Yellow fruits contrasted the pink blossoms and green leaves. After the installation was set up and could be observed from afar, many members of the public were seen to take pictures of the weird banana tree. The blossoming flowers drew many young girls who initially took photos for social media, and later grabbed a banana from the tree as they would an apple in the autumn.

“Roadwork Grave” 2020, Riga



Sidney Lepp, Kertu Rannula, “Roadwork Grave” Riga, 2020. (Artist archive.)

“Roadwork Grave” was an installation set up by my partner Kertu Rannula and me in the summer of 2020 while at the residency of ISSP in Riga. The location was chosen when we witnessed a road construction work next to the central park of Riga. The piles of sand made me think of the cemetery in my hometown. It is located next to the old sand ravine and fresh graves have these piles of orange sand. The materials I used were wreaths and candles which I found at a market in Riga.

The installation was set up during the daylight hours in the middle of July. People who were walking their dog or just enjoying a warm summer day in Riga were able to see something that they wouldn't expect to come across. This work reflects on questions of space and privacy in our everyday lives.

“Geil Studio Parking Space Exhibition” 2020, Tallinn



Geil Studio Parking Space Exhibition, Tallinn, 2020. (photo: Sten-Erik Remmel) (<https://geilstudio.wordpress.com/projects-2/parkingspace-exhibition/>)

“Geil Studio Parking Space Exhibition” (2020)¹⁹ was an event organised by my partner Emilia Schupp and me for other students and active artists at EKA to present their work in an unfamiliar territory. It took just one week to arrange everything: from inviting artists and finding the space to sending out invitations to guests. The chosen location was in the centre of Tallinn — a car park which was usually empty in the evenings. We took into account the need for open air and space in order to keep distance because of the pandemic. Application for permission to use the space was never made and within twenty minutes of the start

¹⁹ Kodanik 2020, “A. Kodanik On Geil Studio (Parking Space) Exhibition “.

of the event the police arrived to check out what was going on. They were there as though invited guests and interested in seeing what the young generation of artists have to offer in 2020. It was interesting to see these kinds of interactions between different aspects and representatives of society i.e., law, space, students, art, and on the whole the event was a melange of the pandemic-manipulated setups when all the bars, galleries and museums had restrictions.

I would compare it to a project which was made using the same structure but larger scale and with different political motives: FURTHER Up in the Air²⁰ which was a project developed and run by artist-curators Leo Fitzmaurice and Neville Gabie in Liverpool. This project was about a soon-to-be-demolished housing block in Sheil Park, Liverpool. The place was home for 18 artists and writers from a spectrum of different disciplines. The artists were given an opportunity to spend one month living and working in Linosa Close, a 22-storey block destined for demolition, with an open invitation to comment and reflect on their experience. The project would be analysed acknowledging the circumstances which were implied by the current situation in Liverpool. For example, why was it demolished and what was built after it? Their studios were open to visitors on the 27th and 28th September 2002. This could be a way to interact with a space that is charged. The direction was already given by the circumstances and curators had taken a chance to work with it.

²⁰ Doherty 2004, “Contemporary Art from Studio to Situation”

“Tic-Tac-Toe” 2021, Tallinn



Sidney Lepp, “Tic-Tac-Toe” Tallinn, 2021 (Artist archive)

Tic-Tac-Toe is a work made by Emilia Schupp and me at the end of March 2021. This work consists of two main physical elements: playground aka tic-tac-toe grid and 10 rocks, 5 in red, 5 in blue colour. These elements were installed in different places in public spaces like bus stops and road crossings or in front of various kiosks.

The aim of this interaction is to activate a non-place. As mentioned earlier, places can be lacking characteristics of a space which would make people to want to spend time there or enjoy their time there — they might feel forced and uncertain

about what to do there. The most common reaction to this kind of situation is to listen to music or scroll on a smart device. With my installation I give a simple chance for the participant to spend time in the space differently than they are accustomed to — by playing a game with a friend or a stranger. This doesn't have to stay on the level of tic-tac-toe — when thinking creatively, there are more possibilities for the use of the playground.

