

THE NEW FRONTIER

SECRET GEOGRAPHIES AND THEIR IMPLICATION ON MODERN AMERICAN WILDERNESS

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Abstract

What is wilderness? And why is it important?

In this day and age of technology, there is a growing disconnect between humans and nature. This is an issue because the American relation to wilderness and nature has a far greater implication than is given credit.

This research project will explore how the American has been shaped by the wilderness and the necessity for a new frontier. Specifically, this project aims to argue for wilderness as a space for self-actualization and the benefits of post-industrial loose spaces as modern-day substitutes for wilderness.

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“In wilderness is the preservation of the world.”

-Henry David Thoreau

Introduction

Objectives

This research project seeks to connect a spectrum of ideas, history, literature, philosophies, and theories about how Americans have been shaped by wilderness.

The goal of exploring this topic is to validate the significance of secret geographies, or invisible, unmanned public spaces. This project will be using the Secret Sidewalk, a century-year old abandoned aqueduct, as the epitome of loose spaces to argue why unmanned public spaces are more than just underutilized nuisances. The argument is these spaces are modern-day substitutes for wilderness. In a highly-urbanized (or suburban) area, unstructured loose spaces allow for experiences that provide platforms to engage in similar sensory experiences which would be engaged in nature.



Sub-topics

In addressing this topic, the sub-topics which will be explored are the philosophy of self, the necessity of play as a fundamental process of life and understanding the concepts of space.

The purpose of exploring these subtopics will be to validate the significance of wilderness as a space for self-actualization. In addition, by attempting to create a stitched truth from various ephemeral topics, the hope is to spark a curiosity for knowledge, and seek a deeper meaning in everyday life occurrences, relationships, and interactions.

Theory

The theory is an extension of Frederick Jackson Turner's *Significance of the Frontier Thesis*. Turner said the American was born of the wilderness. If the American was born of the wilderness, then it can be concluded the American must change according to the wilderness.

This research project will explore three major shifts in the American perception of wilderness. These shifts are:

1. Pioneer Era (survival)
2. Romantic Era (growth)
3. Digital Era (prosperity)

(Louv, 2008)

This project will map the cultural and psychological similarities and differences between each shift.

Concluding Logic

Specifically, one of the main focuses will be on the philosophical implications behind the most recent shift, the digital era.

In a society immersed in technology and digital communication, our minds are constantly being stimulated and distracted. As great as advancements in technology are for convenience of information, communication, and scientific endeavors, there is a trade-off for our ease of

fostering a rich internal life.

The ability to simply sit quietly with our thoughts has diminished. This is an issue for a myriad of reasons. Understanding oneself is the first step into true knowledge. Critical thinking, understanding, and self-knowing have been outsourced to a constant urge to be entertained. Increase in mental disorders such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) have risen dramatically in the last two decades (Louv, 2008). However, few relate the point source of these issues to be the general indifference to wilderness and disconnection with nature (Louv, 2008).

The theory is American cultural shifts are directly correlated with how we perceive the wilderness. Thus this research project seeks to remedy our disconnection of self through the re-introduction and reverence of wilderness and nature. The goal is to articulate the need for a new shift that values the internal

world. A shift that notes the importance of wilderness and nature. A shift that catalyzes the new frontier.

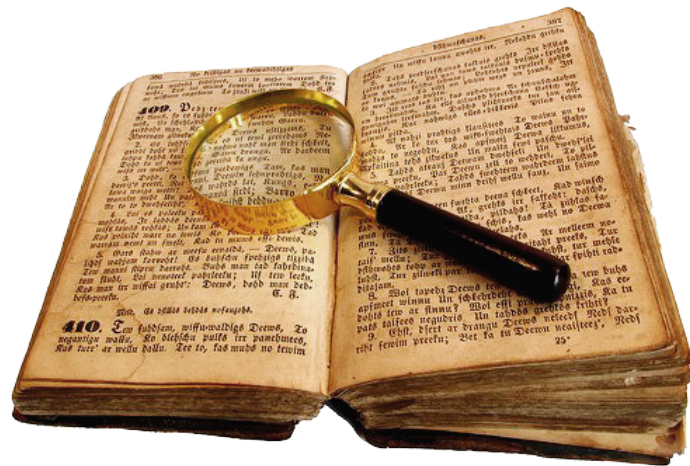




WILDERNESS

W

Words are the greatest insight people have into human history. One of the main arguments made for the belief that human beings are above animals and the rest of the natural world is that we have the inherent ability to learn and use languages to communicate (Institute for Creation Research, 2001). Whether it is written, spoken, interpreted through art, music, technology, it is because of our understanding of words that human beings have progressed, thrived, and continue to evolve. In this perspective, the use of words is the most powerful tool of man.



Old Book
Figure 2.1

Etymology: “the study of the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history.”

Words are modern day fossils and language bears the bones of history.

The etymology and evolution of a word contain an abundance of historical context. The definitions of words are not absolutes, but rather conditional terms. Their meanings are subjective to the context of time. The word which will be analyzed specifically in this study is “wilderness.”

“Wilderness” is a word which has changed drastically over time. The evolution of our outlook on wilderness is significant because it correlates perfectly with major American movements and shifts in culture. From its origin of disdain during the Westward Expansion to its revered idolization during the Romanticism Movement, the American outlook on wilderness is imperative to our overall psyche.



(1867)
Figure 2.2
Fannie Flora Palmer

To understand the implications of wilderness on the ever-changing American environmental psyche, first we must define what is meant by “wilderness”.

“Wilderness” is not a word bound to an objective definition. Rather, it is a subjective concept which changes based on the perspective of the user. There is no material object which defines “wilderness” (Nash, 2001). Even in its literal structure, it is a descriptive adjective. A word describing a “-ness” quality of a space (Nash, 2001). In order to understand what “wilderness” means in its entirety, it is necessary to delve into its etymology.

Old Cigarette Label (1890)
Figure 2.3
H.B. Grauley



“Wilderness”

Etymologically, “wilderness” can be broken into three parts:

1. Wil- derived from “will”, relaying the meaning self-willed and uncontrollable.
2. Deor- Old English for animal, meaning not-of-man.
3. Ness- has the quality of.

