Productive Indeterminacy:
On the Relationship between Play and Science

Natascha Adamowsky (✉)
University of Passau, Innstraße 41, Passau, 94032, Germany
Natascha.Adamowsky@uni-passau.de

Abstract

Over the course of the last two hundred years theories and discourses on play have differentiated in many ways. They are confronted with a multifaceted field of play phenomena and playful activities as well as with a history of manifold play objects, play materials and playgrounds. Both sides – theories and historical phenomena – have not yet found a convincing correspondence, especially since in research, efforts predominate to view regulated and contingent activities as games, or to interpret a play or a game as a symbol, metaphor, function, etc. of something else. In most cases, this 'something else' refers to what is called 'the real thing' in everyday life. But if playing is not the real thing, we cannot experience anything real, fundamental or true in it. It never gets beyond the stage of preparation, simulation or distraction with the result that relations of play to science, knowledge and technology are completely left out. The following contribution takes a completely different approach and sees play as a factor constitutive of culture, that is both as a productive dynamic and as well as a result of culture. The approach is to see play as a special combination of movement and encounter and the player as someone who participates in his surroundings in a mode of productive indeterminacy. The thesis is that the latter is a prerequisite for every form of getting to know as well as of insight.

Keywords: Play theory; History of play culture; Anthropology and phenomenology of play; Epistemology of participation

Продуктивная неопределенность: О связи игры и науки

Наташа Адамовски (✉)
Университет Пассау, Инштрассе 41, Пассау, 94032, Германия
Natascha.Adamowsky@uni-passau.de

Аннотация

За последние двести лет теории и дискурсы об игре во многом изменились. Они сталкиваются с многогранным полем игровых явлений и игровой деятельности, а также с историей разнообразных игровых объектов, игровых материалов и игровых площадок. Обе стороны – теории и исторические явления – еще не нашли убедительного соответствия, тем более что в исследованиях преобладают усилия рассматривать регламентированную и случайную деятельность как игру, или интерпретировать пьесу или игру как символ, метафору, функцию и т. д. чего-то другого. В большинстве случаев это "что-то другое" относится к тому, что в повседневной жизни называется "настоящей вещью". Но если игра не является реальной вещью, мы не можем испытать в ней ничего реального, фундаментального или истинного. Он никогда не выходит за пределы стадии подготовки, симуляции или отвлечения внимания, в результате чего связь игры с наукой, знанием и технологией полностью исключается. Данная статья использует совершенно иной подход и рассматривает игру как фактор, составляющий культуру, одновременно как продуктивную динамику и как результат культуры. Подход состоит в том, чтобы рассматривать игру как особое сочетание движения и сопротивления, а игрока – как человека, который участвует в своем окружении в режиме продуктивной неопределенности. Тезис состоит в том, что последнее является предпосылкой для любой формы познания, а также инсайта.

Ключевые слова: Теория игры; История игровой культуры; Антропология и феноменология игры; Эпистемология участия

At first glance, the investigation of the relationship between play and scientific culture may seem an absurd endeavour. Science is generally regarded as a process that aims at gaining knowledge. Play, on the other hand, is regarded as very important for the psychomotoric development of children and teenagers, but as a nice-to-have in the lives of the rest of humankind. In no way, it is thought, does playing lead to insights into the theory of relativity or the rules that govern evolution. On the other hand: Humans are fully human only where they play, or so we have assured ourselves for a good 200 years, ever since Friedrich Schiller wrote these lines about aesthetic education to Prince Friedrich Christian of Augustenburg (Schiller, 1794/2016). But what could that actually mean?

A warning beforehand: game theories are often like the emperor's new clothes, they consist of a lot of hot air. Of course, people can also be fully human when they are not playing. We can do many other fabulous, crazy, loving and admirable things, such as dreaming, kissing, telling jokes, singing or conjuring up a perfect Schnitzel. But who would deny that? And yet, of course, we must agree with Schiller that play is an indispensable part of our humanity, because, as the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1938) wrote, we are *homo ludi*, and the origin of our culture is based on play.

