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# The Cultural Origins and Play Philosophy of Playworkers

## An Interview with Penny Wilson

Penny Wilson is a playworker—one of a group of professionals who facilitate children’s play in adventure playgrounds, parks, and other settings, principally in the United Kingdom. Wilson grew up in the Southeast of England and spent much of her childhood playing on the coast near her family home. She studied illustration in art school, settled in London’s East End, and came to playwork through a community program for children with disabilities. Over the course of two decades, she has earned distinction for helping such children—especially those with disabilities—play with their peers. Currently she works for the Play Association at Tower Hamlets, a second-tier, not-for-profit organization and play provider. She is an ambassador for playwork and has visited the United States several times to advocate for the incorporation of playworkers into American society. In this interview, she recounts how playwork originated in Great Britain, tells how playworkers view children’s free play and how they facilitate it, describes Britain’s adventure playgrounds, and elaborates on the play of children with disabilities.

**A***ERICAN JOURNAL OF PLAY:* Playworker is an uncommon term in the United States. When playworkers talk and write about play, how do they define it?

**Penny Wilson:** We playworkers do not try to define play. It’s too big and will not be pinned down. Playwork writer and theorist Gordon Sturrock says that trying to define play is like trying to define love. We view play as a set of behaviors that are freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated.

**AJP:** Is it fair, then, to ask what a playworker is?

**Wilson:** It’s easier to describe what we do. We look at what is around for the children we seek to serve and for what they are missing. Then we establish an environment that helps compensate for what is missing. Then we watch how children are using the space and share our reflections as a team. Together we make adjustments informed by those observations and reflections. Then we watch some more.

**AJP:** Is that how playworkers become experts in play?

**Wilson:** No! Playworkers are not experts in play. Children, given the chance, are experts in play. That is what children do. But I don't know one single adult I trust who would claim to be a play expert the way children are. We cannot be. Play is an ancient language—the first universal language—but we lose it as we grow. As playworkers we try to relearn it, but we can never be as fluent in it again. Picasso spent his working life trying to re-create the childlike, unselfconscious, creative process. We can be playful as adults, of course. We can study play and playwork. We can learn a load about play. But we can never again be experts in play. However, that being said, many of us believe we know a lot about play because at one time we experienced it for ourselves. This belief is a great asset to those of us who are interested in re-igniting the play flame for children within their communities. We can remind other adults just how very much they remember about it and then work with them to find ways to provide better play opportunities for children.

**AJP:** Is playwork an art or a science?

**Wilson:** For me playwork is an art because that's how I see the world and how I feel it and know it. For others, it is a science. For others still, it is a political act. Whatever playwork is, it is as different as folks. Given the right conditions every child plays just as every adult has a unique world view. Play encompasses all of human existence. It cannot be pinned down by artificial categories of knowledge. It's best to think of playwork as a craft and playworkers as artisans. That will cover the broadest of spectra.

**AJP:** So what do playworkers do when they are practicing their craft?

**Wilson:** We plan for possibilities. We talk through our shared observations and reflections, and we watch children playing to make sure they can create ways to play however they need to. We call this a play audit. It's a constant process of observation and reflection. We make sure children are offered the richest variety of play types possible. In *A Playworkers' Taxonomy of Play*, Bob Hughes mapped out sixteen types of playing that help us to evaluate the settings that we are creating and managing for play.

**AJP:** Can you give us an example of a play audit?

**Wilson:** Sure. It's often difficult for folks to imagine that there is a reason for identifying so many different types of play. But let's take playgrounds. As we think more and more about creating a rich compensatory environment, we realize that traditional bent-metal playground equipment prohibits

more types of play than it provides. Largely it makes an offer of gross motor play—climbing, swinging, jumping, and the like. But it doesn't provide for role play and dramatic play, or working at digging caves or building fires. Also, what about children's need to manipulate the environment and to dress up or invent things? Traditional playgrounds don't provide for those either. Good playworkers are looking all the time to make sure that the spaces they're responsible for have the right loose parts and settings for the children to create whatever play they need at any time.

**AJP:** We want to talk more about playgrounds, but before we do, tell us how you found your way to playwork.

**Wilson:** It is surprising how many of my colleagues put it the other way round, that playwork found *them*. This makes it sound rather mysterious, like The Force of *Star Wars* fame. But it is my experience, too. I hadn't imagined that playwork would become a career; I just found myself doing it. I went to work on a community program that paid me just enough to live on during a period of Margaret Thatcher's Britain when jobs were hard to come by. This particular project, called a Play Provision, was based in London's East End. We worked with children with disabilities after school and on weekends and holidays.

