

REFRAMING IMAGERIES OF INDUSTRIAL SURPLUS

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*'To
take
a bunch of
unimportant
things,
functionless
"objects", un-
important events
and episodes ...
and to produce a
new fantastic world,
where the powerless
components of the reality
become an active, developing
force, that would let the values
of the real world seem insignifi-
cant and open up the absurdity
of their coexistence.'*

Lapin, L. (1970). *Häppening Eestimaal*.
In *Artikleid ja ettekandeid kunstist
1967–1977* (manuscript collec-
tion, Tallinn, 1977), p.
14.

surplus

/ noun /

an amount of something left over when requirements have been met; an excess of production or supply.

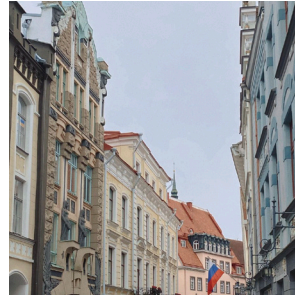
/ adjective /

more than what is needed or used; excess.



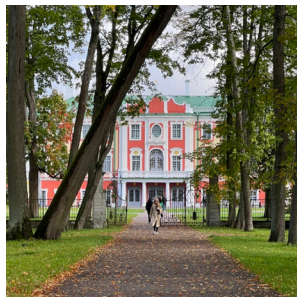
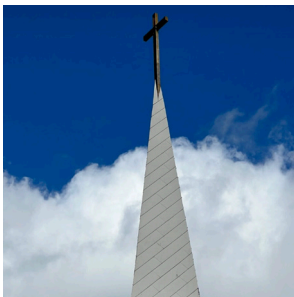
urban fringes
wastelands
slums

the image of Tallinn



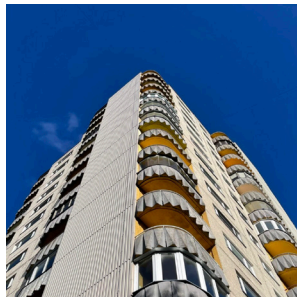
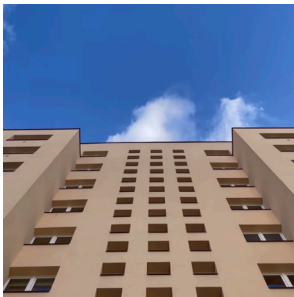
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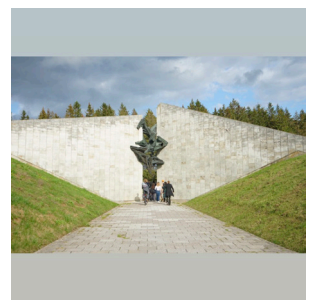
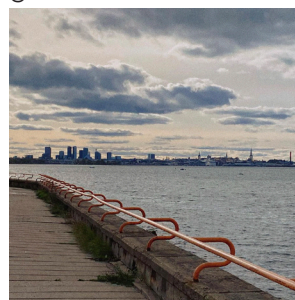
@luisa_victoria

@silvahaarbosch



@melvti

@mabelbelc



Figure(s) 1: Social media representation of Tallinn. Source: extracted from the Instagram accounts of students from the Methods of Analysis and Imagination Graduation Studio.

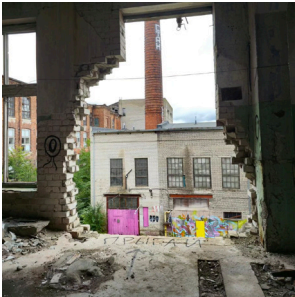


@melvti



@kathleenpanariti

@arvind.rahu198



@luisa_victoria



also the image of Tallinn...?

INTRODUCTION

My fascination with the imageries of surplus sparked when I undertook the task of compiling a catalogue of Instagram posts by students from the Methods of Analysis and Imagination Graduation Studio during the two-week field trip in Tallinn. The images selected (Figure 1) reveal distinct architectural spaces distributed around the city that were easily identifiable. Since Tallinn's urban environment was shaped by a myriad of regimes and eras throughout its history, it reflected in the fragmented nature of its districts. Despite this, one can recognise and categorise the images based on the location they were taken. These images encapsulate places in the city that are legible, either invoking a strong sense of imageability or conforming to a discernible pattern of physical features.

From Kevin Lynch's book, *The Image of the City* (1959), one of the pivotal visual qualities of any cityscape is legibility. It serves as a lens for inhabitants to structure and organise elements of the complex urban environment into coherent mental images. It determines how we navigate a city and influences our perception of the urban fabric.

