



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, billard, bowling, board games like Monopoly – challenge, but less achievement orientation



2. In quest of the third: The case of the Olympic Games

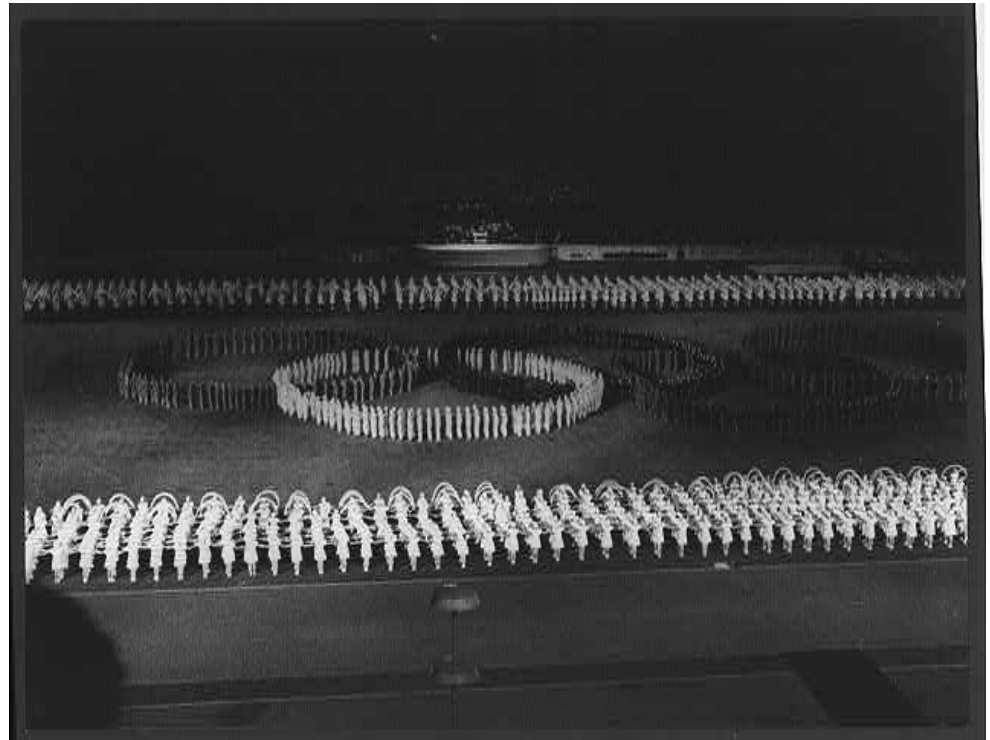
- In English: **no Olympic play**
- In Swedish: **Olympiska Spelen** – and not Olympiska Lekar
 - Lekar = Undertones of children's play: Olympiska lekar in school
- But in Danish and Norwegian: **Olympiske Lege/Leker** (play) – and not Olympiske Spil (games)
 - Spil = Undertones of hazard game or computer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





(3.) Olympic rhetoric of "play"

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

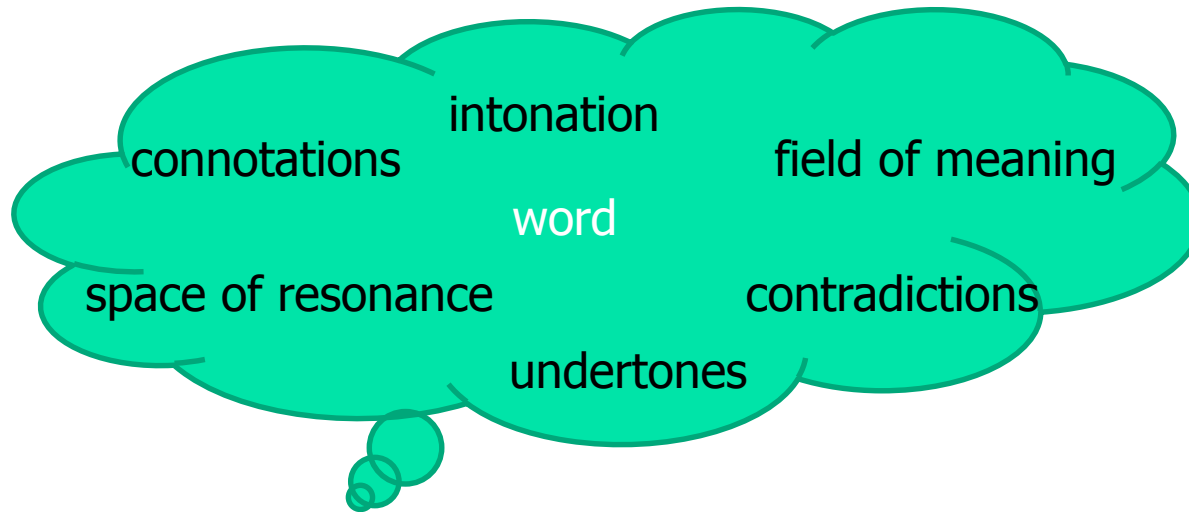


3. The wisdom of language

- 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





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 of 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**