Huizinga's idea that culture emerges from play has often been met with sympathy. However, disagreements quickly surface when it comes to the concrete nature of the relationship of play to knowledge and cognition, science and technology, to politics and economics. Even though play is predominantly held to be something 'good', it is widely felt to be an inappropriate component to all areas where important decisions, hard facts, or noble art are at stake. It's an unusual scholarly situation: on the one hand, play is a very commonplace phenomenon, on the other hand, scientific access makes it become elusive. Yet it should be quite simple as, after all, one thing has not changed over the millennia: people play and everyone who plays *knows* that they are playing. But what are we actually doing when we play? And, firstly: where do ludic ideas, objects and practices of play come from? Over the centuries this question has led to the most diverse answers and irritations.

As is well known, theories and discourses on play have differed vastly over the last two hundred years. In most compendia and encyclopedias, the prehistory of theories of play begins with John Locke's (1690) *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* published three years later. Locke's strategic ideas on the efficient shaping of character with the help of play are usually juxtaposed with Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1762) major pedagogical work *Émile*, in which the author defends unconstrained natural play as the child's very own right. Finally, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* elevates play to a philosophical principle that establishes the aesthetic state of mind as the "inexponible representation of the imagination (in its free play)" (Kant, 2000, p. 219).

Three years later, in 1793, Friedrich Schiller answered the question of how freedom could be created without radical upheavals and terror in the manner of the French Revolution with an idea of play at the centre of a philosophy of freedom. In his aforementioned letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, the concept of play took on a systematic meaning for the first time in Western history:

> In the midst of the formidable realm of forces, and of the sacred empire of laws, the aesthetic impulse of form creates by degrees a third and a joyous realm, that of play and of the appearance, where she emancipates man from fetters, in all his relations, an from all that is named constraint, whether physical or moral. (Schiller, 1999, p. 54, 27. letter)

The aesthetic ideal of playful productivity is now supposed to lead people from the division of labour to their natural, harmoniously active being. Schiller's philosophical revaluation of purpose-free play, however, implies a harsh devaluation of his contemporary play culture and culminates in the slogan: "For, to speak out once for all, man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays" (Schiller, 1999, p. 29, 15. letter).

With the connection between education and freedom in play, Schiller's idea of play becomes the starting point of modern efforts to integrate playful activities into the model of life and set of values of the emerging bourgeois society. For on the one hand, his concept is attractive for pedagogical interest, already formulated by Locke, to functionalise play and to prove that the apparently purposeless activity of play has an underlying use and value. In addition to recreation, compensation and variety, it was above all motivational moments, the secret trickery to practice and learning through play, that played a role in this. The result was the considerable regimentation, functionalisation and foreshortening of the concept of play and of children's play activities.

On the other hand, and quite controversely, Schiller's concept promoted far-reaching moments of universalisation and idealisation that equated play with beauty, happiness and a golden kingdom of the free. For the success of Schiller's idea of play consisted essentially in hermetically sealing off the realm of play and appearance as an aesthetic realm of ideas from profane reality. From then on, a conception of play developed as an exceptional region and haven of the imagination, as a compensatory movement with thoroughly utopian-alternative potential, which, however, also had its price.

The emphasis on the imaginative side of play as an expression of an elementary human talent went hand in hand with its exclusion from all serious contexts of life. As a result, poets such as Jean Paul, Novalis, or Heinrich von Kleist and educators and philosophers such as Friedrich Fröbel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, or Friedrich Schlegel declared play to be the central moment of the artistic-poetic creative process. The concept of play thus joined up with a development that was also to change the social status of the fine arts: "Life is serious, art is serene," says Schiller's Wallenstein (Schiller, 2017, Prologue). Games and works of art that did not correspond to this sereneness were perceived as aberrations and cultural decay. Since then, the talk of right and wrong games has haunted scientific treatises and cultural critique.

