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Play: The Root of all Research

Abstract

It has been suggested that the creative arts exist as sophisticated play phenomena. Do Western attitudes towards 'play' impact upon the regard and funding afforded arts research? Is there a closer link between all forms of research and play than modern Western thinking will allow? Has a cultural imperative led to an intellectual apartheid within research communities?

> Needless to say, child's play and works of art, including literature, stand at opposite ends of the spectrum of play phenomena … But the play activities of child and adult are ultimately continuous rather than disparate, for the fundamental source of imaginative behaviour remains consistent throughout human life: never, as individuals, are we fully assured of our position in the world, never is adaptation complete. (Easterlin 1993: 116)

The term 'child's play' is widely understood to denote the activities that occupy much of childhood after such matters as eating, sleeping and, when old enough, schooling have been given due attention. The same term is applied to adult activities that are regarded as simple or easily achieved, be it in the work place or within a leisure context. While few would argue with the notion of play as an important element of growing up, the latter of these applications reflects an attitude towards play that is pervasive and rarely challenged in Western society; the idea that play, although nice if you have the time, is trivial and of no great consequence in the broader scheme of adult life. Furthermore, given the observation that the creative arts exist as sophisticated play phenomena, this same attitude impacts upon the regard and funding the creative arts receive within academe. Is it possible, however, that the distinction drawn between scientific and creative research stems from a cultural imperative that reflects an ignorance of the fundamental similarities between the two, resulting in an intellectual apartheid?

Child's Play?

Trust a creative writing student to employ such a melodramatic metaphor: *is he* serious, *or just* playing *with our emotions?* I am certainly playing with words, and I couldn't be more serious. Serious wordplay … *is that a contradiction in terms?* Well, no it isn't, and it serves to highlight the difficulties faced when attempting to define 'play'.

Play is often characterised as enjoyable and frivolous activity, especially when we think of children at play. But enjoyment doesn't exclude a serious attitude or consequences, and all manner of behavioural scientists suggest that, despite its often frivolous appearances, children's play provides all sorts of long term benefits. Writing in the international journal *Childhood Education*, Isenberg and Quisenberry claim, 'decades of research has documented that play has a crucial role in the optimal growth, learning, and development of children from infancy through adolescence' (Isenberg 2002: 33). What is more, they note that theorists across the disciplines suggest:

> the *absence of play* is an obstacle to the development of healthy and creative individuals. *Psychoanalysts* believe that play is necessary for mastering emotional traumas or disturbances; *psychosocialists* believe it is necessary for ego mastery and learning to live with everyday experiences; *constructivists* believe it is necessary for cognitive growth; *maturationists* believe it is necessary for competence building and for socializing functions in all cultures of the world; and *neuroscientists* believe it is necessary for emotional and physical health, motivation, and love of learning. (Isenberg 2002: 33)

The psychology of children's play has been sufficiently popularised within Western cultures that most adults would give nodding assent to such a claim. But do such observations lead to better definitions of play? Not necessarily - perhaps not at all. As the list of benefits attributed to play continues to grow, so the task of succinctly defining what play *is* becomes more difficult. Anthropologist Helen Schwartzman concludes in her 1978 study of theories of children's play that the field offers more trial hypotheses, as opposed to definitive conclusions, than ever before, and that 'play requires a multiperspective approach … and resists any attempts to define it rigidly' (Schwartzman 1978: 325).

More recently, linguist Guy Cook has suggested that the difficulties faced in defining play mean that it is "relatively easy to re-classify a playful activity as something else' (Cook 2000: 109). The significance of this observation is related to another made by both Schwartzman and Cook. Each suggests that the Western, or Protestant, work ethic includes a low regard for play, and proves to be a cultural obstacle where definitions of play are concerned. Schwartzman suggests that a Western understanding of play is heavily influenced by 'shared attitudes about what play is *not*'. Play is not: work, real, serious, productive, etc. Such a perspective makes it difficult for most to see 'that work can be playful while play can sometimes be experienced as work … and, likewise, that players can create worlds that are often more real, serious, and productive than so-called real life' (Schwartzman 1978: 4-5).

