

Summary

This research project focuses on figures of an(other) play and critically addresses the ways in which we understand both play and the category of use in relation to the built environment. This focus on play allows us to grasp the specific mechanisms of use at work in it and the necessity of snatching it from its position as an empty signifier at the service of individual creativity and capital's accumulation. Indeed, by focusing on the way in which play uses subjects, objects and the built environment, this work argues for the existence of an(other) play—at odds with gamification—which can be defined as a use of an impossibility of use, a use capable of relating to what remains inappropriate. In so doing, this (other) play calls into question the widespread understanding of use *qua* appropriation.

What is at stake in an(other) play, as I will show in the introduction, is a spatial use that is neither a return to a more original use, nor a completely new use, but rather a use of an impossibility of use. The introduction also situates this work within debates concerned with use and play as well as a specific scholarly tradition working at the crossroads between the disciplines concerned with the built environment, continental philosophy, critical theory, and psychoanalysis.

Consistent with this tradition, the first chapter offers a theory of an(other) play which brings to the fore the limits of a series of received ideas about play and frames this work within a theory whereby play emerges as a specific use revolving around an interruption, a suspension, or a lack. This chapter serves as the theoretical backbone for the study of three figures of an(other) play: children's games as recorded by contemporary artist Francis Alÿs, skateboarding outside Milan's Central Station and Ugo La Pietra's artistic and architectural practice. These figures allow us to tackle the received idea that play is located within specific spatial users (e.g. the child, the athlete and the creative) without completely dismissing it. Yet, before addressing these specific spatial uses it is important to clarify the methodology through which they are addressed. This is done, in the second chapter, through an engagement with the notion of figures which, deployed as a methodological tool, situates itself in an in-between position that avoids simply applying a theory to spatial uses as well as producing a general theory starting from specific cases.

Francis Alÿs's *Children's Games*, the figure studied in Chapter 3, bring to the fore the role repetition and mimesis have in children's games, as well as their potential. Simple gestures like kicking, jumping, or walking, when repeated or imitated in children's play, allow us to grasp a use that does away with the illusion of mastery and ownership of the (built) environment as well as the totality it entails while opening what *is* to potentialities.

Skateboarding, the second figure studied, brings to the fore a dimension of loss necessary to play. In Chapter 4, through a reading that goes against the grain of skateboarding's dominant discourse, the subject of skateboarding emerges as one that is co-created in a series of (failed) relations to a skateboard-toy, while the space of skateboarding emerges as a non-measurable space created by the gap between tangible spaces and skateboarding images, a gap that skateboarding is capable of using, without filling.

The third and final figure of the study is the Italian artist, architect, and designer Ugo La Pietra. La Pietra brings to the fore the profaning character of play and its capacity to deactivate the sacred; in his practice this emerges as a profanation of the dichotomies of private/public and home/city. This operation, already at work in the 1970s, is articulated in La Pietra's later works as a *gioco dell'uso*, a specific use of space that allows both the built environment and La Pietra's own design and architectural vocation to be at play. The last section of the dissertation is dedicated to summarizing the main insights that the studied figures bring to the fore as well as the limits of this project and the ways in which it could be developed further within, but also beyond, the specific topic of play.