SPACES IN PLAY
Reena Ardeshana

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of space and play in relation to border conditions. The essay focuses on the works by the Situationist International and looks at two key proponents of play; Theory of the Dérive as devised by Guy Debord and Constant Niewenhuys's New Babylon. The SI advocated playful-constructive behaviour as a way of removing oneself from 'everyday life' in order to consciously engage in the urban environment. These tactics of urban play were devised as a means of subverting societal conventions and transgressing social borders. The essay argues that play can be regarded as an act of transgression. It is through the seriousness of play that societal norms can begin to be transgressed. Since the border is the space that facilitates transgressive acts, it is through play that these borders are revealed. As it becomes evident that the act of play can transgress and construct new situations it is also necessary to identify the distinction between architecture ofplay and architectureinplay. Whilst both are necessary and valuable, it is the architecture inplay that provides both a spatial understanding of our environment and offers a limitless evolution of space and use.

Key words: play, space, derive, psychogeography, détournement, transgress, Debord, Situationist International, Niewenhuys, Foucault

PREFACE
Our modern understanding of play was theorised by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga and formulated in his book Homo Ludens (1938), which discusses play in relation to culture and society. Huizinga advocates play as a primary and necessary condition of culture in 5 keys points:

1) It is free, it is in fact freedom.
2) Play is not "ordinary" or "real" life.
3) Play is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration.
4) It creates order, is order.
5) It is an activity connected with no material interest and no profit can be gained by it.[1]

Play is a free and meaningful activity that is carried out for its own sake, with no related interest in production or profit. It is separate from practical life both spatially and temporally, and maintains its own self-contained systems of rules. Subsequent scholars, in particular the French sociologist Roger Caillois in Man, Play and Games (1961)[2], extended upon Huizinga's work by emphasising the central role of play in human culture. Whilst Huizinga focused on the competitive nature of play and gaming, Caillois looked at the spectrum of play from the structured to the un-structured, acknowledging spontaneity and playfulness as an inherent component of play. The theories of both Huizinga and Caillois later went on to influence the late-modernist avant-garde group; the Situationist International (SI). Key figures of this movement include the writer and theorist Guy Debord, and artist Constant Nieuwenhuys.[3]

This essay addresses the notion of play from a spatial perspective, elaborating Huizinga's five points on play and introducing a sixth point, in which play can be regarded as an act of transgression. Play will be discussed through Debord's Theory of the Dériveand Constant's New Babylon as two approaches that stimulate encounters and establish new situations, but also challenge societal conventions. These approaches begin to question how play can be seen as transgressive and how transgressive acts can alter our understanding of space.

(SIN)CERITY IN PLAY
The Situationist International were heavily concerned with the cultural crisis of the time. The SI criticised the economic, political, social and cultural state of society. They believed that 'everyday life' had become enslaved by consumerism and had led to the emergence of the passive observer. The passive observer was one whose environment was founded on capitalists ideals such as money, wage labour and ownership. In response, the SI proposed a communistic society where profit was replaced by pleasure, division of labour by increased leisure, resulting in a reduced antagonism between work and play. To create social change and a shift in the

operation of 'everyday life', the SI believed there must be a fundamental shift in 'everyday spaces'. They believed they could improve social life by altering the way in which people engaged with space and play.[4] For the Situationists, play became a unique tool, employed to undermine the institutions of language and therefore social order and authoritative control. They implemented urban play tactics as a means to establish an engagement with space and cause a critical understanding of one's environment.[5] Their aim was to create a 'total work of art' that moved away from the traditional form of art (i.e. a separation between artist and audience).[6] In a bid to instigate social change, the Situationists actively developed tools in which citizens could inhabit and construct their own space. In breaking down the boundaries between play and everyday life, people could actively construct their environments to become spaces that were appropriate for their lifestyles.

