Play, game, display, sport – and democratic self-determination

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Play the game?

- Some languages make difference between two types of play: *Play* and *game* (English)
- **Animals play** – but they do not “game”
- **Olympic Games are not called Olympic Play**
- What is the difference between play and game?
- And is there a **political point** in the duplicity?
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1. Linguistic differentiations – dual relations?

- *Play* and *game*
- *Leg* and *spil* (Danish, Norwegian)
- *Lek* and *spel* (Swedish)
- *Jolas* and *joko* (Basque)

- But only one word: French *le jeu*
- German *Spiel*
Dualism in the philosophy of play

Roger Caillois *Les jeux et les hommes*, 1958 (with the French uniform concept of *jeu* as background)

- **Paidia**: unstructured and spontaneous activities, playfulness – children’s play
- **Ludus**: structured, formalized activities with explicit rules – games: fight, competition, sport, *ludi et circenses*
We like dual oppositions...

- Children versus adults
- Trivial as-if-action versus serious competition
- Spontaneity and freedom versus rules and formal norms
- Chaos versus order
- Process of playing versus result
But Korean:
Three words of play

- **Nori** (noun) and **nolza** (verbum): spontaneous play
- **Gyunggi** (from Chinese): rule-bound games, competitive games with winners and losers, sport
- **Game** (from the West): fun games like computer games, video games, billiard, bowling, board games like Monopoly – challenge, but less achievement orientation
2. In quest of the third: The case of the Olympic Games

- In English: **no Olympic play**
- In Swedish: **Olympiska Spelen** – and not Olympiska Lekar
  - Lekar = Undertones of children’s play: Olympiska lekar in school
- But in Danish and Norwegian: **Olympiske Lege/Leker** (play) – and not Olympiske Spil (games)
  - Spil = Undertones of hazard game or computer game: Olympiske Lege Spil
(1.) Play as Olympic ritual

- **Rituals** invented by Coubertin: Opening and closing ceremonies
- **Play is the framework** – a sort of fiction
- Theater play, festival, show
- Gymnastic tradition of mass display
The Olympic framework: Theater play (1936)
(2.) Competitive games

- Sport = competitive games in the center

- Near to work and production of results: Centimeter, gram, seconds, points

- **Exposition of production** – compare World Expositions

- **Not: “Olympic play”**
In the center: Competitive games (1936)
Olympism refers rhetorically to:

- Play as in children’s play
- Playing together in old folk games
- Playfulness as attitude

Solemn discourse of self-celebration and “Olympic Education”

With idealistic references to Johan Huizinga, Hans-Georg Gadamer etc.
Beneath the dualism: Trialectics of play?

- Spontaneous **play**
- Rule-regulated **game**
- **Display** as fulfilling a form, performance, like in theater and music play, show
3. The wisdom of language

- We have to listen to language – to languages in plural
- Language is a cultural subject – anonymous and powerful
- Full of contradictions, which have meaning
- Expression of deep culture
- Language as fellow-player
Language has deeper meaning

- Words have a space of meaning

  - connotations
  - intonation
  - field of meaning
  - contradictions
  - space of resonance
  - undertones
  - word
4. Philosophy of play

- Play is one – and diverse, plural
- Play as the practice of **the poetical human being**
  - striving, playful curiosity
  - repetition
  - fluctuation to and fro
- Rhythm of suspense
- Compare:
Play as question

- Between process and result
- Has **play** its focus on **question**? Is play a way of asking the world, by (bodily) action?
- Has **game** (and sport) its focus on **answer**, on result and regulated output?
- There is **no Olympic question**
  Only Olympic results
Basis and superstructure

- **Play** is local, situational
  = activity at the **basis**
- **Game** depends on rules, fixed framework
  = intermediary to superstructure
- **Display** follows a given script
  = also intermediary
- **Sport** is organized = **superstructure**
5. Living democracy

- Self-determination in play
- Local play: our play
- Regional and national games (Highland Games): between national-democratic self-determination and representation of power
- Sport as mega-event on the global level: in the hand of large enterprises, organized criminality, and dictatorship
Learning from play about democracy: Ownership

- The problems of sport are not only a question of criminal or directly antidemocratic interests, but also of dimensions:
  - Who plays?
  - Who arranges the game?
  - Who is in control of sport?
- Play informs about the life of democracy, which is more than rules, institutional pyramids or systems
- Play is about ownership
And last but not least...

- In play we laugh – laughter is local and situational, here and now

- **Systems** may function, but they **do not laugh**