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Urban Wildscapes
Chapter 4: Playing in industrial ruins

Interrogating teleological understandings of play in spaces of material alterity and low surveillance

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INTRODUCTION

Industrial ruins, along with other kinds of wasteland, unkempt parks, alleyways, culverts, edgelands and ramshackle spaces on the urban fringe, comprise informal, marginal spaces that continue to be found in most cities. Old mills, factories and workshops in various stages of decay, and originating in diverse eras testify to Britain's industrial past and the vicious cycles of capitalist expansion and contraction that characterize the volatile composition of cities throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Thatcherite economic policies throughout the 1980s rendered whole areas of industrial production suddenly obsolete. Subsequent processes of regeneration have swept away many of these derelict sites, erasing them entirely, or converting buildings into homes, offices and retail outlets as part of the promotion of a new industrial aesthetics (Muller and Carr 2009). However, in areas that have been less successful in attracting inward investment, such ruins continue to linger. Moreover, a new phase of ruination has been heralded by the severe economic downturn.

In this chapter, we explore the specific uses of these ruins as sites for play, first assessing the material and less tangible qualities that promote the numerous playful practices that are subsequently identified. Following this, we critically examine theories about play and discuss the shared characteristics which allow identification of analogies between play and ruins. Finally, we critically analyse how and why ruins are exemplary realms through which we might adopt a critical perspective that highlights both the limitations and potentialities for play in other kinds of urban space.

Despite their negative associations, industrial ruins are the location for a wide range of social practices, including a host of leisure activities. While the pace of urban regeneration and increasingly rigorous zoning policies make such sites less prevalent than they were in the 1980s, they remain spaces in which unauthorized and improvisational activities may occur, providing a space for bodies and activities that are excluded from regenerated, gentrified urban space.

Recently academics have adopted various accounts about such sites, focusing on myths of political and social progress (Trigg 2006), exposing 'the dark
genealogies and destructive operations of the contemporary world' (Gonzalez-Ruibal 2008: 262), interrogating dominant notions of curation and remembering (DeSilvey 2006), critiquing current constructions of heritage (Edensor 2005a; 2005b; High and Lewis 2007), investigating material vitalism (Edensor 2005c), assessing the potential for urban exploration (Romany 2010; Ninjalicious 2005), exemplifying human ambivalence towards 'nature' (Jorgensen and Tylecote 2007; Qviström 2007), and identifying the potential for numerous activities to take place (Shoard 2003; Doron 2000).

In the following section we explore the interconnections between play and industrial ruins and consider the extent to which industrial ruins may offer spaces within which the potentialities and becoming of play can be realized.

PLAYING IN THE RUINS

Before identifying the playful activities that take place in industrial ruins, it is vital to recognize that they are sites for a host of other, ostensibly more utilitarian practices. These include the use of derelict space for sex work, living in a temporary home, growing vegetables, fly-tipping, car-parking and walking the dog; as a resource for building materials, firewood and home furnishings; not to mention the ecological potential that such sites offer as they decay over time and are colonized by flora and fauna that augment urban experience. These activities sit problematically in any division between play and work, and between those activities deemed 'productive' and 'unproductive' or 'illicit' and 'legitimate', for they may be playful or associated with leisure and pleasure, whilst also having 'work'-like qualities, as we discuss later. Such practices also rely on the absence of direct regulation, though they may have their own informal modes of regulation.

