Useful Play:
Social Reform, Child Development, and the Problem of Screens

by

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ABSTRACT

The central question this dissertation asks is, how has play become a natural-seeming strategy for managing the problem of children's screen time? Methodologically I draw from Foucault's writings on genealogy. The hallmark of genealogy is its ability to disrupt taken-for-granted phenomena that, like the value of play or the problem of screens, seem so common sense to us that people rarely think to question them. Using Canadian examples and archival materials ranging from the years 1900-1980 and from a wide range of sources including the early twentieth-century playground movement, the Children's Aid Society, the Canadian Welfare Council, the Canadian Council for Children and Youth, the Canadian Home and School and Parent Teacher Federation, the Children's Broadcast institute, The Canadian Radio and Telecommunication Commission, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, I trace some of the factors that have historically conditioned the possibility for our present configuration of concerns with play and screens. I illustrate that those conditions are not natural or necessary but rather contingent, subject to chance, emerging over time by accident, coincidence, convenience, allegiance, tension, or outright struggle and involve a whole constellation of institutions, individuals, practices, and discourses. I conclude by suggesting that rather than assume the current preoccupation with play is the result of progressive views toward child rights and needs, as has often been the case, play should be understood as linked to the exercise of power and knowledge over children's bodies—as a tool for securing the social body and for producing normative subjects.

Keywords: play; television; children; screen time; genealogy; CBC

To my family, for reminding me of what's really important.

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Introduction

Play is a powerful tool for the development and well-being of a child. Play is said to be instrumental in the learning of language, cognitive, and motor skills.[1] Early childhood educators use play-based pedagogy to teach social-emotional skills.[2] Architects design playgrounds to develop a child's ability to navigate risk.[3] Toys and video games are designed to develop problem-solving skills.[4] Play is so closely associated with normal development that it's even used as a measure in multiple clinical assessments and treatments for developmental delay.[5] It's taken for granted that a wide variety of developmental outcomes can all be grouped under the one activity: play.

As a result children's play is one of the most questioned social activities in Western life. How should children play? How much should they play? What should they play and how should they do it? That parents, educators, health practitioners, and researchers continually ask such questions attests to the importance play's been given in organizing and evaluating children's lives. An absence of play, or of certain types of play, is said to be associated with developmental problems; too much of the 'wrong' kind of play can also be deeply problematic.[6]

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[1] Robyn M. Holmes, et al., "Is there a connection between children's language skills, creativity, and play?" *Early Child Development and Care* (2020): 1-12; Shirley Wyver, "Outdoor Play and Cognitive Development," in *The SAGE Handbook of Outdoor Play and Learning* (London: SAGE Publications, 2017): 85-94; Asal Moghaddaszadeh and Angelo N Belcastro, "Guided Active Play Promotes Physical Activity and Improves Fundamental Motor Skills for School-Aged Children," *Journal of Sports Science & Medicine* 20 no. 1 (2021): 86–93.

[2] Kristin Stuart Valdes, *Humanizing the Classroom: Using Role-Plays to Teach Social and Emotional Skills in Middle School and High School* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019).

[3] Susan G. Solomon, *The Science of Play: How to Build Playgrounds that Enhance Children's Development* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2014)

[4] Michele Dickey, "Game Design Narrative for Learning: Appropriating Adventure Game Design Narrative Devices and Techniques for the Design of Interactive Learning Environments," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 54 no. 3 (2006): 245–63.

[5] Johnny L. Matson (ed). *Handbook of Childhood Psychopathology and Developmental and Disabilities Assessment* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

[6] Silvia Salcuni, Claudia Mazzeschi, and Claudia Capella, eds., *The Role of Play in Child Assessment and Intervention* (Lausanne: Frontiers Media, 2017).

Far less attention has been paid to the historical and social processes that have influenced how and why children's play became a crucial and naturalized element in contests over child development and well-being. In this dissertation I examine some of these processes with specific reference to the issue of *screen time,* which is now one of the most commonly cited threats to child development and well-being. On the one hand, there are plenty of affordances to living a life with screens—access to information, family and friends, entertainment, education, employment, groceries and health care (to name a few)—all available to us at a distance. But, on the other hand, one often gets the impression that every anxiety ever felt about children (plus more!) has been distilled into screen time—bullying, violence, poor social skills, advertising, sexting, pedophilia, pornography, eating disorders, depression, obesity, nearsightedness, and so on.[7] When tech visionary Steve Jobs admitted that he didn't let his own children play with the iPad, it seemed to have confirmed for many that screen time poses a problem to positive child development and well-being.[8]

The Canadian Paediatric Society defines *screen time* simply as "time spent with any screen, including smart phones, tablets, television, video games, computers or wearable technology."[9] The problems associated with screen time are vast but they commonly belong to one of two groups. The first group has to do with questions about the quality of screen content; for example, will children become violent or excessive consumers as a

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[7] Mireia Adelantado-Renau et al., "Association Between Screen Media Use and Academic Performance Among Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *JAMA Pediatrics* 173, no. 11 (2019): 1058–67; Sajani Raman et al., "Screen Exposure During Daily Routines and a Young Child's Risk for Having Social-Emotional Delay," *Clinical Pediatrics* 56, no. 13 (2017): 1244–53; Meta van den Heuvel et al., "Mobile Media Device Use Is Associated with Expressive Language Delay in 18-Month-Old Children," *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 40, no. 2 (2019): 99–104; Kehong Fang, Min Mu, Kai Liu and Yuna He, "Screen Time and Childhood Overweight/Obesity: A Systematic Review and Meta−analysis," *Child:Care, Health & Development* 45, no. 5 (2019): 744–53; Chaelin K. Rae al., "Association of Digital Media Use With Subsequent Symptoms of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Among Adolescents." *JAMA: the Journal of the American Medical Association* 320, no. 3 (2018): 255–63; Carla Lanca and Seang-Mei Saw, "The Association Between Digital Screen Time and Myopia: A Systematic Review," *Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics* 40 (2020): 216–229.

[8] Nick Bilton, "Steve Jobs Was a Low Tech Parent," *New York Times,* September 10, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/fashion/steve-jobs-apple-was-a-low-tech-parent.html?_r=0.

[9] Canadian Paediatric Society, "Position Statement," *Paediatrics & Child Health,* 22, no. 8 (October 2017): 461-468, https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/screen-time-and-young-children, 461.

result of exposure to violent or advertising content? It's worth noting that while concerns about the behavioural effects of screens continue to thrive, the limitations of this type of research are now well understood.[10] The second group of concerns raises questions about the quantity of time screens occupy; for example, will children forego playing with their friends or doing their homework as a result of their screen time? The term displacement theory is commonly used to capture the range of concerns associated with the time screens are thought to take away from other important aspects of a child's life.[11] Whether it be quality or quantity, what both groups of concerns share in common is the idea that screens pose a wide range of problems to the development and well-being of children.

Since television's adoption in the early 1950s, a range of strategies have been devised to manage the problem of screens, ranging from program mandates to media regulation and from media literacy to parental control devices. In recent years, one popular strategy for managing the problem of screen time has been promoting outdoor play. Researchers have been linking outdoor play to greater physical activity, mental health, emotion regulation, motor fitness, environmental knowledge, and long-term pro-environment attitudes.[12] Children's play with natural elements or in natural settings is said to be more complex, diverse, and last longer than play in equipment-based

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[10] John P. Murray, "Television Violence: Research and Controversy," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research,* ed. Norma Pecora, John P. Murray, and Ellen Ann Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 183-205

[11] Barrie Gunter and Jill McAleer, *Children and Television 2nd ed.* (London: Routledge, 2007).

[12] Tim Gill, "The Benefits of Children's Engagement with Nature: A Systematic Literature Review," *Children, Youth and Environments* 24, 2 (2014): 10–34.

playgrounds.[13] Play in nature is also said to increase physical activity among children[14] and help children with emotional and behavioural problems.[15] Natural play environments are also credited for being more gender neutral and fostering gender equity in opportunities for play.[16]

With the wide range of reported benefits of playing outdoors, it's hardly shocking that outdoor play has been promoted to address the equally wide range of problems associated with screen time. Take for instance the Canadian non-profit ParticipAction's highly praised public service campaign that features photos of children playing outdoors with the warning, "screen time is taking away play time"; or "Screen Time," the parental control app that enables parents to give children 'bonus screen time' as a reward for spending time playing outdoors; or *Dot*, the award-winning preschool television series that features a spunky 8-year-old technophile named Dot, who models how to balance screen time with play outdoors.[17] These are just a few recent examples of how play,

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[13] On play in natural settings versus playgrounds see, for instance, Kimberly C. Drown and Keith M. Christensen, "Dramatic Play Affordances of Natural and Manufactured Outdoor Settings for Preschool-Aged Children," *Children, Youth and Environments* 24, no. 2 (2014): 53–77; Antje Luchs, and Monika Fikus, "A Comparative Study of Active Play on Differently Designed Playgrounds," *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning* 13, no. 3 (2013): 206–222; Sylvia Samborski, "Biodiverse or Barren School Grounds: Their Effects on Children," *Children, Youth and Environments* 20, no. 2 (2010): 67–115; Rebecca Sargisson and Ian G. McLean, "Children's Use of Nature in New Zealand Playgrounds," *Children, Youth and Environments* 22, no. 2 (2012): 144–163.

[14] On outdoor play and physical activity see, for instance, J. E. Dyment and A. C. Bell, "Grounds for Movement: Green School Grounds as Sites for Promoting Physical Activity," *Health Education Research* 23, no. 6 (2008): 952–962; Dawn P. Coe et al., "Children's Physical Activity Levels and Utilization of a Traditional Versus Natural Playground," *Children, Youth and Environments* 24, no. 3 (2014): 1-15; Casey Gray et al., "What Is the Relationship between Outdoor Time and Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour, and Physical Fitness in Children? A Systematic Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 12 (2015): 6455-6474.

[15] On outdoor play and mental health see, for instance, Cecily Maller and Mardie Townsend, "Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing and Hands-On Contact with Nature," *International Journal of Learning* 12, no. 4 (2006): 359–372; Jenny Roe and Peter Aspinal, "The Emotional Affordances of Forest Settings: An Investigation in Boys with Extreme Behavioural Problems," *Landscape Research* 36, no. 5 (2011): 535–552.

[16] On outdoor play and gender equity see, for instance, Eva Änggård, "Children's Gendered and Non-Gendered Play in Natural Spaces," *Children, Youth and Environments* 21, no. 2 (2011): 5–33; and Adam J. Lucas and Janet E. Dyment, "Where Do Children Choose to Play on the School Ground? The Influence of Green Design," *Education* 38, no. 2 (2010): 177–189.

[17] Carly S. Priebe, et al., "Make Room for Play: An Evaluation of a Campaign Promoting Active Play," *Journal of Heath Communication* 24 (2019): 38-46; Sean Riley, "Screen Time Parental-Control App Review," Tom's Guide, October 7, 2020, https://www.tomsguide.com/us/screen-time-app,review-6134.html; Kids' CBC, *Dot,* created by Matthew Fernandes, premiered September 6, 2016.

specifically outdoor play, is being used to monitor, manage, and measure the problems of screen time.

Neither the idea that outdoor play is good, nor the idea that less screen time would be better for the child, are likely to raise dispute. The only remarkable thing about the above strategies is that, despite their different objectives (health, surveillance, and entertainment), they all share a basic disposition about the value of play, specifically outdoor play, in relation to the problem of screens—they each subscribe to the widely held view of play's value as a functional tool for securing the child's development and well being against the threat of screens. One of the central questions I explore in this dissertation is, *how has play become a widely agreed upon strategy for managing the problem screens pose to child development and well-being?*

As a research strategy I borrow from Michel Foucault's writing on genealogy. One of the hallmarks of Foucaultian genealogy is its ability to disrupt taken-for-granted phenomena that, like the value of play or the problem of screens, seem so common sense to us that people rarely think to question them. It does so by placing the things that appear to be without history within processes of historical development. My claim is that the value of play with respect to the perceived problems of screens is a historical product and thus open to genealogical analysis. I argue that screen technology first emerged as a perceived problem in the 1950s, during the early years of children's television. At the same time, a growing interest in the science of play was emerging. This was a new expert field of knowledge and set of institutional practices that differed from earlier philosophical and philanthropic movements meant to understand and organize children's play. The way this new science of play evolved from the 1950s onward, I propose, has something to do with how play became a powerful tool in problematizing television then and subsequently screen time today. In developing this argument I explore a range of Canadian examples and archival materials, particularly with respect to early children's television programs on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, including their rationales, objectives, and assumptions about screens and play.

My objective is to illustrate that concepts and practices with respect to both play and screens are not fixed or inevitable, they're contingent, subject to chance, and emerge over time by accident, coincidence, convenience, allegiance, tension, or outright struggle, involving a whole constellation of institutions, individuals, practices, and discourses. It follows then that the conditions that make our present preoccupations possible are not singular or simple, but numerous and complex. While it's not possible to fully account for them all within the scope of this project, it's my objective to begin the work of untangling some of conditions that have led to our present preoccupations with play and screens.

Chapter one (History of the Present) offers a more extensive discussion of how I've taken-up genealogy and outlines my research plan in greater detail. In chapters two through five I proceed in the style of genealogy to look back at four distinct elements of the past that have helped condition the possibility for play to emerge as a tool for mitigating the problem of screen time. Chapter two (The Movement) momentarily sets aside the problem of screen time to consider the late nineteenth-century to mid-twentieth-century playground movements in Canada. The playground movement is significant to the story I want to tell because it undertook some of the earliest and most sustained efforts to mobilize public and private investment in play as an imagined solution to social problems affecting childhood at the time. The playground movement set the stage for later play-based policies to become a response to a wide range of perceived social problems.

Chapter three (Cause) turns to the widespread adoption of television in the 1950s in Canada. Early television programming is a significant moment in the emergence of the type of mass, home-based screen entertainment we broadly think of today as 'screen time.' In the chapter, I trace how the television screen was constituted as a problem for children that needed solving, resulting not so much in a moral panic as a moral *project* that demanded higher standards for children's programming and new research into the effects of television.

Chapter four (Measurement) picks up where chapter three leaves off with the ongoing demand for higher quality children's programming into the late 1960s and 1970s. The

problem of television wasn't simply resolved by morally responsible efforts to produce and promote 'good' children's programs; without better evidence about what television was actually doing to children, the quality of children's programs remained a problem. I suggest that this search for scientific measurements for television's effects, particularly by the Children's Television Workshop in the making of their North American hit series *Sesame Street*, was crucial to the linking-up of experts on children's television with experts on the science of children's play and development, making it logical for play to be imagined as a possible strategy for managing the problem of television then and screens today.

Chapter five (Institutions) investigates how relatively specialized knowledge and practices from experts on children's television and play have become common and widespread. Part of the answer, I suggest, lies with the power of national voluntary organizations that define people's understanding of *what* is a problem and champion certain solutions to those problems. Voluntary organizations tell people what is to be feared and also provide them with the everyday technologies that come to be the necessary response, helping to make certain knowledge and practices common and widespread. I track the institutional use and dissemination of expert knowledge and practices through the 1970s and 1980s by the Canadian Council on Children and Youth in order to show how it is that the knowledge and practices produced by experts became part of a shared national response to the problems of television and play.

Chapter six (The Power of Play) returns to the present moment. Here I examine how play, specifically outdoor play, continues to gain its grip as a solution to the problem of screens. I conclude the chapter by arguing that rather than assume a current preoccupation with outdoor play is the result of progressive views toward child rights and needs, as has often been the case, play should be understood as linked to the exercise of power and knowledge over children's bodies—as a tool for securing the social body and for producing normative subjects.

I want to make a disclaimer from the start that I don't mean to suggest that screens are innocuous or that play is not of value for development. To the contrary, I argue that it's

precisely because play has been scientifically linked to development that it can be central to such a wide range of concerns about childhood. Just because something has been given scientific legitimacy, however, doesn't mean that it shouldn't be open to investigation. For decades researchers have been saying that we need to go beyond understanding play as a mere biological factor in child development.[18] This work contributes to that task by showing how our present preoccupation with playtime and screen time is contingent, fraught, and in need of attention, which isn't the same as saying that it is wrong. Genealogy invites us to question not whether play is an important factor in child development and well-being, but *how* play has become a universally important factor in such a wide range of concerns related to child development and well-being, screen time being just one of those many concerns. Before I proceed, some further background and methodological considerations are in order.

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[18] See, most notably, Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

1
History of the Present
Play, Screen Time, and Genealogy

In his landmark book, *Homo Ludens*, the early twentieth-century Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, made a case for play as universal element in human cultures.[1] Huizinga argued that the prevailing view of human nature in Western life was associated with necessary, instrumental, practices associated with reason, science, and economic production. Against a rationalist view of *Homo Faber* as the starting point for understanding history and cultures, Huizinga proposed a framework centred on what people *choose* to do voluntarily, outside of the sphere of necessity.

This idea was at odds with a more functional understanding of play that slowly emerged during the eighteenth century European Enlightenment—play as a pathway to reason and progress. Historians suggest that prior to the late eighteenth century, little concern was given to the role of play in children's lives. In general, play was associated with "periodic catharsis, associated with fairs and festivals rather than childhood."[2] Several Enlightenment thinkers, however, began to consider the role of play in new approaches to childhood and education. For example, Jean Jacques Rousseau inverted the idea that humans are born sinful, arguing instead for the child's purity and innate innocence. He argued strenuously that humans should "love childhood. Look with friendly eyes on its games, its pleasures and amiable dispositions."[3] John Locke took a somewhat different view. He cautioned against the irrational impact of 'rowdy games' in children's education but also emphasized the importance of freedom in play, suggesting "it is liberty alone which gives the true relish and delight to their ordinary play games."[4]

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[1] Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955).

[2] Gary Cross, "Play, Games, and Toys," in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World,* ed. Paula S. Fass (London: Routledge, 2013), 267.

[3] Quoted in Jamie Gianoutsos, "Locke and Rousseau: Early Childhood Education," *The Pulse* 4, no. 1 (2006): 13.

[4] Gianoutsos, "Locke and Rousseau: Early Childhood Education," 3.

Still, for Locke, the value of playful freedom lay in its utility in pursuit of instrumental pedagogical goals. "The chief art" for educators, he argued, is to "make all that they have to do sport and play too."[5] The idea being that children can't be forced to learn, but childhood education works best when play is mobilized in the service of reason and human development. Locke's own pedagogy was famously built on a view of human organisms as effectively blank slates at birth, a view that configured the child as an empty vessel that, with proper guidance, could be moulded into a rational adult.[6] This view strongly influenced late nineteenth-century empirical science devoted to examining the role of play in biological and psychological development.[7]

The complexity of Enlightenment influences on the role of play in human growth and development is too complex to detail here. However, by the 1930s, Huizinga felt compelled to lament that almost all play studies now "start from the assumption that play must serve something which is not play, that it must serve some kind of biological purpose."[8] Huizinga would have been opposed to how this assumption underwrote a steady growth of scientific studies of children's play through the remainder of the twentieth century. Most of these studies have focused on one or another of three functions: the cognitive, the emotional, and the social value of play, all emphasizing play's importance to normal and healthy child development.[9] Not only has play come to be understood as an essential function in child development, it has also become a standard measure of developmental delays (for example, in the use of the Bayley Scale of Infant and Toddler Development[10]) and as a therapeutic tool for the treatment of a myriad number of possible child pathologies (for example, in play therapy). Scientific studies of

5 Quoted in Gianoutsos, "Locke and Rousseau: Early Childhood Education," 3.

6 Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 61.

7 Larry Wolff, "Childhood and the Enlightenment: The Complications of Innocence," in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World,* ed. Paula S. Fass (London: Routledge, 2013), 93.

8 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 2.

9 David Cohen, *The Development of Play.* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 15.

10 Nancy Bayley, *Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development,* 3rd edn. (Oxford: Pearson Assessment, 2019).

play have situated play among the most highly prized tools for investing in, securing, measuring, optimizing, and remediating a child's development.

In his most influential book, *The Ambiguity of Play,* Brian Sutton-Smith argues that studies of children's play in the twentieth century were widely framed by an "ideological rhetoric of play as progress."[11] By rhetoric, Sutton-Smith means "a persuasive discourse, or implicit narrative, wittingly, or unwittingly adopted by members of a particular affiliation to persuade others of the veracity and worthwhileness of their beliefs."[12] In identifying the various rhetorics of play, Sutton-Smith looks beyond the observable substance of play, its theories, and sciences to better understand contradictions among play theory's apparent 'truths.' Rather than ask 'what is play?' he focuses on the rhetorics that express the way play is placed in context with broader value systems that are taken for granted by researchers, practitioners, and advocates of play.[13] He attributes the play as progress rhetoric mainly to the monopoly of the developmental sciences on the study of children's play, which focus attention primarily on the various functions of play in the child's progress through the stages of development. According to Sutton-Smith, this has left an ongoing blind spot in the understanding of children's play.

I'm persuaded by Sutton-Smith's stance on the limitations of studying play only from the perspective of development. A singular focus on play's role in development, overlooks the fact that play is not a purely biological or psychological construct. It's also profoundly cultural. Some suggest that the ideological rhetoric of play as progress is predominant in Western culture because of the ongoing importance given to children as precious beings, and childhood as a period of innocence.[14] Rousseau's influence on nineteenth-century Romanticism seems particularly notable here. Scholars of childhood credit the Romantics—particularly William Wordsworth and William Blake—for

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[11] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[12] Sutton-Smith, The Ambiguity of Play, 18.

[13] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play,* 8.

[14] On the history of childhood see for instance, Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life,* trans. Robert Baldick (Knopf, 1962); Lloyd DeMause, *The History of Childhood* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974); 1976; Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

reinforcing an idealized vision of the child as pure and innocent, closer to a state of nature.[15] Others suggest that play's importance has to do with the abolition of child labour, where the economically worthless child became the emotionally priceless child, making play the "new work" of childhood.[16] As a result play has become an idealized expression of childhood imagined by adults—one typically associated with whiteness, innocence, and middle-upper class values in the industrialized west.[17] In other parts of the world, however, anthropologists have found significant differences in not only types of play but also in the social value placed on play cross culturally.[18] These differences can't be explained biologically, thus an important dimension of play, along with the range of its meaning and significance to societies, has been under explored.

Working through these literatures brought me to greater appreciation of play's cultural and historical specificity. That prompted some skepticism about play's role in development. For example, if play is only about development, then how do we explain what adults are doing when they play? According to Sutton-Smith, claims about play's role in development have been more assumed than demonstrated.[19] That doesn't mean that claims about play and development are entirely false. However, simply because they aren't entirely false doesn't mean they're automatically true. Even those who espouse the value of play for development have agreed that the link between play and development has been pushed too far.[20] Subsequently, there are a whole host of play activities that are overlooked, ignored, or dismissed because they don't fit neatly within the logic of development; for example, the 'rowdy' games that worried Locke, or any type of play

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[15] Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

[16] Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

[17] On the imagined child and childhood see Alan Prout and Allison James, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1997).

[18] Yumi Gosso, "Play in Different Cultures," in *Children and Play*, by Peter K. Smith (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 80-98; Helen Shwartzman, *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play* (New York: Plenum, 1978).

[19] Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of* Play, 9.

[20] Peter K. Smith, "A Brief History of the Study of Play and of Play Theories," in *Children and Play* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 21-40.

that is unruly, dark, or subversive.[21] This has had significant consequences for understanding the diverse range of children's play experiences, including the simple possibility that play can be purely for fun or enjoyment, rather than development.[22]

The widely accepted understanding of play as progress not only limits our knowledge of the myriad reasons why children play but also increases the likelihood that types of play that don't fit within that understanding of play as progress will be interpreted as abnormal and thus be subject to intervention or regulation. In other words, not all play counts as a good investment. I'm especially interested in the way that children's screen-based play is at best discouraged, and at worst disparaged, unless it can be linked to the same developmental outcomes as 'real world' play. In recent years, both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Canadian Paediatric Society have stressed the importance of encouraging and prioritizing unplugged playtime, meaning non-screen-based play.

When screen-based play is acceptable, it's in cases where it can be linked to the same developmental outcomes as non-screen play. For example, the Canadian Paediatric Society's 2019 policy statement on screen time for ages five to nineteen states, "cooperative or competitive video games, played with family and friends, can reflect and function as traditional play, offering opportunities for identity, cognitive and social development."[23] The message is that play is preferred when it can be aligned with already accepted definitions of developmentally appropriate play. As a result, it seems the creators of screen-based entertainment are always under pressure to market themselves by their value to development first.

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[21] On transgressive play see, for instance, Sutton Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 1997; Sue Rogers, "The Pedagogization of Play in Early Childhood Education: A Bernsteinian Perspective," in *Varied Perspectives on Play and Learning: Theory and Research on Early Years Education*, eds. Ole Fredrick, Sue Dockett and Bob Perry (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2013), 159-174; Anthony Pelligrini, "Rough-and-Tumble Play from Childhood Through Adolescence: Development and Possible Functions," in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Development*, eds. Peter K. Smith and Craig H. Hart (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 438-453.

[22] Marilyn Fleer, "Making Room for Diverse Cultural Expressions of Play in the Retheorization of Play Activities," in eds. Ole Fredrik, Sue Dockett, and Bob Perry, *Varied Perspectives on Play and Learning: Theory and Research on Early Years Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2013), 175-192.

[23] Canadian Paediatric Society, "Position Statement," *Paediatrics & Child Health,* 24, no. 6 (May 2019): 402-408, https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/digital-media.

Academic scholarship on screen-based media has similarly reinforced this idea that children's use of screens—televisions, computers, laptops, tablets, and cell-phones—isn't all bad because what children do with screens can benefit the child in similar (sometimes even better) ways as so-called traditional activities like reading, playing sports, or socializing with friends. Video games, for example, have been linked to the acquisition of math, literacy, and problem solving skills; television has been linked to the development of empathy, co-operation, and tolerance toward others; and online games have been linked to opportunities for participation and empowerment.[24] The literature in this area makes a strong case for the value of a wide range of things children do with screens, including play. For Instance, in her recent book, *Digital Playgrounds,* Sara Grimes begins from the assumption that "children's play is both ambiguous and inherently worthwhile" and makes a compelling case for the importance of digital play on the basis of its "fulling several key functions within children's culture and everyday experience"[25]

In my own early research on play and screens, I argued for online play as a worthwhile form of play that is being hampered by the narrow definition of play as progress. In a paper on Walt Disney's Club Penguin, a Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) for children ages 6-13, I critiqued the game's design and goals (learning, safety, and global citizenship) as yet another instance of Sutton-Smith's ideological rhetoric of play as progress.[26] I played all my cards: I stressed the cultural specificity over the biological necessity of play, I pointed to the dubiousness of the game's developmental claims, and I argued that the game was shaping children's play in narrowly prescribed ways, which was a shame given the promise of flexibility that many have suggested

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[24] On the potentials of screen-based activities see, for example, Marjatta Kalliata, *Play Culture in a Changing World* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006); Seth Giddings, *Gameworlds: Virtual Media and Children's Everyday Play* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Celia Pearce, *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); Rebeka Willett, Muriel Robinson, and Jackie Marsh, *Play, Creativity and Digital Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2009); T. L. Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game* Culture (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); James Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Katie Salen, ed., *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth Games, and Learning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

[25] Sara Grimes, *Digital Playgrounds* (University of Toronto Press, 2021)*,* 63-4.

[26] Jennesia Pedri, "Penguin's Progress: Digital Play and Modern Childhood," Paper presented at the Canadian Communication Association Conference (Victoria, BC, 2013, June).

online games, particularly MMOGs, can offer young players.[27] I argued that Club Penguin was a missed opportunity—not only was it contributing to a narrowly accepted view of play as progress, it was doing so at the expense of the actual young people who were ostensibly benefiting from their play.

