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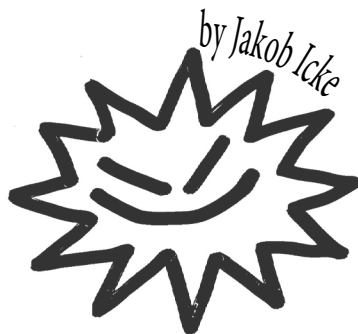
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Sticker Pack:
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INTRODUCTION

This report will begin to define what we mean by ‘critical play’ an approach to design that positions ‘play’ or ‘playfulness’ as a tool to process or to engage with information or challenges in our everyday lives.

I arrived at this term through my own practice, finding critical thinking a somewhat ineffective way to approach my own creative challenges. Play allows us to think horizontally across problems, rejecting academic preciousness that so often inhibits our ability to hap-hazardously explore all corners of a project or idea. Critical Play is a form of praxis; a design methodology that ties theory and practice together. A manifesto to live by, and a method of living it.

This report itself, embodies the term it sets out to define. Throughout I will deploy techniques, media and structures that may seem out of place in conventional academic writing. Writing, and report-making in this way, should inform and strengthen my understanding of critical play itself, and develop a disruptive, alternative understanding of obligatory constraints found in academic writing.

Performance is also an important aspect of the praxis, as the term ‘performance’ can both mean the act of something, as well as the act of communicating something...

This report will de-construct the two aspects of this idea. This is how/ why it is a praxis....

Split up into: Critical (&/VS) Play...

<u>Critical</u>	<u>Play</u>
Critically, it will use this framework to investigate ‘play’ as methodology in culture and society.	It will secondly begin to define the ways in which we can action this methodology in our own lives.

Praxis definition: “Praxis is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, realised, applied, or put into practice. "Praxis" may also refer to the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practising ideas.”
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Praxis_(process)]

This report will explore and examine examples/ case studies which embody both sides of this praxis. Both critical and playful. I will explore the history of this concept, looking at the Situationists International movement.... Looking at ‘Disobedient objects’ and critical play as potential for resistance against oppressive systems and authority in society.

We see this separation of theory and practice in examples such as skateboarding...

I will also look at case studies inside skateboarding, both individuals and DIY build skateparks as well as photography as mediums and tactics of re-claiming space and individual agency within an architectural infrastructure/ system build to keep you ‘in check’ and the feeling of mundanity present.

I will end the report by looking at examples closer to home. Both in speculative design as a whole, and my own personal practice, looking at areas where, often without realising, I have applied key aspects of this methodology to my practice and processes.

I have realised the importance in the approach of performance with in Critical Play. It seems that the term ‘performance harbours two meanings’:
(https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en)

1. an act of presenting a play, concert, or other form of entertainment.
2. the action or process of performing a task or function.

Definition 1: The presentation and communication of X. Its importance lies with making X accessible: comprehensible so people will understand what is being spoken about, in turn increase inclusivity within design and the transfer/ sharing of knowledge.

Definition 2: Perhaps the most important definition in all of critical play... the (DO)ing/ action.

The PLAY it’s self. The action. What ever your ‘play’ is, its this. The performing of an action, the creation of inter-action or muse of a future action. The idea that sparks a creative, conscious flow of ‘doing’. Be it skateboarding, gardening, graffiti or horse riding.

Without a definition 2, there is no critical play. Definition 2, is what separates critical play from critical thinking. I cannot achieve the same results from thought, then I can from play.

To play, is to experience, and to experience is to be connected with the ‘real’ that surrounds you. Sometimes you got to get ‘out there’...

And to get “out there”... is definition 2.

MAPPING WORLD:

Examples of this in the world:

The world [as we know it] is at a breaking point. We are almost (11;58;30) at ‘twelve o’clock’... (doomsday clock).
I write this specific section of the essay on the 21st of January 2025.
As a population we are individual, separate and lost. We are all “immigrants in a system too vast to be [our] own, too tightly wound for [us] to escape.” - De Certeau

Due to this alienation, and echo-chambering technology, we have lost the ability to play. Or feel a sense of self. We band together and immerse ourselves in communities online to feel a sense of comfort, understanding and grasp on both our own lives and the systems that oppress, polarise and scare us.

SITUATIONALISM:

“The world we live in is governed by unexamined and unrecognised cultural forces, which can only be undone through engineering radically different situations from which to reflect.” (The Art Story)
This concept, or methodology was at the heart of a left-wing artist movement group called ‘the Situationists Internationale’ (SI).
They re-branded everyday activities such as walking with no aim, as an act of resistance against a city/ system forcing productivity. This act was first publicly presented in Guy Debords book titled “Theory of the Dérive”, in 1956.

The key take away from this movement was the highlighting of mediums for an alternative or disruptive engagement with our surrounding environments, and in doing so, the systems they orbit around.

We are all “immigrants in a system too vast to be [our] own, too tightly wound for [us] to escape.” - Micheal De Certeau

On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing.” Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into “opportunities.”

Micheal De Certeau - ‘The Practice of the Everyday’

It’s important to recognise that we live in the confines of a system. Systems are not all negative, not all oppressing or agency stripping, strategically built.
The act and praxis of Critical Play is one that can be freeing within this oppressive everyday.
It’s doing something to do that act of something. Anything.
This lack of hypothesis is what makes play the perfect tool for real, unfiltered critique.

Critical play is a “Tactic” people should and can use in the fight against ever increasing ‘strategy’, repression, industry and agency stripping, cap-itol-i-s-m...

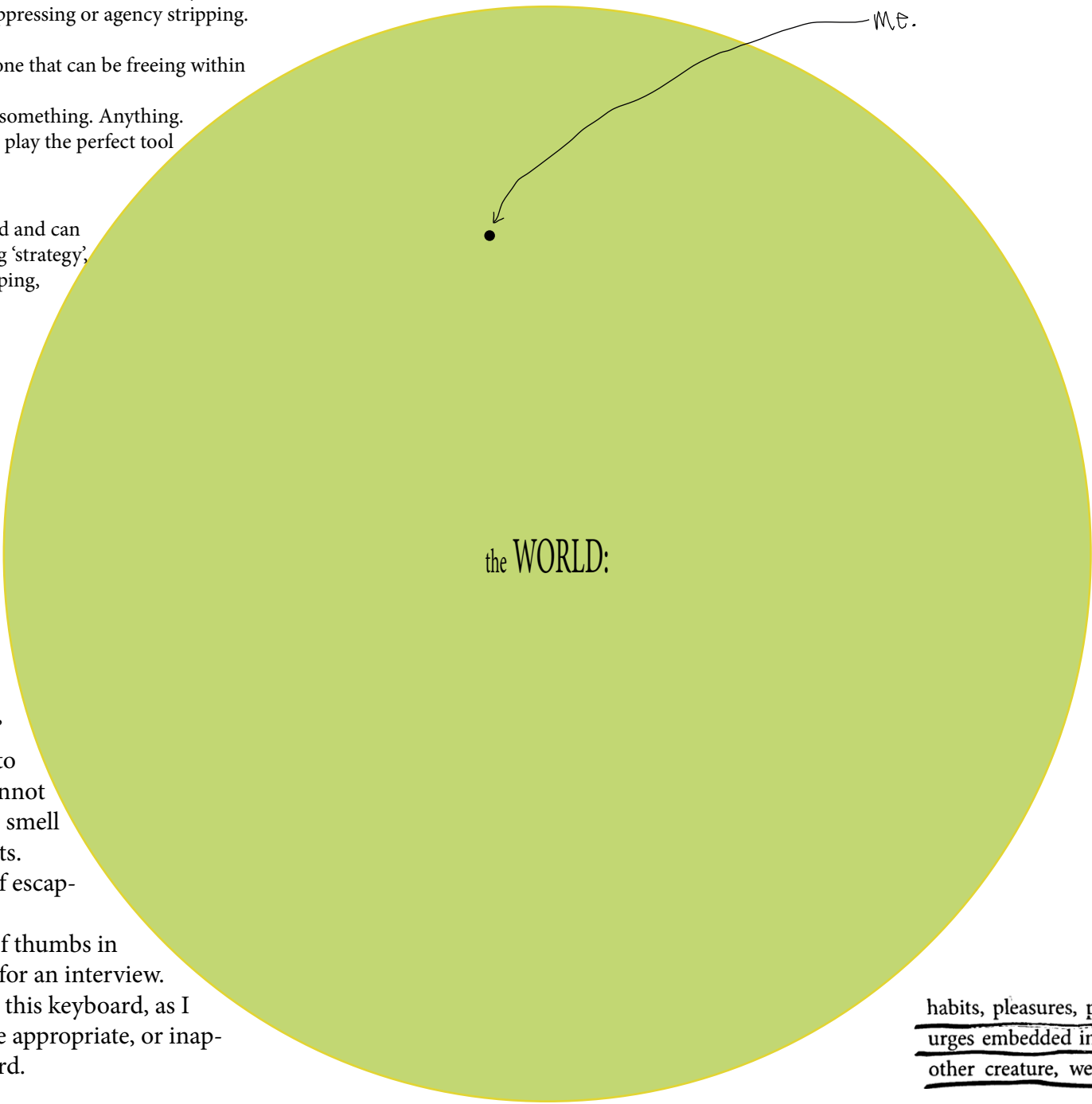
Through out my time at Goldsmiths, I’ve found a lot of instances where people, including myself, have been asked to think critically about something.

