

Symbiotic Homeostatic Disequilibrium in Playworking Interaction

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Do you remember how it is
to be soft?
Like a young child
before the strains of the world
grow into her bones.¹

Playwork at a crossroads

Playwork stands, as we write and as we see it, and to some degree, in existential perplexity: all metaphors aside, the substance of what we do, our approach, our praxis, is in reality, being diluted. We unwittingly seek structural academic scaffolding as we continue to undervalue our own insights: insights which are, often, far deeper than we have the capability to arrange the necessary sentences for, or even deeper in our inability to select the most succinct or salient words for in the first place.

In examination of dilution in order to offer the expediency of example, therapeutic interpretations of playwork purposes (one strand of a triumvirate in schools of playwork thinking, including the developmental and evolutionary) situate the playworker as some form of societal healer: the pursuit of extraneous agendas, however, has reduced the rich wisdom tradition potential of connectivity to simplistic fixes with future focus. The structural academic scaffolding has become, in this instance, a living container (somewhat akin to having one's tower block wrapped in plastic for the duration of the works). Those of a playworking persuasion co-habit richer realms of insight than the diluted substance of masquerade that playwork is in danger of morphing far too quickly into.

Dilution prefaces departure. As playwork provision diminishes, numbers – particularly our academics – try out alternatives, with little thought to either disciplinary or culturally ethical difference. Playwork segues into play therapy. Yet, no thought is given to the shallowness of description of play therapy's therapeutic encounter, in terms of its environment (the room, the contents of the space, a flat pack of toys and playful accoutrements, loose parts as derived from an IKEA catalogue) and the contact (a controlled inducement of a contrived play

frame with a conscripted participant). From this pitifully limited ludic engagement, from this dis-enriched environment, there arise pitifully limited insights. Yet, we are advised that this is developmentally logical.

The therapeutic outcome of play therapy is less to do with a liberation or realisation of the self and identity than it is with a concern for a socially-contrived ‘fitness’, a particularly constructed notion of acceptable citizenship: behaviours, already deemed erratic or contrary, are to be ironed out. Our field’s collision with this regime means the loss of the essential rewilding of creative purposes and, more importantly, that the considerably more emphatic healing potentials of playing and the beneficial consociation of the playspace – the essence of our ludic capital – are demoted in favour of mimetic, medical modelling, and resulting specious, curative nostrums of play therapy.

There will be other adieus, but we are duty bound to consider the grace of how we are, how we might be, now.

Co-operativity and homeostatic operation

And sit, as only grandmothers can,
calm and grounded,
wise with twinkling eyes,
amid the ups and downs
of this crazy world.²

What purpose forms of ‘capital’ if they cannot be given or received? We could and can, after all, consociate³ in a lived experience of communion. Even bacteria can benefit from co-operative interaction for mutual benefit.⁴ In terms of the realm of the human scale, its condition and corollary, is the ludic and playing not a redemptive remedy to certain extant societal dis-eases? This is not to conceive of play in the instrumental terms of early years or sports, health or education. In the contemporary basic interpretation of the free associating of adult and child, the diluted playworker is ‘healer’, simplistic future-fixer; in the deepened and heightened playworking consideration, this erstwhile ‘healer’s concern is of

ontological attendance to the present; it is in the being and becoming: two sides of the same coin of the now. Play is an attendance to the moment which, paradoxically, cannot fully be analysed because time is of the essence, but which *can* be entirely detected, manifest, felt. How is it that this feeling flowers? What follows is threaded with a playwork-derived analysis of neurobiological findings:

Antonio Damasio explains⁵ that feelings are provoked by emotive responses, as a result of sensory stimuli or the engagement of drives (such as hunger or thirst), motivations (such as play), or action programmes (more conventionally understood as emotions) activated by engagement with complex situations; feelings can also be spontaneous, tuned as they are to the background hum of life, our internal register of an inherent rhythm of ‘good, bad or in between’.⁶ Most provoked feelings result from engaging emotions that relate not just to the isolated individual but to the individual in the context of others.⁷ Furthermore, altruism is derived, he states, from ‘blind co-operation’.⁸ What is it that we all are, that we all have in common, if not our potential for and our tendency towards communion with others? It is greater still than this because we are, in social ecology terms, in potential continual communion too with the common indivisibility of ‘nature’: that is, we are a part of nature, we are nature, not once removed from it, looking out of the window at the awesome ‘other’.

