Play City – A contribution by NoRA to African Crossroads
11.12.13 December 2018, Marrakech, Morocco

Context:

Play City is a research, design & build initiative that aims at generating a series of programmed open spaces across the city of Rabat by colonising vacant interstices and injecting shared urban programs such as playgrounds, markets, performance stages, open air cinemas, etc. Residual margins can be reclaimed as productive space that is deliberately designed to be used, thus transformed, (and not just looked at) where one can learn, exchange, have fun, participate, thereby actively augment their everyday urban experience.

In Marrakech – where the pan-african summit was held in December – Jemaa el Fna is an iconic square which image of an ever crowded, colourful and bustling place, at the crossroads of all sorts of flows in the city, is largely present in our collective imagination. Its success revolves around a combination of attractions such as music performances, snake charming and monkey training, magic tricks, henna tattoos, fortune tellers etc. that continue to attract locals and tourists alike, day after day, year after year. The square is spatially structured solely by a series of market stalls on wheels, some fixed and some mobile, where an array of goods are sold: nuts, herbs, juices, snails, etc. As such, Jemaa El Fna concentrates all types of uses and functions, thereby embodying one possibility of a Play City. To directly relate our contribution to this central public space in Marrakech was therefore something we wanted to pursue.

Ø An installation in the garden of Villa Janna

Inspired by the idea that the seminar is being held outside of Marrakech and away from the hustle and bustle of the medina, in a sort of autarkic and private bubble, we proposed to sample the Jemaa el Fna square on-site by installing one of the typical f&b stalls in the very polished garden. The juxtaposition of the 2 elements produced a strong contrast.

The stall typically combines shading, presenting, seating and lighting, 4 elements that seem to be conducive to people gathering throughout the day and co-creating a shared space where ideas/goods are casually exchanged and conversations had.
The stall was installed in the garden facing the main terrace, a visible spot, at the 'crossroads' of different flows within the private property, and became a natural meet-up point throughout the seminar for impromptu gatherings.
Participants to the Summit soon connected the dots between the stall and its origin either because they had previously been to Marrakech, seen a photograph of Jemaa el Fna, or discovered it on a trip to the medina during their stay.

The stall illustrated the capability of a simple set of furniture to generate an active meeting place around it as it offered a new hotspot for informal gatherings, casual discussions over lunch or dinner, day and night, from the minute it was installed.

below: snails' stall in its natural environment;
next: stall transplant at Villa Janna

photograph by Farah Baki.

Ø RE-PLAY: a Research on Play and/in the City

Besides or instead of actual food - snails were served the 1st night and homemade moroccan harira was served on the 2nd night - we presented '*food for thought*' at the stall, in the form of a concise (historical) research about Play and the City.
The research discusses the broader definition of the word play that encompasses the notions of engaging in an activity for enjoyment and recreation, being cooperative, participate but also as a noun, play means the space in or through which a mechanism can or does move=> a room for manoeuvre, a margin, leeway.

The booklet is an image-based compilation of contrasting practices or theories about Play in the urban environment (Huizinga, Lefebvre, Constant, van Eyck, Matta-Clark, Corbusier and others) accompanied by a question, quote or statement that will invite the visitor to reflect further on the topic and form their own conviction.

Individual printed copies in portable size were distributed at the stall.

"*The right to the city* cannot be conceived as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life. It does not matter whether the urban fabric encloses the countryside and what survives of peasant life, as long as the 'urban', place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among all resources, finds its morphological base and its practico-material realization."

To consider the city is to encounter ourselves.

To encounter the city is to rediscover the child.

If the child rediscovers the city,

the city will rediscover the child – ourselves.

LOOK SNOW!

A miraculous trick of the skies – a fleeting correction.

All at once the child is Lord of the City.

But the joy of gathering snow off paralyzed vehicles is short-lived.

Provide something for the human child more permanent than snow – if perhaps less abundant.

Another miracle.

Aldo van Eyck, "The Child, the City, and the Artist" 1962

play /plei/

verb: play

1. engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose.
"the children were playing by a pool"

2. take part in (a sport).
"I play squash and badminton"

3. be cooperative.
"he needs financial backing, but the building societies won't play"

4. represent (a character) in a theatrical performance or a film.
"early in her career she played Ophelia"

5. perform on (a musical instrument).
"a man was playing a guitar"

noun: play

6. the space in or through which a mechanism can or does move.
"the steering rack was loose, and there was a little play"

play /plei/

According to the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga:

Play is primary to and a necessary (though not sufficient) **condition to the generation of culture**.

