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THE CHANGING  
CITY OF  
CHILDHOOD :  
IMPLICATIONS  
FOR PLAY AND  
LEARNING

Roger Hart

THE 1986 CATHERINE MOLONY  
MEMORIAL LECTURE

The City College Workshop Center

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## Roger Hart

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MEMORIAL LECTURE

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roger Hart is Director of the Center for Human Environments of Environmental Psychology at the Graduate School of the City University of New York. He also teaches in the Developmental Psychology Program. He has a Ph.D. in Geography from Clark University which was published as the book "Children's Experience of Place". He founded and edits the journal Children's Environments Quarterly. His work has focussed upon theory and research concerning children's relationship with physical environments: environmental learning; play planning and design; children's participation in environmental change and community development; risk-taking and safety in the built environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

### WILLIAM CRAIN

Associate Professor of Psychology, City College of New York

I am very pleased to introduce Dr. Hart to you. Dr. Hart is the Director of the Center for Human Environments at the Graduate Center fo the City University of New York. He also is the editor of Children's Environments Quarterly and a UNICEF representative to the International Association for the Child's Right to Play.

Dr. Hart grew up in Nottingham, England, where his family is in the plant nursery business--so you see how his interest in the environment might have begun. After earning his B.A. in Geography at the University of Yorkshire, he went to Clark University in Massachusetts, where he wrote his pioneering doctoral dissertation, Children's Experience of Place, published by Irvington Publishers in 1977.

In this remarkable work, Hart explored how children think and feel about their environment in a New England town. He conducted a rigorous scientific study, but he did much more than that. Hart became friends with and entered their own world. So we learn about the places the children really care about--the ponds, trees, and abandoned houses--and we discover how different children's experiences can be from those of adults. I believe that this work will become a classic in phenomenological child psychology.

It is therefore very encouraging to those of us who are concerned about children in urban settings that Hart has turned his attention to this matter, and we are very fortunate to have him with us today. Dr. Hart will speak on "Children in the Changing City: Implications for Play and Learning."

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# Roger Hart

City children have always wanted to play in the streets. They have wanted to be where the action is. The earliest playgrounds were never intended to provide a rich play environment for children; adults wanted children off the streets, especially those children who were considered delinquent. They did not stay off the streets. All over the world research has shown us that when given the choice children would rather play in the streets than in playgrounds. The reasons are simple. Children do not want to be completely segregated from the interesting world of adults.

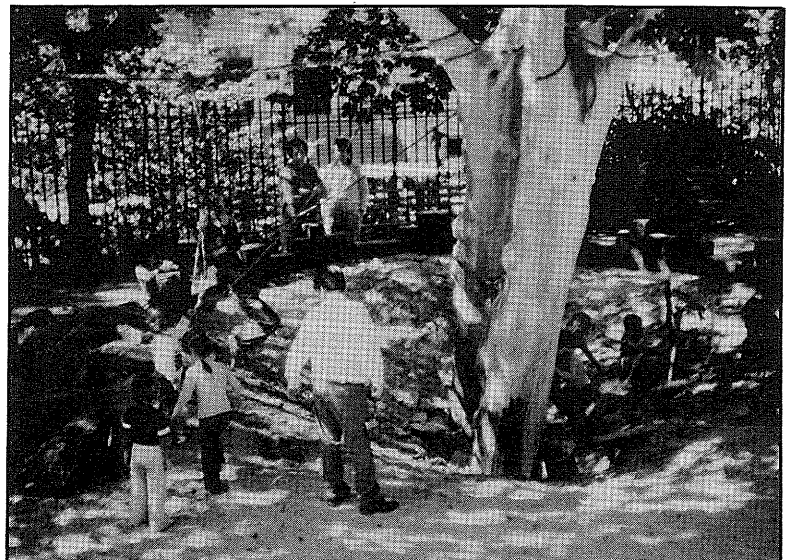
Cary Goodman has written a convincing documentary of how the playground movement, which began in the first decade of this century, operated in the lower East Side of New York (Goodman, 1979). While the reformers behind this movement organized ostensibly to reduce vandalism and protect children from traffic, Goodman argues that they had a deeper ideology. The streets of the lower East Side at this time belonged to those who lived there, including the children who--sometimes organized in marauding gangs--were seen to represent a "counter-world" of potentially serious political opposition to the elites who formed the movement. From this perspective, putting children into playgrounds was a way of neutralizing them and inculcating them with gentry values. The fences of these playgrounds were not just to keep balls in or children safe. They were necessary barriers in the strictly-run organized play settings. If in "choosing sides" the children opted to stay in the streets, they risked frequent harassment by police and sometimes even arrest for such criminal acts as ball play!

While the subtext might have been to encourage socialization according to the norms of the dominant groups in society, the actions of these reformers also embodied recognition of the profound importance of children learning from one another in play. In comparison, at the contemporary provision for children's free time play in the cities seems sharply regressive. The playgrounds are still largely unused, but streets are also becoming empty of children. Many commentators seem to attribute this to the power of television to keep children indoors. A more accurate analysis would, I believe, reveal the "push" factors from the streets to be more important

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in reducing street play. Recent research confirms that the fears of kidnapping, mugging and sexual crimes now exceed the older fear of traffic accidents (Hart, 1979; Medrich et al, 1982; Moore, 1986). I believe a careful historical analysis would confirm my exploratory autobiographic research with New York residents that parents are more restrictive with their children now than in past decades. Current research by Kim Blakely, a doctoral student in environmental psychology at the City University, reveals that not only children but many parents are frightened to visit playgrounds with their young children.