**AJP:** What was that first experience like? Was the program successful?

**Wilson:** No, the project was horrid and abusive. The children had not been respected. Their needs were not understood or met. They were offered very little dignity, and there was almost no play value in the work that was done. I saw children teased and bullied and treated as stupid and willfully difficult. It made me think very, very hard about how I believed children should be treated. And I learned a lot.

**AJP:** What about the experience made you want to continue with playwork?

**Wilson:** It was the children themselves. I found myself entranced by the play that I was invited to share with a group of Down's syndrome kids. They were witty and funny and subversive and knowing. They understood that they were not understood, but they secretly managed to arrange times to tell jokes and stories and escape the controlling and ridiculing factors that militated against them.

**AJP:** Would you say the children took you in?

**Wilson:** They did; this is partly how playwork found me. On one occasion, I was invited to join them as they told circle stories. One child would start a story with a sentence or two, and then the next would develop it, and so on.

I was utterly bowled over by their wit and intelligence and by the explanations that they were translating for me so that I would understand their spoken and signed humor. This is how they welcomed me as an honorary member of their group. The intelligent multilayering of their play blew the world apart for this cynical ex-art-student radical feminist. I was further humbled to learn that these guys had extra chromosomes, not less than me but more. That was exactly how it felt to me at the time. Once I had that feeling that I was missing something important, I knew I could never go back. Here it was—the thing I'd been looking for. I applied for and got a job on an adventure playground for children with disabilities and their peers, and I've never looked back.

**AJP:** Researchers and practitioners have disagreed about the extent to which autistic children play. What has been your experience?

**Wilson:** In the United Kingdom [UK], there is still an assessment criterion that says that children may be autistic if they cannot engage in pretend play. Nonsense! I have had the pleasure of playing with many children on the autistic spectrum, as well as with many children with a wide range of other disabilities. Of course not every child is going to play in ways we recognize easily. But the responsibility for recognizing and comprehending children's play is ours. We have to teach ourselves to observe in a more intelligent way. And as adults, we need to make sure that the play setting accommodates the needs of the children, and we then need to guarantee further that they will find a comfortable time and appropriate space in which to play with their peers. We have to ensure that the needs arising from impairment do not prevent a child from being able to experience free play just as every other child should be able to. Impairments should not be disabling. No child should be segregated from society. That is a form of apartheid.

**AJP:** Give us an example of more intelligent observation. How do playworkers recognize play?

**Wilson:** We recognize it in the same way we recognize play for any child. We observe. And if observation alone doesn't help us understand the playing, then we try it out for ourselves.

**AJP:** Do you mean that you play along with the child?

**Wilson:** Yes and no, at least not too directly. One of the hardest things about learning the craft of playwork is learning to keep in touch with your own sense of playfulness while at the same time not acting on your own innate play drives. For example, a child who is hunkered down by the edge of

the sandpit scabbling sand may appear to be “not playing.” But we must remember that “not playing” is only our imperfect translation of what we are seeing. So, feeling bemused but always being courteous to the children, we copy—accurately—their posture and actions. We keep our distance but stay within their line of vision. We consciously discover for ourselves how it feels to play like this. What does the thing we’re playing with look like? What amusing thing is the light doing? Is there an interesting sound to hear? And in this way we feel our way toward their experience, absorbing ourselves in it, and trying to experience it for ourselves. Then, slowly, we move a little closer to the child and keep doing the same sort of thing as they are doing. If we get too close or address them directly, it can make it look as if we are mocking them. So we usually try to use words quietly to describe to ourselves the experiences that this playing is giving us. At this point the child will recognize the playworker as a fellow sand scabbler. It’s like a train spotter meeting another train spotter. The first says to the other, “Ah, at last. There you are! Someone who understands!” Remember that frequently adults stop children from doing these activities because they are regarded as stimming.