In summary, I would like to state that around 1800, a modern understanding of play asserted itself, oscillating between idealisation on the one hand and disciplining on the other. This was followed by theoretical concepts that accompanied the development of new subjects: sociology discovered play for itself, psychoanalysis, psychology, enthnology, anthropology, cybernetics, business studies, etc. – the list is not exhaustive. In retrospect, however, we can see a development from the Enlightenment to the present

in the course of which theories of play and games became *en vogue* at times in all academic disciplines. All of this is well known, and it would take a book to trace this history of theory in all its interconnections, contradictions, and variety of models.

Surprisingly, the majority of these theories of play are peculiarly distant from actual phenomena. This does not imply a judgement on their epistemological value, nor does it deny that they may offer some important insights. It is merely a finding that they hardly deal with concrete acts of playing. Rather, the playful activity is decoupled from its sensual moments of enjoyment and pleasure and is only used as a model for the analysis of sets of rules, conflict structures and states of equilibrium. With the end of the 17th century, playing was increasingly understood as following rules. The game was regarded as a system of rules, in the sense of an effectuation model. The concept of play was used extensively as a metaphor, for example for the activity of the imagination or as an example of the mathematical formalisation of chance, for philosophical reverie and as a medium of thought. The central objects of study were the play of the child and the adolescent, whose development had to be understood and whose formation and education had to be planned and realised. Questions of teaching and learning were central, with both idealising and disciplining intentions, and occasionally one encounters puzzling things, such as John von Neumann's choice to call two people who have to make a decision player 1 and player 2 and then to christen the mathematical modelling of this decision-making situation 'game theory.'

From a historical distance, this development raises a host of questions. One would like to know which factors promoted the virulence of the concept of play and shaped its specific career. In which cultural-historical context or in which play culture did certain approaches emerge? One of the most striking developments in the history of play is the disintegration of a uniform culture of play described by Philip Aries(1960) in his *History of Childhood*, which begins in the 17th century and gradually leads to a separation of two completely different worlds of children's and adult games. Also significant and well researched is the gradual division of the everyday world into the predominant sphere of work and the subordinate sphere of leisure, the latter leading to the establishment of sport and mass culture in the second half of the 19th century. By contrast, there are large gaps in historical research concerning everyday pleasures and amusements. Play as 'pleasure,' it seems, is no longer capable of theory since 1800 and accordingly finds no place in modern discussions of play.

What one encounters instead are disciplinarily quite scattered studies on selected types of games. One reads about rituals and customs in 'exotic' societies, finds surrealist ideas on art and play, theories of performance and theatre metaphors, cultural critique of gambling addiction, folkloristic collections of children's toys and sociological interpretations of role-playing in everyday life. The extensive literature on sport is separated out as an independent discipline and is not usually addressed as a part of game studies. Only the success story of the computer and its games has changed this lately; these so-called game studies have formed an independent research direction in the last 10 years and established international discourse.

This observation, however, also confirms my thesis that despite a boom in game theory and the great interest in digital games, phenomena of playing and play are still not

a recognised research subject. If play does come into the focus of academic attention, then as a regulated event, be it on the court, on the gambling table, or as a computer game.

The problem with this selection is that these artefacts and architectures represent only a section of the culturally sanctioned forms in which play is permitted. But the question of when someone is playing or whether this or that action is meant to be play is not decided by exercise instructors, educators, philosophers, or entertainment companies. It is solely up to the players; it exclusively lies in their experience. The 'epistemology of play' like that of aesthetics demands a participatory perspective.

In this context, the distinction in English between play and game is very useful. It indicates that there are many playful activities or incidents of playing which are not games. Whereas play refers to the intensity and expressiveness of ludic behaviour, its wit, if you will, and its inclination to folly, games simply denote an institutionalised structure in which play can but does not have to unfold. The fact that games and not play are the most frequent object of study in modern research is due to the general dominance of the 'objective' observer perspective in science, because in contrast to play, games can be investigated without reference to the players, their perceptions, experiences, passions. From a participant's perspective, on the other hand, it is evident that games only allow play to a certain extent and that too much play can ruin a game. The fact that this is hardly ever discussed may be due to the fact that games, in contrast to play, can be ideally operationalised as a scientific-bureaucratic principle: difference and function; field and rule; on and off. The quintessence of games is the fact that they regulate ambiguity, spontaneity and flexibility, which is precisely what play thrives on, out of a situation, which is why the American anthroplogist Helen Schwartzman suspects that games are possibly the last place where one could find out what play actually is (Schwartzman, 1978, p. 327).

