

	<p>Children's Geographies, or: about compressions of time and space in postmodern societies.</p> <p>Karlheinz Benke</p>	<p>Article</p>
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Children's Everyday Life 2day

Time

A lot of musts and **to-do's in a child's development are even increasing** with each generation: on the one hand their experiences are wider ranged, on the other hand they thus can just 'scratch' on someone's or something's surface...

Scratching on the surface, staying in loose contact seems to be the 'natural' result of the many processes in children's everyday life, which is based on a **lack of possibilities and a lack of time**, too. And both seem to be nearly impossible, to get in deeper, to make first hand experiences ...

The motto seems to be: **'faster, higher, bigger, earlier'**. These words describe an olympic process of our postmodern society taking place nowadays in children's everyday life – just thinking of "fast food, pre-school lessons, instant services, high speed,..." This social tendency is, what VIRILIO subsumes in the general process of "acceleration".

One **main thesis** concerning time still is, that permanent changes within postmodern societies cause a **lack of exactly that time children need most urgently to 'create' their individual geographies, to 'understand' space with its implication of distance** and (even emotional) nearness. Only then - I found out - they are really capable of constructing their own stable relation and relationships in their environment and can thus construct their social time.

Space

One of the **outstanding phenomena** is certainly the fact, that being a child today means, to **switch between a lot of - and various - worlds**. And each child finds and constructs its own 'living-word' consisting "of the many spaces of childhood" (as Helga ZEIHNER quoted), which have to be sailed through:

real space, school places/rooms, freetime/sparetime places, familiar space, lingual space, pre-school space, "written" space, philosophic space, in-between-



space/places, public and private space, space of action, natural versus postmodern space, virtual space, fictitious space, and so on...

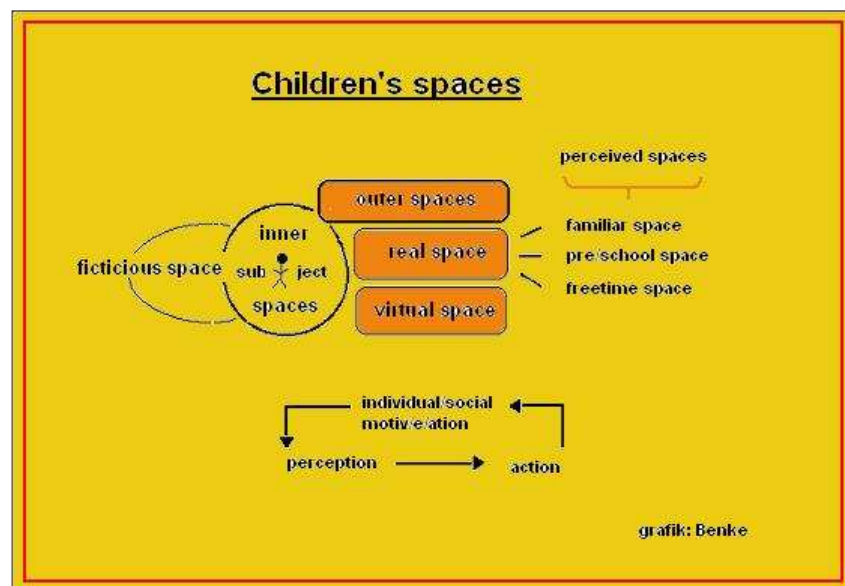
Yes we can say, that the children's movements are quite artistic, when they try to move within their spaces... when they try to live their own space...

Space as a social and geographical basis

You might ask yourself: Ok - but what does it mean for the children - these various types of space?

These above mentioned '**many spaces**' have one thing in common: they are **all constructed by children** and through their actions or - which is remarkable, too - with their non actions (just thinking of disabled or handicapped people).

To get an idea, when and how they are constructed, reconstructed or deconstructed - or just "created" (quoting GIDDENS, VIELHABER o.a.), I want to show using picture 1...



Geographies of children, as they are presented here, refer to **two imaginary axes**, which allowed a structured analysis of the 'many geographies' of children.