Damasio states that evolution operates at a micro-cellular basis. Intriguingly, he uses the term ‘going forth’, which was also used by Edith Cobb⁹ in her work ‘The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood’ in regard to children’s play. There is, according to Damasio, an imperative, even in bacteria, to endure and prevail. This going forth to encounter the environment, at this micro-cellular level, is mediated by both the physical body – particularly in playing, we suggest – and the mind, with its myriad intelligences. This triadic functionality, in encounter with the holding environment, Damasio describes as a ‘homeostasis’. Homeostasis, he states, refers to ‘the fundamental set of operations at the core of life’¹⁰ and not the rather more simplistic interpretation of merely the ‘balanced regulation of life’s operations’.¹¹

A playspace is a positive chaos of communication potentials. It is homeostasis in full flow. The organ states of the viscera (‘located in the abdomen, thorax, and

thick of the skin, along with attendant chemical processes')¹² govern feelings. That is to say, as we read it, chemicals circulate as a result of play motivation in rich environments, for example, and this process begets provoked feelings about the body's engagement in that play by way of a harmonisation of visceral operations, signalled to the nervous system, which alters the metabolism (energy demand/production) accordingly, leading in due course to a favouring of positivity over negativity, a lowering of the mental guard, and a provoked feeling of, perhaps, delight, in the mind.¹³

Thus from which is comprised our ludic curriculum: the engagement of the moment, not ordained by external influences but emerging directly out of human and habitat exchanges. Playing promotes some immunities against the depredations of forces of reward pathway manipulation and distortion, principally where the reward potentials of congress and communication can act to counter the contaminations of, for example, social media. Play is communication: in terms of just the human elements, here in the moment of this sentence, it is our mutually altruistic enduring and prevailing.

The evolution of evolutionary theory has shifted. The interpretation of the take on evolution is changing from Darwinian competition, entrenched in class and hierarchy, to Kropotkin, from competition to mutual aid: evolution is subject to the awakening of the realisation of co-operativity. 'Eukaryotes, cells with a nucleus and complicated organelles such as mitochondria, were probably born'¹⁴ as a result of co-operativity: humans are in the process of re-realising what we might otherwise readily detect or sense.

Is it possible to read into our co-operative engagement with children in the playspace active homeostatic operation? Can playwork be enhanced by readings of ludic, environmental interchange, as being centred on the idea of homeostasis, à la Damasio?

Shared meaning, ludic commons: an introduction to symbiotic homeostatic disequilibrium

How can I explain

those moments of joy and gratitude . . . ?

. . .

what privilege just to be alive with you.¹⁵

Damasio insists that the desired outcome of the homeostatic operation is disequilibrium. Homeostatic equilibrium is system failure and death. He not only gives us the idea of disequilibrium and co-operativity as being both playful enactments but also as evolutionary enhancements. There is mutual benefit in reciprocity of attendant concerns, after all. Let us not fear to negotiate, as JFK opined; or, in terms of any given habitat where play takes place, let us not fear the consideration of our co-becoming.

It may be that by establishing the playspace as unique in terms of both governance and in its not taught stance we create what we describe as an ‘autonomy lab’: effectively an experimental ludic crucible; an econiche for a highly particularised ludic symbiosis. That symbiosis is homeostatic, felt, detected, pragmatic, but it also applies to the symbiosis with the biota, a crucial neglect in our work; in relationships, what Bookchin describes as ‘consociation’; finally, also, in the symbiosis between the attendant practitioner and the playing child. This latter is a specific symbiosis between the adult in fulsome engagement with the playing child (the core proposition of the Colorado Paper;¹⁶ however, few have read the paper or even fewer have applied the thinking.)

Certain ‘playwork’ descriptions, as we stand at the crossroads, are barely recognisable in their methods and delivery. Certain theoretical stances are merely adjunctive. ‘Playwork’ can be and often is reduced, in certain quarters, to merely nods towards the often erroneously described play cycle and Hughes’ infamous play types. The subsummation of the assumed-as collective wisdom of the literature base is completed by the obligatory reference to adult agenda-laden care and share, please and thank you, ‘play nicely’ diktats. The considerations of the playworking disposition go far deeper than the superficial.

The encounter at the heart of playwork exchange is crucial to our understanding, but what precisely conforms that awareness? It is in the ‘what from our perspective is playful about this epistemology or discipline?’ What is it that, in our very essence, in our very being and becoming, provides for our enduring and prevailing? What is it that is felt-detected or sense-perceived in our homeostatic connectivity with the ‘other’ (human, non-human, of the biota), all of which constituents are ‘of nature’, indistinct and inseparable from it?