Nevertheless, nothing is gained from an antithetical juxtaposition of play and game. Rather, we are dealing with a relationship of cultural transformations in which play proves to be an agency of cultural self-reference, as both a component and a generating instance of culture. Its various concrete historical forms result from cultural efforts to bring play into attractive forms and thereby *invite* people to play. These *invitations to play* are cultural arrangements or media configurations that, in the words of K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (1999), enable "heightened experience." They motivate both relieving, de-differentiating events, e.g. in the form of wild dances and dissolute liveliness which promote an ecstatic experience. But they also motivate the experience of media that offer increasing complexity and intellectualisation.

Games are not the only artefacts that a culture devises to create situations of and for. Invitations to play can vary greatly at different times and places. Comparatively clear examples include pleasure palaces, gardens, dance palaces and playhouses, and one could also look at fairs and sports grounds as well as stages of all kinds. We are dealing with a process in which the invention, design and development of play takes place as a culturalisation of play in cultural objects and practices, e.g. in games, but also in elaborate architectures, sophisticated stagings and complicated toys, in practices such as dressing up, throwing dice, and seesaws. But there are always grey areas involved. For, of course,

play can occur at any time outside culturally sanctioned fields, while, conversely, not everything that happens on designated playing fields is performed or experienced as play.

The modern examination of the phenomena of play is essentially shaped by the rationalising efforts just described. The idea is widespread that play can be defined by the concepts of boundary and rule. The conviction that all forms of play should have fixed boundaries, fixed times and fixed rules, however, stems from a bourgeois-capitalist ideology of play that prescribes the forms in which modern society allows for play to happen, but is blind when it comes to actual incidents where playful activities unfold. Most notable is the modern horror of the possibility that play could occur anytime or anywhere.

However, this ambivalent or fearful attitude towards playing is not necessarily a sign of modernity. Many cultures are concerned about ludic performances; prohibitions against games are probably as old as games themselves. But the modern aversion to play has a unique scope as it essentially claims play as a concept of difference from what it is not: There is play and then there is non-play, namely the seriousness of life. At first, this sounds like quite a reasonable view, and no doubt it also hits on a fact: Not only can play happen anytime and anywhere, it can also stay away. Thank God, not everything is play! On the other hand, so what? Undeniably, play is different from many other things we do in our lives. But that applies to almost everything we don't do all the time: High diving, eating cake, painting a flower, thinking sharply, talking, waging war, driving a car… – but no one would think of describing all these things in terms of the difference to their not-occurring, to not-jumping, not-eating, not-driving a car, and so on. Take the example of eating: The fact that we have to eat permeates our whole lives. Our entire culture with its daily routines, rituals, economies, etc. is determined by the need to eat. However, it would seem completely absurd to describe culinary culture on the basis of the difference between eating and not eating in the sense of an epistemological guiding distinction. Nevertheless, it is clear to everyone that eating is something different from dancing, kissing or sleeping. Modern society, however, does not seem to trust the player with such a capacity for differentiation: Our whole life is interwoven with play, and everyone has to play. There is hardly anything, however, with which modernity has such a problem as with this interweaving of the playful into the entire spectrum of culturally coded life processes. This is remarkable insofar as, anthropologically speaking, clarity and certainty of distinction is only important for hostile aggressive communities, but not for friendly groups – it is vital for wolves, for example, but hardly so for young beagles. The differentiation between play and non-play thus leads back to the logic of a friend-foe distinction that hides the actual essence of play, which is to be a movement-in-between, an encounter.

