

The Importance of Playing in the City

A Comparison of Children's Playgrounds

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Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate the importance of playing in the city. Especially in today's urban contexts, play is considered in opposition to work. If work symbolizes the important, serious, and purposeful pursuit of responsible adults, play is often seen as the unimportant, frivolous, and purposeless activity of immature children. (Whitebread, 2012) This view is mistaken. A review of the literature on play in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and philosophy, reveals that play is ubiquitous in the human species; fundamental to the development of [urban] civilisation and culture; instrumental for the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children; and exemplary of our mode of being-in-the-world, in phenomenological terms, as an immersive, interpretive, and sometimes subversive mode of engaging with our urban environment (Chapter 1). After having established the interdisciplinary basis for the importance of play and its urban significance, I examine the social and environmental factors that discourage or inhibit children's play in cities (Chapter 2). This is followed by the analysis of playgrounds, as they constitute one of the main spaces of play provided for children in cities today (Chapter 3). Case studies are conducted in different types of playgrounds in Islington, London, and Sungmisan, Seoul, describing amongst many things, the ways in which children play, how they interact with the physical environment, and how meaningful places are created through their play activity (Chapter 4). The methods used were: participant observation, recollection of memories and interviews with children, parents, and playworkers.

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The Importance of Playing in the City: A Comparison of Children's Playgrounds

Introduction

It is important to clarify from the outset that play and its associated benefits do not pertain only to children but to all human beings. Moreover, children's playscape - defined as the landscape where children are able to play (Frost, 1992) - stretches far beyond the boundaries of the playground. (Cunningham & Jones, 1999) However this thesis focuses on children's play and playgrounds for reasons of scope, as well as the following reasons: 1) Children are the primary agents of urban play. 2) Children's play spaces and opportunities are under threat due to ongoing processes of urbanization and the neoliberal spatial practices associated with it. 3) Children constitute a marginalized group as they are often neglected in decision making procedures. 4) Playgrounds still represent, one of, if not, the main space of play in the city. 5) The analysis of different types of playgrounds and the kinds of play therein, reveal insights into the ways in which communities and sometimes children themselves, are attempting to overcome the paucity of play opportunities in the city.

UN Convention on The Rights of The Child - The Right to Play

Growing research and interest into children as fully fledged members of society, who deserve recognition and protection of their rights, has not gone unnoticed in the policy arena. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) represents a major comprehensive, and supranational attempt to ensure the inviolable rights of children. This convention takes the child to mean "every human being below the age of 18." (UNCRC,1990,4) The issue of children's right to play is dealt with in Article 31 which states that:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

(UNCRC,1990,10)

This convention represents a big step for recognizing, respecting, and promoting children's rights and more specifically, as shown in article 31, their right to play. National governments and decision makers at sub-national scales are able to refer to this convention and article 31, for consultation and guidance on child-related policies, as well as for justification in promoting children's rights to play.

Expectedly, article 31 has received varied attention amongst scholars. Russell and Lester (2010) elaborate on the three key terms in article 31 - recognize, respect, and promote. Recognizing children's

right to play means recognizing “the nature and benefits of play,” (Russell & Lester, 2010, 2) This is dealt with in the first chapter. Respecting children’s right to play means “not to deny or limit access” to play which can be understood in physical as well as socio-cultural and environmental terms. (ibid) These issues are dealt with in the second chapter. Finally, promoting play, perhaps the most controversial, is often understood as synonymous with the provision of play spaces and opportunities - by decision-makers, who are, in the majority of cases, adults. This has been problematized by several thinkers on the grounds that children’s play often happens outside the spaces and times that adults provide for them (Rasmussen, 2004; Hodgkin & Newell, 2007), which leads Lester and Russell to claim, “if play is understood as not control-led by adults, as interwoven into the fabric of daily life, then there is a need to think beyond providing adult-sanctioned, dedicated places and programmes for play.” (2010, 2) Instead, one must think about promoting the ways in which children can exercise their right to play by themselves, in their everyday life in their local neighbourhoods.

The case studies in this thesis (adventure playgrounds in Islington, London, and a natural playscape in Sungmisan neighbourhood, Seoul) represent two different local initiatives that aim to 1) give more agency to children in constructing their own play activities and environments, while 2) tackling the problem of the paucity of children’s play spaces and opportunities, in two of the most heavily urbanized cities of the modern world. In this sense, they represent attempts at resolving the contradiction inherent in the Convention and modern discourses surrounding children’s play, that - on the one hand valorize children’s right to free play, and on the other hand, “rationalize and shape children’s play from the outside to advance social, educational and political goals.” (Kozlovsky,2007) Finally the case studies have in common the fact that they emerged from the local population and are freely accessible - contrary to many play opportunities that are often commercialized or heavily institutionalized.

In practical terms, the adoption and implementation of article 31 has proven difficult. As Adrian Voce, the president of the European Network of Child Friendly Cities and a former playworker in London, UK, claimed in an interview, “the problem is, national and local governments don’t take it [article 31] seriously enough. *We* do, and the playworkers do, because if you read it carefully, they [the convention and article 31] are very comprehensive, detailed, and actually contain practical guidelines.” He also brought attention to how the political climate of austerity is affecting the provision of children’s play opportunities, saying, “during the Labour government, there was a lot of funding for children’s play and playgrounds as well as playworkers. But when the conservatives got in, all of that went out the window. So nowadays it’s very difficult to get the kinds of support that we used to.” (Interview with Adrian Voce, June 2018, London)

Moreover, in many cities today, the proliferation of neoliberal urban regimes has led to an increasing focus on the efficient and profitable use of space (spaces for work and value-extraction) over the creation and maintenance of meaningful places (Harvey, 2004), that could be nurtured through playing. Urban planning, design, and policy have consequently treated play as a phenomenon to be spatially segregated, and designed for the specific niche of children in the form of urban playgrounds (Karsten, 2005). This development has coincided with the characterization of children as ‘vulnerable’ rather than ‘resilient’ (Kozlovsky 2008) leading to safety conscious designs around and within the playgrounds themselves (Verstrate and Karsten 2011). Lines and boundaries are drawn to define playing rules, patterns, and areas for children away from the urban streets and other activities such as walking, cycling, and driving (Ingold, 2007). Adult play on the other hand has been subsumed under leisure and entertainment, collectivised in terms of teams, competitions, and exhibitions in the broader context of the consumption-

oriented economy (Lefebvre, 1991). Free-time and leisure have become opportunities for spectacle (Debord, 1994) and commodification leaving little room for genuine playful engagement with one's surrounding environment and neighbours; while the ubiquitous consumption of televisions, mobile phones, and computer games have further limited chances of outdoor, bodily play in urban places.

Yet in as much as these forces have shaped modern play spaces and practices; the exercising of our right to play (as one variation of our 'right to the city') can have meaningful consequences. For play is not merely the re-enactment or representation of such grand transformations but also an invitation to reinterpret, challenge, and subvert them, and the status quo. Playing with the rules, playing with convention and tradition are exactly *that*, because inherent within play is the tendency to create new rules, to open up new ways of perceiving and experiencing, to re-interpret our surroundings; and equally to bend the rules, to break, or subvert them.

Chapter 1: Importance of Play: Literature Review / Theoretical Frameworks

The aim of this chapter is to review the literature on play and its importance. The various ‘theories of play’ are organized into sociological, psychological, and philosophical accounts. As each branch of study conceptualizes play in different ways, the insights to be gained, regarding the importance of play and its urban significance, are also varied. To summarize briefly, Huizinga, in the sociological tradition, espouses play as being not only fundamental to human nature, but also inherent in, and responsible for, the very development of culture and civilisation. Applying Huizinga to the urban then, means to tease out the ludic elements present in our urban culture, as well as to envisage the ludic city, as a site upon which man’s inherent playful disposition can be realized. Psychological accounts of play focus on the educational and developmental benefits of play for children (e.g. Piaget, Vygotsky). Growing research and evidence in various branches of psychology, have led to overwhelming consensus that play is beneficial for children’s physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. The developmental significance of different kinds of play such as physical play (e.g rough and tumble), symbolic play (e.g pretend play/ sociodramatic play), and play with rules (e.g organized games with rules) for children; raises interesting insights about the design of urban play spaces - for instance, the playground - and the kinds of play that different types of playgrounds encourage. Finally, insights from phenomenology and other literary works of the 20th century, are elaborated in this chapter. Phenomenologists’ focus on lived experience rather than detached reflection is taken as inspiration to think about the lived experience of play as being pre-reflective, immersive, and meaningful. Play is also espoused as being transformative and re-interpretive following Gadamer, who, claimed that play is neither an activity nor an attitude on the part of the subject, but the to-and-fro movement between subjects that draws individuals into its spell.

1.1 Definitional Issues

“The more we try to mark off the form we call ‘play’ [...] the more the absolute independence of the play-concept stands out” (Huizinga, 1949,6)

Play is notoriously difficult to define. Biologists and psychologists have often attempted to define play via its function (i.e its purpose), in the biological organism (e.g, as an activity to release surplus energy, as a relaxation mechanism etc.) (Giddens, 1964) ; or by referring to its instrumental value in developing children into responsible adults (Groos, 1899). These accounts have been criticised on the grounds that they “start from the assumption that play must serve something which is *not* play, that it must have some kind of biological [or developmental] purpose.” (Huizinga,1949,2) For Huizinga, what is important is capturing the lived experience of play, which leads him to define it as follows:

“We might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside the “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.” (Huizinga,1949,13)

While this definition certainly reveals important aspects of play such as how play is i) disinterested, ii) voluntary, iii) proceeds with its own rules, iv) outside of ‘ordinary reality,’ v) promotes groupings, vi)

has an element of secrecy, and thus leads to vii) a different spatial and temporal experience; it does not allow for the understanding of play as an attitude or disposition (Russell & Lester, 2010), or capture the 'back and forth' / 'to and fro' movement of play that characterise the process of understanding and interpretation in the theory of Hans Georg Gadamer.

Roger Callois, writing after Huizinga, criticized his predecessor claiming that by characterizing play as having no material interest, he omits 'games of chance' such as gambling, casinos, racetracks and lotteries. As Callois claims, "it is certainly much more difficult to establish the cultural functions of games of chance than of competitive games. However, the influence of games of chance is no less considerable, even if deemed unfortunate." (Callois, 2001, 5) Callois goes on to develop a typology of play and identifies four different kinds of play: Agon (play involving competition of skills), alea (games of chance/luck), mimcry (role-playing/ sociodramatic play), and illinx (vertigo/ play involving altering perceptions). (Ibid, 12) A different typology appears in psychological accounts in the form of physical play, symbolic play, and play with rules amongst other variations (discussed later). Since Callois, many more 'types of play' have been identified as shown in the picture below. Defining play thus becomes even more complex.



(Play Types, Cornwallis Adventure Playground, London. Source: Rob Hughes, Play Scotland)

As Brian Sutton-Smith explains in his book, *The Ambiguity of Play* (2009), play is inherently ambiguous and there are so many different uses and meanings of the word in our language ('rhetorics'), such that defining it in one way would amount to neglecting other important meanings that are often contrary to the original attempt. Rather than a scientific reduction of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the word 'play', it is perhaps more helpful for one to reflect on his/her own experiences of play to discover what it entails.

The following is thus a play on the word ‘play,’ inspired by Georges Perec, who begins his book *Species of Spaces* (1974) by attempting, in a playful manner, to exhaust the word ‘space.’ What emerges is far from a definition, but the enterprise nevertheless reveals many important aspects, instances, and kinds of play that are helpful understanding what play might be about:

Play ful
 role Play
 Play ing
 Play er
 fore Play
 game Play
 re Play
 dis Play
 down Play
 mis Play
 Play able
 Play acting
 Play thing
 Play back
 Play boy
 Play date
 Play ground
 Play time
 inter Play
 out Play
 under Play
 over Play
 Play off
 Play at
 Play for
 Play list
 Play station
 screen Play
 google Play
 word Play etc.

The term ‘child’ or ‘children’ is perhaps relatively easier to define. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as all human beings under 18 (UNCNC,1990,4) . However such a rigid definition also fails to take into account that childhood and the lived experience of childhood often differs across time, societies, and cultures. As Colin Ward puts it, “in most parts of the world it would be foolish to describe a fifteen year old as a child.” (Ward, 1978,3) Therefore, like play, it is perhaps better to rely on the reader’s intuitive sense and knowledge, with regards to these terms. If a range must be given, this essay, for the most part, deals with the play of children under the age of ten.

1.2 Sociological Accounts of Play

Homo Ludens

Already in the 18th century, Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), a German poet, philosopher, historian, and playwright, wrote, in his 15th letter of *Aesthetic Education of Man* - “man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word man, and *he is only wholly man when he plays*” (15th Letter of Schiller’s *Aesthetic Education of Man*). With these words, says Liane Lefaivre, he became the first notable writer in Western culture “not to extol the value of play in general terms, but to see it as the very essence of human nature” (Lefaivre, 2007, 40)

However it was only much later in the 20th century, through the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) and his seminal work, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1938) that the study of play became systematised into academic discourse, in the field of sociology. He famously posited the notion of *Homo Ludens*, man the player, in contrast to the previous notions of *homo sapiens*, man the knower, and *homo faber*, man the maker - thus challenging the dominant paradigm of man as a rational thinker that had persisted at least since the Enlightenment period; and also *homo faber*, for man was not merely a maker/creator of his environment but an active manipulator whose ludic disposition stretched beyond the mere shaping of his environment, to appropriating and interpreting it in meaningful, creative, and playful ways.

From an urban perspective, the concept of *Homo Ludens*, man the player, has been very influential to the Situationists who sought to challenge the ordered, commercialized, and spectacle-based nature of 20th century urban reality. Situationists, such as Debord and Nieuwenhuys, “sought to reclaim the right to the city through subversive counter-play and everyday spatial tactics, such as *dérive* and *detournement*. (Debord, 1955; De Certeau, 1984)” (de Lange, 2015, 428). *Dérive*, the art of wandering through urban space, was according to Debord, to be undertaken as “a mode of experimental behaviour [...] and in a spirit of adventure and discovery.” (Debord in Andreotti, 2000, 38) This wandering as a kind of play, contributed to the participants’ feeling of being “apart together” which is emphasized by Huizinga as a characteristic of play. Andreotti reveals that this kind of ludic interpretation of city spaces was popular amongst Bohemians in Paris, as shown in a photo from Ed Van der Elsken:



Ed Van Der Elsken. *Page from Love on the Left Bank*. 1957.

(Source: Van Der Elsken’s *Love on the Left Bank*, 1957 in Andreotti, 2000, 39)

Ludic Elements in Culture

Huizinga pursues two major aims in his book. First, he attempts to define the characteristics of play (as discussed previously), and second, he seeks to reveal the role of play in the development of all essential aspects of human culture - in art, politics, intellectual life, legal institutions, and even warfare. In short, his aim was “to show that pure, genuine play is one of the main basis of civilization” (Huizinga, 1949, 5). His method in this pursuit is not scientific, mechanical, or quantitative. For him, the traditional methods and vocabulary of the natural sciences, like ‘position’, ‘force’, and ‘velocity’ cannot encapsulate the phenomena of play, which ought to be about the player’s experience. (Rodriguez, 2006, 2). His analysis thus proceeds via detailed descriptions and comparisons of the playful elements inherent in various forms of culture, making his method more historical and qualitative.

For Huizinga, play is not one of the many phenomena that arise out of social life or culture. It is constitutive of culture in that all forms of culture sprang from, and contain, ludic elements to begin with. For instance, he describes how the desire to win an argument over another through the display of superior rhetorical skill, which underlies our culture of legal practice and juridical institutions, emerge from, and exhibit, essentially playful features of exhibitionism and competition. (Huizinga, 1949, 87) Similarly, philosophical inquiry contains within it certain ludic elements. Plato for instance, employed in his pursuit of truth, a kind of fictional dialogue - which again contains ludic elements of theatricality, pretence, and competition. (Rodriguez, 2006, 5).

Religion too for Huizinga emerged in accordance with basic playful elements. The sequence of rites and rituals that proceed within the demarcation of a “make-believe” sacred space (Huizinga, 1949, 24), give evidence to the ludic elements within religious practice. As Huizinga claims, “we found that one of the most important characteristics of play was its spatial separation from ordinary life. A closed space is marked out for it, either materially or ideally, hedged off from the everyday surroundings. Inside this space the play proceeds, inside it the rules obtain. Now, the marking out of some sacred spot is also the primary characteristic of every sacred act [...] Whenever it is a question of taking a vow or being received into an Order [...] there is always such a delimitation of room for play. The magician, the augur, the sacrificer begins his work by circumscribing his sacred space” (Ibid, 19). This separate space for play with its own rules, that affords a unique spatial and temporal experience for the players involved, constitutes what Huizinga calls the “magic circle” (Ibid, 10).

Ludic Elements in Urban Culture

Undoubtedly, Huizinga considers play to be extremely important if he considers it to be constitutive of, and fundamental to, the development of culture and civilisation as such. But what does this mean for the urban? In so far as Huizinga views attributes such as competition, theatricality, joyful improvisation, exhibitionism, and challenge, as being essentially ludic, the ways in which ludic elements are infused and manifested in the development of our urban culture, also become quickly apparent. In fact, cities can be seen as the arena where such ludic tendencies are most concentrated, exaggerated, and thus expressed in abundance. Competition has certainly become one of the key words in urban studies, with a wealth of literature outlining how inter- and intra-urban competition is shaping our urban environment, economically, politically, and spatially. (Gordon, 1999) The emergence of global cities and the subsequent effects of inequality, segregation, and polarization to name a few, are, according to Saskia Sassen, deeply rooted in the competitive behaviour of global capitalist firms (Sassen, 2002). Finally, the

relevance of terms such as ‘urban entrepreneurialism’ (Harvey, 1989) in analysing current urban culture bears evidence to the view that if competition is inherently ludic; it is in the urban context where we witness its fullest expression.

The same could be said about the other ludic elements such as theatricality. Lewis Mumford for instance, saw the city as a ‘theatre of social action’. He claims, “the city creates the theatre and is the theatre. It is in the city, the city as theatre, that man’s more purposive activities are focused [...] The physical organization of the city [...] as a stage-set, well-designed, intensifies and underlines the gestures of the actors and the action of the play” (Mumford, 1937, 94). Following Mumford, more and more planners, architects, and policy makers are using terms such as ‘urban scene’, ‘urban drama’, and ‘urban performance’ to frame the life of the city (Makeham, 2005, 150). The theatricality inherent in cities is not merely applicable in the metaphorical sense. As Makeham argues, aside from the obvious theatrical performances in the city; there are a myriad of performative elements in the broader physical environment - in the architecture and design of the city - such as tension, irony, intertextuality, and self reflectivity. As he claims, cities as a whole can be understood as sites upon which an urban citizenry, in the ‘practice of everyday life’ performs its collective memory, imagination and aspiration” (Makeham, 2005, 151) Finally, Jane Jacobs’ framing of the life of the sidewalk as an “intricate street ballet” with “dancers [...] twirling in unison” and whose “distinctive parts miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole” (Jacobs, 1961, 60) also reinforces the ludic theatricality that permeates cities.

Relatedly, these performative activities often are underpinned by an element of exhibitionism as cities are places where one sees and is seen - where the gaze of the other is most frequently experienced, forgotten, and renewed. Henning Bech, describes in his book, *When Men Meet* (1997), the experience of homosexuality in modern cities. He describes how the train station, the nightclub, or the gym, become essential places of meeting for homosexuals who oscillate between the desire to be seen, avoided, and forgotten, in the constant flux of new faces, arrival, and departure. Elsewhere, Guy Debord’s work, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), although quite different to Bech’s, reveals another way in which modern cities are becoming the pinnacle of exhibitionism, as does similar literature of the festivalization of cities (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

One of the criticism levelled against Huizinga’s account of the ludic basis in human culture is that it sets the net too wide, such that play comes to encompass practically all human activity that goes over and above simple adaptation to external factors for survival. (Giddens, 1964, 81) If competition, exhibition, improvisation, theatricality are all considered to be essentially play of some sort, then such characteristics are easily discoverable in such a wide range of cultural phenomena, let alone in urban culture - to the extent that it risks obfuscating the nature of play rather than elucidating it. While this criticism is valid and one would be hard pressed in convincing a lawyer in a courtroom that his activity is essentially playing and the courtroom is his playground, Huizinga’s account nevertheless reveals how man’s inherent ludic disposition is central to the development of urban culture.

