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DREAMING THE CITY FOR REAL

Editorial

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Photo by Sharon Stewart of a work created by Saghar Afzalnia, Pompadó Martha, in Marloeke van der Vlugt's exposition The Tunnel as Urban Care-scape.

DREAMING THE CITY FOR REAL

Spaces of Polyphony, Dissonance and Co-existence

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How to dream for real a city, in which the intersecting and often incompatible desires, hopes and interests of those inhabiting it, including the innumerable more-than-human others, can coexist, cross and collide in ways that enable living space for all? What kinds of concrete dreams this ideal presupposes and what horizons might already be within reach? And what kinds of constraints and tensions do they face?

What kinds of dreams and utopic visions permeate the city, and how are they realised? What types of districts, neighbourhoods and corners does the city consist of? How is one able to intervene in them? What kinds of invisible and tacit, as well as visible and materially perceivable norms, regulations and practices cut through the city, and where do they originate? And what kinds of obstacles and challenges are there in making the city one's own, or in making it a just space?

These questions echo through the thirteen expositions in this theme issue. The expositions bring together a diverse collection of case narratives that have emerged in various urban environments. From them unfolds a living and experiential cartography of a versatile and multi-voiced city. This cartography reveals structures that both enable and delimit urban space, presenting the city as a multi-layered world mediated through sensory and aesthetic experience, where different actors and modes of experiencing intersect. It attunes the reader to a register in which the smells, sounds, rhythms, and movements of the city become perceptible in new ways.

In the exposition "City as a stream of sense. An exploration through aesthetic research practices", **Alex Arteaga** walks in Merihaka, the living monument of concrete brutalism rising from the sea, near Hakaniemi Helsinki. There they explore the extremely intimate experiential event where the spatial meanings appear in their becoming. Arteaga's observations emerge from a body-conscious walking practice, side by side with focusing on the intentionality of listening. In the exposition Arteaga develops a form of aurally informed exploration essay-writing.

In the exposition "[SHUT] for business: Performing transition in a bankrupt city", **Roxanne Korda** and **Daniel Blanco Alberti's** site of study is the former industrial area Digbeth in Birmingham. In recent years, this Industrial Revolution era district has seen businesses leave the area. Through witnessing and participating, and through fictionalizing their findings into truth-based narratives, Roxanne Korda wrote and Daniel Blanco Albert composed the opera [SHUT] that examines the Digbeth region as an experiential landscape for those facing bankruptcy. In this project, inclusiveness and immersiveness are created primarily by listening to the subjective experiences of the locals of their site.

In the exposition "Third-Ikebana", **Vincent Roumagnac** examines urban space aesthetically by adapting the method of ikebana, that is, through the collection and arrangement of plants. The practice leads them to third landscapes, to the blind spots within the principles that shape the aesthetic order of urban space. From these fringes, Roumagnac gathers plants and arranges them according to the Shōka style of ikebana, a tradition developed in Japan during the late Edo period. These arrangements offer a view into the city's overlooked margins and its subtle processes of making sense.

Adesola Akinleye observes the city as a living and breathing organism in their exposition "City Dances: What the City Reveals Using Dance as a Method". The city appears not as a pre-established order, but as a changing environment in which various irreconcilable forces co-act. For Akinleye, dance is a method of being and forming an ever-changing, interactive connection with the urban space. Through the formation of dance-based knowledge, a continuous co-play between sensory, political, site-specific and physical elements intersecting in the city emerges. The city appears not only as a background for various human activities, but as an active co-contributor.

In **Denise Ziegler's** exposition "Picking Flowers in the City", the city is a layered and multisensory space of movement, color, sound, time, repetition, dream, and exchange. The collections of works combining moving image and sound reveal the practice of artistic research, which directs attention to the incidental, mundane and fleeting ephemerality that the artist researcher's alertly tuned attention-finding-device picks up while moving through the urban space. Ziegler creates an artistic research method in which they explore with the city. In this setting, the artist's own bodily relationship and urban space forms as a network of observations, from which Ziegler composes quivering still images, similar to the mythical Chimera beast with its disparate head, body and tail.