For some two centuries the culturally constitutive status of play has been reduced to a purely oppositional role. This is a unique strategy of discrimination which not only determines where play has no place, namely among serious things, in work or anything that is called 'reality.' With this juxtaposition it is also decided – and this is the decisive point – that play cannot be understood by itself. According to this view, play is not only different from other things, as such a categorical exception and principled otherness that

does not fundamentally belong with what really constitutes life. It can only appear in the cosmos of cultural truths by way of what it is not.

Here it is important to avoid misunderstandings. Of course, play is different from many things. But it is not obligatory for the knowledge of a phenomenon to describe its peculiarities as opposition to something else. No one would think of describing Plato as non-Aristotle, Goethe as non-Shakespeare, Boris Johnson as non-Thatcher. In the best case, such oppositions are barely beyond trivial. But strangely, hardly anyone seems to notice this. So it seems to be a special epistemological insight for game researchers that in games one always just pretends 'as if.' I have often written this myself, glad to have at all some descriptive thread in respect to the protean phenomenon of play. But the longer one studies play, the more the question arises as to whether this actually says something decisive that no one would have noticed before. Who would deny that you can fly only in play and, of course, not outside play? In the same way, however, you can only fly in an airplane and not outside it, and of course the aeroplane flies and not you. Whom does one want to reassure of what with such ‚insights'?

It is not easy to say goodbye to these and other oppositions. Let's take the example of mimesis in play, the just mentioned acting-as-if. The idea of play as mimesis assumes a clear separation between a world of play in which things are imitated and a real world to which the imitation refers. The problem with this understanding of play is that it reduces play to the status of a proxy; it becomes a dietary medium, a risk-free zone, a salmon impersonator. Such a view necessarily requires making a sharp distinction between salmon and salmon impersonator and treating play as a 'sign-for-something-else.' The first problem with this interpretation is that it is supposed to apply to all manifestations of play. From now on, every kind of playing can only be viewed through something-else-is-actually-meant-here glasses. So a girl who plays with building blocks actually wants to be an architect, a first-person shooter would prefer to kill other people, and every American football match is basically an extended symbolic victory celebration of the American land grab.

Secondly, this interpretation overlooks the fact that someone impersonating a salmon, say a Chinookan fisherman at a first-salmon ritual, bears no resemblance to a salmon at all. Of course, there must be salmon in order to play salmon. But this is trivial. What is not trivial is that with the performance, that is, the appearance of the salmon impersonator who is 'playing salmon' a new aesthetic phenomenon has arrived that has a meaning in itself. Neither is the performer a salmon nor does he look like one, but he shows us a salmon. He produces it, manufactures it, constructs what constitutes being a salmon for him, its 'salmonly' essence. In play we experience what a salmon is for us.

And once again phrased differently: without doubt, games are excellently suited for learning, as forms of therapy and simulation models. However, it would be wrong to see the point of play in reference to or in the logic of a system of signs that reduces play to the role of a signifier, a representative, the inauthentic, a second-order reality. Above all, from this vantage-point one misses two decisive characteristics: on the one hand, play's extraordinary productivity, on the other hand, its culturally indispensable ability to create models of and for something.

In the following, two variants of an understanding of play will be outlined, which conceive of play as a cultural form of generating presence, encounter and participation.