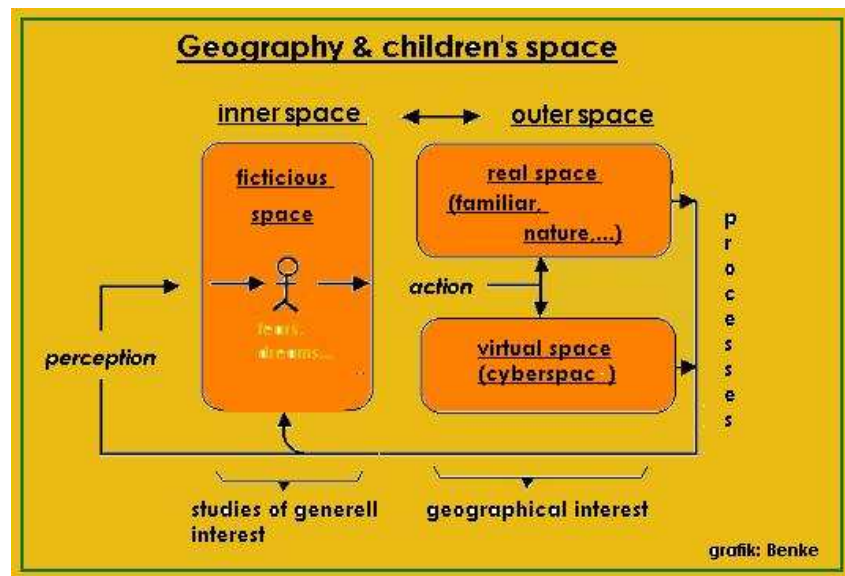
The **first** one is the **longitudinal axis** that corresponds to children's **development**. In the **longitudinal section** so to speak, which symbolizes the **child's development**, children undergo a **concentration of experience of time and therefore of space as well**. This is manifested in the fact that adolescents have to learn, experience respectively acquire more more in increasingly less time, as I have already mentioned above.

But we should be aware of the fact, that their natural development contradicts this 'Olympic tendencies' and not only the growing up generation. Society as well will have to treat the **problems** that most possibly arise from this current situation, that VIRILIO describes as the '**age of acceleration**': utmost nervous or **hyperactive children, children with neurodermitic symptoms** - just to mention two examples.



And the **second, the transverse axis**, expresses its use of real space as well as virtual space. Both at least are again determined by their **emotional-fictitious spaces** (as they are expressed via fears, dreams, desires a.s.o.). Thus we can state: all **researches in the transverse section** are based on the child's perceptual space: they are real, virtual or fictitious.

Seen from the **perspective of the subject itself** (the child), we can distinguish, too, between **inner** and **outer space**. Since perception and action are always accomplished in individual construction of **irreal-fictitious space**, that **'inner' space** (of the growing up agents) must not be neglected with regard to their actions. And this is shown in picture 2...



Real space, or: the type of space we are thinking first...

While **real space is constantly diminishing/decreasing** for the children's wide ranged actions, the **lack of experiences of motion** (e.g. outdoor activities) directly bears on the **spatial perception** of the agents and on their spatial imagination.

And: it probably leads perhaps to a **'distancial' behaviour either towards environment or relationships** concerning other human subjects. The reason might be, because they can neither see, feel or taste the complexity, which they later have to understand nor do they have the chance for a personal reaction. Responsible for that can be the many short time contacts, due to from moving around which is taking time, too.

The reason therefore might be described with the following "picture"...

The Model of "different islands children live on" (ZEIHER)

Children today may feel more and more like little **frogs in a pond**, virtually unable to swim and totally depending totally on the care of their parents (or other adults), when they want to move from one 'waterlily'-island to another.

The outstanding aspect herein is, that seeing the frog-pond with its social implications, a **fully self determined moving around is rather impossible**. Or - it won't happen, because of dangers around or outside these 'secure believed' places, that are usually called school,



freetime places, a.s.o. Dangers that might really exist, or might exist only in our adult imagination.

The effect again is, a so-called **lack of motion**, that - especially in urban areas, but not only there - they won't move because they are being moved. Taxi "Mama" picks them up, drops them down... To move between these islands means dependence.

'Lived space' this way is rather experienced as **multiple scattered islands** than it is perceived as **space in its totality**. And though these places (that set up spaces) are still **geographic** ones, they are **socially constructed** as well.

