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Plork! A foundation for playful making

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ABSTRACT

In their book Learning By Heart: Teachings to free the creative spirit, artist and educator Corita Kent and co-author Jan Steward introduce the concept of plork - "the ecstasy we feel when work and play are one" (2008, p. 159). Perhaps because of its relatively obscure origins, the playful silliness of the portmanteau, or the ethereal nature of its original definition, plork remains academically untouched in terms of critique, analysis, explanation or implementation. In this article, I introduce a theoretical and contextual foundation for plork, arguing that plork might prove a valuable, necessary way of engaging with playfulness, specifically in regard to creative practice and production. Through a review of the literature on play, playfulness, work and creativity, I unpack plork's constituent parts, arguing for a contemporary re-imagining of plork not simply as playful work, but as a reflective, permissive practice that enables the conscious cultivation and nurturing of a playful mindset: not just work and play, but the work that goes into being playful.

Introduction

Let us start as we mean to go on: honestly, and playfully. This is a paper about plork.[1] Perhaps you have already heard of it; perhaps not. Perhaps you plork regularly. Perhaps you are plorking right now without even knowing it. I plork more and more these days; mostly on purpose, although sometimes it just slips out. Plork – a combination of the concepts of *play* and *work* - is a silly word, I know. Perhaps its apparent silliness is why there is almost no academic literature on it. But I believe it is an important, timely concept; one which has become central to my creative and teaching practices.

Plork was a term first used by artist and educator Corita[2] and co-author Jan Steward in their book *Learning by Heart: Teachings to free the creative spirit* (2008, originally published in 1992) and was grounded in the argument that neither *play* nor *work* are words which fully encompass the creative act of making. Based on Corita's artistic and teaching philosophies, plork encompassed the idea that "play is a way of working and work a way of playing" (p. 156). Viewing the two as separate (as we are conditioned to), does not, they argue, serve creative practice; instead, "We need a third word - one which combines the two concepts and allows us to

recognise them together as one responsible act necessary for human advancement" (p. 159). Plork is not gamifying work; it is a separate state, an approach to creativity that encompasses "the abstract and the concrete, the joy and the labour" (p. 159.). It is playing productively: making-playing and playing-making, balancing "playfulness and discipline" (Heljakka, 2023, p. 108).

This third way - not play, not work, not even a combination of the two, but something new that repositions what it means to make art - is, I argue, of great value to creative practitioners; perhaps nowhere more so that in "arguably the most playful form of popular media or art" (Power, 2010) - animation. Animation is a notoriously laborious artistic medium (Hosea, 2011), one which is often assumed to be significantly easier (Quinn & Mills, 2010) and more fun (Ménard, 2023) than in reality. Animators must balance this reality with the necessity of play in their work. Eminent animation director Chuck Jones insisted that directors of animation "must respect the impulsive thought and try and implement it" (Jones, 1991 p. 101), despite animation being, according to animators themselves, "fucking boring" (Ginsburg, as cited by Bourton, 2019). The art of animation treads a line between play and labour, between freedom and constraint. And that's before we get into the cognitive, conceptual, technological and philosophical play necessary for animation to operate at all - after all, animation requires its audience to willingly play along with its illusory nature (Weihe, 2006) - or the fact that being a contemporary artist in a neoliberal, capitalist economy makes play complicated at best. For our purposes here though, it is enough to say that animators rely on play - or rather, playfulness - to work.

It is surprising then, that considering plork offers a potential new way of framing play as clear part of creative production and practice, that there is almost no scholarly research that explores it as a specific concept, and none that presents plork as a methodology for contemporary creative practice. Perhaps because of its relatively obscure origins, or the playful silliness of the portmanteau, plork remains academically untouched in terms of critique, analysis, explanation or implementation.

In this article, through a theoretical and historical deconstruction of Corita and Steward's original conceptualisation of plork and its constituent parts – *play*, *playfulness*, and *work* – I demonstrate the importance of playfulness for creative work. Then, I briefly explore the complexities around its manifestation in arts practice, through the lens of a practicing artist. Finally, I introduce plork as a potentially rewarding - and necessary - methodology for creative practice, re-conceptualising plork for contemporary audiences and presenting a potential protocol for its practice. The arguments in this article are largely condensed from my PhD research, which seeks to fill and bridge the aforementioned gaps in research and understanding.

