

Contents

Fascination.....	2
Layering for stimulation	2
Socio-urban Context.....	2
The Rotermann District.....	2
The Ruins	3
Problematising disconnection	3
Interruptions in spatial flow.....	3
Disintegration of street space and building space	3
Lack of dynamic local engagement	4
Research Question	4
Program	4
Method: learning to walk.....	4
Recursive Process.....	5
Design	5
Type + Style = Identity	5
Intentions.....	5
An excerpt from the manifest	6
Leitmotifs.....	6
Implantation - Allied, yet confidently odd	6
Exterior	7
Form - beguiling and adventurous.....	7
Zoning.....	7
Performance space.....	7
Transparency and technical reality	8
Materials.....	8
Facade.....	8
Technique - As dramatic as necessary, as pragmatic as possible.....	9
Drama.....	9
Pragmatism.....	9
Climate Strategy	9
Sketch Models	10
Construction Drawings.....	10

After going over what fascinated me in Tallinn and what problem I set out to confront, I'll explain my design and hopefully elucidate how this past year has shaped my understanding of architecture.

Fascination

Layering for stimulation

In our **group work** during the excursion, we identified the varying degrees of contextual fit that shape the character of Tallinn's urban fabric. The three groups **Isolation, Layering and Juxtaposition** helped us to characterise them on a scale from boring to overwhelming, with **stimulating** in the golden middle. Building on this hypothesis, my personal fascination with an environment that has the ability to be culturally stimulating became connected to the concept of layering. Layering in a style that can be found in **Estonia**.

Socio-urban Context

Since the early 2000s, following painful economic recovery, Estonia has been focusing on **enabling liberal market capitalism**. In order to align its capital Tallinn to those of other European democracies, it has homed in on fast Wi-Fi, low taxes and efficient bureaucracy for startups and corporations, quick erection of steel and glass high rise offices and luxurious **consumption spaces** to attract wealthy tourists shipped in on massive cruise ships.

The goal of transforming into a competitive economy may have been achieved, but **shrinking cities, fleeing populations and dwindling resources** pose the question if the Babylonian diet of the most carbon-intensive economy in the OECD is worth sustaining, or if **proposing spaces for cultural exchange**, sparking curiosity, has the balancing effect necessary to counter the dominant paradigm of economic growth and **guarantee a vibrant urban development**.

The Rotermann District

In Tallinn, the Rotermann District exemplifies the concept of **superimposition of old and new** as well as the **flawed notion that consumption spaces alone can foster collective prosperity**: It is a former industrial site, between the centre of town, the harbour and the high rise district, that has been recently transformed into a commercial cluster of luxury brand shops, expensive apartments and squeaky clean co-working spaces.

Almost all architectures are industrial heritage buildings that have been meticulously renovated to appear as in their 'original' state, to serve as cleaned up foundations for glass and steel additions. Often between the categories layering and juxtaposition, the developments commodification of that industrial appearance requires a facelift that **erases the traces of decay**.

The Ruins

In contrast, what stands out, are the **last of the available, undeveloped ruins**. They are rough, broken and constituent of pragmatic repairs, changes and fixes that have happened over time.

Situated at the fringes of the area, both ruins were used by the wool industry, as storage and machining halls. Built in 1934, the buildings have **been changed, renovated, and added on to** over and over. The patchwork that remains has been in desolate condition since the 70s and their floor and roof structures are either non-existent or barely hanging on. The limestone facades have welded shut doors, bricked up or destroyed openings, holes in the brickwork and plants growing in the grouting.

During our excursion in October these multilayered buildings induced a fascination only ruins can spark, and so I chose them as my site.

Problematising disconnection

Interviews, a guided museum tour, spending days **sketching** on site as well as ongoing **literature** research uncovered the qualities and deficiencies of the recent developments. Most notably the preservation of heritage buildings combined with imposing additions generate a somewhat **coherent architectural style** that succeeds in drawing attention and building recognizability. Unfortunately, a threefold **disconnection** of the Rotermann district is apparent:

Interruptions in spatial flow

The interruptions in **spatial flow** to other city areas and the seafront due to a lack of a coherent urban masterplan, is an overarching problem of the capital. The district finds itself with excellent external infrastructure by a proximate transport node. Yet the approach possibly involves a journey through a partly ruined wall and a sense of trepidation due to **"No Trespassing"** signs. Its main axes are lined by big windowless walls or **smooth curtain walls**. (...)