(Nash, 2001)

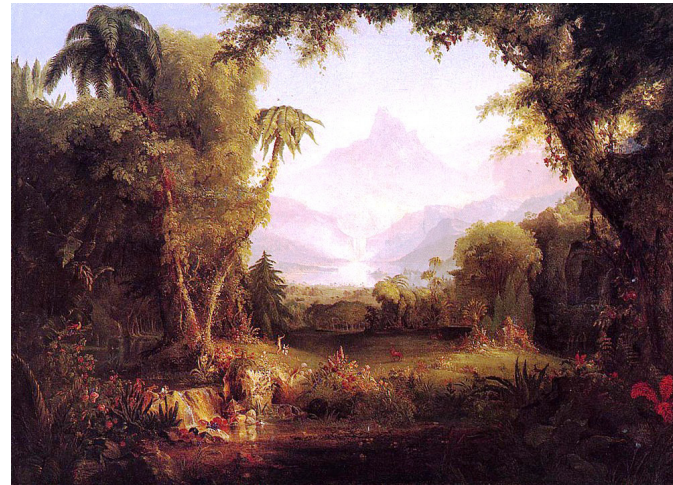
The distinction between wilderness and humans is certain. The word literally means “place of wild beasts” (Nash, 2001). Wilderness is not to be associated with humans. Its origins imply it is the antithesis of everything that is human. This disdain of wilderness can be traced back to biblical times.

The Garden of Eden

(1828)

Figure 2.4

Thomas Cole



Judeo-Christian Origins

“Wilderness” is mentioned in the King James Version of the bible 294 times, and not one iteration mentions wilderness in a pleasant light (“King James Bible Online”, 2014). Biblical perspectives on wilderness repeatedly describe it as “great”, “howling”, and “terrible” (Cronon, 1995). Perhaps the most apparent apparition of wilderness as the antithesis of all good is personified in the story of Adam and Eve.

Whether or not the story of Adam and Eve (and other religious doctrine) is true, it is important to understand the biblical perceptions of wilderness because its primary function in the intellectual realm is considered classic figurative literature.

The Garden of Eden, the Antithesis of Wilderness

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. On this earth, God planted a garden in which beast and man lived symbiotically and knew no other. This garden was called the Garden of Eden.

In Hebrew, the Garden of Eden literally translates in to “the garden

of God.” Symbolically, the Garden of Eden represents paradise. It was a perfect place before the necessity of separation between man and God, a place before sin ever existed, and a place before the fall of man.

After committing the first sin of eating forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the greatest consequence fell upon man; he was sent out of the garden into the antithesis of paradise. The terrible wilderness (Genesis, 10th to 5th century BC).

Understanding American-Christian Influences

Although America is a secular nation on paper, there is no denying that culturally it was born in Christian foundations and is still embedded in Christian traditions. Every single president thus far has been affiliated with a form of Christian upbringing (“The Religious Affiliation of U.S. Presidents”, 2014). In a religious landscape survey by PewResearch, a majority 78.4% of Americans claimed to be Christian (“Key Findings and Statistics on Religion in America”, 2007). These overwhelming statistics of Christian influences in our nation’s founding is not



Wilderness
Figure 2.5
“Place of wild beasts.”



trivial information. To understand the reasoning behind the American environmental psyche, it is imperative to understand the roots of our ancestry.

Biblical Function of Wilderness

In the bible, there are three main functions for wilderness:

1. As a sanctuary from a sinful and persecuting society
 2. As an environment to find and draw close to God
 3. As a refuge and disciplinary force.
- (Nash, 2001)

Definition Logic

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines wilderness as “uncultivated and uninhabitable by human beings (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014).” From this definition, the reader can deduce two things:

1. Wilderness is considered the binary of civilization.
2. Wilderness is a human-made concept.

If wilderness is the opposite of civilization, then it can be concluded the concept of wilderness was created alongside the beginning of civilization. Previous to settlements and the domestication of food resources, human beings did not consider nature apart from themselves. Hunter and gatherers were one with nature. Nature provided, and it simply ‘was’ (Nash, 2001). Man was simply another living organism which belonged to the larger fabric of life. There was no distinction (Nash, 2001).

However, with settlements and domestication of crops and animals came the hierarchy which exists to this day. In this hierarchy, human beings established themselves separate from nature, and ultimately, above

nature (Nash, 2001). Because of our ability to manipulate nature, man arrogantly began to believe he “owned” the land. That nature was made for our purposes and we are free to manipulate the land to do so (Nash, 2001). In drawing the physical boundary lines between controlled land and uncontrolled land, the figurative lines of this hierarchy were drawn as well. Man began to fear the uncontrolled; man now feared wilderness. Civilization (or in this case, settlement) was good, safe, and human. Wilderness was evil, unknown and not of human nature. This view of wilderness was brought forth in the Westward Expansion (Cronon, 1995).



THE FRONTIER

Introduction

In 1893, American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner introduced *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* to the American Historical Association at the Chicago's World Fair. In doing so, Turner effectively changed the modes of intellectual and historical thought by introducing the Frontier Thesis to the scholarly world (. Turner's report was unique and the first of its kind. It is an original theory denoting the importance of the Westward Expansion in the formation of the American spirit ("The Significance of the Frontier in American History", 1893).

Frederick Jackson Turner

Frederick Jackson Turner was born in 1861 in Portage Bay, Wisconsin. Turner was one of the most prominent American historians of the 19th



Frederick Jackson Turner (1861- 1932)
Figure 3.1

century. Influenced by his father's affluent knowledge as a local historian, Turner decided to devote his life to studying American history ("Frederick Jackson Turner", 2014).

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin in 1884, Turner became a professor and scholar of history at the University of Wisconsin and Harvard for 15 years. In his lifetime, Turner published very little, but his thesis on the significance of the frontier was enough to immortalize his namesake into history.

Turner revolutionized historiography, the development of theoretical analysis of history. Because of Turner's essay, scholars began to ponder the big picture beyond the motivations of the Westward Expansion ("Frederick Jackson Turner", 2001).

The American

The classic idea of an American comes strongly associated with individualistic characteristics which are unique to any other culture in the world. In a Cornell study called, "What is an American?," the American is noted to be "autonomous and self-reliant [...] separate individuals" motivated by achievement ("What is an American?", 2014). The summation of these



Pioneer's Home, Eagle Cliff, White Mountains (1859)
Figure 3.2
Jasper Francis Cropsey

characteristics depicts the American as independent, dominant individuals. The idolization of these characteristics is embedded throughout American history. From the concept of the American Dream to rapid industrialization and succession into a capitalistic society, there is no doubt the American is the epitome of individualistic society.

