

# MAPPING HETEROTOPIA: Elicited Encounters in Tallinn

---

Mari Laanemets

*Man zeigte im alten Griechenland Stellen, an denen es in die Unterwelt hinabging. Auch unser waches Dasein ist ein Land, an dem es an verborgenen Stellen in die Unterwelt hinabgeht, voll unscheinbarer Örter, wo die Träume münden. Am Tag gehen wir nichtsahnend an ihnen vorüber, kaum aber kommt der Schlaf, so tasten wir mit geschwinden Griffen zu ihnen zurück und verlieren uns in dunklen Gängen. Das Häuserlabyrinth gleicht am hellen Tag dem Bewußtsein; die Passagen (die in ihr vergangenes Dasein führen) münden Tagsüber unbemerkt in die Straßen. Nachts unter den dunklen Häusermassen aber springt ihr kompakteres Dunkel erschreckend heraus.*

Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, p. 1046

*The whole earth seems to become a speaking path...*

Helmi Karjahärm, "Blossoms of blood"

## Introduction: urban space as a scene of action<sup>1</sup>

A city has many faces. But it is not just the physiognomy of the city that should be examined; it is sensible to look at a city as a text and a context, better to be read than watched. In this sense a city is a pictograph; in any case, it is more than just a map or a space. A city is simultaneously a space or, expressing its subjectivity, a location, a text as well as an event. A city scene is both conceptual and sensational. We cannot examine it apart from interacting political, economic, social, psychological and cultural processes. The use of space is never neutral. A city means relationships. Full of physical and mental barriers and barricades, a city is a specific geographical space, penetrated by the footsteps and

---

<sup>1</sup> I would resort to the German word *Tatort* here, just for the shade of meaning hinting at the scene of a crime in this word, exposing the menacing, perhaps dangerous but simultaneously exciting and fascinating duality of the city, referring to the horror which is written deep into the interior of cosiness (according to Sigmund Freud's *heimlich-unheimlich* matrix, where alien and hostile is actually long-known).

trails of its inhabitants. A city is an object under production, a battleground of competing symbolic constructions and imaginary desires (Welchman 1995: 211). Various practices continuously (re)configure and filter the urban environment. The semantisation of a city results from social use, and in this process urban structures become symbols (Sederholm 1998: 208). City plan is relevant to its social order. Therefore, it should be taken as the public propaganda of the society, i.e. "the organisation of participation in places where it is not possible, the integration of an individual into the bureaucratic production" (Sederholm 1998: 198). Consequently, any aspiration to the democratisation and decentralisation (and naturally, vice versa) of political power needs some kind of spatial strategy.

Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City" reveals the dual nature of a city: he calls one aspect of it a concept city, established by utopian and urbanistic discourse. The first operation of this city is to create its own space (*un espace propre*). De Certeau comments on this as a rationale, repressing everything physically, mentally and politically defective and irrational, which could compromise the city. But within this discourse another one is hidden, which is also constructing the identity of the city, daily and indefinitely. Yet, the crafty combinations proliferating there have no clear legible "faces." Due to the lack of any sensible transparency, those currents, evading any fixation, are impossible to control and determine. The city thus slips into the clear text of the *planned* and readable city (my spacing – *M.L.*; de Certeau 1993: 154–156).<sup>2</sup> How then should one describe or map this "non-readable" (Burgin 1996) identity?

Below, I am going to examine some of Hanno Soans's performances<sup>3</sup> in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Inhabitants create a city through their daily chores, with movements which, with their intersections and indirect paths, rather remind de Certeau of rhetoric. Janet Wolff's idea of a city is similar, when she writes: "The City does not just refer to a set of buildings in particular place. To put it polemically, there is no such *thing* as city. [---] *The city*, then, is above all a representation ... *imagined environment*." (Cit. Sederholm 1998: 212.) Or as expressed in Jonathan Raban's concept of a *soft city*: "We mould them in our images: they in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them. [---] The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture." (Cit. Sederholm 1998: 211.)

<sup>3</sup> Three performances, to be exact. Two of them have actually been performed, while the third exists in a "manuscript" (arranged, nevertheless so that it can be subjected to analysis).

urban space of Tallinn. I think that they provide a basis for the discussion of a certain phenomenon, the reality, which appears, exists and emerges, transforms and changes as a city. A city forms its trigger, regime and outcome, but, as envisaged earlier – the city is a network of various relationships. These performances observe various ways of interaction between a city, a body and social experience, imprinting someone's destiny in the topography of Tallinn. This is a process of mapping, which proceeds from the city as the determinant of our mental space, and on the other hand, it is an object of our desires, visions and sign systems. These performances present this in relation to some monuments, with the aim (anew) of bringing into daylight certain denied meanings, the repulsed and the unconscious, to open back doors. The performances were conducted within the framework of the action *Backdoor Media* (1998 and 1999; hereinafter BM) the curator of which was Soans.

### **Backdoor motif**

The backdoor operates simultaneously as a *locus* and as a metaphor. While denoting the activities at the back façade of the monument in the title performance, the BM as an event actually had to function as a backdoor. Namely, the aim of the event was to present the projects discarded by the media, and offer an opportunity to perform some of those which had been rejected at the more official level, or, paraphrasing the title of the festival – "which had not been admitted thorough the front door."<sup>4</sup> In a word, the festival was an attempt to provide an alternative to the existing channels, where different voices excluded from the official could be made heard and, in the more general sense, to scout the border zone between the mainstream and the marginal.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> A different set of rules applies at the backdoor, which includes unofficial policy and bribery. Soans said that he had been thinking about the "moonshine business" and how to "traffic those rejects in." We should now forget all images of a backdoor as an escape route or an opening for getting out, and the artist's partisan (or rather conspiratorial, considering Soans's position in the Estonian artistic scene) activities should come clear.

<sup>5</sup> The second *Backdoor* festival attempted to use a concept already more specified, narrowing the social focus. "Façades for the Homeless" was an attempt to speak of misery, to coax the media into discussing the ways it reflects this misery, seeing it as the only way to draw attention to the problems concerned. The curator has later stated that it still did not work as it was planned (Mari Laanemets's interview with Hanno Soans

At the same time this was another knock at the backdoor (the one used by spies and psychoanalysts) – a conflict skilfully manipulated by the gameleader between the public (material) being of the location and its symbolic codes, and the phenomena socially and psychically articulating those locations.

It is possible that you are already familiar with these performances. Do you recall the apocalyptic gestures and allusive speech of the situative acts<sup>6</sup>, which created an egocentric<sup>7</sup> sensitive field and an absorbing space of collective presence? As a result of a number of substitutions and relocations, schizophrenic spaces perforated by (personal) psychoses and delirium were born, sewn with mimicry and flatteringly glib and phoney *patches* of (more official) myths. Nevertheless, for precision and in order to refresh your memory, I once again attempt to reconstruct the course of action.

The performance at the monument to an Unknown Soldier took place on October 20, 1998, and was meant to promote the BM festival. I borrow a description from an onlooker: "at 12 a.m. a car arrived at the monument, blaring with rhythm. A girl emerged from the car and put bananas at the foot of the monument. After a while a half-naked man painted neon pink (a well-known art critic) appeared from the main door of the National Library, and for five minutes took a similar position to the sculpture at the other side of the monument, standing as a mirror image of the unknown soldier." (Sobolev 1998.) The phrase "Come out to show them" (Steve Reich) repeated in the beginning and Meredith Monk's hysterical laugh: "I still have my memory. I still have my mind. I

---

October 1, 2000 – Soans 2000b). I liked the way how Soans himself tried to define the backdoor-position during the conference *Interstanding 3: Above boundaries* through Gilles Deleuze's autobiographical reminiscences about how he started to write about other philosophers, which had been an agonising and fruitless, but nevertheless necessary process. Soans transfers this to (his) activities on the social level, in order to describe the role of social art in acknowledging and talking about things.

<sup>6</sup> Although the situationists despised performance and strove to avoid it, and their act strictly differed from it, I have nevertheless dared to call Soans's spectacles the same way, as they seem to take an interest in achieving a similar result. I also think that distinguishing between those two as genres is not absolutely necessary as the danger, which the situationists saw in the possibility that their actionism became art, recedes in the fact that Soans placed his acts on the territory of the aesthetic and symbolic, or into this lean zone of interaction, where art and reality could meet (see Soans 2000a: 1–2).

