

Contingency, debate, and pop-up 'hygge' at *Valby Pavilion*:

Situating temporary public urban settings in design critique

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Abstract

Public spaces emerge through a diverse field of practices and events that combine to make space and create meaning. In today's design and planning practice, temporary interventions play an increasing role in the creation and rethinking of public space 'on the go'. In such transitional interventions, 'the project' is both physically and symbolically created through entangled actions of design with somewhat non-designed and informal practices and DIY aesthetics, as well as various narratives and modes of communication. Temporary public spaces thereby challenge established ways of evaluating and critiquing spatial settings as determined design solutions or 'classic' architectural works—in terms of what they do and how they can be qualitatively understood as part of contemporary place-making approaches. This article forms a critique of the project *Valby Pavilion*, a temporary space in Valby (Copenhagen, Denmark) that serves as a test setup for the future use of its highly contested site. Through a juxtaposition of selected theoretical perspectives from art and architectural criticism to relational site thinking and performance studies, the discussion of the project elaborates upon which aspects require detailed attention when performing a critique of temporary urban public spaces. The article concludes that critical examination of a number of issues (intentionality and origin, the role of spatial adaptations, appropriation, events and situated public debate, dominant planning paradigms, and the characteristic aesthetics of the informal) helps to fruitfully locate public settings initiated under the 'temporary project' label within design and architectural critique.

Keywords

critique; criticism; temporary urban public space; site understanding; narratives; place-making; performativity

Situating the Valby Pavilion

Valby Pavilion is a simple temporary wooden pavilion structure located on a small plot along the main street of Copenhagen's Valby district. Valby Pavilion was installed in the summer of 2013 as part of a site activation strategy through a collaboration between a local committee¹ in Valby and a research team that included the author of this paper.² The temporary setting aimed to activate the vacant site and create a frame for use and debate while the fate of the municipally-owned plot of land was discussed by politicians at city hall. The activation was initiated by a series of installations (smaller installations were later added around the pavilion) to draw attention to the site, and as an initial frame within which the local committee could facilitate new use of the site on a temporary basis. The local committee was interested in relocating the local library to this plot, and it was hoped that the idea of a new cultural facility could be tested through the site's temporary use.

The plot itself, Smedestræde 2, is in an attractive location in the centre of the district. It provides a unique view down the street, which has a characteristic historic village structure. Despite its direct connection to busy surroundings, the plot's setting is intimate, featuring hedges and wooden fences, partially overgrown by intertwined plants and trees. A grassy gravel surface increases the plot's garden character and the sense of wilderness encroaching upon the city. As is typical of sites formerly used for small-scale industry, the plot itself consists of a bricolage of buildings both large and small, a paved backyard, and a gravel lot facing the main street. The remains of a car dealership and associated workshop buildings had lain dormant for some years until the need for a new location for the library focused attention upon the site.

The local committee and our research team collaborated on preparing an initial site 'opening' and frame for activation. More projects and uses were added to the site over time, combining with the already-overgrown gravel surface to narrate the plot as a garden space. The plot was used for activities such as small markets and sustainable living seminars. Other actors added elements to the site, including book exchange cabinets, a seed library, planting beds, and play equipment. In summer 2015, a pop-up bar and café, 'TH. Bar', was permitted to begin operations at the site. Slowly, and unexpectedly, the open area in front of the crumbling buildings, with their bolted doors and windows, developed into a popular hang-out space. The bright red container bar in the front yard provided a Biergarten ambience that was quickly embraced by local residents, leading to new traditions in the form of game evenings, communal dinners, and concerts, coordinated by the bar and the local community.

Ultimately, the future of the site was still undetermined. Budget meetings in the municipal council in late 2015 did not result in any final decision. For the third year in a row, the site's uncertain status was extended, and Smedestræde 2's future use remained open to negotiation. In spring 2016, the council finally reached a decision: Smedestræde 2 would not become the site of a cultural facility. At the same time, however, with increasing frequency, the plot was being appropriated by the community and transformed into a social space and cultural area, facilitated by the pop-up bar.