The verb ‘to think’ is one that, I find to be intangible. I cannot [yet] touch, see or smell someone’s thoughts.

Only the sweat of escaping a nightmare.

Or the twirling of thumbs in the waiting room for an interview.

Or the typing on this keyboard, as I slowly think of the appropriate, or inappropriate next word.



To think, they say is a skill. One that is taught, developed and trained.

To play is an instinct.

In the paper ‘Skateboarding and the surplus value of city’ it states that ‘play’: “serves as a creative function. ‘Play enables individuals, after they have sampled their environments, to generate, in a rather low-cost manner, a repertoire of innovative behaviours that may be adaptive to their specific niche’ ” - Glenney B, BJORKE I and Buchetti A (2024) Skateboarding and the surplus value of city - (Pellegrini AD, Dupuis D, Smith PK. Play in evolution and development. Dev Rev. (2007)

Later in the paper, Glenney states that “through play we uncover our habit, pleasures, personal abilities, and values, satisfying creative urges embedded into the survival of our species.”

Through play we uncover our habits, pleasures, personal abilities, and values, satisfying creative urges embedded into the survival of our species. As much as any other creature, we have been conditioned to be playful to live.

The idea of play allows freedom and creativity in process. The process of understanding both inward and outward.



Figure: 1

Figure: 2

Get a two-litre transparent plastic bottle / Cut away the bottom of the bottle just above the ridged area / Cut a U-shaped section from the back of the bottle / Glue a strip of foam rubber on the inside edge of the bottle / Glue and sew a strip of cloth over the foam rubber / Put a surgical mask in the neck of the bottle / Make four small holes in the sides of the bottle / Feed the ends of two elastic bands through the holes / Soak the surgical mask with a bit of vinegar before putting the bottle over your face / These are the **Disobedient Objects**

Unfortunately, I never had a chance to see this exhibition, as it was put on over 10 years ago now, however...

I am fortunate enough to have the book, giving context to the world of 'counter power' and social movements through the objects used.



Figure: 3

Disobedient Objects Case study:

What are disobedient objects?

Whilst routing around the inter web I found a V&A blog post where on the 21st of march 2014 Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon, had written about the exhibition 'objects of disobedience' that had been ran at the V&A.

"Disobedient Objects is an exhibition about out-designing authority. Looking beyond art and design framed by markets, connoisseurs and professionals, this exhibition considers the role of social movement cultures in re-making our world from below. Disobedient objects can be ingenious and sometimes beautiful solutions to complex problems, often produced with limited resources and under duress. Working by any media necessary, they may be poor in means, but they are often rich in ends." (Flood, 2014)

When researching the use, manipulation and making of these objects featured in this exhibition/ publication, it has confused my understanding of critical play.

On one hand ... The act of critical play, is an act of resistance.

However, I can't help feel that the idea or word of 'play' can seem insensitive or selfish when compared to the situations in which these objects have both been crafted from and deployed.

The word 'play' in this case, would differ to previous examples of self-indulgent comprehension or comment making.

In these situations, the overlap with the word 'play' is to be resourceful in both creation and application of apparatus. At its core my broad idea of what critical play could mean would encompass the made objects featured in the publication.

However, its only when compared with my own current examples, does it highlight not only the spectrum or 'lack of definition' of the term currently, but also my reliance and persuasion to lean more heavily on the humorous, tongue in cheek way of making.

Necessity comes from a lack of resources.

When we're going through tough times, we were able to put a tape recorder, and play some music through one toilet, and it would come out through the other toilets simultaneously turning them into speakers, which I thought this was absolutely remarkable.

We started to realize that it doesn't matter what situations they put you in, if you have the ability to be innovative, you have resilience and grit. So therefore you won't give up. You will always. You will always find a way to give yourself what I call pockets of freedom in situations bankrupt of that sense of freedom.

The good thing in us can come out at the roughest times of our lives. And I think there's no such thing as a bad experience, but a good learning. And what did I learn from that experience? I learned that we all, many of us, have the ability to achieve, to create, to innovate.

This written excerpt was extracted from a 6 minute and 53 sound piece titled: 'Personal growth and collective pockets of freedom on the inside', by Chance Bleu-Montgomery, part of a wider exhibition 'Hard Graft: Work, Health and Rights' at the Welcome Collection.

An exhibition exploring and voicing the struggle of individuals and groups whilst working under oppressive authority in unsafe environments.

I was drawn to 'the prison' section of the exhibition, and revealed in their innovation, collaborative nature and skill in making...

This skill of 'lo-fi engineering' is one that cannot be taught. This skill is inherently an act of critical play. This is a praxis. It simultaneously critiques the system in which the act is being 'performed in' just through the pure action of carrying it out.

This way of making doesn't rely on 'critical thinking' but the spirit of trial and error. Like the text mentions,

"if you have the ability to be innovative, you have resilience and grit."

So, I ask again...

What are disobedient objects?

I would describe a disobedient object, as any objects that itself or facilitates and intercation that resists the very system that the object was created under/ within.

This suggests that a large part of the objects disobedient quality, is the process and situation in which it was made, opposed to solely looking at its intended , end funtion.

Playful Making:

Bricolage/ Adhocishm:

Methods, ideologies or styles of making, that revolve around the idea of being as resourceful, often making them unique to a certain situation. In this way, these methods of making are an act of Critical Play. They take back power from commercial industry, going against the 'buy more, buy now' pressure forced on us by billboards and sexy television ads.

Resourcefulness:

"The bricoleur is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to always make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions." (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17)
<https://anneitemarkham.com/2017/01/bricolage-a-keyword-in-remix-studies/>

Using only what is at hand or available to solve a problem, fix, repair or situate things. This bottom up way of making embraces the, often temporary or unconsidered time-line of what has been/ is being made. Not made for beauty, or to be marvelled at for its intricacy and craftsman ship. But to be made from necessity. Situational necessity, a key component mentioned in Charles Jencks "Adhocism: the case for improvisation"...

Foreword to the MIT Press Edition: The Style of Eureka

Charles Jencks

Adhocism is a mongrel term first used in architectural criticism in 1968. Born from the conjunction of *ad hoc*, meaning "for this particular purpose," and *ism*, shorthand for a movement in the arts, the combination thrives in many places. Adhocism denotes a principle of action having *speed* or economy and *purpose* or utility, and it prospers like most hybrids on the edge of respectability. Basically, as in architecture, it involves using an available system in a new way to solve a problem quickly and efficiently.¹

'Act of Resistance:'

These objects, structures or 'physical moments' made using this methodologies are often disobedient. It is whilst in times of need or necessity that these ways of making shine through.

The example of the 'Make Shift Tear-Gas Mask' shown in the 'Disobedient Objects' section, as an object or form is a symbol of resistance, a symbol of struggle.

It tells a 'story' that other objects don't.

This links to my previous statement that, this way of making, that which makes a comment or critiques the system/ environment it was made under.

This.
Is.
Resistance.

PLAYING WITH(IN) SPACE:

Skateboarding:

Performance:
Definition 1: Performance without outright intent to critique. - skateboarding, bricolage.

Perhaps the purest for of play. The kind that is unrealised... This section will look at the Praxis of Critical play embodied in skateboarding. An action that simultaneously critiques the environment that it is being performed in.

All my life I have skateboarded. And perhaps, because of this, I had never noticed its natural resistance and critical nature. The way a skateboard/ rider occupies space is one completely unique to skateboarding.

The act of skateboarding, is one of critical play. You don't pick up a skateboard the first time, with the intention of subverting or making any kind of 'social commentary', but at its core, skateboarding is a tool/ toy to play in an environment [often] not intended for it.