Examples of urban play tactics devised by the Situationists include the dérive and psychogeography. In his Theory of the Dérive, Guy Debord defined the concept of the dérive as 'a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances' that 'involves playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects'.[7] Like Walter Benjamin's flâneur,[8] the dériver responds to invitations and inducements that the city presents. Whilst this way of walking is essentially unplanned and unstructured, it is also spatially misguided in the way that it orients the walker, not by the conventional organisation of a city, but through the playful juxtaposition of elements that construct the city. The walker can experience new relationships and spatial intentionalities that are mapped through psychogeography, as indeterminate boundaries of exclusion, compelling currents of encounter and unconstructed gateways of chance.[9]

The dérive engages the drifter in, what the Situationist referred to as, 'playful-constructive behaviour'. Debord interprets 'playfulness' as a deliberate removal from everyday life in order to be present within one's environment. The drifter, unlike Benjamin's flâneur, is not a passive observer, aimless and absent-mindedly walking through their environment, but rather an active player in constructing his/her urban environment. The level of engagement required in play induces a keen sensitivity and alertness in the player. The drifter moves according to a certain order; a system of play with scripted rules. The dérive thus emphasises the seriousness of play. The combination of a multiplicity of players[10] and a system of rules, stimulates a 'subjective' reading of an 'objective' space. The city becomes inscribed by man's navigation of and through space. A parallel can by drawn to the labyrinth.[11] By entering the labyrinth, one establishes a subjective reading of space, as from within it can only be understood by the components that construct one's immediate environment. The internal space offers no concept of the overall organisation and system of paths. Upon reaching the centre, a platform above the labyrinth would give one a comprehensive overview of the overall system, but would lack the bodily engagement of being within. Returning to the dérive, this method of walking offers the possibility of being within the space, whilst also removing oneself from the constraints of reality. Like the labyrinth, the dérive offers two perspectives; the experience and observations of bodily engagement within an environment during the dérive, and a constructed understanding of the journey as a whole and therefore the theorisation or mapping of the journey itself.

The engagements and situations that are established between people, city and play, and the disruption of these relations have been the subject of détournement; an urban play tactic. Détournement builds on cultural cues, taking recognised forms and re-using them in new situations in order to subvert cultural meaning and create new aesthetics.[12] As Debord writes in his essay on Methods of Détournement:

> *'Any element, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations... when two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed... The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy'.[13]*

One way in which the Situationists went about constructing situations included occupying found buildings and forcefully adapting and re-purposing the space with

a new use that differed from its original intent. This tactic formed part of a strategy designed to undo the urban hierarchy present in the capitalist city and deconstruct the borders between public and private.[14] The Situationists played with the borders and boundaries of conventional city planning in a spatially ironic way in order to contest contemporary cultural society. The term 'spatially ironic' describes how only through the opposing and contradictory notions of seriousness and playfulness can one begin to de-construct societal norms. By claiming their control over space, through appropriation, they were able to transgress the accepted conceptions of inside and outside, use versus non-use, and re-establish a private territory that acts as a borderless public exterior as well.

BEAUTY IN CHAOS

As stated, the Situationists deliberately used play as a means to overturn and transgress societal conventions. Similarly, we can also see acts of transgression in our contemporary society. Often these acts of play are ephemeral and temporal, leaving a barely visible trace on the landscape. Skateboarding and parkour are just two examples of how space is re-negotiated through the physical engagement with objects in the landscape. Whilst the acts themselves do not alter the spatial construct significantly or even leave physical traces behind, the acts could not exist without the engagement with and transgression of the borders and thresholds presented along the urban surface.[15]

The transgressive act brings to light the skateboarder's presence. As an active participant within the urban environment, the transgressive act of the skateboarder; jumping walls, fences, steps; subverts the physical environment by mis-using urban elements. The skateboarder is therefore able to re-construct and alter the space through the transgressive act.

To transgress is to go beyond, break, infringe or violate the limits of society. These limits can be expressive of behaviour, norms, laws, culture and space. For philosopher Michel Foucault transgression is not necessarily destructive or rebellious, but is an act of revealing. In his Preface to Transgression, Foucault explains that there is a necessary relation between transgression and the limit, as transgression *'carries the limit right to the limit of its being; [and] forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance'*.[16] Transgression allows these social limits and boundaries to become visible by revealing that which was never considered a possibility. In architecture, it is the border or the boundary that becomes most relevant with respect to transgression, as it deals with the notion of opposites; inside and outside, public and private. Since the border is the space that facilitates transgressive acts, it is through play that these borders are revealed. Whilst transgression is often linked to sin or an act of crime, it can also be considered as being beneficiary and purposeful. For example, handing out free food and clothing can also be regarded as a means to reveal the structure of consumerism within our society and acts to subvert these notions. Whilst graffiti is often perceived as detrimental, it could also be considered as a free outdoor art gallery, a highly-stylised re-decoration of the streets. Transgression seeks to find beauty, use and opportunity in disorder and chaos.

