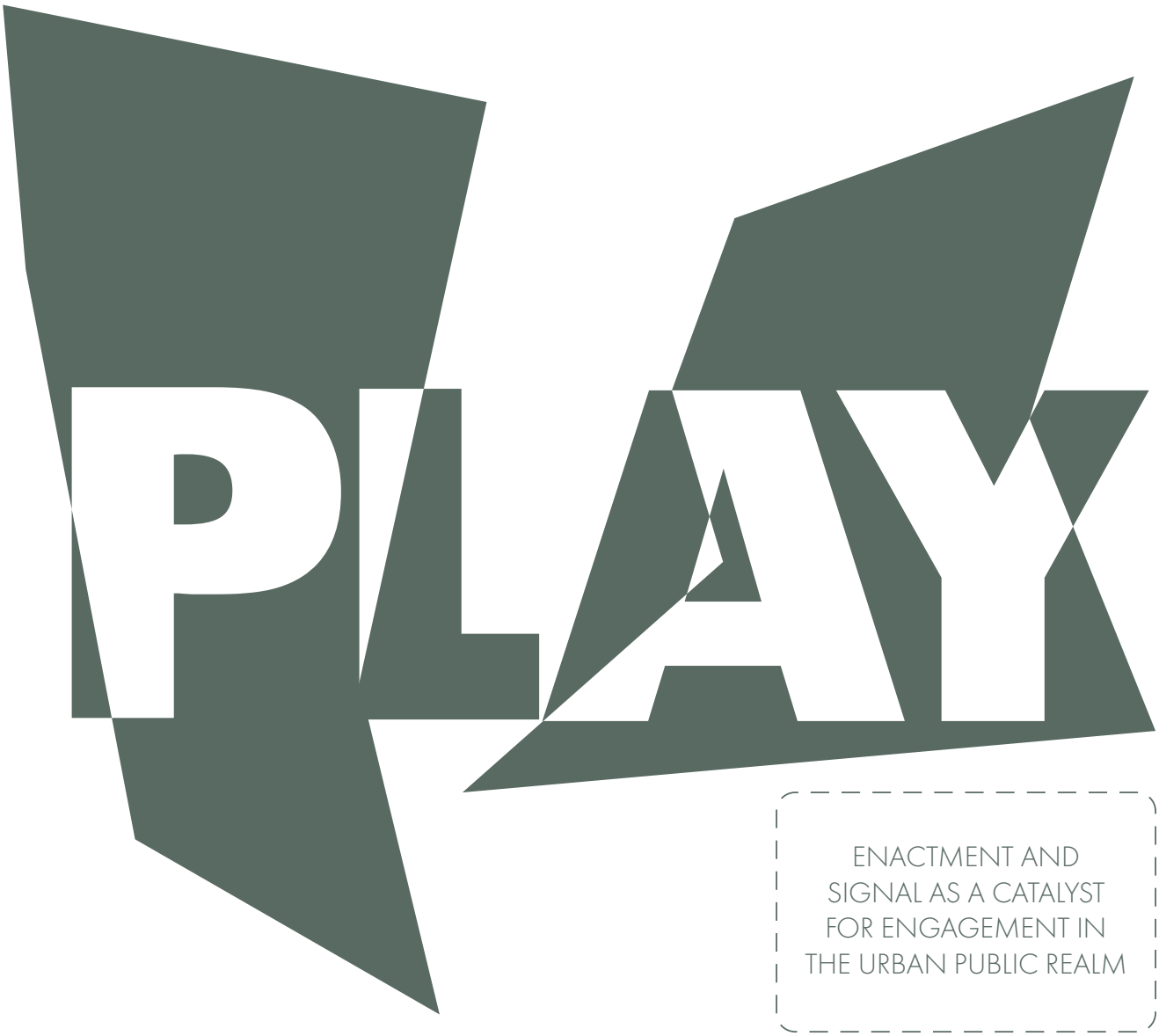
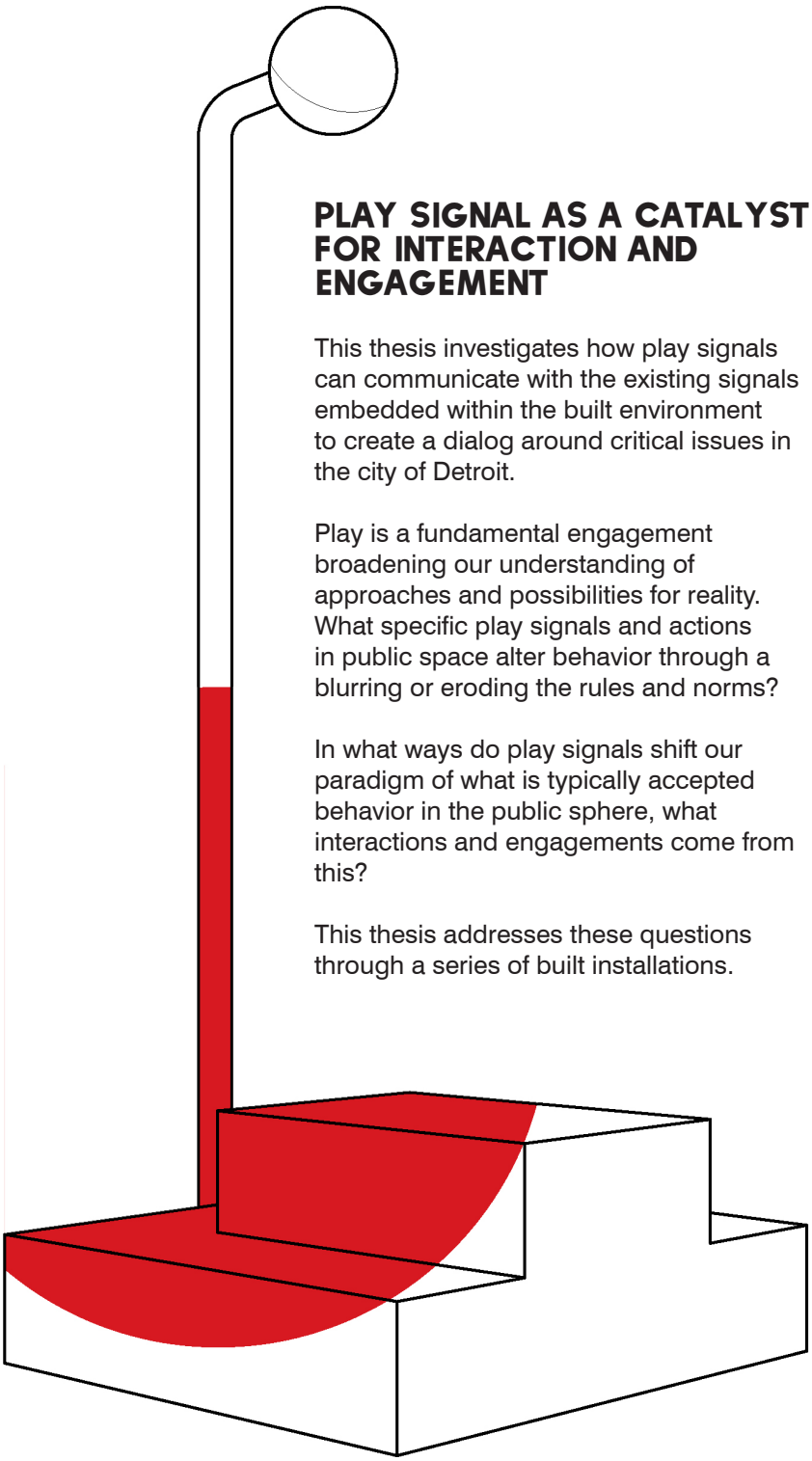


ENACTMENT AND
SIGNAL AS A CATALYST
FOR ENGAGEMENT IN
THE URBAN PUBLIC REALM



PLAY SIGNAL AS A CATALYST FOR INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

This thesis investigates how play signals can communicate with the existing signals embedded within the built environment to create a dialog around critical issues in the city of Detroit.

Play is a fundamental engagement broadening our understanding of approaches and possibilities for reality. What specific play signals and actions in public space alter behavior through a blurring or eroding the rules and norms?

In what ways do play signals shift our paradigm of what is typically accepted behavior in the public sphere, what interactions and engagements come from this?

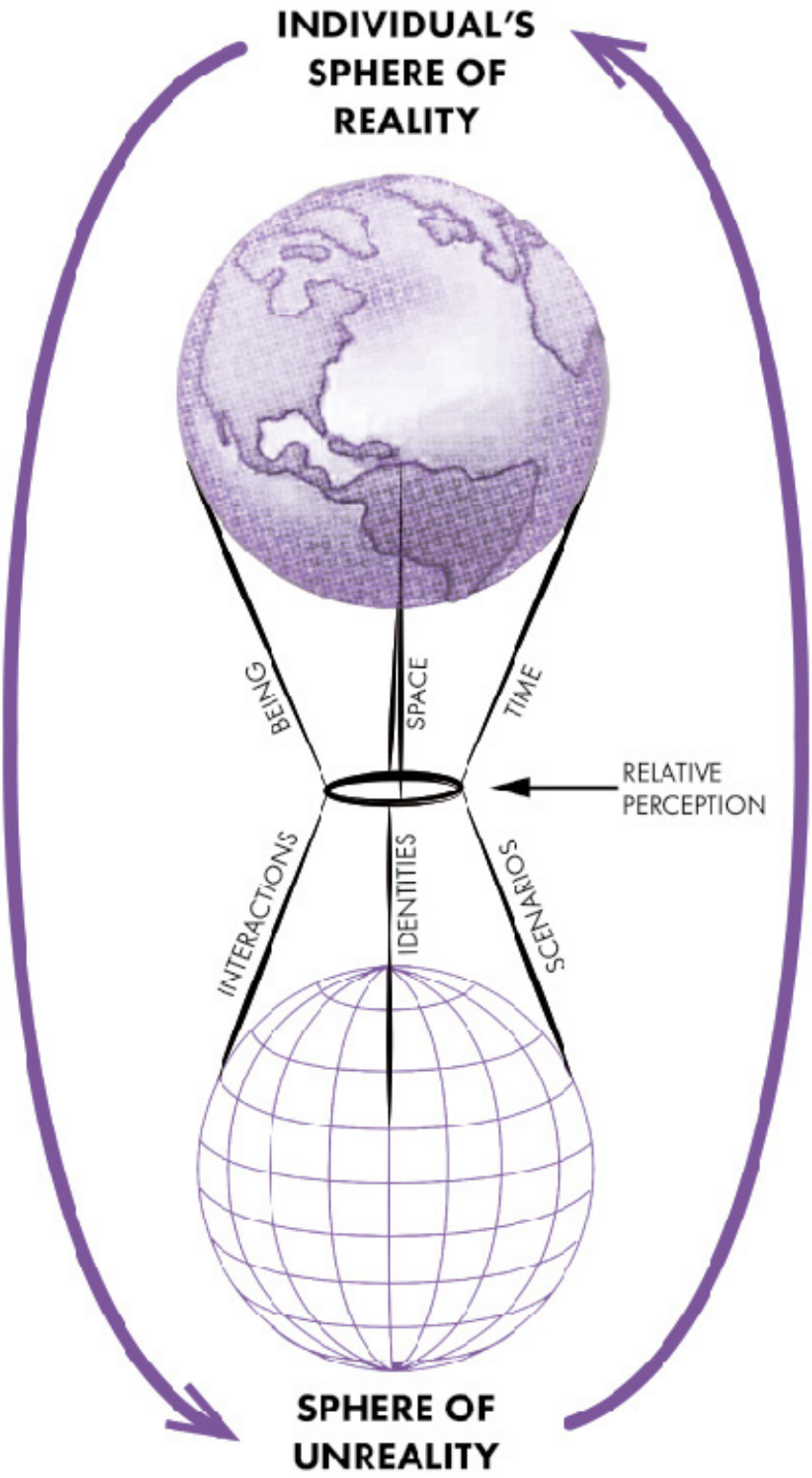
This thesis addresses these questions through a series of built installations.

ARCH 5100-5200 | 5110-5210 Master Thesis Studio and Master Thesis Supplement, Fall 2020 –Winter 2021; Thesis Candidate: Kyle Valentage, Studio Advisor: Claudia Bernasconi, External Advisor: Gabriella D'Angelo

This thesis is dedicated to all the professors that have helped me grow my ideas and actions along the way.

To my studio and external advisors that showed support throughout the process.

And specifically to the residents of Detroit who made all the installations and thesis possible.


INDIVIDUAL'S
SPHERE OF
REALITY
BEING
SPACE
TIME
RELATIVE
PERCEPTION
INTERACTIONS
IDENTITIES
SCENARIOS
SPHERE OF
UNREALITY

THESIS STATEMENT:

Play is a fundamental performance humans engage in to help further understand approaches and possibilities for reality, this is essential for adaptation to the evolving environment.

“Play actions thus offer a critique of conventional understandings of purpose and need, calling for a different way of thinking about these matters.” (Rojek 1995)

Play is fundamental to the modern day being for a variety of cognitive, behavioral, cultural purposes. Play is not frivolous, it retains a challenging and provoking importance throughout a lifetime.

The urban public landscape maintains a significant role in the health of society today, promoting a space to freely search and test interactions of love, esteem, and self-actualization the urban public landscape offers a possibility of engaging in the diversity of the world around as a means of understanding it. (Maslow 1943)

Encoded within the urban landscape, built signals direct us on how we are supposed to act physically and mentally in the space, what is allowed, what is not, what is yes, and what is no. Some spatial features blur this boundary of normative bodily behavior in space. This thesis explores that blurred or gray area of acceptable behavior in order to create dynamic interactions, conversations, and frame critical issues within the city of Detroit.

Through theoretical research on the underpinnings of what play is, analysis of urban conditions and the phenomenon of play, qualitative analysis of the play concept in various facets in the urban public realm, this thesis will distill the core signals of play and put these signals into motion in the built environment as a means of fostering interaction in the urban public realm.

