

in the air
we exist

*ON USING PLAY
TO SURVIVE*

in the air we exist

*ON USING PLAY
TO SURVIVE*

Written by
Gaetan Langlois-Meurinne

Thesis Advisor
Anna Arov

Edited by
Ines de Cacqueray

Photography by
Marco Dell'Abate

Book design and binding by
Gaetan Langlois-Meurinne

Interactive Media Design
Royal Academy of Art
The Hague
2022

This work explores
the way play can
help us survive
better in the
world we live.

CONTENTS

013 Introduction

017 Breathing Under Water

031 Play To Survive

069 Simulated Realities

081 The World We Live In

095 Pursuit of Vertigo

101 Offshore Wind

Before heading to the beach, the surfer is filled with excitement. They have prepared for the session, closely monitoring the weather forecast and maybe even checking the webcam installed on the beach.

Nothing comes close to the feeling they get when they arrive - seeing the waves crashing on the beach, feeling the sand on their feet, the wind blowing on their face, the roughness of the surface of the wax on his board. They have one desire only: to paddle out. But a bit of patience and discipline is needed. The surfer still needs to

take the time to look at the surfing spot and understand the waves, seeing where they are coming from and how they break. And then, ultimately, they will find the best way to enter the water through the breaking waves and paddle out.

It's a ritual repeated every time the surfer rushes to the water - a time taken to observe and to recognise the broader picture before heading out to the sea. And that is what fuels his addiction: knowing that whatever ocean, country or surfing spot they are faced with, the waves will never be the same. The wind, swell and tides influence the ever-changing waves. But the ground on which the ocean sits can also impact it - a beach, point or reef break

determines how the waves will break. It is up to them to show they understand how the waves are forming in the water, and their skill will determine how they ride them. Every wave is unique, and the surfer, however talented they can be, will still have to continuously improvise to enjoy the best and longest ride they can.

INTRODUCTION

Playing is childish and a waste of time, right? Entering adulthood, don't we have no other choice than to stop playing? In any case, responsibilities and routines take away the last bit of free time we had. But still, every human being keeps this playfulness, most probably in secret, inside them. Everyone has experienced playing as a child. Acting freely without any goal or outcome is essential for our development. This experience children acquire, amongst others, help them find their place in society. In the complex world, we live in, finding freedom and curiosity, feeling comfort in things though they are uncertain and building solid human relationships all seem crucial. But where can we experience these fundamental values when our desires in our times control us? How can we pick them up or even relearn them?

In a life in which I thought playing stops when you become an adult, I surprised myself by discovering that my desire to play never faded away. Before I even rejected it, I realised its benefits and the curiosity, openness and lightness that came along. Instead of restricting it to a limited group of young people, I strongly believe in the positive impact it could have if we allowed it to expand to adults. Whichever age group, it can have a beneficial impact, maintaining human relationships and fuelling hope, as well as helping us when we face difficult and often complex situations. I honestly wonder about the reason for its absence and neglect in western society, as I believe it could partly be a solution for some contemporary problems. This thesis focuses on play. Now that it has captured my interest, I wish to research further its origin and values and the psychological and sociological impact it can have on a person.

I will explore the importance of play in childhood alongside its benefits and influence on a person growing older. Next to that, a selection of artists, all connected by play, will demonstrate the fruitful addition it brings to their work. I will then explain how improvising can help us experience a more authentic and playful routine. All these segments are inspirational elements for my personal graduation project where I intend to create a tool to reconnect us to play. While water is my personal playground, it also is the starting point to inspire change in how people walk through space. My graduation project offers a shift in our movement, with the desire to add more playfulness to everyday life. I intend to work on a project that provides tools for people to face uncertainty and unpredictability with serenity. The steps above are meant to ultimately answer how play helps us survive better in the world we live in.



BREATHING UNDER WATER

Breathing Under Water

in the air we exist

I am from the ocean. French parents, French education, French passport, but never lived in France, born and raised in Germany, studying in The Netherlands. Where are you from? - I'm from the ocean. "No matter where I go in the world, it's in the water that I feel at home, anywhere anytime, no matter day or night."¹ I've always questioned my origins, now I know. From the very moment of my existence, I was surrounded by water, specifically amniotic fluid. My body contains 60% water, and the moon attraction controls my internal tides. No wonder I feel a natural belonging to this element.

No matter how much I read about this element, I'll never get used to the feeling I have when I get in the water. I find I am on average 75 days in the water during the year. From when I was a child, my whole family always spent several weeks in our family house at the beach on the French Atlantic coast. My grandmother swam every day until the sickness of dementia didn't allow it anymore. Before that, she'd be showing the example, and the rest of the house was pleased to follow her. Back in high school, I'd join my mother every

in the air we exist

Breathing Under Water

Friday at the swimming pool. I remember her reminding me to swim some lengths when I was spending most of my time fooling around and "swimming" on the pool ground. The most exciting moments in the water came when I picked up my first surfboard. Our family trips became surf oriented. I had my most challenging surf session when I faced 2.5m-3m high waves during a storm in the Portuguese Algarve region. After being left alone by the group, I struggled to pass the breaking waves. Out of fear and the feeling of powerlessness as I faced the waves, I let one crash on top of me while I was laying on my board to head quickly back to the shore. The wave broke and dragged me forward. The white water started to form again as a second wave was in the making. There was no other choice than to stand up and begin to ride. This ride counts as one of the most beautiful and longest I've ever had.

In The Hague, I find myself either surfing in the ocean or swimming in the pool. And whilst other swimmers like to float on the surface of the pool, I've experienced inner peace when I sit at the bottom of the pool, precisely at 3.75 metres underwater. So much to say that water has been a loyal companion throughout the years.

1 "Fishpeople | Lives Transformed by the Sea." YouTube, uploaded by Patagonia, 12 Feb. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeJz78dhfZk&t=284s&ab_channel=Patagonia.

Breathing Under Water

in the air we exist

feel-dry

adjective

*The feeling that a person has not
been in the water for a longer time*
“a feel-dry day”

Personal definition

The magical feeling of being in the water is due to one central element: the change in gravity that results in freedom of movement. All scientific rules that have been maintaining us down to earth disappear. Vertical and horizontal motions are now possible. The absence of gravity goes along with the partial lack of weight—a pathway to rediscovering our body. A world with no limit to the imagination, “a world where I can fly, for once I was the fish”.²

When I enter the water, I sink into its depth. I won't stay long at the surface but rather try to feel the sensation of my body diving below and being surrounded by water. Where does this desire to be surrounded by this element come from? The ability to fly, float, and feel so light and free? The more time passes, the greater I feel pressure in my chest. It reminds me of my limits. Slowly, the arising tension is graspable; the brain seeks oxygen. The body reacts and sends out an instinctive signal, a call to head

to the surface. By maintaining the focus and keeping calm, it is possible to overcome that panic and stay longer underwater. It's a matter of understanding the way your body functions. Panicking is the greatest danger to a surfer during a wipeout when they fall from the board and are dragged underwater by the wave. A wave can keep a person underwater for several seconds, depending on its strength. Either way, the key in such intense moments is to stay calm, paradoxically. It is a pure reminder of our human condition. Faced with the power of the ocean, a human is weak and vulnerable. For example, when we experience a lack of oxygen or if our temperature goes down, for example. My desire to stay deep underwater will always be limited by my ability to do so, which is undoubtedly why I feel so attracted to it. It's a sort of positive addiction, giving me only a tiny dose of sensation to make sure I will come back. I am coming back to dive deeper and longer next time. I'm intrigued by the sensations it offers without forgetting one's vulnerability.

As a surfer in Scheveningen, the closest surf spot in The Hague, when I comprehend how the waves are behaving before entering the water, being conscious of it or not, it is

²“Fishpeople | Lives Transformed by the Sea.” YouTube, uploaded by Patagonia, 12 Feb. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Veiz78dhfZk&t=284s&ab_channel=Patagonia.

always a way to position myself again. To acknowledge that I am facing the ocean, that between the both of us, I'm the smaller and weaker one. It's a form of respect. The interest in finding out how the waves behave to understand the ocean better grows the more time is spent surfing. The more a surfer is in the water, the better they understand the complexity and beauty of nature, and that brings satisfaction. All the energy repeatedly put into each ride when they are paddling out, being dragged by the waves and finally reaching the back is just about a ride on the blue-forming wave. Even if it lasts only for a couple of seconds, it is worth the magic of riding, experiencing nature in all its force, and finding harmony between the wave and the board.