Zoë Sadokierski and **Sarah Jane Jones'** exposition "Wayshowing, wayfinding and waysharing: Designing multispecies encounters in urban landscapes" approach cities as sites of coexistence between humans and other species through reporting two wayfinding projects carried out in the city of Sydney. The "Type Trails" project reveals the hidden logic of finding your way around inner city by visualising

three different memory lines. In the second project, "Nearby Nature", guided walks through the city introduce their participants to specific observation, sketching and storytelling activities which aim to foster a sense of care for the multiple plant and animal species that co-inhabit the urban environment. Further, the exposition presents a report on a shared walk undertaken by the authors to find intersecting narratives, approaches and values underpinning the two projects.

In their exposition "Rakeinen Utopia – Tutkimusta sähköpotkulaudalla" (Grained Utopia – Research on an electronic scooter) **Tero Heikkinen** dreams of a green garden city utopia by riding the city crosswise on an electric scooter. With an experiential, mobile method, a fragmentary city atlas consisting of different driving routes is perceived. The light two-wheeled vehicle opens the city to be experienced through a cluster of rapidly changing multisensory observations, as a hint of utopian condensation. The research orientation based on mobility, in which the technology related to electric scootering is also taken into account, gives new possibilities for approaching the research on the terms of the instrument. What and how the central vehicle, in this case the scooter, demarcates and on the other hand enables, appears quite concretely in the exposition where it smells like a forest here, and a freshly cast asphalt there.

In "KAS! – Monimuotoisempaa kaupunkitilaa maalaamassa" (KAS! – Painting a more diverse urban space) **Heidi Hänninen** discusses large-scale urban mural paintings, realised within the framework of community art, as urban activist art interventions that contribute to strengthening a more socially sustainable and multi-voiced urban space, and at the same time can be viewed through the lense of monumental works of public art. At the center of the exposition is the "Taking Some Space" mural, realised near Kontula mall by the Kontula Art School (KAS!) painters, late summer 2024. KAS! is a low-threshold community art group and represents a heterogeneous sample of local residents. The creation of the piece in itself functioned as a way for them to engage in defining their neighbourhood.

In "Neuvotteluja tilasta – Esitys utooppisena prosessina kaupunkitilassa" (Negotiations of space – Performance as an utopic process) exposition **Pilvi Porkola** presents their artistic project "Sofa – discussions about utopias as part of artist pedagogical research". She frames her "utopian practice" in the frame of reference for social turn, utopian pedagogy and artist pedagogy. In the performative discussions that took place in four locations in the city of Helsinki, Porkola discussed utopic thinking and societal change with two invited guests in each location. At the same time the sofa discussion performance challenges our conception of the normal use of the urban space.

In the exposition "The Tunnel as Urban Care-scape", **Marloeke van der Vlugt** examines a pedestrian tunnel in Amsterdam through long-term, site-based engagement. Over the course of three experiments, the artist's method "Touching" brings forth hidden layers and rhythms of urban polyphony, and the artist's

evolving relationship to this site and its diverse human and more-than-human elements and sensory relations. On the one hand, the work highlights the significance of small gestures and encounters as acts of building connections and as forms of care and attentiveness; on the other, its self-reflexive dimension subtly yet honestly reveals the ambivalent feelings these encounters can evoke – from curiosity, sensitivity, and wonder to anxiety, fear, and confusion.

In the exposition "A Head Massage Tool or a Crowbar? Toolbox for the Reflection of Art in Public Spaces", **Renée Van Oploo** examines in an original and distinctive manner the responsibilities associated with public art, participation, and the implications of the democratization of art. The "toolbox", designed and conceptualized by the artist, offers a playful and insightful framework for assessing both the artist's aims and the impact of the work. Van Oploo does not hesitate to subject their own works and creative processes to such evaluation; rather, the exposition demonstrates strong self-reflection and provides valuable insights into the practices of making art.

Hanna Vahvaselkä's "Uuden aaton katu" (The Street of the New Eve) is based on the collaboration between Hanna Vahvaselkä and Markus Jalonen. Jalonen's artistic project, as a case study of the exposition, connects to a broader discussion about art, urban space, and the experience of disability. Jalonen's artistic work opens intimate views on urban space, where the private and the common, the vulnerable and the shared, enter into dialogue. The exposition makes it visible how accessibility, safety and inclusion are intertwined both in everyday life and in public space, bringing out experiences at the edges of normative perception. It invites you to consider what kinds of spaces the city can offer when diversity is recognized and allowed space to become visible. At the same time, the exposition emphasizes the ethical dimension of art: sharing, responsibility and building a connection.

