PleasurESCAPEs: Mechanized Conveyances as Agents of Alternate Urban Experience

Elias Varon

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pleasure escapes
mechanized conveyances as agents of alternate urban experiences

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This thesis inquires the possibilities of creating pleasurable destinations in a city that engage their urban environment through the deployment of mechanized conveyances - conveyances that offer an alternative experience to the day-to-day "mobilities".

**Mobilities** is a paradigm of the social sciences that examines the movement of people, objects, and ideas in space. Writers in the field such as John Urry have explored the role of mobilities in a wide range of topics such as information systems and urban planning, and especially what this project is primarily focused with: leisure and pleasure. Before unpacking the role of mobilities in this area, we must first understand the role of architecture in this paradigm.

"You can take the steps down the hill or you can take the embedded slide just a few feet away. I always took the slide" - dawn chiang
In Whence and Whither, The Processional Element of Architecture, Philip Johnson states that architecture exist in time, rather than space. He cites Sergei Einstein's reading of the Acropolis as an example: the Parthenon is not an independent entity, but rather, is a crucial component of a larger collective. One that is ultimately experienced as a procession in time - a visual experience powered by human legs (i.e., walking). The orientation of the buildings defined both the route for the experience to transpire, and they controlled the perception of the buildings as either majestic (frontal approach) or picturesque (oblique approach). With the Acropolis serving precedent as one of architecture's "oldest films", this then provides the architect the ability and power to curate an experience based on movement and views, a concept otherwise known as the promenade architecturale, coined by Le Corbusier.
mechanized conveyance and the spectacle

John Urry stated, in regards to mobilities’ role in pleasure, that alternate modes of transportation facilitated alternate performances and contrasting experiences. It is no surprise then, as Rem Koolhaas identified in Delirious New York, that Coney Island was a popular escape from the tenement life in the Manhattan, and in Rem’s words, the finish line for a weekly exodus with the urgency of a jailbreak.

The post-industrial revolution amusement park was the melting pot of the working class population with the bourgeoisie. It was essentially a mass-consumer test-bed for fantastical and alternate methods of conveyance. Because rail transportation as mass passenger transportation being fairly new, people were able to not only access the island more easily, but also experience a dynamic panorama of a changing landscape aboard the train. This was a revolutionary experience for many, and just the teaser for what awaited them at the island.

One of the most crucial elements of constructing the spectacle at Coney Island is two-fold. First, in addition to a highly energized and kinetic landscape of machines, visitors to the amusement park were able to experience the attractions by either spectating or by physically “riding” them, a notion that is otherwise simplified by Josephine Kane as the “whirl and the wonder”. Secondly, there needs to be a direct reference to an otherwise banal or normative condition, such as the ground, in order to achieve a visual and sensorially apparent contrast.

In addition to the amusement park, world expositions are other notable venues where many forms of mechanized mobilities earn their inception, such as the moving sidewalk at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In reality, the two venues are no different from another, and both effectively make use of the “midway plaisance”, to construct the environment for which these mechanized amusements are to be viewed and ridden.

“the adventure is clearly demarcated, self-enclosed, and set in the contrast to the everyday, [constituting] an apparent break with the flatness of reified existence” - georg simmel
The High Line in New York City is a recent and clearly popular urban phenomenon - an alternate experience and spatial narrative over time in Manhattan that has welcomed more than 5 million visitors since 2014.