1.3 Psychological Accounts of Play

Play has been studied at length in different branches of psychology. Earlier theories were focused on the potential biological basis for play and frequently used as their method, observations of play in animals. These thinkers often saw the play of animals and humans to be essentially similar, and springing from similar biological impetus. The later theories of the social and developmental/

educational psychologists espoused play to be of critical importance in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children, often using descriptions of children's play as their method. Practically all of these theories have in common, 1) that they attribute play exclusively to the domain of young animals and/or children and 2) they consider play as a means to an end (varied as the ends may be), and thus neglect the view so strongly embodied in the sociological tradition that play is for the sake of itself.

Earlier Theories on the Biological Reasons for Play

The theories on the biological basis for the existence of play can be summarized as follows: 1) surplus energy theory, 2) the recreation theory, and 3) the practice-instinct theory (Giddens, 1964, 75). The surplus energy theory considers play to be caused by the build up of surplus energy in the organism. As young animals and children have their needs mostly catered by their parents, there is an abundance of energy that must be discharged through playing. Play thus becomes a medium through which this energy is released.

The second theory claims that play is a mechanism by which animals and humans 'recharge their batteries' physically and mentally through doing something fun and relaxing. This view, proposed famously by Lazarus, claims that "the origins of play lie in the need for mental and physical recuperation from the stresses and strains imposed on the individual in other kinds of activity" (Giddens, 1964, 76).

Finally, and perhaps most influential, is the theory of play as practice for adult life, espoused by the Swiss psychologist, Karl Groos (1861-1946). Groos argued in *The Play of Animals* (1896), and later in, *The Play of Humans* (1899), that play has an important genetic role in the development of animal and human intelligence. Studying the play behaviour in animals, he claimed that a kitten playing with a ball of yarn, is preparing to tease the mouse, and young dogs playing at fighting and biting, are pre-empting for later fights and encounters with adult dogs. (Lefaivre, 2007, 40) Play allows the young, to practice real life situations without real life consequences. Thus, according to Groos, play, for young animals and children, is a kind of imitative instinct that functions as an adaptive mechanism for survival as well as for the later demands of adult life.

Later Social/Developmental/Educational Theories on the Importance of Play for Children

The later theories by the social, developmental and educational psychologists were influenced largely by the work of Groos. Freud for instance, considered childhood play to be essential for the development of creativity in adulthood. As he writes in his essay 'Creative Writing and Daydreaming' (1908), "Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him? It would be wrong to think he does not take that world seriously; on the contrary, he takes his play very seriously and he expends large amounts of emotion on it. The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real" (Freud, 1908, 421). Freud goes on to claim that the creative writer, who also takes very seriously his fictional world, is essentially continuing, or substituting, his childhood play.

Piaget - Role of Play in Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget, writing after Freud, is arguably the most well-known developmental psychologist on the topic of children's play. As a constructivist and a genetic epistemologist, Piaget was interested in the *process* by which human beings came to accrue knowledge, rather than the resultant knowledge or the facts themselves. Crucially for Piaget, this process begins in the earliest stages of childhood, from birth, when the infant starts to accrue a wealth of pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual, and embodied knowledge through playing. Through the two concepts of assimilation and accommodation, Piaget describes how a child begins by constructing her own framework for understanding the world via a certain type of play. This limited framework must constantly assimilate new information (e.g. objects, events etc.) that she derives through the play activity. But when this limited framework of hers is challenged, by a kind of anomaly, she proceeds to accommodate (i.e. develop) new frameworks, that better capture her experiences of the world. This new framework must then assimilate more new information, until it is sufficiently challenged, which leads to accommodation and so on and so forth. This progression, which forms the stages of cognitive development in Piaget's works, happens through the embodied playing of the child and her engagement with her surroundings (e.g. her mother, peers, objects etc).

For example, Piaget describes how an infant, in the first 18 months of his birth, engages in what he calls practice-play, that develops his sensorimotor intelligence. As he writes, "a baby sucks his thumb sometimes as early as the second month, grasps objects at about four or five months, shakes them, swings them, rubs them, and finally learns to throw them and retrieve them [...] Each object is assimilated as something "to be sucked," "to be grasped," etc., and nothing more [...] After learning to grasp, swing, throw etc., [...] he repeats his behaviour not in any further effort to learn or to investigate, but for the mere joy of mastering it and of showing off to himself his own power of subduing reality." (Piaget, 1952, 15)

From the age of one, practice-play, that had been simply for the pleasure of mastering certain objects and sensorimotor movements, becomes purposive, as the myriad sequences of actions become organised under a certain goal. The coherent actions then have the potential to become symbolic play, with the advent of representation and language, around the age of two. Symbolic play, for instance in the form of pretend-play or sociodramatic play, allows the child to "construct a whole scene in make-believe" instead of imitating a single action, allowing him to depart from mere satisfaction derived from the mastery of sensorimotor movements to the achievement of "fantasy satisfactions through compensation, wish fulfilment, liquidation of conflicts and so on" (Nicolopoulou, 1993, 4). Symbolic play then gives way to 'play with rules' around the age of four where the child progressively learns to subject his ego to external reality. This move, in turn, "marks the transition to the ludic activity of the socialized individual" (Nicolopoulou, 1993, 4). This is where the child learns how "competition is controlled by a collective discipline, with a code of honour and fair play." (Piaget, 1952, 22)

Vygotsky - Socially Embedded Play and the Zone of Proximal Development

The main alternative to Piaget's framework has been presented by the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), who criticised Piaget's cognitive constructivism on the grounds that it pays insufficient attention to socio-cultural factors that might affect children's learning. (Vygotsky, 2002) Vygotsky did not accept that a child constructed his cognitive representations of the world alone, through his play activity; nor did he believe that only at a certain stage of cognitive development, a child

is 'ready' for socialized play with rules. For Vygotsky, all play, was, in an important way, social and symbolic, insofar as the toys, events, themes, stories, and roles that children enact, are always already invested with sociocultural meanings of that specific time and society. For instance, a child playing at being a 'mother' or children pretending to be 'sisters' act within certain 'rules' that govern motherhood or sisterhood in that particular society in which they find themselves. (Vygotsky, 2002, 3).

Therefore, far from constructing his own mental representations, the child "appropriates the conceptual resources of the pre-existing cultural world, which are transmitted to them by parents, other adults and peers" (Nicolopoulou, 1993, 8), and reinforced by the institutions surrounding childhood (family, schools, etc.) and the collective system of ideas and symbols that permeate a given society. For Vygotsky, then, the child's capacity to develop depends to a large extent on communication and interaction with others. The 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 2002, 8) is one of the key concepts in Vygotsky's work on children's learning through play. It denotes the difference between the child's actual cognitive capabilities when solving problems alone, and the potential cognitive capabilities that could be achieved with the guidance of adults or older peers. For instance, counting to ten is very easily manageable within the cognitive abilities of a six year old child, while quadratic equations might lie too far beyond her abilities. The zone of proximal development is when the ability to be learnt is neither too easy nor too difficult - but stimulating enough that the child could achieve it via the help (what Vygotsky calls, 'scaffolding') of his parents, other adults, and peers. Vygotsky account has been influential in providing justification for the role of adults in children's play, for instance as supervisors or as playworkers in adventure playgrounds, discussed later.

Despite their differences, Piaget and Vygotsky both agree upon the central role of play in the social and cognitive development of the child, and the importance of symbolic play, in developing children's ability to form representations of the world - which leads to the development of language. This insight is gaining more attention in modern research in developmental psychology and education, as evidence mounts to suggest that language and the ability to self-regulate (one's thoughts, emotions etc.) are closely intertwined (Vallaton & Ayoub, 2011) and "together they form the most powerful predictors of children's academic achievement and their emotional well-being." (Whitebread, 2012, 16) Inspired by Piagetian and Vygotskian ideas, there has been a growing body of research into 'learning by playing' in the field of education while in developmental psychology, there is now overwhelming evidence to support the view that play is integral to children's physical and emotional well-being, sociability, linguistic ability and their ability to self-regulate. (Bornstein, 2006)

Benefits of Play in Evolutionary Psychology

The developmental benefits of play for children has been met with increasing interest and evidence in the field of evolutionary psychology. It has been widely recognized that as animals evolved into more complex organisms, the nature of their play activities have also evolved. Thus as David Whitebread explains, in his survey of the literature on children's play in evolutionary psychology, mammals predominantly engage in 'rough and tumble' physical play; whereas in primates, one begins to see more 'play with objects' involving 'tool use' (as well as rough and tumble play). With humans, one sees in addition, the emergence of symbolic play, discussed earlier, which include verbal and artistic expression, pretence, role-play, language games, play with rules, etc. (Whitebread, 2012, 14) As play often lacks the instrumental nature of work that requires an end product, "individuals can try out new behaviours, exaggerate, modify, abbreviate or change the sequence of behaviours, endlessly repeat slight

variations of behaviours, and so on [...] [which] gives play a vital role in the development of problem-solving skills in primates, and the whole gamut of higher-order cognitive and social-emotional skills developed by humans.” (Whitebread,2012,15).

The significance of each type of play according to Peterson and Flanders is as follows: “rough-and-tumble play, mediating and regulating direct physical contact, allows the child to attune his or her body to the embodied presence of others. More abstract forms of play allow for the attuning of motivational states, emotional reactions, and the contents of consciousness over increasingly large spans of space and time. Role play and fantasy mediate abstract forms of identification and the consequent extension of empathy to those beyond the immediately familiar. Finally, the adoption of a role, part fiction and part genuine being, constitutes the establishment of a functional position within a real-world hierarchy of cooperation and dominance” (Peterson & Flanders, 2005, 138)

To summarize briefly, rough and tumble play, which is the most researched area of physical play, is often considered as a way in which children learn to control aggression and develop strong emotional attachments with his peers, (Mellen,2002) while play with objects is often associated with children’s development of concentration, reasoning and problem-solving skills. (Pellegrini & Gustafson, 2005) The development of socio-dramatic, or pretense play (aside from the benefits discussed previously) has also been seen as a way in which children can learn to cope with emotionally stressing or traumatic events, by acting them out in otherwise inconsequential contexts (Berk, Mann & Igan, 2006), which could be further supported and implemented by in therapeutic situations. (Clark,2006)

1.4 Philosophical Accounts of Play

Ontologies of Play and Childhood

Play has been treated by several philosophers throughout ancient and modern times. However it has rarely been the central point of focus for many philosophers. Oftentimes, their views on play arise from a certain ontology of childhood. An exposition of their views on childhood (for instance as pre-/ non-rational) is critical in understanding how such views are still held today and continue to affect current attitudes towards children’s play and the kinds of play opportunities provided for children.

Accounts of children as ‘evil’

The concept of the ‘evil’ child has its mythological origins in the doctrine of Adamic sin. (Alison et.al, 1998, 9). However the idea finds its philosophical manifestation in Hobbes, who claimed famously that man’s life in the state of nature - without society - is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” (Hobbes,1905,97) Children for Hobbes represent this anarchic tendency in man that must be civilised through the help of his parents or society. This view is also reflected in some literary works. For instance, William Golding’s famous novel, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), depicts the brutal cruelty, violence and selfishness of children, when they are left to their own devices, without parents or society for proper guidance. Charles Dickens’ novel, *Oliver Twist* also shows the symbolic protagonist Oliver, who is good and innocent, face the realities of victorian childhood that is far more cunning, brutal, painful, and selfish. According to this view of children, play also becomes representative of the anarchic tendencies of uncivilised children, that must be curbed. (Alison et.al, 1998, 15)

Children as pre-/non-rational creatures - Importance of Play in Development and Education

The view that children are not yet rational, and thus must be trained to become sufficiently rational is still held in many parents, societies, and cultures. Play in this view is often considered as a way to educate or develop children's ability to reason - in practical and theoretical terms. In urban practice, this attitude often leads to 'top-down' measures, whereby adults decide for children where and how they should play. In terms of urban design, such attitudes often lead to risk-averse, one dimensional play equipment in fenced playgrounds, rather than allowing children to explore, take risks, and create their play environment by themselves.

Plato's views on play are interpreted in contrasting ways. He claims in the *Laws* that, "God alone is worthy of supreme seriousness, but man is made God's plaything, and that is the best part of him. Therefore every man and woman should live life accordingly, and play the noblest games and be of another mind from what they are at present." (Plato, 2000, 161) However, Plato's treatment of play in his great work, *The Republic*, is rather more specific - it is to be used in the education of children, to find out their natural interests and aptitudes, which would prepare and drive them towards adult life. As he writes in *The Republic*, "don't use force in training the children in the subjects, but rather play. In that way, you can better discern what each is naturally directed toward" and, "he who is to be a good builder, should play at building children's houses.." (Plato, 1952, 649) It seems then, that play for Plato was a useful mechanism by which children's aptitudes could be found and practiced, so that they could become productive adults. (Frost, 2010)

It is however Aristotle's conception of childhood that has had greater influence on modern views about childhood and play. Aristotle claimed in *Nicomachean Ethics*, that human beings ought to seek eudaimonia, which is best translated as human flourishing or fulfillment. He believed that this is best achieved (in any organism) by exercising its principal function (ergon); and since the principal function of human beings which separates us from animals is our ability to reason; the good life consisted in exercising our faculties of reason. But in order for the organism to properly fulfil its function, he must be fully developed. In this sense, Aristotle's conception of childhood is one where he is not yet fully developed, and thus he must be guided with the help of adults, to acquire theoretical and practical reason, which would mark his transition into a fully developed adult. This developmental view of the child has been very influential in many disciplines. Stage theory, for instance, which explains how a child develops through age-related stages, cognitively, socially, emotionally, and otherwise; which one identifies in Piaget and Vygotsky's works discussed earlier, as well as in Rousseau's famous work *Emile*, bear evidence to the lasting influence of the Aristotelian conception of childhood. (Matthews & Mullin, 2015)

Children as essentially good

Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) view on childhood represented a shift in the paradigm that had existed up until the 18th century. He put forth the idea, in *Emile* (1762) that children were essentially good, pure, and innocent - and that they became corrupted as it were, as they become assimilated into civilised society and its institutions. Expectedly, his views were in conflict with the traditional views about childhood at the time, that were heavily mediated by religious institutions and puritan ideology, for children had been considered to be essentially sinful, uncivilised and evil. As deMaus puts it, "there were those who like children against those who do not; those who trust nature versus those who feared

god; those who discipline lightly opposed to those who believed that pain is good for the young; the age of Reason confronting the Puritan Ethic” (deMaus,1995,422). Moreover, Rousseau was influential in the development of stage theory (that we see in the psychological works described earlier) as he developed a sequence of five age-related stages through which a person must pass to reach moral maturity. (Matthews & Mullin, 2015). In so far as he believed children were only able to be reasoned with properly, from the age of thirteen, he shared the view with his predecessors, that children are not rational or insufficiently so. (Matthews & Mullin, 2015).

Children as Rational Creatures

John Locke (1632–1704) was another influential figure in children’s education. He claimed that children were like blank slates (tabula rasa) who could be guided in the right direction by adults, to acquire new experiences and knowledge. (Matthews & Mullin, 2015) Unlike the thinkers mentioned above, he did not believe that children were lacking in their capacity to reason. In this sense, his views differed to his contemporary, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who claims in *Emile*, that childhood is ‘reason’s sleep’ (Rousseau, 2001, 24). Locke argued that children “must be treated like rational creatures” but specified that reasoning with children should be conducted in ways that they can grasp and understand. As he says, “when I talk of Reasoning, I do not intend any other, but such as is suited to the Child’s Capacity and Apprehension.” (Locke, 1909,131) Rousseau’s view that children were non-rational or insufficiently rational has had more influence in psychological studies of children in the twentieth century, and still holds influence today. Beginning with Piaget, a lot of psychologists held the view that children were egocentric, irrational, and illogical, that they could not understand causality or conceive of emotions held by others different to themselves, unless they had reached a certain stage of development. This view is being challenged in recent decades, as scholars begin with Locke’s assumption that children are able to be reasoned with if the process is child-friendly. (Bynum, 2015,4) Designing experiments in ways that are relatable and understandable by children, have resulted in results that demonstrate that very young children (as young as 18 months) could differentiate between their desires and others’ desires, to act accordingly, and to understand basic principles of causality. (Gopnik & Repacholi, 1997)

On the other side of the Atlantic, John Dewey not only shared Locke’s view that children were capable of reason, he claimed that in certain moral and intellectual matters children could act as role models for adults (Bynum, 2015, 6). This is because he saw children’s immaturity not merely as a lack, but as a positive sign of their potential to learn and develop - something he believed adults often lacked in their narrow-mindedness. As he claims, “when we say that immaturity means the possibility of growth, we are not referring to absence of powers which may exist at a later time; we express a force positively present -- the ability to develop” and that “for certain moral and intellectual purposes adults must become as little children.” (Dewey, 1997, 42)

Dewey also shared with Locke, the belief that children’s learning must branch outside the classroom and books, to expose them to a diverse range of experiences; and the view that any teacher must be aware of the fact that each child might interpret his/her teachings in their own way. (Gray & MacBlain, 2015) Dewey also emphasized the importance of play in education. He believed that games between children were examples of unforced and willing subjection to common rules, in which which individuals interact, share and cooperate. As Bynum illustrates, for Dewey, structured play in children’s games is “a good example of how social control should operate in a harmonious and democratic society. Far from

being frivolous activity that matters only to children, the playing of games is, for Dewey, a prototype for the best way of living with others in adult society.” (Bynum,2015,8)

1.5 Insights from Phenomenology and Other Literary Works of the 20th Century

Phenomenologists ever since the early 20th century, have disavowed the primacy given to detached scientific reflection over engaged, lived experience. Through notions such as ‘being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger, 1962) and ‘body-subject’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) they have attempted to reveal how human beings are always already immersed and engaged in their surrounding environment prior to any analytical reflection about it; and in the case of Merleau-Ponty, how our bodies are the immersed agents, being at once the ‘source’ and ‘anchor’ for all our perceptions, intuitions and understandings of the world. Distilled in the simplest, this move can be seen as an attempt to reverse the primacy given to objective thought over subjective experience; and as a challenge to the tendency, inherent in positivism, to think about the world in terms of what is scientifically quantifiable and verifiable; rather than in terms of the quality of one’s lived experience or lifeworld (Madsen & Plunz, 2001).

Play as ‘being-in-the-world’ - Immersive Engagement with the Urban Environment

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger challenges the subject-object dualism that has permeated much of western philosophy and science. This dualism, which has also been formulated as the mind-body distinction; or as the separation between consciousness and the world; assumes that there is a subject, who stands over and above the object of study - and that through certain methods such as the use of one’s reason, one can plausibly derive an objective understanding of the truths inherent in the world. This attitude, perhaps best exemplified in the traditional methods of science, is one of detached reflection where the subject is unaffected by his contextual situation, and conceptually distinct from the world in which he finds himself. Contrary to this, Heidegger posits the notion of ‘being-in-the-world’ to describe how human beings are always already engaged and immersed in the world, in various purposive activities, such that the world is disclosed full of meaning - before any detached reflection can take place. Similarly, the features of our urban environment are encountered as being meaningful within the context of our absorbed engagement with the city - before we can abstract from it and begin to analyse, criticise and diagnose it.

The reason for outlining Heidegger’s account of being-in-the-world, is because it is extremely relevant when thinking about playing, and second, it has had a great deal of influence on the later phenomenologists such as Gadamer, who dealt more directly with the issue of play. Playing is perhaps the most intuitive way in which human beings become immersed and absorbed in the world, while constantly making use of various equipments in meaningful ways, prior to abstraction or detached reflection. Moreover, playing constitutes one of the ways in which we (and especially children) experience our urban surroundings, and it is through the play experience that the surrounding urban environment is discovered as meaningful for us. This is revealed in the discussion of the example below:

Experiencing the Urban Environment Through Play



*Boys playing
a ball game
on the top
step of the
stairway
behind the
church of
S. Maria
Maggiore in
Rome (1952)*

This phenomenon (in the image) inspired Steen Eiler Rasmussen to claim that while the boys playing may not have learned more about the architecture of S. Maria Maggiore than the tourists (or the planners and architects), they “quite *unconsciously, experienced* certain basic elements of architecture, the horizontal planes and the vertical walls above the slopes. They learned to *play* on these elements.” (Rasmussen, 1962, 17). [my italics]

(Picture source: Rasmussen, 1962, 16)

Without making the church wall an object of knowledge, an object of scientific research, without trying to analyse or criticize the wall from the point of view of a detached subject; the boys experienced the church wall in their own meaningful way. They were amateurs in a certain sense - non professional lovers of this particular urban environment. For Rasmussen, architecture had to return to the lived experience of the inhabitants. As he says, “the basis of competent professionalism is a sympathetic and knowledgeable group of amateurs, of non-professional art lovers.” (Rasmussen, 1962, 7).