Every developed and researched idea is a contribution to our continuing homeostasis analysis of the sublime operational interchanges at the soul of the playing experience. Our actions are in contribution to the unfolding ludic processes we observe. That is the substance of our knowledge commons and our definitional domain. Might it be that by placing our work in a field, centred on research and interpretation of meaning, that we can create a cordon sanitaire, a containment for our practice? We are all participants in a highly particular knowledge domain where our children are not the subjects of scrutiny but *the locus of shared meaning*. We might reasonably assert that children are our collaborators in query and finding.

Margulis argues that ‘life makes much of its own environment.’¹⁷ Part of a necessary practice humility may be that we have to accept that children themselves created and are continuing to create playwork. We are merely the instruments of that evolutionary drive. Our praxis is in service of this eventuality. The playspace econiche is a parliament of adaptive repertoires: the very deepest of democratic functionalities. Communities we recognise and make are not directed out of adult rationalities but from impulses that describe our required collusion with children’s ontological becoming. An essential part of what we are attempting to describe as a ludic commons rests precisely in this reformation.

Of being and becoming

Yesterday, the wind blew me asunder
leaving nothing but air dancing
on the shore
and I was nothing
but emptiness and connection.¹⁸

Simplistic interpretations of being and becoming are rooted in unrefined developmentalism. In terms of the dual homeostatic imperative of enduring and prevailing, of the 'going forth', we are in consideration of a richer perspective: a perspective not reduced to the analogous sound bite at the heart of our global society. Diego Nigro analyses the semantic strata of the Greek language of Heraclitus in consideration of correlations of 'being' with that of 'cosmos'. If, to play the game of starting, in reductionist Classical terms we interpret 'being' as 'changelessness' and 'becoming' with 'ever-changingness', this cosmos is becoming, replete not only in terms of its physicality but also in its 'world-ordering'.¹⁹ This should be read neither as stasis or with an eye for future-fixing. Becoming is the cosmic order: it is, simultaneously, being. The two are inseparable. A diversity of philosophical analyses of being and becoming concur. As Nigro asserts:

'[Nietzsche, Deleuze-Guattari, Parmenides, Plato, Hegel, Heraclitus] teach us that becoming is both sustained by being and makes being visible rather than being in opposition to it.'²⁰

With the nuanced disequilibrium and pragmatic consociation of our playworking interchanges, the ontological becoming is a consideration of the mutual benefit of the present of both attendant adult and playing child. Just as cosmos, in the Greek of Heraclitus, has its semantic strata, so too here does the 'present': we might conceive of it, simultaneously, in terms of the temporal and as 'gift'. Nigro also aligns such 'gift' within his narrative discussion, in his case as '. . . becoming is the identification, development and implementation of the obvious gifts that are in us and in others, including non-human entities, which will put us in touch with

emergence – the hidden gift of [being].²¹ What, we might consider in our playworking interchanges, of the present/gift of play?

The playspaces or habitat places where play takes place are magic systems, replete with all manner of ordinary magic: that which is customarily overlooked, that which is transformative in potential, that which is very much of the moment, becoming and being. Damasio paints a picture of a bacterium detecting the presence of another and the experimentation of co-operativity. It is, in the analogy, a playful nudge. It is of the ordinary, of the ordinary magic, of the vital: one in the eye to the linearity of Darwinian chains of strife. The disequilibrium of play-nuance sustains.

In development of development: our place in the social ecology construct

Embrace the most fundamental of knowings
and let it colour every breathing moment.²²

We are in continual discourse with the constituent elements of our environs, both human and non-human: inseparable from the biota of our surrounds, we are all of nature. Being not of our world is not an option or a possibility for us. Our agonistic inelegance is at odds with the potential of our co-operativities: our being and becomingness. Caution must be advised, however: in the continuous motion of our becoming, in our connectivity of mutual aid and the pragmatism of the homeostatic disequilibrium in operation, we must not return to simplistic or diluted forms of ‘development’. It is, after all, a loaded word, veneered now as it is with overtones of hierarchy, with the patina notion that things do and must always move upwards; it is a trammelling of the unfortunate ‘lesser’ incarnations of the self in a simplistic Darwinian progress towards inevitable perfection. We are, in the truth of reality, far more complex than this. Even if the nature of the nature that we’re a part of does refine its adjustments, might we rather see ourselves and all our co-habitants of the magic system that is ‘home’ in a more rhizomatic, continuously swirling consideration, embracing a homeostatic disequilibrium?