What is plork?

As the constituent parts of plork's DNA can, as I will show, quickly become mired in weighty philosophical concepts, it is perhaps important to begin with simple observations. Plork is a portmanteau of play and work, two states which we are traditionally, societally conditioned to see as opposites: work is productive and valuable, whereas play – particularly adult play – is of little-to-no value (Sutton-Smith, 1997). This has led to a common feeling that outside of very specific socially approved settings, play "tends to be seen as socially unacceptable" (Walsh, 2019, p. 1). This argument has for a long time been rebutted (e.g., Dewey, 1910), however the separation between the two remains deeply ingrained in us. In *Learning by Heart* (2008), however, Corita and Steward argue that not only are play and work *not* opposites, but they are also profoundly interrelated. "Work" – particularly, creative work – "is often done by playing around" (Kent & Steward, 2008, p. 155). When artists make work, they must explore, imagine and experiment, but not frivolously - they must do so *towards* something, an outcome, a goal. Their argument for neither *play* nor *work* fully encompassing this ideal is presented here in full:

> We tend to think of play as abstract, without a goal, and somewhat irresponsible - while work suggests a goal, is specific and honorable. Because of this, play can be more challenging - even though we have been taught to perceive work as that challenge. We need a third word - one which combines the two concepts and allows us to recognise them together as one responsible act necessary for human advancement. We combine the abstract and the concrete, the joy and the labor. That word would represent the ecstasy we feel when work and play are one. (Kent & Steward, 2008, p. 159)

The above concept is defined under the heading, "PLORK". Although that word itself is not then returned to by Corita and Steward, the governing theme of a combined state of playing-working underscores much of their book. Perhaps it is the word's inherent silliness that first drew me to it; in its playful non-sense, it makes considerable sense to me. Plork is presented as a way of doing and thinking which combines play and work to maximise the experience and outcome of both. Unpacking the description above, we can begin to formulate a better understanding of plork:

1. Plork is an act, a feeling and, arguably, a state.
2. Plork combines play (joy, abstraction) and work (labour, concrete).
3. Plork drives us forward.

Here, play and work are considered not only simultaneous, but *the same*. This sets plork apart from other, often better-known play-related concepts such as playbour (Ferrer-Conill, 2018; Törhönen et al., 2019), gamification (Fuchs, 2015; Patricioet al., 2020), or playwork (Play Scotland, n.d.; Play Wales, 2015;), in that

play and work are not seen to be supporting or balancing each other, but seen as incorporated within a single concept. However, the above passage is more description than definition: it speaks of a sense, of a feeling, of a recognition. Perhaps, in addition to my previous suggestions, this lack of clarity contributes to plork not being more widely researched. To apply plork more strategically and systematically to creative practice, I argue that a more practical definition-cum-development of the concept is necessary.

Play

Let us begin by acknowledging that no one definition of play is considered sufficient to successfully encapsulate the concept or activity (Martin & Caro, 1985; Rubin et al., 1983). "Play", as Scott Eberle puts it, "is a roomy subject" (Eberle, 2014, p. 214). This is demonstrated by the myriad uses of play in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, where it is listed as a verb, a noun, informal, formal and a phrasal verb; it means to "engage in games or other activities for enjoyment rather than for serious or practical purpose"; to "move" in a game; a dramatic work for the stage; to move "lightly and quickly; flicker"; to represent and to compete against. To "play with" means to join or manipulate; to "play up" means something is not working, where as "play down" minimises. Play encompasses many things. Play is "manipulating things" (Bogost, 2016a); an expression of 'surplus energy' (Spencer, 1855); instinctive practice (Groos, 1898); "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits, 1978); "the enactment of anything that is not for real" (De Koven, 2013, p. 25); it is "metacommunication" (Bateson, 1955). Play is "not serious" (Huizinga, 1949), but "[absorbs] the player intensely and utterly"; it is, according to Sutton-Smith (1999), a "unique form of adaptive variability, instigates an imagined by equilibrial reality within which disequilibrial exigencies can be paradoxically simulated and give rise to the pleasurable effects of excitement and optimism" (Sutton-Smith, 1999, p. 253). Play experience depends on where you are from; play is contextual. Play looks and functions differently across different cultural and global landscapes (Lancy & Tindall, 1976; Sutton-Smith, 1999). European-American children in the USA, for example, are more inclined towards fantasy play than children from Efe communities in the Congo, or Mayan children, who engage more with play that emulates adult work (Gaskins, 2000; Morelli et al., 2003). These differences are often determined by "cultural values about childhood, gender and relations with the natural world, which are often linked to economic conditions, religious beliefs, social structures and so on" (Whitebread & Basilio, 2013, p. 79).[3] Play may be broadly universal, but play is contextual. And it is complex.

