Childhood's Domain
Play and place in child development

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the interview results, where a fifth of the mentions related to the child’s room at home as a favourite place to go after school. This suggests that although nearly all the children who drew their houses portrayed an exterior view, some obviously intended their drawings to also represent the interior. Also note that one-in-five interview mentions of favourite weekend places were related to indoor community facilities such as swimming pools and cinemas (Table 3, Appendix C).

**TURF MAPS**

"Turf maps" (Figures 10-12) were constructed by plotting items from the drawings on topographic overlays, so that the configurations of favourite places could be compared across sites. A strong impression of increasing territorial diversity is conveyed as one moves from the Notting Dale to Bedwell turf maps; and again, even more strongly, as one moves from Bedwell to Mill Hill. These impressions are borne out numerically. The average number of items mentioned per drawing increases from six for Notting Dale, to seven for Bedwell, to nine for Mill Hill. In other words, Mill Hill children put a third more items into their drawings than the Notting Dale children did. What is the explanation—that the Mill Hill kids had a greater aptitude for graphic communication? Surely not. A more convincing answer is that their territory was in some way richer, experientially.

The Notting Dale turf map (Figure 10) has a few principal nuclei: two housing estate play areas and three parks. Avondale Park—and particularly its playground—was drawn by a large number of children, showing it to be a place of special significance and also indicating a lack of official play opportunities elsewhere in Notting Dale. (Nearly all the Georgian squares and gardens in the area were locked—the privilege of use vested in adjacent residents’ keys—a long-standing bone of contention in the community.) Some of the more adventurous Notting Dale children satisfied their play needs by using a variety of ‘unofficial’ open spaces, like Heather’s building site.

Also note the attraction of Royal Holland Park. Even though many minutes walk away from the neighbourhood and separated by a heavily trafficked arterial street, Holland Park’s size and diversity exerted a considerable ‘pull’ over Notting Dale children.

The Bedwell turf map (Figure 11) also has a pronounced central focus: a small playground set within the large expanse of Fairlands...
Park. Subsidiary attractions in the park (a boating lake, a stream and an area of natural woodland) were also drawn. The acres of mown lawn, taking up most of the space in the park, were not mentioned.

An interesting aspect of the Bedwell map is that it included several mentions of both a local shopping area and a school site. The attractiveness of the school was perhaps a genuine reflection of a sense of belonging on the part of children, attributable to the educational programme and/or the special qualities of the physical setting. The grounds were well used by children after school hours. A sizable grass area, behind the building, was laid out for ball play and surrounded by a tall hedge—giving a sense of privacy and enclosure (in contrast to the expanses of lawn in the adjacent park).

The Bedwell shopping area was typical of a New Town neighbourhood commercial development: a sizable, traffic-free, paved precinct, surrounded by shops, easily accessible by pedestrian paths.

Brian's favourite places in Bedwell—a bridge over the stream feeding the Fariands Park lakes (visible beyond the bridge), and part of Marat Farm (described in Chapter 7, "Rough ground and abandoned places"). (opposite) Brian on the bridge.
from the children’s homes. The precinct was used as a bike-riding circuit and as somewhere to play games by using the raised planting beds, telephone kiosk, letterbox, and advertising hoardings.

Other hot spots on the Bedwell map included the Dip (a sunken, grassy area) and the Canyon Adventure Playground (located in a former quarry some distance from the neighbourhood). Both spaces had the same form: a deep bowl-like depression in the ground.

The Bedwell neighbourhood was a model of pedestrian layout, with many cul-de-sacs and ancillary open spaces. A large open grassy space occupied the centre of the housing area. However, the turf map shows that in spite of the substantial open space resources located so close to home, many Bedwell children preferred to cross the busy peripheral distributor road to use the school grounds or the playground and other facilities in the park. What is the implication? The somewhat bland close-to-home spaces could have been more attractively developed perhaps—especially for children whose territorial limits were constrained by parents.

The Mill Hill turf map (Figure 12) obviously looks different to the other two. A similarity, however, is that the principal favourite place is again a playground, this time located in a corner of Tunstall Park. Other significant places are scattered throughout the neighbourhood, many of them ‘fronts,’ ‘backs,’ greens or rough ground. The Mill Hill map indicates a level of choice and diversity of play places above the other sites. From a policy standpoint this is especially noteworthy since many of these Mill Hill places, so popular with children, went unnoticed or were called ‘eyesores’ by adults.