Huizinga, Johan. Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture. Angelico Press, 2016.
Lees, Loretta, ed. The Emancipatory City?: Paradoxes and Possibilities. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2004.
Rosoff, Amy. "The Reality of Unreality: Using Imagination as a Teaching Tool." The English Journal, vol. 96, no. 3, 2007, pp. 58–62. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30047296. Accessed 9 Sept. 2020.

CONT

WHAT PLAY/WHY PLAY

Play is a fundamental performance broadening our understanding and approaches to possibilities for reality.

Can play start to shift our paradigm of what is typically accepted behavior in the public sphere what interactions and engagements come from this?

1

IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play signals can increase interaction and engagement in the urban environment. Increased interaction and engagement leads to more vibrant city spaces.

"A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over… But the feeling of being "apart together" in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game" (Huizenga)

2

URBAN SIGNALS

The city gives us signals both covert and overt about what is acceptable behavior in space. Whether through built features or written signs.

Using play signals in communication with the built urban signals, new dynamic behaviors and interactions can come forward enriching the conversation of the urban public space.

3

TENTS

SIGNALING BEHAVIOR

The built environment imparts signals for behavior on us, play signals also give us hints on how to change behavior.

A series of installations were created to test this dialogue. Looking to see if play signals and built signals create a new language for normal behavior or performance in a space.

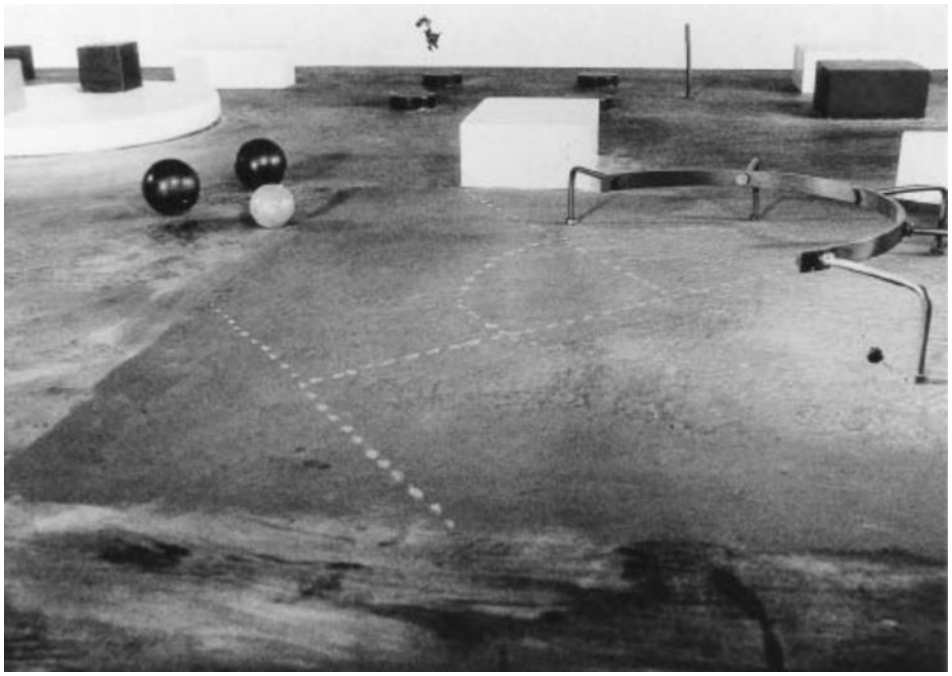
4

FINAL INTERVENTION

Taking lessons learned from the previous interventions, the final installation picked a site for it's distinct characteristics. The installation sought to question a built objects as a marker of private space and if this marker could act as something more than simply a barrier.

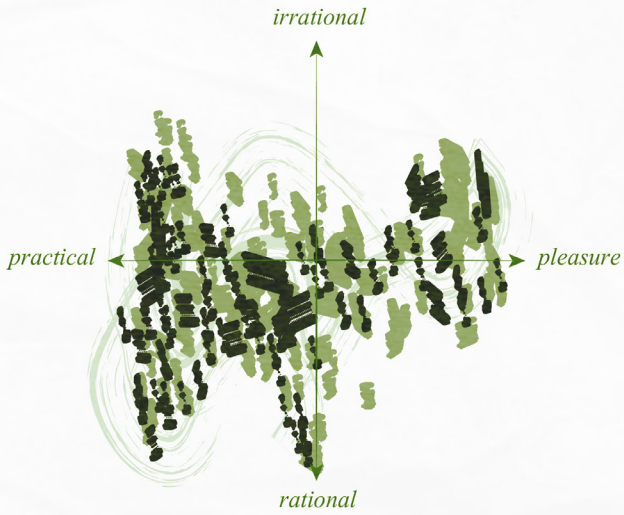
5

I WHAT PLAY/ WHY PLAY



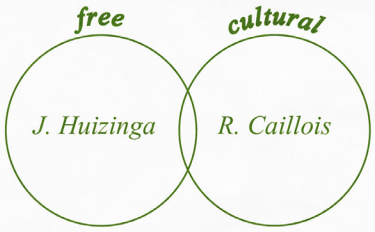
Constant, Ambiance de jeu, 1954. Courtesy Libero Andreotti, "Architecture and Play"

Play as a form of the expression of self is manifest of underlying motives which connect our realized past with new possibilities



Classic Theories of Play

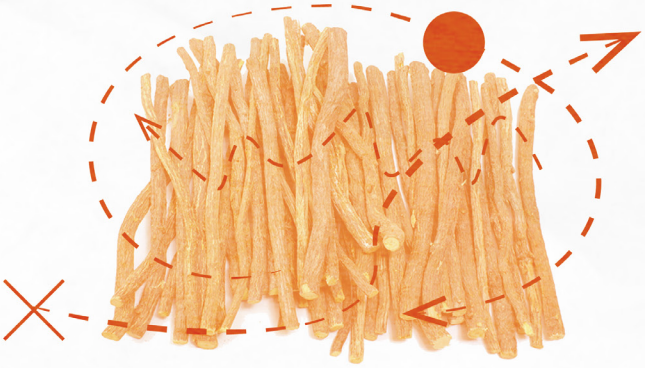
surplus energy	psychoanalytic	cognitive
K. Groos		
M. Lazarus	E. Erikson	L. Vygotsky
F. Schiller	S. Freud	J. Piaget



PLAY

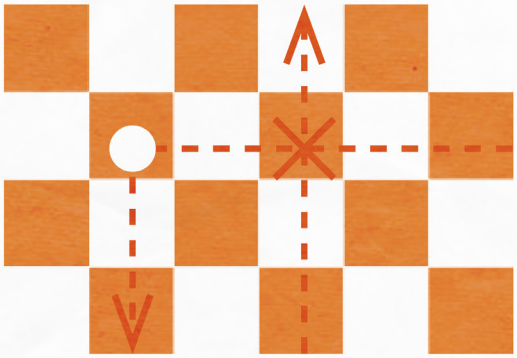
PAIDIA

Free and spontaneous version of play. Improvised rule making



LUDUS

Controlled play bound by rules, limitations, and instructions



"African American girls playing games." 1922. / image: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections

Sandboxes in Berlin became the first public spaces of play

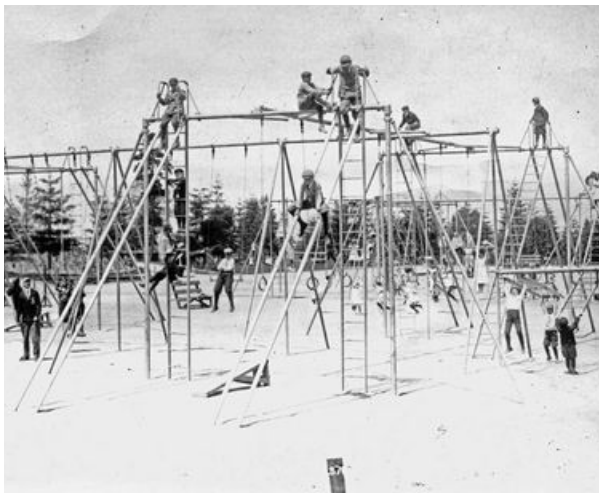
In contemporary times the idea of play has evolved into a more structured phenomenon, safety a guiding principal in this transformation. Images of playgrounds of the past bring up considerable emotive response as they starkly contrast the rubber and plastic playgrounds that we are accustomed to seeing (Fig. 1.0).

The first public play spaces were built in Germany by Friedrich Froebel and promoted free play in contact with natural materials. Through the 1850's these sandy natural spaces were placed around public spaces in Berlin. With an influx of immigrant population and growing community density, children had to mediate space with the streets. In 1886 the German sandboxes were introduced to Boston, the sandboxes spread beyond Boston. (Heller)

Beginning with sandboxes in Boston, the understanding of the importance of public play in the United States grew, leading to the establishment of The Playground Association of America with the founding principles: (O'Shea)

> "That inasmuch as play under proper conditions is essential to the health and the physical, social, and moral wellbeing of the child, playgrounds are a necessity for all children as much as schools." (National Recreation Association records, "Early Days," n.d.)

Fig 1.0



Hiawatha Playground, 1912. Photo Courtesy Rare Historical Photos

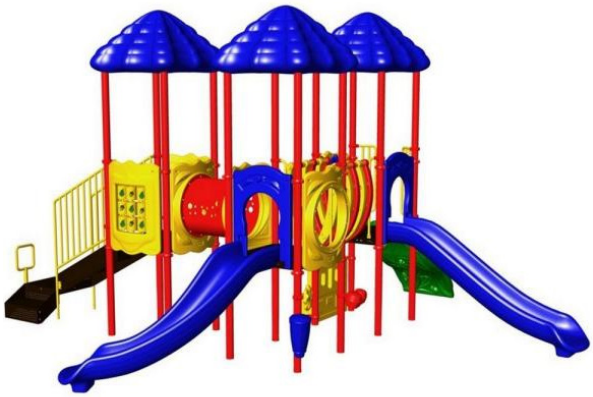
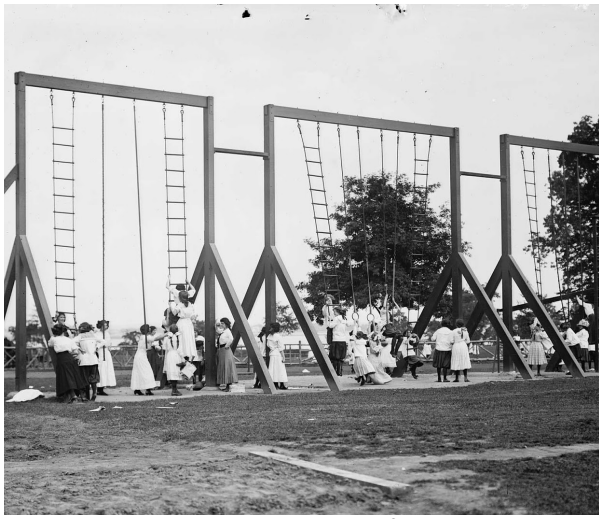


Photo Courtesy The Home Depot

Broadway Play field, 1910. Photo Courtesy Rare Historical Photos

Photo Courtesy MVP Playgrounds



Rings and poles, Bronx Park, New York. 1911. Photo Courtesy Rare Historical Photos

Photo Courtesy rubbermulch.com

Charlesbank Playground in Boston, between 1900 and 1905 / image: Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives

The association garnered support federally by then president Theodore Roosevelt. With federal support, the Association outlined design standards and activities, the playgrounds of the early twentieth century stripped the free-play nature of the earlier sandboxes. Play became more organized, instructors were taught organized play. This organized playground method had gained popularity in the United States by 1917. (Curtis)

WWII had a devastating affect on public playgrounds and the building of new play spaces. Much of the metal play equipment was used as scrapped and re-purposed for war efforts. The play space was devastated by lack of maintenance and disrepair. WWII had an unprecedented impact on play throughout Europe, sites raised by war provided for play experimentation with building materials, rubbage, and new spaces. Following this realization adventure playgrounds afforded children the opportunity to explore, invent and build. Adventure playgrounds in Europe allowed children spaces to collaborate and build together (Heller)

While Europe was embracing a shift towards adventure playgrounds, the United States entered a period after the cold war of “Model Playgrounds”, in which playgrounds took on novel metaphorical shapes, such as rocket ships. This aesthetic shift coincided with a move towards a more standardized manufacturing process of play equipment by larger firms.

Beginning in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s liability became the biggest issue around play equipment. Following issues with safety, playgrounds evolved towards post and platform style with brightly colored plastic coverings. This movement has brought us to the current signals of a typical playground with structured modules, plastic pieces, and soft surfaces. Counter to movement, the belief in open play spaces remained however the speed, modularity and implied safety of current playgrounds still prevails.

Regardless of the prevailing aesthetic or theory on playgrounds, the phenomenon of play has endured. Theoretically play has been the subject of much research, many different theories have evolved from this research however certain characteristics.

