

Enchantment and the Serious Play of A(musement)

Deborah Eicher-Catt

The Pennsylvania State University, York, USA

Abstract

Herein, I interrogate the phenomenological experience of enchantment as a playful sign process. Arguing against the Weberian notion that we are living in a “disenchanted world,” I aim to reveal how the existing contours of enchantment’s sign condition have significantly morphed in America, however, given our current distracting media-saturated environments. I begin by discussing enchantment as a form or habit of play, drawing specifically from the works of semiotician, Charles S. Peirce, and cultural historian, Johan Huizinga. We discover that enchantments take primarily two forms depending upon the interpretants we communicatively construct: one is indicative of what Peirce describes as a play of musement and the other is a result of what I call the play of amusement. The former is vital for human learning at higher orders of abstraction, growth, and positive ethical relations with others. The latter typically produces a bad ambiguity that eventually leads to an inability to discriminate or assess the relevance of perceived information and events. This form of play also often jeopardizes our relations with others given its primary focus on the self. Through this interrogation, we discover that our current enchantments or habits of play have serious epistemological consequences for cultural life.

Keywords: enchantment, serious play, habit, musement, semiotics, phenomenology, epistemology

1. Introduction

I come to the topic of enchantment because of my growing concern regarding our current “attention crisis” in America or what many are calling our increasing “culture of distraction” (for example, see Paul North, 2012). For as social theorist Maggie Jackson rightfully claims in her 2008 book, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (p. 13),

The way we live is eroding our capacity for deep, sustained perceptive attention—the building block of intimacy, wisdom, and cultural progress. Moreover, this disintegration may come at a great cost to ourselves and to society...The erosion of attention is the key to understanding why we are on the cusp of a time of widespread cultural and social losses.

I am particularly interested in the ways a distracted or fragmented consciousness—a multi-tasked consciousness—impacts our ability to create sustained, healthy dialogical relations with others; and, how our predominant modes of consciousness impact our evolving epistemologies. For, unlike distraction, which literally means to “draw apart” consciousness, the phenomenon of enchantment typically manifests as an intense perceptual moment that fascinates or literally “fastens” us to the phenomenal world in varying degrees. Given Jackson’s comments above, we must question whether the attentional arc of enchantment is one of those possible cultural and social losses to which she refers; a loss that would support Weber’s earlier critique of modernity as disenchanting (Jenkins, 2000). Often correlating the rise of secularization with disenchantment, social theorists have long sought to reconcile the world of “spirit” or *geist* with nature, or religion with science (Graham, 2007).

So, I begin by questioning if we are, in fact, losing our ability to attend to the world in any sustained way, to be enchanted in any kind of spiritual way, to engage in focused attention—at least to the extent that we become momentarily spell-bound by the ineffable qualities of life that surround us. At this stage of our cultural evolution, we must ask, as Max Weber argued long ago, whether we are living in a disenchanting world; a world dominated by a rationality that overpowers the ineffable—at the expense of a fuller appreciation of the aesthetic and/or apparent magical elements of everyday life. As I ponder this question, I cannot help but visualize the many young people I have seen walking home from school who now stumble along because they are glued to the smart phones they carry—heads down and yet moving forward—focused on an inanimate object which distracts them from paying attention to the immediate world around them. Is this mere distraction or another form of enchantment? I believe we should ask how our fast-paced, digital landscape currently impacts the role enchantment plays in our lives. Indeed, are we losing an appreciation for enchanting experiences altogether or have our enchantments merely shifted as a response to changing cultural norms? As will become apparent as I proceed, my overall argument takes issue with Weber’s assessment regarding the loss of enchantment in modern day life. Following Jane Bennet’s lead (2001) and appealing to the sentiments of McPherson and Taylor (2012), I aim to show that our world is still filled with forms of enchantment, although some of the traditional contours of its phenomenological sign conditions have morphed considerably given our current media saturated, consumerist environment. Ironically, our new *smart phones* and other forms of digital media have replaced earlier significations of magical thinking in our social imaginary.