On the other hand, this Instagram catalogue also includes a category of ruins, decaying material and abandoned places. These photographs often depict buildings adorned with peeling paint, decaying brick walls and the slow encroachment of biological overgrowth reclaiming man-

made landscapes. They represent a narrative of their own separate from the rest of the developing city. These spaces, although less known, less noticed and almost invisible to a normal city dweller, share physical space with formal architecture within the same urban fabric.

The dichotomy was even more apparent during a Kopli tour curated by a local guide from Hidden Tallinn where he highlighted various fringe spaces tucked away between housing developments. Straying away from the paths designated by the formal city, one might stumble across the burnt walls of a factory worker's house, merely five minutes away from their suburban neighbourhood (Figure 2).

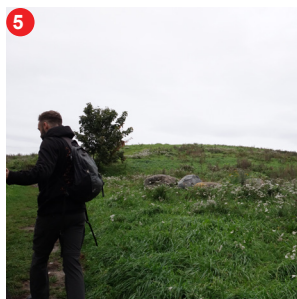


Figure 2: Kopli tour route by *Hidden Tallinn*. Source: by author.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



Figure(s) 3: Jüri Okas, The 'Romanticism' of Wastelands. Source: MAJA.

During the 1970s-80s, a group of Estonian architects called the Tallinn School played a critical role in opposition to the dominant Soviet architecture practices. Their ideology materialised in the 'Architectural Exhibition 78', where they exhibited contemporary artworks ironically depicting the mass constructions of socialist realism (Kurg, 2005). Using architecture as a form of art, they distanced themselves from the overregulation of building policies and social interactions, pointing towards a more dynamic nature of the human environment. The images exhibited defied conventional norms by deterritorialised unfinished courtyards of soviet housing and reimagined industrial surplus as monuments.

In later interviews, the group articulated their opposition towards the totalitarian way of discarding or hiding what was deemed unfit to create a unified urban image - a facade of lived reality. These artists were drawn to the strangeness of wastelands and fringes, investigating previously unseen motifs of slums and discarded objects (Kurg, 2019).

Fast-forward to the present wave of modernization, where another form of totalitarianism dictates the removal of abandoned spaces under the guise of urban redevelopment. The new order stems from modernity's quest for cleanliness and utility, which has deemed surplus

as functionless - the remainder of what is useful, and thereby valueless (Kim, 2017). Despite being by-products generated from the process of modernisation, they are excluded from the urban ecosystem after the depletion of their use, destined to be demolished or replaced. Dirt is perceived as a threat that would taint the social order (Kim, 2015) and this demarcation to achieve conventional beauty would turn a blind eye to things considered unsanitary - waste.

In the context of a city, surplus embodies fringe spaces existing outside the boundaries of the urban landscape, imbued with a sense of chaos or discord in contrast with the functional, legible city. Since the hygiene of urban society relies on separating the chaotic from the orderly - manifested literally in the form of landfills - urban planners often construct metaphorical and physical walls between redeveloped areas and these wastelands. On one hand, they would use imageries of healthy lifestyles and high-quality living environments when illustrating modern neighbourhoods. Contrary to that, the terms 'waste' and 'surplus' are used to describe spaces that have succumbed to demolition or decay and need to be renovated to be made valuable, such as abandoned facilities from the industrial eras.

This demarcation conveys negative connotations towards characteristics associated with wastelands and drives societal rejection of spaces perceived as 'dirty'. Modern imagery in the form of mass media has complex (even skewed) relations with their actual context but is used extensively to shape people's perceptions of reality. It is a common tool to rally public support for new policies and attract funds towards urban regeneration (Campkin, 2015) even if it isolates certain areas in our built environment.

Simultaneously, materials from industrial surplus are romanticised similar to how paintings of Roman ruins were widely circulated during the Grand Tours of the 18th century. If the same pile of junk from a landfill is curated and displayed within the four white walls of a museum, it becomes art that depicts the profound meaning of waste (Figure 5). It is a common theme in contemporary art to transform the physicality of waste material and imbue a new meaning in those spaces (Slessor, 2017). By inserting a touch of artificiality, such as symmetry or geometry, into a naturally occurring phenomenon - decay, we can reclaim parts of these ruins that would have become obsolete otherwise.

This is not an indication of societal acceptance towards surplus, but rather an objectification of decaying matter and the spatial atmosphere it curates. Artists consciously

frame ruins as the 'other', uprooting the body from its natural context to be reconceptualised in a man-made composition (Slessor, 2017). Yet, it seems these surplus spaces are given a place within the functional society when they present themselves as art - being able to contribute to our spiritual and sensory experience. The invisible and insignificant objects gain value by feeding into cultural consumption.

Is this a way of introducing legibility to urban fringes that no longer have functionality?

