

Playing with Being: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Aproductive Ontologies of Children's Musical Play.

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Reconceptualising Play through Creative Ludic Research

A thesis submitted to The University of Gloucestershire in accordance with
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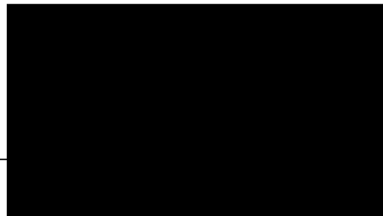
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Playing with Being: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Aproductive Ontologies of Children's Musical Play

**Reconceptualising Play through Creative Ludic
Research**

by

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PhD

2025

Abstract

The musical play of young children is rightly valued for its extraordinary, developmental, educational, social, communicative, and therapeutic benefits. Currently, in northern Europe, the research of children's musical play is led by the observation of the play's appearances and effects, and this knowledge influences both the development of music education, and the monitoring of the transference of extra-musical benefits of the play to the child, and to society. Hypothesising that musical play is more than its appearances and effects, this thesis adds to existing knowledge through a transdisciplinary, performative, fundamentally ludic enquiry into the intangible, other-than-useful *play* of children's musical play.

The aproductive is omitted from the study of children's musical play because philosophers of play, and play scholars, tend to recognise children's musical play in relation to the "adulteration" of the activity away from play and towards the production of the play's benefits, and music educators and researchers of young children rarely write about philosophy or the metaphysical because the application of its knowledge into music practice in early childhood is not explicit. Taking the opportunity to work towards an ontological expansion of children's musical play into this lacuna, this research played three games which were inspired by the work of the multi-disciplinary Castalian monks in Herman Hesse's 1943 novel *The Glass Bead Game*. Dominant scholarly narratives, ancient and modern philosophies, and complementary theories from diverse sources were orchestrated according to the enabling gestures and boundaries of three games played as research. This allowed for play to be mobilised as both a subject and a mode of enquiry – thinking about play through play.

This creative, ludic research intends to expand musical play discourse towards ontology. Play is rendered fragile when it is reduced to only its utility, but through playing games, transdisciplinary research's relational thinking can be well-played towards new discoveries, and rich interpretations of extant knowledge.

Keywords

Aproductive, Creative Research Methods, Children's Musical Play, Early Childhood Music, Glass Bead Game, Ludic Research, Ludic Enquiry, Musical Play, Ontology, Philosophy of Play, Play, Reconceptualisation, Speculative Realism, Utility.

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List of Abbreviations

Being – with a capital "B" is taken to be the fundamental phenomenon that grounds all experience and gives meaning to all experiences (Heidegger, 2007).

BZ - Belousov-Zhabotinsky

OOO – Object Oriented Ontology

Triple O - Object Oriented Ontology

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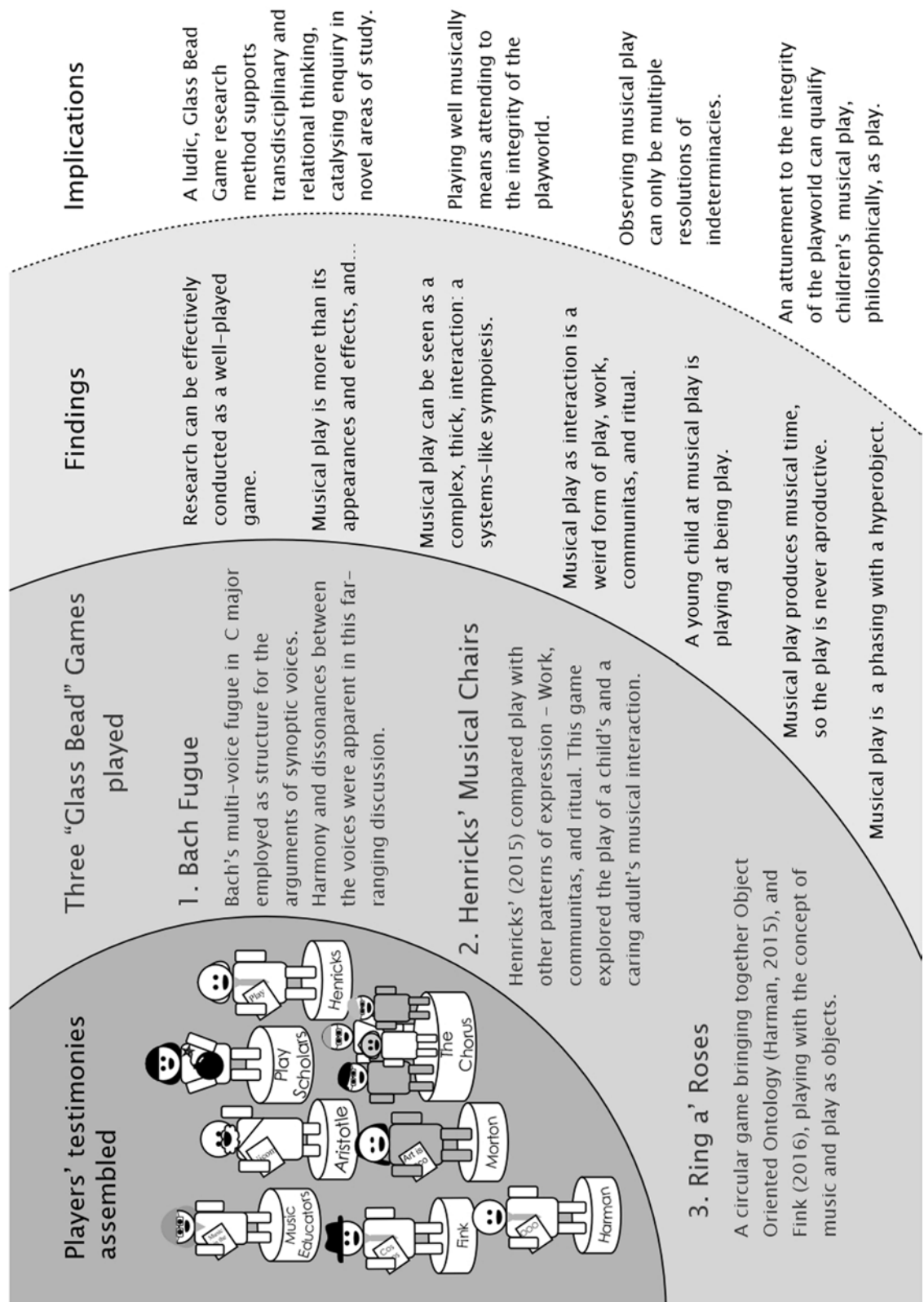
May I offer my profound thanks to the children who have let me play along with their musical play, and to the music professionals, scholars of play, and philosophers who play so generously and compellingly with their actions and their words. This thesis has been a carefully guided therapy, and an opportunity to spend time with the concept of children's musical play and to let it exist richly, and to play with it, without demanding its performance. I am satisfied that play's fascinating beauty is impossible to grasp, and that it is a profound privilege to get to play.

I am exceedingly grateful to my external and internal examiners. Their wise advice helped me to improve the context and the flow of the thesis.

Concept map of the thesis

Figure 1.

Ludic enquiry: What else is there to children's musical play, in addition to its benefits?



Chapter 1: Introduction

At the centre of this thesis are three playful, well-played, game-like enquiries conducted by an experienced early childhood music practitioner who was curious as to what else there is to children's musical play, in addition to its widely recognised benefits. The intention of this research was not to complete, explain-away, or "exhaust" musical play's reality but, through playful discussions, explore the inherent instability between musical play's essence, and how the play is known. In short, there is more to musical play than its appearances and effects, including the possibility that musical play is simultaneously both play and not play. All we have at our disposal to investigate children's musical play are its sensible appearances and effects, and meticulous ways of gathering and interpreting these data. Yet we can, in an equally meticulous manner, speculate about the *play* of musical play which is the locus of a play/not play, paraconsistent dialethic. This thesis therefore invokes play and embraces it as a focus of, and tool of, the research of play's musical play. This research is ontologically sensitive to the being of play within musical play rather than play's, or musical play's, function or outcomes.

The function-less, forgotten-about, unmeasurable, play-focussed qualities of the everyday yet extraordinary activity of musical play in early childhood resist our tools of observation and measurement partly because they do not have a purchase in a biopolitical project of childhood (Lester & Russell, 2014), and they make no apparent contribution to a developmentalist discourse of a child's expected musical progression. If these aproductive qualities do not exist, and there is no more to a child's musical play than what can be observed and beneficially applied, then no matter, we have played a good game, and the musical play of young children remains prodigiously beneficial. If these aproductive qualities do exist in some way as a real

part of musical play, then we have discovered something about the exceedingly deep nature of musical play, and we have achieved this by playing well.

This research is attentive to the possibility of an “infraempirical”, unseen *force* (Massumi, 2002) of musical play. This “force” may, or may not, coincide with musical play’s appearances because this force is a part of the “breath”, spirit, and relation (Irigaray, 1999), *and* the Heideggerian (2007), or even the object oriented, ontological “being”, of the play. So, just as a piece of eggshell is a congruent and ideal implement to separate another fragment of eggshell from its albumen, then play was considered here to be the ideal research implement to deploy in the attempt to separate play from within play. If there is a material or mechanical affinity between playfulnesses and play, or a philosophical resonance, or certain rhythms, logic, or textures within musical play which respond to musically playful provocation, then playful enquiry is an appropriate research method because play should understand play on its own terms. Therefore, for this research, games were the guiding frameworks within which play allowed for the emergence of play. The enquiry’s playful method was not a means to an end, but an aesthetic, exploratory practice which invited play to play within philosophical practice, showing that it is possible to imagine new kinds of knowledge as a set of playful, pleasurable, ontological, and edifying encounters.

Herman Hesse’s 1943 novel *The Glass Bead Game* (Hesse, 2000) was both an inspiration and a touchstone for this research. Details about Hesse’s Glass Bead Game are forthcoming in the *Prelude: Preparing for the games* Chapter, but it is worth including a few lines here to defend the book’s influence on this research. Quibell (2006) remarked that all novels, including *The Glass Bead Game*, which are of a dystopian tradition, are critical of something in the author’s reality. It is fair to

say that this thesis hints at a dystopian view of the over-utilisation of musical play, and it actively seeks a different reality through playful synthesis of what is already known about play and musical play. The *Glass Bead Game* novel described a priesthood who rigorously pursued a virtuosic synthesis of knowledge through play, and the game was the “most precious and most nonutilitarian, most beloved, and was the most fragile jewel in our territory” (Hesse, 2000, p. 340). Gradually the institution became an insular, exclusive community (Edwards, 2019), the main protagonist observed this decline, and he left the brotherhood for a new life, realising that the Glass Bead Game’s manipulation of knowledge for assimilation and posterity had become “infected by conceit, class arrogance, self-righteousness, and exploitiveness” (Hesse, 2000, p. 328). The Glass Bead Game thought-tool was prone to influences extrinsic to the Game, and this fact only became apparent after the Game was extinguished by those who did not value it.

The Glass Bead Game was taken as inspiration only, of a game which can elicit, release, and stimulate independent thinking and, just as equally, inhibit, control, or repress independent thinking. If play is the fragile jewel which is a part of us then, given Hesse’s warning, the task is to strive to play well.

The Players

Any game needs players and, to relate to possibilities of play, this play-as-research was grounded in the use of trans-disciplinary, scholarly, academic, and philosophical voices which were garnered from wide-ranging literature searches and extensive reading. Players were selected from childhood studies, systems theory, fine art, philosophy, therapy, chemistry, astronomy, and fiction, because the conceptual styles and beliefs of these scholarships resonated with the complexity, sensuality, and strangeness of play and musical play. Joining this Chorus-style assemblage of scholars and researchers were the main players – music educators and researchers of young children, scholars and philosophers of play, and Aristotle.

The music educators and researchers were identified through literature searches, and were chosen for their alignment to the thesis' core aims. The search term “musical play” located articles which featured children's active, playful music-making, specifically where the child had agency and autonomy to guide or control this activity. Interpretation of what constituted young children's “music” was broad, to include sounds made with or without musical instruments, and included rhythmic and cooperative repeated movements such as dance. Articles were included which featured children on account of their active engagement in musicking, musical play, self-initiated music-making, and sound exploration. A total of 185 articles were gathered by the end of 2021, and this collection was added to during the writing of this thesis.

The selection of scholars and philosophers of play was grounded in mainstream play scholarship, and extended to those who offered a philosophical or metaphysical framing of play. Individual play scholars were chosen because of a desire to engage

deeply with thinkers who did not reduce play to a developmental function or instrumental outcome, but instead considered play as an open space for ontological, aesthetic, political, and speculative interpretations. Therefore, scholars and philosophers of play in this thesis were those who wrote, and write, about play as something with its own integrity, rather than something that play *does*, even if that integrity can only be expressed in relational terms. In turn, mainstream developmental psychology or educational theorists who framed play in service of future competence were resisted in favour of thinkers who subvert those frames. In this way, a philosophical hospitality was offered to scholars who favour wonder, ambiguity, the questioning of telos, and the importance of aproductivity and, occasionally, choices of scholarship were made to facilitate the playing a good game.

One play scholar, Thomas Henricks' significant contribution to this thesis was his view that we learn about ourselves and the world, and the intersection of these realms, through play. He had produced a tabulated outline of how play might intersect with activities which are not play - work, *communitas*, and ritual - in his (2015) book *Play and the Human Condition*, and this was the starting point for a game exploring a best "fit" of musical play and play within an example of a loving mother-and-baby musical, playful interaction.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) became a player, a steady bass line, and a referee in these games because of an article in *Philosophy Now* magazine (Madigan & Gorlova, 2018) about Aristotle's writing on friendship. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes three different types of friendship – *philia*, utility, and virtue – and how, in a true friendship, these qualities are shared and are bidirectional. Within the thinking of this thesis, a playful "friend" is exactly what music should be for a child, such that the child can share qualities of *philia* (love), utility (usefulness), and virtue with,

within, and through musical play. Although Aristotle stated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that friendship in this manner is not possible between a man and an inanimate object, this did not seem to be a barrier because music, for a musician, is a good friend in account of the love, benefits, and virtue of the friendship. Friendship was why Aristotle was invited into the games, but his influence in discussions of a formal cause of musical play, and a stance of *Eudaimonia* within that play, was why he remained.

Graham Harman and Object-Oriented Ontology (Harman, 2002-2024b) feature in the third game because of their commitment to the autonomy and mystery of objects which, in the scope of this research, include games, toys, musical forms and, it is argued, play and music. Harman's philosophy originated in the work of Heidegger and Husserl, a fact which facilitated the introduction of one of Husserl's mentees, Eugen Fink. The mythic nature of the game came into its own during Eugen Fink's (2016) metaphysical framing of play in the final game as cosmic, ritualistic, and foundational to human existence. The Cultic play of Fink's (2016) player who is played by play, and disappears into play is the young child who is playing musically and who is subsumed into musical play.

This stance, of playing as an immersion within a "thing", like air, which we cannot fully apprehend yet is vital to our existence, led to brief interventions throughout this thesis from Luce Irigaray (1999), who provided a fluid foil to the Heideggerian developments of Object Oriented Ontology. Honouring difference, sensuality, and the unspeakable, Irigaray reorients philosophy itself towards the elemental, the embodied, and the relational, and this position resonated deeply with this thesis' aim to resist instrumentalism and engage with play on its own terms; not as a domination of the world, but as a dwelling within it. Irigaray's elliptical, poetic, and indirect

method mirrored the desire to write playfully and philosophically, rather than to “capture” or “explain” play. Her work gave permission to write and think otherwise, and to shape a text that itself performs something of the musicality and strangeness of its subject. Another writer included for their eclectic and provocative use of poetic language as philosophical enquiry, and for their intellectually playful references to science fiction and popular music, was Timothy Morton. Morton’s *hyperobjects* (2013b), and their ecological thought, helped to guide this enquiry to consider how play expands beyond the individual into entangled, immersive experiences

These are some of the players of a suite of Hesse-inspired Glass Bead Games, who helped in the reconceptualisation of the research of musical play in early childhood as a game – as a structured, yet open-ended speculative, evocative, and performative act. As deeply serious play, the Glass Bead-inspired Games of this thesis performed philosophy, demonstrating that playful engagement can be just as, if not more, philosophically rich as traditional academic forms, whilst adding a hint of the mythic richness of the original novel.

Chapter 2: Prelude: Preparing for the games

This chapter prepares the ground for the coming games. The tension between musical play and free play is considered, as is the idea of the “other-than-useful” within musical play.

Musical play as having divergent qualities within a pharmakon is reflected-on, before an exercise in bewildering moves the research temporarily away from early childhood musical play and towards contemporary art. The importance of what exists in between phenomena, as indicated by the artwork of Cornelia Parker, is applied to our knowledge of early childhood musical play. To congruently examine the other-than-useful, as something which exists alongside the useful of musical play, in a playful way which keeps play present, a series of games is proposed as research method. These games, as literature and thought synthesis, were inspired by the work of the monks of Castalia in Hesse’s novel “The Glass Bead Game”. Just as The Glass Bead Game drew comparisons between seemingly disparate themes, and attempted to express intellectual concepts and artistic values in a common denominator (Hesse, 2000, p. 110), this chapter prepares the ground for games which synthesise many voices in pursuit of one, or many common denominators of children’s musical play.

The musical play of a young child, as a playful activity featuring melody, rhythm, repetition and exaggeration, is vitally useful to the child's development (Dissanayake, 2006; Hallam & Himonides, 2022) and musical play in early childhood is compellingly viewed as a "powerful" educational, developmental, and therapeutic activity (Hallam & Himonides, 2022; Littleton, 2015; Koops, 2010). A developmental, educational, or therapeutic rationale for children's musical play has become normalised, occluding other reasons for, or ways of, engaging in the play, and this state of affairs has arisen recently, gradually, and quietly. Evidence of this shift can be demonstrated directly: scholars and philosophers of play omit children's musical play from their scholarship¹.

It is possible that children's musical play might not be a form of play at all (Suits, 2014), or musical play might be play-adjacent. Some parts of musical play are more playful than other parts, and it is not universally clear what one means by "play", or precisely what degree of adult, environmental, or cultural control means that musical play ceases being play, and becomes some other activity or form of expression. Play itself is notoriously difficult to define without resorting to its appearances and effects

¹ This uncited statement points to an academic lacuna. Why scholars of play omit children's musical play from their scholarship will be explored in this thesis but the reason is, largely, that children's musical play is considered to be adult-controlled, and better aligned with education than play studies. On a personal note, when mentioning my interest in musical play to a playwork specialist at a playwork conference they were sceptical, stating that musical play sounded like "a form of music education through the back door", and was therefore not play.

(Sutton Smith, 1997), and play is thought to be beyond any one essence (Feezell, 2010), maybe because play is a disposition (Henricks, 2015), and an activity separate from material consequence (Huizinga, 1950). Play can be free and uncertain (Caillois, 2001) and, furthermore, play is an intrinsically-motivated process, not a product (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999). Indeed, play is “aproductive” (Eichberg, 2016) because it produces nothing, other than play. Given a play scholar’s understanding of play, it is curious how musical play can be *play* when its valued effects are extrinsic to both play and music. The fact that children’s musical play is widely beneficial is not debated here. Accepting that musical play is a particularly useful activity allows us to ask what else it might be, maybe when it is not being beneficial, and when it is being more like “play”.

With the hypothesis that there might be more to children’s musical play than the undoubted benefits that making music brings, this research plays a series of games questioning the play - the aproductive, ambiguous, uncertain being - of musical play. This research is possible because musical play tends to be noticeable on account of its use of rhythm, melody, repetition, and exaggeration (Dissanayake, 2010), but the essence of musical play is something to do with *play*, which is marvellously mysterious. Musical play’s essence might be interpreted as unimportant, and maybe an immaterial waft of Irigaray’s, or Amos’, “forgotten air” (Irigaray, 1999; Amos, 1996). Air is, after all, a fundamental and abundant resource necessary to our survival, and is the imperceptible, and largely forgotten, fluid stuff which carries music’s sounds in waves. Yet, as Irigaray (1999) stresses, air is the unthought resource – the medium and not the reason. In a similar way, play is likely to be the unexplored, abundant, necessary, and invisible, medium of musical play, and not the

play's reason. This abundant necessity is possibly made visible when play, or everyday life is slightly "broken", and when aspects of it become more noticeable. An open-minded, playful approach for this enquiry would allow for investigations to remain in the abundant medium, or milieu, of play. A conative ecology, or naturally generative context, for the study of play is one which keeps play close at hand, and is serious and light-hearted.

However, investigating the medium of play from within play is a risky exercise. The immaterial medium of play encompasses anything at all in the cosmos and beyond because, as Fink (2016) elucidates, play is a key phenomenon of a truly universal status. Any game that claims to play seriously with play would have to be infinitely distributed across space and time, making the activity of playing "unplayful" because infinite possibilities do not make for good games, at least in human scales of reference. A human-sized, non-infinite game - a finite game - on the other hand, requires a start, a marked-out area within which to play, selected players, and an end-point (Carse, 2012). Therefore, in order to stay playful, a series of *finite* games is what is played here, with the contestants establishing the rules of play for each game, and agreeing on moments of success or failure within the games. But because these are finite portions of the infinite game of what musical play could be, there can be no overall "winner". In theory, play should be the only outcome of play, and this is an acceptable result because it is the play of musical play which is being sought.

On marking out the finite areas for games within the infinite field for play for this enquiry, an indication of what areas are "in play" is necessary. At the risk of sounding like the profoundly simple generalisation found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, practitioners of musical play, and carers of young children, are at pains to

avoid harming a child who is playing musically, and it is their professional duty and moral responsibility to do so. Educators and carers would wish good for a child so that the child grows up as a happy and healthy member of society². It is for good reasons that children's musical play has attained the position of being a charming, "natural" activity which is beneficial and remedial, is both loved and tolerated, and is, at worst, mostly harmless. The ways in which musical play is considered to be remedial will be explored later in this writing but, for now, by way of gentle exploration, the pluralistic potentials of musical play's "remedy" will be floated through the notion of a "pharmakon" which can refer to a magical remedy, a poison, and a scapegoat - a locus of blame.

French philosopher Bernard Stiegler (1952-2020) had researched a concept of musical instruments and musical scores (and later technical equipment such as radio sets, and ultimately as anything at all) as "organs". According to Stiegler, organs are i) biological or "endosomatic" or psychosomatic organs, ii) artificial organs such as tools and instruments, technologies, and iii) social organizations (Stiegler, 2022, p. 86). "Organology", in the manner of Stiegler, was the attempt to understand how these organs interact, asking at what level, relative to the others, does one organ

² I recall speaking to a Special Needs coordinator about the idea of doing more maths, instead of additional English Literature, with a child who was an avid and able reader. They said "no-one wants to be the loneliest genius in the playground". I am still thinking about this nearly thirty years later.

become toxic to another? Whilst Stiegler focussed on Plato's *Protagorus*³ which revelled in the fluid ambiguity of objects which can be remedy, poison and scapegoat, his tutor Derrida dwelt on Plato's *Phaidros*⁴ in which the function and value of writing are explicitly discussed.

In *Plato's Pharmacy*, Derrida (1981) had introduced the ambiguous word "pharmakon", meaning remedy (the beneficial and the transparent rationality of science, technique, and therapeutic causality), yet pharmakon can also mean poison, and everything in between poison and remedy. "Pharmakon", said Derrida, is ambivalent, constituting "the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement

³ Plato's *Protagorus* was written as a dialogue between Socrates and the elderly Protagorus in which the interlocutors attempt to find agreement. Derrida (1981) took up the notion of the right relative quantities as being virtuous within the word "pharmakon" meaning both remedy *and* poison in Greek, and the balance points within the beneficial and the deleterious was investigated by Derrida's student Stiegler.

⁴ *The Phaedrus* (Phaidros) was written by Plato around 370BC. It is a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, and the work influenced Derrida's "Dissemination" (1981), inspiring the notion of "Plato's Pharmacy" and the Pharmakon (the drug, remedy, poison). In the second speech Socrates, talking about love, illustrates the infinite, and therefore slippery, nature of the binary. Anything can be continually sliced into a left and a right half. Derrida writes that we can only move from one cave to another, from *écriture* to *parole*, but there is no getting outside of Plato's cave.

and the play that links them among themselves” (Derrida, 1981, p. 127). However, instead of Derrida’s critical view of the written word, Derrida’s student Stiegler focussed on the interior of the pharmakon: on the moments when something, anything, becomes something else. Stiegler recognised that pharmakon was not an analogy or a metaphor. Instead, “pharmakon” is the everything that is at one’s disposal as a process of becoming.

Following the “organology” of Stiegler, and applying current notions of children’s musical play, we could state the following: musical play i) is “natural” to the child because the child is born musical and that musicality is vital to its survival, ii) it utilises tools like the voice, the body, and musical instruments, and iii) musical play is helpful to the social organisation of the child. Thus, to a caring parent, or a dedicated educator, musical play is quasi-causative of beneficial usefulness, or is otherwise benign. The only toxicity in this interpretation of musical play is the one that is not there, that is found in the negative of these interpretations. Any path away from the benefits of musical play must edge towards the toxic of children’s musical play, and this idea is an “aporia”, a no-go crossing point, which one does not want to magnify. Derrida insisted that there must be a deficit for the benefits to exist and, furthermore, coined “scapegoat” (*pharmakos*) as a term within pharmakon which did not appear in Plato’s *Phaidros* on which Derrida built his theory, but which Derrida (1981) concluded was not necessarily absent. Scapegoat (Pharmakos) merely sounds similar to a mythical person, magician, sorcerer, or even poisoner (Pharmakeus), who is also the wrong-doer banished to outside the city walls in order to purify the city within (Derrida, 1981).

In the spirit of Derrida's take on Platonism, and in search of the "other than useful" in musical play, one does not have to think along the lines of a strongly stressed binary of useful/useless or non-toxic and toxic. However, if one accepts a benefit, then one must accept the possibility of the opposite of that benefit. A benefit taken to general excess assumes a deficit role - like forgetting to eat when making music for hours on end, or acquiring a repetitive strain injury from over-practising one musical passage. Music in early childhood might be regarded *as a very good thing*, but thought only to be of interest to academics studying early years practice or pedagogy, and therefore set apart from serious music study (Young, 2021) or play philosophy. Early childhood musical play as pharmakeus is the probably necessary, but noisome, malarkey placed outside of the city walls of proper, "grown-up" music.

The rich triptych of remedy, poison, and scapegoat, and the ample contents of a fluid, immaterial interior to musical play will influence the finite games to be played here. But a model like the pharmakon is too narrow a confinement for an ontological examination of play because all it does is bring to presence certain qualities of play rather than its "being". Within the expansively playful enquiry embraced here one must speculate about play itself as pharmakon's remedy, poison, and scapegoat, and as pharmakeus' cosmological sorcerer and magician of infinite play which players can only, in finite ways, play along with.

There is a methodological inspiration to be had for the unpromising search for the finite unknown within infinite "nothingness": the Hubble Telescope scientists found thousands of hitherto undetected galaxies in the darkness (for more detail, see Endnote ⁱ). As the Hubble scientists' story illustrates, looking at "nothingness" requires rigorous technique. The astronomers looked multiple times indirectly, in a highly targeted way in the direction of optimum nothingness, towards objects which

might - or might not - be there, knowing that they could only record what their detectors could measure. They recorded several under-sampled images and combined them into one detailed image, using an astronomical photography technique called “drizzling”. They then removed the “noise” which constituted features which were outside of the search parameters. It was only after this process that qualitative judgements could be made about the unknown, and the surprising, and the speculative.

This thesis consists of a set of three, rigorously-planned games which will facilitate a number of indirect glances at a slippery area of study. The approach is akin to “drizzling”: looking slightly “past” musical play several times, and then collating the data prior to interpreting a coherent image. The methodical games that follow are musical play- and philosophy-adjacent, and when noise is minimised and spurious data is removed, hopefully surprising, hitherto unknown insights into musical play might be revealed. If nothing is found, a rapprochement between the areas of study will be achieved.

The process might be accidentally productive. Please head directly to the “implications of ludic research” chapter to find out if conclusions were formed. But before the games commence, the contexts for musical play and play require elucidation. We need to be clear about the elements at the disposal of the games we are to play.

Locating play in children's musical play

The tension between concepts of play and concepts of musical play in childhood is introduced. Children's musical play tends to be noticed, and valued, for its musical, and its extra-musical benefits. Play is considered to elude both theory and control which is external to play. The Glass Bead Game approach is introduced, and a game plan is described.

Academic evaluations of children's musical play are generally situated within education studies, even if its place there is uncomfortable. Vanessa Bond's (2012) literature review, examining how music is represented in early childhood education journals, revealed the generalised expectation amongst nursery settings that music education in early childhood is subservient to non-musical benefits, and that there is a lack of making music for music's sake. Bond's review did contain papers which described the child's spontaneous investigation of musical instruments as "free play". However, only when the child's musical free play was amended, or corrected, by the carer in order for the child to adopt, for example, the correct position for playing a musical instrument (Addessi, 2009) is it revealed that adults assume that musical play is not "free" as such, because it is a part of semi-formal music learning within the local cultural understanding of that music.

Musical play as an expression of natural freedom, as opposed to an instrument of developmental and social progression is a minority view. Messy, or chaotic, musical play can be noisy, can damage equipment, and runs contrary to the idea of music as familiar, rhythmic or harmonious. Yet musical play's spontaneous investigation is all about:

[...] the creating of a world which in which, for that moment, children are in control and can seek out uncertainty in order to triumph over it – or, if not, no matter, it is only a game. (Lester & Russell, 2010, p. xiii)

Musical play might be presented as a free play option in an early years setting, but musical play requires, or arguably benefits from special guidance and equipment, and therefore musical play is maybe not quite as free as one might imagine.

Of course not all of children's musical play is noticed. Alison Soccio's (2013) "The Relation of Culture and Musical Play: A Literature Review". Soccio recognised that children's play which does not contribute to adult's work, tends to be overlooked, and that the innate music of the child as the rhythmic, improvisatory, and deep exploration of a musical world produces a more complex music than adults feel the child is capable of. Furthermore, what is noticed about children's musical play depends on local culture. Music educator Young (2016) expressed concern that our understanding of young children's music-making has a Western bias, and more input is required from music education in areas of the world which have different constructions of childhood, and different discourses and policies about music education.

Hassinger-Das & Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2017) are educators who position children's free play in the context of playful learning, and consider "free play" and (adult) guided play to be subtypes of playful learning. Free play is characterised as being without constraints from the environment, or from adults, and as being the child's pursuit of their own interests. However, the supporting of specific educational activities requires guided, play-based activities in the form of games.

Table 1

Diagram noted by the author from a presentation by Hirsh-Pasek at the Future Museums: Play and Design Conference (2019), V&A, London.

	Initiated by child	Initiated by adult
Directed by child	Free Play	Guided Play
Directed by adult	Co-opted play/games	Direct Instruction

Music educator Niland (2009) agrees that child-centred musical play can be a powerful medium for young children's exploration of many musical elements and concepts. Child-centred, “enabling environments” feature rich resources and opportunities for children so that they experience a variety of musical elements, musical genres, and ways of moving and sound-making (Burke, 2018). However, if the adult is selecting the environment and the items for the child’s play, then the adult is guiding the play, and the play is not exactly “free”. As play theorists Russell, Barclay, and Tawil outline:

[...] (neo)liberal narratives of choice, freedom and entrepreneurialism have emerged alongside ideas of the participating agentic child to position children as making the right choices regarding their own wellbeing, learning and development. (Russell et al., 2024, p. 62)

Russell et al. (2024), point out that the curated, educational environment facilitates the agentic child to make the “right” choices, when given sufficient resources and support. The child’s “wrong” choices, possibly made because of insufficient resources or support, can likewise contribute to the child’s sense of personal or

familial failing. The educational environment that facilitates the child's "right" choices is not one of complete freedom, and it cannot exclude or demand children's play. Supporting a capability approach to children's wellbeing, Russell et al. (2024) advocated for Amin's (2006) four "registers" of a good city, namely repair, rights, relatedness, and re-enchantment. These registers work together to create a play-friendly environment which acknowledges:

[T]he complex interrelationships between space, power, a relational capability approach to children's right to play, and the twin processes of account-ability and response-ability. (Russell et al., 2024, p.52)

The authors stress that given the right spatial, temporal, and affective conditions with the resources, opportunities, freedoms and capabilities to play children can create their own wellbeing, and this wellbeing surely includes a child's musical wellbeing too. But the interrelationships between space and power, environment and curriculum, or cacophony and harmony, are complex. In musical play, adult guidance is often nearby and, for social and cultural reasons, musical play is rarely "free".

A prime example of an environment which encouraged children's (relatively) free musical play was the one created by Donald Pond in his early work within the Pillsbury Studies. Pond was a British music educator who worked for the Pillsbury Foundation in California between 1937 and 1945 (Moorhead & Pond, 1941) and who was given the opportunity to assemble marimbas, metallophones, sarons, drums, gongs, guitars, ukuleles, zithers, and flageolets for the young children's musical play. He also obtained a phonograph and recordings of folk songs, contemporary classical music, and chant, which Pond thought similar to children's singing when at play (Kierstead, 1994). Observing children in this richly provisioned environment, Pond thought that a musical experience was never an isolated thing for the child, but was

“interrelated with his whole living experience” (Moorhead & Pond, 1941). He claimed to have no interest in measuring the child’s musical progress, or in statistical comparisons of children’s musicality, or teaching children anything about music. Instead he was interested in the child’s innate capacity to create music as part of their everyday activity, and the role of the interested adult listener in that creativity (Pond, 1981).

Pond’s work came to a close as the school’s educationalists despaired with the mildly anarchic classroom, and introduced more formal music learning into the Pillsbury Foundation (Kierstead, 1994). It was largely the parents who had demanded a more formal learning approach, but it was the children in the school who had introduced the “wrong” sort of play - warplay - into Pond’s musical play setting. Arguably the children were playing-out, in musical ways, the interrelationships between space and power they were seeing as their country entered wartime.

Musical play is quite easy to spot when an adult is facilitating the play and providing specific environments for the play but musical play, as Pond discovered, morphs into other forms of play, and is resistant to categorisation. Academic literature on children’s musical play is rather hard to find in journals, not only because children’s musical play is distributed amongst journals of behavioural science, music education, and child development, but because the search term “musical play” fails to turn up comprehensive results. For a musical play literature search one needs to almost guess what the researcher was looking for when they were researching musical play, for example “self-initiated music”, “musical exploration”, “musical free play”, “spontaneous instrumental music-making”, “sound exploration”, “instrument play”, or “musicking”. These terms have become useful markers, and they demonstrate how musical play’s terminology is adapted to the research to which it applies. However,

musical play's plurality – its numerous names and its lack of a focussed position in academic literature - is a small piece of evidence of musical play's association with play and its "slipperiness".

A phenomenological approach to the study of play within children's musical play would be the sensible way forward, but the definition, classification, reduction and measurement of play (and game) as phenomena is likely to be fundamentally impossible (Eichberg, 2016). Eichberg suggested that three methods are available to the researcher, or to anyone pondering the nature of the existence of play, each focusing on one of i) monistic phenomenology (all is play), ii) dichotomist phenomenology (there is play and non-play), and iii) differential phenomenology (the differences within play). Using this comprehensive point of view, it would seem that play can be called anything one wishes it to be, and that Eichberg is correct: there is a limit to what the phenomenon of musical play can tell us. Play, as exemplified by children's warplay in Pond's classroom, disequilibrates, says Marks-Tarlow (2010), because it is constantly in search of novelty and arousal, and play questions the dominant normality (Eichberg, 2019). It is difficult to imagine how the recognisably musical equates to the curious, disruptive force of play, and this conflicted area will be examined in the coming chapters.

Bewildering the play of children's musical play

There will be no ensuing argument as to whether or not musical play is play, or is not play, or is a game, because the answer is bewilderingly “yes, it is all of those”. As philosopher, and eco-activist, Bayo Akomolafe (2022) says:

We need something more than solutions. We need something more than that binary of a question and an answer. We need a third invitation. What could be a playful transversal disruption of a question-answer binary? Bewilderment.

Art in galleries does not necessarily refute and replace. Art surely challenges us, and builds on our ways of perceiving and being. In a similar way, the consideration of children's musical play does not have to refute what has gone before, or replace it with something new. There is room for gathering, challenging, building, seeking, and feeling with the information that what we already have. However, bewildering is a good way of clearing the ground for new thinking and, one artwork has been selected here to illustrate the value of looking indirectly at a subject of study, because there is much happening in the shadows.

The British artist Cornelia Parker (1956-) is known for her large-scale, mesmerising installations which utilise familiar, artfully-transformed, objects to bring our understanding of the world into a new light. Parker produced “Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View” (Parker, 1991) as the result of a series of examining explosions as a way of giving a fixed state of being to extreme volatility (Blazwick, 2014). She obtained a garden shed and curated its contents before inviting the Army School of Ammunition to blow it up with Semtex. In a gallery, she reassembled the exploded shed's smithereens around a bare light bulb, thus reanimating the destroyed shed in a poignant limbo.

The first part of the artwork's title refers to a scientific name for significant parts of the universe that are present, but unmeasurable. The second part of the title refers to a technical drawing of a machine with its elements separated yet placed to show how it works. "Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View" brings together objects which have unique and collective histories, and reassembles them oddly, in mid-air, so that they float, in the way that shards of wood and hammers do not.

The shed is shown to be much more than it appears to be because now we can see the shed's "viscera", its gently oscillating, disassembled contents, and the shifting shadows as people file past and, simultaneously, the shed is much less than what it appears to be because the individual pieces are finite, recorded, and can be reassembled in another gallery. One is tempted to question the role of the central light bulb which illuminates some of Parker's exploded objects, and throws others into shadow, and to question what cold, dark matter is. The light is a fire, maybe, like in Plato's cave, causing shadows to dance on the cave's wall, tricking us into thinking we understand what we see, and the cold, dark matter is the rest.

Consideration of Parker's exploded shed invites us to wonder about exploding conceptions of children's musical play. Not to be reductionist, and break it down into smaller, more analysable pieces, but the opposite – a maximalist view of the complexity within the gaps between the parts of musical play study of which we are aware. The "air gaps" (to use electrical circuit terminology) could be an indication of separations between music and play and an indication of that which holds them together.

The importance of the absent, the “gone” in an early childhood musical play object can be illustrated by the cutting of holes from a lycra sheet used for rhythmic play and bouncing toys. Dr Charlotte Arculus found that creating holes called attention to the multi-directionality of the two-dimensional lycra-membrane. Not only could items be bounced on the lycra, but items like fingers, puppets, scarves, could emerge through, or disappear into, the holes. Cutting holes in a sheet of lycra produces offcuts which are “holes”, and which provide a rare opportunity to photograph a hole, an absence.

Figure 2.

Photograph of “holes” cut from lycra - a by-product of hole-y lycra.



What is diverting about holes in lycra is that it is the gaps that make it an interesting material, just like it is the gaps between sounds that make sounds into music. The gaps between musical notes serve two purposes: to give the melody rhythm, and to prevent all the notes happening at once. In terms of practice, it is the gaps in the music where musical play erupts. Adults being silent correlates with toddlers vocalising more, as found by Valerio et al. (2006) and Pitt (2020). Musical play can be thought of as the struggle of gaps. Philosopher Thi Nguyen (2020) stated:

[T]he value of games lies not only in their difficulty, but in the experiential quality of that difficulty — in whether the struggle is interesting, dull, or fascinating. (p. 30)

In this way, children's musical play is a struggle, and an "aesthetic striving", as Nguyen would say. In other words, musical play can be seen as an aesthetic struggle with "otherness", with time and space, separating sounds out in frequency of pitch and timing, but in a way that displays as phenomena, but eludes phenomenological analysis because it is not readily apprehensible.

Games and Conversations as research method

The approach of using games as a research method was motivated by two works: Eigen and Winkler's *Laws of the Game* (1981/1993), and Hermann Hesse's 1943 novel *The Glass Bead Game* (2000). In addition, the idea of placing unnecessary obstacles in the way of research, so that the enquiry itself could be a "good game", was inspired by Bernard Suits (2014).

Everything that happens in our world resembles a vast game in which nothing is determined in advance but the rules, and only the rules are open to objective understanding. The game itself is not identical with either its rules or with the sequence of chance happenings that determine the course of play. It is neither one nor the other because it is both at once. It has many aspects as we project onto it in the form of questions. (Eigen & Winkler, 1993, p. vi)

Under the shifting hegemony of now this, now that science or art, the Game of games had developed into a kind of universal language through which the players could express values and set these in relation to one another.

Throughout its history, the Game was closely allied with music, and usually proceeded according to musical or mathematical rules. (Hesse, 1943/2000, p. 30)

Suits (2014) debated the idea that everything is a game, and that all things are to play for. He argued that a world constituted only of play would be both utopian and dystopian. Such a world might be free from work and obligation, but ultimately it would be rather boring. Sometimes, says Suits (2014), playing games is to choose to abide by inefficient or arbitrary rules because they make playing games possible.

Why do I want to define play? Because it's there? Partly, no doubt. But chiefly because a definition is a kind of restriction or limitation, and I believe that, ever since Huizinga began to find play under nearly every rock in the social landscape, quite a bit too much has been made of the notion. (p. 217)

Suits's (2014) significant contribution to this research is summarised in his "portable" definition of playing games:

[...] playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles (p. 43)

Suits (2014) gives the example of playing golf; there would be no game if one simply picked the golf ball up, walked to the green and placed the ball in the hole. When playing a game, a prelusory goal is agreed (to get the ball in the hole), along with constitutive rules which make the game possible (adhering to golf's rules and regulations), and this is done with a lusory attitude which accepts that the rules make the game unnecessarily inefficient, and fun. These conditions are necessary and sufficient for the playing of a game - a concept which runs contrary (Hurka & Tasioulas, 2006) to Wittgenstein's (1994) view that there are no common qualities shared by all games, and that games only share "family resemblances". Instead of Wittgenstein's various qualities which indicate the presence of a game, with Suits there is a way to locate a game and play it really well.

Thanks to Suits, a quietly momentous facet of this thesis is the open acknowledgement that it is both research, and a game. The prelusory goal of this thesis is to locate the other-than-useful of children's musical play and musicking, and

the method to be used is the inefficient, but joyful, writing of an academic dissertation.

Eigen and Winkler, both scientists at the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry, investigated the role of rules and chance in living and social structures. The writers concluded that one can analyse and deduce the means which art employs, but not the work of art itself, adding “[A]rt demands of the artist a total, that is to say a playful command of the means” (Eigen & Winkler, 1993). Therefore, assuming that musical play is artful, a playful, game-based interrogation of the means which musical play employs in its existence is likely to be a more generative exercise than acute analyses of the thing that musical play appears to be, unless the thing that musical play appears to be is the means of its existence. Such tautology, or Gödel-type strange loop makes little sense in constructivist thought. An idea or motion can cover a lot of ground as it travels along a strip of paper, but if the strip is organised into a Möbius strip, the idea always returns, possibly slightly changed by its journey, to its starting point, as predicted in chapter one’s *Games and Conversations as research method*. As it happens, spiral models are often used when describing children’s development. Vygotsky saw a spiral nature to a young child’s development as they partially revisited their experiences but at a higher level (Vygotsky, 1978), and that musical development can be construed as consisting of spirally reiterative, “cumulative” layers (Swanwick, 2001).

Hermann Hesse’s novel *The Glass Bead Game* was originally published in German in 1943 under the title of *Das Glasperlenspiel*, and in 1946 the novel won the Nobel Prize for Literature. In the novel, a Magister Ludi, a Master of Games, designed and oversaw a set of formal or informal games, which were disciplines intended to lead to the central mystery and the innermost heart of the world, and therefore into primal

knowledge. The Magister Ludi ensured that each game was exquisitely recorded and well-coordinated, and carried the responsibility of ensuring that the games' themes were "brilliantly conceived, dialectically orchestrated and counterpoised" (Hesse, 2000). Some of the games lasted for weeks, requiring the Glass Bead Game players to be skilled in manipulating beads on an abacus, and music on a stave, and to be fluent in multiple languages and academic disciplines. The games translated concepts, motifs, architectural styles and ancient languages into new patterns, symbols, and formulae which, nourished by all the sciences and the arts, strove to represent "perfection, pure being, and the fullness of reality". Within the book *The Glass Bead Game*, the "game of games" developed into a kind of universal language through which the players could express values and set these in relation to one another (Hesse, 2000).

The players of Hesse's Glass Bead Games intended to "arrange and sum up all the knowledge of his time, symmetrically and synoptically, around a central idea" (Hesse, 2000, p. 154). Just as chemists and physicists of Hesse's time had managed to achieve and control the separation and recombination of elements into new forms, the monks of Castalia aimed to become knowledge-information programmers, dissolving thoughts and refashioning them into beads to be woven into new patterns (Leary, 1986). In the novel, the game became a game of whirlpool-like ilinx, and the story ended in tragedy by drowning. One of the early Magister Ludi in Hesse's novel warned the main character about using the Glass Bead Game as a tool for philosophising, citing Kant's warning on belief-based theology as "a magic lantern of chimeras" (Kant, 1788/2002). The Magister Ludi's warning was apposite; there are risks related to the alignment of all human knowledge, and expression of that knowledge, using the media of music, or mathematics via a wire-strung stave,

because any knowledge which could not ultimately be expressed through mathematics or music could not constitute knowledge. Maybe the warning was a prescient one regarding the synoptic gathering-together of all information for reprocessing and dissemination in the manner of Artificial Intelligence. Kant had a point in that the monks of Castalia must have produced an illuminating product, which might have been blinding in its brilliance, but where there is light there are chimeras – illusions of light and shadow, matter and dark matter.

