

# FITNESS OF PLAY

A Prototype for a Holistic Activity  
Space at Toronto's Riverdale Park

by

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## ABSTRACT

The value of personal well-being and execution of fitness varies between individuals as the constant transformation of societal ideologies around fitness continually impact the macro perception. This in turn leaves the notion of fitness to lack stability and security. With the influence of visually stimulating exchanges through virtual interactions in the contemporary world, the body becomes a means of public expression and social identity that places a priority on certain physical and aesthetic conditions of the human body, rather than their degree of health, uniqueness and ability. With such backdrop, the contemporary notion of fitness that encapsulates ideas around a socially constructed 'ideal' becomes the motivational drive of physical exercise for many.

The body-obsessive fitness facilities catered towards a group at large reinforces these socially constructed values as it becomes the location for the production of the ill-defined 'ideal' bodies. The excessive mechanical rigidity and spatial linearity of the fitness floor plans generates a mechanical notion of strength and power; gym equipment and machines that limit the amount of self-induced movements produce robotic and mindless movements; all of which emanate an intimidating and isolating milieu that dismisses the importance of emotional well-being, playful social interactions and a synergy of the mind and body.

The first portion of this thesis examines the fluid nature of fitness culture and the effect of technology and media on promulgating ideas around fitness, as well as its subsequent impact on the socio-spatial realm of fitness facilities and its users. The second portion of this thesis explores the values and elements of play while referring to various built precedents that physically and psychologically constitutes a playful environment in favour of reimagining the relationship between exercise and play. Finally, the third portion of this thesis introduces a speculative proposal located at Toronto's Riverdale Park which redefines the contemporary act of exercise by providing an all-inclusive play-scape rather than imposing rigid exercises found at a gym. The proposed environment utilizes notions of play to penetrate an individual's preconceived notions of fitness to provoke changes in understanding what it means to be healthy and fit, and reclaim the connection of the mind and body, to nature, to play, and to others.



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## DEDICATION

To the misunderstanding of Fitness,  
and the forgotten values of Play.





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# *1.0*

## INTRODUCTION





## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 THE BODY

The human body is not merely a biophysical unit that we possess, but an entity that structures our situations and experiences within nature. We live within bodies, yet we are lived bodies.<sup>1</sup> As a predetermined and material object that interfaces the subject self to the natural world, it becomes a symbolical representation of the self, intimately tied to the long history of shifting societal trends, food, and diet cultures.<sup>2</sup> Within such socio-historical backdrop Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin identifies two archetypes of body. The body-dominant *carnavalesque* ruled by passion and desire, and the *classical* mind-dominant body ruled by logic and reason.<sup>3</sup> The animalistic hunter gatherers and primitive crop culture, as well as the regimentation of feasts and fasts that ground the conditions of scarcity and prosperity of a community in the middle ages portrays a carnivalesque body dominated by the desire of the body. Whereas past spiritual restraining of one's food intake towards a body of self-discipline, commitment to god and spiritual blessings, as well as the embodiment of power and status of idleness and even obesity up until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates the classical body ruled by the will of the mind.<sup>4</sup>

Politics surrounding body image started shifting in the 18<sup>th</sup> to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century when an increase of food security and innovative wellness thinking were gradually instilled into various forms of media. This lead to impacts on discourses of health, beauty and diets, redefining the classical body into the 'class-ical' body – an ideology carrying the belief that a body of higher class in possession of money and time. During this time, the archaic ritualistic body is slowly replaced by the pursuit of an idealized aesthetic in the contemporary society, providing a new mode of social class division.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Colin Smith. "The Body." Essay. In *Phenomenology of Perception*. (Nevada: Franklin Classics, 2018), 67–206.

2 Michael Carolan. "The Conspicuous Body: Capitalism, Consumerism, Class and Consumption." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 9, no. 1 (2005): 82–111. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568535053628436>.

3 Galin Tihanov. "The Gravity of the Grotesque." *Bakhtiniana : Revista de Estudos Do Discurso* 7, no. 2 (2012): 165–178.

4 Michael Carolan. "The Conspicuous Body: Capitalism, Consumerism, Class and Consumption." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 9, no. 1 (2005): 89. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568535053628436>.

5 Ibid, 86.



*Fig.1.1 The Carnivalesque Body*  
*Represented through the book cover of Gargantua and Pantagruel by*  
*François Rabelais*



*Fig.1.2 The Dual Imperatives of Consumer Capitalism  
Captures individuals in a battle of release and restraint*

The recent epoch captures the tension of the ‘ideal’ body in between the dual imperatives of consumer capitalism; On the one hand, individuals are encouraged to release control of the carnivalesque body and indulge in the pleasure of the commodified world, while on the other hand, individuals are conditioned to achieve a classical body of hard work, self-discipline and self-control. The walk on a very blurred but fine line of “release” and “restraint” embodies the recent conspicuous consumption where individuals are no longer content with having control over the “nice things” they are surrounded with, but instead strive to become the “nice thing” itself.<sup>6</sup> Given these conditions, a well-managed body despite going through the challenges of the consumer capitalism, becomes a powerful social symbol that represents success; one that “symbolizes a personal triumph over bodily impulses; a body in control of itself and, thus, in control of the world around it.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, the real motivation for proper self-government of the body is driven by secular blessings of acceptance, admiration and success. Within the contemporary socio-political realm, social perception is what perpetuates the western dichotomy of the mind and body, and the mass and elite.

## 1.2 A FITNESS TIMELINE

Prior to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term fitness was associated with the social qualities and characteristics that enabled an individual to fit into a society to be considered a productive citizen. At this time, only white men were considered to be able-bodied for true citizenship, and the notion of fitness had no bodily association.<sup>8</sup> In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, English philosopher Herbert Spencer’s concept of *survival of the fittest* and naturalist Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* gave birth to a new notion of fitness largely associated with body connotations.<sup>9</sup> The truth that ‘traits of fitness can be passed down over generations, no matter the gender, class and race lend to the Physical Culture Movement with a more egalitarian mindset. Fitness, which originated with an emphasis on physical capability, later developed into a synergy between the body and mind.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, president Theodore Roosevelt actively expressed that the ability to be and become fit, which requires continuous effort and courage, is the potential for self-improvement; insinuating that fitness achieved through the proper training and governing of the self has reached the status of being the ultimate condition of success in a competitive, social Darwinist society.<sup>11</sup>

6 Ibid, 93.

7 Ibid, 92.

8 Jürgen Martschukat. “The Age of Fitness: The Power of Ability in Recent American History.” *Rethinking History* 23, no. 2 (2019): 160-161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2019.1607473>.

9 Ibid, 163.

10 “Physical Culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.” CSUN University Library. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://library.csun.edu/SCA/Peek-in-the-Stacks/PhysicalCulture>.

11 Martschukat. “The Age of Fitness: The Power of Ability in Recent American History.”, 164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2019.1607473>.



## Fitness of Play



*Fig.1.3 Fitness During the Mid 19th Century*

*Influenced by the physical culture movement which aimed at encouraging the development of a symmetrical body*



*Fig.1.4 Fitness at the Beginning of the 20th Century*

*Emphasizes the notion of the body as the site of individual ability where 'exercise' became explicitly directed at improving one's body and potential*



*Fig.1.5 Fitness During the 20th Century to the 1910s*

*The beginning of unnatural body shaping that caused a huge mainstream idealization of small waist in women*



*Fig.1.6 Fitness During the 1940s to 1950s*

*Facilities called “Reducing Salons” for women to work on a slender body included electric belt massagers, vibration machines and slimming suits*





*Fig.1.7 Fitness During the 1950s*

*The addition of weight aided machines as gyms began to exploit the public's interest of building an aesthetic for the body*



*Fig.1.8 Fitness During the 1960s to 1970s*

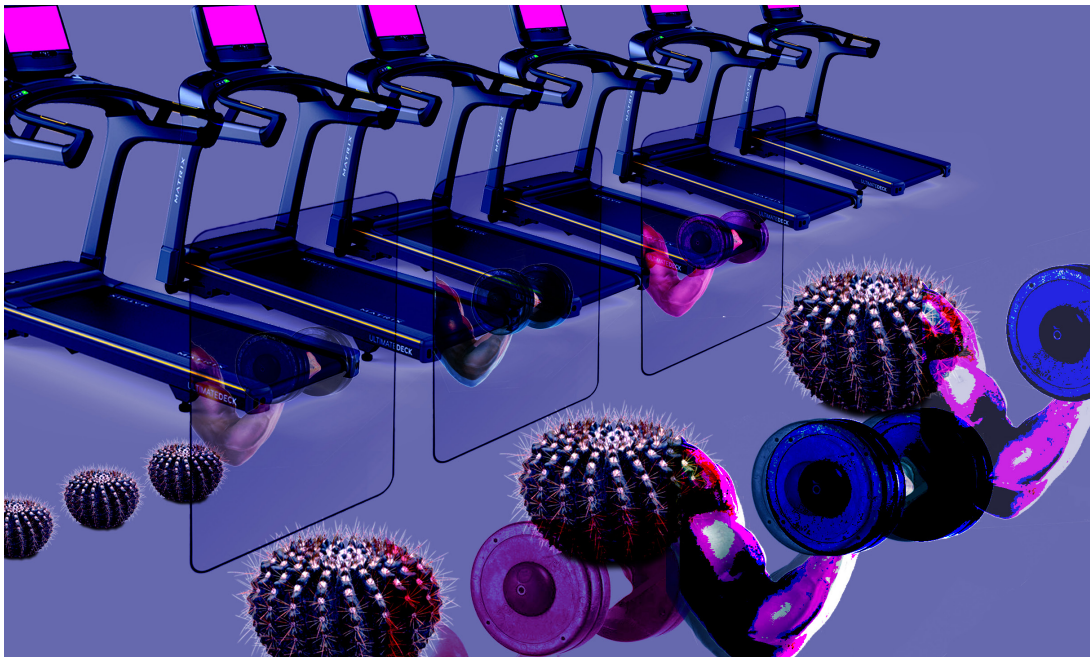
*The social return to a more individualistic perspective on liberties and responsibilities strengthened the pursuit of fitness with the focus of improving the self and the body*





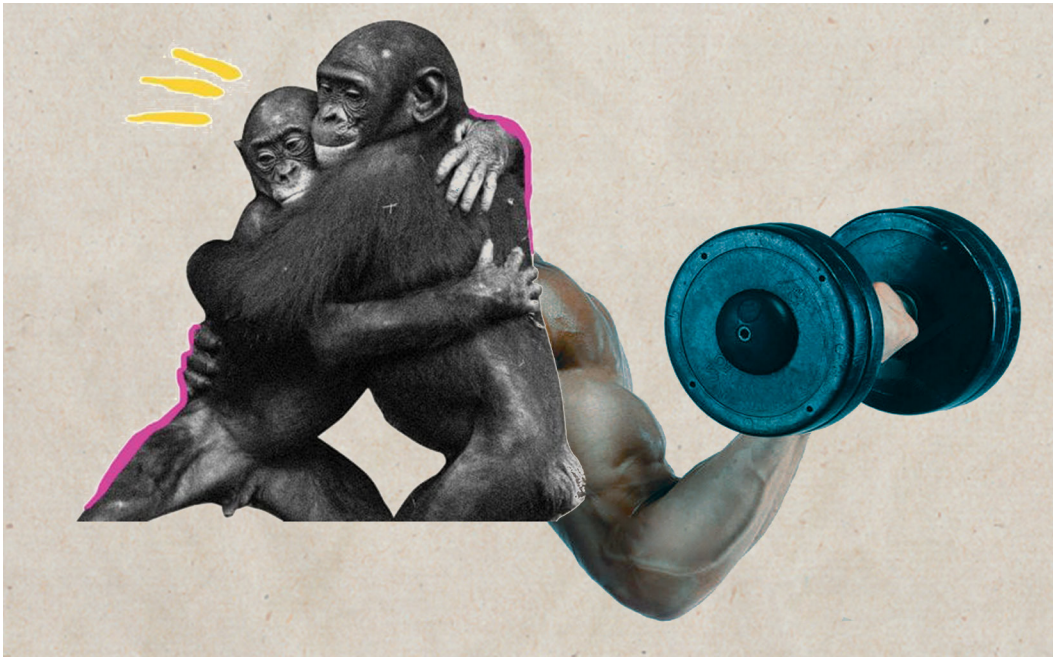
*Fig.1.9 Fitness During the 1980s to 1990s*

*The craze for aerobic exercises were widely commercialized for profit through the use of media and technology. The opening of some of the mainstream gym brands allowed muscle training among both men and women*



*Fig.1.10 Fitness During the 2000s to Present Time*

*Fitness facilities began to contain much more machineries laid out in rows to accommodate for the growing gym memberships and commodification of the body*



*Fig.1.11 The Impact of Fitness on the Society*

*The tendency of humans of a society to follow the footsteps of others is visible within our instinctual desire to fit in. As citizens living under the umbrella of a constant and continuous process of changing social ideologies, standards, acceptance, and influences in the information world, we have developed a certain amount of dependency on the mass media, and tend to believe that the ideologies and products that are sold to us are the way they present themselves to be. However, we can be misguided by these influences that advances with the world, generating a degree of vulnerability for everyone living under the technology induced consumer capitalistic world*

The notion of the body as a site to reflect individual development and ability continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century where physical exercise became explicitly directed at improving one's body and potential. Ronald Reagan's presidency in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century influenced the social advancement to a more individualistic perspective on liberties, rights, and responsibilities. Given these social-political influences that focused on improvement of the individual's body, the effort to stay fit and look fit to gain recognition in domains outside of the fitness realm - such as occupational and social settings - became a 'regulatory ideal'.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, impacts from gender inequality and human rights movements strengthened the pursuit of fitness and became more inclusive and competitive.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand of the fluid social-political forces, the people that dwelled under such forces became the best consumers of interest around fitness, broadcasted through advertisements, products, trends, fads, movements and marketing strategies. From as early as the middle ages towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fitness fads and fashion trends such as corsetry, 'slim suits' and 'reducing salons' emerged the idealization of unnatural body images in women.<sup>14 15 16</sup>

In the 1950s, performance enhancing drugs were used by men for the first time in sports and body-building for acquirement of Olympic metals and enhancement of the general physique.<sup>17</sup> The Bodybuilding craze swept across America following the debut of the first and second *Pumping Iron* film in the 1970s and 80s, empowering bodybuilding for both genders.<sup>18</sup> Following this, gymnasiums began to exploit the public's interest of building an aesthetic for the body, and gym spaces started to alter more towards stimulating the desire for physical enhancement. This public interest set the addition of weight aided machines and gadgets in motion at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and drove the launch of various mainstream gym brands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including Goodlife fitness, LA fitness, planet fitness, and 24-hour Fitness; all of which are in service of the transition from traditional gymnasiums towards the contemporary gym space.<sup>19</sup>

Even the smallest socio-political forces often influence the ever-changing nature of fitness. Like the monkeys in the Monkey Ladder Experiment; at times without fully acknowledging the reason why; individuals of a society have an instinctual tendency

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12 Ibid, 158.

13 Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

14 "A Brief History of the Corset through 1950." *refashioning history*. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://refashioninghistory.com/2017/02/15/a-brief-history-of-the-corset-through-1950/>.

15 "The History of Women in Fitness." *IRONPLATE STUDIOS*. IRONPLATE STUDIOS. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://ironplatestudios.com/blog/2019/4/1/the-history-of-women-in-fitness>.

16 "How Women Became Obsessed with Losing Weight." *Harper's BAZAAR*. Accessed April 16, 2022. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a14626590/history-boutique-fitness/>.

17 "Performance Enhancing Drugs: History, Medical Effects & Policy." Accessed April 17, 2022. <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/8848241/LeeY06.pdf?sequence=1>.

18 "Pumping Iron II: The Women – Challenging the Ideals of Femininity." *Under The Ropes*. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://undertheropes.com/2014/04/04/pumping-iron-ii-the-women-challenging-the-ideals-of-femininity/>.

19 "Pumping Iron at 40: The Classic Bodybuilding Movie." *Muscle & Fitness*. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://www.muscleandfitness.com/athletes-celebrities/interviews/pumping-iron-40-classic-bodybuilding-movie/>.

to conform to the footsteps of others.<sup>20</sup> We are conditioned to think normality means following suit since the desire to fit-in is within our human nature. To understand the conditions that have been and continues to shape the concept of fitness in the contemporary time, it's important to recognize a larger issue of the society that we live in as a context to the today's problematic understanding of fitness.

### 1.3 LIQUID CONTEMPORARY

*Liquidity* is a metaphoric term used by polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman to depict the modern conditions of rapid changes and the unpredictable nature in society. Bauman calls the contemporary time *liquid modernity* driven by what the thesis will refer to as *economic globalization* and *technological dematerialization*; two processes that strengthens the capitalistic structure.<sup>21</sup>

The transformation of technology from late 20<sup>th</sup> century through the 21<sup>st</sup> century has integrated technology into all aspects of daily life, which has changed the way we communicate, interact, consume, work, learn, and live. With the transition from the real world onto a virtual platform that lacks solid structures, stable social forms, and fixed rules and regulations, it gives way to rapid circulation of information, ideologies, products, exchanges, and interconnectedness made readily accessible at any given moment.<sup>22</sup> Economic globalization thrives on the lack of the same impediments which are eroded by economic liberalization and technological dematerialization, enabling the development of a single world capitalistic marketplace.<sup>23 24</sup>

The Internet is the most dominant platform for the spread of individualism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, providing new models and structures to sociability and social relations. However, the network is only a social model, not a collective community of individuals.<sup>25</sup> Bauman observes the greatest difference between a *community* and a *network*:

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20 Hector Navarro. "The Truth of the Monkey Ladder Experiment - Facts-Chology." Facts. Facts-Chology. Accessed February 1, 2022. <https://factschology.com/factschology-articles-podcast/monkey-ladder-experiment-truth>. The "Monkey Ladder Experiment" involved a group of scientists/researchers who placed five monkeys in a room containing a ladder in the center and a banana atop the ladder. It isn't long before one of the monkeys attempt to go for the banana but as soon as that happens, a scientist comes in and sprays all the monkeys with ice-cold water from a hose. If any other monkey attempts to go for the banana the same thing happens and continues to happen until all the monkeys refuse to go for the banana. At this point, a scientist switches out a wet monkey with a dry monkey who has no idea what's been going on in the room and is probably wondering why everyone is so wet and angry. This new naïve monkey spots the banana and attempts to go for it but instead of being hosed down by a scientist, the other 4 wet monkeys hit him, preventing him from touching the ladder. One by one the rest of the wet monkeys are replaced with dry monkeys and each one attempts to go for the banana only to be violently stopped by the other monkeys. It eventually gets to the point where no wet monkey is left and only dry monkeys are in the room. Yet, they still won't attempt to grab the banana thinking something bad will happen if they do.

21 Zygmunt Bauman. *Liquid Modernity*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

22 Ibid, 118-123.

23 Ibid, 53-59.

24 Ibid, 59-63.

25 Ibid, 118-123.



*If a community has you, you belong there. You have your network, your network belongs to you, that is the reversal of the situation. Unlike community, which is just there, you have a network, which is sustained by two activities, connecting and disconnecting.*<sup>26</sup>

Today, a community, which exists physically in the real world to build long term fellowship and intellectual social bonds that generates a feeling of belonging, is being replaced by a series of virtual networks. The individualized connections through technology, characterized by the fact that its built, sustained, and constantly recomposed by oneself, disables the creation of true communities.<sup>27</sup> This process of *individualization* behind the screen isolates individuals into nomadic consumers in the shadows of the internet. Behind a screen, individual identities become fluid and washed away into a series of consumeristic choices and means of self-monitoring and self-improvement, replacing the uniqueness of individuality with the needs and preferences of the larger group. Hence, this form of network socialization becomes the matrix where one constantly maintain, update, and change their identity to be suitable for the current societal norms in order to feel adequate, important and belonged.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, we begin to use a deformed and simplified language of communication through the internet that results in a one-dimensional and surficial connection, created by the continuous process of individualization. This process weakens social connections and replaces the feeling of belonging with a growing void of loneliness.<sup>29</sup> When individuals continue to surf the internet looking for new forms of socialization in hopes to fill the void and to find a sense of belonging, they are in fact caught in between a cycle of loneliness and disrupted social bonds, perpetuating the severance of relationship between the individual and its self and between the individual and others.<sup>30</sup>

So, it turns out that a lack of social structures and norms can enable just as it can disable cultural formations, social bonds, security and individual identities when the security of these bonds and identities gets dissolved into a society of unprecedented frailty and vulnerability.

26 republica2010. "Re:Publica 2015 - Zygmunt Bauman: From Privacy to Publicity." Video. Accessed April 16, 2022. 50:38. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGk-iaTr9hk>.

27 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 201.

28 Ibid, 30-38.

29 Ibid, 182-184.

30 Emma Palese. "Zygmunt Bauman. Individual and Society in the Liquid Modernity." *SpringerPlus* 2, no. 1 (2013): 191–191. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-2-191>.

*Forms of modern life may differ in quite a few respects – but what unites them all is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and inclination to constant change. To ‘be modern’ means to modernize – compulsively, obsessively; not so much just ‘to be’, let alone to keep its identity intact, but forever ‘becoming’, avoiding completion, staying underdefined.<sup>31</sup>*

Bauman believes that our contemporary culture is not a culture of learning, but a culture of forgetting, which serves as the very reason why he expresses that there is a growing conviction that “change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty.”<sup>32</sup> We are trained and conditioned to be ready for changes; to forget old norms and adapt to new ones, and it is for this reason that individuals are often stuck in between the chaos of searching for its self, and replacing the project self to adequately fit into the societal standards.

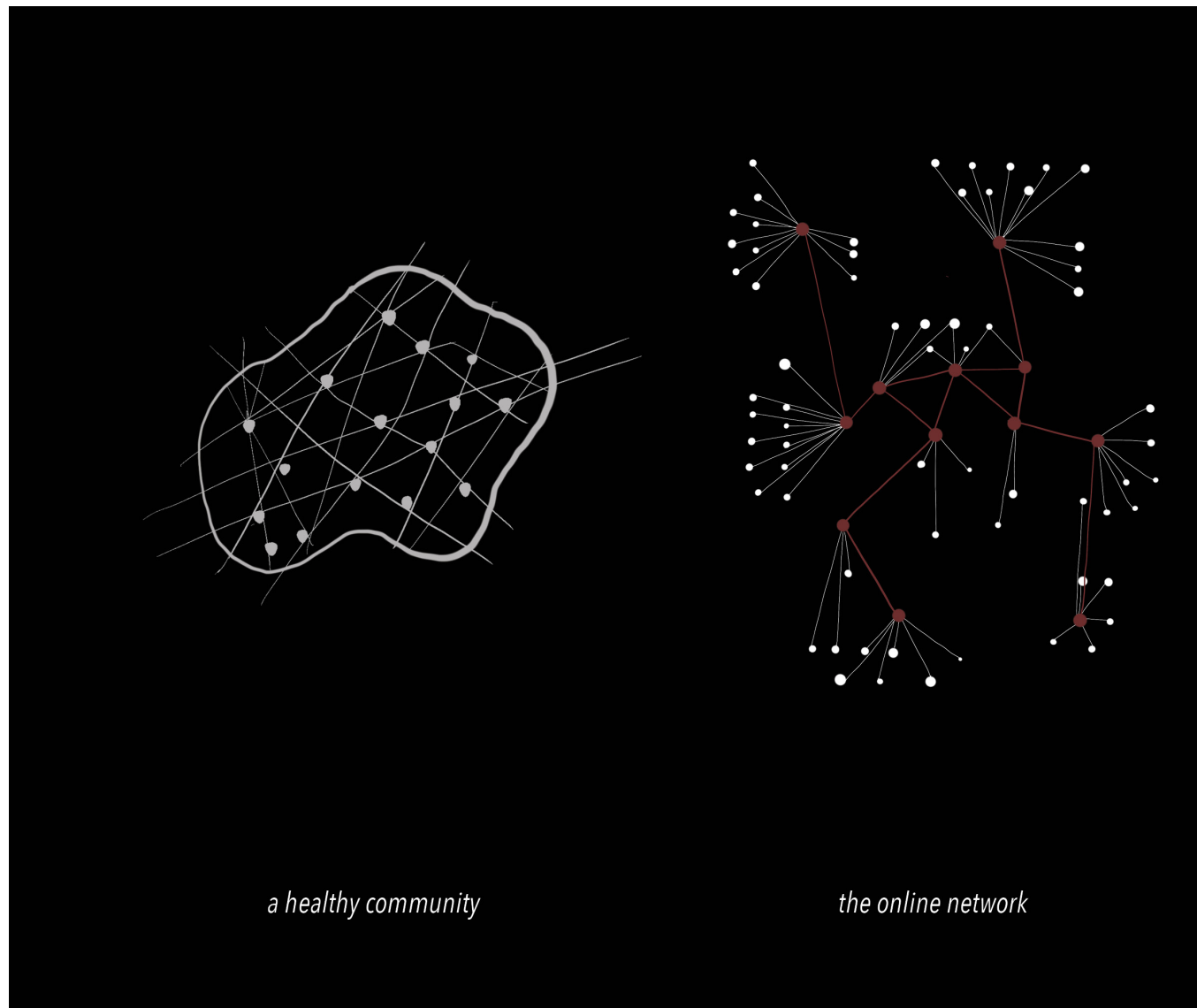
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31 Zygmunt Bauman. *Liquid Modernity*. 1st ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 82.

32 Ibid.



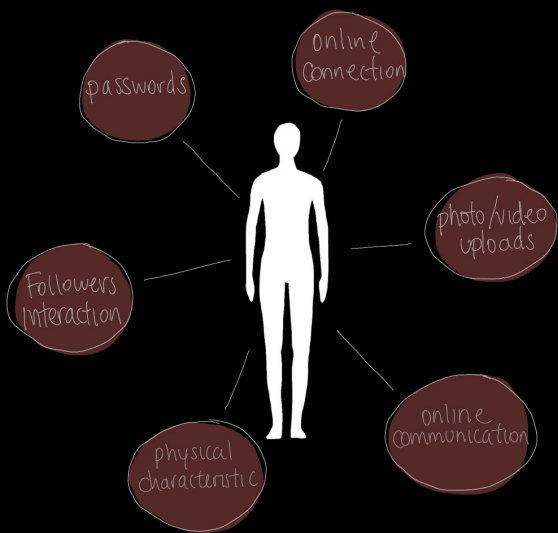
*Fig.1.12 The Dematerialized World*



*Fig.1.13 The Replacement of Communities with Online Networks*

*The contemporary social conditions generate a continuous effort to intentionally reconstruct social identities reflected by consumeristic choices in order to fit in with the society. This replaces the uniqueness of individuals into a socially constructed checklist of standards, which in turn produces an ill-defined notion of fitness that encapsulates the idea around a socially constructed 'ideal'*





*online identity*



*replacement of identity*

# *2.0*

MODERN FITNESS



## MODERN FITNESS

### 2.1 LIQUID FITNESS

Fitness is widely identified as being synonymous with *Health*. Universal definitions of Fitness revolve around the ‘physical condition’, ‘quality’ and ‘ability’, while health centers around ‘a state of well-being’.<sup>33 34</sup> Indeed, the earlier notion of fitness during the Physical Culture Movement near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century identifies being fit as acquiring the ability to carry the will of the mind and the body, suggesting a close resemblance to health and well-being.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, the modern notion of fitness has diverged from health and well-being by associating more directly with the concept of perfection, based on a social-normative image of ‘ideal’ that represents the ultimate condition of success.<sup>36</sup> With this understanding, Bauman expresses that the pursuit of fitness is “continual, never likely to bring full satisfaction, uncertain as to the propriety of its current direction and generating on its way a lot of anxiety.”<sup>37</sup>

Fitness has become one of the most defining liquid concepts of modernity contributing to the generation of anxiety in the current technologically dematerialized world. The *quantified self*, defined by the use of technology and devices to track and analyze physical activity leads to the most recent way we quantify – what originally should be - a qualitative and experience-based fitness journey.<sup>38</sup> This means looking concisely towards the breakdown of numbers and data to quantify achievements and dictate the quality of physical activities. Common prompts that assists such quantification of physical exercise include fitness tracking mobile apps, wearable fitness devices, and most electric cardio machines.<sup>39</sup>

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33 “Fitness.” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed February 13, 2022. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fitness>.