The Frontier Thesis

The Significance of the Frontier in American History was the first and only theory of its time to surmise the point source of how the American came to be. The idolization of individualism can be traced back to the beginning of the Westward Expansion. For this reason Turner states the true American was born in the colonization of the West. Turner argued settlements made in the Atlantic were representative of British

Wagon Train

Figure 3.3
Pioneers crossing
Nebraska Plains



colonies. The colonies in the Atlantic were mere replicas of other colonies made under British rule. They were contained within a certain area, had a lengthy period of time to create representative governments, and progress into working societies and establish themselves over time (Turner, 1893). In contrast, settlements created during the Westward Expansion were constantly evolving and cycling through a process of rebirth in the continuous confrontation of primitive conditions (Turner, 1893). America was finally able to leave behind European influences with every succession westward. According to Turner, this is a key factor to why Americans idolize dominant individualism. Constantly on the forefront of civilization and primal conditions, the pioneer was forced to adapt to the situation according to the frontier, or the wilderness (Turner, 1893).

A National Identity

After gaining independence from British rule, America was on the hot spot in the eyes of the world. As the underdogs who won the war, the pressure was on to garner achievements to prove the revolution was not for

naught (“The End of the Frontier”, 2014). As a new little nation, the first logical step needed to establish its worth was to create an identity distinct from everyone else. What did America have that no other nation had (Nash, 2001)? More than 3.5 million square miles of uncultivated and undeveloped land (Google, 2014).

The advancing frontier line was the first defining source of national identity and pride for America. To control and conquer the ever-expansive wilderness became the national goal (“The End of the Frontier”, 2014). This is perfectly

stated by Francis Joseph Grund, well-known German-American author said, “the universal disposition of Americans [...is to enlarge] their dominion over inanimate nature” (Turner, 1893).

This is evident in widely-held beliefs such as manifest destiny, the religious conviction that America’s rapid growth was a blessing from God (“The End of the Frontier”, 2014). This meant developing the wilderness was not only a mission for national achievement, but to please and fulfill

prophecies given by God. As a predominantly white, Christian country in the 19th century, America’s perspective of wilderness was still a kin to those held in the Old Testament (Cronon, 1995). Thus to dominate the wilderness and develop agrarian societies meant to rid the land of evil in place of good (Nash, 2001).

Implications of the Frontier Thesis

The Frontier Thesis provides the core foundation in the basis of this study: America is shaped by its relation to the wilderness. If America was founded by the wilderness, it can be concluded America changes in relation to the wilderness. It is in wilderness we were born and it is by wilderness we change.

The theory that America changes according to the wilderness is affirmed in Richard Louv’s book, *Last Child in the Woods*. Louv breaks down the shifts in American perspective of wilderness into three periods:

1. The First Frontier or Pioneer Era
 2. The Second Frontier or Romantic Era
 3. The Third Frontier or Digital Era
- (Louv, 2008).

American Progress (1872)

Figure 3.4
John Gast
Personification of Manifest
Destiny



The First Frontier

The First Frontier is exactly what it implies. This period of time was defined by the Westward Expansion and direct utilitarianism (Nash, 2001). Wilderness was simply a resource. In and of itself wilderness had no value. It was still seen in a biblical sense and the actions of the American people reflected these thoughts. Trees became lumber and rivers were manipulated for irrigation. The focus during the First Frontier was primarily on survival and development (Nash, 2001).

The Second Frontier

The Second Frontier, or the Romantic Era, was a period of idolization of the wilderness after the Frontier Line was no more. In 1890, the Census Bureau announced the end of the frontier. This was a disturbing realization for many Americans as the frontier was a fundamental part of the American national identity ("End of the Frontier", 2014). This was short-lived, however, as the end of the Frontier Line ended the romanticism of the West, but consequently kick-started the romanticism of the land ("End of the Frontier", 2014).

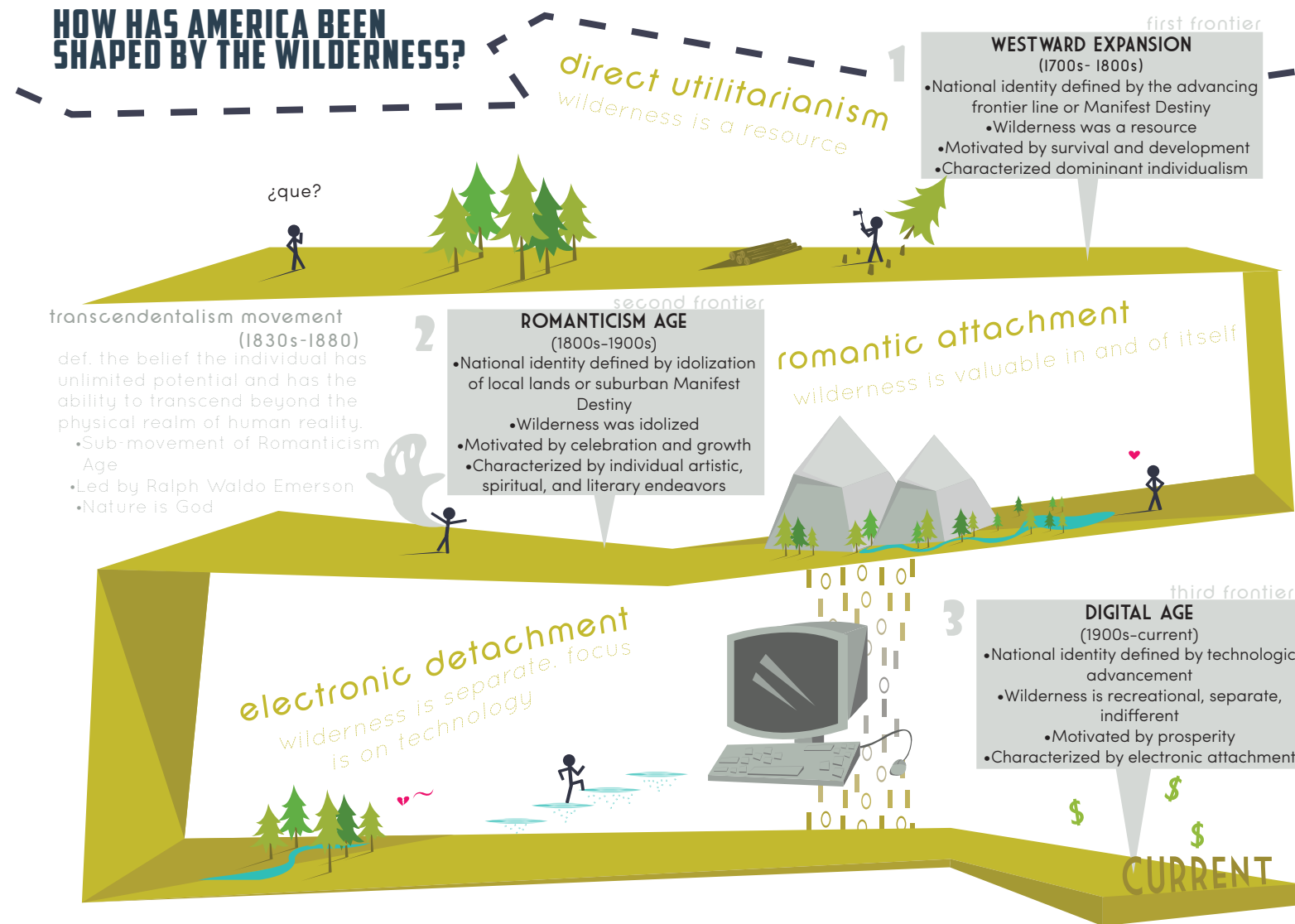
The end of the Frontier Line meant the end of the survival period. With the security of well-being, Americans were able to move onto the next stage of settlement: celebration and growth (Louv, 2008).

