Panu Lehtovuori

ROUTLEDGE

Experience and Conflict: The Production of Urban Space

EXPERIENCE AND CONFLICT: THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE

Work on good prose has three steps:
a musical stage when it is composed,
an architectonic one when it is built,
and a textile one when it is woven.
Walter Benjamin (1979b [1928]: 61)

What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning
Werner Heisenberg 1959, quoted in Sandercock 1998: 67

An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths below.
Michel de Certeau 1993: 152

We have to relearn to think about space.
Marc Augé 1995: 36

Experience and Conflict: The Production of Urban Space

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Helsinki, 20 May 2009
Panu Lehtovuori

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Foreword

Possessing unique, distinctive skills for an urbanist, Panu Lehtovuori is both an accomplished architect and a PhD in urban theory, planning, and policy from the Helsinki University of Technology where he once served as director of its Centre for Urban and Regional Studies.

Using Lefebvrian, semiotic, participatory planning, and Nordic design theory melded to brilliant insights he has written a definitive analysis of Helsinki urban development over the last two decades. Dr Lehtovuori's focus concentrates on the constructive criticism of existing urban planning practices and architectural design for cities, especially those concerned with preserving the traditional downtown for public use. In the process he attacks the narratives disconnected from people's real needs that underlie the exclusive boosterism, spectacular architecture and locational hype so essential to pushing real estate and such international designations as 'European cultural capital'.

By bringing to the surface recognition of conflict, experimental living, environmental alternatives, and inclusive participatory planning he forges a new synthesis of up-to-date urban theories about space and contemporary activist planning for livable and sustainable urban environments. Most distinctive is Lehtovuori's insistence that the grand narratives of planning and architectural urban design be replaced through an understanding of, what Lefebvre called, 'lived space', i.e., the everyday space of conflict, innovation, change, decay, embodied in quotidian practices of residents. This bottom up vision of multiple agencies creating a lived space melds with the top down 'illusion of transparency' defined in contemporary professional practices to produce an inclusive, malleable, living approach to urban planning and policy.

At the opening of his treatise, Lehtovuori frames three questions:

> Why do new urban spaces lack feeling, power and sensory quality?
> Why does 'urbanness' retreat from the newly produced public spaces?
> Why does the political significance of urban space seem to be lost?

From this inquisitive beginning, he charts out the issues, problems, 'artificial realities', and ideological delusions of exclusionary planning and architectural practices. Analysis proceeds using case studies of his native Helsinki and two other important urban places – Manchester in the UK and Berlin, Germany. Empirical cases help ground the reader in his discourse as does his clear, readable writing even when complex theoretical ideas are discussed. No doubt users of this text will appreciate the latter qualities and learn, through reading, the straightforward means of applying Lehtovuori's critical ideas for inclusive, creative urban design.

This book begins with a critical discussion of urban planning and design ideologies that are not exclusive to the Nordic countries alone. Covered are examples ranging from Le Corbusier's International Style as practiced in Europe to urban design in Brazil. A new chapter applies the same investigation of reified concepts applied to the production of public space. UK and Finnish cases are used as examples.

A second section of the book lays out in sharp detail the concepts developed for the critique of contemporary urban planning, design and policy. Lehtovuori presents a comprehensive examination of space and place theory coupled with a critique of contemporary urban architecture. Emphasis here is on how professional practices miss the more malleable aspects of lived space, of inclusive, sustainable environments.

In a penultimate section the author provides a detailed investigation into the two decades effort to preserve the central city of Helsinki. Equally applicable to urban places in America as well as Europe, case study material and analysis provide a wealth of information regarding what to do and not to do in order to promote a 'user friendly' city environment.

A final section supplies a comprehensive guide to the author's own tools developed for a more participatory planning practice along with further detailed examples of case studies including references to Lehtovuori's own architectural and planning practice.

I like this book immensely. I have found it profoundly refreshing to read. In one place, the author provides overviews of the most trenchant arguments against traditional urban planning and architectural design from the perspective of activism, inclusivity and the theoretical Lefebvrian ideas about space. Lehtovuori has produced a text at once applicable to discussions of urbanism, planning, design and public policy with ample case study material that suits the varied courses in these areas. Professionals, academics and students of urbanism will all benefit from absorbing the insights and penetrating wisdom offered by Lehtovuori in this text.

