DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 636 EA 006 368

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TITLE Playgrounds for City Children.
INSTITUTION Association for Childhood Education International, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO Bulletin-27-A
PUB DATE 69
NOTE 60p.
AVAILABLE FROM Association for Childhood Education International, 3515 Wisconsin Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20016 ($1.50, payment must accompany orders less than $5.00)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC Not Available from EDRS. PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Childhood Needs; Found Spaces; *Inner City; *Play; Playground Activities; *Playgrounds; Recycling; *Toys; *Urban Renewal
IDENTIFIERS *Creative Play

ABSTRACT

The work of a contemporary landscape architect is a living realization of the possibilities for increasing children's learning by improving play environment. The designer's philosophy and photographs of six playgrounds are contained in this bulletin, directed wherever there is need to make parks and school playgrounds open, aesthetic, and welcoming places for children to live and play. (Photographs may reproduce poorly.) (Author/MLF)

by M. Paul Friedberg
with foreword by Dell C. Kjer

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(Bulletin 27-A, included in 1968-69 Annual Bulletin Order)

$1.50

Third-class postage paid at Washington, D. C.

Playgrounds for City Children

Contents

Preface

In publishing this bulletin written by M. Paul Friedberg, landscape architect, the Association for Childhood Education International is mindful that here are presented the views of one person outside the discipline of education. The foreword, which follows immediately, by Dell C. Kjer, past President of ACEI, will give credence to acceptance of Mr. Friedberg's material as the bold, imaginative presentation of ideals not at variance with ACEI philosophy but rather a living realization of the possibilities for increasing children's learning by improving play environment and strongly relevant to the 1970 Study Conference theme, "Children and Their Expanding World."

Paul Friedberg himself is constantly growing. His growth in understanding of children's, parents' and the community's needs is evident here in his progression, and constant experimenting, toward the ideal as he has expressed it elsewhere: "What we would hope to work toward in developing playgrounds is to interpret the natural environment into urban terms, freeing children from the stultifying structures of the traditional playground and allowing them to construct their own play environment with the minimum of supervision."

What has been done in New York and Washington, as shown here in many photographs, can be done in other city ghetto areas, in suburbs or satellite cities, in small towns or middle-sized towns—wherever there is need to make parks and school playgrounds open, aesthetic and welcoming places for children to live and play.

SYLVIA SUNDERLIN
Associate Editor

Foreword

In keeping with its history of an interdisciplinary approach to the implementation of its purposes, the Association for Childhood Education International presents the work of a well-known contemporary landscape architect, M. Paul Friedberg, to all who are responsible for planning playgrounds and to all others who are interested in improving the lives and education of children.

The ideas expressed in the words and creative playgrounds of Mr. Friedberg seem to be in keeping with, and illustrative of, those things we desire for all children.

The Friedberg playgrounds, presently available to children in a few crowded cities, are universal in their appeal and equally suited to the needs of children in suburban and rural communities. The principles and beliefs underlying the design are those which ACEI has professed for over seventy-five years—the "power of play," the opportunity to learn through self-initiated activities, the right of every child to participate in such activity—these are among the beliefs we all hold as expressed by Friedberg. Other educational principles inherent in his work are the more obvious principles of "flexibility," "adaptability," "challenge," and "economy"—to name a few. These are elements of all good educational programs and are found in other recent developments in the field of play and recreation, such as the "adventure playgrounds" developed in the last few years in Europe and the United States.

But, perhaps the most unique of Friedberg's contributions arises from the soul of the artist. For he still believes in the mystery of childhood and, one would assume, in the value of childhood as a period of life that has merit within itself, not merely as a kind of preparation for adulthood.

Thus, to become acquainted with the work of an architect and his colleagues that meets the demands of these difficult times, that dares promise of facilitating a belief in the spirit of the child, should lift the spirits of all of us who work with children.

DELL C. KJER, *Professor of Education*
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Playgrounds for City Children

M. PAUL FRIEDBERG

Because there is so much at stake during the early part of a child's life, it is important to evaluate how he gains early education. Head Start and other early childhood programs have drawn attention to the importance of early education and attempts to start the educational process prior to the traditional kindergarten. A child's home life will have the major effect upon him in the years from one to five. Although it is possible to modify the home life, as would be desirable in many areas, efforts to achieve notable improvements would require a great deal of time. Unluckily, the families with the most urgent need for change are least articulate, least vocal about their needs; an alteration of the social and economic order would be required to modify the home life. In view of the improbability of this alteration, the public environment—particularly in depressed economic areas—becomes more important. Improvement in the quality of public life can have great effect.

Second to the home, the public environment influences a child, for the city child spends nearly as much time in his early years in the playground and street as in his home. The importance of the quality of the public environment cannot be underestimated; yet the briefest perusal will reveal in our cities the most barren surroundings. The playgrounds are destitute and sterile, and the streets are filled with fast-moving traffic. Nonetheless, the outdoor public environment, which is basically physical, is more easily manipulated than indoors. It is the place most likely to be changed, so there we direct our efforts.

Out of doors, many children can come in contact with rich experience, which expands their awareness; only through awareness is understanding reached. The primary objective as far as children are concerned should be the creation of a fabric of richness, because an enriched environment stimulates the play process. It is commonly said that to a child his work is play, and his play is work. Through this activity he works toward maturity, by coming in contact with many realities that manifest themselves in social, physical, psychological and cognitive fulfillments. Deprivation of experience stifles the ability to develop and limits the whole child. Children should be stimulated to interrelate, to be involved, to participate, contribute and perceive.

Existing Playgrounds

To evaluate progress, you must see where you stand now and see where you have been. In play for urban children, this is a matter of reviewing the present form of providing recreation for those who live in cities. Playgrounds first came into being late in the nineteenth century but did not become widespread until the early part of the

twentieth. As the cities became large and more densely populated and open space within cities became less available and as it became more difficult for residents to get out of the city into the open surrounding areas, there was a growing need for space to play. And so came about the grouping of abstract activities normally experienced in nature—such as sliding, swinging and balancing—in a single spot, the playground. At first, to those who developed facilities for these activities and for children to whom they were novel, these were quite exciting and inviting. We have progressed little since. We have standardized the elements into a square of sterility. Rock piles have been bulldozed and hills have been leveled into flat asphalt slabs on which superstructures are erected only to hang swings and stand slides.

The fact that life and city have changed has not significantly altered the play area. The fact, as psychologists tell us, that environment plays a major part in growth has not altered the appearances or function of these play areas. For example, we have fully accepted the notion of a slide as being a steel tripod elevated from four to ten feet, with steps leading to the point of departure. We try to overcome the inherent dangers of this piece of equipment by placing a variety of resilient surfaces at the bottom. The danger of the swing is obviated by increasing the size of its surrounding cage. All these things provide one-dimensional activity, and the limits set have never been questioned until now, more than a half-century later.

The deficiencies of today's playgrounds, as well as of the street and sidewalk, are most clearly defined when contrasting the activities of a child in a natural environment. For here he is exposed to a wealth of experiences—stepping stones across a stream, a slide down or a climb up a hill, balancing on a fence, digging in the earth, climbing a tree, throwing a rock. In nature, the child doesn't need devices, for he manufactures his own interests from the wealth of resources at his fingertips. These resources have qualities—color, sound, odors, textures, heat and cold. He doesn't consider any one spot as his playground; his playground is the world.

Back to Nature's Variations

The child's approach to every kind of resource in the natural environment should be considered in the development of the city play environment. It may not be impossible but it is very unlikely that man will ever bring that total experience back into the city. The idea would be to abstract from the child's activities those in nature most universal or basic to living today and relate them to an urban setting. The objective becomes that of condensing the many square miles of country setting into a half-acre of city space.

In recent years, city parks have been taking a new form. Physically the new form provides much of the activity of natural topography. The geometry of the urban terrain is obviously governed by its relation to the total cityscape; but whether play equipment takes the form of a cone, cube or sphere, the activity of climbing up, down, around

and through is very much a part of the physical experience. The notion of high and low is a part of man's physical experience. The notion of high and low is extremely important to a child, for when he is low he is very small indeed and when he is high he is bigger than you. His relationships are quite simplified and unsophisticated. To be great is to be bigger than. Topography can provide interest.

Varied topography can also provide safety. A major problem of the flat asphalt surface common in playgrounds is that it does not provide the necessary curb to random movement. Many accidents in the playgrounds are caused by the collision of two children running at full speed across a flat open area. Through studied configuration, the areas can be broken down into many sectors, reducing the amount of uncontrolled movement while providing a series of intimate spaces in which children gather comfortably.

Topographic variation can also provide vantage points—high areas where two or more children can group and engage in passive play, including watching other children from their overlook. Children learn from each other by watching. Their overlook allows them to group together for social interaction and, importantly, to rest while still involved in the total play environment.

A playground can be complex without being chaotic. The topographic anatomy is the foundation for complexity and variety in such a creation as a superstructure that lends itself to addition and inclusion of slides, tunnels and swings. Complexity allows for continued interest, discovery and choice. Choice is the beginning of the process of discrimination, and discrimination is learning. The more choices a child has the more involved he becomes, and involvement connotes a commitment.

Complexity Without Rigidity

But in the use of traditional playground equipment little choice is possible. The traditional slide allows one approach to the summit, the climb up the set of steel stairs; the experience is the slide down. No matter how many times the child repeats this, it would be difficult for him to gain more than this single-dimension activity from this facility. The slide is out of context; it stands apart from any other object or activities. A child must conform to the preconceived idea of its use. At the risk of disobeying the standardized safety rules of the playground, he may elaborate his learning opportunities by climbing up the wrong way or shinnying up the supporting legs. Usually, these activities are not allowed.

Now picture a hill that has the same elevation as a slide but can be approached from 360 degrees by a climb to the summit, large enough to accommodate a sizeable group of children. There is a slide, one method of getting down built right into the side of the hill. There is a maze of tunnels through the hill to a central core open to the sky, where there is a ladder to the top of the hill, also giving access to the slide. Then there is an adjacent hill with an arched ladder or overhead climber connecting the two hills, yet another avenue leading to the slide. Let the slide be wide enough to take two, three or four children.

Many things can happen as an ancillary to the activity of sliding. Then a playground is complex and meaningful.

A playground should be a sensuous textile woven of touch, smell, sight, hearing and (but that it could!) taste. Areas of differing color, varying textures and resonance should be built into the armature of topography. There is a conscious approach to tactile variation in the use of different materials. Wood and stone provide contrast to the sense of touch; there is cold, hard concrete and sunwarmed sand. In the frame bordering this setting there could be planted flowers to smell! There might be walls for banners to be hung and murals to be painted. For something to listen to, a series of oil drums of different heights, each producing a different sound, can be jumped or banged upon.

A playground should have challenge. All too often the consideration of safety limits the degree of challenge to the child. A basic problem is to mitigate the danger and still provide a reasonable challenge to the child. Challenge prepares a child for maturity by developing a knowledge of his personal capabilities. He finds out how high he can go. how long he can balance, the extent of his endurance and the foolishness of overextending himself.

Challenge creates the basic interest for a child at play, and physical challenge is a major portion of this interest. The mastery of challenge is an accomplishment and can be developed by the creation of a series of preliminary steps that prepare one for the final goal. If the design does not allow for gradual orientation and the development of experience, then the progression is out of balance. Challenge becomes dangerous only when the child is forced to overextend himself.