34 “Oxford Languages and Google - English.” Oxford Languages. Accessed February 13, 2022. <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.

35 “Physical Culture in the 19th Century.” CSUN University Library. Accessed February 13, 2022. <https://library.csun.edu/SCA/Peek-in-the-Stacks/PhysicalCulture>.

36 Martschukat, Jürgen, and Alex Skinner. *The Age of Fitness : How the Body Came to Symbolize Success and Achievement*. Translated by Alex Skinner. English edition. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021), 164-166.

37 Bauman. *Liquid Modernity*, 79.

38 “The Impact of Quantified Self on the Fitness Industry.” Virtuagym. Accessed April 13, 2022. <https://business.virtuagym.com/blog/the-impact-of-quantified-self-on-the-fitness-industry/>.

39 “Living the quantified self: The realities of self-tracking for Health.” This Sociological Life. Accessed April 13, 2022. <https://simplysociology.wordpress.com/>.



*Fig.2.1 Fitness Technologies*

*Virtual/technological prompts that assists the quantification of physical exercise, update of personal fitness status. These prompts attempt to make the fitness experience more playful and interactive, nonetheless, they lack physical interaction and true community building*



*Fig.2.2 The 'Quantified Self' in the 21st Century*

*The prevalent and concise breakdown of numbers and data to quantify our achievements and dictate the quality of our physical activities (fitness tracking). It works in the realm of social media and technology, enforcing a digital notion of fitness*

Concepts such as the Nintendo Ring Fit Adventure introduced in 2019, allows small space/at home exercising while supporting personalized interest and needs; the various Peloton equipment encourages virtual interactive fitness experience with others through the internet while allowing for remote participation; and the mobile game Pokémon Go that trended in 2016 successfully provided an alternative way of experiencing physical exercises by encouraging physical travelling and movements in exterior spaces.<sup>40 41 42</sup> Although these technological prompts assists in the knowledge of personal fitness status, and attempts to make the fitness experience more playful and interactive, nonetheless, they lack physical interaction and true community building. Furthermore, research shows that intense self-tracking can lead to *cyberchondria* where one becomes unduly anxious about their health state based on the data they collect, and in turn, facilitate health destructive behaviours.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the widespread action of a technologically-inseparable quantified self can alter the goal and execution of physical activity that encourages an exclusive, austere, and potentially detrimental fitness approach.

Additionally, technology has given rise to a novel platform for a capitalistic globalized fitness market through modes of social media, virtual fitness experiences and all forms of fitness advertising, unveiling the current prevalent way we are constantly fed with ideas revolving fitness.<sup>44</sup> However, these modes of disseminating information are often one-sided dialogs that rely solely on visual and auditory representation, which keeps the interaction and interpretation ostensible and superficial, in turn failing to communicate the challenges, circumstances, consequences, and truth behind the perceived image on the screen.<sup>45</sup>

## 2.2 LIQUID BODY

Today, it is difficult not to be consumed by a society that perpetuates the strive for an 'ideal' and to accept that the path to achieving it not only means being a good consumer of social ideologies, but also being efficient at changing the self along with the flow of social changes.

40 "Workouts Tailored to You: Ring Fit Adventure: Nintendo Switch: Nintendo." Nintendo Official Website. Accessed April 17, 2022. <https://www.nintendo.com/my/switch/al3p/custom/index.html>.

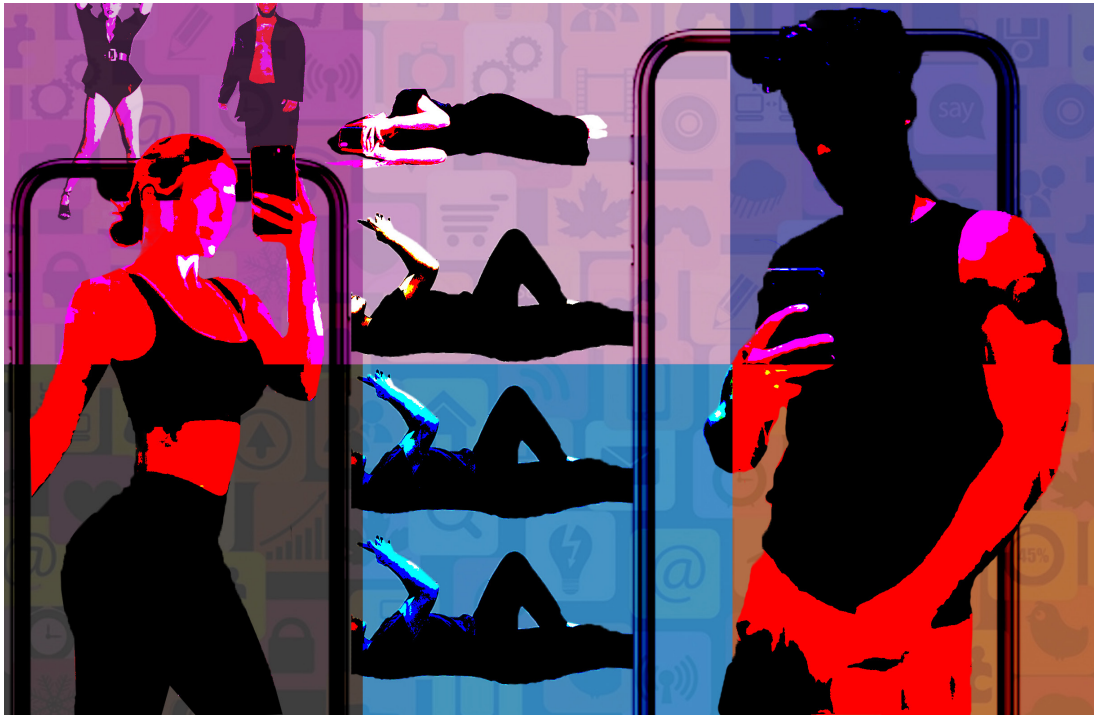
41 "Workouts Streamed Live & on-Demand." Workouts Streamed Live & On-Demand. Accessed April 17, 2022. <https://www.onepeloton.ca/>.

42 "Did Pokémon Go Get Americans to Exercise? the Research Says Yes - but Not for Long." Vox. Accessed April 16, 2022. <https://www.vox.com/2016/12/14/13921012/pokemon-go-exercise-studies-research>.

43 "Living the Quantified Self: The Realities of Self-Tracking for Health." This Sociological Life. Accessed April 16, 2022. <https://simplysociology.wordpress.com/>.

44 "The Effects of Instagram's Fitspiration on the Health and Well-Being of Women." Inquiry Journal. Accessed April 16, 2022. <https://www.unh.edu/inquiryjournal/spring-2021/effects-instagram%E2%80%99s-fitspiration-health-and-well-being-women>.

45 Annalise G Mabe, K. Jean Forney, and Pamela K. Keel. "Do You 'Like' My Photo? Facebook Use Maintains Eating Disorder Risk." *The International Journal of Eating Disorders* 47, no. 5 (2014): 516–523. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22254>.



*Fig.2.3 Fitness on the Virtual Platform*

*Social media progressively became the main platform where ideal bodies, diets, motivational posts and other fitness related images became visually available at any time of the day. The visual-dominant exchanges through social media can be misleading and easily cause misinterpretations for the receiving group*



The visually stimulating exchanges through virtual interactions demands a constant search for a social identity that closely ties to one's physical characteristics in order to fit within the parameters of societal preferences. Social psychologist Robert Farr notes, "the outward appearance of one's body has thus become a window to one's inner worthiness", suggesting that the need for one to look fit and feel adequate within the domains of virtual platforms has become more desired than simply knowing of one's health and happiness.<sup>46</sup>

Where a socially constructed 'fit' body has become the ultimate ideal that is simultaneously hard to achieve, it also dismisses the fact that "not all fitness regimes 'are good for one's health' and that what helps one to stay healthy does not necessarily make one fit".<sup>47</sup> In the western culture dominated by physical appearance, the human body becomes increasingly objectified and perceived as a machine that can be modified and manipulated at will. Such preoccupation has become a fertile ground to the development of various psychopathological disorders.<sup>48</sup> A cross sectional study in 2019 amongst a cohort of gym users internationally identifies a high risk of Exercise Addiction and other disorders, such as Body Dysmorphic Disorder, Muscle Dysmorphia, compulsive exercise, appearance anxiety, low self-esteem and uses of a variety of fitness supplements taken without medical consultation. Rather than being motivated by the desire for increased health and well-being, these behaviors are all associated to the idea of physical exercise as a vehicle to the improvement of body-image.<sup>49 50</sup>

The millions of daily posts and images found on social media evoking visually stimulating and ostensibly healthy bodies and lifestyles, as well as mainstream 'fitspirational' quotes such as "Train. Eat. Sleep. Repeat", "Don't stop until you're proud", "No off days", "No pain, no gain", implicitly but falsely claims that everybody has the ability to alter their appearance in reflection to the ideal body type through physical exercise.<sup>51 52</sup> These forms of false media can in fact be extremely misleading and discouraging to further induce various psychopathological disorders.<sup>53</sup>

46 Robert M. Farr. "The Long Past and the Short History of Social Psychology." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 21, no. 5 (1991): 371–380. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420210502>.

47 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 79.

48 Ornella Corazza et al. "The Emergence of Exercise Addiction, Body Dysmorphic Disorder, and Other Image-Related Psychopathological Correlates in Fitness Settings: A Cross Sectional Study." *PLOS ONE* 14, no. 4 (2019): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0213060>.

49 Ibid.

50 Roberto Olivardia. "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Whos the Largest of Them All? The Features and Phenomenology of Muscle Dysmorphia." *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 9, no. 5 (2001): 254–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10673220127900>.

51 Maria Michela Marzano-Parisoli. "The Contemporary Construction of a Perfect Body Image: Bodybuilding, Exercise Addiction, and Eating Disorders." *Quest (National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education)* 53, no. 2 (2001): 216–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2001.10491741>.

52 "The Effects of Instagram's Fitspiration on the Health and Well-Being of Women." *Inquiry Journal*, April 14, 2021. <https://www.unh.edu/inquiryjournal/spring-2021/effects-instagram%E2%80%99s-fitspiration-health-and-well-being-women>.

53 Annalise Mabe, Jean Fornet and Pamela Keel. "Do You 'Like' My Photo? Facebook Use Maintains Eating Disorder Risk.", 516–523.

And once again, individuals are the best consumers of these social interest and ideologies; ones to embrace the hype and suffer the repercussions and collateral damage. Such serious and mechanical conception of the human body generates an ill-defined notion of fitness that completely dismisses the valuing of mental health, and disassociates itself from anything remotely close to the understanding of health and well-being, leaving little to no room for the engagement between the mind and the body.

The desire to shape and maintain the body has become one of many social driving forces exploited by the fitness industry.<sup>54</sup> As the fluid and pending concepts of fitness become a social construction of undetermined temporal 'ideals,' individuals become anxious and distressed. Consequently, this anxiety pressures vulnerable individuals to seek some form of control and security in a world that lacks both, turning the attention to the closest and easiest target within reach to transform and dictate – one's own body.<sup>55 56</sup> The undertaking of the management of one's physicality that twists the true uniqueness and healthy self into a task that requires constant update and maintenance severs the relationship between the mind and the body. This compromising solution to the troubled social backdrop completely undermines the valuing of well-being, and spoils the joy and meaning of physical exercise.

## 2.3 THE FITNESS CENTER

American author James Reed in a TIME article describes the glorification of the body is now part of everyday American life. The body is described as a commodity to be glorified as Reed describes it as 'the temple of the soul'. He calls fitness fanatics 'passionate converts' and refers to the modern fitness clubs as "latter-day secular cathedrals built to the glory of the body".<sup>57</sup> Aforementioned, a well-maintained body represents power, control, discipline and glory within the dualistic consumer capitalism. Yet, a well-maintained body is also one that requires a certain degree of consumptive release; acquiring a membership at the fitness center, purchasing exercising machines and equipment, dietary supplements, and so on.<sup>58</sup>

Fitness centers are the supreme commodity of the global multi-billion-dollar fitness industry that exploits the interest of over 170 million worldwide members on the cultivation of health and aesthetic of the body.<sup>59</sup> Some of the largest worldwide fitness

54 Michelle B Jacobs. "Obsessed with Impression Management: a Critical Sociology of Body Image in Capitalist Society." *Human Architecture* 2, no. 2 (2003): 66–73.

55 Ibid.

56 Palese, "Zygmunt Bauman. Individual and Society in the Liquid Modernity.", 191.

57 James Reed. "America Shapes Up." *Time*. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,950613,00.html>.

58 Carolan, "The Conspicuous Body: Capitalism, Consumerism, Class and Consumption.", 82–111.

59 "Topic: Health & Fitness Clubs." *Statista*. Accessed December 07, 2021. [https://www.statista.com/topics/1141/health-and-fitness-clubs/#topicHeader\\_\\_wrapper](https://www.statista.com/topics/1141/health-and-fitness-clubs/#topicHeader__wrapper).

clubs in terms of revenue include LA Fitness, 24 Hour Fitness, Life Time Fitness and Planet Fitness with members up to 20 times the capacity than the actual space can hold, have actually built their business model around counting on members that don't show up.<sup>60</sup>

Evidently, success in achieving certain physical and aesthetic conditions of the human body is now glorified to the highest level of worship by the western society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time, the growing interest in gym memberships and demand for more fitness 'cathedrals' naturally yields a growing fitness economy and elitist fitness attitudes that further strengthens the status quo of class division; a successful body implies a successful bank account, and a successful bank account honors the right for one to participate in achieving success.<sup>61</sup>

The frameworks of the social comparison theory recognizes that observing others pursue a goal in a social context can be contagious and activating for the observer.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, individuals who obtain self-knowledge by observing others also begin to compare their own traits and capabilities with those of others.<sup>63</sup> <sup>64</sup> While the gym environment can be familiar and comfortable for hard-core gym "regulars," exercise "fanatics," or "aesthetic people," it doesn't always provide the support and needs for unaccustomed users, fitness amateurs, or "less aesthetic" participants.<sup>65</sup> <sup>66</sup> Due to the presence of the former users who engender negative social comparisons and intimidation, fitness spaces can become psychologically less accessible or inaccessible to unaccustomed users, resulting in a reluctance to engage in physical activities. Hence, within the pre-divided class of bodies that can afford to partake in such an exploitative and demanding market, many gym goers experience further segregation based on their level of aesthetic and magnitude of fitness potential. Negative social comparisons that cause feelings of inadequacy, and confusion around exercise equipment can in turn create intimidation that adversely affects the performance and overall satisfaction of one's exercise experience and disheartens one's fitness goals. These deterrents manifest in the form of what has commonly been referred to as "gymtimidation", which has caused an ever-growing degree of commitment, intenseness, competition, and pressure around the act of exercising within the gym environment.<sup>67</sup>

60 "Why We Sign up for Gym Memberships but Never Go to the Gym." NPR. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/12/30/373996649/why-we-sign-up-for-gym-memberships-but-don-t-go-to-the-gym>.

61 Carolan, "The Conspicuous Body: Capitalism, Consumerism, Class and Consumption.", 82–111.

62 Henk Aarts, Peter M Gollwitzer, and Ran R Hassin. "Goal Contagion: Perceiving Is for Pursuing." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87, no. 1 (2004): 23.

63 Hart Blanton. "Evaluating the Self in the Context of Another: The Three-Selves Model of Social Comparison Assimilation and Contrast." *Cognitive Social Psychology* (2013): 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410605887-10>.

64 Leon Festinger. "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes." *Human Relations* (New York) 7, no. 2 (1954): 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>.

65 "Scientists Say You Can Be Both Fat & Fit - I'm Proof That's True." *Women's Health*. Accessed April 17, 2022. <https://www.womenshealthmag.com/uk/fitness/strength-training/a33441206/rose-stokes-odd-one-out/>.

66 "Why the Gym Doesn't Work for Most People, and What to Do about It." *Diligent Fitness*. Accessed April 17, 2022. <http://diligentfitness.co.uk/why-the-gym-doesnt-work-for-most-people-and-what-to-do-about-it/>.

67 Reed, "America Shapes Up."

Additionally, the standard fitness guidelines of mirror-lined gym walls has sparked many researcher's comments on the negative effects of the gym environment and its influence on negative social comparison.<sup>68 69</sup> Multiple studies in North America demonstrates not only the tendency of mirrors affecting one physically – taking away one's ability to learn how it feels to do exercises properly and causing physical exhaustion during exercise;<sup>70</sup> but also emotionally – a surface evaluation and focus on the superficial factors of one's body can cause feelings of fatigue, less satisfaction and mood decrement post-workout;<sup>71</sup> as well as disrupt mental focus - distracting one's attention and derailing one's reason of exercising, and even inducing the risk of body dysmorphic disorders that are ultimately detrimental to the psychological well-being among individuals unaccustomed to exercise.<sup>72 73</sup>

Beyond the gym mirrors, certain design aspects of the fitness environment can create an atmosphere that is non-conducive to goal attainment and can lead to feelings of intimidation that negatively impacts performance outcomes<sup>74</sup> Modern composition and design of fitness spaces tend to display challenging equipment such as weight benches and climbing machines in plain view; open workout areas, large windows, or open viewing areas that discourage privacy; heavy machineries, treadmills and equipment laid out row by row in a rigid fashion; which all contribute to an intimidating milieu.<sup>75 76</sup>

The rigidity of exercise machines all induce the same repetitive movements between individuals. As well, the mechanical space and layout of modern gyms calls for a mechanical treatment of the body, turning bodies into machines. Gym televisions, the music playlist, and exercise machines with built-in screens, become various isolated modes of entertainment to distract one from the boredom and soreness of exercising.

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- 68 Kathleen A Martin Ginis, Mary E Jung, and Lise Gauvin. "To See or Not to See: Effects of Exercising in Mirrored Environments on Sedentary Women's Feeling States and Self-Efficacy." *Health Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2003): 354–361. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.22.4.354>.
  - 69 Olivardia, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Whos the Largest of Them All? The Features and Phenomenology of Muscle Dysmorphia.", 254–259.
  - 70 "Why Working out in Front of a Mirror Could Be Hurting You." *FASHION Magazine*. Accessed December 07, 2021. <https://fashionmagazine.com/wellness/fitness-mirrors/>.
  - 71 Martin Ginis, Jung, and Gauvin, "To See or Not to See: Effects of Exercising in Mirrored Environments on Sedentary Women's Feeling States and Self-Efficacy.", 354–361.
  - 72 Kathleen A Martin Ginis, Shauna M. Burke, and Lise Gauvin. "Exercising with Others Exacerbates the Negative Effects of Mirrored Environments on Sedentary Women's Feeling States." *Psychology & Health* 22, no. 8 (2007): 945–962. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14768320601070571>.
  - 73 Olivardia, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Whos the Largest of Them All? The Features and Phenomenology of Muscle Dysmorphia.", 254–259.
  - 74 Martin Hagger, and Nikos. Chatzisarantis. *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Exercise and Sport*. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2007).
  - 75 Keith S Coulter. "Intimidation and Distraction in an Exercise Context." *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 19, no. 4: 668–686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2020.1739108>.
  - 76 Philip Wilson, Diane E Mack, and Kimberly P Grattan. 2008. "Understanding Motivation for Exercise: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective." *Canadian Psychology = Psychologie Canadienne* 49, no. 3: 250–256. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012762>.





*Fig.2.4 Gymtimidation*

*The intimidation stemmed from unfamiliar free weights and equipment at the gym induces a sense of pressure and insecurity when users, especially beginners, try to use them for the first time*

As discussed prior, the development of modern fitness centers is a capitalistic mode of production and profit generation. Fitness facilities are good at enticing vulnerable consumers by selling them the dream of the ideal body, when in reality these unrealistic expectations are likely deterring individuals from being active users. In this light, the gym becomes a capitalistic environment where the strong and powerful get more, but the ones that lack understanding can get discouraged, neglected, and dismissed. Once again signifying and enhancing a clear division of class and significance of fitness as power and success. All of these conditions fortify to create a degree of irony that disparages social interactions, perpetuates the inseparable norm of fitness and technology, and contributes to the constant and rise-and-fall of gym memberships in North America.

By boiling down individual needs into a limited set of restrictive machines and dictating movements catered for a group at large, the capitalistic gym environment that directly or indirectly, excludes certain classes; creates an intimidating and isolating milieu, induces negative social comparison, provokes a sense of competition, and dismisses social interactions and weakens social bonds, making way for its industry to exploit the public interest, which in turn subsidizes some serious emerging concerns around social, community and personal health.

### 2.4 CASE STUDY

#### *FIT4LESS*

Shortly after starting my thesis, I started a membership at a Fit4less gym located in Milton, Ontario. Since March 2022, I have been attending a 1-hour session regularly, 3-4 times a week. Through my fitness experience at the Fit4less, I documented various ethnographical and phenomenological speculations to study and analyse the social culture of the gym through personal observations.

*"We must invent the modern building like a giant machine ... the house of cement, iron and glass, without curves or ... ornament, rich only in the inherent beauty of its lines and modelling, extraordinarily brutish in its mechanical simplicity."<sup>77</sup>*

Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier believed that a machine is any object used by man to serve a function, whose function is defined by its shape.<sup>78</sup> With his adherence to linearity and Newtonian beliefs of the body, he viewed men as geometric animals and the body as a machine. Through this lens, a gymnasium logically had to be designed as a machine for training the body and its shape and interior had to reflect this function. Gym spaces therefore became spaces of linearity filled with machines

<sup>77</sup> Patricia Anne Vertinsky, and Sherry. McKay. . *Disciplining Bodies in the Gymnasium Memory, Monument, Modernism*. (London: Routledge, 2004), 44.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 43-44.

that expressed an abundance of masculinity, strength and power.<sup>79</sup>

Author Patricia Vertinsky expresses in her essay that the 20th century Nazi and fascist body culture was centered around impelling bodies straight and directly to their goals, such preoccupation prioritized straight lines and right angles as a symbol of moving forward through space. In this view, curvatures were seen as dysfunctional, feminine, and deviant, and a waste of space, time and energy, as well as a potentially subversive element in the pursuit of power and the rituals of correct body training, hence curves were avoided at all costs.<sup>80</sup>

This design approach and formality gave shape to social relations within the gym space that estranged the female body from the gym and automatically assigned spaces of gender distinction, as well as distinction between various types of body.<sup>81</sup> Hence the architecture of physical culture, sports, and gymnasia that lacks neutrality and transparency became spaces that deliberately expressed stereotyped gender roles in its spatial arrangements.<sup>82</sup>

The approximately 1,500 square meter single floor Fit4less building sits within a commercial plaza located in the center of a heavy residential area of Milton. The gym offers a \$14/month regular membership with access to basic workout areas including cardio, circuit, aerobic, isolation machines and free weights. The \$24/month Black Card (VIP) membership has additional access to a VIP workout area, Hydro massage beds, massage chairs and tanning. Despite the price differentiation, its membership as the name suggests, is very affordable to participants of all ages and class. The tagline “No Judgement” printed on the orange coloured walls, suggests the intent of inclusion, motivation, positive attitude, and enthusiasm. These efforts of adjustments can be seen as an attempt at dismantling the stereotyped spaces to promote neutrality and inclusion. Nevertheless, the noises at the gym echoes that of the industrial age’s mills and factories with the grunts of workers, the clanking of metals and whirling of machines which still emphasizes the mechanical notion of the body, fitness, strength and power.

#### *THE GYM FLOOR PLAN AND VIEWS*

Members are greeted by the mechanical whirling sounds of the crowded rows of machines up on entry. With spatial elements such as the straight trussed ceiling that usually draws attention to a dead end; informal circulation paths formed by the machines that leads users from one enclosed wall to another; the sight of exposed HVAC systems, back of house equipment, plain walls, TV screens and a single window view towards the traffic in the parking lot; and mirrors that extends and highlights the front and back of other machines; one can easily get overwhelmed by the excessive mechanical rigidity and spatial linearity of the gym environment.

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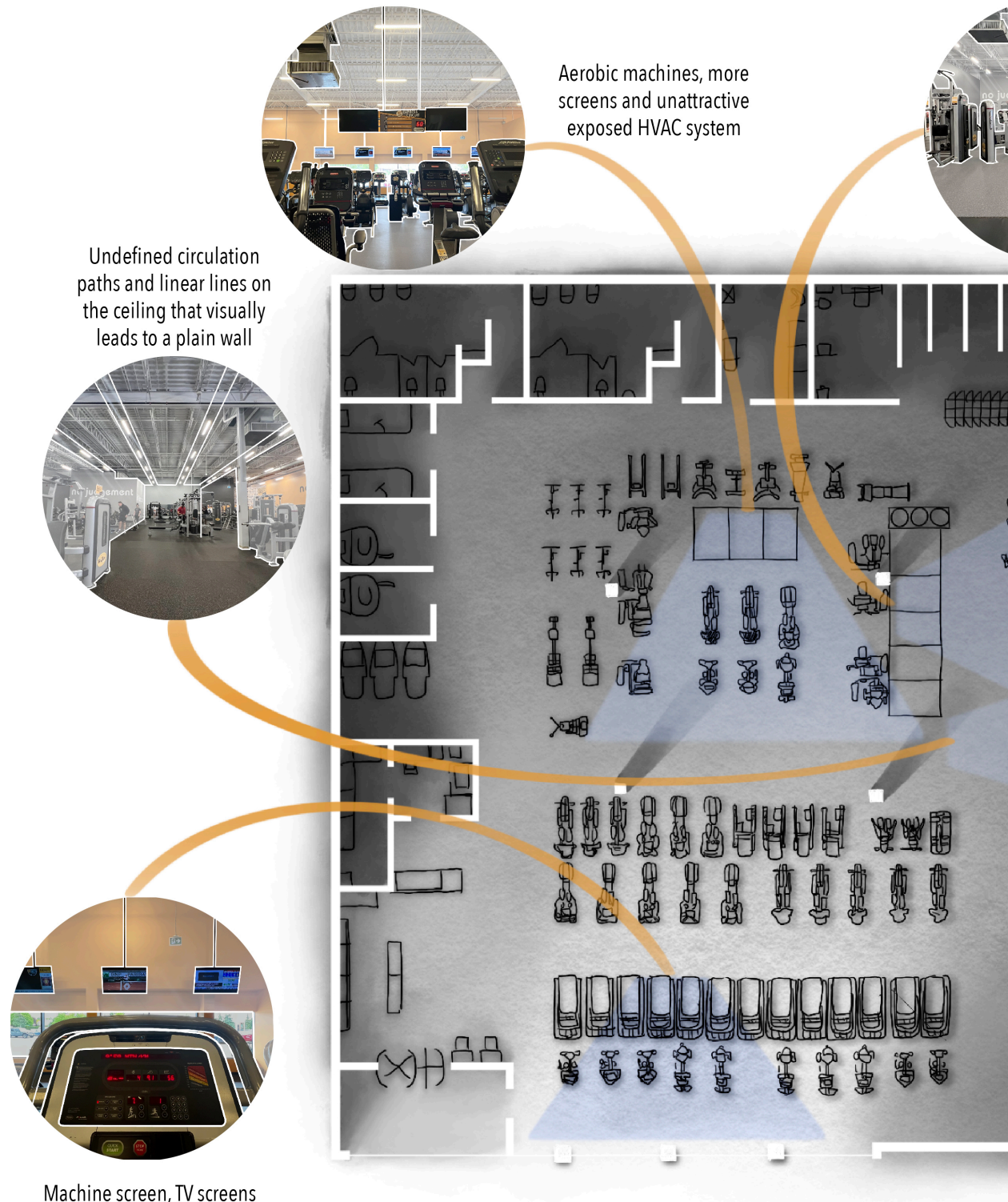
79 Ibid, 44.