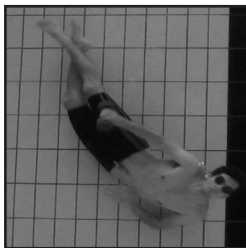
Lift a stone,
 you'll feel its lightness
 fall and it won't hurt,
 dive and you'll fly,
 flip, twist and you'll be
 surprised
 go upside down and
 you'll understand,
 let go and you'll be guided
 hold your breath
 and you'll feel our destiny;
 a human's limit

personal poem

001



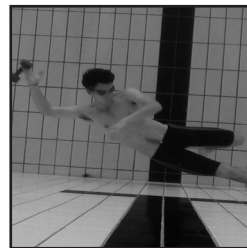
002



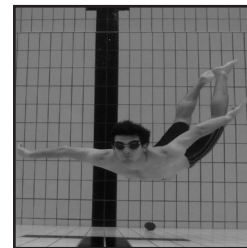
003



010



011



24

25

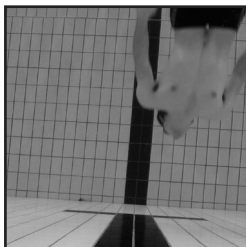
012



004



005



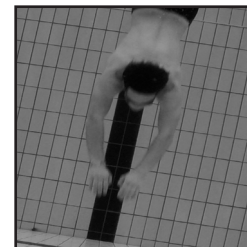
006



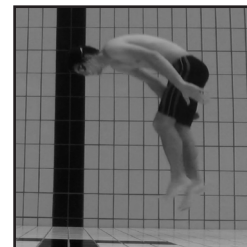
013



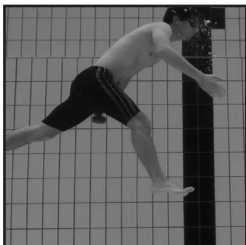
014



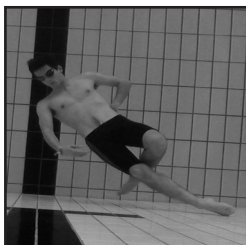
015



007



008



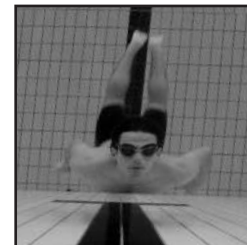
009



016



017



018



in the air we exist

Breathing Under Water

Breathing Under Water

in the air we exist

007



Where does
the desire
to be surrounded
by this element
come from?

The ability to fly,
float, and feel so
light and free?



The oceans define the connections between all the existing continents. Every country with access to water is directly connected to all the other continents through the it. Interestingly enough, this element also

seems to unite us all in a particular way. Observe the behaviour of a person close to water, on whichever beach it may be - be it in Dakar, on the Atlantic French coast, in Algarve in Portugal, in North of Spain, in

Tenerife, in Lima, at the Northsea in Germany, in Scheveningen, at lakes close to Cleveland and in Switzerland, or on Polish rivers. No matter the location and the origins of the person. No matter if people

are jumping, diving, floating, splashing or building, you will see that there is a common behaviour when people gather around water: they tend to explore and play.

PLAY TO SURVIVE

Play is crucial; if we don't play, we die. Observing children who are constantly playing, we don't immediately understand that this rather fun activity actually prepares us for growing up. It is considered in fact a "necessary practice for behaviours essential to later survival."³ It helps "to facilitate the mastery of skills necessary for the function of adult behaviours. Which includes (...) the rough and tumble play of children."⁴ "Instinctive practice, without serious intent, of activities will later be essential to life."⁵

Playing is a way for children to relate to their surroundings and prepare for adulthood. Essential elements of this playful learning process are, for instance, standing up without losing balance, interacting with a person that gives us attention, learning to be independent.... Summarised: the basic skills to survive in society. But as we grow older, the instinctive playful behaviour seems to stop. Why is that? It appears that playing has reached its goal and is no longer worthy of our attention. But if adults play less, does that mean there's no need to fight to survive anymore? Or is there still something coming up that adults should prepare for? Preparing to grow older, face death, or even for the afterlife for example? Could adults live longer if they keep on playing?

I'm surprised to find there are strong values behind the simple act of playing. By diving deeper into the subject, I stumbled upon a wide range of sources displaying the great interest authors have in the act of playing. With the help of

philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists and the supporting work of inspiring artists, I will present the influence play has on a person and its importance in our lives. This conclusion will make us understand Garza's statement that playing leads to a more authentic life, in which a person feels more free and alive.⁶

3 "Theories of Play" CSUN California State University Northridge, www.csun.edu/~sb4310/theoriesplay.htm#:~:text=Play%20is%20the%20result%20of,aimless%20exuberant%20activities%20of%20play. Accessed 12 Apr. 2021.

4 ibid
5 ibid

6 El Juego. Noveduc Libros, 1990, https://books.google.nl/books?id=BsDmmub5TREC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Dance, dance,
move, and play,
or will be lost.

Dance, dance
to be prepared
for afterlife

dance, dance,
I feel we'll be dancing

dancing all day long,
once we'll reach the afterlife,
once we'll reach the sky.

personal poem
inspired by the film title
Pina by Wim Wenders

in the air we exist

Play to Survive

Play to Survive

in the air we exist

The capacity to play,
to have fun, in general
to act freely without
an objective or instant
outcome is an essential
part of human development.⁷

Gloria Collado de la Garza

Before diving into the subject, I wish to clarify the definition of “play”. Many prominent scholars such as Johan Huizinga, Rogier Callois, Lev Vygotsky and Kenneth Rubin wrote their definitions throughout the past century. The psychologist Peter Gray then decided to summarise the many definitions together, highlighting its key elements: “Play is an activity that is self-chosen and self-directed; intrinsically motivated; guided by mental rules; imaginative; and conducted in an active, alert, but relatively non-stressed frame of mind.”⁸ And every time another person is confronted with the field of play, they might add another line to frame and better understand this activity every human being experienced being young. Garza, though, adds a helpful line to define its necessary characteristics: that it is “free or autotelic and that play must be for play’s sake”.⁹

in the air we exist

Play to Survive

Play is a broad term and appears in many human actions. For example, it can be used to compete, or to “passively submit, to become other, and to destroy one’s equilibrium - each of these unconscious impulses appears for the first time in play”.¹⁰ These listed examples incorporate the four fundamental traits of play as described by the french sociologist Roger Caillois. These are: agon (competition), alea (chance), ilinx (vertigo), and mimicry (imitation). In further reading about the subject, I understand that the definition of play is mainly based on ilinx and mimicry for this thesis. Towards the end, I will then essentially focus on ilinx to frame my graduation work, which is at the centre of equilibrium and bodily experience.

Playing “helps a person live, feel connected to its surroundings, and bring about changes”¹¹. A starting quote from Gloria Collado de la Garza, psychologist, in her book *El Juego*, which specialises in the role of play in the first years of children. One of the chapters is entirely dedicated to the “Benefits of playing” in the form of a list.¹²

7 *El Juego*. Noveduc Libros, 1990, https://books.google.nl/books?id=BsDmmub5TREC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

8 Gray, Peter. “Definitions of Play.” Scholarpedia, 10 July 2013, www.scholarpedia.org/article/Definitions_of_Play.

9 *El Juego*. Noveduc Libros, 1990, https://books.google.nl/books?id=BsDmmub5TREC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

10 D. McDonald, Peter. “The Principle of Division in Roger Caillois’s *Man, Play and Games*.” *Sage Journals*, 3 June 2019, doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/1555412019853080.

11 *El Juego*. Noveduc Libros, 1990, https://books.google.nl/books?id=BsDmmub5TREC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

12 *ibid*

Play to Survive

in the air we exist

She explains that
playing helps to:

- 001. To discover, to have the continuous sensation of exploration
- 002. To activate and structure the human relation
- 003. To reconnect to the balance between body and soul
- 004. To communicate values, goods, and cultural heritage
- 005. To open doors to new universes, a getaway from reality
- 00.6 To convert internal damage into a fantasy within a ludic context
- 00.7 To experiment, reduces seriousness towards mistakes and failures
- 008. To learn handling freedom

008



For every point mentioned above, Garza adds a more comprehensive description presented in the following.