Safety is, naturally, a major concern of the parent. A playground should be safe but not at the expense of experience, for play is a part of preparation for the reality of mature life with its built-in dangers. As the child grows, he must sometime learn to cross a street, climb a stair, fly a plane. But all these activities are done within rational limitations. The object in the playground is not to create dangers from which the child will require protection. The traditional swing, a steel slab hung on the end of a chain has, judging from the number of its victims, proven to be the most dangerous object in the playground. Like sliding, there is nothing wrong with swinging; the problem is the swing. A simple, old, discarded tire tied to the limb of a tree has long provided a most enjoyable and safe activity for rural children. But even in the city, that same tire hung by a substantial rope, chain or cable can provide a safe and social play experience. The form is the answer. If you are bumped by the tire, the worst result might be a good push. The fact that two or three children can experience the same activity at one time broadens its use, as the swing then becomes social.

Play is not only for the development of the physical and manual skills; it is also a training ground for social interaction, as through play children become accustomed to interrelating with others. From play come the benefits of mutual experiences and the shared task.

Designing for Flexibility

In the above I have only begun to explore the quality of creative play. To develop activities that meet a child's needs, it is necessary to know children and specifically the child that the playground is being designed for. The designer must here rely on the endeavor for his direction, for the task of design is a challenge in itself.

At the present time there is no single collection point for the information and knowledge gained from the individual designer's experience. Each designer must rely on publisned information and his own information, neither of which is too great. One suggestion is that responsibility for the accumulation and collation of experience be assumed by the manufacturer of playground equipment. Then all designers who involve themselves with playgrounds could easily contribute and receive information from this clearing house. The manufacturer should have this information in order to continue the process of development and improvement. To eliminate the possibility of recurring mistakes and to have continued growth, the designer needs this information.

Underlying the problem, and the solution, of what is required for children, is the question of how to provide it. The economics of today will not allow for uniquely designed facilities for every play space. Economics and competition dictate mass production. But the manufacturer operates, of course, on the profit motive system. His customers are adults. Therefore, most equipment today is geared to attract the adult buyer and does not necessarily reflect a child's needs. To involve the manufacturer would seem to give economic reality to the production of playgrounds, but until the manufacturers of playground equipment educate themselves as to real needs of children or are educated, the designer is required to accept predesigned equipment. His job has been reduced to choice of equipment and placement of it, in which he is limited in selection. In many cases the predesigned pieces are so unique that it becomes impossible to integrate them into the over-all design.

What is needed is a universal design that can meet the needs of children and that has the flexibility for designers to use as a tool in achieving a total concept, a product that can be reasonably manufactured, shipped and assembled and modified as ideas and information about play change. It should be a facility so flexible that it can be modified when it becomes obsolete or when there are inherent design errors.

We spoke before of a hill, an artificial reproduction of natural topography. Such a hill has been used in playgrounds, constructed of brick and mortar, reproducing to some extent the natural environment. This idea is certainly a step—a step away from the flat asphalt toward a more flexible and natural foundation for play. By comparison with usual playgrounds it is very successful; however, the hill is still a static, immutable thing. A child uses the playground for approximately five years; in that time it should continually offer him new possibilities. Great adaptability is needed, through the addition of other, changeable elements.

To answer this need for greater flexibility we have developed modular units which, when as-

sembled, can provide the necessary variety. This is much the same process by which individual bricks take on the many different building forms for which they are used. The modular system allows for the development of a total environment, the core of which is a megastructure—a giant primary structure to which can be attached all the traditional playthings. However, the entire unit is transformed to be no longer a collection of pieces, but one piece with a collection of activities. The composition is not rigid and inflexible; it is possible to unbolt a portion or all of the playground and replace it with new or alternate compositions.

To date, four different means have been explored for making modular units. They are stacked timber, tubular steel boxes, concrete "U" and "J" shapes, and pipe and cable structures. Extensive preparation is not necessary before the installation of the units, and no footings are required, as the weight of the units and the size of the area resting on the ground are sufficient to maintain the stability and permanence of the facility on the surface. This means that all the money spent for the playground provides facilities for play.

Installing a system of this kind also means that only a short time is required from the time of the identification of the need for a play facility to the actual time of installation. A progressive park department could stockpile the necessary elements for many playgrounds and have them ready for use.

Modular units can be manufactured in factories, where labor costs are lower and the quality of workmanship is more consistent and higher. The installation operation is relatively simple and does not require highly skilled labor. The methodology of construction is of great concern if we are to be furnished with sufficient numbers of play facilities in time to meet the needs of millions of children who are growing up. We must look for economy, flexibility and immediacy.

Yet we must not box ourselves in, for in the final analysis the playground should never exist as a separate and unique area away from the home. A child does not stop playing when he leaves the playground. Our real responsibility is to create a total environment that embodies all the characteristics that provide creative play; the ultimate goal is to have the child make his own playground.

It may someday be the responsibility of the park agencies to dump a truckload of styrofoam in an area and let the children build what they wish. Or it might be at other times a pile of wood or ropes or cables or boxes or a truckload of old doors from a building site. These things would be placed at the superstructure, something to place the materials against. The urban designer could provide these backgrounds on a block-by-block, neighborhood-by-neighborhood and district-by-district level. And in these spaces the major happening will occur in order of size and importance.

No more static seesaw! No more immutable concrete turtles! Instead, a dynamic, ever-changing and exciting environment, one in which a child can participate. Participate, be involved with, contribute and learn. This may sound farfetched, visionary and Utopian; the only thing that I find farfetched is the fact that it doesn't exist now.

The Child and Nature

The natural environment—rich, complex and dynamic—offers the child at play an interesting array of materials and situations. Here, where there are no man-made contrivances, the child builds and invents as he explores. In nature he finds:

(1) water—moving in streams, placid in lakes, dynamic in oceans

(2) earth, sand and stones to build with

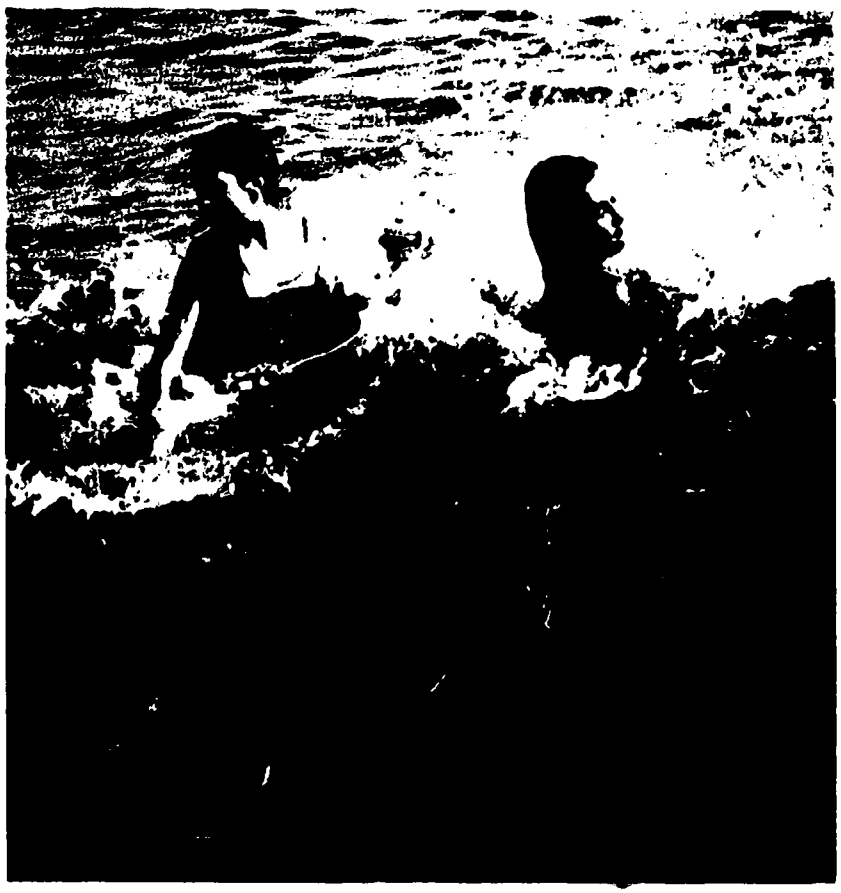
(3) natural geological formations—nature's challenges — for sliding, climbing and jumping

(4) trees to climb, to swing from, and in which to build

(5) snow; puddles from sudden showers, and many other rich, interesting, everchanging situations to challenge him physically, stimulate and develop him creatively.

There is much to be learned from the world nature provides for the child. It is the environment—not the facilities—to which the child responds. When the play situation is transposed from country to city, the experience of nature is lost and in its place is fabricated for the child an artificial, stultifying play situation.

The obvious need of children is not just a place to play—a circumscribed area with three or four pieces of equipment, swing by sandbox, slide by teeter-totter, side by side—but a total world to which he can respond.



Traditional Playgrounds or Raw Spaces

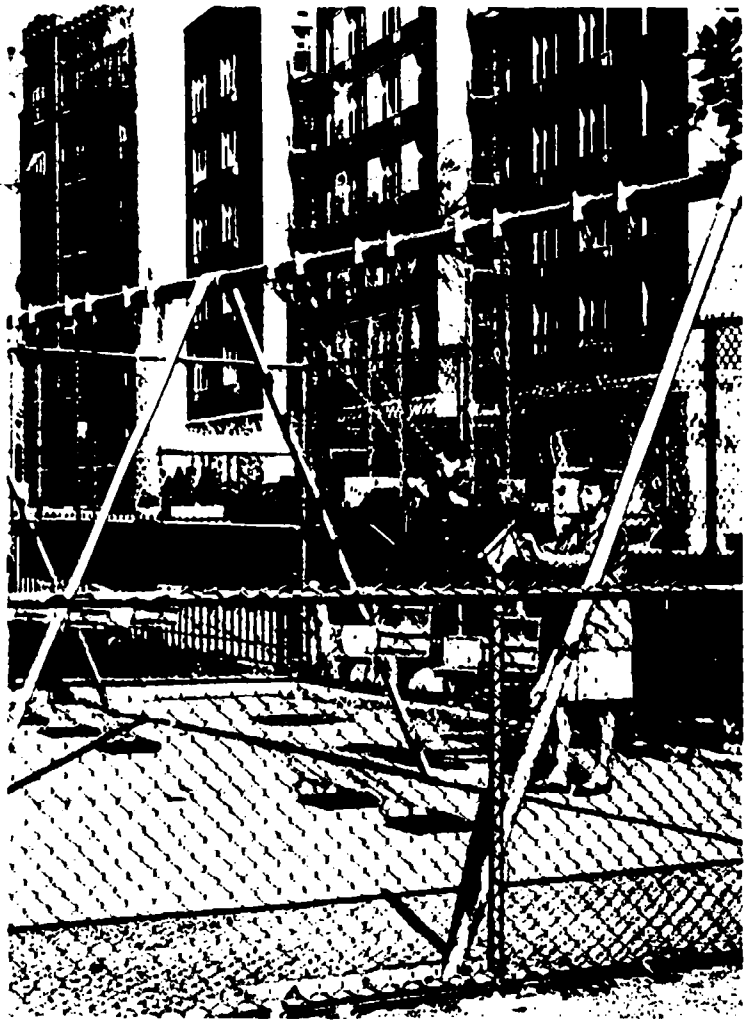
The traditional playground has been fashioned from a symmetrical square or oblong of space, soberly allocated by the city authorities for its intended use. It has been flattened, squared off, and possibly skinned of its grass. The ubiquitous fence encloses it with its rules and regulations stamped on the entry gate. No this, no that! If the child is too young to read the big NO, there is no mistaking the restraint upon him as he enters. There are the spikes on the enclosing fence; a lethal chain link encloses the set of swings and the very stamp of regimentation is set upon the battery of seesaws and the row of swings. We know it is a playground because of its sterility and seal of authority.

