

WALDEMAR CORDEIRO AND THE CLUBE ESPERIA'S PLAYGROUND: LANDSCAPING, EXPERIENCE AND PARTICIPATION

WALDEMAR CORDEIRO AND O PLAYGROUND DO CLUBE ESPERIA:
PAISAGISMO, EXPERIÊNCIA E PARTICIPAÇÃO

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the Esperia Club playground, designed by artist and landscape designer Waldemar Cordeiro (1925-1973) and inaugurated in 1966 in São Paulo. Discussing the project's essential ideas (such as the question of free time, the art movements to which it relates, and the principles of participation and experience), it retrieves the importance of one of Cordeiro's main works – in which the questions of play and the space of children in the city are posed –, also pointing out the actuality of the notions raised, in the Brazilian context.

Key-words: Landscape Architecture. Waldemar Cordeiro. Clube Esperia's Playground. Modernism in São Paulo

RESUMO

O presente artigo trata do playground do Clube Esperia, projetado pelo artista e paisagista Waldemar Cordeiro (1925-1973) e inaugurado em 1966 em São Paulo. Pretende-se, a partir da discussão de ideias essenciais para o projeto (como a questão do tempo livre, os movimentos de arte aos quais ele se relaciona, e os princípios da participação e da experiência), analisar uma das principais obras de Cordeiro – na qual é trabalhada a questão do brincar e do espaço da criança na cidade –, apontando ainda a atualidade das noções ali levantadas, no contexto brasileiro.

Palavras-chave: Arquitetura paisagística. Waldemar Cordeiro. Playground do Clube Esperia. Modernismo em São Paulo

Waldemar Cordeiro (1925-1973) was born in Rome in 1925, the child of a Brazilian father and an Italian mother. In Italy he had his initial artistic formation, studying at the Academy of Fine Arts and the Torquato Tasso Lyceum, in Rome. Still in Europe he had contact with avant-garde artistic ideals, mainly through the Italian abstractionist group *Forma* (1947). He was influenced by the writings of Kandinsky (1866-1944), and by Mondrian's (1872-1944) Dutch Neoplasticism. He visited São Paulo in 1947, but only after being appointed a Brazilian delegate of the *Art Club International* did he decide to settle there. At the time, Cordeiro was conducting his first experiments with abstractionist language, in a search that would culminate in 1952 in the manifesto of *Grupo Ruptura*, São Paulo's most important concrete art group (MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 86).

The group's production is characterized by a rejection of the ideals of naturalistic and figurative art, in favor of an abstract (or, in the group's terminology, concrete) art, evocative of rational and mathematical precepts, and based mainly on the principles of *Gestalt* (CORDEIRO, 2014, p. 697-98)¹. These ideas are linked to a principled defense of technological development, manifested in the use of industrial materials and procedures for the execution of their *oeuvre*. *Ruptura* sought an intervention of the artist in the domain of society's material production, approximating art and industrial design. Opposing the "old" (figurative, naturalistic) art and the "new art", the group's manifesto argued that the "new" would be comprised of artistic intuition endowed with clear and intelligent principles, and great possibilities of practical development (CORDEIRO, 1952, p. 208).

In São Paulo, Cordeiro was part of a circle of intellectuals, architects and artists. At the suggestion of the architect Vilanova Artigas (1915-1985), he began practicing landscape design,

¹ In opposition to abstractionism, concrete art was meant as an objective art, universal in its language, removed from any subjectivity and supported by fundamental compositional elements, such as line, point, color and plane. Influenced by Max Bill (1908-1994), concretes saw in mathematics and geometry ways to achieve objectivity (ENCYCLOPEDIA, 2018). They also opposed the mere denial of naturalism—or the 'wrong' naturalism of children, crazy people, 'primitives,' expressionists (CORDEIRO, 1952, p. 209)—seeking a rational form of expression based on industrial processes.

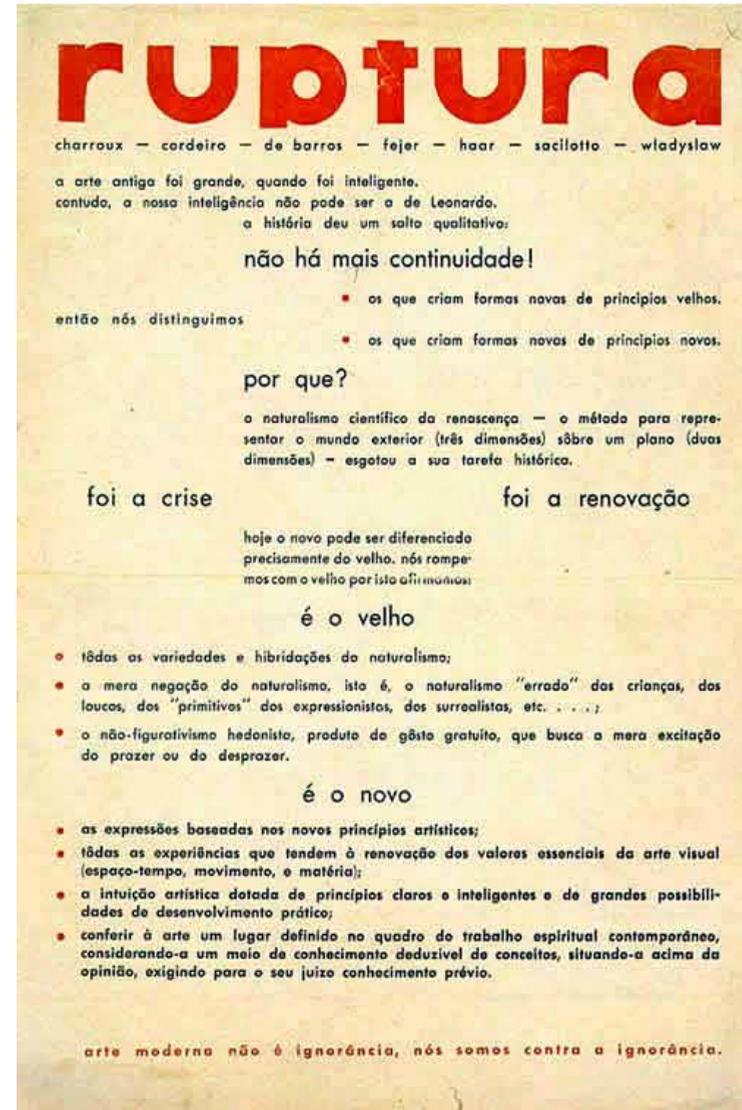


Fig. 1 – “Manifesto Ruptura” (1952) written by Cordeiro. Fonte: <<http://www.mac.usp.br/mac/templates/projetos/seculoxx/modulo3/ruptura/ruptura.html>>. Acesso em: 08 jul.2018.

inaugurating in 1953 his “Jardins de Vanguarda” office. Before starting this new line of work, he developed an interest in botany, alternating visits to the Botanical Garden of São Paulo with the study of plant species and their histological and morphological characteristics (MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 157). Combining botanical knowledge with his practice as a concrete artist, Cordeiro started to link landscape work with the formal aspects of plant species. As such, artistic principles that at the time were still being experimented on would assume the form of floor plans, furniture design, flowerbeds and masses of vegetation, as well as garden objects (e.g. lamps and sculptures), often expressing the transposition of two-dimensional compositions to the three-dimensional garden space.

