

Georgy Daly

INHERENT ARCHITECTURE

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant.
We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

- *Albert Einstein*



Are we born knowing how to architect? And if so, does this inherent gift or sensibility get lost as we funnel through time? Does it gradually begin to trickle away as soon as we leave the womb?

I am interested in the architecture that is instilled within us. Something inherent, as deep as the fields and the earliest farmers. The sudden life we receive, and our gentle ebb away until death. The architectural capabilities we possess from the beginning but forget or neglect to hone, or that perhaps society guides us away from. The enterprising man, and the first untutored builders. How the body's tools made pragmatic decisions through explorative trial and error from the beginning of time.

Scenario.

Year: 2020, post-war

Place: Limerick City

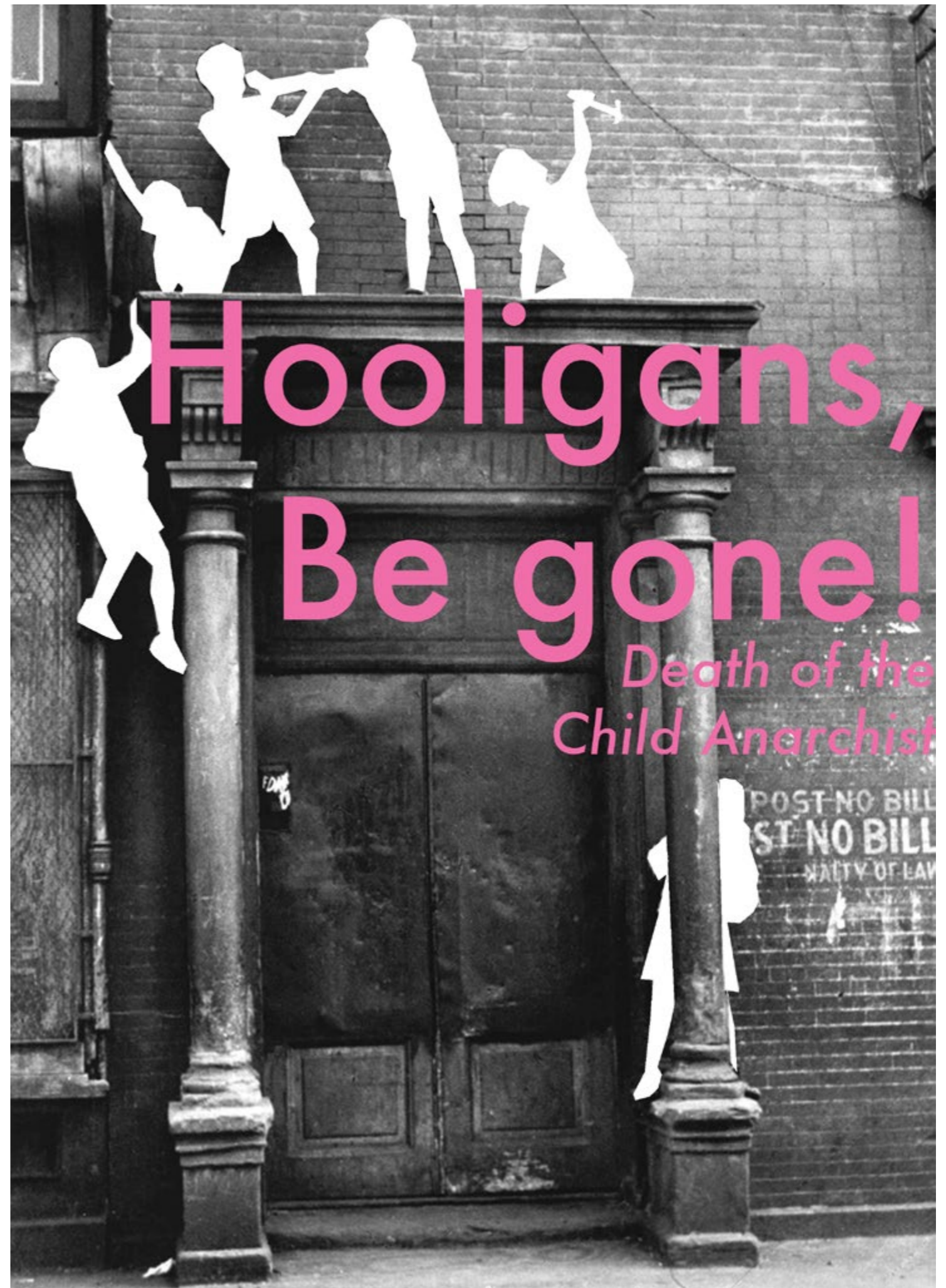
Population: 2,000

The nets hang over the alley-ways, courtyards and roadways – drooping lazily, swinging in the breeze like a wandering daddy long legs. Light filters down through its pores, touching gracefully the shadowed parts, elongating, stretching its tendrils. Moss reaches up the drain-pipes and ivy crawls alongside the little people who roam up and above on hands and knees.

Matter built up over time beneath the web. The old city sat decomposed. They say the moment the city died and its buildings began to collapse was when the concrete paving and tarmac between its feet was up-rooted. This was in turn used to fill the corpse buildings to solid. Though they could no longer function in this New World as dwelling spaces, they were preserved in this way in order to keep some sort of order or framework for the new life. Organic remnants build mounds that form between the man-made material of decayed brick and mortar. In parts, the earth has been flattened by the wise one's hands in order to cultivate new life and growth.

After the tarmac and grit were lifted and crushed in order to provide fill for the dead buildings alongside, they found that the soil in Limerick was poor. Years of slapdash labour and cow-boy construction had whittled away at its integrity, and now all that was left was blue daub and a thick crust of compacted gravel. The unabsorbed rainfall would slither down to the Shannon, taking the carefully woven reed beds with it which had been placed in the hope that they could retain the soil. Something had to be done, the little ones and tall wise hands agreed, and so they set about defining a method to keep their beloved city from the hungry mouth of the river.