The fields of play studies are almost as numerous as the dictionary definitions. Much of the research on play - including key texts such as Johan Huizingas' (1949)*Homo Ludens* and Roger Caillois' (1961) *L'Homme et les jeux* (*Man, Play and Games*) - relate the phenomena primarily to anthropological and sociological concerns. Other

researchers relate the notion of play in pedagogical or developmental terms (Dewey, 1910; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). More often than not, play is researched in the context of children's development, social, linguistic or otherwise (Isaacs 1971; Lester & Russell, 2008; Piaget, 2001; Vygotsky, 1966). Part of the problem with attempting to define play is that it "transcends all disciplines, if not all discipline" (Spariosu, 1989, p. ix). Piaget (2001) defined play according to behavioural categories (sensorimotor play/symbolic play/games with rules); Sutton-Smith (1997) proposed seven 'genres' of play: "humor, skill, pretence, fantasy, risk, contest, and celebrations, all of which are selective simulations of paradoxical variability". Roger Caillois (1961) argues that all play exists on a spectrum between the *paida* ("the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct", p. 27-28) and *ludus* ("games to which, without exaggeration, a civilizing quality can be attributed", p. 27). Simply put, the ludus is play with "two possible endings: winning and losing" (Frasca, 2003, p. 230); paida has no win state but is instead about "free improvisation…carefree gaiety" (Caillois, 1961, p. 13) or "games of make-believe, kinetic play" (Frasca, 2003, p. 229). This notion of spectrums of play was echoed by Kosh et al. (2018), who conceptualise play not as a single definable action or state, but as a spectrum. However, even their own spectrum only goes so far: "The most irritating feature of play", the authors argue, "is not the perceptual incoherence, as such, but rather, that play taunts us with its inaccessibility" (2018, p. 1).

All of which is to say - when Corita and Steward talk about play as a core part of plork, what are they talking about? The tricky part of play is that it seems obvious - we 'feel' play. But, as I found out when suggesting to a student that they need to 'play around' with their work, it is often difficult to instinctively answer the question 'but what does that *actually* mean?'. Scholars such as Eberle (2014) and Gray (2013) provide helpful syntheses of the myriad definitions of play, highlighting 5 common key tenets of play activity: that which is **intrinsically motivated**; **pleasurable**; **voluntary**; that it involves the **imagination**, and that it is **guided, or focused, by rules** (Garvey, 1990; Weisberg at al., 2013; Gray, 2013; Eberle, 2014; Kosh et al., 2018). These are commonly understood to be characteristics of play behaviour. Understanding play in this way gives a place to start contextualising plork. If, in plork, play and work are one, then the consequent activity should bear the above hallmarks of play activity. But again, this does not necessarily solve the problem of *how* one plays. Corita and Steward provide many examples of exercises for students to do that help them experience their idea of play-making activities. But really, these exercises provide examples of how students can enter into the cognitive space *for* play. How we play around is a function of the *desire* to play - how we play is secondary to being play*ful*.

Playfulness

Playfulness is the underlying attitude for play, "an attitude of mind; [whereas play] is a passing outward manifestation of this attitude" (Murray, 1938, p. 163). Dewey presents the argument that play is 'just' an