<sup>7</sup> Karin Laansoo, in her essay *A Pink Bubble Story* stresses just this aspect of privacy and (self)protection (see Laansoo 1998).

still have my philosophy," which sounded afterwards, can be considered as the mottoes of the performance. The performance, lasting perhaps for some ten minutes, ended with the pink person getting into the car and driving away.<sup>8</sup>

The second performance *Reformation* took place on November 16, 1999, at another monument square in Tallinn – at the monument to A.H. Tammsaare. The date was the commemorative day of the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Estonia. Figures clad in white were skipping at the feet of the monument and a voice with a foreign accent recited an extremely pathetic slogan which had once (ten years ago, in the time of the struggle for regaining independence) had immense meaning: "Estonia is in our hands." "This was an absolutely harmless, well-organised and advertised action, which was not directed against the Republic of Estonia, democracy or public safety. It nevertheless peaked with the arrival of the police, who came to investigate the breach of public order," writes Rael Artel, a witness (Artel 2000: 16).

The third performance *Young Estonia prepares for a leap* is a series of staged transformations. The site: the monument to the ship *Estonia* on Rannavärava Hill. The plan of action (based on a photographic session held in preparation for the performance, where it was rehearsed, and what I witnessed): a half-naked young man carrying a pink standard (a reference to the declaration of individualism in the first performance) walks along the arch of the monument up to its edge, then takes a stance which could characterise a hero (a retrospection to the unknown soldier), a sportsman preparing for a performance (a diver), but, also a mourner. Yet another motif is repeated: the spectators lined at the foot of the monument stand hand in hand. There was also a plan to order a marble plate with the names of 13 casualties of the accident at Kurkse.

---

<sup>8</sup> Such a guerrilla attitude was actually conditioned by the fact that the City Government did not grant permission for arranging the performance. Eventually, it suited the conception.

## Monument as a moment<sup>9</sup> in the urban space: Means, space and method of performances

We should not be carried away by the mere fact that Soans selects the key monuments in Tallinn for the locations of his performances. Without overestimating the issue of monuments, subjected to overexploiting in the near past<sup>10</sup>, we could glance at the change Soans is attempting to bring into the unfairly black-and-white scheme. As far as I can see, it is a certain shift aimed at bringing about a turn in conversation. Perhaps he was successful indeed to find a new or undiscovered opening into this world, which had seemingly already been totally lighted up and profoundly discussed. It is enough to recall the previous "court disputes," and it is clear that Soans continues in the same vein. Nevertheless, the way he thinks of them or sees them is radically different. He introduces a completely new horizon and approach to the discourse.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the question *What should be done with Victor?* may seem out of date.<sup>12</sup> Although, considering the fact

<sup>9</sup> This term referring to situationists (see, e.g. research by Sederholm and Soans) actually belongs to Henri Lefebvre. In his work it refers to "a strained feverish perception, which as a refraction, reveals the all-embracing illusion of our everyday existence" (Lefebvre 1996: 138). As a fluctuating and fickle, but decisive perception (such as pleasure, submission, disgust, surprise, fear or umbrage) it is apocalyptic, because it reveals infinite opportunities comprised in everyday life. According to a comment by David Harvey, such a moment of experience is ephemeral, which could, in a blink, disappear into the oblivion forever. In its passing, there are, nevertheless, often unbreakable and sometimes evolutionary opportunities of revealing and fixing it. "Moment" was understood as a breaking point, a radical recognition and lively euphoria (see Sederholm 1998: 209). The critics of situationists, nevertheless, considered it still too passive and merely temporal, which could be changed by a concept of a situation as an already positively spatial and temporal "situation."

<sup>10</sup> The topic of a monument as one of the most important symbols of power emerges each time power changes hands: it could not have been different in the Estonia of the early nineties.

<sup>11</sup> Soans manifests a personal (bodily) experience as acceptable and interesting, even if the talk is about such extremely impersonal thing as monuments. Explaining the selection of monuments as the locations for *statement*, he said that he was seeking the opportunity to stake something personal and something social on one and the same throw (Soans 2000b).

<sup>12</sup> This question naturally refers to Heie Treier's presentation delivered at the Saaremaa Biennial *Fabrique d'Histoire* (1995) "What shall we do with Victor?" and the proceeding questions (see Treier 1995). If any at all, the similarities can be found with the *Monument* exhibition held in Riga the same year, where the artists were asked to relate to Riga's urban space, to make use of the strategic points of the city, e.g., the former loca-

that a theme of heroism pervades performances, it is not completely impossible.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the answers are not pursued by "rephotographing" in the manner characteristic of postmodern historicism. Sometimes it seems that monuments are just an excuse for dragging us into a considerably broader discussion, related to the reading of a city/architecture, a social perception and the reconstruction of everyday life. So we should, before turning to the meanings, explore this "space," the site of these performances and say a couple of words (both theoretical and practical) about starting points.

Lefebvre's principal statement, which forms an implicit basis for the hypotheses of this article, is that a city is not only a text but rather a texture. Neither can a monument, although a result of signifying practice, be reduced to a language or a narrative.<sup>14</sup> This also explains why it is so complicated to "read" a city when reading seems self-evident. Thus we should not read it, but "act" or "experience" it. The latter, once again, calls for borrowing an explanation from Lefebvre. He claims that the process of social practice can be expressed, but cannot be explained by a discourse, because social practice is "acted, not read." As a

---

tions of the monuments to V.I. Lenin, and a place, where still earlier the monument to St. Christopher had stood. They had to do it in a manner that would relate to the (city's) present and to map the moments (although they also become the history of the 20th century), to reflect the tension of the locations. They also had to reprocess old incomprehensible messages and to consider popular chronicles, to take a monument, a city in general, as a topography of the collective memory, where the symbols and traces of memory can be read as books; to do it in the way used by Benjamin (see Helena Demakova's presentation "Monument revisited" – Demakova 1995).

<sup>13</sup>Indeed, the question posed in the title of the essay referred to above becomes clearer if we do not treat it as the tidying up after the historic imminence, but present it as a question about heroism. But the so-called theme of the winner is in Soans's performances related to the gestures of heroism, the position of avant-garde. Let me list some different heroes here encountered in the performances: a tourist, a sportsman, and the media.

<sup>14</sup>In his book *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre devotes a part to monuments. Actually, he speaks of a monumental room per se. It is said to be much too thoughtless to consider a monument as a collection of symbols (even if each monument comprises symbols, which are often old and not recognisable) or a chain of signs (although each monumental entity is constructed of signs). That is why he also advises restraint of symbolic and semiological explanations. It is said that a monument is not even an object, despite the fact that its position as a social object signals of it in one way or another at each step (Lefebvre 1996: 139).

space, it is first and foremost determined by actions taking place in this space<sup>15</sup> (Lefebvre 1996: 140).

Presumably, a monumental work has no significance - it rather has a horizon of significance: a specific or indeterminate diversity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy, within which one and then another meaning emerges in turn, by means of some particular activity - or because of it. Thus, the social or political operations may dwarf a monument in the space, or save various systems and subsystems, codes and subcodes, which constitute and create a society. By means of activity, one or another meaning can be highlighted (Lefebvre 1996: 140-141). The same fluctuation and changeability seems to form the mechanism, the trigger behind Soans's performances. Their impact, too, is above all the result of such mobility - directing and reactivating the substance existing in the personal and collective consciousness within the (surrounding) space in such a way that these reactions either saturate or drain it completely, in accordance with the artist's will, but always as a result of some ongoing acts.

Thus, monumental features are not only plastic; a monument is likely to remain unperceived if only looked at. Lefebvre introduces an interest in the body into the analysis of monuments and architecture. A space cannot be completely overwhelmed by the coding approach of semiology (neither by postmodern historicism). Lefebvre shifts the analysis to the body level, because the body is "possessed" by the monument's space, inherent to the political whole, its constitutional element (according to the strict order of the aims for the use of space). A body obtains social and political meanings, participates in these processes, and the dissemination of the message of the monument merges the members of a society into a unity, providing them, by means of this covenant, with the status of a subject.<sup>16</sup> Monumental space means continuous movement to and fro be-

---

<sup>15</sup>Consequently, it is determined by what must not take place in this location. That, which appears to be empty, may become filled or vice versa, a filled space may become a total heterotopian void (Lefebvre 1996: 141-142).

<sup>16</sup>A monument (as architecture in general) is erected with the goal of offering each citizen a picture of his or her belonging (to a society). It resembles a collective mirror and a recognition effect (an analogue to the mirror effect known in psychoanalysis), securing practical and actual "consensus," eventually transforming the repressive element into a delighted pleasure (Lefebvre 1996: 139). But, like its analogue, it can prove to be a fake unity, existing only to hide an irreparable chasm, an actual non-unity. Strictly speaking, the mirror image is an imaginary construction and an ideal form of the (bodily) integrity.

tween the personal speech act of a common conversation and public speech (Lefebvre 1996: 141–142). This is the space where Soans locates his performances. By switching on and off the ceremonial and/or profane space, he attempts to map the phenomena which are really close to psychogeography, as practised by situationists.<sup>17</sup>

Engaging an important position in the socio-architectural morphology of a city, like specific ganglions, and thanks to the memory accompanying monuments as signs, performances create an effect in the environment consciously applied by Soans. I am interested in this interdiscursive dialogue, in the mobilised architecture and the experience of the (social/symbolic) consumption of the former that the performances attempt to relate to us. I want to examine the personal relationship with the official symbolism, the connections and sublimations between a man and a body, which emerge, or prove inescapable, in such communication. I want to know how these various categories – a city as material body (architecture) and a monument as a symbolic (and also material) body in this space, a social body and, eventually, the author's own human body of flesh and blood, cross and dissolve into each other in the process of performances.