Foremost, I believe grappling with the issue of enchantment in everyday life through

the lens of the pragmatic tradition and especially Charles S. Peirce's semiotic theory, can help us more clearly understand enchantments as discursive constructions. That is, we come to a better appreciation of enchantments as expressive/perceptive *response systems* which are constructed as a consequence of phenomenological sign actions. Through a semiotic lens, we begin to understand how the phenomenon of enchantment produces various signifying forms, depending upon the sign conditions so constructed by the addressee "who is enchanted." Elsewhere (Eicher-Catt, 2017), I outlined the important role our experiences of enchantment can serve in sustaining a semioethic of dialogue. Herein, I am concerned about how our signs of enchantment impact our ways of knowing. To help me unpack the epistemological significance of enchantment, I appeal to communication theorist and anthropologist, Gregory Bateson (1972). Thus my approach is communicological.

So, I see value in interpreting the sign process of enchantment through the lens of play. Following Gadamer's hermeneutical understanding of play (1960/1975) in *Truth and Method*, we begin to see how any encounter of enchantment is constituted as a consequence of playful sign action or interpretation. I also frame enchantment as play because of the similarities I see between it and the characteristics of play outlined by cultural historian, Johan Huizinga (1949). Roman Jakobson's (1960) model of language and discourse also helps me unpack the underlying elements and functions that generally shape the contours of enchantment as play.

As a result, I argue that our current enchantments exhibit different "play forms" as we experience and then learn particular responses to the world, each depending upon the context in which enchantment arises. I outline two primary forms of enchantment as playful sign conditions and the epistemological consequences they have in terms of our perceptions of self, other, and world. I describe these as musements and amusements, drawing substantially from Peirce's ideas but also drawing from the work of American media ecologists (Postman, 1985; Strate, 2014; Turkle, 2015). The latter theorists propose that we view our new forms of cultural media as environments that necessarily shape or "bias" our subsequent expressions and perceptions of the world. I'll end by arguing how our mediations of amusement and musement constitute enchantments as serious play (Bateson, 1972a) and we find that their epistemological consequences are significant (Bateson, 1972c).

2. The Play of Enchantment

It is best to view enchantment phenomenologically as an embodied experience and a consequence of sign actions or semiosis. Enchantment, we discover, is a particular *interpretant* co-constituted between a subject and an object present to consciousness—whether that is another human being, a beautiful sunset, or a high-definition video game (Peirce, 1940). Secondly, I argue that enchantment is a consequence of playful/interpretive sign actions and as such is a form or habit of discourse that exhibits the characteristics of

play. As cultural historian, Johan Huizinga who writes on play asserts (1949, p. 1),

play goes beyond the confines of purely physical or purely biological activity. It is a significant function—that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play, there is something “at play” which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action...the very fact that play has a meaning implies a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself.

To call play a significant function in experience is to emphasize its contours as thoroughly shaped by systems of representation operative within its very construction as a meaningful activity. The “non-materialistic quality” of play thus theoretically extends it beyond a purely physical or biological act and places it into the world of signs—thoughts, representations, messages, and communication—all accomplishments at higher levels of embodied thinking, abstraction, and semiosis. Moments of enchantment, I contend, reflect many of the qualities inherent in all forms of play. Below, I outline these qualities, following Huizinga’s discussion (1949).

2.1 Play is free

Play is the very essence of freedom. At first glance, this might appear contrary to the experience of enchantment, especially as we typically describe it. We talk about being “enchanted by” something...as if we are “captured” by an object present to consciousness from which we cannot escape. And yet, one of the essential qualities indicative of enchantment is its ability as a sign condition to produce discontinuities or gaps in our typical thoughts and actions. It temporarily “loosens” our directed consciousness on the everydayness of life experiences and frees us to experience...something more...something special. Phenomenologically it brackets our taken-for-granted perceptions and expressions and offers us an opportunity to stall discursive closure, rigidity in thinking, and personal stagnation (non-learning). Hence enchantment inaugurates a discursive space from which improvisational or “freer” thinking and actions may materialize. It is this “freeing” aspect of enchantment that reflects, most directly, Jakobson’s (1960) poetic function in language and discursive practices. It instantiates the possibility of reflexivity and creativity through the free-flowing reversibility of messages and codes within human discourse.