They began by testing a more rigid system of reeds and rushes that had been gathered from the marshes bordering the western side of the water, and when those didn't take, they moved to weaving yarn by loom. The brown matter was brittle though, the sheep cloaks having suffered a hardship due to four long summers and winters of frost and rain. The farmers suggested consulting the machine world for recycled plastic parts. Its tensile strength was deemed to be a noble substitute for the wool and the reeds, and so they bartered until they came to a suitable agreement. Soon, the last colony of humans were travelling back down-stream, lugging ton after ton of elasticated materials which came in a



serpentine form tightly wound up in mile long rolls. The heady stench of the ancient strips of oilcloth tarpaulin and stretchy round plastic band began to occupy the New Street World. and the people, keen to be rid of it's foul odor along with the muddy mucous collecting around them, set to work with their hands.

They wove and knotted, the wise hands aiding the little people with subtle deft and tricks, the latter taking over for the former when their big hands were too big or too tired, and refused to knot. The tapestry they made from the confusing bright neon plasticized fibers was so colourful, so rich, that when it came to burying it within the confines of clay daub, they began to think of other uses for the alien thread, and to wonder of a world that stretched high above their heads. The terrifying strength of this remnant of the machine world astonished them, and in it they began to realize a structure for their new beginning. A structure that would stretch for miles, above and below ground in order to stabilize what was left of the Old World, connecting and harmonizing it's last vestiges to their new elasticated one.

As soon as the middle foundations were settled and strong again, the next Spring provided enough watering and light to give birth, to sprout, delicate and reluctant at first, but gradually gaining in confidence. The new boreen-like lanes became a maze of thick hedges lined with whitethorn, ash, sycamore, full of mice and insects and small birds.

We as humans have a need for touch and materiality yet we are arguably losing touch with or sensoral edge. Our hands, once roughened and toughened and sensitive to life, now only recognize the bare essentials. We no longer have to feel actively our way through a space, or modify space in the land to make a place of our own. That's all done for us. The machines we depend upon have lightened our loads, and we no longer feel the need to pass matter through our fingers. Instead, crafting objects and sculpting material has become something that is either specialized in, or regarded as a sort of "childs-play".

