ISTANBUL95 READER:

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Introduction

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ABOUT ISTANBUL95

In order to present *Istanbul95 Reader: Play in the City*, it is essential to start with introducing Urban95 and Istanbul95. Urban95 is a global initiative of Bernard van Leer Foundation that develops programs to support early childhood development in social and economically disadvantaged contexts so as to make lasting change in the environments that shape the lives of young children. Urban95 asks a simple question: If you could experience the city from 95 cm—the height of a typical 3-year-old—what would you change?

Istanbul95, one of several local adaptations of Urban95, started in 2016 with a pilot phase that brought together a diverse partnership, including Boğaziçi and Kadir Has Universities, Beyoğlu, Maltepe, Sarıyer and Sultanbeyli district municipalities, TESEV, Superpool, and Studio-X Istanbul. In 2019, new services and pilot implementations were taken from district level to the metropolitan scale with the participation of Istanbul, İzmir, and Gaziantep metropolitan municipalities. Currently, the program aims for an even wider geographic reach through collaborations with the Marmara Municipalities Union.

As a part of the Istanbul95 initiative, Boğaziçi University Center for Psychological Research and Services developed a home-visitation-based Family Guidance Program for families with children aged three and younger, and supervised its implementation. The pilot phase reached 480 families from disadvantaged backgrounds, who were visited at their homes every 2 weeks for 3 years. During these visits, adults were supported in their parenting skills and children were supported in their physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. Family Guidance Program is now adopted by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, Istanbul Şişli District Municipality, and İzmir Karşıyaka District Municipality as implementing partners.

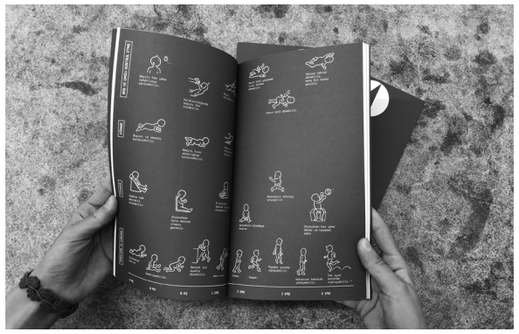
Istanbul95 Launch, February 2018

The Istanbul95 initiative also included the design of playgrounds for children 3 and younger and their caregivers, play programming, transformation of streets to prioritize the needs of children and pedestrians, and public events such as seminars, conferences, and workshops to increase awareness around early childhood. Work on all these different components of the urban realm persists, and the program partners continue to create and share tools to increase the capacity of local administrations to focus on children and families.

SUPERPOOL-ISTANBUL95 COLLABORATION

Superpool is a research-based architectural practice whose fields of activity range from architecture to urban design, publications, exhibitions, and events. Its multidisciplinary approach allows for the collaboration and iteration that the creation of excellent public spaces and programs demands. Within the scope of Istanbul95, Superpool has been involved with many tasks, among them research and designs for playgrounds for young children and their caregivers and *Playground Ideas for 0–3 Years*, a guidebook that provides principles and suggestions to inspire new approaches for families with young children. The publication was prepared in Turkish in 2018 and translated into English, Spanish, and Portuguese in 2019.

Urban Playscapes Conference, September 2018
Participants in the conference organized by Studio-X Istanbul hosted at Kadir Has University as a part of Bernard van Leer Foundation's Istanbul95 program



Playground Ideas for 0–3 Years, Istanbul, 2019

PLAYGROUNDS FOR 0-3 YEARS

From the initial designs, two playgrounds were realized in 2019: Attila İlhan Park in Sarıyer Yeniköy neighborhood and Orhangazi Park in Sultanbeyli Orhangazi neighborhood. Both of these pilot implementations intended to test whether bespoke designs and new approaches to play could inspire transformation in city playgrounds and challenge the proliferation of standard play equipment. As a next step, Superpool developed 20 additional designs for Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's Yuvamız İstanbul [Our Home Istanbul] daycare projects.

To support the design teams of the partnering municipalities, Superpool organized a 3-day design sprint in their office in March 2020, with the leadership of landscape architect Helle Nebelong, one of the authors of this book. 44 participants from 6 different municipalities attended the workshop. To further support public officers, Superpool organized four different training sessions on EN 1176 Standards for Playground Equipment and Surfacing together with Nordic Playground Institute, an expert team on playground safety standards, reaching 185 people from 8 different municipalities.

At the same time, the Bernard van Leer Foundation inspired and supported the preparation of Istanbul Play Master Plan, and Superpool was instrumental in the initiation of this effort. Consequently, the Oyun İstanbul [Play Istanbul] brand was created, and a Play and Recreation Chief was appointed within the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's Directorate of Parks, Gardens, and Green Areas to plan the transformation of Istanbul "from a city with playgrounds to a playable city."

PLAY PROGRAMMING

HOP

HOP Hayalgücü Oyun Parkı [HOP Imagination Playground] pop-up adventure playgrounds are another important component of the Istanbul95 program. Inspired by the work of Suzanna Law and Morgan Leichter-Saxby, who are also coauthors of this book, Superpool started HOPs as public celebrations of child-directed, unstructured play. Stocked with loose parts and staffed by playworkers during a HOP event, any park or open space becomes a playground while gently introducing themes of risk and freedom.

Sarıyer Attila İlhan Park opening day, 2019
Photographs: Engin Gerçek | Studio Majo

HOPs conceptualize play provision beyond swings and slides via elements such as cardboard boxes, fabric, tape, and string to encourage creative and collaborative play among both children and adults.

Since the first HOP, held at Tophane Park on March 1, 2019, pop-up adventure playgrounds have been organized regularly—during the pilot phase, in collaboration with Sultanbeyli, Sarıyer, and Beyoğlu district municipalities mainly for training purposes, and since 2021 in collaboration with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality for scaled-up implementation. Between July and November 2021, 130 HOPs took place in 5 districts and 25 neighborhoods of Istanbul, and despite the COVID-19 pandemic conditions, more than two thousand children were provided with outdoor play, and 198 staff were trained as playworkers. Since July 2022, the program has expanded to reach eleven districts: Avcılar, Bağcılar, Bahçelievler, Bakırköy, Esenler, Fatih, Kartal, Sancaktepe, Sultanbeyli, Ümraniye, and Zeytinburnu.

Pop-up adventure play has also been integrated into Mahalle Evleri [Neighborhood Houses] community centers' programming and has become a regular activity in 4 districts.

HOP Imagination Playground
Beyoğlu95, Tophane Park, and Maltepe95, Zümrütevler Park

First playhouse
Kadıköy, Istanbul
October 2022
Photographs: Pınar Gediközer

Playhouse

Another iteration of play programming started with the opening of Oyun Evi [Playhouse] in Dalyan Park, where a small hut used as a security office was partially turned into a loose-parts library. Since July 27, 2022, every Wednesday afternoon, playworkers facilitate pop-up adventure play at the park. The work is sustained with cooperation between IMM Directorate of Parks, Gardens and Green Areas, Superpool, and other volunteering persons and institutions.

Reading Hours for Babies

With the aim of reaching children even younger than those participating in HOPs, Superpool started reading books to babies in neighborhood parks. The pilot implementations of this program have commenced in the Üsküdar district in collaboration with IMM Directorate of *Muhtar* Affairs. Superpool approached three women *muhtars* (elected neighborhood representatives) in Üsküdar for collaboration and has used the parks close to their offices for the reading sessions, which take place regularly every week. In the first month of the pilot application, one hundred children 5 years and under benefited from reading hours, and 60 caregivers had the opportunity to meet and socialize with their peers.

Shared book reading for 0-5 years old, organised by Superpool in cooperation with IMM Directorate of *Muhtar* Affairs, is carried out in the parks of 4 neighborhood *muhtar* offices in Üsküdar district.
Photographs: Pınar Gediközer

Zümrütevler Square Interim Implementation
Maltepe, Istanbul
September 2019
Photographs: Dipnot TV, Emre Dörter

STREETS FOR KIDS

In the Urban95 program, mobility is another core theme. At the start of 2019, Superpool organized "stroller audits" in the Sarıyer Ayazağa and Sultanbeyli Orhangazi neighborhoods. These walks with caregivers and babies in strollers together with deputy mayors and directors from different municipal departments aimed to develop a sense of urgency in upgrading street infrastructure to better serve the needs of families.

Efforts to improve mobility for children and caregivers continued with the collaboration of Superpool, NACTO GDCI, an international institution with extensive experience on this subject, and Maltepe Municipality. Two implementations were tested in the Zümrütevler and Yalı neighborhoods between 2019 and 2022. Supporting these implementation efforts, Superpool organized multiple training sessions, and Designing Streets for Kids, a book of guidelines prepared by NACTO GDCI, was translated into Turkish. In 2022, in collaboration with Marmara Municipalities Union, Superpool and GDCI launched an open call to cities to submit potential sites for street transformations. Gebze and Malkara were selected and provided technical support for successful transformations completed in November 2022.

Zümrütevler Square completed in October 2020, one year after the interim impletementation, incorporated the design suggestions of the community.

CITY AND CHILDREN STUDIES MASTER'S PROGRAM

A City and Children Studies Master's Program was launched in 2019 at Kadir Has University in cooperation with the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Superpool. The interdisciplinary program operated at the intersection of developmental psychology, urban design, and public administration, and had two cohorts of students. On June 20–21, 2019, an Urban95 Curriculum Development Workshop brought together researchers and academics from around the world to Kadir Has University. A work plan to create an open source Global Urban95 Curriculum was charted out, highlighting networks of existing knowledge in different institutions.

Due to structural changes at Kadir Has University, the master's program is currently on hold, but the approval of this program by the Council of Higher Education in Türkiye has created a basis for the launch of similar programs for willing institutions in the future.

ISTANBUL95 READER: PLAY IN THE CITY

Istanbul95 Reader: Play in the City was designed to support the City and Children Studies Master's Program at Kadir Has University and to inspire the work of designers, playworkers, and play enthusiasts involved in the Istanbul95 program. First printed in Turkish in 2019, the reader is now also available in English. It is conceived as a collection of "manifestos" on urban play spaces. The selected essays point to changing concepts of child and play over time. The first two focus on the value of play and risk taking, and the rest, presented in chronological order, offer a wide range of (sometimes productively conflicting) viewpoints.

Since the start of industrialization and consequent urbanization, those who defend playgrounds and those who are absolutely against them make the same argument: the city does not sufficiently acknowledge children and their need for play. Defining play, on the other hand, is as difficult as defining "child" or "freedom." Maybe that is the reason why so many contradicting manifestos have been written on playground design. This publication collects some of the most passionate texts by designers, activists, and play facilitators from the 1900s to the present day. Their arguments point to the complexities of a design problem that at first seems deceptively easy.

Play Matters 2011

DARELL HAMMOND

Working across the fields of social development, social innovation, public-private sector collaboration, and volunteerism, Darell Hammond founded KaBOOM! in 1995 and for twenty years served as its director. KaBOOM! is a nonprofit organization that aims to bring open-air play to the lives of all children across the United States, with an emphasis on impoverished children. In this article from his 2011 book *KaBOOM!: How One Man Built a Movement to Save Play*, Hammond discusses the meaning of play and tells the story of how Mooseheart, Illinois, where he grew up with his seven siblings, and KaBOOM! got together.

* Hammond, Darell. "Play Matters." in *KaBOOM!: How One Man Built a Movement to Save Play*, 103-115. New York: Rodale Books, 2011.

** For more information on KaBOOM! please see kaboom.org/.

In early April 2002, I returned to Mooseheart. It wasn't yet 6 a.m., and the facility was still shrouded in darkness. I made the familiar left turn off Highway 31 and pulled out my ID to show the guard at the main gate by the field house. The man on duty had been a security guard back when I lived at Mooseheart. For a reason I never learned, he had a hook in place of one of his hands. He greeted me as an old friend, grasping my right hand with his left through the open window in a modified handshake and giving me a hearty "Welcome home, Darell!" Feeling like I was indeed returning home, I continued into the center of campus. This wasn't my first return to Mooseheart—I had been back sporadically over the years, to see friends and to visit the Aireys—but this time was different. This time I wasn't just dropping in for a visit, I was returning with my organization, and we were coming to build a playground.

Back when I was kid at Mooseheart, in the 1970s and '80s, the play equipment had been serviceable but starting to show its age. There were actually two playgrounds: one on the edge of campus and another along State Row, near most of the residence halls. The closer one was more popular when we were kids, because it was so much easier to get to. It had separate stations, not the linked post-and-platform structure that's become popular in recent decades. There was a giant swing set with eight bays, a tiny house that five or six kids could fit into, monkey bars, and a kind of gigantic treadmill, like a steel drum, with different colored planks that formed steps along the outside. During my time at Mooseheart, we used to climb on top and just run the hell out of it.

The more remote playground was gone by the mid-1990s, and in 2001 the school was forced to rip the second one out as well, leaving the campus without any play structure at all. Why? Mooseheart has to routinely get recertified under the Illinois state Department of Child and Family Services, which has strict guidelines on playgrounds, and as the thinking on safety requirements has evolved, more and more play- grounds are ruled out of compliance. On top of that, the school also had insurance considerations—it was potentially liable for any child who got hurt on a playground that was 30 or 40 years old.

Unfortunately, Mooseheart was forced to take the old stuff out before it had money

or a plan for how to replace it. This is actually a dilemma many of our community partners face. At that time, the campus was going through a major upgrade of other facilities. Its steam power plant and residence halls were being renovated, and the school was getting a new multipurpose gym. Those projects were budgeted and rolling forward, and there simply wasn't enough money left over to replace the playground.

Thousands of schools around the country face the same situation every day: When resources are scarce, how should they get distributed, and where does play fall on that list of priorities? Unfortunately, many people think of play as a luxury, not a necessity, so it often falls to the bottom. Schools make do with outdated equipment or none at all. The thinking is that kids are resilient, so they'll be fine in the end. This raises some key questions: Is play really necessary? And if so, what purpose does it serve for kids?

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Many scientists have been asking those same questions lately, in an attempt to figure out how play helps children develop, and a good amount of scientific research shows that play isn't just running around and letting off steam. Important stuff is happening inside the brains and bodies of children while they do it. Exactly how it works still isn't totally understood. Research into play is seriously underfunded and has been underrespected in the scientific community. We know a little about its benefits, but there's far more that we don't know.

Part of the problem is that play is a broad subject; people have a tough time even defining it. Some call it "apparently meaningless activity" or say it's "the product of superfluous energy left over when people's primary needs are met." Others say it's what we're doing when we lose track of ourselves, which seems even more vague to me. Probably the best definition amounts to a list of descriptors: play is unstructured, freely chosen by the child, personally directed and motivated, active, and engaging, and exploratory. There are also a lot of different types—like dramatic play, rough-and-tumble play, language play, and more. So, it's understandable that there would be big gaps in the research.

Still, scientists have slowly begun to fill in some of those gaps. Over the past decade, thanks in part to medical-imaging technology, researchers have been learning more about the purpose of play. Stuart Brown, a psychiatrist, and longtime researcher in the subject, has put together an organization called the National Institute for Play in Carmel Valley, California, which is attempting to connect the dots in terms of academic research in order to assemble a body of evidence about the importance of play. Two other groups pursuing the same goal are the Alliance for Childhood and The Association for the Study of Play.

The research as it relates to animals seems to have advanced sooner than that of children (similar to the way animal protection laws pre-dated those for children). There's clearly a parallel in nature—you don't need to look too hard to see how frequently play shows up among animals, especially among mammals, some birds, and a few reptiles. Predator animals wrestle, from house cats to hyenas, tigers to terriers. Grass-eating prey animals like lambs and antelopes play at bolting—veering and sprinting away from invisible threats. Predator animals such as tigers practice hunting skills like stalking. They pounce on things, roll around with them, and bat them with claws. Even ants playfight.

Most commonly this happens during adolescence, but some animals play as adults as well. Hippos do their version of synchronized swimming: back lips underwater. Ravens slide down a hillside covered with snow and then fly to the top to do it again. Bison run out onto the surface of a frozen lake and slide on all four hooves. In fact, if you wanted to stop animals from playing, in the lab or elsewhere, you'd have a hard time.

Of course, play is a bigger part of development for humans than any other species. There's evidence that children actually played in concentration camps during World War II. The big question is why. Nature tends to be efficient, and any wasteful activity quickly gets tossed, bred out over a few thousand generations. Play typically consumes anywhere from 2 percent to 15 percent of a young mammal's calories, which, during times when food is scarce, could be better used in some other way. So, play must offer some advantages, or natural selection would have eliminated it.

One theory is that play is basically how children learn about the world and prepare to take their place in it. A 19th century German educator named Frederich Froebel, who is still one of the most influential thinkers on the subject, put it best: "Play is the work of children." It's how they prepare themselves to be grown-ups.

For most of the time that humans have inhabited the planet, there were no schools, no standardized tests, no organized teaching, or classrooms or SAT prep courses. Even printed books are a pretty recent development, dating back roughly 600 years, which is nothing compared to more than 200,000 years of human history. Through most of that time, children learned how society worked through play. When a boy picked up a stick and pretended it was a spear, he was taking his first steps toward becoming a hunter. Today, kids hold wooden blocks up to their ears, pretending they're cell phones, but the principle is the same. These kids are trying out adult roles in order to learn how people function in the world.

In fact, that's a pretty good description of all play—it's a test run at life, without many of the consequences one faces as an adult. In much the way the play of young animals is related to what those animals will do once they've matured, for children, play is a stab at reality, a way for them to explore the world with the benefit of a safety net. This could explain why, in very broad terms, boys and girls play differently. Though there are many exceptions, in general, boys tend to tumble and wrestle and play with balls and other objects—practicing the skills their ancestors would have used in hunting—while girls typically play more social games that involve interacting through language and ceremony.

Play is key in social development, and it is also fundamental in brain formation. A newborn's brain is a mass of trillions of neurons. A small percentage of them get assigned to controlling involuntary things like heartbeat, reflexes, and body temperature, but the rest are just waiting for something to do. One science writer describes them as being like "chips in a computer before the factory preloads the software."

Many of these neurons aren't needed, and billions of them will die. But others will form synapses and connect to other neurons, becoming the paths for thought. Those synapses are formed by experience. That's the small-scale version of learning about the world by trying it.

When a baby is 2 months old, synapses start fusing in different parts of the brain on a pretty set schedule—physical movements at around 2 months (up until then, motions are mostly limited to sucking and involuntary reflexes), visual signals at 3 months, memories at around 9 months, and so on. Once babies are old enough to recognize physical objects, they will immediately start experimenting with them, which is the main way synapses get connected to each other.

"Play" at this stage is effectively a quest to gather sensory evidence (along with the language associated with that evidence) about the world and try to categorize it. Can the baby balance this block on top of that block? When the blocks are balanced, that success leads to a connection between neurons, which gets stronger through repetition. And that process happens at a fast pace in the first year of a baby's life—the brain scan of a l-year-old will look more like that of an adult than of a newborn.

Even a child's babbling is a kind of experimental language play. All kids, regardless of what language they will come to speak, babble the same syllables. It's only through the reaction of the adults around them that babies learn the significance of certain sounds in their native languages. Just a few months after those specific synapses start to connect, that region of the brain will become mapped, and the language center of a baby who speaks Swedish will look completely different from that of a baby who speaks English.

The same principle applies to kids who are a little older. The period from age 2 up until about age 8 is when they play the most and—this probably isn't a coincidence—when synapses are being formed at the fastest rate. At this stage, the most active neurons are located in the cerebellum, which controls physical aspects like muscle control and balance. Play helps wire the parts of the brain that control movement.

As a child's muscle fibers mature, play—with its wide range of movements—helps establish the nerve signals to those muscles. It also makes sure that fast-twitch muscles (which are used for sprintlike movements) and slow-twitch muscles (used for slower, longer-lasting movements) form in the right proportion to each other.

How kids play also allows them to experience risk and the consequences of physical actions. It's where they get to push their physical limits (higher on the swing! faster on the merry-go-round!), which teaches them about danger and consequences. In adult life there are a lot of different types of risk—medical, financial, emotional. We protect kids from most of those, and for good reasons, but we may go too far in mitigating and eliminating risk, because managing through situations with risk is how children learn. Physical risk, as an example, is how they learn about the concept. "Reach for the next rung on the monkey bars, but if you don't make it, you might fall."

In fact, you can make a strong argument that falling is part of the developmental process. It's only after being hurt that you develop some resilience and learn how to pick yourself up and try again (as opposed to never doing it again). In theory, hypervigilant parents could make sure that their child never skinned a knee and never suffered any minor injuries or physical hardships, but I don't think that kid would make it far as an adult, where the stakes are higher and where perseverance counts for a lot more.

The physical advantages of play are so deep-rooted that some of them don't kick in until years later. A few studies have shown that physical activity in young people helps prevent or delay the onset of diseases like high blood pressure and osteoporosis even when they're older.

And because play is a kind of physical learning, it turns out that kids who do a lot of it are better at what we think of as traditional learning, too. In one study, kids were broken into three groups. One was given a bunch of objects to play with (a pile of paper clips, a wooden board, a stack of paper towels, etc.). The second group was told to watch a researcher use those same objects and imitate him. A third was told to simply draw the objects. Next the kids were asked to come up with ideas for how those objects could be used. The group that had played with them came up with three times as many possibilities. Why? Play lets people become comfortable with unconventional solutions to problems. It expands the universe of options in a low-risk setting in which failure isn't a big deal.

The effects of play on a child's ability to learn—provided the child has sufficient access to it at the right stage of development—can be long lasting. In a well-known, long-running study, scientists at the University of North Carolina looked at different types of settings for children. Researchers there tested low-income kids from birth to age 5 in a highly stimulating environment with a lot of opportunities to play, compared to the standard home environment for those kids, with less room for play and more responsibilities due to a parent's work schedule. The researchers followed the kids as they grew up, all the way into their 20s. Those who played a lot in their early years ended up with improved reading levels and a greater likelihood of attending college. They even had higher IQ scores, averaging 105 compared to about 85.

That finding was supported by later research, the High/Scope Preschool Comparison Study, which followed 68 kids split between two programs at a young age. One was instruction heavy, and the other was play based. The IQ scores of all 68 kids initially rose, but by the time they hit age 15, the kids in classroom-heavy programs were more likely to show emotional problems and drop into special education programs.

In fact, on top of the learning benefits of play come the social issues. There's a T-shirt with a phrase on it that comes from old report cards: "Plays well with others." Irony aside, that's a big component of adult life. We're social creatures. And this is a fact kids first figure out on the playground, where they learn how to cooperate and compete, how to share, how to take turns, and what happens when they don't get these things right. They learn to experience conflict and solve disputes. They practice taking turns and playing fair, and they face consequences when they don't.

Much of this could conceivably be taught by parents, teachers, or other adults. But the lessons are longer lasting when kids figure them out on their own, and the social

code of the playground deems these lessons self-reinforcing: “Share, or you don't get to play with us again.” A study of one elementary school found that the most liked kids tended to exhibit the most positive social behavior on the playground. They cooperated, they started games but could also follow if someone else took over, and they encouraged other kids by giving positive comments. The kids who were less well-liked didn't do any of these things. Another study, this one focusing on low-income, at-risk kids, found that those who were put into a play-heavy preschool became much more socialized, with effects lasting even into their 20s, and they had lower probabilities of job suspensions or criminal problems later in life.

Importantly, play helps kids behave better when they're back in the classroom. Why? They get to blow off a little steam, which makes them less antsy and more receptive to learning. This is self-evident to any parent who has cringed when the weather's bad because it means the kids are going to be cooped up inside all day. I can say without a doubt that I would not have made it through school without recess. And the science backs it up.

One recent study found that 8- and 9-year-olds who got at least one 15-minute break during the school day behaved better when they were back in the classroom. Another found that kids who play a lot tend to have lower levels of stress and anxiety as adolescents, and there's some evidence that it may help kids with ADHD lessen the severity of their symptoms. Play was even shown to help rehabilitate aggressive monkeys in the lab.

It's worth emphasizing that when these studies talk about play, they're really talking about free play, the unstructured kind, in which kids can do anything they want. They're not merely participating in games overseen by adults that have preset, unchanging rules. This type of play has its purpose, especially for older kids, and I want to be careful here about not setting up a false choice that says one type is better than another. In fact, there are benefits to all kinds of play. But for younger kids, the developmental benefits come from getting to make the rules and change them at will, so that there's enough variety for them to really engage. This is where they learn innovation, where they create a miniature version of the world and learn to master it, as a way to practice for the real world.

The bottom line? Play is pretty much exactly what young bodies were designed to do. And they won't become healthy adult bodies without it.

I should really add one last benefit of play, which can sometimes get lost amidst all the lab coats and clipboards—it's fun.

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About a year after the playground equipment had been ripped up at Mooseheart, I had a series of conversations in which the administrators there, including Mr. Airey, asked for my advice about getting it replaced. I was acting as a kind of informal consultant, putting them in touch with my contacts in the industry, but they hadn't made much progress. Money was still a big issue. And then I had another idea.

The fifth anniversary of KaBOOM! was coming up; we would commemorate it by building our 200th playground. We also had a kind of conference called the Playground Institute scheduled for the spring of 2002. We'd run these events before, dating back to the first one during that snowstorm in Wisconsin, where we gathered everyone involved in the 37 Kimberly-Clark projects. Over the following years, the workshops had become even more hands-on. We were no longer assembling samples of playground equipment in a cafeteria but an actual, permanent playground at a site nearby; this had become a standard part of the conference. Participants learned not only the latest ideas about playground construction but were also able to see those applied in the real world.

The event that spring, was to take place in Oak Brook, Illinois, only about 30 minutes from Mooseheart. What if our 200th playground, the one associated with that conference, went up on campus? After all, I had a good playground during my time there, and now I could help provide the school with a new one. This was a bit unusual, in that I had such a direct connection to them, but in a very fundamental way Mooseheart fit the criteria of a KaBOOM! community partner-kids there needed a place to play and didn't have one.

It seemed like an opportunity to me. Who wouldn't jump at a chance like that, to return home to give something back? It was extremely poignant and meaningful to me to be able to give back to the community that had done so much for me.

I proposed the idea to Mr. Airey and the man who was then serving as superintendent, and they both jumped at it. The build would be part of the training, so the normal funding-partner model was changed up a bit, and the training participants would be replacing the corporate volunteers. Instead of finding a corporate funder for the project, the way KaBOOM! usually works, I asked Playworld Systems, one of the big playground-equipment manufacturing companies and a longtime KaBOOM! partner, if they would donate some equipment. They generously agreed to offer $70,000 worth of equipment. This was far more in equipment than the typical KaBOOM! project. A few other vendors lined up as well-like the company that supplied mulch (technically known as engineered wood fiber), the wood chips that cover the ground as a safety surface for when kids fall.

We would have about 100 volunteers through the KaBOOM! Conference, and Mooseheart had a fleet of buses that we could use to transport them from Oak Brook. Kids and staff members at Mooseheart could do the community element-designing the playground and planning the construction process

When I arrived before dawn on April 6, 2002, only a few people were on-site, getting things prepped. Over the next 2 hours, others began to filter in, and it began to feel a little bit like an episode of *This Is Your Life*. My sisters Dawn, Sherry, and Shirley (also Mooseheart alums) showed up for the day along with five of my nieces and nephews. Mr. Airey was there.

As the kids began to gather in the morning, I was struck by how much the student population of Mooseheart had changed since I was a student. In those days, the school had been more or less entirely white. In the years since, it had become far more ethnically balanced, with something like 30 or 40 percent of students now Hispanic or African American, a far better reflection of society as a whole.

Today, the students at Mooseheart have generally had far tougher family stories. For most of its history, including the time I attended, Mooseheart took in the children of more or less nuclear families, in which one or both parents had died. Back then, the biggest emotional issue for kids was grief. But since the 1990s, the facility has taken in children with much more complicated backgrounds-broken homes, parents with drug problems, kids who've been kicked out of their houses. A few Mooseheart children have come all the way from Africa, after watching their parents die in civil war massacres.

Because of these experiences, kids and staff there today still deal with grief along with far more complex emotional issues, meaning the discipline and standards have had to evolve as well. I felt proud that the school had opened its doors in that way. Mooseheart is an evolving institution. It's a much different community than when I attended, but it appropriately reflects the changing social problems of our country.

As I looked around the campus that morning, I also noticed all the physical changes that had occurred. The hospital was gone, the auditorium was gone, and Ohio Hall had been torn down. Once-vacant spaces were now full, and other buildings looked completely different than they had during my time there.

Nowhere was this more evident than at the school. Kids in all grades at Mooseheart, kindergarten through 12th, attend school in a single building, complete with a new multipurpose gym. When I attended, we all used to walk back to the residence halls for lunch and then return to the school once we were done eating. Now there was a cafeteria. I teased the current students and administrators, saying, "These kids have it easy." But I thought it was awesome that the school hadn't settled-the kids there were getting the best of everything.

By 8 a.m. about 200 people had arrived. I climbed up the mulch pile and took the microphone. "Everyone wants to be able to do something for their own hometown," I said. "This is a great opportunity for me to be able to give back, and I'm glad you're all helping me do that, and now you will have the tools and inspiration to do the same thing for your own community."

And then we got to work.

The weather that day turned out to be absolutely perfect. April can be tricky in Chicago, but it was cloudless and cool, just about ideal conditions to build a playground. Because Playworld Systems had been so generous, the site would be about twice the size of a typical playground. I wish I could say that I worked hard that day, but really I was pulled in a thousand directions. The administrators took me around to meet with students, and they said, in every single introduction, "This isn't just another guest. This is someone who grew up here, played on those sports fields, slept in those dorms, and has gone on and looked at what he's doing now. This is an alum of this place."

The build was more like a party than anything else. Because so many kids were too young to work on the playground, we had other activities for them. In the years since then, we're tried to use this as an opportunity to have the kids learn about service by taking on some kind of small-scale community project. But back then we had an inflatable house called a Jumping Jack, cotton candy, a popcorn maker, and face-painting for the youngest kids. During my tour of the new gym, I jumped into a game of dodgeball-one of the favorites from my childhood.

When it came time to cut the cake, someone realized that it actually had the wrong number written in the icing. Instead of “200th” playground, it said "2,000th." So, there was a mad dash while someone found a knife and scraped off the extra zero. (This was pretty funny, and I took it as a good omen. As I write this book, we're getting ready to celebrate the actual 2000th build in the spring of 2011-1,800 builds in the 9 years since that day at Mooseheart!)

After it was all over, the local Moose chapter from Batavia, Illinois, came in for a corn boil—a giant cookout of corn and burgers and baked beans, and mounds and mounds of coleslaw. By then most of the conference participants had left to catch flights home. It had been a long day for me, but I wanted to stay a few more hours. The playground was gleaming. It felt like one of the most meaningful things that I had even accomplished.

The Problem 2014

SUSAN G. SOLOMON

Art historian Susan G. Solomon focuses on twentieth-century US architecture and has worked as a curator, writer, and speaker. She has advised on playground design, presented conferences, and made publications, and at present she continues her work at Curatorial Resources and Research in Princeton, New Jersey. In her 2014 book titled *The Science of Play: How to Build Playgrounds That Enhance Children's Development*, Solomon takes a scientific look at playgrounds in various parts of the world. Here we include the first chapter, where she identifies key problems in playground design.

* Solomon, Susan G. "The Problem." in *The Science of Play: How to Build Playgrounds That Enhance Children's Development*, 10–31. Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 2014. Solomon describes this publication as a handbook to accompany another of her books, *American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space*. Hanover N.H: University Press of New England, 2005.

** For Solomon's views on play, playgrounds and public space, please see thescienceofplay.com/blog/.

We live in uncertain times, characterized by pressures to prepare our children for undefined future challenges. We are not the first generation to attempt to ready children for terrifyingly unknown events. In 1962, toy and playground manufacturer Creative Playthings published a catalog whose message could be speaking to our own plight. The catalog states that parents and teachers "are being called upon to prepare children for a world so radically new that we dare not forecast its direction, its technology, and its social organization."[1] The launch of Sputnik and the ongoing Cold War informed their unease; we have to confront even more startling technological breakthroughs, a more complex political landscape, and a physical environment that is more dense and urban.

The American playground today fails as a resource that could help kids mature or prepare for unidentified future ordeals. Unlike the exciting playgrounds of the 1950s and 1960s, best illustrated by Creative Playthings' Play Sculptures division, which commissioned artists to rethink the playground concept, today's typical American playground does a particularly bad job at preparing children for uncertainty. We find maintenance-free caged areas that emphasize safety more than critical thinking, smart reasoning, hopeful investigations, or thrilling adventures.

DPH + E (KFC + P)

When we look at today's stock playground, we see an aesthetically unappealing place with few opportunities for personal exploration or social development. The equipment is predictable and demeaning. Almost any child can maneuver easily on it. There is no struggle or sense of accomplishment. Everyone succeeds, but the achievement does not have any triumph; it does not require any struggle or cooperation. No kid can really alter the environment. There is little chance that anyone will ever have a scraped knee or bruised elbow, minor injuries that used to indicate that a child had tried something new. A palette of lurid, jarring, and unnatural colors seem to scream to children that this is a jolly setting;

the color choices seem to say that the play structure has already created the fun. Kids are not trusted to produce their own bliss.

The British have a nickname for this standard playground: “KFC,” for kit, fence, and carpet.[2] American arrangements, which replicate the same dull ensemble, add another threat into the mix: parents. The banal end results of KFC + P mean that we deny children a chance to gain a small bit of independence, to learn a few skills, to meet peers and other generations, and even to get dirty.

Concerns about costs, including liability, drive many decisions about American playground design. Park departments and school boards purchase standard equipment, which they replace when it “looks old,” because it meets their most pressing requirements: it has easy upkeep and it limits their liability. The plastic and metal products need little to no maintenance. To be doubly safe, some authorities shut them down after drizzle or fog because they fear that they may become slippery.

Manufacturers reassure clients that their products meet or exceed all federal guidelines, but the equipment is expensive because the liability cost is built into each sale; local patrons hope to effectively turn their legal concerns over to the manufacturers by buying off-the-shelf products. We have become an increasingly litigious people. Since the 1980s we have nurtured a culture of victimization.[3] Parents feel that the smallest injury can be blamed on someone other than their own child. The American legal system sometimes allows generous damages for an injury, and parents often pursue financial remuneration. In Europe or Japan there is minimal financial compensation; the legal system restricts tort damages. Instead, the European or Japanese child is expected to take stock of his actions and consider his own and communal safety.[4] After an accident, the European or Japanese child would probably say, “What did I do wrong?"; the American child (or his parents) might ask, “Where is my lawyer?".[5]

The difficulty with the American safety guidelines is that they address almost every possibility for injury, both minor and serious. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) published its first *Handbook for Public Playground Safety* in 1981. Those federal “suggestions”, as well as the more technical ones of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) that followed, continue to be updated and remain as effective as legislation. Insurance agents demand that their clients adhere to them. Even Teri Hendy, a highly respected playground consultant and an expert on safety who helped write the ASTM standards, says that these failed institutionally from the beginning because they tried to erase all risk.[6] She now believes that the ASTM should have focused only on preventing fatal, life-threatening, or debilitating injuries. She recognizes how attention to minor injuries has overwhelmed our requirements.[7] Other observers have noted that universally we tend to lump minor and major occurrences into a single category of “injuries”.[8]

The CPSC guidelines demand regularity in the equipment that may itself be a type of hazard. Danish landscape architect Helle Nebelong argues that the uniform spacing of the manufactured pieces, especially seen in stairs and horizontal ladders, lulls kids into expecting conformity and leaves them unprepared for having to deal with variation.[9]

Children who have never had to assess their surrounds expect every rung of a ladder or a monkey bar to be uniformly separated. These kids have no capacity to make appropriate judgments when they face situations that have not been perfectly engineered. Neuroscientists Sandra Aamodt and Sam Wang add that American playground equipment fails to let children distinguish between what is safe and what is dangerous.[10]

Another paradox is that the federal American guidelines, which purport to cover everything, miss some real menaces. A glaring omission can be seen in the way the CPSC's *Public Playground Safety Handbook* (2008) addresses swings. They suggest a “use zone” of “6 feet in all directions from the perimeter of the equipment,” with nothing within that six-foot radius. A change in surfacing color (for example, a large circle) will often identify the use zone. This solution makes sense on paper but means nothing to a toddler rushing through a playground to get from one activity to another. A more feasible solution would be to raise the swings onto a slightly higher plane (such as a low mound) to designate the use zone and to divert a small person, but that is not suggested or encouraged.

The federal guidelines do more than just ensure overbuilt, risk-avoidant equipment. By calling for age segregation, the guidelines reveal a disconnect between playground structure and current thinking on the pedagogy of play. Our playgrounds typically have one area for the two- to five-year-old set and a higher contraption for the five-to-twelve range. Manufacturers have recently added a category for babies, from six to twenty-three months, so we may begin to see a third area for the tiniest users. Although there is a certain logic in separating the smallest, most vulnerable users from older participants, contemporary educators and psychologists look to interactions between age groups as the way that older kids push younger ones to mature. They cite the writings of Lev Vygotsky (1806-1934) as their source.[11] His teachings have been influential since the 1980s, in spite of the fact that he died decades ago and his works were unknown in the West until the 1960s.[12]

The age distinctions on today's playgrounds hark to the 1950s, when child psychologists Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, both of whom emphasized the successive stages of child development, were the most audible voices.[13] Today there is growing unease with Piaget's theories because scientists have shown that not all children go through these predetermined stages.[14] We now believe that older kids can pull along younger ones ("zone of proximal development” is the Vygotsky term) and help them to achieve a bit more socially and cognitively than they might on their own or solely with peers.

Fans of current playground design have always had a fallback position: the equipment may be dull, but at least it provides a way for kids to experience heavy-duty exercise. Recent research shows that that position, too, may be untenable. A limited preliminary study shows that the mere presence of equipment does not increase physical activity, possibly because children spend time waiting in line or because there isn't much opportunity to use it.[15] Today's equipment is good for handgrip and hand coordination; it does not address upper body, core strength, or conditioning.[16] Children need exercises that activate locomotive skills, such as running, jumping, hopping, and skipping. Government guidelines published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention implore parents to see that kids get

aerobic exercise in addition to bone strengthening and muscle strengthening activities.[17]

We need innovative solutions, yet playground patrons often forgo architects, landscape architects, or other artists, because they believe (mistakenly) that their expertise and their designs will be too expensive. Eliminating design professionals contributes to bland results. The good news is that, when they are brought in, designers—who are also cognizant of potential lawsuits—are enhancing projects without elevating costs. It is a "win-win" situation for all involved, with the results suggesting that we might see more creative designs that do more and cost less than the ordinary stock items. Jackie Safer, the donor for the Helen Diller Playground (2011) at Dolores Park in San Francisco, where landscape architect Steve Koch altered the positioning of off-the-shelf equipment and mixed it with pieces of his own design, wisely states, "Spend money on the designer and it will pay off in the end.[18]

Fencing

While the familiarity of standard-issue playground equipment may leave children feeling bored, the high fence that typically surrounds a play area makes it explicit that child's play is an activity restricted to firm boundaries. It circumscribes their actions, making sure that their play world is confined. The playground has come to resemble a caged island, one that reinforces the notion that children are being raised "in captivity."[19]

The ever-present fence might be understandable if its intent were to keep small children away from traffic. Cars pose a very real threat to youngsters, and we, of course, have to do everything possible to keep small fry from going into the street. But fences are hardly the only solution. Landscaping, often with thick shrubbery, achieves the same results without appearing to place kids in "jail." An alternative approach retains the fence but masks it with plants or architectural elements. Architect Linda Pollak (Marpillero Pollak Architects) is someone who points to untapped possibilities for incorporating a resting place with benches or adapting a climbing or swinging apparatus into an enclosure.[20]

Today, with playgrounds often quite far from streets, the high fences mirror parental fears more of trespassers coming in than of kids getting out. A New York City municipal ordinance makes it an offense to enter a playground without a child in tow. Other cities have similar ordinances or have warnings to the same effect. Signs on gates reinforce the message; they not too subtly remind parents to be diligent, to be suspicious of a single adult.

It is good news for society and parents that worrying about playground abductions is a gratuitous gesture. It turns out that "stranger danger" is a very real paranoia, but that the underlying fears that provoke it are not realistic. Historian Steven Mintz, an authority on the history of American childhood, points out that these fears emerged first in the 1970s and do not seem to be abating.[21] He uses the sociological term "moral panic" to explain how overwrought fears replace legitimate concerns, eventually immersing us in a culture of fear. According to Mintz, absurd but prevalent conclusions about safety and risk take hold and force the hand of politicians; fear rather than facts dominates how policy is written.[22]

The possibility that a stranger will abduct a child from a playground is infinitesimally small. Abductors are usually people children know, not strangers.[23] The last nationwide statistic for abductions dates from 1999;[24] that year, there were 262,215 abductions. (Follow up research started only in 2010 and has not concluded.) Of those, strangers or slight acquaintances were the perpetrators in only 115 events.[25] One writer puts that number in context as follows: for the 59 million American children who were age fourteen or younger in 1999, the risk that any one of them would be abducted by a stranger was 1 in 655,555. The same author notes that, less than five years later (2003), 285 children (younger than fourteen) drowned in swimming pools, and 2,408 died in automobile crashes. Doing the math, he concludes that a child is much "more likely to die in a car crash than [to] be abducted by a stranger".[26] Even though car fatalities have mercifully fallen (1140 in 2011, the most recent year studied), the statistics still validate the view of another observer, who notes that we respond to certain names - Etan Patz, Polly Klaas, Madeleine McCann—because abductions and killings by strangers are such a rarity. If they weren't so unusual, we would have too many names to remember.[27] In each of those horrible instances, the children were walking on a street or sleeping in bed, not snatched from a playground.

An irony is that parents are risking traffic accidents as they drive kids around because they are not comfortable leaving them alone at a playground.[28] It may be that playgrounds are like airplanes in the 1950s and 1960s: countless adults feared flying despite the fact that getting to the airport in a car was statistically a greater risk. Today, parents fear playgrounds even though the risk of taking a child there by automobile is more dangerous than being at the play spot.

We are, furthermore, instilling unfounded fears in many kids. Pediatrician and public health physician Robert Whitaker has observed that kids pick up on the fear of their parents and wonder why they should go to a place that makes the adults so anxious.[29] Children have caught on to their parents' unease and have developed their own troubled views. In a survey in the United Kingdom, almost half the parents of seven- to fourteen-year-olds said that it is unsafe for them to let their children outside without adult supervision. Half of them (one-quarter of those polled) believed the immediate threat to be abduction. They have conveyed this fear to their kids: 48 percent of seven- to ten-year-olds agree that they need an adult nearby when they play outside. This number decreases only to 30 percent as they reach ages ten to fourteen.[30] More brazen children in Japan, who see the absurdity of overprotection and constant monitoring, will mock these by playing a game they call "stranger danger" or will play in a way that will intentionally take them out of the view of the mounted surveillance cameras.[31]

Kenneth R. Ginsburg, the lead author of an American Academy of Pediatrics report on play, sees more pragmatic reasons to stop overemphasizing the danger of abduction to children. He astutely reasons that kids may have real emergencies—sickness, an accident, being lost—that require them to reach out to strangers for assistance. Not doing so might further endanger them. Parents who demand that their offspring never talk to a stranger may be denying their children a way to seek real help when they need it.[32] Per-

haps we have to give children different kinds of information, so that they can determine who might be dangerous or who might be a benign, even helpful, presence. That training could start at a more open playground.

By blocking single, older, or childless adults from playgrounds, we are limiting the possibility (and further justification for large monetary expenditures) that playgrounds could be community hubs. We are destroying the chance that a playground could be a "third space" or "third place," sites where people return over and over again to hang out, find fellowship, and gain a sense of community.[33] Community means more than coming together several times a year. It means knowing your neighbors, seeing them often.

The findings of sociologist Eric Klinenberg show that the formation of social capital is more than a nicety or a sweet notion of camaraderie. At times of natural disaster, the sense of shared spaces and of folks watching out for and helping each other can have an impact on survival. Klinenberg examined the role of informal associations in determining who died in a July heat wave that swept Chicago in 1995. In a comparison of two poor, crime-ridden sections of the city, Klinenberg found that the elderly were much more likely to survive in the neighborhood with a strong social infrastructure.[34] We have to consider how open playgrounds could contribute to fostering that type of human foundation.

