PLAY OUTSIDE THE PLAYGROUND

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0.1. Abstract

The playground is an urban phenomenon that emerged after the industrial revolution. As this paper argues, the notion of play extends outside of this physical boundary. The paper presents cases of play outside the playground and explores the relations between play and the city, a research field that begins with artistic and social movements in the mid-20th century and moreover has a leg in feminist behavioral theory. In recent years, the notion of 'urban play' has become relevant through labels such as "the playable city". Focusing on three practices of urban play; street sports, pervasive games, and activism, I find that these provoke debates on public behavior, urban design and further social questions. Manifested in those practices, I present how play can be a means of 'claiming space' in the city.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. What is a play environment?

When we speak of "play environments" of the city today, it is typically referred to as specific sites. Sites we call *playgrounds*. A playground is a clearly defined place designed exclusively for play. It is often surrounded by a fence or other spatial separators that make it very clear when you enter a playground. Playgrounds are also often strategically located in housing areas and schoolyards.

However, *play* and *environment* has existed longer than the playground. Political scientist, urban planner and playground-researcher Gabriela Burkhalter (2016, p.13-14) states that the playground was a "byproduct of the industrialized city of the 20th century". After child labor was regulated, a new need for supervision of children emerged, followed by increased focus on leisure time and public health. Until the industrialization, play was not directed to any specific environment. Yet this does not imply that play did not exist. We could say that the play environment was equal to the urban environment.

The playground functions as a meeting place for children and is still today considered a key arena for their development. Studies of children's behavior throughout history has established that children's play has a great importance in developing the adult personality (Dattner, 1969). The playground is a safe space where children can try new things, learn to take risks and overcome fears, invent games, make friends and claim free spaces (Burkhalter, 2016).

Play is often associated with younger children. In adult society, *play* usually means participating in an organized activity such as playing sports or cards, you never *just play* (McKinnon & Roy, 2017, p. 258). Landscape architect Elizabeth Cummings (2017, p. 21) argues that adults spend less time just playing because it is not an acceptable way for an adult to spend their time. As humans mature and their understanding of the world enlarges, their 'dwelling' advances and becomes more civilized (ibid). I believe there is a lack of words to fully describe and comprehend the different practices of being in public space. However, can an extended understanding of what play can embody, be meaningful to explain more ways of dwelling in the urban environment? In this paper I seek to find suitable expressions and with a broader language perhaps achieve a broader understanding of play's potential as a spatial action.

1.2. What does it mean to 'claim space'?

To 'claim space' is a certain way of occupying of a space. It is a concept that ties to both emotional and physical aspects. The concept could be described as to behave with a feeling of ownership towards a space. A manifestation of the right to *be*, and to belong.

To 'claim space' is a concept rooted in modern feminist movements and can be heard celebrated by Beyoncé and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Flawless* (2014). The track samples a section of Adihie's TED talk where she talks about how girls are taught to "shrink themselves" to not threaten the man. Some call this opposite action 'ceding space' (VanCourt, 2021) which means to give away space. According to coach Rachel Beohm, the act of claiming space is tightly linked to confidence and self-esteem. In this sense, to 'claim space' is to take your place in the world and not apologize for your existence (Nicholls, 2019). In recent feminist literature, it is also said to be a collective action – to claim space for others to join (Nicholls, 2019; VanCourt, 2021). A similar critique is raised in critical theory, by researchers focusing on the contested character of public space. Many urban design interventions throughout modern history can be associated with privatization and commercialization of public space. The possibility of groups to exercise their 'right to the city', is then reduced through design choices, limiting the city's imaginative potential as a space for collective action (Lefebvre, 1967/1996; Harvey, 2013)

In search of an understanding of how we use our urban environment, I borrow these concepts as sources of inspiration.

1.3. Research question

With a point of departure in the playground, the notion of play and behavioral theory, this paper seeks to ask: *what spatial actions emerge when the play environments of the city extend beyond the playground?*

1.4. Method and theory

To investigate play outside the playground, I have based the paper on several readings on the topics of play and urban play. As my main literature reference, I have actively used the work of professor in digital play and design Miguel Sicart, "Play Matters" (2014), assisted by other researchers on the topics. To back up my arguments, I have used articles and books relating to the broader research field of play, urbanism, and urban design history. To further understand the relations between 'play and the city' and the discourse on this research topic, I have touched upon the work of French Marxist-sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. To identify play

outside the playground, I have conducted case studies on three prominent practices of urban play: parkour, pervasive gaming and activism. I have used social media channels to get a better understanding of their practices.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. Play and appropriation

Miguel Sicart states that "play is creative when it is taking over, or occupying a context" (2014, p. 71) According to Sicart, a significant characteristic of play is its capacity of appropriating environments. In his view, playgrounds become environments specifically created for appropriative behavior. A playground is often recognized by having certain elements. The elements come in various scales, colors and materiality. The tower, the slide, the swing and the sandbox are common elements in a playground. The naming of elements helps communicate what they are and how they function.

