

Zine Verschenken

#12 | june 2023 | playground



Editorial

We are proud to announce our special edition of Zine Verschenken in collaboration with 48 Stunden Neukölln. If you are new here, we are a monthly local Berlin zine consisting of FLINTA creators, writers, artists, curators, designers and coders. This has been our passion project for the last 12 months and you may have previously seen some of our zines in the zu verschenken boxes around the city. Our inspiration was to create something that was similar to the black and white zines in Berlin in the 80's. We have modernised our content a little and have all previous issues online via our website and newsletter subscription. If you are interested in finding out more, check our back page for the details.

Each previous issue has a theme that we choose ourselves, but as this is a collaboration, this time we are using the 48 Stunden Neukölln theme 'Play(ground)'.

I have spent the last few months thinking about play and its importance to Berlin in particular. As the city famous for 'Peter Pan syndrome', Berlin has a rich history when it comes to play. As far back as 100 years ago, when artists, free-thinkers and most importantly the closeted queer community flocked away from judgement, lives that were planned out from their births and overall boredom to Berlin, where they were accepted or at the very least tolerated by the authorities. By the end of the 1920's, there were plenty of bars, clubs and theatres that were overflowing with tourists and all kinds of characters, outlandish performances and fabulous cocktails.

For us modern day players, we have come a little ways in the world of play. We can say that at the very least we know the connection between play and the development of a child's young mind. Play is an essential part of our childhood. Through play, we learn important life lessons for our future such as social and emotional skills that are vital to our self-worth. As teenagers, the rules of the game change quite suddenly. There is more focus on study and less on play. The number one question teenagers are asked is what they want to be when they finish school. To be. As if their future profession is the only thing that will identify them as an adult. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Berlin is changing, no can deny it. Gentrification has rivalled the weather as the Berliners' new favourite topic. Everyone has an opinion on it and perhaps there are many changes that are beyond our control. My question to you dear readers is this: Is Berlin changing into a city that prioritises other things before play?

The late 1930's showed us that even during Berlin's darkest hour, there were still some brave souls who risked everything for play. To create spaces for light, love and laughter. They realised that these seemingly small contributions were integral for

the survival of their beloved creative community.

Today's Berlin has its own set of challenges in our world of play. If we can take anything from the history that has passed, it is that we must keep play alive in any way we can. As our city continues to develop, we are here to remind it to play. Encourage others by engaging with them and keep Berlin's story going. Sure, there are plenty of paths, many of them may be faster but play doesn't beat to the rhythm of time. It's immersion, falling into a cloud of pure enjoyment, just for that very moment. For those who keep their eyes (and imaginations) open, Berlin is our key to cherish the vitality of our livelihood.

In Berlin, a city that is constantly growing and developing, play does play (!) a vital part in our lives. In the same way children need play, we as adults need to awaken our relationship with play. Perhaps, in our lifetimes, now more than ever before.

The question is, are you making enough time for play?

Think of your goals, think of all that you want to accomplish this year.

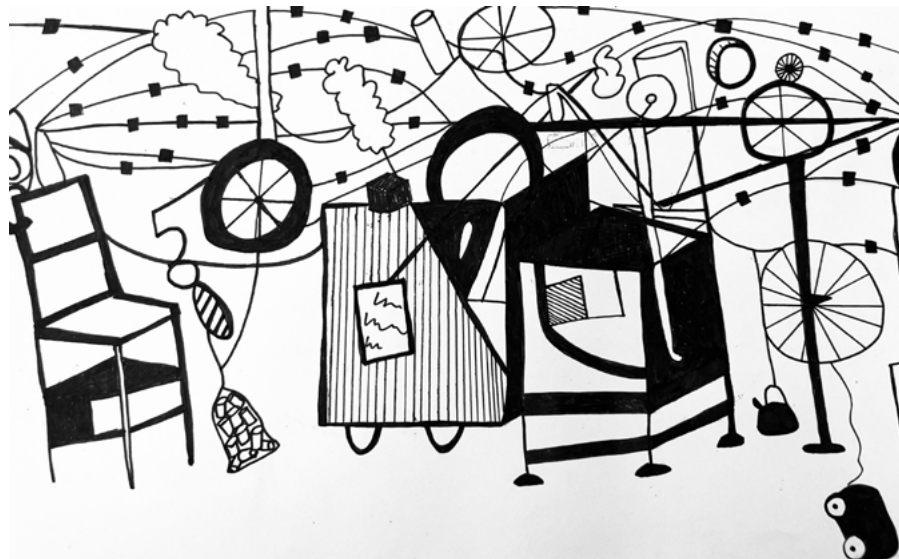
Wouldn't you like to further your social and emotional skills? And your self-worth?