The first time you [I] went street skateboarding - a popular genre of skateboarding where tricks are performed on obstacles in the street, intended of alternative uses, opposed to skateboarding in a purpose built skate park - you have that first feeling of value, or ownership over your instant environment.

Having the ability to break away from these pre-defined or intended confines of surrounding architecture/ environment. That which has been designed and erected in such a way to specifically predict and force actions and interactions to be a certain way whilst within its confines. To both realise, and push against this in such a natural way, skateboarding is a perfect example of the relationship between playfulness and critique. - an example that will be further discussed.

To quote Ian Borden, 'Architectural historian and urban commentator', "This chapter explores a particular urban practice – that of skateboarding – for its implicit yet continuous tendency to critique contemporary cities for their meanings and modes of operation". In this early essay from Borden, titled 'Skateboarding, Space and the City (Berg, 2001),' suggests also that skateboarding is an act of critique...

Skateboarding, I propose, is a critical practice, challenging of both the form and political mechanics of urban life, and so in its own small way is part of this birth of differential space. Through an everyday practice – neither a conscious theorisation nor a codified political programme – skateboarding suggests that pleasure rather than work, use values rather than exchange values, activity rather than passivity are potential components of the future, as yet unknown city.⁶

Skateboarding is such a fluid, occupation of space. A skateboarder flows through a 'spot', often times allowing the outcome of a previously landed trick to dictate where or what will be produced only 5 seconds later.

The temporality of 'street spot' themselves as well as the physical performance of skating them, forces the act of skateboarding to be ever adaptive.

This volatile occupation of space, combined with its alternative use and disregard for intent, is what makes skateboarding a naturally

critical act. It breaks through the monotony of such a metropolitan, urban environment, engages with space, noise and time in ways impossible to have predicted. Leaving bread-crumbs of evidence on the shape of grind marks, mixed with wax to create a destructive marbling on the corner of concrete ledges. Or the slash of colour on a handrail from the paint of a 'fresh deck'.

These sprinklings of evidence creates a city wide code, a language or visual mapping of what spots have been skated.

What tricks performed [ABDs], and often the lifespan of a skate spot...

It's thanks to an almost forensic understanding and exploration of the architecture in cities that skateboarding can reveal, breaking monotony that they have often designed to create.

Figure: 4



Mark Gonzales embodies the idea of 'critical play' in everything her does. Whilst "the industry was caught up in the glamour of 'vert-ramp' skating with Powell and the Bones Brigade at the forefront of the sport, the Gonz was pushing the limits on the streets. Gonz and Natas Kaupus [fellow street skateboarding pinooer] were the first ones to ever skate handrails in 1986." (Wordpress.com/GaGa for Gonzo [anonymous author], 2010)

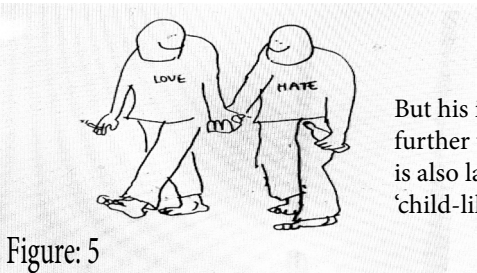


Figure: 5



The screen shot on the left is a screen grab of a video on YouTube titled 'Gonzo in Soho'.

It follows street skateboarding pioneer Mark Gonzales...titled 'the most influential skateboarder of all time (Transword 2006)

But his influence and playful nature went further than just skateboarding, as he is also largely known for his distinctive 'child-like' art style.

It's the lack of predictability embodied in his actions and movements on a skateboard that makes his skateboarding is impactful.

In Iain Borden's paper titled 'thirteen tactics', he discusses the temporalities with in the city, how ever since "capitalism and the modern city have marshalled us into various forms of schedule, appointments, meeting slots, diaries, and windows of opportunity. This is a regime of linear and artificial time".

It seems the way Mark 'Gonz' fluidly flies through this, 'regime' of temporal pressures is one that emphasises this playful energy, and in doing so simultaneously breaking down the regime, and its power over us.

Definition 2: Performance with intent to critique and communicate.
Purposeful (re)claiming of space.

In this section, I will look at the zoom out from the embodied praxis of skateboarding, and explore the potential of the ‘Critical’, when an inherently critically playful act is self aware and communicated intentionally.

As previously mentioned, Skateboarding, is not an act of conscious, designed protest. In many ways, skateboarding in its purest sense, is a ‘selfish’ act.
It is the farthest thing from a ‘teams sport’.
Skateboarding is unique as it grants the ‘opportunity to do something creative, without needing a pitch or a team or a referee’
(Chris Pullman, 2021)

The only person making us perform, is our selves...

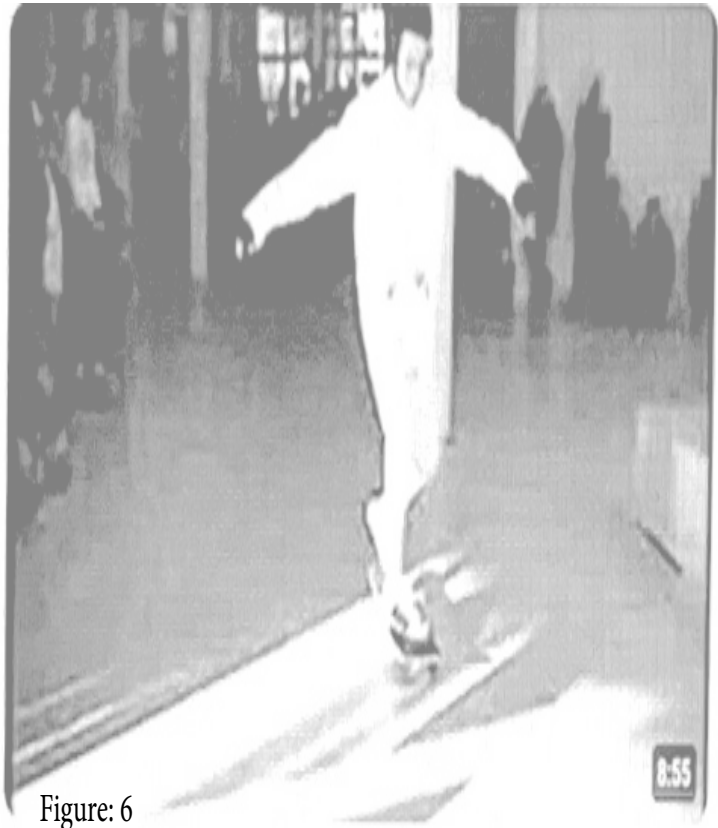


Figure: 6

In 1998, Mark Gonzales collaborated with Cologne artist Johannes Wohnseifer in a piece titled: “Back-worlds/Forwords”

This performance consisted of Mark, dressed in a pristine, all white fencing uniform, skateboarding in a German museum on one of his quintessentially, unconventionally shaped skateboards. Mark navigates obstacles places throughout the space, occasionally hitting them or falling from his board.

This would have been the first time skateboarding has been presented, by a skateboarder, as such ‘art’ communicating the action in this way. He is isolating the act and dynamic movements of skateboarding from the context it has, until this point, been associated with. ‘Playing’ with obstacles, some of which are alien to skateboarding, others more conventional. Again this juxtaposition allows the audience and viewers to engage with the question “what is a skateboard obstacle?” or how this interaction between rider, board and obstacle may take place in other contexts... the street? the park?

This only reinforces the praxis nature of critical play. Both theory and practice are entangled. When skateboarding is performed on the streets, it is an act of critique against the city and its architecture. The systems put in place to stop such a ‘against the flow’ activity to be performed.

When being performed in a museum, its equally criticises its environment. This performance speaks to the ‘two faced nature’ of the art world. The difference that an environment and context can create. A ‘bridge’ that allows those who’d normally turn their nose up, to actually look... and hopefully, develop an understanding.

“Barres” by Luc Mollet: is a theatrical short film featuring various characters navigating Paris’ metro stations, whilst avoiding payment. Starting simple, opening doors, Stepping over turnstiles. Throughout the video the metro system tries to rebuttal or respond to the current method of ‘hacking’ with a ‘fix’.

A clear demonstration of what De Certeaus writes about when describing ‘tactics’. Adaptive in nature, leaning on temporal flexibility.