According to Roger Caillois (Huizinga's successor):

1. **Free:** in which playing is not obligatory

2. **Separate:** circumscribed within limits of space and time

3. **Uncertain:** the course of which cannot be determined and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative

4. **Unproductive:** creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind

5. **Governed by rules:** under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts

6. **Make-believe:** accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life.

The next sequence of this document illustrates the relation the city has entertained with the notion of play and vice versa, especially in the post-war period of the "Trente Glorieuses". It evidences conditions where urban space is appropriated by its inhabitants, reclaiming their right to the city.

Children's Games by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Homo Ludens

"It is a significant function - that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something."

"Homo Ludens" by Johan Huizinga

Play within Idealized

"In Le Corbusier's view, the proportion of leisure areas had to be high and access to them made easy...In the publication of (Unité d'habitation) building he always emphasized children in his photographs of the famous rooftop playground. "

Play within Ordinary

"But Van Eyck's designs differed from Le Corbusier's. Whereas Le Corbusier had imagined his leisure areas located mainly in idealized settings, Van Eyck accepted the narrow constraints of the surrounding conditions of everyday, ordinary Amsterdam. "

"Aldo van Eyck Humanist Rebel" Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis

The Lollard adventure playground on the site of a bombed school.


JUNKYARD / 1955

In Europe, the sites for play were discovered within the bomb sites from the war, where kids were free to imagine, make and challenge on there own. Lady Allen, a landscape architect, said "Better a broken arm than a bruised spirit," praising this Junk Playground as a crucial site for fostering "democratic community."

The Venetian Shopping Mall of Doha, Qatar

JUNKSPACE / 2002

"Junkspace" is an essay written by architect Rem Koolhaas as follows; "Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout..." He adds, "Continuity is the essence of Junkspace; it exploits any invention that enables expansion... It is always interior, so extensive that you rarely perceive limits... " Junkspace is replacing Junkyard and what it had represented, with perfectly planned, conditioned, and safe, supported by computations.
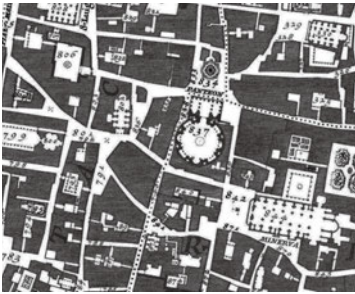
Play within Poche

Map of Rome by Giambattista Nolli, engraved in 1748, which expresses the ground floor plan of the public buildings such as churches as voids; and the 'private' buildings like residential and commercial as poche, defining the city by levels of public accessibility and identifying the key public 'hubs' within Rome.
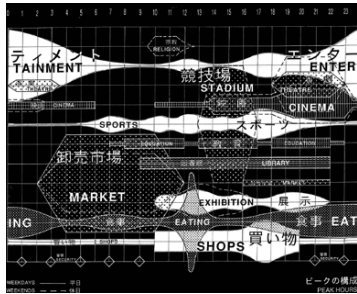
Play within Time

OMA's proposal for Yokohama Masterplan challenged the site by identifying temporal gaps to which various activities can saturate the given space, constantly changing in character and easily shifting between private and public. In this scheme, the city was no longer tied to the boundaries of definite space but extending into the voids in time, regaining the room for maneuver, or play, lost in the city.


Crawley Adventure Playground, 1955

Work and Play

"Work and play appear as opposites if play itself seems just an escape from reality. On the contrary, play teaches children how to be sociable and channels cognitive development; play installs obedience to rules but counters this discipline by allowing children to create and experiment with the rules they obey. These capacities serve people lifelong once they go to work." (Richard Sennett, The Craftsman)

New Babylon

New Babylon (1956-74)

New Babylon is a project by influential Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys which envisions models for cities with the playful and creative human being at the centre. Attempting to resolve the dichotomy between work and leisure, Constant speculated about a society freed from the need to work by automation and visualized the post-labour world.


