POSSIBLE SPACE

by

EILEIGH DOINEAU

(Under the Direction of Marianne Cramer)

ABSTRACT

Public space is becoming more exclusive as increased privatization and surveillance inform the shape and content of the urban landscape. The shift towards securing the city results in vapid, empty plazas and 'festive' commercial spaces focused on safety, entertainment, and consumerism, discouraging the presence of marginal populations or groups who wish to use these spaces for other purposes. Nonetheless, protestors, the homeless, various subcultures, and people calling themselves guerrilla gardeners are discovering ways to reclaim public space. This thesis looks in particular at how citizens have transformed vacant spaces, such as abandoned warehouses and vacant lots, into vibrant and evolving public spaces. Utilizing a theoretical framework derived from game design principles and characteristics gleaned from a study of vacant lot appropriation, the thesis proposes how a landscape architect might design a system that enables the public to design their own public spaces.

INDEX WORDS: public space, democratic space, deep play, game design theory, transgressive architecture, public dissent

POSSIBLE SPACE: USING GAME DESIGN TO RECLAIM OUR PUBLIC SPACES

by

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DEDICATION

To my family.

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CHAPTER 1

DEEP PLAY

Prologue:

In a remote Balinese village in 1958, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz stood among a shifting throng of observers, "a superorganism (Geertz 1)" of hundreds of people focused intently on two blurred and clashing forms sparring in a dirt ring. The fighting cocks, in their wild profusion of bright feathers and thrashing limbs, inspired Geertz, who later wrote of the experience, "it is only apparently cocks that are fighting there. Actually, it is men (Geertz 2)". He saw in Balinese cockfighting what he referred to as "deep play", a form of interaction that symbolically holds profound social and cultural meaning to the players. Cockfighting is not simply a game, but a ritual by which the Balinese enact deeply held beliefs about themselves, from their individual and family status to their cultural history, relationship to nature, and social organization, each of which is visualized in this bloody and violent spectacle. "Its function," remarks Geertz, "is interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience; a story they tell themselves about themselves" (10).

Embedded within all cities are innumerable cultural texts that each moment enforce our sense of identity; these personal and collective narratives shape one another, flowing through intangible and physical landscapes to ultimately tell ourselves about ourselves. Play enacts cultural concepts and searches for the freedom for possibility within constraints. Like the Balinese cockfights, games and landscapes are mediums of

storytelling, though they provide different levels of interaction and not always deep play. The thesis proposes that when placed in conversation, these two texts will enhance the communication of our stories and possibly place the malleable and unfolding stories into the hands of the people who live them. Just as the Balinese cockfight is an expression of their culture so is landscape a reflection of American identity: both are interactive objects that we shape in our own reflection, producing culture through that action. Thus, games and landscapes are expressions of identity as well as mediums of change.

Problem: The Designer's Heavy Hand

Landscape architects mold the urban landscape to the cadence of cities and people. Intrinsic to their craft is the dictation of user activity, which ultimately promotes particular behaviors over others in order to maintain the desired identity of a space. This nearly invisible control is communicated through design techniques that designate what, where, and when activities are to be done. Landscape architects do make an effort to create flexible public spaces but they tend toward the empty box method—large open spaces that can be used for festivals, outdoor movies, art exhibitions, etc. These are flexible for large-scale public events, but are not conducive to small-scale or individual personalization and modification. The dynamism found in spontaneous, user-designed spaces, such as community gardens, is difficult to achieve in a constructed landscape. Most public spaces are themselves static, offering few components which can be manipulated and recreated by the users and few choices beyond which patch of grass or bench to sit upon or which path to take. These types of public landscapes, ranging from natural areas to urban plazas, serve many significant functions and provide spaces in which people can come to reflect, to interact with others, or to learn. Each landscape

typology is accompanied by a set of acceptable activities that is held in place by many rules which serve to maintain stability in busy public spaces.

There are myriad ways that landscape architects discover and incorporate people's wants into their designs, including prolonged observation, charrettes, community meetings, surveys, and informal interviews, for example. Unfortunately, community inclusion is not always possible and even when it is the resulting landscape is still wrought with the ills of predetermination. An alternative to this predicament is in allowing the users to design their own space, which could be changed, modified, and personalized so that it is a more accurate reflection of their unique values and needs. Rather than designing the space directly, the landscape architect's role would be to create a system that could then set in motion the direct design by the users.

Discovering a method that could be employed by landscape architects to 'set up' a site for user-design is challenging. However, the combination of context, an interactive system, and a goal (on the part of the individual user) resembles the characteristics of a basic game. When viewed as a game, it becomes easier to see how a system that is designed for change, for human manipulation, might inspire creativity, innovation, and the desire for engaging interaction. The structure of games is intended to engender play; some can even be reinvented with new rules using the same components. It is the flexibility of game design that when applied to a landscape could potentially endow it with an evolutionary capability that generates numerous unforeseen versions of a single space.

Context: Dwindling Democratic Space

Despite a recent trend in the construction of public parks, greenways, and plazas, the expression of democratic freedom in public space has continued to diminish. Increased surveillance and privatization along with physical programs embedded in the design have contributed to the creation of exclusive landscapes focused on safety, entertainment, and consumerism. Downtown revitalization projects have created innumerable kitschy 'festive' marketplaces and pedestrian malls, which have helped to gentrify neighborhoods around the country. Many 'public' spaces, such as corporate plazas and sidewalks bordering housing developments, are privately owned. In all of these spaces what occurs there can be tightly controlled through the enforcement of rules. Other forms of control are more physical, such as the layout and design of a space, fences, and locked gates. All of these factors reveal to the public what is appropriate behavior, when to use the space, and what to do there. In so doing, it becomes apparent that the members of society who constitute the public rarely include everyone, particularly activists, the homeless, and other marginal populations. As Don Mitchell observes,

> the public sphere, modeled as it is on the palpable fear of the bourgeoisie, has become less a place of critique, debate, and struggle—a place where the cry and demand for the right to the city is heard over and over again—and more an arena for the attempted legitimation of a brutal political economy and landscape as a just political economy and landscape (191).

The structure of many current landscapes maintains and promotes new forms of segregation, hiding the failures of our social system. These actions undermine democracy because "public democracy requires public visibility, and public visibility requires material public spaces" (Mitchell 148). In light of diminishing democratic

public spaces, or spaces for all people in which interaction and activity is not controlled, it is imperative that landscape architects recognize their role in shaping the public sphere.

Perhaps equally as important, people's reactions to gentrification, privatization, and their diminishing claim to public spaces are varied and imaginative and stand tribute to the fundamental human need for self-expression. Community gardens are a common and well-known manifestation of this idea arising out of the availability of derelict private (or public as private) land and a need to create a space reflecting the identity of the community's inhabitants. Community gardens feature vegetable gardens, simple shelters, playgrounds, and art embodying a mélange of architectural styles, plant species, and uses which provide a backdrop for important social functions that unify a neighborhood. A fundamental characteristic that makes these landscapes unique is their ability to be modified by the users to accommodate changing needs and desires. All of the facets in the garden—its plants, flowers, decorations, furniture, and shelter—act as loose components that can be dismantled, torn out, relocated, and reassembled to fit new functions. New things can be brought in and old things recycled or taken away, so that the landscape is always evolving and its users responding to and affecting change reciprocally. Once established, oftentimes members of community gardens create a simple, straightforward set of rules to protect their new space, or sometimes rules are just an unspoken understanding forged out of mutual respect for their creation. These spaces inherently encourage ingenuity, innovation, and creativity in their users and become places of self-expression. The question this thesis seeks to answer is, "How can game design theory be used to create a spontaneous user-designed space?"

Purpose: Towards the Instigation of User Design

The thesis seeks in its own way to surmount the bounds of landscape architecture in America to make places *for* user innovation and change by studying spontaneously usurped and transformed spaces. It views traditional urban landscape design through the lens of game design theory and seeks to invent something altogether new. What makes game design theory useful to the thesis is how game designers construct experiences that are engaging and meaningful to individuals and to the larger social, cultural, and political contexts in which they exist. The impetus for applying game design theory to urban design grew out of seeing interactive landscapes as parallel worlds that exist both outside of and within a dominant world, but with very real bounds that once crossed, require that visitors accept the social contract and the rules of that world so that they might take part in it. A landscape is a game, replete with components, rules, and context that the user sets into motion by 'playing' or performing actions within that system. The space exists without people in it, but the presence and activity of people make that space part of the public realm and give it meaning, producing culture. In games and in landscapes people should be able to enact their lives, enforcing or transgressing social codes and contracts, playing out their various roles.

Game design shares similar traits to landscape design, which is why it serves as an appropriate theoretical framework by which to create an interactive landscape. More importantly, the study of games is a study of the complex interactions between people and their environment or system; based on the understanding of this interplay, game design seeks to craft meaningful interactions. The iterative nature of game design is similar to that of adaptive management in the necessitous cycles of trial and error

followed by evaluation and modification. With games, "iterative design is a cyclic process that alternates between prototyping, playtesting, evaluation, and refinement" (Salen and Zimmerman 11). In the landscape put forward by the thesis, this process will be carried out by the users as people come and go, construct and destroy, rearrange for a variety of events, and respond to environmental change or chaotic events.

Because the thesis cannot truly create user-designed space within its constraints, it culminates in a real-world *simulation* of a landscape that encourages and enables constant modification, the results of which can be viewed as embodying the dynamism of the population endeavoring to use it.

Research Methodology: Games and Forgotten Spaces

A study of game design theory will draw out aspects of game design that relate to landscape design to set up a framework for interpreting three case studies. The case studies embody an array of urban landscape typologies that have all been appropriated by people and transformed into vibrant expressions of personal and community identity. The case studies are a pivotal part of the methodology as they are the real-world models that in their vernacular honesty reveal the language of innovation, imagination, and ingenuity spoken by the people who dreamed them into being. Out of these real-world examples of successful user-designed spaces can be found 12 common characteristics that have been derived from the game design framework in the theory chapter. The presence of most of these 12 characteristics gives rise to a meaningful space that is reflective of its users; thus they become the criteria on which the creation of a real-world game is based. The thesis applies its findings in the form of a game, the Box Game,

which passively allows people's responses to a set of rules and components in an existing public space.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 offers a truncated history of urban public spaces that disclose their crucial role in a democratic society, as well as to call attention to their dramatic transformation in previous decades. The chapter sets up the current situation of landscape architecture, from the state of urban public space today to projects and designers who are toying with similar concepts of user needs, user modification, and social commentary, and the unusual ways in which people are responding to the crisis of diminishing democratic public space. Chapter 3 explores game design theory, as it is applicable to landscape design, setting up a practical framework for looking at and understanding spontaneous urban landscapes as games. Chapter 4 looks in depth at three case studies utilizing the game design theory's framework to deconstruct the various characteristics, components, and contexts that have lead to the meaningful transformation of these forgotten spaces. Chapter 4 discerns 14 characteristics shared by each of the case study sites and games for use as criteria in the creation of the real-world game in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5 the thesis sets up the Box Game, which simulates how a designer might apply some of the characteristics to a real site to encourage spontaneous user modification, and then analyzes the success and failures of the simulation. Finally Chapter 6 sets up further exploration based on the findings of the thesis in hopes that perhaps the ideas presented here might spark interest for others and furnish a foundation for their own discoveries.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC SPACE AND PUBLIC DISSENT

Strangers in our own land, strangers in our city…--Manuel de Sola-Morales

The Role of Public Space in Democracy

Public space has taken many forms over the course of human civilization. It has historically served as a forum for cultural, political, and social exchange between the members of a city. Since the Greek agora, or open space for gathering and market (Wikipedia.org), people have come to public spaces to debate matters of government and culture, to exchange goods, services, and ideas, for representation, and to assert their rights as citizens. Associated with pre-industrial agrarian England is the pastoralist concept of 'the commons', or citizens' sharing ownership of resources (Kohn 9)". To maintain this common resource and ensure that everyone gets an equitable share, everyone must agree that no individual may profit by the resource through its misuse. Critical social discourse has frequently proffered the commons as an alternative to "big government and corporate control" (Kohn 9), and should include "tangible assets such as public forests and minerals, intangible wealth such as copyrights and patents, critical infrastructure such as the Internet and government research and cultural resources such as the broadcast airwaves and public spaces" (qtd. in Kohn 9), and "(public) streets, parks, and beaches; Einstein's theory of relativity; and creative works that are in the public domain" (Kohn 9). Clearly what constitutes the property of the public is controversial;

however, it is important to recognize the significance of public space on multiple levels to grasp the pivotal role it has played throughout history.

Despite its 'heart of democracy' reputation, public space has always been exclusive. Mitchell points out that

> the public spaces of the past were anything but inclusive, except insofar as concerted social protest and conflict *opened* them up for new groups of people and new kinds of politics. That is, then as now, public spaces were only "public" to the degree that they were *taken* and made public. Definitions of public space and "the public" are not universal and enduring; they are produced through constant struggle in the past and in the present….But that said, the places where the struggle may open up—that is, the opportunities for *taking* space—are steadily diminishing as new forms of surveillance and control are implemented (even though many cities are in fact increasing their stock of open spaces and parklands). (143)

For centuries, marginal groups, the isolated, or oppressed, have 'claimed' public space to force recognition of their presence in society; in America women, immigrants, and African Americans have sought the right to citizenship, equality, and freedom. Protestors have claimed public space to bring to national attention their objection to war, discrimination, and many other ethical issues. "To win the right to representation, as part of the political public, excluded groups have taken the streets, plazas, and parks and transformed them into spaces for representation" (Mitchell 52). Just as importantly, public spaces have also born witness to celebrations of culture or political change, and to holidays and festivals that celebrate heritage such as historical, cultural, or religious events. Public space provides a zone in which interaction between different groups both produces and reinforces culture.

> Public places such as parks and plazas and social spaces such as community centers can encourage a certain kind of civic conversation. Sometimes this dialogue takes place quite literally, for example, when a street preacher or petitioner engages the interest of someone passing by.

> But this conversation does not necessarily take place with words. Often the dialogue is the internal kind that is motivated by viewing and reflecting upon a range of people and activities. Public space can incite democratic effects when it positions both subject and object together in a shared and contestable world. (Kohn 15)

The friction that occurs when different populations—each with their particular ideas, visions, rituals, clothes, and food—collide causes new ideas to emerge and spread. Reiterating Mitchell's earlier reflection, this cultural and social production happens in unmediated interactive spaces, which have begun to disappear over the last several decades.

Mitchell writes of public spaces that although they provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, "democratic ideology rests on the assumption that only orderly, rational discourse can produce the sort of 'free trade in ideas' (*Abrams v. United States* 1919, 630) that makes truth and informed public opinion possible"; orderliness is understood in America and upheld by the Court to be maintained when "both the spaces and the discourse are devoid of force" (Mitchell 52). Thus, the taking of public space by force is considered to be a violation of this understanding and yet has very often been the only means by which excluded populations have been able to penetrate and utilize democratic spaces (Mitchell 52).

Mitchell refers to forceful behavior as "violence" because "common usage usually conflates the sense of violence as doing harm with violence as 'unruly behavior'" (52). Quoting Raymond Williams, Mitchell writes that

> 'It is with the assumption of 'unruly,' Williams (1983, 239) suggests, 'and not, despite the transfer of the word, of physical force, that loud and vehement (or even strong and persistent) verbal criticism has been described as violent'" (Mitchell 52).

Herein lies the source of negativity and apprehension surrounding marginal populations, such as protestors and the homeless, whose presence in public spaces incites fear of unruliness and unpredictability and shows the "unpleasant consequences of our social system" and the "sufferings of others" (Kohn 14). "Despite the arguments of those who seek to protect the status quo in the name of an orderly and limited democracy, violence can promote justice or the expansion of rights. This is why the masses went to Hyde Park in the first place, and it is why they must continue to go again and again" (Mitchell 53).

American Protest: The Wobblies to Today

The history of American dissent in public space was greatly shaped by the actions of the Wobblies, or the Industrial Workers of the World, who in the early 1900s began using public spaces to recruit laborers to join their union. A social movement and union aimed at protecting the interests and rights of workers, the IWW found that many of their potential recruits could only be reached via the streets because of high job turnover rates (fig. 2.1, 2.2). "Street speaking made it possible to turn a small group of malcontents into a social movement by unifying workers" (Kohn 27). The Wobblies, or IWW, thus adopted the tradition of soapbox street proselytizing and their success caused local city governments to pass ordinances limiting the rights to speech and public assembly. This resulted in a long period of "'free speech' battles" between the Wobblies and the cities in which these ordinances were enacted (Mitchell 56). The Industrial Worker decried the cities' actions saying, "If only those holding diplomas from some accredited institution of learning are to be allowed to speak we shall have a very quiet time…for…about the only institution in which the majority of us take a post-graduate degree is the school of hard knocks" (qtd. in Kohn 28).

Figure 2.1. IWW protest

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Workers_of_the_World

Following the clashes between social organizations and the state, public discord acquired an exceptionally negative reputation in government so that most important leaders of dissent were incarcerated or deported during World War I and several court cases forced the Court to make legal clarifications about public speech. "The fear of conspiracy, violence, and subversion that guided the Court decisions in 1919 reinforced a long-standing American distrust of *collective* rights, even as it heightened protections for individual rights" (Mitchell 58). These court cases sparked a long line of repressive rulings intended to control people's behavior in public spaces resulting in increased protections for free speech but with special emphasis on restricting content and intent of what is actually said. The Court

> began to outline a theory of dissent in democracy that hinged upon a distinction between the right of an *individual* to speak (and perhaps even to gain an audience) and the possibility that her or his words might actually have an affect—that they might, through persuasion, lead to conspiracy. Like picketing, persuasive speech was understood to be a forceful, even violent, act. Mere speech, however, so long as it did not

> possess “bad tendencies,” was safe. Public discourse between individuals, each rationally expressing ideas, was democratic speech. Mass speech aimed at persuading an audience was illegitimate (at least if that speech was in dissent). (Mitchell 61)

Many rulings on free speech have shaped public discord in America, a number of which are directly applicable to the subject of the thesis, however, no more will be addressed here. The relevance of these early cases of public dissidence reveals the origin of and initial feelings of the state toward the debate over how public space in America is used and by whom, which sets the stage for understanding the role of public space in social and cultural production.

Figure 2.2. Street speaking Wobblies San Diego, California, 1912

Source: http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/89spring/eating.htm

Forty years after the Wobblies’ exploits, civil rights activists seized public spaces throughout the southern states and Washington, D.C., marching through streets to capital

buildings and other significant locations for galvanizing speeches. The leaders of the movement recognized the power and symbolism of persistent humans en masse, particularly as a tactic of nonviolent protest. Enduring brutal treatment by the police and opponents of desegregation, African Americans' (fig. 2.3) presence in public spaces and their staunch determination to gain equal access to it as citizens made their plight visible to millions of Americans, if not directly, then through the media. Similarly, Vietnam War protest in the 1960's, many student-lead, erupted from New York to San Francisco with participants numbering in the thousands. Rallies and marches claimed city streets, parks, university campuses, and the national mall. These are just two examples of massive movements that physically employed public space as a message board for ideas.