**AJP:** What is stimming?

**Wilson:** Stimming is an obsessive, repetitive action that is stimulating to the senses. Some therapists see stimming as serving only to block out the rest of the world, and so they disapprove. Well, as playworkers, we can’t permit ourselves to make that assessment. So we take the child’s behaviors—freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated behaviors—and we treat them as play. There is a practical value in this. When the child sees that you are sharing her chosen experience with her, and so feels accepted, pretty soon she will join in with you. And, when she does, she is triangulating a relationship with you through her play. She might take whatever you are playing with away from you to play with it herself. Or she might correct what you are doing because it isn’t quite right in her view. But the important thing is that you have allowed her to initiate a playful relationship with you. What had been considered a negative, isolating behavior can easily be turned into something that is the gateway to a whole new world for the child.

**AJP:** So, then, you are challenging conventional practices?

**Wilson:** Yes. Playwork is a discipline all of its own and doesn’t necessarily adhere to the rules of the rest of the world. This approach for me underpins playwork. It’s how I developed my own practice. I based it on the insights of

D. W. Winnicott, the visionary psychoanalyst, and his concept of mirroring. He observed that in the early days of life a baby will play copy games with adults—blinking eyes and sticking out tongues together, that sort of thing. Winnicott interpreted such communication as evidence that the child was recognizing that there are other beings external to it. The child also was realizing that this *other* perceived the child and would recognize when the child perceived him. It is through this playfulness that children build a “me/not me” relationship, and it is how they create a space—the transitional or potential space—in which the internal worlds and external worlds of both parties intersect. That is the space in which they find they can play.

**AJP:** We have talked about how you got started in playwork and how you approach it. Where did playwork come from? How did it get started?

**Wilson:** A major factor surely was the rise in philanthropic activity that grew within the upper-middle classes in Britain following the First World War and came to fruition after the Second World War. The spirit of the times, the necessity of pulling together through difficult years, inspired many reforms: state education for all children, health care free for all at the point of delivery, a welfare state that had the health and well-being of the poverty-stricken working classes at its root. The Children Act of 1948 replaced the antiquated Poor Law and helped extend the work of the wartime Home Office that assisted “children deprived of a normal life.” The spirit of these fine ideals is still ingrained in the British psyche and in the culture of playwork.

**AJP:** Do you feel the effects of the World War II even today?

**Wilson:** I live and work in London’s East End where the heritage of the Blitz affects almost every aspect of our lives every day, even now. Children who lived through those times are in their sixties, seventies, and eighties now, and they retain searing memories of bombing raids and rocket attacks. You could not know if you would survive the night or if your home and loved ones would be around when you returned from work or school. If we turn psycho-geographer, we can walk the streets where I live and form a clear picture of the devastation that was inflicted upon Britain. My own home survived the Blitz; bombs rocked the foundations, and there is now no right angle in the place! In many homes there were floods from burst water pipes and fire from smashed electrical cables. Lots of houses were completely flattened. Many people were very brave, and many brave people died.

**AJP:** Was playwork, then, a response to both the physical devastation and the emotional costs that the war exacted?

**Wilson:** Yes, and it was a remarkable concurrence. During and after the war, children played in the rubble in areas levelled by bombs and firestorms. “Junk Playgrounds,” they called these areas, and children climbed on the debris and assembled the odd smashed bits of timber and sheet metal into fortresses and castles and such. Somehow, these children felt safe enough to invent play even in the middle of all this devastation. I still speak with many people who remember playing this way in their childhood in London. Ironically it is out of this devastation that the profession of playwork was born. Playwork grew from the efforts of the remarkable Lady Marjory Allen of Hurtwood, who, like D. W. Winnicott, saw children of the Blitz evacuated to alien, rural environments, where their anxiety for their loved ones and their disorientation often left them misunderstood. Other children hung on in London to face the brutality of the attacks, and she observed them, too. The childhood experiences of all these differed significantly from the idyllic bucolic upbringing she had known in rural Kent. She had been able to think freely and explore nature and to roam adventurously while she was growing up. She became a landscape architect in the 1920s, an unusual career for a woman at that time.

**AJP:** Lady Allen played a key role in popularizing the concept of adventure playgrounds, didn’t she?

**Wilson:** Yes, and there is a tale behind it. Lady Allen had had the good fortune to visit a site—Emdrup—in Copenhagen, where an inspired architect, C. T. Sorenson, had hatched a very new idea. He had been commissioned by the town to address the rising problem of what could have been perceived as delinquent behavior by the local children. However, there was some doubt about whether the children were acting as delinquents or were role playing the acts of sabotage that had become part and parcel of serious life in an occupied city. It’s best to remember that play always seems a bit challenging to adults. Isn’t it wonderful that rather than building a juvenile prison for these kids, Sorenson’s commission was to create a new playground? He had built many playgrounds before, but when he went to look at them he realized that they were empty. There were no children playing in them. Instead, the kids were playing on bomb sites.

