

# Childhood and urbanity in São Paulo city's playgrounds<sup>1\*</sup>

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## Abstract

Playgrounds were deployed in the 1930s, in São Paulo city, aiming at promoting the socialization of children during their free time, especially by offering recreational, artistic and cultural activities, in the context of the changes of thought regarding life in the city, provoked by the new educational and hygienic ideas of that period. To contribute to the understanding of the subject, this work aimed to understand the notions of urbanity and childhood that guided this political and educational project, by means of a systematic bibliographical research of doctoral dissertations, master's theses and undergraduate theses developed at USP and Unicamp. Playgrounds were understood in the sources analyzed as a space and a time of sociability among children, as well as agreements and disagreements between the cultures produced in the universe of children and the cultures of the adult world. This ambiguous character is pointed out in the study, which covered both their disciplinary bias and their form of expression of citizenship and cultural diffusion. Above all, playgrounds were important in the construction of children's bodily experience, considering the emphasis on educational practices related to the body.

## Keywords

Childhood – City – Urbanity – Playgrounds.

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*Is not it better to turn those flower beds into playgrounds? Or into sites for games, with sand, seesaws, fixed bars and all this very varied arsenal of modern organized recreation?*

Luiz de Anhaia Mello<sup>3</sup>

## **Inside São Paulo city**

The first decades of the twentieth century were a period of intense transformation in São Paulo city, mainly in an attempt to organize and redesign the urban space. The yearning for modernization, in accordance with the precepts of European and American cities, came through by means of the forestation of the central area, grounding of floodplains, expansion of streets and avenues, construction of bridges and buildings, as well as the establishment of new educational institutions (ROCHA, 2003). In this period – while São Paulo was not a city as populated as it came to become –, a large belt of small farms filled its urban voids. Therefore, it was possible to imagine that these areas still offered a representation of rural life despite the emergence of this new urban ideas. The greatest expressions of the perspective of nature to be reinvented according to new urban contours were private parks and garden neighborhoods (DALBEN, 2016).

Considering concerns such as the accelerated growth of São Paulo city and the routine of intense work in big cities, in 1929, Luiz de Anhaia Mello published the article “Urbanismo: o recreio ativo e organizado das cidades modernas” [Urbanism: the active and organized recreation of modern cities], based on the premise that one of the main objectives of modern urbanism was to restore contact between man and nature, by means of a general system of active and organized recreation in the cities (TIMÓTEO, 2007).

United by the new ideals, urban planners like Anhaia Mello employed medical ideas to combat and exclude a way of life considered dirty, associated with poverty and filth. The uses and spaces of the city were regulated, ranging from urbanistic-architectural arrangements to new interpersonal relations that emerged in these environments. It was necessary to instill in the population the belief that hygiene was above all a new way of living, which required other habits and behaviors for life in society. This hygienic morality would be achieved with new ways of educating and different relation with the school environment (GOIS JR., 2005; ROCHA, 2003).

Taken as environments that would adequately suppress the street space – a place of moral corruption in which children enjoyed themselves without professional accompaniment –, playgrounds were justified as a measure that, by filling the non-school and work time of children, would provide a specific location for medical-educational interventions. These playgrounds organized and constructed in the city a space in which the elements of nature would be scientifically re-adapted, aiming to intensify their curative and preventive effects on children’s bodies (DALBEN, 2009).

Thus, playgrounds were established in the 1930s in São Paulo city to promote the socialization of children in their free time, especially by offering recreational, artistic and

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**3-** Mello (1929, p. 26).

cultural activities, in the context of changes of thought about life in the city, caused by the new educational and hygienic ideas of that period. Therefore, even though they are considered out-of-school institutions, playgrounds are part of a public policy to ensure the right to education. Above all because, given the small number of early childhood education institutions in São Paulo city at the time, playgrounds were primarily responsible for the construction of children's pedagogy in the city (FARIA, 1993, 1995, 1999a).