What do we do with our work ethic, then, when we're faced with the fledgling dramatic *player* whose greatest desire is to be regarded as a *serious* actor? Or the young sportsperson who aspires to a professional career: full-time *play* and *serious* pay? Do we say of successful actors and sporting identities, 'they

played really hard to get to where they are today'? Is it not more likely that we will claim, 'they *worked* really hard'? It would appear that the work ethic hasresulted in a cultural cringe, which in turn has led to a 'pick and choose' attitudewhen it comes to behavioural labelling. Cook identifies within linguistic research a 'perpetual problem in the analysis of play'. He continues:

> Western academic studies are happy to label aspects of other people's behaviour as 'play', but unwilling to see behaviour from their own social environment in the same light, despite very evident similarities. (Cook 2000: 65)

Cook contends that a similar reluctance is evident when it comes to comparisons of children's make-believe play with adult drama, or competitive games with serious conflicts. He suggests that in such instances, objective enquiry tends to be sidelined by the influence of a utilitarian industrial society's low opinion of play.

That Western society has not always regarded play as it seems to now is evident in the study of language. Cook notes that Dutch historian and philosopher Johan Huizinga has shown through etymological and textual evidence that the attitude towards play was 'quite different, and far more extensive, in earlier periods of European history than it is today' (Cook 2000: 111). Apparently the etymology of many words relating to serious matters share their roots with more playful terms, for example, 'school' derives from the Greek word for 'leisure'. Cook explains:

> We can see this in English, where uses of the words 'game' and 'play' in disparate contexts are a key to considerable changes in the conceptual range of these words. We still use them … to describe drama ('plays'), music ('playing'), sex ('foreplay'), hunting ('game'), and fighting ('swordplay'). 'Swordplay' … seems an odd way to refer to mortal combat … In *Hamlet*, for example, the stage direction 'they play' precedes the dual between Hamlet and Laertes which leads to the death of both. (Cook 2000: 111)

It would appear that such anomalies within language use have come about by, and underscore a complex cultural shift that has seen Western cultures attempt to, 'put away childish things' (*The Holy Bible* 1985: 1 Corinthians 13:11b). For much of recent Western history, behavioural and anthropological studies of play have restricted their considerations to the play of 'others', such as the play of those in non-Western cultures, or of children within their own culture. Time is put aside for play in the adult realm - art and sport are taken very seriously by large numbers of people - but, even so, many adults would regard their involvement with such activities as far removed from the play of children. In general, play is regarded as being of little import in 'grown up' life. Defining play becomes all the more difficult if those seeking definitions refuse to allow that some of their own 'serious' behaviour might be play-like, or playful, or, indeed, play.

Despite these concerns, or in spite of them, this paper still requires a working definition of play. In their publications considered here, both Schwartzman and Cook devote a considerable amount of space to the theories of eminent scholars such as Huizinga, Jean Piaget and Roger Caillois, only to confirm that play defies simple definition. Cook suggests that the concise definition that Huizinga sets out at the beginning of his argument is about as good as it gets. Cook identifies fourteen characteristics that summarise Huizinga's definition:

> Play is:

> 1 a free activity
> 2 conscious
> 3 outside 'ordinary' life
> 4 'not serious'
> 5 absorbing the player
> 6 bounded in time and space
> 7 rule governed
> 8 orderly
> 9 serving no material interest
> 10 profitless
> 11 promoting social interest
>
> and it has:
>
> 12 a tendency to secrecy
> 13 a tendency to disguise
> 14 a faculty of repetition. (Cook 2000: 112-13)

