

*What is the duchess game and why does it represent the foundation of our culture?*

The duchess game, from Alice and Wonderland, says that the more of something I have, the less you have. It says all the things we value; prestige, awards, money, love, are limited, which means we have to compete for them. Because of this fundamental error, we believe that play is there to compete for limited goods. If the things we value were unlimited, all our energy could be focused on play itself and not on the things you have to do to make sure you win and the other person doesn't.

*Is our entire culture based on competition, comparison and contest?*

We make a bargain with our children very early. We say to the child, "you give up the original state of belonging that you know as an infant, and I will provide for you the goods of the culture." At that age we have no choice, so we accept the bargain and it seems appropriate. We start to buy into those rewards and never realize that they can never give us what we gave up. We get trapped, thinking if I just win more, if I just get more stuff, I will feel the sense of belonging and wholeness I once felt. The whole culture feeds this feeling of not having enough yet.

Ultimately we find out, that culture games can never meet the needs of our original belonging. It is not just belonging to family or a team or a country, but belonging to life itself. That takes a huge sense of safety and love that the contests don't provide. But we're never told the truth about this.

*You talk about contest as an addiction, that the sense of defending one's self becomes the primary addiction, which is satisfied through secondary addictions. Let's go into that.*

Once you've lost that original sense of belonging to life itself, and you're put out there essentially alone and told you need these little belongings, you end up doing the things necessary to keep those boundaries secure. Whether it's family, a gang, a team, they hook you into doing the things they support in order to keep you as a member. Membership becomes exceedingly important and you are valuable only as long as you're a member. You are in, only as long as you abide by our terms and continue to pay allegiance to us. Once you stop, you're not a member anymore.

We're never told that there is a membership outside the cultural memberships. We knew that in our original belonging and that's what play helps us find again. We assume that life comes with no structure and if we don't put one there, everything falls apart.

Play has taught me that life comes with its own pattern. That pattern is a sense of belonging that's immensely powerful. Not believing in that however, we go for the frosting, the illusions of prestige, money and so on. Once hooked into that, it's extremely difficult to let go. The price we pay is the need to endlessly defend against all forms of assaults, real and imagined.

Once we assume that our real self is dependent upon the goods, the services, and prestige, we lose control of our original sense of value and well-being. We become attached to the cultural image. Our connection to people is defined by what they offer us. Children have little value, for example. They aren't the coinage of the realm. It is the same for women, for minority groups, and for me and you as an individual. Once I am cut off and become attached to things out there, I lose touch with my true value. I don't know what safe means because safe has always been these other things, a big home, a car, money and fame.

*Women, minorities and children have little value in a contest culture. Help me understand this.*

Girls were of no value to me when I was 8 and 10 and starting to play baseball. I would pass their homes and go to the guy next door. It could be that the girls played baseball very well, but I was conditioned with the idea that girls don't play baseball, so I excluded all of them. I excluded one special needs boy on our block because he couldn't play ball. As we become involved in the contests which bring rewards, we look at individuals and groups of people the same way a little boy looks at girls. We only see and value those who can enhance our participation as a player. In this culture, blacks, Hispanics, women and children have been designed out of the contest. If my goal is to win, I only want to associate with people who can help me win. We don't know how to value people for anything other than their status as a player in the game.

Competition is the way of life in this culture and it has been that way for hundreds of years. Getting out of that model, or at least recognizing the inherent violence and aggression built into that model is challenging. We assumed the only way to survive is by contest and we just go along with it. Everyone is compared to the other. It runs the family, the school, business, the military, gangs, all of them function on the basis of survival. More for me, less for you. As long as the entire culture functions that way, there's no way out for any of us.

Parents will say, "What do you want me to do? My child has to compete." I've had CEOs say, "I have to fire them. What else is there to do? I have to save the company." Gang members say the same thing.

"I had to kill to be a member." Membership assumes an outside that I need to defend myself against. When you add up the number of outsiders, it's no wonder that we don't all end up in mental institutions. We are in a contest with the entire world.