A lack of overt regulation is a key attribute of ruins, important in relation to play since this provides a space outside the strictures of 'health and safety', systematic surveillance and material maintenance. Commonly conceived by planners, business people, local politicians and residents, as the derelict vestiges of former industry, when industrial sites are closed down and abandoned they are unmoored from 'stabilizing networks which ensured an epistemological and practical security' (Edensor 2005a: 313). Though high fences often deter would-be visitors to ruins, along with signs warning about security measures and the likelihood of prosecution, in most cases, these measures are toothless. Usually, somebody will already have found a way past the defensive barriers, and security personnel are rarely employed to protect spaces that are in various states of ruination and abandonment. The ordinary control of the human and the non-human is missing, and plants and animals rapidly move in and colonize the space from which they were formerly expelled. There is an instant alterity to normative urban experience, so that ruined space blurs distinctions between the wild and the tame, and the urban and the rural. This lack of ordering and surveillance thus allows wide scope for activities prohibited or frowned upon in other urban public spaces, and admits those who are intensively surveilled and excluded elsewhere.
A second crucial quality of ruins is their material affordance, to be found within the unfamiliar, unkempt environments that foster a multitude of opportunities for playful interaction with space and matter. The ruin feels very different to most other forms of urban space, is full of multiple tactilities, smells, sounds and sights (Edensor 2007). Such spaces may be sought precisely because they confound familiar forms of comfort and mundane sensual experience. The transformed materiality of industrial space, its decay and the distribution of objects and less distinguishable matter, provide a realm in which sensual experience and performance is cajoled into unfamiliar enactions that coerce encounters with unfamiliar things, and encourage playful and expressive performances. The ruin is not characterized by velvety textures and polished surfaces, ceaselessly swept flooring or plush carpeting. Instead, it contains the rough, splintery texture of rotting wood, crunchy shards of glass, the mulch of mouldering paper, moss and saplings, decomposing clothes, corroding steel and the oily residues of industry. These material conditions mean that derelict factories and warehouses invite expressive physical investigation through the material forms that pre-exist ruination and those that belong to it. Industrial ruins offer empty corridors to run along; stairs to ascend; windows to climb through; trap doors to be avoided, entered or to throw objects down; rubble to clamber over; materials of multiple textures and smells; walls and floors that provide blank canvases for art works; spaces of different sizes and materialities that provide opportunities to explore soundscapes; extensive abandoned and cleared shop floors that enable the enactment of expressive and unfamiliar physical performances. This engagement with materiality, whether artistic, experimental, hedonistic or creative, occurs in a context in which the usual conventions about the inviolability of physical matter as property, commodity or other value-laden substance do not pertain, since the site and its contents have already been officially ascribed as worthless and obsolete. There are few consequences for engaging with matter or space in ways that transgress these norms, and the absence of surveillance provides an opportunity to do so with little chance for such engagements to be apprehended. These circumstances thus provide opportunities for an array of playful activities which we now identify.

**Destructive play: joyriding, burning and smashing**

A particularly obvious range of activities carried out in spaces of dereliction, given the general lack of surveillance and lack of value attributed to these places, are those practices we term 'destructive' play. A common feature of many ruins and derelict landscapes are the vestiges of cars and motorbikes that have been stolen, driven around the challenging slopes, tracks and open spaces without following the norms of careful and 'responsible' motoring, and then burnt or otherwise destroyed (Figure 4.1).

These endeavours, along with other 'destructive' practices, would usually be termed 'vandalism'. However, unlike the destruction of vehicles owned by other people, and the damage caused to public and private property elsewhere,
the smashing up of the buildings and fixtures within ruins carries little sanction. Ruins are valuable repositories of potentially found items and loose materialities, which promote playful abandon and development skills, including the qualities of balance, inventiveness and improvisation recognized in accounts about the relationship between playfulness and space (Ward 1978). In most ruins windows have been shattered, and porcelain sinks assaulted and fractured with implements such as heavy boulders or iron poles. Wooden boxes are dropped from upper floors, or down lift shafts, and spectacularly splinter. Even brick walls may be annihilated by experimenting with improvised techniques of demolition, and lighter partitions made of plasterboard and wood can be ripped asunder with gratifying ease. Watching the spectacle as things clatter downstairs, deliriously tumble from assigned positions into a chaotic heap as shelving is tipped over and thick oil spills out from pierced tanks and oozes across floors is a pleasurable experience. There is a transgressive, playful delight in contravening what in other spaces would be restricted interaction with things and space, and letting go of the conventions of public bodily control. These more radical playful engagements with matter offer opportunities for expressive physical performance and a relatively unhindered engagement with the material world. As such, these destructive encounters challenge notions of 'acceptable' play, blurring the distinction between that which appears to be productive and improving and that which seems to be destructive, wilful, undisciplined and 'mindless' (Figure 4.2).