Mark Gottdiener
28 March 2009

Introduction

The Problem of Public Urban Space in the Contemporary City

In cities, different, contradictory and conflictual actors, practices and agendas co-exist. Richard Sennett claims that while there probably are as many ways to define 'city' as there are cities, a simple definition stating that 'city is a human settlement in which strangers are likely to meet' is quite powerful (Sennett 1974: 39). Hartmut Häussermann detects the normative essence of cities' urban character in 'confrontation with diversity, the un-expected, the non-planned and the resistant moment' (Häussermann 1995, quoted in Groth and Corijn 2005: 513). These ideas suggest that to be urban in a true sense, cities should cater for diversity and alterity, allowing for articulation and integration of the Other. Conflicts are no exception but rather a constitutive part of cities' 'urbanness' (Rajanti 1999).

Public urban space is the key site of the coming-together of different actors and influences, thus becoming the 'soul' of the city and breeding ground of its urban character. In contemporary cities, however, the rich, multifaceted public urban space and the continued production of 'urbanness' in negotiations and conflicts are not self-evident. Steven Graham and Simon Marvin suggest that the 'splintering' of technical infrastructures would also fragment the urban social space (Graham and Marvin 2001, see also Castells 1996: 423–8). Michael Sorkin warns about the foreseeable 'end of public space', saying that 'throughout America, city planning has largely ceased its historic role as the integrator of communities in favour of managing selective development and enforcing distinction' (Sorkin 1992: xiv). In Europe, Marc Augé has discussed the proliferation of 'non-places', the a-historic and identityless realm of highways, airports and malls (Augé 1995). Zygmunt Bauman, developing Sennett's thesis about the importance of meeting strangers and the corollary need to rehearse 'civility', claims that many contemporary urban spaces, such as La Défense in Paris or Itäkeskus mall in Helsinki, are 'public, but not civil'. Those spaces for organised movement, organised consumption and organised entertainment are characterised by a 'redundancy of interaction', lack of friction, togetherness and any deeper reason to communicate (Bauman 2001: 27).

It seems that while urban populations are in general becoming multicultural and multi-ethnic, with increasingly divergent lifestyles, preferences and rhythms, public urban space is paradoxically segregated, simplified and sanitised (Smith 1992). Increasingly, developers and other powerful actors treat cities as commodities. Entrepreneurial planning and the manifold glocal effects of inter-urban competition and image marketing tend to homogenise public urban space on consumerist and aestheticised grounds (Groth and Corijn 2005: 513). Commercial projects and issues of private security eat up the public realm, eroding spatial justice. 'Zero-friction' is secured by zero-tolerance, 'spatial interdictions' making the

access of the Other less likely (Hajer 1999, Flusty 1994). Even largely benevolent efforts towards 'urban renaissance' and planning that ostensibly cherishes the European model of dense city and lively urban space tend to produce artificial and bleak images of public space, stage-sets for imagined use and exclusionary 'outdoor rooms' (Doron 2002). The emphasis is on 'design space', and the public space creation fails to tap complex and emerging social and cultural potentials.

Weak Places – Urban Conflicts

The picture is not simple, though. Contemporary cities do provide counter-examples. New forms of deeply lived public urban space emerge and existing spaces are constantly challenged. It is possible to resist and divert the 'emic' and 'phagic' strategies of 'non-civic' public space (Bauman 2001: 24). Interesting, too, is to look at the potential of forgotten, sidetracked, vacant and under defined urban spaces. To me it seems that more than in neat and regulated centres, a genuine, idiosyncratic experiencing is possible in urban wastelands, nameless strips, under utilised structures, 'contingent' backsides (Wilson 2001) and 'empty' spaces that fall outside one's mental map (Bauman 2001). Strange actions and clandestine disuses, as well as carnivals, events and urban art, may momentarily offer different and surprising experiences.

Throwing meaning in unlikely sites, creates ephemeral attachments or deeply felt moments that I call 'weak place'. Weak place is the moment of signification. The idea entails a redefinition of the notion of place so that it is not closed and physically bounded but rather open and porous, more about experiential nearness than physical proximity. These experiences are idiosyncratic, weak places singular. This means that the experiences cannot be shared. Weak places remain private, and one cannot easily 'operationalise' them in the public realm, in planning debates, for example. Only the coming-together, juxtaposition and collision of many people and experiences – the resulting conflict – lends weak places a public form. Conflict gathers and ties together a tensioned community of those 'who care', becoming a producer of socially significant public urban space. In conflict the personal, ephemeral, hardly tangible feelings may gain momentum and political significance.

