[theme: twinkling electronic sounds, bubbling organically; layers and polyrhythms that ebb and flow playfully with a sense of curiosity and wonder]

**Ident speaker:** [voice with a Scottish accent] Serpentine Podcast: *REWORLDING*. Serpentine. [repeats with an echo; twinkling electronic sounds continue, with snippets of keyboard, melodic buzzing and humming tones] *REWORLDING*. [words repeat and fade; all sound stops abruptly]

[high-pitched, plinking digital start tone, then a distorted, computerised voice says “close your mind to start”]

**Young child 1:** [ambient sound of open outside space] It’s playtime. Whee! Ba ba! Ba ba!

**Penny Wilson:** Play is as important as oxygen, nutrition and love.

**Young child 1:** Ba ba! Ba ba! [child’s high-pitched voice in the background]

[twinkling electronic theme returns, more slowly, and continues under the following speech]

**Young child 2:** I’m in the game because it’s fun.

**Gaylene Gould:** [inside at Gaylene’s house] Aw, I used to love playing out when I was a kid. Playing out meant finding the most intriguing, often abandoned sites, and imagining worlds with my friends. Didn’t matter the weather, sun, rain, or even snow like it is today, which is why I’m forced to record this episode from home. Yep, snow days aren’t the same as an adult, but I did throw a snowball this morning. But back then, I used to love gathering all the kids together and we would act out epic adventure stories. The only aim was to see how deeply we could get lost in the story.

But it’s rare I get lost these days. My stern inner adult voice tells me to put away childish things and colour in the lines I’ve been given. And that’s why in the new world that we are fashioning in this Serpentine Series, exploring the idea of reworlding, I’m keen to see what role play might have in helping to create a new foundation for a new, freer kind of living. Might our disconnection from play be one of the reasons our species is in a right old mess and might learning how to play again be our route out? So, who better to ask than those artists, creatives, playworkers whose practices are grounded in play? And of course, I want to hear from our very real experts: children. I want to know if play holds a serious potential to create a kinder, more aware world. And if so, how do we continue to make space for it?

[rapid swooshing sound, followed by waves of synthetic frequencies; twinkling theme continues]

I went to Bermondsey in London to visit SugarHouse Studios where the collective Assemble have commandeered an old college building at the end of a quiet residential street. [voice moves to new inside space and reverberates more cleanly] It’s now a bustling centre of activity: classrooms are now studios for artisans and creatives, including woodworkers who enticingly fill the air with a smell of
freshly-cut wood. The heart is a large warehouse space with massive shelves stacked with crates and enticing looking objects.

[talking in the warehouse space; gentle background buzzing] Oh, and I’ve just seen the disco ball. Okay, now I get it. So, we’re in the warehouse surrounded by lots of bits of wood and big bits of kit, you’ve got a disco ball hanging from a girder! [Maria laughs] So, that kind of tells you everything about where we are. Got it. Nice. [back in the studio] I was there to meet Maria Lisogorskaya, one of the founders of Assemble. They’re a collective working in design, architecture and art across a whole breadth of space-making projects.

Maria Lisogorskaya: [clear voice, no background sounds] Our work ranges from sort of arts buildings to play spaces to more socially-led projects to projects that are more focused on materiality, and everything in between.

Gaylene Gould: In this particular episode, we’re looking at the idea of playing in this new world that we are going to create together throughout this series, and the role of play and why it’s important. It feels to me, looking across the kind of work you’ve done, since those early days, that play has laid quite in the heart of your work. I’m really curious about Assemble Play, the fact that you’ve now literally set up a kind of sister organization that centralises play in design. Why did you decide to do that as a collective?

Maria Lisogorskaya: Yeah, I guess it stems from probably Baltic Street Adventure Playground, which is our first actual playground with kids, a free play space up in Dalmarnock in Glasgow. And that’s sort of run independently and it’s something we helped to set up during the Commonwealth Games, and that is very much still alive because of the playworkers that are there.

Then we did a few temporary playgrounds in Kings Cross. Again, playworkers being at the heart of it, people who actually know how to run play spaces. So now Penny, who’s been doing that, she’s running what’s become Assemble Play, and it doesn’t have a permanent space yet, but it’s going around different neighbourhoods in London and different arts spaces and it’s such a simple thing and it’s also evolving. We still want to do more things, like we’d love to design more of our own objects that people can play with because at the moment, it’s not even very design-y. It’s just a space and time and some random bits that people can move around, which is another humbling reminder that sometimes it’s not about the design of a thing, it’s just about giving someone space and infrastructure.

Gaylene Gould: The idea of free play, so unfixing play, if you like... Actually, right in the heart of Kings Cross, right in the heart of a really urban built-up environment. Lots of office buildings, lots of adults in suits. What do you think that this play space adds to a city?

Maria Lisogorskaya: Well, on a personal level, it makes them feel more alive and more diverse, I guess, in terms of you don’t just have one use, which is you get off the train, you get coffee and you get in the office and it feels just like one type of rhythm. And it’s nice to have sort of life out in the city and different rhythms and different modes. And also to remember that life can take so many different forms. This is not to criticise new development because we obviously need it as a growing city, but I think this idea of control is an interesting one because how much do you control the lives of others,
essentially? And can we have less of that control or create spaces where there’s a safety, but there’s a freedom to explore what it is to be a human being? And obviously, children have that freedom. Yeah, it’s like how do you have that sense of freedom again? And I think it’s yeah, just about love. [laughs softly] Well, at the end of it, it’s feeling love when you’re in the city because it can be very detached. I think there’s small acts of kindness you get from people or from having children around pursuing something which they’re really interested in, in a really serious way. It’s seeing human love in a really expressive way, I guess.

