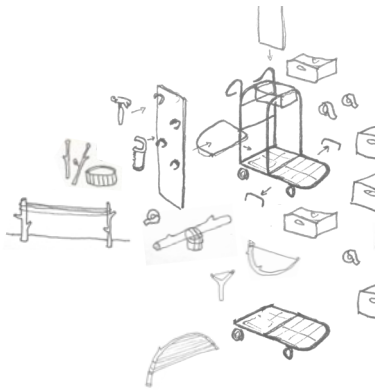


# Adapting the Imposed City Environment as a Playscape Alongside Children

Moving with Improvisational Play in Design Practice



an interpretation by Luke de Jager - June 2022

MFA Programme in Child Culture Design

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*"The body, is never fully determined;  
not bounded, but provisional, relational and enacted, in  
constant dialogue with objects, environments, spaces, times and  
ideas. 'It is from the active, productive, and continual weaving  
of the multiplicity of bits and pieces that we emerge"*

*(Harrison, 2000 as cited in Woodyer 2008, p. 353).*

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and  
as it grew  
and always growing



# Abstract

My investigation finds its focus in the design of cities and the perspective of children living within them.

My concern is the strengthening of the local community and their opportunity to participate in forming their local public environment.

Through Play Culture<sup>1</sup>, children are informally reimagining the functions and meaning of their environment for their play. This often goes well outside of the limited boundaries marked out for them.<sup>2</sup> In some instances, children temporarily reshape the material world within their means and resources available. Children are acting as informal designers within their capacity<sup>3</sup> for their play.

The development of public space for children often takes the form of designated play spaces, developed and implemented by trained adult designers for children. With the renewed focus on participation, these processes may include a participatory dialogue between trained designers and children to inspire a design. However, the design of infrastructure which supports children's ability to directly shape their public realm on an ongoing basis is rarely a formalized design outcome in itself

**I will explore the design of infrastructure (a system of resources) which can support the child's capacity to reimagine space and effect it, celebrating their culture within the public realm.** When infrastructure is designed it should serve as a scaffolding to support the child's creative expression within the making process<sup>4</sup> of their own play.

**I will approach my design process with the following aspects in mind :**

Firstly, I build from the dwelling perspective.<sup>5</sup> This puts emphasis on how design can emerge in a dialogue with place and people, through involved activity and specific relational contexts.

1. Mouritsen (2002) Child Culture - Play Culture

2. Ward (1990, p. 72 -91) Chapter on Adapting the imposed Environment and Play as Protest & Exploration

3. Manzini (2015, p. 37) Diffuse and Expert Design in Design when everybody designs: An intro to Design for Social Innovation

4. Sanders & Stappers (2008, p. 14) Co-creation and the new landscape of design

5. Ingold, T (2011) Perception of the environment : Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill

Secondly, I aim to approach children's Play Culture and particular capabilities as a point of interest that can lead design development. This means that I will aim to form a method of designing that compliments how I observe children designing within their Play Culture. Children are considered leaders of their own play. Drawing from Play Worker mentality,<sup>6</sup> adult designers are considered a resource to support children as actors in the environment.

I will explore a method for collaboration between children as informal designers and myself as an adult professional. I investigate how improvisational play can be a method for design when working together with children. I use the act of making and prototyping as a means for co-design and collaborative communication<sup>7</sup>. The method will be a tangible hands-on prototyping process that aims to support reflection in action.<sup>8</sup> This is necessary when aiming to experience ideas together, bridging communication across age and language barriers.



Leaving this sign on the playground with no verbal brief, resulted in this intervention.

6 P, Wilson : The Play Work Primer (2010)

7 Sanders, E., & Stappers, P. (2014). Probes, toolkits and prototypes: Three approaches to making in codesigning.

8. Zhang, Bekker, Markopoulos, & Brok, P. (2019). Children's Reflection-in-Action During Collaborative Design-Based Learning





During a cardboard building day it started to rain. By reacting to this situation a new site developed on the edge of the playground. This gap afforded some shelter from the rain. Time was spent dwelling there and it became a playspace. The design of this space developed through an improvisation. A reaction to situations, objects the environment and each other.

## Literary Review

*"We do not dwell because we have built,  
but we build and have built because we dwell."*

*(Heidegger, 1971, as cited in Ingold, 1990, p. 186 )*

*"The forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the  
ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the  
specific relational contexts of their practical engagement  
with their surroundings."*

*(Ingold, 1990, p. 186)*

I have been working inbetween theory and practice throughout this investigation. Earlier practice based observations as well as exploratory reading grew into a focussed project at Hjällbo Parklek. The majority of the Literary Review was performed prior to formalising a design approach at Hjällbo Parklek. Since reflecting on the practice at Hjällbo, I have noted areas that could go deeper within literary research. I have therefore added references for further reading on the themes that emerged. There are also reflections within the section : Desrciption of Process, which touch on when and how these themes emerged.



## Citizen Participation in the Design of Cities

Industrialisation and the modernist movement made a great effect on many urban environments. With large amounts of power given to expert knowledge and a focus on functionality, zoning and order. Urban environments became cold machines and largely planned from what could be called a top down approach. A city imposed, rapidly developed with consumerist ideals. However, there was a rise in critical voices to take a view from the street level and consider a humanistic perspective. (Zukin, 2010)

The conversation on citizen participation has grown and there is a push within policy to be inclusive in the planning of our cities. Fincher & Iveson refers to this as the communicative turn (2008). Its focus on a participatory agenda has made an impact and can be seen in Sweden's Policy for Designed Living Environments (2017). It has also reached those who traditionally were not considered capable. New policy to strengthen the rights of children to participate as citizens is of particular interest<sup>1</sup> as well as the broader movement in Child City Planning as a strategy to benefit the wider society (Gill, 2021)

Whilst these agendas hold promise for a city that is not imposed from above but rather formed by those who dwell within it, it does not come without its challenges and there are important considerations to be aware of.

Fincher & Iveson (2008) are critical of the emphasis on procedure and process over ends and outcome. There is a concern that when it comes to decisions, those with power will still influence what gets implemented. The focus on participation is said to overshadow the importance of technical skill and expertise. The role of designers & planners is said to have taken more emphasis as facilitators rather than that of technical experts. It is argued that in both these roles, considering oneself neutral is problematic and it's important for practitioners to acknowledge their political influence and be skilled in both social and technical understanding (2008).

As a response Fincher & Iveson (2008) propose 3 social logics for planning cities for diversity : Redistribution; Recognition; Encounter. (2008). I will focus on Recognition and Encounter.

<sup>1</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009  
with particular interest in : General comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard

## Recognition

Fincher & Iveson suggest that different identities should be supported through a relational model of recognition. This is "based on differences from others but not separation from others." They take this approach instead of the essentialist one which is said to celebrate minority groups in isolation and therefore create more barriers between them (2008). This is applied to the Recognition of children's culture without isolating them, acknowledging the adult identities present and seeking the formation of new relations through learning together.<sup>1</sup>

*Within this view, exploring the potential collaboration between adults and children to assist each other is of importance.*

## Encounter

According to Fincher & Iveson (2008), It is important to open up opportunities for engagement with other identities within the city. This opens up a positive value on diversity, expanding our own identities through engaging the diverse identities which the city affords. Small friendly moments amongst strangers referred to as conviviality are placed with high importance. These can take place in what are called third spaces such as a park bench or the raised pavement used to sit on while waiting for a bus. Ordinary interactions that put people into contact with one another such as talking to a taxi driver are also important moments for such conviviality. (2008).

*How might play in public space be such an opportunity for encounter?*

<sup>1</sup> The approach references practice in Social Pedagogy with particular reference to Pat Pertrie  
Further Reading: Pat Petrie. Children's Associative spaces and social pedagogy, 2011, in Foley, Pam, and Stephen Leverett. Children and Young People's Spaces : Developing Practice.



## Co-Design : Definitions, Roles and Generative Tools

The widening definitions of who is considered a designer and what is design have opened new pathways for practice (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). However with the increased use of terms such as collaboration, co-creation and co-design it has become important to distinguish what is meant by these so that we can assess the level of involvement we are aiming towards.

Sanders & Stappers refer to Co-design as “the creativity of designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process.”(2008). Collective creativity or Co-creation is considered a much broader term that may not include such intentional designing. Co-design places value on the end users as experts of their own experiences. The process should build a connection between the community of users and the design outcome (2008).

Within the field of design that aims to be inclusive of children, involvement can often be left as mere tokenism.<sup>1</sup> Roger Hart’s ladder of participation could be a helpful guide to assess the inclusivity of a design process. However as Fincher & Iveson (2008) pointed out, it is possible to value design process over outcome.

It is important to consider how a design outcome might involve those who engage with it once implemented. To what degree are they involved in taking the design forward? This leads to a concept of design outcome that has a degree of openness for growth by its users rather than left closed. Sanders and Stappers refer to the use of generative tools within the Co-design.

*“Designers will be integral to the creation and exploration of new tools and methods for generative design thinking. Designers in the future will make the tools for non-designers to use to express themselves creatively.” (2008, p15)*

Within the ideals of participation it is easily presumed that a design focus that is more inclusive of the wider public means the differentiation between experts and non-experts no longer exists. However Sanders & Stappers (2008) and Ezio Manzini (2015) who advocate for such an approach still mark out a differentiation. Locating different roles, skill-sets and responsibilities is helpful if we aim for design that brings people together to achieve a common goal. (2015)

To make matters a little more difficult, in the realm of design inclusive of children, it is common to use methods that lean on artistic and playful expression in order to gain insight on their

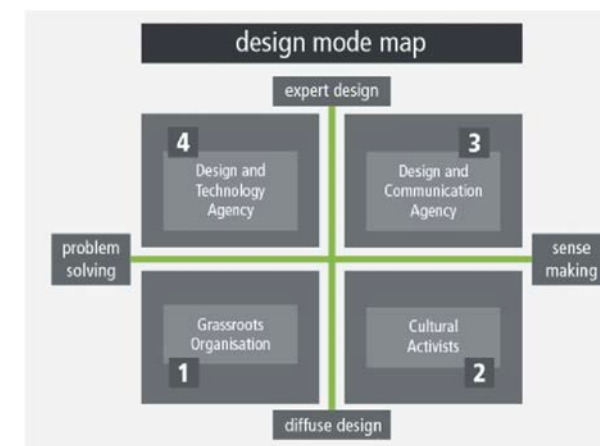
1. Hart, R. (1992). Children’s Participation: From tokenism to citizenship. UNICEF International Child Development Centre

perspective. While the debate on distinguishing the differentiation between terms such as art, design and play can be rather large, I suggest it is helpful to have a good grasp on when art and/or play becomes design. This may help us assess whether children are involved in the design decisions or not?

## Design : Inbetween Problem Solving & Sense Making

Ezio Manzini (2015) offers a helpful guide to understanding the relation between different emerging design cultures in light of designing together. Manzini acknowledges that we are all everyday designers but it could be on a spectrum between trained (expert design) and untrained (diffuse design) experience. Each unique context will have different people on the spectrum and it is the responsibility of those working together to get to know each person’s skillsets and capabilities. We all design just within different capacities.

This intersects with another spectrum between two understandings, a more technical approach where it centres around problem solving or “how things ought to be,” and the field of cultural communication where design is used to make sense of things. According to Manzini, when we design, “we collaborate actively and proactively in the social construction of meaning and therefore also of quality, values and beauty” (2015, p 35) Design is performed across the physical/biological as well as the meanings and conversations that produce them. These are different ways of looking at designs but not separate. If we look at these in polarity, it raises the debate on what is more important form or function.