Standardized playground equipment / image: Wikimedia Commons

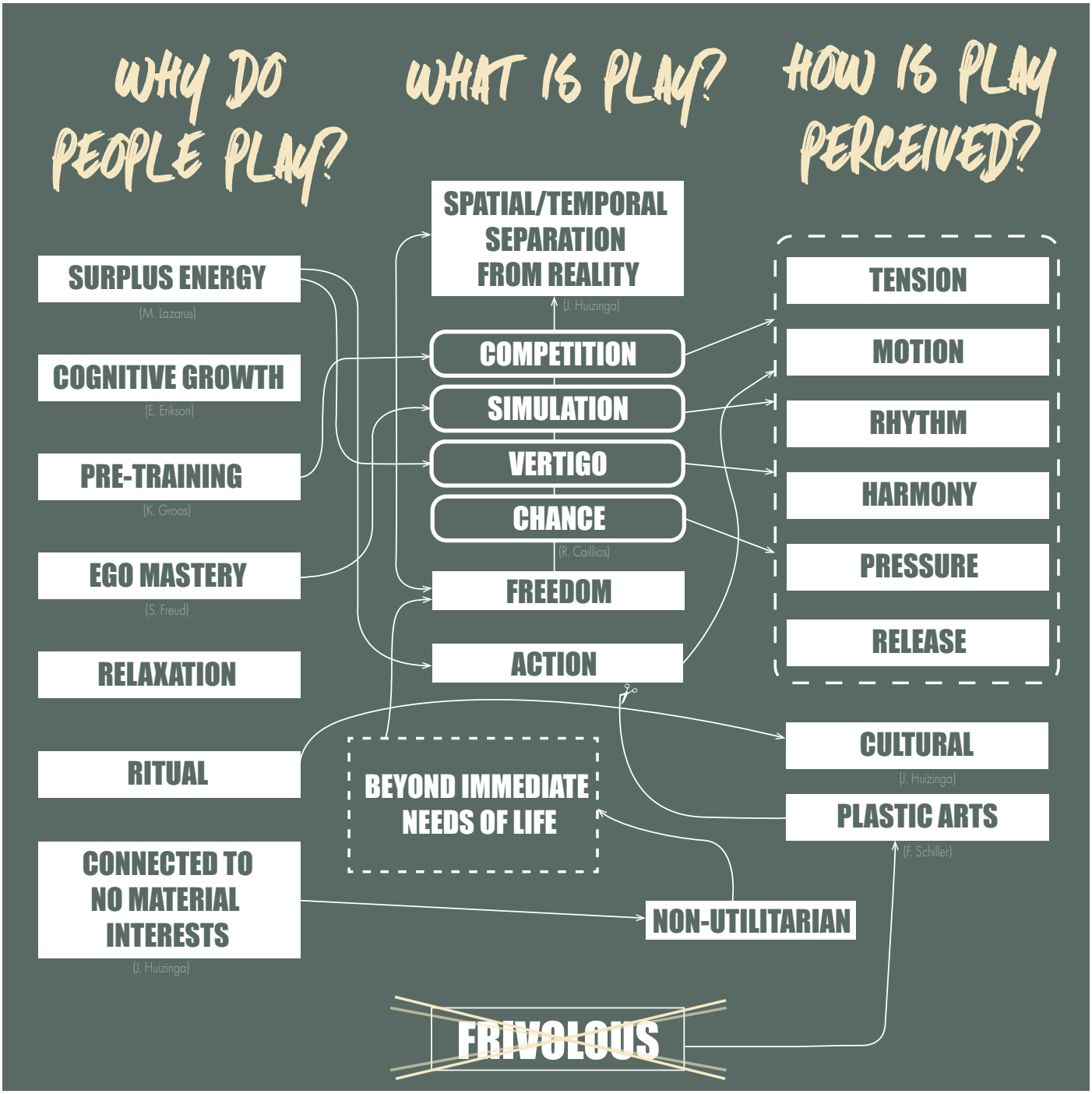
PLAY THEORY

"Play is possible according to Spencer only for an organism which has reached a level of biological organization so efficient that it does not expend all its energy in securing bare survival" (Hein)

Play is not a frivolous activity, nor is it limited strictly to child's play. Play is an enactment that allows us to test new possibilities for reality.

To understand this phenomenon there is a solid body of philosophical underpinning. Classical play theory ranges from the idea that play is simply a release of surplus energy to the idea that it is pre-training for more serious events later on in life. throughout all these theories few characteristics stand out, these characteristics form the groundwork for an understanding of play as a performance and a phenomenon. The following illustrates some of the most commonly held philosophies on play. (Hein)

In order to fully understand the philosophy behind the phenomenon I looked at Play through the lens of three questions: Why do people Play? What is Play? How is Play perceived?



Conceptual Mapping of Play Philosophy Research

The Yorck Project (2002) 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei

Friedrich Schiller: Play as Expenditure of Surplus Energy

Schiller's theory roots itself in the idea that man and some animals have a primary impulse for play. The play impulse is "stimulated by superabundant energy, manifests itself in the free, non-utilitarian exercise of his various faculties" (Hein). In Schiller's doctrine on play he exercises the point that the performance is voluntary contributing to the enhancement of the individuals and societies morals.

Courtesy: https://www.discogs.com/artist/1287395-Karl-Groos?filter_anv=1&anv=K.+Gross

Karl Groos: Pre-Training

Groos theorized that Play is characterized as a pre-training exercise, preparing the being for more serious events later in life. To accomplish this pre-training, Groos points to a "conscious self-deception" in which the being works through disappointments and frustrations that will occur in life. Thus, preparing the being to face more difficult situations later in life.

http://www.dwc.knaw.nl/DL/levensberichten/PE00001026.pdf

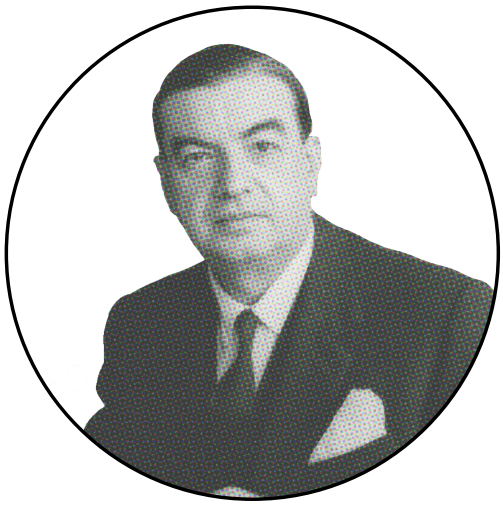
Johan Huizenga: Pre-Training

Huizenga evades all analyses of play in terms of human needs and satisfactions or personal gain. Huizenga theorizes that play is a primitive and non-reducible instinct to which all forms of human culture can be attributed to. Huizenga emphasizes "the "fun" element as the essential feature of play, and contrasts it with the serious and the coerced, but his concept of play is broad enough to include such instances as those in which things as serious as honor and life may be at stake, and pleasure is not the primary objective." (Hein)

1968 Michiganensian, p. 91

Jean Piaget: Cognitive Behavior Training

Piaget theorized that humans play in order to experience the pleasure that comes from implementing their own strategies on the built environment. This experience of play practices bodily and cognitive control. Piaget claims that the in play performance are preoccupied with constructing and enforcing symbolic rules and regimes.



Roger Caillious developed four categories of play that are still widely held today as a means of determining performance: Simulation, Vertigo, Chance, and Competition.

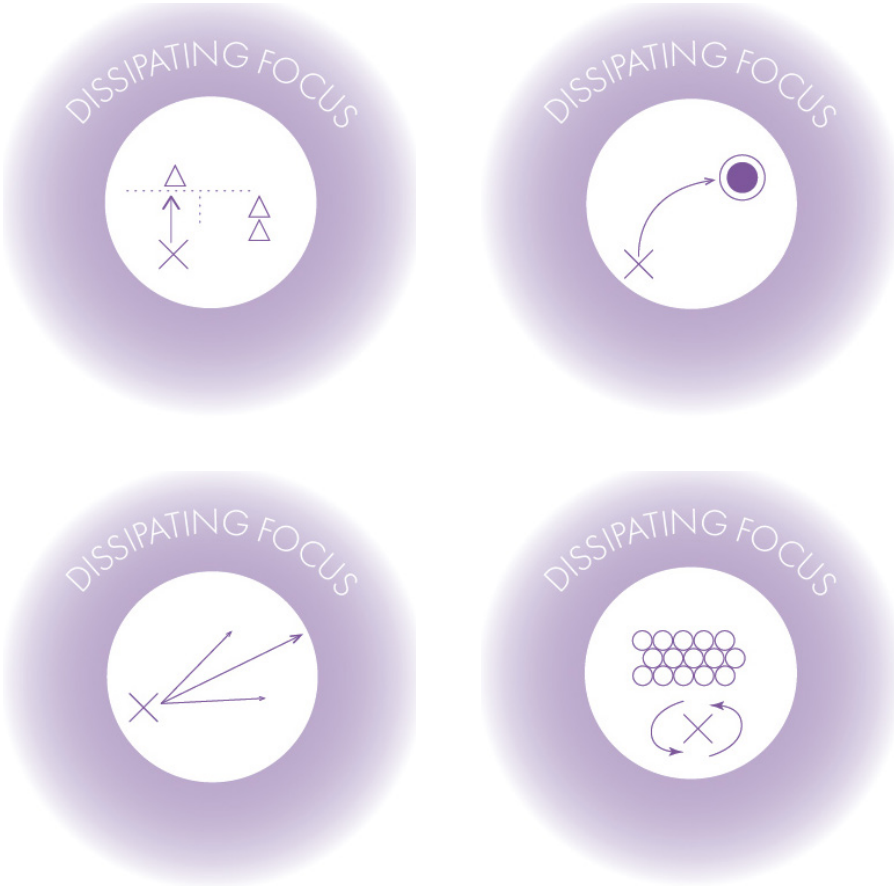
Simulation being the creating of new worlds, scenarios, and character building. Often this category is attributed to a play or story performance.

Vertigo being the testing of our physical bodily limits, typically through motion we attribute this to acts of physical performance such as skateboarding.

Chance often is thought of a game of chance however it can also be attributed to a chance encounter with an unknown individual.

Competition is typically performed through game play but goes deeper into the exploration of an unknown opponent.

Diagramming each category and the focus shift when one becomes a performer (Fig. 1.1)



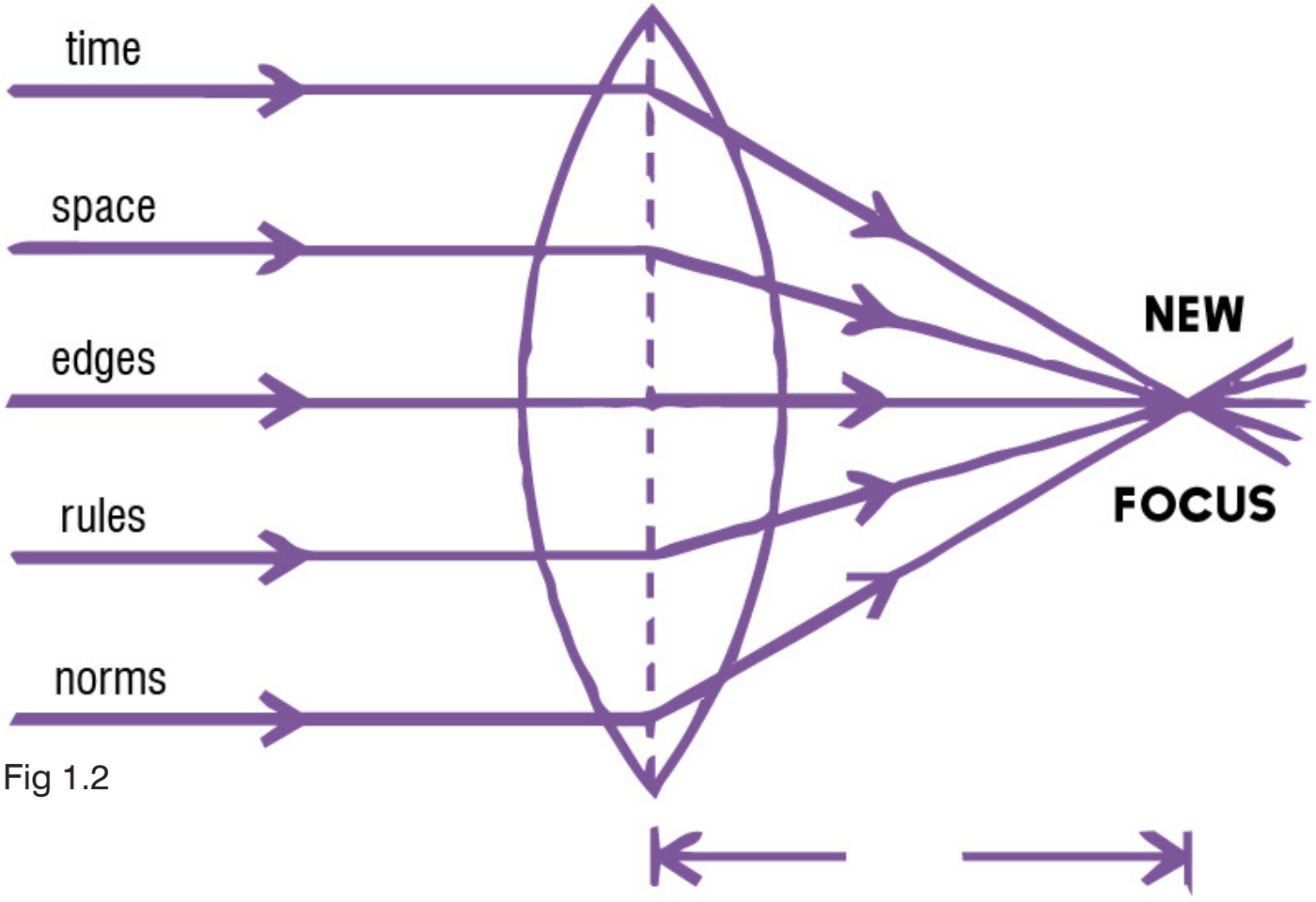
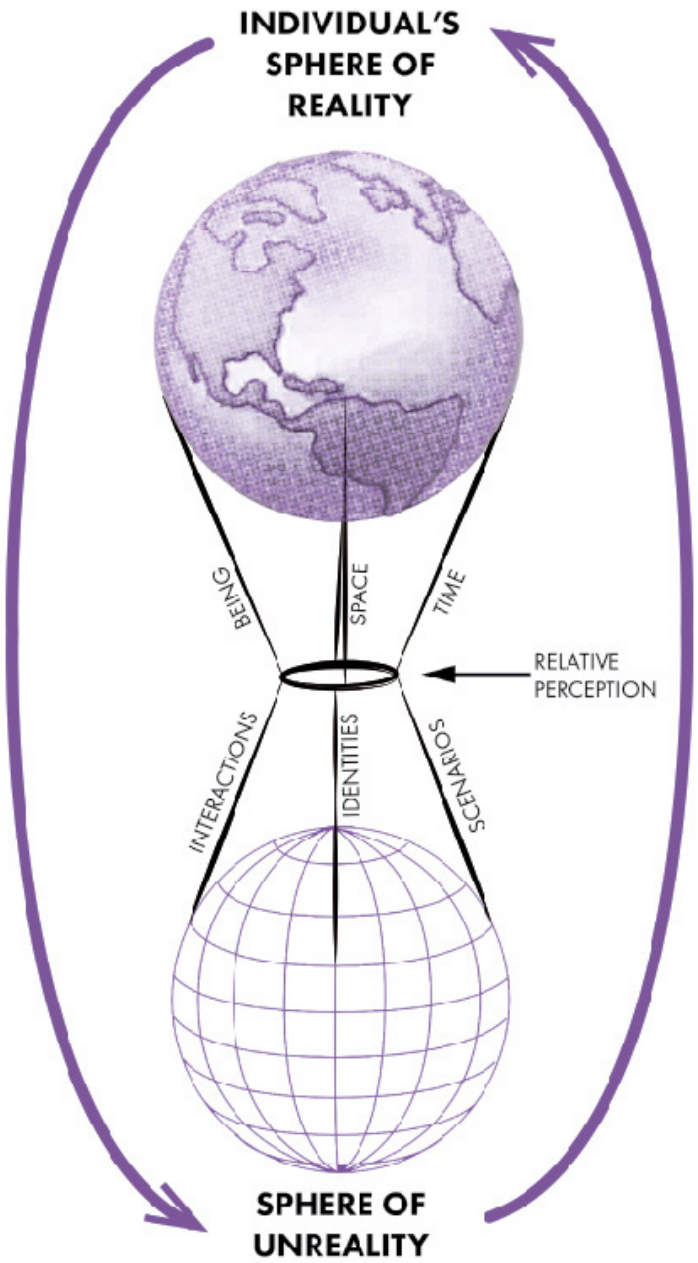