The names can further be seen as assumptions for how the elements will be used, not as a reflection of the actual use (Russell, 2017, p. 220). After exploring the intended function of an element, children often begin to investigate potential beyond the proper use. A slide is used for sliding as the name suggests, but it is can also be used for climbing up backwards or become cover for a hiding place underneath (ibid). These are examples of the appropriative nature of play and creative results that follow from it. Moreover, Sicart (2014, p. 55) points out that there is a need to be critical of spaces designed for play. Due to existing norms and regulations, playgrounds tend to favor certain types of play above others. These decisions could be based on a fear of accidents, instead of being based on the potential of play as an "expressive way of being in the world" (ibid). However, play still finds its ways of creative appropriation. Improper use of equipment is said to be the main reason for accidents in playgrounds (Russell, 2017, p. 220).

Having established appropriation as a fundamental quality of play, Sicart (2014, p. 55) implies that play also has the power to appropriate urban environments outside the playground. Sicart (2014, p. 27) defines being *playful* as "being able to appropriate a context that is not created or intended for play". Sicart's statements lead to an interest to further explore the topic of 'play outside the playground'.

2.2. What is 'urban play'?

Urbanist, writer and researcher Scott Burnham (2008) argues that all cities are the same when reduced to the simplest elements. All cities have networks, streets, sidewalks, buildings, public spaces (Burnham, 2008; de Lange and de Waal, 2019). They argue that it is when the urban environment meets the individual citizen who humanizes the landscape of the city, that the spatial experience of it becomes meaningful (Burnham, 2008). In other words, the individuals of a city give the city character. By presenting art that intervene with the built environment, he encourages creative citizens to influence their surroundings. He describes the artworks as 'unauthorized interventions' of public space and categorizes them as expressions of urban play.

An example of an "interventionist" presented in a different book is artist Alex Villar who ignores the city's spatial codes in his video performance "Temporary Occupations" (2001). The artwork is a series of trespasses where he seeks to demonstrate a potential in the organization of urban spaces by exploring the spatiality of "invisible" spaces in the public sphere (Thompson & Sholette, 2004, p. 66).

Temporary Occupations film still, 2001. Courtesy of Alex Villar.

Urban play can be understood in many ways, but in the context of this paper it should not be confused with 'urban playgrounds' or other types of contained or organized play in urban contexts. Although it occurs in the city, an organized game of soccer on a soccer field is not urban play. Rather, unorganized street sports such as skateboarding and parkour can be examples of urban play. Another example is the game Pokémon GO which by crossing the borders between the physical and digital world turns the entire built environment into a chaotic playing field. Social scientist Eunice Castro Seixas (2021) fittingly describes urban play as

"spontaneous and non-instrumental" play activities for all ages. Urban play can then be understood as playing *with* the city, in process questioning established norms about how to act in public.
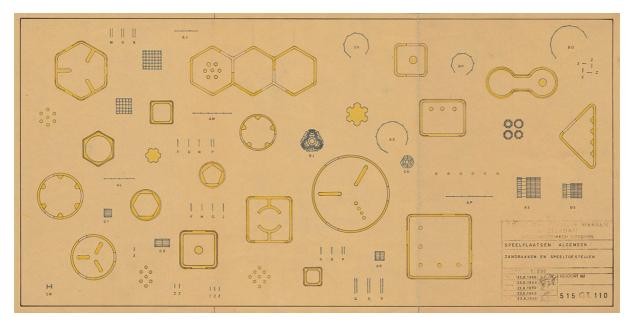
2.3. A research field we could call 'play-urbanism'

Although the label 'urban play' has only recently been established, it draws on ideas that derived in the mid 20th century. To better understand the potential of urban play it is necessary to touch upon a research field we could call 'play-urbanism'. This field is wide-ranging and crosses topics of architecture, urbanism, art, sociology, psychology and politics.

When the welfare state developed after WW2, the civic society emerged as a major actor. The goal of civic society was to promote the local needs of a community (Avermaete & Gosseye, 2021, p. 232). They were generally non-profit and voluntary and began to form new communities and meeting places in the cities. In Denmark, it led to an emergence of playgrounds specifically for housing developments (Burkhalter, 2016, 21). In Emdrup, landscape architect C. Th. Sørensen generated *skrammellegepladsen* (1943), a so-called junk-playground. The junk-playground was a physical result of combining avant-garde pedagogic theory, such as the ideas of Fröbel, Montessori and Steiner (Avermaete & Gosseye, 2021, p. 232). Sørensen developed the junk-playground upon an idea of the urban playground as a natural, rural environment (Burkhalter, 2016, p. 185). This way children in the city could get a closer experience with nature which was understood as favorable for their development.