Disintegration of street space and building space

Secondly, the failure to integrate **street space and building space** results in a closed off, inappropriate environment. The thresholds between interior and exterior have to be strict due to the climate control requirements, but the plazas do not seem to have possibilities of free use and do not connect into the buildings. The **public spaces** are

bleak and overly dictated, while the **architecture**, despite its rather interesting form, seems inaccessible and clashes with the rest of the dynamic, unfinished city.

Lack of dynamic local engagement

And finally, the inadequate programming for **dynamic local engagement**. Private developers gained the confidence and desire to create a dense urban fabric and intriguing architectures during the economic boom, but had to secure profitability by programming for consumption and commerce. In the fervour of economic growth an attempt is made to link shopping with a full-bodied life and collective prosperity. This is not the case. Despite its **surroundings being under constant construction**, it is an area of finished, static state, where locals have no agenda in creating their environment. **Because supply and demand of authentic cultural goods finds no marketplace, the quarter lacks a sense of shared responsibility, disengages locals and thus does not encourage adaptive and community-oriented uses.** Rather, the feeling of having to constantly spend money to justify one's presence, combined with the price and prestige hierarchy of goods and services used for social positioning differentiates and separates people from each other and kills **curiosity** towards ones surrounding environment. The result feels more like an outdoor mall instead of a vibrant urban neighbourhood.

Research Question

This brings me to my research question: "How can the disconnection of the Rotermann District be effectively addressed and rectified, considering the need for dynamic local engagement, uninterrupted spatial flow to other city areas, and the integration of building and street space development?"

Program

To achieve this goal using the means of the architect, **a program/function is selected**. My intentions for the graduation project required a program that suits my fascinations and tackles the larger and local issues at hand. A chat in a local music store about these issues and my fascinations pointed me into a direction: **The alternative theatre scene in Tallinn**. It had just lost a venue due to temporary licenses. Its community, left houseless, felt left to their own devices to build something new. And so, the strongest player in the ranks of cultural stimulation, theatre, became the programmatic tool I chose.

Method: learning to walk

A research question challenged by a problem statement embedded into a broader historical and theoretical perspective is confronted by the project (design vision) which is progressed by intuitive, design and research methods and is documented.

Recursive Process

The process is characterised by testing, trial-and-error and experimenting. I use the familiar disciplinary means of design; drawing, making and writing, to address the problem which in turn informs my research of the employed techniques and generates new avenues of research.

Design

Type + Style = Identity

Theatre, in its minimal form, merely requires a patch of cleared ground, but in order to enhance the expression of performers and the experience of the audience, a meaningful elaboration of the performative space is needed. In the early stages of the design, I focussed on different **stage types** and the possibilities and implications that come with them. I recognised that type lies at the very root of architecture and is far more fundamental to the identity than what is called 'style'. **Style** links architecture to **history**, to a specific phase in the development of material culture, to certain construction techniques and means. But just as the style links to time, **type** expresses the **permanence** of its **essential traits**. This understanding enabled me to **transcend the perceived limitations of 'zeitgeist'** and to integrate overlapping styles into my design, drawing from the **ancient, the vintage and the modern**. This combination is not evidence of the interchangeable or random nature of styles, but rather confirms the synthesised, multifaceted identity of forms in our current time.

To adapt means to be permitting of changes that follow the process of cultural drift as well as physical decay. Over time, the assumptions that go into the design of the architecture become less and less true, but because of a clear and resilient type that can be adapted to over the course of many years, its continuous **reuse** is made attractive.

So what I understand is that a **good design**, one that can survive for many decades, **thousands of years** or forever, needs to be of a style that positions itself as confidently as possible into its time and of a type that **manifests its most essential traits**.

Intentions

I decided to use the idea of a **manifest as a tool** to define what the designs most essential traits are. This text in its early stages helped me to **uncover the character** that the process of designing had already given to my project. The recursive method I used allowed the **reevaluating of the decisions** I had made earlier in the process and clarified them for further steps, so that the **concept is apparent in all scales**, from the urban scale to the architectural scale to the human scale.