However, Cook then notes that this definition is 'not without its problems and paradoxes. It seems to contradict other statements by Huizinga, and to run partly counter to intuition and experience'. No doubt each of the characteristics listed could be challenged with regard to some form of, or reason for involvement in play. Play is often taken very seriously, is at times very lucrative, and might be said to profit the player in a number of non-financial ways, both in the short and long terms. Players may not feel free to refuse play, for either social or financial reasons, or because of some internal compulsion. As Cook notes:

> Play is, moreover, as Huizinga himself points out, the slipperiest of concepts: 'the fun of playing … resists all analysis, all logical interpretation. As a concept, it cannot be reduced to any other mental category'. Consequently any itemised definition will fail alongside some particular instance, which manifestly is play, and yet diverges from one criterion or another. (Cook 2000: 113)

A helpful suggestion proposed by Schwartzman is that play be regarded as a mode, rather than a category. This allows that play 'can occur at any time or place' (Schwartzman 1978: 328), challenging the Western work/play dichotomy, and the notion that play happens outside 'normal life' or in a separate time and space. Furthermore, while some researchers, including Piaget and Freud, suggest that one of the distinguishing elements of play in relation to not-play is a distortion of reality, others, such as Jerome Bruner and Seymour Epstein, 'believe that play is an alternative and a potentially adaptive way of thinking' (cited in Singer & Singer 2005: 19). Schwartzman agrees, arguing that 'play creates and contains its own "reality", which is characterised by *allusion* to, not distortion of, events' (Schwartzman 1978: 328). These are important observations with regard to raising play above the station of non-productive frivolity, and help to frame the broad definition offered by Schwartzman at the end of her extensive survey of theories of children's play:

> In brief, play is an orientation or framing and defining *context* that players adopt toward something (an object, a person, a role, an activity, an event, etc.), which produces a *text* characterised by allusion (not distortion or illusion), transformation (not preservation), and '*purported* imitation' of the object, person, role, etc. In this way, play gives shape as well as expression to individual and societal affective and

> cognitive systems. These are play's products, and they are extremely consequential. (Schwartzman 1978: 330)

More extensive surveys of play than this one might consider in detail distinctions between play and games, or studies of childhood and human anthropology, or studies of play from perspectives of evolutionary, cultural, behavioural or cognitive development, socialising function, personality, and so on. It is a broad field, much ploughed, though not without unturned ground. Indeed, it should be noted that Schwartzman's definition has been arrived at after a very extensive study, but a study of children's play theories, as opposed to adult play practices. However, most important to the thesis of this paper is Schwartzman's idea of play as a mode, or in other words, an attitude. If we allow that adults do play, and that the differences between adult and children's play has more to do with interests and cultural practice than motivation (which will be discussed further below), then the use of Schwartzman's definition as a model is quite appropriate for the purposes of this paper.

More specifically than theories of 'adults at play', this paper is interested in questions surrounding motivations to, and origins of, play, and any relationship that might exist between play and research. With this in mind, and extrapolating from Schwartzman's definition, play might be described as: *an attitude [mode] that allows an imagined [alluded] narrative framework [text/context], to be applied to a given activity, resulting in the creation [transformation] of outcomes [expressions/products] that are beneficial to the individual and ultimately, therefore, society*.

What is immediately obvious about this definition is that it is as broad and open to criticism as any. Furthermore, the introduction of the idea of play as an *attitude* raises new questions. Is murder committed with a playful attitude acceptable? Does any pleasure or release derived from this behaviour by the individual (the murderer) also have an ultimate benefit for society (the murdered and their community)? This example is as absurd as it is extreme, but it is simply a matter of degree. Is the sadist at *play* when inflicting pain upon a willing partner? Quite probably, but, if so, how do we account for the sadist's change in attitude, or the lack there of, when those same behaviours are practised upon an unwilling *victim*? Where is the benefit in a playful attitude if a bully's deliberate trip and a friend's playful kick of a heel both end in broken teeth?

