

A Rhizo-Poiesis: Children's Play(ing) of Games

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What follows is my *rhizopoiesis*, a conjoining of Trueit's (2006) *Play which is more than play* and my ideas, nomadically-rhizomatically generating a further disruption of ideas about play as presented in the early childhood literature. My reading-writing-thinking can be perceived, both abstractly and with/in the actual, as a "vertical dimension of intensities" (Foucault, 1977, cited in Hand, 1988, p. *xliv*). To disrupt a conventional interpretation of Trueit's article, I transpose selections of her rather lyrical text into a *poietic* format, as a way of opening (her) ideas to a rhizomatic understanding of children's play. Centering the text disturbs any regression into a linearly focussed reading. By virtue of what I have included and what I have left out, the re-presentation inevitably reflects my subjective partiality of my understandings of her text, and associated limitations—"Are we not subject to our own limited "understandings" as we impose our interpretations on others?" (Smitherman Pratt, 2006, p. 91). Another (re)reading on another day and I might change what is/not included—"understanding is always changing, in flux, continually being renewed" (p. 93). This (re)reading/writing is processual; I have no idea before doing it what I might find, what might be revealed, what understandings might emerge. Similar to Richardson (1997), I feel the urge to step aside from the dreary writing of ordinary academic prose; to enact "a threshold occasion: a moment of ecstasis when something moves away from its standing as one thing to become another."¹ I thus play with the idea of playing with Trueit's text to see what happens, what spaces of possibilities might open.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poiesis>. See also, Threadgold (1997).

Mythopoesis of play

Play-fully engaging with Donna
Trueit's (2006) writing about
Play Which Is More Than Play, in
which I is Donna

Much has been written about play
from various disciplinary perspectives,
about the value of play,
its relationship to child development
and to learning.

We all know "play" don't we?

Why search for new meanings?

I [Donna] hope not only to open up
modernist habits of thought,
but also to suggest that
play might be the organizing principle
of a discursive practice.

A rhizo-poiesis:

Children's play(ing) of games

An overview of understandings of play
illuminates various work(ing)s of the
concept of play. In these, developmental
approaches are mediated by sociocultural
critiques, but modernist thinking
pervades.

The assumption that everyone knows
about play is foregrounded here by
Trueit's facetious question, to which I
respond in kind: Of course we all do/n't
know about play. Trueit's question points
to the tendency to trivialise "play". Play
goes hand-in-hand with (western)
conceptions of childhood and as all adults
have passed through (graduated from?)
childhood, what more is there to know or
be said about it? We played. Play
happened. So what? Subjectively affected
by *my* childhood experiences of play, I
bring my scholarly understandings in to
the play of play-fully responding to this
question. In working (with/through) this
mythopoesis, I am alert for re-newed ways
of re-thinking play.

Like Trueit, I want to disrupt the
modernist agenda that pervades and
suggest how we might re-think "play". For
the moment, I transpose (again) her ideas,
this time from poem into scholarly
discourses. In the poem, I map Trueit's
ideas; now, in this juxtaposition, I plug the

Note: Discursive practices shape, and are shaped by thought.

As the organizing principle of mythopoetic (primarily oral) discursive practices,

play signifies recursive relations, dynamics, and liminality characteristic of an open system of representation,

one that has far greater complexity than the modernist practices of representation that continue to hold us captive.

tracing back into the map in a (re)shaping of my thinking; in (re)thinking the poetical (re)reading of her text.

I consult the OED for a definition of mythopoetic and find it used in reference to Māori: 1. = MYTHOPOEIC *adj.* 1914 *Jrnl. Royal Anthropol. Inst.* 44 139 *It is clear that the ancestors of the Maori, in common with other races, strove to fathom the unfathomable... The above is part of the result, ideas evolved by a mythopoetic people.*

Striving to fathom the unfathomable – not least in navigating to Aotearoa New Zealand, talking ideas into be(com)ing through storytelling or becoming-myth. What am I attempting here in a mythopoetic gesture?