And what about that? What about the play? Where has that gone? The running, jumping, skipping, dancing, tossing, throwing, twirling play, that was once essential to our very being? That we now avail of in short, prescriptive doses dispensed by the local gym?

My thesis argues that we need to find space for ideas like these that foster the endangered human behavior of "risky play". I do not speak of play followed by ground or scape or area. I mean simply play. Fun. Lightness.

In his article "*Reimagining Recreation*", James Trainor begins by describing the playgrounds of his childhood in the 1940's and 50's, 650 playgrounds all 'imagined' by one stale lifeless man, which he is wholly loathsome of. His depictions of "The banal swing-set. The bone-jarring seesaw. The galvanized slide. the joyless sprinkler." paint a perfectly unsympathetic picture of the lots kids were given at that time to "let off steam". i

Static features, he calls them, excellently portraying the crime scene of a soul-sucking grey non-fun environment. These playgrounds didn't understand the meaning, let alone the concept of fun, nor did play even figure in these "resilient"

i "Reimagining Recreation." CABINET // . N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Oct. 2014. <<http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/45/trainor.php>>.

surfaced deserts. One pictures tumble-weed and crying children simultaneously. Describing asphalt as "An artificial agglomerate, thought to give traction to little feet running through sprinkler basins, but had the added benefit of acting like a human cheese-grater for unexpectedly airborne kids."ii

Then in the late 60's change came about, the playground began to evolve, Radical Urban Playground Design became an invented profession. This was due by and large to the heroic stance and attitudes taken by Jane Jacobs and co. almost a decade before who advocated on behalf of their children against the demolition of one such playground, insisting upon authorities that the play rights of their young had to be protected. Pied-Piper playgrounds began to erupt here there and everywhere, that summoned any bored-to-death-in-need-of-adventure kids to their midsts.

Design for children started to happen finally in 1966. Playscape was the new buzz word, and kids were finally enabled to just let go. Isolated objects became derelict tomasons of the past. These spaces represented creative play as fluid, freeform, and open-ended. Two notable playground thinkers Piaget and Erikson designed environments to unleash children's natural instincts to choreograph their own experiences through a non-prescribed network of features. They were firm that play was essential to culture and pleaded adults to embrace the concept of fun so that the new play scape could be something that could be a site of continually changing children's narratives.iii

However as fate would have it, things were not destined to last longer than a century. One Saturday afternoon in 1978, a toddler named Frank Nelson fell off a 12-foot slide in Hamlin Park in Chicago, and was scarred with permanent brain-damage. ivAll of a sudden, even inherently jovial words such as "merry-go-round" came to be seen as a threat. A new landscape of identical sameness and lameness was born. Anti-septic sterile standardised sameness.

Our assessment of risk has completely shifted since that moment in time when the first law suit was filed. Handbooks outlining specific prescriptions for heights, slopes and angles have drastically recalculated acceptable play. How can we prescribe fun when we don't have a clue what fun is?

Park departments shut their gates permanently because they could not afford to be sued. Eventually, any known risk became synonymous with hazard. Grass and dirt are no longer considered protective because "wear and environmental factors can reduce their shock absorbing effectiveness."v

What is left of the playground of 2014 is nothing more than an engineered sterile static object, tested by those who, put simply, do not know much of anything about children's play. The free-loving kids who ran rampant wildly in the 70's have become the adults who believe that their children should be sheltered from all manner of risk. Consequently, and not surprisingly, young people are turning towards even more reckless risks.

ii "Reimagining Recreation." CABINET // . N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Oct. 2014. <<http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/45/trainor.php>>.

iii Friedberg, M. Paul, and Ellen Perry Berkeley. *Play and interplay; a manifesto for new design in urban recreational environment.*. New York: Macmillan, 1970. Print.

iv Rosin, Hanna . "The Overprotected Kid." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, n.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/03/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/>>.

v Rosin, Hanna . "The Overprotected Kid." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, n.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/03/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/>>

The way children, adults, and the elderly negotiate risk has evolved. It seems as though we are over-protected, over-regulated, over-controlled from birth now.