Around the junk playground, a mounted hedge was planted that underlined the separation between the playspace and the urban environment. One reason for this was to mark the children's domain (Avermaete & Gosseye, 2021, p. 232), another was to shield the neighborhood from play activities and keep the area tidy (Henriksen, 2006, p. 5).

Meanwhile The Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck believed that minimalistic playground equipment would enhance creativity of children (de Roode, 2002). Amsterdam suffered a "scattered demolition" after WW2 due to bombings, leaving vacant plots across the city (Avermaete & Gosseye, 2021, p. 169). Aldo van Eyck was hired to design public play spaces for children in these scattered vacant plots. By leaving the play structures open to interpretation, van Eyck believed children would play unrestricted and free which stimulated their imagination (ibid).

Collection of minimalist structures by Aldo van Eyck. Courtesy of Aldo van Eyck Archive

The playgrounds of both Sørensen and van Eyck are considered radical inventions that shaped playground development worldwide. However, despite their pedagogical radicalness, it could be argued that they were still constraining the play by keeping them in contained sites.

A reformist call for play to get out of the fence later broke out in France. Play was considered a catalyst for a new type of society by the Situationists (Shepard, 2011, p. 29) who were inspired by children's play in playgrounds and the ideas of the French Marxist-sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. The Situationists noticed that the desire to play and create had not been held down by war, fascism or capital (Shepard, 2011, p. 28), rather a desire to "re-claim" play emerged as a counter action to the hierarchal society (Vaneigem, 1967/2003 as cited in Shepard, 2011, p. 28).

After building up in the crossing fields of art to sociology and politics (with Dada and surrealism, to the Situationists), Henri Lefebvre published the manifesto "the Right to the City" in 1967. The notion of having a 'right to the city' is explained as a collective right to change and shape the city and the process of urbanization (Lefebvre, 1967/1996; Harvey, 2008; Seixas, 2021).[1] Lefebvre's "playful Marxist urbanism" (Shepard, 2011, p. 30) calls for cities to provide means for expressing "jouissance" and "lived moments", through opportunities for pleasure, free movement, protest, carnival, actions and strikes (Merrifield, 2002, p. 84; Shepard, 2011, p. 29).

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[1] As a whole, 'The right to the city' can be seen as a framework for understanding urbanization and urban life in relation to the growth of capitalism (Seixas, 2021).

He was concerned that without spaces for these activities the city would become unimaginative (Shepard, 2011, p. 29). Lefebvre also asked for the citizens themselves to improvise and claim their spaces as a part of the right to urban life (ibid).

In line with Seixas' (2021) proposals, is it possible to see urban practices such as young people 'hanging out' in various ways, or imaginative street sports such as parkour, as not only appropriation of public space, but also a means of claiming a part of a "right to the city"? How do forms of contemporary urban play challenge our imagination of what urban life is, and what it should and could be?

2.4. Practices

In this section I will further identify play outside the playground by presenting three social practices that can be labeled as 'urban play': the street sport parkour, pervasive games, and finally, activism. Common for all is their improvised and fleeting use of the city. The examples are chosen because they can radically confront the urban environment and playfully challenge pragmatic spatial behavior.

2.4.1. The street sport parkour

Parkour is the act of running through an area, using acrobatic techniques to pass elements in the built environment. Practitioners, called 'traceurs', interacts dynamically with the city (Brown, 2007) and turns architectural elements into expressive instruments. They climb walls instead of thinking about them as barriers, and leaps over fences instead of walking around them (Balan, 2013). It can be argued that it is in urban spaces that the most interesting routes to express oneself are to be found (Sicart, 2014, p. 55). Parkour first emerged from the banlieues of Paris in the 1980's and is by some understood as a transgressive movement towards the brutalist architecture that characterized those areas (Waern, Balan & Nevelsteen, 2012).

