FROM HUIZINGA TO WITTGENSTEIN.
A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOTIONS OF PLAY, GAMES AND LANGUAGE-GAMES.

by

Annalisa Sassano

July 13, 1994

A dissertation submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of State
University of New York at Buffalo
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Ai miei genitori,
Augusto e Luciana,
perché mi hanno insegnato il grande gioco della vita.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work represents the conclusion of my program of studies at the University of Buffalo. I have greatly benefited from the period of time spent here, from both the academic and personal point of view. I would like to thank the Fulbright Commission in Rome for awarding me a scholarship and so giving me the possibility of starting this unique experience.

I want to acknowledge all the members of my committee for their continuous and supportive guidance. First of all I would like to thank my adviser, Prof. Newton Garver, for encouraging me to go on with my work, to which he has constantly provided valuable and effective criticisms. My sincere thanks also to Prof. Richard Hull and Prof. Carolyn Korsmeyer for their constructive comments and suggestions which have really broadened my way of looking at the subject of this work. Through the modern techniques of electronic communication -- in which we all have faith! -- I could constantly keep in touch with all of them, even from across the ocean.

I enjoyed being around the Department of Philosophy of the University of Buffalo, and taking part in some of its activities. The humorous and intelligent presence of Prof. Kenneth Barber, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the kind assistance of the secretary Judy Wagner made it a nice place to be in.

My thanks go also to Helen Stevens, Director of the Office of International Education, for having expanded my experience of the cultural differences and made Buffalo a friendly place to live in, especially at the beginning. And to my dear Buffalonian friend Maryrose, who performed so sweetly his task of a substitutive-mother. Had she not taken me around, I would have not had the special taste of this city.

Many thanks to my Italian and International friends and to my family, who all supported me very closely during all this time, and especially to my mother for her invaluable psychological assistance, in particular in my moments of confusion and emotional chaos.

This work and my whole American experience would have been meaningless without the presence and caring love of Johan, to whom in this moment I send my most intense thoughts. His company has represented the fullness of my sentimental and intellectual life.

In the end my most special thanks go to my dear father, Augusto. Together, we went through times of deep sorrow and extreme despair. However, he never forgot to encourage me in pursuing my goals and showing me the worth of living this life until its very end. His extraordinary dignity and faith, even among terrible pains, will remain the most profound teaching for the rest of my days. Were he still alive, he would be very proud of me. It is to his memory that this work is mainly dedicated.

Annalisa Sassano
July 1994

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this work is presenting a philosophical analysis of the general notion of *play*. This analysis starts from Huizinga's definition of the "play-concept" and is extended so as to include Wittgenstein's conception of language-games. By supplementing Huizinga's definition with a distinction between "play" and "game", as the two opposite components of that concept, I carry out an investigation of some of the interesting issues raised by his book. I focus especially on the relationship between the play-phenomenon and artistic experience and I develop Huizinga's suggestions regarding this point through an examination of past and modern conceptions of art. The results of this analysis are connected with Wittgenstein's notion of language-games. I find that this notion can be taken to emphasize the very character of *integration* that creative and appreciative experience in art show. Language-games, like artworks, demand and generate at the same time the need of communality, that is of customs.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

(An asterisk on the right side of the title indicates that references in the text are made to paragraph number.)

1. Wittgenstein's works:

BB	**The Blue and Brown Books**
OC	**On Certainty***
PG	**Philosophical Grammar***
PI	**Philosophical Investigations***
PR	**Philosophical Remarks***
RFGB	**Remarks on Frazer's "Golden Bough"**
SRLF	"Some Remarks on Logical Form"
TLP	**Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus***

2. Nietzsche's works:

ADHL	**On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life**
ASZ	**Also Sprach Zarathustra**
FW	**Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft***
GS	**The Gay Science***
GT	**Die Geburt der Tragödie**
HTH	**Human all too Human***

3. Works by other authors:

ÄEM	**Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menshen** (Schiller)
KRV	**Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*** (Kant)
KU	**Kritik der Urteilskraft*** (Kant)
L	**The Laws*** (Plato)
NE	**The Nicomachean Ethics*** (Aristotle)
NSD	**Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung** (Schiller)
R	**The Republic*** (Plato)
THN	**A Treatise of Human Nature** (Hume)
WVC	**Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle** (Waismann)

INTRODUCTION

The present work aims at discussing the philosophical import of the various phenomena that fall in the wide category of play. "Play" seems to escape a rigid classification in any of the traditional branches of philosophy: ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics. Yet, it shares something with each of them.

Being of a philosophical kind, this study is not meant to go into a psychological analysis of the actual play activities of human beings, though references to psychological as well as anthropological studies will be helpful on some occasions. A psychological analysis should involve an investigation, based on factors like age or social context, into *how* our play-life evolves. It should put the emphasis on the contribution given by play to the growth of human beings. Philosophy, instead, shows a different mode of reflection. It focuses on the concept of play, rather than on its applications, and pursues an analysis of that very concept. If it must be granted philosophical relevance, the phenomenon of play has to be taken, from the start, as a distinctive component of human life.

This work will not offer a survey of the philosophical literature on the subject of play, not even an incomplete one. Rather it will unfold some of the concepts advanced by Huizinga in ***Homo Ludens*****.** Though Huizinga's book cannot straightforwardly be inscribed in the professional philosophical literature, it contains some intriguing suggestions concerning the phenomenon of play, which can be further worked out in a philosophical direction. In particular some of its ideas will be used to explore and analyze Wittgenstein's conception of language-games.

Wittgenstein's work is not mentioned by Huizinga (1938), and probably it couldn't have been. Yet this fact represents a stimulus, rather than a hindrance, to draw a parallel between them. Adding Wittgenstein to the list of philosophers Huizinga refers to in his book -- philosophers who dealt with different, but fundamental, aspects of the notion of play -- is a choice which can benefit both Wittgenstein and Huizinga. On the one hand, it provides a point of reference to Wittgenstein's use of

the notion of game and language-game; on the other hand, it enriches Huizinga's conception with a new element.

Among the philosophers mentioned by Huizinga, Nietzsche and Plato occupy a special place. Nietzsche is the philosopher who perceived and emphasized the *agonistic* character of life. His philosophy is relevant to an understanding of play since, according to Huizinga, the tendency to compete is one of the primary features of a play activity, its prototypical form. Plato, on the other hand, underlined the *aesthetic* aspect of play. Play is seen by him as an exercise that may bring men and women to reach a full harmony of being. His remarks on the function of play have a great value for education.

Nietzsche and Plato thus stressed two opposite facets of the concept of play. Nietzsche emphasized the *dynamic* component of play meant as a choice of actions whose tension and struggle towards the achievement of a goal prevail. Plato, on the contrary, pointed out the *intrinsic intellectual* value of play as a powerful force directed towards the creation of a human microcosm of beauty and perfection.

Into this conceptual framework Wittgenstein can fit as the author who grasped the importance of another component of the play-activity, that is, the presence of rules. Huizinga himself acknowledges the role of rules in a game, and says that it is in virtue of this factor that a play-activity assumes a definite character. However Wittgenstein's remarks on the significance of learning a "practice" and showing "mastery" of a certain game, are innovative and central to the discussion about the function of rules in a game.

This concept of "mastery" of the rules of a game will provide, in the present work, the missing link between the two opposite views of Nietzsche and Plato. I will explore the possible connections among the properties of spontaneity and playfulness, which are the immediate expressions of the play activity, easy to find in Nietzsche's writings, and the rule-governed aspect of games, mainly

emphasized by Plato's philosophy. Those connections are suggested by Wittgenstein's notion of "practice."

* * *

Among the characteristics one would immediately include in the notion of "play" there is the *spontaneity* of the play-activity. Play is an activity we choose to engage in freely, without any external conditioning. Its origin can be found in an act of will, in the subject's decision to begin to play. What this act of will consists in does not concern us here since an investigation into its nature would mainly be a matter for psychological enquiry. What matters, instead, is to recognize that the motivation of a play-action is to be located at the level of the individual decision.

If we see some people forced to participate in a game we will not say they are really "playing." As a matter of fact they are, given that they comply with the rules of the game. But, as far as the spontaneity of playing is concerned they are not, since their actions lack the characteristic of being something one does "just for playing." This sense of "doing something just for the sake of it" (which excludes any further motivation) seems to be involved in any kind of play: it guarantees its autonomy of goals.

An external motivation, like money for example, is the one commonly present in professional play, play, that is, engaged in as a regular job. It is true, as some say, that "[p]rofessionalism in games need not destroy the characteristics of play" (Celano, 1991: 140), or that professionals and amateurs "have the same attitude towards the *rules* of those games" (Suits, 1978: 146). After all, professional players are still playing a game and complying with its principles. Like professional musicians, they exploit a natural talent (for, say, baseball or horse racing). However, by investing all their efforts into it they put their whole life at risk. Though a *game* is what is being played by professionals, their playing is too tied in with the rest of their life and it lacks the necessary separation from it.

I rather agree with Caillois (1961: 6) when he says that "the professionals [...] are not players but workers." When professional football players play, they do it for a living. When they undergo the

heavy training sessions and all the preparation rituals that precede a match, they do it because that is their job, and from it they are going to benefit. They are paid for playing, and especially for playing well. Their final goal goes beyond the goals of the game they play each time. Mistakes can be fatal to them.

In these cases the "real" play is for the audience. Indeed the whole idea of having permanent teams, which play regularly, originates from the desire to offer to the audience performances which are more and more well-executed. Only the proven mastery of individuals who dedicate their entire life to "play" can satisfy the fans' need of attending a "good game." It is for this reason that the necessity has been felt of separating non-professional from professional forms of play. One famous example is the one of the Olympic games, the access to which is forbidden to professional players (or so it should be). This split also implies a different measure of evaluation: in the case of non-professional players, bad performances only affect their reputation *qua* players, without endangering their career. People usually play because they know that what they are doing is not a matter of life and death, and winning or losing a game remains within the boundaries of that very game, it does not extend beyond it. When the playing time is over, its laws do not matter anymore.

Keeping in mind this fact, I would like to distinguish between two kinds of use of the word "play": a "literal" and a "significant" one. The word is used "literally" anytime we observe somebody playing a game according to its proper rules. This use is justified from an *external* perspective. Even a person who is *compelled* to do it, or motivated by extraneous needs, is playing, in this sense of the word, including professional players. In this case we conclude that a game is being played from the mere application of the rules: the moves made by the players fulfil our expectations of what they should be like (if we know those rules).

On the other hand, the word is used "significantly" when we understand that performing a certain part in a game is the result of a free choice. This voluntary participation in a game can be suspended at any time. (In a sense, even professional players freely choose their activity, or

profession; but after their choice is made, they are under a legal, other then moral, obligation to continue the activity. They sign contracts.) I call this second use of the word "play" *significant* because it adds a new sense to "play", other than the one of being a syntactically correct employment of rules. This use is justified by the player's intention of playing just for the pleasure of it, and thus it is authorized from an *internal* perspective.

I also distinguish "play" from "seriousness" as follows. A *serious* activity is one which involves an extended responsibility, as it were. The consequences of what we do, with serious intentions, have a considerable impact on our everyday life. On the contrary, actions done for play only bear a short-term responsibility: the moves we choose, the strategy we adopt in a game can change our fortune only within the limits of the game itself. The consequences of those moves are not carried over to "real life": when the game is over, they do not exist anymore.

Therefore I deem "serious" those actions that do not break the causal connections that make up our life, i.e. those activities that link our past to our future life in a consequential way; whereas by "playful" I mean those activities that isolate a portion of time from the rest of our ordinary life and sever it both from past and future. Games are like time islands in the flow of life.

As Celano (1991: 141) tells us, some philosophers have noted the coincidence between *play*, considered as an autonomous and self-sufficient activity, and Aristotle's description of actions which have their end in themselves (see NE: 1094a, 5). According to Aristotle those actions, being ultimate ends, are also the most perfect ones (see NE: 1097a, 30). I agree that using the Aristotelian category of "self-sufficiency" may help us to grasp the genuine sense of play as an activity independent of any external purpose. Nevertheless, as Celano claims, we should not forget that this analogy does not authorize an identification of play and the supreme good in Aristotle. The supreme good for Aristotle is rather "the contemplative activity", which corresponds to the highest human faculty (NE: 1177a, 20-25). Play, instead, is devoid of important value (NE: 1176b, 30-35).

The pleasure of performance, the "fun" element of play, as Huizinga says, is the real characteristic feature of play. Playing is a way of spending time in an immediately rewarding activity which does not have other purposes but itself. We play, above all, for ourselves. Playing is autonomous from other values. It is an enterprise we engage in because we like it and because we know it will grant us some kind of good feeling.

Another important feature of the play-activity is its being governed by *rules*. The rules of a game establish which moves are allowed and which are not, what has to be considered as the start and the end of a game, and what are the conditions for victory, if any. The rules bind the play-activity to a convention, namely to the players' agreement of conforming to the conditions of the game. They set up a distinction between correct and incorrect behavior that has to be respected by all participants. Players follow what the rules say they can do (rules are *normative*) and undergo sanctions where they ignore the rules (rules are *restrictive*). The rules give any play-activity a precise and fixed form, by means of which that activity can be repeated and maintained in the course of time.

As Garver (1967: 232) points out, the rules of games are not "unqualifiedly restrictive". Unlike the so-called "moral rules," which specify "what must and what cannot be done" (so providing human beings with a guide for the correct, e.g. approved, behavior), the rules of a game, as well as of a language, are "constitutive": "they [open] up new realms of activity, by defining the acts and practices in question" (ibid.). This means that the rules of a game offer to its participants a series of *possibilities* of action. Within the fundamental respect of the rules, players can choose one or the other way of playing, the one that pleases them best. To be governed by constitutive rules implies for a certain activity or institution that it could not exist without those very rules. We could not speak a language, nor play a game, nor draw inferences in a logical calculus, did we not have any sort of rules. On the contrary, we could choose any manner of behaving whatsoever even without "moral" or "regulative" rules. What would be missing in that case is only the "*quality* of action" (ibid.: 233).

There is a way in which even moral rules may be considered as *constitutive* rules. A moral rule is *constitutive* compared to the good quality of behavior. In other words: in the absence of a moral rule a behavior or action may still be assumed naturally, but not a *good* behavior or a *good* action (where "good" is defined differently in different moral systems). Moral rules are *constitutive* since without them no values of "good" and "evil" could *exist*. Say that, as members of a small community, we have been raised without any notion of what a moral code is. In this case it is true that we might *happen* to do *good* deeds though we do not *deliberately* choose to act in a good way. For example, we might not steal things from a store though there is nobody around. This not stealing is good indeed, but it is not good in a moral sense. I assume that we must be aware of the moral rules according to which we want to act in order to ascribe a moral quality to our actions. A moral kind of behavior presupposes a choice and a responsibility for it, and therefore it must involve reference to some intended statement. It is only the awareness of our moral code that grants the fact that we avoid some actions as morally bad not only now but in the future as well. In the case envisaged above nothing provides this guarantee.

As Searle (1969: 34) claims, *regulative* rules, unlike *constitutive* rules, "regulate a pre-existing activity [...] whose existence is logically independent of the rules", and they "characteristically take the form of imperatives". An example of regulative rule would be the one contained in the sentence: "Don't slam the door when you go out". Suits (1978: 32) adopts a finer, but equivalent, distinction between rules as "directives useful in seeking a given end" (as in the example: "If you want to drive home safely, try to stay awake"), rules as "externally imposed limitations on the means that may be chosen in seeking an end" (as in moral rules like: "Do not lie to the court if you want to be judged as an honest person")[1], and finally rules as "constitutive rules", which "set out the

[1] I do not see a real difference between the first and second kind of rules, except for the stress that the first one puts on the *usefulness* of rules and the second on the presence of *external* limitations. By "external limitations" Suits refers, as I understand, to rules which do not belong to actions themselves, but rather to the way an action is performed. Therefore moral rules are "external" (Suits, 1978: 31) because they confer to an action a value which does not *naturally* belong to it. This is the same as saying, in Garver's terms, that moral

conditions which must be met in playing the game" (as in the rule of chess: "The bishop can be moved only along the diagonals on the board") (ibid.: 37)[2]. Regulative rules in Searle's sense seem to cover the first two cases of Suits's classification since in these cases the activities exist independently of the rules.

In addition to the distinction between constitutive and regulative rules, there is the one between "formulated" and "embedded" rules. The rules of language -- Garver continues -- are "embedded in a certain practice" (Garver, 1967.: 232), that is, they are not or cannot be always *explicitly* expressed, at least not for all the existing languages. In games as well, it is not always possible to state clearly the underlying rules. Some games, like chess or basketball, have a precise code of rules. However, "sometimes no clear statement of the rules is available; and perhaps none is possible." (ibid.: 231) In any case, what matters is the possibility of identifying a "structure", that is, a certain steady regularity, for an activity to be called "game" (ibid.: 232).

To Garver's last statements I would like to connect my remarks about the difference between the notions of "play" and "game". This difference has been implicitly presupposed in my preceding observations. It is time, then, to make it a little clearer. In fact "play" and "game", though belonging to the same conceptual sphere, possess a different application.

On the one hand, "play" is, fundamentally, an *attitude*, that is, a way of acting that has a specific quality independently of its content. It is not the kind of activity one does, nor the details of it, that are called 'play', but the particular manner of going about them. This is the manner of "fun", the pleasure of doing something for no other purpose but that very doing. One can execute the most serious, usual and unpleasant actions and yet "play". This attitude is also what Hyland (1984: 45) refers to as "the stance of play", that is a special "mode of being-in-the world" (though his notion of

---

rules "make possible a *quality* of action," or, in Searle's terms, that moral rules are regulative rules.

[2] The examples given in parentheses are mine.

play refers almost exclusively to activities, like sports, which exhibit a certain degree of means-to-ends structure).

On the other hand, a "game" is a specific activity, one that has been passed on from generation to generation. Chess, football and poker are all examples of "games". Their being an activity with a fixed form is due to their constitutive rules. These rules make a game into a "finite" event, where this finitude does not indicate a "limitation" but rather a "possibility" of being, as Hyland (1984: 66) says. Therefore, games, unlike play, have a well defined *content*.

Play and game are to each other what a natural phenomenon is to an artificially produced one. A natural phenomenon (gravity, for example)is one whose existence *precedes* rules, as it were, since rules are the *result* of our studying the phenomenon. The phenomenon is something existing out there independently of whether or not we attribute rules to it. On the other hand, an artificial object (say, an airplane) is one whose rules *precede* existence: the object would not exist, had it not been built according to those rules. Play, as a mode of being, is a natural attitude and does not depend upon constitutive rules for existence, as games do. The relationship between play and games is the one of inclusion, from an extensional point of view: the class of play-activities is bigger than the class of games. Conversely, the concept "game" includes the concept "play" : if something is a game, it is played. However, we can play at something which does not have any identifiable form typical of games.

