

Judith Ackermann; Andreas Rauscher; Daniel Stein

## Introduction: Playin' in the city. Artistic and Scientific Approaches to Playful Urban Arts

2016

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/1574>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Ackermann, Judith; Rauscher, Andreas; Stein, Daniel: Introduction: Playin' in the city. Artistic and Scientific Approaches to Playful Urban Arts. In: *Navigationen - Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Jg. 16 (2016), Nr. 1, S. 7–23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/1574>.

### Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:467-10048>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitungen 3.0 Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 3.0 License. For more information see:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>

## INTRODUCTION: PLAYIN' THE CITY

### Artistic and Scientific Approaches to Playful Urban Arts

BY JUDITH ACKERMANN, ANDREAS RAUSCHER, AND DANIEL STEIN

#### I. THOUGHTS TOWARD A PLAYFUL TURN

»Cities are a focal point in our narratives about history. [...] We look at cities to see where history is taking us. [...] It seems that the future of mankind is somehow connected to cities.« These three sentences, taken, in condensed form, from Miguel Sicart's essay »Play and the City« in this special issue of *Navigationen*, capture the significance and urgency of our heightened interest in the development of cities. Indeed, studies of the history, current state, and potential futures of cities abound (and have done so for decades), occupying the center of some disciplines, such as urban studies,<sup>1</sup> and constituting subfields of other disciplines, such as literary and cultural studies,<sup>2</sup> media studies,<sup>3</sup> and history.<sup>4</sup> What distinguishes the essays and discussions assembled in this issue from the majority of research on the city, however, is a shared focus on play as a crucial urban element. As Sicart points out in his essay, »playful engagement with urban environments has been a constant mode of resistance and appropriation of cities for their citizens,« and it seems to us that this engagement deserves much deeper and broader analysis than it has been afforded to date.

Thus, this special issue draws attention to the city as a playground: as a space that enables, and perhaps inherently calls for, playful and often creative encounters among inhabitants, visitors, and the urban environment itself. As Bruce McComiskey and Cynthia Ryan note about the urban theories advanced by Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau,

---

1 Berking/Löw, eds.: *Die Eigenlogik der Städte*; Brenner/Marcuse/Mayer, eds.: *Cities for People, not for Profit*; Farías/Bender, eds.: *Urban Assemblages*; Harding/Blokland: *Urban Theory*; Judd/Simpson, eds.: *The City, Revisited*; Sattler ed.: *Urban Transformations in the USA*.

2 Alter: *Imagined Cities*; Brandt/Fluck/Mehring, eds.: *Transcultural Spaces*; Gaidolfi/Hirschmüller/Wenzl/Wiedemann, eds.: *Metropolen*; Griem/ Scholz, eds.: *Tatort Stadt*; Shiel/Fitzmaurice, eds.: *Cinema and the City*. Gurr/Michel, eds.: *Romantic Cityscapes*; Gurr/Raussert, eds.: *Cityscapes in the Americas and Beyond*; Lehan: *The City in Literature*; Orvell/Benesch, eds.: *Rethinking the American City*; Stevenson: *Cities of Culture*.

3 McQuire: *The Media City*; Townsend: *Smart Cities, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia*.

4 Lenger: *Metropolen der Moderne*.

both describe cities not as »places« that contain people, but as »situations in which people act.« [...] Lefebvre makes an important distinction between »the city, [as] a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact, and the urban, a social reality made up of relations which are to be conceived of, constructed, or reconstructed by thought.«<sup>5</sup>

Playful engagements with the city, the essays collected in this issue suggest, frequently strive to create (or construct and reconstruct) new ways of imagining and experiencing the city, both as a present and immediate reality and as a social reality whose everyday rules and norms can become unhinged – and thus productive – through the activity of play. In and through play, the city space can become an urban playground that has the potential to transform people's sense of themselves as human actors in an urban network of spatially bound and socio-economically grounded actions.<sup>6</sup>

In the narratives we tell about ourselves, the city frequently appears as a serious place: as the center of rising and falling empires, as the seat of power wielded by the modern nation-state, as a space in which the upper tenth (or the one percent, in more recent conceptions) thrive and the poor masses are forced to live in slums or ghettos, as a jungle, Moloch, or a hotbed of sin, crime, and pollution, but also as a multicultural melting pot, the birthplace of avant-gardes, and a focal point for both dystopian scenarios of human demise and utopian visions of human progress.<sup>7</sup> Despite these rather serious conceptions, however, the editors of this issue of *Navigationen* believe that the city has always challenged people to transform their urban surroundings into a more playful environment. Yet for the longest time, playful activities were confined to specific places reserved for these activities, which led to a visible distinction between play and non-play actions inside the city (e.g. work vs. leisure). This development culminated in the creation of specifically marked play areas governed by rules and regulations that shaped the modalities of entry and the conduct during attendance. We already find such rules and regulations in many of the predecessors of these play areas: the *Volks-wiese*, *Volksgarten* (late 18<sup>th</sup> century), and the athletics field (early 19<sup>th</sup> century), all of which were generally located outside of the city gates, sometimes as fenced in areas in the woods.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, people always seem to have tried to loosen the borders between play and non-play, thereby transforming the urban environment into a potentially boundless playground (perhaps a liminal space).<sup>9</sup> It is this pro-

---

5 McComiskey/Ryan: »Introduction,« I.

6 Sutton-Smith: »Play Theory,« III, 95, 100.

7 Lenz/Ulfers/Dallmann, eds.: *Towards a New Metropolitanism*; Prakash, ed.: *Noir Urbanisms*; Drennig: »Cities of Desire«; Brandt/Fluck/Mehring.