For a passerby who is not comfortable with the given situation it works on the level of fantasy and opens up the idea of the space. There are also participants who are not interested in playing or acknowledging the game. They take part in the interaction as an audience because the confusion of the situation makes them reconsider the purpose or opportunities in the space.

The idea of the tic-tac-toe playground comes from my childhood when as a kid I used to play on the streets using materials which were accessible. For example, we used chalk to draw hopscotch games on the asphalt or four squares which could be scraped on the gravel. These were games which brought together different kids from the neighbourhood, it was the activity that made strangers friends and unfamiliar places familiar.

“Yellow Cover Layer” 2021, Tallinn



Sidney Lepp, Kristina Mirjam Villand “Yellow Cover Layer” Tallinn,
2021 (Artist archive)

“Yellow on Soviet constructions” is a series of iron constructions located in public space around housing blocks or shared yards where Kristina Mirjam Villand and I covered old and rusty-looking metal with fresh and appealing yellow paint. The materials were yellow glossy metal paint and metal constructions for children to climb or clean the carpet. Yellow colour was chosen because of the appealing and attractive features it has and metal constructions because of the opportunities they give for the residents or citizens.

The aim of this action is to make the old-looking constructions to stand out and give them a “new life”. By painting them yellow we bring the forgotten object to life again. By thus activating the objects, we give a reminder that these have been forgotten or neglected, bringing attention to the heritage left behind by another government the rule of which I haven’t experienced. Normally, that kind of renovation work is done by housing associations or active members of the community, but taking away this obligation from them is one way to use the objects as material. And by not having any particular connection to the locations we act philanthropically towards people who use these objects. But the goal is to contrast the predominantly grey and ageing surroundings common at the Soviet block housing estates.

“Swings” 2021, Tallinn



Sidney Lepp “Swings” Tallinn, 2021 (photo Emilia Schupp)

This is a project which was released in the beginning of April 2020. The artwork consists of a wooden plate and nylon rope holding the wooden plate to be used as a swing. Three of those were made and distributed around the city of Tallinn. The location for the installation was chosen by looking for a place where swinging is normally not possible. The reason for choosing this kind of location was the idea that the swing would put the viewers’ fantasy to work. In the viewer’s head, there is no need to see a person swinging there in order to get the idea of somebody using it. There is something very inviting about these elements in the space, everyone

has seen a kid running to a swing at a regular playground. On the other hand, playground elements without any activity are instantly bringing up the feeling of abandonment. For example, one of my previous projects called “Sandbox”, made at the end of 2019, was located in the middle lower roof of the Estonian Academy of Arts. The roof was inaccessible and the sandbox was very inviting with all the colours and toys it displayed. Its purpose is to make the viewer realise the potential of the space which surrounds us, but is not being used.

Bonus level

This chapter gives a brief summary of the ideas I have developed during the writing the thesis and working on my practice. I go over some aspects which are becoming crucial to my work and look into the idea of games by James P. Carse. I also touch the subject of distance working during the pandemic. I reflect on the experiments I was able to develop in the public space during the time of the pandemic.

Reflection On Experiments

On many occasions in my work and practice it is important to leave the project in the space anonymously. Anonymity describes situations where the acting person's identity is unknown. The important idea here is that the person is non-identifiable, unreachable, or untraceable²¹. The reason for this is the idea of not being influenced by any other given context. For the audience it could be crucial not to have the idea of the artist who has installed his/her work in the public space as it leaves more freedom for the analysis when there is no idea of the artist presented. Work could be made by anyone who is no different from the average everyday citizen²². Giving the background for a studying or working artist could ruin the pureness of the interaction in these cases. The objects could be just as much part of the city as the small parks or flowerbeds in front of supermarkets. At times there are people who take care of them or place them there, but they don't claim them as their own. Most of the time these people remain anonymous. When making "Tic-Tac-Toe" I was able to stay anonymous because of wearing a mask to hide my identity; I think being anonymous gained yet another layer of meaning after people had to start covering their faces with masks to protect them from the virus. This is what I aim to reach with my interactions or installations as well — to not give the spectator the frame of reference of the concept of "art."