In recent years, the American big agriculture industry has come under scrutiny, due to it's taking for granted the nutritional needs of an entire population. The demand for animals who have lived a higher quality of life is at an all time high in 2014, suggesting that we are waking up to the realities of the unsustainable food economy that was created with the birth of fast food. But the free-range child has been forgotten, the fast-food kid has taken her place. We have reverted to chicken-cooping our children in battery-reared domestic pens in order to protect our beloved 'pets' from the harshness of a reality that they may never come to terms with, but will certainly come into contact with.

This reversion from progressive anarchism to panoptic padded cells leads me to question the spaces we have made available to them. I wish to investigate a world that fulfils the natural habitat of the child, and furthermore the optimum habitat of the elderly, who are equally mistreated in the ageing process.

I believe the distinction and separation we have created between childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderly life to be devolutionary. I believe that we are not inherently different from one another, and that children and the elderly are not subordinate beings. I believe childhood is not a biological phenomenon but a social construct, and that children should not be passive subjects of structures and processes, be they social or physical.

When is a person a child? When is a person an adult? We have successfully given a prescriptive badge to age. And spaces occupied by age-specific groups are as a result scripted.

In his book *Centuries of Childhood*, Ariès put forth the argument that before the 1700's the term 'childhood' never truly existed, suggesting that it is a socially constructed phenomena. There used to be decidedly more fluid indeterminate definitions of 'infancy' and 'youth'. He talks of the distinction and divide that was introduced between adult and child worlds over time, and the idea that emerged that children were subordinate beings in need of supervision and discipline. By comparison, the demographic *mêlé* structure of the medieval school is a world away from what we are left with now. Children gradually came to be seen as creatures of a different order from adults: innocent, fragile, temptable, and therefore in need of moulding. They became isolated from society, in much the same way as we have isolated our grand-parents and parents from society once they are deemed too fragile to care for themselves. So far we have deemed only those at the middle stage of life capable of engaging in the architectural dilemma, and have succeeded in polarising life and death to an extreme degree.

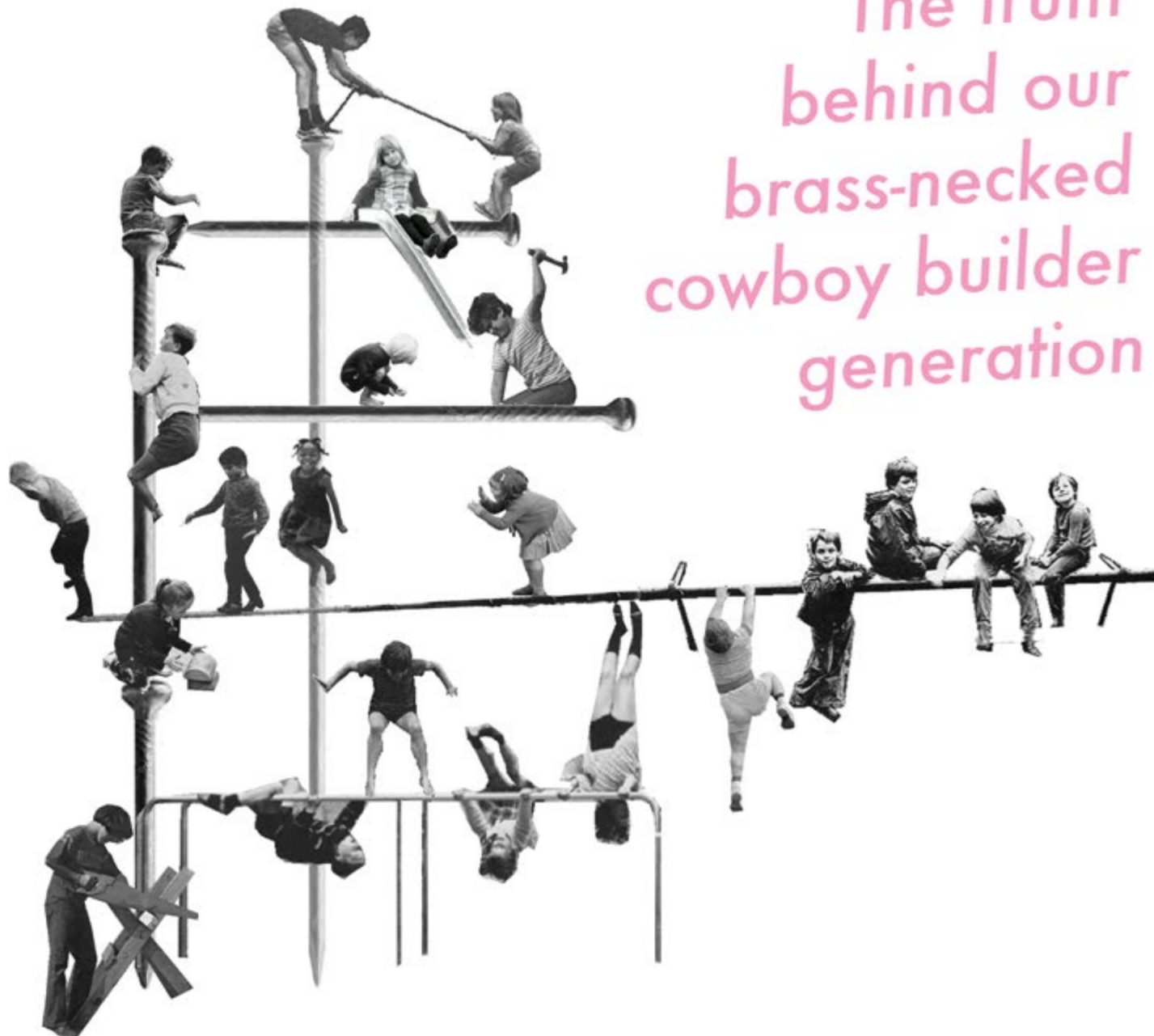
We should address the structure of learning and health care institutions, the material bone, skin and muscle of their structural make-up that detains these binaries in society. Can we begin to imagine structures that allow us to become actively engaged with rather than passively transient of? Structure that is playful, and responsive in a sensorial way. Then let us look to the junctions and connections that tie these playful structures together, these generators of thrill, surprise and wonder.

