Du Flâneur au Traceur
Playful Bodies in the Urban Spaces

Mattia Thibault & Eero Tarasti

Abstract

This paper investigates how play practices affect the players relationships with the urban environment through the bodily movement and performances that characterise them. Building on a definition of playful behaviour derived by semiotics of culture, we investigate urban play from the perspective of motor praxology to outline how movement is central for the experience of the players. We then concentrate on the role of semiotic valorisations in different urban contexts, notably the famous typology of metro users by Floch and different kinds of ludic mobility. Finally, we combine these two perspectives with the zemic model realised within existential semiotics in order to create a typology or urban players as well as urban playful enunciation modes.

Keywords: Urban play, player types, motor praxology, zemic model, valorisations, urban enunciation.

Mattia Thibault (Tampere University) – mattia.thibault@tuni.fi

Eero Tarasti (Helsinki University)

1. INTRODUCTION

Émile Benveniste used the expression "pedestrian enunciations" to describe the relationships between the corporeal movement of the citizens and the semiotic reality of the city (1970). Barthes, when postulating the possibility of urban semiotics, claimed that citizens "speak" the language of the city by living in it (1967). De Certeau (1980), on his side, defined the city as a text that is actualised by the movement of the people within it. Moving within the city, therefore, is not merely a question of interpreting it and navigating it, but it also entails a reconfiguration of the city through its enunciation.

Different ways of moving through or in the urban spaces result in different enunciations of the city by actualising and personalising its potential semiotic structure. For instance, the relationships between the city and the *flâneur* (Benjaimin 1969) or between the commuters and the *metro* (Floch 1990) can assume many forms and reshape urban enunciations according to the valorisation they subsume and the experiences they afford.

It is not surprising, then, that in the context of the *ludic city* (Stevens 2007), playfulness and playful behaviour are increasingly becoming strategies to use, appropriate and regenerate the urban spaces. Even outside designated playgrounds, cities host large numbers of bodies at play, ranging from forms of playful or sportive mobility (cycling, skating, cross-country skiing) to people playing actual urban games (such as *Pokémon Go* or geocaching). To these, we can add all those activities of urban gamification aiming at reclaiming the public spaces such as *parkour* and flash mobs (Thibault 2019).

This paper engages the semiotic features of playful actions in the urban space, understood as ways of enunciating the city. Making use of analytic tools from semiotics of culture (Lotman 1990), motor praxology (Parlebas 2013) and existential semiotics (Tarasti 2015), we will focus on several forms of urban playful behaviour. Our aim is twofold. On the one hand, we will reflect on the influence of playful movement on the subject, centred on their corporeal experience. On the other hand, we will investigate, identify and define a series of urban play archetypes, related to a varied palette of urban enunciative modes. This typology will be positioned next to Floch's different types of subway users and to Bejnamin's *flâneur* in an ideal semiotic typology of urban dwellers.

2. PLAYFUL BEHAVIOUR AND URBAN RESEMANTISATIONS

Play is a central aspect of all human cultures (Huizinga 1949) and has been at the centre of profound philosophical theorisation (e.g. the concept of *Spieltrieb* in Friedrich Schiller's Schiller in his Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man, 1794) and systematic study (famously, Caillois 1967). Nevertheless, play is also known to be a complex concept to clearly outline. While attempts at defining it abound (Stenros 2017), "play" has been pointed out to be something we often understand *in opposition* of something – of work, seriousness, reality, life – but always in an improper way (Bateson 1955). Play, after all, can be extremely serious, and professional gamblers and athletes do indeed gain their life through it. Wittgenstein, famously, suggested that the different activities that we define as "play" have no traits common to all, and that they are related mostly by a family resemblance (Wittgenstein 1953). While the philosopher was indeed making a point on the functioning of language, we do agree that the concept itself might be a slippery one.

In this paper, hence, we will focus on *playful behaviour,* that is the behavioural and interpretative dynamics that take place when someone in engaging in an activity in a *playful* way. To do so, we will focus on Juri Lotman's definition. Lotman (2011) considers play as a modelling system that arises from a precise behaviour, or, better, from a compresence of two different kinds of behaviours. On the one hand, a player adopts a *conventional behaviour*: they interpret and interact with the objects of play in a "fictional" way. They might pretend that the broom is a horse or that their doll is alive, and, in a certain measure, act like if that were the case. On the other hand, players also follow a *practical behaviour*: they are well aware of the fictitious nature of their interpretations and do not quite behave as if they were completely real. The constant compresence of these two behaviours, their twinkling in the players conscience, is what make a playful behaviour possible. If a player would cease their conventional behaviour, they would be acting normally. If they stopped behaving practically, we would have madness – Dom Quixote charging windmills. It is the continuous balance between the two that gives birth to play.