In a period Louv calls the suburban manifest destiny, people began to explore and revere their local lands. Boys pretending to be scouts, girls playing little house on the prairie; the agricultural salt-of-the-earth connection to the land became the new American ideal (Louv, 2008).

With philosophical notions fueled by the Enlightenment Period, Americans also experienced a revolution in thought. They adopted the rational mindset from the Age of Reason and began to question the legitimacy behind blind faith and tradition (Nash, 2001). Instead of associating the wild unknown with evil, people began to surmise if wild places were in fact glimpses of the beauty of God (Burke, 1757). With this fundamental shift in the perception of wilderness, the reverence of wilderness became the new forefront of American identity. Poets, writers, philosophers, historians, and scholars embarked on the Transcendentalism, the spiritual and intellectual movement in which the divinity of the individual was lauded as the greatest possible endeavor ("Trancedentalism", 2014). Wilderness became a path to self-knowing, and ultimately, a search for spiritual and experiential truths. The Second Frontier was focused on individual understanding and truth.

"the first frontier was a time of struggle, the second frontier was a period of taking stock, of celebration."
-Richard Louv

Infographic
Figure 3.5
How has America been shaped by the wilderness?



Digital Binary Code
Figure 3.6

The Third Frontier

If the First Frontier was a period of survival, and the Second Frontier of growth, the Third Frontier is no doubt characterized by prosperity.

In 1993, the Census Bureau announced the end of the second frontier by ending the annual survey of farm residents (Louv, 2008). The percent population of farmers had dropped so low, any statistical information gathered would be insignificant. This mapped the second major shift in ideals for America. The agrarian lifestyle of being connected and one with the land was no more. The last intimate connection to the land was severed and the Third Frontier was here (Louv, 2008). The 21st century welcomed the Digital Age.



PHILOSOPHY

Gnothi Seauton

Figure 4.1

Artistic interpretation of original text inscription at Temple of Delphi



PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

“Gnothi Seauton”, the Ancient Greek Delphic Maxim to “Know Thyself” is perhaps the most fundamental essence of Western philosophical thought. It is the aphorism accredited to Thales of Miletus, one of the Seven Sages of Greece and widely-considered the first philosopher in Greek tradition and Western philosophy (“Thales of Miletus”, n.d.) It is the most well-known aphorism and the only words inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi (“Thales of Miletus”, n.d.) Delphi which Zeus, the Father of Gods and Men, determined to be the center of the world as the navel of Gaia, Mother Earth (“Delphi”, 2013). The significance of self-knowing is a thought which has been adopted, extended, and lauded by the all the greats, including the philosophical trifecta Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle (“Know Thyself”, 2013). Self-knowledge is the genesis of true wisdom.

Philosophy of Self

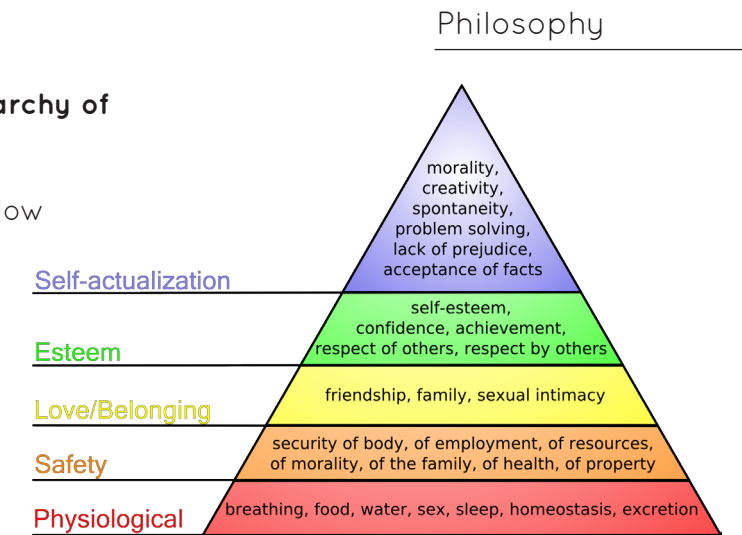
Philosophy of self is the “knowledge of one’s mental states [...] beliefs, desires and sensations [...] beyond the knowledge of the external world to [oneself] (“Self-knowledge”, 2014). It is individual realization of having human consciousness and questioning of its existence and significance.

