Towards Experiential Urbanism

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Abstract
Architecture and urban design are usually seen as tools of dominant spatial practices. They are either believed to mask the interests of power and money, or to represent aesthetic concerns that have little to offer for critical theory of space. I counter this view by showing that through rethinking the conception of space in architecture and urban design, as well as the notion of design itself, it is possible to outline a critical and emancipatory design practice, experiential urbanism. I apply Henri Lefebvre's spatial thinking in the scale of urban design, bridging his broad societal and historical concerns and architects' interest in experiential space. Through the exemplary case of Makasiinit in Helsinki, Finland, I show how material urban artifacts can play a role in the dialectic of space and how people and their relations produce urban atmospheres. Experiential urbanism is conceptualized as a professional practice that supports emerging public spaces.

Keywords
architecture, atmosphere, Henri Lefebvre, *oeuvre*, public space, spatial configuration, urban artifact, urban design

Introduction: Rethinking the Erosion of Public Urban Space

In the contemporary metropolitan regions, traditional forms of public urban space are often seen to be in decline. Recently, however, the established critical notions of the 'militarization', 'end' or 'domestication' of public urban space (Davis, 1990; Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1995), the proliferation of 'non-places' (Augé, 1995) and the 'erosion of spatial justice' (Flusty, 1994; Flusty and Dear, 1999; Dear, 2000) have been re-read, enriched and questioned from a variety of starting points. Both activists and urban scholars have acknowledged that the generalizing notions of decline and loss do not do justice to the nuanced, multi-faceted and rapidly changing terrain of contemporary urbanism. While the dominant political and economic structures and the workings of the profit-seeking real-estate sector may not favour the production of traditional urban values, but rather lead to regional de-concentration of people and programmes (Gottdiener, 1994 [1985]) and increasingly uneven development across scales (Castells, 1989, 1996; Graham and Marvin, 2001), we simultaneously can observe new forms of inviting, meaningful and politically significant public urban

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space. Events, temporary appropriations, conceptual hijackings, systematic resistance or simply the messy ordinariness of urban life may provide for public urban space. Crawford (1999: 8–9) discusses this emergent urbanity in terms of 'everyday urbanism', referring to urbanism as an inherently contested field. Resisting the simple dualism of inclusion and exclusion, Staeheli and Mitchell (2008: 146) locate the productive contestation in 'regimes of publicity' which are rooted in property rights, but not reducible to them. Hou (2010: 7–11) uses the term 'insurgent public space' for the momentary ruptures in instrumental urban processes and the struggles that make difference possible, while my own analysis has led to the insight that public urban space is best understood as a suspended conflict, constantly unfolding in time (Lehtovuori, 2010; Rajanti, 1999; Mitchell, 2003; Groth and Corijn, 2005).

The last decade has witnessed a rich and constructive discussion about public space and public sphere. Gradually, critical urban studies have got rid of simple dualisms, finding nuanced concepts and efficient tools of analysis. In the mainstream urban planning, design and architecture, a methodological renewal has never really advanced. The key concepts are inherited either from 1920s modernism or the 1960s rational systems view of urban process – if not from some even more archaic phase of design-thought. Because of this, it is not so surprising that recently these disciplines have recognized the importance of, for example, informal and marginal uses, events, emergence, or the promise of 'planning the unplanned' (cf. Urban Catalyst, 2007: 286). These phenomena have been outside the conceptualization of space, and thus invisible. It is important to understand that in order to operate, the field of planning, design and architecture must conceptualize urban space in a manner appropriate to its goals. Urban reality is not transparent to the architects and independent of design, but rather a specific artificial reality, produced in professional practices (Dear and Häkli, 1998: 63; Lehtovuori, 2010: 20–6). This resilient and conservative professional reality can fruitfully be compared to the Kuhnian notion of paradigm in science, even though not identified with it (Taylor, 1998). Thus, it will be dictating the urban agenda (cf. relevant questions of a paradigm), the tools of analysis and design (exemplary cases) and the criteria of success (ethics), as long the results are not glaringly inadequate.[1]

Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]: 361) uses the term 'true space' about such a substitute of the lived reality. In elementary terms, the assumptions behind planners' and architects' substitute space are that space can be represented and space can be seen. These elements mutually support each other, much like the two epistemological 'illusions' Lefebvre discusses: the 'illusion of transparency' and the 'illusion of opacity' (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 27). The belief that space can be *designed* without any fundamental problem is a derivative of these two illusions. Lefebvre writes that the illusion of transparency makes space appear 'as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein. What happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought, which becomes incarnate by means of a *design*' (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 27). The illusion of opacity concerns 'natural simplicity'. It is a likewise misleading idea, entailing that things have more of an existence than the thoughts and desires of a subject (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 29). The union of these two ideas describes quite well the mind-set of mainstream planners, urban designers and architects, becoming visible in strategic plans, regeneration programmes, urban lay-outs, park and square designs, street furniture, lighting schemes, and so forth.

The Problem of the Conception of Space in Design Disciplines

After Lefebvre, it is fairly easy to see that the 'true space' of urban design and architecture is a partial and potentially problematic conceptualization.[2] Regions, cities and 'urban elements', their forms, contents and connections, are projected on maps and statistics (nowadays merged in GIS).

Urban space is thought to be simultaneously intelligible and material, abstract and concrete, general and particular. Because of these forgiving paradoxes, space appears as an object which can be effortlessly manipulated – designed. But this ability is illusory, as the design is done in the very same 'true space', or a detached space of the representations. What really happens as the consequence of 'design' and countless other related processes is another issue: urban reality can never be transparent and intelligible to its designers. Lefebvre has taught to us that alternative agendas may be hard to recognize, but they nevertheless exist. Space is complex and polyvalent, providing the *humus* for surprising phenomena, sometimes also for radical societal change. Everyday urban space can indeed become active, rebellious, 'insurgent'. It should cater for diversity and alterity, allowing for articulation and integration of the Other (Harvey, 2006). In urban centres – both old cities and new regional concentrations – different, contradictory and conflictual actors, practices and agendas may co-exist, forming the contemporary public (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008: 1–2). Conflicts are no exception but rather a constitutive part of 'urbanity' as a positive, qualitative criterion of metropolitan space (Lehtovuori, 2010: 1).

