

The Yale Undergraduate Research Journal

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Fall 2020*

Article 35

2020

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Recommended Citation

Saunders, Margaret (2020) "In Search of Play," *The Yale Undergraduate Research Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 35.

Available at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/yurj/vol1/iss1/35>

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In Search of Play

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the existence, inclusion, and access to play spaces in the built environment. It proposes that play is fundamental to the wellbeing of people of all ages, not only children, and analyzes how play spaces are or are not inclusive to people of all ages, then further addresses this in regard to gender, race, and socioeconomic class. This project presents the perspectives of social theorists such as Johan Huizinga, Guy Debord/ SI International, and Henri Lefebvre to analyze the role of space and social production of play. Additionally, it looks at historical case studies like New Babylon, Modellen & Aldo van Eyck's playgrounds as examples of synergy between play & public/institutional design.

INTRODUCTION

In January of 2019, I was 20 years old and visiting a friend in Austin. It was a warm winter-in-Texas day and we decided to spend it doing something fun. We threw two skateboards into the back of her car and drove to the nearest skate park. Neither of us were particularly talented skaters but with a “fun” quota to fill, this was feasible option for two young adults.

As we pulled into the lot she turned to me and said “Are you ready to infiltrate this male dominated space?” I laughed at the formality of her question, responded “yes,” and we made our way to the park. Both of us being novices, we stayed off to the side claiming our territory along the outskirts of the park distinctly apart from the other skaters. We wheeled around in our corner for a few minutes but quickly grew jaded by the space. I looked up at the scene around us and noticed we were the only two girls in the entire park. As I stood there, discouraged by my own lack of skating ability, my frustration grew while realizing my friend was right in trying to excite us before entering this space. Being there wasn't simply a chance for us to blow off steam and play around. Not only were we particularly bad at skateboarding, but as the only two girls there we were even more of a spectacle. We uncomfortably retreated back to the car.

We scoffed at ourselves for being intimidated by teenage boys and I began to reflect on other experiences in similar spaces. I ran through a list of times I had quickly left or opted out of going entirely because I didn't want to embarrass myself around my more skilled peers, nor did I want to be one of the only girls in a male dominated space. Beyond that, I realized that oftentimes I didn't even want to skateboard. I simply wanted to be doing something fun around the energy of others. I was aware that going to the skate park with my friend had morphed into a feat of activism when all we simply wanted to do was play.

I began to question the built environment around me and its role in perpetuating such scenarios. Why are urban spaces for recreation restrictive? When the weather permits, people of all ages will flock to spaces such as the skate park, which exhibits a craving for playful activity. Surely I wasn't the only one who desired an alternative space. Why is it that public spaces built specifically for play are exclusive to children? On a warm Texas afternoon, why couldn't my friend and I just go to a playground?

The freedom to jump, yell, cheer, and swing is primarily associated with children, but in some allocated spaces adults express themselves in the same way. Sporting events, festivals, and skate parks are a few examples of these types of

organized spaces which “allow” adults to act playfully within our societal norms. Beyond the confines of these arenas, strict patterns dictate how to navigate the world. Such examples prove adults are just as playful as children, yet they lack the spaces, such as playgrounds, to act accordingly.

What was fueled by a moment of frustration on the skate park transformed into a deep dive into the research of play and the ways it manifests in the lives of all people, adults and children alike. In the hopes that I may begin to understand why recreational urban space exists as it does, I became enthralled with the ways play is discussed and planned for in the built environment. This fascination led me to the work of psychologists, historians, artists, architects, and theorists to help give me answers to my ongoing questions on the subject. Through my research I aim to analyze the question: where does urban design fail to promote this intrinsic, humanist desire to play? In a culmination of child psychology, history of urban theory, and analysis of contemporary trends, the ultimate attempt of this thesis is to tease out the intersection between psychology of play and theories of urbanism to address the ways in which contemporary urban design can encourage the capacity for play. This thesis proposes that play belongs to humanity, and the design of our environment should encourage it.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS PLAY?

When we think of play, we don’t initially think of a written definition of the word. For most people, what comes to mind is imagery of children playing together. In attempting to create a solid definition, it is difficult to fully grasp the complexity of the act. By boiling it down into a single word there are inevitable variations in its definition as it is unique to each individual. Psychiatrist and play researcher Stuart Brown expresses this apprehension towards defining the word in his book *Play*.

I have long resisted giving an absolute definition of play because it is so varied[....]Another reason I resist defining play is that at its most basic level, play is a very primal activity. It is preconscious and pre-verbal -- it arises out of ancient biological structures

that existed before our consciousness or our ability to speak....play in its most basic form proceeds without a complex intellectual framework. Finally, I hate to define play because it is a thing of beauty best appreciated by experiencing it. (Brown and Vaughan)

The intricacies and ambiguities of play can only be truly understood when playing. However, for the sake of speaking and writing about it, people such as Brown use strategies of categorization to define it. Brown subjects play into these categories: play is apparently purposeless and done for its own sake, play is voluntary, play has an inherent attraction, play offers freedom from time, play diminishes the consciousness of self, play possesses the potential for improvisation, and finally, there is continuous desire to keep playing once one starts (Brown and Vaughan). All of these categories build a definition of this distinct activity.

An athlete, when asked what their favorite part of playing a game, would be quick to speak on the freedom that comes from being in the midst of a play, rather than pinpointing one technical moment. The strong feelings associated with play are difficult to put into words but are powerful, nonetheless. We cannot fully understand play until we are absorbed by it. In sum, play is a unique, individualized, and all-consuming activity. While it cannot be fully understood by just reading about it, there are consistent characteristics of play can help to define the word.

PURPOSE OF PLAY

The existence of play is not questioned, but its importance is heavily debated among adults, especially administrators, teachers, and parents. There is an ongoing discussion in education about the value of play with many schools replacing its allotted time with more lessons (*Pediatrics* 183-188). This is becoming more and more apparent, especially in largely test-based education systems. Parents have started to involve their children with planned enrichment, actively ruling out play-time (Yogman, Garner, Hutchinson, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff). Play is regarded as something contradictory to the realities of daily life and holding no purpose beyond its distraction from efficiency.