This definition is particularly interesting because it frames play as an eminently semiotic act, dealing with a sort of voluntary misinterpretation or use (Eco 1975) of the world that surrounds us. When we deal with forms of play that take place in the urban spaces, then, we are facing some forms of playful resemantisations (Thibault 2020) of the city. While playing, the objects

and spaces surrounding us acquire new meanings that, without erasing them, coexist with their every-day ones.

Leone (2009), for example, describes how, in the practice of *parkour*, the obstacles that are disseminated in the peripheries of French metropoles are regularly reinterpreted and transformed in supports for acrobatic movement. We could say something similar when it comes to skateboarding (Bäckström 2007) – where different spaces or monuments are resemantised to offer skaters the affordances for their tricks, or even for marathons, in which the resemantisation is institutionalised, and streets are closed to traffic and transformed into a racetrack.

Urban play, hence, is a form of pervasive play (Stenros et al. 2009) that makes of the city a *playground* full of *playthings* resulting from a systematic resemantisation of its spaces and objects that involves them in the citizens playful behaviours.

3. MOTOR PRAXOLOGY AND THE CITY AS MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT

Many forms of play, but sports in particular, are strongly determined by the bodily movements they involve. Parlebas (2013) focuses precisely on the importance of such movement, going beyond its role as a necessary component for playing a game, but inscribing it in the context of the players' identities and of their larger socio-cultural environment.

In Parlebas work, the concept of "motor action" is at the centre of a rethinking of the studies corporeality, and places bodily movement at the centre of dynamics of creation and presentation of the personality of the acting individual. The study of this phenomenon, which Parlebas calls *motor praxology* forms a sort of semiotics of the moving body, imagining the latter as a semiotic system, mean to express individuality and personality, but also to communicate with other and to relate to one's environment – an approach perhaps to Fontanille's somatic modalisations (Fontanille 2004).

> "When a soccer player runs into the opposing team's area and shoots forcefully at the goal, when a 100-meter relay runner passes on the baton at full speed, when a canoeist paddles against fierce rapids, or when a dodge ball player throws the ball at his opponent, it is not enough to

explain these physical activities as mere "movements" of a body-machine. These are motor conducts that involve a person's fundamental dimensions: their biomechanical dimension, of course, but also their emotional, social, cognitive, and expressive dimensions. (…) The acting individual is a person who collects and stores information, who draws up and carries out motor strategies." (Parlebas 2013, p. 128)

Motor praxology highlights here two aspects that are particularly important to us. First, the importance of the personal dimension: the feeling of the body and the emotions connected with the action. In play, this is strongly connected with the concept of *ease* (being "à l'aise") that Greimas, in his essay "A propos du jeu", puts at the centre of the playful experience. Ease does not exclude difficulty[1], but it rather indicates the possibility of movement between rigid

Second, the fact that players are at the centre of an intense semiotic activity, focused on the perception of their surroundings, but also immersed in different sociocultural layers.

In addition to opening up these actions to showcase the semiotic wealth they conceal under the surface, Parlebas also denaturalises them. Making recourse to Marcel Mauss studies (1992), he insists on the cultural dimension of such activities: the ways of running and swimming, similarly to those of fighting or dancing, are shaped by the specific habits of a society. These cultural dimensions are deposited and crystallised in a series of "body techniques" that are proper of specific sociocultural environments (Parlebas 2013).

The transposition of such actions in a playful context, hence, that of games or sports, also irremediably mark the latter as specific realisations of underlining cultural structures. For this reason, Parlebas speaks of an "ethnoludicity" as a way to connect the internal logics of sporting games to values of their social context. In practice, it is easy to understand how, for example, urban running is a playful physical endeavour that is characterised by a series of cultural discourses and ideologies (those of fitness and health as well as the standardised models of beauty of our societies), shaped by technological implementations (from shoes to smart-phones and tracking devices, as well as from the media eco-system itself in which runners can share the data of their performance of social media) and strongly influenced by the urban fabric (e.g.

---

[1] Which has been proposed as a key component of games by e.g. Apter (1978) who sees games (sports included) as the voluntary acceptance of unnecessary increased obstacles and difficulties.

allocating specific spaces, like parks, to fitness activities and maintaining them relatively safe for different kinds of runners).

From this perspective, urban play has to be understood as determined by a convergence of technological, social, and cultural factors that influence it at every level, starting from the very body of the athlete (through alimentation, hydration, chemical enhancements etc.), to their equipment and environment.