It seems to me that what Garver says on the absence of exact rules fits in well with the notion of play. Play-actions are not only such that their rules are implicit, but in addition they are such as exhibit the lowest degree of regularity. Any *playful* act, like pretending to fight or throwing a ball in the air without any apparent purpose, seems to be *loosely structured*, as far as the sequence of the acts is concerned. There is no fixed pattern to follow, nor a succession to be repeated. As also Huizinga (1938: 37) reminds us, "rapid movement must be regarded as the concrete starting point of many paly-words." It is neither easy nor important to fix a start and an end of the play-action. Everything is

left to the creativity of the individual. Moreover, unlike games, in play-actions, in the sense just illustrated, what is important is not the result achieved but rather the process itself. Hans (1981), though he makes use of the word "play" in a very wide sense, as meaning an activity of "exchange with the world in which man is continuously engaged" (ibid.: x), rightly characterizes play as an activity "focused upon itself" (ibid.: 11) and whose "primary criterion" is "openness", which "does not mean a *lack* of orientation" but rather "a willingness to put that orientation into question" (ibid.: 12). Even the notion of play, as I take it, is meant to convey the idea of a continuous transformation, contrary to the static aspect of games-with-rules.

"*Open* games", defined by Suits (1978: 133) as "games which have no inherent goal whose achievement ends the game", unlike *closed* games, are analogous to "play". As Suits (ibid.: 131) says they are based on "the principle of *prolongation*": their goal is just in keeping the play going. However by "open games" Suits still refers to games with more-or-less definite moves, like make-believe games of children, whereas by play I mean to refer just to the way any activity whatsoever may be performed.

Given this preliminary distinction between "play" and "games", it is simple to identify the different directions to which play and games respectively point, that is, *innovation* and *tradition*. These two concepts have a psychological as well as a philosophical import. As Bruner (1976) says, play-actions exhibit a typical analytic and synthetic freedom: in play children combine in new forms (synthesis) the different elements in which adult human behavior has been previously examined (analysis). What is important in his analysis is the emphasis put on the innovative thrust of any play-activity: "play provides an excellent opportunity to try combinations of behavior that would, under functional pressure, never be tried." (ibid.; 38)

Even on the anthropological side, where play is identified with a peculiar way of relating "means" to "ends" (Miller, 1973) which looks indirect and impractical, this "inefficiency aspect" of

play-actions is given new value as the element that contributes to the development of novel and successful solutions to daily problems[3].

Apart from the instrumental implications of the previous psychological and anthropological theories, whose main aim is to show to what extent play favors human evolution, the salient philosophical message that we can get from them concerns the relationship between *play*, *games* and *time*. Play seems to convey mostly the character of an open-to-the-future activity: its creativity, its loose structure and its "combinatorial freedom" point towards a realm of ever-changing possibilities. Games, instead, with their load of rules and fixed practices, are the symbol of tradition.

The distinction, drawn by Bencivenga (1994), between an authentic philosophy meant as a form of *play* and a philosophical activity bound by the restraining rules of the schools might be easily incorporated in this play/games dichotomy. In fact his philosophy-play vs philosophy-duty contrast may even represent a significant instance of it. Bencivenga compares the genuine philosophical activity to children's play, insofar as, like children at play, philosophers are free to move in whatever direction they choose to. They have "no specific problem to face", but try and imagine "*what would happen if*" (Bencivenga, 1994: 42). Language is their "lab". Their work is to tell new stories about us (ibid.: 74), "to experiment" with new associations of words and images that might -- but also might not -- lead to new worlds (ibid.: 49) and to witness the unpredictable results of yet unheard-of combinations of concepts (ibid: 46). By thus maintaining themselves alert to the appeal of the possible, philosophers intend to train themselves and others in a special practice, the one of keeping

[3] According to Suits (1978: 41) inefficiency is also part of a definition of *games*, where "the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favor of less efficient means".However in Suits's definition the notion of inefficiency is not related to the production of novelties. It rather concerns the rules themselves. As he states it, the rules of a game establish means of achieving a given result which are non-functional with respect to the procedure one would normally think of. Mountain climbing, for example, is a game according to this definition because the climber would never accept to reach the top with a helicopter (ibid.: 84-7). In my view, this notion of inefficiency in games introduces a non-necessary element. The rules of games are *constitutive* and therefore it is of no use to define the means they allow as less efficient than others, since the rules establish the *only means* in order to attain a certain result. Games, as MacIntyre (1981: 187) emphasizes, are human "practices" where the means-ends relationship is an "internal" one, that is the ends in games cannot be attained but through the means allowed by the rules.

always alive an interior dialog among the "voices" impersonating different points of view on facts and problems. Only so can they help us break the spell of routine and habit which constantly infiltrate our life (Bencivenga, 1990: 24) and make it more and more efficient but only at the cost of an ever increasing automatism (ibid.: 19). On the contrary, the institutions, the academies where often philosophers spend their time can transform the most playful of the human activities into a discipline "established once and for all" and exclusively aimed at self repetition (Bencivenga, 1994: 43).

Bencivenga's metaphor of philosophy is mainly derived from an instrumental conception of children's play, seen as a preparation for future tasks (Bencivenga, 1994: 38). Thus, through its assimilation to this notion of play, Bencivenga wants to emphasize primarily the "experimental" nature of philosophy as an activity open, yes, to a variety of different applications, but which is still, in the end, designed for some purpose: "generating solutions to problems" (ibid.: 43).

With respect to his notion of play, the one I am using here is meant to put more stress on its total independence of any final purpose, rather than on its openness to a variety of undetermined applications. However his emphasis on the playful *soul* of philosophy, as the play with the possible (Bencivenga, 1990: 23), that is as a venture into a realm lying beyond actual reality, in order to "explore unrealized possibilities" (Bencivenga, 1994: 9), helps highlighting the connotations involved in my notion of play, that is its character of freedom and its being a "practice of renewal" (ibid.: 48).

Philosophy as a profession, in Bencivenga's view, tends not towards "renewal" but rather towards repetition. This suggests that it might be assimilated to games-with-rules. Indeed unlike free play, games must contain sets of rules that allow their moves to be repeated identically through time. Thus rules guarantee their permanence.

As Huizinga says, the rules of a game and the order consequent upon them fix it as a "cultural form," that is, they allow a game to be passed on from one generation to the other. To the idea of rules granting the identifiability of a game we can easily connect also Wittgenstein's concept of "mastery" of a game or language-game. Mastery can only succeed where there is something, an activity or a

conception, which can be comprehended and governed in such a way that it can be *reproduced*. But nothing can be comprehended and grasped if it does not have a *form*, that is, a pattern that we can distinguish and recognize, where this form is granted by the presence of rules. Therefore *game*s, whose form is marked by rules setting their start and their end, can be typically mastered, whereas *play*, as a loosely structured activity, is less accessible to a long lasting practice. Play cannot be easily institutionalized since it lacks a permanent form. Thus, if Wittgenstein speaks of mastery of language-*games*, this notion must convey the idea of an activity which exhibits a *form*.

Connected to this aspect of temporary event with a start and an end, is the *expectation* produced by playing a game. Starting a game generates in the participants a state of uncertainty: we do not know who will win and who will lose, what results the game itself will produce. The game is surrounded with a whole configuration of possibilities that branch off from its fundamental rules. According as different applications or different combinations of the rules are chosen, different outcomes will derive. The choice of one particular combination, which is thought to be advantageous to the player, is called *strategy*. In a game with rules the choice of a strategy expresses the *creativity* of a player, which is different from the spontaneous and natural creativity we can find in play. Creativity in a game with rules is the ability to figure out a *novel* and *successful* combination of moves.

According to game theorists the concept of strategy is typical of competitive games, where the interests of players are opposite, but I think it possible to extend the use of this word to cover the method used by one in getting to the desired end, whether or not this implies competition with opponents. In seeking the solution to a puzzle, for example, I can use one or other of several available strategies.

The notion of strategy is connected to the notion of skill. "Skill" is the ability to accomplish a certain task and to accomplish it well. It is the expertise a player exhibits in performing *well* his/her assigned role, whatever it is the strategy chosen. Suits (1978: 37) even talks about "rules of skill,"

which are generic directives expressing some good advice on how to play well in a game. There is a difference, though, in the way skill and strategy are related in sport-games and in games like chess or poker, for example. In a sport-game a player must perform actions, like running or kicking the ball, which already exist as natural actions. Thus his/her skill consists in performing those actions at the best to get an advantage in the game. In a game like chess, however, the moves of the pieces on the board are *instituted* with the game itself. No special skill is involved in performing them as physical actions. Therefore a skilled chess-player is one who knows how to select the right or winning strategy at every step of the game, in reply to the opponent's strategy. For example, in soccer a rule of skill could be: "Keep an eye on the ball when you kick it". In a game like chess it could be: "Pay attention to your opponent's moves, in order to choose the move which is best for you." This rule is nothing but a recommendation relative to the choice of a strategy to counterattack the opponent. It is important, however, to remark, as Denzin (1975: 463 and 469) does, that skill is typically related to the presence of rules in a game, and it is less relevant in play. The rules delimit the arena within which players can test their abilities, their skills. Where there are no rules, there is no convention in accordance to which players are required to act.

The concept of "rule" brings into evidence another fundamental aspect of the play-activity, that is, its *social* nature. Rules are ideally the result of a common agreement of some kind (or rather they demand one) and are meant to assign limits to everybody's freedom of action. In general it is true that if two or more people want to take part in an action they have to adopt, necessarily, some criteria concerning how their communal operations are going to be conducted. (Similar principles govern harmony in music: in order for two or more notes to be put together in a chord they have to contain overtones that fit into each other. This implies that only certain musical links are allowed but not some others[4].) In this way rules grant a *control* over the play-situation. Players, through the knowledge of the rules, understand the different directions in which a game can evolve.

[4] However, the relativity of this phenomenon must be taken into account: what is allowed in harmony varies

The social function of the rules is also present, though in a somewhat hidden form, in games that can be played only by a single person. In fact rules are necessary for an external observer to understand what is going on. There, the player engages in a contest with her/himself, at the end of which s/he will fail or succeed. It is the presence of rules which discriminates *objectively* success from failure.

* * *

All the previous considerations highlight the basic aspects of the play-activity but also the more extreme ones. *Spontaneity* and *rules* represent the two opposite sides of the activity of playing in general. At first they seem to be mutually exclusive. Yet they integrate with each other and they normally coexist in actual play-activities. Different sorts of play-forms can be distinguished according to whether they exhibit one or the other property at a greater length.

In order to clarify the conceptual import of these two aspects, we can summarize the different features characterizing them in the following manner. The concepts associated with the notion of *spontaneity,* as the realm of individuality, are:

freedom or lack of control, absence of limits, production of novelties, unlimited variation.

The idea of *rules*, instead, being essential to the realm of social life, is associated to the following concepts:

control through a structure, imposition of limits, repetition, regularity.

Through this antithetical arrangement of concepts I mean to emphasize the ideal gap occurring between the notions of "play" and "games". *Play* becomes the mark of everything that is

---

with different cultures and periods of time.

unbounded, unique, spontaneous and indeterminate, whereas *game* is the mark of whatever is bounded, repeatable, organized through rules and determinate.

In real life it is impossible to separate in a sharp way what belongs to the spontaneity of the individual from what, instead, belongs to the workings of the rules. Those two notions would be more conveniently conceived of as the ending points of a *continuum* line. Along this continuum we can locate the various play-activities, gradually passing from extreme play-forms to completely rule-bounded games. On this line the ratio between the two extremes would be like the one existing between inversely proportional magnitudes: the more spontaneity is present in an activity, the less rule-governed that activity is.

A fundamental role in bridging the gap between the spontaneity of play and the rule-boundedness of games is held by the notions of "practice" and "mastery". Indeed practice, meant as a long and deeply molding exercise in some activity, seems the ideal candidate to provide a conceptual link between the unexpected and unplanned form of play and the constant and regular aspect of games. Reiterated use constitutes a training that transforms a single instance of an event into a fixed replica of it.

An example of how the step takes place from uniqueness and spontaneity (which are included in the notion of play) to the certainty and constrains of rules (which characterize the notion of games) is the "law of large numbers" (Rapoport, 1960: 91), which roughly states that the higher is the number of the considered instances of an event, the higher is its probability of happening[5]. As Rapoport himself says, this law "provides a bridge from the (practical) indeterminacy of most single events on the small scale to the (practical) certainty of the total effect of a large conglomeration of such events" (ibid.: 92). This law, equally "compatible with the existence or non-existence of free-will in the

[5] For example, the probability of victory in a political election with two candidates is one half for each of them. Yet this holds only on the large scale. At the individual level nothing is changed by saying that. The individual behavior of each voter remains utterly indeterminate.

individual" and with the "large-scale determinism" (ibid.: 92-3), explains how a single historically unique event can, through repetition, create a custom and so become subject to rules.

Through this law (though based only on quantitative considerations) we grasp a sense in which the concept of "play" can gradually change into the one of "game". And this metamorphosis of play into game seems itself to offer a paradigm of the life of the natural and human universe, whose evolution, always beginning from historically unique circumstances, ends up in a law-determined course of events (see Eigen & Winkler, 1975). Every event can be interpreted as a combination of chance and necessity, i.e. of play and game. Some natural geometrical forms, like fractals, can be explained as cases of "tamed chance" (see Mandelbrot, 1983).

These idealized notions of play and game represent a tool for the evaluation of the play or game-like character of many fundamental activities of our life. Following the general lines of Huizinga's definition of game, this work will range from the field of art, where the play-element seems to prevail, to the field of ethics, which instead exhibits a typical game-like character, pointing to Wittgenstein's notion of "mastery" as a mediating link between the two opposite sides of *play* and *games*.

CHAPTER ONE

HUIZINGA'S PICTURE

Huizinga's famous book ***Homo Ludens*** advances a challenging interpretation of the various forms of culture as "play". His investigation, guided by a general definition of what play is, ranges over every aspect of life and illustrates how different civilizations, both western and eastern, have expressed the play-factor in the course of time. Play is dealt with, as it were, as a universal category of history.

Huizinga's perspective is historical and, partly, anthropological. The author aims to discover how far play pervades human activities and to what extent a play-aspect is interwoven with human culture. In the "Foreword" of the book he says that his purpose is "to ascertain how far culture itself bears the character of play." And, a little further, he declares that he will pursue this goal "historically, not scientifically".

One of the leitmotifs of Huizinga's historical picture is the concept of *agonism*. The importance of this concept had already been emphasized by Huizinga (1935: 119), who expressed the "old truth" that living is struggling, striving for something. As such a desire to reach a certain status in life or to get hold of a special object, struggle was, there, said to exhibit a typical cultural significance. Indeed, as the author maintained on that occasion, one of the integral components of culture is the existence of a collective ideal which sets some predominant goals in the life of its participants (ibid.: 44). This ideal, together with other factors, defines the quality of the life of a group. Struggling, then, has a cultural import since it involves an attempt to overcome the obstacles arising against the achievement of that ideal. In ***Homo Ludens*** Huizinga renews his interest in the subject of agonism and applies it to the context of play. His purpose is to show to what extent the two notions of agonism and play are interdependent.

`Agonism' -- from the greek word `αγ_ν' which means "fight," "contest" - designates a typical component of human behavior, that is, the impulse to compete. Competition is an *antithetical* phenomenon: it is the contest between two or more individuals (or parties) who try to outdo each other in some task. Since its aim is the victory of one of the participants, a competition is a highly

goal-directed activity. Huizinga's assumption is that agonism, as a disposition of human nature, permeates many ordinary activities, from sport to law, war, poetry, philosophy and art. But since agonism is one of the fundamental constituents of play-activities, Huizinga concludes that what all those manifestations have in common is the "form" of play.

Applied to philosophy, whose very origins are traced back to the presence of an agonistic instinct in mankind[6], this means something different than what Bencivenga (1994) has in mind when he argues in favor of his philosophy/play analogy. In fact Bencivenga wants to emphasize the *playful* attitude of *doing* philosophy, meant as a search for alternative interpretations of events. Huizinga, on the other hand, examines particular philosophical systems which, following my play/games dichotomy, show a *game*-like, rather than a *play*-like, structure. The component of agonism is, indeed, closely connected to the presence of *rules* in a *game*. There can be agonism only where two or more people try to outdo each other in order to win, but they can be awarded victory only if they have acted according to the established rules.

The agonistic element is regarded by Huizinga as one of the constant features of play, at least of the "higher forms of play" (ibid.: 47). It is this factor that generates the "tension" necessary to any play-activity. In its genuine form the desire to compete has a purely positive function: it represents somebody's desire to show his/her best qualities. It is a way of testing one's own abilities:

> The competitive "instinct" is not in the first place a desire for power or a will to dominate. The primary thing is the desire to excel the others, to be the first and to be honored for that. (Huizinga, 1938: 50)

What matters in competitions is the noble aim to manifest one's own achievements in some fields. The reward for such a successful exhibition is honor.[7]

---

[6] Some of the great hymns of **R*igveda*** and ***Atharvaveda***, the oriental cosmogonies often mentioned by Huizinga (1938: 106-7), are articulated in a sequence of fundamental and "sacred" questions concerning the origin of the universe and its ultimate components. According to Huizinga these questions used to give rise to real competitions during the religious celebrations.

[7] As a matter of linguistic curiosity, the Italian word "cimento" nicely conveys the joint meanings of "play"

Huizinga's reminder of the original meaning of the word `aretê' (_ρετ_) in the ancient Greek culture is very interesting. In its early use the word `aretê' (which means "virtue") was independent of any ethical connotation. Originally the term only referred to some practical ability possessed by a person at the maximum level. Its meaning was "to be fit or apt for something, to be the true and genuine thing in one's kind." (ibid.: 63) The word pointed to a perfection to be reached through a long and steady exercise which would make somebody's ability stronger and stronger. "Rivalry," Huizinga continues, was an integral part of this exercise: victory in a contest was a proof of somebody's gained value. By means of a competition participants were made conscious of their "virtue" and their prestige was increased in the community[8]. Therefore in the classic culture the concept of "ability," "exercise," "virtue," and "nobility" were strictly interwoven, in the following order: people had to give proof of their ability in some competition; the exercise, whose practice was urged by competitions, originated "virtue," i.e. a special power in a field; the publicly recognized "virtue" turned into honor and nobility for its owner.

This notion of _ρετ_ has Aristotelian roots. Aristotle (NE: 1098a) takes *virtue* as the perfection of some deed or action, according to its proper nature. Indeed "the good" consists in accomplishing well what is the "proper end" of something (τ_ _ργον). Only in more recent times has the notion of virtue received an ethical assessment (Huizinga 1938: 65). Nowadays "virtue" mainly designates a moral value, something whose acquisition gives a person the reputation of being serious and utterly devoted to his/her duties. However, I think that even in this modern application the word hasn't lost its original semantic layer. A virtuous person is somebody who constantly struggles with

---

and "competition", though in an abstract way. "Cimento" refers to any activity we engage in, for entertainment, in order to challenge ourselves in one of our abilities. A typical example of its use can be found in the title of one of Vivaldi's works, that is "Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione" (which contains also the famous concerto "Le quattro stagioni"). The musician thus intended to show his "virtue" as a composer, virtue reached through a thorough but *amusing* exercise (in its competitive sense) in both harmony and musical inventiveness.

[8] Huizinga points out that the word "aretê" is etymological related to the word "aristós", which means "the best" (and also "noble"). Thus, "aristos" is one who excels for some special skills. Being such, s/he also becomes "noble".

him/herself in order to remain faithful to his/her moral principles. The competitive factor still acts as the mainspring of his/her actions. Only, it has become more private. MacIntyre's (1981) remarks about "virtue" -- seen as a quality of human behavior to be defined against the background of a "practice" -- are parallel to Huizinga's account of the virtues in ancient Greece. MacIntyre defines virtue as "an acquired human quality the possession of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (ibid.: 191). "Practice" (ibid.: 187) is any social activity, consolidated through time, participation in which enables human beings to procure for themselves the goods "internal" to that practice. These goods, unlike "external goods" such as money or reputation, can only be attained through the practice in question. Among the examples of practices mentioned by MacIntyre there are chess, architecture and farming, one of whose internal goods may be the satisfaction, felt by a chessplayer, architect or farmer, for having reached full mastery of the activity. Indeed practices involve appropriate "standards of excellence," that is, canons of perfect conduct which participants are supposed to follow closer and closer. Those standards provide us with an objective measure to judge individual performances.

