

Introduction

Is play an emotion? As speakers of English, we are accustomed to the idea that it is not. Play is an action, a context, a circumscribed space. It is a “free or unimpeded movement”, an “exercise or action for enjoyment”, a “recreational activity”.¹ Other modern European languages suggest a similarly non-emotive concept: for Huizinga, play is “first and foremost...a voluntary activity”;² for Caillois, “play is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life”.³ For Freud, children pass “from the passivity of experience to the activity of play”,⁴ and, for Groos before him, play is an “activity which is enjoyed purely for its own sake”.⁵ Play may be many things—a mimetic act, an activity of freedom, an autotelic action—but it is not an emotion.

Paidia, however, the ancient Greek word for “play”, was conceived to be something much closer to an emotion than its modern European equivalents allow—or so I will argue in this book. It is not an activity that is engaged in “for pleasure”, as if by partaking in certain activities called “play”—for example, rolling dice or jumping rope—a player might trigger some sort of pleasure reward. *Paidia* is, rather, often a feeling of pleasure that spills over into the physical manifestations of that

¹ OED I.5b, II.6, II.7a.

² Huizinga (1971 [1938]) 7, a translation of (2008 [1938]) 35, emphasis in the original: “Alle Spel is allereerst en bovenal *een vrije handeling*.”

³ Caillois (2001 [1958]) 6, a translation of (1958) 18: “En effet, le jeu est essentiellement une occupation séparée, soigneusement isolée du reste de l’existence...”

⁴ Freud (1921) 13: “Indem das Kind aus der Passivität des Erlebens in die Aktivität des Spielens übergeht, fügt es einem Spielgefährten das Unangenehme zu, das ihm selbst widerfahren war, und rächt sich so an der Person dieses Stellvertreters.”

⁵ Groos (1899) 493: “Beides lässt sich in dem auch von uns so häufig angewendeten Satze ausdrücken, dass sich das Spiel psychologisch als eine Thätigkeit darstelle, die rein um ihrer selbst willen genossen werde.”

pleasurable feeling.⁶ Just as an emotion like fear might cause someone to flail their arms frantically and run screaming in a certain direction, *paidia* causes someone, in a perceived overflow of pleasurable feeling, to dance, sing, and make certain movements just for the pleasure of it.⁷ In the case of fear, the physical manifestation of that feeling is regularly denoted by the verb *phobeomai*: one is being “routed”, and so running away. In the case of *paidia*, the physical manifestation is denoted by the verb *paizō*, which regularly covers singing and dancing as well as more typical forms of English play, like rolling dice, playing ball games, and play-fighting.

Although *paidia* usually maps nicely onto the English “play”—children “play” with dolls and toys, adults “play” drinking games and gambling games—this is not always the case, and these moments of asymmetry are informative. Take, for example, the climactic passage from the medical treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, usually dated to the end of the fifth century BCE. Here the author is revealing his, at the time unusual, belief that the brain holds the key not only to the disease which is the subject of the treatise, epilepsy, but to a vast array of seemingly soul-related phenomena. He writes: “People ought to know that pleasures and good moods and laughter and *paidiai* arise from nothing other than the brain; the same goes for pains and sorrows and bad moods and crying.”⁸

Most of these internal states seem to pair up nicely with one another: pleasures (*hēdonai*) and pains (*lupai*) arise from the brain, since it is the brain that decides whether something is pleasurable or painful, not some other organ, or some external agent. Good moods (*euphrosynai*) and bad moods (*dysphrosynai*) look like opposites as well: although there might be external catalysts for good moods, like beautiful weather or good luck,

⁶ There are important distinctions between “emotions”, “feelings”, and “moods” (for which, cf. Ben-Ze’ev 2000, 45–8, 86–92, and Konstan 2006, xi–xiii, 3–40, 270–1 n. 34), but I am being intentionally loose here. The argument is not that *paidia* is an emotion, but that it helps to imagine play as an emotion in order to grasp *paidia*’s difference from the English “play”. Cf. *OED* s.v. “play” II.6.b for the lost meaning “enjoyment, pleasure, joy, delight”, not attested since the sixteenth century.