Therefore, the proposals of urbanization and modernization of the city led to changes in people's pace of life and the emergence of new modes of circulation, recreation and education. Given this, it is possible to question: How did the intentions related to urbanity and the establishment of playgrounds in São Paulo city alter the experiences of the children who were in these spaces? To contribute to the knowledge of this research theme, this work sought to understand the notions of urbanity and childhood that guided this political and educational project. Thus, we conducted a systematic bibliographic research of doctoral dissertations, master's theses, and undergraduate theses developed at Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and at Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), which investigated the playgrounds of São Paulo city,<sup>4</sup> searching for the keyword playgrounds in their titles and abstracts.

In addition to literature to be reviewed, academic works, books and articles are traditionally considered primary sources of scientific research. Also, we currently note that in qualitative approaches there is a tendency to systematize the analysis of literary sources, which can generate interpretative and creative syntheses (RAPLEY; REES, 2018). The systematic approach to scientific literature on a topic transcends the simple organization and summary of research findings, and produces new categories of analysis and even other conceptual models and theories, which become the basis for future empirical work. This article has been guided by a systematic methodology, which involved decision-making at every step, as well as resumption of procedures and search for a defined contour path. In addition, the research of academic sources involved several procedures, which were carried out in an articulated and combined manner, aiming at obtaining a literature body as comprehensive as possible.

As previously noted, we started by searching for the keyword playgrounds in the catalogs of the libraries of USP and Unicamp, considering the likely interest of both institutions in the topic. When we found a satisfactory number of works available in these collections, we proceeded to the banks of doctoral dissertations, master's theses and undergraduate theses, which led us to the decision to prioritize these sources. The term was found<sup>5</sup> in 25 works, from 1978 to 2016. Of this total, 22<sup>6</sup> were studied and organized in the axes of interpretation proposed in this article, namely, urbanity and childhood: six doctoral dissertations – USP (3) and Unicamp (3) –, thirteen master's dissertations – USP (9), Unicamp (4) –, and three undergraduate theses (Unicamp). In addition, this study is composed of other works on the theme, such as articles, chapters of books or books, which

**4-** Although the implementation of playgrounds was mentioned at the beginning of this work in São Paulo city, the bibliographic research contained in this text also addressed studies on their expansion to cities such as Ribeirão Preto and Campinas (SP).

**5-** The works were selected in searches in the repositories available online and in visits to the libraries of the universities. Due to their date of publication, some works are not available in digital format.

**6-** Although three studies met the selection criteria through keywords, they did not specifically address the issue and therefore were not analyzed in the perspectives of interpretation proposed in this work. However, they have been referenced: Leme (2008); Santos (2005); Ferreira (2001).

complemented the interpretation process. The latter works were gradually located in the quotations of the texts read.

Based on the mapping of production, we emphasize that there is a diversity of works oriented by various interests: school architecture, teacher education, children's cultural dynamics in playgrounds, as well as educational practices and education of the body. The reading of the selected sources, in turn, sought to highlight the elements present in the works so as to understand the subjects urbanity and childhood, in an articulated way, generating a transversal interpretation of the works around these categories. We emphasize that the criteria proposed by Coffey (2014) were partially met and adapted for document analysis, prioritizing theoretical framework, methodology, as well as main results and analyses. Relationships between the analyzed works were also described, taking into account the year of production, supervisor and repercussion in the form of publications.

Considering the objective of the work, we will present below the production on urbanity, which in a way is present in the thematic variety of the studies and at the same time offers a line of interpretation which provides a comprehensive view of this historical educational phenomenon.

## **Urbanity and the playgrounds**

For nature to be present in the space of the city, Anhaia Mello pointed two directions: the idea of taking the city to the countryside, with the implementation of garden cities, or bringing the field to the city, organizing a recreational system. The notions of active and organized recreation were studied by Timóteo (2008) and, as the author points out, Anhaia Mello participated in the implementation of several projects, as is the case of playgrounds, during the administration of Fábio Prado (1934-1938). Considering it difficult to adapt São Paulo city to the principles of organization of garden cities, the urban planner advocated for the implementation of a system of active and organized recreation as a quick yet provisional solution to bring the countryside to the city. In line with this, the so-called useless parks – public spaces without a guided leisure proposal – should be replaced, therefore, by areas with the equipment arranged for active and organized recreation, generated under the ideals of modernity.