FIGURE 1 Location of the site and Valby district in Copenhagen, Denmark



FIGURE 2 The Valby Pavilion site on the corner of Smedestræde and Valby Langgade. The aerial view shows the layout with the pavilion and pop-up bar in front of the vacant buildings (Copyright 2014 by Copenhagen Municipality)



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6

The setup around the pavilion and the temporary installations

'Unfinished and not good enough'

In spring 2016, as Valby was preparing for a third, and potentially final, lively summer with TH. Bar's container bar at the pavilion, the local committee in Valby called for nominations of buildings and urban design projects for their annual local architectural award. The rising appreciation of Valby Pavilion site and the pop-up bar as a popular public space in the district, the complex nature of the decision-making process, and curiosity regarding how something like an architectural award would cope with such a project led our team to nominate Valby Pavilion. The nomination argued for the project's value as a collective and appreciated cultural and social space, with a green oasis character. Although a few other projects, such as building renovations and squares, were nominated as well, the award committee decided not to give the prize to any project that year. Perhaps the quirky and ambiguous atmosphere of the pavilion did not serve as an example of traditional 'good architecture'? Had Valby Pavilion actually won, it might also have proved difficult to find a permanent spot in the project's uncertain temporary setting to place the engraved award plate as well as to name the project's 'architect' and 'client'. Furthermore, the award committee put forward two arguments: that it could not consider projects that were 'unfinished', and that none of the nominated projects were 'good enough'.³

Whether Valby Pavilion is worthy of an architectural award is not the significant point here. Instead, it is interesting to consider the procedure and criteria for the granting of the architectural award and what these say about the appropriate aesthetic and social parameters for undertaking a critical evaluation of an urban phenomenon like Valby Pavilion. This article uses the award committee's statement and associated evaluation criteria as a productive driver to discuss which aspects are important to consider when performing a critique of a temporary public setting.

While the focal point is the specific example in Valby, this discussion relates to a more general increasing interest in temporary-use projects within urban redevelopment. Initiating temporary-use projects is often promoted as a specific transformation strategy and as part of collaborative and exploratory design modes (e.g. Oswalt, Overmeyer, & Misselwitz, 2007; Diedrich, 2013; Wagner, 2016). Such projects are an important part of today's urban landscape. However, their outcomes remain difficult to grasp and evaluate. Discussing this type of space-making under the label of 'criticism' is thus relevant for urban practice as well as for discourse on a wider scale.

Falling apart and temporary— but perfect for watching the sunset

In her essay 'The Architecture of Criticism' (1991), urban design scholar Miriam Gusevich describes how institutionalised formats that evaluate architectural work, such as the 'architectural canon', follow and convey specific selective orderings and definitions of values. These formats—here, I regard the aforementioned architectural award and its criteria as belonging to such evaluative structures—establish a divide between what may be deemed architecture as an elite discipline with certain favourable attributes,

and that which constitutes the rest, i.e. common and ordinary built structures (Gusevich, 1991, p. 8). According to Gusevich, the criteria for evaluating architecture—to decide what deserves to be on a list of good works—primarily refer to factors of "aesthetic merit", represented most fundamentally by the Vitruvian trilogy of *venustas*, *firmitas*, and *utilitas* (firmness, commodity, and delight) (Gusevich, 1991, p. 10), alternatively translated as strength, utility, and beauty. These are simple words, yet they carry complex meanings. Consulting the guidelines for the architectural award in Valby⁴, these factors certainly prove apparent and relatable as a framework for its evaluation of incoming nominations. The guidelines list their main criteria for eligibility as: "beautiful buildings and complexes of high architectural quality", "architectural innovation and a contemporary and modern mode of expression", "a beautiful restoration of an old building taking point of departure in the original architecture", and "a positive contribution to the district, neighbourhood, street, or surroundings".