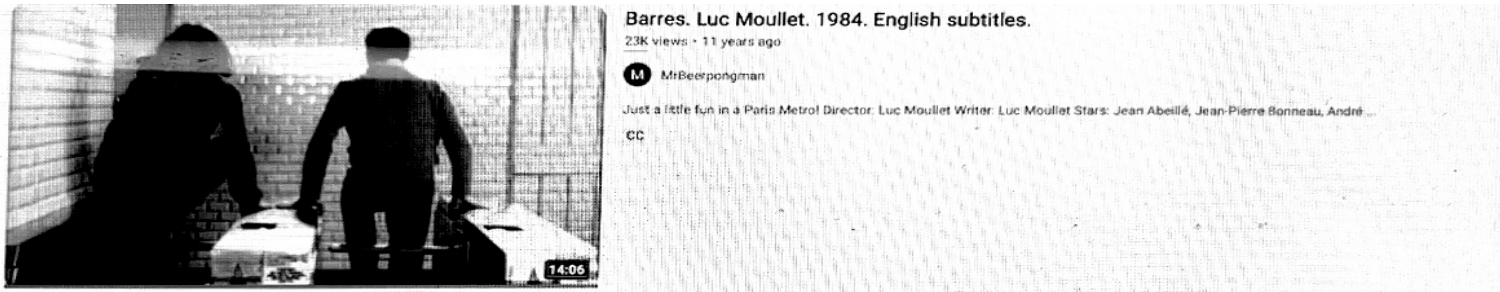


Figure: 7



Figure: 8

Similar to Mark Gonzales’ performance on a skateboard, both actions depicted or at the focus of these videos are naturally disobedient. But for the sake of communication and outright critique or creation of narrative, these examples create a gradual become more hyperbolic. In the hopes that this allows further engagement from its audience.

Everyone struggles in one way or another, with the repressive nature of infrastructure with in urban environments.

But, like Barres does oh so perfectly, to convey it in a way so theatrical and humorous, allows people to engage with it in a separate context, than the act would normally be performed in.

Engaging with the matter/ action differently. Often increasing understanding or presenting an alternative point of view.

The act of changing something from ‘Definition 2’, to ‘Definition 1’.

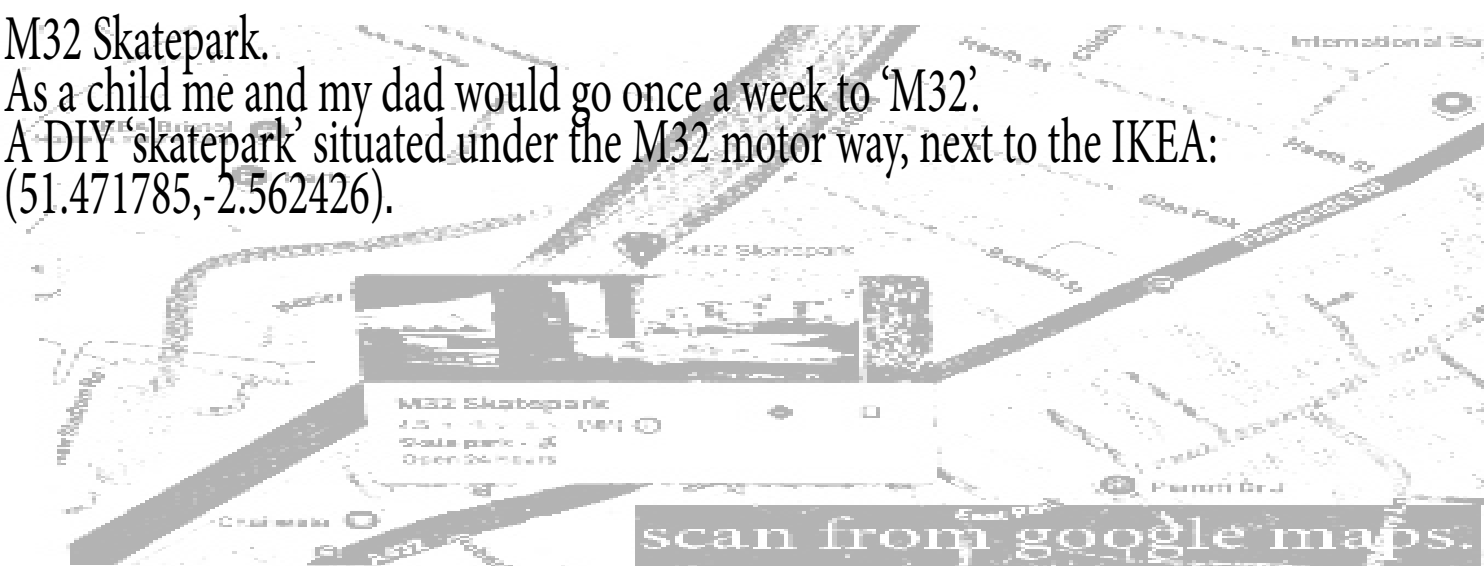
This act is playful...

Yet, when done with the intent of communicating a new point of view, increasing understanding on a topic.

That act is critical. Critique doesn’t have to be a negative, but can also be an act of illuminating an alternative to those whom may only see something one way.



The following section will look at DIY skate parks, there importance as an anti-capitalist reclaiming of space 2and designated ‘space of disorder’. As well as the act of DIY participation and knowledge sharing . Both Theory and action. An example of how these spaces reflect the praxis of critical play.



The ramps started with a crusty lip and ended coping less. There was never not glass on the floor, and it was the kind of place that you dint want to be at when dark fell. However... its where I learnt to skateboard. Its where I met people learning to skateboard. This was my first DIY experience. The frustration of having to adapt to the ‘shoddy’ craftsmanship that this space has been subjected to... I loved it.

As I got older, I ventured further afield, and found myself skateboarding Dean Lane Skate Park, aka Dame Emily Park aka ‘the deaner’ skate park a lot. Originally built and opened in 1978, Dean Lane has been art the heart of Bristol skateboarding, and remains to still be harbouring a huge community of hardcore skateboarders.

These DIY Skate parks harbours a controlled area of disorder. Dean Lane leant into this ‘space of designed disorder’. After a park re-generation in late 90s. This was the councils last hand within the park as its since ‘handed over’ to the skateboard community

“The council don’t really give a toss about thee place really, they’ve left it to us lot to kin of look after the place and kin of do what we want down here really” ‘Dylan- party of DLH Group and long time DIYer of the park: from ‘Nothing meaner than the Deaner’ (2020).

In the book ‘Designing for Disorder’, Pablo Sendra writes:

Developments where all activities and functions are predetermined do not support improvisation and social interaction, and they do not encourage people to engage with the built environment. How can these ‘surfaces for disorder’ be constructed? In what follows, I propose strategies to assemble, disassemble and reassemble these surfaces.

This lack of boundaries to what can and cannot be done in this space allows maximum freedom and inevitable disorder. From punk shows, to out of control fires...

Sure, the council has facilitated skateboarding as the core activity, both through the history of the old skate park, and the act of re-building the new. But to then leave such a concrete landscape, a space for discovery and play. Spaces like this harbour this type of behaviour. These spaces are dying out. They are inherently anti-capitalist, most space in cities has been swallowed up for monetisation or control.

These concrete playgrounds are made out of play. Due to the innate behaviour and type of person whom these DIY spaces are both made by and for.

These types of people often feel constricted by their urban environments and the systems that come with them.

Its an anti-capitalist space-claiming activity.

Everyone has their way of space-calming.

Participating in the world around them. We as law abiding citizens must adhere to the ruling infrastructure around us, regardless of the fact that it’s often designed and build is a disregard for our requirements/ preferences.

These spaces have been designed and made from top down powers, implementing strategies to allow little breathing room or alternative interpretation.

This is why these spaces are both inevitable and necessary.

To escape.

To take back.

As previously mentioned, the Situationist International used techniques such as ‘aimless walking’ as an act of resistance against societies push and necessity towards ‘aim’ and busyness.

Photography:

In the same way, I lean on the use of photography as a method of re-gaining agency over my own acts.

Using special apparatus, you can capture micro moments. Glitches in a looping video. Having the option to capture, for yourself, anything you may see in any particular way you believe fit and know that you own that captured segment of time.

This activity requires a certain movement or activity. Not necessarily a dynamic activity, but one which is described best by ‘being switched on’.

Time to turn off the autopilot.

Ways of engaging with spaces and architecture that were unintended or unforeseen by its original creator.

For many subcultures, ownership and subversion on urban space is at its core, and integral to the cultures origin and development.

These are all claims to land. Taking back power.

The key to these activities, its that individual progression in talent, skill and style is the main personal drive.