⁷ For the opposition of play (*paidia*) and fear (*phobos*), see Pl. *Laws* I.635b: τῶν μεγίστων ἡδονῶν καὶ παιδιῶν...τὸ δὲ τῶν λυπῶν καὶ φόβων... Schöpsdau (1994–2011) i.21 translates “Lustgefühlen und Vergnügungen”; Sauv  Meyer (2015) ad loc. “pleasures and enjoyments” (although in her note at 136 she writes that it is “more literally: recreations”, and at 137: “Elsewhere in this translation the term *paidia*, here translated as ‘enjoyment’, is rendered ‘recreation’, although for stylistic or contextual reasons it and its compounds is occasionally translated as ‘play’ or ‘playful’ (as at 643b–d, 653e2–3, 659e4)”; and Saunders 2004 [1970] translates “entertainments and pleasures”. Cf. playing in the absence of fear at Eur. *Bacch.* 866–70.

⁸ *De Morbo Sacro* 14: εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὅτι ἐξ οὐδενὸς ἡμῖν αἱ ἡδοναὶ γίνονται καὶ αἱ εὐφροσύναι καὶ γέλωτες καὶ παιδιὰ ἢ ἐντεῦθεν, καὶ λύπαι καὶ ἀνία καὶ δυσφροσύναι καὶ κλαυθμοί. Note that, like Plato’s use of “pleasures” and “pains” above, the terms here can signify both the internal states and the class of external phenomena which give rise to those internal states (English “pleasures” and “pains” work this way as well), as does “amusements”. For discussion of the authenticity of this passage, see Roselli (1996) 101 n. 87.

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such moods have no existence outside the brain. Laughter (*gelôtes*) and crying (*klauthmoi*) too seem to parallel each other: both are intimately related to moods and feelings, either as feelings that are inextricable from their external manifestations, or simply the manifestations themselves.

The opposition *paidiai* to *aniiai* (“sorrows”) poses a problem, however. In what sense can “games” be in opposition to “sorrows”?⁹ Even if the two are not meant to be in parallel, the word *paidiai* alone protrudes in this list of eight. All the other items in the author’s list are moods, feelings, and internal states (pleasures, pains, good moods, bad moods, sorrows) or manifestations of those internal states (laughter, crying). “Games”, however, distracts the passage away from this rubric into some social world of dicing, knucklebones, and football. Even if we ignore the plural form, and translate it simply as “play”, the effect is still incongruous: play is an activity or context for activity, not an internal state or a manifestation of some internal state.

Translations such as Littré’s “games” (*jeux*), Jones’ “jests”, and Adams’ “sports” thus suggest something like a categorical error in the sentence—does the author really mean to introduce issues of linguistic deviance (“jests”) or activities of recreation (“games”, “sports”) into this discussion of moods and feelings?¹⁰ Chadwick and Mann, by contrast, perhaps aware of the problem, hit closer to the mark with “amusement”.¹¹ With “amusement”, the word *paidiai* no longer appears to be so anomalous: like pleasure, pain, good moods, bad moods, laughter, crying, and sorrow, “amusement” fits this category of feelings and moods, and even functions as a suitable opposite to “sorrow” if such pairing indeed is the author’s intention. Just like pleasures and pains, amusement and sorrow can be understood as feelings created by the brain alone.¹²

⁹ “Game” here is meant simply as any concrete instantiation of the abstract action “play”. Although the history of English has resulted in different words applied to the verb “play” and the noun “game”, many languages, like ancient Greek, use the same word: “spielen ein Spiel” in German, “jouer à un jeu” in French, “giocare un gioco” in Italian, “ludere ludum” in Latin. Game theorists, by contrast, tend to desire separate treatments of “games” and “play” (cf. Galloway 2006, 19–21, and Ensslin 2014, 7–8); see Chapter 4 for reasons why.

¹⁰ Littré (1962 [1849]) 387 has “les plaisirs, les joies, les ris et les jeux”; Adams 1868 “joys, delights, laughter and sports”; Jones 1923 “pleasures, joys, laughter and jests”; Grensemann (1968) 83 “Lust und Freude, Lachen und Scherzen”; and Roselli (1996) 79 “scherzi”.

¹¹ At Lloyd (1978 [1950]) 248.