Figure 2.3. Civil Rights protest, Birmingham, Alabama
Source: (http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civilrights/cr-exhibit.html)

The Erosion of Public Space

The possibility of public space as a site for expression of ideas and identity is eroding in America, not just through legal limitations, but through the design and

management of public space itself. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, public space's role as a site belonging to the public, a shared space in the midst of a privately owned city, is diminishing as more and more urban land is becoming privatized. In the wake of decades of fighting for social change by "women, African Americans, gays, and the propertyless" (Mitchell 137), as well as the installation of fear of terrorism in the American public following September 11, public spaces are falling prey to the ambitions of "dominant social and economic interests" (Mitchell 138). A revisioning of public space by "corporate and state planners" has resulted in "environments that are based on a desire for security more than interaction, for entertainment more than (perhaps divisive) politics" (Mitchell 138). "The universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space" (Davis 155). To ensure safety, people have employed "the architecture of fear, a landscape of gated communities and fortress-like malls policed by private security forces" (Kohn 7), so that disparate groups do not have to encounter one another. In spite of the thousands of years that people have used public space for dissent and self-expression, there are increasingly fewer spaces in which these activities are possible.

A tightening of control is evident in recent court rulings and government agency regulations, including a 1998 decision over the United States Postal Service's ruling against citizen groups distributing flyers and collecting signatures on the sidewalks outside of their buildings (Kohn 5). Similar regulations have been passed in airports and even public plazas, such as Lincoln Center Plaza, which in 2001 denied the Hotel Workers Union the right to protest; the Court rules that "the plaza was not automatically a public forum because of its park designation and physical characteristics as a public

congregating area" (qtd. in Kohn 6). What is replacing traditional public spaces is large, empty urban plazas surrounding office buildings and what Mitchell calls "festive" commercial spaces, including "downtown or seaside festival marketplaces, gentrified historic districts, and even a certain kind of mall" (138), and results in "the American city being systematically turned inward. The 'public' spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity" (Davis 155). These highly constructed and stylized spaces (fig. 2.4) are focused on inspiring security and consumption and on deterring marginal populations from using the site, and results in a homogenized public (Mitchell 139).

> This homogenization has typically advanced by 'disneyfying' space and place—creating landscapes in which every interaction is carefully planned, right down to specifically planning the sorts of 'surprises' one is supposed to encounter in urban space. Market and design considerations thus displace the idiosyncratic and extemporaneous interactions of engaged people in the determination of the shape of urban space in the contemporary world. Representations of space come to dominate representational spaces. Designed and contrived diversity creates marketable landscapes, as opposed to unscripted social interaction, which creates places that may sometimes threaten exchange value. The "disneyfication" of space consequently implies the increasing alienation of people from the possibilities of unmediated social interaction and increasing control by powerful economic and social actors over the production and use of space. (Mitchell 139).

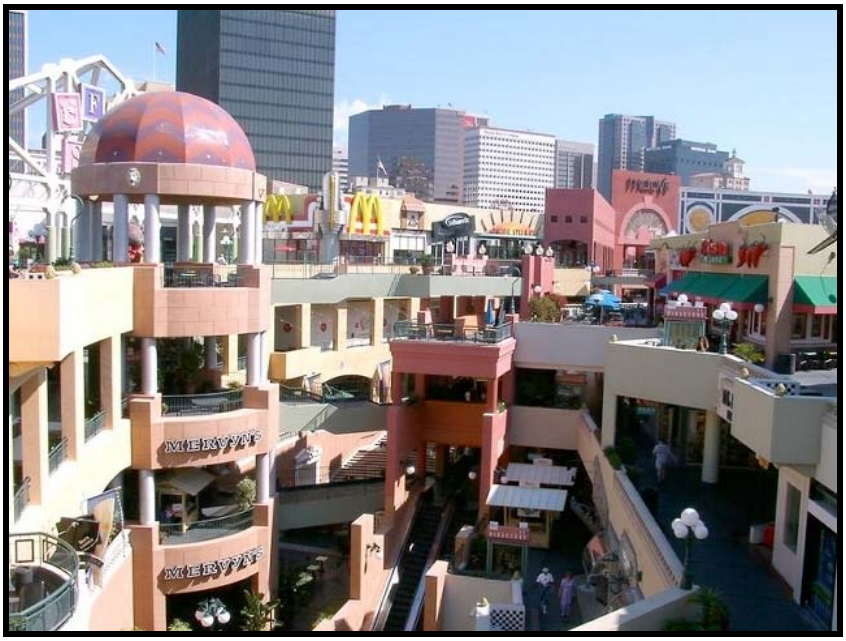

Figure 2.4. Horton Plaza, San Diego, California

Source: http://blog.killervirgo.com/2007/08/road-trip-2007-day-4-san-diego-cont.html

In light of these transformations of public space, of its diminishing ability to be used as public forums for cultural change, and increasing privatization of urban land, people are exercising their need for expression and exploration in different ways. If the city cannot or will not provide for the needs of the people, the people will find their own methods of satisfying them; if public space no longer fulfills its original function, then people find spaces outside of the controlled domain in which the freedom they seek exists. As Mitchell has observed,

> Conflict over rights can…be understood, at least in part, as a species of *locational conflict*. Rights have to be exercised *somewhere*, and sometimes that "where" has itself to be actively produced by taking, by wresting, some space and transforming both its meaning and its use—by *producing* a space in which rights can exist and be exercised. In a class-based society, locational conflict can be understood to be conflict over the legitimacy of various uses of space, and thus of various strategies by the workings of property or other "objective" social processes by which specific activities are assigned a location. (81)

This taking and transforming of space is an act of rebellion, of violence, that supercedes the imposed boundaries of society to create something new, the act of which enriches the heart of democracy; a place for the people by the people. The tug-of-war between security and the contesting of that security has always existed in the city (Mitchell 230). "The only way to transform, and even to overthrow, the *order*—and hence the interests encapsulated in that order—has been to defy that order, to break laws, to act without proper decorum" (Mitchell 230).

The built environment forms the context in which people carry out their daily lives and its structure influences the interactions of its inhabitants. Trendy urban pedestrian malls encourage shopping and deter loitering, grassy lawns or broad steps downtown invite many to linger, and the absence or presence of pedestrian crossings or sidewalks influence people's decisions to walk or drive. Built form speaks a language of design that informs the public as to who is welcome and when and what they shall do there. It delineates which activities are acceptable and where they should occur.

> The design and regulation of the built environment can either reinforce or challenge existing patterns of inclusion or exclusion. By structuring people's perceptions, interactions, and dispositions, spatial practices and architectural markers can mitigate or intensify ingrained social dynamics. (Kohn 7)

More and more of this language is geared toward controlling what goes on in public spaces, specifically, limiting activities that are unpredictable with unforeseeable outcomes. Obviously, this is a deterrent against marginal populations including activists, marginal subcultures, and the homeless. However, such social control impacts the very

essence of democracy as it makes it difficult for different populations to freely interact, to exchange ideas, and to bear witness to one another. As Mitchell writes,

> no matter how hard various agents of the state—including the courts—work to make dissent safe for democracy, a vigorous democracy must ever be one in which dissent exceeds the bounds placed on it, one in which people do not just go again to Hyde Park but rather actively *take* Hyde Park and make it into something altogether new. (77)

What relevance has all of this to landscape architecture? As designers of public spaces, landscape architects, along with planners and government officials, have played a heavy hand in controlling activities in public spaces. The design language is a powerful weapon in enforcing dominant ideas about safety and appropriate behavior, by telling people who is included in the public for which the space was designed, as well as how and when that space should be used. The art of inclusion is as well mastered as that of exclusion and it is practiced in every urban design project. The increase in "open spaces" such as greenways and parks leads one to believe that public space is not diminishing. These landscapes play an important role recreationally and ecologically, but "restrictions on behavior and activities are taken for granted; prominent signs designate appropriate uses and outline rules governing where one may walk, ride, or gather. These are highly regulated spaces" (Mitchell 143).

As we have seen, so much control has decreased and deterred the possibility of expression, modification, and creativity in public spaces, excluding entire groups of users, from activists and artists to even some immigrant populations, enforcing social differences. Harking back to the Industrial Worker's criticism of court rulings on free speech 70 years ago,

> …if Spokane can prescribe certain limits where it is a criminal offense for the poor to discuss those questions, which vitally concern every citizen of

> a republic, other city councils could do the same; the limit could be extended until the only place where those holding different views on economics and politics from the governing class would be allowed to exercise the right of free speech would be where there was no possibility of obtaining an audience. (qtd. in Kohn 28)

If spaces can be increasingly designed to leave out certain populations from exploiting them, the ideas held by those excluded groups will have no opportunity of exposure to the masses. Instead, they have turned to spaces that have been forgotten and overlooked: abandoned warehouses, vacant lots, derelict train storage structures, old landfills. These particular spaces have provided unusual canvases for spontaneous acts of innovation, self-expression, modification, and experimentation, and form the subject of the third chapter of this thesis.

Engendering Democracy: Current Examples

Landscape architects and other allied professionals are not all out to sterilize public space; many projects, old and new seek to create spaces conducive to personalization and creativity by their users. Walter Hood, an Oakland, California based landscape architect and UC Berkeley professor is known for his designs that blend a site's history with the community culture in which it is embedded. Through interviews, observation, and historical study, Hood's attention to the many facets that comprise a community results in inclusive landscapes. Lafayette Square Park (fig. 2.5) in Oakland embodies this methodology: in a rundown historic park in downtown Oakland, Hood recognized the marginal populations who used the site, as well as the other community members. Not only did he design to include spaces for all types of users, he even implemented the project in stages over many years so as not to displace the homeless. Hood's ability to relinquish control in designs, to leave them "messy" and somewhat ill

defined, enables users to act more meaningfully with the space. Describing Hood's design for his celebrated Splash Pad Park (fig. 2.6), an old traffic island also in Berkeley, "It's a lot of moves, creating a multitude of distinct places in a relatively small space. But the design is also open-ended, even a bit confusing and messy. No one would mistake it for minimalism--and no one would say people's behavior here is minimized" ("The Peace Maker," par. 16), writes Andrew Blum for Metropolis Magazine. Hood's talent for recognizing the subtle patterns that define the character of a community imbues his public spaces with profound possibility for meaningful interaction, allowing them to assume lives of their own.

Figure 2.5. Lafayette Square Park, Oakland, California
Source: http://www.wjhooddesign.com/lafayette.html

Figure 2.6. Splash Pad Park, Oakland, California
Source: http://www.wjhooddesign.com/splashpad.html

Gil Doron, an artist and writer, founded Transgressive Architecture, a group he describes as studying the "socio-political and architectural boundaries of the public space in London", specifically the "ongoing sanitization of London's public spaces, and the exclusion of the 'Urban Nomads' (a temporal community)" ("Transgressive Architecture," par. 2). The group collaborates on projects ranging from interventions, writing, and exhibitions, to teaching as methods for critiquing and changing this design direction. Doron proposes that designers learn from these "urban voids" to understand how to create more inclusive spaces.

Slow design is a developing movement that centers on slowing down the process of design to enhance sustainability and has application to many disciplines, from food

production and preparation (the slow food movement) to architecture, landscape architecture, industrial design, etc. Slow design purports considering human behavior, culture, and environmental processes into the design process and taking the time to do extensive research and testing to produce better quality products and experiences. There are several groups and forums dedicated to advancing slow design and creating a critical discourse by that name, including SLOW and slowLab.

Maria Montessori, the controversial Italian expatriate and children's education reform advocate, developed the Montessori Method which emphasizes self-directed learning and the belief that if given freedom, children will naturally absorb the cultural world. Montessori concepts of learning and development forge a relationship between the ideas expounded in the thesis and thus merit recognition, particularly as it continues to be a popular alternative to traditional schooling.

There are many other people working hard to probe current issues of public space ranging from anonymous coalitions of artists, architects, and urban planners who specialize in interventions, to landscape architecture firms such as Van Valkenburgh and West 8 whose designs strive to be modifiable, flexible in use, as well as provocative in subverting notions of what landscapes can be. Bernard Tschumi applied deconstructionist concepts to his design for Parc de la Villette with the goal of stimulating social friction and inviting user appropriation of his follies. However, Tschumi produced a highly designed landscape that never experienced user appropriation or caused social friction. Because it is owned by the city of Paris, the park is heavily policed, and this has contributed to its failures. The city has also imposed uses on the follies in spite of the designer's original intention for them to remain arbitrary

(http://www.archidose.org/Feb99/020199.htm), further diminishing the potential of the design to be transgressive. Despite Tschumi's similar goals, Parc de la Villette is very much the type of landscape this thesis opposes.

The writings of social theorists, critics, and designers such as Randolph Hester, Manuel de Sola-Morales, Lawrence Halprin, and Bernard Rudofsky have all touched on various types of subversions of structure, meaning, and process in design. Specifically, Lawrence Halprin's RSVP Cycles emphasizes process in landscape design, viewing the complex and often invisible interrelationships between people and the environment as "scores" (43). He defines scores as "*symbolizations of processes* which extend over time" (43). Trying to forge a framework for his ideas, Halprin identified four procedures—Resources, Scores, Valuaction, and Performance—which he felt comprised the cyclical creative process and formed the basis for his work.

Tribute must be payed to William H. Whyte's famous studies of public spaces. Particularly relevant to the thesis is his concept of triangulation or "process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to each other as though they were not" (94). Picketers, street performers, and public art are all examples of external stimuli that cause triangulation, bringing people together who might not otherwise interact. This is a powerful occurrence to which public space can give rise and something that the thesis seeks to engender. As well, triangulation has a democratizing effect as it brings promotes interaction between disparate people.

Real-world studio projects done by university students bring social issues to the surface and provide opportunities for interaction and change within the designers themselves, the profession, and in the community. Collaborating with the Transgressive

Architecture group on one such project, students designed “border crossings”, variations of ladders, such as climbable billboards and detachable steps, over fences in the city which could also double as temporary shelter; the resulting work was presented in an exhibition. The project revealed “the limits of what students can do outside the university walls; the degradation of the freedom of expression from the 70’s to nowadays; the boundaries of what is considered to be architectural methodologies and practices; and the difficulties in setting a socio-political architectural agenda especially one that goes against the dominant elements of our society and the architectural profession (local authorities, land owners, etc)” (http://www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/). Other studio projects have developed designs for marginal populations, specifically prostitutes, homeless people, and immigrant squatters, groups that are traditionally ignored by planning and design.

Finally, Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted’s democratic oeuvre and longstanding site of democratic activities, remains a stronghold for activists. A recent court case revealed the discriminatory decision-making of the New York City Parks Department toward civil rights and anti-war groups wishing to use the Park’s Great Lawn for political rallies during the Republican National Convention in 2004 (http://www.justiceonline.org). The organizations who were denied permits chose to “continue the litigation in order to block the effort of Mayor Bloomberg and wealthy private and corporate backers to privatize Central Park, including the Great Lawn, and make it off limits to mass political assembly, while at the same time allowing corporate-sponsored, politically approved events” (http://www.justiceonline.org). The ensuing three-year lawsuit concluded with the Court deciding in favor of the organizations:

> The Partnership for Civil Justice has announced today the filing in Court of a landmark settlement agreement with the City of New York that strikes down key provisions of controversial and unconstitutional regulations aimed at restricting access to the Great Lawn of Central Park. The City must now establish a constitutionally valid permitting scheme for protests in Central Park and must undertake a feasibility study into the optimum and sustainable use of the Great Lawn and what efforts can be undertaken to maximize the availability of the lawn for large events including rallies and demonstrations. (http://www.justiceonline.org)

The Court's ruling is an encouraging gesture of protection toward the First Ammendment, enabling Central Park to remain a place for everyone. Many other people concerned with the privatization of public space and the consequential diminishment of freedom of expression were inadvertently excluded from this chapter.

Figure 2.7. Central Park protest

Source: Marianne Cramer

Conclusion

The story of democratic space does not end here, but is perpetually unfurling as it is written in the invisible patterns of everyday life and replayed before us in our larger cultural rites. Like cockfights for the Balinese, American rituals tell us the stories, the mythologies, we have been writing: of winning big and then losing it all, of heroes and

foes, of triumph over adversity and oppression, of American supremacy and greatness, of failure and disillusionment, of hometown pride carried on the broad back of a football star. Perhaps not so unlike this:

> What the cockfight says it says in a vocabulary of sentiment—the thrill of risk, the despair of loss, the pleasure of triumph. Yet what it says is not merely that risk is exciting, loss depressing, or triumph gratifying, banal tautologies of affect, but that it is of these emotions, thus exampled, that society is built and individuals put together. Attending cockfights and participating in them is, for the Balinese, a kind of sentimental education. What he learns there is what his culture's ethos and his private sensibility (or, anyway, certain aspects of them) look like when spelled out externally in a collective text; that the two are near enough alike to be articulated in the symbolics of a single such text. (Geertz 10)

The deep play in games is parallel to the symbols anchored in landscapes: of relationships of power and people etched deeply into the cities' urban spaces. If we could see the deep play, the profound meanings inherent to our interactions within these spaces, if we were invited to play in public spaces, to express ourselves, to tell our stories, what would we say? What would we see about ourselves? In spite of the diminishing freedom of public spaces, there are people who have been testing, playing with, the boundaries of public space, seeking the freedom between the constraints of walls, gates, and privatization. These urban explorers have reinterpreted a system that no longer builds for them and have instead appropriated, re-imagined, and reinvented forgotten spaces into their own democratic landscapes, manipulating, modifying, and transforming to shape them in their own image, to forge their own meanings.

CHAPTER 3

GAMES AND LANDSCAPES: A THEORETICAL OVERLAY

Designing Experience

What relevance does game design have to landscape architecture? The most obvious connection is that they are both in the business of designing experiences. Designers of landscapes and games create spaces of interactivity between context, components, and people. Specifically, game designers design "*game play*, conceiving and designing rules and structures resulting in an experience for players" (Salen and Zimmerman 1). The experience of a landscape or game, however, transcends its physical attributes as it interacts with people and the surrounding culture and environment to become a thing of meaning. This deep play recalls the Balinese cockfight in that the game, or the ritual, is imbued with the values, beliefs, and traditions of the players, so that it becomes a cultural text. As storytelling mediums, the common threads between landscapes and games become visible. Many parallels can be drawn between the techniques used by landscape architects and those employed by game designers, which will be outlined later in the thesis. With so many similarities, designing a space based on game design theory is useful because game design is geared toward creating spaces of interaction, in which the freedom of choice is an essential building block in making games meaningful. Landscapes are places of interaction, but the freedom of choice is limited by rules and by choices—which bench, path, or grassy patch—and thus, for the

most part, do not provide many opportunities for meaningful interaction. It must be pointed out, however, that despite all of their likenesses, landscapes are not games in the truest sense because there is no eventual outcome of winning or losing.