Bookchin writes of non-human nature that ‘we begin to sense that it is basically an evolving phenomenon’.²³ It is, similarly, towards the notion of this phenomenon that we refer in terms of the development of any given adult or child. In the simultaneity of our being and becoming, ‘we require a way of thinking that recognises that ‘what-is’ as it seems to lie before our eyes is always developing into a ‘what-it-is-not’ . . . [an] ever-richer degree of *wholeness*.’²⁴ Bookchin asserts that the human and non-human are aspects of an ‘evolutionary continuum’ without bias towards superiority in either. We exist simultaneously in the first or biotic nature of our evolutionary history but also in a social construct of human ‘second nature’: what we fail to realise is that the second nature is, and can only be, an inherent component of the first.

The magic of our global home is not an ‘other’, a supplementary module to be affixed to the pre-fabricated house: the magic is inherent in the system as a whole, intrinsic to the place and to our relationships within it. It is to this intra-connectivity of our inter-connectivity relations, in the rhizomatic scheme of things, that we should turn our focus of intent: in the analogy, and once in the evolutionary history, we are the bacteria playfully nudging one another in a symbiosis of homeostatic disequilibrium. Bookchin speculates on the initially egalitarian social dimension of pre-modern human connections.²⁵ Hierarchical governance or tendency of forbearance can facilitate the institutionalisation of aspects of our better nature, effectively shaking the foundations of co-operativity. In hierarchical domination structures we can shift towards a disregard for our environs, our one home; where there is such disregard we can shift farther still in our disregard for one another. Our being and becoming is at stake, as well as the system of our habitat.

That said, all is not lost in a keeping of the faith. Bookchin writes that:

‘In non-hierarchical and even some hierarchical societies, certain customs guide human behaviour along basically decent lines. Of primary importance in early customs was . . . [that of] the practice of mutual aid . . . these customs became so sedimented into society that they persisted long after hierarchy became oppressive and class society became predominant.’²⁶

It is our task, our obligation, to re-identify the enchantment of that still liquid sedimentation, that layer of collective mutual aid: it is a prerequisite of the evolving phenomenon of ourselves, our relationships, of our place in the greater scheme of things, in media res, in our continuing being and becoming. In our playworking, in our interactions in the play and habitat places of play of children, and in the wider interactions that result from our sublime interactions, we can re-discover that we're ideally positioned and we have been all along: we should not work on play or use it, but we should be aware of play's work on ourselves and others.

Ecointelligence amongst the multiplicity

These are not my words,
any more than that is my sunlight
or this is my air . . .
And thoughts of 'you' and 'me'
are somehow no longer important.
There is just the moment
and how it is.²⁷

The habitat of play is often erroneously fashioned as one of an 'unreal' quality. Notwithstanding the counter-perspective that play is the 'real', is it possible that what the divide is really concerned with is a description of elements of a disequilibrium auditing process? What is derived from playful exchanges is an investigation, an interrogation of intelligences. With passing but due regard to what Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences²⁸ theory of cognition conjures up, we might, rather, more subtly position here certain aspects of Gwen Gordon and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens' notion of play selves: within the construct of an integral framework in which worldviews affect considerations of and engagements in play, the idea is that of 'at least eight play selves . . . [which express themselves] in distinct ways' though 'it is not a simple, progressive, linear, or hierarchical relationship.'²⁹ Whilst Gordon and Esbjörn-Hargens' study is with regards to a pre-personal, personal, post-personal and transpersonal transformative development in adults, what we can rather more delicately elicit here in the suggestion is the

symbiotic homeostatic disequilibrium encounters of, say, a Unitive (ego-aware, spontaneous and open) Player in connection with those of a Magical (impulsive, repetitive) Player, or of a Sensitive (individualistic, empathising) Player.

Playing sets out the template, the essential foundational grammar and syntax of the exchanges: our inherent learning curriculum rests in the continuing outplotting of stasis. We suspect that what we see is a symbiotic disequilibrium being enacted. That is a description of the mechanics of adaptive mutational repertoires, our econiche potentiality.