## Design : Balancing Structure & Emergence

Nabeel Hamdi (2004) explores design from a slightly different angle that could add to this view by Manzini. Within the context of city planning & development, Hamdi writes about the concept of informal emergence through the ingenuity of improvisation by people that are not trained designers. Organization and development can emerge from the ground up through small iterative in situation decisions. Design is seen by Hamdi as that which can bring structure, but it should not limit the freedom needed for emergence. (2004)



Using the Fire Hydrant for Play.

May 10, 1979. Image by : Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times <https://www.>

## Children : Adapting the Environment through Play Culture

Children's participation in city planning has come into focus and there is now a push to consider methods within the formal process. While city planners have long considered children, the modernist approach together with an adult centric perspective has led to adult imposed ideas of what children need. While the policy and rise of inclusion on a formal level is to be celebrated, I suggest we begin from a child culture perspective and take time to observe the forms of expression and protest that take place informally within the existing urban environment.

Collin Ward is a notable advocate who wrote about such an ability (1990). With particular reference to chapters on "Adapting the Imposed Environment" and "Play as protest and exploration" it is clear that children have the ability to adapt the environment regardless of adult imposed designs. Ward writes about the long lists of street games designed by children that go outside of the neat playground boundaries set by adults (1990, p. 76). In some instances such as the Fire Hydrant in American culture, the affordances for play and the informal Play Culture surrounding it could no longer be ignored and lead to new design iterations of the water valve and policy changes that supported the play (Ward, 1990, p. 77 ). This is a positive example of how improvisation through play culture can directly impact city infrastructure from the ground up. What will happen if we start to observe such informal happenings and support young city adapters to take this conversation forward through play?

Flemming Mouritsen outlines three types of culture surrounding children : Culture Produced for children, Culture with Children and Children's Culture. The Children's culture being that produced within the children's own networks, adults are not the primary focus here. Mouritsen also refers to the medium of Children's culture as Play Culture:

*"Play culture is a medium which enables children to "cultivate" themselves and their surroundings; they create form and patterns, they form material (language, body, motions, one another) aesthetically. Simple forms are the necessary basis for a complex and artistic performance."* (Mouritsen, 2002)

The Play Culture from Mouritsen view is seen as a medium of expression that affects the tangible environment. The goal is to play for play's sake and there is a clear warning against appropriating it for utilitarian means (2002). However, this statement suggests that we can move with play culture and by doing so we will see new imaginations of our environment as a bi product.

Traces of a basketball used outside of the court boundaries





on the bus stop glass



A group of skateboarders found a piece of wood



given by a carpenter working on a store nearby

On the first day of snow, I was greeted by my neighbour at the window doing this.



There are also arguments by Tara Woodyer (2008) for reframing research as an embodied performance and considering the body as a research tool within children's geographies. Woodyer argues that the embodied perspective is both expressive and generative (2008, p. 353). With clear links to the artistic performance mentioned by Mouritsen, the act of play could be seen as a form of embodied research in process.

Can we value play as an end within itself while also acknowledging it as a means to such valuable outcomes that play can produce? Rauto & Winston (2015) argue that while there are well developed arguments on either side of the spectrum it could be valuable to see what comes into focus if we accept both. Rauto & Winston consider play as an intra-active<sup>1</sup> practice of improvisation.

*"playing is thus never 'free' but always interdependent, never 'guided' but always generative and becoming. Intra-active play is about being 'in it' together: becoming human beings in relation to one another and to the world."* (Rauto & Winston, 2015, p. 17)

This perspective acknowledges how multiple existing material and social relations influence play as they are used as material for improvisation (Rautio & Winston, 2015). From this view, agency shifts from being individualistic to congregational. (2015, p. 20) According to Rautio & Winston, the intra-active approach shifts the study of play "from seeking a definition of what play is (for) towards the ways in which playing (re)generates those playing, all in complex relations to each other." (2015, p. 17).

Lastly, Mouritsen refers to play as that which relies on practice and skill and outworks itself through moments similar to that of improvisation (2002, p. 23-24). Skills, practice, play, improvisation and creativity are much more closely linked. Tim Ingold takes a similar view on the relation between these aspects that lead to creativity and imagination (2013). It is important to acknowledge the role skill & practice has if we are to consider designing tools that support mediums for expression that can shape the urban environment. According to Mouritsen, Play Culture is channeled through informal social networks and does not take on a fixed form but comes into existence through children's production in situations. (2002, p. 23-24)

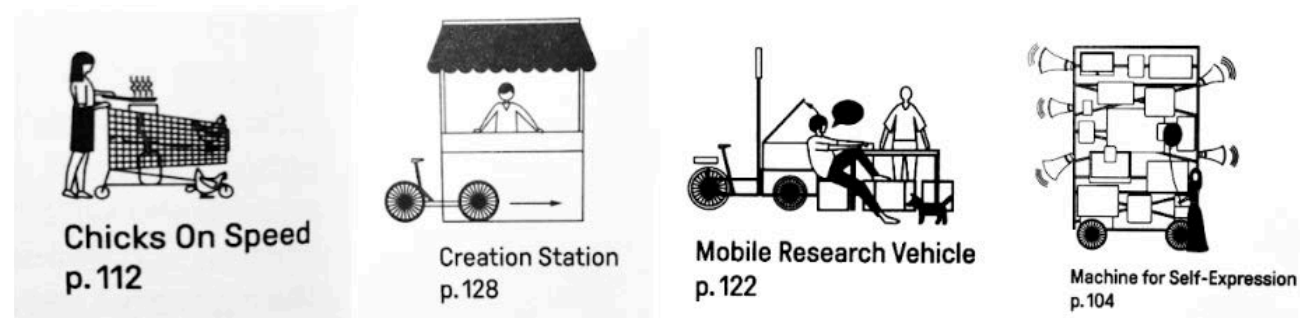
I propose that as adult designers who aim to collaborate with children, we should therefore be adaptable improvisers who can move along with their Play Culture.

<sup>1</sup> **Intra-Action** : A term used to replace interaction which regards two interacting bodies as pre-established and with a level of interdependence. Intra-Action considers agency as not inherent to individuals but as a dynamic force inbetween relations. (Stark, 2016) with reference to : Barad, K., (2007). Meeting the universe halfway : Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning.



## ON/OFF Studio's Co-Machine Concept

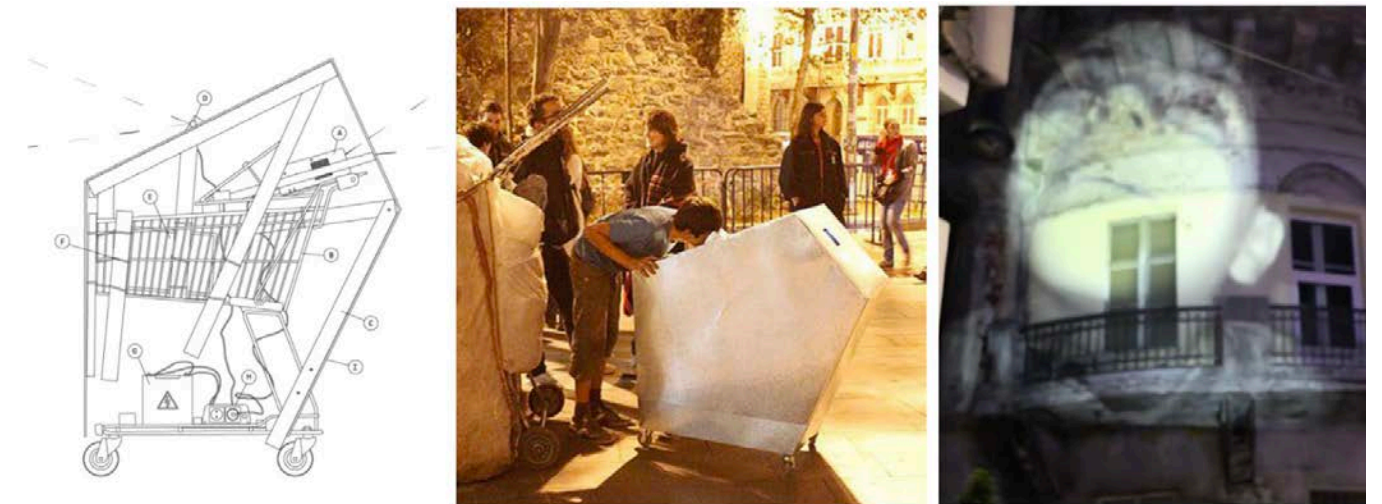
For the urban context and the application of co-design methods I suggest that ON/OFF studio's concept of *The Co-machine: Mobile Disruptive Architecture* (2020) is a good approach to build upon. While the array of projects take on various forms and functions, there is a consistent concept which could be applied to investigate how design might support the child's ability to adapt the city as a playscape through their Play Culture.



### Summary of Concept

ON/OFF Studio<sup>1</sup> is an interdisciplinary design studio that "explores the in-betweens and overlaps of the urban experience to engage citizens in an immediate relationship with their environment." According to the Studio, the Co-machine concept began with the aim to develop "self-initiated or bottom-up interventions to develop new uses and ways to interact and play in the city." (Dorocic, 2020, p. 26). The city infrastructure is opened up through temporary interventions that generate new possibilities from the city's unused potential. This is a common characteristic of design for social innovation. These interventions place emphasis on the ever changing city. They reveal that existing structures are not permanent or fixed as many might communicate. (Dovey, 2020, p. 38) They provide a means for their users and spectators to acknowledge this and be a part of the reimagining. Through disrupting the norm they aim to "temporarily suspend reality and test set roles through playful objects and typologies" (Dias Carvalho, 2020, p. 17). The concept draws inspiration from how local actors use informal methods to act in the urban landscape such as street protestors, vendors and performers (Dorocic, 2020, p. 11). They are often low-budget, low-tech and analogue solutions that reappropriate ready-made things, assembling them into a machine of new functions. (Dorocic, 2020, p. 11). Usually mobile, they can be moved to locations deemed necessary for intervention by their users. By moving across the urban landscape, they propose new relations between spaces, assisting their creators with a tool to explore and engage the city. (Green, 2020, p. 40) There is a focus on a design outcome with social goals as they aim to reconfigure social dynamics present, providing new opportunities for social engagement. (Hugill, 2020, p. 46)

<sup>1</sup> Images : Dorocic, Dan and ON/OFF. (2020) *Co-Machines : Mobile Disruptive Architecture*. Onomatopée



**Example 1 :** *Kopfokino* by ON/OFF Studio<sup>1</sup>

The *Kopfokino* was the first Co-machine designed by ON/OFF Studio which they describe as "a mobile urban life amplifier." The machine consists of a camera system that is mounted on a trolley and protected by an exterior shell. The aesthetic form uses DIY techniques & material which are aligned to the ethos which they aim to promote (Zeiger, 2020, p. 36). While the shell structure is functional, it can take on different forms depending on who creates it. For those who choose to place themselves close to the camera, it projects them onto the nearby environment and thus, opens up the city as a playscape. This change is momentary and the playful performance only lasts while the tool is in use. Whilst sparking interest through this playful experience, the *Kopfokino* creates intrigue within the public realm. There is a direct engagement between the person performing through the projector and the spectators watching the projection. If we apply an intra-active view of play then we see that the spectators as well as the existing built environment have a role that may influence the improvisation of the performer. Whilst this may not be a conscious decision to be involved, their presence and interaction can very well steer the play.