Carpet

A third feature of almost all American playgrounds is a flat, poured-in-place, rubber ground covering known as a "unitary covering," or, more colloquially in Britain, a "carpet." This ubiquitous surface reinforces the sense that playgrounds are risk-free, and, above all, clean. It is also expensive and can double the cost of a playground without contributing to what children can do. Kids cannot move it, mold it, or reconfigure it.

Playground carpets were originally introduced for children's protection. And indeed, modern surfacing is significantly safer than the asphalt or concrete that once were the surface material for playgrounds. Head injuries, the greatest threat to kids, have almost vanished since the late 1970s. That is no inconsequential feat. The question now is how to maintain the current level of protection while simultaneously introducing variety and lowering the cost.[35]

Safety surfacing is, by now, taken for granted—so much so that there is a possibility that rubber surfacing, not unlike fencing, is a component that is chosen "as much on the basis of belief as on analysis."[36] Most falls and injuries today have an impact on upper limbs. David Ball, at the Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management at Middlesex University (UK), feels that the surfacing has not done anything to prevent injuries to these upper extremities.[37] The CPSC, which admits that no surfacing will prevent all injuries, accepts several loose-fill options, including wood chips or wood mulch, pea gravel, sand, or shredded tires. All of these create varied surfaces and offer shock absorption. They do require maintenance and refilling.[38]

Sand, if selected carefully, holds the greatest possibility for an inexpensive surface kids can play on that addresses both severe head injuries and some limb fractures. David Spease, a landscape architect and playground safety specialist, has done testing that shows that sand may be a more effective cushioning substance than originally thought. After seeing that the CPSC's guidelines reduced the permissible heights for falls on sand from five feet to four, Spease tested a particular mixture—lapis sand—for safety. It "contains limestone and sea shells and is frequently used for aquariums. It has rounded edges rather than sharp corners that you typically find in crushed stone products, and most of the particle sizes are about the same. It is kind of like really, really small pea stone." Spease found that it could cushion a fall from a ten-foot drop, allowing for the possibility of higher places to play and more varied surfaces on which to land.[39] A ten-foot drop onto sand would also ally American playgrounds with the reality of German playgrounds, which have adhered to that standard without severe consequences.[40]

The absence of sand and dirt compounds the sterility of the American playground. Many American cities are choosing to forgo sand or water, because they are considered "health risks" which presumably means the possible appearance of stray hypodermic needles or cat feces. Here, too, fear may be dictating policy. It may come as a surprise that a study from Australia (a culture not too different from our own) shows that the occurrence of hidden needles or syringes in public sandboxes is extremely low;[41] the threat of these amounts almost to an "urban legend." The cat issue may not be as rare, but there are simple solutions that prevent sand from being a health risk. The Japanese are not alarmed by animal excrement; the last person to leave a public park simply puts the cover on the sandbox.[42] There should be equally uncomplicated ways to protect larger expanses of sand surfaces.

The sand and dirt-free playground has become so ubiquitous that many children now shudder at the thought of getting filthy or having fun in the mud. In 2012 a mud and obstacle race for adults in the Bronx, New York included a segment at the end for kids. The organizers invited children into the mud pit. Some refused to participate; an announcer told them not to "be afraid to get dirty." The kids prevailed, and the few who did finally participate ventured in "as fastidiously as wading egrets."[43] It is likely that they had been trained by parents who expect to find their children clean when picking them up from preschool or the park. In Norway, by contrast, adults often worry if their children are too spotless at the end of the day. In Japan there are at least five preschools that use mud play as the centerpiece of the daily curriculum.[44]

The American aversion to dirt may have larger consequences, which go beyond the realm of recreation. Mary Ruebush, who has a Ph.D. in immuno-parasitology and who once found one of her children munching on horse manure after he crawled out of her view, has directly faced the importance of dirt in her book Why Dirt Is Good. She cogently argues that small children put things into their mouths because their bodies need a way to boost their immune systems, something that occurs with repeated exposure to "dirt." She defines "dirt" as anything or any place—not just soil—filled with germs. If kids get to taste dirt at an early age, it triggers immune responses. The young body "gets better,

faster, and more specific" in attacking germs.[45] According to Ruebush, kids' bodies need constant exposure and retraining in order to stay healthy.[46]

Dr. Joel V. Weinstock (Tufts Medical Center) and Dr. David Elliott (University of Iowa) present equally compelling information about the usefulness of wormlike creatures called helminths, "intestinal worms [that] have been all but eliminated in developed countries." These worms rarely cause disease; indeed, they can trigger positive immune responses.[47] Weinstock argues that "children should be allowed to go barefoot in the dirt, play in the dirt, and not have to wash their hands when they come in to eat."[48] Weinstock and Ruebush provide arguments that make ridiculous a Minnesota state senator who introduced a bill to mandate daily cleaning of "all surfaces children touch" in playgrounds.[49]

Parents

Parents used to be on the sidelines of playgrounds. Now they are front and center, often hovering over young (or not-so-young) children. They are there to watch every move and frequently can be seen tailing their children on the equipment. The class differences in parenting that Annette Lareau recorded in her book *Unequal Childhoods* do not appear in parents' behavior on playgrounds. Shrinking family size, with fewer older siblings to help parents keep an eye on small fry, exacerbates the situation.[50] The phenomenon of parents inserting themselves into activities they never previously entered is becoming universal. In Norway and Netherlands, a small number of parents are clinging to their kids; Japan has even coined their own term: "Monster Parents." These changes are strikingly new in those countries, and still relatively rare.[51]

Hovering is especially apparent in the United States and the United Kingdom. An extreme example occurred on an English playground, a facility that is fully staffed and that organizes sessions only for children. The mayor has stated that "several parents had invited themselves in and were then making a nuisance of themselves, interfering with what staff were doing" and (outrageously) "disciplining other people's children".[52] At that point, the play workers demanded the parents leave. The parents had apparently not respected the rules and boundaries of the playground and felt that they should have a say in their children's, and their neighbors' childrens', activities.

Some parents may feel they have to elevate play into drills that are akin to what they expect from school. They orchestrate their children's fun into a series of commands so that play time is not "wasted time." Parents who push academic achievement at an early age, and enroll three-year-olds in "drill and kill" academic preparation, are usually not aware of the possibility that their children might later have impaired motivation or poor discipline.[53]

There are other reasons that parents hover or are overly involved in how children play. One educator believes that attachment parenting, advocated by William and Martha Sears and based on earlier work by John Bowlby, has gone away.[54] Sociologist Barry Glassner, historian Steven Mintz, and Judith Warner (author of Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety) speak with a common voice in explaining contemporary parenthood. Each sees a society in which parents feel so unable to control the events around them that they focus on perfecting and controlling their children. They overmanage their children because that is the one remaining arena where they can exercise real authority.[55] During economic downturns that make backsliding ever more difficult to avoid, parents micromanage their children to ensure (they believe) their future success. All three authors agree on the 1970s as the time of a shift in parental attitudes toward risk and safety, perhaps because of a stagnant economy.[56]

It may not be coincidental that parental hovering and fear of strangers surfaced at about the same time. The inauguration of the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System in 1970 (redesigned in 1978) most likely elevated parental angst. Throughout its history, epidemiologists have maintained that this data (based on a "probability sample" from one hundred hospitals with twenty-four-hour emergency room services) has been able to distinguish between minor and serious events,[57] but that has not been communicated well to the public. Parents believe that the accidents are becoming more prevalent and more severe. As a result, fears of death by injury or abduction become very real to adults who do not receive counterbalancing information. Wendy Grolnick, a childhood development specialist at Clark University who has extensively studied parenting, has a keen appraisal. She feels that parents try naturally and instinctively to protect their young. Her most recent work shows that parents become more intrusive and protective when they perceive a threat to their child.[58]

Injuries

Parents become justifiably upset when they read undifferentiated data that tells that there are 200,000 injuries on American public playgrounds per year. Those numbers do not distinguish between injuries such as a broken arm and a cracked skull, whereas the CPSC report on playground hazards has an age range of fourteen months to twenty-one years. We might wonder why the age limit is so high, when most children age out of playgrounds before they become teens; even the equipment specifies an upper age of twelve. We should also put the 200,000 injuries into a meaningful context: only four percent are hospitalized. To gain perspective, we need to know that 100,000 children under five require emergency room visits each year after falling down steps.[59] We can see that the percentage of injuries is much higher on stairs than playgrounds because the population for stairs (only those under five years old) is a discrete sample, whereas the playground data is much less exclusive.

Fatalities in public playgrounds in the United States and Europe are noticeably (and thankfully) very low.[60] In Europe the number is so small that it is not possible to generalize among causes; one researcher thinks that most of these tragic outcomes result from home equipment.[61] In the United States, twelve thousand children (age zero to nineteen) die of all types of injuries each year.[62] The most recent CPSC data covers deaths on playground equipment between 2001 and 2009. Over that eight-year period, forty deaths

occurred.[63] The median age was four years. We should never minimize the tragedy of any death on the playground, but we need to take a close look at these sad occurrences. Twenty-seven of them were hangings or asphyxiations (none of which were deemed intentional). Most were caused by "secondary products," such as ropes, dog leashes, or jump ropes; two were related to clothing, possibly indicating that draw-strings—now forbidden by a CPSC ruling (16 CFR I 120) of 2011 that prohibits them on upper-body outerwear– could be in circulation as hand-me-downs. The remaining thirteen were head or neck injuries from falls (seven); product breakage (one); tipovers of swings sets (two), falls (two, one of which did not show traumatic injury); and one crash of an all-terrain vehicle being driven by a twenty-one-year-old.

Counterintuitively, overprotection does not necessarily eliminate danger.[64] Minor to moderate injuries will occur whether parents are standing over their kids or drinking a coffee nearby. A Harvard Medical School study in 2000 looked at playground injuries and found that the presence of adults did not change the outcomes.[65] And, in fact, American parents have unwittingly upset the design elements that used to deter children from being in situations where they don't belong. Landscape architect Paul Friedberg notes that designing a rung or step high above the ground was once an efficient way to keep small children off equipment meant for older kids.[66] Today, however, we see how parents will often place a young child on the high rung, or go down a corkscrew slide with a little one on their lap. Children fall, or parents get stuck on a turn and children's legs or arms get broken.[67] In such cases, there is a good possibility that the child's family will lodge a complaint and/or initiate a lawsuit and that very quickly the equipment will be deemed "unsafe" and will be removed.

The words of British post-World War II playground reformer Lady Allen of Hurtwood seem apt: "It is better to risk a broken leg than a broken spirit. A leg can always mend. A spirit may not."[68] Without making light of injuries, parents should remember that broken arms are usually the worst injuries that can result on a playground. Where there are broken limbs, kids recover quickly; fractures frequently need to be set and do not need surgery. Such injuries are much more minor than similar ones in adults.[69] Perception of healthcare options in the United States might drive many parents away from Lady Allen's position. The conventional wisdom is that children below the Medicaid line have no access to free medical care; in fact, they (and frequently those two or three times over the level of the poverty threshold) can receive treatment through Medicaid or through Child Help Plus (CHP).[70] The Affordable Care Act may fill in the gap for middle-class families that have been underinsured. These issues do not arise in Europe, the United Kingdom, or Japan, where there is universal public healthcare.

How Did We Get to This Mess?

We spend a lot of time talking about creating "place"—a sense that settings are indigenous, and specific—and yet our playgrounds are generic. Keen observer Nicholas Day sums up the situation: "Today, walking on a children's playground is like exiting the interstate. Regardless of where you are, you see the exact same thing."[71] We have to consider if this is a new phenomenon, or whether it has just become more apparent. It may be a mixture of both, with a history of uniformity in the late nineteenth century, inspired and artist-driven designs at midcentury, and decline for the last thirty years.

Reformers, who sought to aid and orchestrate the lives of the waves of new immigrants who landed on American shores in the early twentieth century, were the first to push playgrounds into a public realm. A symbol of how our government could protect and nurture its youngest citizens, early Reform era playgrounds offered extensive programming. During the first decades of the twentieth century, playgrounds were supposed to shield children from the hazards of the street; offer them advanced physical fitness opportunities; promote acculturation for immigrants; or provide a distinct place where children could, according to John Dewey, do "their own work." Reform era playgrounds were ambitious, far exceeding our own definition of what constitutes a play space. They often had a field house with showers and bathrooms, a library and/or dental clinic, playing fields, and running track. What we would call the equipment was the "apparatus" of ladders and slides.[72] To our contemporary eyes, some of this metal climbing equipment looks both flimsy and dizzyingly high. This exercise equipment was available for adults as well as children.[73] There is some indication that children abandoned Reform era playgrounds, which had gender- and age-segregated spaces, in the teens of the twentieth century, into order to seek "danger and adventure".[74]

The child-centric public play space emerged when the Reform era began to ebb and when the immigrant population had become accustomed to American ways. Playground equipment, specifically for children, came into its own in the 1930s. These pieces were usually plain independent swings or slides or seesaws, most of which were metal. There were fantastical and themed pieces ton hut the underlying form was usually swing, slide, or occasional child-powered merry-go-round.

Inventive playgrounds—often designed by architects, landscape architects, or sculptors—exemplified the period after World War II. Staff and programs were still critical to keeping children entertained. The optimism, economic growth, increased leisure time, and the sheer number of children born of the baby boom altered American society and encouraged investment in public recreation. During this time, educators looked to "open-ended objects that might stimulate original thinking."[75] They saw that the young boomers who were becoming elementary school students needed opportunities to be creative. American artists, who pioneered and led the world by using abstraction as their language during the 1950s and 1960s, saw how their outlook meshed with America's perception that creativity in the Cold War was a democratic ideal.[76]

In 1953 the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), *Parents Magazine* (started in 1926 by psychologists interested in child rearing),[77] and toy and playground manufacturer Creative Playthings sponsored a seminal playground competition. Winning entries, which Creative Playthings promised to put into production, showed that artists could create interesting,

aesthetically worthwhile play equipment. In one of the winning designs, children played in an abstract playhouse with a sand floor and exposed rebar "monkey bars" for the roof; another winner had low ramps for running, jumping, or wiggling through small tunnels. The MoMA, *Parents Magazine*, and Creative Playthings venture may have been the largest and most advertised example of the midcentury impulse toward creative play; it has sometimes overshadowed the many other architects and sculptors who were soon producing unusual play settings. Their endeavors elevated the appreciation of the child's material world; children were entrusted to make educated choices about their own safety. Adults accepted that kids were able to negotiate challenges. Parents tolerated a certain amount of risk.

The MoMA exhibition brought an alliance of artists and playground design to the attention of the public. A playground, designed by architect Louis Kahn and sculptor Isamu Noguchi beginning in 1961, further cemented the collaborative notion for playgrounds.[78] Together, the two created a total environment for play in New York City that was different from anything seen previously. Art patron Audrey Hess, who had earlier chosen Noguchi for an unexecuted playground adjacent to the United Nations building, brought these two men together. She wanted this playground to be a memorial to her aunt, Adele R. Levy, a noted art patron. By commissioning an architect at a smaller scale and a sculptor at a larger scale than either usually encountered, Hess was ensuring an unusual design for the site in Riverside Park.

The two artists came up with a scheme that used mostly concrete; it descended over the three levels of the park but could not be seen by anyone driving along Riverside Drive. Multiple ramps organized the space. Filled with embankment slides, an amphitheater, truncated pyramids, and abstract concrete shapes, this playground plan became well known for the way its amenities meshed into the concrete surface; land forms became a permanent hardscape. It also became notorious for the negative reaction it ignited from neighbors who thought it would be too much of a draw for people from other neighborhoods. The playground, which was never executed (in large part because of neighborhood opposition), imprinted its environmental design on the minds of young designers.

In the late 1960s, architect Richard Dattner and landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, working independently, rethought the Kahn-Noguchi notion of a total environment. Both believed that the isolated and largely metal swings, slides, and seesaws that populated New York City's playgrounds, many left over from Robert Moses's time as parks commissioner (1934-1960), were limiting children's actions. Each designed playgrounds that linked children's activities, both horizontally and vertically, so that every space would be filled with things to do. Their sensitive and artistic conclusions showed that kids could be physically challenged and, given the right situation, execute complex play.

Their designs were complicated assemblages that indicated faith in children's ability to exercise sound judgments or, at least, to take limited risks and learn from their mistakes. Friedberg and Dattner each created playgrounds with a neutral, uncolored palette. Many of their designs interlinked stone mounds and wood frames. To a young population that had grown up with metal equipment, the introduction of wood and stone must have seemed a revelation. These play areas sat on sand that became both an inexpensive safety surface and a dynamic place to play.

An extant and excellent example of Dattner's work is the Adventure Playground (1966) in Central Park. He graciously cites the Kahn-Noguchi playground as his source (as does Carve in Amsterdam, when they note the same inspiration for their playhill at Billie Holiday Park in The Hague). Modified since its inception, Dattner's Adventure Playground still illustrates how children could clamber their way up stone pyramids, access a tree house, hide in a series of tunnels, or play in a water channel. The low, concrete serpentine wall remains especially winning because it charmingly hugs the play space while providing an interesting structure for climbing, running, or balancing.[79]

Kahn and Noguchi were not the only influences on Dattner and Fried berg. Both young men admired and had met Lady Allen of Hurtwood, who later returned their admiration by publishing their projects in her 1968 book *Planning for Play*. Having seen that children in London could play amid the ruins left in the wake of the German Blitz, and familiar with the playgrounds that C. Th. Sørensen created from leftover household and building scraps in Denmark during the war, Lady Allen crusaded for the introduction of adventure play to Britain. She was very successful in seeing many adventure playgrounds come to fruition. These were sites in which children, under the watchful but noninterfering eye of a play worker, could use tools and "junk" in order to construct their own environments. Donne Buck, a New Zealander who began working at London's Notting Hill Adventure Playground shortly after it opened in 1960, has eloquently summed up the impact: "Children whose lives are otherwise circumscribed by age, disability, religion, ethnic origin, poverty, social strife etc. etc. can come together on an adventure playground from pre-school and find their own level amongst the mix of others in ways that they cannot anywhere else in their lives."[80] Play workers sometimes built semipermanent towers in order to maximize space and keep the oldest, most rambunctious kids working away from the smallest ones. These were an early armature, too. Donne Buck remembers building a high, triangular fifteen-foot tower. It was a strategy to refocus the energy of some unruly teens.[81] Buck's important message is that the older children were not evicted; they were given more interesting spaces to control.

The idea of malleable "loose parts" on the playground emerged from the leftover lumber, household materials, or junk that was available—effectively, the "equipment" of adventure playgrounds.[82] Not surprisingly, Dattner and Friedberg found ways to incorporate loose parts into their designs. Dattner, in particular, designed interlocking building vertical pieces for his own Adventure Playground (whose name echoed the European examples) in Central Park and provided storage for them within his stone pyramids. Dattner was effectively creating the foundation for energetic free play. Friedberg believed that urban playgrounds should be part of an intergenerational arrangement, and he sought a way to replicate the unexpected consequences children could experience in rural nature. His 1960s trailblazing work, an entire ensemble for the New York City Housing Authority's Riis Houses (Pomerance and Brines, 1949), has been altered beyond recognition. This was

a twist and up-to-date abstraction of an earlier tradition, the re-creation of nature for an urban audience. New York's Central Park and San Fransisco's Golden Gate Park had been early conveyors of that belief. The Adventure Playgrounds in England also had "landscape mounds" and green areas or digging soil and planting a garden.[83]

Although they look more refined than the rough, messy British or Scandinavian adventure playgrounds, the Dattner and Friedberg examples captured their spirit. Friedberg's and Dattner's self-contained playgrounds allowed children to be independent. Whether they came alone or with a caretaker kids dominated the scene, with adults remaining in the background. The adults formed their own social networks; so did the children. Anyone who thinks that Dattner and Friedberg had an overly romantic vision of adventure play should watch the initial installment of Michael Apted's *Seven Up* series. Apted first began to interview seven-year-olds from diverse backgrounds in 1964.[84] He has returned to the same people every seven years and issued a movie update after each encounter. He concluded his inaugural segment—which mixed children from elite and educated backgrounds with those from much more humble surroundings—with a trip for the children to meet each other in London. The children mixed together at a party; they also spent time together on an Adventure Playground. The producers saw the playground as a place where such a disparate population could find common activities. The kids show that the space—almost two decades after the concept emerged in the UK—encouraged physical activity, moving, and building objects, and the freedom to alter the environment.

The decline in American playground design has been apparent since the 1980s. Even in 1980 there were reports that traditional equipment was too safe and children were avoiding it.[85] It is disheartening that today's ubiquitous standardized equipment, called "post and deck" or "post and platform," which keeps the linkages but has oversimplified everything else, is a bastardized version of Dattner's and Friedberg's accomplishments. A small number of corporations now make American playground equipment, most of which is identical. The distinctions are often only in the colors—which, since the availability of inexpensive powder coating on metal in the 1980s, has created bizarre and lurid color possibilities; these odd hues have further cheapened the look of the post and deck designs. Our general societal concern for safety, the advent of the national safety guidelines, and the ongoing threat of litigation against schools and municipalities have all contributed to the success of manufactured equipment and its role as the defining element in the American playground.

Playgrounds Reflect Cultures

Playgrounds reflect a society's values and attitudes. Editors of a European journal make a distinction between "collectivist" Scandinavia, where the ethos is to support and aid each other, and the "individualist" mode, where each person watches out for himself (and presumably his chance of being sued). Setting up a dichotomy between collective and individualist societies does help to explain why many examples of the best playgrounds, the ones that will appear in the following chapters, exist in either Scandinavia or Northern Europe. In even broader terms, a "collective response," which has deep societal support, has the luxury to consider the greater good; an "individualistic response," in contrast, is self-protective, accommodates no risk, and shelters "surplus safety"—safety that exceeds what is reasonably necessary.[86] Nordic peoples or Northern Europeans emphasize life skills and socialization on the playground. These tools are essential for a collective point of view; public space becomes a training ground for social interaction. Nordic countries, therefore, invest in public experiences and only begin to teach academics when children reach the age of seven.[87] Compare that situation to the English-speaking world, especially the United States and Australia, which has kept its individualistic focus and succumbed to an early education prototype that values content and testing over socialization or communal understanding. There is limited concern for play and playgrounds as part of an overall integrated experience.

Collectivist versus individualist thinking goes beyond educational issues. It extends to a sense of common responsibility. In Sweden, for example, the emphasis is on all citizens being responsible for all the children.[88] This collective view reassures parents that an adult is always watching their children; it also comforts kids by letting them know that they are being monitored for anything that is too outrageous. In such a trusting atmosphere, parents feel they can encourage their children to be self-reliant. The editors of one journal summed it up by asking "Should the dominant image of the child be one of vulnerability or competence".[89] Does the child need protection or independence?

The United States presents a striking contrast to collectivist thinking. Ironically, our individualism may have nurtured dependency. Sociologist Claude S. Fischer uses the frame of "voluntarism" as the "central feature of American culture and character." Fischer defines voluntarism as belief and behavior "as if each person is a sovereign individual: unique, independent, self-reliant, self-governing, and ultimately self-responsible."[90] He concludes that American individualism is "coupled with intense, freely given fellowship—group belonging by voluntary contract or covenant" in which there has to be a balance between deep commitment for good of the group and independence.[91] In Fischer's assessment, self-reliance and self-responsibility are protective; we have strong—but not necessarily unbreakable—loyalties to national institutions; our defining instincts are self-sustaining. Historian Paula Fass has called this the "privatization of responsibility."[92] This allegiance to self-protection helps to explain why we have spent years debating national health insurance, whereas European countries have long had universal coverage. To us, healthcare is an entitlement, a gift; to them, it is the means that keep a society functioning by lessening public health threats.

These distinctions are evident in how national guidelines for playgrounds have different emphases, when we contrast the 2008 voluntary European Playground Equipment Standards with the American CPSC's guidelines from the same year, we see that the Europeans accept risk and recognize the possibility of injury; Americans try to control all vulnerability. They offer their children latitude; we offer our kids the promise of individual total

protection. In both instances, the guidelines have to accommodate wide regional and cultural distinctions within their respective political boundaries. The European standards note:

> *Respecting the characteristics of children's play and the way children benefit from playing on the playground with regard to development, children need to learn to cope with risk and this may lead to bumps and bruises and even occasionally a broken limb. The aim of this standard is first and foremost to prevent accidents with a disabling or fatal consequence, and secondly to lessen serious consequences caused by the occasional mishap that inevitably will occur in children's pursuit of expanding their level of competence, be it socially, intellectually or physically.*[93]

The U.S. CPSC begins its guidelines by lumping together all negative outcomes, all of which it is committed to reducing: "In recent years, it is estimated that there were more than 200,000 injuries annually on public playgrounds across the country that required emergency room treatment. By following the recommended guidelines in this handbook, you and your community can create a safer playground environment for all children and contribute to the reduction of playground-related deaths and injuries."[94]

Japan is also home to some superb playgrounds, and that country gives its own spin to a "collective" spirit.[95] Japan's concept of *Uchi* (inside) starts at immediate family, expands to school, and extends outward to all of Japan (or to all Japanese people). When children start school, they are all equal and part of a new *Uchi*; they are expected to cooperate with each other. The school then expands the "cocoon" of the clan or the home into a wider, more diverse support system. Shared responsibility means that there is a mutual help and mutual trust system and concern for people younger than themselves. This attitude fits with a goal of creating harmony and balance in society. Under those conditions, it makes sense that three-year-olds (provided they don't live near busy streets) will often play outside their houses by themselves. Even kindergartners are expected to walk to a fixed spot where they meet other children and walk together to class. Part of the first grade curriculum in Tokyo (albeit an exceptionally safe city) is learning to get to school alone, a journey that might include crossing streets or riding a subway or bus.[96] In the less dense areas of the city, in the wards where there are no sidewalks, there is further evidence of how the Japanese orchestrate a civil society: children learn to be wary of cars and cars are careful of pedestrians, so that each group shows deference to the other and learns how to navigate shared space.[97]

We cannot change our culture. But acceptance of national character does not give us license to tolerate mediocre public space or isolated places for children that are absurdly boring and financially wasteful. Perhaps we can begin to demand more successful outcomes, especially in urban areas, if we know what is possible and see how other countries are using open areas to help their children grow. Knowing what is available in other societies should be a catalyst for us; perhaps we can try to overcome our ingrained instincts and emulate useful attitudes and the designs they produce.

NOTES

1 Ogata, Amy. "Creative Playthings: Educational Toys and Postwar American Culture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 39, no. 2/3 (2004): 141.

2 I thank Tim Gill (www.rethinkingchildhood.com) for pointing this out to me.

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5 Architect Richard Dattner has often been quoted regarding how kids—or their parents—invoke lawyers. Most recently he was cited in Carol Kino's piece "The Work behind Child's Play," *New York Times*, July 3, 2013.

6 Just a few states have adopted the guidelines into state legislation. Teri Hendy, telephone interview with author, May 8, 2013.

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8 Sandseter, Ellen Beate Hansen and Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair. "Children's Risky Play from an Evolutionary Perspective: The Anti-Phobic Effects of Thrilling Experiences," *Evolutionary Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2011): 260–61.

9 Helle Nebelong, interview with author, December 14, 2011, Copenhagen.

10 Aamodt, Sandra and Sam Wang, *Welcome to Your Child's Brain: How the Mind Grows from Conception to College, 129. New York: Bloomsbury, 2011.*

11 Zigler, Edward F. and Sandra J. Bishop-Josef, "The Cognitive Child versus the Whole Child: Lessons from 40 Years of Head Start," in *Play=Learning: How Play Motivates and Enhances Children's Cognitive and Social-Emotional Growth*, ed. Dorothy G. Singer, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, 23. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

12 Bodrova, Elena and Deborah J. Leong, *Tools of the Mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education*, 2nd ed., 6-8. NJ: Pearson/Merill Prentice Hall, 2007.

13 Ogata, "Creative Playthings," 135. In the 1950s, manufacturers such as Playskool and Holgate segregated their catalogs according to age.

14 Medina, John. *Brain Rules for Baby: How to Raise a Smart and Happy Child from Zero to Five*, 154. Seattle: Pear, 2010.

15 Cardon, Greet et al., "The Contribution of Preschool Playground Factors in Explaining Children's Physical Activity during Recess," *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 5, no. 11 (2008).

16 JJay Beckwith, interview with author, May 7, 2012, Novato, CA.

17 "2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans," www.health.gov/ PAGuidelines/pdf/PAguide.pdf. To be fair, the guidelines do include "playground equipment" in their list of activities to develop muscles. They presumably mean something like monkey bars. They also suggest climbing trees and playing tug of war.

18 Jackie Safier (donor of Helen Diller Playground), interview with author, February 25, 2013, San Francisco.

19 Tanya Byron, address to North of England Education Conference, "Mind, Brain, Community: Inspiring Learners, Strengthening Resilience," January 16–18, 2013, at Sheffield Hallam University, reported by Richard Garner, "Children Brought up 'In Captivity' by Risk Adverse Parents, Says Leading Child Psychologist," *Independent*, January 18, 2013.

20 Linda Pollak, interview with author, April 22, 2013, New York City. Pollak and her partner Sandro Marpillero took advantage of fencing that would have been too expensive to tear down by creating a seating area with plantings and a trellis. The site is the learning garden at the Whitestone Branch of the Queens (NY) Public Library (2010).

21 Mintz, Steven. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* 337–40. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.

22 Ibid., 339.

23 Knight, Sarah. "Forest School: Playing on the Wild Side," in *The Excellence of Play*, 3rd ed., ed. Janet Moyles, 190. Berkshire, UK: Open University Press, 2010.

24 According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (www.missingkids.com), 1999 is the last year for which abduction statistics were gathered. The Missing Children's Act of 1982 allowed data on missing children to be entered into the National Crime Information Center of the FBI.

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26 Gardner, Daniel. *The Science of Fear: How the Culture of Fear Manipulates Your Brain*, 185–86. New York: Plume Books, 2009.

27 Durodié, Bill. "Fear of Adults Has Devastating Effects for Kids; Efforts to Keep Children Safe Often End up with

Negative Repercussions," *Times-Colonist* (Victoria, British Columbia), August 15, 2012.

28 Wyver et al. "Ten Ways." 264.

29 Robert C. Whitaker, telephone interview with author, February 26, 2013.

30 These figures come from an opinion poll commissioned by Playday 2010, a massive public event for play awareness. Play England coordinates Playday with Play Scotland, Play Wales, and Playboard Northern Ireland.

31 Isami Kinoshita, professor of environmental science and landscape architecture, Chiba University, interview with author, May 24, 2013, Tokyo.

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33 Oldenburg, Ray. The Great Good Place. Cambridge: Da Capo, 1989.

34 Klinenberg, Eric. "Adaptation: How Can Cities Be 'Climate-proof'?" *New Yorker*, (January 7, 2013): 32–37.

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37 Ball, David J. "Trends in Fall Injuries Associated with Children's Outdoor Climbing Frames," *International Journal of Injury Control and Safety Promotion* 14, no. 1 (2007): 49–53.

38 CPSC, Public Playground Safety Handbook, (August 2012): 8–10.

39 David Spease, summary of research, forwarded by Teri Hendy in an e-mail to author, May 8, 2013.

40 I am grateful to Peter Heuken and Sharon Gamson Danks for pointing this out.

41 Wyver et al. "Ten Ways." 269.

42 I thank Nicky Washida for pointing this out to me.

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44 Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, interview with author, November 8, 2012, Trondheim, Norway.

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50 Fass, Paula S. "The Child-Centered Family? New Rules in Postwar America" in *Reinventing Childhood after World War II*, ed. Paula Fass and Michael Grossberg, 16–17. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

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55 Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 340.

56 Ibid., 342.

57 Alexander Filip (deputy director of Office of Communications, CPSC), phone interview with author, August 15, 2013.

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59 Zielinski, Ashley E. Lynne M. Rochette, and Gary A. Smith, "Stair-Related In- juries to Young Children Treated in US Emergency Departments, 1999–2008," *Pediatrics* 129, no. 3 (March 2012). The authors report almost 932,000 injuries over the nine-year period under study.

60 Wyver et al. "Ten Ways." 269.

61 Karl-Chirstian Thies, e-mail to author, July 24, 2012.

62 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "CDC Childhood Injury Report: Patterns of Unintentional Injuries among 0–19 Year Olds in the United States, 2000–2006 (2008)." cited in Brussoni, Mariana, Lise L. Olsen, Ian Pike, and David A. Sleet, "Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 9, no. 9 (September 2012): 3134–3148.

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In February 1996, CPSC issued *guidelines about drawstrings* in children's upper outerwear. In 1997, those guidelines were incorporated into a voluntary standard (F-1816). There was a further letter urging action in May 2006 in which they reported a decline in fatalities compared with the period 1985 to 1997, when there had been at least twenty-one deaths from drawstrings. Letter from John Gibson Mullan, director, Office of Compliance, U.S. CPSC, to "manufacturers, Importers and Retailers of Children's Upper Outerwear." Then, in July 2011, based on the guidelines and voluntary standard, CPSC issued a federal regulation prohibiting drawstrings in outwear for the upper body of children.

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65 Waltzman, M. L. et al. "Monkeybar Injuries: Complications of Play," *Pediatrics* 105, no. 5 (2000): 1174–1175.

66 M. Paul Friedberg, interview with author, February 14, 2013, New York City.

67 Gaffney, John T. "Tibia Fractures in Children Sustained on a Playground Slide." *Journal of Pediatric Orthopedics* 29 (September 2009): 606–608. When Dr. John Gaffney, an orthopedist, looked at the number of tibia fractures that came to his office in an eleven-month period, he found fifty-eight. Only eight of those occurred on playgrounds, but all occurred when parents went down slides with children between fourteen and thirty-two months of age. His advice: "If the child is unable to use the slide independently, another activity would be more appropriate."

68 Lady Allen of Hurtwood, quoted in "Junkyard Playgrounds." *Time Magazine*, (June 25, 1965): 71.

69 Clinton, Jeremiah. "Playgrounds Home to Bumps, Bruises and Broken Bones." *Ravelli Republic*, April 2, 2013. Clinton, a Montana doctor who believes the benefits of playgrounds outweigh any injuries, says that broken bones are part of growing up; he claims that 75 percent of boys and 50 percent of girls will fracture a limb before they become adults.

70 I am grateful to Robert Whitaker for pointing this out to me.

71 Day, Nicholas. "Tear Down the Swing Sets." *Slate*, January 28, 2013.

72 For descriptions of Reform era playgrounds, see Cranz, Galen. *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*, 62–87. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982; paperback ed. 1989) See also Iannacone, Rachel. "Neighborhood Playgrounds and Parks." inRobert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, 174. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007.

73 Iannacone, Rachel. "Neighborhood Playgrounds and Parks," 174.

74 Perez, Cecilia and Roger A. Hart, "Beyond Playgrounds: Planning for Children's Access to the Environment," in *Innovation in Play Environments*, ed. Paul F. Wilkinson, 253. New York: St. Martin's, 1980. Perez and Hart, citing the Russell Sage Foundation report of 1914, say that

the playgrounds were often empty while children looked for more interesting places.

75 Ibid., 144.

76 Ibid., 140.

77 Cross, Gary. Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood, 123. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

78 For more information on this history, see Solomon, Susan G. *American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005.

79 For a more detailed analysis and images, see ibid.

80 Donne Buck, e-mail to author, September 4, 2013.

81 Buck, e-mail to author, September 15, 2013. Buck also feels that the high tower may have led foreign visitors to believe that "the Adventure Playground meant large, overpowering climbing" and "that this erroneous conclusion damaged the physical development" in other countries.

82 Nicholson, Simon. "How Not to Cheat Children: The Theory of Loose Parts." *Landscape Architecture* 62 (October 1971): 30–34.

83 Ibid.

84 Apted was actually a minor producer in the first filming; he came into his own in the second movie in the series, *14 Up*.

85 Wilkinson, Paul F. and Robert S. Lockhart. "Safety in Children's Formal Play Environments," in Innovation in Play Environments, Wilkinson, ed., 85–96.

86 Wyver et al. "Ten Ways." 263. Tom Jambor devised the term "surplus safety"; the phenomenon is best seen, according to these authors, in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

87 Waller et al., "The Dynamics of Early Childhood Spaces." 440.

88 Ibid., 439.

89 Ibid., 438, 439–41.

90 Fischer, Clause S. *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*, 10. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

91 Ibid., 242.

92 Fass. "The Child-Centered Family?." 16–17.

93 European Committee for Standardization (EN1176: 2008) "Playground Equipment and Surfacing—Part 1: General Safety Requirements and Test Method." quoted in Little, Helen and David Eager. "Risk, Challenge, and Safety: Implications for Play Quality and Playground Design." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 18, no. 4 (2010): 502.

94 CPSC, *Public Playground Safety Handbook*, Introduction, November 2010.

95 Richard E. Nisbett has written a fascinating study of how Asian and Western thought are different that is very useful to this discussion. See Nisbett, Richard E. *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently . . . and Why*, New York: Free Press, 2003. Nisbett also includes a reference to nineteenth-century German social scientists, who made distinctions between collectivist and individualist societies; he prefers the terms "interdependent" and "independent" and cites Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama as the scholars who coined those phrases (55–57). Nesbitt also recognizes that Americans, who tend to accept only one view at a time, avoid contradictions and seek rules to justify their choices. He maintains that Asian society, geared toward harmony, permits individuals to hold two contradictions at the same time in order to achieve compromise His analysis seems a brilliant appraisal of why Americans find it hard to understand nuances in our daily lives.

96 Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society*, 45–50, 57, 223. Since the 1980s, Japan, where fewer than 30 percent of the married couples have children (2005), has attempted to underscore the role of the individual. See Cave, Peter. *Primary School in Japan: Self, Individuality and Learning in Elementary Education*, New York: Routledge, 2007. Japan changed its school curriculum in 1998, with the changes going into effect in 2002. The new emphasis was on problem solving, learning to learn, creativity, and the integration of subjects. The consensus is that not a great deal has changed. I am grateful to Naomi Pollak, an American architect and architectural critic who has lived in Tokyo for many years, for her insights about how children navigate their way around the city. She pointed out that children do have buzzers on their backpacks if they need to signal someone nearby for help. Naomi Pollak, interview with author, May 27, 2013, Tokyo. Americans will, of course, see a vivid contrast with the way our society operates. In 2008, columnist Lenore Skenazy planned a route with her nine-year-old son so that he would be able to take the subway from a big department store to his Manhattan apartment, a journey of less than four miles. After writing about his successful trip, Skenazy was invited on news programs where the crawl dubbed her "America's Worst Mom." She later reported that a poll on the website of one of the channels indicated that fewer than a third of the respondents endorsed what she had done. Skenazy, Lenore. "More from America's Worst Mom." Huffington Post.com, April 4, 2008 (www.huffingtonpost.com/more-from-americas-worst-b-91675.html).

97 Chris Berthelsen (www.a-small-lab.com/), a New Zealander who has lived in Tokyo for more than a decade, has researched the city and children's roles in it. Berthelsen, telephone interview with author, June 9, 2013.

Childhood: Past and Present 1993–2019

MİNE GÖĞÜŞ TAN

Mine Göğüş Tan has presented studies, publications, and papers in the fields of the sociology of education, gender and education, critical and feminist pedagogies, oral history, and the child in social history. This article*, which she presented at the 1993 symposium Toplumsal Tarihte Çocuk (The Child in Social History), organized by the Turkey Economic and Social History Foundation (currently, History Foundation) and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, was revised and updated in February 2019 for the present volume. It presents a critical overview, from a historical perspective, of the development of the concept of childhood.

* Tan, Mine. "Çocukluk: Dün ve Bugün." [Childhood: Past and Present], in *Toplumsal Tarihte Çocuk*, *Sempozyum* [The Child in Social History, Symposium], ed. Bekir Onur, 11–30. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1994.

John Holt writes, "We constantly ask ourselves... 'What is best for the children, what is right for the children, what should we do for the children?'" (Holt, 1974: 39). According to Holt, this question, and the anxiety we feel in relation to it, is both an effect as well as a cause of modern childhood. Until the institution was invented, it would hardly have occurred to anyone to ask the question, or even if they had, to suppose that what was good for children was any different from what was good for everyone else.

That childhood is an invented institution may seem quite a strange claim for those who regard it as a natural and invariable link in the chain of life. Yet looking at different societies and stages in history, or even at different sections of the same society at the same moment, makes clear that childhood has many different meanings. It is one of those invented concepts that changes according to the knowledge, norms, and values of the current social, political, and economic situation. Right or wrong, the concept of childhood plays a determining role in a broad variety of subjects, from rights given or not given to the child in society to expected behavior, obligations, punishments, and sanctions implemented and educational models (Tan, 1989). Social policies claiming to be based on the suitability of the child's nature in these fields often fail to go beyond reflecting social images regarding that nature.

Modernity's Understanding of Childhood

The paradigm of childhood (Postman, 1983) that influenced both the psychologists of modernity—Jean Piaget, Karen Horney, Jerome Bruner, Harry Stack Sullivan, Lawrence Kohlberg—and its pedagogues—Friedrich Fröbel, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Maria Montessori, Arnold Gesell, Alexander S. Neill—is based on three basic assumptions:

- Children are different from adults (they form a special biological category)
- Children need to be prepared for adulthood (adulthood is an acquisition)
- The responsibility of raising children rests with adults.

This paradigm is fundamentally inspired by the 18th century Enlightenment and the movement of Romanticism that followed. The views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, reflected in *Emile* (1762) and described as the "Romantic approach to childhood," make two significant emphases: children are important, not for this or that particular goal, but in themselves, as they possess unique and valuable psychological qualities that are different from those of adults; and also, childhood is the closest thing to living in the natural state. According to Rousseau, the child is a wildflower whose spontaneity, naturalness, joy, and purity should be revered. Education is a process of reduction, and the adult's faults are due to faulty education. Therefore, education should be provided in a manner that does not disrupt the child's organic and natural development.

John Locke's Protestant approach imagines the child as the citizen of the future, and quite probably as a businessperson. In his book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke proposes a manner of training that will realize intellectual development and self-control according to this model. Since he perceives the mind at birth as a tabula rasa, he holds parents, teachers, and the state responsible for what will be written on this clean slate. Thus, the child's rudeness or lack of knowledge is not to be blamed on the child, but is the responsibility of adults. Locke perceives education as a process of addition, one that will shape and train the civilized adult.

In the late 19th century, John Dewey turned toward the same problem in the field of philosophy with *The School and Society* and Sigmund Freud in the field of psychology with *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Both published in 1899, these works synthesized approaches to childhood in the West from the 16th century to the 20th, and continued to shape debates over childhood thereafter.

Freud showed, within a scientific framework, that the child's mind has structure and content, and that the child's sexuality is loaded with complexities and instinctive psychic impulses that, during the process of transition to adulthood, the child strives to defeat, transcend, or suppress. In contrast to Locke, and similarly to Rousseau, Freud did not view the mind as a tabula rasa at birth. If natural realities are not taken into account, personality disorders may emerge. Yet in showing the significance of early interactions between the child and the parents in determining personality, Freud stands in opposition to Rousseau and closer to Locke.

Dewey, too, in a philosophical framework, emphasized that the psychological needs of the child be treated not in terms of the future, but as "what they are now." According to Dewey, if we strive to adopt the real instincts and needs of childhood and work toward revealing and developing them, the discipline and culture of adult life will evolve of their own accord.

These views, passed on from the 19th century to the 20th and over the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas, played a significant role in the formation of policies and educational approaches regarding children in the West. Raising children without harming their natural structure, and reconciling them with demands born of social change and development, were among the primary problems treated in this context. The modern approach to childhood was also discovered and copied in non-Western societies where traditional models were unraveling and processes of modernization and nation building were taking place. In India, China, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both the institution of the family and networks of social relationships on a wider scale were changing dramatically, and a form of consciousness raising regarding the concept of childhood was being introduced (Çiçek, 2015, 2016).

Nazan Çiçek states that the modernizing elites of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods took the Western world as their only reference point and asserts that one should not be surprised that they enthusiastically adopted this imported "proper childhood" vision. These cadres placed the child at the center of their nation-building and citizen-training projects and also, at least in terms of discourse, displayed a tendency to see the training of children by society as the touchstone in the process of modernization and civilization (2015: 24) This model of the child and childhood, which developed in the West and was internalized as part of modernization, imagined children, who were perceived in Republican Türkiye as bearers of progressive, modernist values, as innocent and fragile beings needing protection, development, and training by adults (Ertem, 2005; Çiçek, 2015).