Perry Else writes:

‘[Play] is a flexible and adaptive process that can be described in many different ways that together can be understood as parts of a whole that holds and creates the human identity. This [‘beautiful’] intelligence is what initially helps us survive in the world, then begin to understand it and eventually transcend it through our mind and spirit. Its beauty lies in the complexity of its seriousness and fun, in its protection and threat, in the conventional and the contradictory.’³⁰

Inherent within the description of this beauty is a description of the fusing of binaries. What transpires is the realisation of a multiplicity: not just in cognitive terms, after Gardner, or with respect to worldviews or play selves, after Gordon and Esbjörn-Hargens – rather, it is a multiplicity in and of the ‘playground’, the ground of play. Play should not be confined to corrals of the physical or the abstract domains. To this we should re-emphasise our overview of pertinent lessons of the thinking on social ecology: our human second nature is inextricably intertwined with first nature. In continuation of policies of hierarchical domination, we not only damage that and those of our surrounds but we damage ourselves. Within and of the ground of play, our connection, or our con-nexus potentiality, our *together withness*, can effervesce with an ecointelligence. We should read the prefix ‘eco’, in etymological terms and thus related to our discussion, as derived from the Greek ‘oikos’: house, habitat, but also of clan – it is with due regard to our one home and everyone and everything that it embraces and contains.

Though we, playwork, are not yet entirely socially acceptable, arising societal changes will ensure that much of what we say and do is a perfect fit. What is ignored in present-day political analysis is any coherent analysis of the arena where impact of inequality is most obviously active, namely in our children: the role of play and playing in the child's lifeworld is not seen as being contributive. Yet it is central. Despite what the dominant discourse also suggests to adults of their own interactions and connections with the constituent human, non-human and other biota of the magic system of our world, play is also a central facet of the lives of those very adults too.

We just must be in a position to perceive this. With regards to a conversation some years ago with Perry Else,³¹ concerning the take up adventure playground provision in Sheffield, he was of the opinion that no matter how well publicised or well located in the community these provisions were, fewer than 10-15% of the child population attended. Are these children, the 'regulars' as we might designate them, really the precursors of evolutionary change?; we might add, in conjunction with the as-yet fully to be described development of playworkers' personal sensibilities and ecointelligences, are we seeing the emergence of what we might term a 'high ludic' potentiality?

The children are best situated to feel this: connected as they are in the continual co-becoming inherent within the investigation, the interrogation of intelligences, of the disequilibrium of symbiotic homeostasis in operation.

Further considerations on symbiotic homeostatic disequilibrium: the strangely ordered cultural ground of play

Stop and stand
on your own patch of ground
– where your feet are.

Really stand there,
all of you – body and mind.

From this place
comes all your wisdom . . .³²

Damasio's analysis of homeostatic operations presents feelings as spontaneous, detected, in visceral terms or in the newer interior of the muscles, 'the subjective experiences of the state of life',³³ or provoked, caused by emotive responses as a result of sensory stimuli, or from the engagement with drives (such as hunger or thirst), or from motivations (such as play). We can intuit an entire chain of chain reactions communicating in concomitant fashion. To this definitional acuity we must also add Damasio's notions of emotions as responses (or, action programmes), and affect as a combination of 'all possible feelings but also the situations and mechanisms responsible for producing them.'³⁴ What we can derive, therefore, is a schematic interpretation.

If, as Damasio asserts, 'feelings are the mental expression of homeostasis'³⁵ – their physiological base being of neural (via the nervous system) and bodily components – then:

- (i) this mental expression (this homeostatic imperative to endure and prevail) flows centrally through the amalgam of affect (the combined situations of the environment, of which an individual's body/neural intra-activity is also a component);
- (ii) emotive responses are effected;
- (iii) these emotive responses influence – in simple terms – cultural modification via a feedback loop back into the affective domain.

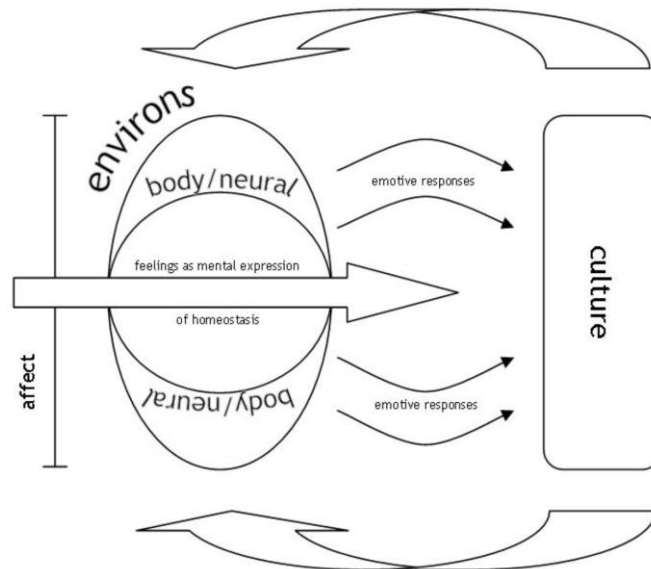


Fig.1: Simple homeostasis model

In the more complex schematic of a multiplicity, we might rather envisage a model whereby:

- (i) an individual's feelings and the subsequent effect on the surrounding culture become blended facets in the twisting of a Möbius strip;
- (ii) intertwined rope-fashion with other strips in the actual and virtual vicinities, there is a threading through of the circular tube of the environs with all its situations and interactions contained therein;
- (iii) the tube in this model contains the rarefied air of affect;
- (iv) a further consideration leads to the realisation that the tube contains not only the twisted rope representation of those of a given cultural group but also the ropes of those of a whole swathe of other groups too, similarly all twisted around one another.

There is a movement inherent and implied in all such strips and rope aspects of the model: a disequilibrium, if you will.

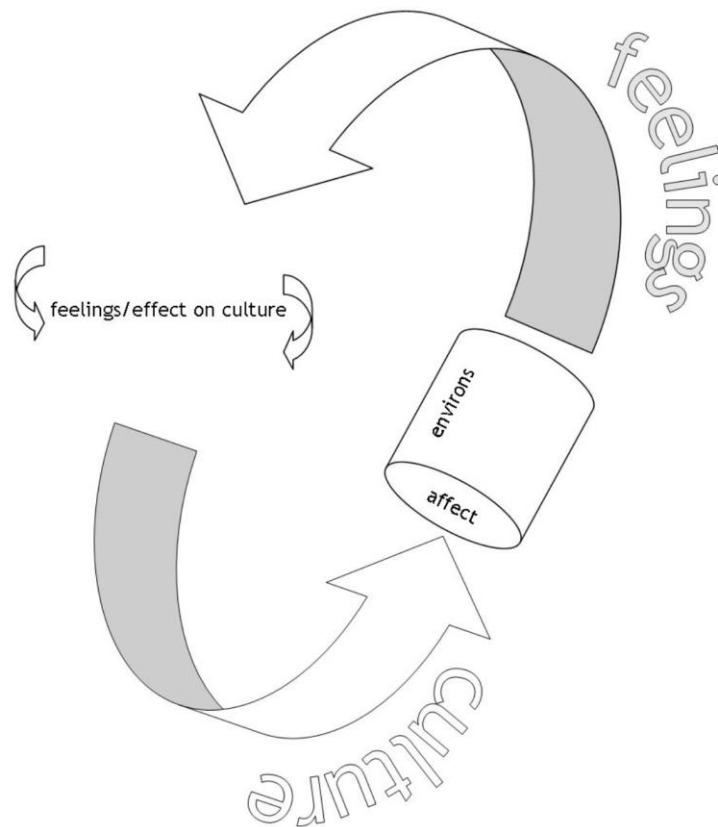


Fig. 2: Complex homeostasis model (single strip)

Let us bring the spin back in to Damasio’s central tenet in his proposition of the strange order of things, which we can read in evolutionary terms: ‘The idea, in essence, is that cultural activity began and remains deeply embedded in feeling.’³⁶ It is our understanding, our lived experience, that play (as a significant ‘motivation’) provokes feelings and also causes a visceral spontaneity of feeling inherent in the homeostatic operation. Not only this, however, but the cooperativity, the connectivity of the play experience, as a corollary of the positive affective environment, ameliorates the development of a shared meaning. What transpires is a cultural homeostasis, which in itself is mediated by a symbiotic disequilibrium. On our terms, the motivation of play drives the generation of feelings and our connectivity with one another has hyper-local and macro cultural effects.

As Damasio writes: ‘In between the early, un-minded foreshadowings and the late flourishings of cultural minds stands a series of developments that can also be seen, in retrospect, as consonant with the requirements of homeostasis . . . [which

includes the suggestion that] a critical instrument of the cultural mind resides with a largely unsung function: *play*, the desire to engage in seemingly useless operations . . .³⁷

Far from it, and far also from instrumental terms, the implicated attendance to play as useless endeavour is entirely unsighted of those who do actually think this way. Play, to those who know, is far richer even than words can say. By way of natural digression and, in some degree, by way of substantiation, we might consider the play, the give, the gift, at the heart of this exposition at hand: that is, in consideration of ‘homeostasis’ as a word itself. ‘Homœo’ (from the Greek, of the same kind, like or similar), and as opposed to ‘homo’ (the same), and ‘stasis’ (a stagnation or stoppage of the circulation of any of the fluids of the body)³⁸ might reasonably not sit easily in conjunction; might we not more readily discern a similarity to, but not an exact analogue of, stasis? Albeit by minute degree, there is movement though it appears otherwise so. This is not an entirely satisfactory description because the operation appears far richer than the words can say.