Like landscapes, games can be seen through a variety of lenses in order to understand how they work on a multitude of levels. In their book Rules of Play Salen and Zimmerman have organized these many lenses into three *primary schemas*: Rules, Play, and Culture (5):

- **Rules** represent the organization of the designed system
- **Play** is the human experience of that system
- **Culture** is the larger contexts engaged with and inhabited by the system (6)

These schemas provide a framework for interpreting all types of design. When applied to landscape architecture, **Rules** can be seen as both a written list of permitted actions or the physically designed space comprised of various parts (materials, textures, and structures) which act as a set of rules, explicit or intuited, telling the user how and when to use the space. The design language works to communicate appropriate behavior and instructions of operation. **Play**, just as with games, is how users interact with their environment, whether sitting and reading, tossing a Frisbee, walking the dog, or shopping. **Culture** is how the space engages with the larger social, environmental, and political systems around it. As Salen and Zimmerman point out, however, each of these schemas is comprised of many smaller schemas, which work together to create meaningful experiences for players. Capitalizing on Salen and Zimmerman's three primary schemas, the rest of this chapter will attempt to uncover how games create meaningful experiences and how this translates into the design of landscapes.

Rules

There are three subsets of rules with which designers contend: Operational Rules, Constitutive Rules, and Implicit Rules, all of which, Salen and Zimmerman assert, contribute to how a game is understood to be played (130). Operational rules are those explicitly dictated to the player, the "rules of play" written in an instructional booklet or printed on the welcome sign at a city park. They are rules that must be followed so that the game can be played. Constitutive rules are the possible logical actions within the system, "logical relationships that are not necessarily embodied in a material form or in a set of behavioral guidelines for the player" (Salen and Zimmerman 132). In a landscape this could be how a person will use a bench or a stretch of lawn; there is nothing denoting how those features should be used, but sitting, lying, or standing on them are several possible responses. Implicit rules are the "unwritten rules" (Salen and Zimmerman 130) of social/cultural behaviors that enable game playing, like "etiquette" and "good sportsmanship" (Salen and Zimmerman 130). The implied rules of a park would indicate to a user that he should not steal another user's ball or eat the contents of a picnic to which he was not invited. These examples may seem simple, but show how each landscape or game is replete with multiple levels of rules that operate collaboratively to communicate to the user or player how to engage play. In landscape architecture, designers rely on these three rules to control the use of their spaces. Design strategies, such as the structure and orientation of benches, shelters, stairs, the layout of the space, and the presence or absence of vegetative cover, fences, gates, and lighting, all communicate various types of rules that determine user behavior and interaction.

Meaningful interactions in games arise out of the qualities of complexity and emergence. Well-designed rules are the framework out of which, within those limitations, complex interactions become possible as different constituents respond to one another and to the greater system. In complex systems "the internal relationships between elements of the system become intricately compounded and extraordinarily complex" (Salen and Zimmerman 152). In a complex system, numerous and unexpected outcomes become possible.

> A modest number of rules applied again and again to a limited collection of objects leads to variety, novelty, and surprise. One can describe all the rules, but not necessarily all the products of the rules—not the set of all whole numbers, not every sentence in a language, not all the organisms which may arise from evolution. (Campbell 108)

Complexity begets emergence, which can be understood as the variety of unpredictable results that arise from complex interactions. Emergent systems are caused by "a special disconnect between the rules of the system and the ways those rules play out" (Salen and Zimmerman 160). An emergent system is best understood as a bottom-up process of change and adaptation, in which disparate parts act as a whole, recognizing and responding to emergent patterns (Johnson 52). An important aspect of emergent systems is that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts…the limited set of the rules of grammar cannot account for all of the possible statements that might be made in a language" (Salen and Zimmerman 170). When looking at spontaneous landscapes as emergent systems, one can begin to see patterns materialize out of the miasma of a seemingly disorderly landscape. With community-reclaimed vacant land, for example, one can see patterns of use, reflected in materials, plants, activities, structures, and in spatial organization, but also patterns of meaning that transcend the simple parts that

comprise the space. Jane Jacobs, the famous urban critic, viewed cities as emergent systems, proffering the study of successful or 'working' city streets as a model for how to create new ones as an alternative to urban renewal (4).

Embedded within any natural, or spontaneous, system is an order incited by the interaction of its various components within a clearly defined set of rules. Rules play an integral role in the creation of an emergent system by operating as instigators of invention, innovation, and ingenuity, giving rise to surprising interpretations of a single space. As Johnson says in his book, Emergence, these systems "obey rules that we define in advance, but those rules only govern the micromotives. The macrobehavior is another matter" (57). By macrobehavior, Johnson is referring to the larger collective patterns of behavior that emerge.

Much of what is understood about emergence has come out of studying the organic development of natural systems, most famously the evolving decentralized intelligence of ants. Operating with no leader or "ant queen" in the hierarchical sense the title connotes, ants are self-organizing social coordinators whose enormous success is at least partly due to "swarm logic" (Johnson 74). The collective behavior of ants is contingent upon communication through a limited language of pheromones, etc. Early computer software designers attempting to create programs that could self-modify to cope with unforeseeable problems based them on the "bottom-up intelligence" of swarms and on the process of evolution itself (Johnson 54-58). Operating according to codes, or rules, both computer and natural systems produce "some kind of higher-level form or behavior...[such as] growing red hair or multiplying two numbers together (Johnson 58).

By imitating naturally occurring systems, computer programs are able to read and respond to patterns, evolving along with the people who use them.

The relevance of emergence and complexity to game design lies in the emergent system's capacity for adaptation and change, which contributes to the creation of meaningful play. "The infinite possibility that arises out of an emergent system is a key design strategy to encourage repeat play. A successfully emergent game system will encourage repeat play. A successfully emergent game system will continue to offer new experiences, as players explore the permutations of the system's behavior" (Salen and Zimmerman 165). If games are emergent systems, then the game designer is in fact only designing the rules by which the game will operate and cannot ultimately control how the players will act or how the rules will pan out in the long run. Indeed, the game designer is only setting in motion a self-designing system. Just as in landscape architecture, game designers create a space filled with some components and a limited set of restrictions, yet they cannot foresee all of the possible uses that the system will produce. The rules that designers create provide an essential structural framework.

Salen and Zimmerman, under the primary schema Rules, frame games as systems of information, dissecting how information circulates during a game, how it makes decisions meaningful, and which qualities render the game a communication system. Information as they define it here refers to the "mathematical, structural way of looking at signals that disregards the knowledge-content or meaning of a message" (201). It is about how much freedom exists to make choices within the context of the game; the greater the information, the more possibility for choice making there is. This is because information, in this context, "is the measure of uncertainty" (193), so that the level of

uncertainty is directly related to the amount of information communicated. Players of games, like users of landscapes, communicate with one another verbally, visually, and through the game or landscape itself. The amount of uncertainty within the message is the amount of freedom that exists to make choices and the more freedom exists, the more meaningful the decision becomes to the game. Salen and Zimmerman describe this potential for choice making in terms of a simple game of guessing:

> If one player is trying to win a simple game by correctly guessing whether a penny is heads-up or tails-down, there are two possible messages the penny can generate (*heads* and *tails*). However, if both players know that it is a two-headed coin, the amount of uncertainty drops to zero. Suddenly there is no game to be played, just as there is no information to be generated by the coin. (194)

Thus, providing for information-rich decision-making is a key component in creating meaningful experiences for players (Salen and Zimmerman 192-194).

An important attribute of information communication, specifically affecting uncertainty within the relayed information, is what Salen and Zimmerman refer to as *noise*. Noise is the amount of distortion within the message and can assume the form of weather or wear, for example, in the landscape. A child wishing to climb a jungle gym that is slick with rain and rusty is faced with more information in choosing his actions. In games this additional level of uncertainty embedded within a message transmission increases the freedom of interpretation and choice available to a player.

> Take the informal play activity of Telephone, in which people whisper a message around a circle. The point of the activity and the pleasure for the participants comes from the noise in the system. The original message receives noise as it passes from person to person, transforming the message a little bit each time. By the time the message reaches the last person, the noise has impacted the identity of the original signal. In most cases, the signal that emerges from the long chain of whisperers undergoes a

> radical transformation—and that is exactly the fun of the game. (Salen and Zimmerman 196)

Balancing noise is redundancy, which makes possible the ability to understand messages, even when they are distorted by noise. Redundancy contributes pliability to a system and prevents uncertainty from being so great that the message is lost. It becomes clear the important roles of noise, uncertainty, and redundancy embedded within games and how they affect the meaning as well as the pleasure of the game experience (Salen and Zimmerman 198).

Contrary to initial thought, rule breaking is an important part of games and design, as it can result in the creation of new meanings. There are several types of players whom Salen and Zimmerman categorize as the standard player, the dedicated player, the unsportsmanlike player, the cheat, and the spoil-sport (269). As one might imagine, the standard player plays the game as it is clearly presented through its rules, components, and goals while the dedicated player seeks to truly understand the game so that he can master it. The last three player types try, through their particular methodologies, to break the game, to find its weaknesses and the weaknesses of the other players so that they can win. Whichever type, when players break rules, they become the designer, modifying the game to fit their particular needs, whether it is for social or personal reasons. Rule breaking is not as simple as cheating. As cited in Rules of Play (2004), Bernard DeKoven writes:

> You're not changing the game for the sake of changing it. You're changing it for the sake of finding a game that works.
>
> Once this freedom is established, once we have established why we want to change a game and how we go about it, a remarkable thing happens to us: We become the authorities.

> No matter what game we create, no matter how well we are able to play it, it is our game, and we can change it when we need to. We don't need permission or approval from anyone outside our community. We play our games as we see fit. Which means that now we have at our disposal the means whereby we can always fit the game to the way we want to play.
>
> This is an incredible freedom, a freedom that does more than any game can, a freedom with which we nurture the play community. The search for the well-played game is what holds the community together. But the freedom to change the game is what gives the community its power. (281)

From a conceptual standpoint, rule breaking is a form of adaptive management. Game design follows an iterative process, which can be seen as paralleling the process of adaptive management in the compulsory cycles of trial and error followed by evaluation and modification. With games, "iterative design is a cyclic process that alternates between prototyping, playtesting, evaluation, and refinement" (Salen and Zimmerman 11). Whether the iterative process occurs during the initial design or later, as seen in the passage above, an important part of what makes games meaningful is their ability to be changed to better accommodate people's needs. Though designed landscapes do not get the opportunity for trial and error prior to their opening to the public, the nature of the process is the same. Game designers will play their game many times, inviting new people to try it out, modifying it until the game is good enough to be released to consumers. With landscapes, this process unfolds as the public uses the space, and will never cease because there are countless unforeseeable events, human-caused and natural, which will challenge the existing management plan. Rule breaking is more like an adaptive management plan, changing and growing to fit the players. In this way games and landscapes become an expression of the people who bring them to life, becoming examples of the democratic process.

Play

Play is the game in motion. Salen and Zimmerman define play as "free movement within a more rigid structure" (304). This definition appears vague, but reveals how play is the exploration of possibility within a fixed system. Play both engages and opposes the set structure around it and occurs all around us in everyday things and events, as Brian Sutton-Smith points out here:

> If we examine how the word "play" is used and concentrate on its so-called transferred meanings we find talk of the play of light, the play of the waves, the play of the components in a bearing case, the inner play of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words…This accords with the original meaning of the word "spiel" as "dance," which is still found in many word forms. (qtd. in *Salen and Zimmerman* 306)

One can see in all of these instances of play the interaction between various moving elements. Sutton-Smith's likening play to dance emphasizes the spatial exploration between boundaries, the freedom for manipulation and reinvention within constraints. Play becomes transformative when it transcends its boundaries to become something indicative of higher meaning, challenging and contributing to the greater system around it.

> Imagine light reflecting from your wristwatch to make a bright spot on the wall: we say that the light is *playing* on the wall. From within the structures of the physics of light, perception, and architecture emerges the unusual circumstance of a floating speck of light on the wall. The light playfully calls attention to itself, changing the relationship between your wristwatch and the architectural space. Your instinct is to play with the light, even for just a moment, to experience this new set of relationships between the movements of your body and the surface of the wall. The play of light, and your play with the play of light, is only made possible by the ordinary sets of experiential relationships that this instance of play transforms. (Salen and Zimmerman 306)

Transformation in this passage may be in the way one perceives architecture, the light, the potential of objects in general to go beyond expectation, and so on. As play pushes against a set of rules, discovery leads to invention and inspires new meanings. Transformative play enables a game to be continually re-envisioned and reinvented. In a landscape, transformative play would render it a constantly evolving system in which its various elements would provide opportunity for reinterpretation through modification and innovation. Creating potential for play is significant in both the design of landscapes and games.

The experience of game playing is sensorial, emotional, physical, social, and cerebral, a collection of abstract and varying responses. The way the body responds to the texture and movement of playing pieces or controls, the other players, the way a game looks or moves, or in the case of video games, the sounds associated with different actions all define the experience of playing. A landscape is experienced in the same way: through sounds, smells, visuals, and other animals and people. Each of these attributes connects the user to the place through play, promoting interactivity, which in turn creates meaning. Salen and Zimmerman point out that the game designer "only *indirectly* designs the player's experience by *directly* designing the rules" (316). The rules provide the boundaries, or formal structure, of the game that through play becomes an experience (Salen and Zimmerman 316).

A vital feature of games is the creation of a primary activity, which through extensive repetition over the course of a game reveals behavioral patterns. Salen and Zimmerman call this feature a *core mechanic*, emphasizing it as the "essential nugget of game activity, the mechanism through which players make meaningful choices and arrive

at a meaningful play experience" (317). In tic-tac-toe the players draw an 'X' or an 'O' in a cell of a grid again and again until someone wins. In tag, the core mechanic is running and chasing. All games have a core mechanic which can be one action or a complex series of actions and its significance lies in how the player participates in the game, or how they interact with it through a succession of inputs and outputs. Thus the core mechanic defines how the player engages with the system and is what enables them to make choices that affect the game and determine the outcome.

Another important aspect of play is that people agree to the rules simply for the sake of playing. No one enforces the rules, but people adhere to them because they make the play of the game possible. This is an important truth because playing the game does not fulfill any practical, real-world needs, so the designer must entice people to play and to want to keep playing (Salen and Zimmerman 333). A landscape, such as a pocket park, pulls people in visually and aurally: the sight and sound of water in a fountain, lush vegetation waving over a wall or spread before them as a sunny lawn, or perhaps seeing and hearing the absence or presence of others. On the flip side, the user seeks out the space for what it offers: a favorite tree, a ritual activity, or simply on the recommendation of others. A game may attract players when they see it advertised or when they read the rules of play. In a game players keep playing because of how it engages them as they focus intensely on a goal, the feeling of control over his situation and activities, and the way that the experience of time falls away, for example. When the player steps into the realm of a game, the game begins. The goal and rules are clear, yet the journey within is ripe with uncertainty. While inside the game realm, the real world outside, with all of its own rules, is suspended.

> A game player begins his or her journey through the space of possibility at the same place every time: the start of the game. But the experiential path that a player takes through the space will vary each time the game is played. Every play of the game will be unique, even though the rules of the game, its formal structure, remain fixed (Salen and Zimmerman 340).

In a landscape, the goal may be less clear and not always the same. Perhaps one just wants to get away, to socialize with others, or to go for a run. In a community garden, the goals may be more specific such as to care for plants, to spray paint a wall, or to attend a community event. Here games and landscapes differ, though in each, the user enters with intent of taking part in and completing an activity.

In game design, it is extremely important to balance the challenge of the game so that the play of it does not inspire anxiety or boredom in the player, that they will not understand the messages in the game, that it will be too difficult to play, or that it will be too easy. In the design of a public landscape, this balance lies in creating a space that is inclusive enough that it can be used by many types of people for a variety of activities, while simultaneously providing a modicum of security by limiting the potential for undesirable activities to occur. In both cases of design, part of establishing balance lies in having clear rules and signs/symbols. Salen and Zimmerman refer to instant feedback, which occurs when a player makes a choice and the outcome of that choice is both clearly discernable and integrated into the larger context of the game. They use the example of a player encountering a large red button in a video game, that when pressed, reveals a door. The player then learns the rule that big red buttons will always reveal a door when pressed (367). A game that creates patterns of meaning such as this that provides a challenge while maintaining clarity and continuity of meaning will keep the player engaged and wanting to play again.

Another significant aspect of meaningful play comes out of games as representations; specifically, they "can represent" and they "are representations" (Salen and Zimmerman 364). Every aspect of a game can be seen as representing something—a place, an act, an idea, and so on. A game as a whole is a representation of something as well. What a game represents and is a representation of assumes meaning as the player interacts with it. Rules as formal systems are necessary for creating meaning and in turn, it is out of this structure that things and actions within the game system acquire meaning. "The context of a game's meaning is the space of experience where interpretation takes place. Interpretation in games is the act of play" (Salen and Zimmerman 374). As a player interacts with a game he begins to interpret and understand it, reading symbols and determining what they mean and how the system works. "Rules guide this interaction, establishing relationships between signs that tell a player what things mean" (369). As the system is explored and made meaningful to the player, the rules of the outside world are temporarily suspended and the realm of the game assumes its unique identity within the larger system. Everyday real world rules and symbols no longer define experience for the player, even if he recognizes actions or objects from it within this parallel world. "The space of play defined by the borders of the magic circle operates as a space of representational possibility. This space of play gives life to a separate reality, world of its own where its inhabitants can perform actions that are permitted to occur in that world, but that would not make sense anywhere else" (Salen and Zimmerman 369). It is evident that it is the "paired interaction of system and context, the play between internal and external meanings that makes representation possible" (Salen and Zimmerman 369). To play the game, one must accept its rules, relinquishing those of the normal world.