Give into play.

Immerse yourself in play.

Lose your sense of time and awareness.

Listen to your inner child - she wants to play.

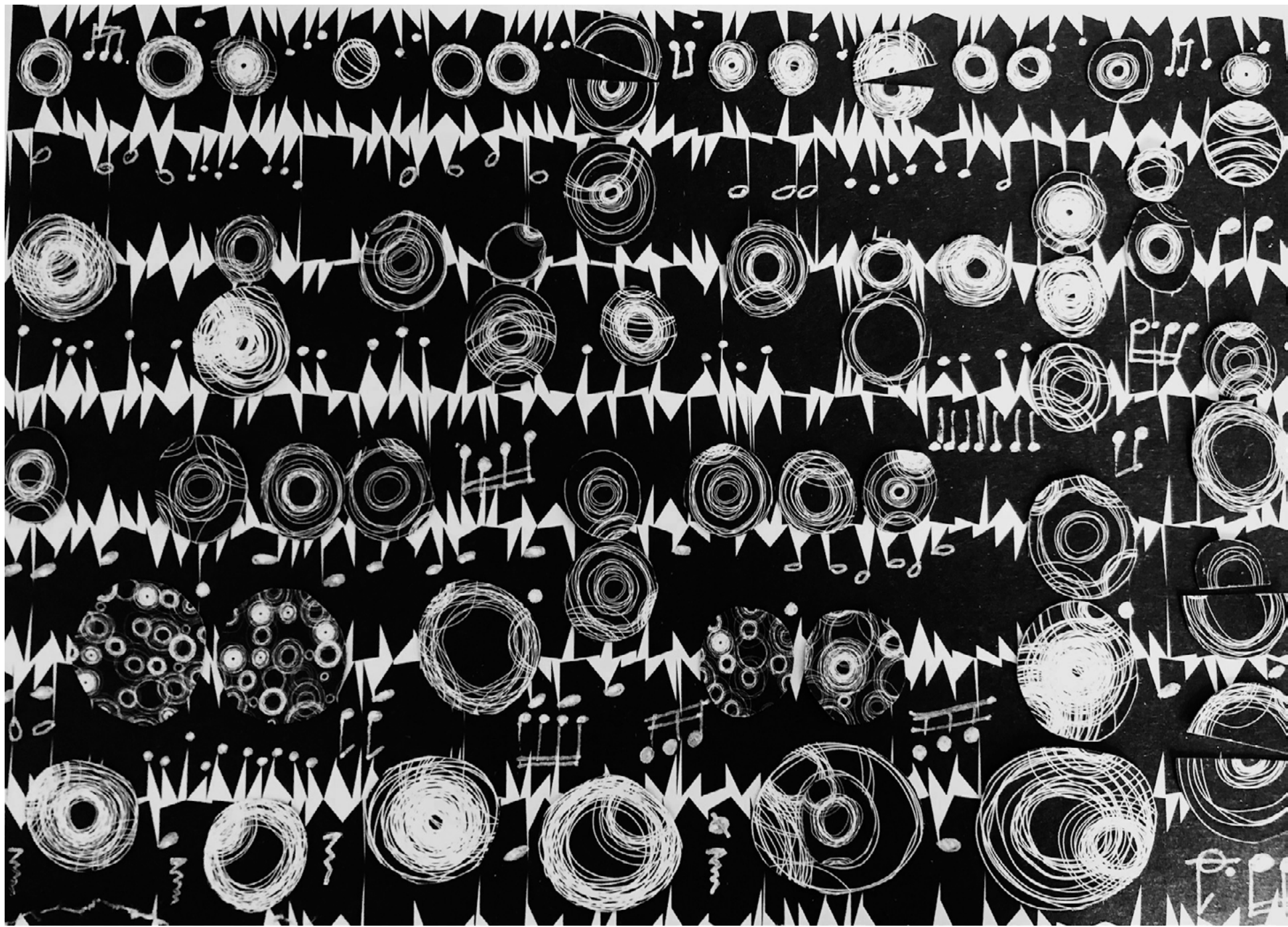


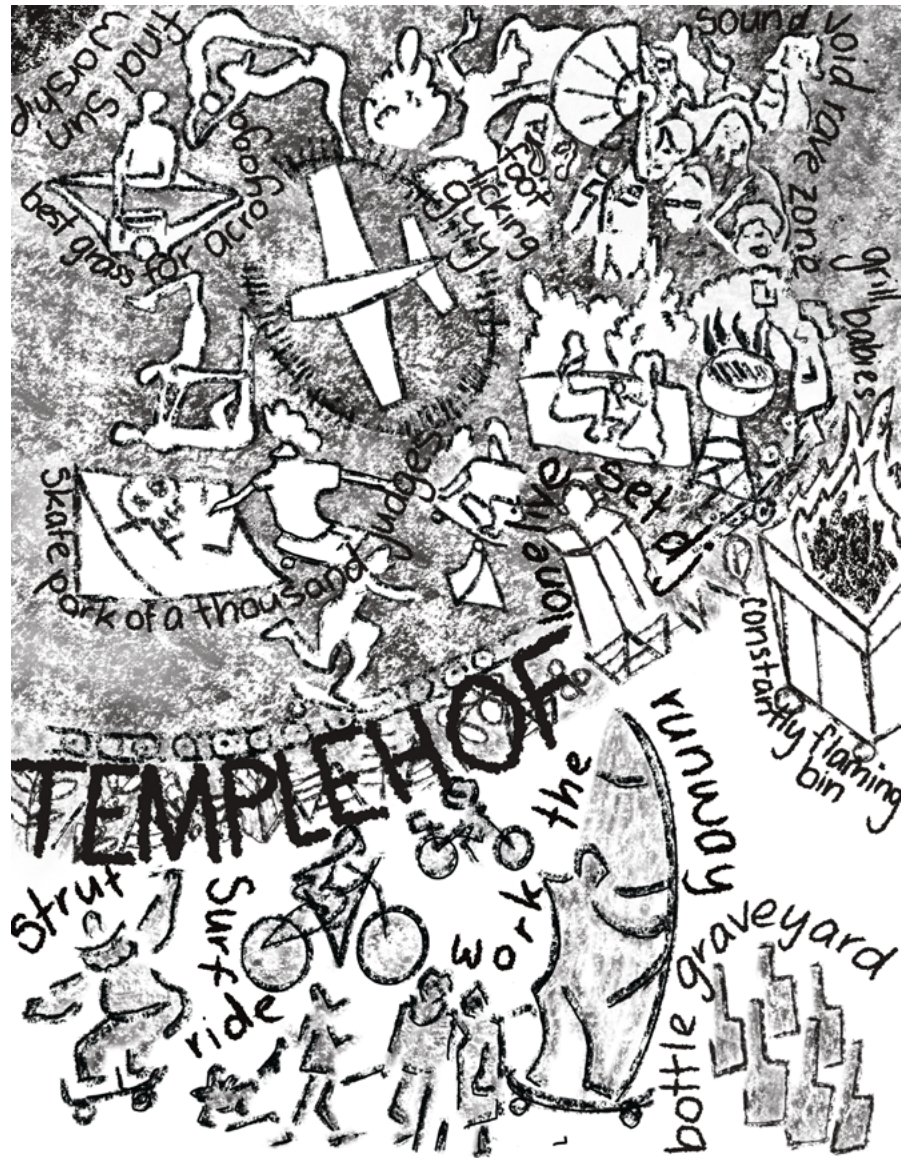
Bracken jungle

A bracken jungle covered the hillside around the rundown farmstead that bordered onto our cottage garden. Bright green in May and red-gold in October, it rose well above our heads as we made rabbit runs underneath by bashing it about with a carpet beater and running around in circles until we were dizzy and out of puff. Sometimes, all we needed to do was unleash our dog so she could chase badgers, following along behind her as she hurtled through the undergrowth making her own criss-cross tracks and tunnels. Or we'd throw ourselves down on the cushiony stems and wait until it sprang back up again like a trampoline, roll around in it to make a cocoon, bury ourselves under the ferny layers, or just lie back and watch the clouds scurrying across the sky. When the sun trickled through the giant fronds, it made shadows that laced our arms in latticework. In winter, of course, the bracken died back, leaving blackened, withered fronds that peppered the landscape, and so our playground temporarily disappeared. But in spring it would grow back thicker than before. We would put the leaves into jam jars and wait to see what hatched out of the eggs on the back, or watch the spores scatter on a windy day, eventually take root and grow into curly fairy fronds.

