

Chapter 6: SoundPlay: A Sonic Experience of Digital Loose Parts

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2. “Concrete Cloud Nine” by David Shull

Cold, hard concrete ground enclosed by a metal fence sounds more like a prison than a place for a child to play, but I grew up on the tennis courts and through my imagination, they were anything I wanted them to be. Some days the courts were a deserted island where I had to attempt to survive, and yet some days they were a crowded, smelly pirate ship where I was the captain. The tennis courts were a place of freedom even though I was practically in a cage. I would go on the courts without a tennis racket or a ball, I wouldn't even need them. I went to the courts just to run around and use my thoughts as my guide for the day while my sister was hard at work with her coach. My mother would stay on the outside of the cage, and I was free to do whatever I wanted. The tennis courts were also a place where I would go to rebel. If I heard shouts from my mother or any other adults when I climbed up the fence pretending to be climbing Mount Everest or when I would steal tennis balls to use as bombs to throw at my enemies, I would pretend I didn't hear them and keep having fun. The tennis courts were my hangout spot, my paradise, and in my imagination, they were my true home. My sister, who is 5 years older than me, was consistently on the same court with me, but yet we had totally different experiences. While she was being instructed and told exactly what to do, I was living in a world that revolved around me. I was in charge of what I wanted to do that day, and I loved it.

Sadly, as I grew older and my life became more structured, so did my experience on the tennis courts. I started to take tennis lessons, where for the first time, someone told me how to behave in my personal paradise. I absolutely hated it. This newfound instruction ended up pushing me away from my own land of freedom. I didn't like to play tennis, so I didn't want to go to the courts anymore. I stayed away for years and didn't think much of it until my Junior year in high school. It had been a really long time since I had stepped foot on the courts that I used to love, but one day my sister asked me if I wanted to go hit around on the tennis courts and I reluctantly went with her, thinking nothing of it. As I started hitting around with her, I started to wonder why I had always stayed away from tennis. I was having a blast, and I wasn't bad either. The difference between tennis when I was younger and tennis as I matured was that no one was trying to control me anymore. I was free to play the way I wanted to, just like I did when I was a kid. It was different now because I was actually playing tennis, but it was how I wanted to play, not how someone else tried to make me. Once again, I was home. I was playing again. The closest thing to playing that I had done in years was pressing buttons on a PlayStation controller, and this was so much better. I was sucked into the game of tennis, I wanted to play all of the time, and I even ended up trying out for the team. I played and I played and I played until I eventually became pretty skilled. Win or lose though, my happiness came in playing and being on the courts that I grew up on. I think of playing as something that you do to feel free from all of the stress and worrying that comes with everyday life. As a kid, I didn't have worries, but I still used the tennis court to escape from authority and rules. As I transitioned into an adult, I used the courts as a place where grades didn't matter, where someone's recent tweet didn't matter, and where I could just think about one thing, tennis. I realized that no matter what changes in my life, and no matter how old or mature I get, I'll always find joy in my happy place, even if it's in a completely different way. Whether I'm playing with imaginary swords and shields or if I'm playing in my third set of a long tennis match, it's still an escape in my own paradise, and once again, I am free. No matter where life takes me, you'll always be able to find me on a tennis court, and I'll never stop playing.