Gaylene Gould: Assemble Play is led by Penny Wilson, a playworker for over 40 years and author of *The Playwork Primer*. My producer Katie joined Penny for a play event in the Woodlands at Mudchute Farm in the heart of East London.

Katie Callin: Look, guys, look!

Young child 3: There’s a donkey!

Katie Callin: He’s running away.

Young child 4: Why are the donkeys –

Young child 5: Donkeys? Donkeys!

Young child 4: Why are donkeys running away? Why are they running away?

Gaylene Gould: [back in the studio] The trees were decorated with shimmering materials and cuddly toys. Chestnuts were being roasted on a campfire and there were plenty of exciting animals to see and sticks to be found.

Young child 6: [outside ambience at the farm; rustling of sticks and dry leaves] I want to find some sticks so the fire is bigger. [rustling continues]

Katie Callin: What kind of sticks are we looking for?

Young child 6: Thin sticks, fat sticks, seeking me out. [children’s voices in the background, distant aeroplane sounds]

Penny Wilson: It’s bizarre to me and I don’t quite understand it – and playworkers generally are quite baffled by the fact – that adults seem quite intent on controlling children’s time and the things they do. So, at school, we’d find it very difficult to let children play as they want to play with the things that they want to play with. [birds chirp in the distance] But childhood isn’t about school. Childhood is about becoming a human and learning for yourself all the things around you. So, learning who you are
and who other people are and what you love and what your passions are and what you’re good at and what you’re not good at and failing and that not mattering and being creative and imaginative and learning how to use your body in three dimensions... And all of those things. [distant sounds of farm animals and children playing; continues in the background] It’s because of the play process that we kickstart everything that makes us unique as individuals and as a species. So, reworlding play is kind of a shorthand way of using that imagery to say: play is endangered, and we’ve got to release it again so that it can have its own place in human existence.

**Young child 7:** I want to have a stick.

**Katie Callin:** Ah!

**Young child 7:** I’m on a stick hunt.

**Katie Callin:** Can you see one?

**Young child 7:** I don’t know, where is it?

**Katie Callin:** Is it that one? [rustling returns]

**Young child 7:** No. I want more sticks.

**Katie Callin:** What about over there? [quiet footsteps]

**Young child 7:** I don’t see them.

**Penny Wilson:** It’s part of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Every child has the right to play. There’s a lot of people that talk about play, say, “Oh yes, but adults need to play too.” Well. I think they probably do. But for children, it’s an absolute necessity. Play is as important as oxygen, nutrition, and love. [outside ambience, distant hum of aeroplane]

**Katie Callin:** Do you think adults are good at playing? [crackling, rustling, scraping sounds]

**Young child 8:** Adults can (play) sometimes, but the child knows their own way how to play. And if an adult doesn’t get it right, the child might get upset... Because I don’t really like it when my daddy tickles me.

**Young child 9:** Yeah, me too. I don’t like tickles.

[rustling of sticks being collected, twigs crackling; continues throughout]

**Katie Callin:** Why not?

**Young child 8:** I sometimes like them but not all the time.
Young child 9: That’s because I don’t like them, and I don’t like laughing. It’s like, "Ah!" [screams!]

Young child 8: You don’t like laughing?

Young child 9: And I can’t even say, "Stop."

[10:00]

Young child 8: I yell, "Stop" at my daddy when he does it, but he doesn’t do it.

Young child 9: When my daddy tickles my knee, I can’t say stop because I just keep laughing.

Young child 8: I laugh and, well, it’s really hard for me to yell, but when there’s a moment where he just stops, I yell, "Stop!" [shouts "Stop"!] But he just carries on doing it. I think I’ve got a good amount then I’ll just pop it in then I’ll come back. [footsteps and rustling of sticks fades out]

Penny Wilson: [outside ambience; voices in the background] What I like about working as a playworker is that whatever my childhood play was like has to be put in the balance so that I can remember something of how it feels for children. So, I’m very much in touch with the sensations and memories and the power of the experience of being lost in play as a child. [crow squawks as she speaks] It’s hard work. It doesn’t always bring playfulness, but it brings me enormous joy.

[hum of aeroplane in the background] The best way to take inspiration from it is to spend time with children while they’re playing freely. Not to try and control it, not to try and lead it, not to impose your own ideas and creativity upon the process because it’s for them. It’s not for you, it’s for them. But what that will do is kickstart, for the adults, something really precious. [crows squawking rhythmically]

Young child 10: This a-buzzy bee has glasses! There you go, you wear them.

Penny Wilson: Me wear them? [crow continues to squawk]

Young child 10: This is a fairy.

Penny Wilson: A fairy bee or a fairy?

Young child 10: Fairy. [Penny laughs]

Penny Wilson: Play feels good. We only give kids two words to describe playing. One is, are you bored, or are you having fun? But children are doing this for the first time and when children are playing, they’re doing lots of different jobs. [helicopter hums overhead] They’re learning how to calibrate their bodies and their minds and all of those complex things that are mentioned. And that would be hard work if it was written down as a curriculum. The reason that they do it is because it feels good. So, they’re not just having fun, they’re doing something really important. It’s not trivial.
Katie Callin: What’s this?

Young child 11: [making playful, high-pitched noises] It’s a duck.

Katie Callin: Oh.