But the concept of modern childhood was, in fact, never implemented uniformly across the Western world, and thus it didn't result in late-period Ottoman elites completely rejecting existing practices. The result was rather an understanding of childhood that displayed highly hybrid forms amid unique social dynamics, critiques of tradition, and pangs of modernization (Çiçek, 2016). This chaos of conceptualization was reflected in myriad differences in real childhood experiences during Republican modernization. Mine G. Tan, Özlem Şahin, Mustafa Sever, and Aksu Bora's *Cumhuriyet'te Çocuktular* (Children of Early Republic, 2007), an oral history study aiming to understand childhood

in the founding period of the Republic, conducted with individuals who were in primary school during those years, displays these differences that ramify along the dimensions of gender, social class, rural-urban, geographical area, and ethnicity.

Özge Ertem (2005) has drawn attention to how boys versus girls and middle-class versus poor children were represented, depicted, and defined in images and values ascribed to children in children's magazines, focusing on discourses related to both the public and the political, and the family and household life.

Yahya Araz's 2016 study on childhood, child marriages, and the age of consent in Ottoman Istanbul constitutes an interesting example in terms of both the conceptualization of childhood in Islam and moments of inclusion of 19th century modernization processes regarding this conceptualization. Under Islamic-Ottoman law, for girls, puberty was reached when the first menstrual bleeding took place, such that a nine-year-old girl could be considered to have reached puberty, whereas the lower age threshold for boys' puberty was twelve. In legal parlance and social practice, marriages of girls between nine and fifteen years of age who had reached puberty were not technically "child marriages," but marriages of girls who were in the same age range but had not reached puberty were. Marrying female children who had not yet reached puberty to adult males was a practice acceptable for all social and economic layers of society, but according to Araz, by the end of the 19th century, the previously existing social consensus regarding the marrying of female children had begun to wither. It was no longer considered "ordinary" and was indeed rebuked: "During this period, the perception of physical maturity, which female children were thought to require for marriage, would be extended to the period after puberty. Physical maturity would now be thought along with the pregnancy of the girl to be married and the healthy birth of the child. Added to this was the completion of social maturity and the development of the sense of responsibility; and marriage would transform from being a 'simple' matter for families into a social matter that required scrupulous attention" (49).

Philippe Ariès and the History of Childhood

The first work to put forth childhood as not only a biological phenomenon but also a social category, and therefore subject to historical processes, was the pioneering *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life) by the renowned French demographer and social historian Philippe Ariès, published in 1960. Not only that, Ariès set out to prove that the concept of childhood was unknown before the 15th, perhaps even 16th century.

What Ariès was actually examining was the contemporary family, but he felt a need to look at the distant past in order to assess the unique characteristics of this type of family. He was interested less in the reality of family—descriptions of behaviors, or laws that regulated it—than in its evolution. He had established a link between the idea of childhood and the idea of family, and in this way sought to comprehend one with the help of the other, and focus on them together. He had determined that art had negated the morphology of the child in almost all ancient civilizations. It was only in Ancient Greece that childhood was depicted realistically—for instance the descriptions of Eros—but by the transition to the Roman period, it was completely erased from the iconography, along with other Hellenistic themes.

Ariès ascertained that in the 10 century, artists visualized children only as miniature adults. In order to follow the progress from such lack of knowledge regarding childhood to the child-centered family of the 19th century, he presented wide-ranging, detailed, and historical examples reflecting the concept of childhood not only in art, but also in language, literature, clothes, games, and school.

For instance, he established that in the distant past, there were no special words to define children. Until the 18th century, *puer* (boy) and "adolescent" were used indiscriminately, and *enfant* in place of both. The word "baby" in English could also be used for older children. When "baby," used in 16th and 17th century England for school-age children, was adapted by the French in the 19th century as *bébé*, it had become a designation for very young children. Ariès also observed that in the early 18th century, the Furetière dictionary defined "child" as a term of friendship, sincerity, and encouragement.

Until the 17th century, and even later among lower-income groups, the concept of childhood was enveloped in the concept of dependency: for an individual to leave childhood, they would have to overcome economic dependency. Terms related to childhood like *valet*, *garçon*, *fils*, and so on were used also, in everyday language, to address those in the lower segments of feudal hierarchy, including servants who were constantly subject to clarify lackeys, journeymen, or soldiers. Soldiers fighting at the front lines at war were known as the lost boys (26). In a sense, children were perceived as a class of temporary servants in a stage of apprenticeship that prepared them for adulthood. In France, for instance, table service was not considered degrading labor. Young nobles learned it, like many other lines of work, as an art.

In conclusion, Ariès asserted that medieval French society was not that interested in the image of the child, and that childhood was a transition period that started quickly and was forgotten equally quickly, in real life as in aesthetics. This indifference, in his estimation, was a direct and inevitable consequence of the demography of the Middle Ages (39). In a society where a high infant mortality rate ran parallel to a high fertility rate, people could not develop much of an emotional tie to what they perceived as a "probable loss of life." Per Ariès, the discovery process of childhood began in the 13th century, and its impressions were then visible in the art history of the 15th and 16th centuries: "From the 14th century on, there had been a tendency to express in art, iconography and religion, the personality which children were seen to possess," which also overlapped with our current understanding (129). By the 15th and 16th centuries, in paintings like baby Jesus cradled by Mary, which glorified the mother-child relationship, reflections similar to the concept of the modern child were notable.

Intense interest in children in painting, the development of a special language defining children and childhood, the design and production of toys expressly for children, the division of adults' and children's games, and the emergence of the first children's clothes, according to Ariès, all happened in the 17th century. The modern concept of childhood was a phenomenon fundamentally unique to the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, and at first included only male children: "The children of the lower classes, the offspring of the peasants and the artisans... went on wearing the same clothes as adults... They kept up the old way of life which made no distinction between children and adults, in dress or in work or in play" (61).

When he said that the idea of childhood didn't exist in medieval society, Ariès emphasized that this didn't mean that children were neglected, forsaken, or despised. Rather, there was no awareness

that childhood might have its own unique qualities, its own nature, and that these qualities distinguished the child from the adult, and even from the young adult: "In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society" (128).

Besides, he thought that medieval adult society appeared rather puerile to us today, and argued that this was a matter not only of mental age but also physical age—in other words, the fact that this community was "partly made up of children and youths." One frequently comes across children in corners of medieval group paintings, either embracing the necks of women, fulfilling their duty as the servants of knights at traditional festivals, or serving as apprentices. It was considered favorable for children to gamble and play card games. And from mother-of-pearl inlays to engravings, from tapestries to calendars, one sees adults playing blind man's buff, hide and seek, snowball, and tag.

Ariès observed that the concept of childhood developed in two distinct aspects. Particularly in bourgeois family circles, an understanding dominated that children were beings to be loved and caressed. But the concept of childhood took a different form in circles other than the family—for instance, from a time before the 16th century, certain clergy, and starting in the 17th century, jurists and moralists. The moralists aimed to develop disciplinarian and rationalist behavior, and were interested in the phenomenon of childhood, but did not see children as sympathetic toys, as noble circles did. The view which imagined the child as a fragile creature of God, needing protection and correction, was also reflected, in time, in family life (133). And in the 18th century, to the childhood approach of the family, a third and new component that emphasized physical health and hygiene was added. From this point on, it was not only the future, but everything about the existence of the child, that became a matter of interest. The child had taken its place at the center of the family.

Ariès also examined the conceptualization of childhood education, and accepted that both the age groups of the Neolithic period and the concept of *paidea* (education, teaching, youth, childhood) presupposed a difference and transition between the world of children and that of adults, a transition made by means of initiation or education.[2] Medieval civilization failed to perceive this difference and thus lacked this concept of transition (412). Therefore Ariès perceived the revival at the beginning of the modern era of an interest in education as the real reason for the transformation in the history of the child. According to him, this development was the product of the 17th-century Moralists, whose roots extended back to Jean Gerson, the reformists of Paris University in the 15th century, and the founders of the *collèges (*religious schools) in the late Middle Ages. In contrast with the Humanists, who adopted a view of general culture that covered life in total and weren't too concerned with education unique to children, Moralists highlighted the education of children within their efforts to moralize society. The child was no longer a *poupart* (small puppet), *bambino* (baby), or cute, comical creature to be affectionately played with however one wished. According to Ariès, the Moralists emphasized the purity and weaknesses of childhood, and tasked adults with protecting the first and reinforcing the second.

Moral discipline required that the child be protected from the putrid world of adults, and that the child pass through a special kind of operation—a kind of quarantine—to enter into this world. Parents were charged with significant tasks in this respect, and were taught that they were responsible of the souls and bodies of children. The family was no longer an institution that merely enabled the passing on of a name and property; now it assumed moral and spiritual functions. The preparation of children for life, too, had been transformed from random training into a process subject to a special kind of knowledge. The training of children, as in medieval times, by working as apprentices of adults and living in other people's homes from the age of seven on, was not in keeping with this approach. The new approach to education was based on the classical teaching model of the *collèges*, which aimed to provide a cultural level based on the fear of God. In the Middle Ages, the school was a place specific to clergy—young or old—and in this way, it became the platform of presenting an individual to society, and the transition from childhood to adulthood. Concerned about children succumbing to the weaknesses in their nature, parents enthusiastically accepted this. According to Ariès, family and school had linked up to succeed in taking the child out of the society of adults.

Ariès discovered the most distinct difference between medieval schools and modern schools in the introduction of discipline in the latter (333). Discipline brought not only tighter control and supervision within the school, but the need for an increasingly longer period of attendance. In this manner, it also extended the duration of childhood, isolating it in prison-like schools and replacing applied education with institutional education. Educational stages, which were preparation processes necessary for the transition to adulthood, resulted in lesser trust placed in the abilities of the child. The separation of classes blocked children from learning things from other children who were older and more intelligent, and prevented each child from discovering at her or his own speed. Following the hierarchical organization of education in accordance with calendar age, an understanding of various divisions within childhood, or youth, evolved. The concept of childhood, used as a category of human beings that required the teaching of reading, now began to be perceived as a different, special, and unique category in other aspects as well.[3]

Influences of Ariès

Ariès's work rescued children from their invisibility in history and came to be considered the year zero of childhood history studies, inspiring productive debates. Certain historians' interest in weak, silent, and passive masses and social sections, disregarded by traditional history, now also zeroed in on children. The new social historians, believing that history must be something other than the history of elites, included children in their attempts to write history in a manner that enveloped the experiences of all human groups regardless of social class, race, gender, religion, culture, or age (Hiner and Hawes, 1985). From this viewpoint, it emerged that children were not a weak and ineffective category, as previously thought, and that they could not be ignored, even in the quantitative sense. One of the most important reasons for this interest in the United States, a country where children's history studies first began, was the post–World War II "baby boom."

These developments brought into focus changes of adult attitudes regarding children and childhood; patterns in children's living spaces (home, school, street); social indicators that determine the duration and influences of childhood; the subjective experience and meaning of being a child; the social, economic, and psychological functions of children, for instance the contribution of the child workforce to the economy and children as a category of consumers; and reflections of

children in artistic, folkloric, and cultural products. The development of studies in the fields of family history, educational history, labor history, and women's history enriched knowledge regarding the past of children.[4] Psychohistory, the psychological dimension of human experience in the past, and the orientation toward history not through rational, pragmatic, or materialist models but in the framework of unique, singular, and subjective experiences and micro-scales, helped children, who have always been a part of such experiences, to emerge in focus in their different dimensions. The renowned child-developmental psychologist and psycho-historian Erik Erikson believed in examining children "not as a mirror or creature but as a creator of culture and in this sense, a dynamic force in their own right," which reflected cultural themes (Demos, 1971).

The relationship between childhood, school, and the middle class has been thoroughly treated in historical context by various authors. The economies of the medieval age, for instance, forced children to share the realities of life at very early ages, including its forms of residence and its traditions of apprenticeship, servitude, art, and skills training. Historians looking at children in medieval portraits who appear elderly and are dressed in adult attire sought an answer to the question: "Were there no children during those days?"[5] According to Lloyd DeMause (1974), who was among those who shared Ariès's modernist, progressive view, the history of childhood is full of nightmares we have only just begun to get rid of; as one retreats back in history, childcare regresses, and examples of murder, abandonment, beatings, torture, and abuse increase. DeMause found the primary source of historical change in each successive generation of parents, who, having immersed themselves in the psychic age of their children, analyzed much better the anxieties of that age than in their own childhood. He believed that each generation of parents progressed further than the previous one in terms of their love of children, and knowledge and skills regarding childcare; therefore, their contribution to social development was at a higher level. But DeMause's optimist psychological theory that claimed parent-child relationships formed an independent source of historical change found little favor among social scientists (Hiner and Hawes, 1985).

A follower of Ariès, Jean Gèlis (1986), linked the reshaping of relationships between parents and children toward the end of the 15th century to the dissolution of former forms of solidarity, for instance the interests of the husband and wife gradually separating from more distant relations, and those of the individual from those of the group. According to Gèlis, in the medieval naturalist philosophy of life that continued to dominate in parts of Europe until the 19th century, the family was in fact a whole composed of both the living and the dead, and the child was the ring that provided the continuity of this totality. In this social context where the rural lifestyle dominated, the source of all abundance and especially the rejuvenation of humankind was Mother Earth. Spirits of the ancestors, under the earth, waited with the hope of being reborn as grandchildren. Adults of reproductive age formed the link between past and future.

Within this kind of life and generational continuity, the child was considered an extension of communal stock, and belonged, as much as its parents did, to its ancestors as part of a collective body. The birth of the child took place in the room where its parents lived, yet in front of the eyes of relatives and neighbors. Its first steps in the cemetery or the church courtyard took place within the framework of the rituals that emphasized the ties between the child and its ancestors. The raising of the child, its games, its relationships with its peers and adults, its rules, and its learning of farming, embroidery, cooking, or animal breeding would take place with the contribution of the whole community, not just its parents.

With the Renaissance, a change, albeit slow, began to take place in this cultural and intellectual environment. According to Gèlis, the most significant sign of change was the determination, increasingly displayed, to protect the life of the child. This attitude, which spread in cities in the second half of the 16th century, was reflected in parents caring more for the health of their children and protecting them from death at an early age.

Gèlis believed that the human effort to extend the life span and cure pain with the help of specialists wasn't new, but had shown an increase in the 17th century as a sign of changes regarding the perception of the self and the body (695). According to this, the independence of the individual who, in the modern age, began to shed his or her former dependencies was sensed via the increasing independence of the body. Previously considered dependent on others, the body now belonged to the individual. Since it was known to be mortal, it had to be saved from illness and pain, and extended via children, the gift of life. Parents now perceived and loved the child less as a part of a community made up of the living and the dead, and more as an integral part of a life of their small, tightly knit family. The circular life cycle was replaced by linear existences that followed one another successively in time.

According to Gèlis, the change did not always follow the same course, nor was its speed the same everywhere. The new family model was first accepted among urban elites, and it was adopted in large trade centers before smaller cities. While it spread through Italian cities as early as the fourteenth century, it did not come about until the sixteenth century in England and France. The transition from communal, open, and general education that taught the child familial values in order to integrate them into the community toward scholastic general education, which treated integration along with the development of the child's skills, took place simultaneously with transformations in the family. Parents preferred to leave this task to specially trained third parties, namely teachers and educators, because they could not provide an alternative to the education once provided by the community (694–97). This was what the contradiction between the child's specialization within the nuclear family and education being provided outside the family was about.

Dissolution of the Paradigm of Modernist Childhood

Like all major theories that began to lose their spell in the early 1970s after the publication of Thomas Kuhn's views (1962), the paradigm of modernist childhood, once thought to be made up of the most unshakable and permanent knowledge accumulated in the field, faced reexamination through interdisciplinary approaches. Research in psychology, economy, sociology, social policy, medicine, religion, and law, and also anthropological and ethnological studies, novels, memories, and autobiographies, provided these debates with new insights and fuel. An examination of the past of childhood required reconsideration of not only children, and not just parent-child relationships, but, in a sense, the entire social-economic-cultural reality (Tan, 1989).

Some authors described Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* as an "example of high rhetoric" and accused the author of randomly and uncritically using data (Spagnoli, 1981). Linda Pollock (1983)

revealed, drawing from memoirs of the period that Ariès examined, that the difference between child and adult, and the idea that the child had to be treated differently, was already in effect. Ross W. Beales Jr. (1985) argued that the Ariès paradigm could not be applied to the US experience partly because US history was relatively short, and differed too much from the English and French experiences.

Yet other authors opposed Ariès's idealism, noting that he based his understanding of modern childhood on the views of a small minority of 16th century pedagogues and moralists. According to their view, it was not possible to understand ideas and concepts independently of certain socioeconomic needs and interests. Like modern childhood, school, too, was an institution based on class foundations and served as a response to the requirements of the division of work, industrialization, and urbanization brought on by the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

The surplus wealth of the middle classes allowed for children to be used in the context of conspicuous consumption. A part of the finances once used for large houses, for instance to add rooms in order to provide privacy or to have family portraits painted, was now used for children's education and clothing (Du Boulay, 1970). Another century had to pass until the idea of childhood reached the children of the working class, who were laboring in mines, factories, and workshops. Photographs taken in London or Paris of the Victorian Era led to observations regarding working-class children seen in the dilapidated clothes of their parents: "We know they drink, gamble, have sex and in fact, take part in every aspect of adult life; it was impossible for them to physically escape this life" (Plumb, 1972: 26).

Shulamith Firestone, in her classic feminist work *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), added a gender dimension to class analysis, writing that the first to be included in the category of childhood were the male children of the middle classes. For the *nouveau riche*, who wanted to keep wealth in the family, male children were the first to wear children's clothes, and also the first to undergo lengthy and isolated education in preparation for adult life, whereas female children and the male children of the working class, who were never really included in the concept of adulthood, were seen as worthy of special attire only much later, and for many centuries could not attend school, either.

Firestone shared Ariès's view of the discovery of childhood during modernity and its acceptance as a separate category, but she also thought that in modern society, children had now entered a period of extreme pressure and surveillance. With the development of empirical science and the bourgeoisie, childhood had been adjoined to the concept of the "family" and thus earned a status in its own right, and while this new approach added an exaggerated aura of innocence and dependency to childhood, it also brought discrimination and repression. The aim of this type of separation was to isolate children from their freedom and keep them under control and pressure in areas such as nurseries, schools, and parks.

Firestone believed that the period described as childhood corresponded to a myth, and a thoroughly disparaging one, and that for children to develop happiness and all their potential, the current understanding of childhood had to be wiped out. Besides, the gradual transformation of children into fetishistic objects in the discourse of modern society also resulted in an unprecedented burden on women at a time when they had only just acquired rights outside the home. For this reason, Firestone argued for the abolishment of not only childhood but also motherhood.

Yet others thought that a break of childhood from adulthood could result in the development as a new sociopolitical class of child-youths who would fight not only for economic progress but also for humanistic progress (Mendel, 1971). According to this, for reasons such as the separation of the life and activity areas of child-youths and adults, obligatory school enrollment, the extension of the school age, and specialization unique to the time of technological revolution, the mass group formed of the same age group would complete the conditions necessary to become such a class. As the world in which adults had grown up was dissolving before their very eyes, social-cultural institutions and concepts based on the principle of the primacy of authority/age were also dissipating before the principle of productivity/performance. Just as workers who know their interests and power gather together in a factory and develop their class consciousness, it could be expected that youths gathered together at school would develop their own ideology and age-related class consciousness against the adults and conceive a new, unique, reciprocal interaction between child-youths and adults. The spread and aggravation of generational clashes, the increase of parental education, and publications and programs targeting parents could be considered evidence of this.

In the 1980s, Neil Postman (1982) introduced the concept of "the disappearance of childhood." Postman was among those who argued that the invention of childhood was among the most important discoveries of the Renaissance, and perhaps its most humane. His view was that childhood, whether as a social construct or a psychological state, emerged in the 16th century along with science, the nation-state, and religious freedom, and developed and progressed ever since. According to him, it was the printing press that invented childhood, because the printing press created a new, symbolic world, laying down the border that separated the adult from the child: entry into the field of abstract knowledge had been linked to literacy, and thus adulthood had become not a biological but a symbolic acquisition, while education had been matched with the concept of the modern school. The printing press and school meant that control over the symbolic environment of the child had increased, and the conditions of control and transition of the child into adulthood were held by adults. According to Postman, in countries where literacy held great importance (for instance England), both the opening of schools and the development of the concept of childhood took place much faster than in other societies. Besides, although "childhood" effectively ended at age seven in the traditional apprenticeship system, organized formal education had helped extend the period during which children were withheld from the demands and responsibilities of the world of adults (Pinchbeck and Hewitt, 1969).

But Postman, departing from the assumption that the best historiography is written after the events have ended and the fire has died down, attributed the great interest shown in children's history studies after the 1960s to the fact that childhood was now disappearing. According to his view, like all social constructs, it was not inevitable that the idea of childhood would persist. Differences between children and adults, from clothes to language, behavior, mannerisms, and expectations, had seriously decreased. Postman argued that ironically, this development corresponded to the mid-19th century, when invented approaches to childhood had spread dramatically. The transition to electronic mass communications—especially television—that began in 1850 with the invention of the telegraph meant that communication was transformed from the local and personal into the interpersonal and global, changing the quality, quantity, flow, and reception of information, and tearing the control of the symbolic environment away from the confines of the home and school. Media replaced analyt-

ical skills with primary perceptions, symbolizing the collapse of intellectual social hierarchies and, in a sense, lifting the differences between the categories of child and adult, effecting a return to the communication environment of the 14th and 15th centuries. According to Postman, this environment was one where secrets disappeared, such that the violence, boredom, decay, corruption, and insecurities of the adult world were exhibited and shared to the utmost, children were used in the sexual fantasies of adults, and consumption madness was effectively transferred to children (91–96). The child had accessed the forbidden fruit of adult knowledge and had thus been expelled from the garden of childhood, while the adult had become more like a child.

The childification of adult taste is evident today in certain clothes, fast food, and the interest expressed in graphic novels and animations, science-fiction, and fantastic films once designed for children. As the investment of adults in electronic games once designed for kids —Sega, Nintendo, Game Boy— increased, it was simultaneously observed that children, for their part, departed more and more from unsupervised games and shifted toward competitive and organized games (İnal, 1993). The phenomenon of game shows that expect adults to perform like children and children to perform like adults, and of course increases in serious criminal offenses, pregnancy, prostitution rates, and drug and alcohol dependencies among the young and children, are also significant in this respect.

In Conclusion: Postmodern Childhood

By the 1990s, the importance of children as agents in the social construction of childhood was in focus. The increase of knowledge in the field of reciprocal communication in the social sciences had disclosed that relationships between children and adults consisted not only of unilateral relationships of authority, and that children, too, with their individual and group reactions, influence the behavior and experiences of adults.

Developments toward realizing and understanding the role and voices of children in determining their worldviews opened new space for theories questioning a single and common conceptualization of childhood, and despite all the impacts of globalization, ushered in a belief in multiple understandings and experiences of childhood across cultures and even within the same culture. Education and learning began to be seen as an activity of collaboration and communication, where children construct knowledge along with adults and other children. Children shed their passive dependency on adults, and are elevated to the status of social actors and partners. In a world where personal relationships have become more and more fragile, and threats of hunger, violence, impoverishment, war, and displacement have increased, these approaches coexist with discourses defending the vulnerability of children, their needs for protection, and their rights for empowerment. In this new period, although it is accepted that children have certain common biological characteristics, the idea that it would be more meaningful to focus on their differences rather than similarities was adopted, and is thought to lead to more illuminating outcomes.

As it was during the same time that technology increased means of communication with multimedia and web-based information flows, global trends began to exert pressure on children who had eliminated their parents. Their entry into a wider social communication network through social media created significant changes in the lives of children, while parents met their loss of power and control with fears of dissolution and radicalization (Long, 2017).

The access of children to computers and an unbridled flow of information was also among the most significant outcomes of postmodernism in education. Modernists believed that science would provide the progress necessary for a better future, and initially regarded the means technology brought to education with great optimism. But in time, this optimism evolved into concerns and a loss of confidence in the irrepressible advent of "aggressive capitalism," the globalization of mass consumption culture, the questioning of the pressures and exclusions of modernism, the withdrawal of values to private fields, and the allocation of the public sphere and education to digital coding and measurement (Lather, 1991; Lankshear, Peters, and Knobel, 2000; Dreyfus, 2008; Livingstone, 2009, 2012; Turkle, 2011; Meynert, 2015).

In the postmodern environment, where new media technologies capture children and fundamental institutions like the traditional family and the authoritarian school are shaken, it is difficult to hew to the assumptions mentioned at the start of this article. In this context, it is impossible for either the innocence of children and their difference from and dependency on adults, or the guidance of adults in the raising of the child, to retain their former meanings. The apprenticeship period to prepare for adulthood is replaced by a concept of *kinderculture* (children's culture), where children are completely exposed to pop culture and economic exploitation (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2004).

In conclusion, we can summarize the childhood paradigm of the 2000s, which involves approaches of multiple childhoods, a more dynamic child, a more flexible pedagogy, and a more sensitive research, as follows (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2007; James and Prout, 2007):

- Childhood is a social concept. In contrast to biological immaturity, it emerges not as a natural and universal characteristic of human beings, but as a certain structural, cultural, and variable component of various societies.
- It is impossible to examine childhood as independent from variables such as social class, ethnicity, and gender. Comparative and intercultural analyses show that there are, rather than a single and universal phenomenon of childhood, various childhoods. In the same time period, and even in the same society, different and contradicting understandings of childhood can coexist. [6]
- Children aren't passive subjects of social structures and processes. They play an active role in the construction and fate of their selves, the people around them, and their societies.
- Ethnography is an important method of research on children. It enables children to participate and make their voices heard in the production of sociological data.
- Advancing new paradigms about childhood means contributing to the reconstruction process of childhood in society, and being influenced by these processes.

NOTES

1 Since in the Quran and according to Sunnah, the child is not considered responsible until puberty, it is observed that Islamic thinkers, from the very beginning, treated matters related to children as an independent, broad, and detailed field of examination. The transition from childhood (*tufuliyyet*) to adulthood was dependent on the realization of certain biological conditions. The hadith stating that "there is no legal responsibility for… children until they reach puberty" is significant in this context. Although the period during which a child requires guardianship is determined to be from birth to puberty, each stage therein is not considered equivalent. According to the nature of the service and protection provided to the child, the duration from the period of breastfeeding to the age of *temyiz*, and the period from *temyiz* to puberty, are treated separately. The stages of childhood—from birth to weaning, then from weaning to age seven, seven to ten, and ten to fifteen—are given different names. While children up to the age of seven are considered not yet pubescent and not mentally responsible and thus excluded from criminal responsibility, children from the age of seven to fifteen are subject to punishment and training known as *tazir*. In particular, the acquisition of the skill of language or oral expression bears importance. Because *temyiz* is generally defined as the stage when the child can, in a consistent manner, correctly understand what it is being told and accurately respond (starting, on average, at seven) (see Canan 1980; Giladi 1989; Bilgin 1992), adulthood is not a state that comes about totally of its own accord, but is rather an acquisition that results from a certain preparation and training. And the primary responsibility in this acquisition, as laid out in all details, belongs to adults. The fact that female children are generally not mentioned in hadith, and therefore to what extent such regulations can be implemented regarding them, is a special matter of interest. On the other hand, it is not known how religious approaches regarding children are reflected in practice, and how this practice changes according to time and place. Research conducted by Hasan Ünder and İsmail Güven at the Karşıyaka and Cebeci cemeteries in Ankara has shown that children up to the age of six or seven were buried in the children's section of the Karşıyaka Cemetery (Ünder and Güven 1992). On the other hand, the same study states that children even younger than seven could be buried in areas where adults were buried. The researchers concluded that a children's cemetery is more of a "poor children's cemetery." The fact that many graves in the children's cemetery have no structures or are surrounded by simple stones, and that burial plot prices here are approximately one tenth of those in other sections, reinforces this view. However, both the architectural structures and the inscriptions of children's graves in the same section as adults show to what extent a differentiation can be observed in terms of concepts of childhood and their expression in different social sections.

2 Avner Giladi (1989) explains the rich and detailed knowledge Islamic civilization possesses about the child's physical development, psychology, and the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses through the fact that it is based, to a great extent, on Hellenistic roots; by translating paediatric, pedagogic, and ethical works and internalizing them into their own textures of knowledge, Muslims rendered them a part of their own culture. However, the fact that the dictionary of Ibn Sidah contains around forty terms defining, in Arabic, babies, children, and events related to their development suggests that the roots of the awareness regarding children and their development may be concealed in local Arab culture (Tan 1994).

3 Even names given to children had changed to reflect the new status of the child. Instead of the medieval tradition of giving all siblings the same name, a separate name began to be given to each child, chosen often in relation to the expectations of the parents.

4 Here it is necessary to point out that in the distant past, those who focused on women's history paid no special interest to children's history. Despite the historical togetherness of women and children, it is a relatively new development for historians of women's issues to focus also on children.

5 On the other hand, according to Monica Kiefer, 18th century colonial-period children were still immersed in the adult environment. Since they were expected to act like adults, it was logical for them to wear clothes suitable to that role (Hiner and Hawes 1985, 7).

6 It has been established that, in the 16th century, while the interest of parents in child health did increase, the rates of leaving children with foster mothers and abandonment also swelled. Moralists and doctors were against this practice, which the parents perceived as a temporary separation but often resulted in the baby's death. Wealthy urban dwellers sustained this tradition, albeit for different reasons than feudal elites (Gèlis 1986, 87). Differentiation in understandings of childhood should not be considered as indicators of love for children in different social or historical moments. We don't know whether love of children was lower compared to the moderns at historical periods or in social sections where rates of birth and infant mortality were exceedingly high. The expression of feelings toward children can vary, as in all other practices regarding children, according to environmental, cultural, and historical factors. In his 1979 study *The Child in Our Traditional Culture*, Sedat V. Örnek shows how such different attitudes are reflected in reactions to a child's death. For instance, in addition to laments voicing the pain of the mother who has lost her child, one also comes across "a resistance that considers it a shame to lament and moan and cry after a deceased child," as seen in statements such as, "Here in our area, brides who lose their child do not cry and wail, let alone lament. They are embarrassed to cry in front of their elders; they cry their tears inside," or, "It is considered a shame to cry after children. Especially a bride who has a father-in-law or a mother-in-law most definitely won't cry after her child, if she does, they shall not see their child on judgment day, their child will be left in the waters," or, "No lament is sung for the dead child, it is a great sin. You shouldn't even cry… In the afterlife, your child will be your intercessor" (18)

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Youth in the City

1909

JANE ADDAMS

Jane Addams was a social reformer, supporter of peace, defender of women's rights, and founder of Hull House, an institution launched in 1889 dedicated to improving conditions in impoverished neighborhoods of Chicago. It would go on to form a model for other social aid centers in the United States. Hull House emphasized the importance of children in the Americanization process for new immigrants. This philosophy both encouraged the Playground Movement and supported research on leisure, youth, and human services. In her book about this philosophy, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909), a chapter of which we include here, Adams claims that cities have the capacity to destroy the spirit of youth, and that play and recreation programs are thus necessary.

* Addams, Jane. "Youth and the City." in *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, 3-21, 1909; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1915; first published in 1909.

Nothing is more certain than that each generation longs for a reassurance as to the value and charm of life, and is secretly afraid lest it lose its sense of the youth of the earth, This is doubtless one reason why it so passionately cherishes its poets and artists who have been able to explore for themselves and to reveal to others the perpetual springs of life's self-renewal.

And yet the average man cannot obtain this desired reassurance through literature, nor yet through glimpses of earth and sky. It can come to him only through the chance embodiment of joy and youth which life itself may throw in his way. It is doubtless true that for the mass of men the message is never so unchallenged and so invincible as when embodied in youth itself. One generation after another has depended upon its young to equip it with gaiety and enthusiasm, to persuade it that living is a pleasure, until men everywhere have anxiously provided channels through which this wine of life might flow, and be preserved for their delight. The classical city promoted play with careful solicitude, building the theater and stadium as it built the market place and the temple. The Greeks held their games so integral a part of religion and patriotism that they came to expect from their poets the highest utterances at the very moments when the sense of pleasure released the national life. In the medieval city the knights held their tourneys, the guilds their pageants, the people their dances, and the church made festival for its most cherished saints with gay street processions, and presented a drama in which no less a theme than the history of creation become a matter of thrilling interest. Only in the modern city have men concluded that it is no longer necessary for the municipality to provide for the insatiable desire for play. In so far as they have acted upon this conclusion, they have entered upon a most difficult and dangerous experiment; and this at the very moment when the city has become distinctly industrial, and daily labor is continually more monotonous and subdivided. We forget how new the modern city is, and how short the span of time in which we have assumed that we can eliminate public provision for recreation.

A further difficulty lies in the fact that this industrialism has gathered together multitudes of eager young creatures from all quarters of the earth as a labor supply for the

countless factories and workshops, upon which the present industrial city is based. Never before in civilization have such numbers of young girls been suddenly released from the protection of the home and permitted to walk unattended upon city streets and to work under alien roofs; for the first time they are being prized more for their labor power than for their innocence, their tender beauty, their ephemeral gaiety. Society cares more for the products they manufacture than for their immemorial ability to reaffirm the charm of existence. Never before have such numbers of young boys earned money independently of the family life, and felt themselves free to spend it as they choose in the midst of vice deliberately disguised as pleasured.

This stupid experiment of organizing work and failing to organize play has, of course, brought about a fine revenge. The love of pleasure will not be denied, and when it has turned into all sorts of malignant and vicious appetites, then we, the middle aged, grow quite distracted and resort to all sorts of restrictive measures. We even try to dam up the sweet fountain itself because we are affrighted by these neglected streams; but almost worse than the restrictive measures is our apparent belief that the city itself has no obligation in the matter, an assumption upon which the modern city turns over to commercialism practically all the provisions for public recreation.

Quite as one set of men has organized the young people into industrial enterprises order to profit from their toil, so another set of men and also of women, I am sorry to say, have entered the neglected field of recreation and have organized enterprises which make profit out of this invincible love of pleasure.

In every city arise so-called "places"—"gin palaces," they are called in fiction; in Chicago we euphemistically say merely "places,"— in which alcohol is dispensed, not to allay thirst, but, ostensibly to stimulate gaiety, it is sold really in order to empty pockets. Huge dance halls are opened to which hundreds of young people are attracted, many of whom stand wistfully outside a roped circle, for it requires five cents to procure within it for five minutes the sense of allurement and intoxication which is sold in lieu of innocent pleasure. These coarse and illicit merrymaking remind one of the unrestrained jollities of Restoration London, and they are indeed their direct descendants, properly commercialized, still confusing joy with lust, and gaiety with debauchery. Since the soldiers of Crumwell shut up the people's playhouses and destroyed their pleasure fields, the Anglo-Saxon city has turned over the provision for public recreation to the most evil-minded and the most unscrupulous members of the community. We see thousands of girls walking up and down the streets on a pleasant evening with no chance to catch a sight of pleasure even through a lighted window, save as these lurid places provide it. Apparently the modern city sees in these girls only two possibilities, both of them commercial: first, a chance to utilize by day their new and tender labor power in its factories and shops, and then another chance in the evening to extract from them their petty wages by pandering to their love of pleasure.

As these overworked girls stream along the street, the rest of us see only the self-conscious walk, the giggling speech, the preposterous clothing. And yet through the

huge hat, with its wilderness of bedraggled feathers, the girl announces to the world that she is here. She demands attention to the fat of her existence, she states that she is ready to live, to take her place in the world. The most precious moment in human development is the young creature's assertion that he is unlike any other human being, and has an individual contribution to make to the world. The variation from the established type is at the root of all change, the only possible basis for progress, all that keeps life from growing unprofitably stale and repetitious.

Is it only the artists who really see these young creatures as they are—the artists who are themselves endowed with immortal youth! Is it our disregard of the artist's message which makes us so blind and so stupid, or are we so under the influence of our Zeitgeist that we can detect only commercial values in the young as well as in the old! It is as if our eyes were holden to the mystic beauty, the redemptive joy, the civic pride which these multitudes of young people might supply to our dingy towns.

The young creatures themselves piteously look all about them in order to find an adequate means of expression for their most precious message: One day a serious young man came to Hull-House with his pretty young sister who, he explained, wanted to go somewhere every single evening, "although she could only give the flimsy excuse that the flat was too little and too stuffy to stay in." In the difficult rôle of elder brother, he had done his best, stating that he had taken her "to all the missions in the neighborhood, that she had had a chance to listen to some awful good sermons and to some elegant hymns, but that some way she did not seem to care for the society of the best Christian people." The little sister reddened painfully under this cruel indictment and could offer no word of excuse, but a curious thing happened to me. Perhaps it was the phrase "the best Christian people," perhaps it was the delicate color of her flushing cheeks and her swimming eyes, but certain it is, that instantly and vividly there appeared to my mind the delicately tinted piece of wall in a Roman catacomb where the early Christians, through a dozen devices of spring flowers, skipping lambs and a shepherd tenderly guiding the young, had indelibly written down that the Christian message is one of inexpressible joy. Who is responsible for forgetting this message delivered by "the best Christian people" two thousand years ago? Who is to blame that the lambs, the little ewe lambs, have been so caught upon the brambles?

But quite as the modern city wastes this most valuable moment in the life of the girl, and drives into all sorts of absurd and obscure expressions her love and yearning towards the world in which she forecasts her destiny, so it often drives the boy into gambling and drinking in order to find his adventure.

Of Lincoln's enlistment of two and a half million soldiers, a very large number were under twenty-one, some of them under eighteen, and still others were mere children under fifteen. Even in those stirring times when patriotism and high resolve were at the flood, no one responded as did "the boys," and the great soul who yearned over them, who refused to shoot the sentinels who slept the sleep of childhood, knew, as no one else knew, the precious glowing stuff of which his army was made. But what of the millions of boys

who are now searching for adventurous action, longing to fulfill the same high purpose!

One of the most pathetic sights in the public dance hall of Chicago is the number of young men, obviously honest young fellows from the country, who stand about vainly hoping to make the acquaintance of some "nice girl." They look eagerly up and down the rows of girls, many of whom are drawn to the hall by the same keen desire for pleasure and social intercourse which the lonely young men themselves feel.

One Sunday night at twelve o'clock I had occasion to go into a large public dance hall. As I was standing by the rail looking for the girl I had come to find, a young man approached me and quite simply asked me to introduce him to some "nice girl," saying that he did not know any one there. On my replying that a public dance hall was not the best place in which to look for a nice girl, he said: "But I don't know any other place where there is a chance to meet any kind of a girl. I'm awfully lonesome since I came to Chicago." And then he added rather defiantly: "Some nice girls do come here! It's one of the best halls in town." He was voicing the "bitter loneliness" that many city men remember to have experienced during the first years after they had "come up to town." Occasionally the right sort of man and girl meet each other in these dance halls and the romance with such a tawdry beginning ends happily and respectably. But, unfortunately, mingled with the respectable young men seeking to form the acquaintance of young women through the only channel which is available to them, are many young fellows of evil purpose, and among the girls who have left their lonely boarding houses or rigid homes for a "little fling" are likewise women who openly desire to make money from the young men whom they meet, and back of it all is the desire to profit by the sale of intoxicating and "doctored" drinks.

Perhaps never before have the pleasures of the young and mature become so definitely separated as in the modern city. The public dance halls filled with frivolous and irresponsible young people in a feverish search for pleasure, are but a sorry substitute for the old dances on the village green in which all of the older people of the village participated. Chaperonage was not then a social duty but natural and inevitable, and the whole court hip period was guarded by the conventions and restraint which were taken as a matter of course and had developed through years of publicity and simple propriety.

The only marvel is that the stupid attempt to put the fine old wine of traditional country life into the new bottles of the modern town does not lead to disaster oftener than it does, and that the wine so long remains pure and sparkling.

We cannot afford to be ungenerous to the city in which we live without suffering the penalty which lack of fair interpretation always entails. Let us know the modern city in its weakness and wickedness, and then seek to rectify and purify it until it shall be free at least from the grosser temptations which now beset the young people who are living in its tenement houses and working in its factories. The mass of these young people are possessed of good intentions and they are equipped with a certain understanding of city life. This itself could be made a most valuable social instrument toward securing innocent recreation and better social organization. They are already serving the city in so far as it is honey-combed with mutual benefit societies, with "pleasure clubs," with organizations

connected with churches and factories which are filling a genuine social need. And yet the whole apparatus for supplying pleasure is wretchedly inadequate and full of danger to whomsoever may approach it. Who is responsible for its inadequacy and dangers? We certainly cannot expect the fathers and mothers who have come to the city from farms or who have emigrated from other lands to appreciate or rectify these dangers. We cannot expect the young people themselves to cling to conventions which are totally unsuited to modern city conditions, nor yet to be equal to the task of forming new conventions through which this more agglomerate social life may express itself. Above all we cannot hope that they will understand the emotional force which seizes them and which, when it does not find the traditional line of domesticity, serves as a cancer in the very tissues of society and as a disrupter of the securest social bonds. No attempt is made to treat the manifestations of this fundamental instinct with dignity or to give it possible social utility. The spontaneous joy, the clamor for pleasure, the desire of the young people to upper finer and better and altogether more lovely than they really are, the idealization not only of each other but of the whole earth which they regard but as a theater for their noble exploits, the unworldly ambitions, the romantic hopes, the make-believe world in which they live, if properly utilized, what might they not do to make our sordid cities more beautiful, more companionable? And yet at the present moment every city is full of young people who are utterly bewildered and uninstructed in regard to the basic experience which must inevitably come to them, and which has varied, remote, and indirect expressions.

Even those who may not agree with the authorities who claim that it is this fundamental sex susceptibility which suffuses the world with its deepest meaning and beauty, and furnishes the momentum towards all art, will perhaps permit me to quote the classical expression of this view as set forth in that ancient and wonderful conversation between Socrates and the wine woman Diotima. Socrates asks: "What are they doing who show all this eagerness and heat which is called love? And what is the object they have in view? Answer me." Diotima replies: "I will teach you. The object which they have in view is birth in beauty, whether of body or soul... For love, Socrates, is not as you imagine the love of the beautiful only... but the love of birth in beauty, because to the mortal creature generation is a sort of eternity and immortality."

To emphasize the eternal aspects of love is not of course an easy undertaking, even if we follow the clue afforded by the heart of every generous lover. His experience at least in certain moments tends to pull him on and out from the passion for one to an enthusiasm for that highest beauty and excellence of which the most perfect form is but an inadequate expression. Even the most loutish tenement-house youth vaguely feels this, and at least at rare intervals reveals it in his talk to his "girl." His memory unexpectedly brings hidden treasures to the surface of consciousness and he recalls the more delicate and tender experiences of his childhood and earlier youth, "I remember the time when my little sister died, that I rode out to the cemetery feeling that everybody in Chicago had moved away from the town to make room for that kid's funeral, everything was so darned lonesome and yet it was kind of peaceful too." Or, "I never had a chance to go into

the country when I was a kid, but I remember one day when I had to deliver a package way out on the West Side, that I saw a flock of sheep in Douglas Park. I had never thought that a sheep could be anywhere but in a picture, and when I saw those big white spots on the green grass beginning to move and to turn into sheep, I felt exactly as if Saint Cecilia had come out of her frame over the organ and was walking in the park." Such moments come into the life of the most prosaic youth living in the most crowded quarters of the cities. What do we do to encourage and to solidify those moments, to make them come true in our dingy towns, to give them expression in forms of art?

We not only fail in this undertaking but even debase existing forms of art. We are informed by high authority that there is nothing in the environment to which youth so keenly responds as to music, and yet the streets, the vaudeville shows, the five-cent theaters are full of the most blatant and vulgar songs. The trivial and obscene words, the meaningless and flippant airs run through the heads of hundreds of young people for hours at a time while they are engaged in monotonous factory work. We totally ignore that ancient connection between music and morals which was so long insisted upon by philosophers as well as poets. The street music has quite broken away from all control, both of the educator and the patriot, and we have grown singularly careless in regard to its influence upon young people. Although we legislate against it in saloons because of its dangerous influence there, we constantly permit muse on the street to incite that which should be controlled, to degrade that which should be exalted, to make sensuous that which might be lifted into the realm of the higher imagination.