What does it mean to return to lived experience? Well, in this particular example one must consider the lived experience of the boys playing. What constitutes their lifeworld? Here the boys are engaged in a ball-game. They thus experience the church wall as a surface to bounce the ball, and the flat part on top of the stairs as their possible field of movement (their possible positions to strike the ball). Finally the stairs that descend are experienced perhaps as dangerous pitfalls or a journey of punishment for losing the game and thus having to fetch the ball rolling down the stairs. While they are immersed in the game, they certainly do not think of the church wall as ‘the S. Maria church wall that was erected in such and such a year with such and such architecture’; nor do they concern themselves with the properties of the church wall such as its shape or material. Instead, the wall is experienced as simply something ‘to bounce the ball off’ or ‘the target’ just as the ball might be experienced as ‘something that moves away from me that I must chase,’ rather than ‘a spherical ball.’ In other words, the boys find the church wall and its surrounding environment as meaningful in the context of their playing. It is only when their immersion in this play is broken, for instance if the ball falls down the stairs, that they start to look at the ball as an object at all – as a substance that is separate from him, that is round and must be fetched to stop it from rolling away unto the streets. Play is thus not only the way in which we experience our urban environment, but also the way in which our surrounding environment is imbued with meaning.

Playing as practice of everyday life

As mentioned, rather than being detached subjects, looking down at the features of the church, like the *voyeur* with his panoptic vision, reading and gazing over New York from the World Trade Centre in Michel de Certeau's chapter in 'Walking in the City,' the boys are more like the *walkers*. They form one fragment of the text, of the myriad of activities going on 'down there.' As de Certeau claims, "they write without being able to read it"; "the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface". (De Certeau, 1984, 93) For de Certeau, this everyday practice of the walking man, or in this case, the boys playing, "that does not surface" warrants special attention. This is because for de Certeau, such practices make up the multiform and manifold ways in which the city resists its own conceptual, rational and panoptic framing. Unlike Foucault who focuses on the structures of power, de Certeau looks at the myriad forms of individual resistance and reappropriation.

As he says, "I would like to follow out a few of these multiform, resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being out-side the field in which it is exercised, and which should lead us to a theory of everyday practices, of lived space, of the disquieting familiarity of the city" (De Certeau, 1984, 96) Such an enterprise would reveal that 'the city' as a concept can never encapsulate the reality of everyday practices; and that the stance of the *voyeur* is an inadequate mode of understanding, let alone, experiencing the city. Instead, it often functions as a tool of control which the everyday activities such as walking and playing in the example above, try to transgress.

The primacy given to the walker over the *voyeur* in both de Certeau and Rasmussen can be represented as the primacy of bodily perception over the sense of sight. While the planner or the architect focuses on his sight, and thus gives importance to images, proportions and representations; the walker, the boys in the image above experience with their entire bodies. For them, sight is not the most prominent sense, but in fact experienced as one with all the other senses of the body. As Merleau-Ponty claims, the body is my "anchor" in the world and the "source" of all my perceptions. It is only through my body that I am able to perceive anything, and everything that I perceive is always in relation to my lived body. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012,14) Bodily playing then, is one of the key ways in which the boys are able to perceive and experience their urban environment at all. This insight is revealed by both thinkers. Rasmussen for instance explains how a child learns his environment through playing: "Confronted by a wall which is so high that he (the child) cannot reach up to feel the top, he nevertheless obtains an impression of what it is by throwing his ball against it. In this way he discovers that it is entirely different from a tautly stretched piece of canvas or paper. With the help of the ball he receives an impression of the hardness and solidity of the wall." (Rasmussen,1962,15)

"Another kid (aged 7), the one protecting the hut, is firmly stabbing a tree with his wooden sword. I ask him what he is doing. He says it's to see how hard the tree is. After a couple tries, he claims the tree is hard and strong." (Fieldnotes from Sungmisan, 2018)

De Certeau focuses on the act of walking in the city and compares it to the act of speech. He claims that just as speech enunciates and concretizes a set of possibilities within the system of language; walking too enunciates and brings to life a set of possible outcomes in the system of the city - thus giving it life. For him, "walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it "speaks." (De Certeau, 1984, 99). Faced by a wall that blocks his way, the walker can be blocked, he can turn, or go over. By making some set of these possibilities come true, "he makes them exist as well as emerge.

But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, trans-form or abandon spatial elements.” (Ibid, 101)

This analysis can equally be applied to bodily playing. While we play, we affirm our environment by taking it up for active use, such as bouncing the ball against the wall. We also suspect various things, for instance the sloping staircase that might impede free movement during the games. We try out various walls, various curves, various staircases, transgressing as well as respecting the environment which we inhabit. Bodily playing as shown in the image above, is perhaps the clearest example of the everyday life practice that creatively transgresses the voyeur’s objective encapsulation of spaces in the city. Of the multitude of ways in which the church wall can be used, the boys have realized and thus made exist a certain set of possibilities - a certain way of living that environment that often escapes the reader or the voyeur’s eye; but nevertheless is always happening in various ways in the city.

One crucial thing one might point out as the difference between (or indeed as the similarity) walking and playing is that playing is often more seductive, creative, and irrational. Playing not only incorporates and actualises certain possibilities as walking does; but also does them creatively and often irrationally. The boys playing above showcase a clear example. While it is true that the world of play (such as the ballgame) has its own rules and rationality within it, this is outside the ‘normal’ way of behaving in the Church premises. As such, it transgresses and challenges, in a creative way, the rational and conceptual framing of the church premises and the codes of conduct associated with it.

Moreover, and largely for the reason explained above, playing is extremely seductive. It’s challenge to conventional rationality and strict codes of behaviour is often what entices us to play in the first place. A game, a play is for fun - principally. It is not rational to play there as the boys did. Neither is it useful to play there, to gain something out of the experience. There is no ulterior motive in play besides the act of playing itself, which is a joyful, fun and exciting experience. This lack of ulterior motive, which often translates to irrationality in modern society (since it aims to attribute purpose or exchange value one everything); is what makes playing so seductive to us.

“A girl and a boy are collecting acorns and tiny pebbles onto a log. I ask them what it is (what it symbolizes). They reply it’s acorn and pebbles. I ask them why they are collecting them and who it is for. The girl looks back puzzled. She responds: “nothing we’re just playing. It’s only a game”. (Fieldnotes from, Sungmisan, 2018)

The seductive and transgressive nature of play is captured in abundance in Sophie Calle’s *Suite Venetienne* (1988) and the following essay by Baudrillard. As Baudrillard says about Sophie’s game of shadows secretly following a man around the streets of Venice: “It is this effect of doubling that makes the object surreal in its banality and weaves around it the strange web of seduction [...] Indeed they want to be seduced, that is to say not solicited within their *raison d’etre*, but *drawn outside of their raison d’etre*, [...] We are, in the end, secretly flattered that something is asked or even demanded of us for no reason, or contrary to reason...There are few people in whom this basic reflex, this spontaneous response to the challenge of irrationality, has been destroyed by the habits of reason.” (Baudrillard in Calle, 1988, 85) The game of shadows has its rules. But it is also against the rules. It is irrational. It is bodies following bodies. It is everyday walking and play at the same time. What is certain is that Sophie’s experience of the streets of Venice as well as the boys experience of the church wall is engaged, exciting

and seductive. In this sense, they are forming the verses that the voyeur on the top of the Eiffel Tower constantly overlooks.

Play as participation, critique, and subversion

Children do not play in a vacuum. They are always already embedded in the physical, social, and cultural context of their surrounding environment. Lefebvre's (1991) notion of the social production of space was highly influential in demonstrating that space is always already invested with various socio-economic values, political aspirations, as well as 'common sense' which denotes the 'normal' kinds of behaviours that are expected and thus reproduced in a given space. As Russell puts it, "'commonsense' is a reflection of the dominant order of any society and represents a 'plane of organisation' that seeks to situate children in certain ways, providing structure and control to fix children into normal patterns of being and becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1988)" (Russell & Lester, 2010) Kytta (2004) elaborates this in terms of 'fields of promoted action' which encourage socially approved and expected actions in a given space, and 'fields of constrained action' which serves to constrain certain types of behaviours through design, outright restrictions, or a pervading sense that children are not welcome. (Russell et al, 2010)

This socio-spatial demarcation of places for children (Rasmussen, 2004) forms the background upon which children participate in the daily lives of their family, community, and society at large. Crucially, their mode of engaging with these spaces (and other liminal, in-between spaces) is through playing. They participate on the one hand by reproducing expected behaviours in designated places for children - such as schools, playgrounds and homes. On the other hand, they participate through challenging expected behaviours, by playing in liminal, in-between spaces, critiquing expected play patterns, and producing different movements. Such challenges to the existing spatial configurations and expectations associated with them, represent on the one hand children's ability to (re-)imagine/ (re-)interpret certain spaces as important places of meaning; while on the other hand opening up cracks in the dominant order of a given space.



(Children playing in an indoor market, Madrid, 2018)



(Children playing in a street yard, Palermo, 2018)

This kind of appropriation of space in ways that are unexpected or unintended is inherently subversive and critical. Even the mere sight of the kids playing in these spaces creates a moment of reflection for adults. Thoughts such as “should they be allowed to play here?” “Why don’t they go to a playground?” might arise. One might also be inclined to say “oh look how much fun they are having”, or even, “I didn’t know you could use this space like that.”

Already the simple act of children reappropriating and reinterpreting the indoor market or the street yard in Palermo, reveals the kinds of rules, expectations, ‘common sense’, and prejudices that adults might harbour. The sight of the kids playing brings to the foreground our implicit prejudices and at the same time offers us the possibility to think about new ways of appropriating such spaces. Thus, their play in such liminal or unexpected places, critiques dominant socio spatial paradigms, while at the same time, actively subverting them via the actualization of an alternate reality. This alternate reality also allows children to experiment with new roles and identities, form new bonds with peers, and have fun subverting the adult gaze. In so doing, they often transform the most mundane and ordinary spaces into places of meaning, places of fun, encounter, and belonging.¹

As Kim Rasmussen (2004) claims, these kinds of places that escape the adult gaze or even subvert the dominant spatial paradigm often make up ‘children’s places’ - places that are deeply meaningful for children and created by them; as opposed to the institutionalised places of childhood which he labels ‘places for children’. Nieuwenhuys’ (2003) confirms in his study of children’s in a South Indian village that children’s places for play were “interspersed through the very fabric of community space and practices, in unremarkable, liminal places such as paths, fallow lands, the beach, the river bank, the wells and the public taps.” (Nieuwenhuys, 2003, 105 in Russell et al, 2010, 29) While children’s places are sometimes located within places for children, they often are not, and can be found in the most mundane and ordinary environments, in their practice of everyday life. (Rasmussen, 2004)

Play as Understanding, Interpretation and Dialogue

“All playing is a being-played... the game masters the players” (Gadamer, 2000, 104)

The concept of play plays a key role in the philosophy of Hans Georg Gadamer. As Monica Vilhauer explains, for Gadamer play is not a “subjective act or attitude - not something that happens in the mind, impulses, or conduct of the subject - but rather, it is an activity that goes on between the players, reaches beyond the behaviour or consciousness of any individual player, and has a life, meaning, essence, and spirit of its own, that emerges from the players’ back and forth movement (Gadamer, 2000, 101-110)” (Vilhauer, 2010, 76) Thus it is less the case of the subject adopting a playful attitude, but more the event of play that draws individuals into its spell. This however does not mean that players are passive bystanders in play. In order for the play to proceed as play, each player must *participate* fully, with the utmost seriousness, lest he become a spoiled sport. (Gadamer, 2000, 102 in Vilhauer, 2010, 77)

¹The ability to transform mundane and ordinary spaces to places of meaning through play is not only applicable to children. Further research could be carried out with regards to the ways in which adults could ‘learn from children’ and thus reinterpret their urban surroundings through play. On this topic, I carried out a case study with three other colleagues, on actively (and arbitrarily) injecting play into the mundane and unused spaces of Donau City, Vienna (2018). The contents of this case study can be found in the Appendix.

Vilhauer explains how this concept of play as the ‘to and fro’ or ‘back and forth’ movement between the players underlies Gadamer’s philosophy of hermeneutics. In his seminal work, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer grapples with the process of understanding and what makes understanding possible. Following on from phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Gadamer claimed that understanding, whether it concerns artworks, other human beings, or political issues, ought not to be conceived as the pursuit of a detached subject who is unencumbered by prejudice. The Enlightenment ideals towards reason and objective truth has led to what Gadamer calls “prejudice against prejudice.” (Gadamer, 2000, 156) One of the key aims in his book is to reveal how certain prejudices are in fact well founded and helpful. Some traditions for instance reflect valuable prejudgments by others that have existed before oneself. But more importantly, there is no human being that is totally free from prejudice. One’s contextual situation, whether it is the historical period to which one belongs, the traditions of which one is part, or one’s upbringing, always already forms the background from which further understanding can take place. In other words, prejudice, or prejudgment, is a condition that makes understanding possible at all. This means that all understanding is essentially interpretation. It consists in the *back and forth movement* between the spectator (with all his prejudices and his particular situation) and the artwork (with its own temporality and its claim to truth), or between the reader and the text, or between two persons. This ‘back and forth’ or ‘to and fro’ movement of presenting and recognizing meaning, the movement of play, is what constitutes understanding for Gadamer. (Vilhauer, 2010,77)

As Vilhauer puts it, “in the encounter with a work of art [or text or living persons] Gadamer finds work and spectator to be players and participants in a continuous to-and-fro dance of presentation and recognition, out of which the meaning of the work of art emerges and is understood [...] To begin with, the text addresses us (the readers) with its message, its claim to truth. We come to the text with our own set of assumptions which make up a kind of background understanding in which we integrate new experiences. We take a stab at interpretation based on what we already know, and the text replies, (‘that’s not yet what I mean’). Our present understanding now enters into play. Through our experience of the other meaning the text offers, which resists our projected presuppositions, our presuppositions become foregrounded, provoked, or called into question, in a way that makes us aware of them, able to examine them and transform them so that we may improve our understanding.” (Vilhauer,2010,78)

This back and forth movement of play that is inherent in our process of understanding and interpretation, can equally be applied to our interaction with urban spaces. To refer back to the description above, several scholars have used the metaphor of ‘text’ to refer to our urban environment. De Certeau for instance, describes how the walkers in the city and their bodies “follow the thicks and thins of the urban text” (De Certeau,1984,93) The urban, like the text or the artwork, presents itself with its own traditions, history, and prejudices. The walker, with his own set of assumptions, understands the urban, by walking - that is, by concretizing a certain set of possibilities, through the back and forth movement between his own situation, or horizon, and that which is presented before him as the urban. As Barthes claims, “the city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, wondering through it, and looking at it. (Barthes,1967,168) Crucially for both Barthes and De Certeau, the city is understood not through an objective and detached study, but through the very act of interpreting it by living in it - which entails at its basis, the back and forth movement of play between the city and its inhabitants. The inhabitants participate by interacting with the city, and through this participatory process, meaning emerges. In this

way, to refer to the lexicon of phenomenological geographers, space is transformed into meaningful places².

Gadamer's account of play certainly has many similarities to the one espoused by Huizinga. Rather than play being a specific activity or attitude that is used to (re-)interpret certain spaces, play is seen as inherent in the very process of interpretation and understanding. In so far as we are living, walking, or playing in the city, we are at the same time interpreting and understanding it, which in turn means that play is already at play. Much like Huizinga's account which treats play in terms of the ludic elements that are inherent in culture and thus reaches beyond the consciousness of the individual, Gadamer too describes play as a kind of 'invisible' phenomenon that is always already at play, when we interpret or understand someone, a text, an artwork, or a city.

² Space denotes a kind of abstract void, that can be measured in terms of length, width and height; and that things can be put inside this container-like space. Place is the immediate surrounding of one's lived experience - which means that places are full of meaning and significance for those that dwell in it. (Relph, 1970; Buttimer, 1980)

Chapter 2: Social and Environmental Factors Discouraging Play in Cities

“It is estimated that more than half the world’s children will soon live in cities” (Lester & Russell, 2010,43)

Lester and Russell (2010) emphasize in their report how children living in cities face multiple ‘stressors’ that make it difficult for them to play. While some of these factors are not exclusive to cities, most of them are exacerbated in urban environments. It is important to note, children’s experience of urban living is far from homogeneous meaning their opportunities for play or lack thereof, often vary across other variables such as their socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, disability, among others. (Lester & Russell, 2010,44) In addition, the complexities regarding the influences exerted upon each child by his particular family, the institutions of which he is part, as well as his surrounding cultural and physical environment, make it even more difficult to reveal the extent to which each factor might be responsible for discouraging a child or children from playing. Nevertheless, these influences often work together rather than separately (Hubbs-Tait et al, 2006) and while each child might be affected differently depending on his circumstance, these ‘stressors’ are significant enough as a general urban trend to be applicable to the majority of children living in rapidly urbanizing, or heavily urbanized cities today.

2.1 Environmental Factors

Traffic

Multiple scholars in the field of urban studies have described how cities spaces are being designed in the interests of automobiles rather than pedestrians. Jan Gehl for instance, in his book, *Life Between Buildings* (1971), famously criticised the fast pace life in cities that cater for automobiles and proposed instead urban architecture that could promote vibrant pedestrian life. He reveals how life between buildings can be fostered by well designed public spaces that encourage pedestrians to walk, cycle, and remain in them. Not only are children one of the main facilitators of such life between buildings, their presence and play in the streets are strong signifiers that a city is catering for its pedestrians (Hillman, 2006) since children are unable to drive and often play in streets that are safe and not overwhelmed by traffic. However the reality is that the major cause of children’s accidents today are related to traffic (Peden et al, 2008), and in the fast developing cities, traffic has increased also on poorly maintained roads where children play. (Lester & Russell, 2010) While accidents related to traffic are more common in poorer children and boys (Bartlett, 2002), there is no doubt that the increase in traffic in the city negatively affects children’s play areas and opportunities in general. Finally, this fact also contributes to the social stigma among parents who are wary of allowing their children to play in streets they perceive as dangerous. (Graying et al, 2002)

Loss of Natural / Green Spaces

Much like streets, natural or green spaces are one of the main attractions for children’s play. As mentioned, oftentimes this is the result of parents who seek out safe play spaces for their children such as parks. But generally speaking, parks or other natural spaces such as neighbourhood hillsides or small mountains in the city, provide a wealth of possibilities for children’s play that inner city playgrounds do not. (Whitebread, 2012) This is due to the fact that playgrounds in the city are often carefully designed

to ensure children's safety, and feature equipment that codify their play behaviour, rather than allowing for, or encouraging their playful appropriation and reinterpretation. (Bartlett,2002) Much like the expansion of traffic, it is widely recognised that the expansion of offices, apartments, and other consumption-oriented spaces have drastically reduced the amount of nature and green spaces in the city. This phenomenon, combined with parents' lack of willingness to send their kids outside to play for various reasons discussed below, has resulted in what Louv calls, the 'natural deficit disorder' that arises from children who have very limited opportunities to play outdoors or in natural environments. (Louv,2005)

Environmental Dangers

Environmental dangers that inhibit or discourage children from playing outdoors can be divided into i) actual dangers and ii) perceived dangers. Lester and Russell outline how in many poorer urban neighbourhoods, "inadequate sanitation and waste disposal leads to a high level of biological pathogens in the water where children play" which could lead to fatal diseases. (Lester & Russell, 2010,44) Moreover, toxic emissions from the traffic, agriculture and industry all pose real concerns for parents who want to protect their children from such environmental hazards. As discussed in the next part, while such risks do exist, oftentimes the perceived dangers outweigh any real risk that might exist.

2.2 Social Factors

Overprotection, and Risk Aversion

One of the major sociocultural factors that negatively affect children's play opportunities is the increasing trend amongst parents to be overly protective of their children. As they perceive the outside environment as dangerous or harmful for various reasons, they adopt a risk averse attitude by keeping children indoors or allowing them to play in predesignated places that are known to be safe – such as the school yard or certain playgrounds (Veitch et al, 2006). Shier (2008) carried out a comparative study of play opportunities and attitudes toward safety while playing outdoors in Nicaragua and the UK. The study revealed that Nicaraguan children have a high level of independent mobility and develop a strong sense of self-reliance regarding safety issues, for instance when they swim in lakes or climb trees. This was not the case with children in the UK who, due to the overly protective and risk-averse nature of their parents, carers, or teachers, rarely have the chance to undertake such activities; and become relatively less self-reliant in issues of safety as well as independent mobility. The reasons for such overprotectiveness can vary in degree from place to place and from parent to parent. However Singer et al. (2009) revealed through their survey of mothers across sixteen countries in Asia, Europe, Africa, South, and North America, that fear of traffic accidents, germs, violence, gangs and possible abduction were commonplace among mothers' globally – which they cite as a possible cause for the reduction in children's spontaneous play over the last two decades in the studied countries.