A WOVEN METAPHOR

Children were discriminating about their use of local resources. Each child wove a pattern of personal play traces through the neighbourhood, laced together with the traces of other known and unknown players. As each child responded to newly discovered opportunities the pattern extended geographically, guided by the developing capacity of the child, whose environmental competence, in turn, was enhanced by the continuing interaction with his/her surroundings.

Metaphorically, the result looks like a cloth of varied solids and voids, arranged in an irregular geometric pattern. Some threads terminate in line with each other where a major road, a railway line, or some other uncrossable barrier blocks territorial extension. Else-
where some of the strongest threads extend by different amounts to form a ragged edge. Sometimes they form a subsidiary piece of cloth tenuously connected to the larger whole.

Checkered areas, echoing street alignments, stand out at regular intervals. The longest threads combine to form a number of heavier ribs crisscrossing between the main solids. Other threads are so short they can be easily pulled out.

These are no ordinary weavings hanging immobile on museum walls. They vibrate with life as new threads weave in while others dwindle away. Some parts of the cloth have a regular pulse; others, out toward the edges, have sporadic and unpredictable rhythms.

The background environment also changes as the brightly coloured playtraces weave through it. Hues shimmer and change periodically, chameleonlike, in lockstep with the playtrace patterns.

The Notting Dale cloth is predominantly grey, with two fairly sized patches of green. A third, larger patch, hangs by a few threads, off to one side. The Bedwell cloth has a large green section, surrounding an elongated blue area firmly attached to one edge, plus a scatter of smaller green patches throughout. The Mill Hill cloth has a motley mix of colours: grey areas, lines and patches of green and blue, and blobs of pink and black.

As the seasons pass, the cloth colours change, more or less in unison, particularly the greens. At one point they seem to disintegrate into many shades of red and gold, before disappearing entirely for a while...only to reappear as a vivid scatter of bright greens, slowly deepening and coalescing together to reform the patterns of the previous season (a few of the darkest green spots having remained unchanged throughout the cycle).

Occasional convulsions occur, sending shock waves reverberating discordantly through the weave, gradually subsiding, modifying the ongoing rhythm with colour changes around the epicentre. Each cloth has a different shock pattern. The Notting Dale cloth suffers intense, frequent jolts at scattered points. The Bedwell cloth appears serene, almost dull, by comparison, with only the vaguest

Dawne's favourite places in Mill Hill.

[Drawing of Dawne's favourite places: playing on the grass, going to the woods, swimming, collecting leaves, reading book, playing in the paddling pool, playing in the park, roller skating.

This is what I like.]

Dawne and her friend doing cartwheels on a carpet of leaves in the dry autumn paddling pool (shown on the left side of her drawing, opposite), in Tunstall Park.
reverberations around the edges—from sources beyond the extremities; the Mill Hill cloth appears in a constant state of flux. Scattered heavy shocks occur from time to time, mixed with many smaller changes in several places simultaneously. The overall impression is of increasing greenness, with more and more threads filling in the larger voids.

FAVOURITE PLACES

Assuming that the children's drawings represented individually significant and memorable experiences, it is 'lawns,' 'playgrounds/schoolyards' and the 'child's own home'—the only items mentioned in more than half the drawings—that come across as the most important places (Figure 13). A further eight items were mentioned in just under a quarter of the drawings: 'local parks,' 'single trees,' 'streets,' 'pavements,' 'other dwellings' (i.e., homes other than the child's or those of friends, relatives and baby-sitters), 'fences,' 'friend's homes' and 'footpaths.' A picture of habitual range emerges, with day-to-day leisure time revolving around the children's homes (and those of their friends and other people), local parks and playgrounds, streets and pavements—and trees (wherever they could be found). Other types of places diminish in significance, without pronounced breaks, across the children's assumed frequented and occasional ranges.

By collapsing the results (Figure 14), a more general comparison between place categories and sites can be made. Now we see that 'hospitels,' 'open space,' 'vegetation,' 'natural ground surfaces' and 'pathways' (streets, pavements and footpaths) account for almost two-thirds of all mentions.

It is difficult to know what the high ranking of 'fences' means. On the one hand they function as an enclosing element, affording privacy and a sense of security; on the other hand, they restrict access. This negative aspect is much less likely to be perceived by children, however, as they sometimes have difficulty projecting the consequences of a world they take for granted. Thus, the majority of fence mentions can be assumed to be positive enclosing elements rather than negative restrictive elements.

The impressive score for 'pathways' in Mill Hill most likely reflects the ad hoc network of informal routes that traversed the local landscape—apparently making a greater impact than Bedwell's evenly laid out system of planned routes.
Mill Hill children also expressed a stronger interest in 'homesites', perhaps reflecting the stable home-based working-class culture of the Potteries, compared to the more plural, social character of the other two sites.