There are multiple facets to parkour, however an interesting understanding of the activity is presented by researcher and traceur Stephen Saville (2008). He views parkour as a practice of "reimagining place" and stresses the quality not having a specific plan for action. Instead, parkour seeks new ways to playfully engage with places. Through creativity, curiosity and the imagination of a parkour traceur, space is continuously in the process of becoming and never 'finished' in an explorative sense. This essential quality gives parkour the ability to transform space (Parker, Fournier and Reedy, 2007) by unlimitedly changing its functional significance. This is a quite thought-provoking environmental philosophy because it questions the

architectural notion of programmed spaces. Researchers in play and games Annika Waern, Elena Balan & Kim Nevelsteen (2012) links this core idea back to the Situationist movement, and their concept of 'derivé', which is explained as unplanned journeys through the urban environment that changes the perception of the city.

Saville (2008) also argues that an important aspect of parkour is practice and repetition. By trying the same routine over and over, the traceur gets more and more familiar with the space and the spatial elements. He argues how a sense of familiarity towards a place can lead to a sense of ownership towards it. Another significant part of parkour is the social and spontaneous aspects of the practice. Groups often gather on short notice and collaborates to lift the progression of the individual (Waern, Balan & Nevelsteen, 2012).

I have found that the parkour community spreads information on several social media platforms and forums. The Instagram-account @cph.pk.spots anonymously publishes images of places, 'spots', in Copenhagen, that they experience as places with high potential for parkour practice. Some of the spots published on the account are playgrounds or parks designed for street sports.[2] However, half of the posts are showing more or less unremarkable spaces of the city. Places with objects that serve conventional purposes, such as a staircase or ramp. These spaces and objects are habitual in our urban environment and seem standard to most of us. However, they obtain added meaning in the meeting with parkour practitioners.

An example is presented when parkour traceur Saville (2008) writes about the appearance of an electricity box in a neighborhood. The box has always been there, but when the traceur notices its presence and leaps over it, it receives new purpose. Parkour's way of appropriating the environment is always temporary. Parkour borrows spaces and objects for a certain amount of time, before returning them to the city (Rawlinson & Guaralda, 2011, p. 22). When practice is over the electricity box is again just an electricity box.

2.4.2. Pervasive games

Pervasive means 'present everywhere' and is a concept that often refers to mixed reality activities that expand the boundaries of play. 'Pervasive' is applied to explain the environment of the game. Pervasive games can take place in all spaces of a city, which potentially makes the entire city the play environment.

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[2] Places such as the "Game Street Mekka" on Enghavevej and "Konditaget Lüders" in Nordhavn are both posted.

"Can you see me now?" was one of the earliest pervasive games exploring mixed reality. It was a chase game based on the principals of "hide and seek". It was created in 2001 by Blast Theory, a British art collective that creates interactive art to explore social and political questions. It was a media art performance with game elements (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011). The experiment combined mapping, real time communication between local and remote participants and GPS tracking. Blast Theory runners equipped with walkie talkies, PDA's[3] and GPS-devices moved around in a physical city, while international players would join online from anywhere in the world (ibid). Online players could access a virtual representation of the same city. In the online world, players would see the runners as dots on a 2D-map. At the same time, the runners had access to the online player's position on a similar map on their PDA-screens. Runners in the city then chased and captured online players by following their position, while the online players ran from them in the virtual world. An online player was caught when the runner stood within 5 m of them (ibid, p. 69).
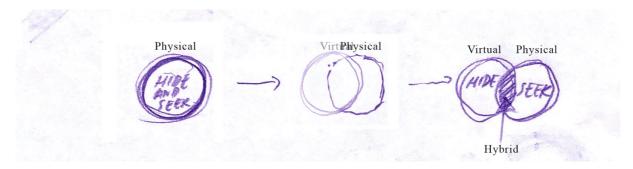

Diagram explaining the main principal of "Can you see me now?"

The game performance was revolutionary at the time due to its broadening experimentation with space. It became a pioneering example with this "split game space" (ibid), or rather merged game space: by overlaying the two worlds, players online and runners in the physical world shared the same 'hybrid space'. Yet the player's experiences of the playspace differed. The runners on the streets faced hilly landscapes, traffic lights and other unexpected barriers. These elements did not exist in the online world (Blast Theory, 2005). The variable obstacles made the relations between players more complex.

A more recent example of a widespread pervasive game is "Pokémon GO". Pokémon GO is played on smartphones and uses 'augmented reality' (AR) as a feature. AR is a concept that explores extensions of the real world (Azuma, 1999). In AR the virtual layer is a supplement to

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[3] PDA stands for Personal Digital Assistant.

the physical world, not a replacement of it (ibid). The essence in Pokémon GO is to catch virtual Pokémon while exploring real life locations in the physical world. When travelling around in "your own" world and by using the geographical location of the smartphone, new Pokémon appear for the player to catch. Using AR, Pokémon GO gives the player the possibility to place the Pokémon they find in the live scene.