¹² For similar reasons perhaps, “amusement” has been the traditional English translation for Aristotle’s discussions of *paidia* since at least Chase (1861) 293–4 (cf. Burnet 1900 *passim*; earlier, Taylor 1818, 386–8, e.g., has “diversions”), although Newman (1887–1902 *passim*) regularly translates “play”. One reason may be that play and games are, in English, just one type of “amusement” (e.g., Joachim 1951, 287, under “pleasant amusements” includes not just “games and play” but “witty conversation, and all forms of artistic enjoyment”). Another reason may be implied by Kraut’s (1997) 181 note ad *Pol.* 1337b33–1338a1 that “games are a frequent source of amusement” (emphasis added).

The *Sacred Disease* author thus seems to be using the word *paidia* in a way suggestive of an internal state—something like an emotion, feeling, or mood. If so, he is not alone: there are a number of instances where “play” does not seem to be the right translation for *paidia*. Consider, for example, the depiction of Paidia from the Metropolitan Museum, reproduced on the cover of this book.¹³ Painted around the cylindrical curves of a *pyxis*—a small jewelry or makeup box—Paidia is found alongside Eudaimonia (Happiness), Peithō (Persuasion), Euklea (Reputation), and Hygeia (Health), all in the retinue of Aphrodite. While at least two of the other abstractions converse with one other, Paidia appears to be in her own world, separated from the rest, entirely focused on balancing a stick on her finger. Her stance is dynamic: legs spread with the weight on her front foot, her left arm outstretched to counterbalance the stick, hair electrically charged as if windswept despite the fact that she is apparently standing still.¹⁴ “Happy” is not the word that describes her expression; she is not smiling or laughing. Rather, she is focused: her eye trains on the tip of the stick, her eyebrow is drawn downward, and her mouth is closed in a flat line with soft chin beneath. The expression is that of someone who is concentrating, unaware or uninterested that others might be looking, like someone biting their fingernails or holding the tongue between the teeth.

We understand this character and recognize her action immediately: she is playing, and Paidia means “Play”. Yet, interestingly, not all interpreters translate her in this way. Ferrari, for example, translates the inscription “Paidia” here as “Joy”.¹⁵ Such a translation, like the passage from the *Sacred Disease*, suggests a different category for the word altogether: whereas joy might be described as an emotion or feeling, play tends not to be. We might feel joy *during* play or *enjoy* playing, but it does not make sense to say that play *just is* joy. Play is an activity, joy an emotion. But what of Greek play—that is, *paidia*? During the period between 425 and 400 BCE, as Shapiro notes, named depictions of Paidia appear on vases “more often than that of virtually any other personification”, and some of the other vases offer clues.¹⁶ The personified Paidia is

¹³ Met. Mus. no. 09.221.40; *ARV* 1328,99; Shapiro (1993) 181–3, cat. no. 1; Ferrari 1995. For the balancing-stick game, cf. Beck (1975) 52, pl. 64, and Neils and Oakley (2003) 272 for depictions and further references.

¹⁴ Note too that the folds of her chiton follow those dynamic horizontal lines in the back leg.

¹⁵ Ferrari (1995) 17.

¹⁶ Shapiro (1993) 180; 180–5 he discusses twelve labeled depictions and one possible unlabeled depiction. Cf. Aly 1942, Kossatz-Deismann 1994, and Halliwell (2008) 20 n. 45.

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often depicted as a woman holding a necklace or string of beads; she appears to have, as Shapiro writes, “a particular interest in more expensive playthings, like jewelry.”¹⁷ But in what sense is jewelry a “plaything”? We don’t usually “play” with jewelry in the way that children “play” with toys, so the regular occurrence of jewelry in these Paidia depictions comes as something of a surprise. Yet, as will be seen in this book, the Greek words that usually cover the English “toy” (*athurma*, *paignion*) also regularly denote objects like jewelry, necklaces, and other such “delights”, as if such objects were understood to be in the same class as “toys”.¹⁸ It is not that the adult female Paidia is “playing” with such objects—at least, not in the way that the child Paidia plays with the balancing stick. It is rather that she “delights” in such objects, and this delight is what is shared with the child Paidia, who “delights” in her toy. Much like the passage from the *Sacred Disease*, “play” here does not seem fully to cover the range of this word, even if the Metropolitan depiction appears unmistakably familiar. Ferrari’s “Joy” instead points to another dimension of *paidia*, one which denotes not the activity but the internal state out of which such activities arise.