As Gil Doron describes in The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression, these transgressive acts are most evident in the spaces that we have labelled as 'void'. These forgotten, isolated and forbidden spaces become appropriated by groups at the margins of our society,[17] who transgress the space by radically altering its use. Doron also states that it is not only the occupants that transgress the space, but the space itself becomes transgressive by playing with the notion of location and time.

> *'The "Dead Zones" are transgressive not only because they exist on the boundary of the city centres. They are also transgressive exactly for the opposite reason, because they transgress any desire to locate them geographically, any confinement, of putting them in (a) place.'*[18]

For example, a residential block maintains the function of living during the mornings and evenings, but becomes a dead zone during the day as their occupants leave. Through the movement and occupation of its inhabitants, the spaces themselves start to play with and alter their intended programme. Unoccupied, these lively spaces temporally become spaces of silence.

The notion of space, time and living conventions also became elements

of play within Constant Nieuwenhuys's *New Babylon*. The utopian model for living rejected the conventional notions of the urban plan, departing from the traditional neighbourhood model and the functionalist's 'ville verte'.[19] Instead, rather than submitting to the forced construct of designated parks, Constant sought to control nature, subverting it with new materials and technology. By defining the (then) current principles of living, but projecting these onto a society dominated by the homo ludens, Constant was able to go beyond the conventional notions of living in order to construct a new set of rules. It was a spatial plan in which collective housing was detached from the ground and suspended from a structure above, freeing the ground for movement and transport. As Constant wrote,

> *'the different floors will be divided into neighbouring and communication spaces, artificially conditioned, which will offer the possibility of creating an infinite variety of ambiences, facilitating the "dérive" of the inhabitants and their frequent chance encounters'.*[20]

The control over climate, light and sounds was a step towards the idealised utilitarian life of the 1960's. But while the homo ludens in New Babylon is free to change the spatial conditions and ambiance of their environment, they did remain trapped within the constraints of Constant's utopian game.

PREPOSITIONS OF RELATION AND SPACE

In addition to the previous considerations, it is probably also necessary to highlight the play of words that is often used in architectural discourse and the various interpretations it can initiate. When discussing play, it is important to note the difference between architecture *in* play and architecture *of* play. Literary devices and metaphors provide tools for architects to create distinct new realities that break away from the conventional rules of design. In Constant's New Babylon, the process and evolution of the design epitomised an architecture in play. The rules for living were conceptualised in a way that allowed the architecture to endlessly evolve, mutate and change the spatial construct. The word itself, in, denotes a spatial quality that allows the act of play to consume the architectural design. An architecture of play however establishes the relation between the player and the game. As the model remains only visionary, we can only imagine how the occupants would use the space and play with the rules of the game.

Linking this back to Chimopar, it is apparent that nature is in play across the vast area and holds a firm grip over the site, meticulously decomposing the factory structures. The result is a stitched terrain of different spaces; an open green landscape clashing against tall concrete walled borders. Old factory halls crumbling with knotted greenery scaling the walls. Planes of concrete cracked open with piercing seams of vegetation. The site speaks of a conflict between nature and the man-made, decay versus purity.

The site also offers a space of play. Urban nomads come to temporally occupy, use, alter, subvert and transgress the space. Along the concrete boundary wall, a door is carved out to allow access into the site, overturning the rules of inside and outside, public and private. The symbol of the door and the wall as a metaphor for inclusion and exclusion has been well described by Neil Leach in his introduction to Rethinking Architecture:

> *'The door, by breaching the wall, and by opening up to the "other", can expose the wall for what it is, and reveal the underlying social constructs on which it is founded. The act of breaching is in effect the moment of transgression The opening of the door reveals the wall as wall, just as, in illuminating the limit, transgression exposes the limit as limit. The door, therefore, serves as the key for understanding the whole question of limit and transgression, of openness and exclusion.'*[21]

Transgression, therefore, is not necessarily a negative act of exclusion but can also entail the positive aspect of inclusion and of opening up to the other.