However appealing, this dynamic insight into the quality and meaning of public urban space has proven difficult to apply in architectural and urban design. The 'double illusion' recognized decades ago by Lefebvre still seems to limit and distort professional practice, so that the positive potential of design disciplines in the production of public space is not realized. Thus, it is valid to say that while a critical and emancipatory understanding of urban potentials is very important, in itself it is not enough in finding better ways to create new public urban spaces. The dominant space production practices – planning, urban design and architecture – too often counteract positive social and cultural processes, sometimes leading to unsolvable conflicts and direct loss of socio-cultural and material values. The destruction of the popularly appropriated public space 'Makasiinit' in Helsinki, Finland, will be discussed below as an exemplary case of this dilemma. This contention, however, should not automatically lead to simple dualisms of planners vs. people or haves vs. have-nots.[3] On the contrary: the production of space has multiple agencies, and in many cases design disciplines might take positive and constructive 'third' roles. Doug Kelbaugh's (2007) synthesizing typology of contemporary approaches, consisting of 'new urbanism', 'post-urbanism' and 'everyday urbanism', provides a useful start to see urban planning and design in a richer way. But a real shift towards new, inclusive and enabling professional practice – a practice which I tentatively call *experiential urbanism* – warrants a deeper methodological re-orientation. In what follows, the Makasiinit case will also provide positive building blocks for this work, grounding and illustrating the theory-driven argument.

One of the first tasks is to rethink our conceptualization of space. We need a certain theoretical, even philosophical, work on the object and context of urbanism, before heading to invent new design tools and procedures. We should ask: How can we get rid of the distanced, visually biased and objectual conception of space? How can we include people's experiences, the lived, *vecú*? And how should we address the societal condition of our practices? To specify these questions in the design field, I suggest that, firstly, the problem in architects' and designers' conceptualization of space should be formulated as the difficulty in really understanding how the small everyday events and mundane spatial practices – gestures, voices, trajectories of walking, graffiti, temporary alterations, decay – take part in the production of public urban space. For an architect or designer, trained to see space primarily as a static three-dimensional object to be visually enjoyed, the importance of everyday life in the production of space is not self-evident. 'Use' of space becomes seen superficially as flows and concentrations of people-objects on urban surfaces, or as performing tasks in stable, pre-existing environments. Two-way productive relations between people and space are not part of that view. Secondly, the problem should be formulated as the lack of understanding of the

political economy that works 'behind' or 'above' the concrete, visible and tangible urban reality, forming its 'logic'. Because of this lack, urban design may seem naïve, misplaced or arrogant. But possibly a more serious problem is that this lack may shadow from view the radical and transformative socio-spatial potential of urban interventions (cf. Harvey, 2006), reducing architecture and urban design to 'local' or 'objectual' embellishment without any broader social role.

Lefebvre's work provides a general framework to re-conceptualize space and to grasp the complexity of producing public urban space. Mark Gottdiener, in *The Social Production of Urban Space*, made much effort to operationalize Lefebvre. His approach is to see urban process through the Giddensian lens of social structuration, so that the structures, institutions and agency of planning (and design) are mutually interdependent (cf. Giddens, 1984; Gottdiener, 1994 [1985]). In Gottdiener's analysis, the real-estate sector received important agency, seen as the partly voluntaristic power which can influence the outcome of societal structures as actual built environments and urban systems. From an anthropological perspective, Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* developed the much-used distinction between 'strategies' of the powerful and 'tactics' of the weak (de Certeau, 1984). In the field of urbanism, de Certeau's distinction has valorized the power of individual users of public urban space to carve niches and create meaningful settings – essentially through use and misuse, through walking, appropriating, reclaiming and inventing (de Certeau, 1984, 1993; Lehtovuori and Havik, 2009).

I wish to continue from the established ideas of Gottdiener and de Certeau in two directions that make the transformative input of Lefebvre's theoretical scheme clearer in architecture and design of public urban space, addressing the above discipline-specific questions. Firstly, I suggest that physical urban artifacts can take the role of the 'other' in the spatial dialectic of trinity.[4] This brings distinctively architectural understanding of form, type and spatial configuration into the heart of the theory of social space. Secondly, I develop a link between Lefebvre's notion of *oeuvre* (city as art-like work) and Böhme's (1995, 1998, 2001) concept of atmosphere, which helps to bride the societal and historical concern of Lefebvre and architects' interest in experiential space.

Urban Artifacts in Spatial Dialectic

Lefebvre offers the notions of production and the act of producing as the unifying terms of his spatial thought (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 15–16). Space is a very peculiar product. It is simultaneously the end-result of production and the context of production, setting its conditions. This double aspect is grasped by Marx's (and Hegel's) concept of concrete abstraction. The *logical form* – in distinction to 'substance' or 'reality' – of social space is 'encounter, assembly, simultaneity' (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 101). This idea opens up a way to understand Lefebvre's project of 'spatializing the dialectic'. He continues: 'But what assembles, or what is assembled? The answer is: everything that there is *in space*, everything that is produced either by nature or by society, either through their co-operation or through their conflicts. Everything: living beings, things, objects, works, signs, and symbols' (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 101).