**AJP:** Much as they played in London?

**Wilson:** Exactly as they played in London. Danish kids were building castles and lighting fires and damming flowing water and searching for treasures left over from the bombed-out homes. They were having marvelous, serious play.

Sorenson breathed the spirit of searching and experimenting into the design of his new playground at Emdrup. A warden was appointed to open up the tool shed each day and to oversee the daily activities in the playground. Once Lady Allen saw the amazing possibilities of what Sorenson created, and that the local authorities supported it, she determined to bring this idea back to the UK. Bit by bit, she managed to find places to experiment with these new playgrounds. Eventually she led the way in establishing a permanent site in Southeast London called Lollard Adventure Playground and staffed with a playworker. Incidentally, she founded the adventure playground where I once worked and which was the very first designed for disabled children and their friends. She had a stunning vision and saw her ideas through, and I feel her constantly at my shoulder egging me on.

**AJP:** So the playworkers in these early adventure playgrounds established by Lady Allen provided the same type of services that you provide today?

**Wilson:** Essentially yes, though of course playwork has evolved over time. Playworkers came to see themselves not as leading the playing of children. They didn't see their role as arranging and corralling children into productive activities as happened in education or in youth work. Those youth workers in the UK originally played a more directive role in the lives of young people, and they often focused on sports in an effort to prepare children for eventual national service. Playworkers, on the other hand, came to see, as Lady Allen saw, the need for children to play as children have played throughout human history, free from adult intervention. Ideally, the children whose play we are working with should have little or no awareness of what we are doing. We don't try to solve the children's problems for them; we don't try to make everything nice and easy. Nice and easy is not what playing is about. It's about discovering that you are a person who can do things for yourself. So we support when we are needed, but our work is primarily invisible. In an ideal situation, the playworker should not exist. And to some extent, that is what we aim for. This does not mean that we are idle, however. Far from it.

**AJP:** You mentioned earlier that playworkers and some therapists disagree about stimulating. Is playworkers' overall view of their role in children's play controversial in Britain?

**Wilson:** The theory and practice of playwork does seem somewhat anticlockwise and outside of common professional wisdom, but I suppose we draw from the kind of nonconformity that sits deep within the British mind. So



I think there is something inherently British and cussed about the craft of the playworker. We sometimes even call ourselves by the collective noun “recalcitrants.”

*AJP:* Recalcitrant in what way?

**Wilson:** Our work is play. We strongly believe in what we are doing, and we tend to believe as well that few other agencies “get it.” So many of the professions that work with children are busy training them for adulthood. They are concerned with imparting knowledge, training skills, or modeling appropriate behavior. So we fight tooth and nail for the right of the child to play. We know that cities are harsh and unwelcoming places for children and that it is our specific role to find a way to compensate for that harshness.

*AJP:* Are the adventure playgrounds you described earlier the chief means for doing that?

**Wilson:** Adventure playgrounds are where the craft and the practice of playwork are applied in their purest forms. But with clever planning and well-considered modes of intervention and sound, reflective, analytic practice, we can support the playing of children even within the tight confines of a school playground. Wherever children play, we want to make a place where they can explore their bodies’ capabilities and their emotions and find for themselves their place in the world. We don’t segregate children by age in adventure playgrounds, and this, too, helps children understand how to make their way.

*AJP:* In the United States, parents and others have worried a lot about children being injured in adventure playgrounds, and we have fewer of them per capita. Should adults have this worry?

**Wilson:** It was Lady Allen herself who said “better a broken arm than a broken spirit.” Perhaps we worry less in Britain because British playworkers have managed to embed play and the lives of the playing children deep into the hearts of the communities in which they have worked. Playworkers are now doing much the same work as the old supervisory community—the neighbors and parents and aunts and uncles—once did for children who were free to play on the streets or in the countryside. When this idea took hold, most neighborhoods of most towns came to expect that they could boast of a Heath Robinson Adventure Playground.

*AJP:* Some compare Robinson to America’s Rube Goldberg. Both drew popular cartoons of comical machines. Does that model suggest how kids play in adventure playgrounds?

