

How can society and its citizens get involved through play and construction of games in creating cognitive and knowledge generating environments?

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Part 1. Games

I have a beat that games could be a means to change people's perception of the world, to change their actions to situations that unites instead of destroying and separates.

I have a beat that games could become a seed for creating a strong feminist movement where women come together and play the possible worlds and utopias they want to see, or where they try out powerful identities that they may not otherwise have in real life.

I have a beat that games could be a process that awakens dormant creativity to life and pry stagnation that instead could turn to blooming actions, desires, dreams.

I have a beat that games can implement these dreams, desires and actions in concrete utopias.

Play invokes and evokes unconscious processes into agency, which is about the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices; therefore, games are more than just entertainment and fantasy.

Play can be about moving our bodies in different environments where the environment itself is the rule

Like in Parkour which started in the suburb of Paris as a critic to the architecture.

Games are means for creative expression and conceptual thinking as well as a way to work with social and critical questions.

Games are fundamental for the human condition; we all start playing to understand the self and the world around us.

Play is the way children work out social and cultural norms.

Playfulness is about forgetting your self and your self consciousness. Playfulness is about crossing a border to an unknown world.

By playing together people form close communities and develop a group identity and a sense of belonging.

To Play is to understand the self or others.

Games open up to possible worlds where we can experience something marvellous. Even see something new within ourselves, a deep desire, a lurking lust, a fragment of urgency.

By playing we can explore new questions of what actions means and what the consequences of not acting in certain ways can turn into. It is all about learning to play in new ways to break up the old expectations about what games are and explore what values games can mediate and in what ways they can affect the players.

I think Play is magic

Part 2.

What If?

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I am in SF on parental leave but also to work on a project about stories of muslim women. One day in the coffee shop in the house we are living the man who owns it tells me that he is Palestinian. He tells me about the situation in his home country. Im thinking of games, that they so often are about conflicts. And about men, for men, by men. Games seems similar with white men.

What if a game was about create an understanding, and intimacy?
What if the game was for Israeli and Palestinian girls coming together to play with different mechanics than conflicts?

I start to think and I start talking to people. Along the way my idea change, expanded, got stuck, become more and more something different.

Everyone I contacted on my expedition told me, you have to go to Palestine, you have to spend time there and meet people on site.

Step by step I got closer.

It took me 5 years.

First time I went to P I visited a Swedish dancer who was doing a gardening project in a village. I met a lot of people and talked about my game project, how to make workshops with Palestinian girls as a first step. I passed checkpoints or the slaughter house as the Palestinians call them.

I came home, contacted more people, organisations, read books, search the internet, re -shaped my idea. Over and over again I returned to a hint about making something more direct, a game with less technology, or no technology at all. Start with bare bodies, touching and the physical space.

The second time I went to Palestine I participated in a LARP. It last for three days and was about a wedding between a norweigan man and a Palestinian woman. I played Caroline, the groom's fathers's new woman. Caroline- a kind person but complete ignorant about the conflict and the Palestinian culture. She was so spontaneous and uncounscious about proper manners and there for triggered a hugh family drama that almost cost the whole wedding.

Back in Sweden I realize that I had to go back to Palestine to find what I was looking for. Some people to work with, some space, which could become the game board.

The third time I went with fellow- students in an art and architecture course, which included visiting an architecture collective working with decolonizing methods. In a refugee camp, I met the Italian artist duo Guiliana Racco and Matteo Guidi and we started to talk about how a place could change meaning by using it as a play ground. Suddenly I had two partners to work with.

I wanted to experience how women living under so many oppressions
OCKUPATION- PATRIARCHAL- CAMP could use the fun frame for

their own expressions and imagination. I wanted to search if game possibly can be a movement for empowerment and a way to explore identity and meaningfulness.

Palestine, is a place, is a construction, is a land, is a home, is divided by a wall, is oppressed, is a space in between, is cut into pieces, is divided by conflict, is a scattered land.

In Palestine the boundaries are constantly moving, the rules are unpredictable, the obstacles are far more than the resources.

How do the Palestinians play this game?

Part 3.

In 2009 the Popular Committee of Arroub and a team of fifty men claim an unused area of land and levelling a hill to produce a flat playing field as a desire for a public place, a place to have fun.

“I felt when I started to go to the stadium that I liked it very much. It is like sitting in paradise, but I felt like I will lose it because I can’t be here permanently. Lots of people speak about us, but we continue this sport. We have no right to walk or go out, but men can come out wherever they want.” A woman in the camp

The stadium facing the camp and can be reached within ten minutes of walking and showing the view of the camp, a view which usually is associated and reserved for the Israeli settlements.

