Empowering Play:

Reflection Paper

Introduction:

Everything Everywhere All at Once

Before the start of the graduation program under the title Heterogeneous City, the methodology of the Architectural Design Crossovers studio for multi-disciplinary synergies with a leading role in seeking suitable spatial interventions was a big unknown.

However, heterogeneity was the best phrase for what awaited us, a dozen students from September 2022. The studio's interdisciplinary, investigative approach, with a strong emphasis on the translation of research into design, was a great field to test ourselves on many levels at the same time, after which I realized it would be a journey where theory, urbanism, conceptual thinking, and building technology in architecture would be closer than anything had ever been.

The research and the design were created in an interdisciplinary collaboration with my mentors, Alper Semih Alkan, Florian Eckardt, and Leeke Reinders, for which I will be deeply grateful.

1. Reference to the Oscar-awarded (2022) movie of the same name directed by Daniel Kwan, Daniel Scheinert.

Reflection:

On Statement

The following paper reflects on a study that began
with the discovery of a documentary titled Match is
an Excuse: soccer, war, and Politics by Anita Werner
and Michal Kolodziejczyk. The book's discussion
of young people seeking basic social needs by
participating in communities centred on football in
post-traumatic situations piqued my interest from
an architectural and anthropological standpoint.
Approaching the studio with an initial study idea
proved highly beneficial in framing the problem, and
The investigation began with the first statement:

Football, as a global phenomenon, is shaping many
people's lives. Naturally, one can antagonize and
trivialize it, but positively, it can give people a
voice to express themselves and fulfil the basic need
to belong. Especially the grassroots authenticity of
so-called football tribes plays an essential role in
nowaday's world. How, then, can architecture go hand-
in-hand with the power of football's expression of
social needs?

The aforementioned football tribes have stayed in the
research for longer, expanded further by the notion
of play, ludicity, and self-organization in one's
urban affordances.

On Research

It was critical to crystallize the terminology in
the next section of the study. This prompted me to
observe that the term ‚play' or ‚tribal' continues
to excel today beyond anthropology, hitting a sense
of identity and distinctness from the larger society
around us. Many of the fundamental components of the
tribal human organization remain. That investigation
is supported by consumer tribes research, emphasizing
the importance of popularizing techniques for
outsiders (exposure to other tribes), standardizing
equipment and practices, or providing a suitable
location for the tribe.

On the topic of play and self-organization, it became clear that an approach to my research could be found in the unexpected moments hidden in the ordinary and mundane aspects of life. As a result, reaching out to people for cognitive purposes was critical to the success of social research. Observing the space in which people played (whether it was a playground, a sports field, or a housing estate) assisted me in understanding that play occurs everywhere. Still, it can occasionally be activated by fundamental architectural elements. We can learn how to transform the city to people's needs if we agree that space is not just a given but is actively produced through ludic activities and self-organizing practices. This point summarized my design agenda through the next steps of the project.

The investigation was carried out throughout the design process (after P2). During this time, I ascertained the correctness of the theses made. As a result, I led to a final understanding of play as simply an unexpected use of public space that can be encountered as an escape from the stresses of everyday life, with the help of further testing of some design solutions and experimentation on the Burgess Park infrastructure.

This definition became a mantra repeatedly repeated during the subsequent design stages. The path to this point was filled with explorations that frequently required me to step outside my comfort zone. The most difficult challenge was talking to strangers, learning new research methods, or experimenting with different working tools. Finally, the work led to the discovery of a gap in architectural research. Self-organization, play, and ludicity are already known in a discourse. However, they have yet to be investigated together, additionally supported by the modern anthropologist approach to tribalism. Therefore, my research findings and methodology can be used to develop experimental informal initiatives that are ludic experiments in interdisciplinary fields.

On Site

One of the biggest challenges of graduating from
Studio Heterogeneous City is locating and selecting
your project site. At P1, I fell into the trap of
frantically searching for the ideal location for my
research topic. London is more intimidating in its
scale than it appears, and searching remotely for the
right spot based on created parameters is entirely
unrealistic. The first trip to London, which helped
gather materials for the study, could have been more
effective in narrowing down my project location.
As a result, I put the search for the site on hold
for the time being, believing that the area will
be discovered as the city and subject matter are
explored further.

A deeper study at the Aylesbury Estate (and its high
density of small, enclosed public spaces for play)
provided a turning point. The ongoing reconstruction
project of the area has severely disturbed local
social cohesiveness. For years, voices of resistance
on the matter of estate redevelopment had gone
unheard, and an intervention based on the temporary
use of vacant or post-destruction spaces was to be
the fundamental component of my project.

I returned to London, this time better prepared, to
conduct further research that included a closer look
at the Estate. There was nothing else to do but step
outside and initiate a conversation. Unfortunately,
once again, the initial assumptions proved to be
wrong. My pre-prepared questions proved entirely
inappropriate for residents whom the authorities had
abandoned. Significant areas of the estate proved
to be quite ill-designed and desolate. My romantic-
sounding techniques appeared a few years out of date.
Observing the locals, on the other hand, led me to a
vital conclusion. Residents of the Aylesbury Estate
and adjoining communities utilised the neighbouring
park as a refuge. They were escaping reality there,
allowing spontaneous, unexpected events to occur.

2. Main question:
‚As an architect, what could I do
for you, for free'

Burgess Park revealed unexpected stories on second
sight. The park, like the Aylesbury Estate, was
created as part of the same objective of cleaning up
slums and industrial areas. However, it never lived
up to its full promise. After some time, new housing
developments also threaten it, and play spaces are
increasingly neglected. Even today, we can see unused
spaces, strange-looking artefacts from the past, and
a two-mile-long bicycle highway draining life from
the rest of the park. That long line, a remnant of
the former Grand Surrey Canal, aided in anchoring my
concept and continuing as a part of an architectural
design.