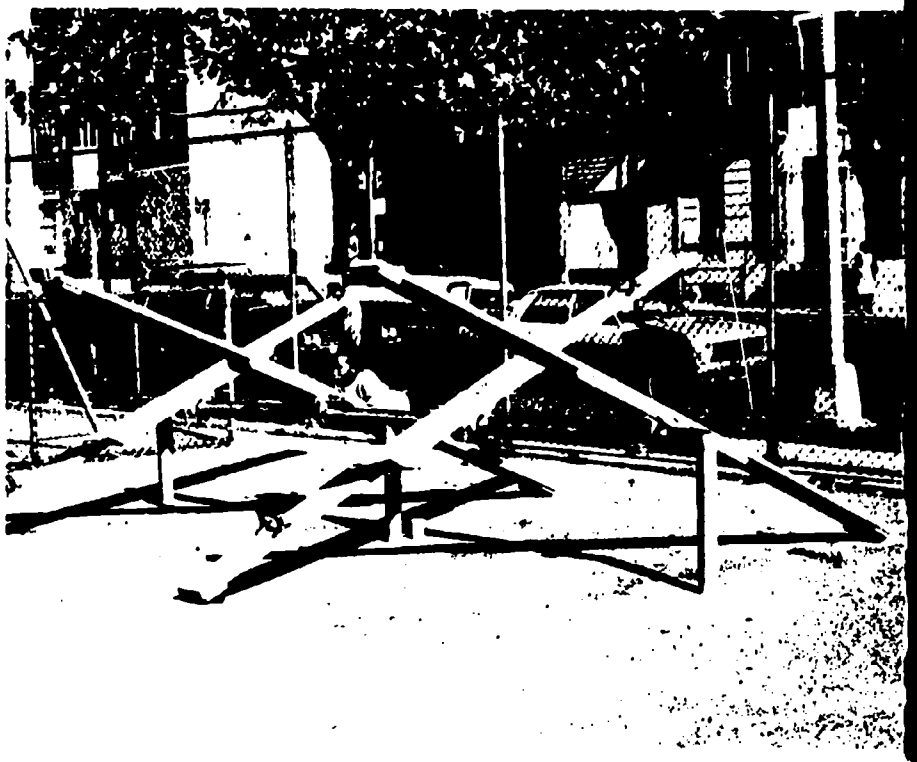
Now presumably the city fathers have already built playgrounds on the city squares of half-acres or quarter-acres allotted to this use. So where do we go for space to play?

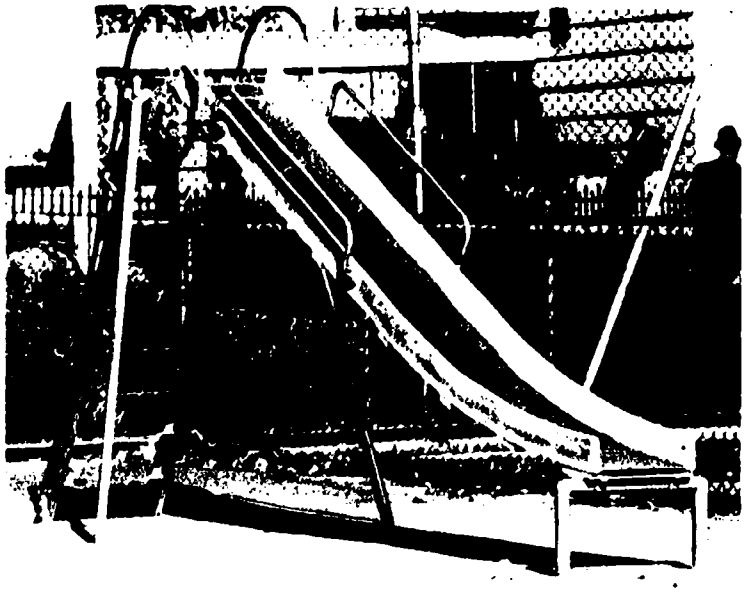
The urban environment offers us a series of leftover spaces, such as backyards; an empty lot with a vagrant tree; perhaps a dumping place for abandoned cars, furniture, tin cans and bottles.

Even in a crowded city, in the shadow of tenement houses, in the narrow alleys, or on that vacant lot, there are possibilities for retrieving the wasted land and putting it to use for children's living.


NO
BICYCLE RIDING
ROLLER SKATING
DOGS ALLOWED
PEDDLING
DEPOSIT LITTER
IN RECEPTACLES







Carver House(Manhattan)

At Carver, where the two-block-long mall in an existing housing project was redeveloped, the notion of play was dealt with in the most traditional sense: arch climbers, wooden corrals and balancing bars, which were considered sufficient for the young residents. But, interestingly enough, the formality of the amphitheater steps and the highly textured screen walls were infinitely more exciting to the child, who could climb and jump freely and who could interpolate the objects in the environment and accommodate them to his nature of play. The formal playground itself lies dormant most of the time, with the exception of the sandbox, which offers a great variety of building experience.

Riverview Towers (Manhattan)

It takes a while to destroy preconception; change is evolutionary rather than precipitous. To form a play environment at Riverview Towers, catalog equipment was intermixed with a series of terraced levels, which grew out of existing topographic conditions. Observation during construction indicated that the total environment of level changes, concrete stepping stones, bridges and slides was more exciting to the child than the formalized play facilities specified from the catalog.*

The important lesson learned at Riverview was that by working with the existing topography we were able to develop a rich fabric of opportunity which the child responded to. Too many so-called playgrounds have had the play value removed by destroying the existing qualities of the site. At Riverview we learned: that the child accepts and adapts himself to changes in topography; that movement itself becomes an important approach to play; that individual objects in an environment are less important than a total environment; and that play could exist on many levels—physical, social and intellectual.

Again, as seen from the examples of the child in nature, the greater the variety of environmental experience the more exciting play becomes.

* By no means do we mean to denigrate manufactured equipment; in fact, the final responsibility for producing facilities for the play environment must be with the commercial sector. Only a manufacturer can gather and synthesize information on a comprehensive scale to produce necessary facilities on a large-scale economic basis. The problem today lies with the approach of the manufacturer, who deals with the unique, unchangeable, single-piece idea. Designs are so specialized that it is difficult to integrate them into the total design; in many cases it is difficult to integrate one piece with another, and the individual pieces are designed by several different designers.

Jacob Riis House (Manhattan)

The designer, aware that play is not necessarily limited to the play area, can design environments for living to meet various needs. At Riis, not only was the existing playground limited (a few concrete pipes, a small dome and a wall maze with some painted games), but efforts were concentrated on growing grass rather than on needs and interests of the residents.

The plaza was redesigned for recreation of all age groups—the elderly, the teenager and the child. Teenagers, whose need for privacy is great during transition from childhood to adult life, gravitate toward the semi-enclosed fountain area where they can be part of, and yet separate from, the other age groups.

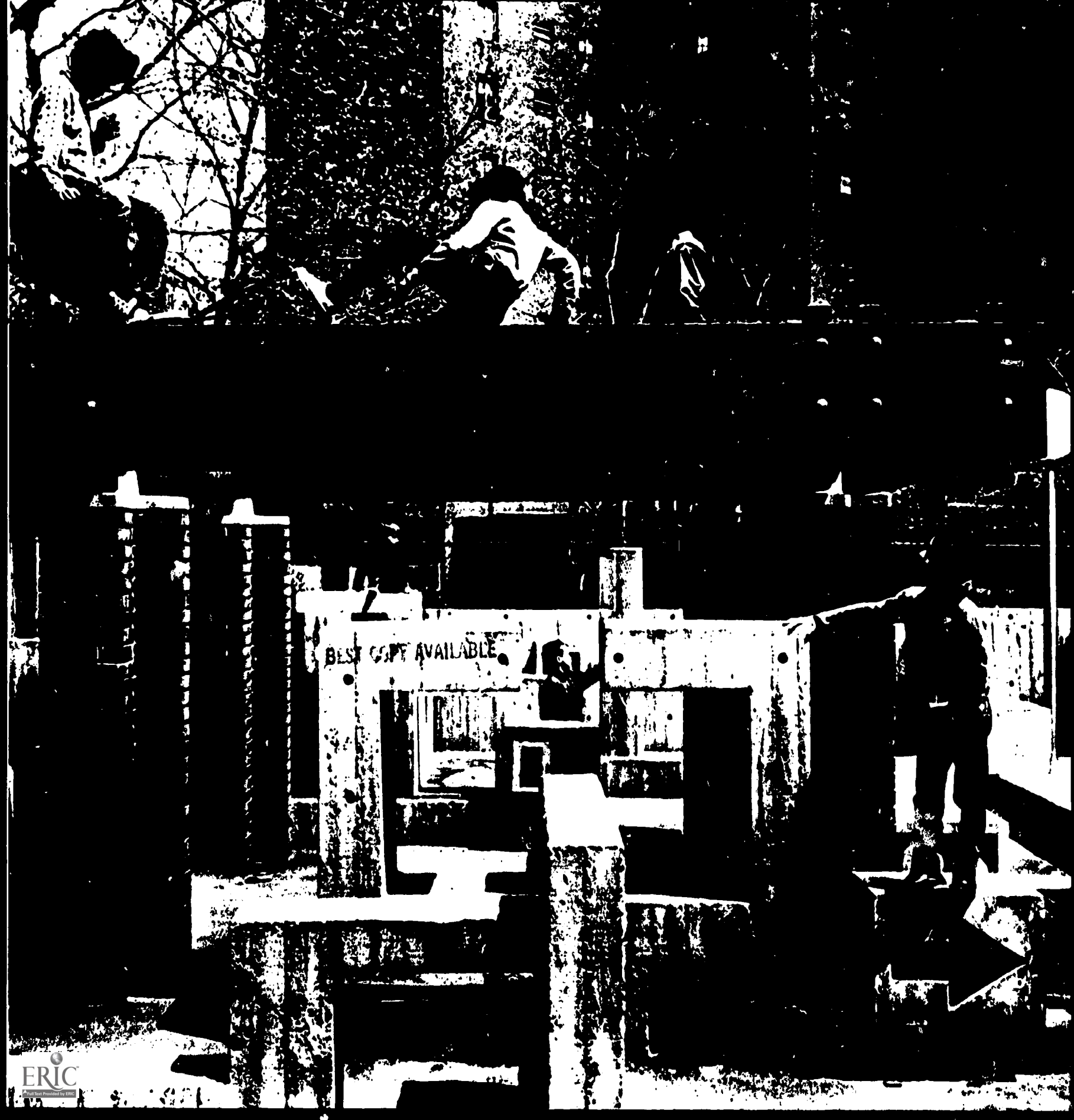
The amphitheater is for all. In summer at least five nights a week there are various entertainments, such as plays, dancing groups and boxing matches. This amphitheater becomes a giant spray pool during the day, where older children, whose chances for vigorous activity are relatively limited in the city, can enjoy water play.