Opposite to this rationale are psychologists and re-

searchers who understand the immense importance which play serves in the lives of children in addition to its immense capacity to positively influence adults. These people understand that, for children, play is a formative tool in social, cognitive, and creative development. Further, involvement of play in the lives of adults can boost creativity and reduce stress. By looking at the work done by psychologists researching play, we see the conclusion to be that play is a very serious activity and is one of the most powerful tools we have for learning. As Brown states:

Play's process of capturing a pretend narrative and combining it with the reality of one's experience in a playful setting is, at least in childhood, how we develop our major personal understanding of how the world works. We do so initially by imagining possibilities -- simulating what might be, and then testing this against what actually is. (Brown and Vaughan)

When a child begins to navigate the world, they do so through play. The act of climbing structures, feeling blocks, and drawing shapes are all part of the initial and intrinsic behaviors which allow for children to understand their existence in the world. Further, it teaches them very important means of social interaction and communication. A child learns about things such as boundaries, problem solving, creativity, and compromise through the act of play.

Beyond the lives of children, play is heeded as an action for the sake of amusement and recreation, or rather, an activity which is the opposite of serious tasks. Adults see play as something to distract from productive work. Yet, in the minds of children, play is the root of all "productive" learning. As psychologist Bruno Bettelheim stated in his book, *The Importance of Play*,

Besides being a means of coping with past and present concerns, play is the child's more useful tool for preparing himself for the future and its tasks...Play teaches the child, without his being aware of it, the habits most needed for intellectual growth, such as stick-to-it-iveness, which is so important in all learning. (Bruno)

The skills taught in play are both intrapersonal and analytic. When a child rolls a marble down an incline plane, they learn about physics. When they put that marble away, they learn

about organization. And when another child asks to use that same marble, they learn about compromise. There is ample opportunity for growth on a social, personal, and intellectual level in the realm of play.

Adults who are skeptical of play see it as an activity which distracts from efficiency. Ironically, when a child plays, they are engaging in an activity in such a way that is most productive for them. As Cosby Rogers and Janet Sawyers, professors of Child Development, state in their book *Play in the Lives of Children*: "Young children do not differentiate between play, learning, and work. When children are engaged in play, they are learning and enjoying every minute of it (Rogers and Sawyers)." Children are fully absorbed in the task at hand, a skill that many adults aim to do when trying to be their most productive. It isn't until children are assigned tasks by adults that they lose the self-guided ideals of play while consequently losing motivation. This disruption makes them less "productive" in their learning.

Beyond positive developmental side effects, the ultimate evidence of play's importance is its intrinsic nature within humanity. Rogers and Sawyers write that "[w]e should value play not just for its indirect stimulation of cognitive skills and problem solving, but because play is the main feature of what it means to be human (Rogers and Sawyers)." We need not quantify the benefits of play when it simply is a part of human existence. The unassuming nature of play defines its beauty. As Stuart Brown states: "One of the hallmarks of play is that it appears purposeless. But the pervasiveness of play throughout nature argues that the activity must have some purpose after all (Brown and Vaughan)." Whether we realize it or not, play shapes us into who we are: "Play, like a virtue, is its own reward (Dattner)."

Research done on child psychology makes ample connections between play and the development of social, cognitive, language, intellectual, and motor vehicle skills in children. Evidence also suggests play stimulates growth and learning, no matter what age we are. Beyond these scientific reasons giving value to play is the overwhelming realization that play is part of the human experience. As German philosopher Frie-

drich Schiller wrote, “Man only plays when he is human in the full sense of the word, and he is only completely human when he is playing (Dattner).” To this end, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint any precise or quantitative benefits of play - it is an impetus that drives us to exist according to our most pure forms of self.

PLANNING FOR PLAY

Since play is fundamental in being human, it follows that it is innate in all interactions we have with the environment around us. This raises the question: where does play belong?

Play can exist in any environment, as it is simply a matter of the player insinuating the activity. As play environment designer Barbara Hendricks writes in her book *Designing for Play*, “Play is about the pleasure of functioning - the joy of being alive and able to do things (Hendricks).” In theory, the act of engaging with the world playfully can occur in any location. Yet, in our contemporary society, play is often assigned to very specific and compartmentalized spaces. The decision to allocate play-spaces is made by governments and city planners who see play at face value—understanding that children play—but not taking any further time to understand its complexities. Consequently, a majority of playgrounds in urban spaces are constructed with simple, prescribed designs.

Within this framework of playground design in city planning, at the bare minimum, is an understanding that children deserve to play and are accordingly given the space to do so. But what about adults? If an adult wants to play, there are limited spaces in which they are truly free to do so. In her book, Hendricks highlights this notion by saying,

Adults who like to play, do so on the sly - they take their grandchildren out to the park or amusement centre as an excuse so they can play. We all benefit from playing this type of play - we shouldn't need to have a child behind us as an excuse to hop on a swing in the park and take a good high swing. (Hendricks)

When the city is not planned with an understanding that adults *do* enjoy playing, it perpetuates that it is not socially acceptable for adults to do so. Because the built environment limits them, adults refrain from acting playfully. Where a child will

see any built structure and turn it into a playground, an adult will only do so under conditions which make it socially appropriate.

Why, then, do adults seek out other forms of playful spaces? Parks, skate parks, and basketball courts are all planned in cities under the pretense that people want and need recreational space as a necessary facet of urban life. Why is there such a division between play spaces for children and the “play” spaces for adults? Upon graduating from the playground, teenagers and adults migrate towards skate parks, playing games on basketball courts, or going on walks and runs through a park. All of these are socially acceptable forms of recreation, but the idea of simply playing is not. Moments of playful energy come out in these designated spaces, but they are understood as something entirely separate or perhaps more “mature” than the playground.

The way a society implements playgrounds, parks, skate parks, basketball courts, and any infrastructure that supports forms of play is critically important. These spaces can reflect social status, power dynamics, as well as cultural trends and artistic movements. The intricacies which come from the design of play spaces are an immensely important reflection of our society, as Hendricks notes by saying:

Play is a creative act and humans play with objects, with symbols and ideas is the basis for the development of civilisation and culture. Play yards then, are breeding places of culture and creativity. (Hendricks)

What do our play spaces say about us? When play is isolated, it becomes something that must be sought out and not easily accessible. To this end, when people engage in play, it becomes a form of spectacle. People stop and stare when they see others playing, but the underlying reality is that everyone wants to play, it is only a matter of feeling comfortable enough to partake.

As children grow up, they learn the norms of society, especially as they manifest in public space. When a child becomes too old for the playground, they are taught that phase of life when they may act playfully is over. While the desire to play doesn't diminish entirely, the accessibility of it certainly does. Children are soon forced to navigate the world in a new

and limiting way. The feeling of being able to move freely subsides as they become aware of the societal guidelines which indicate that infrastructure is meant as a means to an end, not as an opportunity for exploration in itself.