The experience holds an opportunity to mediate informal convivial (friendly) encounters through this playful third space. It could of course cause conflict depending on what a performer chooses to project. After all it is a tool open to different user intentions. However this informal openness is what it aims to support, in contrast to the highly controlled and regulated urban environment. It places trust in those who use it and at its best it will artfully raise conversation of what is allowed and what is not.

<sup>1</sup> Images : <http://www.onoff.cc/projects/kopf-kino/> (Accessed 02 June 2022)



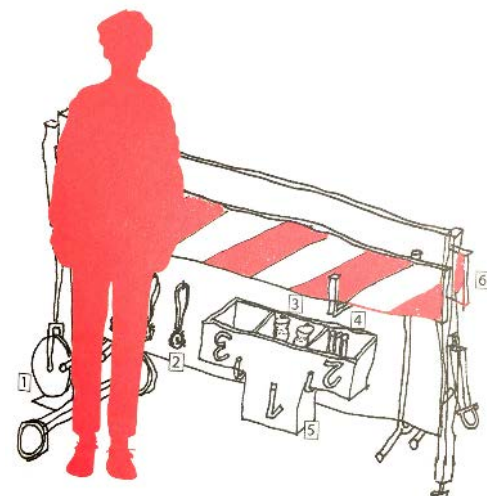
Is this design and does this intervention change the materiality of the space? While it is not building with brick and mortar, there is a very real change in the experience of the environment and this change is experienced beyond the players themselves and extended to others. Materials such as light are affecting the environment. However it is momentary. It is here that we are challenged to consider how we relate time and permanence to our definition of what is valued as design. For what period of time does an environment need to change in order for it to be accepted as a design? Even the brick building eventually degrades if we do not maintain it. Maybe whether it is permanent or not is the wrong question to evaluate if this is design. Let's assess those involved and to what extent it is possible to say they designed.

The Kopfkino is clearly a designed tool as it has been conceptualized, planned and iterated with a goal in mind. This was led by design experts of ON/OFF Studio who were likely to take the responsibility of making iterative design decisions while being informed by a collaboration with various other crafters and non-expert testers.

But are those involved in using the tool presented by ON/OFF Studio considered to be designing the environment? While the moments may be fleeting, let's imagine some small improvisational decisions that may occur. For example choosing how to move the object in order to project where you think is necessary, or choosing which facade is relevant for your performance, or how you choose to present yourself as you engage and respond with those watching. There could be an element of decision making and iteration towards a goal. Is this playful and artistic improvisation considered designing with this designed tool? If we assess the outcome of this process, could we not say that the users have used this tool to generate multiple variations of how the urban environment might be reimagined? Whether the process was leaning towards unconscious play improvisation or clearly thought out decisions does this matter? I will need to take this question further.

### **Example 2 : The 100m Apparatus by Alexander v.Lenthe<sup>1</sup>**

While the 100m Apparatus is only presented as a concept sketch, it's focus sparks particular interest. This Co-machine aims to assist in the transformation of city streets into running tracks. The machine is designed for a context where cars dominate city streets. It equips its users with the tools necessary to claim the street and



<sup>1</sup> Images : Doricic, Dan and ON/OFF. (2020) Co-Machines : Mobile Disruptive Architecture. Onomatopée

block off traffic (Lenthe, 2020, p. 142). Tools are neatly presented in a movable structure that aims to visibly communicate its intention.

These tools include: "two barriers; water; chalk, to mark the start and the finish line; medals and a podium to award the runners." (Lenthe, 2020, p. 142). The 100m Apparatus is both seriously playful and playfully serious. The playful intention sparks a serious issue that affects most who dwell on the city streets.

If children are to already adapt streets as race tracks informally, then one might ask why would we need this design? I suggest that in this case making informal play visible through such tools is of importance because it increases the voice of those who use the street. This tool offers a means to make oneself more public if the users desire to. It causes those who don't see this need to stop and acknowledge it. The full scale road barriers make this point rather clear. But we can not leave here, the machine serves the full experience, with the inclusion of medals, and a podium for those that take part. Why include such tools, surely a road closure is functional enough? The inclusion of these celebrate the culture of those involved, they add valuable tools that may add to the play experience of the players but are also important for their communication outwards to those spectating.



## Methods

*“It is sometimes thought that in improvisation we can do just anything. But lack of a conscious plan does not mean that our work is random or arbitrary. Improvisation always has its rules, even if they are not a priori rules...we carry the rules inherent in our organism”*

*(Nachmanovitch 1990, p. 26).*

During this investigation, I had a personal aim to formalise an approach to practice as a designer working alongside children’s culture. I had previously been practicing in this field for a few years. While observing the emerging theme of my investigation, I made a decision to make sense of an approach through following embodied experience<sup>1</sup> practice. I aimed to discover methods within practice through following an intuitive and improvisational journey of actions. I therefore took many routes of curiosity. Many did not find their way into this composed thesis but these formed a part of the learning<sup>2</sup>. Within the unique opportunity of having freedom to play as a student, I moved in this way. I therefore struggled to clearly articulate planned methods before action.

In this approach it was crucial to create moments of reflection in order to see the patterns emerging. These included : Brief moments while in action, deeper moments through writing exercises aimed at articulating practice and pivotal times preparing for our regular presentations. I often found myself preparing for presentation, feeling I was not exactly sure what I was doing. Preparing presentations, was very much a reflective practice as much as it was a platform to share with others. It is important to note, I was not only reflecting alone but through a group of brilliant peers and lecturers who have practical experience and skill within the field. There were many informal moments reflecting while in conversation or busy with an everyday task.

The underlying patterns and structures of what I was doing began to show. I can begin articulating some of the methods used so that myself or others can apply them. My aim is not to say that in design practice, we don’t need planning and we shouldn’t be structured. Planning can be helpful, and there is structure, even within improvisation but sometimes less planning can be helpful too.

<sup>1</sup> Harrison, P. (2000). Making Sense: Embodiment and the Sensibilities of the Everyday. Environment and Planning.

<sup>2</sup> There is a summary of the supporting informal projects within the appendix





# Exploring through Improvisational Play

## Using Play to Generate Play

I start by acknowledge myself as a player. I explore relations in their situation through play actions. As the theory of Intra-Active Play suggests, I have found that play often generates more play<sup>1</sup>. It seems play can be generated both between a person and material(s) or between multiple people as material (eg. movements, sounds etc) or between multiple people and multiple material/s (an environment) surrounding them. This can happen with what is present as well as with what we bring mentally or physically.

## Following Existing Affordances; Acknowledging Skills & Failure

I will set/find a situation and begin with whatever comes to mind, exploring directions as they build on one another. I let my curiosity follow the affordances within the situation, creating a gesture which leads to creating a new situation and it grows from there. My skills play a crucial part in this process, framing what I can and can't do, as well as what I am able to express. However I do not put this in the front of my mind. Instead, I run ahead free to fail and stumble along. I know that as I step out in play my skillset grows and if I fail, it can form a valuable dialogue to build from.

## Being Present, Moving Freely

During this I try to be present, guarding momentary play as a precious and valuable happening within itself. It is important to be able to move with curiosity. Being sparked by personal interest can lead to a sense of play focus<sup>2</sup>. It is therefore important that those playing feel they can move freely provided they are not harming themselves or others. I want to observe what gets built and played as it emerges through improvisation with the skills the players bring and acquire within the situation. Outcomes and involvement are left to their own interest and interventions are not structured as formal workshops with clear phases, instructions or time set by myself. These structures do exist, set by other environmental factors, which I move along with in the present situation.

## Documentation (Video & Photography)

In these moments there are many dialogues at play. If my mind sparks, making a connection, I quickly capture the situation using my phone and then continue. Later revisiting the

documentation to be reminded of situations to reflect on. I must be careful of documenting while in the moment as it can break down play focus for myself and others. Due to my focus on play as action in between multiple relations<sup>3</sup>, video seems to be ideal. It can capture multiple information combining sounds, movement and visuals in time.

There are also ethical concerns regarding revealing identity and positioning people as research subjects. I have found a helpful approach is to position the documentation process as part of exploring together. This has not always been possible and methods for this continue to be explored. Some attempts have been successful when coming alongside others play and celebrating their discoveries. This often leads to opportunities to join in and test the play action with them. At this point I will ask if I or they can film the moment. I play the video back for those involved to both reflect and celebrate the discovery. This becomes an opportunity to show the lens focus is on the material or tool being improvised with gestures of the body that keep identity non descript. If this is not possible, documenting my own body to express an observed action by re-enactment is helpful.

## Collaboration : Building together while at Play

If asked I will always invite others to join the play or ask to join what is already being played. I aim to open up opportunities to build off each others play. I do this by showing interest in what others are exploring and also sharing what I discover along the way. This conversation is largely action based and incorporates trying, testing and enacting with each other, the materials and surroundings. The type of dialogue supports collaboration across age and language barriers as we can reflect while experiencing actions together. When we build things in this way it could also be called **In-Situation Prototyping**<sup>4</sup>

## Other Relevant Methods :

- Hacking,
- Cultural Probes,
- On-site Observation
- Drawing

1 Rautio, P., & Winston, J. (2015). Things and children in play - improvisation with language and matter.

2 Chapter on Rhetoric of Self by Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). The ambiguity of play. (Notes on intrinsic motivation and the state of flow referencing Csikszentmihalyi's theory pg. 185

3 Play as an Intra-Active Process, see Rautio, P., & Winston, J. (2015). Things and children in play - improvisation with language and matter.

4 Sanders, E., & Stappers, P. (2014). Probes, toolkits and prototypes: Three approaches to making in co-designing.



## Description of Process

*Tim Ingold poses a view on making that celebrates the process of discovery along the way, suggesting the idea that form arises through a patchwork of discoveries.*

*Ingold outlines the intelligence of gesture and its role in dialogue between maker and material. As the maker makes a gesture there is a response that is reacted to and leads the maker towards a final form. Intelligence is built into the design not by fully articulating everything in planning but rather through a rhythm of embodied dialogue and practical skills in action.*

*(Ingold, 2013).*

*To me this is very similar to being a designer within a collaborative design process. I can form an idea and use my skills to leave it as a gesture, open to dialogue between myself and those I'm working with. I get a response from those experiencing it and this is done repetitively in a sort of rhythm until finding a form. In design terms we could refer to this as making prototypes.<sup>1</sup>*