Although translators often show awareness of this aspect of the word—Dover, for example, translates the “playing” (*paizousin*) of the initiates in the *Frogs* underworld as “enjoying themselves”, Olson translates the common hedonistic exhortation “eat, drink, play” (*esthie, pine, paize*) as “eat, drink, enjoy yourself”, and Sauvé Meyer takes the *paidiai* opposed to fears (*phoboi*) in the *Laws* as “enjoyments”¹⁹—the interest here lies not in finding some suitable translation for the Greek *paidia* that can cover delight, enjoyment, play, amusement, and others simultaneously. Rather, it lies in grasping the conceptual challenge that ancient Greek *paidia* offers us: how can this emotive aspect of “joy” or “delight” be understood as continuous with that other aspect, namely that activity we think of as “play”? For us, the natural relationship between the two insists on a separation: the play activity (rolling dice, playing catch) gives rise to joy and delight. But the Greek offers a reversal, and so a promise of continuity: joy and delight cause people to “dance” (*paizō*), “sing” (*paizō*), and engage in other forms of play, like balancing a stick, throwing a ball, and rolling dice. The continuity suggested by this is not that singing, dancing,

¹⁷ See Shapiro (1993) 183, e.g. the Eretria Painter’s Paidia (30 Shapiro), who is “holding out a string of beads” (181); cf. 19, 21, 32 Shapiro, the last of whom “holds the jewelry in its box” (183).

¹⁸ See Chapter 4 for discussion.

¹⁹ Dover (1993) 57 on Ar. *Frogs* 318–20; Olson (2010) 97 on Ath. 12.530c; Sauvé Meyer (2015) 137 on Pl. *Laws* 1.635b. Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.18, where Miller 1914 translates *paidia* as “merriment”.

and playing are results of “joy” or “delight”, but rather that they just are forms of “joy” and “delight”.

How exactly does this work? Understanding this continuum is the challenge of the book. Over the next eight chapters I will explore ancient Greek play (*paidia*) by studying the child psychology at the root of the word (the *pais* of *paizō*), engaging with the philosophical debates surrounding play in the classical period, reimagining the numerous toys that have survived from antiquity, and probing the meaning of play’s conceptual opposite, the “serious”, or *spoudaios* in Greek. What emerges is a concept of play markedly different from the one we have inherited from modernity. Play is not a certain set of activities which unleashes a certain feeling of pleasure; it is rather a certain feeling of pleasure that unleashes the activities we think of as “play”.

This question of play may be of some significance for those who are interested in the multidisciplinary field of play studies, especially when it is considered how the modern word “play” has shaped many of the field’s assumptions and inquiries. But the question takes on additional stakes when it is remembered how interrelated play is with traditional questions of aesthetics. Guyer, for example, in his history of modern aesthetics, chooses “play” as one of his three strands to trace through the centuries, from Kant, who speaks of the “free play of the imagination”, to Walton’s 1990 book *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, which appears in the epilogue of Guyer’s third volume.²⁰ Yet the connection between art and play does not begin in modernity. Plato, for example, in his later works, categorizes all painting, sculpture, theater, music, and dance—namely, those practices today categorized under the word “art”—as forms of “play”. Although it would be easy to confuse this discussion of play with his more famous discussions of mimesis in the *Republic*, if we examine his notion of *paidia* carefully we will see that, with *paidia*, Plato is embarking on entirely new ideas about art.

Play, Mimesis, Aesthetics

The potted history of Greek aesthetics reads that Plato banned the poets in the *Republic* due to the dangerous effects of mimesis while Aristotle rescued mimesis in the *Poetics*, endowing it with the theoretical

²⁰ Guyer (2014) i.9; for Kant, i.421–58; for Walton, iii.557–66. Other notable advocates of play’s role in aesthetics include Schiller (Guyer i.485–6), Schleiermacher (ii.149–51), Arnold (ii.226), Pater (ii.251–4), Spencer (ii.380–9), Gadamer (iii.50–6), and Santayana (iii.243–5). Cf. Hein 1968, Sonderegger 1998, and Wetzel 2010 for overviews.

grounding that would last it through the following centuries.²¹ Although this history of aesthetics is widely circulated, less studied is the fact that Plato returns to aesthetic questions after the *Republic*, and, in three late works, the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*, establishes “play” (*paidia*) as the new overarching category set above all forms of what we today name “art”: music, poetry, theater, sculpture, painting, and so forth. His definition of “play” in all these texts is “that which is for the sake of pleasure alone”. What may be most remarkable about this definition is that mimesis is absent, and, in fact, not essential to the new category at all.