An excerpt from the manifest

Long enough alternative theatre has hidden in small black boxes squeezed in between the 'economically viable' forms of entertainment. The bad habit of subordinating the Other spatially leads to a representation of compliance instead of criticism. Dusty, crammed venues do have a charm but in our world of elbowing for the most attention, alternative performance architecture needs to fight in the weight class of the institutions it attempts to confront. The timid 'underground' has to undergo a metamorphosis into a confident giant. A beacon, beguiling Tallinn inhabitants, locals, cosmopolitan audiences, touring theatre companies, vagabond performers. An artform that has existed for over three thousand years now is housed in a building able to survive for at least a thousand. Hefty monolithic natural stone exudes powerfully what is necessary to face the continuous paradigm of growth around it. By opening portals to its world, figuratively and literally, it exhibits authentic discussion of values, a space to question the status quo, to communicate freely, to provoke the comfortable and give courage to the uncomfortable.

Leitmotifs

This text was productive of three guiding 'leitmotifs' of the three ranges of scale:

Urban/Implantation - Allied, yet confidently odd

Architectural/Form - Beguiling and adventurous

Human/Technique - As dramatic as necessary, as pragmatic as possible

Implantation - Allied, yet confidently odd

The transformation is clearly a part of the Rotermann Family by deliberately integrating industrial heritage and adding an imposing architectural gesture. But it's the odd one out, due to its program and as it embraces the ruined state of its heritage undercarriage.

The transformation uses the ruin's **combined footprint** as a landing area for the 'hot space'. The towering volume is legible from all sides and bound to **turn heads** of passers-by. It bravely rises above its adjacent buildings and challenges the notion of a Tallinn saturated in symbols. Tractive architecture must be bold and push the limits of what is tolerable. In this case, it has to assert itself in the urban fabric. It stands in dialogue with the three office-blocks on top of the neighbouring building; which one is stranger in appearance lies in the eye of the beholder.

On the southern side of the plaza, the „**forbidden portal**“ is minimally enhanced to allow safe passage, embracing the trampled path people use anyway to access the district. Here, more bike parking Infront of the casino and the hotel anticipates the improved infrastructure Tallinn plans for bikes in the future. In the north, an alleyway

currently used for delivery and lined with alcohol shops connects to **the back-of house, logistics**, staff and performer 's entrance.

Exterior

The **exterior** of the in between-spaces mirrors and enhances the **existing gradient of accessibility** in the degree of ground sealing: On the one hand, the more public the urban space is, the more green peeks through the pavers. It maxes out in a patch of lawn that plays with the „to see and being seen“-dynamic theatre-going society has going on with beachy lawn chairs in front of the crumbling facades. On the other hand, the more secluded spaces in the back pockets are paved to generate clear patio spaces that can be used for outdoor work by the scene-carpenters workshops or for performers' BBQs after a premiere. The paved and slightly lowered **entrance-patio** with adjacent bike-parking is delineated by the existing industrial chimney and **guides visitors into the theatre.**

Form - beguiling and adventurous

Inside, the striking freestanding, rotated stone faces the incoming with two of its eight portals. They can be opened to devour audience directly or be kept partially closed to lure in the curious around the corner.

Zoning

Four functions zone the **interior**: The performance space, the serving spaces, the bar, and the backstage. The **proportion** of the spaces, resulting from the decentred position of the cuboid, aligns with the requirements of the designated functions. For example, the bar area, is the widest area.

The **ticket reception** isle in the foyer offers a helping hand (and tickets) when meeting the massive monolith. To the left, **public garderobes** and washrooms across two floors are housed in the former storage building volume. To the right, the space narrows into the **bar area** housed in the former wool industry hall.

On the opposite side, a rolling gate toggles the connection to the **backstage area**. Here, logistics, staff rooms, workshops, a performer's foyer, boxes, laundry, offices and technical rooms find their place in the existing northern flank.

Performance space

The symmetrical, vertical **arena stage** departs from established norms and reflects the experimental nature of the art it will bear. The **galleries** are suspended from the above timber truss into the permanent shell like a honeycomb in a barrel. The architecture seeks to instil some **restlessness** in the audience. As a result, they are required to seek new points of view to the performance. Two **spiral staircases** elevate audience,

performers and technicians alike. I want to note that the constructed space seeks to deconstruct the possible direct reasoning common to the spectacle, while the architecture allows the spectator to conceive their own logic, **participating** indirectly in a type of **theatrical expression**.