Naturally connected to the presence of "standards of excellence" is the existence of a competitive thrust in those who participate in a practice. Like Huizinga, MacIntyre emphasizes the highly qualitative component of the competition for "virtues": "internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel" (ibid.: 190). The "internal goods" are the perfection obtained in a given practice. However, MacIntyre differs from Huizinga in that he emphasizes the *ethical* character of the notion of practice. He holds as "necessary components of any practice with internal goods and standards of excellence the virtues of justice, courage and honesty." These three virtues are required by the *social* character of practices: we must include them in our relationship with other participants if we want to excel *truly*. Excellence reached through deception is not true excellence[9].

[9] The fact that those virtues must be presupposed in every practice introduces a vicious circularity in MacIntyre's definition of virtue. If, as he says, every virtue is an "*acquired quality*" it has to be the result of a

The notion of competition for virtue that Huizinga borrows from the ancient world finds its appropriate function in education. Indeed competition can be a great incentive to the improvement of one's mental or physical talents. As the author himself acknowledges "in the beginning of civilization rivalry for first rank was undoubtedly a formative and ennobling factor." (Huizinga, 1938: 101)

Huizinga's conception seems to exclude altogether the possibility of cooperative games from the sphere of play. Those games, as we know, do exist both in children and adult life. But they are not included in Huizinga's picture. This exclusion has a reason. As Huizinga says, playing has a fundamental "antithetical character." "Antithetical" does not mean necessarily "agonistic." Among the antithetical but non-agonistic forms of play Huizinga mentions musical examples: "a part-song, a chorus, a minuet, the voices in a musical ensemble" are all instances of "playing together" without competing (Huizinga, 1938: 47). They constitute a form of harmony reached through the diversity of elements. These examples reveal that co-existence of "competition and friendship" which, in Hyland's terms, is entailed by the etymological meaning of "competition." Indeed the word "com-petitio" means "to question together, to strive together" (Hyland, 1984: 123) which suggests the presence, nowadays neglected, of a cooperative component in the practice of competition.

However, the respect in which these and other examples mentioned by Huizinga differ from real cooperative games -- which is, in turn, the feature they share with agonistic games -- is the amount of "tension" they generate. The kind of tension Huizinga alludes to is, once again, best represented by some musical patterns called "*a canone*." Here the tension is generated by the principle of imitation: each voice imitates and "chases," as it were, the theme sung by another voice, thus creating the illusion of a movement without end. In cooperative games, instead, this compulsion to assume an antithetical stance is absent. Rather, those who participate in a cooperative game direct all their efforts towards the attainment of a communal goal.

---

previous practice. Then, how can the virtues of justice, courage and honesty be *presupposed* by any practice, without already *presupposing* one?

It is exactly the factor of tension that raises play to the level of the highest cultural forms[10]. At the end of a section illustrating the importance of that factor Huizinga says:

> The more apt it [the game] is to raise the tone, the intensity of life in the individual or the group the more readily it will become part of civilization itself. (Huizinga, 1938: 48)

Cooperative games lack this element, and therefore are excluded from Huizinga's picture because they cannot promote culture in any sense. Indeed, as Huizinga (1935) maintains, struggling for something, and therefore *tending to* it, is an element indispensable to culture. It itself provides the *form* of a culture.

Though the elements of tension and uncertainty have a relevant "cultural" role, Huizinga (1938) never states precisely the meaning of the expression "being an essential factor of culture". But from his comments -- and from the definition of "culture" given by Huizinga (1935: 47-8), which highlights the priority of spiritual over material values -- we get a clear impression of the aesthetic mark of that expression. What is "essential" and enriching for a culture (like the noble competition aimed at showing personal virtues) is something that inspires a good behavior, high spiritual values and, above all, images of beauty and harmony. Indeed the whole of collective imagery shared by the members of a community represents the condensed product of its culture. Not only artistic and literary images are the expression of a culture, but also the ideal models of an epoch, the beautiful and balanced manners with which a society likes to adorn its way of living. This interpretation is strongly supported by the evocative picture of the aristocracy in Burgundy Huizinga draws in his ***The Waning of the Middle Ages***.

Now it may seem that by including play in the realm of those activities which are indispensable for the growth of culture and which favor a noble education, Huizinga is considering

[10] MacIntyre (1981: 190) has a very similar remark: "it is characteristic of them [internal goods] that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice." Indeed games are classified by him among the practices with internal goods, which are those practices that stimulate a "competition to excel".

play from an instrumental point of view. This would be contrary to his admission of the autonomous value of play, which he rather wants to study as an independent function of human nature. In fact Huizinga does not subsume play under the category of "aesthetics" because he considers play, along with aesthetics, among the universal categories of life. It is true, however, that his aesthetic ideal, into which play is made to fit, is disengaged from any utilitarian view. The forms of beauty do not have other purposes but the very beauty they express.

Play thus possesses an "aesthetic" quality, which is, indeed, part of its essence:

> Many and close are the links that connect play with beauty. All the same we cannot say that beauty is inherent in play as such; so we must leave it at that: play is a function of the living, but is not susceptible of exact definition either logically, biologically, or aesthetically. (Huizinga, 1938: 7)

What the two categories of "play" and "beauty" have in common is exactly the freedom from exterior conditioning. I would like to rename this feature the *contemplative* factor. This factor represents the absence of any need or external motivation in either playing a game or composing a piece of art. Play is for the play's sake, as well as art is for art's sake. It guarantees autonomy in both cases.

This aesthetic quality of play has much of a Platonic character. Huizinga explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to a Platonic view of life when he quotes from the ***Laws*** the passage in which Plato defines human life as playing "the noblest games" and says that "man is God's plaything." In virtue of this quality, play places itself outside "ordinary life." Play represents a higher region of spirit where mankind rise in order to secure themselves from the needs of everyday life.

The far-reaching aesthetic trend of Huizinga's study is noticeable, in particular, in his account of the secret and profound links joining poetry and play. "Poiesis" (πο_ησις), as he says, "is a play-function" (ibid.: 119). Poetry is the most genuine form of play, one that will never desert, as it were, its play-role: this role is simply part of its essence. Poetry, through words and images, creates its own cosmos, which is totally independent of the ordinary world, and where any "serious" concern is

abandoned[11]. The example of poetry highlights one of the most remarkable aspects of the play-activity, that is, its being different from ordinary life. Playing a game represents "a stepping out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own." (ibid.: 8) In contrast with ordinary life, where we constantly perform actions to meet our needs, in play we are free from these worries and absorbed in a world with its own needs and goals.

In his vivid picture of the ludic character of culture the author weaves a whole series of ties between the agonistic factor of play and the aesthetic one. The complementarity of those two factors constitutes the axis of Huizinga's discourse. All the other components sharing a part in the notion of play lean on it, to a smaller or grater extent.

First of all, the aesthetic quality of play provides the author with a nice way out of the impasse in which he finds himself when he argues in favor of the "freedom" of the play-activity. Play is a "voluntary activity," he says, and it cannot be forced on us by anybody. Men and women play because they are free to do it and in doing so they are not trying to accomplish any extraneous purpose: they play because they want to. Indeed games can be suspended at any time if participants agree. Huizinga's comment is:

> Play is superfluous. The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need. Play can be deferred or suspended at any time. (Huizinga, 1938: 8)

Huizinga is aware of the difficulties created by this concept of freedom of play, so insisted upon in his study, when he says that "freedom must be understood in the wider sense that leaves untouched the philosophical problem of determinism." (ibid.: 7) The difficulties arise because the

[11] Huizinga's mention of Vico's conception of poetry, seen as the peculiar form of expression of the ancestors of mankind, is illuminating and intriguing. There is a well known analogy, in the ***Scienza Nova*** of G.Vico, between the three stages of the history of mankind and the stages of the psychological development of human beings: the primitive men, creators of a genuine poetic language, i.e. a language teeming with imaginary sequences, are assimilated to children, whose expressions employ fantasy more than reasoning. In both of them the power of imagination surpasses reason. Huizinga must have been inspired by Vico when he stated that "the world of the savage, the child and the poet" are one and the same world (Huizinga, 1938: 26).

author has told us, earlier in the book, that play is a fact of nature, is a primary "category of life," and as such it cannot be modified or freely chosen. However, play is also a "creator of beauty," in an ideal sense. And so its social or psychological cause does not really matter. What counts is the pure phenomenon as we observe it, the experience of a free push towards this beautiful play. All the rest is left untouched as the subject of a different kind of investigation. In disagreement with psychologists and physiologists, who try to determine the causes and the purposes of play in life, Huizinga replies:

> They attack play direct with the quantitative methods of experimental science without first paying attention to its profoundly aesthetic quality. As a rule they leave the primary quality of play as such, virtually untouched.(Huizinga, 1938: 2)

Unlike them, Huizinga is interested in retrieving this very "primary quality." "Nature [...] gave us play" (ibid.: 3). The essential characteristic of this natural activity is "fun." This conclusion, as well as the rest of Huizinga's conception, is derived, mainly from the observation of children's play and from the study of the "sacred rituals" of primitive societies. The main reason for looking into these areas is that at this level he can find the elements of play in their most genuine form, since culture, or civilization, has not fully affected them yet. It is a methodological choice.

Close to its aesthetic value is also the characterization of play as a "significant function." To have a *significant* function means that "there is some sense to it [...] which transcends the immediate needs of life" (Huizinga 1938: 1). There is more to play than it appears, and that goes beyond the actual limits of the play-action: "in acknowledging play you acknowledge mind", says Huizinga, "for whatever else play is, it is not matter."(ibid:3)

It seems to me that because of its "signifying" something, play must involve reference to a reality which is not there concretely, in the material activity itself. Indeed what typically "signifying" expressions, like words and sentences, "mean," or "refer to," is not present in them. They have the power to direct one's attention to something different from what they materially are. Likewise, play generates a second level of existence; it doubles, so to speak, our present life. This implies another

consequence: while playing we are fully alive and at the same time we can see ourselves living. We become special observers of our own actions by being conscious that what we do is "just play."

In the light of this, Huizinga's remarks on language as the most prodigious play-activity of mankind appears extremely fascinating:

> In the making of speech and language the spirit is continually "sparking" between matter and mind, as it were, playing with this wondrous nominative faculty. Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words. Thus in giving expression to life man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature. (Huizinga, 1938: 4)

Two additional characteristics of play, according to Huizinga, are the "limitation" in space and time and the presence of rules. The first one refers to the existence of particular areas dedicated to the play-activity. Their limits can be "materially" or"ideally" drawn. Within these spatial limits, the time for play has a limited length too. The need for spatio-temporal boundaries in a play event is the need for a special "order." In fact this special arrangement of things guarantees its separateness from ordinary life and it establishes a unique link among the participants of a game. Huizinga says:

> Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life [play] brings a temporary, limited perfection. (Huizinga, 1938: 10)

In addition to creating order, the existence of temporal limits of games grants their very authenticity: it keeps them separate from serious ordinary activities. Though, as Huizinga (1938: 5) says, the contrast between play and seriousness is a precarious one (since people may play with the utmost seriousness), a distinction must still be possible. A world where no division were to be retrieved between serious and playful attitudes, or serious and playful activities, would be a world which has lost the genuine sense of play. It would be a world where "a vast contamination of play and seriousness" has taken place (Huizinga, 1935: 181-2).[12]

[12] A world of this kind was, in Huizinga's view, the European world before the Second World War.

The loss of such distinction would be consequent, following Huizinga's reasoning (ibid.: 223), upon the loss of another fundamental distinction, the one between "myth" and "logos," between the world of magic and play, and the world of rationality. The moral we can draw from Huizinga's remark is that logos should never be abandoned, lest our culture should deteriorate. Since this is the very logos which shows itself in the rules of a game, its presence is an indispensable requisite for the play-activity too. Giving up logos could be fatal to play.

The special order of play is indeed brought into existence by the presence of *rules* in a game. The rules are the most important part of a game since it is in virtue of them that any play-activity acquires a definite identity. Only by means of rules, establishing which moves are allowed or not, can a game be spatially and temporally limited. Moreover it is the observance of the rules that produces a special circumstance and excludes play from ordinary life. Huizinga states this point as follows:

> These rules in their turn are a very important factor in the play-concept. All play has its rules. They determine what "holds" in the temporary world circumscribed by play. The rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt. (Huizinga, 1938: 11)

Being governed by rules is what, in a game, creates the *illusion* of being carried to a world different than the one we are living in. And, etymologically, `illusion' comes from the latin word `in-ludere' which means "in-play" (ibid.: 11).

The presence of rules in a game allows us to interpret it as a social event. As I emphasized in the **INTRODUCTION** to the present work, rules exist when actions and wills of different persons have to be coordinated. Complying with the rules is necessary in order to keep the participants united in a game, to reinforce their awareness of sharing in a particular experience. In accepting the rules of a game players are temporarily suspended from another set of rules, the rules of ordinary life. When there are rules and people willing to accept them, any game acquires a precise identity that is maintained unaltered through time. As I have already said, rules grant repetition.

* * * *

> Huizinga's analysis of the phenomenon of play results in the following definition:
> Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is "different" from "ordinary life". (Huizinga, 1938: 28)

Huizinga does not explicitly distinguish between *play* and *games* in the way I did in the **INTRODUCTION**. He does not discriminate between an attitude of play and activities, games, where this attitude can be shown at its best. Very briefly he touches on the "irreducible quality of pure playfulness" just to say that it is not "amenable to further analysis" (ibid.: 7). His examples of play-forms, taken from different epochs and cultures, are all examples of well-established activities, that is, games with a long playing tradition behind them. Those are, as he says, "more distinct and articulate in form" (ibid.: 7). Had he distinguished *play* from *games*, Huizinga would not have entangled himself with the perplexities about determinism. Indeed play as an attitude is a natural fact, which makes it a part of our being, and as such there is no question as to its *freedom*. However games are activities limited in space and time. They can surely be *freely* elected at any moment of life.

With the above definition Huizinga intends to capture the *essence* of the play-phenomenon, as he often suggests in his pages and understand "what play is *in itself*" (ibid.: 2). The several cases of play he considers, as different, apparently, as the cultures they belong to, are but instances of a universal category of play which finds expression in that definition. In spite of this acknowledged essentialist tendency, Hyland has stated that

> Huizinga's real method is to follow in effect the Wittgensteinean principle, "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use". (Hyland, 1984: 36)

Hyland grounds his claim on a supposed analogy between "culture," as Huizinga means it, and "language-game." According to him, Huizinga, contrary to his own alleged *essentialist* stance,

follows "the Wittgensteinean relativist procedure," and thus holds that in each culture "anything that is called play is play in that culture" (ibid.: 37).

Hyland's claim is a misleading one for two reasons. First of all, Huizinga (1938), in the first chapter, before going into a detailed description of the play-forms fostered by different civilizations, inquires into the nature of the phenomenon in a general and abstract sense. This preliminary enquiry ends in the definition of the concept of play given above. Therefore that definition provides Huizinga with a fixed paradigm with which to compare all forms of games, and to judge about their stricter or looser adherence to it. And if Huizinga finds "close ties between play and war" in some cultures (Hyland, 1984: 37), this is not because he *relativistically* accepts as "play" whatever is called such in those cultures, but rather because war, in his view, exhibits some of the *formal* characteristics of games in general. Secondly, Hyland's claim about Wittgenstein's relativism is not fully acceptable either, since Wittgenstein's conception of language seems to be beyond any relativistic issue. In my opinion, Wittgenstein's advocating the principle of use just sets aside that issue and tells us that meaning is neither "relative" (i.e. lacking the desired universality) nor "absolute."[13]

Nonetheless, Hyland's proposed analogy between cultures and language-games is interesting for an inverse reason. It suggests an interpretation of "language-game" as an open context including linguistic and non-linguistic components, which, as it will be clear later in this work, is what Wittgenstein means by it.

As I have tried to show so far, all the characteristics listed in Huizinga's definition are tied, to a greater or smaller extent, to the aesthetic quality of play itself: its peculiar freedom, which rises from the individual's choice; its being non-ordinary life, which disconnects the play-activity from the usual logic of the ordinary world; its being spatially and temporally limited and its producing a special "order"; its having proper rules; and finally its competitive nature.

---

[13] For an examination of Wittgenstein's notion of "language-game" see chapter 5 below.

Apart from Huizinga's statements about the independence of play from any other category, I think that his conception of play is aesthetically biased, in a fundamental sense. We can typically find all those characteristics in artistic works: artistic activities are free, they raise us beyond the world of everyday experience, they obey special order and rules and they certainly possess a competitive aspect.

The last two aspects seem less relevant in works of art; yet they are essential to them. Indeed, a genuine work of art involves a double competitive attitude: a *private* one due to the fact that in producing their work artists are constantly testing their abilities; and a *historical* one, deriving from the artist's effort to create new forms of expression instead of passively repeating some fixed canons. This double confrontation, with personal abilities and with tradition, is what generates artists' very originality and the tension necessary for the growth of their works.

In fact, when the artistic trend of an epoch reaches a precise identity, it forms a "style," the style of that epoch, which establishes a model to be imitated. The more this model evolves into a fixed set of rules, the more the style becomes rigid. This is, typically, the moment, in the history of any form of art, when imitation prevails over inventiveness. On the other hand, just as a result of a "competition" with the style of expression inherited from past tradition, the genuine artistic work appears to be less in control of rules. The originality of the artist consists exactly in breaking away from the rules of tradition, and leading the way to a new model, which, however, at this moment is not yet fully identifiable. The genuine work of art is halfway between the abandonment of the old rules, no more endowed with creative power, and the definition of new rules. At this point inventiveness has a predominant role[14].

This interplay between rules and inventiveness in a work of art allows us to place the genuine artistic products on that side of the ideal continuum line between play and games where the weight

[14] The second chapter of this work is entirely devoted to an analysis of the relationship between inventiveness and rules in artistic creation.

of individual contribution seems to be stronger than the influence of rules. This does not exclude entirely the rule-factor from that kind of products: rules do exist in them, but they are not always easy to discern. Genuine artists, unlike imitators, look for new rules or for a novel use of the old ones. Gombrich's main thesis (fully discussed in the following chapter) is indeed that human creativity mainly consists in a struggle for a definition of new rules.

If Huizinga's analysis accentuates the aesthetic quality of play, this means that, though he explicitly deals only with examples of *games*, he considers the individual inventiveness and free-character of play more relevant than the presence of rules in it. Therefore this quality can be taken to represent that *attitude* of playing which I distinguished from games and which Huizinga, instead, does not explicitly focus on in his work as a separate subject.

CHAPTER TWO

PLAY AND ART

As I have shown in the previous chapter, Huizinga's conception betrays a deep *aesthetic* bias, not so much in his overt definition of play as in the dominant style of his investigation. The aesthetic component of *play,* as Huizinga emphasizes, is evident especially in its character of freedom, in its being non-ordinary life and its ennobling function. Indeed art -- as well as play -- creates a world of its own and is, as well, independent of the primary needs of life.