**Wilson:** I sometimes forget that I need to paint a word picture of these places. I get huge delight from taking my American friends and colleagues to adventure playgrounds and watching their faces as they realize what they are looking at. There are climbing structures, most often handmade by the playworkers and children with the support of an experienced adventure playground builder. There are swings with high jumping platforms and massive, dizzying arcs. There may also be high rope bridges, towers, and punch bags. There is water and sand and mud for damming and digging and building and for water fights, too. There are dressing up clothes and face and body paint and other art materials for the children to experiment with. Children can grow plants, build dens and forts to play with, and even cook. There are noisy places and quiet places, and there are also food and water and toilets. And ideally, there should also be an indoor space so play can continue whatever the weather, though of course, the children can choose to be out in the rain and snow if they wish.

**AJP:** Are adventure playgrounds usually identified in any particular way to potential users or others?

**Wilson:** They are set off by fences and more. These are places of high emotional content as noted playwork lecturer Stuart Lester has said. And they are, above all, quirky. The surrounding fence makes a mark on the community and denotes that this is a different sort of space. The fence is a statement that the place is dedicated to children and their playing. Nothing else. Other agencies may share the territory, but the agenda remains constant. Here the children are in charge. Don't expect it to look like an adult idea of a space. There is nowhere else like this in the world. The fence shouts out the message that this is a compensatory environment, so, "Stay away cars and developers and people with their own ideas about what children should be doing."

**AJP:** You earlier described playworkers as recalcitrants, but you seem intent on convincing other agencies of the value of play. So are playworkers also emissaries?

**Wilson:** Playwork is indeed ambassadorial work sometimes. We need schools and hospitals to understand that we view children through the lens of play as they see children through the lens of education or medicine and that all our work and our skills are valid and vital to the children who see so much less real play in their lives. Of course this applies to anyone who works with children or in places where children spend time. It is particularly vital that parents understand the need for their children to play. It is they who create

the time and space for their children, they who can decide to allow the kids to play together after school and on weekends rather than cramming their every waking minute full of activities structured by adults. I think there is growing pressure on parents to overstructure their children's time.

*AJP:* Would it be fair to say, then, that you don't believe the booming sports and entertainment industries are contributing much to children's play?

*Wilson:* Don't be silly. Of course that's fair. Play can't be commercialized. It can't be bought and sold. All these things that you speak of destroy play. Sport, especially, is something quite different because it is completely within adult control.

*AJP:* What about all the play equipment and toys that parents and grandparents buy for children?

*Wilson:* They are largely just marketing opportunities. They restrict play. Toys are designed mostly for a very limited use; you have to buy more toys so that you can do more playing. Toys such as these create disposable experiences rather than discovered ones.

*AJP:* What about amusement parks?

*Wilson:* No digging and damming and fire and dressing up are allowed here! There is a real danger that children take on board the message that only commercialized experiences are legitimate play activities. A trip to a theme park or a water park is great fun, but they should not be delivered as an experience that is somehow more valid than an afternoon noodling around in the yard or enjoying a natural setting. Kids are enriched when they are allowed to explore for themselves. The same goes for toys. They are just things that can be bought. Lots of fun, but not the same as finding a bit of stuff that you take and use in your playing to do the job that you need a thing to do. Playworkers think about loose parts—things that can be used for anything—sticks, stones, or household objects put to playful purposes. These are much more valuable to the playing child than a designer toy that has one fixed purpose and generally does the playing for the child. Toys often turn children into spectators in what ought to be their own voyage of discovery. No, play is not entertainment—these are different things.

*AJP:* Play is serious business then?

*Wilson:* It is a common mistake that adults make to think that play is frivolous and fun, a pretty frill of childhood. But play not only develops physical and mental strength and agility, it is the mechanism by which children work out their thoughts and emotions. As adults we struggle to explain and

understand ourselves and the things that happen around us. We wrestle with words. For example, I find it very difficult to capture the words I need to explain this thought to you now. Children have exactly the same need to grapple with their thoughts. But they use their playing as their language. Words are not their medium.