I engage with Trueit's projected flow of movement through play – read play ambiguously here, as performance and as constantly changing movement – with recursivity, interrelating systems, speed and flow, thresholds of in-betweenness, openings. Complex, yes, and hard to shake off modernist trappings of representation – language, discourses and the notion of representation itself. Biesta and Osberg (2007) outline complexity's challenge to representation: a static, passive, or representational view of knowledge relies on a binary understanding, "which holds that the world is simply present in and of itself and that we can acquire knowledge of it . . . [a] binary logic of representational epistemology . . . that there is a real world that knowledge somehow reflects" (p. 24); "that knowledge is an accurate representation of something that is separate from knowledge itself (Osberg,

In modernist discursive practices one
observes play,
objectifies play as a “thing” or an “event,”
and represents “play” definitely.

However,
modernist discursive practices are
(1) very different than the dominant
discursive practices that preceded them;
and

(2) these prior practices probably
cannot be fully appreciated
from our now too distant stance.

[But,]
we can *speculate*—and it is necessary
for us to do so,
because in regard to “methods of
representation and the recasting of
meaning” there have been
“universes of thought evolving into
other universes of thought.”

Due to the recasting of meaning,
I am led to consider the implications of
another meaning
of play as “the play,”
as in theatrical performance,
as an acted re-presentation of a story.
I speculate that the play is not the thing
itself,
but rather,
the play is a site of far greater
complexity,

Biesta & Cilliers, 2008, p. 213). Rather,
knowledge and reality “are part of the
same emerging complex system which is
never fully “present” in any (discrete)
moment in time” (p. 213). These authors
call this “emergence”. Emergence
explicates active and adaptive
understandings “towards questions about
engagement and response” (p. 213),
releasing us from modernist captivity.

In reviewing the concept of play, I note
that pervasive modernist practices linger.
“Play” is under scrutiny as Ailwood’s
(2003) analysis disrupts long held
relatively simplistic and naïve
understandings, bringing other agenda out
of the shadows. But, play is still objectified
as something that happens, as an
experiential event and an eventful
experience, albeit with poststructuralist
leanings. Alternatively, Trueit’s
engagement with cosmological ideas that
precede modernism, although distant and
speculative, opens an oscillation through
past~present~future space-times or
universes of thought. A change from
always thinking forward in relation to the
not-so-distant past; a change ~~towards~~
thinking differently? Beyond
representation; thinking emergence?

Epistemology addressed, play(ing) with
play(ing) becomes the conversation and a
linkage appears to children playing their
imaginary games (i.e. of play) and the
games they play (i.e. “the play”),
particularly those informed by children’s
literature, the media and popular culture.
So the game is not perceived as the thing
itself but as a site of complexity, a milieu of
various becomings, spaces of convergence
and (con)fusion. As children and games

a *nexus*, or perhaps, a *temenos*,
 in Ancient Greek thought “a sacred
 space within which special rules apply
 and in which extraordinary events are
 free to occur.”

The play is not just the play: it is much
 more.
 And it is the “more-ness” in this sacred
 space of play
 I wish to bring forward:
 the staging of cultural education
 (*paedeia*)
 leading to creativity and transformation.
 In this place, in this ancient time,
 the play was not just entertainment it
 was education;
 recreation was for re-creation.

converge, adults may see only confusion
 among/within children’s games (in early
 childhood settings). Yet, the *temenos* or
 space-time of early childhood requires
 educationists’ respect for the children and
 their understandings played out in their
 games. Along with the children, we must
 expect the unexpected and accept the
 surprise of its occurrence within this play-
 site of complexity.

So...the play is not just the play; the play is
 not just the game; the game is not just the
 play; the game is not just the game. “More-
 ness” or “and...and...and...” (Deleuze &
 Guattari, 1987, p. 25) is foregrounded
 within the *paedeia* of the setting. This OED
 quotation elaborates *paedeia*:

1904 S. H. BUTCHER Harvard Lect. on
 Greek Subj. ii. 124 The Greek Paideia
 (ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ) in its full sense involves the
 union of intellectual and moral qualities. It
 is on the one hand mental illumination, an
 enlarged outlook on life; but it also
 implies a refinement and delicacy of
 feeling, a deepening of the sympathetic
 emotions, a scorn of what is self-seeking,
 ignoble, dishonourable—a scorn bred of
 loving familiarity with poets and
 philosophers, with all that is fortifying in
 thought or elevating in imagination.