However, saying that art is free from external conditioning, as play is, should not be taken as meaning that it is rule-free. Like all human artifacts, works of art conform to the intentions of their maker. An artist who is going to paint a landscape or even a set of abstract figures has ideas in mind s/he wants to see somehow expressed or mirrored in her/his work. Artworks are not accidental events: they do not just *happen* to be around. They are *made* to be appreciated or even criticized for the sense they intend to communicate. They are meant to be noticed. Those intentions[15] and ideas are, like rules, what bestows on a work of art its "special order."

In this respect, a particular work of art resembles the structure of a *game*. Both a work of art and a game have *constitutive* rules[16], that is principles of production without which that very game or work could not be brought about. The difference is that while a game is, in most cases, a social event governed by overt rules, a genuine, original work of art is, typically, an individual product. But still, it has to contain a rule which makes *possible* that work, or rather the translation of the idea or project of it into a real object.

The rules according to which a single work of art -- painting, sculpture or whatever -- is produced are, mostly, *internal* to the work itself and difficult to read off. It is this "complexity" of original artworks, and its related "ambiguity," as Bencivenga (1994: 145-6) says, that favors the

---

[15] I am here using the word "intention" in its ordinary meaning, i.e. as the will to do something.

[16] See Garver (1967: 232).

growth of a true aesthetic experience, that is of an experience which exhibits the true mark of play. Such an experience is "playful," according to Bencivenga, because it challenges us to confront with a "new and strange situation" and so it produces that "widening of our boundaries denied by everyday efficiency" (ibid.: 135-6).

When those rules become familiar, they can be learnt and imitated and thus gain a considerable *social* import, which is, however, *diachronic*, more than *synchronic*. What was once new and revolutionary, in an artistic field, becomes part of a traditional expertise, it gets sanctioned by the institutional teaching of a "school" and is handed down to new generations of artists in the form of rules. This traditional training represents the background against which an artist has to measure her/his ability and taste.

This fact prompts an inevitable remark on the relationship between the *play/game* distinction and art. Art seems to have two sides. Its *play*-side is represented by the artists' inspiration for their work, their non-compelled manner of working. Its *game*-like structure can be retrieved in the work of art itself: it depends on a work's being done according to certain criteria, on its confronting with certain models. Thus it may reasonable to say that *art* and *play* exist as natural dispositions[17], which can manifest themselves only if they take on some material *form* or structure, that is if they comply with some rules.

In the following pages I will examine the thought of philosophers who have dealt with one or the other of these aspects of art. Some have emphasized the role of "rules" in art, that is its *game*-like aspect. Some others have highlighted the "spontaneity" of an artistic product, that is its *play*-like nature. In this overview Kant's aesthetic ideas represent a nodal point since they express, in an articulate manner, the crucial sense of art as *spontaneity in rules.*

[17] This observation leaves untouched, deliberately, the whole issue of the biological origin of play.

1. Gombrich on the role of tradition.

1.1 Gombrich's thought on the role of tradition in art is significant and instructive. In his view, understanding this very role is what enables one to find a plausible answer to the question of why art, or representations in general have a history after all. Through a detailed analysis of works of art, artists' views, and psychological theories of perception, Gombrich comes to the conclusion that art is an enterprise swaying between tradition and novelty, though he puts more emphasis on the authority of tradition and the burden of conventions than on invention. For this reason his book makes a valuable contribution to our discerning the interplay between inventiveness and rules.

Gombrich (1956) is concerned with representational visual art, whose history, in western society, he sees as a gradual achievement of the *rules* of "mimesis."[18] The word `rules' is not used here accidentally. In fact, mimesis, as the author maintains, is not the obvious result of the act of "looking at" something, but the consequence of a slow learning process that teaches painters *to see* the outside world. Indeed painting is more a question of "knowing" than of "seeing" (ibid.: 254). In brief, it is a question of knowing *how* to see and *what* to see. As Gombrich remarks:

> (T)he discovery of appearances was due not so much to a careful observation of nature as to the invention of pictorial effects. (ibid.: 279):

The "discovery of appearances", that is the faithful rendering of reality in painting, is brought about by the acquisition of an artistic mode that empowers painters to "imitate" reality.

Every period and every culture, as Gombrich says, has had its *ways of "seeing"* the world. Those ways are like visual categories, called "schemata", through which human beings are enabled to sort out and classify objects and scenes. These categories affect artistic representation, by becoming artistic "conventions." In some cases they can be translated into explicitly framed precepts so as to become "rules," i.e. canons to be applied literally by the apprentices. Gombrich (1956: 128-

[18] His choice is motivated by the interest he has in studying the role of visual perception in art.

9) mentions an example taken from a XVIIth century Chinese textbook on painting which lists precise rules on how to paint orchids. These rules are formulas to be memorized by the disciples. This kind of conventions yield that "vocabulary of forms" (ibid.: 247) which constitutes the expressive instrument, or *language,* of an artist. The whole of those conventions make up the artistic "style" which is dominant in an epoch and which filters the artist's very perceptions:

> The style, like the medium, creates a mental set which makes the artist look for certain aspects in the scene around him that he can render. [...] [T]he artist will therefore tend to see what he paints rather than to paint what he sees.(ibid.: 73)

One of the most lucid examples of the power of stylistic conventions mentioned by Gombrich is the rendering of an English landscape, a view of Derventer, by a Chinese artist, Chiang Yee (ibid.: 74). In this painting it is striking to see the *interpretation* of this landscape through those winding forms so typical of most of Chinese art.

The "mental set," also called "principle of selection" (ibid.: 157), applies to the artist's reading of nature as well as to people's perceptions of the world, and it varies from one period to another. It indicates the disposition to see certain things and not some others. Indeed this mental set acts like a perceptual net, so to speak, that only lets through the items a subject *expects* to find in a given place. The mental set has perceivers promptly identify the stimuli they are prepared for. According to Gombrich, the "expectations" triggered by a mental set are due, in part, to previous experience, which has made our sight keen and ready to notice some particular aspects of reality; and, in part, to human beings' built-in capacity to respond *holistically* to the incessantly varying stimuli of the environment. This is the ability to process the empirical data not in isolation, but by organizing them in relatively steady patterns in which they are mutually related. Gombrich does not take sides on this point (ibid.: 276). What matters to him is that those patterns act like sorting devices: only that kind of information is let through, for which they provide identification.

Given this premise, it is almost inevitable, for Gombrich, to conclude that the overall process of artistic representation, both at the individual and the cultural level, follows a rhythm of "schema and correction" (ibid.: 99). The schema, whether innate or acquired, is the necessary "starting point" (ibid.: 272) the first step of the act of representing[19]. The rest of the work consists in a continuous effort to *match* this schema against reality, in order to reach a faithful picture of it. Hence it is through a long process of adjustments and modifications of those conceptual schemata, and not through the immediate look of an "innocent eye" (ibid.: 251), that representations become closer and closer to their outer model.

The gist of Gombrich's thesis is that in both perception and art the subject's dispositions play a determinant *active* role. One of the recurrent statements of his book is that in the representational process there is a "predominance of making over matching" (ibid.: 158), that is a predominance of the schema, the conceptual formula, through which the artist "interprets" reality, over pure "seeing." This feature has left its mark on the history of art. Only in the last two centuries have painters engaged in a "struggle against the schema" (ibid.: 149), a radical attempt to disentangle themselves from the conventions of tradition, though, as Gombrich suggests, this disentanglement is doomed to remain incomplete. There will always rise new schemata that set new standards of comparison for representations. New generations of artists, who want to break with traditional models, must still confront themselves with the past. They need tradition with all its inheritance of proven formulas, against which to test their ideas.

All this implies that artists are always placed between the rules and formulas of the past and the present scenery of reality. In this trade neither tradition nor nature has an exclusive relevance. Artists are rather the meeting point where those two factors mingle and interact. Therefore pure invention as well as pure perception ("the innocent eye" look) are ideal limits:

---

[19] Gombrich says that a schema has the function of what, in science, is called "hypothesis," that is the initial idea which, after being set out, has to be tested against reality (ibid.: 271).

> More is needed than a rejection of tradition, more also than an `innocent eye'. [...] [The artist] must actively try [an] interpretation, but try it critically. (ibid.: 274)

Very close to this view, emphasizing the importance of integrating tradition and inventiveness, are Eliot's (1920) reflections on the role of tradition in poetry. Eliot defends an "impersonal theory of poetry" (ibid.: 53), according to which a poet is raised to the highest level when s/he can melt her/his individuality into tradition. Artists are truly original when they sacrifice their "personality" to poetry as a whole living above individuals. What is most original and new in their work as *contemporary* artists is the breathing in it of "the dead poets, his ancestors," the part where "those assert their immortality" (ibid.: 48). That true art should live on the level of immortality is therefore Eliot's message. An artist's language belongs to the region of eternity which is above any difference between past and presence.

Eliot's understanding of tradition is even more radical than Gombrich's. Gombrich conceives of schemata as the product of tradition with which an artist has to confront him/herself in order to create his/her own artistic language. Those schemata are meant to stress the relativity of artistic languages to periods of time and cultures. They mark the flow of time. For Eliot, on the other hand, tradition is not something already given, but the result of a "great labor:" "tradition -- he says -- cannot be inherited" (1920: 49). This "great labor" involves the need of taking possession of the past, as it were, and merging it into the present. As a result of this effort, poets gain "a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence," that is they gain the "historical sense" (ibid.: 49), and also cause a change in the "order" of tradition.

1.2 The import of Gombrich's conception of art is much broader than one would think. Its general significance is that we are *essentially* historical beings and only as such can we be creative. This fact, in turn, expresses the deep *relational* nature of human existence, and not only of artistic practice. History is the background to which we are constantly *related.* We are not isolated beings.

And events, facts and situations of our life are never independent of connections with other events, facts and situations. Our experience, mainly our cognitive and behavioral experience, is not an absolute beginning, something that starts by itself independently of any point of reference. Every experience begins in a pre-existing context interwoven with ideas and customs, which disposes us in a certain way toward the world. It always involves a *relationship* with something that is already *given*.

Tradition is a very important part of what is "given." In fact all the empirical inputs are channelled into us through our predecessors' perceptual and cognitive habits. Empirical influences are a matter of our present experience, but our present is born out of our past and it is somehow conditioned by it. I do not mean to deny the existence of external empirical influences. However *external* cannot mean "absolutely independent". Empirical influences are "external," but, indeed, with respect *to us*. They are related *to us*, i.e. there is a subject ready to receive them. And this receiving subject has to combine them into her/his network of already active influences.

Human creativity is then the freedom of experimenting with the inherited habits, of replacing them with some other ones. Goodman (1978) makes a similar remark on our "ways of worldmaking," which are ways to "remake" previous worlds. Each world -- a "system of description," that is a net of interrelated notions through which we describe experience -- is made out of or built upon other worlds (ibid.: 6-7). In setting forth this thesis, Goodman explicitly acknowledges the importance of Gombrich's and Kant's philosophical dismissal of the "pure content" theory, the theory according to which something exists out there with no human concepts as intermediary, i.e. "unconceptualized given." As Eliot (1920) seems to suggest, being innovative means devising new ways of using tradition, i.e. the rules, and so redefining tradition itself.

This kind of "creativity" defines the exchange between tradition and individual novelties taking place in games. Indeed being original in playing a rule-governed game seems to mean nothing but mastering those rules in the best possible way. A creative chess player, say, is one who exploits the set of existing rules in the most innovative and advantageous way.

There is a close resemblance between Gombrich's notion of schemata and the notion of rules-of-a-game. Like rules, the so-called schemata provide "constitutive" principles, without which it would be impossible, for an artwork, to exist. They usually express the language and the conventions used by a particular School or artistic trend. Think, for example, of the XVth century Flemish painting, with its refined and detailed descriptive mode, or of Medieval sacred paintings with all their array of canons concerning the posture of the body and the hierarchical arrangements of portrayed people according to their social rank. These conventional principles easily allow the identification of an artwork as belonging to a certain period or School, and the repeated application of its expressive mode.

However, in addition to these *schemata* a work of art also contains *rules* which are peculiar to it and which cannot be easily grasped independently of it. Those principles are mostly "embedded,"[20] that is deeply interwoven with the work itself and inseparable from it. They are mostly used in a self-referential way. Indeed in creating a piece of art artists want to show something about those very rules and not just use them to get a certain result. They are concerned mostly about the rule-language itself, about how to improve it, change it, prove it outdated. What is being represented -- e.g. painted, sculpted, composed in music -- is an opportunity for them to *say* something about their manner of representation.[21] Artists *find* rules while working, so that their product is essential to an understanding of them. This fact explains the artwork's originality and uniqueness. Different works of art, belonging to the same artistic trend, may represent, and do in fact represent, a unique application of the same general schemata (or rules), the same basic technique. The schemata are always filtered through an artist's own personality.

---

[20] On the concept of "embedded rules" see Garver (1967: 232) and page 12 above..

[21] Danto (1981) carries to a full extent the thesis of self-referentiality of art, so providing a further support to the affinity between art an play. Indeed, as Bateson's (1972) theory about the play-forms of anthropomorphic animals suggests, there is a typical "metamessage level" in play too. In play-fighting, for example, those animals show a peculiar behavior which conveys the self-referring signal "it's only play". See page 74 below.

In games instead, at least long-established games like chess or football, we do not find this second type of rule. Here rules are a means to carry out moves which are other than the rules themselves. The set of rules and the set of moves are distinct ones. The first is *about* the second. There are no explicit rules which, say, explain the structure of Picasso's "Guernica" except the painting itself. A player, instead, follows pre-established rules. Playing a game may be a practical way to learn its rules, but these (at least the general ones) can be listed and learned separately.

As far as highly rule-governed games are concerned, we can extend to them Gombrich's reflections on art and tradition. It seems plausible to me that a balance or tension between the rules inherited by tradition and the search for innovations must have existed in the history of games too. What is different in art and in games is the level of conventionality, at least if we confine our examination to representational art (which is Gombrich's main focus). In rule-governed games, like chess or soccer for example, there is no "mimesis," no attempt to imitate an external reality[22]. Gombrich himself, touching on the subject of games, to illustrate "the relation between form and function" (Gombrich, 1956: 102), says that the only thing users and makers of chess-boards must pay attention to is keeping clear the distinctions between the pieces -- each of which has a special function -- and the positions they occupy on the board. Provided that those differences are noticeable, there is no other "problem of likeness or representation." The "form" depends on mere differentiation of "function." The rest is left to the fancy of the designer. A game is an activity completely detached from serious life. Therefore there is more arbitrariness in it. This may explain also the relative permanence of games' structure, like chess, whose rules remained virtually unaltered for centuries.

However, there are play-forms (like playing with dolls or playing at the war among kids) which do have an "imitative" purpose. In these play-activities, loosely rule-governed, there seems to be present the same *schemata*-principle that Gombrich finds in representational visual art: real life

[22] It seems that the game of chess was meant, in origin, to reproduce the battle between two armies in ancient India. But nowadays this *representational* value of the game is lost.

situations are not passively reproduced, but re-constructed by means of common *schematic* tools. A piece of wooden stick, or even two fingers can "represent" a gun, or a flabby pillow, covered with a blanket can "serve" momentarily as a baby. Besides, toys like dolls or guns are being made more and more resembling their real models.

2. Kant's word on art.

2.1 Gombrich's awareness of the role of tradition in art may be interpreted as a transposition of a Kantian thesis on the historical level. Indeed the need for starting prototypes, so emphasized by Gombrich in his account of painting styles, shares with Kant's philosophy the general assumption about the *relational* quality of our nature. While for Gombrich this quality expresses the deep meaning of history, in Kant it belongs *essentially* to the human cognitive structure, since the human cognitive structure necessarily conditions what can be known. Experience dos not constitute an absolute beginning, which deposits its results on a *tabula rasa*, but it presupposes always something. This philosophical approach also affects Kant's aesthetic theory insofar as aesthetic judgment is not grounded on empirical evidence -- as might be represented by what people like most and are mostly attracted by, on the basis of sense impressions. As Gadamer (1960: 41) says, the principle on which aesthetic judgment is based "stands halfway between a mere sensuous and empirical agreement in matters of taste and a rationalistic universal observance of a rule." The main components of Kant's aesthetic theory are *spontaneity* (free play) and *rules*, which together exhibit the double structure of artistic experience.

In Kant's view the trade-mark of true art is a special "playful" attitude. Artistic works are really such if they can "prove final as play" [*als Spiel...zweckmäßig ausfallen*, KU: 43, 175]. This means that, for Kant, what matters in art is not the purposeful attainment of a goal, but rather the very process of making and creating, which has in itself its own delight. Rules are there, but only to be

followed with no effort [*ohne Peinlichkeit*, KU: 45, 180] as if no intention of obeying them were noticeable.

Nevertheless, art is not just mere play [*blosses Spiel*]: there must still be in it some "mechanism" [*Mechanismus*], otherwise the meaning of an artwork could not be materially expressed and would vanish:

> Daß aber in allen freien Künsten dennoch etwas Zwangsmäßiges, oder, wie man es nennt, ein Mechanismus erforderlich sei, ohne welchen der Geist, der in der Kunst frei sein muß und allein das Werk belebt, gar keinen Körper haben und gänzlich verdunsten würde. (KU: 43,176). [23]

Some rules must be present even in the works of a genius, whom is usually considered as the extreme expression of originality in art. Kant says: "jede Kunst setzt Regeln voraus, durch deren Grundlegung allererst ein Produkt, wenn es künstlich heißen soll, als möglich vorgestellt wird (KU: 46, 181)"[24]. Works of art are *free*, insofar as they do not exhibit any *apparent* constraint, but even the most original works of art are still artifacts, material products, and as such they must involve some technique, that is some rules for its production.

In the case of a genius, however, the "rule" is not a rigid schema or explicit formula anticipating the overall result of his/her product. The rules making the genius's work into a work of art are not based on a concept [Regel..die einen Begriff zum Bestimmungsgrunde habe - KU: 46, 181], that is on a representation, in the intellect, of what that work is going to look like[25]. Thus there

---

[23] Eng. Trans.: "that in all free art something of a compulsory character is till required, or, as it is called, a *mechanism*, without which the *soul*, which in art must be *free*, and which alone gives life to the work, would be bodyless and evanescent". (Meredith)

[24] Eng. Trans.: "Every art presupposes rules which are laid down as the foundation which first enables a product [...] to be represented as possible." (Meredith)

[25] This happens, for example, in the case of a craftsman, who, in building a piece of furniture, say a chair, has a clear idea of what he is going to do, in order to obtain just the kind of chair he has in mind.

is no ready-made schema foreseeing the artist's actual results. On the contrary, a rule, or model, is yielded by this very work. Nature gives art a rule through the genius:

> Genie ist die angeborne Gemütsanlage (ingenium) durch welche die Natur der Kunst die Regel giebt. (KU: 46, 181)[26]

Genuine artists, geniuses, have to show a *mastery* of the rules, which is what makes the greatest difference between them and "imitators." These follow models pedantically; they simply apply in detail the "rules" abstracted from the work of the genius (KU: 47, 186). The genius, instead, creates on the basis of a powerful, internal force that shapes all the "rich material" in him. The artist's work *must* so appear spontaneous, "non-intentional" [*nicht absichtlich*]. As Gadamer (1960: 51) remarks, in Kant's aesthetics "what the concept of genius achieves is only to place the products of art aesthetically on the same level as natural beauty."