The land was owned by a bad-tempered farmer who wore oilskins and a sou'wester hat even at the height of summer, and whose hard life in the merchant navy had made a bit of a pirate out of him. Whenever he coughed, you could hear the tar rolling around in his lungs, and his breath sounded like the smoke coming out of a funnel. We used to play with his son but he put a stop to it once he discovered us sliding off his hay bales in the barn and, later, building dens and frying sausages behind the haystack on the hillside.

Hidden under the ferns, we'd lie still when we saw him coming, stifling our giggles with grass as he thrashed this way and that with his stick, intent on rooting us out. 'Course, if his shepherd dog was there, we didn't stand a chance. Otherwise, we'd wait hours for him to go and listen to the calling frogs and clicking bugs that signalled evening was approaching.





Memories of a gallery rat

As a child, I spent a lot of time at the art gallery. My mother was an art student and before moving to London, we spent a lot of time at a warehouse squat in Liverpool that was turned into a community art space. It was a place where local and international artists convened. A home to the weird and wonderful for a month or so before everything would change once again. It was the place where I would smell weed for the first time and see drunk people dancing and flirting the night away. I learned how to think differently there, and I wasn't the typical 5-year-old that the adults got to know, I was the gallery kid.

My best memories were the strangest memories. My mother deciding to become a security guard for ticketed events, and then getting blind-drunk on red wine, tumbling down all over the place like a fainting goat on the same evening.

My playmates were the grown-ups. They taught me how to make art out of papercutting, collaging and sometimes, there was a bit of photography too.

I became an event photographer at one point and cried because I wanted to sing on stage with my mother and her group of friends instead. That night, I learned that it was wrong to crop out the legs of a person standing in my photos. That made me the de facto photographer for my mother's portraits – it was a time before smartphones and instant digital selfies existed.

At the same time, wild art installations surrounded me. A pig's head on a banquet table setting, a sonic moving machine made entirely out of junk, a red soaked tent with the sounds of a heartbeat played on repeat.