The multiple nature of space is not (just) a description, but a precise theoretical argument, which informs Lefebvre's research strategy. If space is logically and formally a multiplicity,[5] there can be no way to conceptualize or represent it directly, or on one plane of analysis.[6] Lefebvre constantly works against any simplistic reading of urban situations. There is always deep-seated *otherness* in space. Space is full of 'traps' and 'secret places', making an easy comprehension of it illusory and deceptive (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 28–9). The only possible way to conceive is dialectical, a movement or change (cf. Gottdiener, 1994 [1985]: 128). Lefebvre's genial idea, then, is to propose a

synchronic dialectic, a dialectic of the present. He spatializes Marx's (and Hegel's) dialectic, which is usually conceived of as a temporal movement from one stage to the next (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 65–7). In Lefebvre's mature thinking, the dialectic consists of a continual movement between three terms, for example those of conceived, perceived and lived space (Elden, 2004: 36). That is the discourse 'of' space, instead of scientific-representing discourse 'on' space.

The idea of spatial dialectics is both seducing and challenging. According to Gottdiener, Lefebvre left his new theory on social space 'metaphorical' and did not fully develop the idea of taking account of space in Marxian concepts (Gottdiener, 1994 [1985]: 132).[7] Later Shields (1999: 150–2) found Lefebvre's use of non-teleological, non-linear dialectic confusing, but Elden (2004: 37) countered this by claiming that *dialectique de triplicité* is 'neither a replacement of dialectical reasoning with "trialectics" [Soja] or the introduction of space into the dialectic [Shields]'. For Elden, the elements of the dialectic are in fluid, rhythmic relation to each other. The 'third' term is not the result of the dialectic, but synthesis is able to react upon the first two terms (Elden, 2004: 37).

Often, the representational space (*vécu*) – emotions, experiences, deep symbolisms, art – is thought to be the mobilizing 'other' in the spatial dialectic. Shields (1999: 120), for example, suggests that both perceived and conceived may be overturned by a transcendent, deeply other moment. I have elsewhere developed the notion of 'weak place', which likewise refers to singular and existential experiences that have the power to destabilize practices or dominant representations (Lehtovuori, 2000, 2010).

Here my interest is slightly different, however. I wish to ask, what role material artifacts, physical space and spatial configurations could have in the spatial dialectic. Lefebvre does not discuss that in any detail, but offers some directions. Firstly, if things and objects may assemble, as he evokes, it seems that they are granted a role. Social production of space is not only based on social relations, structures, representations, and so forth, but *has important materialities*. Secondly, for Lefebvre space is not a master term. It is not something over-arching or something that could be called 'frame' or 'point of reference' for lesser notions and applications. On the contrary, *space is always specific, unique and in the making*. Starting from these two ideas, I also wish to test spatial dialectics as a research strategy in the 'micro' scale, such as the recreation of urban squares and parks, or the creation of new, sometimes temporary, public urban spaces.
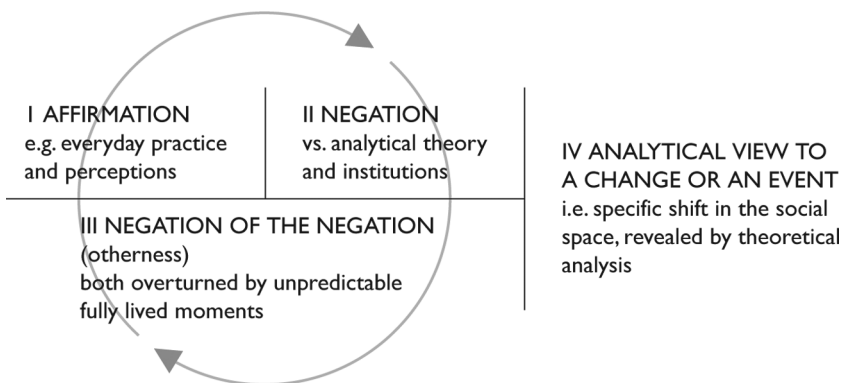

Figure 1. The production of space

When we try to understand the production of public urban space in a dialectical way, firstly, the idea of simultaneity becomes very important. The notions of individual experience, moment, tension, conflict and experiment open the possibility of an analytical understanding of the provisional production of space, as well as the possibility to speculate its future. Different elements come together in a moment of production. Space is conceptualized as the possibility of simultaneous existence of differences, but those differences are not necessarily on the same plane of analysis. As Massey (2005: 9) formulates, space is a 'coexisting heterogeneity'.

Secondly, in the dialectical conception, public urban space does not consist of places that a function or content can 'occupy', but of points that are characterized by centrality and accumulation. These points are not simple locations, but *centres of the spatial dialects*. They are the 'gathering-together' of 'everything that can be named and enumerated' in space (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 331). The coming together, furthermore, entails a latent contradiction or actual conflict.

Thirdly, dialectical conception cannot be only descriptive. Rather, it concerns connections between analytical categories, about space in the making. Schmid (2005: 110) interestingly suggests that for Lefebvre the core of the dialectical problem of form and content is in an effort to understand action (Schmid, 2005: 98). Criticizing Hegel's abstract thought, Lefebvre foregrounds social practices through Marx and individual poetic creativity through Nietzsche (Schmid, 2005: 111). A painter, for example, could not develop his skills and awareness without actually painting. Painting is not a pretext or an arbitrary manifestation of an inner, pre-existing talent, but its source.[8] Similarly, space can only be understood in its production. The terms of a spatial dialectic influence each other, co-producing space in a dialectical movement where the experiencing human being is in a central position (Lehtovuori, 2010: 125).