Institutionalisation and Over-scheduling

Overprotection and risk-averse parenting are complemented by increasing institutionalisation of children's daily lives and intensive scheduling. Kim Rasmussen's (2004) study of Danish children's daily lives shows that they spend their day largely within three institutionalized locations – their homes, schools and recreational institutions. His description of their daily routine in and between the three

corners of this ‘institutionalized triangle,’ (Rasmussen,2004,157) reveals great similarities with patterns that have emerged in many other cities in developed countries:

“Children wake up at home between 6.30 and 7.30 in the morning. They wash, brush their teeth and dress, eat breakfast, and watch a little morning television. At about 8.00, children walk or cycle to school or are accompanied or driven there by parents. At school, they are subject to the school’s general organization of time and place until about 1 or 2 p.m., when they go to youth recreation centres or clubs or to after-school programmes. These places have ‘services’ for children and direct where and how they may spend their time. Between about 3 and 5 o’clock, children are taken home by their parents or they walk or cycle home on their own. Children stay inside or play outside until dinnertime. Then there are also those children who go to various leisure-time activities at certain places at certain times on certain days [...] Before children go to bed between 8 and 9 o’clock, as a rule they have also managed to watch television, listen to music on their own equipment, amuse themselves on a playstation or at a computer, perhaps do some homework, play with brothers, sisters, friends, or pet animals, and talk a little with their parents” (Rasmussen,2004,157).

While the specific routines may vary, this general trend of moving between ‘urban islands’ (Zeiger,2003) in a regimented and scheduled way, is characteristic of many children’s lives in the city. As Rasmussen claims, these institutions are primarily ‘places for children’ in that they are designed by adults for children. He contrasts this with ‘children’s places’ which denote places that are made by children themselves and thus have special meaning for them outside of adult supervision or knowledge. Institutionalised places for children come with their own codified behaviours and rules that may direct or restrict children’s free play (Rasmussen, 2004,167).

Earlier the Better

One of the many possible explanations for this trend of institutionalisation and over-scheduling of children’s lives is a changing attitudes towards education. As Whitebread (2012) claims, “increasingly in many countries within Europe and across the world, an ‘earlier is better’ approach has been adopted, with an emphasis upon introducing young children at the earliest possible stage to the formal skills of literacy and numeracy [which] is inimical to the provision and support for rich play opportunities (Whitebread, 2012, 3).

Rise of Virtual Media

Finally, the increasing use of virtual media in the form of mobile phones, television and computer games have further restricted the amount of time children could play outside or with friends. Fjørtoft (2001) remarks in his study of the impacts of outdoor play on pre-primary school children, that over the last ten to twenty years, children have become more sedentary as traditional games that require lots of movement are now changing into sitting in front of one’s phone or computer. Notwithstanding the physical benefits of playing outside and the social and emotional, attachments, acquity, and intelligence that could be developed by playing with other children; such a pattern has led to issues such as increasing obesity in childhood, (Anderson et al., 1998) and motor problems in several Scandinavian studies (Due et al, 1991; Fjørtoft, 2001). These concerns have led to the resurgence of interest and provision for outdoor play in kindergartens, forest schools and outdoor schools in some parts of Scandinavia (Fjørtoft, 2001;Tovey, 2007; Frost, 2010).

Chapter 3: Playgrounds

“The history of the playground is marked by an irresolvable contradiction: on the one hand, modernity has conceptualized play as a biologically inherited drive that is spontaneous, pleasurable, and free. It valorized the subjective experience of play as an attribute of the autonomous, individual self. On the other hand, modern societies began to rationalize and shape children's play from the outside to advance social, educational, and political goals. Thus playgrounds are very much about censoring and restricting types of play deemed undesirable and displacing them from places deemed dangerous or corrupting, such as the street” (Kozlovsky,2007,1)

Froebel and the emergence of the first kindergarten

Historically, children played in the streets, alleys or vacant lots near their homes. The concept of a playground, as a specific place for children's play, came about in the 19th century through the developmental psychologist Friedrich Froebel, who was a student of the Swiss pedagogue Pestalozzi. Froebel saw children as being essentially creative, and believed passionately that play was central to their holistic (rather than merely for social or physical) development (Frost, 2012). In 1837, he opened a school for young children and subsequently renamed it 'kindergarten' (essentially a play garden) while also providing them with 'gifts' that would stimulate their learning and thinking abilities - such as spherical shapes or blocks (Gray & MacBlain, 2015). These 'gifts' were deliberately abstract in form so as to allow children's creative appropriation without explicit direction and guidance. In this sense, Froebel was a proponent of allowing children to play freely as he saw the playground as a natural extension of the early daring adventures of childhood, such as venturing into caves and streams, and climbing trees and mountains. As Frost remarks, “Froebel's emphasis on many unstructured play materials, influenced emphasis on natural creative materials or “loose parts” by theorists and playground designers to the present time.” (Frost, 2012, 2). This can be seen for instance, in the playgrounds designed by Aldo Van Eyck as well as adventure playgrounds discussed later.

Despite Froebel's romantic aspirations, the early development of playgrounds in Germany, the UK and the USA took a rather different route in terms of its design and function. In the mid 19th century in Germany, playgrounds emerged in concordance with outdoor gymnasiums that focused on developing physical excellence, health, and nationalistic values. Gymnastics equipment such as parallel bars, horizontal chin-up bars, and vaulting horse, were introduced into such playgrounds. In the UK and the USA, playgrounds were increasingly implemented during the period of industrialisation, so that children could play away from the temptations and dangers of “mean” streets. (Curtis, 1917).

Industrialisation and the emergence of sand gardens

The effects of industrialisation in the mid to late 19th century and early 20th century played a big role in driving children away from their usual play locations like streets and alleys. On the one hand, there was great pressure from increasing immigration that led to “massive pockets of poverty in America's largest cities” with thousands of homeless children living in the streets in deplorable conditions. (Frost, 2012,3) Legislative measures were taken, in New York, forbidding children from playing in the streets. The situation in the UK and in many other industrializing cities of Europe was similar. Friedrich Engels'

description of the *Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1845) bears witness to the conditions in which children were living during the period of industrialisation in London:

“A horde of ragged women and children swarm about here, as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles. In short, the whole rookery furnishes such a hateful and repulsive spectacle as can hardly be equalled in the worst court on the Irk. The race that lives in these ruinous cottages, behind broken windows, mended with oilskin, sprung doors, and rotten doorposts, or in dark, wet cellars, in measureless filth and stench, in this atmosphere penned in as if with a purpose, this race must really have reached the lowest stage of humanity” (Engels, 1891,64)

As Frost explains, “the plight of these children eventually became so destructive that social reformers, charitable groups and other organizations formed a movement for play and playgrounds,” as part of a wider movement known as the child saving movement. (Frost, 2012, 4) One major result of this movement was the emergence of sand gardens - piles of sand gathered in public parks to mitigate the dangers of the deplorable sanitary conditions such as the spreading of diseases among children. Frost, remarks that “hills, roads, ponds, bays, bridges, wells, tunnels, and islands emerged through an abundance of representational play [...] and boys up until about the age of 15 accomplished valuable training in industrial and mercantile pursuits, law environment, topological imagination, and civic training through sand play” (Ibid, 5)



(Sand garden. Source: Picture Perfect Playgrounds, Inc. 2018)

Equipment Manufacturers and Traditional Playgrounds

As equipment manufacturers entered the scene, around the end of the 19th century and the beginning the of the 20th century, the creation and dispersal of playgrounds increased rapidly. Sand gardens and exercise equipment were complemented by new play equipments such as swings, slides, seesaws, and climbing walls, while new spaces were created for organized games such as football and basketball. Public playgrounds and school yards began to adopt these equipments funded by both private and public sources, while galvanized steel, wood, and plastic equipments were developed in response to safety concerns emerging at the time (Frost, 2012, 5)



(Children playing on metal swings circa 1905. Source: Karen Madorin, HPPR, 2016)



(Wood and sand equipment for safety concerns, East Greenlake, 1969. Source: Seattle Municipal Archives)



(Traditional Playground Equipment in Kinnear Park, 1913. Source: Seattle Municipal Archives, "Seattle at Play")

These traditional playgrounds reflected in large part the early psychological theories about childhood play discussed in chapter one. As these theories sought to explain play through its function, such as the release of surplus energy, or recreation; the design and manufacturing of play equipment followed suit, focusing on allowing children to release excess energy through exercise equipment or to relax through swings, seesaws and the like. Consequently the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits to be gained from playing and the features of a playground that might incite such benefits, for instance, those that encourage symbolic or pretend play, were largely absent. These features (e.g loose parts) are revealed in the discussion of later forms of playgrounds below. One obvious explanation for this absence is that such theories in psychology and education were only beginning to emerge at the time, and thus required more time to be accepted and implemented into practice.

Problems with Traditional Playgrounds

As new theories and studies emerged outlining the benefits of play for children's development, traditional playgrounds came under scrutiny and criticism. One of the strongest criticisms alluded to above is that the equipments that were being installed usually led to one-dimensional play - and thus were inadequate for the holistic developmental needs of children. (Fjeldsted, 1980) Slides, swings, and seesaws that are even today ubiquitous in elementary school playgrounds and public parks, allow for one type of activity, mainly physical, namely sliding, swinging and seeseawing. They are rarely used in different ways that require a child's physical and mental flexibility, creativity and challenge (Aaron & Winawer 1965). Moreover, traditional equipments rarely became sites of symbolic play or pretend play that is considered crucial in later psychological theories for the child's cognitive, emotional and social development. Strickland (1979) for example, found that children in traditional playgrounds merely talked about their roles whereas children in creative playgrounds (playgrounds that were designed specifically to encourage children's creativity) took on genuine roles in a dramatic play. (Strickland, 1979) Campbell and Frost (1985) found that traditional playgrounds predominately hosted physical and organized play, while creative playgrounds showed significantly higher occurrences of symbolic and construction play.

Another problem was that traditional playgrounds often featured heavy steel equipment that were fixed and unmovable. Not only was this considered as hazardous for children who might run into, or fall from

these equipments; children preferred action-oriented equipment over fixed ones. (Frost & Campbell, 1985) While the issue of safety has gradually improved through the introduction of various new materials like plastic, and sand underneath the ground; static equipment and the lack of ‘loose parts’ that allow children to move, build, and create new structures, is a problem that continues to persist in many traditional playgrounds today.

Finally more recent scholars have criticised the fenced, and segregated nature of urban playgrounds. (Karsten, 2005). Lines and boundaries are drawn to define playing rules, patterns, and areas for children away from the urban streets and other activities such as walking, cycling, and driving (Ingold, 2007). This development has coincided with the characterization of children as ‘vulnerable’ rather than ‘resilient’ (Kozlovsky 2008) leading to safety conscious designs around and within the playgrounds themselves (Verstrate and Karsten 2011). The focus on safety leads to risk averse equipment and play patterns which has been criticised on the grounds that a degree of risk is beneficial to children’s development (Sandseter, 2009).

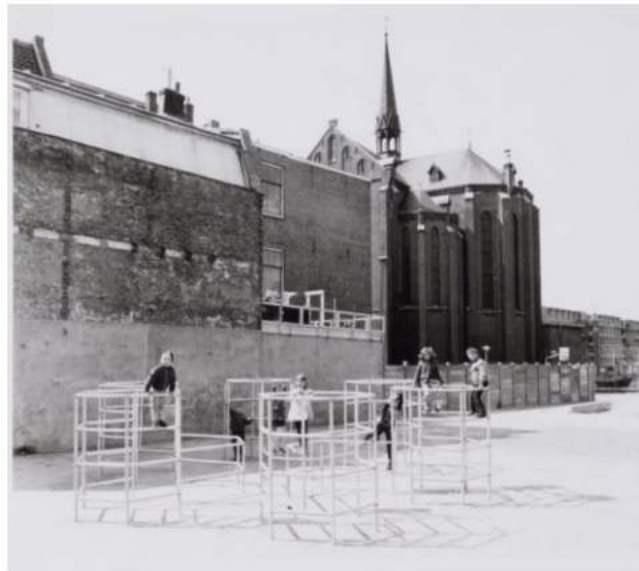


(Generic Playground Equipment and Safety Conscious Design. Source: The Big Building, 2017)

While the proliferation of traditional playgrounds and its equipments slowed down during the Great Depression and the Second World War due to raw materials being used primarily for the war effort, several initiative emerged near the end of the war and after, that embraced new views on children’s development through play. Two of the prominent architects responsible for this movement - Aldo Van Eyck in the Netherlands and Carl Theodor Sørensen, the danish architect and creator of the first junk playground - are discussed below.

Aldo Van Eyck’s playgrounds : Affordance over Function

Aldo Van Eyck designed over seven hundred playgrounds in and around Amsterdam after the Second World War. Influenced by Froebel’s idealism and the modernist inclination in design and architecture towards the aesthetics of abstraction, Van Eyck’s playgrounds were marked by abstract shapes and forms as play equipment - challenging the functionalism that had prevailed, and continues to prevail in many traditional playgrounds today. Instead of designing play equipment that directed children’s play activities via a certain function of the equipment - such as swinging, sliding, or seesawing - he focused on affordances (Gibson, 1979), designing features that afforded many different interpretations and creative appropriations.



(Aldo Van Eyck's Playgrounds, 1947 onwards) (Source: Archive of MO Merjin Oudenampsen, Demerjin, 2013, 4)

As Withagen and Caljouw (2017) explain, “the playgrounds were fantastic because the objects were simple: rectangular and round frames for climbing (the ladder like an igloo), a sandpit, a group of circular concrete blocks for jumping from one to the other – objects that are not anything in themselves, but which have an open function and therefore stimulate a child’s imagination. A child sits still on a slide or a swing: it is the object that produces the movement. Van Eyck’s objects do not move, but they allow a child to move with all the acrobaticism and suppleness he can muster. That was the genius of their simplicity” (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017, 7).

While Aldo Van Eyck’s focus on providing a variety of affordances to allow room for children’s creativity and differing interpretations was a development from the inflexible nature of traditional playgrounds, it could be argued that his designs are still made by an adult (himself) for children, much like Froebel’s abstract gifts. In this sense, they still lack the radically participatory aspect wherein children are able to design, affect, and change their own play environment according to their desires and needs. This is also shown in the fact that Van Eyck’s equipments are fixed and contain no moveable ‘loose parts’ that children could rearrange, or combine with surrounding materials to build and create new symbolic features. One might say then, that while Aldo Van Eyck’s playgrounds are certainly more participatory than traditional playgrounds in that children are encouraged to apply their own creativity

and interpret the abstract forms in ways that invest it with meaning; they are not participatory enough in so far as they do not allow children to change or create the play environment themselves. As Kozlovsky remarks, “if the modernist imperative was to make play environments ”imaginative,” it followed that the ”imagination” at play should be that of the child, not that of the architect.” (Kozlovsky,2007,6) The junk/adventure playground discussed in the next part goes further than Aldo Van Eyck’s playgrounds with regards to children’s participation, as children are encouraged to build and create their own play structures.

Before turning to adventure playgrounds, it is worth noting that Aldo Van Eyck’s playgrounds, as shown in the pictures, were seamlessly integrated into the surrounding urban architecture, rather than fenced or segregated in certain designated neighbourhoods. This reflects on the one hand, Van Eyck’s interpretation of playgrounds as landscapes themselves, and the desire to make art a part of everyday life. (Kozlovsky,2007,6) But more importantly, the lack of a physical fence, lines, or barriers bare evidence to his view that children’s play can, and should be, integrated into the everyday life of the city - as the lack of a physical and mental demarcation of a separate place for play encourages fluid transition between play and non-play. In this sense, Van Eyck’s playgrounds preempt contemporary playgrounds that i) focus on integrating play with nature and the surrounding environment; and ii) embody complex equipment that allow for multiple affordances.

Junk / Adventure Playground

Junk playgrounds were first designed by the Danish landscape architect, Carl Theodor Sørensen in Emdrup near Copenhagen in 1943. Their emergence near the end of the Second World War marked on the one hand, a desire to reinvigorate the urban child’s landscape after the atrocities of the war, and on the other, a challenge to the didactic and limited nature of traditional playgrounds and its four S’s : slide, swing, seesaw, and sandbox. Sørensen observed that children enjoyed playing in construction sites and junkyards more than traditional playgrounds. Thus he envisaged the idea of enclosing a space wherein children could play in ways and with materials that would otherwise be prohibited. As he claimed, “perhaps we should try to set up waste material playgrounds in suitable large areas where children would be able to play with old cars, boxes, and timber.” (Sørensen in Kozlovsky,2007,5) Sørensen believed that children’s inborn creativity led to an infinite variety of play activities and thus they should be provided with materials that allow for opportunities to realize them.



(Emdrup Junk Playground, 1943. Source: Fireflies Play Environments, Inc.)

The junk playground contains scrap materials and loose parts that can be shaped and molded by children to create various play structures - such as forts, huts, bridges, houses, furniture, and tools. The moveable parts encourage children to be creative, flexible, and industrious, challenging them to constantly create new playworlds themselves. (Noren-Bjorn, 1982). Kozlovsky describes the difference between traditional playgrounds and adventure playgrounds in the following way: “an adventure playground has no readymade play equipment and no predetermined agenda for what should take place in it. Children introduce content and meaning to the playground through their own action. Whereas the conventional playground operates by inciting kinetic modes of pleasure, the adventure playground engages the child through a qualitatively different kind of gratification. It induces the pleasure of experimenting, making, and destroying” (Kozlovsky, 2007,2) One specific characteristic of adventure playgrounds is that a supervisor overlooks children’s play activity, primarily for issues regarding safety, and secondly to guide or teach certain skills that children might need in using certain tools - e.g hammers and nails. (Vance, 1982) As Bertelesen, Emdrup’s first play leader claimed, the purpose of the leader was neither to govern children’s play from the outside, nor to guide their activities towards a useful goal, but rather to act from within, allowing them to pursue their own goals. (Bertelesen in Kozlovsky, 2007, 8)

Sørensen’s junk playground was imported to the UK by the english landscape architect, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, who was impressed by what she saw in Emdrup - and saw within it i) a possible solution to the problem of boring and sterile playgrounds that were spread throughout the UK; ii) a place that could instill democratic values in children through peaceful negotiation and resolution of conflicts; and iii) a place where children could stay away from delinquency. (Kozlovsky,2007,13) Her concern for children during the war led her to build a junk playground, which she renamed, ‘adventure playground’ to dissociate the negative connotations that ‘junk’ had with hazards and uncleanness. (Ethier,1999,11) The difference of Lady Allen of Hurtwood to her scandinavian counterpart was that she proposed building these playgrounds on bombed sites, which she put forth in her article, ‘Why Not Use Our Bombed Sites Like This?’ The first adventure playground was subsequently built, on a bombed church premises in Camberwell (1948) and later in Clydesdale (1952).



Notting Hill Adventure Playground, c.1960 (c) Donne Buck/V&A Museum, London

(Source: inside picture)

Lady Allen of Hurtwood believed that the construction and reconstruction of adventure playgrounds should be undertaken by the local population such as parents and children, with the help of volunteer organizations and local councils. As such many of the adventure playgrounds in England were initiated and run by the local population. According to London Play (website) there are around 80 adventure playgrounds currently in the UK (2018), of which around half are run by local councils and the other half by voluntary sector groups. The Adventure Playground Association (2006) claim that adventure playgrounds have gained popularity in the local and community scale as well as the national and european scales (Chilton, 2003) as current estimates suggest approximately 1000 adventure playgrounds exist within Europe alone.