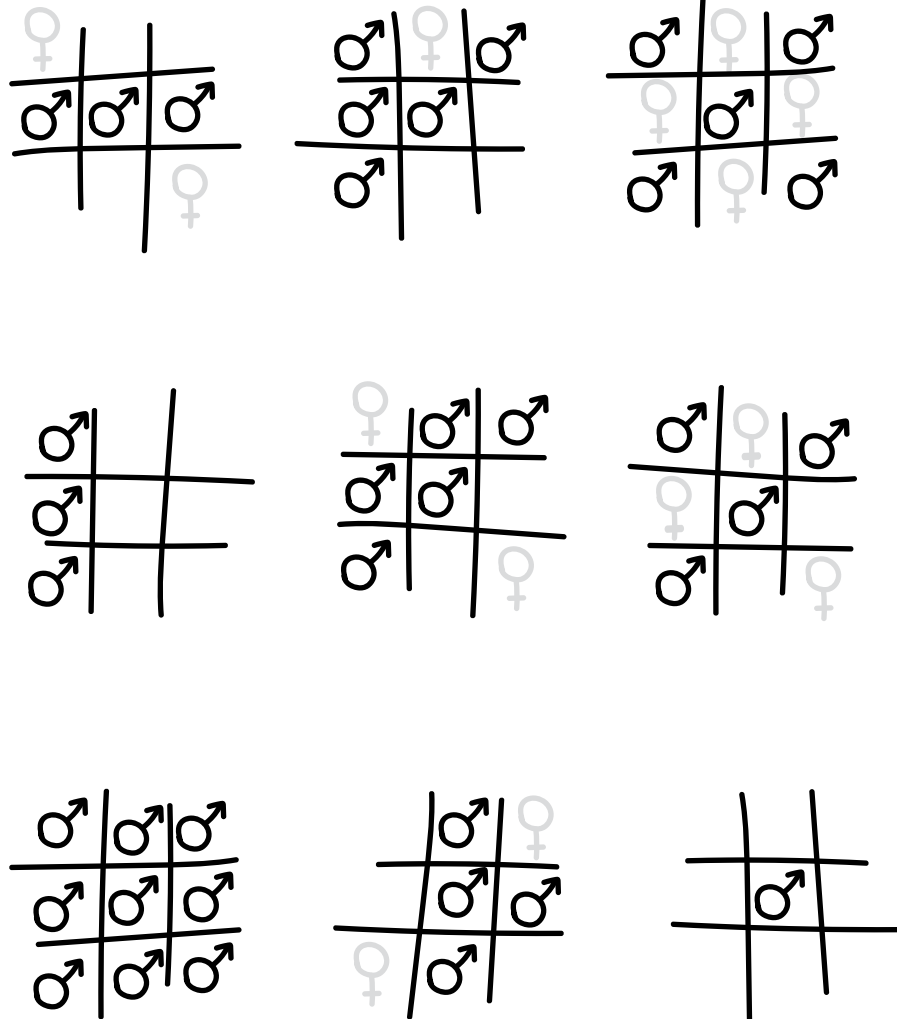
I didn't know what good art was, but this was my playground.



make it play!



install and scan



Kant Goes on Vacation.

Notes on Play

What's your game style? Are you a joyful epicurean or rather ascetic? A kantian or a hedonist? Do you put critical judgment on the game or just prefer to play regardless? Do you play by the rules or are they, by any means, any rules at all? I've been thinking about writing, thinking about play, but it's already months that my mind feels like a blank space. A milk jar being continuously filled without no one noticing the hole on the bottom. Sometimes things don't seem to flow, or they just flow too much. Anyway I'm just writing this because the ocean swallowed my book. But let's start from the beginning. It all started with a blank space.

G and I decided to travel to Mexico for 1 month, just like that, just because we can. Some ludic lusty vacation would certainly help to unblock our minds. Some new landscapes, words, unknown games to be played. After 4 diazepam in a 10 hour flight spent half awake half asleep 'cause not even valium can knock me down, we arrived in Mexico City. Two days before it was 1st of May. I had been planning my triumphal entry for weeks. I would be wearing a self-made red polka dot dress with a long split in the middle. When my friends found me I would happily show my underwear through the split: a vibrant red thong bought from AliExpress where I stamped the hammer and sickle drawn with gold glitter, while the Internationale anthem would play. Everything is going smoothly: everyone stares at me, the communist chorus, the fist in the air and my thong glittering wild. Suddenly I hear them shouting: "no, no, no!" while doing crazy gestures with their hands. I look down and my breasts are also out. Crap. My triumphal entry turned into a striptease show. That was not in my plans.

In Mexico we first stayed at my friend's place. She's studying the infras. Poets and terrorists, cultural guerrilla fighters. What's funnier than that? She was cordially invited to join one of their meetings. She says they spoke in rhymes and drunk absinth as if it was the last year of the XIXth century. Yet, we are not in the XIXth century, not even in the XXth. They said lots of things would happen in the year 2000. Now some people still live in the past and others seem to live nowhere. I asked her if she was a kantian or a hedonist. She said she's deep inside a kantian but pushes herself really hard to play like a hedonist. Sometimes so hard that she regrets it.