As a landscape designer, Cordeiro worked mainly on residential projects, at first designing gardens for residences made by modernist architects such as Artigas, João Kon (1933) and the urbanist Jorge Wilhelm (1928-2014). With the development of his career, he started designing common areas for apartment buildings, recreational clubs and public squares. In the 1960s, he also worked in the urban planning, participating in urban development plans such as the Integrated Development Plan of Goiânia (1969) and planning green areas for the Basic Urban Development Plan of the Tietê River Valley, in São Paulo² (CORDEIRO, 2014, p. 722).

2 Cordeiro carried out hundreds of projects (CORDEIRO, 2014, p. 699), but many were destroyed or had their original character modified. Although an important figure in modern landscaping, he has yet not received much attention from academic studies; his collection is difficult to access, and there are no policies to preserve his work. A notable exception is the catalog *Waldemar Cordeiro, An Exact Fantasy*, organized by his daughter Analivia Cordeiro in 2014, which gathers texts written by the artist and analyzes various aspects of his trajectory.

THE CLUBE ESPERIA PLAYGROUND: AN ARTISTIC AND URBANISTIC IDEA

The Clube Esperia playground is significant in Cordeiro’s body of work. It represents a synthesis of the concepts, references and practices that permeate his trajectory; it is, in other words, an intercrossing between his artistic and urbanistic-landscape design works. Commissioned in 1963, the project is part of a private sports and leisure club, located in the northern part of São Paulo. Its area is divided into different sectors, where the equipment designed are distributed.



Fig. 2 – Playground overview. Source: Cordeiro Family Collection; MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 257

The starting point of the project is a proposal for *child play* in the industrial city, and the idea of new spaces and equipment where this *play* can take place—even in the less-than-ideal context of São Paulo’s fast-paced, overwhelming urbanization process. The scenario in which this process takes place is crossed by great migratory flows, linked to the city’s industrialization in the middle of the twentieth century. As a result, the city’s population increased from 579,000 inhabitants in 1920 to more than 1,300,000 in 1940. In the following decade, São Paulo’s population would surpass 2,000,000 inhabitants (IBGE, 2010). This considerable population increase was also related to the city’s verticalization, with higher urban density in the regions circling the downtown area. This urbanization logic put the interests of the real estate market at odds with the great poverty of the majority of the population: the working class was increasingly pushed to the periphery. In addition, several issues stemmed from a model of urban development that privileged an individual, car-based transportation logic. This created problems of mobility, floods, fragmentation of the urban fabric, and others—these issues still affect the day-to-day lives of the present inhabitants of Brazil’s biggest urban metropolis. With no consideration to the importance of green spaces and common areas in the original configuration of the city, and without significant public policies aimed at recreation and leisure, this urbanization process ended up relegating leisure spaces mostly to private areas. One of the consequences was the loss of the most traditional space for children’s play: the street.

Cordeiro was acutely aware of this context and of the contemporaneous debates on modern urbanization. Based on Le Corbusier’s (1887-1965) *Athens Charter*—in which the Franco-Swiss architect synthesizes the discussions of the Fourth Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) regarding aspects of a functional city, including the issue of “leisure”³—in 1964, the

3 The *Athens Charter* establishes the main guidelines of functionalist urbanism, dividing cities into areas that have four key functions: living, working, circulating and recreating. In this new city, human occupation would be opposed to traditional urbanistic organization—including the proposal of tall buildings implanted freely in large green areas. Critically evaluating leisure in existing cities, Corbusier defended that their available building surfaces were, in general, insufficient. In his view, in the period between the two great wars, European

landscape designer delivered a series of lectures at the Institute of Architects of Brazil, covering topics such as art and landscape, the teaching of landscape design, and most importantly “the problem of free time”⁴:

The lack of a critical view on the problem of free time is responsible for the abandonment of the individual in industrial society, who is condemned to inertia, the origin of mental, physical and moral degeneration. This is solitude in the collective. The ‘Fordist’ and ‘Taylorist’ spirit, which dominates human relations in bourgeois society, causes the individual to cease to exist when it is out of the rut of routine, or not under the sign of the machine-man, the profit-making machine (CORDEIRO, 1964 apud MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 246, own translation).

In addition to worrying about the alienating solutions for the increase of free time in industrial society (MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 246) — among which he emphasizes the passivity brought about by the advent of television — and pointing out the need to transform free time into a time of personal development, critical thinking, dialogue and leisure (as opposed to alienating commercial production), Cordeiro insisted that governmental powers had a duty to solve the problem.

Cordeiro’s long-standing reflection concerning art was in permanent dialogue with this approach to urban planning. As we shall see, the playground’s project testifies to an

cities’ built landscape advanced over their natural landscape, leaving the urban fabric with fragmented free surfaces that were located far from the places of dwelling and daily life. As a solution, he envisions a system of green areas at distinct scales, with the creation of green reserves: around dwellings; regionally; in the country, articulated to an efficient transportation system, establishing an entertainment program encompassing all kinds of activities. (CORBUSIER, 1933, pp. 14-17).

4 Cordeiro was part of the organizing committee of the seminar “Man and São Paulo’s Landscape” (*O Homem e a Paisagem Paulistana*), held in 1964 by the Institute of Architects of Brazil (IAB). With hundreds of participants from various areas (architects, landscape designers, urban planners, geographers, social assistance workers, engineers, among others), the seminar discussed issues raised by urban development in São Paulo.

understanding of landscape architecture as a “cultural action”⁵ guided by avant-garde art (MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 256). The late 1950s are characterized by a shift in Cordeiro’s art, related to the developments of the debate between São Paulo’s concrete and Rio de Janeiro’s neoconcrete groups⁶, and the gradual dissolution of *Grupo Ruptura*. This transformation – expressed initially by the “*cor-relação*” paintings, in which prevails a luminous and blurred chromatic language, although still obeying the relational proportions– demonstrates Cordeiro’s interest in detaching himself from the rigidity and ideological meaning of geometric shapes at that moment. The *Gestalt* principles, however, are fundamentally maintained, whilst the demands brought by Brazil’s new historical situation and cultural scenario require a “participating concession”, according to Medeiros (2004, p. 124).