It is worth asking then what the advantages of street play are to children's development and to society to see if anything of importance is being lost. There are dozens of accounts in the popular press about the demise of street games and chants. Such commentary usually seems superficial and nostalgic. However, if looked at together with the amazing records by Iona and Peter Opie (1959) on the history of children's street games one might conclude that this reflects an erosion of autonomous child culture. The streets have been a place where children could meet children on their own ground and create their own settings for play. Jane Jacobs (1959) considered the issue sufficiently important in her classic book on the Death and Life of Great American Cities to devote a chapter to it. She claims that children "need an unspecialized outdoor home base from which to play, to



All over the world children find building sites more interesting than playground. Children want to be where the action is, not segregated away from the adult world.

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hang around in, and to help form their notions of the world." There are a number of critical considerations in Jacobs' description, but to my mind the most important is "unspecialized." Unlike playgrounds, athletic fields, gyms, and youth clubs, the streets are rich stage sets with props from which children can create their own settings for play rather than having them defined for them. Secondly, the streets are not separated from the world of adults as are the institutional settings we provide for children. Jane Jacobs argued that only from the streets can children learn the first fundamental of city life--that is that people must take a modicum of public responsibility for one another even if they have no ties to each other. And this, she wrote is only learned from "other people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility to you." Ironically, since 1961, when she wrote this, fear of these same kinds of people on the streets of U.S. cities has become the major reason parents give for keeping children off the streets.

There are exceptions, of course to the generalization that street play in the cities is dying. In New York, for example, there are still some traditional Italian neighborhoods where the eyes of the adults on the streets offer children a security generally unavailable elsewhere. The situation is also more severe for some children than others. The movements of girls are much more restricted generally although this also varies greatly according to cultural group and according to family child-rearing style. Nevertheless the generalization that street play is decreasing dramatically is a statement which most parents would agree upon.

Anyone who doubts that the physical landscape can profoundly influence child-rearing should read the series of books by John and Elizabeth Newson (1970 and 1977). These books chart the history of child-rearing practices of more than 700 families in Nottingham, England. The books currently available deal with children at one, four, and seven years of age. It is possible to extract from these books a picture of how the physical landscape of working class children differed from that of middle class children. With less space in the home, children in working class families were more commonly required to play outside. Working class housing, which generally had no front yards or gardens, lead children to play in the street, even at four years of age. Furthermore, because the families lived so close to one another the parents were reluctant to intervene when squabbles arose between their children and other children lest this lead to conflict with other parents. Consequently the children of working

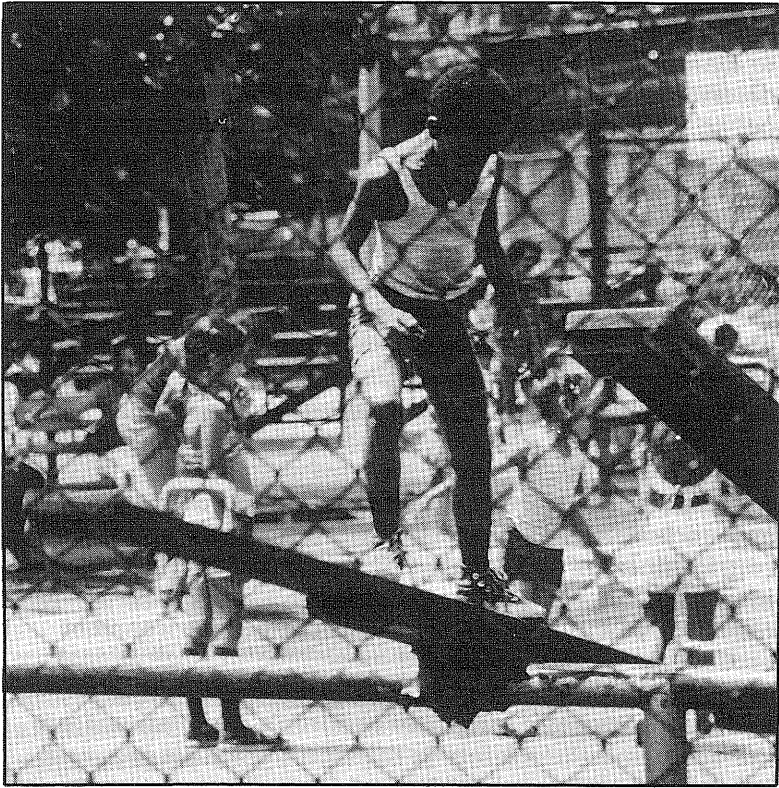
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class families played in a more communal setting and developed autonomy at the same time as they learned how to manage conflicts in their social play. The Newsons describe how these patterns changed when families moved out to large public housing estates with gardens divided by hedges. But it would be a mistake to conclude the physical environment of people's neighborhoods determines in a simple one-directional manner their child-rearing practices regarding outdoor play. It will be shown below that much of the physical landscape is in fact created by parents, consciously or unconsciously, to socialize their children in particular ways.