Parlebas highlights the relationship with the material environment of the player as one of the three criteria of internal logic of motor praxology, together with the participants' relationships with others in cooperative and competitive contexts. These criteria are meant to underline how bodily movement cannot and should not be considered in isolation, but rather at the centre of a net of relationships involving different players, equipment, and environments.

While all of these elements are important, for the study of urban play it is indeed the relationship with the material environment which is of primary importance. Parlebas distinguishes between two types of environments: one is *controlled*, man-made and designed to host that particular game or form of play, while the other is *wild*, non-standardised, sometimes not even stable[2]. The latter, requires a specific way of interacting with it:

> "when the environment is "wild" and not standardized, as in windsurfing or adventure canoeing, participants carry on a continuous motor dialogue with space; they collect data, try to evaluate the obstacles in advance, and continually take preemptive action. This internal logic requires the acting individual's competence in dealing with this information." (Parlebas 2013, p. 130)

Urban spaces used in playful activities are particularly interesting from this perspective as, while being definitely man-made they are generally not designed with the purpose of hosting play. While there are indeed urban spaces made with such purpose – parks, stadia, bike-lanes – it is often the very resemantisation of the urban spaces that is making such activities

---

[2] In an interesting parallel, Apter (2007) uses sailing as an example of activity in which changes in the environment (growing wind, stronger waves) affect the possibility to engage playfully with the space and the activity and players might be forced to abandon their telic (playful) attitude because of the increasing danger.

meaningful. The excitement around the Grand Prix of Monaco, for example, arises especially from seeing racing cars running in the city streets instead of in a regular track. Similarly, *parkour* practiced in a specifically designed area might work as a physical activity but will loose its political charge and much of its aesthetics.

The city, hence, considered as a wild, man-made environment, is a fundamental component of urban play when it comes to motor praxology. The players will have to study it constantly, evaluate its obstacles, traffic and passers-by and continually take action and adjust to it.

The semiotic complexity and richness of the urban text (Volli 2008) makes it a particularly challenging environment. It might be for this reason that some forms of urban play minimise interactions with the environment, recurring instead to digital interactions, or are contained in safe spaces (such as skate parks, playgrounds, town square and similar. Others prefer to somewhat "tame" the urban spaces, by deviating traffic and designating specific play-spaces so to transform the city in to a more – but not completely – controlled space (it is the case of marathons and similar sporting events).

4. PLAYFUL VALORISATIONS OF MOBILITY

The concept of valorisation, as defined and applied in Floch (1990) can be particularly useful in delineating different ways of relating to the urban fabric – and of moving within it. For example, in his famous paper dedicated to the Parisian Metro, Floch (ibid.) outlined four types of users, based on their valorisations of urban rail mobility and of the trajectories – intended as discourses and as texts – through the network. His typology was based on their valorisations of the continuities and discontinuities of the trajectory. Users valorising the discontinuity are "surveyors" who enjoy the possible variations of their trajectories, while those that valorise the continuity are "daydreamers" relatively unaware of what is happening around them. The users that do not valorise discontinuity are the "pros" navigating the underground network with self-assurance and efficacy. Finally the "strollers" – or *flâneurs* – do not valorise continuity, and enjoy the spaces of the Metro, their shops, their attractions and so on. This typology of users, then corroborated through interviews and fieldwork, show the potential of valorisations as a way of looking at different kinds of relationships with the urban environment.

Thibault, M., & Tarasti, E. (2022). Du Flâneur au traceur: playful bodies in urban spaces. *Semiotica*, *2022*(249), 79-94.

In another work, Floch (1987) applied a similar, but reversed, method while advising for the construction of a shopping centre. Starting from the needs and desires of potential customers, Floch identifies four types of shoppers (the *chore-doer*, the *consumerist*, the *convivial* and the *browser* – my translations) and then reconstructs their valorisations of continuous or discontinuous spaces – and elaborates design strategies based on them.

Both studies are informed by Floch's famous semiotic square dedicated to different kinds of valorisation. First developed for the analysis of market spaces (Ibid.), Floch applied it to marketing strategies for the automobile (1990) and subsequently to several other areas, among which furniture advertising (Floch 1995). Floch build its semiotic square (fig. 1), based on Greimas (1989), to develop the opposition between utilitarian values (i.e. use values) and existential values (related to identity and self-expression). To this axis of contraries he then adds an axis of subcontraries (non-existential values and non-utilitarian values) so determining four semantic positions. To each of these positions correspond a specific form of valorisation:

1) utilitarian values are connected with a *practical valorisation* focusing on comfort and convenience; 2) existential values are related to *utopian valorisations* concerned with identity and self-expression:

3) non-existential values are connected with *critical valorisations* based on strategic thinking;