Fig 1.2

One common thread that emerged through the research on play philosophy is that in any theory, the built environment that one had inhabited before becoming a play performer had shifted and the rules and bounds became blurred. (Fig. 1.2)

In diagramming each of Roger Caillious's categories of play it became apparent that the player and the audience have vastly different focuses. When one entered any of the categories of play their focus shifted to a new environment.



"I am defining playing as stepping out of the confines of reality to imagine new identities and scenarios" (Rosoff)

Rosoff, Amy. "The Reality of Unreality: Using Imagination as a Teaching Tool." The English Journal, vol. 96, no. 3, 2007, pp. 58–62. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30047296. Accessed 9 Sept. 2020.

Fig 1.3

Similar to the idea of an altered focus, the idea that play happens in unreality is central to the phenomenon. When one enters the play sphere their own perception of reality (time, space, being), is discarded and new scenarios, interactions, and identities are able to be tested a brought back to the sphere of reality. (Fig 1.3)

PLAY THEORY DISTILLED

In order to form a basis for understanding play through observation and analysis going, the philosophy and ideas were distilled down into a concrete definition highlighting the key aspects of play performance. (Fig 1.4)

Through creating a concrete foundation for what is Play, analytical look at how our performances and actions are influenced by signals of the built environment.

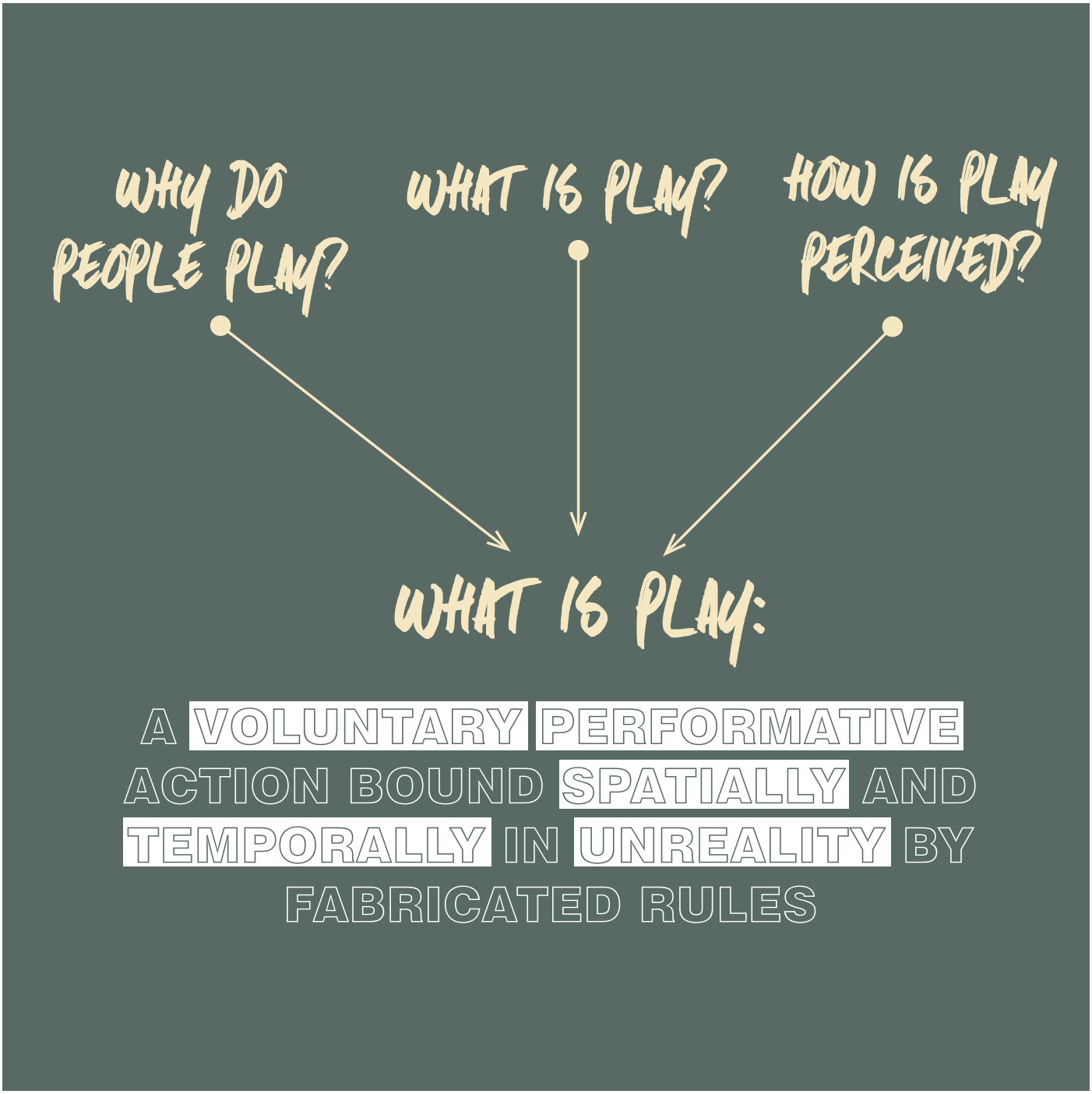

WHY DO PEOPLE PLAY?
WHAT IS PLAY?
HOW IS PLAY PERCEIVED?
WHAT IS PLAY:
A VOLUNTARY PERFORMATIVE ACTION BOUND SPATIALLY AND TEMPORALLY IN UNREALITY BY FABRICATED RULES

Fig 1.4

2 IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

"In other words, play links us to what has gone before (and to our basic frameworks for acting-in-the-world) at the same time that it frees us from the grip of instinct and manufactures new possibilities of living" (Henricks)

"Lefebvre proposes that it is practices of play which best illustrate the capacities for social action and expression which the urbanization of society has made possible." *(Stevens)*

“The segmentation of social life by capitalism highlights the threat which play poses, as evidence of a non-instrumental, non-commodifiable basis for urban social relations. It also reveals the special potential of play to respond dialectically to instrumentality." *(Stevens)*

"Here we have another very important characteristic of play: success won readily passes from the individual to the group" *(Huizinga)*

The questioning and investigations of this thesis highlight the importance of public spaces to the civic and social well being of Detroit. This is not an idea that is singular to Detroit, all cities are battling between capitalistic segmentation and expressive freedoms of public space.

Through the enactment of play performance in public space we can highlight critical issues within the city, foster interaction and engagement, and push against the commodification and division that capitalism poses to urban public space. Just as the city provides signals for how to act in space, play signals can used in communication with these existing built signals, creating dialogue for dynamic behavior and interactions in public space.

It is important to begin understanding why people come to cities, “they also come to cities searching for love, esteem and self-actualization, and to experience the diversity of the world around them and to learn to understand it (Stevens, Maslow 1943)”. The urban environment thus serves as a host of interaction, dynamic movement, play etc. because of it’s specialization and diversity, proximity and unplanned experience of the urban add to the tension and disturbed expectations. All of these signals provide a breeding ground for enhanced human experience.

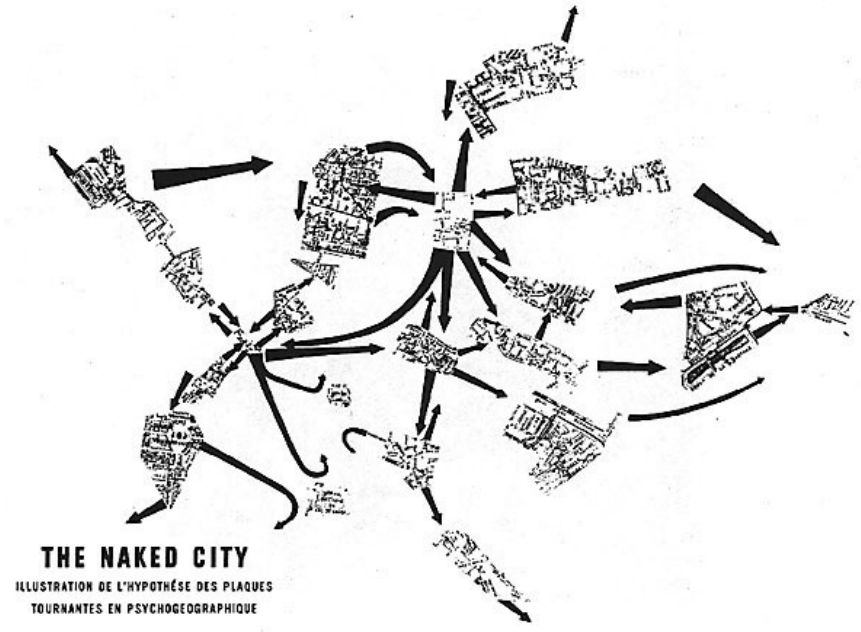
OEURVE: work of art of everyday life.

HABITUS: impact on social-spatial conditions.

So then we must look at how play has a role in this dynamic performance of the city. “Lefebvre proposes that it is practices of play which best illustrate the capacities for social action and expression which the urbanization of society has made possible.” (Stevens. Henry Lefebvre utilizes two words when talking about the urban environment; Oeurve as a work of art of everyday life, and Habitus as the impact on social-spatial conditions.

> “uncontrolled play’ in urban space: ‘In the public realm . . . the unquestioned virtues of sobriety, industry, rationality, diligence and so forth are not only challenged, they are discarded.’” (Stevens)

The term “uncontrolled play” that Stevens uses here is a rhetorical construction, the reason that one chooses how and why to play depend on their personal values and virtues of reality. Stevens begins here to get at the idea of play signals questioning what is considered normal behavior in space. His use of the word “discarded” is a strong expression for how play signals can communicate with existing signals of the built environment.

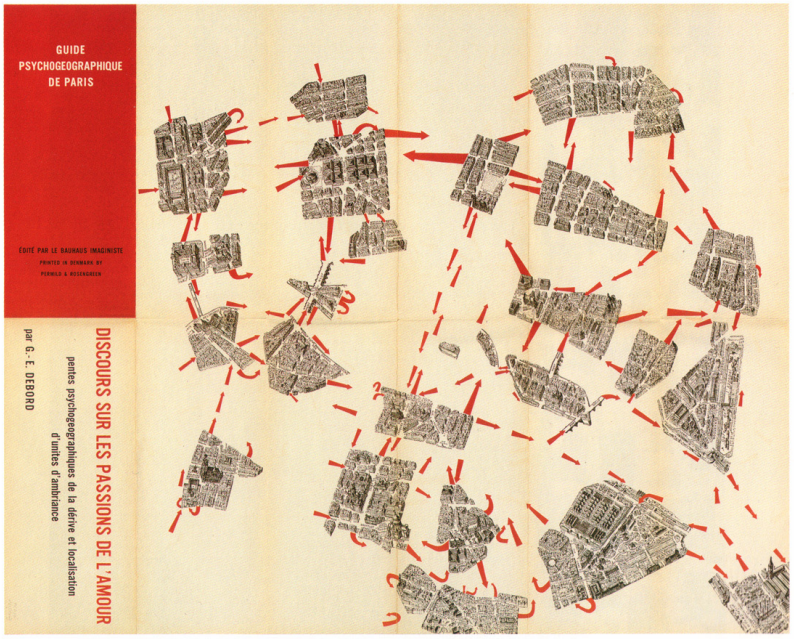


Map of Paris created through the act of Derive
The Archaeologist - Theory of the Derive

DERIVE: To drift to wander like clouds for extended periods and map out new possibilities.

A case study for a new and "uncontrolled" way of exploring the signals of the built environment is to look at The Letterist International, a radical collective of artists and theorists in Paris during the 1950's. The Letterist International developed the term "Derive", a way of moving or drifting through the city for hours or days at a time. This movement allowed for a free mapping of the city based on the forces, allowing for the mapping of possibilities.

The Letterist International were directly opposed to the limitations of play within the city. Through the practice of derive, they were able to study urban spaces and the potential for new types of play. The derive used new ways of reacting to the signals of the built environment to create a more liberated experience of the city and understanding of possibilities in the city.



Map of Paris created through the act of Derive
The Archaeologist - Theory of the Derive

The Letterist International and the case of the Derive are an example of how individuals benefit from experimenting with the built environment in new ways. Johan Huizenga had another expression for the benefit of experimenting with the built signals of the city in new ways.