Discovery is the first result on her list of essential functions bought by play. Garza explains that when children play, they find themselves in continuous exploration.¹³ Secondly, playing works as the development and structure of human relationships, as two or more individuals need to relate to each other. When two persons play together, their attention is focused on developing the best game strategy rather than the partner's physical appearance. The game removes judgment and offers a safe space to create a healthy relationship that puts aside stereotypes, prejudices, and other social constraints.¹⁴ Thirdly, besides influencing the relationship players can have between them it also provides a healthy environment for the individuals to concentrate on their inner balance. Playing is a natural activity, comparable to an auto-regulated circuit going back and forth between being tense and relaxed.¹⁵ Garza points out that it allows us to reconnect to the balance between body and soul that has been possibly lost. Suppose a young child doesn't want to play anymore. That can signify an unbalanced feeling between the soul and the body, which can signify an illness—emerging from the individual and being then felt by the community. Another result in playing is that it becomes a tool to communicate values, goods, and cultural heritage. It can be seen, for example, when children imitate their parents in

role-play, a game in which they mimic what their parents or other adults can be doing in their environment. But it can also be through passing on traditional games in society such as “La pelote basque” and “La pétanque”, two sports that contribute to the French cultural heritage¹⁶ as they have been passed on through generations. Playing also opens doors to new worlds; Garza describes it as a so-called healthy getaway from reality. The rules are the backbone of playing, a frame for every player, which doesn't exclude anything bizarre and absurd. That detail means playing can drive off reality and navigate through fantasy, aiming to come back much stronger to reality after some time. “Fantasising is playing secretly”.¹⁷

The last three benefits of play listed focus on expression, experiment, and freedom. Expression in the sense of opening up. It allows a person to transform the pain of an emotional wound into a fantasy within a ludic context.¹⁸ Through play, the pain can go away for that moment, as you dedicate that space in your heart to your fantasy world. This might help to see a person who was neglected or scared in another way, and maybe understand them better. In any case, —playing acts as a space to experiment. It can help reduce the weight and gravity we attribute to mistakes and failures. Suddenly, a new

13 El Juego. Noveduc Libros, 1990, https://books.google.nl/books?id=BsDmmub5TREC&printsec=frontcover&asource=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

14 Ibid p.37

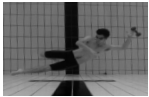
15 Ibid p.38

16 Ibid p.38

17 Ibid p.39

18 Ibid p.40

010



environment opens up where anything is possible, allowing us to explore and discover new alternatives. No matter the outcome, the process of experimenting and trying things can be repeated endlessly if we are in a safe environment. Besides stimulating the intellectual level of a person, it simultaneously influences their confidence as making mistakes in a game have no consequences and can be repeated endlessly. Lastly, Garza's final result of playing is that it helps us learn how to handle freedom. Playing isn't an assignment, a physical activity, or a moral necessity. It is actually the opposite. Roger Caillois describes it as "spontaneous, uncertain, not beneficial, and unproductive".¹⁹ It simply is a redundant activity that produces pleasure and that you can stop at any moment.²⁰ Those circumstances help a person to act and behave freer.

Listing all the fundamental functions of play shows the complexity behind such a simple ludic activity. Garza explains clearly why playing works as an instrument to equip children to become independent adults in society. Nevertheless, the functions of play that incorporate these crucial values don't need to be limited to children; on the contrary, they most certainly are very beneficial for any individual, whatever his age.

¹⁹ El Juego. Noveduc Libros, 1990, https://books.google.nl/books?id=BsDmmub5TREC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

²⁰ Ibid

Personally, the fifth point listed: opening the door to new worlds as a getaway from reality, is the one that interests me the most. As playing allows you to add some fantasy-driven elements to a familiar environment, I can imagine a person walking to the next train station, when all of a sudden, all of the earth's gravity forces disappear. What if the person had the same balancing skills as a newborn baby? What if all objects encountered on the way like cars, light posts, sidewalks, trees started moving and shifting positions all of a sudden, creating a constantly changing maze? The more realistic the play's set-up is, the more surprising it becomes for the players as they believe they are in a familiar environment they know how to control. At this point, the exciting part about the role of fantasy in play is introduced. The reality of the pictured environment defines the frame and the game's rules. Using the example above, the realistic environment would be the path towards the train station, the buildings lined up, the cars passing by. And the added fantasy would be the unpredictable behaviour of the surrounding objects such as the moving sidewalk and trees. The most impactful effect, in my opinion, is when the perception of our reality changes and when changes appear in actions we take for granted. It is a way for us to question and continuously assess our surroundings when we suddenly need to improvise in a place believed to be safe and never changing.

In a broader sense, playing helps the player live fully, connecting to life and producing change by toggling between reality and fantasy. It is also a way to express our desires and necessity to instigate change in our habits, relationships and environment.²¹

Later in this chapter, I'll present a few artists to explain the practical aspect of change. I get excited when I add fantasy to my routine as it goes hand in hand with defining the values of play.

21 El Juego. Noveduc Libros, 1990, https://books.google.nl/books?id=BsDmmub5TREC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false



And similarly, just
as the child and
the artist play, the
eternally living fire
plays, builds up
and destroys, in
innocence.²²

Nietzsche

Nietzsche points it out those that still play are the child and the artist. In the creative field many artists use playfulness, some more consciously than others. There are those that use it as a way to generate new ideas, to feel inspired. And others who put play in the centre of their work. The artists I selected are from both categories, their practice may vary but the common ground is that play and its values have a significant influence on their work. The reason I made this specific selection isn't based on an intellectual approach but rather on

22 Nietzsche, Friedrich, Die Philosophie Im Tragischen Zeitalter Der Griechen (German Edition). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

the excitement I experienced when I discovered them. Their work profoundly resonates with me. This is probably due to the fact that these artists add improvisation and unpredictability to their work, with external elements that influence it and that they have no control over. These external elements can be a person, gravity, or even the concept of the “normal way of thinking”. And even if some pieces are intensively rehearsed beforehand, these external elements bring some kind of tension, an illusion to what will be the final outcome. It is the very definition of what it means to be “alive”. And finally, I like to think that these works include an invitation to a certain playful attitude and lifestyle that transcends the stage, the documentary or the book. These are all inspiring outcomes that I wish to take the example of for my personal graduation work.

How can we re-explore the way documentaries are shot? Capturing life more authentically is something every director longs to do. For Alex Cabeza Trigg, an alumnus with a master in Photography & Society from the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, the solution to bringing more authenticity is to introduce play in front of the camera. In a discussion, the alumnus argues that using play creates a different approach to a documentary, giving it a way to create a more speculative work by introducing improvisation.²³ I found it interesting to see that he is intentionally looking to create a new form of documenting. A camera standing and rolling in front of someone sets the picture’s frame, and it influences the way people are acting in

front and behind it. Due to the presence of cameras, things may happen differently than in real life; a person may act differently. The idea of changing the way you can shoot a documentary from “being a fly on the wall” to leaving the camera standing and seeing what happens intrigues me. Especially because film scenes nowadays are so much about planning and catching the perfect shot, with the ideal lighting, with the person who will fit perfectly. Already in documentaries, there’s a bit more freedom, much more room for improvisation. Some of them push it even to the extent that the filmmaker is only an observer without having any influence on what can be happening. Like the film *Nemesis* from the independent filmmaker Thomas Imbach that portrays the replacement of Zurich’s old railway station by a police station and a prison on 35mm film over seven years. The final outcome is a feature-length documentary showing the whole evolution of the construction site including a plethora of detail. Another example is the photo series “TTP” by Japanese photographer Hayahisa’s Tomiyasu, who documented during a period of five years the way passersby used the ping pong table in front of his house. The most exciting aspect of these two pieces, in my opinion, is the process by which they were made. The photographer or filmmaker has no control over the scenes

23 Cabeza Trigg, Alexander. Personal conversation. 1 Dec. 2021

017



happening in front of them, they never encounter the protagonists of their stories and are guided by what is happening, observed through their lens. It refers to the earlier mentioned seventh point in Garza's list of fundamental functions of play: The experiment. The artists play without any specific aim; they explore, fail, discover and repeat the process. The result is a series of images where either the creators imagine a story or they leave it for the spectators to do so. Both these artists only have their cameras as tools; they know how the story starts but will never see the way it ends, leading to a serendipitous result.

in the air we exist

Play to Survive

Play to Survive

in the air we exist

Ce qui m'intéresse,
c'est de jouer partout,
tout le temps et avec
tout le monde.²⁴