During this early stage in my research, I was introduced to a new colleague at the university's writing centre, where I worked part-time, who was a doctoral student in the psychology department. I seized the opportunity to try out my ideas on a psychologist who shared many of the same disciplinary predilections as the play scholars I situated my work in response (and/or in opposition) to. I rehearsed my critique of Club Penguin in the break room: Club Penguin is an example of how children's play continues to be co-opted by the language of progress. I argued that rather than assume play must always be for development, we need to begin to acknowledge that there are many possible outcomes of play outside of development that can't necessarily be predicted but are equally important for the child. Their response came in the form of a question: "aren't those the same thing?"

Eight months later I arrived at the same suspicion as my colleague in the break room: in my effort to critique the idea that children's play is primarily about progress, I'd without realizing, maintained the underlying universalism that play matters because it has essential value for the child. The next question was, why had I been unable to see the sameness? And more importantly, how could I critique the tendency to uncritically conflate play with progress without having to either denounce play's value or celebrate play's value in some other form or context?

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[27] Jonathan Gratch and Janet Kelly, "MMOGs: Beyond the Wildest Imagination," of *Journal of Interactive Learning Research* 20, no. 2 (2009): 175-187; Sara De Freitas and Mark Griffiths, "Online Gaming as an Educational Tool in Learning and Training," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 38, no. 3 (2007): 535-537; David W. Shaffer, Kurt R. Squire, Richard Halverson, and James P. Gee, "Video Games and the Future of Learning," *Phi Delta Kaplan* 87, no. 2 (2005):104-111; Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins, "Harnessing the Power of Games in Education," *Insight* 3, no. 1 (2004): 5-33; Dongping Zheng, Michael Bischoff, and Betsy Gilliland, "Vocabulary Learning in Massively Multiplayer Online Games: Context and Action before Words," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 63 no. 5 (2015): 771–90; Mizuko Ito, *Engineering Play: A Cultural History of Children's Software* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009).

Amidst a vast and growing amount of research on children's play, it remains the case, that play is primarily of interest to researchers because of its possible value—directly or indirectly—to the child's developmental progress. The literature takes one of two general stances on the value of play for children. The first links play directly to specific development outcomes. Those who take this approach are commonly development scientists who are interested in play's role in biological development. Proponents of play-based learning or of play-based therapies also tend to take the stance that specific types of play or purposefully designed play opportunities or apparatuses have a direct effect on the child's development.[28] The second stance, by comparison, views play as indeterminate, unpredictable, and ambiguous, thus what the child gains through play is open-ended and remains peripheral to the play itself. Sutton-Smith is without doubt best known for this approach. Since its publication, *The Ambiguity of Play* has been cited by researchers who have similarly begun to recognize the range of possible outcomes, both intended and unintended, of play. The proponents of this view come from a wider range of disciplines including media studies, anthropology, sociology, education, game studies, and childhood studies.[29] On the surface they differ; ultimately, though, their differences are superficial compared to the thing that unifies them, which is their commitment to the view that play

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[28] See, for example, Doris Bergen, Darel R. Davis, and Jason T. Abbitt, *Technology Play and Brain Development: Infancy to Adolescence and Future Implications* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Sergio Pellis and Vivien Pellis, *The Playful Brain: Venturing to the Limits of Neuroscience* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Avis Ridgeway, Gloria Quiñones, and Liang Li, *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play: A Cultural-Historical Interpretation Using Visual Methodology* (Singapore: Springer, 2015); Susan G. Solomon, *The Science of Play: How to Build Playgrounds that Enhance Children's Development* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2014); Natalie Canning, *Children's Empowerment in Play: Participation, Voice and Ownership* (London: Routledge, 2020); Silvia Salcuni, Claudia Mazzeschi, and Claudia Capella, eds., *The Role of Play in Child Assessment and Intervention* (Lausanne: Frontiers Media, 2017).

[29] See, for example, Sutton-Smith*, The Ambiguity of Play*; Rebekah Willett, Chris Richards, Jackie Marsh, Andrew Burn, and Julia C. Bishop, *Children, Media, and Playground Cultures: Ethnographic Studies of School Playtimes* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Rebekah Willett, "Remixing Children's Cultures: Media-Referenced Play on the Playground," in *Children's Games in the New Media Age: Childlore, Media and the Playground.* Eds. Andrew Burn and Chris Richards (Surry: Ashgate, 2014), 133-151; Nevin J. Harper, "Outdoor Risky Pay and Healthy Child Development in the Shadow of the 'Risk Society': A Forest and Nature School Perspective," *Child and Youth Services* 30, no. 4 (2017): 318-334; Barbara A. Wasick and Jill L. Jacobi-Vessels, "Word Play: Scaffolding Language Development Through Child-Directed Play," *Early Childhood Education* 45 (October 2017): 769-776; Mizuko Ito and Matteo Bittanti, "Gaming," in *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media, Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2019), 195-242.

is a beneficial activity and a worthy investment. Whether one subscribes to the first view that play is directly implicated in the child's development or to the second view (as I did) that play's indeterminate character is what makes it valuable, there continues to be a near universal assumption that the child's play is something worth investing in. This was an unsettling realization for someone who had aligned themselves with the latter approach in critiquing the former.

I attribute my inability to see the uniformity in these approaches, first, to the pragmatic rightness or self-evidence that play carries and, second, to my reliance on normative judgement in critiquing the treatment of play as a value proposition. Play is difficult to call into question because we take it for granted that it's a natural or innate part of the stage of life we call childhood. This is one reason why a common (confused) response I hear after describing this project is, "but play *is* good for development." How then do you begin to critique something as good and as 'right' as play?

To challenge the self-evidence of play as progress I needed a different approach. My first impulse was to turn to a critique of ideology as a framework for analysis. I considered developing a critical analysis of the rhetoric of play as progress as a distinctly ideological discourse. By ideology I was drawn to John Thompson's argument that to study ideology is to analyze how symbolic forms and processes can be seen to maintain systems of domination.[30] But the more I read and thought about this, the more uneasy I felt about the tendency in theories of ideology to contrast ideological discourses to some sort of absolute truth. The classic example is the contrast in many Marxist studies between ideology as an expression of the ideas of the ruling class and the 'truth' embodied in advancing the interests of the proletariat. Even Thompson's attempt to broaden the critical study of ideology beyond this kind of Marxian duality still required a reference to something outside ideology; ideology is still cast as part of the winning of consent in support of systems of domination that we can empirically verify and critique.

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[30] John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

That kind of critique of ideology wasn't going to lead me to what I wanted to know, which was how play's value for development came to be taken for granted. Calling the idea of play as progress ideological captures the persuasiveness of the idea and to its wide reach and points to it as misleading. However it falls short in explaining how it is that play came to be so persuasive and so widely accepted as a tool for securing a range of outcomes for the child. The consensus about what play is (the uncontested truth of play's value for child development and progress) has also been won through practices that are not ideological. In Florian Eßer's words, "the 'big' discourses of contemporary childhood…only become effective because they are situationally created in practice."[31] What must follow, then, is a focused investigation into the ways that ideas about play have sought to make themselves *practical*. Furthermore, if I was going to contribute to broadening understandings of play, I needed an approach that would steer me away from either denying or confirming play's value for development. I came to see what Nikolas Rose and Paul Rabinow mean when they say, "celebration and denunciation are insufficient as analytical approaches."[32] When we're focused primarily on denouncing play's various value propositions as ideology, or celebrating them as positive values, we can easily overlook that the way play is understood today is not a matter of nature but in fact has its own discursive history. By scratching at the surface of that history, we may open new possibilities and directions for the study of children's play and for the critique of play's value propositions. To do this I turned to Foucault's writing on genealogy.

In the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche urges that

> we need a critique of moral values, for once the value of these values must itself
> be called in question—and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions
> and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have
> developed and shifted.[33]

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[31] Florian Eßer, "Theorising Children's Bodies. A Critical Review of Relational Understandings in Childhood Studies" in eds., Claudia Baraldi and Tom Cockburn, *Theorising Childhood: Studies in Childhood and Youth* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan): 102.

[32] Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, "Biopower Today," *BioSocieties* 1 (2006): 215.

[33] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudmarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 5.

The same may be true for the study of play: we need a critique of play's value propositions, but first the value of these value propositions must be called into question, for which a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances from which they emerged and changed is needed. This is the task of the genealogist. Taking more than a little inspiration from Nietzsche, Foucault's use of genealogy, exemplary in his studies of the modern prison and sexuality, offers a compelling approach to the study of play. I am drawn to genealogy in particular for its ability to disrupt taken-for-granted phenomenon that, like play, seem so natural to us that we rarely, if ever, think to question them. As a critical analytic, genealogy enables me to ask not whether play is good for development, but *how* play became a crucial and naturalized element in contests over children's development.

Genealogy has been described as a methodological toolkit,[34] an interpretive analytic,[35] historical-ontology,[36] a kind of meticulous examination,[37] a counter-memory,[38] and a history of the present.[39] The variation in description is not surprising given that Foucault only offered fragmentary accounts of genealogy in introductions, chapters, essays, lectures, and interviews, and never with any fixed language or style of presentation. Foucault left us few clear methodological statements about genealogy, nor, as Mitchell Dean puts it, did he endeavour in his writing "to allow his own heuristics to congeal into a fixed, formal method."[40] Undertaking the work of genealogy after the work of Foucault has demanded a close examination and interpretation of Foucault's

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[34] Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 6.

[35] Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 122.

[36] Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[37] Williams, Athena, "Genealogy as Methodology in the Philosophy of Michel Foucault." London Foucault Circle, (2005): 5.

[38] Maria Tamboukou, "Writing Genealogies: an exploration of Foucault's strategies for doing research," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 29, no. 2 (1999), 203.

[39] Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 21.

[40] Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories*, 14.

work. Studying Foucault's genealogies in search of his 'method,' many times I felt like a cryptographer deciphering one secret code only to find another. I am thankful to those who have interpreted Foucault's work in pursuit of their own genealogies and for elucidating what genealogy is and especially what genealogy is not.[41] To say then that this is a Foucaultian genealogy, tidy and formidable as it may sound, would imply fidelity to something that clearly doesn't exist. Worse still, it may lead the reader to believe that where others have settled for ambiguity, I have somehow succeeded in clarifying Foucault's methodology once and for all. This is all to say that the chapters that follow are less a Foucaultian genealogy and more a genealogy after Foucault.

In this dissertation I view genealogy as a way of approaching a particular problem. Put another way, genealogy is an approach to inquiry; it inspires the kinds of questions that a researcher sets out to answer. What type of questions does genealogy inspire? Genealogy inspires questions about present problems; but not just any problems in the present. Genealogies are intended to investigate problems we might think of as hidden in plain sight. These are problems that are difficult to question because one rarely thinks to question them or even thinks it possible to question them. Genealogies ask questions about present problems that are so commonplace that most people wouldn't even regard them as problems. These have been described as both depth problems, because they are deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life, and surface problems, because they are a common presence in everyday life.[42]

Equally important is what genealogy is not. Genealogies are not typically about prescribing solutions to problems—rather, genealogies articulate problems. Genealogies take problems apart to see what they are made up of, so that we can reach a clearer understanding of what the problem is. Genealogies ask, "why this present configuration

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[41] In particular Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013); Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton University Press, 1995); Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (The University of Chicago Press, 1982); Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories*; Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[42] Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, 1.

of concerns?"[43] Genealogies articulate how present problems emerge in order to discover the conditions that made it possible to regard them as problems to begin with. These conditions are never necessary but contingent, emerging over time through accident, coincidence, convenience, allegiance, tension, or outright struggle, involving a whole constellation of institutions, individuals, practices, discourses, and so on where each unique problem emerges. It follows then that the conditions that make a present problem possible are complex; there is no single, simple answer but a complex set of answers to the questions that a genealogy asks. Once we can begin to illustrate how we arrived at a problem (what it's made up of), it may then be possible to see how today's problems might be made differently (possibly better) if and when necessary for the future. But this last point is not the express aim of genealogy; there's nothing to say it couldn't be, only that it usually isn't. In any case, it isn't the objective of the genealogy in question; my objective is not to provide an alternative solution to the problems raised throughout my investigation. My objective is more modest—to merely begin untangling the many complex conditions that led us to our present configuration of concerns with respect to play and screens.

Genealogy is also clearly not a method for conducting said inquiry. Although genealogy is not itself a method, genealogies do as a matter of fact require methods of research. Not surprisingly, genealogies principally rely on the collection of historical data. I wanted to investigate how play has come to be used to problematize children's screen time, so I began by reading a number of general works on play, child development, and modern culture and then moved to consider how some of the assumptions, issues, and concerns raised in this literature were evident in the earliest Canadian children's television programs. This directed my attention toward the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) during the 1950s.[44] Although the cinema (a.k.a. the silver screen) preceded television by more than half a century, the television screen is a much closer

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[43] Michel Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 11.

[44] My focus has been on English-language children's television simply because Radio-Canada has its own distinct history beyond the scope of this project. There is, no doubt, an equally compelling story waiting to be told about French-language Canadian children's television.

relative of the sort of mass, home-based, media entertainment experience that we're referring to when we use the term 'screen time' today—time spent with smart phones, tablets, televisions, video games, computers, and so on. Television facilitated the emergence of the kinds of problems that today screen time recommendations have been designed by experts to resolve.

I took the CBC as my starting place for two more reasons. The first is the not inconsequential matter of access to historical material on children's television. Children's television scholars have pointed to a relative lack of research on children's television, for which a lack of access to archival material, as I soon confirmed firsthand, is partly to blame.[45] Given that the national broadcaster is funded partially by public money, a certain degree of national importance has been placed on archiving its records. Even still, the archival material for the children's department falls-off quickly after 1980 for undisclosed reasons. The second reason I began with the CBC is that it provides one instance of the contemporary ethos I've been describing and thus makes available for reflection the kinds of challenges, concerns, and questions involved in producing children's screen-based media. As part of the national public broadcaster, the children's department offers a glimpse into the kinds of concerns raised by screens because it has always been the expectation that it will be attuned and responsive to those concerns.

The archival research for this project was conducted at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa where the CBC's public records are kept. Additional research was carried out at Carleton University's Reader's Digest Resource Centre in the Duncan Memorial Communications Research Collection, which contains additional archival materials from the CBC between the years 1922-2004. But the CBC served only as a starting place for research. The concern for play in this country predates television by at least half a century. The question guiding my inquiry led me to archival materials ranging from the years 1900-1980 and from a wide range of sources including the early-twentieth-century

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[45] On the problem of archives and Canadian television see, for instance, Jennifer Vanderburg, "(Who Knows?) What Remains to Be Seen: Archives, Access, and Other Practical Problems for the Study of Canadian "National" Television," in *Canadian Television: Text and Context*, eds. Marian Bredin, Scott Henderson, and Sarah A. Matheson (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012), 39-57.

playground movement, the Children's Aid Society, the Canadian Welfare Council, the Canadian Council for Children and Youth, the Canadian Home and School and Parent Teacher Federation, the Children's Broadcast Institute, and the Canadian Radio and Telecommunication Commission, all of which have been helpful in my attempt to trace the emergence of the concepts and practices on the basis of which our present concern for screens and play has been formed.

While genealogy relies on historical research, Foucault was clear that genealogy isn't the work of a historian in the traditional sense of reconstructing the past along a linear course of development.[46] Plotting out the major ideas, events, and individuals in play or television's history wouldn't speak to how play became a deep obsession or how it was put into practice as part of the answer to the problem of screens. Rather than attempt to account for the general history of ideas and intellectual arguments about play and television, using the archival material listed above, my genealogy shifts our attention toward a history of practices and techniques and specific ways of acquiring knowledge and exercising power in society. It is then possible to ask, who has the authority to speak truthfully about playtime and screen time? What groups or institutions confer that authority? And how is that authority used in organizing children's lives?

From the archives I collected memos, letters, minutes, agendas, news articles, scrapbooks, manuscripts, interviews, pamphlets, posters, guidelines, policies, regulations, audience research studies, press releases, budgets, scripts, program files, and more. I was foremost interested in the sort of texts Foucault calls "prescriptive texts," texts intended to suggest rules or guidelines or to offer advice on how to act as one should.[47] These texts included, for example, the formal mandates of philanthropic and voluntary organizations, script policies circulated to guide the form and content of children's television programs, advice columns written to influence popular opinion about play, play kits designed to instruct parents on how to design, build, and organize a home playground, and audience research studies with the purpose of informing the direction of future action. I'm not

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[46] Michel Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure, 5-6.*
[47] Foucault, 12-13.

directly concerned with the extent to which anyone practiced the advice or behaved in accordance with such guidelines or rules. Foucault explains that the usefulness of prescriptive texts is that they are themselves objects of practice in that they're "practical texts"

> designed to be read, learned, reflected upon, and tested out and they were intended to constitute the eventual framework of everyday conduct. These texts thus served as functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects…[48]

These texts offer evidence of the kinds of moral codes (ie. the values and rules prescribed by experts including philanthropists, churches, psychologists, doctors, producers, policy makers, and so on) that urge individuals to act morally and thus form the basis of what we recognize as true or false, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, normal or abnormal. What we can begin to see from these materials that play isn't only something children need to do for development but is one of the disciplinary practices or techniques used for acting upon and shaping the behaviours and capacities of children.

Genealogy is historical then to the extent that it uses historical sources to place the things that today appear without history within processes of historical development—things like play, whose status as a biological necessity gives the impression that it is transhistorical. Quite often historical accounts of children's play set out to uncover the factors that have either inhibited or supported the child's instinct to play.[49] They understand play as immutable; play's function in development remains constant, while the thing that changes is the degree to which a society has either fostered or neglected play throughout history. Genealogy invites one to consider the history of play differently by taking this universal understanding of play as progress as a starting point or in Rose's

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[48] Foucault, 12-13.

[49] See, for example, Joe L. Frost, *A History of Children's Play and Play Environments: Toward a Contemporary Child-Saving Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Howard Chudacoff, *Children at Play,* (New York University Press, 2007).

words, "as delineating the site of a historical problem."[50] By positioning our present understanding of play and screens as itself the object of historical inquiry, we can see not only that it has a history, but more importantly *how* our knowledge of play and screens has emerged not by necessity but through a complex play of forces. My goal in this genealogy is to begin to delineate the play of forces involved in the emergence of our concern for playtime as a solution to screen time.

The history I take-up in this project is not intended to be exhaustive. Screen time is only one of the many areas of child development and well-being where play has been positioned as a useful strategy for intervention. As noted earlier, play has been endowed with great instrumentality: it's useful for a wide number of developmental issues and capable of serving as a point of support for a wide variety of programs, strategies, campaigns, policies, practices, and so on. My concern is not with setting the record straight by uncovering a fundamental timeless truth about play or its relationship to screens or to development. I want to know how our present configuration of 'truths' about play came into being, and how it has made and shaped our life, our efforts, and our practices with respect to children's screen media engagement.

I arrived at genealogy out of a need to understand how a uniform truth about play's value had without my realizing influenced my early research on children's play and screen media engagement. In his own self-reflection on discovering the need to revise his original plan for his *History of Sexuality* Foucault writes,

> After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would be better left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if

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[50] Nikolas Rose, "Identity, genealogy, history," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 129.

it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?[51]

I have found this to be a useful way of summarizing the chapters that follow: they are the result of my labouring to begin to think differently about children's playtime and screen time rather than to go on legitimating what is already known.

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[51] Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure*, 8-9.

2
The Movement

From the Twentieth-Century Playground Movement to the Science of Play

Play emerged dramatically as an imagined solution to social and psychological problems associated with modern life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The playground movement that swept North America provides an especially graphic example. The playground movement didn't mark the sudden emergence of an interest in play but rather was one of the earliest and most sustained efforts to gather and generate the factual material needed to mobilize both public and private investment in play. I argue that the outcome was not so much a new respect for play, but a new way of managing or channeling play that brought children under the purview of specialized adult supervision on the public playground. Here they could not only be supervised but also observed, inspected, diagnosed, nurtured, guided, transformed, remediated, disciplined, and so on. By the mid-twentieth century a new science of play began to emerge. This was a new expert field of knowledge and set of institutional practices that differed from the philanthropy that guided the earlier playground movement. The new science of play was crucial to standardizing and universalizing play's role in child development and legitimating play as a useful tool for shaping future populations into productive members of society.

The playground movement was one expression of a larger play movement that emerged in North America around the turn of the twentieth century. In *The Play Movement and its Significance* Henry Curtis identifies at least five distinct, though not unrelated, directions that the play movement took in its early years. In addition to the playground movement, there was a movement for the inclusion of play in school programs, a movement for the provisioning of play to children below the school age, a movement for public recreation, and a movement for the rebirth of 'the play spirit' (i.e., to enjoy life more fully). The playground movement was ordinarily recognized as *the*

play movement. Its goal was "to provide a place for play where the children can go during their leisure time, and be off the street and away from the evil influences which they might encounter there, and under the constructive leadership of trained directors."[1] Boston offered the prototype for a playground of this sort in 1886. New York City followed in 1898, opening thirty-one playgrounds, and by 1906, the year the Playground Association of America was organized, there were already at least twenty American cities maintaining playgrounds. Just ten years later the number of cities with playgrounds reached five hundred.[2] The tremendous interest in play during the first few decades of the play movement, according to Curtis, were sufficient evidence that a "Renaissance of Play" was underway.[3]

Toronto was among the first Canadian cities to establish a supervised playground of the sort Curtis describes in 1907. Compared to the United States, significantly less scholarship exists on the playground movement in Canada.[4] What information we do have has been gleaned from municipal, provincial, and federal archives where minutes of meetings, notes and letters from prominent leaders of the movement, scrapbooks, newspaper records, photographs, and so on are held. There are enough records to show that the American playground movement provided an important model for the movement in Canada. J.J. Kelso, who made the first proposal to the Toronto Board of Education in the late 1890s for a playground in the centre of the city, had not only visited playgrounds in Boston, New York, and Chicago but also took up correspondence with the Playground

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[1] Henry Curtis, *The Play Movement and its Significance* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1917), 19.

[2] Curtis, *The Play Movement and its Significance*, 12.

[3] Curtis, 10.

[4] On the Canadian Playground Movement see, for instance, Caroline Andrew, Jean Harvey, and Don Dawson, "Evolution of Local State Activity: Recreation Policy in Toronto," *Leisure Studies* 13, no. 1 (1994): 1-16; Susan E. Markham, "The Impact of Prairie and Maritime Reformers and Boosters on the Development of Parks and Playgrounds, 1880-1930*," Society and Leisure* 14, no. 1 (1991): 219–33; Elsie Marie McFarland, *The Development of Public Recreation in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks/Recreation Association, 1970); Anne Marie F. Murnagham, "Disciplining Children in Toronto Playgrounds in the Early Twentieth Century," *Jeunesse* 8, no.1 (2016): 111-132; Sarah Schmidt, *Domesticating Parks and Mastering Playgrounds: Sexuality, Power and Place in Montreal, 1870-1930.* M.A. thesis; George Wall, "Outdoor Recreation and the Canadian Identity," in *Recreational Land Use: Perspectives in Canada,* eds. Geoffrey Wall and John S. Marsh (Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1982), 419-434; E. Laird Wilson, *The Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association,* M.S.W thesis, McGill University, 1953.

Association of America's founders, Dr. Luther Gulick and Dr. Henry Curtis, to obtain resources and enlist their support.[5] Upon request, Kelso was sent images, copies of the Playground Association of America's circular, copies of *Playground Magazine,* and arranged for members of the association to speak in Toronto.[6] In his 1906 treatise on the need for playgrounds titled, *Supervised Playgrounds: One of the Greatest Needs in Toronto To-day*, Kelso included photos of American playgrounds loaned to him by the American Institute of Social Service. In it he posed the question, "How would [a supervised playground] look in Toronto?"[7]

The first five supervised playgrounds in Canada were opened and operated by the Toronto School Board in 1908.[8] Programs were offered on these school playgrounds from 8:30am to 9:00pm in July and August and each had four to five salaried supervisors. The average attendance at each playground was over 284 children in the summer season. The same year, on May 13, two hundred and fifty of Toronto's 'leading citizens' received a letter that read,

> Dir Sir,
>
> There is among the citizens of Toronto a general interest in the question of equipped and supervised playgrounds, and it is thought that the time is opportune for the organization of a TORONTO PLAYGROUNDS ASSOCIATION. A public meeting, of which you will be duly notified, will be held for the purpose of organization, and your name has been mentioned as one likely to be interested. I have, therefore, been requested to ask you to reply, stating if you will join heartily in making this movement a success. Can you work on Committee, volunteer for playground work, or assist financially?
>
> An early reply will be appreciated.
> Yours Sincerely,
> J. J. Kelso.[9]

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5 Library and Archives Canada (LAC), John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol. 1, file 17, Letter from Luther Gulick to J.J. Kelso, 10 October 1906; Letter from J.J. Kelso to Henry Curtis, 9 May 1907; Letter from Playground Association of America to J.J. Kelso, 18 April 1907.

6 LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

7 J.J. Kelso quoted in Anne Marie F. Murnagham, "Disciplining Children in Toronto Playgrounds in the Early Twentieth Century," *Jeunesse* 8, no.1 (2016): 115.

8 Murnaghan, "Disciplining Children," 116.

9 LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, "Playgrounds: What Toronto is trying to do for its Children," 1910.

The following month, on June 2, a public meeting was held at Toronto's city hall during which the Toronto Playground Association was formally organized. Its main objective was to "influence public opinion and impress upon the Civic Authorities the desirability of the work being taken up as part of the City's business."[10] By 1915 there were at least fifty supervised playgrounds operated by either the Toronto Board of Education, the Toronto Playground Association, by the City of Toronto Parks Department, or privately. Slowly the movement spread to other Canadian cities and municipal playground associations were organized most notably in Winnipeg, Hamilton, London, Ottawa, Montreal, and Vancouver.

Why the intense effort to invest in playgrounds during this period? Unlike the play movement that developed many years earlier in Germany to stimulate physical health and development, the play movement in both Canada and the US was described by its leaders as a social reform movement.[11] The playground movement emerged in the late nineteenth century alongside what historians today refer to as the Progressive Era's child saving movement—or what was then called the New Social Spirit—marked by a new sense of social responsibility for the weak and dependent.[12]

Kelso, who was a leader in the playground movement's spread across Canadian cities, was a long-time children's advocate. He founded the Toronto Children's Aid Society in 1891 and became the first Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent children, a position he held between 1893-1907, preferring the title, "friend of the children."[13] One of the main purposes of the Children's Aid Society was to prevent crime and to provide a detention home for young offenders, its earliest motto being, "it is wiser and less expensive to save children than to punish criminals."[14] Kelso was not surprisingly also a

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[10] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, "Playgrounds: What Toronto is trying to do for its Children," 1910.

[11] Curtis, *The Play Movement*, 11.

[12] Curtis, 9.

[13] John McCullagh, *A Legacy of Caring: A History of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2002), 44.

[14] McCullagh, *A Legacy of Caring*, 48.

leader in campaigning for the 1908 Juvenile Delinquent Act, which aimed to treat young

offenders not as criminals in need of punishment, but as misguided children in need of

guidance and treatment.[15]

The playground emerged as one of the tools for the prevention and treatment of this

type of misguidance. The Toronto Children's Aid Society's constitution lists "the

providing of playgrounds in the poorer districts" as one of its main objectives.[16] Children

living in the poorest city neighbourhoods of Toronto like St. John's Ward were considered

in greatest need. One Toronto newspaper columnist urged that the Ward, where an entire

family would commonly occupy two small rooms, had the greatest need for a playground

because the children, who were no longer occupied by work, had nowhere else to go, so

"they swarm the streets, learning evil before they have mastered the alphabet, and

graduating in crime before they leave school." But there was more to the need for

playgrounds than the generous philanthropy implied by the child saving movement. The

columnist continues:

> Only those who are well acquainted with the Ward at all realize what a menace to
> our civic peace are these hundreds of children brought up on the streets, where
> rudeness, cruelty, cheating, lying, impurity and vice of every kind is so quickly
> learned, where opportunities for mischief are so many, and for harmless
> amusement so few.[17]

The more pressing concern was the social threat posed by poor, particularly immigrant,

city children living in the slum-like conditions exemplified by the Ward. Protecting the

child from the dangers of urban streets was a means to protecting society's interests. With

respect to juvenile delinquency Kelso wrote,

> the child safeguarded and protected means much to the community in the
> prevention of crime, and the peaceful evolution of industrial citizenship. Crime
> renders property and human life unsafe, is one of the heaviest items of taxation,

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[15] McCullagh, 48.