Narrative is a significant feature of a meaningful game and works on multiple levels to involve the player in the game and to personalize his experience. Just as the user's interaction with the landscape becomes a story, so does the interaction between a player and the game. Salen and Zimmerman refer to two kinds of narratives in relation to games: embedded and emergent. Embedded, as the name implies, refers to a storyline that predates the player and can serve as the motivation to play the game (383). An interesting example of an embedded narrative referenced by Salen and Zimmerman from the Wipeout XL game manual:

> Future world…
>
> A ball bounces. A pin drops. A man falls.
>
> Gravity is the glue which binds us to our planet.
>
> We are about to apply the solvent which will free our species forever.
> --*Pierre Belmondo, Director of European AG [anti-gravity] Research, Nevada, April 2035* (404)

An emergent narrative is the story that occurs as the player plays the game, and is "possible because of the way games function as complex systems" (Salen and Zimmerman 383). The player enters the apocalyptic world described above, and as he interacts with its existing story, he creates his own. Creating narrative can be how the place looks, sounds, and smells, or in signs, symbols, game interface, etc, all of which communicate an existing embedded story, and influence the player's personal emergent narrative. Salen and Zimmerman cite Warren Spector's ideas, saying that "games create 'possibility spaces,' spaces that provide compelling problems within an overarching narrative, afford creative opportunities for dealing with these problems and then respond to player choices with meaningful consequences" (390). This is both a physical and

metaphorical space of possibility that gives rise to the player's unique identity and story within the game (Salen and Zimmerman 390).

Like games, a landscape can be a simulation, defined as "a procedural representation of aspects of 'reality'"; this relates to how games create representations (Salen and Zimmerman 423). Games and landscapes can be representations of places in time, processes, people, things, objects, or of events. For example, a memorial is a potent landscape typology designed to provoke remembrance of an historical event and to act as representations of that particular occurrence. Games as simulations of the real, outside world is an extremely important concept that helps to locate the play experience within the larger systems in which they exist, as well as renders the play meaningful to the player. While some simulations are extremely abstract, such as Chess as a representation of war, others can be very specific, even when they are fantastic (Salen and Zimmerman 424).

A heavy contributor to the possibility for meaningful play is the interactions that occur between players during the game. Player interaction occurs through the assumed role of each player, which may constantly change over the course of the game or may be a constant, fixed role or character such as in Role-Playing Games, or RPGs. In either case, player interaction creates certain social relationships and can transcend the game itself to affect feelings in the real world. Inversely, any relationships the players may have outside of the game greatly shape their interaction within the game. Play is made meaningful through the interaction of the players as they engage with the game system. According to Salen and Zimmerman, "if the space of possibility of a game is large enough, players will find ways to create their own roles and styles of play" (467). As

discussed previously in this chapter, the ability for players to manipulate and modify the game is empowering and leads to deeper play.

As players interact with one another within the game system, they forge a social contract, which is a mutually accepted understanding of the how the game operates. "A social contract, a commitment to a shared set of behaviors and values, is a social frame for understanding what it means to enter into the magic circle" (Salen and Zimmerman 473). As a player, one must accept the social contract to play and to keep the game going.

Out of the complex relationships and social contract forged between players emerges the possibility of "transformative social play", defined by Salen and Zimmerman as when players "actively engage with the rule system of a game, manipulating it in order to shift, extend, or subvert their relations with other players" (475). The manipulation of a system and rule breaking has been touched upon in this chapter, and the concept of transformative social play is a similar effort to personalize and modify the game to better reflect the needs, values, and desires of a particular group of players. A play community may alter the rules of a game to make it fairer or more challenging or interesting (Salen and Zimmerman 476).

A very important concept here is "forbidden play", in which what isn't ok in the real world is permitted in the game. "Games throughout history and across the world have subverted norms of social behavior. Perhaps this should come as no surprise. Inside the artificial context of the magic circle, games not only create meaning, but they *play with meaning* as well" (Salen and Zimmerman 479). In this way, games become significant challengers to social, cultural, and political conventions, providing

opportunities for players to invent and experiment with alternative variations of reality. Sometimes the subversive inventions overwhelm the game to become embedded in the real world, transforming culture. Because players go between both the real and game worlds, so too do their individual experiences, each influencing the other, so that the artificial world of the game ultimately becomes inextricably linked to the real world, which contributes profound meaning to the play experience. What arises out of such complex interrelationships cannot be directly designed (Salen and Zimmerman 478-485).

Culture

Games do not operate in a vacuum; they engage with the larger environmental contexts around them, informing and being informed by them. This engagement infuses the game with meanings reflecting the larger social, political, and cultural milieu. Just as culture can transform games, however, so can games alter culture. Salen and Zimmerman refer to games as *cultural texts*, as in the Balinese cockfighting ritual, possessing the capacity to tell stories about cultural ideologies, stereotypes, and mythologies and reinforcing ideas of identity (510). Games have an intrinsic relationship with culture because they are a product of it, thus the image of place, a people, an idea is woven into every game. Games can inadvertently or intentionally embody historical events, popular culture, or politics. Salen and Zimmerman in Rules of Play refer to Brian Sutton-Smith's concept of rhetoric, defined as "'being a persuasive discourse, or an implicit narrative, wittingly or unwittingly adopted by members of a particular affiliation to persuade others that it is correct" (517). They outline his seven rhetorics of play:

- Play as Progress
- Play as Fate

- Play as Power
- Play as Identity
- Play as the Imaginary
- Play as Rhetoric of the Self
- Play is Frivolity

The seven rhetorics can also apply to landscapes. For example, children's playgrounds fall under the rhetoric of *progress* because they seek to teach children how to be members of society, to get along with other children, to solve disputes, to share, etc. Many texts have been written on the political agendas underlying children's playgrounds and it is not difficult to see how influential the structure and potential for freedom and discovery would be on the developing human mind. The New York Casitas explored in the following chapter play a vital role in reinforcing the *identity* of Puerto Rican immigrants, providing a scenario in which traditional roles, food, music, and cultural events are preserved and passed along from generation to generation. However, designers most often utilize rhetorics of *power*, *progress*, and *fate* to communicate, cultivate, and reinforce desired behaviors and beliefs. Red Square in Moscow and Tiananmen Square in Beijing embody the rhetoric of *power* in landscape, reflected in their large open expanses of pavement surrounded by huge buildings of tremendous political significance. Within Tiananmen Square (fig. 3.1) is the Monument to the People's Heroes and Mausoleum of Mao Zedong. The square is surrounded by two enormous historic gates, Tian'anmen and Quianmen, the Great Hall of the People, and the National Museum of China (Wikipedia.org). Red Square (fig. 3.2) resides between Lenin's Mausoleum, the Kremlin, several historical cathedrals, and the State Historical Museum (Wikipedia.org).

The two plazas may physically invite a variety of activities, but the powerful peripheral structures possess a dominating presence that potentially weights any political events with enormous pressure and significance to the point of suppressive intimidation.

Figure 3.1. Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tiananmen_Square&oldid=284040759

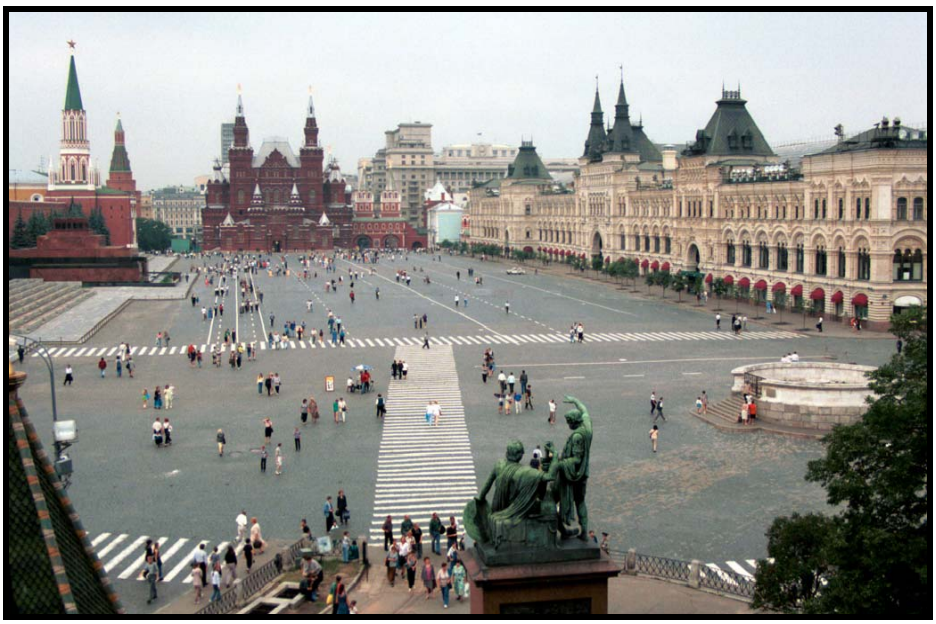

Figure 3.2. Red Square, Moscow, Russia

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Red_Square&oldid=281294152

Framing games through the Sutton-Smith's rhetorics of play, it is easy to see how culture permeates and is affected by game playing, whether by reinforcing identity, encouraging growth, encouraging creativity, or challenging social norms. "Games act as social contexts that allow exploration of certain values and attitudes" (Salen and Zimmerman 522). In this way, games play an important role in shaping the cultural contexts in which they reside. Imbued with so much transformative potential, it is important that game designers realize the capacity for meaning within their games and that meaning exists inherent to the game regardless of the designer's intent. In just the same way, landscapes reflect, reproduce, and reshape culture as well by promoting a certain behavior, social group, identity, or history, while eschewing others. They tell stories about who the users are and what they do there, utilizing similar rhetoric to that of Sutton-Smith. Some stories are told by designers or governments, espousing their ideas

as to who the public is; others are filled with the rhetoric of the disenfranchised, reminding the world that they too are the public.

If games interplay so profoundly with culture, it would be interesting to design a game that allows the player the opportunity to challenge cultural norms and rules. An attempt at this concept was brought to life during the New Games movement, based on games of cooperation, hard work, and equality with the impetus for changing the larger culture of the time. One such game, Earthball, disclosed in surprising ways the ability of a game to reveal and alter culture. Two teams of players were to strive to get the globe-like ball over their opponent's goal, or in the designer Stewart Brand's one rule, "' There are two kinds of people in the world: those that who want to push the Earth over a row of flags at the end of the field, and those that want to push it over the fence at the other end. Go to it'" (528). Yet when the game was played for the first time, when a team came close to their desired goal, rather than pushing it in, they instead helped the opposing team to move it the other direction, so that no one won the game. As Brand saw it, "'The players had been competing, but not to win. Their unspoken and accepted agreement had been to play, as long and as hard as possible '" (528). This story shows an interesting result that came out of the zeitgeist (Salen and Zimmerman 528-29)—that there is a third type of person in the world who plays for the sake of interacting with other people as part of a community.

Designing the potential for modification and manipulation of the game by its players makes possible the transformation of the game and the culture. To do this, designers must build into the game things that encourage manipulation and are non-leading as to how they must be used. For the modification to be meaningful, it is

imperative that the player is able to see immediately how their actions have affected the game and how that change will play out within the larger systems encompassing it. Salen and Zimmerman refer to games that allow this kind of modification as "open systems" and contain the qualities of being "nonhierarchical, openly accessible, non-guided, and emergent" (546). Such a game, like a deck of playing cards, enables its parts to be used in other games. The components of such a game cannot be completely without identity because they will not inspire use, but nor can they be overly specific because they will not lend themselves to new uses. Thus, what a game designer is ultimately doing is creating a "meta-game";

> A game system designer designs the structure within which other game designers will create games. The "rules" of the system are the physical qualities of the game system components; the "play" that takes place is game design itself, resulting in sets of rules that make use of the game system. This kind of process requires that the game system designer give up a significant degree of control, as other player-designers decide how the game system will be used in actual games. But this loss of control is ultimately what is so satisfying about designing game systems: as a platform for player-driven creativity, a game system is a catalyst for truly transformative and emergent play. (Salen and Zimmerman 547)

When games or landscapes lead to unexpected transformations it means that people have been able to find the freedom for individual expression and personalization within the realm of possibility of the game.

Conclusion

It is helpful to view the design of a landscape like a game because it provides a different lens for seeing and solving design problems. Games and landscapes are complex systems endowed with qualities that enable them to provide meaningful experiences for their users. When a person conceives to play a game, he sets in motion a

machine of simple parts that make possible not only a journey but an exploration into the realm of possible choices. Games, as microcosms of the real world, reflect the values, ideals, and histories of human culture; as a player engages with a game, he rewrites and revisions those existing constructs. Despite their obvious fictitious and sometimes fantastic nature, games tell a group of people about themselves, altering and being altered by the larger encompassing social, cultural, and political milieu. This transformative quality of deep play renders games as important indicators of identity and as potential catalysts for change. Similarly, as designs, they provide a unique and helpful framework by which to understand human-human/human-environment interaction; in this case, the urban landscape.

CHAPTER 4

SPONTANEOUS LANDSCAPES: TOWARDS A DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Suspended Space

The thesis attempts to uncover a framework that can be used by landscape architects to set in motion the organic growth of a community space that is continually modified and changed to fit the needs of the people and the larger contextual social, political, and cultural environment. As discussed in the previous chapter, the thesis seeks to accomplish this by designing the space as one might design a game. Well-designed games inspire continued use because they leave room for exploration, innovation, and creativity between clearly defined sets of rules, however simple, which provide meaningful interaction. An essential irony in the thesis is the idea that one can 'design' an organically evolving landscape, as design in its very nature is a plan that limits and directs user actions. However, as the following case studies will reveal, each spontaneous landscape evolves as a type of game, enacting a limited set of rules, however abstract, and a variety of components (game pieces) to create a place that becomes representative of its users and the ever-changing ideas, dreams, and needs embedded within the city. The people who have shaped these spaces have done so through play by exploring the space within the constraints of society to uncover the measure of freedom by which they can craft new spaces in their own image. The selected case studies encompass a broad array of landscape types bound together by their common origin of

appropriation and evolution as cultural spaces. What can we learn from these spontaneous user-designed games?

In his article "The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression", Gil Doron writes that

> the goal of this research is to show how these marginalized communities transgress spatial constraints and produce different environments. I would not choose the term 'resistance' to describe their activities, since resistance implies a concerted fight against the authority or the oppressor. The space of resistance is the (imaginary) space, of that 'outside' the space of the system or the law. Rather, most of the activities that I will identify, even if they have this component of opposition, are working within the boundary of the system itself. For all of the above reasons and more, the term transgressive is more suitable for describing these activities and the spaces they produce, than the term resistance. (252)

He points out that designers only create spaces, but that once relinquished, they continue to be built, recreated, redefined, taking on a life of their own through their many users. In tune to Lefebvre, the designers make and designate the space, but it is the users, the players, who produce it. As with games, the transgression occurs through the subversion of established social rules as dictated by the space itself and the larger culture around it. As these players appropriate abandoned spaces they modify and transform them, infusing them with new meanings through their non-traditional activities. Within the preexisting boundary, these characters find the freedom to personalize spaces to accommodate new activities or pursuits. Perhaps most importantly, these transgressions allow people to see things that they may not have known were there, truths about the world, or to at least raise questions. Speaking of urban voids and the marginalized populations who usurp them, Doron writes that

> They all transgress the boundary set for the uses of the place. They reveal how the public space is restricted to a very small spectrum of activities, and how many other activities are not permitted. Moreover, these

> activities put into question which 'public' these places are designed and designated for… (254)

These types of activities subvert notions of public and private and force society to consider how land is used and for whom, as well as reveal the inability for planning and architecture to meet the needs of diverse populations.

The breaking of rules in urban spaces is more than the simple taking over of private (or public as private) land. It can be found in the very bone structure in the act of claiming, through the use and application of nontraditional materials, the spatial composition of the various parts, to the activities that occur there. Utilizing the available components and operating within the rules of the larger system, these acts transform derelict lots into meaningful spaces.

Manuel de Sola-Morales reflects:

> Strangers in our own land, strangers in our city, we inhabitants of the metropolis feel the spaces not dominated by architecture are reflections of our own insecurity, of our vague wanderings through limitless spaces that, in our position external to the urban system, to power, to activity, constitute both a physical expression of our fear and insecurity and our expectation of the other, the alternative, the utopian, the future. (qtd. in Doron 258)

Going further, spaces that are not dominated by the prevailing architecture or exhibit a vernacular unlike that of the surrounding environment, are seen as spaces that are 'vacant' and not being put to their maximum use. However, these spaces have attracted nontraditional use and now expose cultures that were otherwise not visible.

Why do these spaces attract use? Doron claims that these spaces are in a state of 'suspension', which seen through the eyes of a game designer or player, is a state that reveals the gaps in which freedom can reside; freedom of interpretation of use, specifically for expression. "Suspension merely marks the boundaries of any system (i.e.

space) and by doing so marks the place where transgression can operate" (Doron 260). It is within this space, "a space that was always there within the most rigid boundary of architecture" (Doron 262), that the opportunity arises for reinterpretation and meaningful interaction. Goth and Corijn refer to structures in this state of suspension as "temporarily left aside from the hegemonic visions of configuration of urban space (due to their having become obsolete in terms of their original function and use-value)—where distinct possibilities for practices of innovation and playful intervention arise" (506). Now all that is needed are the players.

These spaces attract use additionally because of shrinking "urbanity" or "'the confrontation with diversity, the un-expected, the non-planned, and the resistant moment', the space for the articulation and integration of the 'other'" (Hausserman and Siebel, 1987, qtd. in Groth and Corijn 505). As fewer places exist for these types of interactions to occur, people begin to look to vacant lots and structures that have been ignored and forgotten by the encompassing milieu. Marginal groups whose activities do not fit into pre-conceived niches seek places that encourage manipulation and invention.

It should be noted that although the case studies are being analyzed through a game design lens, they are not in the truest sense of the term, 'games'. Games are designed by designers, however simple, from hide-and-go seek, tag, or tic-tac-toe to the Sims and Warcraft. The case studies are the opposite of anything designers create; they are, in fact, the antithesis of designed spaces. The first two case studies explore the spontaneous user-designed landscapes, which, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, are bottom-up spaces, while the last discusses Adventure Playgrounds, which are a top-down approach to instigating user-modified spaces. The case study chapter attempts to

analyze how game design theory might be applied to a variety of user-designed spaces. The first case study hones in on Puerto Rican Casitas in New York City and delves deeply into how they embody the three game design schemas, Rules, Play, and Culture. The second case study draws from four different specific landscapes around the world and shows how in each the three schemas work together to create a meaningful experience for the users and the larger environment in which they exist while also including Rules, Play, and Culture. The final case study looks at a specific top-down attempt to design spontaneity into the landscape. By studying these user-created places, patterns emerge that begin to resemble a game and help to inform how a landscape might be designed as a game that will act like an unpremeditated landscape.

Puerto Rican Casitas in New York City

In New York City's Puerto Rican neighborhoods, residents have transformed vacant lots into thriving, vibrant community gardens as miniature landscapes of their homeland. Filled with vegetables and flowers reminiscent of Puerto Rica's flora, these cultural landscapes serve as therapeutic gardens for the displaced in a sometimes harsh new world, as places for celebrations, community centers, and after school care for youth of all ages (fig. 4.1). Puerto Rican immigrants have been constructing these spontaneous gardens, known as *Casitas*, since the 1980's to reflect the built vernacular of their homeland (Winterbottom 78).