Makasiinit, Helsinki: A Micro Case

The creation of a momentary public urban space in the former State railway warehouses in Helsinki, Finland, provides an illustrative example of the spatial dialectic. The warehouses were located very centrally in Helsinki's Töölönlahti Bay area. Since 1987, when the State railway moved away, the buildings, popularly called 'Makasiinit', got new artistic and cultural uses, at first very small scale and sub-cultural. Gradually, however, Makasiinit became one of Helsinki's most popular event venues. The buildings hosted a versatile array of events and some semi-permanent uses, such as a huge flea market, drawing at its peak 400,000 visitors annually (Lehtovuori, 2010: 182). Their varied programme and the lowbrow character of the historic buildings made them well known and frequented by many kinds of visitors. In 2000, both the City and independent researchers noticed the growing 'Makasiinit phenomenon'. Surveys done during that year showed that people from almost all social and age groups in Helsinki region knew about Makasiinit. An overwhelming majority also felt that Makasiinit was an inviting place (Makasiinityöryhmä, 2001; Manninen and Villanen, 2001). Even though the place changed from marginal to popular during the 1990s, the unique location of the Makasiinit buildings literally on the footsteps of the Finnish Parliament underlined their role as an alternative and free space vs. official and representative.

Simultaneously with the popular appropriation of Makasiinit and their surroundings, the official city planners took a very different view about the area. Built on a nearly century-long sequence of failed architectural competitions, projects and real-estate deals (Nikula, 1990; Haarni, 2000), planners' drafts included cultural buildings, offices, parks and water features, completely overlooking Makasiinit. Essentially, the new public space in the reused old buildings was out of the planners' representation of space. They did not 'see' it. The discrepancy between official and popular views finally led to Helsinki's biggest planning conflict in decades. In autumn 2000, about 8,000 people

Figure 2. The railway warehouses in their original use in 1928
Photo credit: Helsinki City Museum.

surrounded Makasiinit as 'Human Wall', a festive, symbolic event to protect the buildings (Lehtovuori, 2010: 198–201). At that time, the conflict opened a momentary *political space*. Firstly, it helped to form a new public (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008: 122) both in the sense of finding like-minded citizens and in the sense of public visibility, media presence, weight of argument and legitimacy. Secondly, it provided for that public the context and content – in other words space – to perform in the public sphere, to develop the initial preservation argument, to make a difference, and finally to be heard by the decision-makers. Makasiinit thus became a platform for wider discussion about Helsinki's urban agenda, good city life and an alternative programming of city centre spaces, gathering new groups as part of the public or *project* (cf. Castells, 1996).

Despite media frenzy and the relative success of the alternative programming cause, in 2002 the City Council confirmed the official plan without any major revisions,[9] and in 2006 – after still another symbolic act of resistance in the form of a spectacular fire in the empty building shell – the Makasiinit buildings were demolished. It goes beyond the scope of this article to analyse the reasons of the ultimate failure of the popular 'Pro Makasiinit' movement. Here it suffices to say that when the conflict was moved from the openly public and situated space of Makasiinit to the institutional sphere of representative democracy and decision-making, the power balance markedly changed.[10] More important here is to acknowledge that in the process of appropriation and contesting, the key element was the physical artifact of the old warehouses: the space. Firstly, the rough aesthetics, scars of time, smell of wood and tar and the historic allusions of hand-made bricks, steel trusses and other paraphernalia all contributed to a special *atmosphere* that attracted users and underlined the value of a different place in the increasingly sanitized city centre. Secondly, the size of the buildings and the rail-yard, their form reminiscent of a town square, their direction *vis-à-vis* views and flows, and the fluid, sieve-like spatial organization, originally made to facilitate quick movement of goods through the warehouses, are all specific *configurational qualities* that explain why the buildings were so well-suited for various events and other temporary uses. The

atmospheric and configurational analyses help to understand how, precisely, the material artifact of Makasiinit was valuable as a 'living' and connected socio-spatial (socio-material) reality.

Makasiinit in the News 2000–2006

Let me illustrate these initial points through analyzing the news coverage of the Töölönlahti Bay area planning in 2000–6. The data consist of 132 news articles published by the main national newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. The articles were collected through a digital archive search in 2007.[11] The data are not completely inclusive, because the search engine may have missed some texts or the archive may have omissions. After double-checking with the printed newspaper editions, a handful of articles were added. Thus, the data represent the range of topics and the relative weight of different perspectives. The several hundreds letters to the editor, published by *Helsingin Sanomat* alone, are not included in this analysis.

Of the 132 articles, 16 discuss city and traffic planning in general with a mention of Töölönlahti Bay area, 35 the planning and real-estate process of the Töölönlahti Bay area, 30 Makasiinit, 26 the Music Hall project, and 25 other topics of the Töölönlahti Bay area. These numbers indicate the importance of the Makasiinit-Music Hall debate as the key issue of the whole Töölönlahti Bay area planning. Even though the planning project involves several other complex and important topics, such as a city centre traffic tunnel, the role of an old real-estate deal between city and state, the new Land-use and Planning Act (2000), the future of Kaisaniemi park, hopes for a new city centre library and ongoing art and cultural projects, as much as 40 percent of all news coverage is about the Makasiinit conflict and the Music Hall.

Focussing on the news articles on Makasiinit (N = 30), the following main themes emerge:

1. Indeterminacy and openness, combined with urban centrality: In 2000, Makasiinit was the central venue of Artgenda, a Baltic art biennial. Producer Isse Karsten stated: 'One of the themes of Artgenda is space and its use. Makasiinit is a difficult space, because there is nothing ready. On the other hand, exactly this gives [the organizer] free hands. It is good also because the audience can reach it easily' (4 May 2000). Later in autumn, *Helsingin Sanomat* reports the opinions of different political parties. The Greens, wishing to save Makasiinit, see an opportunity to join the two wings and create 'the beating heart of the city', while Christian Democrats and Social Democrats view the question from the point of view of a unified, modern townscape and representativeness of the space next to the Parliament building. Interestingly, the area planner plays its centrality down, stating that 'Töölönlahti Bay area is not part of the city centre, but rather just a park, or a route to the city centre' (7 November 2000).