²¹ Wallace 1999 "Anonymity" Ethics and Information Technology.

²² Mace, "Everyday Citizens".



"Making Tic-Tac-Toe Field", Tallinn, 2021 (photo Emilia Schupp)

A Pandemic Affects the Space



"Shops Start Using 'Social Distancing' Stickers on Floors" Qatar 2020 (<https://www.qatar-tribune.com/news-details/id/185838/shops-start-using-social-distancing-stickers-on-floors>)

During the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic since the end of 2019 there have been various shiftings in the rules of behaviour in public space. Personal space differs depending on many factors, for example country, age or culture. Many countries have implemented social distancing rules to keep people operating from a safe distance²³. Those rules clash with our norms and general sense of personal

²³ McClure 2020, "New Normal: How Far Is Safe Enough?".

space. Governments in different countries have changed the way we experience our intimate, personal and social space. Moving the normal contact area from 1-2 meters away from what we were used to. They have also influenced our experience in public space as many places have shut down and it is recommended not to linger in public spaces if it is not necessary. The 2+2 rule has been applied which means that no more than two people can move around in a public space together, keeping a distance of at least two meters from others.²⁴

For making these restrictions possible and easier to follow, I have seen different methods which have been used. Most common ones are markings on the ground showing where the 2-meter distance lies. In shopping malls benches have been removed to discourage people from spending their time there and thus spreading the virus. Wearing a mask in public has become normal and, in many countries, obligatory. Analysing this situation is very interesting for an artist who works mostly with public space. There are many pros and cons to this unusual situation which the spreading of the virus has created, for example:

1. Museums, galleries, institutions are closed;
2. Working outdoors or in public space is preferred;
3. The idea of public place is shifting;
4. Working alone and in isolation;
5. Restricted access to material(s);
6. Events are cancelled;
7. Travelling is limited.

²⁴ Estonian Government 2021, “Strict Restrictions Are in Force All Over Estonia From March 11”

Playing in the City

"There are at least two kind of games. One could be called finite, the other can be called infinite. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play."²⁵ In my practice I see the city space as a playground and myself as an artist and a constructor of small finite games. While engaging in small interactions and installations which could be used or referred to as games, I acknowledge myself in an infinite game that I am building that's called art field. The author of "Finite and Infinite Games" James P. Carse has written "No one is forced to be a lawyer, there are rules you must follow to continue being a lawyer". This can be easily observed as a student at EKA. There is this infinite game of art that all the people involved with the academy or art scene are part of. To continue playing this game, there are tasks or assignments like exhibitions or events one can take part of to be in the game. In addition, all the participants' individual contributions can be seen as tasks in the game, whether it is an installation, project, action or performance. All of these can be seen as investments in the "infinite game of art".

Looking at my practice I have applied the principles of a finite game very directly on some of my projects. For example, I play with the idea of a game with no players – like in the case of the work like "Sandbox" or "Swings". Or if you take the project called "Tic-Tac-Toe" then there is the idea of a game for passing the time. Still there is something about the game which gives a perspective of the world. When stepping into the role of a player we need to forget that they are optional. Example: "You step freely into the role of mother, but once in it, you must suspend your freedom to give the role the attention it requires."

"No one can play a game alone. One cannot be human by oneself. There is no selfhood where there is no community. We do not relate to others as persons we are; we are who we are in relating to others." This quote could be applied perfectly to my practice as I understand the idea of being alone, anonymous and lonely in the non-space where there is not enough context to build an idea of the artist. In many cases this could be unnecessary, but there is no negative side to giving it a chance. Organising events or undertaking interactions in spaces which are usually not

²⁵ Carse 1987 "Finite and Infinite Games".

considered suitable for art, and evoking unusual reactions are great triggers as the game enables the participants to find themselves in a new situation.