It seems to me that monuments are just the right places to look at

- a. the relationships between the inhabitants and the city – how they see and perceive it;
- b. the characters in a (modern) city (I specifically have in mind a flâneur and a tourist);
- c. social, political and other relationships stored or lagging behind in these locations, the effect, which these signs of reality control;
- d. and, eventually, the artist and allegory.

The role and position of monuments in a city are uncomplicated and paradoxical: on the one hand, monuments are the supportive means for checking, colonising and (ideologically) influencing the group memory, using the per-

---

<sup>17</sup>Psychogeography is among the most interesting, and perhaps also the most far-reaching ideas of situationists, which they defined as a discipline exploring the laws and specific effects of geographic environment, whether consciously organised or not, influencing the emotions and behaviour of individuals, and how a human being acts in accordance with his cognitive psychological map. "An unconscious construction of the social and physical world; we project the psyche onto an outside world and act as if what we had projected is a quality of the world" (Sederholm 1998: 210).

petuation of a reminiscence as an excuse. They embody history, acting as its symbolic charges.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, there is no other less conspicuous object than a monument, which we pass with our eyes open, yet not noticing it. Just monuments, although made to be looked at (and to be seen), appear the most unnoticed, even the most non-existent spots in a city. Only a tourist is prepared to relate to them (as sights), as cultural texts.<sup>19</sup>

Still, a monument always leaves a trace as a scratch on the bottom of our unconscious. Soans is interested in the codes, which are inserted into these monument spaces as epitomes of social architecture – this loaded symbolic structure, as well as in the phenomena operating in the unconscious, the uncontrolled.

### **Flâneur vs/or tourist?**

It was actually *Nadja*, a book by French surrealist André Breton, that inspired me to write about Soans's performances and guided me to the possible interpretations thereof.

A large part of this book is dedicated to the description of Paris – its (famous) monuments and buildings, streets, cafés and parks. The places where the author has planned to meet Nadja and the random locations where looking for Nadja or shadowing the girl lead him have a meaning for the author – the city is like a letter, or a fortune-teller. But what is the most important, these random encounters with the enigmatic in everyday life, so suddenly offered by the city, make Breton look and see the city with very different eyes, the way the city is seen by a tourist or a flâneur. Weirdly enough, this book seems to share with Soans's performances more than meets the eye at first glance.

---

<sup>18</sup> A monument always has a clearly understandable message. "It says what it wishes to say – yet it hides a good deal more." (Lefebvre, cit. Sederholm 1998: 206–207.) Monuments mask a lust for power and hide the arbitrariness of the latter behind the signs and the façade, pretending to be an expression of collective will.

<sup>19</sup> Soans drew my attention to this observation by Robert Musil. Indeed, the monuments become visible if new capital is invested into them, when they are interpreted differently. As soon as habits emerge, a city as the visible landscape vanishes (see Gilloch 1996: 64). That is why an estrangement effect as a certain technique is needed now and then. When Bertolt Brecht takes a street scene as a basic model for his epic theatre, the shift acts also in the opposite direction; the street/city becomes a (speaking) stage under our (flâneur's) glance.

Of the possible contacts with Breton's book, I am most interested in the concept of a flâneur – the character of the inhabitant of a modern metropolis, and the way of looking at things peculiar to a flâneur as a particular visual and aesthetic practice for communicating with the city.

The flâneur emerged in the streets a bit more than a century ago. This character was first described by French poet Charles Baudelaire and then by German philosopher Walter Benjamin in the Paris of the 19th century, an individual in an urban space at the moment the modern city planning was born. The flâneur was the first to think of cognising and representing the public places of a city and their atmosphere. By his artistic and theoretical invasion into urban space he attempted to break the rationale with unorganised, bizarre *mise en scenes*. (As far as he practised gestures, and did not narrate stories, he was an actor, but never a dramatic one. See Sederholm 1998: 194.) This means seeing the city (environment) as a collection of places and situations, a space or a field where everything is constantly changing, creating, but also losing its meaning. The flâneur is a hidden watchdog of urban space, a spectator of plays. And, to put it in other words – he provides meaning to the world, which is already here (Sederholm 1998: 201–204).<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand, the flâneur is a fictitious actor, and what he writes is fiction. On the other hand, he indicates the beginning of social observation as a style: the dreaming of a solitary subject gradually becomes an ideological attempt to reprivatise social space, to confirm that individual passive observation is

---

<sup>20</sup>Just as an allegorist composes a book of emblems, "he writes his reverie as text to the images." Benjamin calls it "illustrative seeing" (Benjamin 1982: 528), which we in turn may attribute to a tourist. Among others, he is the author of the idea: "The superficial inducement, the exotic, the picturesque has an effect only on the foreigner. To portray a city a native must have other, deeper motives – motives of one who travels into the past instead of into the distance." (Benjamin 1981: 194.)

We could also mention the film *Stonetour* (Andres Kurg, Marko Raat and Hanno Soans, 1999) as an attempt to look at Tallinn with a tourist's eyes. Among other things, the authors attempted to catch, to reflect the Western (clandestine) images of post-socialist Eastern European countries. (One of the wittiest scenes shows Andres the guide explaining to the tourists how the Estonians built a palace for their president in the early 1990s. The National Library, the palace in question, surely looks like a fortress, thus allowing a western tourist to project his vision of an Eastern European post-communist authoritarian terror regime.) On the other hand, an attempt was made to mystify this nationally sensitive culture by attacking its monuments (or ruins?). It was the misuse of such mythology that provided the distance and a platform for criticism.

knowledge of social reality which is just as adequate. Susan Buck-Morss writes that in our time (the end of the 20th century – *M.L.*) we have not lost the flâneur's vivid attentiveness, but rather, his marginality. If the flâneur as a special character has disappeared, it is due to the saturation of the consumerist society with the attitude the flâneur possessed (Buck-Morss 1986: 103–104).

Today we can talk about a tourist whose practice is close to a flâneur's. Similarly, the tourist's inverted glance presents the city to us in a different, new and unaccustomed light. Above all, it makes the city (afresh) visible. The tourist is also seeking a text with his eyes, the so-called textual fragments, which could add up to some sort of a speech.

If a flâneur was a distanced observer, who became a consumer, maybe even a fetishist, in the shopping malls (Sederholm 1998: 201), then a tourist is a participant, someone who wishes to be there in person. A tourist discards the elitarian stance of a flâneur and abandons the bystander position of the latter. Tourism actually transfers it into aesthetics or an approach, which is accessible to anyone. Tourism has made such "loitering" a daily practice, but also a commodity (Buck-Morss 1986: 105).<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>The latter, as well as the spectacle society as such, was not accepted by the situationists, who, generally, declared loitering – drifting (*dérive*) their method. They also reproached making a fetish of space, which, according to them, did not differ from the fetishism of things (e.g. Lefebvre, see Sederholm 1998: 200). The artist's album "Pathetic Positions" published in the magazine *kunst.ee* can be considered as an extension of the same theme. These cadres, eventually forming a wilful genealogy, could also be related to the tourist's glance. This is a proper situational study of practical mythology and the fetishism of places, reflecting the transformation from a stance of war heroism into tourism heroism, its replacement by sublimated, but nevertheless as aggressive pathetics. But it is not invasion which appeals here to Soans, but the specificity invested in these places, that banal *genius loci* – (practical) mythology.

Related to this, I am reminded of another Estonian film, *Ma pole turist, ma elan siin* ("I Am not a Tourist. I Live Here") (Peeter Urbla, 1987). Outside apologetic pathetic patriotism, this is also a very interesting, a kind of situative film. It is an attempt to map the historic and political economy of the city and the uncontrollable libido of its inhabitants, their psychological investment in the environment. Drama unfolds in the urban space of Tallinn. The city's role is not limited to a mere background but it is rather a trigger activating (various) desires of the inhabitants, an engine keeping them going, testing their creed and world view, as well as reflecting them and their values and, in the end, providing meaning to everything. *Das Unheimliche* enters the game when Feliks Kramvolt, "a native, a third generation inhabitant of Tallinn," becomes a tourist in his hometown. Kramvolt could be compared to another (fictitious) character – the

Helena Sederholm considers the flâneur to be the great-grandfather of the modern artist. (Baudelaire had earlier declared him to be the reincarnation of "the painter of modern life.") The postmodern flâneur, however, is said to possess more physical qualities, i.e. he is not a secluded and passive onlooker. Rather, he interferes with the process and situations of production<sup>22</sup>, plunges into the events of everyday life, focuses on the transfer of meanings, but also transfers focus from mystery and romanticism to the common. Also the initiative, spreading in modern art to link individuals with their local surroundings, makes a flâneur an important character (Sederholm 1998: 194–204). An artist as a tourist, a situationalist loiterer *par excellence*, often shifts attention from the aesthetic considerations of a work of art in favour of social reality and everyday situations.