Designed by James Corner Field Operations in tandem with Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the park adapts previously utilized elevated rail infrastructure to create a park that itself acts as the conduit between destinations in the city (such as the Meatpacking District and Chelsea neighborhoods), is itself a destination in the city, and most importantly, has “microdestinations” throughout the entire length of the High Line (this includes the sunken overlook, vendors, rolling beds, and playgrounds embedded in the structural framework). This entire experience, similar to the Acropolis, is powered by the human legs.
mapping
comparing the seemingly incomparable

The experience of the High Line may seem like a far stretch from that of an amusement park or world exposition attraction. But in executing a side-by-side comparison of these experiences, we see that their construction of experience through views and movement is more alike than one would imagine, albeit abstract. Comparing these entities arrives at the diagram below, which essentially states that there is a space or entity situated on a linear path or route, featuring a visual experience or vista “aboard” the path, and an impacted visual experience and vista from outside of the system. Collectively, this constructs the material and ambient experience of being physically present in the system. Although amusement parks are displaced from city centers to create a literal “escape”, the High Line achieves this from within the city by utilizing a new datum; i.e., a new tableau. This thesis then contends that mechanized conveyance systems can achieve the same within a city.
the high line
new york, ny
experience
shoot the chutes
Dreamland, Coney Island, NY

Adventure Thru Innerspace
Disneyland, Anaheim, CA

US Pavilion
Expo '67, Montreal, Quebec
shoot the chutes
dreamland, coney island, ny

adventure thru innerspace
disneyland, anaheim, ca

us pavilion
expo '67, montreal, quebec

path

path

path
shoot the chutes
Dreamland, Coney Island, NY

adventure thru innerspace
Disneyland, Anaheim, CA

US Pavilion
Expo '67, Montreal, Quebec

scenography

scenography

scenography
shoot the chutes
dreamland, coney island, ny

adventure thru innerspace
disneyland, anaheim, ca

us pavilion
expo ’67, montreal, quebec
shoot the chutes
Dreamland, Coney Island, NY

Experience

adventure thru innerspace
Disneyland, Anaheim, CA

Experience

us pavilion
Expo '67, Montreal, Quebec

Experience
Because the primary site of investigation for this thesis is mechanized conveyance, identifying the types of systems, how they work, and how they are situated in a historical breadth can give clues and narrow down how these systems may be able to situate themselves in a pleasurable way.

From 16 primary systems of conveyance emerges a set of 5 broad criteria that each system addresses:

- layout configuration (circuit vs shuttle)
- vehicle configuration (separate vs continuous)
- accessibility (limited vs hop-on / hop-off)
- control of vista and motion (controlled vs uncontrolled)
- programming (adjacent vs self-contained)

Furthermore, in looking at how each of these 16 exist in a historical framework, there is an evident influence and overlap that these systems have on other forms of conveyance. For instance, the roller coaster predates many forms of contemporary mass transportation, and as stated earlier, many of these systems were debuted at a world exposition or amusement park, albeit in a more spectacular fashion rather than practical (the escalator made its first material debut as a temporary installation in Coney Island). Despite these systems’ material idiosyncrasies (ex: cable conveyance vs conveyor conveyance), they are one in the same.
space / vehicle
boarding platform
chassis
path infrastructure

paternoster elevator
stuttgart, germany

layout configuration
circuit
shuttle

otis scenic elevator
marriott marquis, john portman, atlanta ga
cabinentaxi people mover
hamburg, germany

general motors futurama II exhibit
1964 world's fair, flushing, queens, ny
space / vehicle
boarding platform
chassis
path infrastructure
layout configuration
space configuration
circuit
separate
limited
hop-on / hop-off
AqiLissoco
glidepath, ripley's aquarium
myrtle beach, sc

umeda sky building escalator
osaka, japan
space / vehicle
boarding platform
chassis
path infrastructure

layout configuration
circuit
separate
limited

space configuration
shuttle
continuous

Allision

user movement + vista
controlled
uncontrolled

haunted mansion
disneyland, anaheim, ca

seattle space needle
world's fair 1962, seattle, wa
trolley, the grove + farmers market
Los Angeles, CA

Colonial Tramcar Restaurant
Melbourne, Australia
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testing interventions on minneapolis skyway

Provided the crosslist of techtonic criteria and the 16 categories of conveyance, a variety of tests can then be conducted on a site with a mundane condition to simulate creating an alternate experience. Minneapolis has the largest skybridge system in the world. Within the downtown, the pedestrian experience in the city primarily occurs within them, and the skybridges dominate the vista in the automobile experience through the city. In this case, the skyway system is a banal method of mobilities in the city. Using mechanized conveyance as an operation, can there be interventions that either replace or interface with the bridges to allow a more pleasureable way of moving throughout the city?