2.2 Play is not ordinary or real life

Here Huizinga means that play creates a temporary sphere of thought and action that stands apart from everyday “real life.” Again, experiences of enchantment are extraordinary events (to varying degrees) that allow us to step outside the realm of everyday consciousness. While play is not “real,” it often imitates it in a “trial-and-error” fashion, as Gregory Bateson attests (1972b). We try out different modes of discourse and action—of thinking and behaving as we play. It is partially this iconic quality of play that makes it so enthralling—we can be Other for a brief period of time as we adopt a different

perspective from which to view self, other, and world. This quality of play resembles moments of enchantment—moments that signal a temporary transcendence of everyday “real life.” That is why the mystical and/or ineffable qualities inherent in enchantment are also indicative of play. Understood within Jakobson’s semiotic model, we can conclude that enchantments set a different context for thought and action. This is partially because of enchantment’s unique evocative qualities—we are summoned as an addressee by the world, after all, in ways that are atypical.

2.3 Play acts as an interlude

Here Huizinga claims that play transpires within certain limits of time (duration) and place (local). It contains, he says, “its own course and meaning...a treasure to be retained by the memory” (Huizinga, 1949, pp. 9-10). It therefore “adorns life, *amplifies* it and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual—as a life function—and for society...” (1949, p. 9). Likewise, enchantment instantiates a particular context for interactions or a “play frame” (Bateson, 1972b). This frame creates unique message-to-code discursive relations and *amplifies* those relations. Furthermore play, Huizinga says, instantiates a space that is like a magical or sacred “playground.” He states, “all play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course” (1949, p. 10). Like play, experiences of enchantment create a specific frame of discourse (the metalinguistic or code function) that “cuts” into the taken-for-granted or mundane experience—creating a semiotic and phenomenological boundary condition. Enchantments thus create gaps in the stream of mundane experience that, depending upon their contours, can bring us to an epistemological threshold from which possible change or learning may transpire. Ironically, enchantment, like play, simultaneously frames or cuts conscious experience into recognizable units of perception *and* fosters integration of thought and action within its bounds as aesthetic expression. Above all, enchantments emphasize a specialized moment of contact where the phatic function of language and discourse as an aesthetic comes to the fore.

2.4 Play creates order

Ironically, in the semiotic process of “cutting” mundane experience into a specialized experiential frame, play also creates a peculiar order within its bounds. Here Huizinga is acknowledging how play reflects an aesthetics, given its focus on integrative perception and expression. As he eloquently asserts, “play has a tendency to be beautiful...it may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects” (1949, p. 10). Thus, like play, enchantment is characteristically rhythmic and seeks harmony or integration even through or perhaps because of the tensions it necessarily invokes. Like play, enchantment is thought to cast a spell over us and captivates us in its wholistic presence. Semiotically, we can understand this “ordering” process as the consequence of unique meta-linguistic and code to message

relations (Jakobson, 1960). It is also this ordering mechanism that makes enchantment as play so appealing and addictive—especially in a culture of distraction.

2.5 There is tension in play

For Huizinga, play entails an “...uncertainty, a chanciness, a striving to decide the issue and so to end it” (1949, p. 10). And, the element of tension imparts to play a certain ethical value in so far as it means a testing of the player’s prowess...courage, tenacity, resources and, last but not least his spiritual powers—his “fairness” (p. 11). Enchanting moments also entail similar tensions which in the end, I will argue, often manifest in two very different sign conditions or *interpretants* that have significant consequences for interpersonal relations. Again, these tensions produced in play and enchantment can be understood through the lens of Jakobson’s model of discourse. As Jakobson says (1960), always “at play” in discursive practices are the tensions between the various appositional/oppositional elements and functions of discourse. For example, tensions play out between the referential function (context) and the phatic function (contact) or the metalinguistic function (code) and the poetic function (message) or between the emotive (addresser) and conative (addressee)—with each apposition necessarily also serving as an opposition to the others. Enchanting experiences are, therefore, communicative moments necessarily ambiguous and risky, to a certain extent, given the playful balancing act we activate between these communicative elements and functions at any given moment.