activity approached with a playful attitude; without this attitude, the activity is not play; without a playful disposition, *we* do not play. As Sicart (2014) argues, playfulness allows us to take "the attitude of play without the activity…[it] is a way of engaging with particular contexts and objects that is similar to play but respects the purposes and goals of the object or context". Play is the activity; playfulness is the cognitive process of (re)framing and engaging with that activity (Sanderson, 2010); the *way* of doing it. This distinction is evidenced in a meta-analysis of the definitions of play conducted by Masek and Stenros (2021). One key finding from the meta-analysis is the linguistic distinction between *play*, *playful* and *playfulness*. The study found *playful,* and *playfulness* are presented as synonymous, as playfulness "refers to the essence of the adjective" (p. 15). *Play* and *playfulness*, on the other hand, although on occasion presented as synonymous (e.g. Márquez Segura et al., 2016) are more often presented as two distinct (albeit related) concepts and phenomena (Proyer, 2017, p. 3). This is in step with Dewey's above suggestion; play is an act, playfulness is the cognitive attitude that allows and frames that act; the two are related, but distinct. If then, plork is where work and play are the same, it is logical to suggest that playfulness is a precursor to plork. When I suggest that students 'play around' with an idea, perhaps what I am really suggesting is that they approach their work more playfully; *to allow them to* play with it.

Shen, Chick and Zinn's (2014) synthesis of the literature on playfulness highlights a distinction between playful *behaviour,* and the *characteristics* of playfulness itself. In this regard, they conceptualise playfulness as a personality trait - not something you *do*, but a way you *are*. This trait is represented - through considerable consensus - by three key qualities: **intrinsic motivation**, **freedom** and **spontaneity**. These key qualities help us to unpack what we mean when we say we do something *playfully*. **Intrinsic motivation** is akin to non-consequential behaviour in that it represents motivation not driven by external consequence or gain. Shen et al note the importance and relevance of a specific type of intrinsic motivation: fun (Podlichak, 1991; Schaefer and Greenberg, 1997; Chick et al., 2012). As such, they highlight ***fun-seeking*** as a "more precise terms to capture the distinctive motive that defines playfulness" (Shen et al.2014 p. 64). When we are playful, we seek enjoyment and pleasure. **Freedom** refers to a mental state where real-life consequences of the players actions are not of concern (e.g. Bishop & Chace, 1971; Bundy, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Ellis, 1973; Ferland, 1997; Olsen, 1981; Schwartzman, 1978); freedom "stems from the *disregard for* consequences external to play" (Shen et al., 2014, p. 65, emphasis in original). This freedom includes the freedom to engage in non-real realities and, relating to intrinsic motivation above, the freedom from external constraints e.g. "negative expectations from others, expectant punishment or humiliation following poor performance" (Shen et al., 2014, p. 69). This is framed as this dispositional quality of ***uninhibitedness***. Lastly, **spontaneity** is identified as a key quality of play through its ability to **"**[give] rise to the playful trait's unique, impulsive character" (p. 66). Spontaneity in this regard is characterised as a "mental propensity to give quick, prompt responses without deep thought or

premeditation" (p. 66). Through this analysis of the literature, Shen et al propose a working definition of playfulness:

> A personality trait that underlies the individuals' tendency to be intrinsically motivated, with a clear fun orientation, and to engage oneself spontaneously in an unconstrained manner. (p. 68)

Despite playfulness being "too diverse, too idiosyncratic, personal" (De Koven, 2017) to satisfyingly define, Shen et al's working definition provides an emergent consensus of its common elements: "the predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment" (Barnett, 2006, p. 955). However, just because we have the cognitive ability to reframe situations in such a playful way does not necessarily mean that we will in any or all given instances. Bernard De Koven (2014a; 2014b) paints playfulness as a choice: for adults in particular, being playful is something we recognise and allow ourselves to do or be. Giving ourselves permission, however, does not necessarily come easily (Walsh, 2019). We are taught to "distrust" play (De Koven, 2014a, p. 17); we are taught that play is frivolous and childish. Trusting that playfulness is a valid and valuable way of being in the world, is the proverbial 'hard bit'; as De Koven notes, there is "nothing hard about being playful. The hard thing is to let your *self* out to play so that you have that choice" (p. 34). Playfulness is a *conscious*, considered act. Although part of our nature, it does not necessarily happen naturally - we must purposefully choose it. Playfulness, arguably, takes work; it takes the conscious effort of staying on the "playful path" (p. 34).

We can, however, increase our ability to make this choice to become, and then remain, playful. Proyer et al. (2021) argue that playfulness "can be changed by deliberate intervention" (2021, p. 145) ; by practising playfulness in small ways, individuals might be able to increase their propensity to approach experiences in a playful way. It seems reasonable to argue that to increase playful engagement with creative practice, we might need to actively and/or consciously nurture it. This appears to be part of Corita's teaching ethos shown throughout *Learning by Heart*: by continuing consciously to practice playfulness, we can become more playfully creative, or more creatively playful in our work.