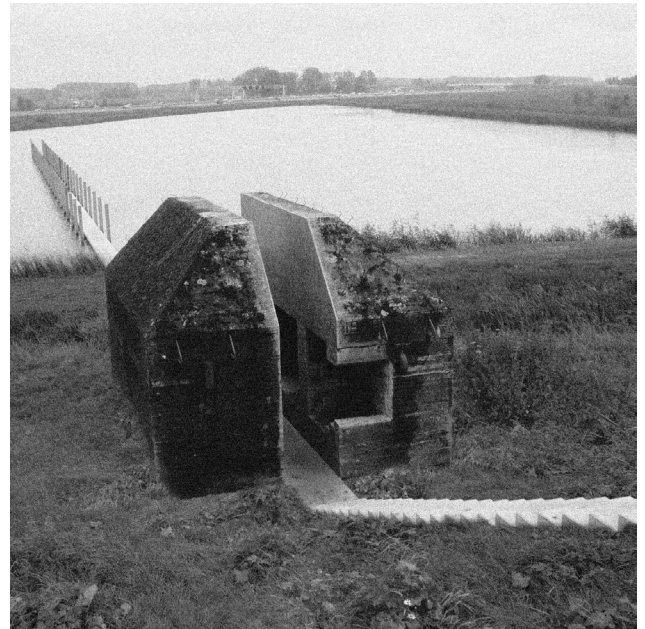
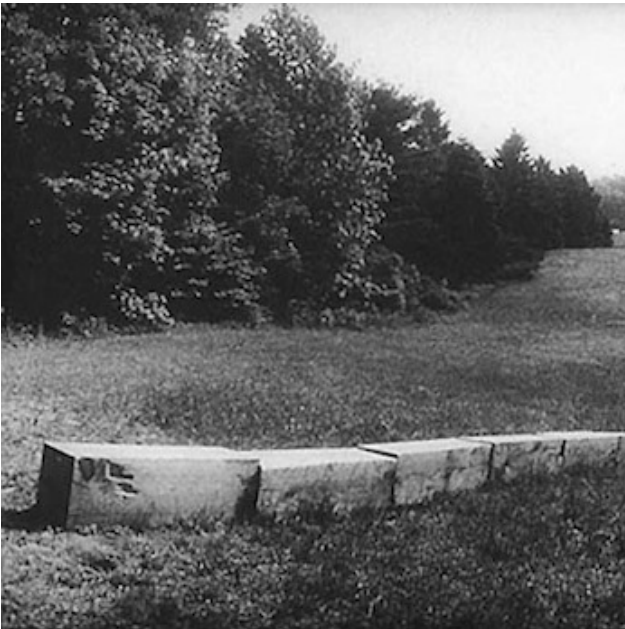


Figure 4: Robert Smithson (1971) Broken Circle/Spiral Hill. Source: Landart Nederland. **Figure 5:** Ai Weiwei (1971) Making Sense. Source: ianVisits. **Figure 6:** Carl Andre (1977) Secant. Source: Rhizome. **Figure 7:** RAAAF / Atelier de Llyon (2013) Bunker 599. Source: Landart Nederland.

KOPLI, TALLINN

The Kopli peninsular was born for a purely functional purpose during the peak of industrialisation of the Tsarist empire. It was planned as a large urban plan aimed at military production, including supporting facilities such as vocational training facilities, worker houses and raw material quarries. All these functions exist in the same geographic area but use different resources and provide different benefits, working together in an ecological sympatry. It demonstrates a uniquely human quality where we can differentiate ourselves and occupy symbiotic territories in society to form engaging, contributive and opposing relationships (Anderson, 1975). The result is a robust network of exploited spaces, where each plot of land has its designated place in the machine-like city.

However, after Estonia's independence and the economic shift into the service-based industry, the production facilities slowly left Kopli for less dense areas outside Tallinn. This process signified the slow extinction of the industrial landscape and the destruction of long-existing coordination and codependent functions in Kopli. It left behind patches of dysfunctional space that are up for grabs for private developers or anyone who cared to appropriate the space, which was when victims of gentrification from the city centre squatted in this region. Unfortunately, political and social issues further fragmented the urban fabric, where the recent privatisation of selected plots

formed 'gaps' between developed areas. These gaps of messy, unsanitised landscapes remained as wastelands after losing their previous purpose, no longer recognised as part of the city's image and void of human activity. The surplus materials and texture of their landscape are haunted by the past ways of human life, or rather disturbance (Tsing et al., 2017).