The playground is laid out in a group of sculptural block mounds. Relationships between the mounds are critical, for they form the basis of "linked play," a concept offering exciting, decision-making possibilities as the child goes from one experience to the next. For instance, to get to the slide, the child is no longer restricted to stairs but can climb to the top of the mound from any side or crawl through one of three tunnels that penetrate to the center and climb a ladder up the opening to the top. There are inherent educational possibilities for the child who can sit awhile and rest while watching others below.

In linked play the child can get from one place to another by using stepping stones, arch climbers, bridges or even the slide. He can move throughout the playground on different levels, at ground or intermediate level; on stepping stones or over the heads of other children by use of climbers or bridge.

Materials used in Riis are mostly natural materials. The granite blocks have small projections or depressions to make climbing easier, with varied and graduated heights to permit children of different ages to play simultaneously in the same area. The trellises placed throughout the site have been repeated in the playground where they are much lower for younger children to climb without having to exceed their skill levels. If challenge is inherent in the playground experience the child will be less likely to seek challenge in the street or in more dangerous situations.

Riis is basically a child's world. There are no fences; the design is geared toward freedom in using space. Rich, heavy materials—durable enough for a great deal of use and abuse—wood, granite blocks, bricks; water and sand; sculpture and planting attract many to an everchanging environment.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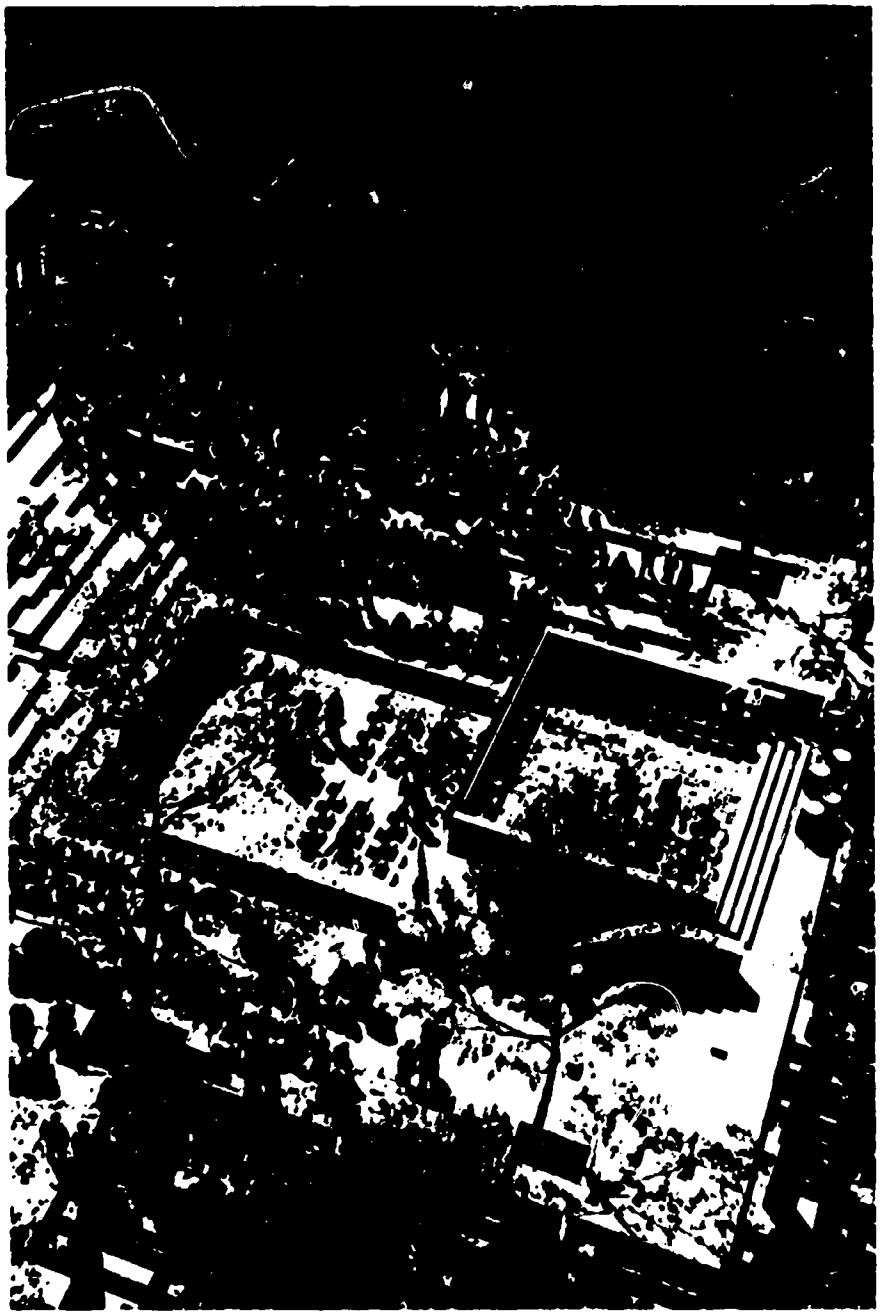


Buchanan School (Washington, D.C.)

As the idea of a total environment for play and recreation becomes more strongly established in the mind of the designer, many opportunities become available. The schoolyard of Buchanan, which was a flat asphalt area enclosed by a chain-link fence, was modified under an Astor fund grant into a community recreational facility. The sidewalk was widened to become a sitting area for elderly persons and other adults. Trees were planted close together to form a canopy of leaves over the sitting area. The view was oriented primarily toward the children's play area. The design of the play area offers a wide range of experience and challenge to the broadest possible age profile. There are stepping columns, bridges, tree houses, modular concrete units, a cable spiderweb, arch climbers with swings suspended from them, a mound with three slides and tunnels, and a cable slide from the summit of the mound to the sand area in the valley.

Beyond the playground is a depressed basketball court, which accommodates the school during the day for free play activities and is used by teenagers after school and on weekends. The steps for the depressed basketball courts offer space for informal games; it is also used as an amphitheater. By depressing the basketball court we have, through design, eliminated the usual fenced enclosure. Beyond the basketball court are a snack bar, restrooms, and athletic director's office.

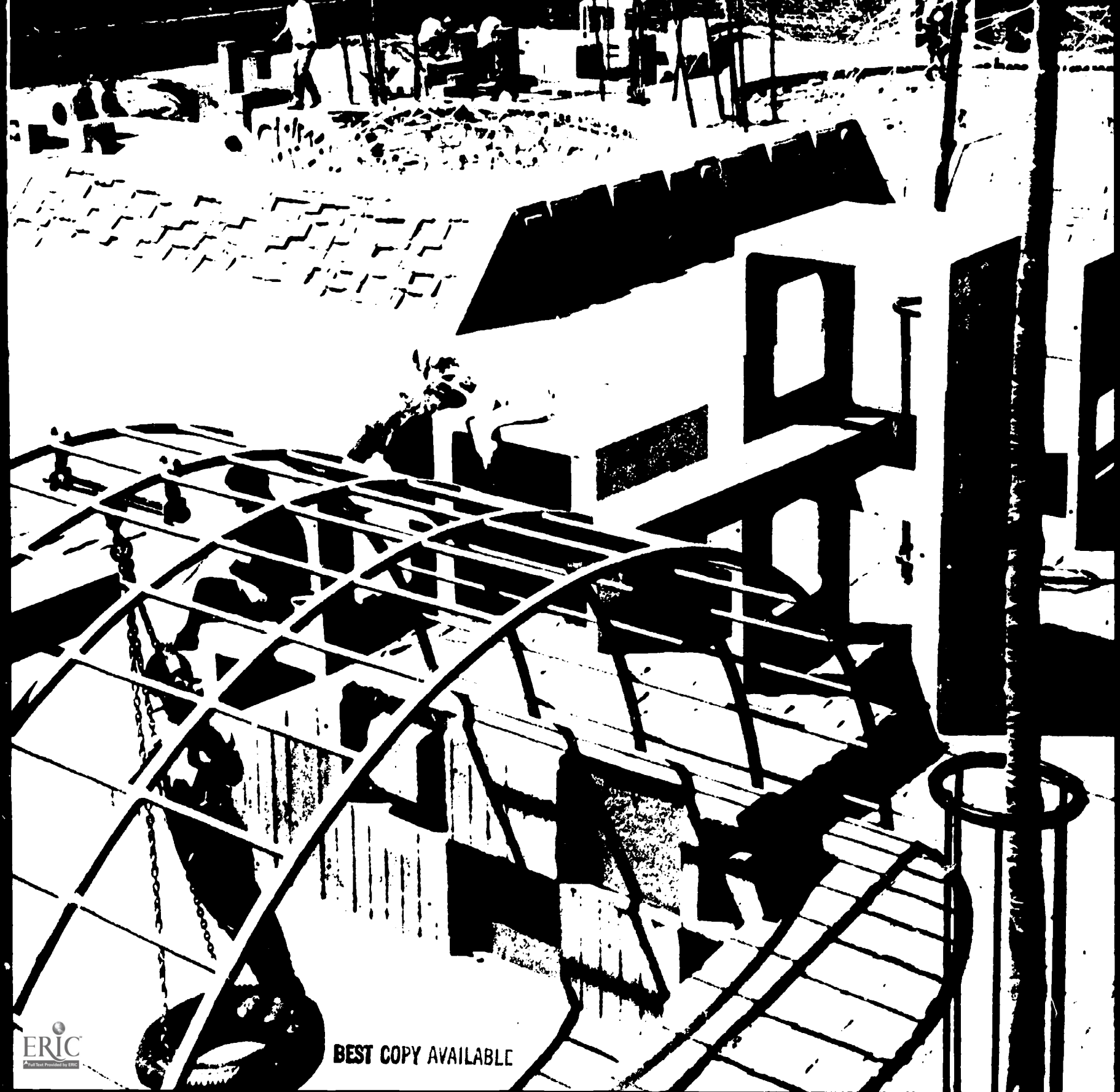
The use of this rather limited space has been expanded by juxtaposing the facilities for various age groups. The young child watches the older child, the older child watches the teenager, the adult views the entire area; this interaction creates a participant-viewer situation. The child becomes the actor, the adult the spectator. There can be observation without policing.