Efforts to challenge current conceptions of play must also be mindful of the pendulum's swing. In the same way that the Western work ethic may lead to adult 'play' being re-classified, the opposite danger exists. Cook notes:

> Thus we find writers treating as 'games' such activities as electioneering … nuclear arms races … or the domestic lives of alcoholics … Here there is clearly a danger of forcing together activities which are essentially different from each other, or whose relationship to play is metaphorical rather than actual, and imposing upon the players of games an analysis and evaluation which is not their own. (Cook 2000: 109)

Clearly discussion of this topic is fraught with many pitfalls and difficulties, not least of which is the task of producing an acceptable working definition. In a discussion as necessarily brief as this one the difficulties noted are far outweighed by those not even touched upon. Nevertheless, if we allow that adults do play, and that often our play is activity more closely related to the play of childhood than we are willing to admit, then the obvious question that

follows is, why *do* we continue to play beyond the formative years of childhood and adolescence?

Why play?

As noted above, it is widely accepted that 'play has a crucial role in the optimal growth, learning, and development of children from infancy through adolescence' (Isenberg 2002: 33). However, there are those who suggest that we never stop growing up, or at least that we never really stop playing - it is simply a matter of our play growing up with us. In her discussion of a Literary Theory of Experience, Nancy Easterlin contends that 'we do not outgrow the need for play but rather progress to more sophisticated forms of imaginative activity' (Easterlin 1993: 116). Considering the question, 'why do we bother with literature', she notes that anthropologists and psychologists regard literature and other aesthetic practices as originating and functioning in play, 'which suggests the centrality of all such activities in human adaptation and survival' (Easterlin 1993: 113). According to Huizinga's early twentieth-century analysis of the function of play, 'play is not an outgrowth of culture but vice versa' (Easterlin 1993: 114).

The question such assertions raise, says Easterlin, is this:

> Does the greater and greater distance between play and seriousness … over the course of human evolution suggest that all play has become increasingly trivial, a residual cultural phenomenon whose adaptive purpose has been superseded by refinements in cultural organization? (Easterlin 1993: 114)

It has already been argued that the 'greater distance between play and seriousness' is not as great as many might suggest but, this aside, the short answer to Easterlin's question is no. Although most of us living in the West no longer face the physical challenges to survival of, for example, those in hunter-gatherer societies of millennia past, as individuals we are faced with the task of adapting to increasingly complex cultures. 'Our adaptive capacity is now increasingly cognitive and psychological rather than physical' (Easterlin 1993: 115). Far from being trivial, or of pure entertainment value, 'literary art, like all forms of play throughout the course of human history, has an ongoing adaptive and cognitive value' (Easterlin 1993: 120). Easterlin writes:

> play activities, including literature, serve two essential yet contradictory functions: they allow us to act out novelty within an arena that ensures control and safety. (Easterlin 1993: 116)

For Easterlin, it is the 'ambiguous and shifting relationship' we have with a rapidly changing world that play helps us to deal with. Our need to 'determine and redetermine the relationship of self to the world' does not stop when we reach voting age. Play phenomena allow us to regularly reassess that relationship via 'experiences in which the individual has a greater degree of control than he or she has in normal daily life' (Easterlin 1993: 116). Or, in the terms of our working definition, play provides an *imagined narrative framework*, which is conducive to *the creation of outcomes that are beneficial to the individual*.

Bruner suggests we use our ability for imaginative narrative thought to produce story-like backgrounds as an aid to explaining 'the shifts and changes of our life encounters', whether it be a religious explanation of the inexplicable, or the formulation of a scientific theory (Singer & Singer 2005: 19). Taking this a step

further, Epstein contends that humans adapt to their environment via a process that is both experiential and rational. Accumulated 'story-like generalisations … of one's life situation or of the world' comprise the experiential mode, and in its more mature form this functions 'along with the rational system to become the basis for intuitive wisdom or creativity' (Singer & Singer 2005: 20). Although reading much like the theories of play discussed to this point, these are observations drawn from theories of thought and human experience. The similarity is worth noting, and is, perhaps, not surprising given the apparent general consensus regarding play as a means of coping with our experiences. Of particular interest, however, is that each of these theories, and our working definition of play, postulate that the player, or person subject to experience, is able to contextualise their play or experience by means of a story-like framing narrative.