[16] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 4, "Reasons Why Business Men and All Lovers of Children Should Liberally Support The Toronto Children's Aid Society," 1890.

[17] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

and can only be eradicated or limited by a complete and thorough system of child protection.[18]

Without an alternative to the city streets, children posed a threat to social order and to the beauty of Toronto.

Playgrounds were one tool for managing problem populations of youth—for reforming youth who had succumbed to delinquency but more importantly for the prevention of delinquency. In a magazine column from 1909 called "Playground Talk," Kelso writes,

> The playground as an important factor in civic righteousness is being increasingly recognized not only in Toronto but in all the leading cities on the continent….as some of our leading reformers have pointed out, the supervised playground will undoubtedly save many spirited youngsters from the police court and the prison cell.[19]

Kelso maintained a detailed scrapbook containing one hundred and sixty newspaper reports, including the above column, all relevant to the subject of play published between 1906-1913. Canadian-born, middle class children are entirely absent from the discussions and debates about playgrounds. Instead, they stress the importance of play and playgrounds for the prevention of delinquency among the poor and working-class. *The Toronto Globe,* for example, wrote that "nothing else is so potent a preventative of crime as such play is; in point of fact it is almost the only efficient preventative to which the community can resort."[20]

The idea of the delinquent was not inconsequential to the ability to mobilize a playground movement in North America. In Canada, the 1908 Juvenile Delinquents Act recognized the juvenile delinquent as distinct from the prototypical hardened, lower class criminal. The preamble to the Act states,

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[18] Jean Trépanier, "Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Protection: The Historical Foundations of the Canadian Juvenile Delinquents Act of 1908," *European Journal of crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice* 7, no. 1 (1999): 50.

[19] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

[20] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

it [was] expedient that youthful offenders should not be classed or dealt with as ordinary criminals, the welfare of the community demanding that they should on the contrary be guarded against association with crime and criminals, and should be subjected to such wise care, treatment and control as will tend to check their evil tendencies and to strengthen their better instincts.[21]

Setting the delinquent apart from the criminal was partly a measure to protect the young and impressionable from the negative influence of the adult criminal. But distinguishing the juvenile delinquent from the adult criminal had yet another effect, which was that it brought the young offender under the purview of newly specialized forms of supervision and guidance or control. Distinguishing the juvenile delinquent in this way gave birth to a range of new institutions and techniques for managing young offenders—like the juvenile courts and related institutions designed to manage the children and youth of the urban poor and the working class—expanding the state's power to intervene in the lives of children and their families.[22] But it also gave birth to a range of techniques for the prevention and management of potential future delinquents. Playgrounds were one of the techniques designed for this type of intervention, where the potential delinquent was set apart—made visible, observable, and manageable—within the highly organized structure and under the normalizing gaze of the trained playground supervisor.

The playground wasn't just a compelling preventative because it provided a practical alternative to the city streets. One of the major roots to the problem of delinquency was idleness, which the street encouraged. The sentiment among child savers like Kelso was that working-class children had nowhere to go but the street where, without a purposeful way to spend their time, they posed a risk to society. Along with encroaching urban development that eliminated the space for play, there were new temporal changes to adjust to. On one hand, the school year became longer and attendance became mandatory, occupying more of children's time in favour of intellectual development. On the other hand, the absence of labour increased the amount of children's leisure time. For reformers

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[21] Juvenile Detention Act, *Statues of Canada,* 1908.

[22] Jean Trépanier, "Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Protection," 53.

like Curtis the problem with the new child labour laws was that nothing adequate came to take the place of work, resulting in idle time. The need for playgrounds emerged out of the need to accommodate the changing temporal and spatial conditions of working-class childhood—impacted by things like lengthening school days, new child labour laws, rising immigration, and increasing urban congestion. Playgrounds provided the 'proper' space for those children to go where their time would be properly utilized.

Kelso deemed the existing spaces for children to play in Toronto ineffective for the task. In his letter to the Secretary of the New York Metropolitan Parks Association requesting resources on play, Kelso described Toronto as a "very beautiful and attractive city" full of parks but "not one playground worthy of the name." He lamented that a piece of property that had been set aside for a playground near Toronto's waterfront had been left in its original condition "with the result that it is merely a gathering place for loafers, who fill the air with profanity and disgust passers-by to such an extent that a demand was made on the city that the property be leased out for manufacturing purposes."[23] He expressed this concern directly to the Mayor of Toronto correcting "a tendency to confound a vacant lot or open space with a playground." The "true conception of a playground," according to Kelso,

> is to have various kinds of swings, gymnasium appliances, sand piles, a wading pool and a building with lavatories and wash-rooms, all under the control of a director or superintendent whose duty it would be to separate sexes, maintain order and encourage and assist the young people to have a good time. Where there is just simply a vacant lot set apart, it becomes a loafing place. The bigger boys take possession and by this promiscuous gathering together without direction or supervision, much more harm than good results. I wish it were possible for you to visit some of the modern playgrounds in Chicago, New York or Boston, for I am certain you would not rest satisfied until Toronto had at least one of these very desirable playgrounds. At the present time we are greatly behind in this important matter.[24]

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[23] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol. 1, file 17, Letter from J.J. Kelso to Archibald A. Hill, 8 October 1906.

[24] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol. 1, file 17, Letter from John Kelso to John Shaw, 22 September 1906.

Most important, since the movement was about the normalization of a problem population, was that the playground required specialized equipment and a supervisor whose purpose was to instruct the children in the correct way to play according to age and gender. The Toronto Playground Association believed that without a play-leader, a playground with even the most costly equipment could be a "positive menace to the neighborhoood." [25]

The first supervised playground operated by the Toronto Playground Association was opened on August 11, 1909 at St. Andrew's Square and was called the St. Andrew's Square Playground. Several hundred children attended the opening. A local newspaper reported on the event:

> The ground which is rather dusty at present, is divided into two parts, the easterly half being devoted to the girls and very small boys, and the westerly half to larger boys. A wire fence encloses the whole ground, and girls and larger boys are separated by a wire fence. The ground and equipment have been donated by the city, the equipment having cost more than the civic appropriation, $500. The cost, including the fences has been $1000. The supervision is under the charge of the Toronto Playgrounds Association. Miss E. McRoberts is the supervisor for the girls and Mr. Donald G McQuillicuddy formerly Y.M.C.A physical director, Stratford, supervisor for the boys. They are to be paid for their services for the remainder of the season by the Toronto Playgrounds Association, which hopes to see a number of similar playgrounds established by the city in the near future, the city paying the whole cost thereof. The boys' section of the ground is equip with parallel bars, teeters, giant stride or parole, trapeze, swinging rings and rope ladders. The girls' section is provided with swings, giant stride or maypole, sand courts, teeters, basket ball and a slide resembling a chute, the last named being the most popular attraction. The ground is to be open from 9am until 8:30 every day except Sunday.[26]

The goal was to establish a certain consistency across these playgrounds, to ensure that they were evenly distributed in the most problematic areas of the city, that they were open and available at the correct times, that they were properly equipped, and that the correct games were played under the supervision of a professionally trained leader. These factors

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[25] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.
[26] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

were key to play's utility as one of the means, if not the primary means, by which the problem child could be shaped into a productive and compliant member of society.

If concerns about juvenile delinquency helped to produce the conditions for play's emergence as a tool for social reform, then the question is what has sustained it? One significant factor has been the idea of a play deficit—ie. the idea that children are playing less than previous generations, resulting in a lack of play. For instance, supporters of the playground movement would commonly express the need for play in terms of their being not enough of it. On February 26, 1908 the Spectator quoted Mrs. Wolverton from the local council of the National Council of Women who stated, "there was not enough of play in the life of the child of to-day, and the result was that only the intellectual side of his life was developed." She was backed by Kelso who similarly believed not enough of people's energies were devoted to play.[27]

An actual deficit in play wasn't the real problem for the playground movement; children were still playing. The problem was that their play, especially autonomous street play, was deemed ineffective or, worse, a threat. In July 1907 a boy told a reporter at the *Toronto Star*, "we have been playing catch in Alexandra Park, but a few nights ago a policeman came and put us out of that. We knew it was against the law to play catch there, but we had to go somewhere."[28] The City of Toronto bi-laws prohibited playing ball in the street, a crime that children could be brought to court over. In his practical guide to the playground movement titled *American Playgrounds, their Construction, Equipment, Maintenance*, published in 1909, Everett Mero delves deeper into the problem of street play:

> There is play and there is play. There is play that grows like a weed and never gets beyond the weed state; and there is play that has careful cultivation so that it becomes a useful plant. The latter kind is required to accomplish results worthy of efforts expended. This is the kind that most wise investigators and expert

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[27] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.
[28] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

students contend for, as soon as they get far enough into the subject to truly appreciate practical conditions. Directed or supervised play is necessary.[29]

Mero's explanation of what makes play worthy of investment recalls Foucault's observation that normalizing discourses are also disqualifying discourses. Once play is understood primarily as an investment, there can be right or wrong ways to invest in play. In other words, not all play counts as a good investment. Play only counts if it can be made useful and thus requires careful investment to prevent the wrong kind of play from flourishing. The playground movement, then, wasn't about a lack of play; it was about channeling play into the correct spaces and times and dictating the kinds of play that counted as a valuable investment.

The play deficit wasn't an objective fact or pre-existing social concern that the playgrounds then sprang-up across North America to remedy. The play deficit is part of the produced knowledge about play. It was a strategy engaged by civic clubs, philanthropists, religious leaders, city officials, and others for mobilizing the public to invest in playgrounds. Predictions about the play deficit like the following, published by Kelso in a Toronto newspaper, were common to the movement:

> It is safe to predict that in the next few years thousands of acres of valuable city land will be returned to the children for health and recreation. In the rapid development of cities and eagerness for wealth and commercial success, no thought was given to the city beautiful, nor did anyone realize that the vacant lot on which their boyish pastimes were held would disappear so rapidly. Now thoughtful men see the mistake that has been made and are earnestly striving to restore the children's heritage.[30]

The problem Kelso describes is that play has been disappearing. The solution is to restore it to its former place in society.

The concept of a play deficit was (and remains) significant to sustaining the value assigned to play as an investment through which a broad range of problems associated

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[29] Everett B. Mero, ed., *American Playgrounds: Their Construction, Equipment, Maintenance and Utility* (Boston, MA: American Gymnasia Co., 1909), 17.

[30] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

with childhood could be managed. Firstly, by framing the problem as a play deficit, playgrounds became a flexible solution allowing for a diverse number of causes to coalesce under the Toronto Playground Association whose members included politicians, doctors, ministers, law enforcement, women's clubs, private philanthropists, and so on, who all had different reasons to support the investment in play. People of course still referred to delinquency and other social problems that would be addressed by investment in playgrounds, but the concept and language of a play deficit allowed for play to be used to address a broader range of concerns. The purpose statement of the Toronto Playground Association was broad for precisely this reason. Its purpose was influenced by the purpose of the Playground Association of America, which was in Gulick's words, "as broad as the impulse to play is universal."' To give a sense of just how broad, in 1910 the Playground Association of America's "statement of purpose," published in *Playground* reads,

> Dependency is reduced by giving men more for which to live. Delinquency is reduced by providing a wholesome outlet for youthful energy. Industrial efficiency is increased by giving individuals a play life which will develop greater resourcefulness and adaptability. Good citizenship is promoted by forming habits of co-operation in play. People who play together find it easier to live together and are more loyal as well as more efficient citizens. Democracy rests on the most firm basis when a community has formed the habit of playing together.[31]

Delinquency is just one of the many significant social concerns that the Playground Association of America considered play a useful strategy for addressing.

The Toronto Playground Association's purpose was even more general, with no mention of a specific rational for play. Its list of four objectives was to promote healthful recreation, stimulate public opinion in favour of establishing playgrounds (especially in congested districts), to familiarize members with the advantages of supervised playgrounds, and to accept donations for the acquisition of land and equipment of

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[31] Dominick Cavello, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,1981), 37.

playgrounds.[32] Despite the range of interests that would have been held by its membership, all could accept that investing in play could address a range of social problems at once; the play deficit became a proxy for issues like delinquency but also for problems of physical development, citizenship, moral character, for racism, for socialization, laziness, sickness, and so on. In this way, the play deficit rendered a whole host of problems related to urban industrial life intelligible and at the same time manageable under the same problem-solution frame.

Secondly, the play deficit was useful in mobilizing the sweeping objectives of the playground movement because it naturalized play broadly as a worthy investment. The idea of a play deficit is meaningful only relative to the value of play itself. The playground movement gave meaning to the play deficit by gathering and generating the facts needed to speak with authority about the value of play. To do so, the movement drew on both the moral and spiritual value of play as well as the earliest scientific knowledge about the biological function of play from late nineteenth and early twentieth-century theorists like Herbert Spencer, Karl Groos, and G. Stanley Hall. For example, by 1926 the American Playground Association, by then renamed the American Playground and Recreation Association, published *The Normal Course in Play*, a training guide for play workers. The section on play theory includes a small number of theorists including Friedrich Schiller, Herbert Spencer, Karl Groos, and G. Stanley Hall. The training guide bases its stance on the function of play in child development on Hall's controversial recapitulation theory, which correlates the evolution of a child's play with the evolution of humanity.

As co-founder of the American Playground Association, Gulick believed that the real key to making the play movement a success would be a systematic theory to describe the role of play in the child's moral and physical development. With no such theory available, he instead used the psychological theories of his friend G. Stanley Hall to link the moral lessons and technical skills learned through team play to the attitudes and aptitudes

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32 LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, "Playgrounds: What Toronto is trying to do for its Children," 1910.

necessary for the citizen's adaptation to modern society.[33] The playground movement put into practice the ideas of these theorists in order to support statements about play as the child's birthright. Curtis, also a student of Hall's, addressed an audience in Toronto describing play as superior to education on the principle that education was a modern invention and that no one invented play.[34] While the notion of play being a child's nature and birthright was not novel[35] the idea of a play deficit helped transform that birthright into a functional utility.

While early play theories supported the biological basis for play, they lacked the precise explanatory power the play movement needed. Nearly two decades into the movement, Curtis was still urging that

> …probably the greatest need of the play movement at the present time is facts, facts which will show the amount of sickness of school children in cities where play is furnished and in cities where play is not furnished, which will show the physical development of children in such cities; also delinquency.[36]

The need for strong, conclusive, and coherent evidence about the developmental imperative for play, and subsequently the problems associated with a play deficit, continued to be the work of developmental psychology, contributing to what we today refer to as the science of play.

Early developmental psychologists had shown marginal interest in play, tending to focus instead on the intellectual development of the child. At the time interest in play was so marginal that James Sully's (1892) *The Human Mind*, one of the first textbooks on psychology, only mentions play in a single footnote.[37] It wasn't until the late 1940s and early 1950s that Piaget made what is still considered one of the most important contributions to the subject. In *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* Piaget

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[33] Cavello, *Muscles and Morals*, 34.

[34] LAC, John Joseph Kelso fonds, MG30-C97, vol.1, file 2, Play and Playgrounds Scrapbook, 1906-1918.

[35] For an historical overview of changing perspectives on play from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century see Jenny Holt, "Normal" versus 'Deviant' Play in Children's Literature: An Historical Overview," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 34 no. 1 (January 2010): 34-56.

[36] Curtis, *The Play Movement*, 21.

[37] David Cohen, *The Development of Play* (3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2006), 27.

approaches the study of play as an extension of his theory of the intellectual development of the child, recording the basic evolution in the way that his children played with objects along four distinct stages of cognition: sensori-motor (ages 0-2), pre-operational (ages 2-7), concrete operational (7-12), and formal operational (12+). At each stage, Piaget argues, play serves different uses; for example, ritualistic play may serve emotional uses while symbolic play may serve as a way of coping with reality.[38] As the child progresses through the stages of development, so too their play progresses in variety and complexity. Put simply, play reflects the child's progress as they gain increasing control over their environments.

Although it was already common practice to recognize play (for example, on the playground) in relation to age (among other categories like gender, class, and race), Piaget's contribution gave new meaning to the practice by mapping play onto clearly delineated stages of normal cognitive development using scientific methods of inquiry. These were not the morally oriented or anecdotal pronouncements of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century philanthropists about play as a birthright. Nor was it the sweeping and controversial recapitulation theory of Hall's. The new ages and stages theory of play gave scientific validity to what the morally oriented reformers had long been saying about play being an important investment in the child's development.

Perhaps more important is the way that Piaget focused attention on play's function in the stages of normal development. By the 1950s normalcy had become the particular expertise of psychology. According to psychologists the solution to social issues could be located in the development of normal personalities, which begin in childhood and are influenced significantly by the child's environment. Hence psychologists played a significant role in advising parents (and also teachers, doctors, nurses, and so on) on creating the proper child-rearing environments to ensure the child's normal development.[39] Psychologists took over the function of instruction on how to raise good

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[38] Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood,* trans. C. Gattegno and F.M. Hodgson (1951; New York: Norton, 1962).

[39] Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1999), 43.

citizens from the child savers, ministers, private voluntary associations of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century through radio, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, public talks, and so on.[40] For example, Samuel Laycock, who was among a small number of psychologists who developed a public profile disseminating popular psychology to Canadians, gave a series of talks over CBC Radio on how to raise a well-adjusted child for the modern world.[41] The ages and stages theory espoused by psychologists like Laycock was useful to the play movement because scientific theory offers the promise of predictability, making play a useful tool for securing the child's normal development.

By the 1950s, securing the proper conditions for play for the preschool child became a significant focus partly because of the newly recognized importance of the child's early years to normal development.[42] This is evident in the publication of instructional guides and play kits designed to educate the public on the developmental need for play. For example, in 1950 the Recreation Division of the Canadian Welfare Council published "A Kit on How to Plan a Home Playground," a thirty-eight-page booklet available for fifty cents, "designed to help leaders in arousing community-wide interest among parents in planning home playgrounds." The kit explains that unlike school-age children who have access to public playgrounds, the preschool child requires the proper conditions for play, specifically outdoors, at home where they were safe from danger.[43]

The kit is divided into four parts: Part one makes suggestions on how to organize a campaign for better home play facilities, encouraging community groups/organizations to educate the community on the value of play. It outlines, how to get a community campaign going: first "establish a committee composed of persons with a recognized interest in child welfare" followed by a list of suggestions: "Chairman of the Home and School Association, Municipal Recreation Director, Superintendent of the Playgrounds Department, Director of the Children's Aid Society, Nursery School Leaders, Secretary of

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[40] Gleeson, *Normalizing the Ideal,* 18.

[41] Samuel Laycock, *Our Children in Tomorrow's World* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1951).

[42] Gleeson, *Normalizing the Ideal,* 103.

[43] LAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Fond, MG 28-I10, vol. 293, file 14, A Kit on How to Plan a Home Playground, 1950, np.

the Recreation Division, Community Welfare Council" and other overlooked groups that "since a campaign of this type would tend to keep children off the streets, you will find that there will be in many instances interest on the part of Truck Drivers Associations, Traffic Divisions of Police Departments, Municipal Transport Commissions, and others." Second, the kit suggests a sub-committee for publicity for which the kit provides ready-made press releases, diagrams, and photos. The kit also suggests putting up displays at local lumber yards where supplies for building home playgrounds could be purchased, community workshops to instruct parents on the construction of play equipment, and contests with prizes; for example, a contest for "the most original approach to the provision of equipment and facilities to meet play needs of children."

Part two of the play kit is made up of a series of seven press releases to be used for publicizing a home play campaign. Their approach is conversational and each is a continuation of the topic covered in the previous release. The advice offered in the first release, titled 'The Good Old Days,' is worth quoting here at length:

> Not so very long ago most children grew up in large families in small communities. Now these conditions are reversed for a great many of our newest citizens. Safe and satisfactory play was not much of a problem when there was ample space, little traffic, and many children of about the same age. They had grass and trees, sticks and stones, sand, and pieces of wood. Very small people could let their imaginations go and try out their new-found ideas without running into too much danger. They could find out about the world and develop their own abilities in surroundings that were safe, familiar and not too complicated for them to understand or cope with.
>
> In a modern city, on the other hand, a child finds his surroundings too complex and swiftly changing to understand, while at the same time he lacks the variety of little things [with] which to experiment. Cars and trucks tear by, bells ring, people come and go, while the child finds no simple things with which to learn to live in his own way. He is forced to fit himself into the adult world too soon and misses an essential stage of his development.
>
> But you can give back to your child the lost advantages of a simpler world if the necessary elements are kept in mind. These have been listed by the Recreation Division of the Canadian Welfare Council in this fashion:
>
> Security-Protection from the hazards of the street. The mental security of familiar surrounds.

> Physical Development-Every muscle in a child's body must be used and practiced if he is to grow up strong and able.
>
> Mental Development-A child needs surrounding in which he can grown mentally as well as physically in his own way at his own pace.
>
> Social Development-The opportunity to learn to get on with other children through the sharing of toys, and co-operative play.
>
> It would be useless to say these things if there were nothing that could be done about them. A small, well-fenced area, supplied with simple, inexpensive objects, such as a sandbox, large wooden blocks and small toys can be made to serve very effectively. If such a play area is well thought out, your child can be helped greatly to grow into a healthy, happy, well-adjusted person.
>
> In our next article, we shall feel with the child's needs in more detail, and suggest practical means of supplying them.[44]

The six remaining press releases describe the play needs of children and the equipment best suited to those needs; for example, they specify the amount of space needed for play, the location and layout of that space, and the types of common or cheaply obtained objects (such as blocks, ladders, and boards) that should be available to play with.

Part three of the play kit is filled with diagrams, lists of materials, and costs for the recommended play equipment including swings, sandboxes, climbing apparatus, playhouses, and water play. Part four of the kit supplies photographs of children at play that can be purchased from the Canadian Welfare Council in Ottawa for $1.25 each. They picture kids playing in sand, by a playhouse, on a wheel, and on swings, all surrounded by a picket fence. Finally, a list of reference material is provided with the titles and authors of publications on play, where they could be obtained, and their costs.

The continuities between the advice administered via the playkit in 1950 and the playground publicity between 1908-1913 are notable; in particular, the need to adjust to the conditions of modern urban living, which have displaced the child's natural times, places, and things for play thus producing a play deficit. Foucault cautioned against reading too far into these types of similarities, mistaking them as a form of historical continuity. Instead, what these similarities might suggest is that early on a thematic complex of play as a necessary investment formed around children's play. The fact that

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[44] LAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Fond, MG 28-I10, vol. 293, file 14, A Kit on How to Plan a Home Playground, 1950, np.

this thematic maintained a certain constancy suggests that it is a possible point of problematization around which concerns about childhood have been repeatedly formulated and reformulated.

There are also important, however subtle, differences in the 1950 play kit. Whereas the public playgrounds were designed for the management of problem populations and for the prevention and correction of associated social problems, the home playgrounds promoted by the Canadian Welfare Council were for the cultivation of normal (ie. physically, mentally, and socially well-adjusted) children. Instead of a municipally employed playground supervisor, psychologists could advise and train parents on the proper conditions for children's play through national channels of communication. What's more is that the scientific claims from psychologists about play applied to all children, not just the potentially delinquent children of the working-class.

This doesn't mean that particular children weren't considered differently at risk without play; rather, once play was scientifically understood as a function of development, all children were potentially a risk. Play no longer functioned solely as a tool for the social reform of problem children but also as a legitimate tool for promoting normal development and preventing abnormality in all children. It became possible for play to serve this function because of the normative orientation that developmental psychology brought to the study of play, grounding play in the scientific stages of child development. To use Foucault's metaphor, play became the ultimate panoptic gaze, capable of making the whole child visible to the expert observer. The next two chapters begin to trace how the science of play factored into managing an entirely new and unknown threat to child development that emerged along side it in the mid-twentieth century: the television screen.

3
Cause
The Screen Problem, A Moral Project

The Playground Movement was at once an effort to increase children's opportunities for enjoyment and a project of social and moral improvement through a set of new normalizing practices. The rise of a postwar consumer society during the 1950s and early 1960s, and the baby boom of that era, created conditions for new set of imagined threats to meaningful social life and progress.[1] Many critics seized upon television's transition from a novel communications technology to an omnipresent aspect of postwar life, as a new source of social problems. There was much speculation yet little consensus about the effect television would have on the postwar family. On one hand, the media presented utopian visions about television's potential uses for fostering cross-cultural understanding and on the other hand presented warnings about television threatening the Canadian way of life.[2] Since children both literally and figuratively represented the nation's future, its not surprising that Canadians worried in particular about the time children spent and what they saw watching television.[3] Television was thus novel and exciting and at the same time approached with caution, which prompted an indeterminate number of excitements and anxieties about the child's development and well-being. This led to considerable research and various responsive practices intended to help manage both the potentials and the problems of the television screen.

The next two chapters focus on how screens became viewed as a 'problem,' beginning with the television screen's adoption in the 1950s in Canada. The chapter at hand lays out the conditions that made the problem of screens possible, starting with the general form of inquiry that proceeded from the television screen's adoption. In chapter four I'll show

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[1] Paul Rutherford, *When Television was Young: Primetime Canada, 1952-1967* (University of Toronto Press, 1999), 10-11.

[2] Katherine Rollwagen, "The Young Medium: Regulating Television in the Name of Canadian childhood," *The Canadian Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (2020): 33.

[3] Rollwagen, 28.

how new practices of investing in the proper times, places, and things for play emerged in response to the problem television presented. For now I'm only concerned with how the television screen became a problem that needed solving and how this shaped the early moral response to children's television production in Canada.

The second half of the twentieth century is a notable period for historical accounts of children's play in North America. In *Children's Play: An American History*, historian Howard P. Chudacoff cites October 3, 1955, as the precise date that changed American children's lives. That Monday marked the debut of *Mickey Mouse Club,* the first major American Network television program made specifically for preadolescent children. Historical accounts of children's play like Chudacoff's contend that screen-based technologies, beginning with television's emergence in the 1950s, are partly responsible for declines in children's play across the globe.[4]

Chudacoff is not alone in isolating the emergence of television, lumped in with what we now call 'screen time,' historically as a powerful influence on children's play. A common view has been that there was a golden age of play in the first half of the twentieth century that began with the liberation of children from the workforce and ended with the coming of television and the mass commercialization of children's cultures.[5] Folklorists Peter and Iona Opie, who began their careers in the UK documenting the street and playground play of children during the early 1950s, remember being told that their study was too late because television had replaced children's autonomous play.[6] Sixty years' worth of scholarly research on play has since been attempting to determine the impact or effect of screens, including television, on children's play, and although the conclusions about its effects differ—ranging from beneficial, to benign, to negative— what has been accepted is that television was the cause of, among other things, a momentous rupture in the times, places, and things associated with children's play.

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[4] Howard Chudacoff, *Children at Play* (New York University Press, 2007).

[5] Seth Giddings, *Gameworlds: Virtual Media and Children's Everyday Play* (New York Bloomsbury, 2014).

[6] Iona Opie, "A lifetime in the playground," *International Journal of Play,* 3 no. 3, (2014): 202.