FIGURE 7 The containers of TH. Bar frame the pavilion that serves as a relaxed stage and seating in front of the crumbling backdrop with smashed windows, bolted doors and graffiti.

Most of the time, the dominant character of the Valby Pavilion site is one of a rather trashy bricolage. The worn-out pavilion itself, with its coloured lanterns, second-hand interior, and pallet furniture; the plant beds and various 'homemade' signs; the DIY swap stations, graffiti art, containers, Biergarten benches, and parasols in front of the deteriorating and empty buildings combine to create an eclectic backyard style. This is an ambience more associated with 'hygge'⁵ and an informal community get-together than with good qualitative architecture and specific, well-thought-out urban design solutions. While this setting can nonetheless be one of 'beauty' and 'delight', its references are of a rather contingent, informal, and non-designed nature. Valby Pavilion is a "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989), created more by its appropriation or inhabitation through human presence and its traces of conviviality than it is by wooden beams or other material elements. The criteria of innovation and quest for contemporary and modern expressions are equally difficult to apply to the Valby Pavilion. Much like other recent temporary projects (see e.g. Reynolds, 2015), the DIY character and Berlinian⁶ ambience are rather amateurish and nostalgic. While the combination of programmes could be described as 'modern', featuring for instance a pop-up bar and a plant seed and book exchange system, their 'design solutions' are simple and mainstream, uncomplicated, readymade, *ad hoc*, and to some extent not even particularly well manufactured in terms of craftsmanship. Aspects of innovation could arguably be mentioned in terms of the overall programmatic test setting of the temporary space, but these are difficult to ascribe to anything specifically innovative in the site's physical layout. While good restoration solutions and enhancements of heritage qualities are highlighted in the award guidelines, this criterion is likewise difficult to read directly within the space at Smedestræde 2. The surrounding buildings are in very bad shape, ready for demolition, and the pavilion itself and the additional temporary installations are, due to their 'prolonged' temporary state, similarly being worn down as time passes. This represents a state that is quite the opposite from improvement and renovation of an existing building structure. However, if we consider the aim of the pavilion being to mimic, catalyse, and highlight a discussion of how to deal with the site's heritage, then the project does indeed address heritage on a more symbolic and abstract level, placing the site's history in a new context—without, however, leading to actual renovation.

Valby Pavilion thus confronts several challenges when it comes to meeting the criteria of the award nomination. Perhaps, however, a temporary setting such as this one relinquishes the possibility for this kind of recognition and dissemination because other logics are at stake than those that dominate and are framed by award guidelines of this kind. What other aspects can help us reveal the particularities of a space such as Valby Pavilion? I will explore this further in the following discussions of evaluative criteria of relevance for the contextual and dynamic properties of urban spaces.



FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10

The neighbour, Louise, describes the space like this: “To me it is a free space where I can relax with my ‘neighbours’ and enjoy a green spot in the city that creates a community among locals. The ambience and ‘hygge’ that spreads among people, in the light of the coloured lanterns, music and candlelight, the homey atmosphere, (no matter if it’s a boring Monday or a Saturday evening), under the open sky, the rough look with the beautiful old buildings of Valby in the back—to me this is the heart of Valby, with space for everybody” (Photographs by Louise Lammert, 2017).

There are a number of important aspects in identifying the significance, value, and disvalue of spatial settings that challenge static rules and aesthetic criteria. As Gusevich (1991, p. 10) argues, the historic, social, and cultural context might reveal logics that transgress and challenge, or even oppose, dominant “aesthetics merits”. These logics can be of a paradigmatic nature, for instance by challenging good taste and promoting the “cultural values of ugliness” (Gusevich, 1991). Bad taste and ugliness can be correct. This is not a new phenomenon but is a recurring concept in aesthetic theory and philosophy (e.g. Goodman, 1968). Ordinarity, imperfection, disharmony, and their ambiguity can form strong aesthetic stimulations and attractions, represented for instance by the aesthetics of decay in ruinous settings of post-industrial environments (Braae, 2015), where a modern version of the “ruin gaze” and “ruinophilia” is an important aspect of the spatial qualities of “eclectic transitional architecture” (Boym, 2008). As one of the neighbouring residents to Valby Pavilion and a regular customer of TH. Bar says when I ask her about the generally poor state of the built structures at the site: “I find it very *hyggelig!* It’s beautiful. It creates a rough look.”⁷