### Situationalist *détournement* and allegory

*Speak to me of heroin and speed  
Of genocide and suicide, of syphilis and greed  
Speak to me the language of love  
The language of violence, the language of the heart  
This isn't the first time I've asked for money or love  
Heaven and earth don't ever mean enough  
Speak to me of heroine and speed  
Just give me something I can believe*

P. J. Harvey, "The Whores Hustle And The Hustlers  
Whore." – *Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea*

---

main hero of Soans's performances. Still, in this article, the description of an artist as a tourist and/or a flâneur has to remain without an explanation. There is an episode in the very beginning of a book by Paul Powles, *Sheltering Sky*, where Port claims that a tourist is a person who keeps thinking of returning from the very moment of his arrival, but the traveller may never return. Flâneur links time and space in the same manner, entering the labyrinth of the city without fear of losing himself. Straying may actually be his preferred aim. And a tourist (Theses) is someone who remembers the road back.

<sup>22</sup>Such rebelliousness is much more characteristic to a bohemian. The bohemian's demonstrative, unrestrained loitering was an expression of anarchy and individualism, a more or less obscure mutiny against society, and, to the same extent, self-deception. A bohemian's political views do not diverge to a great extent from those of a professional conspirator (Gilloch 1996: 155).

Anders Härm sees Soans's "living sculpture" as an act aimed at the labelling and designation of context and location (Härm 1998). This activity could also be called allegorical.

A flâneur, like a tourist sees the city as a text, which he treats as allegorical. He organises this text accordingly, tearing details from their contexts in order to produce new constructions – in order to construct situations which would merge psychological, urbanite, historical and moral elements. He places fragments from different eras into one and the same space, where they gain more meaning than they initially possessed. It is not difficult to notice the similar strategy in Soans's performances. His performances as construed situations<sup>23</sup> are characterised by the tactics imitating the situationalist *détournement* – he uses old meanings, while arranging them in new relationships, he takes well-known situations and translates them into various readings: emerging at the top of the monument to the *Estonia* as a diver (which is quite close to being a very bad joke); or standing opposite the unknown soldier, imitating him and his stance while painted pink<sup>24</sup>, and having the eternal flame substituted by bananas<sup>25</sup>. This had an impact of an allegory dropped into a conversation.

Allegories emerge when some meaning is lost, when communication proves impossible (the starting point of an allegory). Just as Karin Laansoo writes: "when entering through the front door, one can only experience the disability of communication – the bronze soldier has got no flame to guard" (Laansoo 2000). This is a statement, which makes a reference to the backdoor. (A path which

---

<sup>23</sup>The author himself has admitted that these performances have been constructed piece by piece. Each single phrase has a meaning. The role of chance, as well as intervention, can be considered minimal. The spontaneous reaction of the audience who ate the bananas at the foot of the monument after the artist had left even angered him.

<sup>24</sup>While exploring the issue of pink, I came across a passage in the manifest by ha.so.tif (Soans's artistic pseudonym – *M.L.*): "Pink is above all the contrast colour of grey and therefore the colour of the negation of concrete. This is the colour of vivid, demanding negation of concrete, protesting principally against any climate. I repeat: against any possible climate! Pink is the imaginary colouring of an absolute materiality, uniting the most sensitive bodily grooves with the artificial intensity offered by synthetic polymers. Pink is a short circuit emerging somewhere down below, between bodily pulsations and mechanical vibrations – a bioport and an anal switch." (Artist's letter to the author, February 2001.)

<sup>25</sup>The art critics (see, e.g. Sobolev 1998) promptly interpreted this as a reference to a banana republic, while the artist had not had such a direct connection in mind.

leads about, including, nevertheless, a promise of resolution. Both allegory as well as *détournement* are methods which use a second road – a substitute or an alternative with a noble cause – to break stereotypes and thus undermine power.) A pink soldier and a heap of bananas at his feet fill in the gaps<sup>26</sup>, which are also covered by the stubborn confirmation that he still has his memory, his mind. Like someone's not too well concealed fear of castration.<sup>27</sup>

Soans's gesture referred to another possible "entrance," it tried to add the meaning of the new era to the monument, to find the Hero of Our Time<sup>28</sup> instead of the bronze soldier, activating its latent meaning (which we still rather wish to avoid.) Although these specific monuments have long ago stopped to mark anything, and have long ago been written off the present, they still secure their hidden symbolic meaning by their past, and their insignificance is only os-

---

<sup>26</sup>"What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others." Nicolas Abraham *Notes on the Phantom*.

<sup>27</sup>It is difficult to deny this primary interpretation of psychoanalysis, this one allusion and not to give in to the appeal of this interpretation. Still, the most important accents are obviously elsewhere. (The artist claims to have comprehended this at a later point, unexpectedly, in the course of the discussion with the author of this article.) The subject of the father might be introduced into the performance, but let me have just one deviant note, an observation relating to castration and androgyny, actually belonging to Benjamin: the "spirituality" and "pure love" of an androgyne were related to infertility. (Another) tragic hero, individualistic and infertile in his social protests (Benjamin 1977: 233).

(Androgyny is not accidental here, the previous description did not mention the apron worn by the artist, which depicted a mannequin's body without any genitals.)

<sup>28</sup>A hero, who embodies (and simultaneously lives in) the present perfectly – is the authentic representative thereof, an allegorical figure. This is a glamorous hero of the neon era, who intends to be Ramses II and the Pink Panther simultaneously" (Härm 1998). Still, and without any irony, similarities can be detected in Soans's search, with the aspirations of Benjamin and Baudelaire in search of the hero (and heroism) of modern times. Benjamin writes that a hero as a pathos-figure is a victim of his time, a man cursed destined to tolerate and undermine it. His defiance and challenge are pre-determined to remain an empty protest, his *hybris* is to demand the hero's status, which, in the end is more of a theatrical performance in front of a mirror, with just one spectator (Benjamin 1977: 232, Gilloch 1996: 151).

On the other hand, this "hero" is a role for an artist. Soans comments: the threshold of pain for noticing differences in conduct or clothes is so low in Estonia that there is no need to do anything special, "if to be noticed is important." Developing this so-called concept of modern heroism, Soans gives a certain critical inversion here.

tensible.<sup>29</sup>

Obviously, no other monument in Tallinn has given rise to more discussions than that soldier, and there is no other monument one would more like to forget, to bury. In this sense, Jüri Okas's draft for the redesign of the location of the monument, directing one past the monument, without the compulsion to approach it directly, completely avoiding confrontation, was logical. This was another attempt to change the (un)conscious, to influence it through the reorganisation of matter.

Soans's gesture is more personal, more demonstrative, but it strives for a different effect. If Okas's project was external, official, representative, historical and political, then Soans's internal, personal, social gesture is an alternative, but not an unbinding one (rather the contrary<sup>30</sup>). He did not want to design but to present the location, we could say, to reframe it in order to make it visible.

Okas's project and the close history, which had gradually stripped the monument of Soviet attributes, such as the plates with texts, let alone the guard of honour and the eternal flame, served the "erasing," so that the liberated Estonia could accept this monument. This can be compared to some of the mechanisms of our psychology like rejection and suppression. Soans, on the other hand, acts in an independently opposite way (compared with Okas, his activities seem completely anti-economic and useless indeed). His gesture reveals the indefinite tactics and the traumatic consequences of such acts. Although the deeper impulse is derived from a personal narcotics depression – where one's internal state is made visible by relating a body to the environment<sup>31</sup>, this extends as a (not at

---

<sup>29</sup> A monument has an afterlife exceeding the initial intention of its erection (and since most of the significant monuments glorify history, then in their afterlife, the same structures are rendered as places of mythical fraud) (Gilloch 1996: 73).

<sup>30</sup> Soans's writing on Silja Saarepuu seems as much to apply to his own work, relating to his choice in favour of "social sculpture." "Such author's position requires an artist who also acknowledges his own role in the social circulation of power and responsibility" (Soans 2001: 240).