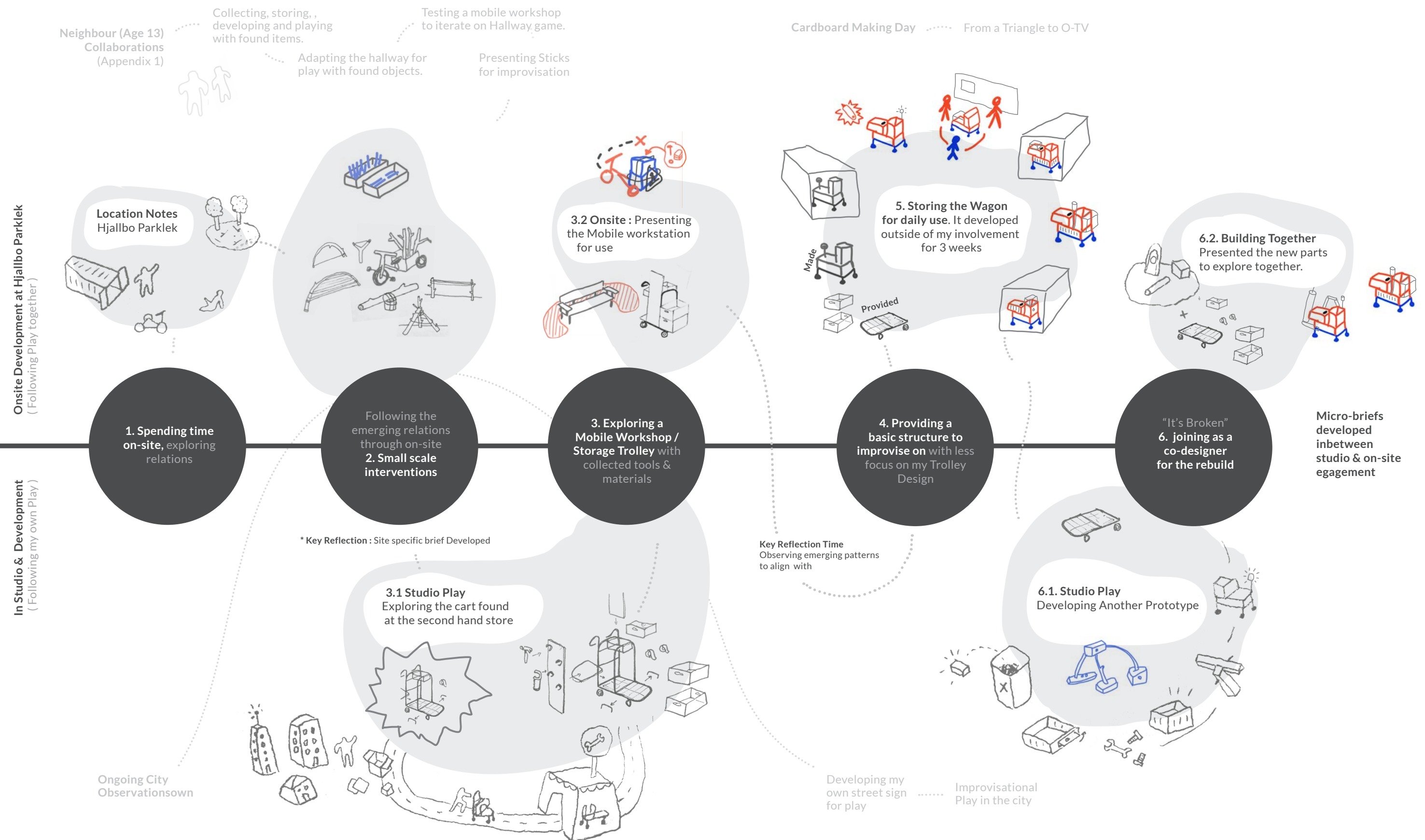
My investigation has drawn from practice in various different contexts. In composing this thesis, I have chosen to put particular focus on : **The Wagon Design at Hjallbo Parklek**

Other ongoing observations through informal projects have contributed and influenced the project development. This timeline should not be interpreted as a plan I knew prior to action, but rather a reflection of the journey which grew over time. Please note that the graph is simplified as decisions were influenced by multiple relations. There is a summary of the supporting informal projects within the appendix .

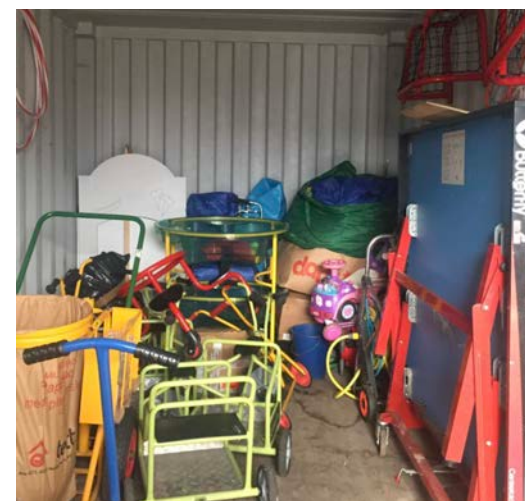
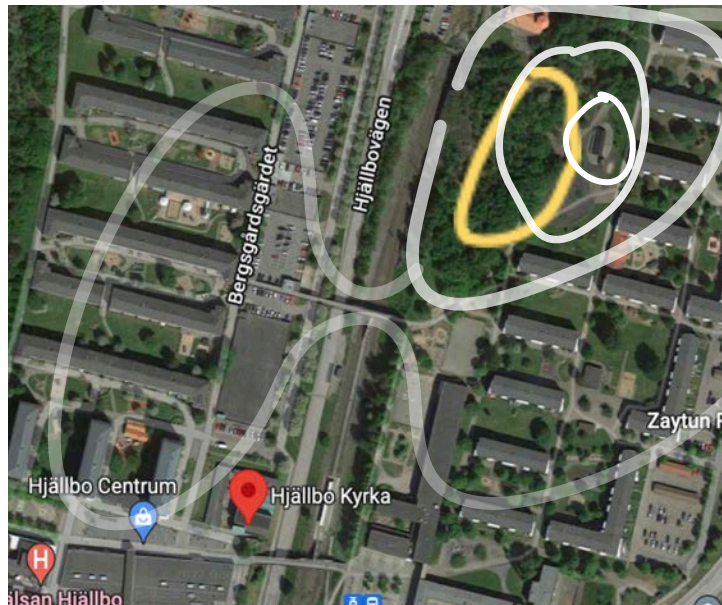
<sup>1</sup> Sanders, E., & Stappers, P. (2014). Probes, toolkits and prototypes: Three approaches to making in codesigning.



# Process Timeline







# 1. Spending time on-site

## Dwelling on-site : Exploring Relations

I began with the goal to dwell on site and explore relations between people and the existing environment. Due to being from outside the community, it was important to build relationships with those who spend time here and observe how they use the space. My relation is limited and only based on a short period of time. The goal is to build in a manner that connects the resources and skillset present on site and to find ideas that support the interests of the local community. I formally got introduced to the staff who said I could be present, after which I took 2 weeks to join in, meet people and simply follow along with what was happening. I made some observations and I intentionally sought to learn from those who have made observations of their own.

## Hjällbo Parklek : Key Notes

Hjällbo Parklek is a staffed playground space within close proximity to the surrounding built environment. Within close walking distance to other well used public spaces. (eg. tram stop, central plaza, shopping area, residential space and forest...). Examples of other built infrastructure not intended for play include an electrical tower, public benches, tables, street lights, bins... Pedestrians walk past regularly on the well used walkway on either side of the space. I decided to work with this site as a starting point that has the potential to expand play outside of the playground boundary.

There is a local group of children who spend time here regularly after school and on weekends. The main group age ranges between 5 -13. Parents and older people do spend time here but it is evident that some children are here without their parents . Adult play workers are present daily, between particular times. They curate the space with loose parts stored in a blue container at the centre of the parklek. The temporary infrastructure is functioning as storage until the Parklek house is built. The staff open it daily and curate the space with loose part play items. Items are predominantly purchased play equipment such as hoola hoops, bicycles, balls, soccer goals, pogo sticks etc...There are some items intended as tools such as a bucket of chalk, tape and some cardboard materials but these are limited. There are no evident signs of child made or collected objects stored in the container for play. However there are signs that children have adapted some of the items and surrounding environment. For example, the bikes are often joined by rope, and chalk marks the floor.





It is important to note that Hjallbo Parklek does not aim to be a Construction Parklek such as Bygglekplatsen in Biskopsgården, Gothenburg. There is little infrastructure directly focussed on assisting children to build their own place. However the staff seem supportive of the concept that the children should shape their own play, they are free to follow their own interests and conversations regarding more building infrastructure were supported if it fits within their capacity.

It is currently activated in this way to gain community interest and develop a safe space while formalized development plans are drafted by architects. There has been a participatory dialogue with children from the area to inform the design and the new infrastructure is due to be installed later this year. Plan highlights include, play structures, landscaping and a Parklek house. According to the lead staff member, the parklek house does not aim to function as an indoor space for the children and this will remain outdoors with some shelter extending from the roof. The house will function as staff office and storage.

Within the future plan there seems to be a gap for the development of infrastructure that can support childrens capacity to reimagine space and effect it on an ongoing basis. Some aspects are designed for this. Those noted include the Play Bushes which take the form of childrens movements over time. The outdoor class room space may also assist. The storage of loose parts has the potential to support ongoing participation by children as these parts can extend into the surrounding environment through the childrens own decision making process.





## 2. Small Scale Interventions

### Collecting Loose Parts from the nearby forest

The staff told me that sometimes children had collected objects like sticks, stones and leaves and asked to keep them in the container alongside the other purchased play items. This sounded great but I could not find evidence of infrastructure dedicated to supporting this. I later found out that there is a concern with lack of space in the storage area, and the staff are cautious of



adding extra things. There is a forest right next to the Parklek that is naturally storing loose parts. Sticks are a great loose part, building component and ambiguous<sup>1</sup> play tool. I had done some practical investigation of this with my neighbour.<sup>2</sup> I began exploring how design & curating may activate these as play items. I started to collect and curate, simply placing a pile out of the forest context and onto the tarmac floor. The activity of collecting sparked some interest and I would always aim to invite those interested to join in the activity. Later that week, the Park Services aimed to do some maintenance and it was the perfect opportunity to see if they would assist. After this, huge piles of sticks were left in the forest and open to use.

### Presenting Sticks for Improvisation

One day I arrived before the children got to the Parklek. What would it take to activate these sticks into play items? I began to do my own investigation of the stick material. I followed my own curiosity, it sparked as I investigated the affordances<sup>3</sup> set by different forms, weights, bendiness, length etc. The aim was to enter into my own play by following the play in the material. Maybe by playing I could generate more play?<sup>4</sup> One of my explorations lead to combining the bendy stick and a string I found to create tension. Soon some children arrived and asked what I was doing. I replied, "I am exploring these sticks." I intentionally left my answer quite open without too much direction. Soon there were a number of children all exploring sticks (or using sticks as tools to explore other things). Some did their own explorations and others took things that had already been changed and built on that as a starting point. My tension stick was taken. I was asked to help add more strings in a particular way. I asked how it worked? The response was an action similar to playing a harp. Later, another child took it and went flying around the area as if it was a wing. I found it again on the floor and used it as a flag. There were many objects explored and built which remained on the playground after the container got locked that day.

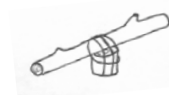
One particular child (Age 7) was very invested and I observed that he developed his object in a continuous process of trying, failing, observing, trying again, succeeding, failing, trying something different etc. It seems he built through experiencing situations and then improvising in the moment. What he built changed into different things many times. He arrived at some iterations that were quite technical, such as a device made using tension between sticks that holds a loose stick in the middle to spin on. I had seen him there most days that I came to visit. The staff knew him well and referred to him as **Master Builder**.

1 Gielen, M & van Leeuwen, L. (2016). Ambiguity as a virtue in design for play

2 Neighbour Collaborations : Stick Improvisation. See Pg 22

3 Affordance Definition (merriam-webster) : the quality or property of an object that defines its possible uses or makes clear how it can or should be used. eg. *We sit or stand on a chair because those affordances are fairly obvious*

4 Play as an Intra-Active Process, see Rautio, P., & Winston, J. (2015). Things and children in play - improvisation with language and matter.