The first variant is of a more abstract nature. It aims to describe the connection that is established between people and their environment in play. This togetherness is thought of as a dynamic which continually offers new possibilities of encountering the form and fullness of the surrounding reality. The idea of thinking of play as an 'ecological' cultural form goes back to the work of the Dutch anthropologist Johannes Buytendijk. He states: "[The] possibility of doing some justice to the form and fullness of reality [...] applies to a process such as play, where the organism and its environment, in being together, produce the unified dynamics of life, where dark reasons, opposing tensions, ambivalent behaviour, the ability of the senses to see (Klages), vital imagination, possibility and actualisation, past, present and future combine" (Buytendijk, 1933, p. 138). In its ability to make connections, play is tremendously productive, not to say excessively so. Play is therefore one of the central expressive phenomena of cultural history because it gives form and expression to this „togetherness" of human and environment – "it gives shape as well as expression to individual and societal affective and cognitive systems," as the American anthropologist Helen Schwartzman writes (Schwartzman, 1978, p. 330). I am convinced that the attraction of play lies precisely in this coincidence, in the convergence of heightened experience and aesthetic production. Throughout history, people have ceaselessly produced new aesthetic forms in play, new rules and procedures, choreographies and architectures, gaining important insights and developing techniques. An enormous repertoire has emerged that constantly multiplies the world into infinity. For every game is an attempt, a trial or probe, an experiment. It may or may not succeed, but in any case it creates connections between the player and the object of the game, between subject and object, the human being and the world around them. This coming together is an essential prerequisite of human cognition. It does not mean that every playful incident leads to cognition, but it does mean that cognitive effects can be achieved in play. The space of play has a fundamentally cognitive quality, and this is based on the feature of play that it organises abstract things in a way that makes them manageable for the human imagination.

The human brain is quite capable of abstract thinking. Our great weakness, however, is that we emotionally occupy the abstract by way of concretising it, making it sensible. As the social anthropologist Dieter Claessens (1980) writes, play was an important hinge in human evolution because it offered human communities a way to precisely confront this problem. Play, after all, is always something dynamic. To play is to make connections between intellect and sensuality; to play is to build speculative bridges between spirit and matter. What we encounter in play is recognised in a vital way. So we can assume that it was indeed the playing human being who first succeeded in finding a form of mediation between the archaic concrete-sensual and the space of possibility for abstract-distanced thinking – and thus the origin of culture.

The question that naturally arises now concerns the special character of this mediation process. If one asks oneself what people actually do when they design games, one realises that they primarily make available spaces for experimentation, in which cultural tensions can be enacted. The aesthetic form production offers not only pleasure

and enjoyment, but also techniques of visualisation, strategies of expression, methods of setting things in motion or in relation. These techniques, strategies, and methods represent, in a highly changeable way, a common thread in the history of European ideas and knowledge. Of particular importance is the strange potential of play to choreograph tension and conflict and thereby arrive at models of balance and connection.

As far as we can see today, play is part of the constitution of every culture. It has a remarkable capacity to offer itself as a container for processes of meaning-making or as surface for recording and inscription. Disparate things can be brought into reconcilable forms, nameless things can find performative processes from which nameable figures emerge. Play provides a method of enabling interplay, and it is, as it were, the attempt to make something appear in its movement in time and space and thus to create a connection between oneself and this something. In this connection, play proves to be a way of vital recognition.

So I would like to suggest that designing invitations to play is a prototypical process of developing models. These models organise spaces to describe, embody and make descriptive the things that are around us. It is a special ability of play-making to condense a situation out of the abundance of disorder, in which conflicts, dispositions, passions, moods can be brought to the point, to their principle, into an interplay.

Forms of play are among the oldest cultural testimonies that have accompanied human history universally from the very beginning. Interestingly, despite all their occasional exuberance, they do so in relatively stable forms. This gives rise to the assumption that forms of play do not only perpetuate themselves with great success, but also the cultural practice of play-design. The fabrication of play situations – toys, boards, parcours, stages, props…. –, however, is not external to the spirit of play. The 'play inventors' are always negotiating with themselves as players; the players, on the other hand, are looking for their designs to succeed or work out as play unfolds. But what do we – asked again – actually do when we play? What happens in these spaces of play so that epistemological effects can occur in them? What do we have in mind when we study people playing?

Working backwards through these questions, it must first be stated that one is undoubtedly dealing with decidedly ambivalent cultural phenomena. The problem is that one can rarely deal with the process of playing itself; often, especially in historical research, one is left with culturally sanctioned forms in which games are meant to take place. However, in order to understand people playing, it is indispensable to enter into the event and participate.