3) non-utilitarian values, finally, give birth to *ludic valorisations* oriented towards hedonism and "unserious" pleasures.
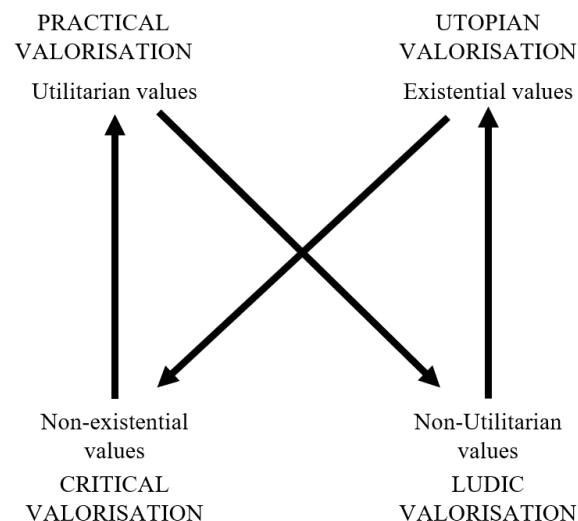

PRACTICAL VALORISATION — Utilitarian values

UTOPIAN VALORISATION — Existential values

Non-existential values — CRITICAL VALORISATION

Non-Utilitarian values — LUDIC VALORISATION

Figure 1 Floch's semiotic square of valorisations

While these valorisations have been used to analyse discourses around several products and practices, they have been recently applied to urban mobility (Thibault et al., forthcoming) to investigate, in particular, the specificities of *ludic mobility* – that is, forms of movement through the city that are organised around the pleasure and the playful feelings derived from them. In the study, the authors specify further this specific form of mobility making use of Caillois' four forms of play (1967). Therefore, they individuate a ludic mobility focused on *agon*, or competition, that encompasses all forms of races, more or less institutionalised, related to the movements of vehicles or bodies in the urban spaces. There is then a ludic mobility connected to *alea*, or chance, indicating practices like wandering, the *flânerie*, and the Situationist dérive. Ludic mobility related to *ilinx,* or vertigo, comprehends activities based on speedy, swift, and acrobatic movement, both enabled by certain vehicles, or by specific bodily practices such as parkour. Finally, ludic mobility related to *mimicry*, or simulation, can be linked to practices involving reimagining the function of different urban elements (e.g. the use of stairs and other street furniture by skateboarders) and experiencing cities in unusual ways (such as in augmented reality games like *Pokémon GO*).

These different types of ludic valorisations of urban mobility can obviously be combined. *Parkour*, hence, will contain elements of ilinx due to its acrobatic nature, of mimicry for its attempt to reimagine the urban landscape and agon, for the effort to master its skills and perform increasingly difficult tricks. Alea can also be introduced in the case of *traceurs* that chance on one's path or adverse meteorological conditions.

Both the valorisations of the use of the metro system and those of urban mobility seem to put at the centre the importance of the movement of the body. On the one hand, the two typologies described above have to do with the *quality* of such movements. Daydreamers and pros prefer the fluidity of an uninterrupted movement, that keeps a stable rhythm from its entirety. The bodies of surveyors and flâneurs, on the other hand, move in a discontinuous way. Their stopping is as important as their moving. They accelerate and decelerate, they interrupt their trajectories, they get side-tracked. Similarly, different forms of ludic mobility are also based on different qualities of movement. Practices related to agon, for example, likely require a movement that is fast, strategic, clearly directed towards a goal. Alea, instead, involves drifting through the urban spaces, a movement without a clear trajectory, or that changes trajectories at

all times. The movement in Ilinx is not only usually fast, but also daring. It involves jumping, somersaulting, spinning: the very principle of this form of play requires the body to move in a way that confounds the senses. Mimicry, finally, involves exploratory movements: looking through the city in search for something (be it a physical object, like in geocaching, or a digital one in augmented reality games). The movement is investigative, tentative, experimental. All these different forms of movement are reflected in their relationships with the urban spaces. The latter can be ignored in the abstract moving of daydreamers, or it can be a source of interest for the flâneurs. It can be a "game board" for pros researching the most convenient way to their destination, or a space to be mastered by the surveyors. It can be space to cross in the fastest possible way in agon, or a rhizome in which to get lost in alea. A space full of affordances for the acrobatics of ilinx, or a semiotic wealth in which to select the relevant saliences in mimicry.

On the other hand, the *meaning* assigned to movement within these typologies is equally important. The movement of a pro is a mean to an end, that of a daydreamer is almost a chore, to evade with escapism. The movement for a flâneur is a form of curiosity, that of a surveyor an inventory. For an athlete engaging in a form of agon, the movement is a challenge, with themselves and with other athletes. For someone wandering though the city, their aleatory movement is a way of loosing themselves. For the acrobatic practitioner of ilinx, the movement is a form of freedom, of liberation from their own limits. For the player in a practice of mimicry, the movement is a support of their insight.