Ultimately the definition of transgression within architecture is difficult to specify as it has multiple and varied readings. Transgression can be an act of subversion against societal conventions; an illuminator of boundaries and border conditions; a means

of appropriation; a reading of opposites; an inclusion of the other. Transgression maintains its urgency and its agency only for a limited moment of time. There is no specific set of rules or protocol, and no specific result. As particular methods become overused, such as the urban play tactics developed by the Situationists, they become cliché and lose their power.

Transgressive architecture and play must therefore develop its own language that deals with specific conditions of each site, boundary and limit. Not only is space transgressed or played by the architect and its users, but the space itself plays and transgresses, establishing spaces of play and spaces in play. What becomes evident is the reciprocal relationship between space and use. As described by Doron earlier in this essay, architectural 'dead zones' refuse to be defined geographically and temporally. This raises broader architectural questions as to what events could occur in these spaces that are temporarily used. It is therefore necessary to closely examine these spaces of abandonment, which are only marginally accepted by our society to understand how these spaces are continually transformed by use, but also alter use. How can this interplay between space and use also begin to change every day spaces? Spaces ofplay can therefore be considered as 'unchanging', in which acts are carried out according to a specific time and location, where the space is structured around specific rules and order. Spaces in play therefore operate within a zone of changeability, offering infinite possibilities of use. They respond to the movement of time in order to provide a space for different users which require differing functions. Could we then as architects design spaces that shift with time, respond to use and adapt to users. A space that is in play with the notion of abandonment.

NOTES

1   Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1980), pp. 8-13.
2   Roger Caillois, Man, Play and Games (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
3   Libero Andreotti, 'Architecture and Play', in: Tom McDonough (ed.), Guy Debord and the Situationist International (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 215.
4   David Pinder, 'Situationism/Situationist Geography', in: Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (eds.), International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, vol 10 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2009) p.144
5   Libero Andreotti, 'Architecture and Play', in: Tom McDonough (ed.), Guy Debord and the Situationist International (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 213.
6   Simon Sadler, The Situationist City (Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1998), p.105.
7   Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', in: Libero Andreotti, Xavier Costa and Paul Hammond (eds.), Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City (Barcelona: ACTAR, 1996), p. 22.
8   The flâneur is a man of leisure that observes society through strolling or meandering. See: Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'flâneur'. Online: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flaneur (accessed 17 December 2016).
9   Chris Jenks, Transgression(London: Routledge, 2003), p. 148.
10   Debord suggests the dérive should be carried out with 3 or 4 people. Any more persons could lead to a collapse of organisation and fragmentation into multiple micro derives. Fewer than 3 members could lead to a narrow reading of the environments, as a thorough understanding of the environment could only be achieved through intense discussions.
11   The model of the labyrinth is being investigated within the Border Conditions studio as a means of looking at a space through the simple elements of walls and route. The labyrinth and its component platform balance the internal experience with the external overall view.
12   Simon Sadler, The Situationist City (Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1998), pp. 17-18, p. 44.
13   Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement', in: Les lévres nues, no.8 (Brussels, 1956), translated as 'Methods of Détournement', in: Ken Knabb, Situationist International Anthology, pp. 8-14.
14   Sadie Plant, The most radical gesture; The Situationist International in a postmodern age (London: Routledge, 1992), in: chapter 3 '... a single choice: suicide or revolution', p. 89.

15   Gil M. Doron, 'P.S. The Eye of God is in the Dee-tail' in: Marc Schoonderbeek (ed.), Border Conditions (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 2010), p. 175.

16   Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', in: Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 33-35.

17   Doron describes various groups that use and occupy void spaces such as the homeless, who reconstruct shelters within the urban landscape, physically changing the space, and street vendors that temporally take over the public street in order to sell goods and maintain a flow in consumerism. Other groups mentioned by Doron include squatters, prostitutes, gays, sado-masochists, drug users and boat dwellers.

18   Gil M. Doron, 'The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression', City, vol. 4, no. 2 (2000), p. 256.

19   In the traditional town, streets are logically ordered to facilitate movement and accommodate the masses of built structures and housing, leaving little room for social space. The reversal of this arrangement, 'ville verte' or green town, is a regimented organisation of isolated skyscrapers within a park-like landscape, where corridors seek to limit social encounters.

20   Constant Nieuwenhuys, 'Another City for Another Life' in: Benno Tempel and Laura Stamps (eds.), Constant: New Babylon. To Us, Liberty (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2016), pp. 206-209.

21   Neil Leach, Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 19.