Most people have to lose in a contest culture but we don't tell anybody that. Not being a winner in a culture, that only values winners, builds up aggression day in and day out. There's also an issue of kindness that we are not honest about. Somewhere along the line things change from sharing to not sharing and we aren't honest about this. We don't say, "remember that sharing I told you about in pre-school, well, now in first grade we don't do that anymore. Now it's winning that counts. Forget the sharing stuff." Deep down we know what we are doing when we take away the safety and love and give them stuff instead.

*I will be negligent as a parent if I don't teach my child to stand up for him or herself, to take the hard knocks, to learn the ropes and make it to the top.*

The parent is part of his or her peer group hierarchy and it extends directly to the children. Each of us become like knots in a fishing net. You're going to be a failure if you don't compete in your religion, in your job, in your marriage, in your child rearing, in the car and home -- and we pass this on to our children.

That incredibly resilient, flexible, creative being, who can use intelligence to explore the unknown becomes trapped. Our creative intelligence becomes focused on not failing and there is nothing left to explore the unknown. Risking anything new becomes too tough. Whether we are a 7-or 8-year-old worried about how we look or the man or woman who is caught in a horrible job. We are trapped and the contest structure does not allow us to step out.

There is an illusion that the culture likes us. But when we stop winning, as certain athletes and stars have discovered, we find that the culture never liked us for who we really are. That was an illusion. What they like is the illusion of being a winner. Who inhabits this position is totally irrelevant. The contest teaches me to devalue people as individuals. What I do to them makes little difference as long as I keep winning. I can fire them. I can shoot them. What difference does it make?

The point we often miss is that in devaluing the other, I become devalued as well. A little bit of myself has been killed off and you loose connection with that sense of, "I'm valuable just because I am." My value now comes from the contest.

The material goods, the stuff, the money, fame, prestige drives the economy. Our economy is really based on fear, on substituting material goods for this integral sense of self. From this we develop a self-perception that needs the stuff in order to feel whole, which drives the economy. This creates tremendous pressure to continue the contest.

I've thought about this a lot. I've worried about it and at times even cried about it. I have said to myself, Fred, this is really stupid. Go back to being a University Professor, buy another Porsche. Then I think about Christ in the Bible when he says "go to the children." Why did he say that? Was that just a metaphor? I've read other sages who have said the same thing but they never say why, and as a race, we have never done what these wise men and women have told us to do. It finally dawned on me, they are pointing to this sense of belonging. The reason they don't tell us why is because they can't. You must feel it and when you do, you don't need to be told.

*Play implies being safe. That is the central issue.*

When I play with gang members, I don't tell them not to be gang members. What I say is, "I want you to be safer on the streets." Literally I'm using play as the best self-defense there is. We think that contest is the best way to survive, the fight-or-flight idea. What I say to gang members is that there is a safer way, safer than fight/flight. And that's play.

Going out onto the street as a playmate means that there's less chance that the young man is going to reach for a gun, which means there's less chance that a 2-year-old is going to get shot. In a very practical, real, tangible way, I present play as a way to keep humans safer, whether it's in a corporate office, with gangs on the street or in a classroom. Once we're safer, we don't need to defend ourselves. If I don't need to defend myself, then you don't need to defend yourself. Now we can focus our energy in much more creative ways. It's much easier to communicate, to love, to be kind and do all those things that we'd really rather do. Play begins when we feel safe.

*In your book, a young boy made the statement, "play is when I recognize that we're not different."*

Play provides a way for us to slide between the categories in which we live. In that magical time/space, which is play, we're not members of any category. We aren't men or women, white or black, Americans or South-Africans. That's the genius of play, not to be limited by all the categories. Once you experience play and then find yourself back being male, white, and all the other cultural labels, you realize that here is an experience that can take you beyond all the cultural limitations you have accepted about yourself. You discover that there is a way to slide between all of the frames the culture has imposed.

*You made the observation that children have a hard time playing in the shadow of adults.*

Not only in the psychological space not there, but as competitors, we don't know how to design the physical spaces for children to really play.

*Why is it that children, who innately play, have such a difficult time playing in the shadow of the adults?*

The physical and psychological space we provide doesn't allow for what I call original play. Our interpretation of what play is, has re-defined play itself. Adult playing spaces have white lines, they have people called referees and time-outs. In original play you don't need people running around saying time-out. People who only play under a system of artificial time-outs don't know how to regulate their own sense of play. I'm always taking time-outs based on some adult's whistle. It is important to keep in mind that adults don't value play. It is something that happens after the important things are done. Then we send children out to some artificial space that we think is for play, and we call it recess.