Photography as an act (performance) of space (m/t)aking:

“ ‘On Site’ is a collection of photos taken whilst I worked on a building site as labourer briefly.

During this time I worked closely with my dad. I’m thankful for this time spent together. The work was hard, but rewarding, And I saw such beauty in the building site.

A temporary space, ever changing. A beautiful demonstration of things interacting with things. Then humans with those things.”

This ‘photo book’, of which I produced within the best part of 2 hours symbolised the importance that photography or photo making, collating and sharing, holds. In this specific case, these photos were taken at a time where I felt personally lost. I had recently dropped to of university, worked a series of dreary jobs all of which resided in a small town in Kent. A town that, as a 18 year old kid wanting more from life, didn’t seem promising. When working on the building site, this changed in a way. I loved the ache. I loved the hard work. Above all I loved the textures. Building sights may seem like a non-place or non-time. It’s the limbo of change. An old house to a new. The ripping of oak floor boards for heated laminate.

The finished product. Oh how we long for the end. The finished. The packaged product. The marble counters.

Oh. So. Much. Marble.

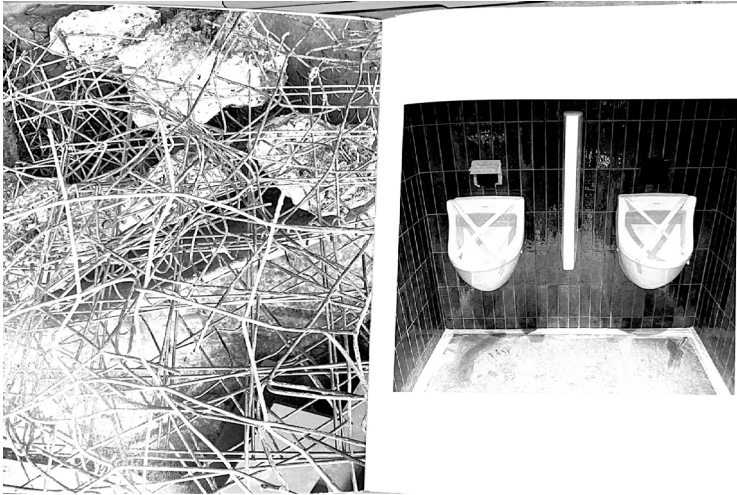
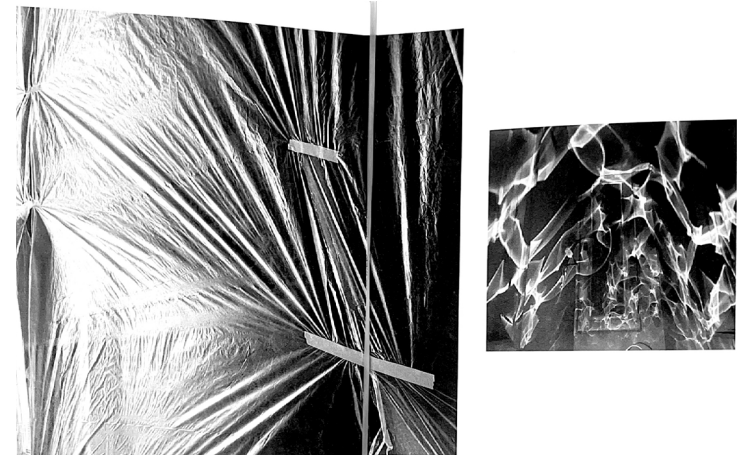
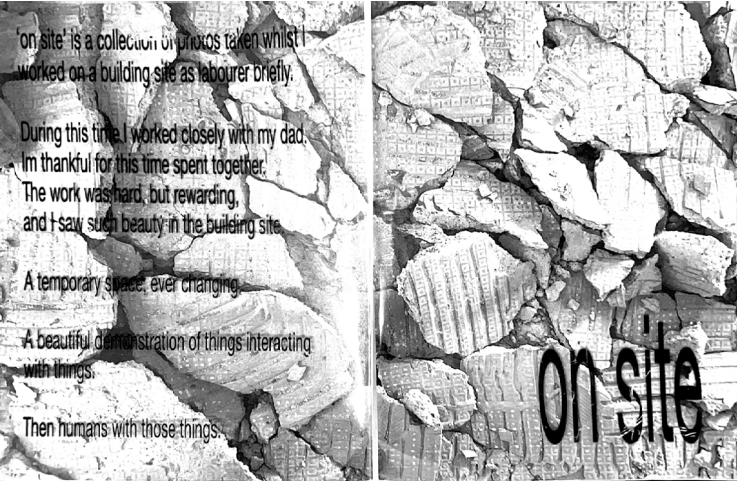
The building site, in this time line of ‘product limbo’ is so fruitful and creates such magical textures. Capturing these textures for me was important. I remember thinking that if these moments, situations, piles of rubble or taped up tarping were situated in the MoMA, no-one would bat an eye. Photography in this moment was my way of playing.

My way of taking control of my position in life, a way of taking or owning my own actions and time I had to spend doing something, something I didn’t want to be doing.



Figure: 10

Included, is a smaller, shortened version of the book.



Critical Play Exemplified in *DESIGN*:

In this section I speak on and analyse two references from the realm of Speculative Design. These are important examples for me, as they are both speaking/ examples of Critical Play, and have laid the foundations of both Critical Play as methodology, and will influence my practice going forward...

Whilst researching for the essay, I found an article published on 'http://speculativeedu.eu' Titled: Jimmy Loizeau: Speculation needs to be inclusive or it risks being bourgeois and elitist...

The article consisted of a conversation between Sara Božanić the interviewer and Jimmy Loizeau, who [among many other things] is head of MA Goldsmiths Design. The conversation, as the title alludes to, speaks of the increasing lack of accessibility and inclusion within the [speculative] design world. Here, Jimmy speaks of dancing, as a way of allowing [some]ones self to negate the logistical and serious path often unnecessarily industry driven methods and processes.

Here, Jimmy speaks of dancing, as a way of allowing [some]ones self to negate the logistical and serious path often unnecessarily industry driven methods and processes.

There is gossip you are currently working on the brief “The great design disco”. Can you share more info about it with us?

It was a subtitle for part of the launch of the Design MA expanded in 2019 and was intended as a metaphor for practice as something fun, The Design Disco – dance and design here is used to describe a levity of practice. The assumption is that design or practice has an obligation to be weighty, serious, logical, done with a furrowed brow. If we cannot play with our discipline then the discipline will struggle to move forward and will instead be colonised by the weighty gravity of lofty, carefully argued research.

Dance is a form of practice that is not like that. In a disco, you dance, you move, you throw yourself around and you go to sleep. The next day you may regret some of your moves, perhaps most of them. You may however remember a few good ones and attempt to repeat them. If you continue this iterative process, eventually you might move like Madonna or Fred Astaire. You may come together with another person and discuss or further plan your moves. You are making something, you are being a practitioner – more importantly though, it’s fun. Practice is allowed to be, and should at least sometimes be, fun.

<https://speculativeedu.eu/interview-jimmy-loizeau>

To dance, perhaps an even more accurate and well fit word than play: is to flow with your conscience. Do what feels right to you at then moment of doing it.

He ends this segment by expressing that “more importantly though, it’s fun. Practice is allowed to be, and should at least sometimes be, fun.

The idea, to have fun within a practice is the allowance of freedom and for yourself, decisions, ideas etc to be pulled and lead by this ‘Dance’ this flow of consciences. People will and can recognise when something has been produced by ‘fun’.

An example of practitioners who seem to have implemented this idea of ‘play/fun/dance’ would be DWFE.

Self described as being “an experimental design syndicate producing projects that look at how artefacts, systems and material culture can offer some degree of relief from the emptiness of contemporary living.” <https://cargocollective.com/DWFE/DWFE>

Comprised of 4 designers, Jimmy Loizeau, Laura Potter, Matt Ward and Nic Hughes, DWFE seem to produce and interact with playful ideas, in which part of the ‘play’ is integral to the creation, execution and participation of the ideas.

One example being a project titled “recreational bombs’, where blown up balloons have had a defusing device attached, ‘mimicking’ the intensity of defusing a bomb. These ‘games’ almost child like are a perfect example of how simplifying an idea and making it ‘playfully’ allows for increased engagement.