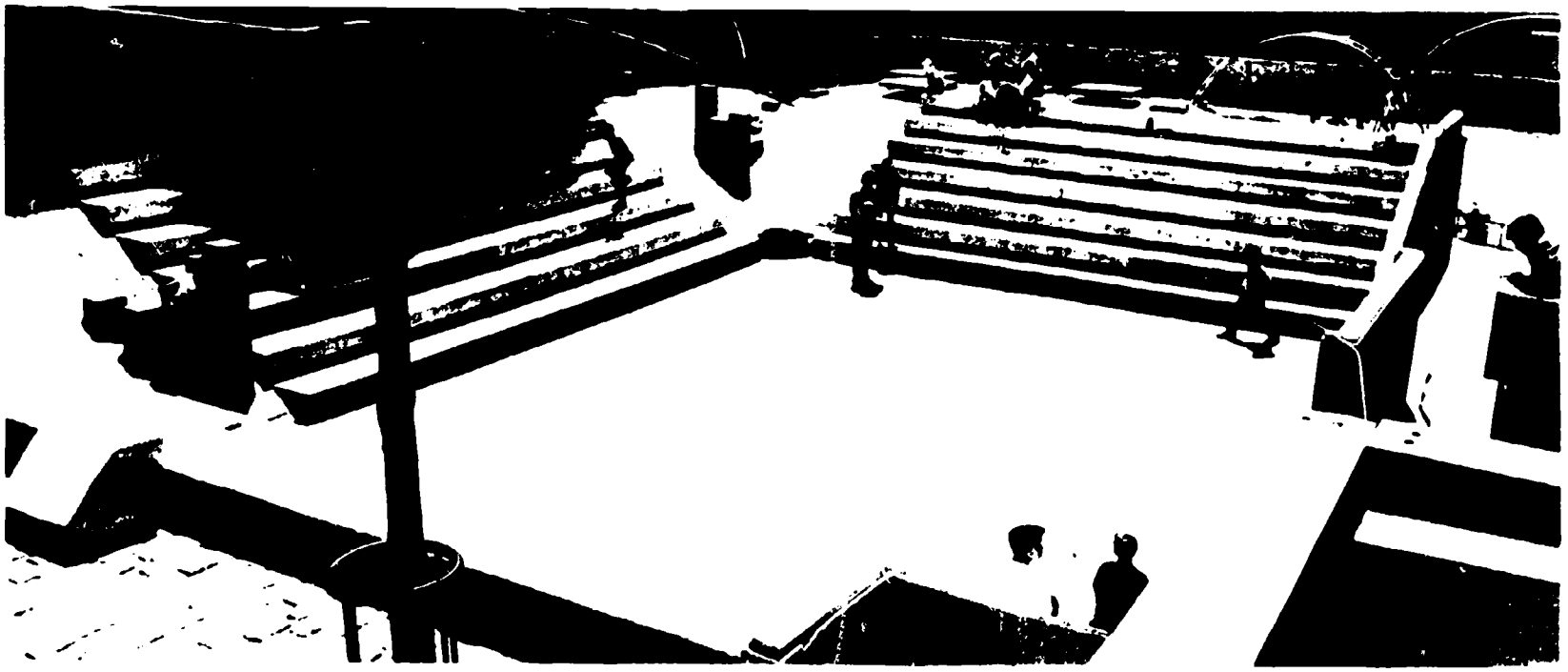
Public School 166 (Manhattan)

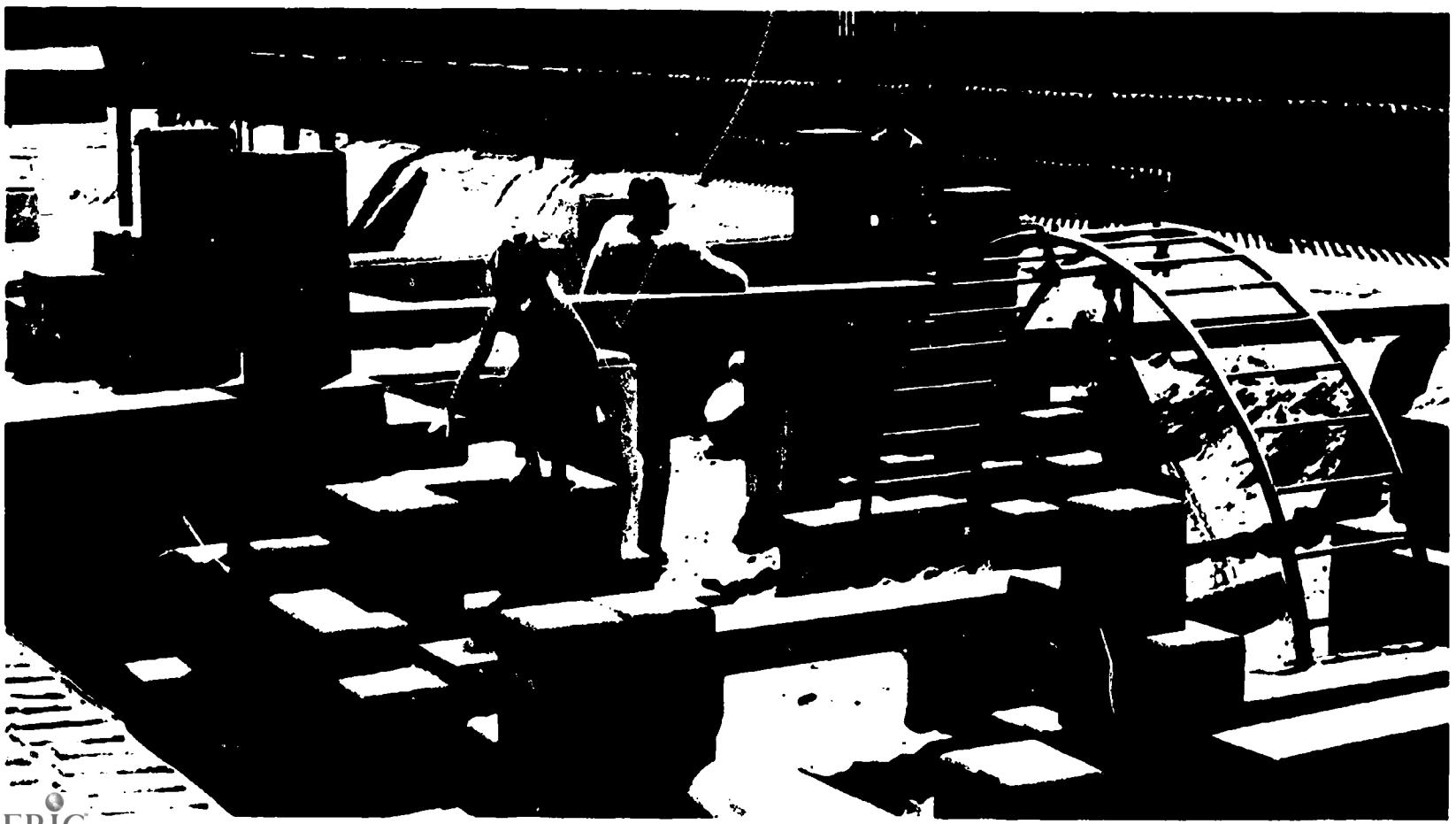
The schoolyard at P.S. 166 is of modest proportions. In this rather limited space (100' x 175'), there has been incorporated a kindergarten play area, an amphitheater, an underground comfort station, a variety of play facilities, including concrete modular units, spring pads, wood stepping blocks, outdoor blackboard, arch climbers, geodesic domes with swings attached and wood bridges. On the street, a small indentation provides a sitting area with benches and chess tables.

The amphitheater is transformed into a giant spray pool on days when the area is not being used by the school. Concrete walls have been textured and painted in primary colors. The kindergarten play area is very much the same quality as the total area except that facilities have been scaled down to meet the size of the three- to six-year-olds. Placing the facilities of one age group next to another permits the younger children to develop skills as they observe the older children in action.

By using the space under the large slide mound for the comfort station we were able to provide much-needed bathroom facilities without using up any space from the playground itself. The geodesic dome offers an opportunity to play at three different levels. There is sand under the dome, swings hang into the space formed by the semicircle, and the structure itself offers a climbing opportunity. Therefore, children play on three levels with a reasonable compatibility and safety.







Bedford Stuyvesant Vest Pocket Park(Brooklyn)

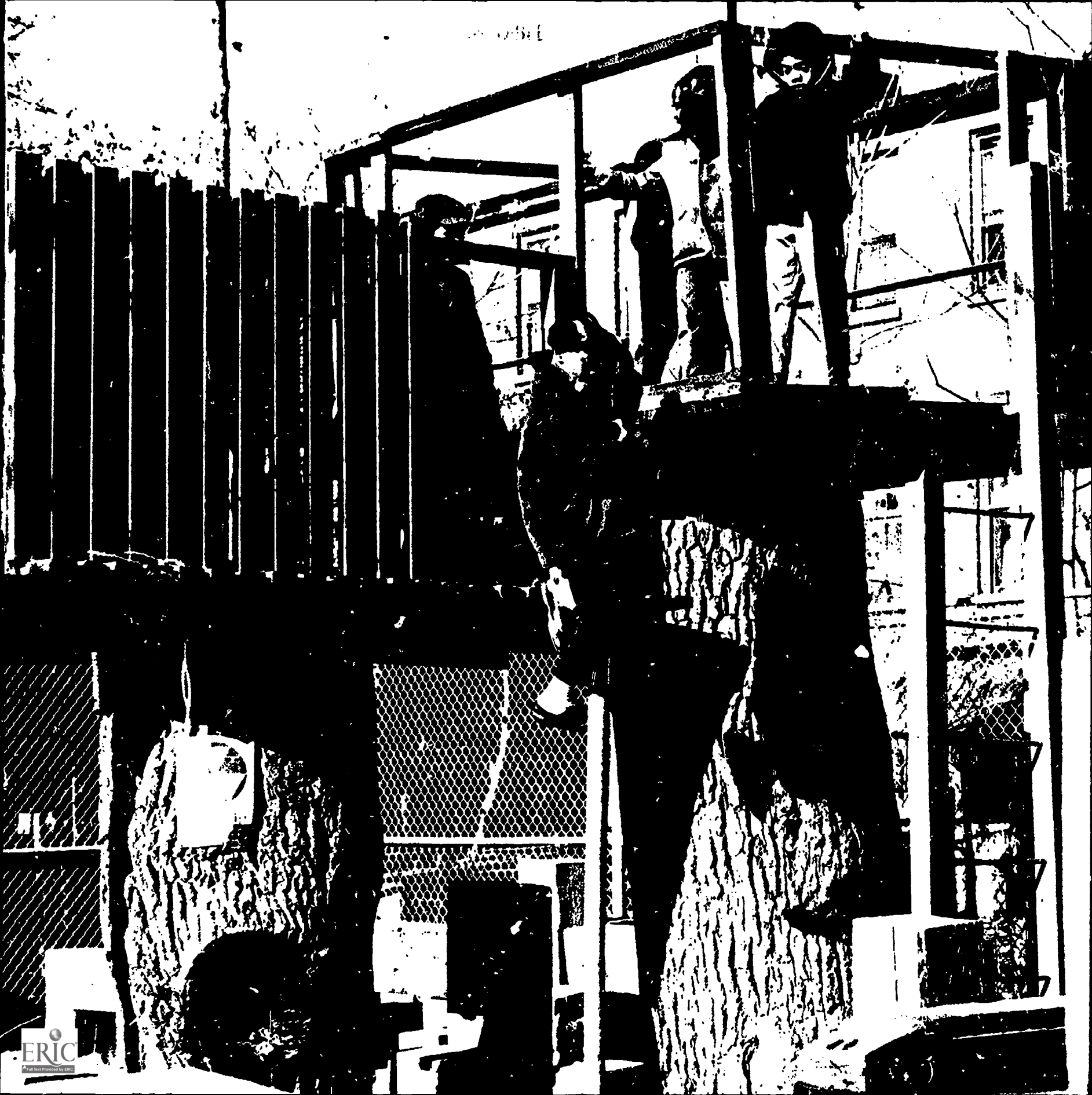
In the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn a vacant lot was transformed into a vest pocket park to be used for a period of two to three years while a larger parcel of land was being prepared for a housing project. The park project was based on the notion of self-help. The people of the community were given the opportunity to build their own park on the theory that they would increase their self-respect and pride through the act of construction; unfortunately this idea proved fallacious.