The creativity and alterity characteristic of
 milieu(s) of children’s games emerge
 through/with such understandings of the
 complexity of the culture of the setting and
 through/with the cultural complexity of
 the setting. Becoming- is apparent in the
 re-creation that happens through the game
 and its play(ing). Entertainment *and*
 education; play and learning are mutually
 constitutive and their conjunction alters
 both (De Castell & Jenson, 2003).

In this sacred space of play
extraordinary events occur.
Energy flows through all things,
bringing contiguity.
The free play of forces brings in to
relations:
players [the children];
time
[of past, present and future relationships
and games (to be) played];
senses: speaking, hearing, seeing,
feeling;
and inter-subjectivities
[fairytales and popular culture heroes
and heroines].

There is a flowing together
that forms an unbroken sequence in
time
and uninterrupted expanse in space.
There is a dynamic system of patterns
and transformation
that “makes it possible to deal with

Yet, how extraordinary is this, ~~really~~,
considering the complexity of this play-
site? And, considering the chaos of energy,
forces, players, time, senses, inter-
subjectivities? Toscano (2005) explains
chaos in Deleuzian understandings as
infinite speed of forms and entities
emerging and disappearing
simultaneously leaving no points of
reference. So, as energy ebbs and flows
through both children and their games,
~~boundaries~~ are crossed over and crossed out
and the free play of forces, the play or
movement of what happens between
forces, becomes an(other) entity. Children
as players within games merge within
relationships among each other: as they
relate to each other and brush alongside
others relationships with others;
remembering past relationships and
present affects, experiencing relationships
of the now, envisaging relationships as
they may be in the future. And, into the
chaos of in-between spaces come
memories of games already played; as
well, energy of present games and
expectations of what these games may/will
become. The children bring their senses
into play as they negotiate relationships
and the storyline of their game drawing
characters in and drawing from the
characters as they are played.

Children within games flow together,
sometimes together and sometimes multi-
directionally. The storyline may not
emerge as expected by any/all of the
players and in that sense it is disrupted.
In another sense, as long as the game
continues it is unbroken. But, even if/when
time intervenes (e.g. tidy-up time or home
time), the games most often only pause,
to be taken up again at the next session

unresolvable differences and
contradictions”
in a relational manner.

Recognizing patterns and rhythms.
Recognition by “patterns of
resemblances”
means that of *bundles* of relations must
be seen
rather than one set of relations,
or isolated events.
While all situations are contextual,
one is,
in a mythopoetic culture,
looking at *an* event as a bundle of
relations over time.

This backwards and forward looking
marks the threshold of play,
for in this culture, the play,
as a sacred *temenos*
where extraordinary events are free to
occur,
insists on the flow of dynamical
interactions.

The dynamic flow of play is
complicated,
but the energy might be thought of
deriving from the use of language
(which is why I suggest play is the
organizing principle
of mythopoetic discursive practices).

or soon after. Even when the play-space
is interrupted, the game is likely to
re-emerge in another play-space in
a similar or altered form. Patterns and
rhythms of play within games and
of games seem tacitly understood by
the players. With practice, through
generating the data and working with
it, these become recognisable to me. I
see that play is a heterogeneous bundle
of relations, ideas and understandings
that have “merged and collided over
time” (Ailwood, 2003, p. 295), all in
oscillation.

In the oscillation, the constant moving
backwards and forwards through the
storyline of the game now and reflections
of similar or different storylines already
played, thresholds are glimpsed in stop-
start moments as games and players turn
ebbs into flows. Or is it more of a
fibrillation, a quivering of uncoordinated
movement(s)? In liminal spaces of the
games and their playing, interactive flows
(e)merge.