2.6 All play has rules

As Huizinga states, these rules “determine what ‘holds’ in the temporary world circumscribed by play” (1949, p. 11). If the rules are transgressed, then the “whole play-world collapses” and the “illusion” that play creates is suspended. Semiotically, we know that these rules are the social conventions or metalinguistic code conditions that constrain how we might perceive and respond. Experiences of enchantment are also circumscribed by particular code-to-message relations that distinguish the two basic types of enchantment that I will discuss shortly. There resides in any frame of enchantment, therefore, a fragility to experience—given that the codes and messages within everyday life can easily dispel the boundaries of its existence.

Now that I have established our enchantments as forms of play, let’s look closer at how these forms typically manifest in lived experience. Here, I am asking: what forms or habits of play do our enchantments typically create? It appears that our experiences of playful enchantment manifest in primarily two different cultural forms—depending upon how they function for various perceiving/expressing subjects with a particular socio-cultural moment. I call these enchantments the play of amusement and the play of musement. They are distinguished based upon the type of semiotic play they represent and the phenomenological sign consequences each produces for self and other relations. I’ll begin by describing the play of amusement.

3. The Discursive Forms of Playful Enchantment

3.1 The play of amusement

Enchantments that are primarily about satisfying the experience of sensory enjoyment alone, I identify as amusements. An amusement is an aesthetic of experience that is marked by fascinations with things in the world (for example, our new digital forms of media) that are often used as modes of self-gratification or entertainment. Thus, social critic, Bernard Steigler, calls our current fascinations with digital technology, fleeting “strokes of enchantment” (2014a, p. 5). In such cases of enchantment, the play of musement or thinking as productively pragmatic (as Peirce would argue) is significantly diminished. The play of amusement appears to accentuate the symbolic nature within Peirce’s phenomenological category of Thirdness rather than the aesthetic of Firstness. As we know, Thirdness is the world of the intelligible more so than the ineffable. It is the world dominated by symbolic representations. It appears we are, therefore, amused by the abundance of codified information available through our *smart* devices—in whatever form they display—because we are enchanted by the supposed power of the symbolic. Thus, following Peirce, we can say that the theoretical prowess inherent in the play of musement is eclipsed by the play form of amusement. Unfortunately, in such situations, a banality to existence often manifests as the production of more abductive moments are thwarted by the bombardment of the symbolic. We continually surf the web or check our cell phones regularly to counter-act the banality this type of barrage of intelligibility creates. At the extreme, the play of amusement theoretically looks very much like a distracted consciousness. This is because, ironically, often a distracted consciousness is the result of being attracted or “attached” to too many phenomena at once. The current onslaught of intelligibility through playful amusements creates, of course, a non-fluent character to thoughts movement within semiosis. This is because the aesthetic quality to thought’s unfolding has been eclipsed by the symbolic.

Peirce helps us to understand this sign condition of amusements. Concerning our perceptual process in amusements, it appears that the proper evaluation process of information is disrupted when our goal is merely to be sensually stimulated and/or entertained. When appealing to only enchantments as amusements, our ability to habituate ourselves in such a manner so as to make good observations of the world—observations paired with reflection/deliberation activated through what Peirce describes as self-control are thwarted (1958-1966, CP 5.442). Lacking the focus and attention that careful deliberation requires, our observations become shallow and subject to the demands of the faced-paced modern, mass society. Because of this, we seem to rely more on pure “sense” perceptions or perceptual judgments (as Peirce would say is indicative of artists) which stand outside the bounds of rational criticism and self-control. As Peirce indicates, “artists,” those who create art, are “those for whom the chief thing is the qualities of feeling” (1958-1966, CP 1.43). So, by appealing primarily to the play of enchantment as amusement, we are becoming less able to make critical distinctions and see differences that make a

difference in the phenomenal world. I think our recent election of Donald Trump for U.S. President is a good case in point.