In the 1960s Cordeiro gets acquainted with the concept of “open work” of art, advanced by the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco (1932-2016)—who, in a collection published in 1962, explored the relations of indetermination present in contemporary poetics, demonstrating the artistic tendency of opening the artwork to a construction of meaning based on the interpreter⁷—drove

5 “In this struggle, the landscape project identifies itself with the organization of free time, reaffirming its character of a cultural action guided by art, which was then oriented to the incorporation of the semantic, the contingent, the real and the three-dimensional ... Landscaping at that time combined the contemporary reflections of the artistic milieu with the demand for a cultural and artistic policy, providing matrices for the production of equipment necessary for the wholesome exercise of free time” (MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 256, *own translation*).

6 From the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, “Paulistas” and “Cariocas” had heated debates on the direction of Brazilian art. Concrete principles advanced by the *Ruptura Manifesto* started being questioned in Rio de Janeiro, where the *Grupo Frente* artists—including Franz Weissmann (1911-2005), Lygia Clark (1920-1988), Lygia Pape (1927-2004) and Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980)—gradually distanced themselves from concretism, highlighting what they considered as formal rigidity and lack of artistic freedom, and adopting a more critical stance in relation to the limitations and inequalities of the Brazilian modernization process. Together with the art critic Ferreira Gullar (1930-2016), they published in 1959 the *Neoconcrete Manifesto*, in which they defended the sensory propositions, the “environmental art” and the idea of “anti-art”, described by Oiticica as: ‘the artist’s understanding and reason to exist, no longer as a creator of contemplative art but as a motivator for creation—creation as such is completed by the dynamic participation of the ‘spectator,’ now considered the ‘participant’ (OITICICA, 1966, p.1, *own translation*).

7 The “open work” of art is a theoretical model for explaining the course taken by avant-garde art, with its productions progressively turning to forms whose determination would depend on the participant’s interaction. According to Eco, “[the] author presents a

Cordeiro’s reflection from the 1960s onwards. In this period, through a critical analysis of his own work and by approaching the neoconcrete principles of active participation, he begins to seek a greater dialogue between the artwork and the “real.” This is observed in artworks such as “Opera Aperta” (1963), in which Cordeiro experiments precisely with the problem of participation. Over a blue monochromatic canvas, small mirrors are geometrically arranged: the “realization” of the artwork depends radically on movement and the spectator’s point of view. By observing it, the spectator becomes a part of it, animating and altering it. Thus, Cordeiro will increasingly seek to

(...) transfer art from the domain of contemplation—a special attitude that is appropriate when one is in museum halls or in front of a monument in a public square—to the contingency of existence [in] all moments, corresponding to the aspirations of a new humanism ... for urban society and its new folklore, industrial folklore. (CORDEIRO, 1964 apud MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 246, *own translation*)

It is in this context of a critical revision of his own work that Cordeiro will take interest in figurative tendencies, informed by French movement *Nouveau Réalisme*, in works known as “popcretos”: artworks in which, appropriating contributions from pop-art, kinetic art, and ready-mades, he proposes the creation of a “semantic concrete art” that incorporates real “objects” and the aspect of reality to the works of art, dialoging with social issues and criticizing the alienation and consumerism imposed by the mass medias (COSTA, 2002, p. 13). The project of the Esperia’s playground can perhaps be considered the best

finished product with the intention that this particular composition should be appreciated and received in the same form as he devised it. As he reacts to the play of stimuli and his own response to their patterning, the individual addressee is bound to supply his own existential credentials, the sense conditioning which is peculiarly his own, a defined culture, a set of tastes, personal inclinations, and prejudices. Thus, his comprehension of the original artifact is always modified by his particular and individual perspective. ... a work of art, therefore, is a corporeal and *closed* form ... while at the same time constituting an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself” (ECO, 1989, pp. 36-37)

example of this aspiration for an “existence [in] all moments”, a defense of art as part of the ordinary living and inseparable from urban life.

SITUATION, IMPLANTATION, SECTORIZATION

With an original area of 2500 m², the playground is part of Clube Esperia, on the banks of the Tietê River. The club, which originally used the river for training and water sports competitions, had to relinquish part of its area for the construction of the Marginal Tietê highway in the 1970s —separating the club from the river and bringing the playground closer to the limits of the terrain.

The children’s playground is bordered by walls, benches and flower beds. Its main access is to the north, comprised of steps leading to the central area. It is implemented through a rectangular platform of 40 x 70 m, elevated about 50 cm in relation to the rest of the terrain, thus reinforcing the separation

already suggested by the walls; this spatial differentiation makes explicit the idea put forward by the landscape designer of an autonomous club within the club, governed by children (CORDEIRO, 1966b, p. 22).

Surfaces paved with various materials (sandstone, Portuguese mosaic, hydraulic tile, *pedra mineira* and ceramic, as well as sand, earth and grass) delimit the different sectors of the playground, which according to the landscape designer is “virtually subdivided in areas for children of different ages.” Among these five sectors (namely: Aquatic Games, Sand Tank, Central Sector, Active Games and Roadway), Cordeiro makes use of vegetation primarily in a functional way: according to him, the species served to dose light, protect from the wind, prevent certain paths of circulation and to act as a replacement for fences, also contributing to the formal and chromatic composition of the space (CORDEIRO, 1966b, p. 22-23).