Play and its playing are complex, yet its
energy is illuminated in the children’s
talking their way through storylines. Play,
I suggest, is also a methodology, a way of
children expressing complex
understandings and a way of opening
those understandings to adults. But,
immediately I think of cultural lore:
Inasmuch as (western) anthropology may
want to understand the lore of ~~other~~
cultures, why does it assume that other/ed
cultures might want to share their
understandings? Similarly, just because
adults want to know, doesn’t necessarily
mean children want to tell. But, we can
be(come) with them in their curricular

The audience members are drawn out
of themselves,
their energy flowing outward,
toward the events enacted on stage,
reacting to the performance;
and energy from the performer is
absorbed,
drawn into,
as the viewer receives this version of
the tale.

This active engagement and
participation,
giving and receiving,
attention and reflection,
is part of *paideia*,
being drawn into oneself,
drawn continuously forward.
Each performer and participating
viewer
allows him or herself to be drawn in to
the movement
and find the play,
the slip, in a situation,
to be in the movement,
and to work with

spaces. Perhaps we need to (re)learn to
play, ourselves and with them. If we want
children to work alongside us towards
shared understandings, why not learn to
play alongside/with children; “with” as
engaging in their play-full activity, not
“with” as in toy. For the moment, in this
moment, my suggestion is that we
(re)learn play(ing).

So, adult-outsiders become part of the
audience but must be willing to be drawn
into the play and the game, towards the
players, responding to the playing. We see
other parts of the audience playing their
part, players of bordering games becoming
part of the energy as the games brush
alongside each other, merge and collide,
responding to the performance of players
of other games. The energy melds; energy
of the game and its players and energy of
outsiders and the exteriority of the milieu.
Each understands the game in their way.

Players interact with the exteriority,
aspiring singularly and severally to the
multiplicity of the *paideia*, players
oscillating between inside and outside, so
the inside becomes the outside, insider
becomes outsider, inside(r)-outside(r).
Drawn into the movement or the machinic
play of the play, into the liminality of
play’s constant motion.

Play(ing) with/in the slip. Here the
storyline (e)merges, in response to what
has already happened, responding to
creations of the players, to players’
creativity. And, I am glimpsing an
emerging storyline around “play”.

the movement,
to find—to *create*—variations.

But there are multiple sites of play in
the play,
and the flow of reflexivity and
reflection
infuses all,
permeating individuals with cultural
values of creating,
perhaps even creating as an ethical
responsibility—
creating *self*.

Self in this sense is not an object,
but rather seems almost another site of
play,
of reflexivity, reflection and
connection,
with the other and with tradition.

Gadamer (1998, pp. 103-109)
associates play with performance and
the dynamism of play with creating
self. He says:

*The movement of playing has no goal
that brings it to an end;
rather, it renews itself in constant
repetition.*

*The movement backward
and forward
is obviously so central to play that it
makes no difference
who or what performs this movement.*

*The player is subsumed by the play,
playing without purpose or effort,
absorbed into the structure of play, and
relaxed by it.*

*First and foremost play is self-
representation. All presentation*

In the multiplicity of the milieu, of playing
in the games, of the games in play, the
children collectively and collaboratively
negotiate their storyline(s), in an ethics of
processing through their own becoming,
and merging and colliding with others in
their becoming. Becoming child/ren
emerging.

Not being a particular *someone*.
Be(com)ing someone different. Becoming-
child, singularly and severally. Becoming-
children, different, yet understandable
within the lore of the *paedeia*.

Moving through, moving with, moving in
games-playing-becoming-child/ren.

The games are never-ending. They pause
only as children tire of negotiating
storylines or when the programme says it's
time for something else. Like a rhizome,
they shoot in (an)other moment(s), later,
tomorrow, next week. Games keep going,
newly different in different moments. For
the game to continue, characters and roles
shift within moments of movement, within
movement of moments. What matters is
that the game continues. The game takes
over, draws the players in, with no
~~end~~ other than the processual
condition. Process *is* (Means and ~~end~~).

Play is about becoming-, in whatever way
matters. The gaming (presentation) is
about always already becoming-. Within
the space-time of the setting and
programme, insider-outsider becomes the
storyline.