Young child 12: It’s not a duck. It’s a chicken.

Young child 11: It’s chicken.

Young child 12: Bawk bawk bawk bawk. [imitates high and fast chicken squawking sound] Chicken’s fun. [twinkling electronic theme returns][child screams softly in enjoyment]

Young child 13: This is the biggest one! This is the big guy. He’s called the big guy.

Young child 11: [children’s voices interrupt and weave between one another] That’s the big guy!

Young child 12: Oh, the big guy!

Young child 11: No, that’s a big guy!

Gaylene Gould: [twinkling electronic theme continues; children’s voice in the background] It’s impossible to hear kids playing and not immediately smile and get that same feeling of freedom I guess that I kind of had as a kid. And I’m really happy that I’ve got a playmate with me today. Joining me from the studio today is Tamar Clarke-Brown, who is an Arts Technologies Curator at Serpentine Gallery. Welcome, Tamar!

Tamar Clarke-Brown: Thank you, Gaylene. Good to be a playmate today.

Gaylene Gould: Yeah, exactly. [music fades out] It just wouldn’t be the same if I was on my own. So, what did you think listening to those pieces from Assemble, what thoughts did you have? I guess what came to you?

Tamar Clarke-Brown: I really liked this moment where the two kids are saying, "It’s a duck. No, it’s a chicken." I think play for me and the potential of play is really this idea of... You know, we’re so scheduled in life and as you become an adult, things are so strict that play to me is this moment of... It’s freeing up around the space of yourself or around the space of potential. So, I always think of it as a node in a system and you have all this space around where you can kind of swing and free play. I’m thinking especially of a mobile game I used to be addicted to called Benji Bananas where you just swing from point to point. But it’s this idea of, I suppose, even thinking about it linguistically, this idea that you can kind of uncouple yourself from a strict next point, I suppose. You can really swing free around that moment and there’s so much potential around that.
Gaylene Gould: Yeah. I never played Benji Bananas, but now I want to play it because the other thing is it's the moment-to-moment choice, isn't it? Because you're swinging from... You just choose which way you want to go moment to moment. And I think the idea of play being where it's something that's really present, it's unscheduled, it's unplanned. I mean, I thought that big moment, the big takeaway for me, of Penny's, was where she was saying (play is) where we learn to be a human being. It's where we understand all of these different aspects of relating, knowing what things feel like, knowing what you want to do in the moment. All of that is part of that deep human knowledge.

Tamar Clarke-Brown: A hundred percent. I think it is definitely that moment of absolute relationality to the world where whatever happens in the next moment is very much connected to what happened in this moment. And you really have to pad around and touch things and feel things and really understand the essence of everything that you're potentially engaging with to make that next move. So, it's such a powerful space to be and it's amazing to hear the same. I live opposite of school and it's one of my favourite things. It's because you can hear, in the morning, you can hear all these ways of being in the world and you can hear everyone kind of making connections and relations with each other and everything that can happen from there.

Gaylene Gould: Oh, I'm so jealous. I'm so jealous because I was thinking, listening to this, of how I used to live opposite a school and it's the same. It's scheduled, you have these bursts of joy, don't you, at a few times of the day. So, I'm curious for you, what does play mean to you, and how does it slot into your work and your role at Serpentine? How do you make space for it?

Tamar Clarke-Brown: Within Arts Technologies, we coalesce around different areas that we think are very relevant, whether that's AI, blockchain, synthetic ecologies, all these different things. And last year, we released a publication called Future Art Ecosystems 2, FAE 2, which focused on art in the metaverse. And as part of that, gaming and gaming technologies are one of the biggest drivers of the development of the Metaverse. So, we've kind of focused a lot in the past two years on gaming. So, I think one of the things that people don't always see perhaps is that we are an arts organisation making a video game. There's so much detail that goes into that process. The character creation, the environment creation, the sound work, all these different things – animation. There are so many things that go into making a world, making a game. And we are really excited. I'm really excited about just having the moment to also share that level of detail that goes into what is it to make a world, what is it to make another space that you can explore as a space of possibility, but also all of the different voices that go into that moment.

Gaylene Gould: I'd love to ask you some really basic questions. What is a game? [laughs]

Tamar Clarke-Brown: This is a very hard question. A game, a game, a game. A game, I like to describe it more as a space of agency. I think a game essentially is a space you go into. There are some rules often that are created whether you make them during the process or whether they're kind of inscribed as you go in, and as you enter that space, you know that there are certain ways of... Your main goal, I suppose, is to, in different ways, to survive, which is a weird way to put it. But if it's a card game, you know that the rules are you win in a certain way and that is survival.
So, I think I’ve come to really understand that games are, in a very basic way, about survival in different ways. Working out how you can, I suppose, navigate in that space to create the best outcome for you and potentially your collaborators as well. [twinkling electronic sounds return with new motif of spacy frequencies which shimmer, echo, fade and repeat beneath Tamar’s speech]

One part of the work I’m doing at Serpentine is with the artist Gabriel Massan. Gabriel is a Brazilian-born, multidisciplinary digital artist who we’ve been working together with for the past year now, actually, developing a video game that looks to reimagine the possibilities and the meaning of the ‘Third World’. [music fades out]

**Video game voice:** [electronic swooshing; distorted, computerised voice returns with a low drone] *Third World: The Bottom Dimension.* [High-pitched ping that echoes and fades]

**Tamar Clarke-Brown:** [eerie, ambient electronic tones swell gently] The producer and vocalist LYZZA has provided the soundtrack for the game, which she developed in collaboration with Gabriel. And we’ve been hearing snippets of that throughout this episode.