While the traces of decay and the general neglect surrounding Valby Pavilion are not obvious positive qualities, and could even be considered quite problematic in terms of heritage and sustainability, these conditions nevertheless seem to play a paradoxical role in creating the space as a distinct milieu, infusing it with a character that speaks of dereliction and misuse, but also of invitation and liberatory imperfection. This is highlighted by the contrast between the site’s overall dysfunctional ‘bad shape’ and the meticulous care and detailing that can be found in the caretaking of plants, changing decorations, and creative add-ons to the pavilion and the bar setting, including blankets, cushions, and candlelight. Basic functions such as water and toilets are lacking here. However, sitting amongst all this in the pavilion “is a perfect setting for enjoying pink sunsets,” as the neighbour says.

The trendy aesthetics of DIY and re-use encompassed by the temporary setting add complexity to the aesthetic parameters that we might find in traditional architecture award guidelines. While it is right that aesthetic criteria is taken seriously, the paradigmatic aspects of culture and the meaning of counter- and cross-cultural dynamics affect these criteria. We must thus carefully consider historic and social context when seeking to understand these dynamics (Gusevich, 1991, p. 11). Since the informal, unplanned, and open character of public temporary spaces such as the one in Valby reflect a certain Zeitgeist and trend in urban culture, the corresponding paradigmatic planning and design rationale based upon participatory and exploratory formats form an important background to inquiry and critical examination. A closer look at such uses and discourses might inform the ways in which we can address the final, quite open criteria of the award guidelines: “a positive contribution to the district, neighbourhood, street or surroundings”—first by considering the intentions behind the establishment of Valby Pavilion as a temporary site activation.

An 'open' frame with and for multiple intentions

Art critic and philosopher Noël Carroll offers us further concepts with which to discuss and perform criticism of artistic products. These prove useful for exploring Valby Pavilion. In his book *On Criticism* (2009), Carroll presents an insightful overview of what he regards as the basis for performing critique of cultural productions. One of his rationales is the “reasoned evaluation” (Carroll, 2009, p. 7), which he considers to be the goal of criticism, requiring a focus on the cultural product in question as an intentional outcome of an artistic act. The “success value” (Carroll, 2009, p. 53) of a given work thus depends on whether one can identify the artist’s intentions and evaluate the work relative to these. If we transfer Carroll’s concept to a spatial setting, we must investigate the intentions behind the setting’s origins and emergence.

What, then, are the intentions behind Valby Pavilion? The pavilion was designed and conceptualised by our research team, in close collaboration with a representative from the local committee. As designers and researchers, we sought to create a temporary physical frame that could facilitate a public debate about the site, its history, and its future, and to support the local committee by creating a space for sharing local discussions and programmatic experiments regarding the proposed cultural facility. The structure was also designed to deliberately mirror the building morphology of the surrounding historical context, thereby addressing the theme of cultural heritage.

“Smedestræde in the old village environment is a very special part of Valby’s identity. A vacant site is a chance for something new to happen. How can cultural heritage and future ideas meet? Throughout the rest of this year, the temporary installation will create a basis for further discussion and idea development: How can this site become a new urban meeting place? The site has been opened up and offers space to stay and relax. The wooden construction is a terrace, a stage, a culture house, and a dream bed. A structure that can frame relaxation, performances, meetings, and communities. As a fictional house that needs to be filled with thoughts and ideas about the future. The window displays project material about a possible new cultural gathering place on the site. On the blackboard, everybody is invited to note down their dreams and visions – for this site, for the district, or for life in general. The project is part of SEEDS, an EU project through which University of Copenhagen and Valby Local Committee work together to test strategies for appropriating and transforming leftover areas in the city through locally based temporary projects.” (Text from inauguration poster)