Yoann Bourgeois

Yoann Bourgeois has a background in circus contemporary dance. He is an acrobat, a choreographer, the co-director of the Centre Chorégraphique National de Grenoble, and first and foremost someone who loves to play. Play in his eyes brings a particular intensity to life.²⁵ The player knows how to transform any restrictions into a rule for a game. He perceives adults as sad beings, which is one of his reasons for not wanting to grow up.²⁶ Whatever the choreographer's work, play will always be in the centre of all things for Bourgeois.²⁷

in the air we exist

Play to Survive

Describing it as an expression of freedom, unproductivity, and uncertain activity, all of these fundamental values are the source of enrichment for artists, explains Bourgeois. For him, it's a model everyone should copy: "The power relation disappears from the moment on both individuals become team players".²⁸ Bourgeois started playing during his teenage years, feeling lost about the choices he had to make for his future career. But his practice and works show that it wasn't only a personal career choice but, as he states, a way of life, a solution to restrictions that western society imposes on us. Playing might be a crucial tool to survive in the first years of our existence, but continuing to do so as we grow up can help us solve conflicts and tensions on every scale. It is a tool to connect us again to our human nature. Bourgeois describes his shows as art without media in which "the human encounters the human".²⁹

'Le plateau en équilibre' portrays the sensitivity of balance. Every move of any of the two individuals on a platform influences their balance as they are only supported by a rotating pillar attached underneath the structure. When no one moves, the individuals seem to be stable, but in reality, the forces are rarely equal, which leads to a constant game of maintaining

24 "Yoann Bourgeois : " Newsroom - Université Grenoble Alpes, 27 Apr. 2017, newsroom.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/culture/yoann-bourgeois-jouer-partout-tout-le-temps-avec-tout-le-monde--190289.kjsp.
25 ibid

26 Hahn, Thomas. "Un processus de vie." ARTCENA, 1 Dec. 2020, www.artcena.fr/actualites-de-la-creation/magazine/portraits/yoann-bourgeois/le-dispositif-yoann-bourgeois.

27 ibid

28 "Yoann Bourgeois : " Newsroom - Université Grenoble Alpes, 27 Apr. 2017, newsroom.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/culture/yoann-bourgeois-jouer-partout-tout-le-temps-avec-tout-le-monde--190289.kjsp.

29 "Tentatives d'approches d'un point de suspension | CCN2." Centre Chorégraphique National de Grenoble, www.ccn2.fr/yoann-bourgeois/tentatives-d-approches-dun-point-de-suspension. Accessed 12 Sept. 2021.

Play to Survive

in the air we exist

balance on the platform. Both players need to pay close attention to the platform they are standing on. They acknowledge their partner, understand that their movements will influence the other's position and recognise the need for collaboration. It's so powerful to witness a performance that is about play but simultaneously tackles the notion of interdependencies. The unpredictable movements of the plateau create tension for both the performers and the audience. The engaging aspect of this work centres around the improvisation of the performers. As they are faced with the forces of gravity that create a constantly unstable platform, their skill level isn't what becomes most important. The crucial aspect at that very moment is for them to feel like they belong as one together.

Another piece that plays with the elements of gravity is "I wonder where the dreams I don't remember go," which premiered for the first time at the Nederlands Dans Theatre in The Hague. What kind of magic is at work when a person walks on a table and leans back entirely but yet never falls back? Or sits on a table that is attached to the ceiling, or even moves up and down a straight wall as if gravity decided to change its laws? This performance is set in a standard room furnished with an ordinary table and a couple of chairs surrounded by two massive wooden walls and a ceiling. The twist is introduced when the three wooden plates start moving, which completely changes the audience's perspective and expectations. The standard set-up portrays the frame, which has the same function as a

rule in a play. It represents a safe object that the audience can relate to. When the safe things change, the audience loses their anchor point and no longer knows what to expect. Suddenly, new perspectives open up through a drastic change, and the performers guide the audience through a poetic and magical environment. I remember very well the gripping feeling I had when I was watching the performance. I particularly recall the change that happened when you see gravity from a different perspective. It allowed me to open myself up to new possibilities and dare to imagine everyday life differently.

Thomas Hahn, journalist and dance critic, describes Yoann Bourgeois' work as the theatre of sensations. The amazing particularity of these pieces is that the performer experiences sensations³⁰ brought to them by their body in movement and their environment that they wouldn't usually experience on a typical stage. It's not only about repeating an act from the rehearsal, but it's actually about living and exploring in the moment. Whenever I see Bourgeois' inventive works I feel very much invited to try them out myself. First and foremost for the simple reason that he makes me want to play as his Art seems to be a playground for performers.

30 Hahn, Thomas. "Un processus de vie." ARTCENA, 1 Dec. 2020, www.artcena.fr/actualites-de-la-creation/magazine/portraits/yoann-bourgeois/le-dispositif-yoann-bourgeois.







More precisely I want to find out for myself what it is like to question gravity, to be suspended in the air, to fly through a room, to find myself on a rotating platform. The excitement comes from the curiosity I get about the way I would react on these platforms and in these situations, I'm curious about what it feels like, wondering if I can experience my surroundings in a new way. In the same way Bourgeois's work is described as a "performative installation on a variable scale that offers a new poetic approach and relation towards our surroundings".³¹

Exploring further the intent of playing around with the spectators' expectations, I came across the choreographer and director of the Centre Chorégraphique National de Créteil, Mourad Merzouki. His leitmotif: Shake up the dance world to give it a new dimension. His approach is to combine a multitude

Using the same
techniques as in
hip hop and adding
some magic to it.³²

Mourad Merzouki

in the air we exist

Play to Survive

of artistic expressions from classical dance to hip hop, from theatre to circus or even with the use of new technologies.³³ These practices don't generally mix well together. The result is a stage filled with artists from diverse artistic backgrounds that share their stories with their bodies and aesthetics to create a single body of work. Merzouki's piece *Vertikal* (2018) "defies gravity and combines the energy of hip hop dance with the poetry of aerial acrobatics."³⁴ The performers are attached by strings, but the idea was to make them as transparent as possible so the viewer could focus on what is essential, the body and its movements. The spectators forget about these cables and start seeing only fluidity, lightness, and the poetic aspect of the piece. The dancer's point of reference, usually the floor, is not there anymore, as the strings that restrain actually open up new possibilities; they seem to change and enrich the dance. "You orient yourself in the space in a new way; it is as if the wall turns into the new floor. The pleasure of being suspended over the ground, we all dream of flying, of being suspended in the air"³⁵, says Francisca Alvarez; acrobat, who performed the piece. Suddenly magic was happening on stage; the dance reached the next level and everything we thought we knew about movement needed to be redefined. The dancers can start exploring, whereas the spectators are confronted with their expectations.

31 Hahn, Thomas. "Un processus de vie." ARTCENA, 1 Dec. 2020, www.artcena.fr/actualites-de-la-creation/magazine/portraits/yoann-bourgeois/le-dispositif-yoann-bourgeois.

32 "Insolites - Danse à La Vertikal." YouTube, uploaded by Télé Matin, 5 Mar. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Txx6oDIFaA.

33 Ibid

34 Television, Zdf -. German. "Vertikal - Dance Defying Gravity By Mourad Merzouki." IMZ International Music + Media Centre, media.imz.at/avant-premiere-music-media-market/catalogues/2020/film/vertikal-dance-defying-gravity-by-mourad-merzouki-1760100. Accessed 12 Feb. 2020.

35 "Insolites - Danse à La Vertikal." YouTube, uploaded by Télé Matin, 5 Mar. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Txx6oDIFaA.

Play to Survive

in the air we exist

I see this moment of playing with expectations as an opportunity to redefine what we think is possible. It opens up the imagination of the spectator. Without knowing that it was possible, the dancers take the spectator by the hand and introduce him to their magical universe. The freedom of imagination in Merzouki's piece is central as he doesn't add a specific story to the performance. The story lies in the hands of the spectator and is being shaped by the performance happening right in front of him.³⁶

The concept of playing with expectations once again resonates with what Garza lists. Playing offers a space to escape reality, leaving to the side all the realistic realisations and predefined ways of thinking. It creates room to be able to question our surroundings, to create fictive scenarios with an unknown result. Playing has no function; it doesn't offer solutions but gives a new perspective. At least, that is what Cesaere Pietrouiusti tries to defend in his book "Non-functional thoughts"³⁷, a collection of non-realistic thoughts and actions.