<sup>31</sup> Here I would like to refer to Laansoo's article, *A Pink Bubble Story*, where she discusses the above performance from a viewpoint that cannot remain unnoticed within the framework of this analysis. Namely, Laansoo sees the major idea of the act in the protection of a private space, in hinting, that the private space has been attacked. Relying on Elizabeth Grosz's study on dual processes, where a subject psychically constructs his environment, and how social inscription on the surface of a body becomes a psychological interior, she interprets the bronze soldier as an exterior, a surface, whose interior

all bad) metaphor over society and becomes a diagnosis for the whole of society. "I think that nothing which has once existed should be hidden. As they want to delete monuments and street names, or like we keep deleting things in our personal histories." (Soans 2000b.) The same goes on in social practice. There is always violence and death, aggressiveness and negation and a monument must delete their traces, replacing them by the signs of power and assurance, which permit violence and terror to be prevented (Lefebvre 1996: 140). Okas's project was also aimed at rejecting the memories of something unpleasant. Monuments – the means of official propaganda – produce invisible legitimised violence, which Soans wants to make visible. We could refer to two operational devices of Soans's performances, to two primary processes, described by psychoanalysts as well as linguists, which also operate in a monumental space: substitution and condensation.<sup>32</sup>

---

self is a frail pink being who needs liberating and who has something to say, something that the people passing the monument every day have not noticed. Only the performance forced them to a symbolic crossing, to step from one room to another, and the lime wall of the monument became the imaginary boundary between these rooms; the performance opened and made visible, for a short period, something of the intimate *bubble* (Laansoo 1998). Not wishing to cement the irreversible opposition city – body, which to me seems rather like a (possibly violent and painful) reciprocal influence, I want to stress that such a shift in the viewpoint – to look at the surface of a body from the perspective of the interior and vice versa – might prove fruitful while interpreting Soans's performances. There is a more general idea in Grosz's article, which has already been referred to here that a city always leaves its traces on the body – it produces bodies and their conduct. It is a form and a context where one adopts to social rules and expectations, concealing and making abnormality and psychology natural, which is buried in geographical space, and the politically unbound and unstable identities within. It is not unnatural and alienating by nature, it can still cause the feeling of alienation, which disturbs the reception of sensory and perceptual information. (Grosz 1998: 48–49). This can happen when the locations do not correspond to the new era and new needs – to the new body. This is perhaps the cause of a personal protest, counteraction – to undermine architecture with the content of one's life, in order to change it into a place and in order to change places (Jeff Kelley, see Sederholm 1998: 219).

<sup>32</sup>The first is the application of metonymy, a shift of meaning resting on the adjacency (*Young Estonia prepares for a leap*), the second, comprising substitution, is the use of metaphor and similarity (*Backdoor performance*). Here, we should talk about the structure of Soans's performances. As there are "pictures," reasoned and constructed in detail, the components of which stand out clearly when observed with attention, they are similar to *tableaux*, being like animated collages. At the same time, everything is open for the return of (personal and historical) memories, which the author still attempts to apprehend. Soans's aim is not so much to distinguish or determine the status of

The case of Tammsaare's monument is naturally much more complicated. The Unknown Soldier still featured a negative sign, the approaching of which could even give some pleasure, all the more so as the performance was connected to violating a restriction (of the authorities). So it became an intervention of a kind into our guarded, secured and simulated social-spatial order. And equally, on the psychogeographic territory, it became a collision with the things banished into our unconscious.

Tammsaare's monument is, as referred to already, sacred in a different manner. The famous writer on the one hand, and the devoted mass gatherings, which took place here in the late 1980s, rendered a positive sign to this location, the attacking of which could be interpreted as an abuse (of the Republic of Estonia).

This is how things dissolve while seen through allegory – they are demolished while conserved simultaneously (Benjamin 1982: 414–415). Allegory comprises both destructive and constructive aspects. An allegoric glance saves the picture, but at the price of tearing it out of its context and thus consuming it. Destruction and redemption are the faces of the Janus of allegories (Gilloch 1996: 137).

What does it mean in relation to these monuments? These monuments are for the urban space whose allegory is in the realm of words, and a commodity in the realm of things – ruins. Härm, analysing the *Backdoor* performance, claims that the monument is void as it stands for too many different things. It exists as an independent substance, referring to nothing else but itself – until eventually the Unknown Soldier becomes truly unknown (Härm 1998). Perhaps the independent substance referred to by Härm can be understood as frozen (*erstarrt*).

Monuments present history, doing it in the mythical form, which should be cancelled, demystified by allegory. In other words – allegorical vision permits these myths to be overcome and becomes a moment of historical awakening (Benjamin 1982: 344). A monument, where the past becomes a phantasmagoria, constitutes a part of the mythical character of the epoch (Gilloch 1996: 177). The monument is the nest of the dialectics of a myth, it is not enough to reveal it, and it must also be resolved. The recalling of the forgotten past is a way to cancel myths. If the monument's empathy belongs to the winners, then for Benjamin the task is comprised in the redemption of their experience, which are not

---

monuments (as is Okas's aim), but to touch more humane psychological processes in this space, or even through this space, in order to prepare a map of a humane geography.

commemorated in monuments. A monument becomes an allegory of the injustice of history (Welchman 1995: 210).

But for Benjamin, history is an endless rewriting, reconfiguration, but it is not a reconstruction, which is essentially not possible. An idea to preserve the past, even in the form of a monument, is just a shamelessly incorrect illusion.

A monument is not durable, as its meaning is not fixed or final; it is subjected to political changes, the transformations and ruin of the modern times. Its meaning is constantly changing in time (Gilloch 1996: 73). Eventually, even a monument can be considered as a commodity of incidental exchange value, destined to become outdated and useless in the production process. Without being pessimistic, we can compare it with an allegory. Fragments of the shattered world are for gathering and reuse. The monuments "presented" in such a way are not marionettes of political or financial powers, but (could be) "commodities," where usefulness, not the function of continuous representation is the core of the struggle and argument. The artist's attitude, at least, assures that a monument, any image of architecture, may (or even must) be consumed, spent, wasted, as well as recoded, produced and demolished. The ethics of *dérive* also prescribed losing oneself, acknowledging relativity, admitting the incompleteness and transience of things, love for speed, faith in mental reserves and the ability to detect and forget (Sederholm 1998: 216).

During the *Reformation* performance, one fair sentence, which has been heard on this square earlier, is repeated with a foreign accent. Nicely distancing itself, it refers to a certain manner of contemplation and the changes in it. Soans has not denied that one of his aims was to reconstruct or recall a loudspeaker patriotism of the past, the history of this quickly forgotten location. But the phrase as it was presented acquired a completely new meaning. It can be understood as a reference to foreign capital and in the context of the BM festival it was quite natural to interpret it as a sign of a transfer of the press and thus, the freedom of speech, under the foreign control.<sup>33</sup> A row of skippers forms an image of a broken human chain (the Baltic chain).<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup>See e.g. Artel 2000.

<sup>34</sup>Jasper Zoova also made use of the motif of this event of the year of 1989 in his video installation "Baltic chain" (1999), which was also presented during the BM in the Sony Centre. The installation was constructed on a number of TV-sets (on the first demonstration in Frankfurt/Main at the exposition "Western-Eastern Divan," 7 TV-sets

The *Backdoor* performance secularised the ritual – standing at attention, substituting it with another, which could form a new social signal. Actually, those weird castrated rituals are more like residuals of rituals, such as a guard of honour, or maybe, subjective ceremonies like skipping, boxing (*My books about kickboxing*<sup>35</sup>), or diving. Old rituals are inverted and therefore demystified, while a mix of lively events and daydreams are ritualised (a dim inscription on the flyer of the first performance: "when I first tried LSD I wanted to get married to a heating fan," which should have provided a frame for the processes, referred to personal narcodepression; the image of boxing was very personal as well, and far exceeded sports).

### We need a checkout!

*On the global scale, allegory allows the most random, minute, or isolated landscapes to function as figurative machinery... fragmentary or schizoid constellations often now stand in allegorically for trends and forces in the world system.*

Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

We presented allegory as an attempt to "provide a new voice." Bananas, the neon pink body, as well as a strange voice as an uncanny image<sup>36</sup> or the diver were a provocation, aiming at provoking a dialogue, while also offering us a certain new look, wishing to create a space for the potential interaction. And last but not least, commenting on the Estonia of today.

---

formed a tower on the circle of car tyres), which showed people standing on the road-side, hand in hand, filmed from a passing car. The image of a broken chain was similarly memorable. It was accompanied by the noise of Formula 1, also allowing for the emergence of several allusions to indifference, banality, sports, and spectacle. Zoova's own comment is shortish, but significant: faces melt, 1= ∞.

<sup>35</sup> A song by Röövel Ööbik. Beside the fact that the title perfectly suited Soans's personal world and autobiographic memories, which served as the internal trigger of this performance, he was also attracted by the macho-attitude of this song, which coincided with the external concept of the performance. The artist abandoned the idea to present the song, as it still seemed too gentle to him. Let me add that this all took place at the opening of the exhibition of the Estonian graphic art *Your Hidden Life* (curator Vappu Vabar) in Tallinn Art Hall in 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Here I am referring to Freud's *das Unheimliche*; thus this voice elicits the horror enveloped in the homely (as this is hometown), which seems to be a strange intrusion, but, as Freud states, the dispelled evil is actually within us.