Self-knowledge is the most important pursuit of wisdom because to know one’s self is to achieve the highest form of enlightenment (“Know Thyself”, 2013). In the quest for philosophical enlightenment, the greatest and most obvious truth is often blatantly ignored. Self-satisfaction stems simply from being aware and realizing the individual is fully in control of oneself. It is only then the individual realizes the full extent of potential simply in their being and seeks to fulfill these potentials in the desire for self-actualization.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Figure 4.2

Abraham Maslow



Disclaimer: The Objective for Truth

This disclaimer is written in the hopes to clarify the deluge of information which has been deposited upon the reader thus far. The objective of this section will be to assemble the seemingly jumbled information on the wilderness, the three frontiers, philosophies, and the American. The belief is that essentially, all knowledge, philosophy, history, psychology, science, mathematics, spirituality, etc. are interconnected. As long as two schools of thought possess the bare bones of truth, there is always a string connecting the two ideas which can be used to validate some form of inclusive, intersecting truth. There is a reason behind the existence and simply being of all things, and this chapter is the attempt to connect the inkling that wilderness and nature have a far deeper implication to the well-being of a man’s soul, mind, and spirit than it is readily accredited.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a theory of human motivation to map the basic fundamental levels in human development (“Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”, 2007). Maslow created a hierarchy of five tiers of basic human needs and growth potential. This is often envisioned in the form of a pyramid with the more basic necessities on lower levels (Figure 4.3). The five levels of human motivation are:

1. Physiological- Food, water, warmth, and sleep.
2. Safety- Security, stability, and shelter.
3. Belonging- Family, friends, and community.
4. Esteem- Achievement, independence, respect and recognition.
5. Self-Actualization- Realization of person-

al potential, self-fulfillment, seeking growth.

(“Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”, 2007).

Maslow claimed an individual must satisfy the most basic needs before progressing to the next hierarchical need (“Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”, 2007).

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is the basis to why the three frontiers perceived wilderness so differently. Each frontier experienced changes in societal human-motivation, thus the evolution of the frontiers makes complete logical sense.

During the First Frontier, Americans were focused on survival and development (Louv, 2008). There was no time to consider wilderness as anything other than an obstacle to overcome. The pioneer’s relationship to wilderness of direct utilitarianism because he was motivated by acquiring physiological and security needs.

After the Frontier Line was obsolete, the Second Frontier of celebration and growth was able to take place in light of the new sense of physiological, and safety security. The fulfillment of the two lower-level tiers allowed for the exploration

of the third, fourth and fifth level hierarchies of esteem and self-actualization. Thus in the Second Frontier Americans were able to relate to the wilderness in more than simply a value-based trade-off of resources, but in the highest regard of having value in and of itself. This belief was reflected in the evolution of the image of the American simply being a pioneer developing the wilderness, but as an independent individual capable of attaining limitless achievements and inherently born of good nature (“Romanticism” and “Transcendentalism”, 2014). These notions took fruition during the Romanticism and Transcendentalism Movement which took place during the Second Frontier. Valuing wilderness allowed man to understand and obtain a higher regard within himself.

The Third Frontier’s electronic attachment is somewhere in between the First Frontier’s direct utilitarianism and the Second Frontier’s romantic attachment (Louv, 2008). With the onslaught of technological advancements and digital connections, appreciation and interaction of wilderness and nature experienced a step backwards from the Second Frontier. In the Digital Age, the transcendental ideals of the individual were replaced with economic and so-

cial status as pinnacles of achievement. This unfortunate regression in philosophical enlightenment came to be because of man’s detachment from wilderness and nature.

To pinpoint the Third Frontier’s indifference of wilderness to be the exclusive causation of America’s relapse in self-actualization would be a mass generalization, but the argument is that there is a definite correlation between the two circumstances. *This theory will be explained further in a later section.*

A Deeper Look into the Second Frontier: The Enlightenment Period (Part I)

While the end of the Frontier Line allowed for means for the emergence of the Second Frontier, the intellectual mindset of European enlightenment essentially sparked the Romantic Period in the States (Nash, 2001).

The Enlightenment Period was the revolution in human thought which took place in 17th-century Europe. During this time, man challenged ideas purely based in faith for factually sound in science and reason (“Enlightenment”, 2014). One of the core subjects studied during the Enlightenment was astronomy and the solar system. In studying the stars,

the discovery of the majestic, complex vastness of the universe piqued the curiosity to search for the Divine (Nash, 2001). This interest of foreign planetary landscapes extended to the unknown and feared landscapes of Earth as well. People began to replace the biblical disdain of the wilderness with an alternate biblical perspective in which the wilderness was a place one could come to find God (Cronon, 1974). The belief that one could catch glimpses of God in the wilderness set the foundations for Romanticism of nature.

The Romantic Period (Part II)

The Romantic Period was the artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that took place in 18th century after the Enlightenment Period. This period of time was characterized by the idolization of notions based on invisible, ephemeral liberal merits (“Romanticism”, 2004). Such notions as the artist in pure form who has the ability create something out of nothing, a god in his own right (“Romanticism”, 2004).

The Romantic Period was a response to the reductionist view of nature during the Enlightenment Period (“Romanticism”, 2014). In this perspective, romanticism seems like a complete deviation from scientific reasoning,

however, scientific reasoning lay the foreground for romanticism to develop.

The Enlightenment Period was essential to Romanticism for two reasons:

1. Discoveries in a scientific understanding of the expanse and complexities of life instilled a sense of wonder, awe, and thirst for knowledge. This
2. With any perspective or belief based in absolutes (even logic and facts), stirs the questioning of the existence of an opposing force.

These two reasons combined with the inquisitive nature of the Enlightenment Era, there was no doubt Romanticism would arise from the shadows in attempt to validate and legitimize the existence of artistic, romantic, and spiritual notions.

The Ode to Flower

Romanticists debased the cold, scientific-rational of nature as reductionist point-of-view and revered the personal, all-encompassing experience of nature as the true worth of nature (“Romanticism” I, 2014). However, the belief that either

perspective of nature is more valuable than the other is a ridiculous and non-sensical accusation. Scientific rational and aesthetic understanding is not mutually exclusive from one another. The basis for appreciation is on opposing ends of the spectrum, but it that does not take away from the value of the subject in question (“Ode to a Flower”, n.d.) Contrast, different perspectives of a subject only add onto the beauty of the subject. This is perhaps best embodied in the famous monologue, Ode to a Flower, by American theoretical physicist, Richard Feynman (“Ode to a Flower”, n.d.).

In this monologue, Feynman, the scientist is confronted by his artist friend who disregards Feynman’s ability to appreciate the beauty of a flower in all its aesthetic glory. Feynman disagrees. Perhaps he does not appreciate the beauty in the same way his friend does, but what of the beauty in smaller processes occurring within the flower? The color of the petals which evolved to attract insects to pollinate its seeds? The fact that the petals are colored at all, indicating insects can see and are attracted to some color more than others. To quote, “[scientific] knowledge only adds to the excitement, the mystery and the awe of a flower. It only adds. I

don’t understand how it subtracts. (“Ode to a Flower”, n.d.).