For example, Kopli Maji, a 'hill' in the landscape was once a clay quarry for brick production in the adjacent ceramics factory. After the depletion of resources, the hole left behind became a landfill, with remnants of pottery pieces still scattered around the site (Figures 9 & 10). Today, it is characterised by overgrowth, cul-de-sacs and a single trashcan in the middle of nowhere. Since the ground has been deemed structurally unsound for development, the space is to be left unbuilt for the foreseeable future. This is just one of many areas in Kopli that fall short of participating in the current sympatric ecosystem. Albeit functionless and isolated, we should not let them become permanent forms of waste in the urban fabric.

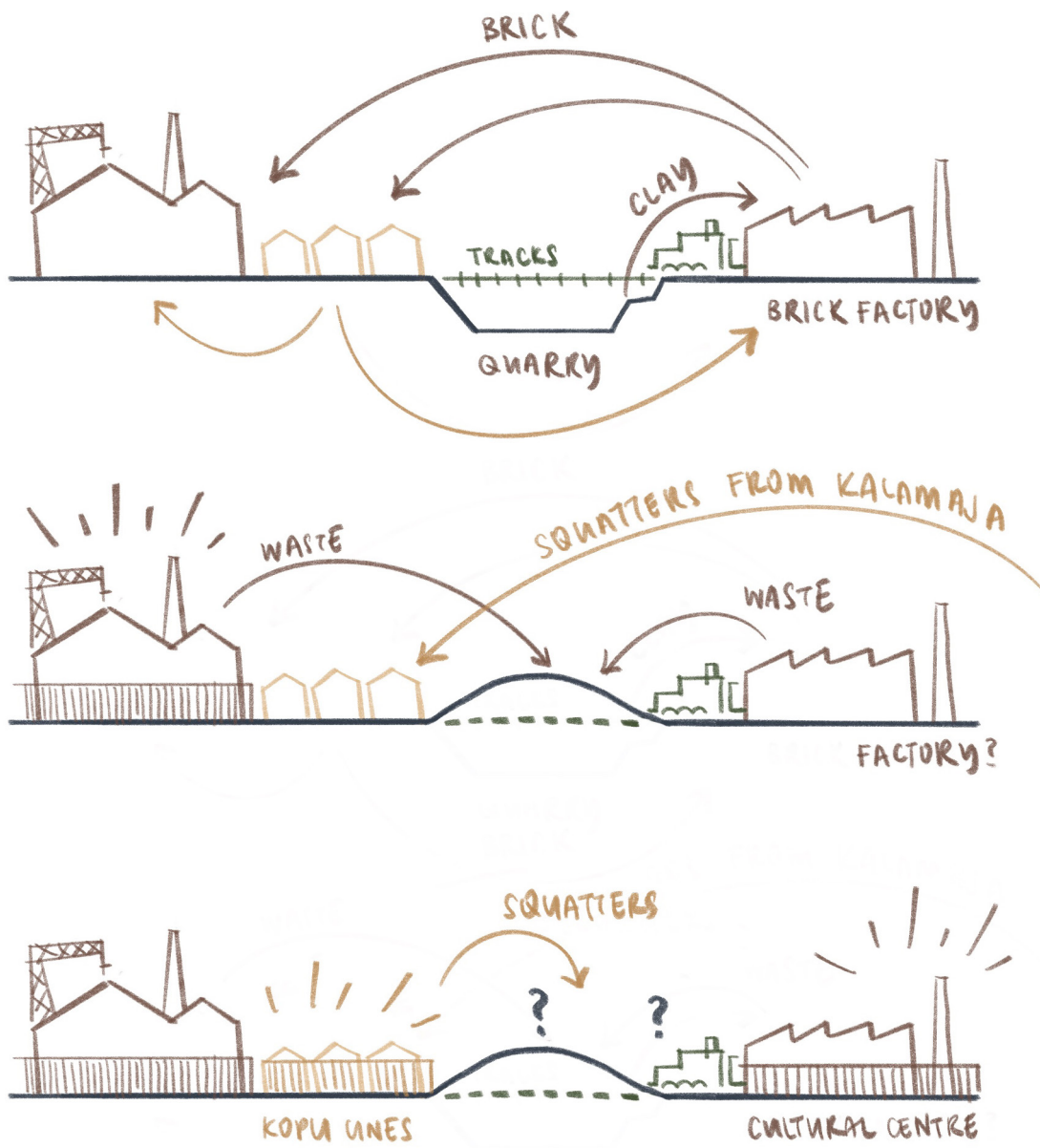


Figure 8: Fragmentation of industrial ecosystem. Source: by author.



Figure 9: Pre-existing industrial ecosystem in Kopli. Source: by author.