What if we as architects were to unscrew a building's integrity, de-fusing its joints, rattling it's stoical membrane. The definition of fused in this thesis is the joining



WOULD YOU LET THEM BUILD YOUR HOME?

The truth
behind our
brass-necked
cowboy builder
generation



or merging to form a single entity. If we are to relate building to the human body, bones being part of its structural make-up, fusing of joints would be like bone ossification, which is the process of laying down new bone material by cells called osteoblasts. The osteoblasts in this case are the filler material for fusing metal.

I am interested in loose joints within the construction of a building, connections that are not fused, and the tentative nervousness of the second just before tipping or break point. This point is where I have identified that an element of fun can be extracted from.

I am interested in the pin joint, and dynamic nimble tensile structures that are allowed to move with and against the human body, and the structural aspects of the playground objects... Swings, see-saws, slides, even that old vilified merry-go-round. Structures that actively question how we should move through a space, that make us second-guess our consistent walking pace, that re-imagine how we inhabit structure on an experiential level. Structure that tests and arrests our senses, keeping us sensorially nimble.

Is this in fact what the adult is missing? And are we oppressing and neglecting our own "childish" needs for fun? Should we begin to play alongside our children rather than statically re-enforcing a panoptic position?

And can we even define play, and its function? There have been many plausible theories surrounding its utility. Some regard its function as the discharge of excess energy, or as many parents still refer to it as "letting off steam". This argument I find the least convincing. Others then relate it to a means of setting-up children for the adult world, a preparation of sorts for the nitty-gritty seriousness of life. This too I find difficult to accept, as it confines play to a "pre-life" childhood stage in a way. An exercise in restraint, an innate urge to exercise dominance, or the channeling of harmful impulses, are other musings suggested by angsty theorists who seem hell-bent on defining something that perhaps does not need any definition.