8 Ackermann: »Mobile Location Based Gaming in der Stadt,« I76.

9 Brandt: »The City as Liminal Space.«

cess of loosening up encrusted notions of play as an ultimately meaningless (i.e., merely escapist, entertaining) and non-play as an ultimately serious endeavor that this journal issue seeks to challenge.

A critical awareness concerning the playful exploration of urban spaces traces back to 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde movements from the French philosopher Guy Debord and the Situationists in Paris in the 1950s and 1960s to the Fluxus movement of the 1960s and the London punk scene interventions of the Sex Pistols in the 1970s. The Situationist technique of *dérive* provided a new way of experiencing the city physically as well as mentally. In a 1956 article, Debord defined the *dérive* as

one of the basic situationist practices [...], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.<sup>10</sup>

A second concept developed by the Situationist Movement is psychogeography, understood »as the study of precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.«<sup>11</sup> Like a speed-run variation of Walter Benjamin's *flâneur* adjusted to the fragmentation and dynamics of high modernism, *dérive* formed the basis for a change in consciousness and perceptiveness. As Stephen Duncombe points out in his study *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (2007), the Situationists considered those potential predecessors to urban games to be a subversive prelude to their revolutionary agenda:

The Situationists saw it as their mission to fight against »the society of the spectacle,« but they also felt a responsibility to set something else in motion to replace it [...]. The Situationists encouraged people to *dérive* – drift through unfamiliar city streets. [...] These situations, it was hoped, would create »collective ambiances,« which encouraged participants to break out of the soporific routine of the society of the spectacle and participate in the situation enfolding around them: to make sense of new streets and sights.<sup>12</sup>

The Situationists were not the only group blurring the differences among urban art, analysis, and activism in a playful way. As early as the 1960s, the avant-garde movement of Fluxus aimed at crossing the borders between art and non-art by presenting

---

10 Debord: »Theory of the *Dérive*.«

11 Debord: »Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography.«

12 Duncombe: *Dream*, 130.

a specific practice aimed at the trivialization of the aesthetic, and the infiltration of art by the everyday. [...] Fluxus was a hybrid form or *intermedia*, and so it could be music, performance, dance, and literature at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

Fluxus is often viewed in connection with *Happenings*, a term coined by artist Allan Kaprow when describing his 1959 performance *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*.

Happenings are events that, put simply, happen. Though the best of them have a decided impact – that is, we feel, »here is something important« – they appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, happenings influenced the culture of political protest and intervention of the 1960s and 1970s that focused on a collective production of reality through performance and embraced the opposition between transitory actions and their lasting effects.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1970s, London punk scene pop activist and entrepreneur Malcolm McLaren adapted several of Debord's strategies, aiming to create situations that would challenge people's perception of everyday life. As manager of the seminal punk band Sex Pistols, McLaren reverse-engineered the strategies of the culture industry and the spectacle surrounding the celebrations around the jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. Performing »God Save the Queen (The Fascist Regime)« on a rented boat outside the Houses of Parliament on Jubilee day, the Sex Pistols crossed the line between playful political and cultural intervention to initiating a Do-It-Yourself-pop mythology around the city of London that was adapted by several first generation British punk groups. At the same time, the vast variety of literature and films from Jon Savage and Greil Marcus to Julien Temple and John Robb covering those events demonstrates how pop culture creates a mental map of the imaginary city comparable to the New York of Andy Warhol's factory in the 1960s or South Central Los Angeles in the gangsta rap scene of the late 1980s. Digital open-world games like the recreations of New York, Miami, and L.A. in the popular *Grand Theft Auto*-series (since 1998) pick up those urban pop mythologies and turn them into adventure playgrounds. Instead of bringing about revolutionary action that, in the context of Debord's dogmatism, would not have been playful very long, the techniques of *dérive* and the idea of psychogeography created a link between urban pop history, political activism, and performance art. With respect to urban gaming and/or cruising through the open-worlds of digital game cities inspired by popular culture, those loose joints gain new relevance beyond avant-garde nostalgia.