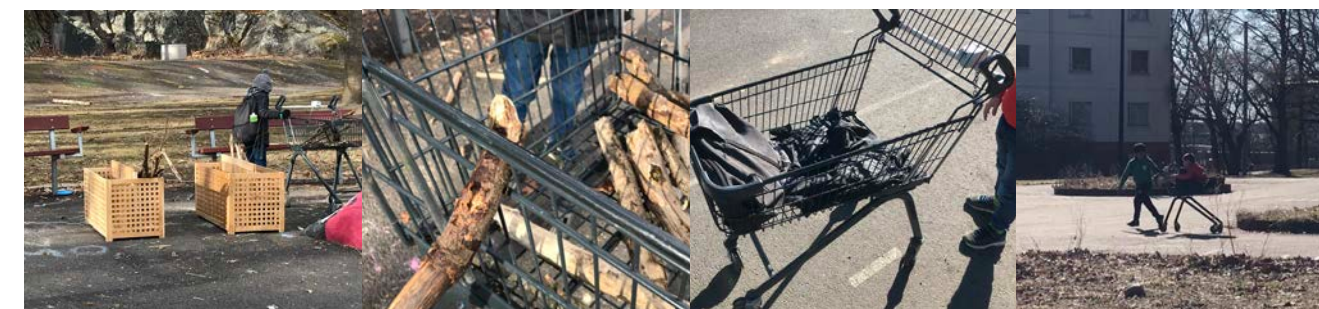
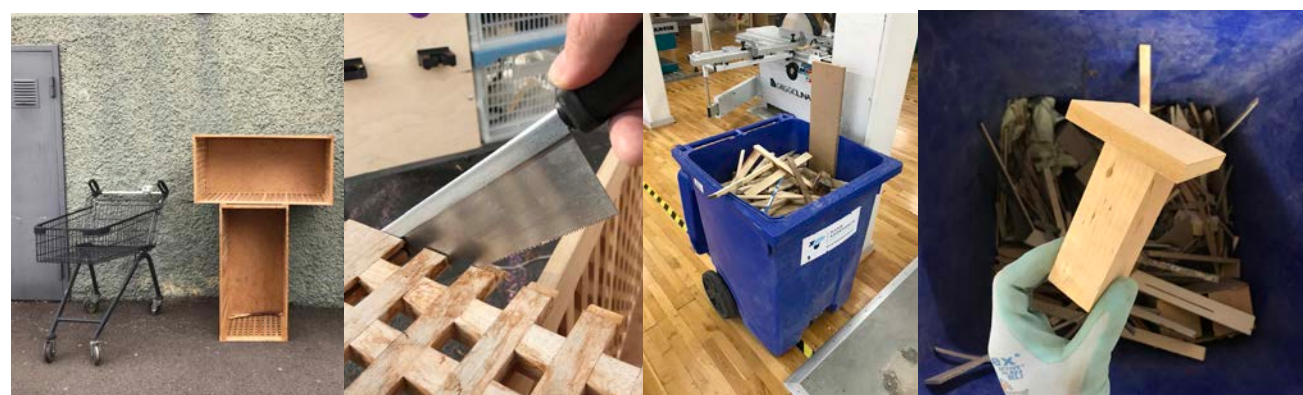
## Meeting The Bin Room Manager & using found objects

Later that week I arrived to a rainy day. The parklek was empty and the container was locked. I decided to stay and follow my own play explorations. While exploring out in public, an elderly man came walking by and greeted me. We began talking and I learnt he is the local bin room manager. I shared stories of gathering items from my own bin room with my neighbour.<sup>1</sup> He said there are often many usable things left by those living in the apartments. He offered to take me on a tour of the bin rooms alongside the parklek. He opened the door to the first Bin Room. There was nothing.

“Lets go to the other room’s, he said.” (There are many in the area). He opened the second door, and to my surprise there was a trolley and two wooden containers. These were perfect! They could assist me in my exploration of storing and collecting material for the Parklek.

I made a few changes to the boxes using the tools I had bought to site and then I started collecting with the trolley. I wanted to see what would happen if there was a container of found parts that could remain accessible even when the container was locked. The recent stick building intervention had sparked some interest from the Parklek staff. I was told that there is a wood factory nearby that has usable waste. They suggested it could be a great resource. This was similar to the situation at my design school where there are bins full of wooden offcuts. I collected some from school and put them in the new storage area alongside sticks. I strategically left them next to the bench we used for building in previous interventions. It was time to go home as the parklek was still closed and empty.

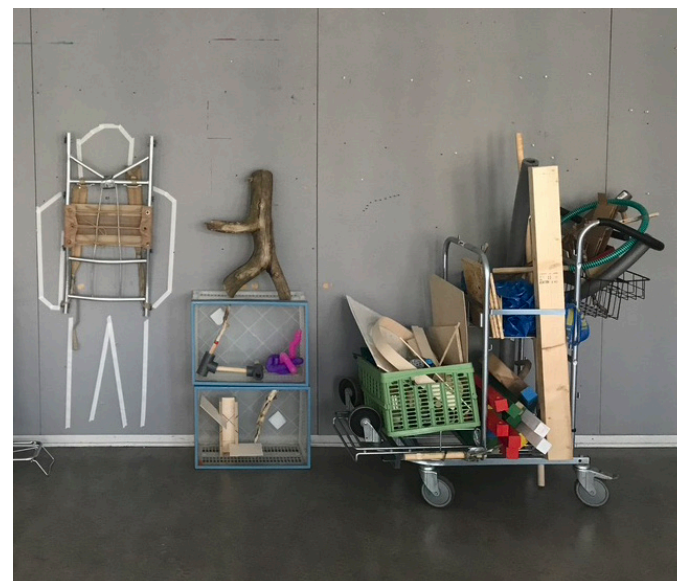
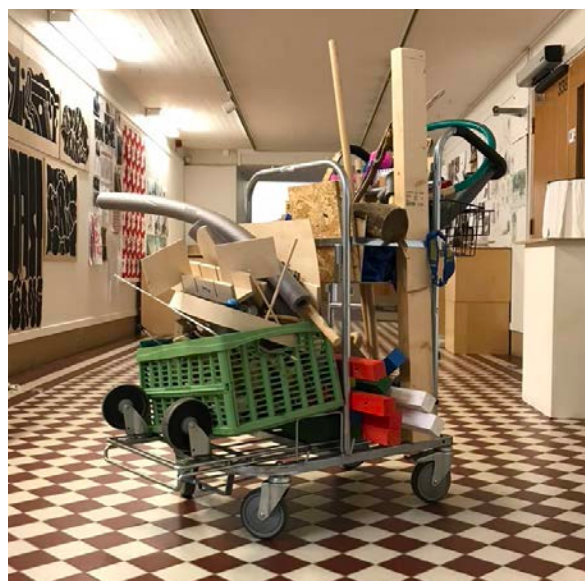
On my way out, **Master Builder and his friend** arrived. I spotted them investigating the containers. They took some sticks and attached them to the trolley by using the grid as a weaving structure. They placed their belongings in the trolley and spun each other around.











### 3. Exploring a Mobile Workshop/Storage device

#### 3.1 Studio Play : Designing through situation led prototyping

After much on-site investigation, I needed some time to reflect within my own space and timing. At this point it was quite difficult to make sense of the many happenings. I decided to follow a hands-on explorative approach and trust connections would be made while at play.<sup>1</sup>

I went to the local second-hand store that focusses on old building waste. Maybe as I browse, I will see something that sparks an idea? I found that it works well for me to experience existing objects and then explore what they afford to build ideas<sup>2</sup>. An odd looking trolley caught my eye. Infact there were a whole series of them in different shapes and sizes. They were a nice scale and the framework sparked a playful curiosity within me. It had rubber clamping devices that functioned very intuitively. I jumped on and rode across the shop floor. This was perfect! Items purchased included : a Street sign (Warning Building in Progress), some clamps to attach things to existing street poles<sup>3</sup> and another trolley that was a basic wheel base structure.

But there was a problem, How can I take all of these items on the public transport inbetween Hjallbo and my studio every day? I decided to try. I sneaked onto the tram, ready to get shouted at. Nothing happened. I then realised that it was almost the same size as a baby stroller. The public transport was designed with this size in mind. It was a perfect city hack which continued to assist me throughout the project whenever the space was not needed by someone else.

During the next 2 weeks, I explored the trolley through use. I stored all of my collected tools and material on it and slowly discovered better ways of using it. I used it to collect free prototyping materials from people at different waste sites. On a journey for cardboard I learnt that public roads are bumpy and stretchy cables are an easy intuitive way to tie things down. I did low cost changes to suit my situational needs as they arose. Structure and organization developed and my ideas grew in what was a fun process of engagement with the city and this object.

#### \*Key Reflection Time : Site specific brief

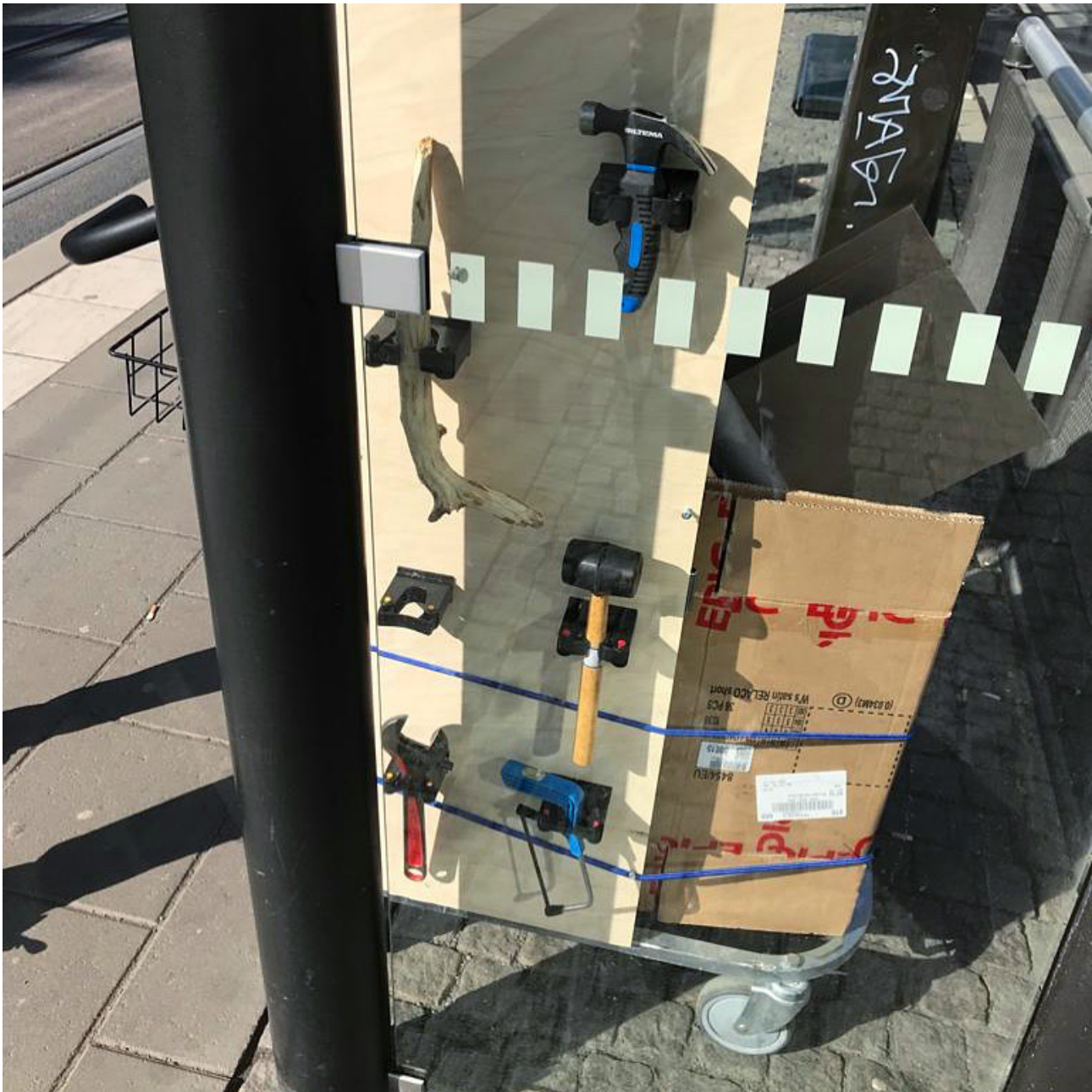
A site specific brief started to emerge. I decided to focus the brief on infrastructure (a system of resources) that could support actions of collecting and storing. My practice based research lead me to assume that this will lead to the development of child made play tools and assist in the adaption of the existing environment as a playscape.

