

My name is Stephanie Sutton and I am currently enrolled on the History of Design MA at the Royal College of Art and Victoria and Albert Museum. I am getting in touch as I would like to enquire about the possibility of participating in the SAHGB Graduate Student Forum in May 2014. Research for my MA dissertation (submitted in September 2013) focused on the design of children's playgrounds and outdoor play spaces in Britain between 1953 and 1978. Using two prominent types of playground space, architectural and adventure playgrounds, my research situates the playground within a broader social and historical context and questions what the pictorial and material presence of the playground meant within this time frame. Focusing on the intersections between architectural and design discourse, experimental pedagogy and concerns in post-war society, my research examines how these subjects manifested in design for play and uses both playground types, coupled with the play space of the street, to not only to understand how children become the recipients of adult ideologies and constructs through design, but to document the changing topography of London during this period.

At the SAHGB conference I propose to deliver a short ten-minute presentation using my research into the adventure playground movement. Situated on empty plots of land the playground space was given over to children who could play freely with little adult intervention and mediation. Described by anarchist writer Colin Ward as a 'free society in miniature', the concept of adventure play was considered to be revolutionary, allowing children's agency and creativity to centre the movement and dispel the need for a designer or architect in the planning of play spaces.

As sites located within the interstices of the city, the adventure playground inevitably becomes part of a wider narrative of urban reconstruction and architectural history. It will therefore be one of the key aims of the presentation to understand the adventure playground as a result of and response to changes taking place in the urban landscape during this period. By utilising bomb sites and vacant plots of land, the adventure playground attempted to harness the excitement and danger of street play. Yet despite the seemingly free nature of the playground, as a designated space defined by adults the idea behind adventure play was not without problems. Moreover, the adventure playground can be used to determine a shift in children's use and negotiation of city space.

In addition to this, I will address the meaning of these spaces within the context of prolonged reconstruction, using primary source material to consider the material and pictorial presence of the adventure playground and the image or notion of play. Mapping out a trajectory of the adventure play movement from its roots in social and moral construction in the mid-1950s and the involvement of organisations like the National Playing Fields Association, to libertarian approaches to play and education in the 1960s and 1970s championed by the likes of Ward.

Please do let me know if any further information is required (CV, images etc.), at the moment the research has been completed for submission, however I am hoping to develop the work further. Therefore the opportunity to participate in the forum would be useful.