NAKED CITY
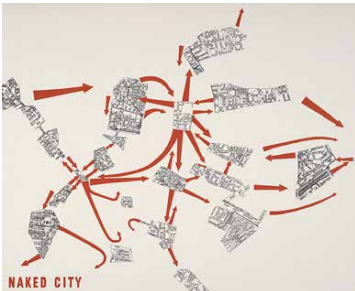
City for the Dérives

Situationist and Guy Debord's psycho-geographic map of post-war Paris in 1957, expressing the city as product of drifts or dérives, of no pre-set route or duration, and driven by intuition rather than calculation. Dérive is a ritual exorcism of the instrumental, efficient, and ratiocinative life Le Corbusier and other urban planners envisioned for post-war cities.

Jacques Tati "Playtime"

Re-Playtime

Playtime, a French comedy film by Jacques Tati from 1967, takes place in modernized city of Paris, highlighting sterile urban lifestyle under modern industrial technologies, accepted as necessary by society, but humorously represented as obstructions to daily life and an interference to natural human interaction. While the film was about the future, current-day cities seem to have followed similar steps, and the film's message can be re-visited.


Constant Nieuwenhuys' Labyrinteen, 1968
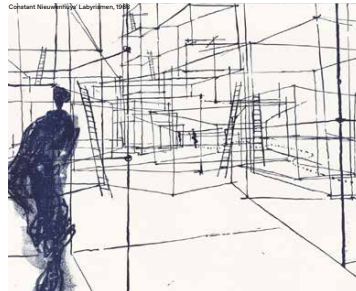
Utopian City

Inspired by Johan Huizinga, Constant believed in cities in which man is liberated from manual labour, where man can dedicate himself fully to the development of creative ideas. "New Babylon offers only minimal conditions for a behaviour that should remain as free as possible. Every limitation of movement, of the creation of mood and atmosphere should be inhibited. Everything should remain possible, everything should be able to happen. The environment is created by the activities of life not the other way around."

Playground in early 1900s

Old Playground

An image of a playground from early 1900s in Dallas, Texas, which often described as one of the most dangerous playground from the past, but the fact that the image being strikingly similar to the painting by Constant of an utopian city of freedom and creativity raises question about what we may have lost on the way of modernization and safety measures.
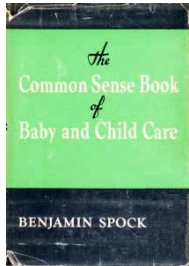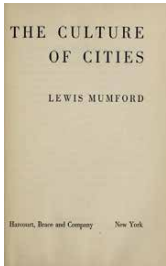
Child Empowerment

"Lewis Mumford had already, in his *Culture of Cities* (1938), made the point that childhood has to be appreciated as a 'valuable phase of life' (P.430). But in many other cultural expressions of the period, the child became empowered as never before. This new attitude toward childhood spread rapidly in the social sciences. Perhaps the first sign of change was Benjamin Spock's revolutionary and epoch-making *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946) that advocated an extremely liberal, non authoritarian approach to child rearing."

Vittorio de Sica "The Bicycle Thief"

Vittorio de Sica and Jean-Pierre Melville

"The same phenomenon occurred in the cinema novels, where the child was characterized no longer as a small adult, but as a fundamentally different kind of human being with distinctive way of experiencing the world, and in particular the city. In cinema, this is the case in Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) and *Miracolo a Milano* (1950); and Jean-Pierre Melville's *Les enfants terribles* (1949)"

'Aldo van Eyck Humanist Rebel', Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis

UN Playground by Isamu Noguchi, 1952
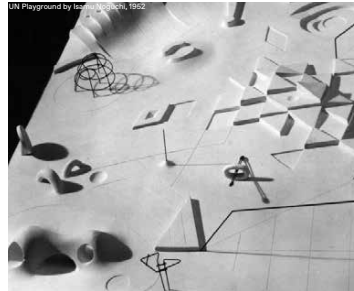
Isamu Noguchi on Playground

"Children, I think, must view the world differently from adults, their awareness of its possibilities are more primary and attuned to their capacities. When the adult would imagine like a child he must project himself into seeing the world as a totally new experience. I like to think of playgrounds as a primer of shapes and functions; simple, mysterious, and evocative: thus educational. "

"Court of Ideas" 1967

In Pittsburgh, architect Troy West, then an assistant professor in the Department of Architecture at Carnegie-Mellon University established Architecture 2001 (located at 2001 Central Avenue in the Hill District) in 1967 as a community studio. He began the project in response to students' questions about why the architecture program was not engaged in the city they lived in. The principal project was a renovation of a junk-strew lot into a "Court of Ideas" with murals, performance space, and sitting areas.