<sup>1</sup> Approach : Making Sense through Embodied experience

<sup>2</sup> Creating by acknowledging we build off what already exists is an Improvisational Technique

<sup>3</sup> See what became of these in the side project : Temporary Street Sign ( Appendix )









### 3.2 On-site : Presenting the Mobile Workshop/Storage Device

I took my trolley carrying tools and materials to site with the hope that it would be adopted. I assumed it would be taken on a journey of play to various situations within the area and used to assist child lead play.

Alongside this, I aimed to setup a workshop situation using the existing park table and bench. I wanted to investigate the use of tools and materials and whether these resources supported the adaptation of existing infrastructure for play. I hoped to see new things collected, developed, played and stored by those using it. But events turned out a bit differently.

I arrived at Hjallbo Parklek where there was almost no children around. I dropped off the cart and decided to go get lunch before we start. When I got back all of the tools were taken off the holders and many things were not where I left them. This was not the plan, but something was happening. **Master builder and his friend** had made their own device using a found container, a box and the stretchy cable to connect everything to a bicycle. The tools, tape and other items were inside. They added their snacks, and the street sign that I had left nearby. Off they went to the far corner of the parklek. While a bit dissapointed that my trolley was functioning as nothing but a shelf, I realised that this was their own journey and the concept had been taken, with them directing it. They continued throughout the day without me. During the day, I observed that they had blocked off a section of the road that the staff had created for the bicycles. They placed the building sign infront of the area and used chalk to redirect the road. Over time they started connecting the bicycle contruction to various things with the long stretchy cable. They continued while I worked on the workshop situation at the other end of the parklek.

The mobile workshop followed learnings from the stick intervention. One or two of us began exploring and soon there were about 7 children ranging between 4-10 years old. Some parents joined. The pieces of off-cut wood in combination with sticks from the forest were popular and so were the tools. Many objects were developed again. It was a playfull process of exploring experiences with the materials, tools and the surrounding environment. Objects were made, played and then made into something new again. Many children were interested in using tools as play within itself. The simple act of drilling or cutting was done on repeat, with improvisations on how to use the tool emerging. The drill was used as a sort of sculpting/cutting device and then went back to typical drilling again. The material produced was often left aside after action and then someone else would find it and take it further in their direction.





### \*Key Reflection Time : Aligning with emerging patterns

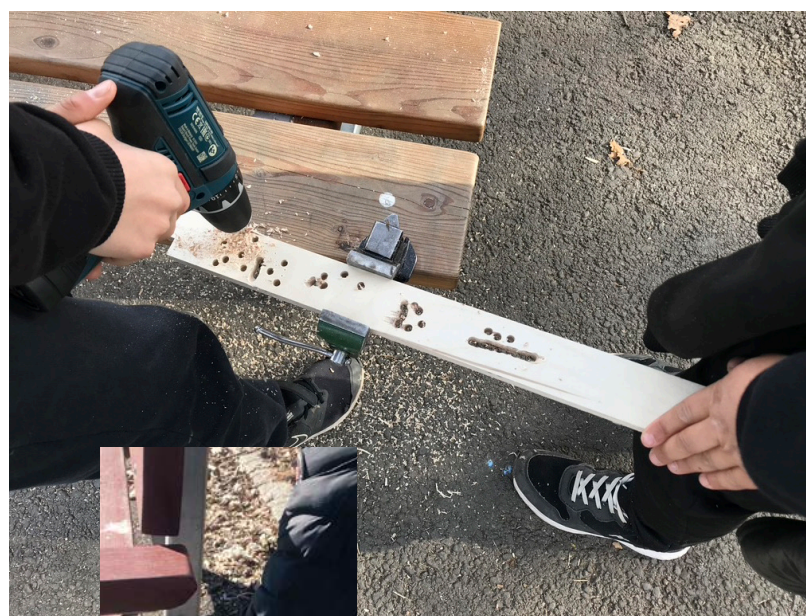
Through the workshop intervention I discovered a method for exploring alternative functions of existing infrastructure in public space with others. I realised it could be done with little verbal instruction. First, I had a particular activity in mind. Next I observed public space and identified infrastructure with its existing affordances that might support that activity. Then by placing my trolley and its context alongside the park bench I had curated a new situation. Activity began and the bench quickly changed function. I was surprised at how many times the bench was used outside of its typical function without me verbally instructing people to do this. Further more, peoples use and improvisation generated many more ways then I had considered. I only had thought of adding a clamp. In fact, the engagement was even more directly focussed on the bench. The arm rest was used to break sticks, the gaps between the seat slats as a space to clamp wood etc. The bench was re-purposed to suit the needs of the situation surrounding it and these emerged in a beautiful flow of improvisational action.

The trolley I designed recieved quite alot of intrest from the staff. The various interventions were showcasing an idea through action and this sparked conversations. The lead staff member shared an idea to purchase their own trolley and develop a mobile work station. I said they could have mine but there were ideas of how to iterate the design to suit them. They said it should be bigger and have multiple containers. They could select from a stationary shelf and then wheel it out. It could be kept in the future Parklek House and taken out on specific days, managed by the staff. It seemed they would run with this idea. With limited capacity, I decided to leave this up to them. They seemed invested and I aimed to continue exploring if these ideas could be more child lead.

The trolley I designed was not recieved with the same level of ownership that I saw in the hacked bicycle version made by the **Master Builder & Friend**. This lead me to consider trying a different approach that aimed to take focus off my trolley design.

I had observed the use of tools, and while the children were very capable of using the drill and saw, I needed to find options that they could take ownership of when I am not there. When testing situations with less tools the children found other means that were effective. They even started making their own tools to achieve their goals.

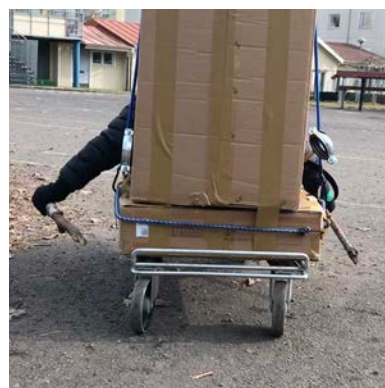
Regarding storage, the staff told me that children did take from the stationary containers I left on site, but when I looked it seemed to be fairly neglected. This worked for raw materials but it seemed a more secure space may be needed for developed items especially if they are to be continued. I decided to explore working with the existing container storage that is unique to this context. It is not always accessible, but it is secure which has other values. Possibly we could change the culture and store child made & collected things.











## 4. Providing a Basic Structure for Improvisation

I decided to try bringing the wheel base structure as infrastructure to improvise on. It had no elements designed by me. I arrived on site as usual with no instructions along with my trolley, tools and materials. I added cardboard to the materials as it worked well for me when I explored my trolley. It is a material easy to shape and change within their skillset without me. I aimed to see if they would find it of interest, and if so, trust that they would build something which they decided was necessary.

I setup next to the bench and as usual, it was the local **Master Builder and Friend** who arrived. They got straight into building things and I made sure to let them work on whatever interested them. While assisting with the build of a flute, I could see something was being built on the wheel base structure. The Master Builder jumped onto the structure and started trying different ways of pushing himself around with sticks. While it was very much momentary and did not take on a typical planned form, he was designing, iterating on his ideas and exploring functions through embodied experience. This was the first day I offered to store it for them to continue using.







### It looks like mine !

It was only when I took this photo at the end of the day, that I realised how similar these look. At this point I had only observed a few functions. It was described as a car, it was ridden and there were some other developed objects strapped to the top.

Did I influence their design?

Is this their idea or mine?

This is a difficult question. But as the theory on Intra-Active play<sup>1</sup> suggests, it is highly probable that what was in the environment influenced the improvisation. Even if I gave no verbal instructions, there was instruction inherent within the context of objects and the situation I curated.

At this point, I must be cautious to call this their design, but possibly it is ours. With the process of following improvisation<sup>2</sup> in mind, I decided to see what would happen over time.

<sup>1</sup> Rautio, P., & Winston, J. (2015)

<sup>2</sup> Theory on improvisation suggests that when practicing through repetition, over time, as our skill builds we make improvisations and these movements give rise to different discoveries. Tim Ingold considers this a part of the creative process. According to Ingold, we create through a process of improvising on what exists with all of its weaved together relations rather than from an isolated genius. (2013.)





## 5. Storing the Wagon for everyday use

### 3 Weeks of in-situation Prototyping by the Master Builder

The Staff agreed that we could keep the built object. I initially hoped to keep many objects from different children but the staff felt they did not have the space. So I compromised and decided to just focus on this object as a test. I was concerned that the aim to design public infrastructure that would serve the broader community might get lost. But what would happen if it is stored? I assumed it would be developed over time for multiple play situations. I had this in mind due to the previous project experience with my neighbour.

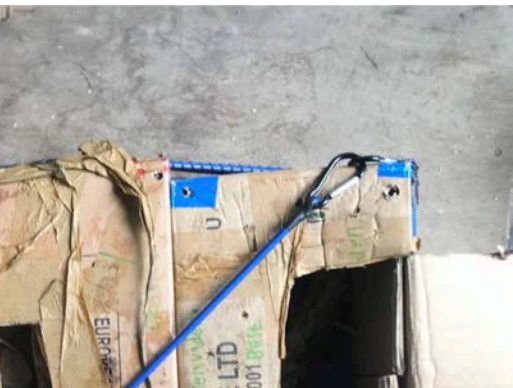
Over the course of 3 weeks, the object was stored in the container and made available daily. Over this time I did not add to the build and was predominantly off site. I came to visit a few times. The staff were very invested in helping and made many remarks of how engaged the Master Builder was with this object. The staff said that they felt sad at the end of the day when they had to stop play to pack it away. Stories began to emerge. One day there was an attempt to push it up the steep hill into the forest. Another day a group of children spent time on an unspecified project together with the object. This story made me wonder, was this object communal? When I visited, it was always **Master Builder** who was pushing it around or making changes to the form. The staff kept referring to it as his.

It took on various forms over time. One day I arrived during a popcorn event. It was placed at the front of the queue, alongside the popcorn machine. Two arm additions were holding popcorn. Another day I arrived to explore attaching plywood waste to the fence with cable ties. A few children asked if they could join me, soon they took over. During the build, **Master Builder** and **his Friend** came to assist. They parked the object next to the fence and started offering me tools. This was a great moment as our roles had reversed.

After 2 weeks, I decided to ask what its functions were. To my surprise, the reply was very specific. "It's a Wagon!" The front compartment is for collecting found materials, the middle one is for collecting rubbish and the top one is for tools...and other things. There were many found objects stored inside, a mix of personal items, wood, tools and other bits and pieces. It seemed that along with the many new functions that developed, the core foundation was similar to my design. I did not expect this after all the changes that occurred without me present.

It seemed that this wagon was slowly changing the culture of what belongs in the container. Conversations grew with the staff regarding the future playground plans and how to integrate ideas to assist the building and storage of items made by children.









