
Creation of the "Zone effect" by contemporary art practices

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ABSTRACT. Sometimes, by creating and locating contemporary artworks within the landscape, an effect occurs that could be termed a "Zone effect". The idea of a "Zone" is borrowed from Andrei Tarkovsky's film "Stalker", which was released in 1979. The present paper aims to identify the particular features of the idea of the "Zone" drawing an analogy with contemporary art practices as one of the urban elements. With the help of this medium, the strategies employed to determine relationships between the creator, art practice and spectator will be defined. In this paper the author has explored several methodological features regarding the "Zones" mentioned above, as well as attempted to understand in what ways spaces have interfered with the subject. To understand the additional factors, the author has used the interdisciplinary approach, named as the place valence method. The "Zones", in which artists create the artworks, reveal how interventions create the landscape effect.

KEYWORDS. cultural landscape, commission, contemporary art, place valence, attraction.

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1. Introduction

Perception of a landscape is subjective and depends on the way how individuals inhabit or employ it. Public space which is part of a cultural landscape is a place for experiments, interpretations and proposals for a broad range of specialties. Contemporary artworks in public space, both object based (such as urban installations or sculptures) and process based (such as performances or happenings), emerge into new forms locally and globally. Thus, the artscape is a changing entity as is the landscape itself.

The aim of the research is to look at the changing role of contemporary art practices as a way to rearrange and to define the possible strategies employed to determine relationships between the creator, art practice and spectator. The task is thus to identify the particular features of bringing in the idea of the "Zone" as one of the urban elements. The conceptual topic is based on the case study research in Latvia and internationally. Case studies are selected on the basis of ethnographic methods and the researcher's observations. The study sought and distinguished groups that derived the "zone effect" and transformations of the place during the investigation.

Sometimes, by creating and locating contemporary artworks in the landscape, an effect occurs that could be called a "zone effect". This effect is part of the atmosphere, attraction and potential of the site. The idea of a "Zone" is borrowed from Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*, which was released in 1979. The film depicts an expedition led by Stalker to a place called the Zone, which is a supernatural, mythical place, disconnected space, the void, with an imaginary capacity to fulfill one's deepest desires, faith and hopes. The Stalker in Tarkovsky's film (*Stalker*, 1979) says: "Maybe the zone is a very complex system of tolls... I have no idea what goes on here in the absence of man. But as soon as someone arrives everything goes haywire... the zone is exactly how we created it ourselves, like the state of our spirits... but what is happening, that does not depend on the zone, that depends on us."

Tarkovsky got inspired from Russian authors Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, who wrote a novel *Roadside Picnic* (1971[1972]). In the novel the Zone is an area where the aliens had possibly landed. The so-called Visitors have a "picnic" and accordingly to their actions they have not noticed humans or paid attention to the site. The Visitors leave artefacts and phenomena behind them and they do not return to the same place twice. The conception portrayed in the film has also been applied by an urban art lab in Rome (Laboratorio d'arte urbana, 2012) operating under the name of *Stalker*. This collective works and experiments within the landscape particularly in the peripheral territories of the city, forgotten and abandoned areas under transformation.

Accordingly to the novel *Roadside Picnic* by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, the author of the present paper has interpreted the Visitors as artists or creators who stop at the site for a shorter or longer period of time. The Zone is understood as an area where artistic actions have occurred and **a Picnic** - as a particular place where artwork or action is situated. A Picnic place can range from acceptance of the site to a total rejection of the surrounding landscape, local inhabitants and/or other players. These artistic activities can be manifested in the landscape for a shorter or longer period of time. During the Picnic, a Visitor becomes the "owner" of the place for a certain period of time depending on the action. Thus, the space becomes inhabited and occupied. In some cases, the creators obtain knowledge through experiencing the site. Although for the people who are not included in the Picnic,

the actions might seem incomprehensible and odd, after a while when they have got an opportunity to get to know what is happening, the idea becomes more understandable to them, too. Thus, awareness, communication and information become important for integrating an artwork into the everyday life. In this context, it is important to note the production of space pursuant to Henry Lefebvre's concept of the perceived, the conceived and the lived, as well as to Martin Heidegger's *being-in-the-world* and *being-with-others*.