Using a combination of Maya, NoLimits Simulator, and the architectonic repertoire of plans and sections, we can better understand how combinations of these systems will impact the pedestrian experience in the city, the automobile experience in the city, and create a new experience and spectacle altogether. For the first three experiments, the program of a revolving restaurant is the starting point, followed by additional variations and permutations.
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revolving restaurant as bridge
circular path
arrayed program
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varied path xyz
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varied path xyz
arrayed program
upright orientation
throughout path
cable car / moving
platform hybrid
After conducting these experiments, while on the extreme end, a plethora of possibilities have opened up. The behavior of the vehicle relative to the path configuration dramatically changes the experience. For the second test, the arrayed restaurant booths created a terraced portion due to the hybridization with the ferris wheel gyroscope. Throughout the research of this project thus far, it has been made clear that the role and scope of the architect in transit design is limited to stations, and many conveyance systems are in the scope of the engineer. When it comes to curating an experience with conveyance, it is currently only seen in constructed realities and artifices (i.e. theme parks). These systems of conveyance yield exciting results when engaged in a city.

Moving forward, the tests will be dialed back, and more analysis will take place on the articulation of the vehicle, and how programming may be incorporated to enhance the kinetics. A more refined language of representation with more tests and experiments will clarify the criteria for the final design.

The final design will be an experimental restaurant, hotel, or other mixed-use leisure-type program that interfaces with a mechanized conveyance system.
In this text, Adams provides a thorough history of the amusement park industry and culture, ranging from economic metrics to detailed accounts of the perception and effect of the rollercoaster.


Of the four “ecologies” that Banham presents in this text, one of which places focus on the realm of entertainment and spectacle in Los Angeles, i.e. the “fantastic”, specifically citing Disneyland. He relates the cultural impact of Disneyland to “the city’s obsession with mobilities”, stating that “Disneyland offers illicit pleasures of mobility. Esconced in a sea of giant parking lots in a city devoted to the automobile, it provides transportation that does not exist outside - steam trains, monorails, peoplemovers, tram-trains, travelators, ropeways, not to mention pure transport fantasies such as simulated space-trips and submarine rides” (109-110). Banham is essentially stating that Disneyland acts as an escape from a city where the automobile, intrinsic to Los Angeles transit culture, is banal.


Walter Benjamin had a crucial role in researching the phantasmagoric effect of consumption, and was particularly fascination in researching this in the context of the World Expositions. World Expositions, like Amusement Parks, are commercial establishments for the mass-consumers, but Benjamin was keen in observing the fantastical effect on visitors, recalling his account of the Galerie Des Machines (a moving platform exhibit) at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, 1889. He wrote, “Four locomotives were guarding the hall of machines, his account of the Galerie Des Machines, stating that Disneyland offers illicit pleasures of mobility. His account of Disneyland to “the city’s obsession with mobilities”, stating that “Disneyland offers illicit pleasures of mobility. Esconced in a sea of giant parking lots in a city devoted to the automobile, it provides transportation that does not exist outside - steam trains, monorails, peoplemovers, tram-trains, travelators, ropeways, not to mention pure transport fantasies such as simulated space-trips and submarine rides” (109-110). Banham is essentially stating that Disneyland acts as an escape from a city where the automobile, intrinsic to Los Angeles transit culture, is banal.


This text was particularly interesting, in that while all 10 projects that are presented are unbuilt, they demonstrate clear design processes constructed on allegory and twisting narratives (ex: The Oxygen House, “a home for dying” as opposed to a “house for living”). Each project had a linear narrative in some form, and the forms for each were conceived of a collage of images to create the narrative. This provided loose insight into developing a design language for this thesis project.