---

13 Schmidt-Burkhardt: *Maciunas' Learning Machines*, 9.

14 Kaprow, Allan: »Happenings in the New York Scene,« 16.

15 Van Eikels: *Die Kunst des Kollektiven*, 217.

In our present time of heightened digitization, new conceptions of the city and a new desire to reconnect digital spaces with physical places in order to counteract tendencies toward the disembodiment and the disembedding of the post-modern individual have emerged. De Souza e Silva and Hjorth suggest, for instance, that »[m]obile phones may overlay a fictitious narrative as well as virtual game elements onto urban spaces,«<sup>16</sup> while scholars like Michiel de Lange and others have already begun to offer alternatives to the popular notion of the digitized *smart city*. De Lange views the »playful city« as a substantial alternative:

The use of play and games can get people involved with their city. Game[s] spark different people to participate actively and offer agency to experiment in a safe environment. Some games provide insight into rules, procedures and parameters, others encourage players to develop team strategies and mutual trust to build. Play and games make an appeal to creativity, innovation and learning. It seems a promising way to address and strengthen the cleverness of citizens. The truly smart city is a playful city.<sup>17</sup>

In the same vein, Steffen Walz introduces the neologism »playce« to highlight the increasing appearance of intersections between play and places.<sup>18</sup> Ingrid Richardson identifies a »playful turn« for our present media culture, while Joost Raessens speaks of a widespread »ludification of culture,« promoted by digital technologies, such as computer games and mobile phones, which »seem to stimulate playful goals and to facilitate the construction of playful identities.«<sup>19</sup> We take these assessments as a foundation for our own conceptions of the playful urban arts, which we will develop in this introduction and which frame the essays and discussions to follow.

---

16 De Souza e Silva/Hjorth: »Playful Urban Spaces,« 603.

17 De Lange: »The Truly Smart City Is Hackable and Playful«. See also the work of the research project »The Mobile City: Mobile Media & Urban Design« founded by Martijn de Waal and Michiel de Lange, including de Lange, »Playing Life in the Metropolis«; de Lange, »The Playful City.« For studies of smart cities, see, among others, Townsend: *Smart Cities*; Deakin, ed.: *Smart Cities*; Deakin and Al Waer, eds.: *From Intelligent to Smart Cities*; Campbell: *Beyond Smart Cities*; Araya, ed.: *Smart Cities as Democratic Ecologies*.

18 Walz: *Toward a Ludic Architecture*.

19 Richardson: *Ludic Mobilities*, 445; Raessens: *Playful Identities, or the Ludification of Culture*, 53.

## 2. PLAYING THE CITY/PLAYFUL URBAN ARTS

### 2.1 PLAY VS. PLAYFUL

Our conceptual framework for this special issue follows Miguel Sicart's definition of play as »a human mode of being in the world, a particular phenomenological stance to the world.«<sup>20</sup> Moreover, we embrace Sicart's distinction between play and playfulness, according to which play is an »activity in the world, while playfulness is an attitude toward the world.«<sup>21</sup> As an activity, to borrow an insight from play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith, »play [is] contained by frames« while a playful attitude may be »disruptive of frames.«<sup>22</sup>

The distinction between play and playfulness adds a deeper understanding to established terminologies. Contrasting the rather improvisational free form of play with the rule- and goal-driven game corresponds with the difference between *paidia* and *ludus*, according to cultural theorist and philosopher Roger Caillois.<sup>23</sup> In *Understanding Video Games*, Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Susana Tosca, and Jonas Heide Smith explain the difference as follows:

In a *paidia* activity, one is not bound by rigid rules. *Ludus*, by contrast, refers to systems with formalized rules like chess, soccer, or backgammon. Although winning or losing is not anathema to *paidia*, these goals are not always present [...] in *ludus* play forms. There are rules that must be adhered to and winning is a result of meeting these specific conditions.<sup>24</sup>

The difference between *ludus* and *paidia* could also be compared to the acting out of a pre-scripted role in contrast to performing improvisational theater, which often just creates a situation for the participants to appropriate. Applied to urban spaces, the idea of play can have a similar effect as on a theatrical space. In his pioneering study *The Image of the City* (1960), Kevin Lynch already compared the participatory aspects of urban life to being on a stage:

Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with other participants.<sup>25</sup>

---

20 Sicart, in this volume, 28. See also Sicart: *Play Matters*, 19-34.

21 Ibid, 31.

22 Sutton-Smith: *The Ambiguity of Play*, 196.

23 Caillois: »The Definition of Play and Games.«

24 Egenfeldt-Nielsen/Tosca/Smith: *Understanding Video Games*, 27.

25 Lynch: *The Image of the City*, 2.

In that sense, urban games, or various forms of playing the city, appear as performative processes that hold substantial transformative potential. As Judith Ackermann and Martin Reiche argue in their essay in this volume,

games are connected to performativity and in that sense equipped with a transformative quality. [...] They are able to alter players' perception of reality as well as their relations to others. Triggered by a different view of the world and its modified meaning for the players, they even result in a transformation of the world itself.<sup>26</sup>

This assumption follows play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith's argument that

play as we know it is primarily a fortification against the disabilities of life. It transcends life's distresses and boredoms and, in general, allows the individual or the group to substitute their own enjoyable, fun-filled, theatrics for other representations of reality in a tacit attempt to feel that life is worth living. [...] In many cases as well, play lets us exercise physical or mental or social adaptations that translate – directly or indirectly – into ordinary life adjustments.<sup>27</sup>