In this context, the Zones are understood as urban elements in urban fabric combining the notion of the landscape structure and geography. Thus, in this paper the "zone effect" is seen as a trait of place that characterizes its specific essence and structure. To name a few, such traits include atmosphere, association, identity, recognition, known or obscure experience, novelty which has not been discerned previously. To illustrate the Zone effect, the town of Aizpute in Latvia with 4561 inhabitants¹ is offered as an example.



- Art residency *Serde*
- Locations of artworks (Picnic places), created in the framework of Art Laboratory AIZ in 2011
- ▲ Cast Iron Art Symposium place (A Picnic place)
- //// The Conceptual Zone area

Fig.1 The Zone effect created in the Aizpute town's centre²

Figure 1 illustrates Aizpute town's centre with the artwork locations that were created during the Art Laboratory AIZ held for the third year by the art residency and workshop centre *Serde* in 2011 (Serde, 2012). Art Laboratory AIZ is curated by artist Māris Grosbahs and various artists were gathered from Latvia, the United

States, the Switzerland, the Great Britain, Norway, Germany, Russia, Belarus, and Serbia in 2011. Artworks made during the Laboratory were small-scale artistic, urban interventions, including sound experiments and video works, spatial installations in the environment, site-specific interventions and performances. All of them were temporary works or actions. Besides the Art Laboratory activities, there is also the International Cast Iron Art Symposium organised in Aizpute which was held for the third time in 2011. The case of Aizpute demonstrates that artists are eager to exhibit their works and involve the local communities and other interested individuals by both involving them in the creative process and explaining the result. The exhibited artworks along with the activities as part of the process form an uncertain border of the Zone area, which should be understood symbolically and not literally.

2. Towards the determination of the place

The place valence method is applied to comprehend the way to approach the place before and after the artwork is created. This method was adjusted in folklore studies (Laime, 2011. 27). The title of the method includes two concepts: *the place*, to be understood as a particular element of the landscape, which is limited by the existing tradition; and *valence*, a term borrowed from linguistics and chemistry to describe one element's ability to attract itself to other elements. Thus, in the context of this research, valence represents an ability or capacity of the place:

- to attract artists (creator, interpreter), where the ability or capacity is based on the idea (objective), and it can either actualize or not actualize the ideas of authority and/or supporters (commission), who can descry and "bring forth" (Martin Heidegger's concept of *Hervorbringen*) or highlight a specific character of the landscape, including meaning, the value of landscape elements interpretation, research and awareness; and
- to attract viewers, users, individuals as a "newly established" landscape, landscape element or process. The created place or the artist/creator's personality's potential to attract visitors to the landscape or the created place.

In this research three varieties of the place valence are distinguished, such as (a) *the naturally determined place valence*, which includes geographically, geologically or ecologically unusual or particularly in the tradition marked formations, attracting the artist's or the creator's attention and interest by encouraging new ideas and artistic activities. Use of natural landscape features (such as meadows, forests or reliefs) forms the basis of the artistic practice; (b) *the historically determined place valence* in turn is associated with the site-specific importance of a historical event or its (long-term) use for a specific purpose and function. For example, artistic actions within art residency and workshop centre *Serde* in Aizpute, Latvia can be named as such. Local inhabitants become aware of the artistic actions in this place seasonally, thus the local communities get engaged and certain individuals get involved. In this way the Zone becomes recognizable by repetitions; and (c) *the artistically and creatively expressed place valence* pursued subjectively. For example, the Open-Air Art Museum Pedvāle (2012) founded by the sculptor Ojārs Feldbergs in 1991, is arranged within the territory of the land, allocated for such purposes by the land owner. The sculptor's primary aim was to merge active use of agricultural land with contemporary art in the Museum. Unfortunately, the attempt was unsuccessful. However, through environmental artworks by young and

professional artists, he manages to focus at safeguarding the natural features of the cultural landscape and creating inspiring conditions for diverse creative activities. The museum received the UNESCO's Melina Mercuri Award for its protection of its cultural patrimony (Varas; Rispa, 2006. 133). The museum's development is progressing according to the artist Ojārs Feldbergs' creative ideas regarding the potential merging of the cultural landscape with the artefacts.

