



Go outside and play

## Description



Children are told to "go outside and play" so they don't strangle the cat, smear  
them. It's also to get them away from the  
ed to hypnotise children.

But "go outside and play" trips off the

tongue more readily than "come inside and play," or play in the garage, toolshed or the Landrover. It's probably safer too, though *outside* is best thought of as a garden, an enclosed safe area, if you are lucky enough to have one.

In fact the model of the outdoors that people favour is not some untrammelled wilderness, but the safer, in-between zone betwixt inside and *really* "out there" (the wild, elusive, pre-inhabited natural *other*, that probably doesn't exist).

Thanks to gardens, sophisticated adults easily associate *outside* with *play*, bolstered too by the nineteenth century invention of the English pleasure garden. Landscape historian Jonathan Conlin describes the long-gone Vauxhall Gardens on the south side of the Thames in London as

“incorporating elements of masquerade, *chinoiserie*, and other exotic fantasies that transported visitors to new realms of fancy. Promenading along their shaded walks of a summer evening, visitors could escape the pains of the city while still enjoying its pleasures. Sudden contrasts of light and dark, familiar and strange, pleasure and danger that would have seemed deeply unsettling anywhere else became a source of excitement and wonder” (1).

For people brought up in temperate climates the natural world at its best presents as *bucolic*, a vast parkland of pleasure and play. I’ve written about [play](#) before, and referenced the famous book by Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*. In that book he says a lot about play, but nothing about gardens or nature.

## Toying with nature

I think that *play* serves as a useful conceptual intermediary between digital technologies and nature (a growing interest of mine). To ask how smartphones and other mobile media assist or hinder our relationship with the natural environment is to ask how they help or hinder play.

In writing about music in everyday life, which these days involves iPods and other mobile media devices, Tia DeNora says, “to play is to dream in the medium of action” (42). She adds, “play furnishes the lifeworld with opportunities for action, with things (roles, riffs, possibilities, personae, scenarios, postures, action chains, styles) that one can play, replay and play over and play around with, together in ways that access forms of experience and ways of being in the world” (42-3). It’s about “making a place.”

Technologies inevitably come into play in this place making. DeNora says, “If play is engagement with the world, then the features of the world can be understood in the broadest sense as toys” (43). She doesn’t assert this (but it’s something to conjure with): perhaps the artefacts we urbanites carry with us when we *go outside and play* are as much a part of the “outdoors” as the trees, flowers, mud and sunshine.



## References

- Conlin, Jonathan. 2013. *The Pleasure Garden, from Vauxhall to Coney Island*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press
- DeNora, Tia. 2013. *Music Asylums: Wellbeing Through Music in Everyday Life*. Farnham, England: Ashgate
- Huizinga, Johan. 1955. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press

## Notes

- Also see posts tagged [play](#).
- The first image in the article is Chatsworth House Gardens in Derbyshire England. Lancelot Capability Brown had a hand in the design (re-design) of the gardens in the 1750s. The second is of one of several sculptures erected along the Thames Southbank in London to promote an exhibition of Salvador Dali's work in 2010. This is at Jubilee Gardens where the London Eye is located, about a mile down river from the site of Vauxhall Gardens.

## Category

1. Nature

## Tags

1. gardens
2. nature
3. outdoors
4. play

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