I think that it is important to acknowledge the games that are being played around us in order to be part of them. There are many games that we can choose to be part of and only one that we have to be in. The infinite game of life where we are already in the role of a player according to the theory of James P. Carse²⁶. It makes no difference whether we accept to be part of the game or not, the only difference lies in what moves we make.

²⁶ Carse 1987, “Finite and Infinite Games”.

Summary

When I began skateboarding at the age of 11, I had no idea that in 2021 I would be trying to find similar opportunities in the city for my art practice. In terms of art I have chosen a target group of people to whom I attempt to show the same things I saw when growing up. Using urban space creatively and trying to find more ways for using it for my own benefit and fun. I learned that gaining another perspective of the city helps grow interest and inspire new ideas. This extra perspective can make commuting and living more interactive and can work as a bridge between city officials and the inhabitants. There are many ways to express criticism or present the needs of an ordinary citizen, and also many ways to interpret their interactions. By analysing other artists' work I can see interactions which at first might seem mostly intuitional, but which will have more relevance in the future when reconsidering them from distance. Hereby I mention some indicators which in my experience are relevant in this case:

- Location (more precise location in the urban environment)
- Engagement (whom will the work engage)
- Materials used
- Date
- Artist's background
- Setup/Method

All these factors are extremely dependent on time as well as in constant change. There is a big chance that in the future they will address the viewer in many other fascinating ways than at the moment of being developed.

Here are some factors which influence this kind of work:

- Nostalgia
- Emotions
- Relation to the materials
- Reminiscing
- Confusion
- Trigger critical thinking

I am not saying that these factors are something that the artist ought to emphasise in their work, but by analysing, I find these have the strongest change when dealing with this kind of practice.

I have discovered many new directions and interests during my practice, for example the need to challenge myself in new situations. Small steps were taken and comparisons made in Riga, but in the future it would be good to change my environment even more, perhaps finding a residency in a city with rules and regulations I am not familiar to.

By doing this research and practical work I have made many discoveries and undergone great personal development. I am very happy to be able to juxtapose my practice with such great artists. A large part of this development and progress has taken place thanks to my peers and supervisors, who gave me an opportunity to gain perspective and reflect on my work in order to understand my position in the context.

The outcome of the practical work is a “memory game” made using the documentation of my interactions with public and urban spaces inside and around the building of the Estonian Academy of Arts. The game consists of eight projects displayed on sixteen playing cards introducing my practice and research in TASE 2021 exhibition in the academy building.

After all, in art, there is no point to play for mere winning. Situations, time and context can change but principles are everlasting. According to Simon Sinek, we should try to build and nurture healthy and sustainable structures to keep learning and growing²⁷. And most importantly — leave a nice playground for the next generation.

²⁷ Sinek 2019, “The Infinite Game”.

Bibliography

Books

Augé, Marc (1992), *Non-places: Introduction To An Anthropology Of Supermodernity*, Le Seuil, Verso.

Beuys, Joseph (1973), *Caroline Tisdall: Art into Society, Society into Art*, ICA, London.

Carse, James P. (1987). *Finite and Infinite Games*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Doherty, Claire (2004) *Contemporary Art: from Studio to Situation*, Black Dog Publishing

McEvilley, Thomas (1991), *Art & Discontent, Theory at the Millennium, Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. McPherson & Company.

Sinek, Simon (2019). *The Infinite Game*. Portfolio/Penguin.

Wallace, Kathleen A (1999). *Anonymity*. Ethics and Information Technology.

