

9.00am Play as emotional survival

Brian Sutton Smith is not able to attend in person. This is a special film where Brian is interviewed by Fraser Brown – filmed in April 2011. Fraser Brown will be introducing the film.

Brian outlines his approach by considering play together with humour and stories.

Drawing on the work of Robert Fagan, Brian suggests that play is closely related to survival and successful adaptation, and that it takes many forms.

Brian identifies 308 forms of play that he categorises into seven rhetorics, or ways of thinking, in his influential book *The Ambiguity of Play*. These rhetorics include play that is about progress, fate, power, identity, the imaginary, the self and frivolity, and have ancient and modern forms.

Brian links the seven rhetorics to the seven primary and secondary emotions identified by Antonio Damasio. Next, using the work of Peter and Iona Opie, he matches the range of children's play behaviours with the emotions and the rhetorics. These arguments are further developed in Brian's forthcoming book *Play as Emotional Survival*.

Brian considers play as a type of mythology and suggests that it is important to understand children's jokes, humour and stories. Using several examples of uncensored humour he suggests that the freedom inherent in play is evident in children's humour.

Using examples of children's stories Brian argues that pretend play goes much further than make-believe. He suggests that pretending is derived from dreams and not always rational or functional. This may give rise to play behaviour that is primitive and challenging to society.

Brian concludes that we should make allowances for this behaviour even if it is unpopular and try to strike a balance when embracing the non-rational.

Biography Brian Sutton-Smith



Brian Sutton-Smith is a play theorist who has spent his lifetime attempting to discover the cultural significance of play in human life, arguing that any useful definition of play must apply to both adults and children. Brian's interdisciplinary approach has included research into play history and cross cultural studies of play.

Following the completion of his PhD in Wellington, New Zealand, Brian travelled to the USA on grant from the Fulbright Programme, where he began an academic career with a focus on children's games, adult games, children's play, children's gender issues and sibling position.

Brian is the author of some 50 books, *The Ambiguity of Play* being among the most recognisable and praised. Following his donation of an archive of nearly half a century of academic play research Brian was appointed as a Scholar in Residence at the Strong National Museum of Play in New York.