This general leisure system was intended to endow urban spaces with leisure arsenals for gymnastics and children's play, adding the beauty of planned green areas. This perspective of bringing the countryside to the city, frequently practiced by English urbanism, argues that rather than expand infinitely, the city should preserve a human scale of expansion (ARASAWA, 1999). This cultural policy was developed in São Paulo city, during the administration of mayor Fabio Prado, who created the Department of Recreation and Culture, and appointed Mário de Andrade its first director (ABDANUR, 1992, 1994). Thus, playgrounds – also called “parques de jogos” [game parks], “clubes para menores operários” [clubs for child workers], and “centros recreativos” [recreation centers], as Bartalini (1999) discriminates – besides aiming at beautifying cities, with their trees, playgrounds and gardens – were part of a project developed from elements of a civilizing process, of the

healing of the bodies and souls of those who lived in cities; and urban affairs were, above all, first-rate medical and sanitary agendas (MAGALHÃES, 2008).

The first study on playgrounds we identified dates back to 1978<sup>7</sup>, and consisted of a bibliographic research, which pointed out a small number of works on preschool (FONSECA, 1978, 1981, 1985). The author examined studies on children to find out why their care did not usually start until they were seven years old. He consulted *O Estado de São Paulo* newspaper from 1935 to 1938, that is, from the year of foundation of playgrounds to the year of implementation of Estado Novo, a fact that marked the decline of playgrounds. In his publications, Fonseca concluded that industrialization and urbanization were the phenomena that exerted the greatest influence in the implementation of playgrounds. His studies showed, finally, the desire that playgrounds be children's reserves, giving back to children what they had lost due to intense urbanization and modern cities.

We found discussions about leisure in São Paulo city from the demands created by an urban-industrial society in some publications (NIEMEYER, 2001, 2002). In the meantime, playgrounds are considered by the author as an organized leisure experience in the city, influenced by a modernizing project and by the proposals of the New School Movement. We emphasize that the first interpretations of these institutions in line with the urban phenomenon are available in the author's work. In addition to the considerations about leisure practices, this work portrays the rise of playgrounds mainly from 1954 to 1960, when 61 playgrounds were built.

In contrast, the weakening of this proposal is also problematized by the same researcher, who considered other measures that modified the occupation of playgrounds, anticipating the pedagogical format of future preschool classes, which was established from the 1970s on. This weakening of the proposal illustrates the deactivation of an ambitious integral education project which at the same time had revolutionary proposals such as those of Class-Schools and Playground-Schools idealized by Anísio Teixeira in the 1950s and weakened playgrounds, without giving them back their role of complementary educational institutions (NIEMEYER, 2002).

Similarly to these works, Filizzola (2002) sees playgrounds as an out-of-school institution, which was intended to organize the leisure of the children of workers, offering educational, recreational and welfare activities. To analyze such institutions, Filizzola stressed that there is a need for studies that expose the historical context of urban space reorganization and, therefore, his contributions included an attempt to recover the panorama of the industrialization of São Paulo city.

The relations between playgrounds and the nation project idealized by the ruling class of São Paulo city can be explained by an ambiguous character attributed to playgrounds, with strongly moralizing attitudes and great educational potential (GUEDES, 2006). In order to present the conditions of production of a photo album of the playgrounds produced in 1937, and its materiality and circulation, Silva (2008) conducted a historical study. Her sources help us understand that this iconographic publication was part of a strategy of the government of the time to advertise playgrounds, considered the most relevant project developed by the Department of Recreation and Culture.

**7-** The master's dissertation of João Paulo da Fonseca was published in book format in 1981, with the title: *Educar, assistir e recrear – um estudo de objetivos da pré-escola*.

The historicity of these playgrounds is also pointed out in the research developed by Wilderom (2014), who sought to analyze the educational spaces of São Paulo city from 1935 to 2013. The author's long history of study includes the production of public educational equipment, since the establishment of the Department of Recreation and Culture and playgrounds of the working districts of São Paulo city until the establishment of Centros Educacionais Unificados [CEU - Unified Educational Centers], currently operating in the outskirts of São Paulo. In this sense, the author sees educational spaces as urban interventions, that is, as equipment that induces urbanities. Thus, besides being the spatial composition of cities, the urban is a process that integrates the spatial mobility of everyday life.