**Hedonistic play: drinking, drug-taking, partying and sex**

Other playful engagements within industrial ruins can be broadly thought of as hedonistic pursuits. During the emergence of early acid house and rave culture, abandoned industrial premises such as warehouses and factories providing expanses of floor space were popular venues for illegal raves and parties. Moreover, outside of such mass-events, ruins continue to be sites for drinking and

![Figure 4.1](Upended car, industrial ruin in Leicester (photograph: Tim Edensor, 2003))

![Figure 4.2](Smashed partition, derelict Oldham cotton mill (photograph: Tim Edensor, 2007))
Playing in industrial ruins

drug-taking, with most derelict sites revealing cans, needles and other drug-related paraphernalia. These activities blur the lines between pleasure and necessity since, for some, ruins provide a safe space in which alcoholics and addicts may carry out their practices with little chance of being disturbed or of disturbing passers-by; while the same spaces provide opportunities for those less dependent on drugs and alcohol to hold parties in which drinking and drug consumption can be undertaken for fun. Similarly, the prevalence of condoms reveals that ruins are also settings for sex. While they may serve as sites for sex-workers to take their clients for business, ruins also provide spaces for other sexual practices. David Bell (2006) and Gavin Brown (2008) have discussed the role of new media in reproducing spaces as cruising areas, or spaces for public sex; and there are websites which provide information on cruising areas including ruined buildings, and how to find and access them. Thus, the sexual adventures that take place in ruins may be spontaneous but can also be organized. Accordingly, this also renders such activities liable to state intervention, with the monitoring and policing of these websites (Chanen and Brown 2007) in the context of attempts by the state to eradicate same-sex play from cruising areas (Walby 2009), and public toilets (Johnson 2007), revealing that whilst ruins may be less directly regulated than other urban spaces, they are not necessarily the unregulated counterpart to more ordered urban spaces.

Artistic play: graffiti and other interventions

A third form of play might be labelled artistic or creative. In ruins there are often numerous objects and forms of matter that cannot be identified or classified, partly because of their transformation under conditions of decay and partly because of the visitor's unfamiliarity with industrial processes. Objects made out of unfamiliar material, off-cuts and residues from production processes, parts never assembled with other bits and other equally enigmatic, unclassifiable artifacts litter ruined scenes. This has the effect of contravening the usual visual order and attuning the eye to an emergent aesthetics, one that cannot be fixed through endless maintenance but is constantly becoming different. Thus, shards of metal, things twisted into peculiar shapes, dead animals, matter and fixtures released from their usual confinement collect and mingle. Scenes are framed by collapsing structures and the decorations of yesteryear mock the ongoing production of the visually modish in commercial space. Such unfamiliar scenes involve the random mixing of artifacts, so that things which were previously separated merge in new juxtapositions, striking chords through their unfamiliar accompaniments. Besides these unusual assemblages, large machines, structural entities and other objects appear as pieces of sculpture, allowing their aesthetic, shapely and textural qualities to be apprehended. Accordingly, an emergent aesthetic effect contrasts with the aesthetic ordering of much urban space. In this context, the ruin renders itself available for artistic and creative play.

Visitors may move objects around, compose impromptu installations. Artists are drawn to ruins because they provide a realm outside official artspace against
which artworks can be composed. More organized attempts to utilize ruins as sites of exhibition have been mobilized in recent years. For instance, in 2003 at an old x-ray works in Smethwick, Birmingham, UK, an artistic collective took over the property temporarily, spending some time restoring the building so that it was in a condition to serve as an exhibition space, subsequently utilizing the rooms and the materials to produce a series of artworks (Webb 2003).

Most obviously, ruins serve as venues for graffiti, ranging from tagging and slogans associated with subcultural groups, to more elaborate designs produced by experienced artists (Figure 4.3). Since there is no sanction for composing designs on neglected, often crumbling walls, certain sites are saturated with the work of such artists.

Adventurous and expressive play: action sports and urban exploration

A fourth kind of playful practice draws upon the particular affordances of many ruins, identified above, which offer potential for a range of playful somatic engagements with space and materiality (Figure 4.4).

