

COOP
DESIGN
RESEARCH

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PROGRAM

SITUATED-STAGED- SPONTANEOUS PLAY-PLAYGROUND- PLAY ELEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The importance of the research dedicated to the notion of a playground and its design lies in the fact that, it is a contradiction between: what we think a playground is, and how much we really understand what a playground could be. Most common phenomenon presently; in the urban environment; is the phenomenon of catalogue playgrounds, that are designed to serve a particular entertainment. I question, is there a space for the process, for the in-between, for the interpretations and for the appropriation of play? Is there a space to imagine new concepts of playgrounds, different than, what designers considered so far? What kind of observations and studies are necessary to undergo, once working on the playground project?

I argue, that play is an activity happening in the particular moment, and in this process of play situation, playground is constructed. The moment of play is the creative act of children, while in the contemporary playground situation, we see that playground is defined by adults. Adults decide where play will take place, city decides how many playgrounds the neighbourhood needs, industry decides what a playground is and how a play should be performed. In some occasions, architects and designers have an opportunity to participate and express what would a playground represents to them. In the meanwhile, kids still manage to surprise us when playing in the areas not intended for play, inventing unexpected scenarios for games. These games transform the spaces into a **'ceremony of initiation'**¹. Street furniture as much as play elements, can trigger the initiation for various games and participate in children's ways of meaning-making. Naturally I question: Can a playground situation be designed?

Aldo van Eyck focused on creating a space of the 'in-between', the situation of a dialogue between children and the city, children and objects - play elements, children and other children; inhabitants of the city. This thesis discusses what makes the play object an object where multiplicity of meanings, games can be performed. How these objects succeed in opening up a dialogue with a child, and not just predetermine the defined particular activity or use. Playground is defined by space in-between (**'between this street corner and that school building'**) and also by the time in between (**'between when the school finishes and parents come to pick their children up'**).² Children's imagination is stimulated only, when there is created a space and time for the imagination to be triggered. In all the other cases where children are instructed how to play, how to use and how to live, I find a playground meaning to be lost.

¹ Dargan, Amanda, and Steve Zeitlin. *City Play*. 1st edition. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990, 29.

² *Ibid*, 31.

This thesis discusses three stages of the playground shift. What started as a natural appropriation of the street for the purpose of play by children, was later on carried by a city responsibility of providing a playground designed by architects, sculptors and artists, is presently in the hands of catalogue playground companies. The interesting fact is that one was not replaced by the other, but currently we see all of the three scenarios co-existing. In my research, I will be looking at the playground situations in these three scenarios through the lens of psychology observations of Martha Muchow and my own observation field notes captured, shared and archived on Instagram, as written texts, as well as video documentations.