These two dimensions, the quality and the meaning, are certainly of great help to individuate the role of corporeal movement in urban play. They are not, however, sufficient. We have seen above, with Parlebas (2013), that movement is never neutral, but it needs to be appreciated in its sociocultural context. To do so, we will make use of existential semiotics.

5. A ZEMIC TYPOLOGY OF URBAN PLAYFUL MOVEMENT

In the previous sections, we have identified several different dimensions related to the centrality of bodily movement in different practices of urban play. These dimensions are focused on the relationship of the players with themselves and their bodies, as well as with the spaces of the city, which are resemantised during the playful activities, and finally with the sociocultural and "ethnoludic" contexts that surround each of these practices.

To put these dimensions in a system we will make recourse to an analytical tool from existential semiotics: the zemic model. It is an ontological model rooted in several semiotic and philosophical theories presented in Tarasti (2015). This concept, one of the most famous of existential semiotics, is a model articulated on a modified semiotic square and is based on the combination of three main elements. First, two categories from Hegel's logics: *an-sich-sein* and *für-sich-sein*, that is, being-in-oneself and being for-oneself (Tarasti, 2015). These are considered as contrary terms, first one referring to any entity as such without yet any definition, and the second one the same entity as determined by others. In order to logically infer contradictory and implied terms from this primary opposition, Tarasti (Ibid.) recurs to a second element: the formalisation of self, elaborated in Fontanille (2004), and adds the philosophical categories of *Moi* and *Soi*. Their integration with Hegel's category gives birth to two additional ones: *an-mir-sein* and *für-mich-sein* - being-in-myself and being for-myself.

The four categories can also be related to a third element: the greimasian modalities of *vouloir* (wanting to), *pouvoir* (being able to), *savoir* (knowing to), and *devoir* (having to).

The zemic model, however, is not a "pure" greimasian semiotic square as Tarasti puts the four categories in "motion" by providing two possible paths throughout the model along different directions. In this respect, the zemic model departs from greimassian nominalist semiotics to tackle a new kind of ontological epistemic issue, more closely related to phenomenology. The model is articulated around semiosis from the perspective of the subject, mapping its functions in two directions: as sublimation (body to values) or as embodiment (values to body).

The name "Zemic", hence, derives from the "Z" shaped path that it draws (fig. 2) and from the fact that it focuses on the *inner* movements of the subject (and therefore it is "emic" and not "etic")(Ibid.). The zemic model is articulated in four steps: the first two are related to the sensible, while the other two are related to the intelligible in Levi-Straussian terms.

MOI

M1 Primary body

M2 Person, identity

S2 Social practice,
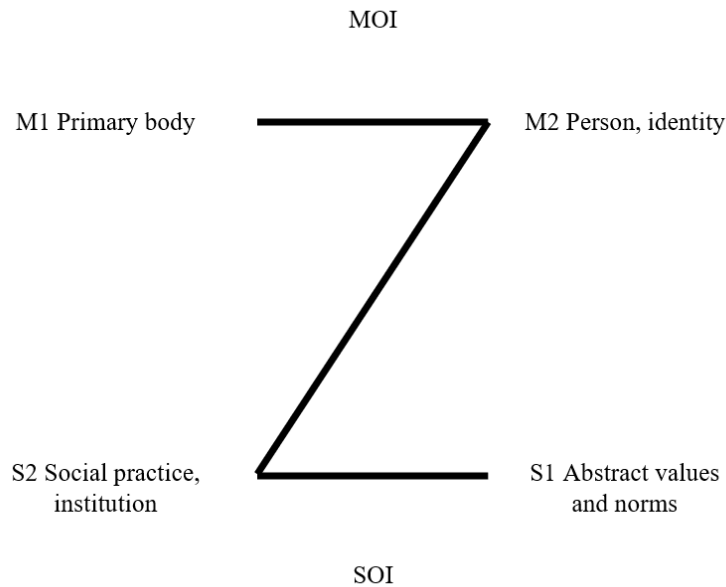institution

S1 Abstract values
and norms

SOI

Figure 2 The Zemic model

The first step is "Moi 1" or *être en moi* (being in myself) and it deals with the physical qualities of the subject, its body and chora (the pre-lingual stage pre-lingual stage of development, dominated by a chaotic mix of perceptions and needs, introduced by Kristeva and Derrida). This step is related to the modality of *vouloir*.

