

A short article for Varoom! Magazine issue 30, Play.

by **Ben Stopher**

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Play.

Google tells me that to play is to ‘engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose.’ and whilst this definition captures some of what I consider important about the concept of play, it misses much. An aspect of this definition that appears to me hollow up close, is the idea is that play is not attached to serious purpose. The education of any serious visual / creative involves rigorous play by design and to detach this serious process from serious purpose offends ideals of creative practice per se.

The second way in which this standard definition falls short is that it does not address the purpose of play in a creative educational context. The act of play in this context is fundamentally to do with the explicit production of a kind of space integral to the creative process. A great analogy – that is not mine – is to liken this kind of play to the kind of play in the steering wheel of your car i.e. a free, non-prescribed movement without explicit consequence. This sense of play starts to speak to the kind of creative space that the act of play in creative practice seeks to create.

These additional conceptions of play start to describe why play has become both a thing and a word increasingly valued by creative educators. The production of a space for individuals to discover things through doing, using, remaking in a way that forces consideration of the motive forces at work in such situations is an important tool in sustaining developmental creative practice.

At London College of Communication, UAL both the undergraduate and postgraduate Illustration courses are intentionally co-located in a programme community with provision both in games and interaction design. These courses provide the illustration subject here with methods and tools to both value and design play of various kinds. What is most apparent in this exchange is that in creative practice play takes many forms and serves many purposes all central to the development of contemporary creative practice.