Following paths that sought to understand medical discourses on the Brazilian nature to distinguish the urban and rural environments, Dalben (2009) analyzes the relations between the sanitarian, hygienist and eugenics movements and physical education. These relations saw nature as an ideal environment for healing and disease prevention and for the strengthening and education of the body by means of physical exercises such as gymnastics, sport and games. According to the author, these out-of-school institutions were important to maintain the proximity of education with these curative ideas (DALBEN, 2009).

Some years later, studies in São Paulo city were complemented by research on the expansion of playgrounds to other cities of São Paulo state, such as Ribeirão Preto and Campinas. Guided by a modernizing discourse oriented to provide city children with recreation, hygienic care and practices related to physical education, playgrounds were established in Ribeirão Preto city in 1961. Playgrounds were in operation until 1980, when they became primary schools (PRANDI, 2015; FONSECA; FERREIRA; PRANDI, 2015).

Committed to understanding recreational practices in playgrounds, Pizani (2012) dedicated his studies to the municipality of Campinas. The author outlined the operation and organization of playgrounds in the city mainly by discussing the role of physical education and recreation in the constitution of a leisure project, from 1940 to 1960. For Pizani, the historical and socio-cultural scenario of Campinas city, in addition to the changes planned by Plano de Melhoramentos Urbanos [Urban Improvement Plan]<sup>8</sup> helped to establish playgrounds in the city, acting for the occupation of children's free time.

In view of the above, we corroborate the meanings attributed to playgrounds:

Seeing the city as the opposite of the natural environment became inevitable, and the urban, seen as a place of degeneration and filth, corroborated the perspective that a playground, full of natural elements, would be a suitable environment for this return, aiming to unite nature with the scientific precepts of hygiene to ensure the health and education of future citizens. (DALBEN; DANAILOF, 2009, p. 166).

Playgrounds are presented with ambiguities such as progress and backwardness, the old and the new, or the present and the past, because they are constantly re-signified

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**8-** In 1934, urban planner engineer Francisco Prestes Maia was hired by the city of Campinas (São Paulo state) to create the city's Urban Improvement Plan, also known as Plano Prestes Maia. The plan began in 1938 and was not completed until the 1960s. According to Rodrigues (2011), the plan – associated with rationality, progress and modernity – changed the urban features of Campinas.



and adopted both as “a haven in Brazilian history and a shelter of body care suited to the modern precepts of hygiene and education” (DALBEN, DANAILOF, 2009, p. 164). In the face of urbanization, playgrounds were considered a fruitful space for life in cities, with a nature built and organized for the urban.

Some specificities of the establishment of cities, houses and streets in Brazil are outlined by Da Matta (1997), in a work entitled *A casa e a rua – espaço, cidadania, mulher e morte no Brasil* [The house and the street – space, citizenship, women and death in Brazil]. For the author, the house and the street are not only ordinations of the physical space or geographical spaces. From another perspective, they are institutionalized cultural domains that confer emotions, reactions and framed images, presenting themselves as categories worthy of sociological interest.

However, when proposing reflections on the urban, Delgado (1999) transcends the territorial limits of the city. For the author, in some cities, urbanity as a way of life is almost non-existent. The complexity of cities can be made explicit by this distinction between city and urban. Thus, he concludes that the city does not represent the urban. The city is a spatial composition defined by the population and by a set of constructions. The urban, in turn, is defined as a process of integrating the spatial mobility of daily life to a point where such mobility structures the urban (DELGADO, 1999). Considering the notion of urbanity discussed above, we understand that the playgrounds of São Paulo city presented us with proposals that altered the modes of circulation, recreation and education of children, in a way complementary to the urbanization and modernization of the city space suggested at the time.

From a careful and specific perspective of the relational and urban dynamics that were established in São Paulo city, we present an analysis about the bibliographic production previously mentioned, involving playgrounds and urbanity. Therefore, we emphasize that thinking these institutions from the notion of urbanity has become not only a possibility but also a necessity for the understanding of playgrounds.