> Casitas are a form of Caribbean vernacular architecture associated with Puerto Rico's working poor. Once constructed in Puerto Rico by highland peasants, coastal sugar workers, and urban shanty dwellers, these structures have been replaced for the most part by reinforced concrete houses and high-rise apartment buildings. (Sciorra 156)

The primary building material in New York City is scrap lumber taken from other sites, with the addition of some purchased items.

> Built to conform to community aesthetics, common features of New York casitas include a pitched roof, with an entrance at the gable end, and some type of veranda—often with x's, in the railing. Exterior walls are painted in the vibrant colors of the Caribbean and interiors are often outfitted with electricity and some form of plumbing. Occasionally, a latrine can be found on the lot. Casitas are constantly modified and renovated, with extensions added after initial construction. (Sciorra, 156)

The constant modification and renovation of the casitas enables them to evolve with their users' needs, to accommodate new people, a variety of age groups, festivities, and even workshops that help to preserve the immigrants' heritage and traditions, especially in the context of the predominant culture.

Figure 4.1. Puerto Rican Casita, New York City

Source: http://www.cityfarmer.org/casitas.html

In this way, one can begin to see parallels between the design of community gardens, such as the Puerto Rican casitas, and the design of games. Looking back at the

previous chapter and its division of games into Rules, Play, and Culture as a method of creating meaningful experiences, it is possible to frame the casitas in a similar way.

Rules:

Within the greater system of New York City, with its operational and implicit rules, its pre-designed parks, plazas and multitudes of other public spaces, Puerto Rican casitas are an example of rule breaking. Harping back to DeKoven's excerpt, these places are

> changing [the game] for the sake of finding a game that works…it is our game, and we can change it when we need to. We don't need permission or approval from anyone outside our community. We play our games as we see fit. Which means that now we have at our disposal the means whereby we can always fit the game to the way we want to play.
>
> This is an incredible freedom, a freedom that does more than any game can, a freedom with which we nurture the play community. The search for the well-played game is what holds the community together. But the freedom to change the game is what gives the community its power. (281)

The casitas are the Puerto Rican community exercising their freedom to find what works to maintain and nurture their cultural identity and sense of community. Through the construction of the casitas, the displaced population is able to take control over their environment through group and individual expression. As Sciorra asserts, "the casita is not merely a nostalgic lament for an idealized past but a form of community organization whereby control of one's immediate environment is achieved through the use of traditional expressive culture" (158). Within the greater framework of New York, their actions are illegal visually, architecturally, and ethically. From the types of materials used and the manner in which they are arranged to define a structure, to the presence of livestock such as chickens and goats, these gardens challenge ideas of how a garden, a hangout, a park, or a community center is supposed to look (fig. 4.2). Community

gardens themselves are becoming widely accepted, although the appropriation of private or city-owned property most frequently ensures that eventually they will be forced to leave when the owners wish to develop the land.

Figure 4.2. Casita in community garden, New York City
Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/ 23/nyregion/23casitas.html

The process of transforming and maintaining the environment recalls the cycles of adaptive management, which here occurs as the game unfolds. Trial and error, evaluation and modification, simply to begin the process anew is part of how this landscape operates successfully, allowing the users to explore what works best for them. Each time the player begins the game, interacting with the system through its components and rules, all three are altered. The game is modified, the user has expressed and reinforced his identity, and the city of New York has been reminded of its diverse inhabitants.

The game of the casita lies in its maintenance and recreation, in preserving and fighting for this refuge each day, in perfecting and altering it to suit ever-changing needs of the community, and in rebuilding and relocating it when the garden is dismantled by

the City. The persistence of the casita for nearly 30 years in New York City, attests to its powerful ability to bind communities together, to preserve a cultural identity, and to consistently operate within the rigidity of the greater system. As one resident stated, "This is our block. This is our block. This is our home. And when they want, they'll come and knock it down and do what they want. We don't care. We'll just make our house again. And if the government doesn't like it, then the government can find a place to put us" (Sciorra 162).

Play:

When one steps into this constructed environment, he steps out of the regular world of New York City and decides to accept this place with its own rules and identity; he becomes a player in this resurrected Puerto Rico and suspends New York City's lens for the use of another. "The Casita provides a cultural enclave, a structured environment in which traditional Puerto Rican aspects of socialization and behavior are accepted" (Winterbottom 82). What is important and 'normal' in New York, the qualities which define success, stature, and role in society are subverted in the garden to support what is important to the community members—qualities and roles that are understood by all of the players (fig. 4.3). This alternate world, reminiscent of a lost world, a desired world, is held in place and made true within this clearly defined zone by the members who all know and share an understanding of the system. It is their shared knowledge and mutual acceptance of this game that makes it possible to play.

> The casita allows those using it to reassume the roles they had lost, and can regain self esteem through building projects, food preparation, musical performances and storytelling. In the casita, one is not judged by the standards of wealth or job status, but by the beauty and health of the garden, the civic activities one hosts and by genuine expressions of Puerto Rican culture. (Winterbottom 85)

This mutual understanding delineates the boundary between the space of the casita and that of the rest of the city, helping to reinforce the distinct identities of those involved and those on the outside, as well as locating the game within the larger social, political, and cultural context. "This continual stream of communication between players, and between those playing and those not playing, helps sustain the magic circle" (Salen and Zimmerman 371). This social contract of shared complicity is what allows the game to be played and infuses it with meaning.

Figure 4.3. Inside Rincon Criollo, New York City

Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/23/nyregion/23casitas.html

What makes these landscapes so successful is their resemblance to a well-known, oft dreamed-of space. Like many games, the casitas are a simulation of something that really exists, or did exist, in this case 1950's era pastoral Puerto Rico.

> The simulation of a tropical, preindustrial landscape in the northern urban environment is achieved through close attention to detail. Chickens, ducks, geese, rabbits, and in the case of one casita, a goat, may be found in the transformed city lots. At *Rincon Criollo* (Creole Corner) the bottoms

> of tree trunks are painted white to simulate the mixture of lime and white paint used on the island to repel wood-eating insects. (Sciorra 157)

As with any game, the creators knew what they wanted to simulate and using what was available to them, they selected details that said 'home' to them. "A simulation, as a representational process, is more than a series of independent procedures producing a result. A simulation arises from the operation of a system in which every element contributes in an integrated way to the larger representation" (Salen and Zimmerman 439). It is how these elements work together that makes the simulation effective, that brings the whole picture into focus. In this case, it is the integration of familiar materials, patterns, movement and actions of people and animals, sounds of someone whistling, and smells of particular plants that when merged together become Puerto Rico. The casita becomes more than the sum of its parts and the homeland emerges to create a meaningful experience. The recreation of this nostalgic Puerto Rican landscape is significant because it reflects an idealized vision of the homeland and what the immigrants like best in contrast to New York City (fig. 4.4). The simulation of a beloved place becomes key to these special community gardens, providing meaningful interaction time after time.

Figure 4.4. Rural casita, Puerto Rico

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/beruff/831479991/

The casita is not an exclusive world because it can be physically and emotionally accessed by outside groups who have never been to Puerto Rico. Even though the structures do not look like other buildings or houses in New York City, or other places in America, they have roofs, walls, and windows, even porches—they are shelter, however small—and thus the visitor recognizes them as houses. The vegetables or flowers, though perhaps unfamiliar, are arranged in rows or on mounds in some kind of visually organized way, and thus the visitor understands them to comprise a garden. Old men playing chess under the shade of trees and children running along the paths connote a particular atmosphere—one of community and relaxation. Out of these features, a distinct narrative emerges: it is a story about a place that is not American, that may no longer exist, etc., but the visitor puts the pieces together to create an engaging fiction

about this place, one that is different every visit but always familiar (fig. 4.5). Against the backdrop of this fictive world, an evolving narrative is constantly taking place. "When we play a game, we are doing more than just shuffling signs drawn from the domain of the real world; instead, we are shifting to another domain of meaning entirely" (Salen and Zimmerman 369). Inside the world of the casita, one accepts the time, symbols, aesthetics, and rules of this 'place within a place' to understand how this environment works and how it fits into the larger social milieu; "[it] has its own set of rules for determining not only what things mean but also for determining how they are made *meaningful*…[within] a realm of artificial meanings, marked off in time and space from the real world" (Salen and Zimmerman 368). As Sciorra emphasizes in his paper, "many, unaware of the Puerto Rican memories are lured to the casitas as places of nature. They emit a strong presence transcending cultural barriers and tapping more universal cultural meanings" (85).

Figure 4.5. Rincon Criollo, New York City

Source: http://gothamist.com/2009/02/23/casitas.php

Culture:

When a person steps into the casita, he puts in motion the rules of the game, he engages the story, he plays the game. The users are the players who modify the casita, who pluck the vegetables from the neat garden plots, who decide what will happen next, who transform the space from something inert into a meaningful experience. The entrance and exit of the player, the things they bring in, remove, or rearrange, and the stories about their actions that emerge both inform and are informed by the larger culture in which the game exists.

> When transported into the heart of the dense urban environment it is made all the more powerful in both the contextual contrast and the will to preserve and create these places. As a place, every aspect of the casita, including the architecture, the batey and the garden expresses Puerto Rican culture. Within the casita forms of expression can be found in the visual art, the garden layout, the plant selection, the music, the dance, and the social life, and it is these elements woven together that form the experienced metaphorical sense of place. The indigenous architecture, in its ever evolving manifestations, the gardens, clearly subsistence in form and use, and the animals in pens or running loose are all components of a cultural landscape, a "home". (Sciorra 85)

Framing casitas as games is a helpful way of seeing how Rules, Play, and Culture interact to create a space ripe with meaning. This game, as a simulation of a beloved homeland, plays out into the larger fabric of the city and into the lives of its inhabitants because it enables the exploration and preservation of a particular identity. It serves to both render a population distinct while weaving it into the encompassing social, political, and cultural milieu. The game, though user-designed, set in motion the evolution of a public space, reflecting the hopes and dreams of an entire culture, and providing a place for individual expression through modification, creativity, ingenuity, and innovation within the more rigid structure of New York City. Quoting Flores, Winterbottom writes that "the casita as a cultural oasis provides an 'alternative to being American in any

narrow, culturally delimited sense. Beyond its place in the pluralistic mosaic, Latino culture harbors a deeper challenge to mainstream U.S. society in the form of a different, and potentially divergent, ethos and aesthetic'" (qtd. in Winterbottom 86). It is a painting of another world, an ideal world, and an invaluable reflection of the lived and diverse worlds rooted in a multicultural metropolis (fig. 4.6).

Figure 4.6. Community and cultural enclave, Rincon Criollo, NYC
Source: http://nylatinojournal.com/home/culture_education/ny_region/

Spontaneous Communities: An International Survey

The appropriated sites in this case study are used as places for social and cultural production. These suspended spaces, mainly structures, have inspired a variety of uses by marginal populations. In Helsinki, abandoned railroad sheds (fig. 4.7) were awarded a new life when several artist collectives took them over, setting in motion a transformation of continuous reinvention. "Parting from an initial focus on artistic production and consumption assumed by various actors from the independent art scene, the warehouses

have since attracted very diverse and continuously changing users and events, making the space a veritable 'non-institutionalised' social and cultural institution in the heart of the city" (Goth and Corijn 509). The key to the warehouses' transformation was in temporary lease contracts to the user, creating an ever-changing user-group or "'spontaneous urbanity'…which has been open to constant change and flexible, almost personalized, transformation of space" (Goth and Corijn 509). This setup encouraged a broad array of uses and cultivated the materialization of a hidden aspect of the greater culture, where before there had been no place for it. Over time the warehouses, or 'Makasiini', harbored small businesses specializing in "cultural production", cultural events, and a wildly popular flea market (Goth and Corijn 509). The space's greatest contribution to the city was in its role as a venue in which unadulterated social interaction could transpire, which ultimately lead to cultural transformations.

Figure 4.7. Makasiini, Helsinki, Finland
Source: http://papunet.net/selko/

Rules:

As discussed in the preceding chapter, Johnson writes of these disordered, ambiguous spaces that they only "obey rules that we define in advance, but those rules only govern the micromotives. The macrobehavior is another matter" (57). The rules of the dominant culture, the social norms and expectations, and the rules of the architecture of the warehouses themselves provide the boundaries within which the users can birth new meanings. The play of this game happened as the users, or players, explored the realm of possible uses for the preexisting space, modifying it to create new cultural expressions and evolutions. Just as with the casitas, stepping into this uniquely public space, one largely ignored and uncontrolled by the government, the rules of the outside world were suspended and new rules assumed, enabling unanticipated events to occur. To see the potential of a vacant space, one must abandon for a moment the accepted aesthetic of the outside world, to see beyond the signs of decline to the symbols of the parallel world in which innovation and self-expression is possible. Once inside the game, one must learn the language of the particular place.

Culture:

An unanticipated effect on the encompassing political and social system was that the warehouses became the true cultural center of the city, obscuring the deliberate cultural spaces built by city planners. When the city began to consider developing the site, various political and social groups emerged to protect the space as it currently was. "The 'Pro-Makasiini' movement—a loose platform of supporters uniting politicians, residents of the adjacent neighborhood, researchers and diverse cultural and social associations—emerged and its emergence marks the articulation of voices external to the space" (Groth and Corijn 510). This is significant as it reveals how a game can infiltrate

and affect the larger cultural contexts. The argument eventually transcended the simple fight to preserve an important architectural space and the unique culture it fostered, but it also became a debate about the disparate visions for the city and which one was to be fulfilled (Groth and Corijn 511).

Figure 4.8. Abandoned warehouse, RAW-Tempel district, Berlin, Germany
Source: http://www.difu.de/index.shtml?/ english/occasional/

Similar to the Helsinki 'Makasiini', Berlin's Raw-Tempel area was historically a place for housing trains (fig. 4.8) that was later abandoned and taken over by artists looking for a space conducive to "cultural and social projects" (Groth and Corijn 513). It too evolved into temporary leases with the property owner but has no bearing on how the space is used (Groth and Corijn 514). This freedom from most constraints has attracted a wide array of uses rendering it as an

> open 'parallel universe', a complex entity still relatively free from economic and spatial constraints where a radical pluralism flourishes. At present, this unique site is used by more than 40 different socio-cultural projects both from the professional and experiential scene; it functions as a

> major stabilising element for the neighborhood and offers a high degree of social inclusion. (Groth and Corijn 514)

The parallel universe of the game world, with its special rules outside the restrictions of Berlin, makes possible the visioning of other lives, events, and ways of interpreting the world. The parallel world is the Berliners' assertion of control over their environment, through the manipulation of the constructed, planned world to better accommodate their individual lived experience (fig. 4.9). Stepping into the game, this simulation of Berlin that is not Berlin, in the bones of its discarded history, they forged a social contract that this parallel universe has different boundaries than the outside world, boundaries that are altered as deemed fit to "nurture the play community" (DeKoven 281). Anyone can play, one must only be able to read and interpret this game from the larger context in order to manipulate the pieces and to create a meaningful experience.

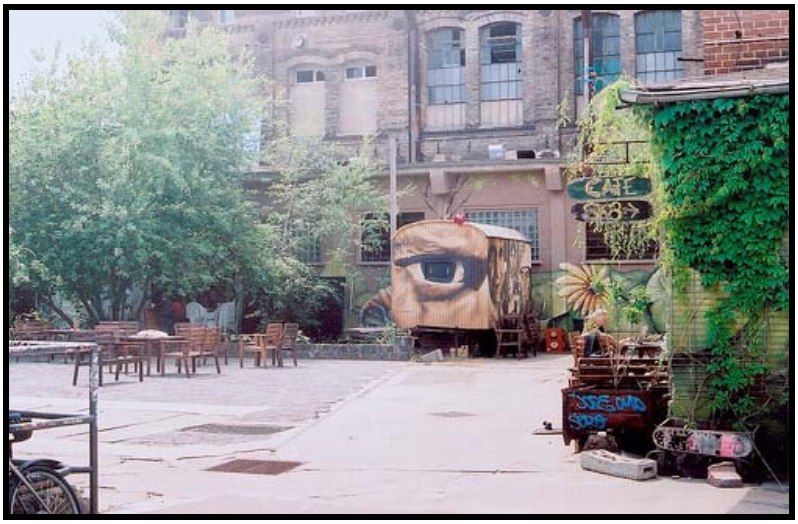

Figure 4.9. Appropriated warehouse, RAW-Tempel district, Berlin, Germany

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/genial23/2646798174/

Culture:

Just as with the Makasiini, Raw-Tempel fell under fire when it lost its lease during the sale of the site to new owners. Concerned over the future of the area, activists

insisted on being part of the planning process, recognizing the potential of a bottom-up created space. Herein lies another example of how a small space for freedom of expression and exchange of ideas, found within the larger, more rigid structure of the larger cultural contexts, becomes a form of empowerment, resistance, and exploration, that ultimately plays into the greater system.

Figure 4.10. Construction of People's Park, 1969, Berkeley, California
Source: http://www.peoplespark.org/1969_Building_a_park.html

The last two sites in this case study are both in San Francisco, California, a city long known for its culture of social agitation and radical ideas. People's Park in Berkeley was formed in 1969 on a piece of land acquired by the UC Berkley through eminent domain. The three-acre lot had sat empty for two years and attracted the highly active and politicized student body, along with community members, and some business owners who decided to turn the space into a park for the people. The act was in retaliation against the school's increasing control and limitations of the students' political activities,

or as they saw it, their right to free speech. Mitchell, in his documentation of People's Park, quotes an ad that appeared in the student paper that spring:

> A park will be built this Sunday between Dwight and Haste. The Land is owned by the university which tore down a lot of beautiful houses in order to build a swamp.
>
> The Land is now used as a free parking space. In a year the university will build a cement-type expansive parking lot which will compete with the other lots for the allegiance of the Berkeley Buicks.
>
> On Sunday we will stop this shit. Bring shovels, hoses, chains, grass, paints, flowers, trees, bull dozers, top soil, colorful smiles, and lots of weed…
>
> We want the park to be a cultural, political, freak-out rap center for the Western World…
>
> This summer we will not be fucked over by the pigs "move on" fascism, we will police our own park and not allow its occupation by an imperial power… (107-108)

The volunteers who came Saturday did just that, deliberately breaking the rules of law and going against the University, creating a space for all people, born not of the simple desire to 'do good' but rather out of an effort to defy a system which they found oppressive (fig. 4.10). The activists wished to build "an open community-controlled political space" (Mitchell 108) whose construction became a regular weekend "'event'" that attracted hundreds of volunteers at a time (Mitchell 112). The rule-breaking act exemplifies the inability of the larger system to provide for all of the needs of its citizens, as well as how a group of players manipulates the rules to make the game more relevant to its lived experience.