The shared goal was for citizens to be able to play in, collaborate, and enter the development process as soon as the ‘pavilion skeleton’ had been constructed. As a result, ‘the client’, you could say, was not a passive receiver but various known (the local committee) and unknown (potential users) active co-players or co-creators, and our intentions as architects, landscape architects, and researchers were thus strongly linked to a specific collaborative setup and the negotiations, changes, and compromises that it entailed. Significantly, the local committee shared our ambitions, reflecting the overall municipal vision of co-creation and urban experimentation.⁸ However, although the committee was a municipal organisation, its members held diverse viewpoints and agendas in relation to the project. While the project manager was keen to initiate DIY facilities and environment-focused programmes, some colleagues were more focused on the political goal of building the library, while others were more interested in promoting other local political agendas more generally. As a result, the intentions behind the project were numerous and were coloured by the fact that the project emerged as a combinatory and collaborative setup, involving researchers with design backgrounds, local politicians, grassroots-oriented staff from the local committee’s administration, volunteers, and activists. Valby Pavilion was not an independent artistic statement, nor a piece of architecture with a clear brief.



FIGURE 11

The 'homemade' DIY style of the container bar taking over the Valby Pavilion



FIGURE 12

I Valby drømmer vi om...

REISETILBÆ
FREDAG 24. JUN
30. AUGUST
KL. 16-17

Smedestræde
i det gamle landsby-
miljø er en helt særlig del af
Valbys identitet. En tom grund er et
mulighedstelt for at noget nyt kan opstå.
Hvordan kan fortidens kulturarv og fremtidens ideer
mødes her?

Den midlertidige installation vil resten af året danne base for videre
diskussion og ideoudvikling: hvordan kan stedet blive til et nyt bymæssigt
medested? Grunden åbnes op og giver rum til ophold og samvær.

Trækonstruktionen er både terrasse, scene, kulturhus og drammeseng.
En figur der kan danne ramme om ophold, forestillinger, møder og fælles-
skaber. Som en fleksivhus skalden fyldes med tanker og ideer for fremtiden.
I vinduet udstilles projektmateriale for et muligt nyt kulturelt sam-
lingspunkt på grunden. På tavlen kan alle notere drømme og visioner
- for stedet, for bydelen og for livet i det hele taget.

Projektet er en del af SEEDS, et EU-projekt hvor Københavns
Universitet og Valby Lokaludvalg sammen afprøver strategier for
indtægts- og omdannelse af byens restaurer gennem lokalforankrede
midlertidige projekter.

Koncept, design og produktion: SEEDS gruppen: Bettina Lorenz, Kristian Boserup og Anne Wøjner, Section for Landskabsarkitektur
og Plandesign, Københavns Universitet i samarbejde med Valby Lokaludvalg. Rådgiverfirma: Arkitektur, Skulptur, Byplan
Tilbyrådene og de lokale aktører: Valby Lokaludvalg, Valby Landsbyråd, Valby Landsbyråd, Valby Landsbyråd, Valby Landsbyråd.
Kontakt: Københavns Universitet, Bettina Lorenz, Valby Lokaludvalg, Valby Landsbyråd, Valby Landsbyråd, Valby Landsbyråd.