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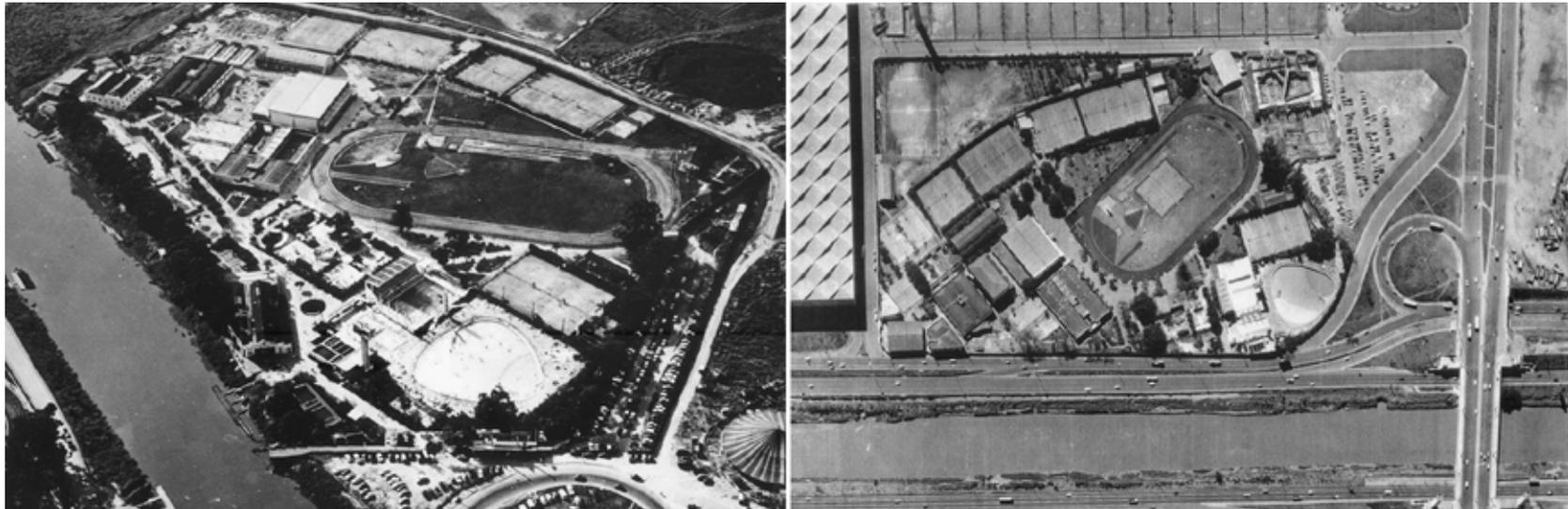
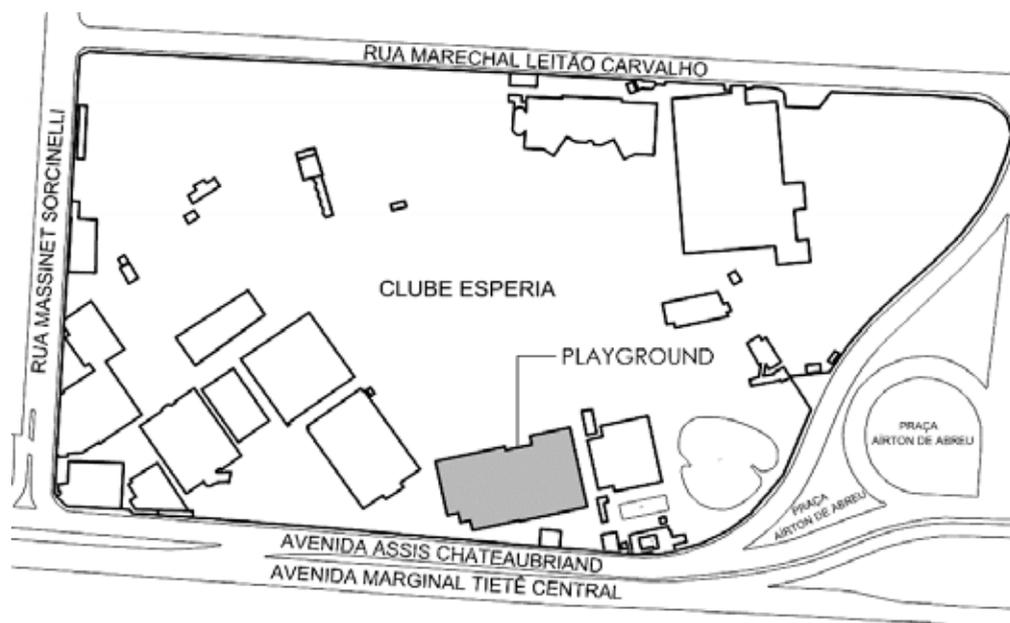


Fig. 3 – Aerial photos of the club in 1967 (left) and 1976 (right)
Source: Rios do Nosso Lugar, 2018 «<http://riosdonossolugar.blogspot.com.br/2014/11/agua-e-memoria.html>»



PLANTA DE SITUAÇÃO

Fig. 4 - The Club's site plan. Source: Carmona-Ribeiro e Oliveira, from Geosampa

Table 1 – List of Sectors and Playground Equipment. Source: Carmona-Ribeiro & Oliveira

Sector	Area (m ²)	Equipment	Paving
Roadway	780	Concrete track	Cement floor;
Active Games	440	Sand Tank; Doll Houses; Concrete Table; Modulated Wood Blocks; Easels; Stage; Swing set; Seesaws	Sand; White Portuguese pavement;
Central Sector	500	Tram; Tunnel; Labyrinth; Restrooms	<i>Pedra mineira</i> (stone from the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais); Irregular sandstone; Portuguese black and white mosaic;
Aquatic Games	320	Climbing frame; Spiral; Swedish Tower; Pool; Diving Board; Concrete Cylinders; Wood Deck	Square Hydraulic Tile, 15x15cm;
Sand Tank	460	Habitable Sculpture; Concrete Sculpture (Bridges); Concrete Cylinders; Boat; Blackboard.	Sand; White Portuguese mosaic; Cement floor.

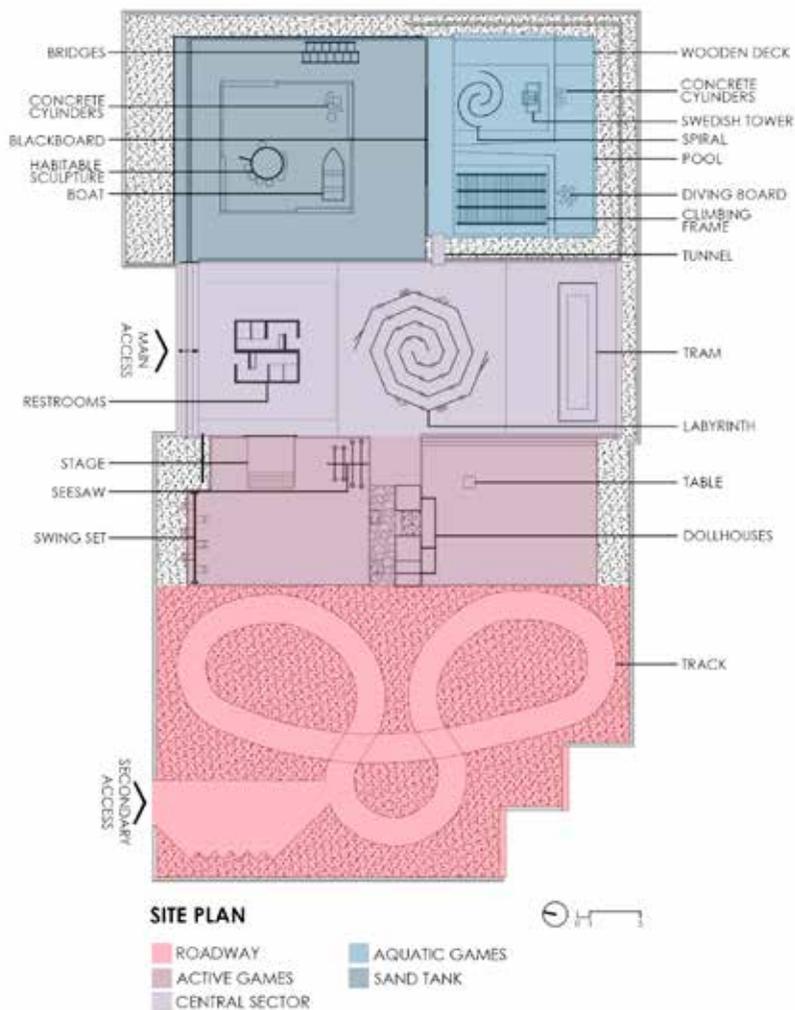


Fig. 5 – Site plan drawn from Clube Esperia's ground plans.
Source: Carmona-Ribeiro & Oliveira

PLAYING AND EXPERIENCE

From the playground's main access, one arrives at the central sector of the park, which functions as a structuring axis, organizing circulation. It also houses the toilets, the only equipment of a strictly functional character. This small building is located just in front of the upward steps, and has a roof in inverted pyramid format, with four water-flow channels directed at the center—a solution that has a structural and rainwater-capture role, widely employed in brutalist architecture projects in São Paulo. To the south of the sector there is an old tram vehicle, a reminder of São Paulo's urbanization history (by then the city had lost its tramway network, which was replaced by a car and bus transport system). This can be seen as a re-signification of an urban symbol, with its appropriation under a new context opening it to the playful interpretations of children. This procedure of re-appropriation, using a real object from the city itself, is an aspect that links the playground to the aforementioned "popcretos".