**Gaylene Gould:** So, take me to this world. What are we seeing when we arrive? [eerie electronic tones continue at different pitches under her speech; elongated, slow moving, organic resonances]

**Tamar Clarke-Brown:** *Third World: The Bottom Dimension* is a multi-level game. Each of the levels, it’s designed to be a kind of very disorienting, kaleidoscopic world. So, the sky is ever-changing, the rocks around you look like mushrooms, a flower looks like a flower but also looks like a frog. There’s so many different things changing constantly as you go between these spaces. It’s incredibly volcanic. And for Gabriel, it was really important that it really echoed this sense of, yes, they’re building a world, but (Gabriel) comes from a very continental country. So, Brazil itself has so many different ecosystems within it and the game is created to really echo that sense and also to add this kind of fantastical layer where you never really know exactly what you’re looking at.

**Gabriel Massan:** Basically, my relationship with games was always about escaping, becoming something that I wasn’t. When I was 10 or 11, my aunt donated a PC to me. The first thing that I did was try install The Sims. [eerie ambient tones get longer, with textured electronic fluttering sounds]

I was the only kid that was playing The Sims because all the boys, they were playing GTA or Counter-Strike, first-person shooting games. So, I think from that, I also could see myself different from the others, really from a young age, and that my interest was really moved by fantasy, freedom, or building instead of destroying while most of the kids were becoming interested in violence. So, at first, it was really hard to engage with the other kids, but I think everything changed with the online games. I could actually make friends online, plus have a different life, but I was still missing something. I kept thinking, oh my god, how could I create my own things and share with everyone on the internet and at the same time invite everyone to play with me and to engage with me in the environments that I want to create? I think these feelings and those notions guided me throughout digital art, first with video art, now with games and 3D art.
[eerie ambient tones continue, with textured, distorted fluttering sound getting more intense]

Tamar Clarke-Brown: The sound designer for the game was LYZZA, and we’ve asked her to do sound beds, environmental soundtracks for each of the games levels, each of the games environments, but also, all of the characters within the space have their own sounds, their own ways of speaking and communicating. There’s an incredible amount of Foley sound that she’s developed for the game.

[eerie ambient tones dissolve into spacey pings and melodic rhythm with occasional beat]

So, a lot of the ways that (the speakers) were talking when they were doing the recording sessions for the game for the sound were really kind of leaning into that sense of people developing their own languages, the sense of play, the sense of nonsense. And also, there are these kind of in-game narrative films, but along the way, it really is about you finding your own sense along the way because a lot of it sounds like it’s this made-up language that you can’t completely understand, and should you have to? Should there be other ways that you can kind of navigate? Do you need to understand everything exactly as the rule book says it needs to be? Does that even exist? That’s not life.

We really wanted to lean into that sense of the fact that you can’t understand everything, even if you want to. There is this scientific way of navigating the world that isn’t everything. [beat ends, spacey sounds continue] There’s spirit, there’s life, there’s community, there’s all these things you can’t understand in a kind of empirical way, so we wanted to play with that in the sound work as well.

[warm electronic vocalisations that oscillate in tone, like a voice heard underwater, continue]

Gaylene Gould: That soundtrack sounds just like the sounds of the kids, when kids are playing, you know? That we also heard the kids at Mudchute is you’re always making up language and making up words and trying out sounds and so there’s a real connection there, I think.

Tamar Clarke-Brown: I love that. And really, I mean, the one thing that always draws me to art is the fact that it is everyone’s individual language, right? Everyone makes up their own language as they navigate through the world, and in general, no one’s way of speaking, or way of being, echoes anyone else’s. So, let’s lean into that and have fun with it.

[warm electronic vocalisations continue, as if speaking with curiosity and warmth, then fades]

Gabriel Massan: The game for me at first was a way of letting people experience inequality [new synthesised electronic motif begins with slow, atmospheric melody; echoes on ambient sound bed; continues under Gabriel’s speech] or letting people experience the discomfort because those feelings, they’re really incorporated in my experience. I wanted to recreate the same environment but not with the same forms or signs, trying to replicate the system. But in a way, there’s more fantasies, it’s more colourful, and way more inviting. So, I started to rethink, how can I criticise inequality by allowing people to be in their own thoughts instead of mine or to really write their story inside my own story? I think Third World came from this.

Third World is a single-player game that uses the notion of a metaverse, but as if it was offline. There is no map, and also, the instructions are mostly related to playability. So, you’ll be diving into this narrative and you don’t know exactly what is wrong or what is good, so you need to find your own way
inside this place, plus understand that you are not really welcomed or that the people there, the characters, they also consider you as a threat.

I think every person that will play the game will come with a different intention, so there is different ways that you can navigate or that can keep you alive. Because I was kind of thinking, how can I build an experience that is not limited by the same constructions or notions of discovering and navigating [atmospheric electronic motif evolves with syncopated percussive elements], taking that from the colonial perspective? How can we not apply the same rules or the same contradictions as in the past? How can we invite people to dive into new experiences without coming with the same notion of navigation and tourism? How can I bring all of that into worldbuilding and then create a world that is offering a chance to look in a different way, a chance of building our own maps? I think that’s what the idea behind the game is. [music continues, weaving together synthetic chords and percussive drum patterns; it is atmospheric and eerie]

Gaylene Gould: I think this sounds fascinating because going back to what you were saying about what a game is and the fact that it’s creating, inviting you into a world with a kind of set of rules, this idea of survival, that’s what it sounds like you and Gabriel are playing with here. What does survival mean and look like? And it’s also like it’s inverting the whole premise of video games because normally, it’s about conquering those worlds, isn’t it, when you go into them?