Cypress Hills Playgrounds in Brooklyn NY by Charles Forberg, 1967

## Playground Renascence 1966-1968

From book "American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space": "The years 1966 to 1968 appear to have been the high point for playgrounds in America (...) Author Jay Jacobs state that "after generations of neglect, the public playground is suddenly in the midst of a renascence as designers, sculptors, painters and architects strive to create a new world of color, texture and form for toddlers."

Carrara playground by Enzo Mari, 1968

Vest Pocket Playground by M. Paul Friedberg, 1968

Churchill Gardens Estate, Pimlico, London

Brutalist Playground

"I think that the structures built during the postwar period demonstrate that society was more able to conceive alternatives and imagine the world anew after the destruction and failure of the recent past (...) It was also a time when playgrounds formed part of the landscape and broader architectural ideology, therefore being a concern of the architect to design. In this way playgrounds were part of the built environment, not separate to it."

Jane Hill of ASSEMBLE

Safeguarded Playground

"The history of the playground is marked by an irresolvable contradiction: On the one hand modernity has conceptualized play as (...) spontaneous, pleasurable, and free... Yet, on the other hand, modern societies have rationalised and shaped children's play from the outside to advance social, educational and political goals. Thus the 'playground' is in fact about censoring and restricting types of play deemed undesirable and displacing them from places deemed dangerous or corrupting, such as the street."

Roy Kozlovsky

Aldo van Eyck's Playground Elements
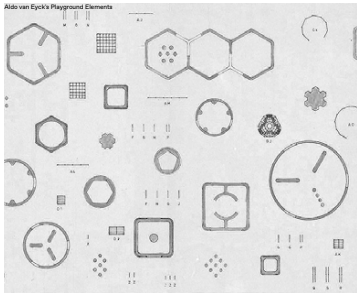
Allowing Children to Move
"(Van Eyck's) playgrounds were fantastic because the objects were simple: rectangular and round frames for climbing, a sandpit, a group of circular concrete blocks for jumping from one to the other (...) which have an open function and therefore stimulate a child's imagination. A child sits still on a slide or a swing: it is the object that produces the movement. Van Eyck's objects do not move, but they allow a child to move with all the acrobatism and suppleness he can muster."
Rudi Fuchs

Typical Playground Equipments
"...every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities..." according to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child set in 1989, but by emphasizing their right, it led to rapid separation of childhood from the adulthood, further escalating in seclusion and over-protection of the children. The playground equipments today represent the end result of the "right to play" in shapes.

Play within Lost Purpose 1968
"An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the raison d'etre which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one. A recent and well-known case of this was the reappropriation of the Halles Centrales... For a brief period, the urban centre, designed to facilitate the distribution of food, was transformed (...) into a centre of play rather than of work -- for the youth of Paris."
Henri Lefebvre

Students' Protest In Paris
A spontaneous anti-authoritarian revolt of a cultural, social and political nature emerges at the University of Nanterre where students, led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit a 22-year-old sociology student of Lefebvre, reject the status quo. Debates and general assemblies take over the streets, businesses, administrations and universities of Paris and France. Slogans written on the walls translate the desire for a renewed society and urban life.

City under Surveillance
Scene from the film "The Truman Show", where the entire city is one big contemporary playground, perfectly secured and constantly surveilled without any accidents. The film referenced popular reality shows such as "big brother" but what it had highlighted was the fact that real cities were mimicking the shows.

City Dismissed
Skaters choose space where others dismiss. They prefer the abandoned, empty, meaning-less sites, most which were left over spaces from the process of modernization.

Experimenting Production of Space
Performance "Man walking down the side of the building" by Trisha Brown. Her intention was to draw attention to the simple and natural act of walking through a situation in an unnatural scenario. The simplicity of Brown's instructions – to walk down the side of a building – placed the emphasis on the act of movement, rather than on its motivation or any kind of narrative. It also traces Lefebvre's production of space through pure body behaviour.