Plato was not the first to associate play with art. Long before Plato, yet continuing steadily up to Plato’s day, “play” was a term that regularly denoted activities like music, dancing, choral performances, and, by extension, theater. Regarding music, Apollo in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* performs on the *kithara* amidst the other gods, and this act of musical performance is described as “playing” (*paizonta*).²² Pan in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* is similarly described as “playing” when he performs on his panpipes (*paizōn*).²³ In Euripides’ *Bacchae* there are the “melodies” (*paigmata*) of an aulos,²⁴ and Stesichorus similarly mentions that Apollo loves “*paigmosunai* and songs”²⁵. The fourth-century Ehippus also appears to be referring to songs or melodies when he uses the more familiar diminutive of *paigma*, *paignion*.²⁶

Along with music, dancing was also a common denotation of *paizō*: in the *Odyssey*, the house resounds with the “feet of men and women dancing (*paizontōn*)” (*Od.* 23.146–7), while, in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*, Ares and Hermes “dance” together (*paizousi*, 200–1).²⁷ The eighth-century Dipylon vase, one of the earliest surviving examples of Greek alphabetic writing, bears the following verse inscription about “dancing”:

²¹ Cf., e.g., the front-cover jackets of Guyer 2014: “Aesthetics began with Aristotle’s defense of the cognitive value of tragedy in response to Plato’s famous attack on the arts in *The Republic*, and cognitivist accounts of aesthetic experience have been central to the field ever since.” Cf. Freeland (1992) 111: “It is well known that one of Aristotle’s aims in the *Poetics* was to defend tragedy against Plato’s moral critique in *Republic X*.” Cf. Ford (2002) 95–6 and Halliwell (2002) 178.

²² Hom. *Hym. Apoll.* 206: νῖα φίλον παίζοντα μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι.

²³ Ar. *Frogs* 230: καὶ κεροβάτας Πάν ὁ καλαμόφθογγα παίζων.

²⁴ Eur. *Bacch.* 160–5: λωτὸς ὅταν εὐκέλados / ἱερὸς ἱερὰ παίγματα βρέμη σύνοχα / φοιτάσιν εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος. Dodds (1944) ad 152–69 translates *paigmata* as “music” (“sweet and holy music of the pipe”), Kovacs (2003) as “songs”; Roux (1972) ad 160–9 writes: “Παίγματα: les ‘jeux’ d’un instrument de musique, d’où les ‘morceaux joués’”; cf. Λύδια παίγματα λύρας, *CA* 37.15, Hedylys 10.7 GP, Polyb. 16.21.12.

²⁵ *PMG* 232: παιγμοσύνας <τε> φιλεῖ πολὺς τ’ Ἀπόλλων, / κήδεα δὲ στοναχὰς τ’ Ἀΐδας ἔλαχε.

²⁶ Ehippus fr. 7 KA κοινωνεῖ γάρ, ὦ μεράκιον, ἢ / ἐν τοῖσιν αὐλοῖς μουσική κἄν τῇ λύρα / τοῖς ἡμετέροισι παιγνίοις. ὅταν γὰρ εὐ / συναρμόσῃ τις τοῖς συνοῦσι τὸν τρόπον, / τόθ’ ἡ μεγίστη τέρψις ἐξευρίσκειται.

²⁷ While Apollo engages in his own form of “playing” (see above note).

“Whoever among the present dancers dances the best [will win the cup].”²⁸ The verb for “dancing” in this inscription is *paizō*. Similarly, the dancers of a Hesiodic fragment are described as “lovers of the *paigma* (dance)”, while, in Homer, dance itself is similarly described as *paigma*-loving.²⁹ Later, in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, the chorus describe their desire to dance as a fawn “playing in the verdant pleasures of a meadow (*empaizousa*)”—a verb that describes not just the fawn’s activity but the chorus’ as well.³⁰