When we look closer at amusements from the standpoint of imagination and our abductive capabilities, we see an overall decrease in the “reasonableness” of our attractions or what we find admirable. Things that are deemed admirable in our society are based more upon arguments of feeling and sensibility (characteristic of artists’ abductions) rather than arguments of reason (characteristic of rational/scientific thinkers). So, our thinking/judgments, like that of the artist, have become more detached from the concrete reasonableness of experience—and tied more to what we might call the primary sensuality of experience—the world of representation and abstraction. I think this helps to partially explain why our culture appears so focused on the body/sensuality as opposed to the “sensuousness of thought” as Peirce would say that evolves in more rational modes of thinking (Anderson, 1987). Bernard Steigler (2014b) describes this cultural trend as the creation of a “libidinal economy” (represented most prominently in current popular TV and tabloid magazines) and claims that it is an outgrowth of capitalism and a consumer-oriented culture. As Steigler argues, unfortunately the organization and production of desire is the telos of such an economy.

Using Peirce’s discussion of artistic abductions, we can begin to understand this trend. After all, he says that artistic creativity/abduction has as its purpose “to seek”—a striving to embody the phenomena of life through representational means—an intense desire, in other words propels all esthetic action (Anderson, 1987). Our instances of amusement as play, (especially as they relate to consumer goods, services, and forms of digital technology) appear to provide the scaffolding for the maintenance of this type of economy and the insatiable desires that fuel it. The rise of the play of enchantment as merely amusement in our culture could be a consequence of our widespread use of artistic abductive processes. This could partially explain the cultural landscape of our postmodern times which is often characterized as one of “pure” play—or the carnival (Gergen, 1991).

As detailed above, one of play’s essential qualities is that it represents unchecked freedom from and freedom to. Such sign conditions are ripe for the production and normalization of fantasy chaining events and people. While imagination may be free to roam in such instances, it is, I contend, more often than not a diminished form—one that is not nourished by the constraints placed upon it by “good perception,” as Peirce would say. Consequently, we find a culture satisfied by mythologies—the sedimentary forms of our originary capacity for *mythos*—grounded as they are in Thirdness. One of the most powerful production companies of modern times, The Disney Corporation, serves as an excellent example of propagating such mythological enchantments. A good many Americans (both children and adults alike) are quite “enchanted” by Disney’s array of animated characters in their movies, television shows, and theme parks. Disney has successfully created a social imaginary—a production and re-production of mythologies that now easily replace any originary mythical consciousness we might have had. George Ritzer argues in his book, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* (2010), that such theme

parks offer us powerful simulations that serve to fuel a hyper consumerist culture.

So, we are now easily fascinated or enchanted by our evolving digital technologies (like the example given above) with their high definition graphics—where real-life babbling brooks seem to pale in sensual, stimulating comparison. Social theorist and critic, Barnard Steigler, would agree. In his (2015) book entitled, *The Re-enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit Against Industrial Populism*, he suggests that many forms of enchantment nowadays (especially those created through digital technologies) are increasingly evident in everyday life. Unfortunately, he claims, and I concur, that enchantments such as these typically end with disappointment, leaving us feeling existentially hollow or empty—spiritually adrift in a sea of consumerism fueled by ever increasing narcissistic tendencies. Consequently, we see diminished communicative practices (for example, text messaging, twitter, emails, and instagramming) diminishing the duration and quality of our relationships with Others that, in turn, severely diminish a healthy and fuller sense of Self. Licensed clinical psychologist and media scholar, Sherry Turkle, agrees. For her, our current culture of distraction fueled as it is by our digital fascinations, has severely hampered what she describes as the “lost art of conversation;” an art that must be resuscitated if we are to build interpersonal intimacy and communities of shared meaning (2017). Turkle understands that it is within the immediacy of these dialogic relations that healthy selves may come to fruition in the first place and where lasting communities are constituted.

Thus, appealing only to the play of amusements, ironically, we seem to be losing the “art for *imaginative thinking*” as Peirce suggests (Alexander, 1990), as we become too receptive to ready-made ideas—easily adopting other’s ideas instead of thinking and deliberating for ourselves. Unfortunately, under such conditions cultural discourse too often resembles echolalia, as American media ecologists have claimed (Strate, 2006), where endless repetition of established cultural codes dominate the social landscape. So, Peirce would describe this sign condition of amusement as indicative of an “unbridled” imagination; a condition he contends that often leads to disaster. This is why Peirce’s development of the concept of self-control became a central theme in his writings (Petry, 1992). At the very least, this type of unbridled imagination leads to generalizations that are not grounded in the “facts of experience” (as General Semanticists would say), and so they exhibit an irrationality or non-rationality to the actions performed from them (Korzybski, 1994). And as we become a culture that cannot get enough of the amusements we have created, we devolve into a culture that no longer knows how to think.