Such adaptations, we may note, often occur in specific spaces, or places transformed into play spaces, frequently through particular media. As Judith Ackermann and Martin Reiche note about the role of media in the playful urban arts:

media interaction in public (spaces) can be utilized to reclaim formerly or usually functional space to become a space that inherits a narrative [...] by creating new thoughts, allowing for encounters between otherwise unknown inhabitants (interaction ensembles) or becoming associated with the joy the people felt while interacting with the art that was temporarily installed at these locations.<sup>28</sup>

The connection between a space, or location, and play as it is outlined in this assessment (and appears in several other essays in this volume) harks back, at least in some way, to the idea of the game as a magic circle as it was originally conceived by Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* (1938), one of the founding texts of Game Studies. Game designers and scholars Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman updated the concept in 2004:

In a very basic sense, the magic circle of a game is where the game takes place. To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or

---

26 Ackermann/Reiche, in this volume, 73. See also Weiß, »Sich verausgabende Spieler und andere vereinnahmende Falschspieler.«

27 Sutton-Smith: »Play Theory,« 116.

28 Ackermann/Reiche, in this volume, 82.



perhaps creating one as the game begins. The magic circle of a game might have a physical component, like the board of a board game or the playing field of an athletic contest. But many games have no physical boundaries.<sup>29</sup>

Using the urban landscape for the creation of site-specific art allows us to draw upon a complex system of signs and spaces for establishing a unique condition of reception.<sup>30</sup> In this context, the notion of the presence of an art piece, be it an interactive installation, a performance in the public sphere, or an urban game, creates a sense of being located in a safe room, thereby facilitating experiments with civic actions and training collective acting and subjectivization.<sup>31</sup> This safe room heavily supports the occurrence of playfulness and thus also brings the argumentation back toward the Fluxus movement, which also tended to be described as an attitude.<sup>32</sup> As Kaprow elaborates in his 1983 article »The Real Experiment,« we need to distinguish between so-called *avant-garde artlike art* and *avant-garde lifelike art*. While the first is heavily connected to seriousness and continues rather mainstream art-historical traditions, *avant-garde lifelike art*, including Futurism, Dada, Fluxus, and Happenings, »is not nearly as serious as *avant-garde artlike art*. Often it is quite humorous.«<sup>33</sup> This presents a fruitful basis for combining site-specific art and playfulness for a meaningful transformation of the urban environment, merging in the idea of playful urban arts.

## 2.2 URBAN PLAYGROUNDS/THE PLAYABLE CITY

Several essays in this volume pick up the notion of the city, or particular sections or spaces of the city, as a playground for exploring alternative visions of urban life. In the artworks and games discussed in these essays, the built environment serves as a setting and framework for different kinds of play that offer creators and players new ways of viewing and experiencing urban space.

Michael Straeubig and Sebastian Quack's »Playful Locative Ensembles in the Urban Soundscape,« for instance, introduces the concept of the Playful Locative Ensemble, understood as »a group of players [...] who create a common soundscape by moving in an urban environment.«<sup>34</sup> Exploring the role of »private auditory spaces embedded in a multi-sensorial public space,« the authors analyze the ways in which games such as *A Folded Path* (Circumstance), *Phantom Synchron – Soundtrack Weimar* (Daniel Ott, Sebastian Quack, Kirsten Reese, and Enrico

---

29 Salen/Zimmerman: *Rules of Play*, 95.

30 Kaye: *Site-Specific Art*, 33.

31 Van Eikels, 202.

32 Smith: *Fluxus*.

33 Kaprow: »The Real Experiment,« 203.

34 Straeubig/Quack, in this volume, 87.

Stolzenburg), and *KlingKlangKlong* (Michael Straeubig) transform a musical soundtrack selected by the game creators into a soundscape emerging from the players' encounters with the soundtrack in a specific form (ensembles) and a specific (locative) urban environment. As the authors suggest, »[a]ll three projects invite participants to experience the relationship between sound and place and to navigate an urban soundscape through movement,« while »the movement of ensembles of players within the ensemble of the cityscape constitutes play.«<sup>35</sup>

Daniel Stein's »Playing the City: The Heidelberg Project in Detroit,« turns to Detroit's most controversial outdoor art installation, started by the African American resident-artist Tyree Guyton in 1986. The article reads the Heidelberg Project as a prominent example of playing in and with the city, interpreting its use of abandoned houses and empty lots in a predominantly African American neighborhood as an attempt to transform a bleak environment into a creative, potentially magical, space that challenges dominant conceptions of urban decay and disillusion. The article further suggests that the project's playful transformation of cast-off everyday items from shoes to shopping carts into culturally meaningful artifacts on conspicuous display functions as an example of an urban form of »playful politics« that aims to work as a »catalyst for change« by redefining the discourse of Detroit as the paradigmatic failing American postindustrial city into a discourse of neighborhood resilience and of art as a means of imagining a better world.