2.2 "Spiel" is the real mark of Kant's general aesthetic theory and not only a feature of artistic products. It plays a key role in the judgement about beauty. Indeed "Spiel" characterizes a particular kind of relationship between our faculties of knowing [*Erkenntnisvermögen*] which is the cause of that "feeling of pleasure" [*Gefhül der Lust*] that accompanies our *reflection* on nature. And beauty is what is revealed by this feeling of pleasure.

In general, "Judgment" is the faculty of referring the particular data of our sensible experience to some universal patterns, i.e. to the concepts of Understanding[27]. When we "reflect" on nature, that is when we think of it without aiming at any exact knowledge, the type of judgement that we apply, the "reflective Judgment" [reflektierende Urteilskraft], is one in which only "the particular," e.g. the

---

[26] Eng. Trans.: "Genius is the innate mental aptitude (*ingenium*) *through which* nature gives the rule to art." (Meredith)

[27] "Urteilskraft überhaupt ist das Vermögen, das Besondere als enthalten unter dem Allgemeinen zu denken." (KU: IV, XXVI)

intuitions of imagination, is "given." The "universal," instead, under which the particular has to be subsumed, has still to be found (KU: IV, XXVI)[28]. In the "reflective Judgement," the faculties of Imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] and Understanding [*Verstand*][29] are both active and play the same general role as in the "determinant Judgement", but they do so in a different proportion. In the second kind of Judgment, Understanding guides Imagination with its concepts, since it determines the only conditions at which knowledge is possible. In the first kind, Imagination and Understanding, or intuitions and concepts, *play* with each other. This happens because the relationship between intuitions and concepts is not constrained as it is in theoretical knowledge. In "reflection" intuitions, the data of experience, are still being referred to concepts -- as the formal conditions of any knowledge in general require -- though not in a pre-determined way. In "reflection" this relationship is the one of a free interaction, which does not end up into a rigid combination of concepts and intuitions. It is this free agreement that enlivens the soul and brings about that *feeling of pleasure* that is the distinctive feature of aesthetic judgement on beauty. Kant says:

> Wenn mit der bloßen Auffassung (apprehensio) der Form eines Gegenstandes der Anschauung, ohne Beziehung derselben auf einen Begriff zu einem bestimmten Erkenntnis Lust verbunden ist: so wird die Vorstellung dadurch nicht auf das Objekt, sondern lediglich auf das Subjekt bezogen; und die Lust kann nichts anders als die Angemessenheit desselben zu den Erkenntnisvermögen, die in der reflektierend Urteilskraft im Spiel sind, und sofern sie darin sind, also bloß eine subjektive formale Zweckmäßigkeit des Objekts ausdrücken. (KU: VII, XLIV)[30]

---

[28] The second kind of Judgment, the "determinant judgment" [bestimmende Urteilskraft], is the one typically employed in theoretical knowledge. In it, the particular data are subsumed under a ready-made universal ("die Regel, das Prinzip, das Gesetz", KU: IV, XXVI) which means that the "pure concepts" of Understanding ("Kategorien") guide the unification of the manifold data of experience.

[29] In the philosophy of Kant these are rather technical terms. Roughly, "imagination" is "the faculty of a priori intuitions" (KU: VII), and "understanding" is "the faculty of concepts". The two faculties are complementary since "intuitions", [Anschauungen] whether a priori or not, represent the component of knowledge given by the senses, that is the part of it that we *receive* from experience. "Concepts" [Begriffe], instead, represent the *active* component of knowledge, for they prescribe the law to experience without which knowledge would not be possible, and so are *constitutive* of it (KU: Vorrede, IV). Knowledge, for Kant, is given neither by intuitions nor by concepts alone, but by the union of the two (see KRV, I,I,II,II).

[30] Eng. Trans.: "If pleasure is connected with the mere apprehension (*apprehensio*) of the form of an object

The feeling of pleasure is what distinguishes reflection from theoretical knowledge. It is the enlivening felt by the subject when concepts and intuitions combine without producing a definite agreement. Pleasure is therefore caused by the *unexpected* way those two combine and it reveals what Kant calls "Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur" (the "purposiveness" or "finality" of nature) (KU: IV, XXVIII).

This "Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur" is a "subjective principle" that the faculty of Judgement gives itself to retrieve an order even in the particular phenomena of nature, which are "left undetermined" by the *a priori* concepts of Understanding [*die durch jene Gesetz, welche der reine Verstand a priori giebt,...,unbestimmt gelassen werden,* KU: IV, XXVI]. It is a law for the subject, but not for nature, (in which, as far as we can know, we can find no real purposes, but only causes and effects), a "need of our understanding" [*Verstandesbedürfnis,* KU: VI, XXXVIII] to find "an order"in the particular laws of nature [*Ordnung der Natur in den besonderen Regeln,* KU: V, XXXV]. It is an *a priori* principle of the faculty of Judgement (since it cannot be derived from nature).

"Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur" is the principle by means of which nature is represented *as if* [als ob] it agreed with our need of retrieving an order in its empirical, particular laws. The pleasure we feel when we find nature agreeing with our cognitive need is what unveils this very finality: "Also wird der Gegenstand als dann nur darum zweckmäßig genannt, weil seine Vorstellung unmittelbar mit dem Gefühle der Lust verbunden ist" (KU: VII, XLIV)[31].

---

of intuition, apart from any reference it may have to a concept for the purpose of a definite cognition, this does not make the representation referable to the Object, but solely to the Subject. In such a case the pleasure can express nothing but the conformity of the Object to the cognitive faculties brought into play in the reflective judgment." (Meredith)

[31] Eng. Trans.: "We can only apply the term 'final' to the object on account of its representation being immediately coupled with the feeling of pleasure" (Meredith)

2.3 In Kant's aesthetic theory the notion of "play" has a double application, both in the creation of genuine art and in the aesthetic appreciation of it. Play-like is the true artistic product. And playful is the internal state of whoever pronounces a judgment on beauty. The most remarkable feature of this theory is the antithesis between "blosses Spiel" and "Mechanismus." It seems to be parallel to the antithesis between "play" and "game," as synonymous with, respectively, total disengagement from rules and total submission to them. Art, in Kant's view, is somewhere in between: it is a "game" that has to have the appearance of "play." Suits (1978: 93) mentions Kant's theory of art as based on the inversion of the "normal" means-ends relationship, which is typical of *games*. But he also says that "Kant likens aesthetic experience to *play* as a kind of purposiveness without purpose " [italics mine], adding, later, that Kant like other writers, was addressing himself "primarily to `play' rather than to games" (ibid.: 94). Thus he recognizes the middle position between play and games that art occupies in the Kantian aesthetics.

In the aesthetic judgment on beauty the notion of "Spiel" is evidently meant to emphasize the *dynamic* character of the Understanding-Imagination relationship. It turns out to be very close to the notion of play, with its connotations of action disinhibited from rules and of freedom from constraints. It is in this respect that Huizinga (1938: 38) mentions the use of the word *Spiel* by Kant. Now the linguistic choice of Kant -- as well as similar uses of the word which put the stress on this unconstrained type of movement -- is considered by Huizinga as a sort of vanishing of the concept of play, a mark of conceptual weakness. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the idea of a free movement is at the core of the meaning of "play." Huizinga's comment might be explained only if we considered that he does not acknowledge a "play-game" distinction and, according to his definition, one of the central components of the ludic activity is the presence of rules that is, something that restricts the freedom of action and delimits the appropriate area of a game.

The primary role attributed by Kant to the subject in the aesthetic judgment, supports my supposition that play, together with art, belongs to the sphere of spontaneity. However, in Kant's view, spontaneity is not an uncontrolled power of the fancy ("so glauben seichte Köpfe, daß sie nicht besser zeigen können, sie wären aufblühende Genies, als wenn sie sich vom Schulzwange aller Regeln lossagen", KU: 47, 186).[32] It is rather the disengagement from an agreement determined beforehand by the rules of the Understanding. But a kind of agreement has still to be in place. Kant uses the expression "freie Gesetzmäßigkeit der Einbildungskraft" (KU: 22, Anmerkung, 69) or "Gesetzmäßigkeit ohne Gesetz" (KU: 22, Anmerkung, 69). Here "Gesetzmäßigkeit" ("lawfulness" or "regularity") does not point to a rigid constraint; rather it denotes the presence of the Understanding as a general background against which representations test themselves. It means that even in the free play of the Imagination the general rules of Understanding must not be violated.

This Kantian antithesis between Understanding and Imagination seems to parallel, under different clothing, the dialectics of "tradition" and "innovation" we found in Gombrich. As tradition, in Gombrich, is the necessary standard of comparison for innovative works of art, so, in Kant, the Understanding provides the screen onto which only Imagination can freely project itself. In the genuine work of art -- both seem to state -- there has to be an underlying tension between *rules* and *spontaneity.* The last one, meant as a pure creative freedom, cannot be conceived apart from rules. The condition of "freedom in play" [Freiheit im Spiele] always involves two terms that balance each other. The mark of difference is: that which, in Gombrich, is accounted for as the corollary of man's historical situation is, in Kant, viewed as necessarily following from the subject's constitution (in the transcendental sense). But they share the fundamental idea that human *creative* power cannot be productive apart from its nexus with something already given as a term of comparison.

[32] Only "shallow minds fancy that the best evidence they can give of their being full-blown geniuses is by emancipating themselves from all academic constraints." (Meredith)

3. Schiller and the "play impulse."

3.1 Schiller's conception of art significantly contributes to developing, in an original fashion, the Kantian theme of "free play." In both Kant and Schiller, play is an expression of human nature and is intimately related to aesthetic experience. In Kant the possibility of play, and therefore of freedom, belongs *essentially* to our nature. Play rests on the *formal* and universal conditions of knowledge, i.e., the relationship between Understanding and Imagination. In Schiller's conception, *play* is, rather, an "ideal" condition, towards which a fully developed human nature tends. Thus while in Kant play has a remarkable dynamic character, in Schiller it represents a condition of balance and is the highest spiritual value with which mankind has to be nourished.

The "play impulse" [Spieltrieb], attributed by Schiller (ÄEM) to mankind, is a direct expression of freedom. It emancipates human beings from all restraints, both physical and moral (ÄEM: Letter XXVI). The "play impulse" is like an intermediary force between the two basic instincts of human life (ÄEM: Letter XIV): the "sense impulse" and the "formal impulse" (ÄEM: Letters XI to XIII). The first one, the "sensuous [Sinnlich] impulse" is the impulse of animal life, one which pushes human beings to fulfill their needs. This impulse, acting through the sensory stimuli, is what makes human beings what they *really* are, that is finite and temporally located beings, subject to changes. The "formal impulse," on the other hand, is the expression of what, in human beings, is "absolute" and "infinite," that is reason. Reason does not derive from experience. Rather it imposes its principles onto reality. These principles are not dependent on the changes of time: they are eternal. Because of the presence of reason human beings are "free," that is "autonomous."

This twofold disposition of human nature does not, however, involve a contradiction. The two impulses are directed towards different objects (ÄEM: Letter XIII) (in modern terms, we might call them "body" and "mind"). "Culture" must take care of educating *sensitivity* and *reason* so that

each is granted its own domain and none prevails on the other. But reaching this condition of balance between them remains an "idea of reason," that is, an ideal goal toward which human beings tend, without ever fully attaining it (ÄEM: Letter XIV). Individuals may and do experience, occasionally, a sense of the completeness of being. Anytime this happens, a "new impulse" gets uncovered: that is "the play impulse" (ÄEM: Letter XIV), which harmoniously combines the sense and form impulses.

Through the play-instinct material needs spontaneously conform to the ideas of reason, and vice versa, the laws of reason agree with those needs. Play thus represents a third realm between the realm of physical "forces" and the realm of rational "laws" (ÄEM: Letter XXVII). And in preventing the predominance of either the "sense" or "form" impulse, the play impulse generates a state of freedom, and it will "set man free both physically and morally" (ÄEM: Letter XIV)[33]. Freedom is thus the result of a perfect balance between two opposite tendencies. It coincides with the *perfection* of the human nature, with its full expression. When human beings have fully developed themselves, they are not biased towards one or the other side of their nature. Rather, they have become *total* human beings and therefore *autonomous* wholes, which possess *in themselves* all that is needed in order to fully exist. This kind of freedom is not a freedom of doing and of making choices, like the moral kind, but it represents the purest and fullest possibility of *being*.

If play thrives on this sort of freedom, play itself indicates the fullness of being. Play is life itself at the highest degree. As Schiller says, a human being as human, "is only wholly Man when he is playing" (ÄEM: Letter XV). That is why beauty is the object of the play impulse (ÄEM: Letter XV). Beauty, on Schiller's view, symbolizes the full realization of the potentialities of human nature. It is *form* and *life* at the same time, and such that it enlivens both reason and sensitivity. That beauty and play belong to the same sphere is suggested by the pleasure people take in "appearances" (Letter

[33] Schiller mentions some linguistic evidence to show the association of "play" and "freedom:" he notes that "play" usually denotes an activity which, though not contingent, does not involve any constraints.

XXVI): human beings can truly *play only* with "aesthetic appearances,"[34] that is, *freely* entertain themselves without caring for reality.

This conception is very close to Huizinga's concept of play as an activity that has "its aim in itself." Both authors take play as synonymous with autonomy, independence from extraneous needs, absolute enjoyment. And they both profess the existence of a deep affinity between art and play, though Huizinga is less explicit on this point.

3.2 The dichotomy between "sense impulse" and "formal impulse" reflects the basic duality of existence, the duality of *necessity* and *freedom*, as Schiller illustrates it elsewhere, or between "state of nature" and "state of culture," "real" and "ideal" (NSD: 22). According to Schiller "necessity" is the expression of the "spontaneity" [freiwillige Dasein] of natural phenomena. "Spontaneous" is a nature which creates according to its internal laws, and follows them, in the Spinozistic sense of the word, *necessarily* [die Existenz nach eignen und unabänderlichen Gesetzen] (NSD: 1). In the "state of nature" human beings live in a "sensible harmony" [ungeteilte sinnliche Einheit] with the rest of nature (NSD: 22).

External nature, however, is diametrically opposed to the human world. Nature is to human actions what necessity is to freedom. Human reality is characterized by "freedom" and not by spontaneity. *Freedom*, here, is what makes us into beings endowed with a "moral disposition," that is beings capable of making choices according to certain ethical principles. Indeed freedom is what enables us to exercise our "will" over the *necessity* of nature. Human beings who have attained this kind of freedom have abandoned the state of nature for the "state of culture" [Stand der Kultur][35]. In this state human beings experience a feeling of a deep split from nature. Their existence is marked by

[34] Those are different from "logical" appearances, that is from those images which purport to be true pictures of reality, but which are, instead, false (ÄEM, Letter XXVI).

[35] Schiller does not give a full explanation of this expression. The only meaning we can attach to it is the one we get from its contrast with the expression "state of nature".

a continuous but unfulfilled wish for the lost harmony. The only harmony they can claim is a "*moral* harmony" [moralische Einheit], which is, nevertheless, just an ideal (NSD: 22). Art is the symbol of this split of the individual from nature: "Die Natur macht ihn mit sich eins, die Kunst trennt und entzweiet ihn" (NSD: 23). Art is whatever does not follow *necessarily* from the laws of nature. Therefore, while nature is *spontaneous*, art is *free*[36].

3.3 Schiller's last characterization of "spontaneity" and "freedom" invites a further reading of the play-game antithesis adopted in this work. I identified *play* with a form of behavior whose source is the *individual*'s power, where the individual is taken as the source of *free* actions. I therefore attributed to play both the properties of "spontaneity" and "freedom," meaning by the last a disengagement from rules. Schiller, on the contrary, divorces "freedom" from "spontaneity." In NSD Schiller takes freedom, in a typically Kantian sense, as the *conditio sine qua non* of morality. *Moral* beings must be free in order to control their will and be responsible for their deeds. Thus freedom is the support of rationality. In ÄEM Schiller considers freedom as the expression of a reconciled human nature. Neither kind, though, belongs to the realm of spontaneity.

Spontaneity belongs to a field different from the one of morality. Being spontaneous is acting according to instincts rather than reason. It does not involve any decision-making, but only a non-conscious unfolding of natural potentialities. *Spontaneous* nature is the realm of the pure *happening*. Morality is the realm of *decisions*.

However *spontaneity*, in the sense of the word adopted by Schiller, does apply to play as I meant it. Indeed, *play* is a natural phenomenon and therefore spontaneous. As Huizinga also acknowledges, *play* belongs to nature: "nature gave us play" (1938: 3). Huizinga, however, leaves the issue unanalyzed, for fear of becoming entangled with the problem of determinism. Only a distinction

[36] "Naive" and "sentimental" poetry are, respectively, the expression of the "state of nature" and the "state of culture".

between *play* and *games* might have disengaged him from that problem. Indeed *play*, as a natural attitude, is surely a component of human nature and surely something we do not choose. It cannot but spring off from a deep impulse which is part of a human nature not yet corrupted by social rationality. *Games*, on the other hand, belong to the realm of freedom. They are ludic activities governed by rules and *freely* chosen. Thus, while *play* is "spontaneous," *games* are "free," following Schiller's sense of the two words. Indeed taking part in a *free* game, e.g. in a rule-governed activity (like chess, or basketball for example), involves a *moral* responsibility on the player's side. Playing a game requires the ability of making rational decisions for the sake of winning the game together with an acceptance of its rules and their consequences.

The moral kind of freedom which is exhibited by games, is not totally unrelated to the "freedom" revealed by the "play impulse." Indeed the latter can be considered as introductory to the former: the balance between spiritual and material needs is the condition, for human beings, to gain *autonomy* of choice, independence from the necessity of nature. Indeed as Hans (1981: 115) points out, "for Schiller all of those moral and intellectual choices a man must make, if he is to be fully human, can only be made if he has first had the freedom to make those choices, and that freedom is given to him by the aesthetic."

If art is also *free* (and not *spontaneous*), then it must be considered as a *game*.

4. Walton and the *game* of aesthetic appreciation.

4.1 As we have just seen, in Kant's aesthetics the notion of play is fundamental for an understanding not only of the moment of artistic creation, but also and especially of the appreciator's reactions in front of a work of art. In this respect Walton's (1990) general standpoint is in line with Kant's interest in the moment of *judgment*, i.e. in the act of aesthetic evaluation. Walton is not so much concerned, as Gombrich is, with exploring the mechanism of artistic production. Rather he is

concerned with investigating the cognitive aspect of representation, that is the relation between the beholder and a work of art.

As a consequence of the shift of attention from creation to appreciation, the word "mimesis" gains in Walton (1990) a different meaning than it has for Gombrich. In fact, according to Gombrich (1956) *mimesis* is, literally, the attempt to imitate the outside world in art. Placed between tradition and invention, the task of mimesis is the one of enabling an artist to match the inherited stylistic stereotypes against reality. On the contrary, for Walton *mimesis* "can be understood to correspond roughly to *representation*" (Walton 1990: 3). "Representation" is, in turn, interchangeable with "fiction," since its fundamental role is a make-believe role. Thus mimesis, like representation, is whatever prompts an imaginative process in the beholder's mind. Walton (ibid.: 3) explicitly disclaims any use of an "imitation or resemblance theory of depiction."