Our attitude towards music is typical of our carelessness towards all those things which male for common joy and for the restraints of higher civilization on the streets. It is as if our cities had not yet developed a sense of responsibility in regard to the life of the streets, and continually forget that recreation is stronger than vice, and that recreation alone can stifle the hunt for vice.

Perhaps we need to take a page from the philosophy of the Greeks to whom the world of fact was also the world of the ideal, and to whom the realization of what ought to be, involved not the destruction of what was, but merely its perfecting upon its own lines. To the Greeks virtue was not a hard conformity to a law felt an alien to the natural character, but a free expression of the inner life. To treat thus the fundamental susceptibility of sex which now no bewilders the street life and drives young people themselves into all sorts of difficulties, would mean to loosen it from the things of sense and to link it to the affairs of the imagination. It would mean to fit to this gross and heavy stuff the wings of the mind, to scatter from it "the clinging mud of banality and vulgarity," and to speed it on through our city streets mid spontaneous laughter, snatches of lyric song, the recovered forms of old dances, and the traditional rondels of merry games. It would thus bring charm and beauty to the prosaic city and connect it subtly with the arts of the past as well as with the vigor and renewed life of the future.

When Snow Falls on Cities 1957

ALDO VAN EYCK

On the Design of Play Equipment and the Arrangement of Playgrounds 1962

In the years after World War II, the Amsterdam Urban Development Department decided to produce at least one children's playground in every neighborhood in order to heal wounds in both physical spaces ruined in the war and urban life more generally. Architect Aldo van Eyck was appointed to direct this project, and from 1947 to 1978 he furnished the city with more than seven hundred playgrounds. Eyck is also the author of many critical texts on the subject, and a selection of his articles and speeches at conferences were published in English in 2008 under the title *Collected Articles and Other Writings 1947–1998*. The two articles included here are from this publication*.

* van Eyck, Aldo. "When Snow Falls on Cities" and "On the Design of Play Equipment and the Arrangement of Playgrounds," in *Collected Articles and Other Writings 1947–1998*, ed. Vincent Ligtelijn and Francis Strauven (Amsterdam: SUN, 2008), 108 and 112–19. The former was first published in the October 1957 issue of *Goed Wonen*. The latter is from a speech van Eyck delivered in 1962 at Marcanti, Amsterdam.

WHEN SNOW FALLS ON CITIES

The citizen has forsaken his identity.
He has become an onlooker instead of a participant,
an isolated soul amid millions of isolated souls.

But the child withdraws from this paradox.
It discovers its identity against all odds,
damaged and damaging, fouled and fooling,
in perpetual danger and incidental sunshine.
Edged towards the fringes of collective attention, the child survives, an emotional and "unproductive" quantum.

Look, snow! A miraculous trick of the skies—a fleeting correction.

All at once, the child is Lord of the city. The child is everywhere, rediscovering the city whilst the city in turn rediscovers its children, if only for a while.

Yet what it needs is something more permanent than snow.
Something the city can absorb without losing its remaining identity, something not altogether different from the incidental things the child adapts to its imagination and vitality, something carefully shaped and judiciously placed where there is still some room: on innumerable formless island left over by the road engineer and the demolition worker, on empty plots, on places better suited to the child than the public watering place.

In Amsterdam 150 such places have been laid out. They become indications for play, tools for the imagination. They constitute a conscious attempt to give the child's movement a visual meaning in the image of the city. They are places where energy condenses and disperses, indications for increased community.

If childhood is a journey, let us see to it that the child does not travel by night.

The artist, essential ally of the child, is there to lessen the conflict.
He too is pushed back to the periphery of collective attention.
His function is still too decorative (he is abused and misuses himself).
His task is to bring about a plastic order.
He belongs in the centre.

It is hard to put into words what I have learnt to recognise as appropriate while designing almost 400 playgrounds in cooperation with other parties. I am aware that there is a controversy regarding the merits of "public playgrounds" and "enclosed playgardens". The question of the play equipment and the architecture of play facilities is linked to this.

In a big city like Amsterdam one can only find a limited number of places that are big enough to set up an enclosed playground. These places have all been used. However, the need for places where children can play has not yet been satisfied. Years ago it was therefore our opinion that to correct this shortcoming inherent to the city we still had to find places suitable for children to play. Places that are still free and have no great commercial value. A series of forgotten spots, left over because a road takes a particular route, triangular squares lying there lifelessly. We thought we could breathe new life into them by putting a few objects there as street furniture, as an integrating constituent of the city, to which we now gave this special purpose. It turned into a long series, and these playgrounds are an essential complement to the play-gardens. In my opinion there is no need for controversy between open playgrounds and enclosed play-gardens, because I see the first as a complement to the second.

But in Amsterdam we are now in the same position as fifteen years ago: we have used up all the places in the inner city that might have been used for playgrounds. Between the playgrounds we have created a more finely-meshed network. It might be said that there is no more to be done. But despite the opposition that is to be expected, I would like to go further: I want to try to make the network even denser by once again combing the city, this time in search of places that are just big enough for one single play apparatus. If I am able to find 500 such places, that would give us, between every two playgardens, five or six public playgrounds and in between them even more places with one or two play apparatus. The opportunity for the child to discover its own movement is an integral part of the city; the city is also a playground. The child uses everything there, everything built, everything it can crawl through and climb over. Things children are not actually allowed to play with, but with which they can play very well. I would not like to remove

this opportunity altogether, nor is it possible to do so. A child will mirror itself in the city. This is inevitable, but of course leads to conflict. There is also danger everywhere and at all times. The child discovers things and appropriates them. A lamp-post is requisitioned as a play apparatus. Some things cannot cope with it. By creating things on a close-knit network throughout the city, things of which a child can say, "That's mine," one can localise the danger. Despite the fact that the playgrounds are very close to traffic, just a few metres from lorries, it is still safer to create them than not to. Rubbish thereby also concentrates in particular places and becomes more easily manageable. When the child plays in particular places, we know where the rubbish is and then we can clean it up.

So, our idea is to create an even finer network of single play apparatuses which the city must be able to absorb. Just as one places a bench because one wants to sit, a lamp-post because one wants to light the street, a newsstand because one wants to buy newspapers, I am putting a playdome there because children want to play.

The special thing about these playgrounds is that they do not belong exclusively to children. The city simply continues in these places, with all the dangers and disadvantages that go with it, and they are not closed off. They are meeting places, for children too, but when the child has gone to bed it's just an ordinary street again. Since there is too little parking space, they are even used for that. This is a shortcoming, but unavoidable, because the city is necessarily chaotic, however much architects and urban planners want to put everything in order. Functions conflict with each other and this may mean, to give one example, that it is not possible for children to do somersaults. So now we have, not the child misappropriating the lamp-post, but the adult misappropriating the child's play-space. The city is not a paradise, but a place of violence, full of conflicts. These things are rooted in human blood.

The playground is for everyone. At night, any play apparatus set up there becomes something different. When someone beats their rugs on it, a somersault frame is no longer a somersault frame. During the break at a girl's school, a climbing arch may provide seats for 30 girls from 15 to 17 years old, all eating their sandwiches. It has then become an aluminum hill. If one throws a tarpaulin over it, it becomes a tent. Use can also lead to misuse, and less pleasant things can happen; sometimes the big ones chase the little ones away, sometimes the whole thing is smashed.

The public playground has to be attractive as a meeting place for everyone, including adults, if its existence is to be justified. It also has to be acceptable to the city even without the movement of the child. The city has to be able to absorb the forms. For the sake of urban meaning the play apparatus have to be arranged very meticulously with regard to each other and their immediate surroundings. One must observe well the place where one wants to make a playground: where are the windows, which way do people walk, where are the front doors, can the sand from a sandpit blow inside, etc. After a few years one has gained some experience in this. You are grafting something new onto something that already exists, and if you put the wrong thing in your syringe the existing thing will react immediately. This also applies to an enclosed play-garden, but an error there does

not have irrevocable consequences. It is difficult to make a play apparatus in such a way that it does not appear as an alien element in the city, and that it is acceptable in the long term. The violence of the city immediately unmasks any mistake. But the city also rewards what is meaningful, whether it was deliberate or not. There can be unexpected results, like a hill full of girls, and that is particularly nice. The child has discovered this possibility for itself, and this is a reward, a bonus for the designer.

It is my opinion that the play apparatus should be elementary in form in the sense that they satisfy movements that the child discovers anyway. Contrived ideas may be fun at a fair, which is after all temporary, but in a city we have to create the opportunity for what the child already does: tumbling, climbing, jumping. The child likes leapfrogging, so we make short pillars for that purpose. We cannot outstrip the child, we just imitate it. Fifteen years ago we still thought we had to create complicated things for play. Now we set up a simple tumbling frame, and we see the children somersaulting round it like flywheels while talking at the same time! It's a fine thing a human flywheel right there on the street. The tumbling child belongs in the city scene, just like herring carts.

My opinion is that a lot of the playground equipment you find in the catalogue is not suitable for public space, not aesthetically, and because it is not real enough. Playground equipment has to be real, just as a telephone box is real because you can phone in it and a bench is real because you can sit on it. An aluminium elephant is not real, since an elephant is meant to move, and as an object in the street it is unnatural. A child can make anything out of a simple form. If a play apparatus represents an animal from the start, the form dictates its construction so much that it puts an end to pure play. There are rods you can't stand on, sharp corners into which your hand vanishes. An aluminium giraffe stands there odd and bored, even in a playgarden. The elementary archetypes such as the dome, igloo and arch are perfectly satisfactory because a child can sit on or under them, and can discover all sorts of things in them.

Catalogues sometimes contain some quite complicated things.

Aldo van Eyck designs for climbing arch
Nico Snijdersstraat, Amsterdam

SOURCE ↙
Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief
(beeldbank.amsterdam.nl)

Hasebroekstraat, Amsterdam

Aldo van Eyck
designs for play equipment
SOURCE ↘
Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief
(beeldbank.amsterdam.nl)

Laurierstraat, Amsterdam

Zandstraat, Amsterdam

Mendes da Costahof, Amsterdam

Dijkstraat, Amsterdam

Playgrounds with play equipment designed by Aldo van Eyck
SOURCE ↘
Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief (beeldbank.amsterdam.nl)

Jacob Thijsseplein, Amsterdam

There is no art in sitting down at a table and drawing all sorts of constructions. But in the course of these fifteen years we may have developed about thirty play apparatus that fit the bill well.

If we look at all the positive and negative things in the public playground, it appears that this sort of place excludes a lot of possibilities. There is no supervision there. This should not actually be necessary, since, after all, many eyes are watching and many feel they share the responsibility. In some countries this is the case but not in ours. Unfortunately it happens all too rarely that the people in a neighbourhood help keep a sandpit or a public play area clean. You may even see ladies in fur coats letting their dogs roam there! By contrast, in the Jordaan, where the population is very homogeneous, people have accepted the playground on Palmgracht as their collective property and work together to keep it clean.

Now, when I start talking about enclosed play gardens, some of you may think I am going to say I don't understand why there has to be a fence. But that's not what I want to say at all. I am convinced that the play-garden is, or can be, essentially positive. It can be enclosed in order to guarantee from the inside the right seclusion, security, intimacy and shelter. In such cases the aim is to create an "interior", and that is possible, even though the sky is the ceiling. But this sort of interior is hard to achieve with a fence. A fence has the effect of keeping people away, plants or walls are more suitable for making the playground a space of one's own. You cannot make an "outdoor room" from a public playground, but you can from an enclosed playgarden. So the enclosure is not to keep anyone out, but for the purposes of spatiality, and to increase the possibility of proper supervision. Whether the supervision is actually good depends on the person responsible for it. Does he stay sitting in his hut or, as an adult worker, does he actively lead and stimulate?

What I am actually concerned about is whether the enclosure is justified by a greater opportunity for play inside the garden, whether in other words you succeed in making more of your play-garden, as a small world in the midst of the large. The enclosure of this particular place must bring with it an extension, intensification and enrichment of the play potential. For example, in an enclosed garden one can set up building materials and as adult occupy oneself with a group of children undisturbed. No one else can make improper use of the situation. I do not find the installation of mobile play apparatus sufficient reason for putting up a fence. I see the enclosure as a challenge to do things in the playground which one cannot do on the street. The possibilities there have been more or less exhausted, but in a playground they are almost unlimited, and I do not believe they have already been sufficiently exploited everywhere.

I am a vehement opponent of current urban planning,

which very much hinders spatial boundaries. Everything is made open; planners suffer from a mania for openness. Space has become so continuous that no spaces can be formed. There is one large continuous outside. In this big space there are blocks, arranged well or not, and it is in this emptiness that we move around and seek the seclusion we remember from the old city. There is also something inaccessible about the blocks themselves, and we are no longer "received" by urban squares. We arrive abruptly at the front door, the division between the inhospitable emptiness and the inaccessible blocks. It is difficult to create an enclosed space between them. One can hardly build a wall or anything like that. It would be easier if urban planners had another concept in mind, if one created a series of enclosed, recognisable, large and small spaces: living room, street, square, indoor and outdoor spaces, instead of voids that wash around masses. The enclosed space would then already exist and all we would have to do would be to close it off. But we have to create these spaces ourselves. The fence is cold and bare, and the children play in a cage. This is not your fault. That's the way society works. The site is divided up: a rectangle for a playground, a road there, a building here. From an urban planning point of view the procedure is poor. It is difficult to create an enclosed urban space in this emptiness, not only a place where things stand, but one where a child feels at home, which it recognises as a small world amidst the big one. That is why it is so important to bring in a good designer who helps create the right environment. The atmosphere is decisive to the success of a play garden. The designer cannot create this atmosphere only by himself, the leaders in the playground must also help to do so. But what he can do is make sure the equipment does not get in the way.

I hope I have told you a few things that differ a little from what you hear so often.

Now a very essential point. The public playground the way we make it, is actually a gift from the authorities to the neighbourhood or district. This is on the one hand a fine thing, but on the other it's a pity, because in this case no justice is done to personal initiative. Here in the Netherlands, there is very little opportunity to do anything on one's own initiative. It is limited to the window-sill.

In Switzerland people behave in the street as they do in their living rooms, which is a delight for the urban planner and architect, because everything is maintained by the people themselves and stays attractive. Though it does make life a little dull.

In London the people embellish the city themselves, by putting a big flowerpot out on the street, for example. People walk around it and children don't tip it over.

It is understandable that in a playgarden one wants to protect what one has made oneself by enclosing and shutting it off. For that matter, the things one makes oneself do not have to be so splendid and sound as what one receives as a present. But in fact, I believe in most cases they will be good. So, by developing one's own initiatives, by building oneself, one ends up with a playground that accords with one's own views. You make your own mistakes and judge them yourself.

In the city one always wants everything to go increasingly along well-smooth paths. Urban planners are scared to death of a gap or a hole. But Weesperstraat, once it was demolished, became one big play-area which not even the finest playground can match. There is an incredibly big wall, which the children can daub on as much as they like. The architect feels inclined to smooth everything out. People are afraid of the unforeseen, afraid of the danger lurking around the corner, afraid of spontaneity. People do not want to accept that the city is and should be chaotic.

I read the following somewhere: "when it's good weather play outside and when it's bad play inside". It sounds practical, but psychologically speaking it is a limited view. If a child does not want to stay inside when it's bad weather, but has to stay inside, it remains bad weather. But if you can enjoy yourself in the playground even when it's raining, then it's no longer bad weather. And anyway, we call rain bad weather here because it rains so much. In some other countries they call it good weather. Our cities are not adapted to rain. Where there are arcades, it's pleasant to shop. In the same way, a playground can still be appealing when it rains if there's a covered play-area. That costs money, of course, but a covered play-area can in part be linked to the enclosure, so that a light construction is sufficient. On the other hand, the club building has to be attractive when it's good weather too, and that is possible in a room with the right degree of openness, with a good transition from outside to inside (terraces). I find it an unnecessary restriction that a child has to play when it's "good" weather and do handicrafts when it's bad. And then there's snow, which is all at once good because it's a gift from heaven for the children.

Here too I again see a challenge to your enclosure. I am against putting a building inside a fence. First the fence to fend one off, and then a block that's closed too. It's better to erect the building on the public road.

The Netherlands is a flat country, but that does not make it absolutely necessary to act in a two-dimensional manner. Why would we spend twenty thousand guilders to make something utterly and totally flat? It has happened that I wanted to put some hills on one of these flat sites, but that costs money too. The ground can be banked up for dykes and bridges, so surely it can be done for children too? A small difference in height, of 1 to 1.5 metres, is sufficient to break up a large space into smaller spaces. If you stand on top of a bank 1.5 metres high, the world suddenly becomes very different. I do however understand that in a playground like that, supervision becomes a little more difficult. But we are introducing the miracle of a slope, of a valley and a hill. In this way we are anchoring our playground much more in the ground as a "place." A dyke is much more sculptural than a fence, in any case.

There are dozens of things like this to think up. If we create a playground well, we create a world in which man rediscovers what is essential, in which the city rediscovers the child. We must not ask the child to discover the city, without at the same time wanting the city to rediscover the child.

My intention with these words was to make a contribution, to reintroduce the child as an essential constituent of the city.

The Uses of Sidewalks: Assimilating Children 1961

JANE JACOBS

Jane Jacobs is known for her urban research and actions as a journalist, writer, and activist. In 1952, she began working for *Architectural Forum* in order to write on reconstruction projects, initiating a major research undertaking in which she would come to regard urban planning with increasing suspicion. She opposed the destruction of New York's cultural and historical texture and held demonstrations, organizing the public with her activism. She instigated similar protests in Toronto, where she moved in 1968 and spent the rest of her life. Her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* asserted that urban renovation did not meet the needs of many local residents, and helped popularize sociological concepts such as "eyes on the street" and "social capital."

* Jacobs, Jane. "The Uses of Sidewalks: Assimilating Children." in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 74-89. New York: Vintage Books, 1961.

Among the superstitions of planning and housing is a fantasy about the transformation of children. It goes like this: A population of children is condemned to play on the city streets. These pale and rickety children, in their sinister moral environment, are telling each other canards about sex, sniggering evilly and learning new forms of corruption as efficiently as if they were in reform school. This situation is called "the moral and physical toll taken of our youth by the streets," sometimes it is called simply "the gutter".

If only these deprived children can be gotten off the streets into parks and playgrounds with equipment on which to exercise, space in which to run, grass to lift their souls! Clean and happy places, filled with the laughter of children responding to a wholesome environment. So much for the fantasy.

Let us consider a story from real life, as discovered by Charles Guggenheim, a documentary-film maker in St. Louis. Guggenheim was working on a film depicting the activities of a St. Louis children's day-care center. He noticed that at the end of the afternoon roughly half the children left with the greatest reluctance.

Guggenheim became sufficiently curious to investigate. Without exception, the children who left unwillingly came from a nearby housing project. And without exception again, those who left willingly came from the old "slum" streets nearby. The mystery, Guggenheim found, was simplicity itself. The children returning to the project, with its generous playgrounds and lawns, ran a gauntlet of bullies who made them turn out their pockets or submit to a beating, sometimes both. These small children could not get home each day without enduring an ordeal that they dreaded. The children going back to the old streets were safe from extortion, Guggenheim found. They had many streets to select from, and they astutely chose the safest. "If anybody picked on them, there was always a storekeeper they could run to or somebody to come to their aid," says Guggenheim. "They also had any number of ways of escaping along different routes if anybody was laying for them. These little kids felt safe and cocky and they enjoyed their trip home too." Guggenheim made the related observation of how boring the project's landscaped grounds and playgrounds were, how deserted they seemed, and in contrast how rich in interest, vari-

ety and material for both the camera and the imagination were the older streets nearby.

Consider another story from real life, an adolescent gang battle in the summer of 1959 in New York, which culminated in the death of a fifteen-year-old girl who had no connection with the battle, but happened to be standing at the grounds of the project where she lives. The events leading to the day's final tragedy, and their locales, were reported by the *New York Post* during the subsequent trial, as follows:

> *The first fracas occurred about noon when the Sportsmen stepped into the Forsyth St. Boys' turf in Sara Delano Roosevelt Park...[1] During the afternoon the decision was made by the Forsyth St. Boys to use their ultimate weapon, the rifle, and gasoline bombs... In the course of the affray, also in Sara Delano Roosevelt Park... a 14-year-old Forsyth St. boy was fatally stabbed and two other boys, one 11 years old, were seriously wounded... At about 9 P.M. [seven or eight Forsyth St. boys] suddenly descended on the Sportsmen's hangout near the Lillian Wald housing project and, from the no-man's land of Avenue D [the project grounds' boundary] lobbed their gasoline bombs into the group while Cruz crouched and triggered the rifle.*

Where did these three battles occur? In a park and at the park-like grounds of the project. After outbreaks of this kind, one of the remedies invariably called for is more parks and playgrounds. We are bemused by the sound of symbols.

"Street gangs" do their "street fighting" predominately in parks and playgrounds. When the *New York Times* in September 1959 summed up the worst adolescent gang outbreaks of the past decade in the city, each and every one was designated as having occurred in a park. Moreover, more and more frequently, not only in New York but in other cities too, children engaged in such horrors turn out to be from super-block projects, where their everyday play has successfully been removed from the streets (the streets themselves have largely been removed). The highest delinquency belt in New York's Lower East Side, where the gang war described above occurred, is precisely the parklike belt of public housing projects. The two most formidable gangs in Brooklyn are rooted in two of the oldest projects, Ralph Whelan, director of the New York City Youth Board, reports, according to the *New York Times*, an "invariable rise in delinquency rates" wherever a new housing project is built. The worst girls' gang in Philadelphia has grown up on the grounds of that city's second-oldest housing project, and the highest delinquency belt of that city corresponds with its major belt of projects. In. St. Louis the project where Guggenheim found the extortion going on is considered relatively safe compared with the city's largest project, fifty-seven acres of mostly grass, dotted with playgrounds and devoid of city streets, a prime breeding ground of delinquency in that city.[2] Such projects are examples, among other things, of an intent to take children off the streets. They are designed as they are partly for just this purpose.

The disappointing results are hardly strange. The same rules of city safety and city public life that apply to adults apply to children too, except that children are even more vulnerable to danger and barbarism than adults.

In real life, what significant change does occur if children are transferred from a lively city street to the usual park or to the usual public or project playground?

In most cases (not all, fortunately), the most significant change is this: The children have moved from under the eyes of a high numerical ratio of adults is low or even nil. To think this represents an improvement in city child rearing is pure daydreaming.

City children themselves know this; they have known it for generations. "When we wanted to do anything antisocial, we always made for Lindy Park because none of the grownups would see us there," says Jesse Reichek, an artist who grew up in Brooklyn. "Mostly we played on the streets where we couldn't get away with anything much."

Life is the same today. My son, reporting how he escaped four boys who set upon him, says, "I was scared they would catch me when I had to pass the playground. If they caught me there I'd be sunk!"

A few days after the murder of two sixteen-year-old boys in a playground on the midtown West Side of Manhattan, I paid a morbid visit to the area. The nearby streets were evidently back to normal. Hundreds of children, directly under the eyes of innumerable adults using the sidewalks themselves and looking from windows, were engaged in a vast variety of sidewalk games and whooping pursuits. The sidewalks were dirty, they were too narrow for the demands put upon them, and they needed shade from the sun. But here was no scene of arson, mayhem or the flourishing of dangerous weapons. In the playground where the nighttime murder had occurred, things were apparently back to normal too. Three small boys were setting a fire under a wooden bench. Another was having his head beaten against the concrete. The custodian was absorbed in solemnly and slowly hauling down the American flag.

On my return home, as I passed the relatively genteel playground near where I live, I noted that its only inhabitants in the late afternoon, with the mothers and the custodian gone, were two small boys threatening to bash a little girl with their skates, and an alcoholic who had roused himself to shake his head and mumble that they shouldn't do that. Farther down the street, on a block with many Puerto Rican immigrants, was another scene of contrast. Twenty-eight children of all ages were playing on the sidewalk without mayhem, arson, or any event more serious than a squabble over a bag of candy. They were under the casual surveillance of adults primarily visiting in public with each other. The surveillance was only seemingly casual, as was proved when the candy squabble broke out and peace and justice were re-established. The identities of the adults kept changing because different ones kept putting their heads out the windows, and different ones kept coming in and going out on errands, or passing by and lingering a little. But the numbers of adults stayed fairly constant—between eight and eleven—during the hour I watched. Arriving home, I noticed that at our house, the laundry, the pizza place and the fruit man's, twelve children were playing on the sidewalk in sight of fourteen adults.

To be sure, all city sidewalks are not under surveillance in this fashion, and this is one of the troubles of the city that planning ought properly to help correct. Underused sidewalks are not under suitable surveillance for child rearing. Nor are sidewalks apt to

be safe, even with eyes upon them, if they are bordered by a population which is constantly and rapidly turning over in residence—another urgent planning problem. But the playgrounds and parks near such streets are even less wholesome.

Nor are all playgrounds and parks unsafe or under poor surveillance, as we shall see in the next chapter. But those that are wholesome are typically in neighborhoods where streets are lively and safe and where a strong tone of civilized public sidewalk life prevails. Whatever differentials exist in safety and wholesomeness between playgrounds and sidewalks in any given area are invariably, so far as I can find, in the favor of the much maligned streets.

People with actual, not theoretical, responsibility for bringing up children in cities often know this well. "You can go out," say city mothers, "but stay on the sidewalk." I say it to my own children. And by this we mean more than "Don't go into the street where the cars are."

Describing the miraculous rescue of a nine-year-old boy who was pushed down a sewer by an unidentified assailant—in a park, of course—the *New York Times* reported, "The mother had told the boys earlier in the day not to play in High Bridge Park... Finally she said all right." The boy's frightened companions intelligently raced out of the park and back to the evil streets where they enlisted help quickly.

Frank Havey, the settlement-house director in Boston's North End, says that parents come to him time and again with this problem: "I tell my children to play on the sidewalk after supper. But I hear children shouldn't play on the street. Am I doing wrong?" Havey tells them they are doing right. He attributes much of the North End's low delinquency rate to the excellent community surveillance of children at play where the community is at its strongest —on the sidewalks.

Garden City planners, with their hatred of the street. thought the solution to keeping children off the streets and under wholesome surveillance was to build interior enclaves for them in the centers of super-blocks. This policy has been inherited by the designers of Radiant Garden City. Today many large renewal areas are being replanned on the principle of enclosed park enclaves within blocks.

The trouble with this scheme, as can be seen in such already existing examples as Chatham Village in Pittsburgh and Baldwin Hills Village in Los Angeles, and smaller courtyard colonies in New York and Baltimore, is that no child of enterprise or spirit will willingly stay in such a boring place after he reaches the age of six. Most want to go out earlier. These sheltered, "togetherness" worlds are suitable, and in real life are used, for about three or four years of a small child's life, in many ways the easiest four years to manage. Nor do the adult residents of these places even want the play of older children in their sheltered courts. In Chatham Village and Baldwin Hills Village it is expressly forbidden. Little tots are decorative and relatively docile, but older children are noisy and energetic, and they act on their environment instead of just letting it act on them. Since the environment is already "perfect" this will not do. Furthermore, as can also be seen both in examples already existing and in plans for construction, this type of planning requires

that buildings be oriented toward the interior enclave. Otherwise the enclave's prettiness goes unexploited and it is left without easy surveillance and access. The relatively dead backs of the buildings or, worse still, blank end walls, thus face on the streets. The safety of the unspecialized sidewalks is thus exchanged for a specialized form of safety for a specialized part of the population for a few years of its life. When the children venture forth, as they must and will, they are ill served, along with everyone else.

I have been dwelling on a negative aspect of child rearing cities: the factor of protection—protection of children from their own idiocies, from adults bent on ill, and from each other. I have dwelt on it because it has been my purpose to show, by means of the most easily understood problem, how nonsensical is the fantasy that playgrounds and parks are automatically O.K. places for children, and streets are automatically not O.K. places for children.

But lively sidewalks have positive aspects for city children's play too, and these are at least as important as safety and protection.

Children in cities need a variety of places in which to play and to learn. They need, among other things, opportunities for all kinds of sport and exercise and physical skills—more opportunities, more easily obtained, than they now enjoy in most cases. However, at the same time, they need an unspecialized outdoor home base from which to play, to hang around in, and to help form their notions of the world.

It is this form of unspecialized play that the sidewalks serve— and that lively city sidewalks can serve splendidly. When this home-base play is transferred to playgrounds and parks it is not only provided for unsafely, but paid personnel, equipment and space are frittered away that could be devoted instead to more ice-skating rinks, swimming pools, boat ponds and other various and specific outdoor uses. Poor, generalized play use eats up substance that could instead be used for good specialized play.

To waste the normal presence of adults on lively sidewalks and to bank instead (however idealistically) on hiring substitutes for them, is frivolous in the extreme. It is frivolous not only socially but also economically, because cities have desperate shortages of money and of personnel for more interesting uses of the outdoors than playgrounds—and of money and personnel for other aspects of children's lives. For example, city school systems today typically have between thirty and forty children in their classes —sometimes more— and these include children with all manner of problems too, from ignorance of English to bad emotional upsets. City schools need something approaching a 50-percent increase in teachers to handle severe problems and also reduce normal class sizes to a figure permitting better education. New York's city-run hospitals in 1959 had 58 percent of their professional nursing positions unfilled, and in many another city the shortage of nurses has become alarming. Libraries, and often museums, curtail their hours, and notably the hours of their children's sections. Funds are lacking for the increased numbers of settlement houses drastically needed in the new slums and new projects of cities. Even the existing settlement houses lack funds for needed expansions and changes in their programs, in short for more staff. Requirements like these should have high priority

on public and philanthropic funds—not only on funds at the present dismally inadequate levels, but on funds greatly increased.

The people of cities who have other jobs and duties, and who lack, too, the training needed, cannot volunteer as teachers or registered nurses or librarians or museum guards or social workers. But at least they can, and on lively diversified sidewalks they do, supervise the incidental play of children and assimilate the children into city society. *They do it in the course of carrying on their other pursuits.*

Planners do not seem to realize how high a ratio of adults is needed to rear children at incidental play. Nor do they seem to understand that spaces and equipment do not rear children. These can be useful adjuncts, but only people rear children and assimilate them into civilized society.

It is folly to build cities in a way that wastes this normal, casual manpower for child rearing and either leaves this essential job too much undone—with terrible consequences—or makes it necessary to hire substitutes. The myth that playgrounds and grass and hired guards or supervisors are innately wholesome for children and that city streets, filled with ordinary people, are innately evil for children, boils down to a deep contempt for ordinary people.

In real life, only from the ordinary adults of the city sidewalks do children learn—if they learn it at all—the first fundamental of successful city life: People must take a modicum of public responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other. This is a lesson nobody learns by being told. It is learned from the experience of having *other people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility* to you take a modicum of public responsibility for you. When Mr. Lacey, the locksmith, bawls out one of my sons for running into the street, and then later reports the transgression to my husband as he passes the locksmith shop, my son gets more than an overt lesson in safety and obedience. He also gets, indirectly, the lesson that Mr. Lacey, with whom we have no ties other than street propinquity, feels responsible for him to a degree. The boy who went unrescued in the elevator in the "togetherness"-or-nothing project learns opposite lessons from his experiences. So do the project children who squirt water into house windows and on passers-by, and go unrebuked because they are anonymous children in anonymous grounds.

The lesson that city dwellers have to take responsibility for what goes on in city streets is taught again and again to children on sidewalks which enjoy a local public life. They can absorb it astonishingly early. They show they have absorbed it by taking it for granted that they, too, are part of the management. They volunteer (before they are asked) directions to people who are lost; they tell a man he will get a ticket if he parks where he thinks he is going to park; they offer unsolicited advice to the building superintendent to use rock salt instead of a chopper to attack the ice. The presence or absence of this kind of street bossiness in city children is a fairly good tip-off to the presence or absence of responsible adult behavior toward the sidewalk and the children who use it. The children are imitating adult attitudes. This has nothing to do with income. Some of the poorest parts of cities do the best by their children in this respect. And some do the worst.

This is instruction in city living that people hired to look after children cannot teach, because the essence of this responsibility is that you do it without being hired. It is a lesson that parents, by themselves, are powerless to teach. If parents take minor public responsibility for strangers or neighbors in a society where nobody else does, this simply means that the parents are embarrassingly different and meddlesome, not that this is the proper way to behave. Such instruction must come from society itself, and in cities, if it comes, it comes almost entirely during the time children spend at incidental play on the sidewalks.

Play on lively, diversified sidewalks differs from virtually all other daily incidental play offered American children today: It is play not conducted in a matriarchy.

Most city architectural designers and planners are men. Curiously, they design and plan to exclude men as part of normal, daytime life wherever people live. In planning residential life, they aim at filling the presumed daily needs of impossibly vacuous housewives and preschool tots. They plan, in short, strictly for matriarchal societies.

The ideal of a matriarchy inevitably accompanies all planning in which residences are isolated from other parts of life. It accompanies all planning for children in which their incidental play is set apart in its own preserves. Whatever adult society does accompany the daily life of children affected by such planning has to be a matriarchy. Chatham Village, that Pittsburgh model of Garden City life, is as thoroughly matriarchal in conception and in operation as the newest dormitory suburb. All housing projects are.

Placing work and commerce *near* residences, but buffering it off, in the tradition set by Garden City theory, is fully as matriarchal an arrangement as if the residences were miles away from work and from men. Men are not an abstraction. They are either around, in person, or they are not. Working places and commerce must be mingled right in with residences if men, like the men who work on or near Hudson Street, for example, are to be around city children in daily life—men who are part of normal daily life, as opposed to men who put in an occasional playground appearance while they substitute for women or imitate the occupations of women.

The opportunity (in-modern life it has become a privilege) of playing and growing up in a daily world composed of both men and women is possible and usual for children who play on lively, diversified city sidewalks. I cannot understand why this arrangement should be discouraged by planning and by zoning. It ought, instead, to be abetted by examining the conditions that stimulate minglings and mixtures of work and commerce with residences, a subject taken up later in this book.

The fascination of street life for city children has long been noted by recreation experts, usually with disapproval. Back in 1928, the Regional Plan Association of New York, in a report which remains to this day the most exhaustive American study of big-city recreation, had this to say:

> *Careful checking within a radius of ¼ mile of playgrounds under a wide range of*

> *conditions in many cities shows that about 1/7 of the child population from 5 to 15 years of age may be found on these grounds... The lure of the street is a strong competitor... It must be a well administered playground to compete successfully with the city streets, teeming with life and adventure. The ability to make the playground activity so compellingly attractive as to draw the children from the streets and hold their interest from day to day is a rare faculty in play leadership, combining personality and technical skill of a high order.*

The same report then deplores the stubborn tendency of children to "fool around" instead of playing "recognized games." (Recognized by whom?) This yearning for the Organization Child on the part of those who would incarcerate incidental play, and children's stubborn preference for fooling around on city streets, teeming with life and adventure, are both as characteristic today as they were in 1928.

"I know Greenwich Village like my hand," brags my younger son, taking me to see a "secret passage" he has discovered under a street, down one subway stair and up another, and a secret hiding place some nine inches wide between two buildings, where he secretes treasures that people have put out for the sanitation truck collections along his morning route to school and that he can thus save and retrieve on his return from school. (I had such a hiding place, for the same purpose, at his age, but mine was a crack in a cliff on my way to school instead of a crack between two buildings, and he finds stranger and richer treasures.)

Why do children so frequently find that roaming the lively city sidewalks is more interesting than back yards or playgrounds? Because the sidewalks are more interesting. It is just as sensible to ask: Why do adults find lively streets more interesting than playgrounds?

The wonderful convenience of city sidewalks is an important asset to children too. Children are at the mercy of convenience more than anyone else, except the aged. A great part of children's outdoor play, especially after they start school, and after they also find a certain number of organized activities (sports, arts, handcrafts or whatever else their interests and the local opportunities provide), occurs at incidental times and must be sandwiched in. A lot of outdoor life for children adds up from bits. It happens in a small leftover interval after lunch. It happens after school while children may be pondering what to do and wondering who will turn up. It happens while they are waiting to be called for their suppers. It happens in brief intervals between supper and homework, or homework and bed.

During such times children have, and use, all manner of ways to exercise and amuse themselves. They slop in puddles, write with chalk, jump rope, roller skate, shoot marbles, trot out their possessions, converse, trade cards, play stoop ball, walk stilts, decorate soapbox scooters, dismember old baby carriages, climb on railings, run up and down. It is not in the nature of things to make a big deal out of such activities. It is not in the nature of things to go somewhere formally to do them by plan, officially. Part of their charm is the accompanying sense of freedom to roam up and down the sidewalks, a different matter

from being boxed into a preserve. If it is impossible to do such things both incidentally and conveniently, they are seldom done.

As children get older, this incidental outdoor activity—say, while waiting to be called to eat—becomes less bumptious physically and entails more loitering with others, sizing people up, flirting, talking, pushing, shoving and horseplay. Adolescents are always being criticized for this kind of loitering, but they can hardly grow up without it. The trouble comes when it is done not within society, but as a form of outlaw life.

The requisite for any of these varieties of incidental play is not pretentious equipment of any sort, but rather space at an immediately convenient and interesting place. The play gets crowded out if sidewalks are too narrow relative to the total demands put on them. It is especially crowded out if the sidewalks also lack minor irregularities in building line. An immense amount of both loitering and play goes on in shallow sidewalk niches out of the line of moving pedestrian feet.

There is no point in planning for play on sidewalks unless the sidewalks are used for a wide variety of other purposes and by a wide variety of other people too. These uses need each other, for proper surveillance, for a public life of some vitality, and for general interest. If sidewalks on a lively street are sufficiently wide, play flourishes mightily right along with other uses. If the sidewalks are skimped, rope jumping is the first play casualty. Roller skating, tricycle and bicycle riding are the next casualties, The narrower she sidewalks the more sedentary incidental play becomes. The more frequent too become sporadic forays by children into the vehicular roadways.

Sidewalks thirty or thirty-five feet wide can accommodate virtually any demand of incidental play put upon them—along with trees to shade the activities, and sufficient space for pedestrian circulation and adult public sidewalk life and loitering. Few sidewalks of this luxurious width can be found. Sidewalk width is invariably sacrificed for vehicular width, partly because city sidewalks are conventionally considered to be purely space for pedestrian travel and access to buildings, and go unrecognized and unrespected as the uniquely vital and irreplaceable organs of city safety, public life and child rearing that they are.

Twenty-foot sidewalks, which usually preclude rope jumping but can feasibly permit roller skating and the use of other wheeled toys, can still be found, although the street wideners erode them year by year (often in the belief that shunned malls and "promenades" are a constructive substitute). The livelier and more popular a sidewalk, and the greater the number and variety of its users, the greater the total width needed for it to serve its purposes pleasantly.

But even when proper space is lacking, convenience of location and the interest of the streets are both so important to children—and good surveillance so important to their parents—that children will and do adapt to skimpy sidewalk space. This does not mean we do right in taking unscrupulous advantage of their adaptability. In fact, we wrong both them and cities.

Some city sidewalks are undoubtedly evil places for rearing children. They are evil

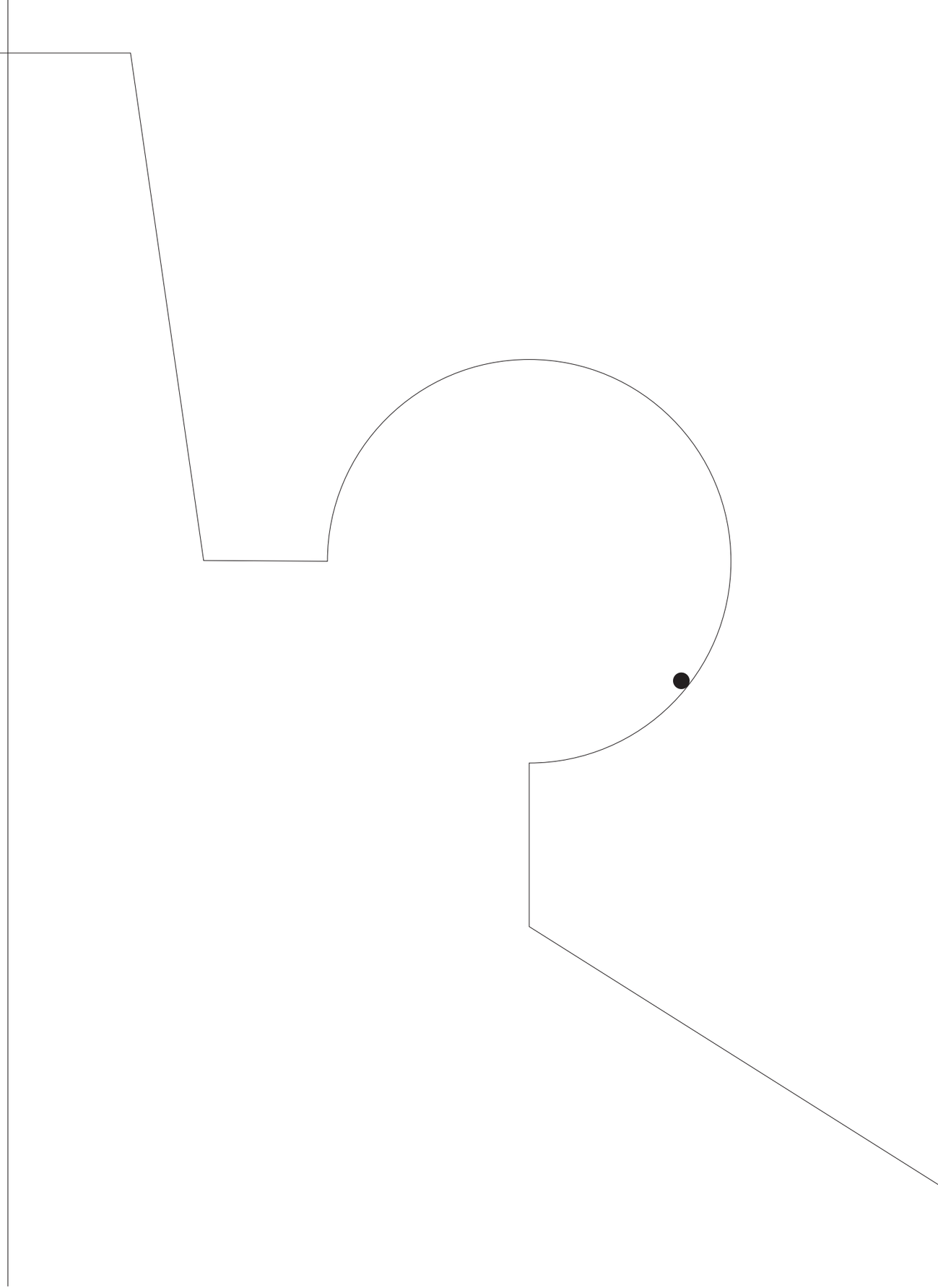
for anybody. In such neighborhoods we need to foster the qualities and facilities that make for safety, vitality and stability in city streets. This is a complex problem; it is a central problem of planning for cities. In defective city neighborhoods, shooing the children into parks and playgrounds is worse than useless, either as a solution to the streets' problems or as a solution for the children.

The whole idea of doing away with city streets, insofar as that is possible, and downgrading and minimizing their social and their economic part in city life is the most mischievous and destructive idea in orthodox city planning. That it is so often done in the name of vaporous fantasies about city child care is as bitter as irony can get.

NOTES

1 Forsyth St. borders Sara Delano Roosevelt Park which extends for many blocks, the Rev. Jerry Oniki, pastor of a church on the park border, has been quoted in the *New York Times*, with reference to the park's influence on children. "Every sort of vice you can think of goes on in that park" The park has had its share of expert praise, however; among the illustrations for a 1942 article on Baron Haussmann, the rebuilder of Paris, written by Robert Moses, the rebuilder of New York, Sara Delano Roosevelt Park, then newly built, was soberly equated as an achievement with the Rue de Rivoli of Paris!

2 This too has had its share of expert praise; it was much admired in housing and architectural circles when it was built in 1954-56 and was widely publicized as an exceptionally splendid example of housing.



Adventure Playgrounds 1968

Lady Allen of Hurtwood worked as a landscape architect from 1920 to 1930 and was elected the first fellow of Britain's Institute of Landscape Architects in 1930. She was committed to child health and children's rights, and her struggle bore fruit when England passed the Children Act in 1948. She took active roles in nurseries, early childhood education, and children's films. During World War II, she worked on the transformation of waste material from bomb sites into children's toys. Following the war, she served as a liaison officer with UNICEF in Europe and the Middle East. She wrote articles on play areas. Her book on adventure playgrounds, *Planning for Play* (1968), helped disseminate her ideas across the world.