### 2.3 TRANSMEDIA PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

The legacy of Situationist concepts and their potential for exploring open-world games are discussed by Andreas Rauscher in »Playing Situationism: Ludic Spaces in Transmedia Contexts.« Without the goal-driven ideological agenda of Debord's original concept, *dérive* becomes a technique of connecting the digital spaces of games like *GTA* and *Red Dead Redemption* to the mental maps created by the archives of cinematic, ludic, and musical pop history. As Rauscher suggests, the notion of playfulness as introduced by Sicart also hints at possibilities for turning genre settings into adventurous playgrounds reflecting the semantics and syntax of genres. From a playful perspective, the references to popular culture in many open-world games are no longer generic window dressing but can be regarded as a hermeneutic tool in the larger network structure of a transmedia psychogeography. In contrast to Debord's original concept's restriction to the urban space of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Paris, the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the environment can be expanded upon navigating and toying around with standard situations in digital spaces.

Anna Lena Hartmann's »Die Aneignung von Location Based Mobile Games am Beispiel des Spiels ARTventure (2015)« also deals with a form of playfully navigating a city. Researching the appropriation of the self-designed location based

---

35 Straeubig/Quack, in this volume, 96.

mobile game *ARTventure* in the context of the playin'siegen festival, she identifies the challenges of hybrid space navigation and the possibilities of influencing a person's behavior in a rather familiar physical space by enhancing it with a digital layer. Recalling the *dérive* strategy of rapidly passing through different ambiances in the *dérive*, the mobile game is able to offer a hybrid space realized individually via each player's movement, resulting in an only partially shared drift experience that can update former psychogeographical experiences with a certain environment on a personal level.

## 2.4 THE DIGITAL CITY

Considering the potential of games to connect the physical spaces of a city with a digital, smartphone-based, virtual world, Marianne Halblaub Miranda and Martin Knöll's »Stadtflucht: Learning about Healthy Places with a Location-Based Game« turns to a game specifically designed to activate players in their built environment in order to promote healthy exercise and increase city dweller's awareness of, and future participation in, urban planning processes. The authors use the prototype for their game *Stadtflucht* (urban flight) as a case study, assessing the results of a test run staged in the east side of Frankfurt am Main. Based on the data they collected (GPS coordinates, heart rate, photographs gathered as the players navigated their way through the six stations of the game), Halblaub Miranda and Knöll conclude that games like *Stadtflucht* can indeed increase and transform city dweller's awareness of their surroundings and instill in them a heightened interest in the urban planning process. Moreover, they suggest that the data produced by such games could also be used to give city planners a better understanding of how people understand and experience the city.

In »Media Interaction in Public (Spaces): Researching Interactive Installations' Support for (Inter-)Human Interaction with Machines and Environment,« Judith Ackermann and Martin Reiche introduce the concept of »media interaction in public« to describe »a complex communication scenario combining interhuman and human-machine interaction that gives rise to flexible actor-spectator constellations at the junction of digital and physical spaces.«<sup>36</sup> The authors identify the potential of urban interactive installations to initiate this type of mediatized interaction. Their analysis of two art pieces curated at the playin'siegen festival focuses on the multiple activities these pieces facilitate. Their empirical findings indicate that media interaction in public spaces can create new interaction ensembles and affect people's environmental awareness. The attitude of playfulness is a key factor in the appropriation of the artworks' grammar of interaction bridging digital and physical spaces and in establishing a heightened receptivity for those effects.

The critical reflection on the extension of playfulness from analogue urban environments to their digital counterparts is also an important aspect of Miguel

---

36 Ackermann/Reiche, in this volume, 72.

Sicart's »Play and the City.« Sicart's provocative article challenges scholars as well as designers to think about playful interactions as a useful interface and design practice. Instead of remaining exclusive for corporations or opaque because of their amount and complexity, interactions with the open-data created by smart cities can provide access to information-heavy urban environments on the level of human-scaled experiences. As Sicart concludes: »the data produced and used in smart cities should not necessarily be presented as a utility for citizens. It should be presented as a prop for play, as games but also as the source for toys and playgrounds. Data-rich cities can become playable cities, and, by becoming such, they can become more human, more inclusive spaces.«<sup>37</sup>

## 2.5 PLAYIN'SIEGEN: INTERNATIONAL URBAN GAMES FESTIVAL

This journal volume emerges from the international urban games festival *playin'siegen*, which premiered in Siegen, NRW (Germany), in April 2015. The festival was designed as an artistic-scientific project, with a particular focus on playful urban arts. It combined the areas of science, gaming, exhibition, and performance to highlight their intersections and acknowledge the various possibilities of design as research as well as performative research. The project was mainly organized by Judith Ackermann, Anke Lenk, and a group of Master's students in the field of Media Culture based at the University of Siegen.