80 Ibid, 43.

81 Patricia Anne Vertinsky, and John. Bale. *Sites of Sport : Space, Place, Experience*. (London: Routledge, 2004),17.

82 Ibid, 21.





Machine screen, TV screens  
and windows looking  
towards the parking lot

Aerobic machines, more  
screens and unattractive  
exposed HVAC system

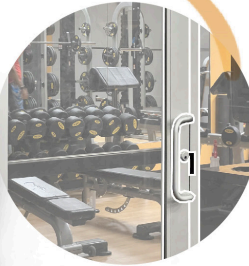
Undefined circulation  
paths and linear lines on  
the ceiling that visually  
leads to a plain wall

*Fig.2.5 Spatial-ethnographic Study of Fit4less and User Views , Milton ON*





Anaerobic machines placed uncomfortably close to aerobic area



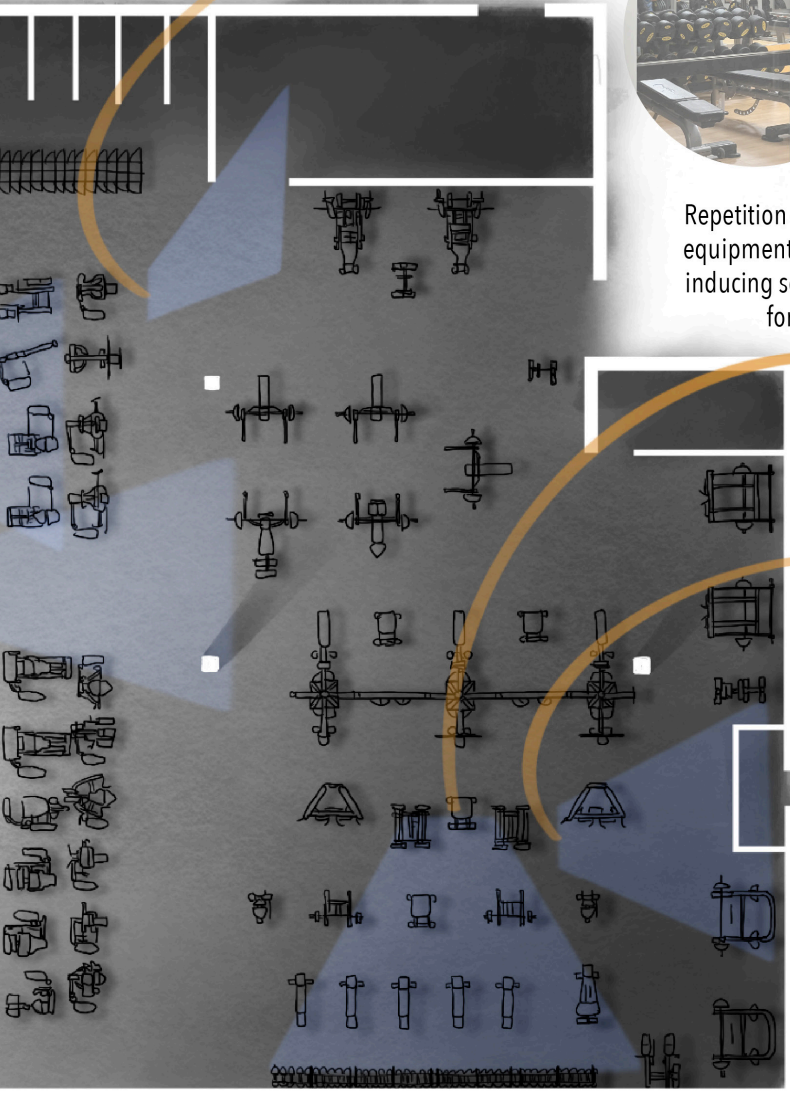
VIP area architecturally defined and divided by a see-through glass door



Repetition of weights and equipment placed in view inducing seriousness and formality



Mirror spanned across the gym wall inducing intimidation and body comparison



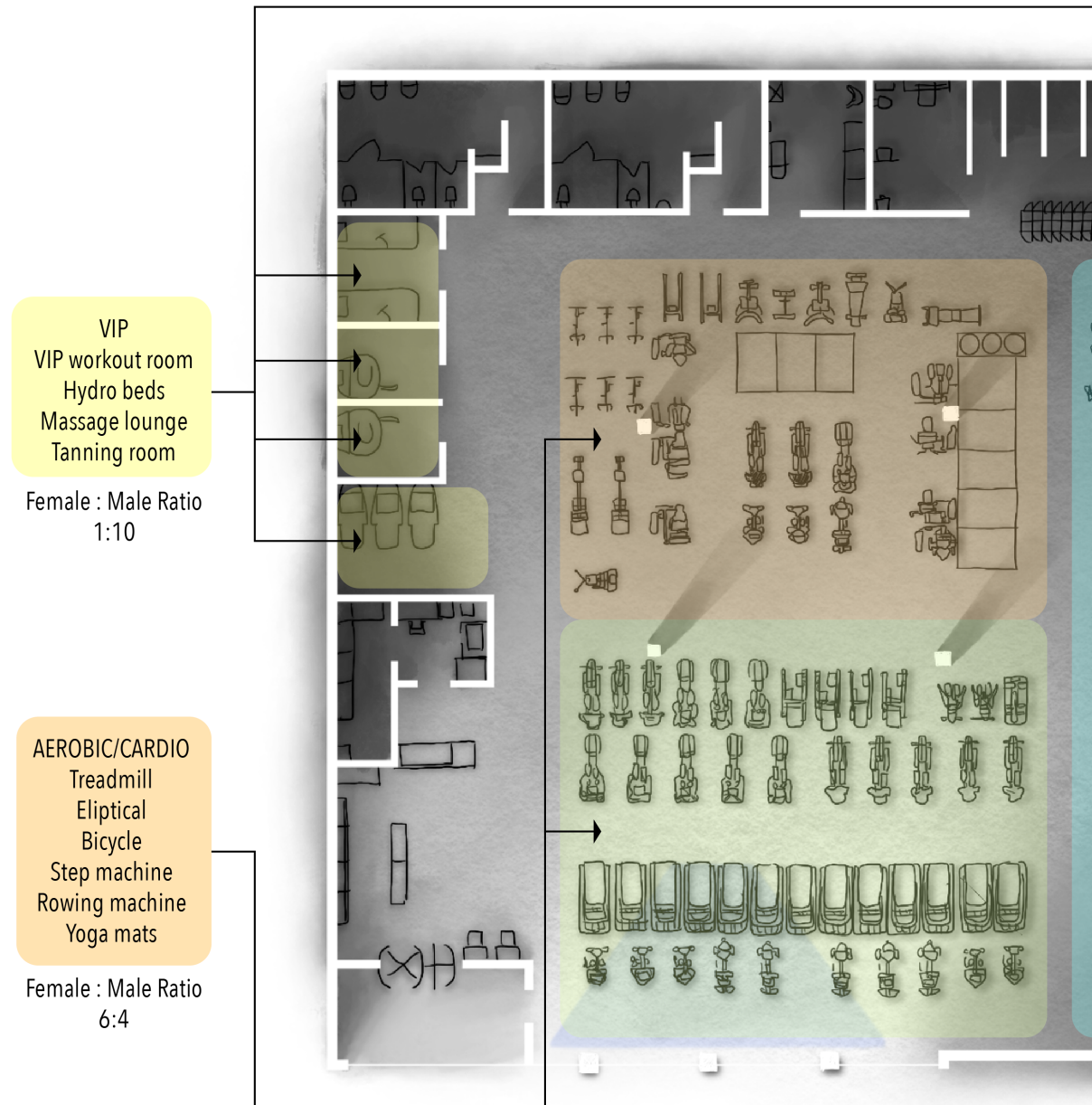
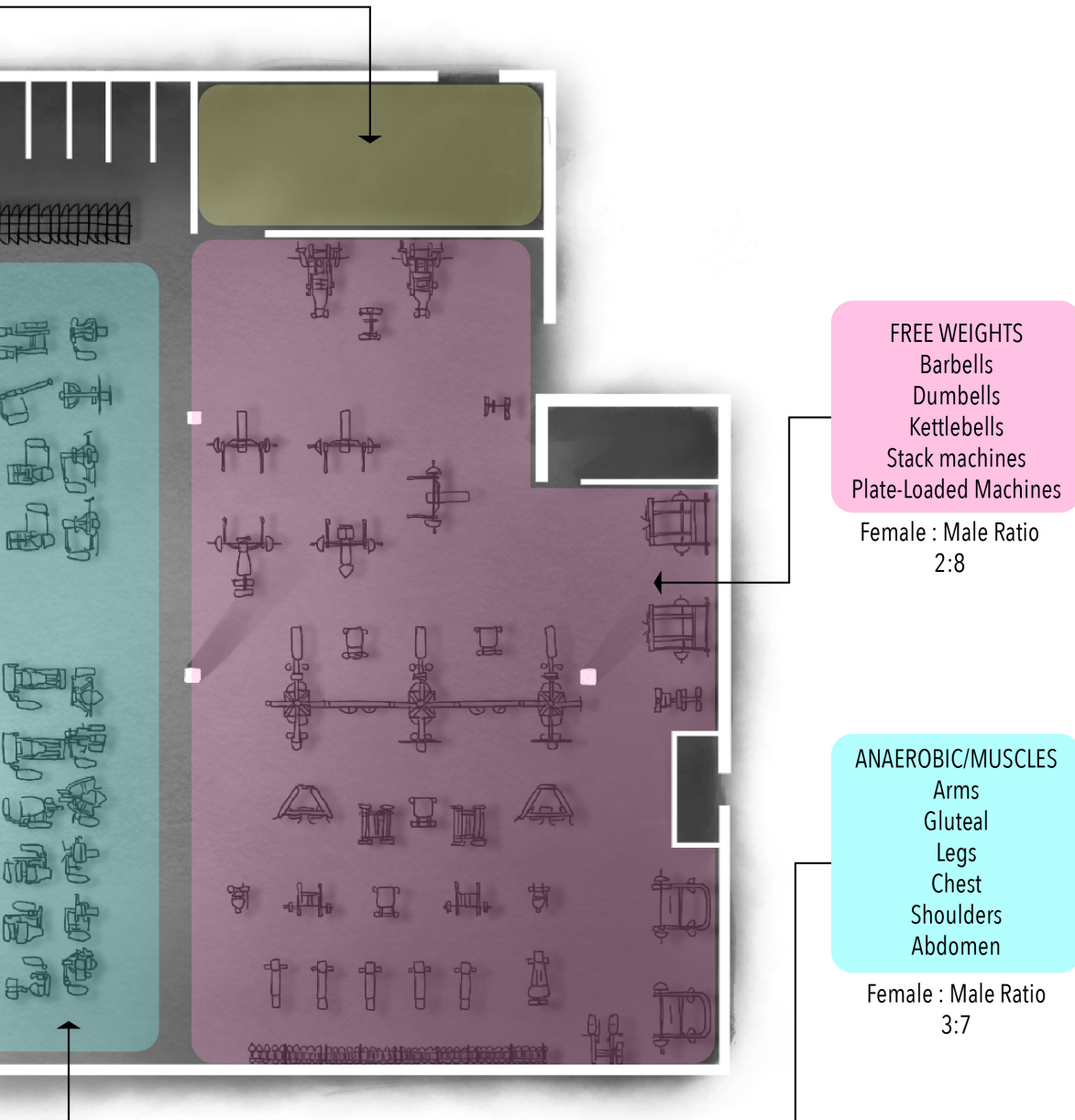


Fig.2.6 Phenomenological Study of the Distinct Gym Areas, Milton ON



At the same time, as individuals lose interest from the unexciting and dull repetition of gym exercise, the workout itself becomes robotic, mindless, and tiresome. This ironically pushes individuals through the motions of their typical workout routine as everything around them straightforwardly points them towards their goals. Through the duration of their fitness routine, users circulate through the various areas of the gym, moving from one machine to the next, training specific parts of the body, and stops when their bodies reach total exhaustion. At this point, they would leave as the next batch of exercisers filters through the space.

Aside from the ridged circulation of linearity conducted by the gym floor layout, the gym machines and equipment itself also induces controlled movements, a set of movements that is predetermined by the manufacturer, with nothing more or less than the prescribed limits. Consequently, long term gym users are likely to be more dependent on the specific machines to target the specific parts of their body, which dismisses the importance and appreciation for free and self-conducted movements.

The areas of the gym are distinctively divided into categories and types of workouts, reinforcing a social distancing between various types of gym users, delineating areas of use for different users. Between the regular workout area and VIP black card area is a wall and a glass door. These architectural element serves as an instantaneous physical and psychological barrier that reinforces capitalism with a distinction of class hierarchy, suddenly making the tiny room in the back of the corner a more socially desirable, and higher power space. Even though the gym promotes equal accessibility to everybody, the lack of variation in users' ages, as well as the observed class and gender ratio in the distinctive areas are nevertheless formed within the gym environment through its architectural layout, and pre-existing gender, age, and class stereotypes that leads to a spatial division and separation which forms a psychological hindrance and inaccessibility to various groups of bodies.

In these instances, the traditional values of fitness and qualities of fitness space and stereotypes elevated by Le Corbusier is very much reflective in the socio-spatial typology of the modern gym space. Gyms lacks neutrality and transparency resulting in an everlasting presence of body, gender, and class distinction. The notion of well-being in such fitness environments are therefore promoted in an ill-defined, rigid and mechanical fashion, which fails to bring forth a sense of lightheartedness and playfulness.



*3.0*  
PLAY





# PLAY

## 3.1 PLAY & CREATION

Cultural theorist Johan Huizinga recognizes the non-materialistic, pleasurable, yet serious qualities of play as a function of cultural formation and a fundamental activity of civilization and well-being. Play has been significantly prominent in all aspects of human progression since archaic times.<sup>83</sup> *Homo Ludens* meaning 'Man the Player' suggests that humans are meant to play, and forms of play manifest in all aspects of life as long as the space we inhabit holds the ground for playing.

In *The Human Condition*, Philosopher Hannah Arendt describes humans as *homo fabers* meaning 'Man the Maker'. She believes humans are the makers of the environment we inhabit and that "the world would not exist without the human activity which produced it"<sup>84</sup> This relationship between the action of playing with, learning, and inhabiting together as social beings in the same environment is what gives purpose and desire to the continuous process of creating.<sup>85</sup>

Author Scott Eberle identifies the six elements that are involved in the process of play: Anticipation, Surprise, Pleasure, Strength, Understanding, and Poise; though distinguished into six steps, they are not practically observed in any specific order. Eberle's work defines play as a process "driven by pleasure that yet strengthens our muscles, instructs our social skills, tempers and deepens our positive emotions, and enables a state of balance that leaves us poised to play some more."<sup>86</sup> *Anticipation* is the state of readiness, of curiosity, during which our interest narrows and our mind focuses and we are able to predict what happens next. Anticipation gives way to the next element, *surprise*, an unexpected encounter, unfamiliar idea, along with curiosity and novelty that produce the third element *pleasure*. Pleasure is the anticipated state that motivates one to discover and explore that curiosity and novelty, allowing for the learning and *understanding* of new knowledge. Through experience and understanding, *strength* is gained in the form of mastery, which

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83 Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens : a Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2016).

84 Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed. / introduction by Margaret Canovan. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 22.

85 Ibid, 23.

86 Scott G Eberle. "The Elements of Play Toward a Philosophy and a Definition of Play." *American Journal of Play* 6, no. 2 (2014): 231.



allows one to reach the final element of *poise*, a sense of balance, fulfilment, dignity and composure.<sup>87</sup>

Play appears to be detached from specific material, function or purpose, solely valued for its pleasurable qualities. However, play occurs in cultivated environments and at the same time, it cultivates new environments, social relations, experiences and transformation of spaces through its process. In all areas of life, the act of play and creation builds communities, strengthens social bonds, creates new culture and ritual, and fosters well-being of the mind and body. Therefore, play and creation in all of its forms that results in the making of physical and psychological meaning and experience becomes a necessity for *homo ludens* and *homo fabers*.

### 3.2 HUMAN NATURE & DESIRES

#### MOVEMENT AND PLAY

Today, the concept of play has a childish connotation and its perceived as unproductive. Individuals often lose the willingness to play when they reach adulthood as it is often dismissed by society, as one grows older. Indeed, adults no longer need to indulge in play to develop social or emotional skills, however, the act of playing transforms into a therapeutic and restorative exercise.<sup>88</sup> Complimentary to Eberle's concepts around play, research doctor Stuart Brown expresses that play is a "state of being" that takes place through purposeless, self-motivating activities which provides pleasure and fun while requiring the proper emotional state for it to occur.<sup>89</sup> Taking part in play is a way to "put us in sync with those around us, as well as a way to tap into common emotions and thoughts and share them with others."<sup>90</sup> Hence it allows humans to be in an altered state where "the differential in power can be overridden by a process in nature that is within all of us."<sup>91</sup> Brown expresses that body-play is universal. Movement of the body accompanies all elements of play, and structures our knowledge of the world around us.<sup>92</sup> It is the first and foremost basic form of play that any human being participates in, allowing the body to exit the stillness created by gravity and a lack of movement. We instinctually desire bodily movement and play as we are able to observe children crawling toward objects that arouse curiosity only months after being born.<sup>93</sup> "Movement-play lights up the brain and fosters learning, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience."<sup>94</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 222-227.

<sup>88</sup> Bowen Faville White. *Why Normal Isn't Healthy How to Find Heart, Meaning, Passion & Humor on the Road Most Traveled*. (s.l.: Stress Technol, 2004).

<sup>89</sup> Stuart L. Brown, and Christopher C. Vaughan. *Play : How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. (New York: Avery, 2009), 58.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>91</sup> "Play Is More than Just Fun." Stuart Brown: Play is more than just fun | TED Talk. Accessed September 10, 2022. [https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart\\_brown\\_play\\_is\\_more\\_than\\_just\\_fun?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_play_is_more_than_just_fun?language=en).

<sup>92</sup> Brown, and Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, 83.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 76.

To obtain these characteristics of human nature requires movement and motion, hence movement of the body is one of the biggest initiators to foster a playful-state of mind.<sup>95</sup>

Brown categorizes fitness individuals into 4 categories; the exerciser, the competitor, the enthusiast, and the socializer.<sup>96</sup> In his opinion, the enthusiasts and socializers are more likely to engage in pure play through their movement of exercise due to the fact that they pursue the activity for the short-term pleasure and experience rather than a purposeful long-term goal like the exercisers and competitors do. Fitness and play are therefore interdependently linked through the purposeless and goalless pleasure of exercising the body, and the positive emotions and playfulness of the mind achieved through the fitness experience. In this sense, fitness may or may not be a form of play, depending on the individual's motivation behind exercise and seeking play. Hence, play could be as much of an activity as it is an emotional state of mind that either encourages or hinders a playful spirit.<sup>97</sup>

### CURIOSITY AND VISUAL CUES

If the mentality and physicality of play occurs interchangeably and simultaneously to foster play, it is essential to either foster a mind that desires movement, or to use body movement to initiate a playful state of mind. In the case of design, it is more compelling for architectural elements to stimulate a curious and playful mind followed by playful movements. In his book *Brain Rules*, John Medina outlines the 12 rules of how the human brain functions. Medina expresses that the emergence of a prevalent sedentary lifestyle is the greatest predictor of successful aging and cognitive health.<sup>98</sup> Our brains were evolutionally supported by “olympic-caliber bodies” as our ancestors used to cover 12 miles of grounds per day hunting, gathering, and moving. Hence our bodies naturally desire to go back to their “hyperactive serengeti roots”, desiring motion, movement and body-play.<sup>99</sup> He calls physical exercise ‘cognitive candy’ as it energizes our mind and boosts our brain power, and he believes that the human brain developed to be the most advanced in the word “under conditions where movement was a constant requirement”.<sup>100 101</sup>

In discussing the brain rule regarding ‘attention’, Medina claims that humans “don’t pay attention to boring things” as boring things disengages our attention resulting in mindless activities.<sup>102</sup> To retain attention and mindfulness, there is always benefit in stimulating the senses. However, “vision trumps all other senses”, being the most

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95 Ibid, 84.

96 Ibid, 57.

97 Ibid, 58.

98 John Medina. *Brain Rules. 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School*. 1st Pear Press trade pbk. ed. (Seattle, Wash: Pear Press, 2009), 13.

99 Ibid, 24.

100 Ibid, 22.

101 Ibid, 11.

102 Ibid, 71.

dominant sense that humans possess, taking up half of the brain's resources.<sup>103</sup> The brain typically relies on the information that its resources provide to coordinate movements and feel emotions. With vision being the biggest stimuli, removing visual cues and replacing them with unconventional environmental features will force our brains to engage in circuits that it is not typically used to. For example, taking a trip up any set of stairs requires little attention once we find the first step, simply because the action of walking up the stairs with the exact same dimension is encoded in our brains through the many years we have performed the action. If we were to randomly select several steps and change the dimension of each step, we are changing the environmental conditions that are embedded in our memory, resulting in the climber to misstep and potentially fall over an extremely routine task. Rather than short circuiting to its accustomed movements, the replacement of familiar visual cues with new ones forces the brain to relearn the environment and re-calculate the actions to signal the body. In this instance the brain works in a different way than usual, naturally requiring more attention and awareness of the mind and body. In turn, this naturally engages more sense alongside vision, fully immersing individuals mentally and physically within a given environment.<sup>104</sup>

#### MACHINE VS. NATURE

It is common in western culture to view nature as dualistically opposed to culture due to the externalization of nature as a separate entity from the civilized world that we inhabit. Such a notion becomes the entailment of the growing segregation between human and nature in which humanity's place in nature becomes paradoxical and decomposed.<sup>105</sup> The focus of social practices and civil complexities within western civilization, rather than it being the understanding and experience of our bodies in their natural form, has made our society relatively independent from our natural background.<sup>106</sup> In this light, the practice of civilization in western culture can be seen as a facet to the broader phenomenon of the humanistic strive for appearances that are unnatural and difficult to attain in the modern fitness realm. At the same time, nature is often woefully excluded from the pursuit of fitness and modern fitness planning.

On the concept of *fitness tourism* – wellness/exercise retreats that take place close to nature, researcher Jo Little stresses on the over-desire of 'appropriately' sized and shaped bodies within contemporary ideas of health and beauty. Examining the motivations behind the consumption of these fitness retreats, the client's satisfaction is heavily dependent on conventional weight loss and body size reduction, which goes to show the skewed contemporary relationship between nature, wellbeing, exercise and the body.<sup>107</sup>

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103 Ibid, 240.

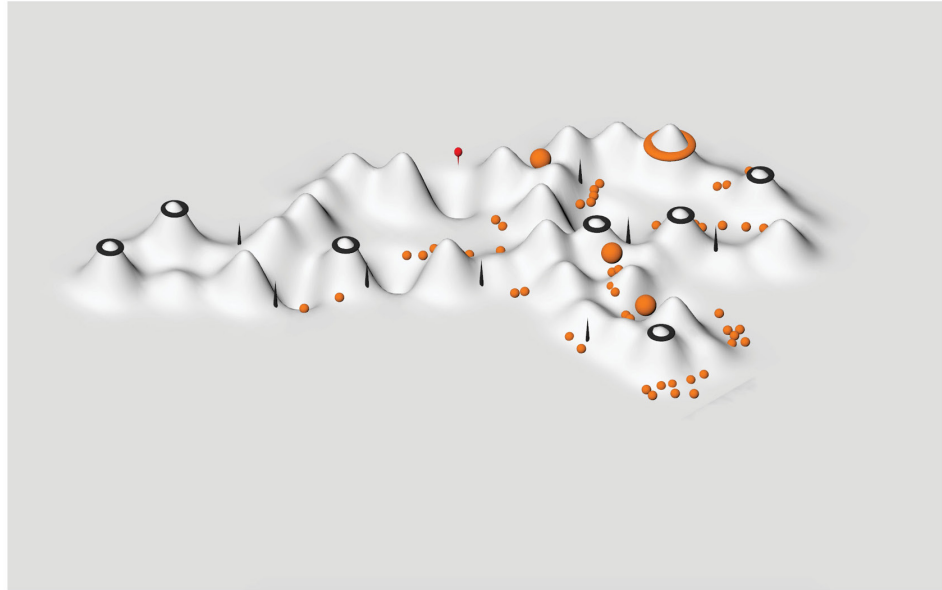
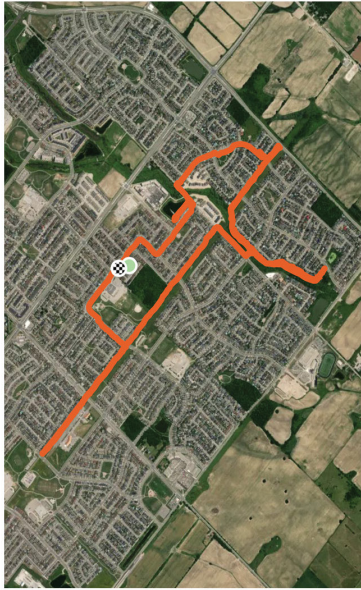
104 Ibid, 117.

105 Yrjö Haila. "Beyond the Nature-Culture Dualism." *Biology & Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2000): 155–175. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006625830102>.

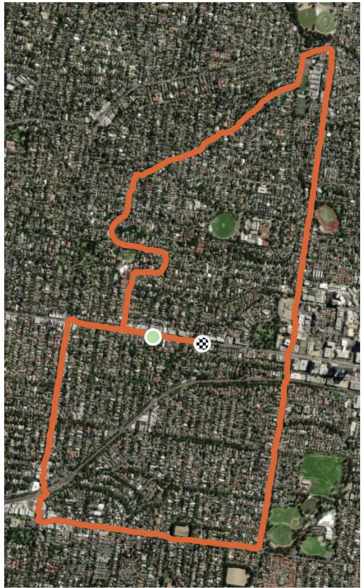
106 Ibid, 167.

107 Jo Little. "Nature, Wellbeing and the Transformational Self." *The Geographical Journal* 181, no. 2 (2015): 121–128. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12083>.