Play is intrinsic, therefore it can occur whether the space designates it or not. However, the social norms of city life will detract the masses from feeling comfortable expressing themselves playfully. While children can show how easy and important it is to play, it will ultimately be the adults who designate and design the spaces that promote it. As Brown says:

Authentic play comes from deep down inside us. It's not formed or motivated solely by others. Real play interacts with and involves the outside world, but it fundamentally expresses the needs and desires of the player. It emerges from the imaginative force within. (Brown and Vaughan)

Our imaginative selves will emerge if and only if we are given the space to do so. Play belongs everywhere and should not only exist in systematized, strictly programmed play spaces for children. The question should not be whether or not the city should allocate space for play, but rather, how can the design of the city facilitate play?

CHAPTER 2: PLAY IN SOCIETY

Historians, theorists, sociologists, and activists have heavily influenced the conversation on play. Outside the field of psychology, their work has analyzed play from different angles, observing its role in adults' society. Through the early and mid 20th century, key figures have formed a range of theories and opinions on play, from seeing it as an intrinsic human trait, to a catalyst for social urban change.

PLAY AS A HUMAN TRAIT:

JOHAN HUIZINGA

Dutch historian Johan Huizinga was one of the earliest to examine the role of play in our society. In his book *Homo Ludens*, published in 1938, he revealed the role of play as a wider social phenomenon. In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga specifically targets the role of play in different facets of life as it ex-

amines the act of playing through a social, cultural, and deeply human lens. While the entire book aims to analyze play, his working definition of the word is that it is:

A free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy. (Huizinga)

While many hold the assumption that play must serve as a tool for development, or that the act of "playing" must facilitate some external purpose, such as providing an escape from the burdens of work, Huizinga's book emphasizes that the total absorption of a player is inherent to all humans, positing play as an inherent dimension in all folds of society including law, war, and art. Central to Huizinga's argument is play being essential in our lives and as a core element of what it means to be human. He discusses how the presence of play has the power to absorb, distract, and enchant us by saying,

Nature, so our reasoning mind tells us, could just as easily have given her children all those useful functions of discharging superabundant energy, of relaxing after exertion, of training for the demands of life, of compensating for unfulfilled longings, etc., in the form of purely mechanical exercises and reactions. But no, she gave us play, with all its tension, its mirth, and it's fun. (Huizinga)

By organizing these thoughts into a text, Huizinga formally pioneered the idea that play has influenced the construction and organization of various societal structures. If play is natural then everything we do must stem from playing. His argument tracks the restrictive structures of society and points out the ways in which play is fundamental to them. He states "the sacredness and seriousness of an action by no means preclude its play-quality (Huizinga)," contradicting the notion that play cannot be a serious activity and, therefore, proving even the most rigid facets of society were formed with play.

Huizinga contradicts many of our preconceived notions of play and equates play quality to the most consequential

parts of our society. He focuses on such topics as law, art, language, love, and war. Law, for example, can both inhibit and provide freedom to various parties. The appearance of play in such matters may seem absurd, yet Huizinga argues that they are linked, stating “that an affinity may exist between law and play becomes obvious to us as soon as we realize how much the actual practice of the law, in other words a lawsuit, properly resembles a contest whatever the ideal foundations of the law may be (Huizinga).” Lawyers play with their words to construct an argument, wagering power in a courtroom. Law is a game of power, a contest, and according to Huizinga “contest means play (Huizinga).”

Even the act of war – variably the most serious act a society can engage in – entails an element of play, according to Huizinga. War is a game and “ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game (Huizinga).” Just as in play, war outlines a set of rules and the players are tasked with competing within the framework of those rules. “Fighting, as a cultural function, always presupposes limiting rules, and it requires, to a certain extent anyway, the recognition of its play-quality (Huizinga).” Without rules, there is no game. Without play, there is no war.

War, like play, is spontaneous. The outcome of battle is unknown and rides on the back of chance. The battle field, the space which determines who wins, who loses, who lives, and who dies, is no more than a setting for the unfolding of a game. “The spot where the duel is fought bears all the marks of a play-ground; the weapons have to be exactly alike as in certain games; there is a signal for the start and the finish, and the number of shots is prescribed (Huizinga).” Albeit morbid, Huizinga argues the battlefield is no more than an incredibly high stakes playground.

Huizinga ultimately questions why, in the process of constructing a society, the element of play has been suppressed? The human desire to play may have formed these structures, but it is certainly not condoned any further. To deny play is to deny societies and individuals the right to evolve and exist. While many things can be debated in society as real, valid, or important, the existence of play must not be contested. “Play

cannot be denied. You can deny, if you like, nearly all abstractions: justice, beauty, truth, goodness, mind, God. You can deny seriousness, but not play (Huizinga).” While the importance and relevance of play remains to be argued, its presence as a form of human expression is firm.

Play, with its capacity to possess us, draws us into a different world. When we are set free through the act of playing, we are pulled from the routines and norms of daily life. During the process of organizing all aspects of human life, society has ignored play. Play in itself is not seen as a priority and thus not accepted as an aspect of daily life. The structures which control adult life such as language, law, reason, and work have come to organize acceptable human expression while concurrently ignoring the need for play.

Of special interest to Huizinga was the role of aesthetics that define and promote play. Play in itself is an aesthetic experience of the entire body, a facet which architects and artists became fascinated with as well. As opposed to looking at a work of art, where one may be visually immersed, play immerses us in every facet of our senses. Huizinga describes this phenomenon by saying “play casts a spell over us; it is enchanting, captivating. It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things: rhythm and harmony (Huizinga).” Play possesses a similar capacity to music in the sense that it can transport the listener to a different state of emotion. The body becomes the vessel for bringing a sense of bliss, which Huizinga notions by saying “in play the beauty of the human body in motion reaches its zenith. In its more developed forms it is saturated with rhythm and harmony, the noblest gifts of aesthetic perception known to man (Huizinga).” These noble gifts can be brought about by the simple and innate act of playing. If these distinguished aspects of human nature are sparked by such an accessible activity then why does society limit it?

Huizinga pinpoints play as a fundamental form of human expression, so how is this reflected in the built environment today? Simply put, it’s not. Our cities often reflect the notion that play is reserved for children. If we shift our understanding of play then its capacity to bring people together

can be fulfilled. Acknowledging play isn't enough, we must work to have a tangible engagement with it. It is unrealistic to assume that play can be integrated into all facets of society, but the physical design of urban spaces can assist in promoting it. An individual may have difficulty introducing playfulness to their routine, but the world around them can inspire it.