Pokémon GO has been praised for getting young people out on the streets and in motion. Another effect is that the game can lead the players to discover new places of the city, that they otherwise would not have gone to (Jenssen, 2018, p. 21).

2.4.3. Activism – a third example of urban play

In art history, political messages have been communicated through a playful aesthetic in both dadaism and surrealism (Sicart, 2014, p. 72). The surrealists wanted to remove themselves from established ideas of production and consumption by 'playing with' society's values in controversial expressions (Shepard, 2011, p. 28). In the meeting of art and play there was a potential for liberation (Shepard, 2011, p. 28).

"It was in fact from art that play broke free. The eruption was called Dada" (Situationist Raoul Vaneigmen, 1967/2003 as cited in Shepard, 2011, p. 25).

Through activism, play can be used as a means of expressing political views. The appropriative and creative nature of play can result in a potential to transform the city and disrupt established norms (Seixas, 2021). The rebellious action "Camover"[4] that took place in Berlin in 2013 was camouflaged as an urban game but was a clear political protest towards the surveillance state.

Henri Lefebvre referred to previous revolutions as 'festivals', including the French Revolution (1789) and the events of the Paris Commune (1871) (Shepard, 2011, p. 30; McDonough, 2009, p. 26). According to geographer Andy Merrifield (2002, p. 83), Lefebvre pointed to revolutions and festivals as prime moments of spontaneity. In his view, festivals did not have to be a contrast to everyday life. Festivals were representations of the Dionysiac[5] side of humans, that only differed in the way they were organized and what behavior was tolerated (ibid).

While contemplating the urban future and drawing on the ideas especially seen in rural French festivals, Lefebvre called for actions of play to enter everyday urban life (ibid). He
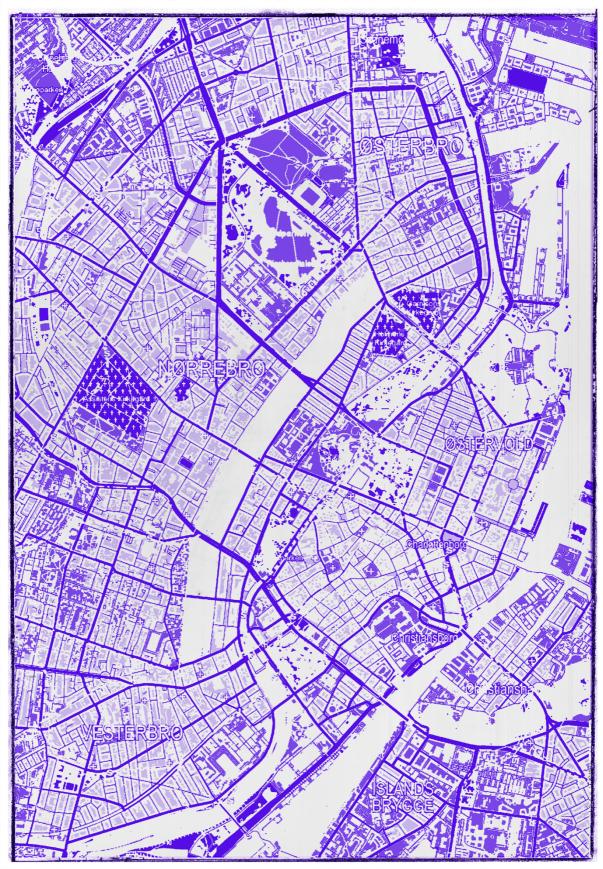
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[4] Read more about Camover here: https://camover.noblogs.org/spielidee/idea-of-the-game/
[5] Dionysiac relates to the sensual, spontaneous, and emotional aspects of human nature (Oxford dictionary of English).

wished for the city to remain a place for art and ideas and pointed to the streets as a place for spontaneity, festivals and parties (Shepard, 2011, p.30). The streets became an important public scene for both Lefebvre and the Situationists, and the spatial actions that would play out here was imagined to be a spontaneous "radical theater" (Merrifield, 2002, p. 83).

Every now and then, these theaters play out in the streets of cities. "Critical Mass" is a semi-organized political movement, where hundreds of cyclists ride together through urban centers to reclaim the streets as a safe space for biking (Stevens, 2007, p. 85).

Another contemporary case of playful activism is "Picnic the Streets". In June 2012 an action to reclaim city space took place on Place de la Bourse in Brussels (Van Parijs, 2022). The action was based on an opinion piece by philosopher Philippe Van Parijs and drove thousands of people to gather simultaneously for a grand picnic in the heavily trafficked square. Due to an election the following fall, the political parties backed up the action after it gained popularity through a Facebook-event (Van Parijs, 2016). As a result, the boulevard that previously hosted a four-lane motorway, became car-free (Van Parijs, 2022).

