

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

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4. “Boundaries” by Jessica Maroney, David Shull, and Stan Bottcher

In this audio project, three students discuss the idea of *boundaries* around playing: in the woods, on a tennis court, and on a trampoline. The authors came together to find connections among various aspects of their Play Narratives and create a 4-minute sound project.

Transcript

[Classical guitar, “Creek Song,” introduces us to Jess.]

Jess: We all have a thing around us called a boundary. You can’t see it, but it’s there—kind of like an invisible force field. There are both emotional and tangible boundaries. Each one of the following narratives explains the physical boundaries in which we played, as well as our personal boundaries. These areas were special to us and made us feel independent. Sometimes our parents, siblings, or friends would try to dictate or alter our play, but no matter who influenced us, we could still feel safe in our own boundaries.

[The guitar brings us to the woods: a creek babbling along and birds singing above.]

Stan: We had spent 4 years exploring and mapping out every inch of a 3-mile stretch of creek bed behind our homes. We had built nearly a dozen bases and bridges, with secret stashes of Band-Aids, a steak knife, and two rusting lighters, all stolen from our homes. I was responsible for mapping out the farthest section, which I didn’t mind because it had the most interesting features, like a wading area smooth with sand, and a tree fallen across the creek that caught amazing trash any time it rained hard.

David: 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, . . .

[Tennis balls being hit.]

. . . and through my imagination, they were anything I wanted them to be. The tennis courts were a place of freedom even though I was practically in a cage. I would pretend I didn’t hear my mother’s shouts when I climbed up the fence, . . .

[A windstorm comes off a mountain.]

. . . pretending to be climbing Mount Everest, or when I would steal tennis balls . . .

[Bombs burst in a battlefield.]

. . . to use as bombs to throw at my enemies.

[A trampoline bounces us back to Jess.]

Jess: The trampoline offered me a place of comfort, yet surprise and transcendence. It was like walking on quicksand and the moon at the same time. The harder you stepped, the deeper your feet got sucked down, and the higher you soared. Jumping up and down, I could feel the air move past my face as I broke through it. Often, I would go higher than I expected, which was exhilarating, but the best part was I knew I would always come down. I existed between the trampoline and the rest of the world and was constantly being pushed by both sides.

Stan: Whether it was drawn on a map, created by metal fence, or shaped by bouncy fabric and steel springs, each of us played within a boundary. Though we were in enclosed areas, we were able to be free within our spaces. We had no room for people to tell us what to do; our spaces belonged to us. When others would attempt to govern our

play, we put up our invisible force fields and continued to be unrestricted. Usually it worked, but sometimes the influence was too harsh.

An article from Glenview Elementary School states that

Man: “Learning to establish boundaries is a critical part of human development. Children need to understand both physical and emotional boundaries. We can explain what appropriate physical boundaries are to children and how to establish their own personal space and to respect the personal space of others, but emotional boundaries are a more difficult concept to teach.”

[Back in the woods.]

Stan: We had talked about what we would do if we ever decided to leave the creek. Ben was a year older than the rest of us, and he was heading to high school in a week. He was a “high schooler” now, and “high schoolers” didn’t do these sort of childish things. We decided that we didn’t want anyone to be able to find our bases, so burning the maps seemed the only course of action.

David: My sister was always on the same court as me, but her experience was different. She was being told exactly what to do by an instructor while I was living in a world that revolved around me. I started taking lessons too, 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.

[Kids playing and jumping on the trampoline.]

Jess: Gradually, my trampoline found itself fostering the feet of my friends and neighbors who would come to jump with me. I tried to ignore the other people surrounding me, but they kept yelling and laughing and bumping into me, invading my space. Just when I was about to speak up, I heard a snap. Then, another one. And another one. I shouted for everyone to get off but they didn’t pay attention to me. They didn’t even notice that my home was being destroyed.

David: Psychology professor at the University of California, Berkeley, Tania Lombrozo, believes that . . .

Woman: “Children need to explore and experiment and be on their own sometimes in order to develop independence and responsibility and self-efficacy. By keeping them under our direct supervision at all times, we sacrifice that, and we narrow their world in profound ways.”

David: It was hard to not let other people influence us sometimes. People invaded our physical boundaries; the area where we played didn’t belong to us anymore. As a result, we learned how to deal with and overcome these challenges. We still had our personal boundaries, a place where no one could tell us what to do, where we could always be free.

[A fire crackles in the woods.]

Stan: We sat in silence watching the fire burn down, and the sun go down. And the woods grew dim, as if they were sad to see us go. I grabbed a handful of dirt and dumped it unceremoniously on the remaining embers and stomped them out.

[The guitar picks up again.]

David: 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 think about just

one thing: tennis. 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 the tennis court, and I'll never stop playing.

Jess: If I had kept the trampoline to myself, this wouldn't have happened. But then, I might have been jumping alone in my fantasy land forever. I let the memories bounce back into my head. I know that in my mind, the trampoline belongs to me and it is invincible.

[Guitar fades out.]

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