A counterpart of the Unknown Soldier referred to the change which has taken place in society – the attitude of war heroism having been replaced by the attitude of media heroism – the change which seems to be profound and irreversible. But it re-emerged in the interactive space of Soans's performances, in another shape, in the way that we could notice the remarkable similarity. The structure was the same, only the signifiers differed.

The last performance by Soans, *Young Estonia prepares for a leap*, is the most radical<sup>37</sup> manifestation of heroism. This is perhaps the most painful of the subjects as it dissects the present, and unlike the previous performances, it is not possible to hide behind the unfair history and unjust fate – the so-called past (this is the widespread irresponsible attitude, which Soans is actually demonstrating in all of his performances). The attitude of heroism even seems unreasonable here, while the metonymical substitution turns ambivalent another case of drowning, the Kurkse case, suddenly opening up to us via the shift of signifiers.<sup>38</sup>

But, and one would better put up with this from the start, Soans does not pretend to save those past moments for eternity, although his performances are characterised, inter alia, by some measured pathetics (which are didactic gestures as well) – they reveal the history in those monuments and squares.<sup>39</sup> It seems that

---

<sup>37</sup>Here: it presented an unpopular opinion, not being afraid to be pathetic or cruel, in a manner that is obviously unpopular at present.

Benjamin, cited above in relation to this subject, assumes that today there is no place for a hero, he is an antithesis, a figure catalysing conflicts (Gilloch 1996: 150–151). This is the hero's role in Soans's performance as well. Soans has hinted that he had perceived the same conflict in himself, that modernism seems to have been overcome and the hero has been left with only "a smart nosy rooster" attitude (Soans's words) as this is the only one the contemporary times have to offer to him.

<sup>38</sup>Heroism (which is broken in this monument) and the idea of making-yourself a state, the bravado of this, together with particular choices (of heroism) are psychologically imposing for the artist (Soans 2000b). "To continue, repeating some modernistic gestures – in order to gain self-confidence ... seizing for the tactics of the New Left of the 1960s, which become an optimistic starting place," Soans wrote for the *Analogue TV* and evidently he was contemplating the idea of a performance, which had to take place at the monument to the *Estonia* (Soans 2000a: 2).

<sup>39</sup>The challenge "Come out to show them" and the response "I still have my memory, my philosophy" also stand in relation to the bronze soldier as well as in relation to Soans himself, they can be perceived as his speech. There is no need to have a closer look at these statements as the idea behind them is clear enough. Is this a case of a personal

Soans is willing to reclaim those (abandoned) stages of official pageantry to the life of the city (and consciousness). But they would be transformed, as the initial aim, for which and after what they were shaped, has long ago stopped to be adequate for the new times and new needs. While examining Soans's performance, we can notice similarities with Lefebvre's ideas on the *détournement* of a space – to create meaningful atmosphere by changing perspectives and combining different spaces located far from each other.

The attempt to find a way to visualise the symbolic buzz, which is offending his own personal body, to approach the experience, which is far from the central construed symbolism, to reach the Other and different experience and vision, is much more ambitious. This Other of these performances is still the same paradoxical divided personality: on the one hand, Soans appeals to the tourist's experience (to reflect the exterior) and on the other hand, we can assume the knowledge acquired by him as the Other, which is obviously unimportant for the Authority, although it emerged in response to it. Sometimes it happens that a common citizen is *stranger* than a tourist.

On the day he met Nadja, Breton knew precisely what he was seeking for, (although he failed to find it). There is an extract just at the beginning of the book: "Last October fourth, toward the end of one of those idle, gloomy afternoons I know so well how to spend, I happened to be in the Rue Lafayette: after stopping a few minutes at the stall outside the *Humanité* bookstore and buying Trotsky's latest work, I continued aimlessly in the direction of the Opéra. The offices and workshops were beginning to empty out from top to bottom of the buildings, doors were closing, people on the sidewalk were shaking hands, and already there were more people in the street now. I unconsciously watched their faces, their clothes, their way of walking. No, it was not yet these who would be ready to create the Revolution." (Breton 1960: 63–64.)

And soon he meets Nadja. But revolution was not possible in Paris in 1928, thus *Nadja* is an attempt to unleash the missing social revolution on sexual territory (Burgin 1996: 102).

*Dérive*, as well as the construction of situations were the techniques of protecting liberty recommended by SI, which were to lead to a revolution in every-

---

hysterical protest or the protecting of one's private space, as Laansoo thought? Yet about castration – the bronze soldier is entitled to feel agitated (who else if not he).

day life and common consciousness (Sederholm 1998: 205). Situationists saw a city as a (political) playground, offering opportunities for both hedonistic and intellectual revolutions.

### **Was reformation possible in Tallinn in 1999?<sup>40</sup>**

Soans has said that among other things, he was attracted by the labour ethics and the ideology of meaningless labour – "you must labour...", which has been infused into the Estonians generation after generation by the works of Tammisaare, contrasted to the pathetics of meaningless labour originating from Gilles Deleuze. In the performance, skipping refers to the latter. Can this also be a reminiscence and indirect reference to a flâneur? Is it not an allegory of a free writer (or an artist) in the era of consumerism, forced to prostitution? Soans is interested in the work (and job) of an artist, which does not seem to be a real work (as many think in our young country), and in a certain social experience.

Mapping a (new) place and role for an artist can be found in Soans's artistic projects. We should remember that the subject of the second BM festival was an artist in a social space/environment; an artist's position in general.<sup>41</sup> Benjamin writes, using Baudelaire as an example, how a flâneur, meaning an intellectual, found himself at a marketplace: assuming that he was a spectator, his actual aim already was to find a buyer. This referred to his financial instability as well as to the ambiguity of his political position (Benjamin 1977: 237).

In the urban space of Tallinn we can see how the social is addressed everywhere around us. Soans interferes with the everyday life, interrupts it and reconstructs it, penetrates into the popular consent, into this bureaucratic production of deals and common sense, in order to reveal social relationships in the space

---

<sup>40</sup>When I read an extract from the book by Buck-Morss, "This was just it, the newly constructed pomp of urban phantasmagoria with its promise of a change-as-progress, which elicited the most typical melancholic allegoric response" (Buck-Morss 1989: 178), I found this, perhaps even a heretic analogue: could it be that the young republic, pragmatically pushing on, like Estonia today, is this phantasmagoria? Or in other words (and I am tempted to present this as a demand): we should wake up the nation attached to its own (media) image. Still, speaking more generally, it is possible to assume that this idea is not completely alien to Soans either (see Soans 2001: 243). *Dixi*.

<sup>41</sup>See "*Backdoor Media* 99. Instead of the concept for *Façades for the homeless*": "To change (different) experience into artistic projects..." (Soans 1999.)

where they latently exist. He moves to humanise and integrate those sick places with an unhealthy aura into modern Estonian society, to speak to the changed and the changing social experience not by defining, but by creating common contacts (Soans 1999).

He attempts this from his individual position, registering his own sufferings, and localising them in the urban space. This is his ambitious answer to the city, wavering between the sense of duty characteristic of a citizen and self-centred unconcern.

### **Summary: heterotopias.**

Heterotopias seem to be an explanation to what de Certeau calls "illegible identity." Michel Foucault calls other places (*des espaces autres*), the so-called "contra-places," heterotopias which simultaneously represent, compete and challenge, as well as turn upside down actual places (Foucault 1997: 352). They are made and staged, and they contrast not only with actual places but also with utopias. They are antiutopian and antidiscursive (Genocchio 1995: 41). (This would be de Certeau's "a city of concept" – a location without an actual space, which is inclined to present things more perfectly than they actually exist.) My wish is to close my article by attributing the term of heterotopia to Soans's performative activities.

Heterotopias do not exist in reality, but still they do actually exist. Being socially constructed weird places, they simultaneously create meaning for the social being and reveal its essence. They are locations contained in other spaces, which become evident when something is broken; they open up in the gaps of space and discontinuities in time. Foucault names a museum and a library, but in a way a monument is also a heterotopia, which accumulates a piece of time, placing it outside the (outward) flow. These places are characterised by unregulated and disrupted "internal" character, an invisible but still visibly operative difference (Foucault 1997: 352–354).

Foucault compares the functioning of heterotopia with a glance into a mirror. This is also spaceless or virtual – we see ourselves where we actually are not; while at the same time, this place corresponds to ourselves, and we find the absence of ourselves where we actually are, as we see ourselves altogether beyond. This (invention), nevertheless, forces us to return to ourselves, to reconstruct

ourselves where we are. The mirror therefore presents both twisted and joint experiences: as a virtual, unreal location, where we are not (utopia), refers to an actual, real space, where we are non-existent, seeing ourselves beyond. This ends with our returning to ourselves, denoting respecification of self in the place where one is (Foucault 1997: 352). In any case, a mirror only denotes reality (which is) somewhere else.