Here, Easterling provides an insightful investigation on the effect of experience constructing memory from sensorial interactions, referencing that “physical passage through the landscape, by, for instance walking or riding, provided a mnemonic structure to store and index memory and experience. Movements of the body exercised the mind and stimulated memory and understanding...perceptions involved more than simply visual contact with scenery...passage along the trail enveloped by the individual in a motion picture experience and a script that was consciously compiled, stored and reconstituted. The high altitude enlarged views, while the narrow path collapsed may historical epochs into a single body and a single moment” (41). Here, it is made clear that a linear spatial narrative that engages sensorial movement in space leaves a profounder impact on the individual. This also reinforces Sergei Einstein’s investigation of the “cinematic” procession through the Acropolis.


As previously mentioned in Easterling’s text, Einstein develops the cinematic concept of “montage” in the built environment. Within it, Sergei cites the Acropolis as one of architecture’s most “important films”, explaining how the Greeks controlled the route of procession by the placement of buildings on the site, as well as controlled the perception of them based on frontal or oblique approach, creating a majestic or picturesque apperance, respectively. The cinematic experience of movement through space that is emphasized in this text is crucial to the development of this thesis.


Covering a wide breadth of the role entertainment, theming, and spectacle has in architecture, Oliver Herwig clearly identifies the relationship between amusement parks and world expositions, which is at the foundation of this thesis project. Herwig drew many parallels, mainly on the nature of mass consumption that both venues focus on. With an overall lack of scholarly texts covering amusement parks and their attractions, Herwig was able to frame the role of architecture and design within them, such as the more transient nature of traveling fairgrounds (ex: Oktoberfest in Munich).


Elaborating on the concepts that Einstein introduced in Montage and Architecture, Philip Johnson draws his “own” conclusions that architecture exists in time, instead of space, emphasizing Einstein’s assessment that architecture is experienced physically rather than simply a drawing. He adds, “the approach is only one aspect of the processional, one moment of feeling. The next is the experience of entering, the shock of the big space, or dark space, as it enclosed (in time always) the visitor” (167). This reinforces the notion of careful orchestration to the space, and draws parallels with the construction of a motion picture (cadence, rising action, falling action, etc.).
In this incredibly thorough text, Josephine makes incredible observations on the experience of the amusement park, and the built environment surrounding the individual experiencing that “the amusement parks in Britain created a new eclectically and highly popular formula of fantasy, noise, colour, and movement, drawing on the legacy of modern spectacle inaugurated by the international exhibitions, department stores, and Coney Island”. Here, Josephine also made the claim about the “whirl of wonders takes on a particular resonance, encapsulating the interrelationship between physical disorientation (whirl) and visual spectacle (wonder). In lieu of modernity, Josephine identified the rising fascination with the machine aesthetic, stating that “the visual landscape of the parks was quite unlike anything which had come before. The ‘gear and gird’ aesthetic of the industrialized workplace was transposed to the world of pleasure with great success … the bare lattice structures and whirling mechanical apparatus of the rides were an important part of their charm... it offered transposed to the world of pleasure with great success ... the bare lattice structures and whirling mechanical apparatus of the rides were an important part of their charm... it offered an early utopia. A place of consumption, socioeconomic class was irrelevant.”

The ride is a fragmentation into different “scenes” that the vehicles traverse, and different attractions have different capacities. For instance, the Haunted Mansion, an Omnimover, is basically a spatialization of some story from the Disney canon housed in a “show building”. The ride is a fragmentation into different “scenes” that the vehicles traverse, and different attractions have different capacities. For instance, the Haunted Mansion, an Omnimover, is basically a spatialization of some story from the Disney canon housed in a “show building”. The ride is a fragmentation into different “scenes” that the vehicles traverse, and different attractions have different capacities. For instance, the Haunted Mansion, an Omnimover, is basically a spatialization of some story from the Disney canon housed in a “show building”.