The second step, "Moi 2" is devoted to the *être pour moi* (being for myself) and therefore to the personality of the subject and its inner characteristics and abilities. It is related to *pouvoir*.

"Soi 2" is the third step, dealing with *être pour soi* (being for oneself). The subject is now integrated in the social institutions, where its modality of *savoir* is fundamental.

The last step is "Soi 1" or *être en soi* (being in oneself). In this higher level the subject interfaces with cultural values and axiologies – and is therefore confronted with the modality of duty: *devoir*.

Even if these four positions are called "steps", they are not alternate in time or necessarily subsequent: the subject is simultaneously immersed in all of them, even if it is generally more committed or focused on one of them. This is particularly relevant if we want to apply this model to urban play, as it connects the primary bodily experience of the players (that we can position in M1), with the fact that they express themselves and their personality through their

activities and movement (M2), and the fact that they do so in a specific social context (S2) and withing a cultural frame (S1).

If we open up a zemic representation of urban play, then we have:

Moi 1 – The bodily experience and movement of the subject, including its feelings and playful liberation and enjoyment, as well as fatigue and pain. The modality of *vouloir* characterises this step, as it links the movement to the desires and choices of the players.

Moi 2 – The expression of personality and mastery through playful urban movement. This step is related to *pouvoir* and hence to the skills and abilities of the players.

Soi 2 – The subject is now part of a social context, in this case of a community of players (marathon runners, skaters, parkour practitioners etc). Their performance has connotation of belonging, and their movement acquires characteristics that are distinctive of the group. The main modality here is *savoir* as the display of specific knowledge about the playful practice – including both the skills needed to perform it and the knowledge of how to resemantise the urban space in accordance with the requirements of the playful activity in question – is cardinal for being accepted and recognised as a member of the group.

Soi 1 – The subject, though the playful movement and practice, pursues specific cultural values. The skaters and parkour artists that, through their praxis, fight for their right to the city (Lefebvre 1968) as well as the runners that pursue goal of fitness and health, all connect their movements to the realisation of a higher value. This can acquire the status of a moral imperative, hence its connection with the modality of *devoir*.

All these elements coexist in every form of human play, although with different degrees of intensity. Each subject, then, will be immersed in all these dimensions, but they might valorise one of them in particular, thwarting their experience around it. Hence, as in Floch, we can imagine a typology of urban players based on the step of our zemic model that they valorise the most. This will allow us to construct and describe four types:

FREE MOVER: Is the type related to the first step of the zemic mocel, M1 and to the modality of *vouloir*. Free movers, as the name suggests, valorise the freedom of movement enjoyed in urban play activities. They are focused on their senses and feeling, exploring their limits and enjoying

especially the power of their body in activities of agon, the vertigo that can be generated from ilinx forms of play, or losing themselves in aleatory wandering.

THRASHER: derived by skateboarding slang, this type is related to the second step of the zemic model, Ms, and to the modality of *pouvoir*. Thrashers valorise the possibility to express their personality and their selves in their activities of urban play. They may focus on creating their own personal style, on tracking their own improvement as a form of tenacity, and in general on their own skills, choices, and preferences in all forms of play.

GANGMATE: is the type related to the third step of the zemic model, Soi 2, and the modality of *savoir*. Teammates valorise the player community above all. They enjoy the feeling of belonging; they share the concerns and interests of their groups (e.g. safety and reserve lanes for bikers) and they may be involved in the organisation of events and management of the community.

TRACEUR: a term derived from a name for parkour practitioners, is the type related to the fourth step of the zemic model, Soi 1, related to the modality of *devoir*. Traceurs valorise the cultural and political dimension of urban play, sometimes reaching levels of activism. Forms of mimicry are particularly relevant for traceurs, as they involve a reappropriation of the urban space.
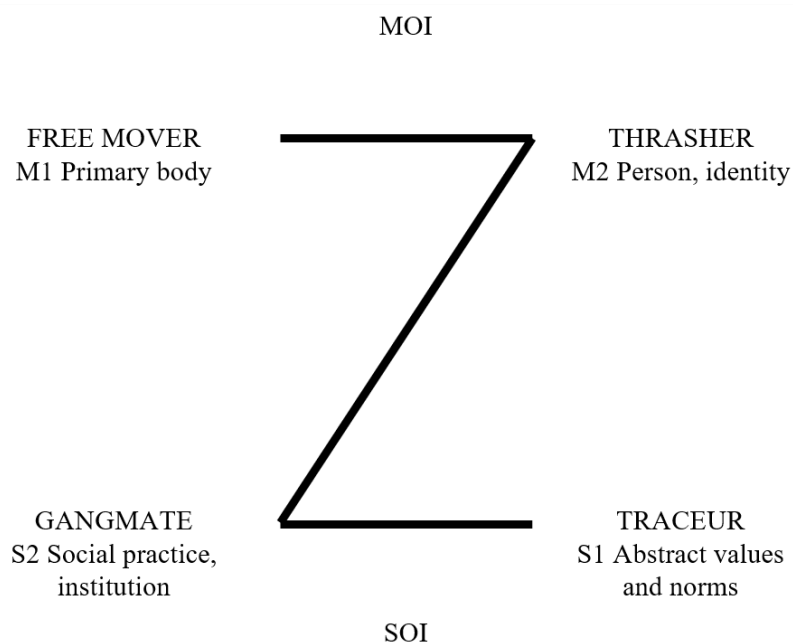
MOI