I have discovered the importance of the link between experience and conflict in the context of aesthetic contemplation in architectural and urban settings. It concerns material spaces that can be locally felt, walked upon, touched, smelled and seen, and thus spaces that can also in principle be designed (in the sense that design can define the local conditions of experience). However, I believe that the links between personal signification, attachment, care and action play a role in a wide variety of conflicts and for different kinds of 'public'. While 'non-local' values, political inclinations and solidarity to a group do inspire devoted action, a personal, local trigger is also important. Therefore, if urban conflict in the Fordist era was largely played out along institutionalised lines, with organised actors and clearly

definable antagonistic positions, now urban struggles are fragmented, particular and differentiated. The disputed frontiers cross all spheres of life and society, including feelings and knowledge (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 418). Today's conflicts do not follow class boundaries, but rather produce new and surprising societal divisions and *ad hoc* coherences. Mark Gottdiener has argued that contemporary urban conflicts would be played out between 'growth' and 'no-growth' (Gottdiener 1994 [1985]: 165). They are against the lack of urban life forms in the city (Schmid 2005: 153), against experiential poverty and limits of appropriation. Individual activists, conservation movements and protest groups thus get, in a new sense, a constitutive role in the production of 'urbanness' and public urban space. Important from the point of view of architecture and planning is that conflicts are embedded in a specific site or spatial structure, as the case of Makasiinit (Chapter 8) shows. The notion of 'quasi-object' suggests that none of the actors can exclusively claim such site but nevertheless they all have a stake in it.

Urban Events Producing Space

Since the mid 1980s, Helsinki has witnessed a remarkable urban cultural change. Together with new sites and forms of consumption and leisure, new cultural institutions and new local media (Cantell 1999, Eskola and Ruoppila 1999, Mäenpää 1993, 2000), the re-appropriation of the city's central public urban spaces has been an important arena and facilitator of the change. Entirely new public urban spaces, taking unprecedented forms, have also been created. *Urban events* have had a key role in the process of public space creation. From the Night of the Arts (since 1989) to the Human Wall demonstration in Makasiinit (2000), events have brought something new: a new reading of space, a new use or a novel vision of the future. Events have nurtured the Other.

After pioneering soundings and experiments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, two major events in Senate Square, the Total Balalaika Show (1993) and its tenth anniversary the Global Balalaika Show (2003), roughly mark the beginning and end of a period of establishing a new use-culture of public urban spaces. During these years, Finland recovered from the worst economic depression since the 1930s, joined the EU and the European monetary union. Helsinki searched for a new, independent role as the gateway to the post-1989 East, became the global window of IT led futures, celebrated as the European City of Culture in 2000 and again fell back into relative invisibility in the first years of the new millennium. The decade from 1993 saw a wave of urban cultural innovation, followed by an inability to nurture further innovation and build on it. During these years, several urban events were important with respect to the production of public space. Besides the Total Balalaika Show and the City of European Culture project, Charles Landry, a consultant who analysed the 'urban creativity' of Helsinki, names the Night of the Arts, the Forces of Light and the Huvila tent of the Helsinki Festival (Landry 1998: 65–79). Timo Cantell argues for the importance of events in changing the

public perception of the city and in offering glimpses of a utopia of a European city, a 'would-be Helsinki' (Cantell 1999: 90, 187–9).

My interest in events dates back to an empirical pilot study in summer 1997. This study suggested that specially arranged urban events are, by their sheer number, an important part of Helsinki summer culture in streets and parks. According to the observations of the documentation tours[1], the events were not an exception but an important factor strongly characterising the otherwise somewhat quiet and conventional use of urban spaces in Helsinki. During each observation session, there was at least one major public event taking place, from rock and skating parties to the Naisten Kymppi women's jogging event and the DTM car race (Lehtovuori 2001: 68). Clearly, the event policy of the City of Helsinki, formulated in the Development Scenario of the 1992 General Master Plan, had already succeeded in the mid 1990s. At present, the number of urban events is large, and their popularity is still growing. The city centre spawns beer tents for collective viewing of sports events. There are wine festivals, samba carnivals, mass religious gatherings and annual snow boarding events, many of which attract tens of thousands of viewers and participants. Currently, Helsinki is updating its policy. It will draft a special 'events strategy', which fully recognises the role of events in the economic development.