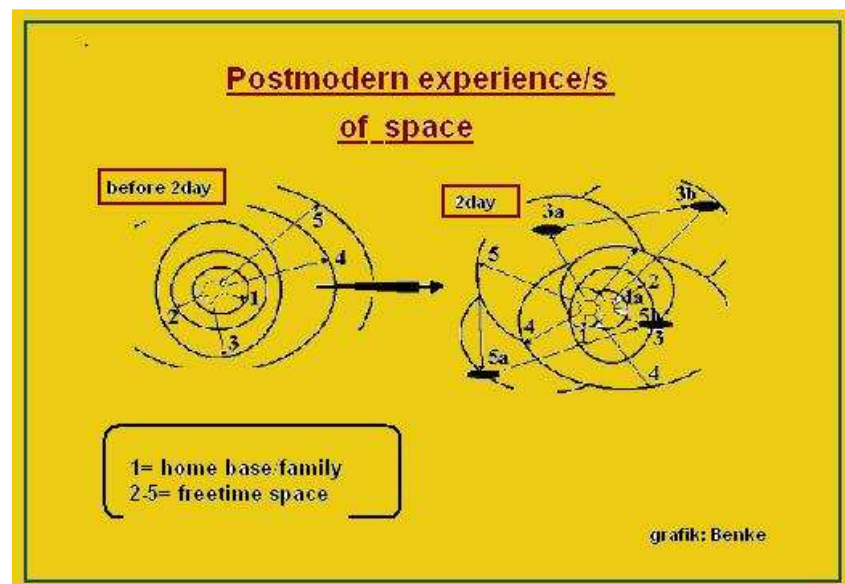
But nevertheless: there is '**no order, no system**' they can experience. ZEIHNER'S Model can symbolize, that children get in contact with other regions, nations, cultures before can get in touch with some areas of their neighbourhood. And this must have impacts on their special behaviour and their emotional landscapes...

E.g. children often know more about the rain-forest and thus earlier than about their own neighbourhood's nature. What is closer to children's living world, what are they concerned with first?

Or: Which values remain for the children regarding an ignored neighbourhood? Does this mean less trust, less relation in neighbourhood, too?

Being moved also means to miss the **spaces in between spaces**. And with that, too, thousands of possibilities of experiences... I guess, what they cannot feel, see, touch a.s.o., they might have less relation to... Less or even no relation to the things in the "space-in-between" which are flowers, water, animals... And having no relation leads to the total contrast of political understanding...

The development process of these **various spacious islands, originating from one central zone 'at home'**, is shown in picture 3.



Virtual space - Virtuality

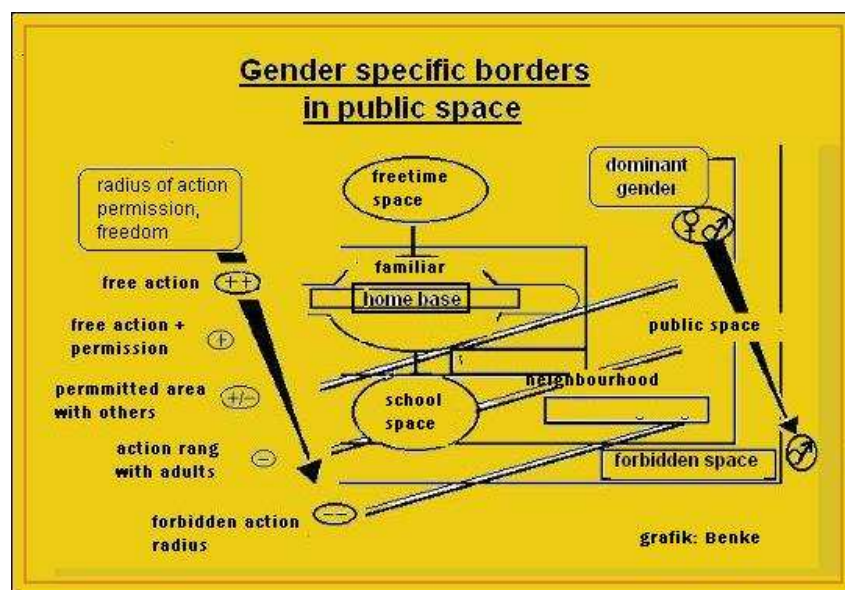
Another **main thesis** of my observations is, that infinity of **virtual space** must be seen as a **substitution for the ceasing real space**...

Lots of actions that cannot take place in real life (meaning: real space, too) can be or have to be lived in **virtuality** (meaning: in virtual space). Maybe to avoid 'real' dangers, maybe to experience various ways of individual freedom... because **'there'** everything is allowed, everything is **beyond any control mechanisms** of adults'.

To give you an **example**: Mic, 12 years old, told me, that he certainly knows, that killing people in computer games is not ok. But it is on the other hand an experience he could never make throughout his life, what it means 'to kill someone', because this action would be irreversible... and thus he would never do so...all he is, is being interested in "new feelings" arising out of his actions... feelings that are possible just in virtual training fields... in virtual space.

Fact is: **Simulations replace reality** (BAUDRILLARD) because real space decreases - and not only in urban areas. And these simulations **replace the direct and immediate contacts**, communications and interactions from one to one. And thus **simulations let the second hand experience increase**, too.

But crossing the **bridge from virtual space to real space** means... Taking part/using, creating and constructing real space depends not only on the existence of space, but on the adults' **permission**, too. As it is shown in picture 4...