FIGURE 13

The inauguration poster and layout for the initial temporary interventions

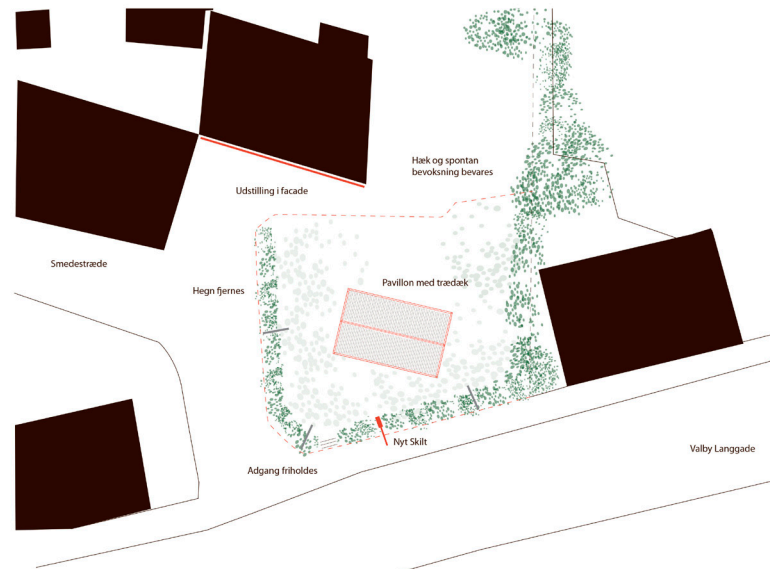


FIGURE 14

If we consult Carroll's terminology, the "success value" relating to the intentions foregrounds the "reception value", the value that the recipients or audience get from experiencing the produced work (Carroll, 2009, p. 6). While it is possible to ask whether the pavilion meets the divergent initial intentions of both the researchers and the various local agents, the logic of the space is such that its meaning is to be created through use and appropriation – through the open call. This occurs in a manner that is characterised by contingency and unpredictability, difficult to relate to intentional acts and choices. Activation of the site via the installations did indeed occur, and public debate and discussions took place, but the prototyping of ideas for the expected new facility was relatively less prominent. The most evident increased use of the site, however, emerged from the unexpected but successful activation by the private bar owner, resulting in a rising interest in the site's future and even a petition to "save the 'TH. Bar'"⁹, "Valby's cosiest gap" (TH. Bar sign)—itself representing public debate and involvement. Whereas official municipal information meetings did not evoke strong public opinion about use of the site, the announcement of the coming closure

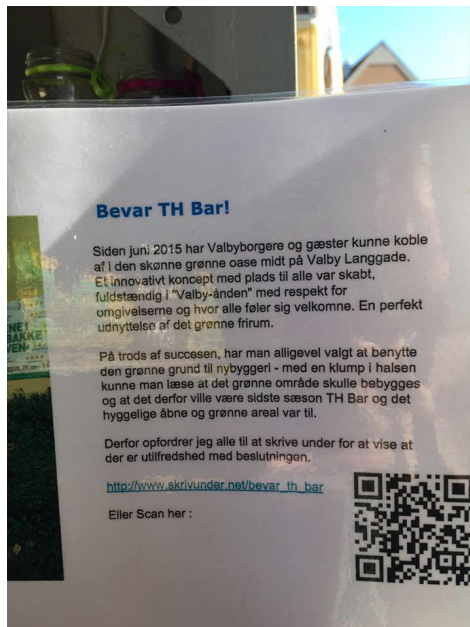


FIGURE 15



FIGURE 16

'Save TH. Bar' protest info by local residents at the site advocating for keeping 'Valby's cosiest gap'

of the pop-up gathering point certainly did. Polemically, one might ask whether this popularity and care is not, in fact, related to the "positive contribution to the district, neighbourhood, street or surroundings" requested by the award criteria. Nevertheless, this engagement is also anchored in fear of loss of the specific quality that emerged within Valby Pavilion in its later stages as a lively hang-out spot, an engagement that could potentially cause agitation and discontent upon closure. Not all public awareness is positive.

A discursive public space

The importance of ongoing shifts in the appropriations, alterations, debates, and negotiations centred around Valby Pavilion points to the necessity of considering another aspect of critical evaluation: the space as a public realm. In her article 'On criticism' (1987), architecture theorist and historian Mary McLeod discusses the ways in which criticism of public space requires specific attention to forces other than initial intentions (1987, p. 5). Architecture, and public space in particular, "necessitates a conception of meaning that is highly ambivalent, continually changing, and closely linked to context" (McLeod, 1987, p. 4). Criticism of public space must deal with a wide range of issues and "cultural and productive relations in their most encompassing sense". This also requires that "influence becomes a more difficult, and inherently more political, issue", McLeod (1987, p. 6) argues. The overall political situation and debate of the site 'in limbo', awaiting its fate, is thus a fundamental condition of Valby Pavilion's trajectory.