Run 1: Neighborhood Run



Run 3: Urban Neighborhood Run



External Stimulant



Natural stimulants



Motive natural stimulants



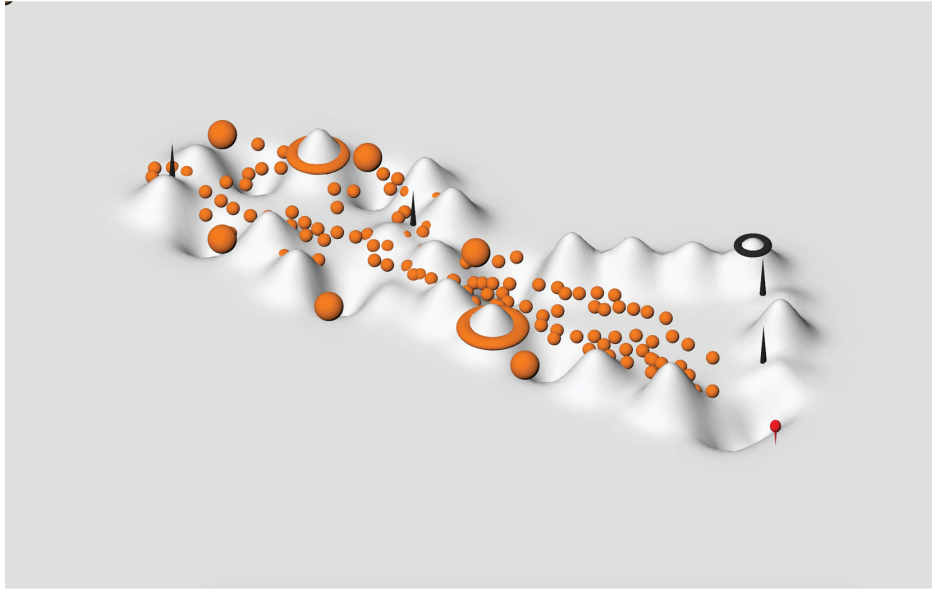
Physical obstacle

Fig.3.1 Documentation of runs in 4 various environments

Each mound in the model represents a change in my average pace that occurred during my run, indicating the changes of my location. The areas where the plane sinks in indicates a stop. The black and orange figures sitting on the mounds gives form to refer to both external and internal factors that contributed a rise in awareness and alertness to the surrounding environment. (part of the data retrieved from Strava app)



Run 2: Nature Run



Run 4: Treadmill Run



Internal Stimulant



Undesirable feeling



Euphoria

movement in relation to my position within my surroundings at that time and  
influential stimulants that were experienced during the run. These stimulants  
With external and internal stimulants experienced through each run

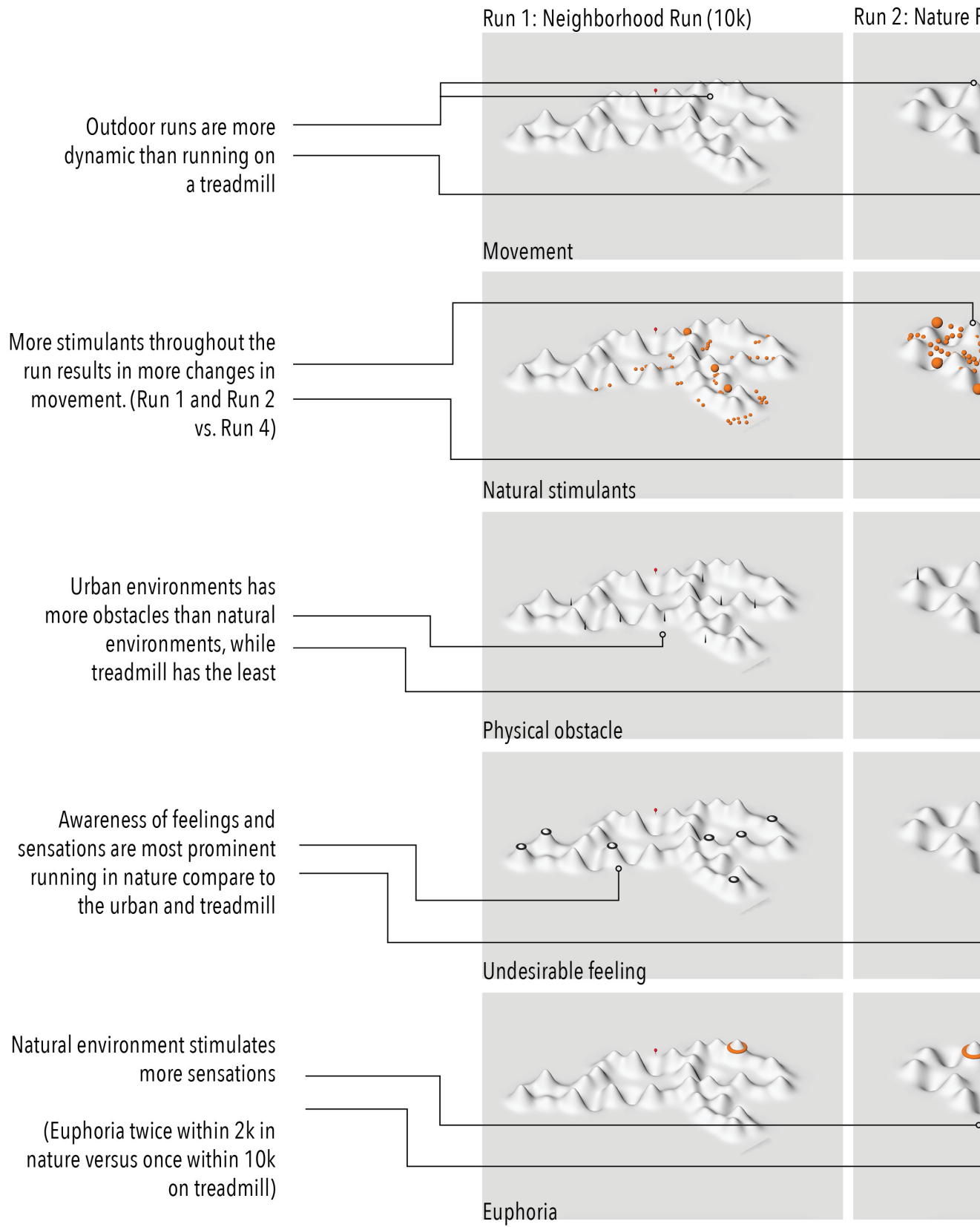
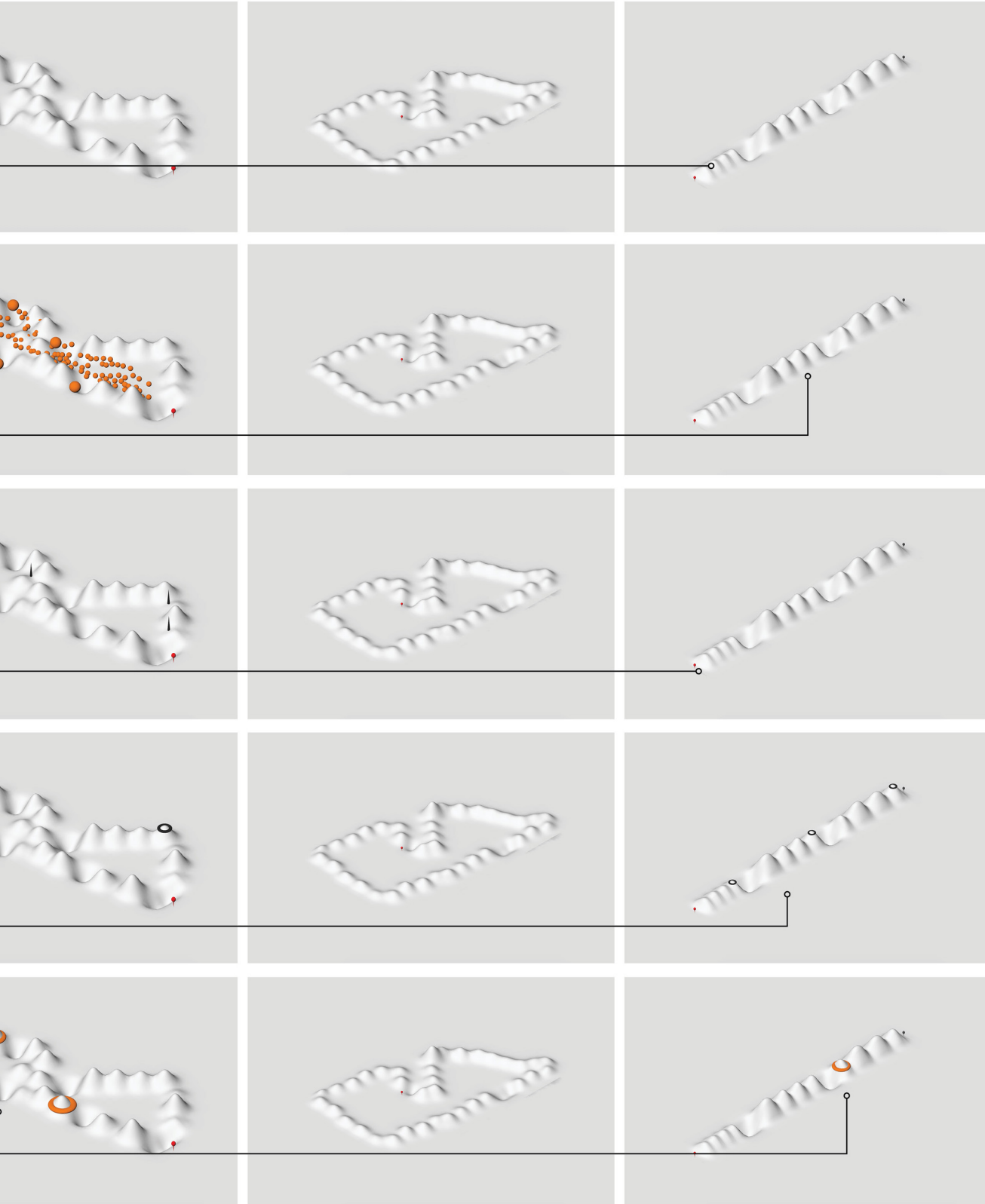


Fig.3.2 Analysis of external and internal stimulants

Run (2k)

Run 3: Urban Neighborhood Run (10k)

Run 4: Treadmill Run (10k)





*Fig.3.3 Visual analysis of running on a treadmill vs. in nature  
Demonstrating the role of the setting on mindfulness, awareness, as well as positive/negative emotions*







Nonetheless, the beauty of the natural environment in which the clients were situated in was referred to as the most vital characteristic for the enjoyment of the exercise practices they participated in.<sup>108</sup> The study shows that the benefits of the natural environment were not simply about the enjoyment of natural beauty but to also provide access to the clients' sense of acquiring bodily skills that could not be gained in other spaces. This hints at the significance of the presence of nature in both producing bodies that feels healthier, and also as the medium that is required to produce those bodies.

During the initial stage of my thesis, I had the opportunity to experiment with ways of representing the physical and psychological experiences of a number of running sessions within urban and natural environments. With the aid of the Strava app and personal recollection, a series of 3-dimensional representative models have been mapped out to conceptualize the physical and emotional changes through the courses of each run. The physical experience is documented through 'movement' which was represented by the general route, and the change of pace. On the other hand, the psychological experience was recorded based on mindfulness which was determined by the positive and negative stimulants that occurred both externally and internally.

The illustrative analyses demonstrate that running in greener environments yield variations in movement and a more dynamic experience, which contribute to a greater sense of revitalization and positive engagement. Inherently, natural settings consist more opportunities for engagement, which positively promote awareness and mindfulness, providing an direct psychological health benefit.

The dichotomy of humanity and nature is deepened when methods of incorporating nature, such as pre-recorded videos of nature and the outdoors, are ironically implemented into civilized methods of exercising. This is exemplified by the treadmill/cycling machines in a gym that have a screen in place to trick our brain into thinking we are in nature. This desire and need for humans to be in nature emphasises the disconnection from nature in the civilized world, and highlights a fundamental problem in the modern construct of fitness and well-being.

#### *AFFINITY FOR EXPLORATION, MASTERY, AND COMPOSURE*

In his book, Stephen Keller expresses the profound relationship between people's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and health, and the diverse natural environments.<sup>109</sup> He believes the concept of *biophilia* refers to humans' inherent affinity for the natural environment, which could be initiated through *biophilic design*. Biophilic Design – which seeks to create a closer connection between humans and nature through built forms - has an element of playfulness expressed

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108 Ibid, 124.

109 Stephen R Kellert. *Building for Life : Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection*. Washington, (DC: Island Press, 2005), 3.

through the “incorporation of decor, natural materials, artifacts, objects, and spaces whose primary purpose is to delight, surprise, and amuse.”<sup>110</sup> Humans naturally find a sense of playfulness and attraction in buildings and landscapes that are “rich in environmental complexity and mystery and that offer frequent opportunities to wonder, imagine, explore, and discover.”<sup>111</sup>

American architect Grant Hildebrand digs deeper into the ways in which architectural forms emulate appealing archetypal and natural settings to spark anticipation, curiosity, exploration, adventure, pleasure, comfort, and most of all, well-being. These are best highlighted in the form of the six paired environmental conditions and experiences; prospect and refuge; enticement and peril; and order and complexity.<sup>112</sup>

*Prospect* is a condition with extensive views that allow for the sight of distant objects and activities. It is within our survival instincts to locate significant lookouts and seek penetrability into a zone of concealment. Hildebrand suggests that prospect can be achieved by providing openness, brightness and extensive/panoramic views. On the contrary, *Refuge* is the place of concealment and protection. Refuge can include designs of smaller intimate spaces with enclosure to provide a sense of comfort and safety.<sup>113</sup>

*Enticement* within an environment provokes curiosity and urges our exploratory intuitions towards gaining new information. It is an “invitation to explore”<sup>114</sup> encouraged by characteristics of the setting, such as views and opportunities for movement from one space to another whose features are only partly revealed. *Peril*, on the other hand is the element of adventure that gives rise to the emotion of thrill, characterized by the pleasure of fear which we naturally seek to enjoy. The feeling of thrill arouses our interest as it intensifies the closeness of discomfort and amplifies the value of the refuge. At the same time, “seeking the assurance that we can handle danger by actually experiencing it is itself a source of pleasure.”<sup>115</sup> Peril can be achieved through the illusion of a lack of architectural material to support us such as heights, glass floors and open balconies.<sup>116</sup>

*Order* associates with regularity, simplicity and harmony. It reflects our desire for organization, repetition, and familiar conditions. *Complexity* relates to a sense of disorder and irregularity that can stimulate our evolutionary desire for mastery, problem solving, and balance. Complexity and order work together to increase the appeal of an object, image or space. However, too much order produces dullness

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110 Ibid, 140.

111 Ibid, 148-150.

112 Grant Hildebrand. *Origins of Architectural Pleasure*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press. 1999).

113 Ibid, 21-49.

114 Ibid, 61.

115 Ibid, 69.

116 Ibid, 51-89.

and boredom, and too much complexity creates chaos and confusion. Hildebrand believes that the function of architecture is to provide spaces of ordered complexity to enrich our satisfaction of a dynamic experience.<sup>117</sup>

The second pairing of enticement and peril is perhaps the most relevant to the notion of play. Nevertheless, Eberle's six elements of play is very much apparent within all three of Hildebrand's pairings. Enticement and peril responds to our desire for exploration, which is anticipated with an element of surprise driven by our curiosity and pleasure. Prospect and refuge relates to the human desire for safety and comfort through the speculation, understanding and mastery of the surrounding environment. And finally, order and complexity reflects the need for an aesthetic and dynamic experience, as well as our evolutionary desire to explore and problem solve as a way to strengthen our understanding of space and objects. Essentially, play boils down to the three key processes of exploration and mastery that naturally follows with composure. Composure leaves us with a sense of fulfilment and pleasure which is what play ultimately anticipates. This source of pleasure feeds back to the desire to explore further and experience play all over again.

With that in mind, the works examined in this section that are centered around human's desire for movement and play, the importance of curiosity and visual cues, the benefits of nature on our awareness and mindfulness, and a balance between Hildebrand's six paired conditions all serve as indicators toward how design can physically and psychologically promote the three key processes of play.

The importance of visual curiosity in promoting exploration is prevalent in the works of Eberle, Medina, and Hildebrand. As humans are sensorial beings who are naturally drawn to movement and exploration, we learn not by passive reaction to the environment, but by actively testing the environment through observation, experiment, and imitation.<sup>118</sup> Play is likely to occur when stimulation of the visual, along with other ambiguous psychological and environmental cues occur unexpectedly to foster a curious state of the mind and trigger our exploratory drive. The natural environment is inherently beneficial and evolutionarily familiar to us. It is non-rigid, non-prescribed, complex, yet reduces stress, promotes mindfulness, and provides us with the ground of freedom, openness, variety, and ambiguity required to play. Hence, a design that promotes anticipation, curiosity, and exploration within a natural environment would theoretically stimulate a curious and playful state of mind to encourage the desire for movement play.

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117 Ibid, 91-137.

118 Medina, *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School*, 280.

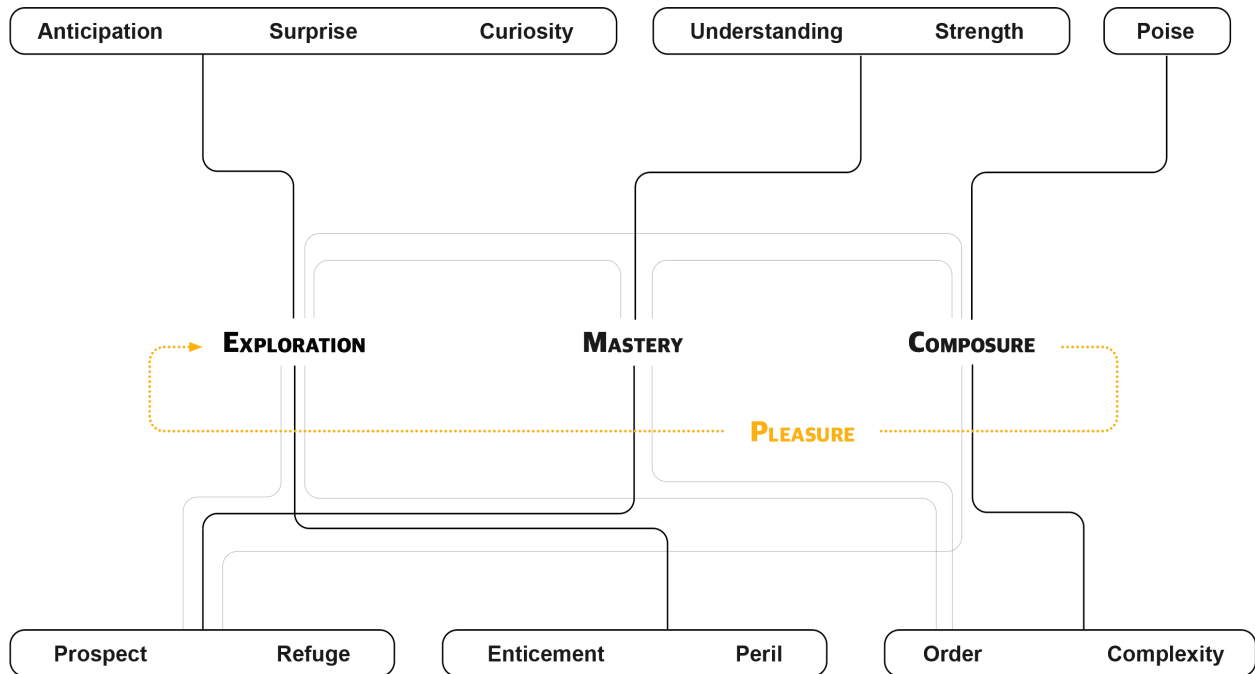


Fig.3.4 The three processes of play

### 3.3 PRECEDENTS

When it comes to the topic of play, our mind often misconceives it as a childlike notion. We automatically associate the concept of play with child play, or think of playgrounds as purely for children while it is just as important for everyone else. This concept is strengthened when play is easily documented spatially for children as children's playgrounds are found in many corners of the urban context, however, for others there aren't many designated grounds for playing. Although the aim of this thesis is to constitute a playfully effective ground for adults, it is essential to consider the design principles revolving children's playgrounds within urban environments, and how they activate our instinctual desire to play.

Examined in light of the three processes of play, the precedents in this section embody principles that encourage a dynamic culture of experiences. Each precedent demonstrates the use of playful design languages and techniques to foster exploration, mastery and composure through the conscious and unconscious connection of the human mind and body to nature, to play, and to others.

#### *ALDO VAN EYCK'S PLAYGROUNDS*

Aldo van Eyck (1918-1999) is well known for designing more than 700 playgrounds after World War II, between 1947 and 1978 in the city of Amsterdam. He aimed to create places that fostered dialogs and communities with a ubiquitous motif of 'Kinderspelen' or children's play as the main topic seen within in Dutch paintings dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which also echoes the work of Johan Huizinga.<sup>119</sup>

Seamlessly integrated into the surrounding context through their unbounded materials, spatial ambiguities, and minimalistic, yet monumental forms, these playgrounds were merged within the city to form a continuous network of places that redefined the movement of children to explore and play at the scale of the city. He intentionally created abstract play equipment that gives freedom to the imagination to stimulate creativity and interpretation. These playful, spontaneous and architectural playgrounds injected new life into the post-war city, and became activation sites where play occurred spontaneously.<sup>120</sup> Van Eyck's design was successful and continues to influence how we think about cities, architecture, and playgrounds.

119 Liane Lefaivre, Ingeborg de Roode, and Rudi Fuchs. *Aldo van Eyck : the Playgrounds and the City*. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2002), 37-41.

120 Rob Withagen, and Simone R Caljouw. "Aldo van Eyck's Playgrounds: Aesthetics, Affordances, and Creativity." *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017): 1130. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01130>.



*Fig.3.5 Dijkstraat, Amsterdam - Centrum – before and after*



*Fig.3.6 Van Boetzelaerstraat, Amsterdam - Oudwest – before and after*





*Fig.3.7 Exercise playground in Nanchang, China*



*Fig.3.8 Body cultivating while social bonding*



### CHINESE OUTDOOR EXERCISE PARKS

The insertion of outdoor exercise parks within residential areas in China spiked in popularity during the turn of the 21st century, after the allure of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.<sup>121</sup> In many parks, minimalistic structures were installed to encourage personal fitness amongst elderly primarily in the form of calisthenics, utilizing one's own body weight rather than advanced pieces of weighted machinery. Aside from exercise equipment, vacant spaces of these parks and lots are often put to use for other group activities such as Tai Chi, Public Square Dancing, stretching and walking. Although built to encourage personal fitness and to cultivate longevity, most people use the parks as a common ground for socialization within a community, hence the exercise parks becomes landmarks for daily routine of gathering, bonding, friendship building and mental composure.

Defined by paved surfaces, and often located in unbounded small groves of parks and the city, these exercise spaces allow for more intimate exercise regimes, minimizing the number of spectators. The mechanical park equipment allows for similar exercise as gym equipment and machines. However, with the simplicity and absence of instructions, the use of the space and equipment becomes user dominant, transforming the space to become dynamic in the way that its socially determined and used. Furthermore, the strategic layout of these parks along with its colourful equipment resembles a children's playground, making it both visually and psychologically more accessible, inviting all groups of society, and eliminating any chance of discrimination.

The socio-cultural context of these exercise parks eliminates the necessity of traversing to a prescribed space to get exercise, such like a gym. The existence of these public spaces within the public realm also work to diminish the exclusion of certain age and gender groups, as well as social hierarchy experienced in commercialized spaces. All of which results in a more welcoming, social, and playful exercise environment.<sup>122</sup> Numerous cities in North America have installed fitness parks today, indicating a growing phenomenon that expresses the urban desire to play and socialize, and exercise in a non-prescribed environment.

121 "Beijing: Public Exercise Equipment." Spacing Toronto. Accessed September 18, 2022. <http://spacing.ca/toronto/2008/07/08/beijing-public-exercise-equipment/>.

122 Gill M Lawson. 'Social interactions in Chinese parks : a walk in Lu Xun Park'. In *International Congress 2010 Healthy Parks Healthy People*. (Melbourne, Vic, 2010), 11 - 16

*REVERSIBLE DESTINY*

Philosopher Shusaku Arakawa and artist Madeleine Gins emphasize the importance of cultivating longevity. Traditionally, architectural forms are tied to their specific functions. This concept of singular destiny of architectural form and function assigns a fixed place on the purpose and activity of the body within the space. The pair of artists-turned-architects coined the term *Architectural Body* that focuses precisely on the way bodies interact with architecture. Their works explore the potential of the human perception, senses, and body to challenge mortality beyond the Newtonian science through erratic art and playful architecture.<sup>123</sup>

Their approach was to create environments that demand attention to encourage mindfulness in an effort to revoke automatisms and the generally perceived normative physical and mental behaviours within a space.<sup>124</sup> Physical stimulants such as a constant shifting of elevations; undulating topography; trench-like passageways; as well as visual stimulations such as an aversion to right angles and linearity; an absence of symmetry and regularity; shifting colours; removal of visual cues; all challenge the senses and perception of both the body and mind of its users. Arakawa and Gins believed that changes in bodily perception would lead to changes in consciousness. This in turn challenges the body and mind as a way to “reverse destiny”. These factors provoke human’s natural exploratory drive and desire to learn, stimulating the immune system, sharpening the mind, and compels users to re-evaluate their physical and spiritual orientation to the world, leading to that desired shift in consciousness.<sup>125</sup>

Their art-like works are inspirational in the way that it reassigns unconventional meanings and experiences to conventional spaces and architectonic components to invoke sensorial and perceptual stimulation. In their works the physical form, function and the human body become a dynamic sequence of experiences that induces mental and bodily stimulation, rather than an isolated concluding experience.

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123 Santirak Prasertsuk. “The House and the Reversible Destiny: The Work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins.” *MANUSYA* 2, no. 2 (1999): 78. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-00202005>.

124 Gordon C. F Bearn. “Effecting Affection: The Corporeal Ethics of Gins and Arakawa.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 2 (2010): 46. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jae.0.0078>.

125 “Could Architecture Help You Live Forever?” *The New York Times*. Accessed September 18, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/20/t-magazine/reversible-destiny-arakawa-madeline-gins.html>.