The street networks of central Copenhagen, 1:25000.

The research of the three practices have led to two significant findings. I have designated the findings into two categories, as either I. Conflicts or II. Obstacles. Illustrated by the following diagram, I found that these two concepts emerge when play extends from its assigned borders and generates tension with conventional uses of public space. I use the term "power" to describe the potentials for change implied by the forms of tension in urban play. I will return to this notion as part of the discussion.

I. Conflicts

I have found that urban play can lead to conflicts between user groups. This is illustrated by a case I have called:

"The battle at the garden of the Royal Library"

In the summer of 2016, when the game had just been launched, the garden of the Royal Library became a hub for Pokémon GO players due to the many Pokéstops located here (Possing, 2016). Pokéstops are one of the most important game elements in Pokémon GO. At a Pokéstop, the player retrieves useful items for hunting Pokémon. In addition, they are often located nearby

cultural and historical places in the physical world.[6] A Pokéstop can only be accessed when a player is physically present at the stop, which is partly responsible for driving players to visit new areas of the city. Pokéstops can also be used to attract Pokémon through placing so-called "lures". Lures are placed by individual players, however, all players surrounding the Pokéstop would benefit from them. This is how a "Poké-hub" emerges, and this happened in the garden at the Royal Library in 2016, which led to a conflict between different user groups that hit the newspapers and provoked debates.

The garden at the Royal Library is a sanctuary known for well-groomed flower beds and a central water basin. Both tourists and local people come here for a breathing space. The garden has been a public space for "something so unmodern as tranquility, blossoming beauty and birds' twittering" (Possing, 2016). [7]

("The Calm Garden of the Royal Library" (Google Maps, 2022))

In August 2016, the tranquility was disturbed by urban players. The garden experienced a transformation, when up to 400 players gathered simultaneously to play (Rasmussen, 2016). Players from outside of Copenhagen would take the train in to the city to visit the Pokémon hub (Rasmussen, 2016). The facilitators of the garden had to put up extra resources such as mobile toilets to accommodate the sudden "festival" that had emerged (Grøn and Jensen, 2016). Something that first appeared as an exciting new phenomenon, after a while became a problem concerning whose public space it was and how one should behave in it.

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[6] In the Campus of the Royal Academy at Holmen, there are several Pokéstops; the statue of the founder of the Academy and the brick sculpture by Thomas Bo Jensen are examples.
[7] translated from Danish by author

An opinion piece was written by a frequent user of the garden who was provoked by the player's behavior. It raised the following questions: "Why should the public space pay for the ruthless and boundless behavior of players? How can random game developers decide where festival-, noise- and playgrounds should be situated?" (Possing, 2016).[8] They believed only calm and sophisticated conduct belonged in the garden.

The players, on the other hand, felt that it was their right to be in the space. The garden was a public space and where the play was best. The conflict ended when the game producers relocated two of the Pokéstops, together with a season change that made it less attractive for players to spend time outside (Grøn and Jensen, 2016).
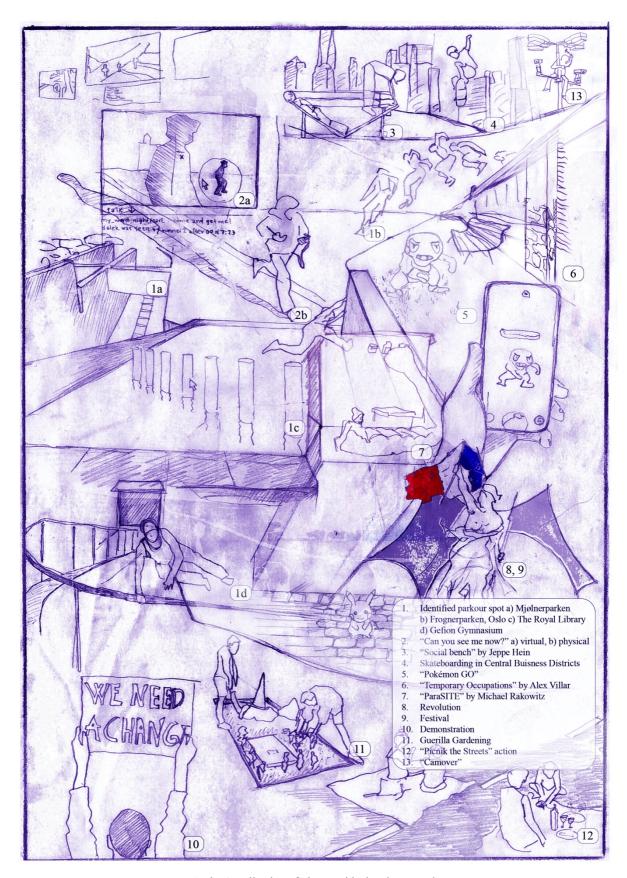
II. Obstacles

For people in general, the elements in our urban environment mostly consist of everyday objects placed beyond contemplation. A building, a staircase, a bus, a sign. For urban players with "parkour vision" (Saville, 2008) these objects can become very important. In both parkour and pervasive gaming, city elements are mentioned as significant features and are by some referred to as *obstacles*.