The Architecture of Pleasure: British Amusement Parks 1900-1939.

Making Leisure Work: Architecture and the Experience Economy.

Similar to Klingmann’s text, Making Leisure Work also takes a look at the role of the experience economy with architecture. Citing the Disney parks, he discusses the notions of “entertainment capacity”, and its influence on the Disney “Dark Rides”. The Dark Rides are basically a spatialization of some story from the Disney canon housed in a “show building”. The ride is a fragmentation into different “scenes” that the vehicles traverse, and different attractions have different capacities. For instance, the Haunted Mansion, an Omnimover, is a continuous system that typically has a high throughput.


One of Rem’s seminal texts, Delirious New York provides an thorough introspection to the role Coney Island had within New York City at large. He cited Coney Island as the finish line for a weekly exodus with the urgency of a jailbreak, emphasizing the popularity for the working class masses to escape the tenement life to a modern pleasure palace. Koolhaas also provides insight into some of the parks, namely Dreamland and its Shoot the Chutes attraction, but also mentions Steeplechase’s closure and its relationship to its controversial owner. Moreover, Rem draws parallels to 1939 New York World’s Fair, describing the Trylon and Perisphere, the fairs icon, which featured a rotating stage centered around a “model of the future”. All of this relates to eachother such that it is Rem’s assertion that both Coney Island and the World’s Fair behaved as a fetal Manhattan, some testing ground that ultimately acted in symbiosis with the city at large.

Lonsway, Brian Making Leisure Work: Architecture and the Experience Economy.

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Pine, Joseph B., and James H. Gilmore. The Experience Economy: Work Is & Theatre & Every Business a Stage.
While no a heavily architectural text, the Experience Economy discusses how our economy has evolved from agrarian production to experience production. In other words, we have progressed from making a birthday cake from scratch on less than a dollar’s budget, but now resort to paying for an entire birthday party experience. The experience becomes a commodity, here, Gilmore and Pine draw parallels between the business to the theater, noting “actors" and “staging" (It’s more of an ‘experience’ to dine, for example, at a restaurant where the kitchen is “staged" in the dining room, and the entire meal becomes a performance). Here, Pine also notes the hierarchy where from “reading the book" to "seeing the movie" turns into "now go ride the ride". The text ultimately provided economic framework that reinforced Klingmann and Lonsway’s texts.


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In this text, Randl provides a well-rounded history of kinetic and mechanized architecture, and how the programming of such structures is emphasized or incorporated into the design. The citation of amusement parks towards the start marks a clear influence on the inception of the revolving restaurant, among other categories of mechanized conveyance.

In this collection of essays, cynical assessments of spaces and facilities ranging from the West Edmonton Mall to Disneyland itself. However, Sorkin made similar observations to Rem, stating that Coney Island was an arden of leisure in the workaday city. Yet, he sees Disneyland otherwise. However, also similar to Banham’s assessment of Disneyland, Sorkin notes that everything at Disneyland is always a movement - the queues, the rides themselves, the tram that takes you from the parking lot to the entrance, and your car itself.

Paramount to the foundation of this thesis project, the paradigm of Mobilities, as described by Urry, questions a notion that we are territorially fixed in society, instead suggesting a more complicated entanglement of different objects, people, and ideas intersecting time and space and in motion from point A to B. With Mobilities covering subjects ranging from information systems to what this project is mainly focused with, leisure and tourism, Urry draws comparisons between pleasure and means of transportation, namely alternate ones. This then reinforces the idea mentioned consistently about alternates and contrasting the mundane.

A seminal text in architecture theory, Learning from Las Vegas draws a relationship between speed, scale, and information in Las Vegas. In various ways, the Strip in Las Vegas is a larger incarnation of the Midway Plaisance that originated from the World Columbian Exposition of 1891, but at the scale of the automobile rather than the pedestrian.