American media ecologist, Neil Postman, warned us about the danger of such amusements back in the 1980’s. Harkening back to Aldous Huxley’s lament in *Brave New World* about the political power such amusements yield, Postman reminds us that as a culture we should not fear what we hate (1985). In other words, it is not our hate toward social conditions and others that will be our cultural undoing. Instead, we should fear that which we come to love, given that our insatiable desires will be our eventual ruin. Focusing on the rise in popularity of new media forms like TV and other digital technologies,

Postman was also concerned about the growing trend toward trivialization of information that these new media forms can create. As he contends (1985, pp. 155-156),

when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility.

3.2 The play of musement

Enchantments that open us to a profound sense of wonder and puzzlement about our social circumstances and the world reflect “the play of musement,” a phrase Peirce used for describing the very movement of productive thought within semiosis (1998). As an esthetic of experience marked by freedom and movement of thought, the play of musement, according to Peirce, highlighted the imaginary potential within productive sign relations (Sebeok, 1981). These are instances where our phenomenological circumstances open us up to a moment of semiotic reverie (however short-lived it might be) where the signs actions of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness come into play—what Gadamer describes as the play of hermeneutics. For example, sitting by the ocean listening to the waves lap onto the shore. This experience can activate and highlight the esthetic experience of Firstness (as a unity of experience) at the same time that it moves thought forward in its interpretive development toward a yet to be codified Thirdness. Watching an opera or ballet performance are other examples that are more cultural than natural. These types of enchantments often entail stepping out of the ordinary or typical ways of being in the world into what Peirce describes, ironically, as the objective idealism of the real. In such circumstances, we often feel a profound sense of connection to things greater than ourselves—a momentary unity of experience—circling the parameters of the beautiful—the aesthetic. At the same time, the objects to consciousness take on the “vagueness” Peirce describes as indicative of the play of musement.

These types of experiences powerfully demonstrate the aesthetic capacity inherent in sign processes in which “living feelings can be spread” through the mediation of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness (Peirce, 1992, p. 327). As Peirce theorized, the affectual thread of Firstness spreads through thought and thus sustains a necessary fluency to thought’s productive unfolding within semiosis. This description of thought as “living feelings that can spread,” was one that Peirce adopted to accentuate the importance of a productive aesthetic fluency to thought’s unfolding that begins in Firstness. Distraction, of course, breaks up the fluency to thought and jeopardizes its full accomplishment, as Peirce would have it.

In terms of our perceptual process in enchanting moments such as these, the play of musement helps us to cultivate better observational abilities (enacted by all of our senses) because of its sustained intensity and emotionality—allowing the living feeling to spread in our thought processes as we “attend” to the world. Gadamer would say that in such

instances of playful enchantment we have become responsive to the “claims” a genuine esthetic experience instantiates (1975); that is, we are able to attend to the “call” of enchantment and sense the transformative potential that inheres within it. Thus, the play of musement creates a resonance between thought and its aesthetic enactment and, when fully appreciated, between us and the world. This resonance, I believe, is why Peirce claimed that a prowess inheres in the play of musement.

When considering our imagination and abductive capabilities within the play of musement, ironically these types of enchantments set the semiotic stage for what Peirce describes as a more “scientific” or rational mode of thinking (Anderson, 1987). This is because, although these forms of enchantment encourage an openness to the Otherness of the world through the humbling experiences that often accompany them, they are also tempered by serious deliberation activated through the self-control of Secondness. The play of musement is, after all, true wonder in the face of the world as phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us (1962, p. xv). This is a wonder that often sparks doubt about the boundary of the known and thus requires *serious* deliberation and reflection. Peirce theorized, of course, that the aesthetic dimension of our abductive endeavors fluctuates between artists and scientists, particularly as it relates to imagination. Peirce was convinced that imagination must be exercised in order to be fully developed and this was significant given imaginations capacity to generate ampliative reasoning (Anderson, 2005, p. 17). Therefore, Peirce suggests that both our adeptness at perception and imagination are mediated and heavily shaped by our receptivity to ideas—demonstrating a triadic structure to the nature of aesthetic sensibility. In other words, the good abductive reasoner (fueled by the play of musement) will ironically be self-controlled enough to remain open to new avenues of thinking that could prove counter to any thought’s current progression. Said differently, we do not want to allow imagination to wander too far. So, for Peirce the play of musement is not unbridled imagination, but imaginative thinking that leads to pragmatic, thoughtful ends.