Have you ever taken a good look at the so called play spaces adults have created. The people who design them never play in them. In Southern California, where the summer temperature reaches 90 and 100 degrees, we have schools with metal slides. How can this happen? Not only do adults design them, other adults put them on the playgrounds and still others bring their kids to them.

The equipment or toys define play and adults stand around like prison guards. "No you can not go down the slide head first." Most adults are not concerned with expansive learning. They are only interested in not getting caught in a law- suit, which is another contest. So, the child asks, "where am I supposed to play?"

Schools are caught in the contest, which is connected to law and then the contest decides how children are going to play. This impacts, very tangibly what a teacher does. Am I going to be sued because they were playing ball and running through a space where other kids were sitting? So there's no ball playing. And the kids then are left with virtually nothing to do.

So they begin to nudge each other and say well okay, I'll play with you. What does that mean? How am I suppose to play with you? I don't know. The only thing I've done with anything is collide. This must mean I'm suppose to collide with you. So you get collision, punches, kicks, and teachers say no, we can't touch, again because they might get sued. It's very uncomfortable for children and for adults because the original nature of play has become so distorted.

One of the tragedies is that we're afraid of a system that isn't even there, so the best thing to do is just stand still. I've been on playgrounds all over the world and teachers often remind me of crows sitting up on lines, looking down at kids wandering around below. Or they remind me of prison guards.

The whole function has been to separate themselves as a guardian and once you abstract that role your whole focus becomes essentially fear. Don't let kids get hurt. Don't let them get taken. All the processes are defined by our fears of engagement in contests.

*Because of that fear, we narrow the possibilities of childhood tremendously. What have we substituted for original play in our culture?*

We call it games, which means something that is not very serious. It's the time left over. The problem is that those activities have become encompassed by the idea of competition. Play has become as serious as going to law school, doing mathematics and the other subjects in the school.

I can remember living on the coast and I thought, "I'm out here surfing every day, let's try playing volleyball with the people who play volleyball every day. I went up to a group of men and said, can I join you? They were reluctant but let me in. In an hour I never touched the ball. They were that good at excluding me from the activity, which is what competitive play begins to do. It became very clear that I wasn't a member. The competition is intense and all starts when we substitute original play for competitive games on the playground.

The kids who are heavy don't get to play. The kids who can't hear, can't see, can't move, they all get excluded and were taught that exclusion is okay. As long as the rules are defined for me to win, whoever I exclude is all right. The process begins very early.

*The pressure to win never goes away. This implies that anything it takes to win is okay. Help me understand why cheating and aggression, whatever it takes to win, is the hidden foundation of our culture?*

Once you decide that you can devalue or exclude someone, and you can do anything to them necessary to win, then what you do and how you do it is based on the tools at hand. We will say at the little league level that it's not okay to go over and beat up the person on the other side. But it is okay to slide into a base in such a way that knocks them over.

As you step up it becomes okay to slide in such a way that might hurt the other person. Look what happened with Tanya Harding and the Winter Olympics.

We have this unspoken notion that levels of violence and aggression in any activity are graded. We don't allow the 2-year-old to beat up his 1-year-old brother when he takes his truck away. At a certain age we're going to say defend yourself. What does that mean? It means if they hit you, hit them back.

Does it mean pull out a gun and shoot them? No. But at another level we say yes, it does mean that. It means shoot them if that's what it takes to defend yourself. Once I'm disconnected, what I do to them doesn't make much difference. I do whatever it takes.

*Is the aggression and violence in our culture going up? Do we have any choice?*

The contest culture doesn't provide a choice. There's no time-out. I remember a hockey player that decided he wasn't going to participate in a fight and he was asked to leave the team. This required great courage on his part but the team could not tolerate that. For the team to say you're right, we don't need to do this, calls into the question the very essence of the team. Most humans are not ready to do this. Their identity is attached to membership to the team. If we're not a team than what happens to the game? What happens to me? They're held together by the contest net and we don't know what to do when someone steps outside. We lack this courage because the contest has become more than a material net, it is also deeply physiological.