If, as Huizinga asserts, culture is an outgrowth of play, and play, by means of a story-like framing narrative, enables us to deal with our experiences of life, it follows that one of the greatest artefacts found in all cultures of the world is story. Maurice Saxby agrees that story is fundamentally connected with the development of society and humanity's search for understanding. He writes:

> The raw material of literature is experience of life. When ancient man began imaginatively to explore, shape and control his environment through dance, chant, song, painting and story seeking to bring under control the inexplicable and seemingly chaotic forces about and within him, he was creating a literature. Literature is man's attempt to record, explain and control experience, for as the folk tale of Rumplestiltskin … indicates - to verbalise and to name is to gain power over that which is named, be it person, place, or phobia. (Saxby 1987: 3)

Saxby's claim is not a controversial one. The casual observer would be likely to draw the same conclusion whether they were told or witnessed a depiction of a Dreaming story, or read any of the Greek myths, Icelandic sagas, Bible stories, or any number of traditional tales from across the cultures of the world. However, in the same way that many have difficulty recognising the 'play' in their 'grown up' behaviour, the casual observer might not so readily draw the same conclusion with regard to his or her own use of literature. Where the casual observer might recognise similar practices at work here and now is in children's interaction with literature. Indeed, it is a comparison that Saxby draws:

> In the first instance the entrance to story (told or read) provides for exploration. Children can wander around inside the story as it were, trying on roles, predicting outcomes, even retreating when necessary … It is a discovery process that helps the child gradually order his environment as relationships become clearer, human motivation is made manifest … and the reader's role in a social matrix emerges. (Saxby 1987: 5-6)

Once again, the similarity of the terminology used by Saxby and the play and experience theorists is hard to ignore, and this statement agrees strongly with claims that literature, and all forms of play, have 'ongoing adaptive and cognitive value'. But is it the case that using literature in this way is something we leave behind with childhood? In terms of our language use, Cook claims that even as adults we remain fascinated with the rhymes, rhythms and language manipulations of the playground, such as those found in skipping games or choosing who will be 'it'. He writes:

> The most popular tabloid newspapers are devoted to representing events in weak puns. In big-business advertising, the promotion of goods is carried out not by listing their qualities, durability, uses, and cost, but through fictional cameos, plays on words, and rhyming and rhythmic jingles. Even some of the most serious discourses, such as political rhetoric, prayer, liturgy, and literature, use repetitive and rhythmic language which is markedly play-like - even though these forms are considered anything but playful by their users. (Cook 2000: 4)

However, it is not only a play-like use of language that remains with us into adulthood. Cook notes that one of the major uses of 'adult language - both quantitatively, in terms of the amount of time devoted to it, and qualitatively in terms of the importance attached to it' (Cook 2000: 36), is fiction. Today in the West, television is the prime source of adult fiction, with often very large audience viewing figures relating to films, sit-coms and soap operas. As well, a significant proportion of the output of the print, cinema and computer games industries, and, to a lesser degree, the Internet, is fiction (Cook: 2000: 37). Surly the consumption of such large quantities of fiction by the adult populations of Western societies is indicative of motivations more serious than frivolous, even if unacknowledged or unnoticed.

In his discussion of narrative, Michael Roemer suggests that 'we could consider story a compensatory realm - not because it fulfils our wishes or consoles us with visions of a better world, but because it counterbalances our daily existence' (Roemer 1995: 37). Story, or fiction, sets us free from responsibility. We connect with fictive figures whose destiny is assured, nothing we can do will influence the outcome, but joining in the effort to change the unchangeable allows us to acknowledge for a time that we are not our own masters; 'Paradoxically, [this] very lack of freedom sets us free'. Roemer acknowledges that, 'for our own sake and the community's', we need to retreat from the pressures of the real and, in the 'safe arena' of story, take time to reassess and recover (Roemer 1995: 37).

