

Play: The Mother of Invention

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Necessity is not “the mother of invention”; play is. Play is a necessity, not merely to develop the bodily and mental faculties, but to give to the individual reassuring contact with his fellows, which he lost when the mother’s nurtural services were no longer required or offered.

Ian Suttie, *The Origins of Love & Hate* (1935)

Life best lived as play

Play... It is of a higher order than seriousness. Seriousness seeks to exclude play, while play can include seriousness. We moderns have lost the sense of ritual and sacred play. Our civilization is worn with age and is too sophisticated. Then, what is the right way of living? Life must be lived as play; playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing...

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1938)

Play = being human

Playing is a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others. Play is a mode of being human...a way of being in the world, like languages, thought, faith, reason, and myth... Play is the expressive, creative, appropriative, and personal activity through which we make sense of the world.

Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters* (2014)

Play in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them... The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. (Isaiah 11: 6-8)

This is what the LORD Almighty says: Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. (Zechariah 8:4-5)

Play is difficult to define

Free play ✦ Solitary play ✦ Social play ✦
Constructional play ✦ Imaginary play ✦
Object play ✦ Symbolic play ✦ Verbal
play ✦ Rough-and-tumble play ✦
Manipulative play ✦ Small-motor play ✦
Large-motor-play ✦ Mastery play ✦
Rule-based play ✦ Make-believe play ✦
Language play ✦ Sensory play ✦ Human
play ✦ Animal play

Play is most often understood according to its qualities

- **Voluntary**
- **Inherent attraction**
- **Freedom from time**
- **Diminished consciousness**
- **Improvisational potential**
- **Continuation desire**

Attempt at a definition

To be play-full is to imaginatively and creatively engage one's self, others, God, and all of reality so that peace and justice reign within us and with others.

Jaco J. Hamman, *A Play-Full life: Slowing Down and Seeking Peace* (Pilgrim Press, 2011)

The necessity of play

- Cultivates imagination, curiosity and spirituality
- Ignites joy, a sense of wellbeing & feeling alive
- Fosters relationships and sense of belonging
- Allows for us let go and awaiting return
- Teaches and informs (*paideia*)
- Instills problem solving and a sense of mastery
- Contains destructiveness & aggression
- Cures, corrects, forms ad re-creates
- Awakens neoteny, sustaining juvenile characteristics into adulthood

The neuroscience & biology of play

- Awakens the cerebral cortex: memory, attention, awareness, thought, language, & consciousness (brain wave attunement)
- Stimulates the motor cortex: gets one moving (physically)
- Excites the hypothalamus: controls motivation & the Amygdala: regulates social behavior & assists with facial recognition and and bodily expression
- Counters the release of cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine by the adrenal glands (stress) & relaxes a person with the release of natural opioids

How do you play?

- The joker: nonsense and laughter
- The kinesthete: through movement
- The explorer: through new worlds
- The competitor: rules, keeping score, and winning
- The director: planning and executing
- The collector: holding objects
- The artist/creator: fabricator of objects
- The storyteller: imagination, novelists, writers

Play: A victim of cultural forces

Malls are now everywhere and growing by the moment. By 1987, there were more shopping malls in America than high schools... The “mallings of America” directly coincides with the “franchising of America” or the “chaining of America.”

Al Gini: The Importance of Being Lazy: In Praise of Play, Leisure, and Vacations (2005)

Those who cannot play choose...

- **Control**
- **Criticism**
- **Compulsion**
- **Conflict**
- **Competition**
- **Consumption**

Play as a way of living...

Practice Boundlessness

Boundlessness beckons you to experience life as flowing, abundant, inexhaustible, endless, unfailing, infinite, ceaseless, and everlasting.

Practice Realness

Realness challenges you to hold polarities or opposites in close relationship and to resist dichotomous thinking

Practice Creativity

Creativity invites you to use and nurture your imagination and to spend time with those more imaginative than you; Hope more and wish less

Practice Slowness

Slowness encourages you to resist speeding through life, to savor the tastes, smells, sights, and sounds of life, not appreciate time and space; Resist the velocitization of life (Carl Honoré)

Practice Hospitality

Hospitality motions you to create a space in your home or life where you and others can grow, for such spaces carry potential; Turn hostility (*hostis*) into hospitality (*hospis*, Henri Nouwen)

Practice Transcendence

Transcendence summons us to experience awe & wonder, and to feel small/insignificant while discerning meaning or value

Become a master in the art of living

The master in the art of living makes little distinction between work and play, labor and leisure, mind and body, information and recreation, and love and religion. He simply pursues his vision of excellence at whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him, he's always doing both.

L.P Jacks, *Education through recreation* (1932)

Comments, Observations & Questions