The city center is like a giant human market for crickets, erotic potions, chickens for rituals, unpublished books and white and black magic. G and I are searching for the cheapest taco and we find our spot for 10 pesos very close to Alameda. My inner Kant says: "look into yourself for inalienable truth: eating that taco is wrong for you (wrong for anyone)". But I can't help it.

Dogs seem hungry and my friend still has no bed. We sleep on her couch and talk to her roommates. They look like nice people, both have mustaches, “typical mexicans” they say

and ask questions about typical Berlin, techno parties and nakedness. My friend suspects she’s just there to cover their part of the rent, as she pays an unusual amount for the city, but we Europeans can afford it, right? Still the guys look nice, give lots of tips and tricks. That night we go to the Cineteca Nacional to watch Sundown. The day after we pack our stuff and head to the next stop.

Bahía Escondida means Hidden Bay. Yet the town is not hidden anymore. That’s okay for me, not that much for G, who always claims to hate people. Once during a breakdown I told him to move to my village, to a house in the Galician mountains in the middle of nowhere. He argued it would be too much effort. Play should be the opposite of effort, something that comes out naturally, that just flows. Nonetheless I seem to have an obscure relation with nature, which I repulse as much as worship. There’s something deeply dark about beauty and fun, about these little games we use to play. I often feel blocked, unflowing. Other times I think it’s just so wrong. A little boost for my weak moral superiority. Everything seems cool and laid back until it’s not anymore.

We arrived at Hidden Bay on a Tuesday. Another flight, this time one hour. There was no choice as the other option was to cross a bumpy road for 17 hours. I spend an hour maniacally controlling the plane wings with the power of my mind, cat alert position, making circles with my feet in the air as if they were the engine that keeps the world going. Upon arrival everything seems to be worthy. Indeed, Bahía Escondida looks like paradise and feels like Paris Hilton’s video of Stars are Blind. Big green palms everywhere, blue beaches, corals, wildlife, and the inhabitants are not yet sick of tourists. The land of the service workers, G called it with a mix of irony and truth. Then he bought a sombrero.

Our hotel is in front of the main beach. Nothing to do with those big white blocks of apartments in the South of Spain, small balconies for the low class vacationers. This has just 2 floors and our room, bright and spacious, heads to a nice courtyard with a fountain. They told us we would be almost alone, it seems to be mid-season. For dinner we got some tlayudas -huge tacos made of a slightly hard corn shell- and accidentally fed the dogs on our way with the meat falling on the floor. When we came back, in the darkness, everything seemed different, teared apart, neglected. That night I dreamed that the King of Tacos would enter our room through the window frame and kidnap us. He requested a ransom of 800 pesos and we gave it to him, telling him it’s not too much. Once released we thought about warning the police, but G refused.

I woke up early like nothing had happened. G and I went to the main beach right in front of the hotel for a sexy early morning bath before the place starts getting busy. We sank into the water, dived into the waves fighting against the streams, then came back to the surface. I opened my eyes and the water was no more blue, but dead, excretory brown.

We took a quick shower.

The Pacific Coast drives through a funny line of tectonic plates that might result in a wide variety of epic catastrophes such as earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Yet, the

waves are beautiful, the wind in the palms, the music hitting the ground with no matter what (cumbia, reggaeton, tropical, electro), but the ocean ate my book. I was lying on a lounge, a liter of margarita in my hand. Here you cannot just lie on the sand because the sea might come and swallow you too, so there I am in my lounge and people are gorgeous with tan flat bellies and tiny bodysuits. They jump in and out of the ocean like in Baywatch but when I try I just get trapped in a washing machine, so I sit on my lounge and read Annie Ernaux. I like to imagine her doing the same, a liter of margarita to accompany her writing about deeply intimate affairs. She surely would love it. I remember my friend saying “at 4 in the morning the only thing people want is Danza Kuduro and La copa de la vida by Ricky Martin” but do I?