Practicing Reclaiming of Rights
Gordon Matta-Clark in 1971, at an abandoned lot under the Brooklyn Bridge, using waste materials to construct various pieces, such as this "Garbage Wall" which meant to provide shelters for the homeless in the area. He was exploring the wider interpretations of the street and the city, which was also a common shared theme of artists in Lower Manhattan of late 60s and the 70s.

Rooftop for Expression / London 1969

Scene of the famous impromptu concert on the rooftop of Apple Corps building by The Beatles, immediately turning the street corner and adjacent buildings into a concert hall and causing a large scale halt in the city. Ringo Starr remembers, "There was a plan to play live somewhere. We were wondering where we could go – 'Oh, the Palladium or the Sahara.' But we would have had to take all the stuff, so we decided, 'Let's get up on the roof.'"

The Beatles Anthology / Chronicle Books

Photo Image by Barbette Mangolte

Rooftop for Expression / New York 1971

Performing artist Trish Brown's "Roof Piece" transcended body movements from one roof top to the other, expressing visual and space-time shift from one dancer to the other. It was one part of series of artists experimenting with potentials in the city, especially in the SoHo districts of New York in late 60s and 70s. Almost simultaneously, performing artists in New York and London had used rooftops as perhaps an escape route from the changing streets.

The Bread and Puppet Theatre / New York 1966

"We want you to understand that theater is not yet an established form, not the place of commerce you think it is, where you pay to get something. Theater is different. It is more like bread, more like a necessity. Puppet theater is the theater of all means. Puppets and masks should be played in the street. They are louder than the traffic. They scream and dance and display life in its clearest terms. Puppet theater is of action rather than dialogue."

Peter Schumann, founder in 1963

Philippe Petit tightrope walk / New York 1974

"I had dreamed, I had toiled, I was an impatient child finally getting what I wanted," recalled Petit of the day he stepped out onto the wire to cross the towers, to realize a dream he first had in 1968, at the age of 18, when he saw an architectural drawing of the proposed buildings in a newspaper. "I had these elaborate hopes and dreams and thoughts about illegally landing on top of this magnificent structure."

Reclaiming by Tagging

Young people were the key players in shaping the contemporary graffiti movement. The first modern graffiti writer is widely considered to be Darryl McCray, who was given the nickname Cornbread, a high school student from Philadelphia, who in 1967 started tagging city walls to get the attention of a girl. TAKI 183, which comes from Greek name Demetraki and his address, had been regularly tagging around New York City in the late 1960's and early 1970's, said to have started the whole tagging movement.

Reclaiming by Body

Parkour was developed in France, primarily by Raymond Belle, and further by his son David and his group Yamakasi, during the late 1980s. Andy Tran of Urban Evolution calls it the "human reclamation" which is about "reclaiming what it means to be a human being. It teaches us to move using the natural methods that we should have learned from infancy. It teaches us to touch the world and interact with it, instead of being sheltered by it."

Robert Lance Mountain skating in empty pool

City as Cement Playground

According to Ian Borden, the author of "Skateboarding Space and the City; Architecture and the Body," skateboarding rejects the idea of the architect as the creator and their work as a project. Instead he suggests that skateboarding is in-fact an architecture, not as the object, but as the production and reproduction of space as suggested by Lefebvre, and the city being full of such architecture. He states, "Two hundred years of technology has unwittingly created a massive cement playground of unlimited potential."

Drawings and games on a parking lot in district of Esslingen, 1960 by Thomas Windenberger

Modern city ground re-purposed for Play

In the 1960s in France, the idea of a modern city is heavily founded on the anticipated mass advent of individual cars. Parking lots and carparks proliferate in the city while public transit soars, eliminating the need for them. Those blank canvas of asphalt will be spontaneously appropriated by children as recreation lots.

PLAN VOISIN / 1925

"What you have just been shown was the city's "City", its feverishly active business centre. The idea of realizing it in the heart of Paris is no Utopian flight of fancy. The enormous increase of land-values that must result would yield a profit to the state running into milliards of francs - for to acquire the central part of Paris and redevelop it in accordance with a coordinated plan means the creation of an immense fresh source of wealth."