Still, while describing this activity as empirical geography, and interpreting these performances as locations for storing, circulating, signifying, decoding, etc., human elements, the controversy and tension hidden in them would remain unnoticed. Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis reveals our internal life as a space (of reminiscences, dreams and passions)<sup>42</sup>, comparable to heterotopia, if one thinks of it as a certain place of collective internal space (which is quite similar to Benjamin's vision of urban space). But this is not exactly the space that Foucault has in mind, since Foucault sees it as a location that invites us to step out of ourselves, where the erosion of our lives, time and history becomes evident. This is a space that "gnaws and claws at us" (Soja 1995: 15) and is thus inconvenient. Heterotopology must spread out this "different" human geography, which, in its empirical opaqueness and ideal transparency, usually remains invisible.

When a monument exists with the support of collective belief and acknowledgement, it creates a place where the reformulation of the work of this acknowledgement and belief could begin (Lefebvre 1996: 139). I would also like to recall the situationists' call for total desublimation.

Soans selects absolutely definite places in urban space, attempting to provoke a certain communicative situation. (A conflict here is not necessarily negative in essence.) So he strives to learn something about himself (above all, and I feel sorry that this personal level had to be completely abandoned here), to find answers to some questions – just like that small crazy Parisienne showed Breton his limits, Soans seems to pry at the monuments in Tallinn.

Still, this is not just his private space of passions and suffering; several other spaces are opening here which wrench open the collective unconscious, considerably wider in extent. This is the space in which we all move around and act

---

<sup>42</sup>n ...to call this assistant of psychoanalysis topoanalysis. Topoanalysis then would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives. In the theater of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles." (Bachelard 1999: 44.)

as participants. Those staged (by Soans) spaces – chasms and construed situations – recreate social and political being and bring the essence of this being to the surface.

According to Foucault's description of the mirror effect (the impact which Soans strives for), monuments invite us to step out of ourselves; we are dangerously vulnerable and open, and would not let go before life and history is bruised. I think that this can be quite an unpleasant, painful or ugly experience. And Soans, from his part, would not do anything to alleviate this experience.

If heterotopia is a case of some other (psychological, social, historical) space becoming visible in the actual space, perhaps Soans's performances make the psychological, imaginary<sup>43</sup> space visible in the actual urban space.

### **Allegory, political unconscious and cognitive mapping**

According to Fredric Jameson, cognitive mapping is the only possible radical political aesthetics in the postmodern world today (Jameson 1991: 50–51). It is not difficult to detect the similarity with the utopian loitering or drifting of a flâneur and situationists.<sup>44</sup> Jameson borrows the term from Kevin Lynch's book *The Image of the City*, published in 1960, where this connotation denotes the way inhabitants get around in the city, where the "map" is a forked set of mental representations, which do not only engage the formal knowledge of the printed map of the city, but also contain reminiscences of individual bodily contacts in the city. Jameson unites the empirical and ideological (as the subject's image of his actual relationship with the terms and conditions of his being), which is completed by cognitive mapping – a single subject's situative representation of

---

<sup>43</sup>I use this notion here like John C. Welchman, in the context, which the serious-minded Lacanians would probably disapprove of. For Lacan this meant a certain difference between a phase (so-called mirror phase) in the child's development, where his being is no longer directed by lust and urges, but not yet determined by the language (i.e. symbolic). The interim quality of the "imaginary" is linked to the acknowledgment and projection of oneself, to what has not yet been conquered by the social rules. This is the *public imaginary* Welchman is talking about in order to refer to the analogous "interim" in the social articulation of the space, where one cannot talk about "pure" nature or "pure" architecture (symbolic), where we perceive architecture as the extension of ourselves (Welchman 1995: 311).

<sup>44</sup>Leaving aside the fact that Jameson saw it in the global scheme, he rejected and excluded the local subjective approach as schizophrenic.

the changing totality which escapes complete reach (e.g. the structure of a city as a whole). According to Colin MacCabe this is exactly "the missing psychology of the political unconscious" (cit. Burgin 1996: 197–198).

However, can the inventory of the political (as well as social) unconscious be the underlying idea in Soans's performances? In their own way, his performances represent "geopolitical unconscious," as Jameson calls it, trying to implement national allegory as a conceptual instrument in order to contain being in the world, but not as a return to the (new) national state (Jameson 1995: 3; Jameson 1991: 54; see also Burgin 1996: 197). Soans positions his performances on the moments of fracture, when dissatisfaction, dullness, and a need for reconsideration emerge. He fills in the empty (more formal) allusions and expectations in these monuments. It is true that he does it in an unpredictable manner or even contrary to the expected. Hallucinations and fantasies are fixed for a moment in the configuration of performances.

### *Post scriptum*

As a conclusion, just another piece of observation relating to the carnival. It is clear, indeed, that Soans's performances are characterised by a certain play-like quality, carnivalesque. (Moreover, in the Middle Ages, carnivals were held at the market places which formed the centre of any city, and in a sense, from the viewpoint of the national unconscious, psychogeographically, the same holds true for the squares with monuments.)

According to Mihhail Bahtin's carnival theory, the carnival was a political act, an alternative policy, which reversed and undermined the existing (social) hierarchy (and as such, was utopian in essence), it was an interference in the normal rhythm. It would, naturally, be shortsighted to think that the carnival continues in the same fashion and meaning. The modern era has a sublimed carnival; the carnival has become a play, an object of the distanced and sentimental glance of the wide public. Still, from time to time, vile and scary, broken and detached fragments of the carnival can be found in very different cultural discourses. More often still we face the symbolic and ritual material of the carnival which has been transformed into a terror of the unconscious, signalling both personal as well as social and historical symptoms. The internalisation and neurotic sublimation of the carnival is the result of transformation. The carnival is

not a (revolutionary) social practice any more, but rather a (aesthetic) composition, relocated from the territory of social operation to the territory of art or an individual, private act (Stallybrass, White 1993: 284–286).

We could think that, first of all, within the selected borders of public symbolic architecture, Soans constructs some very intimate, or some unreal scenes from his childhood.<sup>45</sup> We could interpret his actions as the descriptions of the violence of the past via private performances, making use of the labelled social space in order to provide his own meaning by means of parody upon the blurred social meaning, to tame the anxiety, to fill in the terrifying meaninglessness and void.

In the modern approach to culture, the carnival has become a model, an ideal and an analytical category, a metaphor of licensed interruption and social and symbolic transformation (Hall 1993: 6–7). But like Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Stuart Hall is also convinced that the classical idea and metaphor of revolution have no ground in the modern society, they have been replaced by the repertoires of resistance (Gramsci) or rituals (Hall 1993: 12).<sup>46</sup>

This practice of "oxymoronic combinations" and doubling shifts Soans's performances towards the carnival. Still, besides the noticeable political conscious (targeted at the media society) of those performances there is still another link to the carnival – the bodily discourse and "body politics,"<sup>47</sup> which may not have received due attention in this article. (It is the carnival that joins these two discourses interesting to Soans: the social and the body). The body was a material part in the carnival: its means and its field. The body is made to be tested, it

---

<sup>45</sup>I have not yet mentioned probably the most decisive fact that Soans's father is a sculptor and the author of several monuments, including the monument to A.H. Tammsaare. In this sense, the title of Härm's article "A child remembers the violence of monuments" is damned ambivalent, although he dares not to invade such a personal territory in his analysis.

<sup>46</sup>The book by S. Hall and T. Jefferson (London, 1975), examining subcultures of the British youth of the post-war period, was titled *Resistance through Rituals*, which gives an accurate picture how the ideas of transgression and symbolic reversal were adjusted and reconceptualised in and for the modern times. It treats ritual as the symbolic dimension of movement, the stylisation of social operation, the "fooling" with symbols and signs, the unleashing of resistance and the reperformance of scenes of the theatre of life, a *bricoleur*-effect (Hall 1993: 11).

<sup>47</sup>One of the two versions of the transformation metaphor presented by Jameson, a programme of libido revolution, also including the carnival which is political so far as being itself is the figure of social revolution (see Hall 1993: 7–8).

is forced to participate and to give up distance. The revealing of the (inconceivable) terror of the public unconscious, which is one of the aims of Soans's performances, is still not mere mimicry in order to get through the needle's eye of the censorship. This is the symptomatic locus of the imaginary, the secondary sign system, which translates and presents the messages of the unconscious to the outside.<sup>48</sup> This is impersonated speech, the emptiness (nonsense and absurdity?<sup>49</sup>) of which notional relocation is permitted.

The pink figure could also be a grotesque body in the carnival, or, to be more exact, its *disjecta membra*, just like performances are the scattered, shifting residue of these ritual traditions. The spectator is left with nothing but a voyeuristic glance at a sentimental and exhibitionist play. The emerging identifications can be simply arbitrary, momentous and partial. (The hopeless absurdity of an act to be compensated by bananas, see Kaus 1998.)