Transparency and technical reality

Dissimilar to the other development's tries to conceal their dirty high-tech secrets, and to the traditional, crusty theatre's attempt to hide the magic that makes drama possible, a **pellucid cornice** radiates the performance spaces inner workings, allowing a glimpse of the technical reality that happens behind the scenes. Its ability to let in **natural light** can be toggled via motorised interior awnings. This mechanism, inspired by the Teatro Officina's roof (a theatre by lino Bo Bardi in Sao Paolo), allows a **dramatic change of atmosphere** of the performance space.

Materials

Bar area: Here, the full height of the original volume can be experienced and is emphasised by the vertical zig-zagged facade. A generous amount of light is permitted through the **window strip** above, as well as the skylights lining the perimeter of the core.

Designed to be **accessible** for everyone even during events, the line between theatre foyer and public space is blurred in the funnel-shaped spaces surrounding the stone cube.

For the interior, **familiar** materials and elements are used: The tiled floor, stained wooden furniture and comfortable couches. But they are used in a strange way, the size, the lighting and shape. Durable, familiar materials encourage maintenance by the community, which can be productive in instilling a sense of shared responsibility. By not relying on the charm of the expensive people are compelled to look past superficial differences, to focus on communication with each other. But blowing the spaces out of proportion brings the special atmosphere of the place to the fore.

Facade

The existing **facades** act as props in the gestalt development of the scenery. Its openings show superimposed window axes, disregard of previous orders, demolition and re-addition. To add to this story, **rectangular window boxes** are extruded. Their position is determined from the configuration inside. Some act as **passages** to the patios, some are for **seating niches** and some contain **artefacts from the site, artwork or neon-lit advertising**.

The facade's **black backdrop** is visible through the porous ruins and sculpted white concrete soffits make cutting right through the openings possible, while permitting further decay of the limestone walls.

Technique - As dramatic as necessary, as pragmatic as possible

The relationship between the architectural concept and its materialisation is expressed in the leitmotif 'As dramatic as necessary, as pragmatic as possible.'

Drama

On the one hand, Drama. Spectacular construction methods are used to realise the conceptual ambitions of the design. For example, the **typological clarity and symbolic confidence** relies on the true weight of **natural stone**. Its durability, the haptic, acoustic, thermal and visual feedback of monolithic construction cannot be replicated by deceiving methods of imitation. The decreasing width of the large format blocks reflects the necessary strength of the walls and makes the cantilevering of the suspended galleries possible. The **adaptability** of the gallery structure is ensured by the use of steel joints connecting the rafters made from engineered wood to the steel suspension cables.

The **crown** uses theatrical **large format glazing** to permit natural light and visibility of the technology it houses.

Pragmatism

On the other hand, Pragmatism. Rational aspects such as **sustainability, constructive sequence, climate control and integration of functional features** are taken into account.

This is why I choose a consistent stabalux mullion and transom system for the elements facing the sky. The system allows me to seamlessly integrate low-incline skylights and vertical window strips into the slanted roof. The same system is used for above the performance space.

The foundations, floor slabs and under stage, as well as the soffits of the ruin piercings are cast in **concrete**. Clad in blue sheets, the window boxes are welded to be **structurally sound frames** and act as anchors connecting the timber panels to the existing facade. **Lightweight timber** prefabricated panels precisely line the existing facades and organise the functional spaces.

Climate Strategy

Thermal comfort is provided by use of the chimney effect for **natural ventilation** during the moderate temperature season and **wall heating/cooling** and **mechanical ventilation** with energy recovery by heat pump during the extreme temperature seasons. The wall heating/cooling works in synergy with **thermal mass** of stone and avoids heating a large volume of air, because comfort is needed only near the walls.

Acoustic comfort is provided by decoupled joints, double doors and absorptive panels. The flexible gallery structure is housed in the central cube, followed by the surrounding timber lining of the again surrounding pierced existing facades.

Sketch Models

Used in development of the thresholds between the existing and the addition and the construction sequence.

Construction Drawings

Conclusions

The success of the Rotermann District in re-using of existing built mass to create striking, recognizable architecture of a coherent style is enhanced by the project based on the understanding of what is necessary to balance out the dominant paradigm of economic growth: Spaces for cultural stimulation that spark curiosity, foster a sense of shared responsibility, engage locals and encourage adaptive and community oriented uses.

Complementary to the effects of mallification, Unfinishing Spaces is neither a utopia nor an obsolete fashion trend, but helps to bind the fragments of space which have fallen out of time (or use) back into the fabric of contemporary architecture.

And if it succeeds, that fabric appears at the same time familiar, yet striking, providing a new definition of a vibrant Tallinn.