To access an industrial ruin it is often necessary to climb under a fence or into a window, or pick a route through mounds of rubble. To walk in a ruin, whether it is cluttered by multiple objects and fragments, or comprises vast, open spaces is therefore to move within a material environment that continuously corporeally engages the visitor, distracting, repulsing or luring the body towards or away from particular routes, chambers or fixtures, offering engagements with unfamiliar textures or peculiar shapes, and testing embodied capacities to manage risk, move in unusual ways, crouch, bend and leap, to make a path around, through, under or over things (Edensor 2008). Particular affordances that inhere in expanses of concrete floor, chutes, kerbs, large boards and ramps provide a playground for the vehicular pursuits of skating, skateboarding, motorcycle scrambling and mountain biking. Such disordered space also provides a location for play that entails risk and danger through encounters with unstable structures and surfaces, requiring balance, agility and bravery beyond that encountered in managed play spaces or activities, such as climbing and abseiling, where health and safety regulations restrict the level of risk. Akin to the developmental approaches to play discussed below, it could be argued that these forms of play help develop useful skills of recognizing and negotiating danger, and knowing one’s bodily capabilities. Yet beyond these instrumental approaches, as proponents of parkour, urban exploration or free running may argue, such encounters with risk need also be understood as forms of ‘extreme’, ‘adventure’ or ‘lifestyle’ sport, involving self expression, playfulness and heightened embodied sensation (Wheaton 2004), and the production of particularly valorized landscapes (Cloke and Perkins 1998).

The backdrop of the ruin provides a particular aesthetic for such activities, informed perhaps by some of the fantastic scenes featured in the spectacular action movies that use ruins as stage-sets for dangerous, frequently violent action (Edensor 2005a). The exploits of urban explorers who typically focus their
activities upon ruined and forbidden sites, often at night, involve an engagement with such spaces as evidenced by the websites and blogs that communicate experiences, share photographs and recommend derelict sites. The elements of danger chime with action and lifestyle sports, and climbing and other specialist equipment is utilized to access and explore derelict space. The illegality of many of these practices adds a further frisson to these playful endeavours. Spectacular vantage points are sought from which to take photographs, and strategies for avoiding security and police contribute to the sense of adventure (Garrett 2010; Romany 2010; High and Lewis 2007; Ninjalicious 2005).

In addition to these physically expressive and sporting pursuits, many derelict and abandoned sites are littered with a plethora of ‘felicitous’ spaces (Bachelard 1969), the attics, cupboards, offices, cellars and host of micro-spaces in which children and sometimes adults may linger and create dens. Indeed, evidence of the production of these small affective, atmospheric realms recurs throughout ruined space, testifying to urges to claim space away from control. Typically bordered by obstacles, arranged with office and industrial furniture, decorated with small items, pictures and graffiti, these dens again testify to a material looseness that allows creative play and dwelling in less regulated space (Bingley and Milligan 2004) (Figure 4.5).
THEORIZING PLAY IN RUINS

We have argued that wild spaces such as industrial ruins are important spaces for play because of their material affordances and the absence of surveillance. We now extend the focus of this chapter to consider the playful activities we have identified in order to critically interrogate academic theories about the meanings and purposes of play.

Dominant notions of play have foregrounded its relationship with childhood. For instance, according to Bateson (1956: 145), when 'people talk about play, they tend to say what it is not - "it is not real" or "it is not serious" - and then the rest of the sentence gets rather vague when the speaker realizes that play is serious'. As this infers, dominant conceptualizations rely on the temporal or spatial separation of play from work, adulthood, production and the 'real stuff' of life, by viewing play as part of childhood development, as a process of learning and 'trying on roles' for future adult life (Katz 2004). The child's right to play is ingrained in international law under Article 31 of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 2008). Notably, UNICEF includes the right to play under the banner 'survival and development rights', reflecting the broader instrumental and developmental approach to play in childhood, with play valued as 'a means through which children's physical, mental and creative capabilities are developed' (Valentine and McKendrick 1997: 219).