Since *Homo Ludens* was published in 1938, the number of people living in cities has multiplied. While cities continue to grow and develop around the world, their built environments are continuously evolving. As cities create new spaces for people to live and work the fundamental existence of play must not be ignored. Structures which allow for adults to jump, step, or balance should be incorporated into the urban landscape. Play is an unpredictable, whimsical, and qualitative activity that benefits humanity beyond a quantitative understanding. Huizinga argues that “this intensity of, and absorption in, play finds no explanation in biological analysis. Yet in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening, lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play (Huizinga).” Play is innate, and all humans deserve the space for it.

PLAY AS A CRITIQUE: THE SITUATIONISTS

Since its publication in 1938 *Homo Ludens* has provided a critical lens through which to view modern society and its constraints. This interest peaked in the 1960s when many members of the Situationist International (SI), a group of artists, writers, philosophers, and activists were critical of where the post-WWII society was heading. They were approaching radical ideas on life in the modern, post-war era, and their focus was heavily intertwined with a critique of capitalism and consumerism and how these concepts shaped everyday life (Eagles).

During the time the Situationists were producing their critiques, the modern city had become a reflection of new modes of consumption. New technology and industrialization allowed for rapid and widespread materialism. This group saw these new manipulations of the city as being particularly infected by mass consumerism. Repetitions of building forms and signage were seen as the antithesis of how the city could pro-

mote and reflect a meaningful life. Guy Debord, a prominent member of the group, was specifically critical of the way this development of society had come to dominate our ‘lived experience.’ In his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, he argues these modern forms of production had become a spectacle that people observed, but did not engage in. He states, “the spectacle is an image saturated society in which the commodity-form dominates ‘lived experience.’ (Debord)” Debord saw the interactions of people being controlled by a language of, and desire for, commodities. He described this as an “alienation” towards true, lived experiences.

To combat this disassociation towards engaging with daily life, the Situationists proposed a revolt that promoted the unification of art and everyday life. “Only an avant-garde which sought a fusion of art and life, they believed, could assist the ‘proletariat’ to achieve a revolution which embraces all areas of life (Eagles).” They provided techniques like ‘Detournement’ and ‘Derive’ which encouraged new ways to go about experiencing the city and engaging with one’s surroundings. These were both theories with game-like instructions which outlined a way to experience the city in an unscripted and instinctive way. Both theories used psycho-geography, a practice combining awareness of the space around you with engagement of the mind, to guide the experience (Smith). These theories promoted elements of spontaneity and playfulness previously suppressed in the new consumer-dominated city. As Debord stated, “real life needs to replace life-as-stage, lived for us through the commodity-as-spectacle (Eagles).” In engaging with these practices, the city dweller may explore their environment in a new way and fight against apathy in modern urban life.

A key approach for the Situationists to revolutionize the city was Play. They saw the modern worker as one whose individuality was lost in the hierarchy of the workforce. The structure of working class society restricted individual freedoms while further perpetuating disengagement with life. The tool for regaining this freedom and individuality was unobstructed play. They were inspired by the work of Huizinga but expanded his ideas of play by saying it was wholly separate from the sphere of work; “the Situationists maintain that ‘play,

radically broken from a confined ludic time and space, must invade the whole of life.’ (Eagles)” Their idea of a utopian society was one which was furthered by fluctuating ideas, playful experiences, and spontaneity.

Proposals for ways to navigate the city more playfully define the work of many Situationists alike. While the intentions of such ideas prove a need for play, their execution was limited to people who had the freedom of resources and time to partake in such activities. Texts produced by the Situationists often remained within the sphere of educated, primarily white male philosophers, urbanists, and sociologists. Those with social and economic privileges could partake in such aimless wanders around the city – with the affordance of time and lack of fear for personal safety. Such affordances do not exist for many due to gender, class, or race. While play was important to the narrative of their work and circle, it was thus limited to their sphere with the tangible repercussions of a more playful city never broadcasting to a broader audience.

As designers today work to create a better city for the future, the radical, yet limited, ideas proposed by the Situationists should not be entirely abandoned but critiqued and utilized in such a way that is accessible to all city dwellers. Themes of anti-consumerism, advocacy for changing ideas, and increased playfulness are ones which can be constructed from the design of public urban spaces. Play doesn’t require a guidebook to comprehend, however, designers and planners must manipulate spaces to allow true access for it – an idea in planning that is not always intrinsic.

PLAY AS A RIGHT: HENRI LEFEBVRE

Henri Lefebvre was an urban theorist whose work sought to link ideals of playfulness and freedom into the urban environment. In his book *The Right to the City*, Lefebvre recognized the importance of addressing humanist needs in the city. He analyzed the way public and social spaces had become commodities in the modern city and critiqued contemporary urban life as an extension of over-commercialization. Lefebvre saw that cities were being designed for the corporation, not for the individual human.

In his proposal for a better city, Lefebvre emphasized access to spaces that provide for spontaneity, expression, and for play. While cities allowed for inhabitants to exist in the workforce, they did not respond to their social needs, which he highlights by saying “social needs have an anthropological basis; they have opposite and complementary aspects: they include the need for security and the need for openness, the need for certainty and the need for adventure, that of the organization of labor and that of play (Ockman and Eigen).” These needs were not being met by the commercialized and commodified image of the city which Lefebvre experienced.

As he saw it, there was a constant desire for freedom in the confines of urbanity. Lefebvre came to conclude the emphasis of development was rarely placed on the social needs and desires of residents. In order to showcase the necessity for freedom through playfulness which the urban environment lacked, he specifically analyzed the minuscule promotion of physical expression within the city, stating “the human being also needs to accumulate energy as well as to expend it, even to waste it in play. He needs to see, to hear, to touch, and to taste, and he needs to unify these perceptions in a ‘world.’ (Ockman and Eigen)” According to Lefebvre, modern urban planning compartmentally allocated the needs of a person as various aspects of daily life — work, recreation, living, entertainment — were separated. At the same time, deeper, expressive, and passionate qualities of human life which weave these needs together were disregarded during the planning processes.

Application of Lefebvre’s ideas on playfulness and access within the urban landscape can and should be expanded on today with a sharper focus on contemporary urban life. Issues such as gender and race, which appear out of the scope of his work, must be incorporated into a modern application. His ideas should be tailored to the needs of the community based on the input and voices of all members. Where Lefebvre called for a “rallying cry” from the city dweller to achieve a new spatial reality, modern planners have the responsibility to ensure each voice is heard (Ockman and Eigen).