* Allen, Lady of Hurtwood. "Adventure Playgrounds." in *Planning for Play*, 54-83. 1968; repr., London: Thames and Hudson, 1969.

** The final text in this chapter, "Rough Land, Animals and Gardens," is by Lady Cox.

*** Visuals used in this chapter are from the original book, reproduced by permission of Thames and Hudson.

The secret of a successful adventure playground
is in its continual development,
it is never complete, never developed.
It is a sort of "terrain vague" that
can be many things to many children.

—**JACK LAMBERT,** Leader

Adventure playgrounds are places where children of all ages can develop their own ideas of play. Most young people, at one time or another, have a deep urge to experiment with earth, fire, water and timber, to work with real tools without fear of undue criticism or censure. In these playgrounds their love of freedom to take calculated risks is recognized and can be enjoyed under tolerant and sympathetic guidance.

It is to be hoped that the now old-fashioned playgrounds of fixed equipment on a sea of asphalt will soon be relics of the past. They are condemned because children quickly tire of the inflexible ironmongery. Static objects have a place in the total play picture, but alone they are not enough. Playground designers advanced a small step forward when they turned away from ironmongery and instead used piles of equally static logs, climbing-frames and expensive play sculpture of abstract shapes. As these failed to sustain the children's interest, there was a resort to concrete boats, traction engines, lorries and broken-down cars. But, to the exasperation of authority, the children soon tired of these novelties too and went back to their more exciting play in the streets, or found more creative amusement on waste land. Here at least they could move things around to their liking, build houses with old bricks and timber, and (when the policeman was not looking) light a fire or channel muddy ditch water into rivulets and pools. Nowadays such precious waste land is becoming scarce, the streams are hidden in the sewers, hills and mounds are levelled and buried under concrete, and the trees are not for climbing.

The inspiration for adventure playgrounds came from Denmark where the Emdrup playground was opened in 1943, during the German occupation. Professor C. Th.

Sørensen, the famous landscape architect, had designed many beautiful playgrounds in Copenhagen, but was impressed by the fact that children seemed to prefer messing about in junk yards and building sites, and developing their own brand of play with the waste objects they found there. With great perception and courage, he started the Emdrup waste material playground in a new housing estate outside Copenhagen, He and the children were fortunate in its first understanding leader. John Bertelsen was a trained nursery school teacher and an ex-seaman; he was, therefore, well equipped to tackle this experiment. From that beginning, Emdrup has inspired the world.

Writing in 1947, Professor Sørensen stressed his convictions:

> *When contemplating an adventure playground it is opportune to warn against too much supervision and too many arrangements for the children. It is my opinion that children ought to be free and by themselves to the greatest possible extent. A certain supervision and guidance will, of course, be necessary but I am firmly convinced that one ought to be exceedingly careful when interfering in the lives and activities of children. The object must be to give the children of the city a substitute for the rich possibilities for play which children in the country possess.*[1]

The two most important human needs are experience and control over one's own experience.
—R. D. LAING
↙
Politics of Experience, 1967

The Skrammelegeplade of Denmark, the Robinson playgrounds in Switzerland and the adventure playgrounds in the United Kingdom and other countries are all descendants of Emdrup. They are all, however, significantly different from one another, for waste material playgrounds are influenced by the country, the nature of the site, the wishes of the children, the imagination of the leader, and the amount of money available. But all have a common purpose: to enable children to handle malleable materials in their own way, in a free and permissive atmosphere.

Nearly all the adventure playgrounds in the United Kingdom were started and are run by autonomous groups of parents and others drawn mostly from the immediate neighbourhood. The majority of these playgrounds are on waste land awaiting development and are therefore held on short leases, varying from five to ten years. Not all have been successful; not all have endured even to the end of the lease, mostly because of insufficient financial support.

The Leader

The key to a successful adventure playground lies largely in the quality and experience of the leader. He or she must be a mature person who provides the background for the children's own initiative and who is willing to act rather as an older friend and counsellor than as a leader. The title or name for such a person still eludes us: a supervisor is associated with discipline; a youth leader is trained for different work; and warden savours too much of authoritarianism. There is no single specification for the right person and as yet, in England, no full-time training. But people with various and unexpected backgrounds do emerge who take to the exacting work with a sure instinct. Some of the more successful have been actors, carpenters, plumbers, a night-watchman, or a worker with experience of handicapped or emotionally disturbed children. Only rarely do the trained youth leaders or school teachers feel at home in so unorthodox a situation. Perhaps they have too much to unlearn before they can begin.

What is needed is a person of warmth with a rare quality of understanding, especially of those children who may be ill-favoured, dull at school or, for one reason or another, detached from their social group, for it is these children who find in an adventure playground much that they have missed. The leader must have infinite patience and, above all, be friendly and uncondemning in general, even if he occasionally shows that he is human by uttering a sharp reprimand. Children enjoy the experience, in people they trust, of every sort of human quality, and are not necessarily dismayed by changes of mood. They must know, infallibly and beyond doubt, that the leader, like a good parent, will never fail them, whatever trouble they may get into.

The successful leader of an adventure playground is one who has confidence in the children's positive attitudes to make and create things in their own individual way, and in their ability to make good relationships with each other. He is less concerned with their physical development, or with organizing them into "teams" for games or joint activities, or showing them "how to play". He does, however, act as referee when a situation is in danger of getting out of hand, or when the children are unable to resolve their transient difficulties by themselves. He needs to be many steps ahead, to anticipate what materials and tools will be suitable for emerging projects, and he must be willing to discuss and support whatever activity seems to meet the needs of the moment. Above all, he will be eager to praise any endeavour that has patently brought pleasure to a group of children or, indeed, to an individual child, and not show his despair when the whole thing is abandoned and never completed.

The leader will make it his concern to attract voluntary workers to the playground. These may bring special skills, such as painting, carpentry, modelling, music or dramatics. He will also have opportunities to establish helpful contacts with parents and with the various branches of the social services; in this way he may be able to help the children when difficulties arise.

The leaders usually have no qualification except experience. The best of them are priceless.

The Committee

The leader must be supported by an understanding committee whose job it is to relieve him of much of the administrative work, such as securing sufficient funds, developing local interest, and managing publicity. Their main function is to support the leader when he needs support but not to interfere too much. Once a leader has been appointed by a committee he must, like the editor of a newspaper, be trusted to develop the work in his own way. Many adventure playgrounds have foundered either because the committee have assumed too much control and "directed" the leader, or because they have started off with pioneering enthusiasm and later failed to support him through the inevitable crises. The relationship between committee and leader depends on mutual trust, which grows and develops with time. In the early stages, great patience is needed on both sides; the committee's job is as difficult as the leader's, though different.

Variety of Opportunities

In the flexible atmosphere of an adventure playground, there seems to be no limit to the variety of occupations that can be developed and enjoyed. Some of these may be transitory, others may become established features. Some playgrounds develop a keen civic sense by arranging weekly or monthly parties for the older people of the neighbourhood, baking the cakes on the premises and arranging entertainments. Simple operas have been devised and performed, magazines composed and printed, waste logs and timber cut into suitable lengths and delivered free to old age pensioners, gardens cultivated and the produce and flowers given to sick friends or neighbours. Groups of older children sometimes form themselves into working parties to decorate and clean the rooms of old people, who greatly appreciate this concern of the outside world. Art shows have been arranged. All these and many more activities give young people a sense of being part of the community in which they live and doing things of value for others. Many adventure playgrounds arrange camping holidays or weekend trips into the countryside; some organize trips abroad.

The leader—interested, helpful but not interfering

One of the older boys made his own film of the adventure playground he be-

The end of a perfect day

longed to. He was not satisfied; "I missed something," he said. "I think I missed the community." This is good comment, for the playground is an entity, with a spirit that runs through the extraordinary mixture of ages, characters and occupations.

Children in an adventure playground can develop a healthy sense of self-esteem because there is always something at which each can excel. There is progressive development, through rich play opportunities, to a growing sense of responsibility towards the playground itself, towards care of the younger children and others outside the playground. Willingness to help others is perhaps the sign of real maturity, the goal of all who work for and with young people.

The Site and Its Use

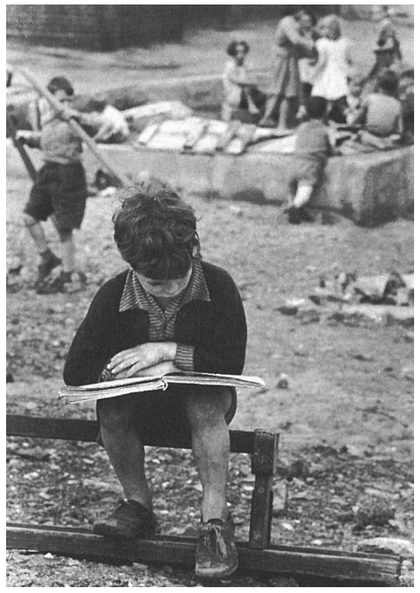
Adventure playgrounds are shaped by the children themselves according to their needs. But certain basic elements must be provided, either by the committee or by the local authority, or by a combination of both. Probably there will be little choice as to the size or shape of the site. Anything less than a quarter of an acre is too small, and anything more than an acre and a half may present difficulties of supervision and maintenance. The shape is of little moment. Most available sites are flat, but this can be remedied by building hills. There must be a play hut or pavilion large enough to accommodate all the children during dark evenings and in inclement weather. In addition to the largest possible area for indoor activities, the hut must have lavatories for boys and girls and one for the staff, an office for the leader, ample space for storage of materials, and be well heated and lighted. A covered veranda greatly adds to the possibilities of use.

There are differing opinions as to whether the site should be enclosed by a palisade, a brick wall, wire-mesh fencing, or be left totally exposed to the curiosity of passers-by. Children and young people prefer to play and work in a world of their own and not in the full glare of publicity. A totally enclosing barrier also reduces the annoyance to adults,

St. John's Wood Adventure Playground, London

who find it difficult to understand why such a mess is enjoyable to children and prefer to keep such inevitable untidiness out of sight. If the playground is enclosed, adults would see only the coiling smoke from bonfires or smell the delicious aroma of sizzling sausages and roast potatoes. Such a barrier also tends to baffle noise. In Emdrup, the playground is sunk 6 feet below the surrounding land, and finger-repelling shrubs have been planted on the adjoining high banks. Those who argue that the adventure playground should be visually open to passing adults (and policemen) believe that this reduces the chances of undesirable goings-on when the playground is closed.

A quiet read



The children in adventure playgrounds are so occupied, happy and engrossed in what they are doing, that insurance companies are surprisingly understanding and realize that the total situation is a healthy one. They are impressed, too, by the presence of a leader, and are therefore willing to grant most reasonable terms.[2]

It is well to remember that in Great Britain in 1966-7 it cost as much as £20 a week to keep a wayward boy in an Approved School.[3] If, by making our playgrounds rich and exciting in their opportunities, we can save only one child a year from delinquency, we have found the salary of the leader. The cost to the community of street accidents is formidable; we need to save only one child a year from a tragic accident and the salary of a leader has been met.

Since the leader and his assistants cannot be expected to attend the playground every day of the year, it is wise to have some part of the site that is never closed, so that the children do not feel excluded when the leader is not there. The hard surfaced ball game area can certainly be open to children at any time they care to make use of it, and this is true also of the section set aside for small children and their mothers. This latter section should be regarded as a comfortable garden area with trees and grass, scats and cables. Experience has shown that, where it is clearly apparent that great care has been taken to make a pleasant and well-kept sitting area, there is no destruction or abuse. The neighbourhood will respect such a garden, and so will the children, provided it is always kept trim and well ordered. Any sign of neglect will invite destruction.

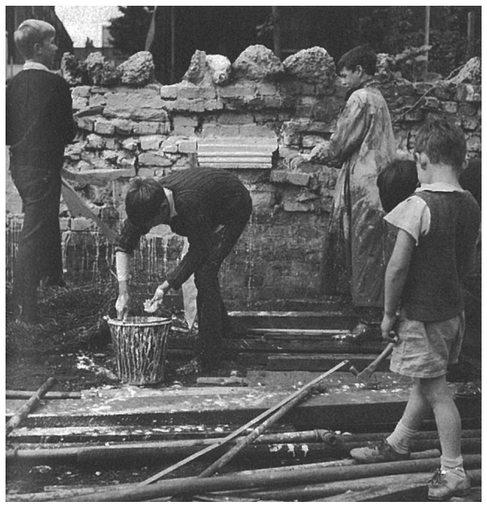
Children make their own order out of chaos

Apart from the free, permissive atmosphere and rich opportunities for self-expression found in adventure playgrounds, they are also notable for the intensive use that is made of the space and facilities. When children are at school, for instance, supervised play group is organized for the pre-school children during the mornings and afternoons. This is a great boon to parents who are often hard pressed to find places where their small children can play in safety.

During holidays and on Saturdays, the playgrounds are open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. During term-time, the school children use them during the mid-day break and from 4 to 8 p.m., winter and summer.

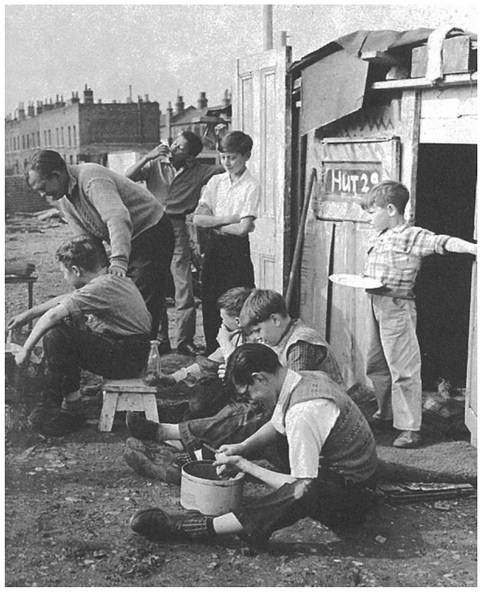
The characteristic attachment of young people in adventure playgrounds to their own community—especially as they grow older—poses a problem that has not yet been entirely solved, for some of those over fifteen are reluctant to leave to find their pleasures and entertainment elsewhere. So strong is their attachment that in one instance it has been found necessary to build special accommodation on the playground where these young people can continue their community activities on their own. On another playground, the fine indoor facilities are rented out between 8 and 10 p.m., for a small sum, to young people who wish to practise a skill, such as judo, or to form a band. They are astonishingly responsible when trusted in this way to care for the property and to behave well.

Bandley Hill Adventure Playground, Stevenage, England



Ampton Street Adventure Playground, London

Children know their own limits



Sausages and mash with the leader

It can be seen, therefore, that adventure playgrounds are able to cater for children as young as two and young people up to twenty or older. They are in use from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. The wide age-range and the extended hours of use throughout the year, winter and summer alike, make the adventure playgrounds uniquely different from all other playgrounds.

The main prejudice against adventure playgrounds, as already mentioned, is their untidiness; but this can be hidden from the outside world. Another argument used against them is fear of accidents, and this needs examining with care. The sites are usually rough; the tools are strong and potentially lethal; the climbing structures made by the children, although tested by the leader, appear rickety and dangerous; bonfires might be considered a hazard; and the large numbers of children of all ages, working or playing singly and in groups, might be thought uncontrollable at times. Yet in all the ten years' experience in the United Kingdom, there has been nothing more serious than cuts and bruises, and no parent has ever made a claim. Children are prone to danger whatever they are doing; many fatal accidents occur when they play in the streets amid the traffic, and very serious accidents happen when, because of boredom, they play monkey tricks on the fixed equipment of orthodox playgrounds.

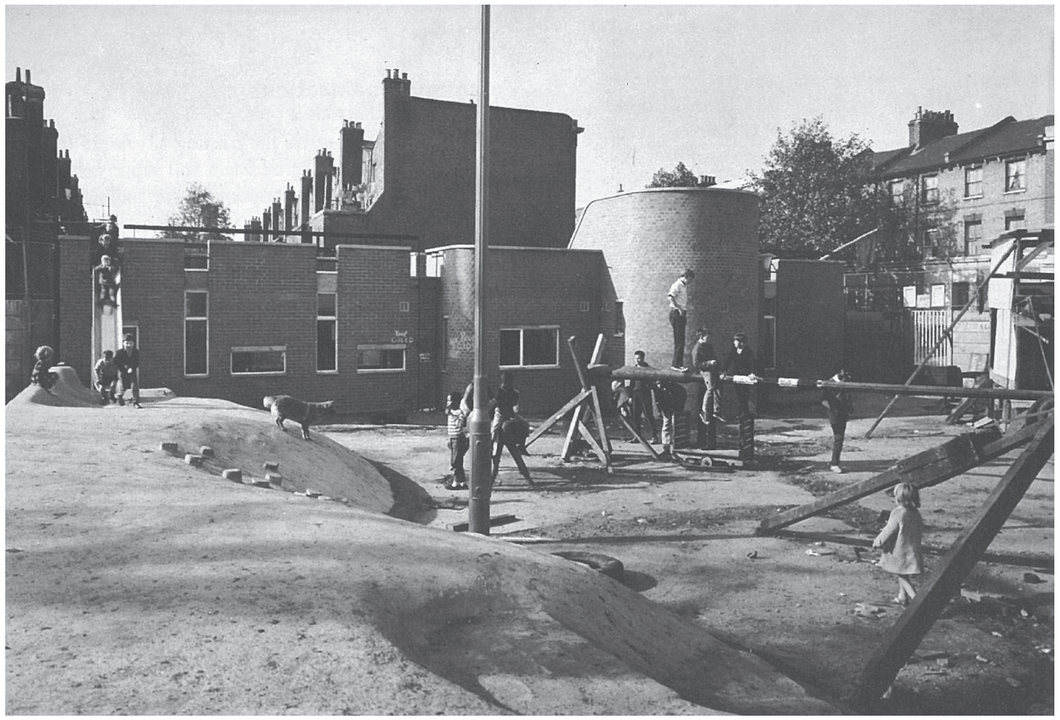
Notting Hill Adventure Playground, London

Voluntary Organizations and Local Authorities

Who should be responsible for creating adventure playgrounds? Who should maintain and supervise them, and who should be responsible for finding the finance?

If there are to be sufficient adventure playgrounds for any given catchment area, then clearly Iocal authorities must take a major responsibility in regard to finance and making suitable sites available. Hedged around as they are, however, by regulations, fear of litigation, etc., they may be insufficiently flexible to face the problems involved in actually supervising the playgrounds. It seems necessary for voluntary organizations to act as pioneers, to demonstrate a need and the possibility of meeting it.

One of the main difficulties in creating an adventure playground is finding the money for the initial cost (building, fencing, heating, drainage, etc.), and then the money to maintain the playground. In Denmark a solution has been provided in the Children and Juvenile Welfare Act



Notting Hill Adventure Playground
The adventure area and building from the north, showing, on the left, the slide from the roof. A photograph taken before the children had created their own playground.

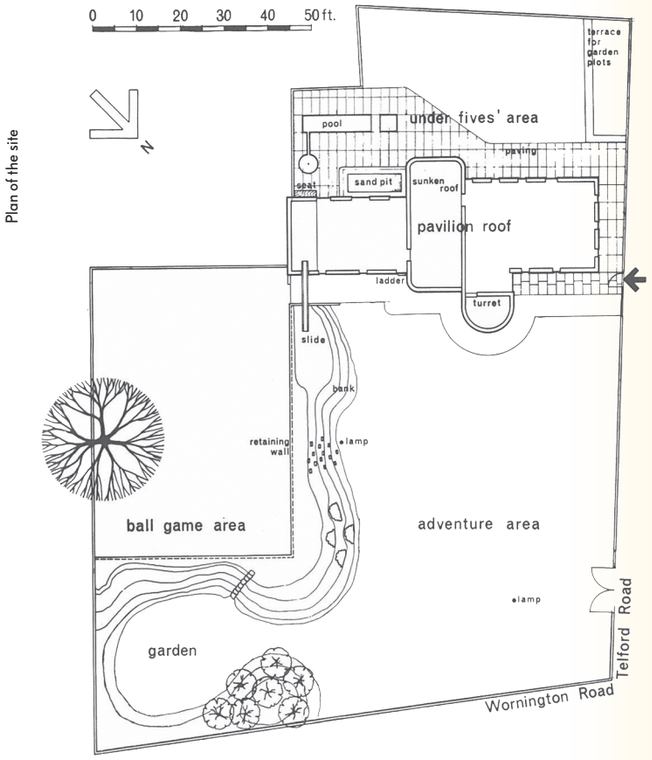
which came into force on 1 April 1965. Public annual grants to institutions for children and young people of school age and over amount to 45 per cent from the state and 35 per cent from the local authority; the remaining 20 per cent is not difficult for the voluntary organizations to raise. In addition to the maintenance costs, there is full payment for rent and interest on repayment of mortgage loans, four-sevenths being paid by the state and three-sevenths by the local authority.[4]

In view of the nature of adventure playgrounds, perhaps the best solution would be a partnership between voluntary organizations[5] and local authorities—the former taking all responsibility for administration and running of the playgrounds, and the latter being responsible for contributing at least 85 per cent of the capital cost and administrative expenses. This implies a national, or at least a regional, voluntary organization with sufficient knowledge and experience not only to advise the local authority on suitable locations, but also to see that the adventure playgrounds are run efficiently. The outstanding example of such an organization is Pro Juventute in Switzerland.[6]

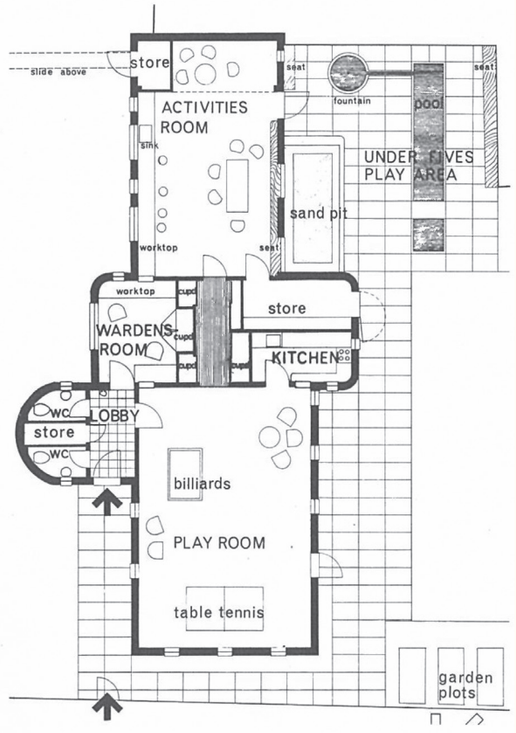
NOTTING HILL ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND, LONDON

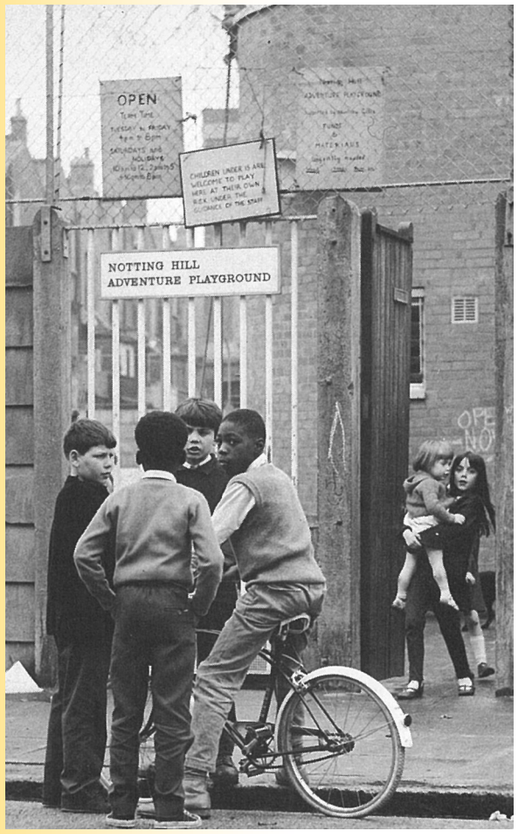
This playground is in a densely populated and underprivileged area on a site of just over a third of an acre, which was given and fenced by the Borough. The scheme consists of a playground for school-age children, separated from an area for under-fives by the playground building. The building itself has two large recreation rooms which are used by both groups of children.

Plan of the site

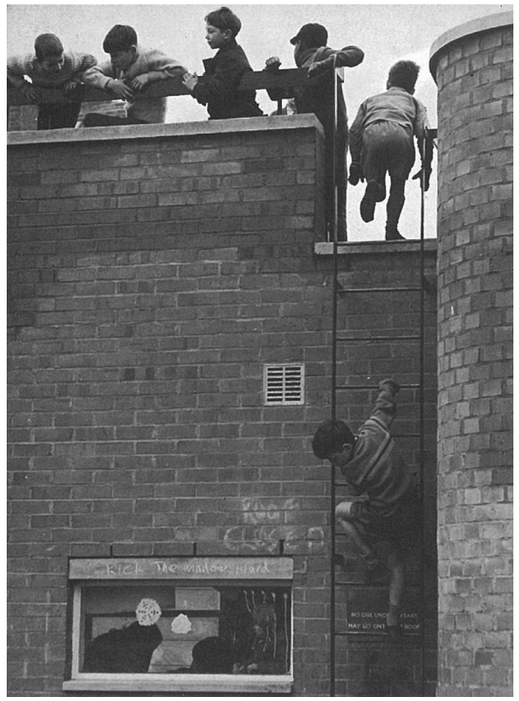


Plan of pavilion





Entrance to playground



The way onto the roof

The School-Age Playground

The main playground is divided into three sections: the adventure area, the hall game area, and the garden. The largest and most important of these is the adventure area, which is the starting-point and the heart of the whole scheme. The existing ground surface here was old asphalt and earth, and nothing was done except to install 25-foot street lamps.

The ball game area (65×45 feet) is divided from the rest of the playground by a 4-foot retaining wall of concrete blocks, with the excavated material from the building piled against it, shaped and graded. This bank was then surfaced with sprayed concrete on steel mesh, and granite setts were embedded in it to form steps, climbing-stones and platforms. It is constantly used for climbing, running, sitting and watching. An unsurfaced or grassed bank would have been completely impractical.

In the most secluded corner, an ambitious garden was originally planned but then dropped, partly because of its cost and partly to offer the children the opportunity to make the garden themselves. The garden site was left with banks surrounding it, and a grove of sycamores was planted on a small mound. This free growth of activities depending on the children themselves is an essential feature of the playground.

The Under-Fives Area

Being on the south-west side of the building, this area is the sunniest and most sheltered part of the playground; it has a sand-pit and paddling-pool with a paved surround. The central area has a smooth asphalt surface and is used by toddlers with their wheeled toys and for their games.

The area is intended for use by the older children as well, but for quieter activities than those carried on in the adventure area. Table tennis and other similar games could be brought out here on summer evenings. Along one side a terrace has been built of a suitable height for sitting on; this was intended to be filled with a good topsoil so that the children could grow their own seeds and plants.

The Roof

This is part of the playground and has been planned with areas for play on different levels, one of which is a turret. The roof is intended for the older children and can be reached only by climbing a steep ladder, whose bottom rungs have been cut off in order to deter the younger children. The slide down from the roof not only provides fun but also satisfies the authorities as a quick means of escape. The sunken area in the middle is used by groups of older children as a kind of outdoor room for playing records and gossip.

Playroom

This is the largest room (20×30 feet); it is just inside the entrance to the building, and also has a door to the paved area on the other side. It is for games, meetings, dancing, table tennis and billiards. The tall narrow windows are designed to allow children of all ages to see out and at the same time to reduce the glass area (and thus the breakages) to the minimum. Ventilation is by louvres which do not project beyond the face of the wall inside or outside. The ceiling tiles provide heat insulation and sound absorption. Partly inset fluorescent ceiling lighting is used in continuous runs and with plastic diffusers. The walls are lined with pin-up or chalk board, and the curtains are provided by the children.

The well-equipped small kitchen enables the girls to do some cooking, and snacks can be served through the hatch. This is so heavily used that more space and a wider serving hatch would be fully justified.

The Activities Room

This room is linked to the playroom by a lobby lined with cupboards. It is designed for quieter and more sedentary activities, such as painting, clay-modelling and crafts. A strong work-top, surfaced with formica, runs the full length of the room and has a sink let into it. This work-top is lit almost continuously by windows which look into the adventure area and again give the maximum light with the minimum glass area.

The under-fives playground

On the other side of the room, the windows are rather larger, since they look on to the sunny and sheltered part of the playground for the under-fives. These larger windows slide vertically to avoid projections, and the lower sections are glazed with toughened glass. A continuous window-seat is low enough for the smallest children to sit on or to use for arranging their toys.

This room is particularly suitable for the day-time play groups of children under five; it has a large store-room opening to both the room and the outdoor under-fives area.

The Leader's Room

When he is in his room the leader occupies a key position on the plan. His door is immediately opposite the main entrance door, and when both doors are open there is a direct view of the playground entrance gate. The room has a wide window commanding the adventure play area, and a side window from which the slide, the roof ladder and the ball game area can all be seen. There are two work-tops, each with a hatch communicating with the top main rooms. The leader's room also contains a full-height locking cupboard and the telephone.

Cloakrooms and Stores

There are two cloakrooms, each with a WC washbasin, with access from the main entrance lobby, where there is a drinking fountain. A small ablution room, with a foot-bath and, if possible, a shower or handspray, would be a useful addition. The two HVCs were provided with a maximum of seventy children in mind. Actually 250 children often use

the playground at one time, and to WCs for each sex would be much better. Coat-hooks are provided in the lobby as well as in the playroom.

In addition to the storage already mentioned, there is a locked store off the entrance hall for cleaners' materials, electrical equipment, and access to the water tanks and small storage loft.

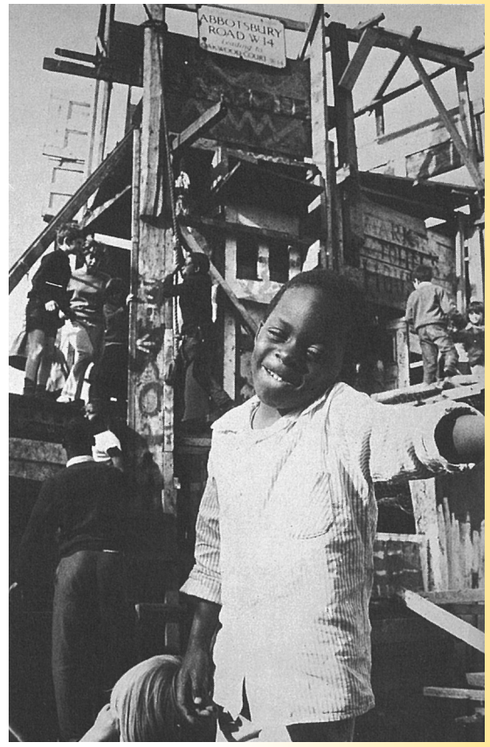
These two cloakrooms and the store with the tank and loft above form the basis of the roof turret.

Heating

High-level fan heaters warn the two main rooms, with the addition of a radiant convector at the end of the activities room. The cloakrooms have miniature electric radiators, and the leader's room has a radiant convector. The system is flexible but expensive, and economy demands a very high degree of supervision, which is not always possible. Ideally the heating should be controlled from the leader's room.

Materials

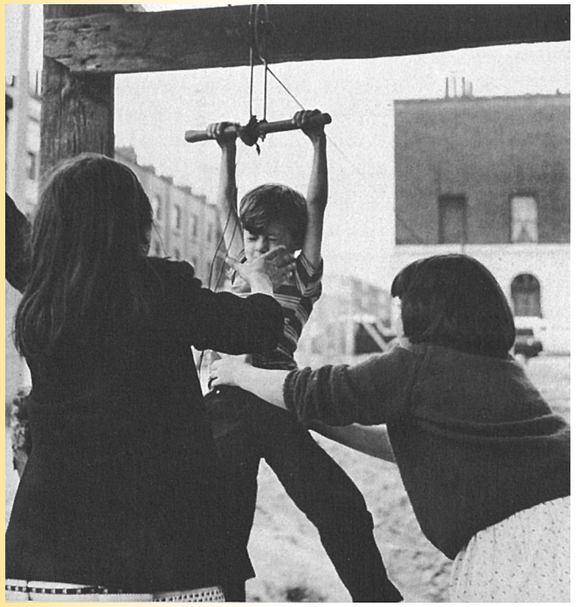
The permanent structure is of bricks, blocks and concrete, all as strong as possible and with good paint finishes. There is no plaster to be chipped, and many vulnerable corners have been rounded. The changing decorative elements are provided by the children; these take the form of hand-printed curtains, and material on the pin-up and chalk boards which line the walls.



Everything must be as strong as money will allow if maintenance costs are to be avoided. Strength is important in door-frames and fixings, door-hinges and stays, all internal and external wall surfaces, parapet and handrail fixings—everything, in fact, that can be shaken, scratched, swung on, climbed on, bashed or idly picked at.

The absence of plaster seems to have been justified, for the robust surface of the walls is wearing well. The rough surface inhibits drawing. The finish was achieved with large quantities of a "block filling" type of paint and a top quality gloss specification in all vulnerable areas.

Very good quality cement glaze finish, on cement and sand rendering, in the cloakrooms has so far proved to be as good as glazed tiles. The floor riles in



the main rooms, although two-tone and mottled, are too pale. The problem of black rubber heel marks and dirt brought in from the playground is more acute than in schools and other buildings for children. It is clearly necessary to forgo a fair amount of light reflection in order to ensure a reasonable everyday appearance.

The glazing is the most vulnerable part of the building, but the narrow windows with no projecting casements have so far been successful in keeping breakage to a minimum.

Fencing The Site

The site had a bad history of vandalism and dumping. The fencing was therefore carried out before the playground work and quite independently of the playground plan. A 12-foot fence was provided, consisting of 8 feet of concrete planks and 4 feet of chain link. This has proved to be a surprisingly good solution. It is high enough to keep balls inside, and it is solid enough to make the playground a world of its own. This is important since the inevitable untidiness of the adventure area does not contribute to the beauty of the neighbourhood. Besides, the children do not want to be watched by people outside. It is impractical to have no views into the site at all; hesitant children like to look in as they pass before deciding to come and play. Also it is necessary to be able to keep an eye on the playground when it is closed. For these reasons two small gaps were made and filled with vertical steel railings.

Costs

The total final cost (excluding fees, fencing and gifts in kind) was £11,633 in 1966. Of this, £9,370 was for the building with the fixtures and drainage, and the rest was spent on the features of the playground itself, including ground surfacing to all but the adventure area and the garden.

The area of the building within the walls is 1,509 square feet, and this gives a cost per square foot, including drainage and services, of £25,30.

Architects: Michell and Partners

After visiting Notting Hill Adventure Playground, Arvid Bengtsson of Sweden, himself a distinguished maker of playgrounds illustrated in this book, made the following comment:

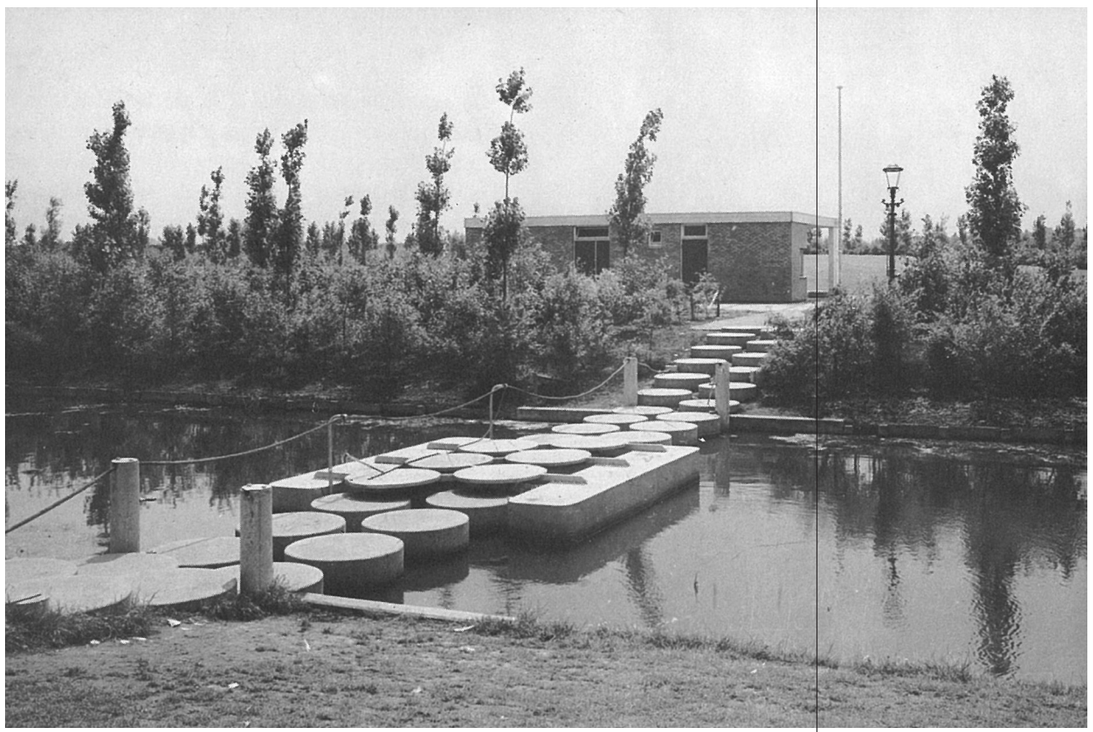
I do not think I have met anything since my first visit to Emdrup in 1946. Chat has made me so thrilled. It has just the spirit and atmosphere. I have always been looking for it in my own playgrounds but I did not find out how it was achieved. What is it that makes Notting Hill so extraordinary? Could it be the intimacy, the warm feeling of shelter? Perhaps playgrounds are often too open. Notting Hill has an excellent pavilion with an extremely good relation to the out-of-doors and this is a very rare thing indeed.

The Leader of the Notting Hill Playground, Pat Smythe, makes his comment:

The atmosphere here is homely. Homely to the boy returning from a spell in Borstal, to the old ape pensioners coming to their own Club, to the unmarried mother bringing her baby to the nursery group that she herself attended not so long ago and homely to the West Indian youth fresh off the boat. Homely, too, to the thousands of children that come in from the troubled streets.

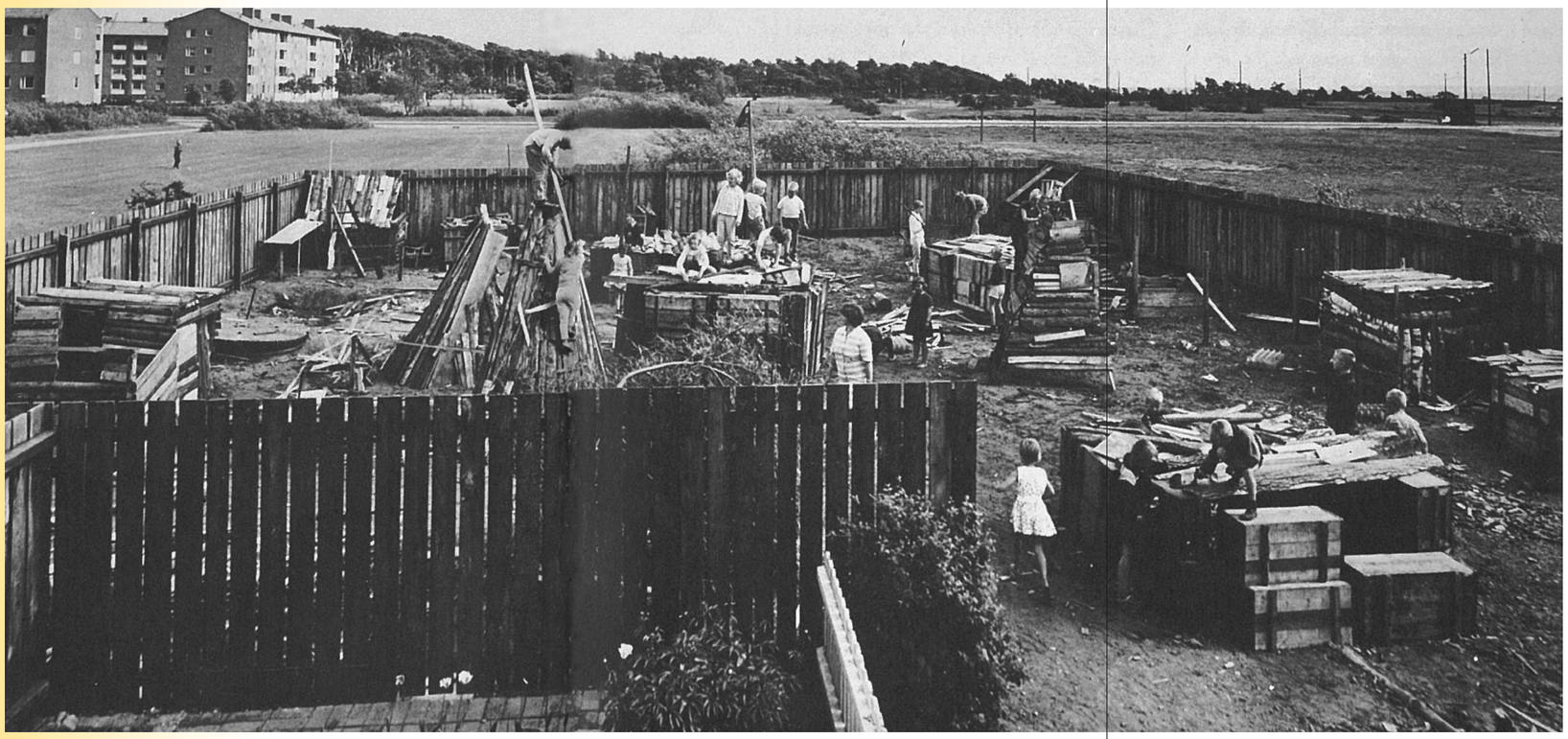
Educationalists come to look, to listen and to learn. They come to watch children doing natural things such as creating dream-houses out of old timber, splashing about in water, digging in the soil, enjoying the flowers from plants grown by themselves, or making music with their home-made steel band.

The sociologists ask how a self-made community can be created in an area that has not yet learnt the science of community life for they know that life is a pretty raw business between the railway and the canal, despite the superficial refinements of television and washing machines.

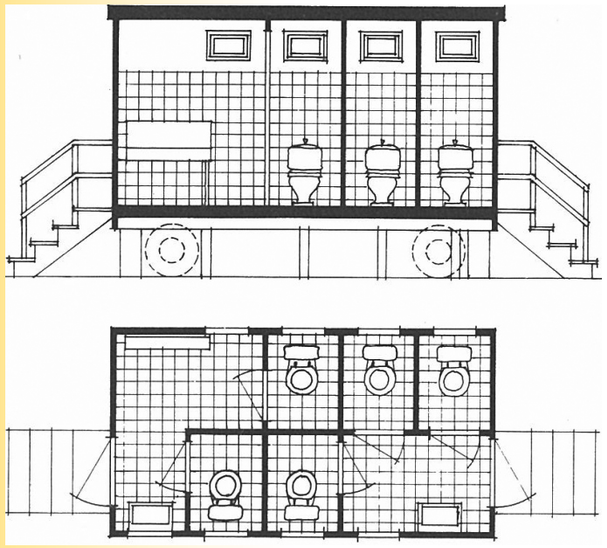


The floating bridge leading to Children's Island, Amsterdam-West, which is supervised by neighbourhood clubs

House-building on Children's Island



An adventure playground in Odensgatan, Sweden, forming part of a comprehensive playground including swings, gardens and grass playing areas. The adventure playground, which was opened in 1960, is about 1,450 square yards and is enclosed by a tall timber fence which gives intimacy for the children and hides their activities from the passer-by.



Mobile toilet car

Building Site Playgrounds

Children delight in the excitement and danger to be found on building sites, where they can use materials left by contractors and can also explore the half-built houses. This is naturally deplored by the contractors for much damage is often done. Børge T. Lorentzen, the town architect of Rødovre, appreciating these natural instincts in children, has evolved the idea of reserving a small part of building sites as playgrounds, which he supplies with tools and scrap material from the builders.