Pietrouiusti explains that the "persistence of thoughts of

such a kind in individual memory is very rare."³⁸ He believes that if there isn't an effort to preserve them at all cost, these thoughts risk "to disappear in a short time. This process of erasure operates in a similar manner to what happens during the forgetting of dreams." The central idea of his work is to show "that it is possible to make an artwork which concentrates attention on non-functional thoughts" as this is a psychological dimension that is generally ignored. Through his work Pietrouiusti "gives these thoughts a space to exist".³⁹

The process of non-functional thoughts that the reader discovers in the pages of his book happens in two parts. First, the reader understands the sentence and then imagines himself following the instructions. Then, the reader realises the absurdity of what is written and sometimes sees how hard it can be to follow these instructions. This creates a mixture of humour and confusion. The ridiculous situation is pointed out, and it makes us realise that there is very little space in a western society driven by functionality for the non-functional things.

36 "Insolites - Danse à La Vertikal." YouTube, uploaded by Télé Matin, 5 Mar. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Txx6oDIFaA.

37 Pietrouiusti, Cesare. *Non-Functional Thoughts*. Napoli, Edizione Morra, 1977. 38 "Interview with Cesare Pietrouiusti." *Academia*, 3 May 2014, www.academia.edu/41753839/Interview_to_cesare_Pietrouiusti_Non_functional_thoughts.

39 *ibid*

Additionally, the second part gets the reader to imagine the scene. However absurd it may be, the attention brought to this detail has an impact on them. It opens up a possibility that hasn't been considered before and might invite the reader to shift their perception of an ordinary situation they can be in.

Earlier in the chapter, I explained that the artists' intent to use a playful attitude as a way to showcase their work was something they all had in common. However, after looking closer at how they come about doing so, I would add that the artists also set a frame for the audience, the observer or the reader to enable us to look at our familiar surroundings and daily life in a new way. As if the artists' intention was ultimately: "Making visible an unconscious element that was never meant to be visible."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ D. McDonald, Peter. "The Principle of Division in Roger Caillois's *Man, Play and Games*." *Sage Journals*, 3 June 2019, doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/1555412019853080.

⁴¹ Zebala, Ander. *Nederlands Dans Theater Open Studio*, William Forsythe's movement material, 18th Dec. 2020, The Hague.

If we believe what
dance can do,
it will expire.⁴¹

Ander Zebala

009



in the air we exist

Play to Survive

013



Play to Survive

in the air we exist

SIMULATED REALITIES

in the air we exist

Simulated Realities

Simulated Realities

in the air we exist

Apart from children and artists, who else takes playing seriously? Usually, it isn't regarded as socially acceptable to see adults play. However, looking closely at the components of play, one of them, improvisation, has a similar, enriching value. Both practises play and improvisation, through music or on stage, have the same purpose: to seek an authentic experience. But to achieve being authentic, the person needs to follow certain established rules needed to improvise and has to have the skills to do so.

The Dutch actress Pamela Menzo introduced me to improvisation in the theatre. During the workshop, she gave us an insight on methods she uses to rehearse and mentioned one of her colleagues. He would find a public space to rehearse his role for his next play. Once, he entered a supermarket and grabbed a huge wheel of cheese, typically used for decoration. With assurance, he headed to the cashier and asked to pay for the entire wheel. He set himself the challenge of playing the role until the end, until he had left the supermarket.⁴¹ I was personally fascinated by the situation he put himself in to reach a more realistic comprehension of his character.

⁴¹ Pamela Menzo, Text Handling based on *The Room* by Harold Pinter, Royal Academy of Art, 14th Oct 2020, Exploring the Theater (IST), The Hague

Seen as a tool to put forward the authenticity of the play in the 16th century, the actors of the *Commedia dell'Arte* completely embraced improvisation. "Their style may suffer from this method of playing impromptu (last-minute changes), but at the same time, the action gains in naturalness and vividness."⁴² Two elements that the actors of the Italian comedy incorporated in their play were to give their full attention to the other actors on stage and to forget themselves to let the authenticity of the play be felt.⁴³ The actors often mastered the art of entertaining the public with very little. Generally speaking, improvisation on stage makes acting appear more natural. The actors need to feel like their character to open up their imagination fully, and the audience can better relate this way as it is not just one big eloquent speech.

Besides offering an authentic experience, improvisation was, back in the days, also a proof of the artist's skill, explains the French songwriter and jazz player André Manoukian.⁴⁴ For example, in the musical world, Beethoven, the German composer and pianist, who counts as one of the most admired composers in the history of western music, made most of his revenue through improvisation battles. Around the 19th

⁴² Balme, Christopher. *Commedia Dell'Arte in Context* (Literature in Context). New, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Pouy, Gregory, "#150 Pourquoi l'improvisation est-elle essentielle? Avec André Manoukian", Vian!, Nov 2020, Spotify

Improvisation on
stage is where
the true essence
of the actor comes
across.⁴⁴

Rodolphe de
Maupeou

century, improvisation duels frequently occurred across Europe, including famous pianists that participated in them. In Vienna, Beethoven's residency at the time, the contests were a popular form of entertainment among the aristocracy.⁴⁵ The two pianists competing would each set the tune the other improvised on. After the famous duel against Steibelt, Beethoven became the most admired piano virtuoso in Vienna. The battles seemed to show the importance of improvisation, especially on a professional level, with the simple aim of seeking originality in the play and connecting deeper to the instrument.

The French songwriter and jazz player André Manouklian recalls the history of improvisation in music. Going back to

⁴⁴ De Maupeou, Rodolphe. Student at Cours Florent Paris, Personal Conversation, 19 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁵ "The Man Who Dared to Challenge Beethoven to a Musical Duel in Vienna." Classic FM, 18 Jan. 2019, www.

classicfm.com/composers/beethoven/guides/daniel-steibelt.

016



the root of it, he explains that in the 17th century, the skills of a musician were judged by his ability to improvise.⁴⁶ Over time, improvisation was used by the artists able to master the techniques and instruments. The way to achieve this was to connect with the instrument, understand how it worked and explore playing with it. After all, “we say “playing” music and not “doing” music.”⁴⁷ There’s a ludic dimension to it. It’s about listening, hearing, and using it to create new music. “When you reach the ludic dimensions, it becomes alive. You’re not following the rule; you become one with the instrument and receive what it wants to give to you.”⁴⁸ Everyday life turns into an improvisation when we listen and respond to a person or simply every time the words we use help us interact with someone.

As my interest in improvisation started growing, I registered to take part in an improv workshop led by Christian Capozzoli, an improvisation professional from New York City. Very quickly I was put to the test as at the beginning of the workshop I found myself sitting on a chair with a stranger to my right and facing 15 people. We both were given two simple pieces of information that we had to use in our acting. A number, ranging from 1 to 10, representing the confidence level of the character we had to play and a random situation. In this case, it was two pilots sitting in the cockpit. 3,2,1, and we started playing for about 2 minutes. I was impressed by how little information was needed to create a scene, build an atmosphere, and initiate a dialogue to entertain the public. The other actor on my side was reacting to my body language and words and we began to understand each other in that way. I felt an absolute interdependence between us two, as our interaction became crucial to getting the idea across.

The aim of the workshop was for us to learn new improvisation techniques. To my surprise, theatrical improvisation comes along with quite some rules.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Pouy, Gregory, “#150 Pourquoi l'improvisation est-elle essentielle? Avec André Manoukian”, Vlan!, Nov 2020, Spotify

⁴⁷ ibid

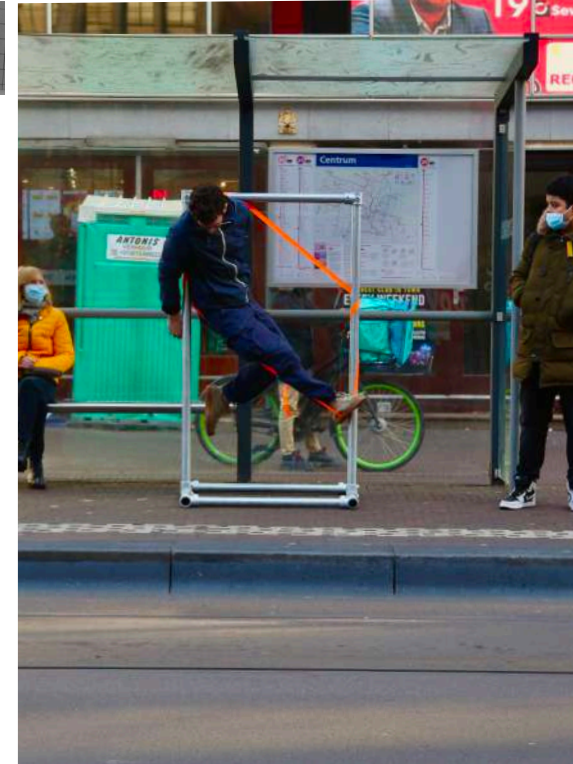
⁴⁸ ibd

⁴⁹ “Rules of Improv | Pan Theater.” Pan Theater, 15 May 2021, www.pantheater.com/rules-of-improv.html.