In contrast, in reviewing theories on play in adulthood, Stevens (2007: 32) argues that play is 'fundamentally non-instrumental', 'purposeless', 'illusory', 'non-reflective'; a 'wasting away of time'. He further defines play as hedonistic and gratuitous, 'emotionally pleasurable to all participants' (36), an opportunity for people to 'fully be themselves and ... transcend the roles which have been defined by them for work and domestic life' (46). Like other dominant conceptualizations of play (see Evans 2008), Stevens' definitions are rooted in a
separation of play from production and work, adult everyday life, and are romantically conceived as being outside power relations. Such notions are more broadly rooted in neo-liberal ideals about the productive, responsible citizen, and the ‘teleological march towards reason’ (Katz 2004: 98) which informs ‘dominant Western constructions of childhood and adulthood, the former characterized by play, frivolity, freedom, innocence, dependency and a lack of responsibility, and the latter by work, seriousness, independence and responsibility’ (Evans 2008: 1663).

In this vein, Huizinga (1950: 7) insists that all play is other to work, ‘is a voluntary activity’ and that ‘play to order is no longer play: it could at best be a forcible imitation of it’. However, significant problems with this definition of play are encountered when applying this to the numerous forms of play which characterize adult and child everyday life. For instance, commercial children’s play spaces, computer gaming and hen and stag parties reveal a blurring of leisure and work time that instantiate new, idealized work-play rhythms characterized by the bonding exercises that involve white-water rafting, paint-balling and role-playing and which seem to have become integral to work practice and culture. Defining play as ‘other’ to work thus becomes problematic.

Assertions that play is the antithesis of production, order and responsibility are analogous to the ways in which disordered spaces such as industrial ruins are similarly conceived as marginal, lacking purpose and wasteful; and they are further typified as excessive, dangerous, and ‘out of place’ (Edensor 2005a). Official accounts of ruined and derelict sites in planning and local government discourses typically identify them as unproductive spaces, blanks that await more productive use; as ‘blots on the landscape’, unsightly spaces that signify economic depression and a lack of vitality; or at worst, spaces of danger, criminality and deviance; assignations that are not ameliorated by media representations of such spaces as venues for criminal activity, spectacular police chases, fights and as the lair of the abject and the malevolent. In the examples of ruined space and play discussed above, the simplistic reasoning inherent in such assignations of play and ruin is all too apparent. For ruins are often well-used places, sites of pleasure and leisure as well as spaces for productive and generative practices. We have identified a wide range of diverse playful practices that blur distinctions between productivity and pointlessness, creativity and destruction, legality and illegality, and respectability and abjection, confounding the simple distinctions between play and work discussed above. We have also shown that these derelict spaces, like other species of wasteland and interstitiality, are utilized by both adults and children for play, highlighting that ‘playing is not (just) kids stuff’ (Harker 2005: 59).

As Cloke and Jones (2005: 312) argue, because of the shared associations with disorder, irresponsibility and freedom, play and childhood have become ‘associated with places and spaces which are seen to be outside of adult control and ordering, where the fabric of the adult world has become scrambled or torn, and the flows of adult order are disrupted or even abated’. Ruins and urban
wildscapes have become situated within a broader debate regarding children's lack of access to diverse and challenging play environments (Jenkins 2006). Implicit in such discourses is an assumption that the denial of access to wildscapes has a detrimental impact on children's long-term development. Ruins perhaps provide an ideal environment for this kind of outdoor, unsupervised and risky play; but this is an environment which is commonly perceived as being off-limits to children and young people. As such, ruins and wildscapes are entangled in the paradoxical geography of play space that simultaneously constructs them as both risky and ideally-suited to children's play. Thus, associations between childhood playfulness and innocence and vulnerability produce contradictory understandings of playing in wild spaces. For while 'there is an assumption that in losing themselves in disordered spaces, children actually find their selves - become “true” children – without the ordered surveillance of adulthood with its restrictions and imposition of overarching codes of how children should be' (Cloke and Jones 2005:312), the disordered, unregulated qualities of wild spaces make them seem particularly fearful and dangerous as spaces of play, and thus children's access may be restricted. This is despite the recent identification of wild spaces as particularly important spaces for children's development through play, with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA 2007) arguing that 'children need wilder places to play where ... children can learn valuable life-long lessons, particularly about risks and how to deal with them, from playing in the natural environment'. Furthermore, such assessments contrast with teleological notions that distinguish absolutely between childhood and adulthood, denying the possibility for the child's acquisition of the adult skills of judgement and responsibility, and similarly, refuting the childish qualities of adult play.