Work

As with play, there are many kinds of work. Work, like play, is not easy to define (Rosso et al., 2010). Also, like play, work spans many different academic disciplines, including psychology (Ros et al., 1999), sociology (Rosso et al., 2010), economics (e.g., Smith, 1937), labour (e.g., Marx, 1973; Marx & Engels, 1948; Sayers, 2005), management, and output (e.g., Fayol, 1916; Taylor, 1947). Writing on work has traditionally been "primarily concerned with human productivity in exchange for remuneration and the conditions under which such

transactional exchanges took place" (van der Laan et al., 2023, p. 253) – situations and spaces where we produce things for financial or other forms of material gain. Work, Clark (2017) argues, is "the familiar things we do … to make a life and a living" (p. 62). Geuss (2021) suggests that remuneration attached to it is not as conceptually important to work as is the 'objective' value, which can be "measured and valued independently of anything one might know about the process through which that product came to be or the people who made it" (p. 5). Whether conceived in financial terms or otherwise, work "obtains its measure from the outside, through the aim to be attained and the obstacles to be overcome in attaining it" (Marx, 1973, p. 712).

In this regard, work is not just "doing and making" as Corita and Steward suggest (2008, p. 1), but doing and making with a specific focus on the *results* of that doing and making; not just the act of working, but a cognitive process that defines an act *as* work: an attitude or mindset of 'workfulness'. This draws parallels with the governing assumption that work is the opposite of play which typifies much of the historic literature (Holzman, 2016; Thiagarajan, 2015). Play – particularly adult play – is driven by intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic measure, and as such is painted as a distraction from what is important (e.g., Aristotle, 2008; Aquinas, 2006). Because of this, play is often portrayed as "essentially useless" (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 201); of little or no value (Weber, 2002); and even sinful (Brailsford, 1975; Scitovsky, 1978). Work, on the other hand, which focussed on function and product, is typically deemed good; 19th- and 20th-century industrialists were often driven by the idea that "value depends entirely on utility" (Kerr, 1962, p. 48). As I have already mentioned, work and play are, then, traditionally understood, practised and experienced as, at best, overtly separate activities (Ford, 2006).

Too often, we envision work as something required of us by someone or something else – play, on the other hand, is the thing we make a choice to do (Bogost, 2016b). However, Dewey (1910) argues that distinguishing play from work based on a result- or output-based focus introduces "a false, unnatural separation between process and product" (p. 166). In fact, he suggests that, developmentally speaking, work – "interest in the adequate embodiment of a meaning (a suggestion, purpose, aim) in objective form through the use of appropriate materials and appliances" (p. 163) – is an extension of the play attitude. The two are intertwined: play *needs* outcome; without it, play degenerates into "fooling" (p. 218). Conversely, a single-minded focus on outcome leads work into "drudgery", where "the process of doing loses all value for the doer" (p. 218.). This returns us to Corita and Steward's description of play ("the abstract … the joy") and work ("the concrete…the labor") within creative practice as conceptually different. However, they also argue for their symbiosis as key to the creative act: that artists' "best times are when working and playing are the same" (Kent & Steward, 2008, p. 156).

Creativity

As if I had not already opened enough undefinable philosophical cans of worms, in order to understand work in the context of creative output (as is the focus of both Corita and Steward's original conceptualisation, and my own research) it is important to take a brief moment to acknowledge the connection between *creativity* and playfulness. Nowhere is the complex nature between playfulness and work made clearer that in creative production. The British Council (n.d) defines creativity as "the expression and invention of novel and appropriate ideas" This "novel-and-appropriate" framing has become the go-to definition for much research into creativity (Silvia, 2018, p. 272) but remains the source of much debate (Diedrich et al., 2015). But as with the previously introduced concepts, across the span of disciplines in which creativity research has been conducted, e.g. business, psychology, neuroscience, education and the arts (Puryear & Lamb, 2020; Brandt, 2021), there is little consensus on a universal definition (Plucker et al. 2004; Hennessy and Amabile, 2010; Simonton, 2016).