We dive again into the ocean. The water is blue again, crystal clear but waves are becoming uncontrollable. “And that’s why they call it the Pacific” I hear my mother talking. The friend who originally asked the Hedonistic vs. Kantian issue told me to be the exact opposite of myself: a good old libertine trapped in the voice of a repressive moralistic but rightful 19th century man. Within the waves, I don’t know which one should win. I let myself flow or I fight. Anyways I might drown. When I decide to leave I’m afraid it might be too late. I swim and swim but the waves don’t give me peace. One after another they pull me in and out, they wrap my body and my bones until I’m exhausted. In a second of tranquility I manage to run and the water still covers my feet when the next wave arrives. I’m saved. G decides to stay.

People around have fun, they still swim, they let themselves flow from side to side, outside inside outside. People dance, drink, chat, surf. People eat tacos, fish and seafood brought in boats that were sailing the brown water. Locals, nomads, wannabes, posh or classic red-faced tourists, snobs. It’s a weird combination. When I was a child I wanted to be a hippy. Sell my necklaces and rings at the beach, scam the tourists, give good prices for the ones that deserved it. Every child wants to be a hippy or to be a god, but I wanted to be both. Live from the earth and for the earth. Now I’m just jealous or sane, both ways are disgusting.

The waves are getting bigger while I write and my skin is red. People call it paradise but I cannot remember Eve taking a forbidden coconut from a palm. Our christian god might have called it hell but anyway I don’t believe in superstitions. I sink again in a dream but this time there is no King of Tacos but a dark old forest. There are children playing and the day is getting darker and the leaves are falling til their heads are covered. I wake up with a sudden wave that sinks my lounge into a huge foam load. I can barely react to save my shoes, I count the things around me, my purse, my phone, my clothes. G has everything hanging from the sun umbrel-

la, the clever elf. Everything seems to be fine, wet, but fine. When the next wave comes, almost as close as the last one, it spits out something I forgot: my book is now three times its size and full of sand. It falls apart with the touch of my skin.

I'm pissed. Yet I'm still here. I lay myself again on the lounge and watch the sea. G is miles away, the furthest one of all swimmers. Right next to the spot where I found my book now lies a dead fish, pretty close to us. I always act like a strict mother, with my arms I ask him to

come back. He's not looking anyway. And now it's getting dark, for me, a bright, bizarre kind of dark. Mix of every color, Dionysus black, and I watch the waves growing over us.

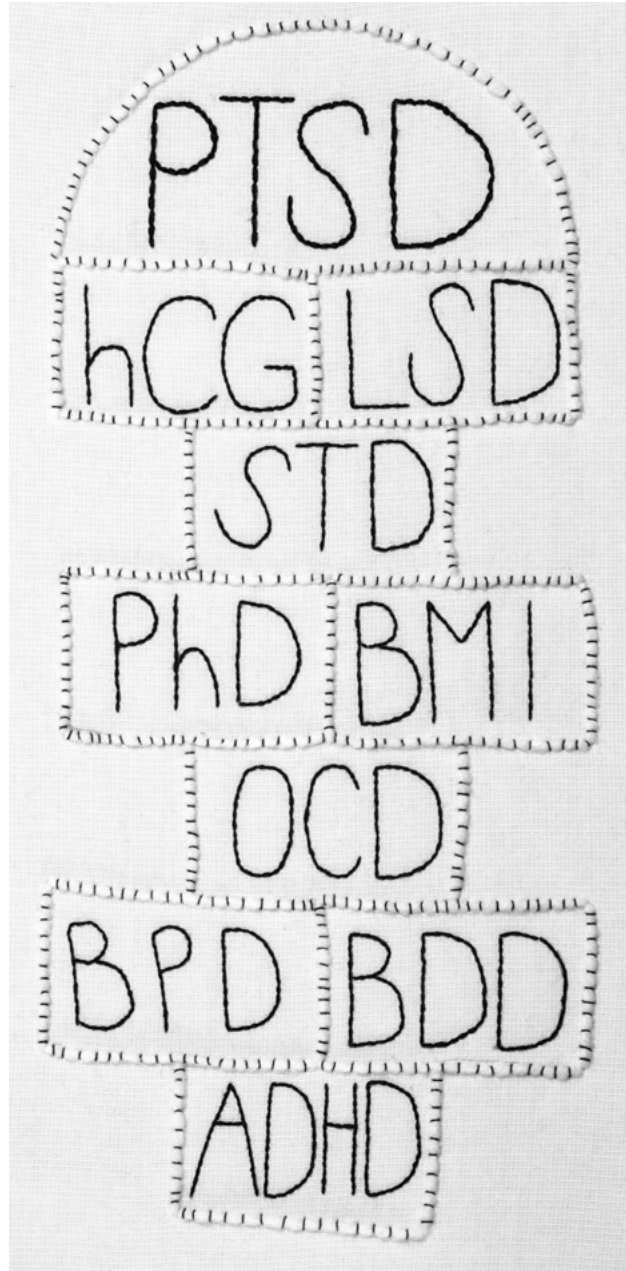
G tries to swim back but he doesn't seem to make it far. He swims like a robot in nothingness, no step further or back. I might have to go inside (to do what?), then I look at the fish, eyes wide open, mouth ajar. Half-open, like us. We see ourselves only through the cracks. The next wave brings the fish closer. It's dead gray, but doesn't smell yet. I ask myself if someone will bring it back to the ocean or if we should make a ritual, bury him or burn him like a viking. It might be eaten back by the ocean tonight and rediscovered in the middle of another chaos, another paradise on the other side of the planet.