Appropriation vs Domination of Space

When participating in events, experiencing their atmosphere, observing other people and sounding my own feelings, I realised that events not only take place in public urban space, but *partake in its production*. In events, however, the production of public urban space was something very different from the production of architectonic space I was somewhat familiar with through my education. Various personal, momentary and invisible aspects felt important: the production of space was about feelings, surprises, new points of view, sudden changes of perception, new sites or places to be found and visited, new uses and new meanings one could attach to those sites. Sometimes the new practices or practice-based visions led to conflicts with the ideas and points of view held in the official city planning. For the ephemeral and quite complex processes of space-creation, the understanding of public urban space in architecture and planning seemed to be distant, external and even counter-productive. A dialectic of domination, appropriation and diversion (cf. Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 167) was taking place.

However, events were not a-spatial, but had their own spatial patterns and locational logics. I came to the conclusion that, with regard to the subtle phenomena of events, the main problem in architecture and planning's space-conception is that space is conceived of as something separate both from the meanings people give to it and the actual uses and practices taking place 'in space'. Despite a rich

1 Documentation was conducted by Pekka Lehtinen, Mikko Mälkki and the author.

texture of relational space-theorising, planning and architectural practitioners understand public urban space predominantly as a visualisable stage or stage-set, not as a socially rich entity or realm, even less a process. Space is objectified – and sometimes even subjectified, so that architects can claim that space has a 'will', with themselves as its priests and oracles.

Furthermore, the objectification makes it impossible to grasp the classical idea of public space as a political constellation and a vehicle of a specific community. This aspect has become increasingly complex and contested with the rise of consumerism, electronic media and the horizon of a global community, so that it is possible to argue that urban space has fundamentally lost its role as a political arena. Even though there is no way back to the classical world, I believe that this view can also be proved to be mistaken in the present societal condition. For example, eventual public spaces and their tensioned communities can influence urban agenda setting (*Shadow City* 2004).

Rethinking space, place, event and conflict, I wish to formulate a theory about public urban space, which would do justice to my observations and introspections about the production of public urban space in Helsinki. My aim is to compile a theory, which would include physical space, its use and, as the most difficult aspect, the personal, singular moments of invention and existentially important experiences that are indispensable elements of the lived urban space. The theory could be called *the experiential approach to the production of public urban space*. At its core is an effort to address in a novel, dialectical way the relations between the physical, social and mental aspects of space.

The Space-concept in Planning

The focus on the theory of space reflects my belief that the shortcomings of the planning and design of public urban space cannot be solved on the level of institutions or on the level of an agency (cf. Giddens 1984: 24, Dear and Häkli 1998: 60). Rather, a relevant criticism needs to address the structural level, which in this work entails re-thinking the conceptual foundations of the practice of planning and urban design. I consider the way space and its public aspect are conceptualised, with the epistemological ramifications of the conceptualisation, to be the key from which to start. My hypothesis is that while the theories of space in architecture, planning and other space-related sciences have advanced, the relationship between the physical, social and mental aspects of space has been articulated inadequately, hampering the application of the new theories in developing design practices.

In finding a new approach, my main source is the idea of dialectics of space, proposed by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]). The new conceptualisation has certain unique characteristics, the most important of which are: 1) space always appears dynamic and processual; 2) space cannot be conceived of generally, but the conceptualisation is always specific, in a society, site and moment in time; 3) the conceptualisation is able to deal with the radical

qualitative difference between the various 'elements' or 'moments' of social space, without conflating them to a single plane of representation; and 4) providing the opportunity to think the not-yet-existing, the Becoming is as important as describing the existing things.

The experiential approach provides a transdiscursive and relational theory of public urban space. I will show that, firstly, by introducing the notions of experience and conflict in the theory of public urban space and, secondly, by treating them as 'dynamists' of the theory, it is possible to understand the production of public urban space better than with the current theories. Instead of abstractly classifying different aspects of space or assuming structural similarities between them, the dynamic theory of space entails a dialectic understanding of the relations between its physical, social and mental aspects. Only after such work on the level of the structures of thinking is it possible to evaluate and reform the planning and design practice – a task, which I hint at in the last chapters of the book.

The need for my undertaking is underlined by the surprising lack of a well-founded and relevant theory of space in the disciplines of architecture, urban design and planning. Dictionaries of planning and architecture[2] do not even contain the entry 'space'! Madanipour states that the absence of the term 'space' from sociology reference books may be understandable, 'but its absence from architectural reference books is quite noticeable' (Madanipour 1996: 7). In much of architectural and urban research the question of space is understood as the visual and volumetric qualities of buildings, hence mainly described and studied in impressionistic, photographic, hand-gestural or poetic terms. The structure, syntax or morphology of space in relation to social structure have only recently been paid sufficiently serious attention. Even though much used in education and criticism, the notion of space is far from clear. The logic of its complex constituents in urban situations, in particular, should be clarified.