#### Safety and the Search for Adventure

As society works to create safe environments for children, the environment ironically is becoming increasingly boring and unchallenging for them. In addition to the greater restrictedness of children's movements because of increased dangers in the environment, there is also a reduction in children's freedom to use the environment because they spend more and more time in institutional care rather than in their parents' care. This is best understood by reviewing how children's exploration from the home and their safety is managed. First, it is important to distinguish "danger" from risk or unpredictability. We obviously want to remove danger from children's lives but we do not want to remove risk or unpredictability in doing so. A balance has to be struck, in providing for children, between children's healthy need for risk-taking or adventure and the safety concerns of children's caretakers. "Danger" is undoubtedly a culture-bound notion. However, certain elements and situations in the environment are universally dangerous: they defy learning through experimentation by certain aged infants and children because they are beyond their physical or perceptual abilities. Other parts of the environment are simply "unpredictable" to children; they await experimentation and learning.

It is valuable, then, to think of children facing an "unpredictable" world; one full of risks which it is necessary for them to engage with if they are to develop competence and go on to further explore an ever-expanding world. As social scientists and child professionals, our job for the future is to consider how to guarantee children accessibility to an environment without danger but which provides the unpredictability which is the basis of "adventure." This demands that we think of two sides of the issue: the degree of safety in the environment and the quality of the child's learning situation.



Too often approaches to child safety consider only the environmental side of the issue, showing little concern with the child as an active learner, striving for competence and adventure in the environment. Children want to learn how to engage competently with the environment. They want to know how to climb steps, use elevators, and play in the road. At the same time, they have no desire to get hurt, so they grade the environmental challenges which they set up for themselves, setting each challenge just a little beyond their existing experience with the phenomena. It is for this reason that a single tree can often satisfy the same child's climbing aspirations for many years.

There are a number of factors influencing a child's environmental safety, not all of them well understood, but existing theory and research suggests that the quality of the particular attachment relationship which a child has developed with his caretaker(s) is central. Together the child and his or her primary caretaker work as a learning system to experiment with and evaluate the child's ability to explore new places and situations without serious physical danger. It is a three-way negotiative process between caretaker, child and the environment. A poor attachment relationship means that a caretaker is not well attuned to his child. This means that he or she is not

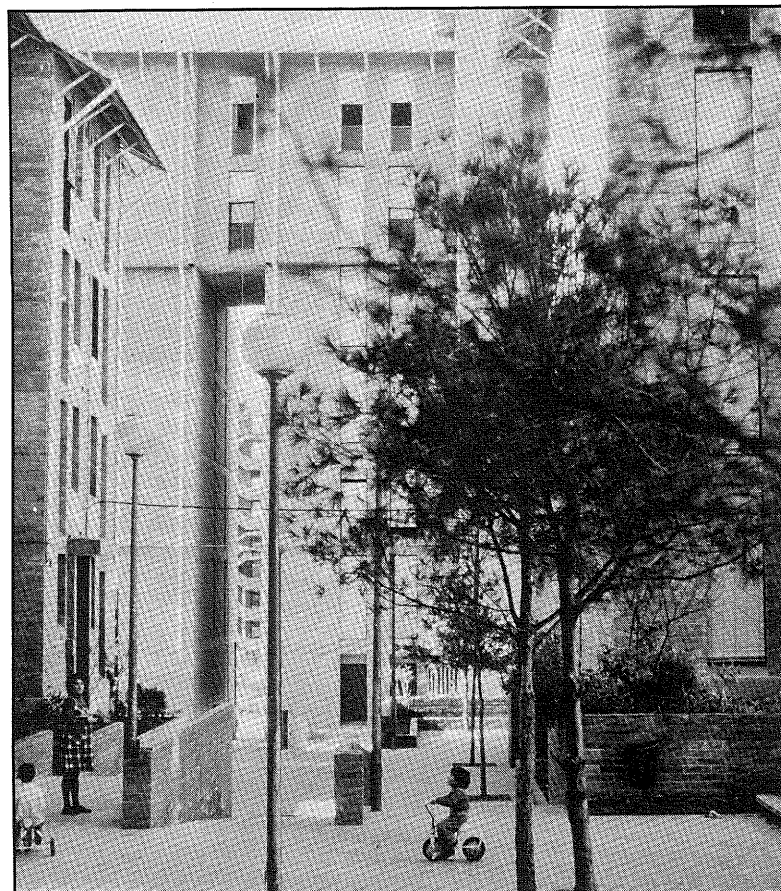
likely to be able to optimize the balance between the child's safety and the child's freedom to explore and experiment with the environment. The particular pattern of restrictedness which is adopted by the caretaker undoubtedly has an important socializing influence on a child, having implications beyond the development of the child's environmental competence to a general influence on the child's personality.

The current changes in western societies of family structure and women's work roles are causing difficulties for many parents and increasing the need for substitute caretakers. Margaret Mead (1966) argued cogently that having two or more substitute caretakers may actually be more healthy for a child growing up in a complex social world, as long as a sense of continuity is guaranteed by not changing these persons all the time. This notion has since been supported by empirical studies (e.g., Hoffman, 1987). Nevertheless these caretakers should still be sensitive persons who understand the particular abilities and fears of the child, who are always available to the child and who dare to allow the child to experiment. Problems may arise when substitute caretakers are poorly attuned to the child's developing competencies, either because there have been too many changes in the substitute caretakers or because caretakers have too many children under their charge to be able to be sensitive to them. The common result is for caretakers to overly constrain the child's activities. Furthermore, as children spend more and more time in institutional settings, their opportunities to face uncertainty in environments are further reduced by their caretakers because of fears of legal liability. In addition to a growing restrictedness on children's freedom to use the environment, legal fears of litigation are also leading designers to create play environments which are static and boring.