The varieties of the place valence mentioned above are not so unequivocal and may involve two or all three aspects, or transgress from one to another. For instance, the Open-Air Art Museum Pedvāle incorporates both the naturally determined place valence due to its location in a specially protected cultural and historical territory of the Abava Valley and is a cultural monument of national importance; and the historically determined place valence because Firkspedvāle and Brinkpedvāle manor houses (Fig.2), as well as the classical style rectory ruins of Sabile are situated in the territory of the museum. At the same time, the transformation of the landscape function and meaning towards the artistically substantial place, provides the third variety – the artistically and creatively expressed place valence. Since the opening of the museum, it periodically attracts artists, visitors and spectators on the national and global level, who repeatedly visit Pedvāle to see both the existing and new artworks. The museum is offered to visitors as a recreational place.

The naturally determined and the historically determined place valence may be defined as sequential and continuous, site-adapted, contextual (requiring comprehension of the essence of the landscape used by the artists to create artworks), while the artistically expressed place valence may occur as a process not related to the place. The latter can be compared to the Visitors, who go for a Picnic, which is not related to the site. The place valence analysis determines the potential of the landscape, which can be developed to encourage the involvement of artists and local inhabitants in the artistic process.

3. Phenomena of the Zone creation

Nexus between a landscape, creator and the contemporary artwork can be understood in terms of three following steps: before, during, and after the creation of the Zone. It is possible to trace two intertwined segments: (a) relation between the site and the artist during the development of the Zone; and (b) how the attraction effect that identifies the Zone can be created.

3.1. Before creating the Zone

Sometimes creators get interested in a particular landscape type or its separate elements and stories as **inspiration** sources for their works. Wandering, drifting, walking and observations are some methods how to get to know the surroundings and the issues related to them. However, the artworks that are not characterized as site-specific, place-specific or contextual can be determined as a Picnic interaction without particular linkage to the site.

According to the general features of space, several categories have been drawn to **attract artists before** creating the Zone. The artists or creators can be attracted by: (a) selection of space either because of the interest of artist (materials working with) or through commission; (b) the ways of how the artwork may be incorporated into the site and what elements or processes may become interpreted; and (c)

challenge, experiment with sites, materials, media. Some landscape spaces that may be selected are the following:

- consolidated spaces which are dense, occupied, complete with meaning, built structures, flora, symbolic and informational signs or other objects. They can be not only physical objects, but also saturated with events such as festive parades, fairs, planned or spontaneous actions, etc.;
- open, empty spaces, for example, squares, meadows;
- "heterotopias" or other spaces;
- "terrain vague", the in-between and "a space in time";
- urban voids, abandoned territories;
- brownfield, greyfield, greenfield;
- abstract space, utopia;
- transferable, mobile spaces, for example, mobile garden;
- non-spaces, for example, chain shops;
- strategically important spaces such as nodes, edges, squares; and
- cultural and historic environments, cultural heritage sites - sites which are defined as a cultural or natural heritage.

Each of the landscape spaces mentioned above reflects some particular problem, issue or aim.

3.2. Relation between the site and the creator during the development of the Zone

The process that occurs during the development of the Zone can be linked with the **placemaking** concept (Fleming, 2007) which mainly is understood as part of the urban design that makes places meaningful and liveable, involving the production of place. Apart from the process of making or creating place, the **writing [in] landscape** approach is possible to distinguish. In this context the approach includes the idea of creation of new stories, elements or revival of the existing and the forgotten. In this way re-writing or re-definition of the landscape takes place.

Jane Rendell has developed a project of **site-writing** influenced by debates of art-writing, that incorporates and explores the position of the critic through "the site of writing itself, investigating the limits of criticism, and asking what it is possible for a critic to say about an artist, a work, the site of a work and the critic herself and for the writing to still "count" as criticism" (Rendell, 2010. 2). In this way writing [in] landscape incorporates not only physical and meaningful process of placemaking, but also "an active writing that constructs as well as traces the sites between critic and writer, artist and artwork, viewer and reader" (Rendell, 2007. 69).

We may distinguish several characteristics of places created, which includes:

- temporary places (ephemerality, provocation, shock, etc.);
- enduring places (stability, values, etc.);
- places of everyday life (ordinarily, known, etc.);
- contemplation place (ambience, atmosphere – reflecting humour, anger, passion, wonder, attachment, etc.).

Thus, through cognition and various relationship models the creator and the site can meet. Division of the models by José Guilherme Abreu (Abreu, 2011. 122-141) allows understanding the inscription of art in the places of common interaction. He

discusses four models that underlie the idea of the **artistic place** which are the following: transformation of aspects, transposition of corpora, transmission of experiences, and transfiguration of sites.