Methodology: Stone, Paper or Scissors

The effort to combine in one theory personal, momentary feelings and insights with other material, which appear to be variably shared and 'provable', warrants a careful methodological consideration. Essentially, the work originates from my own experiences. I am acutely aware that an experience – what is 'right now' – cannot be conceptualised, but rather conceptualisation always comes 'after', it is

2 E.g. *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture* by J.S. Curl; the German *Handwörterbuch der Raumforschung und Raumordnung*; and the concise *Arkitekturtermer* by J.T. Ahlstrand. Dictionaries of sociology lack the entry 'space', too. The *Deutsch-Schwedishes Handbuch der Planungsbegriffe* (2001) is the exception of those handbooks I could consult. It does define space, stating that in planning 'space' connotes the areas that people inhabit or influence in some other way. These spaces are characterised by economic, social or political content (p. 278).

in the past tense. This leads to the seemingly paradoxical situation that the theory I am proposing *cannot be a conceptualisation of public urban space as something*, as an idea, a thing or a collection of properties. I will not be able to represent (name, describe, classify) my object of study, stating that 'public urban space is A'. While the theory cannot be a representation, I hope it can provide the reader with a grounded 'intellectual strategy' or 'approach'.

Benjamin, Heidegger and Vattimo are among thinkers who have wrestled with the problem of presenting the non-presentable. They have explored intellectual and literary methods, such as 'dialectical image', 'literary montage' and 'weak thought', that try to do that difficult feat. In this work, I utilise those tools in a rather limited way, nevertheless aiming at 'transdiscursive' or possibly 'rhizomatic' writing (Shields 1996, Hillier 2007), at a mixed and multiple text where the middle is foregrounded instead of the beginning and end. I use three types of text: 1) personal notes, memoirs or 'micrologies' about emotionally strong, important moments; 2) 'excursions' or cases, which represent observations in a traditional way (also images belong to this group); and 3) reflective theoretical text, which I would like to see as a diagram, as the 'mover' or 'intellectual machine' I set in motion. While Helsinki and its evolving public event venues are the focal point of theorising, illustrative parallel phenomena can be found in most cities of the developed West. Because I spent 2001 in Manchester and several shorter periods in Berlin, I will sporadically refer to the harbour reuse in Salford Quays, the renovation of Manchester city centre or Berlin's recreated squares Leipziger Platz and Pariser Platz, as well as events, club nights and solitary wastelands in those cities.

An effort to approach and question the elusive 'boundary' between singular and shared, directly lived and represented, inward-looking and communicable weaves together the moments and cases I discuss. All cases represent a change in social space, a moment suggesting the possibility of meaningful public urban space. All cases are, therefore, about Becoming. Because I develop new theory, I limit my interest to situations and moments where something valuable for the new can be found. By juxtaposing the three types of text, my intention is to open up opportunities for event-like knowledge creation for the reader.[3] Its metaphor might be the ancient game 'paper, stone, scissors', where the players simultaneously hit a table with either a clenched fist, flat open hand or fist with two fingers open, respectively signifying stone, paper and scissors. Paper beats stone because paper can wrap it; scissors beat paper because they can cut it in two, and stone beats scissors because scissors become blunt if one tries to cut stone with them. The micrologies are the 'stones', the representations of facts are 'paper' and the theoretical diagram provides the 'scissors'. These three elements constitute a 'game', process or dialectic, which is the eventual text, the

3 The epistemological status of transdiscursive writing is not entirely clear. My effort is to move away from the centuries-long 'perspectival' tradition of thinking towards the emerging 'inspective' mode, which entails that the separation between knower, what is known and the techniques of knowing in-between the two would dissolve (Varto 2000).

non-objectified theory and the specific process of producing a public urban space somewhere, sometime. To continue the metaphor, stone could stand for the non-reflective 'spatial practices' of Lefebvre's *dialectique de triplicité*, paper for his 'representations of space' and scissors for the 'spaces of representation' (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 33–9). However, the construction is in movement, and while all the constituents are always needed, any of them may take any position in Lefebvre's diagram. The structurally dominant representations of space may wrap the stone-practice, but likewise the stone can be interpreted as the Moment, the singular Other or the 'weak place', which shifts the game and overcomes the dominant, abstract representation.