Articles

Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Hooligans as Artists - Lecture on Post-Vandalism in Brussels, 2011 <https://culture.pl/en/event/hooligans-as-artists-lecture-on-post-vandalism-in-brussels> (accessed on 12.05.2021)

De Hoop, Harmen, About, Web Page <https://harmendehoop.com/about/> (accessed on 12.05.2021)

Estonian Government (2021). *Strict Restrictions Are in Force All Over Estonia From March 11, 2021*. Kriis.ee: <https://www.kriis.ee/en/news/strict-restrictions-are-force-all-over-estonia-march-11> (accessed on 21.03.2021)

Hatherley, Owen (2016). *Soviet Squares: How Public Space Is Disappearing in Post-Communist Cities*, The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/21/soviet-squares-public-space-post-communist-cities> (accessed on 04.04.2021)

Историческая страница Орска [Historical page of Orsk], *Основание Орска* [Foundation of Orsk] <http://history.opck.org/istoriya/letopis-sobytiij.html> (accessed on 12.05.2021)

Kodanik, Anita (2020). *A. Kodanik On Geil Studio (Parking Space) Exhibition, 2020.* Artun.ee: <https://www.artun.ee/anita-kodanik-on-geil-studio-parking-space-exhibition/> (accessed on 03.03.2021)

Kosta-Théfaine, Oliver, *Web Page*, <http://www.olivierkostathefaine.com> (accessed 12.05.2021)

Levy, Deborah (2021). *The Lasting Aftertaste of David Hammons's Sugar.* Frieze: <https://www.frieze.com/article/Deborah-levy-david-hammons-sugar-bowl> (accessed on 03.03.2021)

Lotz, Corinna (2010), *Grasping the Uncertain. A World To Win:* <http://aworldtowin.net/reviews/FrancisAlys.html> (accessed on 29.04.2021)

Lichtenstein, Grace, (1974). *Stuntman, Eluding Guards, Walks a Tightrope Between Trade Center Towers.* The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/08/08/archives/stuntman-eluding-guards-walks-a-tightrope-between-trade-center.html> (accessed on 03.03.2021)

Mace, Ruth, “*Everyday Citizens*”, Ucl Anthropology: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/lab-uk/everyday-citizens> (accessed on 03.03.2021)

Martínez, Francisco (2017). *This Place Has Potential: Trash, Culture, and Urban Regeneration in Tallinn, Estonia.* Journal.fi: <https://journal.fi/suomenantropologi/article/view/60577/30841> (accessed on 03.03.2021)

McClure, Jon (2021). *New Normal: How Far Is Safe Enough?.* Reuters: <https://graphics.reuters.com/HEALTH-CORONAVIRUS/SOCIALDISTANCING/qzjvqenmyvx/> (accessed on 05.04.2021)

Purlyté, Gabija (2013) *The Moving Images Of Art: Railings (Fitzroy Square) By Francis Alys,* TN2 Magazine: <http://www.tn2magazine.ie/the-moving-images-of-art-railings-fitzroy-square-by-francis-alys/> (accessed on 05.04.2021)

Scrimgeour, Alexander (2015). *Alexander Scrimgeour on Sofia Hultén,* Artforum: <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201510/sofia-hulten-56291> (accessed on 04.04.2021)

TATE Art Term. *Social Sculpture*, Tate.org.uk <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/social-sculpture> (accessed on 12.05.2021)

Theophanidis, Philippe (2015). *Philippe Theophanidis on December 30, 2015, Bliz-Aard Ball Sale By David Hammons, 1983.* Aphelis.net: <https://aphelis.net/bliz-aard-ball-sale-david-hammons-1983/> (accessed on 03.03.2021)

Underdogs, Olivier Kosta-Théfaine <https://www.under-dogs.net/collections/olivier-kosta-thefaine> (accessed 12.05.2021)

Uptmoor, Ferdinand, *Skulptur Projekte Archiv, Projects, Joseph Beuys*, Skulptur Projekte: <https://www.skulptur-projekte-archiv.de/en-us/1977/projects/82/> (accessed on 03.03.2021)

Vlady, *Actions, DIY Crossing*, 2020, <https://www.vladyart.com/actions/> (accessed 12.05.2021)