Having exposed the works on urbanity, in the following topic, we shall indicate works on childhood, an axis that also stood out in the process of interpreting the sources.

## **Childhood and body practices in playgrounds**

As stated in the previous topic, Fonseca (1978, 1981, 1985) argues that the aspects that most influenced the implementation of playgrounds were industrialization and urbanization. In addition to dealing with issues related to urbanities, his studies relate to the constitution of playgrounds as children’s reserves, an intentionality concerning childhood, which would restore to the children of the city what they had lost due to intense urbanization.

James and Prout (1997) conceptualize childhood as an active set of social relations, constituted in the first years of human life. An example of this active set of social relations is studied by Fernandes (1961) in the 1940s, in Bom Retiro neighborhood, in São Paulo city. The author examined the organizations of children in groups, *trocinhas*, which he also called children’s cultures and thus concluded that they have elements taken from adult

culture and elements developed by children themselves. Consequently, we understand that children's cultures are not: "[...] something children carry around their heads to guide their behavior. Peer culture is public, collective and performative, ie: A stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers." (CORSARO, 1997, p. 95).

The doctoral dissertation of Faria (1993, 1999b) pioneered the research specifically related to children's cultural productions in playgrounds. It studies the production of intellectual Mário de Andrade, the public administration policies of the municipality of São Paulo, as well as the working-class children who attended playgrounds. According to the author, new forms of care for poor children were tried in the playgrounds, considered appropriate spaces for the education of children, who would thus become adults more adapted to the society of work.

The ways of triggering childhood education in out-of-school spaces, in particular playgrounds, directed the children to the purposes of regeneration, civilization and nationalization of the time, as already mentioned (BERTO; FERREIRA NETO; SCHNEIDER, 2009). The childhood represented in the period, therefore, is the one on which hopes of a better future were placed, which aimed to elevate the nation to a developed country and their children to a pure human race, with new men who were civilized and prepared for progress.

Nonetheless, there was a plurality of intentions in playgrounds and ambiguities of structures and their uses. Although playgrounds were intended to discipline working-class leisure, they also guaranteed to this class the right to free time, by means of the public space destined for this purpose. In the same way, Faria (1993, 1999b) considers that for children this right assumes even greater proportions, because space for recreation could be understood as a way of guaranteeing the very right to childhood.

In interviews conducted in these playgrounds, currently called and operating as early childhood centers in Campinas city, Tonolli (1996) highlighted the reports of documents that were burned for lack of space for their archive and memory. Nevertheless, the author found a significant amount of materials, which she analyzed. Ferreira (1996) also reports the lack of organization of the documents. For the author, the absence of a historical archive of the Municipal Department of Education<sup>9</sup> is an obstacle for researchers. This means that the efforts of both researchers also took into account the lack of precision of events, explained by the absence of records. Anyhow, the commitment to present the contributions of the playgrounds established in Campinas to children and early childhood education should be emphasized.

In addition, Paula (2003) used newspaper clippings to study the body language of young children of Celisa Cardoso do Amaral playground, also located in Campinas city, in its first ten years of operation (1942-1952). In the clippings examined, newspapers highlighted these spaces as an imperative of large cities, precisely because of the rapid and unprecedented increase in population and families who did not find in the city their spacious houses with large backyards. In her final considerations, the area of these playgrounds was highlighted as fundamental to allow bodily experiences, differentiating

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**9-** In Portuguese, Secretaria Municipal de Educação.



itself from the space of the school, which tends to prioritize the “docilization of bodies” (PAULA, 2003).

Nonetheless, it should be reiterated that playgrounds were medical and sanitariat agendas, and were thus circumscribed to a project of healing the body and soul, as pointed out by Magalhães (2008). In addition, nature was understood as the necessary environment for disease prevention and body strengthening, by means of physical exercises such as sport, games and gymnastics. As mentioned earlier, playgrounds aimed to keep educational practices close to these curative ideals (DALBEN, 2009). Therefore, differentiating these spaces from others, such as the school – characterized by the docilization of bodies – requires in-depth studies and careful appropriations.