Hesse tantalisingly implied that the first Glass Bead game was invented by musicians. He described an abacus structure strung with wire strings that could be threaded with glass beads resulting in an analogue of a stave with music notation. One could “play” the bead notation, and recompose and translate the notation to produce elements for improvisational musical play or the basis of a fugue-like composition. The wire-strung abacus was described by Hesse as being an invention of a “Bastian Perrot” who, in *The Glass Bead Game* was a real, or fictional, music teacher of the early 1800s. According to Hesse, Perrot’s music students would string glass beads on the wires within the frame to represent note values and durations, and adjust the beads to play with musical or rhythmic counterpoint ideas or challenges.

Thirteen years after Hesse’s *Glass Bead Game* was published, Remedios Varo’s 1956 painting *Armonía (Autorretrato sugerente) – Harmony (Suggestive self-portrait)* depicted a game similar to Perrot’s. Varo’s painting features a ghostly human figure threading objects, including scraps of paper and a turnip, on to a G clef music stave. The square root of minus one (an imaginary number) is written on one scrap, and the first six digits of Pi are written on another, and crystals and leaves are also skewered by the stave, as they fizz with incandescent sparks. Varo also illustrated mystical influences beyond melody and rhythm, such as the wall guiding

the melody on the stave, the emanation of opaque, mathematical and free-form objects from seemingly nowhere, and pictorial references to resting and nesting, all of which mysteriously affect, or indeed “play” the musician as the musician plays music.

Profound thinking about the nature of play and music, as depicted in Varo’s painting, and Hesse’s novel, was a zeitgeist of the nineteenth century. “Le Grand Jeu” was a term for the rivalry between the Colonial powers of Britain and Prussia over influence in Central Asia which came to a close around 1907 (Sergeev, 2013).

Coincidentally, “The Great Game” was the name chosen by a near-contemporaneous group of Paris-based poets, writers, mystics, and painters who published a journal called “Le Grand Jeu” between 1928 and 1930. The group of artists, philosophers and friends identified with Hindu non-dualistic philosophy, as opposed to surrealism which was considered by some to be simply a new form of mysticism (Ventosa, 2018). Scholarship within Le Grand Jeu included close reading of the Upanishads which are Sanskrit texts at the core of Hinduism, and knowledge of Hindu sacred poetics.

The group of artists calling themselves “The Grand Jeu” defined their research as:

[...] experimental metaphysics; the pursuit of states of being that were felt to surpass spatio-temporal limits, and the experience of what might normally only be comprehended through metaphysical logic, such as the play between multiplicity and unity, a sense of discontinuous time, or the encounter of the finite (self) with the infinite. (Roberts, 2018, p. 40)

A core member of Le Grand Jeu was play scholar Roger Caillois (1913-1978).

Caillois was a childhood friend in Reims of Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, who was also a core member. According to Caillois, the title of the group and its periodical, “Le

Grand Jeu”, was primarily chosen because espionage “symbolically signified metaphysical research” (Roberts, 2018). Roberts (2018) adds that the group considered themselves “serious players” deciding on their motto “he who loses wins, as it is a question of losing oneself”. The graphic on the cover of the group’s journal was a spiral, and this image must have been a forerunner of Caillois’ “whirlpool” classification of *ilinx*. Caillois (2001) would later use in relation to vertiginous, risky play as a desire for disorder and destruction such as “the intoxication that is experienced in military barracks – for example, in noisily banging garbage cans” which today would be considered to be, if not embraced as, musical play.

Le Grand Jeu group continued to collaborate in Paris until the Second World War, when they dispersed. In the late 1920’s Hesse was a vocal pacifist living in Switzerland and was writing *Der Steppenwolf* and a collection of poems called “Krisis” (Alessandro et al., 2002). Despite their overlapping literary and intellectual interests, and shared fascination with the mysteries of play, it is unlikely that Hesse ever met Caillois or the members of Le Grand Jeu. Hesse travelled to Malaysia, Ceylon, Singapore and Sumatra in 1911 (Alessandro et al., 2020) to visit the place where his mother was born and grew up, and to nurture his interest in Hindu philosophy and religion. Hesse also had a deep interest in Indian culture and Buddhist philosophy, as demonstrated in his 1922 novel *Siddhartha* ⁵.

⁵ Hesse wrote *Siddhartha* in 1922. The eponymous hero’s name is a portmanteau in Sanskrit of Siddha (achieved), and artha (that which was sought).

Hesse began writing *The Glass Bead Game* in 1933, and completed it in 1943 (Wolfendale, 2016). The novel is about serious play, deep connections between disparate topics of study, and disruption and loss. Hesse's *Glass Bead Game* stressed the need for meditation, and strove to "create unity and harmony, cosmic roundness and perfection, and Hesse (2000) described an early *Glass Bead Game* like so:

A Game, for example, might start from a given astronomical configuration, or from the actual theme of a Bach fugue, or from a sentence out of Leibniz or the Upanishads, and from this theme, depending on the intentions and talents of the player, it could either further explore and elaborate the initial motif or else enrich its expressiveness by allusions to kindred concepts. (p. 30)

In the context of this research, to play a potentially disruptive game between music scholars and scholars of play is one thing, but to invite the musical player, the wall, the music stave, impossible things, a fizzing turnip, magic, and other ghostly objects of Varo's *Armonia* into the play risks the production of chimeras, and vertigo, bewilderment and loss.

But maybe what is lost requires losing. *Le Grand Jeu* stated "he who loses wins, as it is a question of losing oneself" (Roberts, 2018), and this thesis would like to lose question-answer binaries like "is musical play actually play?" Maybe Kant's chimeras - the illusions of light and shadow, matter and dark matter - are trying to tell us something, and need to be foregrounded as a significant part of the game in the manner that there is both more, and less, to apprehend about musical play. The idea of a Hesse- or Varo- inspired "game of games", within which one could play musical notes against calculus, garden design, or a religious text sounds bewildering, and other-worldly, and exactly the sort of disruptive, if not magical, thinking that is required when playing with ideas about musical play.

Playing a Glass Bead Game is risky, akin to Akomolafe's (2022) third invitation to bewilderment, and sounds exciting, but the ground needs to be solid to support ilinx play, or thoughts become dizzy and mixed-up. Therefore the process of bewildering children's musical play will be played-out methodically - "drizzled" like the Hubble Deep Fields Study - and playfully, by playing three structured games.

Summary, and game plan

Currently “musical play”, as written about by researchers, educators and therapists who work with very young children, and “play” as written about by scholars and philosophers of play, are relative strangers. All are united by the idea of the child having the opportunity to play well, because the pleasure of full participation in playing leads to wellbeing, health, and adaptiveness, both within and beyond the play (Russell et al., 2024; Barrett, 2016; Campbell & Alvarez, 1990; Lester, 2010; Sicart, 2017). Researchers interested in musical play tend to be overwhelmingly positive about the play’s potential, and children’s musical play is considered to be at least benign, and at most essential to our existence (Dissanayake, 2017). Philosophers of play recognising that play, as a universal concept, cannot be fully understood, cultivate a nuanced, and developing, relationship with, rather than a fixed understanding of, play. This relationship echoes that of the Pharkakon’s remedy and poison, indicating that not all play is benign at worst.

What is lacking in academic literature is a curiosity about the elusive nature of *play* when that play becomes musical. One reason for this is that children’s musical play is closely linked to adult-organised activity (Suits 2014; Hughes 2020), and the notion that the play is only musical because of the adult’s needs and desires. Another reason, as we shall find, is that coordinated effort typical in musical play pushes the classification of musical play away from play and towards work, ritual, or *communitas*.

Earlier in this writing, the avoided area of potential knowledge, between play and children’s musical play was referred to as a lacuna. It is tempting to view such a gap as a deficiency to be filled, yet conceptualisations of play and musical play are

merely constructions, and using them as polarities reinforces their position and the absence of a position in between. It is more likely that what occurs between play literature and musical play literature are vectors of awkwardness, which are uncomfortable to address without supporting one side over the other. This research aims to dwell in that awkwardness, but its energy arises from curiosity rather than attentiveness to, or advocacy for, a particular aspect of play or musical play. A pragmatic approach must recognise that being playful or being musical are, in themselves, forms of being which can be routes towards forms of knowing, and can equally be an excuse to just “be”. Addressing “being”, and doing “being” well without useful production requires uncomfortable troubling of long-held ideas about the roles of music and play in development in early childhood, and the belief that musical play is fun and hard work for a reason.

Therefore this research chooses to be with play, and aims to be musical in its tone. The medium of play is the method chosen to play with play, and to play with musical play. Playing will allow for a joyfully playful curiosity so that one can see what turns up in play’s “laboratory of the possible” (Henricks, 2006). The prelusory goal, inspired in part by Suits (2014), and within the tiny utopia of this exercise, is to run a series of three, unique “Glass Bead Games” with their own constitutive rules, which will play new musical/philosophical worlds of play into existence (Sicart, 2017). The first of three games is the Bach Fugue Game. This plays with assembled academic opinions about the utility of children’s musical play, and orchestrates these voices into the fugue from the first Prelude and Fugue written in 1722 by J. S. Bach (1685-1750) for *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, with the intention that these voices can be listened to, together, in a novel way. This fugue was chosen to be the game’s structure two reasons: The fugue was written to be played on an instrument tuned to

equal temperament, and the fugue exemplifies a complex, multi-voice structure which enables individual voices, and real and implied harmonies, to be heard. In the game, the fugue provides a template for the wise and divergent voices of scholars of play, scholars of education, and scholarship from the relatively alien disciplines of chemistry and engineering, to be played together. The fugue's astonishing clarity and complexity is deeply moving, and the game leaves profound impressions which are sensitively gathered.

Henricks' Musical Thinking Chairs is a party game of reduction in pursuit of complexity. Play scholar Thomas Henricks (2015) interpreted how play contrasted with not-play, and presented this information in table form. Conventionally, the party game of musical chairs requires a chair to be removed by a referee each time a played-in music track is interrupted. In this game a "chair" is removed from the "table" when the conversation about musical play's status as play, when compared to three other patterns of expression which are not-play, is considered "exhausted". Exploring the musical play of a mother and baby as an activity separate to everyday life, work, and ritual, the game determines areas of "tacit" agreement between play scholars and music educators of young children, and also pinpoints musical play as interaction as a particular realm of scholarship which has potential for further conversation.

Having opened up the conversation about the possible nature of children's musical play beyond its bountiful utility, the traditional circle game Ring o' Roses provides the playing-space for a metaphysical consideration of play, and musical play. Object Oriented Philosophy, which is Graham Harman's development of Heidegger's Tool Analysis, is played alongside Eugen Fink's writing on the nature of play as a symbol of the world, using Ring o' Roses as a guide. Ring o' Roses was chosen because it is

recalled by philosophers, and known by children, and is therefore a familiar departure point for extravagant thought. The method aligns with the play scholarship of Eugen Fink and assists in legitimising the view of play as an object, or cosmological unit, which plays us, and musical play as a temporal, aesthetic form of play, plays both the child, and temporality. Such a view might not be immediately useful, but it points to a deeper understanding of the inner realities and being of the musically playful.

Chapter 3: Fugue! A Game of Utility

The Fugue Game is a playful, and serious, response to the seemingly impossible task of synthesising the literature written by scholars and philosophers of play about the nature of play, with the literature written by music educators and researchers about the nature of musical play. A conventional literature review was conducted prior to the playing of this game, and it was found that very few play scholars write about the musical play of young children, and very few researchers of children's musical play write about philosophies of play. The prelusory goal of this chapter is to explore the lacuna in the literature. The main point of contention is expected to be the pursuit of utility through musical play turning musical play into something other than play. The fundamental polarity of positions requires exploration using a rigorous method which allows for agreement, disagreement and, hopefully, the generation of new thoughts regarding the nature or essence of children's musical play. We need a fair fight – a fugue.

The problem of how to give a fair voice to the academic voices comprising this discussion was addressed by using an eighteenth century fugue as a template, and creatively transposing the fugue from a musical piece to a piece of prose. A fugue was chosen because a fugue is a polyphonic, contrapuntal musical composition which thrives on the harmony and dissonance of its multiple voices. Originating in vocal models, the fugue evolved from the French chanson, the *ricercar* and the *canzona* into the fugal procedure which reached its peak in the baroque, when it became popular as an instrumental, rather than vocal, device (Bukofzer, 1975). The fugue's progress from a vocal to an instrumental composition, and on to a written arrangement, is unsurprising because its robust structure lends itself to supporting complexity. Etymologically, the word "fugue" evolved from the Latin, then Italian, "fuga" meaning "flight", and is related to the French "fugere", to flee (Oxford Languages, 2024). The parallel between the fugal "flight" and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) is serendipitous here, if only that this particular reterritorialization of melodic voices depends on an ongoing, complex, yet playful balance between polyphony and harmony and the creation of purposeful cacophony and silence. Within a fugue, melodic voices offer a multiplicity of dynamic dimensions, lines and directions of thought, and recomposing the fugue using academic thinking in a game of assembling, of processes, and of connections which keeps all the voices, or elements, in dynamic relation with each other. The fugue facilitates a sort of assemblage which, in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari, is very much like a "set of connections that come together for a period of time and which, when taken together, produce a recognisable behaviour or effect" (Thornton, 2018, p. 11).

For the purposes of this game, four academic voices, and their unique positions, were mapped on to a fugue's voices. The academic voices were synoptic - the assembled opinions of "Scholars of Play", "Music Educators", a "Chorus" of possibilities, and "Aristotle". Using the framework of the fugue, these antiphonal voices were able to combine, and agreements and disagreements emerged as delightful harmonies and crunchy, satisfying dissonances. Even areas of silence, where the voices had nothing to say, contributed to the overall sense of the composition.

J.S. Bach's Fugue from Prelude and Fugue in C Major from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis 846–893) was chosen to provide the template for the voices for two main reasons. The first was that Bach wrote the fugue, and other pieces in the collection, to demonstrate that multipart harmony was possible in changing keys using a new tuning technique. The second reason for choosing this fugue was that the four melodic voices have unique positions on the keyboard and expression in the composition.

The Fugue in C major is the first fugue in J.S. Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* which he wrote to demonstrate how tuning a keyboard instrument to equal temperament made playing in any key a pleasantly exciting experience. Before equal temperament tuning, an instrument such as a harpsichord would have been tuned to itself using the mathematical relationships of "just" tuning. If just tuning was applied to a harpsichord the home key, usually considered to be C major which is a scale containing no sharps or flats, the playing in C major would sound perfectly in tune. The player would be limited to playing only in the key of C, and closely related keys like A minor. On a keyboard instrument tuned to C major, the playing of pieces in B flat major, which is a note close to C on the keyboard, but which has a scale which is remote from C major in the relationship described by the circle of fifths would sound

“sour”, and would divert the listener’s attention away from the music, and towards the uncomfortably out-of-tune notes. (Please see Endnote ii for more information on the circle of fifthsⁱⁱ). Equal temperament solved the problem of playing in multiple keys on the same keyboard by employing a mathematical “fix”. Using equal temperament, all of the notes on the keyboard are relatively slightly out of tune, but all are equally out of tune, therefore all notes sound acceptable in all of the keys that one can play in on the keyboard.

Equal temperament might be a mathematical amelioration but it gives equal voice to all keys (in Western Art Music), and facilitates the tensions one feels (the modulation – the key-change moment the boy band stands up from their matching stools) as the music “changes gear” into another key. Equal temperament freed up the keyboard player to play in any key and to move between keys, and the listener could focus on the excitement of modulation between keys, rather than the sweetness or sourness of the relative keys. The alternative would be to stay in one key for the duration of the piece - which is pragmatic, but not exciting. Bach’s fugue in C major was written to celebrate “equal temperament” and moves exquisitely between keys, generating extraordinary harmonies, both real and implied. Conversations, which stray quite far from their metaphorical home key, should not sound “sour”. Therefore we can focus on the words and the sounds of the argument without being distracted by out-of-tune harmonies and clashing resonances caused by the technicalities of the instrument.

Bach’s Fugue in C major is quite short, at twenty-seven bars long (Giraud et al., 2012), is well-regarded, and a performance by Karen Rosenak of the piece can be found online within *The Art of Fugue: Bach Fugues for Keyboard, 1715-1750* (Kerman, 2015). The Fugue in C major is written for four voices – alto, soprano, tenor, and bass – in *stretto* which means that the voices overlap significantly. Each

voice carries a subject – a recognisable musical motif – and that subject is answered (or repeated in canon to some extent) by other voices in turn whilst the subject is still being stated (Kerman, 2015). This methodical build-up of one line to four polyphonic voices leads to a showpiece of contrapuntal art. The short fugue has three extensions, or phases; the first establishes the home key, the second phase modulates, and the third and final emphasises the home key again (Riemann, 1890).

As a well-known piece, Bach's Fugue in C major was referred to by Dorschel (2018) during imagined conversations between philosopher Wittgenstein, composer Elisabeth Lutyens, and pianist Myra Hess. In Dorschel's script-like writing the characters mused on the seriousness of the playing of music and the playing of games. Like Dorschel's discussion, this composition also uses imagined conversations, but this game uses academic voices which follow Bach's fugue to the very end, requiring the voices, and their conversations, to resolve.

The Voices of the Fugue

The subject of this fugue, to which the voices will return frequently, is “utility in children’s musical play”, and each unique voice takes a turn to speak about this subject. As the fugue progresses, each voice has the opportunity to answer that subject, and to develop their arguments. Each voice must keep within the fugue structure. Any interjections must offer considered harmony or dissonance which reflect the harmony or dissonance of the original piece of music. Voices will overlap; tensions will arise in the arguments and, as the fugue progresses, the voices offer variations of the original subject, and return to variations of their original subject.

The four voices of this game are: Music Educators, who start the fugue, and whose voice maps on to the alto line, Scholars and Philosophers of Play whose voice maps on to the soprano line, The Chorus whose voices map on to the tenor line, and Aristotle who maps on to the bass line. For this document, each voice has been given its own font chosen from the “Lucida Palette” designed by Bigelow and Holmes (2014). Bigelow and Holmes called the family of fonts “Lucida” because they were designed to be “lucid”, clear, and easy to understand even in low resolution. Divertingly, The Chorus use the font called “Lucida Console” which is the font used in computing’s “Blue Screen of Death”. Their potentially disruptive influence is welcome.

Scholars and philosophers of play – Shortened to Scholars of Play (font Lucida Fax)

The voices of scholars and philosophers of play who are represented here are academics, practitioners and philosophers with an interest in the activity which is human and non-human play. Their voices are both academically relatively recent, and are culturally ancient, originating in Northern Europe, North America, and Australia, and in Ancient Greek, and Ayurvedic texts.

Music Educators and Researchers of Young Children – Shortened to Music Educators (font Lucida Sans Unicode)

Scholars of musical play are those who have an interest in supporting the musical play of young children. The voices represented here are music educators, researchers of young children's development and care, and practitioners working with young children. Their voices are academic, relatively recent, and originate from the United Kingdom, Northern Europe, North America, and Australia.

The Chorus of Sophocles – Shortened to The Chorus (denoted by font Lucida Console)

The third voice of the composition is inspired by a Greek Chorus, and is the voice of possibility. Their role is to introduce new ideas, challenge the other voices, and to represent the ideal spectator, or the ideal listener. The chorus of a Greek tragedy comprises many voices. Aristotle

stated that “the Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, in the manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles” (Aristotle, 1974). According to Kirkwood, Sophocles’ Chorus was dramatic, coherent, and was used to carry forward, or to introduce, thematic or emotional elements essential to the action (Kirkwood, 1954). Therefore the intention of a Sophocles Chorus is used here. Aristotle did not expand on the nature of the Euripidean chorus but, according to Phoutrides (1916), the Euripidean Chorus was an involved, angry or frustrated spectator “showing more flesh than reason or intellect”.

Thoughts inspired by Aristotle’s Writing – Shortened to Aristotle (font Lucida Calligraphy)

Aristotle, who lived between 384 and 322BCE, believed that a achieving a full and well-lived life required good habits, hard work, healthy interactions with fellows, and application of reason to achieve a “happy medium” between extremes. A virtuous life, he argued, is a life in pursuit of “Eudaimonia” which encompasses a good soul for oneself and for others in society. To help us achieve merely a good life, we need friends who are fun (philia) and we need friends who are useful (utility). For a virtuous life however, we need virtuous friends who lovingly challenge us and inspire us to work towards that shared, unattainable truth.

Aristotle's imagined position in the Fugue is that the qualities required for a lifelong friendship between humans would be the same as the qualities required for a lifelong friendship between a human and music⁶.

It must be stressed that nurturing a friendship with music is not Aristotle's position, but an imagined one. Aristotle, in Nicomachean Ethics Book 8 (Aristotle & Brodie, 2002), stated that a fondness of inanimate things is not a friendship.

⁶ In the Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle et al., 2002) Aristotle notes that to be musical is a making of music (Book 2), an enjoying of that making (Book 3), and a knowledge of the good and bad of music (Book 9), and an active engagement which requires work, pleasurable effort, and focus (Book 10). This ancient text rarely mentions children, because the child is not associated with excellence, because their age prevents skilled action (Book 1), and because children (and animals, and slaves), cannot make moral choices. However Aristotle knew that learning is a process that takes time (Book 7), and that the child should be constantly living according to the orders of its educator (Book 3), so careful guidance is required for the child to acquire speech, and furthermore, communicative artistry. Interestingly Aristotle quotes his mentor Plato, who claimed that “men should be trained straight from their childhood to receive pleasure and pain from proper objects” (Book 2). Virtue is therefore a struggle, and it would be wrong to give a child the impression that learning was always fun.

Figure 3.

The structure of the Fugue

	Exposition					First Extension								Second Extension				Third Extension					Coda				
Scholars of Play	Real Answer					Subject								Answer	Subject			Answer									
Music Educators	Subject					Answer	Answer			Subject		Answer		Answer							Answer						
The Chorus	Answer					Answer			Subject			Answer		Answer		Subject		Answer		Subject							
Aristotle	Subject					subject					Answer			Subject													
Bar number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27

Note. An interpretation of the 27-bar long structure of J.S. Bach’s Fugue in C major, showing the voices’ starting points, approximate durations, and points of overlap. Information about the Fugue’s structure was garnered from Motuzaite-Pinkeviciene (2010).

In this game, in this “Fugue of Utility”, the musical shape of J. S. Bach’s fugue gives structure to the arguments between Scholars and Philosophers of Play, Music Educators and Researchers of Young Children, A Chorus of Possibilities, and Aristotle, all of whom are discussing the subject of utility in children’s musical play. Complex harmonies in the fugue are represented by bickering between the participants, and moments of musical resolution reflect agreements amongst the voices. Music Educators are the first to comment, setting the stage in the home key of C major, and starting on C. The first reply is from the Scholars and Philosophers of Play (shortened here, for expediency, to Scholars of Play). The play Scholars’ answer to the Music Educators’ statement is a “Real Answer” because it is an exact transposition of the Fugue’s subject to the dominant (starting on the note G). This makes the Play Scholars’ Real Answer closely related to, yet perfectly at odds with,

the initial subject. The Chorus are next to speak, and their response starts on the same note as that of the Play Scholars, albeit an octave lower, making their initial statement both a statement of their position, and an answer to the Music Educators' Subject. Aristotle makes his first statement starting on the same note as that of the Music Educators, but an octave lower, so his statement is closely related to that of the music educators, but offered in his own, unique voice. Already there are alliances and differences, and the exposition allows for these opinions to be expressed clearly and audibly.

After the initial exposition, and during the three fugal extensions, the voices are in *stretto* as they overlap, introducing their subject matter. This multi-voice technique creates harmonies and dissonances. Of note is a perfect cadence in A minor (the relative minor of C major) towards the end of bar 13, which provokes a four-voice agreement; a feeling of tension in the harmonies and therefore the voices in bar 17; and a perfect cadence which is another moment of musical and argumentative agreement in bar 19. At the end of this short fugue is a coda which revisits thematic fragments, and brings the fugue to a satisfactory conclusion in the home key (Motuzaite-Pinkeviciene, 2010).

The aim of *Fugue! A Game of Utility* is to make audible new combinations of sounds, or even to make sensible the effect of new combinations of sounds, from a novel arrangement of the academics' published written works. The challenge is to substitute academic voices for musical voices whilst maintaining voice order, harmonic progressions, and dissonances of the original fugue.

The Exposition

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Starting at bar 1, Music Educators make a comprehensive statement of the subject of utility in musical play, which sets the tone for the Fugue:

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Music Educators: Our statement is:

“Musical play is more than useful; it is vital to the survival of human beings.”

Musical play is a complex, and useful, activity. Musical play of young children is an activity in which young children more or less freely explore and create with sound with limited guidance from a teacher (Nieuwmeijer et al., 2019). It is also when musical instruments, such as xylophones, are appropriated by children for their own diverse play purposes which may or may not coincide with the adult’s intentions (Young, 2003, p51). Musical play happens when children sing known songs and make up their own songs (Dean, 2019), even on car journeys (Koops, 2014). As Delalande and Cornara (2010) discovered, young children, when left to their own devices, play with musical instruments in a process of sound exploration via repetition and variation. Also, young children’s communication is musically rhythmic and social (Alcock, 2008).

The engagement of young children in musical play activities is widely regarded as useful. In brief, benefits include the promotion of education and general wellbeing (Gudmundsdottir, 2010; Hallam, 2015; Schellenberg, 2011), therapeutic benefits for the child (Stige et al., 2010; Pavlicevic, 1990), the child's sociability (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010), communication (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), and the mitigation of the stresses of motherhood (Barrett, 2009).

If it were not for musical play, we would not be able to play this fugue game, because we might not have survived as a species. The ethologist Ellen Dissanayake states that musicality is a “psychobiological capacity that underlies all human communication, including music” (Dissanayake, 2010). Dissanayake explained that human babies are born relatively underdeveloped because of the small pelvis necessary for a bipedal stance. The large size of the human brain, and therefore head which accommodates that brain, and the need for humans to give birth to the large-headed child via the narrow pelvis means that babies are born relatively helpless and dependent on their mother for survival. Shortly after birth, facial expressions, melodic vocal contours, and rhythmic movements are used by the baby to assist in bonding. Without that bonding, the helpless infant might not survive. These bonding “devices” employed at the root of all

human communication are characterised by patterning, repetition, elaboration, exaggeration, and manipulation of expectation (Dissanayake, 2010). These devices make the “ordinary extraordinary”. (Dissanayake, 2017). Ordinary communicative acts, because of their musicality, become extraordinary in their profundity.

Therefore playful music-making in early childhood is not “useful”, it is vital.

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Starting at bar 2: Play Scholars’ statement on the subject of utility in musical play is a “Real Answer”, to the Music Educators’ provocation...

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Scholars of Play: Our statement is:

“Utility is not the point of play because play’s output is play, not utility.”

It goes without saying that anyone of reason would wish for all children to be educated, healthy, communicative, and content, but if play is adopted by an adult with the aim of bringing about these qualities in a child through the medium of musical play, then this adult-mediated musical play is likely to be music education, therapy, or parental guidance, and not play. If an adult-determined positive change is desired for the child, then training, education, or therapy would be more

efficient routes to that goal than play. An adult can approach these tasks playfully, but the child's activity would not be "play".

Even without the influence of adults, the nature of musical play is difficult to ascertain, particularly when that play produces an effect which is judged to be reliably useful to a cause which is exterior to play. To avoid a dichotomist analysis which casts adult-determined play as productive of developmental achievement, and therefore other play as not productive or destructive, we offer Eichberg's term "aproductive" (Eichberg, 2016). We can speculate that musical play is aproductive, lying outside of the measurable, outside of the human, as part of a cosmic differential phenomenology. As humans we catch glimpses of play in music, and glimpses of music in play, no more or less than we are privileged to witness the play of kittens or the planets. Some of this play we can harness to our needs, pleasures and desires, and this is why we are discussing here the utility of musical play of young children. We must remember that play can also be cruel and painful; and Trammell (2023) argues that torture is play.

This position needs to be stated to demonstrate our growing understanding of play, not to protect play, which does not need the acknowledgment or approval of humans in order to exist. To expand on Sicart's thinking about "playthings" (2022), one could say that musical play with instruments and toys is an activity which is shaped by play for the encouragement of play. Musical play with instruments or musical toys could be one symptom of play, or a materialist technology of play.

It seems that we agree with Dissanayake (2010) that life is sustained through play. We add to that theory, that play sustains itself through play (Lester, 2018). Play sustaining itself happens to coincide with the sustaining of us. It is therefore unwise to link play, and therefore life, to a utility which is external to play. What would become of play, and life, when either is determined to be no longer useful?

Luckily, play is a slippery, plural concept which evades the confinement of simple definitions. As Sutton Smith (1997) explained, play is ambiguous, so our conversations about play are often dependent on rhetoric, akin to plausible stories, which are rooted in the play's appearance and the story that the observer of the play wishes to tell. Remember that the players of musical play, the young children playing, tend not to talk about themselves as "players" (Nome, 2019). As Nome says, the output of play is, first and foremost, more play. To extend Nome's thinking: the output of musical play might well be musical play, and nothing more.

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Starting at bar 4: The Chorus' opening statement on the subject of utility in musical play is also an answer to the Music Educators' statement, and it appears to be inspired by the Play Scholars' words.

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The Chorus: Our statement is:
"Musical play has many possibilities including utility".

The child communing with chime bars in a den, or the mother-and-baby's motherese, indicates a simple activity which hints at something infinite, ineffable, god-like, or a godly-ordered thing. When playing musically, we can speculate that humans align briefly with the infinity of music or play, and get to be with music and play for a short while. This is a remarkable feat because of the possibly infinite nature of both play and music, and of the frantic business of humans who are usually so occupied with other activities that they do not notice this alignment happening. Play, which can also be speculated about as being infinite, inevitably presents some features which can be regarded as musical. Music, which can similarly be speculated about as being infinite, inevitably presents some features which can be regarded as playful. These features might be different from the features that are regarded as musical or playful to other species. It is also inevitable that some aspects of this infinite version of the alignment of music and play will be found useful in serving the infinite needs of humans.

The good thing about thinking about musical play as an aspect of an infinite process is that we realise that we will never truly grasp the reality of play or musical play. Discussing how utility arises from musical play is our work here.

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Starting at bar 5: Drawing on his Nicomachean Ethics: Aristotle's statement on the subject of utility in musical play both supports, and moderates, the Music Educators' statement.

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Aristotle: My statement is:

“Musical play is useful, yet utility is neither its efficient nor its final cause.”

“The young live by emotion and, more than anything, pursue what is pleasant for them and what is there in front of them” (Aristotle, Rowe, & Broadie, 2002). Unfortunately, a merely philial⁷ relationship with making music will not last, because if musical play stops being “fun”, nothing remains to keep the child engaged. If the play is both fun and useful, the relationship with the play is likely to last longer. However, usefulness such as improved speech, academic attainment, language and wellbeing, whilst being beneficial to the child, are external to both music and play, and are unlikely to be lifelong motivators to the very young music student.

I suggest that early childhood is a time to establish what could be a life-long friendship with music and play, and utility alone is not the way. Utility, philia, and virtue are required for the child to form a life-long friendship with music.

⁷ "Philial" is used here to denote a type of love, specifically friendship or affection. Philia is one of the four ancient Greek words for love, alongside "storge," "agape," and "eros"

Engaging in a conversation about the utility of children's musical play already assumes a telos, a productive agency, which might not be the point of the music, or the play. It will be enlightening to consider musical play's underlying, enduring cause, or essence.

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## First Extension

Having stated the subject in their own voice and in their own terms, from bar seven, the fugue moves on to its first extension. In the music, voices start to overlap, and harmonies become “crunchy”. Aristotle has not quite finished speaking when Scholars of Play develop their initial subject in harmony with Aristotle’s words. Soon after the Scholars of Play start talking, the Chorus chips in with their ideas. Music Educators then add to what becomes a robust interchange. This first episode does not conclude musically, but at the end of this episode there is a key change in bar 13, from C major to the relative minor of A, reflecting a slight “change of gear” amongst the voices

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Scholars of Play: We agree with Aristotle’s assertion that useful play is a risky pursuit. The activity which is recognised as musical play might well be useful but musical play, in clear pursuit of an output of non-playful utility, is not play. If the adult manipulates the child’s play to control play, the adult also controls the child (Sutton-Smith, 1997). This is good for learning and child regulation, but not good for play.

The Chorus, who answer in stretto, interrupting the Scholars of Play: Like any decent omnipotent god-like thing, play has qualities (some of which we notice), and appearances (some of which are of use to humans, and surely some of which are not useful), and some qualities and appearances which are outside of our perception. Might play have its own perception of its

environment? Jakob von Uexküll (1864 – 1944) illustrated the different qualities of a stone on a path by its path quality, its “weg-ton” or, if the stone becomes airborne, its throw quality, its “wurf-ton” (Uexküll,2001). Of course, the stone that persists on the path, or lands in the long grass, or which maims an animal, remains the same stone, with different qualities such as path-stone, landscape-stone, or death-stone, where some of these qualities are not determined by a human. What is so for the stone is also so for play.

We hear what Aristotle says, and extend his thoughts beyond friendship with music. It seems that musical play has “utility-ton”, and a musical-ton, and a play-ton, and an infinite variety of “tons” or qualities. It is also inevitable that there will be those who wish to protect the qualities of play that they find of interest or use, and promote these in their take on play.

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Scholars of play are still speaking about the appearance of play which is thought to be beneficial, and are interrupted several times...

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Scholars of Play: There are problems associated with attempting to establish the benefits of play. If we are to play along with the idea of many “tons” or qualities of play which are educational or developmental qualities, then play will fall away to insignificance. Additionally, as Beunderman (2010) indicates, there are problems correlating play with benefits. Play is slippery because it is characterised by complex, causal

relationships, so it is hard to develop longitudinal studies of a play activity which changes and develops as the child grows. Yet, play is beneficial for the child. Beunderman summarises, and cites (see Beunderman, 2010, p5-6), that play's benefits include a child's better physical and mental health, improved learning, community's cohesion, and the child's enhanced understanding of their environment. Importantly, play is fundamental to a child's enjoyment of their life. If play is accepted as generally beneficial, and the variable is access to play, then play provision should be judged on whether it allows children to play, rather than on instrumental outcomes (Lester & Russell, 2008).

Uexküll's (1982) prescient thoughts about the qualities of the stone on the path suggest that the stone's qualities are contextual, not neutral, and are not limited to those perceptible by humans. His stone example was a gentle introduction to the idea of the *Umwelt*, the subjective universe or, rather, the countless *Umwelts* upon which nature plays its symphony of meaning.

Later on in his book, Uexküll uses the metaphor of a musical instrument keyboard on which "nature plays its symphony of meaning, which is not constrained by space and time". He says that in our lifetime, and in our *Umwelt*, our own subjective universe, our task is to construct a key [set of unique properties] on that keyboard, over which an invisible hand glides (Uexküll, 1982). In other words if, as Uexküll says, "flowers, animals, and people, are but symbols of an all-encompassing symphony or composition of nature, which ranks all things according to their significance and meaning" (Uexküll, 1982, p78), then this organisation,

this composition, is *at play*. Flowers, animals, and people, are at play.
Everything is at play. Even play is at play.

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The Chorus talks over the Scholars of Play...

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The Chorus: Play is therefore in the eye of the appraiser of that play? whether a state of affairs which is thought to have been brought about by play is useful or not, is also in the eye of the appraiser. We thought that play existed merely for our pleasure, excitement, curiosity, bewilderment, entertainment, entrainment, development, and guidance, but we are happy to learn.

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Scholars of Play continue with their subject throughout the First Extension, despite the interruptions.

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Scholars of Play: There are, without doubt, applications for play, but these applications are not play intentions. As Marks-Tarlow states; play suffuses the brains, bodies, feelings, and minds of mammals, and play emerges spontaneously and intuitively across all psychotherapeutic modalities (2015, p271). Play is “radiant” and memory-invoking, and “play events commonly represent rhythmic intercessions in the way

people think about their lives” (Henricks, 2002), because play does not live only in the moment, but stretches across our lives as play itself, and as something else (Henricks, 2002).

However, there are clear differences between play organised to encourage behaviours which meet the goals of, say, a school curriculum, and the play which is largely determined by, and directed by, the child. We say “largely” because, as Pringle’s (1985) writing elucidates, the child can only choose to play with the toys which are placed in front of them, and these toys are usually chosen by adults. Of course, given the chance, the child will play with things which are not deemed to be toys at all, or by what is available to hand.

Aristotle: As I said previously, the young live by emotion and more than anything pursue what is pleasant for them and what is in front of them. As they age, that which is pleasant changes quickly (Aristotle et al. 2002).

The Chorus: Our concern is with young children’s musical play, and our noticing of that play, and our tendency to find utility in that play. Music, as in the melody, harmony, and rhythm within children’s play, is intimately linked to play, and it is likely to be always present in that play, becoming periodically audible and visible during that play. Music holds the play in an aesthetic, sensuous, felt realm in time for as long as is required by the child. Play and music can be constantly and intimately linked, but only in momentary steady play states does music emerge noticeably to hold that moment

in equilibrium before play disrupts and disequilibrates (Marks-Tarlow, 2010), and moves the moment on. Musical play is not always constant experimentation and noise, there are patterns and moments of activity which appear systematic.

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Scholars of Play respond with a key point; that play is complex, and that a narrow understanding, even of one aspect of it, comes with risks.

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Scholars of Play: The understanding of musical play that we have acquired to date has been largely derived from observations of children by adults (Barnett & Owens, 2015) with an adult-biased agenda. Indeed, the majority of the examples given by our Music Educator colleagues are the result of children's musical play being observed by adults, in adult-organised spaces, often in pursuit of adult-oriented goals.

Play is recognised as a universal right of all children, as outlined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2013), which states that children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. The International Play Association interprets children's play as "any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves", and that play is "non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end" (IPA, 2013). Children's musical play could be interpreted as joining in with cultural, artistic, or recreational behaviours within the spirit of Article 31 and, as such, is

somewhat reliant on adult influence. This reliance on the adult, and the influence of the adult in a child's musical play is a category-defining characteristic of the play.

Adults' culturally-, and artistically-informed demonstrative actions and observations may well ignore, limit or prohibit the more challenging, 'transgressive' aspects of children's play (Cowan, 2020). The adult-constructed space in which the children are active, and the adult-chosen tools that the children have at their disposal, will affect the child's movements. Also, the children's bodies have a history which they bring to the play. It is not clear that the adult observing musical play is observing "musical play", or the "connections and co-creations between the body, its internal processes, and its highly organised playground" (Mulder, 2021).

As Kushner (2015) points out, the tension between the self-determined nature of children's play and the essentialist purpose of school, or a desire for the child's development for that matter, does not mean that any understanding of play needs to be abandoned. We do, however, need to develop a better understanding of the play of musical play. Not only is there a risk of play's nature being subsumed into utility and education, there is also the risk that we miss out knowing about an aspect of play, in musical play, that no-one has noticed before.

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The Music Educators' first answer in this First Extension, from bar 9, defends the child's initiative in musical play.

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Music Educators: We are aligning the musical play of the young child with the concept of “musicking” (Small, 1998). Musicking incorporates all musical activity – composing, performing, listening to recorded music, and “singing in the shower” – as action which explores and celebrates relationships that constitute the human identity. Musicking, according to Small (1998, p221), affirms, explores, and celebrates the integrity of the person because musicking gives us a tool with which we can articulate real concepts of ideal relationships, and reconcile contradictions. Musicking is about the exploration of music-making rather than the performance, and the consideration of what happens between those who are exploring the music (Schei & Eriksen Ødergaard, 2020). Being about exploration, musicking depends on curiosity. Children’s musicality “is embedded in, and becomes apparent in the action of exploration when children exclusively reveal their affiliation with that which they find meaningful” (Schei & Eriksen Ødergaard, 2020, p. 171).

Scholars of Play: Small’s (1998) concept of musicking was derived from Bateson’s work on metacommunication. Bateson examined the idea of metacommunication in his chapter “A Theory of Play and Fantasy” (Bateson, 1987), stating that the vast majority of both metalinguistic and metacommunicative messages remain implicit. Bateson asked the question “is this play?” and Small was asking “is this music?”. Palmer,

Burnard, and Burke (2024) took the idea further, suggesting that play is enacted through musicking, and coined the term “musicking-as-play” to recognise the play force that manifests with, and in, music performances. Not only do these authors acknowledge the materiality and relationality of active musical play, they also identify the “transgressionality” which is fundamental to play, and musical play.

Music Educators: Whilst the word “musicking” has gained traction in early childhood music education, the word “musike” has, disappointingly, not. Alcock (2008), in an article exploring the rhythmic and social nature of young children’s communication in an early childhood setting in New Zealand, utilised the ancient Greek word “musike” to encompass the temporal acts of poetry, drama, dance, and music that mediated the play of the young children she observed. Indeed the rhythmical, playful communication that was observed was viewed as connecting play, culture, and musike, with musike representing the underlying pulse or rhythm which allows time and movement to be experienced aesthetically. Alcock observed that children empowered themselves as a group to communicate, have fun, and to express ideas imaginatively and aesthetically, with rhythm created through body movement being a critical mediating factor in the success of the enjoyment. Whilst the Greek word musike combines the temporal arts of dance, drama, music, poetry and song, Alcock claims that from a pragmatic

perspective, a pedagogical awareness of rhythm in musike, and all the arts, facilitates access for teachers and children to social communication and culture.

The child at musical play is musicking with musike.

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In this first extension, Aristotle is still contemplating the subject of the fugue. From the end of bar 10 his voice is responsible for new harmonies amongst the other voices.

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Aristotle: As I stated in the Exposition of this Fugue, early childhood is a time to establish what could be a lifelong friendship with music, and with play. This friendship has the potential to be useful, pleasant, and virtuous. I also stated that to focus on one aspect of musical play, such as its appearance of usefulness in the child's socialisation, is not the way to attain friendship with either play, or music.

Friendship is a kind of excellence, or goes along with excellence and, furthermore, is very necessary for living (Aristotle et al, 2002). A good friendship is reciprocal, with each wishing well of the other for

their own sake. A good friendship has mutual awareness since it is founded in the three lovable qualities [of utility, philía, and virtue], and the loved friend is “another self” – allos autos/heteros autos.

The Chorus: So to encourage a child towards a lifelong relationship with music a friendship approach, which encompasses usefulness, fun, and excellence, should work.

You also said that the word friendship does not apply to the loving of inanimate objects, for if there is no reciprocal loving, there is no wishing for the other’s good (Aristotle, et al., 2002).

Aristotle: Indeed. Notice that I added that to focus on one aspect of musical play, such as its appearance of usefulness in the child’s socialisation, is not the way to attain a lifelong friendship with music. The appearance of musical play, specifically its appearance of utility, is under discussion here. The appearance of musical play is not the whole being of musical play, and the appearance of a friend is not the whole being of a friend. Lovable qualities such as utility, philía, and virtue are useful indicators of a good friendship yet they are not the friendship. One should treat music and play in the manner that one should treat oneself, and involve oneself in one’s own actualisation, one’s own energeía (Kim, 2018), and one should recognise that energeía in the actualisation of musical play. Maybe the idea of another self helps here (heteros autos/allos autos). One treats a friend

as one treats oneself, and one treats music and play as one treats oneself.

Music Educators: Musical play is useful, pleasurable, and also virtuous. We have outlined the useful, the child's involvement indicates pleasure, and it is the responsibility of the music educator to encourage the virtuous. Musical play should have care and consideration of artistry. Musical play is not about uncaring, irrelevant reproduction (Regelski , 2005). Musical play is musical and, in order to treat the musical part of musical play with due respect, musical skills are required, and one acquires those skills through a playful music education with a caring, playful, and knowledgeable partner.

Musical play has long-established links with music education. Kodály , the Hungarian composer and pedagogue, stated “[it is] while at play, that children will learn” (Campbell & Alvarez, 1990). The Kodály approach is an heuristic mode of learning, using children's songs created by the child, or songs sung for the child, as the foundation for musical appreciation and understanding. Children's games, songs and dances are utilised to provide musical experiences rooted in traditional customs and social– historical events (Forrai & Sinor, 1990).

The Chorus: The use of adult-led songs for adult-desired behaviour is arguably the utilitarian nature of music which is exploited by governments and music professionals (Hallam, 2010;2015), and critiqued by Henley (2020). Henley summed up her position with “At the end of the day, music does not transform people. People – including the self – transform people” (Henley, 2020).

Aristotle: In Metaphysics: Socrates neither “comes to be” absolutely when he comes to be beautiful or musical, nor “ceases to be” when loses these characteristics, because the substratum, Socrates himself, remains (Aristotle & Ross, 1908). In the same way, musical play is more than its appearances or its effects.