The question remains: what do we do while playing? There is no exhaustive answer to this question. Helmut Plessner (1941) would have said that we keep ourselves in between, Victor Turner (1983) that we are betwixt-and-between in a no-man's land, Richard Schechner (1981; 1988) spoke of a threshold area between two and uncountable options. All these formulations characterize play as a certain kind of movement into the non-identical and thus as the basis for our being able to unfold as individuals.

This takes me to my final point – not only the claim that play is essential to human culture, but also that it provides the basis for us to develop as individuals. The central question we have to face is not who am I, but who do I want to be? The above mentioned

American theatre anthropologist Richard Schechner therefore once described play as a way "to act in-between identities" (Schechner, 1981, p. 88). What he meant is a so-called intermediary position, a being-in-between, which is characterised by a double negativity. It holds someone who plays a king in the suspended lightness of between not-me, because playing king, and not-not-me, because not being king. Players are thus always in a threshold zone, in the movement mode of the non-identical. If it does not want to be merely tautological and just repeat itself, any form of self-knowledge can be gained only from such an eccentric position.

With the "in-between" or the intermediary position of the player, Schechner associates a rejection of all attempts to define play as a framed event and thus implement a division according to 'inside the phenomenon' and 'outside the phenomenon.' What he rejects here Schechner considers a rationalist approach to identifying play and locating it safely between definitive boundaries, using the metaphor of the ‚frame': "[I]t's too stiff, too impermeable, too 'on/off', 'inside/ outside'. 'Net' is better: a porous, flexible, gatherer; a three-dimensional, dynamic flow-through container" (Schechner, 1988, p. 16).

With the net metaphor, play itself moves into the centre of attention. It becomes manifest as the actualisation of a multiply interwoven web of "both intrinsic and extrinsic relations," (cf. Sutton-Smith, 1978, p. 97), as a simultaneous engagement of inner and outer dimensions. Play becomes recognisable in its character as a polymorphous point of intersection of the most diverse oppositions, some of these fundamentally antithetical such as I and the other, order and disorder, freedom and submission, paidia and ludus. Also intersecting in play are culturally and historically staged tensions between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' (see Turner 1989), between the 'raw' and the 'cooked' (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1976), between 'human' and 'animal' (cf. Geertz, 1983), as well as the most elementary ontic experience, "namely the experience that something happens and that something is 'there' – in contrast to nothing" (Jean-Luc Nancy, cited in Gumbrecht, 1998, p. 219).

Describing the atmosphere of in-between from the position of the player offers a way to approach the experience or creation of presence in play. The concept of presence refers primarily to the dimension of space. "Derived from the Latin verb 'producere' equal to 'to present', 'to produce presence' means to bring things within reach so that they can be touched" (Gumbrecht, 1998, p. 208). This touch is roughly comparable to what Jerzy Grotowski describes as "[…] confrontation with the spectators […] in their presence" (Grotowski, 1981, p. 182) and Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1952) as the boundlessly soulful sensuousness of the encounter: "At no moment is the sensual so close to the spiritual, the spiritual so sensual, as in the encounter. At this moment everything is possible, everything in flux, everything diffused. […] Here is the deerlike, the birdlike, the animal-dumb, the angel-pure, the divine. In a greeting there are infinite possibilities" (p. 163).

Where touch implies an embodied form in space, the encounter is an event, a phenomenon of time. Taken togeher, embodiment and temporalisation lead to the concept of performance. It is thus that something absent or in principle inaccessible is made available in play by undermining the non-identity of something and its representation in certain situations. In this sense, players are first and foremost performers.

Thus, the search for the reasons of play lead us by the very simple insight that one has to play in order to be able to talk about play. Descriptions of play are particularly convincing when gained through a participatory perspective. In this way we can say goodbye to an understanding of play that establishes it as the counterpart of rationality and divides the world according to ordering schemes such as: here is play, there the seriousness of life, here is hard reality there the free arts of appearance and illusion, here objective science and there the speculative forces of fantasy. In order to find out how concepts, designs, ideas, metaphors and procedures are used in play in order to create epistemic spaces and dynamics, one must enter into intellectual *as well as* sensual realms of play in which new ways of thinking and viewing can be tried out.