Some of the most important ones are listed below:

- 001. Say 'yes' and accept any reality
- 002. Add new information
- 003. Don't block
- 004. Avoid asking questions -
unless you're also adding information
- 005 Play in the present and use the
moment
- 006 Establish the location
- 007 Be specific and provide colourful
details
- 008. Listen to your partner
- 009. See the impact of your response
- 010. Use more than words

008



On stage, the rules help release creativity. They intend to set a structure that works as a universal language for the actors. Once boundaries are set, they offer creative space to flourish, develop, and expand your imagination—a type of freedom within the frame. Improvisation isn't just about inventing everything from the beginning to the end. But instead it is about playing within the given frame. The listed rules of improvisation are there to help the actors succeed in the creative process of coming up with a realistic dialogue.

An improviser is a well prepared and trained person, curious about anything that comes their way, seeking information and inputs from their surroundings.⁵⁰ The improviser implements the techniques and strives to bring across their intention. A confused public is something to avoid at all costs. The most important element of improvisation is the ability to bounce back from any situation. To have the capacity to react accordingly to whatever happens or is being said. What is needed is great attention directed towards the partner and the skill to use every element as fruitful input to the scene. To experience improvisation for those acting on stage or in the audience is exciting. The excitement comes from the mixture of unpredictability, unknown and absurdity that can be felt. When the actors start, they never know where the action will take them. No arrangements are made before the start of

the scenes. If two actors are on stage, their role is to respond to the partner; they aim to build a story together. Rejecting information coming from the partner can break the harmony. Thus denials should only come with extra information that the partner can work with. On stage, the actors are a team building an “object” that don't not know its measurements and restrictions. All that matters is the growing process.

The core values of improvisation are active listening, being in the moment, following intuition and making solid choices. Interestingly, play offers a space to express precisely those values. Thinking back on Garza's list of essential functions and comparing them with improvisation shows that at least three values between both practices overlap. Firstly, play guides human relationships, while improvisation helps us connect to people and depend on them. Secondly, play opens us up to new possibilities and allows us to experiment - the same goes for improvisation. Being in the moment, following your intuition and taking decisions are forms of experimentation. And finally, the rules that are set allow both practices to exist and to grow successfully.

50 Theatersport Den Haag, Instant Game Workshop by Christian Capozzoli, 25th Sep 2021, The Hague

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

in the air we exist

The World We Live In

The World We Live In

in the air we exist

Comfort in
uncertainty
is, now, more
critical than
ever.⁵⁰

Cas Holman

Initially, the curiosity of researching about play came to me because of its universal existence. No matter the origin or social background, every child discovers the world through play—a universally accepted action. The desire to play seems to disappear as a person grows older. Adults are faced with more responsibilities and important decisions, they have less free time than children and the cities simply lack playful infrastructures for adults. But play's absence in adulthood is most probably caused by the way society perceives it with contempt. However, in some cases, the desire to play is still present. And actually comes along with many benefits. Therefore, throughout the last chapters, I have decided to investigate the behind-the-scenes of this ludic activity to understand its existence and effects.

in the air we exist

The World We Live In

Navigating through Callois' and Garza's sociological and psychological approach and diving into artistic works showed surprising benefits to playing. Taking a step further, I realised the potential that seriously implementing play to a broader audience could have to their daily life. What started with a simple and naive inquisition now leans towards a sincere attempt and proposal I have to face the complex world we live in.

In a western society that “deeply fears chaos”⁵¹ and seeks control, there is a contemporary need to answer the question “What makes us human?”. In our modern world, improvisation is rarely seen as the services, gadgets and goods that were created were designed for simplicity, efficiency, and constant optimisation. The desire to control everything takes away room for unexpected and unpredictable occurrences. Access to any information happens within seconds. However the reliability of its content is not guaranteed. For example, celebrities on social media platforms can easily influence and manipulate our perception, and in the end we are left feeling that perfection, success, and comfort is the only reality that exists. In a place where all this happens, it is so much harder and complicated to find an answer to the simple question: what makes us human?

⁵⁰ Cas Holman: Design for Play from the series 'Abstract: The Art of Design', Created by Scott Dadich, Netflix, 10th Feb 2017

⁵¹ Ben-Tor, Tamy, Artist Talk, 1st Year Academy-Wide Propaedeutic Project Week, 24th Jan 2022, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague

The World We Live In

in the air we exist

The deeper the topic of play is explored, the clearer it becomes that play, particularly the benefits of play, might answer that question. Or at least it would show what the Germans call “Mittel zum Zweck”: a means to an end. The benefits I wish to highlight are improvisation, intuitively driven choices, and interdependencies. They are the ones that then lead to curiosity, openness, and flexibility. “Play teaches us something that lessons can’t. Outside the classroom, how can we teach children to be resilient, a good leader, a team player, a compassionate member of society?”⁵²

To take it even further, I would say that mastering improvised behaviour and serenity in unpredictable situations at play are essential tools to face chaotic and undesired situations in real life. It helps us put aside the desire to control and instead *embrace* and *approach* challenges we face in our modern world differently.

Embrace in the sense of accepting “chaos to be a crucial part of life”.⁵³ And not aspire for control as it instead profoundly oppresses human nature.

Approach in the sense of seeking comfort in uncertainty, as it is “now more critical than ever to feel comfortable exploring things we aren’t familiar with,”⁵⁴ explains the toy designer Cas Holman. “When children get to exercise that early on, it has a lasting impact with how comfortable they are at figuring things out.”⁵⁵

in the air we exist

The World We Live In

The conceptual artists and amateur architects Arakawa and Gins, known as the architects against death, push this idea of discomfort in their work. Their vision was to create buildings that could increase mental and physical stimulation.⁵⁶ In their opinion, living too comfortably was catastrophic for people, as they felt instead that people needed to live in a perpetual state of instability.⁵⁷ This state of instability is brought by a young, creative and stimulative attitude. The intention isn’t to simply criticise comfort but to seek discomfort as a way to “stimulate the immune system, sharpen the mind and lead to immortality.”⁵⁸ That reason alone was enough for both architects to be opposed to right angles, to avoid symmetry, to install inaccessible doors that lead nowhere and to introduce constant shifting elevation in their buildings, light switches that are only a couple centimetres from the floor and several hanging gymnastic rings.

“Through play we can really support children to be a creative person, to be an engaged person, to be a lifelong learner.”⁵⁹ In fact, play represents not only a strong and universal connection that humans have in common but also prepares the next generations and inspires the adults of our time.

52 Powell, Steffan, Why We Play - Series, 12 Jan 2022, Produced by Amelia Parker, BBC Sounds, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct3030>

53 Ben-Tor, Tamy, Artist Talk, 1st Year Academy-Wide Propaedeutic Project Week, 24th Jan 2022, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague

54 Cas Holman: Design for Play from the series ‘Abstract: The Art of Design’, Created by Scott Dadich, Netflix, 10th Feb 2017

55 *ibid*

56 Doeze, Marie, “Could Architecture Help You Live Forever?” The New York Times, 21 Aug. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/08/20/t-magazine/reversible-destiny-arakawa-madeline-gins.html.

57 *ibid*

58 *ibid*

59 Powell, Steffan, Why We Play - Series, 12 Jan 2022, Produced by Amelia Parker, BBC Sounds, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct3030>

The World We Live In

in the air we exist

in the air we exist

The World We Live In



At the beginning of the thesis, I described the contemplative aspect of water. It is the experience of flying I get once I am inside the water, moving my body in a way that challenges

gravity. Somewhere I can never be too far from the coast, the “safe land”. This element that is never too intrusive and that I can escape from whenever a slight discomfort is felt.

This peaceful and naive description was used as a kickstarter, a metaphor to imagine the possibilities of body movements, to use a common ground to introduce the world

of play. But water is versatile in the way that it can also be a great source of chaos—the source of powerful and invasive destruction.



Due to heavy rainfalls in Peru during the spring of 2017, rivers overflowed and mudslides brought chaos to the whole country. As a resident of Lima's capital, I was personally confronted to the floods. The water masses that originated from the river had reached our neighbourhood and slowly entered the garden until it finally got to the house. It was such a surreal moment when the water slowly entered our home. I witnessed the transformation of a usually so-called safe place, turning into a hub of chaos. At first, it seemed so odd as the masses of water weren't part of the ordinary landscape of the house. I faced the uncomfortable, frightening, and destructive side of the water that reminded me as a human of how small we are faced with nature. The weeks after the floods we put all our efforts into repairing the damages the mud had brought.