Play’s richness lies, in part, in its inexplicability and in its simultaneous comprehension, in its ineffable vagaries on the viscera. What we play we feel, and that does not always come packaged with tidy words. What we may intuit in our connectivity in the affective realm is richer still. In terms of the symbiotic disequilibrium, in description of the interactions and intra-actions of attendant adult and playing child, and in relation to the immediate environment, there is a simultaneity of both ‘shape and flux’.³⁹ Jay Griffiths asks us to consider Ilya Prigogine’s examples of whirlpools, eddies and flames.⁴⁰ They are, according to Prigogine, examples of ‘dissipative structures’. Citing a private correspondence with Fritjof Capra, she writes that ‘. . . At the bifurcation point, the dissipative structure also shows an extraordinary sensitivity to small fluctuations in its environment. A tiny random fluctuation, often called ‘noise’, can induce the choice of path.’⁴¹ This description is resonant with the disequilibrium processes, the critical crux moments that are actually more than atomised moments in themselves, the mutual being/becoming, inherent in play connectivity. To return to the evolutionary history combined with analogy, it is in the playful nudge of the bacterium in the environs of the primordial soup. The dissipative structures of play

are the operations of symbiotic homeostatic disequilibrium in (albeit potentially unperceived) action.

Hearing those of playworking inclinations describe their tales and experiences of interplay with children and the surrounds is to see playwork, or playworking, as an art form: subtle, sensitive and fulfilling for both the adult and the children, and there we have the nub of it. Our insistence has always been for the being/becoming potentials for playworkers as much as it is for the children.

In summary

Keep it close,
that moment when your heart tugs
and your eyes well.

To feel the world's sorrow
is also to feel its joy.

Allow moments to expand
to hold all they have to show us.

Slow your step,
so the ground where you are
can be washed by your tears.

Then watch,
as the slow pale light that follows
deepens
and the whole world sparkles,
like sunshine after rain.⁴²

In play we are inspired: we are, in Damasio's terms, motivated in our interactions; that motivation is a provocation of our feelings, detected and then transmitted within our bodies, in the viscera, in the newer interior of our muscles, within the

nervous system, expressing themselves in the neural pathways and resulting in emotive responses. We are, in the locality within the initial parameters of our skins, of co-operative arrangement. Our motivations may be inspired by all manner of objects and intentions of our home, the world in which we are, insofar as 'objects' may be seen here as all the world's constituent phenomena, its fellow humans, its non-humans, the multitude of its biotic array, and all the myriad abstractions therein. In play is our potential and our actuality of connectivity, and as such we and our fellow players may reap mutual benefit irrespective of our nominal ages. The symbiotic homeostatic disequilibrium operation is, in its rhizomatic, non-hierarchical arrangement, of acute and clear and present evolutionary concern. That our being and becoming is predicated on co-operativity, rather than competition, is self-evident in the art and action that is encapsulated by the terrain of play. Yet, the playworking-minded is not the default condition of the populace as a whole.

In our open consociation of being, in communion with and interrogation of intelligences, we may find precisely that which we do not readily know: that is, as can be illustrated in the words of the author Ben Fountain, 'It's hard to change people's minds with information and rational arguments. I think what really changes people are experiences.'⁴³ Or, as attributed to the arguments of cognitive scientists Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber,⁴⁴ interactionists' perspectives on 'weird' habits of mind (or, for comparison here, consider play) appear agreeable to them, but they jar when perceived with the reasoning of intellectualists' rationale. Reason, according to Mercier and Sperber, is an evolved trait, arising and persisting because of our ability to engage in co-operativity, 'developed to resolve the problems posed by living in collaborative groups.'⁴⁵ In the continued eointelligence of our playworking stance, it is in experience rather than persuaded reason, necessarily, that our fellow humans will discover the magic system, the ground of play, the communion and connectivity at the heart of being and becoming.

The core political argument we have is that playing directly impacts on well being. If so, then playworkers need to be able to demonstrate that contributory factor and, most crucially, their own heightened health as a consequence of that encounter. Discussions with Perry Else⁴⁶ coalesced around the emergence of the

‘high ludic personality’. In some ways what we are attempting to do, probably vaingloriously, is to call out the high ludic to guide and lead others to playing themselves healthy.