To the center of this area is the "Labyrinth:" with great prominence, this equipment has a geometric composition consisting of two spirals, with a diameter of approximately 9.5 m and 1.65-meter-high walls. The walls have openings of different shapes (creating "windows" or even providing children with passageways), as well as rectangular blocks and galvanized steel tubes that protrude (allowing children to climb the walls). Made with concrete, they are painted with vivid colors in some sections, configuring planes of color that stand out from the apparent concrete; below the protuberant elements, we find painted forms that imitate their shadows, forming a composition in which the natural shadows, in continuous transformation, combine with artificial ones, providing a kinetic representation (CORDEIRO, 1966b, p. 24). In this toy, a clear relationship with the principles of São Paulo's concretism, especially those informed by the *Gestalt*, emerges: a special emphasis is given to effects of color, light, shadow and movement.

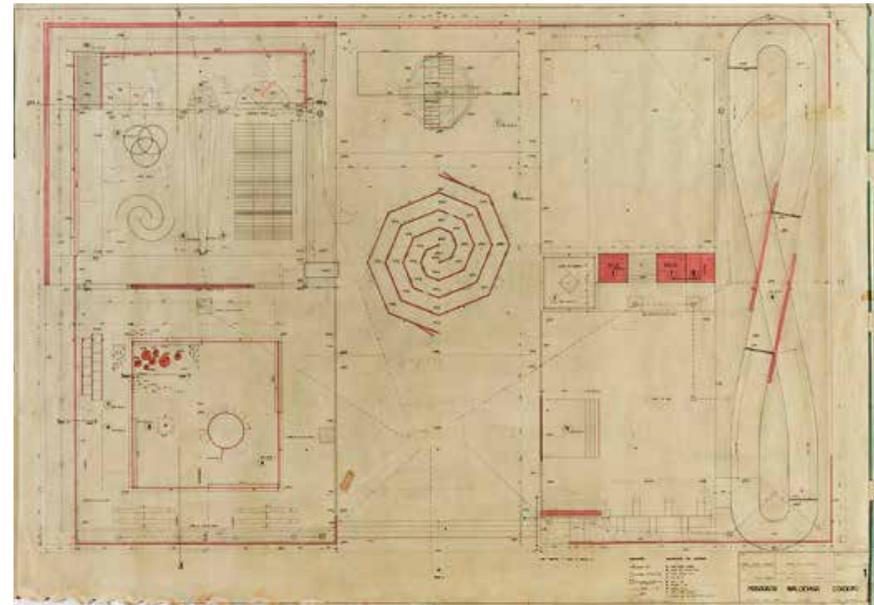
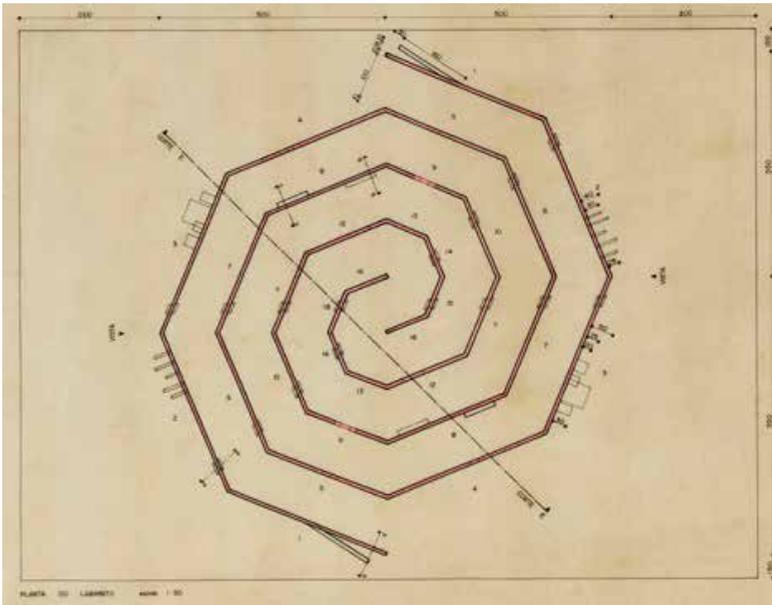


Fig. 6 and 7 – Original playground drawings by Cordeiro (1963).
Source: FAU/USP Archive

Even when the theme, informed by tradition, would suggest a figurative elaboration, we opted for a direct, “gestaltian” optical objectivity. Under the transforming force of sunlight, this language, encoded in three dimensions, communicates with a moving observer, employing dynamic and kinetic resources, as in a movie in which the viewer is the main actor (CORDEIRO, 1966b, p. 23, *own translation*).

The “Labyrinth,” therefore, invites the user to fruition and to an exercise in creative freedom, insofar as it is presented as an antithesis to traditional labyrinths, whose walls served only to limit freedom of movement and prevent passage. It is the user who gives meaning and movement to the artist-landscape designer’s proposal. The children are offered the possibility of choosing their own paths, reconstituting the artist’s work from a new motif. In this sense, the playground represents an assimilation of the ideas of participation and the “open work” of art into the lexicon of concretism.

This user freedom also guides the conceptualization of the sector designated by the landscaper as “Active Games.” This space is comprised of two areas: a large sand tank (it is important to remember that sand is a moldable, multi-possibility material: unsurprisingly, the sand tank is a favorite of children), and, to the side, a paved space with freely-arranged easels and modular blocks of wood, as well as traditional equipment such as seesaws and swings. While the latter are traditional children’s equipment, the former are non-figurative objects of “gestaltian” elaboration, demonstrating the modern principles of modulation, series and prefabrication. Through objects that are conferred meaning by childhood creativity, Cordeiro reintroduces the industrialization debate under new terms. As such, he contradicts the criticism of those who devalued concrete art by characterizing it as mechanistic and intransigent.