These positive assertions about the value of children's unstructured play in wild spaces have involved moves to increase such play in recent years. However, the converse has been true for young people and adults, for whom play is not seen as an important part of everyday life or development – a product, in part, of the 'teleological closure' (Aitken et al. 2007: 5) in dominant conceptions of 'growing up', with adulthood the end point of development, not an ongoing process. Moreover, rather than risk being seen as integral to the value of play (as it may be with regard to childhood), playful activities for adults and young people are commonly seen as dangerous infringements on other, responsible, productive uses of public space, further undergirding the splitting of urban space into 'wild' and 'regulated' realms. Thus, activities which may be considered as 'play' for young people and adults, such as hanging out, drinking, skateboarding and participating in public sex, have faced increased restrictions in public space in recent years, particularly in the highly regulated spaces of many contemporary Western cities (see, for example, work on restrictions placed on young people hanging out in public space by Collins and Kearns 2001; Skelton 2000; Thomas 2005; and on the regulation of drinking by Jayne et al. 2006). As we have seen, ruins provide venues for such pursuits, with the particular material and unregulated qualities of industrial dereliction allowing a range of playful activities.
However, we are aware that there is a danger of romanticizing ruins and neglecting issues of danger and power that influence who plays in such spaces. Ruins may be spaces of exclusion, for they are often protected by barriers and fences that prohibit access for those without particular levels of physical agility. Accordingly, differently abled bodies, the young and the old and those who are fearful of such spaces, may be effectively barred from playing in ruins. In addition, while some may choose to visit industrial ruins to explore multiple, playful, heightened forms of embodied experience, other users may do so because they have no other place to go. Homeless people, sex workers and drug addicts use ruins as spaces of low-level surveillance in which they can carry out that which is forbidden in other urban locations. It is thus essential to attend to the ways in which the activities and bodies encountered within ruins remain implicated in broader power relations. For instance, without the protective gaze of surveillance and supervision, child’s play can often become a zone of affective disorder, whereby playful punches and kicks spillover into unacceptable and transgressive acts of bullying and beyond. In this context, industrial ruins reveal the necessity of avoiding any conceptualization of play as purely hedonistic and devoid of power relations, for we subsequently miss the multiple forms of tension, competition, friction and hurt which often accompany different forms of play. As Harker (2005: 52) argues with reference to Gagen’s (2000) work on gender, performativity and power in play, ‘playing can more often than not be used to reinforce existing spatio-temporal relations and sediment existing power relations’.

Tendencies to over-emphasize the playful virtues of industrial ruins also have implications for the way in which we view wild spaces in dualistic terms, as ‘other’ to those spaces described as ‘smooth’, regulated urban spaces. Here, it is imperative not to celebrate certain forms of play within industrial ruins as ‘authentic’ or heroic, or as essentially ‘transgressive’ and ‘resistant’ in contradistinction to more ‘inauthentic’ and ‘mainstream’ play within more regulated commercial spaces. More importantly than this though, notwithstanding the restrictive elements of play in ruins that we have mentioned, we argue that the more evident lack of regulation and the particular materialities of industrial ruins throw light on the potential for play in other, apparently more controlled spaces to disorder and disrupt their regulation. For while we do not wish to undermine our depiction of the range of expressive, adventurous, unsupervised and sensual qualities of the playful practices carried out in ruins, nor back-track from the suggestion that the potentialities of play in most other more tightly regulated, materially consistent and controlled environments might be suppressed, such conditions cannot wholly exclude the potential for play.