The core of Walton's aesthetic theory is that a "representation" is *whatever* has the function of being a "prop in a game of make-believe" (ibid.: 52-3). Therefore, according to this definition, not only works of art are "representations," but everything that can be used in that way. Being *fictional,* or, for that matter, being *representational*, is a feature that cuts across the distinction between artworks and mere *objects*. Both, independently of their ontological status, can lay claim to the attribute of fictionality.

Works of art are *representational* just because they have the function of "props" in games of make-believe. Indeed they function as material supports to the imaginings in which appreciators engage when they come to know that work. A *prop* is an "objective" entity because it exists independently of the games it can actually raise, that is, independently of *whether* it causes such games. These "imaginings," the "games of make-believe," are generated when the beholder joins the "fiction" created by the author of a novel or painting and tries to imagine what that novel or painting "says that has to be imagined." In playing these games, appreciators of a work of art get involved in the "fictional world" originated by that very work (Walton, 1990: 57-67). For example, in reading

Gulliver's Travels the reader is carried into believing that Gulliver had such and such adventures, i.e., the ones narrated in the book. Similar is the participation of an observer to the fiction generated by a painting like *La Grande Jatte*: s/he *imagines to see* people strolling in a park on a sunny day (the examples are from Walton).

The fundamental component of fictionality, in Walton's opinion, is the so-called *principle of generation*, which is a sort of "convention" or "agreement" (explicit or implicit), among the participants of a game-of-make-believe, about *what has to be imagined*, the "fictional truths" that have to be entertained (ibid: 40-1). This constraint allows them to keep separate the properties of "being fictional" and "being imagined." What one presently imagines in front of a *representation* can be different from what has been *agreed* upon. What is "fictional," e.g., what is *representational*, is so not because someone is actually imagining it, but only because that is what has been agreed about at the beginning of the game. In the recurrent example of the book, the make-believe game of two kids who *decide* (principle of generation) to consider the stumps in the woods as bears, it may happen that the two participants imagine that they are in front of a bear when they see, from a distance, something that looks like a stump. If this is not, really, a stump, but a "moss-covered boulder" (Walton, 1990: 37), what the kids have *imagined* is not what is *fictional*. Indeed what is *fictional* is only what they have initially agreed upon, i.e., that stumps (and only stumps) are bears.

In the case of a work of art, the agreement takes place, implicitly, between the artist and the beholder: certain fictional events must be believed by the appreciator who is enjoying the work. "Fictional worlds" produced by works of art are of two different kinds: "work worlds," containing only the *fictional truths* generated by the work, and "game worlds," belonging to the appreciator's aesthetic experience and encompassing her/him as the main subject. For example, in the game-world of the spectator of *La Grande Jatte* it is not only "fictional" that some people are strolling around the park on a sunny day -- which is what constitutes the work-world -- but, in addition, it is "fictional" that the observer *sees* those people (ibid.: 59) -- which constitutes the game-world. This distinction,

in turn, generates the other one between "authorized" and "unauthorized" games of make-believe. The first ones are games whose "rules," e.g., the principles of generation, are *authorized* (ibid.: 397-8), that is commonly accepted, by appreciators, for a certain work. Vice versa the *unauthorized* games, or the "unofficial" ones, are games which do not conform to these rules. An example of unofficial game would be the one entertained by a beholder of *la Grande Jatte* who imagines to see "hippos wallowing in a mud hole," instead of people strolling in a park (ibid.: 60).[37] Given this distinction, what is "fictional" in *la Grande Jatte* (the work-world) is what all the *authorized* games (game-worlds) have in common.[38]

4.2 In the last distinction we can retrieve the interplay between inventiveness and rules so typical of art in general. In Gombrich's theory the inventiveness of an artist consists in her/his being able to apply *critically* the rules inherited from the past and adapt them to the needs of her/his present time. Pure invention and absolute freedom of representation do not take place in artistic work. In Walton's conception, instead, the dialectical relationship between *play* and *game*, or *inventiveness* and *rules*, is given by the distinction between *authorized* and *unauthorized* games of make-believe. Among the games of the first kind we find the imaginings that are *motivated* by the interpretative *rules* accepted by players, and that must follow the fictional situation suggested by a work. On the contrary, *unauthorized* games of make-believe exhibit freedom from the rules, or principles, normally agreed upon by appreciators. It is in this kind of games that the subject's cognitive response is close to the notion of play. The creativity of appreciators consists in deserting the rules that make up a

[37] With his conception of "game worlds" Walton shows a different appraisal of the beholder's role than Gombrich does. Indeed "work-worlds" are independent of the appreciators' participation. According to Walton a work-world exists independently of whether someone takes part in it and therefore independently of the games one can play with it. It would exist though nobody ever knew of it (ibid.: 42). On the other hand, in Gombrich's view, the "beholder's share" is fundamental in determining what has been represented (Gombrich, 1956: 165-69).

[38] The notion of "unauthorized game" represents an interesting analog of Wittgenstein's notion of a "private language-game". On this point see page 168 below.

fiction, and leaving imagination free to wander. Note, however, that, in this case, rules still determine whether a game is *unauthorized* (ibid.:397): where the rules are not the ones commonly accepted, there the game is an *unofficial* one. Even in this view, then, inventiveness cannot do without rules, but it consists in devising a different set of them.

As I said earlier, there is a certain analogy between Walton's approach and Kant's. Both are mostly concerned about the appreciators' reactions. However, one difference is immediately noticeable. While Kant uses the word "*play*" to refer to the relationship of Understanding and Imagination as the essential feature of aesthetic judgment, Walton uses the word "*games*" in talking about fiction or make believe. As Suits (1978) also says, make-believe activities are *games* because we can distinguish moves in them. "Each `move' (if we may call it that) either is for the purpose of evoking a dramatic response, or is such a response, or is both." (ibid.: 110) This terminological difference is remarkable. What matters in Kant is the free and unexpected way the two faculties interact. On the contrary, in Walton's conception it is the presence of rules, determining the fictional content of a representation, which is the most important fact. Indeed an *authorized* game of make believe has to adhere to the *content* of a representational work of art, but also *unauthorized* ones must stick to some principles. In this respect Walton's conception is close to Huizinga's definition of game as a rule-governed activity. These rules have the function of delimiting the area of the "game-world."

This different perspective consists, mainly, in the fact that while Walton aims to investigate the specific activity in which appreciators of a work of art engage, Kant intends to emphasize their internal attitude, which is one of enlivening the soul through the free play between the faculties. In using the notion of rule-governed game Walton seems to highlight, more than Kant does, the social dimension of that activity, guided as that is by an *agreement* among participants. Kant instead focuses on the *subject*'s state in the aesthetic judgment on beauty. This judgment exhibits, nevertheless, "universality" [*Allgemeinheit*] (KU: 8); it is valid for everyone, since it rests on the formal conditions

for the use of the Judgment (the relationship between Understanding and Imagination) which are supposed to exist in everyone. Therefore in Kant the need for an agreement is an *essential* premise of the judgment on beauty and must not be secured to any external base (like the principle of generation).

5. "Art as experience": Dewey.

5.1 A view on art similar, in some respects, to Walton's is held by Dewey (1934). Dewey rejects the notion that art is a realm of objects standing outside the range of ordinary experience. Art is not a "compartmentalized" area of human activities, requiring special criteria for its appreciation. The conception according to which art is whatever is stored in museums and is far off the common practice with things, has its roots only in the big gap that has slowly arisen, in western societies, between artists and the rest of mankind (Dewey, 1934: 8-9).

Against this view, Dewey intends to show the continuity of aesthetic with ordinary experience. His underlying assumption is a notion of experience as a constant trade going on between individuals and environment:

> Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication. (Dewey, 1934: 22).

This interaction takes place in two different phases, the phase of disruption and tension, when the organism clashes with a world felt as extraneous, and the phase of order and harmony (ibid. 15). When this exchange is carried to fulfillment we have "*an* experience." What we are experiencing is then perceived as a unified whole, whose parts are felt as concurring to produce one and the same end. We are conscious of this event as pervaded by a "single *quality*" which gives it unity through its

variations in time (ibid.: 37). Thus the event becomes uniquely identifiable as *that* feeling of love, *that* talk with friends, *that* walk in the sun, etc.

In Dewey's view, art brings to perfection this feature of experience as *an experience*. The very work of art testifies to this occurring of an interaction between the self and the outside world, where the interaction is experienced as complete and is accompanied by a sense of satisfaction (ibid.: 53). In creating or appreciating a work of art we *perceive* the emotional, intellectual, or practical aspects of things as constituting a coherent whole of interrelated qualities and we enjoy it as an end in itself. Art is just a continuation of the natural processes of life.

5.2 Following Dewey's conception, there is no room for sharp distinction between the "artistic" and the "aesthetic" components of art, that is between its elements of "making" and "receiving." Indeed a complicated combination of production (the *artistic* component) and appreciation (the *aesthetic* component) constitutes the structure of every experience and therefore of art too (Dewey: 44). On the one hand, artists are the ones who first and fully enjoy their work. "To be truly artistic, a work must be also esthetic -- that is, framed for enjoyed receptive perception." (ibid.: 48) On the other hand, the appreciator doesn't just receive some perceptive stimuli. As Dewey says he "must *create* his own experience" (ibid.: 54).

Thus Dewey, like Walton, emphasizes the *qualitative* and experiential aspect of art, rather than its ontological status. "Artistic" is an attitude, "a quality of doing" (ibid.: 214), which we may assume toward things and events. This is a particular way of interacting with the world. As such, art is similar to *play*, though art is not only an attitude, as Dewey's criticism of the theory of "art as play" is meant to show.

Dewey (1934: 278) does admit that the theory of art as play makes a significant contribution to the understanding of artistic phenomena, since it includes "action," concrete action, among the constitutive elements of the artistic adventure. Being in action is the characteristic of children at play.

However this theory does not take into account the evolution of children's play toward highly structured and less spontaneous play forms. The initial kind of play, which is similar to the play-forms of animals in its lack of purpose and direction, undergoes a thorough transformation in time. As children grow up, play turns into a game. What was, initially, just a loose "succession of acts" becomes an ordered "series." Actions are directed toward a predetermined goal since they depend on "rules." "As the need for order is recognized, play becomes a game; it has rules." (Dewey 1934: 278) In submitting their actions to rules children realize how much they can effect a considerable change in the material world (ibid.: 278). Play has thus turned into a purposeful activity: building a fort, defeating the enemy in a battle, behaving as a good doctor.

Dewey's conclusion is that art is like play only in some respects. As an *activity,* it shares the freedom and the spontaneity of play. But as a *product,* that is as a *work* of art, it is determined by rules which involve "reference to objective materials"[39] and create "order." Unlike Gombrich (who sees the order of art as bearing on the artistic language itself, on its own "schemata") Dewey identifies the "order-component" of art with a psychological function of our interaction with the environment. More than on the artwork itself, Dewey lays emphasis on the author's role in instituting "order" in her/his present experience. According to him, *order* is born out of an organism in its trade with surroundings. It is not just induced by the inevitable influence of tradition with which artists must confront themselves. Rather, it is the outcome of their "interest" in producing something new, in their "interest in the transformation of material" (ibid.: 279). It meets a future demand rather than a past influence.

5.3 In his parallel between artistic and playful activities Dewey hits upon a very significant point, the presence of rules, which marks the difference between games and play and disengages art

[39] Dewey (1934: 279) says: "Play remains as an attitude of freedom from subordination to an end imposed by external necessity [...]; but it is transformed into work in that activity is subordinated to *production* of an objective result."

from the exclusive metaphor of play. "Rules" reveal the transformation that has taken place. They are the symptom of an *order* that has grown out of the initial *chaos*. Eventually it seems that art, in Dewey's definition, is something lying between *play* and *games*. It shares something with both of them. As an attitude toward things, which is unconstrained and spontaneous, art has some of the traits of play. As a *finished* work which exhibits a structure, an ordered pattern, it has the appearance of a game. Dewey sees the *order* of artistic activity as arising from the need to accomplish an end, i.e. the artistic product. Therefore art is like games-with-rules when it is considered as a "work," that is as an activity which produces some material result in the world.

The very position of art as lying between the two realms of "caprice" and "routine" -- i.e. the realm of chaos and the realm of mechanical processes (ibid: 40) -- further exemplifies its being an activity which lies between play and games. Indeed in its extreme form, play is just random and purposeless movement, whereas a game is something whose structure is invariably set by rules. Art is not only *play*, because it aims to realize a definite product. And it is not just *game*, because, being also aesthetic, it represents an unfinished experience, which expands itself in the moment of appreciation[40].

6. Danto's metaphysics of art.

6.1 To the extreme opposite of Walton's and Dewey's conceptions lies Danto's (1981) theory of artistic production. Indeed Danto's book aims to stress the radical *ontological* difference between artworks and material objects without making reference to aesthetic appreciation, whatever this may consist in. According to him, something cannot be deemed an artwork just because we can appreciate

[40] For Dewey (1929: 361) art is, significantly, both "instrumental" and "consummatory". It is, at the same time, "means" and "end". Indeed an art-product is not external to the producing activity and separable from it, as it happens in mechanical production. Rather it is its internal consequence. Therefore, art, like games, is a self-directed activity, with no goals beyond its very existence.

it *aesthetically*. Rather a distinction between artworks and non-artworks has to precede appreciation: "aesthetic response presupposes the distinction and hence cannot *simply* enter into the definition of art" (Danto, 1981: 113).

In Danto's metaphysical kind of view the identity of a work of art is to be retrieved at a *causal-historical* level. Knowledge of the author and of the time when a work has been done is essential to the identification of it as a work of art. He uses twice (ibid.: 44, 113) Wolfflin's thesis that "not everything is possible at every time," meaning that something may, nowadays, represent an aesthetic quality which might not have been such in the past.[41]

Though the retrieval of the historical origin of an artwork does not solve the question of what makes it into a work of art, the meaning of Danto's thesis lies in disengaging art from any *perceptual* criteria. We can easily see this if we compare his thesis with Gombrich's ideas about artistic creations. Gombrich (1956) too intends to show the relativity of artistic perception to periods of time and disclaims the theory of the "innocent eye," but he still leaves room for perception, though a *trained* one. Danto, instead, disallows altogether the statement that "*aesthetic* differences *are* perceptual differences" (Danto, 1981: 43). In his view identifying an artwork is not a matter of learning how to *see* some features. Aesthetic qualities are not like "sensory qualities:" we *know* they are there in advance, and it is not the case that we can "miss" them (ibid: 99).

The denial of the recognitional role of perception in art means that an artwork cannot *simply* be identical with its "material counterpart," since this one could, in principle, occur at any time, while an artwork is time-relative. By "material counterpart" of an artwork Danto means the artistic product as a material product, which, as such, and not as an artwork, might exist at any time. Indeed it might be the case that among totally *indiscernible* (to the eye) objects (like an array of "squared red canvasses" all of which but one being artworks, ibid.:1 ff.) there is still room for the identification of

[41] Danto (1981 : 45) says: "It is not difficult to conceive of objects which, though they would not have been works of art at the time they were made, can have in a later period objects precisely like them which are works of art."

the real artwork -- which means that this identification did not take place through a perceptual recognition.

The "imitation theory of art," so held responsible for ontological deception by Plato, in the ***Republic***, is a good candidate for a definition of art as *perception*-based. The concept of "imitative art" implies the ability to *see* similarities between a picture and the reality it depicts. It must have been this "descriptive falsity" of imitative art that struck Plato so much. In fact "an imitation *x* is also a false *x*" (ibid.: 17), which means that, for example, a depicted cat is *perceptually* true, but false *in reality*. Plato, however, did not acknowledge the opposite function of art, which, as Danto says, is the "extruding of objects it applies to from the real" (ibid.: 18). While Plato emphasizes the wanting-to-be-like-reality side of imitative art, Danto wants to explore exactly the opposite one, that is the mimetic-therefore-*unreal* side of it. This is the Aristotelian attitude toward artworks. As Danto (ibid.: 13-4) reminds us, for Aristotle, the pleasure of artistic representation comes exactly from knowing that what we are attending to is an "imitation" and not the thing itself.

According to Danto a conception of "art as imitation" does not allow a distinction between artworks and mere objects. It overlooks the relationship between the content and the way this is represented. Such a conception is totally content-oriented: what matters is the "content" of an artwork, what this is about. The "material medium," that is the physical substance of which an artwork is made, like colors, words, marble etc. remains "transparent." Indeed, in a Platonic kind of theory, the invisibility of the medium itself is what grants the conditions for the "illusion," i.e. the (false) belief that we are facing a *real* thing (ibid.: 151).

In Danto's view, artworks are not only *about* their content. They also *"express*" something about it (ibid.: 148), they say something about the way the content is presented to the audience. As an example, Danto imagines the case of two stories, exactly like each other in form and content, except that one of them is a normal newspaper report and the other a "nonfiction story". What makes the

latter into an artwork is that its author has *chosen* to represent something the way he does in order "to make a point" about it (ibid.: 146).

The inverse of Wittgenstein's maxim about *showing* and *saying* (TLP 4.1212) in language is definitely applicable here. Artworks, unlike language, are *opaque* because they *can* and *do say* something about their *form* and how this is related to their content. They do not just *show* like in a mirror, as pictures do according to the ***Tractatus***, a story about the world. They want to make a point of how *they* tell us this story, in a word, about themselves. As Danto says, artworks are *metaphors*. In fact "a metaphor presents its subject and it presents the way in which it does present it" (ibid.: 189). In a metaphor the medium becomes "opaque," and we finally become conscious of it. This happens because art is something dependent "upon theories" (ibid: 135).

6.2 The transparency/opaqueness issue reinforces even more the similarity between *play* and art. Indeed it seems that *play*, as I use the notion, bears the character of "opaqueness" which belongs to artworks. In "just playing" people do not only act in a certain way, but they also want to make it clear that *this* is the way they want to perform their actions. Play, as I said earlier, is mainly a manner of being. In games, instead, players seem to concentrate mainly on the moves to be executed, so rendering their way of acting *transparent*, in Danto's sense.

This "opaqueness" feature of art tallies also with Bateson's (1976) psychological remarks about the "meta-communicative" level of play. According to Bateson, play-actions carry them the message, "This is play." This message is a "meta-message" since it is *about* the very actions of the game and inhibits any ascription to them of the usual denoting functions (ibid.: 120-21)[42]. The presence of this message means that a game is not only a set of moves but it is also the way these are performed. This feature of playing corresponds to the *"expressive*" component of artworks

[42] The example used by Bateson is the one of a play-fight between two monkeys, where the actions do not "stand for" real fighting moves.

emphasized by Danto. Besides, this meta-message determines what Bateson calls the "psychological frame" of play (ibid.: 127). Like the picture's frame, this one has the function of enclosing in a definite area everything that belongs to play, keeping out at the same time the irrelevant components. The frame's role is to bring the audience to regard what lies *outside* the frame with a different attitude than what is *inside*. Therefore play, like art, is what is going on within the *frame*.

Bateson's notion of "frame" is close to Huizinga's remark about the "non-ordinary" quality of play, which Danto too acknowledges. Indeed Danto says that the inhibition of normal reactions, the ones promptly triggered by the *real* events of life, is not an exclusive function of art, but also of "games, magic and dreams," "all of which fall outside the world and stand at just the same kind of distance from it" (Danto, 1981: 18). "It was just a game," or "It is an artwork" (ibid.: 18) are statements which have the similar effect of distancing reality from the appreciator, thus delimiting the area games and artworks fall into. What is different in Huizinga's and Danto's conception of games and art, is perhaps the fact that, in its being "non-ordinary life," a game is markedly isolated from life itself, while artworks, though distanced from reality, still retain a relation to it: they are *representation*s of it.