Figure 4.11. People's Park, Berkeley, California

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/shamrocktattoo/2616195724/

People's Park was created as a space where anyone could go, including marginal populations who were ostracized by the dominant culture. In this free people's park, people and activities that were not generally accepted or too highly controlled were able to find peace or a voice in the space (fig. 4.11, 4.12). A Free Speech Stage was erected for music and rallies and a Free Box was built in which people could give away old or unwanted clothes. Today there are even raised boxes filled with vegetable plants maintained by Food Not Bombs for the homeless. Mitchell writes of the park that

> It was, especially by contemporary standards, a quite unmediated space. The attractiveness of People's Park for homeless people indicated to many park defenders not that it was a dangerous and out-of-control place but rather that it was working as it should: as a truly public space. It had developed as a political space that encouraged unmediated interaction, a place where the power of the state (and other property owners) could be kept at bay. (123)

Figure 4.12. People's Park, Berkeley, California
Source: http://www.frankmooreforpresident08.com/photoblog/uploaded_images/peoplespark-P4260022-787336.jpg

Just north of Berkley lies the Albany Bulb, a former landfill and completely manmade piece of shoreline projecting out into the Bay from the mainland by a narrow strip of land, a spit (fig. 4.13). The Bulb sat in an undefined state of use following the closing of the dump in the late 1980's. Its suspension state and geography render it in relative isolation and thus attractive to a large group of homeless people who appropriated the Bulb in the early 1990's. They built homes from on-site debris, eventually attracting artists who constructed sculptures out of found objects, both natural and manmade. The homeless encampment was eventually forced to leave the site, but art continued to be created up until the first phases of development began (http://environmentalsciences.berkeley.edu).

Figure 4.13. An aerial view of the Albany Bulb, California
Source: http://www.agirlandaboy.com/ journal/archives/001611.html

The Bulb attracted visitors from all over the Bay community. Mostly ignored by the City, a unique type of place began to emerge, pieced together by the found remnants of the greater San Francisco Bay area, wrestled from trees and large swathes of overgrown weeds and from in between boulders. Unkempt nature and resurrected objects collide to create a landscape of mystery and intrigue, which defies established notions of public parks. Wildlife and wild plants colonize the area, just as the folk artists who come to arrange the playing pieces into new and surprising configurations (fig. 4.14, 4.15). As with the New York Casitas, this play of the game and the very existence of the game is constantly being challenged, as tempestuous weather frequently tears sculptures apart and from the trees and earth. The players must be able to adapt and modify to the changes, using the new materials that enter the space, which results in greater flexibility of ideas and ingenuity. The Bulb is perpetually in flux, which is part of the attraction. The game

is always the same; it is always comprised of the landscape, the wind- and sea-swept components, and the basic, unchanging rules of the weather. But each time, the game presents a new challenge, a new narrative, a new way of seeing it. When the players enter the space, whether they are simply the one-time visitor or an artist who regularly comes to build, all who enter the Bulb must suspend the rules and ideas of San Francisco, to learn to see the Bulb. Its persistence is testament to the complicity of its visitors who engage in and choose to believe in the game. In so doing, the Bulb's identity as a place of experimentation, art, and nature born of waste and forgotten, assumes an important role within the larger cultural world in which it exists, informing it and persisting within it equally, a product of it.

Figure 4.14. Sculpture at the Albany Bulb, California

Source: http://www.well.com/user/pk/waterfront/photo-of-the-week/Photo060227.html

Conclusion:

All of these places are simulations of a world we recognize, built of pieces we know by heart, with specific names and uses. But stepping inside the simulation, the

symbols of the outside world relinquish their meanings, their utilitarian uses, to become simple building blocks. A rake, handsaws, window frames, and shovelheads become a crane; fallen concrete bollards become canvases; discarded wooden boards become dragons or casitas; an old warehouse becomes a theatre or a small business; an abandoned abbattoire is a music venue and a restaurant. To play the game, one must be able to learn to read the signs, to accept the rules, and to agree to the social contract that allows the game to endure.

Figure 4.15. Sculpture at the Albany Bulb, California

Source: http://sanfrancisco.about.com/od/sfbayareawildlife/ tp/East-Bay-Parks-and Hikes.htm

Adventure Playgrounds: Designed Spontaneity

The final case study applies the three principle schemas of game design theory to a rather unexpected landscape: the Adventure Playground. The Adventure Playground is quite different from the citizen-appropriated landscapes discussed in the preceding paragraphs. It is useful here, however, because it presents an experiment in user-

designed spaces; sites that are merely set-up and filled with components, with some very loose rules. Though specifically designed for children, it is interesting to explore how the Adventure Playground has been successful as such a space, particularly through the lens of game design.

A Danish landscape architect and designer of children's playgrounds, C. T. Sorenson, noticed how children preferred playing with the construction materials during the building of the playground to the finished product (Cooper 18). His observations evolved into a vision for a new type of playground that would be built by the children themselves. The first Adventure Playground, or junk playground as they were called, opened for play in Copenhagen in 1943 to tremendous success. It was fenced in and comprised of piles of lumber, rope, and other construction materials with plenty of nails and hammers. A play leader was the key element in the playground, and acted as a supervisor who merely provided "guidance" and handed out the materials (Solomon 12).

> Throughout the site, kids chose freely what they wanted to do. The simplicity of the concept is still startling: give children some discarded materials and the equipment with which they can alter them; employ a sensitive adult to stay in the background and come forward only when necessary. Nothing was ever stale; the large structures on the playground were dismantled each autumn so there could be an annual fresh start. (Solomon 13)

Out of this simple scenario, children were able to experiment with the materials by building or tearing down and to take part in a nearly infinite number of possible activities in solitary or with other children. Many other Adventure Playgrounds sprang up all over Europe, with a few in the U.S. and their unique take on child's play became a focus of controversy, even through today.

Perhaps one of their most avid promoters, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, an English children's activist, said of Adventure Playgrounds that they

> are perhaps the most revolutionary experiment we know for absorbing the interest and releasing the energies of young people. Children the world over have a deep urge to experiment with earth, fire, water and timber. They need to be masters of the materials to hand and be free to move them around to suit their own desires and to create their own order out of seeming chaos. They delight to work with real tools, to use them in their own way and at their own pace without criticism or censure. Their love of freedom to take calculated risks is recognized and welcomed in adventure playgrounds for these qualities bring their own exhilarating sense of independence and adventure. As Ibsen has said 'There is always a certain risk in being alive, and if you are more alive there is more risk'. (Bengtsson 8)

Indeed, children have far less freedom than the average person, their lives overly filled with rules and restrictions that assume a particular intensity when one remembers the profound need for innovation and creativity, for explorative freedom that is inherent to childhood.

It is in this need of freedom for self-expression and discovery in a place made for this process, that the familiar attributes of game design theory, Rules, Play, and Culture, emerge. What arises out of the children's interactions with the materials and one another is far more than the sum of the parts of the playground. An excellent example of emergence within the Adventure Playground was documented at The Yard, an experimental version built in Minneapolis:

> When the Yard first opened, it was every child for himself. The initial stockpile of secondhand lumber disappeared like ice on a hot stove. Children helped themselves to all they could carry….Some hoarded tools ands supplies in secret caches. Everybody wanted to build the biggest shack in the shortest time…Then came the bust. There wasn't a stick of lumber left. High-jacking raids were staged on half-finished shacks. Grumbling and bickering broke out….But on the second day of the great depression most of the youngsters banded together spontaneously for a salvage drive. Tools and nails came out of hiding….Rugged individualists who had insisted on building alone invited others to join in—and bring

> their supplies along….New ideas popped up for joint projects. By the time a fresh supply of lumber arrived, a community had been born. (Cooper 22)

Nothing preexisting in the Adventure Playground can account for this behavior, thus the children's collaboration is emergent behavior, and resulted in play being meaningful. The rules consist of the form and potential of simple building materials and a patch of earth within a fixed enclosed area, yet the game provides countless hours of entertainment and discovery.

As with the Puerto Rican casitas or the suspended structures, the Adventure Playground is a parallel world in which children can go and do their mischief (Cooper 22), where they indulge a part of themselves that is not accepted in the outside world. In truth, the Adventure Playground is a simulation of a World War II bombsite, and they are often built on vacant lots or actual bombsites. The rules and components remain the same, but the experience, the narrative is always changing because in this game the children are the ones making decisions.

The aesthetic of this parallel world defies what is regularly accepted by adults—it is unkempt and chaotic, full of useless scrap materials. The Adventure Playground takes its components from the everyday world, seeing value in objects that are deemed waste or useless, such as scrap metal, roofing, or broken boards. These wasted parts, just like the washed-up refuse of the Albany Bulb, assume new life once inside the Adventure Playground. Children see them as new, especially as they are now arbiters of their own environment, and set about constructing, destroying, and burning. The playing pieces are basic which enables them to be used for a variety of activities and thus quite open to interpretation (fig. 4.16). The process of building shelters without anyone instructing

them on how to do it allows the children to rediscover the potential of the materials on their own as well as how they fit together to become a structure.

Figure 4.16. Adventure Playground, Berkeley, California

Source: http://pakaboo.wordpress.com/2007/12/31/ berkeleys-reusable-adventure-playground/

Advocates of the Adventure Playground claim that through unmitigated play, children learn naturally things about the world. As discussed above, they learn physics, geometry, as well as socialization. They learn how to share and how to work together to complete a common vision, as well as how to manage disputes that arise. The playground is a microcosm of the larger system, but one in which children are free to learn at their own pace, alone or with others, to build or to destroy at will, and to relieve themselves of pent up energy and mischief that has no place at home or at school. They

bring into the Adventure Playground many feelings about the world and are able to explore them.

> For in moving and arranging objects in space, a child unconsciously communicates feelings about himself—a fact which of course forms the basis of most contemporary play therapy. It may be that when a child builds, rearranges, or knocks down a structure in play—whether of toy blocks in his bedroom, or empty crates on a vacant lot—he is symbolically testing his powers to change himself. (Cooper 22)

If self-actualization is the ultimate goal of Adventure Playgrounds, then they carry a heavy burden to fulfill. Regardless, freedom to explore the power of oneself within a fixed system is all part of the game; it is part of the narrative that unfolds as the player experiences the game's parts, aesthetics, rules, and other players. What children make of the game is emergence and renders the experience full of meaning. The meaning informs how the children see themselves, both within the game and the greater system, and affects the larger culture.

It is important to recognize that although the Adventure Playground very much attempts to create a user-designed space, it is still guided by the Leader. The Leader may remain mostly on the peripheries of the children's play, but he is nonetheless someone who presides over the space, a lasting connection between the designer of the space and the users, ensuring that the space will always be used for a particular purpose. In the second chapter it was revealed that to design a game that enables modification and manipulation, it is paramount that its parts not be leading in their use. These games are "open systems", meaning that they are "nonhierarchical, openly accessible, non-guided, and emergent" (Salen and Zimmerman 546). In this way the parts of a game, or of a

landscape, are capable of being used in other games in ways that the designers did not foresee (fig. 4.17).

Figure 4.17. Adventure Playground
Source: http://www.quilime.com/aggregate/?page=11

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Adventure Playground that is relevant to the thesis is that it is built to be a game. The clearly delineated boundary of the space through which one must pass requires acknowledgement of transition: from the greater, encompassing culture with all of its expectations of children, into a parallel zone in which all of those expectations are suspended. Unlike any of the previous case studies, the Adventure Playground was conceived of by members of the larger system who set in motion the possibility for unmediated play. The game was designed for children by adults, but in such a way that it would enable children to forge their own world, one full of their individually discovered meanings. Here the chapter comes full circle; having set out with the intent to construct a game that could be modified to reflect the players, it closes on an example of how such a thing might be done.

Analysis

Spontaneous landscapes, as we have seen, arise out of the user's search for a place over which he may discover some control to live, create, produce, simulate, preserve, or reinforce his ideas (fig. 4.18). He seeks a space that is simultaneously within the larger milieu but that is free of the overarching rules and expectations of it. Within this suspended and nested space he creates a "game". What these places have in common, the characteristics that make them useful to the users and that allow the game to be played, is what this paper seeks to understand so that they may be replicated.

Figure 4.18. Sculpture at the Albany Bulb, California
Source: http://redstartstudio.com/?cat=11

To discern these characteristics two matrices were generated from repeated descriptors of the spaces gleaned from the readings and writings of critics, as well as from the author's own writings and observations on the case study sites. These characteristics are present in the case studies and in meaningful games. Each fits into the three schemas, Rules, Play, and Culture, though as we have seen, many act or exist inter-

categorically, such as emergence, to influence and enhance the gaming experience. The schema matrix focuses on the categories of Rules and Play, as visualized in Table 4.1. Within the Culture schema, all of the attributes work together as cultural texts telling stories about the players and locating the game within the larger cultural context as it transcends the physical confines of the space. Characteristics that fall under the Rules schema are *Dense Urban Context*, *Emergence*, *Suspension*, *Transience*, and *Transgression*. Those that occur within the schema Play are *Emergence*, *Role-Playing*, *Representation*, *Narrative*, *Modification*, *Boundary*, *Goals*, *Social Contract*, and *Transformation*. An attribute called *Guided/Spontaneous Creation* lies outside of the three schemas, delineating whether the game is designed from the top-down or bottom-up; within the thesis, only the Adventure Playground fosters guided creation. This graphic quest for emergent patterns exposes common characteristics amongst the case study sites which, through their ubiquitous presence, are integral to the evolution of the space into a meaningful reflection of its users.

Table 4.1. Shows categorization of 13 case study site characteristics under game design schemas of Rules and Play

	Rules	Play
Boundary		X
Dense Urban Context	X	
Emergence	X	X
Goals		X
Modification		X
Narrative		X
Representation		X
Role-Playing		X
Social Contract		X
Suspension	X	
Transformation		X
Transgression	X	
Transience	X	

All of the sites, spontaneous or guided, occur within a *Dense Urban Context*. Out of the remaining 12 characteristics, *Suspension, Modification, Transgression, Transience, Boundary,* and *Goals* are the qualities that made the sites usable to their appropriators and form the subject of the matrix in Table 4.2. Some of these characteristics are manifested in physical form such as empty structures or a weedy and overgrown landscape, while others are simply individual motivations or the knowledge of property rights. The final six characteristics, *Social Contract, Emergence, Transformation, Role-Playing, Narrative,* and *Representation* are emergent, experiential qualities made possible by the presence of the qualities in Table 2. The existence of these emergent characteristics reinforces the play experience and makes it meaningful to the people involved. When studying the matrix in Table 4.2 it is clear that each of the case study sites became the unique places that they are because of the presence of these essential characteristics and because each characteristic enforces and enhances the production or presence of the others. An additional diagram was created to further illuminate the relationships between the characteristics and the game design schemas, shown in Fig. 4.19. Those listed on the outside are organized according to which schema, Rules or Play, they belong and are those characteristics that are either intrinsic to the site or brought to it by the users. The characteristics clustered in the center of the diagram are those that cannot be directly designed, but rather emerge as the user interacts with the space and contribute to meaningful play. Figure 4.19 reveals a similar theoretical structure and other parallels to that of Calleja's Digital Game Involvement Model (fig. 4.20), reinforcing the concepts discovered in this chapter. As mechanisms of a functioning system, the characteristics result in meaningful interactions and creations for the users. The rest of this section will

seek to outline how the qualities within the matrix work to define the ability of spaces to become meaningful, user-designed expressions of a city's inhabitants.

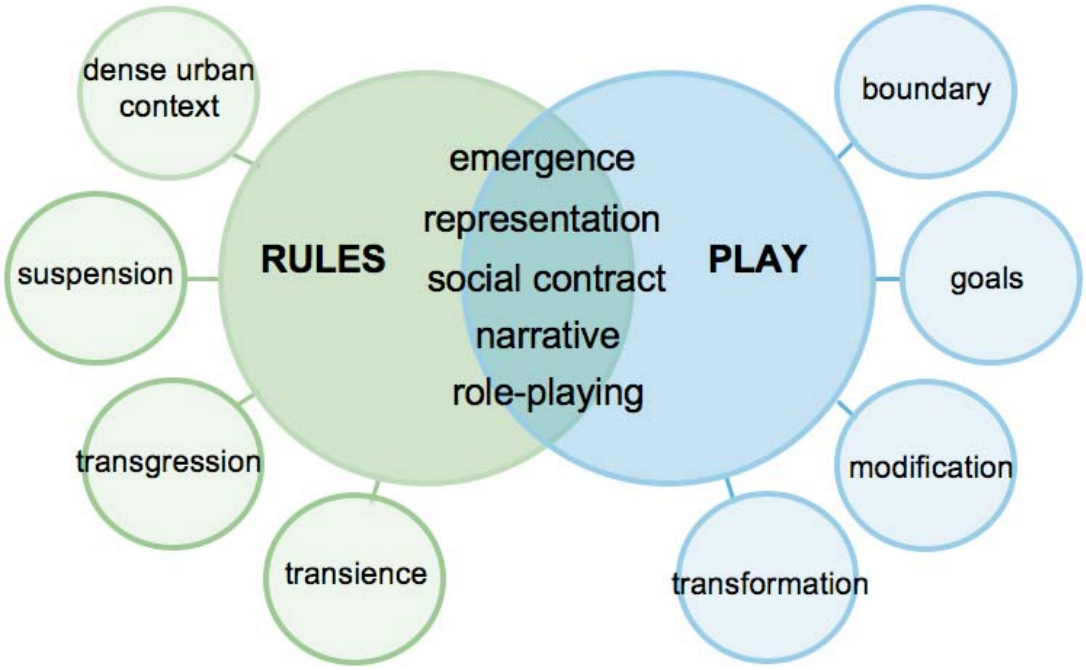

Figure 4.19. Diagram illustrating relationship of characteristics

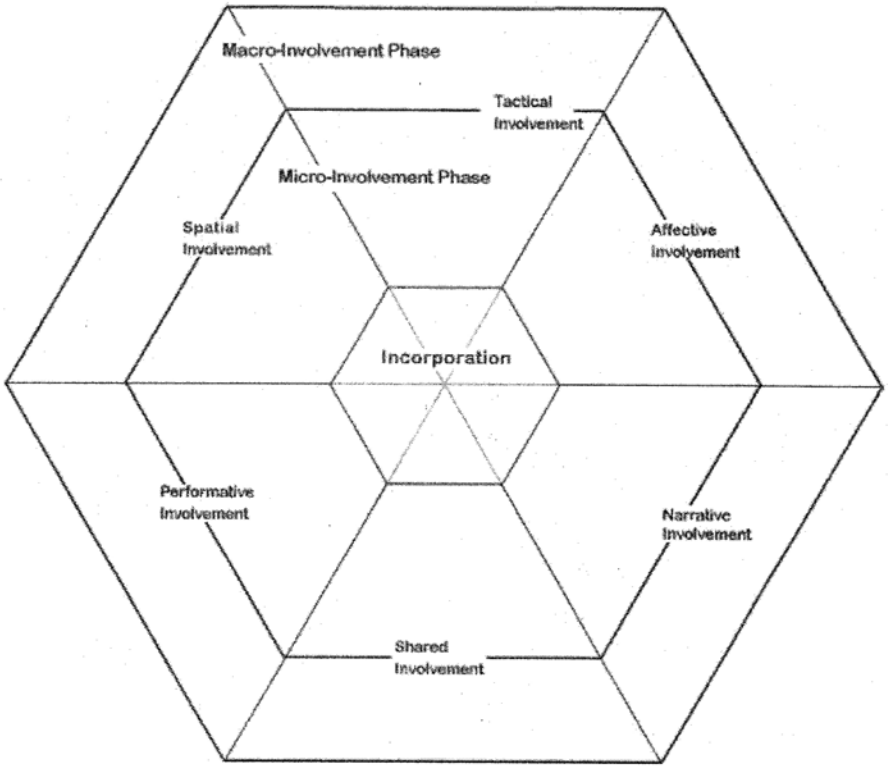

Figure 4.20. Calleja's Digital Game Involvement Model

Common to all of the sites, the highly urban condition, or *context*, is a Petri dish for unusual forms of space claiming, and as this chapter has disclosed, the appropriation of vacant lots is not an uncommon manifestation of the need to claim space. From the time of childhood, urbanites have more restrictions placed upon them legally, socially, and spatially than the average rural kid, a situation that the Adventure Playground promoters recognized and sought to alleviate. As the city dweller grows, those limitations may be replaced by new dos and don'ts, but the need to experiment, to personalize, to claim, and to express does not diminish. As well, one becomes more aware of the rules and more familiar with the game, which may hone these intrinsic needs. Similarly, all games provide a context in which play occurs, defined by the rules

and the physical and symbolic conditions of the space of play. Thus, the quality of *suspension* in a vacant space, or the measure of possibility within the rules, becomes the determining factor in the site's potential for use. This is especially true for those who seek a malleable space where the dominant code of the city is not upheld, where new rules can be forged. However, here the role of the *dense urban context* is crucial because the vacant site is nested within the larger system of the city, which imbues the space with poignant meaning as it connects with and informs the city, while maintaining a distinct identity apart from its environment.