I wonder how well prepared I was for that disaster. I can only suppose my playful nature influenced the behaviour I had in such a circumstance. If we would implement playfulness in our daily routine, can it better prepare us for similar events in the future? For example, the day we will face floods in the Netherlands and worldwide due to accelerating sea-level rise, or during any other event of this magnitude, could we say that playing would have been a solution in confronting this impending crisis or natural catastrophe with more stability?

THE PURSUIT OF VERTIGO

in the air we exist

Pursuit of Vertigo

Pursuit of Vertigo

in the air we exist

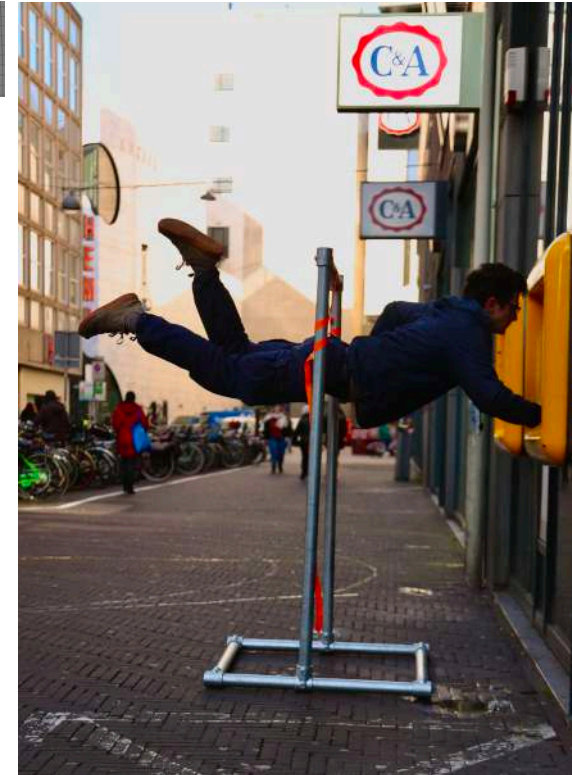
011



What is concretely meant by “introducing more playfulness in our daily routine”, particularly in the case of adults?

Let's look back at Callois' four fundamental categories of play that I mentioned in *Play To Survive*. The artist's works, the art of improvisation and my personal affection towards water all fit into the two categories of *ilinx* (vertigo) and *mimicry* (imitation). I plan to focus on *ilinx* for my graduation project and use it as a foundation for the experimental and production phase. Callois describes the category of *ilinx* as simple as “twirling in place or as complex as mountain climbing.”⁶⁰

60 D. McDonald, Peter. “The Principle of Division in Roger Caillois's *Man, Play and Games*.” *Sage Journals*, 3 June 2019, doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/1555412019853080.



in the air we exist

Pursuit of Vertigo

Pursuit of Vertigo

in the air we exist

Meaning more specifically, that Ilinx looks for “the pursuit of vertigo, gratifies the desire to destroy temporarily [the player’s] bodily equilibrium, escape the tyranny of his ordinary perception, and provoke the abdication of conscience.”⁶¹

How can playfulness then be better introduced in our daily lives? Is the solution simply to remind each other to give it a try at the next playground once in a while? I prefer to start with something already rooted in our habits. For instance, picking a moment of the daily routine and changing, revising, or twisting it. Simply looking with new eyes at familiar elements, be it objects, behaviours or thoughts, by adding a playful element to it. This will open up a space where the “player destroys their sense of social and bodily stability and tends toward the degradation of the existing order.”⁶² Take, for instance, a very repetitive action such as a movement. The body posture while walking from a place A to a place B won’t change because the gravity force that makes us put one foot in front of the other is always the same. Exceptions may occur if a person decides to crawl on all fours, walk on their handstands, slide or do

somersaults. Besides these exceptions, what if an installation could help us fly, float, and feel light and free? To put it simply, by changing the position of the body of a moving person. I am inspired by the position in the water, where we are able to switch from a vertical to a horizontal posture and to use our weight to navigate: leaning with the body to the front to go forward, to the back to go backwards and to the sides to pick a direction.

Through the interactive installation that the visitors can experience themselves I wish to invite them to discover a new and playful way of moving. A place where they can experiment, interact, relearn or even unlearn, be intuition-driven and improvise. Just as Cas Holman pictured it, I aim to create an installation with a “creative freedom to avoid giving a straightforward use”⁶³ to the users. Mostly, it is up to them to decide and to find out how to interact with it. Finally, I wish through that installation to create an environment where people can play. To create a space where the participants can practice feeling “comfort in the uncertain”.⁶⁴

61 D. McDonald, Peter. “The Principle of Division in Roger Caillois’s *Man, Play and Games*.” *Sage Journals*, 3 June 2019, doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/1555412019853080.

62 *ibid*

63 Cas Holman: Design for Play from the series ‘Abstract: The Art of Design’, Created by Scott Dadich, Netflix, 10th Feb 2017

64 *ibid*

011



OFFSHORE WIND

in the air we exist

Offshore Wind

Offshore Wind

in the air we exist

I am not sure what to think when I ask myself if my graduation project will help visitors to survive better in their everyday life. I feel so powerless next to that question, plus it's not up to me to control the emotional outcome of the experience. My sincere wish though is to introduce more playfulness in the simplest tasks of our day, and this will start with me. For the simple reason that it brings a bit of lightness and humour in the midst of the complexities and serious situations we face in our lives. And besides lifting some weight off of our shoulders, it also works as a powerful tool to introduce more creativity in established ways of thinking and behaving. Through my installation I am trying to focus specifically on one value of play: the ability to change how we perceive our surroundings and to realise what we take for granted. This dares us to question and redefine what is familiar to us.

Playing is simple, not many resources are needed to start. The necessary resources can be found all around the city, in the path to work that changes daily, the utility of the objects found on the street, an interaction with a stranger or a friend. If our mindset is open to play, our human imagination will guide us and supply the needed elements. Playing is universal, it's a worldwide phenomenon. The differences in the nationality, origin, and language of the player might be a hurdle but won't restrict it from happening. Imagine playing as a new layer of communication. A layer that helps us understand other cultures, to focus on similarities and to be enriched by our

in the air we exist

Offshore Wind

differences. "If we can play together, we can live together."⁶⁵ If play can help to keep us young and in a state of constant curiosity and openness by learning how to improvise and accept failures as part of the game of life, then I'm positive that it will be easier to face uncertainties. Then for sure we will all be a bit more prepared and confident to face the world we live in.

Imagine a world that takes playing seriously? Imagine a world that turns cities into playgrounds without age restrictions to make sure we constantly play while doing our daily tasks. Or simply to keep us alive. And if we equip our routine with more playfulness, it's not with the intention to escape our duties, but simply to add more creativity to it. Simply to dare to change what we know best. Simply to dare to be the change we wish to see.

65 Cas Holman: Design for Play from the series 'Abstract: The Art of Design', Created by Scott Dadich, Netflix, 10th Feb 2017

* In surfing offshore wind is generally an ideal condition: winds blowing from the coast delaying breaking waves

Offshore Wind

in the air we exist

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Cabeza Trigg, Alexander, When Olive trees glisten, Master Thesis, Master Photography & Society, 2021.

Christe Ma, D. W. C., and H. H. P. M. Ritzen. The Manual of Modern Pataphysics. Christe and Ritzen, 2021.

De la Garza, Gloria Collado, El Juego. Noveduc Libros, 1990,

Evers, Frans. The Academy of the Senses. ArtScience Interfaculty Press, 2012.

Pietrousti, Cesare. Non-Functional Thoughts. Napoli, Edizione Morra, 1977.

Topham, Sean. Blow Up - Inflatable Art, Architecture, and Design. Munich, Prestel, 2002.

Valdenebro, Ximena de. El Arte y El Juego. 4th ed., Cundinamarca, Colombia, Universidad de La Sabana, 2001. Educación y Educadores, redalyc.org

Van Dam, Renske Maria, Working with/in the gap, KU Leuven, Arenberg Doctoral School, Faculty of Architecture, May 2021

WEBSITES

Gray, Peter. "Definitions of Play." Scholarpedia, 10 July 2013, scholarpedia.org

Hahn, Thomas. "Un processus de vie." ARTCENA, 1 Dec. 2020, artcena.fr.