Transcendentalism (Part III)

In the midst of Romanticism, another spiritual and philosophical movement convicted the Atlantic Coast. Transcendentalism is the belief the individual has unlimited potential and has the ability to transcend beyond the physical realm of human reality. Transcendentalists based their understanding of the world not with factual, tangible knowledge, but rather the human understanding of the spirit and divine (“Transcendentalism”, 2014).

Essentially, transcendentalism was the philosophical movement that pushed for man to become the best iteration of himself by understanding himself. Transcendentalism was a spiritual and philosophical movement to push people towards self-actualization (“Transcendentalism”, 2014).

Self-actualization is the highest tier in Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Self-actualization is the seeking of self-fulfillment through a constant need for personal growth (“Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”,

n.d.). In this sense, Transcendentalism was the highest level of consciousness and knowledge the America ever experienced.

The Premise of a New Frontier

Parallel to how the concept of wilderness was defined alongside civilization, the appreciation of wilderness was born in the disdain of the cities (Nash, 2001). Yi Fu Tuan, Chinese-American philosopher and geographer, says for environmental value to exist, it must have antithesis. To quote, “water is taught by thirst, land, by oceans crossed” (“Topophilia and Environment”, 1974). This is an important observation because when following the patterns of history, extremities of either regard catalyzes a shift due to grievances found over extended periods of an unchanging status quo. These major shifts from direct utilitarianism to romantic attachment to electronic detachment have been a rather fluctuating wave of varying levels of enlightenment and self-understanding.



NECESSITY OF PLAY

“I climbed up a stump and suddenly I felt immersed in Itness. I did not call it by that name. I had no need for words. It and I were one.”

-Bernard Berenson, art critic

Objective

This objective of this chapter will be to explore the concept of play and how it has changed over time. In addition, this study will explore nature and wilderness’ role in the aspect of “loose” play and imagination. It will argue against the “criminalization of natural play”, risky play. The goal is to validate the value of play in a liberal form and not just a recreational outlet or supervised, structured activity. This study will argue that play is rather a beneficial, fundamental life outlook and process.

Digital Grievances and Losing Touch with Nature

D.H. Lawrence, famous American author and poet described the omnipresent state of information as a “transparent mucous-paper” (Louv, 2008). Lawrence said because all information and communication is seemingly at the tip of our fingers, people believe the facade of having wisdom and wonder (Louv, 2008).

Primary experience is the measure of internally interpreting the physical world. There is a difference between knowing something and having experienced something. The lack of interaction with nature has caused an atrophy of the senses (Louv, 2008). This is a problem specifically for children born of this era



because primary sensory experiences are being replaced for secondary electronic experiences.

Robin Moore, professor of childhood development says natural environments are essential for a healthy development of an interior life (Louv, 2008). This interior life comes into play in unstructured, “risky” play in which children test their environments and abilities and learn how to engage with the world around them (Rosin, 2014). Without direct, sensory experiences, children grow up with a missing social filter. There has been an increase in aloneness and depression, a phenomenon Louv calls “cultural autism” (Louv, 2014).

In the late 1970s Theodora Briggs Sweeney, a safety consultant from



Risky Play

Cleveland, Ohio, revolutionized the standardization of playground equipment. Due to one particular instance when the city of Chicago was sued for 9.5 million dollars because of faulty playground equipment, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission created a book of requirements and guidelines for all equipment (Rosin, 2014). This kick started a cultural shift in socially acceptable risk. Lawsuits and insurance rates effectively eradicated risk from not only playground equipment, but the majority of public spaces (Rosin, 2014). To be risky was to be dangerous. Everything became standardized.

Coupled with a disconnection from nature, the elimination of risky play is a horrendous step backwards for the development of an interior life. Ellen Sandseter, professor of physical education in Norway, claims children must be exposed to certain stimuli or ‘fears’ in order to learn how to deal with real-life risky situations (Sandseter, 2011). This is called the non-associative theory of risky play. When children are exposed to risky stimuli, children associate the situation with a positive thrilling emotion. If a child is unprepared to cope with the situation, the child may master how to cope with the situation as he or she matures (Sandseter, 2011). This exposure to thrilling stimuli allows children to deal with risky situations in a positive light and in a self-determined reasoning of the situ-



Kids Playing

Figure 5.2
Free play and imagination

“The vitality or intensity experienced through playing adds strength and depth to our experience of the world.”

- Tara Woodyer

"[...] there is something about nature-that when you are in it, it makes you realize that there are far larger things at work than yourself."

-Lauren Haring, nature enthusiast

Risky Play cont.

ation rather than fearing or feeling ashamed of not being able to handle a situation (Rosin, 2011). This is relevant with Louv's argument for why children need nature. The standardization of playground equipment, public spaces, and other manufacture equipment combined with the growing disconnection from nature is eliminating imagination and free play from childhood. This is causing an increase in anxiety, Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, depression, and an increase in adult-phobias (Sandseter, 2011). These psychological disorders are often not accredited to the lack of nature or risky play (Louv, 2008). Pills are given to treat these disorders. However, what people may need is simply an environment to experience thrilling stimuli to understand the world through primary sensory experiences.



In Awe
Figure 5.3
Nature induces wonder

"...found spaces are places that enable people to exercise their freedom of choice"

-Proshansky, environmental psychologist

Loose Space

Loose spaces are spaces people recognize possibilities in and take risks in order to achieve the desired goal (Franck and Steven, 2007). A narrow alley way used as a street market to peddle goods or a city plaza that also functions as some sort of public amphitheater are all examples of loose space. Loose spaces are important because they are places that hone imagination and creativity. As Simon Nicholson, a British architect, said, "the degree of inventiveness and creativity [...] are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it (Louv, 2008)". Similar to loose space, Nicholson calls these variables "loose-toys". Coupled with nature and loose spaces would create a space of ultimate creativity, wonder, and imagination.



Interacting with Nature
Figure 5.4
Kid holding frog



The Secret Sidewalk

Walking on Top
Figure 6.1
The RH walking atop the Secret Sidewalk



The Tunnel
Figure 6.2
Looking into an active mile-long train tunnel.



1. In association to phenomena (in accordance to our sensory, experiential perceptions, meaning of space, spatial relations)
 2. In relation to man and his physical environment (grounded in facts, geography, science, and what can be measured analytically)
- (Sack, 1).