I believe that the boundary between lived and represented presents an important challenge for architecture and planning. A new understanding about the 'tools' to work on this boundary may open opportunities to reform planning, think the professional practice of planning in new terms. Clearly, introspection of one's directly lived experience produces unique, irreplaceable knowledge. But how can such knowledge be used in planning? How, as a planner, to be subtler towards individual experiences? How to support soft phenomena? In the proposed inspective mode, the object-ness of knowledge and, therefore, its transferability are placed in question. The collapse of the distance between knower and the 'object of knowledge' foregrounds action, doing something in the world one is in – or immersed. Like the studies on events, the design projects are an integral part of my being in the world. This is the methodological reason to refer to my own design work in the last chapters. In a sense, my own work provides an extended set of cases. Furthermore, the above-formulated hypothesis about the need to address the space-conception of architecture and planning before proposing changes in the institutions or practices cannot be proved or disproved in one study. While my focus is on the structures of thinking, I would, nevertheless, like to make an opening from the theory to the practice and to test aspects of the theory. This is the practical and rhetorical reason for including analysis and reflections of a selection of my own projects and interventions. I believe that the lessons drawn from those tests hint about the relevance of the developed theoretical approach.

Notes about Terminology

'Space' is a key term, which will be discussed, defined and redefined throughout the thesis. Because Lefebvre is an important authority in my work, I want at this early stage to note that I have chosen to use simply 'space' as the equivalent of the French '*l'espace*', even though there is also an argument for 'spatialisation' (e.g. Shields 1999: 153–7).

Because my focus is on the structures of thinking, the three terms, which define the area or discipline of the study, namely 'architecture', 'urban design' and 'urban planning', are treated as a single continuum. I do not emphasise the institutional and practical difference that developed between architecture and planning in the

United States and the United Kingdom in the latter part of the twentieth century, because with regards to the notion of 'space' those disciplines share a very similar understanding. While an architect may be concerned with the 3D composition of an architectural object and a planner with a different complex including societal processes, urban economies, party politics and users' preferences, they both imagine space rather similarly as something visualisable and mappable. Leonie Sandercock, for example, claims that 'the articles of faith of these apparently divergent city-building professions [planning and architecture] … bear remarkable similarities' (Sandercock 1998: 23). Furthermore, in the countries of continental Europe and Scandinavia the division is less clear also on the level of praxis: architecture and planning are commonly taught in the same faculties and an architect may design both buildings and cities. In Finland, urban planning has throughout the post-war decades been practiced as physical planning and design (cf. Taylor 1998: 5). Even though there are some developments towards the Anglo-American differentiation, in Finnish 'urban design' and 'urban planning' are both covered by a single word, '*kaupunkisuunnittelu*'. The word '*rakennustaide*' (like the German '*Baukunst*') may refer to aesthetically merited buildings and urban plans alike.

Outline of the Theoretical Construction (Parts 1–3)

Each part is divided into two chapters, the first concerning the theory of space in general and the second public urban space in particular. In Part 1, I discuss the currently dominant visual paradigm in understanding the city, as well as its critiques in social sciences, planning and urban design. Maps and statistics are the main tools, facilitating the mastering of the space-related knowledge. The ordered visual representation, which I call Concept City, is often taken as real, leading to the belief that cities and their public urban spaces can be designed with no deeper problem. Because of this structural reason, the lived city and the many, diverging and conflicting urban experiences become excluded from the planning and design processes. Public urban space is understood either as primarily physical or as primarily social phenomenon, but the links between those realms remain obscure.

In Part 2, I start to build my main theoretical argument. I assert that instead of a lump of matter or a mental category, only, space should be understood as socially produced. I discuss the elements of social space, with emphasis on how the relations between qualitatively different aspects can be conceptualised. I then move to theory of place. Meaning and place cannot be separated. As noted above, relational place-theory views place as the moment of signification. This notion I call 'weak place'. Place becomes personal, temporary and changing. The singular place-experience is triggered by a material condition, but it entails feelings, memories and knowledge. Place is open and porous, and it offers itself as a possible centre or nexus of the physical, social and mental aspects of social space.

In Part 3, I bridge the seeming gap between the individuality and singularity of place-experience and the public, shared aspect of social space. Social space

and its production are best understood as a dialectical process, a spatio-temporal dialectic. Social space consists of points of dialectical centrality. Public space emerges in the conflicts between different lived place-experiences, collisions of weak places, which may constitute a temporary community. A public urban space is understood to be a specific, time-bound assembly of qualitatively different elements, a suspended conflict. Physical and architectonic space, too, may take prominent roles as the 'other' in the dynamics of spatial dialectics.