Both music and dance are thus covered by this term “play”: as an activity it is *paizō*, and as an instance or product of that activity it is *paigma*, or the diminutive *paignion*. Most of all, however, it is in the union of these two—both singing and dancing—that *paizō* is most often used, not least because this combined activity of singing and dancing typifies the traditional Greek chorus. In the Hesiodic *Shield*, for example, choruses follow a wedding procession and “play”—that is, “sing and dance” or “perform” (*paizontes*)—while, a few lines down, young men are described as “playing/performing in dance and song” (*paizontes*).³¹ Pindar similarly speaks of the choral dancing and singing in *Olympian* 1 as “playing”,³² and it is in this tradition that members of dramatic choruses describe their own activity of singing and dancing as “playing”. The chorus at the end of Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousae* tell the audience, “we’ve played enough, and so it’s time to go...”, and earlier in the comedy they strike up a song with “Let’s play”.³³ In *Frogs*, “play” repeatedly occurs in the chorus’ descriptions of their dancing and singing: the chorus describes their activity as “playing and dancing”, and, when Dionysus, a few lines down, expresses his wish to join in the chorus, *paizō* covers that combination of song and dance.³⁴

²⁸ CEG I 432.1: ἡὸς νῦν ὀρχεσθὼν πάντων ἀταλότατα παίζειι...

²⁹ [Hes.] fr. 10a.19 MW: φιλοπαίγμονες ὀρχηστήρες, Hom. *Od.* 23.134: φιλοπαίγμονος ὀρχηθμοῖο. Cf. Pl. *Laws* 7.796b and Xen. *Symp.* 9.2.

³⁰ Eur. *Bacch.* 866–7: ὡς νεβρὸς χλοεραῖς ἐμπαίζουσα λείμακος ἡδοναῖς.

³¹ Hes. *Scut.* 277–9: τῆσιν δὲ χοροὶ παίζοντες ἔποντο... (Most 2007, ad loc.: “Performing choruses followed them”); Hes. *Scut.* 281–4: νέοι κώμαζον ὑπ’ αὐλοῦ, τοί γε μὲν αὖ παίζοντες ὑπ’ ὀρχηθμῶ καὶ ἀοιδῇ... (Most 2007, ad loc.: “Young men were carousing, accompanied by a pipe, some performing in dance and song...”).

³² Pind. *Ol.* 1.16–7: οἷα παίζομεν φίλαν | ἄνδρες ἀμφὶ θαμὰ τράπεζαν.

³³ Ar. *Thesmo.* 1227–8: ἀλλὰ πέπαισται μετρίως ἡμῖν | ὥσθ’ ὦρα δὴ στί βαδίζειν (cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 278b: πεπαίσθω μετρίως ἡμῖν τὰ περὶ λόγων). Ar. *Thesmo.* 947: παίσωμεν (cf. 795, 983).

³⁴ Ar. *Frogs* 388: παῖσαι τε καὶ χορεύσαι; 415: παίζων χορεύειν βούλομαι. See Dover (1993) 57–9 for a list of *paiz-* words in *Frogs*. For further examples of *paiz-* meaning “dance” elsewhere, see Autocr. fr. 1 KA (with Orth 2014, 144 ad loc.), Ar. *Peace* 816–17 (Olson 1998) ad loc. glosses “Join me in celebrating this festival”, i.e. ‘in my dancing’; cf. *Birds* 669), Plut. *Sol.* 8.5 (παίζειν καὶ χορεύειν), and *Mul. virt.* 249d with Calame (1977) 165.

When considered in this way, “play” appears to cover, as both verb and noun, a similar range of pursuits to those that the word *mousikē* covers: as has been noticed before, *mousikē* tends to include singing, dancing, and, by extension, the poetry and dramas involved in such performances, but does not cover visual arts, like sculpture and painting.³⁵ This, on the whole, holds true for “play” as well; yet, in the fourth century, as has been seen, perhaps even already in the late fifth, there is an apparent expansion of “play” into the realm of the visual arts as well.³⁶ The extension would seem to be a natural one: “play” often includes physical objects—that is, “toys” or “playthings” (*athurmata*, *paignia*)—so it is not a far step for one to “delight” in physical objects like sculptures and paintings.³⁷ Although *paigma* or the diminutive *paignion* tend to denote more abstract instantiations, like “dance (n.)”, “song”, “theatrical play”, or “piece of writing”, the Stranger of Plato’s *Statesman* may be prima facie evidence that *paignion* was being used as a term for paintings and sculptures, at least inasmuch as these too were considered to be pleasure-objects.³⁸

Plato’s turn to play in his later writings may thus not be particularly innovative considering this long history. If anything, mimesis was his radical addition to the vocabulary of ancient aesthetics, as has often been noted.³⁹ Play, by contrast, may be viewed as a return to tradition: as so often in his writings, Plato takes the intuitions inherent in the Greek spoken around him—for example, words like “beauty” (*to kalon*), “justice” (*to dikaion*), or “play” (*paidia*)—and articulates these intuitions in new and surprising ways. Play becomes his new category for all art because, in some sense, art had always been thought of as play.