Analytical science measures geography and space with boundaries, numbers; through tangible modes of thought. This definition of space completely excludes abstract concepts of space as a source of value or specificity. Understandably, space is hard to quantify through philosophical or theoretical ideas, but the argument is geographic space is not empty (Sack, 4). Yi Fu Tuan, Chinese-American geographer, says to completely enjoy nature one must yield to the sensations like a child (Tuan, 1974). A child perceives their environment with no judgment as everything is immediate and aesthetic distance is minimal (Tuan, 1974). The Secret Sidewalk is not a typical sight, it is a conglomerate-



tion of both urban and natural history, thus the draw towards this mysterious destination for local youth and urban explorers alike.

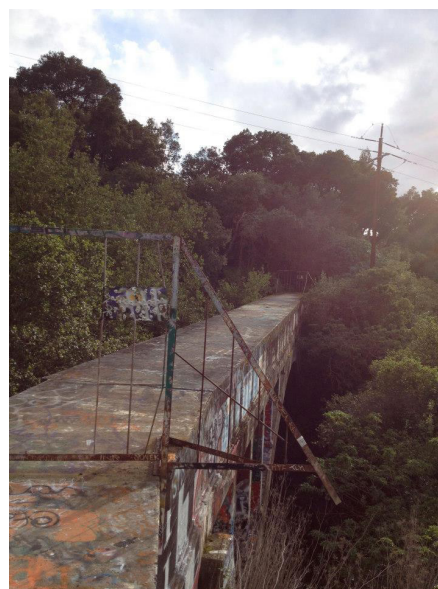
Site Narrative History

In the book *Loose Space*, loose space is defined as “a place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, seat of the dissolution of normality’s and con-



Hobbit Hole Path
Figure 6.4
At the west end of the SS.

The Water Tower
Figure 6.5
First graffiti landmark and climbing challenge.



Suicide Bridge
Figure 6.3
Rightfully named as there is no ledge.

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to redeem loose-spaces, or spaces that aren’t constrained to a specific function allowing for a wider spectrum of possible uses (Franck and Stevens, 2007). This study will argue for the benefits and redeeming qualities of unstructured spaces in helping our understanding of place. The argument is that loose spaces, specifically unmanned public spaces, have become a substitute for interaction with nature. The site in question is the Secret Sidewalk, a century year-old abandoned aqueduct overrun by nature, which is the epitome of a post-industrial loose-space.

Site History

The Old Niles Canyon Aqueduct, or as it is better known, the Secret Sidewalk, is a decommissioned aqueduct that once used to pump water to San Francisco until it was replaced by the Hetch Hetchy Aqueduct (Levin, 2009). The Secret Sidewalk is private property, owned by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. Since it’s decommission in the 1960’s the Secret Sidewalk has evolved into a local urban mecca for local teenagers and youth (Levin, 2009). It is a place that blends history of the space, modern urban aesthetics, and nature into one.

Concepts of Space

The Secret Sidewalk is not just a space. It is an experience, an adventure, a place of mystery and wonder. In a society where liability issues are eradicating loose spaces, there are less and less opportunities for a general creative outlook in our daily environment. So in addition to the detachment from nature and wilderness, humans are limiting the imagination and possibilities in tight man-made environments and spaces (Franck and Steven, 2007). This is a growing problem in how people perceive spaces as merely functional pieces. It reinforces the idea of separation of playful imagination and definite absolutes (Woodyer, 2012).

Geographic spaces cannot be fully defined. There are two ways in which space is analyzed and documented:

strains, the moment of play and of the unpredictable (Franck and Steven, 2007).” This is essentially what the Secret Sidewalk represents for many people. In a quick survey taken of descriptive adjectives about the site, the most used words were:

- 1. “Cool”- 12
 - 2. “Fun”- 9
 - 3. “Scary”- 5 (in reference to suggested night time visits and the Wicked Witch of the Niles)
- (Moon, 2014)

As simple as these adjectives are, one can deduce from the words that the Secret Sidewalk is a place of wonder and intrigue (“cool”), interaction, challenge, and manipulation (“fun”), and risk and excitement (“scary”). As a post-industrial site overtaken by nature, the Secret Sidewalk serves as a perfect loose space that changes according to however the user wants to interact and play with the space.

Modern-day Wilderness

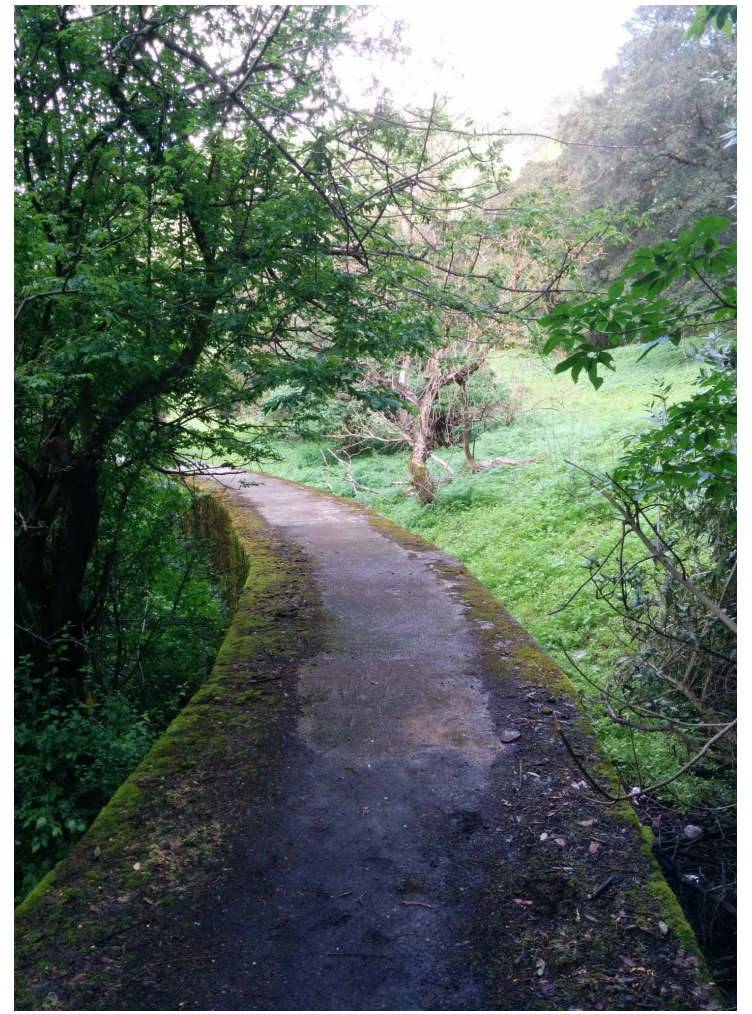
The argument introduced in the beginning of this research project is that post-industrial loose spaces are modern-day substitutes for wilderness. This is because these types of spaces provide for a myriad of aspects wilderness once represented throughout history.