(Wooden Structure / Rope Bridge/ Swing at Castle Hill Adventure Playground, London)

The superiority of adventure playgrounds in comparison to traditional and contemporary playgrounds with mixed use equipment have been documented by many writers. (Matthews, 1985; Frost 1988; Woodley 2008; Moore 1989; Hayward et al, 1974) Hayward, Rothenberg, and Beasley found in their comparative study of traditional, contemporary, and adventure playgrounds, that: while children in the first two categories were concerned primarily with the use of equipment and their play activities, children in adventure playgrounds ventured further than the mere concern for their immediate surroundings. Their conversations branched into areas such as building materials, marriage, dreams, seasons, fighting, clothing, cleaning, raising fruits and vegetables, raising animals, caring for the sick and elderly, and many more (Hayward et al, 1974); not to mention the time they spent designing and creating complex play equipment such as tire swings and rope climbers. (Frost & Klein, 1979) This is also reflected in the length of time devoted to certain play activities in these playgrounds. Hayward et al, found that the most popular activity on the traditional playground is swinging (8 minutes), while in the contemporary playground it was to play with multiple-function equipments (11 minutes) and finally in the adventure playground children spent the most time playing in the clubhouse and fixing up things (31 minutes). Moore (1977) traced the movements of 8 year old kids in the same playground while they a) used traditional equipments, b) wandered and explored natural areas, and c) played games such as hide and seek or chase. As shown below, the children's movement patterns are predictable and limited when using traditional equipments:

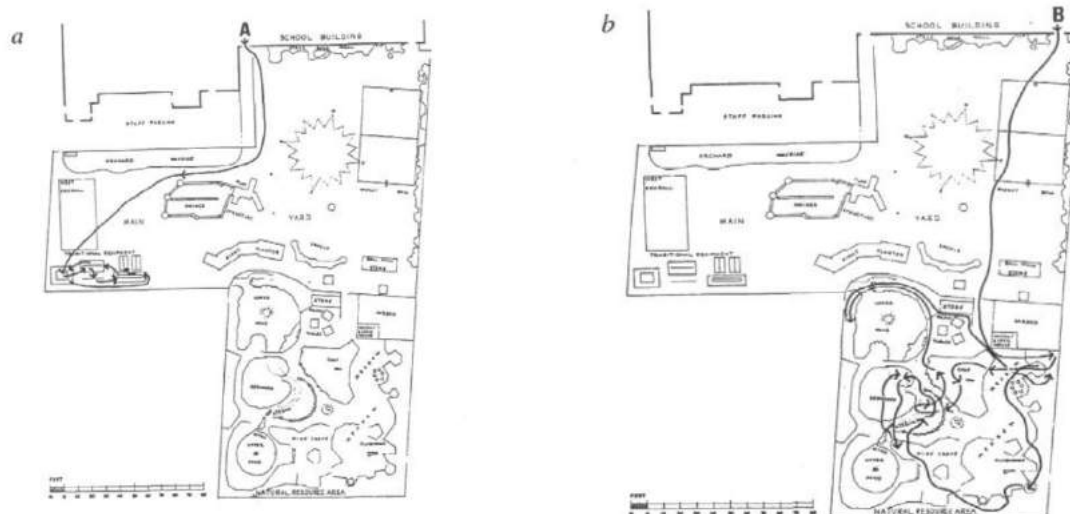


Figure 4 (continued)

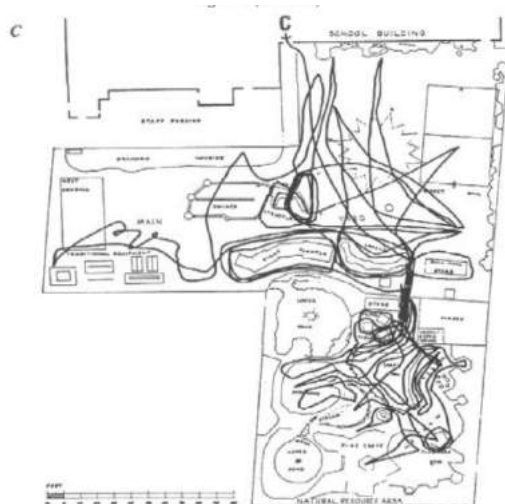


Figure 4 (continued)

(Source: Moore, 1989 in Freutel, 2010)

Overall research indicates that adventure playgrounds are superior to traditional playgrounds in terms of the variety of play, play duration, interaction with peers, attendance rates, and finally opportunities for risky play - all of which contribute to the child's holistic development. As Frost claims, children need "semi-private harbors for overhauling or playing out shattered emotions; places for social play and learning, and for interacting and cooperating with others [...] a wide range of movable materials (loose parts) for creating model situations, mastering emotions, and constructing reality by experiment and planning (Frost, 1988, 15) All of these activities have been shown to be encouraged and stimulated to a greater extent on adventure playgrounds when compared to other types of playgrounds.

Risky Play

Risky play can be defined as "thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury" (Sandseter, 2009). As safety concerns have been at the forefront of the design, planning, and legislation regarding playgrounds (Versate & Karsten, 2011; Ball, 2002) for several reasons discussed earlier, the opportunities for risky play have been reduced. (Clements, 2004; Gill, 2007) Brussoni et al, (2012) have

claimed that too many restrictions on children's outdoor play hinders their development. Many scholars have outlined the benefits of risky play for children: i) risk allows children to learn about their own abilities and limits (Little & Eager, 2010) They learn not only about the physical capabilities of their own bodies, but also about the nature and limitations of the equipment that surrounds them. ii) Facing risks also challenges children mentally and emotionally, as they are faced with situations that invoke fear, courage, comradeship, determination, uncertainty, and care amongst many other emotions. iii) risk also creates an element of realism in children's play, that an overly safe environment would not - precisely because the world in which we inhabit is full of risks of various kinds. This also means that iv) risky play can be a way to practice dealing with risks that come later on in life. (Frost, 2010)

For example, faced with a leap that is too far, or a jump that is too high, the child first and foremost comes to perceive and understand his environment in concretely bodily terms. As Merleau-Ponty claims, the leap is too far and the wall too high only in relation to my body and it is my bodily existence that allows me to experience such risk at all. Rather than the child working out explicitly the force or velocity with which he must throw himself in order to make the leap; he intuits them and all the while constantly navigates his environment that reveals a kind of pre-reflective, precognitive body knowledge. He takes a step back in fear of the fall, balances himself with his arms, moves his entire torso to adjust his balance, and so on. While he does this, he also displays a wealth of deep understanding of his surrounding equipment. Even before any explicit reflection, he has already felt the texture and hardness of the ground underneath his feet, the wind that might throw him off balance, the wetness of the wooden plank from which he must jump and so on. While this bodily perception and understanding is constant and not exclusive to risky play situations; it is when faced with risk that the body must constantly assimilate new information from the surroundings. By allowing the child to experience situations that are risky and thus outside of his comfort zone, he learns through his body, in ways described above, his surrounding environment. In Vygotskian terms, risky play is an example of the zone of proximal development. Dealing with equipment that is too safe and offers no challenges, the child has no real need to master and learn new bodily motor skills, or learn new things about the environment that might thwart him.

Contemporary Playgrounds and Nature Integrated Playscape

Contemporary playgrounds are distinguished from traditional playgrounds and adventure playgrounds in that they contain "composite play structures that comprise various apparatus and types of equipment inter-connected in a way that they form a unity." (Stoilković, 2006, 116) These structures are pre-designed by artists or architects and allow for multiple different functions within the same structure. Moreover, similar to Aldo Van Eyck's playgrounds discussed previously, they allow for multiple affordances and as the equipments and structures are creatively designed to allow for different interpretations and play activities. Oftentimes, care is given to arranging them in aesthetically pleasing ways, so as to integrate the playground into the surrounding landscape, and to make the playground a pleasing landscape in itself. (Sandseter, 2009, 3) Children tend to love contemporary playgrounds more than traditional ones because they are "more interesting and more challenging." (Stoilković, 2006, 116)



(Contemporary Playground, Holland Park, London, 2018)



(Contemporary Play area, Madrid Rio, Madrid, 2018)

Natural playgrounds are ‘intentionally designed playgrounds’ in which elements of nature are naturally occurring or have been placed to enhance play spaces (Fjortoft, 2004 in Ethier, 2017). They contain natural elements like wood, rocks, and forest. Lee (1999) found that natural playgrounds are met with more enthusiasm and physical activity by children than traditional playgrounds which afforded the least challenging kinds of play and the most non-play such as wandering or standing around. (Lee 1999, in Sandseter, 2009)



(Natural Playground in Sungmisan Neighbourhood, Seoul, Korea. 2018)

Sandseter (2009) conducted a study comparing the affordances of risky play in ordinary (traditional) playgrounds and natural outdoor playgrounds in preschool children. Following the distinction made by Kyttä (2004) between potential affordances and actualized affordances, she found that numerous potential affordances existed in both types of playgrounds. Play involving great heights such as climbing, jumping down, balancing as well as those involving high speed such as sliding, running, swinging, and sledging were available in both the traditional and natural outdoor playgrounds. However one of the most pronounced differences was “the difference in dangerous elements in children’s access.” (Sandseter, 2009, 14) The natural playground contained several cliffs, a pond/small lake, rocky walls,

big rocks and steep hillsides etc, whereas the ordinary playground contained no dangerous elements. (Sandseter, *ibid*) Therefore the potential risks of the environment were higher in natural playgrounds.

Another difference was that the ordinary preschool playgrounds were fenced off and enclosed meaning children could not venture into the surrounding area; unlike the natural playground which allowed for freer movement and exploration into the surrounding forest area. The amount of independent mobility allowed to each child by the environment and by supervisors impacts upon actualized affordances, since the features mentioned above cannot be utilized or experimented with, if children are not allowed access to them. (Kytä, 2004; Sandseter, 2009) This mobility license was clearly greater in natural playgrounds than ordinary playgrounds resulting in more exploration and adventure, but also higher risks of getting lost.

Kuh, Ponte, and Chau (2013) compared children's play in traditional playgrounds and natural playgrounds. They found that features of natural playgrounds such as loose parts, trees, stones, pathways, sand, and water "developed children's ability to solve problems, cooperate, observe, and move freely within the new environment while engaged in cooperative, construction or dramatic play, rather than the repetitive, and constrictive play on traditional play equipment." (Kuh et al., 2013 in Ethier, 2017) Overall the research indicates that natural playgrounds are not only beneficial for children's physical development, but also aids their social, emotional, and cognitive development, more so than traditional playgrounds. (Ethier, 2017)

Chapter 4: Case Studies of London Adventure Playgrounds and Sungmisan Play Area

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study of two play areas that form a part of children's urban playscape - adventure playgrounds in London and a nature integrated playscape in Seoul, Korea. The choice of comparing playgrounds in London and Seoul is motivated on the one hand by Jennifer Robinson's idea of challenging eurocentric comparative analysis (Robinson, 2015), in order to reveal cross-cultural similarities as well as differences in children's play activities, patterns, and movements. On the other hand, the chosen areas represent two (or three) different attempts at overcoming the problems of traditional playgrounds, and the paucity of play opportunities in two different megacities that are heavily urbanized. The comparative analysis of play areas, equipments, activities, patterns, movements, and memories reveal interesting insights about the relationship between the physical play environment and the kinds of children's play that is generated; the role of adults in each play area; the views of the community regarding children's play; and finally how these playgrounds are *places* of significant meaning for those that have played in them.

4.2 Methods

Multiple interdisciplinary methods were used to conduct this research. A summary of the methods, their justification and how each method unfolded in the two areas are summarized below.

Participant Observation

Participant observation constituted the primary mode of research. In Sungmisan, Seoul, this entailed closely observing the variety of children's play activities, as well as their patterns of movement within the play area. My position as a playworker and researcher meant that I was introduced on first name basis to all the children (aged 3-7) of the Woori Childcare House, with whom I attended Sungmisan numerous times, for their playtime (December/January 2018). My responsibilities included generally overseeing their play activities with other employed caretakers of the institution, regarding issues of safety as well as facilitating and participating in their play when requested to do so by the children. Despite the closeness that I subsequently developed with the kids, I remained careful not to intervene in their play unless I was invited or asked to do so, to observe which activities and 'children's places' they develop without adult intervention. Moreover this attitude stems from the belief that research concerning children must proceed 'with' them and not 'on' them (Rasmussen, 2004) - meaning an adult must always be conscientious of how his own position as a potential figure of authority might affect how children play, narrate their experience, and finally how he/she as the researcher might interpret them. Nevertheless, my close relationship with them meant sometimes I was requested to help or even participate in their play, which I undertook with great pleasure and interest.

Observation was also undertaken in four adventure playgrounds in London over July and August 2018. Three of them are in Islington, north London and one is in Holland Park, west London. Similar to the case study in Seoul, my field notes contain descriptions of children's play activity within the playground. Observations in both cases are descriptive rather than explanatory. This stems from the belief in the

phenomenological method of description - as a way to give an account of lived experience - rather than positivist methods that might seek to explain children's play activity through various tests and measurements. However, in so far as the descriptions are my own rather than the children's themselves, they must be taken as simply *that*. For reasons already outlined, I did not interfere or request to join their play activities.

Interviews

Some interviews were also carried out with caretakers, playworkers, and parents in Seoul and London, to gain further insight into their views on their children's play environment and the importance they attributed to play for their children. These interviews gave further insights their aims, concerns, and delights concerning the chosen areas, as well as their community's views on children's play. As previously mentioned, some casual conversations were had with children of the two playgrounds although this was relatively more extensive in Seoul than in London.

Sharing memories

Recollecting childhood memories was another method that was used to reveal the importance of the places under study. This is inspired by Walter Benjamin's, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*. Benjamin's book is a detailed description of his memories of childhood. It is not a 'factual' recollection and intentionally so. Instead, Benjamin almost rediscovers certain special objects and places of his childhood. He remembers these objects and places as having an important meaning for him and recollects how he used to think, feel and move around these spaces and objects.

The attempt to re-collect and re-experience objects and spaces from the perspective of a child, although a difficult enterprise, is extremely fruitful in so far as we are reminded of how we once thought and felt as a child. Such an exercise reveals fairy-tale like imaginations, excitement, fear, interest, inspiration, anxiety, possibility that were woven into our surrounding places and objects. Often the most mundane objects, features are the most important and captivating to a child. Memories of London adventure playgrounds are taken from Wendy Russell's work 'Sharing Memories of Adventure Playground' (2017). Memories of Sungmisan natural playground is taken from former residents and users of the neighbourhood who frequented Sungmisan to play, during their childhood. Some old pictures were used to encourage them to share their memories with each other.

Background

Sungmisan Neighbourhood, in Mapo district, Seoul

Sungmisan Neighbourhood is located in Mapo district, north-west of the Han River which stretches across Seoul. The neighbourhood is named after its small local mountain called Sungmisan. The community began in the mid 1990s when a handful of parents established, a childcare centre, called Woori Childcare. The founding parents wanted to create an alternative childcare system to the ones that were commonplace at the time in Seoul. Exemplifying the ‘earlier is better’ attitude discussed previously, these institutions focused primarily on educating kids from age 3 to 7, in maths, english and the like, so that they could excel in school. The founding parents on the other hand, wanted a more relaxed atmosphere for their kids, one that recognized the importance of playing, and learning through playing.

As Mrs Chang confirmed in an interview, “all the [other] kindergartens were worried about making the kids competitive for school. So lots of arithmetic, lots of reading and these kinds of things. I wanted a different environment for my child, [...] where he isn’t made to do what he doesn’t enjoy but an environment where he could play as much as he wants and where people respected what the kids wanted to do.” (Chang, Jan 2018, Interview with one of the founding parents) They also prioritized the proximity and safety of community-based management of childcare where parents, teachers and kids who shared similar values could decide together how best to construct their early childhood. An important feature of the organization was that instead of being subject to a strict timetable or a list of activities, children would co-design their own play-activities and moreover co-design certain features of the neighbourhood environment. (Ahn, 2007) In this respect, Sungmisan neighbourhood represents a grassroots, bottom-up, community movement that is attempting to provide great play opportunities for children, while attempting to give them agency in deciding where and how they wish to play

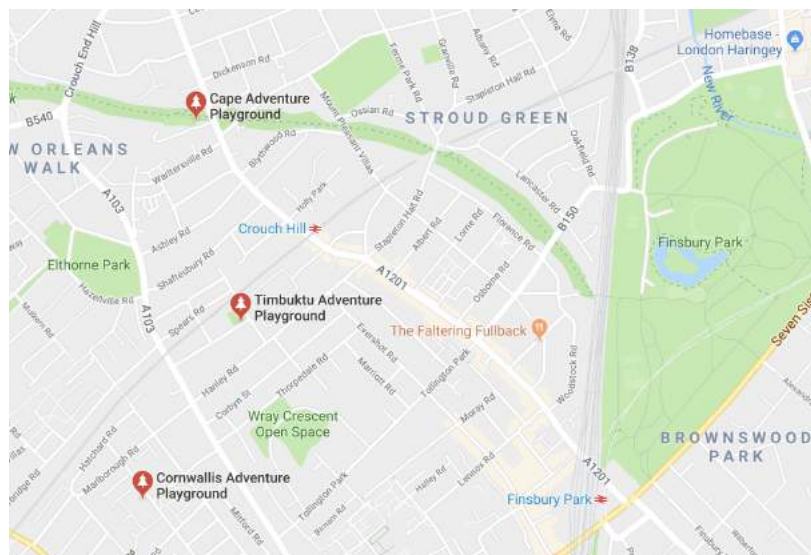
This neighbourhood community has since grown in every direction. The population in the area has sharply risen as have the participants in the community. The community developed its own alternative schooling system; a local cooperative market for organic foods, neighbourhood martial arts classes and bike trips as well as regular festivals for the people of the community. Nowadays, there are an even greater variety of activities for the residents such as choir, theatre and cinema. The slogan for the community since its beginning has been “Sungmisan Ma-eul” literally translated as Sungmisan village, reflecting the desire of the community founders and current members to create a feeling of a village within the city based on strong community ties and self sufficiency.

London Adventure Playgrounds: Cape, Timbuktu, and Cornwallis

Cornwallis, Timbuktu, and Cape are all adventure playgrounds in Islington that are run by the Islington Play Association (IPA) - a charity organisation. The IPA work together with Islington Council and a strong volunteer sector in the area, to provide valuable areas for children's play. Islington, despite its current status as a fashionable place to live and socialize, is in fact the fourth poorest borough in London. According to the IPA website, Islington "has less open space and fewer parks for children to play in than any other London Borough and most people's homes have no garden." (IPA website, 2018) The IPA have been working since 1971 to improve children's opportunities for play in the area and now there are a dozen adventure playgrounds in the area that are heavily used by the local population.



(Source: IPA website: islingtonplay.org.uk)



(Google Locations of 3 adventure playgrounds in Islington, London)



Cornwallis

Timbuktu



Cape

Cornwallis, Timbuktu, and Cape adventure playgrounds were all initiated around the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike the one in Holland Park, all three continue to practice and uphold the guiding principles of adventure playgrounds - such as children designing their own play equipment, loose parts, playworkers, and a large wooden structure that affords exploration, adventure, and risk taking. While Cornwallis and Timbuktu are fenced strictly, Cape is situated on the edge of a park without any fences allowing children to move more freely around the surrounding area. Cape is instead contained by the landscape around it - a road to one side and a hiking path on the other. While Cornwallis and Timbuktu were strict about no adult presence within the fences of the playground besides playworkers, the latter's lack of a fence allowed walkers or runners to observe the playground and children passing by to join in albeit for a short period of time.

(Source: Google Satellite Pictures)



(Source: Google Satellite Image)

Holland Park adventure (contemporary) playground

Holland Park Adventure Playground (HPA) is located inside Holland Park, in West London, in a relatively prosperous borough of Kensington and Chelsea. HPA has opened recently compared to the playgrounds in Islington - fifteen years ago in 2003. Like the ones in Islington, it is funded and run by the local council of Kensington and Chelsea, and managed by employed playworkers, volunteers, local parents, and the children themselves. One major difference between HPA and the playgrounds in Islington, is that HPA, despite its name, is closer to a contemporary playground that features multifunctional play equipment, pre-designed and aesthetically arranged by landscape architects and designers.



(Source: Google Satellite Image)

It is important to note that while the adventure playgrounds in Islington and Holland Park are running and being funded; many other adventure playgrounds in London and the UK are at risk of shutting down. For instance, the Triangle Adventure Playground (TAP) in Oval, South London is currently at the risk of closing, due to the cuts in funding by Lambeth Council, who themselves have had a fifty percent cut in funding due to government budget cuts. Such austerity measures put pressure on local councils to slash funding towards youth/ children's services and TAP is one of many old adventure playgrounds that are currently under threat according to Harriet Grant of *The Guardian*. (Grant, 2017) Watford, Southward and Brent have all lost their adventure playground while the beloved adventure facilities in Battersea Park was sold to a commercial company, Go Ape, meaning an adult and two kids now have to pay upwards of sixty pounds for entrance to these facilities. (Grant, 2018)

Meanwhile, HPA is subject to a one million pound upgrade, as Kensington and Chelsea council have released plans for a major redesign of the playground. (Cooper, 2018)

Once work is complete, the 4,800m² playground will include

- 25m zip wire
- Ten people see-saw
- 56m hill coaster
- 110m of water channel
- 11 people dragon swinger

Source: Kensington and Chelsea Council



How the revamped Holland Park Adventure Playground could look (Image: RBKC)

(Source: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Website)

4.4 Comparing Results

Layout of the play area and equipments

Sungmisan

The play area in Sungmisan, is located near the peak of the small mountain that takes approximately twenty minutes to climb for the children. Integrated into the natural landscape, the play area consists of a large flat open space as well as a semi circular staircase that leads down to another open space, resembling a miniature segment of the colosseum. The open spaces stretch in all directions via small pathways - some of which have been cleared for walking, while others are embedded in between trees and scattering of leaves. The entire space that comprises the children's playscape in the observed time (2 hours each day) is estimated to be around two hundred square meters, although there is no natural or artificial barrier separating this play area to other paths and open spaces within the mountain. In fact, children's play is observable not only in this particular space but throughout the journey - on the streets to get to the mountain, then throughout the entire hike.