Scholars of Play: Music education controls the music of musical play. But the articulation of musical play, the musike of play, is to be found in the performance of that play. The performance of that play - what the play looks like, even if what we are looking at and listening to is complex, and emergent - is merely a small part of what the play is, and does not reliably define that play. In his book *The Ambiguity of Play* Sutton-Smith (1997) tackled the difficulty of defining play by suggesting that play’s ambiguity should be acknowledged, and that play can be usefully viewed from the perspective of a minimum of seven different rhetorics, each of which serve to emphasise aspects of play: Play as progress, Play as fate, Play as power, Play as identity, Play as imaginary, Play as the self, and Play as frivolous. Of course, play as progress is the play form under examination here, with musical play being, as you say,

very useful to a child's development and socialisation, amongst other benefits.

Music Educators: Play as progress, fate, power, identity, imaginary, self, and as a frivolous activity. We recognise all of those qualities in musical play.

What of play as an unfolding? German pedagogue, and founder of the Kindergarten, Friedrich Froebel's (1782–1852) principle that early childhood is important and should be valued as it is, and not seen as accelerating towards the next phase of development (Pitt, 2024). Today this way of thinking still feels quite radical. In the nineteenth century Froebel called the Kindergarten "the free republic of childhood" – a sentiment which probably contributed to the closure of the kindergarten shortly after his death by Prussian authorities in 1860 (Weston, 1998).

Scholars of Play: Sutton Smith argued that biologically, play's function is to "reinforce the organism's variability in the face of rigidifications of successful adaptation" (Sutton Smith, 1997, p231), which he wryly observed was another expression of progress. This is play shaking things up when life becomes too comfortable and easy. Sutton Smith also suggested that play is a "lifelong simulation of the key neonatal characteristics of unrealistic optimism, egocentricity, and reactivity" (Sutton Smith, 1997, p231). Play is more about ongoing adaptability, than its taxonomical characteristics at one stage of life.

The Chorus: Talking of ongoing adaptability, the Music Educators mention Froebel who, as well as being a pedagogue, was a person formed by his curiosity. Whilst at University, Froebel's tutors and colleagues strove to apply an atomistic approach to the unveiling of an underlying logic to the structure of crystals - Haüy's "molécule intégrante" (Kahr, 2004). Froebel took a different approach which included an holistic, dynamic view of axes of symmetry and nesting polyhedra. Froebel recognised "a very remarkable analogy between the development of crystalline forms in nature and that of human intelligence and feeling" (Kahr, 2004). He continued: "like the world of intellect and feeling, the world of crystalline forms is a glorious and instructive world. It shows in outward guise what in the former realm lies open only to the spiritual realm" (Froebel, 1898, in Kahr, 2004).

we find it delightful that Froebel looked to crystal development and structure to facilitate his understanding of child learning and development. The approach is akin to ours, in which we look at the musical developments and structure of a fugue to facilitate the understanding of musical play!

Aristotle.: We must remember that we are, so far, only discussing the useful appearance of musical play.

Music Educators: Before we move on, let us outline what is understood to be musical play's appearance: musical play is movement of the body. Observing young children's musical play with assorted musical instruments

Gluschankof (2002), working in Israel, asserted that movement and gesture were driving and decisive forces behind kindergarteners' instrument playing. Young (2008) in England, observing children at free play with Orff xylophones, recognised that children's gestures during musical play were governed by the child's physiology and movement vocabulary, and the musical instrument's play potential. Slowing down videographic data of the children playing together musically, Young revealed underlying forms of temporal organisation and in-the-moment adaptation in the play.

Scholars of Play: These children, immersed in their activity, might well be in flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Music Educators: Custodero (2011) noticed observable indicators of flow in music-making activities amongst infants. These indicators included features of self-assignment, self-correction, deliberate gesture and development of that gesture within the activity.

Aristotle:: Musical play is an activity. There are two categories of activity: kīnēsis and energeia (Hurka & Tasioulas, 2006). Kīnēsis is movement towards a goal, maybe a valued and useful one. Energeia is the activity of "being at work", and can be thought of as being internal to such an activity. Energeia has no discernible goal, and has

no aim because it is the state of something already in action - it is the source of the modern word “energy”. In order to move forward - to employ kinesis - in our deliberations, we could entertain the idea that children’s musical play can be both kinesis and energeia, depending on who is looking. This is what Hurka calls “a modern response” to the problem of whether an activity like musical play is telic or autotelic, or play, or something else.

Kinesis, being a movement towards a goal, determines the nature of the goal because the end-state value of a process is derived from the process that was designed to attain that end-state. Whilst Hurka suggests that this approach sidelines the value of process, it is clear that no-one becomes a good pianist by never playing a piano, so a kinesis towards a specific goal is a necessary part of becoming a piano-player of any skill and, similarly, someone who plays musically needs to engage in playing musically if they have any wish to become adept at playing musically. There are many opportunities to learn to hate playing the piano, or to hate playing musically, along this journey, so the quality of the process, the energeia, that leads to the end state is of vital importance to the would-be friend of music.

Music Educators: To continue with musical play’s appearance: it is the case that the majority of the influential research of children’s musical play has

been conducted in highly organised preschool settings. Our feeling is that the child plays in that setting, even if the setting is organised and planned by the adult.

Musical play initiated by the child's curiosity was researched by Delalande and Cornara (2010). They observed children's exploratory sound-making play, finding parallels between the three main forms of play studied by Piaget (1951/2007), as in sensorimotor play, symbolic play and play with rules, and the musical behaviours of a suckling infant. In addition, when observing young children's playful musical behaviours, they recalled Piagetian theory, specifically the circularity of sensory motor behaviours such as gesture leading to pleasure or interest and curiosity which causes the child to repeat the action. After a certain age (about seven months), the child introduces variation to the initial gesture in order to maintain interest. Returning to the rhythmically "musical" suckling of an infant; the telos of suckling is satiation. The telos of circulatory, sensory motor behaviours noticed in curiosity-driven musical play might also be satiation, but they are also pleasurable.

Musical play is a play form which arises from curiosity, features identifiable use of gesture, and is pleasurable to the child.

Aristotle: The rhythmic suckling, the satiation, and the noticing of particular gestures associated with play prior to satiation indicate that the continuum of musical play is divisible (Aristotle & Kenny, 2011). In every divisible continuum there exists excess, deficiency, and a mean which might be relative to each other, or relative to us.

Within this mean contraries eliminate each other, indicating that moral virtue is a kind of middle state. Even though we are playing a game of utility here, and not virtue, we have a moral imperative to act with virtue. The middle state, the in-between state of children's musical play, is one in-between two extremes such as useful and destructive, boredom and excitement, hunger and satiation.

Musical play occurs "in medias res" – in the middle of events - and it is sustained by an internal existence as well as an external telos.

Scholars of Play: Play, musical or otherwise, occurs *in media res*.

However, play does not always satiate. Eberle wrote that play is "an ancient, 'emergent' process driven by pleasure that strengthens our muscles, instructs our social skills, tempers and deepens our positive emotions, and enables a state of balance that leaves us poised to play some more" (Eberle, 2015, p500). Hunger is satiated by food, but the player is likely to be exhausted long before play is satiated.

There is no reason to believe that play results in behaviour that is classified as positive or useful by the psychologist or carer. Indeed, play has an important role to play in disruption: from Caillois' whirlpool-like *ilinx* (Caillois, 2001) to Lester's remark that in play we can refute an actual, stable model of reality as the ground of life (Lester, 2018). In other words, play is not the activity to use to define anything, including play. This is unusual, in that one would use mathematics to defend a mathematical theory, but play is not in the business of defending its existence, largely because play is never complete. Games might end with a clear winner, but the will to play more is not extinguished at the end of the game.

Play occurs *in media res*, but play does not have a middle because it does not have a beginning or an end.

The Chorus: It seems that the purpose of play is not necessarily what play is. To act with a purpose will lack serendipity and the meandering curiosity of what we know to be play. Yet we have different types of play (Hughes, 2002) such as communication play, fantasy play, mastery play and so on. The end point of the play – the *telos* – might align with the play's intention. Scholars of play also look at the multi-layered "archaeology" (Stocker, 1981) of intentions that the play comes "out of" to determine what sort of play might be occurring.

we remain in the middle: Play's purpose is no more than for the play to exist, and musical play is useful.

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### Perfect Cadence A minor – relative minor

At bar 13, there is a key change, from C major to the relative minor of A, reflecting a slight “change of gear” amongst the voices.

Up to this point, the voices established that musical play is not merely useful, but vital for the survival of humans, that utility is not the purpose of play, that playfulness is linked to curiosity, and that a lifelong friendship with music is virtuous. There was agreement that play, and musical play, is an activity identifiable by its gestures, and it might be a middle part of a continuum.

In the second extension of this Fugue, the four voices talk over one another. Musically, the harmonies become “crunchy” and, around bar 17, there is a feeling of suspended “stuckness” immediately prior to the third, and final, extension. In the second extension, the voices discuss musical play’s appearance of utility, and adults’ tendency to divert play towards utility. The tension regarding telos, the purpose, of play persists until the conversation is revived when Aristotle suggests examining the causes of utility in musical play. This unpromising interrogation leads to some surprisingly profound thoughts.

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Second Extension

From bar 14, the Music Educators repeat their initial subject matter, and swiftly develop this in a novel direction. The Chorus and Scholars of Play answer in *stretto*, with overlapping voices, before Aristotle joins in the discussion.

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**Music Educators:** Musical play is useful to the child. Marsh (2017)

recognised musical play and games from the home played out as playground games to be an essential part of the successful resettlement of young refugees. The ability to find a utility in musical play which is quite remote from music and play is not the fault of music and play.

**The Chorus:** worthy examples of musical play's utility do indeed build a picture of usefulness emerging from a complex phenomenon. However, there appears to be no simple answer to the question "what is musical play's utility?" because musical play's utility appears to be plural, and diverse. We could interrogate, or celebrate, one purpose of musical play, and the resulting data might be useful and succinct, however it is far more interesting to accept many viewpoints on the purpose of musical play, listening out for interesting harmonies and dissonances. It takes more than one note to make a melody, and more than one sound to make a rhythm. It is likely to take more than one point of view to arrive at an interesting take on the utility of musical play.

**Music Educators:** We are simply noticing what musical play looks like when we see it. The play is noticeable because of the child’s use of repetition, or rhythm, or melody in their play. Musical behaviours in musical play have been highlighted as particular gestures as previously mentioned, and also as “vocal behaviours to comfort and entertain self” (Custodero, Calì, Diaz–Donoso, 2016), and “sound discovery” (Peñalba et al., 2020; Dansereau, 2015). Sometimes the play is distinctly musical (Barrett, 2009), and sometimes it is just “certain sounds and combinations of sounds” (Kokkinaki et al., 2017). In themselves, these activities are not obviously useful. Musical play can have a “floating intentionality” (Cross, 2014), which is akin to ambiguity.

**The Chorus:** Play happens, sometimes, in the middle of music.

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At bar 15, Aristotle answers robustly to the Music Educators, stating the following:

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*Aristotle: Play is part of a poesis, a making-with what is there.*

**Scholars of Play:** A making-with with no telos. Play is voluntary and separate from material consequence (Huizinga, 1950), or free, uncertain

and unproductive (Caillois, 2001), or an intrinsically-motivated process, not product (Johnson, Christie, Yawkey (1999). “Purposefulness” makes some theorists question the playfulness of musical play. A purpose, such as to be musical together, suggests intentions which are product-orientated, or a prelusory goal, as Suits might say. Musical play might well be an intrinsically valuable activity, much like Aristotle contemplating god, and a cat chasing its tail (Suits, 1977), yet musical play is more like a game. Musical play has a prelusory goal which is to achieve a state of affairs using means permitted by rules, which in this case include voluntarily moving together with recognisable rhythm, or the making of melodic sounds (Suits, 2014).

There must be some other criteria that we can use to determine whether musical play is “play”. To continue Suits’ line of logic, but applied to musical play: child-initiated musical play might be an autotelic activity. Autotelicity is a necessary part of play, but autotelicity alone is neither a sufficient nor full definition of play. Suits would maintain that the aesthetic or religious experiences that are Aristotle contemplating god, the cat chasing its tail, are “candidates for the denomination of play” but only when they are autotelic activities (Suits, 1977). The moment the activity is valued for its usefulness for some other purpose, it is no longer play.

**The Chorus:** Musical play happens, and the play is just floating there, waiting for someone, or something to notice it. But if someone or something notices it and diverts the play in a direction which is not play, then the activity ceases to be play. Unfortunately play evades definition, so it

is unclear how anyone or anything knows if the activity is play.

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The Scholars of Play, from bar 16, are operating in a slightly higher, more insistent register.

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**Scholars of Play:** Play is, indeed, a complex activity, and it is easy to lose sight of how and why we play, and therefore what form that play takes becomes complex and multivalent, or simply shrouded by telos. Sutton Smith wrote of “paradoxical signifiers” within play, which are things which are and are not what they signify. His thoughts were influenced by Gregory Bateson’s notion of metacommunication in play, that players signal “this is play” to other potential players (Bateson, 2006).

There is, however, a playfulness to play: an “underlying quality that predisposes some children to joyfully occupy themselves for hours even with the simplest of objects” (Barnett & Owens, 2015). Barnett and Owens (2015) develop this notion further, recognising, at least amongst adults, that players depend on a predisposition and an ability to “frame” and “reframe” the environment to elevate the level of enjoyment the play offers. Furthermore, Barnett and Owens thought that the ability to symbolize, conjecture and imagine alternatives to reframe the environment was a skill too advanced for young children.



**Music Educators** : Many would disagree with that premise, because babies do not have to be taught musically communicative skills, they are born with them (Dissanayake, 2010; Trainor & Trehub, 1998; Cirelli & Trainor, et al., 2018; Robb, 1999; Trevarthen, 2015). Traditional children's games, songs and dances have long featured in early childhood, for child entertainment, and to encourage socially-shared regulation (Zachariou & Whitebread, 2015). In a similar vein, but regarding child-led musical play, Cirelli et al. (2020) highlighted a potential link between spontaneous musical play in the home and social development, describing how singing and dancing together is highly collaborative, with implications for developing the child's social identity and emotion regulation.

**Scholars of Play:** Else (2011) recognised the child's establishment of the play frame, which is the material or non-material boundary which keeps the play intact, and the potential for subsequent flow in the child's play within that frame. The play flow can absorb the child for minutes or days, and is self-regulated with the adult, if present, outside of the play frame, unless invited in to the play frame by the child. The adult, according to Else, might "contain" the play frame, assisting the child on their way back to their play, without "adulterating" the play frame by entering into the play.

Gluschkoff's (2002) kindergarten was a play frame created by adults, and what was observed was categorised as musical play by the

musically-interested observer. Play scholar Feezell (2013) proposed that there are many types of play to be observed. The child-initiated, or play-partner-initiated, activity around sound discovery and the repetition and variation of sounds and movements (along with the responses those sounds and movements promote in the players) could be “play as behaviour or activity”; the players’ experimental and methodical exploration of making sounds could be the “play as motive, attitude or state of mind”; and “play as meaningful experience” could relate to the potential transformative experience which takes place within the “play as form or structure” that the temporal nature of music affords. We have not yet discussed whether musical play is a candidate for play as an ontologically distinctive phenomenon.

Russell (2014) discussed the difficulties regarding play’s value and meaning, particularly how play is associated with the rhetoric of progress (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Russell pointed out that research into children’s play tends to be linked with adults’ professional work with children, and the value attributed to the play becomes inextricably linked with the instrumental gains associated with the play. Russell concluded with the view that play, and progress, have become associated with adults’ emotional investment in childhood. To this extent, play, and by extension musical play, can be managed, defined, and organised towards emotionally-charged, desired outcomes.

**Music Educators:** May we reiterate that we are simply noticing what musical play looks like when we see it. The outputs of musical play are noticeable on account of the child’s use of repetition, rhythm, and melody. We can

facilitate this play by supplying equipment and an environment which encourages musical play (Peñalba et al., 2020).

**Scholars of Play:** All play is prone to “adulteration” (Sturrock & Else, 1998). Burghardt (2011) pointed out that play tends to be written about in the language of the researcher’s interest (cognitive, behavioural, psychological), which indicates how the play has been silently subsumed into the adult’s guidance.

**Music Educators:** We agree that it is difficult to place limits and boundaries to musical play, and researchers who are advocates of young children’s playful music-making would attest to, but would not necessarily agree on, the usefulness of musical play. Young (2018) remarked that the field of early childhood music is a “fragmented, complicated and energetic area of activity driven by varying aims and agendas”. Young (2016) had already pointed out that that academic writing regarding our understanding of young children’s playful music-making spans many disciplines including education, psychology, developmental psychology, phenomenology, sociology, musicology, ethnomusicology and community music, folklore, neuroscience, cultural studies, therapy and childcare.

Academic references to children's musical play can be found in academic journals that focus on early childhood studies, child development, music education, cognitive science, neuroscience, semiotics, play, therapy and psychology. Musical play is a relatively new, and exciting field of study, and neuroscientific methods (Bower et al., 2021; Huotilainen et al., 2009) and videographic methods are applied to its investigation and observation (Pitt, 2020; MacRae, 2022).

**Scholars of Play:** Musical play is an interesting area of study. Should it be considered a subject of play scholarship there could be different ways of slicing musical play up for research purposes: For example, after Eichberg (2016), one might speculate on a monistic phenomenology (all is musical play), a dichotomist phenomenology (there is musical play and non-musical play), and a differential phenomenology (the differences within musical play).

**Music Educators:** The Eichberg-inspired categories are intriguing and, as music educators, we tend to find musical play wherever we look. Small's term "musicking" (1998) touches on a monistic phenomenology of musical play. Bond (2015) used the term musicking for children's vocalizations and movements, audio recordings, chanting/intoning, playing instruments, and dialogues about music. Ruddock (2018) advocated for musicking as the basis for music education because it necessarily integrates culture and

praxis. Koops and Tate (2020) explored how musicking, in particular teacher–child interactions in early childhood classrooms, could be evaluated and promoted through the development of a family musicking framework. In short, the verb “musicking” is interesting in that it avoids the word “play” as children engage in “musicking” rather than “musical play”.

**The Chorus:** Identifying the non-play within musicking helped Palmer, Burnard, and Burke (2024) to propose the concept of “musicking-as-play” which acknowledged “the interrelationship of materiality, relationality, and transgressionality” within musicking. Musicking-as play allows for instruments, bodies, and music to be played, and that music is a crystallisation of the play force, although it is not currently understood as such.

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About half way through this short second extension, the voices sound rather “stuck”.

In bar 17, Aristotle’s voice in the bass takes on the subject again, but starts on a different note, in a manner which challenges all the other voices. The result is an exquisite tangle of melodies which produces some surprising harmonies.

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***Aristotle:** The subject of this fugue is Musical play and Utility. We think we do not have knowledge of a thing until we have grasped its “why”, that is to say, its cause (Aristotle, 1929). If our question is “why is musical play useful?” the answer would begin with the word “because”. Hocutt (1974) made an excellent point: that the translated word “because” from the Ancient Greek “hoti” is unsatisfactory on account of “because” being inherently teleological in its nature. This might lead people to think that all causes are final and efficient – and this is not the case. A more accurate translation of the ancient Greek “because”, or “hoti” would be “that, “in that”, “since”, or “for”. Answering “why is musical play useful ?” with responses of “because” has brought us to this point. Let us change the question. Let us methodically consider the four causes of utility in musical play, and answer according to our specialisms or interest. The four causes are material, efficient, formal, and final. The material cause of something is what it is made of. The efficient cause is how it comes about through change. The formal cause is the essence of a thing, and the final cause is its purpose.*

*(1) Material cause – that out of which it is made. If one asks the question “Why is musical play useful?” an answer which considered the material cause of that utility could be “Because it is made of things which lend themselves to a useful outcome”. So I ask, by virtue*

*of what material of music, does utility inhere in musical play and, by virtue of what material of play, does utility inhere in musical play?*

**Music Educators:** Utility inheres in musical play since the material of music is rhythms and melodies. The child initiates these rhythms and melodies using available resources, and challenges themselves to sustain them. The struggle to produce a melody or a rhythm which is pleasing to the child is a process requiring many skills, the honing of which is useful to the child. Material causes of music also include the instrument, the acoustic, and sonic vibrations, so air is also a material cause of music. It is hard to limit music to material causes, because all of these things are doing “work”, which makes them into efficient causes. If one was to ask what the barest essential materials are for music-making, the answer is a body, and air. The human body is required to make, hear, and respond to musical sounds. Aside from air and a body being useful for the survival of the musical player’s body, air is required to carry the sounds the player makes.

**Play Scholars:** Play, like music-making, is also a “doing”, so “things” within play are efficient causes. There is no “raw material” of play that can be identified, harnessed, yet still maintain its identity as play, because the play becomes play “for” a predetermined purpose, an efficient cause, and becomes visible by its rhetoric (Sutton Smith, 1997).

Aside from a body, and air, and items used in play, like a spacehopper, a tree, a chess set, or a harmonium, a material cause of play – the material thing that comprises play – is “cause”. Play interrupts the invisible connections of cause and effect that shackle ordinary existence (Henricks, 2019). Therefore, for example, wonderment, curiosity, boredom, uncertainty, and belligerence are material causes of play too.

These material causes of play have a seductive attraction, a beauty and, considering the infinite interiority of play, it is reasonable to believe that some aspect of play can be diverted towards utility. Yet play is ephemeral, immaterial. Play, in itself, is not material or materially useful. Play can contribute to product development and national exports of games and toys, but play itself has no product. As Eichberg (2016, p. 105) says: “The playing human being moves outside the categories of productive and unproductive. Play is aproductive”.

**The Chorus:** Play does not just produce itself. Play, like musical play, is temporal. Play either takes time in order to happen or, because play is separate from ordinary, everyday life, play makes time in order to happen. Following on from that: musical play makes rhythmical, melodic time, both of which qualities allow us to notice the time that is being made. We could say that time is the material cause of music, but what if music is the material cause of time? If play is the material cause of time, play is not aproductive, and play does not only produce play, it produces play-time too.



*Aristotle: Question two: Efficient cause - how useful change comes about: How does music facilitate useful change, and how does play facilitate useful change? So I ask, by virtue of what efficient cause of music, does utility inhere in musical play and, by virtue of what efficient cause of play, does utility inhere in musical play?*

**Music Educators:** An efficient cause of play is how the player plays with music's patterning, and how the player plays with repetition, elaboration, exaggeration, and manipulation of expectation. Spoken about in that way, musical play is a patterned call and response with the world, and with the whole living experience. This movement, and these moments contribute to the efficient cause of the ensuing utility.

**Play Scholars:** Play is both a catalyst and an inhibitor, so it is not a reliable efficient cause. There are far more efficient causes of necessary change. Music can be a part of play, but play recedes when utility advances. However, both music and play can make bodies move together, can affect large crowds, can help time to be passed pleasurably, and can question and disrupt. Play's efficient cause is related to how play is a "cause". In order to be a cause it has to be in relation to the rest of the world. A Juul explains (Juul, 2008), to play a game is not to step outside of the world and into a separate, magic, realm. To play is to recognise salient differences between play and the

activity in the surrounding context, to cross an imperfect boundary which is fully contiguous with life.

**The Chorus:** We used to think that play is the efficient cause of musical learning in early childhood. The child plays, which is a natural activity for the child, and the child gathers skills and repertoire as they play. We then understood that the adult organising play such as this is a music educator organising musical learning which happens to resemble a playful activity, but the activity is not “play”. Now we think that a child at musical play is being enveloped in patterning, and in time, in a magic realm. What was quite simple has now become esoteric, and marvellous, and we are not entirely sure what play, music, or “useful” means any more.

*Aristotle: Question three - Formal cause - the essence of a thing: By virtue of what essence of music does utility adhere in musical play, and by virtue of what essence of play does utility adhere in musical play?*

**Music Educators:** The relationships between sounds are the essence of music. Therefore the interplay of relationships of sounds is the formal cause of utility in music.

**Play Scholars:** An active being, or an active ontologising, or maybe an active making-with, is an essence-like, formal, cause of play. Play is the

autotelic (self-creating) system which vicariously affects a child's movements, and maintains their being separate to an everyday reality. The boundary between the real world and the play world, akin to Huizinga's "Magic Circle" (1950) is permeable, like a porous membrane (Castronova, 2007) in that the real world can be found on either side of the play-circle-membrane, and play can happen in the real world. Different rules and expectations apply within the play membrane, and this environment is protected by the players.

The essence of play and games can be instrumentalised, or at least introduced in a highly controlled way to improve children's behaviour in learning environments (White et al., 2017; Christie and Johnsen, 1983), and games can be designed with certain ethics in mind (Sicart, 2009). There is a "middle way", as DeKoven succinctly puts it: "[T]here is a mastery that comes about in the harmony that is created between purpose and purposelessness. This is the game well played" (DeKoven, 2013, p. 143)

The game well-played is seductive, as gamblers fully know. Fink (2023), when discussing fashion said:

[...] beauty is the greatest seductive power on this earth—the beauty in all things, in natural landscapes, and in human cities, the beauty of artworks, and the beauty of human bodies and the clothes that cover these bodies and allow them to shine through.  
(p. 7)

A similar argument can be made for musical play as a combined, constructed, cultured game-well-played, which is conserved by many to be beautiful, and seductive. To answer the question: musical play is

useful because it seduces with the beauty of a well-played game. Beware of attempting to locate the essence of play. Indeterminacy is valuable as a safeguard against corporate takeover (Malaby, 2009)

**The Chorus:** Liberated from a utilitarian view of musical play, we think that a feeling of “truthiness” is a formal cause of music, and play, and we wish to explore the possibilities of this feeling. A child’s musical play is their active being with the cosmos. A liberation, yet there is no simple truth to be revealed in that liberation. Play for health, wellbeing, learning, or for control of the child is a highly processed version of play, only distantly related to play. It is unlikely that the addition of play, the existence of which is not dependent on its usefulness, renders music useful. This is not to say that play is not useful, it is to say that play plays with possibilities, therefore it is possible that play is useful, and it is possible that play is not useful. Materials of Play cause utility to exist in musical play because we make it so, and because we need its utility. Musical play appears to be fun for most, and it appears to be useful.

To paraphrase Morton (2013a), musical play has a particular “contour” to its material and immaterial shape. This contour meets both physically and vicariously with other, receptive shapes. Some of that meeting results in changes of shape or contour over time of musical play and of music, and of the musical player.

*Aristotle: Question four - Final cause - the telos, or purpose of something: By virtue of what purpose of music does utility inhere in musical play, and by virtue of what purpose of play does utility inhere in musical play?*

**Music Educators:** Music is intentionally made by humans, so the final cause of music is musicking. The utility comes about in the activities working towards this telos. Similarly for play; the final cause of play is play. The utility comes about in the activities working towards this telos: in the making.

**Play Scholars:** Play plays play. The telos of play is play. Play has many appearances, including one of utility. Play is not useful until a use is found for it. A final cause of utility is one which has been imposed on play. One could learn something during play by pure chance, because chance events lack final causes.

**The Chorus:** Music and play exist together in musical play. They nourish each other, and the reality of music and play “leaks out”.

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Third Extension

The Third Extension, starting at bar 19, is led by the chorus.

The other voices interject during a very lively discussion which reaches a clear conclusion - a C major chord at bar 24. After this pause for breath, the voices become exceedingly excited, and finally end the piece on a moment of clarity.

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**The Chorus:** Let us talk about systems. Discussion of causes led us to use terms like “making with”. Let us explore musical play as a dynamic system. Being curious, and inspired by Froebel’s foray into physical science, we shall consider the Belousov-Zhabotinsky (BZ) reaction. It is an example of an oscillating chemical reaction. Free radicals interacting with products of the ongoing reaction cause swirling, repeating colours to rhythmically flash in the beaker, until the mixture is “spent”. The reaction is rhythmical to a musician, alluring to an artist, and a bit of diverting fun, to a chemist <sup>8</sup>.

The Belousov-Zhabotinsky reaction is an example of non-equilibrium thermodynamics with rhythm, and that is why we are

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<sup>8</sup> I researched the Belousov reaction when studying to be a Licentiate of the Royal Institute of Chemistry. Altering the reaction’s recipe, I developed novel cyclical reactions which flashed light, oscillated in temperature, or cycled novel colours. The solutions took on a temporary, observable “life”.

introducing it to a discussion of musical play. The oscillating chemical reaction creates a beautiful, rhythmical spiral patterns on its surface or, if the cocktail of reactants is continuously stirred, brief flashes of colours. One is witnessing a self-organising system which is quite robust to perturbation, in that the system generates the substances it requires to persist, with minor loss, until eventually the reactive substances are spent (for a thorough introduction, see Straub, 2024). The chemical reaction appears over time to be robustly self-sufficient, yet the system ceases to operate when its reactants are spent. The reaction appears to be an eye-catchingly beautiful, imperfectly self-replicating system, swirling in a beaker.

**Music educators:** The Belousov–Zhabotinsky reaction is an interesting phenomenon on which to theorise. The reaction appears to find its own resources and its own rhythm. Children’s musical play shares these qualities in that once the play is established, the play finds its own sounds, rhythms, and energy which keeps it going. One major difference is clear though: new ideas in the form of different rhythms, ideas for lyrics, or changes of equipment or personnel, are brought in to the musical play from outside of the play, and sounds and movements “leak” visibly to the outside of the play, whilst the BZ reaction is composed of reactants placed in a glass beaker. Both the BZ reaction and children’s musical play is fascinating and alluring. Froebel spoke of nature unfolding its essence according to the laws

of the universe, and he viewed humans as part of that system of unfolding (Pitt, 2024).

**The Chorus:** Here are some more fascinating facts:

1. The BZ reaction is autocatalytic (a catalyst is a thing which increases the rate of a chemical reaction without undergoing any change itself). Autocatalysis is central to the propagation of life, and is intrinsic to many other biological processes (Bissette & Fletcher, 2013).
2. The BZ reaction has been used to test Turing's theory: that intercellular reaction-diffusion of molecules is responsible for morphogenesis, the process by which organisms, tissues, and organs develop their shape (Tompkins et al., 2014).
3. The reaction is imperfectly self-replicating, being an example of deterministic chaos, viewed as a "virtually unlimited reservoir of periodic behaviour" which can be quantitatively stabilised using a feedback algorithm (Petrov et al., 1993).
3. The BZ reaction produces alluring patterns at a pace which is convenient for observation. These patterns evolve into spiral wave chimera (see Epstein (2006) and Tang et al. (2014) for snapshots of real and potential spirals – the chimera – occurring in the BZ reaction), or "fuzzy clusters" (Wickramasinghe & Kiss, 2013) of general colour or property change.
5. Energy is lost from the BZ system and, without the addition of reactants from outside of the system, it will eventually fizzle out, or become something else.



*Aristotle: The BZ reaction is the product of a precise concoction of reactants in a glass beaker, by a chemist- observer, in a laboratory. The swirling reactants in the beaker produce an observable, dynamic rhythm. Musical play is, arguably, the product of a very particular concoction of reactants in a play space, by a child, in a safe place of playful affordances. The child, who is the sound-maker, or who is with sound-making items, assembles reactants within that play-space, and the resulting assemblage produces observable, dynamic rhythms.*

**Scholars of Play:** Two quick points: the first is about the play-space, and the second is about the items in that play-space. The first point is that any space is a play space and anything is a play thing. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 17, states that “play takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise” (UNCRC, 2013). Secondly, as Sicart explained (2022), anything can be a plaything because the ontology of the things we play with is separate from its epistemology. Anything, be it reactants in a beaker, or sound-makers in a space, are potential play things.

*Aristotle: If all it at play, some things are more at play than other things, and the organisation of the assemblage, or the concoction, is important. In “Autopoiesis: The Organization of the Living”, Maturana and Varela took care to discriminate between the autopoietic machine and the allopoietic machine (1980). The*

*autopoietic machine is homeostatic, and is a network of processes of production which both regenerates and constitutes its own network. When Maturana and Varela refer to autopoietic machines, they refer to living objects. This is in contrast to the allopoietic machine which is a non-living object, and is the result of an assemblage of distinct inputs which produces something new. Children's musical play can appear to be autopoietic. An example of this might be the two-way interplay of child and percussion instrument described by Young (2003). An example of allopoietic musical play would be a music box which has pre-cut rollers and can only play one tune and no other. The BZ reaction is an allopoietic machine with a product which appears to have temporary autopoietic properties.*

**The Chorus:** children play, chemists play, and chemical reactants play. All is play.

***Aristotle:** The BZ reaction and musical play have similarities in that they both exhibit an autopoietic-machine-like, system-like properties of cyclical, iterative *energeia* which swirls around, perpetuating itself. The Belousov-Zhabotinsky reaction “performs” its visible oscillations for an observer. Likewise, musical play’s melodies and rhythms leak out of the (non-mechanical) musical play “system”.*

*The BZ reaction differs from musical play in many ways. One is that the BZ reaction is dependent on being concocted using a particular recipe of reactants which, if deployed in a certain way, guarantee a result. Play on the other hand has no recipe, and no guarantee. One might be tempted to think that musical play is more akin to an autopoietic machine or system than an allopoietic one. Such a statement has limited application because it is the result of a comparison of chemical reactions and children's musical play using measures which were not devised for such comparison. I refer you to my statement (back in bar 15), that play is a poiesis, a making-with, which is neither autopoietic nor allopoietic. The BZ reaction has been a catalyst for a conversation about systems, and now we can leave it behind.*

**Scholars of Play:** The chemists' use of the word "chimera" for tantalising patterns within oscillating systems, and "fuzzy clusters" for instant and profound changes within those systems, have been noted. Those terms will be useful when describing play.

As Eberle notes: play is a roomy subject, broad in human experience, rich and various over time and place, and he adds that playing holds a fractal quality which leaves us poised for what comes next (Eberle, 2014). Regardless of the status of the system, the elements within the system are "at play", and one notices chimera and fuzzy clusters in play.

If play is a system then it is more like a “complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical system” (Harraway, 2016). Play is more like a “sympoiesis” (Harraway, 2016), even if it does have autopoietic qualities. Play has recursive, iterative telos which is noticeable by its tendency to reinforce players’ behaviours and their sense of mastery, and also by its tendency to frustrate and humble players (Stark, 2023). Play scholar Lester (2013) points out that players want to “affect and be affected by creating uncertainty and disturbance, and to play with the relationship between disequilibrium and balance”. Play might produce a chimera of recursive stasis, and these patterns distract and delight us. Play also produces fuzzy clusters of unpredictable changes.

**The Chorus:** Play perturbs a musical play system, and then leaves to find something more interesting to do elsewhere.

**Scholars of Play:** Fink (2016) would applaud The Chorus’ statement that all is play. Reality is not the product of purposeful efficient action, but instead reality is the result of being a co-inhabitant of the playful cosmos. Chemical reactants in a beaker, and children in a play-space, even if it is an adult-built space, respond playfully.

Children appropriate and reconfigure aspects of an adult-determined world, and a playful challenge is to test how far they can go without attracting the approbation of nearby adults (Lester, 2020). A different world is always possible, and as Lester stresses, when playing, children are engaging in an act of subversion, however soft, of “micro-political lines of flight initiated by a collective desire to break away from the play of organisation by generating emotional resonances that are life

affirming”. Lester adds that children’s micro-political acts in play can make new connections and can animate “generous ethical response-abilities”, and that provision for children’s play must offer room for children to co-create their own timespace for playing (Lester, 2020, p. 162).

Therefore, it is possible that play can appear to represent an autopoietic system, but play’s action in the world makes play part of a sympoietic system. Play is adaptable, illustrated by Henricks’ descriptions of “play as human condition, play as performance (Henricks, 2015), and Sutton Smith’s rhetoric of play as progress (Sutton Smith, 1997). Play can appear in many and diverse realms of human activity.

**The Chorus:** Let us deal with the appearance of systems. Van Gelder (1995), in his paper “What might cognition be, if not computation?” used the illustration of a watt centrifugal governor to describe a particular instance within a steady state, and this illustrative metaphor appears to work well for musical play too. The centrifugal governor spins faster as the machinery increases in speed. Centrifugal force moves the two balls outwards, arresting the governor’s speed which in turn moderates the machinery speed. Van Gelder’s interesting note was that outside of a steady state, when the centrifugal governor is shifting to accommodate the system’s change, the governor’s arm positions are intimately related to, but not representational of, the machine’s speed. However, at a steady state when the machine is operating optimally and the governor is not having to adjust, even though the governor is constantly monitoring the machinery, is the only time when the position of the governor relates in a knowable way to the rest

of the machinery. One might glance at the governor and think that it is giving us information about the machinery which it responds to and controls. This perception would be incorrect because of the lag between the machinery's movements and the governor's responsive movements and corrective action.

If the governor is moving, then the system has already changed, and the governor is moving to correct that change. The steady state is invisible, and the governor's movement alerts us to a change that has already happened in the system, and its work to maintain the steady state.

External information about a system is not information about the system, it is information that has already leaked out of the system.

Considered as a complex, responsive process, which is sensitive to being observed and interpreted, musical play might well have the appearance of an autopoietic system. Play (playfully) throws out visible or audible clues (is it a duck, a rabbit, a game, play, torture?) from the system to trick an observer into thinking that they know what sort of activity they are observing. Bateson identified these "clues" which appear in the activity of play as a metacommunication. Bateson explained that the playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite (Bateson, 2006). In other words, we know what we are looking at is play, but we cannot know what the play means to the players.

**Scholars of Play:** Aside from those external clues, and returning to the internal system, musical play's telos might be recursive, with a circular causality which is autotelic. If this is the case, then musical play, maybe within play, could be described as an autopoietic system, in line with

Feezel's (2013) notion of play being an ontologically discrete phenomenon which makes itself. Musical play is therefore not a binary of process and product. Musical play is a making-with, in that it makes-with people, instruments, rhythm, melody, cultural concepts, tunes, scales, harmonies and more. Musical play makes sounds which leak outside of itself, which is partly why we might recognise the play as musical, and that stuff which has leaked out might well be recognised as play, nourish, or might equally well destroy, the central, recursive system.

We mentioned Beunderman (2010) earlier, as a play scholar who outlined benefits of play, and the problems of foregrounding those benefits. He wrote about capturing play's value, which he pointed out was not the same as measuring play's value.

Play has intrinsic values related to the subjective, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual experience of play, instrumental values which can be seen to contribute to social or economic objectives, and institutional values, which are the processes and techniques organisations adopt as they work towards creating play opportunities (Beunderman, 2010).

Therefore, the play system, whether it is musical or not, is a nuanced affair. Any information which leaks out of the making-with system, is noticed and valued differently by the player, by the educator, by society.

Musical play is momentarily self-perpetuating, generating a product which feeds the making of more product. Musical play is a making-with.

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The Music Educators answer in *stretto*, overlapping the words of The Chorus

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**Music Educators:** As we mentioned in the prelude, an excellent example of a scholar who strove to create a self-sustaining environment for musical play which facilitated the child's interest, was the early work of Donald Pond in the Pillsbury Studies (Moorhead & Pond, 1941). Pond thought that a child's musical experience was "interrelated with his whole living experience" (Moorhead & Pond, 1941), and was interested in the child's innate capacity to create music as part of their everyday activity. When the Second World War reached the United State of America, the "wrong" sort of play – warplay – leaked out of children's play and into Pond's musical play setting. Arguably the children were playing-out, in musical ways, the interrelationships between space and power they were seeing as their country entered wartime.



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Within the overlapping voices arises a small resolution - a perfect cadence in D major.

This is technically astonishing

D major is a significant departure from the home key of C major, yet this harmonically challenging musical leap is smooth, and the resulting impression is one of dramatic, surprising coherence.

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**The Chorus:** All is play. Yet musical play is finite. Musical play has these movements and not those, and these sounds and not those.

We do not necessarily consider ourselves the sole arbiters of musical play, as it is possible that a pebble on a path perceives its own version of musical play, but we will never know. Suits said that play was depended on its context (2014), and the same is the case for music. If we plug music into Luhmann's thoughts on systems (Baraldi et al., 2021), then music is part of a system which exists because there are things which are not music. Music exists by negating that which it is not. This means that the musical environment is being distinguished on the basis of internal operations (such as negation). The music system therefore observes the distinction between itself and its environment which is a product of itself. This is paradoxical because the music system only exists within an environment which is different to it. Music has to be a self-referential system capable of observation (and negation) observing itself.

*Aristotle: To say “All is play” suggests that play is infinite, and therefore we must ask how its infinity is infinite? In *The Physics* (Aristotle, 1929), I determined that “Nature” could be defined as a principle of movement (including change of all kinds). In order to understand that movement, one must consider qualities such as continuity, infinity, place, time, and void.*

*Movement, or change, is the passage from potential to actual existence, where *a* becomes *b*. Such change requires the capacity of *a* to become *b*, and the capacity of *b* to change *a*. The capacities of the mover and the moved are required for change to be the actualisation of two potentials (*a* to *b* and *b* to *a*). The simple corollary of this is that play as a movement can influence change, and is changed by moving. To grasp this moving, consider continuity: infinity of time is derived from infinity of motion, and this is derived from its infinite divisibility. The number one is a lower limit of numerals in an infinite sequence in either direction. Play also has limits within its infinite existence.*

**Scholars of Play:** So the field of play might be infinite, but there are semi-defining boundaries, even if they are puzzle-shaped (Juul, 2008), or circular (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004), or like a membrane (Castronova, 2007).

***Aristotle:** Play has no material body. If it did it would have a “natural place” (Aristotle, 1929) or, as Morton (2022) puts it, “this movement, and not that”. However play, and music, are temporal entities, and time is unlimited. This is why play and time cannot be limited by division into parts, and play, and music, can be increased or decreased (just like a number) without limit.*

*Movement can only ever occur in relation to place, time, and void (Aristotle, 1929) where “void” is something with the appearance of nothingness, yet is a medium, because placing something in nothing requires the nothing to be something into which a thing can be placed. Conceptually, there is “nothing” outside of “everything” (Aristotle, 1929), and this nothing embraces everything, even itself. Therefore there might indeed be a limit to a cosmos, and there is no limit to the conceptual dimensions of that cosmos.*

*Here we are discussing the limits of one sort of play – the utility of musical play. It appears that there is a limit to play, because there are some activities which are not play. Because the temporality of play is infinite, there is no limit to its conceptual dimensions, even if we decide to place limits on what is play. We only get to see certain*

*parts of it at any one time, and in this way infinite play gives the impression of finitude.*

**Music Educators:** The bounded, defined aspect of musical play that we are thinking about here is useful, and it includes the child-led, curiosity-driven play with musical instruments and toys when an adult is present, but is not interfering, with the play. For example, Dansereau (2015) strove to observe child-made music-making amongst three- and four-year olds by inviting children to play with sound-producing objects such as “rain sticks, cabasas, hand drums, pairs of rhythm sticks, claves” which were presented in a box. Behaviours which did not involve the objects presented were not analysed, and musical behaviours were observed to be purposeful sound making, which was not necessarily the making of organised sounds, such as the use of rhythm or melodic motifs. Dansereau insisted that, as researchers, they were aware they were “employing an adult understanding of what the function of these objects is intended to be” (Dansereau, 2015, p. 35), but they did not communicate that adult orientation to the children. The observations took place in a school which had weekly music lessons, so the children must have been aware of the difference between playing with an object and playing music. However Dansereau used an example the pouring of sand from one cup back to another in a smooth fashion as having musical

qualities which would be missed by an observer with a narrow definition of what is musical.

**Scholars of Play:** The example of sand-pouring, as an observed musical behaviour which “leaks” out of the play, is intriguing. The sand-pouring could have been the child in the deep state of experience known as flow, which Csikszentmihalyi (2013) describes as an activity with clear goals. Flow activities offer immediate feedback, require a balance between challenge and skill, merge action and awareness, and require no significant distractions or worry of failure or self-consciousness. In flow, the sense of time becomes distorted for the player, and the activity becomes autotelic.

**Music Educators:** One can sense the satisfaction of pouring sand of just the right consistency from cup to cup (Dansereau, 2015), and we feel that this is an example of musical play as a sensual call-and-response between things. How musicians feel about their musical instruments is like how we feel about our favourite toys which co-construct knowledge and identity (Palmer, 2022). In adulthood, musicians tend to have a deeply sensual and intimate connection with their musical instruments, and any loss of, or damage to the instrument is profoundly felt.

**The Chorus:** The sensual experience of sand-pouring is implicit. The rationale behind interpreting the sand-pouring

as musical, or playful, is explicit, and a result of cognition and theorising. We could carefully study sand-pouring and could make some aspects of sand-pouring explicit, but the implicit sensual experience of sand pouring would remain unexplored. We would have sand-pouring data, and a better intuition about sand-pouring, but no implicit, sensual knowledge about the activity. Sand-pouring is more than a collection of observable qualities.

Additionally, the harder we look at anything, including sand-pouring, the more it looks like the thing we are looking for. The closer you place the sensor to the system which is being measured, the more the system is disturbed, because measurement necessarily introduces noise, which is a process called “back action” according to Ladd (2012), described in detail by Barad (2007), and indicative of behaviours of observed phenomena.

Being, like sand-pouring, and play, resists intuition, and cannot be made explicit in a reliable, “scientific”, way. Musicking resists intuition to a lesser extent, in that the presence of rhythm, melody, repetition, and exaggeration can render any action musical, but there is some form of recognisable performance in the activity. Playing also resists intuition, and again there is some form of performance in the activity which is arguably different from the musical version of the activity.