It was quickly seen that in a poor community, one could not ask local residents to give away their labor, the only available commodity, the only means they had to earn money. Therefore, some of the local unemployed men were given decent wages to build the facility. The teenagers requested an opportunity to work on the park and were satisfied with modest payment. Younger children ran errands and got involved in the painting—very much in the Tom Sawyer-Huck Finn tradition. The result was that in ten days the park was completed.

It was noteworthy that the building of the playground was as much of a recreational experience for the children as was the final product; they were involved with the real world, doing real things, and this was exciting. A lesson learned in the building of the park was that in an area in a deteriorating state, it was not right to use second-hand materials that looked obviously used and inferior before their use on the site. But it was essential to develop an exciting, well-built facility with which the local community could clearly identify.

The final product offered a wide range of choice, from wood stepping columns to tree houses; balancing pipe, slide poles, and pipe climbers. A small amphitheater built into the site overlooking an open flat area is used for volleyball games or as a small stage for local productions.

Walls were painted by students from Pratt Institute. The whole development of the vest pocket park was a modest but revealing experiment, indicating that a community could, under the right direction, find a reasonable amount of economic relief while rehabilitating their own physical environment. It was also revealed to the residents that play and construction were not separate concepts for children, that limited, junk-filled lots could have positive, fruitful use and that men could find paid employment and take pride and responsibility in the meaningful regeneration of their neighborhood.



Housing and Urban Development Demonstration Grant

For the massive program implied in developing small block-by-block facilities essential for both young and elderly, one could not rely on individual design and specialized building techniques. Moreover, if the final answer to playgrounds is the systems approach, the manufacturers would become involved, and rightly, for they can provide quality and economy on a large-scale basis.

Through the Beautification Act, a federal grant made possible some experimentation. Four modular systems were designed which could be stockpiled and quickly placed on a site requiring a facility.

Because these modular systems do not require footings, they can be erected for a short time (one or two years) and easily dismantled without any great capital loss. The only expense is for labor in erecting and dismantling. An advantage is that changes or additions can be made as defects are observed or new ideas developed. As a play facility would be in place during the life of the child user, it was important to consider how the playground itself could be modified periodically to sustain continued interest for the child.

The four systems were:

1. *Stacked wood timbers.* These are 4" x 4" treated fir timbers used to develop rectilinear and pyramidal forms through various connections, bridges, ramps and arch climbers. The wood forms can be connected to facilitate continuous play. Swings are suspended from some bridges or climbers. By connecting these large forms to one another, the total play area was increased and security was strengthened as the change of movement was substantially diminished.

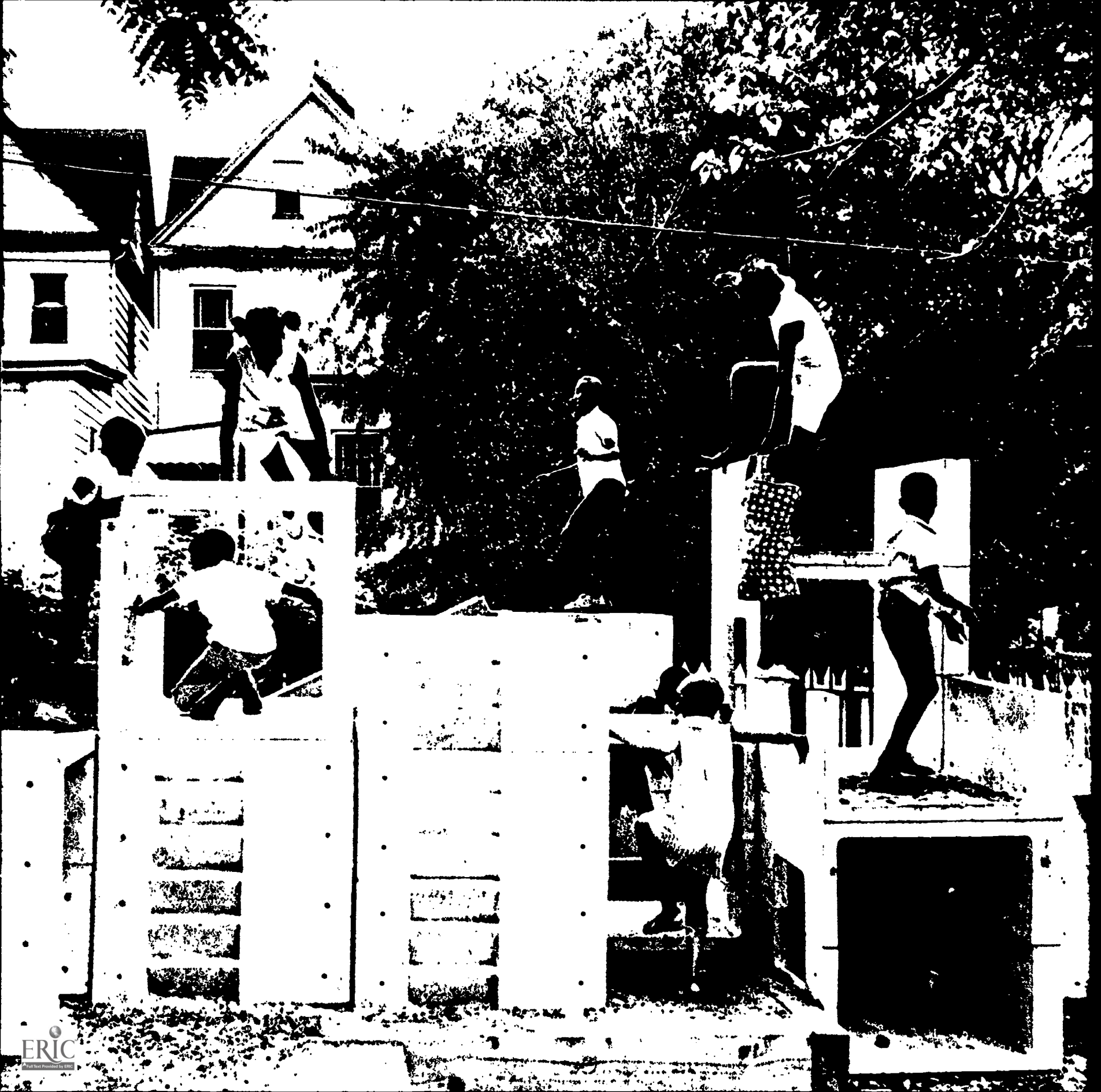
2. *Tubular steel bars.* These bars, bolted together, form a large primary structure, from which bridges, seesaws and swings are hung. The structure itself can be climbed on or through. An artist-designed plaque could be attached to give the structure color and dimension.

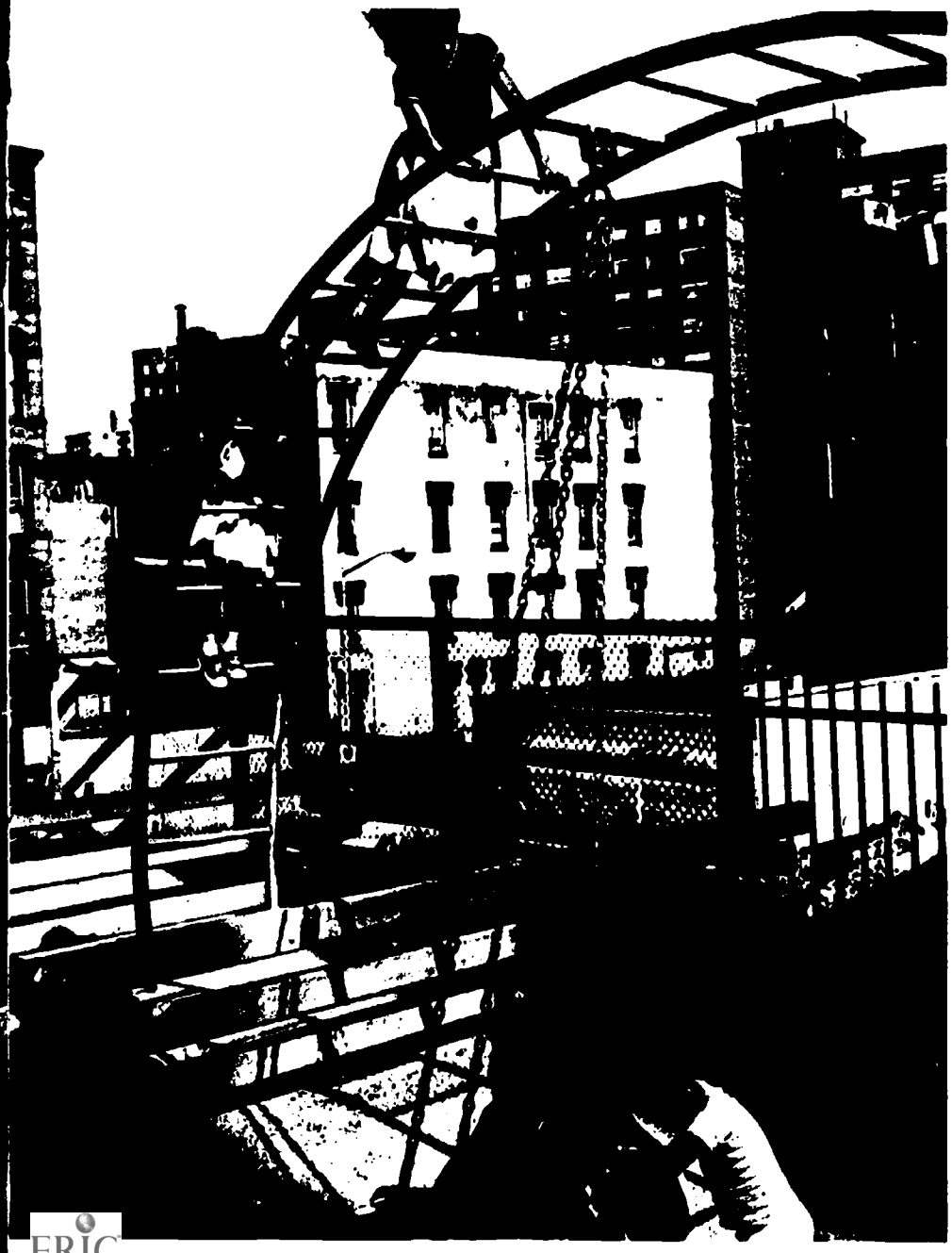
3. *Concrete modular bases.* From J and U units doweled together and stacked are formed miniature urban developments. Swings, slides and slidepoles can be attached.

4. *A series of pipe and cable units.* Although primarily for climbing, this unit can also be used for playing tag.

With the aid of a manual giving limited instructions, local communities could design and erect their own play facilities. Built-in flexibility and ease of modification assure easy revision if there is obvious error. Because these are manufactured items, there is a reasonable guarantee of quality.