Richard Butsch observes how rare it is for a technology, like television, itself to be so widely accepted as a cause, not just a cause of disruptions to children's in play but a cause of a wide range of childhood problems, as is the case with children's television. He observes how overuse or misuse of any other toy or technology would be presumed a pathology of the child, not the technology.[7] What's more curious is that television was recognized as a cause a priori; the widespread adoption of television immediately invited a search for its effects on children. In 1951 Elenor Maccoby, a Harvard psychologist, published one of the first studies of children and television titled, "Television: Its Impact on School Children." Maccoby conducted open-ended interviews with 332 mothers in Cambridge, Massachusetts who were asked to report how much time their children spent watching television, the social context of their viewing, and to describe any problems that had arisen out of having television in their homes pertaining to mealtime, bedtime, homework, and ease of childcare. The study also examined the activities that children were giving up in order to watch television.[8] Maccoby concluded that children in "television homes" were spending two and a half to three and a half hours per week watching television and suggested that "the magnitude of the effect this will have on their lives depends on large measure on what they would be doing if they were not watching TV during these hours,"[9] which the study concluded consisted mainly of cuts to "both outdoor and indoor playtime and to the amount of time a child spends helping with household tasks."[10] She repeated these and similar findings in subsequent journal articles and in an address at the 1955 US Senate Hearing on Juvenile Delinquency. Maccoby's research wasn't a response to the discovery of new childhood pathologies for which television was then determined to be the cause, but rather a search for causal knowledge about the effects of television.

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[7] Richard Butsch, "Class and Audience Effects: A History of Research on Movies, Radio, and Television," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29, no. 3 (2001): 262-263.

[8] Elenor Maccoby, "Television: Its Impact on School Children," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1951): 421-444.

[9] Elenor Maccoby, "Television: Its Impact on School Children," 435.

[10] Elenor Maccoby, 437.

Causes are routes to knowledge in that they demand careful study. In a literature review of more than two thousand studies spanning fifty years of research on children and television, Norma Pecora found that during the first decade of television, researchers continued the search for causal knowledge largely asking how much time children watched television, what its effects were on cognitive development, and what its relationship was to violence.[11] The demand for causal knowledge about television is perhaps best illustrated by Paul Lazarsfeld's testimony during the 1955 US Senate Hearings. The title of his testimony was "Why is so little known about the effects of television on children and what could be done about the matter?" Lazarsfeld points to the fact that television has become a national concern, yet there had been no "concentrated effort to acquire relevant knowledge" about its effects. He attributes the lack of knowledge in part to the sporadic nature of academic inquiry, where "knowledge on any specific topic accumulates slowly." He goes on,

> but if some problems become a burning social issue then it might be a mistake to leave research progress to the accidental initiative of individual scholars. I don't want to overdo this comparison, but we certainly would not have a polio vaccine or an atomic bomb today if most of the research departments had been left to doctor-of-philosophy dissertations. We obviously do not need anything of the magnitude of a Los Alamos Laboratory to study the effects of television. But if it is an urgent social problem then we need some central social planning; priorities have to be set up, and some central organization is needed to coordinate research work and to press it forward.[12]

On the question of what type of research was needed, Lazarsfeld suggested, research on the possible good effects of television, longitudinal research on the long-term effects of television on the child's personality development, and studies on how the family can create an environment that could compete with television for their children's time.[13] The

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[11] Norma Pecora, "The Changing Nature of Children's Television: Fifty Years of Research," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*, eds. Norma Pecora, John P. Murray, Ellen Ann Wartella (New York: Routledge, 2006), 12.

[12] Duncan Memorial Collection (DMC), "Why is So Little Known About the Effects of Television on Children and What Could Be Done about the Matter?" 1955, 1-2.

[13] DAC, "Why is So Little Known About the Effects of Television on Children," 4-5.

centralized project Lazarsfeld described never materialized; nevertheless, studies of television's causal relationships nearly doubled from 1950-59 to 1960-69,[14] drawing a range of conclusions about, for example, how television influences youth, about the effects (positive and negative) of television on values and outlook, on knowledge and school performance, and on leisure and interests.[15]

Concerns about the effects of television became stronger in the 1970s, with the number of studies increasing nearly three and a half times from 1969 to 1979.[16] Some of the most condemnatory causal explanations of television's effect on children emerged during this period. Marie Winn's *The Plug-In Drug,* for example*,* claims that television destroys children's capacity for intelligent thought. As a result of their addiction to television, Winn argues, children are deprived of play and of the opportunity to participate in the everyday rituals of normal family life. She uses the metaphor of the drug throughout, referring to television as an "insidious narcotic," describing children as "TV zombies" who watch in a "trance-like state," and she provides a series of testimonials from parents who helped their children "kick the TV habit."[17] Neil Postman's *The Disappearance of Childhood* similarly describes television as a tremendously influential social force, responsible for not only the destruction of children's lives but the destruction of childhood itself.[18] From the late 1980s onward the television was accompanied by video games, computers, tablets, smart phones, etc., and as the types and uses of screens multiplied so did the number of studies of their causal effects both good and bad.

It's not my goal to give a comprehensive review of the research on children and television-effects. What I've sketched here is intended rather to illustrate the sustained

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[14] Pecora, "The Changing Nature of Children's Television: Fifty Years of Research," 6.

[15] On early children and television effects research see, for instance, Hilde T. Himmelweit, A.N. Oppenheim, and Pamela Vince, *Television and the Child: An Empirical Study of the Effect of Television on the Young* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); Wilbur Schram, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B. Parker, *Television in the Lives of Our Children* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971); Leo Bogart, *The Age of Television*, 3rd ed. (New York: Ungar, 1972).

[16] Pecora, "The Changing Nature of Children's Television: Fifty Years of Research," 6.

[17] Marie Winn, *The Plug-In Drug* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

[18] Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982).

investment made in discovering the positive or negative effects of television. After decades of research, the effects of television remain inconclusive, yet the idea of television, and later screens broadly, as a powerful influence on children (good or bad) became conventional wisdom. The assumption underlying this wisdom is that there is causal knowledge yet to be found through the persistent application of more and better research. Ian Hacking refers to these underlying assumptions as depth knowledge, or the idea that "a certain sort of knowledge is possible."[19] Without this depth knowledge, there could be no competing claims to surface knowledge about the problems or possibilities of screen time. To put it plainly, debates about whether screens present problems or possibilities for children persist because they take as common ground—as fact or as truth—the idea that screens have a causal effect.

Causes are not only routes to knowledge; causes are also formative and regulatory. First of all, identifying a cause allows us to subsequently identify better or worse courses of action. In medicine, for example, knowing the cause of a disease is the starting point for devising an effective course of treatment. Secondly, knowing the cause of something is helpful if prevention is desirable. In other words, causal knowledge allows us to control or manage outcomes. And third, causal knowledge allows us to take what would otherwise be little more than a cluster of symptoms or effects and turn them into a known entity about which we may then produce general theory.[20] The accepted fact that television has effects presented a problem that couldn't simply be ignored, it required management. This created the need for new policies, practices, experts, authorities, etc. to guide the proper use of television—to make children's television do good.

The response to the problem of television was not simply a moral panic, as is often suggested. Those who describe the response to children's media as a moral panic suggest that historically each new medium brings with it a rash of panic similar to the one before. Thus the concern over screens is seen as a continuation of the concern over television, which is seen a continuation of the concern over radio, which is seen as a continuation of

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[19] Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 211-12.

[20] Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul,* 81.

the concern over comics, which is seen as a continuation of concerns over penny dreadfuls, and on and on. Thus each new concern is dismissed as yet another moral panic that will eventually be replaced by the next innovation in children's media. The limitations of this type of media framing have been well documented.[21] To the list of limitations I'll add that, in the specific case of children's play, dismissing concerns about the effects of screens on the times, places, and things for play as a result of continuous panic fails to explain how these concerns have thrived and furthermore how they've shaped, channelled, regulated, and transformed the experiences of childhood playtime and screen time.

Rather the response to children's television resembles a moral project. I mean to capture two main ideas with the phrase moral project. The first is that the response to the problem of television has been made up of collective and varied efforts—from individuals and institutions alike, working in different and sometimes contradictory ways —to align practices and beliefs defining what is acceptable and unacceptable within the boundaries of children's television. These efforts include things like formal recommendations from paediatricians, position statements, public service campaigns, media literacy curricula, parental control devices, and programming policies, to name a few. The second idea, which follows from the first, is that this is a normative project in that its efforts are based on value judgements about how children's television ought to be made and used. What's important is the moral project I'm describing is not made up of a set of complete, pre-existing, or overarching plans, but rather piecemeal along the way by those who claim to know the answers to television's problems and by those who accept and adopt that knowledge as truth. This is to say that the various responsive practices intended to manage the problems of children's television—and subsequently what we today accept as good screen time—are filled with contingency.

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[21] On the limitations of media panic framing see, for instance, Kirsten Drotner, "Modernity and Media Panics," in *Media Cultures: Reappraising Transnational Media*, eds. Michael Skovmand and Kim Christian Schrøder (London: Routledge, 1992), 43-62; David Buckingham and Helle Strandgaard Jensen, "Beyond 'Media Panics,'" *Journal of Children and Media* 6, no. 4 (2012): 413-429; Chas Critcher, ed., *Moral Panics and the Media* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003); Karen Leick, *Parents, Media and Panic Through the Years: Kids Those Days* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

In Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) played an important role in this moral project by defining the content and form of good children's television. As the national public broadcaster, the CBC was under pressure to ascertain for what positive effect television might be used. Many Canadians had already been watching television via American Network signals that were available to Canadians because of their proximity to American boarders, prompting considerable concern.[22] It's clear from reading the Massey Commission report on the CBC that television was seen as powerful socializing institution.[23] Accordingly, from its earliest days, CBC children's programming was guided by a shared sense of moral responsibility to use television to serve the child's needs rather than commercial interests.

The CBC's response to the problem of children's television wasn't a panic. It developed detailed policies to minimize the effects of violence in their programs, it filled its programming with references to Canadian culture, with lessons in French language learning, with pro-social messages about citizenship, with respect for persons of authority, with practical instructions about safety, and inspired children's interest in activities like reading, crafting, and playing outdoors. It employed experts on children and child development to consult on its programs, and it worked closely with its own Bureau of Audience Research to investigate the effectiveness of their programs. In this process the CBC situated itself as a proper moderator for children's use of television in Canada. The goal for the remainder of this chapter is to trace some of these practices at the CBC in its early years that helped establish norms for what counts as 'good' children's screen media engagement today.

The CBC's first policy for children's television was developed in 1954 under Fred Rainsberry who began his fourteen-year tenure as the first head of the children's department that same year. In his book, *A History of Children's Television in English Canada 1952-1986*, Rainsberry recalls the challenge of developing a policy for children's

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[22] For example see "Canadian Children Watching American Television," CBC Archives, https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/canadian-children-watching-american-television.

[23] Vincent Massey, *1949-1951 Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.* Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 2000).

programming given the widespread concern for the effects of television on children. Prior to his appointment, the policy for English Language children's programming was simply to produce programs that were "pleasing to parents and not disturbing to children."[24] The growing nature of concerns about television's effects required a more thoughtful approach. The new policy, according to Rainsberry, was not "etched in stone" but would be intended to serve as "creative guidelines for writers and producers…guidelines for critical evaluation of any idea advanced by an independent producer."[25] The policy of the children's department was not meant to define *what* to do but to define *what was possible* to do. Its policy provided the guidance and constraint for what was morally permissible within children's television.

We can get some perspective into how these guidelines operated by evaluating the programs that were developed by the children's department during that time, the first of which was the *Canadian Howdy Doody Show*. The program was licensed from NBC in 1954 just prior to Rainsberry's appointment and ran five days a week for over five years.[26] *Howdy Doody* is a useful illustration because it was the first program to be developed under Rainsberry's supervision and because it served as a vehicle for the continuing development of the children's department's policy over the course of the show's five-year run.[27] Thus it addressed many of the most significant problems television presented for children—for example, it was an American program (and although Canadian content regulations didn't formally come into effect until 1970, there was already concern about the effect of American content on Canadian values), it had a reputation for being rowdy and assertive, and it carried commercial sponsorship and was heavily merchandised.

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[24] Frederick B. Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television in English Canada, 1952-1986* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1988), 15.

[25] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 23.

[26] Frederick B. Rainsberry, "Children's Television in Canada: Program Policy in the Eighties," in *Children and Television: A Challenge for Education*, eds. Michael E. Manley-Casimir and Carmen Luke (New York: Praeger, 1987), 189.

[27] Rainsberry, "Children's Television in Canada," 190.

The children's department made a concerted effort to address these problems so that the program would better suit a Canadian audience of children eight-years-old and younger. The process of 'Canadianizing' *Howdy Doody* involved creating Canadian characters and a Canadian theme. A press release announced, "The serial will recent the exciting adventures of Howdy Doody and the story is built around a group of spirited characters some of whom are already well-known through the NBC show in the United States." But "Instead of Buffalo Bob, CBC-TV will present as emcee Timber Tom, a young Canadian forest ranger with a great fund of information on outdoor life."[28] The show also swapped the popular American Western genre for a 'Northern,' using references to Canadian wilderness and racially stereotyped characters like Princess Haida, who is "an Indian native of British Columbia and belongs to a tribe called the Thunderbird Tribe" and possesses "good" magic spells that have been passed down through generations of Witchdoctors.[29]

The emcee Timber Tom not only conveyed knowledge of Canadian folklore but also helped adapt *Howdy Doody* to the ethos of public service broadcasting, which was to inform and to educate the public. Television in Canada emerged within a publicly funded non-commercial broadcasting monopoly where entertainment was secondary to the goal of informing, educating, and uplifting Canadians. Children's television was no less, and arguably more explicitly, part of this project. The *Canadian Howdy Doody Show* took the general approach of education through entertainment. Timber Tom's role was to lead the show's characters and to "stimulate a disciplined and creative response" from the live audience of approximately thirty children referred to as the "Peanut Gallery."[30] Timber Tom provided voiceover commentary during educational nature and travel films, during which the children in the live audience could ask questions. The films were licensed from the Encyclopedia Britannica Corporation to replace the "old-time films" that were used as

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[28] Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Byron Harker fonds, MG31-D244, "CBC" vol. 4, files 4-5, press release for "Howdy Doody on CBC", 3 November 1954, 6.

[29] LAC, Byron Harker fonds, MG31-D244, "CBC" vol. 4, files 4-5, Script Policy and Character Descriptions: Canadian Howdy Doody Show, nd.

[30] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 43.

interstitials in the American version of the show. The hope for these film segments was that they would stimulate an interest in knowledge and education among young viewers through a careful balance of entertainment and education.[31]

Early on in the Canadian series, an additional character was added to support the delivery of the show's educational material. Mr. X was an inventor who could time travel and was thus a vehicle for teaching viewers about history. The script policy explains that,

> the value of Mr. X is high in both entertainment and educational value. Since he can take others with him on his journeys, it is possible for him to go back and show representative scenes of history with Doodyvillers present to comment upon the historical scene and catch the interest of the viewers. [32]

Children initially disliked the new character and so he was recast as a "kindly, wise old man." Rainsberry attributes the character's failure to the fact that

> the educational theme was too self conscious and produced an abstract and somewhat cold or forbidding character which tended to frighten rather than to entertain or to inform the children…The reaction of the children was natural, because they were resisting the authoritarian principle of learning, particularly when it appeared in a situation which they expected to be entertaining.[33]

The failure of Mr. X helped affirm the show's policy on how to educate through entertainment, according to which, the key to achieving an entertaining, yet educational approach was "pointing up not point out":

> Re: educational matter. It should be stressed that all educational matter need not be academic or moral. Thus instruction can be given in the every day business of living and indeed it is impossible for any script not to educate in this manner. e.g. A child is shown buying a ticket at a theatre wicket. Here the small child learns that he must pay to enter the theatre, that there is a specific spot where he must pay, that he must say "one please" or words to that effect, that he will hand his money through the bottom of the partition, that he will wait for his ticket, say

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[31] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 46.

[32] LAC, Byron Harker fonds, MG31-D244, "CBC" vol. 4, files 4-5, Script Policy and Character Descriptions: Canadian Howdy Doody Show, nd., 8.

[33] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 43-44.

thank you, and receive change, etc. Note that the above is education through example. It would be wise that the majority of educational matter on the HD [Howdy Doody] show be given in this manner.

Information and guidance should be pointed <u>up</u> and not pointed <u>out</u>.

  e.g. of <u>POINTING OUT</u>
        DILLY ENTERS COVERED WITH MUD
              TIMBER TOM: What happened to you Dilly?
              DILLY: oh I was crossing the street and an ole' car just came by and splashed me all over with mud.
              TIMBER TOM: Well, Dilly, you should have looked both ways before crossing the street. (TO PEANUT GALLERY) And you remember that too kids, it's always better to look both ways when <u>you</u> cross the street. Then <u>you</u> won't get splashed.

The above shows how a simple guidance fact can become lecturey.

  e.g. of <u>POINTING UP</u>
        DILLY ENTERS COVERED WITH MUD
              TIMBER TOM: What happened to you Dilly?
              DILLY: oh I was crossing the street and an ole' car just came by and splashed me all over with mud.
              TIMBER TOM: Well just goes to show you, you should have looked both ways, huh?
              DILLY: Guess so. Now I won't be able to go to Cap'n Scuttlebutt's birthday party.
              TIMBER TOM: Guess not. Don't worry though, we'll have fun right here!

Note that the same information and cause and effect is given without reverting to the "teacherish" lecture.

      Academic education, such as historical and geographical acts, should be worked out into the plot and it should contribute to the plot's development.

      e.g. Mr. X takes Dilly and Mr. Bluster back to the time of the Frontenac in Canadian History. The message that they want to find out about is hidden in Frontenac's powder horn.

Just this situation will produce a wealth of educational historical interest. But point it up and <u>don't point it out.</u>[34]

The only instances where the "didactic element" was admitted into the script was in teaching traffic safety, which became an integral part of the show. In partnership with the Canadian Highway Safety Conference, the CBC produced a Howdy Doody themed activity booklet to instruct children on the rules of traffic safety called "Follow the Rule with Howdy Doody and the Safety Clubbers." Using the show's characters, humorous episodes, colouring sheets, and cut-out activities children were instructed to follow "Constable Traffy's" five rules: to look both ways before crossing the street, to walk not run, to stay away from parked cars, to play in safe places, and to walk facing traffic when sidewalks were unavailable.[35] Still Rainsberry maintained the view that if the child's response to these lessons was spontaneous, arising out of an entertaining script, that "a more basic foundation for moral conduct is being established than can be achieved by didactic indoctrination."[36]

The eagerness to establish a certain continuity between the child's experience of television and the experience of school is also reflected in the script policy's reference to appropriate language, narrative, story arc, and subject matter. The first item listed in the policy states that, "mistakes in grammar should not be allowed by any character in the script." Character accents were permitted, as in the case of Cap'n Scuttlebutt whose "language can be liberally interspersed with the idioms of the sea"; Princess Haida on the other hand, "does not speak in the grunting basic English usually ascribed to the North American Indian." The policy also stipulates that the vocabulary should be appropriate to the six to seven-year-old age and that "baby talk, rhyming lines, code languages, substitute profanity (ex. "darn it") be avoided."[37] In addition to vocabulary, the script

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[34] LAC, Byron Harker fonds, MG31-D244, "CBC" vol. 4, files 4-5, Script Policy and Character Descriptions: Canadian Howdy Doody Show, nd., 3.

[35] LAC, Byron Harker fonds, MG31-D244, "CBC" vol. 4, file 15, Follow the Rule Booklet, nd.

[36] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 46.

[37] LAC, Byron Harker fonds, MG31-D244, "CBC" vol. 4, files 4-5, Script Policy and Character Descriptions: Canadian Howdy Doody Show, nd., 1.

policy outlines the appropriate use of narrative, story arc, subjects to be avoided (such as gambling or liquor), the use of supernatural powers that children might fear in real life, and physical violence or reference to violence, which was one of the top concerns about television's influence in children's behaviour.

The CBC defined good television not only by the nature of its content but also by the nature of its form. The aesthetic qualities of good television were particularly significant to managing the negative influence of television content, especially violence, on children's behaviour. It's quite possible that violence has been the most enduring concern about television. In 1961 Wilbur Shram et al. reported that in the span of 100 hours of programs from the period of 4pm-9pm (the so-called "children's hours" of television) there were

> 12 murders, 16 major gun fights, 21 persons shot, 21 other violent incidents with guns, 15 fist fights, 15 incidents in which one person slugged another, an attempted murder with a pitchfork, two stranglings, one stabbing in tieback with a butcher knife, three successful suicides (and one unsuccessful suicide), four people pushed or falling off cliffs, two cars running over a cliff, two attempts made to run over persons with automobiles, a raving psychotic loose in an airliner, two mob scenes (in one the wrong man is hanged), a horse grinding a man under its hooves, two robberies, a woman killed by falling from a train, a tidal wave, an earthquake, a hired killer stalking his victim, and, finally, one guillotining.[38]

The CBC's approach to managing the effect of violent programs involved controlling the form or aesthetic quality of the program as much as by controlling content.

Rainsberry tells the story of how, early in his role as head of the children's department, he and Joy Simon, who was a specialist in early childhood education, traveled to speak with parent groups in Toronto and throughout parts of Canada to answer questions and respond to concerns about the effects of television. Parents were especially anxious about the effects of violence in "cowboy serials." Rainsberry and Simon focused parents' attention away from the potentially harmful effects of program content alone and toward

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[38] Schram, Lyle, and Parker, *Television in the Lives of Our Children*, 2-3.

the techniques of television production. Rainsberry explained to parents that, while there may be "guns and chases," children were not frightened by the highly predictable plots of cowboy serials where "good always won out in the end." He contrasted this with the popular program about a dog called *Lassie*, which carried a less straightforward plot with tension and anxiety and could, according to Rainsberry, be more frightening for children.[39]

This emphasis on production technique eventually became the primary focus of the CBC's policy on violence. By 1961 all of CBC's programming, not just its children's shows were subject to the broadcaster's general policy on violence. The policy included an itemized list designed to minimize any negative effect of violence or aggression, particularly on children who may be watching. It was intended to be used by all CBC staff responsible for selecting, purchasing, commissioning, producing, editing, and/or scheduling programs for young audiences. According to the policy, staff were also "expected to inform themselves about the available experimental evidence linking television and violence in a causal relationship, and to keep up to date with the literature on the subject."[40]

Claims to causal knowledge about the effect of television-violence on children informed a significant part of CBC's policy on children's programs. The section of the policy for children's programs is prefaced by a description of what is known about the effect of television violence on children. The section begins with a statement about the CBC's approach to children's programs which says, "the CBC has tried to produce programs and to select films whose content and treatment are consistent with what is known about the creative growth and development of North American children." The section then quotes two studies that found it's not violence itself but how violence is depicted that's the problem for children. One of these studies was Hilde Himmelweit's 1959 report on "The Effects of Television on Children" in which she argues,

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[39] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 15-16.

[40] LAC, CBC fonds RG41-B-I-3, vol 806, file TI-3-1-2, "Programming Policy and Procedures: Violence in Television," 7 July 1969, 2.

It is not so much the programme content, but the camera play that causes it. The moment you show children close-ups of emotional expressions of anxiety and tension…then the child responds to this rather than the number of dead or injured.[41]

Subscribing to this view, the CBC's policy on violence gave members of production and post-production—for example, writers, producers, directors, cinematographers, editors, and sound designers—guidance on how to select and present violent content so as to dampen or avoid its effect. For example, "avoid lingering close-ups of faces in pain"; "Avoid scenes in which tension is prolonged without relief. Heavy music, dead silence, and ticking clocks enhance tension as do scenes shot in shadow or half light. Watch for cumulative tension-building effects, and avoid sudden dramatic noises after a long period of silence"; "Edit out sequences of ugly or frightening faces emerging from shadow to close-up light"; and "Avoid weapons that are easily obtainable by children. These include clubs, razors, knives, bottles, rocks. Avoid hanging scenes, trip wires, booby-traps, things which children can easily imitate. Guns and swords are acceptable if the camera shot is long and there are not multiple intercut close-up."[42]

Howdy Doody illustrates the CBC's general education-through-entertainment approach to children's programming, but it is worth noting that the CBC had a longstanding tradition of educational broadcasting and used its available, if at times scarce, resources to produce programming that it believed would enlighten while entertaining the audience, as per its public mandate. For example, one of the earliest ways the CBC achieved this mandate was through its national school radio broadcasts. From 1942 to 1960, the CBC produced educational radio broadcasts for intermediate to senior elementary and junior high school classroom use across Canada in co-operation with a National Advisory Council made up of representatives of each provincial department of education, the Canadian Teacher's Federation, the Canadian Education Association, the Canadian Home

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[41] LAC, CBC fonds RG41-B-I-3, vol 806, file TI-3-1-2, "Programming Policy and Procedures: Violence in Television," 7 July 1969, 4.

[42] LAC, CBC fonds RG41-B-I-3, vol 806, file TI-3-1-2, "Programming Policy and Procedures: Violence in Television," 7 July 1969, 4-5.

and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, the Canadian School Trustee's Association and the Conference of Canadian Universities.[43] School broadcasts provided an opportunity to strengthen Canadian unity and to foster a strong sense of civic responsibility among youth. Programming over the years covered geography, history, current events, art, music, literature, science, and political and social science. With the introduction of television in the early 1950s, both the public and Canadian government began looking to the CBC to investigate the potential of television in school broadcasting, resulting in a national study to determine how educators might best utilize television in the classroom.[44]

Although responsibility for educational television in Canada was eventually handed over to the provinces, The CBC maintained its reputation as a proponent of the educational uses of television through its program policy for all young audiences. *Howdy Doody* was the earliest example of this, but perhaps the clearest examples are in the case of its preschool programs. Careful emphasis was placed on creating a preschool program policy that would allow, in Rainsberry's words,

> the playful element to be the dominant factor, avoiding the sharp separation of entertainment in the home from the formal experience of education itself. At the same time, nothing that was presented for children for informal viewing should be inconsistent with the experience they were having in school.[45]

Thus programming for the very young and preschool-aged child pursued a distinctly educational approach, first in radio then in television. *Kindergarten of the Air*, which began as thirteen-week experimental radio series funded by the Junior League in the winter of 1947-48, was designed with the goal of providing young children the necessary preparation for life in school.

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[43] DMC, "Can TV Link Home and School," 1954, 3.

[44] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41-A-V-2, vol 861, file PG-4-2-1, pt. 1, memo from Supervisor, School Broadcasts to Director of Programs, 4 February 1954.

[45] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 164.

CBC took over full responsibility of *Kindergarten of the Air* the following year, which became a regular fifteen-minute program on CBC Radio Monday through Friday from 1948 until 1961. The program's objective was detailed in the 1948-49 edition of the national teachers' manual, *Young Canada Listens*:

> All over the country there are homes containing children who are not yet ready, or able, to go to school. 'Kindergarten of the Air' is designed to meet the needs of these children by providing them with pre-school training in games, songs and useful activities.[46]

At the time, kindergartens were established in some parts of Canada while in other areas, particularly rural areas, they were completely absent. The CBC imagined television as a tool for reaching these underserved populations. The programs were planned with the advice of kindergarten experts and representatives of the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, the Junior League, and the Federation of Women's Institutes, and scripts were prepared throughout the years by a mix of radio performers, professionals, and experts in kindergarten instruction.[47] The segments included elements like physical exercises, traditional or folk songs, story-time, and play activities, often calling upon the co-operation of parents. Children were always given suggestions for indoor or outdoor activities of a constructive nature—such as collecting specimens of leaves and flowers or making themselves useful around the house. In 1961 *Kindergarten of the Air* was superseded by a new daily radio pre-school programme called *Playroom*, which was intended "to serve directly the cause of development in the very young, ranging from age three to age five."[48]

In 1957, the National Advisory Council adopted a recommendation made by the Executive Committee of the Canadian Home and School Federation urging the CBC to provide a televised educational kindergarten program following the same principles as *Kindergarten of the Air*. The result was *Nursery School Time,* a fifteen-minute daily

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[46] Richard S. Lambert, *School Broadcasting in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1963), 183-84.

[47] Lambert, *School Broadcasting in Canada,* 183.