"I can't go many places without seeing a nice-looking obstacle", as one noted to Saville (2008). As they imply, an obstacle can be almost anything. It can be a small object such as a stone or bench. Obstacles can also be larger scale urban elements such as hills or private property. It can be dynamic elements like traffic lights and busy cars and people. Seen from the perspective of an urban player, all these obstacles are challenges to be completed in order to "level up". The obstacles are reinterpreted as support for amplifying the movements of a traceur (Waern, Balan & Nevelsteen, 2012). For urban players, the play advances when the space gets more complicated (Sicart, 2014). The complexity of a space is depending on its level of obstacles. Therefore, a public space that presents both dynamic and static obstacles is of great value for the practice.

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[8] Translated from Danish by author

The numbered legend in the image reads:

1. Identified parkour spot a) Mjølnerparken
   b) Frognerparken, Oslo c) The Royal Library
   d) Gefion Gymnasium
2. "Can you see me now?" a) virtual, b) physical
3. "Social bench" by Jeppe Hein
4. Skateboarding in Central Buisness Districts
5. "Pokémon GO"
6. "Temporary Occupations" by Alex Villar
7. "ParaSITE" by Michael Rakowitz
8. Revolution
9. Festival
10. Demonstration
11. Guerilla Gardening
12. "Picnik the Streets" action
13. "Camover"

Author's collection of play outside the playground.

3. DISCUSSION

1.1. The power of play

Lefebvre (1967/1996) and Sicart (2014) considers play as a part of all aspects of being human. The transformative and disrupting capacities of spontaneous and creative play are visible in the political actions of social movements, such as in "Picnic the Streets!" (2012) and "Camover" (2013). It also shows in parkour's ability to change perceptions of space and when pervasive games take control of public squares.

In his manifesto, Lefebvre (1967/1996) also stresses the fact that not all types of play have a potential for social change. He critiques the consumer society of using the power of play to promote commercial leisure and "increase urban entrepreneurialism" by creating designated play areas in the city: the playground, the leisure center, the theme park (Seixas, 2021). According to Lefebvre (1967/1996), play has become a product and urban life a commodity in the consumer society.

A common belief in modern society is that something only has essential value when the outcome of it can be measured as growth (Cummins, 2017,). Play is usually linked to health, learning, efficiency, creativeness and innovativeness (Seixas, 2021). These beliefs lead to an understanding of play as valuable only when it is linked to either learning and educational outcome, or as a physical activity promoting health benefits (Cummins, 2017). These values have been taken up by structural systems and are prominent in contemporary urbanism. The notion of "the playable city" has more recently been taken up by some sociologists and urbanists as a response to "the smart city" (Chisik, Nijholt, Schouten & Thibault, 2022). The playable city is an understanding of city-making with the main goal of achieving a place for play, playfulness and games (Seixas, 2021). We also see more and more visible examples of play and playfulness in the built environment. In Copenhagen, projects such as "Konditaget" by JAJA architects (2016) and Israels Plads by Cobe (2014) are public squares that claim to facilitate and promote play for all ages ("Israels Plads", n.d.; "Parking House + Konditaget Lüders", n.d.). I believe that both these examples are misusing 'the power of play' to promote ulterior economic motives and they reduce 'play' to instrumental athletic activities. Pokémon GO was also created with an ultimate goal of generating profits (Rasmussen, 2016) and some justify this because the game had positive health effects on young people.

Although many game producers have profit in the back of their minds, I find that the notion of pervasive gaming has an interesting potential. The tension that emerged in the battle

of the garden in the Royal Library was unargueably unique, unforeseen, and powerful, and lead to a very interesting 'event'. There is also a potential in the added layer of virtual reality that extends the spatiality of the play beyond the physical world, that I have yet to further explore.

Sicart (2014, p. 5) argues that the postmodern society has created a "mechanical" form of play and he thinks there is power in order "to re-claim play" as a reaction to this urban tendency. Architect and researcher Sandi Hilal (2022) calls for suspicion towards notions that we take for granted, such as 'public space is for everyone'. Today, the public space is hosted by the state and we as citizens are guests in it (ibid). This means that the state as hosts can decide what behavior is accepted in public space. By implementing obstacles in urban design furniture, they seek to prevent skateboarders from playing in the street network and homeless people from sleeping on benches. Hilal asks: "how can we enable other frames?"