Lavatory facilities are provided by a mobile toilet car. The district medical officer has approved this arrangement in a temporary play area. A shed is put up for the leader and as a store for the tools. Girls as well as boys from six to sixteen enjoy these improvised playgrounds and the contractors have been willing collaborators.[7]

LENOX-CAMDEN PLAYGROUND, MASSACHUSETTS, USA

An experimental playground was built, and its use and development carefully studied during seven months (April to October 1966), in Lower Roxbury, Boston, Massachusetts. The following description is an abstract front the assessment of this experiment written by Robin C. Moore.[8]

The site (285×55 feet) was flanked on each side by housing in a declining neighbourhood with demolished houses near by. The housing project, with which the playground was identified, was entirely Negro and of varied social character.

An initial design was presented and well received at a meeting held in March, attended by about ninety members of the Lenox-Camden Tenants Association (mostly mothers), and general support remained constant throughout the project—a group prepared a mid-day meal for the work-crew each Saturday.

Construction started in April and the playground was almost finished by mid-October. As money was extremely scarce, the design was conditioned by the availability of donated, local or scrap material, and as the voluntary labor lacked continuity, the constructional tasks had to be very simple.

The total cost was $2,800. An estimated cost for the same design let on contract was $15,000, and for a very mundane “standard” playground on the same side the estimate was $7,500.

The site before operations began

AIMS OF THE EXPERIMENT

The design objectives related to the general goal of aiding individual development as follows:

- To provide an environment that would stimulate creative and imaginative play, motor action and manual skills, cognitive development and the acquisition of knowledge, sensory stimulation and powers of perception, and finally the social aspects of play—self-knowledge, personality development and social adeptness.
- To provide a clear identifiable locus for more general community activities.

Most playgrounds provide a very narrow range of activity and they are unattractive, dangerous and uninteresting. They are low-ranking items for resource allocation, and when built, are designed to meet only two objectives—easy installation at a low cost and negligible maintenance.

The aim of the experiment was to create a “free” varied, choiceful play environment so that specific issues relating to the design of playgrounds could be examined. Creative and imaginative play are often assumed to be the most valuable activities that children engage in, yet they are the activities least provided for.

The attitude taken was that a playground shout be a place for free expression, where activities that were illegitimate elsewhere could be indulged in. Play with fire and mucking in water are examples. Only a few very specific things were strongly frowned upon: throwing stones at one another, breaking bottles, dropping litter and destructive attacks on the fixed equipment. A lesson quickly learnt was that the “fixed” environment had to be made extremely robust if it was to stand up to heavy, boisterous “normal” use.

It was assumed there would be substantial critical reaction by the community—dirt, dangers and the general second-hand quality of the material. On the question of dirt there was little criticism, it was neither cleaner nor dirtier than other places; most of the com-

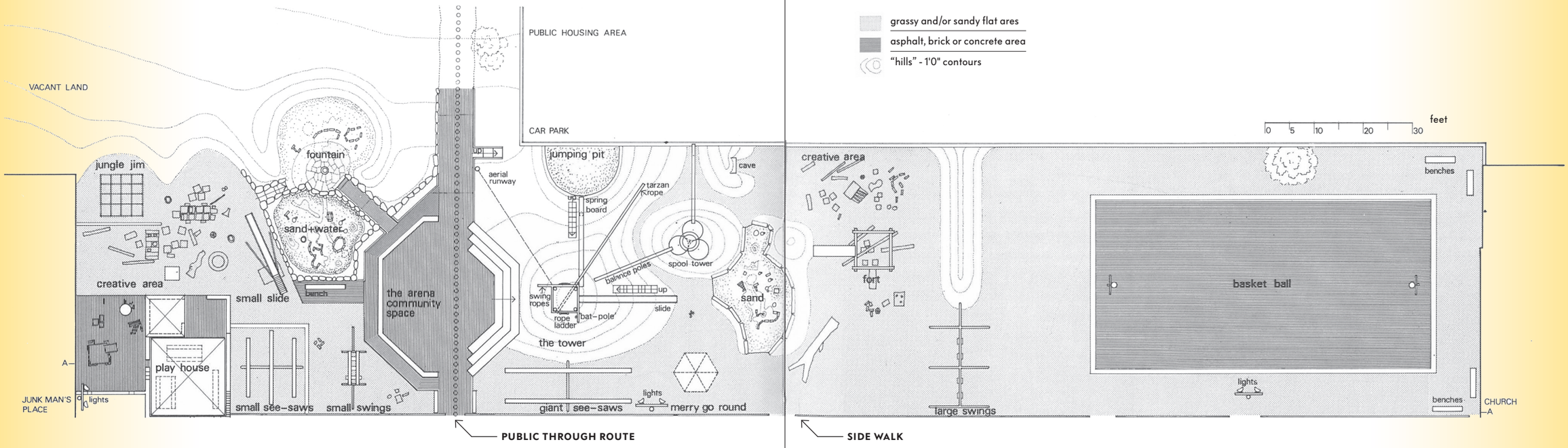
ments about danger came from older teenagers and young adults, nearly all of whom had no children. Many were out to "knock" the playground, especially before the basketball court was built. This group also criticized the "second- hand nature" of the playground. The critical and ridiculing roles were the only attitudes which conformed to peer-group standards. The criticism was used as an opportunity to explain the ideas behind the playground and its experimental nature—the playground had to be exciting and even dangerous to attract the over-tens.

Most criticism from the community centred round issue of danger—but in conversation this would usually concede to the other side of the question: the need for challenge. These critics were encouraged to know that there had been only one serious accident, which could have happened just as easily on a "regular" playground.

ACTIVITY AND PATTERNS OF USE

Very quickly the children viewed the playground as a legitimate place for play—it therefore took on a clear identity even at an early stage.

Once the playground was in operational condition it stimulated a surprising number of more formal activities. There were two arts and crafts programmes. A neighbourhood street carnival was held alongside the playground one summer evening. A sports evening was held for teenagers, movie shows were held on Saturday nights through the summer, and other possibilities discussed.



Activity was the initial attraction and excuse for coming to the playground; but if the setting for action allowed people to sit around watching, they did so—talking, singing, joking, flirting, etc., while the more intensive activity of the playhouse, tower and basketball court provided a background interest.

The length of time spent on the playground per trip was often relatively short. Trips were frequent, and it often appeared as if activity on the playground was just one link in a chain of play activity occurring in and around the child's home. The playground was just one among a number of other play areas—the street, the large sand "desert" adjacent to the housing project, grass and asphalt areas within the project, the project's spray pool, etc. For example, a child would come back from school, play a while, go home to change, maybe have a snack, return to the playground, go sit and talk on the front steps of a project building facing the playground, go to the "Slush-Truck" (the local refreshment van, being crushed ice and fruit syrup at 10 cents a helping), borrow a bike and go for a ride, return to the playground, go fetch something from home such as a doll, candy, a gun, the latest Batman gimmick to show a friend, return, etc.

As far as one could tell the most frequent trips were made to and from home. In this way the playground functioned almost as a large open-air playroom, and an adjunct to the other living spaces in the child's home.

The location of the playground, so near to most of the homes, dearly facilitated this pattern of use. It is suggested that this pattern was healthy; visits did not have to be in the least bit formalized, as they would be to a facility further away. The playground was always the first place to "check out" when looking for friends and or action. This leads to the conclusion that play-spaces should be incorporated intimately into housing areas.

The most important observation made in terms of age was that it bore little relation to physical ability, to courage in particular—as well as spills. A six-year-old girl would, for example, climb up the tower without a second thought, while an eleven-year-old boy would be scared and unable to take the same route. This observation has many implications for design, such as the non-segregation of different age groups.

A set of activities noted very carefully were those which were totally unplanned and unpredicted—the children saw potentialities in situations, materials and environment that were unseen by the designer: e.g. jumping from the spool tower into the sand-pit became a really popular pastime. It was a graded challenge; a few jumped from the yellow spool (top), most from the middle red spool, and the smallest from the lowest blue spool. Again, it was not initially realized how common and highly organized an activity "collecting bugs" is. It is easy enough to provide for—just by having a few large, but movable, rocks around (one twelve-year-old wanted to organize a "bug exhibition").

CREATIVE AND IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Creative play is an opportunity for children to manipulate their environment to achieve their own ends and to sense the fact that the world around them can be changed and need not be taken as given.

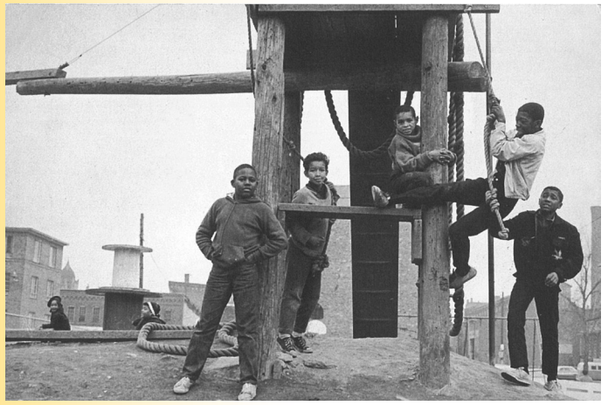
Materials that would normally appear as "junk" in other people's eyes are very relevant to much creative and imaginative play. Useful junk consisted of objects that could be used for building construction or objects that previously had a specific function and could still be used as such: the steering wheel of a car, for instance, became the steering wheel of a "fire-engine." These materials were often used individually as props to the imagination and many times functioned as the initial stimulus, setting the child thinking along a particular line.

Movable materials did raise a number of practical problems. The less robust items tended to get smashed and lost their usefulness. They had to be cleaned up and disposed of. After a while, movable materials became dispersed over the playground, tending to reduce their play potential. Stimulation was increased if they were reassembled frequently by the adults. Some of the more attractive items were carried right off the playground—a problem that diminished only when the fence was put up.

General construction became such a popular activity that some of the hills and an additional sand-pit of the original design were omitted to give general construction more elbow-room. One aim was to discover the most popular movable materials. These turned out to be milk crates, large timber cubes 1 foot to each side, 2-inches thick timber up to 12 inches wide and 5 feet long, sheets of masonite and chip-board, 50-gallon barrels and many other kinds of robust junk. Bricks were a good idea, they were used acidly for building, but they got broken and scattered over the playground, and the children threw them at each other. Great interest was also shown in more fragile materials: long, thin slivers of wood, cardboard boxes, old domestic items such as clocks, TV sets, etc.

In the context of creative and imaginative play it was fascinating to observe what might be called group imagination in operation at close quarters. This was the important social aspect of play operating at its highest level. Typically, a creative sequence would start in a leisurely way with a small group; as time went on more would join in, children of diverse ages. Different members would make suggestions, try something out and meet, or not meet, with the approval of the group. One idea or action would suggest another, with different members taking the initiative and leadership.

For example, one day a small group of eight- to twelve-year-old boys spent an hour building two clubhouses and another couple of hours playing around then, adding to them, and just sitting in them talking—dreaming up various kinds of imaginary situations, such as being in the middle of the jungle. Finally, they smashed what they had built, with energetic pleasure. The second day, I arrived to find a "Pepsi cart" already constructed in the same vicinity, on a large loading pallet about 8×3 feet lying on the ground; this had obviously partly suggested the vehicle, A "milk-truck" was under construction, suggested by the crates, The constructions were done in beautiful detail, complete with all kinds of "levers", "head-lamps", "wheels", "seats", etc. The group's imagination was in operation all the time, with the group growing in size, mostly boys, the younger members fol-



lowing behind, taking orders from the older members. Then for a long, long time the kids "drove" the vehicles, delivering milk and Pepsi, chatting to the "storekeepers" and "housewives", negotiating hazards on the "highway". The kids acted out a whole chunk of everyday adult experience.

The greatest amount of creative activity, in terms of both frequency and span, took place behind and in the playhouse. It is suggested that one of the reasons for this was the sense of enclosure there: spaces of adequate size for constructive activities, out of psychologically from the surroundings, even though other activities were going on in the immediately adjacent area.

Kids the world over enjoy the feeling of secrecy and of sharing it with a few intimates. Through imaginative play they were quite able to turn a far corner of the playhouse into a "secret place", even though every kid on the playground knew the playhouses had a "far corner". The need is for the sense of privacy rather than physical isolation. Elevated positions were very popular (where one could feel separate yet still observed); the tops of both towers and the top of the slide were often used in this way.

One aim of the study was to identify situations involving educational activities (such as bug-collecting) and more specific instances of cognitive problem-solving. These occurred often, of course, during creative play. But a good example occurred during construction. A long time was spent trying to figure out a way of making water available for play in the area adjacent to the fountain. One day the kids wanted water and quickly solved the problem. They found an old pair of handlebars, stuck one end over the fountain and directed water to wherever they wanted it as it gushed out the other end.

THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN

Early in the experiment it was decided that thunder-fives were a special group, requiring special study. Their behaviour was often quite abstract, movement was comparatively slow, exploratory and often localized. The area in and around the playhouse was the favourite "roaming space" for this group. It became clear that ideally there should have been a special area of extremely intimate scale provided for them. These parts of the environment would take on the appearance of large-scale open-air playrooms. A critical difficulty is trying to comprehend the very small-scale environment that children operate in. For the youngest children this is completely different from an adult scale.

Much behavior was patterned with imaginative play and interspersed with more active pursuits (like climbing over the playhouse). For the five-year-olds and under, creative play often appeared far more abstract than for older children—the first explorations of the sensuous and other qualities of their immediate surroundings. Children

at this age would just play around the playhouse, in the sand, and/or at moving a few small pieces of timber around.

The attachment of the youngest boys and girls to the house is well illustrated by the following example. A group of five-year-olds (girls and boys) spent a good hour making "mud pies" in the playhouse, but the sand to make them was brought in a paper bag from the sand-pit, the water from the fountain, the "fruit" (sawdust) from the "arena" where sawing had been done, the "frosting" was shaken from an old can of cleaning powder. In passing, it should be noted that this example is an excellent illustration of how important minute parts of the manipulable environment can be for imaginative play.

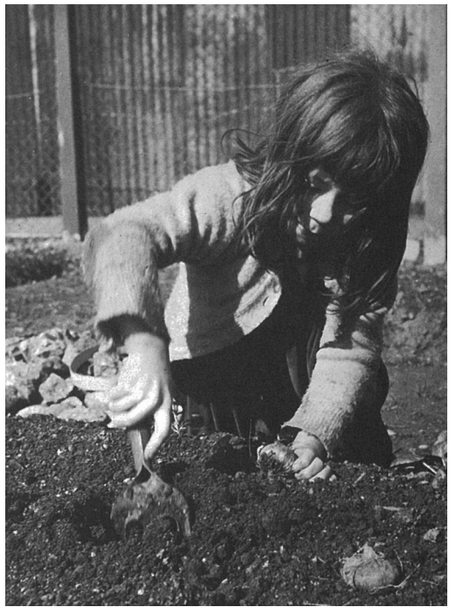
Rough Land, Animals and Gardens

> *Life is a continuous flow of experiences. What happens before is the threshold of experience to come.*
>
> —**EDMUND N. BACON** (Design of Cities, 1967)

Many children these days live in homes where it is forbidden to keep animals except perhaps budgerigars and canaries. Close and intimate contact with nature is possibly the greatest loss suffered by town children. We should strive to ensure that every town has some rough tracts of land within reach of all, and as near a country setting as possible. The problem is to avoid tidiness on the one hand and squalor on the other, which means unobtrusive managing. Rough land with scrubby undergrowth, wild flowers and worms, butterflies and hedgehogs, are an incentive to play and learning. They encourage laughter, discovery, surprise and curiosity.

Lollard Adventure Playground
(A school has now been built on this site)

Such an area has been used in an interesting way in Crawley New Town. It is a 4-acre rough tract of scrub and wild life, with many tall forest trees. It has been roughly divided into four portions with a meandering path and low cleft-chestnut fencing to mark the boundaries. The children of the neighbourhood have free access to one portion for a year in which they can do as they like: cut the undergrowth and make houses, dig holes, etc. But they must not—and do not—damage the forest trees. After a year, the second section is opened to them and the first



Lollard Adventure Playground

one closed. By the time they come back to the first section, the natural regeneration has taken place and the process starts all over again.

One of the great advantages of having a garden in a playground is that it gives the children a continuous, constructive interest. From the age of five to twelve, or sometimes even later, they have an instinctive desire to grow something, be it food, flowers or pets. There is much talk about discipline. The discipline of the seasons, the weather, the type of soil and its feeding are very valuable in showing children that they must obey certain rules in order to get results—and results are what they want.

Parkhill Adventure Playground in London had about a quarter of an acre of landscaped garden which had been neglected for many years. It was completely overgrown with perennial weeds. Woody nightshade, dock, couch-grass, polygonum and convolvulus or bindweed flourished everywhere. Six months before the playground opened, the weeds were rooted out, the land dug, leveled and seeded with the help of the local vouch club. Originally it was planned to develop the garden as an area for old people and mothers with young children, but on that fine April morning when the gates opened, the children who arrived had other ideas. They immediately staked out individual claims on the roughly dug beds and rockeries. Some of the older children wanted to share, but all the younger ones wanted a garden of their own.

The shape of a child's garden is very important, especially when forty or fifty are working in close proximity. Narrow plots with a long frontage, every part of which can be cultivated while standing on a path, are ideal. When their enthusiasm is high, children forget they have feet and, given a broad plot, they will tread neighbouring gardens flat when making their way to the back of their own. At Parkhill the broad beds were divided down the middle so that the breadth was never more than 2 feet. A barrier to keep the soil in the gardens is also necessary. On a flat surface some kind of fixed boundary is essential even if it is only a line of bricks or stones or a strong concrete curb. On a wet and sticky day, lawn and garden or path and garden all become one under a child's feet.

What the children grow in their gardens is their own affair. Advice is given when asked, but children learn

as much by their mistakes as by their successes. Bulbs are probably the most rewarding culture, especially for beginners. Some are bought; the children are encouraged to bring their own; a sharp lookout is kept for end-of-season surplus stock sold off cheaply in local shops. Each child has at least six large bulbs which are certain to flower. Second-hand bulbs have a disappointing habit of producing copious leaves but no blooms.

In twelve school gardens in Amsterdam, around 6300 children in the 5th grade are learning how to develop their own gardens.

When spring comes, so do the vandals. In 1966, when the playground gates were left open for the builders, every tulip was picked as it flowered. The most persistent vandals, however, are animals. Sparrows decapitate the snowdrops, tear the crocuses to shreds and snap off the scillas. Wood pigeons peck at the tulips, and once a grey squirrel was seen hurrying across the lawn with a crocus corm in its mouth. The children counter these hazards by planting their small, vulnerable bulls in clamps. After-bonfire night on 5 November, having collected all the rocket sticks they can find, they surround their gardens with stockades strung around with black cotton.

A charming children's garden in a Swedish playground; attractive and protected from draughts.
Architect → ARVID BENGTSSON

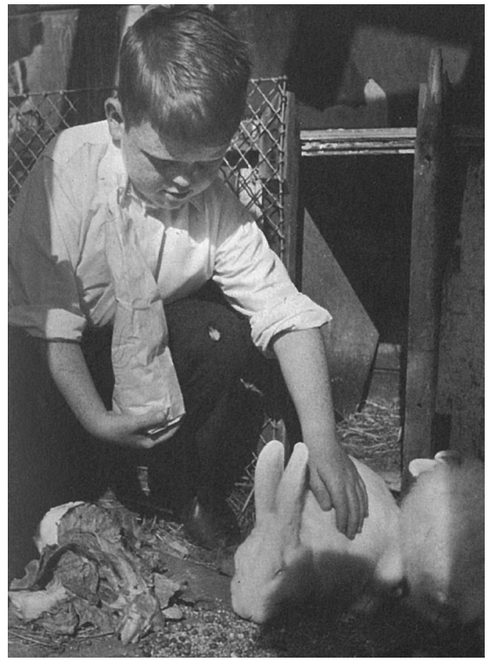
In the Easter holidays, annuals are planted. Again some basic stock is bought, but this is really reserved for children of large families where there is no money to spare. The majority can afford a packet or two of seeds, and a great deal of swopping goes on. Apart from a passion for sunflowers, the children's taste is romantic. Their favourites are cosmos, love-in-the-mist and gypsophila, delicate flowers with vague, misty foliage. Virginia stock is very popular with the boys, and it is difficult to decide whether its success is due to its lovely colours, quick rate of growth or the amount of seed for the money.

Gardening tools for children are a problem. For the very young, a stock of the smallest trowels and handforks are bought. They are light and harmless as weapons, but they are also easily lost. Friends have given a number of strong iron trowels and handforks which the older children use for planting and weeding. "Women's size" garden forks, so necessary for digging, cause a great deal of anxiety; the prongs are very sharp and will easily pierce a Wellington boot or gym shoe. A grindstone is used to blunt the points, and their use is carefully supervised. Watering-cans, leaky or sound, are also essential. In drought or after deluge the children water everything, including each other.

When the lawn was made, the type of grass-seed selected was said to be "child-proof". Cutting it was sheer hard labour. The children help, but the lawnmower becomes a bus, a racing car or a tank—and the result is rather patchy. Nor are the children natural path-weeders. One has learned to dread the remark, "I've just turned it over for you." This means that the gravel is now buried under 6 inches of soil, and the weeds are still there. Weedkiller, put down hastily on Sunday afternoons when the playground is shut, is increasingly relied upon.

Two large borders are reserved for perennials with a long flowering period that can be divided as the children need them. They also provide a continuous display of flowers. In their own gardens, the children pick whatever they have grown, and all their flowers, in their prime, go to their proper place—home to mother.

The Parkhill playground had an old greenhouse, relic of its tennis-club days, built in the garden area. It was 30 feet long, with a central doorway but no door, and it had a glass roof in



A mobile zoo which visits the London Parks during the summer months

a dangerous condition. It was the perfect place for breeding and rearing insects, particularly butterflies and moths.

The greenhouse was divided into two sections by building a 3-foot wall across its width, with door-frame and door in the center. This sounds easy on paper, but with lack of knowledge it was extremely difficult. Even a 2-foot wall must have a solid concrete foundation; bricks must be wet, or else the mortar will not bind them together; plumb-line and spirit-level are vital tools, and small children love prising the bricks off a new wall as soon as the young builders have gone home.

On top of the wall a strong wooden frame was fixed and covered, together with the door, with perforated zinc. Anyone with a knife could cut through it like paper. After the third major break-in, the whole area was covered with wire netting.

A glasshouse without shade would have been far too hot for rearing butterflies and moths, which have to have dappled shade. Luckily, large clumps of polygonum were growing through the earth floor, and enough were saved to give a screen along the front glass wall. There was also an ancient mulberry tree growing close to the end wall; this shaded half the roof.

Before buying or collecting a single insect, stock was taken of all possible food supplies. It is useless having insects which cannot feed. For silkworms there were, miraculously, the mulberry leaves. For stick-insects, there was a large green privet bush, the garden had plenty of food for butterflies, including buddleia, the "butterfly bush". Outside the garden area, nettles and thistles flourished, providing plenty of food for the caterpillars of Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals, Peacocks and Painted Ladies. There was also a large lime tree and numerous small hawthorns, but, unfortunately, no poplar.

There are two butterfly farms in England.[9] The initial stock was bought from them: silkworm eggs, stick-insects, moth pupae, and later butterfly larvae or caterpillars. The children constantly brought in moths and caterpillars, but there was great difficulty in identifying many of these single specimens. Caterpillars that would not eat what was offered were released into the garden. Several pairs of small moths, including the Common Footman, the Muslin Moth and the White Ermine, were found, oddly enough, in the aviary that had been built in the other half of the greenhouse. They bred abundantly on the polygonum clumps, and the children saw the whole process of "moulting" which fascinated them. (Written by Lady Cox.)

NOTES

1 Letter to the author, 1947.
2 *Insurance.* Booklet No. 1, London: National Playing Fields association, 1967.
3 Home Office Report.
4 Sigsgaard, Jens. "The Playground in Modern Danish Housing". *Danish Foreign Office Journal*, No. 54, (October 1965): 4.
5 More detailed information on grants, leaders' salaries, working hours, materials, insurance, constitutions, the organization of adventure playgrounds with their addresses, may be obtained from: The National Playing Fields Association and The London Adventure Playground Association.
6 Pro Juventute Swiss Institute, Zürich, Switzerland.
7 Lorentzen, Børge T. *Children and Animals*.
8 Moore, Robin C. Dipl. Arch. University College, London, 1962. Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of City and Regional Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, November 1966. The project was initiated and supported by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the South End Neighbourhood Action Programme (local poverty agency) and the Lenox-Camden Tenants Association. Towards the conclusion of the project, financial support was given by Action for Boston Community Development.
9 Worldwide Butterflies, Ltd., Over Compton, Sherbourne, Dorset and Butterfly Farm, Ltd, Bilsington, Ashford, Kent.

The Theory of Loose Parts. an Important Principle for Design Methodology

1971

British sculptor Simon Nicholson worked on art and design throughout his life. He lived in the United States from 1964 to 1971, and in 1966, for the University of California at Berkeley's College of Environmental Design, he prepared a course titled Design 12. It presented a proposal on the possible contribution of play to education in open, interactive environments, in forming systems, and in ecological thought. He followed it up in 1971 with his so-called loose parts theory. Upon returning to England in 1971, he taught at Open University until 1989, and from 1976 to 1985 he conducted an experimental course titled Art and Environment: Interactive Art and Play. He extended his interest in participatory approaches to urban planning and design in a further course, Urban Development: Community Participation in City Decision Making.

* Nicholson, Simon. "The Theory of Loose Parts: An Important Principle for Design Methodology." *Studies in Design Education Craft and Technology*, series 1, vol. 4, no. 2, September 2009, accessible at https://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/SDEC/article/view/1204 on 23 November 2022, originally published as "How NOT to Cheat Children: The Theory of Loose Parts," *Landscape Architecture Quarterly*, no. 62 (October 1971): 30–34.

Creativity is for the gifted few: the rest of us are compelled to live in environments constructed by the gifted few, listen to the gifted few's music, use gifted few's inventions and art, and read the poems, fantasies and plays by the gifted few.

This is what our education and culture conditions us to believe, and this is a culturally induced and perpetuated lie.

Building upon this lie, the dominant cultural elite tell us that the planning, design and building of any part of the environment is so difficult and so special that only the gifted few—those with degrees and certificates in planning, engineering, architecture, art, education, behavioral psychology, and so on—can properly solve environmental problems.

The result is that the vast majority of people are not allowed (and worse—feel that they are incompetent) to experiment with the components of building and construction, whether in environmental studies, the abstract arts, literature or science: the creativity—the playing around with the components and variables of the world in order to make experiments and discover new things and form new concepts—has been explicitly stated as the domain of the creative few, and the rest of the community has been deprived of a crucial part of their lives and life-style. This is particularly true of young children who find the world incredibly restricted—a world where they cannot play with building and making things, or play with fluids, water, fire or living objects, and all the things that satisfy one's curiosity and give us the pleasure that results from discovery and invention: experiments with alternatives, such as People's Park, Berkeley, have been crushed or quashed by public authorities.

The simple facts are these:

1. There is no evidence, except in special cases of mental disability, that some young babies are born creative and inventive, and others not.

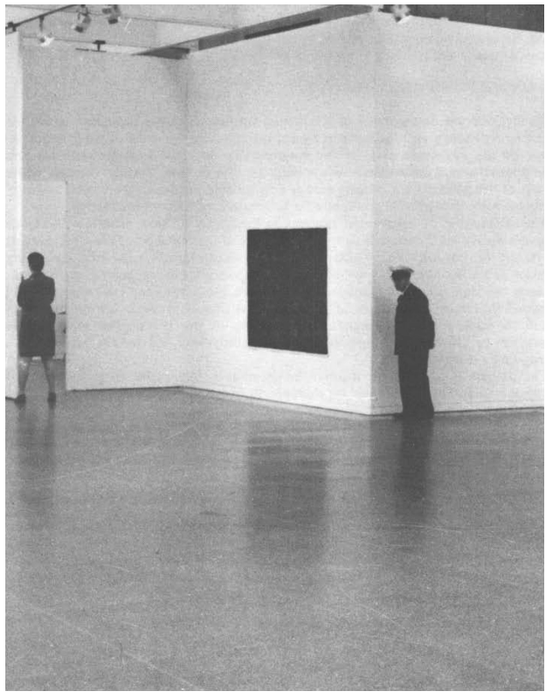
2. There is evidence that all children love to interact with variables, such as materials and shapes; smells and other physical phenomena, such as electricity, magnetism and

gravity; media such as gases and fluids; sounds, music, motion; chemical interactions, cooking and fire; and other humans, and animals, plants, words, concepts and ideas. With all these things all children love to play, experiment, discover and invent and have fun.

All these things have one thing in common, which is variables or "loose parts". The theory of loose parts says, quite simply, the following:

> *In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.*

It does not require much imagination to realise that most environments that do not work (i.e. do not work in terms of human interaction and involvement in the sense described) such as schools, playgrounds, hospitals, day-care centres, international airports, art galleries and museums, do not do so because they do not meet the "loose parts" requirement; instead, they are clean, static and impossible to play around with. What has happened is that adults—in the form of professional artists, architects, landscape architects and planners—have had all the fun playing with their own materials, concepts and planning-alternatives, and then builders have had all the fun building the environments out of real materials; and thus has all the fun and creativity been stolen: children and adults and the community have been grossly cheated and the educational-cultural system makes sure that they hold the belief that this is "right". How many schools have there been with a chain-link and black-top playground where there has been a spontaneous revolution by students to dig it up and produce a human environment instead of a prison?



Example of an exhibition with few loose parts. Visitors could only interact in a minimal way, (even visually) and most people passed right through the gallery to high-interaction exhibits beyond. Even the attendant's job does not involve interaction with his environment, except in emergency.

If we look for a moment at this theory of loose parts, we find that some interesting work supports it and in particular that there has been a considerable amount of outstanding recent research by people not in the traditional fields of art, architecture and planning. Much of this research fits into the following five categories:

Design by Community Interaction and Involvement

Ten years ago, a special issue of the magazine *Anarchy* was published in which nearly all the fundamental educational, recreational and community advantages of adventure-playground environments were described, including the relationship between experiment and play, community involvement, the catalytic value of play-leaders, the relationship between accidents and the environment, and indeed the whole concept of a "free society in miniature". Later, in 1967, the facts on adventure playgrounds and play-parks were taken and discussed in the context of the architecture and planning professions in an article in *Interbuild/Arena*.[1] Although the implications of the concepts and facts outlined in these researches are only now being widely disseminated, the process of community involvement has evolved very fast in both Europe and the United States. Outstanding among these have been some of the educational facilities *charettes* such as those in East New York,[2] and the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project (SNAP) in Granby, Liverpool, recently described in an unusual article in the *RIBA JOURNAL*.[3]

The interesting aspect of the evolution of community involvement—in the area of recreation in particular—is that the really meaningful programmes soon appear to leave play, parks, and recreation by the wayside and become social organisations for community action in all aspects of the environment, Pat Smythe, for example, a pioneer in this field, worked for nine years on adventure playgrounds and then became fully involved in the revolutionary Neighbourhood Council project in Golborne. In terms of loose parts we can discern a natural evolution from creative play and participation with wood, hammers, ropes, nails and fire, to creative play and participation with the total process of design and planning of regions in cities.

Behavioural Planning and Design

Parallel with the development of community involvement there has been a growth in behavioural planning, i.e.: the study of human requirements and needs as the basis for the design of the man-made parts of the environment. A recent example outlining this approach to design is Constance Perin's in her book *Man in Mind*. Another example where the use of behavioural data is being used as a design determinant is the *pattern-language* at present being developed at the Centre for Environmental Structure, Berkeley.

The relationship of behavioural planning to the theory of loose parts is a direct one since the theory itself derives from it: however, one of the problems of loose parts is that the range of possible human interaction is an exceptionally wide one and many behavioural studies have only gone so far as to state very broad and general requirements (such as the statement, for example, that "children like caves") and have not explicitly described the more subtle forms of behaviour that may occur—to use an analogy—"inside the caves". The behavioural generalisations of the 1970s often resemble the generalities or "laws" of the pioneers of social anthropology and merely state what we already know to be true.

The process of community involvement is actually inseparable from the study of human interaction and behaviour; for example, to carry the previous analogy further, the study of children and cave-type environments only becomes meaningful when we consider children not only being in a *given* cave but also when children have the opportunity

to play with space-forming materials in order that they may invent, construct, evaluate and modify *their own* caves. When this happens we have a perfect example of variables and loose parts in action and—more important—we find that a behavioural methodology of design, related to this example, has existed for some years: the methodology—involving what is called the "discovery method", has been developed by a unique group of researchers working in curriculum innovation for elementary schools. The obvious pattern of behaviour that can be identified here is a self-instructional pattern—namely that children learn most readily and easily in a laboratory-type environment where they can experiment, enjoy and find out things for themselves.[4]

The Impact of Curriculum Development

The principle of variables and loose parts has been acknowledged by most educators since the 1960s: when *Mathematics in Primary Schools* was first published in 1966 by H.M.S.O., to quote the Advisory Centre for Education, "It was a bombshell". The discovery method that it described has since then been wonderfully exemplified by the Nuffield Foundation, the Elementary Science Study, and several other organisations.[5]

The E.S.S, for example, has now produced thirty of the most imaginative curriculum units ever devised: their format (as is that of the Nuffield Mathematics Programme) is almost totally interdisciplinary, and concerns visual art and music, as much as mathematics and the natural sciences. But this is not all, for another characteristic of these programmes is that they break down the distinction between indoors and outdoors, a feature that had hitherto been experimented with mostly in the progressive schools of the 1930s.

By allowing learning to take place outdoors, and fun and games to occur indoors, the distinction between education and recreation began to disappear.

The introduction of the discovery method has been accompanied by intense research into the documentation of human interaction and involvement; what did children do with the loose parts? What did they discover or re-discover; What concepts were involved? Did they carry their ideas back into the community and their family? Out of all possible materials that could be provided, which ones were the most fun to play with and the most capable of stimulating the cognitive, social and physical learning processes?

It was educational evaluation that provided the missing element in the design process and completed a system which is a perfect methodology for designers, and which pre-dated the recent application of behavioural studies to urban planning - while the emphasis on real-life problems, frequently outdoor and off the school premises, was the beginning of a natural trend towards de-schooling and environmental education.

Environmental Education

It is hard to talk about environmental education without mentioning that the whole educational system, from pre-school through university, is on the verge of changing: for who

needs these institutions in their present form? The prototype for education systems of the future are almost certainly those facilities that take children and adults out into the community and, conversely, allow all members of the community access to the facility.

There are several groups in the U.S. which have been experimenting with this process with children—by far the most comprehensive being the Environmental Science Centre in Minnesota:[6] a detailed bibliography of publications and environmental curriculum materials has recently been compiled for a new course at the University of California, Davis.[7]

Environmental education, (as opposed to conservation education, or the understanding of preservation of the non-man-made environment) means the *total study of the ecosystem*, i.e. man, his institutions, and his structural, chemical, etc., additions, included. The subject of human ecology, our values and concepts, the environmental alternatives and choices open to us—in the fullest sense—has recently become a dominant factor in some education programmes. To express this in the simplest possible terms, there is a growing awareness that the most interesting and vital loose parts are those that we have around us every day in the wilderness, the countryside, the city and the ghetto.

Institute for Contemporary Arts, London

an example of a high-interaction environment, with many loose parts: the Magic Blower is an abstract cylindrical sculpture, in which travels a column of moving air. The viewer may set it at any angle and can operate a solid-state power control attached to the on-off switch: most important, the participant invents all of the materials and shapes that can be used with the column. At full speed many shapes may spin and bounce above the end of the perspex cylinder. How much of a sculpture does the artist invent, and how much does the public invent? Joey Schlenhoff, a young boy who came to Play Orbit, went back home and invented his own. Could the paintings in the first image generate the same degree of interest?

Art and Science Exploratoria

Finally there are groups of people experimenting with the theory of loose parts in art galleries and the science museums. (A simple example leading to this interest was the discovery that the most worn tiles on the floor of museums were usually adjacent those exhibits involving the maximum amount of variables and human interaction). In 1970 the first comprehensive exhibition of interaction-works entitled "Play Orbit" was held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. This was recently followed by an exhibition of work (parts) by Robert Morris at the Tate Gallery: to quote a critic's review of the exhibition, "the public got into the party spirit—a somewhat over-zealous participation. They were jumping and screaming, swinging the weights around wildly—the middle aged in particular. The children were the most sensible of all the visitors" (!) We are beginning to realise that there are more ways to interact with art than to be solely contemplative (i.e. there exists the possibility of more loose parts and "variables" than via visual perception alone) and that although it is fine to allow scientists and artists to invent things, how about allowing everybody else to be creative and inventive also?

The Immediate Future

The whole idea of loose parts raises some fundamental questions about the way we design things: if you are an inventor or designer yourself, what parts or proportion of an environment or components for an environment can you legitimately invent yourself, and how much, for example, can children or adults in the community invent and build? How are variables and loose parts introduced into the world of newly born children, and what function do the variables have on cognition and perception? If contemplation is merely one of the many possible forms of human interaction, what exactly are the other ways we can interact with our environment? Is society content to let only very few of its members realise their creative potential? It is the purpose of this article to propose that it is not, and that if we know that creativity is not just a characteristic of the gifted few, a crash programme of educational, recreational and environmental improvement must be started. I would like to propose the following four-part programme using the loose parts principle, whereby this could be achieved:

1 Give top priority to where the children are

All children—and particularly many of the most needy such as those living in an urban ghetto or who are disadvantaged—spend a lot of the most important time of their lives in elementary schools, day-care, preschools and children's hospitals; these are the environments that need immediate transformation.[8,9] This holds true even in innovative school districts that have extended or abolished the classroom walls—simply give top priority to the environment of the new "classroom" or "playground", whether it be a mobile unit, exploratory museum, ecological reserve or study centre, or wherever the children may be. Ten years of vest-pocket parks, concrete plazas and adventure playgrounds have failed to do this: we *must* solve this problem. Even if a local community is sold on the idea of a pocket-park or adventure-playground it is still better to use the asphalt area of an elementary school for it, for this is where the children are.

2 Let children play a part in the process

Children greatly enjoy playing a part in the design process: this includes the study of the nature of the problem; thinking about their requirements and needs; considering planning alternatives; measuring, drawing, model-making and mathematics; construction and building; experiment, evaluation, modification and destruction. The process of community involvement, once started, never stops: the environment and its parts is always changing and there is no telling what it will look like. Contrary to traditional parks and adventure playgrounds, the appearance of which is a foregone conclusion, the possible kinds of environment determined by the discovery method and principle of loose parts is limitless. The children in the neighbourhood will automatically involve all their brothers, sisters and families; this is design through community involvement, but in the total community the children are the most important. It is not enough to talk about a design methodology—the methodology must be converted into three-dimensional action, or it is worthless.

3 Use an interdisciplinary approach

In early childhood there is no important difference between play and work, art and science, recreation and education the classifications normally applied by adults to a child's environment: education is recreation, and vice versa.[10] For professional architects and landscape architects, this means a first-hand experience and knowledge of children's behaviour and an understanding of their physical and social needs and cognitive learning processes. The revolution in curriculum innovation, mentioned briefly above, was undertaken by researchers acquainted with real human needs, not by researchers employing behavioural consultants on the side: such an interdisciplinary approach is a prerequisite to the solution of the problem.

4 Establish a clearing-house for information

We desperately need an international clearing-house for information on children's environments, from maternity onwards. dealing with all aspects of their growth, education, curricula and play, and—in particular—information on *human interactions and involvement* with loose parts in the environment. The time-lapse for dissemination of research and evaluation is at present about 5-10 years and should be reduced to the near-instantaneous. The information should be available in the form of newsletter, demand-printing, micro-film, audio- and video-cassette, and video-cassette systems linked to CATV and satellite, and communicated to school districts all over the country, from which it could be distributed, either free or by subscription, to members of the community, elementary schools, day-care centres, and any other person or institution needing it.[11] Much of this evaluation, filming and videotaping can be experimented with, recorded, photographed and played back by the children themselves.

Where Does All This Lead Us To

There are a lot of suggestions and recommendations in this article. Maybe more than can be acted upon at any one time. But we need to act on all of them if we are to build a society in which individuals and communities have greater control over the loose parts with which their environment may be constructed—loose parts that are at present controlled and fixed by an inflexible education system and cultural elite. The problem is a critical one when we consider young children. Most of the existing design methodologies do not take into account the theory of loose parts and thereby fail. The 4-part programme could act at least as a start toward solving the problem of cultural availability of bits and pieces of the environment—in both the software and hardware sense—and the extent to which a new generation will be able to invent new systems with the parts.

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8 *The School Playground as an Outdoor Learning Environment—a Community Project to Extend the Elementary School Curriculum to the Outdoor Playground.* Berkeley Unified School District, Berkeley, California, June, 23, 1970.
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10 *Everett Interim Preliminary Report, Education/Recreation, General Analysis and Recommendations* (Appendix 2), Lawrence Halprin and Associates: City of Everett, Washington.
11 The quickest way to get some preliminary information is at present *Big Rock Candy Mountain: Resources for our Education, Winter* 1970, Portola Institute Inc., Menlo Park, California. For information on communications see *Radical Software*. 11-12. New York: Raindance Corporation, and Michael Shamberg, Guerilla Television, Holt Rheinhart and Winston, 1971.

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Wilson Des. "Democracy begins at Golborne", The Observer, April 11, 1971.

Clearing House for Information

Apart from ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) which is academically oriented, there have been few attempts to create a nation-wide system of environment-information, especially in the area of early childhood, elementary and secondary education. Most of the work at assembling data has been restricted to compiling book titles—a method which has proven practically useless. Most people do not have the time to check off bibliographies. Some examples are as follows:

Sleet, David A. *Interdisciplinary Research Index on Play: a Guide to the Literature*. Ohio: Department of Physical Education, The University of Toledo, May 1971.

Martin, Fred. W. *Bibliography of Leisure*: 1965-1970. Program in Leisure Education, Recreation and Related Community Service, Teachers College, Columbia University, January 1971.

A Bibliography of Open Education, Education Development Center and the "Advisory for Open Education", Newton, Massachusetts, 1971.

Nicholson, Simon. *Environment Education – A Bibliography*, Environmental Education in Early Childhood, UNEX, University of California, Davis,California, 1971.

In addition to such lists, there are also some imaginative writings that may have more meaning for the average citizen and community, for they are not merely literary. Such an example is:

The Last Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools Portola Institute, 1971, distributed by Random House.

But the best interdisciplinary compendium so far, is the sum total of the issues, especially that of September 1971 of: *Big Rock Candy Mountain*, Portola Institute, Menlo Park, California. (An earlier version of this contribution appeared in Landscape, Architecture Quarterly, October, 1971).

Free the Children! Down with Playgrounds! 1977

DENIS WOOD

Geographer, cartographer, independent educator, and artist Denis Wood has influenced the creative and activist spirit of the new generation of critical cartographers, experimental and psycho-geographers, and ecologically and politically conscious landscape architects and designers. Wood has written many books* researching and criticizing the political and social meaning of mapping, and his main thesis is that maps, rather than representing reality, present an argument. This expanded toward a broader thesis of "constructing" the world via a series of socially structured perspectives. His article** included here presents, along with two mapping studies, a critical view of playground designs, developed on the pretext of protecting children from traffic.

* The idea for his best-known book *The Power of Maps* first emerged in an exhibition he curated (Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, New York, 1992).

** Wood, Denis. "Free the Children! Down with Playgrounds!" *McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, series 1, vol. 12, no. 2 (September 1977), accessible at http://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/7155/5094> on 18 January 2023.

*** See deniswood.net/.

"Just put up the fence—the kids'll find something to do inside it." This remark was made recently by a parent serving on a committee overseeing the design of a neighbourhood playground. The committee had asked a group of students in a senior design studio to come up with a decent playground. Working with the residents and drawing on recent environmental design research, the students coughed up five plans. At a neighbourhood meeting, the residents rejected them all. The reason? No fence. During the meeting the residents unanimously supported this fence, described enthusiastically as a ten-foot-high chain link fence with barbed wire along its top. After heavy debate, they decided they could skip the barbed wire. When informed by the designers that, given the budget, they could have either the fence around or the play equipment within the playground, the residents were overwhelmingly for the fence. The students castigated these parents as Neanderthals. I disagree. As far as I can see, their attitudes toward playgrounds differ from those of others only in being less hypocritical. Armed with their mandate, the students returned to their drawing boards to do fence details.