Based on Kampylis and Valtanen's (2010) extensive review of the literature, Walia (2019) posits the following:

> Creativity is an act arising out of a perception of the environment that acknowledges a certain disequilibrium, resulting in productive activity that challenges patterned thought processes and norms, and gives rise to something new in the form of a physical object or even a mental or an emotional construct. (p. 242)

Echoing Czikczentmihalyi (1999), Walia posits that creativity specifically involves the generation of some output, whether physical, mental or emotional. By this token creativity is, like work, output-oriented. Further, the creative act is arguably the result of play. There is a wealth of research arguing that creativity is facilitated by play through both cognitive and affective processes (Dansky & Silverman, 1973; Howard-Jones et al,, 2002; Moore & Russ, 2008; Russ & Schafer, 2006; Saracho, 1992). Not all play is creative, argue Mainemelis and Ronson (2006), but more often than not, "creativity is born out of some form or moment of play", p .85). Indeed, play is often described as the natural precursor to creativity (Freud, 1926; Vygotsky, 1978; Huizinga, 1949; Piaget, 2001; Winnicot, 2001; Turner, 1982). In fact, if play is the precursor to creativity, but play is simply the outward manifestation of an attitude - the act itself - we can say that play*fulness* is the real "facilitator of creativity and creative responses and…creative expression in a given setting" (Proyer et al.,, 2019, p. 55). To create, to work and make works, artists must not only play, but be playful.

(Re)Defining plork

In summary so far, we can see (amongst other things) the following:

- Plork relates to play, which, amongst other things, is regarded as intrinsically motivated, fun, and governed by rules.
- Plork also relates to work which, amongst other things, is regarded as output-oriented.
- Work is not antithetical to play.
- Playfulness is an attitude which constitutes the precursor to play. It relies on openness to opportunity, the ability to reframe situations as play and it is not driven by specific outcomes.
- Playfulness is inherently personal.
- Playfulness can be characterised as a driver of both play and creativity.
- Playfulness can be characterised as a cultivated – and cultivatable – choice.

Playfulness allows the creative production of outputs - works - to occur. This, fundamentally, is what Corita and Steward (2008, p. 159) refer to as plork - not play, nor work, but a combination of the two concepts. It is feasible, then, to argue that plork is the adoption of a playful attitude towards creative production - an embracing of risk, of operating in free and uninhibited ways that prioritise fun but direct that energy and effort towards the creation of artistic works.

This position, however, feels incomplete; to adopt this playful attitude, we must first choose to be on our "playful path" (De Koven, 2014a) - we must choose to be playful. But how do we do that? Is it as simple as saying "now I am playful"? To complicate matters further, De Koven goes on to suggest it is not actually a case of choosing playfulness but that we are, in fact, playful by default - we do not choose play, so much as we choose *not to play (*De Koven, 2014b). Plork, then, is *not* choosing *not-play* in order to make creative work. As ever with play, things that seem easy, aren't necessarily.

It is these questions that have rumbled around my head for the last 3.5 years during my PhD at Edinburgh College of Art, The University of Edinburgh. My research interrogates the notion of plork, and how playfulness manifests in and through (Borgdorff, 2011) making, and teaching, animation. I adopted practice-as-research (PaR) methodology (Nelson, 2013) - research not only *about* arts practice, but "on and for practices … conducted in (or close to) practices" (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 66) - which balanced theoretical background, creative arts practice, and the recording of, and reflection on, the experience of making the works (Skains, 2018). This was supported by interviews with contemporary artists, and survey data gleaned from workshop participants, including at the Playful Learning Conference 2024.

Through the process of reflecting on my own film-making practice, I became increasingly aware of behaviours - and the reasons behind those behaviours - that were effectively choosing not-play. Using personal storytelling as a sense-making tool (Bochner, 2001, 2002), I uncovered a deep-rooted pattern of prioritising extrinsic goals or value, instead of intrinsic, free, fun-driven creative activity. Even when I begin projects with a playful attitude, my work is often affected by a fear of failure; of a work needing to contribute to a portfolio, the ultimate aim of which is to drive financial gain from future work. The irony is, of course, that by focussing on extrinsic motivation, I worry myself into an unplayful corner, resulting in a decrease in my creative engagement with my own projects; by worrying about the quality of the work, I stop being playful enough to create the work in the first place.