The sector also gives space to “make-believe,” one of the fundamental aspects of children’s play. This is the role of the stage located on the side of the paved area, and of the set of

“doll houses,” which, despite the name, are regular prisms elaborated from fundamental geometric forms, the square and the triangle. Spaces open to imagination, in these instances the projected equipment again is related to the idea of the artist as a “propositor” (proposer)⁸. The freedom that is proposed to the children expresses the unity of participation and experience, in favor of individual and collective learning:

It is the nature of landscape design to exclude all coercion in respect to the conduct of the one who has the fruition, who must feel free and independent. To produce leisure equipment, therefore, is to create conditions for possibilities of self-education. (CORDEIRO, 1964 apud MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 247, *own translation*)

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It is also possible to establish an analogy between the large “active games” sector and the traditional space of children’s play: the street. The landscape designer symbolically returns the children their autonomy, by creating a place of play uncontrolled by adults⁹. Conscious that the child does not necessarily depend on pre-made equipment to play with, Cordeiro reaffirms customs that were lost in a city of car-lined streets and vertical dwellings, in which free space became increasingly limited.

This aspect is highlighted when the “active games” area is analyzed in relation to the adjacent roadway area, at the western boundary of the playground. This sector is characterized by a winding track, at different levels, meandering across a great lawn¹⁰. In the original design, it was meant for small

⁸ We opted to maintain the original Portuguese word “propositor,” since to the best of our knowledge the direct translation “proposer” is not a commonly used equivalent. The term denotes in a concise manner the principles expressed in the practice of Brazilian art at the time: the role of the artist would be to combine different artistic modalities, which would present themselves as a “proposition” whose meaning would be developed from the experience of the user’s participation, who appropriates the artwork, the space itself, and develops creative action.

⁹ According to the artist: “Distanced from adult coercion, children would develop their own consciousness. For this, however, it would be indispensable to prohibit the entry of adults” (CORDEIRO, 1966b, p. 22, *own translation*)

¹⁰ Formally, the runway is a reference to the mathematical principles of concretism, alluding to the topological form of the Möbius strip. This mathematical relation is also explored by

electric toy cars and even traffic signs (CORDEIRO, 1966b, p. 23-25). This is a reference to the modernizing ideals that were then in vogue, in which the road system is one of the city’s main structuring elements. This idea is present in the city of Brasília and in the economic policy of President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961)¹¹. Cordeiro seems intent on demonstrating the possibility of peaceful coexistence between a reinterpretation of the traditional street—a meeting space with many other uses besides the passage of vehicles, among them children’s play—and the modern street, where the road is meant strictly for the fast circulation of cars. Curiously, as the electric cars were never acquired, the roadway had its traditional street character, and not its modern character, emphasized. The children started to use it to run or to ride their bicycles, as if it was a somewhat tranquil street in a residential neighborhood.

The set formed by the two sectors east of the playground (“aquatic games” and “sand tank”) seems to bring a new element to the discussion: here, there is a proposition of returning to “natural,” outdoor leisure, with spaces evocative of a beach. Contrary to a “naturalistic view of the landscape,” Cordeiro (1964, p. 483) states that the simple imitation of nature would omit human character and induce alienation. Answering to this, the playground is a non-figurative, concrete reading of the coastal landscape, conferring new forms to the essential

artists such as Lygia Clark, in her work “Caminhando” (*Walking*, 1964), in which she teaches how to construct the tape from a strip of paper, and by Cordeiro himself, in compositions such as “Desenvolvimento óptico da espiral de Arquimedes” (*Optical development of Archimedes’ spiral*, 1952). This equipment seems to reveal Cordeiro’s desire to give concrete form to the idea of infinity, in a cyclical and uninterrupted pathway.

¹¹ Circulation is one of the functions distinguished by Le Corbusier in the *Athens Charter*, which proposes a radical separation between the different types of urban flows (pedestrians, automobiles, cargo and people transportation), on runways of different dimensions and speeds. In addition to functional thinking, one can see in Corbusier the elevation of the automobile to the stature of a symbol of modernity, as opposed to railway transport, considered a “serious obstacle to urbanization” (Le Corbusier, 1933, pp. 23-24). The structuring of the city from a system of expressways would be one of the guidelines of Lúcio Costa’s (1902-1998) plan for Brasília; this aspect of the new capital would contemplate Juscelino Kubitschek’s public management policy, which combined the creation of a national road system (understood as a priority for the country’s development) with subsidies for foreign private capital to implement the automobile industry—according to Fausto (2012, p.365), this would result in Brazil’s great dependence, to this day, on highways and oil products.