## 6. “It’s Broken!”

I had now observed many outcomes that were aligning with my design intentions. By storing the Wagon, it did get developed over time. There was clearly an interest and sense of ownership. The staff said it got used every day. It was still questionable as to whether it belonged to those who built it or if it had become communal.

It was being adapted for use in different situations and it did assist with the adaption of the surrounding environment. Things were being collected and stored. There were many stored items that I did not bring to site, and many had clearly been developed with bits of tape added or things joined together. I observed the cardboard structure being used as a work table the perfect height for Master Builder.

The overall form had changed every time I visited, I observed a day when time was spent drilling holes all over the cardboard structure. The visual appeal of the object was clearly communicating that it was made by the children. It is an object on the playground formed by the culture of those using it. When I built my Trolley, I also enjoyed this constant adapting and personalisation. I was reminded by the Master Builder that this is an important part of the play.

At this point I was happy with the outcomes, as there was a form of infrastructure supporting the adaption of the environment as a playscape lead by the children. But I wondered if I should assist further with my design skills. I considered working on it, but I felt it was not mine.

After 3 Weeks, I arrived to the staff and Master Builder saying it is now broken...

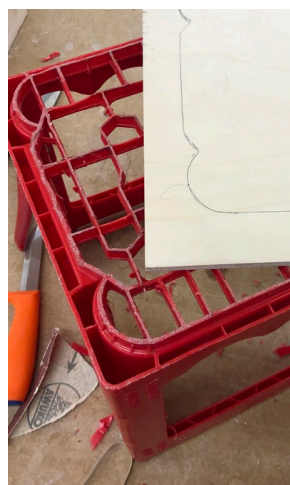
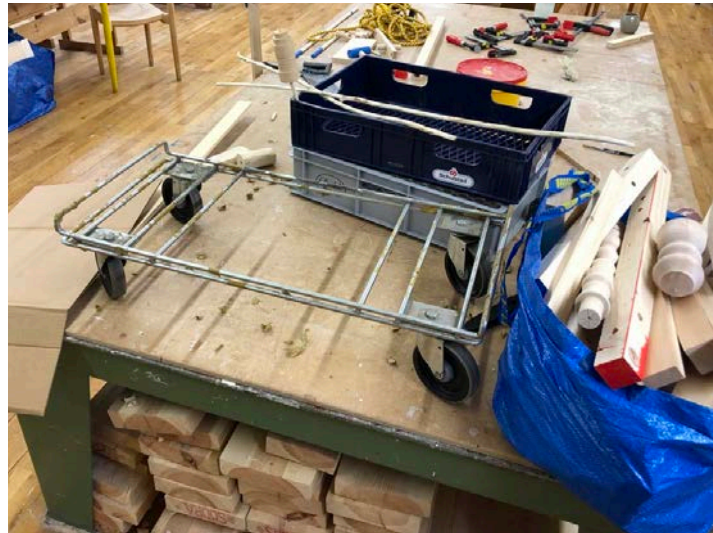
I knew the cardboard wouldn't last but I thought it was always breaking and being fixed. Why would they say this now? Apparently it was taken out when Master Builder wasn't there. Some children played with it, and they were accused of breaking it. A staff member had placed it in this fenced off area where they keep things that are not locked over night.

I took this as an opportunity to ask Master Builder if I could assist him as a designer to develop it again? I also made a suggestion that it could be for everyone. He gave a thumbs up and immediately began making a base from cardboard. However this didn't last long. He asked me to hold up the off cut and ran through it like a doorway. The focus shifted to explore this instead.

I had some ideas to explore a stronger structural system using wooden offcuts from the workshop bins. To test it I needed to take it to my the woodwork studio. So I asked if I could take it and return shortly to present another prototype.





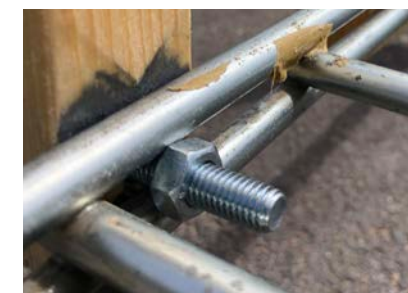
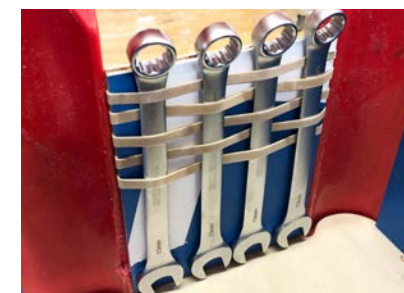


## 6.1 Studio Play : Discovering Another Prototype

I revisited the bins. The art students throw away all sorts of nice shapes and sizes here. I found more than enough, including some plywood offcuts. I had been observing the use of crates in the city, which sparked an idea. I spotted one at a friends work and after sharing the idea, he gathered two more and gave them to me. They were the perfect size! Maybe this wheel frame had been designed for crates before I found it?

The design challenge was to balance the use of design to bring structure while not stifling the opportunities for emerging improvisation.<sup>1</sup> I was aiming for strong frameworks that could bring organization but remain changable into new forms. Cardboard had been an important form making material, but I assumed the parklek designers would add and explore that addition. It was still important that everything should be changable with a fairly basic skill<sup>2</sup>. I decided to test spanners, bolts & nuts. I had previously observed how sticks from the forest were plugged into holes and so I decided to work with 8mm holes that afforded these collected additions.

I decided not to draw out plans but to rather practice the playfull process I observed from **Master Builder**. I improvised by physically trying different things and seeing what ideas grew. The system allowed me to place things in different positions. I could experience new situations without too much worry because I knew I could quickly change again. It was a fun sprint in the workshop<sup>3</sup>. There were many material discoveries that built from affordances already existing in the forms. By working in this way I discovered additions that could easily plug in and out while still having strength when assembled. Different parts relying on the forms of others.



1. Hamdi, N. (2004). Small change : About the art of practice and the limits of planning in cities. London: Earthscan.

2 The ability to improvise and express oneself through making require skills

Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). Free play : Improvisation in life and art. Chapter on Practice (pg 66 - 77)

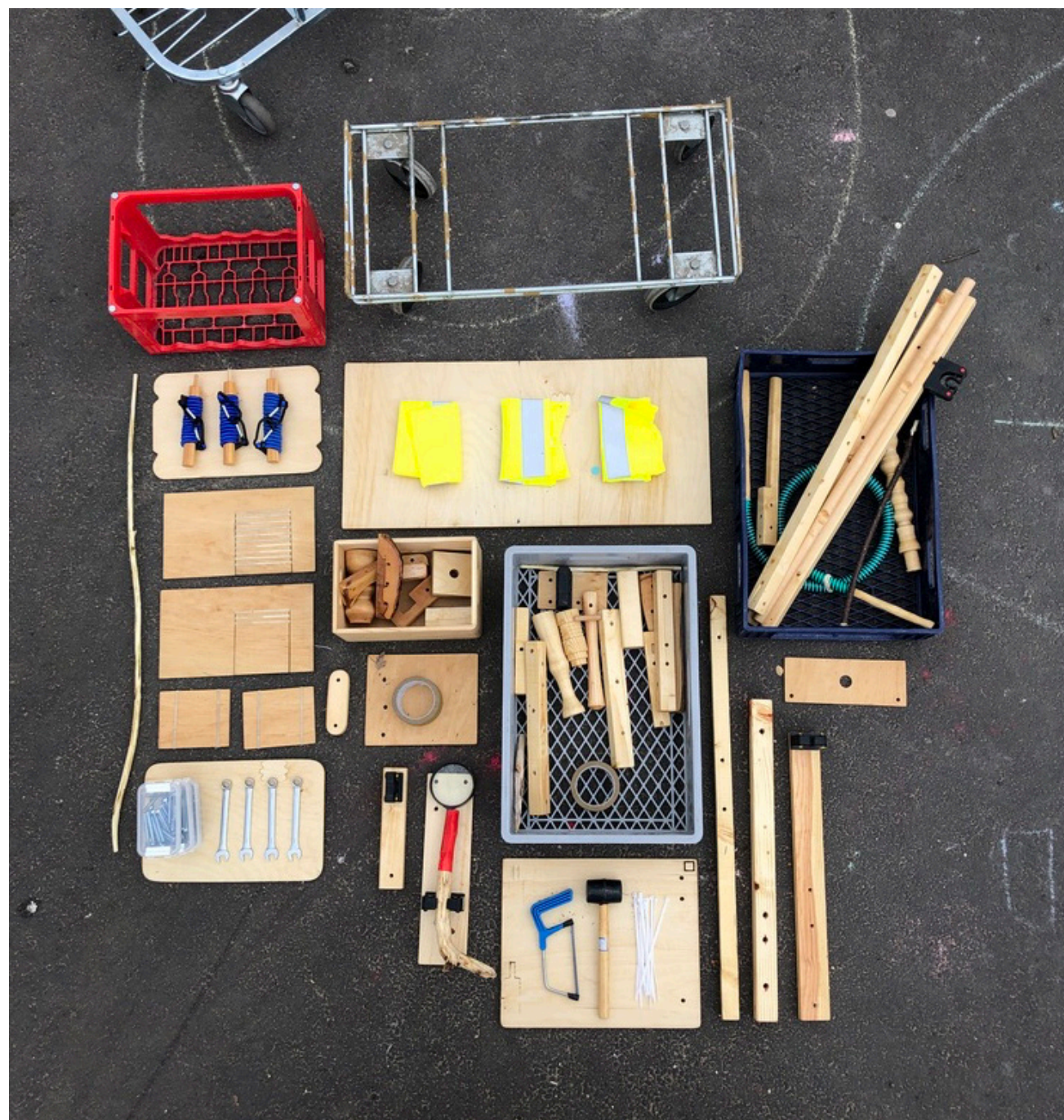
Ingold, T (2013). Making, Growing & Learning

3. It is difficult to say when others are in a state of play. But here, amongst deadline pressure, I had found my own play. This didnt feel like work to me, even though it may look that way with its productivity and use of energy.

See Chapter on Rhetoric of Self by Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). The ambiguity of play.

(Notes on intrinsic motivation and the state of flow referencing Csikszentmihalyi's theory pg. 185





## 6.2. On-Site : Assembling Together

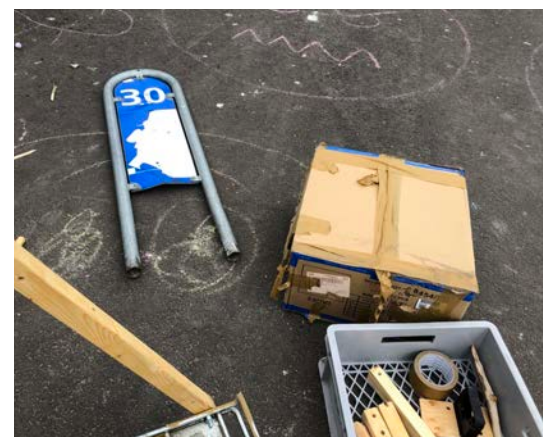
I arrived at the parklek with all the components dissassembled. I assumed my design partner would be there as usual. Master Builder arrived while I was documenting all the parts layed out on the floor. It seemed he knew what I was presenting but we struggled to communicate across the language barrier. It was clear that there were different methods of building proposed here and so I decided to introduce them through action.

I began by showing the large ply platform that was cut to fit exactly between the metal frame. This referenced the cardboard version he started making the day I asked to assist. I plugged it in, stood on it (to show it can take weight) and then took it off again. Master Builder came to explore it a bit. Next I showcased the red crate by plugging the wood components into it. I showed that it can be added and removed repeatedly. The red crate references the tool section of the previous prototype by having a similar scale. This lead to showing the various tools and fixtures, placing them inside. I then demonstrated how the building system works. I expressed that there are many parts we could try by going over to the collection, picking up different ones and handing them over. I chose one to demonstrate how to assemble.