The idea behind the festival was to employ games, performances, art, and science into the urban space in order to create new approaches toward participation, civic action, and intercultural dialogue. The overall aim was to experience modern forms of gathering in the public space not only from a practical-experimental point of view but also by reflecting on and analyzing them in a theoretical-scientific manner. All parts of the festival called for direct (inter-)action by the visitors, allowing them to experience alternative forms of self-efficacy bound to an environment identified as familiar. Therefore, all games, performances, and exhibitions curated at the festival were designed not only to make use of the surrounding space but also to transform passersby into interactors by requiring communication, interaction, and negotiation among people who neither knew each other nor had any prior knowledge of the field.

The nearly thirty different games played during the festival were mainly designed for a particular venue or adjusted in accordance with the specificities of Siegen, a city with a population of approximately 100.000. The selection contained games by widely known international (urban) game designers invited to participate in the festival, but also games developed by students from the University of Siegen as part of a Bachelor's degree course on Location Based Mobile Gaming and a Master's class on Urban Gaming run by Judith Ackermann. In addition, the festival organizers launched a call for games advertising certain places to

---

37 Sicart, in this volume, 27.

be transformed into playgrounds during the event. As part of this spatial transformation, game designer Zack Wood (on behalf of the *Church of Play*) created a *Playance* for the Upper Castle in order to remind people that the castle once was created as a fortress in times of war and renewing the emotions tied to that historical space by transforming the site of war into a site of joy and play. During the *Playance*, the participants performed five rituals to help them engage playfully with the fortress, while the gardens of the castle were nevertheless crowded with tourists and festival visitors.

While the *Playance* temporarily conquered one specific space in a playful way through the activities unfolding there, other games used single objects from the city (callboxes, fountains, designated sitting areas) and transformed them into game elements. In the game *Die acht menschlichen Kreise*,<sup>38</sup> designed by Sebastian Nentwig and Julia Ollertz from the *playin'siegen* team, two teams of initially five people swarmed the city in search of different objects found on a set of play cards. Once they had reached a location, they had to build a circle around it and take a picture of it in order to gain points. As the objects grew in size with each round, there was no way of winning the game but by making passersby join the circles, resulting in much interaction between unfamiliar people close to certain spots in town and in creating a positive community feeling after having managed to build and document a circle together. The games and performances were deliberately located in abandoned properties or in hot spots of the city in order to establish a constant move between these two poles and in order to promote the experimentation with rather unfamiliar routes for the visitors. This was additionally supported by the location based mobile games specifically designed for the festival, each of which overlaid the city with a particular narrative and invited people to playfully explore the urban environment by following the paths proposed by the designers and engaging in a hybrid-reality experience connected to the town.

The festival organizers received very positive reactions from the visitors of the event, the different actors of the town and the county, and their national and international funding partners. In addition, the festival garnered substantial media feedback, including radio, TV, print, and web coverage. Since April 2015, the festival activities have been thematized in academic conferences in Germany as well as abroad. Furthermore, the *playin'siegen*-team was invited to conduct urban gaming workshops for different organizations and purposes throughout Germany. Thanks to the huge success of the festival, the organizers have decided to continue *playin'siegen* on a biannual basis.

### 3. FORUM: PANEL DISCUSSIONS

In the forum section of this issue, we print revised transcripts of the two panel discussions from the »Digital Spaces: Game, Design, Art« conference that was or-

---

38 The title translates to »The eight human circles.«

ganized by Judith Ackermann, Andreas Rauscher, and Daniel Stein as part of the playin'siegen international urban games festival 2015. The discussions were recorded on video, transcribed, and then edited by the panel contributors and the editors of this volume. The first panel, titled »Game Design for Urban Spaces,« is moderated by Andreas Rauscher (Media Studies, University of Siegen) and features Judith Ackermann (Media Studies, University of Siegen), Marianne Halblaub Miranda (Urban Games for Health, TU Darmstadt), Christiane Hütter (Invisible Playground, Berlin), Gwyn Morfey (Fire Hazard, London), Michael Straeubig (Game designer, University of Plymouth), and Philipp Ehmann (The Street Game Conspiracy, Vienna). The discussion addresses a number of important issues at the crossroads of urban and game studies, including the suggestion that play can be quite serious and transformative in an urban context, the particular ways in which games can connect players and spectators into an urban community (however temporary that community may end up being), differences between site-specific and site-generic games, the interdisciplinary challenges of urban game design, the possibility (and perhaps even inevitability) of creative appropriations of games by those who play them, and the challenges of securing public and/or commercial funding for playful urban arts.

The second panel discussion, »(Digitale) Kunst im Urbanen Raum,« is moderated by Judith Ackermann and Stephan Schwingeler (Art Historian, Zentrum für Kunst- und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe). It brings together Katja Glaser (Graduate School Locating Media, University of Siegen), David Penndorf (Hackspace Siegen), Jonas Hansen (Media Artist, Kunsthochschule für Medien, Cologne), and Martin Reiche (Media Artist, Berlin). Their discussion revolves around the connection between art (including street art and interactive installations) and games, the significance of space for artistic engagements with spectators who can become players by playfully engaging with specific art installations, the Situationist influence on contemporary playful urban arts, hacking as a playful appropriation of urban spaces and structures, the influence of commercial (i.e., capitalist) forces on the creation of urban games and digital urban art, and the complex connections between digital and physical city spaces.