I contend, therefore, that such modes of enchantment activate the play of musement which allows for a fullness of feeling to arise spawned by the ineffable qualities that inhere within it—much like other play forms as Huizinga describes. This is partially explained by the semiotic movement of thought it entails. For these modes of enchantment are aesthetically rich because thought moves recursively (and quickly) from Thirdness (a momentary interpretation of the event within the symbolic) back to the mode of Firstness—where the birth of an originary *mythos* arises. As Peirce theorizes, the play of musement is not directed consciousness toward a goal as much as a means for self to instantiate an important interlude in thought’s typical directedness. This was important in order for a type of *spiritual* mediation of thought to occur. The desire which is instantiated by such a phenomenological event of enchantment is one, therefore, that typically transforms our consciousness—from one bent on satisfying increasing self-obsessions to one that orients more toward the world of others—in creative and imaginative ways. I think the increase we see in companies that fully embrace play as an integral part of

their company design are demonstrating the value of the play of musement. Here, I am thinking of American companies like Google and Pixar Animation Studios, whose work environment is designed to be highly playful so as to maximize the free-flow of creativity and innovation all the while bounded by thoughtful reflection (see Statler, Roos & Victor, 2009). Elsewhere I have argued that experiences of enchantment such as these tend to produce more authentic encounters with others (2017). This is because they are premised upon imaginative yet *thoughtful* discourse and action.

4. Understanding Enchantments as *Serious Play*

I believe we can be more adept as cultural beings if we begin to acknowledge that our seemingly innocent enchantments represent serious play. By this I mean that through both forms of enchanting experiences we *learn* particular orientations toward the world that have significant consequences for self, other, and world relations.

It appears that our distracted consciousness and enchantment in its extreme form as amusement jeopardize our full esthetic sensibility which is needed to make logical connections among evolving ideas. Epistemologically, with enchantments that manifest in the play form of amusements we appear to stay confined to what Gregory Bateson describes as Level I or Level II learning (1972c). In his hierarchical model of learning, Bateson characterizes Level I learning as primarily imitative gesture, functioning primarily through iconic means (Eicher-Catt, 2016). Level I learning exemplifies classical conditioning where stimulus/response exchanges have been habitualized within pre-given contexts for interaction. While manifesting a higher-order of learning through displaying higher orders of abstraction, Level II learning still exhibits a diminished capacity of thinking and reasoning, according to Bateson. At Level II, organisms learn their power to “punctuate” experience in ways that serve to reinforce prior learning at this level (1972c, p. 298). Level II learning is thus highly self-validating since it closes off what Bateson describes as “loopholes of thinking” or the necessary gaps that possibilize further discourse and action.

Thus, our play of amusements appears to merely perpetuate narcissistic tendencies and a striving for our fifteen seconds of fame—now so easily fulfilled (at least in one’s unbridled imagination) by social media. I believe, therefore, that such cultural conditions of enchantment born from our mere amusements more often than not produce an inauthentic orientation toward others and the world (Eicher-Catt, 2017). These forms of enchantment produce a bad ambiguity that eventually leads to an inability to discriminate or assess the relevance of perceived information and events. We easily can become lost in a sea of highly codified, repetitive significations that eventually become “nonsense.” This condition, I think, produces and lies at the very heart of what current social critics have called a “disenchanted world” view (Jenkins, 2000). That is to say, with this form of enchantment we are, ironically, creating new degrees of disenchantment. This is because we are producing mere form and losing our full esthetic potential to produce ideas and

events of substance.