Johan Huizinga author of *Homo Ludens* suggests, too, that perhaps we are approaching this search for definition wrongly, as something that should counter the opposite of play, as though seriousness must have a carefree alternative or inverse in order for humans to be able to retain some form of biological balance. He describes play as a cultural and not a biological phenomenon, though he does liken play as to being older than culture. Animals, he says, have not waited for man to teach them their playing. Too readily do we jump to the conclusion that play is the direct opposite of seriousness. Examined more closely, however, the contrast between play and seriousness proves to be neither conclusive or fixed. For some, play can be very serious indeed. Children's games, football, and chess for example are all played in profound seriousness.

Graphic designer Paula Scher is an advocator of the eternal search for serious play. She began thinking about the concept of play being something that had a very serious edge to it when influenced by an article she read by Russell Baker, a wonderful humorist for the *New York Times*, which parodied seriousness versus solemnity. He stated that children almost always begin their creative endeavours and exploits by being serious, which is what makes them so entertaining when compared with adults as a class. Indeed the very definition of play is to engage in a childlike activity or endeavour. For Scher, her conviction is that the moment we become too well-educated, we become solemn.

It is in the early years of creative pursuit, where we are not really sure what we are doing or hoping to achieve, those dogged serious points of play and passion, that we accomplish a plethora of unprecedented discoveries. There is something wonderful about that form of youthful thought where we can let ourselves grow and play, and be anarchist jackanapes, in order to then accomplish things. To be totally and completely unqualified for a job. Being goofy is another off-shoot of serious play.

In order to comprehend a world where architecture can fulfil a higher societal role in terms of how we can begin to participate and co-engage with a playful architecture, a close examination of activities that detail successful recreational appropriation of space is necessary.

The Goma Airport in Congo is what could be described as a special area of conservation for use by kids. Currently devoid of aircrafts, this area emptied as a result of continuous warring and volcanic eruptions. It has since been annexed by Congolese kids who too are making up their lines as they wander in, out and around this make-shift play "air-space". Parts of the abandoned planes are loosened and used to re-fabricate in some instances, and other times are just used as devices catering for fun. Re-negotiating space and modification of scape are the order of the balmy day here.

"The Land" in North Wales is another example of a world which grew out of the necessity for a need for risky play business in the 00s. Although set in a very different cultural context where children are now thought to have been too sheltered by their parents, this renegade adventure playground is like those pioneered by landscape architect Lady Allen in the 1940s, all frayed rope and crusty pallets. No asphalt here, only grass, dirt and the occasional remnants of rough crumbled concrete.

The best example of a sub-culture that engages actively with architecture on its own playful terms however, all constraints removed, is probably skateboarding. Skate culture came into being in the mid-70s., essentially as a result of Tomason's that came in the form of emptied out domestic swimming pools. They had been drained because of a two-year drought in Southern California, and young teens began to think of an alternative use for them that involved using their curved surfaces as half-pipes. This re-appropriation of site led to a lot of pop-up renegade, untrained skatepark construction. A couple of leading pioneers in this anarchic field that emerged were Mark Scott and Mark Hubbard, who coined the term "reverse engineering" in the early 90's when they began building skateable surfaces out of necessity. Two young bricoleurs who possessed an instinct for evaluating every type of manmade object, they up-skilled their building techniques by using suburban landscaping jobs essentially as guinea pigs for experimental research for their very real projects.

The term skateable reverse engineering means to imagine the craziest skateable surfaces possible, and to then fabricate them. Out of seemingly bizarre beginnings, illegally assembled moonscape-type spaces of undulating cement began to crop up. These became places people were allowed to freely occupy that were finally specific to their needs. Skaters could now engage with a play of spaces where people "made up their lines as they went along".

Dismissive of authority and convention, skateboarders suggest that the city is not just a place for working and shopping but a true pleasure-ground, a place where the human body, emotions and energy can be expressed to the full. They represent more than just secondary users and essentially redefine business and governmental spaces. Like snowboarding, it is perhaps more accurate to liken the activity to an art-form rather than a sport. An art which makes use of the matter lying beneath an artifice's surface as a canvas. The matter may be organic or man-made, snow or concrete, and the artifice takes the form of boards with wheels or without. For those who skate, "the primary relationships are not with his fellow man, but with the earth beneath his feet, concrete and all."