2. Open public space, positive urban atmosphere: The difficulty in finding open and free-of-charge spaces in the city centre, especially for the youth, was one theme. In an interview, one citizen expresses this, saying 'we should keep Makasiinit. It is a free place for Helsinki citizens' (16 September 2000). In 2005, the re-use of a Makasiinit fragment, to be preserved according to the official plan, was studied by the City. The building department's architect sees high value in the building and place, stating that 'this is a sweet spot. From here you can see all the important buildings of Finland (9 April 2005). After the May 2006 fire, Flow, an urban music festival that started in Makasiinit, had to find a new site. Suvi Virtanen, producer of Flow06, refers to the atmosphere of Makasiinit as a qualifier of the new venue: 'This space feels ok; [after the loss of Makasiinit] we still wanted urban milieu characterized by red brick' (19 August 2006).

3. Political significance: In 2000, several open discussion and debates were organized in Makasiinit. The ongoing conflict about its future seemingly helped to shape more general political ideas. Linking Makasiinit to other recent planning questions, *Helsingin Sanomat* sums the debates, asking 'how long the City can make decisions indifferent of strong expressions of public opinion' (22 May 2000). Before the Human Wall demonstration in August 2000, journalists had made a non-scientific enquiry about citizens' attitudes towards Makasiinit. At that time, over 50 percent of interviewees wanted to keep the buildings, while about 30 percent would have let them be demolished. The view of the City Council was the opposite: 30 for, 50 against (16 September 2000). Six years later, the Makasiinit fire was 'the most photographed event of Finland'. In the evening hours of 5 May 2006, the multimedia message traffic in the national mobile network was double the normal level, as people were sending mobile phone snapshots of the surprising and touching event (7 May 2006). During the demolition, the City of Helsinki was cleaning the bricks for re-use and as memorabilia. In 2006, *Helsingin Sanomat* reported that those bricks that are not needed will be sold. However, 'those who want a souvenir in their book shelf have to unite, as the bricks will be sold in bigger quantities' (5 June 2006). (Later the City had to buy back the small amount of bricks sold to private people as they were found to contain toxic creosote.) Makasiinit was also remembered by a collectors' stamp designed by popular artist Kimmo Pälikkö (3 June 2006).

4. Material spatiality, historical layers: In a number of the studied texts, Makasiinit are seen to belong to the traditional townscape, historical layers of which are mentioned as an important source of value. 'From citizens' point of view, the most interesting question of the detail plan proposal is the Music Hall site and how big a part of the Makasiinit will remain' (7 November 2000). In a discussion in 2002, planners, activists and politicians touched on the value of the historical layer of industry and traffic, represented by Makasiinit, from a material point of view. The question – unanswered in the discussion – was, 'how small a material reminder can be to still exist' (9 January 2002).

5. Decay: The bad condition of the Makasiinit buildings and dirtiness of their surroundings was a constant theme of the public discussion. Right-wing politicians, especially, maintained that the area around the Parliament building is a representative space of power. Phrases such as 'the view from the stairs of the Finnish Parliament' or 'the living room of the nation' (16 September 2000) were often used. (On the contrary, people and parties arguing for keeping and renovating Makasiinit spoke about the 'symbolic value of citizens' power'.) During the winter of 2005–6, the problems of bad maintenance and neglect escalated: 'There is an apocalyptic feeling in Makasiinit in Töölönlahti Bay. A burnt car is left in the courtyard…. Trash and litter floats everywhere. The space between the buildings looks like a village street in a Western movie' (21 March 2006).

6. Other themes: Other relatively often mentioned themes were the quality and judicial status of the planning process, the city's real-estate policy and the 1980s real-estate deal between the City and the State, that laid the ground for the current development. Also, visual axis and views across the Töölönlahti Bay and its general spatial openness are mentioned now and then: in an interview, one Helsinki citizen stated that 'we have to preserve openness. And please mention that I am born in Helsinki' (16 September 2000).

The news coverage clearly echoes the arguments built by the opposing sides of the conflict. Makasiinit is put in different and ostensibly irreconcilable frames both in space and time. Some see it as an ugly nuisance in the representative space of power, some as a positive and enriching urban

space mixing marginality and centrality. Some see it as an obstacle for development, impossible to fit to a vision of a clean and modern city centre, while some accept it as a natural and organic part of the historical city. Interestingly, the notion of townscape is adopted by both parties; the time-frames just lend the notion an opposing meaning *vis-à-vis* Makasiinit. The political significance of the conflict, outliving the actual Makasiinit buildings, is also obvious from the news coverage.

Makasiinit in Spatial Dialectic

We can thus say that during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Makasiinit radically dynamized the planning and redevelopment of Helsinki's city centre. The non-official and counter-cultural uses, combined with an inviting and relaxed atmosphere, showed that a self-organized, warm and inviting public urban space is also possible in Helsinki, a city considered rather cold and over-organized. Makasiinit made a difference, as the citizens experienced a different, enabling urban opportunity, forming a new urban public. Finally, the conflict gathered other interests and groups, mobilizing a substantial part of the city's population to discuss good urban life and defend their 'right to the city'. This is the positive legacy of Makasiinit, visible in many later urban cultural initiatives and projects in Helsinki. After the bitter fight over Makasiinit, an events and place-based approach in urban development became formally and politically accepted, moving from a marginal position to the centre stage of urban development and policy (Lehtovuori and Havik, 2009).

A crucial contention is that *without just that material artifact*, the whole process of appropriation and conflict would have been different, or might not have happened at all. Therefore, I argue that the artifact did, indeed, play an independent and active role in the spatial dialectic. I mention three exemplary mutations or shifts:

1. The appropriation as a common peoples' place was part of a mainstream spatial practice, that of commercialization of space. However, the atmospheric and configurational qualities of Makasiinit made a straightforward commercial use difficult. The space remained indeterminate and open (Groth and Corijn, 2005). In 2003–4, the globally operating show and music producer Leningrad Cowboys failed to turn Makasiinit into a standard commercial event space, due to various problems, such as the large scale of the buildings and details of their construction technology. This I take as a further proof of the 'power of space' of the material shell (Lehtovuori, 2010: 202).