Soans's autobiographic confession can become an allegory of (more general) social processes and status. The need for changes is detectable, if shadowed by nostalgia. To draw a critical note – their potential ends in subjectivity, autism and vanity, and finally, they are mere isolated spectacles, rather presenting individual differences than drawing attention to social, economic and other leakages.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup>Julia Kristeva has synthesised the oppositions of Bahtin's carnival – the classical and the grotesque – with Lacan's categories, symbolic and imaginary respectively.

<sup>49</sup>Jan Kaus has seen it as the act of an absurd man, the "charming nonsense, present here and beyond" which he interprets through Albert Camus's philosophy as a creation impelled by the death, the loss of weight and absurdity (of life). Still, Camus has no such direct impact on the concept of Soans's action, leaving aside the egotistical autism of the young artist (a mentality the representations of which in Estonian art Soans himself has thoroughly examined), as interpreted by Kaus: "Soans stood in honour and memory of his human loneliness – denoted by his pinkness – he was in no hurry whatsoever – sooner or later (at least) he (his body) crushes against the buoy of existence. There was a heap of bananas at his feet – they were meant for the audience to compensate for and to underline the absurdity of his standing." (Kaus 1998; my spacing, indicating the loss of private solitude – *M.L.*)

<sup>50</sup>I would, nevertheless, withdraw my words with their hidden reproach "as if those performances produced no results" at once after mouthing them. This passiveness can partly be explained by the fact that while treating the space more spiritually, without interfering with its material organisation, its occupation takes place rather in the memory, not in physical space. Proceeding, Soans aims at teaching us to see, making us notice. As far as the autobiographical side is concerned, it exists in a hidden form, but the touristic-political mapping of the city breaks the narrator's ego. So finally, the city and its regime seem to direct (and interrupt) the narrator, and the acts of his rhapsodic

The carnival appeals to the fall of décor, which the young country and the Estonian nation have to support in order to be like "real" and to survive. Cleansing oneself from the "filth" (i.e. from the past, poverty, inequality and of all similar things which are not correct but rather an ugly stain on the national pride), desperate denial and suppression of everything which is unpleasant and upsetting turns this into a very stubborn detail in the self-definition. Each of these monuments represents a specific mentality and attitude, and Soans consciously attempts to split the fissures behind them even wider.

But still, the tragedy of carnival is comprised in the fact that the reversal works for one night only, the next morning everything returns to their old places.

## References

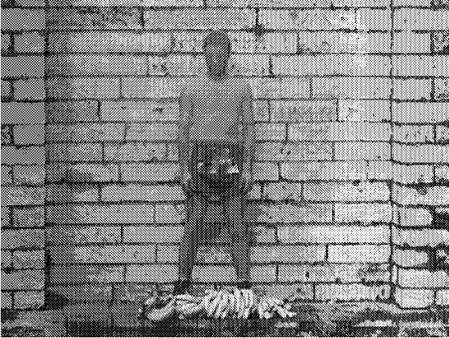
- A r t e l, Rael 2000. Backdoor – to enter or exit? – *Umelec*, No. 1, pp. 16–17
- B a c h e l a r d, Gaston 1999. *Ruumipoeetika*. [Poetics of Space.] Tallinn: Vagabund
- B e n j a m i n, Walter 1977. *Illuminationen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp
- B e n j a m i n, Walter 1981. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band III. Kritiken und Rezensionen. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp
- B e n j a m i n, Walter 1982. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band V. Das Passagen-Werk. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp
- B r e t o n, André 1960. *Nadja*. New York: Grove Press
- B u c k - M o r s s, Susan 1986. The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering. – *New German Critique*, Vol. 39 (Fall), pp. 99–141
- B u c k - M o r s s, Susan 1989. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press
- B u r g i n, Victor 1996. *In/different Spaces*. Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press
- d e C e r t e a u, Michel 1993. Walking in the City. – *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 151–169
- D e m a k o v a, Helena 1995. Taaskülaskäik monumendi juurde. – *Fabrique d'Histoire*. Saaremaa Biennaal. Konverentsi tekstikogumik. Eds. Eve Linnap, Peeter Linnap, pp. 10–13

---

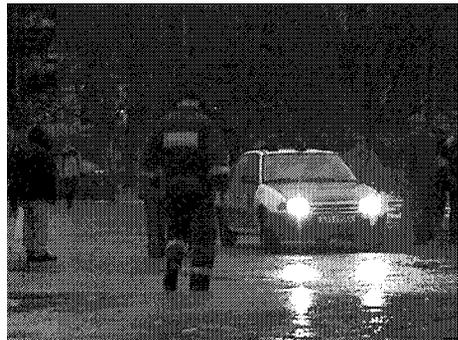
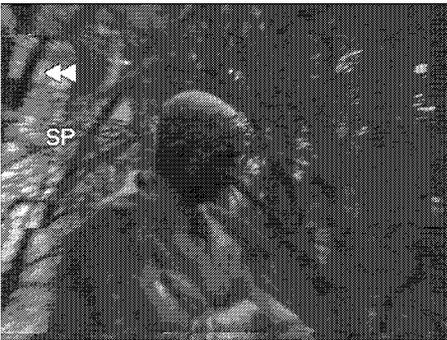
speech. And finally, this is characteristic of the TV-age, which, as architect Glenn Weiss, takes care of the effect which would create a situation for ourselves, just for one moment (cit. Sederholm 1998: 209).

- F o u c a u l t, Michel 1997. Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias. – *Rethinking Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Neil Leach. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 350–356
- G e n o c c h i o, Benjamin 1995. Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of "Other" Spaces. – *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*. Eds. Sophie Watson, Katherine Gibson. Cambridge, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc, pp. 35–46
- G i l l o c h, Graem 1996. *Myth and Metropolis. Walter Benjamin and the City*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- G r o s z, Elizabeth 1998. Bodies–cities. – *Places Through the Body*. Eds. Heidi J. Nast, Steve Pile. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 42–51
- H a l l, Stuart 1993. For Allon White: Metaphors of Transformation. – A. White. *Carnival, Hysteria and Writing. Collected Essays and Autobiography*. Oxford: University Press, pp. 1–25
- H ä r m, Anders 1998. Laps mäletab monumendi vägivaldada. – *Eesti Ekspress*, 13 Nov.
- J a m e s o n, Fredric 1991. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London, New York: Verso
- J a m e s o n, Fredric 1995. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- K a u s, Jan 1998. Hanno Soans seisis. – *Sirp*, 23 Oct.
- L a a n s o o, Karin 1998. *A Pink Bubble Story*. Manuscript
- L a a n s o o, Karin 2000. Intervention Through the Back Door. – *Analogue TV*
- L e f e b v r e, Henri 1996. The Production of Space. – *Rethinking Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Neil Leach. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 139–146
- S e d e r h o l m, Helena 1998. *Starting to Play with Arts Education*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä
- S o a n s, Hanno 1999. Backdoor Media 99: "Fassaadid kodututele" kontseptsiooni asemel. – *Backdoor Media* Samizdat
- S o a n s, Hanno 2000a. A Recipe For Analogue TV. – *Analogue TV*
- S o a n s, Hanno 2000b. Mari Laanemets's interview with Hanno Soans, 1 Oct.
- S o a n s, Hanno 2001. Applied Situationism in New Estonian Art. – *Nosy Nineties. Problems, Themes and Meanings in Estonian Art on 1990s*. Eds. Sirje Helme, Johannes Saar. Tallinn: Center for Contemporary Arts, pp. 227–242
- S o b o l e v, Mari 1998. Tundmatu sõdur muutis värvi. – *Sõnumileht*, 21 Oct.
- S o j a, Edward W. 1995. Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-LA. – *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*. Eds. Sophie Watson, Katherine Gibson. Cambridge, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc, pp. 13–34
- S t a l l y b r a s s, Peter, W h i t e, Allon 1993. Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnivalesque. – *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 284–294

- T r e i e r, Heie 1995. Mida teha Viktoriga? Võitja fenomen. – *Fabrique d'Histoire*. Saaremaa Biennaal. Konverentsi tekstikogumik. Eds. Eve Linnap, Peeter Linnap, pp. 14–21
- T r e i e r, Heie 1998. Monument 1990. aastatel. – *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 9. Tallinn: Teaduste Akadeemia Kirjastus, pp. 257–284
- W e l c h m a n, John C. 1995. On Axe's Edge: Architecture and Performance. – J.C. Welchman. *Modernism Relocated: Towards a Cultural Studies of Visual Modernity*. St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, pp. 203–217



*Backdoor.* The performance at the monument to an Unknown Soldier, 20 Oct. 1998.



*Reformation* ("Usupuhaustus"). The performance at the monument to A.H. Tammsaare, 16 Nov. 1999.