Two Notting Dale scores reflect a more intense level of urban development. The high score for 'open space' mirrors the appearance of the Notting Dale turf map and reemphasises the dependency of Notting Dale children on local parks and playgrounds. Further reinforcement is given by the low mention of 'macro-landscape features' long since obliterated by urban development (except the wooded crest of Holland Park recorded as 'open space').

To sharpen a comparison of natural environment elements across sites, 'vegetation', 'natural ground surfaces', 'macro-landscape features', 'aquatic elements' and 'animals' were combined (Figure 14). Both Bedwell and Mill Hill have two-thirds more mentions than Notting Dale—a clear indication that natural elements were less widespread in highly developed Notting Dale. The almost identical score for Bedwell and Mill Hill, however, is surprising when one considers the great contrast between Bedwell's tidy swards and Mill Hill's unkempt acres. Even though the perceptual impacts, as expressed on paper, show little difference between the two sites, the contrasting impacts on children's overt behavior during the field trips was quite apparent—as we shall see in later chapters.

Since the similarities across sites are stronger than the differences, the scores for remaining categories indicate a common core of childhood-environment experience. This raises a note of caution concerning cross-cultural differences. Suppose additional sites in continental Europe, Africa, Asia or Latin America had been included, then surely the variations would have been much greater—as indicated by the UNESCO study of young people's environments.4

The interview results (Figure 15), although more sparse and less rich than the drawing results, reinforce the above conclusions. The full list of responses (Table 3, Appendix C) has been reduced to seven categories. Note that local open space has been divided into 'formal/official' (mostly parks and playgrounds) and 'informal/unofficial'.

This useful subdivision was not feasible with the more finely-grained drawing results. (See Appendix A for a discussion of differences between interviewing and drawing methods.) The 'informal/unofficial' category included 'fields', various types of 'rough ground', and 'greens' (a category of open space falling between formal park and rough ground).
The first three items in Figure 15—'formal/official open space,' 'homsites,' and 'streets and associated spaces'—account for just over three-fourths of the total after-school mentions. This result dramatically emphasizes the experiential investment that children make, by necessity, in their homesites and immediate surroundings. The ranking of 'streets and associated space' has been boosted in Figure 15 by the inclusion of alleyways, small lawns, 'fronts' and garage courts that the interviews showed (reinforced during field trips) were 'associated' with street play.

The interview results also point to some interesting weekday/weekend differences. There is an indication that streets were much more frequently used after school than at weekends, most likely because there was not enough time after school for anything else but street play—on the way home, or before and after mealtimes and homework. Larger blocks of time, available at weekends, were more frequently invested in the use of community facilities, including trips to Saturday morning pictures, visits to swimming pools and outings to football matches.

MISSING ITEMS

In reviewing the results, it is important to remember that a wide range of individual differences are masked—that what may have been 'habitual' for one child may only have been 'occasional' for another.

The popularity of some items can be explained in terms of proximity, intrinsic attractiveness, and social or cultural significance. For other, less popular, items explanations are not so easy. Was it because they did not exist on the ground? Were there access difficulties? Parental restraints? Variations in taste amongst children? For all places there are value judgements to be made regarding their contribution towards, or hindrance of, child development. Just because something was well-used does not make it automatically more desirable for human development—and vice versa.

Considering the normal attraction of children to water, the low rate of mention of 'aquatic features' in all three sites (Figure 14) indicates a lack of water-play opportunities close to home. None of the major parks or playgrounds in Notting Dale offered features suitable for water play. Nearly all the mentions related only to the lakes in Fairlands and Tunstall Parks. Additional aquatic resources were available, but were too far away and appeared only in the occasional ranges of a small minority of the most mobile children.

Very few mentions of 'animals' were made (Figure 14), except for pet cats and dogs and an occasional bird. One reason is that children's relationships with urban wildlife are hard to document. The scale of organism is usually too small to draw on paper. Neither are they often mentioned verbally. Perhaps it is because of the ephemeral quality of interaction. Animals are not place-specific. They migrate and hibernate and constantly move around in search of food and shelter. Children move around a lot too, so that although the paths of children and wildlife may cross frequently, they are the briefest moments... a butterfly fluttering out of reach... a beetle disappearing down a crack in the pavement. Yet some children were extremely aware of the presence of wildlife and knew very well where and when to find it.

Mentions of local shops were surprisingly low (Figure 13, bottom) and inconsistent with field observations. Small shopping areas and corner stores were present in all three study areas, so the results were not biased because of non-availability. One reason for the low score was that children associated local shops with running domestic