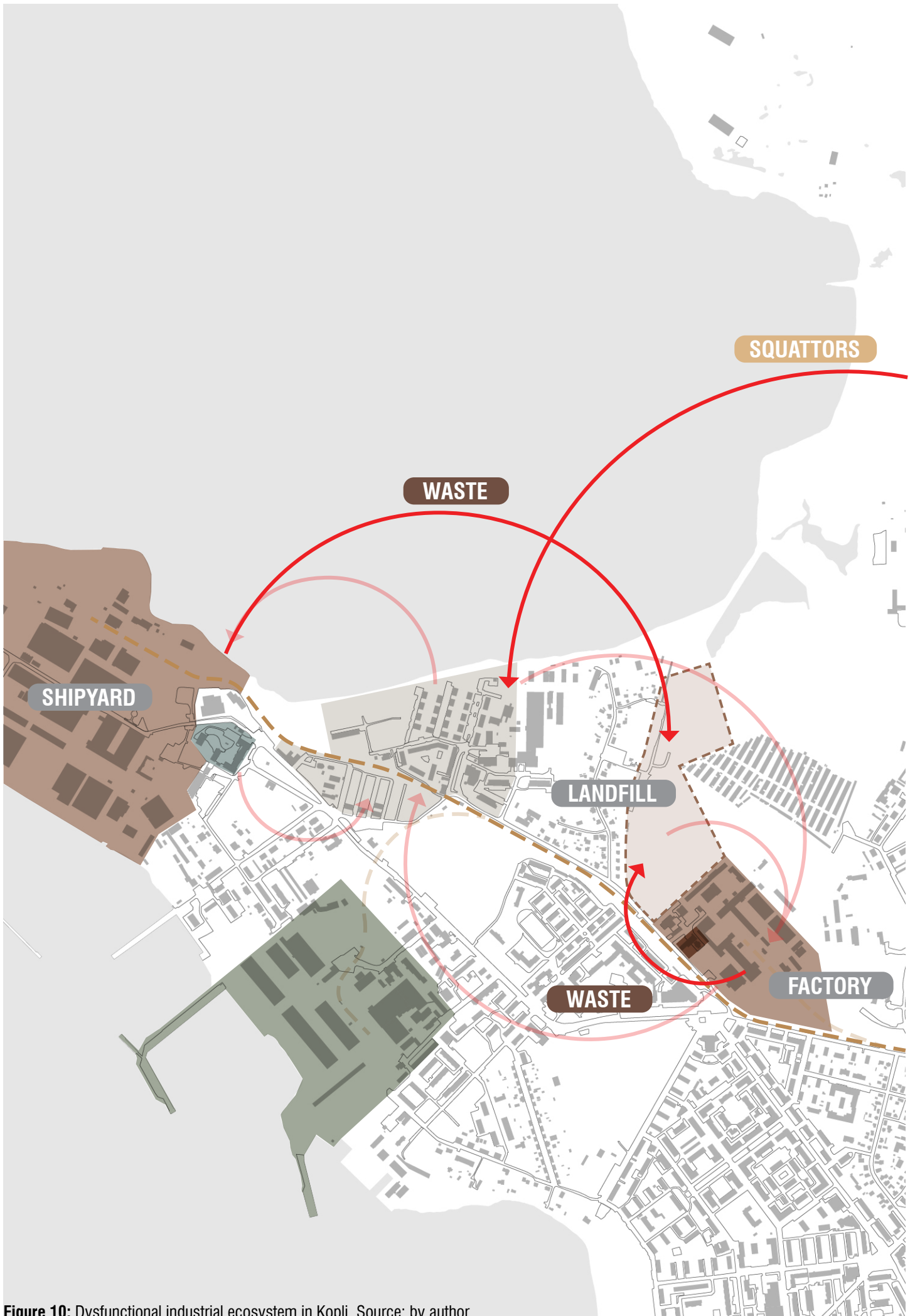
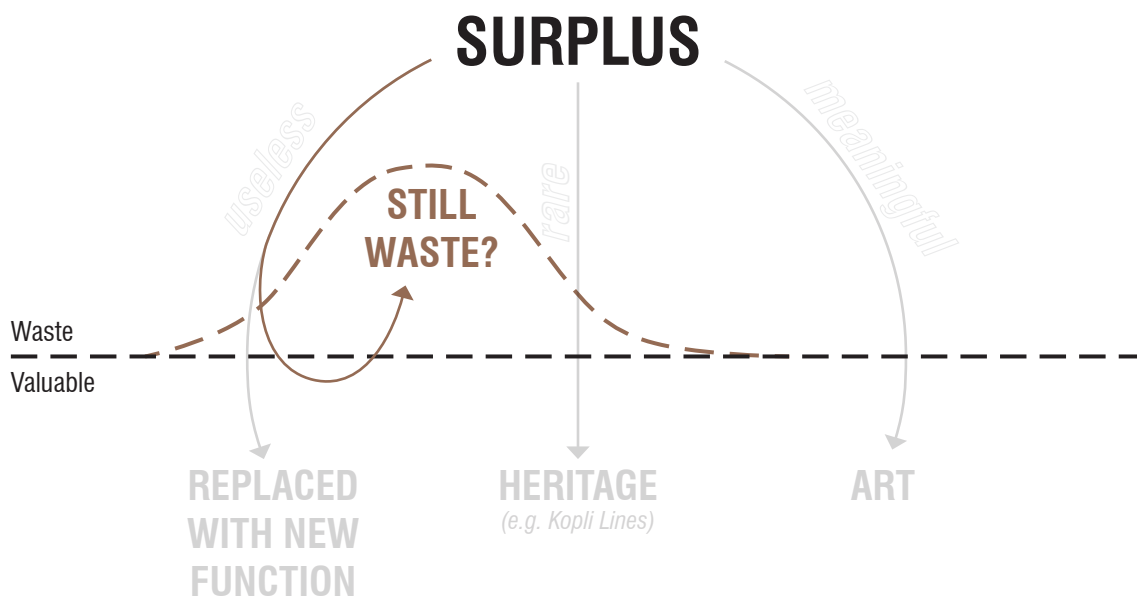
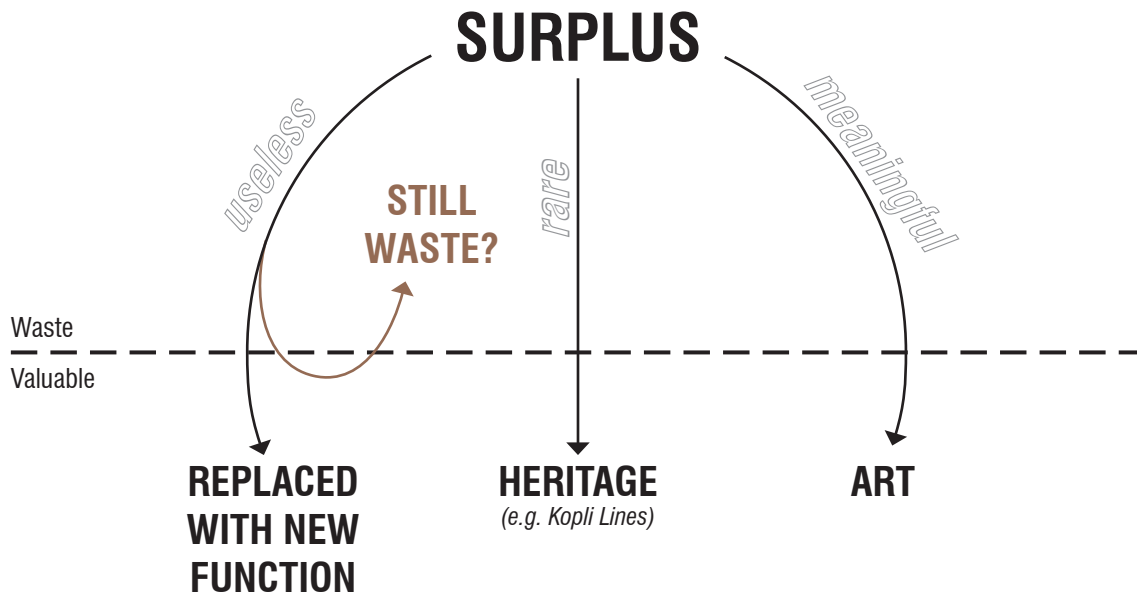