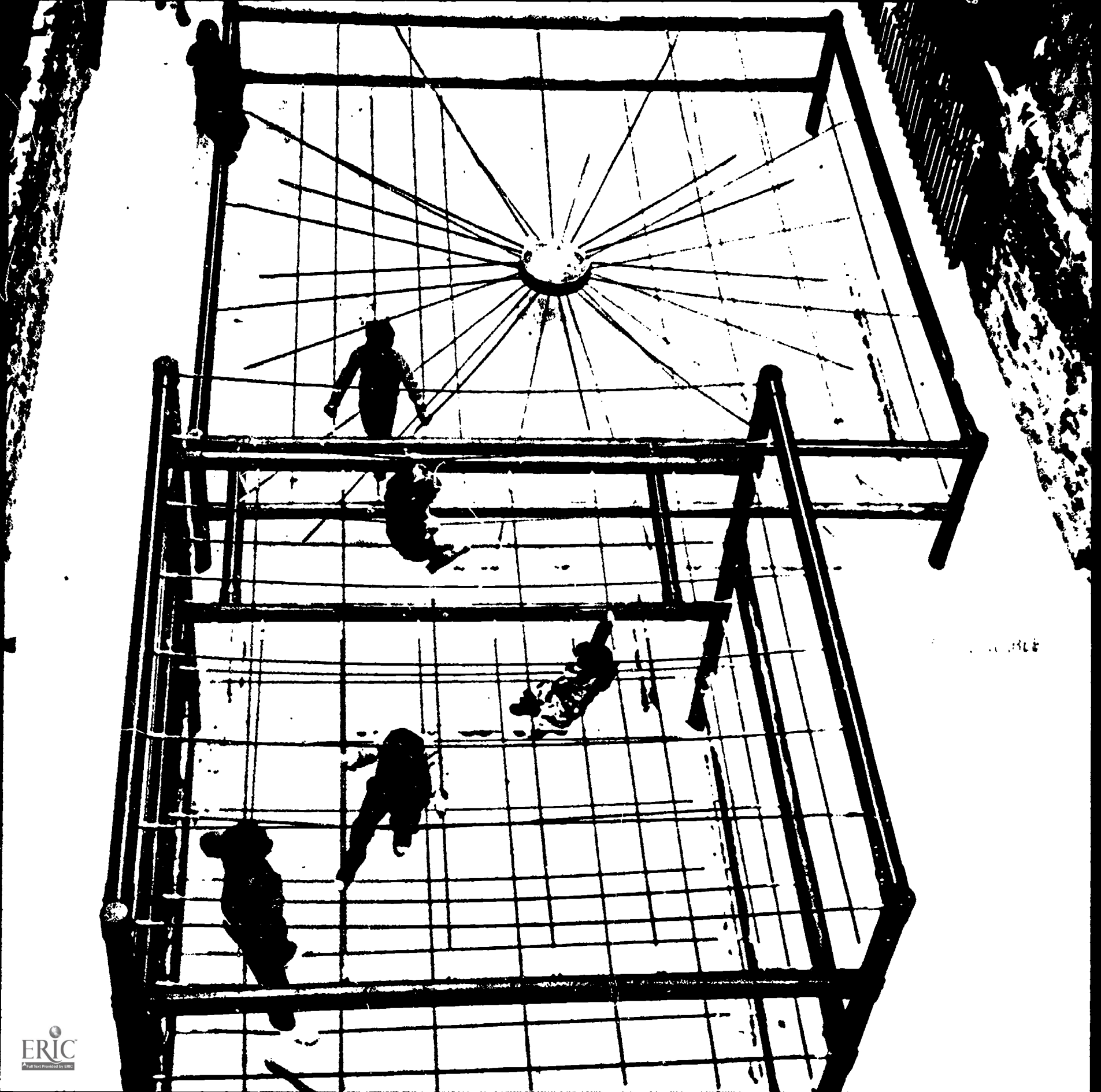
Since no foundations are required, the money is spent for above-ground facilities as opposed to the traditional approach in which one-third of the cost is for below-ground foundations that have no play value whatsoever.