(Open Space, children playing with ropes)



(Slopes, pathways, loose parts, natural forestation)

There are several exercise equipment dispersed around the area that are designed for the elderly, and one play house for children. Another built feature is a semi circular concrete barrier that is open to be used in any way children see fit. There is no explicit equipment designed for children's play except the play house. The lack of traditional play equipment such as swings, slides, and seesaws, is immediately apparent. Nevertheless, the natural landscape is full of loose parts, that children can use to play, most notably, broken planks of wood, branches, pebbles, leaves, ropes (brought by themselves) and various things left by users and found on site such as bb gun pellets. Overall, Sungmisan play area has many features of adventure playgrounds, such as supervisors, loose parts, areas for exploration and adventure, semi private spaces, areas permitting risky play, large open spaces and so on.



(Semi Circular Concrete Structure. Children Scouting Play Spots, Sungmisan, 2018)

Cornwallis, Timbuktu, and Cape Adventure Playground

The adventure playgrounds in Islington all share one common feature: there is a large wooden structure that takes up a central spot on the playground. These structures usually consist of staircases, bridges, cottage-like platforms, ropes and various other features that encourage children to explore and undertake risks. These structures differ to the equipments in Holland Park, in that they form the setting for all kinds of socio dramatic and symbolic play of the children. The wooden structure is the background upon which all kinds of games take place. In the more contemporary playground such as Holland Park, play is often mediated through the equipment because the equipments lend themselves to specific kinds of functions, movements, and games (as will be shown below). In addition, in the Islington playgrounds, the wooden structures, the availability of various loose parts and various tools, and the guidance of playworkers allow children to design, add, and change parts of the playground themselves. Oftentimes, ropes are attached for swinging; mats are lined up for risky jumps and so on. In this respect, more so than the one in Holland Park, the adventure playgrounds in Islington share many similarities to Sungmisan, in so far as they cater towards active participation on behalf of the children, in designing their playscape; and the built features act as a background setting for all kinds of creative play, rather than inciting children to play in a certain way based on the functions of the equipment.

Wooden Structure common in all the adventure playgrounds studied:



(Cape, embedded in the forestation, unfenced)



(Cornwallis, Large structure with swing.
Fenced)

Holland Park Adventure Playground

Holland Park itself is extremely tidy and designed aesthetically - boasting the famous Kyoto garden, inspired by Japanese gardens as well as a Dutch garden. The playground is situated on one edge of the park, with a semi natural barrier of trees that surround the play area, as well as fences where required. The demarcation of the area is clear - there is an inside and an outside. The entire space is smaller than Sungmisan, but contains nevertheless a whole series of play equipment, specifically designed for children's play. Despite its name, HPA incorporates many features of a contemporary playground, that features pre-designed play equipment, that affords multiple play opportunities. HPA even contains traditional play equipment on one side such as swings; but the majority can be described as multi-functional and multi-affordance play equipment. Children here sometimes play supervised by employed supervisors, while others do so in the presence of their parents or adult companions (who sit on the edge of the playground on benches).



(Swings, slides and other more traditional equipment)



(Spider web obstacle course)

Variety of Play Activities

Sungmisan hosted a great variety of play activities and types. Physical play such as running and chasing each other, climbing trees, rough and tumble play, play fighting were all observed throughout. Children were also seen in construction play using loose parts and features of the surrounding natural landscape, to build various things such as kitchens, houses, forts, hideout huts, swords etc. A whole host of symbolic and sociodramatic play also occurred such as playing house, pretending to be soldiers, thieves, animals, trees, tanks, planes, etc; while many features of the environment and its loose parts were also interpreted to mean various things - e.g) leaves, thin branches, and bb-gun pellets became ingredients to make korean pancakes, while a wooden plank served as a stove.



(Large unfenced open spaces allowed for lots of physical play - tag, hide and seek, racing, and exploration into surrounding areas)



(Play house: site of various role playing games)



(Various loose parts collected to symbolize cooking)

“Playacting is everywhere. One becomes the cook, the other the grandma etc. Their imagination weaves stories about little objects. One becomes an ice cream maker, another becomes a frying pan, another a tank, tiger etc. Time flies and no one looks bored.” (Fieldnotes from Sungmisan, January 2018)

Children also created their own play equipment by attaching ropes to three trunks which was used for jump rope, competitions on who could go underneath or jump over without touching the rope, or sometimes as a boundary between the 'alive' zone and the 'dead' zone when playing other games like tag. Several times children were also seen collecting broken branches and stones to create a fortress. Roles were divided between those who would explore the surrounding nature to find suitable building material, those that would transport them back to 'base', those that would integrate the collected material into the existing structure, those that stood outside to protect the hut from outside invasion, and finally those that would design and arrange the interior.



(Collecting materials for building their hut)



(Pebbles and wood gathered to start a fire)



(Attaching ropes to trees to create their own play)

Cornwallis, Timbuktu, and Cape Adventure Playgrounds

Symbolic/pretend play was also very common in all the adventure playgrounds except in HPA where it was less common. In Timbuktu, Cape, and Cornwallis, children were engaged in some form of symbolic/pretend play which became the overarching context within which other types of play would proceed. So for instance in Cape adventure playground, a group of boys were playing at being kings and soldiers, defending their castle, their ‘base,’ from possible invasion - similar to the game observed in Sungmisan.

Child 1: I’m the king! We have to go back to base!

Child 2 (who is on the fringes of the game): Should I come ?

Child 1: Yes! Let’s go back, we need to defend the base now!

Child 3: Jamie is already there defending it

Child 1: We can’t leave him alone, let’s go! Hurry up!

A whole host of physical activities such as running, swinging, climbing, and chasing were also observed. These were often interspersed with different elements of risk as risky play. Risky play was observed more frequently in adventure playgrounds than the contemporary playground in Holland Park. A more detailed study of potential and actualized risk affordances are dealt with later.

“As quickly as one kid enters a game, he will leave it and join another one. They ask quite bluntly can I play with you. There is no hesitation, new game , new rules, leave new game etc. There are enforcers who enforce the rules or create new ones. The rulebreakers are usually cut out or scolded until they fit in.” (Fieldnotes from Cornwallis Adventure Playground, July 2018)

Holland Park Adventure Playground

In HPA, children were observed playing primarily with the provided play equipment. This was perhaps due to the fact that despite its name, the adventure playground did not contain any loose parts or tools such as stones, wooden planks, branches, ropes, hammers, bricks etc. As such, children had less opportunity to construct their own play environment as had been originally envisaged by the founders of adventure playgrounds. However this did not stop the children from engaging in all kinds of different play activities. Like Sungmisan, almost all children engaged in physical play of some sort, either with the equipment or around them. There were lots of running, chasing (tag), climbing, and hiding, in and around the play equipment. Oftentimes this was how the children moved between various play equipment such that the journey from one to the other also became a kind of chasing game. Climbing walls, zip lines, various obstacle courses, a rope spider web, were all frequently used. Despite the names attributed to these equipment, most are integrated with other features such that a climbing wall is also at once a kind of tree hut, a vantage point looking onto the entire playground. An arching ladder is integrated with ropes, with various seats hanging on the structure and so on. Symbolic / Pretend play was also observed although it did not seem as robust compared to other places studied.



(Children playing at rescuing each other from the sea) (Climbing multifunctional equipment)

The role of adults and risky play

The role of adults was more significant in Sungmisan and Islington than in HPA. The caretakers and myself acted very similar to adventure playground supervisors. This meant allowing the children to play as they want, as much as possible, and interfering only when it is absolutely necessary with regards to issues of safety; or when asked/invited to help or participate by the kids themselves. Contrarily in HPA, the adults were usually parents who were seated on separate seating areas for adults, overlooking their children. The only instance that brought an interaction was when a kid fell down and was hurt, and thus

came to his mother for help. While in concrete terms both play areas had very little adult intervention, the feeling was entirely different - whereby in Sungmisan I felt much more like a participant, being sucked into their playworld or at least ready to be so. In HPA the feeling was much more detached, as if I was merely observing.

All the play areas studied contained potential affordances of risky play. Sandseter categorizes these potential affordances in nine different features (Sandseter,2009):

- 1) Climbable features,
- 2) Jump-down-off-able features,
- 3) Balance-on-able features,
- 4) Flat, relatively smooth surfaces,
- 5) Slopes and slides,
- 6) Swing-on-able features
- 7) Graspable, detached objects - loose parts, wood, stones, leaves -
- 8) Dangerous tools - hammers, nails, etc
- 9) Dangerous elements nearby - steep hills, cliffs, etc

All of these features afford a certain risky activity such as climbing, jumping down, throwing, using dangerous tools etc. The degree to which these potential affordances are actualised depends partly on the role of the adults, how much they intervene for issues of safety, and finally how much mobility license is given to the children so that they may actually experiment with such features. The first table below shows the potential affordances present in each playground under study as well as the mobility license afforded to children by adults. The second table illustrates the number of instances where the risky play was actualized.

	Sungmisan (Natural)	Cornwallis (Adventure)	Timbuktu (Adventure)	Cape (Adventure)	Holland Park (Contemporary)
Climbable	Trees, Hills, Large rocks	Wooden structure, Large container	Wooden Structure	Wooden Structure, trees, steep hill	Climbing wall, obstacle course, spider web
Jump-down	Trees	Wooden structure, container	Wooden Structure, jumping platforms	Wooden structure	Heights of play equipment, climbing walls
Balance-able	Trees, Steep slopes	Wooden structure, rope Bridges	Wooden structure, rope Bridges	Wooden structure, rope Bridges	Spider web, triangular web, rope Bridges
Flat, Smooth	Play hut, open field	Platforms on wooden structure, open flat ground	Platforms on wooden structure, open flat ground	Platforms on wooden structure, open flat ground	Open space, 'ocean hill' - mini smooth hill resembling the sea
Slope/Slide	Steep hills	Wooden slide	Wooden slide	Steep hills,	Traditional

				Skating half pipe nearby	Slides/ zip line, Sliding pole
Swing-able	Rope swing (self made)	Rope swing structure	Rope swing structure	Rope swing structure	Traditional Swings
Grasp-able (loose parts)	Wood, branches, stones, sand, pebbles, acorns, bb gun pellets, leaves etc	Wood, planks, logs, tyres, sand, stones	Wood, planks, logs, tyres, sand, stones	Wood, branches, stones, sand, pebbles, acorns, leaves etc	None
Dangerous Tools	Ropes	Various tools for making things (hammers, nails, saws)	Various tools for making things (hammers, nails, saws)	Various tools for making things (hammers, nails, saws)	None
Dangerous Elements	Steep slopes, stairs, sharp stinging trees, branches	Sharp edges of wooden structure, large swing	Sharp edges of wooden structure, high platforms	Steep slopes, stairs, sharp edges, high trees	Height of play equipments, possible collision to sharp edges
Mobility License	Extensive, Unfenced, Relatively lax control	Fenced, Certain high points forbidden by playworkers (e.g top of container)	Fenced, Certain high jumps or hanging from high points forbidden by playworkers	Unfenced, Free movement to surrounding areas (forest area, hills, skating half pipe etc) Certain risky activities like jumping from heights forbidden by playworkers	Fenced. Free movement within playground. No instance of intervention observed.

No. of occurrences of risky play observed over 90 minutes in each playground. If two children utilized dangerous equipment this is counted as two instances.

	Sungmisan	Cornwallis	Timbuktu	Cape	Holland Park
Climb	5	8	4	10	9
Jump	3	5	5	9	4
Balance	3	5	1	4	2

Flat/Smooth	5	0	2	0	1
Slope/ Slide	8	2	4	1	3
Swing	1	7	4	1	4
Loose parts	14	6	5	7	0
Dangerous tools/ elements	10	6	3	4	0
Total	49	39	28	36	24



(Risky play in HPA: Climbing obstacle course)



(Risky play in Cape: Climbing tree)

A playworker at Timbuktu adventure playground, when asked about what makes adventure playgrounds different from other playgrounds, claimed, “children here tend to engage in more risky activities. They are very explorative also which you don’t find in many normal playgrounds.” She also raised concerns saying “as adults we often think about provision, whether its food, safety, or play equipment. But here the idea is less about providing children with what we think they want, but letting them decide what they want and helping them achieve that.” (Anonymous, July 2018)

Risky play was seen considerably in all adventure playgrounds. Several times, children would dare themselves and each other to take risks, while consulting each other about possibilities of success or failure. Both instances shown below show one common type of risky play - jumping from heights.

Child 1: I’m gonna jump from here!

Child 2: You'll die if you do that

Child 1: No I won't, it's not that high

Child 2: Yes you will!

Playworker (intrudes abruptly): Get down! You know you're not allowed there!

(Cornwallis Adventure Playground)

Child 1: I wonder how badly you'd get injured if you jumped from here

Child 2: Badly

Child 1: Should I try it?

Child 2: No!

Child 1 contemplates for a few moments and decides to use the stairs.

(Cape Adventure Playground)

Managing risk was another key aspect of the playworker's role. While some activities such as attempting to jump from too high a platform can lead to a real risk of serious injury, other activities might be less hazardous. The playworker's job then is to allow for the element of risk while diminishing the chances of serious injury. As a playworker in Cornwallis playground says, "for instance, we, or they themselves put mats on the floor if children want to jump from somewhere high up. Of course we have to take care that the risks they take aren't too crazy!" (Anonymous, July 2018)

Memories of Sungmisan and Adventure Playgrounds

What this approach reveals first and foremost is that Sungmisan as well as adventure playgrounds were places of fun, places of meaning, places of exploration, adventure, care, collaboration, and friendship. The memories of Sungmisan are taken from 5 residents of the area who used to play in Sungmisan as a child. In the case of adventure playgrounds, Wendy Russell has conducted a similar study collecting adults' memories in her work, 'Sharing Memories of Adventure Playgrounds.' (2017) By creating encounters between people who used to play, work, volunteer there and giving them prompts such as old photos, she incites their collective memory. While the 'aura of photography' might play a role in projecting certain emotions onto the past, they are nevertheless useful in bringing back the kinds of activities and feelings in the adults. Inspired by Russell (et al) I used similar pictures to incite conversations about memories in Sungmisan, Seoul. Both accounts reveal a remarkable similarity in that these play areas were not only central places of their everyday life as a child, but also places of safety, encounter, excitement, belonging, difference, places a bit on the edge, places of ritual, and movement. (Russell et al, 2017) Some of these quotes are revealed below. The recollections from adventure playgrounds are from Wendy Russell's work. All quotes are anonymous at the request of the participants.

Memories of Adventure Playgrounds from (Russell et al, 2017)

Example of Picture Prompts

(Russell et al, 2017 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQVWRb4SSdc>)



(Russell et al, 2017 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQVWRb4SSdc>)

"Cos it was an amazing time, like everyone had a crap life in the house but as soon as you got to the adventure... it's was a really good time."

"I couldn't believe it was here... It was very like Dr Who's tardis... You'd walk in and it was like wow!"

"Adventure playgrounds were a norm to me to be honest, it's a part of my life, my upbringing, it's literally part of my generation... the community spirit, just having them vibes."

"When it's working, it can be an amazing place..."

"When they were building the underpasses for the roundabout at Lawrence Hill, they were stacking all the bricks, and they were digging big holes. So there were these massive holes! So when it was raining, there were these massive puddles... and there were these bricks! FRESH! Just asking to be thrown in! So we're in there "bombs away, bombs away!" and round the corner.. PC plod came around."

"Safe, it was like as if you were safe. My home was crap. Everyone would have a go at me. I was a teenager. I felt coming here, somewhere I know, somewhere familiar... I know I'm going to be alright. If I want to cry, if I want to shout and rant and rave, it was alright."

"It was in the mid 60s, there weren't any fences or anything.. And it had a structure of an old boat.. which we used to call the shipwreck ...we used to come over here and have mud fights."

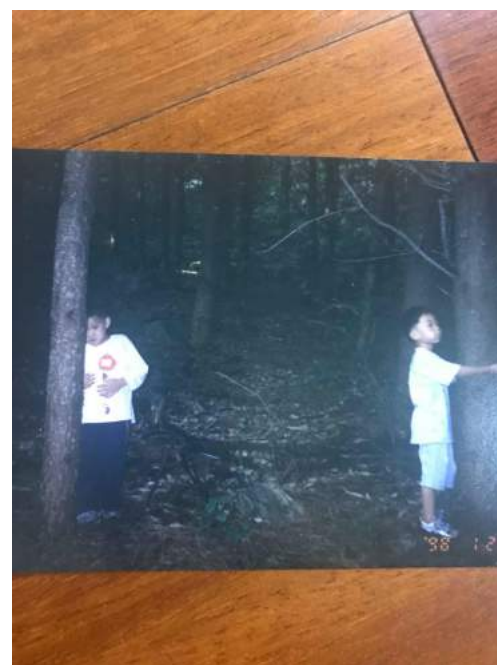
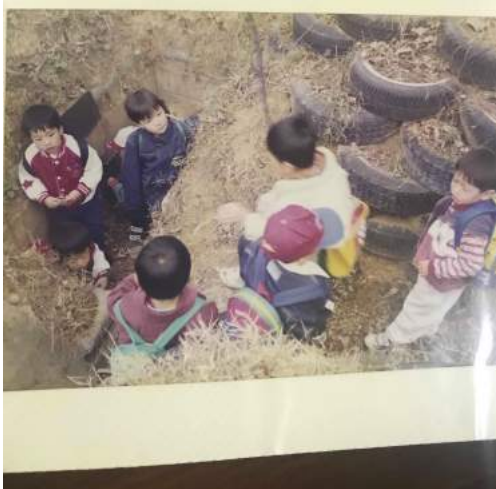
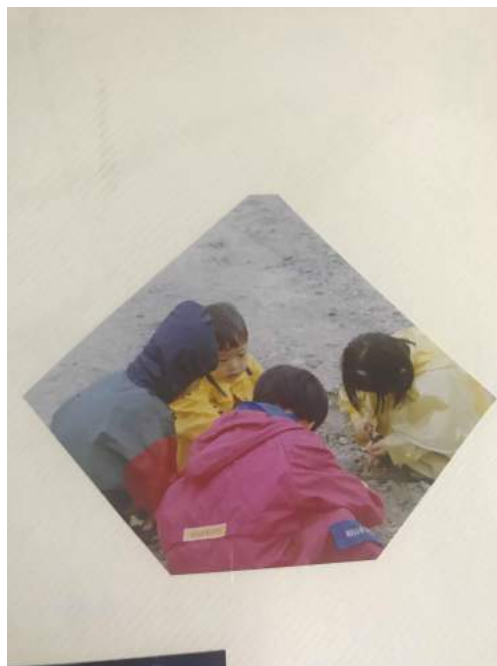
"The zip wire... the structure.. And also.. Gosh the goats. I have a distinct memory of goats running around"

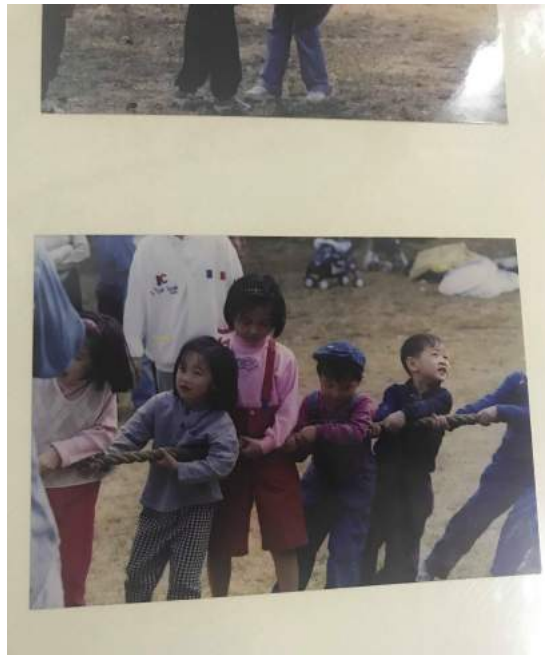
"I played here as a child.. In the corner there there is a doorway.. It's been sealed for a while now.. We used to climb over.. And see all around the edges.. Thats been there from the 70s. We used to walk all the way around that and play touch."