There are many factors which influence the operation of the child-caretaking systems as described here. One which we have the ability to change through public policy is the design of housing. Over the past two decades, social scientists have been severe critics of high-rise housing as a place for families with children. One of their primary arguments has been that high rise housing prevents mothers from being able to watch over their children. Following the model presented above, I argue that this is a simplification of the problem: high-rise denies caretaker and child the opportunity to see, hear, or otherwise recontact each other at will. If a child is playing outside a high rise tower, the child care learning zone is broken and no negotiative learning can occur.

This results in an "all-or-nothing" approach to child-care for those low-income families who commonly live in high rise housing: either the parents relinquish care and let their children play outside anywhere they wish, or they take the over-protective route of keeping them inside the apartment all of the time.

The North European countries have now stopped providing public housing in high-rises for families with children. However, the problem remains in the U.S. and in many countries throughout the world. If economics dictate that high rise be built, planners of high-rise housing should at least attempt to recognize the problem. A comparison of child-rearing in three different kinds of high-rise housing in New York illustrates how much difference



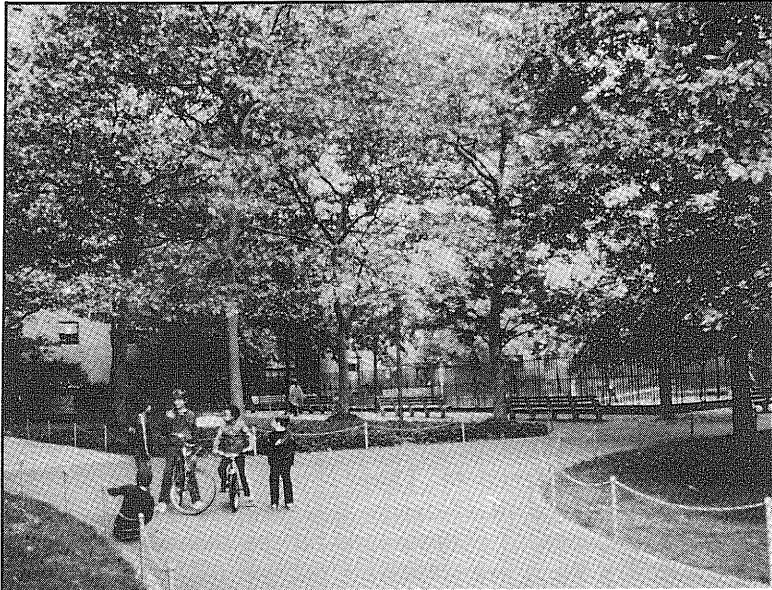
It is so difficult to rear children in high rise housing and to safely allow them to play outdoors that Northern European countries no longer build such public housing for families. Good design can make a difference however. In this photograph of housing in Barcelona a two year old is able to talk with his mother on the 4th floor because of thoughtful design.

environmental design details can make (Mackintosh, 1982). Mackintosh compared families with children under 10 years of age in three types of high-rise housing. The first was the most common category of high rise: single high-rise buildings with no integrated development. The second was East Midtown Plaza, which has plazas and elevated playgrounds and is built in an integrated way. The third site was Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, an older development which looks almost suburban. It has a lot of grass, no through roads, fenced playgrounds and its own very visible security police. The research found that in the single high rise buildings only 14 percent of the children had access to the outdoors. In Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village 39 percent were allowed outside alone but in East Midtown Plaza 73 percent of the children had that freedom. These considerable differences were largely the result of design differences. For example, the elevated playgrounds on the second floor of East Midtown Plaza are accessible only to tenants living in the complex. This means that the children can play outdoors without adults actually being there. Many parents can even see the children from the windows of their apartments.

The larger plaza of East Midtown Plaza would be suitable for older children's play if it were closed off from the street. The parents there tried to accomplish this but could not because it is a public open space. This example raises a critical issue of growing importance in the changing landscape of childhood: the privatization of public space.

#### The Privatization of Public Space

Although successful for young children East Midtown Plaza, the high rise development with elevated playgrounds, is less than ideal for other children in the parents' minds. They complained bitterly that the large open plaza at ground level also should be closed to the general public so that their children could use it safely. They failed in their struggle and so the space is largely used by teenagers and adults. Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village has its playgrounds on private property with fences and restricted access. These playgrounds are well used by children. Over half of the residents there commented positively about this insular layout. While these examples may demonstrate the safety advantages of private space for children who have access to it, the privatization of public open space is a growing issue in cities. As parents struggle to find play opportunities for their children, we are going to see more and more



The relatively safe outdoor play environment in Peter Cooper Village\ Stuyvesant Town in New York City which some parents describe as "suburban".

examples of children being removed from such public open spaces as streets, sidewalks, parks and playgrounds and placed in private housing complex playgrounds and private gyms, or driven to a wide diversity of amusements by their parents. In addition to the obvious social inequality of play opportunities provided by these solutions, privatization also results in all children being denied the democratizing values of having free access to one another in what is the most valuable time for social learning: play time.