2. This 'resistance' or 'stubbornness' of the urban artifact, which at first sight seems purely 'tactical', actually led to 'strategic' results: Makasiinit was gradually appreciated by some politicians and even urban planners as an *interestingly alternative* space. After the 'Human Wall' demonstration, around 2001, they were finally 'seen' by the official system. They were seen, specifically, as having the potential to become an important non-institutional and alternative cultural space, a programme which gradually was understood to be an indispensable element of a contemporary metropolitan strategy. This possible horizon made it difficult to claim that the conflict concerns marginal interests, only, and was used with some success in the subsequent political debate.

3. For the planners' dominant representation of space, stressing a virtual history of past, failed plans and imagined visual qualities of future vistas and water features, the present and real material artifact of Makasiinit was a 'trap' into which they almost fell. In its ostensible muteness and neglibility, the artifact became a lighting-rod for unforeseen energies, values and cultures that changed the landscape of urban planning in Helsinki.
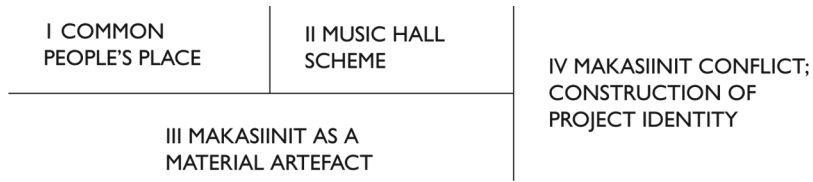
I COMMON PEOPLE'S PLACE	II MUSIC HALL SCHEME
III MAKASIINIT AS A MATERIAL ARTEFACT	

IV MAKASIINIT CONFLICT; CONSTRUCTION OF PROJECT IDENTITY

Figure 3. The material artefact was dynamized in the Makasiinit conflict, creating a momentary public and political space

Taken together, Makasiinit overturned both the everyday spatial practice, making it 'strategic', and the planners' representation of space, fundamentally questioning its sense and legitimacy. Figure 3 shows the relations of this dialectic. The material artifact was the lever, the unexpected otherness, that changed the process, gathered new actors and produced a momentary public space. The dialectic of trinity provides an analytical view to the possibility of a new future, a new, different space (Lehtovuori, 2010: 179; cf. Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 371–3). In the end, the opportunity was not taken at the Makasiinit site, but had several important 'spin-offs' elsewhere in the city, in its planning and politics.

Atmospheric Spaces – *Oeuvre*

Let me now briefly turn to the notion of atmosphere and its significance. The smell of tar, emanating from old railway sleepers in sun, the soft soundscape of old brick walls and wooden platforms, and many other elements synaesthetically produced the atmosphere of Makasiinit. One could literally 'step into' their lingering atmosphere. In the middle of the rapid city centre development of the 1990s, this quiet, subtle and at the same time inspiring, activating and free atmosphere was a welcome alternative. Makasiinit became an oasis of difference, and every new strictly programmed commercial development raised its value.

In design, atmosphere is a rather over-used and common concept. Architects, designers and scenographers are usually trained to deal with atmospheres, or spatial moods. To some extent, we know how to create, for example, a festive, joyful, or solemn atmosphere in a building, room or stage. While we can design saunas, corporate meeting rooms, community centres and scientific libraries with some control of their atmosphere, in the dynamic urban context the control is lost. The notion of atmosphere is then used either to describe a momentary impression – which may be recorded as a tourist photo – or to refer to a poetic interpretation and cultural product – evoking Dickens's London, Faulkner's Chicago or Saramago's Lisbon. At the same time, we all know that urban spaces, sometimes even whole cities, do have atmospheres, which to some extent influence material and economic practices, such as housing choice and tourism. The question is, how to operationalize atmosphere in planning, urban design and architecture.

The German philosopher Gernot Böhme has developed atmosphere as a concept in aesthetics. For him, atmospheres do not exist outside (individual) perception but nevertheless they are not subjective. Atmospheres are '[s]omething *between* subject and object. They are not something relational, but the relation itself' (Böhme, 2001: 54). Atmosphere extends both from subjects and objects, becoming the common field of perception. As a phenomenological concept, atmosphere can be said to be the way objects let us perceive them.

Furthermore, atmospheres are spatial and, to an extent, material. Böhme's notion is partly based on Hermann Schmitz's idea (1969: 343) that atmospheres are always spatial, but cannot be

Figure 4. Intencities project in Makasiinit, Helsinki, 2000
In urban situations, people are central in producing a certain atmosphere.
Photo credit: Laura Mänki.

pinned down to positionable places (Isohanni, 2006: 62). Twilight is a good example: it creeps in every nook and recess, like fog, but it also has the character of a medium, in which one is, which tones everything and mediates the relationship with things around (Böhme, 1998: 19). One perceives 'through' atmosphere, but it also has some objectual materiality as a 'half-thing' (*Halbding*, Böhme, 2001: 61–3).

In a passing note when discussing urban places, Böhme (1998: 53–5) proposes that the atmosphere of a city concerns the style and manner of its unfolding urban life.[12] While referring to a 'city' may be imprecise, the interesting point is that urban atmosphere is not primarily a question of built forms, colours or light, for example, but of citizens' activities and presence. Urban atmospheres are not predominantly aesthetic or visual questions, but social. They are made by people, and they *have to be lived*. This dynamic and social reading of the concept of atmosphere is important regarding my effort to conceptualize public spaces so that architects and urban designers can properly grasp how everyday events, gestures and other details of practice take part in their production. It foregrounds a two-way relation between people and their environment, where both the social and the material aspect are equally constitutive. People bring with them the social questions: Class, gender, professions, culturally coded practices and social networks, as well as urban economy and policies, enter the analysis. Understood like this, urban atmospheres entail many structural factors of the production of space, or the 'vertical analysis' suggested by Gottdiener (1994 [1985]).