The Problem

Who dismayed me were the students. At no point - even once it became clear that nothing more than a prison exercise yard was wanted—did any of them suggest that the neighbourhood might not need a playground. On the contrary, they implicitly accepted without investigation the need for and social good of the playground. Although an occasion for dismay, that the students did not question the need for the playground was not an occasion for surprise. Not only are they taught in the schools that playgrounds are socially necessary, but nowhere in their education are students encouraged to question the need for their clients' projects.

Nor is the problem confined to students—for whom, given the fact that their teachers regularly impersonate clients, such questioning is a form of double jeopardy; the problem is instead pandemic in the entire research/program/design/build profession.

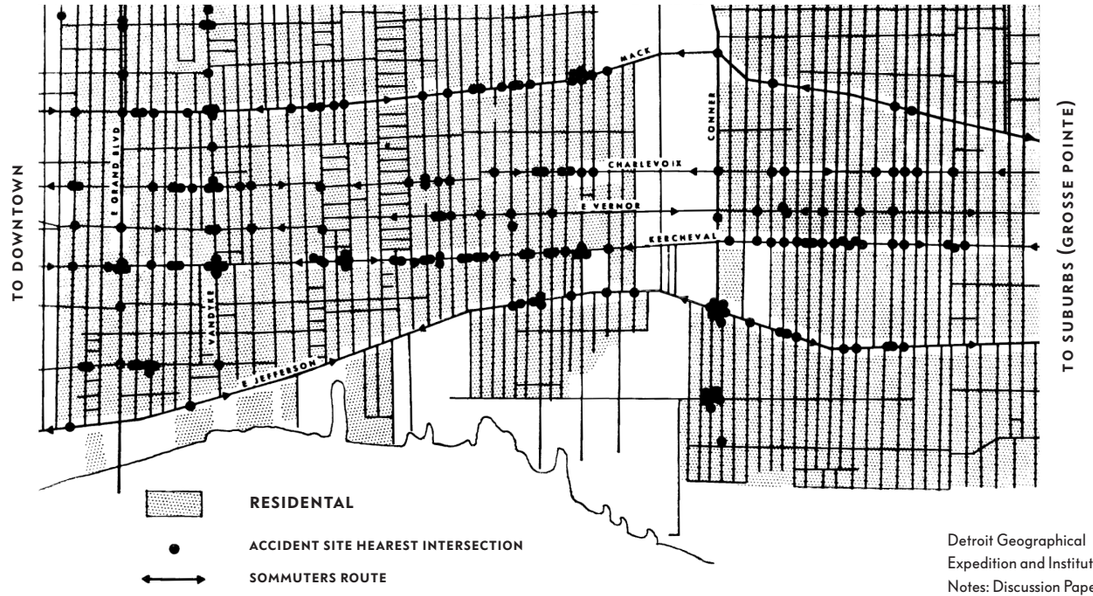
In a special issue of *Landscape Architecture Quarterly* embracing the theme that "Children Know Best", a number of leading research/designers ignore their own point and lay down schemes for the improvement of playgrounds without questioning the rationale for their very existence. Indeed, although Robin Moore opens his article with the remark that playgrounds are widely regarded as "unfit for human habitation",[1] he never pauses to wonder if this might not be inherent in the playground idea, rather than in specific playground designs. Despite mounting evidence that kids use playgrounds of all types with monumental infrequency, that they regard piles of spools with the same indifference that they regard swing sets, designers continue to believe that playgrounds are both necessary and good. The reason for this, I suggest, is that they have never thought about what real social roles the playgrounds play.

Nor is this problem confined to playgrounds. Practically no voice in the research/program/design/build business—whether encapsulated in a single individual or spread across a multitude of institutions—questions the need for a client's project, especially if the project has even the most minimal social sanction. The assumption is made, a priori and implicitly, that malls, parks, playgrounds, dormitories and freeways are the necessary, irreducible elements of the built environment. They may be improved, changed, modified, enhanced; but not done away with. Such assumptions vitiate the entire research-to-build process. Decent research about the behavior of children in playgrounds cannot be carried out if the researcher implicitly assumes that playgrounds are necessary or good. Decent programming cannot result when the research data on which it is based is polluted by unrecognized assumptions. Workable designs cannot materialize from faulty programs. Thus, for example, apartment buildings cannot even be conceived, much less built, if it is assumed that people have got to live in single-family detached homes.

This state of affairs exists because contemporary research/program/design/build procedures have no way of standing outside themselves and examining their own fundamental model of the way the world hangs together. What follows here is a questioning of the playground idea. It is intended that this serves as an example of the sort of questioning that must take place for everything were search, program, design, and construct. Nothing more rigorous is required in order to stop the construction of improved examples of things we never needed in the first place.

Children Know Best

A playground is an adult-created, sometimes supervised, place for kids to play. Without reflection, it sounds like a good thing, something for the kids, *a beau geste* of the kind that demands applause. Except that the kids don't want anything. A playground only makes sense if adults know better than kids where, when, and with what to play. But if kids do know best—and everything suggests they do—then the adult construction of playgrounds is senseless. Roger Hart, who exhaustively studied kids at play in Wilmington, Vermont, a town without playgrounds of any sort, observed: "A finished play place is not required...



Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute. Field Notes: Discussion Paper No. 3: The Geography of the Children of Detroit, Detroit 1971.

WHERE COMMUTERS RUN OVER BLACK CHILDREN ON THE POINTES-DOWNTOWN TRACK

Children create their own play places, the process (of that creation) being all important".[2] Iona and Peter Opie, in their seldom quoted but unparalleled study of kids at play[3], put it even more simply: "Where children are is where they play." Adults fantasize play taking place in the fields and woods, but kids play where they are. If they grow up in the fields and the woods, they play there; but if they grow up in the streets and corner lots, they play there. The Opies tell of a London boy just returned from a week's holiday in a rural village. Asked how he liked the country he said: "I like it—but you can't play ball in the road as you can in London".[4]

Adults don't understand about playing ball in the road. Late for an appointment or eager to get home and cutting through neighborhood streets to save a minute or two, a driver is unwilling to slow down to crawl through a bunch of skateboarders cavorting in the street. Frequently someone gets hurt—usually a kid, but sometimes his dog. And it's not just the inner city. This evening the *Associated Press* wires carried a photo of a kid—with pain written all over his face—sitting on the curb of his wide suburban street in Vancouver, Washington. Over his shoulder you can read the words of a sign that says, "Please slow down. My dog was hit yesterday. Tomorrow it could be one of my brothers." The caption reads: "Lewis Jackson, 6, sits by a sign he put in his front yard last week after a fast car struck his dog Herbie. The dog is recovering, but Lewis wanted to be sure that drivers go slowly from now on."[5] It might have been his brother, and in a thousand streets the next day, it was his brother, or someone's brother.

After a few times of this the cry is raised again to get the kids off the street. And it is always to "get the kids off the streets". Never the cars. After all, in the adult mind, streets

are for cars, not for people; they're for zipping along, not crawling. "Stay out of the street, dear, or you'll get hurt." In this automotive age we tend to forget—or ignore—the fact that streets were laid out long before Henry Ford was born, with people (mostly) and horse-drawn carts in mind. The stereotyped equations run like doggerel in our heads: streets = cars, kids = playgrounds.

When the observed reality is streets = kids, we move without reflection to get them into playgrounds. Frances Gettier, a Raleigh, North Carolina mother, is typical. She says,

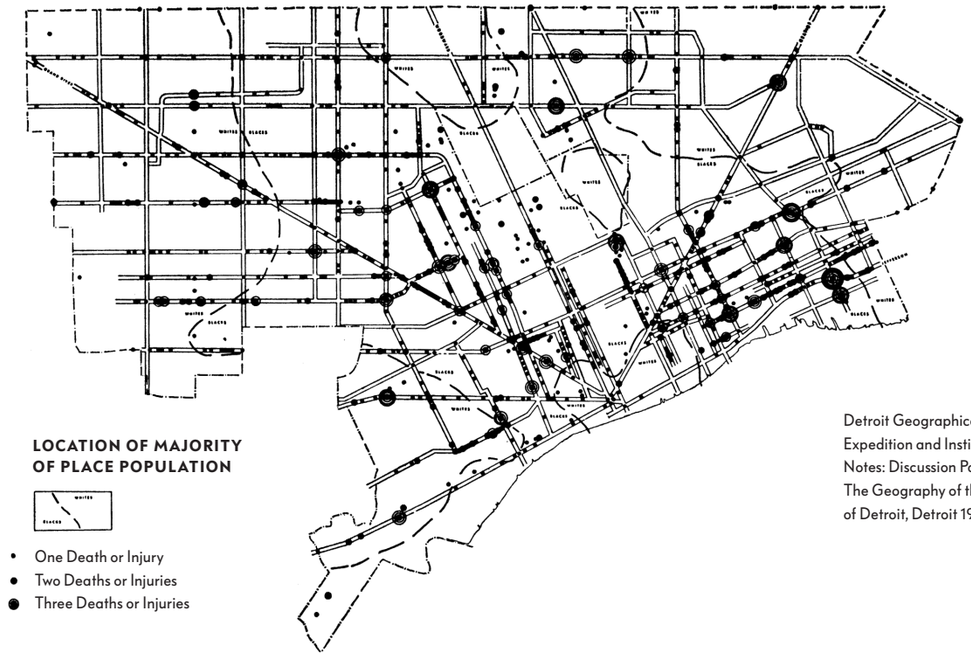
> *There isn't much in the way of parks. My kids play in the street and it makes me mad... So I started watching the neighbourhood young people play to see what they were up to and what they enjoy. They were playing ball in the street, but skate-boarding was the biggest thing. One of the boys was hit by a car while skateboard-ing. He wasn't hurt, but it could have been much worse. I decided then to try to get them off the streets and into a park.*[6]

The reaction is not unusual and could be multiplied a thousand times any day of the year in the United States alone. This example is just a little sillier than usual. Gettier's goal is to stop the kids using the streets and sidewalks for skateboarding by adding some zigzag asphalt trails to a ravine in an existing park. Then the kids'll have a place to go. Translated into English this means that the next time the kids are seen skateboarding in front of their homes on the surfaces the skateboard was designed to run on, any irate driver, scared out of his wits by having—at sixty miles an hour—just missed a kid, can scream that his tax dollars have been spent to build a skateboard park and why the hell don't they get out of the street and into the park...

But it's not just skateboarding and it's not just missing kids. It's a lot of different play activities and it's often serious injury or death. Things like skateboards, bicycles, soap-box autos, and go-carts were really made for the streets. If you've ever used one you don't need to be told that the irregularities inside walks make for awkward spills on a skateboard, that going over curbs at anything but a walk can ruin the rim of a bicycle wheel, and that soap-box carts and go-carts simply can't handle curbs at all. But there are a lot of other street games that are street games because the streets and the kids are there.

"Four Square", a popular game among youngsters this summer, is fast-paced and competitive. Nearly every day, from early morning until sundown, scores of youngsters in the Brookhaven neighbourhood test their speed and agility on Four Square boards chalked on neighbourhood streets. And although the youngsters play barefooted on the hot pavement, the heat doesn't seem to dim their enthusiasm. "We just call the kids in the neighbourhood to play and before you know it, the streets are filled," said Alison, a seventh grader...[7]

Other games played in the streets of Raleigh, North Carolina, during the summer of 1976 by kids of almost all ages included the classic kick-the-can, give away tag, red rover, and four-foot-in-the-gutter. Some of these were being played in playgrounds (usually on basketball courts, since modern playground designers tend not to provide the large,



Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute. Field Notes: Discussion Paper No. 3: The Geography of the Children of Detroit, Detroit 1971.

CITYWIDE PATTERN OF CHILDREN'S PEDESTRIAN DEATHS & INJURES BY AUTOMOBILES

bare open spaces demanded by these games), but all of them were being played on the streets. When cars came along, the kids backed the curbs. There were few accidents that I saw: just some near misses.

But all too often kids get hit. Gwendolyn Warren puts it this way:

> *The whole thing about the transportation: the commuter traffic. The way Detroit is situated, there is the central place downtown and then there are rings which go outside of that and the big ring right outside downtown Detroit is the Black com-munity. All the area about a mile going out from downtown Detroit is one-way traffic and runs right through the heart of the Black community. And on one spe-cific corner in six months there were six children killed on one corner by commut-er traffic. But, naturally, these deaths of these children or the injuries or whatever it happened to be were disguised as something else. They never said that a certain business man who was working for Burroughs downtown who was on his way to Southfield went through the Black community by way of this commuter traffic and killed my people—Black children. Even in the information which the police keep, we couldn't get information. We had to use political people in order to use them as a means of getting information from the police department in order to find out exactly what time, where, how and who killed that child. The fact that it actually establishes a pattern proves it is not "accidental". Are the expressways which are*

right in the heart of the city built for the people in the city? From the outside, it is obvious that they aren't.[8]

And Warren is right: there is a pattern, as the two Figures must make terribly clear, a pattern of hurrying adults running over playing children. What the Figures don't show is the way treelawns, sidewalks and yards—play spaces for children—were eaten up by the road-widening demanded by the heavy commuter traffic. Jean Jones says Detroit's inner-city black children should not:

> *be subjected to riding their bicycles on well-travelled streets without a warning to the driver, like the ones on Cook Road in Crosse Pointe Woods with "Caution, Bicycle Lane" signs. Nor should they have to play in areas like portions of John R. and Bush where their porches are four to eight feet from the crowded streets swarming with suburbanites swatting down innocent children like flies in their flight to their "safe" neighbourhoods.*[9]

To which I can only add, that while it is worse in the inner-city of Detroit, it is not really different in the suburbs: adults in their blind hurry kill kids there too. They've even made a game out of it. A California company called Exidy manufactures a computerized game called Death Race, the object of which is to run over and kill pedestrians. A company executive, Paul Jacobs, says, "If people get a kick out of running down pedestrians, you have to let them do it."[10] Or let them scream, "Get the kids off the street!" I don't doubt the heart felt sorrow in the scream. I just wonder why it's always the kids that have to get out of the streets, and never the cars.

"Yong Peple" Playing in the Cloister

Never the cars. We like to console ourselves with the thought that this conflict of kids and adults in the streets is something new, something related to the modem car and our concern for our children's safety. It's a nice thought, but untrue; adults have never appreciated kids in streets. After describing a conflict between an obstinate driver and a group of kids playing in the street, the Opies go on to say,

> *What is curious about these embroilments is that children always do seem to have been in trouble about the places where they played. In the nineteenth century there were repeated complaints that the pavements of London were made impassable by children's shuttlecock and tipcat. In Stuart times, Richard Steele reported, the vicinity of the Royal Exchange was infested with uninvited sportsmen, and a beadle was employed to whip away the "unlucky Boys with Toys and Balls". Even in the Middle Ages, when it might be supposed a meadow was within reach of every Jack and Jill in Britain, the young had a way of gravitating to unsuitable places. In 1332 it was found necessary to prohibit boys and others from playing in the precincts of the Palace at Westminster while Parliament was sitting. In 1385 the Bishop of London was forced to declaim against the ball-play about St.Paul's, and in 1447, away in Devonshire, the Bishop of Exeter was complaining of "yong pepIe" playing in the cloister, even during divine service, such games as "the toppe, queke, penny prykke, and most atte tenys, by which the walles of the saide Cloister have be defowled and the glas wyndowes aIl to brost."*[11]

Given these examples, which could be multiplied into a roar of adult disapprobation of kids playing in places frequented by adults (I myself was permanently scarred by a Mr. Miller who would rage whenever I rode my wagon down the sidewalk in front of his—and my—apartment building), the whole idea of playgrounds begins to acquire a rather self-serving tint. By getting the kids out of the streets, out of the yards—out of the hair—and into the playgrounds, adults were thinking not so much of the kids as of themselves. It was the automobile that made it possible, for the first time, to disguise this selfishness under the sanctimonious skirts of pretended concern for the safety of children. What a wonderful idea! Under the pretence of concern for the children we'll put them into these special places—call them playgrounds—and lock them up. To keep them quiet we'll fill the playground with wonderful things to do like hanging from an iron bar or climbing up and down an old wooden spool. Not that we have to pretend our concern for our children's welfare any longer. We've made sure that the streets really are dangerous places for kids to compete with us. When they fight us for the use of that space, we win, and they die.

I can't help noticing that even if historically kids have been in the way of adults, they are more so today; nor can I overlook the fact that the two major kinds of institution intended to free adults from the bother of children—the schools and the daycare centers—are also two of the biggest clients for playgrounds. Today's playgrounds keep the kids not only out of adult places, but out of adult times. To be blunt, the playground is a ghetto in which kids are kept, in all ways out of the way of adults (except for those few hired to watch them).

Without asking if this is good for adults, is it good for kids? The answer is unequivocally no. Drawing not only on his own experiences but on a mass of psychological literature, Hart observes among other things that "Play is direct training for skills demanded in adult life."[12] This is an important reason why kids play in the streets and why they don't stay in the playgrounds. Kids like adults. They want to do what the most important people in the world – their parents – do. They want to be near them, around them, and to justify the seriousness and reality of what they are doing by doing it in spaces occupied by adults. It may be play to us, but to the kids it's life. As Hart adds: "Children have a desire to play and learn "where the action is", not cloistered away in special areas. Much valuable social learning is incidental and will be frustrated by segregating children... I have observed that children choose to play in front yards so long as the site provides good trees for climbing, good dirt for modeling."[13]

It must also be observed that in addition to the positive benefits from associating

with adults, there are other benefits from playing in adult places such as yards, streets, plazas, railroad tracks, the living room or the kitchen. Play in playgrounds is play in a single, homogenized, sanitized environment; play in other places is play in highly diverse, convenient, multi-faceted, dynamic environments. Arguing for the total desirability of playing in the street the Opies say,

> *Where children are is where they play. They are impatient to be started, the street is no further than their front door, and they are within call when tea is ready. Indeed the street in front of their home is seemingly theirs, more theirs sometimes than the family living-room; and of more significance to them, very often, than any amenity provided by the local council... Should such persistent choice of busy and provocative play-space alert us that all is not as appears in the ghettos of childhood? Children's deepest pleasure, as we shall see, is to be away in the wastelands, yet they do not care to separate themselves altogether from the adult world* [14]

Tindall, in an elaborate study of the home ranges of one hundred black second and fourth graders in urban and suburban settings in Baltimore and Annapolis, Maryland, discovered:

> *For the most part, second graders in both environmental groups indicated a marked preference for places in close proximity to the actual house in which they lived. The most frequently mentioned places of second graders included their own backyards; school yards; back alleys; front lawns and sidewalks, front steps; up the street; and, in many cases, the children indicated a special preference for their own houses.*[15]

Furthermore the second graders actively disliked—and avoided—"busy streets, places very far away from their homes, empty houses, bars and taverns, and in two instances, the movie house..." mostly out of fear, "either fear of being run over or hit by a car ; fear of getting lost; fear of dogs; fear of being beat up or picked on by older children; or fear of being punished by parents for travelling too far from home."[16] Much to her surprise, Tindall found the same to hold for fourth graders, for suburbanites as well as for inner-city kids, and for owners as well as nonowners of bicycles. She concludes:

> *The high frequency of home oriented activity nodes for all sub-groups, regardless of environmental background, would suggest that the areas in close proximity to the children's homes offer much more in the way of recreational opportunities and resources; that these areas offer fewer threats to the children... that both bicycle owners and nonowners are found to be predominantly home oriented as a group.*[17]

Hart's work with kids in a small New England town, the Opies' work with kids in various settings in England ranging from London to rural villages, Tindall's work with urban and suburban Maryland blacks: all point to the same conclusion. Kids like to play—to be—in the yards and streets and places near their homes.

The Wasteland

Beyond the advantages to the child of playing in the street and yards, there is the disadvantage to the child of playing in the playground. Robin Moore summarizes the feelings of many when he describes school playgrounds as "places where kids destroy each other."[18] The Opies report that "Often, when we have asked children what games they played in the playground, we have been told 'We just go around aggravating people'." They conclude:

> *We have noticed that when children are herded together in the playground, which is where the educationalists and the psychologists and the social scientist gather to observe them, their play is markedly more aggressive than when they are in the street or in the wild places.*[19]

But despite the facts that skateboards were meant for streets and that kids do like adults, they don't want to be around them all the time. Sometimes kids want to get away from adults, sometimes even from other kids. In either case the very last place they want to go to is a playground. Or for that matter any other sanitized, organized, cleaned-up, appropriate play space. Robert Paul Smith calls these places where kids get away "the vacant lots".[20] I used to call them "jungles". The Opies call them "wastelands".

> *The literature of childhood abounds with evidence that the peaks of a child's experience are not visits to a cinema, or even family outings to the sea, but occasions when he escapes into places that are disused and overgrown and silent. To a child there is more joy in a rubbish tip than a flowering rockery, in a fallen tree than a piece of statuary, in a muddy track than a gravel path. Yet the cult amongst his elders is to trim, to pave, to smooth out, to clean up, to prettify, to convert to economic advantage as if "the maximum utilization of surrounding amenities" had become a line of poetry.*[21]

One cabal of designers, recognizing the truth of this, has advocated the creation of intentional junk yards and empty lots. Yet not only does the sanctioning and organizing of these experiences rob them of their only point – getting away from the adult-planned, adult–approved adult world - but also few communities are willing to build empty lots; they're eyesores and would undoubtedly violate every health and safety code any community ever erected. Adventure playgrounds are put forward as a compromise: not as tame as the traditional playground, but not as wild as a "jungle". Like most compromises of this type they tend to satisfy neither kids nor adults and involve logic of the most specious sort. No one has yet explained why there is more "latent play potential" in a rubber doughnut designed with the single purpose of speeding down a highway supporting two tons of metal, than in a swing set, teetertotter or sliding board.

Indeed, observations of school age kids and swing sets recently carried out by my students in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina indicate that swing sets have more purpose than anyone has cared to acknowledge. Not only does the typical swing set offer changing potentials for growing children from the passive swinging of toddlers, through

the violent stand-pumping, cherry-bumping, and leaping of younger teens, to the quiet conversational swinging of older teens and adults—but it enters actively into other play: kids ride their bikes through swing sets as if they were obstacle courses; use the whole swing "enclosure" in games of House, Business and other fantasy play; use the uprights to climb on, and the crossbars as balance beams worthy of the name; and so on, ending, not with the limited imagination of most adults, but with the furthest limits of the most fertile imagination of a kid. Small wonder then that Garside and Soergal, in their study of children's use of a full-scale urban park in Worcester, Massachusetts, found that cap proximately fifty per cent of all of the children from ages five to fourteen *who are in the park* (my italics) are in the swings section".[22]

Why then, aren't swings used twenty-four hours a day by hordes of joyous children? Not because they're "single purpose play equipment"—such an animal exists only in the minds of designers—but because they're in and of playgrounds and kids will tolerate being ghettoized just so much of the day. This is not a problem that can be solved by innovative design, but by no design at all. Leave the kids be!

Non-Design Award of the Year

Let me pull together what I'm saying about playgrounds. Playgrounds fail by segregating children from adults; at the same time they fail to provide a way of getting away from adults. By segregating play from the rest of life, playgrounds violate the child's need and interest in being near or with adults. Nor, for most kids most of the time, can playgrounds satisfy the necessity of being close enough to home to hear the halloo for supper or the call for bedtime. Nor can playgrounds satisfy the desire of children to escape from adults into places that are private or silent or dangerous or adventurous. The playground, true to its isolationist intentions, is supposed to keep the child out from under foot, while keeping it under eye. Even a playground supporter notes that "Playgrounds and play were considered as necessary evils to keep children occupied."[23] A cage would serve as well. (And does, of course. There is little difference between a cage and a pen, and a playpen—and by extension a playground—is just a coy name for something basically unspeakable.) Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, playgrounds don't even make good cages. Even in the inner city where "there's no place to play", playgrounds can't keep the kids off the street, off the stoop, off the sidewalk or out of the doorways. (See Cozzens, 1971, for an example of this.) [24]

Then why do we build them endlessly and at great expense? A coach in Baltimore puts it this way:

> *You are buying a little protection. Why do you think the state and the feds lay out money for downtown games? You think they love the kids? That is not it, man. That is not it at all. They give out bread because they're afraid if they don't their cities are going to get trashed.*[25]

We build playgrounds to justify not paying attention to our kids; we build them to placate the nagging in the pit of our stomachs that something's wrong with our world, deluding ourselves that it can be fixed by a fenced-in acre and a bunch of old tires; we build them to calm our anxiety that our kids might be "up to something", knowing that that could never happen in a playground; we build them, in the bitter end, to be able to say "The damn kids should of been in the playground", when we kill them in our streets.

I'm not opposed to playgrounds, provided that the rest of the environment is positive and supportive. I grew up in a world of playgrounds and I loved them and spent a lot of time in them. They can be nice places where you can meet people that don't live next door, and play basketball on a full court out under the sun or the stars and swing excitingly high and stop yourself suddenly by dragging your feet on asphalt, and chase, or run from, other kids up the wrong end of the sliding board and play in a big sandbox shaded by trees and get a drink of water without having to go inside. Playgrounds can be wonderful places. What I think is crazy is thinking that building playgrounds relieves us from other obligations, is thinking that building playgrounds means that kids can't play in the streets in front of their homes, is assuming that playgrounds will make the roads safe and the citizens moral. What I think is immoral is building playgrounds as placebos for the adult distaste for children. The cure for that disease will not be found in paving stones and chain link fences.

When a client approaches a design team with a request for a playground—or a dormitory or a civic mall or recreation center or an apartment complex—that design team is obligated to consider what that structure is intended to do, and it is not enough to accept as an answer that kids need a place to play. Where in the name of all that is holy could they be living if they don't already have a place to play? If the problem is that kids are getting killed in the streets, the solution lies in the streets, not in the playgrounds; if the problem is that kids are watching too much television, the solution lies in the homes, not in the playgrounds; if the problem is that the neighbours don't like kids fixing their cars on the street because it "downgrades the neighbourhood", the solution lies with the neighbours, their aesthetics and their sense of community; not in the playgrounds.

Sometimes the greatest service a design team can do its client is to design nothing, to say, "Here: this problem doesn't have a physical solution. We can't help you." Or perhaps, "You don't need a playground. You need speed bumps across your streets. Call your city councilman." I think awards should be given for this sort of service rendered by designers, for saving us all another zillion dollars and another failed playground. We need a non-design award of the year. We need a dozen non-design awards of the year. And we need to pay designers, researchers, builders and programmers—pay them their full going rate—for not designing, for having the wisdom not to program, for having the wits to let it be. But it will never come to pass unless researchers, programmers, designers and builders can learn to stand outside themselves, outside their methods, and ask the fundamental questions: not, can it be done well, but should it be done at all?

Don't build that fence—the kids'll find something to do without it.

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The evening I finished writing this I opened *The Raleigh Times* to find the following letter in its Hotline column. The Ridgewood area referred to is a low density suburb of big homes, spacious lawns and spreading trees, the kind of place people move to "to give the kids a place to play". None of the streets mentioned are terribly heavily traveled. Otherwise it speaks for itself.

> *I want to sound off about so many children riding skateboards in the city streets. There are two places in particular that I have encountered in the Ridgewood area—on Leonard Street and around the corner of Dixie Trail and Churchill Road. There are always children riding skateboards in the street there and I am scared to death I am going to hit one of them. I don't know if the parents are aware of how dangerous this is. Maybe they will read this and keep their children off the streets. Mrs. R.J.* [26]

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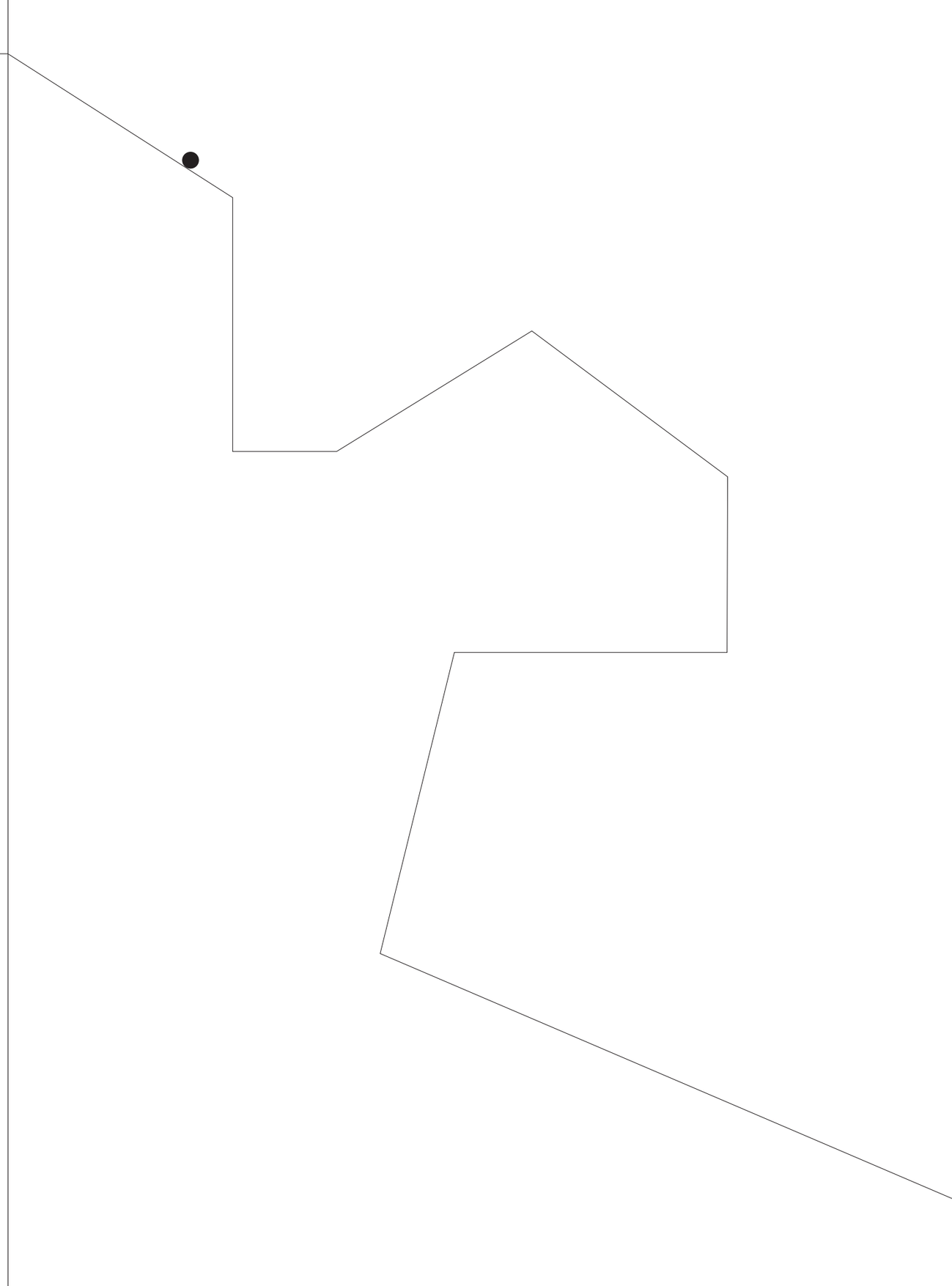

It Starts with a Playground 2011

DARELL HAMMOND

In his second text reprinted in this book, Darell Hammond explains the change theory of KaBOOM!, which he founded, and a one-day open-air playground construction activity by KaBOOM! along with preparations and impacts through various examples.

* Hammond, Darell. "It Starts with a Playground." in *KaBOOM!: How One Man Built a Movement to Save Play*, 137-152. New York: Rodale Books, 2011.

Mixing concrete is a hard, messy job. Each bag weighs 80 pounds, and we typically go through 280 in a given day. Sometimes volunteers have some construction experience, but on one build awhile back, many of the people mixing concrete were absolute beginners who had never even seen a bag of the stuff before. I could tell they needed help.

We're ready for this. After all, even if you're experienced at construction, you'll likely be learning things on a KaBOOM! Build Day, because odds are that you've never built a playground before. Part of the success of our model is that people are randomly assigned to tasks, so you get folks outside their respective comfort zones and doing things that maybe they have never done before. We expect this, and we have a system in place to ensure quality.

In about 45 minutes of training, build captains learn enough to oversee the various projects. At every build, at least one professional installer from the playground equipment company supervises construction and ensures that it meets the manufacturer's specifications so the warranty will be in place. We also have two project managers on site who move around and supervise the entire series of events and all the work.

Simply lifting something that weighs 80 pounds off a pallet and into a wheelbarrow is more than most people can manage on their own, which means they have to team up and start working in pairs. Next, volunteers have to split the bag open, mix the gray, chalky dust with water from a hose, and stir the resulting slurry with a hoe, like mixing a giant batch of cake batter. A concrete wheelbarrow holds two bags plus water, and when it's fully mixed, the whole load weighs more than 170 pounds. Those wheelbarrows have to be pushed over to where the playground is going up, navigating around volunteers hauling mulch, and then the concrete gets dumped into the hole where each component is being built.

That process has to happen over and over again throughout the day—for a typical playground, it happens 140 times. Because this is so much work, volunteers usually figure out that it's most efficient to get a system going. The rhythm of the concrete team plays a key role in ensuring that the holes get filled on time, the play structure itself can go up on

schedule, and everything else in these massive, 1-day projects can keep moving forward.

On one build years ago, I immediately noticed that the concrete team hadn't figured out the right sequence for the steps, and many of them were standing around, unsure of what to do next. The hose was leaking, turning the ground into a mud bog and making the few loaded wheelbarrows that much harder to push. And for the rare batch that was being completed, the volunteers were being sent back when they got to the holes because the concrete hadn't been mixed correctly and was too soupy. Concrete that is too wet takes too long to dry, jeopardizing the playground's structural integrity, a risk we can never take.

The clock was ticking. We were due to finish the entire project in an hour and a half, and we still had a lot of bags of concrete sitting untouched on the pallet. To the relief of the build captain, and frankly the whole team, I took charge. I was in a purple KaBOOM! T-shirt, so they immediately trusted that I knew what I was doing.

"Grab your wheelbarrows and line them up side by side facing the same direction," I explained. I created a rough assembly line, assigning two volunteers to haul bags over. I gave one person the hose and gave him a nickname: the "Water Boy," which quickly caught on. He began working his way down the line of wheelbarrows, and people started yelling, "Water Boy, let's get going! We need you over here!" Each wheelbarrow had two people on either end mixing the concrete using garden hoes, which work so much better for this than shovels. One volunteer became the "inspector." That person was responsible for making sure that every wheelbarrow was thoroughly mixed to the right consistency before it got sent over to the playground. The batches of concrete suddenly started coming out a lot better and faster. Once we got the kinks worked out, the volunteers started having fun.

It's not the most glamorous job, but when the concrete team is working smoothly, when people start getting dirty and working hard, other people suddenly want to come over and join them. I've seen this happen over and over again. The music's playing, the concrete team is yelling, making noise, teasing each other (especially teasing the Water Boy or Water Girl), and people who aren't doing that feel like they're missing out. The other jobs aren't as hard, but they aren't as much fun, either. I love being on the concrete team, and if I'm going to be at a build, most project managers know they can rely on me to take over this dirty task and get the team running smoothly and having fun.

Invariably someone will ask, "Why not just use a concrete mixer?" Companies make backyard models, which you just plug in, add the ingredients, and out comes perfectly churned concrete. The reason, in a nutshell, is that the experience just wouldn't be the same. The point isn't simply creating a playground but getting people to work hard, side by side with strangers, on a tangible project that improves the neighborhood. Not having any problems to solve, not getting dirty, not sweating shoulder to shoulder, not struggling a little bit would turn the whole thing into a simple transaction. What makes the KaBOOM! playground builds special is the fact that it's all about teamwork and what people, without machines, can do together.

I once had a woman in an inner-city neighborhood ask me why KaBOOM! was different from all the other nonprofits that came to her and made grand promises that sometimes did not come true. Why is this playground going to be different? she wanted to know. I said, "It's different this time because KaBOOM! isn't building the playground—you are. We'll be there with you, and we'll help you, but you're doing the work."

In other words, getting a group of neighborhood volunteers organized around a specific goal is as important as anything else we do. If a playground were to somehow go up without the community being actively involved—if, say, we did the bulk of the work ourselves, or we used industrial equipment instead of local muscle, or if the corporate volunteers built the project without engagement from the community we would consider that a failure. The process counts as much as the playground, and part of that process is stripping out the advantages of technology and getting people, many of whom have little construction experience, to roll up their sleeves and work together.

We have two primary aspects to our mission at KaBOOM!. We want to turn a patch of dirt into a beautiful new playground to create better play opportunities for kids, and we want to help transform the community. The real change doesn't come from the events of that single day. Instead, it comes from all the planning and organizational work leading up to it, and the way that those skills get applied to other local projects afterward. The objective isn't merely a physical change to a single piece of land but a civic transformation.

The basic philosophy at KaBOOM! comes down to three key elements, specifically:

1. Convening People Around a Collective Cause. Too often, people in a neighborhood are at odds with one another, creating a fractured sense of community. Rallying people around children and the cause of play is powerful; social barriers are crossed for the greater purpose of taking action and fighting for something positive.
2. Achievable Wins. There are dozens of small victories built into our process. For each "win"—when a person gets four wheelbarrows donated for the day, for example, or when another person figures out a way to involve kids from the local school—someone is celebrated and applauded for making it happen. The individual responsible for the win is lifted up and celebrated. The completed project—the playground—is the final, big win for the entire community.
3. Cascading Steps of Courage. The success of the project is a powerful and tangible transformation of a physical space, and it happens in a relatively short period of time through the hard work of the people who live there and in partnership with others who care about the community. The completed playground creates a confidence that comes from the recognition that individuals can make a difference, that they have a voice, and that the power to make other changes and upgrades happen in the community lies within their grasp. What they do next is viewed as the cascading steps of courage.

That is the KaBOOM! Theory of Change.

The manifestation of this last step of the Theory of Change is witnessed through "ripples," the word we use for all the follow—on effects after a playground goes up. We don't take credit for that term. It comes from a speech Robert Kennedy gave in 1966 in Cape Town, South Africa. At the time, the country was in the grip of apartheid, and Kennedy called on the country's citizens to take action against racial oppression. The subject resonated in the United States, too—America was in a bitter civil rights struggle when Kennedy gave that speech. City Year adopted the concept of ripples," and we borrowed it from them.

Kennedy said: "Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others . . . he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Ripples are what KaBOOM! is really about. We measure our success by looking at what happens after we leave. We like to say, it starts with a playground. That philosophy goes back to our earliest days.

In 1997 during the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, we were one of many organizations to take part in a massive service Project in Philadelphia, which involved about 3,000 volunteers spread out over 6 miles of activities. Many of the people were doing important things like collecting trash and sprucing up parks, but the fruits of their labor were invisible to casual observers. In comparison, the playground project was incredibly tangible.

Because of this we got a lot of attention, culminating with the participation of then Vice President Al Gore and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (and future Secretary of State) Colin Powell during the Build Day. It was the first time we had to organize a press pool, arrange for a mult box (an electronic device allowing multiple media outlets high-quality audio), and coordinate security with the Secret Service. Both men got to work and worked hard. At one point they were both standing on a 6-foot deck helping to precariously lift a 200-pound steel roof onto the structure. I was impressed and also amused (and a little anxious) as the Secret Service detail was going nuts!

Our project there was in the Nicetown neighborhood of northern Philadelphia, an extremely tough part of the city at the time. The Build Day turned out great, but a few mornings after the playground was finished, it got tagged with graffiti. Our community partner for that project was a nonprofit across the street from the site, run by a woman named Juanita Hatton. Juanita went out and cleaned up the graffiti herself. A few days later, the playground was tagged a second time, and she again cleaned it up herself. The same thing happened, again and again for 5 days straight, until she ultimately wore down the graffiti artists. From that point on, the playground stayed graffiti-free.

Juanita designated local kids to be captains of the site, with orders to report anything unusual to her. Ted Adams, the project manager, told me about going back a few months after construction to check on the playground. It was in immaculate condition, and he could tell that members of the community were still looking out for it, under her guidance. "We walked over to the playground together," Ted said, "and there was a broken juice bottle. Some kid saw her coming and ran over and picked it up before she even said anything." Some Boomers have followed up on this playground several times over the years, most recently in 2010, 13 years after construction, and it was still in great shape. Kids from a Boys and Girls Club nearby use it every day, and they have regular service days to repaint benches and plant trees. It's become a part of the community. Many communities struggle with establishing ownership of their parks. Sustaining them takes people like Juanita Hatton who take action, enlist others, remain consistent, and retain visibility.

That's a crucial end result of the way we work—the community takes care of the space because they own it. KaBOOM! didn't give a playground to the Nicetown community. Instead, everyone involved chipped in assets and labor and donations, and we helped the people in the community organize and build it themselves. Local kids designed it, their parents helped choose specific components, volunteers led the planning committees and hunted down tools and food and a DJ—and on the day of construction, they all came together to do the work. So it only makes sense that they would want to protect it afterward. (The Philadelphia Eagles football team participated in the build, and they were so inspired by the experience that they started building a playground each summer during training camp completely on their own, without the help of KaBOOM!, a nice example of a ripple.)

KaBOOM! conducts revisits each year to about 25 of our alumni playground builds, specifically those that are at least 2 years old. We try to meet and talk with people who were involved in the project. We hear some good stories from these revisits that are documented in our database. Minimally, the revisit is an opportunity to see how well the playground is being maintained. We rate the playground as "passing" or "failing" using specific criteria. Currently, 86 percent of our playgrounds pass, as the Nicetown one did when we conducted revisits in 2007 and 2010. We are proud of that number, and we continue to work to see it increase.

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In 2002, in a quirk of timing, New Haven, Connecticut, had two playgrounds under construction at the same time: one through KaBOOM! and our community-building approach, and the other through the standard method in which outside contractors had been hired. In 2006 I talked to Hannah Sokel Holmes of the New Haven Housing Authority, and she described what happened at the second site: "We had trouble with things like kids throwing stones at contractors, and people knocking down the temporary fences during construction," she said. "None of that happened at the KaBOOM! project. With the other project, we talked to the community about what the builders were trying to do for them, but they weren't truly involved. They didn't get to make any of the decisions; they didn't get to design it or plan it or build it. That other playground is trashed today. The community-build playground, our playground, is well-maintained, while the playground that was professionally installed is in horrible disrepair."

There are some people who can't differentiate between the two approaches and

are skeptical about the whole enterprise. I see this first hand, when I talk to potential funders who don't think they can make a lasting difference in what they perceive as a "bad" neighborhood. Unfortunately, sometimes residents of those communities start to believe that themselves.

When we helped build two playgrounds in the North Side neighborhood of Pittsburgh in 2008, the projects got covered in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. We were happy for the coverage, but the writer spun the story in a way that underscored the persistent low expectations people have for communities like that: "Residents of those neighborhoods, plagued by vacancies, crime, blight, and vandalism, say children need safe places to play but that the effort and expense may have been for short-lived gain," the story read. "It's nice they're doing this," said Don Boggs, while watching the swarm of activity during the build on Spring Garden Avenue Tuesday. He has lived in Spring Garden all of his 46 years. "But I'd be amazed if it lasts more than 6 months."

The two playgrounds are still up and still in great shape, more than 2 years later. There is no question that there were normal and relatively minor issues that happened in the first few months following construction. But they were addressed quickly, which is key to any community that is both "maintaining" a playground and "maintaining ownership" of the playground. A bolt came loose and was quickly replaced. A plastic element that listed sponsors was vandalized and replaced. Graffiti on the playground was quickly removed. The community organization we worked with for one of those playgrounds even managed to get a vacant house next door demolished after the playground went up. Another ripple.

There's a line of thinking that says *if things have been bad in a certain community, they will always be bad*. A poor community will never be able to improve its circumstances. That sort of thinking frustrates me, because I know that individuals and organizations and communities can and will rise to challenges, as long as the challenge is presented in a way that asks them for their very best. I've seen it firsthand throughout my life.

In Durham, a group of neighborhoods near Duke University had been bickering with each other (and with the school) for years before they built a playground through KaBOOM!. It was on the grounds of an old school, Lyon Park Elementary, which had been abandoned after desegregation and left to rot for decades. A group from the community put together a $6.4 million bond referendum, which passed in 1996, to gut the school, renovate it, and make it home to a cluster of nonprofits—GED prep, a health care clinic, vocational training, a day care center, programs for seniors. But after all the money was gone, there was no playground for the day care kids. The center opened in 2002.