Mário de Andrade’s collection of children’s drawings, with documents prepared in the playgrounds and children’s library, was also an object of research (COUTINHO, 2002). To situate Mário de Andrade and his collection in the genesis of the study of children’s drawings, the author performs an exhaustive computerized cataloging of the drawings found, and also develops an iconographic analysis of these images. Based on this work, the author understands that it was possible to reconstruct and reinterpret the intentions of Mário de Andrade in collecting these children’s drawings.

Another analysis of the children’s drawings of Mário de Andrade’s collection was produced by Gobbi (2004). The drawings were approached by the researcher as documents, because of their importance and the understanding that children are producers of knowledge. Her doctoral dissertation evidences the author’s commitment to situate the discourses that composed the actions of Mário de Andrade. Particularly in relation to the works published until then, Gobbi (2004) develops an ethnographic approach to the actions of Mário de Andrade. With this, the author presents the drawings considering not only the children’s voices, but also different perspectives on the different ways of being a child and their cultural manifestations. In this doctoral dissertation, playgrounds are understood as privileged territories in which there was fusion between the aesthetics of modernist projects and the ideology which conceived the out-of-school spaces to educate children.

The artistic manifestations of the children attending playgrounds in 1937 and 1938 were also studied through the photographs of Benedito Junqueira Duarte (BRITO, 2016). In summary, we can deduce that playgrounds were involved in the care of children of the popular strata, who received medical care and had contact with art and culture.

The playgrounds of São Paulo city were focused on another publication, which aimed to understand them as significant elements of analysis of the education of children’s bodies (DANAIOLOF, 2006). According to the author, in playgrounds, children’s experiences were altered, especially with regard to the education of the body. She defines the education of the body as forms of education instituted in the spaces where the subjects are, and she dialogues with the categories of time and space, understanding that each time of history marks bodies in a singular way. The researcher also added the analysis of children’s cultural production, taking into account urbanity, as previously discussed: “The city was the beautiful and cruel expression of industrialization, of the high number of migrants in the streets, of poverty and lack of structure to welcome and assist the poor and above all the children.” (DANAIOLOF, 2006, p. 8).

For Danailof (2006), the proposal of urbanization and modernization of the city dictated new rhythms and modes of circulation, housing and recreation in these spaces. Therefore, we emphasize the relations between urbanity and children's cultures in studies related to playgrounds.

In addition, we consider that the analyses undertaken provide us with two possibilities: A disciplinary and authoritarian one and a form of cultural diffusion as an expression of citizenship present in playgrounds. Danailof (2006), Guedes (2006) and Dalben analyzed the actions taking place in these educational spaces and concluded they were aimed at instilling a national identity into the children of immigrants, making their bodies docile for work in factories. In this set of research, which includes other works such as Sandroni (1988) and Raffaini (2001), playgrounds are also seen as a form of social control to prevent criminality and the delinquent idleness of children.

On the other hand, playgrounds are also understood as institutions responsible for universal access to culture and education by means of play and artistic activities (FARIA, 1993; NIEMEYER, 2002; FILIZZOLA, 2002; GOBBI, 2004). Until then, the rights to education and art were denied to a portion of the population. And playgrounds pioneered in promoting interventions in favor of transformations in society, connecting research and cultural diffusion in this endeavor (DALBEN, 2016).

Finally, we highlight that the studies examined present a variety of discourses in force at the time, which ratified the two possibilities presented above for understanding playgrounds. For Niemeyer (2002), it is precisely the duality of these institutions – sometimes progressive, sometimes conservative – that allowed playgrounds to be created and propagated in contexts of different municipal managements and under various policies. Above all, the selected bibliographic production helped us elucidate the intersections with urbanity and childhood in the playgrounds of São Paulo city.

In the final considerations, we shall now gather the interpretations on the theme researched.

### **The playgrounds of São Paulo city: Childhood and urbanity articulated**

In order to understand the notions of urbanity and childhood that guided playgrounds, this article analyzed the productions identified by means of a systematic bibliographical research of doctoral dissertations, master's theses, and undergraduate theses developed at USP and Unicamp. In general, playgrounds were understood in the analyzed sources as a space and a time of sociability among children, as well as of agreements and disagreements between the cultures of the universe of children and the cultures of the adult world. This ambiguous character is pointed out in the research that covered both its disciplinary bias and its form of expression of citizenship and cultural diffusion.