This is perhaps unsurprising. Playfulness relies on being intrinsically motivated, separated from others' opinions or voices, yet "proponents of [the] neoliberal arts cannot make art without regard to reception" (Konstantinou, 2020). It is almost impossible to create art with a blanket disregard for the effect it might have on potential clients, investors, purchasers, or funding bodies. This leads to a perfect breeding ground of counterproductive self-consciousness, and self-worth becoming defined by productivity, which further stifles creativity (Carroll, 2022, p. 4). After all, "whoever *must* play cannot *play*" (Carse, 1986).

However, as the research progressed, I became more conscious of my own play-limiting behaviour and began to choose play - or not choose not-play - more readily. The use of reflection as a key part of my methodology allowed me not only to acknowledge that I wanted - needed - to be playful but forced me to confront what it was that blocked my own playfulness and subsequently begin to build strategies, rulesets, frameworks and permissions through which I invited myself to engage more playfully in my work. What I came to understand was the value in reflection and permission-giving as key parts of the process of engaging with playfulness in service of creative practice. This research leads me to argue that perhaps plork is not just the act itself, but the cultivation and nurturing of the ability to be playful at all. If playfulness drives play and creativity, is not antithetical to output-driven activity, and is a cultivatable choice, then perhaps plork is allowing ourselves to *access* playfulness: not playing-working, but *the work that goes into being playful.*

This forms the basis of my argument for the importance of plork as an ongoing practice. Whilst this contemporary conceptualisation of plork, takes a step away from Corita and Steward's initial one, I believe this allows for more nuance, more accessibility and a more personal approach to engaging with playfulness as a part of creative practice. Instead of a single act or a resultant feeling, plork might be conceptualised as a cycle of reflection, permission-giving and practice (fig. 1); necessarily centred around the self, as playfulness is "too diverse, too idiosyncratic, personal" (De Koven, 2017) to create a one-size-fits-all ruleset. Indeed, I argue that a useful practice might be to write a personal manifesto for playfulness - a reflection and reminder that

play is acceptable, necessary and valid[4]. Practitioners must reflect on their own not-play, write their own rules, and grant themselves permission to be playful. Through this, they might be able to shake off some of the extrinsic concerns that blockade play and find their way back to their playful path.

Figure 1 - Conceptual model for plork

Discussion

Whilst there is increasing literature on the importance of adult playfulness, there is little which discusses how we might systematically use playfulness for creative ends - how we might understand, nurture and engage our playful attitudes, and how that might be of benefit. I argue for plork as a legitimate and necessary avenue of research into adult playfulness, particularly for artists and arts educators. But plork is not some magic bullet that is going to make everyone more playful. The plork I argue for is plork as a practice, and practice requires effort; it is a process of learning, exploring, discovering and playing which allows for greater scope for playful attitudes to come to light. By acknowledging the value of playfulness, accepting our own relationship to that playfulness, and attempting to engage with it further. Plork forces us to reflect, to take

some personal ownership over our own playfulness, and presents a strategy through which we can consciously engage not only with play, but with playfulness. This proposed new vision for plork is perhaps less romantic, but more practical than Corita and Steward's initial conception. And yet, I argue it is cut from the same cloth; instead of exercises which attempt to encourage playfulness through drawing, making and doing, I argue for practices that *reflect* on creative making, and help us remind ourselves to be playful.

De Koven (2017) argues that to understand and comprehend playfulness, "we have to discuss it, describe it, reflect on it". To encourage ourselves back to playfulness, we must then also consciously permit it, engage with it, summon it. If my research has shown me one thing, it is that we *can* choose to be playful more; it just takes a little work.

Footnotes

[1] The pronunciation of this has come under much scrutiny during this research. I favour a homophone with 'cork', which has outraged several workshop participants who steadfastly believe it should rhyme with 'work'. Pronounce it however you want. I'm not in charge of your mouth.

[2] I follow the example given by the Corita Art Centre (corita.org) in honouring the artist wishes by referring to her as Corita. The exception to this is in any work published under other names (e.g. Corita Kent, or Sister Mary Corita); in these references, the surname cited as the author will be the name used.

[3] In this regard, this research focuses primarily on Western conceptualisations of play and work. This is primarily due to the personal context of practice-based research; it is I who is doing this research, here and now, and can only speak to the contexts and understandings of play that have surrounded me.

[4] A version of my own Plork Manifesto can be found here: https://plork.itch.io/plorkmanifesto

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