

Child, City and Play

A polyphonic biography

Abstract

In this research, the “child”, the “city”, and the concept of “play” are regarded upon as three distinct realities, which, despite the fact that are concurrently three distinct “subjects” pertaining to their own academic fields, need to be placed under a new set of relations, in order to avoid being subordinated one to the other, as it has often been the case in previous “interdisciplinary” approaches. On the other hand, this study is also an inquiry on how we can “use” bibliographical references and prime material from field research while giving both of them their own integrity. These issues enriched the research which started off as an investigation of the child–city relationship, by means of a field research in which children were asked upon to use photography in order to portray their view of the urban environment; they led to the constitution of a triple research subject, the *Spielraum*, which brings together “Child, City and Play”. The dissertation takes the form of a polyphonic biography of *Spielraum*, in a narrative that does not try to prove a research hypothesis but rather show the “interilluminating” (to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term) dialogue between *Spielraum* and the characters that have influenced it. Consisted of six independent essays, it examines the notion of childhood in the fields of city theory and design; it traces the urban / spatial perspectives in pedagogical discourses; it emphasizes on the elements of “the child” and on “play” in the biographies of the characters that have been its influences. It aims to, albeit diagrammatically, de/pre-scribe an “other” world, the possibility of which is more distant today, in our assumingly “child-centered” era, than probably ever before: a world in which the spirit of play, of freedom, of creativity, exiled from the functionalistic production of the city, will acquire its own space; where the city will be designed for children, because “if cities are not meant for children, they are not cities”, to use the words of Aldo van Eyck; and where Architecture will be serving Man, so humiliatingly called “user”, and will be collaborating with pedagogy to make new values and new principles come to light, following Henri Lefebvre’s saying, that “there can be no different society without a different space”.