

# VERTIPLAYGROUNDSCHOOL

## PLAY

These days, with smartphones, flexible work options, cloud storage and our increasing mobility it seems that work has invaded every aspect of our lives. What used to be considered the bedroom is now an office, what used to be a leisurely afternoon at a café is now a meeting, what used to be public space is now a convention center...Far from liberation, however, this invasion increasingly looks like submission. Where are the spaces for creativity? For dreaming?

What we are missing, many think, is the space to play. The urge to play of course begins with children. In previous eras, architects found inspiration in design of play spaces for children, from the Bauhaus and Corbusier during the Modernist movement to post war pioneers such as Team Ten's Aldo van Eyck and the "Adventure Playground" movement in Europe, American designers and artists such as Louis Kahn and Isamu Noguchi in the 1970's. Today, architects like David Rockwell, Capitein Roodnat in the Netherlands, Snohetta, Elemental, Tashiko Horiuchi, among others are continuing that tradition.

We are also in our own work always inspired by designing spaces for children, whether they are in school, at play...or even just accompanying their parents parking on a parking garage! We believe that in play lies the antidote to a banal environment primarily defined through working...and that architects can use play as a means to imagine more radical and immersive public experiences.

For children, however, play is something more serious. Play is the primary means by which children learn and discover their place in the world. Designing specifically for play means recreating aspects of the world that children can both experience and be actively engaged in changing. A good play space is a microcosm of the world itself, providing and combining many different types of spaces, materials, ages, surfaces and equipment.



Nigel Henderson - Children Playing on Chisenhale Road c1949



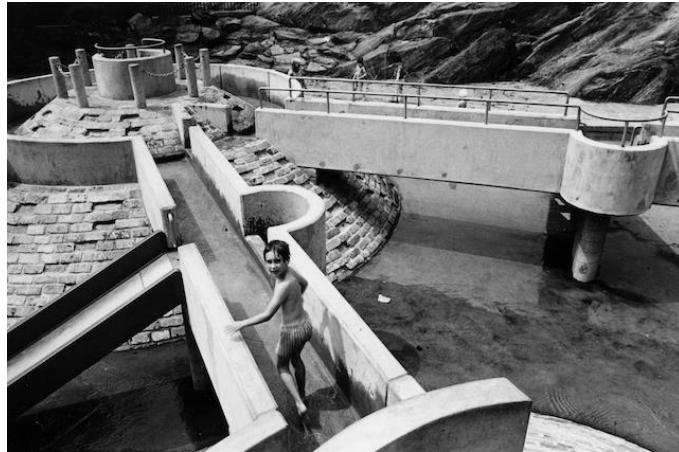
Aldo van Eyck, playground in Amsterdam void left by WWII



Snohetta - Swarovski Kristallwelten, 2015

## **PlayGROUND**

For this studio we will begin with the design of a playground, working together with Richard Dattner – one of the best known “young turks” of playground design in New York City in the 1970’s. Richard will work with us to understand what makes a great playground, and also share his thoughts on play equipment. We will visit playgrounds and make observations. We will study the way that earlier architects, artists and designers imagined play spaces, and how people are looking at them today.



Water Playground, Central Park. Richard Dattner 1972

We will design for the East Village, still one of New York’s most creative neighborhoods, but also one in which its primary occupants are aging and raising families. Tomkins Square park, known for its radical past, now hosts three playgrounds. That will be our first site.

## **VERTIplayground**

And just when things are getting cozy and comfortably situated on the ground, we are going to take the playground into its urban future, turning things literally on their head and creating a vertical urban playground for a site on the edge of Thompkins Square. We will start to think about play in section – spaces can be connected with slides, ziplines, netting, climbing walls, auditoria etc.

## **VertiplaygroundSCHOOL**

This vertical playground will form the basis for the final design problem, the creation of a preschool entirely based on notions and spaces for play. This school will use the same site, but integrate programmatic elements such as indoor classrooms, spaces for teachers and parents etc. The emphasis will be on creating a new school typology based on play, but also on creating entirely unimagined new types of spatial and sectional experiences. We are going to reinvent the future! It will be a lot of WORK, but also a lot of PLAY.

## TECHNICALITIES

For the first two weeks students will work through an intensive session of research and investigation through the design of a playground. Students will be asked to visit a series of playgrounds in the city and document the observations via photography and video; each student will develop a playground design, and then turned vertically through a series of spatial explorations. Through this last exercise students will find the site in the city, study its context and embark a design trajectory of their VeritplaygroundSCHOOL. The studio will be structured through a series of assignments and pin ups/discussions in which students will present design evolutions via drawings and physical models. Supporting readings will be distributed along the semester with each assignment and discussed during class.

The VertiplaygroundSCHOOL studio will be taught jointly by Dan Wood and Maurizio Bianchi Mattioli, with assistance from Nidi Kacholia. Dan Wood is the co-founder, with Amale Andraos, of WORKac in New York City, an award-winning practice that operates at the edges of the discipline and in collaboration with other fields to explore and re-invent the many intersections between architecture and the "everything else." Maurizio Bianchi Mattioli is a Senior Associate at WORKac and has jointly thought design studios for the past 4 years. Nidi Kacholia is a recent graduate of the GSAPP. On June 2nd we will have a special presentation by Richard Dattner, founder of Dattner Architects and author of *Design for Play* and *Civil Architecture –The New Public Infrastructure*. Richard will participate in the Midterm and Final Reviews.

Dan Wood and Maurizio will lead the studio and one of us will be at every studio, for reviews and available via email.

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## SCHEDULE

### Week 1

May 30, June 1  
June 1  
Studio introduction  
Assignment 1 - **PLAY**

### Week 2

June 4, 6, 8  
June 4  
Presentation by Richard Dattner  
Student Research Video Presentations  
Assignment 2 – **PlayGROUND**

### Week 3

June 11, 13, 15  
June 11 Pin Up  
June 15 Assignment 3 – **VERTIplayground**

### Week 4 June 18, 20, 22

June 18 Pin UP  
20,22 Descrits

### Week 5 June 25, 27, 29

June 25  
Pin Up  
Assignment 4 – **Vertiplayground-SCHOOL**  
June 27,29 Descrits

### Week 6 July 3, 6

**July 3 – MIDTERM REVIEW**  
July 6 Descrits

### Week 8 July 9, 11, 13

July 9 – Pin UP  
July 11,13 Descrits

### Week 8

July 16, 18, 20  
Final Design

### Week 9

July 23, 25, 27  
July 23 Final Presentation Pin Up mock up

### Week 10

August 1  
**August 1 - FINAL REVIEW**

**READINGS & REFERENCES.**

*Additional readings will be provided per assignment.*

Dattner, Richard. (1974) *Design for Play*. The MIT Press.

Bangtsson, Arvid (1972) *Adventure Playgrounds*. HarperCollins Distribution Services

Juliet Kinchin and Aidan OConnor. (2012) *Century of Design, Growing by Design 1900 – 2000*. MoMa

Le Corbusier. (1968) *The Nursery Schools*. The Orion Press

Novak, Anja. Wilken, Debbie. Van Eyck, Aldo. (2002) *Aldo Van Eyck: Designing For Children, Playgrounds*. NAI Publishers, The Netherlands.

The playground project. <http://www.architektur fuer kinder.ch/>

Van Eyck, Aldo. (2006) *Aldo Van Eyck: Writings*. Sun Publishers. The Netherlands.