To say no to what membership in the team requires appears almost life threatening. It's no different in a corporate office, when someone is cutting 50% of the employees, or a gang that says that to be a member you need to go out there and hurt somebody. And most of us go do it. That's the allegiance. That's membership and we literally cannot conceive of another way of being.

A 12-year-old gang member in San Fernando Valley once said to me, "Fred, I understand what you've done for me as an individual is making me safer on the street. How am I suppose to go back to my neighborhood when my father's in the gang, my uncles are in the gang, my brothers are in the gang and everybody I know on the street's in the gang? What am I suppose to do?" That's one of the things that I think play does and why it's so scary. It forces us to face the terror that the contest has over our lives. That terror is, as you mentioned, getting worse. We've been taught this since pre-school. It is the only thing we know. To expect anyone to feel anything different is a huge expectation.

*Is there any difference between the gang member and the little league player in terms of how the adult conditions them to accept and participate in the contest?*

My high school football practices were more violent than our games because we were killing each other to make the starting line-up - wiping each other out. Isn't this suppose to be a team? We're only a team when there's an opposing team. A team of little league players is a team only vis-a-vis another team. If that other team is not present, what you've got is inter-team contest and that is as aggressive and hurtful emotionally and physically as the game against another team.

There was an article in the Times about the women's Olympic crew. They do fine against another crew. Take that away and they beat each other up. We don't really know what it is to feel real togetherness. Togetherness is only a consequence of an outside adversary. If you take away the adversary there's no togetherness.

The contest culture is designed to keep you on edge, always wondering whether you're in or out. The moment you're on edge your whole physiological system and entire immune system is not working at its highest levels. The whole thing is designed to work against itself.

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Team members have been taught that hurting others is necessary to defend the self, the team. But you're essentially alone and that feeling of aloneness is taught to you by the coach and by the process of being a member of a team.

The contest culture is designed to keep you on edge, to keep you wondering whether you're in or out. The moment you are on edge, your entire immune system is not working at its highest levels. The whole thing is designed to work against itself.

*I can hear thousands of people saying, "This is evolution - survival of the fittest." Ashley Montagu and others have pointed out that Darwin has been greatly misunderstood. Cooperation is the highest order, which implies your concept of original play.*

It is very difficult to grasp what I am saying without having had a direct experience that demonstrates that there is another way. I played little league, high school football, college crew, amateur ski racing. I did it all and assumed that contest was all there is. I never knew there was anything else. The whole world seemed that way.

When I looked at the wildlife programs on National Geographic, and they said baby lions were playing to learn behaviors necessary as predators. I said, yeah, that makes sense. It must be true. Had I not played with wolves and cheetahs, I would have never understood that they know another kind of behavior. They know contest but there's another dimension, which is original play, and if we don't know what to look for, it's invisible. We have been programmed for so long, not only as a culture, but as human beings, to believe that fight/flight, survival of the fittest and competition is the only way to be.

The challenge has been to explore and share an experience which the whole world says doesn't exist? How does one say, not only that it exists, but that it is absolutely necessary - that it's tangible and real. It's not fairy tale and it's not idealistic, rather, it is absolutely essential. The contest culture is a dead-end.

*Contest and aggression is built into our self-identity. It is at the core of our economic structure, the educational structure and the athletic structure. As the intensity of this aggression increases it will cause increasing harm to every species on the planet. And yet, as you have said, we have been so deeply conditioned that what you're talking about remains invisible to most.*

My task is twofold. The first is to give an intellectual frame so we feel safe in our intellect. Then I have to lead us through a gradation of steps which are not intellectual, that takes our body to the play space. I have to create that slippage so we can take our body and slide in to play, gradually, so we don't know what happened. It must be felt. "Oh, this is what you're talking about. Okay. I feel it". Even then, there is going to be an enormous problem of coming back into the corporation, to the gang or the classroom, the real world. At a deeper level, this is the same challenge that Jesus faced.