*Aristotle: Mind is not matter and matter is not mind. The organs of sense are material and are responsible for news of the material world reaching our consciousness. Mind and matter cannot be resolved into*

*each other either way (Wicksteed, 1929). There is no rift between human sensual experience and human cognitive experience.*

**The Chorus:** Our vocabulary is shifting, as Erin Manning would say, away from method and towards technique (Manning, 2023, p. 58).

**Scholars of Play:** Play, and sand pouring, is rooted in indeterminacy. Indeterminacy is prized by Malaby (2009) as a “bulwark against corporate takeover”.

**The Chorus:** We appear to be “thinking in the act” (Manning & Massumi, 2014) as in we are starting to not just describe musical play and its benefits; we are activating modalities of thought into new collaborations.

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From bar 24, the provocations of The Chorus and Scholars of Play are in *stretto*.

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**Scholars of Play:** Playworker and complexity theorist Arthur Battram suggested that playing arises at the edge of order and at the edge of chaos. He used the term ‘ludocentric’ as a descriptor of a sweet spot of playing, attained by “steering a course between the Scylla of over-regimented childcare and the Charybdis of out-of-control kids charging about so ‘freely’ that they hurt themselves and others” (Battram, 2006). Whilst chaos might be a part of musical play, it is not the part which tends to be celebrated or encouraged, to the extent that the play finds itself unplayfully near the Scylla of over-regimented childcare.

*Aristotle: Even such an indeterminate way of seeing play is problematic because it is a way of loving. Those who love each other for their uses (be they determinate or indeterminate) do not love them for themselves but insofar as some good accrues to each of them (Aristotle, Broadie, & Rowe, 2002). The researcher researching flow will find flow, the musician will find rhythm, the player will find play. The sand-pourer takes pleasure in the pouring of sand, and a young person lives by emotion, taking pleasure in the erotic, or the sensuous as opposed to the older person who pursues the beneficial over the pleasant.*



**Scholars of Play:** Possibly alluding to the adult-mediation of musical play Bob Hughes, whose writing has contributed to theories of playwork, created a taxonomy of play which does not feature “musical play” as a play type (Hughes, 2002). One might speculate that Hughes conceives of music as an example of a highly specialised activity which, like jewellery-making or candle-making, “invariably has to be supervised and taught to children” (Hughes, 2001) and he questions whether such activities which require adult supervision or, presumably, an adult to lead the play, should be in a play space, being better suited to a school environment. However, Hughes terms as “communication play” the sort of play that might be “nursery rhyme murals, music and books”. He does not specify whether the “music” in this instance is recorded music playing in the background, or a child’s made-up or reproduced song.

**Music Educators:** The example of communication play that Hughes cites as an example of a child playing with words is “Willy–bum, willy–bum, poo, poo, fart pants” (2001). Hughes does not seem to notice the carefully crafted rhythmical structure and intentional use of palilogy in this expressive example. There is nothing random in the rhythm and repetition of the words and, in all likelihood, the child used a distinctive melodic tonality as opposed to a monotone to create clear motifs.

**The Chorus:** We seem to be moving away from the notion of systems yet we are still dwelling on the appearance of musical

play, and thinking about clues that leak of the play as being indicative of that play.

what if musical play is a way of recreating a temporal map? One can recreate rhythms and songs of others to find out how the musical land lies, or one can make one's own way across the terrain. The map is cultural, and portable, and is always available to mark out time from earlier in the day, or childhood, into time now. Bruce Chatwin's 1987 book *The Songlines* (Chatwin, 2008) describes the process of language, and land, coming into existence through song within the Aboriginal Dreamtime.

Rhythms and simple tunes are tonic palimpsests. There are no original tunes because musical notes have been ordered in that way countless times before, but each time the tune is recreated it sounds unique, and has unique affect because it is received in a unique way.

**Scholars of Play:** Mapping, as a collaborative process, rather than a product is an intriguing idea. The differences of the terrain of play are indeterminate, yet mappable. Castronova (2007) observed that players enable a permeable membrane between themselves and the rest of the world, which forms a sort of shield to protect the play's fantasy. Within the membrane, certain assumptions and attitudes are required for the play and are assumed by the players. Outside the membrane is the "real world", but, as Castronova pointed out, the membrane is porous, and people cross the membrane constantly, in different directions, carrying their behavioural assumptions and attitudes with them (Castronova,

2007). The world within and without of the play become enmeshed. Any mapping of this terrain would have to be nimble.

**The Chorus:** Any mapping of the terrain of play should be nimble, and leaky. A map can be leaky. The Zuni Map Art Project community (Zuni are Native American Pueblo People native to the Zuni River valley) has attempted to embrace the totality of its own landscape ideology, replacing the “cartographic invasion of the last 500 years” with a collective effort of local artists’ individual take on an area or subset of space within the Zuni universe (Vaughan & Lee, 2019). Some images blend landscape and narrative, Western cartographic symbols, and esoteric knowledge. As Jim Enote said in an interview with Darling:

*“A map may be something we heard from our grandmother about a place. There are maps in song and in prayers. There are maps that are etched in stone and woven into textiles and painted on ceramics”*

Andrew Darling (2012).

Mapping of the terrain of play should be nimble, as in fleeting and shifting, and also beautiful. Pingle’s (1985) paper on Āyurvedic texts and Ritual reveals that ancient Indian texts describe a ritual conducted around the time of the child’s first food taking, or weaning. The child is ceremonially placed amongst a map-like arrangement of beautiful toys, and the toy that the child touches first indicates the path of their future. The child can only choose from what is presented to them by doting carers. However, the child makes a choice out of what is available, whether the

choice is a drum or a tractor, a doll or building blocks. The child's choice of toy, out of what the child's family chooses to place in front of the child is, as Pringle suggests, related to the ancient Greek consultation of deities at the local oracle. This puts us in mind of a secular, occasionalist view of play – play as god's will, or the will of the cosmos?

**Scholars of Play:** The child is an inhabitant of the cosmos, participating in the being of the cosmos in a way which Fink would describe as ungrounded and free from conditionality (Halák, 2015).

**The Chorus:** As an inhabitant of the cosmos, one can harness play for a particular purposes. An adult harnesses the will of the cosmos to get a baby's attention by singing a little song, and the young child harnesses the will of the cosmos when whiling away some time with chime bars in a den.

**Scholars of Play:** Huizinga quoted Plato in his book *Homo Ludens*: "Life must be lived as play, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing, and then a man will be able to propitiate the gods, and defend himself against his enemies and win in the contest" (Huizinga, 1950, p212). In short, play appeases the gods, and we are playthings of the gods.

**The Chorus:** Musical play, as play or not as play, is the will of the cosmos, a signal that leaks out of a system, a way of being, and a relative position.

**Music Educators:** Pinpointing a paradox in musical play, ethologist Ellen Dissanayake (2017) coined the term “artification” to explain how the somewhat musical properties, or temporal aesthetic operations, of formalisation, repetition, exaggeration, and elaboration within an impromptu exchange of mother–baby communication, contributes to the making of ordinary bodies, vocalisations, movements, and surroundings, into something extraordinary. Dissanayake recognised that artful behaviour operations are used in ritualistic practice as well as in diverse art forms, and pointed out that people “artify” things they care about, or consider important, utilising temporal aesthetic operations which perfectly convene as a paradox of the ordinary extraordinary. Dissanayake (2017) left this well-defined paradox hanging, tantalisingly. The “ordinary extraordinary” cannot be easily accounted for by “the power of play”.

**The Chorus:** we, in general, notice children’s musical play because we like to see the child choosing to play with objects we like, and making sounds which we recognise as purposeful and meaningful, and sensual, and maybe even spiritual. we, as a Chorus, start to understand that if there is a “purpose” of musical play for a child, then that purpose is likely to be play, for as long as that play is fun. Musical play is a complex activity which, if it helps, can be regarded as a type of system which “leaks” information, and this information can be taken by well-meaning adults to inform their practice of

education, welfare, or education, thereby diverting the activity away from play and towards an end which the adult thinks of as useful or desirable.

**Music Educators:** The boundaries of play are leaky, and children's musical play requires effort that might be interpreted as work. The making of sounds, movements, and rhythms that please the maker sufficiently for them to want to make the sounds again, require a certain amount of work and effort.

**Scholars of Play:** We agree that the boundaries of play are leaky, and that play requires effort and action, whether that action is: recursive, with equilibrating, disequilibrating, or fractal tendencies (Marks Tarlow, 2010), an interactive stance like Huizinga's "agon" (Huizinga, 1950), or a spiralling development (Eberle, 2014). Play motivates the child to move, and the moving child acquires skills as they move. The child learns to walk, to climb trees, ride bikes, to sing, and to play drums.

Nguyen called this sort of ongoing negotiation between doing and reflection on the act, an aesthetic striving (Nguyen, 2020). Here the negotiation is between the child at play and the objects, other people, cultures, habits, and the acoustic environment. At musical play, the child has found a way to use their environment and the objects within it to mark out their being in time, temporally and artfully, for no other reason than doing exactly that. The play, becoming briefly musical, has a recursive telos, a self-perpetuating aim, which is to maintain the play music which interacts with the ongoing melodies or rhythms.

*Aristotle: A balance of fun, usefulness, and virtuous effort are, as I said, the requirements for friendship. Musical play has to be fun and useful for the child, and the play must require effort which is recognised by the child's carers and by society.*

**The Chorus:** Musical play is a "making-with", a sympoiesis, and it seems that some children might enjoy the effort of making sounds out of, or rhythms with, the world, and that being able to control the temporality of the world feels good.

**Scholars of Play:** In lila, in play, in musical lila we are all gods playfully and unintentionally calling new worlds into being and turning existing worlds upside down. In musical play, in musical lila, we make and break worlds.

**Music Educators:** Musical play is necessary for our survival.

**Scholars of Play:** Musical play is part of play's existence. Musical play is playing with us.

**The Chorus:** Sometimes we want to play with play, and sometimes we do not.

**Scholars of Play:** As Fink said: play is deeply rooted in our existence. How we understand human existence, as a particular way of being in the world, is celebrated by playing (Boronat, 2015).

## Conclusion (Coda)

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The Coda, from bar 25 to the final chord in bar 27, is based in subject material which concludes at the end of the fugue with a plagal cadence which progresses from the subdominant to the tonic chord. Leading up to that cadence The Chorus lead with the original subject, joined by the Music Educators, with Scholars of Play harmonising with both. Aristotle has already made his statement, yet continues to offer a solid, continuous note which anticipates the final key change into C major.

What follows is a set of conclusions which are not necessarily what the voices say, but what their combined voices suggest as implied harmonies.

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**The Chorus:** Musical play has many appearances, and the play is not useful until a use is found for it.

**Scholars of Play:** Musical play cannot be defined by its useful application. In spite of musical play's uses, there could be a musical play which is aproductive (Eichberg, 2016), lying outside of the measurable, outside of the human, as part of a cosmic differential phenomenology. Sicart's thinking about "playthings" (2022) suggests that musical play with instruments and toys is an activity which is shaped by play for the encouragement of play.

*Aristotle: This process has been playful, and phronetic. Clegg, Flyvberg, & Haugaard, (2014), attempting to affect change in business practice without resorting to "oppressive" utopian thinking, drew on*



*the (my) Aristotelian tradition of phronesis, proposing “a contextualist form of critique that situates itself in analysis of local practices to render domination transparent and open to change”. According to Flyvberg, a phronetic approach concerns values and interests and goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (episteme) and technical knowledge or know how (techne), and it involves “the art of judgment” (Flyvberg, 2001). Such an approach feels appropriate here because the intention is to account for all possibilities, and to uncover risks within this highly specific domain of social action which is utility in children’s musical play, when we cannot ask the child beneficiary about the nature of utility. In useful musical play we need to be aware of the movement and limits of play.*

**Music Educators:** Within this discussion there has been the opportunity to explore our knowledge of musical play in new and unlikely contexts. Talk of systems, and leakiness, and ambiguity, and mapping, challenges the context of our knowledge of the bonding “devices” employed at the root of all human communication, characterised by patterning, repetition, elaboration, exaggeration, and manipulation of expectation (Dissanayake, 2010, p23). We recognised these devices as musical play and as useful. Dissanayake insisted that these devices make the “ordinary extraordinary”. (Dissanayake, 2017), and musical play’s utility in realms such as communication could not

fully account for profound “extraordinariness”. Consideration of the play which brought about and shaped these devices does hint at the infinite interiority of such devices and how their ordinariness is extraordinary.

**The Chorus:** It has been pleasantly hard work to use a known piece of music – a fugue – to “architect” or “map” voices which influence the thinking about musical play in early childhood. The unusual connections made seem to be local points of resonance and silence (eigen values; “very own” values) in the literature that appear to be shared by many fields of academic thought.

**Scholars of Play:** Playing a fugue-style game was necessary because a conventional literature search revealed a lack of overlap between the academic writing on play, and the research into the musical play of young children. A musical game was a productive engagement which provoked a novel synthesis. Novel synthesis is what we seek, and as feminist philosopher of sexual difference, Irigaray (1985) says:

If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again. Don't you think so? Listen: all round us, men and women sound just the same. The same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The same attractions and separations. The same difficulties, the same impossibility of making connections. The same . . . Same ... Always the same. (p. 205)

**The Chorus:** Musical play is a discrete, temporary autotelic activity akin to “active ontologising” (which in modern parlance could be “vibing”) which is separate to, yet occurs within, the autotelic activity of play, and is remarkable by its use of rhythm and melody and other musical devices.

**Music Educators:** Flohr (2010), researching children’s brains during music-making, concluded that it was important to allow children to exercise their “natural” impetus to create music that is unlike adult music, and that free exploration and play with instruments is to be thought of as an important part of early childhood and primary grade music education.

**Scholars of Play:** There it is again. You speak of musical play’s utility. You state that children’s musical free play with instruments is an important part of their education. Musical play, because of its tendency towards utility, is simply one tangent of an infinite number of tangents to the leaky circle of play. Irigaray (1999) warned us of our tendency to resort to appraising appearances and values, and that the sensing of “air” – the unthinkable – is impossible as a direct action. Maybe the reason music plays is the same reason a rose flowers.

*Aristotle: Musical play is an ongoing sympoiesis with the world, and with time, and context. The activity has the potential to foster, and equally destroy, a lifelong friendship with music.*

**The Chorus:** Considered as a system: alluring aspects of musical play leak out of play into the real world, and these are apprehended by players, educators, and academics, to be indicative of the play. Some activities should remain in the play world.

**Scholars of Play:** The child is playing at being music and playing at being play in the same way that the child plays at being “doctors”, or how the squirrel plays “dead” if approached by a human.

**The Chorus:** Yes, we see a child playing at being music, rather than being musical.

**Scholars of Play:** Or, because we already associate the term “play” with playing musical instruments, the effect is diminished or tautological – we say that the child at musical play is playing at the playing of music. One can certainly imagine playing at being a musician, although that sounds rather disrespectful. The child is allowing play to be the motivating force in the activity. The idea is not novel. Huizinga wrote in *Homo Ludens* about “Asobase Kotoba”, literally “play-language” or polite speech, which was the mode of address used in conversation with persons of higher rank. The polite form for “you arrive in Tokio” was, literally, “you play arrival in Tokio” [sic]; and for “I hear that your father is dead”, was “I hear that your father has played dying” (Huizinga, 1950). This illustrates how play is a collective self-protecting mechanism of the sort that thrives when people and children can create momentary time/space within their daily lives (Lester & Russell, 2014). As the chorus mentioned earlier, this play can be augmented, and held, by the

temporal nature of music which marks out that play-time in rhythm or melody.

*Aristotle: Thanks to Suits, I am quietly engaged in the autotelic activity of contemplating god, whilst watching a cat chase its tail. I am at play (Suits, 1977). The child does not have to make a sound to be engaged in musical play.*

**Scholars of Play:** This game produced attractive chimeric ideas, and fuzzy clusters of colourful opinion.

**The Chorus:** The voices of this Glass Bead Game played an aesthetic exercise, an “art sui generis” – of its own kind. The game created implied harmonies – new ideas, shapes, and sounds which feel truthy. This is what art does for us.

Yet "truthiness" is a tricky quality.

In children's musical play the ideas, shapes, and sounds are new and remarkable when compared to the previous activity of playing in the sandpit, and the child has something different to care about and notice. As the musical play activity progresses they continue to care about it, and recognise some worth in the process or the product of the play, or the effect the play has on others. It is probably the change from one state of ordinary affairs to another of musical play that generates a feeling which feels personal, and important. The feeling "works" and it fits a narrative of belief, and

therefore truth. Of course, truth and play are not that simple.

Morton (2013a) writes about *dialetheia*, the double-truthed quality of objects and things which have an appearance which does not belie their underlying essence. The child looks like they are playing with music, but they might be musicking-as-play, or maybe play is playing the child, or music is moving the child. One can point to a general zone of musical and playful activity happening, and make certain observations which support particular beliefs, but we think that the feeling of truth for the child arises from something that we cannot see: A rift opening up between essence and appearance. The child is getting inside of play and music, or play and music are getting inside the child. This is what feels “truthy”.

*Aristotle: We considered the material, efficient, formal, and final causes of musical play. It was the formal cause that captured our imaginations. The formal cause is not the same as the form that the play takes. The form of a thing is not only its sensible appearance. Form is also the underlying pattern, haecceity, or “thisness” which generates the expression of the form (after Aristotle, 1908).*

*The formal cause of a child’s musical play, the essence of that musical play, is a part of the child’s active being with the cosmos, as they play the divisions of an infinite movement, specifically, they are in the middle of a continuum of sounds, playing the relationships between*

*sounds, and playing therefore with, and making-with, the limits of the cosmos.*

**Music Educators:** Musical play is more than useful: our lives depend on this play.

**Scholars of Play:** Musical play has many appearances, including one of utility. Musical play is not useful until a use is found for it.

**The Chorus:** Musical play manifests as “active ontologising”, a “vibing”, a making-with.

**Scholars of Play:** Play is both the catalyst and the inhibitor of musical play.

**The Chorus:** Musical play holds on to sensual moments.

**Scholars of Play:** Play disrupts, and disequilibrates, and moves the moment on.

**The Chorus:** Relying on musical play for its utility renders it fragile, and vulnerable.

**Play Scholars:** Musical play, because of its utility-appearance, is a tangent of play. There are an infinite number of tangents to a leaky circle of play.

**The Chorus:** A child's musical play is their active being with the cosmos. A liberation. There is no simple truth to be revealed in that liberation.

**Music Educators:** The paradox of musical play in early childhood as the "extraordinary ordinary".



## Summary and Implications

As a result of this fugue game, the diverse voices might agree that the young child playing musically is...

... a young child playing at being music and

... a young child playing at being play

The voices tended to agree that musical play is useful, and that utility is not the point of musical play. Indeed, the point of a Bach Fugue is not to be “useful”, but elements of it have proved very useful for our conversation.

*Fugue! A Game of Utility* was created because a conventional literature synthesis of Children’s musical play and philosophies of play would have been a very short and unedifying piece of writing which would not have facilitated the composition of diverse and stimulating ideas into new forms. The fugue became a play-space, a milieu in the sense of an “assemblage” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013), which was in the middle of four collections of thought which, in turn, were contiguous with early childhood music practice, play scholarship, philosophy, social science, taxonomy, and chemistry scholarship. This play-space was a location of idea-play, a meeting point of scholarly multiplicities (Burnard & Köbli, 2024), no less than J. S. Bach’s Fugue in C major was a meeting point of melodic multiplicities. J. S. Bach exhibited exquisite technique in making audible the melodic matter that mattered. This play-space borrowed some of those melodic techniques, to make audible the musical play matter that mattered enough to reveal itself as playful harmony or dissonance, on the subject matter of the usefulness of musical play in early childhood.

Facilitating the setting-out of academic knowledge contrapuntally, this fugue of words was almost synesthetic, as the music's clarity, complexity, resolutions and tensions were reflected in the positions of the performing voices. The voices sounded alongside an exterior milieu of materials, and interior milieu of composing elements, composed substances, permeable membranes, and unnecessary obstacles. The assemblage of voices formed both the milieu as surroundings, and the milieu as the medium of their surroundings, with bountiful entry points for playful interactions. As hoped, the fugue provoked forms of expression towards what Lester (2016) called "becomings, responses, trajectories, and unheard-of futures". The fugue's complex, musical structure held the voices together, differently, in harmony or dissonance, which made a space within which the hitherto unheard could resonate.

Play scholars, channelling Fink, said that "musical play is useful because it seduces with the beauty of a well-played game". The seduction has been successful, in that the paradoxical "conclusions", some of which could be opening statements of entirely new theses, are the result, and are included in the upcoming "Interlude". As Fink reminds us, play is not a childish affair. If the essence of the world, of everything, is play, then the human at play puts themselves on the line of the abyss between themselves and the cosmos, in an attempt to "correspond" with the prevailing whole (Fink, 2016, p. 31).

We would never stop to ask if a Fugue was, in itself, a useful thing but the structure that Bach devised for it, certainly has been useful. Playing *through*, rather than *with* disciplines of play scholarship, music education research, chemistry, and systems analysis, this game generated the following thoughts about, and allusions to, some of the qualities of musical play. What emerged were fuzzy clusters of affective possibilities, or imaginative constructions, rather than discrete findings and

conclusions. As possibilities, these outcomes are not “useful” to disciplines of music education or child development, and they are probably unsurprising to scholars of play. These possibilities, which hint at an articulation of the spaces in between musical play scholarship, were presented at the Possibility Studies Network Conference, Cambridge University (Harmer, 2024a):

## **Interlude - Breathing Space after “Fugue! A Game of Utility”**

*Playing games which depend on rhythm, melody, repetition, and exaggeration can make the invisible almost tangible, almost graspable.*

*Musical play, and our existence, depends on rhythm, melody, repetition, and exaggeration.*

*Musical play's aproductivity is linked with allure, and causation.*

*Musical play has many appearances, including one of utility. Musical play is not useful until a use is found for it.*

*Play, and musical play, occurs in media res, but play does not have a middle because it does not have a beginning or an end.*

*Musical play manifests as “active ontologising”, a “vibing”,  
a “making-with”, for which play is both the catalyst and the  
inhibitor.*

*Musical play is liberation. There is no simple truth to be  
revealed in that liberation.*

*Musical play holds on to sensual moments, until play  
disrupts, disequilibrates, and moves the moment on.*

*Musical play feels truthy.*

*Relying on musical play for its utility renders it fragile, and  
vulnerable.*

*The young child playing musically is... a young child  
playing at being music... and a young child playing at  
being play.*

*Play is the autotelic (self-creating) system which vicariously affects a child's movements to briefly form an autopoietic system of musical making-with.*

*Musical play, because of its utility-appearance, is a tangent of play, or not. There are an infinite number of tangents to a leaky circle of play.*

*A child's musical play is their active being with the cosmos.*

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Chapter 4: Henricks' Musical Thinking Chairs

In the Fugue game, the Music Educators channelled the thoughts of Dissanayake (2012; 2017), stating that “playful music-making in early childhood is not useful, it is vital”. Scholars of Play questioned how musical play, with such an emphatic non-play telos, could qualify as “play”? A Chorus of Possibilities broadened the discussion into new and unfamiliar disciplines, whilst Aristotle was a supportive moderator. An unintended emphasis on the sensual, and on the active ontologising or “vibing” of musical play, emerged through the game. It was agreed that musical play is useful, and it had a “truthy” feeling, along with a sense of cosmic liberation. The opportunity is now taken to consider the play of a mother-baby interaction which appears pleasurable, artified, and playful. Guided by Henricks’ (2015) tabulated data comparing play to behaviours which are not-play, a typical episode of mother-baby musical play will be played-with in a game characterised by reduction in search of complexity. The voices in the game are the collective voices of Scholars of Play, and Music Educators, with Aristotle as the referee. Elements of Henricks table will be considered, and “removed” until the element on which all voices cannot agree is isolated. At the end of the game it is found that musical play as interaction is a slippery expression of play.

Introduction to the game

Dissanayake (2017) claimed that mother-baby interactions are musical, and that the features the activity shares with play gave rise to the arts in humans. The rationale for this claim was that artists are innately receptive to stereotypy (repeatedly-used gestures like head bobs, or utterances), repetition, exaggeration, elaboration, and surprise, which are all ordinary features of quotidian life, but which are made extraordinary by the artist who manipulates these features so that they appear translated to a different, elevated, domain. This translation of features when applied to an action can render that action transformed, special, or transfigured. Dissanayake (2017) added that this “artification” of domains of action requires no special skill, and the results do not have to be accomplished or beautiful, but they are playful.

An activity like mother-baby vocal play is, maybe, too protean to be called a ritualised behaviour, even if it shares some ritualistic qualities, yet it is captivating, pleasurable, and socially unifying. Dissanayake (2017) referred to this pleasurable, socially unifying behaviour as “exaptive”, meaning that the artifying behaviour is a pre-existing trait which does not have to be learned, which is found in newborns and infants, and which might be used for a purpose quite distant from the problem at hand – in this case communication, bonding, and care. In the mother-baby interaction considered here, the artification - the use of repetition, exaggeration, and elaboration – by the baby is exaptive because the artification originates from the baby’s behavioural predisposition, and is deployed on account of the interaction being important, as well as useful. Similar behaviour appears useful in later in life too, when artification of activities is employed by adults in uncertain situations which benefit from group ritual.

It is alluring to think of musical play as an exaptive behavioural and playful disposition which does not originate as a response to the immediate interaction, but emerges as required from some point, presumably, in our evolutionary history. Dissanayake does not explore whether it is the artification of sounds and movement into musical offers which can be exaptive, innate, and essential to survival, or whether it is the drive to *play* with others, with sounds and with movement, which is the innate, exaptive, behaviour at work. To explore how the innate behavioural disposition to engage in musical play might be located within play, or indeed how the innate behavioural disposition to play might be located in musical play, a typical example of mother-infant's musical play will be considered in relation to other forms of expression which are closely related, but largely *not-play*. This process might hint at the relationships between play and music in one example of musical play.

The example of musical play considered here is the wordless musical play of a mother and her baby. This example is an imagined, but typical, and almost mundane, melodically-vocalised interaction typical of those identified in Scotland, Nigeria, Germany, Sweden and Japan, by researchers who found that “mothers spoke to infants with similar rhythms and intonation, and infants moved in sympathy (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 2), and the mother and baby are mutually engaged, looking at, and listening to, each other's rhythmic patterns, and facial and gestural expressions (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Weinburg & Tronick, 1994).

The following commonplace episode of musical play is between a baby and a mother who communicate lovingly using facial expressions, melodic vocal contours such as the glissando “ooh!”, and rhythmic, repeated movements. As the Music Educators remarked a number of times during the Fugue, Dissanayake had noted that these bonding “devices” are employed at the root of all human communication, and

Dissanayake further characterised these devices as the use of patterning, repetition, elaboration, exaggeration, and manipulation of expectation (Dissanayake, 2010).

Because these devices are also used in music-making, these early mother-baby interactions are considered to be musical. Here is a typical, imagined interaction:

A seated mother cradles her swaddled, calm baby, smiling and rocking her upper body side to side as she hums. She pauses, eyes widening, eyebrows rising, and the baby opens her eyes. The mother pauses, smiles and starts rocking the baby again, in time to her humming. At the end of a hummed phrase she pauses again, and the baby coos. She hums another phrase, rocking side to side in time to the tune, pauses, and the baby coos. The mother smiles, replies with a nod, and a glissando “ooh!”, and recommences the rocking and humming.

The musicality of this sort of mother-baby interaction has been explored over the last thirty years (Addessi, 2009; Custodero, 2008; Delavenne et al., 2013; Malloch, 1999; Malloch and Trevarthen, 2009; McLean, 2016; Español & Shifres, 2015; Trehub & Trainor, 1998), contributing to a growing acknowledgement that the young baby’s communication with its carer is playful, and rooted in musicality. Trevarthen who, along with Malloch, initiated a great interest in the musical communication of infants, latterly queries the “how” of musical interactions (Trevarthen, 1999).

Trevarthen’s (2020) more recent work initiated investigations into the interdependent patterns of infants’ and carers’ body movements as part of a musicality which is bound up in the music, dance, and other temporal arts within the local culture.

The mother-baby interaction is both musical and playful, and playfulness is also considered to be innate to humans (Huizinga, 1950). Indeed, Sutton-Smith (1997, p. 231) explained that, biologically, play's function "is to reinforce the organism's variability in the face of rigidifications of successful adaptation". This is successful adaptation to, Sutton-Smith adds, both the everyday actual, and the possible. We know that the mother-baby interaction is playful because it looks and sounds playful, and because playful activity is noticeable as a behaviour, attitude, or as an activity with a particular structure, or as a meaningful experience (Feezell, 2013). In addition to observing the noticeable phenomena of play there is an opinion, explored in the previous chapter, that play is an activity in and of itself, and that play is a play of the world that humans partake in. This view is a result of Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of play presented as ontology (Heidegger, 1957, in Caputo, 1970), in which Being as "mission" (*Geschick*), and Being as "the world" or "fourfold" (*Geviert*) was understood by Heidegger in terms of play. Being, according to Heidegger, could not be fully known by humans because Being (a thing's "thisness") is withdrawn – manifest but unintelligible because Being is something which we can only know through its associated phenomena. Nevertheless, we can be aware that Being is both our willingness to play along with, and work with, Being as mission (*Geschick*), and Being as the fourfold (*Geviert*). In other words, play is happening underneath the phenomena. The baby, and its mother, are *played by* and *play with* worlds of meaning (Wall, 2013).

To get a deeper appreciation of the place of play, and the sort of play (or not play) present within a typical mother-baby musical play episode, the interaction will be analysed using Thomas Henricks' table of play which was published in his (2015) book *Play and the Human Condition*. Henricks is a sociologist, anthropologist, and a

Distinguished University Professor at Elon University, USA (Elon University, 2024).

Henricks' detailed table of play summarises the views of many scholars of play regarding the differences between play and other patterns of expression. Henricks (2015) was at pains to point out that the table was "not ideal in any moral sense" and that it was a model, and an attempt to build communities of shared discourse. This is the spirit in which the table is employed here – as a point of departure – as a theoretical configuration which is stable according to multiple points of view.

Multistable was a word used by Leach (2020) to describe how a concept can be applied in a multiplicity of ways and contexts by people with differing interests, some of which are beyond the intentions of the concept's creator. The table is used respectfully to facilitate Henricks' original intention of shared discourse, and to potentially furnish us with unexpected results. To continue the furniture theme, and to maintain a seriously playful approach, a game of musical chairs is played underneath this table.

Henricks' (2015) six patterns of behaviour (play as action, play as interaction, play as activity, play as disposition, play as experience, and play as context) form the six "chairs" and these are considered by the players, in turn, in relation to musical play of the infant, and of the mother. Each of these six patterns of behaviour is contrasted with four patterns of human expression (play, work, *communitas*, and ritual). The game's intention is to end up with one chair, which is the pattern of behaviour which locates musical play as the most argued-about, or most problematic, and therefore most alluring, pattern of expression.

The players of the game are Music Educators of young children, and Scholars and Philosophers of Play. Aristotle is the Master of Ceremonies (referee), and makes judgements as to how the game progresses. If there is agreement between Henricks'

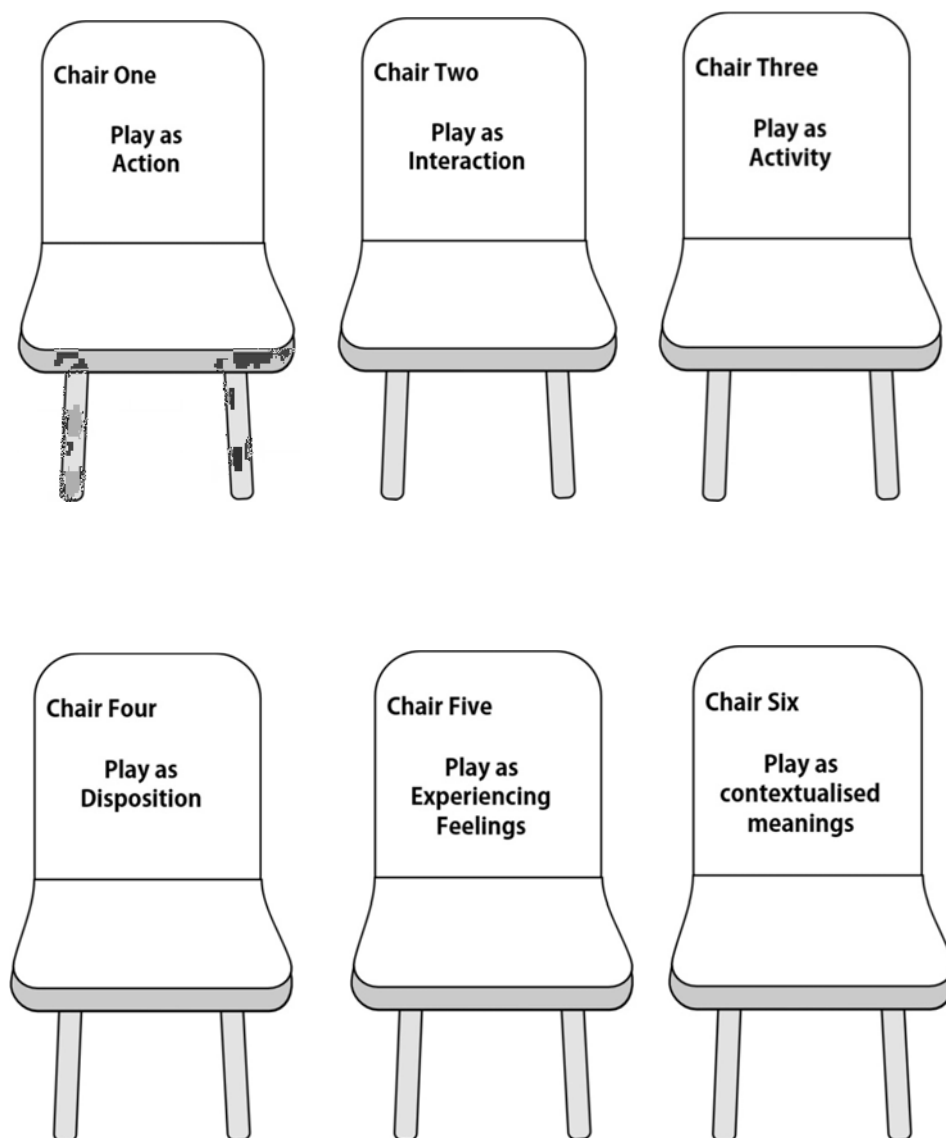
table, music educators, and play scholars about how musical play compares with play and other patterns of expression, the chair is uncontested, and is removed from the game. If there is little or no agreement, or disparate arguments for defending an agreed position, the chair remains in the game because there is more to play for.

An alternative title for this game could be “Wittgenstein’s Musical Thinking Chairs” because Wittgenstein was accustomed to music, and to games, and to iterative heuristic processes (Lewis, 2004, Tilghman, 1973). Indeed, Michael Nedo, the editor of *Wiener Ausgabe* (Wittgenstein, 1993) suggested that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is best understood by studying connections between remarks, and the repetitions of those remarks in changing contexts. This repetitive, heuristic tool is essential in understanding the original writings of Wittgenstein, as in “repetition as a means of surveying the connections” (Wittgenstein, 1993). Hence it seems legitimate to conduct this iterative exercise in the manner of Wittgenstein when cross-referencing Henricks’ work and the themes. Because Henricks’ writing is supplying the “thinking chairs” for this game which are used to represent several comfortable sets of theories to “sit on”, the game is called “Henricks’ Musical Thinking Chairs”. However, Wittgenstein’s philosophy inspires the game, for when the connections have been made, the last “chair”, the last part of the model left standing at the end, is the winner, simply because we cannot speak in agreement of it, yet we have much to say.

The six chair-positions to be played

Figure 4.

The six chair positions to be played. For each “chair”, scholars will debate how a mother-baby musical interaction sits with human expressions of play, work, communitas, and ritual.



The conventional party game of Musical Chairs starts with one fewer chairs than players. Music is played and, when the music is stopped by the referee, the players compete to sit on the available chairs. The person without a chair is removed from the game, along with one chair, and the game continues. The final iteration of the game requires two players who compete for one chair when the music stops. The last chair remaining is the winner.

Henricks' Musical Thinking Chairs is a development of this party game, and it can be thought of as a fanciful, complex, iteratively heuristic process of anti-reduction. Instead of actual chairs, there are uncomfortable, disputed, diverse viewpoints, and contested theories to be competed-for. Viewpoints which are relatively easily "sat upon" and accepted by all participants, are removed from the game. Viewpoints which are contested and argued about, remain in the game. The final chair remaining in the game should represent the most contested area(s) of music education practice, research, and play philosophies.

The participants in the game are just Music Educators, and Scholars of Play, with Aristotle as the referee. Aristotle is given the responsibility of removing the chairs, and his judgements are final. Given this responsibility, a brief introduction to his perspective is necessary.

Aristotle: The flute-player, cithara-player, sculptor or mother-and-baby, all have some characteristic function, and they are all doing an activity which serves that function well (Aristotle et al., 2002). Serving that function well brings happiness, but the sort of happiness which arises from doing an activity well is not the happiness that is synonymous with living well.

We become a cithara-player by playing the cithara, and we become playful by doing playful things. But just doing is not enough; that would give us both

good and bad cithara players, and good and bad players. Our actions in our dealing with human beings, must aim towards a certain quality, and demonstrate a certain excellences of activity and disposition. As I wrote in the Nicomachean Ethics:

So it does not make a small difference whether people are habituated to behave in one way or in another way from childhood on, but a very great one; or rather, it makes all the difference in the world.

(Aristotle et al. , 2002, p. 112)

It is clear that music possesses the power of producing an effect on the character of the soul (Aristotle & Sinclair, 1981). It is our duty as citizens to enrich both the game and the music that we are playing.

The Playframe and the Players

The imagined, typical musical play interaction between a mother and her infant, as presented in the introduction is:

A seated mother cradles her swaddled, calm baby, smiling and rocking her upper body side to side as she hums. She pauses, eyes widening, eyebrows rising, and the baby opens her eyes. The mother pauses, smiles and starts rocking the baby again, in time to her humming. At the end of a hummed phrase she pauses again, and the baby coos. She hums another phrase, rocking side to side in time to the tune, pauses, and the baby coos. The mother smiles, replies with a nod, and a glissando “ooh!”, and recommences the rocking and humming.

The players are:

- Scholars and philosophers of play – Shortened to **Scholars of Play** (font Lucida Fax)
- Music Educators and Researchers of Young Children – Shortened to **Music Educators** (font Lucida Sans Unicode)
- *Thoughts inspired by Aristotle’s Writing* – Shortened to *Aristotle* (font Lucida Calligraphy)

For font rationale, please see page 53.

The Game's Multistable Table

Gathering the opinions of many play scholars, Henricks assembled a table collating a conceptual model of Play compared to three other patterns of expression; Work, Communitas, and Ritual. The table is reproduced here in summarised form, from Henricks' *Play and the Human Condition* (2015). Henricks further refined play as activity into six areas which are, in brief: play as action, play as interaction, play as activity, play as disposition, play as experiencing feelings, and play as contextualised meanings. Some of these areas were broken down further. For example: Play (versus Work, or Communitas, or Ritual) as an action was further dissected into "stance toward object world", and "Rationale for behaviour". Using this table, one can compare and contrast Play with other forms of expression. One can see immediately for example that, according to Henricks, Ritual shares very few qualities with Play. To repeat: Henricks (2015) stated that the table was a model, and an attempt to build communities of shared discourse. This is the spirit in which the table is employed here – as a point of departure – a table of many valid opinions which are going to be resonated to see how they sound in the context of one example of musical play. In this sense the table is expected to be either an unstable, or a "multistable table".

Table 2.

Abridged version of the table in Henricks' "Play and the Human Condition (2015, p. 63).

	PLAY is...	WORK is ...	COMMUNITAS is ...	RITUAL is...
As Action				
Stance toward object-world	transformative	transformative	conformative	conformative
Behaviour rationale	consummatory	instrumental	consummatory	instrumental
As Interaction				
Directionality of engagement	unpredictable	predictable	unpredictable	predictable
Pattern of engagement	contestive	contestive	integrative	integrative
As Activity				
Source of event governance	Self-regulated	Self-regulated	Other-regulated	Other-regulated
Org of action sequences	episodic	interdependent	episodic	interdependent
As Disposition				
Readiness for action	curiosity	Self-confidence	hope	faith
As Experiencing feelings of...				
Exploration	Fun	Interest	Delight	Enchantment
Restoration	Exhilaration	Satisfaction	Joy	Rapture
Remembrance	gratification	pride	blessedness	reverence
As contextualised meanings...				
Within event	ascending	ascending	descending	descending
Beyond event	ascending	descending	ascending	descending

Note. Henricks noted Play expressed as behaviour (Play as action, Play as interaction, Play as activity etc) and correlated this with play expressed as patterns of expression (Play, Work, Communitas, and Ritual).

The Rules:

Before we start the game, we need to clarify who is conducting the musical play that we are debating. The baby is engaged with the play as much as the adult. There are two people at musical play, and it is play's qualities, in relation to the baby and the adult's actions, that are under examination here. Also, the chair, the room's acoustic, the food in the players' stomachs, the air that carries the mother's song facilitate the play. But this is a game, and we can agree on rules to make the game possible, and we can foreground activities and theories which make the game enjoyable.

[...] to play a game is to engage in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by specific rules, where the means permitted by the rules are more limited in scope than they would be in the absence of the rules, and where the sole reason for accepting such limitation is to make possible such activity. (Suits, 1967, p. 148)

To make the game possible, it is necessary to define some of Henricks' words. Henricks (2015) separated "play" from "not-play" by separating play from work, from *communitas*, and from ritual. For Henricks' purposes, *work* was considered self-regulated and interdependent. The distinction between work and play is not simple. By way of an example, this thesis is a playful piece of work. Henricks recognises that work is interdependent, in which a task comprises steps and stages towards its completion and means, curiosity, and experiences, are largely subordinated to work's ends.

Communitas was a notion arising from Huizinga's (1950) notion of festival, festivity and social bonding, which acknowledged common plight and egalitarian support, arriving at a description of people's "wilful immersion into external forms", which allow for the "seeking of feelings which transcend and expand and integrate the

self”, and experiencing the “re-creative and regenerative power of otherness” (Huizinga, 1950, p. 59). *Communitas* is therefore taken to be fun immersion into festivities with others. For Henricks, ritual has a distinguishing quality of interdependence, in the sense that the event occurs as a sequence of staged, and progressing, behaviours.

As a social scientist, Henricks is interested in the meaning of the activities noted in the table both within and beyond the events. Henricks holds that ascending meaning refers to “the way individuals confront, oppose, and transform the external patterns of the world”. These patterns can be “social, cultural, environmental, or bodily in character”, and are how individuals confront the world and change it, or change themselves (Henricks, 2015, p. 77). Descending meaning is where the individual “more or less accepts the terms of external patterns or persons”, and Henricks illustrates this idea with the example of complying unwaveringly with an organised ritual. Finally, consummation is related to the person’s sense of commitment to the action in the moment. As a rationale for behaving in a certain way, Play and *communitas* are consummatory because of the level of vibrancy of gesture and expression in the moment (Henricks, 2009).

The “musical game” shall continue in a reiterative form until each facet of Henricks’ model has been considered. Henricks shall call the tune, as it were, and Scholars of Play and Music Educators shall state briefly how the model is the case for them regarding each quality. If there is a simple case to make, and if voices are in harmony, then that part of Henricks’ model, that “thinking chair”, shall be removed from the game and from further consideration. The last chair left in the game is the most contested chair, representing the expression of play most at odds with musical play.

Chair One: Musical Play as action

Figure 5.

Chair One, Play as Action



In Table 2, Henricks states that:

Play, considered as action, and as a stance toward the object-world, is transformative,

and

Play, considered as action, and as a behaviour rationale, is consummatory.

The first round of this game considers “play as action”. Musical play would conventionally be classed as an activity rather than an action because it is comprised of several actions, but Henricks was referring to play as action as the stance one takes towards the world during physical encounters with that world. Henricks asks might the player engage sensuously with the world, wreak havoc on it, challenge it, or cause to be challenged by it, or demand a random, chance encounter with it (Henricks, 2015, p. 43) Such play is manipulative or transformative in that players are testing, expanding and ultimately solidifying their own powers. Regarding play as action as a rationale for a particular behaviour being consummatory, Henricks refers to the “sense of commitment to happenings in the present”, because being in the moment at play tends to give players a sense of vibrancy in their gestures, as thought, feeling and action are integrated.

If Music Educators and Scholars of Play agree with Henricks' position wholeheartedly, then this first Chair will be removed from the game.

Music Educators: We believe that musical play has unique qualities, and adapt Henricks' model thusly:

Table 3.