As noted before, Huizenga attributed culture to the phenomenon of play rather than cognitive or biological needs. Additionally, Huizenga describes a "play community", new relationships and interactions, that arise out of urban play:

> "A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over… But the feeling of being "apart together" in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawling from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game" (Huizenga)

GRAY AREA: Enlarged framework for what is considered acceptable behavior in space.

Synthesizing both The Letterist International's use of the Derive and Huizenga's beliefs in "play-communities," we can imagine new possibilities and scenarios for interacting with the signals of the built environment. This communication between signals creates a language or dialogue.

Opening up a dialogue between signals enhances the gray area that exists between what is considered acceptable behavior is space and what is not; what is yes and what is no. Enlarging this gray area produces more opportunity for new interactions and engagements with each other and the built environment. The gray area allows us to question how we are using our environment, if it can be used in more productive ways or if there are more dynamic engagements that can come from it. The interactions from the expanded gray area highlight critical issues happening within the city. As we begin to question why behaviors are considered normal, we begin to question our built environment and the power structures behind it.


NO
SKATEBOARDING
BICYCLE RIDING
ROLLERBLADING
SCOOTER RIDING

3 URBAN SIGNALS

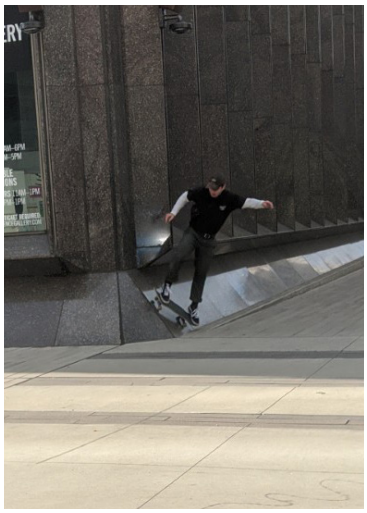
"Public life should also be understood in the broadest sense as everything that takes place between buildings..." (Gehl)

The city gives us signals both covert and overt about what is acceptable behavior in space. Whether through built features or written signs. However, there is still a "gray" area of what is "yes" and what is "no". By working in this gray area, expanding it, and manipulating it we're able to test new behaviors and create dynamic interactions and dialogues about our civic environment.

In order to understand these built signals and their interaction on our behavior to them, time must be spent collecting observations, data, and media. Over the course of several weeks the area of Campus Martius in Downtown Detroit was observed. Observations included quantitative data collection, qualitative data collection, photographs, audio, and video to map behavior to the built features of the space.

Life in the city is dynamic, the built environment is dynamic, constantly evolving based on social, economic, and political factors. Through observing our interactions with the built environment we can draw a framework for which play signals can communicate in this space.

Fig 3.0



Skateboarder performing an act of vertigo on the building's slope

We often think of the built environment as buildings, sidewalks, streets, and maybe parks. These things do constitute boundaries, edges, and corridors, however there are far more built features that signal behavior than these.

Signs are a key feature of the built environment they are typically the most expressive about what is allowed, utilizing words and symbols they tell where you can and can't walk, where you can't skateboard, where you can't walk your dog, or even in the case of street lights when you can and can't walk. Often these are the most overt signals for behavior by the built environment.

Permeability acts as a signal for spaces of free use and spaces of limited access. Spaces can be completely impermeable in the sense of a fence around a property or less permeable through the use of dense vegetation that implies a boundary.

The ground often works as a demarcation of where we should be in space, sidewalks often are a very particular concrete color while roads are darker, grasses are a softer more inviting place stay and engage.

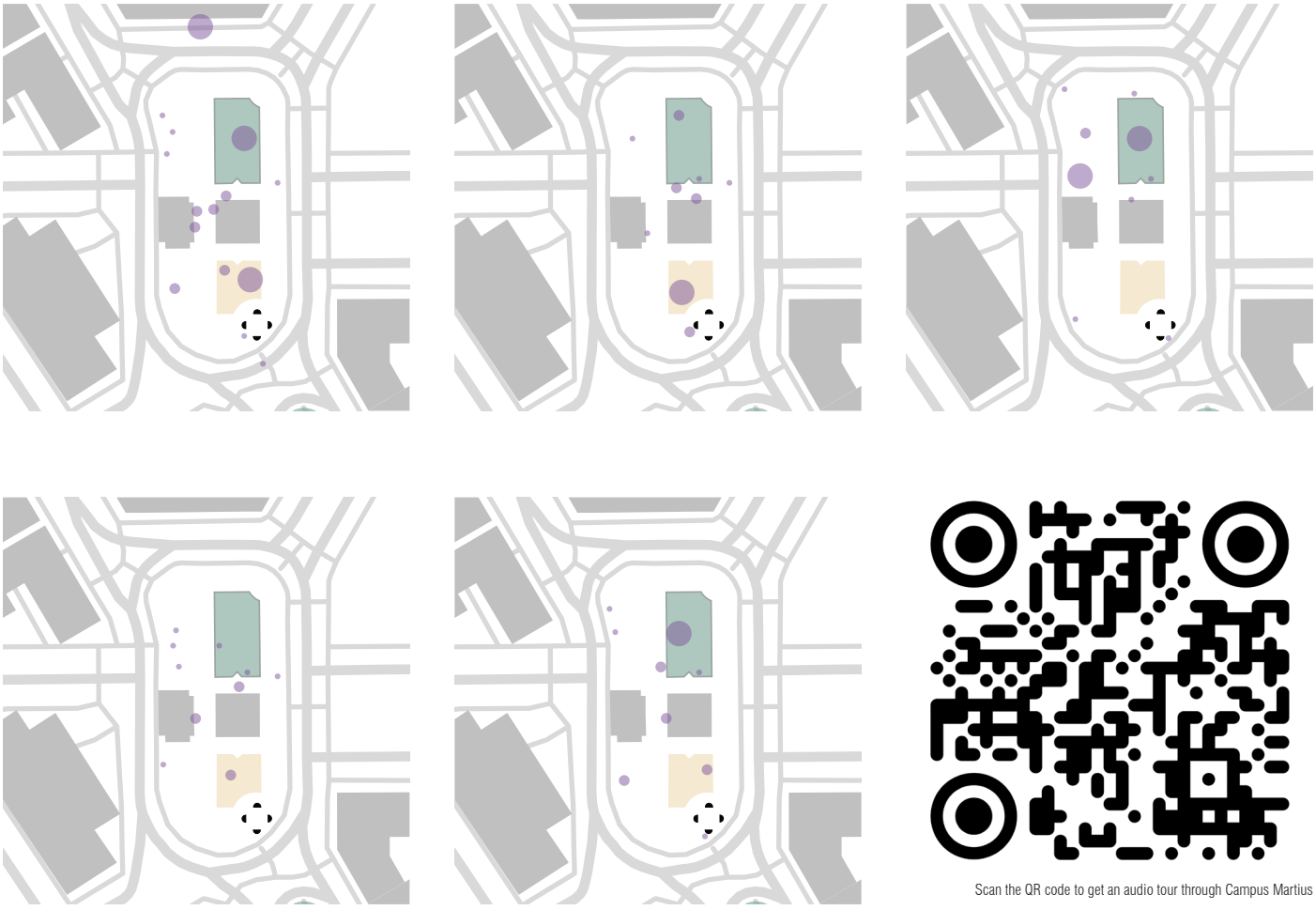
These are a very non-exhaustive list of some of the more overt examples of signals in the built environment.

CAMPUS MARTIUS BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION

Fig 3.1

Campus Martius is not technically a public space, it is a Privately Owned Public Space which has a whole other set of connotations as far as rules, policing, and accessibility.

However for the purpose of observing our interaction with the built environment, Campus Martius represents one of Detroit's most central, well-known, and large spaces in the downtown area.

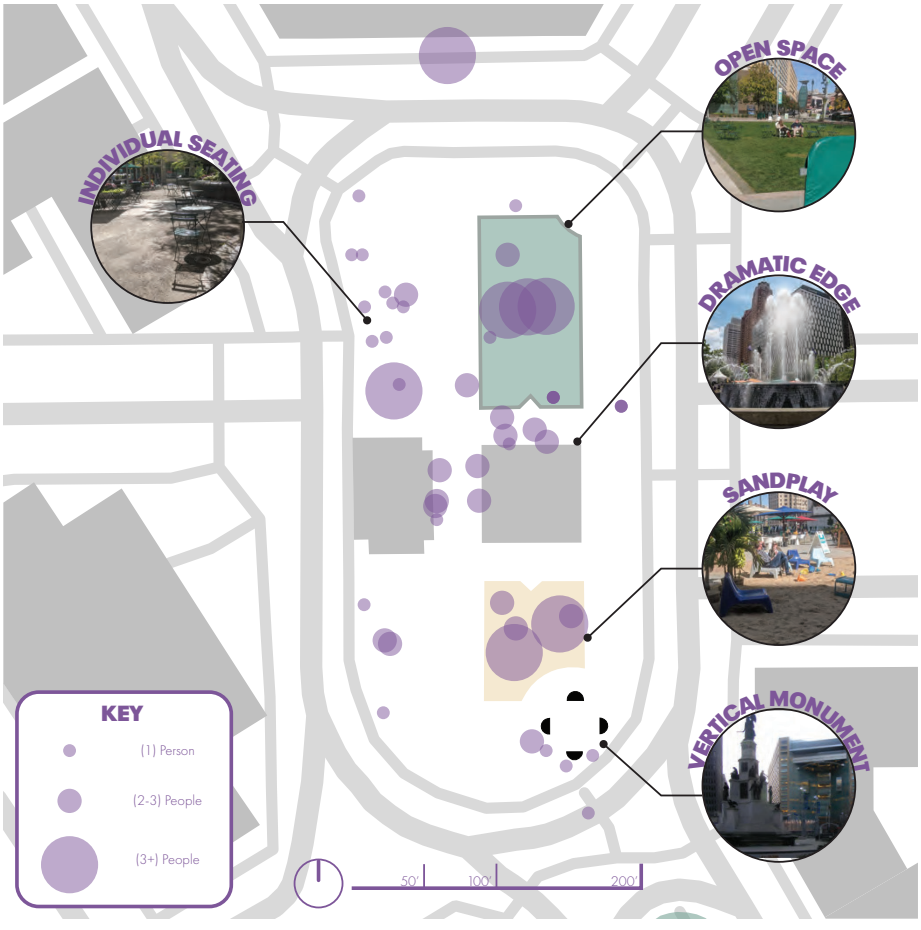


Individual Day Population Cluster Maps

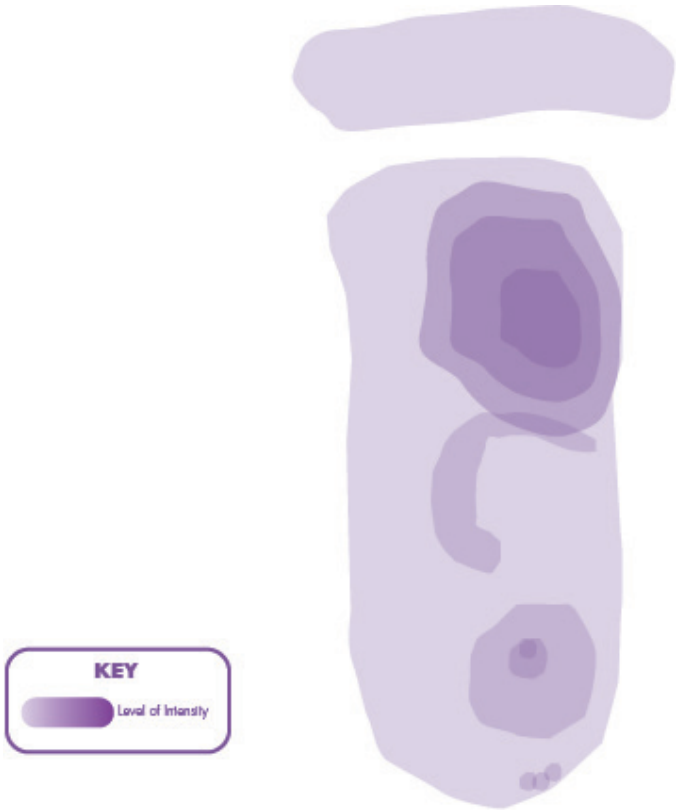
Scan the QR code to get an audio tour through Campus Martius

During this five day observation, it was observed and mapped in the park where the highest density of people congregated. The larger bubbles represent larger groups of people while the small bubbles represent individuals.

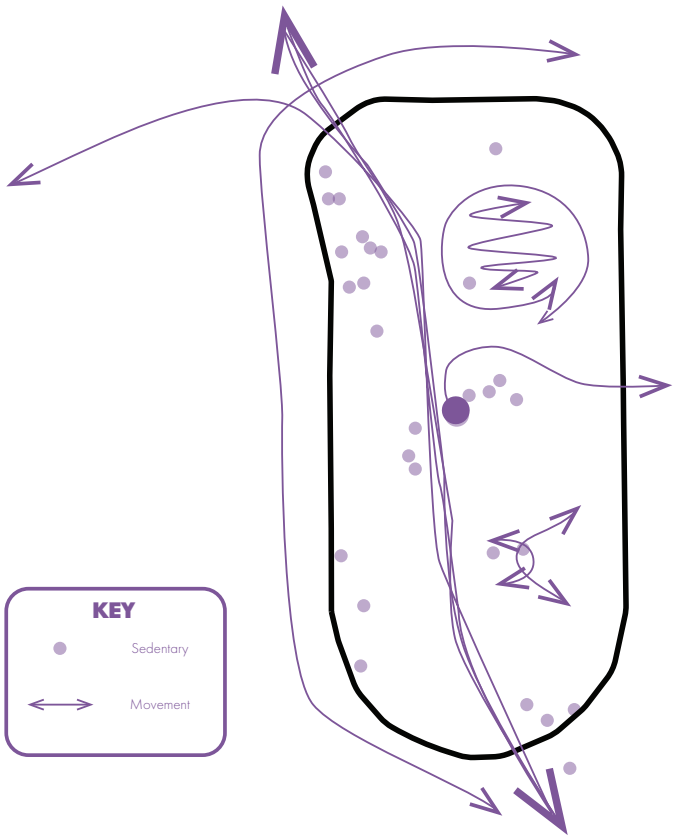
Following the five day observation the maps were overlayed and to draw a correlation to size of groupings and built features. The collaged map indicates that the larger groupings of people congregated in the more open spaces while individuals and smaller grounds tended to stick to perimeters of built objects.