In terms of our definition of play, it would appear that, with regard to these various forms of fiction at least, adults still desire entry into *an attitude that allows an imagined narrative framework* (fiction)*, to be applied to a given activity* (viewing, reading, game playing, browsing)*, resulting in the creation of outcomes* (catharsis) *that are beneficial to the individual and ultimately, therefore, society*. Although we develop a broader and often more practical relationship with literature as we grow into adulthood, fiction still makes up much of our reading, and, as a dominant cultural artefact across various media, fiction remains a fundamental coping tool. As suggested above, 'play' is still central to adults' ability to assimilate the ideas and experiences they accumulate as they go about their lives, and it is through the use of 'sophisticated forms of imaginative activity', such as literature, that they achieve this. Essentially, the play we engage in still consists in the forms we grew up with, and involves the use of 'imaginative activity … within an arena that ensures control and safety'.

Serious play

If play phenomena, including the creative arts, have had and continue to have such a significant role in the development of individual and society, why is it that Western society places them a poor second to other endeavours, such as science and business, for example? Are these play phenomena so fundamental

to who we are that familiarity has bred contempt? I suspect the answers to these questions could fill volumes, and would consider the rise of science, religious theologies, industrial revolutions, and so on. The question I would like to raise here is this: has the 'poor cousin' status of play phenomena, including the creative arts, led Western society to forget its roots where research is concerned? In other words, just as there is evidently a close relationship between art and play, is it simply a cultural cringe that denies the extension of that relationship to other 'serious' endeavours, including scientific research?

The *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* lists research as: 'the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions' (Pearsall 1995: 1225). This probably represents the generic understanding of research that might be held by the 'person in the street'. However, even though there is no suggestion of it in the wording of this definition, common representations in the popular media might lead many to assume that such 'investigations' are always carried out in lab coats, and involve test tubes and/or computers. In its web site's glossary of terms, the Australian Research Council (ARC) describes 'basic research' as: 'experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying phenomena and observable facts, without any particular application or use in view' (Australian Research Council 2007). There would, perhaps, be fewer 'people in the street' familiar with this type of 'pure' research. While the idea of research leading to the acquisition of new knowledge matches our dictionary definition, that one would undertake such activity without a specific application in mind is less likely to resonate with the general community. And yet, I would suggest that this is essentially what each of us does when we are at play.

Much of the play of adults and children involves *an attitude that allows an imagined narrative framework, to be applied to a given activity*, such as the enjoyment of fiction or imaginative role-playing games. While the result, though difficult to quantify, is likely to be *the creation of outcomes that are beneficial to the individual and ultimately, therefore, society*, it is unlikely that adults or children enter into these types of play with any goal beyond pleasure in mind. More often than not, the player enters into such play happy to learn where it will lead, much like the researcher involved in pure research; new discoveries are assimilated into the general pool of knowledge, their usefulness not realised until connections are made at a later stage.

It might also be suggested that the researcher begins by adopting an *imagined narrative framework*. In the same way that an adult accepts the fictional scenario of a film or book, or a child entering into imaginative play says, 'let's pretend', the researcher must imagine a possible outcome, even if they have not yet imagined an application. The Singers suggest that 'our capacity to venture into 'mights,' 'woulds,' 'coulds,' and to reshape the seeming inevitability of our futures into images of new action or even into the creative directions of the arts or sciences' is inadvertently learned 'by the pretend play of the young child and later by combinations of storytelling, reading, and mental re-enactment of what we have seen or read' (Singer & Singer 2005: 1, 5). Indeed, it is not uncommon for the creative artist to conceive of, or advance, an idea before it becomes reality; certainly we do see instances of science fiction becoming science fact. In the field of psychology, the Singers note that human stream of consciousness became a cental topic after the publication of William James's textbook, *Principles of Psychology*, in 1890, but that it wasn't studied seriously until the 1960s:

> Because of the difficulties in developing scientifically reliable methods for studying consciousness, psychologists largely

> shifted their approach to behaviourism and the study of learning in small animals … It was left to great writers of fiction, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, … William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Saul Bellow, to explore in vivid and creative literary prose the workings of our human stream of consciousness. (Singer & Singer 2005: 12)

Of course, it could be argued that James, the scientist, raised the profile of the discussion of stream of consciousness, then some authors simply 'played' with the idea until science was advanced enough to more 'seriously' consider the matter. However, I suspect that I would not be alone in my belief that the quite masterly representations of stream of consciousness produced by these authors could not have been ignored by scientists at work in this area, and that it is likely these works of art still influence scientific study of the topic. Surly the production of these artistic 'play phenomena' required just as much insight, toil and sweat as much of the scientific product related to the topic.

Is such a comparison of the artistic and the scientific simply a case of 'forcing together activities which are essentially different from each other'? What I am suggesting is that, while there might be obvious significant differences in the approaches and product of the arts and the sciences, they are *essentially* the same, or that they share the same origin. Discussing Huizinga's assertion that culture is an outgrowth of play, Cook notes the controversial theory of JS Gould that 'species sometimes take a feature originally evolved for one purpose and develop it for another - in a process referred to as evolutionary "exaptation", in contrast to evolutionary "adaptation"' (Cook 2000: 111). The classic example of exaptation, says Cook, is the human mouth; originally adapted for eating, as the instrument of speech it demonstrates a case of exaptation. Although a theory developed after Huizinga's time, Cook suggests his thesis can be expressed in the same terms:

> Human children, like the young of other animals, play. 'Civilization' has developed as an adult exaptation of this childhood characteristic. Though we may have an innate disposition to play, our cultural organization, developed as an extension of play, arises as a secondary effect. Societies are held together by institutionalised activities which are essentially play-like: art, religion, education, warfare, philosophy, law. All that we take most seriously is an exaptation from play! (Cook 2000: 111)

Such an understanding of the origins of our cultural institutions allows that the arts and sciences are born out of the same motivational starting point; that they might still 'speak' to each other should not be surprising. Neither should it be surprising that Cook claims fictions can be superfluous and entertaining, deeply depressing or upsetting, and that 'some are considered among the greatest human achievements, and the best provide insights into the human condition which have generally proved far more durable than records of facts (such as historical chronicles) or attempts to capture the nature of reality (such as scientific descriptions and theories)' (Cook 2000: 36). Likewise, such a perspective more readily accepts the contention of philosopher and physicist, Mario Bunge, that, 'mathematicians, like abstract painters, writers of fantastic literature, and creators of the animated cartoons featuring talking animals deal in fictions' (Bunge 2001: 188). As well, such a view prepares students of history for the complaint of the nineteenth century Prussian historian, Droysen, that 'history is the only science enjoying the ambiguous fortune of being required to be at the same time an art' (Evans 1997: 27), and that Hayden White's *Metahistory* addresses this dichotomy with an appeal to history's

narrative nature (White 1973). And quite plausible becomes the claim made by philosopher of history, Keith Jenkins, that the problem regarding the study of history is a more fundamental one:

> that the world/the past comes to us always already as stories and that we cannot get out of these stories (narratives) to check if they correspond to the real world/past, because these 'always already' narratives constitute 'reality'. (Jenkins 2003: 11)

Our investigations return us to story, as suggested above, one of the greatest artefacts of all cultures of the world, and originating in play. Whether a convincing case for the close relationship of the arts, science and play can be made or not, more difficult to dismiss is the narrative structure that underwrites all our endeavours. Whatever the field of study, a narrative framework provides the researcher with an understanding of extant knowledge of the topic, and a narrative framework will be required to continue the story.