This role of "frame" might be fruitfully applied also to Wittgenstein's notion of language-games, inasmuch as the conception of language-games imply the thesis of a context-dependence of meaning. A context, or a language-game for what matters, can be regarded as a more or less closed area *within which* only, as with a frame, we must look for what we need. Assigning meanings to words is a function of the language-game we are *in* [43].

[43] For a detailed account of language-games see page 135 below.

CHAPTER THREE

PLAY VS GAME

SELVES VS SELF

VOCABULARIES VS VOCABULARY

1. "Incipit parodia..."

1.1 With this concise but captivating statement Nietzsche announces the content of ***The Gay Science***. His words have a premonitory effect: they warn the reader of the subversive tone of the book, of the radical change of mind urged by it. Indeed, Nietzsche effects a perceptive and extensive criticism of the traditional values of culture, ethics, and philosophy. These are divested of their established power and recast in a new shape. His writing, however, has the unmistakable trait of play: play with very serious intentions, but still play. The most playful aspect of Nietzsche's philosophical and "artistic" enterprise is its continuous *agonistic* tension.

Huizinga's comment on Nietzsche is short, but his insight into his philosophy is deep. He mentions Nietzsche in the part of his book where he is trying to show the *original* competitive sense of philosophical wisdom. Nietzsche is drawn near the Sophists:

> [The Sophists] were animated by the primitive instinct of competition, the struggle for glory. Some of Nietzsche's biographers blame him for having re-adopted the old agonistic attitude of philosophy. If indeed he did so he has led philosophy back to its antique origins. (Huizinga, 1938: 152)

The agonistic component of Nietzsche's thought contributes to exploring the notion of play. My aim is to use some of his writings to understand what role, in general, agonism has in play and games. Most of the references will be made to ***The Gay Science***, whose title alone already expresses a playful contrast of notions.

In Nietzsche's philosophy three main lines of thought can be retrieved, corresponding to three different conceptual oppositions: the opposition between *individual* and *society*, the one between *individual* and *ethics*, and the one between *individual* and *science*.[44] All three are presupposed in the definition of what it is to be "noble," what it means to be "aristocratic."

---

[44] Quite surprisingly in Nietzsche another antithesis exists between *individual* and *aesthetics*, which

Nietzsche's conception of the noble man has an irrational tint. The idea of the noble or higher man is combined with the marks of passion, striving for excellence, independence of any pre-established moral canons, autonomy from any coercive logic:

> ist die höhere Natur die *unvernünftigere* - denn der Edle, Grossmütige, Aufopfernde unterliegt in der Tat seinen Trieben, und in seinen besten Augenblicken *pausiert* seine Vernunft (FW 3)[45].

Those higher natures have set themselves against a "well-ordered society," since they "reawakened again and again the sense of comparison, of contradiction, of the pleasure in what is new, daring, untried; they compelled men to pit opinion against opinion, model against model"(GS 4). Aristocratic men, on the one hand, and a well-disciplined society, on the other, drive toward different ends: the ones toward the achievement of the highest goals they are entitled to; the other to providing all members with equal means, to creating a fair equilibrium among different individuals needs. A democratic society aims at the well-being of the majority and yields an indifferent leveling. The noble man and a well-balanced society exemplify, respectively, the rights of the *quality* against the power of the *quantity*. The *individuals* in the strong sense of the word, those "truly in-and-for-themselves" (GS 23) are irreconcilable with the tendency of the "herd." "Intellectual progress" depends on them only (HTH: 224).

Nietzsche's conception of progress is far different from the positivist kind of notion we are accustomed to. It has an explicit anti-Darwinist flavor. Indeed in Darwin's theory, the "struggle for existence" works, eventually, for the well-being of the whole species, in spite of the individuals. As such, in Nietzsche's sarcastic remark, it represents a restriction and an impoverishment of the "will to power which is the will of life" (GS 349). According to him, progress, when considered as the process

---

belongs to an earlier phase of his thought. It will be dealt with later in this chapter, in connection with the couple Apollonian-Dionysian.

[45] Eng. Trans: "the higher type is more unreasonable, for those who are noble, magnanimous, and self-sacrificial do succumb to their instincts, and when they are at their best, their reason pauses." (Kaufmann)

which brings advantage to the majority, to the society as a whole, generates uniformity. On the contrary, the "higher natures" extolled by Nietzsche are the individuals who are "more unrestricted, more uncertain and morally weaker" (HTH: 224). Their exceptional physical and psychological structure represents the failure of the striving for normality, the exception to the common program of progress, though it is to the strength and courage of those individuals that what is new and original is due.

In the eyes of Nietzsche the opposition between individual and society expresses the *original* distinction between "evil" and "good," with the two terms exchanged in role with respect to the common sense's understanding. Indeed while for ordinary people what is not integrated with the rest of social life "is always *evil*, being that which wants to conquer and overthrow the old boundary markers and the old pities; and only what is old is good" (GS 4), for Nietzsche *good* becomes what is *evil* for society. He overturns the instrumental interpretation in which *good* is whatever strengthens the social ties of a community, and *evil* what destroys them.

Thus strong individuals are antithetic to the laws of *ethics* too. Indeed any ethical canon is supposed to provide the *rhythm* for an ordered social life, the rules on which the cohesion and harmony of a community depend. As such it is despised by Nietzsche as a barrier to the emerging of the highest men:

> Mit der Moral wird der einzelne angeleitet, Funktion der Herde zu sein und nur als Funktion sich Wert zuzuschreiben. (FW 116)[46]

According to Nietzsche moral laws are instruments of coercion, and anyone advocating the need of stable moral laws reveals a "personal abjectness, impersonality." What better polemical target was there for Nietzsche than the "categorical imperative" of Kant? (GS 335).

[46] Eng. Trans.: "Morality trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function." (Kaufmann)

Nietzsche's corrosive criticism of the Kantian moral tenets has its roots in what might be called a *nominalistic* attitude toward the "self." In fact Nietzsche forcibly discredits the idea of a universal, Platonic sort of entity like "the human nature," thought of as the common substratum of numberless contingent replicas. There is no superindividual "self," but only different and non-repeatable selves. Therefore there cannot be a common ethical canon, or norms of "correct" behavior valid for everyone, like the "categorical imperative" of Kant is meant to be. The only admissible imperative is "create yourself," "become your unique possibility of being" (GS 335). Indeed Nietzsche does not deny the existence of a central unity, the so-called "self," in each human being. On the contrary, everything in them is so absolutely individual and unique, including their suffering, that it cannot be matched to anything else. Even in the deepest sorrow the self remains mysteriously inaccessible, "hidden from the neighbor" (GS 338). Any sentiment of Christian com-passion is metaphysically impracticable. The individual is the hero of Nietzsche's ethics. Against it rises society with its rules of life, representing all that is repeatable, leveling and coercive.

This conception allows us to frame the opposition between "individual" and "rules" as the opposition between the force of renewal and the power of stability (GS 296). Thus it surprisingly coincides with the results of the psychological and anthropological analyses highlighting the innovative nature of play.[47] Nietzsche's conception seems to lie completely on the side of "play," thus reinforcing the opposition between play and games with rules. Indeed the individual is the symbol of the continuous rejuvenating of the forms of life, of the uniqueness of being, of the denial of any prefixed model. The rule is instead the symbol of stability, of repetition of the old, of the weight of the past.

The next important opposition is the one between *individual* and *science.* Science, with its laws, tries to impose on nature a steady network of connections. Scientific knowledge is the reduction of chaos to order (GS 109). Compared to it, the domain of individual forces is the realm of freedom

[47] On this point see the Introduction page 14 above.

and creativity, that is the realm of art. Art helps human beings to distance themselves from the colorless reality and offers them the "childish and blissful....*freedom above things*" (GS 107). In this respect, art is like play:

> Wir sollen auch *über* der Moral stehen *können* [...] über ihr schweben und spielen! Wie könnten wir dazu der Kunst, wie des Narren entbehren?(FW 107)[48]

Art and play both open up a second level of reality; they *re*-produce it. Art, like play, is creative, whereas science describes a ready-made reality and discovers a "mechanical world," which is "an essentially *meaningless* world" (GS 373). This is what Nietzsche means when he says:

> Hätten wir nicht die Künste gutgeheißen und diese Art von Kultus des Unwahren erfunden: so wäre die Einsicht in die Allgemeine Unwahrheit und Verlogenheit, die uns jetzt durch die Wissenschaft gegeben wird - die Einsicht in den Wahn und Irrtum als in eine Bedingung des erkennenden und empfindenden Daseins -, gar nicht auszuhalten. [...] Nun aber hat unsere Redlichkeit eine Gegenmacht, die uns solchen Konsequenzen auswiechen hilft: die Kunst, als den *guten* Willen zum Scheine. (FW 107)[49]

The theme of "appearance" occurs frequently in Nietzsche's work, and in his hierarchy of values it acquires a positive meaning. "Appearance" is not discarded as being deceitful and not trustworthy, as synonymous with error. "Appearance" is form and beauty. It is no more a barrier to truth. Rather it is essential to it, the only truth we can deal with: "We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn" (GS, Preface: 4). A truth, without its "veils," would not be worth seeking because deprived of its appeal. Thus Nietzsche merges into the concept of truth the

---

[48] Eng. Trans.: "We should be *able* also to stand above morality [...] to *float* above it and *play*. How then could we possibly dispense with art - and with the fool?" (Kaufmann)

[49] Eng. Trans.: "If we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science - the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation - would be utterly unbearable. But now there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the *good* will to appearance." (Kaufmann)

concept of interest and attractiveness: this new value-loaded notion replaces the neutral and value-free notion of an objective truth. As I understand it, it is *appearance* which is the great "parody" of Nietzsche's book: the parody of truth and seriousness.

We can now see that the antithesis between individual and science is the same as the one between art and science. This, in turn, becomes the antithesis between *play* and *seriousness:* the truths of science "diminish *the capacity for joy*" by "making [man] colder, more like a statue, more stoic" (GS 12). Science is synonymous with seriousness, art with play[50], because artists arrest themselves at the level of forms and "play" lightly with them, without striving for the content behind them.

Artistic knowledge, as opposed to science, is a "gay science." The gay science is the joyful, playful metamorphosis of science, that overturns the fixed world of seriousness in order to discover in it new dimensions, to regenerate it in freedom. The "freedom above things," made available by the cult of appearances, is nothing but play: it is the freedom of the fool and the child. The ideal of gay science is "the ideal of a spirit who plays naively [...] with all that was hitherto called holy, good, untouchable, divine" (GS 382). Gay science is "amazement" in front of things. Choosing its standpoint amounts to accepting life, in all its contrasting appearances, as a positive and exciting fact. Seen through the lenses of gay science life turns into a play-phenomenon.

1.2 This joyful coupling of life and play is implicit also in the relationship that life has to history, a relationship that Nietzsche (in ADHL) examines with a bias towards its first element. "Life," taken as deep instinctual energy, is absolved of its main fault, forgetfulness. Indeed life's instincts are powerful just because they involve oblivion of the past. Animals possess those instincts in the purest form, being uncontaminated by memory of past events and by culture. Nietzsche extols their unconscious happiness, their being "enthralled by the moment" (ADHL: 8). Like children at *play* they

[50] In Perkins (1977) it is possible to find an exhaustive index of references for the association among the concepts of art, play and child in Nietzsche's works.

exhibit a blissful *unhistorical* way of living, blind to both past and future. Human beings, instead, are chained to their past by their power of remembering. Memory inhibits the freedom of their vital instincts.

Nietzsche's praise of an unhistorical way of living is not a censure of history altogether. Rather it is meant to serve as a stimulus to choosing a different attitude toward history. Nietzsche condemns the "inward culture" of his times which does not "visibly show itself in actions" (ADHL: 24) and which puts history on the same footing with science. Such a culture only wants to "understand, calculate, comprehend" things and events instead of accepting them as "sublime" and "unintellegible" (ADHL: 29). It transforms historical studies into a mere collection of facts. History as a science testifies to an "eternal non-subjectivity" (ADHL: 31). In the face of this, Nietzsche reminds us that "a fact is always stupid" (ADHL: 48). Facts need interpretation, which is a "plastic force" enabling human beings to embody past into their own present and mould it for their needs. According to Nietzsche the "historical sense" should be always sustained by the *unhistorical* horizon of life (ADHL: 10).

The contrast between history as a "science" of the past and history as a "knowledge" for the "live" present of mankind, called by Nietzsche (ADHL: 14) "*critical* kind of history," suggests an interesting parallel with the play-game coupling. Indeed, the first type of history resembles the structure of a game with rules. Rules have the function of preventing any subjective change. They grant exactly that "eternal non-subjectivity" that in Nietzsche's words characterizes historical erudition. They are also meant to lead players to an end and thus they even seem to imitate history in the "Hegelian way" (ADHL: 47) so much criticized by Nietzsche. Play instead shares some common traits with history meant as knowledge for life, which implies, on the contrary, an "eternal subjectivity." History in this sense is meant to be a spur to action, and action is an expression of the subject's power.

1.3 So far we have found in Nietzsche more than one suggestion for new and interesting interpretations of our subject. The amazement, the joy of appearance, the tendency to renewal are all features that enrich our original conception of play.

Before turning to the concluding remarks I would like to dwell shortly upon Nietzsche's notion of *consciousness*. His comments on this point are extremely helpful in understanding the fundamental, antithetic and agonistic character that life has for him. Once more the word opposed to "consciousness" is "individual:" the individual and his/her fully developed consciousness represent the opposite ends of Nietzsche's idea of life. Consciousness, for Nietzsche, does not belong to the individual sphere; rather it sharply contrasts with it. Consciousness is the result of the process of mirroring ourselves, through communication, with the outside world. The consciousness human beings finally gain is the knowledge of their self reached through a comparison with other beings. It is a social effect: "only as a social animal man acquired consciousness" (GS 354). Indeed, it is the need to communicate with other people that spurs human beings to find a common "measure," that is a proportion between their needs and feelings and other men's needs and feelings.

And Nietzsche is right in saying this. Communicating means that I want someone else to share an event or a thought with me. To reach this point I have to make myself understood: what I say and the way I act have to be such as to allow other persons to assign them the same sense I did. This sameness of sense is the common means with which we interpret reality. This search for a common means of expression induces in human beings an awareness of their thoughts, feelings and actions. In confronting themselves with an outer reality they come to perceive their being different from it; they realize there is a contrast between "inner" and "outer" regions of life. They become aware of themselves as being a *limit*, so to speak, between an inside and an outside. Before this distinction takes place, there exists an undifferentiated experience of being and doing. It is an experience without any form imposed on it: it is just living. However, it is this "animal" kind of life that represents the truest experience.

As an immediate consequence it follows that the only part of individual life available to consciousness is the non-individual one, the one that can adjust itself to this common means of expression. Paradoxically, as Nietzsche suggests, the maxim "know yourself" is impracticable: the act of self-knowledge misses its target in the very moment of its happening, and it is, in the deepest sense, contradictory. Knowledge is reduction to a common understanding for the sake of communication. The true self is, instead, incommunicable, and therefore non-reducible to any common measure. When it becomes object of knowledge, "when we translate [it] into the [language of] consciousness" it loses its uniqueness by becoming comparable to other selves[51].

This rather anti-Cartesian idea that "consciousness does not belong to the individual existence" casts new light on the topic of the present work. The radical break between the exclusive originality of the individual and the social nature of consciousness seems to preclude any way of bridging the gap between the two, unless the individual evades the authenticity of being. Brought to its extreme consequences, Nietzsche's conception seems to imply that the individual, in essence, is a sheer impossibility: s/he cannot exist but on condition of giving up the most original part of his/her own being. In the very moment consciousness emerges, individuality loses its true component, that is, incommunicability. This consequence is, at first, at variance with Nietzsche's overemphasizing the role of the best individuals and is defined by Miller (1981) as the "aporia of Nietzsche's strategy of deconstruction." The aporia inevitably arises from the application of an old language, the language of the *self*, to announce its annihilation, so that Nietzsche "must affirm the thing he means to deconstruct in order to deconstruct" (Miller, 1981: 260). However, it accounts, at the same time, for the radical agonistic quality of life. In Nietzsche's conception individuals never match each other. They are

[51] Language is the instrument of this self-knowledge: "the human being inventing signs is at the same time the human being who becomes even more keenly conscious of himself" (GS 354). In fact language allows us to subsume particular and individual experiences under a common denominator: by using the same words, we can, each, express our own senses. However, in being so conveyed under the same symbol, our experiences lose their original significance, while at the same time they become communicable.

separated by an unbridgeable gap, the one that divides incommensurable worlds. And incommensurable worlds can only be mutually exclusive and try to prevail over each other.

It is evident that the notion of "memory" entertained by Nietzsche, as a power that negatively contrasts with the instincts of renewal, matches the role of his concept of consciousness. Both memory and consciousness are obstacles to the development of the true part of life, that is instinctual energy. Indeed as consciousness rises through reporting our immediate experience to a common understanding, so human memory sets up a link between some present experience and a term of comparison, our past. However, according to Nietzsche, something goes lost in the attempt to compare the present to any past occurrence of events. Individual life is irremediably unique and exhausts itself in each of the timeless moments of present. It cannot be forced into any universal or eternal pattern, lest we should lose hold of its very uniqueness. The deepest individual events cannot be recaptured by us, either through memory or language. Thus we are left forever orphans of our own inwardness: inasmuch as we *are* unique and non-repeatable beings, we cannot *say* we are such. This sheer incompatibility of *being* and *saying* evokes the Wittgensteinean logical and ontological antithesis of *showing* and *saying*. In fact one of the theses of the ***Tractatus*** is that we cannot *say* anything about the logical form of language. This can only *show* through language itself. Likewise in Nietzsche's conception it is impossible to *be* the individual one is and at the same time to *say* one is so. Paraphrasing Wittgenstein, one's originality just *shows* outwardly. However, this parallel cannot be pushed too far. Indeed, the fact of *showing* something implies a correspondent understanding on the observer's side. We, speakers and receivers of a linguistic message, understand the logical form it *shows*. But in Nietzsche any kind of understanding -- that is, any kind of reduction to a common parameter -- seems to be precluded. Neither myself nor anyone else can *understand* my own individuality. The original self is forever hidden.

Against this background the antithesis between *aesthetics* and *individual* seems quite out of place. The contrast between the categories of Apollonian and Dionysian represents an exception to

the conception of "individual" just illustrated. The Apollonian deity is the image of the *principium individuationis* (GT), the source of form and appearance. As such it is also the image of measure, of reason. The individual, under the category of Apollonian, becomes the symbol of the rational power controlling destructive instincts and contrary impulses. On the other hand, the Dionysian is the symbol of "oneness" and wholeness as opposed to the principium individuationis. As a category it includes all the irrational forces of the human being. The Dyonisian energy blurs the borders between things and cancels their individual forms.

Thus Nietzsche holds a conception of the relation between aesthetics and individual different than the one sketched above. Indeed, he says:

> (D)er ganze Gegensatz [...] der des Subjektiven und des Objetiven, überhaupt in der Ästhetik ungehörig ist, da das Subjekt, das wollende und seine egoistischen Zwecke fördernde Individuum nur als Gegner, nicht als Ursprung der Kunst gedacht werden kann.(GT: 40)[52]

And later he adds that the will is "the unaesthetic-in itself." There is one way in which this apparently striking contradiction can be resolved, if we consider the early Apollonian category as the symbol of the individual become conscious of himself (in the Nietzschean terminology) and therefore become "measurable", "communicable." However art, under the Dionysian category, is still the expression of creativity, freedom, irrationality. Thus the antithesis between aesthetics and individual does not lead to a conception of art necessarily different from the one just illustrated.