Extract from Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Oeuvre complète, volume1, 1910-1929
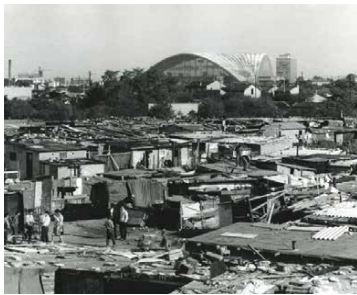
NANTERRE SLUM / 1965

When in the 60s a version of Plan Voisin materialises in Paris, it is not at the 'center' of the City but rather at its periphery. The modern business district of La Defense - the CNIT is seen in the background - is erected right next to its exact opposite urban form though peripheral too: the Nanterre slum.
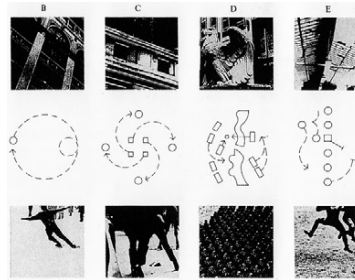

Deconstruction of a City

The Bernard Tschumi's theoretical projects "Manhattan Transcripts" (1976-1981) aimed to offer a different reading of architecture in which space, movement and events are independent, yet stand in a new relation to one another, so that the conventional components of architecture are broken down and rebuilt along different axes. By this act, architecture can again host accidents, coincidence, and surprises.

Wall as a Script

"The greatest surprise: the wall was heartbreakingly beautiful... The same phenomenon offered... radically different meanings, spectacles, interpretations, realities... in spite of its apparent absence of program, the wall (...) had provoked and sustained an incredible number of events, behaviours and effects... the wall was a script."

Rem Koolhaas, "Field Trip" 1993
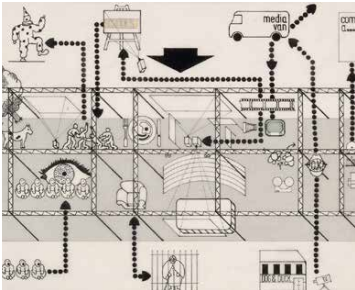

Physical Equivalent of Play

Alternative option to the streets in UK which were rapidly losing its freedom, theatre director Joan Littlewood and architect Cedric Price had collaborated to make a facility called Fun Palace which is like a factory for activities, events and performances, with fully flexible and mobile architectural elements. Although it was never realized, their attempt of creating a physical equivalent of "play" had significant impact in architecture.

Incident in Time and Space

Instant City by Archigram is a device made of moving objects and technology that seeps temporarily a community to create an event. It becomes an information network, education, entertainment and facilities for a population on the move. It demonstrates an impossible representation, that of a city that has no existence in itself, which is only an incident in time and in space.

www.bmiaa.com/instant-city-travelling-exhibition-now-at-college-maximilien-de-sully/
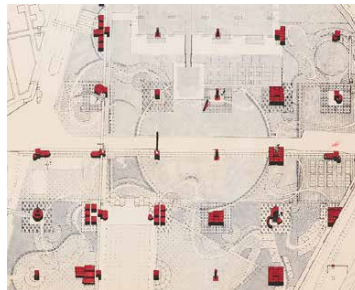
Parc de la Villette by Bernard Tschumi

"La Villette could be conceived of as one of the largest buildings ever constructed... It opposes the landscape notion of Olmstead, widespread during the 19th century, that 'in the park, the city is not supposed to exist.' Instead, it proposes a social and cultural park with activities that include workshops, gymnasium and bath facilities, playgrounds, exhibitions, concerts, science experiments, games and competitions, in addition to the Museum of Science and Technology and the City of Music on the site."

www.modulo.net
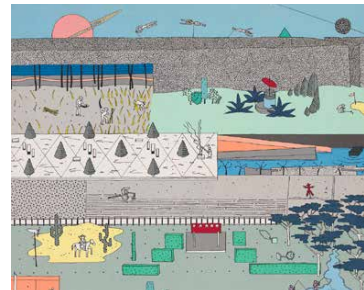
Parc de la Villette by Rem Koolhaas

"The program by the city of Paris was too large for the site, leaving no space for a park. The proposed project is not for a definitive park, but for a method that - combining programmatic instability with architectural specificity - will eventually generate a park." "What La Villette finally suggested was the pure exploitation of the metropolitan condition: density without architecture, a culture of "invisible" congestion."

www.oma.eu