The 'urban playgrounds' and public spaces we see in cities today, are typically generously furnished with comprehensive programs. But as researcher and urban planner Quentin Stevens (2007, p. 199) points out, some of the best play opportunities can be found in leftover spaces such as alleyways, tunnels, spaces below bridges and staircases, because they are "underdesigned" and unprogrammed. This belief is supported by @cph.pk.spots, whose majority of posts are precisely characterized as unremarkable, "left-over" places. Perhaps it is not so odd that parkour came to be in the so-called "SLOAP"[9] of the modernist housing in the Paris periphery.

But how can urban spaces be drawn to manifest the power and potential of play? Urban public spaces should accomodate and support play, at least according to Lefebvre (1967/1996) who emphasizes the importance of having cities that provide opportunities for pleasure, protests, and free movement, and points to the streets as a place where these radical spatial actions can unfold. However, the design question remains inexplicable, since playful use cannot be predetermined by function but defined through action, as Stevens (2007, p. 216) stresses. Moreover, Stevens concludes that urban design should be loose, fleeting, and incomplete, and that there are interesting opportuntites in risk-taking design that can invite for both exploration and conflict (ibid, p. 219).

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[9] SLOAP=Spaces Left Over After Planning

4. CONCLUSION

The research question that this paper asked was *what spatial actions emerge when the play environment of the city extends beyond the playground?*

The potential of play

When the play environment of the city extends beyond the playground, play takes place between tensions and contradictions of urban social life (Stevens, 2007, p. 2). On this paper I have found that some of these tensions can be described as conflicts, obstacles, and power.

When urban players are faced with obstacles it can lead to unexpected and creative spatial results. Instead of moving away from elements that are supposed to prevent play, urban players confront these challenges (ibid, p. 197) and they become helpful elements that can express identity and recognize new movement patterns in the built environment.

Play can be a method to get to know a space or an area, as we see in parkour and pervasive gaming. Spending meaningful time in a space can also catalyze a sense of ownership towards it and when people with different perceptions and intentions feel a similar level of ownership towards a space, conflicts between them can appear. These conflicts, as the battle in the garden of the Royal Library is an example of, rise important questions towards societal norms about public behavior and who is managing public space. It is important to ask these questions, to be able to discuss social urban futures.

Outside its conventional boundaries, play has shown to have disruptive power. The transformative power of unstructured and spontaneous play has proven to be very forceful in battles for social change, as we have seen in previous revolutions of course, but also in recent political actions such as "Picnic the Streets".

Play can be a request for a struggle towards efficiency, seriousness and technological determinism (Sicart, 2014, p. 5), when it becomes a means to 'claim space' in the public sphere. To 'claim space' was introduced as a feminist concept, used by women to reach a higher level of confidence in personal and professional situations. However, both play and the action of claiming space does not have to have a clear intention, plan, or measurable goal to be valuable. I see potential in the action of 'claiming space' also because it can lead to unmeasurable results, such as feelings of both connectedness to and detachment from 'the bigger picture' that we call society. Play can also just be play, without having to be educational or lead to anything specific.

Play can rather be a powerful means for people to claim their space and express their being in the world, or as Stevens (2007, p. 1) puts it, people's *needs* can be expressed through

their playful behavior in public space. These needs extend beyond definitions of functions (ibid) and can therefore often flourish in underprogrammed spaces. Playful use-value of space is far broader than function (Lefebvre, 1991b as cited in Stevens, 2007, p. 200) which is why these spaces can be more valuable, and host more powerful spatial actions, than a fully equipped playground. Aldo van Eyck and C.Th. Sørensen also believed in play as an expressive form of being and saw potential in minimalistic, or very little, design, where free play and creativity could unfold.

If I were to work further with the topic, I think there is potential in looking deeper into relations between virtual architecture and physical space, work with site specific public space interventions, and imagine possible urban futures that draw on the ideas explored in this paper.

To sum up: besides offering opportunities for structured and adventurous play in playgrounds, cities host both planned and spontaneous urban play that utilizes the elements of the city in "their own playful logic" (Chisik et al., 2022). This paper has presented three subcategories of urban play: athletic play, digital play and political play. The essence of all practices presented, is that they take place outside established play areas. Instead, they claim both physical and virtual spaces outside conventional play boundaries.

Playground by Aldo van Eyck. Courtesy of the Amsterdam City Archive

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