To draw an interim conclusion, I would argue that with the notion of material, urban artifacts partaking in the spatial dialectic and the broadly and socially defined understanding of urban atmospheres, planners, designers and architects are better equipped to deal with the constituents of public urban space. With these tools, the 'design' is fundamentally redefined, becoming understood as processual, subtle, open, social and radical. I would further suggest that in this way, design can contribute to the creation of 'urbanity', instead of being servant of the real-estate process only. With these tools, design starts to look very different, new and fresh. Rooted

in experience and social reality, it also can be small and almost invisible, rather 'caring' and 'nurturing' than 'forcing' and 'ordering'.

Form of the Urban

But what is the 'urbanity' experiential urbanism may help to produce? How we should understand 'the Urban'? Lefebvre, in an interview,[13] strikingly said that '… today the city is above all considered according to a historicist model and there are masses of studies on the origins of the evolution of cities. But studies looking into the future are rather few and tentative. This is a serious error…. [U]rban thinking is at its beginning. It is still a thinking attached to the land, to the logic of agricultural production which leaves traces, outlines. One continues to think in forms shaped by this social base: the land and not the city' (Lefebvre, 1996 [1989], 211–2). This critique is still highly relevant and is applicable to urban planning and design. The whole map-based practice of planning indeed is tied to the land, to former 'outlines' of urban form, and disconnected from the complex, changing, non-local and mixed socio-spatial reality that is the Urban. The overtly visual tools of analysis and representation make the situation worse. Planning thus does not have 'the sense of possibility' but looks down to the surface of the Earth, working in 'the rational sense of reality'.[14]

Urbanization has reached new levels since Lefebvre's time, so that the horizon of a completely urbanized world is very imaginable. It does not necessarily lead to 'urban society' in a qualitative sense (Lehtovuori, 2010: 212). For Lefebvre, urban society is a possibility that requires a dialectical change, 'an urban revolution' that overcomes the countryside–city or rural–urban distinction. The notion of a 'multi-centred metropolitan region' (Gottdiener and Budd, 2005), suggesting a globally connected, pulsating and creative urban process on a completely new scale, is one way to theorize the possibilities of 21st-century urbanism. Castells's 'informational city' with its dual emphasis both on the unprecedented scale of urbanization and the sharp intra-regional polarization is another enduring insight (Castells, 1989, 1996: 404). Clearly, we should be able to recognize a historical and spatial sequence from rural to industrial and from industrial to urban 'continent', or realm. In this dialectical view, urban conflicts are not against urbanization or development as such, but against the lack of urban life forms in the city (Schmid, 2005: 153), against homogeneity, boredom and simple power of money.

The conflict about the publicly appropriated urban space in Makasiinit in Helsinki is a good example. The experimental and free uses of Makasiinit can be seen as truly urban phenomena, as momentarily lived realizations of the potential urban life and space. The conflict was much more about broadly political questions of empowering process and the promise of a good urban life, than about narrowly professional questions of built heritage or aesthetics. In urban design and architecture, this moment should be seen as an important sign: professional practices should indeed be re-thought so that they can facilitate explorations in the realm of urban possibilities. Architecture and urban design should think in forms of the urban, on future and surprises, instead of past forms of land, its traces and historical models.

What, then, does it mean for an architect or urban designer to think in the forms of the Urban? In *Right to the City*, Lefebvre discusses a scheme of forms. In his long list, 'urban form' is the most concrete and immediate.[15] Mentally, urban form concerns simultaneity of events, perceptions and elements of a whole in the 'real'. Socially, urban form presents itself as the encounter and the concentration of what exists around us, in the environment. Through concentration of assets and products, acts and activities, as well as wealth, urban society becomes the privileged social site. This privilege is not just that of an easy life or material wealth. Urban form is the 'meeting between the *oeuvre* and the product' (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]: 137–8). The point is that unlike the countryside and unlike the factory, the *urban form allows people to produce their own social conditions*.

This is exactly what was happening in Makasiinit in Helsinki. The same production takes place in countless other urban places, case-by-case in a different, unique way. This quasi-voluntary social production, facilitated by a relatively rich material condition (product), is the 'work', the *oeuvre*, which essentially is the meaning of urban society. In this perspective, the focus of design-thought should be the meeting, articulation or, in Latourian terms, the *association* of qualitatively different 'elements' coming together in the centres of spatial dialectics.

Conclusion: Experiential Urbanism in the Realm of Possibility

As architects and designers, we should ask how to see in a fresh way, how to tell about our novel findings and how to act outside the established institutions. We should recognize the centres of spatial dialectics and facilitate the process, let the production of the Urban happen. Chora, an innovative charity in architectural research and action, has condensed the challenge of the new practice in the words 'new phenomena need new eyes' (Chora, 2001: 74).

Above, I hope I have given hints of what this could mean in practice. Firstly, material – urban and architectural – artifacts can take dynamizing roles in the spatial dialectic of trinity. Sites and buildings can indeed be seen with new eyes, as something more independent and powerful than just pieces of land to be developed, property to be re-vamped or spots to insert a cool design. Material urban artifacts do take part in the two-way dynamic, producing urban space. They cannot be easily abstracted but rather should be acknowledged in their materiality, connectivity and meaningfulness. Secondly, the phenomenological notion of atmosphere is linked to the lived space, to the space of 'users', to urban life in its full complexity. Feeling and sounding of urban atmospheres – something architects are trained to do – does constitute a link to the social production of space. Sensing a place is not just an individual and elitist exercise, but a relevant tool of ethical and emancipatory design. The development of concrete methods of experiential urbanism is in its beginning. The notions of urban catalysts, curation, strategies of temporary use and wikiplanning are early examples of a redefined future practice.