FREE MOVER
M1 Primary body

THRASHER
M2 Person, identity

GANGMATE
S2 Social practice,
institution

TRACEUR
S1 Abstract values
and norms

SOI

Figure 3 Zemic model of Urban Players

Different types of urban players will interact with each other in different ways: free movers might enjoy forms of solitary play, focusing on their own movements and feelings; thrashers could take turns in showcasing theirs skills and compete in demonstrating their abilities; gangmates can focus on forms of play that involve active collaboration and even competition with other groups, but also invest in accessories, fashion and group forming activities; traceurs, finally, might combine their playful activities with political activism (e.g. in flash mobs) and engage passers-by and communities.

Similarly, the different types also make emerge different relationships with the urban spaces. The valorisations of different levels of the urban play activity involve different valorisations of the city itself.

For free movers, the city is the setting for their movement, an environment to experience, to feel, to perceive and that directs their play performance in different ways.

Thrashers see the urban spaces as a set of affordances for their play: stairs, ramps, benches: all urban objects are explored as possible complements to the playful movement. Reading the space and including it in their acrobatics or tricks is a cardinal part to prove their skills and abilities. Finding the right spots to exercise is also a way of exercising their knowledge about the play practice.

For gangmates cities are primarily social spaces. The occupation of different locations to play in is a form of territorialisation that gives birth to a sense of belonging and of community. The urban landscape is not only the space that allows play to happen, but also players to meet and to create relationships among themselves.

Traceurs, finally, see the urban spaces as a cultural space, embedded with ideas and axiologies, where every action can be part of a dialectical effort. Traceurs might defend their right to the city and attempt to "rewrite" the urban spaces with their practices. Or they might, on the other hand, use the urban spaces as a stage or a platform for sending, through their playful actions, a political message.

These different uses and relationships with the spaces of the city often coexist, in different measures, in any given form of urban play, but different players can valorise different ones. A free mover skater may look for long downhill streets to enjoy a ride down with little effort.

Another one focusing on their own skills – a thrasher - will look for interesting place to try new tricks such as a skatepark. A gangmate will look for places that they are known for being used by other skaters, so to meet them there and socialize. A traceur, on the other hand, might chose to skate to commute, or they will try to occupy new spaces – maybe forbidden ones – for their practice.

Something similar will also happen with other forms of play. If we think of running, a free mover could chouse to run in the historical city centre early in the morning, to enjoy the beauty of the surroundings and the fresh air. A thrasher will look for running circuits, or safe pedestrian spaces where to focus on their speed and cardio. A gangmate could run along a river, or a coast, a place populated by other runners and passers-by. A traceur runner, finally, might go running in a park with multiple fountains and clean air, so to support their goals of health and fitness.

All these different ways of engaging playfully with the urban spaces can be also understood with different types of urban enunciations – as they actualise different properties of the city. As the simple act of walking around the city can be understood as a way of enunciating it (Benveniste 1970), these different forms of playful movement in the urban spaces act as different modes of enunciation – shaped by the valorisations of the subjects and capable of realising several instances of the expressive potential of the urban landscape. If we think of cities as strictly codified social spaces, all these forms of playful enunciation can be also understood as strategies to transcend that place, i.e. to deny it and escape its power dynamics. By doing so, players would also reach a *suprazemic* level of reflection (Tarasti 2021) and engage with the essence of the urban spaces (what Hegel calls its *Wesen*). Playful enunciations, hence, would not simply offer different realisations of the city spaces from other ways of engaging them, but they could be understood as a unique practice that allows the players to establish a direct relationship with the essence of the city itself.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have combined different perspectives on play and movement, on urban spaces and on their valorisations by different subjects. These perspectives, that include semiotics of culture, motor praxology, existential semiotics and a structural approach to valorisations, have helped us outlined a possible typology of urban players articulated in four types: free movers,

thrashers, gangmates and *traceurs*. These typologies, ideally, can sit aside other famous typologies of different city dwellers, like that of the *flâneur* (Benjamin 1969) or those outlined by Floch around the use of Paris' underground system (1990).