A major solution to this problem is for cities to once again staff play environments for children; this time on a larger scale than in the 1930s. One such move in this direction is the full-time staffed "Playground for All Children" recently built in Queens, New York, to integrate disabled children. The result has been an overwhelming demand by parents and children to use the place. Having staff has also enabled the playground to be made more challenging and interesting by adding elements like a waterwheel, tumbling mats, nets and many toys and other loose parts like building materials, vehicles and musical instruments. Staff could be provided on a large scale by using the thousands of unemployed teenagers during the summer months as "playleaders." However, we also need to think of more radical solutions than simply staffing playgrounds. Playgrounds can never be a complete substitute for streets and sidewalks because they are

segregated settings away from children's homes and removed from the everyday world of adults.

The woonerf is an urban design concept which has worked remarkably well throughout Dutch cities and which could be extremely successful in U.S. cities. By turning many city streets into cul-de-sacs, Dutch planners have not only been able to reduce traffic accidents but they have also given back control of the streets to the people who live on them, including the children. Strangers are more easily identified now for there is no reason for them to walk through, unless they are visiting or making a delivery. Small gardens and trees have been planted between the car-parking spots. Toys and children's vehicles are left outside on the streets, signs of a greater trust. Children can be found in the street not only in ballgames but building model houses and making toy race tracks. This greater sense of security, created by people now able to manage their own space, would be harder to achieve in many cities of the U.S., but it would be a great improvement over the present situation of streets being completely stolen from their residents.

#### Opportunities to Transform the Environment

Louise Chawla has conducted some fascinating research on the memories that people have of their childhood (Chawla, 1981). A number of such research studies has been conducted in the past and they usually reveal the importance of natural settings to children (Cobb, 1977; Lukashok and Lynch, 1956; Clay, 1969). While





Wordsworth, and hundreds of other poets, authors and painters who have followed him, may have been correct about the importance of nature to children, Chawla's conclusion may be equally profound. She discovered that it is not the rural setting as a place of nature that seemed to be important but the rural setting as a place of freedom; the freedom for a child to move and manipulate the environment. My own research, in Vermont, similarly revealed the remarkable extent to which children wished to transform the environment through dirt play, building houses, 'forts' and structures of all kinds (Hart, 1978). The photograph below is a most powerful demonstration of this. It shows a sandbank in the back of the school of the town where I worked. The sandbank occupied 40 children at a time with no adult involvement. The children were all under 10 years old (average age seven years) and yet they created incredibly complex dam systems. Their interaction shatters the conventional wisdom regarding the late development of cooperative play in children and attests to the importance of two major factors: the availability of manipulable elements in the environment and the freedom to transform the environment without adult intervention.

The earliest age at which children use materials symbolically in play predates the age when they will spontaneously create symbols in the classroom. In their



constructive play indoors and out, children reduce the scale and complexity of the world and represent it in model and map form (Hart, 1979). This symbolic play is not only valuable to children's understanding of the world, but it is extremely valuable to their communication with one another in play. A major question to ask of the changing city of childhood then is: are the opportunities for symbolic play through the physical manipulation of the environment changing and, if so, are new substitutes replacing them?

My own answer to this question is that there are reduced opportunities to freely manipulate the physical environment symbolically and that the substitutes for these opportunities are manufactured and hence qualitatively different. This includes most toys, modular construction sets, and computer software. All of these things have more predetermined structure (and hence more predetermined meaning) than is possible when a child is simply freely exposed to use a diversified setting with many types of "loose parts."

Opportunities to transform the environment vary greatly according to social class. In the New England town which I have studied in the greatest depth, the physical landscape of the different housing areas can be "read" as a powerful expression of social class and child-rearing ideology. While not all parents are aware of the impacts of these different landscapes on their children, variation in this degree of awareness or concern is itself an expression of the ideology of child-rearing.



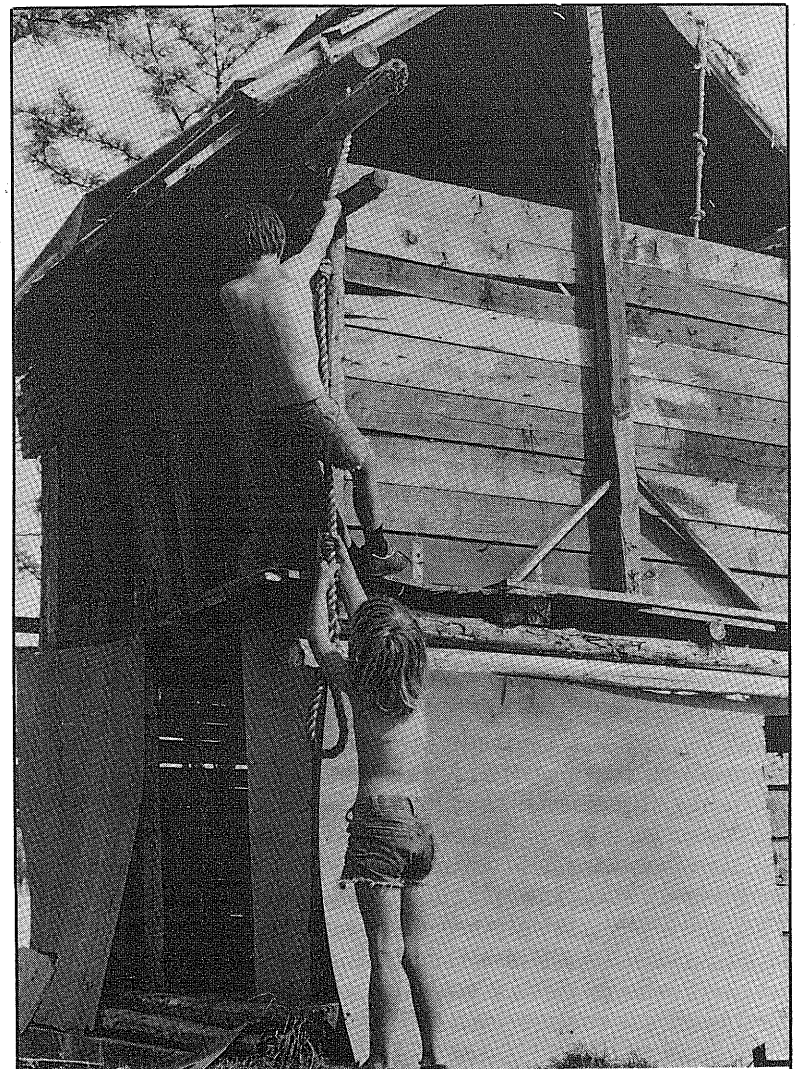
Children are always on the lookout for a diverse set of props for play.

