
Book Reviews

Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900–2000

Juliet Kinchin and Aidan O'Connor
New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012. Images, credits, notes, index, further reading. 263 pp. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780870708268

Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900–2000, by curator Juliet Kinchin and curatorial assistant Aidan O'Connor and published by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), accompanies the ambitious and introspective exhibition of the same title that opened at MOMA in New York 2012. This book resembles other coffee-table books—beautiful color and black-and-white photographs fill the pages and the content presents a broad survey of the subject—and proves a noteworthy source for general readers interested in learning more about the convergence of twentieth-century material culture and childhood.

MOMA describes *Century of the Child* as an overview of the “modernist preoccupation with children and childhood as a paradigm for progressive design thinking.” The curators found inspiration in Swedish reformer and social theorist

Ellen Key’s 1909 book of the same title, in which she proclaimed that the recognition of children’s needs would define social, political, psychological, and aesthetic reform. Key also proclaimed that the spaces a child occupies contributes significantly to her emotional and physical well-being. Kinchin and O’Connor’s catalog complements the MOMA exhibit and documents that many modernists did, indeed, produce innovative and creative designs to enhance the physical, intellectual, and emotional development of children. The authors provide short but useful descriptions of the contributions of a number of last century’s leading educators and the ways they influenced popular thinking about the distinct needs of children.

From discussions of the new century to avant-garde playtime, from wartime propaganda to domestic landscapes, *Century of the Child* focuses on twentieth-century models of play and on the international social and political agendas that inspired designers to create works for children. The authors introduce several prominent figures and theories affiliated with progressive education. “The Kin-

dergarten Movement: Building Blocks of Modern Design,” an aptly named subtopic of the first section, provides a detailed summary of Friedrich Froebel’s contributions to progressive education. His “gifts,” a set of abstract design activities, fostered a child’s ability to recognize and appreciate harmony in design. The authors briefly discuss the post–World War II Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach first made popular in Italy. Educators recognized that children learn in diverse ways and that the physical environment contributed to a child’s capacity to engage in creative thinking. Classrooms designed to accommodate the Reggio Emilia approach provided visual stimulation and included open spaces with child-scaled structures intended to encourage interaction. Photographs of the Diana Municipal Preschool in Reggio Emilia, Italy, illustrate a well-designed Reggio Emilia space. The piazza (or central space) includes a mirror triangle, which creates for a child the illusion of a thousand miniversions of himself. The atelier, a space intended for research and experimentation with materials, features lush greenery, drums, laptops, and paints, among other objects.

Discussions in *Century of the Child* go beyond the individuals and theories synonymous with child play and pedagogy. The authors turn to Charles and Ray Eames (best remembered perhaps for the still-coveted 1950s Eames Lounge Chair they first designed for film director Billy Wilder) and devote considerable attention to the creation of children’s furniture. The Eameses designed individual pieces from single sheets of plywood, painting them red, blue, yellow, and magenta. Kids soon turned the light-weight furniture into toys.

O’Connor’s essay on the Chicago Progressive-Era laboratory discusses many aspects of Frank Lloyd Wright’s work. Given Wright’s controversial reputation (he left his wife and six children for his mistress), some readers may be surprised to learn about the meticulous attention he paid to pedagogy in his designs for children. Wright incorporated the basic forms of Froebel’s gifts in the windows of his 1912–1913 design for the Avery Coonley Playhouse in suburban Chicago. He noted that the elemental, geometric forms he used resembled a celebratory parade with balloons and confetti. Wright also designed the Hillside Home School complex in Wisconsin. Aside from the classroom spaces, Wright included a large assembly hall, gym, laboratory, and art studio. O’Connor suggests that he “demonstrated a remarkable capacity for childlike joy at a time when he was being ostracized for leaving his own family” (p. 40).

Essays also introduce readers to the impact of unique perspectives on childhood and design such as Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s puppets, Bruno Taut’s Crystal Chain, Aldo van Eyck’s Amsterdam Orphanage, and others.

Overall, Kinchin and O’Connor provide a broad overview of modernist designers’ preoccupation with childhood. There are some areas in the book, though, where the determination to provide a global perspective on twentieth-century design lends to brevity and seems too ambitious an undertaking. The authors seldom mention computers or video games, which many cultural institutions now acknowledge as art. A plethora of such innovative technologies, including the computer itself, first appeared in the

twentieth century—and as early as the 1940s, Edward U. Condon displayed at the world's fair a computer with gaming capabilities. The authors do an excellent job, however, of creating a dialogue of the social, political, and psychological implications of designer works for children.

This book serves as a general resource, and the online interactive exhibit found at www.moma.org proves an essential companion.

—Michelle Parnett, *The Strong, Rochester, NY*

Play in the Early Years

Marilyn Fleer

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. References, vignettes, photographs, glossary, indices. 261 pp. \$94.00 paper. ISBN: 9781107640221

In *Play in the Early Years*, Marilyn Fleer communicates the importance of play in young children's early education and development. Focusing primarily on the role of play in the Australian government's Early Years Learning Framework (a curriculum for children from birth to age five), she uses a variety of theoretical perspectives to develop a schema to help the reader understand children's play. Her schema considers the setting (such as school, home, playground) in which play takes place and the nature of play. She encourages readers to reflect on their own personal memories, perspectives, and expectations of play to become aware of the value of children's play. Fleer also describes a systematic analysis of teaching

based on children's play in early-childhood education. She demonstrates the ways in which others have understood play in different eras, cultures, and early-childhood education settings (such as child care, family child care, schools, and community groups). The book discusses a wide range of topics, including perspectives on play from different individuals such as infants, children, teachers, families, communities, classrooms, and various early-childhood settings; different theories of play including classical, developmental, and post-developmental; integrating play into the early-childhood education curriculum; promoting children's play development; using cultural technologies in children's play; using play for assessment purposes; and advocating for play.

In her first chapter, she introduces the different perspectives on play from personal memories, early-childhood education teachers, and theorists. Fleer provides an important discussion on the teachers' beliefs about children's play, which determines how they implement play in their classroom. At the end of each chapter, Fleer includes glossaries to assist students to relate their understanding of important concepts to ideas. She also presents vignettes and real-life examples to assist students with making the transition from theory to practice. Throughout the book, she underscores children's play experiences in various ways. Every chapter highlights numerous instances of play based on young children's interviews and observations. These interviews and observations focus on important concerns and on children's resourcefulness and interests during their play.

Play in the Early Years appears to be