We have thought for some considerable time, in our different but connected ways, that the playwork transmission, both internal and external, could easily be translated as a ‘wisdom tradition’. That text has been examined but not rigorously followed through. We see the potentials of deep democracy in our everyday exchanges but seek validation in decaying idealisations across the left/right axis. We discuss a new politics but, in truth, we are in concert with a politics as old as humankind. The reminder of this, a necessary corrective, is in our everyday dialectic with the child at play. If descriptions of the new politics do not encompass the dimension as a disciplinary obligation then we need to inform them of this spiritual manifesto.

It is, as we read it, our homeostatic imperative to endure and prevail, to go forth: shifts of evolutionary consideration have brought co-operativity, rather than Darwinian competition, into the firm frame of our potential comprehension. The symbiotic homeostatic disequilibrium at the operative core of our selves is also at the operative core of our external local and macro systems. Our connectivity contributes to that which we are and to that which we feel.

Playwork at a crossroads must follow the playworking approach, with consociation, communion and connectivity at its heart. It is a necessary endeavour in the rediscovery of evolutionary wisdom.

Be fierce in your humanity.

Be devoted to this life.

Be light on this earth.⁴⁷

Endnotes:

- ¹ Rachel Holstead (2013), excerpted poem: from *Soft* in the collection *The real world*
- ² Holstead, excerpted poem: from *Be gentle* in the collection *These are not my words*
- ³ After Murray Bookchin (1982)
- ⁴ Antonio Damasio (2018), p.19
- ⁵ Damasio, p.99/100
- ⁶ Damasio, p.107
- ⁷ Damasio, p.237
- ⁸ Damasio, p.237
- ⁹ Edith Cobb (1993)
- ¹⁰ Damasio, p.25
- ¹¹ Damasio, p.26
- ¹² Damasio, p.103
- ¹³ Damasio, p.108/9
- ¹⁴ Damasio, p.235
- ¹⁵ Holstead, excerpted poem: from *The real world* in the collection *The real world*
- ¹⁶ Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else (1998)
- ¹⁷ Lynn Margulis (1981) in Bookchin (1982), p.359
- ¹⁸ Holstead, excerpted poem: from *Air dancing* in the collection *Nasc*
- ¹⁹ Diego Nigro (1999), p.327. Relevant content in Nigro's dissertation correlates with previously conceptualised understanding of being and becoming
- ²⁰ Nigro, p.5
- ²¹ Nigro, p.7
- ²² Holstead, excerpted poem: from *Life* in the collection *These are not my words*
- ²³ Murray Bookchin (undated). *What is social ecology?* (abbreviated to WISE here on in), p.2
- ²⁴ Bookchin (WISE), p.4
- ²⁵ Bookchin (WISE), p.5
- ²⁶ Bookchin (WISE), p.7/8
- ²⁷ Holstead, excerpted poem: from *These are not my words* in the collection *These are not my words*
- ²⁸ Howard Gardner (1993)
- ²⁹ Gwen Gordon and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens (2007), p.78. Published in *AQAL: Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, but a copy is accessible via Gwen Gordon's website (see references)
- ³⁰ Perry Else (2009), p.131
- ³¹ Communication between Perry Else and Gordon Sturrock, relayed in personal communication between Gordon Sturrock and Joel Seath
- ³² Holstead, excerpted poem: from *Stop and stand* in the collection *These are not my words*
- ³³ Damasio, p.25
- ³⁴ Damasio, p.100
- ³⁵ Damasio, p.6
- ³⁶ Damasio, p.5
- ³⁷ Damasio, p.186/7
- ³⁸ Oxford English Dictionary (1979)
- ³⁹ Jay Griffiths (1999), p.133
- ⁴⁰ Griffiths, *ibid*
- ⁴¹ Griffiths, p.136 (in communication with Fritjof Capra, referenced by the author as *Recent research of Ilya Prigogine: a summary*)
- ⁴² Holstead, full poem: *Close* in the collection *These are not my words*
- ⁴³ David Taylor (2018) reporting on an interview between Malcolm Gladwell and Ben Fountain regarding the latter's book on American politics, *Beautiful country burn again* (full reference not provided by the reporter), in *The Guardian*

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Kolbert (2017), citing Mercier and Sperber's book, *The enigma of reason*, in *The New Yorker* (full reference not provided by the reporter)

⁴⁵ Kolbert, *ibid*

⁴⁶ Communication between Perry Else and Gordon Sturrock (see above)

⁴⁷ Holstead, excerpted poem: from *Human II* in the collection *Nasc*

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