*Fig.3.9 Site of Reversible Destiny - Yoro Park, Gifu Prefecture, Japan - elliptical field*

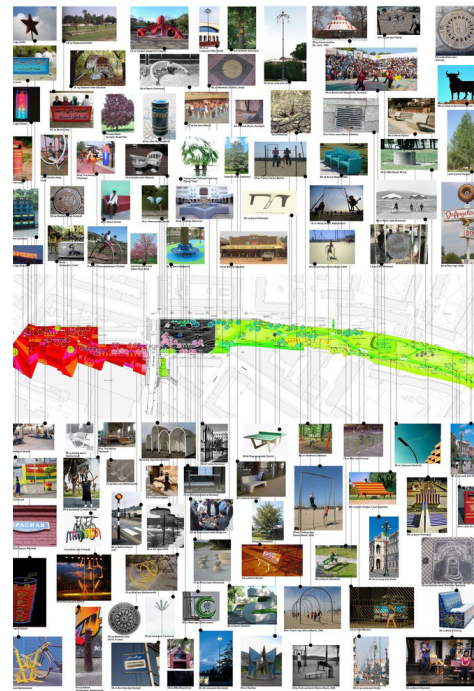


*Fig.3.10 Bioscleave House - East Hampton, New York, United States*





*Fig.3.11 Superkilen - Red Square*



*Fig.3.12 Various cultural significant symbols and amenities*



*Fig.3.13 Superkilen - Black Market*

### SUPERKILEN

Located in Nørrebro, Denmark lies the most ethnically diverse park, Superkilen. Superkilen is a 750-meter-long urban park comprised of lanes for different speeds, playgrounds, various sports facilities, spaces for cultural activities, and areas for picnics and gatherings. Designed by BIG alongside local intelligence with the focus of enabling intercultural encounter and social cohesion, the park embraces various landmarks from 60 different cultures to embrace the cultural diversity of the city of Copenhagen to create its unique living and play space. Its stimulative colours in the west section, invigorating a high energy level that encourages recreation and activities. The wavy lines on the floor in the middle section illustrates the general directionality of the space and creates an illusion of movement which promotes activities of lighter energy level. The east section, also the longest, consists of green hilly surfaces for a more relaxed and leisure experience.<sup>126</sup>

Although the range of varieties and integration of culturally significant elements throughout the park shapes it into a multi-cultural landmark, in order to effectively foster a level of connectivity within a diverse group, other considerations must be made. Jonathan Daly expresses that focus must be placed on an individual's everyday lifestyle, and not by simply imposing material representation of culturally significant objects from an individual's culture as a means of enticement. Much of the material objects do not necessarily enable intercultural encounter, but instead, could induce minor cultural conflict as few of these material representations mean much to other ethnic groups. Several objects, such as the Octopus-shaped slide and the boxing ring, were successful at enabling intercultural encounter. However, it was not the objects themselves that triangulated intercultural encounters but their form and placement in the public space, as well as the play-related affordances that provided a place of shared commonness of everyday life.<sup>127</sup>

While more consideration on the proper fostering of emotional connectivity amongst different cultures is vital, the project attempts to acknowledge the contested nature of public space. It does so by testing with the role of underdetermined and overdetermined programming to provide a place of belonging while enabling multi-culture collaboration and shared commonalities. Additionally, the distinction between a hierarchy of energies through the park is clearly distinguished through the use of various colours, vegetation, materials, and planned spaces for varying activities. This transition of energy from the west side to the east side forms new, dynamic surroundings for the various needs and preferences of its users. Hence the project successfully provides a range of opportunities to explore and master while evoking visual curiosity, attracting different users and bringing vitality to the neighbourhood.

126 "Superkilen: Participatory Park Extreme! - Mythological Quarter." Accessed September 18, 2022. [http://mythologicalquarter.net/s/SUPERKILEN\\_Brett\\_Bloom\\_2013.pdf](http://mythologicalquarter.net/s/SUPERKILEN_Brett_Bloom_2013.pdf).

127 Jonathan Daly. "Superkilen: Exploring the Human-Nonhuman Relations of Intercultural Encounter." *Journal of Urban Design* 25, no. 1(2020): 65–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2019.1622409>.

*YANWEIZHOU PARK*

In the urban heart of Jinhua, an industrial city in Zhejiang, China, one last piece of natural wetland approximately 64 acres was the pinnacle of sustainable revitalization. Designed by Turenscape, Yanweizhou park is a flood permeable site that embraces the fluctuating levels of the surrounding rivers. Connected by a steel pedestrian bridge that invigorates the movement of people from the two adjacent lands to the park, the site is populated with flood adaptive vegetation throughout the inland area and along the terraced river embankments, revitalizing the bound between the city, people and nature. The inland bio-swales encourage river water to infiltrate through its permeable gravel layers improving the water quality mechanically and biologically, making these ponds accessible and friendly to visitors.<sup>128</sup>

The design is primarily composed of curves. A serpentine bridge, curvilinear paths that defines circular bio-swales and planting beds, and curved benches. The spatial organization of the park establishes an extensive paved area for large groups of visitors during the events at the on-site opera house. At the same time, the meandering paths also outline intimate alcoves that create places for individuals and smaller groups. All of which provides a stimulating environment that attracts and evokes inclination to explore through the site. The curvature and circular design work to unify the on-site buildings and natural environment into a harmonious entity, reflecting the dynamic fluctuation of water, people and material that animates the site.<sup>129</sup>

*CLOUD TOWN EXHIBITION CENTER (ROOFTOP TRACK)*

Built on the roof of the Cloud Town International Convention and Exhibition Center in Hangzhou, China, a 760-meter-long athletic track meanders over the roof top of the building and loops through a multitude of green slopes. Designed by ZUP, the integration of steps that vary in length as well as areas where the athletic track becomes sloped provokes visual curiosity and encourages movement and access from the ground to the rooftop level. A 50-meter-long segment of the track supported by four V-shaped columns overhangs the front of building granting a sense of peril and enticement.<sup>130</sup>

Serving its main function as the rooftop circulation, the track cohesively blends into the surrounding surfaces and slopes to provide a variety of different experiences by delineating a number of recreational programs and resting spaces. While these recreational amenities serve as stopover places and a chance to play and master, the track becomes a passive connection that ties each distinct space into one confluent system of play, exercise and socialization.

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128 To Quyen Le, Oswald Devisch, and Tu Anh Trinh. 2019. "Flood-resilient Urban Parks: Toward a Framework." *Area (London 1969)* 51, no. 4: 804–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12543>.

129 Sara Daneshmand et al. "Sustainable and Resilient Landscape Design to Flood (Case Studies: Resilient Projects in China)." (2018): Chapter 4. Accessed Oct 10, 2022.

130 "Second Stage of Hangzhou Cloud Town Exhibition Center / Approach Design (ZUP)." ArchDaily. ArchDaily. Accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.archdaily.com/903443/second-stage-of-hangzhou-cloud-town-exhibition-center-approach-design>.





*Fig.3.14 An aerial view of Yanweizhou Park*



*Fig.3.15 An aerial view of the Cloud Town Convention Center and its roof top track*



#### SUMMARY

The precedents examined in this section demonstrate that a safe space for playful encounters, community building and mindful experiences can be fostered through designs that are carried through with comprehensive techniques and playful languages. Whether physically or psychologically, openness and dynamicity circulates within all of the projects discussed in this section, and it is important to learn from the qualities of dynamicity when designing to engender playful experience that encompass the various physical and psychological needs of individuals.

By considering the conditions that allow for a dynamic surrounding, as well as the three key processes necessary for play, those of: exploration, mastery and composure, a number of overlapping spatial and architectural qualities can be identified. These qualities are: the use of colours and forms to spark visual curiosity and visual invitation; the placement of design components that are seamlessly integrated into the surrounding context; an unboundedness and openness of spaces that provide a sense of place and belonging; the use of various architectonic elements such as vegetation, materials and planned spaces to create a range of opportunities and dynamic surroundings for the various needs and preferences of its users; and lastly, the use of natural environment to encourage the connection of both the mind and body to nature, to play, and to others. These spatial and architectural qualities once properly incorporated in design, echoes with many of the characteristics demonstrated in the play index that in turn makes it possible to experience play.

### 3.4 PLAYFUL FITNESS: WHAT IT MEANS TO OTHERS

During my thesis research, various informal conversations were held with friends and family who are moderately familiar with the gym environment. Generally, the conversations revolved around the topics of: “what comes to mind when thinking of the term ‘playful fitness’”, and “what programs or amenities could make the experience of exercise more enjoyable?” Many of the responses alluded to existing activities and spaces, with the largest overlapping concepts being: “open and safe spaces”, “encouraging more collaboration and group activities”, “colourful places”, “friendly competitions”, “activities in a natural environment”, “activities that challenge the mind”, “a range of activities to intrigue different people”, and “the opportunity to watch others play”.

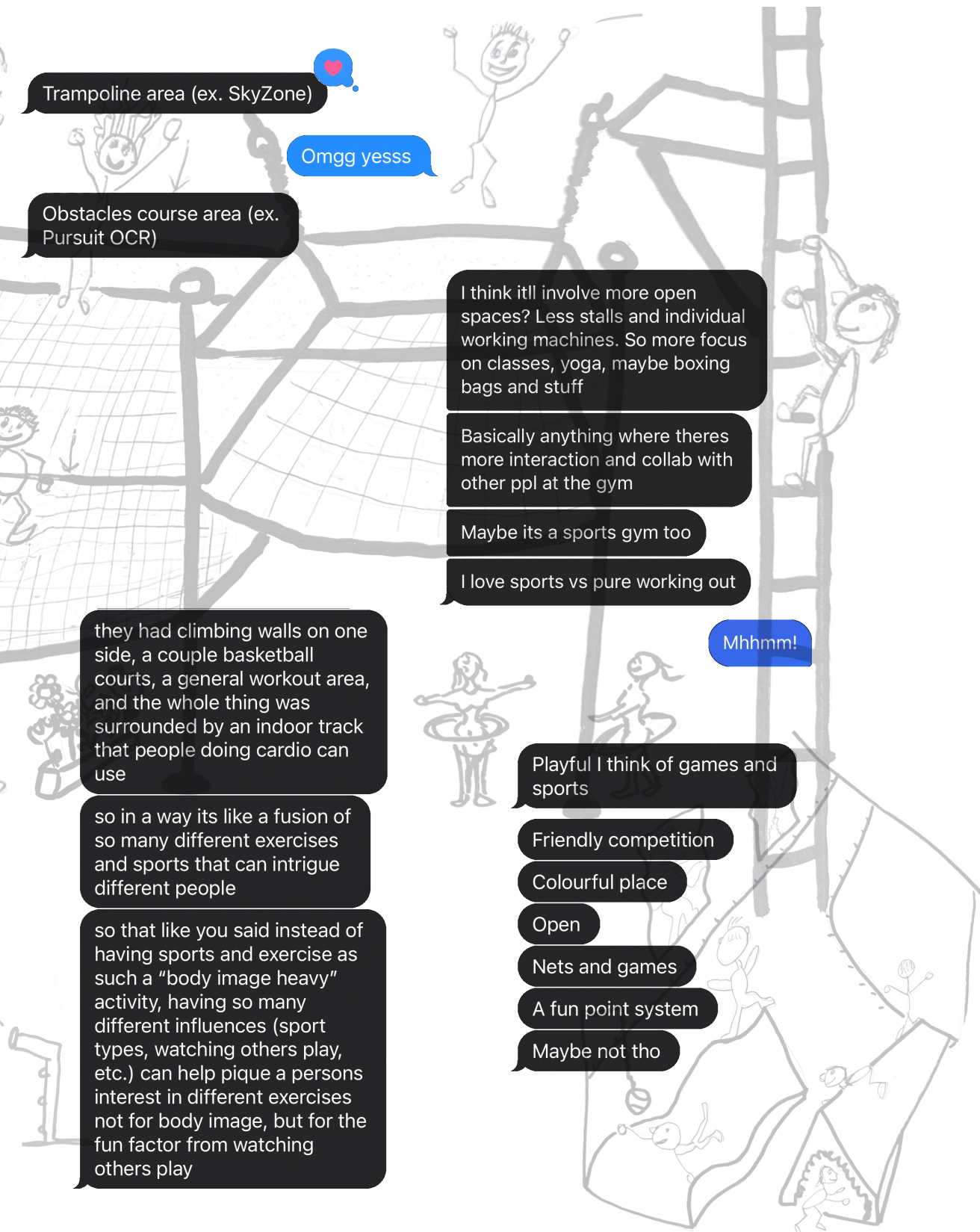
Examples of common places and activities that were mentioned include: obstacle courses, leisure sports, climbing walls, escape rooms, trampoline parks, etc. In all instances, the activities and places foreshadow an anticipation of doomed play that expresses the contemporary desire to solve, understand, and collaborate. A range of choices, a narrative space, a sequence of surprise, a variety of colours, a series of enticement and peril which deepens the appreciation for refuge, an attempt at solving a challenge with our mind and body that leaves us in a state of fulfilment, and composure and pleasure when we learn about what our body and mind can

conquer. Pleasure is what we ultimately seek for, and these desires echo with all the indexes of play.



Fig.3.16 Playful Fitness to Others

Conversations with peers informing what a playful fitness space could embody to provide a more enjoyable exercising experience



# 4.0

DESIGNING FITNESS  
OF PLAY



## DESIGNING FITNESS OF PLAY

### 4.1 THE SITE

Located in east Toronto, Riverdale Park is made up of an east and west section monumentally divided by the Don River, DVP, VIA Rail, and the Lower Don River Trail. Connected through a pedestrian viaduct, the space is larger than 100 acres and includes open hilly landscapes that consist of an existing outdoor running track wrapped around an informal soccer field, outdoor gym area, and multiple baseball diamonds. The hilly landscape provides the altitude for an immaculate view of the Toronto skyline on the east side, attracting people of all ages from nearby areas to stop by and enjoy the view. In addition, the hill on the east side is a popular toboggan hill during winter, which sits in close proximity to the Bridgepoint Health Center to the south and the community pool, skating rink and tennis courts to the north. All of which indicate the desire for recreational play by its healthcare-centric community, making Riverdale Park a major recreational, ecological and cultural asset for implementing the concept of playful fitness within its larger context.

The park is situated South of Danforth, North of Gerrard, within close proximity to the Riverdale Farm, East Chinatown, Greektown, and Little India. It is bordered by Cabbagetown, Regent park, Riverdale North and Riverdale South; four culturally and historically diverse residential neighbourhoods. Aside from native Canadians, the top 3 countries of origin in the area include, China, Philippines, and India. The four neighborhoods are primarily composed of residential homes, schools, churches and families of all socioeconomic backgrounds. There is an even ratio of females to males in the area and a small percentage of families with children, resulting in a proportionately smaller representation of children in the area. One third of the population represents seniors and the elderly, and majority of the population are educated individuals of working age. With Broadview station being just a 5-minute walk away from the park, and eight streetcar stops along Broadview Ave that border the vicinity of the park, the park is well-connected to surrounding transit services and the downtown core. This way the park can easily attract a wider range of individuals from nearby locations as well as across the city and region.

#### *SITE CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES*

There are no fitness facilities within the 10-minute radius of the site, as well as a 60% reduction in the number of fitness facilities in the area compared to that of



the downtown Toronto core, suggesting fewer accessibility to fitness and recreation opportunities within the vicinity of the area. With expected residential population growth in the area, there will likely be an increased need for recreational spaces and leisure activities. Furthermore, within the site the current viaduct lacks visibility, and the accessibility to Lower Don Trail remains inadequate. Additionally, the under usage of green spaces in the park occurs due to the lack of seating and maintenance of recreational surfaces, as well as poorly defined trails and pathways, making the park less visually accessible and welcoming. Such conditions make it very difficult to provide a sense of connection and play for its community.

Various communal organizations such as the Evergreen Brick Works and the Todmorden Mills, as well as various events and farmers' markets within the region express large amounts of desire and effort in the preservation of natural and cultural heritage of this historical site. These events provoke a conscious effort to bring the community together for the celebration and embracement of cultural and socioeconomic diversity within its surrounding neighbourhoods. Hence operating at an urban scale, the site of Riverdale Park becomes a medium for socialization, a landmark for gathering, bonding and friendship building.

## 4.2 DESIGN APPROACH/OBJECTIVES

My research on the issues around the modern notion of fitness and the socio-spatial concerns of modern gym spaces indicate that the notion of fitness is an ever-changing social construct that moves rapidly with time. Nonetheless, we have come to understand that play as a concept stays consistent and significant in all stages of life. Rather than imposing rigid and prescribed physical exercises through the extensive use of equipment and machines, the approach is to utilize design principles explored in the previous chapter to infuse a series of physical and intellectual hierarchies, as well as newly designed components and programs within the landscape, so that the park becomes an embodiment of the three processes of play. Those being exploration, mastery, and composure as the underlying motivation for the site in order to target human's natural desire to play.

As individuals possess varying needs for play, a strategically programmed site within nature that is capable of accommodating a range of choices and conditions would yield a malleable environment for different physical and emotional needs.<sup>131</sup> By bringing the typically enclosed act of fitness "outside" the box, Fitness of Play aims to challenge the programs and architecture of modern gyms to provide a completely inclusive place within a natural environment, psychologically and socially accessible to all. This proposal aims to dismantle the modern attitudes, beliefs and misconceptions we have towards physical exercise by cultivating a curious and playful state of mind to foster playful movements and interactions.

131 Hildebrand, *Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, 47.



*Fig.4.1 Riverdale Park East from Broadview Street*



*Fig.4.2 Existing exercise station and track on the east side*





*Fig.4.3 Current viaduct over Don Valley Parkway*



*Fig.4.4 Riverdale Park West from current viaduct*

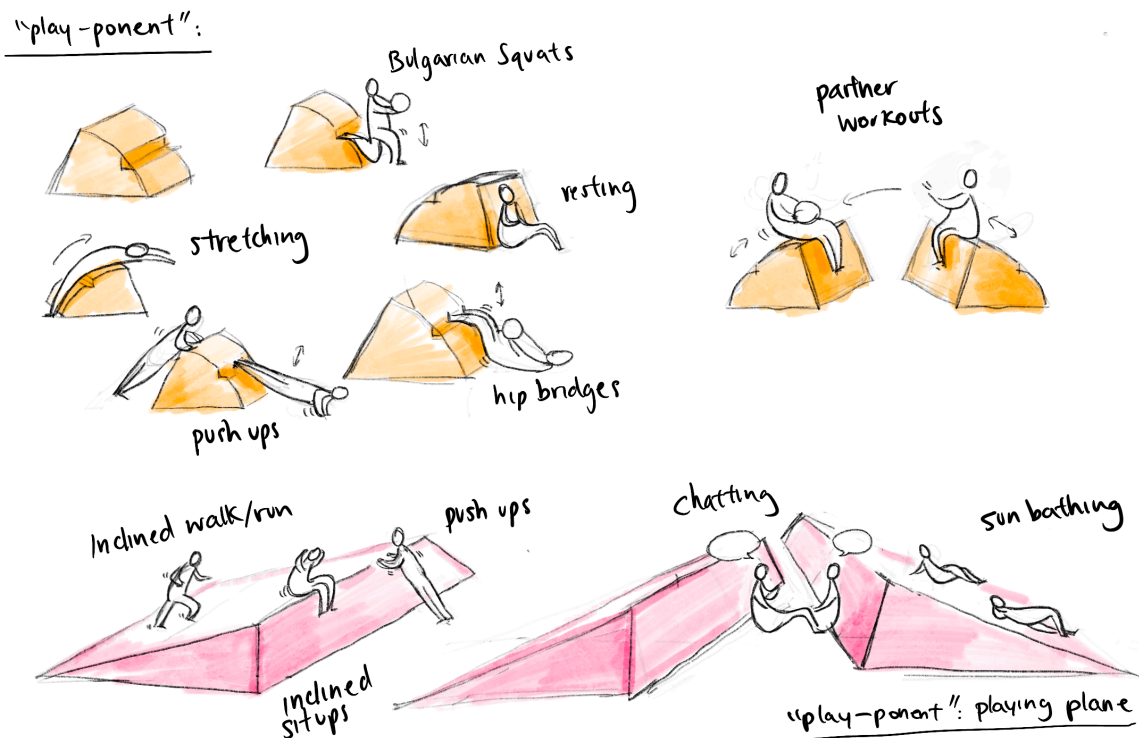


Fig.4.5 Early Sketches of Play-ponents

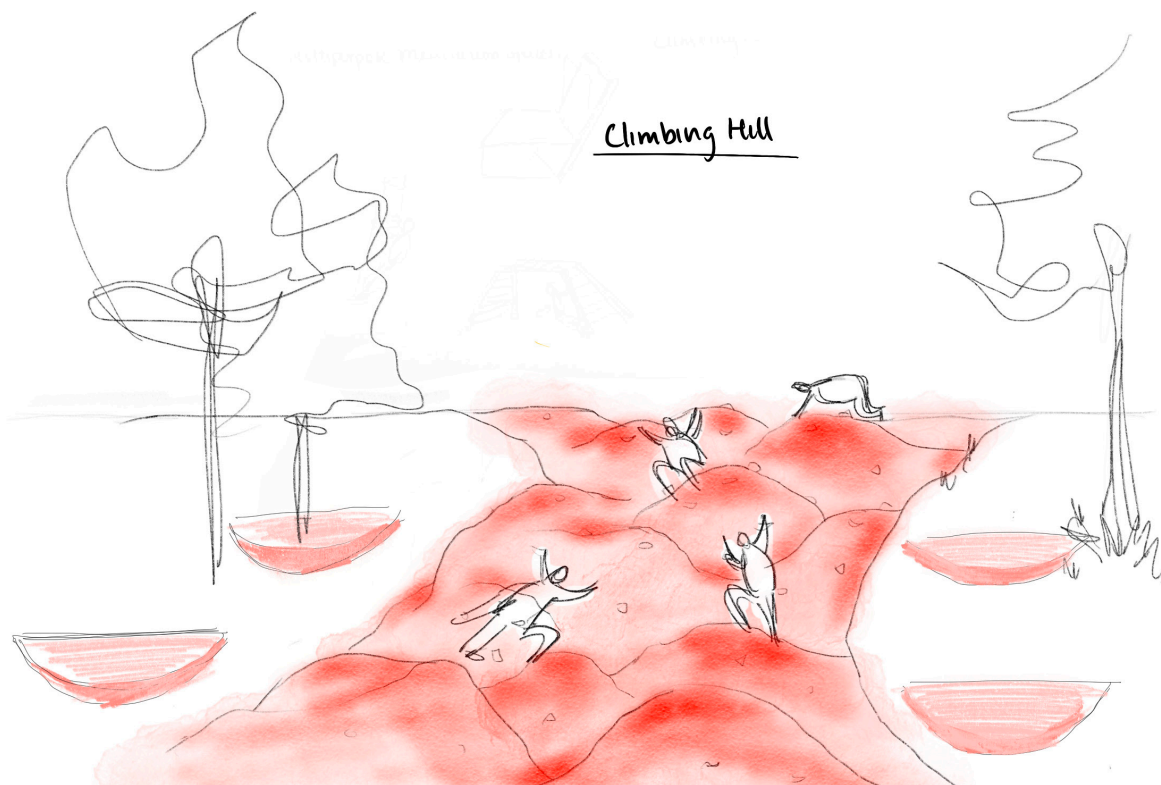
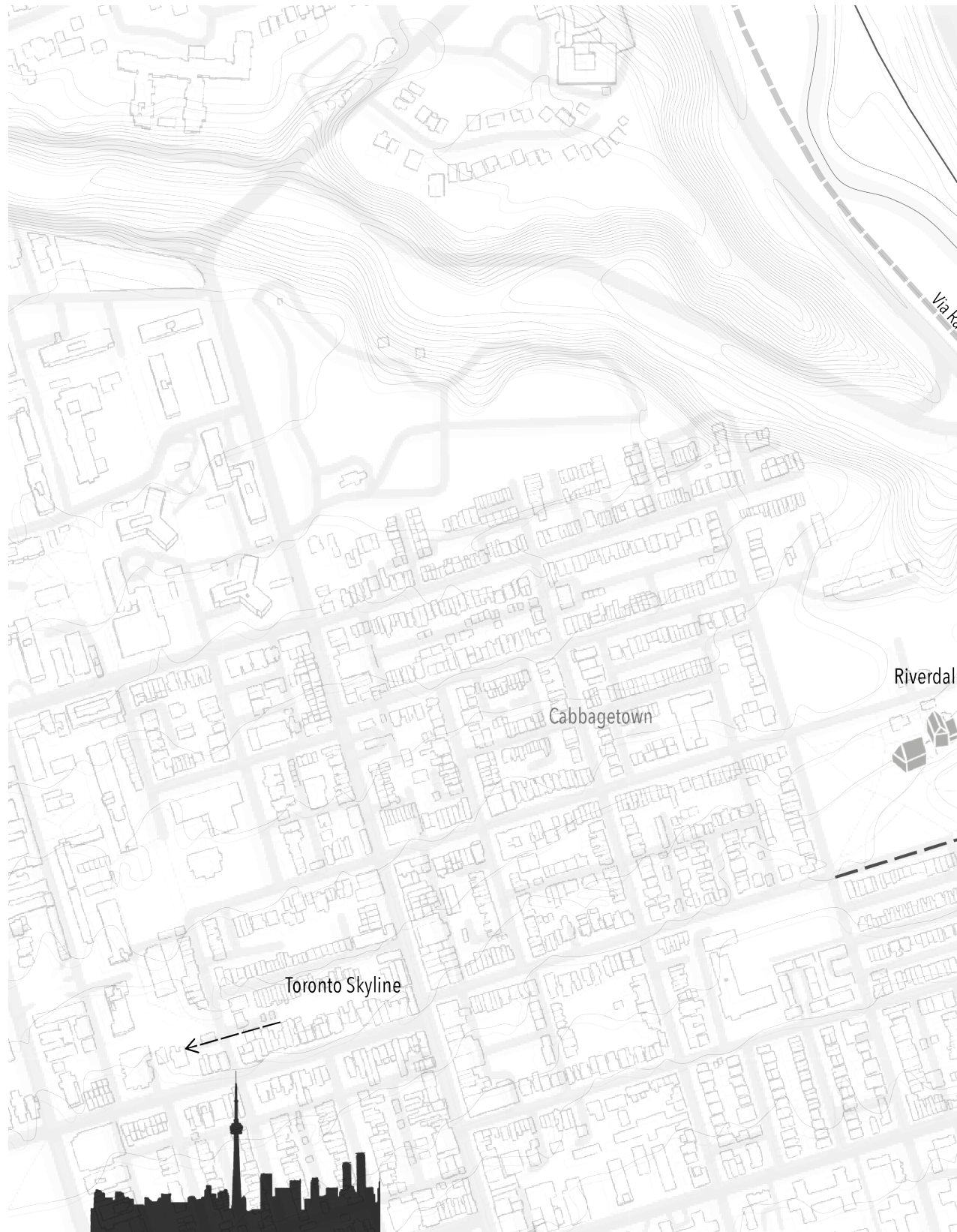