The city is a body of organized customs and traditions rather than a jumble of individual men (PARK, 1987). Thus, it can be understood as something greater than the sum of its institutions and administrative devices; the cultural processes and the uses of the people compose these spaces with their human nature. Consequently, there is a

cultural and historical process that involves cities and somehow maintains the past in contact with the present. For this reason, the author advocates that cities are a laboratory that must be studied, considering human nature and the social processes that occur in it.

In this sense, the studies presented here not only alternate considerations about the establishment of playgrounds in the city (PIZANI, 2012; PRANDI, 2015; FONSECA; FERREIRA; PRANDI, 2015) and analyzes of the urbanization of São Paulo city, the latter being concomitant to their construction in the said period, but also indicate the plurality of their architecture and uses (TIMÓTEO, 2008; BARTALINI, 1999; ABDANUR, 1992, 1994; NIEMEYER, 2001, 2002; WILDEROM, 2014; GUEDES, 2006; DALBEN, 2009).

Despite the indication of controversial peculiarities regarding the character of playgrounds, we observe that, in different ways, all the works refer to cultural practices related to education, whether thinking about the spaces intentionally organized in playgrounds or the pedagogical practices developed there. Above all, it is possible to affirm that these playgrounds were important in the construction of children's bodily experience, taking into account the emphasis on educational body practices.

Memory is something that marks experience and builds our identity. These experiences can be rediscovered in time by means of documents or other traces that give new perspectives and even several more mature points of view. Thus, Gobbi (2012, p.220) emphasizes that: "[...] knowing that one cannot go back, transforming playgrounds into an idyllic place for childhood, one can build other projects that are still unfolding in parties, studies, videos, and new research."

In this sense, we highlight the strength of research that crosses questions about the memory of educational institutions, such as playgrounds.

Childhood is a permanent and essential category in the structure of societies. It is a period that does not remain inflexible, because it is the result of social, economic, political, technological and cultural actions (QVORTRUP, 2010). As a result, childhood changes throughout history while remaining as a category that constitutes discourses on the transition from childhood from one historical period to another as something quite significant.

The studies presented here conjecture, on the one hand, about social discourses and practices architected from a mythologized image of children and a homogeneous conception of childhood. However, we must assume that, even in spaces and times determined by adults, children's cultures are constituted in these spaces in a way that is beyond what is predicted and determined. That said, "from the diverse social relations, children – aware or unaware of their knowledge and practices – propose variations within the same system of rules generated by adults, by institutions [...]" (GOMES, 2008, p. 181).

We identify the studies presented by Coutinho (2002), Gobbi (2004) and Brito (2016) using children's drawings as an expression of the possibility of studies that seek to compose the history of playgrounds from the productions of the children's universe. However, the other works presented, albeit based on studies of childhood (PAULA, 2003; FARIA, 1993, 1999b; FERREIRA, 1996; FONSECA, 1978; TONOLLI, 1996;) or of cultural history (DANAIOLOF, 2006), have not yet considered children and their production as legitimate sources of research. Thus, we emphasize that this article has intended not only to revisit

the works on playgrounds, but also to suggest and reaffirm the importance of children in reflecting on the educational institutions that they occupy.

Finally, we reiterate that the works analyzed suggest other research opportunities. The notion of urbanity may provide us with other tools for the study of school institutions idealized as playgrounds in São Paulo city. The complexity of cities and the spatial mobilities of the daily lives of the children who occupy these institutions would contribute not only to the description and understanding of the cultural practices that were consolidated but also to the educational practices currently carried out in schools that were built in the past to meet the objectives of these institutions. In the meantime, we aim to contribute, through our bibliographical research, to facilitate and stimulate new research in these spaces, organized from the 1930s on and modified by children and other social actors that currently occupy the schools – former playgrounds. Having said that, children can be considered participants and protagonists in the construction of schools and other school institutions that they occupy.

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