*is potentially a representation for
someone.*

Play before an audience becomes

the play

and

*openness toward the spectator is part of
the closedness of the play.*

*The audience only completes what the
play as such is:*

*a process that takes place "in
between."*

*Play does not have its being in the
player's consciousness or attitude,
but on the contrary play draws her/him
into its dominion
and fills her/him with its spirit.*

*The player experiences
the game as a reality that surpasses
her/him*

*all the more the case where the
game is itself "intended" as such a
reality—for instance,
the play which appears as presentation
for an audience.*

Each performative occasion is an
opportunity to create,
to reinterpret and to grow through the
experience.

The extraordinary occurrence of play,
the "more-ness,"
derives from the powerful dynamism
of relations and interactions,
the circumstances for the emergence of
the new
and for transformation.

This semantic play does not provide a
neologism for *play*,
a word—like "spirit"—that defies

Openness and closed-ness in never
ending de-territorialising movement, de-
territorialising play (verb/noun),
de-territorialising play (adjective/noun),
interrelations among insider-outsider
players contesting the game and the
storyline processing in the in-between;
also, read "play" ambiguously as what
children do and machinic movement.

The players *become* the game,
both develop into and are
accepted as the game and enhance the
game.

The game and its storyline become
more than the collective contributions
of the players.

It becomes a milieu, an "interior milieu of
impulses and exterior milieu of
circumstances" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,
p. 317).

Becoming-(...), becoming...

There is no playing down the
complexity of play, of play as
movement. Elusive, indefinable,
dynamically changing, emerging.

However, these semantics have not
overwritten or over-played play with any
newly coined expression. "Play" and
play(ing) fly free, avoiding concretising.
But, I do have an offering as to how might
we conceive of play differently. It is about
finding a way beyond thinking of play as

defining.
 It presents only a speculative re-
 description
 of play as dynamic flow
 through which systems—cosmological,
 mythological, human, and natural—
 are transgressed,
 transcended,
 and transformed.

Play, as the organizing principle of
 discursive practices
 or re-presentation (re-enactment) in
 Ancient Greece,
 blows open
 the tight
 and constraining
 discursive practices of representation in
 modernity.

But then, we all know about “play,”
 don’t we?

thing or event and thinking of play
 verbally, as dynamism and movement, as a
 milieu of becoming. “Becoming is the pure
 movement evident in changes *between*
 particular events... [It is] a characteristic of
 the very production of events. It is not that
 the time of change exists between one
 event and another, but that every event is
 but a unique instant of production in a
 continual flow of changes evident in the
 cosmos. The only thing “shared” by events
 is their having become different in the
 course of their production” (Stagoll, 2005,
 pp. 21-22, original italics).

Following Trueit’s playing
 mythopoetically with play, I would
 approach the discourses of play (in the
 early childhood literature) play-fully. I
 would blow open the modernist
 representation of the centrality of play to
 supposed developmentalist advantage. I
 would work to disrupt thinking that
 enables play to be understood as
 governmentality, and more. I would
 present a *rhizopoietic* offering of play as a
 machinic assemblage, a milieu of
 becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

And, I would not pretend to know
 anything about “play” as children
 understand it until I (re)learn to be a
 player as children are in their childhoods,
 until I (re)learn to play as children do.
 Sutton-Smith (1997) says: “We all play
 occasionally, and we all know what
 playing feels like” (p. 1). But, do we? It is
 like drawing and painting; when we stop
 doing it, we forget, we stop learning how
 to do it. When we stop playing, we stop
 learning about it or how to do it; we stop
 learning what play(ing) is, what play(ing)
 means; we stop understanding play(ing).

In play-fully engaging *rhizopoietically* with play which is more than play, I hope this (ad)venture has gone some way towards disrupting the idealisation of children's play that pervades much of the work of play theory and interrupted order and rationality in favour of a Dionysian approach relating to the sensual, spontaneous and emotional. Hopefully, I have also averted a modernist, civilising tendency "to take away play's muddy complexity and reduce it to some kind of pure fun, pure intrinsic motivation, pure flow, rid of all encumbrances" (Sutton-Smith & Magee, 1989, p. 54) and also turned away from ways of controlling it—both children's play(ing) and theorising about it.

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