On the other hand, epistemologically, our form of playful enchantment as musement appears to involve higher levels of learning, according to Bateson's typology (1972c). As Bateson describes it, Level III learning is extremely difficult and rare to achieve, especially because of what he calls the "self-validating nature" of Level II learning. Level III requires a profound "reorganization of character" of the organism that requires that we not only learn to replace prior Level II premises with other premises, but that we facilitate a full replacement of contexts through the experience of contraries or double-binds. Such contradictions throw the unexamined premises of Level II into relief (Eicher-Catt, 2016). Rather than closing any loopholes in thinking (and thus reducing uncertainty), Level III learning "bursts open" the categories of thought engrained in Level II (1972c, p. 305). Hence, Level III fosters abduction. Because the self is no longer central in such instances, these forms of enchantment direct our consciousness outward toward the world of others. Thus, enchantments as the play of musement can signify an important "pause" in our distracted everyday existence and thus offer productive moments of discursive possibility. This form of enchantment is thus vital for human learning, growth, and positive ethical relations with others (Eicher-Catt, 2017).

Thus, applying the concept of serious play to the topic of enchantment begins to flesh out Peirce's understanding of an esthetic sensibility toward the world—an altogether important sensibility, I claim, which makes a pragmatic difference in our epistemological encounters with the world. With such a pragmatic move, this esthetic sensibility reflects what Peirce describes as a critical common-sensism (1958-1966, 5.445). According to Peirce, this particular orientation is generated by our ability to balance our perceptual judgments (which are affectually based) with self-control (which fuels ethical considerations). Friedrich Schiller, of course, had much earlier argued that the ability to temper both the formal impulse (analytical reasoning) with the sense impulse (literally sensations through the body) was by way of what he called the *play impulse* (2004/1795). I believe Peirce's notion of an aesthetic sensibility (which follows Schiller's insights) is one that captures the very essence of enchantments as serious play, since it acknowledges the mediation of musement and amusement as a consequential sign action.

As I read Peirce, it is this esthetic sensibility, after all, that constitutes the imaginative yet productive *geist* or spirit that, through concrete reasonableness, possibilizes all productive conscious experience (Anderson, 2005). This, I believe, is what Bernard Steigler articulates in his recent work, *The Re-enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit Against Industrial Populism* (2014). When viewed as a playful yet serious sign process that impacts self, other, and world relations, we discover enchantment's continuing aesthetic role as a possible pragmatic approach to dealing with our current cultural life. Theoretically outlining our enchantments as serious play, offers us a way, therefore, to reposition our thinking about the attention/distraction and the musement/amusement problematics so as to pragmatically see them for what they are and the consequences that come to bear.

So, rather than dismiss our playful forms of enchantment as innocent discursive constructions, we need to understand them as serious forms of play. Viewing enchantments as serious play, therefore, emphasizes the playful movement of sign action—between the play of musements (as ineffability) and the play of amusements (as intelligibility). Understanding our enchantments as serious play thus accentuates the reversible and reflexive process that Peirce said inheres within a given productive and pragmatic semiotic. From the time of Plato in western culture, serious play has been connected with the advancement of the individual and society. This is because our ancestors recognized that play forms have serious consequences for how we perceive, know, and understand the world around us. Our enchantments as serious play are no different. They resonate in particularly intense ways that reverberate throughout our everyday lives.

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About the author

Deborah Eicher-Catt (dle4@psu.edu), Ph.D., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale,

1996, is Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences at Pennsylvania State University, York. Her research in philosophy of communication takes a communicological focus, exploring the intersections of communication theory with semiotics, phenomenology, narrative, and feminism. She is Fellow and Founding Member of the International Communicology Institute, past Chair of the Philosophy of Communication Division for the National Communication Association, co-editor (with Isaac E. Catt) of *Communicology: The New Science of Embodied Discourse*, guest editor of special journal issues for the *American Journal of Semiotics*; *Listening: Journal of Communication Ethics, Religion, and Culture* and *Atlantic Journal of Communication*. In addition to being an award-winning teacher, she is the author of numerous book chapters and journal articles. She has received top paper and top article awards including the Donald Ecroyd Research and Scholarship Award from the Pennsylvania Communication Association. She serves on several journal publication boards and is currently the President of the Semiotic Society of America.