[48] Lambert, 186.

program "to assist in the development of young children through programmes that are both educational and entertaining" and ran from 1958 until 1963.[49] The same techniques were used again in *Chez Hélène*, another daily 15-minute telecast that first aired in 1958, designed "to meet an urgent need in Canada to increase bilingualism among both its french-speaking and its English-speaking population."[50]

Mr. Dressup and *The Friendly Giant* are the CBC's best remembered and longest running preschool programs, often compared in style, pace, and approach to *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*. Both programs also similarly relied on the personalities of the adult host and dialogue with puppets to "evoke meaningful responses from children."[51] *Mr. Dressup*, starring Ernie Coombs, ran for eighteen years and was considered the CBC's strongest chance at competing with the popularity of the American preschool television phenomenon *Sesame Street* since it dealt with a range of emotional and social problems that *Sesame Street* didn't deal with.[52] *The Friendly Giant*, starring Bob Homme, ran for over twenty-five years and although it wasn't strictly speaking "educational," Rainsberry describes the program as nevertheless committed to the growth and development of two to six-year-old children, for which Homme won numerous awards including the Order of Canada in 1998 for his extraordinary contribution to the nation.[53]

Because children's television content wasn't and still isn't overseen by any regulatory body in Canada, the CBC was in many ways responsible for setting the bar for 'good' children's programming.[54] The public broadcaster acted as the proper moderator for children's television, playing a significant role in establishing voluntary norms or a kind

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[49] Lambert, 202.

[50] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 254.

[51] Rainsberry, 162.

[52] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41-B-1-5, vol. 808, file 181, memo from Don Elder to Alan Tasker, 16 February 1973.

[53] Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television,* 168.

[54] With the exceptions of violence and advertising, the Canadian Radio Telecommunication Commission (CRTC), the regulatory body responsible for Canadian Broadcasting, is not involved in issues related to the content of children's programming on television. Canadians can direct complaints about the CBC's children's content to the CRTC, but the content of their programming is self-regulated, much like private broadcasters. For more on regulating children's television in Canada see André Caron and Ronald I. Cohen, *Regulating Screens: Issues in Broadcasting and Internet Governance for Children* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

of 'moral code' according to which it conducted the operations of the children's department and encouraged others to do the same both nationally and internationally. For instance, Rainsberry reported the success of the first international seminar on children's television held in Boston in 1958, which was a cooperative effort between the Agoos Foundation for Character Education, The National Association of Educational Broadcasters, the Ford Foundation, the Lowell Institute Co-operative Broadcasting Council, Boston University, and the CBC. Rainsberry praised the expertise of the Canadian attendees, particularly from the CBC, who he felt provided a bridge between the perspectives of the commercial and educational broadcasters. The CBC hosted and participated in numerous television workshops and seminars in Canada as well. From these conferences and workshops, it's evident that the CBC's believed 'good' television was publicly oriented—although public broadcasters contributed the minority of available children's programs, they made up the majority of what the CBC considered 'good' programs.

During his time at the CBC, Rainsberry frequently published his ideas on good children's television in journals, newspapers, bulletins, and pamphlets intended for a wide range of readers including psychologists, educators, television producers, politicians, religious organizations, and parent groups. After his appointment as National Supervisor of Children's Programs in 1958, Rainsberry published an article in *Child Study* (the journal of the Child Study Association of America) titled, "Social responsibility and the use of television for children." The article is an example of how the subject of children's television was approached at the CBC, which was first and foremost as a moral responsibility. Rainsberry begins, "Good programming for children demands responsible broadcasters, thoughtful parents and, above all, a recovery of basic human values." He addresses the concern about television's influence, stating that it's wrong to be satisfied with knowing that a program such as a cowboy film doesn't cause juvenile delinquency: "the broadcaster has a responsibility—as great as the school's responsibility—to foster the creative growth and development of the child."[55] Neutrality wasn't an option,

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[55] DMC, Frederick B. Rainsberry, "Social Responsibility and the Use of Television for Children," nd, 19.

children's television required a positive approach. Rainsberry's positive approach was education-through-entertainment: "A good children's program is built on the principle that there is an unbroken continuity between learning and entertainment,"[56] a view evident in the CBC's approach to programming.

The CBC not only imagined itself as responsible for contributing to the standard for good children's television programming but it was also held accountable for those standards by members of the public. The Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation kept an interested watch on what the CBC was doing with children's television. In May 1960, it passed a resolution to urge the CBC, as the agent of the Board of Broadcast Governors of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation "to undertake comprehensive research into the effect of television upon the minds and personalities of boys and girls." Citing Lazarsfeld's 1955 address on the need for research on the effects of television, the Federation argued that the research already conducted by the CBC wasn't satisfactory and neither was "the short-term, uncoordinated research of universities and various scholars."[57] In the following chapter, we'll see that the Federation wasn't alone in its belief in the potential for television to shape, manipulate, and control the child (for better or worse), a belief that contributed to the constant drive for higher quality television. Despite all the work the CBC was doing to bring good television programming to Canadians, quality programming demanded better evidence, the search for which I'll argue was crucial to the linking-up of experts in television effects research and experts on children's play and development, producing the conditions for play to become a measure and tool for managing the problem of screens.

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[56] DMC, Frederick B. Rainsberry, "Social Responsibility and the Use of Television for Children," nd, 21.
[57] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41-A-V-2, vol 861, file PG-4-2-1, pt. 2, "Resolution-Television Research," May 1960, 1.

4

Measurement

Quality Screen Time, a Scientific Approach

The problem of television wasn't simply resolved by efforts to produce and promote 'good' children's programs. Concerns about television's effect on children in North America actually appear to have escalated during the 1960s. In 1961 FCC chairman Newton Minow made his famous speech titled "Television and the Public Interest," calling television a "vast wasteland." The same year, a team of Stanford researchers published *Television in the Lives of Our Children*, the day's most authoritative study of children and television, revealing a number of worrying statistics and anecdotal evidence to confirm television's shortcomings.[1] Concerns about the impact of television on Canadian children were similarly mounting. By 1964 the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation had already been pressuring the Board of Broadcast Governors and the CBC for more than three years (to no avail) to dedicate at least one-tenth of its public funding on research to determine the distinct impact of television on Canadian children.[2] The Federation sent a letter to every member of parliament expressing disappointment that,

> The CBC has some $70 million of public money each year to operate a service that has the power to affect for good or ill, the behaviour, beliefs, morals and ambitions of Canadian children. Yet they say they are not able to spend a cent of that money to find out what, in fact, is resulting.[3]

Despite commending the CBC for "the excellence of several programs," the letter emphasized the yet untold dangers presented to children by mass television

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[1] Wilbur Schram, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B. Parker, *Television in the Lives of Our Children* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971).

[2] Library and Archives Canada (LAC), CBC fonds, RG41-A-V-2, vol. 861, file PG-4-2-1, pt. 2, "Resolution-Television Research," May 1960, 1.

[3] Duncan Memorial Collection (DMC), press release from the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, 20 January 1964.

consumption.[4] The need for higher quality children's television remained a central problem that could not be solved by feelings of moral responsibility or by public mandates to produce 'good' children's television alone.

In the previous chapter, I argued that underlying the demand for causal knowledge about television is a depth knowledge—the belief that knowledge about television's effects is possible through the persistent application of better and more research—hence, causes are routes to knowledge in that they demand careful study. Measurement is another route to knowledge related to cause insofar as measurements are useful, essential even, for the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of a cause.[5] In this chapter I suggest part of the answer to how play became a strategy for managing the problems and possibilities of screen time lies in the demand for new scientific measurements or ways of knowing—that is to say new mechanisms for producing and making sense of knowledge about children and television. I'll show how the search for causal knowledge about television led to the use of play as a tool for the measurement of—but also importantly for mitigating the problems and maximizing the possibilities of—the effects of screens.

Without doubt, the most famous attempt to solve the problem of quality children's television anywhere and at any time was *Sesame Street.* In her proposal to the Carnegie Corporation on May 13, 1966, Joan Ganz Cooney requested funding to conduct a fourteen-week feasibility study to investigate ways of producing and broadcasting "high-quality educational programming"[6] for all preschool children, but for "disadvantaged" children in particular—those living in inner cities, usually poor, and usually Black or Spanish-speaking.[7] Studies of children and television frequently reported that children in lower socio-economic settings were the heaviest viewers of television. This fact

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[4] DMC, press release from the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, 20 January 1964.

[5] Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 96.

[6] Richard M. Polsky, *Getting to Sesame Street: Origins of the Children's Television Workshop* (New York, Praeger, 1974), 8.

[7] Gerald S. Lesser, *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street* (New York: Random House, 1974), 12.

combined with the economy of televised teaching (the larger the audience, the lower the educational cost per child relative to classroom initiatives) meant television was an attractive answer to the education gap.[8] *Sesame Street* would meet its target demographic where they already were: watching television. The goal however was to channel television viewing toward important forms of cognitive development that would prepare "disadvantaged" children for school, the eventual outcome of which was the creation of The Children's Television Workshop (CTW). After three years of research, planning, and preparation, the hour-long daily television show, *Sesame Street*, premiered in the United States on November 10, 1969.

  Sesame Street quickly reached Canadian audiences, officially airing on CBC in 1970. The show's popularity with Canadians became evident when rumours circulated about the possibility of its not being renewed by CBC for the 1971-72 season. The clearest explanation for dropping *Sesame Street* was that the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) new Canadian content regulations were coming into full effect, imposing a 40% limit on broadcasting foreign content with no more than 30% from any single country. The rumours incited protest from educational authorities and parents primarily from Alberta where *Sesame Street* was only available via the private CBC affiliate CHCT-TV, which had no incentive to use its foreign content limit on a children's show that generated zero advertising revenue. The CBC received passionate letters of support for *Sesame Street* from numerous parents who expressed sentiments like, "Sesame Street has proved an amazing success. I have a two-year-old son who is learning to talk and count at the same time";[9] The National Council of Jewish Women of Canada had bumper stickers printed with S.O.S, which stood for "save our Sesame"; and The Hudson's Bay Company ran a week-long contest to solicit public opinion on whether or not *Sesame Street* should be continued on Calgary television and

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[8] Edward L. Palmer and Shalom M. Fisch, "Beginnings of Sesame Street Research," in *G is for Growing,* eds. Shalom M. Fisch and Rosemarie T. Truglio (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6.

[9] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41 vol. 838, file 265, pt. 1, Letter from I. Murray Phillips to Knowlton Knash, 1 March 1971.

why. The winning entry, submitted by Florence Charlton who ran Highland Day Nursery, speaks to the impression made by *Sesame Street's* educational approach:

> As I write this, I can see the backs of 30 little heads. However, the owners of these 30 heads are not aware that I am writing about them, as they are watching, listening and virtually living on Sesame Street. They are singing with Susan repeating their ABC's, counting to 10; in general, beginning their education and having fun.[10]

The remaining six hundred contest entries were forwarded to the CRTC,[11] which had already received more than three hundred letters independently from residents of the Calgary area about *Sesame Street,* urging them to put the needs of Canadian children above the need for Canadian content.[12]

The Calgary protests are, as Michael Hayday describes, revealing of the ongoing struggle for Canadians to prioritize Canadian content regulation.[13] However, the protests didn't change the CRTC's decision on Canadian Content regulation, nor did they change the fact that *Sesame Street* would count against the broadcaster's US content limit. And yet, the CBC decided to renew *Sesame Street* for the 1971-72 season anyway at its own expense and at the expense of its own original content. The decision to renew *Sesame Street* had little to do with content regulation. Neither did it have to do directly with pleasing Calgary mothers; the Calgary protests were a significant inciting development, but they weren't exactly the reason why the CBC decided to renew *Sesame Street* for the 1971-72 season. The CBC's rational for renewing the program was to keep its place in Canada as the provider of quality children's programs. *Sesame Street* had redefined the meaning of quality television by making television a legitimate means for serving children's needs, and the public broadcaster was invested in maintaining its monopoly over serving those needs.

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[10] "Sesame Contest has a Winner," *The Albertan* (12 February 1971).

[11] "Bob Shields on TV," *The Calgary Herald* (11 February 1971).

[12] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41 vol. 838, file 265, pt. 1, Letter from Robert W. Nichols to Barry MacDonald , 19 January 1971.

[13] Matthew Hayday, "Brought To You by the Letters C, R, T, and C: *Sesame Street* and Canadian Nationalism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 27, no. 1 (2016): 95–137.

The CBC's monopoly over educational television in Canada had already been challenged by the CRTC's decision not to grant the CBC the responsibility for Educational Television in Canada, resulting in competition for the first time from new provincial broadcasters like Television Ontario (TVO), which was in the process of developing a new experimental educational program called *Polka Dot Door*. Dan McCarthy, then head of the CBC children's department, wrote in a memo:

> [TVO] are beginning to make like they intend to challenge our heretofore monopoly on <u>quality</u> programming for the pre-school age child………..with the exception of the unfortunately very rare presence on the occasional private station of a locally-produced program which is sensitive and has some respect for its childhood audience, there is a tragic wasteland for children beyond the Corporation……. "Romper Room", syndicated on many CTV affiliates is so bad that Time Magazine, with thorough-going logic was able to pillory it along with assorted other American network offerings, ("Misterogers Neighbourhood" excepted) when it did its excellent article on the unique "Sesame Street."[14]

Renewing *Sesame Street* was important to the CBC's reputation as the leading provider of quality children's programming in Canada. The CBC knew that if they didn't act fast in its negotiations with the CTW, no matter the financial cost, that it would lose *Sesame Street* to a competing network.[15]

New York Times bestselling writer Malcolm Gladwell calls Sesame Street a tipping point: "that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behaviour crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire."[16] The protests were an early indication that *Sesame Street* was spreading, signalling to the CBC that a "new era" in quality children's programming had begun. Looking ahead into the next five years of children's television, a CBC staff member wrote in an internal memo dated September 1971,

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[14] LAC, CBC fonds RG41-B-I-3, vol 962, file TI-3-1-2, Memo from Dan McCarthy to J. Angeloff, 8 December 1970.

[15] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41 vol. 838, file 265, pt. 1, Memo from E.S. Hallman to Asstistant General Manager, ESD, 28 January 1971.

[16] Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Little, Brown and Company, New York, 2000).

We should attempt to be both the major producing organization in this new era (not obviously in money terms, but in presentation control) and a prime mover in this eminently "good-work." FCC Chairman, Dean Burch, has declared that, "the "chewing gum for the eye" approach is dead. "One way or another", the issue of crass commercialization and quality on children's programming, "…will be resolved, and soon." (The climate is very right!).[17]

The CTW transformed the public service ethos that television *should* serve the child's needs into the belief that television legitimately *could* serve the child's needs, given the appropriate conditions and correct training. The fact that in 2019 *Sesame Street* celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and continues to be widely referenced in screen time recommendations as the gold standard of quality children's programming suggests that there is yet something we can learn from *Sesame Street* about our current efforts to mitigate the problems and maximize the potentials of screen time.

The impression one may get from the vast writing on the innovations of *Sesame Street* is that the CTW redeemed children's television from a vast wasteland and turned it into fertile ground for education and child development in just a matter of years. The impact the CTW had on the CBC and on Canadian children's television generally was owing not to the fact that it produced something radically different but to the fact that what it produced aligned with the CBC's already twenty-year history of children's programming. Stimulating educational broadcasting has been from the outset one of the main functions of broadcasting in Canada. In its 1929 report, the Royal Commission on Broadcasting, known as the Aird Commission, stated the need for a public broadcaster in Canada and that, in order to serve the public, "it needed to be an instrument of education." The report specified that education should be conceived of as both entertaining and informative.[18] In chapter four I describe the way the CBC applied this education-through-entertainment approach to children's radio first in the 1930s and then to television in the 1950s and 1960s.

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[17] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41 vol. 838, file 265, pt. pt2, "1975 and a Little of 'That'……", nd.

[18] John Aird, *Report of the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting* (Ottawa, Ont: F.A. Acland, 1929).

The "new era" in quality television marked by the CTW, then, wasn't simply defined by the use of television to teach preschoolers. The CTW's approach was distinguished by the way it bridged a gap between experts in child development and experts in television production. Reflecting on *Sesame Street* in the mid-1970s, Ganz Cooney wrote,

> …from the beginning the planners of the project, insisted that the show be designed not merely as a broadcast series (stamped with the inevitable imprimatur of some "name" individual or institution in early childhood education) but as an experimental research project that would bring together educational advisors, researchers, and television producers as equal partners.[19]

The experiment was not to just to see if television could have a positive effect on children's education—in Ganz's words, "there was nothing very radical, after all, about using various popular television techniques to try to teach preschoolers some basic cognitive skills like recognition of letters and simple counting"[20]—the thing that was uniquely experimental about *Sesame Street* was that, "to an unprecedented degree, the creative, educational and research components were to function as inseparable parts of the whole," which had not been done before.

Edward Palmer, the first director of research for *Sesame Street*, writes that the three defining features of the *Sesame Street* experiment were 1) its narrowly focused and expertly planned educational curriculum 2) its attempt to forge the most effective possible methods of televised teaching and 3) its accountability to bring about rigorously measured educational results.[21] More broadly, the project developed by the CTW can be summarized into three overlapping perspectives:

Expertly Planned Curriculum—Although psychologists had been researching the causal effects of television for more than a decade and were already among the types of experts being consulted on the content for children's programs, even at the CBC, the CTW was the first to formally and rigorously employ the insights and methods of

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[19] Joan Ganz Cooney, "Forward," in Gerald S. Lesser, *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street* (New York: Random House, 1974), xv-xvi.

[20] Joan Ganz Cooney, "Forward," xv.

[21] Palmer and Fisch, "Beginnings of Sesame Street Research," 7.

psychology in the development of a detailed educational curriculum for a children's program. The majority of the instructional goals for *Sesame Street* were developed during five, three-day-long seminars known as the Summer Seminars, held in 1969 with individually selected experts in the fields of education, psychology, and television production.[22] The primary instructional goals fell under three categories: symbolic representation ("The child can recognize such basic symbols as letters, numbers, and geometric forms, and perform rudimentary operations with these symbols"); cognitive process ("The child can deal with objects and events in terms of certain concepts of order, classification, and relationship; he can apply certain basic reasoning skills; and he possesses certain attitudes conducive to effective inquiry and problem solving"); and the social environment ("The child can identify himself and other familiar individuals in terms of role defining characteristics. He is familiar with forms and functions of institutions which he may encounter. He comes to see situations from more than one point of view, begins to see the necessity for certain social rules, particularly those insuring justice and fair play").[23] Each category included a concrete set of goals that were detailed and circulated to CTW staff in a document titled "The Instructional Goals of the Children's Television Workshop" and served as a reference guide for producers, researchers, and writers.

Methods of Televised Teaching—Probably the most controversial and widely criticized feature of the CTW's approach to televised teaching was its insistence that, in order for television to have an educational effect, it needed to hold the child's attention.[24] The CTW's education-through-entertainment approach differed from the CBC's in that it blended the objectives of public service broadcasting with the look and feel of commercial entertainment. Ganz Cooney reportedly observed that, "children are conditioned to expect pow! wham! fast-action thrillers from television and certainly highly visual, slickly and expensively produced material."[25] To hold the child's attention

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[22] Polsky, *Getting to Sesame Street,* 85.

[23] Polsky, 85-87.

[24] Polsky, 6.

[25] Polsky, 11.

then, the CTW applied the techniques of commercial entertainment, including the actual commercials themselves, to the style and format of *Sesame Street,* giving the show its characteristic fast pace and repetitive format.

Measured Educational Results—The really crucial part of the CTW's experiment was its use of measurements—formative and summative research—to determine the effectiveness of both *Sesame Street's* curriculum and methods of teaching. The research department of the CTW existed exactly for this purpose. The research advisory committee for *Sesame Street* included psychologist Jerome Kagen from Harvard, sociologist James Coleman from Johns Hopkins, behavioural specialist Francis Mechaner from the Universal Education Corporation, and measurement specialist Samuel Messick from the Educational Testing Service. The CTW didn't just consult with these experts on *Sesame Street*, they integrated them with experts on children's television production to create an entirely new type of expertise. In Cooney's words,

> we're talking about a marriage—not researchers to work as consultants to producers…we were by then talking about a product that would come out of a marriage—living together, dealing together, drinking together, eating together until they would all absolutely understand what the product looked like.[26]

The closeness of these distinct experts is credited for the coherent creative vision and educational curriculum for *Sesame Street.* But more importantly, the marriage of distinct groups of experts came to define the CTW as a new kind of expert authority on televised methods of teaching.

In preparation for season one, the research department conducted eighteenth months of formative research to generate empirical evidence about the effectiveness of specific elements of S*esame Street* prior to going to air.[27] During this phase, each piece of programming was tested on preschoolers at selected New York City daycare centres to

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[26] Shalom M. Fisch and Lewis Bernstein, "Formative Research Revealed: Methodological and Process Issues in Formative Research," in *G is for Growing,* eds. Shalom M. Fisch and Rosemarie T. Truglio (New York: Routledge, 2011), 52.

[27] Thomas D. Cook et al. *Sesame Street Revisited* (New York, Russell Sage, 1975), 46.

see if they were effective at holding their attention and teaching them.[28] Because no one in television had yet undertaken research of this kind, the CTW had to develop its own methods of measurement. For example, they developed a "distractor" device to measure the amount of time the child's eyes were looking at the television screen. Another method of measurement involved a child watching a segment of the program and then re-watching the same segment a second time with the volume off, during which the child was asked to narrate what is happening in order to measure how much of the segment the child absorbed and retained. As a final measure, five months before broadcasting nationally, five episode prototypes were aired in Philadelphia and the reactions of a preselected group of three-, four-, and five-year-olds were studied and final program adjustments were made.[29]

Through its formative research, the CTW operated openly under the assumption that television has causal effects, which made it possible for them to pursue lines of research that were unlikely at the CBC. For example, formative research was about testing appeal as much as it was about testing educational outcomes; if a child wasn't interested in the program, the argument was that they wouldn't absorb information from it. Questions about optimizing the commercial and mass media effects of television to appeal to children weren't possible within the moral register of the CBC's children's television department, where the goal was largely to minimize television's effects. The question of appeal often ran contrary to the cultural and public service objectives of the Canadian public broadcaster on the whole.[30] When the CBC did concern itself with the appeal of its children's programs, it depended on the quantitative measurements of audience ratings to determine audience size—a program with a large audience was interpreted as having high appeal. Qualitative information about the appeal of children's programs was limited to lettermail from viewers and later on to small surveys and questionnaires with school-age

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[28] Polsky, *Getting to Sesame Street,* 90.

[29] Polsky, 90.

[30] Ross A. Eaman, *Channels of Influence: CBC Audience Research and the Canadian Public* (University of Toronto Press, 1994), 113.

children, parents, and teachers on children's television viewing habits and preferences,[31] both falling under what the CTW referred to as summative research.

Summative research, as the name suggests, takes place some time after viewing has occurred. The CTW's summative research was conducted by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, NJ and directed by psychologist Samuel Ball from Columbia University. Following the first season of *Sesame Street,* the Educational Testing Service produced a four hundred-page report on its findings. The researchers sought to measure the program's success by the degree to which it taught all preschoolers, but especially those considered "disadvantaged," the skills listed in the original goals statement. The study involved pre-testing 1124 American preschoolers in October 1969 prior to *Sesame Street* going on the air, 1017 of whom were then post-tested at the end of the season in May 1970. Both pre-tests and post-tests included eight tests on body parts, letters, forms, numbers, sorting skills, relational terms, classification skills, and puzzles. Briefly, the report concluded that "the impact in most goal areas was statistically significant. Children who viewed 'Sesame Street' achieved many of the stated goals in letters, numbers, and forms, and they gained appreciably in their skill in sorting and classifying."[32] The researchers correlated *Sesame Street's* success with three variables: quantity of viewing, viewing environment, and class differences. They concluded that children who watched *Sesame Street* showed greater gains in knowledge than non-viewers, that there was no advantage to watching *Sesame Street* in a daycare vs. home setting, and that *Sesame Street* benefited children in all socio-economic situations, but that children learned more if the program was viewed with a mother.[33]

The CTW presented the findings of its summative research at academic conferences in order to actively engage a wider research community. In 1971, for example, it presented a paper titled, "Sesame Street summative research: some implications for education and child development" for the American Psychological Association, the largest scientific and

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[31] DMC, "Relations with the Children's Department," Memo from E.F. Wasserman to J.A. Patton, 31 January 1955.

[32] Polsky, *Getting to Sesame Street,* 93.

[33] Polsky, 93.

professional organization of psychologists in the United States.[34] Along with sharing the results of its research widely, the CTW invited secondary analyses of its data and external review. It's hardly surprising that, to date, *Sesame Street* has generated more than a thousand research studies, significantly more research than any other children's television show.[35]

The CTW's approach was first and foremost defined by the linking-up of experts in the science of development with experts in children's television production. And while it may have been a 'marriage of equality,' the CTW's educational model stood out from similar efforts, like the CBC's, I argue, because its claim to causal knowledge about the educational effects of television was produced using the methods of the developmental sciences. Public broadcasters, like the CBC, were driven by a moral responsibility to make 'good' television; the CTW's approach, on the other hand, was driven by newly created expert knowledge and scientific research methods. The long-term legacy of the CTW is that it shifted the responsibility of solving the problem of quality children's television from the intuition of television creators, writers, producers, and performers toward experts in the sciences of child development. In the introduction to *Children and Television*, Ganz Cooney points out that whereas

> producers believe, or always had until CTW came along, in intuition, taste and experience as the means to successful shows. And luck, always luck, as the *sin qua non* of a big hit…we were suggesting that luck not be allowed to rule with quite such an arbitrary hand—that its role be cut down, however slightly (though we hoped it would be more than slightly), by something very much akin to science.[36]

Gerald Lesser, chair of the CTW's Program Advisory Committee, similarly observed at the time that, "attempting to use television to teach young children is based on so little

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[34] Children's Television Workshop, "CTW Research Bibliography: Research Papers Relating to the Children's Television Workshop," 1968-1976.

[35] Jeanette Steemers, *Creating Preschool Television: A Story of Commerce, Creativity and Curriculum* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

[36] Joan Ganz Cooney, "Forward," xvi.

real evidence that it is almost purely an act of faith."[37] Thus the *Sesame Street* experiment emerged out of the desire for empirical evidence about the effects of television. Out of the experiment, the CTW created a new system of knowledge production for making the unknown effects of television on the child knowable, contributing to a new regime of truth—what CBC called a "new era"—which defined, among other things, who it is that can speak truthfully about children and television, which discourses are accepted as truth, and the mechanisms through which the truth about children and television can be judged.

The empirical approach of the CTW didn't entirely replace the CBC's moral approach to children's programming, nor was the moral approach completely absent in the scientific approach formulated by the CTW—for one thing, the CTW began from an undeniably moral and normative impulse to do 'good,' to produce quality children's programming and to address the national achievement gap by preparing "disadvantaged" children for school. However, the status of knowledge produced by the CTW via systematic research, where empirical information is gathered through scientific methods, is fundamentally different from the subjectively produced knowledge used by the CBC in the creation of its children's programming. Unlike the intuition of a television producer, parent, or teacher, the formative and summative research produced by the CTW became a persuasive source of knowledge because it is linked with scientific truth, one of the most powerful and persuasive sources of knowledge in society.[38] The CTW constructed an entire apparatus around *Sesame Street* for producing truths about children and television, turning the subjective category of 'quality' into an objective truth. This is in part how it has become for us today that television is considered quality when it can be causally linked to the child's development and explains how it is that *Sesame Street* is still recommended by experts on quality screen time after fifty years.

The CTW's methods produced new kinds of empirical truth, undermining, or at least relativizing, the existing facts or knowledge about children and television. Calgary's moral outrage over the CBC's possible cancellation of *Sesame Street* is evidence of the

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[37] Lesser, *Children and Television*, 14.