"We used to go up the tunnels.. Sewage tunnels..there was like a competition, who could go the furthest manhole. You'd burn your name in concrete with a candle to prove you got the furthest."

Memories of Sungmisan

Photo Prompts:





“Oh yes! I remember we used to have our own trees, like each one of us had our own tree that we had to defend and if someone else got there without you knowing you’d be out the game. I remember mine was really high up and there were lots of spiky things around it so I never lost!”

“There were lots of worms, and this guy (pointing to the friend next to him) used to pick it up and try to scare everyone. He’d dig them up from the ground or find it underneath rocks and stuff and start chasing the girls with it. I think my mum still has photos of that.”

“Yeah we used to play there all the time! I mean there and the playground outside the childcare house with the sand and the big slide. You (points to friend) used to be obsessed with this robot Sunguard and imitate him all the time, jumping off this super high platform and once you fainted!”

“I just remember we used to play a lot of tag, hide and seek, and these kinds of games. But when you’d have to run to save yourself, I remember I was scared of running down these stairs so I always used to go one by one whereas all the boys were jumping two steps at a time. And I fell badly once too so yeah.. That’s what I remember, the fall!”

“Looking back, if you think about it, that’s probably why we all fought so hard to save it from being redeveloped [into apartment blocks]. I mean, it wasn’t just us, it was the whole ‘village’, the whole community used to go there.. Playing, walking... lots of old people too hiking and stuff.”

“It’s changed a lot now. I mean they cut half of it off to make houses now so when I went up there last week, yeah it’s not the same as it was.”

“You guys remember behind the well, there was a little path and at the end of it there’s a small wall. If you jumped over it, you’d be in the backyard of the school. We used to go there all the time as a shortcut and there was a neighbour who used to shout at us from his window. Now they’ve built over it and the wall is huge.”

Conclusion

This research paper has aimed to demonstrate the importance of playing in the city. The literature review in the first chapter in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and philosophy have given varying interpretations to the nature, purpose, and benefits of play. Sociological accounts, especially Huizinga's conception of play, reveals that play is not only fundamental to human nature, but also responsible for the very development of culture and civilisation. This has been applied to the domain of the urban to show that the ludic elements such as competition, theatricality, exhibition, improvisation, and challenge are most concentrated in the urban domain and it is in cities that they reach their fullest expression.

Psychological accounts of play have been consulted to demonstrate the benefits of play for children's development. While such accounts run contrary to sociological accounts in that they focus on the instrumental value of play for the development of children's abilities; they are nevertheless critical in revealing why play is of great importance for children's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. Psychological accounts have also demonstrated how the different types of play such as physical, symbolic (pretend/ sociodramatic play) and play with rules, are each instrumental for developing different abilities.

Various philosophical positions on childhood have been elaborated to demonstrate how views about childhood are intimately linked to attitudes towards play, not only during the time in which the views were espoused, but also today. Finally, play has been analysed from a phenomenological perspective. By elaborating the views of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer, this part aimed to demonstrate that playing in the city is a mode of being-in-the-world. To play is to immerse oneself in one's urban environment. In the case of children, it is one of the very ways in which they experience urban reality. Furthermore, play has the potential to transform mundane and ordinary places, as revealed by instances where children play in liminal, in-between places. Last but not least, play has the potential to be critical and subversive as often functions by interpreting and reinterpreting the given meanings and codes of behaviour associated with a given urban space.

After having established the interdisciplinary basis for the importance of play for children and its significance in the urban sphere, I explored in chapter two, the social and environmental factors that discourage or inhibit children's play in cities today. A whole host of factors were identified, such as traffic, environmental hazards, loss of green spaces/nature, increasing institutionalization of children's daily life and play activities, extensive scheduling, as well as the "earlier is better" attitude increasingly adopted by parents. These factors reveal that there is a specificity to urban children's opportunities for play - that is markedly different from children living in rural areas.

Chapter three has examined playgrounds as one of the main spaces of play in the city. The history and the subsequent analysis of different types of playgrounds reveal that differing attitudes towards play and childhood explored in chapter 1 are being implemented in the design and functioning of playgrounds. Traditional playgrounds have been shown to be inept and inadequate for the holistic development of children as they rarely allow for children's free play, adventure, and risk taking which are all important for children's development. Moreover they have been shown to be inferior to the two alternative playground models discussed - adventure playgrounds and natural playgrounds - in terms of attendance rates, amount of social interaction, duration of play, variety of play types, amongst other variables.

This has led to a closer look at alternative playground models in the form of adventure playgrounds in London, one contemporary playground also in London, and a natural playground in Seoul, Korea. These alternative models are free and bottom-up local initiatives that aimed to tackle the problem of traditional playgrounds and the lack of play opportunities for children in modern cities today. All of the alternative models have been shown to be superior to traditional playgrounds in allowing room for children's imagination and creative appropriation. The contemporary playground in Holland Park, while allowing multiple affordances to children, via multifunctional equipment, did not result in a great amount of adventure or risk play. There was also less symbolic/ sociodramatic play compared to adventure and natural playgrounds. Adventure and natural playgrounds had ample opportunities for risky play and adventure; and importantly, allowed children to create their own play equipment via loose parts and materials. In this way, they allowed for the creation of 'children's places' within 'places for children.'

Finally, recollecting memories of Sungmisan and adventure playgrounds has shown that both were very significant places in the everyday life of children. It is evident from their personal accounts that both London adventure playgrounds and Sungmisan were important places of meaning, fun, adventure, risk, excitement, fear, encounter, and memory, among many more. They were places where children could escape the adult gaze, be themselves, as well as try out new roles and identities, and where children could laugh, cry, and rant with their friends. Sharing memories of childhood play, allowed the participants and the researcher, to rediscover and re-experience, albeit temporarily, the joys, laughter, anxieties, and fears of childhood and the places that were central to our lives when we were children.

Further research could be done into children's play in liminal, in-between spaces - such as paths, streets, intersections, boundaries etc, for children's playscape, as mentioned in the introduction, stretches far beyond the boundaries of the playground. Moreover, the ways in which play allows not only children but adults to re-interpret the most mundane and ordinary spaces into meaningful places; provide interesting areas for further inquiry. This enterprise might reveal that even for adults, play is neither unimportant nor frivolous; but rather a way in which we can experience our urban surroundings anew, as well as a way in which we can reinterpret, challenge, and subvert dominant spatial paradigms.

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3. Boys Playing at S.Maria. Source: S.E.Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, 1962
4. Children Playing Indoor Market, Madrid, 2018
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6. Sand Garden. Source: Picture Perfect Playground Inc, 2018
7. Children on metal swings, 1905. Source: Karen Madorin, HPPR, 2016
8. Wood and Sand Equipment, East Greenlake, 1969. Source: Seattle Municipal Archives
9. Traditional Playground, Kinnear Park 1913, Source: Seattle Municipal Archives
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16. Castle Hill Adventure Playground, London. Source: Islington Play Association (URL: islingtonplay.org.uk)
17. Ibid
18. Children's Playground Movement. Source: Moore, 1989. Found in Freutel, 2010
19. Contemporary Playground, Holland Park, 2018
20. Ibid.
21. Contemporary Playground, Madrid Rio, 2018
22. Natural Playground, Sungmisan, Seoul, Korea, 2018
23. Ibid.
24. Islington statistics. Source: Islington Play Association (URL: islingtonplay.org.uk)
25. Google Locations of London Adventure Playgrounds. Source: Googlemaps, 2018
26. Satellite Images of London Adventure Playgrounds. Source: Googlemaps, 2018
27. Satellite Image of Holland Park Playground. Source: Googlemaps, 2018
28. Development Plan for Holland Park. Source: Kensington and Chelsea Council
29. Drawing of Development Plan for Holland Park. Source: Kensington and Chelsea Council
30. Open Space, Sungmisan, 2018
31. Slopes, Paths and Looseparts, Sungmisan, 2018
32. Semi Circular Concrete Structure. Children Scouting Play Spots, Sungmisan, 2018
33. Wooden Structure, Cape Adventure Playground, 2018
34. Wooden Structure, Cornwallis Adventure Playground, 2018
35. Swings, Slides and Other Traditional Equipment, Holland Park, 2018
36. Spider Web Obstacle Course, Holland Park, 2018
37. Unfenced Open Space/ Physical Play. Sungmisan, 2018
38. Play House, Sungmisan, 2018
39. Various Loose Parts, Sungmisan, 2018
40. Collecting Materials for Hut, Sungmisan, 2018
41. Pebbles and Wood Gathering, Sungmisan, 2018
42. Attaching Ropes to Trees, Sungmisan, 2018
43. Ocean Feature, Holland Park, 2018

44. Climbing Hut Equipment, Holland Park, 2018
45. Risky Play in HPA, Holland Park, 2018
46. Risky Play in Cape, Cape Adventure Playground, 2018
47. Photo Prompts for Memories of Adventure Playgrounds. Source: 'Sharing Memories of Adventure Playgrounds' by (Russell et al, 2017)
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQVWRb4SSdc>
48. Ibid
49. Ibid
50. Ibid
51. Photo Prompts for Memories of Sungmisan, 2018
52. Ibid
53. Ibid
54. Ibid
55. Ibid

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Henrik and Martin – my supervisors – for their advice, support, and patience. I also extend my gratitude to everyone involved in Woori Childcare House and all the adventure playgrounds I visited in London. Special thanks goes to all the children who inspired me to carry out this research. Thank you finally to my family and Carolina for your unwavering support.

Appendix

VISUAL
RESEARCH
METHODS
UNINTENDED
USE
OF
UNINVITING
PLACES

Carolina Gatti, Wan Hee Kim, Julien Moliera, Sara Ostojsic

DONAU CITY

Donau City had been created with the intention of making it the 'second city centre' of Vienna. It was supposed to be a lively place, a new hotspot for both residents and tourists. However the reality in Donau City betrays the planner's ideal intentions. To say that the landscape of Donau City differs from the old streets and buildings of Vienna is an understatement. What strikes the average person most when walking through this 'city' is that it is uninviting, empty, underused, lonely, and alienating. Hardly anyone stops here to relax, meet, interact and play. Our horizon is crowded with tall towers and the shiny glass that surrounds them reflects back to each other their pride, grandeur and narcissism.

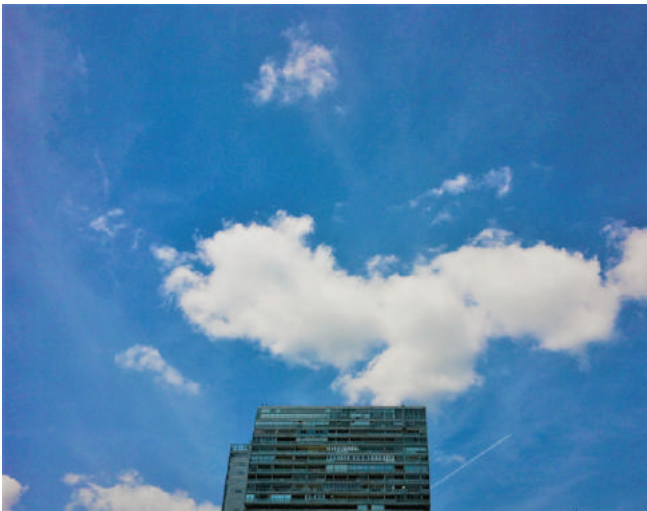
It is for this reason that we started to question the design of several places in Donau City. We wanted to see how certain design features influenced people's behaviours and sentiments in different places. This desire developed into asking ourselves the question, how can we depart from merely criticizing the design of Donau City and instead take a more active approach in making it more inviting, fun and engaging?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

SARA

Thursday 8 June, 1pm to 2pm,
sunny day, hot weather

As it could be seen from the selection of photos that I chose to represent my first impressions, the first thing that struck me when I stepped into Donau City was great presence of skyscrapers. The landscape that they create does not resemble the traditional picture of Vienna, and at the same time their great height covered my view on the riverside, so I did not have a feeling that I am that close to the Danube river, since I could not see it from any angle. On the other hand, I felt a bit confused and lost in the star-architecture buildings, empty spaces and fences. My overall feeling was that the whole landscape was created in order to host built environment and concrete, and not the people.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

JULIEN

Even though I had passed by and crossed Donau City cycling, my real first impression built up when I dropped the bike and started contemplating the area. Unused spaces, grandeur, concrete and isolation were the first words that hit my mind. While wandering more in-depth in smaller-scale space I was struck with the treatment of vegetation in the district. Most green attributes were “en-caged” through various forms of design: Plant pot, privatized access to turf, lonely street trees, and so it goes. It is particularly intriguing since the new city is surrounded with green areas.

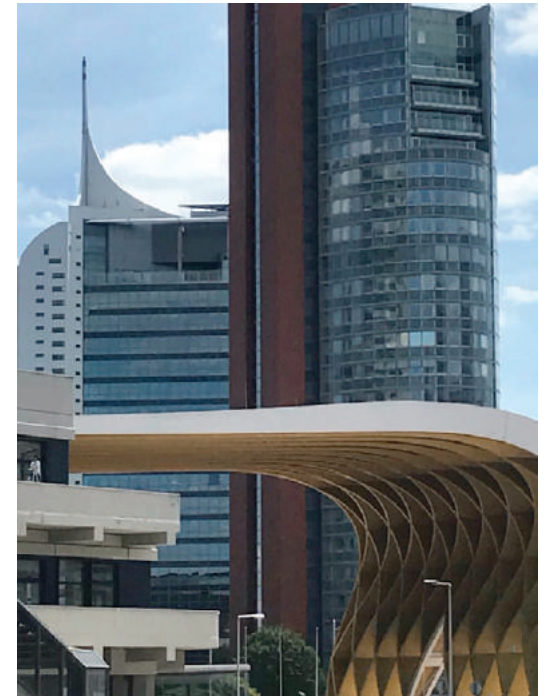
Even then, having the modernist architecture concepts in mind the place relates well to the advocated principles but since it was built in the 1990s, it is curious to see that no lessons from past failures have been taken into consideration.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

CAROLINA

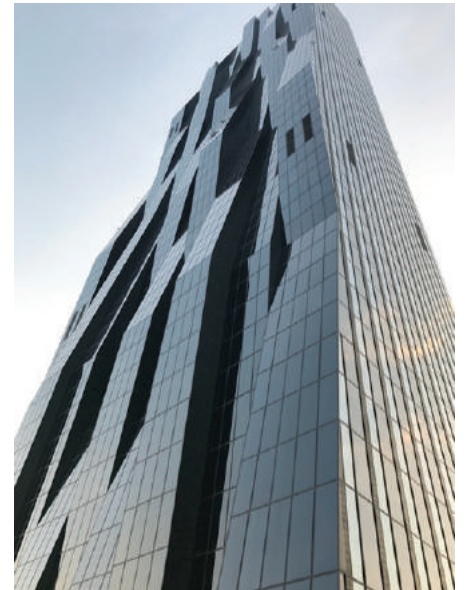
As a first impression, Donau City seems immersed in a game of geometries and juxtapositions of colors and shapes, resulting in a difficulty to extrapolate specific feelings or sense of place. The spaces are characterized by absence and over-planning, although the lack of people around might be related to the hot weather and the small amount of shaded spots and refreshing greenery.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

KIM

My first impression of Donau City can be described in three words. Empty, Lonely and Unused. All around the colossal towers dreamt up by architects who envisioned the 'second city centre' of Vienna, were vast amounts of space drained of life and energy. Resembling a desert more than a city centre, Donau City struck me as profoundly placeless. It seemed like an architect's dream gone horribly wrong.



RESEARCH DIRECTION

After exploring Donau City on our own, we gathered our individual first impression in order to develop a common research topic. The feeling that we all shared was that Donau City is overplanned, but ironically, it had vast amounts of unused or underused spaces. It lacked vibrancy and life. This led us to an idea to interact with the space and explore the possible. As it could be seen from our series of the possible, the common line that follows all photographs is playing with the green and/or lights. By putting these nature motives in our pictures, we at the same time wanted to grasp the feeling of the presence of "lonely plants", encapsulated green spaces and lack of connection with the nature that surrounds the whole area, but is somehow distant and absent. The further analysis will be provided in the following section.

How can people make use of this space in a way that overcomes its alienating nature?

Methodology

In order to carry out this research we decided to create a photo series. The series would depict three photos that represented the empty, the real and the possible. One photo was taken as we found the places of our choice - usually empty and unused. The second photo captured any real use of this place by residents or visitors if there were any. The third photo represented what is possible in these places. In this third photo, we as researchers took it upon ourselves to reinterpret the underused spaces for unintended purposes. Usually this amounted to us using these places for some sort of play - to rediscover the place as a possible environment for fun rather than a lonely, alienating space devoid of potential. At the same time, in several cases we intentionally played with the notion of absurdity (like sunbathing on the uncomfortable gravel) in order to point out the absurd design of some places which seem to prevent any unintentional usage of the space.

The series amounted to the juxtaposition of pictures, showing underused, empty spaces and at the same time possible uses and activities that these spaces could host. Placing these photos directly next to each other with similar frames was intended to have the effect of displaying the stark contrast between the three elements we wanted to capture - the empty, the real and the possible.



Tuesday, 13th of June, 10.30am

Monday, 19th of June, 7pm
most workers left the building, the area is calm



Tuesday, 20th of June, 8pm
After a long warm day, the last workers are leaving the building.



Monday, 19th of June, 6.30pm

Street dancers used the freshness of the later afternoon , practicing moves using the reflection provided by the material of the building

Tuesday, 13th of June, 11am



Tuesday, 13th of June, 11am



Tuesday, 20th of June, 8.30pm
Warm evening, streets are
empty apart from a few cyclist

3
km

Tuesday, 13th of June, 10am
The plaza at the feet of the building
is empty, a few persons are passing
by on the other side of the bamboos



Tuesday, 13th of June, 10.30am



Tuesday, 13th of June, 11am
A guy is observing the surroundings from his window on the right side.

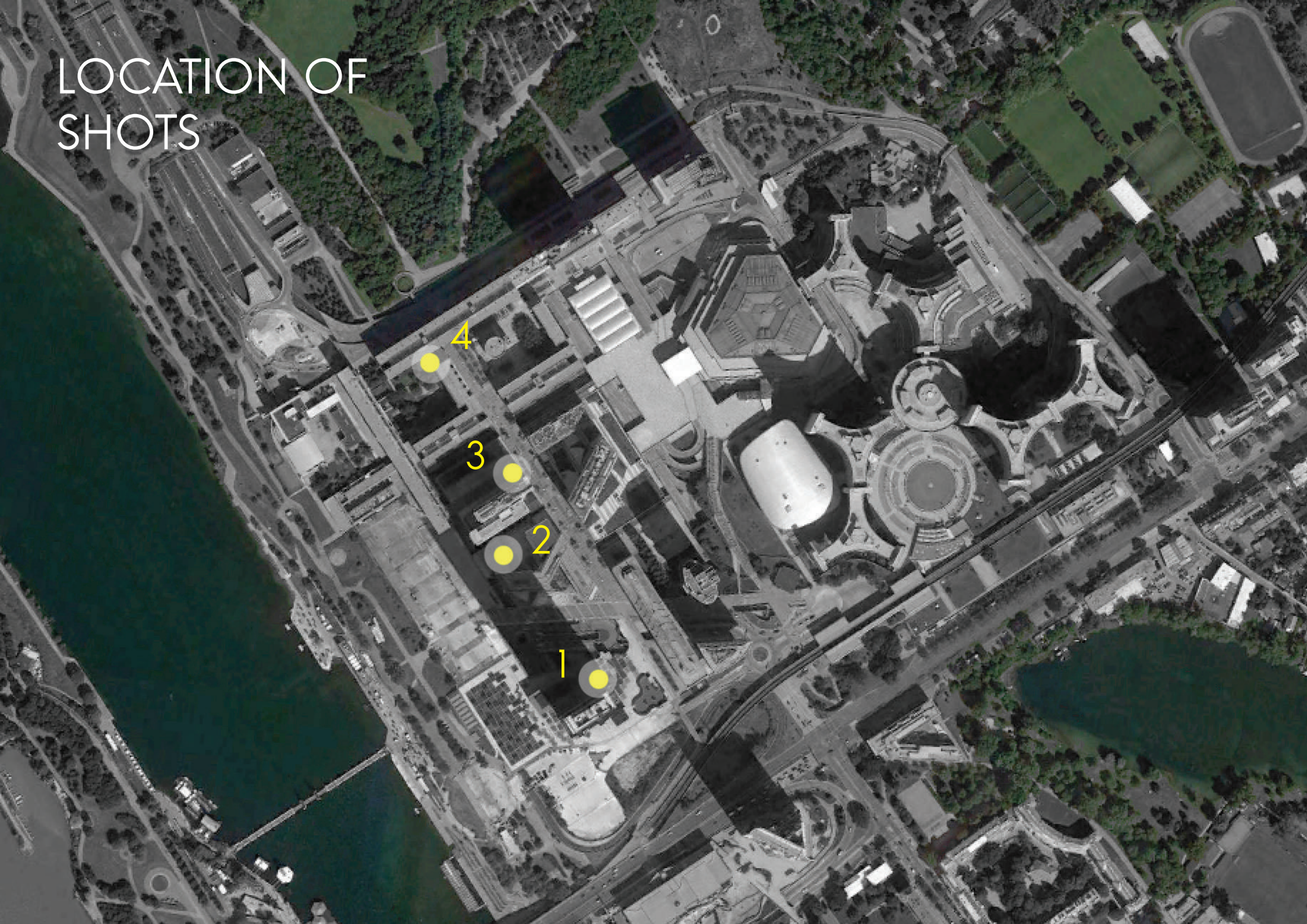


Tuesday, 13th of June, 10.30am



Monday, 19th of June, 6.30pm
People are gathering and chatting in front of the turf

LOCATION OF SHOTS



ANALYSIS OF SERIES

1 This series of pictures captures the empty, the real and the possible elements of a small patch of grass outside the parking lot of the DC tower. The well-kept grass was not intended for any kind of use besides aesthetics. Surrounded by concrete roads for cars to exit the car park, this patch of green rarely, if ever, would host any kind of human activity. The reality as shown in photo in the bottom right is cars passing through the green. The bottom left reveals a rather absurd appropriation of this totally unused space for physical activity such as yoga. While we do not believe this kind of use would ever happen in this area, the absurd appropriation was presented and captured to highlight the possibility of unintended use in unused spaces.