Overall, both panel discussions and the essays collected in this volume seek to bridge the gap between »artistic and scientific approaches« to the playful urban arts. That is to say, they connect perspectives by artists with those of researchers, feature the work of artist-researchers (or researcher-artists), and train a scholarly gaze on playfully artistic/artistically playful interventions into common conceptions and prominent discourses about the meanings and significances of cities for our past, present, and future.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The playin'siegen urban games festival would not have been possible without the help of many students and teachers of several university courses: Timo Schemer-

Reinhard's web project course that prepared the project's website and created the various social media channels, Jürgen Müller-Stephan's class on print creation, which took care of the multiple publicity materials, Judith Ackermann's TV-project class that produced all of the audiovisual material, the participants of her two game design courses on the Bachelor and Master levels, who created location based mobile games and site-specific urban games for the festival, and the Master's project class responsible for the organization and the operation of the festival itself, co-taught by Anke Lenk and Judith Ackermann.

Special thanks go to Sina Müller, who designed the festival's logo and the cover for this special issue and provided us with design support, and to Nicole Schneider for designing the conference program and poster for the »Digital Spaces: Game, Design, Art« and for copyediting and formatting the manuscript for this issue.

In addition, as a project like playin'siegen cannot be realized without sufficient financial resources, we also thank all of our funding partners and sponsors: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Brillen Fuchs, British Council, City of Siegen, County Siegen-Wittgenstein, Ctrl-blog.de, Fachstelle für Jugendmedienkultur NRW, Graduate School Locating Media, Kellershohn, Lasertag Arena Siegen, modulbüro, Österreichisches Kulturforum Berlin, Scoutopia, Sparkasse Siegen, Stiftung Digitale Spielekultur, Südwestfalen Agentur, University of Siegen, and Wissenschaftsjahr 2015: Zukunftsstadt. Daniel Stein thanks the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung for financial support of the Digital Spaces conference.

Furthermore, our thanks go to Nina Voigt for transcribing the English panel discussion and to Daniel Parlow for transcribing the German panel discussion. Last but not least, we thank all of the contributors for supporting this journal issue with their ideas and Jens Schröter for accepting this manuscript for *Navigationen*.

## REFERENCES

- Ackermann, Judith (2014). »Mobile Location Based Gaming in der Stadt: Spielerische Eroberung des urbanen Raums und Hybrid Reality Theatre.« *Mobile Medien – Mobiles Leben: Neue Technologien, Mobilität und die mediatisierte Gesellschaft*. Ed. Thomas Bächle and Caja Thimm. Münster: Lit, 2014. 104-130.
- Alter, Robert. *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2005.
- Araya, Daniel, ed. *Smart Cities as Democratic Ecologies*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Berking, Helmuth, and Martina Löw, eds. *Die Eigenlogik der Städte: Neue Wege für die Stadtforschung*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2008.

- Brandt, Stefan L. »The City as Liminal Space: Urban Visuality and Aesthetic Experience in Postmodern U.S. Literature and Cinema.« *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 54.4 (2009). 553-81.
- Brandt, Stefan L., Winfried Fluck, and Frank Mehring, eds. *Transcultural Spaces: Challenges of Urbanity, Ecology, and the Environment*. Tübingen: Narr, 2010.
- Brenner, Neil, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Meyer, eds. *Cities for People, not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Busse, Beatrix, and Ingo H. Warnke, eds. *Place-Making in urbanen Diskursen*. Boston/Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014.
- Caillois, Roger. »The Definition of Play and Games.« *The Game Design Reader*. Ed. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. Cambridge: MIT, 2006. 122-155.
- Campbell, Tim. *Beyond Smart Cities: How Cities Network, Learn and Innovate*. Milton Park: Earthscan, 2012.
- Deakin, Mark, ed. *Smart Cities: Governing, Modelling and Analysing the Transition*. Milton Park: Routledge, 2014.
- Deakin, Mark, and Husam Al Waer, eds. *From Intelligent to Smart Cities*. Milton Park: Routledge, 2012.
- Debord, Guy. »Theory of the Dérive.« 1956. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/314>.
- Debord, Guy. »Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography.« 1955. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2>.
- De Lange, Michiel. »The Playful City: Using Play and Games to Foster Citizen Participation.« *Social Technologies and Collective Intelligence*. Ed. Aelita Skaržauskiene. Vilnius: Mykolas Romeris University, 2015. 426-434.
- De Lange, Michiel. »Playing Life in the Metropolis: Mobile Media and Identity in Jakarta.« *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*. Ed. Valerie Frissen et al. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2015. 307-320.
- De Lange, Michiel. »The Truly Smart City Is Hackable and Playful.« Universiteit Utrecht: News and Events. June 1, 2015. Web. 2/15/2016.
- De Souza e Silva, Adriana, and Larissa Hjorth. »Playful Urban Spaces: A Historical Approach to Mobile Games.« *Simulation & Gaming*, 40.5 (2009). 602-625.
- Drennig, Georg. »Cities of Desire: Ecotopia and the Mainstreet Cascadia Imaginary.« *Transcultural Spaces: Challenges of Urbanity, Ecology, and the Environment*. Ed. Stefan L. Brandt, Winfried Fluck, and Frank Mehring. Tübingen: Narr, 2010. 145-58.
- Duncombe, Stephen. *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. New York: The New Press, 2007.
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Susana Tosca, and Jonas Heide Smith. *Understanding Video Games*. London/New York: Routledge, 2008.