[38] Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), 9.

persuasiveness of the CTW's methods and the difficulty of returning to subjective approaches to knowledge. The proof of 'quality' was no longer in the pudding but in the formative and summative research. It became difficult to justify programming on the assumption that a friendly host, the inclusion of certain themes, or the use of specific vocabulary would have a positive impact on a child's education or development. These kinds of claims were now expected to be validated through the use of research. It's not surprising that at the 1972 CBC's president's meeting it was decided that there would be a review of existing CBC children's programs in order to ensure they would stand the test of external expert scrutiny.[39] The same year, the CBC cancelled one of its own preschool programs, *Chez Helen,* so funds could be re-allocated to a Canadian co-production of *Sesame Street*, which was projected to cost about $210,000 (CAD) annually. The rational was that "from an educational point of view the function of familiarizing children with French, as in *Chez Helen*, would be carried out in the "Canadianizing" of *Sesame*. Therefore this policy objective will be maintained, only we believe in a more effective way."[40]

Empirical evidence differs also in that it is more useful than the subjective knowledge produced by intuition or out of moral responsibility, firstly, because of the reproducibility of scientific methods.[41] When the CBC and CTW became co-producers in 'Canadianizing' *Sesame Street,* for the 1972-73 season, the CBC contractually agreed to reproduce the CTW's methods, beginning by conducting its very own feasibility study (like the one Ganz Cooney famously used to persuade the Carnegie Corporation of the public need for high-quality preschool programming). The CBC also agreed to assemble its own panel of Canadian experts, approved by the CTW, which included Dr. Rabinovitch, Dr. Regan, and Madame Souchay, to help determine the educational goals of the Canadian segments and to certify each segment prior to production. More than

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[39] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41 vol. 861, file PG-4-2-1, pt. 4, Minutes of the President's Meeting, 12 April 1972.

[40] LAC, CBC fonds, RG41 vol. 838, file 265, pt. 2, Memo from Knowlton Nash to Norn Garriock, 17 January 1972.

[41] Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience,* 9.

forty countries have since partnered with the CTW to bring quality children's television to children across the globe through various co-production agreements—one of the primary keys to *Sesame Street's* global reach over fifty years being the reproducibility of the CTW's empirical research methods.

Empirical evidence is more useful than subjective sources of knowledge, secondly, because it purports to make elements of the social world—the world of actual audiences —visible.[42] Cooney claimed to be bringing the voices of real children into the production of *Sesame Street* through its formative research.[43] The CTW's methods, which were principally informed by the fields of child psychology (together broadly understood as the science of children's physical, cognitive and social/emotional development) are made credible by their claim to having access to the child's mind—that is, their claim to being able to scientifically measure the cognitive effects of *Sesame Street's* techniques. The methods of psychology promised researchers access to the child's interiority, which is what makes the CTW's claims to truth both persuasive and useful in controlling the effects of screens toward developmentally appropriate ends.

Not everyone agreed with the psychology behind *Sesame Street*. Psychologists Jerome Singer and Dorothy Singer were the most outspoken critics of the CTW's approach to *Sesame Street*. Instead they endorsed the approach of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* on the grounds that the pacing of *Mister Rogers'* was better suited to the child's developmental needs, provoking a controversy between themselves and Lesser of the CTW in *Psychology Today*.[44] Where the Singers did agree with Lesser and the CTW, however, was about the fact that television had an unavoidable influence on the child and that the developmental sciences could provide the causal knowledge needed to re-direct television viewing toward healthy and normal psychological development. But whereas the CTW targeted the television screen's effects to control the child's development, the

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[42] Ang, 9.

[43] Polsky, *Getting to Sesame Street,* 45.

[44] Jerome Singer, Dorothy Singer, and Gerald Lesser, "Children's TV: Does Fast Pacing Inhibit Imagination," *Psychology Today* (March 1979): 5-60.

Singers targeted the child's development by introducing play for the first time as a tool for the measurement and control of the screen's effects.

Television wasn't the only emerging area of interest to child psychologists in the 1950s. Recall that the 1950s marked a turn to interest in children's play as a serious object of scientific study, owing greatly to the force of Piaget's *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood,*[45] which offered evidence of a causal link between play and normal child development. The scientific study of play and television-effects research culminated in the work of Jerome and Dorothy Singer. The Singers spent the first half of the 1970s building on the work of child psychologists like Piaget, Erikson, Werner, and others to bring make-believe or imaginary play into the generalized theories of psychology. With this objective in mind Jerome Singer's book, *The Child's World of Make-Believe: Experimental Studies of Imaginative Play* (1973), was to be one of the first contributions to the scientific literature on the nature of make-believe play, aiming to show how make-believe play can be studied scientifically in a systematic and controlled way.[46]

Having spent the first half of the decade studying the causal relationship between make-believe play and cognition, the Singers then turned their focus in 1976 to the effects of television on children's imaginative play. In their 2005 book, *Imagination and Play in the Electronic Age,* they recount how the idea to study television and play came to them after observing a group of school children pretending to be Peter Pan, Wendy, and the Lost Boys, then later learning that the teacher had not read them *Peter Pan* but that it had aired on television the previous evening: it "led to a question we asked of each other at home that evening. Does television enhance a child's imagination or does it impede the child's capacity for symbolic play?"[47] Using the evidence and methods J. Singer

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[45] Piaget, Jean. *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood,* trans. C. Gattegno and F.M. Hodgson (First published 1951; New York: Norton, 1962).

[46] Jerome. L. Singer, *The Child's World of Make Believe: Experimental Studies of Imaginative Play* (New York: Academic Press, 1973), xi-xii.

[47] Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, *Imagination and Play in the Electronic Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 58.

published in 1973, the Singers used make-believe play as a new scientific measurement for producing and making sense of knowledge about children and television.

The first study the Singers published on children's play and television is aptly titled "Can TV Stimulate Imaginative Play?" The study involved sixty three-and-four-year-olds in a daycare setting who, prior to the study, were individually tested for intelligence using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and for their predisposition to imaginative play using interviews with the child and the Barron Movement Threshold Inkblot Test. The children were then divided into four groups: group one watched *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* for half-hour each day for two weeks, group two watched *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* for half-hour each day for two weeks with the presence of an adult who mediated the viewing, group three watched no television and received "make-believe training" from an adult who guided open-ended exercises to initiate imaginary play, and group four served as a control and went about regularly scheduled preschool activities. After two weeks, the children were observed on two separate occasions during spontaneous play by a pair of researchers who rated them on two variables: imaginative play, defined as play that introduced "elements of time, space, or character not immediately given in the perceptual environment" and positive affect, measured by "smiling, laughing, and other bodily indications of happiness in the children while at play."[48] The study concludes,

> television may have only a limited impact on this age group viewing in a setting like this. It is likely that at the very least television's prosocial or particularly optimal cognitive benefits may have to depend upon at least some mediation by a concerned adult in the situation. A program such as *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* may serve as the basis for stimulating increased imaginative play seems to be subject to careful qualification if viewed by smaller groups in the company of an adult.[49]

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[48] Jerome L. Singer and Dorothy G. Singer, "Can TV Stimulate Imaginative Play?" *Journal of Communication* (Summer 1976): 76.

[49] Singer and Singer, "Can TV Stimulate Imaginary Play?" 80.

Their conclusions are based on the observation that imaginary play and positive affect increased only slightly in all groups except the control group where both measures declined. The group that watched television accompanied by an adult who initiated imaginary play received the highest scores and the control group, which watched no television and received no play instruction from adults, had the lowest scores.

In a second publication, drawing on additional qualitative data collected during the same study of children's free-play at daycare, the Singers correlated the child's predisposition to imaginative play with family television-viewing habits. Parents responded to questionnaires regarding their viewing habits, their attitudes toward sex roles in child rearing, and their personal and social self-worth. The two main findings the Singers report are, first, that the families tended to watch the most popular television shows including *All in the Family, I Love Lucy*, and various popular detective and police shows such as *Mannix* and *Kung Fu*.[50] And, second, they found that the children of mothers who perceived themselves as high in personal self-worth (characterized by traits such as "ambition," "confidence," "creative," "energetic," "fairminded," or "idealistic") showed more imaginative spontaneous make-believe play. Mothers of children who showed less imaginative play perceived themselves as high in social self-worth (characterized by traits such as "attractive," "compassionate," "considerate," "cooperative," "friendly," and "generous"). The Singers conclude,

> One of our theoretical hypotheses that as yet bears more intensive testing has to do with the possibility that children who have been encouraged to develop more extensive imaginative play tendencies are likely to be less influenced by negative content and more capable of integrating pro-social messages perceived from television. [51]

Whereas the first publication was about the effect of television on play, the second study raised the question of whether pre-existing levels of imaginative play in children impacts the negative effect of television. In the first study, the times, places, and things of

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[50] Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, "Family Television Viewing Habits and the Spontaneous Play of Preschool Children," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 46, no. 3 (July 1976): 498.

[51] Singer and Singer, "Family Television Viewing Habits," 501.

play serve as the site for the observation and measure of television's effects (good or bad). In the second study, play becomes a tool for the treatment and the prevention of possible pathology arising from television viewing—the more imaginative play a child exhibits to start with, the greater the chance of television having a pro-social rather than negative effect on the child viewer. Play thus serves as a barometer for and/or a precondition for the health of the child's relationship with television screens. In both studies play is a tool for managing the child's relationship with television. In the Singers' words,

> Rather than approaching television, clearly a permanent member of the household, with negative attitudes either of censorship or helpless scorn, we believe it is up to mental health workers to examine the parameters of the child's imaginative capacities and to find ways in which systematic viewing with adult help can enhance growth possibilities in a variety of constructive areas.[52]

According to this view, television is an inevitable cause, but the trained health worker can examine the child's imaginative capacity and anticipate how a child will be affected by television; of course, the value here being the ability to then manage those outcomes. If play is a predictor of television's effects on the child, it follows then that it can be a point of possible intervention into the nature of its effects.

In the same way that turning television into a science enabled the reproducibility of *Sesame Street*, making play into a scientific method had the added advantage of making that method available to others so that the results of their studies could be replicated in various child care settings by parents, teachers, and healthcare workers. The 1976 study was, in fact, described as a mixture of "formal experiment with community intervention,"[53] the intervention being into parents' management of children's play and television. The Singers established parent groups that met through the following year under the direction of a member of the research team to teach parents "how to use the

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[52] Singer and Singer, 502.

[53] Singer and Singer, "Family Television Viewing Habits," 500.

television medium more effectively";[54] for example, how to control the television set, determining which types of shows are appropriate, and how to manage their own social attitudes about television.

The subjects the Singers selected for their experiment and intervention were "all in their twenties or thirties and might be classified best as American-ethnics: they worked in blue-collar or lower-level white-collar positions, and had strong subcultural ties to Italian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Irish backgrounds. Most of the mothers worked at least part time and viewed the day care center as an absolute necessity"[55] The target population for the Singers' intervention were not dissimilar to the CTW's. And like the CTW, the Singers would meet these children and their families where they already were: watching television. The goal was similarly to channel television viewing toward the development of specific cognitive functions within the "disadvantaged" child.

Though it may be obvious, I'll point out the similarly classed nature of interventions into both children's screen time and children's playtime. Part of the answer to the question I posed in the beginning—*why play* —lies precisely in the normative orientation of interventions into children's development and well-being. Recall that the early twentieth-century playground movement was also a movement for social reform. Playgrounds were envisioned as a tool for redirecting the street play of children in the poorest urban neighbourhoods toward productive activity. Television, referred to as an 'after school ghetto,' was similarly treated as a class problem, heavy television viewing being correlated with income, education, and working or single mothers who were said to rely on television as a 'babysitter.' The model for community intervention exemplified by the Singers, then, is based on the understanding that socio-economic status is a predictor for both television viewing and the amounts of make-believe and imaginative play, accounting for part of the difference in development between lower and middle class

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[54] Singer and Singer, 500.

[55] Singer and Singer, 498.

children.[56] For the Singers, as for the playground movement, one of the goals of play intervention is normalizing poor and ethnic populations to middle class standards.

Despite not having identified a particularly strong causal relationship between television and play in their first two studies, a year later the Singers published *Partners in Play: A Step-by-Step Guide to Imaginative Play in Children,* a practical 'how-to' play book.[57] This move recalls Hacking's observation that the inconclusive nature of research doesn't undermine science or the need for intervention, instead it drives research and makes intervention seem more urgent and necessary.[58] Qualifiers like 'may,' 'possibly,' and 'needs further research' have a tendency to be discarded and replaced with the understanding that *this is the way it is*—*this* is the effect of play on imagination and *this* is the effect of imagination on television viewing. *Partners in Play* includes a final chapter titled "Using Television Constructively for Imaginative Growth," which advises parents on how to provide children the proper times, places, and things for play in order to maximize any possible benefits of television.

To be clear, I'm not questioning the validity of causal knowledge about television or the connection between play and imagination, I'm making an observation about the use of evidence in the firming-up of a conceptual connection between television screens and the temporal, spatial, and material conditions of children's play—the way that in the process of becoming a scientific method, the meaning of play and the meaningfulness of some types of play over others comes to seem self-evident. In order to use play as a measure that could be reproduced by others (which is the goal of scientific research) the Singers first had to decide which play behaviours are meaningful. In Jerome Singer's words, observing and rating the child's play wasn't the challenging part; rather, the challenging part was deciding what counts as worthy of observing and rating.[59] The play

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[56] Joan T. Freyberg, "Increasing the Imaginative Play of Urban Disadvantaged Kindergarten Children through Systematic Training," in Jerome. L. Singer, *The Child's World of Make Believe: Experimental Studies of Imaginative Play* (New York: Academic Press, 1973), 137.

[57] Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, *Partners in Play: A Step-by-Step-Guide to Imaginative Play in Children* (Basic Books, 1977).

[58] Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul, 88.*

[59] Singer, *The Child's World of Make Believe,* 32-33.

actions that are considered psychologically meaningful are not given but are a result of the decision-making process involved in all research—in this case the Singers first decided what counts as meaningful action and then, of course, decided on what those actions mean.

This begs the question, *why imaginative play?* The Singers define imaginary play as "play that introduces time, space, and related features that are not given in the immediate environment of the child."[60] The key to imaginary play's importance is in the child's creation of imagery, (ie. imagining situations and things that are not really there), which is central to the Singers' model of cognitive development. Here is the long answer the Singers give to the question, 'why imaginative play?':

> ...at least to some extent, the development of imagery as an elaborated symbolic representation of percept is a skill that depends in part on the child's exposure to certain social experiences. In telling the little elephant to lie down and go to sleep the child inevitably must not only speak those words, but try to reconstitute from long-term memory the experience of going to sleep in the form of actually seeing his own bed, rehearsing the sound of his mother singing the lullaby, and perhaps experiencing some of the kinaesthetic sensations associated with snuggling down into the covers and preparing for bed. All of these memories now occur at the same time as he is in a classroom looking at a plastic elephant. These associated images may now become part of a new stimulus situation that the child has created and to which he may react by forming a new schema. In this sense, then, the make-believe play, if it operates in the fashion described, forms the basis for creation of novel environments which then generate their own feedback and further complex memories. If this is the case, then we can begin to see how much learning may indeed take place in the course of spontaneous play, and how much the entire cognitive development of the child may be related to the degree to which the whole series of novel environments of this kind are generated by the child.[61]

In the 1980s, the Singers further developed their use of play as an instrument for the measurement of television's effects on the child's imagination in "Television and the

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[60] Singer, 34.

[61] Singer, *The Child's World of Make Believe,* 31-32.

Developing Imagination of the Child." There they explain, this time in simpler terms, the same rational for play as a measuring instrument:

> Studying young children through observations of their make believe play affords us opportunities to understand how these images develop, and how they are used…Their inner representational system is expressed through their conversations or utterances as they play.[62]

In 2005 they further simplify saying that "…regardless of the tools we use, observing children is the best way to understand how their minds work."[63] Because imaginative play is said to be at the centre of a child's cognitive development, it's been envisioned as a window into the child's mind. In this way, psychology has fashioned play into the ultimate panoptic gaze, capable of rendering the child's interiority visible to the trained observer. The Singers introduced play as a new and compelling measurement for the psychological study of television's effects—its authority resting on the promise that play functions as a conduit to the child's total development.

The Singers offer us a glimpse into how it has come to be that when we want to know the child's development, we can study its play and, similarly, when we want to manage the child's development or threats to development (for example, the threat of screen time), we can target their play. Although play had already been used in a systematic way for psychotherapeutic and diagnostic purposes for at least forty years prior, the Singers took this practice out of the therapy room and into the observation of and intervention into everyday phenomenon like television viewing—they thereby opened play up as a legitimate site for intervention into yet another childhood problem: the problem of screens. The CTW helped to produce the conditions for the Singers' to use play to measure and mitigate the effects of screens by bringing in and normalizing the psychologist as an expert on the proper use of children's television. Whereas the CTW

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[62] Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, "Television and the Developing Imagination of the Child," *Journal of Broadcasting* 25, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 373.

[63] Singer and Singer, *Imagination and Play in the Electronic Age,* 27.

used the tools of psychology to intervene at the level of the screen, the Singers applied the tools of psychology, specifically play, to the child in the audience.

By historically tracing play's emergence as a site for problematizing the screen within the history of responses to children's television, we can see how the Singers' use of play as a tool and measure was not inevitable but contingent. In other words, it took effort: it involved decision-making, decision makers, hypotheses, and experimentation. Play emerged in this way not because play is the obvious antidote to screen time. Play is useful because it is made so, not out of necessity but out of convenience (the Singers are specialists in the study of imaginative play), coincidence (the study of children's play and the study of children's television were coinciding), opposition (the Singers were responding to the work of the CTW), and importantly out of scientific processes that gave legitimacy to play's use.

The Singers' proposition that we can alter the effects of television by studying and managing the temporal, spatial, and material conditions of the child's imaginative play was one of the earliest justifications for intervention into children's play as a means of managing the problem of screens. More than three decades later, in fact, the Singers' own argument has only slightly changed. In *Imagination and Play in the Electronic Age,* they argue that play is in decline and that the majority of children's free time is spent watching television. Their advice remains that, "parents and teachers can foster symbolic play if they give children *time* to play, *space* for play, and some *simple toys* or *props*."[64] But the Singers are not alone. Play has become the stock and trade of those concerned with child development and well-being in the age of ubiquitous screen-based media. In the following chapter, I'll take up the question of how it is that knowledge regarding play's usefulness as a strategy for managing screens has become common and widespread.

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[64] Singer and Singer, *Imagination and Play in the Electronic Age,* 33.

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Institutions
Play, Television & The Canadian Council on Children and Youth

The Singers' proposition in the 1970s that play could be used to mitigate the television screen's effects was novel. In the decades following, efforts to promote play as the antidote to the problem of screens broadly have become common and widespread. This chapter explores how relatively specialized knowledge and practices from experts (like the Singers and the CTW) eventually became part of a national response to the need for play and the perceived problems of children's screens.

Part of the answer, I suggest, lies within the power of national voluntary organizations, which by the 1970s came to be understood as a "third sector" in Canadian society and an important resource to the country.[1] The Canadian Council on Children and Youth (CCCY) was one such organization, responsible for initiating two significant national projects aimed at addressing the need for play and the problem of television screens through the 1970s and 1980s. I'll demonstrate that the CCCY helped normalize concepts and practices pertaining to 'good' play and television first by serving as a network or instrument of knowledge distribution and second by exercising its power to define the context in which an understanding of *what* is a problem is agreed upon and to offer the necessary solutions to those problems.

Today's efforts to address children's play and screens didn't arrive on the scene fully formed; they are, in Ladelle McWhorter's words, "offspring of multiple generations or iterations, involving irretrievable loses, frequent new combinations of character and lineages."[2] Outdoor Play Canada, currently the largest network of play advocates in Canada, traces the lineage of a national interest in play to December 13, 1991 when

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[1] Theresa R. Richardson, *The Century of the Child* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 173.

[2] Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy,* (Indiana University Press, 2009), 52.

Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which formally stipulates the child's right to play. But while the UNCRC certainly reignited a national interest in the child's right to play; it was neither the first time the child's right to play had been stipulated nor was it the first national effort to enforce the right to play. The lineage of a national effort to promote play in Canada can be traced further back to November 20, 1959 when the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and all its seventy-eight Member States.

The 1959 Declaration in its entirety included just ten principles that were adopted and expanded from the 1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Along with the child's right to freedom from discrimination, right to special protection, right to nationality, and right to social security, the 1959 Declaration granted the child the right to play: Principle 7 of the Declaration states, "the child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education," the purpose of education being to "promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgement, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society."[3] Although the rights set forth in the Declaration were non-binding, the purpose of declaring rights, then, as now, is to codify society's obligation to fulfilling those rights. Hence, the General Assembly passed an additional resolution to recommend that governments of member states, specialized agencies, and non-governmental organizations publicize the Declaration "as widely as possible" and to request that the Secretary-General publish and distribute the declaration "in all languages possible."[4]

In 1974, The Canadian Council on Children and Youth (CCCY) initiated the National Task Force on Children's Play with the mandate to endorse the child's right to play as

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[3] United Nations, "1386 (XIV) Declaration of the Rights of the Child," 841st Plenary Meeting, 20 November 1959, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/1386(XIV).

[4] United Nations, "1387 (XIV) Publicity to be Given to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child," 841st Plenary Meeting, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/1386(XIV).

stipulated by Principle 7 of the Declaration.[5] Although the 1959 Declaration was the rational for a national task force, more than a decade had passed between the Declaration and the CCCY's initiative; why the sudden interest in play? The Play Task Force emerged out of three meetings held by the CCCY in 1970, the reason for which was to reevaluate the CCCY's purpose and mandate after twelve years of being in operation as an organization. Summarizing the consensus reached at those meetings, the CCCY chairman Dr. K.S. Armstrong reported it was decided that there was still need for a national organization dedicated to children and youth for two reasons, one being that health, welfare, and education were carefully guarded provincial responsibilities and as a result there wasn't a federal department of government dedicated to the planning or coordination of services to children and youth and the second being that the council's impression was that the federal government itself believed voluntary organizations like the CCCY were essential in filling that void. While their purpose and objectives were still considered valid, it was determined that their programming, which largely consisted of a national conference every five years, was in need of revision. The organization's programming going forward would be more closely related to current issues of the day.[6] Under the proposed theme of "The Status of the Child in Canadian Society," the CCCY undertook a series of projects exploring society's responsibility to the child in six major areas: the child as citizen, a child's access to healthcare, child abuse, the child in the legal process, children's play, and children's television.[7]

Those three meetings were important also in reimagining the role the CCCY envisioned for itself as an organization. The consensus with respect to its major function was that it would provide a forum for 1) providing expert feedback to other organizations, professions, governments, and especially parents about current issues effecting children and youth and 2) to help government develop its value system with respect to children

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[5] Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 11, file 22, "National Task Force on Children's Play Information Sheet," 1974.

[6] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 5, file 10, Minutes of the Canadian Council on Children and Youth Annual Meeting, "Chairman's Report," 21 June 1971.

[7] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 11, file 22, "Canadian Council on Children and Youth Information Sheet," nd.

and youth. As a forum, the CCCY felt that it would be in a position to shape public attitude and opinion about issues related to children and youth and to mobilize parents, professionals, and organizations to move into action around those issues. It's significant that the CCCY chose both play and television as issues important enough to warrant their own special projects because it put the CCCY in the position of being an expert on those issues and therefore in the position to both shape national understandings of and prescribe solutions to those issues.

The first meeting of the National Task Force on Children's Play was held over November 15-16, 1974 in Vancouver, BC and was attended by eighteen individuals including members of the CCCY; child psychologists; members of Canadian university departments of education, paediatrics, psychology, physical education; members of Recreation Canada; the United Way; the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association; and the Children's Environments Advisory Service of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. During their first meeting, attendees discussed the major areas of concern for play to be addressed. They included things like the need for adequate space for children living in urban areas to play, the need for adequate training for play leaders, the need for families to support play, the need for education on the value of "unproductive play," the need to de-emphasize "organized play," and the need to consider the impact of television in shaping children's play. Out of their list of concerns, a series of fifteen goals were formed. Each goal was coded either "long-term" or "short term" and placed into one of two categories: "information or awareness raising" or "control or action for change."[8]

Finally, out of those goals the aims and objectives of the Play Task Force were formed. In its official statement of purpose, its three major objectives were first, "to serve as an advocate for the child's right and need to play," second, "to create an awareness of the impact and importance of play in the life of all human beings," and third, "to develop a communication network among those individuals and organizations concerned with children's play and to provide opportunities for co-operative action and information

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[8] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 13, file 14, "Summary of Proceedings of the First Meeting of the National Task Force on Children's Play, 15-16 November 1974.

sharing among these organizations."[9] From 1974 to 1980 the Task Force fulfilled these objectives through research, workshops, conferences, seminars, press releases, campaigns, position papers, play kits, play leadership training, and legislation and guidelines for play spaces. By 1980 the Task Force Committee declared its projects complete and resigned itself to being a national resource centre for children's play and recreation.[10]

The creation of the Play Task Force is meaningful because it marked the first ever effort to mobilize a play movement on a national scale in Canada. This was partly possible because the need for play had been linked scientifically to the development of all children; the Task Force defined the need for a play movement first and foremost on the basis that play is universally essential. In a position paper titled "The Child's Right to Play," the Task Force emphasizes the need to advocate for play because it "provides the components and prerequisites necessary to achieve a meaningful and productive life in our modern day society."[11] Unlike for the early twentieth-century playground advocates, play was no longer mainly prescribed on the basis of problems like class, urbanization, race, or delinquency. By the 1970s the need for play was firmly rooted in the child's biological development and thus, while children were still differently at risk, in theory all children were at risk of delays to their development without adequate opportunities for play. The 1959 UN Declaration helped the Task Force to further universalize the idea that all children need to play by providing a set of normative rules that delineated not only what was morally or ethically good but also owed to all children. If play is both a right and a prerequisite for life itself, the question of play's value disappears and what remains is an essential truth from which all the Task Force's efforts to mobilize play then followed.

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[9] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 13, file 14, "Summary of Proceedings of the First Meeting of the National Task Force on Children's Play, 15-16 November 1974.

[10] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 4, file 2, "Program Committee Report,"29 August 1980.

[11] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 11, file 18, "The Child's Right to Play," April 1976, 2.

One of the Task Force's first efforts was an annotated bibliography of existing research on children's play. The bibliography covered six areas including theories of play, developmental values of play, educational values of play, cultural influences of play, environmental influences on play, and play and the disadvantaged child. The section on environmental influences included the research on the "media effects on play," which was entirely devoted to the effect of television on play. The major research in the field of television and play was still relatively scant; apart from a small number of studies using play to measure the effect of television on violence, particularly in cartoons, the bibliography cites the three papers published by Jerome Singer and Dorothy Singer based on their 1974 study of *Mr. Roger's Neighbourhood* and imaginative play.[12]

The annotated bibliography was partially for the Task Force's use, but more importantly its purpose was to make research on children's play accessible to anyone working with children. The CCCY played an important role in disseminating information produced by experts in a way that made that research useable. In other words, the CCCY helped make research on children's play practical. They referred to it as "community awareness and education" and it was a notable priority. Another notable example of community awareness and education was a series of resource sheets produced by the Task Force called "Play Pages," which were distributed to individuals, organizations, and associations who were encouraged to further reproduce and distribute them through their networks. Each sheet covered a single play-related topic for example "parenting and play," "creative play spaces indoors and outdoors," and "sport and physical activity." The number one priority in selecting recommended resources on these topics was accessibility to the public.[13]

In addition to making expert knowledge about the need for play readily and easily accessible, the Task Force's major efforts were focused on defining what actions should be taken to fulfill the need for play. With the goal of making play a tool for use by

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[12] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol 11, file 18, Annotated bibliography on children's play, April 1976.