The suspension of the vacant lot or abandoned building endows the space with the potential for *modification.* Modification becomes the essential core mechanic of the space, the activity that is repeated again and again as the tool by which the user interacts with the space or the player plays the game as he pushes towards his *goal*. In the case studies modification was performed on many levels, most often to repurpose a site: the evolving uses of a single building through a system of rotating leases; the challenge of rebuilding a sculpture, relocating a demolished casita; or inventing new forms more conducive to promoting a democratic world. Construction, or deconstruction, is frequently the specific core mechanic, first with building or altering buildings and then within that space, constructing gardens, sculptures, and maintaining or changing what has been built. The key to modification in these spaces lies in their flexibility and malleability to respond to the changing needs, or *goals*, of users, whether it be preparing for a particular festivity, maintaining a garden, or launching a small business: create, construct, rebuild, revise, relocate. Resulting from the constant modification is a dynamism enhanced by adaptive management that operates as a built-in mechanism for

change and evolution, a process that strives to adapt to the changing needs of the system. Even within the rigid structure of the Adventure Playground children were able to adaptively manage their own designs and experiences, freely modifying to fit their whims.

Modification becomes the means for personalization, ownership, expression, innovation, and experimentation within the system's *boundary*. The boundary takes the form of the physical space of a structure or the property lines of a vacant lot as delineated by a fence. Often, as seen in Table 4.2, the boundary is made explicit through an aesthetic transition, such as from an area of well-maintained streets and buildings and mowed grass to a place of cracked sidewalks, tall weeds, and dilapidated structures. Rules act as boundaries as well, providing the rigid structure within which the users explore the realm of possibility of the space, of the game; the shape of a building and its materials act as rules that mold the experience. The boundary of a site, whether tangible or intangible, reinforces the identities of the people on either side of it, and locates it within the greater cultural environment.

As users overtake and interpret the suspended spaces, exploring the potential freedom within the system's rules, they reinvent the architecture and the landscape through novel uses and activities. These actions *transgress* the intended use of the space, the laws governing private property, the accepted aesthetic of the city or neighborhood, and perhaps most importantly, they subvert and question basic norms of what, how, and when things should be used. The Albany Bulb is a weedy waterfront park in which garbage and weather define the aesthetic and use; the Casitas are illegal community centers celebrating the cultural vernacular of a minority; the warehouses are derelict

incubators for social and cultural production; the Adventure Playground gives young children tools and building scraps and lets them destroy, burn, and handle conflict. Each of these places transgresses the rules of the dominant culture, breaking apart the object to reassemble it in an unexpected way, *transforming* established perceptions. Rule-breaking is very much the underlying tone of these spontaneous landscapes, intentional or not, but meaning in this case could not occur without bending and molding the rules of the city so that new things can be made. As discussed in the preceding chapters, rule-breaking is a fundamental part of gaining ownership over something, and here provides the impetus for claiming space and for transforming and operating it. Without transgression, there can be no true change, as can be seen in thousands of years of human society.

A unifying attribute, whose significance cannot be overlooked, is that of *transience*. All of the sites, with the exception of the Adventure Playground, were illegally appropriated land. Some of the Casitas were successful at becoming the property of the community. However, as shown in Table 4.2, the majority of the sites were eventually reclaimed by the legal owners and demolished, despite lengthy and sometimes violent resistance. Transience influences modification for some of the sites, such as the changes wrought by natural forces at the Albany Bulb. However, transience is also the embodiment of the elusive pursuit of freedom and change that contributes to the poignancy of the activities which the space harbors. Even the children-built structures of the Adventure Playgrounds are torn down seasonally so that the game can begin anew.

The characteristics discussed in the preceding paragraphs are those exhibited in the matrix and gave rise to the experiential characteristics that form the subject of the rest

of this chapter. What arises out of interaction between a user and this web of complex, interwoven characteristics is *emergence,* which transcends its boundaries to infuse the people and the city with meaning. Emergence, as Chapter 2 reveals, is the unpredictable outcome of a complex system and the product of adaptation and change. Emergence renders the experience of a place meaningful, thus encouraging the desire for repeat engagement or play. As emergence overwhelms the bounds of the site, it mingles with the encompassing environment affecting and being affected by it, to become a reflection of the zeitgeist. The warehouses in Helsinki and Berlin are cases in point: each one became so interwoven into the cultural fabric of the city that when the time came to demolish them, even people who had never really been a part of them joined the resistance.

Within the boundary of the space and through its modification, the site becomes a *representation* of important ideas, places, events, or objects that often could not exist outside of the suspended space. The Casitas' deliberate simulation of 1950's pastoralism illustrates how representation can be manifested in physical form, as well as how it plays out within the community of users and into the larger system in which it resides. Its existence is maintained and upheld through a *social contract* shared by all players, without which the simulated world would not exist. The transformed warehouses in Helsinki and Berlin, People's Park, the Bulb, and even the Adventure Playground all rely on representation to evoke and inspire meaning. The representation is less literal, perhaps, than in the Casitas, but the use of external references and symbols render them parallel worlds of possibility: of greater equality and democracy, of freedom for

unmediated play, experimentation, expression, and social interaction. The spaces become representations of alternate possibilities, fusions of the lived and dreamed worlds.

Narrative plays an important role as the historical story inherent within a vacant space whose materials and appearance act as texts by which the story is communicated. The story that the space tells provides the incentive to appropriate the space or to play the game. The narrative embedded within the site engages with the personal narrative that unfurls as the user interacts with the space. This emergent narrative personalizes the experience of the user and as it merges with the larger, embedded narrative, becomes a story unique to that space. In People's Park, the embedded narrative of a place for the people, outside of the oppressive rules and conventions of society, created a space in which people could simply 'be', free to say, think, and do what they wanted; to act out a part of themselves, to test the realm of what a democratic, free space could be. In the Casitas, people engaged with the simulated story of Puerto Rico, assuming identities relevant to their culture that enabled their unique story to play out.

Role-playing happens when people step into the space and engage with the embedded story. They become the main character of their emergent narrative as they interact with the space and play the game. As seen with the Casitas, role-playing allows Puerto Ricans an opportunity to enforce cultural identities that may not be accepted or appreciated outside of the casita. As soon as the boundary of the space is breached and the user begins to interact with other users and the space itself, a role is assumed and his narrative comes to life.

The matrix (table 4.2) visualizes and organizes the essential characteristics that have made the case studies successful spaces and shows how their collaborative presence

creates the potential for meaningful interaction for players. The following chapter will utilize the matrix as a structural framework for designing a spontaneous, user-designed space. By ensuring that each characteristic is present or made possible within the designed system, possibility for meaningful interaction, or emergence, is increased.

Table 4.2. Matrix showing how characteristics are manifested in case study sites

	Adventure Playground	Albany Bulb	People's Park	RAW-Tempel	Malasiini	Casita
Suspension	Bombing Site/ Vacant lot	Closed down landfill	Vacant lot	Abandoned warehouses	Abandoned warehouses	Vacant lot
Transgression	Dominant aesthetic, social norms	Dominant aesthetic, property laws	Property laws, social norms	Dominant aesthetic and culture, original architecture's intent, rotating lease goes against tradition of impersonal business transactions	Dominant aesthetic and culture, original architecture's intent	Dominant aesthetic and culture, property laws
Modification	Scrap building materials for play	Maintenance, new waste materials for constructing	Repurposing	Repurposing	Repurposing	Maintenance, repurposing
Boundary	Fence, aesthetic transition	Geographic idsolation, aesthetic transition	Fence, transient/ subculture user populations	Aesthetic transition, architecture	Aesthetic transition, architecture	Fence, aesthetic transition
Goals	Exploratory freedom	Artistic expression, space to live unmolested	Democratic space for everyone	Socio-cultural projects	Cultural projects and production	Cultural enclave/ community center
Transience	Seasonal deconstruction of built structures	Site ownership, natural forces (weather)	Site owner-ship	Repurposing	Rotating leases	Site ownership, repurposing for events

CHAPTER 5

DESIGN APPLICATION: THE BOX GAME

There are four factions who want to rebuild the world, each in their own image.

-from the Box Game

Disparate populations are given a landscape that they can each reconstruct to their own taste. 50 multi-colored boxes clustered in space comprise the cityscape which, when relinquished to the machinations of the individual mind and hand, are reconfigured as something new. Drawing from game design theory and the 12 characteristics found in the case studies, a simple game was created to see how people would respond to and manipulate a given set of rules and components when given the possibility of choice proposed in the opening narrative. Due to the limitations of time, location, and weather, a true application of the ideas put forth in the thesis was impossible. However, the game embodied many of the characteristics shown in the matrix and revealed, even in its minimal structure, the capacity for meaningful play on multiple levels.

Figure 5.1. The Box Game, Game 1

The game consisted of 50 cardboard boxes of varying shapes and sizes, 10 of which were solid-colored and 40 of which were painted combinations of yellow, blue, green, and red. The components were designed to be exceptionally simple and non-guiding in form while providing variety and rhythm through the four colors (fig. 5.1). Much like a child's wooden block set or a deck of cards, the components were intended to be abstract enough to give rise to a number of games. The game space, or magic circle, was laid out as a large square divided into quadrants, all of which were outlined with marking tape. The boxes were placed haphazardly throughout the square, in stacks or scattered, ignoring the lines of the quadrants. With the knowledge that the first user group would be a game design class, the game was given structure through an ambiguous narrative: *There are four factions who want to rebuild the world, each in their own image.* This line provides the embedded narrative of the game by giving some loose direction as to what the game is about, how it should be played, and what its goals are.

The narrative's cryptic language provides a scenario against which the players react through the core mechanic: construction. The freedom for interpretation of the game narrative and the components enables the users to respond in more personal ways, and then to respond to one another's unique movements. In addition to the brightly colored components, seeing other people playing with the game may entice passersby to engage in the game as well. A final key aspect of the game is that it is presented as a suspended space, similar to the case study sites. This is achieved by setting or constructing the space and then abandoning it, leaving only the rules and structure, or components, open to inquisitive discoverer's interpretation.

Three separate Box Games, games 1, 2, and 3, were orchestrated to observe the public's response. Game 1 was a dry run to get feedback from game players and designers. Games 2 and 3 were literally abandoned in public spaces around Atlanta with a sign as the only invitation to play; the author in these cases was a passive observer and took only notes and photographs. The photographs were altered for the thesis so that none of the participants can be identified and so that the evolving game structure is emphasized over the individual players. The original photographs have been destroyed.

Game 1: Dry Run

The first user-group played the game in a large grassy area on the University of Georgia campus. A small portion of the field was set up with the game as described above and the students were each given a slip of paper explaining the narrative. Immediately, the students, without verbalization, broke into four teams and began piling boxes in their quadrant. After some tinkering and then a 10-minute lapse in activity, they began to modify the game, setting in motion its evolution. Rules were added, such as *big*

boxes count less than little boxes, which would cause a riot of activity as everyone adjusted to the change. As the students became more comfortable with the situation they began to transform the game. A box was placed in the center of the square, where the four quadrants intersect. This dissolved the 'team' mentality and suddenly everyone was each for himself, or all for one, stacking boxes into a teetering tower. The game evolution started to pick up speed as game after game was invented with the components: make a castle, make a robot with only red and blue, build a wall and bust through it, Jenga, get inside the box, throw small boxes into the big box. The initial rules lasted only a couple of revolutions, but people continued to play as they reinvented the goal of the game and acted out their ideas, ultimately personalizing and owning the game. The social contract that emerged established a mutual understanding that anyone could revise the game and as people responded to the revisions, continuous play occurred.

Figure 5.2. The Box Game in motion

Analysis

The game design class stayed within the magic circle, or the game space, during the entire play duration. As a group of people who design and play games frequently, their response was not representative of the average person; however, they did not all respond in the same way. Based on the five types of players identified by Salen and Zimmerman—the standard player, the dedicated player, the unsportsmanlike player, the cheat, and the spoil-sport—all of the participants fell within the standard and dedicated player types; however, several different responses arose from within the two typologies. Throughout much of the game there were almost always two sub-games: a primary game that the majority of people played, and a simultaneous peripheral game. This was because there appeared to be several subsets of players within the standard and dedicated player categories: one or multiple leaders who created and drove the evolution of the primary games; participants who played the games intitiated by the leaders and who otherwise stood watching; and a few people who played the peripheral game, such as one student who built a protective wall of boxes around himself from which he watched the activity of his classmates. On a side note, observation was a common phenomenon at the Adventure Playground as a loose form of engagement and learning; it is interesting to note that people of all ages spend much time watching the actions of others. The various emergent behaviors exhibited by the participants resulted from the ability for the space and the components to be manipulated, personalized, and reinvented by each player. The initial structure of the game dissolved through its many incarnations, fusing and dividing the group of players. By remaining in the magic circle (game space), the participants were able to discover their most comfortable role through which they enacted their

personal narrative within the larger narrative of the space, creating their own magic circle. Some simply rearranged boxes to form their own niche to watch others, while some consistently found new ways to use the boxes, bending the very rules of the physical components, such as opening a box and getting inside of it.

Figure 5.3. Reinventing the game

Games 2 and 3: Atlanta

Site and Setup:

Games 2 and 3 were conducted in Atlanta, Georgia in an effort to simulate more accurately the application of the design framework in the real world by engaging the un-knowing general public. These game applications focused on people's reactions to rules, specific rule sets, context, people as player types, and the general attitude toward something unexpected and out of place.

Game 2 was erected at a busy intersection on the intramural fields in Piedmont Park, juxtaposed against the traditional games being played, specifically baseball, kickball, football, and Frisbee. The fields were packed with multiple large-scale refereed games going on at the same time and groups of players were loitering about waiting for their turn. Several modifications were made to the Box Game based on suggestions from the student players: the game had less-defined boundaries, relying only on a solid-colored box, one of each color, to delineate the corners of the game square. This was done to enhance the invitation to play by rendering the game space less formal. A small sign was set up exhibiting the same narrative that was given to the students, with the addition of *Come Play* written underneath, and printed in small type so that people were forced to come and stand at the edge of the magic circle to read it.

Figure 5.4. The game setup at Little Five Points

In the final location, a small and bustling square in Little Five Points, the game was set up as usual, with the boxes in haphazard piles and slightly scattered (fig. 5.4). This time no edges were delineated to define the game space and a narrative was stuck up on a nearby pole stating simply: *What can you build with these boxes?* This site was selected for its intense urbanness and the broad array of people that visit the collection of vintage stores, pubs, music venues, and global clothing/gift shops in the area. The population stands in stark contrast to that of the intramural fields at Piedmont Park which, though varied, draw people for the single purpose of traditional play. Little Five Point's qualities are much more similar to the spaces discussed in Chapter 3.

Figure 5.5. Curiosity piqued: players beginning to interpret the game

Analysis:

Rules

In each game the rules or narrative were altered according to the user population and the site, so it is difficult to know how different rules affected play, as well as if people reacted to the rules, the components, or both. The rules/narrative may have been the cause of people's behavior toward the game in Game 2, resulting in a game that did not come across as inviting. Nonetheless, in Games 1 and 2, people reacted to the system; just after the game was set up on the square at Little Five Points, three people began to build towers and castles with the boxes, breaking down and reconstructing objects multiple times. Two of the three were standard players, simply playing with the boxes as they were, rearranging them into different forms and configurations. The third person was a dedicated player, deeply exploring the rules of the components, transforming the boxes to alter their potential by opening them up and throwing them into the little tree overhead (fig. 5.6), extending the play space vertically and changing the goal of the game.

Figure 5.6. A dedicated player extends the magic circle upward

This exploration of the realm of possibility or the freedom within the more rigid game structure echoed the evolutions of Game 1 by the game design students. All players moved the boxes around, playing off of the color variations and the shape of the boxes, as well as the actions of the other players. However, only a few people broke the rules of the components by opening the boxes or extending the realm of the game itself. From simply building with the boxes to actually physically transforming them, in both Game 1 and Game 3 the goals and structure of the game were modified leading to unexpected interpretations of the game space, goals, and components and thus rendering the players designers (fig. 5.7, 5.8). Through adaptation and change, or adaptive management, the game continued to evolve along with the players' desires to become reflective of them.