Compiled Population Cluster Map



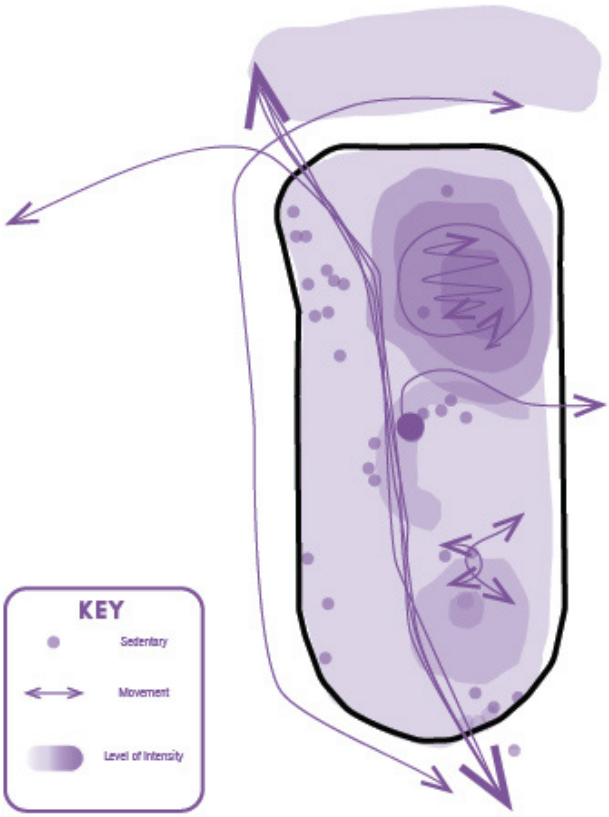
Activity Intensity Map



Activity Direction Map

While observing clusters, movement and intensity of activity were also observed and mapped. The Intensity Map shows that in the larger open spaces of the park that the intensity level of activity was higher. This meant more running, chasing, and tests of bodily vertigo, all performances that are characteristic of play. while the spaces that were smaller had lower intensity, sitting, talking, looking, photographing.

Combing the two maps indicates that larger open spaces lent themselves to performances that were more akin to play while the smaller spaces tended to act as corridors or meet-up spots.



Child displaying simulation on the “boulder” testing new realities for their position in the city

Campus Martius displayed many built-in signals that imparted on the user how to act in the space. Larger softer areas tended to lend to more active free performance while the harder edges and ground planes tended to more subdued activity. The sandbox to the south of the park naturally led to open play for families, children took advantage of this feature creating and moving freely through the sand. Natural corridors created by the edges of the built features created natural corridors that people moved through.

While Campus Martius was chosen as the site for the week long observation, these reactions to built signals apply all over the city. The edges, open spaces, built objects, and sensory (sounds) signals are universal through the city. The signals may take different forms, be more brutal and concrete, colorful and programmed, or objects placed for the purpose of placemaking.

ON PLACE:

IN OPTICS: Dynamic unfolding of the city. The scenery revealing itself as HERE and EMERGING

IN POSITION: The body as it moves through the built environment. Above/Below_Fast/Slow_Desnse/Open

IN COMPANY: The position of our bodies with norms of BEHAVIOR of others in place

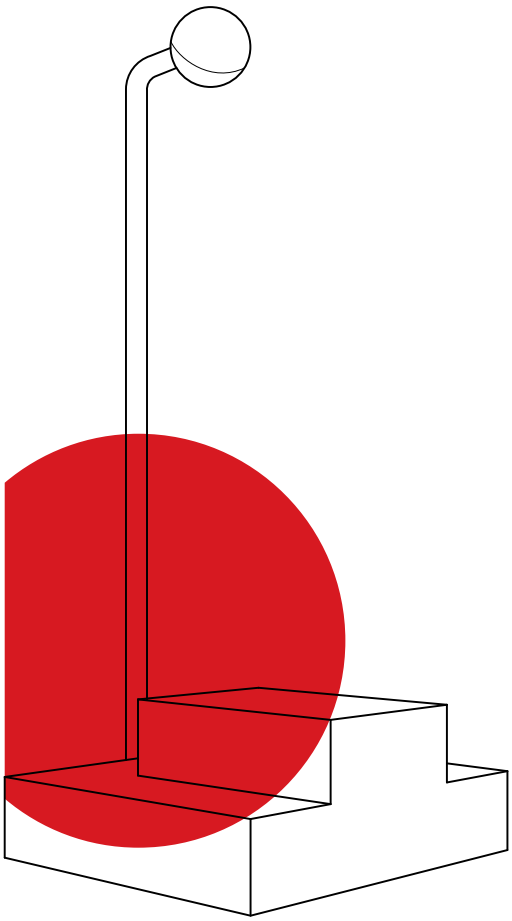
IN SENSES: Through our senses we interpret what the environment expects from our actions

Adult performing through sound

Following the Campus Martius study and taking considerable about of time deriving through the city like a Letterist Internationalist, it became clear that we interact with our built environment through four different means. Optically the city unfolds in front of us, it is dynamic as we move, edges, scales, materials, and people are presented and the scene changes as we continue. Positionally, the built environment imparts an experience, being on above something is a very different feeling than being below, being next to a tall skyscraper feels very different than a fire hydrant and laying in grass is quite different than laying on the sidewalk. Through the company of others we again are enforced upon what normative behavior means. Running through crowded sidewalks elicits a different response than walking amongst the crowd, or singing in a crowded elevator. Finally, we interpret what is happening around us through our senses, not only sight but also the smell of flowers or the smell of a sewer, the sound of birds or the sound of a garbage truck backing up. Optics, Position, Company, and Senses all signal our place in the built environment and imply normal behavior for those spaces.

4

SIGNALING BEHAVIOR



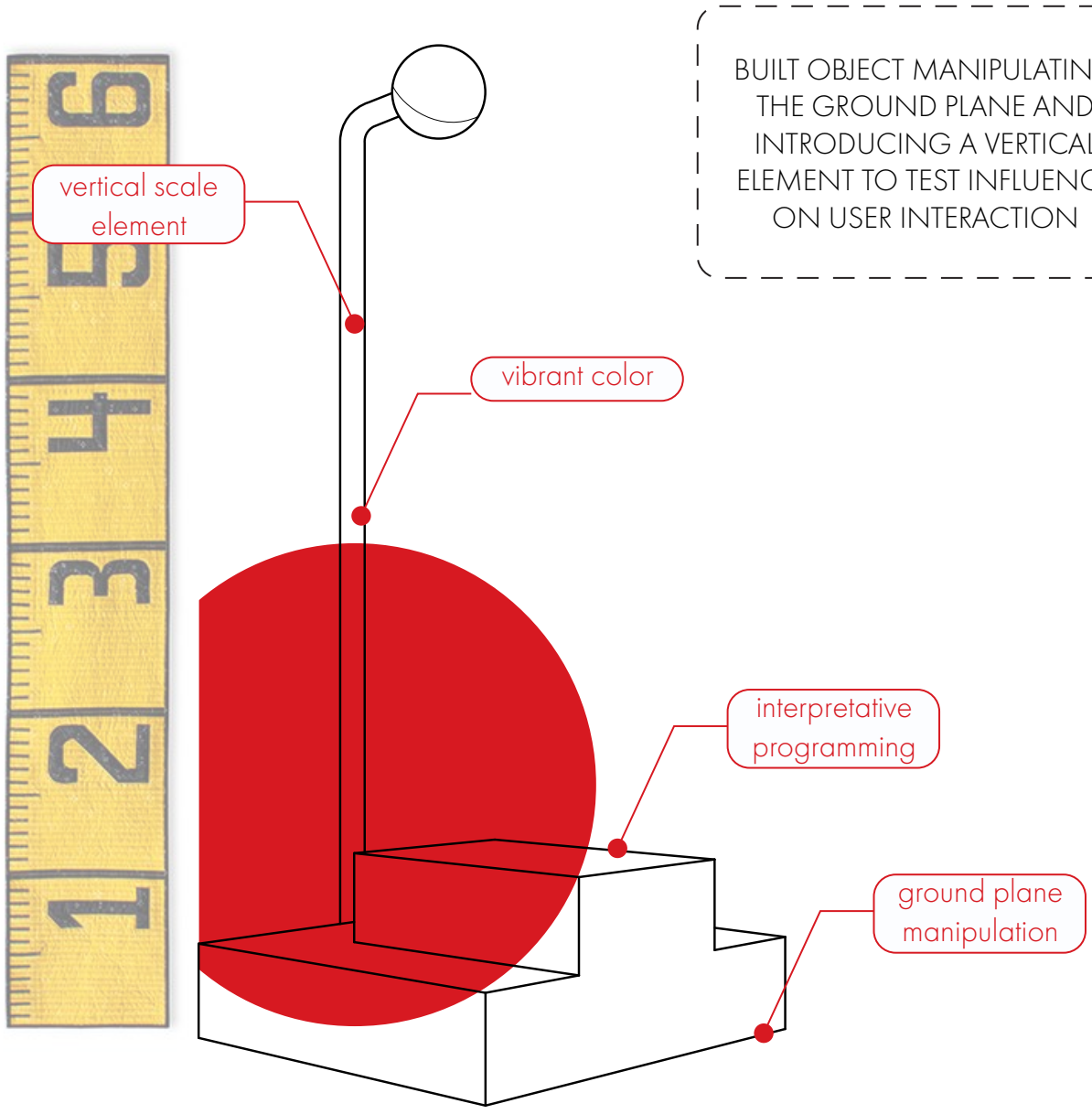
Child playing with placed built object

Praxis is the idea behind the series of built objects testing the dialogue between the built environment and play signals. This is where the philosophical underpinnings of play meet the on-the-ground testing of objects. In this chapter a series of three built objects, possibly called, interventions were designed, placed, observed, and reported to challenge what is normal behavior is space.

Each one of these installations creates a method to not only alter the existing built space and performances happening in them but also create a framework to look at critical issues happening in Detroit and in cities all over. To a certain level each installation attempts to widen that gray area of what is normal behavior, create new interactions and engagements, and frame the issue of privatization of public space in the city of Detroit.

Play signals are universal, if these installations can create a dialogue with existing critical issues in Detroit while altering behavioral performance, than they can be applied at a greater scale, throughout the city and throughout many cities.

GROUNDWORK


BUILT OBJECT MANIPULATING THE GROUND PLANE AND INTRODUCING A VERTICAL ELEMENT TO TEST INFLUENCE ON USER INTERACTION
vertical scale element
vibrant color
interpretative programming
ground plane manipulation

The first intervention was called Groundwork. This installation manipulated the ground plane through a platform of two steps up and two steps down. A vertical element was added with a brightly colored sphere on the end. The object was intentionally left up for interpretive programming to see how it would be utilized in the spaces.

Groundwork was placed in two different settings to compare its affects on the behaviors and performances of each.

Existing Park Conditions

HANSEN PLAYGROUND

SITE: The first site that Groundwork was placed in was a public park surrounded by residential streets. The installation was purposefully placed near an existing play structure in the site as to test how performative behavior would be affected by an object that blends into it's environment.

EXISTING BEHAVIORS: Before the installation was set up, the park displayed a high vocal presence, energetic outbursts to go along with the actions of the park. Movement in the space was quick, erratic with many changes in directions and unpredictability. It was clear that those users playing in the space were making up rules for the use of the objects through their vocal outbursts, these rules were dynamic and as the users burst from one objects through to the next the goals and rules of play evolved. Attention in the space was very short, the users were actively using the space as a group taking advantage of all the different built objects and thus attention would meander similar to the rules.

Vertigo, Chance, Competition, and Simulation were all displayed through the activities at the park in some way.

NEW BEHAVIORS

After placing the object in the park next to the play structures, behaviors were not changed at all. The users of the park used Groundwork in the same manner that they had been using the existing playscape. Vocal presence remained high and directed at the new object. Movement was high in intensity as users were running, jumping, and hitting the object.

It is a fair assumption to make that the play signals of Groundwork melded with the existing signals of the park. Without this contrast behavior was not altered all the same performances were still present.

Vertigo, Chance, Competition, and Simulation were all still displayed through the activities around groundwork just as they had been prior to the installation.

Existing Corridor Conditions

SIDEWALK

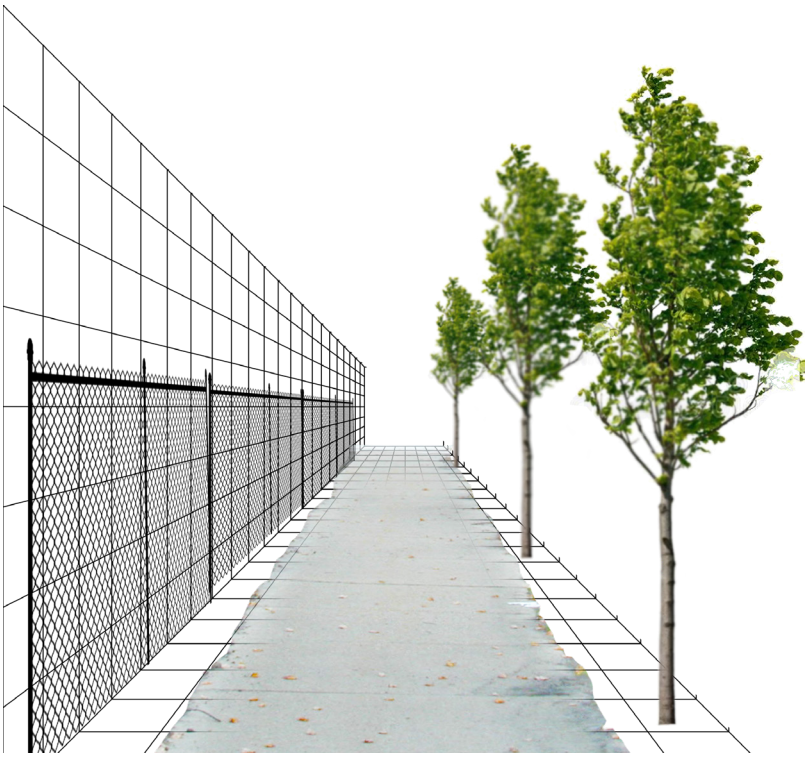
SITE: The second site that Groundwork was placed in was a sidewalk. The sidewalk is used simply as a corridor to get from here to there. It is sandwiched between the street, and a fence demarcating private property.