Music Educators' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Activity

Music Educators think that the activity of musical play for the child...		Music Educators think thinks that the activity of musical play for the adult...
...as stance toward object–world is transformative		...as stance toward object–world is largely conformative
...as behaviour rationale is consummatory		...as behaviour rationale is instrumental

Music Educators: We would expect musical play of the child to be both transformative and consummatory, and to align with Henricks' interpretation of "play". However, we also think that children's musical play aligns comfortably with "work" which might be education as the work of the child (Littleton, 2015), "communitas" (Pitt, 2014) and "ritual" (Dissanayake, 2006). Music demands our attention, which can be hard work, and music demands our willingness to integrate with it, to "consume" it, along with others. There is ritual in the cultural and structural aspects of musical activity, and therefore there is ritual in musical play. Regarding the child's

stance towards the object-world in musical play, we feel that the play is transformative because of how musical play relates to *communitas* and ritual.

Scholars of Play: For musical play to be play, the activity has to have qualities of play. Henricks (2015, p. 62) stated that “Play is something people choose to do”, and he refined that idea adding that play is characterised by the two qualities of transformation and consummation. These are features which should apply comfortably to musical play, and the aspirations of musical play.

Table 4.

Play Scholars’ adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Activity

Scholars of Play think that the activity of musical play for the child...		Scholars of Play think that the activity of musical play for the adult...
...as stance toward object-world is ...transformative		...as stance toward object-world is ...transformative
...as behaviour rationale is ...consummatory		...as behaviour rationale is ...consummatory

The child’s musical play should coincide with Henricks’ notions of play being, as a stance towards the object world, transformative and, as a behaviour rationale, consummatory. The child’s musical play should not align, or should align to a lesser extent, or to an extent decided by the

child, with “work”, “communitas” or “ritual”, because play is, in our understanding, voluntary, and autotelic. As an illustration of this stance, we recall Suits (1977), who defined play as the temporary reallocation to autotelic activities, of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes. However, playful communitas, in which the child is integrating with others (like its mother in our example), seeks common commitment and shared purpose, in which case the musical play is a particular flavour of play which is both autotelic, and instrumental, which is a little paradoxical.

Ritual, on the other hand, is not play, as such, because ritual requires one to conform to an externally-decided set of actions. However, Henricks (2015) reminds us that conforming our actions to an external structure allows us to “let go”, because the comforting structure of a ritual relieves us of the bother of thinking about what to do next, and this allows the play to flow. Of course there is a paradoxical quality to this situation. Therefore, let us say that play is not work, despite the saying that play is the work of the child. Rather, play plays with work, play plays with communitas, and play plays with ritual. As such, work, communitas and ritual are not play yet play influences these forms, and when that is the case we can study the play within the playful versions of these forms.

Aristotle: Thank you scholars. I am inclined to remove the chair “Play as Activity” from the game, because we are generally in agreement on the child’s stance and behaviour rationale in musical play. However, each voice has taken a unique route to this

agreement. Please extemporise on your positions, and also explain a little more about the adult's stance and behaviour rationale, on which you disagree.

Music Educators: As the adult generally desires the young child to be a part of their musical world, they tend to model behaviours which conform to the cultural musical paradigm, and use these choices instrumentally, to guide the child's enculturation. As the child assimilates formal music-making and its rituals, and self-regulates with others, the child starts to "join in" and contribute uniquely to the playful ritual (Hannon & Trainor, 2007; Trinick & Pohio, 2018; Young, 2008). The child, or the infant, that we are discussing at this moment, is playing musically in a world of others, and in a world of adults.

We accept that a child's musical play also aligns with "work", "communitas" and "ritual" – activities which are "not play", according to Henricks. There is ritual in musical play which is notably formalised, rhythmically repeated, exaggerated, and uses elaborated sounds and movements (Dissanayake, 2006). Dissanayake suggests that it is likely that rituals, such as those in human music-making, evolve through time as the process of selecting the behaviours that produce the most effectively communicative signals. This process of ritualisation gathers movements and sounds from elsewhere (for example, dandling a baby by "trotting along" on the knee). However, as Dissanayake illustrates, the mother's head nods and her undulant sounds and caresses are drawn from adult affiliative contexts (Dissanayake, 2006), and infants are born ready to respond to, and coordinate, their own movements to those of their carer. The musical behaviours of a suckling

infant are behaviours which develop in early childhood into exploratory sound play (Delalande & Cornara, 2010). Delalande and Cornara (2010) concluded that the circular nature of gestural motor behaviours in musical play indicated the child's pleasure, interest or curiosity, and that caused the child to repeat the action. The repeated sound-making musical gesture gives shapes and form to feeling (Dissenyake, 2012), and also synchronises participation (Van Puyvelde et al., 2013). This synchrony in musical play is necessarily conformative, because transformation of the child from a musical child into an encultured musical child cannot happen without the transformation of the child into a conformative being. According to John et al. (2016), it is through musical play that children "naturally acquire both the musical practices of their own culture as well as an imaginative musicianship of their own". Similarly, Cirelli et al. (2020) described musical play as "an important part of home life and, potentially, sibling play". To this extent, musical play is an activity which the child has consumed and "internalised", which has been "caught, not taught", and which is instrumental in the process of the child being an encultured, musical being.

Regarding our quibble as to musical play being akin to work, *communitas*, and ritual, which are activities that Henricks separated from play: the child's musical play might require striving, sharing, exploration, or ritual. The fuzzy nature of musical play's relationship with work and other not-very-playful activities is reflected in newly coined terms such as "musicke" (Alcock, 2008), "musicking" (Small, 1998) and "musicking-as-play" (Palmer, Burnard, & Burke, 2024). Musical play is an activity which integrates culture and praxis, and the term "musicking" has been widely adopted in early childhood music studies (Countryman, 2014; DeVries, 2011; Niland, 2019; Peñalba et al., 2020; Stuart Rose & Countryman, 2020).

Scholars of Play: The play of the child and the play of the adult is the same play. According to Henricks, as a stance towards the world, play is transformative, and work is transformative too. Henricks recognised transformation as it was interpreted in the Piagetian sense of people imposing their will on external circumstances (Henricks, 2015; Piaget, 1951/2007). This imposition, and the resulting changing of the world, strengthened players' interpretive frameworks. However, one could state on a simpler level, that if one takes a playful stance towards the world, one is transformed into a player, and thus play is transformative.

The child repeating and modifying a pleasing action is certainly transforming its actions, adapting to its activity, and is accommodating its culture, but we are unsure as to whether this adaptation-accommodation is worthy of the term "transformation". The child might well be somehow transformed by musical play, but transformation is not why the child engages in the play. When Dissanyake (2009) states that the baby is "born ready" with "proto-aesthetic dispositions" to respond to, and to coordinate their own movements to those of their carer, there is "transformation", but the transformation is the manifestation of evolving, endogenous behaviour.

Thinking about play as action, Henricks' (2015) notion of consummation refers to the means of the activity rather than the ends, and a commitment to the activity, with an emphasis on "ingestion". Ingestion and consummation entails internalisation or, put more playfully, "getting oneself outside of something". Other play scholars agree: explaining why play emerges spontaneously and intuitively across all

psychotherapeutic practices, Marks-Tarlow suggested that play “suffuses the brains, bodies, feelings and minds of mammals” (Marks-Tarlow, 2015), whilst Sicart (2017) was far more direct in stating that play is a “portable tool for being”.

Henricks (2015) refers to Marks-Tarlow’s (2008) work, specifically self-development as a non-linear, recursive path which emerges from chaos to complexity). Marks-Tarlow later suggested that the child’s initial, active exploration and engagement with the physical [and musical] world serves to calibrate internal faculties. When this system is “calibrated”, external cues facilitate the navigation of the child’s internal world. Play gives the child who has experienced safety, trust and positive motivation, according to Marks-Tarlow, a “portal into reality, rather than a defence against it”, and the “early fractal seeds of self-expression are detected within the passions and occupations of later life” (Marks-Tarlow, 2010, p. 56). So whilst a child’s grounding in the musical ritual and work of that child’s local culture is important, the grounding is not something that can be corralled into action for a non-play or non-musical outcome. Well, of course it can be, but not in the name of play.

Consummation, therefore, gives attention to play’s ability to effect change, and to integrate emotions, feeling and action. Play’s ability to effect change is irreducible to a simple cause-and-effect process. Trying to cause play to cause an effect is likely to be a process which is overly controlling, and debilitating for a child. Play is nothing to do with a linear progression along universal set points. Play cannot be marched along to a regular beat however, paradoxically, musical play can cause us to march along to a regular beat.

Music Educators: Ritual is seen in the employment of traditional models of practice, and will feature in early childhood music classes today (Young, 2018), such as in the ubiquitous use of traditional nursery rhymes. According to Opie and Opie (1997), the only “true”, child-orientated nursery rhymes written prior to 1800 were infant amusements, lullabies, and rhyming alphabets. Otherwise, riddles and songs were written for adult perplexity and diversion. The idea of musical play being an accessible tool to benefit children’s development is a view which is deeply embedded in the academic literature of music in early childhood, and that view aligns strongly with musical play for the adult being conformative and instrumental. Academic writing about children’s musical play tends to be written for journals with a particular educational, developmental or therapeutic remit, which supports the notion that musical play in early childhood is an activity which is referred to by its applied use in specific contexts. For example Custodero et al., (2016), adopted Winnicott’s (2005) psychoanalytical approach to explain how children used musical material as a transitional object, like “an accessible tool”, which facilitated children’s musical behaviours and musical agency away from a playground or a classroom.

Children’s games, songs and dances are utilised to provide musical experiences rooted in traditional customs and social-historical events (Froebel, 1878/2015). Campbell & Alvarez (1990) defined the Kodály approach as an “heuristic mode of learning”, citing the use of children’s songs, whether these were songs created by the child or songs sung for the child, as the foundation for musical appreciation and understanding. Additionally, traditional children’s games, songs and dances are celebrated

as musical play which can assist with the child's metacognition, self-regulation and predispositions to learning (Zachariou & Whitebread, 2015). The authors introduced musical play in the form of adult-led songs and games as "a new context affording for regulation" and, because of the activities' inherent inter-subjectivity, concluded that musical play was a fertile context for socially-shared regulation. Regulation, in this study, was identified as self-regulation, of the sort considered crucially important to children's development, learning, emotional control, co-regulation within jointly-agreed activities, and distinct from regulation which is external and not controlled by the child.

In summary, the adult's musical play is playful, and is influenced by the adult's wish to present a vibrant musical world which welcomes the child. The adult encourages conformational behaviours from the child, and this conformation is instrumental in habituating the child into music and associated skills. The child's musical play is playful, and plays with that musical world.

Scholars of Play: Henricks (2015) stated that the purpose of play is to continually construct, support, and revise self-regulating frameworks. Taking on board the writing of Piaget, Vygotsky, Freud, Erikson, Bruner, Fein, Dorothy and Jerome Singer, Sutton-Smith, and Winnicott, Henricks concluded that play helps people, through action, to explore the implications of self. This exploration requires an environment, a naturally generative conative ecology, and the environment that supports generalised play may, or may not, be the same environment that supports musical play, as Moorhead and Pond (1941) would attest. Henricks' view is derived from the psychological and the

psychoanalytical. For other play scholars, play has no intrinsic purpose, and the play can be instrumentalised towards specific learning or developmental goals, as outlined by the Music Educators. Play Scholars and Play Workers tend to be mindful of the protection and the promotion of children's *capability* to play. Such an approach is concerned with creating the conditions for play (the capability for children to play) rather than enabling or facilitating specific forms of play for the social and economic benefits they are assumed to bring. It is, however, possible for both capability and guidance to co-exist (Russell et al., 2024).

We refer to Sutton-Smith's *Rhetorics of Play* (1999) in which he points out how easily players can have one extrinsic function for the play (a rhetoric of play), and "experts", including the adult mother in our example, have another. Sutton-Smith endeavoured to establish the extent of the outcome of ambiguity within several rhetorics of play.

As Sutton-Smith (1999) stated;

...psychologically, I define play as a virtual simulation characterized by staged contingencies of variation, with opportunities for control, engendered by either mastery or further chaos. (p. 231).

He went on from this point to wonder if he had invented another form of rhetoric of progress, specifically one which is the "potentiation of adaptive variability" (Sutton-Smith, 1999). We believe that musical play is a rather good example of this "new" rhetoric of play. Fundamentally, we agree that musical play as action is transformative and

consummatory, but in a far more interesting way than has been hitherto explored.

Aristotle: We have agreed that the musical play of the child concurs with Henricks' approach to "Play as Action". There is complexity and nuance to how musical play is a play activity. However, arguments from both Scholars of Play and Music Educators regarding "play as activity" coincide sufficiently with Henricks' model, and I shall remove this chair from the game.

Chair Two: Musical Play as Interaction

Figure 6.

Chair Two. Play as Interaction



In Table One, Henricks states that:

Play, considered as interaction; the directionality of engagement is unpredictable.

and

Play, considered as interaction; the pattern of engagement is contestive

Henricks asserts that play is not simply a process of moving through the world - it is a pattern of engagement with the world because players play at or with something or someone. Henricks suggested that the directionality of that engagement is unpredictable. He added that the pattern of engagement of that play is contestive. Henricks supported, to a degree, Huizinga's (1950) thesis that play represents a contestive stance towards the world because the play can develop into a competition *for* something, or is a display *of* something. In contestive play, symbolic and material elements are used to facilitate the play, and players are fascinated by difficulties and obstacles in order to achieve a good game (Henricks, 2015). Players want a good game, and a certain amount of challenge and perplexity draws us in to play, maintaining our interest and enabling accomplishments to be pleasurable.

Music Educators: Our thoughts do not easily align with Henricks'. We suggest that musical play, for the child, considered as an interaction, has a directionality of engagement which is both unpredictable and predictable. We feel that as a pattern of engagement for the child, musical play is contestive and integrative. We feel that in interactive musical play the pattern of engagement for the adult is different, being relatively predictable, and that the adult's directionality of engagement is integrative, in that it integrates with the child's musical play. In summary:

Table 5.

Music Educators' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Interaction

Music Educators think that musical play as interaction for the child...		Music Educators that musical play, as interaction for the adult...	
...has a directionality of engagement which is...	...unpredictable and predictable	...has a directionality of engagement which is...	...predictable
...is, as a pattern of engagement,	contestive and integrative	...has a pattern of engagement which is...	...integrative

Scholars of Play: We agree with Henricks that play as interaction is unpredictable and contestive. If the directionality and the pattern of engagement of the adult differs from that, then the interaction diverges from play and towards playful instruction or, more specifically, ritual.

Table 6.

Play Scholars' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Interaction

Scholars of Play think that musical play as interaction for the child...		Scholars of Play think that musical play, as interaction for the adult...	
...has a directionality of engagement which is...	...unpredictable	...has a directionality of the engagement which is...	...predictable
...is, as a pattern of engagement-	contestive	...has a pattern of engagement which is...	...integrative

Aristotle: Music Educators' assertion that musical play as interaction has a directionality of engagement for the child which is both unpredictable and predictable, is inconsistent. Additionally, a contestive and integrative pattern of engagement sounds muddled. This portion of the table does not seem to function satisfactorily for the Music Educators. Voices only partially agree on the child's musical play for the child as being unpredictable and contestive, and both voices wholly agree on the adult's interaction within the play. If we can move towards an agreement on what sort of interaction constitutes the child's musical play, the chair can be removed. If not, the chair remains in play.

Music Educators: Focusing on the interaction of the child: the child's directionality of engagement can *sound* unpredictable. Order and structure are not always apparent in musical play. As Countryman, Gabriel, & Thompson (2016) pointed out, spontaneous vocalising accounts for the much of the din that is associated with a school playground, yet their analysis found multimodal "concoctions" of sound, movement and gesture within that play. This is why we suggest that there is a tendency within the child's musical play to playfully move towards the "predictable" which might start as concoctions of sounds, but might shift towards fractions of melody, or rhythm.

The musical play of children, in improvised vocalisations according to Knudsen (2008), is not part of a route to adult music or becoming an adult, it is about being a child. Therefore we insist that, as a pattern of engagement, musical play might sound random, but there is a tendency towards wanting to move together, hence the suggestion that integration is almost an inevitable part of musical play. This tendency can be useful. For example, Marsh (2017) recognised musical play and games from the home played out as playground games to be an essential part of the successful resettlement of young refugees. Therefore we feel that for the child, the processes considered previously in "play as action", for example the work of experimentation, lead to unpredictability, but there is an overall tendency in the play towards a *communitas* of agreement of movement, rhythm, tonality or repertoire, so the pattern of engagement is ultimately integrative. Sometimes this agreement is hidden amongst other sounds, as Countryman, Gabriel, & Thompson (2016) discovered, and sometimes the integrative pattern of engagement is only revealed through the close analysis of audio and video recordings of children's musical play which reveals structures

within the sounds generated (Plowman & Stephen, 2008; Young, 2003). Hence the child's pattern of engagement is amongst unpredictability, or the child's pattern of engagement is unpredictable on account of their physical development or the inappropriate (maybe adult-sized) tools for musical play at their disposal, but the play partially integrates with the musical structures, and integrates increasingly over time. Crucial to the playful interactivity is how difficult it is for a baby to create order out of its immediate surroundings. The child is swaddled, her vocal chords and musculature undeveloped. The world is a place of contest and struggle for the baby, and limits and boundaries are constantly being discovered and tested.

As the child becomes older, some of the contestive patterns of engagement challenge the status quo. This can be musically desirable, moving the song along, shifting the rhythm or, of course, these challenges can be musically undesirable, stopping the musical play altogether. With older children, musical play behaviours which prevent synchronised, or adult-led music from happening tend to be termed disruptive behaviours, and are studied separately from musical play, with a focus on the social, emotional, and mental health difficulties of the child (Mullen, 2019).

Scholars of Play: That musical play is a form of play which tends towards the predictable and the integrative suggests that the child's musical play is an interaction which necessarily morphs into ritual. Henricks positioned ritual as a pattern of expression different from play, but it would seem that musical play might start in early childhood as play, and gradually be guided by the adult, or by society in general, towards ritual. Henricks says that ritual features interdependence, and a

sequence of behaviours in stages or progressions, each in preparation for the next, and only those who are considered competent or worthy can move onwards (Henricks, 2015). Ritual was defined by Bellah (2017) as the primordial form of serious play in human evolutionary history. The play of ritual, Bellah explains, requires shared *attention*, and shared attention requires shared *intention*. Ritual, according to Bellah can be described as being delimited in time, requiring cooperation, shared attention, and organised behaviours which are both serious and playful, leading to an arousal of the group. Ritual is likely to take place in particular places, and lead to some form of in-group solidarity.

Huizinga (1950) stated: “the ritual act has all the formal and essential characteristics of play”, and that “all true ritual is sung, danced, and played”. According to Caillois (2001), Huizinga’s book *Homo Ludens* originated as an oration entitled *The Cultural Limits of Play and the Serious*, so the idea that play is a cultural phenomenon is not new.

Huizinga (1950) held that “culture arises in the form of play”, and “that it is played from the very beginning”. It is hardly surprising that play and culture are inextricably linked, and Huizinga would agree that any orderly aspects of social play (or orderly activity of opposing groups) are likely to be evidence of cultural influence, and are likely to be interpreted as integrative to the local culture. Signs that the young child is assimilating their local culture by acquiring local ways of music-making will be met, by the adults, with what Henricks views as enchantment and, ultimately, a faith in the activity’s role in the child’s progression.

Music Educators: The adult's role in our sequence of mother–baby musical play is closer to an expression of ritual than play; the adult has faith in a musicality to the interaction with their child, and is rightly enchanted by the child's integrative responses. The child is already acquiring the local styles of expression. Play has a role in making that acquisition the activity it needs to be for them.

Scholars of Play: The ritual act of musical play can be sung, danced, and played by the adult in undeniably playful ways but, in this context, what the child is doing is different. The child is playing musical play, playing the song, and playing the movements. There are two play forms coexisting: the adult's playful musical ritual and the child's playful musical play. Henricks is saying that play is contestive. He doesn't mean that play is agonistic (combative), he is simply pointing out that play pushes boundaries to see what happens.

It is reasonable that adults seek predictability in their engagement with musical play, and that they strive for the enchanting integration of the child in that play. The adult creates conditions for musical play, by creating the conative ecology, and the context for the play. Ritual, to some extent - even though ritual shares no traits with play according to Henricks (2015), and ritual is serious play according to Bellah (2017) - and *communitas*, are likely to be constituent parts of that conative ecology rather than the play. Maybe a "golden mean" of order and chaos, and a predictable unpredictability, forming an ecology of challenge, is fruitful for musical play, and the "golden mean" of order, chaos, and predictable unpredictability sounds like Derrida's (1981) *pharmakon* of remedy, poison, and the scapegoat. The doting carer rocks, sings, and

caresses as “remedy”, in full knowledge that some order of ritual, or temporary predictable procedure in the whirlwind of work involved in caring for a young child, is only fleeting, but in hope that some elements of the ritual become habitual.

Music Educators: Unpredictable, contestive play is not, in general, a desirable feature of musical play, and it was the sort of play that contributed to the closing down of Donald Pond’s research into children’s musical play at The Pillsbury Foundation School (Moorhead & Pond, 1941). In group music activities, unpredictable, contestive, disruptive play is guided or facilitated towards controlled predictability. However, musical challenge and random chance do have a valuable place in musical play, or there would be no delight and charm to it.

Aristotle: I shall not remove this chair (Play as Interaction) from the game. As Henricks states, play as interaction has a pattern of engagement which is unpredictable, and a directionality of engagement which is contestive. The locating of pattern in musical play determines that play has a curious relationship with ritual. Yet musical play, with its integrative patterns of engagement relies on contestive and unpredictable expressions for the play to have, for example, the quality of charm which is necessary for the play to be adored by both child and carer. Pharmakon as a space for this fluidity of expression is helpful, although the formal cause of musical play, as discussed in the Fugue is causing us problems, largely because

we are not entirely sure what is at play. The mother and child are at play, as is the child and its clothing, as are the mother's fondly remembered memories of her own musical play, and less fondly remembered memories of learning scales on the violin. The intervals between the sung notes are also at play.

The essence of musical play has been foregrounded by the expression of musical play as interaction. Also foregrounded is how the world gets in the way of, or interacts with, that interaction.

Musical play's formal cause of sensible thing and underlying pattern disrupts this part of Henricks' table. There appears to be more to contest. The chair remains.

Chair Three: Musical Play as activity

Figure 7.

Chair Three. Play as Activity



In Table One Henricks states that:

Play, as an activity and as a source of governance, is self-regulated

and

Play, as an activity and as an organisation of action sequences, is episodic.

Play as activity considers play of and for human conduct. Henricks (2015) distinguishes play as an activity different from not-play because play is self-regulated and episodic. Self-regulation regards the source of event governance and how the activity is developed and sustained (Henricks, 2015), and episodic describes play's short, coherent, recursive passages (Marks-Tarlow, 2010). According to Henricks, play expends energy in an activity which can be identifiable to a typical observer as play as opposed to work or ritualistic behaviour and, for the players, engagement in play might require entry into a culturally articulated form of play. For example, the play might require the temporary subordination of paidia to ludus. Paidia and ludus were terms developed by Caillois (2001) to help distinguish between different types of play based on players' level of perceived freedom, the structure of the play, and the purpose of the play. Paidia refers to what could be summarised as spontaneous,

free, and disordered play, characterized by a sense of exuberance, freedom, and creativity. Ludus represents structured, rule-bound play involving formalised systems of rules and competition.

According to Henricks (2015), self-regulation is the source of event governance of play, and this is how the play's activity is developed, monitored, and sustained, and self-regulation is at the root of why many play theorists define play as voluntary or free. However, freedom is bounded by the environment, the rules of the game, or by daylight hours, making the notion of freedom in play rather nuanced. When playing with others, players have to determine and enforce standards of behaviour. Within play, there are short, coherent passages of activity which repeat, or recur, and these added together organise the play experience.

Music Educators:

Table 7.

Music Educators' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Activity

Music Educators think that musical play, as an activity for the child, and...		Music Educators think that musical play, as an activity for the adult, and...	
...as a source of event governance, is	self-regulated (also like work)	...as a source of event governance, is	self-regulated (also like work)
...and as an organisation of action sequences is	All sorts, including episodic/ interdependent	...and as an organisation of action sequences is	All sorts, including episodic/ interdependent

Scholars of Play:

Table 8.

Play Scholars' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Activity

Scholars of Play think that musical play as an activity for the child, and...		Scholars of Play think that musical play, as an activity for the adult	
...as a source of event governance, is	self-regulated	...as a source of event governance is	self-regulated
...and as an organisation of action sequences is	episodic/interdependent	...and as an organisation of action sequences is	episodic/interdependent

Aristotle: We have a significant degree of consensus. This should be a short game!

Music Educators: We have already considered musical play as action, in the stance the child takes towards the object-world. Musical play as an activity refers to its “ongoingness”, how the play looks as time passes. We believe that for the child engaging in what we might call child-initiated musical play, the play is self-regulated and the child chooses whether or not to play, even if a caring adult is nearby. How the play unfolds is more complex, and is episodic and interdependent. For example, Cirelli et al. (2020) who was highlighting a potential link between spontaneous (and therefore self-regulated) musical play in the home and social development, noted that children’s singing and dancing together was highly collaborative. Whilst Cirelli et al. (2020) were investigating the implications for developing the child’s social identity and emotion regulation, it is clear that the dancing play was both self-regulated, and interdependent on the participation of

others. Music's motifs, repetitions, and rhythms are by their nature, episodic, and even infants are sensitive to musical properties such as pitch, contour, and rhythm (Ilari, 2002). Play which is musical will have these episodic properties.

Scholars of Play: Henricks suggests that self-regulation is the source of event governance of play, and this is how the play's activity is developed, monitored, and sustained. One would expect musical play and any other form of play to be diverting, or pleasurable, if not "fun" (Sicart, 2017) at least to someone engaged in that play. Therefore some of the child's self-regulation in this play must stem from them gaining pleasure from the activity, even if we cannot witness this pleasure as an observer ⁹.

Having expressed concern over the level of work and ritual that Music Educators consider is a necessary part of musical play, we are concerned that a disposition of playful fun is endangered, and we are also aware that a disposition of playful fun is not a sufficient measure of play. As Gregory Bateson, the anthropologist, social scientist and cyberneticist,

⁹ I recall a classical music concert to which a group of people from the local Deaf community had been invited. At one point a Deaf person signed to my friend, asking "Is the audience enjoying this? I can't tell because no-one is smiling or moving".

wrote (1987) in a metalogue similar to ours, about games and being serious:

Daughter: Daddy, are these conversations serious?

Father: Certainly they are.

D: They're not a sort of game that you play with me?

F: God forbid . . . but they are a sort of game that we play together.

D: Then they're not serious!

The father-daughter conversation discusses rules of logic which allow us to play with ideas, and how we have to play with those rules to not only challenge logic but to also to play a fun game. They decide that they are not competitors playing against each other, they are working together to build up ideas which can “stand”. The pair concludes that “life” is a game, or a form of play whose purpose is to discover the rules, but the rules of life are constantly changing, and always undiscoverable. This take on “serious play” as the way in which musical play plays with work and ritual is important. We feel that it is the players’ choice to engage in metalogues or musical play, and they take pleasure in taking themselves extremely seriously as they regulate themselves in that play. We think that musical play can be a pleasurable manifestation of serious play.

Music Educators: Agreed, and the focus of the musical activity cannot be assumed. When playing musically with others, a “let’s play together” intent towards communication or socialisation might be the legitimate source of event governance of the musical activity (for examples see Niland, 2015; Nome, 2020; Barrett, 2016). Yet, conversely, musical play can also be an

entirely solitary, self-soothing occupation (Adessi, 2009; Dean, 2020).

Musical play is dependent on how we feel, and where we are, and who we are with.

Aristotle: We are in agreement with Henricks that the musical play for the child, as a source of event governance, is self-regulated, and the play demonstrates episodic features. We are in agreement that musical play, possibly uniquely, is interdependent on personal and environmental factors. I shall remove this chair!

Scholars of Play: Wait! Some of the Music Educators' examples conflate young children's musical play with adult-guided musical play. This is unsurprising given the youth of the children involved in the studies to which they refer. We would expect the presence of attentive adults. We have discussed that the adult's musical play with the child can pursue a very different agenda from a child's musical play with another child. What if the adult's musical play, as a source of event governance, is ritual- or work-based, because they are a pedagogue following a curriculum, or a therapist pursuing a cure? That adult is seeking conformity and integration because they have faith that the musical process can secure predictable, reliable outcomes for the child. The episodic nature of musical play can also be hijacked for non-play reasons.

Music Educators: Frequent, repeated use of songs of common repertoire such as nursery rhymes and clapping games might be considered as musical

play (Forrai & Sinor, 1990; Marsh, 2017). You are correct that play can be subsumed into non-play. For example, Zachariou and Whitebread (2017) associated the co-reproduction of songs with children's self-regulation, but their work focussed on how musical play could be manipulated to achieve the outcome of self-regulation.

Scholars of Play: The source of self-regulated event governance of musical play is very difficult, if not impossible, to know but, in play unlike ritual, we feel that the source is linked to the pleasurable seriousness of musical play, and how musical play is superfluous to survival, yet has some socially adaptive advantages. The “devices” identified, by the ethologist Dissanayake, as the root of all human communications (patterning, repetition, elaboration, exaggeration, and manipulation of expectation) are features which express what she referred to as the “artification” of aesthetic practice. In our example therefore, it is artification which makes the ordinary mother/baby encounter extraordinary (Dissanayake, 2010; 2012; 2017).

Music Educaors: Countryman, Gabriel, & Thompson (2016) concluded that young children (aged 3–12 years) used the artification devices noted by Dissanayake in their aesthetic practice of spontaneous vocalisations. The researchers determined that the children used these devices in vocalisations to attract attention, sustain interest, coordinate group effort and provide emotional excitement and satisfaction. The researchers further hypothesised that a baby's intentional use of repetition in vocalisations is the baby gaining control of their voice, and attaining pre-lingual “transferable ownership and referentiality”. Therefore if increasing the ability to

manipulate the voice is a part of the baby's musical play, this is a serious affair which is assisted through elaboration, exaggeration, and manipulation of expectation, all of which could be interpreted as "episodic".

Scholars of Play: Again we return to the same problem. Artification might be a feature of a baby's vocalisation to its mother, but we doubt that artification, or socialisation as a result of artification, is the reason why the baby engages in this play. We are in agreement about the episodic nature of musical play. Even without scientific study, repetition seems to be entirely logical and self-evident as we hear the mother's repeated phrase, and witness the rhythmic rocking of her child. However, the episodic nature of the musical play is more than simple repetition. Repetition does not capture "artification" of encounters, nor patterning, elaboration, exaggeration, and manipulation of expectation. Repetition suggests multiplication, and that is not what is happening in the mother-baby encounter. It is helpful that Henricks used Marks-Tarlow's (2010) word "recursive" to illustrate how play contains moments which build on itself, sometimes quite unpredictably, like bounces of a ball. We think that Marks-Tarlow's work is significant here, in that the recursive nature of musical play moves the play from chaos to complexity, and this points to the root of the "artified", aesthetic, musical play. However, the recursiveness of the play simply makes the play noticeable, and does not reveal any ultimate truth about the musical play, because there probably isn't one. This play of chaos, complexity, and order is a fun thing to engage with, especially in a loving environment. The baby could be playing for the play of it.

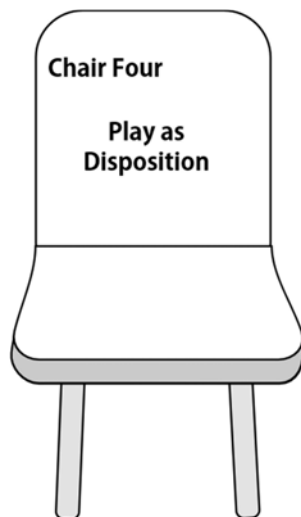
Musicking is a temporal practice. Husserl's analysis of temporal experiences in terms of primal impression, retention and protention (Husserl, 2019) gives us a helpful representational framework of how musical sounds appear to us. However, even if temporal experiences like hearing a sequence of notes sung by a mother to her child is experienced in these phases, the relationship between the phases, as experienced, is not linear (Hoerl, 2013). The sequence of notes are not a simple sequence of tones, but a collection of tonal, and sensual, and maybe ritualistic sounds delivered with intention and movement, and within a particular acoustic. The mother's song is a deeply felt event. As Massumi (2018), channelling Sanders-Peirce stated: "Nature's not in play simply for coming together". We believe that the mother's musical play has a "genuine thirdness", a "thickness", a "non-divisibility" and a "change on separation". In other words, the past of even one sung note is mediated by the present of it and the allure of what happens next, and this allure supervenes as the "third" between past and future.

Aristotle: Having started this game with a strong degree of consensus, we have diverged. We agree that the child's musical play is self-regulated, and that the source of event governance for that play can be dependent on the presence or intentions of adults. The organisation of action sequences in that play is episodic, playing with chaos and complexity. I can remove this chair from the game.

Chair Four: Musical Play as Disposition

Figure 8.

Chair Four. Play as Disposition



Henricks states that Play, as disposition, and as a readiness for action, is founded in curiosity

Henricks (2015) recognised that play is only play when the participants recognise it to be so. The disposition to play is a readiness for action, which requires attentiveness, readiness and a commitment to organise behaviour. The players might look forward to experiencing a “good game”. Henricks refers to Eberle’s (2014) description of play-readiness as his favourite, in which anticipation, interest, openness, readiness, expectation, curiosity, and desire, all pull the player forwards through the play. To distinguish the disposition for play as opposed to the disposition someone might have for work, *communitas*, or ritual, Henricks suggests that the disposition for play is “curiosity”.

Music Educators: We feel that curiosity alone is insufficient as a disposition for musical play.

Table 9.

Music Educators' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Disposition

Music Educators think that musical play disposition for the child as a ...	Music Educators think that musical play disposition for the adult as a ...
...readiness for action is more than curiosity, also self-confidence, hope, faith	... readiness for action is more than curiosity, also self-confidence, hope, faith

Scholars of Play: We feel that curiosity is a sufficient disposition for musical play.

Table 10.

Play Scholars' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Disposition

Scholars of Play think that musical play disposition for the child as a ...	Scholars of Play think that musical play disposition for the adult as a ...
...readiness for action is: Curiosity	... readiness for action: Curiosity

Music Educators: The idea that babies can be actively musical is relatively new (Custodero & Johnson-Green, 2008; Putkinen, Tervaniemi & Huotilainen,

2013). Largely, the readiness for action of the child is recognised amongst music educators to be a wish to actively “be with” another person (Barratt, 2016). Whether that “being with” constitutes a playful, communicative, aesthetic, educational, or therapeutic experience depends on the child, and the context and intention of the play.

Aristotle: This is why we are playing this game: To identify aspects of musical play which are inconsistent with general theories of play.

Music Educators: The playful mother–child interactions identified by Stern (1985) as being evidence of “affect attunement” caught the imagination of the growing number of scholars interested in both child development and music education, because the interactions were identified as musical. There is a clear correlation between the attunement of musicians “jamming” together and the wordless, melodic, communications between a mother and baby. The mother and baby are “jamming”. Jamming does entail wordless communication, and babies are preverbal, so the idea that they communicate musically in play is compelling. Trevarthen (1999) had coined the term “IMP – Intrinsic Musical Pulse” which he associated with gestural mimesis and rhythmic narrative expression of purposes, along with motive, consciousness and emotions as foundations of human intersubjectivity and fundamental to the newly coined term “communicative musicality”. The rhythmic sympathy between mother and baby was termed communicative, but was identified by Trevarthen as being the baby’s “transmodal or submodal unity of expression and experience in a baby’s listening”. The term “communicative musicality” was the term that gained the most traction in academia and practice. In general, prior to 2000, musicality in children’s

musical play was identified as participation in the communicative and expressive discipline of music (Tarnowski, 1999) and being open to the possibilities that exploration, improvisation and creation that engagement in music afforded.

Vygotsky's *Genesis of the Higher Mental Functions* (Vygotsky, 1966), in which he wrote about the intuitive vocal interactions between mothers and babies, formed a basis of the theoretical framework "communicative musicality" as written about relatively recently in *The Human Nature of Music*, (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2018). Vygotsky's writing regarding how children use role-play and imitation to freely reconstruct the socio-cultural practices of the adult world around them was cited by Nieuwmeijer et al. (2019).

Latterly, it seems perfectly acceptable for young children's musicality, for example according to Barratt (2016), to be identified as children's performative music-making, through which they explore their identity in music, and their music in identity, because music-making provides the means for them to "trial different ways of being in the world". In other words, musical play is currently widely linked to the child's development (eg. Berger & Cooper, 2003), which indicates the level of confidence, hope and faith, that musical play has a direct and positive role in the development of the young child. But whether the child engages in musical actions out of curiosity, or a desire to "be with", we do not know.

Scholars of Play: As Henricks previously stated (although he does not claim the phrase as his own: "play is the laboratory of the possible" (Henricks, 2006, p1). In the playful home or early childhood setting,

child development is expected, demanded, or is arguably unavoidable as the child gathers experiences each day.

Music Educators: ...as “knowing bodies” actively explore their environment (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2018; Alcock, 2008).

Scholars of Play: Yet to be ready for play is to be curious. As Henricks says, the anticipation of play begins with the anticipation of curiosity. Quoting Eberle (2014), Henricks (2015) further elaborated that play starts with anticipation, and the experience deepens to include interest, openness, readiness, expectation, curiosity, and desire.

***The Aristotle:** Basic agreement on curiosity as a disposition and as a readiness for action. Chair removed.*

Chair five: Musical Play as Experience

Figure 9.

Chair Five. Play as Experiencing Feelings



Henricks stated that Play:

as exploration, facilitated the feeling of fun,

as restoration, facilitated the feeling of exhilaration,

as remembrance, facilitated the feeling of gratification.

After considering the disposition to play (curiosity), here Henricks considers the level of involvement of the players during play, and how different experiences in play might feel. He recognises that play experiences can be negative, but assumes that events in play are moving forwards consistently. Once play has begun, the player experiences moments of fun (excitement, exploration, and disorder), moments of exhilaration (pleasurable restoration and order), and at the conclusion of the activity the player experiences feelings of gratification (Henricks, 2015).

Music Educators: We feel that musical play's work-like, communitas-like, and ritual-like nature means that the qualities of feelings which Henricks

associated with work, *communitas*, and ritual, also apply to the child's musical play. The adult's musical play might well feel different from the child's. We suspect that many adults appreciate the ritual of musical play and, whilst they might feel similar feelings to the child during play, we are aware of adult feelings of enchantment, rapture and reverence, particularly in response to their child's engagement in musical play.

Table 11.

Music Educators' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Experience

Music Educators think that musical play, as the experience below,	facilitates feelings for the child of (all sorts of)...	facilitates feelings for the adult of (ritual-like)...
Exploration	Fun, interest, delight, enchantment	Enchantment
Restoration	Exhilaration, satisfaction, joy	Rapture
Remembrance	Gratification, reverence	reverence

Scholars of Play: We agree with Music Educators' summary, and suggest that Henricks' table starts to demonstrate some instability at this point. Henricks created this table to situate play using contemporary play scholarship, and to differentiate between an activity which is play and an activity which is not play. Therefore we simply reproduce Henricks' interpretation of play here, hoping to find that musical play for the child meets the conditions of what Henricks might term "real" play. Real play occurs in free time, explores new relationships, and "realizes ideals".

Real play runs counter to a regulated, ritualistic “ideal” play which “idealizes reality” and is the play approved of and sponsored by “established elites” (Henricks, 2015a). We appreciate that the child is engaging in contextual play which “prizes and intentionally convolutes patterns of recognition and response” (Henricks, 2015, p. 213) in an ascending pattern of meaning construction, opening up, rather than restricting the play. The adult is tending the play towards ritual, and is enchanted by the child’s accommodation of their ritual.

Table 12.

Play Scholars’ adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Experience

Scholars of Play think that musical play, as the experiences below,	facilitates feelings for the child of (all sorts of)...	facilitates feelings for the adult of (ritual-like)...
Exploration	Fun	Enchantment
Restoration	Exhilaration	Rapture
Remembrance	Gratification	Reverence

Music Educators: Very few Music Educators attempt to define “play”. The music educator Campbell (1998), identified play as a process by which children imitate adult behaviour and learn adult roles and values. This led to her calling for teachers to take children’s playground songs seriously as starting points for music education. She claimed that children’s songs are “characteristic of the national tradition at large” and through playing together musically (singing, moving together and interacting with one

another in enjoyable circumstances), children develop a musical and cultural consciousness. Similarly, reinforcing the cultural, situated nature of children's musical play Koops (2010), researching in The Gambia, reminded us that children under five years old are rarely alone, and are expected to play with other children without any adult supervision. It is through children listening, observing and doing music with peers and siblings, and playing together unhindered by adult intervention in a musically rich environment with an unquestioning expectation that everyone is musical, that young children acquire musical skills. These two examples infer the fun, interest, delight and enchantment of young children's musical free play.

Joy is recognised in children's musical play. Koops (2017) observed 4–7 year olds engaging in musical play and identified an “enjoyment cycle” of enjoyment, motivation, and participation and learning, aligned with concepts of agency and flow. In this particular article, enjoyment in musical play was distinct from “fun”, in that children's enjoyment was associated with a balance of structure and freedom, and novelty and familiarity. Pleasure for the participating children arose in these activities from engagement, challenge and satisfaction found in the engagement. However, play is not always fun for all, and children's musical play can be viewed as “noise”. Nieuwmeijer et al. (2019), working in classrooms in the Netherlands, found that some adults found musical play difficult to sustain because, according to the authors, some adults found the play to be “uncontrolled noise” and “not real music”. Having defended the point of view that even infants can discern melodies (Trainor and Corrigall, 2010), infants must surely also be able to discern cacophony. Nieuwmeijer et al. (2019) advised that a necessary condition for musical play to occur was freedom from rules, adult expectations and instruction, and that adults needed to be informed

about the role of musical free-play in children's musical needs and overall development. This contradicts our decision that musical play facilitates feelings of enchantment. The noise is merely a necessary stage. Noise can be a type of proto-composition which necessitates "creative fallout" and "noise" (Kenney, 2007). Kenney advocated for tolerance of "this stage in the young composer's learning". The earliest reference to noise found in journal articles and books about musical play was by Cleall (1981, p. 44), who wrote about the importance of free musical play, saying (rather obscurely) "Let it happen, rather than make him do this. Make him do that. If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing badly", adding that a creative education comes about when children are active of their own volition. Children's musical play in playgrounds was referred to as "din" by Countryman, Gabriel, & Thompson (2016), but these researchers were typical of many who sought and found patterns within the multimodal "concoctions" of sound, movement and gesture within the play, reminiscent of the way in which "patterns" of pulse, quality and narrative had been identified in mother-infant dyadic proto-conversations by Malloch (1999), who described these interactions as "communicative musicality". In fact, the researchers who find sound, movement and gesture within the noise of musical play are the adults who evidently feel enchantment, rapture and reverence in musical play.

Scholars of Play: Henricks' table is, as was mentioned at the start, multi-stable. He produced the table to both situate and formalise the views of play scholars, and to differentiate play from not play. Henricks (2015), was interested in the causes, consequences, and contexts of play, and his interest was sociological. Throughout *Play and the Human Condition* (Henricks, 2015), the book which carries this table, Henricks referred

frequently to his contemporary, Scott Eberle. Eberle defended an evolutionary basis for play, writing from the point of view that play is developmental to the player (Eberle, 2014). Whilst Henricks focussed on contrasting play and not-play, Eberle focussed on play's elements: anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength, and poise, which feature as "expressions" in the unfolding of play. Eberle expressed the limits of play in a different way from Henricks, pointing out that there is only a fine line between play and not-play as in for example: the anticipation of play and the indecision of not-play, the surprise of play and an unpleasant shock, and the pleasure of play and the unplay-like qualities of over-indulgence. Eberle (2014) developed this idea, stressing that play has a fractal quality, in that each part of play has the capacity to reconstruct the whole.

Whilst we concur with Henricks' experiences of play, and the feelings that accompany these experiences, we feel that the feelings which are facilitated through exploration, restoration, and remembrance in musical play are partly due to play's, and to musical play's, fuzzy nature. As mentioned earlier in *The Fugue*: "Regardless of the status of the system, the elements within the system are *at play*, and one notices chimera and fuzzy clusters in play." Within those fuzzy clusters one might observe work, *communitas*, and ritual in musical play, and they might be chimeras. This playful work has been helpfully identified as "aesthetic striving" (Nguyen, 2020). According to Nguyen, we engage with art for the satisfactions of the struggle. The fun, interest, delight, enchantment, exhilaration, satisfaction, and joy all stem from aesthetic engagement in the pleasures of careful attention, interpretation, and evaluation.

Musical play seems to be a designed, endogenous artgame that you have to play in and with. According to Squire (2006), an endogenous game is orientated to the group, who discover how to play through play, and players' identities are recruited, managed, and built over time. An artgame, according to Sharp (2015, p. 49) uses the innate properties of games (interactivity, game mechanics, and player goals) to create expressive play experiences that "explore metaphysical questions around life, ethics, and aspects of the human condition".