On Design

The interdisciplinary approach of the studio
encouraged dialogue and exchange of ideas, breaking
down the silos that often exist in traditional
architectural discourse. This collaborative
environment facilitated a deeper exploration of mine
agenda, resulting in designs that are not solely
driven by formal considerations but above all address
social, cultural, and environmental concerns.

The shift from research to design was relatively
smooth and straightforward because of the developing
of a transparent design agenda and matrix of
precedents at the time of P2. The real difficulty was
managing workflow in a design organized at multiple
scales. Successive iterations got me closer to the
final design, yet I needed more time. A breakthrough
moment came after an exercise in collaging reference
projects. Experimenting with cutouts and the study's
findings unlocked the design's potential and further
concept development. Five interventions, based on
three design principles, enabled me to tame the
various iterations that had been developed previously
and lead to a more than adequate solution.

My design strategy from the start was to work on the urban planning scale (let's call it 1:2000) and the architectural detail scale (1:20). As a consequence of these two components, the final design had to be formed. I stated that it was a challenge due to the ambition and desire to optimally address all elements at all sizes. Such a method appears counter-productive, yet it finally led me to comprehend the interplay between project organization, material and energy flows, and technical solutions to create simple components to manufacture and erect on-site. Furthermore, it was enjoyable to thoroughly examine the many technological solutions in terms of the criteria I had established. Finally, I can present my thought with one graphic and a few words, which is a significant benefit.

The execution of the project led me to some further discussion. Paradoxically, as the profession has historically held a dominant role in shaping urban environments, it now finds itself increasingly dependent on external factors and facing criticism of its relevance and power. As mentioned by Jeremy Till in *Architecture Depends* or Reiner de Graaf in *Four Walls* we are more driven by external forces, compromising our ability to address pressing societal issues and the needs of communities. In my opinion, to move forward, it is imperative to recognize the limitations of the traditional architectural paradigm and seek alternative ways of practicing architecture. This requires breaking away from the notion that architecture is a self-contained discipline and embracing interdisciplinary collaboration. By engaging with other fields such as sociology, economics, environmental science, and urban planning, architects can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex systems in which they operate.

In the face of the ongoing sale of parks, playgrounds, and allotments in London, the project „Empowering Play" advocates for a shift in urban planning paradigms. It is the architecture that is no longer an exercise in asserting power and control, but is rather as a service to communities and individuals.

Honest thoughts encountered along the way:

On Studio

The Architectural Design Crossover studio's
relatively loose approach was nearly a blessing
in disguise. When I picked this studio, I wanted
it to be a place to genuinely explore my present
interests and those discovered along the road. That
has unquestionably been fulfilled. Consequently,
I am pleased with my accumulated practical and
theoretical baggage this year. Furthermore, I know
that the project with which I will enter the final
presentation reflects the careful decisions and
information I have earned during my schooling.

I appreciate the flexibility I felt in selecting the
topic of the study, as well as its methodologies,
design strategies, and form of representation. I
appreciate the opportunity to collaborate cross-
disciplinarily with each of my tutors and advisors.
The many perspectives on the topic have opened my
eyes to how to conduct the work my way. The number
of viewpoints, paired with the infinite number
of options and the absence of any limitations,
was arguably the most significant challenge after
repeatedly moving outside one's comfort zone. Looking
for additional iterations and pushing myself further
due to ambition led to unsettling moments when a
project about play stopped exciting me. At the time
of the P3 presentation, my anxiety was amplified by
comparing myself to other design processes in other
graduation studios. I needed ,the design' at that
point, which was still far off. Openly expressing
my doubts in front of other students and tutors was
essential for defining the project's eventual look
and, most significantly, returning to play again with
my work.

I must also mention a few things about the atmosphere in the studio created by the tutors and students. A year of project collaboration, thousands of discussions, and hundreds of coffees shared brought everyone together, resulting in a fantastic mix of personalities. The project moved forward due to the continual availability of instructors, and the culture of working in the studio formed part of the self-organization I discussed in the project. Above all, I felt comfortable in the general atmosphere, and the individuals I had the pleasure of meeting at graduation are the biggest treasure I will carry beyond the university's doors.

On Myself

I've finished previous presentations in a variety of ways. I am being sure of where I'm going, providing architectural or political manifestos for the future, and confessing to a lack of confidence, my concerns, or the challenges of the ongoing investigation. By bringing my views together in the form of my comments and the final narrative, I intend to leave a trace that contributes to the discussion of alternative approaches to the city, architecture, and grassroots design. It is unquestionably a path I want to follow in my future activities and a first step toward truly coming out from behind the drawing board.

The graduation process has become a journey, the essence of which I now fully understand as I write this paper. Reviewing the notes from the first few weeks, I can figure out how far I've gone in creating the project. Through my project, I have witnessed the transformative power of an alternative approach to architecture firsthand. That heightened awareness serves as a foundation for addressing societal challenges through architecture. I have learned to listen to diverse voices, embrace inclusivity, and prioritize the well-being of individuals and communities.

This mindset of empathy and social responsibility will guide me in seeking alternative approaches that prioritize the needs of people over formalist concerns. Through the readiness to embrace unconventional solutions and the commitment to social responsibility, I can contribute to the transformation of architecture into a more inclusive, responsive, and impactful profession. It all sounds like a great challenge, but finally, amid these challenges, I can find myself.

Thank you
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