EXISTING BEHAVIORS: Before the installation was set up, the sidewalk displayed a very low vocal presence couples talking to themselves or individuals quietly moving through the space. Movement was very directed, linear, and at a constant speed, it was a utilitarian kind of movement to fulfill a transportation need. Rules on the sidewalk were less overt and more implied, personal distance etc. but most of all the fence represented rules for how to behave around other peoples private property. Users of the sidewalk had very directed attention however it was not on the environment itself, many people look at their phones while they were waking or stare at the ground in thought.

Vertigo, Chance, Competition, and Simulation were entirely not present on the sidewalk prior to Groundwork being implemented.

Groundwork placed on-site in the corridor

Fig 4.0



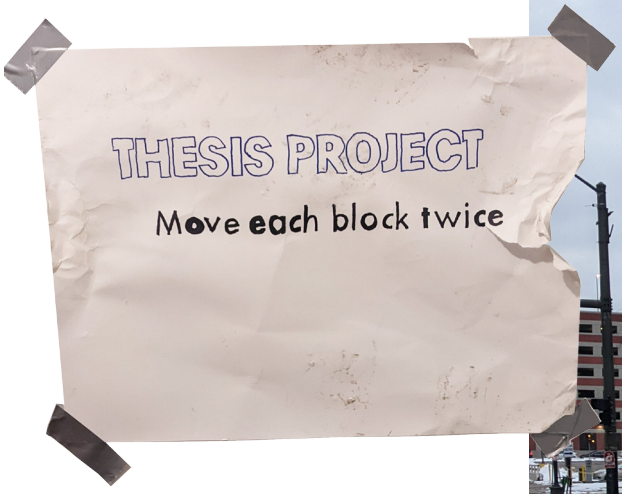
Corridor Conditions

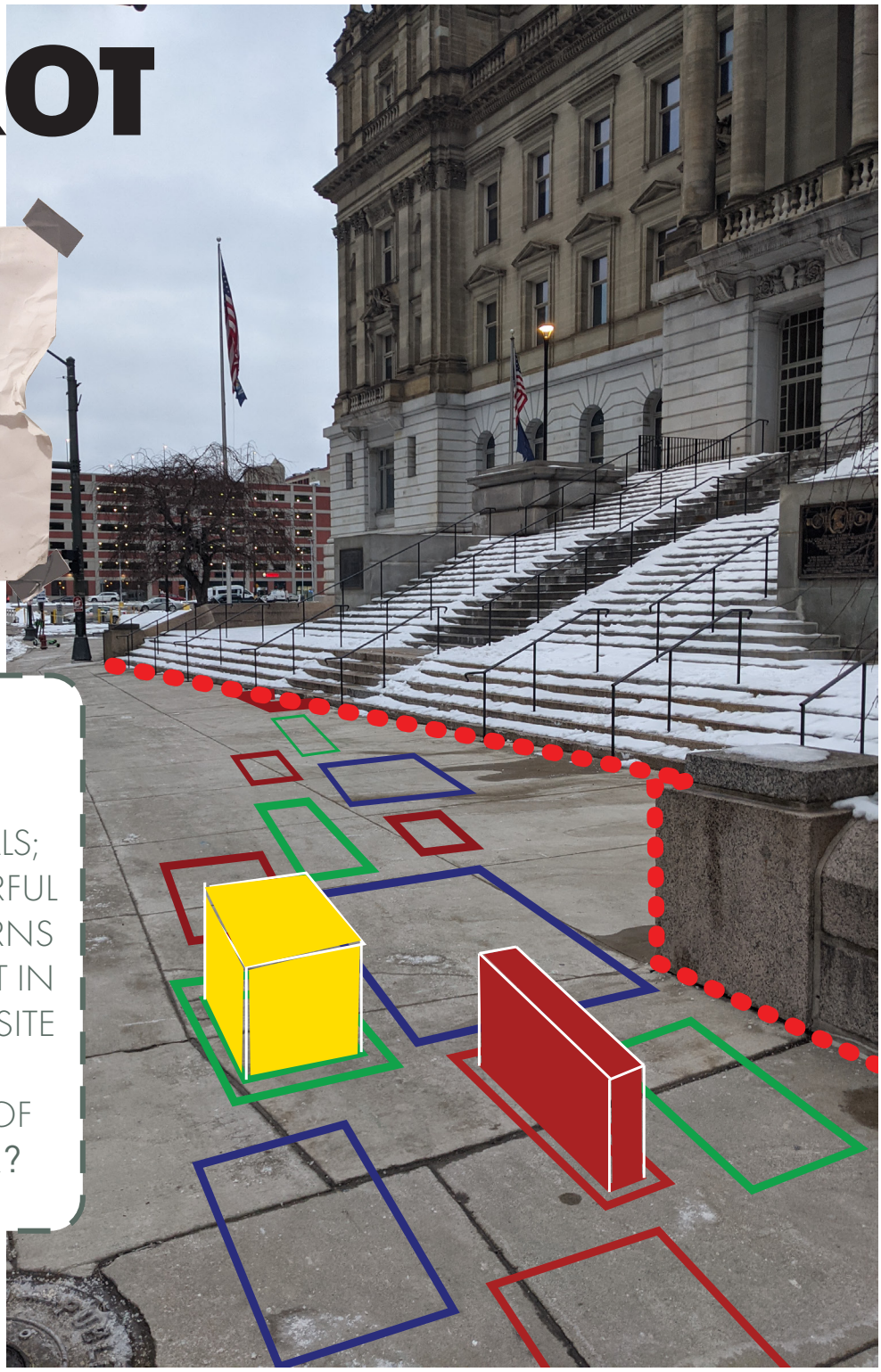
The sidewalk represented a built contrast to Groundwork, unlike the playground the signals of Groundwork stood out as a diametrically opposed to the residential corridor. New behaviors were introduced along the sidewalk that were not previously present. Users were stopping, staring, pointing, stepping, and touching. Additionally, the normally accepted behaviors that went along with the fence line were challenged, users were touching the fence, leaning over it, and using it as a handrail when walking up the steps.

Groundwork stood in stark contrast with the existing signals of the sidewalk. This contrast created a sense of questioning and wonder. Whether users climbed the platform or stopped and wondered about it, new behaviors and performances were introduced through this built object that had not been previously present.

Of the four play categories vertigo was the most prevalently seen when users would climb the platform and reach for the ball. Additionally, simulation was present when children would climb the platform and present themselves in a new position in the sidewalk not previously experienced.

BOX TROT





INTENTION:

IMPLEMENT PLAY SIGNALS; SIDEWALK CHALK, COLORFUL SHAPES, GROUND PATTERNS TO SEE IF THERE IS A SHIFT IN BEHAVIOR ON A PRIVATE SITE

DOES THE HARD EDGE OF PRIVATE BEGIN TO BLUR?

The site of Boxtrot was chosen as the Old Wayne County building in Detroit

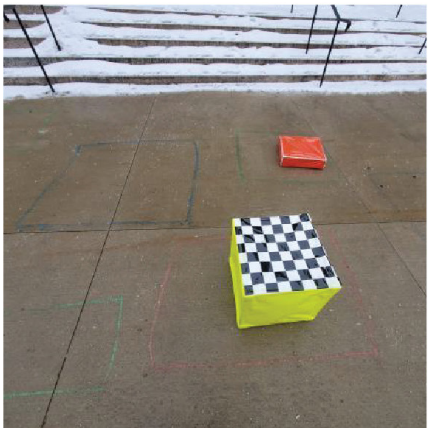
The second installation took the idea from Groundwork and selected a site that represents a public and private divide. The Old Wayne County building was previously the hub of civic activity in Detroit. The building has since been sold to a group of out of state investors and with this private ownership comes new signals such as private security, grounds crew, and surveillance.

The design for Boxtrot was to push on this boundary between the public sidewalk and the private stairs of the building. Using play signals of brightly colored sidewalk chalk to indicate space and boxes of different size the directive was simple; “move each box twice”. Through these guidelines and observation it was questioned if people would begin to push the private boundary and move the boxes into private space.









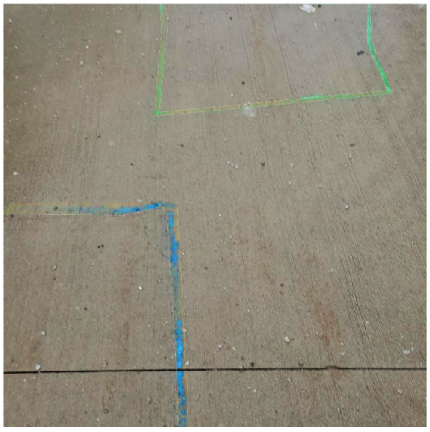
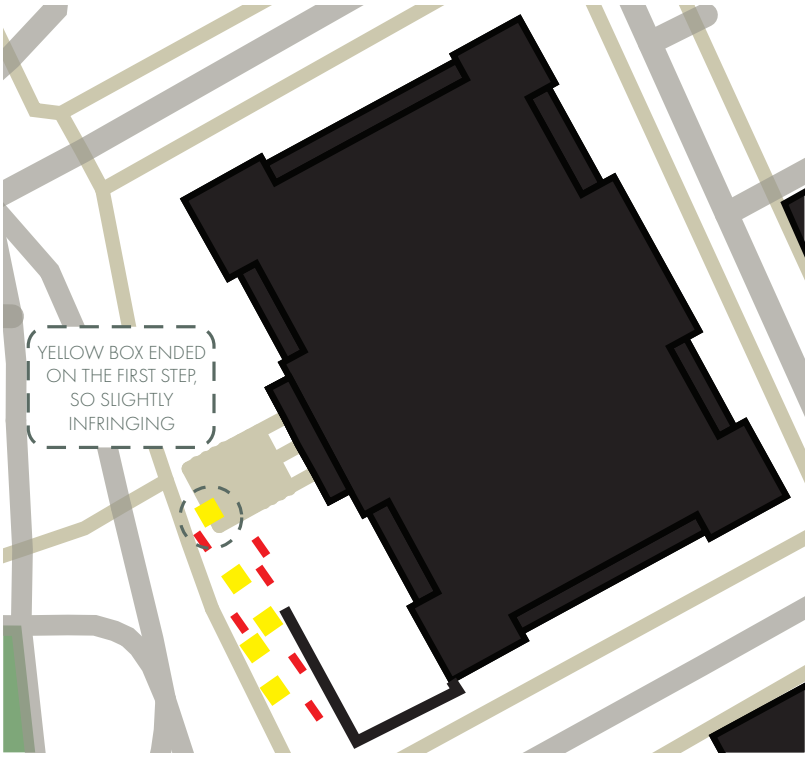


Fig 4.1



Map of Boxtrot Movement

While Boxtrot as a concept successfully worked, pedestrians moved the boxes, it did not quite have the affect that the method sought to test. Only the yellow box crossed the threshold, barely. It can even be questioned if those who participated were made aware of the public and private divide that they were mitigating.

While Boxtrot was not so successful in pushing the public and private boundaries, what it did do was get people to interact with play signals in a space where there previously were none. On this sidewalk people a performance, picking up the unknown objects and deciding where they felt best to place them. It was quite an odd performance one that many people watched in question of what those that were partaking were doing. While it cannot be said that Boxtrot had any implications on the issue of the site people private it did have implications showing that introduced objects and play signals can introduce new behaviors into areas where they are not.

TALK TUBES

INTENTION:

IMPLEMENT PLAY SIGNALS; TALK TUBES IN TWO LOCATIONS; OLD CITY HALL AND NEW CITY HALL, WITH WALKIE TALKIES INSIDE THEM

DOES THIS INCITE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HOW PUBLIC/PRIVATE IS UTILIZED?

OLD WAYNE COUNTY BUILDING

OLD CITY HALL, SOLD IN 2017 TO A NEW YORK INVESTMENT GROUP. HAS BEEN VACANT SINCE. ARCHITECTURE EVOKES FEELING OF AUTHORITY AND HISTORY.

COLEMAN A. YOUNG MUNICIPAL CENTER

HOUSE OF CITY OFFICES, AN IMPORTANT BUILDING TO THE CITIES CIVIC ENVIRONMENT.

Sites of both Talk Tubes

TALK TUBES: Multiple connected nodes attached through tubes underground that allow users to communicate with each other.

The third installation was placed at the same location as Boxtrot and one additional. Talk Tubes consisted of two PVC tubes with voice activated walkie talkies in them, so as to create open talking without button pressing. The Talk Tubes were bright yellow and mimicked the talk tubes that are ubiquitous at playgrounds. During this installation one talk tube was placed at the Old Wayne County Building and one at the new city hall, Coleman A Young Municipal Building.

The intention behind Talk Tubes were to get people utilizing the city in different ways talking to see what kind of dynamic conversations could come out of it. The Coleman A Young Municipal building is a very public building now where all the civic activity of the city happens while the Old Wayne County building stands vacant and private as an icon for civic pride. Talk Tubes was a way to introduce dialogue between these two environments.