This is how one arrives at the core of play: the fact that the phenomena of play not only belong to the preconditions of reason, but are inextricably bound up within it.

REFERENCES

Aries, P. (1960). *L´enfant et la vie familiale sous l´ancien régime* [The Child and Family Life under the Old Regime]. Plon.

Buytendijk, F. J. J. (1933). *Wesen und Sinn des Spiels. Das Spielen des Menschen und der Tiere als Erscheinungsform der Lebenstriebe* [Nature and Purpose of the Game. The Play of Humans and Animals as a Manifestation of the Life Instincts]. Kurt Wolf.

Claessens, D. (1980). *Das Konkrete und das Abstrakte. Soziologische Skizzen zur Anthropologie* [The Concrete and the Abstract. Sociological Sketches on Anthropology]. Suhrkamp.

Geertz, C. (1983). *Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zur Beschreibung kultureller Systeme* [Dense description. Contributions to the Description of Cultural Systems]. Suhrkamp.

Grotowski, J. (1981). *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Methuen.

Gumbrecht, H. U. (1998). Die Schönheit des Mannschaftssports: American Football – im Stadion und im Fernsehen [The Beauty of Team Sport: American Football – in the Stadium and on TV]. In G. Vattimo, & W. Welsch (Eds.), *Medien-Welten-Wirklichkeiten* (pp. 201-228). Wilhelm Fink.

Hofmannsthal, H. von (1952). Encounters. *Yale French Studies. Symbol and Symbolism 9*, 162-165.

Huizinga, J. (1938). *Homo Ludens. Versuch einer Bestimmung des Spielelementes der Kultur* [Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture]. Akademische Verlagsanstalt Pantheon.

Kant, I. (2000). First Section, First Book: Analytic of the Beautiful. In P. Guyer (Ed.) & E. Matthews (Trans.), *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (pp. 89-127). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511804656.007

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1973). *Das wilde Denken* [The Wild Thought]. Suhrkamp.

Locke, J. (1690). *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*. Awnsham and John Churchil... and Samuel Manship.

Pfeiffer, K. L. (1999). *Das Mediale und das Imaginäre. Dimensionen kulturanthropologischer Medientheorie* [The medial and the imaginary. Dimensions of cultural-anthropological media theory]. Suhrkamp.

Plessner, H. (1941). *Lachen und Weinen. Eine Untersuchung nach den Grenzen menschlichen Verhaltens* [Laugh and Cry. An Investigation into the Limits of Human Behavior]. Leo Lehnen.

Rousseaus, J. J. (1762). *Émile ou De l´éducation* [Emile or Education]. Jean Néaumle.

Schechner, R. (1981). Performers and Spectators – Transported and Transformed. *Kenyon Review, 3*(4), 83-113.

Schechner, R. (1988). Playing. *Play & Culture 1*(1), 3-19.

Schiller, F. (1999). *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man.* Generic NL Freebook Publisher.

Schiller, F. (2016). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Penguin. (Original work published 1794)

Schiller, F. (2017). *Wallenstein's Camp*. Hansebooks. (Original work published 1798)

Schwartzman, H. B. (1978). *Transformations. The Anthropology of Children's Play.* Plenum Press.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Harvard University Press.

Turner, V. (1983). Play and Drama: The Horns of a Dilemma. In F. E. Manning (Ed.), *The World of Play. Proceedings of the 7th Annual Meeting of The Association of the Anthropological Study of Play* (pp. 217-224). Leisure Press.

Turner, V. (1989). *Vom Ritual zum Theater. Der Ernst des menschlichen Spiels* [From Ritual to Theatre. The Seriousness of the Human Game]. Campus.

СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ / THE AUTHOR

Наташа Адомовски
Natascha.Adamowsky@uni-passau.de

Natascha Adamowsky
Natascha.Adamowsky@uni-passau.de