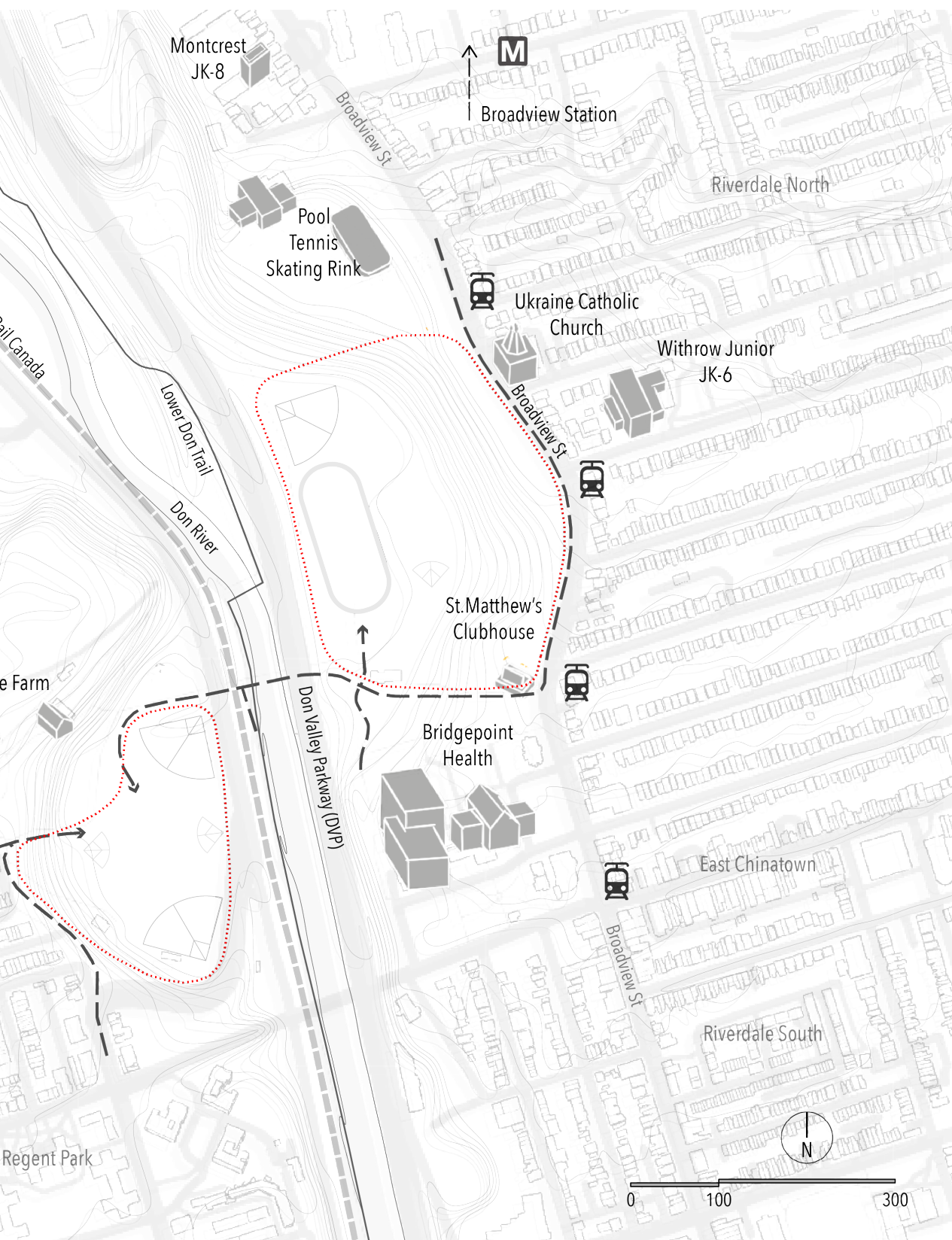
Fig.4.6 Early Sketch of Climbing Hill

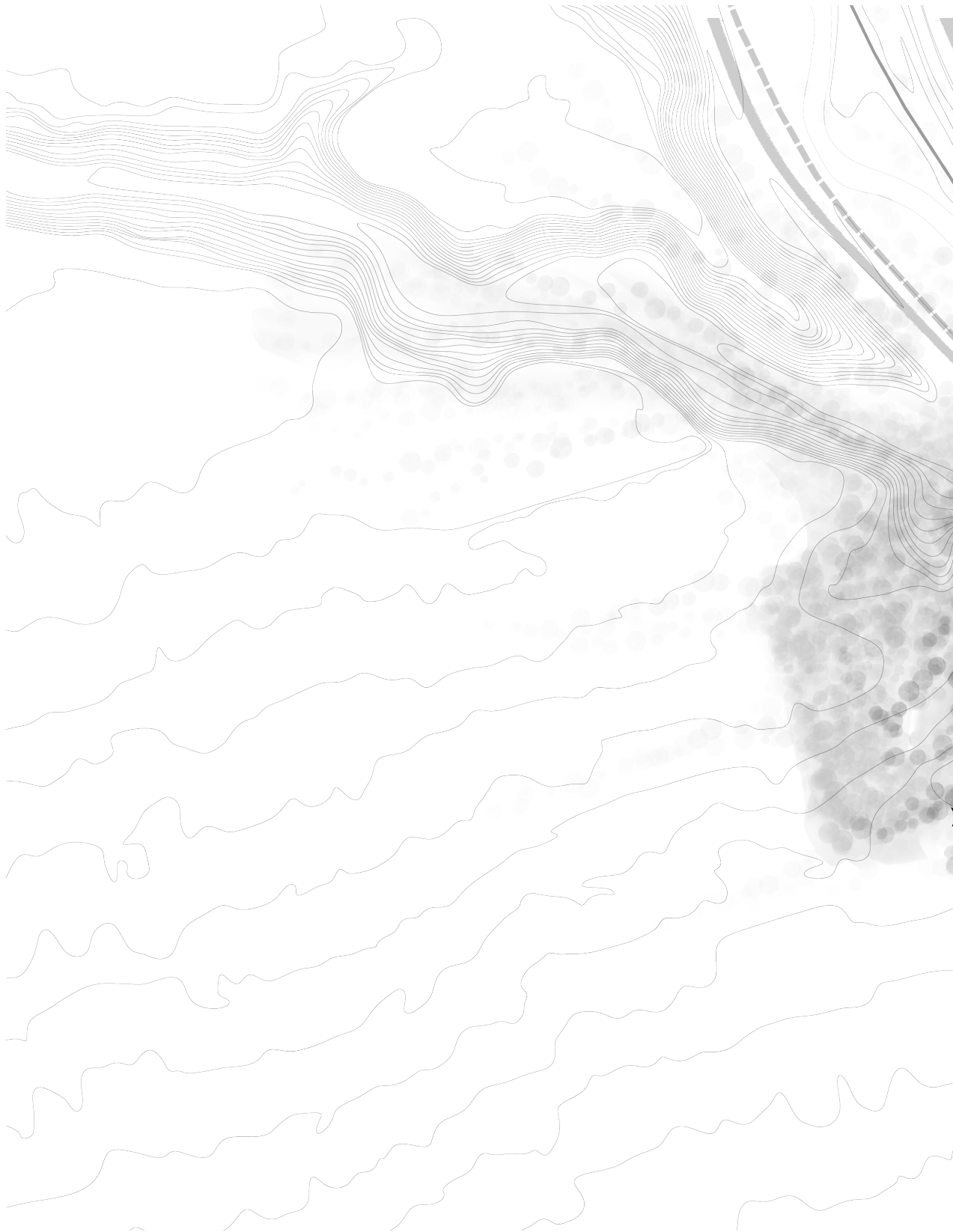




*Fig.4.7 Site Plan and Existing Conditions*







*Fig.4.8 Masterplan*



### 4.3 FITNESS OF PLAY AT RIVERDALE: THE PROPOSAL

In order to enhance the physical, visual and intellectual connectivity for cultural and community engagement throughout the park, multiple improved entry points are added to various locations in the park. Stretch stations and park specific infographic signs are strategically located throughout the park with newly implemented wheelchair accessible paths and programs. These programs include, *the track*; *the bridge*; *the platforms*; *play-coves* and *play-swailes*; an arts & culture center and communal garden; and an area for the practice of Taichi; all of which activates the processes of exploration, mastery and composure.

In an attempt to provide alternatives to the various forms of exercises found within a typical gym, the park is composed of physical hierarchies consisting of a series of paths and spaces, as well as intellectual hierarchy reflected by the intensity of energy through its proposed programs. The track is made up of a hierarchy of paths that runs throughout the park encouraging passive movement through the park and provides a source of cardio. Various programs along the track constitutes a hierarchy of spaces. These spaces encourage stopover and extended use, providing places for which strength and aerobic exercises takes place. All of the paths and spaces merges together through an underlying intellectual hierarchy of shifting energies transitioning from the east side to the west side.

#### THE THREE PROCESSES OF PLAY THROUGH DESIGNED PROGRAMS

##### EXPLORATION

Exploration is the process of play that is intrigued by enticement, peril and curiosity. It is through the act of exploring that one is able to experience emotions of anticipation and surprise.<sup>132</sup> Operating at the scale of the park, exploration is manifested through a hierarchy of paths, providing a dynamic way to explore and wander through the park. The design of the track and the bridge accommodates for three varying speeds –Bike, run and walk. The track and bridge provide visual prospect and encourages passive movement through the park. The language of undulating and meandering paths creates an illusion of infinite flow of movement and serves as a visual connection across the vastness of the park. From here, the track and bridge become a medium that keeps the energy and movement on route at a high intensity level, enabling the performance of physical activity in the form of cardio.

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132 Eberle, "The Elements of Play Toward a Philosophy and a Definition of Play.", 219.





Fig.4.9 Concept Diagram



*Fig.4.10 The Track - as it bridges over Don Valley Parkway*







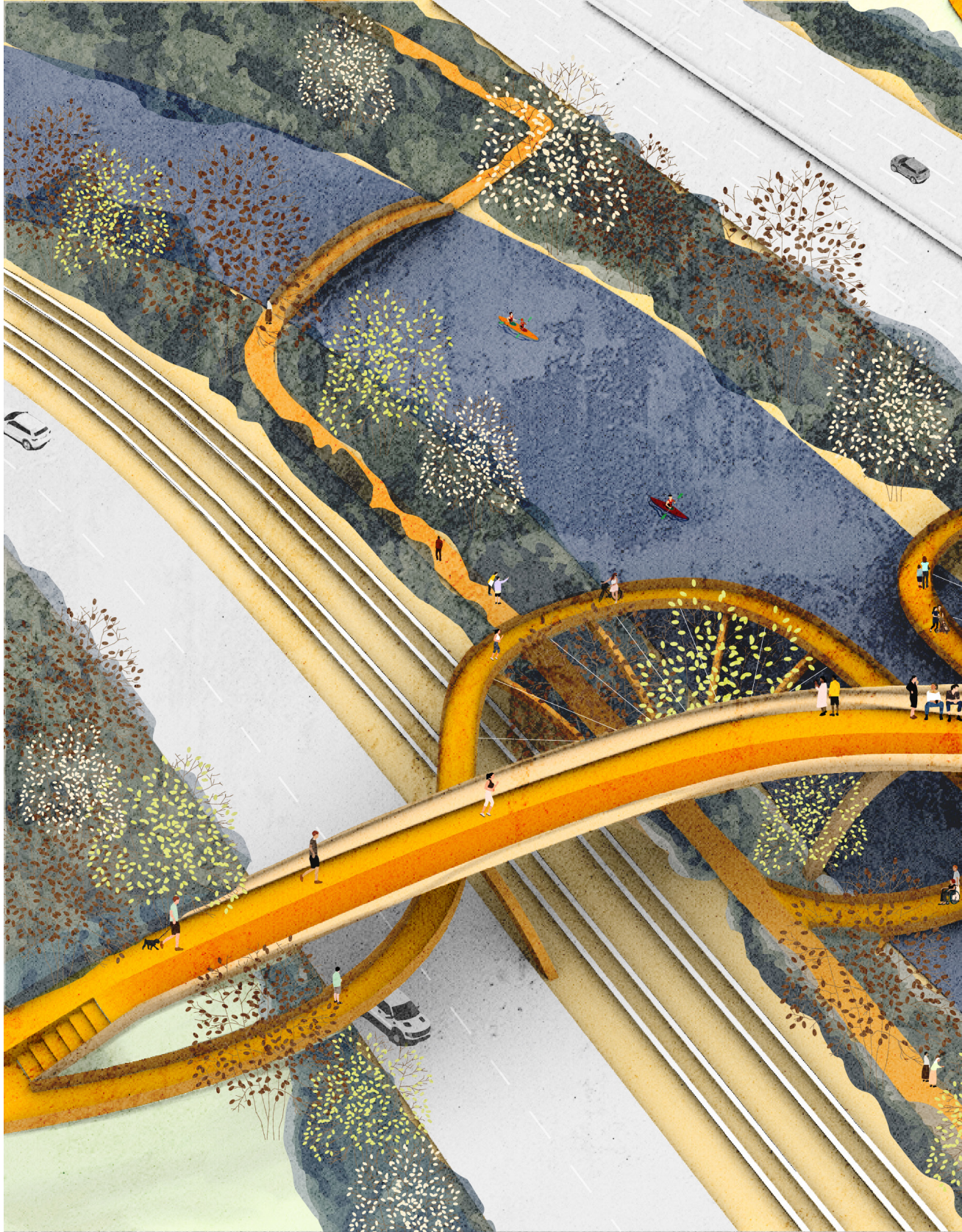
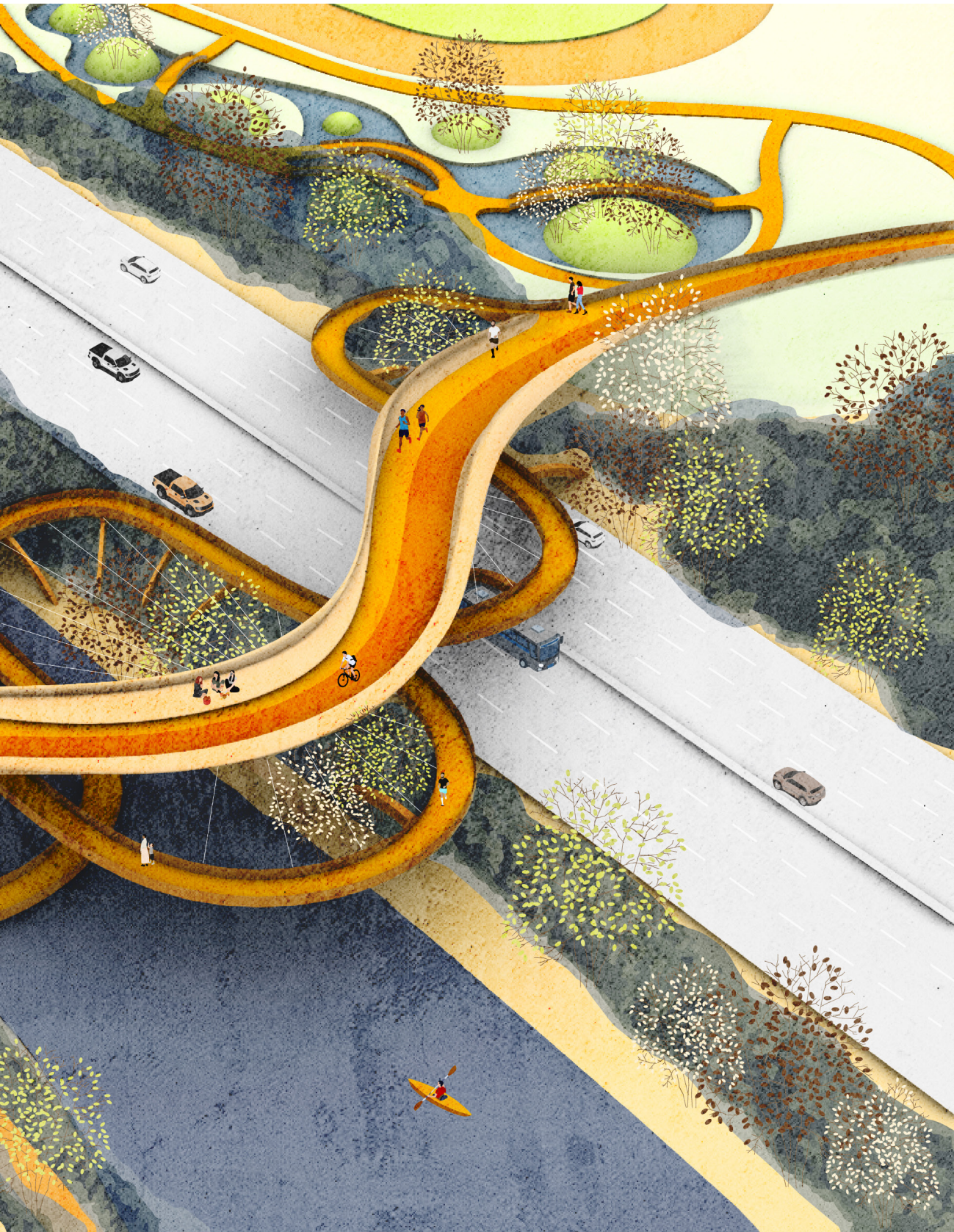


Fig.4.11 The Bridge







### *The Track*

Signified by its stimulative colours, the track serves as the circulation route throughout the park. The track is composed of two shades of orange made of recycled rubber. The darker shade of orange indicates a faster speed for bikers while the lighter shade of orange indicates foot-only path accommodating joggers and pedestrians. The bright undulating track with its curved language defines a number of functional programs, stopover amenities and places for rest, providing a variety of different experiences along the different paths. These curvilinear lines create illusions of directionality to induce curiosity and movement. The material surface of the track that differs from its adjacent green field delineates the threshold between the passive movement of its users and the surrounding open landscape. Thus, the track serves as the connective tissue that ties all the elements within the park together, redefining the movement of people at the scale of the park. In addition, the track cohesively blends into the natural slopes of the existing landscape which provides an unbounded and inclusive experience that energizes the users, and becomes a confluent system of exploration, play, and exercise.

### *The Bridge*

While the track provides circulation within the park, a portion of the track extends into a connection that bridges over the Don River, DVP, Via Rail, Bayview street and down to the Lower Don River Trail. Supported by three sets of curved steel columns that resemble the shape of arches, the bridge form itself is made with steel armature and clad with timber veneer. The railing of the top bridge is formed to seamlessly flow along the smooth curvature of the bridge. The railing is formed into a concave shape that raises up to eyelevel where the bridge runs directly above the busy DVP. The concave-like shape in tandem with the raised height of the railing partially encapsulates its users with its light and earthy timber material to draw attention away from oncoming traffic and redirect the view towards the skyline on the opposing side. By creating a visual barrier against the oncoming traffic, it physically and psychologically masks the noise of the vehicles.

Roaming towards Bayview street on the other side of the DVP, the bridge begins to overlook the Don River and the forestry of the Riverdale farm. The height of the railing begins to lower as the traffic noise diminishes slowly. Parts of the railing begin to convex inwards to provide seating while other places by the railing allows for temporary lookouts and rest. In addition to the top portion of the bridge that render visitors from one side of the park to the other, two additional foot-only ramps meanders directly beneath the bridge. These ramps are made accessible from either ends of the top bridge leading to the Lower Don River Trail – an existing system of exploration in nature – to expand the sense of open space. Fastened to the bridge above with tension cables, the ramps serve as a wheelchair friendly route, a bicycle access ramp, as well as an alternative mode of foot-path that connects one system of exploration to another. With the structural support of curved steel girders, steel beams, tension cables and steel columns, the top and bottom bridge exist in harmony with the curved language of the track, constituting a physical and visual

connection that stretches between the two pieces of lands and lower level trail. In turn, the structure attracts positive attention from park visitors, oncoming traffic from DVP and Bayview street, as well as kayakers approaching on the Don River.

#### MASTERY

Mastery is the process of play that incorporates learning, understanding and strengthening. Playful exercise spaces provide a sense of refuge and safety with opportunities for visual prospect and outlooks yield the conditions for individuals to safely learn and understand the surrounding environment that their bodies are situated within.<sup>133</sup> This process of learning new ways to move through the site and experience the various opportunities that bodies may interact with the given context allows for the strengthening of the body and mind simultaneously. Operating at the scale of landscape and architectural elements, mastery is manifested through a hierarchy of spatial programs that enable various still-movements for aerobic and strengthening exercises. Each of these stopover programs operate at a less intense energy level in accordance to the various activities that each space may accommodate for. Majority of the spaces remain underdetermined and open to interpretation to encourage new ways of interacting with the landscape, architectural elements, and with others. While the track is the medium that ties all the element into one, these spatial programs become activation sites along the track where play occurs spontaneously.

#### *The Platforms: Outlook, Green Roof and Rink*

Situated off of Broadview street on the East side open slope, two sets of timber decked stairs rise and converge into an upper level platform where the rubber track becomes a semi-passive outlook that faces directly west towards the Toronto skyline. Made up of curved girders, the platform structure is supported by glued laminated V-columns with fixed connections at the top and bottom providing both vertical and lateral resistance. The V-shaped columns are made up of a curved front piece acting in compression while the semi-curved back piece acts in tension. The stairs and the platform structure are both guarded by a timber cladded steel armature structure that stretches into a line of lounge seating on the rear side. The timber cladded seating forms an inviting urban surface on the platform to relax and watch the surrounding views. From here, the outlook becomes a semi-passive platform that allows for the passive movement of bikers and joggers while providing a safe and comfortable place to idle and stay. The convergence of the stairs along with the curvaceous form of the railing structure provokes wonderment of what it leads to, intriguing activity and movement toward the upper level. The height of the platform provides a panoramic view over the rest of the park, granting a sense of prospect and peril along with the enticement and opportunity to watch others play.

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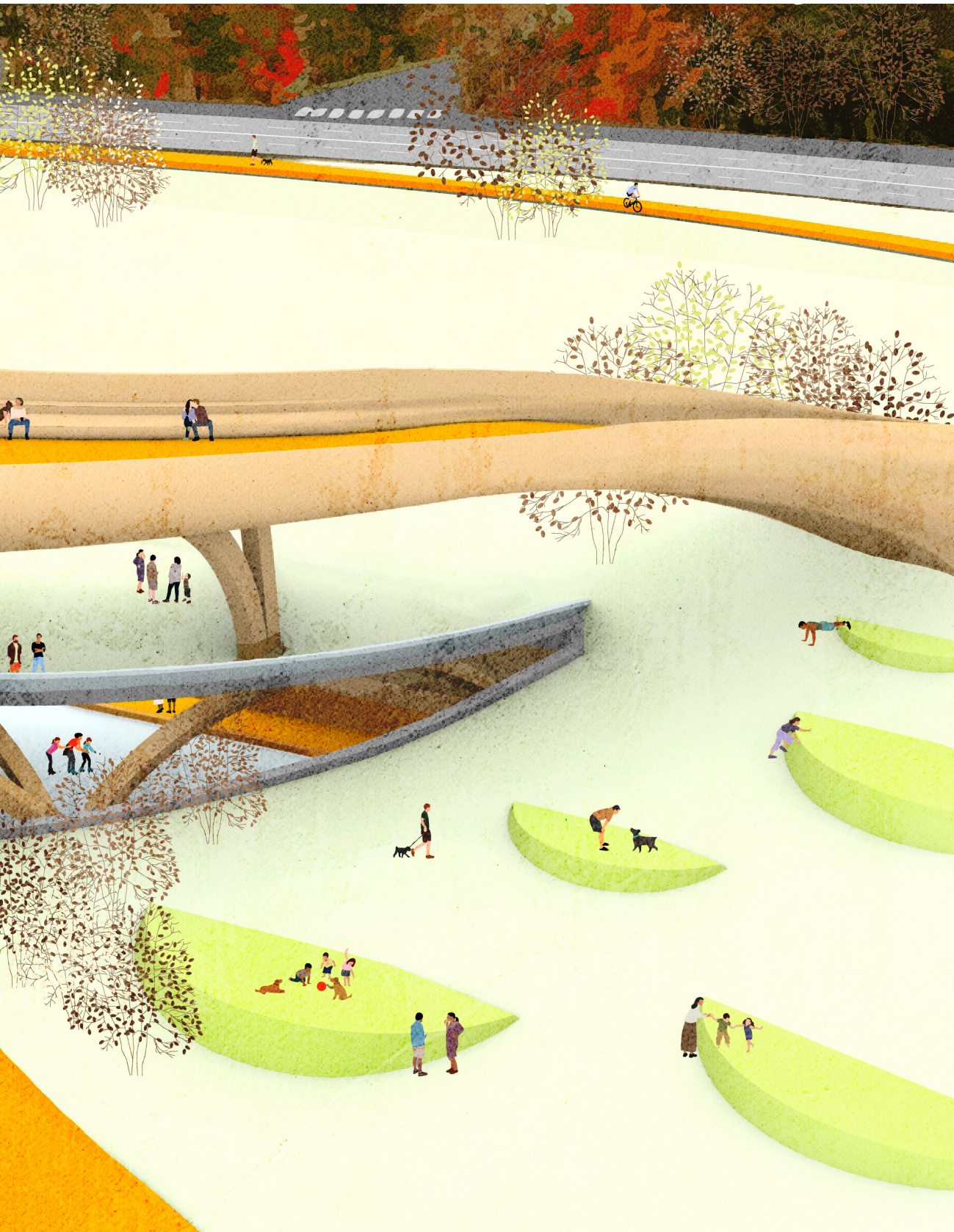
133 Ibid, 227.