It is insufficient, of course, to consider only what the landscape looks like; one must also consider the rules in the use of these settings. Some parents even go out of their way to make the environment full of loose parts for their children to use. More often though it is a question of different degrees of manicuring what would otherwise have been a rich setting for play. Beneath it all, I discovered there is a hidden curriculum in most homes, which we know very little about, and the landscape around the home is one visible expression of that curriculum. For example, many low-income manual working families in the town wanted their children to become physically competent and to have practical intelligence or resourcefulness. They did not see the school providing these skills so they apprenticed the children themselves to build, observe, navigate, hunt and so on.

In marked contrast was an area of the town which was completely suburban in character and made up of middle-class outsiders, mainly from Connecticut and New York State. The environment around their homes, which originally had a varied topography and vegetation, had slowly been homogenized to the point where there was no pond, no running water, no trees, no tall grass, no shrubs and no hills; all was blacktop and mown lawns. Into this manicured setting has been dropped toys, equipment and mini-bikes. Such a tremendous transformation helps set these children's futures on a different trajectory than those of their contemporaries living in other kinds of environments. The implications of these contrasting environments are enormous because during the elementary school years, the children were not allowed to play outside of this "suburban" hill. The children do not construct houses or build in dirt; in fact, they cannot transform the environment at all. They learn to be extremely good at responding to the latest electronic toys or vehicles even though they cannot even mend their own bicycles. The point is that the children from these middle-class suburbanized households are being prepared for a technocratic society. There is no discordance between what they are learning at home and what they are learning at school. In contrast many of the low-income children of manually working Vermont parents experience a discordance between the informal learning of the home which stresses practical intelligence or resourcefulness, and the formal schooling which emphasizes language and decontextualized knowledge. These contradictory curricula result in some of the most resourceful or intelligent children in the town not being evaluated highly in the school and ultimately taking jobs which are not in accord with their potential.

One very successful approach to re-inserting opportunities to transform the environment in urban and suburban environments has been the "adventure playground." These playgrounds are usually spaces set aside for children over the age of eight which are run by "playleaders" who usually allow children to build their own play places with materials they provide. Other common elements to these exciting environments are towers, tree houses, rope swings, ponds for wading, wheeled vehicles of all kinds, fires and even animals.

Adventure playgrounds have been developed primarily in Europe. In the U.S., there has been strong resistance to these very exciting self-built and changing play settings.