[music continues in the background]

Tamar Clarke-Brown: Yeah. We’ve had so many conversations around what is it to, if life is a game, which is the common phrase, is everyone playing the same game? [music fades out] Is everyone playing different versions of the same game? And through this notion of a game, which people also often think of as kind of a whimsical thing, how can you actually use a game to not only transform a psychological reality or show people your world, I suppose, but also to perhaps also materially change the world for other people as well? Because no one’s navigation through a game, through the world, is ever the same.

I mean, I think it’s incredible that people are able to and artists are able to make spaces where they have created a freedom for themselves. Worldbuilding in itself... I think the important thing is this kind of return moment, which doesn’t always get spoken about or communicated about. What happens after the fact? What happens after you’ve played the game? What does it mean to return to the world after this moment of exploring and play? What is that return moment and how does everything that’s happened within that space, within that time, feed back into what you do thereafter, feed back into how you communicate with people or change what you do in the world thereafter?

I’m going to go on a climate change bent now, but everything is changing in the world and there’s no way that we are going to survive if we are not open to change. And that is, I think, just the bottom line. We have to be open to that. We have to be open to that process. And I think games, spaces like this, really help to acclimatise us to that notion that it’s okay and that the next moment can happen and that actually, there are all these other people in the space changing, actively changing with you, alongside you, and how can you find power in that moment? How can you find power in that constant change that is necessary for us to get to the next point?
Gaylene Gould: The next level, right? Yeah.

Tamar Clarke-Brown: The next level.


There are so many different ways of playing. We’ve heard some kids playing at Mudchute Farm and playing in the metaverse with Gabriel. Another project associated with Assemble is the Material Institute in New Orleans, a free community and arts education centre.

Musician 1: That’s great. Okay, keep going. [music starts again with drum fill intro]

Gaylene Gould: This music was sent over by the Institute: a peek behind the scenes into jams and collaborations between some of the students who also sent over some voice notes with reflections on play. François Boudreaux is a designer and the Fashion Instructor at the Material Institute.

François Boudreaux: [voice note begins; live music continues beneath his speech] A little bit about Material Institute. We have three different departments: agriculture, fashion, and textiles, and music. And I love the unconventional approach to an education. We kind of work with the students in a way where they can actually learn in different atmospheres outside of just a classroom. So, for example, in the fashion department, sometimes we have class in the garden where we pull from nature, whether it’s crops, leaves, rocks, minerals to pull from a different perspective or reference to help design a different narrative. [live music fades out]

Sometimes in our disciplines, I feel like we love to reference only that discipline from the past. And at Material Institute, we try to break the box and help (students) explore a way of thinking that’s very open and free. We’ve made this place because New Orleans is a very expressive place. It’s very vibrant. If you look at the heritage of our music, our fashion, our culture, our spirituality, the way we communicate, our dialect, our ethnicities, I think we have a lot of spaces for a lot of things, but I don’t think we have a lot of spaces to play or to have room to create.

It might be due to the economics of things. There are a lot of poverty-stricken areas – that doesn’t allow too much room to explore these avenues of art. Especially in New Orleans, art sometimes can be seen as that’s what you do in your spare time or it’s fun. So, we’re offering a creative playground that’s challenging the norm of a regular education to communicate in more of a modern way. We’re definitely trying to give the students options and let them know that you can still support your family and also be an artist.

It takes work, it does take discipline, and it does take this level of interacting with your adolescence or your youth. You have to still keep that free spirit and not become hard. Your voice deserves to be heard and to be in a conversation amongst other tasteful things and excellence.
[short rhythm played on an acoustic guitar being practised]

**Musician 2:** [to the guitar player in the room] Yeah, see, because that’s way too on the nose. [short guitar rhythm repeated four times] And that’s like with just slightly less pressure. It really is like... [we hear either a cat sound, a door hinge, or a person making a high squeak] you got to be fast.

**Musician 3:** You want to go again? Yeah. Okay.

**Riley Teahan:** Hi, I’m Riley Teahan. [soft, warm electronic chords evolve and layer in the background] I’m an artist and a designer at the Material Institute. My background is in theatre, which continues to teach me the importance of collaboration and process. We move so fast through life, so having the space to experiment and play and be curious, that slows me down, gets me excited about learning. Our creativity is powerful. We’re building worlds. We do this every day. Through the stories we tell, the words we speak, the materials we work with, the community we keep, how we spend our time. It’s all a choice. When I’m creating, I’m choosing to build a world that is honest, raw, present, sensual, where we care for the earth, where we trust and nurture what our minds can dream, and our hands can make. [music fades]

**Musician 2:** [in the studio again] My favourite part about learning quick (stuff) like that is that you actually have to be less in control of it. Your hand just has to naturally just... [vocalises rhythm of guitar playing quickly] That gets tricky.

**Eric Guerrero:** [soft, warm electronic chords return and continue under speech] How are y’all doing? My name is Eric Guerrero. I’m a fashion student at Material Institute in New Orleans, Louisiana. Literally, New Orleans is a melting pot. We have so many different cultures, so many different people from different walks of life that just come here. This city is one of a kind, I’ll tell you that.