2 This series is very interesting as it displays all three elements of the empty, the real and the possible. The empty space is what we encountered on our first few visits to this space, which is somehow reasonable since the time when we visited the place was 11 in the morning, on a very hot day in the time of working hours. However, this led us to think about using this space for skateboarding, as shown by the picture in the top right. Skateboarding here represented our unintended play - the possible. Nonetheless, after interviewing some of the residents who informed us of dance practice sessions that occur in this area, we discovered that this space is actually actively appropriated by the residents. The dancers shows up every day around 6pm, when the sun is not at its peak and when the light creates a reflection on the building's surface, which they use as mirrors in order to practice their dance moves. This reality definitely challenged our perception of Donau City as lacking creative appropriation of empty spaces.

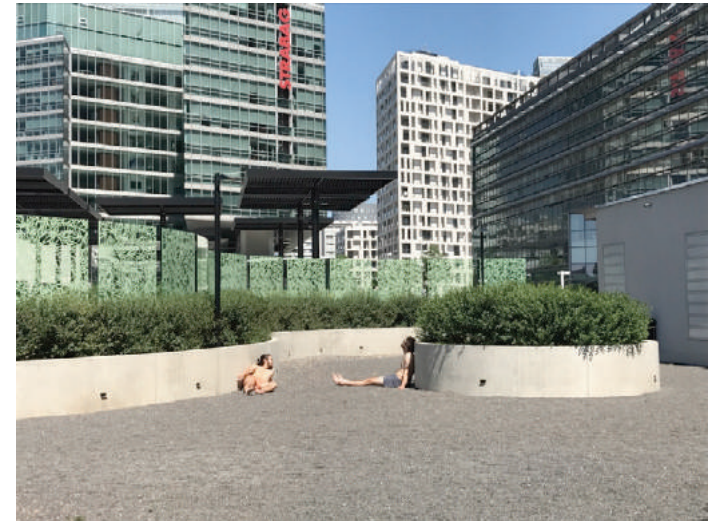
3 All the elements for a nice public space are present in that particular area - plants, water, benches etc. - the combination of these elements bizarrely ended up creating an uninviting and absurd environment. Plants are encaged and benches are very separated from each other, not facing one another. In answer to this questionable design we installed a hammock in between two pillars encaging the plants, in order to show an absurd potential for this place, which could be appropriated differently. As it can be seen on the photo, the bench on the other side of the glass is used by people, since it is facing the pedestrian avenue. When we visited the place in the later afternoon, to see whether it is used in the after-working hours when the heat has diminished, we only did noticed people using this public space to pass by on bicycles and using this part just as a passage on their way home.

4 We used this spot for our third series of photos, since it represents a pleasant, but underused green area in Donau City. This well maintained turf, which is partly in the shade created by buildings, seems like a nice spot for leisure and relaxation, even in the hot summer days. However, many residents and users of Donau City that we interviewed couldn't even recognize where this place is situated, although some of them mentioned that the area lacks green spaces. As a possible scenario, we tried to show ping pong here, although it seems very absurd, since there is no ping pong table. This photo was also pointed out as "the favourite" photo by most of people that we interviewed, possibly because it was shot at the green space. However, when we went to visit this place in the later afternoon, we captured a group of people chatting while walking their dog. However it again confirmed that this green spot is not very much used by people, probably due to the lack of requisites for human activities (benches, tables etc.) and the position of this place, since it is surrounded by buildings and faces the wall on the other side.

SAMPLED PICTURES USED FOR THE INTERVIEW

The choice of pictures has been developed to question people on their perception of selected public spaces. The goal is to challenge residents/user's vision on the presupposed use of the built environment as a constant feature. By showing interviewers unintended/spontaneous usage of certain spots, we hope to trigger their raw reaction on what we perceived as an "unused" space. The series seeks at depicting a gradation of events from most likely to least likely to happen.

In this way, while skateboard could seem pretty natural to most people, sun bathing, on the other hand, might evoke more deviant behaviour. Overall, the serie aims at analyzing people's knowledge of the area while collecting their feeling on how certain spaces could/should be used differently.



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

This interview was conducted outside the entrance of the blue jagged Donau tower. Time: Late afternoon/early evening. Still bright. Interviewee was having a cigarette break.

He is a 42 years old English man and a photographer/documentary filmmaker by trade. He is in Donau City for a short while (few days) working for Nissan to shoot advertisements for cars. He mentioned that such automobile corporations see Donau City as an ideal setting to shoot their advertisements. He himself is only temporarily employed by Nissan for this capacity.

What is your first impression of Donau City?

"Um... have you ever seen the film Truman show. It's empty space. It's not as alive as I thought it should be. But I don't mind that. It's got like an end of the world feeling... I don't mean that in a negative way.. I like the symmetry. I took a lot of photos myself cos there's a lot of symmetry everywhere and the glass. I'm a photographer, I'm a cameraman by trade you see. It's either the end of the world ... or the start of a new one."

How likely do you think people would use this space for unintended uses as shown in these pictures (the series of 3 pictures we showed him)?

"Well okay.. I mean this is skateboard heaven (looking at first pic). And Bmx and everything. If they're allowed to do it here.. Are the police here okay with skateboarders here? It's almost like the skateboarders were the architects for this whole thing"

Do you recognize where these places are?

"No.. I don't recognize that (seeing the three pics in the series) .. I 've only been here a day you see"

If you had to use these spaces yourself, what would you do?

"I'm a photographer.. So I'd be doing what you're doing..."
"I wouldn't like to live here"

Why?

"Well..it's doesn't feel like an old place with a community. It feels like a new place with not enough people.. It doesn't feel like a community.. It's more business. It doesn't mean people can't enjoy themselves and make the best use of the spaces..."

"No.. I'm a country person you see.."

We interviewed those 3 persons while they were going for a swim in the Danube around 7pm on a tuesday evening. All of them grew up in Donau City and study in the city center, commuting on a daily basis. They are 20 years old on average.

What do you think about those 3 pictures?

"We like them, they look fun! not really representative of Donau City but it's a nice vision"

Do you know where they were taken?

"Yes of course."

They easily pointed out every exact location for the pictures we show them, giving us interesting insights about their knowledge of the district.

Have you seen people experiencing unintended uses in Donau City?

"Oh well not that much we have to admit, it is already pretty rare to see a crowd in here. But we know that every evening here and there, there is a group of break dancers that gather exactly where you have that picture with skateboard actually"

How likely do you think these places are to be unintendedly used?

"Apart from the break dancers, skateboarders and perhaps children, we don't witness that much spontaneity in Donau"

If you have to use this space yourself, what would you use it for?

"We have the chance to be so close to the Danube and the Donaupark that, to be honest, we are not too keen on staying in the concrete jungle. we'd rather walk for a few minutes rather than staying stuck here. So we think that those things (shown on the pictures) could happen anywhere but it would need another context"

Would you say that places in Donau City are generally underused? If so, why?

"We would say yes globally, yes. After 7pm, the place empties out so fast. It is a work place you know.. People that do not live here tend to leave right after work. But for us living here, we really enjoy this calm and peaceful environment. It is pleasant to have so much space and not so many people, especially when you're a kid."

Do you feel "excluded from the rest of Vienna?"

"As we told you before, we go to the city center everyday with the U-bahn and once you take off the mental boundary it is actually not that far. And in the end, it is highly appreciable to come back home where there is no noise and such a proximity to leisure areas."

Female, between 40 and 50 years old, not a resident, she has been working at the Café/Restaurant Donaucity for a month.

She is on her cigarette break at 18.30 on a Monday afternoon, sunny weather but nice in the shadow.

She says she doesn't know the area well, but she thinks it's grey, there are no flowers and it is boring. Looking at the pictures, she says that the picture in the middle (where two of us are playing ping-pong on the green space) does not represent Donau City in the right light. She comments how she would never live here.

She says that she has seen people and kids playing football around the café, on the concrete, but never on the green areas. She doesn't recognize the exact locations of the three pictures properly. She doesn't think it is likely that people would use the spaces the same way as shown on the pictures, engaging in some absurd activities in unintended places, but she would play ping-pong in the green like we did.

She believes the area of Donau City is underused because there are no shops on the main roads, no boutiques or small imbiss, to go out and look around a bit; "you have nothing here!", she adds.

When she arrives to Donau City with the U-bahn in the morning, she walks straight to work and back to the station once her shift is over, she never stops in the area after work or goes walking around in her breaks. Only once she stopped after work to watch a Portugal football match at a restaurant close to her job place, just because she wanted to see the match and there was no TV at the café where she works.

She insists that the area is not interesting for her and that the design is wrong. When there are storms or strong wind it is a mess, flower pots fall from the buildings and she reports the story of a woman that fell down from a building few years ago. Small families live around the area, but the flats are a bit too expensive.

On the spot where one of our photo series was made (bamboo bench), a woman in her late sixties was sitting down and relaxing, it was late afternoon, 19pm. She has been a resident of Donau City for more than 15 years and she knows well the neighbourhood.

She still remembers how the site looked like when she firstly moved in. Not all the buildings were finished at that time and, to her surprise, buying a flat this close to the riverside was not that expensive. She is currently retired, but she used to work in a bank, while nowadays she enjoys doing photography and journalism.

When we asked her to comment the 3 pictures that we chose, she pointed out the ping-pong in an open green space, saying how she likes that one the most.

How likely do you think places in Donau City are to be unintendedly used?

"Not much. There are skateboarders here, but I've never seen people playing ping pong or sunbathing here. These things never happen because many people who live in Donaucity don't spend that much time in the public spaces here. They commute by car or by metro, so they just pass by on their way from work to their home. People don't communicate that much with each other. Some of them tried building some community social life at the beginning, but that stopped."

What is the reason behind that? Is it somehow related to the design of the public spaces or is it due to the people?

"I think it's due to the people. Although I do think it is not perfectly designed, at the same time I don't think it's a sleeping city like Seestadt. Seestadt is isolated city, people stay there and never go to other places. Here, people don't stay, but they move around the city, because the city center is very close by metro."

So, would you say that places in Donau City are generally underused?

"Yes. For example, this playground for kids is always empty."

Why?

"Because not so many people live in this building next to it. Flats are too expensive, which makes this building half empty, people can't afford to live there."

Do you like living here?

"Yes, I do.. But I grew up in the first district of Vienna, in the middle of the city. Although it's nice here, I prefer to live in the city, because during the weekend it's really dead. Also, there is not much green here, except, of course, the Donaupark. "

INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS

We conducted four interviews in total – one interview each. All interviews were very insightful and interesting for our research purposes. We interviewed two women – one woman who commutes to Donau City to work there and has done so for a month only. The second woman had retired to Donau City and lived there 16 years after working in the banking sector in the 1st District. We also interviewed one man who was at the DC Tower for some days working for a Nissan conference in the capacity of cameraman filming adverts for Nissan's new cars. Our final interviewees were a group of three young men (students) who live in Donau City and thus know the area and what goes on quite well.

This varied sample of interviewees in age, sex, profession and relation to Donau City gave us a wealth of interesting insights. For example, one of the most interesting facts we discovered while talking to the group of three young men who lived in Donau City was that there were in fact spaces being appropriated for unintended uses – and specifically for play. They pointed to dance practices that occur in the evening in a public space where the dancers use the reflective surfaces of the buildings as mirrors for their practice sessions. This came as a welcome surprise to us who had thought that such unintended reinterpretation of spaces for play were non-existent in Donau City. They also said that they rather liked the large empty spaces because it felt open and uncrowded.

This sentiment also resonated with the English photographer working for Nissan and passing through Donau City who felt that the large, empty, almost 'apocalyptic' feeling of the area was not necessarily to be interpreted in a negative sense. He argued that people could have fun in these areas, especially skateboarders. He also revealed that Nissan saw Donau City as an ideal place to shoot its advertisement for its new cars which gave us an insight into the profile of companies that inhabit the grand buildings; and moreover confirmed in small part our perception of Donau as vast, empty, and technologically advanced – 'ideal' for advertising cars.

The woman who comes to Donau City to work in a café was very much in agreement that much of Donau is empty and unused. She said that kids and people interact and play outside the cafe where she works but she doesn't see much of that going on anywhere else. She attributed this lack of activity to a lack of "small shops" in the area that would attract people as well as the absence of accessible green space. She confirmed that in her view, unintended uses of space for play was not really going on in Donau City.

The lady that was sitting on her own on the bench and who has been a resident of Donau City for long shared the same impressions of a social space being rather empty; she described the average resident of the area as following an everyday pattern made of transport-work-home, thus not engaging with each other in the streets or in community activities in the open space.

ARCHIVE



4



60370
17

5



6



carolina



kim

10



12



11



sara

ARCHIVE DETAILS

	Person/Institution	Collection	Location	Date	Title	Comment	Source
1	Fritz Kern	ÖNB Bildarchiv und Grafiksammlung		1979	Wiener UNO-City	Picture of the ancient Donau City Kirche before the change of style.	http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/baa389568
2	Joe J Heydecker	ÖNB Bildarchiv und Grafiksammlung		1988	Vienna International Centre	View on Donau city from the River showing the UNO part before the second round of development	http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/baa16844705
3	Geodatenviewer der Stadtvermessung Wien	Archives of Vienna's Orthophotos		1956	Orthophoto	Ortophoto dating back from 1956 where Donauinsel did not exist, highlighting the fast process of construction	https://www.wien.gv.at/ma41datenviwer/public/start.aspx
4		Bilderdienst der Stadt Wien		04.09.1960	Schrägluftaufnahme	Digitalization of film photograph: Aerial view Wagramer Street; Schüttaustraße; Bretteldorf (today UNO-City) showing how 50 years ago the area of Donau City	https://www.wien.gv.at/actaproweb2/benutzung/archive.xhtml?id=Stueck++be8efcb9-7377-4275-b219-383aeba5f3c1VERA#Stueck-be8efcb9
5	Otto Simoner	Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv Austria, Donaustadt, 1965 - 1969	Inventarnummer 232.502A(B)	5.1966	Wien 22, Donaupark	Café's table facing the Donauturm, somehow showing that the area was a location for leisure time	http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Pages/ImageDetail.aspx?p_iBildID=1924586
6	Hans Siegenfeld	Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv Austria	Inventarnummer 400.051A(B)	04.05.1974	Wien 22, UNO-City	UNO-City in construction, seen from the Kaiserwasser basin.	http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Pages/ImageDetail.aspx?p_iBildID=1937404
7	ONB	Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv Austria, Donaustadt, 1975 - 1979	448.122A (B)	1975	Wien 22, Donaupark	View over a water basin with water lilies against the Danube.	http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Pages/ImageDetail.aspx?p_iBildID=1925053
8	ONB	Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv Austria, Donaustadt, 1975 - 1979	Pk 3453, 13	08/23/1979	Wien 22, Opening of UNO-City	Consecration by Cardinal King.	http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Pages/ImageDetail.aspx?p_iBildID=1559072
9	Karoly, Fotostudio	Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv Austria, Donaustadt, 1950 - 1954	506.732C	1952	Wien 22, Donaustadtstraße	Facade of the corner house with the Steinbrechergasse over this obliquely from the right against the Gerambgasse during road construction works	http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Pages/ImageDetail.aspx?p_iBildID=1925064
10	Kern, Fritz	ÖNB / core, F.	FO505130 / 08/19	1979	UNO-City (ausen); die ganze Anlage, im Vordergrund ein Schwan auf der Donau	The river entrance of Donau City before the sight was changed	http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Pages/ImageDetail.aspx?p_iBildID=1160173
11	WAIS - Vienna Archive Information System	Bilderdienst der Stadt Wien		18.07.1994	Oblique aerial view	Birds view perspective on Donau City in 1994	https://www.wien.gv.at/actaproweb2/benutzung/archive.xhtml?id=Stueck++16bd4f48-b004-4ba8-a9ba-3h374e3c2cf8VERA#Stueck-16bd4f48
12	Dominique Perrault Architecture, Archdaily	DC Towers I + II / Dominique Perrault Architecture		09 Apr 2012.	N/N	Architecture plan of the Donau City showing 2 DC towers, among which 1 of them was never built.	http://www.archdaily.com/224192/dc-towers-i-ii-dominique-perrault-architecture/www-bever-co-at

COMMENTING THE ARCHIVE

The ambient pattern that comes to mind when looking at the archive pictures is the constant change that seems to characterize the area of Donau City through time. The evolutive landscape often features construction sites, cranes, both for the construction of the Vienna International Center (VIC)/UNO-City by architect Johann Staber in the seventies and for the development of Donau City in the nineties. Currently, the area is still undergoing construction representing the constant flux of the landscape in Donau City in the past and today.

Aerial views from the the fifties and seventies show settlements in the area. It is interesting to see that the buildings were located far from the riverbank of the Danube as the Neue Donau did not exist at that time. The dredging of the Danube actually made the riverfront visible today.

Featuring in the background of some of the archive pictures found, the Donauturm, built in 1964 for the occasion of the Viennese International Horticultural Show, suggests an image of the area as a place for leisure activities.

A comparison between archive pictures and the contemporary landscape highlights the development of the area in terms of structures, blocks and mobility. A general expansion can be noticed but in particular the gained access to the riverside ultimately changes the image of Donau-City. The complete makeover of the church as seen in one of the archive picture is remarkable.

One of the picture chosen as 'archive' it is actually the proposed master plan designed by Dominique Perrault Architecture studio for the two DC towers, of which only one has been realized. A particular of the rendering shows individuals in the public area at the bottom of the towers and white tents that might be either market stands or sunshades; here we can create a link with our production of images, in which we challenge the idea of Donau City as a new city-centrality and as a place for recreation.

CONCLUSION

Finally, it is important to point out the limitations of our research, which might have influenced our final results. Due to time constraints, it was impossible to be present at the places that we observed in all times of the day. It was evident that Donau City was more used in the afternoon hours than in the time when we first arrived to visit the place, at noon.

On the other side, like in every other research using visual methodology, when you depict one aspect of the reality, at the same time you have to exclude its other parts. The approach we took while doing this research was clearly inspired by our first impressions of that precise moment, that could be subjective to change, depending on a different context.

Our interview insights showed us how this space is pleasant for some people, while unpleasant to others. At the same time, our starting assumption that residents of Donau City do not use vacant public spaces to creatively appropriate them or use them for purposes that they were not initially designed for, was in one case proven wrong. The break dancers using the reflection of modernist buildings, using the cold, mirror-looking like surface of the built, concrete environment, and appropriating them for something very alive and creative definitely challenged our first preconceptions.

However, the research that we conducted put more lights on the reasons why public spaces in this area are not completely successful. The next step in this direction would definitely be more direct approach in activating the public places in Donau City, with direct interactions in the space (for example, placing a bench on unused place and observing reactions of residents). In the end, more insights on the project itself, more time and better access to the photo archives would definitely be helpful to better understand the local context of Donau City.