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, we conclude by reflecting upon how thinking about industrial ruins in relation to play challenges the dominant distinctions that position play as other to work, adulthood, smooth urban space, power and regulation. Rather than
maintain these divisions, we contend that the proliferation of playful activities in
industrial ruins can divert us to a recognition of the potential wildness and play-
fulness within managed urban areas, reveal possibilities for challenging structures
of governance and regulation, and dispute strict distinctions between ‘wild’ and
‘smooth’ urban spaces, work and play, and childhood and adulthood. The sheer
effort to maintain the material order and regulatory conditions in even the most
highly regulated spaces means that there are always opportunities to capitalize
on moments of inattention or failures of maintenance. As Cloke and Jones
contend, play can be a means to make wild those spaces that otherwise may be
seen as ‘smooth’, revealing their rough edges and the potential these hold to
refigure and challenge systems of order and governance:

However ordered, or unordered those street spaces may be, children [and adults
engaged in playful activity] are able to disorder the street as adult space when they
transgress spatial and/or temporal boundaries and thereby enter a more liminal, hybrid,
inbetween world.

(2005: 312)

It is further worth noting that the inclusion of multiple textures, materials and a
certain ‘wildness’ in planning practices is currently influential, and this provides
opportunities for a more playful, experimental, expressive and sensual engage-
ment with urban space. But even where this is not the case the unruly effects of
sensual stimuli are always liable to break through the carefully guarded city. Since
the distinction between wild spaces and more regulated urban spaces is not as
clear cut as it may seem, this opens the potential for more varied forms of playful
engagement to occur away from derelict sites. Spatially deterministic assumptions
are liable to miss the ways in which ordered spaces are continuously subverted by
play. This is especially apparent when we consider the similarities between particu-
lar kinds of play in ruins and other forms of urban exploration such as free
running, parkour and skateboarding, along with graffiti-writing, public drinking
and hanging out, along with some of the other playful activities mentioned above
that are often tightly regulated but still extend across urban space.

It remains important to recognize that relative freedom from direct retribu-
tion is essential to the playfulness afforded in the industrial ruin, since this
foregrounds the affective, embodied and sensual qualities of play. For instance,
the untying of objects from obvious position and function within ruins allows
them to be interpreted and played with in ways that allow scope for imaginative
improvisation and exploration. Hence ruins are spaces in which playing may
conjure up and enact the different potentialities that have previously only existed
as unactualized possibilities, generating heightened sensual, affective and
embodied experiences that open the potential spatial, social, political and mater-
ial orderings to be confounded and threatened by the immanent, sensual,
improvisational qualities of play. If we recognize that play is connected to and
integrated within work, production, everyday life and power relations, we can
see its potential to not only reinforce existing power relations but also transform
them. Like the children's play that Katz maintains is not simply learning or copying adult roles, but playing with them, negotiating and transforming their relations to dominant power structures in the process, play is always potentially transformative or subversive of power. Indeed, Katz contends that rather than being 'banished in the teleological march towards reason', play and 'childishness' may be thought of as positive forces in adulthood, 'ready to be sprung as revolutionary consciousness', figured as 'both a form of coming to consciousness and a way of becoming other' (2004: 98).

Harker (2005) suggests that play may best be conceptualized as always potentially emergent, with the potential to shift the actuality of the moment in unforeseen ways, generating encounters which could always have been otherwise. This infers that it is less important to analytically separate apparently opposing spaces and times of work and play. Accordingly, this provides a means to think non-teleologically about industrial ruins, not as 'dead' or waste spaces but as spaces constantly re-formed by both transgressive and playful activities, capitalist modes of production, broader power relations and contemporary forms of urban governance. Moreover, the kinds of play we have identified in ruins allow us to think non-teleologically about play in other spaces in which powerful forces of exclusion, domination and governance are more readily apparent and come with more immediate reprisals -- and in which forms of play occur nonetheless. As such, we have argued that an attentiveness to playfulness in industrial ruins offers an opportunity to think about the role of 'wild' spaces within the contemporary city, and the potential 'wildness' present in more managed urban spaces which might offer possibilities for playful transformation.

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