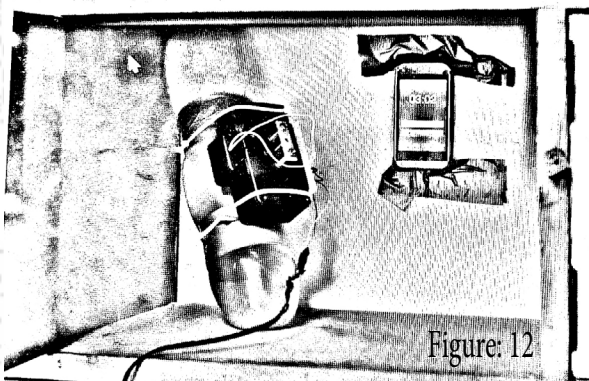


Figure: 12

Figure: 11

DWFE stated that the project was “an attempt to develop tension and anxiety: emotions that elevate our engagement within an entertainment topology. The project has been imagined as a series of scaled, contextually specific events, which all involve the design and construction of an explosive device.” This project exemplifies what I think is most important about speculative design in general, which is accessibility to understanding / inclusivity. The idea of speculative design is to make commentary. To speculate, guess, predict changes to peoples, communities and world wide systems. There is no point in doing so if these speculations, guesses and predictions are incomprehensible to those stakeholders of which both informed the prediction, and who will be most infected by the possibility of truth behind the speculation.

The way in which these design collectives and individuals approach the speculative design world is refreshing. It is the foundation of my methodologies and approaches behind ‘Critical Play’... In which I hope to carry through to my own practice...

My practice:

My current work in year three has consisted largely of making. Making to comprehend and explore topics of research. One area/ object I have been looking into are objects made to resist oppressive systems...

TATTOO GUN:

The figure (Tattoo Gun 1) above is a Bic biro melted to create an L shape. On the rear of the Biro is a motor and battery attached with white zip-ties. God Bless Zip Ties. On the front of the Biro, is a cut off Sharpie pen casing, again attached with white zip ties and some black duct tape. On the motors spinning head, I have created an 'offset' spinning extension section, which allows me to attach a long curved needle into the spinning offset piece, which attaches to the ink cartridge of the Bic biro. God Bless the Bic Biro. When [randomly found] wires connect the battery to the motors conductive prongs, un surprisingly, the motor turns on, spinning its head, consequently spinning the offset piece attached to its spinning head, moving the bent wire round, creating a back and forth motion. It's at the point that this motion is created , combined with a needle and ink, that a tattoo gun is made.

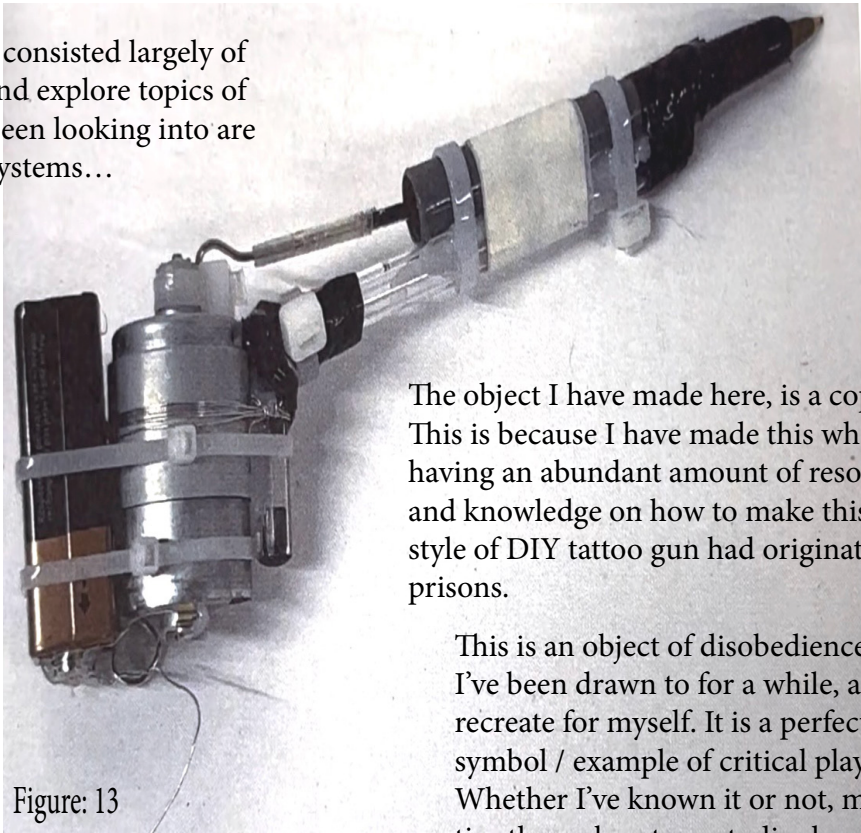


Figure: 13

The object I have made here, is a copy. This is because I have made this whilst having an abundant amount of resources and knowledge on how to make this. This style of DIY tattoo gun had originated from prisons.

This is an object of disobedience. An object I've been drawn to for a while, and wanted to recreate for myself. It is a perfect metaphor, or symbol / example of critical play. Whether I've known it or not, my entire practice through out my studies have been some form of critical play. Only until recently have I too realised the reliance on humour and performance in my practice.

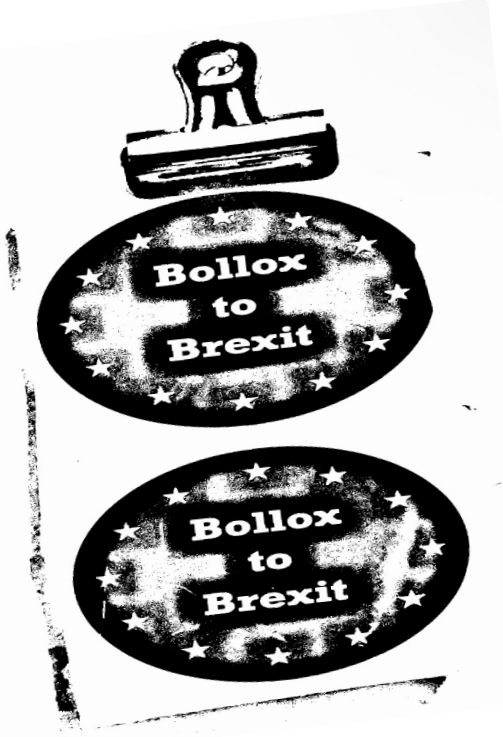
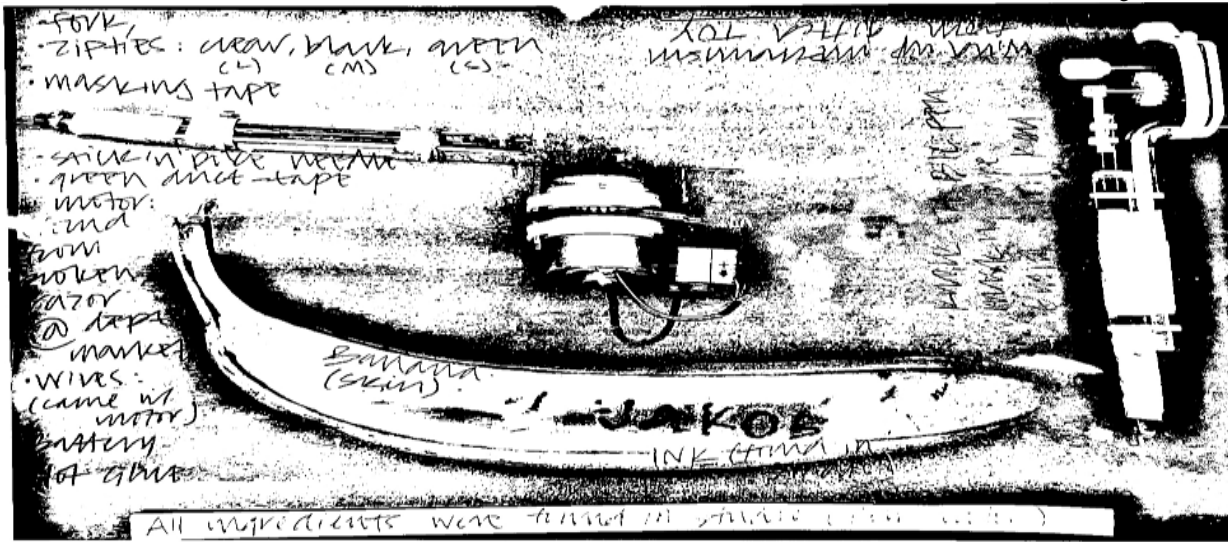


Figure: 14



'Critical Play Sticker Pack One': Stickers as Apperatus.