When you experience that love is the most important thing in life, and it is not just an intellectual idea, it is tangible and it's real, the challenge is - how do I live that way moment by moment? Everything changes. This is what original play is all about. This is the experience I try to bring to corporations, gangs, and to classrooms. I want them to feel it in their body, in their hearts, not just in their heads.

A woman who worked at a university went back to a boardroom after she had played. All of the other faculty, were male and involved in their normal academic bickering. When she entered the room she touched, in an appropriate way, every person before she sat down. By the time she came to her seat the entire environment had changed. There was no contest going on and she was astounded.

She had the courage not to fall into the old pattern or to become a non-contestant contestant, but just provide an option, and to do so in such way that made it safe. With that option the group slid in to a new space and were able to carry on in a completely different way. She provided a new option.

*Safety is the key. Play is impossible if I have to defend myself.*

It's got to be safe. Scientists say the biochemistry of the brain is such that you cannot be afraid and love at the same time. Intuitively I've understood this in play. I literally cannot be afraid and play at the same time. If I'm afraid, my body motions are more angular. My eyesight changes.

My emotions become jerky. I'm more tense and those emotions or motions are picked up by my playmates. If they are skilled, like wolves or special needs kids, they clamp down until I'm not afraid. As a playmate, it's my job to include people who are afraid and do it in ways that are safe for them, which is exactly what the wolves do.

*There is no reference for safety in the self-identity we create in our culture. We have to defend ourselves endlessly.*

In order to feel safe we have to have referees, wear equipment, and make lines. Real play doesn't need that. Because our contests aren't safe, and the culture isn't safe, we're constantly in a state of self-defense. If we were safe, we wouldn't need social roles like

Psychologists and Psychiatrists. We wouldn't need laws, attorneys and the insurance companies. The whole thing would fall apart if we felt safe. It's such an irony or tragedy, that so much of our lives are kept together by fear.

*How did you discover what play really is?*

I didn't know how to move. I thought I did. I was an athlete, even into adulthood and I thought I knew something about moving, but found, when I came to very young children who knew how to play, that I didn't know how to move at all. I knew how to collide. I knew how to move in straight lines, but I didn't know how to be round. I didn't know how to use full body energy with another human, not to bounce off of, but to really be together in a way in which I didn't have to guard my energy.

I came to young children because I wanted to be with humans who were learning and it was learning that I was after. I didn't want to teach kids anything. I wanted to learn what they're learning and what I learned was how to play. I didn't know that learning or playing was going on at the time. For years I never talked to an adult about what was happening to me on the ground. I was too afraid. Adults thought it was silly. "He's just playing around with kids. That's a waste of time." I knew something was happening but I couldn't grasp it because understanding meant intellect. After all, I am the product of a university and have a Ph.D.

Then I read a quote by Bateson. He was looking for "this pattern to connect." And I thought God, this is it. That's what I feel. I feel connected. That's what's going on. I read sociology, psychology, psychiatry, but I never read anything that described what I was experiencing on the ground. Then it dawned on me. "Of course, they don't play!" They write about play, they watch it, and in order to keep their objectivity they need to be separate from it. With that separation, and being raised in contests cultures, they miss the entire thing. So, I stopped reading and went back to the ground and began feeling what was happening.

There, two things were revealed. First there was no contest. Playmates never compete with each other, nor did they compete with me about anything.

*What was the second rule or principle?*

It has to do with the way they included me in the process through touch. Touch wasn't random. When I first got down, they touched me first on the hands and feet as I watched. They did the same thing whenever they included anyone they didn't know as a playmate. Then the touch moved up the body and the last place they touched was the top of the head.

One day I was playing with a boy with Autism. We were out on the lawn and I watched him fall down. He was like a cobra with his head up, who then relaxes and just goes down. So I thought, "I'm going to try that." So I fell down, and clanked my hips, my shoulders and my knees. I looked back and the boy was sitting under a tree smiling. It was as if he was saying, "Why do I get all the slow learners. Fred's just never going to get this stuff." We did this week after week and I just wasn't getting it. Then, one day he took my hand and fell down with me. That was my first lesson, that falling is falling down, not over and it went on from there. The learning was in the way the kids treated me, the kindness they presented to me, and the clarity of the lessons they taught.