"Hayahisa TOMIYASU." Hayahisa TOMIYASU / , 31 May 2017, www.tomiyasuhayahisa.com.

"I Wonder Where The Dreams I Don't Remember Go." Nederlands Dans Theater, 12 Feb. 2021, ndt.nl

"Interview with Cesare Pietrousti." Academia, 3 May 2014, academia.edu

"Rules of Improv | Pan Theater." Pan Theater, 15 May 2021, pantheater.com

"Tentatives d'approches d'un point de suspension | CCN2." Centre Choréographique National de Grenoble, 12 Sept. 2021, ccn2.fr,

"The Science of Water | Science in Pre-K." Science In Prek, 23 Sept. 2021, scienceinprek.si.edu

"The Man Who Dared to Challenge Beethoven to a Musical Duel in Vienna." Classic FM, 18 Jan. 2019, classicfm.com

"Yoann Bourgeois : " Newsroom - Université Grenoble Alpes, 27 Apr. 2017, newsroom.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr

ARTICLES

Bataillon, Stéphanie Janicot Et Stéphane. "Philippe Geluck : « L'humour est une branche de la philosophie »." La Croix, 25 Apr. 2020, la-croix.com

Doezema, Marie. "Could Archi-

itecture Help You Live Forever?" The New York Times, 21 Aug. 2019, nytimes.com

Jarry, Alfred. Living is the carnival of Being, The science of imaginary solutions, R./OCS, 23 Jan. 2007

Powell, Steffan. "Playtime: Is It Time We Took 'play' More Seriously?" BBC News, 13 Jan. 2022, bbc.com

Van Boxsel, Matthijs. "What is Pataphysics?, The science of imaginary solutions, R./OCS, 23 Jan. 2007

CONVERSATIONS

Cabeza Trigg, Alexander. Personal conversation. 1 Dec. 2021

Chebez, Cami. Personal conversation. 4 Sep. 2021

Dumbar, Gert. Personal interview. 14 Jan. 202

Hole, Bodvar. Personal conversation. 16 Dec. 2021

FILMS

Cas Holman: Design for Play from the series 'Abstract: The Art of Design', Created by Scott Dadich, Netflix, 10th Feb 2017

L'écume des jours. Directed by Michel Gondry, Brio Films, 13 May 2013.

Perdrix. Directed by Erwan Le Duc, Domino Films, 19 May 2019.

Nemesis. Directed by Thomas Imbach, Thomas Imbach / Okofilm

Productions GmbH, Andrea taka for Okofilm Productions GmbH 15 Apr. 2021

VIDEOS

"AMA - a Short Film by Julie Gautier." YouTube, uploaded by Guillaume Néry, 9 Mar. 2018, youtube.com

"Bill Viola Interview: Cameras Are Keepers of the Souls." YouTube, uploaded by Louisiana Channel, 16 Jan. 2019, youtube.com

"Fishpeople | Lives Transformed by the Sea." YouTube, uploaded by Patagonia, 12 Feb. 2021, youtube.com

"Free Fall - Guillaume Nery." YouTube, uploaded by CIPA APNEA, 24 Jan. 2013, youtube.com

"Insolites - Danse à La Vertikal." YouTube, uploaded by Télé Matin, 5 Mar. 2019, youtube.com

Michel Gondry. "I'VE BEEN 12 FOREVER - Short Film." YouTube, uploaded by Partizan Official, 5 Aug. 2014, youtube.com

"One Breath Around The World." YouTube, uploaded by Guillaume Néry, 1 Feb. 2019, youtube.com

Productions, Mona. "Studio Visit with Tomás Saraceno." Vimeo, uploaded by MONA productions, 12 Sept. 2021, vimeo.com

"Roman Signer - Tracks ARTE." YouTube, uploaded by Tracks ARTE, 14 Jan. 2015, youtube.com

"Gravity Art : Points de Suspend-

sion- Tracks ARTE." YouTube, uploaded by Tracks - ARTE, 8 Oct. 2016, youtube.com

"Turbulent Flow Is MORE Awesome Than Laminar Flow." YouTube, uploaded by Veritasium, 11 June 2020, youtube.com

WORKSHOPS

Menzo, Pamela, Text Handling based on The Room by Harold Pinter, Royal Academy of Art, 14th Oct 2020, Exploring the Theater (IST), The Hague

Ploetz, Susan. Live Action Role Play, Individual Study Track, Royal Academy of Art, Sept-Dec 2021, The Hague

Theatersport Den Haag, Instant Game Workshop by Christian Capozzoli, 25th Sep 2021, The Hague

Willems, Rogier, Exploring the Theater, Individual Study Track, Royal Academy of Art, Sep-Dec 2020, The Hague

Zebala, Ander. Nederlands Dans Theater Open Studio, William Forsythe's movement material, 18th Dec. 2020, The Hague.

PERFORMANCES

Bio, directed by Mickael Chetrit, Very Good Show & Eux Compagnie d'Improvisation, performed by Eux Compagnie, Théâtre Trévis, 19 Jan. 2022, Paris.

106 107

I wonder where the dreams I don't remember go. Choreographed by Yoann Bourgeois, performed by Nederlands Dans Theater 1, 3 Dec 2020, Online, The Hague.

Symbiosis, Created by Polymorf, International Documentary Festival Amsterdam, Eye Filmmuseum, 20 November 2021, Amsterdam.

Woven State. Choreographed by William Forsythe, performed by Nederlands Dans Theater 1, 3 Dec 2021, Amare, The Hague.

PODCASTS

Powell, Steffan, Why We Play - Series, 12 Jan 2022, Produced by Amelia Parker, BBC Sounds, bbc.com

Pouy, Gregory, "#150 Pourquoi l'improvisation est-elle essentielle? Avec André Manoukian", Vlan!, Nov 2020, Spotify.

Vedantam, Shankar. Work 2.0: Life, Interrupted. Hidden Brain, Nov. 2021, Spotify.

West, Stephen. Episode #155 Emil Cioran - Absurdity and Nothingness, Philosophize This!, Jul. 2021, Spotify.

APPS

Rimini Apparat GbR. The Walks, 3.2, 19 Jul 2021, rimini-protokoll.de, thewalks.page.link/ios.

in the air we exist

Bibliography

Bibliography

in the air we exist

LECTURES

Ben-Tor, Tamy, Artist Talk, 1st Year Academy-Wide Propaedeutic Project Week, 24th Jan 2022, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague

Fudakowski, Kasia. Artist Talk, 1st Year Academy-Wide Propaedeutic Project Week, 24th Jan 2022, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague
Habjouga, Tanya. Artist Talk, 1st Year Academy-Wide Propaedeutic Project Week, 24th Jan 2022, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague

Seger, Lieven. Artist Talk, 1st Year Academy-Wide Propaedeutic Project Week, 24th Jan 2022, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague

Van Dam, Renske Maria. Working With/In the Gap: Japan-ness in Architecture of Experience, PhD Public Defense, Leuven, 24 June 2021, KU Leuven

IMAGES

In order of appearance:

"Ama." Les films engloutis, 2018
lesfilmsengloutis.com.

"Celui Qui Tombe." Centre Choréographique National de Grenoble, 2014, ccn2.fr

Rezvani, Rahi. "I Wonder Where the Dreams I Don't Remember Go." Nederlands Dans Theater, 2020, ndt.nl.

Philippe, Laurent. "Vertikal." Centre Choréographique National Creteil & Val De Marne, 2018, ccncreteil.com.

"The interior of the Reversible Destiny Office." Arakawa and Madeline Gins, "Site of Reversible Destiny, 2019, reversibledestiny.org

"Bill Viola – The Raft, May 2004 video/sound installation." Public Delivery, 2021, publicdelivery.org

Special thanks to:

Ma XiaoYao, Samriddhi Ghattak,
Jeroen Meijer, Marco Dell'Abatte
for your inspiring and warm
presence. All fellow IMD peers.

Janine Huizenga, for your trust and
care. Anna Arov, for your patience
and guidance throughout the past
three years. Florian Mecklen-
burg, Lyndsey Housden, Adriaan
Wormgoor for shared knowledge
and time.

Ines de Cacqueray for meticulous
proofreading. Soma Wonglamdab
for the technical insights.

Gert Dumbar for taking humour
and playfulness seriously.

Printed & bound at Royal Academy
of Art in The Hague, Netherlands
February 2022

Typefaces
Akkurat by Laurenz Brunner
Lyon Text by Kai Bernau

Printed on Rebello paper - 100g/m²
Tintoretto - 200/m²

in the air we exist