**AJP:** Have you observed America enough to form any impressions about the state of play in the United States?

**Wilson:** I have been working with various groups in the United States for about five years now. My first visit was a massive shock! I had no idea how deeply the removal of play from children's lives was engrained. For a nation of peoples who are so loving and courteous, it was horrific to me to see what the systems of control were doing to your children. It goes so much against the grain of the American psyche, this taking away of play. It struck me that, somehow, you had reached a point where you were frightened of the spontaneous creativity that your children might produce if they were left to play on their own. Free play felt like a very dangerous concept to many of you. Yet, you had a sense that something was very wrong. I fear that the No Child Left Behind initiative has done great damage to your children.

**AJP:** Damage of what sort?

**Wilson:** Ask American adults how they played. They will have made dens and dammed water and dug holes and played with fire and dressed up and played at cooking or pretended to be adults; they will have played chase and hide-and-seek. All of these are survival skills that the human race needs to keep in circulation in human behavior. They are observed in children's play all over the world. Could it be that while the young brain is growing at such a rate and filling itself chock-a-block with information, the most important skills to learn at the very start of life are the ones that show us how to keep on living? Certainly it could. And we learn these through play. Deprive children of their playing if you will, but be prepared to take the consequences. A number of years ago, in Texas, psychiatrist Stuart Brown connected play deprivation to impulsive violence. Playwork lecturer and writer Fraser Brown has also investigated the shocking isolation of Romanian orphans. If a whole nation of children is going without free play, even if it is a less extreme sort of deprivation than these two examples, then I have a real fear that is a big wave of trouble going to break.

**AJP:** Do you find any hopeful currents in the United States?

**Wilson:** Yes. I am very relieved to know that advocacy for play and training

programs to offer the skills of playwork are becoming firmly established in America. In a wide variety of settings, from education to museums and parks departments, and in many more places, a change is gathering. There are a huge number of folks around who know that something is very wrong in the lives of children and have worked out that it is a lack of play. These folks, once they see and understand what is happening, are becoming staunch campaigners and activists for children's right to play.

*AJP:* Before we leave you, tell us about your current playwork project.

*Wilson:* I am working to reintroduce a culture of playfulness into London's big housing estates—you call them housing projects—in the East End. These estates are modern high-rise tower blocks that were built without a thought to the way children would play in them. The architects didn't suspect that the old untidy neighborhoods they demolished had always contained important liminal or "in between" spaces that had no single, dedicated purpose but just happened to be the very spaces where children played. Children depended upon them. You won't see children skipping or playing cricket on streets now; there is no room for them to play. Where cars rule, everything else has to give way.

*AJP:* So adventure playgrounds and projects like yours must compensate?

*Wilson:* Nowhere in Tower Hamlets, site of my project, is designed with children and their playing in mind. And there are not enough adventure playgrounds and other play projects to serve the high-density population that we have. Our work is to try to find as many ways to overcome the isolation and lack of play that children feel and to show that play is not only a perfectly fine thing to do, and not an antisocial thing to do, but a measure of a healthy community. I am starting with the adults—starting in a sense at the beginning—by sharing stories of our own playing in our childhoods. People tell their play stories straight from a deep memory space that they had mostly forgotten. And through these resurfacing memories, they begin to see why play was so important to them and how much it has disappeared from the lives of children. We aim to explore ways to support its rekindling. There is almost always an "aha!" moment when they begin to see what needs to be done to make the community's life more playful and liveable. This may seem to some a strange way to start a play project, but I think it will prove to be solid and effective. Ask me in three years.

*AJP:* What do you hope play promises for us in the long term?

*Wilson:* Children who play together in an accepting and supportive environ-

ment—beyond differences of disability, race, culture, and religion—are likely to change the flavor our communities. It seems to me that a great deal that is wrong with the world could be addressed through the provision of play opportunities for children. It is hard to feel hate, anger, frustration, and prejudice when you are playing together.

*AJP*: One last question—what do playworkers do when they are not playing?

**Wilson**: Whatever we do with our spare time, it is hard, once we have understood this play business, to ignore it. A colleague of mine loves to go on roller coaster tours and play pirate in a rubber dingy on the Regents Canal. Another loves to go hiking and camping and build fires. One loves to garden, another to study Arabic, ride BMX bikes, skateboard, and take part in political campaigns. I love cooking and life drawing and being in our almost-house in France, trying to take the “almost” away. We adults can enjoy playing, but it is no longer our first language. We have to relearn it. It’s often been said that play is like a river that runs deeply through us all. It runs throughout time and in all spaces. Play nourishes and sustains us. We wither without it.