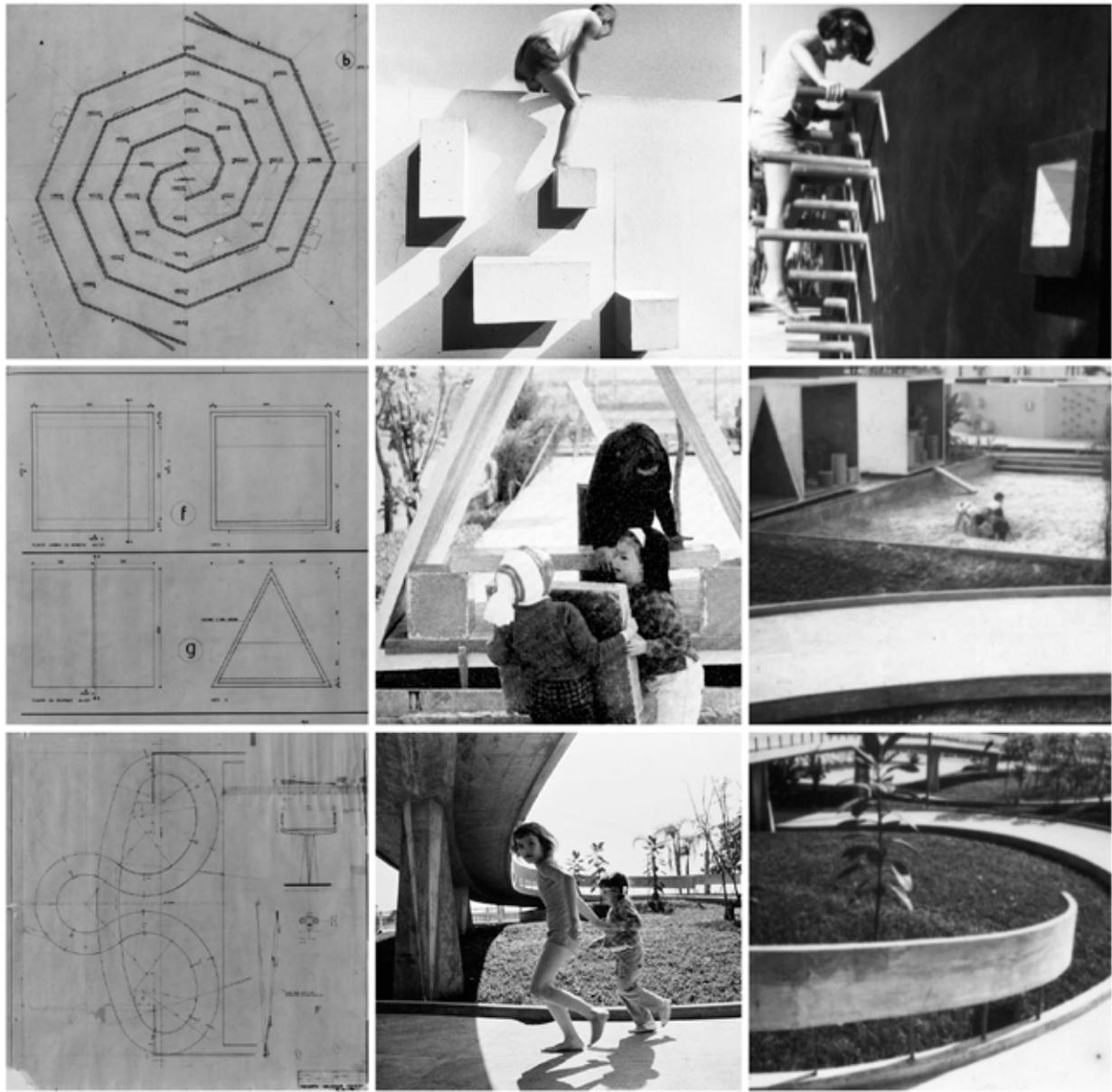


Fig. 8 – Equipment designed by Waldemar Cordeiro. Source: Carmona-Ribeiro & Oliveira, from the Library Collection of FAUUSP; CORDEIRO, 2001; LUCIANA BRITO GALLERY, 2018

elements of its constitution—water and sand—and allowing imponderable elements like the sun and the wind to have an important role.

Between the two sectors, organizing this “beach” space, there is vertical plane covered by 15x15 cm black ceramic, a re-reading of the school blackboard. Here, once again an object is taken out of its original context and brought into a space in which the child has autonomy to appropriate something usually beyond their reach (considering that, at least in the context of the classroom, the blackboard belongs to the teacher). The notions of hierarchy and authority are questioned, making it possible for the children to assume control over their own learning, and emphasizing the emancipatory character of the playground.

The aquatic games sector brings to the playground an idea little explored in children’s playgrounds: the idea of play with water. It is worth noting that Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994) also employs this artifice in his Pampulha Yacht Club (1961) project: there we find a large pool of rectilinear forms and rounded edges, punctuated by concrete sculptures (MOTTA, 1986, p. 109). Cordeiro, makes a more interactive use of space and equipment, placing three water-sprinkling metal sculptures, two of them climbable, in a shallow pool.

When analyzing the equipment in both sectors, as well as the spatial organization proposed by Cordeiro, one can assume that the landscape designer was aware of the playgrounds designed by Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck (1918-1999), in post-war Amsterdam. As for spatial organization, the Clube Esperia sand tank, surrounded by concrete benches, configures a space of socialization similar to those of the Dutch capital¹². The tubular

12 The main issue separating Van Eyck’s and Cordeiro’s projects concerns state investment policies to solve the problem of urban leisure. Holland implemented a policy of ensuring at least one public playground per district in Amsterdam, which resulted in a network of more than 700 playgrounds throughout the city (KOLLAROVA, LINGEN, 2016, p. 25). As for the Brazilian scenario, Cordeiro was extremely critical of the inertia of the state in respect to free time policies; to him, only governments would have resources for the creation of adequately-equipped green areas (CORDEIRO, 1966a, p. 512). Although Cordeiro intended the playground as a reproduceable model (MEDEIROS, 2004, p. 259), he would never come to see an effective state policy towards this.

steel equipment used in the aquatic games, with their winding forms, also remind us of the Dutch playgrounds (KOLLAROVA; LINGEN, 2016, p.40-52)¹³, as well as the “jumping” stones (which encourage children’s adventure spirit) and concrete cylinders arranged in the sand tank and in the pool. In both Van Eyck’s and Cordeiro’s playgrounds, the modernist perspective on technique and materials is evident: industrialized materials such as steel, and techniques such as reinforced concrete, whenever possible in prefabricated equipment, are prioritized, with a view to the serial production of playgrounds. Simple, synthetic, rational forms are employed, and the materials are almost always made apparent, demonstrating the imperative of the “truth of materials.”

It should be noted, however, that Clube Esperia’s playground also incorporates some of the critical revisions that this modernist stance—pointed out by many as “technicist” in its belief that technology and industrialization would in themselves have the power to solve the contradictions and conflicts of 1960s—had been developing. Thus, the project can be approximated to the so-called “brutalist playgrounds” that were being built at the same time in England, such as the Churchill Gardens Estate in London (1962) and the Park Hills Estate in Sheffield (1963). In both cases, architects reiterate the use of building materials and techniques such as reinforced concrete, in sculptural toys that invite children to explore climbable surfaces, as well as metal bars, sand tanks, tunnels, while giving new meanings to ships’ chimneys, towers etc. (THE GUARDIAN, 2015).

In these projects, the use of modern technique and repertoire becomes a method of aesthetic and social criticism—insofar as they radicalize the structural and formal possibilities of industrialized materials and techniques, contradicting the harmony, “cleanliness” and “purity” of *International Style*, a kind of “market modernism,” linked to real estate speculation,

13 An equipment similar to Cordeiro’s “Roller Coaster” can be found in recent projects, such as the “Superkilen Park” in Copenhagen (2012), whose origin the project authors attribute to India (FREARSON, 2012). The design of this standardized toy, therefore, was able to withstand the test of time and exceed national borders. Medeiros (2004, p. 263) states that the water spray equipment in the Esperia Club resemble models seen in the Italian publications present in Cordeiro’s library.