At this stage, our typology is theoretical, as it originates from an adaptation of the zemic model. Several examples of possible relationships between our types and other players and urban spaces have been made to crystallise them into a larger system of relations. However, future studies should combine player interviews and observation, as well as semiotic analysis of different realisations of these activities, in order to integrate and reinforce the typology.

This preliminary work, nonetheless, is useful to showcase the centrality of body movement in the context of urban play and in the relationship between players and the urban spaces as well as to outline the potential of playful enunciations of urban spaces.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apter, Michael. 2007. Danger: Our quest for excitement. Oneworld Publications Limited.

Barthes, Roland. 1967. "Sémiologie et urbanisme", in Barthes, L'aventure sémiologique, Seuil, Paris.

Barthes, Roland. 2004. Le sport et les hommes: texte du film Le sport et les hommes d'Hubert Aquin. PUM.

Bateson, Gregory. 1955. A theory of play and fantasy. Psychiatric research reports.

Benjamin, Walter. 1969. Paris: Capital of the nineteenth century. Perspecta, 165-172.

Benveniste Emile. 1970. "Deux modèles linguistiques de la cite", in Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale 2, Gallimard, Paris.

Bäckström, Åsa. 2007. Skateboarding: radical and romantic physical use of urban architecture. In Inter: A European Cultural Studies: Conference in Sweden 11-13 June 2007 (No. 025, pp. 151-158). Linköping University Electronic Press.

Caillois Roger. 1967. *Les Jeux et les hommes*, Gallimard, Paris.

De Certeau Michel. 1980. L'invention du quotidien, 1, Arts de faire, Union générale d'éditions, Paris.

Eco, Umberto. 1975. Trattato di semiotica generale, Milano: Bompiani.

Floch, Jean-Marie. 1987. "La génération d'un espace commercial: Une expérience de 'pratique sémiotique'" Actes Sémiotiques 9 (87): 5-29.

Floch Jean-Marie. 1990. Sémiotique, marketing et communication. Sous les signes, les stratégies, PUF, Paris.

Floch, Jean-Marie. 1995. Identités Visuelles. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Fontanille, Jaques. 2004. Soma et séma. Figures du corp, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.

Fontanille, Jacques. 2004. Soma & séma, Figures du corps. Maisonneuve et Larose.

Greimas Algirdas. 1989. Du sens II. Paris, Seuil.

Huizinga, Joan. 1949. Homo Ludens. A study of the play-element of culture. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1968. Le droit à la ville. París: Anthropos.

Leone, Massimo. 2009. "Le Parkour sémiotique. Pratiche urbane di invenzione della naturalità", in Bonadei R. (ed.), NaturaleArtificiale. Il palinsesto urbano, Bergamo: Lubrina.

Lotman, Juri. 1990. Universe of the Mind. A semiotic theory of culture. London: IB Taurus.

Lotman, Juri. 2011. "The place of art among other modelling systems" Sign Systems Studies 39(2/4): 251–270.

Mauss, Marcel. 1992. "Body Techniques." In Incorporations, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. New York: Zone.

Parlebas, Pierre. 2013. Motor praxeology: a new scientific paradigm. Playing Fields: Power, Practice, and Passion in Sport; Vaczi, M., Ed, 127-144.

Stenros, Jaakko. 2017. The game definition game: A review. Games and culture, 12(6), 499-520.

Montola, Markus, Stenros, Jaakko, and Annika Waern. 2009. Pervasive games: theory and design. CRC Press.

Stevens, Quentin. 2007. The ludic city: exploring the potential of public spaces. Routledge.

Tarasti, Eero. 2015. Sein und Schein: Explorations in existential semiotics. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.

Tarasti, E. (2021). Existential Semiotics and Its Application to Music: The Zemic Theory and Its Birth from the Spirit of Music. In Sounds from Within: Phenomenology and Practice (pp. 29-56). Springer, Cham.

Thibault, Mattia. 2019. Towards a typology of urban gamification. In Proceedings of the 52nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

Thibault, Mattia. 2020. Ludosemiotica, il Gioco tra Segni, testi, pratiche e Discorsi, Rome: Aracne.

Thibault, Mattia, Wallius Eetu, Apperley Thomas and Juho Hamari (forthcoming) Gamifying the city: E-scooters and the critical tensions of Playful Urban Mobility, *Mobilities.*

Volli, Ugo. 2008. Il testo della città — problemi metodologici e teorici. Lexia 1–2: 9–12.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. Philosophical Investigations, E. Anscombe (trans.) New York: Palgrave Macmillan.