Lefebvre believed that in order to change the actualities of life in the city it was necessary to shift its spatial struc-

ture. He argued that space for the expression of all senses was a fundamental right. To live a healthy and happy lifestyle, free from the confines of work and consumerism, he felt people needed spaces that allowed them to feel unrestricted. Through thoughtful, inclusive, and tactical design of shared spaces, modern planners and designers can construct a future where ideals of a playful city are transformed into a functioning and accessible reality.

CHAPTER 3: PLAY IN THE POSTWAR LANDSCAPE

Many post-WWII cities employed reconstruction design efforts involving top-down initiatives in line with consumerist ideals. Cities such as Stockholm and Amsterdam constructed simple, large-scale, and overpowering structures in order to facilitate industrial economic development. Observing such rapid and corporate development, certain designers and artists began to utilize play as commentary on the needs of individuals and as a tool to meet them.

THE PLAYFUL CITY: NEW BABYLON

Physical manifestations of Situationist theories emerged alongside the written work of Debord and Lefebvre. One of the most prominent artists stemming from this group was Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys. As a member of the New Situationists, beginning in the year 1953, he was inspired by the activism and artistic expression that emerged from this group (Giaimo). In 1959, Nieuwenhuys began to instill new life in ideas inspired by Situationist thought through his project titled *New Babylon*. In varying mediums like paintings, built structures, models, and texts, Nieuwenhuys created an ongoing exhibition that outlined a new city form.

Nieuwenhuys' work was heavily influenced by the freedom he saw in the lives of children. He is quoted saying "the child knows no other law than their spontaneous zest for life, and has no other need than to express this (Giaimo)." This enthusiasm for life is one which Nieuwenhuys wanted to see in the lives of adults, particularly in the way they interacted with

the city. In his experience, the adult world had "a morbid atmosphere of inauthenticity, lies and barrenness (Giaimo)." He observed this barrenness reflected in the urban environment and described the city as "a thinly disguised mechanism for extracting productivity (Giaimo)." In line with the Situationist thinkers of his time, he was very critical of the way in which the modern city was shaping life and restricting people of their humanistic freedoms.

In order to translate the ideals he felt necessary for this new playful environment, Nieuwenhuys began his work on *New Babylon*. He aimed to create a city specifically for the "Homo Luden," or the "playful man (Giaimo)." His design philosophy was to create a space that would combat the automated production that was pervading urban life. *New Babylon* was composed of interconnected units, which he called "sectors." These units would be free to be rearranged by the citizens of the city, with each rearrangement creating new spaces and new aesthetics. He utilized color, texture, and moveable structures to allow for freedom and manipulation of the environment (Giaimo). In his city, adults had the power to move beams, swings, and bars as a way to interact freely and curiously with their environment. Essentially, *New Babylon* was the ultimate playground.

The majority of Nieuwenhuys' work took the form of paintings and small scale models of his structures; each piece possessed a unique idea of mobility and fluctuation. The models radiated a sense of interdependency between the built and human interaction. Further, each piece promoted playfulness through material, color, and form. Pieces such as *Ladder Labyrinth* (figure 1) highlight the interaction of the citizens with the structure. The agglomeration of ladders and beams allows the citizen to climb, hang and balance. They are free to interact with the space however they please.

Other models, such as *Atmosphere of Play* (Figure 2), use color and simple forms to promote this freedom of exploration and curiosity. The space has no clear program but invites the citizen to interact with it on their own terms, again drawing from elements of the children's playground yet indicating this is a space for adults.

While the majority of the multi-year project *New Bab-*

ylon is mainly small scale models and drawings, Nieuwenhuys did in fact create structures at full scale. In 1968, he constructed *Playful Stairs* (figure 3) and intended for to be on display. In 2016, this exhibit was reinstalled at the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague, Netherlands (Giaino). This exhibit allowed for his *New Babylon* to come to life, if only for a brief moment. This immersive experience prompted the viewer to engage with his ideas of playfulness at this scale.

Recalling *Right to the City*, Lefebvre presented the changing urban landscape as something that must be in constant conversation: “insofar as one can define it, our object – *the urban* – will never be fully present and realized in our thought of today (Ockman and Eigen).” Further, Lefebvre posited that in order to create a more humanist city, different methods must be tested to achieve it. “To take this ‘object’ as real and truthful is an ideology, a mythifying operation. Our inquiry must consider a vast number of methods for seizing this object, without fixating on one procedure (Ockman and Eigen).” In other words, the city should not be understood as one project or ‘object’ but as an ongoing conversation and procedure. In Nieuwenhuys’ work, he was aware of this constant experimentation, testing, and innovation that must occur across different mediums to speculate a new image of the city. By creating an ongoing exhibit over a period of fifteen years, he was able to construct such a dialogue of urbanity that was constantly in flux.

As *New Babylon* never existed beyond the exhibition space, it consequently remained influential only to those who had the opportunity to see it. Those who could access museums showcasing his work were impacted by his ways of challenging and questioning the broadly accepted perception of the city, ultimately limiting the true influence he had on the city itself and all those who inhabit it.

THE EXHIBITION PLAYGROUND: MODELLEN

In post-WWII Stockholm, rapid urban renewal projects were enthralling the city and aligning with consumerism and utopian visions of transportation. Historians Varkasalo and

Hiryonen observe this:

Strong economic growth and population growth fueled the transformation in the 1950s and the 1960s. The expansion of trade and business and their concentration into larger units, the increased prevalence of motorized transport, and the planning utopia of a ‘car city’ all played a key role in the extensive demolition of the housing stock. (Verkasalo and Hirvonen)

This combination of economic growth and desire for an ultra-modern city forced rapid technical transformations unto the built environment. As a consequence, adored historical housing was abolished in favor of new mass housing projects.

An additional element of this urban renewal was the construction of commercial districts, highlighted in the journal *Planning Perspectives*, specified as “two aspects of urban renewal: one was the construction of new apartment buildings in centrally located historical settings, the other was changing central parts into commercial districts.” This combination of corporate construction and mass demolition prioritized large scale development over the rights of city dwellers. A people-focused and engaging city was overpowered by demolition and consumerist renewal.