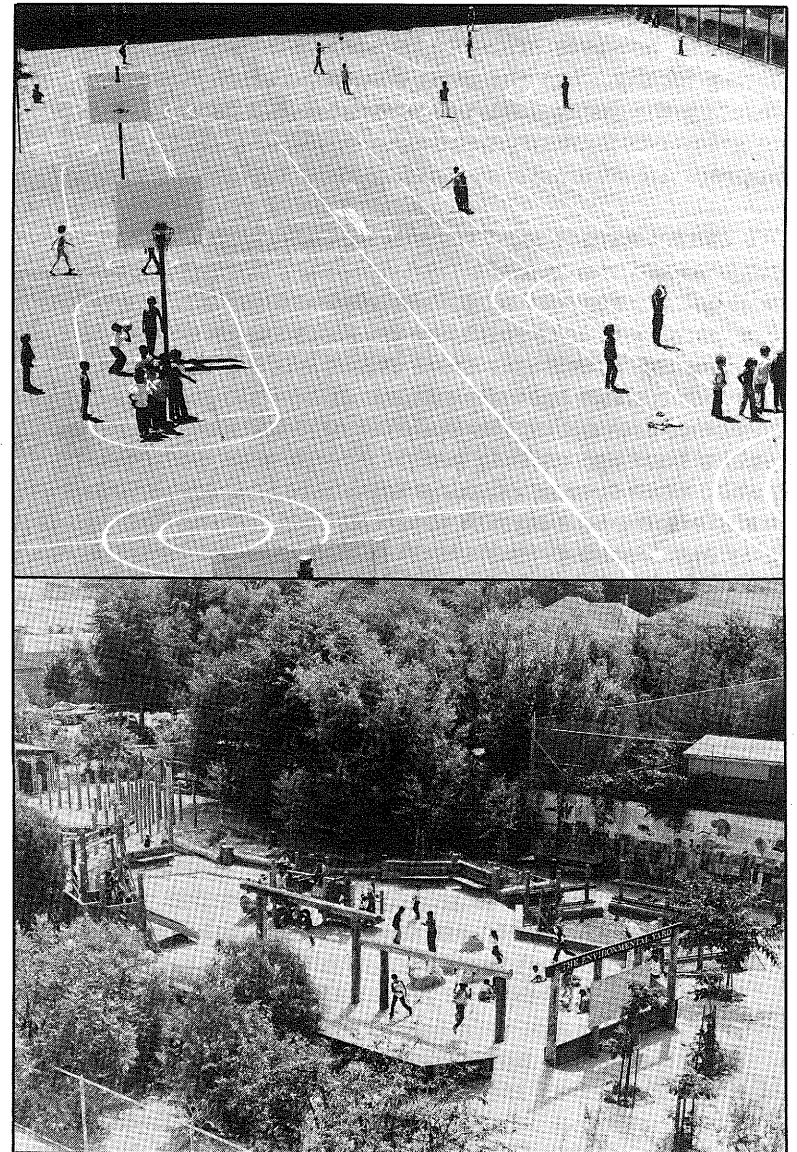


The Harbourfront Adventure Playground in Toronto, Canada. (Photo by Robin Moore).

The resistance has come from both parents and institutions because of fears of accidents to children, particularly in the insurance-bound U.S. (Cooper, 1970). Nevertheless, fewer serious accidents are likely to occur in these playgrounds than in traditional ones. For an explanation to this, one simply has to turn to the model of children's environmental exploration presented above. When children have the chance to experience risk, or uncertainty, as in the adventure playgrounds, they learn to grade environmental challenges for themselves. If they are unsure or need help, they have the option of turning to the playleader, the formal caretaker in this setting, who is there to support them as they explore and experiment with the environment, developing a range of competencies. In contrast, a traditional playground offers very little room for manipulation, modification and children's self-regulated graded challenges. In these settings, child quickly becomes bored, and seeks further excitement in such pranks as tying chains up to make swings higher and in activities such as climbing the steel scaffolds of slides. Such dramatic experimentation in concrete and steel playgrounds is dangerous. The mistake has been made of thinking of safety as lying in the environment rather than in the behavioral transaction between the environment and children.

### Schoolyards

As long as children had more freedom in the city it did not matter too much that schools had such poorly designed outdoor spaces for children. In the search for creative solutions to the provision of a physically diverse landscape for city children we should now rethink the potential of schoolyards. Because they are located next to schools--the major administered child-care institution of all communities, real economies could be realized in their maintenance and security. Children could use the schoolyards both during and after school time. Change to these settings can be made by the local community themselves, particularly parents and their children including the older high school students. A model of what can be done with a schoolyard is presented in the following 'before' and 'after' plans and photographs of the Washington Elementary School in Berkeley, California. This setting is not only heavily used for play by the children, but it is also a rich setting for all of the teachers who recognize the value to learning of children having direct contact with a diverse natural physical environment. The figures speak for themselves of the success of this setting.



### Responding to the Changing City of Childhood

There is a common danger when looking historically at children's environments to romanticize the past. I have tried to avoid this. While there have been some definite changes for the worse to the city of childhood, much has improved, most noticeably in terms of physical health. Furthermore there are many creative solutions to the problems I have identified. I have suggested some of them and argued for policy initiatives that should be undertaken by a wide variety of different agents: city planners, architects, landscape architects and school

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administrators to name but a few. The most valuable potential however probably lies with parents themselves, acting locally. For the most common theme running through the issues I have discussed is the need to return to greater community control in order to create an appropriate outdoor city environment for children.

We cannot expect most parents to undertake the diverse suggestions I have made for improving the situation without the support of government and private agencies. For parents to take initiative on these suggestions--making the streets safe from crime; closing streets to through traffic; providing better child-care services closer to home; preventing the building of traditional high-rise public housing; staffing public playgrounds and policing public open spaces; creating adventure playgrounds and transforming schoolyards to diversified natural settings for play and learning--they need a governmental structure which supports them. Such a structure would make sure for example that city planning, park planning, police districts, school districts and housing agencies coincided with one another and reflected as closely as possible the structure of a city's neighborhoods. If we could create such a system, I have confidence that parents would work hard to give the city back to children. As this paper has illustrated, if children have the chance to freely mingle with their neighbors and interact dynamically with their environment in public outdoor settings, a healthier proportion of them will grow up caring for the communities and urban environments in which they live.

## DISCUSSION

When I was a child, the playgrounds were used for more formal activities--mostly by older kids. And we had access at age 7-9 to the whole city and we usually roamed around--in vacant lots, houses, 42nd Street.

I lived in mid-Manhattan and as a girl, it was different than for the boys. They were able to use the subways but I wasn't-- the first time I got out of my neighborhood was when I was accompanied. My father took me to all kinds of places--to historical places. That was when I started high school but I do remember that we had the streets--here at 89th street, at the start of Yorktown--and that street was ours from Broadway to West End--all kinds of playing on that street--the street was closed--and we had marble games and handball games

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and bicycles--so it was very much like what you talked about--in the small environment.