Scan the QR Code to bring up the conversation between these two individuals

OLD WAYNE COUNTY BUILDING

COLEMAN A. YOUNG MUNICIPAL CENTER

Users of the Talk Tubes

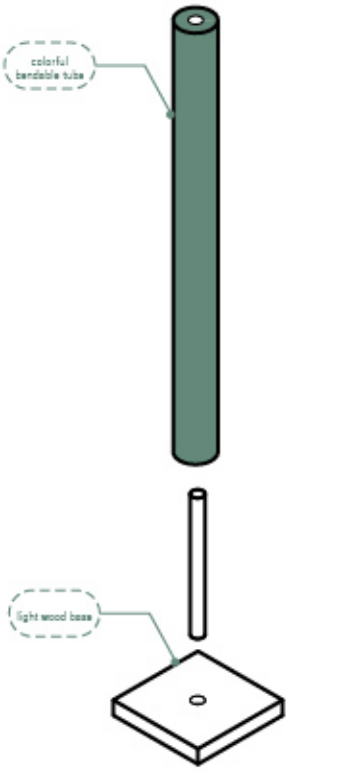
The Talk Tubes brought up a variety of intriguing, entertaining, and dull conversations. It was an experiences that the users found odd in some ways but also quite fun at the same time. I highlighted one conversation through the QR code on the left, in which the individuals had a positive conversation about space in the city of Detroit. About the importance of public, multiracial, space in the city. The individuals also talked about the importance of this kind of discourse that public space fosters. One big major point from this conversation was that the two were able to feel as though they could have an open conversation with each other because the face-to-face aspect had been taken out of the equation. Talk Tubes eliminated that feeling of confrontational when discussing critical topics with another person.

The Talk Tube method was very successful in opening up dialogue between various people and users of the city, it brought up an array of topics and interactions. The Talk Tubes are a method that can and will be employed further in more places throughout the city and can even be replicated in other cities.

The three interventions used play signals as a way to communicate with the built environment. They did not push or question the boundary of privatization in Detroit however they were successful in introducing new behaviors and performances in areas of the city where normal behavior was quite evident.

5 FINAL INSTALLATION

MEADOWLANDS



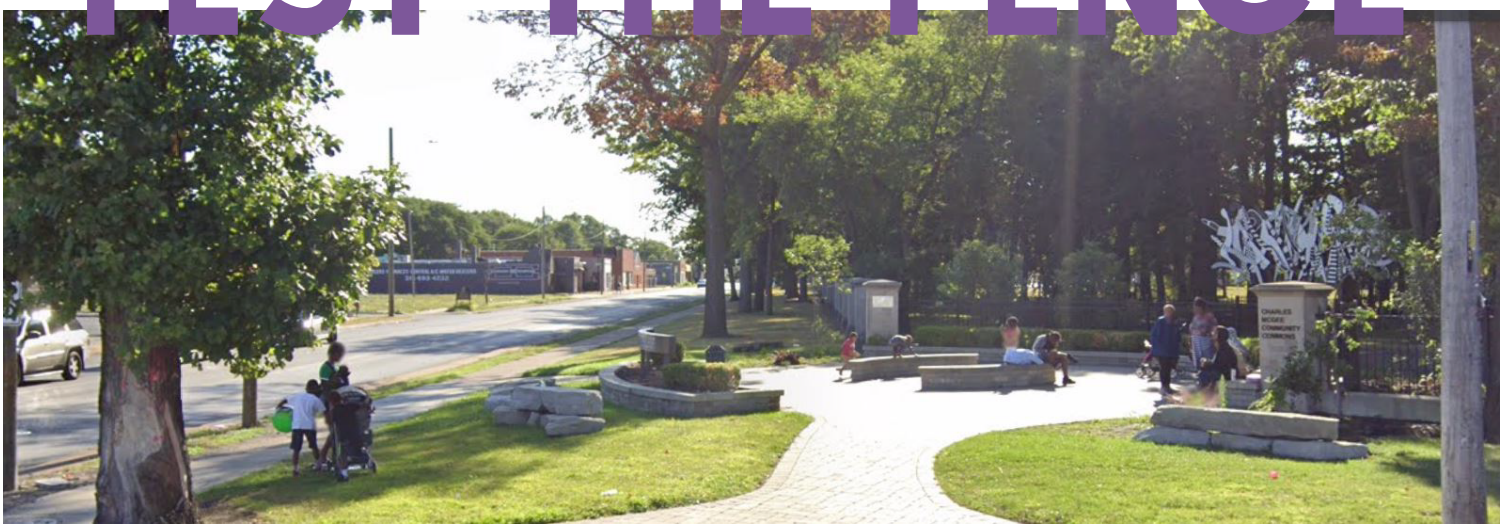
Axon

The final installation, Meadowlands, was placed at the corner of Mcnichols and Wyoming, this is a very busy intersection and it had been observed over quite a long time that children had congregated and played there when their day programs got out. With no play equipment or landscapes. This corner is a very busy corner, with a lot of vehicular traffic and noise it is no place for a child to play.

Just beyond this little section pulled off the intersection is the fenced in campus of the P-20 Marygrove High School. The grounds of the campus offered large trees and open spaces for play. While the children were stuck on the outside of the fence there was a large open environment that was much safer and open to play.

Meadowlands utilized a dense grouping of varying vertical foam tubes to extend the tree'd area beyond. The tubes were flexible, light, and open to be used however those desired. Tubes were placed on and along the fence as well to bring the users up close to the fence.

TEST THE FENCE



WHAT DOES A FENCE DO:

divide, mark, keep out, keep in, restrict, limit, control, deter, protect, block, enclose, confine, establish, in, out,

QUESTION:

If it is a necessary boundary, Can the fence serve as more than just a boundary?

INTENTION:

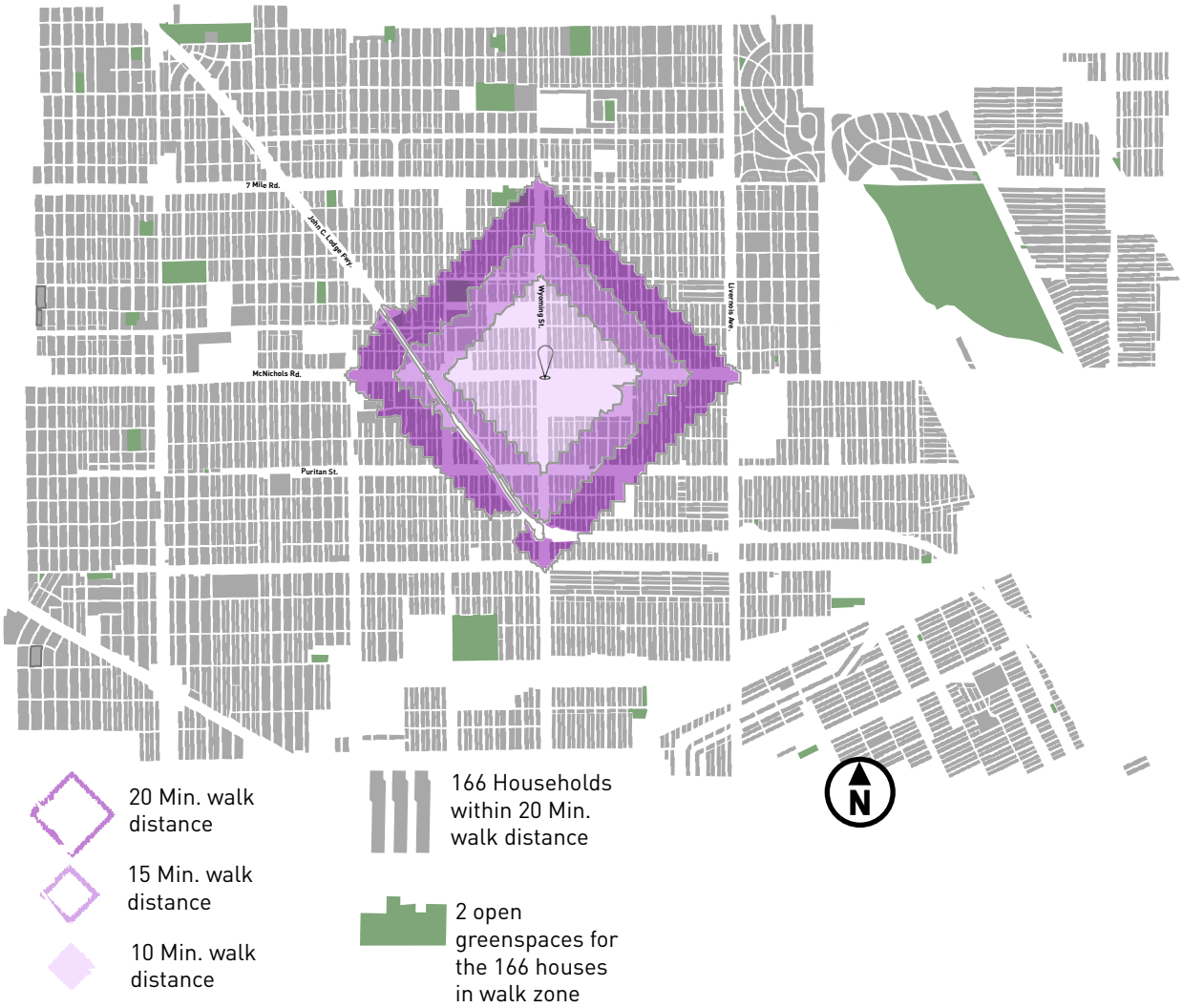
Push on the boundary of the Fence using Play signals to communicate with existing signals/language

SITE CONTEXT:

Scan the QR Code to see and listen to the corner context

Large open Wooded area beyond fence

OPEN SPACE ANALYSIS:



In order to find out why children congregated around this part of the intersection, a green space analysis was conducted. What was found that within a 20 minute walk distance from the site there were only 2 open green spaces. This is in contrast to 166 households. Clearly showing that this area suffered from a lack of open play spaces.

CHILD CARE FACILITIES:

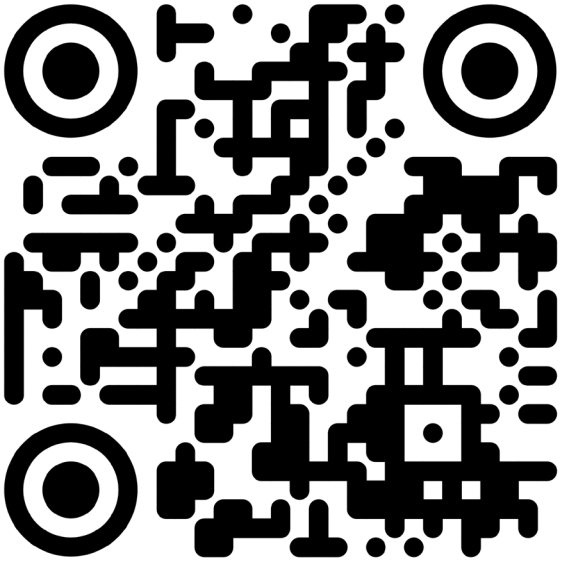
Additionally a map was produced showing the amount of child care facilities around the site. Within 5 minutes walking distance of the site there are 4 child care facilities and 10 minutes out there is one more. Not pictured on this map is a homeless women's shelter adjacent to the site in which women and young children stay.

What these maps show is that this is a highly residential area, with many resources for residents and children. Given this density however there is a sore lack of open space for the children to play. Thus after day time programs the children find it most fitting to play at this intersection corner.

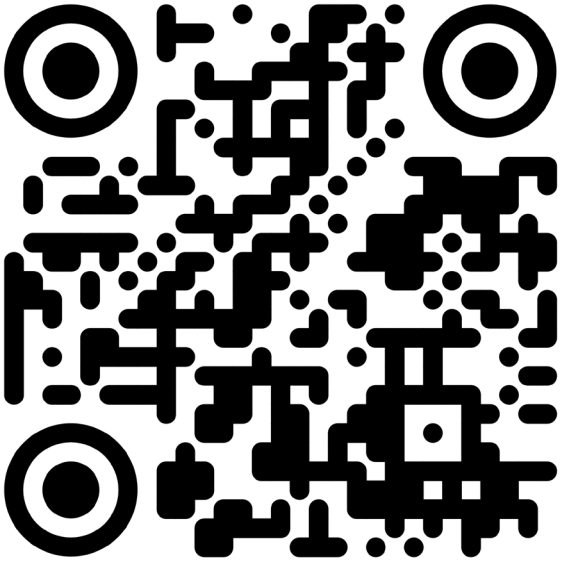
MEADOWLANDS

Fig 5.1

RULES OF PLAY



Rules #1
Scan the QR code to see initial play



Rules #1
Scan the QR code to see the evolution of play

A pillar of play are the dynamic evolving rules as the play evolves. Through the videos above you can see how the children went from a certain weaving through the poles, to tagging and chasing each other, to openly moving, collecting, and stacking the poles to create a new environment. As the play evolved the energy level and intensity grew, poles that were on the fence were pulled off and bent over the fence.

All of these actions are the performance of play, it happened in a brief time in a particular place and was finished.

Through the installation and observation, Meadowlands became less about testing the fence as a boundary or barrier and more about activating the space and creating new performances and play signals where they had not existed previously. The idea of the fence keeping out of limiting the children took a backdrop to a new environment that had not previously been there. The focus of the children shifted to the new objects and the objects were used as a play signal to enter into unreality, creating dynamic rules and testing what the objects could do.

Meadowlands set out to test the fence, whether it was a necessary boundary and if so could it act as something more. However, what came from the installation opened new doors to questioning public space and the privatization of public space.

As Lefebvre theorized, capitalism is a mechanism to colonize and segment life. Meadowlands opened the door to new questions about the allocation of resources, specifically in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Meadowlands showed that at it's root it was not necessarily about the fence, there are deeper socio-political forces at work that make these children have to walk 20 minutes to find an open green space.

Play signals work as a strong language with existing built features, however as the city continues to evolve and we continue to be residents, neighbors, and observers these signals can be used in even stronger ways to question the socio-economic forces that shape our city.

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FIGURES