In 1968, Danish artist Palle Nielsen created an exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in response to the mass urban renewal overtaking the city. Titled *Modellen: A model for a Qualitative Society*, this exhibition was inspired by the freedom children express during play. Nielsen sought to bring this child-like expression out for all in the modern city. He acquired this idea from André Gorz’s book *Labor strategy and neo capitalism* in which Gorz states “in a developed society needs are not only quantitative (the needs for goods for consumption) but also qualitative...the need for emancipation not only from exploitation but also from coercion and isolation at work and during leisure time (Pelkonen).” Nielsen wanted to translate this freedom he saw in child’s play and bring it into an adult space in the form of his exhibition.

For three months the main exhibition space of Moderna Museet was transformed into an indoor adventure playground; the space now contained children painting, jumping, and sliding. According to Nielsen: “I wanted to deconstruct ‘the

white cube' as the idea of an art museum... The idea of an art museum was to be changed by the live presence of active, playing children in the museum (Mitchell).” By giving children the opportunity to occupy a museum, their way of seeing the world began to seep into an adult space. Nielsen wanted to prove that children have the capacity to make a social impact. The ways they interact with space should thus be reflected in the built environment. Not only was he proving that children have needs in the urban landscape but he showed that adults could learn from them as well. He felt that in order to build a more humanist city everyone- adults and children alike - should be provided with the opportunity to express themselves through play.

At the time of their construction, Nielsen’s ideas were radical and faced backlash from the art community for contradicting the traditional code of conduct within the museum space. Nevertheless, in contemporary museums around the world, playful and interactive exhibitions are now commonplace and often encourage adult interaction as well. Exhibitions including massive ball-pits, swings, and other playful attribute invite people of all ages to partake. Over time these exhibitions have grown in terms of scale and innovation. The Belgian city of Kortrijk even introduced an urban festival called *PLAY* involving the work of forty contemporary artists creating interactive pieces promoting playfulness across the entire city landscape (Ronse and Teerlinck). The work from this festival seeps into each corner of the city and promotes spontaneous, interactive playfulness for all inhabitants.

The popularity of such exhibitions proved that age does not dictate those who desires play. Adults and children alike find tremendous pleasure in these spaces. However, a space within a museum is by default limited to only those who enter the space. Museums can impose limitations such as location within the city, limited geographic and or media publication of exhibitions, and possible entrance fees. Nielsen’s work proved how radical ideas about play can become widely accepted, furthering the notion that everyone, adults included, want to play - it is only a matter of making it socially acceptable. While the museum is a reflection of societal trends and spatial desires, it remains a confined way of providing play to all. His work, and

many ephemeral exhibitions onward continue to intrigue and delight by promoting freedom and exploration; proving play is not radical, but coveted. Yet these ideas can only truly be accessible to all if they extend beyond museums and into the public urban fabric.

PLAYING IN RUBBLE: ALDO VAN EYCK’S PLAYGROUNDS

The post-WWII Amsterdam landscape was visibly demolished. To improve the urban environment, the city commissioned architect Aldo van Eyck to create a playground in each neighborhood. Between the years 1947 and 1978 Van Eyck designed over 700 playgrounds for the city of Amsterdam (Withagen and Caljouw). Through humanistic design approaches which fostered societal interaction, van Eyck imprinted a lasting legacy on Amsterdam and design theory entirely.

The destruction of houses and buildings from the war left extensive desolate spaces across the city. In line with other cities at this time, certain planners, developers, and architects favored the use of massive regeneration in the design of a new city — specifically those who were members of the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) (Withagen and Caljouw). Their ideals for planning included the separation of work spaces, residence, and leisure through means of large scale planning initiatives to reorganize and rebuild the city.

Van Eyck opposed these massive regeneration projects and had a vision of the city which could be designed within its existing fabric. He sought regeneration in a way that would cultivate community spaces and bring a new life to the city without any further demolition. What he saw in derelict sites around the city was an opportunity to create unconventional play spaces that fostered creativity, exploration, and social interaction.

Conventional playgrounds during this time were typically fenced in and distinctly separate from the rest of the urban scene. These playgrounds were isolated and with very little ambiguity in the design of their structures. Van Eyck saw this standardization of playgrounds as a barrier to social interaction and creativity and sought to integrate his work into the city rather than fencing it in. Further, he played close attention to materi-

als used in order to blend his work with the rest of the city like, for example, using mostly concrete and steel already present in the existing urban backdrop (Withagen and Caljouw). In merging the playground with the city, he created a fluidity with which spaces may be enjoyed by children and adults alike.

Van Eyck's playgrounds created a new social dynamic within public spaces occupied by caregivers and children, respectively. As professor Rob Withagen states in his article, *Aldo van Eyck's Playgrounds: Aesthetics, Affordances, and Creativity*,

By not fencing the playing children, they became an integral part of the city. Moreover, by placing benches at the square, van Eyck created a place that invited parents or guardians to oversee their children and to gather together. Street life and community were stimulated. (Withagen and Caljouw)

Not only did the placement and layout of these playgrounds alter the urban framework of the city, but their design fostered a new type of creative play for the children. No two of his playgrounds were the same; each design possessed its own unique combination of structures. The playgrounds had no apparent prescribed order, nor did they follow any strict code of standardization. Former director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam Rudi Fuchs described elements of Van Eyck's playgrounds by saying:

The playgrounds were fantastic because the objects were simple: rectangular and round frames for climbing (the latter like an igloo), a sandpit, a group of circular concrete blocks for jumping from one to the other – objects that are not anything in themselves, but which have an open function and therefore stimulate a child's imagination. A child sits still on a slide or a swing; it is the object that produces the movement. Van Eyck's objects do not move, but they allow a child to move with all the acrobaticism and suppleness he can muster. That was the genius of their simplicity. (Withagen and Caljouw)

Van Eyck wanted to allow children the freedom to discover their own methods for interacting with structures. He regarded the child's perspective with the utmost importance and felt that everyone could learn from them. After snowfall in Amsterdam, Van Eyck observed “when snow falls on cities, the child takes over, Lord of a transformed realm. All at once,

with miraculous assistance, the child is everywhere, rediscovering the city whilst the city in turn rediscovers its children, if only for a while (van Eyck and Ligtelijn).” If the city allows the child to be free, it begets freedom for all members of the community. It is these ideals he wanted to inject into the post-war landscape.

In emphasizing the importance of child's play, van Eyck pioneered the playground as an integral part of the city. His playgrounds established a new system of urban public spaces, “...the playgrounds together form a network of focal points spread all over the city: an additional urban fabric of public places where not only children gather but parents and the elderly too (van Eyck and Ligtelijn).” His playgrounds were innovative in their design yet established a new facet of urban life in Amsterdam. What had been spaces of rubble and abandon were filled with life, inspiration, and play. Using tactical design which merged his work with the rest of the city, van Eyck's playgrounds benefited Amsterdam entirely and beyond only children.