[13] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420vol 11, file 19, Summary of Proceedings of the Fourth Meeting of the National Task Force on Children's Play, "Task Force Meeting Program," 30 April to 1 May 1976, 9-10.

individuals, government, and public or private sectors, the CCCY produced four distinct instructional guides between 1974 and 1980: a two part "Play Leadership Training Kit," produced jointly with Fitness Canada, which they described as an example of the type of cooperation between government and voluntary sectors necessary to provide leadership in areas of national concern, (play being one such concern);[14] "Play Space Guidelines: A Resource Document for Planning Formal and Informal Play Spaces Throughout the Community," which was designed to be adapted to accompany any municipal planning policy and/or provincial planning act, according to the needs and resources of a given community;[15] and "All About Play: A Source Book for Planning Children's Play Opportunities," which claimed to be the first Canadian source book of its kind, designed to offer practical information on all aspects of children's play ranging from play and learning to play and television.[16]

Each of these guides provide detailed instruction on the optimal conditions for children's play including when, where, and how children should play. For example, the "Play Space Guidelines" make detailed recommendations based on the child's age and stage of development, like that children ages one to six years old should have play spaces located within one hundred meters from their dwelling and in view of as many adults as possible. One type of facility the guide suggests is a "playschool park" that is "outside," "small and intimate," and that includes "areas for creative, cognitive, social, physical and quiet play." It should also "have a natural or garden-like setting" and be contained by "low enclosures." The recommended space is eight hundred to twenty-five hundred square feet to accommodate a maximum of twenty to thirty children.[17] The guide is accompanied by a child development chart for further planning considerations. Similarly, "All About Play: A Source Book for Planning Children's Play Opportunities" covers a

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[14] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 15, file 8, "Play Leadership Training Kit," 1978.

[15] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 15, file 9, "Play Space Guidelines," 1980.

[16] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 14, file 10, "All About Play: A Source Book for Planning Children's Play Opportunities," 1979.

[17] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 15, file 9, "Play Space Guidelines," 1980, 5.

broad range of detailed ways to promote play. For instance, according to the guide, even television "can be a powerful catalyst for play opportunities" when "carefully and continually monitored." To help children use television as a stimulating "play partner," some suggestions include, "teaching children that choosing a T.V. program to watch is like choosing a book to read. Encourage them to take the time to select carefully," "be consistently aware of what activities T.V. viewing is replacing. Go to a hockey game instead of watching one on television; or better still, go out and play hockey," and "encourage children to keep a T.V. diary for a week or a month. This will help them realize how much time they are watching other people being active, rather than being active themselves."[18] The emphasis in each of the Task Force's guidebooks was placed on giving practical advice that could be taken-up by the government, academics, public and private institutions, as well as parents in order to shape the temporal, spatial, and material conditions of children's play in ways that would optimally support the child's normal development.

Like the Play Task Force, the idea to undertake a major project in the area of children's television arose out of the decision to revise the CCCY's programs to address the major issues of the day. The issue of television's effect on childhood development and well-being was arguably reaching its height by the 1970s. The proposal for a project dedicated to the issue of children's television was initiated by Fred Rainsberry who was then secretary-treasurer of the CCCY and professor in the Department of Curriculum of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Rainsberry based his proposal for a children's television committee on the policy he developed during his tenure as head of the children's department at the CBC. The basis of that policy was to produce programs that are consistent with what was then known about the creative growth and development of children in North America. These included, for example, programs about music, science, imagination, courage, adventure, biographies, and the activities of young Canadians.[19]

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[18] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 14, file 10, "All About Play: A Source Book for Planning Children's Play Opportunities," 1979, 77-78.

[19] Duncan Memorial Collection (DMC), "CBC Policy on Children's Programs," nd.

The two phases of the project involved, first, a national survey of program resources

and talents to

> report on the present state of broadcasts for children in Canada, and would
> explore attitudes toward the development of a program for children that would
> contribute to national identity by examining the regional and multi-cultural
> richness of Canada in terms of social relations in play and in creative endeavour.[20]

The rational given for the survey was that, "with a thorough study in hand, printed in

French and English for national distribution, we would have the factual basis on which to

inform broadcasters, parents, teachers and advertisers of the real concerns of Canadians

about the need for good television for children."[21] The second and more substantial phase

of the project was a consultation on children's television, which eventually led to the

creation of the Children's Broadcast Institute, whose mandate was to work toward the

improvement of children's broadcasting in Canada.

The initial consultation on children's television was hosted by the CRTC between May

14-18, 1972, and brought together fifty Canadians, three representatives from Europe,

and five from the United States, all by invitation from the CCCY.[22] The participants were

writers and producers from public and private stations and from educational television,

experts concerned with child development and the impact of television, and individuals

involved in sponsorship of children's television. The goal of the consultation was to

evaluate the state of children's television programming in Canada and to consider what

resources would be required to fulfill unmet needs in the area. This was to be

accomplished through presentations from researchers on the known impact of television

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[20] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 17, file 17, Letter from Fred
Rainsberry to Gérard Pelletier, 21 May 1971.

[21] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 17, file 17, Letter from Fred
Rainsberry to Gérard Pelletier, 21 May 1971.

[22] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 17, file 17, Letter from Margery
R. King to Gérard Pelletier, 25 May 1972.

on children and on the current state of children's programs in Canada and internationally, as well as working groups, and program development workshops.[23]

The five day consultation resulted in the affirmation that children are a special audience in need of special programming for four reasons: 1) because children's needs "are qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from older people" 2) you must communicate with children differently in appropriate "forms and types of presentations" 3) children can't advocate for themselves, and 4) "children are a natural resource that need to be protected."[24] In light of these special needs, the consultation concluded that "the key goal of children's television should be to motivate, stimulate, and encourage creative activities and play and to provide an enriched experience for the child." It was agreed that producing this type of quality children's programming required central planning rather than a variety of unrelated programs. By the end of the consultation, the solution reached was that an independent council was needed to deal specifically with broadcasting for Canadian children by carrying out research, recommending policy, stimulating national program distribution, and suggesting prototypes for programs.[25]

If the idea for an independent council on children's television sounds a lot like the Children's Television Workshop (CTW) in the United States, that's because it was modelled after the CTW and its success with *Sesame Street*. At the end of the May consultation, it was decided that there would be a second consultation to discuss the details of the new council. That consultation was held in September 1973 under the title, "Consultation on Television and the Child." Participants again included CRTC staff, market researchers, academics, representatives from the broadcasting industry, and producers of children's television. And again the conclusion was that there was need for an independent centre to concentrate resources, to encourage the production of Canadian television, and to unify research and development efforts to make optimum use of scarce

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[23] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 17, file 17, Minutes from the Consultation on Children's Television Program Planning Meeting, 9 February, 1972.

[24] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 17, file 17, Summary of Reports from Discussion Groups at the Consultation, nd.

[25] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 17, file 17, Summary of Reports from Discussion Groups at the Consultation, nd.

resources.[26] In Rainsberry's words, "we need a Children's Television Workshop here in Canada, with our own particular kind of view."[27] In their discussion about how to go about creating a Canadian version of the CTW, the most important point was that "one of the major break-throughs of the *Sesame Street* concept was the method of its origin: it brought together people with many different backgrounds, and thereby generated an intellectual ferment" and so it was Rainsberry's goal to be similarly inter-disciplinary and inter-professional.[28]

In the spring of 1974, the Children's Broadcast Institute (CBI) was formed as a non-profit, federally chartered organization made-up of concerned organizations and individuals for the purpose of improving the quality and quantity of children's broadcast programming in Canada. In a letter summarizing the rational for the CBI, Rainsberry wrote,

> we are convinced that this association is a necessary adjunct to existing organizations and can do much to implement and stimulate research and specify realistic objectives for all of us who are interested in the improvement of children's broadcasting in Canada. [29]

Some of the major organizations who showed their interest by supporting the CBI were the Association of Canadian Advertisers, the Institute of Communication Agencies, CTV, Télémétropole, toy manufacturers, cereal manufacturers, the Canadian Broadcasting League, the CCCY, and the CRTC.[30] The CBC was also invited to appoint a member to

[26] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 15, file 15, "Proposal for Centre for Children's Television," 1973.

[27] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 15, file 15, Report of CRTC Consultation on Children's Television, 12 September 1973.

[28] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 15, file 15, Report of CRTC Consultation on Children's Television, 12 September 1973.

[29] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, Letter from Fred Rainsberry and Boyd Browne to Patricia MacKay, 16 April 1974.

[30] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, Letter from Fred Rainsberry and Boyd Browne to Patricia MacKay, 16 April 1974.

the CBI's Board of Directors but declined because they were already committed to doing the work the CBI proposed to do.[31]

The CBI's basic function would be to fund worthwhile projects aimed at improving the children's television viewing experience in Canada. The projects it might support included research, concept development, training, pilots, and incentives for improving the quality of children's programming such as awards and keeping lists and libraries of high-quality programs. In addition to deciding which projects were worthy of funding, the CBI also took on the role of directly influencing the development of children's programming in Canada through its own projects and research; for example, it hosted seminars, conducted surveys, and disseminated research on children's television.[32] The CBI described itself as "a clearing house for information about children's programs and research in child development, marketing and the effects of television on children."[33] The really salient thing about the CBI's efforts is that they not only diagnosed a lack of quality programming as the problem (for which investing in quality programming was the solution) but also took on the authority to define "quality" as programming that would serve the distinct viewing needs of Canadian children.

The CBI's hundred-page handbook titled, "Children's Television Programming: Some Prior Considerations and Research Designs for Canadian Broadcasts" was one of its major efforts to steer television creators in Canada toward improving the quality of children's programming. The introduction lays out the major concerns about children's television, which include its vividness and lifelikeness, its relative accessibility, and its success and pervasiveness as a mass medium.[34] Concerns aside, the introduction stresses that television can be used for educational purposes if done correctly, meaning if it's

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[31] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 16, file 12, Letter from Lauren Picard to Fred Rainsberry and Boyd Browne, 29 September 1974.

[32] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 15, file 15, "Proposal for Centre for Children's Television," 1973.

[33] LAC, Canadian Council on Children and Youth fond, MG28-I-420, vol. 16, file 15, "Children's Broadcast Institute Background History," 1 April 1976.

[34] Children's Broadcast Institute, "Children's Television Programming: Some Prior Considerations and Research Designs for Canadian Broadcasts, written for the CBI by Janet Solberg of the CRTC Research Branch, (October 1977), 3.

tested by research designed in accordance with what is scientifically known about the child's development. Chapter two of the handbook stresses the importance of using research instead of instinct, feeling, and personal experience when creating children's programming and provides a detailed step-by-step blueprint for reproducing the methods of formative and summative research created by the CTW. Chapter three on child development similarly stresses the fault in using conventional wisdom or anecdotal evidence with respect to determining the distinct needs of children viewing. Producing children's programs requires not only television experience, but also an expertise in the child. To facilitate this expertise, the chapter sets out six general principles on child development and maps the normal stages of physical, social, intellectual, and personality development across age groups using Piaget's ages-and-stages theory of development.[35]

With its newly defined project areas, the CCCY shaped an agreed upon understanding of which problems required attention as well as the necessary response to those problems. In the case of play, the problem was a declining trend in playtime, and in the case of television, the problem was the increasing trend in time spent watching low quality television. The solution to these problems required careful consideration of exactly the kinds of play and television that would support the child's developmental needs. This of course required not only expert knowledge to determine what is meant by quality but also a network of organization (new and old), made-up of a range of specialists, to establish and encourage values and norms with respect to play and television. Both the Play Task Force and the CBI are examples of how voluntary organizations help to universalize understandings of and responses to problems like the play deficit or screen time; the express goal of both the Task Force and the CBI under the CCCY's revised mandate was to make knowledge and practices common.

The value of play and the idea of quality screen time have become essential factors in a child's overall development and well-being in no small part because of the ongoing effort to normalize our understanding and use of both in everyday practice. The Play Task

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[35] Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood,* trans. C. Gattegno and F.M. Hodgson (1951; New York: Norton, 1962).

Force and CBI guidebooks in particular offer evidence of the values and rules that have been prescribed by experts to urge individuals to act morally. These values and rules are normative in that they form the basis of what we recognize as true or false, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, normal or abnormal. In the next chapter, I'll argue in greater detail that in tracing how these values and rules have been emerging, we can see that play isn't only an innate biological function that serves the child's development but is also one of the disciplinary technologies used for acting upon and shaping the behaviours and capacities of children.

6
The Power of Play
Monitoring, Managing & Measuring Screen Time

The movement to get children away from television screens grew through the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with the unprecedented expansion of programming through satellite and cable television. The increasingly deregulatory mood of an advancing neoliberal era was also raising new challenges for television's reputation.[1] In August of 1984, the Federal Communications Committee in the United States released a deregulation report outlining the loosening of regulations regarding program policies, program ascertainment requirements, and commercialization policies, among other things.[2] Similarly in 1987, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission adopted new television regulations citing the need to keep up to date with "rapid growth and technological change" and "increasing competition in the home entertainment field." While attempting to maintain the objectives of the Broadcasting Act, they hoped that the changes to the regulations would "help reduce the regulatory burden, the costs of which are eventually borne with the subscribers, and permit the Commission to develop a more supervisory role with respect to the general operation of systems across the country."[3]

Many raised concerns about what this meant for the increasingly fine line between advertising and children's programming, particularly with the introduction of popular American programs like Strawberry Shortcake, the Smurfs, the Care Bears, and My Little Pony—programs built primarily around toy marketing.[4] Against this backdrop, the CBC's

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[1] André Caron and Ronald I. Cohen, *Regulating Screens: Issues in Broadcasting and Internet Governance for Children* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

[2] Heidi Young, "Deregulation of Commercial Television," *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 13, no. 2 (1985): 374-375.

[3] Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, "Archived Public Notice CRTC 1986-1982," CRTC (1986). http://www/crtc/gc/ca/eng/archive/1986/PB86-182.html.

[4] Tom Englehardt, "The Strawberry Shortcake Strategy," In *Watching Television: a Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture,* Todd Gitlin, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 68-110.

mandate to offer distinctively Canadian programming, as well as quality educational programming for children, came under increasing pressure.[5] Meanwhile, new possibilities for continually increasing screen time gave additional impetus to get children away from screens to play outdoors. The spread of home computers, digital phones, and tablets, from the 1990s to a point of near ubiquity today, has accelerated concerns about screen time, setting the stage for promoting outdoor play as an increasingly necessary project.

In the last several chapters I have traced the emergence of play as an apparently self-evident or uniform response to the new postwar problem of screen time. If the early twentieth-century playground movement promoted supervised play as a seemingly common sense strategy for addressing problems of early industrial civilization, the postwar era saw roughly parallel initiatives to offer outdoor play as a response to the newly perceived problem of screen time. In Canada this developed in parallel with postwar efforts to improve children's television itself, in keeping with the CBC's early mandate to educate, rather than merely entertain.

By outlining these tensions, problems, and proposed solutions I've argued that the self-evident value of play is not a result of it being naturally suited to resolving problems facing children either early in the century or in the early postwar era when excessive screen time was first seen as a major social problem. Rather, play was framed in a fundamentally instrumental way, as a socially useful tool. Play's usefulness to the screen problem in particular is the result of a historical process that predates the war, involving various efforts from a wide range of sources that have contingently conditioned the possibilities for what counts as self-evident, universal, and necessary. These contingencies are still in the present process of unfolding. In this chapter I return to the present moment to try to observe what Colin Koopman calls "universalizing in-motion";[6] that is, how play's value as a solution to the problem of screens is gaining its grip for us today. I end the chapter by suggesting that the reproduction of play in this way is

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[5] Frederick B. Rainsberry, *A History of Children's Television in English Canada, 1952-1986* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1988), 259.

[6] Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 239.

evidence of play's power as a disciplinary resource for acting upon and shaping the behaviours and capacities of children.

Most concerns about the impact of screens today sound remarkably similar to past concerns about television. The most significant difference is that today television is lumped into the broad category of screen time, where watching television programming is just one of the many things we can do with our televisions, desktops, laptops, tablets, and smartphones. In the beginning I introduced two main sets of concerns about the impact of screens—whether it's watching a television screen, streaming video, scrolling social media, playing a game, video calling, or searching the internet. The first set of concerns is about the influence that content might have on the way that children behave. For example, one regularly expressed concern is that after watching high-action content, children will imitate those actions, especially violence, in their play.[7] Children emulating what they see in the media is, of course, only a problem when those behaviours are themselves considered a problem; for example, play fighting as an imitation of violence seen on television or in video games. No one raises concerns when children imitate positive behaviours; for example, when a child recites a lesson about sharing or tolerance from a show like *Sesame Street*. So concerns about the negative influence of screens are managed largely by encouraging children to engage with high-quality content.

The second and more complex set of concerns about the impact of screens has to do with the amount of time children spend with screens. Quantity of time spent with screens is today one of our primary measures of healthy child development. Studies of child well-being in which time with screens functions as an independent variable typically conclude that the more time the child spends with screens, the worse-off they are according to other measures of well-being. For example, screen time has been linked to poor academic performance, to delays in social-emotional development, to delays in language learning,

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[7] John P. Murray, "Television Violence: Research and Controversy," in *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research,* ed. Norma Pecora, John P. Murray, and Ellen Ann Wartella (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 183-205.

and to health issues including obesity, ADHD, and myopia.[8] For children globally, heavy

screen time is considered not only a risk factor but also a predictor for problems like

obesity. For example, a 2019 study of 10,000 Finnish school children found that children

with high amounts of recreational sedentary television viewing and computer use are at a

higher risk for being overweight, regardless of how much they exercise.[9] A 2010 study

conducted in the UK reached the same conclusion that, "both television viewing and

computer use are important independent targets for intervention for optimal well-being

for children, irrespective of levels of MVPA [moderate/vigorous physical activity] or

overall sedentary time."[10] What this evidence seems to suggest is that the amount of time

children spend with screens matters at least as much as (or more than) what's on the

screen.

With the range of possible negative outcomes correlated to quantity of time with

screens, it's not surprising that screen time has been an important target of intervention

into children's well-being. Based on best available research, including the studies cited

above, the Canadian Paediatric Society's current policy statement on screen exposure for

preschoolers recommends no screen time for children under two years old and less than

one hour for children between two and five years old. The advice they give paediatricians

for counselling parents of young children on how to adopt these recommendations is

based on an easy to recite 4-M model: *minimize* screen time, *mitigate* (reduce) the risks

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[8] Mireia Adelantado-Renau et al., "Association Between Screen Media Use and Academic Performance Among Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *JAMA Pediatrics* 173, no. 11 (2019): 1058–67; Sajani Raman et al., "Screen Exposure During Daily Routines and a Young Child's Risk for Having Social-Emotional Delay," *Clinical Pediatrics* 56, no. 13 (2017): 1244–53; Meta van den Heuvel et al., "Mobile Media Device Use Is Associated with Expressive Language Delay in 18-Month-Old Children," *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 40, no. 2 (2019): 99–104; Kehong Fang, Min Mu, Kai Liu, and Yuna He, "Screen Time and Childhood Overweight/Obesity: A Systematic Review and Meta‑analysis," *Child:Care, Health & Development* 45, no. 5 (2019): 744–53; Chaelin K. Raet al., "Association of Digital Media Use With Subsequent Symptoms of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Among Adolescents," *JAMA: the Journal of the American Medical Association* 320, no. 3 (2018): 255–63; Carla Lanca and Seang-Mei Saw, "The Association Between Digital Screen Time and Myopia: A Systematic Review," *Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics* 40 (2020): 216–229.

[9] Elina Engberg et al., "Heavy Screen Users are the Heaviest Among 10,000 Children," *Scientific Report*, 9, no. 11158 (2019): 1-9.

[10] Angie S. Page et al., "Children's Screen Viewing is Related to Psychological Difficulties Irrespective of Physical Activity," *Pediatrics*, 126, no. 5 (November 2010): 1011-7.

associated with screen time, be *mindful* about the use of screen time, and adults should *model* healthy screen use.[11] In 2019 the Canadian Paediatric Society adopted and adapted the 4-M model for a new policy statement on screen time for school-aged children and adolescents. Rather than minimizing and mitigating screen time, the emphasis is placed on *managing* and *monitoring* screen time. It recommends managing screen time via screen time apps and 'family media plans,' which serve as a written agreement between a child and their guardian about the child's individualized screen time and content limits. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics' family media plan sets "screen free zones" like bedrooms and the dinner table and "screen free times" like in the car or before bed; sets content guidelines like that the child agrees to "use media to be creative," to watch educational content "vetted by trusted sources like PBS or Common Sense Media," and to "NOT spend lots of time watching fast-paced shows or apps with lots of bells & whistles";[12] and sets a list of alternatives to screen time like "looking at books, going to the library, playing outside, playing dress-up or make believe, playing with friends, playing with blocks, Legos & puzzles, being with my family."[13]

The problem of managing children's screen time has as much to do with the problem of managing children's time in general given that the temporality of children's lives is becoming seemingly more dense. According to the 2018 *LEGO Play Well Report*, one in five (17%) children say they are too busy to play.[14] From academic to extracurricular obligations, children today are said to have less unscheduled time than previous generations. Screen time matters in the grand scheme of things because time is finite; if as experts suggest children are indeed spending more time with screens, the real concern is that they won't have enough time during the day for activities necessary for their development like sleeping, studying, and of course, play. Hence why the Canadian

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[11] Canadian Paediatric Society, "Position Statement," *Paediatrics & Child Health,* 22, no. 8 (October 2017): 461-468, https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/screen-time-and-young-children.

[12] American Academy of Pediatrics, "Create Your Family Media Plan," accessed May 24, 2021, https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx#planview.

[13] American Academy of Pediatrics, "Create Your Family Media Plan."

[14] The Lego Foundation, *LEGO Play Well Report*, (The Lego Group, 2018). https://www.legofoundation.com/en/learn-how/knowledge-base/lego-play-well-report-2018/

Paediatric Society's 4-M model includes *monitoring* for signs of problematic screen use including "screen time that interferes with offline play, physical activities or socializing face-to-face."[15] Screen time matters not only because of the possible negative influence of poor-quality content but also, significantly, because of what the quantity of time with screens displaces.

The outdoor play movement in Canada has become more directly involved in monitoring, managing, and measuring children's screen time in the digital age. In June 2015 a group of Canadian experts representing fourteen organizations, with input from more than sixteen hundred stakeholders including parents, educators, and health practitioners, released a Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play which states,

> Access to active play in nature and outdoors—with its risks—is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children's opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings—at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.[16]

According to the statement's authors, the motivation for producing the position statement was that "children's play has become more structured and occurs increasingly indoors" fuelled in large part by "television, computers, electronic games, tablets, [and] cell phones."[17] Outdoor play is thus a strategy for re-directing children away from the indoors where screens loom large.

Outdoor play not only re-directs the child's activity away from the screen, which is viewed as sedentary and solitary, equally important is that it encourages play that is self-directed, otherwise known as a "free play." Outdoor Play Canada, which describes itself as "a growing network of leaders and organizations working together to galvanize an outdoor play movement across Canada," defines free play in its thirteen-page glossary of play terminology as "child directed, intrinsically motivated, freely chosen and is a goal in

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[15] Canadian Paediatric Society, "Position Statement," 464.

[16] "Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play," https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/position-statement-on-active-outdoor-play-en.pdf.

[17] Mark S. Tremblay, et al., 6477.

itself without external rules and structure."[18] The power of free play is that it's presumed that it puts the child in control of the play. Sports are not considered free play because, as psychologist Peter Gray puts it, "if it involves a coach, it isn't play."[19] Free play is about fostering the child's agency, opposed to opportunities for play that are organized, structured or mediated by adults or, worse, screens. Free play is also opposed to opportunities for play that have intended outcomes or goals, like sports, which may be active and played outdoors but are rule bound and goal oriented (determining where, when, and how to play and why) so aren't considered free play. The idea is that, in free play, the child has the freedom to choose the where, when, how, and why of their own play.

A whole host of articles and bestselling books have been written by experts in support of outdoor, free play. Mary Rivkin writes, "the human species evolved in the outdoors" and suggests that evolution may be disturbed when children grow and develop with minimal involvement in the outdoor world.[20] She reasons that because children are the most vulnerable to changes in the environment, it is especially important for them to continue to have access to the outdoors, which is "their natural habitat."[21] In a similar tone, Joe L. Frost suggests the "dissolution of children's outdoor play" may affect a child's "fundamental survival skills."[22] Peter Gray has also written forcefully about declines in outdoor play and increases in psychopathology in children and adolescents. In his most popular book, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play will Make our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Gray argues for learning through play on the basis of its consistency with our evolutionary history as hunter-gathers and that children suffer irrevocable damage to their mental growth, emotional development, and overall sense of well-being when they are denied the chance

[18] Outdoor Play Canada, "Outdoor Play Glossary of Terms," Draft 5.1, May 2019, np.

[19] Peter Gray, Keynote Address Nature-Based Early Learning Conference. *North American Association for Environmental Education* (August 28, 2019).

[20] Mary Rivken, *The Great Outdoors: Advocating for Natural Spaces for Children* (Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2015), 697.

[21] Mary Rivken, 703.

[22] Joe L. Frost, "The Dissolution of Children's Outdoor Play: Causes and Consequences," *Common Good Conference*, 3, no. 1 (May 2006): 7.

to free play. The problem isn't that children don't know how to play (according to these authors, it's in their instinct) but that they haven't been given the appropriate space or opportunity to play.[23] The solution, to return children back to nature—to play at their natural times, in their natural places, and with natural things—is by no means new. It carries resonances of Rousseau and of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Romantics.

The point is that these ideas have been around for a long time in Western social thought. If the goal of today's outdoor play movement is to make outdoor play a universal priority for all children, it clearly won't be achieved by the sudden awakening of society to the essential value of play. I submit that the genealogy I've undertaken here reveals the universalization of outdoor play is shaped by prevailing social inequities, assumptions, institutional discourses, and established cultural practices. It continues to take great effort to maintain the mechanisms, practices, and strategies, etc. that make the value of play known and to mobilize that knowledge into actual opportunities for children to play. The Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play, was designed for precisely this purpose:

> to be a foundation of credible evidence from which programs, strategies, campaigns, policies, practices and environmental modifications can be provoked, initiated and supported.[24]

The position statement offers science-based evidence for the imperative of free play, outdoors, and in nature for healthy child development, around which efforts to promote play can then coalesce. Still, there is virtually no reflexivity here about the fact that children are not a monolithic category, with equal opportunities, interests, values and ambitions. Nor is there self-awareness of how the promotion of outdoor play is in any way related to broader disciplinary discourses or technologies of normalization.

A number of groups and organizations have already adopted and aligned their interests with the position statement including Outdoor Play Canada, Right to Play, Child and

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[23] Peter Gray, *Free to Learn*: *Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play will Make our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

[24] Mark S. Tremblay, et al., 6482.

Nature Alliance, CHEO Research Institute, Earth Day Canada, BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit, the Lawson Foundation, ParticipAction, The Canadian Coalition for the Child's Rights, Kid Active, Play by Nature, and Hight Five: The Best Way to Play. Though their individual goals vary, they similarly promote play, especially play that is active, outdoor, and free, as a means for actualizing their mandates. For instance, Outdoor Play Canada hosts an annual summit on outdoor play where they present the Outdoor Play Canada Honour Award, "designed to recognize and celebrate an individual/ organization who has demonstrated exceptional and sustained leadership for the promotion of outdoor play in Canada";[25] the British Columbia Children's Research Institute is designing a "Playability Index" to measure "the extent to which a given environment is friendly for children's unsupervised outdoor play" for the purpose of "designing urban environments to meet children's needs and positively influence their development and well-being";[26] the Canadian Parks Council published "The Nature Playbook," which is a guide to help Canadians "Take Action to Connect a New Generation of Canadians with Nature";[27] and The Lawson Foundation committed 4.95 million dollars to the second phase of its "Outdoor Play Strategy." [28]

The alignment of various interests with the position statement is one of the factors involved in how a uniform truth about play's value in managing a myriad number of threats posed by screen time is being maintained. As its author's state, the position statement is intended "to facilitate a recalibration of attitudes, practices, policies, and ultimately normative behaviours to promote healthy child growth and development."[29] I argue that such position statements, along with things like Outdoor Play Canada's glossary of play terminology, and the Canadian Paediatric Society's screen time

[25] Outdoor Play Canada, "Introducing the 2019 Outdoor Play Canada Award Winners," September 28, 2019, https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/2019/09/28/introducing-the-2019-outdoor-play-canada-award-winners/.

[26] Brussoni Lab, "Playability," accessed June 24, 2021, https://brussonilab.ca/playability/.