Taken together, the Parts 1–3 form a succession of ideas, from 'paper' to 'stone' and to 'scissors'; or from representation of space to the singular moments of lived space and then to the diagram of the synchronic dialectic, which is the 'dynamist' of the elements of theory. This tensioned diagram provides an alternative – transdiscursive, case-specific and time-bound – way to conceptualise the links between physical, mental and social aspects of space.

Outline of the Empirical Work (Parts 4 and 5)

In Part 4, I report my findings about post-1989 urban events in Helsinki. The key observation is that in the Helsinki inner city, urban events tend to be located centrally but anyhow to spaces, which have a specific symbolic or visual fringe character. This observation about the sources of 'event potential' is confirmed with space syntax modelling of Helsinki. Senate Square is the main event venue, but the old railway warehouses were even more emblematic in this respect before their demolition to make way for the Music Hall scheme. My main interests are, how events can be the 'other', the third element in spatial dialectics, how they can untap urban symbolisms and are able to change them, hi-jacking established meanings attached to spaces. In Chapter 8, I follow the appropriation and diversion of the old railway warehouses, usually called Makasiinit. Between 1998–2002, Makasiinit triggered an influential planning conflict, which opened a new kind of political arena. In the light of spatial dialectics, Makasiinit can be seen as a point of centrality, a carrier of a community and an emerging public urban space.

If Part 4 is a 'game', where paper, stone and scissors perform their tricks in the production of public urban space in events, Part 5 can be seen as the 'limits of the game' in the professional field. In it, I elaborate on new design and planning practices in the light of the developed theory of space. I present a set of 'theses' for the experiential approach and reflect upon projects. I wish to establish a clear analogy between theory and practice. If space is multiple, coming-together, tensioned and event-like, neither thinking nor acting can grasp it in its totality, but the relationship remains 'weak'. Theory can provide new ways to dissect the world, which make new insights possible. Likewise, design can make oblique cuts to the urban potential, actualising something of its possibilities. Space can be understood and acted on dialectically. The primary point of experiential urban design is not to advance better representations of space, a discourse 'on' space. Rather, it is to suggest that planning and design might freshly 'partake' in dialectical discourses 'of' space.

PART 1
Concept City

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Chapter 1
Space Distanced and Objectified

Landing Area for UFOs

Vallila, Helsinki. Next to our then home, the huge classisist Hauhontie building, there used to be a small park. Rather the park was a neglected strip of bushes, and the only thing about it worth mentioning was that down and outs liked to hang around there. One spring, the City's Park Department decided to renew the park. The rationale was to beautify the neighbourhood and also to drive out the alcoholics – which was not openly said. Soon the work started. The land was levelled, new earth was brought in, paths were lined and gravelled, most old trees were felled and some new ones were planted. A few slices of granite were installed here and there, with a French public toilet on the most visible corner next to the tram stop. The trimmed strip was given a new name Hauhonpuisto (Hauho Park), and a wooden block in which the name was carved was erected. The public space was supposed to be ready!

Right under our window happened to be the climax of the clumsy compilation. In the middle of an obscure grass area, in between the French toilet, a turning rail for the trams, and a blue, heavily tagged air quality control box, the city's workers laid a stone circle about ten metres in diameter. It was surrounded by a handful of vandalism-proof benches, a few over-sized trash bins, and a bed of pink roses. Only in the autumn, when evenings got dark, I realised its clou*: on the perimeter of the circle there were four low expensive-looking light poles. Their light was very sharp, making the granite circle and the benches unapproachable. The place was like a questioning room in a police station, and, indeed, even the down and outs could no longer use the benches in the evenings. The hideous creation bothered me so much that I thought to buy spray paint to paint the glass domes of the lamps matt grey.*

Gradually I calmed down, I got 'used' to it. My wife and I tried to find the humour in it, and because the only function we could imagine for the place was cosmic and unintelligible, we started to call it the landing area for UFOs.

Helsinki 1997

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This small incident in a not-that-important neighbourhood in Helsinki serves to open my treatise in relational theory of public urban space. Firstly, I am interested in architects' space-conception and its effects when designs are realised. In Hauhontie, the park design itself clearly was a 'UFO'. The design had been done

blindly with respect to the site, its history, as well as the present social life and the cultural prospects of the neighbourhood. Despite good intentions to beautify, the new Hauho Park did not represent a successful production of public urban space. The result was far from the oft-stated ideals of public urban space as, for example, a nice oasis or a social meeting point for a mixed audience. It was a missed opportunity socially, experientially and aesthetically.