In basic terms research is about making sense of the world in which we live. It might be said, that research is born out of a need to play. When researchers say, 'What if…', or 'I wonder…', they adopt an attitude, *an attitude that allows an imagined narrative framework, to be applied to a given activity, resulting in the creation of outcomes that are beneficial to the individual and ultimately, therefore, society*. It might be said that research is the most sophisticated outworking of our fundamental need 'to verbalise and to name … to gain power over that which is named, be it person, place, or phobia' (Saxby 1987: 3). Indeed, if we allow that our culture has developed out of play, and that play is at the heart of and is in essence investigation, then research sits alongside other forms of 'sophisticated … imaginative activity' as an activity with 'adaptive and cognitive value', that 'allow[s] us to act out novelty within an arena that ensures control and safety' (Easterlin 1993: 116). Play, storytelling and research are all born out of the same human need for understanding and advancement. For those who fail to see this, making value judgements in order to distinguish between the forms for funding purposes becomes an exercise in economic rationalism, and defines research much too narrowly.

At the close of Play

> The real problem with the 'ficto' in fictocriticism is the way it serves to undermine the writing. Fiction may well be just a different realm of factuality, but works so called suffer an image problem all the same. They're easily dismissed as decorative. I think we should start challenging both ourselves, and others, by labelling what we do philosophy. (Magee 2006)

Paul Magee expressed his concerns about fiction's 'image problem' in the October 2006 edition of *TEXT*. Should we really be thinking of removing the 'ficto' from fictocriticism, or relabelling any of our disciplines' activities? Wouldn't doing so be a continuation of the Western tendency to attempt the removal of 'play' from our serious endeavours? Wouldn't it be an acknowledgement that what we do isn't as good or as serious as what other disciplines do? Will our research be any more rigorous if we adopt a name change? Of course, Magee isn't suggesting that what we do is lesser, but that it is often regarded us such by those outside of the discipline; however, it is doubtful that sending fiction or any scholarly 'play phenomena' for an extreme make-over is likely to have a significant impact upon perceptions of the discipline.

Interestingly, within the discipline of literary fiction, adventure literature is often dismissed as formulaic and escapist. It would appear to suffer from discrimination similar to that experienced by the arts within academia, and creative writing within the arts. But adventure literature has its defenders. John Cawelti acknowledges that formulaic literature is in another category, but claims that it has its own intrinsic value. He writes:

> while most of us would condemn escapism as a total way of life, our capacity to use our imaginations to construct alternative worlds into which we can temporarily retreat is certainly a central human characteristic and seems, on the whole, a valuable one. (Cawelti 1976: 13)

In her study of adventure literature for children, *The Bright Face of Danger* (1986), Margery Fisher suggests that 'by stretching the convention of improbable excitement by an acceptance of human nature both as it is and as it can be,' adventure stories offer 'an enlargement of life through imagination' (Fisher 1986: 19). Similarly, Richard Phillips claims that adventure literature 'enable[s] writers and readers to remove themselves from the messy realities and textured experiences of here and now, enabling them to imagine alternative, other possible worlds, departures from the *status quo*' (Phillips 1997: 168).

I give adventure literature this closing cameo because its defenders' response is that of those who recognise the value of play. Rather than accept the dominant cultural position, which suggests that the 'colour' of their thinking doesn't really belong on the same bus, advocates of adventure literature champion its strength as a launching pad for possibility. As behaviour so thoroughly fundamental to human makeup, play, and its artefacts, must not be devalued or relabelled. Instead, academia and all of society are more likely to benefit from the proper recognition of the value of play, and its seminal role as the starting point of all research across the disciplines. Play, including the arts, must be vigorously pursued for the pleasure it brings, the insights it offers, and the possible worlds it inspires.

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A final thought … if this paper should leave readers asking the question, 'Is the author serious about this, or just playing with us?' the only appropriate response would be, 'Define play'.

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