

An Invitation to Play, 2025

Soundwalk; 15 minutes

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GALLERY TEXT

An Invitation to Play is a soundwalk that encourages a playful look at the world around us. Using experimental audio and lessons from game studies, we will guide you through a series of playful exercises as you walk through Boston Public Garden.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As children we often look at the world through the lens of play - sidewalk cracks invite us to avoid stepping on them under perilous threat; trees for climbing stand out amongst the rest; we determine which house hides the terrifying monster and walk on the other side of the street. However, as we reach adulthood, we often lose this lens of play. This soundwalk invites listeners to adopt a playful attitude toward their natural spaces and the people around them. For fifteen minutes, as listeners stroll around the lake in the Boston Public Garden, we will create the space for a playful interaction with the world. Together, we will explore the positive psychological benefits of play and how a playful attitude affects us and colors our lived experiences. We will hear stories of designers who seek to create playful moments in daily life - designers such as Bernard DeKoven who spent his life inviting others to participate in what he called “the infinite playground.”^[1] Finally, by exploring some of the aesthetic elements of play (including imagination, playful objects, flow, and the magic circle), we will create opportunities for playful attitudes towards nature, others, and ourselves.

MEDIA LINK(S)

- <https://explore.echoes.xyz/collections/5R1qvWZkyniHAjz0>
- <https://mouseandthebillionaire.com/aitp/excerpt.wav>
- <https://mouseandthebillionaire.com/aitp/map.png>

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ARTIST STATEMENT/BIO

Matthew Bethancourt develops experimental games and interactions. He is interested in site-specific games, alternative controllers, procedural sound, sonification, and contemplative/reflective play. His work, much of which invites people to do silly or mundane things, pointing to deeper themes and unanswerable questions, has been shown at a diverse collection of conferences and venues including A MAZE Berlin, IndieCade, alt.ctrl.GDC, XOXO, SEAMUS, STEIM, and ICAD. He founded the Whaaat!?! Lab for experimental play at the ATLAS Institute of the University of Colorado Boulder where he also directed the Creative Technology and Design program from 2016 to 2021. He has an MFA in Design & Technology from Parsons School for Design in New York and is currently working towards a PhD at Concordia University in Montreal, QC.

REFERENCES

- [1] De Koven, Bernard, and Holly Gramazio. *The Infinite Playground: A Player's Guide to Imagination*. Edited by Celia Pearce and Eric Zimmerman. The MIT Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11625.001.0001>.