Figure 5.7. Unforeseen interpretations

Figure 5.8. Evolution

Play

In Games 1 and 3 play occurred on multiple commitment levels: from the rule-altering dedicated player to the peripheral standard player who in Little Five Points quickly stacked some boxes to form a 'W' (fig. 5.10) before continuing on his way out of the square. All of these players set the game in motion, interpreting the rules and components in his own way to shape the space as he desired. The narrative of play—*There are four factions who want to rebuild the world, each in their own image*; *Come*

Play; *What can you build with these boxes?*—each suggest a scenario, however abstract with which the players' own narratives interacted. Contributing to the embedded narrative are the bright colors of the boxes, their ragtag appearance, and their size relative to the space. In Games 1 and 2 the boxes seem dwarfed by the large grassy parks in which they sat, while in Game 3 they seemed numerous and large in the crowded plaza, which may have made the game more inviting or interesting to play. The author believes that the boxes were what enticed people to play rather than the narrative.

Figure 5.9. Unfolding narrative

Through the core mechanic—construction—the player manipulated and modified the game using the components. The simple, straightforward but moveable and

modifiable box became the mechanism by which the player expressed his choices and ideas. As he moved and altered the boxes, the player became empowered through his ability to affect the game.

Figure 5.10. Personalization: what does this story say?

As the players explored the potential of the components, spatial boundaries, and rules, they invented new games and new meanings. A box was the base of a bridge or a tower, a place in which to sit, a wall to hide behind, a container, a hat, a lid, a decoration in a tree. This transformative play through modification enabled the game to be continually re-envisioned by a player to suit his desires.

Interestingly, common to Games 1 and 2, all of the players remained within the magic circle, whether it was clearly delineated or not. As well, though people opened boxes and threw them around, no one tore them up or stole any. People also responded to one another's box creations in considerate ways, sometimes teaming up to build things.

This behavior can be interpreted as a mutual, unstated acceptance of the rules of the game and the social contract so that the game could continue to be played.

The boxes may have invited play because they are a representation of a child's block set. Perhaps this reference to youthful, unmitigated play enhanced the invitation to play the game or even limited or opened up how one should play with the boxes or interpret the rules.

Figure 5.11. Little Five Points

Culture:

The author believes that context played a pivotal role in how the game was received by the public. Over the course of an hour at the intramural fields nearly everyone who walked past the game stopped to read the sign. People were interested as it was so clearly out of place, although no one engaged the game. Several people touched

the boxes and walked around them. At the Little Five Points location, fewer people stopped to look, but more people played with the boxes. Within this specific eclectic urban context the boxes did not seem so out of place amongst the African drummers, belly dancers, homeless people, loiterers, and shoppers (fig. 5.11).

Compounding the embedded and emergent narratives are the larger contextual narratives of the site in which the game is located. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of play observed was the fact that once players felt comfortable within the magic circle, they felt that the usual real-world rules no longer applied and thus they were freed to truly explore the potential of the components. In Game 1, the players were game design students who, through play during class time, loosened up enough from whatever social rules to feel that they could push against the boundaries of the game system to alter the game. In Game 2 it appeared that the context of the intramural fields impeded a person's desire to engage with the game, whether because socially it seemed unacceptable or because he was there to play a particular game already and this game was not an enticing distraction. The 'player as performer' syndrome may have deterred people who were wary of being put on display in front of others or becoming the object of attention. Perhaps this could also have been a product of social conditioning that has produced citizens who feel they should not touch things that belong to other people or to avoid what they do not understand. It is difficult to say which reasons may have influenced people's choice to not interact with Games 2 and 3.

Figure 5.12. Game 1 players reinterpreting the game

Another interesting observation was that most often the people who did interact with Game 2 appeared to the author to be already social transgressors, alternative people such as punks, eccentrics, and the homeless, for whom playing with the boxes of some unknown person did not require so many steps outside of their zone of propriety. Perhaps if the game had been left up for an entire day or week, it might have melted into the regularity of Little Five Points and invited more play by a broader spectrum of people. On the other hand, the boxes may have disappeared out of the proximity of play or been swept up and disposed of during regular maintenance activity. This alternative type of player can also be seen as the most common instigator of the space transformations

discussed in Chapter 3. The Albany Bulb, the Makasiini, Raw Tempel, and the Casitas were all initially exploited by alternative populations, social transgressors of varying degrees, who were attracted to the site by its potential for manipulation. These social transgressors include artists, the homeless, and immigrants, all of whom were the original site appropriators who recognized the potential of the spaces and transformed them. It was only after this preliminary transformation that others began to want or feel comfortable enough to participate, perpetuating the cycle of adaptation and change. Games 1, 2, and 3 could not fully set in motion this cycle.

Just as the case study sites violate aesthetic, cultural, and social rules of the cities in which they reside, the Box Game transgressed the traditional rules of Piedmont Park's intramural fields and Little Five Points square by boldly claiming public space and asking passersby to touch, move, and re-imagine objects belonging to someone else (fig. 5.13). The Box Game invites passersby to suspend the rules and formalities of the city and to step into the magic circle of the game.

Figure 5.13. Little Five Points: final game configuration

One interesting note about Games 2 and 3 is that no one stopped the game. The games' presence in public spaces was either ignored or indulged but there was never any effort to move it out of the way or to dispose of it. This could be due to the types of spaces selected as game sites, the types of people present, or the day on which the games occurred. Perhaps it is testament to the fact that these particular spaces are working—that they are allowing any member of society to come and express themselves, to stake their claim of public space. If the games had been set up in spaces of high human density and movement, such as the downtown Atlanta transit stations, business, or tourist districts, the boxes might have received more negative attention.

Incorporation of the Matrix

The 14 characteristics discussed in Chapter 3 provided the framework upon which the Box Game was designed. Utilizing the matrix, one can most closely emulate the 'perfect storm' conditions that produced the spontaneous case study sites. Like the Adventure Playground, the game is a *guided creation*, conceived and constructed by designers for others to use. Little Five Points was the most *urban context* in which the game was located and the one most like the case study sites. While Games 1 and 2 took place in cities, their immediate context resembled a more rural setting. The primary activity in the Box Game, the core mechanic that drives the action and provides the player with the ability to affect the game, is *construction*. The player plays the game by moving and manipulating the boxes, constructing and deconstructing objects in space to *modify* his environment. This core mechanic parallels the cyclical building, breaking down, and rebuilding central to the case study sites and embodies the concept of *adaptive management* that enables the space to constantly adapt to the ever-changing needs of the

users. Players explored the *boundary* of the space, extending it upward into the trees or by altering the boundaries of the components as they opened boxes and got inside of them. Some people stepped within the boundary of the game without acknowledging the magic circle and closely regarded the components through their everyday real-world lens.

The colorful boxes are a *representation* of a child's block set and of the basic components of buildings and cities, and the Box Game is a representation of spontaneous user-designed spaces like the Albany Bulb or the Casitas. They are set up like an architectural structure and then abandoned, in a state of *suspension*, left to be discovered and transformed by the willing citizen. To build using blocks within the magic circle, to step into the magic circle and accept its rules of play, and even the very presence of the boxes in public spaces intended for consumption or traditional games are all acts of *transgression*. *Role-playing* occurs within the game space as people engage with the system, enacting the rules and exploring their place within the game. As the game is set in motion through play, each player's own *narrative* emerges, responding to and affecting the larger embedded narrative of the game. Whether the player is reacting to the story of competing factions and the reconstruction of a city, to the form or color of the boxes, or to the actions of others, they are weaving their own story.

Just as a key component of the case studies is *transience*, so is it to the Box Game. The author temporally appropriated each public space site as an experiment in democracy and the original layout, or structure of the game, was reinvented continuously as each player manipulated the components to adapt them to their whims. By constantly being rearranged and re-envisioned the Box Game was able to maintain a dynamic relevance to its users as it evolved, encouraging repeat play.

Outside of the magic circle, the Box Game acted as an impetus for interaction between populations that might not otherwise have felt comfortable or had reason to interact. Out of their own free will, people stopped to play the game. The dissolution of boundaries was much more profound and widespread than the game space itself; boundaries between people fell away, if but for a moment as they considered or manipulated the space. Ultimately, this is the goal of the thesis: to invite people to modify public spaces and to increase social friction between different populations through the medium of landscape. If a landscape can bring people together, even for a short time, innumerable stories are exchanged through simple interaction, bending and transforming ideas and producing culture, rendering it a truly democratic space.

The Box Game could not entice everyone to play; in fact, very few people overall chose to engage with the game. As well, the ideas in the thesis and their application to a real landscape are long steps from the Box Game and may not actually work. However, the thesis seeks to propose a new frame by which to read the cultural texts of our cities, not to single-handedly unearth the solutions to the problems it discloses. That citizens are often subtly subverting the city's spaces, claiming and shaping despite the rising rules and restrictions, is evidence that the game has already been set in motion and that play is occurring. The thesis unites these subtle symbols to inspire landscape architects to read the cultural texts entrenched in the landscape, to answer the "cry and demand for the *right* to the city" (Mitchell 21).

Conclusion

What does it say about American culture that most people would not interact with the game? Perhaps people, when confronted with landscapes exhibiting the rhetorics of

identity, the imaginary, the self, or frivolity, find them too ambiguous or foreign to understand or wish for interaction. Perhaps people have spent too long in spaces of power, control, and progress. Maybe the average person has forgotten how to play or lost their ambition to rebuild the world. If there were more landscapes that provided the tools for deep play, to be sculpted by the individual, what would our cities and our landscapes look like? What stories would they tell?

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTION: THE POTENTIAL OF LANDSCAPES

This thesis transgresses the more rigid boundaries of landscape architecture as it searches for the freedom to reinterpret the rules. Doron concludes in his article that

> whether architects and planners can engage with the space where their sovereignty is suspended, and what architecture will arise, is a question that maybe only architects and planners could give the answer to. Maybe, for several reasons, it could not be done in the practice itself, maybe a new kind of school, or an architecture and planning laboratory, need to be created, where the tactics of suspension can be produced and tested; where Architecture of Transgression, done by an architect will be invented. However, the creation of this architecture laboratory will already be an act of transgression, since architecture and planning school is a factory and a fortress where the architect and planner's sovereignty is being manufactured and protected. (262)

In trying to create spaces for personalization, creation, and expression, this thesis modifies the rules to own the game, setting in motion the adaptive management of an evolving landscape. In so doing the landscape is set free to fail, to try again, to succeed, to become something altogether new and unforeseen.

Rooted in the Box Game's capacity for modification and change is a level of uncertainty which is communicated to the player through its form, appearance, setup, and embedded narrative. This uncertainty is enhanced by a high level of noise—for example, the bustling atmosphere of Little Five Points, the size and layout of the square, the variety of loiterers and their activities, and the cloudy weather—which contributes to how people interpret the game. The high level of ambiguity within the Box Game provides a large

measure of freedom for choice making on the part of the player, rendering his decisions more meaningful.

Informing the design of the Box Game was the search for avenues of meta-design so that the components could be used in a variety of games, increasing the amount of freedom in choice making for the player. The basic form of the boxes and their limited spectrum of colors serves as a meta-game (Salen and Zimmerman 546) system, much like a deck of cards. This flexible system of components enabled the players in Games 1 and 3 to invent a variety of new games.

As DeKoven writes, "the search for the well-played game is what holds the community together" (Salen and Zimmerman 281), and though small indeed, there was evidence that people interacted with other members of the community that they may not have otherwise felt comfortable with as they stopped to watch or play the game. The Box Game is not a unique community catalyst, but it does pose an opportunity for the dissolution of the boundaries that exist between people and groups.

Each case study examined in the preceding pages is a testament to the persistent human pursuit of ideals in the face of enormous cultural, social, and political limitations. The existence of the landscapes is proof that landscape architects, architects, and planners cannot foresee all of the needs of a city's inhabitants. They plan for particular types of people, allow market demand to influence the shape and content of their spaces, and increasingly they limit the possibility of unpredictability in public places so that they will be 'safe'. Parallel to this rise in commercialization, privatization, urbanization, and control are surprising forms of rebellion, squeezing out from forgotten spaces—from the narrowest strip of median to the most dilapidated urban structures. "*Claiming* the right to

the city requires never taking that right for granted, never being satisfied with how it is for now 'closed,' how it is for now 'secured,' how, for now, utopia has been materialized" (Mitchell 236). Artists, the homeless, immigrants, or regular citizens calling themselves guerrilla gardeners see what trained professionals do not: they see the holes in the urban fabric not as sites for renewal, but rather as loopholes for defiance, for social and cultural production. The thesis does not propose that it is possible to design spaces that can act like user-created spaces because we cannot possibly predict all of the needs of the people. Rather, perhaps by learning to see as they see, to study spaces that 'work' just as Jane Jacobs did, designers can set in motion the game of evolution. Not knowing what the outcome will be, inspiration will come from the notion that one's space will have multiple lives, it will have its own lives, ones given to it by the people who conspire to use it.

This thesis proposes vacant abandoned lots as game application sites. Facing a shortage of affordable land and a host of environmental degradation issues caused by suburbanization and chemical, monoculture farming, there is no excuse for wasting available urban land. Most importantly, the game design framework provides a means of developing dynamic public spaces without the barrier of project financing that often takes years to surface from the Byzantine bureaucratic establishments in charge. A landscape architect's job would be to seek out potential vacant spaces and then to set up a game that would encourage the site's community development to serve the people's needs; ultimately they would create suspension by finding the right combination of characteristics. As Doron claims, "suspension merely marks the boundaries of any system (i.e. space) and by doing so marks the place where transgression can operate"

(260). This new type of landscape architect must expose "a space that was always there within the most rigid boundary of architecture" (Doron 262), so that the opportunity arises for reinterpretation and meaningful interaction. For example, it would take several cycles of adaptive management to find the right noise and redundancy levels within the message to attract players to a space. If successful, the space will be largely self-managing, with the users making the necessary adjustments to the system as they modify and construct the space. It is important to note here, however, that the purpose of the game design framework is the creation of democratic spaces and not the rehabilitation of rundown urban spaces. Although rehabilitation is a desired outcome or byproduct, the framework seeks to diminish the deterministic hand of the traditional designer so that the hidden desires of the city's inhabitants might contribute form to the built environment.

The potential for future games to allow for public participation in a broad array of projects is yet to be seen. It would be interesting if a game could be designed to address issues of environmental processes, such as a game focused on urban environmental restoration. How could a game be created to connect people to their natural environment? How could environmental processes be used as a game's context or rules?

Another standing question of significance is how to prompt user transgression. The presentation of the space—its rundown appearance and apparent vacancy—may stimulate a desire to explore the space's potential. Rules may provoke a response out of people, causing them to either follow or defy them. One approach might be to deliberately frustrate users by designing against them to provoke a creative response; perhaps by imposing rules of structure or use upon people, which blatantly go against their desires.

It is important to recognize that not all games produce positive results; they can be coercive and degenerative, devolving into games of ill intent. It follows then, that landscapes designed as game systems are also vulnerable to degenerative processes, and this must be taken into consideration as they game system is designed and later engaged with by users. Degeneration is one of the side effects of emergent systems.

The Box Game, in its multifarious incarnations over the course of three games, is an inquiry into the human desire to create one's own reality rather than to have it dictated to them. Given building blocks, will people see only battered cardboard boxes or will they build kingdoms? The thesis found that both scenarios are true. More people might have played with the boxes had the setting been more private and less exposed to the judgment of peers. As well, the application analysis recognized that the game fell short of the 'perfect storm' conditions that gave rise to places like the Casitas and Raw Tempel. The Box Game would probably be a more accurate simulation of these spaces if it were to be left up for at least several days to give time for people to adjust to its presence and deem it a truly suspended space rather than a social experiment, someone's temporary art installation that should not be touched, or simply something not to be trusted. Revisions to the rules or narrative could entice more interaction or deeper play. Similarly, the game presentation could be altered in a number of ways, including the addition of more boxes, a broader spectrum of sizes and shapes, or an arrangement stacked more intentionally in towers or dispersed more haphazardly throughout the space. The game space could be delineated more clearly or perhaps people would find the game more approachable and inviting were it to be left completely open with only a small sign dictating initial player behavior. There is a legion of possible arrangement combinations between the game's

rules, components, context, and play space that would be worth exploring to enhance playability. A revised version of the Box Game could be applied to a space in New York, Chicago, or Boston where there are many pedestrians moving through intensely urban spaces.

Ultimately, however, the goal of the thesis is not to produce a host of Box Games, but to call attention to the homogenizing results of many current designs and to implicate landscape architects in this process. Most importantly, it reminds landscape architects that they also have the power to change this course of space-making: in the creation of a game system that invites someone to play and then to modify their environment, it becomes an expression of the self even with only a few adjustments. The player is empowered through his control over his surroundings. The boxes act as catalysts and tools for change: they are the baby dolls, hedge clippers, and scrap metal of the Albany Bulb; the empty warehouses of the Makasiini; and the plants, animals, and white paint of the Casitas—sculptures of people, a library, cultural think tanks, or pastoral Puerto Rico. The various components, abandoned lots, and rules of form and space were set in motion by the engine of human imagination and desire. These spaces are nothing without people, but with people they are far more than the sum of their parts. The concepts behind the Box Game are intended for real-world application to an abandoned site. The space should remain as it is with whatever materials found on-site as components and the rules to be perhaps disseminated through a deliberately spread rumor or a narrative tacked on a wall, fence, or side of a building. Each game system should be adapted to the site's unique cultural and environmental contexts to engender game play; this situational approach to game design renders the design process more accessible to

members of the community and broadens the possibility for the creation of a meaningful space. Much is to be tried and tested, but perhaps through many game design evolutions and adaptations there will be a few meaningful spaces produced that are reflective of their users' dreams.

And what of the dreams and desires of users in public spaces? As we have seen, public spaces are increasingly devoid of individual expression. Heavy programming or, to the other extremity, vast wind-swept plazas leave little room for personalization. With so much of the activity being controlled through design and surveillance in the wake of international instability, it is difficult for discordant populations to interact and thus induce the friction of ideas, which are essential ingredients in the recipe for democracy. The sometimes very subtle protests of citizens against the increasing difficulty to claim space signals that designers of public spaces have not done their job in making places for the innumerable populations that comprise the metropolis.

Stepping back into the jungles of Bali to rejoin the surging crowd and the fighting cocks, we are reminded of the purpose of the game: to be a part of something collectively human, to revel in a history twisted and frayed by time but always new and evolving, to link our individual stories to the greater human epic. We want to own our personal narratives, to manipulate and determine their unfolding, but ultimately to see the die our hand has cast, to relive again and again our great inventions, our deepest failures. The thesis puts forth a device by which designers can enable citizens to reclaim their spaces. It is not the only or best tool, but with it, perhaps, all citizens may have the opportunity to suggest revision, to contribute to the creation and management of spaces that reflect the sleeping dreams of the city, to construct something in an honest vernacular.

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