Aldo van Eyck viewed the playground as a tool to heal wounds inflicted on Amsterdam's built environment by the war. In doing so, he gave space back to the community in a way that hadn't been possible during the war. Whereas grand political and military decisions dominated the physical city, he altered the landscape so people may occupy the streets with a refreshing sense of comfort and confidence. This notion of play's ability to disrupt the status quo of space remains a very powerful tool for designers. Equitable and accessible play spaces have the capacity to bring neighborhoods together in the wake of a war-torn city and beyond. Providing spaces to play begin to mend modern cases of urban injustice like gentrification and Redlining in the United States by reestablishing how space is allocated in the city. Thoughtful and tactical design can create a playground space for children and all people while also aiming to address broader political and social issues.

POSTSCRIPT: PLAY TODAY

The artistic movements, urban and social theories, and architectural projects of the early 20th century all played a role

in shaping a contemporary understanding of play today. Over time, the relationship with play has shifted, in some spheres becoming more popularized, in others still restricted. The final section of my research aims to analyze the following questions: how does play manifest in contemporary society, in the built environment and beyond? In what ways is the dialogue on play still evolving?

USE AND ABUSE OF PLAY

In recent years we have started to see resurgence in the interest in play. Play is slowly starting to permeate into adult realms as more people discover the mental benefits of creating time to play in order to release stress and form a positive outlook on life. Play is starting to be understood by some, such as psychologists and entrepreneurs, as valuable for people of all ages. However, many adults continue to write off play as an activity for children or as an activity that must be compartmentalized from the rest of adult life. Nevertheless, there are distinct examples among various sectors of contemporary society where the benefits of play are being explored in different capacities.

In the field of wellness expertise, play has been introduced for its positive benefits on mental health. Andy Puddicombe, the founder of the meditation app Headspace used by millions of people, emphasizes play as a very important part of his balanced lifestyle. He is quoted saying “an essential part of wellbeing is play. I feel as we get older we often lose touch with a sense of playfulness. Kids can help us stay in touch with that sometimes, but I find doing things that make me laugh is as important as anything else. It can be hanging out with friends, watching comedy, juggling, anything that brings me a sense of joy (Ramsdale).” For his millions of followers, they are inclined to incorporate play into their lives as a way to mimic his lifestyle. These efforts, while successful in encouraging health and wellness, have the potential to be categorized as an exclusive, idealistic conduct that is only attainable through unwavering commitment.

Commercial implications of play are becoming popularized as well, as seen in the apparel sector. Outdoor Voices, an athletic apparel company, grew to success by marketing their

products as “technical apparel for recreation (Outdoor Voices).” In contrast with other sports brands who market for elite performance, Outdoor Voices creates bright, pastel-colored pieces while boasting a playful slogan “Doing Things,” which prompts people to become active by doing whatever fun and playful exercise they feel like. One of their founding principles states: “When you let go of the expectation to perform, that’s when the real magic happens. You learn that the joy of the game will always outlast a win (Outdoor Voices).” The success of this brand is tied heavily to its capacity to promote a playful community. For those familiar with the brand, and for those who can afford it, the garments become a symbol of freedom to act more playfully while easing pressure off of high performance.

Indeed, Outdoor Voices found their niche corner of the market, yet the brand ultimately has not gained meaningful traction to compete with brands such as Nike or Under Armour. For Outdoor Voices, exercise which consists of simply having fun quantifies success, but this idea is not universally accepted. For many people, they feel they “aren’t doing enough” if they don’t partake in a serious workout. This feeling is especially present in public spaces where the routines of exercise are already established. A stigma still lingers around acting playfully as an adult in public. Adults are tied to ideals which limit unobstructed feelings to play, even with regards to exercise, and hesitate when believing play to be acceptable or enough.

The tech industry has seemingly aimed to sever these ties and encourage play in an effort to increase productivity and creativity. Companies such as Google are guiding this movement through offices equipped with climbing walls, slides, and ping pong tables. Spatial emphasis on play is meant to promote positive side effects such as creativity and productivity, while also keeping Google highly competitive among the most desirable places to work.

The company’s various headquarters house such spaces which include Pac-man themed game rooms, an antique subway car room, and an indoor beach at their Dubai headquarters, to name a few (Stewart). These spaces are abundantly playful but are heavily programmed too, each instituting clear guidelines attached to the slides and requiring employees to follow

the rules of ping pong and video games. Bright colors, bold shapes, and stage-set-like rooms in Google's offices resemble children's playgrounds, yet this type of play is dictated by its environment, and inhibits authentic exploration by the player. This directly implicates the type of play involved in these offices are subject to the principles of the company.

Google invests large amounts of money to promote playful ideals in their products and branding. Regardless of how impressive and playful their offices, however, they are only accessible to employees of the company. This reiterates the idea that play is exclusive and available only to those who have earned it. Further, it constructs the notion that play is something one must attain rather than something that is intrinsic. Ultimately, if play has become competitively sought in a workplace then it has been commodified.

If play is tied to a brand or a company, for whom does that allow play for? Does one have to own the clothing from a brand, or be a top performing employee to gain the freedom to play? Does one have to have goals in mind such as cultivating a new wellness lifestyle in order to play? If play is contingent on buying or earning, it is no longer authentic and free and undermines the essence of play itself. These efforts in society today are well intentioned but limited. Under current trends and without any urban infrastructure for it, play is afforded only to those who seek it out, buy into brands, or are offered it in their workspace.

A child doesn't need anyone to tell them to play, nor do they need a playground. Yet the majority of adults need validation, excuses, and guidance to allow themselves to play. How different are we, really, from the children at play? What will it take to shatter our perceptions and restrictions that limit us from free expression?

Perhaps the built environment is a place to start. For most, the playground is the root of play. Yet, the playground remains a space reserved for children. If the built environment offered similar spaces for adults, it is likely they would be more inclined to play, therefore, shattering any societal notions that continue to hold them back. What if play, instead of being a privatized concept, was accessible to all people in the urban

environment? Play would be accessible without a dress code or an access code.

