PLAY AS

RADICAL

PRACTICE
Play as Radical Practice was the 2016 Changing Play Serpentine Galleries commission. Artist Albert Potrony worked with children aged between two and four years old and Early Years Practitioners to explore the value and possibilities of free play in the school system.

Taking up residence at The Portman Early Childhood Centre, Albert developed a kit of multiple parts using transparent sheets, reflective roll, foam tubes, circles and triangles sourced from DIY shops and scrap stores. Over 12 weeks the children used and re-purposed the materials and developed their own lines of enquiry.

Materials were adapted according to how the children used them. Scale, quantity, number of variables and location of use were in constant flux, being reassessed through observation, active engagement with the children and discussion with staff.

Through this process of collective endeavour new materials emerged during the project; film, photographs, conversations and questions have been developed into a new kit of multiple parts and result in this booklet, card game and a film for the conversation to be continued and developed beyond the commission by the people who play it.
Children are inherently curious beings, eager to explore the world. A drive to play is pushed by a motivation to experience life in a deeply meaningful and personal way. Scholar Miguel Sicart describes this as an innate human necessity: ‘we play because we are human, and we need to understand what makes us human, not in an evolutionary or cognitive way but in a humanistic way. Play is the force that pulls us together.’


So how can play change us?

Play is a creative process. Play is a means of connecting people with themselves, with others, with new ideas and divergent ways of thinking. It offers us the opportunity to express, construct, deconstruct and negotiate understandings of the world. Play is a tool for individual and collective transformation, a way of becoming.

At a time when national curriculum is increasingly promoting an education culture of standardisation, individualism and outcome-driven learning in schools. The ongoing partnership between Serpentine Galleries and the Portman Early Children’s Centre presents an unparalleled opportunity to explore the radical possibilities of art, play and early childhood education.

Our image of children is of competent, complex and intelligent individuals, capable of participating in the values, beliefs and understandings that shape their lives. Children are able to play an active role in co-constructing culture and cultural values alongside adults when principles and practices are developed in response to children’s curiosities.

Changing Play is built upon pedagogic practice that values democratic exchange, uncertainty and difference amongst groups of people. Relationships and friendships between children, artists, curators, teachers and families have planted the seeds that the project has grown from. A radical concept in neoliberal times.

Louisa Penfold
Independent Children’s Curator and Researcher
“In any environment both the degree of inventiveness and creativity and the possibility of discovery are directly proportional to the number and kinds of variables in it.”

“Loose parts offer children the opportunity of having control of their own creative impulses.”

“Through the use of Loose Parts play becomes a communication and it implies values such as centeredness, empowerment, self-directed play, opportunities for risk and challenge, growth of confidence and self-esteem, individuality, new experiences and cooperation.”

Albert Potrony has developed a short film following his residency with Portman Early Childhood Centre. The film will be available in Summer 2017 and can be viewed online at serpentinegalleries.org/ playasradicalpractice
with talk of the ‘death of childhood’ – is fuelled by concern about the degree to which children’s everyday lives are being colonised, even poisoned, by adult agendas. There are real political questions that need to be asked about children’s need for space and time in which the concerns of adults genuinely fade into the background.

Chaos/Order

Chaos for whom?

What is the adults role?

Do we really understand what children are doing?

How do we present alternative, multiple readings of play?

Play exists only at the edge of chaos – which means that play exists only in the zone of complexity – a weird mixture, in uncertainty, of order and chaos, between order and chaos.

Because: the concerns of adults about the state of children’s need for education and in uncertainty, stereotypical behaviour, and predictability and order isn’t order – it’s background.

That need to be asked by adult agendas. These are real political questions in these definitions, children’s everyday lives are being degree to which children’s need for education and in uncertainty, stereotypical behaviour, and predictability and order isn’t order – it’s background.

What is missed out in these definitions?

Who is failed by these definitions?

How should primary schools change to better support children?

The more complex things become the more we seem to desire a process of reduction and thus control, but such reduction strategies might simultaneously shut out the inclusion and justice we want to achieve. This framework for the reduction of the complexity and diversity of learning strategies and education is introducing beyond the narrow practice of the child, the community and Chaord, the community and the child. These are the main themes and questions that emerged throughout the residency at the Portman and provided the framework for this set of cards.

Standardisation

What is normal?

Who is the standard child?

What is missed out in these definitions?

The recent emergence in the UK of profound debates about the state of the nation’s children, about the state of the nation’s children, about the state of play.

These are the main themes and questions that emerged throughout the residency at the Portman and provided the framework for this set of cards.
About the Play Kit

A game to play and a conversation tool, this play kit has no rules. Come up with your own rules. Play it like games you know or feel free to use the other players. conversations with the other players. The prompts and questions come from the documentation of the sessions at the Portman. They focus on the children’s creative responses to the kit of multiple parts provided by Albert during the residency.

The Prompts and Questions

Use it to explore your own experience and use them to start conversations with the other players. Make connections between the cards and the documentation of the sessions at the Portman. They focus on the children’s creative responses to the kit of multiple parts provided by Albert during the residency.

The Images are a small selection from the documentation of the sessions at the Portman. They focus on the children’s creative responses to the kit of multiple parts provided by Albert during the residency.

The main themes and questions that have surfaced through the project inform the structure of the cards. The images are a small selection from the documentation of the sessions at the Portman. They focus on the children’s creative responses to the kit of multiple parts provided by Albert during the residency.

The Prompts and Questions

Use it to explore your own practice and use them to start conversations with the other players. The prompts and questions come from the documentation of the sessions at the Portman. They focus on the children’s creative responses to the kit of multiple parts provided by Albert during the residency.

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About Albert Potrony

Albert Potrony is an artist with a participatory practice exploring ideas of identity, community and language. He is currently developing Achilles Heel, researching anti sexist men’s groups of the 70s and 80s, who were striving for a new type of masculinity that would embrace and support feminism. Recent projects include Another Utopia (2015), a year-long project culminating in an installation and film exploring the squatting and housing co-operative movement in London, and The Potential Space (2014), a film looking at parallels between making utilitarian objects and artistic practice, developed with members of Friends of Cathja, a charity that supports people experiencing mental health issues.

About Louisa Penfold

Louisa Penfold is an independent children’s curator currently undertaking her doctorate at the University of Nottingham in partnership with Tate and the Whitworth, University of Manchester. Her research is investigating the construction of child-led pedagogic practice in art museums. She has worked on the learning programmes at ABC Kids, the Queensland Art Gallery, and the Ipswich Gallery in Australia.

About Alex Thorp and Ben Messih

Edited by Effie Coe, Albert Potrony, Alex Thorp, Ben Messih and the staff at the Portman Early Childhood Centre. Design by Cameron Leadbetter at Shining Studio.

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PLAY TO HOW