Figure 10: Dysfunctional industrial ecosystem in Kopli. Source: by author.

REFRAMING PERCEPTIONS

Our relationship with and perception of waste determines its future outcome. As shown in the diagram, the narrative we attach to surplus, whether it is useless, rare or meaningful influences the approach to making it valuable.



What happens when a space is deemed useless but we are unable to replace it with a new function? Does this call for a shift in our perception of these wastelands to make them valuable aspects of our urban ecosystem?

Figure 11: Diagram illustrating ways to reframe surplus space. Source: by author.

A PATH ELEVATED ABOVE THE LANDSCAPE
SYMBOLISES THE EXISTENCE OF HUMAN ORDER

A SIGN OF HOW A MODERN, RATIONAL
MAN HAD CREATED A CLEAN REALM
FOR SOCIETY, SEPARATED FROM THE DIRT BELOW



Figure 12: Romanticising Kopli. Source: by author.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & METHODOLOGY

The legibility of any space relies on conveying a coherent mental image to the observer, tapping into his familiarity with his built environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, while the observer singles out and organises components of the image he sees (Lynch, 1959). The construction of this image relies on identity (or rather the ease of identification), spatial patterns and their attached meanings. Thus, an intensive study into the existing material and landscape of these waste spaces would be carried out to determine their unrealised potential.