Stickers are among some of the most disobedient objects of resistance made.

The physical properties of these objects allow them to be so:

>Cheap to produce.

>Light to carry.

>Easy to make independent of any 3rd party production system.

All these attributes mean that this object can be littered around environments, given out at large numbers, and stuck everywhere and anywhere with little care or financial burden.

This ease of large scale distrobution, means that what ever words are written, or picture that is shown, gets seen and read... a lot.

Graffiti writers have relied on stickers for this exact reason... getting up. Getting their name known and out there as much as possible.

This medium cannot be beaten.

Stickers are used not only for personal graffiti world clout, but often presenting political statements ('bollocks to brexit'), personal business details ('buy my weed...') or just for 'funzies'?

Stickers also embody critical play through its praxis nature. Stickers are both theory and practice. They all around us, all stickers have been stuck. By someone. Anyone. Its a physical action both producing and sticking these objects. You have to feel strongly enough, feel proud enough or be desperate enough to go through the process; from conception to stuck.

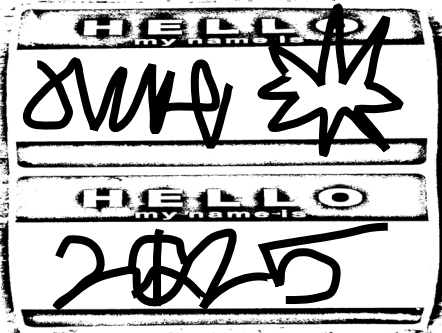


Figure: 15

For this reason... I decided I wanted to make a 'critical play sticker pack: one <3':



This was a purely playful. These stickers are not serious. I do not expect them to achieve any major break through. However, as a gesture, a nod to the idea of 'comment-making' in a playful way, I think they are successful. Hopefully they are a catalyst to make people think.

If only a passing thought.

A second long break from the intensity of passing urban life.

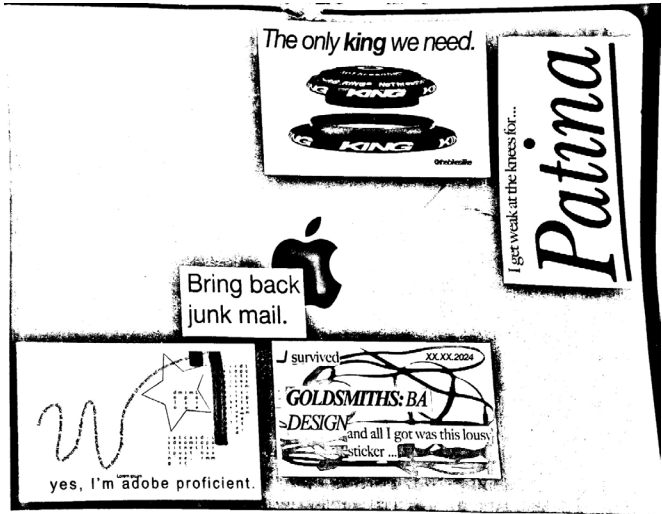


Figure: 16



Figure: 17

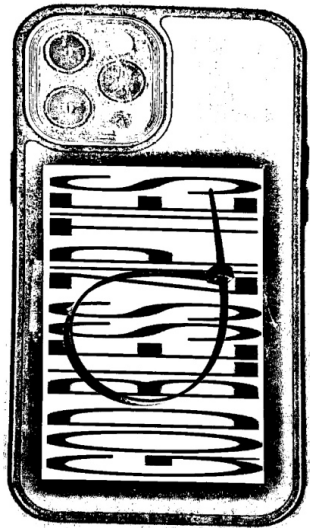


Figure: 18

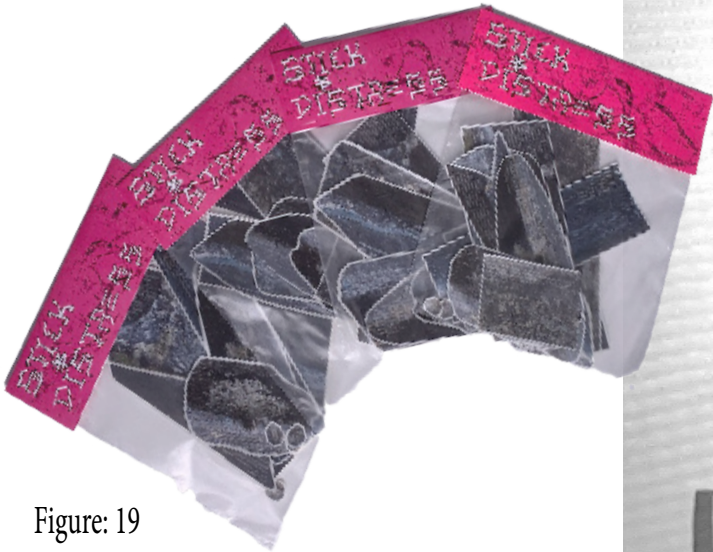


Figure: 19

I had previously made a sticker pack as an outcome of my first year project 'skatemarks' where I described "this sticker pack is a tool... a tool to put meaning, where society has previously been content to say nothing."

They mimic the marks made from skateboarding, as an act to try and represent the disregard for expectation and intention within architecture in areas where skateboarding is not possible.

A way of physically marking a spot, even when anti-skateboarding architecture is present. The act of sticking a sticker in a place is a similar interaction to skateboarding.

Figure: 20



The Future:

Critical Play TO DO list:

- CONTINUE MAKING. → make a distinction between making to understand / critique & making out of necessity.
- ENGAGE IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF 'COMMONS' CREATED.
↳ OTHER subcultures that align with critical play!
- USE FRAMEWORK OF C.P AS A WAY OF MAPPING THE 'CORE' OR 'EDGES' OF A TOPIC?
 - IMPERMEABLE PROPERTY
 - 'OPEN SOURCE' HARDWARE!
- CAN I CREATE / FORMULATE A COMMON FROM CRITICAL PLAY?
↳ A COMMON OF THOSE LIKE Minded.
- MAP 'CRITICAL PLAY'.
 - WHATS THE EARLIEST EXAMPLE?
 - CIVILISATION ERA?
 - lol.

In my studio practice I intend to implement my now reconstructed idea of Critical Play.

I have realised that speculative design, is often a case of using a specific example or 'accessible topic' or question to explore wider, often unanswerable questions, systems, places, situations, times, individuals, groups, spaces...etc

I feel that critical play is a method, praxis within my design practice that I can implement to do that translation. The translation of the unanswerable to the digestible. This transition of making an idea playful and accessible is one that is key to my practice. A technique I'm working to improve.

To the left is a 'critical play TO DO list:' which has noted areas in which I am planning to go on and expand on my current conclusions.

I want to map alternative commons created from critical play. Places outside my western hemisphere where anything other than DIY is not an option, and resourcefulness is in the everyday. I think these examples will be interesting to compare with my westernised obsession/ initial view of these ways of making.

Conclusion:

In the introduction, I had set out to 'begin to define what we mean by 'critical play' an approach to design that positions 'play' or 'playfulness' as a tool to process or engage with information or challenges in our everyday lives.

I had originally arrived at this term through my own practice, as an initial act of rebellion against the term 'critical thinking'. I felt the term loosened up the seriousness in approach to an idea or project.

I have explored the idea of Critical Play being a praxis[where practice and theory merge] through acts such as skateboarding, exploring both sides of the idea of 'performance' and the ways in which something can be communicated and received. I have looked at methods of making and building as ways of creating commons under restrictive and oppressive systems. Focusing in on objects deemed disobedient, which only reinforces critical play as a praxis, the object being both made and used as an act of resistance.

Along with skateboarding, I have explored commons created through means of DIY, looking at the importance of these spaces, as well as photography which has been a personal act that has allowed me to playfully regain agency and a sense of self/ projection of self onto my surrounding environment.

Along with this I have linked back to my own current practices, making as a way to understand wider contexts, and exploring mediums such as 'stickers' as objects with a rebellious nature.

Lastly, this report itself set out to be an act of critical play. In both subtle ways such as tone, word choice and layout. To obviously and unapologetically including CHAT GPT as a reference, [albeit, in a unconventional way] along with wikipedia and other academic 'NO-NOs', which when situated appropriately, can add value to a piece of writing.

I feel that through this report I have achieved my set goal of "setting out to define:" and have begun to map out some key areas of critical play...