Certain things are already so common in society that if you go against the norm, it’s not really accepted or your mind just doesn’t push you there because you don’t even see that. All you’re seeing is everyday products. So, being creatively free is definitely one of the most important things you could do if you want to do anything creatively, I believe, because you’re allowing your brain to just flow, you’re allowing yourself to just flow.

There’s certain things that you’re going to put on a piece of paper if you’re just drawing freely and colouring [music fades out] and not being so perfectionist about it and thinking about the outcome. [new ambient electronic motif begins; quiet sheets of sound slowly evolve as he speaks] If you’re just in the moment, you might see certain things that you’re doing over and over again that start becoming you, or that are you and you’re starting to understand it and now you’re developing it more. Like, when you’re free and you’re starting to understand yourself and you’re starting to understand your ideas, you start really being able to gather everything else around you and kind of digest the world in a way that’s going to settle in your stomach very nicely. You’re not going to get a stomach-ache. And I encourage everybody to be more creatively free in their work and all their practices, so maybe they could get more in tune with themselves and then just grow further and further. [music fades out]

Stay blessed. [rhythmic live music with drums and piano returns and ends abruptly on a drum fill]
**Musician 1:** Woo! [shouts excitedly] I like that. [snare drum rim shots] That’s funny. I’ve never really, I never jammed on anything quite that style before like that. [sound of drumsticks being moved on the kit] I like that a lot. It’s almost like – that’s some real jazz!

**Musician 2:** Yeah, that was fun. [final kick drum and piano notes played; live music stops.]

**Jdot Smith:** How you doing? [ambient electronic sounds return and evolve as he speaks] I’m Josh aka Jdot. I think collaboration and play makes ways for new possibilities just by the simple exchange of energy, and not energy in this hippy-dippy sense of the phrase. The exchange of energy is like everything: your technique, your skills, your personality, your interests, your dislikes, the communication that we have.

Collaboration and play is beautiful. It’s such an amazing experience. It’s like everybody get to play and then you start to be able to play games that your collaborator is used to, and they begin to play games that you’re used to, and then now you’re exchanging like, ”Hey, I like that game that we used to play.” [music fades out]

So, collaboration and play... [new motif begins; melancholy electronic, orchestral sounds, building slowly] Ah, the possibilities are endless, it’s beautiful! And in real life, I love the collaboration. It’s a beautiful thing. And I hope and believe that someone hearing a message along these lines, any young upcoming designer, artist... I’m from Holly Grove, New Orleans, Louisiana, and 34 years old. And the beauty of being able to be open and have resources and seeing your brothers and people around you win, that’s all you need. So, be blessed.

**Electronic video game voice:** Play more. Play more. Play more. [echoes and cuts]

**Gaylene Gould:** I mean, there’s so much... [music fades out] I love the real provocation from François at the top where he said, ”It’s important to remain adolescent, to keep your free spirit, not become hard.” And also, how he relates that to nature and the ability to get out into it, which is what we heard from Penny as well, just hearing the kids playing in the woods.

I thought about this idea of (the Institute) being in New Orleans, an economically challenged area, and the idea that it’s designed to challenge the norm of education, which often tells those who are economically challenged that creativity is not a viable career path for them... I think there’s something interesting in there about who gets to play, what does the world tell us about who has the permission to play.

**Tamar Clarke-Brown:** Definitely. I really loved hearing those clips from New Orleans, and I think it’s definitely about who has the possibility to play? Because also, that is about – whose imaginations are we listening to? Whose worlds are we building? All of this. If it’s that you are not allowed to play, you are only able to follow a certain path. What does that do? How does that limit not only yourself, people around you, but the wider world?

It’s really limiting to the possibilities of what can happen because the world is a world, how many billions of people... Everyone needs that possibility to play, to grow, to change, to influence, to expand, to connect. And I think these spaces where you’re hearing, you can hear so much joy and so much, I
don’t know, *expansion* – I love that word – in the voices from New Orleans that I think that’s, in its own way, like a testament. That’s the choir we should hear of the world.

**Gaylene Gould:** Yeah, I think so too. And I love Riley’s description. I think it’s the best description of play I’ve kind of heard. It’s so succinct.

[40:00]

"It’s the space to trust and nurture what our minds can dream and our hands can make." And you’re like, "Yeah, pretty much." That’s, I think, the heart of a lot of what we are doing in play spaces, right? I also love the work that Assemble are doing that centres collaboration and this idea of collaboration is about this exchange of energy, but that’s not just a woo-woo concept. It’s actually techniques, skills, personality in games. Yeah, I think this idea of collaboration and playing together, they’re so central to Assemble in their practice.

**Maria Lisogorskaya:** [voice back in the warehouse space with background buzzing] Yeah. There’s lots of stuff going on all the time, like furniture, and just ideas as well. You’re like watching someone make something and you want to try it too. And I think that to talk about play again, I feel like sometimes new developments create these maker spaces, but they’re so slick and so precious that you can’t really have that freedom and play in them because I think (the developers are) just like, "Oh, let’s take off the artist bit, but not actually provide freedom for them to make that mess that they need to make." So, I think that it’s really important in designing play for adults.

**Gaylene Gould:** [bustling into the room, floorboards creak] Oh, it’s got that school... I haven’t smelt that smell since metal work at school. It’s got that real-

**Maria Lisogorskaya:** And it’s great because I guess this allows us- [door squeaks in the background] to collaborate.

**Gaylene Gould:** To collaborate. [both laugh]

**Maria Lisogorskaya:** Allows us to collaborate, exactly. [objects moved around, banging sounds of craft workshops in the background] And it is, I guess that’s how you play because if this wasn’t here, I wouldn’t necessarily even think about, "Oh, maybe we can get that welded with Lawrence because he’s just done here." I think that definitely affects the playfulness of our work. We’d make some stuff ourselves and then we see how that looks.