There are several factors affecting the creator's relation with the site and the decisions made. First, **nature and human factors** must be mentioned. The factors linked to nature contribute to geology, hydrology and ecology. The factors defined by human are functional, aesthetic and ethic. In this way the Open-Air Art Museum Pedvāle has been offered as an example. The museum is a well-known and multifaceted culture and arts centre in Latvia. It is a platform for the development of traditional and contemporary art with integration of natural environment and cultural heritage. There are local and international open-air art exhibitions, symposiums, and workshops held. The founder Ojārs Feldbergs continued to work in the environmental landscape and organized various happenings, actions, performances and other staged events.

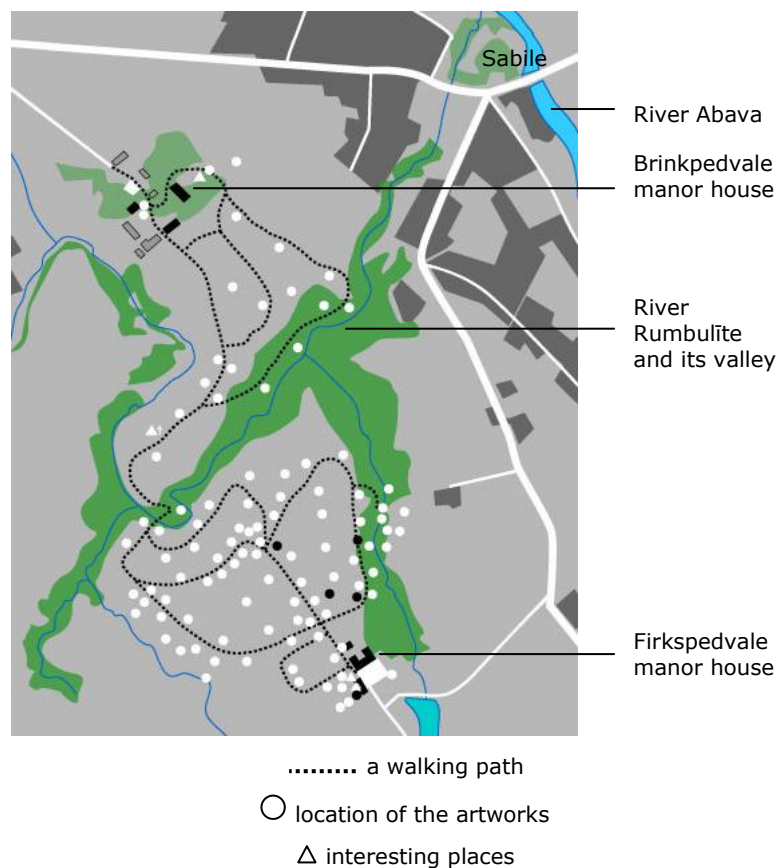


Fig.2 The territory of the Open-Air Art Museum Pedvāle with locations of artworks and a walking path in 2011³

Large part of the museum's exhibitions – both permanent and temporary objects or actions – are linked with the natural setting of the site and incorporates water, trees, terrain, meadow, valley, earth or stones for their compositional setting within

the landscape. Furthermore, it incorporates such features as day and night, seasonal changes or rituals incorporating agricultural actions, for example, *Experimental Stone Plantation* that artist Ojārs Feldbergs has been implementing since 2007. He has done the ritualized process of stone planting and cultivation not only at Pedvāle, but also in Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Israel, Vietnam, Egypt, Thailand and several other countries. However, there are artificial creation processes that represent the natural ones, for example, the environmental art object *Stone. Fog* by Ojārs Feldbergs and Fujiko Nakaya made in 2011 (Fig.3). In the fog there are eight stones placed representing the peaks of the highest mountains in the world. All artworks are exhibited for visitors' evaluation, depending on their perception and experience, and highlight both the naturally and historically determined place valence.



Fig.3 The environmental art object *Stone. Fog* by Ojārs Feldbergs and Fujiko Nakaya, Latvia, 2011 (Open-Air Art Museum Pedvāle, 2012)

The second factor is that **commission** determines the preferable result or invites the preferable creator. The impact of a top-down vision of the territory by developers or planners and territory ownership has been significant. Accordingly, commission for the landscape is a predominant attribute. Different visions of the landscape can affect the decision-making in future, as well as the policies of the artwork commissions. Another factor marks the **level of the idea implementation**. It questions to what degree the planned and the initiated has been implemented and what determined the development. Yet, this subject requires further analysis of the before-and-after stages of the placemaking.