Before 1948 it was common for women to occupy outdoor space for both work and sociality. But the conditions that developed from the precarious and restricted space of refugee camps, there was a perceived need to close oneself away, with the consequent loss of using one's body in open common space.

The common is about participation and sharing. Activities that take place outdoors and in organizations are closely monitored and always in danger of falling back on the families’ reputation or violating traditionalist customs and views.

The women especially have to be careful.

Levelling playing fields - *From a Space for Men's Activities to a Space Activated by Women* is a project founded by me, Giuliana Racco and Matteo Guidi. Since Giuliana and Matteo were living in Arroub when we met, they told me about the stadium, and we started to think in different

ways how it could become a space for women's magical worlds, a space where they could unfold their dreams.

The group we worked with was about 12 women in the ages between 35-65. From the beginning we imagined to work with younger women but since they were more controlled by the camp's social rules the elderly women were more accessible. Either their men had left them for other women or the men jailed so their approach was that: We don't have anything to fear, we don't care what the camp thinks.

The women spent like 18 hrs a day in their homes and they all have either mental or physical problems.

First time we met them where in the women centre in the camp, and they were so keen to play. As soon as we asked them to show us some games from their childhood they jumped from their chairs and start playing.

The project, two weeks in Arroub, was like a game in itself, with struggles, unpredictable incidents, more struggles, puzzles, misunderstandings, suddenly a sign, an opening. But with the clear goal mind, to make some kind of game with the women, in the stadium, we strived on.

We faced the fact that the women didn't want to go to the stadium at all. They wanted to play in the Women centre.

Because it was winter and cold?

Were they were afraid of the Israeli soldiers?

Was it the pressure from the camp that prevented them?

We tried to understand, and the woman who was suppose to be the bridge between us and the women was not good in speaking English.

We took a meeting with AbuKhiran, the head of the camp to get his permission to make the game. He might not have understood the idea fully but he promised us that no shadows would fall over the women.

So we played games in the women centre, childhood games from Palestine, Sweden, Italy, dancing and drumming.

Everyday me, Guiliana and Matteo asked if we could go up to the stadium. We read facial expressions and body language. Waiting for a sign.

So one day, suddenly...FILM

So now the stadium was an open arena, a possible world for more physical games, experimental approaches.

We tried different ball sports.

“We never have fun” We want to play more, the women said.

FILM Jumping ropes

We played well know games. We all remembered our childhoods.

“We want to have fun. We want to play more.”

FILM

We jumped more ropes

FILM

This was the game 7 stones a old game which is well known all over the world. The women played it differently from the men, with no competing, and no divided team. We were thinking if that could be a game that we together could re-make to another game, with new rules and strategies. But the women didn't want to. We never understood the reason.

During our play with the women we talked with them about the stadium and the future of using it. The women were clearly divided in two groups the Inshalla –the Yalla .. That meant that the Inshalla women were not sure if they would use the stadium again and the Yalla women that they would like to start using it for play and activities.

After 5 days of play and socializing in the stadium we asked what the women would like to do as the triumph game and they said they like to walk.

So to turn the walking into a game, me G and M decided to make a relay where the women would be divided in to competing teams, one walking clockwise and the other in counterclockwise to create a pattern of two parallel movements, like a women movement.

The Yalla team with blue scarfs and the Inshalla team with pink scarfs. We also printed bibs with Yalla Inshalla and numbers.

The day for the relay a team of women in the centre baked pizzas. AbuKhiran, the head of the camp sent his men to clean up the stadium, this was his way to say that the women's activities counted.

FILM

This quotation is summing up my work pretty well:

Cat's cradle is a game of relaying patterns, of one hand, or a pair of hands, holding still to receive something from another, and then relaying

by adding something new, by proposing another knot, another web. Or better, it is not the hands that give and receive exactly, but the patterns, the patterning. Cat's cradle can be played by many, on all sorts of limbs, as long as the rhythm of accepting and giving is sustain. Scholarship is like that too; it is passing on in twists and skeins that require passion and action, holding still and moving, anchoring and launching. Haraway

Still it is that games that are played by women is less worthy, they are not considered real games.

Games that lack technology is uninteresting cause Money rules.

There for I think it is important to make games that are about selfempowerment, to expand the understanding for the body's action space.

Sometimes I feel that we live in a time were our understanding and acceptance for technology is deeper than for ourselves, for our body, mind and souls.

Sometimes technology tame the wildness within us.

We believe that we have the right information about the world without investigating further and we trust technology to take us there, to experience life.

I will continue to make games, playful activities in specific places, with people who are in one way or antoher marginalized to get an understanding for the layers of power, the choices we make, the behaviour of the multiple and how to grow our dreams into our lives.

Maybe that makes me a romantic player.