- Fariás, Ignacio, and Thomas Bender, eds. *Urban Assemblages: How Actor Network Theory Changes Urban Studies*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Gaidolfi, Susanna, Tobias Hirschmüller, Gerhard Wenzel, and Julia Wiedemann, eds. *Metropolen: Politik – Kultur – Imagination*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014.
- Griem, Julika, and Sebastian Scholz, eds. *Tatort Stadt: Mediale Topographien eines Fernsehklassikers*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2010.
- Gurr, Jens, and Berit Michel, eds. *Romantic Cityscapes*. Trier: WVT, 2013.
- Gurr, Jens, and Wilfried Raussert, eds. *Cityscapes in the Americas and Beyond: Representations of Urban Complexity in Literature and Film*. Trier: WVT & Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press, 2011.
- Harding, Alan, and Talja Blokland. *Urban Theory: A Critical Introduction to Power, Cities and Urbanism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Sage, 2014.
- Judd, Dennis R., and Dick Simpson, eds. *The City, Revisited: Urban Theory from Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York*. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 2011.
- Kaprow, Allan. »Happenings in the New York Scene.« 1961. *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Life and Art*. Ed. Jeff Kelley. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: Cambridge UP, 1993. 15-26.
- Kaprow, Allan. »The Real Experiment,« 1983. *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Life and Art*. Ed. Jeff Kelley. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: Cambridge UP, 1993. 201-218.
- Kaye, Nick. *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. London/New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*: Trans. and ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996.
- Lehan, Richard. *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.
- Lenger, Friedrich. *Metropolen der Moderne: Eine europäische Stadtgeschichte seit 1850*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013.
- Lenz, Günter H., Friedrich Ulfers, and Antje Dallmann, eds. *Towards a New Metropolitanism: Reconstituting Public Culture, Urban Citizenship, and the Multicultural Imaginary in New York and Berlin*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2006.
- Lynch, Kevin, *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: MIT, 1960.
- McComiskey, Bruce, and Cynthia Ryan. »Introduction.« *City Comp: Identities, Spaces, Practices*. Ed. Bruce McComiskey and Cynthia Ryan. New York: SUNY P, 2012. 1-17.
- McQuire, Scott. *The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space*. London: Sage, 2010.
- Orvell, Miles, and Klaus Benesch, eds. *Rethinking the American City: An International Dialogue*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2014.

- Prakash, Gyan, ed. *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopian Images of the Modern City*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.
- Raessens, Joost. »Playful Identities, or the Ludification of Culture.« *Games and Culture*, 1.1 (2006). 52-57.
- Richardson, Ingrid. »Ludic Mobilities: The Corporealities of Mobile Gaming.« *Mobilities*, 5.4 (November 2010). 431-447.
- Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play – Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge: MIT, 2004.
- Sattler, Julia, ed. *Urban Transformations in the USA: Spaces, Communities, Representations*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2016.
- Schmidt-Burkhardt, Astrit. *Maciunas' Learning Machines: From Art History to a Chronology of Fluxus*. Vienna: Springer, 2011.
- Shiel, Mark, and Tony Fitzmaurice, eds. *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. Malden: Blackwell, 2001.
- Sicart, Miguel. *Play Matters: Playful Thinking*. Cambridge: MIT, 2014.
- Smith, Owen F. *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*. San Diego: San Diego State UP, 1998.
- Stevenson, Deborah. *Cities of Culture: A Global Perspective*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian. *The Ambiguity of Play*. 1997. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian. »Play Theory: A Personal Journey and New Thoughts.« *American Journal of Play* 1.1 (2008). 80-123.
- Townsend, Anthony M. *Smart Cities, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia*. New York: Norton, 2013.
- Van Eikels, Kai. *Die Kunst des Kollektiven: Performance zwischen Theater, Politik und Sozio-Ökonomie*. Munich: Fink, 2013.
- Walz, Steffen P. *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games*. Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2010.
- Weiß, Gabriele. »Sich verausgabende Spieler und andere vereinnahmende Falschspieler: Das Spiel zwischen Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit in ästhetischen Lebensformen.« *Spiel*. Ed. Alfred Schäfer and Christiane Thompson. Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014. 35-61.