This step during the creation of the Zone contributes to the creation of the attraction effect that **identifies the Zone**. Through this attraction effect the place's ability of the change emerges and is emphasized for a longer or shorter period of time. The ability of the change is characterized by the notion of dynamics. Dynamics of micro-landscapes emerge having a further probability of transition into a landscape of wider spectrum.

Apart from the everyday practice, "**ways of operating**" or doing things as described by Michel de Certeau (1984. 29-42) leads to the discussion of relation between the site and the creator. **Creativity** and **improvisation**, as well as the creator's *being-in-the-world* and *being-with-others* form a large part of this relation. The creativity and improvisation approaches have been interpreted as a trend to rapid technological and social change that is often associated with

"modernization" (Hallam; Ingold, 2007. 16). Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (2007. 19) state that improvisation and creativity are "intrinsic to the very processes of social and cultural life".

3.3. Identification of the created Zone

The last step implies the elements of **attraction** and **advertising** that become significant after the Zone has emerged in the landscape. This gives a direction asking for the impact on the results obtained. It should be asked how the Zone appears.

This segment opens the ability of an artist to draw attention to the landscape space or demonstrate accessibility of the space to be used. The place valence method allows drawing people's attention to the landscape or a particular place through creative activities and processes. In this way the artists or creators provide a motive to visit and use places which was unfamiliar to general public before. Thus, a Picnic place becomes open and usable for society. The landscape spaces mentioned above that might be chosen include, for example, abandoned premises, mountainous territories or yards of the block of apartments. These phenomena can be traced in Andy Goldsworthy's trail of connecting several art shelters as stopping, resting points and landmarks into the territory of a transition between the Alps and Provence with a diversity of exceptional landscapes. All this has been incorporated into the project *Refuges D'Art* in the Haute-Provence Geological Nature Reserve, Digne, France. Also, the urban installation *Pier* (Fig.4) by Siiri Vallner and Indrek Peil at Kalaranna 1, Tallin, Estonia that lasted for three months in 2011 is another example. The installation was made as part of the Urban Installations Festival *LIFT11* within the Capital of Culture Programme.



Fig.4 Urban Installation *Pier* by Siiri Vallner and Indrek Peil, Tallin, Estonia, 2011 (LIFT11, Urban Installations Festival, 2012)

Furthermore, it is possible to achieve impact on the local economic growth by broadening the cultural field⁴.

Three main transformation or alteration levels may be distinguished according to the identity of the cultural landscape (in the form of material and intangible elements or processes):

- *values and identity preservation of traditional or historical landscapes in direct application* by none or minimal attachment of new elements (artefacts) without burdening and modifying the existing landscape. For instance, small scale urban installations, sculptures, interventions or street art projects can be grouped here. This description can be applied to the cybernetic sculpture *Red Queen's Race* at the Jelgava baroque Palace courtyard by artist Krists Pudzens in Jelgava, Latvia, that was installed in 2010 and lasted for two months (Fig.5), or the environmental artwork *Symbolic Reconstruction of the Jelgava City Historical Rampart* that was located at the crossing along Ausekļa and J.Asara Streets in Jelgava, Latvia, in 2010 (Urtāne; Alle, 2011. 17-30). These artworks in Jelgava were implemented as part of the European project *Art Landscape Transformation* that took place from 2008 to 2011 and was supported by the Culture Programme 2007-2013 of the European Commission;



Fig.5 Cybernetic sculpture *Red Queen's Race* at the Jelgava Palace courtyard by Krists Pudzens, Jelgava, Latvia, 2010 (Photo: Krists Pudzens)

- *values and identity transmission of traditional or historical landscapes into new symbolic forms or symbolic synthesis of new elements (artefacts)*. However, this kind of transmission and stratification of historical information encourage the establishment of historical connections of the place understandable for future generations (Zigmunde, 2010. 56). For example, concert *Strāvoklis*⁵ by Latvian independent musicians singing songs with incorporated poetry by Latvian poet Rainis took place next to the monument of the poet. By this the traditional poems of Rainis were presented in a different light to be better understood and accepted by new generation; and
- *creation of new values and identity by emerging new traditions and experiences* from other cultures, by promoting the processes of globalization and technological growth. In this case, monotony increases without keeping the uniqueness and distinctiveness characteristic to the nation and landscape. However, it must be mentioned that in the art scene experimental ideas have been developed in a unique way, thus increasing the diversity.