Annette Arlander's exposition "Citizen Pine" challenges the ways of thinking about citizenship and of the human relationship with the rest of nature. It opens new perspectives on the notion of citizenship, extending it to non-human actors such as trees. The exposition builds on the author's conversations with pine trees, asking the provocative question, "What if we considered pine trees to be citizens, city dwellers?". The author's approach is a combination of artistic and speculative research with an emphasis on being, listening and discussing, and it shows that artistic research can provide significant contributions to current debates about nature's rights and ecological citizenship.

In addition to the expositions described above, the issue includes two contributions in the **Voices (Puheenvuorot)** section: **Niran Baibulat** presents an exposition-shaped modification of her opening lecture (lectio praecursoria) held in the public examination of her doctoral thesis "Kävellen kuvaitu, kävellen koettu" (Depicted by walking, experienced through walking) at the Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki on 7 June 2025. **Esa Kirkkopelto's** Voices contribution "In other words: on the

common ethics of art making and artistic research” is based on his invited talk at the Sibelius Academy Research Days on 24 March 2025. Kirkkopelto brings into consideration the ethical relationship between art and research, especially in regard to the challenges of artistic research. Both Voices contributions are in Finnish.

Through the expositions the theme issue emphasizes the role of artistic methods and artistic research in comprehending the city as an open, constantly changing space and site that channels its inhabitants’ wants, needs and interests. The contributors develop models for thinking and doing for strengthening the potential for humans and more than humans to participate in their living environment. Through the artistic interventions, an understanding of co-agency emerges, opening new perspectives on the use, care and protection of city space, as well as on alternative orders of relating and inhabiting the city.

The city is not a singular and permanent place, but an ever-changing, flowing and diverse. Some of its districts are distinctive, some more generic. There are sub-cultures and high cultures, landscapes and billboards, place fixation and throughflow. Freedoms, responsibilities, rushing around, references. The expositions highlight a diverse set of questions concerning today's urban environment and urban life, related to urban nature rights, ecological citizenship, and to whom urban space belongs. They suggest fresh perspectives on the conditions under which the urban space is realized. Expectations, needs and dreams do not necessarily correspond to norms or averages. Through artistic thinking, both the city's blind spots and its most public spaces are brought into new forms of engagement within societal debate.

Several expositions propose an actant-network where the artist acts with the city who contributes to or participates in the artistic research activity. These conditions are also influenced by more-than-human inhabitants, such as flowers, trees, and birds. Conceptual and practical frameworks are always situational and site-specific, and they point towards particular points of attention. In its materiality, the city gives measure and scale to the exploration, bringing the role of bodily and temporal experience to the fore. The city is never an empty canvas, but a space and situation pervaded by countless social, cultural, political, human and non-human threads.

The methods of artistic research presented in the issue demonstrate that dreaming the city otherwise is not only an urban imaginary dimension, but also a genuinely performative one, that sets in motion and produces new sensory spaces. The city keeps turning and deferring to new positions and postures, turning dreameries into tactile sensations.

City is a gathering space for its residents, and, as the expositions show, for a diverse set of urban activity and activism. The city belongs to its citizens, even though the various processes of its operations are managed, regulated and

controlled. Sometimes these processes cause contradiction and conflict, sometimes they contribute to enabling and safeguarding co-existence and co-operation. Regulations and norms, as well as the physical and architectural components of urban space, are swaying and changing. They are profoundly spatial and conceptual practices, and thus subject to renegotiation and change. They are dismantled and replaced with new ones. They can decay over time, and are repaired and renewed. The only certainty is that the city will never be complete, but there is always space to dream it different.

The RUUKKU theme issue **DREAMING THE CITY FOR REAL – SPACES OF POLYPHONY, DISSONANCE AND CO-EXISTENCE** has been conducted as part of the research project **City as Space of Rules and Dreaming** combining artistic research, law, and urban planning research (Kone Foundation 2021–2025). The Call for Proposals was announced in the international art and research event "City is sound, city is quicksand" organised at Hietsu Pavilion, in the tender armpit of the city's most beautiful beach on a bright May afternoon in 2024. The editors of the issue are **Maiju Loukola, Aino Hirvola, Jaakko Ruuska, Paul Tiensuu and Henna-Riikka Halonen.**

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