*In your book you described how one boy said, "I'm only playing when I am not playing." What does that mean?*

It has taken me 20 years to understand this. There is the social, cultural, psychological image that I have identified with being Fred - white, male, 6'4", 200 pounds, athlete - all the categories within which I live my life. When I play, I have to step outside all of them. I have to give up my allegiance to every category. Only then I can truly play. "Fred" disappears in play. When play really happens it's the interaction of two faces of God. Play is creation's energy, not Fred's. I don't create it. I can participate and share in it. I can allow it. It is the disappearance of our social and cultural conditioning that allows play to be.

*Original play has two qualities. One is creation and the other is learning. David Bohm was absolutely clear about this. Creativity is impossible without play and play is the act of learning.*

If I have learned one thing through play over the past 25 years it is that I belong to the universe and with that, I learned the essence of all other things, of all the things we think of as separate, like the essence of a lion, or a child, or a Zulu person, or a flower. By learning that we all belong, not just as an idea, but as a tangible reality, I learned what the differences are for. The differences aren't for me to be afraid of.

The differences are for me to learn how to be fully this form and to share fully with every other form on earth. That's powerful and it literally puts me in the midst of the universe. Play has allowed me to learn what to do with differences. In the contest culture you fear difference and play has taught me to love difference. Because of the differences I have an incredible variety of playmates.

I lived on a farm as a little boy and I remember the first day of summer when I blasted out the screen door to play. Everything was there to be with me and I was there to be with everything. I had all the time and all space in the world. Play gives me that sense, both when I sit and think about it and when I'm actually on the ground with a child or a cheetah. There is that feeling and that is the learning. In 1980 somebody said there are 1.8 billion different forms of life on earth. This is a lot of playmates to play with and to learn from. Play is learning. It's endless and it is so exciting.

*Or the opposite, which is being overwhelmed by the variety of things that I have to defend against.*

It's about communication. The first stage, and it's the same whether I'm playing with wild animals or children, is the play look. It's a look that says literally I know that being a playmate means there's nothing to be afraid of. It's like a camera shutter, "click". It's not an aggressive or an intense look. It's a present openness that encompasses a whole being in one glance. You do it and it's done. After that, the play begins in the space between us. My task is to be so aware, so present, that the space between us becomes like a three-dimensional rubber band that we're constantly pulling on.

*You have suggested that play is innate. What makes you think that babies innately play and that it's not a learned or cultural experience?*

I'm making that assumption from the play I've done all over the world, with kids of all kinds, especially those with "so called" problems. None of the categories of disease or disorder seemed to make any difference. Autism makes no difference. Cerebral Palsy makes no difference. All kids seem to understand this quality of communication in the same way.

*In your book you said, "It's not enough to merely change the way we do things. We must develop a new consciousness, which is to retain, even under the weight of the contest culture, a choice each moment to be a kind and fearless playmate rather than act out of personal rank, disappointment or vengeance."*

By the time children are 2, or 2 1/2, growing up in a contest culture, we get violence. Kids don't know how to play. I get Ninja punched and Power Ranger kicked. As a playmate, you have to give love at the point of attack.

To be able to play or love while you're getting kicked and not fall into the role of manager, director, parent, teacher, and all the roles we normally inhabit, is very challenging. The punch comes and the letting go, both emotionally and physically, allows the person who gave the punch to feel two things. One is, I don't need to attack. And two, is to feel a model free of vengeance. Not just to hear, don't hit back, but to actually feel a presence that doesn't attack, one that is tangible and still loving, so that the child learns that this is real world stuff. You're modeling a presence that's working in the real world, not just presenting an ideal.

*Most adults feel children must be disciplined. What you're describing is a completely novel experience for most children.*

It's totally outside that which seeks to control by using force, of any kind. It gives you a way to handle an attack that keeps you and the other person safe. That's important. The only thing we know is to try to stop aggression with violence and that doesn't work.

Play give us an option in which we can literally stop aggression, by keeping the child and myself safe, while providing an entirely different framework of relationship. Play not only stops aggression, but builds a relationship, which can move more deeply into other areas of life. Play is an antidote to violence because it changes the foundation upon which we build our relationship.