**Gaylene Gould:** And then let’s just get Lawrence to do it properly! [both laugh]

**Maria Lisogorskaya:** Yeah!

**Gaylene Gould:** So, I’m curious about your memory of playing as a child [Maria laughs] and the spaces in which you played, given the fact that you’ve now become an adult who helps design such spaces.

**Maria Lisogorskaya:** Yeah, I really loved getting stuck in mud and just moving, shuffling mud around.
Gaylene Gould: Which is pretty much what you do now. [both laugh heartily]

Maria Lisogorskaya: Exactly! Basically, just being out in nature and running wild.

Gaylene Gould: What I really remember... We would've played together well, I can see. How would you like to see cities deal with play spaces, if it was up to you, if you were the major architect of the world?

Maria Lisogorskaya: Oh my god! [laughs]

Gaylene Gould: Yes.

Maria Lisogorskaya: I'm not sure I want that job.

Gaylene Gould: You now have a new title. Yeah, exactly. I'm not sure I would either.

Maria Lisogorskaya: [with humour] Wow. An amazing opportunity. [speaking seriously again] For me, I think it's all about having the variety of experiences and different voices as well. And it not being a formula like, "This thing works. Let's just have thousands of them everywhere." But I feel like each place has something you can celebrate. I think that's the beauty of children – that they can take a random piece of trash and just move it around like it was a butterfly or something.

And I think that's something we should take forward, really appreciating what is there, and whether that's a really, really urban environment which could be skated on or parkoured on, or something that could be added to it, which makes it even better, or something very, very kind of focused on nature and allowing that to flourish and having sort of a bit of wilderness. So, I feel, as a sort of urban designer, you need to allow for that difference, I think, and different types of designers and different types of communities managing those spaces. Having the infrastructure of having free accessible place with trained professionals who really care about the ultimate wellbeing of children, but then having a lot of freedom in what is possible for them to do, I think that is really important.

Maybe I'm sort of avoiding the answer, but maybe it's a planning question about what you allow people to do and opening up imagination about what's already great because I feel like people are creative, and so, I think supporting those instincts is really important.

[sounds of playing child’s voice, outdoor ambience, leaves rustling and distant hums]

Penny Wilson: There are various theories about play. And that they revolve around the theory that survival of the species is hardwired into the young human brain through playing. [crow squawks; ambient outside sounds; children’s voices continue beneath her speech] So, all of the playing that you stereotypically see, there are 16 different types of playing and have been noticed all over the world, and they are survival skills, so running and hiding and jumping and fire and water and all of those things, making dens, all of that. It’s universal. Children do it wherever they are. And once you start to think of play as having a purpose and a function that is fundamental to the survival of our species, then you start to think about why you're seeing what you're seeing. [children shout in the background]
One of the things that human beings need is empathy. And when people feel driven to play-fight, have a rough and tumble or tickle or whatever, and you let them get on with it, just let the whole thing go along, it produces oxytocin in the brain, and oxytocin is associated with empathy. So, lots of childhood settings make the mistake of stopping play-fighting because they think they're getting aggressive with each other, whereas in fact, what they're doing is developing empathy, which is just one example of what happens when you interrupt the play process with an adult agenda.

**Young child 14:** I want a bigger campfire!

**Penny Wilson:** Okay.

**Another playworker:** A bigger campfire?

**Young child 14:** Yes. But with stones on the outside, just like in my plan.

[twinkling electronic theme music return and continues under her speech]

**Gaylene Gould:** There's so much interconnected throughout what Penny's saying, what Gabriel's saying. And to me, it's such a big mic drop moment with this idea that game-playing is actually about the survival of the species. And it really connects to what you were saying earlier, which is you play the game, you play games in order to learn how to survive. I'd never considered that before. It's huge.

[theme builds in intensity - joyful and positive, edging towards resolution]

**Tamar Clarke-Brown:** Yeah, we keep using this term recalibrate, but in a very kind of almost quick way to really understand your own psychology, what you're doing, why that's not working, why this is not working, why actually, in order to get X thing, you should probably do Y... Or just the way that you could play better. I think that's the phrase, you could play better. And we're talking about play as practice, and if play is practice, how can you practice better?

One of the big things to consider always is how do we live together? How do we live better together? And I think, especially in collaborative games, it is always about how do you rearrange yourself, and through that process, also help to make the wider game or the wider ecosystem work better, or the strategy in the wider world work better?

So, I think games in themselves and play as practice really are an amazing opportunity for you to be able to really see yourself in this mirror or see other people in this mirror in a very direct way and understand your psychology in a way in which maybe you wouldn't engage with it in your daily life. It is almost like a gauze I suppose, that allows you to play in the world in a different way. This really takes me back to an aspect of Gabriel's game, *Third World*, how we interact with the world around us.