With so many agents influencing the space, there are a great number of "architectural practitioners" (Jacobs & Merriman, 2011, p. 211) involved. Valby Pavilion, as a public realm, is occupied by multiple voices. The pavilion is used for play, musical performances, and as bar seating. However, it also works as a 'speaker's corner' for media performances. On several occasions, local politicians have used the setting for publicity,



FIGURE 17



FIGURE 18

The pavilion as a discursive space and symbol for political and cultural agendas (Photograph by Martin Sørensen, 2013, 2014)

with the installation acting as a prop in photo sessions. In this media context, the installation is appropriated and used to perform symbolic gestures of a political character. Appropriation by different actors engages these installations in various practices and agendas, and as a consequence, their meanings shift. They lack a single clear expression and purpose. Valby Pavilion is a rather simple installation, but its strategic or tactical appropriation endows it with symbolic meaning that transcends the site's simple appearance. This is further intensified by the plot's uncertain state and ambiguous ownership. The spatial setting is difficult to label because of the ongoing loading of intentions, yet, it can nevertheless be used to absorb new attentions as a public setting with an 'open call' for appropriation.

In temporary public settings that serve as supportive frames for DIY activities and local engagement, the meaning of appropriation and space production, the "taking and making" of space (Vallance, Dupuis, Thorns, & Edwards, 2017, p. 88) is thus an important factor to draw into a critical examination. It is vital to consider the ways in which a setting becomes public through acts of "occupation, production, management, use, function or service, responsiveness and adaptability" (Vallance et al., 2017, p. 89), revealing both emancipatory spaces of possibility and forces of dominance and control. The various appropriations of Valby Pavilion—from political debate to occupancy by a pop-up bar—underline how the vagueness of the temporary framing can withdraw itself from adhering to certain dominant logics (Vallance et al., 2017, p. 88), and how the DIY format can take on a mediating role (Dahl, 2016).

Meaning on the move

In the context of critique, it is important to advocate consideration of temporary public spaces as a form of spatial reasoning and as highly discursive settings, transcending their more obvious uses and the properties of their amenities and facilities. The field of performance studies (e.g. Fischer Lichte, 2004; Schechner, 2013; Jalving, 2011), is useful here for critically investigating cross-cultural and processual aspects. Since performance studies investigate *doings and changes*, a frame is created within which the performative and dynamic character of the temporary installation in Valby can be addressed. For instance, arguing for the consideration of objects not as static artefacts but *as a performance*, performance theorist Richard Schechner (2013, p. 3) points out that "the artefact may be relatively stable, but the performances it creates or takes part in can change radically". This is demonstrated in the presentation of the multiple meanings

of the pavilion. The pavilion stays the same, yet it is activated by various narratives and uses. The pavilion gains what architectural historian Stanford Anderson (1987, p. 10) terms a certain “quasi-autonomy”, meaning “a degree of independence from precedent, from intentions, from specific patterns of use and meaning; an availability for re-use and reinterpretation”.

A perspective on space as practiced and continuously constructed is thus necessary to address site development of a temporary character, like the one in Valby. It is important to consider not only the aforementioned change in use and appropriation but also the diachronic aspects of space, since temporary spaces are situated in the grey zone, in a state of tension between being a means to a certain result and being a goal unto themselves (Samson, 2010, p. 123). The changes and overlays in use and understanding thus require scrutiny. These changes can be rather drastic, due to the highly scenographic use as Valby Pavilion's dominant characteristic. Designer and theorist Andrea Kahn (2005, p. 286) argues that urban sites are in constant change, with “overlay and interplay of multiple realities operating at the same time, on the same place”. Whether Valby Pavilion is ‘good enough’ as a space remains open to question. However, it is definitely not ‘finished’, and is definitely undergoing change. This is not only because Valby Pavilion is a site development project, but also because the project's temporary condition and transforming state require a critical examination of its coming into being, development, and multiple meanings, rather than of some fixed end result.