Such an approach can accommodate the baby, the preverbal two- and three-year olds, and the children singing in the school playground. These players are actively trying on what Nguyen calls "different agential skeletons" for size as they play (Nguyen, 2019). Dipping in and out of the different agencies required to fully participate in and contribute to the art within which they are immersed. This is hard work, and Nguyen refers to the activity as aesthetic striving play (Nguyen, 2019). The player dwells in subtlety and ambiguity of being and striving in the moment, and then steps back and reassesses how that feels when emerging blinking back into everyday reality of a musical encounter, only to immerse again and to emerge again, building agential fluidity and, most importantly, the capacity to manage that fluidity.

Aristotle: For the purposes of this game, we have a consensus, in that Henricks' summary of this particular way of describing play holds with the child's musical play in the manner that the play is being considered. I shall, hesitatingly, remove this chair.

Chair six: Musical Play as Contextualised Meanings

Figure 10.

Chair Six. Play as Contextualised Meanings



Henricks stated that:

Play has contextualised, ascending meanings within the event
and

Play has contextualised, ascending meanings beyond the event.

This chair addresses the meaning of play, as in the causes and consequences of play to the individual, and how play diversifies experience, solidifies behavioural strategy, and contributes to problem-solving, both within the event (whilst immersed in the play) and after the event (when the play is finished). Henricks qualifies this approach, adding that play contributes to the building of the playful spirit and habits of self-directed enquiry, rather than the direct development of experience-based skills. Also play, as a fundamental form of relating, is necessary for us to understand what we do (Henricks, 2014).

According to Henricks (2015) play reveals a pattern of ascending meaning both within and beyond the play event. He says that in instances of ascending meaning the

players impose their own action schemes on their environments and try to work out what they can do in and to the world, how they assert themselves, and how pleased they feel as a result of those assertions. In contrast, descending meaning entails accommodation of the outside world, and giving control of the play over to something or someone else. Henricks considers ritual to be, in this sense, opposite to play, because ritual determines the moral and cognitive direction and how one moves and relates to others. Ritual is therefore descending in meaning both within and after the event. However, Henricks realises that communal bonding found in *communitas* which, employing agreed movements and sounds, can be of ascending meaning after the event. Henricks, following Piaget's (1951) writing, stresses that both ascending and descending meaning making are necessary elements of human learning and social adaptation. In general, play is a way in which people take particular elements of the world and turn those elements into something different from what they were before (Henricks, 2014). This chair tackles how players give themselves, or are allowed to give themselves over to play.

Music Educators: We strongly feel that musical play for the child is, in Henricks', terminology, ascending, during and particularly after, the event. We can argue equally that musical play for the child who is playing with others, is descending within the event, and ascending after the event. Therefore, musical play is, for the child, aligned with play and with *communitas*. We recognise elements of work and ritual in elements of

musical play, but play and *communitas* are at the forefront of a child's meaning-making in musical play.

Again, it is difficult to judge the contextualised meaning of musical play for an adult, but we feel that the majority of adults who wish for their child to engage in musical play have an agenda for that play, which might manifest as approval for particular behaviours, or engagement with certain therapies or pedagogies. Such actions make the play descending in its meaning within the event, but after the event when the adult senses their own, or their child's, accomplishment and satisfaction of the play, the meaning is ascending. As mentioned earlier, musical play's relationship with ritual and work is complex.

Table 13.

Music Educators' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Contextualised Meaning

Music Educators consider musical play, as contextualised meaning for child...		Music Educators consider musical play, as contextualised meaning for the adult...	
...within the event, to be	Ascending/ descending	...within the event to be	descending
...and beyond the event to be	ascending	...and beyond the event to be	ascending

Scholars of Play: We think that musical play for the adult and the child has to have an ascending pattern within and beyond the event.

Table 14.

Play Scholars' adaptation of Henricks (2015) categorisation of Play as Contextualised experience.

Scholars of Play consider play, as contextualised meaning for the child...		Scholars of Play consider play, as contextualised meaning for the adult...	
...within the event, to be	ascending	...within the event to be	ascending
...and beyond the event to be	ascending	...and beyond the event to be	ascending

Scholars of Play: For musical play to be ascending in meaning, the resource of musical play must be drawn-on in a positive way to enable an “impetuous pattern of meaning-making” (Henricks, 2015), and to help ambitions to be fulfilled. These ambitions might be harboured by the child or the adult, and be nurtured by a playful environment which is free from the sort of obligation which is demanded by ritual and work. The child, and maybe the adult too, is at play in the musical environment, and is playing with understandings, and playing with what it is like to be situated in a musical world.

Following Henricks' thinking, the opposite of the unobligated playful environment should be some form of compulsory music ritual. However such a statement is complicated by the fact that some play behaviours are more ritualistic, or rule-bound (*ludus*) than others, which are more free-form (*paidia*). The child, who is required to conform to behavioural expectations of the social, the educational, or the therapeutic, might not

be able to control or manipulate the situation they find themselves in, and any attempt to do so by the child, however playful, would not be welcomed by others.

Returning to the playful musical environment, such as the one illustrated in this game as a rhythmic, melodic, a verbal interaction between a mother and her baby, ascending meaning can be found within and beyond the event. The episodic acts of musicking within the mother-infant episode inevitably deal with unpredictable interaction patterns of melody, rhythm, body movement, digestion, tiredness, and body temperature, and the movements facilitate the achievement of momentary satisfaction, or consummation, as Henricks (2015) phrases it. The accomplishment of such play is, Henricks asserts, more “we” than “I”. As a behaviour rationale or contextualised meaning of the event, consummation of the “we” through the musical play of the “I” is play of an ascending pattern.

Consideration of musical play outside of our mother-infant example does deliver a conundrum: Taken to a logical conclusion, the child playing musically freely, making sounds which a passer-by might think are “raucous”, and which do not coincide with any recognisable rhythm, or discernible exaggeration or repetition, is engaging in a playful act which is counter to the rhythmic, melodic music of the local culture. Such an act, particularly played-out with others can be a contestive pattern of play of ascending meaning. Sutton-Smith (1997) coined the rhetoric “counterludic identity” for such an act, and the example of such play does not need to be so extreme. Maybe the child is playing with polyrhythm whilst everyone else is playing strictly in-rhythm. We must return to the second chair in this game, which was the “Play as

Interaction” Chair, and which was not removed from the game. We disagreed on whether musical play arose from the local culture, or whether a culture has arisen, or is arising, from musical play. This is where we are stuck. If the musical play is locked into musical culture, its meaning is descending. But we do not know whether, or do not want to contemplate whether or not musical culture is locked into the musical play of young children.

Music Educators: The musical play that we consider to be freely chosen, extended, uninterrupted musical play was found by Berger and Cooper (2003) to be a positive contributor to children’s music education. They cited play benefits as described by Piaget, Vygotsky and Froebel, and used their case study to explore how musical play could be encouraged and maintained in early childhood settings. Berger and Cooper’s (2003) work is mentioned here because they identified the child’s uninterrupted musical play as “unfinished play”. In contrast to “unfinished play”, Berger and Cooper identified two other play themes as “extinguishing play” and “enhancing play”. Enhancing play was what adults were advised to do to support the child’s ongoing musical play, and extinguishing play was what adults did when obstructing children’s play. Adults can bring a descending meaning to children’s musical play.

Scholars of Play: “Adulteration of play” (Else, 2014) is the term for when an adult takes over or dominates a child’s play for their purposes.

Music Educators: But the child can invite others in to their musical play. In Norway Dag Nome (2019), utilising the theoretical framework of

communicative musicality, identified young children's shared sounds and rhythms as non-verbal invitations for others to join in the activity and to develop a shared purpose, to be "meaningfully present together as sounding bodies". Furthermore, musical play in infancy does not have to be rhythmic or melodic all of the time. Some referred to the children's use of cultural artefacts (such as a frying pan) as extensions to the sounding body. Other authors, writing about musical play as movement, exploration, discovery, and repetition, regarded the apparatus used in sound-making as a separate entity, discrete from the body, and the child first has to use repetitive movements to discover what the sound-making object could do, prior to discovering what they could do with that affordance (Delalande & Cornara, 2010; Dansereau, 2015).

Ansdell (2014), who wrote from the perspective of a music therapist and also community musician, stated that musical engagement is irreducible to sonic structure, cognitive models, and the exposure of underlying structures and mechanisms. Instead he called for an expansionary practice around the interdependent ecological relationships between sounds and people, people and people, sounds and people and places. In other words, musical play is an expansionary practice for children and the people who care for them.

Therefore, there are many opportunities for musical play to attain a descending pattern of meaning, but this does not mean that musical play has a descending pattern of meaning. However, many well-meaning adults will adulterate musical play and bring a descending meaning to the play. Musical play, as a social, political, therapeutic, educational or cultural act is related to ritual and work and, for the child at musical play, we feel that the play is of ascending meaning to the child, or at least it should be.

Aristotle: We are in agreement that musical play, for the child, is of ascending meaning during and after the event, according to Henricks' description. The child's curiosity and engagement is apparent during the play, and a sense of consummation is apparent after the play. I shall remove this chair from the game.

It is interesting that the child's transgressive behaviours which might be counter to the rest of a group who are engaging in a musical game, ritual, or event of communitas, can be interpreted as contestive. This was a pattern of engagement of play which was picked up when we were considering Play as Interaction. Henricks' (2015) view on the contestive within play acknowledged that communal play can be contestive in being a challenge of what we can do together. Players want a good game, and a certain amount of challenge and perplexity draws us in to play, maintaining our interest and enabling accomplishments to be pleasurable. It seems that musical play is about unadulterated discovery, yet this seems insufficient. Challenge is a necessary part of musical play.

Removing the chair "Play as Contextualised Meanings" from the game leaves us with one remaining chair: "Play as Interaction". This chair remains because of the difficult relationships between play, ritual, communitas, and musical play. It is the duty of all citizens to sit on this chair for a while.

Reflections on Henricks' Musical thinking Chairs

The game of Henricks' Musical Chairs utilised Henricks' (2015) "multi-stable" table separating play from "not play" for its original intention, which was to provoke debate and discussion. Henricks was aware that play's qualities cannot be abstracted from the real behaviours people produce, and that play may forever remain ambiguous or paradoxical, but he hoped that the elucidation of activities, interactions, and dispositions of play would help scholars to express which unique combinations assisted in the representation of play. Henricks' table was tackled, iteratively and methodically, in honour of Wittgenstein's analytical method, in the aspirational hope that some original thinking about the unique nature of children's musical play might somehow be "revealed". Within the game, areas of agreement were accepted, and the game moved onwards. Areas of disagreement, which required further discussion, were highlighted. At the game's end there was one element of particularly rich disagreement - one winning "chair" remaining in the game - "Play as Interaction". Interestingly "Play as Contextualised Meanings" was a close second. It seems that musical play requires some social or personal challenge to achieve satisfaction, or consummation.

Another close and worthy runner-up in this game was "Play as Action", although it became clear that there was a fuzzy boundary between what could be considered action in musical play and what could be considered interaction, particularly when considering how representations of play interacted with representations of "not-play". Noteworthy of this part of the game was the idea that Suit's (1977) "temporary reallocation" to autotelic activities of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes is unlikely to be monodirectional. The Scholars of Play conjectured that the reallocation of resources by the player during musical play is a fluctuating,

bidirectional, temporarily equilibrating, allocation of instrumental (in this case work-like, *communitas*-like, or ritualistic) purposes within musical play. Also discussed within “Play as Action” was a take on “serious play”, inspired by Bateson (1987) as the way in which musical play plays with work and ritual, allowing us to conceive of musical play as a pleasurable form of serious play. Some of the seriousness of musical play might arise from the coincidence that play is episodic (Henricks, 2015) and music, as an aesthetic form, is episodic too (Dissanayake, 2006).

The serious play of a baby’s vocal communication, and how that baby increases its ability to manipulate its voice, is musical play as interaction, and it is made up of serious work of repetition, elaboration, and exaggeration, within some ritual-informed framework. Even though Massumi’s (2018) thoughts on nature-at-play being a “genuine thirdness”, a “thickness”, a “non-divisibility” and a “change on separation”, were discussed in “Play as Activity”, it is clearly the complex interaction between players, between dispositions, between play, and work, and ritual, and between now and next, that makes musical play what it is.

Play as interaction “won” this game because musical play interacts with “not-play” in a unique fashion. It seems that musical *play* can play with, and contest in playful ways, *not-play* in the forms of ritual, and work (within Henricks’ descriptions of these qualities), and musical play can co-exist with these qualities in some form of briefly observable dynamic equilibrium. As the Scholars of Play pointed out, the *ritual act* of musical play is sung, danced and played-out by the adult in undeniably playful ways but, in this context, the similar but *playful* act of musical play is sung, danced, played, and worked at using elements akin to ritual, or even work, by the child. The child does not merely mimic the adult’s play.

Henricks reminds us that play is contestive, and the child at play pushes at the boundaries of play, and work, and ritual, to see what happens. There might be momentary, dynamic stases of order, or chaos, or of work, or play, or of predictable and unpredictable action, which allows the mother-baby play to dwell for a while in a “saddle point” in Game Theory parlance. Musical play which is operating at the edge of chaos is likely to be ludocentric, as opposed to being a ritual or a piece of work to be accomplished. Ludocentric play is recognised as operating at the place where order makes the transition to complexity (Battram, 1999). As such, Battram (1999), channelling a systems interpretation theory of Maturana and Varela (1980), might agree with an autopoietic interpretation of musical play as a self-referential social system. As Henricks (2006) stated at the outset; “play is the laboratory of the possible”, and within that laboratory, musical play seems to be a momentary, dynamic, briefly stable, ecology of play, and music, challenge, pleasure, expectation, sounds, bodies and more.

This game promised to be a game of reduction towards complexity, and this state of affairs has been achieved. Musical play has been reduced to autopoietic, contextual action or interaction, which is quite sad because the play never feels that complex.

She hums another phrase, rocking side to side in time to the tune, pauses, and the baby coos. The mother smiles, replies with a nod, and a glissando “ooh!” and recommences the rocking and humming.

According to Eberle (2014), “anxiously waiting for a bus cannot claim anything for play, but passing the time whistling a version of Van Morrison’s *Moondance* while waiting for the same bus surely can”. In the same manner, the activity of an

exhausted mother pleading for the child to go to sleep cannot claim to be a play activity, but humming, whilst enjoying the baby's responses, surely can. The mother pauses the rocking, suspending the play, introducing episodic interruptions to the space and time of the play. As Gruneau (1980) points out play, such as this mother-baby musical interaction, features a paradox in that the activity is a peak experience of transcendental fantasy, with a nature and form greatly influenced by social structures and cultural formations. The rules of this musical play episode are rooted in the social experience of the mother, but when these rules are applied in this game, two things happen: rules of play become established between the mother and the baby, bringing the pair together, and secondly, the rules of play insulate the pair (certainly in this quiet moment of devoted play) from society at large. The example of musical play here describes independent, spontaneous aspects of human agency, and dependent and regulated aspects of it. To sift this engagement into distinct piles of play and pedagogy, *paidia* and *ludus*, love and music, dance and comedy, or loving action and hard work, is an example worthy of the Sorites Paradox. We cannot derive clear judgements about musical play from incremental increases in imponderable actions. In short, the boundaries, between loving actions and actions bordering the coercive in musical play, are fuzzy.

Within his writing, Gruneau admired the lyrical and compelling ruminations of the theologian and philosopher Novak's writing on sport, but he also criticised Novak's "romanticized hagiography", particularly in how Novak turned to the sacred in order to grasp some of the fundamental paradoxes of play in sport. Novak (1976) stated that sports "embody a transcendent mythic form, a ritual elaboration of the music [sic] of the human spirit that is at once both dramatic and deeply religious".

Immediately one is drawn to the notion of the human spirit's music as dramatic and religious. Also compelling is the idea that musical play could interact with the music of the human spirit. Whilst the mother humming to her responsive baby can be attributed with a descending meaning, and likened to ritualistic, or even functional, work-like behaviour, the child's behaviour in the same activity is more akin to conceptualisation of play. There are few areas of shared human activity that support the paradoxes of independence, spontaneity, dependence and regulation, free-thought and belief, in one form. These paradoxes contribute to how we think about children's musical play as being useful. They remind us that utility can be rooted in the everyday, and become manifest in the transcendent.

Children engage in musical play because it feels good. Young children vocalising, or using their bodies as resonators, or using sound-makings which are to-hand, appear to find the activity fun and intriguing. The baby's soft palate is an inexhaustible toy (Street, 2017). As Street points out; children practise and extend the sounds they know from their surroundings, and these early interactions are the embodiment "of powerful sources on which later models of expressiveness and creativity are founded". Interestingly, Street observes, these surroundings are changing in modern times and, in reference to Appadurai's (1996) notion of "scapes", the influential environmental landscapes that affect family lives are also "mediascapes" dominated by Western media, particularly songs and characters from films, and "ethnoscapes" which are ever-changing as a result of global migration.

Maybe the paradox of the frivolous and the serious in play, or consideration of musical play as a complex system, which sounds quite grand and impenetrable, feels particularly unhelpful when theorising about children's musical play because these "scapes" and the fleshy bodies which play in them, and the boundaries between

human and spirit, play, music, action and belief, themselves feel blurred. In the made up example of musical play under examination here, the boundedness of mother and baby rocking and humming appears fluid, because it stems from the couple's experiences which are being constantly morphed by their activity. The affective boundedness of mother and baby's play is permeable, interactive, and constantly changing (Rogoff, 2003), and the ecology is wishfully, intentionally, conative. Fluid boundaries are not "serious" boundaries: the couple's play is happening in a temporary world within the ordinary world, and the play is dedicated to the performance of an act apart (Huizinga, 1950, p. 10). The fluid boundary or border between this playworld and ordinary serious life is itself not *serious*, it is playful. Rather, the boundary *is* serious because, as Calleja (2015) points out "[r]eality does not *contain* play; like any other socio-culture construction, play is an intractable manifestation of reality", and it *is not* serious, and it is playful, because, Calleja continues, any play/non-play boundary, such as a magic circle (Huizinga, 1950) does not possess the clarity and analytically rich formulation of the real, serious world. The boundary has a dialethism, a double-truthed quality of seriousness and playfulness, and its appearance does not belie its underlying essence.

The interactive participatory medium of musical play, to which the baby contributes, as does the mother, as does the song, and the movement, encompasses entrainment of both parties, and an "aboutness" which is variable and particular to the individual and is, according to Cross (2008), rarely, if ever, consensually determinate. The temporal structure of the rhythmic rocking is experienced as interactive and shared, and means that both mother and baby can align their behaviours to each other, entrain their attention and gain an enhanced sense of mutual affiliation. The floating intentionality refers to the less observable nature of music's meaning as lacking any

precision of agreement between communities of listeners. Cross points out the paradox that music's meanings are immediate and direct, yet are individually variable; music appears to embody unmediated, direct meaning. One might say, Cross elaborates, that we have a tendency to experience the acoustical signals entailed by the music as though there were a necessary causal connection between the signals' structure and the affective and motivational states of their producers (Cross, 2008; 2009).

When Robinson (2016) brought together a Burkean (Burke, 1969) identification of a distinction between the physical body (skin, muscle, organs, and bones) and the affective self (the psychosomatic feeling-becoming-thinking, or heart-becoming-mind), to the notion of friendship, he recalled Aristotle's notion of "friendly feeling". This feeling can, transiently and imperfectly, or weirdly, extend beyond the body to merge with others in a collective bodies-becoming mind, just like a floating intentionality. As Robinson elaborates this interaction is a "persuading-becoming-believing and also belong to "opinion-becoming-reputation", or doxa.

Not only is the appearance of musical play ambiguous, recognisable appearances might be the result of doxas (beliefs) which are hegemonic. We must bear in mind that not all cultures micro-analyse mother-and-baby practices, or seek any "intensification of individualism and self-optimization which require high levels of self-regulation" (Young, 2019). Young asserts that such attributes are valued in a neoliberal society but, taken to the level of "intensive mothering" which "supposedly offers choice, autonomy and fulfilment as a mother", they are more likely to require "unrealistic levels of investment and self-regulation", and "conflicted feelings of guilt and anxiety". Young concludes that mother-baby musical play is valuable, and intensely private, never intended to be scrutinised for micro-disciplinary techniques,

even those that we might consider to be part of a local musical culture with which we identify.

After the publication of “Ambiguity of Play” (Sutton-Smith, 1997), Sutton-Smith wrote a definition of play:

Play, as a unique form of adaptive variability, instigates an imagined but equilibrated reality within which disequilibrium exigencies can be paradoxically simulated and give rise to the pleasurable effects of excitement and optimism. The genres of such play are humor, skill, pretense, fantasy, risk, contest, and celebrations, all of which are selective simulations of paradoxical variability. (p. 253)

Having played hard to locate interactivity as the contested overlap on play and musical play, the discovery slips away into mostly friendly feelings, humour, skill, and the realisation that the final chair of the game is an imagined “equilibrated reality” at best.

Smoke does not travel in a straight line up a chimney; its swirling vortices are affected by thermal currents which in turn are affected by the quality and quantity of the fire and the design of the chimney. Similarly, the direction of musical play appears to be non-linear, organised yet disequilibrium, and in search of novelty. Some form of “chimney”, some temporal, cultural boundaries, seem to channel musical play into the play type that it is. The music is audible, just like the smoke is visible, and both are carried in the invisible, forgettable, vital, medium of air.

We are minded that play is also the “lila”, the divine playful action of the gods, which causes smoke and music to swirl between order and chaos, and which makes

movement and music interesting. The etymological root of the word lila is “lih” and “lelay”, which mean flicker and flame (Nadarajan, 2004).

Aristotle: Let us not look for precision in the same way in everything, but in accordance with the underlying material in each sphere, and to the extent which is appropriate to the enquiry. Some people think happiness is excellence, others that it is wisdom, others a kind of intellectual accomplishment, or pleasure, or prosperity. Happiness is what is best, and finest, and pleasantest (Aristotle et al., 2002), even when it is happiness with complexity.

Interlude: Liminalities

The young child's musical play is, on account of its rhythmic movement and melody, a performance of gestures of marching, rolling, looking, ignoring, listening, and feeling, and doing "codes" (Turner, 1979), operating somewhere in-between, yet apart from, the everyday world of functional society. According to Turner (1979), this is a liminal space not controlled by the clock, and is a place where "anything might, even should, happen", yet the musically playing child's idiosyncratic, quirky, or strange activity would be, according to Turner, more "liminoid" than "liminal". The liminal is found between recognised, calendar-based, socially-structured, or biological ways of being, whilst the liminoid of children's musical play is centred in the "irreal" (intangible, immaterial), the messy, chaotic, and sensuous. Fragrant crocodiles, "dot doot doo" improvisations, ringing metallophones, and silly songs sit uneasily, if they sit at all, within serious, sophisticated music research (Young, 2021).

To dwell on the liminoid nature of the young child's musical play is to sit with the infinite number of ways with which it is impossible to pin down play. *Paidia*, the modern Greek word for children, was adopted by play scholar Caillois (2001) to describe types of play remarkable by their "diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety". The activity of *paidia* is therefore contrary to *ludus*, the rule-bound game, but as Caillois points out, both *paidia* and *ludus* are simply two, amongst many, ways of playing, and that play types include winning (*agôn*), luck (*alea*), mimicry, and *ilinx* (altering the player's stability of perception). Play's appearance is ambiguous at the least, evading definition (Sutton Smith, 1997), and play "is not just an irrational, spontaneous or useful activity, but rather the grounds

for the human possibility for meaning” (Wall, 2013). The term liminoid is, therefore, yet another way to illustrate the slipperiness of play.

At the start of this writing the word “pharmakon” (Derrida, 1981) was floated as a word which expressed musical play’s multiplicities - as a remedy, poison, and scapegoat. However, describing potential and combinatorial appearances of musical play, regardless of their utility, was compelling, but it did not get us closer to the reality of children’s musical play.

It is as if play, or musical play, is taunting us, and playing with us. One is minded of the aesthetic turn (Aurelio, 2012) of Schelling’s (1800) *System of transcendental Idealism*. Schelling, a philosopher at the University of Jena in Germany, who took over from Fichte, developed a model of thought in the System of Transcendental Idealism. Aurelio writes that Schelling, in his later work, claimed that the world attracted artists by calling on them, and the world offered itself to an artist’s vision in a way that it did not for non-artists. In this way the world seduced artists, by showing itself and then hiding, speaking and then returning to silence.

The next game of this enquiry considers an ontological view of children’s musical play as a withdrawn object which exists only in hiding, yet has the apprehensible qualities of the musical pharmakeus (the wizard, magician, poisoner, and scapegoat). The game considers how musical play’s qualities seduce the child artist and musician, and anyone or anything else that is open to its magic. Occasional glimpses of musical play’s shimmering, molten, real interior lure the child in further.

Chapter 5: Ring OOO Roses

This game is a development of the article “OOO, Guerrilla Metaphysics, and the Allure of Children’s Musical Play” published in *Music Education Research, Special Issue: Posthuman Perspectives for Music Education* (Harmer, 2024b). The abstract can be found, beyond the references, in the Endnotes ⁱⁱⁱ. The original article introduced the philosophy of Object Oriented Ontology to the early childhood music education community, and dwelt on the “allure” of objects, in particular the allure of Ring o’ Roses, where allure is “a special and intermittent experience in which the intimate bond between a thing’s unity and its plurality of notes somehow partially disintegrates” (Harman, 2005, p. 143). The intention of the original article, other than to add to philosophical thinking within early childhood music studies, was to offer a speculative realist account of the mystery and impenetrability of children’s musical play. The playful music-making of the young child remains impossible to fully grasp despite the application of technology or duration of observation and, regrettably, no equipment can record the curiosity or wonderment of musical play, which leaves the play to be documented as the collection of appearances of a work-like affair. Thus, the original article, which advocated for the allure and magic of musical play, was a curiosity – a tiny drop of philosophical wonderment and speculation in an ocean of efficient, resourceful practice.

Certain technical sections of the original published article which build the case for play, musical play, and the philosophy of Object Oriented Ontology in relation to Barad’s Agential Realism remain here, and are updated and extended. The structure of this chapter is the same as the aforementioned article - however the argument is

entirely different. *Ring OOO Roses* dwells on the nuts and bolts of Object Oriented Ontology which is Graham Harman's rigorously documented, speculatively realist, development of Heidegger's phenomenology (2002; 2005; 2007; 2011a; 2013; 2016; 2018; 2020a; 2022; 2023), and attempts to align that philosophy with the writing of philosopher and play scholar Eugen Fink. Fink was a philosopher of play, student of Husserl, a contemporary of Heidegger, and is recognised as the most speculative of his generation of phenomenologists (Moran, 2007).

In this game the familiar, game-like circle-song *Ring o' Roses* is used as a touchstone for extravagant, human-decentred thought about the lively, exquisite interior of objects. The hope is that removing the human, or at least placing the human on the same ontological footing as the musical play with which they engage, might help us to contain play's appearances and effects, and allow us a deeper exploration of musical play's allure and how musical play affects change.

Ring a' ring o' roses,
A pocketful of posies,
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
We all fall down.

Figure 11.

A Dance like Ring o' Roses (Riksarkivets Julekalender, 2011).

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Ring a' Ring o' Roses

The first line of Ring o' Roses is a chance for all the players to assemble and to start moving in a coordinated, circular direction. The players of this game are "Ring o' Roses" as an example of serious play, Object Oriented Ontology, and the writing of Eugen Fink. Fink and OOO are introduced to one another. A path of pragmatic speculative realism is pursued which leads us to speculate about play, and music, as objects which exist equally. The prelusory goal for the game is to arrive at an ontology of musical play that aligns with Fink's writing.

Singing Ring a' Ring o' Roses (or its variations like Ring a' Roses) provokes equally the rolling of eyes and an enthusiastic scrambling to form a circle. The movement-song is widely known with variations (Matterson, 1991), and its melody, which is largely a rhythmic play on the minor third *sol - mi*, has been sung by children and their carers for over a hundred years (Opie and Opie, 1997). Ring o' Roses is used here as a structure for philosophical discourse because the song-game has made itself felt in philosophy, play scholarship, and music education literature. Ring o' Roses is also used here because it is a silly party game which does not matter a jot whether it is won or lost. The point is to actively engage with the motion, the melody, and the mindset, and to play to see what happens.

Oddly, Ring o' Roses' classification as play or game is a point of debate. Play scholar Suits speculated, through the words of a narrative character called Grasshopper, that "Ring around the Rosie" is "simply a kind of dance to vocal accompaniment, or a choreographed song", concluding that "it is no more a game than Swan Lake is" (Suits, 2014, p. 98). Later on in the same book, Suits cheekily

states that Ring around the Rosie is only called a game by small children and Wittgenstein, and it is not a game largely because it has another class of activity, other than game, in which to reside, whilst a game such as chess does not (Suits, 2014). This statement chimes with the previous chapter's conclusion that musical play, with its unpredictable pattern of engagement and contestable direction of engagement, has a curiously liminoid relationship with play.

“Ring-a-ring-a-roses” was the singing game that came to Wittgenstein's mind when considering family resemblances between children's games (Wittgenstein, 1994). Wittgenstein (1994) initially refers to ring-a-ring-a-roses as a language game and a means to learn the native language, and later as a source of amusement which has lost some game-like elements. This point was visited by Dorschel (2018) in an imagined conversation between Wittgenstein, composer Elisabeth Lutyens, and pianist Myra Hess. Through Dorschel (2018), Hess and Wittgenstein teased:

Take the sober route with me then, friends. Ring-a-ring o' roses is a game, a song and a dance at once. Characteristically, there is a penalty for the slowest child. The slowest child goes “to hell”.

And Wittgenstein, according to Dorschel, quips:

Or to Vienna (p.126).

In Dorschel's mini play, all characters agreed, through a circular reasoning that presumably brought the circle game of Ring o' Roses to mind in the first place, that play in music is sought, and found by the players.

The choreographed, un-game-like, hellish, performance of Ring o' Roses must have come to mind when Bob Hughes created a taxonomy of play which did not feature “musical play” as a play type (Hughes, 2002). Hughes was of the opinion that music

was an example of a highly specialised activity which, “like jewellery-making or candle-making [...] invariably has to be supervised and taught to children” (Hughes, 2001). Indeed, the reliance on traditional musical rhymes in early childhood education leads many scholars to doubt the playfulness of Ring o’ Roses. If Ring o’ Roses is a game, and it does share “family resemblances” with other games (Wittgenstein, 1994), then it might be more akin to the *ludus* (the rule-bound game) than *paidia* (spontaneous play), according to Caillois (2001), or more allied with adult-led care or education than child’s play. As if to clarify this point, play scholar Juul agreed that *Ring a Roses* was only an interesting challenge for a child up to a certain age. The activity ceases to be a game, just like “Tic-Tac-Toe” (Noughts and Crosses) ceases to be a game, once the child understands the strategy (Juul, 2013).

Indeed, the play, game, performance, amusement, language learning opportunity, and song of Ring o’ Roses is sought, and found, by musical players, and its rhythm, melody, and movement can be seen and heard in children’s spontaneous play with no adult input (Koops 2010; Countryman 2014; Marsh 2017; Custodero, Cali, & Diaz-Donoso, 2016). Of course, the music of Ring o’ Roses is also taught in early childhood settings and schools, utilised and adapted by pedagogical approaches such as the Kodàly method (Campbell and Alvarez 1990). The tune’s minor third (sol-mi) is a virtually universal motif in European folk tunes, and a Kodàly technique is to use this interval as a nucleus before expanding the child’s singing to the upper and lower neighbouring tones of la and re (Ringer, 1971).

It is Portuguese visual artist Paula Rego’s depiction of the circle-dance-song that taps into the play’s strange existence. Rego’s etching of Ring-a-Ring-A-Roses was one of a number of nursery rhymes that Rego created for her granddaughter Carmen for her second birthday. The image of adults dancing is ominously dark, with underlying

themes of power, domination, rebellion, sexuality, and gender, which gesture to the strange and weird origins of many nursery rhymes (Rego & Warner, 2019).

Ring-a-ring a Roses, with its rich connection to play scholarship, games, art, philosophy, education, plague symptoms, and death (Opie & Opie, 1997), forms a strange yet familiar milieu for this game. It seems that Ring o' Roses has many strange appearances: depictions and descriptions of Ring o' Roses might be critical and dark, yet gales of laughter often accompany the activity. Its relationship with play is as curious as its relationship with the players, the room's acoustics, the limitations of the space, the philosopher's experience, a memory, the pedagogue's duty to a curriculum, the vocal ranges of the singers, the air, the singers' gut biomes, or the weather. All of these things shimmer with the playful seriousness or the serious play of Ring o' Roses, which plays philosophers, children and adults as much as we play it.

The playful seriousness of Ring o' Roses is ideal for the task of aligning an Object Oriented Ontology with musical play, and this task is made possible because it is funny to take Ring o' Roses seriously, because being serious about the song-and-dance's daft reality is exactly what is required. Harman (2020b) mentioned in a magazine article that *intentionality* in Husserl's phenomenology, and the definition of *comedy* in Aristotle, have a considerable overlap. As Harman stated, *intentionality* in Husserl is dependent on the taking of another object seriously only in a human's mind, and this is the basis of phenomenology. *Comedy*, according to Aristotle, is dependent on *inferior* characters (Harman, 2020a), suggesting that humour is to be found when objects take other objects seriously but humans do not, presumably because the human is only going on the object's readily available phenomena, rather than the object's inner being. The taking of other objects seriously, by humans and

non-humans, is an important part of a flattening ontology within which no object's existence is superior, and no object is conflated with the total sum of its properties. According to Aristotelian risibility, Ring o' Roses might appear to be funny (or hellish) when we judge it on its surface appearance but, from a flattened ontological viewpoint, its actual existence is no funnier than anything else's. To *play* Ring o' Roses is not to engage in an inferior copy of serious action, but to engage with, or in, play.

Object Oriented Ontology ("Triple O", or OOO) is a branch of Speculative Realism which is a contemporary philosophical movement developed by Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, and Quentin Meillassoux (Mackay 2007), and comprises a growing number of scholars and artists including Timothy Morton, Ian Bogost, Levi Bryant, Patricia Ticineto Clough, and Jane Bennett (Harmer, 2024b). Adherents of Speculative Realism critique, and speculate beyond, the "narrow bandwidth" of philosophy restricted to the human-world correlate, which is the view that meaning is only possible between a human mind and its thought (Morton, 2013a). The philosophy of OOO operates at a depth that is, by definition, difficult for humans because the philosophy communicates reality as something which cannot be reduced to a description of its qualities (how a thing appears to us) or a summary of its relations (what a thing does for us or to us). Poetic language, metaphor, or analogy is deployed by OOO authors when discussing the real beyond human access, because these modes of expression hint and allude rather than assume direct access, and this is what is so attractive about OOO – a philosophical realism which insists that causality is an aesthetic affair. OOO understands the preservation of a thing's essence away from the full perception of not only humans and other things, but even

the thing itself. Such a statement is not radical when we realise that the appearance of something is simply an illusion, an Husserlian adumbration (appearance), and never its full reality - yet a well-crafted metaphor (and, I would argue, well-presented data, a mother's song, or a brief moment of musical play), might grant a glimpse of that which we might *sense* as deeper access..

A philosophy which starts from the point of appearance as mere illusion sounds ideal when considering the philosophy of play, and musical play. Play seems to make it its business to be ambiguous, and slippery, and its reality forever beyond our access. To think that play is play because of its ambiguous and slippery appearance would not constitute a Triple-O approach because ambiguity and slipperiness are themselves merely appearances – illusions which keep the inner core of play hidden. A human mind-bending, paraconsistent, dialetheic¹⁰, logic is suggested by Morton (2013a): that there is an inherent instability between essence (the inaccessible “thisness” of an object's inner being) and aesthetics (how a thing appears). This is a good thing, and it is the inner difference-for-itself – the way that an object's reality occupies at least two places simultaneously, being something and not something at the same time - is why anything happens (or more correctly, how time is made for things to happen), and it is how things die, or change (Morton, 2013a). It is worth noting that Morton's words could stand as a metaphor for children's musical play: a thing which is music

¹⁰ A dialethia is a double-truth. Objects are irreducibly, intrinsically suspended - an object is uniquely itself and its appearance is inseparable from the object, yet the object is not reducible to its appearance. There is a Rift between the object's essence and appearance. The object is $p \wedge \neg p$ (p and not p). (Morton, 2013a, p. 162).

and not music, and is play and not play, and is something capable of causing change – some of which is very useful.

The philosophy of OOO is currently being explored, stretched, and critiqued. For example, Lindley et al. (2020) applied OOO to everyday heterotopic design, applying the philosophy as a generative mechanism which contributed to ideation, design theory, and a framework for analysis. Wilde (2020) suggested a Topos-Oriented Ontology which acknowledged equal existence for objects and emphasised the relevance of *where* that object is. Zahavi (2016) suggested that speculative realism (of which OOO is a flavour) with its particular application of phenomenology, and its taste for the weird and the uncanny, is a philosophical dead-end. In speculative realism there is no way, says Zahavi, to distinguish speculation from “free phantasy [sic]”.

Harman’s writing critiques “correlationism”, which refers to the part of Kantian philosophy, and its descendant strands of Idealism, in which the only reality is one which is bound up in, or correlated with, human perception. Harman extends that notion of perception to all objects and not just humans. In brief, an anti-correlationist, object-oriented philosophy of human access states that there is a world entirely independent of human thought, and that world exists independent of human cognition, and that we can know this world (Harman, 2012).

The “round square” is offered by Harman (2023) as an example of an object without representation, and as an example of the potentially paradoxical and rather weird “being” of objects which are beyond human understanding, but can, somehow, be “known”. Harman holds that it is a matter of fact, not dogma, that humans think, and the human-world correlate is a fact, but the human-world correlate does not have to be a necessity because things do not have to correlate with human thought in order to

exist (Harman, 2005). Things exist, and appear to other things, and humans might, or might not, have partial access to this reality. Harman emphasises that the idea of things which exist beyond our access to them via our senses is not to be confused with Kant's "noumena", because noumena are borne only by humans. OOO recognises that all objects-in-themselves hide from everything else, even themselves (Harman, 2012).

OOO is a realist philosophy, in that it supports the idea that a world exists independently of the human mind, and the theory is opposed to the correlation, as in "correlationism", of world and thought (Harman, 2016). In *Realism Without Materialism*, Harman (2011b) discussed Braver's (2007) six possible meanings of realism, favouring "[T]he world is independent of mind", and adding a further meaning: "all relations are on the same ontological footing as the human-world relation." In this way, the basis of OOO is the withdrawal of all objects, including humans, from direct perceptual, causal relations (Harman, 2005). Such complete withdrawal raises the problems of how objects ever interact, and how change happens. We live, suggests Harman, in a sensual space full of objects which cannot be present, and change happens vicariously. This approach differs from that of realists in the old-fashioned sense who speculate on reality itself, because a speculative philosophy like OOO is more aligned with speculating about the nature of reality independently of thought and general humanity (Bryant, Srnicek & Harman, 2011). The speculative realists of OOO aim to think directly about a renewed attention to reality itself, and they choose to do this because they say that developments in neuroscience, interpretations of physics, the ecological crisis and, latterly, the increasing use of artificial reality, require it. In other words, the human is

not the arbiter of reality, and our understanding of how things happen has been skewed by over-reliance on our limited senses.

Realism, in the context of this writing, is taken by Object-Oriented Ontologists to originate with Aristotle's writing. This is convenient given Aristotle's role in previous games within this thesis. Harman explains that Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, claimed that no form can be completely defined (Harman, 2013). Using Socrates as an example, Aristotle declared that Socrates as a person is more than a vivid description of him, and more than any current, ever-changing assessment of him. Accepting this basic premise, Harman points out a disagreement he has with Aristotle: Aristotle thought that a composite (like a lawn with its blades of grass, or a rugby team, as a collection of players), could not be a unit. OOO, on the other hand, allows for ontologically "emergent" entities, such as a lawn, a team, or a city, to exist as an aggregate object even if it does not have qualities possessed by some of its parts. OOO thinking points out that these aggregate objects are quite robust to changes of grass length, team members, citizens and architecture, and an emergent entity is generally thought to arise as an effect of complex causes.

Harman's notion of emergence as a grouping of objects arranged together in such a way that they form "a larger compound entity per se", means that an emergent object is a sum total of parts which is ontologically distinct from its constituent parts (Harman & Witmore, 2023). An emergent object is therefore an object irreducibly wrapped in other objects "all the way down", as it were. Morton takes this further, coining the term "hyperobjects" for objects, which might be aggregate, and which are massively distributed in space and time relative to humanity's perception (Morton, 2013b). Thus Harman uses the term "emergent" in a uniquely OOO way. For example liquid water (an emergent object, and a hyperobject) has different

properties from gaseous hydrogen and oxygen. As Niki Young (2021) explains: *ontological* emergence is itself an ontological or real phenomenon *of the world*, and it cannot be fully framed in human ways of knowing the world. In other words, ontological emergence cannot be fully explained away by its appearance, effects, or relations.

OOO's position is *realist*, in that a knowable world, which is independent of human thought, is acknowledged, along with the idea that we can mentally *allude to* something outside human thought without *thinking it* in the sense of literally having mental access to its qualities. Harman (2020b) did refer to his position as “formalist”, in that he was interested in the underlying forms of things (as alluded to in the Fugue chapter), “in the medieval and Leibnizian sense of ‘substantial forms’ – referring to forms hidden in the things themselves rather than forms abstracted from the things by the human mind”. In this formalist approach, the hidden realities of objects cannot be exhausted by any or all of their appearances to us, *or to other objects*. This position, when applied to the arguably aggregate or ontologically emergent object of play, is a step beyond finding play, and definitions of musical play, “slippery” to access. It is hoped that OOO's approach can assist in determining how play is not being awkward, evasive, or slippery. In a formalist sense, play is, simply, “existing”, and it is by existing that play, and all objects, refuse any final insight (Feichtinger, 2019).

Banu (2014) suggests that there is “a deep trench between teleological, purposive, user-centred design and speculative object-oriented ontology”. A similar-sized trench can be found between a conventional view of the young child's musical play, and speculative, form-curious, object-oriented ontology, despite the fact that speculative realism (the idea that things can have a human mind-independent existence), and the musical play of young children, is not incompatible. In musical play, things do not

have to exist to be sung about, and things do not exist in order to be sung about, and the appearance of the song that is sung does not necessarily belie the play's meaning. Musical play is an excellent example of everyday, strange object which cannot be fully explained-away by examination of its appearances or its relations. Musical play can be extraordinarily alluring both philosophically and in its luminous presence, and, furthermore, musical play probably does not need humans in order for it to happen. Having accepted that children's musical play is beneficial, this game is an opportunity to speculate about *how* it is what it is.

Play is not an obvious subject of OOO, and Graham Harman has not written directly about play, yet his writing often has a quality of reserved playfulness. As Vigato (2021) pointed out: the cover of Harman's book *Object-Oriented Ontology, A new theory of everything* (Harman, 2018) featured a Lego-style brick. Also Harman chose a faint picture of a burning pickup truck semi-submerged in a rippling, sky-reflecting lake for the article *Dwelling Within the Fourfold* (Harman, 2009) which was an article about Heidegger's *Geviert*¹¹ and the mirrorplay of fourfold structures. It seems that play does not yet have an obvious role in OOO, but play is surely to be found deep within the existence of objects.

De-centring the human from thinking about children's musical play is problematic because early childhood music, music-making, and musical play are unequivocally human-centred. The oft-cited ecological environment conceived as a set of nested

¹¹ Heidegger referred to das *Geviert*'s - the fourfold's - "mirroring reciprocity" as "Spiegel-Spiel" as in game-game or, more literally, "mirror game" (Heidegger, 2012)

structures, each inside the next like a set of Russian dolls, with the developing person at the innermost setting (Bronfenbrenner, 2009) is testament to child-centred thinking. Writing on the subject of early childhood music education which approaches the decentring of the child and the “flattened”, ontological thinking that OOO develops, within Europe, is sparse. Biesta’s (2020) mention of education as “spooky action at a distance” certainly qualifies if only because “spooky action at a distance” is exactly what Morton (2016) claims is “causation”, because causation is “vicarious” (Harman, 2012). Philosopher of education Biesta (2020) proposed that a “soul to soul” education is not organisms adjusting their actions to each other to secure a successful ongoing transaction, but instead a summoning or calling. It is diverting to think of a “soul to soul” education as “spooky”, or “passionate”, and even more diverting to think of musical play as a spookily passionate influencer of objects.

Human- and other-crafted objects like Ring o’ Roses, musical play, play, melodies, or computers are things with ontic agency, being animate, but not living. Speculating about their existence is like asking Biesta’s question *Hey! You there! Where are you?* (Biesta, 2020). In answer, Ring o’ Roses’ words are found occupying a page of a book, its music is a signal stored on an obsolete recording device, its melody is being sung right now somewhere in the world, and its imagery is an artist’s etching. One can wonder what it is like to experience being Ring o’ Roses, just as one can wonder what it is like to be, and to experience being, a computer, a microprocessor, or a ribbon cable (Bogost, 2012). Bogost clarifies that such an exercise is an attempt of panexperientialism rather than panpsychism. This is speculation as a creative, and philosophical, serious, and playful act, played in the hope that OOO can point us to how we experience the liveliness hidden inside of things like play, and musical play.