*Fig.4.12 The Platforms: Outlook, Green Roof and Skating Rink*







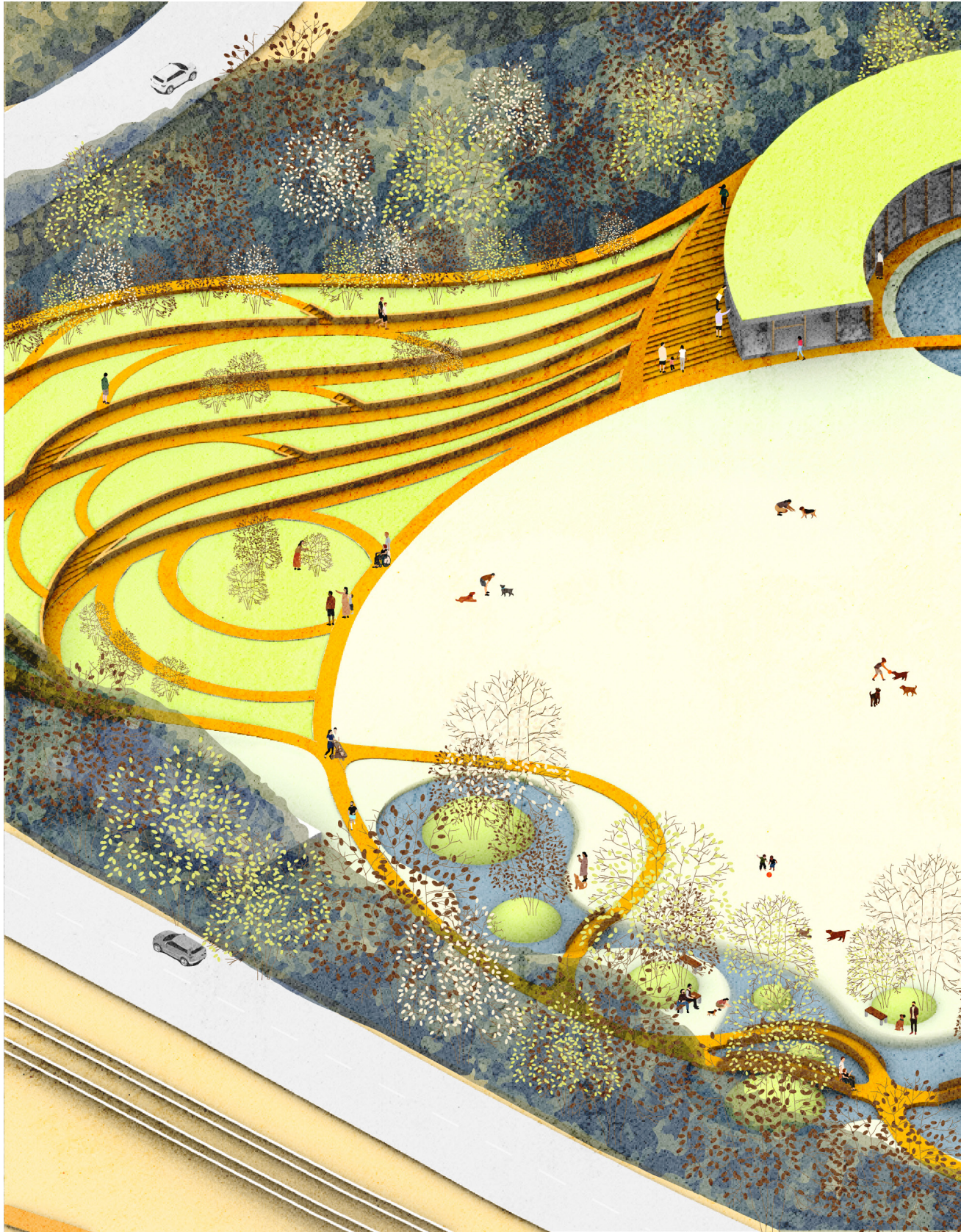


*Fig.4.13 View of the Toronto Skyline from the Green Roof at Sunset*









*Fig.4.14 Arts & Culture Center, Communal Garden and Terraced Seating*



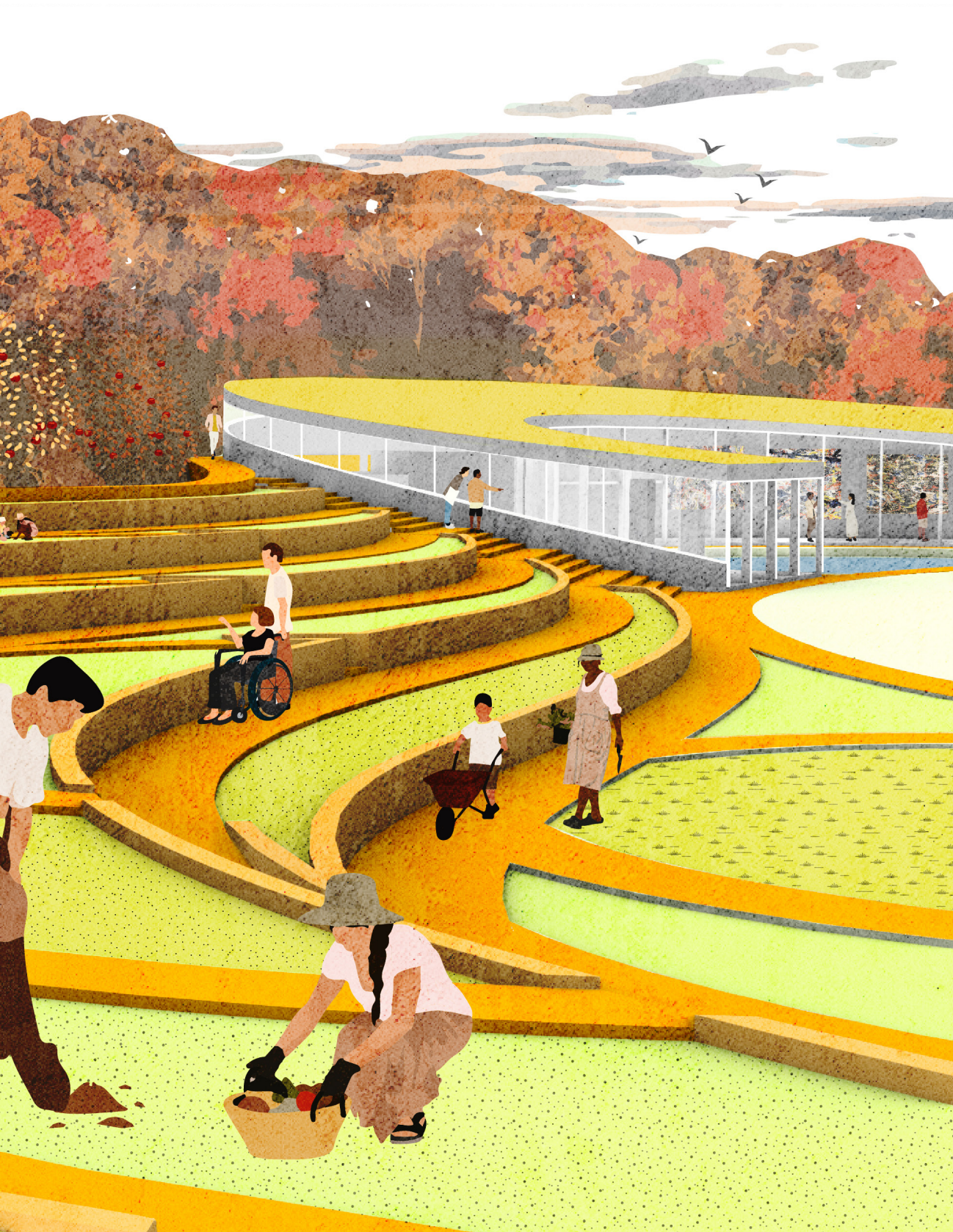






*Fig.4.15 Communal Garden*



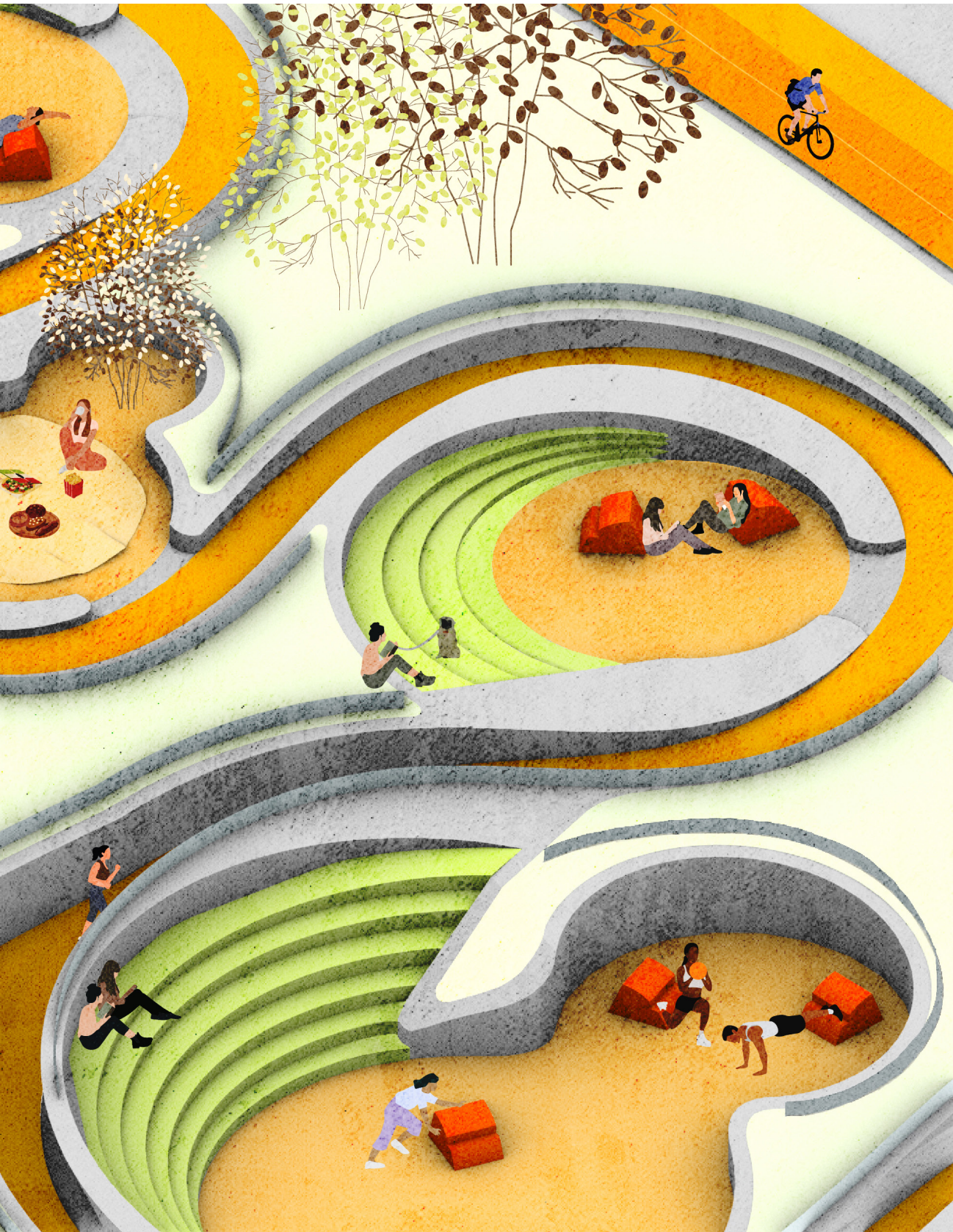






*Fig.4.16 Play-coves and Play-ponents*







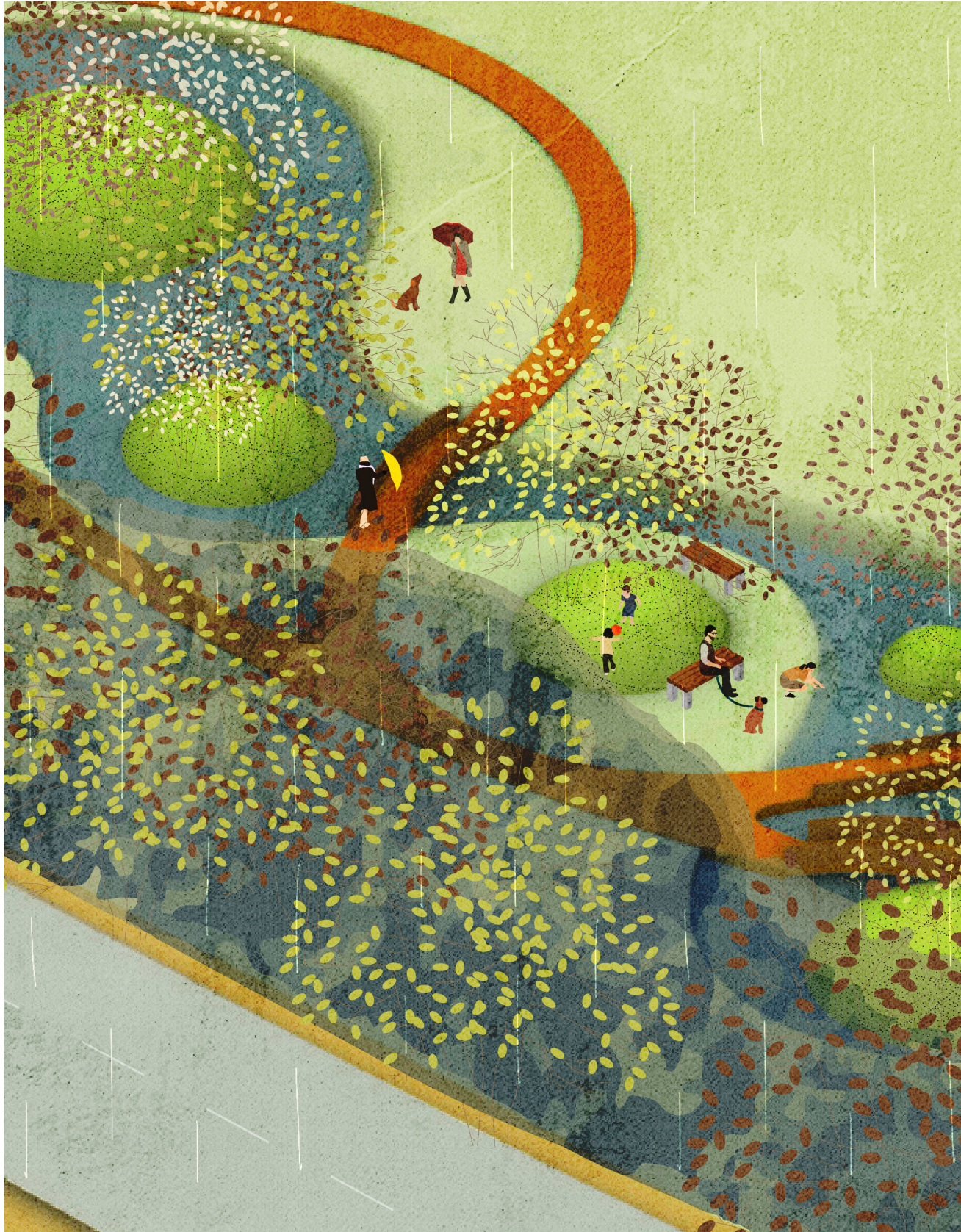


*Fig.4.17 North Entrance: Ramp & Climbing Hill*



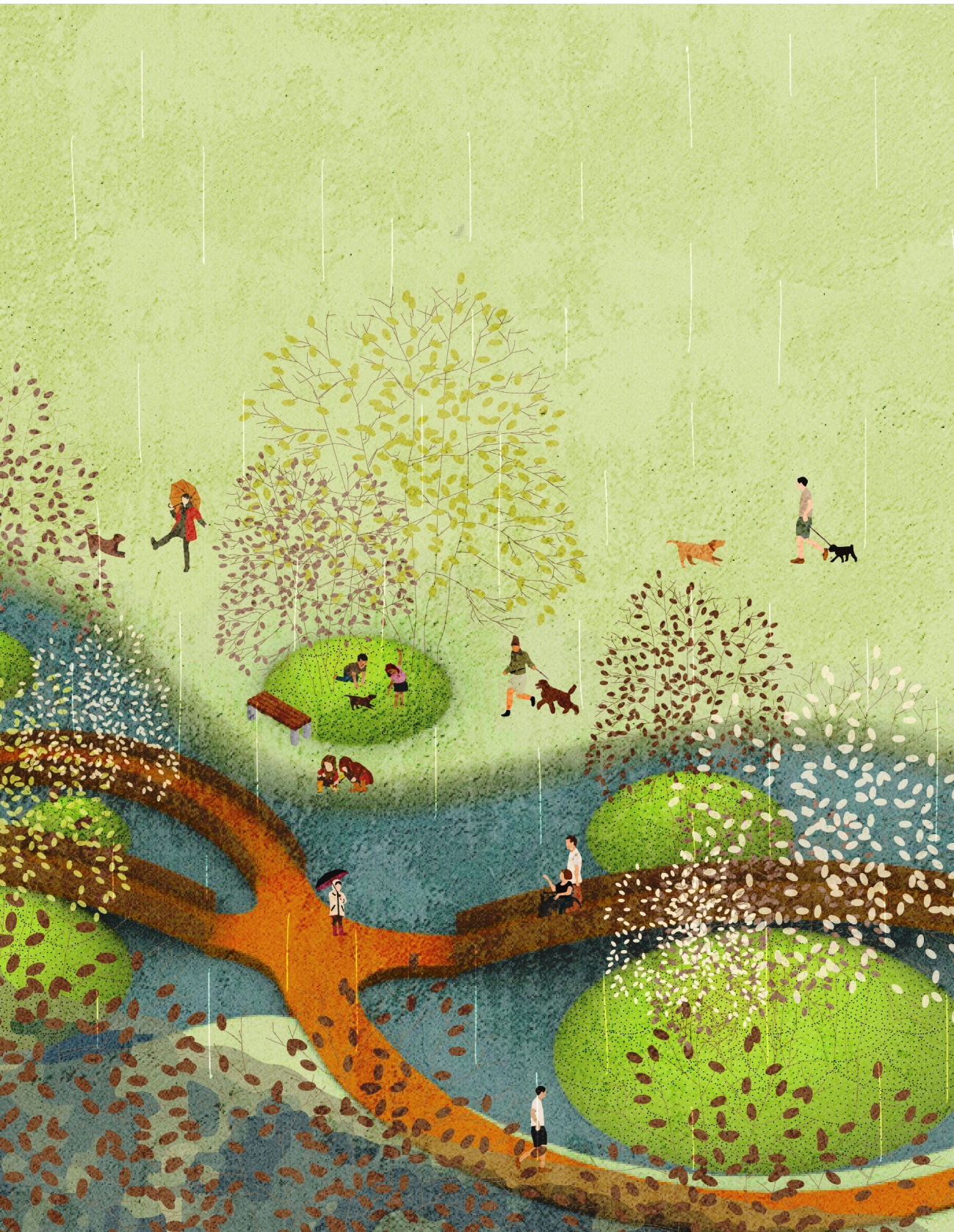






*Fig.4.18 Play-swales*



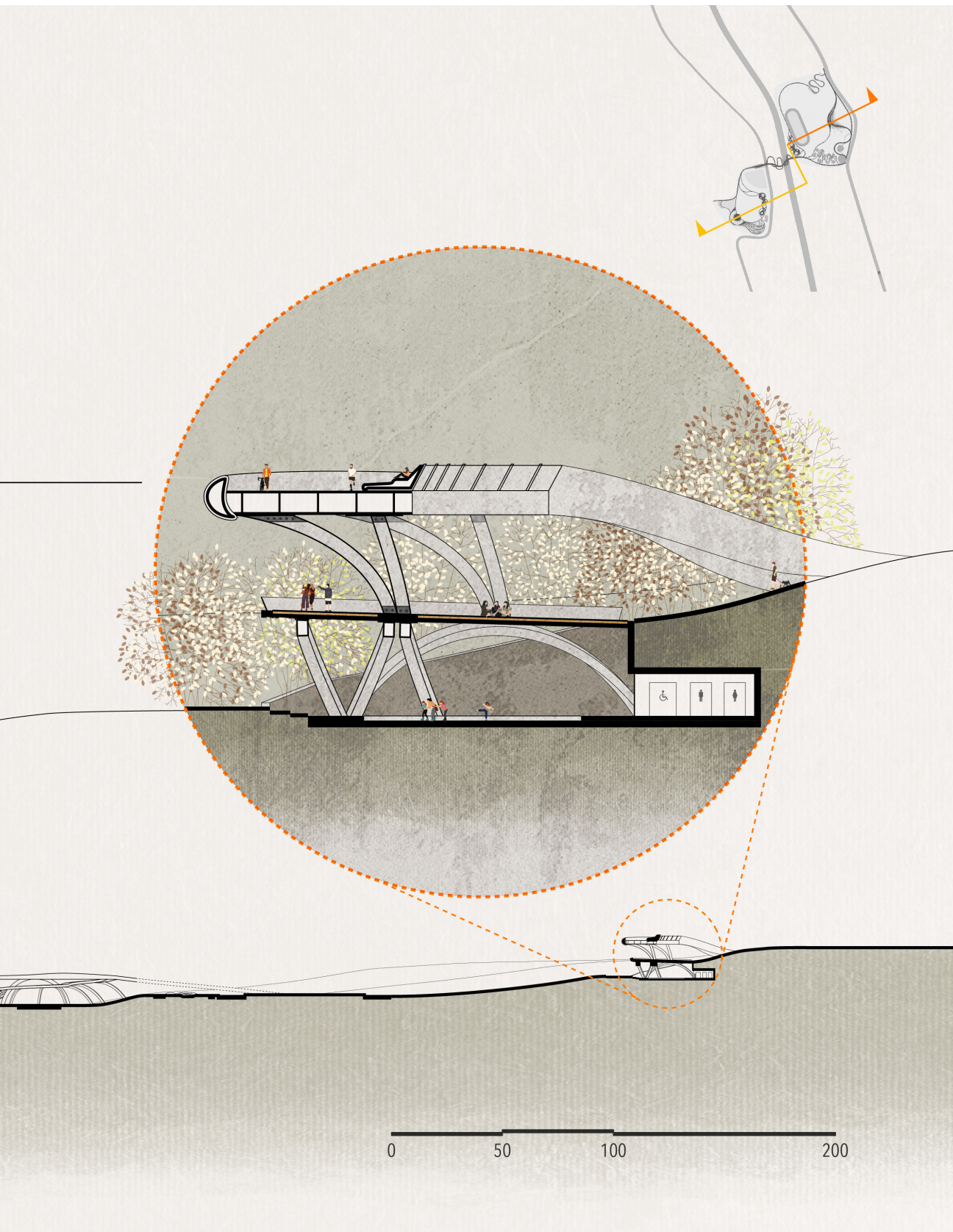






*Fig.4.19 Site Section with Building Blowups*





Located at the bottom of the outlook platform, a semi-enclosed rink functions as an ice skating rink during cold seasons, and a roller skating rink during warmer seasons. Upon arrival, the exterior track that crosses through the bottom of the slope diverges into a series of shallow steps near the entrance, immersing visitors into the rink space. The steps lead to a path that crosses over the rink toward the skate rental booth, washrooms, and change rooms on the inner side, defining a section of the rink as a beginner-friendly zone. Held up by concrete load-bearing walls and retaining walls, the rink space is partially carved into the earth while the skate rental and the change rooms are completely stationed underground. Due to the sloped nature of the landscape, the skating rink that is engulfed by the surrounding landscape provides a place of refuge that shelters against the exterior environment and the busy streets above. Nonetheless, the connectedness and openness of the space directly to and from the track system makes it spontaneous and extremely accessible to the public.

Directly beneath the upper outlook platform is a green roof that extends over the skating rink. made up of steel girders and beams, the green roof is supported by 4 steel arch columns that transfers the load from above directly into the ground. With the outlook platform above, the appearance of the green roof functions as a smooth extension of the adjacent slopped hill to provide a semi-shaded/sheltered ground that faces the skyline. Transcending down the three platforms, each level brings one closer to the sheltering of the ground as one transitions from a level of prospect to a space of refuge with the constant accompaniment of safety and comfort. With its location just off of Broadview street, the three platforms exhilarate their own body of activities and energy, monumentally animates the urban landscape while attracting the attention of numerous passersby.

#### *Arts & Culture Centre and the Communal Garden*

Contrary to the east side of the park, the west side is bordered by woodland and suburban blocks. The privacy created by the mass foliage and residential surroundings, as well as the hilly landscapes emanate a tranquil energy. These intimate conditions produce a suitable environment for the integration of relatively calmer programs and activities.

*The impulse to create art is a result of the play impulse. Art and culture have long been seen as a sort of by-product of human biology, something that just happens as we use our big, complex brains. But the newer thinking is that art and culture are something that the brain actively creates because it benefits us, something that arises out of the primitive and childlike drive to play.*<sup>134</sup>

Shaped in a semi-circular structure, an arts & culture building is partially embedded into the natural slope of the topography. The interior of the building

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134 Brown, and Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, 59



will accommodate spaces for both planned and self-conducted arts and fitness workshops all year round. Art exhibitions will showcase artistic expression created from the local community, and will exist on display along the inner perimeter of the building and its transparent façade in various accessible forms. The semi-circular language of the building symbolizes unity and community while the body of shallow water at the front serves as a moment of relaxation and reflection upon entry. As arts are indicators of emotional intelligence, they also produce emotional intelligence.<sup>135</sup> Operating daily from 7am-7pm, the arts and culture center attracts the public eye with its open opportunities to create, learn, and interact through the appreciation for nature, culture, arts, and exercise.

Adjacent to the building, an assemblage of layered green seating sweeps along the slope of the hill on one side while a terraced communal garden sprawls out of the building from the other side. The changing levels and curvatures of the green seating platforms encourage all types of gatherings and socialization. An existing path that is now a part of the track system extends from the bridge and along the perimeter of the Park's west side. The path transforms into a set of stairs that exits the park to the residential blocks beyond. As the path climbs up along the green terraced seating, it diverges into an elevated pathway that stretches along the backside of the arts & culture building. Moving alongside the upper windows of the building, the elevated pathway provides an opportunity for visitors to see the workshop rooms below and observe the activities happening inside the building. The same path continues toward the communal garden on the other side, highlighting the edge of the garden as it slowly ramps back down into the open field. From here, the path divides into series of foot-paths that meanders through play-swales, circular mounds, and planted vegetation, providing a dynamic experience of roaming through the west side of the park.

Both terraces mold the building's perimeter and converge two sets of stairs and ramps rising along either sides of the building. From afar, the stacked natures of these terraces evoke a sense of depth and visual connection, enlarging the image of the built environment. The physical integration of architecture, molding of landscapes, as well as newly paved surfaces produce the visual organization and spatial refinement of the existing baseball diamond and Riverdale dog park on the east side. The grand gesture of curves complements the existing ecology in an effort to seamlessly unify the presence of the building within the surrounding natural scape.

Author and farmer William Marshall suggests that planting and gardening is a form of art that induces a sense of enjoyment and pleasure.<sup>136</sup> A garden is therefore an aesthetic in nature formed with the colours of different plants and species, and

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135 Ibid, 138-139.

136 William Marshall. *Planting and Ornamental Gardening a Practical Treatise*. (London: printed for J. Dodsley, 1785), 5.

composed by the gardeners. The communal garden is composed of six rows of curved timber planting beds. Each line of planting bed is raised up to waist height in order to offer six levels of planting opportunities. Following along the nature of the circles and curvatures, the planting beds are divided into various shapes and sizes. The green roof of the arts & culture center collects and filters rain water, which then gets stored in an underground cistern to hose the plants. With the varying shapes and sizes of planting beds, it aims to inspire a dynamic range of vegetation. During the fall season, the blossoming fruition of the garden motivates the community to come together to present the 'Riverdale Park Farmer's Market'.

For Hannah Arendt the *homo faber* are the creators of "the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice"<sup>137</sup> The sequence of planting beds become an 'open canvas' that sparks the interest of people within the community to spontaneously participate in the nurturing, composing, cultivation, creation and harvesting of an artful garden. The garden becomes a symbol of care and effort of a collective community expressing the effort of revitalizing the bound between locals, visitors and nature.

#### *Play-coves and Play-ponents*

The context and conditions for play must include familiarity, free-choice, minimal speculation and intrusion. The environment for play must also be rich in experience, stress-free, and under the control of the users to allow the exercising of free choice.<sup>138 139</sup> Signified by its simple yet monumental circular form, a network of play-coves sit along the existing path that is now a part of the track system leading directly to the bridge. Situated directly west of the statue of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen at the southeast corner of the east side slope, the pit structures are connected through a series of trench-like paths. With the popularity of Taichi practice by the statue at the top of the hill, the play-coves embody a system of activities that extends down into the park. The various dimensions of play-coves allow for groups of various sizes to conduct activities of various types.

Retained by concrete walls and paved with recycled rubber, these spatially ambiguous and open play-coves are flexible and versatile. This system of user dominant coves encourages activities of all sorts including meditation, yoga, picnic, reading, relaxation, and exercising. Fabricated to conform to the existing topography, certain play-coves contain a set of shallow steps that function as seating opportunities that also lead one up to its surrounding landscape. A number of play-ponents – red triangular forms that are distributed throughout the site to function as stretch/warmup stations – are also placed within certain play-coves. The volumes of the play-ponents are structured with molded recycled cement and a hollow core partially filled with sand to give the unit its weight and resistance.

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<sup>137</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

<sup>138</sup> Anthony D Pellegrini. *The Role of Play in Human Development*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18.

<sup>139</sup> Richard Dattner. *Design for Play*. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1969), 137.

The molded form is covered with a thick layer of recycled rubber that provides the cushioning and friction to perform physical exercise upon. The weight of the play-ponent structures redefines the pushing and rearranging of these singular units into new activities of physical challenge and practice. In turn, they constitute new opportunities of socialization and teamwork. With the specific sculpting of these play-ponents, they inspire individual, partner or group activities that range from self-conducted stretching, squats and push-ups, as well as relaxation, pushing around, and personalized workouts.