Another reading of the incident is political-economical or 'structural'. While the designers most likely would not acknowledge it, the new park was meant to clean up the neighbourhood and to push unwanted people elsewhere. Both the city and at least some of the local residents supported that, because the cleaning is believed to increase property values and lessen crime and the fear of it. The project was a small piece in a large pattern of post-industrial urban change, which entails socio-economic shifts in many neighbourhoods. Vallila, the quintessential working-class area, is slowly becoming – if not hip and trendy – at least a somewhat culturally valued middle-class inner-city area. In this context, the 'spatial interdictions' (Flusty 1994) of the park design can be seen as far echoes from the 'City of Quartz' (Davis 1990).

The example of Hauho Park is not an anecdotal exception, but rather a rule. Specimens of new public space design, which arouse feelings of falseness, blandness, and displacement, are common across the developed West. There seems to be a pattern of the expert planning and design being unable to recognise, never mind accept, experiential qualities, users' practices and subtle symbolic characteristics of the urban environment they are operating in. Likewise, key structural forces remain unaccounted and 'unseen'. As a result, amazing, rich situations and surprising potentials are neglected, and the production of public urban space becomes a dry exercise of implanting stylistic reifications, pieces of generic modernism or pseudo-historicism.

Fire and Water, or the Mutually Repelling Elements of Architects' Space-conception

The myopic space-conception of practising architects, urban designers and planners is an important factor, underpinning this state of affairs. In those practices, space is first and foremost thought to be material. This naïve realistic idea entails that space 'is'; it is out there, naturally, all the time. Secondly, space is seen through the grid of Euclidean coordinates as an endless, three-dimensional continuum. This intellectual device makes space seem translucent and intelligible. Bernard Tschumi condenses this combination of two ideas, saying that architects tend to view space as a 'three-dimensional lump of matter' (Tschumi 1996: 30). Architecture and urban design are then conceived of as modulating the postulated formless Ur-Matter, making it visible through differences (inside-outside, light-shadow),

cultivating and dignifying it.[1] The visible space of architectural incarnations is represented in maps, aerial photographs, perspective drawings, axonometries and façade projections – and more often than not those geometric representations are taken for real.

Despite its seducing simplicity and ostensible clarity, this space-conception is inherently confused. The geometric, three-dimensional space is *absolute*. Therefore it does not depend on particular manifestations. Material space, on the other hand, is *particular*. Material space is always *a* space, a specific, unique space. This contradiction could be circumscribed by understanding 'materiality' as a category, as a mental thing.[2] An architectural object or urban design would then consist of material substance and non-material form. In the mainstream thinking this is not the case, though, as the quotation from Ching below will show. Confusion also resides in the idea of visibility. The metaphorical visibility, the idea that space is intelligible and whatever there is in space can be known, assumes that space is translucent. But visibility in the real world can only be attained through the opaqueness of materials. Taken together, the elements of this common space-conception are like fire and water. The ideas of absolute and particular space repel each other, as do the ideas of translucent and opaque space.

Below I will elaborate on the problems of the visibility of urban space, as well as Lefebvre's notion of 'double illusion' of translucency and opacity. Now it suffices to say that in *urban situations* such an understanding of space is glaringly inadequate and impossible to sustain.

During the twentieth century, the theory of space has, fortunately, developed a great deal from the perspectival Enlightenment origins, such as the Euclidean continuum and the one-eyed abstract perceiver of objects in this continuum. The notion of space has received various interpretations, which reflect epistemology, ideologies and the conception of the world of their time (Norberg-Schulz 1971, van de Ven 1978, Stenros 1992, Madanipour 1996, Varto 2000). While there are distinct differences in the space-conception in architecture, planning and other sciences of space, a clear resonance between the theoretical developments can be traced, leading from absolute to relational space-conception.

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1 It is striking how much this idea resembles the description of Genesis in the Bible.

2 Philosophy is clear on that distinction. The definition of 'space' in the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* starts: 'The classical questions include: is space real, or is it some kind of mental construct, or artefact of our ways of perceiving and thinking? Is it 'substantival' or purely 'relational?' (*Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1994). Psychology seems bet for the mental construct: 'Fundamentally, space is an abstraction, a geometric characterisation of a system of location of m objects in n dimensions' (*Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985).