Eugen Fink (1905-1975) was Edmund Husserl's assistant at the University of Freiburg, and he wrote his PhD thesis under the supervision of Husserl and Heidegger. Fink and Heidegger harboured vast and irreconcilable differences in their political convictions¹², but maintained a lifelong friendship (Boronat, 2015). Fink's work was made near impossible after Husserl's expulsion from the University of Freiburg on account of his Jewish background, and Heidegger's support of Germany's National Socialist Party. However, Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time*, published in 1927, was a significant influence on Fink, in particular Heidegger's thoughts on play (Moran, 2007). Heidegger wrote, for example, that Dasein (being there, or existence) is "spielraum" – room for playing – in that existing is to be space-making, leeway-making, play-making (Heidegger, 2007). Fink's post-war research focussed on the speculative phenomenology of play and, believing that ontology (the branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature of being) needed to be integrated into phenomenology, Fink sought a compromise between the systems (philosophies) of Husserl and Heidegger (Moran, 2007), and developed a metaphysical approach to play concerned with the cosmological, anthropological, and ontological (Boronat, 2015).

Eugen Fink devoted two pieces of work to the ontology of play: *Oasis of Happiness: Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play* (1957) and *Play as a Symbol of the World*

¹² According to Moran (2007) who reports from the writing of Bruzina (2004) Heidegger became Rector of Freiburg University and imposed the ban on Jews working in the State. Fink was arrested in 1940, spending time in concentration camps, was interrogated by the Gestapo, and was inducted into the German Army, refusing to become an officer.

(1960), brought together along with *Play and Celebration* (1975), and *Fink's Notes on Play* (1954-1973) in the book *Play as a Symbol of the World and other writings* (2016). However, much of Fink's writing, assumed to be 30 volumes (Nielsen & Sepp, 2006), remains untranslated and unpublished. Fink was a phenomenologist who was intrigued by play, recognising that all essential phenomena of the human being's existence are bodily, yet determining that play had an appearance which was capable of a "stronger experiential reality and power of impression than the bulk of everyday things in their worn-out ordinariness" (Boronat, 2015).

Convinced that it would be too "cheap" an explanation to say that the imaginary realm of the playworld was exclusively human, Fink (2016) pursued the idea that the playworld was a non-actual product of a psychical inner world *and* an ontic outer world (the ontic outer world being the "external" world that exists outside of our perception, cognition, or intentional acts). If everyday life is the empirical and the "real", then the playworld, the psychical inner and ontic outer world, is part of the unreal where, maybe, the unreal is intimately linked to the real, as in a mirror image, for example. The human, for Fink, is "world-forming" because he is "projecting the spatio-temporal structural field within which he himself then establishes himself". In this way, certainly the earlier writing of Fink is rooted in phenomenology and the role of the human in the interpretation of reality. As a result Fink (2016) stated "we can make no justified statements about something that withdraws from all accessibility".

Fink's contemporary, Heidegger, could be said to be interested in the "going-wrong" of tools that humans take for granted, such as hammers, or railway platforms with roofs, in the manner that we notice these things differently should the tool break, or should rain fall (Heidegger, 2007). This position was a development of Fink's

teacher, Husserl's, writing. Husserl believed that the existence of something was, in principle, the result of a mental act. Heidegger conjectured that a thing, like a tool appearing differently to us when it breaks, is an indication of a deep inner life of the tool, or an unfathomable existence of the tool, which is brought, briefly, to the human's attention. It is this thought that Harman (2005) and OOO take further, suggesting that the hammer (for example) is a real object that silently labours in the depths. We are aware of the hammer and its Husserlian adumbrations (appearances) but, Heidegger reasoned, there must be more to the hammer's reality than humans can apprehend. Harman (2002) in his PhD thesis added that there must be more to the hammer's reality than even the hammer can apprehend.

If Heidegger was interested in the "going wrong" of things, as the hammer breaks, then Fink was interested in the "going wrong" of Being during play, when our unfathomable existence is brought, briefly, to our attention. Despite Fink's strictly phenomenological scholarship, Fink knew that there must be more to reality than that which we are aware of, and play hints at that odd reality, but he still framed the problem in human terms. Play, according to Fink, appeared to be a paradoxical nexus of restoration and obligation, activity and idleness; "[T]he human being at play does not think, and the thinking human being does not play" (Fink, 2016, p.78). Play, it seemed, is a way of being which brings our attention to how we exist in the world, and play does that in a way which eludes the phenomenological approach.

Fink (2016) lamented that he did not have at his disposal:

[...] an adequately cultivated conceptuality to express with the necessary clarity the world-relation of human play and the relation of understanding to the play of the world itself that is concealed therein. (p. 127)

Fink (2016) held that playing is “a finite creativity within the magical dimension of appearance”, that play puts humans “on the line” in an “abyssal sense”, and that play belongs not only to the finite human, but also to the world-totality. Fink’s (2016) notion that play is a delimited fragment of the world appears to chime with the OOO notion that play could exist as a discrete, mysterious and unknowable object with an extraordinary inner life that humans and other objects might be able to apprehend.

It is an interesting game to bring Fink’s thoughts, and the Heidegger-Aristotelian-based philosophy of Object Oriented Ontology, into the same circle of play. Fink (2016, p. 198) claimed that “the cosmological difference between world and thing is incomprehensible with the resources for thought provided by conventional thing-ontology”. It is hoped that Object Oriented Ontology’s development of Heidegger’s tool analysis might allow for a play-as- Object Oriented Ontology, which is what Fink was looking for. For Fink (2016, p.198) writing in 1960, the cosmological difference between world and thing was “incomprehensible with the resources for thought provided by conventional thing-ontology”, and he thought it would be through the understanding of play that “one could find approaches that would allow us to formulate the relation between world and thing as a more determinate question”. Yet Fink knew that play would resist such hard work, because the playworld “baulks at a simple assimilation into the actual world” (Fink, 2016). Play, maybe, is a real object which withdraws from access, and cannot be exhausted by its appearances, or its effects.

A pocketful of posies

The dance-game continues with the gathering together of people, philosophies, music, and play. Object Oriented Ontology terminology is introduced, along with the important points that real objects equally exist, and all objects withdraw from one another and themselves. Graham Harman illustrates this concept using The Quadruple Object - a development of Heidegger's "Geviert". The appearance of play is questioned. Play, as an object, is speculated about.

In Object Oriented Ontology, “objects” are not counterpoints to subjects because objects do not need to be subjects, or be perceived at all, in order to exist. To avoid this subject-object confusion, objects have been referred to as “units” by Bogost (2012), and what counts as an object includes humans, hammers, horses, the sum total of all the Styrofoam on earth, and the Dutch East India Company (Morton, 2013b; Harman, 2018). Bogost holds with the notion of a flattening ontology within which all objects equally exist, and introduced the notion of “the point of tiny ontology” to express the idea that objects are not metaphorically scattered evenly over a two-dimensional flat plane, but are rather collapsed into an infinitely dense dot. This dot is a dense mass of absolutely everything, everywhere, in its entirety, forming what could be a singularity. How the singularity contains everything - logically, neatly, or messily - is not for another object to say, because an object simply “is” (Bogost, 2012).

If we can speculate what it is like to be Bogost’s single quantum which does not give a fig for appearances or relations because it can occupy more than one space at once so that it is not “pushed about” by what something else thinks about it or how

something else uses it, then we can start to imagine that other objects, like play maybe, might operate in a similar way, and that whatever play actually *is*, play's appearances are merely badges of honour accumulated from humans along its history.

Morton takes a different path, agreeing that all objects equally exist, and zooms out from Bogost's take, stating that some objects are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans (Morton, 2013b). These "Hyperobjects" are larger than we can imagine. They hint at their existence via qualities including their viscosity (they stick, like Styrofoam balls, or an earworm of music), and their non-locality (like the music of J. S. Bach, or a game of Ring o' Roses) is massively distributed in space and time). However, Ring o' Roses' size, if we can access that information, or whether it is relevant (because how large is Ring o' Roses anyway?) does not reveal all there is for anyone or anything to fully know about the entirety of Ring o' Roses.

Harman coined useful neologisms which describe our attempts to know the entirety of things and the world around us. Using the current example, one can dwell on what Ring o' Roses is made of compositionally or historically, by singing the song, describing typical accompanying actions, and finding a reference to it in The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes (Opie and Opie 1997). These helpful descriptions, which could go into great detail, would be "undermining" the object. Additionally, one could dwell on what Ring o' Roses does to other objects, or the human mind or senses. One might describe the affects which come about through its application, such as a coordinated musical performance, enculturation, or time being passed agreeably. These equally helpful descriptions would be "overmining" the object. Also, one could do both of these things for a more thorough analysis, which would be "duomining" the object (Harman, 2011a). None of the resulting phenomena

“exhaust” the reality of the object because objects such as Ring o’ Roses, play, music, and paperclips, remain stubbornly unified but irreducible, and withdrawn, entities.

Although each iteration, recording, or observation of it appears to be unique, there is an occasionally determinable Ring o’ Roses “essence” that makes the activity what it is, and that is being played-with, and maybe eroded or destroyed, as the children disrupt the ring, and participants lie down in the middle of the circle singing a loud song about a butterfly. Ring o’ Roses, and play, morph our actions as they withdraw, leaving behind a gesture of the essence of Ring o’ Roses as adult revelry that Paula Rego depicted in her nursery rhyme book (Rego & Warner, 2019). We can generate Ring o’ Roses musical play data by observing musical play, or Ring o’ Roses brain scans by scanning the brain of a person singing the song’s melody. We never get to Ring o’ Roses full reality, but there are some features of Ring o’ Roses which definitely make it what it is, and not Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, or a tree.

For example, the song could be sung and performed perfectly at gunpoint, and this would not allow for the “essence” of playful fun which is necessary for Ring o’ Roses to have an ineffable “Ring o’ Roses-ness”. There is a limit to how the melody, actions, or intention of the activity can be shuffled or modified by, say, a child’s chaotic songs about a butterfly before Ring o’ Roses is extinguished and it becomes something else, like a different song, a ritual, work, or torture. Yet the borderlines between Ring o’ Roses’ ways of being are not prescriptive because the activity’s essence is shadowy and hidden and not to be found on its surfaces. The real object is withdrawn, as are its real qualities, leaving available its adumbrations - its appearances only - and the totality of the object’s being is not identical to its accessible surfaces (Davies, 2019). As Harman phrases it (about a hammer, rather

than a nursery rhyme): “[T]o *use* the hammer does not give us any more intimate contact with the hammer’s reality than to *see* or to *think about it* does” (Harman, 2010, p. 3). The being of an object, such as Ring o’ Roses, has everything to do with something much deeper than evident qualities. There is arguably one Ring o’ Roses, and countless expressions of it.

Therefore objects like art, play, and Ring o’ Roses, and hammers, are translations of their inner reality (Morton, 2013a). Sometimes we can tune-in to this inner essence, and sometimes we cannot. Harman’s speculative realism is founded on the assertion that objects resist us knowing them completely, withdrawing their essence whilst still emitting alluring sensual qualities. Hayles (2014) interprets this resistance - our inability to tune-in to the object - as the object resisting the human’s interest. Tuning-in, according to Hayles, places the human within a fuzzy system of objects, and acknowledges the presence of the human because, frankly, humans are more curious than most objects are about other objects. Harman would disagree with this correlational stance. Running contrary to Harman’s view on the full withdrawal of objects, Hayles states that objects meet in fuzzy system-like relations (like the “fuzzy clusters” the Chorus mentioned in Chapter 2’s *Fugue! A Game of Utility*) that one object senses another object’s “allure” (a hint of the other object’s essence) which is relevant, interesting, and maybe *useful* to the first object.

Ring o’ Roses is useful to us. We might be able to tune-in to it, or it makes itself available to us, and other objects, in different ways. Ring o’ Roses might present as a song, a dance, a therapy, a torture, a duty, a noise, an educational opportunity, or in Henricks’ (2015) terms, as play, work, communitas, or ritual, and it can be infinitely more than all of these things. Ring o’ Roses has been decorated by Wittgenstein (1994), Hughes (2001), Opie & Opie (1997), observed as musical play (Koops, 2010;

Countryman, 2014; Marsh, 2017; Custodero, Cali, Diaz-Donoso, 2016), employed within educational material by Kodály (Campbell, 1990), deployed for specific benefits such as self-regulation (Zachariou and Whitebread, 2019), and referred to as a choreographed dance (Suits, 2014). With each iteration, Ring o’ Roses is “encrusted with all the accidental jewellery left by neighbouring entities” (Harman, 2009) or, as suggested earlier, bedecked with badges of honour accumulated from humans or other entities along its history.

In this way, Ring o’ Roses as a silly song is less than it appears to be and, as a historic, educational and developmental phenomenon, it is more than it appears to be. If appearances are so unreliable, there must be something about its inner, withdrawn existence that points to the song’s inner reality. Some speculative, metaphorical “dissection” of the object itself seems to be required.

As a cognitive device to help illustrate the shadowy inner life of objects, Harman radically adapted Heidegger’s *das Geviert* into the *Quadruple Object* (Harman, 2011a). Heidegger’s original *Geviert* had four quadrants, within which each part reflected every other part: Earth was a generalised, nourishing force, god(s) were concealed, only bestowing plural hints regarding their existence, mortals were that which does the experiencing, and sky was also that which is present, yet with specific features (Harman, 2009). Gevorkyan & Segivia (2021), sympathetic to an Object Oriented Philosophical approach, emphasised the nearness, or “distanceless” proximity of these four cardinal components. Earth, sky, gods, and mortals are not near or far from each other, but instead the elements “shine together” in a unity of “shining reciprocity”. As such, *das Geviert*, the fourfold, was not a model of cardinal points representing dichotomous thinking, but a representation of circular, conceptual thinking.

Harman's main criticism of Heidegger's *Geviert* model was that a human seems to need to be present in order to "kick the fourfold into gear" (Harman, 2009). The *Quadruple Object* was devised by Harman to depict how real, withdrawn, objects and real, withdrawn, qualities exist in their own right, without the necessity of gods and humans, and to support a theory of things in themselves rather than of human *Dasein*'s access to the world (Harman, 2009). Harman's (2010; 2011a) fourfold is a system of two objects (real and sensual), and two qualities (real and sensual), and four tensions between the real and sensual objects of time, space, essence, and eidos. In this quadruple object real objects and their real qualities are concealed, and sensual objects and their sensual qualities (which might be available to humans as phenomena) can only exist as a correlate of their real versions (Harman, 2018). There would be no need for description if there was no tension between an object and its specific manifestation at any instant (Harman, 2011b), yet an object is what it is because of the tensions between its real object and its real qualities. A thing's appearance is different from its essence, and appearance and essence is permanently in a state of strife, such that "essence is a tension between real objects and their moments" (Harman, 2010).

Fink would have been more than diverted by a theory of objects (a thing-ology) and by a theory of *play in itself*, rather than the worldly human's access to it. Calling human play "worldly" was to refer to what was self-evident and superficial, but also to what was deeply problematic (Fink, 2016). Fink applied a unique fourfold understanding to the term "worldliness". In brief, worldliness for Fink (as described in *Play as a Symbol of the World*) was comprised of i) concealed character, of eidos and "thisness", which is intraworldly and cannot be applied to the world itself, ii) the prevailing of the world itself and the letting-emerge of all finite beings, iii) the

human being's world-position as their specific position in the cosmos, and play, and iv) play's sensuous delight, mysterious passion for appearance, for beguilement, and radiance of colours, and for the ruddy complexion of things (Fink, 2016). Fink did not pursue his fourfold interpretation of the world in relation to play and, similarly, Heidegger set *das Geviert* aside in later writing. Fink's fourfold was an anthropocosmological conception of play, on which he built the idea of *Play as a Symbol of the World* (Fink, 1960/2016), applying some distance to how we know that play makes its presence felt in the world. His interest in the ontology of play led him to believe play to be a delimited fragment of the world (Halák, 2015), and that playing is a "finite creativity within the magical dimension of appearance" (Fink, 2016, p. 29). To complete this picture, Fink (2016) determined that "play" is related to "world" in the mode of "symbol", and the relation between these three unknowns was Fink's cosmological formula.

Fink (2016, p. 30), musing on how play has its own ontic appearance, yet play is also a projection of the playing human, asked whether "the strange land of the non-actual [is] the elevated site where the essentiality of all things in general is invoked and brought to presence?" For Fink, actuality is not a property that belongs to a matter or a thing, yet if that actuality is removed, the whole thing with all its properties, vanishes. Fink's explanation of the *essence*, or the essential nature of things, had emerged from Husserl's teaching in which essence is a fundamental, unchanging quality of a thing, which cannot be empirically observed, but which can be revealed through phenomenological analysis such as eidetic reduction (Husserl, 1982). Being primarily phenomenological rather than ontological, Fink's interpretation of essence diverges fundamentally from Harman's (2010). For Harman, the essence of a thing is never fully available to any senses, regardless of philosophical, scientific, or

theoretical technique. This makes Harman's epoché comparable to that of Husserl's and Fink's, however, Harman's is a limiting factor of the philosophical approach (or "unnecessary obstacle", if you like) which evacuates the human from a thing's existence. For Husserl (and for Fink's earlier writing), essence is ultimately a phenomenon, and for Harman, essence is a tension between the withdrawn real object and its equally withdrawn real qualities, neither of which can be directly apprehended by humans or other objects. As Morton (2013a) puts it, dialectically: objects are ontologically riven between essence and appearance, such that their existence is due to a "rift" between an object's essence and its aesthetic appearance - that which makes an object itself, and not itself, simultaneously. He adds that no human is required for this analysis.

Fink held that the dimension of play which makes play "play" (like the essence of play) is inseparable from play itself, and that play's being is inseparable from real playing things and from playful events. Play withdraws into play, as it were.

Assessing the playful event will not assess play, because of play's magical dimension of appearance, and because the player vanishes into play (Fink, 2016).

In OOO terms, an object like play is withdrawn, yet its exterior would be "encrusted" with accidental qualities which are not inherent to the object's core reality but instead form a kind of outer shell that accumulates around it. These "encrustations" can be things like attributes, perceptions, or relationships, that other objects (like humans, or any object) assign to the encrusted object, and these encrustations can change or shift over time, but don't define the perceived object's true essence. The object itself remains "withdrawn" from full access or understanding, as these accidental qualities or encrustations mask the object's deeper reality. Cracks in this encrustation cause a bewitchingly emotional effect on humans

(Harman, 2012), and this effect is only the result of an allusion to the real, withdrawn object.

Between the Heidegger-inspired rigour of Harman, the slightly obscure words of Fink, and the poetic flourish of Morton, it feels correct to say that Ring o’ Roses has an appearance which both expresses, and does not express itself, not in an “either-or” manner, but rather in a way that is both true and false simultaneously. Play is a strange land indeed, but not very much stranger than other things, like music, or waterfalls, or black holes. Play’s strange land becomes noticeable when play subsumes other things by playing them, and altering their reality. By entering into the interior of Ring o’ Roses and being subsumed by play, the musicking child altering the original real Ring o’ Roses object, is the artist who is “making and studying causality” (Morton, 2013a). To borrow and lean heavily into Morton’s writing: Ring o’ Roses is an aesthetic trace, an elegy to the disappearance of itself into other objects (Morton, 2013a, p.18).

New objects are formed by new relations such as play, and other objects expire. As Morton says, “the aesthetic dimension is where death happens” (Morton 2013a). Practitioners of musical play in early childhood are familiar with the concept of “tuning in” to the child’s music-making (Lefebvre, 2004; Evans, 2007) with the understanding that the child’s music holds emotions and concepts which were inexpressible in words. Tuning-in to musical play is to be aware of the vitality of that play - not in an animist way, but in a way which recognises that the object has an experience which is important, like birth, life, and death is (Moreton, 2013a). In order to exist, Ring o’ Roses must be fragile, allowing for the birth of playful Ring o’ Roses or musical Ring o’ Roses, or no Ring o’ Roses at all. When the boring Ring o’ Roses becomes fun, Ring o’ Roses has been matched by the sensuality of a fun

version of itself. It follows that observing musical play is tuning-in to the death of music-making in one way which has disappeared, leaving only sensual impressions and memories which fade, prick and prod, or expire (Harmer, 2024b).

Yet not all things change other things in a noticeable way. To some, singing Ring o' Roses, and music-making in general, is forgettable, and unremarkable. Harman (2012) explains this by suggesting that real objects change vicariously, and sensual objects endure "a buffered causation in which their interactions are partly dammed or stunted". In this way, Harman states, the only place in the cosmos where interactions occur is in the sensual realm of phenomena (but not just human-directed phenomena). In other words, individuality is in the depths, and the interactive potential is on the surface. Some objects have absolutely no relation at all to other objects, just like some might say that Ring o' Roses has absolutely no relation to play whatsoever.

Surely this thinking would have assisted Fink (2016) - particularly his rather circular thinking of:

If the essence of the world is thought as play, it thus follows for the human being that he is the only being in the vast universe who is able to correspond to the prevailing whole. Only in the correspondence to what is beyond the human may the human being then attain his native essence. (p. 31)

Taken at face value, Fink is suggesting that humans, in order to access the true reality of being human, must align with a larger reality which is beyond the human and, unsurprisingly, the human is the only creature who can do that. Additionally, there is the curious notion that the human is the only creature who can access the play-essence of the world. This is a strictly correlational stance. A non-correlational,

beyond-human, stance would register the possibility that anything, and not just humans, can access a worldly play-essence. This position would maintain Fink's idea of play being at the centre of everything, but play (and Ring o' Roses) would be at the centre of everything *for everything*, not just humans.

A-tishoo! A-tishoo!

This line of Ring o' Roses sees a mash-up of Fink's cosmological formula with OOO. Play plays us like fire burns cotton – vicariously. Vicarious causation in OOO and play.

One cannot help wondering how Fink would have written about the essence of play if ontological essence was liberated from its dependence on an eidetic reduction by a human, and was, instead, an internal, withdrawn tension of all things. Latterly, Fink was regarded as Husserl's most loyal disciple and his chief critic (Moran, 2007) and his work moved away from regarding everything as an object¹³ of human perception. It is possible that Fink, in his work to indicate the ontology of play, was progressing towards this way of thinking.

Fink (2016) stated that play has its own ontic appearance, which makes play into play and not work, ritual, or *communitas*, as Henricks (2015) might say. Fink's statement is understandable in general terms, in that we know what play is but we struggle to define it, and this approach chimes with Sutton Smith's opening statement to *Ambiguity of Play* (1997): that we all play occasionally, and we all know what

¹³ A Husserlian, intentional object is experienced, perceived, and constituted in consciousness by a subject. An object-oriented ontological object has an existence that is independent of human perception, thought, or interaction, and it exists in its own right, with properties and behaviours that are not entirely contingent upon how they are perceived or conceptualized.

playing feels like. More difficult to fathom is Fink's notion that play is the strange land of the non-actual, and is the elevated site where the essentiality of all things in general is invoked and brought to presence. It seems that Fink, when writing about play, is suggesting that the non-actual – that which transcends immediate, actual moments - is where stuff really happens.

Of course there can be an unreal quality to play, and play does not have to make sense to players or non-players, but how the unreal, which is an essential part (a *haecceity*) of play, reveals its essence, or effects fundamental change (or not) on things, is difficult to comprehend. Harman remarks that an answer is not to be found anguishing about the human-world gap, or the denial of such a gap. Instead, claims Harman, causality unfolds “in a place where philosophy no longer enters - the sphere of inanimate physical things” (Harman, 2010).

For Harman, and within OOO, causation is object-oriented, and vicarious. A useful explanation is found in Harman's retelling of speculations within early Islamic thinking. In *Object Oriented Ontology* Harman (2018) relates that Islamic philosophers Abu al-Hasan al Ash'ari (874-936) and al-Ghazali (1058-1111) claimed that God was the exclusive source of not just creation, but all causation. So when fire appears to burn cotton, it is actually God that burns it. Rudiments of this occasionalist view still exist in the use of terms “force majeure” and “natural disaster” which were the acts of God that toppled chimneys in poor weather. Harman explains that two entities of cotton and fire influence each other by meeting in the interior of a third, until something happens (Harman, 2012), adding that objects distort when they see, or touch. Of course, any object distorts another, in the way that it touches, or moulds, eats, or burns another thing. One could, under laboratory conditions, obtain a thorough description of what happens when cotton catches fire, and that would reveal

an empirical account of the process, or a feminist account, or a chemist's account, or a funny account, all of which would not reveal the entirety of the reality of the burning cotton. Harman, applying the ancient Islamic philosophy, explains that fire does not meet cotton. Instead, the withdrawn, real object of fire encounters the sensual object of cotton, or fire meets the flammability of cotton.

Applying that theory to Ring o' Roses: a child meets the playfulness of Ring o' Roses, and a child meets the musicality of Ring o' Roses. Similarly, in musical play, play does not meet music - instead, play meets the playfulness of music.

We all fall down

Ring o' Roses dies a bit. Emergence is tackled. Play (in OOO) is considered as an ontologically emergent, aggregate object which cannot be epistemologically reduced.

If we consider play as an object (as in a *real* object which withdraws from access by humans and other objects), then an object-oriented philosophy should help explain the ambiguities of play, if only to clarify how play's appearance is in the eye of the beholder, and its reality is hidden from access by anyone or anything, even play itself.

If we consider play as an *emergent*¹⁴ object, in a uniquely ontological, as opposed to an epistemological (or knowable though our senses) way, then play can have properties which are not (traditionally, conceptually, or momentarily) possessed by its parts¹⁵, and play can be a multitude. Harman's OOO notion of emergence is a specific grouping of objects together, arranged in such a way that they form "a larger compound entity per se", and are a sum total of parts which is ontologically distinct

¹⁴ "Ontological emergence", according to Harman, is to be understood as an ontological or real phenomenon, namely a withdrawn feature of the world in and of itself, rather than an occurrence to be framed in terms of our ways of knowing the world (N. Young, 2021).

¹⁵ For example, water (liquid at room temperature and pressure) has properties which differ from the properties of the constituent elements hydrogen and oxygen (gaseous at room temperature and pressure).

from those parts (N. Young, 2021). An object is irreducibly wrapped in other objects “all the way down”, as it were, in an infinite regress that will not reach a unit on which everything depends.

It is difficult, yet possible, to speculate about play as an ontological, emergent object - an emphatically mysterious multitude, or set of conditions, which somehow plays us - and, at the very least, this analysis chimes with play as an ontologically distinctive phenomenon, which play scholar Feezell (2013) memorably stated is manifested in and through natural events, animals, children, and adults. In one of his five analyses of play, Feezell followed a line of thinking of Gadamer’s (2004) *Truth and Method* which, in brief, stated that play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play, and which requires a player with a certain attitude in order to come into being. Play, said Gadamer, is not reducible to the player’s attitude, and play reaches *Darstellung* (representation) through the players. In OOO terms, play gets vicariously wrapped in players, or players wrap themselves vicariously in play, but these conditions are not necessarily apparent to other people or players. Harman might say that the new play-player object withdraws and is inexhaustible from the outside, and it is also filled on the inside with a new, real play-object sincerely absorbed and decorated with sensual objects (Harman, 2012).

An ontological, emergent account of play explains why play is the slipperiest of subject-matter for many philosophers, despite a multitude of approaches to delimit its qualities and effects. Plato, for example, devoted himself to the healing of a play-seriousness duality (Ardley, 1967). Sutton-Smith (1997) focussed on the ambiguous appearance of play and its affordances, listing seven, and the possibility of more, *rhetorics of play* which align with views of play, and which in turn reflect how research into play is conducted. Play’s appearances can be quite subtle, and as

mundane as a child making the best of something ordinary (Lester, 2010), and play's appearances are not obvious because "play" comprises implicit, metacommunicative messages (Bateson, 2006). Bogost (2016), an advocate of OOO, suggested that play can be expressed as a mundane, general concept - as the act of working a structure for the purpose of leisure, distraction, rejuvenation, or even enjoyment. In Bogost's sense play is not an alternative to work, but the process by which it is done, such that play is "the work of operating a subset of the world, one separated from itself via the circumscription of the magic circle"¹⁶ (Bogost, 2016). However, the Harmanian "undermining" of play, which describes its features, or the "overmining" of play which interrogates its effects and relations, always fails to reach into the very being of play itself.

In classic emergence, wholes are more than the sum of their parts, and they feature a certain complex stability and causal mechanism which produces novelty. The Belousov-Zhabotinsky reaction was mentioned earlier in the Fugue chapter as an example of a complex, temporarily stable, causal mechanism from which emerges a rhythmic colour change when certain reactants are stirred together. Even though the BZ reaction can be rationalised epistemologically, it is a phenomenon which has

¹⁶ Bogost (2016) refers to "the magic circle" which is a concept originating in the works of Huizinga (1938/1950) and Callois (1958/2001), and developed by Salen & Zimmerman (2004). The magic circle is a metaphor for the separation between ordinary life and play. The concept has been developed into play as a world, frame, bubble, net, screen, reality, membrane, zone, environment, or attitude (Stenros, 2014), and criticised by those who consider the play/life divide as invalid (Malaby, 2007, Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008).

charmed many chemists. MacLure (2013) writes about how the emergence of sense from data is accompanied by a “shimmering” of the data with a glow which “seems to invoke something abstract or intangible that exceeds propositional meaning, but also has a decidedly embodied aspect”. This glow, says MacLure, is a surface effect which belongs in the realm of the virtual, real and abstract, which is outside of our control. In a similar vein, play philosopher Eugen Fink (2016) insisted, in *Oasis of Happiness*, that all the “essential fundamental phenomena of human existence shimmer and appear enigmatic in an ambiguous way”. An awareness, which Morton calls ecological, is one which is “saturated with nothingness, a shimmering or flickering, a shadow-play of presence and absence intertwined” (Morton, 2018, p. 5). Data sheets and chemical reactions are not usually charming or sensually surprising. We expect such things to behave in a certain way, such that their appearance matches the technical and efficient manner of their genesis. We apprehend the adumbrations - the sensual qualities that empirical data make available to us - so when the unremarkable data meets the ordinary excel spreadsheet we do not expect fireworks, we take the stable entanglement of the sensual appearance of the data for granted. However, things like curiosity, love, music, meditation, analysis, or hard work can open a rift between an object's essence and its appearance (Morton, 2013a). This is when you get inside the data, or the data gets inside of you; a glimmer, a shimmer of the real breaks through, hinting at an abyssal, and vast interior, and a new set of relations. When the philosophically “real”, inexhaustible sensual data is music which is getting inside the child, “shimmer” is in combination with sound, air, vibration, and affective movement of the body, and it also fleetingly combines with the friendly feeling which Aristotle called *philia*. *Philia*, as outlined in the *Fugue!* chapter is a part of friendship, along with utility and virtuousness. Robinson (2016) suggested

that a friendly feeling can extend beyond the body, “to merge with others in a collective bodies-becoming mind”, in a doxa, a commonly held belief. This, in turn is a concept which resonates with discussions in the *Musical Chairs* Chapter. Musical play, it was agreed by the voices, has a “genuine thirdness”, a “thickness”, within a paradox of independence, spontaneity, dependence and regulation, free-thought, and belief, all in one form.

In OOO terms, play is emergent because it is more than (and less than) its properties. Play is more than its properties because play withdraws, withholding its vast interiority and revealing only assorted shadowy, point-of-view adumbrations (appearances) to any observer, and play is less than its properties because play can be composed of simple, recognisable appearances of play, as Henricks’ table demonstrated in the Musical Chairs chapter. Yet play, in all its ways of manifesting, can cause change through an aesthetic process called allure (Harman, 2012). Play, and music (and data, and chemical reactions) sometimes reveal their inner molten core which is “wrapped in its delivery” (Morton, 2013a) and they bewitch, charm, or repel us, and become part of us for a short or long time.

As N. Young (2021) maintains, emergence - glowing, shimmering emergence - cannot be a sensual property of a real, withdrawn, object because senses cannot reach the inner reality of an object. However, this point is queried by Morton, who holds that emergence must be related to the sensual properties of objects. To illustrate this idea, Morton (2013a) used Koffka’s (1935) description of a soap bubble in Lehar’s (2003) *Gestalt Isomorphism*. In Morton’s summary, the soap bubble is not spherical on account of a spherical template or mathematical code, and the global form is not formed in one “pass”. For the soap bubble, emergence is continuous, as the innumerable local forces of surface tension act in unison, settling into the equilibrium

of a dynamic system model. The forces, says Koffka, acting on the system induce a change in the system configuration. That change, in turn, modifies the forces acting on the system, such that what appears to be a static system is a dynamic balance of forces ready to spring back into another motion when that balance is upset. Morton used Koffka's explanation to illustrate how emergence is relational, and that emergence is a sensual object (in Morton's view), despite its inner, hidden reality, qualifying emergence as a real object (in Harman's view). Soap and air emerging as a sphere, frozen water emerging as a snowflake, or the firing of neurons to form a thought, are all examples of emergence. These examples sound mundane, but Morton explains that the objects' interaction, and emergence, occurs in a sensual ether¹⁷. The sensual ether is an object too. Objects do not clunk into each other; they meet vicariously, within the object-laden ether.

In summary, all objects – and play qualifies as an object on account of its withdrawnness - unify their pieces into an emergent reality that has genuine qualities of its own (Harman, 2010), all objects are emergent entities by virtue of sustaining relations between their component parts, and real objects are composed of other real objects (N. Young, 2021). Yet, one cannot apprehend an object by its appearance or its effects, in that emergence must exist as a real emergent whole before it has any effect on any other object. Sensual objects do not exist autonomously because they

¹⁷ Harman (2005) refers to this ether as the murmuring sensuality of the world in which we bathe, and above which we do not rise. Ether, the cloud of gaseous qualities which are present to apprehension, is the cloud within which objects take form and manifest, sensually, in actual experiences.

belong to real objects, and real objects interact with the sensual mediator of another real object, not another real object itself (N. Young, 2021). Siding with Morton, one could say that via an asymmetrical, sensual meeting, soap met voluminous air which formed the soap bubble that was photographed for the cover of Fink's book *Play as symbol of the world: and other writings*. Water met the coldness of air for a snowflake, data met neurons for a shimmering glow and, returning to Ring o' Roses, a unified whole of play met the playfulness of music.

Again?

Phenomenology dies a little bit.

It is worth noting that, for OOO-adherent Morton, the world, as humans know it, has already ended, because what humans call “the world”, as the place which revolves around what humans can see and feel within human timescales, “is simply too small to cope with reality anymore” (Hudson, 2021). Sparrow (2014) takes this point further, suggesting that phenomenology, in Husserl’s tendency towards an absolute idealism (in which the world inescapably exists as a correlate of human thought), is dead, or more precisely “undead” and zombie-like. Sparrow concedes that phenomenology has a future as a necessary corrective to the excesses of science, or phenomenology has a future which requires it to embrace, oddly, its idealist heritage. Sparrow argues that if idealism (the view that the world depends on human thought) cannot prove the actual existence of the divine (that is: if empirical science cannot prove God exists), then we must accept that idealism (the view that the world depends on human thought) is still a form of realism (where there is a world beyond human thought). Taking this thinking to play, and the example of Ring o’ Roses, in which play met the playfulness of music sensuously and vicariously, the meeting of play and music is beyond empirical science, and we cannot prove or measure the meeting, and can only talk of the realism of the state of affairs to which the interaction points, indirectly, using metaphor.

Fink, as a student of Husserl, was influenced by idealism: that the world is dependent on human thought. Indeed, Harman referred to Husserl as “an object-oriented idealist” (Harman, 2011a, p. 20). Fink considered play to be a phenomenon deeply

rooted in human existence, to the extent that human existence, as a particular form of being in the world, is celebrated by playing (Boronat, 2015). Such thinking is linked to the world only being understood through our subjective, lived experience, and the well-trained, scientifically-minded phenomenologist is at pains to be aware of the artificial separation between perceiving and the perceived. However, in *Play as a Symbol of the World*, Fink (2016) acknowledged the role of the human in playing, and in understanding play, but he seemed to imply that there was much more to play than its existence as a human phenomenon or, in contemporary terms, as human correlate. In pursuing the ontology of play as a thing in itself, Fink (2016, p. 279) noted that delimited examples of what play appears to be, such as the “abundance of kinds of play, and modes of play, which are openly manifest”, do not get at the core of what play actually *is*. Play, therefore, is always a “likeness”, stated Fink (2016), being a phenomenon with the structure of mirroring itself. The world¹⁸, in shining

¹⁸ For Fink “world” seems to be something rooted in the everyday and sensible and, crucially, Fink has one eye on realism (a world beyond human thought). In brief, Fink’s (2016) worldliness is fourfold: the everyday interaction of all finite things and events, the infinite steering of time and space, humans operating in the world, and humans sensuously feeling their place in the world. This approach differs from Heidegger’s (1954) fourfold, *das Geviert*, of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities, which is more ontologically expansive. Harman’s fourfold takes the ontological spirit of Heidegger’s *Geviert* further. Harman removes the need for a human to be present at all: “reality and relational presence are not two fixed levels of the world, but refer instead to two faces of every site in the cosmos” (Harman, 2009, p. 299).

back into itself, appears as play, and this appearing, as an event, is withdrawn, and is beyond anything phenomenal. In this way the world, as the emergence of all beings, remains hidden in the nameless realm of absence, and the appearing only becomes comprehensible, or at least graspable, by the phenomenon of play (Fink, 2016). Fink seems to be suggesting, paradoxically, that if one looks away, or dodges play's intention - *or is playful* - then the essence of play just might emerge in a way beyond perception.

Play is a phenomenon for which the appropriate categories do not easily and unambiguously present themselves. Its shimmering, inner polysemy may perhaps most readily be addressed by the cognitive resources of a dialectic that does not level out paradoxes. (Fink, 2016, p. 26)

Again, as Fink (2016) notes “play withdraws from a perspective that would fix it in place: it shuns firm contours and escapes the net of reflection's delimiting determinations”. In his later work Fink finally speculated about the ontology of play. He noted that the speculative world-theatre - the dramatic play or spectacle - of play's representation as the *parousia* (the divine-like “coming” of play's essence), occurs in the medium of the non-actual. The non-actual for Fink was still related to the everyday human-minded actual, but, as Fink added, an ontological characterisation of play is “hardly possible” because it would depend on the actual/non-actual opposition. In other words, play's reality eludes human access. If accessing objects is an object-orientedly sensual business as according to Harman, rather than intentional, human-based one as according to Husserl, then objects can have a metaphysical status particular to themselves, and objects do their work in the cosmos with a reality beyond humans' or anything else's appearances or relations.

Fink's interest in play's very own ontology suggests that Harman's is a position towards which Fink was travelling.

With an object-oriented view of the ontology of play, the play of the world could be a metaphysical field where objects, whether perceived or not, engage, produce effects, and interact with each other in their own "play", maintaining their autonomy even as they participate in, or affect, their environment, impacting the world around them according to play.

Concluding this game

Causation is at play.

Metaphorically speaking, deep inside a withdrawn real object is the equally withdrawn and inaccessible, real object-real quality (RO-RQ) relation which points to the essence of the object, and which is the relation responsible for causation (Harman, 2005; 2020a; Morton, 2013a). Even though all things exist in exactly the same way, the RO-RQ tension hints at an object's essence, which is related to how one thing is different from another thing. If everything was identical, then nothing would need to happen, or if it did happen, change would be redundant anyway. If everything was identical, there would be no need for play.

Suits (2014) told a seemingly parallel story. He speculated about a Utopia, where all possible needs are met, and there is no need to work or behave in a particular way because all cravings are instantly satisfied. There is no requirement for any change because everything is perfect as it is. Seeing as Utopians want for nothing and every single one of their instrumental needs is eliminated, game-playing is proposed to be everyone's primary activity, and the supreme human good. This requires Utopians to put unnecessary obstacles in the way of attainment, just for the fun of overcoming them. Unnecessary obstacles can be rules, regulations, and time limits, and we are familiar enough with these as part of playing games. As Suits (2014) elaborated; it is easy to pick up a golf ball and place it in the hole. A better game demands rules around golf clubs, fairways, a dress code, and not placing the ball in the hole by hand.

A speculation unexplored by Harman, and inspired by Suits and Fink, is that objects' flattened ontological existence might crave change, and therefore objects somehow allow themselves to be "at play". The RO-RQ tension, the withdrawn, inexhaustible, and ineffable "thisness" of an object is itself "at play", and the tension can be played vicariously, as if it were a string of an aeolian harp (a harp operated by the wind) sensitively mediated by Irigaray's (1999) forgotten air. If playing is one thing's ability and willingness to commune with another object and to radically change it, and be changed, then play is, as Fink suggested, at the centre of things. If this is the case, then not everything is play, but everything's essence is at play. Play, in this way, "breaks the hammer" (Krell, 1972) as we notice the symbol, cipher, or algorithm that reveals that the world is play without a player, or rather, play plays. The implication for musical play is that play, when playing musically, causes, or generates, a very particular quality of time, and space.

It is *Weltlauf*, as the course of the world, which Fink associated with aion (eternity). More specifically Fink considered aion to be a cipher (an algorithm, or symbol) for the world (Elden, 2008). Therefore Heraclitus's familiar statement (Fragment 52 within the *Dielz-Kranz numbering*) that "Aion is like a child playing a game" or, alternatively "Aion is a child playing at draughts; kingship is the child" was, for Fink, a metaphor for cosmic time. The course of the entire world and other worlds, through time, and the totality of being, is "as play".

As outlined in the previous chapters, defining and playing games is possible by agreeing to abide by rules, but just *playing* does not require rules. Fink, in 1973, wrote in *The World Significance of Play* (within Fink, 2016, p. 243), that play can be used as a model:

[...] for understanding the total process of the world's movement as the emergence and demise of all things, as the foreground of the coming into appearance and as the depth of the concealed essence, as the interpenetrated play of opposites, as the removal of temporal demarcations and of the boundaries between life and death, as the rendering nugatory of modalities, when everything possible becomes actual and everything actual becomes possible”.

If the totality of the world is play without a player - like the play of essences suggested in the previous chapter - and if *aion* (eternity, and a symbol for the world, according to Fink) is like a child playing a game, then what is *aion* when the child is playing a *musical* game?

One would expect cosmological play - *aion* - to have an *other-than-human* tempo – one that is not bound, or is bound differently by *Chronos* and *Kairos* ¹⁹, and therefore cosmological play's relationship with the child's musical game might be tenuous. The child playing a musical game on earth in the everyday, ordinary, human time of the world is guided by the time of the world (*Weltzeit*). However, as Dissanayake (2017) explained, artification is what the young child does to make the ordinary into the extraordinary and, in musicking, the child makes ordinary time - ordinary

¹⁹ In ancient Greek philosophy, *Chronos* represents linear, measurable passage of time as measured by clocks, calendars and other quantitative means. *Kairos* signifies the right, opportune, or critical moment, focussing on the quality and significance of time rather than its quantity or duration.

Chronos - extraordinary. The play's relation to clock-based, Chronos-inspired time might be recognised by an observer as a competent rhythm, but to the child immersed inside musical play, the rhythms are other-regulated, play-regulated, or body-regulated. Time which is made, or felt, inside the playing bodies feels entirely different from the time made or perceived by the observer standing outside of the playing world. Inside the play world of musical play is a place of critical moments, within which the players are fully present to their musicking, caught in what Stern (2004) calls a pivotal space. Stern adds that both action and inaction, in such a moment of meeting, will change the destiny of the situation as the actors, caught up in the Kairos of events and the fleeting nature of critical moments, collude in a new state of being (Stern, 2004).

Consider the series of critical musical play moments which is a child patting an upturned basket, or banging a drum. The child pats, or strikes, likes the sound, and repeats the action. On repeating, the second sound is being imagined in the future as the current beat resounds around the room in the past. To continue to beat the drum creates a sensual, temporal space which slides between the future and the past. A similar effect was described within Morton's (2016) "spooky passion at a distance" - a think-piece about time manipulation by DJs in nightclubs for musical play, inspired by Bjork's music and Husserl's hyletic data²⁰. Morton describes the DJ's reading of

²⁰ Husserl used sounding a drum as an example of a "hyletic datum" - a material that provides a setting for an intentional event. Hyletic data do not intentionally represent anything, but are imbued with intentional content which allows us to see, hear, taste, smell, or feel them as present objects. According to Husserl one is conscious of the drum's sound

the music and the crowd and how the DJ draws beats from the future, yet to be played, into the present and on into the past in some strange temporal slippage.

Drums, and upturned baskets, bins, and boxes are frequently used in early childhood musicking, yet harps, lyres, and plucked instruments, which beautifully invoke the slippage of time in musical play, are somewhat less common. The plucked harp requires the pulling back of the string in advance of the sound to be made, and its release at the desired moment of sounding. Just like the drum's sound is anticipated with the raising of the beater or the hand, the sound of the plucked harp string is anticipated, and the string released to let the note be heard at the right moment.

Heraclitus (fragment 117) points out that this is analogous to the movement required for the bow and arrow (Wheelwright, 1959). There is a bending back prior to the release of the arrow towards its mark. It is bending *and* release, and lifting *and* lowering, that contributes to a time-related, moving, sonic space for the person at musical play. As well as being a transient, involving sonic space, as play the activity is part of the child's self-protecting mechanism (Lester & Russell, 2014), and the activity might present to the casual observer as an example of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

and the duration it fills in a continuity of "modes" in a "continuous flux". There are a series of "nows" – as the sound is given, whilst one is still conscious of the sound, as the sound has passed, although in the flux of consciousness, the sound remains a "now" (Husserl, 1905/2019).