³⁵ Cf. Ford (2002) 94. Thus the necessary but awkward phrasing of *Pol.* 288c regarding “the *mimēmata* which partake in painting and *mousikē*”.

³⁶ Pl. *Pol.* 288c, *Laws* 10.889c–d, with Gundert (1965) 210. Cf. Plut. *Advers. Colot.* 1123c.

³⁷ For discussion of *athurmata* and *paignia*, see Chapter 4.

³⁸ For *paigma* as dance, cf. the term *philopaigmones* (“lovers of the *paigma*/dance”) at [Hes.] fr. 10a.19 MW and Hom *Od.* 23.134, discussed above. For *paigma* as song, cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 160–5, Euphippus fr. 7 KA, and Stesich. *PMG* 232, discussed above. For *paignia* as theatrical performances, cf. Euphro fr. 1.35 KA, *Com. Adesp.* 925 KA (= Suet. *Aug.* 99.1), Pl. *Laws* 7.816e, Dioscorides 21 GP, Alex. *In Arist. Metaph. Comm.* 18.18 Hayduck, Ath. 14.621d. For *paignia* as a type of “non-serious” (i.e., “just entertainment”, “just for fun”) writing, cf. Gorg. *Hel.* 21, Alcimus Hist. *Sikelika*, fr. 1 *FGrH* 560 (=Athen. 7.322a), Leonides (*AP* 6.322); *paignia* are also attributed to Crates the Theban, Aratus, Philetas, and others: see Chapter 8, 200–201, for discussion.

³⁹ Cf. Ford (2002) 95, with further references at 95 n. 7.

Chapter-by-Chapter Overview of the Book

If pleasure is the cause, not the result, of the actions and objects of play, how exactly does this play-pleasure arise in the first place? This is the question of Chapter 1, which investigates the psycho-physiology lying behind “play” (*paizō*) and its etymological root, “child” (*pais*). It has become a truism that *paizō* means “to behave like a child” or perform “the spirit of childhood”, but what exactly do these latter terms mean?⁴⁰ I explore this childish mode of being as perceived by various authors, such as Diogenes of Apollonia, Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, and anonymous medical writers. From Homer onward children are described as intellectually inferior to adults, and, at least from the time of Heraclitus, this intellectual inferiority is related to the decreased cognitive capabilities that adults experience during intoxication. But this cognitive incapacity has a positive flipside: for both children and intoxicated adults there is a physiological state of heightened pleasure. As Aristotle says, the young share the condition of the intoxicated as part of “their nature”.⁴¹ Deferral of pleasure for the sake of some longer-term goal—the act of reason par excellence—becomes impossible, and all that is functionally left for both groups is enjoyment and the acting out of that enjoyment. This heightened state of pleasure—one which motivates certain actions, but is not necessarily caused by those actions—offers the central clue about play’s physiological origins; after all, the verb that regularly characterizes the activities of both children and intoxicated adults is “play” (*paizō*).

In Chapter 2, “Why Plato Needs Play”, it is noticed that in three late works, Plato establishes play as the new overarching category encompassing poetry, music, sculpture, painting, theater, and other forms of what we today categorize as “art”. What does Plato mean by “play” and how does this differ from his better-known conception of “mimesis”? Although moderns, especially since Darwin, tend to think of play as necessarily mimetic, Plato clearly disagrees; play, as he defines it, is that which is “for pleasure alone”, and mimesis occupies no place in his definition at all. By “pleasure alone” he seems to mean that unlike eating, drinking, and sex, which are all processes *accompanied* by pleasure, play is “only” pleasure, “just” pleasure, much in line with the subjective pleasure-models developed in Chapter 1. Plato is thus not simply reshuffling

⁴⁰ Beekes (2010) 1143 s.v. *pais*, Halliwell (2008) 20, respectively.

⁴¹ Arist. *Rh.* 2.12, 1389a18–19: ὥσπερ γὰρ οἱ οἰνωμένοι, οὕτω διάθερμοὶ εἰσιν οἱ νέοι ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως. See Chapter 1 for discussion.