Prompt: 'what is critical play': what was found was a definition related to 'game design'. I then decided to adapted this definition to relate it to design as a whole, specifically the genre in which I prefer to sit in.

CHAT GPT:

- ⑥ Critical play refers to an approach in game design, gameplay, and game studies that challenges traditional norms, assumptions, and practices within games and the broader gaming culture. It is a form of reflection and critique, where games are used not just for entertainment, but as tools for exploring deeper social, political, or cultural issues. (OPENAI, 2025)

CHAT GPT: + JAKOB ICKE.

- ⑥ Critical play refers to an approach in ~~game~~ design, ~~game~~ play, and ~~game~~ studies that challenges traditional norms, assumptions, and practices within ~~game~~ and the broader ~~game~~ culture. It is a form of reflection and critique, where ~~game~~ are used not just for entertainment, but as tools for exploring deeper social, political, or cultural issues. (OPENAI + Jakob Icke, 2025)

Notes on Publication Choices:

I chose to create the publication this size, as this is something to be read, pocketed, folded, given, passed, thrown, caught and binned.

I want, not to be precious over the physicality of this publication, but for the words to be read and spread...

I have chosen a sticker pack as part of the outcomes/ to be attached to this publication:

Stickers are fun.

Stickers are playful.

Some of these stickers reference aspects/ sections spoken of in this report.

I hope that the stickers on the front will make people pick this report up and read it...

much like the toys on the front of childrens magazines.

I have chosen GX115 paper, a gloss finish of 115gsm.

Thick enough it wont tear to easily.

Thin enough to throw in a pocket.

The gloss finish [i hope] will have somewhat of a water resistant quality... we will see.

Lastly, this has been printed on a digital mono black and white printer [SHARP BP-50M26PCL PS]. This printing is free, and accessible to me. Critical Play rejects the idea of relying on 3rd party commercial services.

Where Possible.

Thank You for reading.

2025

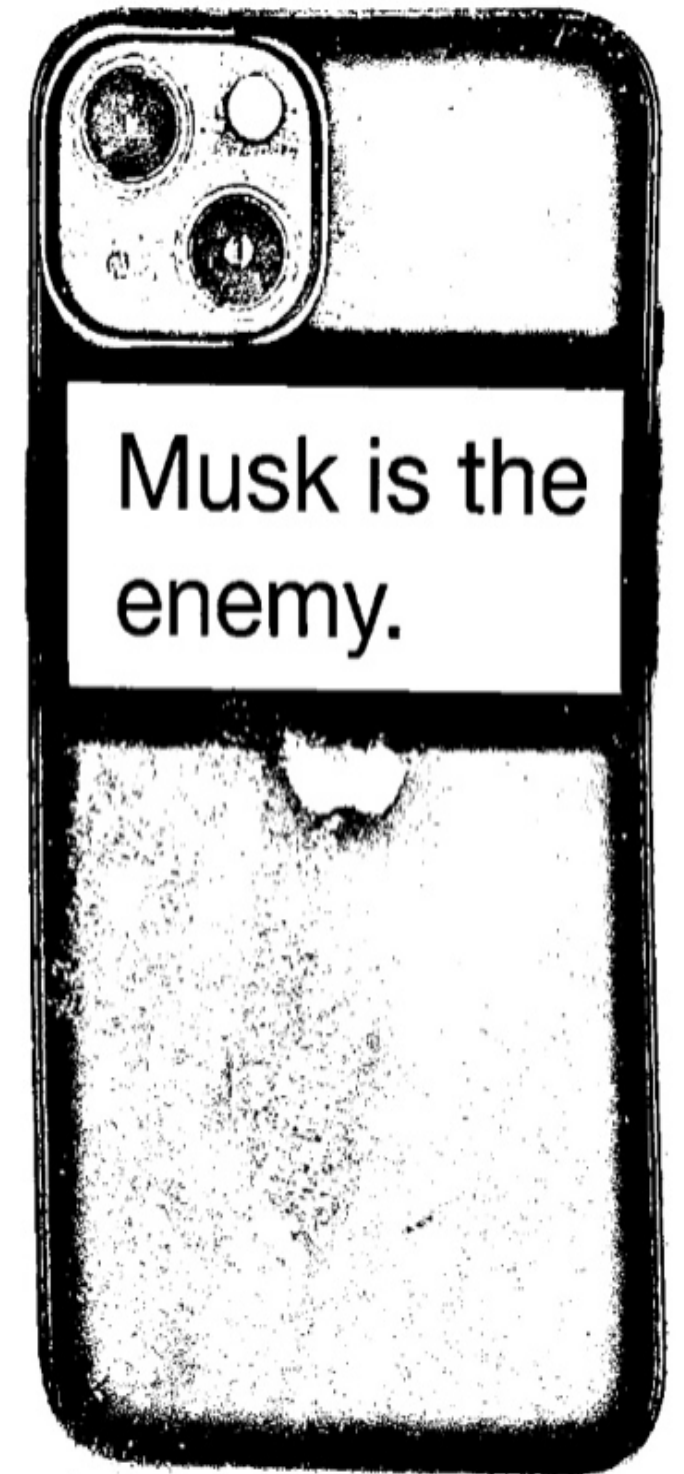
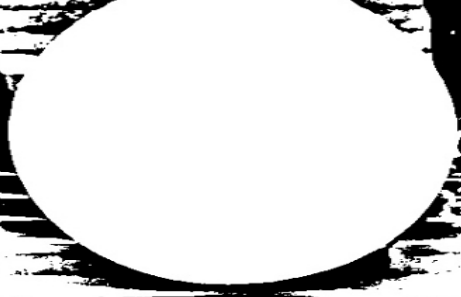


Figure: 21

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			Iain Borden ; Another Pavement, Another Beach: Skateboarding and the Performative Critique of Architecture -Derived from Iain Borden, Skateboarding, Space and the City (Berg, 2001). -Thirteen Tactics; Iain Borden OPENAI (2025). ChatGPT. [online] chatgpt.com.	Figure List:
				Figure 1: Scan of ‘Man Wearing Makeshift Tear-Gas Mask’ from ‘Disobedient Objects’ Book, V&A.
				Figure 2: Scan of Front Cover of ‘Disobedient Objects’ Book, V&A.
				Figure 3: Scan of ‘Makeshift Tear-Gas Mask’ from ‘Disobedient Objects’ Book, V&A.
				Figure 4: Screen Grab of ‘Gonzo in Soho’ youtube video.
				Figure 5: Scan of Mark Gonzales’ ‘love-hate’ drawing.
				Figure 6: Screen Grab of ‘Mark Gonzales at a Museum in Germany’ youtube video.
				Figure 7: Screen Grab of ‘Barres. Luc Moullet. 1984. English subtitles’ youtube video.
				Figure 8: Scan of my Sketchbook with printed stills from Barres by Luc Moullet.
				Figure 9: Screen Shot from @joe_icke Instagram page, featuring myself skateboarding M32. C.2016.
				Figure 10: A shortened and scaled down version of ‘On Site’ photo book.
				Figure 11: Scanned in and enlarged DWFE logo.
				Figure 12: Scan of photograph taken from DWFE website, from a project titled: ‘Recreational Bombs’.
				Figure 13: Photograph of Tattoo Gun, made by me.
				Figure 14: Scan of 2 made tattoo gun and tattooed banana. Surrounded by list of ‘ingredients’.
				Figure 15: ‘hello my name is’ stickers by me.
				Figure 16: ‘Critical Play Sticker Pack One’ on laptop.
				Figure 17: ‘This Sticker Should Make You Cry’ on Phone.
				Figure 18: ‘God Bless Zip Ties’ on Phone.
				Figure 19: ‘Stick and Distress’ sticker pack.
				Figure 20: ‘Stick and Distress’ stickers.
				Figure 21: ‘Musk is the enemy’ sticker on Phone.



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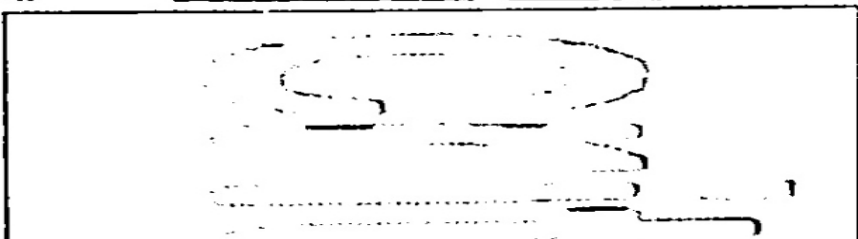
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CRITICAL PLAY

critical play