Kant would say there is a moral obligation that derives from our free will, from our rational nature. If not, we are animals. Just tell that fish. G makes it to his lounge, exhausted, he comes with the tongue out like a dog and lays down. "For one moment, I was afraid of not coming back". All the games are funny until they are not anymore.

A long time ago we went climbing in a team event and my colleague got trapped. Hanging from her harness in the middle of the air I heard her shouting while waiting for her rescuers: "And this they call it fun!". I asked G again about Kantianism vs. Hedonism. G said he's none of that, he's just a gourmet. I just want to play. Play by the rules, play so wrong that it's finally over. Or maybe just leave a Google Review.

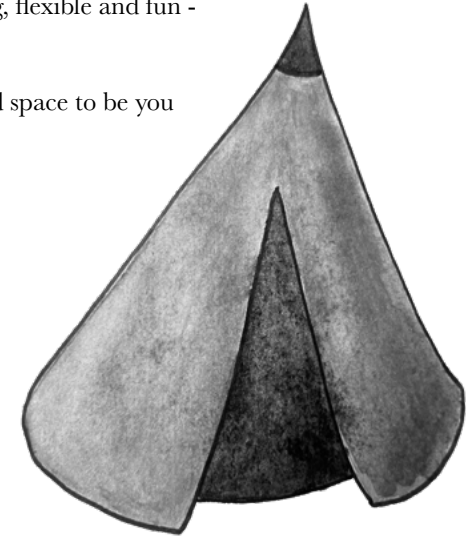
Rate the system: 2,5 (not bad, just mediocre).





The meaning of play

Play is the universal language of childhood,
not an adult word that stands for what we do when we're not working
To a child it's a way of life
If you can't play, you'll never learn
Playing means being co-operative
It means making music,
practising a skill
Play is being free:
free to choose, experiment and enjoy,
free to explore and express
It's healthy, wholesome, holistic
and completely natural
It is a way of working things out,
understanding ourselves
and making sense of the world around us
Play is important for its own sake
It doesn't fulfil a goal, produce a result or reap a reward
To play is to follow our whims, interests and desires
It is what we do when everyone stops telling us what to do
Play is uncertain, challenging, flexible and fun -
no rules!
Play is sacred
It means having the time and space to be you



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Artists Bianca Cheung
Elena Marcos
Erin Johnson
Karen Foster
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Nadia Cheung
NINANIÑA

Do you want to contribute to the zine?

Have any questions?

Send us an email:

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scan the QR code to access our website:



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