To conclude, if we understand public urban space as an *oeuvre*, it becomes easier to value 'everything there is' – from feelings to chance encounters, from graffiti to carefully designed façade alterations, from temporary uses to large-scale urban projects – as part of the *same* dynamic and meaningful space. Space, place and use are not now seen abstractly as separate 'layers' (e.g. space as background on which use occurs, sometimes creating place), but as an interwoven socio-spatial process. This conceptualization points towards a professional practice which proactively supports new and surprising urban futures. The analysis and design of public urban spaces can, indeed, operate in 'the sense of possibility'. In the context of the crisis of political legitimacy and fiscal problems of public authorities, on the one hand, and increasing demand for high-quality urban space, on the other, we need fresh approaches to support emerging public spaces. The qualifier of potential associations and dialectical centrality is to what extent they can induce positive changes, including the horizon of a radical social and spatial transformation. In times of crisis, this productive and liberating dimension of urbanism is increasingly important, opening new paths towards the differential 'urban continent'.

Notes

1. Planning is of course not an independent and monolithic domain, but often closely linked to economic and other special interests. See for example Brindley et al. (1989) for discussion. The underlying basic concepts or 'issues of faith', however, are quite similar across different styles and scales.

2. I am referring to Ed Soja's, Ali Madanipour's and Stuart Elden's contributions, among others. Michel de Certeau, Zygmunt Bauman and Marc Augé have revalorized public space and its use. Recently Quentin Stevens has synthesized that discussion in *Ludic City* (2007).

3. Dualism seems to be present even in the notion of insurgent public space, which is seen to suggest 'the ability of citizen groups and individuals to play a distinct role in shaping the contemporary urban environment', as opposed to 'the institutionalised notion of urbanism and its association with master planning and policy making' (Hou, 2010: 15). Castell's (1996) 'project identity' is an interesting notion aiming at finding a theoretical alternative to the oppositional political process.

4. I use the original Lefebve's formulation instead of Ed Soja's neologism 'trialectics'. In French *dialectique de triplicité*.

5. Massey (2005: 9) suggests that multiplicity and space are co-constitutive: 'Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space'.

6. See Hillier (2007) for detailed theory on 'multi-planar' analysis and planning theory.

7. Gottdiener (1993) lucidly discusses how Lefebvre might have encountered the idea of spatial dialectic: 'In *Dialectical Materialism* ([1939] 1968) Lefebvre analyzed Marxian political economy at a time when he was breaking with Stalinism and the Communist Party. No doubt he was reacting to dogmatism and orthodoxy (as well as to Stalin's politics), and this reaction was reflected in a critical reading of Marx's *Capital*. Lefebvre noted that the latter work was essentially about time – the extraction and circulation of surplus value. Lefebvre believed that Marxian political economy neglected the material aspect of production: the world of commodities existed in *space* as well as time. In 1939 he announced that the dialectic was spatial as well as temporal, and that this realization put Marx's system in a new light. Lefebvre went literally to the material dimension of dialectics. In his view, the production activity of capitalism resulted in a space – that is, a materiality. Furthermore, this "space" possessed its own dialectical moment. Like the other categories of Marxian thought – money, labour power – it was a *concrete abstraction*. That is, space was both a material product of social relations (the concrete) and a manifestation of relations, a relation itself (the abstract). It was as much a part of social relations as was time. In short, by applying Marxian thought to Marx, Lefebvre arrived at insights that transcended Marxian political economy and pointed away from dogma. He needed the next 30 years to work out the implications of these early revelations'.

8. '*So erprobt und entdeckt sich ein Maler zunächst in seinen ersten Versuchen, worauf er seine Technik verwollkommnet und seine Gestaltungsweise abwandelt. Es wäre widersinnig anzunehmen, dass dieser Maler sein Talent entwickeln und sich bewusst machen kann, ohne tatsächlich u malen; die Malerei ist für ihn kein Vorwand, keine gelegentliche Manifestation eines zuvor und innerlich vorhandenen Talents*'. Lefebvre in *Der Dialektische Materialismus* (1966), quoted in Schmid (2005: 99).

9. A symbolic gesture acknowledging the conflict was included in the plan: the site of Makasiinit was renamed 'Makasiinipuisto' [The Park of Makasiinit], and a small fragment of the buildings was supposed to be preserved. Later events have rendered the gesture empty, and in 2010 the dominant idea is to knock down the fragment to make room for another big new programme, a 20,000m^2 new underground events space by the Finnish developer SRV. The project is subterranean to preserve the imaginary views important for the official city plan and the key reason behind demolishing Makasiinit. The project is not approved by the time of writing the article.

10. For a full account see Lehtovuori (2010) and Haukkala (2003). The author was active in the 'Pro Makasiinit' movement, co-authoring an alternative plan for the area in 2000. See http://www.livady.com/makasiinit/.

11. Thanks to researcher Simo Haanpää at the TKK Centre for Urban and Regional Studies for the archive search.
12. *Die Atmosphäre einer Stadt ist eben die Art und Weise, wie sich das Leben in ihr vollzieht* (Böhme, 1998: 55).
13. *Société Francaise* in 1989.
14. *Möglichkeitssinn* and *Wirklichkeitssinn*, in Häussermann and Siebel (1987). Chora (2001) outlines the method of Urban Curation, which the possibilities, or proto-urban conditions, are a key starting point.
15. Each form in Lefebvre's grid has a mental and social existence. This duality is supposed to help in deciphering the relationship between the real and thought, abstract and immediate. Lefebvre discusses logical form, mathematical form, form of language, form of exchange, contractual form, form of the practico-material object, written form and urban form.

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