To speculate on what this space would provide (or not provide) is one without strict programming. It is one that is designed with the flow of the city which allows people to pass through yet also inviting them in with opportunities for play. The structures within this space would be varying in scales, allowing a range of capacities for exploration - simple structures with open ended possibilities for interpretation for their use. If the space offers freedom to interact, people will play without even realizing it, creating a truly immersive experience. There are no set instructions for what this space must look like or what this space must have. It should build upon the city environment surrounding it and create subtle, playful structures.

Certain examples I have come across hold such characteristics. When I have interacted with them, I have been prompted to play in a way that feels natural and effortless. These spaces are not amusement parks, nor basketball courts, but rather simple structures in the urban landscape that have allowed me to interact in a way that is fully attune with my own motivations.

Park am Gleisdreieck in Berlin is one that heralds these ideals. The park was designed by Atelier LOIDL and completed in 2014. Before this space was transformed into a park, it was a derelict railway (Grosch and Petrow). Similar to Aldo van Eyck's use of play in post-war Amsterdam, Park am Gleisdreieck uses playfulness as a tool to heal the wounds left by both the war and the collapse of the rail industry in Berlin. A space that once stood as a division of rubble between neighborhoods is replaced by a series of paths, green space, and varying recreational zones. The park is showered with different forms of play-spaces, including a skate park, jungle gyms, and multi-use turfed plots. This expansive park brings neighborhoods together and instills a sense of freedom, exploration, and community.

The success of this park comes from its ability to provide space for play without it being the only intended function. For example, at one location the placement of two sleek, large swings next to open green space allows for people to lounge while simultaneously inviting them to swing. The opportuni-

ty is there but is not forced. At another location, small structures stick out of the ground at various heights and distances from each other, encouraging some to take a seat, and others to climb, jump, or balance. The trails in this park have equally seamless access for people walking, biking, skateboarding, and rollerblading. At Park am Gleisderick, play is woven into the space in every corner. It is a free flowing, public outdoor space which gently extends an invitation to park-goers with the freedom to play.

Future projections of outdoor public urban spaces should look to examples like Park am Gleisderick in order to produce typologies that successfully incorporate play into their design. Play structures, as they have been traditionally thought of, do not have to be explicitly designed in order to make a space playful. Conscious design of traditional elements, such as lowering the height of a dividing fence and making it wide enough and sturdy enough to climb on, can allow for a playful interaction with everyday urban design.

Park am Gleisderick succeeds in its ability to use design details to make urbanism more playful, seamlessly intertwining playfulness and the urban environment. Redesign of a park bench, for example, can have a large impact. Danish artist Jeppe Hein created *Modified Social Bench*, a piece which examines the relationship between both the viewer and the person sitting. He uses sculptural techniques on his benches to turn them into playful iterations of a typical park bench. Some form slides, hills, or figure eights, causing sitters to be pushed together or sit face to face, which Hein does to “create a social playground (Hein).” This example, among others, highlight how thoughtful manipulations of common urban forms can be a powerful method to alter the status quo of urbanism.

Both Ephemeral examples such as Modified Social Bench and permanent parks such as Gleisderick can perpetuate these ideas and allow for the continuing exploration of playful design. Such methods and representations of play are constantly in conversation with contemporary society. From small scale design innovations to socially conscious large-scale parks, these modern projects are continuing the effort to make urban life more playful for all.

GENDER AT PLAY

There is value in questioning the built environment around us, especially on the playground. Play spaces are a reflection of not only cultural creativity but of societal norms. The patterns of spatial relationships begin on the playground and continue through life. Patterns such as sharing and cohabitation, as well as patterns of inequality, are equally embedded. The recreational spaces we use show the realities of gendered power dynamics that exist in our society. From my own experience on the playground and of various research studies, there is evidence that girls, starting as early as the age of 8, start to feel uncomfortable in playgrounds and park spaces (Sidorova). Perhaps this stems from a growing awareness of their bodies and the pressure to monitor how they move them; or perhaps they simply want to engage in different activities than the boys. Early on, regardless of reason, girls begin to disengage with parks and playgrounds, inadvertently allowing boys to dominate the space.

As girls grow up and seek recreation beyond the playground, they are met with the play spaces which are often heavily male dominated. Skate parks and basketball courts are consistently dominated by men, entertaining them with a sense of ownership at these sites. While such public spaces are *technically* open to all, the feelings of power dynamics fostered within the space create unspoken rules of authority. While they may seem trivial to analyze here, these relationships transcend beyond the playground or the skate park. Examples of men using play as a means to assert power can be seen in the workplace, such as men making work decisions while “playing golf.” When girls feel excluded, especially at a young age, it becomes more difficult to challenge the precedent of male dominated spaces in adulthood.

From a girl on the playground, to a teenager seeking playful spaces, and finally to an active adult, my experiences have often left me questioning my true freedom of expression in the built environment. In times that I have sought out recreation, I have felt the dominance and pressure to perform according to the precedents which exist in society. Yet, when I am in a space that does seamlessly promote play for both children

and adults with no predisposed gendered dynamics, I am enthralled by the ways *everyone* is capable of playing.

As I set out on this search of play, my goal was to become more literate on the subject as a means to secure a strong foundation for speaking on the ideals I felt strongly about. Through the course of my study I was exposed to many different opinions and approaches on thinking about play and became increasingly aware of the gaps in my research. In the field of architecture and urbanism there is a significant missing piece: gender and play have not been, and continue to not be, seriously discussed. The more I looked for the connections between play in the lives of adults with an emphasis on the lives of women, this gap was further proved. My initial epiphany in the skate park had been warranted.

The discussion on play is still ongoing and there many gaps remain to be filled. Whereas I was initially struck by the lack of gender awareness in design of play, there are a multitude of pressing urban issues that play must address which are not yet part of the discourse. Providing for play in the urban environment is more than just providing fun. It is about making people feel comfortable in these spaces – a freedom that is not guaranteed for people of all genders, races, physical abilities, and socioeconomic classes. Play is something that deserves attention and reform because it is innate to all humans, and therefore should be accessible to them. Exploring play and the ways to design for it is a pursuit with a deep social impact. Without play, we are restricted mentally, physically, socially, and creatively. If future design of urban spaces is done with a conscious understanding of this, the morphology of the city can shift in such a way that allows for inhabitants to be increasingly and freely expressive. An urban experience which embraces playfulness will be one that incubates a positive, energetic, and vibrant population. The city can be a space where play does not have to be earned, afforded, or fought for, but where delight and pleasure are seamlessly woven into daily life. Play is found all around us if only we open our eyes to it, but what if we didn't have to go looking for it? With the space to play, people will play, and I will be the first to join them.

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