[27] Canadian Parks Council, "The Nature Playbook," 2016, https://parks-parcs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/nature-playbook.pdf.

[28] Lawson Foundation, "Outdoor Play Strategy: Phase 2 (2021-2023)," accessed June 24, 2021, https://lawson.ca/our-work/outdoor-play/second-phase/.

[29] Mark S. Tremblay, et al., "Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play," 6493.

recommendations are part of standardizing and universalizing what constitutes good or normal action with respect to play and screens in the digital age. They form the basis for what we know about play and screens and guide our efforts to support the healthy development of future generations.

The CBC has also aligned itself with the movement to promote play, particularly outdoors. The CBC Kids companion website for parents, called CBC Parents, offers parents "simple Crafts, healthy recipes, active living ideas, easy ways to learn through play and details on your kids' favourite CBC Kids shows."[30] The website's main menu leads to a series of play resources for parents with titles like, "24 Ways Every Child Should Play Before Age 12."[31] In keeping with their long history of purposeful programming, the CBC's animated television series for ages four to seven called *Dot*, is another example of how outdoor play is being normalized as a tool for screen management. The series is based on the children's picture book by digital lifestyle expert and entrepreneur Randi Zuckerberg and features an eight-year-old technophile, named Dot, who plays responsibly outdoors with her iPad. According to the CBC, the program "celebrates all the ways kids can use technology to play and explore while maintaining balance and getting lots of active, outdoor time."[32] Martin Markel, then senior director of children's content told the press, "it's a great model for how parents at home can integrate technology into their own lives and the lives of their children…we expect the show will be a big hit for us."[33]

Shortly after its debut, the series received the 2016 Kidscreen Award for Best New Series, a Parents' Choice Award, a Common Sense Media 5 Star rating, and the Roger's Prize/BANFF Media Festival Excellence in Canadian Content Award. The series companion app, Dotopedia, which was launched a year later as part of CBC Kids multi-

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[30] CBC, "CBC Parents" accessed September 22, 2021. htttp://www.cbc.ca/parents/.

[31] CBC Parents, "24 Ways Every Child Should Play Before Age 12," February 23, 2016, https://www.cbc.ca/parents/play/view/24-ways-every-child-should-play-before-age-12.

[32] CBC, "Schedule Changes Coming to Kids' CBC This Fall," August 16, 2016, www.cbc.ca/parents/play/view/shedule-changes-coming-to-kids-cbc-this-fall.

[33] Jeremy Dickenson, "Kids' CBC readies fall lineup," Kidscreen, May 30, 2016, http://kidscreen.com/2016/05/30/kids-cbc-readies-fall-lineup/.

platform strategy, won the Award of Excellence for Best Cross-platform Interactive Content at the Youth Media Alliance Awards, a Common Sense Media 4 Star rating, and has received nominations for a BANFF Rockie Award for Interactive Content For Kids and Youth, and a 2018 Canadian Screen Award for Best Cross-Platform Project for Children's and Youth.

 Dot's success is not a coincidence. The series has been widely celebrated because according to experts *Dot* is an example of quality screen time. *Dot* counts as quality screen time not because it merely celebrates a balance of screen time and playtime but because it's designed to regulate children's screen time and playtime in developmentally normative ways. Children's media texts, including *Dot*, are never just passive celebrations of childhood, they're one of the central means through which we regulate our relationship to images, language, and practices related to childhood.[34] *Dot* does more than just celebrate balance; *Dot* regulates our relationship to normative concepts and practices associated with balance including 'unplugging,' 'screen-free zones,' and 'outdoor active play.' The series offers a set of conceptual rules to guide the child in the normative sense of enabling them (and their guardians) to shape, channel, and transform their conduct so as to improve that conduct. Its aim is to guide the child toward determining better from worse action—specifically, playing outdoors is better; too much screen time is worse.

 It's not presumptuous to say that this is one of the show's objectives nor is it surprising given that the CBC continues to take seriously its mandate to select children's programs that serve the child's core developmental needs. In an interview with the CBC, the show's creator, Randi Zuckerberg, explains that her motivation for creating *Dot* was firstly to address the gender gap in the tech industry and secondly to help children to know when to unplug. Referring to Dot's character, Zuckerburg says, "she's very entrepreneurial, but we wanted to make it balanced. She knows how and when to put the tech away."[35] *Dot*

[34] Rose, Jacqueline, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 138-139.

[35] Born Digital, "CBC to Premier Randi Zuckerberg's Animated Show About Tech-Savvy Girl," June 2, 2016, accessed June 24, 2021, https://www.borndigital.com/2016/06/02/randi-zuckerberg-2016-06-02.

aligns with the expert recommendation that among the most significant things we can do to secure the child's development is reduce screen time in favour of increasing outdoor playtime.

Outdoor, active, free play is not only a tool for monitoring and managing screen time but also a measurement of how children are doing in the age of ubiquitous screens. In Canada, ParticipAction's annual "Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth" and Active Healthy Kids' "Global Alliance Report Card on Physical Activity" both use active, outdoor, free play as a primary metric of health and well-being. In recent years both report cards gave Canadian children a failing or near failing grade for active outdoor play. According to ParticipAction, on average Canadian children and youth in grades six to ten play outdoors for only fifteen minutes per day, earning them an 'F' on the report card. Similarly, on the 2018 Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance report card, Canadian children received a D for active play.[36]

Both report cards note that there are limitations to what we can learn from play given that we don't yet have a reliable measurement for play. Recognizing this as one of the major barriers to studying children's outdoor play, researchers at Queen's University are working to overcome the challenge of scientific validity by designing an outdoor play algorithm. Their goal is to provide a more reliable measurement for specific types of play using accelerometers, GPS data, and various mapping technologies.[37] The algorithm is meant to take the subjectivity out of quantifying play defined as active, outdoor, and/or free with the hopes of improving the validity of future studies.

While it may be the case that once an algorithm is established it no longer directly involves the subjectivity of the individual researcher, what is often overlooked is that algorithms require the input of data collected by researchers who are not exempt from

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[36] Participaction, "The Role of the Family in the Physical Activity, Sedentary and Sleep Behaviours of Children and Youth. The 2020 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth," Toronto: ParticipACTION, 2020; Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance, "Global Matrix 3.0," (November, 2018). https://www.activehealthykids.org/3-0/.

[37] Michael M. Borghese and Ian Janssen, "Development of a Measurement Approach to Assess Time Children Participate in Organized Sport, Active Travel, Outdoor Active Play, and Curriculum-Based Physical Activity," *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 3 96 (March 2018).

having to make crucial and complex decisions about what to count in the first place. Those decisions are central to the kinds of knowledge that an algorithm can produce. For example, in order to develop a measurement for play that can be reproduced by others, researchers must first decide which play behaviours are meaningful. The actions that are considered meaningful and therefore worth measuring are not given but contingent upon, for example, who decides what actions count as outdoor, active, free play. The design of an algorithm is another example of the way that the value of outdoor play is not given, but rather is constantly produced and reproduced through the collection of data that then becomes the foundation of knowledge upon which future strategies are sustained.

Play continues to be a solution to myriad childhood problems in part because of the widespread institutional investment from multiple stakeholders who help create and maintain our shared knowledge and practices with respect to those problems. Neither the problem of screens nor play's value is given, hence why they must be continually reproduced and reinforced today through the creation and maintenance of standard norms and practices using guidelines, recommendations, definitions, report cards, algorithms, and so on. Even as older views or practices have fallen out of favour or have lost their status as 'truth,' the mechanisms and alliances that were established can and do live on in new forms, practices, institutions and so on.

It's worth repeating that what I'm calling into question here isn't the validity of our knowledge about play and screens. What I question is the idea that there is something ready-made and universal out there called outdoor, active, free play for us to study and to harness. We treat the science of play as an objective process of uncovering knowledge about play (for example, about its role in the child's development). The science of play is, more accurately, the process of producing knowledge about play through scientific practice. In other words, knowledge about play, as well as screens, is produced through scientific practices (for example outdoor play algorithms or audience research studies) and forms the basis for non-scientific practices (for example, reform movements, task forces, public service campaigns, position statements, screen time recommendations, rights discourses, and so on). This doesn't mean that the knowledge that is produced is

invalid. It means knowledge and practices involving play and screens are not inevitable but rather contingent, subject to chance, emerging over time by accident, coincidence, convenience, allegiance, tension, or outright struggle and involve a whole constellation of institutions, individuals, practices, discourse and so on. Knowing how knowledge is produced allows us to begin to see that play is not just something children need to do for their development; it's also a technique for producing particular ways of being in the world.

The ongoing reproduction of play as a useful site for shaping the temporal, spatial, and material conditions of childhood is evidence of play's power as a tool for securing the social body and for producing normative subjectivities. Play promises us access to the child's total development—not only to the child's cognitive development but also to their physical development. It's play's scientific link to development that makes it so useful to such a wide range of factors involved in childhood, including the problem of screens. Efforts to secure the child's development latch onto play because they take for granted that play is panoptic—a way of making visible everything there is to see and making knowable everything there is to know about the child's development. Put another way, play is a medium through which populations can be shaped, supervised, observed, inspected, diagnosed, nurtured, guided, transformed, remediated, disciplined and so on.

To borrow a familiar concept from Foucault, I'm suggesting a view of play as a disciplinary resource. Play belongs to a set of power relations responsible for producing the effects we call development along with, for example, psychology, paediatric medicine, and education. Western societies invest many millions of dollars creating all sorts of so-called appropriate opportunities for play not to "foster the sweet bird of liberty,"[38] as Brian Sutton-Smith phrases it, but to foster the child's progress through the normative stages of development. When we speak of unleashing the power of play we're really speaking of making play work for us—capturing or channeling play, containing its benefits, optimizing its outcomes—with the hope of securing the child's future as a productive member of society. The organizations and mechanisms I describe in the first

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[38] Quoted in David Cohen, *The Development of Play.* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 7.

part of this chapter are all part of a network of regulation demanding that we invest in play in specific ways and at specific times, always in the service of producing the enabled child who will, one day, be ready and able to participate fully in society.

Because the movement to 'free' children to play actively, outdoors, in nature is a movement to liberate children from the structures—particularly screens—determining their play, it's easy to lose sight of or overlook its regulatory imperative. To the contrary, I'd suggest that outdoor play's association with freedom only makes it a more effective form of disciplinary power, versus the so-called structured play experts now discourage, precisely because of its association with freedom. Play in general, but free play in particular, remains a powerful resource for regulating the child's behaviour in large part because it doesn't have regulation as its objective. The way Foucault puts it, the success of disciplinary power "is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms."[39] Play is a tool or technique for child development that experts tell us is innate to all children, meaning that it's imbedded within the child rather than imposed on the child. Further still, play is often associated with positive feelings of joy and freedom, quite the opposite of discipline or regulation. The shift in expert discourses toward free play might be a shift toward a looser form of disciplinary power, but it is looser only in the sense of its shifting tactics. This helps to explain why we require position statements, definitions, report cards, and algorithms to manage, monitor, and measure free play. To reiterate, what we call free play is not less but more so a tool for securing the child's future as a productive member of society than, say, the highly structured tactics reminiscent of the early twentieth-century playground movement.

This is not to suggest that utilizing play toward positive developmental outcomes is a negative. Foucault's ideas with respect to disciplinary power are uniquely suited to explaining how play operates because while on one hand discipline produces subjected bodies, it simultaneously increases the utility of the body. There is a positive economy of discipline that strengthens the body.[40] This is important for at least two reasons: one is

[39] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 86.

[40] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* 94.

that play can be both understood as 'good' in the sense that it prompts the child's development and at the same time be understood as a disciplinary technology in the way that it strives to normalize that development. Thus it's not necessary to denounce play's association with progress in order to launch a critique of play's various value propositions. Two is that it leaves room for considering the possible ways that individuals resist constraint. Georges Vigarello stresses that this simultaneous strengthening means that the body might also at any time turn against the powers that seek to constrain it.[41] And in fact, studies of children have shown just how adept they are at subversion, particularly in play.[42] As Sara Grimes describes, "with limited access to other forms of cultural participation, play becomes a key forum for children to congregate, negotiate, critique and engage in political discourse."[43] For instance, researchers recently returned to the recordings made by Peter and Iona Opie in the 1970s and 1980s of children's scatalogical and transgressive songs and rhymes on the playground, many of which have survived in various forms on today's playgrounds. They argue that these songs and rhymes can serves as entry points into worlds otherwise off limits to children as well as tools for exercising power.[44]

One might be thinking, what are the consequences of universalizing practices as uncontroversial as encouraging children to spend time playing outdoors with all its advantages or something as trivial as reducing the amount of time children spend on screens? Even universal practices as seemingly trivial as these have consequences that are anything but trivial. Universals are of consequence first of all because they condition possibility for action. They provide a framework for everyday conduct by enabling us to question our action and subsequently shape that action according to normative rules

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[41] Georges Vigarello, "The Life of the Body in Discipline and Punish." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12 (1995): 158-163.

[42] Marjatta Kalliata, *Play Culture in a Changing World* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006); Brian Sutton-Smith, *Folkgames of Children* (University of Austin Press: 1971); Laura Tallant, "Framing Young Children's Humour and Practitioner Responses to it Using a Bakhtinian Carnivalesque Lens. *International Journal of Early Childhood* 47, no. 2 (2015): 251-266.

[43] Sara Grimes, *Digital Playgrounds* (University of Toronto Press, 2021), 6.

[44] Lara Jopson, Andrew Burn, Jonathan Robinson, "The Opie Recordings: What's Left to be Heard?" in *Children's Games in the New Media Age: Childlore, Media and the Playground*, eds. Andrew Burn and Chris Richards (Surry, England: Ashgate, 2014), 48.

prescribed by those recognized as experts. The problem here is that while play in the abstract appears universal, definitions of what counts as appropriate play aren't. So they mustn't be taken for granted.

One of Brian Sutton-Smith's greatest contributions to the study of play has been illustrating the diverse range of meanings given to play in order to illustrate that play is ambiguous. As a result of this ambiguity, attempts to treat children's play universally for development have often exposed contradictions. For example, ParticipAction, whose mandate is to promote physical activity, targeted the play deficit with a public service campaign using the slogan, "Screen time is taking away play time. Make room for play."[45] In an unexpected twist, the following year ParticipAction praised the massively multiplayer online game, Pokémon Go in a position statement for doing "positive things."[46] The statement was all the more curious given ParticipAction's previous involvement in a position statement that discouraged people from playing physically active video games like the Nintendo Wii on the basis that they are "typically played indoors, and were linked to a TV and game console."[47] The Joan Ganz-Cooney Centre, a non-profit founded by the creators of *Sesame Street*, in the United States similarly published a report on Pokémon Go praising it for not only stimulating outdoor play, but for bringing families together through what they call "joint media engagement."[48] The approval of one game and not the other is evidence that what counts as 'good' play is contingent: Pokémon Go received an endorsement (whereas the fitness game console Nintendo Wii previously did not) because by playing Pokémon Go "people are getting active outdoors (which aligns very well with our Position Statement on Outdoor Active Play)."[49]

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[45] Carly S. Priebe et al., "Make Room for Play: An Evaluation of a Campaign Promoting Active Play," *Journal of Health Communication*, 24 (February 2019): 39.

[46] Allana LeBlanc, "Is Pokémon Go becoming the Next Fitness Craze," ParticipAction, July 14, 2016.

[47] Allana LeBlanc, "Is Pokémon Go becoming the Next Fitness Craze," np.

[48] Kiley Sobel, "Families and Pokémon Go," Joan Ganz Cooney Center, March 28, 2017, https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/2017/03/28/families-and-pokemon-go/.

[49] Allana LeBlanc, "Is Pokémon Go becoming the Next Fitness Craze."

While the stakes may arguably be low in cases where universals are used to form decisions about things like whether or not to endorse a digital game, there are potentially greater stakes. For instance, the position statement on outdoor play isn't only being used to promote play or to measure the value of play, it's also being factored to decision making beyond play, like in the case of a precedent-setting legal ruling made by the Supreme Court of British Columbia, dismissing a civil claim against the municipality of Saanich in the case of a playground accident. The judge cited the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play on the matter of risk-taking stating that, "children who never hazard a chance are unlikely to develop properly either physically or emotionally."[50] The statement's authors have marked this ruling as evidence that the statement is working as intended, "to facilitate a recalibration of attitudes, practices, policies, and ultimately normative behaviours to promote healthy child growth and development."[51]

Secondly, universals have consequences because their constraints are not felt evenly or equally by all. Since play is now widely recognized to be something that all children need for their development, we tend to overlook the way that efforts to define and secure appropriate opportunities are exclusionary. Today's algorithms, glossaries, indexes, report cards, and so on, which we use to encourage and support children's play are rooted in presuppositions about age, class, race, gender, geographic location, and more. Yet, it's now widely recognized that childhood is not felt or experienced universally.[52] In *Disclosing Childhoods* Syros Spyrou explains that

> though it might be useful to retain a notion of childhood as a singular and universal phenomenon based on children's structural position in the generational order, it is also important to acknowledge the variety of childhoods which emerge in local, particular contexts as these are variously constrained by structural forces

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[50] Tim Gill, "Playground claim thrown out in landmark court judgement," *Rethinking Childhood,* February 22, 2016. https://rethinkingchildhood.com/2016/02/22/playground-claim-landmark-court-judgement-british-columbia_canada/.

[51] Mark S. Tremblay, et al., "Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play," 6493.

[52] Mary Jane Kehily, *Understanding Childhood: A Cross Disciplinary Approach* (Bristol: Polity Press, 2013).

and as variously experienced by children themselves depending on their social characteristics and biographical circumstances.[53]

To illustrate Spyrou's point, play in nature is the gold standard for developmentally appropriate play; however, access to outdoor spaces and especially to 'nature,' which is itself an idealized category of mythic proportion (especially in Canada), is not given. To give another example, the high value placed on active play reinforces certain able bodies as normal bodies, ignoring the range of different abilities and disabilities children possess. There will always be types of play and thus types of players (i.e. children) who can't be assimilated to universal norms. As a result supplementary disciplines will emerge to deal with the abnormal.[54] Thus for some children, play is a technology that seeks to optimize, where for others it seeks to normalize, seclude, surveil, and discipline. Hence, it's important to know who has the authority to decide what counts as meaningful play activity (and subsequently the power to discount other activity) as well as what groups or institutions confer that authority. Perhaps most important of all, we need to know how that authority is currently used in organizing actual children's lives.

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[53] Syros Spyrou, *Disclosing Childhoods: Research and Knowledge Production for a Critical Childhood Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), *9.*

[54] Michel Foucault, "Lecture Two: 15 January 1975," in *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France* (New York: Picador, 1999).

Conclusion

On April 8, 2020 Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind *Sesame Street,* announced that a half-hour special called *Sesame Street: Elmo's Playdate* would air simultaneously across all WarnerMedia networks in the United States on April 14 and globally in the United Kingdom, Mexico, Singapore, and Canada via their distribution partners on April 15. The special is part of the *Caring for Each Other* initiative launched by Sesame Workshop in March, 2020 at the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic to help children and their families cope with changing routines, anxiety, and loss as result of the crisis. What makes Elmo's Playdate particularly special is that it's a virtual playdate, (imitating a video conference call reminiscent of FaceTime, Zoom, or Google Meet) in order to "feel very familiar to today's viewers," most of whom were adapting to online learning following school closures and to lockdowns that prohibited seeing family or friends in person. According to the press release, "the special would follow Elmo, Grover, Cookie Monster, Abby Cadabby, and a few famous friends as they find new ways to play and learn together." The press release promises that "kids will love getting a visit from their Sesame Street friends, and caregivers will appreciate how the special models playful learning opportunities they can use at home."[1]

Elmo's Playdate is evidence of how we've adapted as previous ways of being in the world have been disrupted due to Covid-19. For most of 2020, across North America, playgrounds were cordoned off with caution tape, their swing sets removed, and signs posted prohibiting children from playing on them. Meanwhile, screen time limits were all-but entirely lifted as screens became a lifeline to family, friends, and essential services. As a result, many of the things we hold to be necessary and true about children's play and screens have also been disrupted. Despite normally being discouraged, screen time became a defining characteristic of the new 'normal.' Now that things are different,

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[1] Sesame Workshop, "Primetime Special 'Sesame Street: Elmo's Playdate' to Offer Families Connection in Challenging Times," Press Release. https://www.sesameworkshop.org/press-room/press-releases/ primetime-special-sesame-street-elmos-playdate-offer-families-connection

Elmo's Playdate is an effort to model a new set of norms for healthy play and screen media engagement.

The pandemic has cracked opened a small window into the contingency of what we hold to be necessary truths about many things, including play and screen time. Screen time limits are only applicable when we don't depend on screens for a wide range of daily tasks. Outdoor play isn't possible during national lockdowns or when playgrounds, school grounds, national parks, and so on are closed to the public. This of course doesn't mean that outdoor play is no longer beneficial or that screen time is suddenly innocuous; rather my point is that the answer to the question how should children play went from outdoor, active, free play to 'virtual playdates' and the answer to the question how much screen time is okay went from hourly limits determined by age to 'it depends.'

It need not take a global crisis to see the contingency in the way that things are today. For those who are willing to look, genealogy can help to elucidate that the way things are today depends on a wide number of forces. Not all of the forces involved in making-up the present are as obvious as a pandemic. In fact, most are barely perceptible because they've become part of common and everyday experiences—like software quietly running in the background—and it takes incentive to question the way things normally are. Genealogy provides us with the heuristics to look into our everyday practices in order to ask how they came to be the way they are—how we know certain things are true, how we know certain actions are good or bad, and so on. Genealogy illustrates how things came to be the way they are in order to help us see that how anything comes to be is contingent rather than necessary. This dissertation begins the work of tracing some of the factors that have contingently and historically conditioned our present concern for play and screens. In doing so, I've examined Canadian archival materials that not only speak to the role of play but also the place of television in children's lives, which contributes to filling a relative void in Canadian media studies.[2]

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[2] Natalie Coulter, "Missed Opportunity: The Oversight of Canadian Children's Media."
Canadian Journal of Communication 41, no. 1 (2016): 95-113.

There is never just one cultural element that enables something to thrive. As noted in the introduction, there is no single answer to the question of how play became a widely agreed upon strategy for managing the problem of screens. Rather, there are multiple complex answers to the problems genealogies trace. Colin Koopman uses the helpful metaphor of an hourglass laid horizontally on its side where on the left side there are a tangle of threads and as each thread is pulled, one at a time, through the narrow centre and into the right side of the hourglass, one can observe the individual features of that thread and can also identify how, despite its distinct features, it relates to each subsequent thread that passes through the hourglass. As such, genealogy helps to coordinate the numerous, seemingly disparate elements of our culture so as to reveal how they've been woven into a larger, multi-threaded singularity that we recognize in the present.[3]

In keeping with Koopman's metaphor, throughout this project I've untangled four distinct threads that are part of the making-up of our particular knowledge and practices around play's usefulness as a tool for managing, monitoring, and measuring the problem of screen time. Though they are distinct, they are related in that they each support our particular way of understanding and subsequently responding to play and screens. The concerns of the twentieth-century playground movement, for instance, might seem like concerns belonging only to the past; nevertheless, they are significant to how play came to be understood as an investment flexible enough to address a seemingly endless number of threats to child development. The movement propelled efforts to gather and generate the factual material required to mobilize highly costly investment in the 'correct' play infrastructure across Canadian cities. These knowledge practices might have fallen to the wayside if they had not been further bolstered by the work of psychologists who took-over the role of play expert and who mapped play onto the biological development of the child, standardizing and universalizing the proper requirements for children's play.

Meanwhile, the emergence of television in the 1950s as the cause of a momentous rupture in children's lives gave rise to a range of new responsive practices for managing

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[3] Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 48-49.

the threat that the screen posed to child development, including a search for measurements of television's effects, which facilitated the linking-up of experts on television with experts on play whose knowledge became the foundation for national campaigns, programs, and policies, setting new standards of practice for children's play and screens.

None of these factors were necessary. Nor do they form a complete picture of the past; first, because there are factors that, due to the limited scope of this project, haven't been explored here but are nonetheless important—for example, both childhood and nature have their own complex histories of contingencies—and, second, because the goal of genealogy is not to present a complete historical narrative that traces the past along a linear course of events. That may seem unsatisfying to some, which is understandable. It's not been easy to sit with the loose ends of the threads genealogy unravels. I realize that I may have opened equally as many questions as I've answered. For instance, what about the role of other public broadcasters, particularly TVO Kids which has had a significant impact on children's television in Canada as well as abroad. What, if anything, were private broadcasters doing to keep up with increasing demands for 'good' or 'quality' programming? What about the many screens that have entered into our lives in addition to television? In particular how do digital games from the 1980s to present factor into the history of children's play and screens time? Despite having garnered their own criticism, digital games are significant instances of play. How has the idea of a play deficit today been sustained in the wake of many millions of people playing an expanding number of digital games across multiple platforms? Is it logical or reasonable to see the influences of these games simply as extensions of a screen-based play deficit, in the manner of the 1950s through the 1970s? Or are they something qualitatively different? I have only skirted such questions here without engaging them in detail. Answering them satisfactorily will require many more future visits to the archives.

I began this project by saying that play is a powerful tool in a wide range of developmental outcomes; screen time is just one of the many areas where children's play has been a useful tool, and if *Elmo's Playdate* reveals anything at all, it's that play

continues to be applied in new ways even in the case of children's screen time. As I write this, someone else is busy devising or implementing yet another developmentally appropriate opportunity for children to play. Thus there are numerous directions for extending the work I've begun here to address the question of play's attachment to progress (or what Sutton-Smith called the ideological rhetoric of play as progress) in areas as diverse as child care, education, medicine, urban development, and even environmental advocacy. Genealogy can be used to trace the ways in which play has maintained its status in each of these areas (and others) as a tool or technique for normalizing the child's development. The advantage being that it then becomes possible to destabilize the normative practices that undermine and exclude the types of play and players who don't conform to the rule.

Although it may not have been Foucault's express purpose in undertaking his own genealogical inquires, genealogy has the potential to do more than simply map out a set of historically contingent normalizing discourses that have achieved a disciplinary and taken for granted character. As Maria Tambouku suggests, genealogy has the potential to make room for creative intervention:

> Calling into question self-evidences of the present by exposing the various ways they were constructed in the past, such histories shatter certain stabilities and help us detach ourselves from our 'truths' and seek alternative ways of existence.[4]

Or to paraphrase Koopman, once we know how things have been made-up, we can see that they could've been made-up differently[5] and, more importantly, that they can still be made-up differently for the future, if and when desirable. While this is beyond the scope of the present project, it offers important direction for the future of the work I've begun here.

One of the reasons why it's so difficult to critique play's attachment to progress is because play carries a pragmatic rightness, a sense that it is *essentially* good. By

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[4] Maria Tamboukou, "Writing Genealogies: An Exploration of Foucault's Strategies for Doing Research," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 20 no. 2 (1999): 210.

[5] Koopman,

historicizing this widely taken-for-granted idea, what I've aimed to lay out is how play became good not so that we can strip it of its goodness but so that we can strip it of its naturalness. Play can't be taken-for-granted as a natural or innate part of the child's 'becoming' in the world. Play is, indeed, a part of the child's 'becoming' not simply because it has to do with the child's development but because it is a tool or technique in the general exercise of power over children's bodies and in producing normative subjectivities. As such we require further consideration of the ways in which play's use may be fraught and in need of attention across the many areas of the child's life where it is applied.

What I'm suggesting is that it's important to know why it is we organize ourselves in the ways we do. There is ample scholarly inquiry into what happens to children under various play circumstance but comparatively fewer inquiries into why adults create those circumstances for play in the first place. What I hope to have demonstrated is that genealogy offers one such approach to this sort of inquiry. By looking back historically we can gain grip on that which conditions our present circumstance and also, importantly, our forward-looking projects; we can see how our decisions, which eventually become lost to us, will then be used to generate knowledge that will continue to shape future studies, practices, programs, policies, recommendations, and interventions.

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