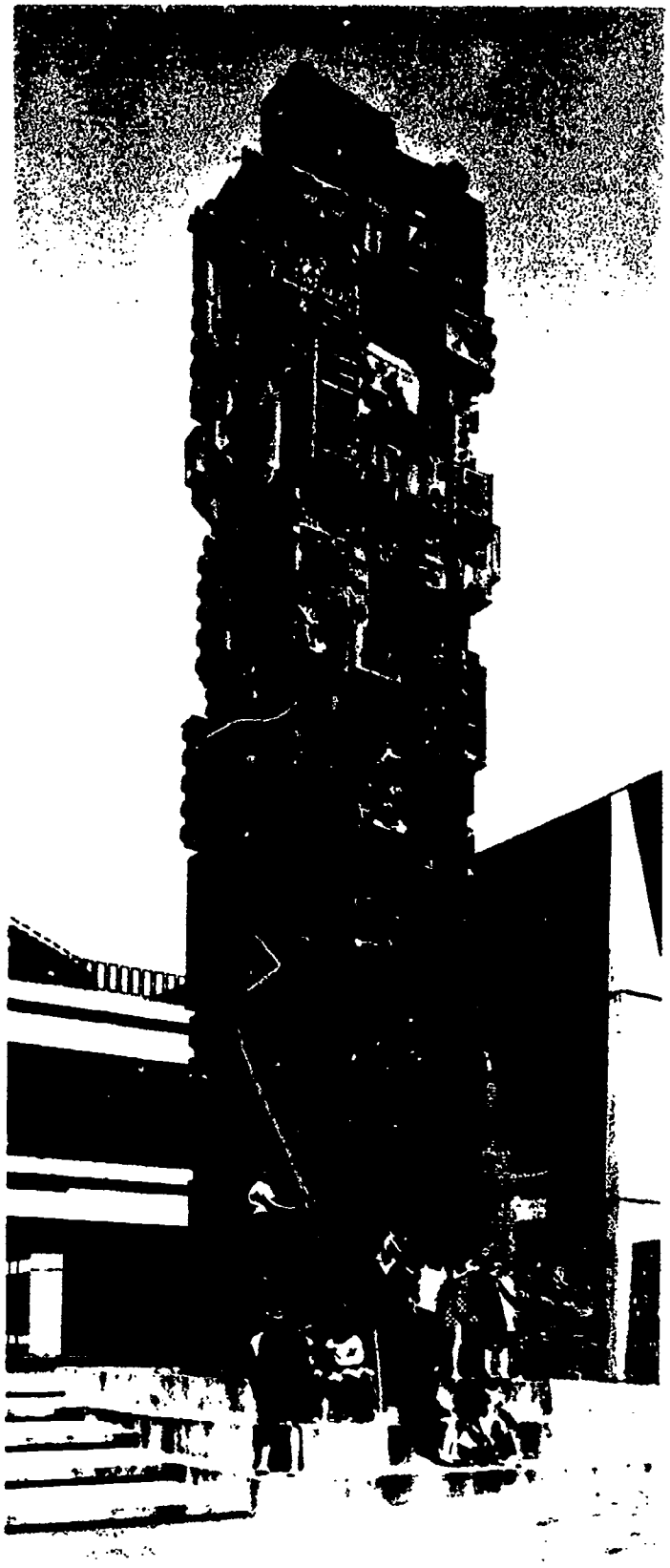


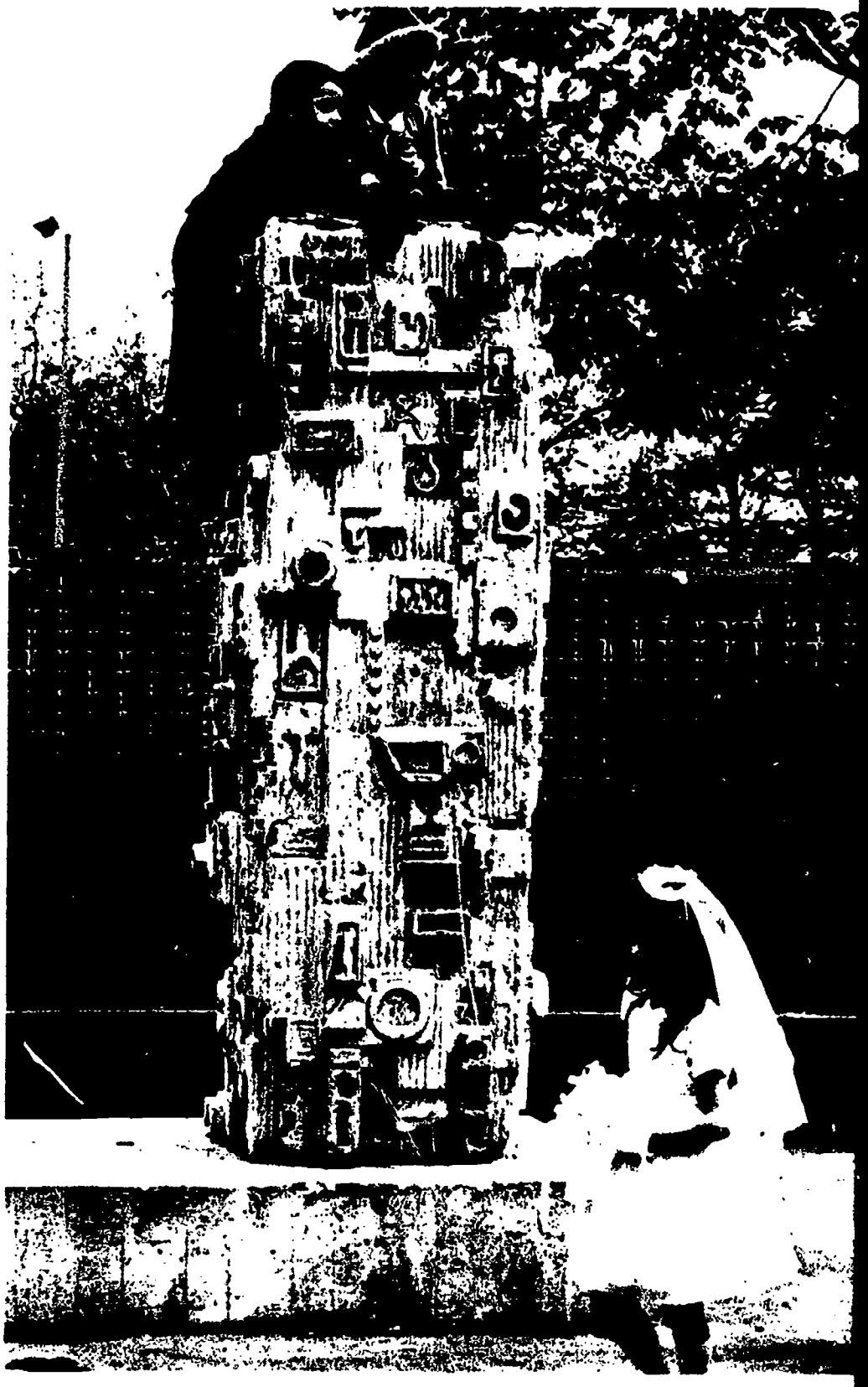


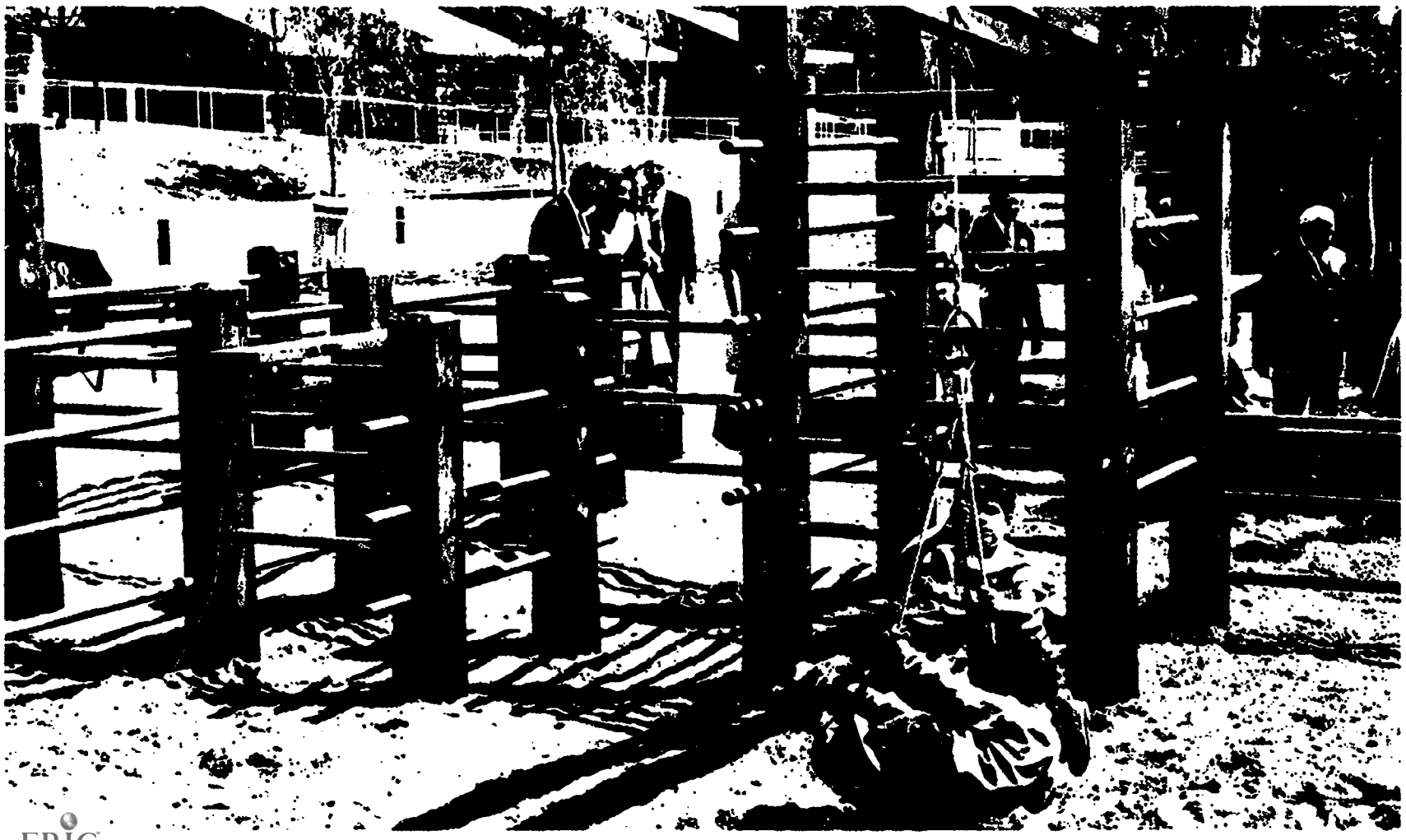
Art and Play

Having artists and sculptors design pieces for children to play upon often leads to an unprofitable compromise, not only for the artist, who must modify his aesthetic tastes to accommodate play, but also for the child, who may find that the facility offers only limited play possibilities. It is, of course, important to expose the child to art. Ideally, children should come to feel comfortable and at ease with works of art. With frequent exposure, his sense of perception will expand, but it is wrong to pervert the child's idea of an art object to that of a plaything. If a piece has any play value that is an extra benefit, not its primary purpose. Art should not be confined to galleries and museums, where children are conducted on annual or semiannual pilgrimages by teachers or parents to give them their quota of contemporary culture. Nor should the artist have to subvert his primary purpose to accommodate physical play.









Play

Play is a continuum of either mental or physical activity. The following is a miscellany of physical play experience:

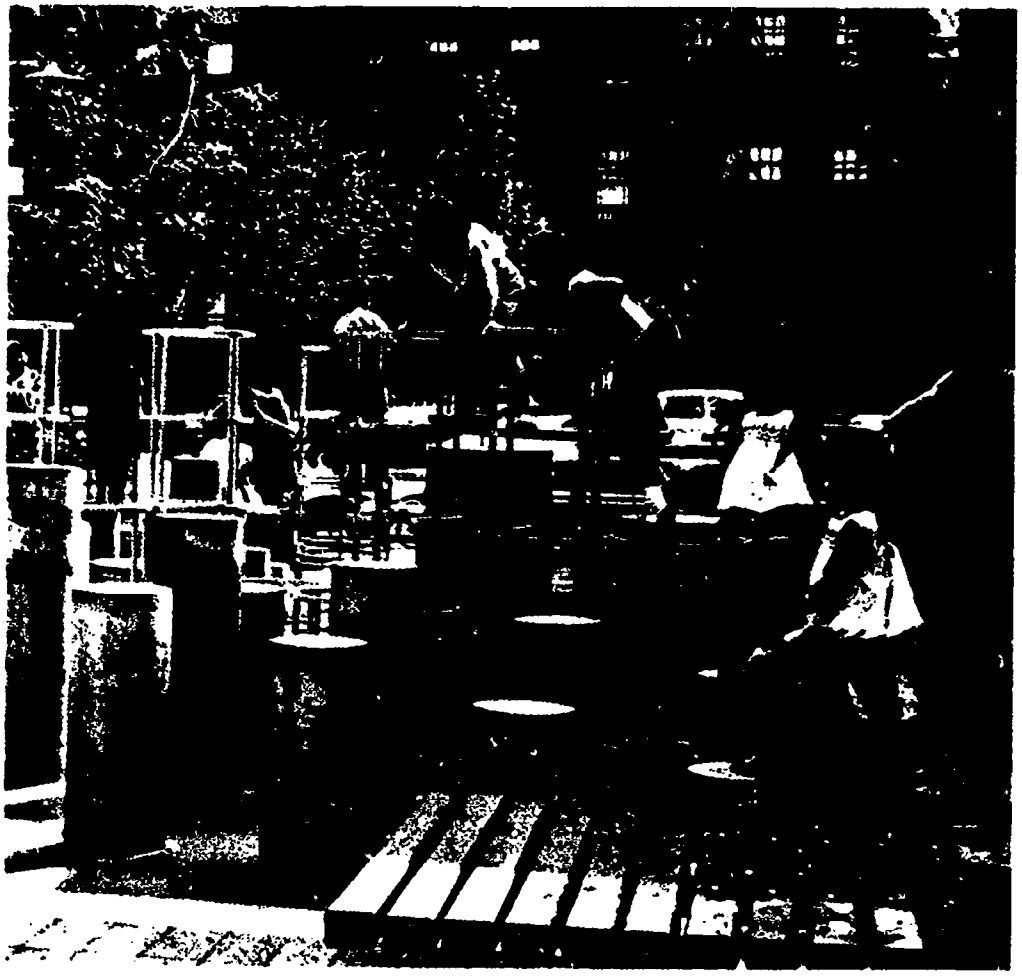
You see the springboard, a 4' by 4' platform supported on four truck springs that jiggle and move in response to the child's action. He may jump from one to the next and feel the change and movement resulting from the kinetic energy of the spring.

Stepping stones and climbing units offer choices. Here the pattern and size of the column allow a number of path opportunities. The child can go up and play individually by accepting the challenge of achieving the summit of the highest. Games of tag are possible, either at ground level or from top-of-column to top-of-column. Columns can be chalk-numbered for sequence. By themselves they might prove limited but when combined with other opportunities they are one sequence of the whole. Stepping timbers form bridges, caves, vantage points; they can be carved, punctured and modified. The bridge gives continuity to movement and action and gives the child the opportunity for improving balance skills while he crosses both physically and mentally from one activity center to the next.

A swing, which normally might be considered a potentially lethal but exciting experience, has been modified to the most rational form—a simple, round tire, which in form and substance is safe. The platform permitting more than one at a time to swing enhances cooperation and interaction. The child's capabilities are expanded. He flies, he floats, he rocks. The swing is an extension of his feet as are skates to the skater, or skis to the skier.

Very much as a swing expands the capabilities of the human body, so too the slide allows for rapid, graceful action. By expanding the width and length of the slide, the experience can be expanded. The older child expresses his interpretation of the play piece by pitting his own skills or strength against the traditional use. The young child will slide on the seat of his pants. If an older child tries to jump the entire length of the slide and misses, the angled side cushions the fall and deposits him in the sandpit below.

There is need for play with movable material. Since the playground was not fenced off during the construction of the playground at P.S. 166, the children were free to play on the site and make use of the cobblestones and boards. Play during this period was perhaps richer and more imaginative than that upon the completion of the playground, a disappointing but real fact indicating the need for an expanded and enlightened approach to even the most creative of playgrounds.



Selected Readings

Lady Allen of Hurtwood. *Planning for Play.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1968.

Association for Childhood Education International. *Housing for Early Childhood Education.* Washington: The Association, 1968.

———. *Physical Education for Children's Healthful Living.* Washington: The Association, 1968.

Frank, Lawrence. *Play Is Valid.* Washington: Association for Childhood Education International, 1968.

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Let's Make a Picture. San Diego County, Department of Education, art guide on approaches to teaching art; developmental levels in painting and drawing, teaching ideas. Bibliography. Illus. in beautiful color; black-and-white line drawings. 74 pp. $2.25.

Physical Education for Children's Healthful Living—23-A. New concepts of physical education. Basic movements, sequential skills. 80 pp. $1.50.

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The World in Children's Picture Books—N. Compiled for X11th World Assembly of OMEP. 16 pp. 50¢ ea.; 5 copies, $2.

Creating with Materials for Work and Play—5. 1969 revision. Articles on use of clay, paints, paper, block, wood, puppets, musical instruments; science materials, cooking, room environment, formulas, natural materials. 12 leaflets, $1.25.

Nursery School Portfolio—1. The nursery school child, his needs; the nursery school. 1969 revision. 16 leaflets, $1.50.

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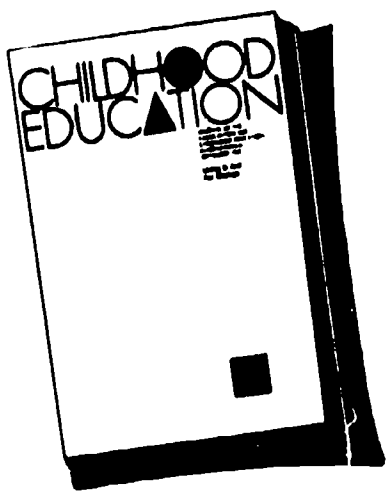

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