To summarize this important gender aspect means in a few words: while we still can meet girls near home base, boys do have the permission to stroll around in wider ranged areas - until they reach girls' **forbidden spaces**. This means, that the socially and geographically **tradition of treating, rising and educating girls** (linking back to the roots of MUCHOW & MUCHOW about 1930's) **is still existent**.

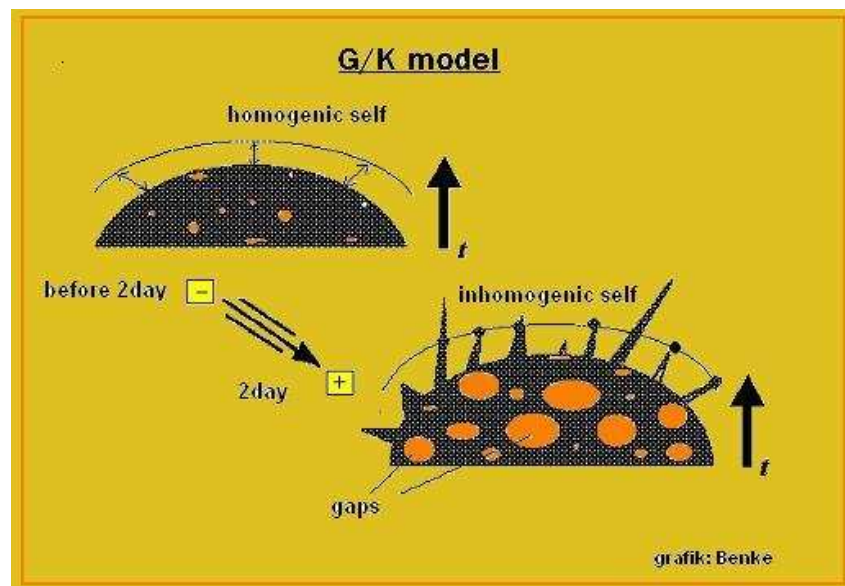


G/K-Model (standing for 'Germteig'/'sour-dough' and 'Käse'/'cheese')

All what you have heard now about my studies, will indicate at first sight, that there is a wider and radical change in children's everyday life concerning time. And at second sight it is visible, how these conditions of time influence their spatial behaviour, too.

Time and space - both - have to be seen under the aspect of '**compression**': less time for living the same steps in development of children, less (real) space for making experiences first hand (concerning nature) or directly from one to one (concerning human interaction).

The consequences of this temporal-spatial compression in children's everyday life today will be demonstrated via this **specially constructed and designed ,G/K-model'**.



The G/K-model describes a dearrangement of the ego-structure as an expression of the incapability of commitment towards the self respectively the social-spatial environment due to decreasing primary experience (postmodern space versus natural space).

The G/K-Model means...

- In contrast to 'earlier' times, children nowadays almost 'have to' grow up quickly to be successful, to be first - so that they miss their individual time, their individual rhythm. This process of acceleration means, that they do have to take more steps in their development processes in less time. Within this "**rising-up-quickly-process**", they develop a 'Self' that has a lot of gaps or what I call an "**inhomogenic self**" meaning a Self with a wider range of non-homogenic self-confidence as we suppose.
- This rapid development leads to the fact, too, that - concerning their individual development, their personality,...- we suppose that "**they are to be found there, where we believe them to be**". But where they are often far away from!

And thus we pick them up there, where they are not... instead of taking them from where they really are – 'here'... in between or still at the bottom of my fingers in this in my "hedgehog"-like model [as I tried to demonstrate you now].



What I may summarize, is:

To understand this G/K-Scheme means maybe..

- not to take them in general for young adults and thus in all cases,
- to avoid high potential of misunderstandings...
- to give children what they need: their individual time and space
- to give way to let them act totally self determined and beyond any control.

Appendix

My "Geographies of Children" consist of what I call "types of space" meaning real, virtual, emotional-fictitious space, which all influence the subject's actions. The question is just "how" do they do this? What are some special aspects of **social-space** or **time & space**...

Working on my studies took me **over 7 years** of my entire life. Thus you might see - the difficulty of a discussion of few minutes is, to give you a **short idea** about my studies concerning a wide ranged analysis of space (and its definition). My work is based on qualitative researching methods, treating the aspects of **social-space** as well as **time & space**, which means too, that some facts or statements might be neglected here within a few minutes remaining to explain...

As well as there it seems to be clear, that there is always a big difference between younger and older children, when we are talking just generally about "children"...

Nevertheless - the publication of all these thoughts and studies is my dissertation paper as well and it is (titled)...



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