Master Builder started to assist, as we started by setting up the wooden sides. I saw that he could recognise what to do with the spanners. To my surprise, the skill was a little tricky at first. I needed to assist, but he got it after some trial and error. Eventually he could do it alone. We fixed a few sides onto the frame and then he ran off. Something had clearly sparked. He came back carrying some objects. A street sign (Not the one I put there) a large cardboard pipe and his old cardboard box that still had collected things inside. He had clearly still been collecting while I was away. He grabbed some spanners from the toolbox and went over to the sign. I looked closer and realised he was putting the skill we just used into action. He gave me a large smile after removing a bolt from the sign.

Focus turned back to the wagon prototype and we continued, but now I could see Master Builder had gained confidence. We built together. He selected elements and assembled while I assembled some side parts that I thought could form a strong foundation. We showed each other different options as we explored. Soon the large cardboard pipe came along. He held it in different positions and then attempted to fit it over the long stick. This task required us to work together, so I assisted since I am fairly tall.

We went on like this for a while. I showed my collection of smaller parts in the grey crate. Master builder went to fetch his box. He poured all of his things inside. The form we arrived at had similarities to my final studio prototype, but there were also clear changes.







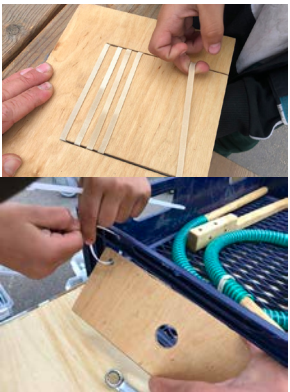
Dialogues & Discoveries

During assembly there were many discoveries I had not considered. I made this small door after noting the action of posting items through the slots designed in the previous prototype. I intuitively felt that it should be accessible in the direction depicted. But I couldn't solve how the metal stops it from opening. So I placed it the other way around. Master builder insisted to turn it around. I demonstrated my frustration. He simply lifted the whole crate to set the door over the metal... Of course!



Neat things - Messy Things

When designing alone, I discovered some ideas that I really liked. They became rather neat and organized. Such as these Stretchy cable holders. I had my doubts about whether these would serve any benefit and actually last. I decided to still present them and see what happens.



Intuitive Assembly

By choosing to design with fairly simple and intuitive methods of building, the opportunity for participation and taking over the lead grew.





## Description of Results

After presenting my design additions on the assembly day, I left the Wagon to be continued by the designers of Hjalibo Parklek. For now, my direct involvement had come to an end and I felt the new building system would add some longevity to the project. The Staff said they would like to keep storing it. I had previously communicated to Master Builder and the staff that, it could be shared. However I was still unsure if it was considered communal. I did not want to insist. I aimed to let those who will use it decide.

I left the site and returned 3 days later on 09 May 2022 to observe what had changed. I greeted everyone with focus on a different side project that emerged during this time. It explored Improvisational Play in the city through Street Signs.<sup>1</sup> I intentionally kept a distance, waiting to see how the wagon was used without me leading the play.

I will present these observations as the project results (from my perspective). Please note that this design is not fixed and exists within multiple relations. It is likely to change over time with the direction of those using it, or due to some other effect.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for short summary



### 09 May 2022 : A group situation !

After some time away from the Parklek, I tried to spot where the Wagon had gone. I looked across the tarmac and there was Master Builder sitting on it alongside a group of children. I looked closer and saw an object or two on the ground. They seemed to be working on something. The group grew and soon there was a buzz of children around the Wagon. I went to say hello, keeping in mind not to facilitate, direct or assist.



### Inked

A marker was added. There were multiple names and drawings on some parts.



### Children Assisting Each Other

There was the usual energy around improvising with objects that I had become accustomed to. It seemed the activity had continued, only this time I was no longer the assistant.

Master builder was now assisting friends with his skills.

I looked around and saw other children helping each other with tasks.

### Building on each others ideas

There was a clear improvisation on each others ideas. Experiencing them together through play actions and then inventing something else.

### Adapting

These objects were being adapted and then used as play tools. They were not in isolation but improvisation extended past the objects, making use of the surrounding environment affordances.







### Breaking and Remaking

A while was spent figuring out how to build this device. After using it I heard. "It's dead," and the piece that broke off was shown. Some more investigation of the object continued.

I then heard. "No...Its alive!" I turned around to see a new game created and the broken piece was now hit with the handle as a bat.

### Reuse

This button was added and played after it broke off a piece of wood.



### Changing Form

While I did not see many cardboard additions yet. The Wagon was still changing form over time. The building system I had presented afforded the ongoing development of its form by those using it. The culture of use developed before would have also impacted this.



### Bolts & Nuts

This building system was put into use by many children and it seemed to be easy enough to work with.

### Small Changes

The bolt I placed in the crate whole had a second one added.



### Doing Maintenance

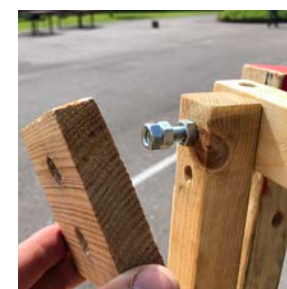
The organization and neater parts that I added were still around. I didnt expect this. At the end of the day I realised that Master Builder was actually maintaining the organization. He neatly roled things up, and placed them in place. During chaotic group activity he was also performing this role. There was a moment when he ran around counting spanners as he worried one was missing. It is difficult to know the different levels of ownership experienced towards the Wagon, but it became clear that even if Master Builder is considered to be the owner, he seems to be serving the wider community through his actions.





### Still Collecting & Adding Tools

The collecting continued. There were objects that were not there previously. A glove, lego, more wood, a wood pole wrapped in red cloth and some plastic elements that resembled flowers. New tools were also added. I assume they were taken from inside the container. A child safe cutting knife, more tape and some scissors.



### New Approaches

This piece of wood had a hole bigger than the nut. Multiple nuts were added to make it plug in with a good fit.



### Storing Child Made things

The daily storage in the container continued. It had proved to be an effective way to create an opportunity for the continued development of child made loose parts. While space was a concern until the Parklek House is built, The Wagon was accepted by the Staff. While I was concerned that it was only one object, I discovered that it could contain many and these were being made by more children than just the Master Builder.

This Wagon and its Play tools with all of their hacks and additions by the children over time, grows into a form celebrating their Play Culture and displaying it. It offers a different direction to the idea for a staff operated Workshop Wagon. A design that through the process has become child lead and managed.













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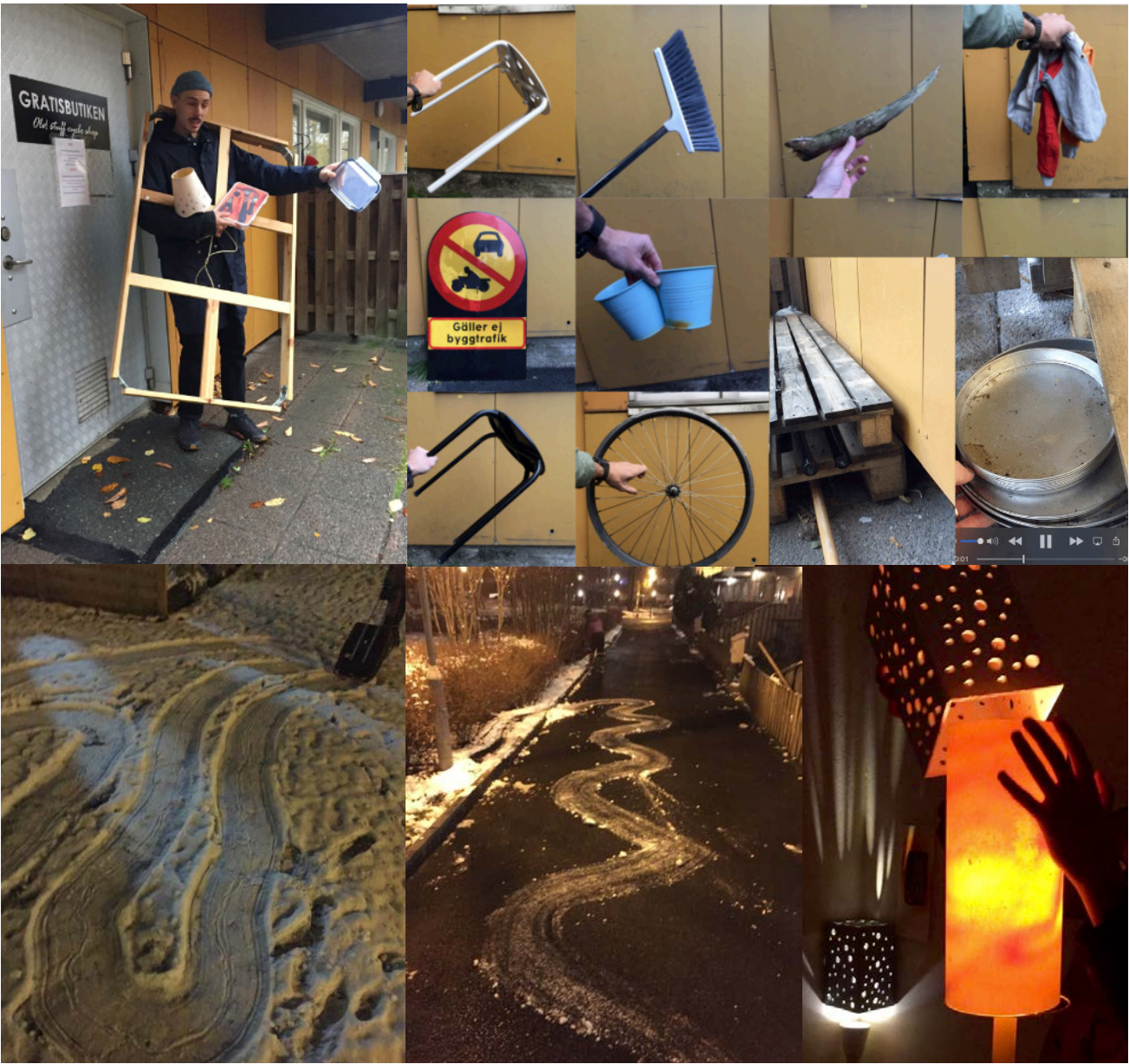
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# Appendix

## Collaborations with my Neighbour : Collecting, Storing, Developing

Within my neighbour hood, I had a brilliant friend age 13, who lived next door. We saw each other most days and when greeting me he would usually say “Gratis Butik?” This was an invitation to join him on a journey to explore the local “Free Shop”. An room where others left items they didnt want any more. We collected things together and explored area. Many of these items became play tools for various journeys. One day we found an old suit case. As we walked across the snow it left a trail. A large scale drawing machine was discovered. I learnt a large amount from my friends ability to improvise with found things to create play in the environment.



# Appendix

## Temporary Street Sign: Exploring Improvisational City Play

Through observing the city environment and some interaction with signs at Hjallbo Parklek. I followed an small brief to desgin a temporary street sign. While this is fairly detached from the Wagon context, the challenge to consider using design as a form of organization and structure that can support imporvisation within an existing city system was a good learning path for me as a designer. The outcome of which I had plenty of fun with and sparked some conversations in public space. The temporary nature of the sign and my learnings on improvisation with existing things created a great playspace for me within the city. The sign is changable and designed to be used by anyone who wishes to try while its up somewhere.