What are the boundaries that create and separate surplus spaces from the urban fabric?

There exists an invisible line on the urban map that delineates the borders of fringe spaces and the surrounding cityscape. The characteristics of this line would be studied, whether physical in terms of thresholds and topography or intangible, indicated by zoning plans or ownership. The character of said boundary would reveal the potential of creating new relationships with the existing urban ecosystem - how the site would take resources from surrounding functions as well as contribute benefits to areas of demand.

What are the textures of surplus spaces?

Next, the research would extend into the physicality of waste, its material, grain, and scale in relation to its surroundings as well as the state of decay. The findings from this study would inform the possibilities of working with existing textures.

What are the existing values?

The concept of 'as found' encapsulates the approach of this study on surplus spaces. The investigations above aim to uncover hidden potentials of a currently latent site and meanings that are already present in a seemingly undefined space. These existing values would be organised in new relationships to stimulate engagement between observers and areas of waste.

How do different approaches add value and reframe perceptions of waste?

Figure 11 illustrates different ways value is added to surplus based on our perception of them. These approaches give legibility and relevance to spaces previously undefined and lacked devices for engagement. By inserting physical patterns recognisable to their observers, architects and artists can exploit familiar spatial configurations and frame a new image of waste.

Naturally, different environments resist and facilitate the process of image making, certain physical features would resonate more with specific people groups who can identify their symbolic attachments. Thus, a focused study of precedents would also aid in constructing a recognisable image for Estonian inhabitants. The future design should draw inspiration from familiar vernacular spatial patterns and local semiotics in Tallinn.

To conclude, this research aims to investigate existing values of the wastescape and ways of giving legibility to spaces of this nature in the context of Kopli's ecosystem.

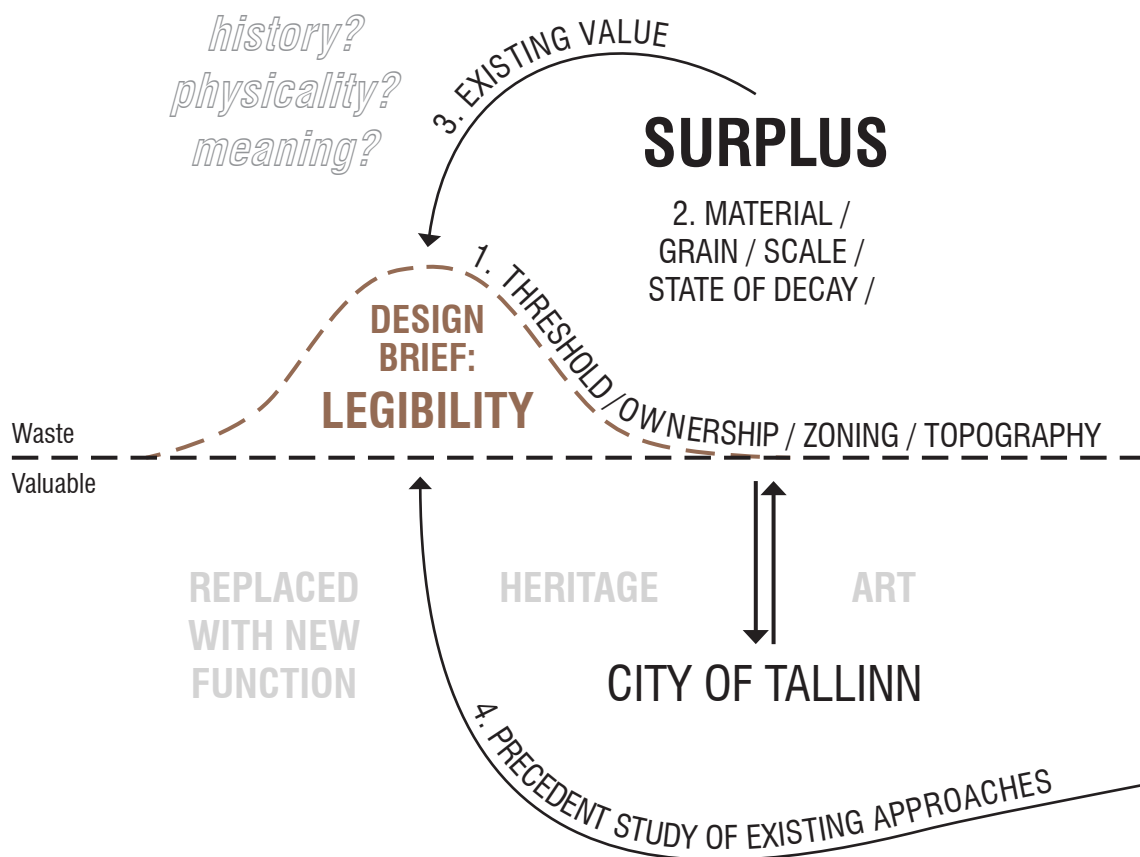


Figure 13: Diagram of methodology corresponding to research questions. Source: by author.