Architecture results unintentionally in skateboarding, and that's ok. It means our streets are utilised for something other than commerce. To want to ban the weaving of skating from streets is to suggest that architecture is unintended for occupation. As Marc Spiegler wrote for Metropolis magazine, "the presence of skateboarders bridges the gap between the public and what critics have called "relentlessly auster, even inhumane structures".

Thesis year Reflection

If this thesis writing began by the search for a mechanism to depolarise adult and child worlds, then the aim of the thesis project was to find a mechanism that depolarises adult and child worlds. When we make architecture, we create worlds. We have been constructing space for ourselves in the land since the beginning of time, and similarly kids construct their own exclusive spaces in very special ways.

The purpose of this thesis investigation is to give a new relevance to architecture. We talk of the role of architecture so much, yet national architectural dialogue is at a minimum. Architecture is seen as a currency which only architects trade in. For our profession to be taken seriously as a social science, a social vehicle and a social tool, it must engage whole-heartedly with society, it must become part of society.

My argument from the outset is that in order to effect change, kids must also be brought into the design process- and early on. In this way, Limerick has a small window of hope of injecting cultural capital into the city.

My project became an all-day school that has looser curriculum and an emphasis on recreational activities, which is believed to instil confidence in students with dysfunctional backgrounds. It is a school that embodies and supports inventiveness, creativity and play over everything, and enables kids to take their ideas and run with them- literally and figuratively. I wanted to explore relearning a way of learning by making a renegade learning culture for kids that celebrates a counter culture, and articulate the aesthetic of the new worlds and spaces of this alternative learning hub where the kid is the instigator of the creation. As the goal is to challenge the current schooling system of mindless learning, this is instead about a parallel learning environment- meaning age gaps overlap, filter in and collide at different points during the day. Playing with subtleties and extremities in this way forces us to critically analysis specific needs of kids at different points of their lives and at different times of the day.

This ties back to looking at structure as an opportunity for exploration. Having worlds made up of distorted circulation, walls for climbing, net floors, frames, and planted landscapes means learners are constantly questioning their immediate environments. Is there a different way of looking at toilets in another form rather than just a row of cubicles, sinks and soap bars? Should the toilet be seen as sanctuaries for being fully alone with oneself, or indeed just another a learning environment that generates creative responses and thinking? What should the new-age library be like? Is it a loud mediatheque pixelated with eureka moments? Can kids learn to pass and generate ideas through concentrated moments of gaming, ball passing, and sweating?

Trying to unthink social norms and specifically deviating from standard practise can be difficult, but highly amusing and immensely satisfying... It is what we hope to give back as architects after all. Architecture is inherent within us, and I am fully convinced that we are born knowing how to architect. It has the power to transform. Yes, architecture is something we are born understanding, and therefore belongs in the hands of the many instead of the few. We must believe that the way of thinking cultivated in architectural studios, and used by kids on so many levels as they grow, is something that can be prototyped and repeated on a much bigger level in order to bring our society into the 21st century.

- i "Reimagining Recreation." CABINET //. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Oct. 2014. <<http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/45/trainor.php>>.
 - ii Reimagining Recreation." CABINET //. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Oct. 2014. <<http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/45/trainor.php>>.
 - iii Friedberg, M. Paul, and Ellen Perry Berkeley. Play and interplay; a manifesto for new design in urban recreational environment,. New York: Macmillan, 1970. Print.
 - iv Rosin, Hanna . "The Overprotected Kid." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, n.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/03/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/>>.
 - v Rosin, Hanna . "The Overprotected Kid." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, n.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/03/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/>>
 - vi Ariès, Philippe. Centuries of childhood: a social history of family life. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962. Print.
 - vii Chow, Low Lai. "Deserted Congolese airplanes are the new playgrounds for kids - Lost At E Minor: For creative people." Lost At E Minor: For creative people. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.lostateminor.com/2014/05/23/deserted-congolese-airplanes-new-playgrounds-kids/>>.
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Images from the abandoned Goma Airport in Congo

i Brown, Michael Christopher . Michael Christopher Brown. 2013. Instagram, Goma. Lost at E Minor. Web. 22 Oct. 2014.