When Duke started to reach out to these communities in 2000, the meetings turned ugly. Mayme Webb-Bledsoe works in the community affairs office at Duke (and grew up in the Lyon Park community). "It was like a civil war," she told me. Some people in the neighborhood had employment disputes with Duke, or property disputes, or just something going wrong that they didn't like, and they came to these sessions ready to went loudly. "It would last 3 or 4 hours, and they didn't want to talk to us-they just wanted to yell," Mayme said.

Our project there took place on February 21, 2001. Durham usually has pretty mild winters, but on that day there was snow, thunder, and lightning. In spite of less-than-ideal circumstances, this was the first tangible project that the six neighborhoods surrounding Duke were able to come together on and successfully complete. It gave them a sense of what was possible, Mayme said, and after that they were off and running. In the past 7 years, the residents, in conjunction with several partnerships, have built more than 40 houses and refurbished countless more in the area adjacent to the Lyon Park playground. They have built another two playgrounds, one with KaBOOM! and one without. With funding from Duke, they also completed a 32—unit housing facility for seniors.

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One morning in the early spring of 2006, I was sitting at the airport in Atlanta, waiting for a flight to Jackson, Mississippi, where I was scheduled to meet with Jim Barksdale, the technology entrepreneur who'd given KaBOOM! $1.5 million for our work in the Gulf region after Hurricane Katrina. He wanted an update of how his contributions were being used, and I was looking forward to the meeting in part because I really respect Mr. Barksdale and enjoyed being with him, and also because I had a lot of good news to report.

I was sitting at the gate, drinking a much-needed coffee and checking my BlackBerry, when I was surprised to see another KaBOOM! employee, a longtime project manager named Erica Liberman, who happened to be booked on the same flight to Jackson. Erica was traveling to Mississippi to run a Design Day at an elementary school there.

In 2002 we had 12 employees. Four years later, we were above 90, all working on a range of different initiatives and projects, many of which include frequent travel. Unlike the old days, it's impossible for me to know what everyone's doing and where they're going. In fact, this has been a major shift as a result of our rapid growth. We could no longer hold staff meetings by gathering around a small conference table, and my job had significantly evolved. Instead of managing playground builds like I had done in the first year, I was now managing managers, and I was far less involved in the day-to-day operational details of the organization. I still attend a number of playground builds a year, but much more of my time is spent meeting with funders and plotting overall strategy.

At the gate in Atlanta, I recognized a chance to get down to the ground level again, if only for an hour or two. I called Mr. Barksdale's assistant and asked to push our meeting back so that I could attend the Design Day.

Erica and I showed up at Pecan Park Elementary School in Jackson mid-morning. The school sits on Claiborne Avenue, about 2 miles northwest of downtown. The double-sided marquee in front welcomed KaBOOM!

In the lobby on the wall, displayed on a bulletin board, was a giant anthill made of brown construction paper, which the school was using as a way to track fund-raising for the project (which is really much cooler than the traditional fund-raising thermometer).

Each family or person who made a donation was represented by a red paper ant—the goal was $10 per family. In addition to parents, the school had received donations toward the playground from the postman, maintenance workers, delivery people, even the FedEx guy. I found out later that they managed to raise the whole $10,000 in a month!

Erica introduced me to the principal, a dynamo named Wanda Quon. I don't think Wanda believed Erica's story that the CEO of KaBOOM! just "happened" to spot her at the Atlanta Airport and tagged along for the morning. Wanda just smiled and changed the plans a bit, so she could give me a tour around the school. We ducked our heads into classrooms, and I met many of the teachers. Pecan Park has about 500 kids, and I was amazed by how much Wanda knew about them. Not just their names, but what their families were like, who had older brothers or younger sisters in the school, whose mom made the best brownies for fund-raisers, which dad could be counted on for a spring cleanup day-everything worth knowing, she knew, and she made it all seem effortless.

Jackson is an inner-city community, and people move in and out frequently. About a third of the student population typically changes during a given year, so it's sometimes hard to build up a lot of social capital among parents there. Wanda is a rock of stability, though—after a lot of years teaching in Jackson's public schools, Wanda came to Pecan Park Elementary in the early 1990s and became principal 12 years ago. In fact, she's been at the school for 18 of its 21 years in existence.

Design Day was a blast and a reminder to me how much these projects mean to the kids. Every single kid in the school had made a drawing of the dream playground he or she wanted to see—just like Ashley Brodie had done all those years earlier, at the Livingston Manor playground in Washington. We couldn't have the entire school come to Design Day, so the kids in each homeroom had drawn names out of a hat to send a single lucky representative—25 in all. Those 25 wanted swings, swings, and more swings along with slides and benches. One 6-year-old named Dontavius asked for "a talking tree that only speaks good words." (Magic trees like that are tough, but we did incorporate a special tube that lets kids from one side of the playground talk to those on the other side.)

The meeting wrapped up with cheers and thank-yous, and I left for the meeting with Mr. Barksdale, feeling completely lucky for the chance meeting at the airport.

Of course, I kept in touch with Wanda and got frequent updates on the project as it moved forward. The school had to remove some outdated wooden play equipment in the schoolyard, including the hard surface underneath, which was the source of a lot of scrapes and bruises and nurse reports—almost one a day—for kids who'd gotten hurt jumping down onto it. The kindergartners were fascinated by the giant trucks that came to remove the equipment, and their teacher worked it into their lesson that day, asking them to write stories about what they had seen. One downside: Those same kids showed up at school the next day, expecting to see a gleaming new playground in its place. One girl was so disappointed that she started crying. The teacher had to explain that the KaBOOM! equipment wouldn't go in for another 2 weeks. But excitement was definitely mounting.

Once the day of construction finally came—May 18, 2006—more than 200 local parents and volunteers showed up along with central office people from the school and the district, janitors, and even a local SWAT team.

It was a weekday, and children at the school were jumping out of their skin. The teachers staggered the classes so that each one could come outside for a stint to watch the progress and do cheers for the volunteers. The local news station recorded a segment to air that night, and three Jackson radio stations did live feeds during construction. It all helped connect Pecan Park to the larger community. "The build showed that even though we're a Title I school in inner-city Jackson, we've got positive things going on," Wanda told me.

But then the ripples started. Wanda had bigger plans for the school yard than just a playground, and first up was a walking track around the perimeter. That year, 2006, Mississippi had been named the fattest state in the country for the third straight year, and Wanda thought that teaching her students some of the elements of a healthy lifestyle could reverse that. She thought she could break the cycle. Early research into the cost of a walking track left her a little daunted, though. Estimates from local contractors for a simple quarter-mile track, 6 feet wide, ran about $61,000.

At the same time, the foundation run by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Mississippi launched a program to get people in the state to exercise. When Wanda heard about the program, she immediately signed her school up. Schools had to log the mileage that they walked, but the program offered grants of $3,000, which she used to buy computers that could keep track of all that. It was a small help, but over time the lack of a walking track became a problem. The school property takes up an entire city block, with a fence around the back and a sidewalk on only 2½ sides of the perimeter. When kids walked the rest of it, they were in the street.

She applied to the foundation to give her a grant for the walking track, but representatives told her that $61,000 was too much. So she stopped calling contractors and started calling asphalt companies directly. After all, contractors would have sub-contracted the job out, so they were effectively middlemen that she could eliminate. That got the price knocked down to about $45,000, an amount that the foundation agreed to cover. The track went up in the late spring of 2007, about a year after the school's Build Day.

It isn't an oval, which would get boring for kids over time. Instead, the track meanders around past the playground and up the hill near an outdoor classroom before winding back again. "The kids use it almost every day," Wanda told me. "They love it." Since then, a few other schools in Mississippi have gotten similar grants for walking tracks, but Pecan Park was the first in the state.

Wanda was just getting started. That fall she applied for another grant, $58,000 from the Mississippi Department of Education to provide fresh fruit and vegetables for students at Pecan Park. One snack for every student, every day—strawberries, pears, plums, nectarines, whatever's in season. (Wanda told me that the program even benefited teachers by introducing them to exotic stuff like kiwis: "Some people on my staff had never eaten one," she said.) The grant provided enough money to purchase a refrigerator

to store everything along with carts to deliver the fruit to individual classrooms. Since then, parents have told her about trips to the supermarket when kids hit the produce aisle and ask, "Mommy, get some of that."

And there's more. Wanda got yet another grant in the summer of 2008 to put in fitness equipment along the walking trail. It's a set of seven stations, including a vault bar, horizontal ladder, pull—up bars, sit-up station, and more. Total cost: $24,000, which includes $16,000 for equipment and another $8,000 for installation. Pecan Park's phys ed teacher attended training on how best to get children to use each station. As a result, the body mass index of kids at Pecan Park has been going down.

What else? Where do I begin? Pecan Park held a play day in September 2009—kids played games like Duck Duck Goose and learned the handjive dance from *Grease* and had relay races where they had to pass a football from one kid to the next using only their forearms, no hands. Wanda took the opportunity to finally put in the stepping stones that were designed on the Build Day more than 2 years ago. "When you look at our campus, you'd think that all the components were laid out as part of a master plan," she told me. "They all fit together. The walking track circles by the KaBOOM! playground and behind the outdoor classroom. The benches are dotted along the track, and the fitness equipment area is accessible from the playground and the walking track."

In all, Pecan Park raised $175,000 from grants and other sources for the school and its children. And it became a model for Jackson schools. One fan came all the way from the White House to check it out. In March 2010 First Lady Michelle Obama traveled to Mississippi to meet Wanda Quon and hear about all the things she'd been able to do to make the kids at Pecan Park a little healthier. Mrs. Obama had already volunteered on a KaBOOM! project in California, so she knew the kind of work we did. She used the visit to Pecan Park as an exemplary model to highlight her campaign to reduce childhood obesity, called "Let's Move."

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Wanda Quon didn't just work to improve her own school. Jackson is about 170 miles north of New Orleans, and she drove down to volunteer at other KaBOOM! projects in the area after Hurricane Katrina. She and her librarian came to the 50th build in New Orleans, with Regis and Kelly, and she and her husband drove to Bay St. Louis for the 100th project. "That was an adventure," she told me. "He had been training for his first marathon, but he broke a bone in his foot, so he had to wear an air cast and couldn't train anymore. He really didn't want to go to the build, but I told him he'd enjoy it. And he did. There's pictures of him hauling mulch in his air cast."

KaBOOM! does not consider taking on a project in Jackson without talking to someone like Wanda Quon first. She's a great example of a KaBOOM! alumnus, folks who serve as extensions of KaBOOM! In their respective communities and take actions to help ensure that all kids have great places to play. Wanda is now mentoring other people in the community who want to create play or wellness programs aimed at kids. That helps build up the community's social capital and helps kids stay healthier. As Wanda puts it, "If we can convince kids when they're young, we can make real changes."

And to think, it all started with a playground. As Wanda puts it, "If it weren't for the KaBOOM! project, none of these things would have happened."

Playwork Practise and Pop-Up Adventure Play & Story of the Tour

2015

MORGAN LEICHTER-SAXBY & SUZANNA LAW

Morgan Leichter-Saxby studied in London to become a playworker and play ranger. In 2010, aiming to draw attention to the lack of knowledge in her country in the field of playwork, she founded Pop-Up Adventure Play USA. She and Suzanna Law designed and began to teach the Playworker Development Course. Law began to work as a playworker in socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods in Manchester, and helped the establishment of the Pop-Up Adventure Play in both the United States and the UK. In 2014 the duo set out with a little yellow car to bring together play rangers, reaching various parts of the United States through workshops and activities. Here we include two short chapters from their book, which include a review of their Pop-Up Adventure Play tour in 2014.

* Leichter-Saxby, Morgan. "Playwork Practice" and "Pop-Up Adventure Play." in Morgan Leichter-Saxby (text) and Suzanna Law (photographs), *The New Adventure Playground Movement* 15, 16-18. New York: Notebook Publishing, 2015.

Law, Suzanna. "Story of the Tour." in *The New Adventure Playground Movement*, 23-24.

** See popupadventureplay.org/.

As has been shown thus far playwork has grown and blossomed out of the adventure playground movement, but now includes people working in different arenas. These professionals are connected by a set of formal Playwork Principles, as well as a certain outlook. Dr Fraser Brown (Professor of Playwork at Leeds Beckett University), explains, "playworkers should adopt a non-judgmental, non-prejudicial, non-directive, and largely reflective approach to their work"[1]. In many cases, this involves creating a safe and flexible environment within which children can be free, and then deliberately letting go of our adult assumptions and expectations regarding what they might do there. The best play sites are always evolving, led by the needs and desires of the children who attend, with adults being careful to respond to children's cues and to withdraw when no longer needed.

One key aspect of playwork is the focus on children's own, self-directed play as our top priority. We spend a lot of time thinking about the *environments* of play, always seeking ways to "loosen them up" so that children can take, shape and transform whatever they can find into whatever they might need. For us, many of the problems children face today (such as aggression, anxiety and depression) can be framed as symptoms of play deprivation.

The field of playwork is far larger than can be addressed here; becoming a playworker takes time, education, practice and the support of a good team. There is some more information on routes into this field, provided at the end of this book, and our website provides a wealth of tips on how to apply the basics of playwork in any setting.

Unquestionably, playwork is a challenging approach with the potential to be astonishingly rewarding. It involves a great deal of work behind the scenes and training in tools such as risk/benefits assessments. When studying playwork, new practitioners find a whole new vocabulary for discussing what they see and how children behave in the space. It is a position that asks adults to take a great deal of responsibility, while at the same time reminding them to remain humble and learn from the play experts in our care.

Pop-Up Adventure Play

The original idea of a pop-up adventure playground was based on the idea that play is good for everyone. We wanted to incorporate as much of the classic adventure playground as possible, while also directing efforts towards making it easy for communities to build themselves. By using materials already possessed, along with the public space shared with their neighbours, organisers have been hosting events that welcome everyone and give them something to talk about afterwards. We held the first pop-up adventure playground in New York City in 2010, and very soon people began to email from around the world—Boston, Bogotá, Cairo, Mexico City and Shanghai. Again and again, these individuals shared the same concerns: parents working too hard, children under academic pressure, and crumbling social networks—all contributing to one key problem: children not playing out the way they used to. Furthermore, this situation reproduces itself: when people feel surrounded by strangers, they don't feel confident making new friends. They report feeling less safe in their own neighbourhoods, and more alone. Children playing outside are both the symptom and catalyst of a healthy society: their presence in public space demonstrates community networks while strengthening them.

This provided the foundation for our design of the pop-up adventure playground model. These events are free, public celebrations of child directed play, filled with ordinary and recycled materials (such as cardboard boxes, fabric, tape and string), with adults ready to support play without providing direction. They offer a "starter" version of the classic adventure playground model, gently introducing themes of risk and freedom by welcoming and encouraging people of all ages and abilities to play together. We always urge new or-

Block Party, Pop-Up Adventure Playground, Fairport, New York

Pop-Up Adventure Playground, Tour Stop #12, Be Active Kids, Cary, North Carolina

Tour Stop #12

ganisers to start small and grow from within their community of support, building the skills necessary for a more permanent site as they go. For many of the organisers you'll meet here, pop-up adventure playgrounds are gateway projects, building towards a permanent site. Others view pop-up adventure playgrounds as a way to reach out into communities they don't often see, or to collaborate with other local institutions or festivals.

Story of the Tour

BY SUZANNA LAW

The tour seems like so long ago. In fact, it seems a little bit like a dream to me; a two-month long dream, shared by only one other person. And when I stare in disbelief at some of the images from our trip, I like to webcam with Morgan and stare at her, too; I can't quite believe we drove for almost 11,000 miles in the tiniest yellow car imaginable.

And what, you might ask, was the reason for such an incredible journey? Well, we were responding to need. We were responding to the request from all over the US from people who wanted to find out more about play, more about playwork, and more about how play can change their lives. We were invited into communities just as a playworker is invited into play, and in return we were deeply inspired by these amazing people.

As I flick through the photos, I see the faces of 16 hosts that took us into their homes, fed us at their kitchen tables, and spoke of their hopes and dreams for play. That's 16 little

a)Pop-Up Adventure Playground, Be Active Kids, Houston, Texas
b)Pop-Up Adventure Playground, Tour Stop #3, Be Active Kids, Bernheim, Kentucky
c)Pop-Up Adventure Playground, Tour Stop #12, Be Active Kids, Port Clinton, Ohio

groups of people in 16 different locations across the USA- exactly double the number of our original aim. Double. There were folks who we have worked with before, groups with whom we'd been in conversation with for a long time, and new friends who reached out to us for the very first time. Actually, location number 16 was booked two weeks into the tour upon hearing that we would be heading their way!

We were enormously humbled to meet these play champions in their own communities as they spoke about their work, their passion for play, and their isolation from others in the field. As we crossed 28 State lines, we reflected on just how important our tour mission was: to connect play people from across the country with other like-minded people in order to Inspire communities to take a step forward in the confidence that play would lift their community as they work together. We were invited into communities to meet their needs, and together with some of our Special Guest friends, their needs were met through play.

Upon arriving at each site, we delivered workshops introducing the basic ideas of playwork. Working closely with the hosts, we tailored each of these to meet the needs of the community, and included time for the participants to play. There are so many great photos of adults at play, capturing moments in my mind that I recall fondly, and of course abundant photos of Pop-Up Adventure Playgrounds that we helped to run as part of the tour.

So many memories, so many great play moments.

It was an incredible journey that started with two playworkers in one car, and ended with a reach of over 2,000 people spanning 30 events. But that's just the beginning.

Welcome to this story, and thank you for picking up this book. You, too, are now a part of the adventure.

NOTES

1_____Brown, Fraser. "The Playwork Principles: A critique." in Foundations of Playwork, 123-127, ed. Fraser Brown & Chris Taylor. Maidenhead: Open University Press / McGraw Hill, 2008.

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained: Exploring Children's Playscapes 2017

HELLE NEBELONG

A landscape architect from Denmark, Helle Nebelong focuses on spatial design and the development of cities in harmony with everyday life. She defends children's right to play and the necessity of their access to nature and a healthy environment, and develops thought and design on natural play areas for their development. Nebelong is among the pioneers of the natural play area movement, and advocates the use of fixed equipment, bright colors, play areas isolated from the rest of the park, local natural materials, and a questioning of borders. Nebelong supports many institutions regarding the matters of play and play areas, and her article here focuses on concepts of security and risk in play areas.

* Nebelong, Helle. "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained: Exploring Children's Playscapes." *Exchange: The Early Childhood Leaders' Magazine*, vol. 238, (November–December 2017): 54-56.

** See hellenebelong.com/.

I grew up with my mom and dad and two sisters in a suburb of Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. We lived in a terraced house with a small garden on a cul-de-sac. My sisters and I played in the garden, which was surrounded by high evergreen hedges. It was a safe place and we spent hours playing in the sandbox, which I am convinced is the smallest one that has ever existed in the world.

When I was six years old I was allowed to play in a wild, "secret" garden at the end of the road. Here, children of all ages came from the local townhouse areas. It was a wilderness with lots of old fruit trees, bushes, and high grass. We climbed the trees and we built caves. There were no adults present, and sometimes it was quite violent. Sometimes we came home with tears rolling down our cheeks and with bloody skin scrapes. But we learned a lot! It was nice to come home and be put in a hot bath together with my little sister and get a lot of care from mom and dad.

Helle Nebelong and her little sister, 1961

When I was eight years old, my family and I lived in Tórshavn in the Faroe Islands for two years. The biggest change, I think, was to come from pancake flat Denmark to an archipelago in the Atlantic consisting of rugged cliffs and steep mountains. There were no traditionally equipped playgrounds, there was just great nature everywhere, and nature was the children's playground.

I played with some boys, and sometimes we played in the harbor on the cliffs below the lighthouse. We jumped around and it was a matter of getting back safe on the mainland before the tide came and swallowed us! The adults didn't know we were playing there; if they did,

they probably would not have let us. I also remember from those days in the Faroe Islands that we ran on ice skates down the streets, which were sometimes covered with ice. In my childhood in the 1960s there was not much focus on what children did after school time—as long as we got home for dinner.

A Wrong Lesson Learnt

Today, parents in many countries are controlled by their imaginings of all the dreadful things that can happen to children. The fear is so enormous that many parents do not dare let their children play alone outside, unless there are adults present.

Emdrup Skrammellegeplads, the junk playground

Children today are not allowed to build towers to climb as high as they did back in the 1940s!

The paradox is that when you over-protect children, they don't get a chance to seek out challenges and harness their own, natural courage. If we prevent children from the fundamental curiosity of finding out how things work—learning by doing—they do not learn to prevent and handle hazards. And, if so, they will not grow up being resilient and prepared to meet the many unavoidable challenges of the future. It's therefore essential to teach children from the very beginning of their life that there are wonders, challenges, and dangers out there. Living is fantastic but risky.

Safety is a Myth; Risk is Reality

To learn about life takes time and demands courage and risk-taking. Grownups are responsible for giving children lots of time to play outdoors and explore and learn about life by practicing all kinds of skills. Instead, they let children stay indoors, sitting still in front of computers and television for hours caught up in fantasy worlds that are not their own. Hey, that's really dangerous!

Danish Concepts

International Play Association, IPA, was founded in Denmark in 1961, and Denmark has a long tradition for promoting the child's right to free play. The junk playground—*Skrammellegepladsen*—was invented by landscape architect C. Th. Sørensen back in 1943. Sørensen saw how children found a hole in the fence around a building site and went there to play with all the loose materials when the workers were off duty. That gave him the idea of designing a junk playground—or adventure playground—where children could play with bricks, boards, and recycled materials. There are still some adventure playgrounds left in Denmark, and the concept has spread to other parts of the world

and new adventure playgrounds have been founded. Here children learn to handle all the "dangerous" things. They learn to use tools—to saw, hammer nails, and cut sticks with a knife—and they learn to build and light a bonfire.

Staffed Play Yards

Another Danish invention is *Bemandede legepladser*, which means playgrounds that have educated trained staff (www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellows/detail/3566/Tanya+VINCENT). In Copenhagen today there are 26 staffed local playgrounds and a new one—number 27—is on its way.

A manned playground is "a place for free, daily, and often messy play: a back yard for families without their own," says Tanya Vincent, a Sydney, Australia-based architect who made a study tour in 2012 to investigate Copenhagen's *Bemandede legepladser*. The concept is nearly 80 years old and it's quite brilliant because it functions as a local meeting place for families and children of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Children can play on their own or they can be directed by the staff if they don't know what to do. Many Danish parents don't spend so much time with their kids due to work, so the staff on these playgrounds can give the children some grown-up contact.

The ability to concentrate on, for example estimating distance, height and risk, requires a lot of practice and is necessary for a person to be able to cope successfully with life. Children learn through play in natural, asymmetrical settings like climbing a tree.
PHOTO ↙
Helle Nebelong

Cycle Safe—the Newest Play Concept

Children learn best through play. This goes for cycling as well. So, the Danish Cyclists' Federation has recently been granted funds to co-finance the construction of nine permanent bicycle playgrounds around Denmark.

Children who are "cycle safe," meaning that they can start, stop, keep a straight line, and take one hand off the handlebar to signal, will be much better at remembering traffic rules and watching out for other road users later on. The children will learn these skills through play. The playgrounds are not restricted only to children—they can also be used for training adults without cycling experience or people in need of a tune-up of their cycling skills.

The playgrounds have been developed in collaboration with the Danish Cyclists' Federation with funding by Nordea-fonden. The playgrounds are being individually developed for each municipality according to the surrounding area with the overall theme: nature and sensory experience inviting institutions and families alike to play on bicycles.

From the opening summer 2017 of one of the first bicycle playgrounds in Denmark.
PHOTO → Helle Nebelong

Rødovre Adventure Playground, Copenhagen
PHOTO → Helle Nebelong

Standardized Playgrounds

Most playgrounds today consist of brightly colored rubber surface and pre-fabricated equipment. It seems to be a grown-up thought that everything having to do with children should be colourful, fun, and as safe as possible. Play is about much more than fun and safety! Safety standards have been developed based on real, tragic accidents. As guidelines, the standards are very useful when designing playspaces for children and are combined with common sense, but they are, in my opinion, an enormous barrier to children's real need for play and learning about all aspects of life through play. A child's healthy development and resilience are accomplished through risky play and it should be every child's right to play in natural surroundings.

I've said it many times before, but I'll repeat again: I am convinced that standardized playgrounds are dangerous, because all asymmetry has been taken away. When the distance between all the rungs in a climbing net or a ladder is exactly the same, the child has no need to concentrate on where he puts his feet. Standardization is dangerous because play becomes simplified and the child does not have to worry about his movements. The kinesthetic sense is the one you use to estimate distances and move your body safely through a landscape. The more knobbly and asymmetrically-shaped a playscape for children is, the more this sense will be enhanced and the better the child will be to overcome challenges, which one is confronted with throughout life. The ability to concentrate on, for example, estimating height and risk, requires a lot of practice and is necessary for a person to be able to cope successfully with life. The focus on safety is essential but must not lead one to forget to care about design and atmosphere and make one buy boring play equipment because it is easy and secure.

Children in the City 2017

ELGER BLITZ

Industrial designers Elger Blitz and Mark van der Eng are the founders of Carve, a design, architecture, and engineering office based in Amsterdam and launched in 1997. Carve focuses on public space planning and development for children and youth. Blitz is sought out as a visiting scholar in the Netherlands and abroad for his interdisciplinary, innovative approach to design aimed at children and youth. Carve is known in Türkiye for its design of the playgrounds at Zorlu Center (2014), Marmara Forum (2020) and Tophane Square (2020) in Istanbul. In his article included here, Blitz treats the topic of the city being/remaining active via two examples by Carve: the Van Beuningenplein and Meerpark playgrounds.

* Blitz, Elger. "Children in the City." in *The Active City*, ed. Ad de Bont, 148-157, commissioned by the Amsterdam Municipality, Amsterdam: Urhahn | urban design & strategy, 2017.

** See carve.nl/.

Van Beuningenplein photographs → Marleen Beek
Meerpark photographs → Jasper van der Schaaf
Photograph courtesy → Carve

Getting children to be physically active is not an art, because they do it of their own volition. Providing enough suitable space for physical activity and play turns out to be a more difficult task. Places where children can freely move, play and do sports—unprogrammed, unstructured and unsupervised. Creating such places is difficult in a crowded city, but is of vital importance.

The Netherlands has plenty of policies designed to let children grow up healthily, to eat healthily and to play and be physically active regularly. How is this last aspect done in a city like Amsterdam? A city that is growing like other cities, and where available space is under pressure from urban densification. On balance, this means; more users, less space for play, and more demands on space. At the same time, our freedom of movement within the public domain is being limited, in particular because it is seen and exploited as a source of revenue by new parties. More outdoor cafés, but also wider sidewalks for children?

The EU monitor for the ideal city shows that the qualities we are looking for do not lie in a highly dense mega-metropolis, but in a city whose growth is based on the old, but certainly not hackneyed, conviction that a city that is pleasant for children—a playful city of activity—also appeals to adults (adapted freely from Aldo van Eyck).[1]

Van Beuningenplein

You almost invariably see activity and movement on Van Beuningenplein in the Westerpark district of Amsterdam. The functioning of the square can be considered from many perspectives. As one of the designers, I describe our aim with the square as creating space for children in the city, space to play and move. The design of Van Beuningenplein is based on a multitude of activities, space for all sorts of age groups and target groups, and on the possibilities of use changing throughout the day.

The original Van Beuningenplein has to be viewed in the context of the 1901 Housing Act, the resulting emergence of social housing, and the ambition of creating healthi-

VAN BEUNINGENPLEIN
A challenging playground on top of a car park in the Staatsliedenbuurt neighbourhood Amsterdam

Edges as seating objects, fields suitable for all kinds of sports and games, protection only in places where "ball danger" exists

er living conditions in highly polluted cities. We can also view the "playground movement" and the founding of a "playground association" for Van Beuningenplein in 1908 in this context. In 2008—exactly 100 years later—plans were drawn up for a car park beneath Van Beuningenplein so that the cars could disappear from the surrounding streets. The extremely dilapidated square came back to life as a "play area" for the neighbourhood.

Abandoning Expectations

Before I delve into Van Beuningenplein, let me introduce an idea from the authoritative American architecture historian Beatriz Colomina. She argues that it is the mass media in particular that shapes our image of what architecture is and should be. The media representation not only sticks as images in our collective memory but also determines our expectations.

In the design process for Van Beuningenplein, we freed ourselves from these highly influential expectations for various reasons. One reason was to investigate how an "open" square can offer space for various activities. The desire for an urban "functional" void that offers space for all sorts of uses is common. In practice, however, such an urban void rarely invites any form of spontaneous activity. Reasons to move are needed.

Another motivation for abandoning expectations was prompted by our experiences during an average participation meeting. This confirmed yet again how right Colomina is: the wishes of future users reflect perfectly what the media serves up: football in the city means a so-called Cruyff Court; a playground consists of standard multi-coloured pieces of equipment taken from a catalogue. Little imagination is apparent, and this inevitably leads to even more of the same. To convince everybody, existing examples are shown where the anticipated result is only partly achieved. In the design process for Van Beuningenplein, we therefore avoided this by only showing images of possible activities, with the request to express a preference. The positive result was that we could abandon a fixed programmatic classification according to age and users, separated by fences. A surplus of activities was possible on this small square. Normally, this would not be possible without fundamental compromises.

A Square to Cherish

Another source of inspiration is Mark Wigley, an architect and writer from New Zealand who is affiliated with Columbia University in New York. He views the built environment not only as a physical environment—after all, a piece of asphalt doesn't make a square—but rather as the whole of ideas and images of the physical environment that we have in our minds. The designer plays with these ideas, but in the end it is the users who (re) construct and embrace physical space, I think that it does indeed work like this, and that the users embrace and determine Van Beuningenplein. Children simply like being there, while adults no doubt think of the increased value of their nearby homes. The reasons for the popularity of the square vary and will probably remain unknown to some extent. But the fact is that users, consciously or not, play a crucial role in the good functioning of the design. That is a lucky result, but also one that is difficult to achieve.

Legible and Allowable

At Van Beuningenplein we ignored the conventional playground arrangement. Katherine Masiulanis describes the typical arrangement of a playground as follows: "Excellent for adults with too little time, overloaded with information in daily life and in search of a space that they can scan and understand easily." We design for children. Although they want it to be unstructured, we certainly did choose for a programmatic arrangement and structure.

The power of the design lies in the transitional zones within the programmatic arrangement. Within a clear composition, things can become a lot less clear, even chaotic, at the level of the details. Zones and functions overlap one another and use is determined by the people using them at any given moment. Possible conflicts are factored in and actually contribute to the optimal user qualities.

VAN BEUNINGENPLEIN
Amsterdam
Borderless spaces, water as a play element.

VAN BEUNINGENPLEIN
Amsterdam

Soft transitions between leisure activities and games.

It's a layout that appeals to children, who attach less importance to a formal arrangement and search for unexpected possibilities. The unconventional layout is intended as an invitation to children, since they are Inclined to search for the limits of what is offered to them: what is both possible and acceptable. Are these swings just for toddlers? Is the plane below a bench or a playing surface? Is the stand in the middle a place to play or to sit? Are the edges behind the basketball hoop intended for skating? And if not, can I skate on them? In our experience, children "read" an environment as they play—organizationally, ergonomically and in terms of social acceptability. The notion of "perceived affordance", as described by the American psychologist Donald Norman, aptly describes this interaction between object and (young) user. He writes about the qualities and characteristics of an object or place that is determined by its possible use and the possibility of a person being able to recognize the potential for a more specific use.[2]

The square's lack of immediate (functional) legibility might very well negate the usual reserve among adults in determining if something is allowable. Owing to that ambiguity, the unexpected and unforeseen use by children can be more difficult to assess and hence difficult to prevent by adults, who have a more conditioned outlook.

Van Beuningenplein has become a place to learn through experimentation, which is perhaps the biggest possible stimulus to become and stay active. It offers a solution for the limited availability of play spaces in the city by offering space for many forms on activity on a relatively modest site.

Meerpark

Sportpark Middenmeer Voorland was a conventional sports park, with an athletics track, a skate park, basketball courts, tennis courts, football pitches and an ice rink (Jaap Edenbaan) located between the railway, A10 motorway and buildings in the east of Amsterdam. It was constructed in the 1920s. We took advantage of our involvement in the redevelopment—in the period 2006-2010—to preserve as much green "play space" within the

periphery of the city, to extend this and transform the area into a city park for collective use, which serves many more users than the previous sports park.

From Sports Park to New Type of City Park

The original question was to create a new playground in the middle of the sports park. Therein lay for us just part of the solution to the problem of making the sports park attractive again. The idea soon arose to combine new park functions and potential for unstructured sports and games with the existing sports complex.

The ambition was to realize maximum usable space and to create a new type of city park. This could be achieved by removing physical barriers between the various parts, opening the sports fields to the public, and creating a connecting green park zone at the heart of the new park.

The most fundamental physical change was to remodel Radioweg into a broad park zone. The cycle path has been rerouted to create space for this. The existing sports fields were connected to the green zone by small footbridges. Meerpark is no longer "just" a sports park. The (spatial) connection between organized sports and "spontaneous" activities makes this remarkable. There is an unforced connection between various "zones of activity" and there is interaction between use and users, and the new arrangement is an invitation to new users and different forms of use.

Remove the Fences!

It can scarcely be called an "intervention", but it was crucial for the area: abandoning the idea that a sports field is the property of a sports club. Arnold Reijndorp, Professor of Urban Sociology at the UvA, argues that the fact that a space does not function entirely publically does not mean that it cannot be considered part of the public domain. This idea formed an important reason for removing the fences.

The sports fields are accessible for use by many groups all day. In practice, this gives rise to no conflicts, because it is clear who the primary users are and the clubs in the park still operate as strong cozllectives. The added value lies in coming into contact in a casual manner with the sports clubs. This encourages children to engage in activities, and encourages adults to continue taking physical activity. Other advantages are that the

MEERPARK
Amsterdam

The natural playground invites children (and adults) to embark on a voyage of discovery. Make it challenging!

number of burglaries in clubhouses has declined and the canteen makes more money thanks to the "new" users.

A Play Hill with Boulder Wall

What was previously a neglected piece of greenery has been transformed into the "tip" of the new park zone: a play hill. The site contains elements, artefacts and unclear transitional zones, again based on the notion of perceived "affordances". The original "dangerous" drainage ditch beside the play area has become an adventurous water playground The green zone around the sports field is thus accessed as a new "nature playground".

This public play area features both play equipment and an "artificial" 3,5-metre-tall, bright-orange professional climbing wall (the Boulder Wali). This combination draws on perceived affordances: playful qualities as additions to the existing arsenal of the conventional sports park. The Boulder Wall is the connection with the green play hill and also provides a large seating edge. Interventions ensure a blending of functions and unclear boundaries.

Deliberately attracting the "boulderers"—a "weak collective" without an official organizational structure, but with strong social connection—can contribute significantly to the functioning of the park. Reijndorp: "One new function can generate many new functions and uses." The "boulderers" are pioneers in what had previously been the "no go" area

MEERPARK
Amsterdam

Parents can keep an eye on their children from the seats around the playground. Nearby, but not too near. The sloping grass surface (without fall protection!) offers something for all age groups. Smaller children climb up halfway, while older ones set off to explore the tunnels. A custom made design without standard playground equipment.

in the sports park. They are new users and generate Interest among other users and passers-by—young and old—to discover what this orange wall, seemingly difficult to climb, has to offer The "unclimbable" becomes "conquerable" with the help of dedicated climbers, and a new form of physical activity is revealed to the public.

In addition, routes connect the out-of-the-way allotment gardens and the sports park. Together they form the new park. In Meerpark it is the connecting "zones of transition" that open up and boost the potential and possibilities of the area, though they do first have to be discovered.

MEERPARK
Amsterdam

Boulder wall

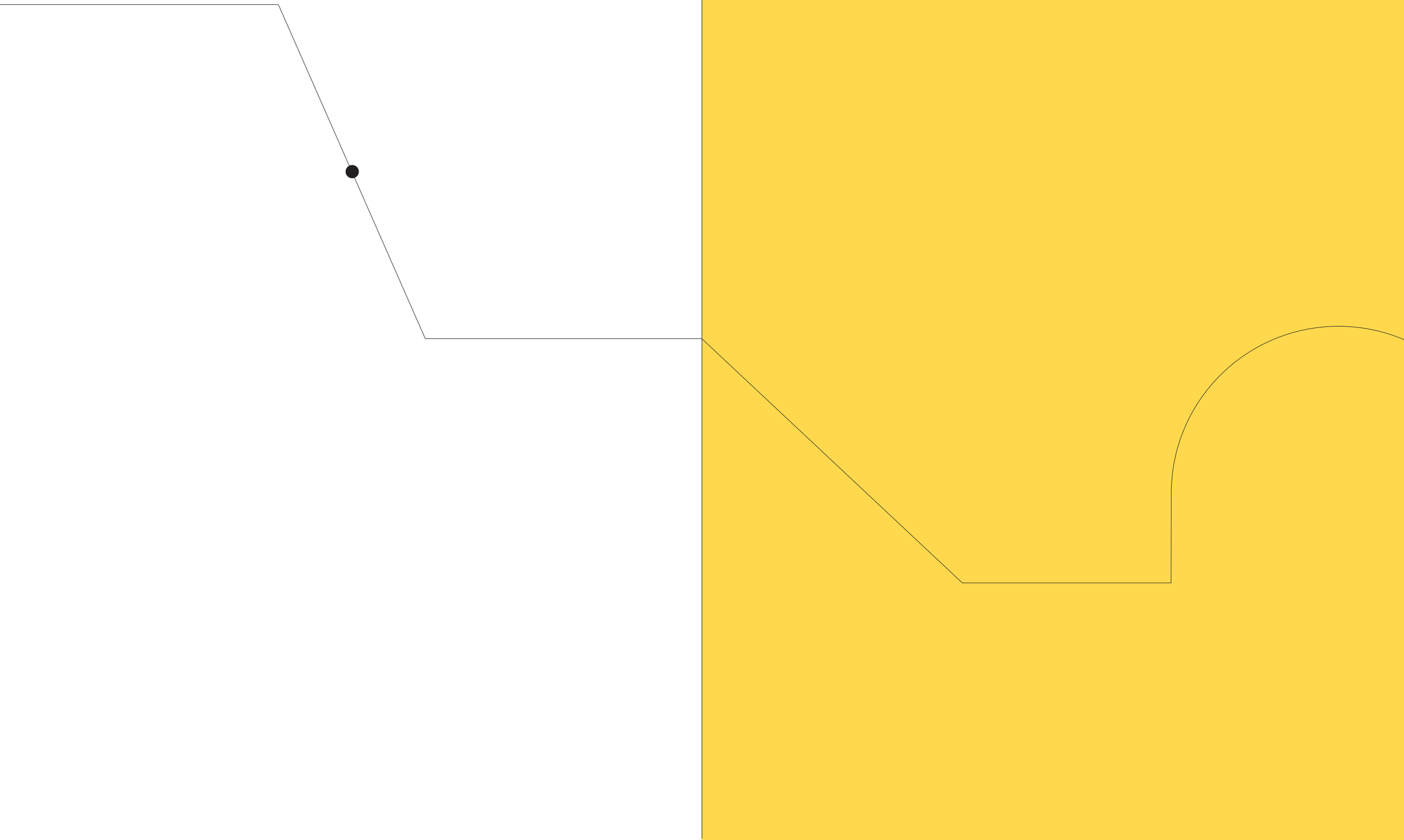
Finally

Meerpark is easily accessible on foot or by bike, and focuses primarily on the surrounding neighbourhoods. Besides the traditional city parks, it is one of the few more generously sized green areas within the A10 motorway. Unfortunately, the question regularly crops up here, and in other green sites, whether homes could be built here. I call that "a pig in a poke"! Constructing new sports fields outside the ring road by way of compensation has only negative consequences: they are only accessible by car; they reduce opportunities for physical activity close to home; and possibilities for strengthening social cohesion disappear. Places like Van Beuningenplein and Meerpark are of great value for the active city. Public sports and play facilities close to home are a prime motivation to get plenty of physical activity often, both organized and spontaneous. They are of inestimable value to the city. It is vital to preserve them!

NOTES

1 The Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017. https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/cultural creative-cities-monitor/media/3monitor2017.pdf (accessed 25 November 2022).

2 Norman, Donald A. "Affordance, Conventions and Design." Interactions 6/3 (June, 1999): 38-43.



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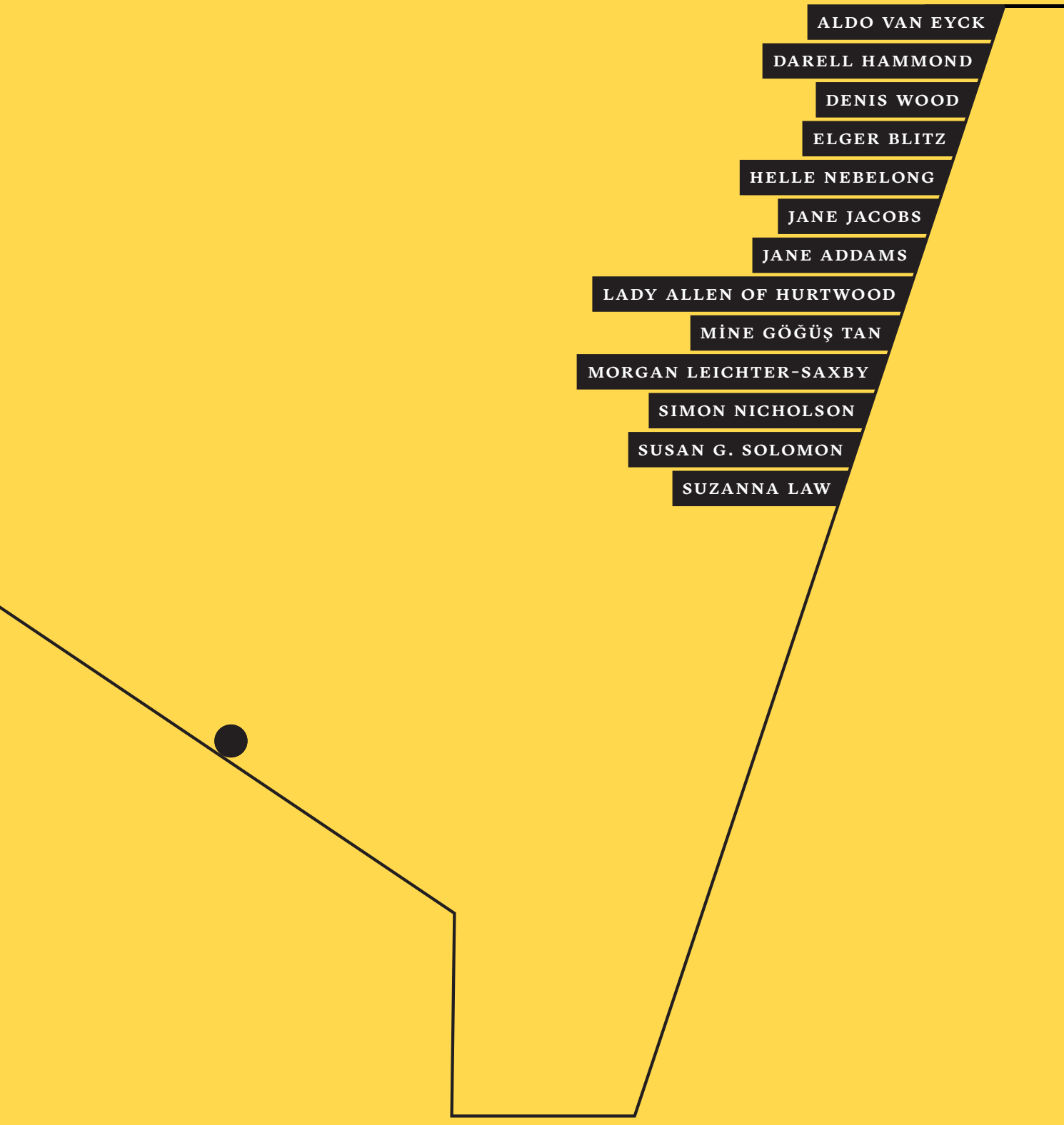

SUPERPOOL

Bernard van Leer FOUNDATION