Conclusion and reflection

This article's point of departure was the open question of whether Valby Pavilion could be considered ‘good enough’ in its ‘unfinished’, temporary and ambiguous state. This question arises from the generic statement produced by the local architecture award committee to explain why it turned down all project nominations. This paper seeks neither to answer this question with a clear yes or no, nor to overthrow or fully adhere to criteria of this specific award. Instead, the aim has been to use ruminations concerning this statement and its background as an invitation to explore which aspects of temporary public settings require critical and open-minded investigation in the context of current design and planning paradigms. First, I show that a critique requires close attention to aesthetic expressions and their cultural references and development, in this case the setting's informal, non-designed, and makeshift character. Second, an investigation of the intentions behind the project reveals multiple coexisting agendas and shows that the programmatic open call for appropriation and DIY action makes it challenging to define whether any single, clear intention has been fulfilled. Third, considering the space as a public setting highlights how, despite their contingency, the appropriations of the space over time play an important role in matters of agency and public debate. Finally, exploring temporary public settings such as Valby Pavilion from a performance perspective and with a relational and dynamic understanding of space making—in which spatial alterations, events, and discourses combine to narrate and create the project—underlines the need to address temporary public settings diachronically and as a form of ongoing literal and figurative meaning-making.

Just as meaning is cultivated and continuously developed, the object of criticism itself is also an ongoing construction. As Miriam Gusevich (1991, p. 21) argues, criticism is reflective and reactive, drawing upon a specific context; yet it is also a highly editorial and constructive act: “the object of criticism, however, is not simply given. It is reconstructed through discourse”. As designers and researchers, we thus have the responsibility to challenge, nuance, and cultivate modes of criticism that can qualify emerging, but difficult to grasp, fields of practice and discourse.

Notes

- [1] Copenhagen has 12 local committees that serve to connect the citizens of districts with the city council and the municipality's administrative departments. The committee is a municipal unit but also an independent local agent. It consists of representatives of local associations and representatives from the political parties in the Copenhagen City Council. The committee can have an advisory role or limited decision-making authority in specific cases. The organisation is obliged to secure dialogue with citizens and coordinate municipal activities in the district.
- [2] This paper elaborates upon studies from my PhD research and work conducted in our research team involved in the Valby collaboration, through the EU Interreg SEEDS project. The research team consisted of Associate Professor Bettina Lamm, the author as a PhD student, and the research assistants Kristian Skaarup (2013) and Anais Lora (2014).
- [3] <http://www.valbylokaludvalg.kk.dk/ingen-arkitekturpris-i-aar/>
- [4] <http://www.valbylokaludvalg.kk.dk/fokusomraader/arkitekturpris/>
- [5] The Danish word *hygge* has recently been added to *The Oxford English Dictionary* and is here defined as: "hygge: Esp. with reference to Danish culture: a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being; contentment from simple pleasures, such as warmth, food, friends, etc./Esp. with reference to Danish culture: that inspires or engenders feelings of contentment or well-being as from experiencing cosiness, comfort, social harmony, etc.; pleasant, harmonious; cosy, comfortable."
- [6] On multiple occasions, people using the space and commenting on related social media (Valby Pavilion, the TH. Bar, and the local committee all have Facebook and Instagram profiles) refer to the 'Berlin' ambience as characteristic of the site.
- [7] Based on a phone conversation and e-mail correspondence with the neighbour in September 2017.
- [8] Co-creation Copenhagen/Fællesskab I København, Teknik- og Miljøforvaltningen, Københavns Kommune, 2015.
- [9] https://www.skrivunder.net/bevar_th_bar, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bevar.th.bar>

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