Hart: Could I ask you what was the youngest age that you played outside like that?

I guess it must have been 8 or 9.

Hart: There's a really powerful example for you but let's just hear a couple more, because this is really revealing.

I'd like to take it really further back--to the 1920s, for example. I remember very vividly--nowadays they still have some store deliveries--down these chutes which were coal cellars--and you walked around it because there was a myth was some sort of monster could catch you and drag you down. This certainly was for girls who were told to walk around it. The narrow alleys between old tenements I'm talking about. We had railroad kind of tenements where you walked through and you had to get to the middle of the sidewalk because, once again, somebody could grab you. Certainly there was all this sex fear but we were out in the street because older siblings and other older children were supposed to mind you as well as the occasional parent who would run out and yell at you. You did go to the playgrounds with older siblings. There were big families, and the older kids were expected to take all the little ones with them and mind them. They helped them to cross streets. You did have more freedom of travel in that sense. But not real far away. I remember the first time it was real far away; it was a big adventure. We went on the subway. I was told not look directly at people. I remember somebody exposing themselves on the subway. And I was staring with fascination, not knowing quite what I was seeing. And my sister grabbed me and jerked me, saying we have to move--and explained to me later why we had to move. But you were brought up to have a certain sense about managing in the city. There was less traffic, and less anonymity about the danger. There were supposed to be bad people who lived near you, like somebody poorer than yourself was automatically supposed to be bad or a bum--or somebody who didn't have a job. The whole notion was that they could grab you with no explanation, I think people were brought up way back in the 1920s with a fear of the city--but I remember reading a wonderful account of childhood in Copenhagen by Hans Anderson--with the same fear riding underneath, hiding there, expectation of some crime, expectation of grabbing of children--all of these things. I think these things were there but the hype is that once upon a time we had an Eden. And now

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we do not. We didn't have an Eden, and we shouldn't be relating to it that way. But should help children to understand, certainly as they get older, some of the questions, I know bringing up my own children, either they would be prisoners or they had to manage to travel around the city. Not at 7 or 8, but neither did I travel at 7 or 8. But nowadays I do think there are children of 12 or 13 who have never been on the subway alone, and for that matter, adults who say they'd never get on the subway. I think that's serious.

I want to make another point, that I think is interesting. My husband, who is the same age as I am, grew up in the Bronx. There were still kids playing in the street; he rode his bike to La Guardia Airport once. We have lost some of that freedom even in the other boroughs.

How do you refit old structures? You have been talking about wanting to have children involved working together to create a different way of using existing space and I could see that as a way of helping create playgrounds and helping with resources without it being an extra cost and it would give the students an opportunity to learn.

Hart: First you would need to find planners and architects who believe in participation. Most children's participation projects are pretence like the gardens of Lady Bird Johnson's program of "Beautification" in the '60s and early 70s. Gardens supposedly made by children from waste lots weren't children's projects at all; it was adults setting up the whole project and children being simply brought in for the flowers. Children knew nothing about the political process that made the gardens possible, or where the plants and soil came from. Speaking of architects, I was thinking of what kinds of questions you might get from an unsympathetic audience. One that occurred to me might be, "Do you know of people--adults--who have grown up in these kinds of restricted situations? What are they like? What do you say to people who ask you such questions?"

Hart: You're asking a question that has as much to do with social evolution as it has with child development. The impact of negative change in the city shouldn't only be measured in the long term, as to whether children have become mentally disturbed in some way. The question is what kind of children, what kind of society, is being created by us? It becomes a bigger question--a social evolution question. And I would argue that when children have less opportunity to transform the environment, to understand the nature of such

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transformations, to know who lives around them and shares the neighborhood with them, they are alienated from their own communities and from the future of these neighborhoods. So I have to say that the answer lies not in its impact on children but its impact on society. If we want a society that is democratic, in which people are participating, and understanding who makes and cares for their neighborhoods, then we should be very concerned now about how children are involved from the beginning. I really want to live in a participatory democracy and I want to talk about models that really might help us achieve that. But this would be another lecture, perhaps with the title: "John Dewey Reconsidered." What went wrong with John Dewey is that he was talking about a small town. We need somebody to talk about children and democracy in the big city.

Hubert Dyasi: Thank you, Roger, for giving us such an excellent lecture. I don't want to call it a lecture because it was really much more rich than that. It was something we'll treasure very much. It reminded me of a number of things. It reminded me of something that was written by a compatriot of Roger's--sometime in the 40s--Sir Percy Nunn. He said; "We play not because we're young. We are young as long as we find it necessary to play." That also referred to playing with ideas, and playing with things. And I think Roger's theme referred very clearly to that. It also reminded me of something that was written by Jacob Bronowski in one of his lectures on "The Ascent of Man" and that was that we as human beings are born endowed with something that no other living thing has and that is plasticity.

We can fit and create environments and transform them, but somehow in the process of our development, the older members of our species tend to constrict the development of the younger ones, and sometimes purposefully, so that by the time we are old, we are no longer able to play or be flexible. Roger's lecture reminded us that as long as we have access and as long as we have direct participation, and as long as we ourselves are allowed to learn autonomously, and as long as we learn about situations that we are going to meet as adults when we are young, then we are enriched not only for ourselves but also for the society in which we live.

Most importantly, as Roger said, if we don't take children seriously and give them the opportunity to take themselves seriously we are endangering our own future.

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