[Music fades and evolves into fast-paced, bubbling electronic rhythms; continues under speech]

**Gabriel Massan:** I think the intention behind all of this is really related to creating empathy. I think I'm also trying to create an experience that is trying to re-significate what it means to be an individual. Because you're not part of this ecosystem, it doesn't mean you cannot relate to that, that the same
rules they’re applying for those who are living inside this ecosystem doesn’t apply to you because you’re only a visitor.
I wanted people to also understand that they should take care of the place they’re visiting because our relationship with games as humans is that you enter this experience at one point, you’re leaving, and then you’re going back to your own reality. How can we rephrase that and say that all those realities are connected? Because when we leave those creatures, this environment is still alive, even if the player isn’t there.
This starts, for me, applying almost the same rules as we have in the real world related to natural resources. So basically, everything that you collect inside the game will not be replaced. If you collect a crystal, every character inside the games needs a crystal to keep them alive. So, it started to really tell the player, if you collect that many crystals, the others that are living inside this environment will not be able to keep living or to keep existing because they also need the energy. [music fades out]

Gaylene Gould: [twinkling electronic theme returns, more slowly] I love this idea of doing better. I think it’s really quite intriguing, in Gabriel’s game, that your impact on this planet, on this world that you’ve made, that you’ve created, you are really aware of it as the player. You become very aware of the impact that you’re having on this environment and that you could deteriorate the environment.
And I was thinking about this natural world, the relationship between that and as a kid, part of what we were doing when we were playing in these environments, these very precious spaces, is we wanted to come back. We wanted to come back and be able to play tomorrow. So, it was very important that we looked after it. It was very important that it remained in a state that we could continue to play in. So, I like this idea that you are very aware of the way in which you are leaving the environment after you’ve played. It’s a nice idea. Tamar, thank you so much for playing with me today!

Tamar Clarke-Brown: Thank you. It’s been so fun.

Gaylene Gould: All of the things that play gives, I feel like I’ve gotten from our exchange, our energy exchange today. [audibly smiling] So, I would love to invite any final words of wisdom that the journey through this series is all about. What do we need to build new worlds that are healthier, more resilient, more generative than the ones that we have? Any words of advice around play?

Tamar Clarke-Brown: What happens next is what happens next. I mean, with the game, for instance, we’re going to be doing a lot of playtesting, so we’re really excited to see how different people play the game, all the different possibilities of navigation in that space, what’s going to happen and the fact that no one will ever play it in the same way again. And what does it mean for people to share tactics in our game? What does it mean for people to say, “Oh, you didn’t see that thing over there? Oh, you didn’t see that? Oh, okay, well if you just come with me, I’ll show you how to do that thing.”

How does that also expand what people are able to see and do and really expand not only your own perceptions, but the perceptions of those around you? And that is, I suppose, what art is at the end of the day as well. It is about perception. It is about changing perceptions of the world and really being able to see the full gamut of things. [music fades]
Gaylene Gould: Listening to all these stories, I’ve come to realise just how fundamental play is to human development. As Penny says, “Play is necessary for children to learn about themselves, their relationship to the world, to develop the human skills needed to navigate a complex, interconnected environment.”

So, why should that learning stop? We desperately need such messy, untamed play spaces so adults can practise empathy, interconnectedness, and as Riley from New Orleans says, “To nurture what our minds can dream and our hands can make.”

By paying close attention to how we play and what we learn while doing it, we grow more aware of who we really are, and of the world around us. And it’s this kind of wisdom that might help us forge a new way forward. So, let’s forget all the rules, all except one, and that’s simply to pay attention to what naturally emerges. So, this is my stern inner voice talking, telling you to start mucking about, play very seriously, grow down rather than up, and go play with a stick. Our future depends on it.

Young child 15: Just start playing with the children. Just start playing with the children and exploring! Yeah, that’s all.

Gaylene Gould: I think we’ve got time for one more game, don’t you? So, we’ve heard about gaming and creative play as ways to rethink the world we’re in, but sport can also be a space where the imagination can run wild. Alvaro Barrington is an artist who recently designed a colourful new community basketball court with the London Lions and Serpentine. It’s got these amazing colourful grounds that remind you of skies, landscapes, desert suns – and a real popping ’80s energy. You can visit the court at Weavers Fields, East London.

Alvaro Barrington: My name’s Alvaro Barrington. Today, I’m a basketball court designer and we’re standing in front of the basketball court that we designed in the studio. I grew up in Brooklyn in the ’90s, and that was really the era that basketball became what I think the world know it as. It’s the era of Michael Jordan, it was the era of basketball becoming an international sport, but it also coincided with the rise of hip hop and that was a big part of it, and Jordan was born in Brooklyn. So also, I’m a fan of the culture, its cultural impact. It wasn’t just a game, it was also about how we imagined ourselves and how other people imagined us.

Also, you come in here and you really could play a whole game and be a spectator. We wanted a bit of both of that, for you to be able to come in as a spectator and be amazed at someone scoring and doing their thing on the court.
I think we need more reasons to go outside and more reasons to want to be in each other’s space and with each other. And basketball is just such a great game. It’s a team game, but I think art today has to give people more reasons to go outside and that’s incredibly important in the age of the algorithms and things wanting to keep people inside. [twinkling electronic theme layered with echoes of basketball court voices that grow more distant; theme draws to a close]

**Gaylene Gould:** Serpentine Podcast: *REWORLDING* is presented by me, Gaylene Gould. [ambient electronic theme music] The series was produced by Katie Callin with production support from Nada Smiljanic at Reduced Listening, and curated by the Serpentine Editorial team: Hanna Girma and Fiona Glen. Thanks to all members of Serpentine’s Programmes, Communications and Audiences teams for their direction and contribution. Special thanks to Serpentine leadership team, Bettina Korek, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Yesomi Umolu. The theme music for *REWORLDING* was conceived and produced by KMRU. Our thanks go to all guests, contributors and advisors on *REWORLDING*. [music fades out]

[57:52]