The sounds of the drum and harp surround, or circlude²¹, the child in this temporally strange object (the immersive sonic soundscape) which is created by the play. Fink reminds us that for the adult, play is “a strange oasis, a dreamy resting point for restless wandering and continual flight” and that “Play gives us the present” (Fink, 2016). The present, in this sense, needs to be expanded: the child at musical play gives the present to the external, interested, adult observer, whilst the child within the musical play is nesting in multiple temporalities.

This nested, circluded, child at sensual musical play is making new sensual connections via a “line of flight”. MacRae (2011) explores compelling parallels of heterotopic (different or “other”) space, and Deleuze and Guattari’s “lines of flight” in a child’s play. Often lines of flight are understood to be going somewhere or doing something, like freeing oneself from being tied to a fixed point so that a new point of view is possible (Moss, 2019), or a “transformative shift into the not-yet-known” (Davies, 2014), or a change of direction in an activity (MacRae, 2011). But musical play is an immersion-in, and a making-with, and thinking-with, time and space - a temporal sympoiesis - and a thinking-with, or making-of, time. As a temporal sympoiesis the play is not time travel into the past, which is the sort of time travel

²¹ Circlusion is a word coined by Bini Adamczak (Lewis & Adamczak, 2022). It is useful because “penetration” still rules supreme over the heteronormative imagination and its arbitrary division of bodies into “active” and “passive”. If education is “fed” into passive bodies/children, another view is that music and play circludes, envelopes, the child.

that would really bother historians, but a time-playing of infinite *nows*²², of infinite pasts to respond to, and infinite possible futures to attend to.

If time is the thing which is necessary to prevent everything happening all at once, then time is particularly important in music, because a temporal separation between notes is required for melody. Pulling back, and releasing the string, or raising and lowering the beater on to the drum, makes intention-filled, near-silences in between sounds. Music, and musical play, plays with “nothingnesses” like silence and air. Such a dependence on the invisible and the ephemeral is both wonderful and sad. It is wonderful that a phenomenon in the Heideggerian sense does not have to be a tool like a hammer, and sad that the ephemeral, impervious to empiricism, is undervalued. Luce Irigaray’s work develops this notion into the idea that touch is about communing-with rather than seizing-hold-of. Irigaray suggests that there are many forms of touch, other than grasping, which can ensure a sensitive mediation between individuals in a culture of transcendental differences (Irigaray, 2024).

Musical play, in its circluding immersion, is play with a causality which is beyond the “clunk” causality (Morton, 2013a) of things grasping, things hitting, and things moving. Almost anything, like a branch falling off a tree, can hit a drum, and anything hitting a drum can deploy energy which unfolds in time and space in accordance with a rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004), even if the rhythm is not a familiar one

²² Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson’s watercolour “Blue Voids / A Series of Subtle Nows” depicts temporality, or the four dimensions, in two dimensions. It can be found in Gompertz et al., (2014).

to humans. Hitting a drum precisely twice, or in a way which accurately produces the imagined sound from the future is surprisingly hard to accomplish, requiring some skill and intention. Such intention puts the play activity at odds with notions of play because it can be associated with “work” and “ritual” (Henricks, 2015), and detached from the idea of children’s play as “transgressive” (Kowan, 2020). The intention of rhythmic drumming, or melodic singing, becomes an aesthetic striving (Nguyen, 2020) which creates its own timescape, a making-with-time, and a practice of causality, which requires a coordination of human and non-human actors which are able to “naturalise the values and structures of institutions, communities, particular places or whole societies” (Adam, 1998), or which feel so good that effort is expended on doing it again and again.

For Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* the “line of flight” (“*ligne de fuite*”) is a leakage or escape to within, and is nothing to do with flying. The word *fuite* means leak, but “*ligne de fuite*” is commonly translated as “line of flight”. Deleuze and Guattari’s “*ligne de fuite*” (2013) was translated by Brian Massumi as “leaking or flowing into a vanishing point”. This leakage originates from “the milieu”. Massumi clarifies Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the word “milieu” as a technical term meaning surroundings, as well as medium, and middle. The situation or activity is therefore moistly flowing and leaking from itself into itself. The coherence of the local situation stems from an empiricism which relies on the “mysticism and mathematicism” of concepts as multiple “heres” and “nows” (Deleuze, 2021, p. xvii), akin to the “drizzling”, the multiple, off-centre images required to be made by the Hubble telescope to photograph distant galaxies. It seems that “here”, and “now”, is an agreement, not a certainty. As Morton (2013a) writes:

Thus to be located “in” space or “in” time is already to have been caught in a web of relations. It is not that objects primordially “occupy” some existing region of spacetime, but that they are caught in the fields of, and [are] otherwise “spaced” and “timed” by other entities”. (p. 21)

“Here and now” is a strange term. In the preface to *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze (2021) recalls Samuel Butler’s 1872 novel *Erewhon* about a fictional European country which satirised Victorian Britain by presenting the familiar as odd and paradoxical. Deleuze cited the novel to exemplify the familiar which is displaced and becomes an oddly modified “here and now”. Whilst the word “Erewhon” is an anagram of “nowhere”, and “now here”, coincidentally, and as a delightful, accidental, homonymic antonym, the word “Erewhon” sounds very similar to “[yr] erw hon”, which is Welsh for “this acre”, or “this place”. Again, there is an odd slippage between the nowhere and the somewhere. If “here” is an agreement of a number of enquiries, and not a certainty, then “here and now” is also an agreement because it is a leaky, blurred space which observation merely catches glimpses of. To be enveloped by sound in musical play can be quite overwhelming, and this is why musical play is not fun for everyone. Not everyone enjoys not knowing what happens next, and being immersed in this uncertainty, which is somewhere in the “no-when”. In musical play this blurred space is not a static place. It is something immersive and changing and, like being in flow, we might not know when we are in its time (and space), or when we are not in it.

The playing of time and place in children's musical play

Musical play is the way that “the music no one has heard yet” is brought about (Kratus, 2024). Kratus explains that adult-composed music requires many intentions, for example planning, even if randomised chance is intentionally built into the composition, and an orientation towards creating a musical “thing”. Creation of a musical “thing” sounds like a specific telos for the child’s play, such that the activity could be interpreted as musical composition, rather than play. However, as Kratus points out, child-composed music might lack the intention of its product being interpreted and heard as music, and the child is more likely to be orientated towards sound production, and movement experiences. The intention of the play for the child is different from the intention of the play for the adult. For the adult, sound-making is product-led, and for the child it is about making sounds in the moment (Kratus, 2024).

To summarise: drumming, or tapping out a rhythm, or skipping over paving stones with a voiced or internal chant, are all examples of musical play as an activity which requires a bit of effort, and which creates its own time and space, and an unreliable appearance. This musical play with time and space is a circled, slippery way of being for the musical player and, for the observer, a playful musical composition results. The slipperiness of this play means that it evades empirical and ontological analysis (Feezel 2013) and play, for a while, is playing us (Fink, 2016). Play is

playing us in this other space, this musical, heterotopic²³ space, this strange no-when with an alien quality of time - this *hyperspace*.

Hyperspace and children's musical play

A technological solution to being in a heterotopic, hyperspace outside of space and time is a Class II impossibility, requiring technologies which are currently impossible but might be realised in future millennia (Kaku, 2008). In the realm of science fiction, and as outlined by Morton (2022), to get outside of time and space one can either stay in the same place, and move through time, like the traveller in HG Wells *The Time machine*²⁴, Or one can stay in the same time, continue one's daily duties and have fun on the holodeck, and move through space. This is the solution used in *Star Trek* (Roddenberry, 1966-1969) with their use of a Warp Drive which enables the Starship to travel through space faster than light speed. As Morton points out, these are both deeply technocratic and imperialistic technologies: the Starship in *Star Trek* with the superior warp drive has the advantage in colonisation of the cosmos - exactly like how the sailing ships of the eighteenth century, who used John Harrison's chronometer to calculate longitude and therefore their exact position on

²³ Heterotopic comes from the Greek "hetero-" meaning "other", and "topos", meaning "place".

²⁴ The time machine in H.G. Wells' 1895 novel does move in space, but only because the resident Morlocks pull the machine into their cave (Wells, 2017).

the ocean, had significant advantage over their less technological competitors (Morton, 2022).

Children's musical play, on the other hand, requires aesthetic striving by the child to attain, and it is relatively easy for the observer to identify because of its recognisable melodies, instruments, movements, or regular rhythms. If, for some reason musical play is not easy to identify, then audio or video recording techniques can be used to foreground aspects of the play for its identification, analysis, description, encouragement, or modification (Plowman, 2008; MacRae, 2022). However, attaining a heterotopic, flow-like status in musical play is far from prescriptive, and we shall continue to look to the imagined future of science fiction for an indication as to why this is the case.

In Star Wars, the Millennium Falcon does not expend fuel or effort attaining hyperspace to get about the cosmos, because this spacecraft is either in hyperspace, or it is not (Morton, 2022). For the Millennium Falcon, Morton argues, hyperspace is felt, rather than owned. To illustrate this concept Morton (2022) gives the example of temperature: one can feel a range of temperatures, and sensing warmth is entirely different to the measurements that can be acquired and expressed using degrees Kelvin or Celsius. Theoretical physicist Rovelli (2018) agrees, stating that a measurement (by a physicist in a white coat) is not necessary for reality like warmth to be created. Warmth is an example of a case of indeterminacy being resolved when some quantity reacts with something else. Taking this observation to musical play, it seems that musical play, much like temperature, or hyperspace, is a thing which just "happens", given the right conditions, and locating musical play is likely to be the result of multiple resolutions of indeterminacies (Harmer, 2024a).

Morton assures us, following the scholarship of Luce Irigaray (1985), that hyperspace is everywhere. Furthermore, states Morton (2022), hyperspace corresponds to “the utopian feminist image of the ‘body’ as a being that doesn’t have a rigidly defined inside or outside and that has multiple entry and exit ports. Presumably it follows that the potential for musical play, as an access to a heterotopic space and time, is everywhere too. Hyperspace, and immersive musical play, is not something that one has to shoot off to at warp speed, or try hard to attain, it is right here, in a series of “nows”, as part of the “milieu” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). Therefore, to access hyperspace, all one has to do is create the conditions which resolve the indeterminacies of hyperspace and “here and now” is hyperspace, or not. Nobody owns hyperspace and hyperspace cannot be measured, controlled or quantified. Hyperspace either is, or is not and it is not something that one has to shoot off to at warp speed, it is right here (Morton, 2022). To extrapolate: in a similar way, nobody owns play. Play is not a thing to be measured, controlled or quantified, which makes play immune to technocratic and imperialistic takeover. Play is the temporary, or permanent, resolution of indeterminacies: play either *is*, or *is not*, and we cannot shoot off at high speed with special technology to a particular place of play because we might already be playing.

Fink (2016) concludes the first chapter of *Play as a Symbol of the World* with the words:

When thinkers and poets point in such a humanly profound way to the immense significance of play, we should also be mindful of the saying: we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven if we do not become as children. (p. 31)

Fink is suggesting that children have special access to heaven through their play, and there is no reason to believe that this is not so. Given the notion of hyperspace - some “meta” space-time, or a heterotopic space as a play space - the odd and magical world of play can dance with our human finitude within a multitude of temporalities, as opposed to a promise of a future heaven. Within the infinitely unknowable nature of play, the playing of a child is a clue to a certain way of being and becoming, and the musical playing of a child brings our attention to the playing of temporalities. We can marvel in this play, and maybe “ooze” ourselves into it. Sharp-edged empirical assessment of this heavenly hyperspace is diverting but impossible in the play’s sticky slipperiness. All we can do with hyperspace is play in it, and maybe it will play with us.

Children’s musical play as play with a hyperobject

Rovelli (2018) reminds us that saint, theologian, and philosopher, Augustine of Hippo (354-430CE) said that song is the awareness of time, and adds that music could be the source of time. Morton (2013) would concur with the position that making art (like musical play) is playing with causation, and that causation is at the root of time creation. Therefore musicking is a temporal art not because it exists in time, but because it creates a particular quality of time. According to OOO, time is generated by objects, rather than encompassing them. Time (and space) emerges from the tensions between things and their qualities, and time belongs to the surface, rather than the depth, of reality (Harman, 2023).

Having introduced the idea of play as an ontological object in OOO terms, the thought of music as an ontologically emergent object is rather compelling. Music

would be a very large emergent object - a “hyperobject” even - which is cosmically immense and made up of infinite melodies and rhythms, frequencies and movements. Music fits with Morton’s (2013b) concept of a hyperobject: music is undoubtedly distributed across time and space on a scale inconceivable to humans, and music is non-local, existing in our heads, on paper, in a digital recording, and within radio waves. Music is sticky (with earworms), inter-objective as it tangles with other objects, and it *phases in and out* of human time, being global, opaque, persistent, and influential in multiple dimensions. Unusually for hyperobjects, which Morton lists as climate change, Styrofoam, and radioactive waste, the music hyperobject arguably exerts a positive influence on the human world (Andrews, 2024).

Morton’s (2013b) hyperobject theory follows that time, which is fluidly flowing and seeping around things in a *ligne de fuite*, becomes more viscous (more sticky) as it flows around hyperobjects (and maybe interesting things like play and music), so it flows at a slower rate. This allows matter and energy to pass at different speeds relative to the player and the observer.

Chapter 6: Tidying up, Gratitude, and Implications

Perhaps then, quite paradoxically, play cannot be conceived completely within our systems that allocate significance and worth and value. Something about play spills beyond utility, refuses ontological traps, cannot be scaled up, lingers in the margins, thrives in the minor, and emancipates through underground passageways of the useless. (Báyò Akómoláfé, 2024)

The British Sign Language sign for “sun” isn’t just the sign for “sun”. You embody how you sense the sun – showing how swelteringly hot it is, or how welcome it is. (Rowe & Harmer, 2015)

Tidying up and reflection

Tidying up after play is an irritating part of play. Beyond what is required for the sanitary, tidying up is for those who have stopped being curious, or for those who are prevented from being curious. However, tidying up also allows for one to play differently with things which have become newly vibrant, because they have been moved into a different order. Even though this enquiry was open-minded to the possibility that children's musical play was nothing more than remarkably useful, and therefore too evolutionary, too educational, adult-led, or therapeutic to be considered to be *play*, the opportunity was grasped to ask what else, other than useful, could the musical play of the young child *be*? Now the games are tidied away it feels right to reflect on the methods which have been played-with, and to thank the players.

Locating the other-than-useful of children's musical play was not achievable by looking at musical play directly, because musical play, like love-making for example, has multiple manifestations which might represent one passing moment or aspect of the activity, but does not represent the entire reality, or being, of that activity. The idea that children's musical play has defined goals which are exceptionally useful, seemed to align the activity with a specific, fulfilling, realising, learning or therapeutic achievement. But surely there must be more to musical play which is more loving, time-passing, workaday, and ordinary - like the mother-and-baby interaction of Chapter three? An attempt was therefore made to access the inaccessible and, to circumvent the possibility of utter failure, musical play was wholesomely anticipated to be related to play, and a playful method of enquiry was chosen.

The inspiration for using games as a research method to analyse children's musical play was, primarily, Hesse's novel *The Glass Bead Game*, although the artists Cornelia Parker and Remedios Varo, play scholars of *Le Grand Jeu*, chemists, and scientists who operate the Hubble Telescope, were also influential, albeit the apparent distance between their work and the musical play of young children. Three games were played to investigate the "other than useful" of children's musical play. On tidying the games away, it became clear that the Fugue was a technical exercise about children's musical play as *play for* utility. Musical Chairs was a fun way to work through ideas of musical play as *play as* (or *play not as*) something, and Ring O' Roses was an excuse to examine children's musical play as *play being* something. The Fugue and the Musical Chairs games ended up describing the space (the nature, form, and function) of musical play, and Ring o' Roses described the being and time of musical play. All three were finite games which "drizzled" the infinite arena of musical play - looking slightly askance at musical play - with the ambitious, lusory intention of collating the resulting data into a novel insight into musical play's aproductive being.

A lusory stance to the games was productive, in that the enquiry was, like a good game, both entertaining and extremely challenging to conduct and, hopefully, pleasurable to read. Also, a lusory stance had, at its bottom line, hope, in the manner of Lester (2010): that applied imagination is able to produce a picture of a life that is generally better than the situation is now.

The structures of a fugue, tabulated theory, and a nursery rhyme were challenging, but not onerous to abide by: they simply provided a respectful tailing off of when one thing mattered less and another thing mattered more, because this sort of difference is what is required to make a game possible. That which mattered in the fugue, for

example, was the voices' dissonance or harmony. In the tabulated-theory musical chair game, the voices' divergence was important, and in the Ring o' Roses game, a circular, collecting-together of disparate ideas mattered. A mattering difference within a game can be one of beauty, or how sonorous, or blue, or how alluring something is. This is how the world, and play, offers itself to a researcher, and an artist, a musician, and a baby in unique ways. Schelling's (1800) claim was mentioned earlier - that the world seduces artists, and then hides, speaking and then returning to silence. Play, as a symbol of the world (Fink, 2016), might well do the same thing, but with everybody, and everything, maybe all of the time.

A Fugue from Bach's Well Tempered Clavier was chosen partly because it appears to be deceptively simple; starting in C major, yet its underlying structure is breathtakingly complex. The fugue was also chosen because its music was written for tempered tuning, allowing for the charm of moving between different keys, without being distracted by awkward intonation. Morton (2013b) complained that tempered tuning is one of the things that humans "do" to music - a fudge to make it work for us, to make it useful to us, and this is indeed true. However, tempered tuning renders the technical differences within a piece of music less audible to us humans, and makes music's affects, music's accessible qualities, and the sensual variations within those qualities, more intimate. Bach's fugue, as an exquisitely crafted meeting-point of structural, melodic and conceptual multiplicities, allowed for the sensitive blending of the fugue's voices into arguments and agreements.

The intimate effect of those voices sounding together was profound and fragmented, yet coherent. Whilst the motivation for the Fugue was to locate the other-than-useful of children's musical play, several revelations emerged from the game. Some of the

revelations were presented in the *Interlude – Breathing Space after the Fugue!* as fragmentary statements for further meditation.

A “light” systems-analysis was attempted in the fugue, concluding that musical play did exhibit chimeric, fuzzy clusters of systematic behaviour which appeared as patterns. Rather than autotelic, the play was often self-regulating, and robust to perturbation, but the voices agreed on *sympoiesis*, a making-with, as a better description. Musical play’s appearance leaks out of this making-with, and this part of the fugue introduced the idea that play’s appearance is not actually what play is, but merely an indication that play is happening.

The Fugue! Game was a success within this enquiry in that there was little, if any, practical application to the Fugue’s rather metaphysical revelations, other than that the abandonment of oneself to musical play is to allow for wonderment, and the production of a particular quality of time, and that applying oneself to the utility of musical play entirely misses the point of play. Such a conclusion contributes to a defence of the aproductiveness of children’s musical play, and its qualification, in play scholarship terms, as play.

Henricks’ Musical Thinking Chairs was a game of reduction in pursuit of complexity. Musical play as interaction was determined by the players to be the least thought-through, and most generative, aspect of musical play as play, or as something other than play. The game was inspired by two texts. The first was play scholar, sociologist, and anthropologist Henricks’ (2015) table, published in *Play and the Human Condition*, which contrasted play with modes of expression which are not play. The second was ethologist Dissanayake’s (2017) paper which proposed that an

infant's musical play is both artified (utilising repetition, exaggeration, elaboration, and surprise), and exaptive (innate to the child, originally evolved for one purpose, and co-opted for a different, unrelated, purpose). The game was guided, in part, by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1993), specifically its method of iterative enquiry. In Wittgenstein's work, the sense of the writing is found in the repetition, and the contexts between remarks, and the repetitions within changing contexts. In this way, repetition surveys connections. Exploring the importance and relevance of musical "play for" multiple contexts, the chair of most intrigue was determined to be that of Musical Play as Interaction.

The connections between Musical Play as Interaction, and conceptions of not-play, were vigorously debated by the games' assembled voices of music educators and scholars of play. Musical play as interaction was found to occupy a highly contested position of being play, and work, and ritual. It was concluded that musical play's appearance, as well as its utility, is in the eye or ear of the observer. Musical play's appearance as being equally what it is, and not what it is, was tackled in the final game.

Ring O' Roses, was an opportunity to play together the philosophy of Object Oriented Ontology, known as Triple O, and the philosophy of Eugen Fink. Like the circular ilinx of Ring O' Roses, the ontology of OOO is a "dizzying affair" (Bennett, 2012). Object Oriented Ontology, and particularly the work of Graham Harman (2005) gave us the words "undermining, overmining, and duominig" to highlight the activities we conduct to try to understand something by examining its qualities or relations. Indeed, under-, over-, and duominig summarised what had so far been

attempted in the analysis of musical play in the Fugue and in the game of musical chairs. The play's many qualities and the play's relations had been well-explored.

OOO's rigorous investigations of a reality which is ineffable, and beyond the knowable, sounded like a good fit with musical play, the description of which remained utterly inexhaustible, despite a vigorous analysis. OOO invited Heidegger's contemporary Eugen Fink into the play, which travelled along a Möbius-style loop. It was anticipated that OOO *should* align with Fink's writing, because OOO is a speculative realism which builds on Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology. OOO overcame the phenomenological problem of epoché, and transcending the human, with alarming ease with an epoché of its own which sounds fair and respectful: all things exist, and they exist equally.

In the game, Fink's analysis of play as a symbol of the cosmos was woven into OOO. This allowed for play's expansive, cosmological symbolism to be aligned with the conception of play existing as a withdrawn, inaccessible, but ever-present object, or unit, which has the same reality as any other object. In this way the child's musical play, which in one sense could be interpreted as "playing with causation in a small, local way" could, in an equal sense, be interpreted as "play with the cosmos".

OOO explains how the very existence of all things is the same. But, intriguingly, some objects exist "more equally" than others (Bogost, 2012) and, as speculated in this enquiry, the withdrawn, inexhaustible, and ineffable "thisness" of an object is itself "at play" in some sensitive, vicarious mediation, and is open to change, and death. In other words, all is at play, and play changes that which it plays with, and play itself changes. The original child at musical play becomes a new child-musical play object.

Furthermore, if play is a legitimate hyperobject (Morton, 2013b) of unimaginable size and manifestation, and maybe an emergent (N. Young, 2021) collective object of which all parts exist equally, then musical play and its temporal nature does facilitate, for example, a series of temporal dwelling spaces which move us, mediate us, change us, and time us in a special way.

Many of my professional musical play colleagues focus on the infinite relations of things, quoting the excellent works of Harraway (2016), and Barad (2007), and thus contemplation of the total relationality of all things. Viewing play as a withdrawn object (Harman, 2016; 2018) which pre-exists its relations is a view which makes playing a game about play's ontology possible, as explained in the playing of finite games. It was only by regarding play as an independent object – which is an interpretation that takes Eugen Fink's reading of play as a symbol a little bit further – that an examination, albeit metaphysical, of the role of play in causation and Cosmology becomes technically feasible.

It has been useful to think of play (and musical play) as both a Finkian symbol and a Harmanian *object*. Such an object is not the object of a subject, but is its very own independent object that does not require a human to qualify its existence.

Furthermore, one can think of play (and music) as a *hyperobject*. With this conceptual leap, and aligning with Morton's writing on hyperspace (2022) and hyperobjects (2013b), play (and musical play) can withdraw, can exist beyond human conception of space and time, can reveal its sticky sensual qualities, and can become partially available to the child and us, occasionally, as parts of it are phased-with.

How musical play *is*, as a beneficial activity, already has decent representation in academic thought, as indicated in this thesis. The *other-than-useful*, and the

aproductive ontologies of children's musical play were always likely to be underrepresented. One aspect of musical play which was very difficult to represent seriously, and which could be argued to be aproductive, is enchantment of the child, of music, and of play.

As mentioned earlier, Amin's (2006) *The Good City* has four registers: 'repair', 'relatedness', 'rights' and 're-enchantment', and re-enchantment (in a city) is to be found, according to Amin, in social gatherings which combine pleasure with the skill of negotiating difference. Re-enchantment in musical play is exactly the same, as demonstrated by and within the social gathering of the mother and baby musical episode of chapter two, and the negotiating of difference, in an ontological sense, that was highlighted in chapter three.

The playful method of this philosophical enquiry has occasionally stretched into the metaphysical, and has gathered together diverse voices, and has negotiated their differences aesthetically. Aesthetics, rather than metaphysics or epistemology should, claims Harman (2012), be the foundation of philosophical inquiry, so play is an appropriate tool for both enquiries into, and re-enchantment of, children's musical play.

Gratitude for the voices

When one finishes playing, it feels right to thank one's fellow players.

This enquiry was in a search for aproductive ontologies of young children's musical play. The research had nothing to promote, and no method to prove: it grew out of a need to satisfy a genuine interest in the deep reality of the musical play beyond its utility. A re-enchanting children's musical play is probably play which sensitively mediates, and dwells, and is humble in the face of both music and play.

From the outset, this thesis was intended to be a series of games where the players were aggregates of groups whose voices brought a textual sensibility to the orchestrated games so that a fuller understanding of children's musical play would emerge: an understanding which would be beyond that of musical play being very useful. Hence Scholars of Play had the combined voices of scholars and philosophers with diverse views on the nature of play, Music Educators also represented music practitioners and researchers of music in early childhood, "The Chorus", originally thought of as "the man on the Clapham Omnibus", were assorted, alternative viewpoints and theories from areas generally outside of philosophy, music, and education, "Aristotle" represented several of his books in their different translations, and Henricks provided the wherewithal for a game of musical chairs. Similarly, Object Oriented Ontology was a collective idea, focussing mainly on the work of Harman, but with contributions from many more scholars including Morton and Bogost. I am grateful to all the contributors, and hope that I have represented their works accurately and fairly.

Philia and utility were relatively easy framings for enquiry into early childhood musical play. However, Aristotle's, and MacIntyre's (2007), writing on virtue did not apply itself easily to musicking because their interpretations of virtue seemed too

prescriptive, or too transactional, and therefore too “useful”, leaving insufficient room for curiosity, wonder, awe, magic, and playfulness. The original, quite simple hope of extending thinking about the utility of music in early childhood into *philia* (the love of the activity) and *virtue* (the respectful quality of the activity), was shelved, and a different path engaged-with. Even though music as friendship was not progressed at this time, Aristotle’s writing about formal causation is one element of his extraordinarily prescient thinking which underpins the “weird reality” of OOO. I am grateful that Aristotle remained in the games as a voice of great wisdom.

I am grateful to music educators, many of whom I count as friends. All of us work uniquely with children, and we are reliant on each other’s generosity in the sharing theories, instruments, ideas, and repertoire. Having stepped outside of musical play’s utility for a while, I look forward to advocating for a sensuality-focussed, curiosity-led, sympoietic approach to play which supports the being of young children in musical play.

It is a brave move to attempt to pin down play into a comparison table, and I am grateful that Henricks (2015) did. His table, which likened play to activities which have qualities which separate them from play, was the start of a good game which was played to work out the stickiest, most controversial or complex aspect of musical play. The “winner”, musical play as interaction, showed us how musical play is a dance of dispositions, play, work, *communitas*, *and* ritual. With wry humour, Henricks (p. 6) pointed out that scholars tend to investigate play because they are interested in matters that are, to them, more important than play itself. The Musical Chairs game showed that, for the mother and child, the thick, immersive, fluid play of play was the most important part of their interactive play. This observation would have been extremely hard to achieve without Henricks’ help.

I am grateful to Graham Harman for sharing his philosophy of human access in books, freely available articles, and YouTube videos, and the widely interpreted philosophy of Object Oriented Ontology. OOO did for all objects that which Heidegger did for the hammer. Heidegger recognised that the hammer has its own deep interiority which is somewhat perceivable to the human wielding it, and Harman recognised that this was the same for all objects.

As someone deeply devoted to musical instruments and repertoire in early childhood musicking, the notion that, in OOO, the materiality of musical play is not important, is upsetting. Harman states “[I]n fact, OOO has no interest in matter, let alone materialism” (Harman, 2018, p. 258). To illustrate: Ring o’ Roses, is written down, sung, and remembered, and has many forms, all of which are impossible to fully grasp, and some of them exist beyond human thought. The full reality of Ring o’ Roses, and all other objects, eludes us: musical play can take on observable forms, but these phenomena are not what musical play is. Such is the reality of children’s musical play: it exists because it exists, and not because it acts.

I would like to thank Timothy Morton for his book *All Art is Ecological* (Morton, 2021) which first introduced me to an Object Oriented Ontological outlook which proved productive when thinking about play. Morton’s writing is compelling – he calls it “faux naïve” – combining pop music or Star Trek with startlingly deep philosophies. His writing informed large areas of this thesis, and gave me the courage to include chemistry, systems analysis, hyperspace, and metaphysics into the understanding of children’s musical play.

I would like to thank Eugen Fink. He was a late arrival into the games played here, and he arrived at the right moment. Few philosophers write about play, maybe because play is an extraordinarily difficult subject to write about seriously whilst still

doing it justice. According to Fink, and in a line of thought that coincides with Harman's: the player is played by play, and the player withdraws into play. Or, in the spirit of this thesis: the young child at musical play is both a young child playing at being music, and a young child playing at being play. Musical play, in its existing, causes change as the player, who is played, disappears into play. The child who has played musically is now a new object who can support new appearances, and new sensual qualities.

Musical play is apprehended by the child or adult as having a certain appearance, a charm, or an allure because, returning to Fink's words, the cultic of the play adheres to the human. Fink (2016) says that play's spell, or play's power, has a magic quality. Not in a heavy way, or useful way, but in a magic way. Fink hastened to add that we no longer believe in magic, adding that the early human beings practiced magic in cultic play, and the child in its play-activity behaves surprisingly like the "primitive", practicing their play in a literal, or imagined, marked-off area away from everyday life (2016).

Extending Harman's and Morton's hefty thinking to the trajectory of Eugen Fink's writing on the ontology of play, has led to two observations:

Firstly, play is not *aproductive*, producing nothing other than play (Eichberg, 2016), because play produces the time required for it to happen. This is an important point because one of the drivers of this research was the assertion, from philosophers and scholars of play, that children's musical play could not be *play* because it was *productive*, on account of it being initiated for the useful benefits it bestows to the players and to their immediate community. For example, in the Fugue Game (Chapter 3), Scholars of Play stated that "Utility is not the point of play because play's output is play, not utility." One can now add to that scholarly view by offering

that musical play is just like play because it produces time, with the distinction that musical play produces musical time. Admittedly, musical play, and its time, is prone to adulteration (Sturrock & Else, 1998), partly on account of the age of its players requiring adults in close attendance, and partly on account of musical play's particular relationship with ritual, *communitas*, and work (see Chapter 4).

Secondly, play, and music, can be considered as ontologically emergent objects and, furthermore, as hyperobjects (Morton, 2013b). Children's musical play is therefore, a playful phasing with a multidimensional hyperobject. Banging a drum, being rocked gently and lovingly, and listening to a Bach Fugue are good, challenging games which let us play with, and phase with, ineffably large, multidimensional objects.

Implications of this ludic research

A Glass Bead Game-inspired research method, originally inspired by Hermann Hesse's (2000) fictional game of synthesis, abstraction, and aesthetic thought, was applied creatively in this research to make emergent some of the other-than-useful qualities of children's prodigiously useful musical play. By doing so this research attended to, and imagined its way into, the gap in academic literature between *play*, as written about by scholars of play, and *musical play*, as written about by music educators and researchers of musical play. It was thought that this gap has arisen on account of the child's musical play being understood as overwhelmingly useful, rather than playful.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the approach of using games as a research method was motivated by two works: Eigen and Winkler's *Laws of the Game* (1981/1993), and Hermann Hesse's 1943 novel *The Glass Bead Game* (2000). Another influential text was Suits' *The Grasshopper. Games, life and utopia*. The idea of placing game-like obstacles in the way of research, so that the enquiry itself could be played as a "good game", was inspired by Bernard Suits (2014), Eigen and Winkler reinforced the notion that elements of chance and rules underlie all that happens in the universe, and Hesse's elaborate and mystical Glass Bead Game was an important conceptual touchstone. The very idea of knowledge being fused into an impossibly perfectly shaped, crystal clear object with exquisite depth and beauty, was compelling.

There are a number of online blogs which speculate as to how Hesse's Glass Bead Game could be manifested in real life (current blogs best found through search terms such as Glass Bead Games blog). There is an interesting development of a useable Glass Bead game by game designer JustKnecht (Giannetti, 2024), and a Glass Bead-inspired research platform and journal was run by a collective of artists, theorists,

and art historians (found at <https://www.glass-bead.org>). These are all inspired interpretations of the Glass Bead Game, because Hesse (2000) never disclosed detail about the novel's Game, and only alluded to its qualities or purpose, stating:

Under the shifting hegemony of now this, now that science or art, the Game of games had developed into a kind of universal language through which the players could express values and set these in relation to one another. (p. 31)

“Realising” was a favourite expression amongst Hesse's (2000) original Glass Bead Game's players, and this research was sensitised towards the feelings of realisation associated with wonder, sensuality, and resonance, in pursuit of epistemic knowledge and problem solving for existential, ontological, and institutional purposes. The original players played a path from Becoming to Being, or from potentiality to reality, striving to achieve perfection in their play: a perfection of “pure being”, and “the fullness of reality”. This research explored the possibilities of playing well with current knowledge.

A surprising realisation of this research was that research can be played well, to the extent that research can be viewed as a form of play, and that good research is well-played research. This should not have been a revelation given Gadamer's (2004) assertion that interpretation and understanding is a form of *Spiel* (play), and Fink's (2016) conception of play as a fundamental metaphysical category, and not just leisure or recreation.

Games for this research were chosen for their aesthetic formalism and their pattern, rhythm, and structure which, including their repetitions and disruptions, were congruent with the child's musical play itself. A lusory attitude allowed for playful methods to foreground the sensual, affective, and ephemeral qualities of what we

already know about children's musical play through experience and academic writing. Being playful encouraged the asking of different questions: not "what does musical play look like?" or "what does musical play do?", but "what does it mean to be with musical play?", and "what kind of reality does this musical play disclose?", and "what kinds of knowledge are possible through musical play?"

It is said that children learn through play. One could say that adults research through play.

For music practitioners

This research was played-out with the intention of seeking out the other-than-useful qualities of children's musical play. The ludic approach used is certainly of use to researchers, but it was never the intention to be "useful" to music practitioners by creating yet more pedagogical approaches, educational theories, methods, or repertoire. The "other than useful" of children's musical play revelled philosophically in the *philia*, the love, of knowing about musical play, and the love of knowing how it feels to be in the middle of musical play.

The result of that revelry is a deeper understanding of children's musical play as something other than a tool for development or learning, and more as a mode of being. By emphasizing aproduction, resonance, and wonder, the research data, which had been created to support the child's extra-musical development, now supports a deepening attunement to musical play which values the "aproductive" play of both adult and child together lingering in play for play's sake. Attuning to how well both adults and children play would allow for children and educators to dwell in the unfolding logic of the game itself, and to allow for meaning, wonder, and relation to

emerge without needing to be fixed or assessed. This dwelling is assisted in musical play which, as outlined in this enquiry, produces its own musical time.

In a ludic pedagogy practitioners are co-players rather than instructors, who reflect on the ecology of sounds, bodies, objects, and spaces within which musical play occurs. To resensitise practice within a philosophical grounding which helps practitioners to become more attuned to the relational, sensual, and emergent aspects of musical play will require the development of a language of aesthetics, being, and wonder, and an acceptance of such language in educational discourse. To monitor such play is to attune to:

- i) Immersion and Absorption into play: fostering a shared ethos of curiosity and openness, aiming for the moments where the world outside ceases to matter.
- ii) Playful bodies in motion: during musical wandering, nonsense, and experimentation, noticing moments when the body becomes something else, like a rhythm, a melody, a puppet, or a metaphor.
- iii) Laughter, sounds, silence, and nonsense: when nonsense words, sounds, and actions make more sense than standard, commonly accepted communicative gestures.
- iv) Integrity of the playworld: as tambourines, chairs, scarves, or floor tiles act as agents in the play, when the play creates its own reality, and players invest in this play as if it is real.

As discussed in the Fugue chapter, developed in the Musical Chairs Game, tinkered-with during Ring o' Roses, and as created for the research of this thesis, a sympoietic playworld requires maintenance which responds to the shifting, emergent dynamics of play in the moment.

This sensed, play-orientated approach resonates with current conceptions of musical play in early childhood, but shifts the discourse slightly from utility to ontology, accepting that children's musical play is useful and underlining its importantly ontologically rich, sensual, and cosmically resonant nature. Inspiration can be drawn from the method utilised in this research to create environments and to design musical toys that honour play's intrinsic and ontological value, and focus on playing well. Such spaces and objects would not steer children towards predetermined outcomes but would allow everyone to be co-players dwelling in the unfolding moment.

The ontological expansion of musical play into the support of play itself could be matched with a speculative extension, or aesthetic deepening, of play scholarship into this possibility space too. Affirming the intrinsic value of children's play, Playwork prioritises child-led, emergent experiences over utilitarian outcomes, and recognises the adult's role as a sensitive facilitator rather than a director (Play Wales Chwarae Cymru, 2025). Playwork is an example of play scholarship offering a practical and evidence-based scaffold for ethical, rights-based engagement with play, and playwork principles. The research of this thesis, on the other hand, has playfully reached into the philosophical and metaphysical potentials of a particular play - musical play - focussing on where musical play, sympoiesis, work, ritual, communitas, and ontology resonate, before venturing on to a more speculative, aesthetic, and ontological terrain which foregrounds the sensual, metaphor, allure, and philosophical wonder as being central to its play.

In practical terms, musical play practice, and play scholarship as exemplified in Playwork practice and the work of many philosophers of play too, are not in opposition. An attunement, rather than a resolution, is required. This research has

been a start towards such attunement, and it invites further imagining of being and becoming, or becoming and research, as play.

For future researchers of play

As a research methodology, glass bead-inspired research-as-games, or ludic research, is a legitimate addition to methods which encourage transdisciplinary, relational, and performative, even embodied thinking. There are implications for future ludic researchers in the areas of:

i) Transdisciplinarity - using ludic methodology researchers can draw on diverse fields in a non-hierarchical, “flattened” manner in which, inspired by an Object Oriented Philosophy within which all knowledge exists equally, contributions can be included because of their intrinsic value, and because of how well they help the game play out. Such an approach can encourage deeper ethical, philosophical, and existential engagement.

ii) Relational Thinking - complex subject matter, such as musical play, is not analysed in isolation but as part of a network of resonances between play, modes of being, local culture, and affect, or between architectural styles, or ...enantiomers of sulphur. One idea can be developed across different contexts in the same way that a theme or musical motif is developed into variations in a piece of music, as long as one is clear about how the music should sound, or how it could be played, or how the new composition relates to the current musical canon.

iii) A “different” usefulness - broader, richer interpretations of children's play and similar activities, that go beyond developmental or educational frameworks can be encouraged because the research-games pave the way for a philosophically literate

research paradigm in early childhood and music education. This, in turn, will help to challenge the tendency toward purely instrumental or measurable outcomes. The use of games as research inspiration could assist in, or catalyse new areas of enquiry in fields such as postqualitative and diffractive research, rebellious research (Burnard et al., 2022), possibility studies, artistic research in education, theopoetics, crealitics (Glăveanu & De Miranda, 2022), and ecological aesthetics in childhood studies.

Ludic research comes with a “health warning”. There is no patentable “method” for glass bead game-inspired research, but there are guidelines. To play a good Hermann Hesse-inspired Glass Bead Game of research, a researcher needs to balance rigour and intuition, structure and composition, possess a deep interdisciplinary curiosity, and have a degree of optimism which helps them to enjoy the research, balanced with a humility which reminds them that they are only playing. Hesse’s Glass Bead Game involved the fictional synthesis of all human knowledge as an idealised form of intellectual and artistic play. To bring that sort of play into research practice one needs to assimilate a broad, deep knowledge base, with enough grounding to draw meaningful connections, to recognise how and why concepts evolve and recur, be philosophically literate, and be attuned to how well the research is playing-out. In practice, ludic research requires one to read across disciplines, mentally mapping idea-resonances between disparate sources such as a mathematical formula and a poem, or a philosophical axiom and a fugue, and play with patterns to attain novel pleasing patterns, rather than merely proving points. The essence of the game lies in connecting and composing conceptual “beads” together in meaningful, elegant relationships between these elements. These relationships can be analogies, counterpoints, metaphors. The goal of the play is not analysis, it is ritual and artistic engagement in the form of aesthetic striving in pursuit of some form of elegance in

the way that a well-played game is elegant. In this way, a research project can be composed as a particular fugue, or as a "composition," drawing from unexpected sources such as a quantum theory concept, and a children's song, as long as the process is played well.

The approach of the ludic research game requires the adoption of a spirit of intellectual, playful reverence. A good player (researcher) cultivates a detachment from utility, because the game is played in order to play well, to think deeply and rigorously, and to be playful, but not frivolous. There is reverence in the joy of interconnection because a researcher has, or should have, rather like an artist, an inner sense of devotion to truth, beauty (in whatever form), and coherence. Of course, there is no prescribed pathway to attaining one's own sense of truth and beauty, and a researcher has to locate their own formal structures, like a fugue, a tabulated theory, a nursery rhyme, a mandala, a set of playing cards, or a symbolic gameboard. These are the constraints that limit resources, make the game finite, and demand creativity. The easier the game is to "get", the easier it is to collaborate and invite other players, share references, and to co-construct metaphors, or symbolic exchanges. Documentation of the game is documentation of relationships within the game.

Rather than asking "What is the use of this research?" a playful researcher asks "What is the elegance of its thought-architecture? What worlds does it open?" For playful researchers, ludic research transcends disciplinary boundaries, composes with ideas, and is comfortable with treating knowledge as a form of play – as both a sacred ritual and a cosmic phenomenon – very much like the way a young child engages with the world through musical play. A good researcher, of any age, is a *Magister Ludi* of play.

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Endnotes

ⁱ In December 1995 Robert Williams, director of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, decided to devote his discretionary ten percent of the Hubble telescope's observation time to looking deeply at a tiny part of the darkest, emptiest section of space that he and his team could find in a year of searching. The segment of space viewed by the Hubble telescope's camera was the equivalent of the area of sky marked by the top of a pinhead held at arm's length (NASA, n.d.). After the removal of noise, such as cosmic ray disturbance, images of space debris, and scattered light from earth, the resulting Hubble Deep Field Image was constructed from 342 images which were carefully recombined. The three distinct wavelengths of light detected were designated red, green and blue, resulting in one colour image. The emptiest, darkest area of space revealed 3,000 hitherto unidentified galaxies in various stages of evolution. Deep Fields research continues to capture images of objects which are billions of light-years distant (Gianopoulos, 2025).

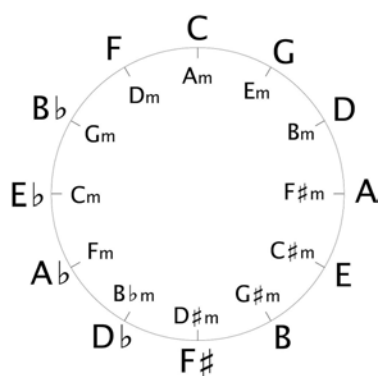
ⁱⁱ Circle of Fifths (Fugue chapter). The scale of C major has no sharps or flats. If C is allocated as note 1, then note 5 brings us to G, and G major which is the scale of one sharp. Again, if G is thought of as note 1, then note D and D major would be a fifth up from G, where D Major has two sharps. The pattern of fifths and increasing sharps is illustrated by the "Circle of Fifths". C major has no sharps or flats, and its relative minor, A minor also has no sharps or flats. The right hand side of the circle

has increasing numbers of sharp accidentals, and the left hand side has decreasing numbers of flats.

Moving from a chord of C to one of G is a common and pleasing chord change in Western popular music. One can make the chord progression slightly more interesting by using the relative minor as a pivot chord between C and G. Moving from C major to B major, say, is possible but in Western music it is a challenge to justify and make the chord change make sense. Modulation up one tone is commonly used in pop music, and modulation up one degree of the circle of fifths is used in traditional music, to provoke a bit of excitement.

Figure 12.

Diagram of a Circle of Fifths by Joseph Harrington (2007), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



iii Abstract for *OOO, Guerrilla metaphysics, and the allure of children's musical play* published in Music Education Research (Harmer, 2024)

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Abstract

Inspired by Graham Harman's philosophy of human access, and within the "flattening ontology" of Object Oriented Ontology, Ring o' Roses is speculated about as a discrete entity (a finite object), with ontological independence from humans, repertoire, song, utility, and cultural context. Ring o' Roses dances us through an introduction to OOO, and on to the idea of young children's early musical play as different from a bunch of qualities and benefits. Musical play can be considered as ontologically irreducible, only accidentally useful, only ever apprehended sensuously, and as having a weird and vast, yet fragile, interior announced by allure, which is composed of charm, courage, and humour.

Keywords: Object Oriented Ontology, OOO, Harman, children's musical play, allure, charm, weird