The first two transformation or alteration levels include the idea of introducing a new layer into landscape that is more or less notable, whereas the third level forms a new vision and a new layer.

One may ask what kind of influence it is possible to attain. According to this transformation of tradition and function, arising from the place valence method application, the preferable site and planning strategies can be defined if required. It is a circular twofold process. On one hand, it provides a potential or capability of the cultural landscape, and, on the other, it is the capacity of the artwork to determine the landscape, outlining the subsequent research directions.

4. Conclusions

This research demonstrates various processes with which the methodology has been built to understand the connection between the contemporary artwork and a landscape better. Analysis shows that the nexus between the landscape, the creator and the contemporary artwork can be understood in terms of three steps: before, during and after the creation of the Zone (the idea borrowed from Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*). Awareness of artistically created effect such as Zones implies a series of features including inspiration, placemaking, the writing [in] landscape approach, notion of site-writing, the artistic place, nature and human factors, commission, level of implementation of idea, identification of the Zone, creativity, improvisation, attraction, advertising, which are applicable into the conceptual framework of searching for new ways of formulating the place. The directions mentioned above can be characterized as pragmatic solutions to include a landscape appreciation into the **everyday life**. Thus, artworks which are located into public space are intended for all individuals. Practice of everyday life has roots in that how individuals perceive and experience the world as a landscape. This is based on the concept of the *lived space* as formulated by Henry Lefebvre (1991). This symbolic dimension concerns the space of "inhabitants" and "users".

Thus, the proposed way to look at contemporary artwork practices as urban elements is a way how interventions create the **landscape effect**. To sum up, it is important to understand the process of **becoming** in the context of artistic phenomenon. The effect created into landscape defines notification and attraction to the place by individual's perception and sensations.

The study reflects that the landscape is a source of **inspiration** for the artists or creators and people's attraction. Thereby the research allows concluding that the possible strategies for future analysis include a relationship of the potential of the cultural landscape and the artwork defined landscape or a Picnic place.

5. Acknowledgements

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6. Notes

1 Number of local inhabitants at the beginning of 2011 provided by the Central Statistics Board <http://data.csb.gov.lv/dialog/statfile16.asp> [consulted in June, 2012].

2 The source of the presented map is prepared in cooperation with the interdisciplinary art group *Serde*. The map is given without the scale.

3 The source of the presented map is prepared in cooperation with the Open-Air Art Museum at Pedvāle. The map is given without the scale.

4 See, for example, FLEMING, Ronald – Lee, *The art of placemaking: interpreting community through public art and urban design*. London, New York, Merrell, 2007; FLORIDA, Richard, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0205.florida.html>, 2002 [consulted in October, 2011]; FLORIDA, Richard, *Cities and the creative class*. London, New York, Routledge, 2005; LANDRY, Charles, *The Creative City: a toolkit for urban innovators*. London, Comedia, 2008 [2000].

5 *Strāvoklis*, Latvian independent musicians performing songs with incorporated poetry of Rainis. The concert of young Latvian musicians took place on the 4th of May, 2011 in Riga next to the monument of the Latvian poet Rainis (real name Jānis Pliekšāns) erected in a traditional manner according to the design of sculptor Kārlis Zemdegs. Poetry of Rainis organically was integrated into various contemporary genres, such as punk rock, psychedelic rock, industrial, folk, electronics, avant-garde and indie. <http://www.stravoklis.lv/>.

7. Legends

Fig.1 The Zone effect created in the Aizpute town's centre

Fig.2 The territory of the Open-Air Art Museum Pedvāle with locations of artworks and a walking path in 2011

Fig.3 The environmental art object *Stone. Fog* by Ojārs Feldbergs and Fujiko Nakaya, Latvia, 2011 (Open-Air Art Museum Pedvāle, 2012)

Fig.4 Urban Installation *Pier* by Siiri Vallner and Indrek Peil, Tallin, Estonia, 2011 (LIFT11, Urban Installations Festival, 2012)

Fig.5 Cybernetic sculpture *Red Queen's Race* at the Jelgava Palace courtyard by Krists Pudzens, Jelgava, Latvia, 2010 (Photo: Krists Pudzens)

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9. Biography

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