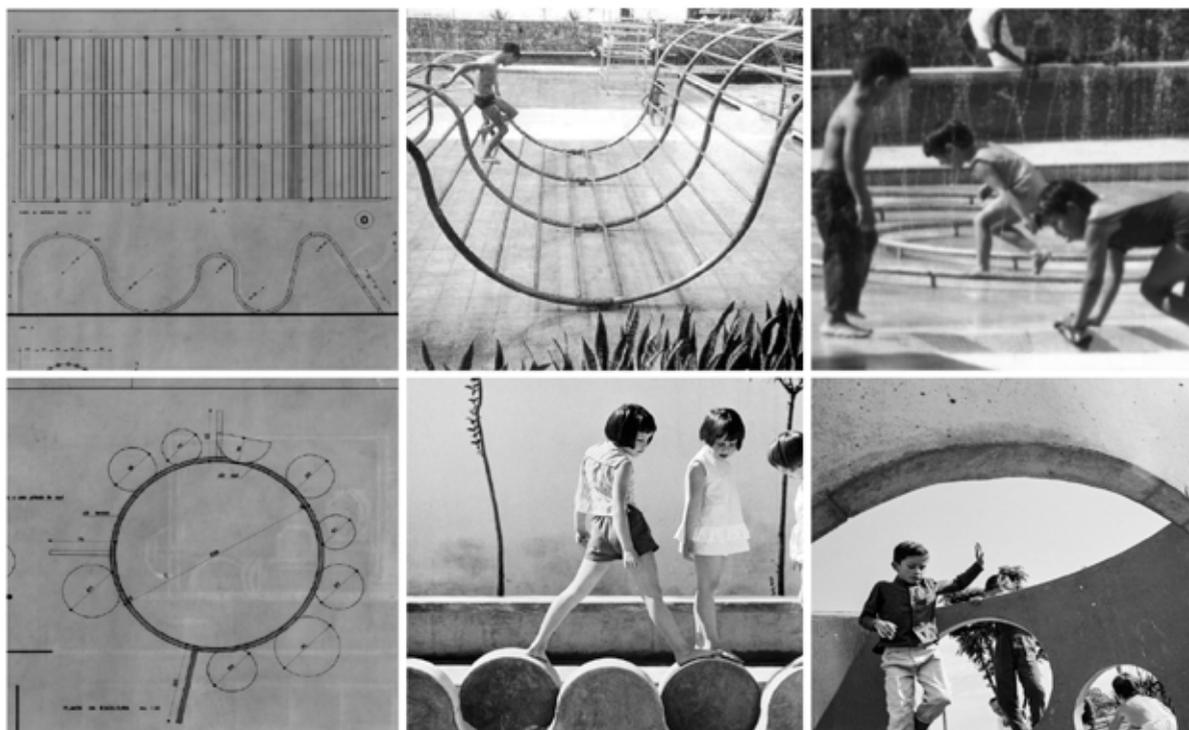


Fig. 9 – Equipment designed by Waldemar Cordeiro. Source: Carmona-Ribeiro & Oliveira, originally from the Library Collection of FAUUSP; LUCIANA BRITO GALLERY, 2018

in which social concerns and the transformation of the way of life were forgotten and abandoned. By insisting on participation, freedom and children's autonomy, Cordeiro's playground places the idea of experience at the center of the project. The word *experience*, according to Bondía, comes from the Latin *experiri*:

Experience is primarily a meeting or a relationship with something that is experienced, tested. Its radical is *periri*, in which we also find *periculum*, danger ... there is a beautiful word that has this "*per*" [prefix], which denotes the act of going across: the Greek word *peiratés*, pirates. The subject of experience has something of this fascinating being who exposes themselves by going through an indeterminate and dangerous space, putting themselves to the test and seeking in this space

their opportunity, their occasion (BONDÍA, 2002, p. 25, *own translation*).

Thus, as an active, propositive organizer, counting on the actions of the children themselves, Cordeiro conceives a space open to individual and collective possibilities, valuing the learning potential of free time. "Security" and "comfort," seen as bourgeois or petty-bourgeois notions¹⁴, are despised and

¹⁴ Some of the architects and artists who worked in São Paulo in the 1950s and 1960s were linked to communism and other leftist tendencies. Artigas, for example, was a member of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) from 1945. Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992) read Gramsci: significantly, when analyzing the first brutalist houses of Artigas, she identifies in them a generous but also severe "morality of life," in which "all mirrors of the bourgeois hall are broken" (BARDI, 1950, p. 69, *own translation*). Cordeiro initially approaches the Italian Communist Party, but refuses the party's populism and its socialist realism postulates, forming his political positions

denounced. There is even a desire for a certain amount of *danger*, with abrasive concrete surfaces to climb, obstacles to overcome, passages to go through. The eventuality of the child grating a knee is not seen as inadmissible: in this sense, to be exposed to direct sun, wind, rain, to get wet or dirty—i.e. discomfort—is considered stimuli to creativity, a part of experience and of learning about the space, the environment, the body. Learning to deal with the absence of physical and even moral limits (such as the absence of rules imposed by adult supervisors), being able

according to Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual. Per Medeiros' interpretation, to Gramsci, cultural performance is a political activity: "it is up to the intellectual, as an agent of persuasion conscious of their place in history, in the life of the nation, to actively participate in the production of values addressed to the transformation of the world conceptions of the masses" (MEDEIROS, 2004, pp. 51-52). Still according to Medeiros, an autonomy between political activity and aesthetic elaboration is thus recognized, the first not determining the second, positing a non-paternalistic approximation between intellectual and people—allowing us to imagine a socially active, combative but not necessarily militant, role for art, even abstract art." This was Cordeiro's instance not only in Italy, but also in Brazil, where he maintained his independence in respect to the postulates of the PCB.

to share and invent the moment of play with other children, are gains of autonomy and awareness, essential to a concrete practice of freedom.

THE PLAYGROUND TODAY: BETWEEN OBLIVION AND DESTRUCTION

The Clube Esperia playground has now lost its original character, with some of the equipment replaced by colored plastic ones (typical of shopping malls and narrow playgrounds commonly seen in the condominiums of the Brazilian middle class). Some of its spaces were completely altered, or even demolished; the roadway, for example, has given way to an impromptu "food court," another sign that the association between certain conceptions of leisure and outright commercialism is not fortuitous.

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Fig. 10 – The Playground's current state.
Source: Oliveira, 2017

The Club's users and administrators, heritage protection bodies, and professional bodies of artists and architects do not seem interested in recuperating the playground or its memory. Recently, in England, one of the "brutalist playgrounds" was reconstituted in a room inside the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), in foam and pastel colors, supposedly justified by the "inadequacy of concrete for children's play" (THE GUARDIAN, 2015). According to Wainwright, the original playground was thus turned into

(...) an innocuous, candy-coloured world, consciously removed from the negative associations of stained concrete and failed utopias that have become ingrained in the public psyche. Shed of such connotations and transposed into a Mr. Soft universe, the playful power of these landscapes can be seen afresh, freed from political baggage (WAINWRIGHT, 2015).

We can see that, contrary to the ideas of Cordeiro and many of the artists and architects of the 1960s, whose propositions were associated with the project of transforming our very way of life, the paradigm of walled and fenced leisure equipment became hegemonic: impassable walls and rounded edges, in which, under the imperative of security, the actions and perceptions of users are monitored and predetermined. Especially in Brazil, the expectation of leisure as a central element to urban life, which would be translated into the design of quality public equipment, is simply not realized. In addition, the principle of the importance of children (who would bring with them the possibility of imagination and participation) to urbanistic thinking is unable to spread and gain a more meaningful expression. The logic of commodity and real estate speculation—in which radical experience, capable of transforming both individual and community, has no space or expression—continues to dominate the construction of the city, its structures and equipment.

In this sense, and believing in the strength of Waldemar Cordeiro's projects, we remain hopeful that a greater recognition of his work may bring to light the continued relevance and

permanence of the problems he posed more than 50 years ago. Nowadays, when new urban movements, artistic occupations, networks and groups of activists arise in São Paulo, rethinking the propositions of the Clube Esperia playground seems to be a possibility of re-signifying leisure, throughout fields such as urbanism, art, culture and politics.

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