Post-industrial sites are often abandoned, forbidden, dishelved and overrun by nature. The strange merge of two opposing qualities of urban structure and creeping nature give these sites a surreal, apocalyptic characteristic. It is a source of wonder and awe, perhaps not in a beautiful sense, but rather a bewildering shock. This is relative to the perspective of the wilderness during biblical times. Wilderness was feared, but it was also considered “great”.

In addition, as these secret geographies are not officiated by a governing factor, information about these sites are very minimal. This only adds onto the factor to the mysterious and unknown draw of these sites. There is an inherent danger in exploring these sites, but this is the benefit of such spaces. In a society



Canopy Cove
Figure 6.10
Change of environment in SS



The Secret Sidewalk
Figure 6.9
Top of “entrance” to SS near the frame



The Tunnel
Figure 6.11
Graffiti landmark #3

where lawsuits and insurance claims have eradicated unstructured, risky play, these unmanned, loose spaces allow explorers opportunities for individual risk-assessment and challenge oneself through direct interaction with the land. This engages the explorer's consciousness with the land and their own awareness of their abilities. Since these sites are not kept up, physical interaction is often necessary to navigate through them providing the explorer an all-encompassing primary experience.

Frontier-Connection (Part I)

As for the relationship of unmanned public spaces to the ideals of the wilderness during the Westward Expansion, it is evident again in the use of language. The people who experience these spaces are often called "explorers". It is not completely akin to the same definition of a "pioneer", but bear similarities ("Meriam-Webster Dictionary", 2014). An explorer is defined as:

"a person who travels in search of geographical or scientific information" ("Meriam-Webster Dictionary", 2014)

While the "pioneer" is defined as:

"someone who is one of the first people to move to and live in a new area" ("Meriam-Webster Dictionary", 2014)

Both the explorer and pioneer are out to obtain something. The explorer obtains information about the land, a sort of "conquering" by knowing. The pioneer obtains the land by conquering. Though the explorer does not physically conquer the "wilderness", the explorer conquers the

unknown land by gathering an experience of the place.

Romanticism-Connection (Part II)

As stated previously, the Secret Sidewalk is a hot spot for local youth. Covered in urban culture, it goes without saying this is a special place for many people.

Since the Secret Sidewalk is such a strange experience (imagine a 4-foot lifted sidewalk in the middle of a mossy, thick-canopied forest), it has become the point-source of many haunted rumors and urban legends. It is spoken highly of amongst local youth and often spurs interest and excitement when spoken of to people who are unaware of its existence.

Technically, the Secret Sidewalk is a liability and as a public-owned utility, considered a nuisance. In 2008, San Francisco aimed to demolish the old aqueduct, but the move was put on hold as petitions arose for the potential use and love of this space.

The fact is the Secret Sidewalk is an abandoned aqueduct in the middle of nowhere. But people have spoken, and it has value in and of itself.

Conclusion

The Secret Sidewalk is the perfect example of a substitute for wilderness because it offers a fully-encompassing sensory experience of nature and risky, unstructured play.



The Secret Sidewalk

Mapping an Abandoned Aqueduct

Landmarks

Narrative Use of Space

The Secret Sidewalk is unique because it requires the explorer to interact directly with the landscape and be aware of the surroundings in order to traverse through it successfully.

To begin with to get to the aqueduct, one must cut through a neighboring suburbia and walk along live train tracks. The tracks eventually lead to a curved dip which is the entrance of the demolished Niles Brick Factory with gigantic piles of colorful, crumbled bricks that inevitably everybody clambors on top of (Mosier, n.d.).

Immediately to the right of the bricks is a narrow trail opening covered with an orange netting that failed to keep anybody out. The trail goes up a steep hill where the explorer catches the first magnificent

glimpse of the Secret Sidewalk to the right. It fittingly reads, "Honor Among Kings" in classic 90s graffiti font.

Continuing up the hill, the peak of the water tower peeps over the left-side of the hill. The water tower is a view to behold as well, covered in an amalgamation of graffiti, first-comers will invariably be stunned at the sight of such strange beauty. To top it off is a explorer-made rope 15-feet off the ground attached to the tower's ladder. It is only reachable if the explorer is able to climb a square-shaped pipe with pure fore-arm strength. Do not be disappointed, most explorers are not able to succeed.

At the base of the water tower lay remnants of teenage shenanigans and tomfoolery. The water tower is a popular gathering space.

Immediately adjacent to the water tower is the Plank Tree. It is a medium sized oak that is on the cusp of a

hill. Hammered into the trunk are five 3-inch nails to assist climbers to the wooden plank permanently fixed to the lowest branch.

After climbing the Plank Tree, explorers back track down the hill to a near-invisible dirt trail to the right of the hill. It leads to the flat valley below the hilly vista with two possible destination points; 1. The Tunnel or 2. The Frame. Traditionally, the Tunnel is next.

The Tunnel is the cavern in which trains travel underneath the Old Niles Canyon. Its entrance is undoubtedly the most artistically-inclined graffiti in the Secret Sidewalk.

After visiting the Tunnel, explorers can backtrack to the flat valley and climb the hill towards the Frame. The Frame is a leftover steel structure on top of the aqueduct that is a perfect square. One side juts out over the aqueduct which acts as a bar to assist explorers on top

WATER TOWER
THE FRAME
DEMOLISHED BRICK FACTORY
GRAFFITI TRAIN TUNNEL

SUICIDE BRIDGE
RAPPEL HILL

MANHOLE

★ START

mission blvd

old niles canyon road

canyon heights road

of the sidewalk. Once on top of the Secret Sidewalk explorers have a glorious view of the Old Niles Canyon with not a soul in sight. From here explorers can go right into the canopies of old oaks. Walking atop a 4-foot wide "sidewalk" covered in moss and immersed in a thick vegetation is surreal.

At the very end of the sidewalk is another frame, the entrance to Suicide Bridge, a ledge-less crossing over a 50-foot ravine. Explorers often peer over the edge despite the risk.

At the other side of the bridge is the grand finale, Rappel Hill. Simply mismatched ropes tied to a tip of a tree root, explorers must use this to rapel down an extremely muddy, steep hill. At the base of the hill is the middle of the train tracks explorers came from. The end of a grand adventure.

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