*There's a tremendous amount of so-called "maleness" implicit in the aggressive model. The female model historically has, using your terms, been more playful. I'm curious how you feel about this gender difference?*

The model we call feminine, in terms of relationship, is closer to what I call a playmate, but it is not the same. In order to play you have to give up being a woman too. You can't hold on to being mother and be a playmate. Holding on to being a woman is just as much category as being a male.

Play is creation's model, not a cultural model of how a woman or man should be. I have played with women in public who have been as aggressive and violent as any man. In my experience on the ground, American little girls can be as violent as American little boys. Being a playmate is different than being feminine or male.

*To propose that we engage in what you call authentic play rips apart the fabric upon which our society is built.*

Original play challenges the fundamental assumptions of the contest culture because it's based on a different quality of relationship with the world. It's not just, "wouldn't it be nice if we were kind to each other." It's a different foundation which changes the nature of everything that happens in your life.

I do think that it can happen without destroying the contest culture. That's the magic of play, or at least, some of the magic of play. Play allows us to change, to learn, grow, and expand without attacking. If play attacks it becomes another contest and that implies fear.

In order for me to play with a cheetah, the cheetah has to do something so I know that I don't need to be afraid. When I am with New York gang members and those guys get down and play with me, a white guy, something has to happen in which fear is obliterated. It happens in the space between us and that is the marvelous gift creation has given us. A culture based on play is bigger than that of fear and contest. It provides a bigger container for the culture to grow. Play is much more mature than aggression.

*Again in your book you said: "Abducted by culture and alienated from their playful selves, children must turn away from their ecstasy to be educated by those who have been reduced to orphans, grieving or the absence of love". That is very powerful.*

This is literally what happens. As an adult I'm orphaned from play and then I do the same thing to my own kids. Part of me knows exactly what I'm doing and another part of me says, "God, what else am I going to do?" We isolate children in our contest culture, especially special needs kids, because they're not going to ever win. It's just overwhelming to me.

I remember sitting on a porch with my dad and the man from across the street came over. He was a Vice President of a major insurance corporation. He'd had a heart attack and was talking to my dad about what he should do. He had two choices. The company said he had to continue working seven days a week. His doctor said five at most or you're going to die. His choice was to go back to work and die, leaving the insurance money to his wife and daughter, or get fired, lose his home and change his life style. He literally sat there and said, "I'm going to chose to die and give my wife and daughter the money." That a man chose to give his wife and family a life-style rather than his being. In a contest culture, we're constantly faced with that choice. Do I give them the stuff or do I give them me?

Play says, "give them you, your being, the one thing you really have". The contest culture dissipates and devalues that essence. Not only does a playmate provide a safe space for that child to drop the defenses, but as a playmate with other adults we provide a safety net. Play says, "Go ahead, and choose life." Then, maybe we can build a culture that's not based on fear.

*You made the statement that the current competitive culture has an insatiable appetite for failure.*

Every victory is built on a mountain of failures. The higher up you go, the more failures there are. In order for that gold medal to hang on the neck of one person, millions of others had to fail. At every level, the higher you go, the more bodies you stand on. Whether it's in getting in and out of graduate school, getting a position in the military, or any corporation, it's all built on the same hierarchy of bodies. We really haven't been honest about that. Every victory is somebody's funeral. In order for us to continue to be victorious, we have to look the other way.

*Your book gave me a new understanding of the word "adulteration." Alice Miller, talked about the boy who killed four boys, and said to his parents in court, "Why didn't you play with me one single time in all these years?"*

I don't know how many times that's happened to me. Around the world people say, "I've never played before." When I played at an orphanage of 100 girls in Johannesburg, the matron said to me, "We didn't know they could play." These kids have never played in their lives. To never experience that you belong, just because you're alive is an immense tragedy.

It is not just belonging to a little group. You belong to the whole world. You are part of everything. For the child who has never experienced original play, everything is a struggle to belong. The fact that they are ostracized, excluded, and kill somebody else, just emphasizes the fact that in order to belong, they have to destroy.

We've interwoven those two. In the contest culture belonging means exclusion and destruction. With play belonging means inclusion. That's a very different approach to life. Play changes the entire framework of what's possible on Earth. It's not just a psychological issue, it's an ecological issue. It is a matter of survival.

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