Based on the research questions, I would work with visual material and imagery as a method of investigation. The architects from Tallinn School also employed this method in their exhibition on surplus space, manipulating photographs and drawings to convey the complexity of spatial meanings (Figures 12 & 13). This visual methodology would be a vehicle for understanding existing urban textures and reframing surplus in future strategies.

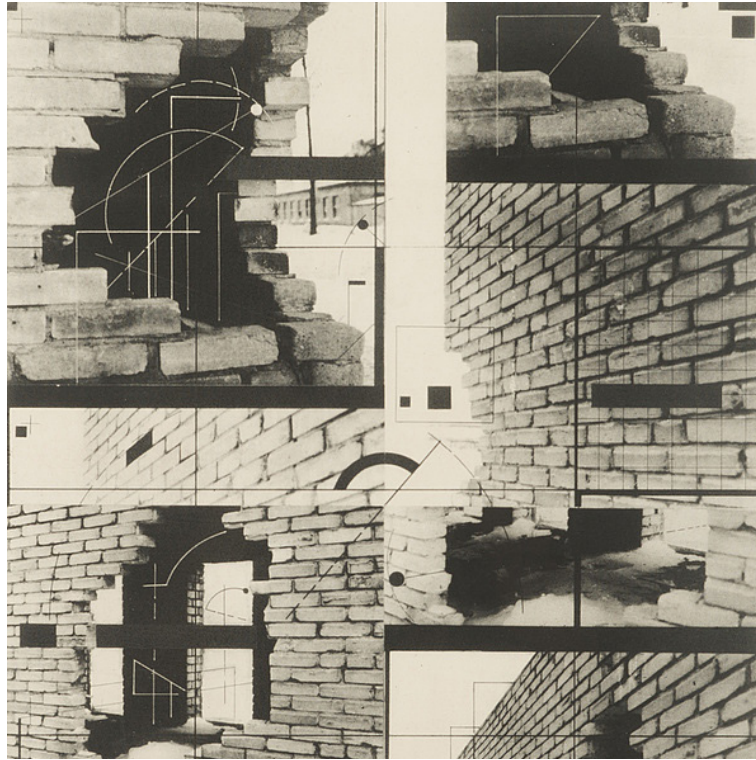


Figure 14: Jüri Okas (1978) Reconstruction PL. Intaglio. Source: Bukowskis. **Figure 15:** Gas station in Paide by Jüri Okas. Source: Ajapaik.

The research and eventual design would focus on areas in the Kopli district that are underused or abandoned, with no future redevelopment plans.



Figure 16: Areas with functionality and/or slated for redevelopment (grey) versus surplus spaces (white). Source: by author.



"Agora & Acropolis"

Figure 17: Hypothetical sketch of future design. Source: by author.

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Figure 3: Okas, J. In Lapin, L. (2021). The ‘Romanticism’ of Wastelands. MAJA, 105. <https://ajakirimaja.ee/en/leonhard-lapin-the-romanticism-of-wastelands/>

Figure 4: Landart Nederland – Landart kunst in heel Nederland. (n.d.-b). <https://landartnederland.com/>

Figure 5: Mansfield, I. (2023, April 11). Ai Weiwei fills the Design Museum with bricks and stones. *ianVisits*. <https://www.ianvisits.co.uk/articles/ai-weiwei-fills-the-design-museum-with-stones-and-bricks-61867/>

Figure 6: Land art of the Anthropocene. (2014, January 28). *Rhizome*. <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/jan/28/land-art-anthropocene/>

Figure 7: Landart Nederland – Landart kunst in heel Nederland. (n.d.-b). <https://landartnederland.com/>

Figure 14: Okas, J. (1978). Reconstruction PL. Bukowskis. <https://www.bukowskis.com/fi/auctions/F349/lots/1492469-juri-okas-reconstruction-pl>

Figure 15: Bensiinijaam Mäol, vaade. Arhitekt Jüri. (n.d.). Ajapaik. <https://ajapaik.ee/photo/123428/bensiinijaam-maol-vaade-arhitekt-juri-okas/>