Located on the far side of the existing pathway, a set of three play-coves sink into the landscape to generate three exhibition-coves. These coves are integrated perfectly at eyelevel to gracefully showcase a sequenced display of native plants and species. Native tree species such as ash, maple, cedar and white pine are met with native shrubs including elderberry, red osier dogwood, speckled alder, swamp rose, eastern cottonwood, and green ash.<sup>140</sup> The flowers of most tree species as well as the white and earthy browns of the eastern cottonwood, green ash, and speckled alder makes an appearance throughout spring; the purple and pink of the elderberry and swamp rose blossoms during early summer; the bright red of the osier dogwood all year round; all of which contributes to a beautifully vibrant foliage throughout the year. In favor, the exhibited species are interpreted by educational signs situated at the upper and lower levels. These physical signs stimulate the learning of local ecology as one move through the path that connects the network of play-coves.

These physically sunken cove spaces minimize the number of spectators to induce feelings of independence, safety and refuge. Meanwhile, the maze-like passageway that physically takes visitors deeper into the ground provide a sense of stability and rootedness. The shifting of elevations of the path system that transcends individuals in and out of the ground captures attention and stimulates awareness of the surrounding environment as one playfully explores and learns new ways to interact. The absence of instructions of the play-coves and play-ponents assign freedom to the unending possibilities of activities that the programs may hold. Such adaptable environment allows for the prospect of a dynamic range of exercises and activities. From here, the design of the play-coves along with its play-ponents encourage various degrees of repose, intimacy and socialization.

#### *North Entrance: Ramp & Climbing Hill*

Located off of Broadview street and situated at the north end of the east side park, a ramp curves into the slope of the existing topography and meanders down the slope as an extension to the track system. While functioning as a bicycle access ramp, the winding path establishes a direct connection and movement from the upper level sidewalk to the lower level existing track on the open field.

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140 “Riverdale Woodlands & Other Task Force to bring back the don projects at Riverdale.” Accessed October 18, 2022. <https://lostrivers.ca/content/points/rvdlpjts.html>.



Architect Richard Dattner demonstrates that an environment to play freely is one that is structured enough to provide a feeling of safety, as well as the freedom to alter the natural order of things.<sup>141</sup> Three sets of wooden decked steps follow the circular lines of the ramp to descend into the surrounding landscape. With the existing topography that accommodates for the carving of the ramped path, portions of the bottom steps become a rubberized climbing hill. The melding of the steps and sloped climbing hill into the existing structures provide an alternative method of moving from one plane to another. During winter, the adjacent hill becomes a popular destination for sledding and tobogganing. The rounded platforms in between the curvature of the path as well as the integration of steps, climbing hill and retaining walls provide natural and built grounds that invigorate a variety of snow activities. These factors encourage the creation of own experiences with both existing and natural materials, offering the freedom to alter the natural order of things. As Gins and Arakawa would express, such combination of the natural and built conditions revoke automatisms and normative physical and mental behaviors within a space. By opening up the imagination of all the ways the space can be used, it provokes different methods of traveling as well as new ways to move the body.

### *Play-swales*

Due to the sloped nature of the park, the woodland at the base of the east side slope exists as a natural wetland. The wetland has mature native woodland trees that drain and store rain water from the field to the south. Since the park exists within the floodplain of the Don River, fundamental flood-mitigation design is considered. Shaped asymmetrically to mimic the liquidity and flow of water, two play-swales situate on either side of the park at the lower flat land near the side of the Don River. Inspired by the existing woodland, the two play-swales function as natural bio-filters that retain, infiltrate and filter the storm water and surface runoff from the slopes on either sides of the park. Occupying 7% of the west side and 5% of the east side, the sizes of the swales safely accommodate for high and low flows of water infiltration and drainage.<sup>142</sup>

Starting from the base, each asymmetrical curvilinear swale is composed of a gravel storage layer that surrounds the drainage pipe; a filter fabric; bio-retention aggregates and planting mix; and topped with mulch for soil protection.<sup>143</sup> The soil mix allows for the growth of flood-adaptive vegetation including cattails, arrowheads and sedges, and non-native European water horehound.<sup>144</sup> While the plant species and porous ground composition slow down the process of permeation, the roots of the plants break down toxic chemicals from the pollutants before discharging the filtered water back to the river.<sup>145</sup>

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141 Dattner, *Design for Play*, 86.

142 "An Introduction to Bioswales." Home & Garden Information Center | Clemson University, South Carolina. Accessed October 18, 2022. <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/an-introduction-to-bioswales/>.

143 "Toronto Green Streets Technical Guidelines." Toronto. Accessed October 18, 2022.

144 "Riverdale Woodlands & Other Task Force to bring back the don projects at Riverdale".

145 Jennie Morton. "How Bioswales Provide Aesthetic Stormwater Management." *Buildings* 111, no. 5 (2017): 17.

Aside from contributing to the ecological health of the site, another part of the objective of the play-swales is to magnify a new intellectual experience of walking through the park. Moving along the excavated swales, hills of mounds of varying sizes and heights grow out of the concavity of the play-swale. The mini contours formed by these mounds reflect the characteristic of changing landscapes throughout the site. Complimentary to the fun-shaped swales, the mounds accent the play-swales and become the home to an array of native plants and species on display. As the play-swales gets filled with water during rainy seasons, it becomes a scenic yet functional element within the park - a water garden that flourishes during rainy seasons. Furthermore, systems of paths flow alongside and diverge against the curvature and depth of the play-swale and mounds. The paths enable a sequence of physical and visual opportunities as one traverses and bridges over the body of water and mini lands. The branching and turning of the paths make use of the open green spaces of the site to single out the experience of walking alongside nature while slowing down the movement of visitors. At the scene of the play-swales, the path becomes a means of refocusing the experiential mode for an individual; redefining the dimensionality of itself within the vastness of the overall park. Such setting stimulates mindfulness and revitalizes the bond between people and nature.

#### COMPOSURE

Composure is the third and final process of play achieved through exploration and mastery. Achieving composure yields a sense of fulfilment and poise. It acts as an individualistic gain on an emotional and mental level through the interaction of dynamic and complex objects in a given environment. It is through composure that one is able to experience the full pleasure of play, which then enables play to begin all over again.<sup>146</sup> Within the park, all of the paths and spaces are connected through an underlying intellectual hierarchy of energies. The order of energies transitions from a high intensity level (active) to a low intensity level (zen) moving from the east side toward the west. Operating at the dimension of the site and experienced at an individualistic scale, the physical movement between various programs by its users invigorates different degrees of energies. Aside from the intensity of activities invoked by a given program, the shift of energies is also brought forth by the use of various colours, architectonic elements, as well as intellectual stimulants.

#### *Colours, Materials and Textures*

The cultural diversity of the area is a defining characteristic of the Riverdale neighbourhood. One of the objectives of the design is to create intellectual connectivity with a deeper sense of community. With the main foreign populations made up of Chinese, Filipino, Indian and Greek, the colour palette of the proposed design is dominated by the colours of the flags of these origins; orange and green from India; yellow from China; blue from Greece; and red from Canada and the Philippines.

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146 Eberle, "The Elements of Play Toward a Philosophy and a Definition of Play.", 226.

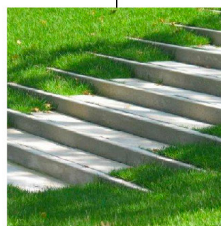
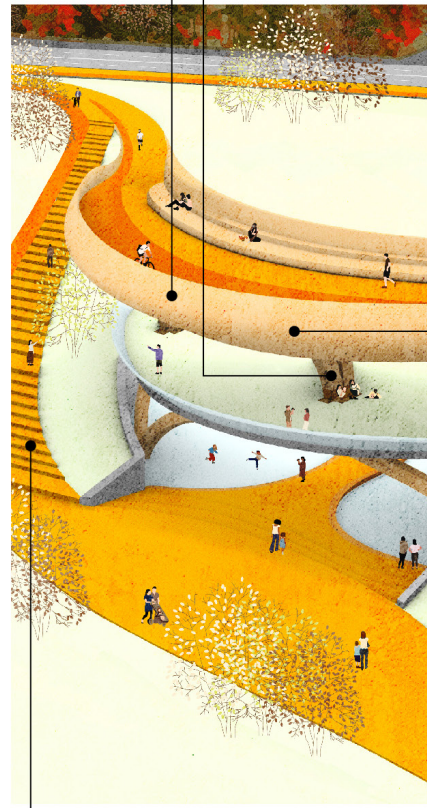
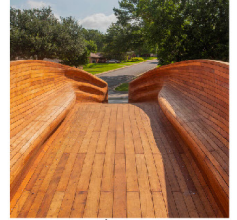
Recycled Rubber



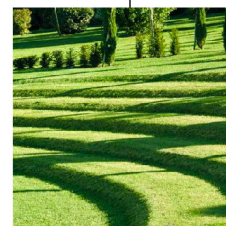
Poured Concrete



Timber Veneer



Timber Stairs



Terraced Green Seating



Vegetation a

Fig.4.20 Colour and Material



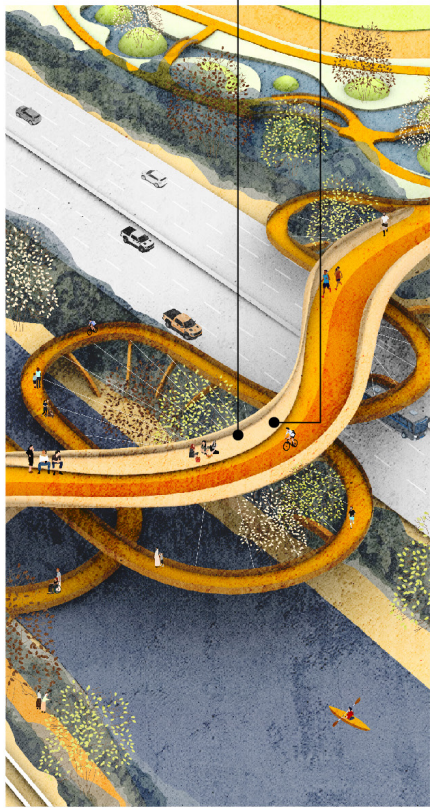
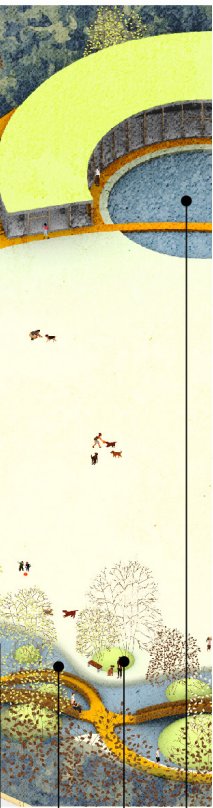
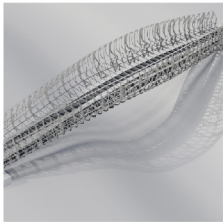
Timber Retaining wall



Glued Laminated Columns



Steel Armature



and Planting



Grass Mounds



Water





*Fig.4.21 Infographic Sign*







The combination of these colours reflect the dynamic culture and people of the community, symbolizing a mixture of these cultures into one harmonious scheme.

According to behavioral psychologists, the light of various colours that travel through neurological pathways affecting the pineal gland in the brain can affect a person mentally, physically, and emotionally.<sup>147</sup> The red play-ponents scattered throughout the site presents a powerful colour that portrays activity and passion. Red easily attracts attention and provokes excitement. In almost all cultures, yellow symbolizes warmth and happiness.<sup>148</sup> It is also the most noticeable to the human eye being the brightest on the visual spectrum. The orange and yellow track that dominates the park is a combination of red's power and spirit and yellow's fun and approachability. Orange and yellow invoke motivation and enthusiasm to invigorate energy, positivity and playfulness. Within the design, the architectural materials that are represented by the colours red, orange and yellow are: recycled rubber, timber, and weatherproof steel. Generally, rubber and timber provide slip resistance, safety and a sense of warmth; steel provides the sturdiness and strength for weight bearing and protection at changing elevations; and poured concrete is used as retaining walls. The materiality of concrete provides a sense of heaviness and stability that holds the earth back to enable the transcendence into the earth.

In contrast, the colour blue is often associated with water, which provides a sense of stability and biologically reduces the heart rate.<sup>149</sup> The pool of water that signifies the entrance to the arts & culture center, as well as the water at the play-swales during rainy seasons enables a moment of reflection and relaxation. Thus, water becomes a symbol of empowerment, peace, and composure. Complimentary, green is the colour of balance and harmony that symbolizes nature.<sup>150</sup> As the project situates within an abundantly green space, grass, garden vegetation and native species accompanies users both physical and visually throughout the site. To enhance this connection and soften the impact of the built forms on the surroundings, the green steps sitting within the play-coves as well as the green mounds at the play-swales are both elements that encourage a seamless and balanced transition from the built environment into the surrounding natural landscape. Such accessibility and availability to natural material and texture throughout the site provides a sense of growth, renewal and well-being that constantly rekindles humans to nature.

The colours and materials are strategically chosen to create energy and balance. They serve as physical and visual invitations that evoke curiosity, approachability, tactility, and the desire to explore. In addition, the colorfulness and abundance of textures within the environment also resembles a children's playground.

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147 Charis Lengen. "The Effects of Colours, Shapes and Boundaries of Landscapes on Perception, Emotion and Mentalising Processes Promoting Health and Well-Being." *Health & Place* 35 (2015): 166–177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.05.016>.

148 "The Ultimate Guide to Color Psychology," Nora Doyle Design. Accessed October 18, 2022. <https://noradoyledesign.com/2020/05/26/the-ultimate-guide-to-color-psychology/>.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.

Such qualities contribute to the liveliness of the urban environment, making it both physically and psychologically more accessible to everybody. Given this, the chosen colours and materials contribute to a safe and dynamic surrounding that provides a range of interactions for the various physical and psychological needs and preferences of its users.

### *Short and Informative*

Out of the three processes of play, composure is the process that provides a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, which effectuates changes in emotions to enable one to experience the full pleasure of play. Thus, it is essential to offer activities for the body and mind to experience composure. These activities may include exploration and mastery, such as a visit at the arts & culture center to create art and participate in various workshops; or a stroll through the play-coves that result in an unforgettable social interaction and friendship building. Nonetheless, it may also be in the form of intellectual stimulants. Throughout the park, a series of educational signs are scattered along the track and within various programs. These signs provide short and enlightening information on the history and ecology of the site, as well as facts about fitness, well-being and the human body. These brief yet impactful learnings about the science of the human body positively stimulates the brain in an effort to reconnect the body to its mind. At the same time, new information about the culture of the site also forms an intellectual and emotional bond between the body and the natural and historical surrounding that it situates in.

### *The Language of Circles and Curves*

One of the defining features of the design is the dedication towards circles and curves. Several reasons emerge for the use of this primary design language. First and foremost, the notion that curved lines and circular objects are more preferred is evident in the long history of research and writings on aesthetics, art, architecture and biology.<sup>151</sup> From an evolutionary standpoint, circular shapes elicit positive emotions as it naturally appears more friendly and youthful. The appeal of circular shape is rooted in our attraction to the prominent round features of an infant.<sup>152</sup> In art, circles symbolize infinity, perfection and completeness. Culturally, circles symbolize unity, community, friendship and love.<sup>153</sup> In design, curvatures and circular forms are easy to follow as they lack start or end points, representing movement, continuity and cycle.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, curves and circles are often associated with nature as its organic shape and form is inherently ubiquitous in nature.<sup>155</sup>

151 Katherine N Cotter., Paul J. Silvia, Marco Bertamini, Letizia Palumbo, and Oshin Vartanian. "Curve Appeal: Exploring Individual Differences in Preference for Curved Versus Angular Objects." *i-Perception (London)* 8, no. 2(2017): 2041669517693023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041669517693023>.

152 "Why Do We Find Circles So Beautiful?" BBC Science Focus Magazine. Accessed October 18, 2022. <https://www.sciencefocus.com/science/why-do-we-find-circles-so-beautiful/>.

153 "Complete Unity: The Fascination with the Circle." Owlcation. Accessed October 18, 2022. <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Complete-Unity-An-Elements-of-Art-lesson>.

154 "The Circle, The Wheel of Fortune & The Rose Window." Dartmouth. Accessed November 05, 2022. <https://math.dartmouth.edu/~matc/math5.geometry/unit9/unit9.html>.

155 "7 Elements of Design and Rule of Thirds." Guelph hiking. Accessed November 5, 2022. <https://www.guelphhiking.com/Elements-of-Design>.

As humans' innate desire to seek connections with nature sit at the heart of biophilic design, architects often favor curvilinear designs to reflect a sense of fluidity from the natural surroundings of the building.<sup>156</sup>

The circle embodies characteristics that evoke a sense of peacefulness and symmetry.<sup>157</sup> As a designer, I am personally drawn to curvatures and rounded geometries. Curves are pleasing to the eye and easy to follow as it lacks sharp angles. Creating with curvatures and circular language is enjoyable as it is naturally playful, leaving me with a sense of balance and ease. In the proposed design, the use of curves and circles physically and visually enhances the natural ecology of the park. It aims to raise awareness to the preservation of native species as well as the valuing of natural ecology within the region. The curvilinear paths overlap and intersect throughout the design, defining circular, semi-circular, and rounded programs that sit in between. With the circular language, these programs playfully morph, transform and adapt to the varying functions and experiences of the park.

Circles and curves are a lacking feature in the overly mechanical modern fitness setting. By implementing the language of curves into the ritual of exercise, it challenges the traditional goal-oriented mindset, and counteracts the angular dimensionality and aggressive mechanical linearity. The conversion of straight lines to curved lines dismantles the subversive element in the pursuit of power and strength as well as the formality of extreme body training. Hence, a well-rounded environment revokes rigid exercise routines and constricted bodily movements, transforming the act of physical exercises into a lighthearted and wholesome experience. Thus, the language of curves intellectually redefines the meaning of exercise while artfully serving as the dominant unifying expression of nature, community and play. This language emerges when people and their environment come together as a harmonious whole.

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156 "Curved Walls Are Trending in Interior Design." *Architecture & Design*. Accessed November 05, 2022. <https://www.architectureanddesign.com.au/suppliers/siniat/curved-walls-are-trending-in-interior-design#>.

157 "Why Do We Find Circles So Beautiful?" *BBC Science Focus Magazine*. Accessed November 05, 2022. <https://www.sciencefocus.com/science/why-do-we-find-circles-so-beautiful/>.



*A DAY AT THE PARK*

Kate, and her husband Ben lives in Regent Park with their son Kris. As someone who grew up in the area, Riverdale park has always been a place of picnics and leisure for Kate throughout her childhood. Excited about the recent introduction of Fitness of Play at Riverdale Park, the park has greatly contributed to the variations of weekly activities for Kate and her family.

*7:00 am*

Kate starts her Monday mornings by conducting a group yoga workshop at the Arts and Culture Centre every week. Besides her usual attendance, she sees new faces every week. Kate has been running the program for a few months now and has made numerous connections during her workshops where she meets people of all ages and backgrounds that share a similar interest.

*9:00 am*

After Kate completes her workshop, she gets her favourite coffee and bagel from the café in the building. She like to sit on one of the lower level green seating next to the building to watch pet owners playing with their dogs. Across the field, a baseball game occurs every Monday morning. She watches as she enjoys her breakfast.

*9:15 am*

Kate walks along the path on the west side of the park to head to work. While she crosses the bridge, she sees her friend Brandon, and his girlfriend Susan. Kate knows that they like to have their morning exercise at the park every other day. The three friends stop at the lookout area on the bridge to catch-up about their weekends before Kate proceeds to the east side of the park.

*9:25 am*

On her way to Broadview station, Kate walks along the top of the east side hill where she spots a group of locals performing Taichi in front of the Statue. Continuing down Broadview street, she sees elders stretching on play-ponents; friends sitting on top of the platform bridge; kids playing on the soccer field; as well as joggers and cyclists in the distance circulating the track and paths in the lower field.

*10:00 am – 3:00 pm*

As Kate works elsewhere during the day, numerous visitors pass through the park - a landmark of activities and gathering. Various groups and individuals filter through the play-coves with all types of activities while joggers and cyclists flow along the paths of the park. The platforms curiously invite the strollers along Broadview street to wander the stairs toward the upper platform where they pay a stay on the lounge seating to watch the skyline. Roaming across the bridge over the DVP, pedestrians spontaneously meander down the ramps to the Lower Don Valley Trail where a new connection to nature is discovered. Friends and family drop in and out of their preferred workshops at the Arts and Culture Centre. Locals come together to meet at the garden right outside the building to celebrate and create a variety of herbage; during which old connections are strengthened and new connections are formed.

## Fitness of Play

Elders walk along the paths over the play-swales where they find kids and pets playing with each other. Visitors become intrigued and enlightened from learning the various infographic signs that capture their attention as they move through the park.

*3:15 pm*

Later in the afternoon, Kate leaves work to pick up her son Kris from Withrow Junior by the park. On their way home, they like to walk through the paths along the play-coves where Kris can often find his friends in the play-coves. While Kris plays with friends, Kate likes stretch on the play-ponents before she leans against a play-ponent in one of the smaller play-coves to journal and read her book.

*5:00 pm*

Little later, Kate and Kris crosses over the bridge to head back home. They spot Brandon and Susan coming up from the ramp, who has just explored a beautiful part of the Lower Don Valley Trail, and are headed over to the roller skating rink before they catch the sunset.

*7:00 pm*

After dinner, Kate and her Husband Ben meets Brandon and Susan at the green roof above the skating rink. The four lay there as they chat over snacks and drinks, watching the sun go down behind the Toronto skyline in the distance.





# 5.0

## CONCLUSION



## CONCLUSION

After a busy day in early October, I headed to the gym for my usual routine of cardio and anaerobic exercises. As I began my sets on the isolation machines following a tiresome treadmill run, I let my mind wander off while gazing over the rest of the gym. Within my peripheral, the activity of a father and his son caught my attention. The son was standing right in front of the father, who was sitting slantwise at the edge of a diagonal ab bench facing the son; the two were tossing a medicine ball back and forth. As the father catches the ball, he would lower his body backwards onto the diagonal surface of the bench and come back up, completing one rep of sit-up as he tosses the ball back to his son.

The interaction performed by the two was intriguingly creative and effective within the normally rigid gym environment, fostering movement and teamwork simultaneously. After I got home, I began to sketch their interaction as I experimented with the different shapes and figures that could replace the ab bench. The design wound up with a triangular volume that provides stability while its various sides provides the surfaces for numerous interactions. As I began to imagine the activities on/with the triangular volume, I decided to make one face of the volume into a curved surface with an indented landing carved into the curvature. The curved surface encourages dynamic and reciprocal interactions that follows the natural curvature of the body, while the indented portion provides a landing that unlocks a range of different activities that are only limited by the users' imagination.

The aspiration to redefine the relationship between exercise and play was stimulated through personal experiences and encounters within the socio-spatial conditions and patriarchal realm of the body-obsessive fitness facilities. Within the age of information and media characterised by its temporality and volatility, the dual imperatives of consumer capitalism that also promotes individualism capture individuals in between a constant battle of release and restraint. These social conditions generate a continuous effort to intentionally reconstruct social identities reflected by consumeristic choices in order to fit in with the society. This replaces the uniqueness of individuals into a socially constructed checklist of standards, which in turn produces an ill-defined notion of fitness that encapsulates the idea around a socially constructed 'ideal'; all of which contradicts the process of individualization,



disrupts the formation of culture and communities, reinforces the commodification of the body, and contaminates the undertaking of mind-body cultivation.

As I learned about the unpredictability of modernity and fitness cultures, fitness facilities began to reveal itself as a capitalistic commodity; one that allows for the production of the predominant yet unrealistic 'ideal' bodies. These ideal bodies reflect the societal desire to achieve certain physical and aesthetic conditions in accordance to the social influences. The mechanical aggression and spatial linearity that echoes with the archaic notions of impelling bodies straight and directly towards a goal generates a mechanical notion of body and movement. A range of isolation machines that limit the amount of self-induced movement produce the same automatic and mindless motion that not only isolates muscles within the body, but also isolates the body from its mind, and from its surroundings and others. While seemingly open to everybody with the potential of achieving empowerment and self-actualization, the ethnographical and phenomenological conditions of the gym create a socially complex setting that establishes its own set of body cultures and social hierarchies. The contradicting cultures and conditions of the gym that leaves little to no room for learning, self-exploration and playful social interactions is often what makes it psychologically inaccessible to many members that value a synergy of the mind and body through free movements and a dynamic experience.

With the corporeal impact of fitness transmitting beyond the tangible physicality of architecture, a rewiring of the concept through the integration of play and all of its defined notions explore much of what exercising for well-being can truly look like. The objective of the thesis is to provide a speculative proposal that dismantles the modern attitudes, beliefs and misconceptions instilled within the act of physical exercise by cultivating a nurturing environment that embodies the three processes of play; those being exploration, mastery, and composure. My approach of bringing fitness "outside" its box and integrating the various functions of gym programs into an existing outdoor landscape provides the malleable environment required to serve a range of physical and emotional needs of its users. Through the integration of a series of physical and intellectual hierarchies within a natural environment that fosters a curious and playful state of mind, Fitness of Play challenges the existing programs and architecture of modern gyms to provide a completely inclusive place that is psychologically and socially accessible for all.

Contributing to an aesthetically dynamic experience, the physical and intellectual hierarchies that manifest through various programs, colours, materials and intellectual stimulants are united by the primary language of curves. Curvatures produce a series of ordered complexities, prospect and refuge, and enticement and peril; all conditions that reciprocate to the natural form of the human body, movement and environment. Designed to embrace the changing seasons, the new environment invigorates a spectrum of energies that establish a range of playful experiences throughout the year.

The opportunity for users to customize interactions that uniquely cater toward their own preference and needs attract visitors of all ages and backgrounds on a day-to-day scale. Such a setting also motivates visitors to move from one condition to the other; from refuge to prospect, enticement to peril, and through a series of ordered complexities. In this light, movement through the park will always satisfy the changing preferences and needs of the users, activating a dynamicity of emotions and a holistic experience that targets the body and mind simultaneously. 'Playful fitness' under such dynamic conditions becomes an activity that occurs spontaneously to foster exploration, improve interpersonal connections, constitute a healthy community and ultimately rekindle the mind and body with itself and with others. Thus, Fitness of Play becomes a place where inclusivity, creativity, belonging, socialization and exercise all fall within the umbrella of play.

By transforming the function of the gym into a fitness play park, the physical form of the landscape, as well as the functions of the programs along with the human body becomes a dynamic sequence of experiences on a daily basis. These experiences promote mental and bodily challenges rather than as one static, concluding experience. Users have the opportunity to push their bodies for health gains and explore what their bodies are capable of doing as a pathway towards achieving actual self-fulfillment. From here, the dimension of an individual is redefined in association with the perceptions, emotions and personal achievements emerged by the interactions with physical forms and interpreted symbolisms within the park. These new physical, emotional, and intellectual meanings produced by such dynamic interactions drives the ultimate desire to reimagine the relationship between exercise and play.

Standing visionary and optimistic, Fitness of Play addresses the role of an environment in cultivating desired corporeal conditions. Rather than staying inside the boundaries of pragmatic limitations to offer precise answers, the design depicts optimized visualizations and narrations that pose questions about the current information age we live in and its influence on the fluidity of fitness as well as the understanding of health and well-being. As physical bodies remain separate from the internet world, Fitness of Play conveys the importance of a place that isn't limited by the norms of society or the dependency of technology, but one that reciprocates the true needs and desire of our body and mind. While the design of the proposal is densely guided by the cultural and physical attributes of its site, Fitness of Play is more than a fitness playground in Toronto, but a creative expression that embodies the theoretical and conceptual fruition to inspire architectural and landscape projects with the aim of nurturing play in all of its forms.







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