1.4 Nietzsche's theory about the origin of consciousness is credible: there would be no need of awareness, were human beings condemned to live isolated. After all, becoming aware of ourselves really is "looking at [ourselves] in the mirror," that is recognizing ourselves as others, objectifying

[52] Eng. Trans.: "the antithesis between the subjective and the objective, is quite out of place in aesthetics, inasmuch as the subject, i.e., the desiring individual who furthers his own egoistic ends, can be conceived only as the adversary, not as the origin of art." (Haussmann)

our "self." However, this implies, to a certain extent, having already met or experienced "otherness." We form this category after we actually experience the presence of other people: human beings similar to us but different, i.e, others. Consciousness involves making ourselves, in a sense, *different from ourselves*, capable of becoming an object of knowledge.

However, I don't share Nietzsche's seemingly negative evaluation of the phenomenon of consciousness. Though intrinsically limiting, it is the only way we can know about ourselves and our individuality. It is the only way our "self" or a portion of it, can emerge as such. This very knowledge and self-consciousness is still a product of the individual, even if it is induced by the social surrounding. At least, it makes individuals aware of their deep incommunicability. Nietzsche's dramatic conception of the individual depends on his identifying it with the most irrational and instinctual forces.

Applied to the notion of play Nietzsche's philosophy of individuality produces an impasse. As we noticed, play is an individual function, but through the adoption of rules it takes on a typical social form. In its highest development it becomes a game with fixed rules. Given Nietzsche's conception of consciousness, how is a passage from the individual to the social sphere ever possible, if individuals lose their authentic being when they relate themselves to other individuals? There is no way to recover any meaning to our original hypothesis of a continuous link between the realm of individual existence and the one of social values.

Nietzsche seems to leave open two alternatives: either play does not belong to the individual sphere, as an activity with rules, or, if it is an individual matter, it is utterly incommunicable, and such that it cannot be shared. In fact, if play is a social activity defined by rules, there is no place in it for individual expression. Since rules would represent the "consciousness" of the play-activity, play would become an object of knowledge through them. Therefore individuals could take part in a game only if they adapted their own individuality to this common "consciousness"(e.g. rules): they could only play if they abandoned their individuality.

The second alternative would make us incapable of even talking about play.

Yet, no philosophy but Nietzsche's seems to fit better the idea of play: the play of "gay science". Nietzsche himself suggested this idea and often used the concept of play as distinctive feature of his conception of the "overman." In ***Thus Spoke Zarathustra*** the author, Zarathustra, says:

> Unschuld ist das Kind und Vergessen, ein Neubeginnen, ein Spiel, ein aus sich rollendes Rad, eine erste Bewegung, ein heiliges Ja/sagen. Ja, zum Spiele des Schaffens, meine Brüder, bedarf es eines heiligen Ja/sagens: *seinen* Willen will nun der Geist, *seine* Welt gewinnt sich der Weltverloren. (ASZ: 294)[53]

In this passage play is completely on the side of the individual, of the "will," and his power of creativity. His strength, the "yes," means the rejection of any restriction imposed by rules. His struggle against the laws of society, the laws of "Thou shalt," are a sign of his heroism. To be consistent with the previous interpretation, this notion of play is acceptable only insofar as it bars access to any rule, to any consciousness: play can be enacted, lived, but not understood.

Huizinga's rationalistic conception of play as a rule-bounded activity seems to be at loss in the context of Nietzsche's turmoil. In Huizinga the play-activity exhibits a remarkable aesthetic character, without being, nonetheless, totally disconnected from its social function. In Nietzsche, instead, play belongs to the individual sphere: it is synonymous with childhood, creativity, will, and therefore in antithesis with any socially shaped phenomena. Their divergence looks even greater if we read what Huizinga (1935) writes about the crisis of contemporary society, which is antithetical to Nietzsche's praise of instinctual life. There Huizinga reports the cause of that crisis to having substituted pure *being* -- which is "life" as Nietzsche conceives of it -- for *knowing*, whose primacy

[53] Eng. Trans.: "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the [play] of creation, my brothers, a sacred Yes is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world." (Kaufmann)

has been replaced by the cult of force and action.[54] European civilization has been corrupted by the irrational tendencies that pushed away *logos* and opened the way to *mythos*, that is by a vitalistic philosophy centered on the "will to power".[55]

All this is surprising, since we have seen Huizinga positively emphasizing Nietzsche's thought, and especially his re-enactment of agonism in philosophy. However, it confirms that Huizinga looks at the so-called agonistic component of play from a rationalistic point of view. Competition requires a long steady exercise through which players can show their best qualities in a game. It involves the respect of certain rules, and exercise contains a sort of planning about future results to be reached. On the contrary, Nietzsche's idea of the "overman" excludes any attempt to measure his qualities against someone else's qualities. The "overman" is absolute creativity, a winner since the beginning of his struggle. Thus agonism means striving against obstacles in order to destroy them, rather than a stimulus for the players to match their own "virtues" against somebody else's

As Perkins (1977) shows, in Nietzsche's writings there is abundant textual evidence of an internal kinship between aesthetics and play. To this aesthetic characterization I would like to add an ethical one. Indeed, the whole idea of "individual" plays a fundamental role in overthrowing any kind of moral credo centered on the well-being of society. Therefore play too, with its individualistic connotations, assumes an ethical as well as an aesthetic tint. And this happens because ethics itself has been absorbed by aesthetics: the true moral for Nietzsche is the moral of the hero, that is the free spirit, the creator.

1.5 Given that in Nietzsche a joyful and instinctual life has somewhat the aspect of play, it follows that play and memory lie on two opposite sides. Indeed, free play symbolizes the continuing search for new solutions, while memory has the task of retrieving constancies in time. And if we take

[54] See Huizinga (1935), chapter X.

[55] Ibid., chapters XIX and XX.

play to be synonymous with inventiveness, artistic inventiveness especially, that conclusion places itself at the opposite end of Gombrich's thesis about artwork creation. In fact, by emphasizing the role of schemata and rules in art, in a word of *tradition* -- which makes artwork similar to games -- Gombrich leaves little room to inventiveness, or, as Goodman (1978: 6) calls it, "absolute immediacy." In his rather Nietzschean-minded philosophy, Rorty (1990: 40) shares this thesis too, when he says that "it is hard to imagine a culture dominated by exuberant Nietzschean playfulness."

Truly enough, Gombrich's ideas are supported by the fact that memory occupies a large portion in our life, which is a fact admitted by Nietzsche too, though with regret. If we did not have any capacity of reminiscence, every act or thing we do or say would be isolated from the rest. Life would be a succession of disconnected point-like events. Memory, instead, sets up relationships among facts. By keeping trace of past events, it allows us to recognize what has already occurred and discriminate it from the new event. Indeed, something looks new when compared with what has already occurred, and if no instance of it can be retrieved in the past.

As a consequence of the importance of memory in life, it seems that play, meant as absolute freedom of action, cannot really exist, except as random movement, as art cannot exist without schemata. However some temporary and minimum *repeatable* pattern or scheme must be present. By this "minimum pattern" I mean a structure, even a loose one, which allows holistic identification of an event or action. For example, the most rule-free form of playing with a ball exhibits certain repeatable schematic moves, like bouncing, kicking, throwing the ball, in virtue of which we can say that they are an instances of ball-playing, though no strict constraints are present.

From Gombrich's and Nietzsche's examined books two interestingly different senses of history emerge. According to Gombrich, history, or rather tradition, is taken as the necessary starting point of artistic creativity. Schemata and rules handed down to the young generations are the indispensable medium through which feelings and ideas find expression. On the contrary, Nietzsche makes history into an adversary of the most original part of the self. Only that kind of history that

helps forgetfulness of the past as such is of advantage to life. This is the kind of history that turns into actions. Therefore, while for Gombrich, present is always burdened with past since past is its source and its condition, Nietzsche contests the past's priority over present and values it in function of the last one. It is the present which leads the past.

Another, quite different, conception of history is suggested by Eliot (1920: 49).[56] The "historical sense" gained by poets in their confronting themselves with tradition is "a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence", that is a perception of past as what permeates present with living energy. This attitude towards tradition generates an exchange between past and present. As Eliot emphasizes, "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (ibid.: 50). Thus past lives and only lives through the present and present itself helps creating tradition, in a sense. Present and past depend on each other.

2. Nietzsche's legacy.

2.1 With his playful glorification of "gay science" Nietzsche opens up a new path to philosophy. His is a philosophical attitude, advocating a proliferation of equally good theories of the world, in opposition to the view of the "unique and true picture of reality." The Nietzschean metaphor of a "veiled truth," a truth which is always value-loaded and only shines through its numberless shrouds, seems to prefigure the future developments of a *pluralistic* conception of science. Indeed, the step from assuming a concealed truth to admitting the existence of different but equivalent truths is short. In this respect Goodman, Feyerabend and Rorty all share with Nietzsche an anti-*monistic* trend. Actually they go even further than he did: they want to dispense with truth altogether, to leave us with its veils only. In Nietzsche's thought there is still room for values like "truth" and "self," though both these notions are not transparent anymore. When it can be reached, truth is nothing but

[56] For an analysis of Eliot's conception see page 46 above.

dull objectivity, which does not yield any good for life. Even a self exists for Nietzsche, and it is the cradle of one's own individuality and uniqueness, but it is hidden, incommunicable. The western myth of a universal nature that all men share has crumbled. Its place has been taken over by many incommensurable selves. Eventually, according to Nietzsche, what we are left with are "appearances," that is effects of a concealed cause. He does not consider this as a loss, however: it is through single appearances and effects that we suppose the existence of an underlying cause.

Goodman, Feyerabend and Rorty take the next step toward dissolving even this last residue of metaphysics still present in Nietzsche. Their common conclusion is that there are no substances such as "the truth" or "the self," but only "appearances," bundles of thoughts and emotions. The reduction of these bundles to and underlying unity is out of place. Those philosophers invite us to accept courageously the end of our past metaphysical illusions. Note, however, that they do not deny metaphysics a citizenship in this world. Metaphysics has simply lost its preeminence, its absoluteness: it is but one among equally admissible forms of thought.

As Goodman (1978) puts it, we are "confined to ways of describing whatever is described" (ibid.: 3). If we admit this, no *unique* and *neutral* stuff is left underneath, something like a *substance*. Indeed, there is no world outside our way of representing it. Worlds are made of just other worlds (ibid.: 6), as descriptions are made of other descriptions. There cannot be a "world undescribed, undepicted, unperceived" (ibid.: 4)., since whatever the world is, it can only show through our ways of portraying it. Among these ways there is none which is privileged, one to which all the others can, irectly or indirectly, be reduced: art-worlds or perception-worlds are no less important than physics-worlds (ibid.: 102). For Goodman the significance of a "non-trivial pluralism" is that "many different world-versions are of independent interest and importance, without any requirement or presumption of reducibility to a single base." (ibid.: 4) Its legitimacy implies that worlds are not "found," but "made." As Goodman (1976) has already said about "art languages," in "representing an object we do not copy [...] a construal or interpretation -- we *achieve* it" (ibid.: 9). A world is what comes out of

our relationship with the surrounding phenomena. This relationship is unbreakable into separate and isolable components like subject and object.

Within this framework, both truth and knowledge undergo a deep transfiguration: truth is no more conceived of as a "correspondence to the world," since there is no such independent "world," and knowledge is not a matter of finding the true description of "the world" (1978: 21). Worlds and versions of them are fashioned along with each other (ibid.: 6, 96) However, this "radical relativism," whose tenet is that everything has to be weighed according to a point of view, does not imply that "everything goes" (ibid.: 94), that all versions of the world are indistinguishably good. We can still tell "right" from "wrong" versions, where "rightness" is a "matter of fit with practice" (ibid.: 138) and what is a "good practice" depends upon "habit" (ibid.: 136).

Goodman often insists on these notions of "practice" and "habit." They help define reality in terms of what we are used to, that is the description we are familiar with. "Realism -- says Goodman (1976: 38) -- is a matter of habit", which means that we consider realistic the description or picture that better suits our usual way of describing and picturing objects and events. Sticking to habit does not exclude changes or progress. The switch from one version of the world to another in every field, be it pure science or painting or common sense, can be seen as a search for a better agreement with a given practice, prompted by many factors among which good luck is not the least important. Thus "successful," rather than "truthful," becomes the key predicate for interpreting theories: successful is the theory we are ready to accept because it fits well with the rest of our opinions and practices.

This notion of habit fills up the gap created by the fall of the metaphysical fallacies. It takes on the role that used to belong to the idea of a trans-theoretical world, that is the role of grounding a theory about the world. It becomes the point of reference against which the success of a theory has to be measured, though it is not an ultimate and definite kind of limit of our judgments. It is a "soft" sort of ground, liable to change depending on the change of some other variables. Habit constitutes a *foundation* for the subject, rather than for a theory.

2.2 The decline of the myth of the absolute truth leaves the way free to values of different sort against which one can judge the goodness of a theory. Those new values are values like rightness, simplicity, coherence. Even more than Goodman, Feyerabend (1975: 63) insists on the "ideological" character of facts, and points out that taking facts as theory-unladen is a false stance. Therefore, according to him, the switch from one to another conception of the world (as it happened when the Copernican cosmology replaced the Aristotelian one) is not a matter of finding a better adherence to some newly discovered data, but the choice of a totally different practice, to which "non-scientific" components are not extraneous. In Feyerabend's defense of *pluralism*, not only is *objective reality* decentralized in favor of innumerable self-standing world-views, but also the universal *reason* of Descartes and Kant surrenders to a plurality of "reasons." Reason's uniqueness and absoluteness are abandoned in favor of variety and relativity.

In his inquiry about the reasons of the scientific development Feyerabend wants to take into account the procedures *really* used by researchers in their time and weigh them against the logical notion of methodology as it has been ideally "reconstructed" by philosophers of science. In choosing this direction of research Feyerabend intends to ignore the distinction between "context of discovery" and "context of justification" - which include, respectively, the psycho-sociological circumstances in which a discovery happens to be made and the rational testing of a scientific hypothesis independently of those circumstances. He wonders whether science can make any real progress apart from a close interaction between those two domains (ibid.: 153). Indeed many disparate elements contribute to determining the life of a scientific theory, among which psychological and political factors are not the least important (ibid.: 119), as the case of Galileo shows (ibid.: 72-5). History has always had influence on science, though the long established Western rationalism has tried to conceal this fact: "there is no escape from history [...], though there exist powerful mechanisms creating the illusion of such an escape." (Feyerabend, 1987: 111)

Feyerabend also aims to blur the borderlines of a rigid distinction between "rules" and "practice," where the former define an ordered and rational methodology and the latter indicates the activity performed following those rules. He has in mind "a new *relation* between rules and practices" (Feyerabend, 1975: 249), one in which there is no dominant exclusive role of either reason or practice. Indeed the classical reason which has sought unity and the absolute truth in science, is not above history. Rather it is deeply involved in and molded by it. It is nothing but a kind of "practice" among others, or, as Feyerabend (1987: 60) says, it is a "tradition among many," and like all traditions, it is backed up by values, personal biases and habits.

All this means that the so-called "objectivism" of Western thought is not, in itself, an *objective* choice (1987: 297). Though the "rise of rationalism" in ancient Greece is at the basis of the development of modern science and thus responsible for the introduction of the reality/appearance (or unity/plurality) dichotomy, that rise has only introduced "a special kind of order," and not just *order* over *chaos* (ibid.: 118). Prior to this form of rationalism and opposite to it, the Homeric tradition used to identify knowledge with a collection of different and particular experiences, namely with a πολυμαθ_η (1987: 112; 1975: 207). These two opposite kinds of tradition are, respectively, the *theoretical* and *historical* approaches (1987: 118).

In Feyerabend's view, the act of dethroning reason from the privileged position it has always had in our culture is exactly the meaning of "anarchism" in science. Anarchists recognize that knowledge is not a linear progress toward a final end, but is "*an ocean of mutually incompatible (and perhaps even incommensurable) alternatives*" (1975: 21), which include myth, religions and magic practices. All these represent different but equally meaningful "traditions." Nothing is so special about "science," except its having been adopted as the main research method in western culture (ibid.: 258). Reason has rather to be thought of as a "guide who is part of the activity guided and is changed by it" (ibid.: 250).

For Feyerabend the defense of "anarchism" is the defense of a humanitarian attitude, one that favors the growth of free individuals (ibid.: 12 and 32), i.e. beings who *can* make choices among all the alternatives they face. And the "society in which all traditions are given equal rights" is "a free society" (ibid.: 246). On the contrary a culture that grants an exclusive privilege to the uniformity of the scientific method is a culture that levels off its members and prevents them from developing original solutions to the problems of life. In his concern for the rights of humanity Feyerabend even echoes Nietzsche's ideas about individuality and consciousness: "each individual has features inaccessible to even the most comprehensive collection of laws - how else would people recognize each other as being different?" (1987: 122).

2.3 Here the phenomenon of "play" is again the symbol of freedom, disentanglement from rules. Anarchism is indeed the mark of a *playful* culture, which, like the Nietzschean "gay science," chooses variety over uniformity. The Nietzschean inheritance of Feyerabend shows through his conception of alternative world-views as theories "competing" with each other and so contributing all together to the "development of consciousness" (1975: 21). Feyerabend's saying that science, that is the western rationalistic form of knowledge, is only one among numerous forms of knowledge, amounts to saying that the epistemological competition is always open, that there is no prevailing form of truth. It is this endless competition among incompatible alternatives that keeps alive the *game of knowledge*. Playing is indeed acknowledged by the author as what gives origin to theories and world views:

> (T)he actual development of institutions, ideas, practices, and so on, often *does not start from a problem* but rather from some extraneous activity, such as playing, which, as a side effect, leads to developments which later on can be interpreted as solutions to unrealized problems. (Feyerabend, 1975: 160)

Thus playing is seen by Feyerabend as a model of behavior which is the opposite of a behavior based on reason and fixed rules. It is the opposite of planning: the one who starts playing

does not have in mind a precise goal to attain, neither does s/he follow a predetermined path to reach an end. Developing "ideas" and "practices" through play means that, in solving a problem, for example, we cannot distinguish, beforehand, between *what* is to be done and *how* it is to be done. Objects and means are defined only as we go along. What we have is a whole from which, slowly, we unravel the many threads[57]. Playing is not therefore guided by reason, that is, by a set of rules defined independently of their several applications, since there is no predetermined distinction between rules and actions. Games, instead, are. Games contain sets of instructions which guide the moves in them.

Feyerabend says that the scientist's work possesses the features of play rather than of a game, so emphasizing his/her character of creator, "sculptor of reality" (1975: 270), rather than of simple discoverer. Like Goodman, he likens science to art in order to show that, in art as well in scientific theories, there are no "neutral objects which can be represented in any style" (Feyerabend, 1975: 176). Styles are as *incommensurable* as scientific theories.

Using play as a standard for science, however, does not mean that all rules should be forgotten or that "we should proceed without rules and standards" (ibid.: 249). Instead, we should favor a natural development of science, on the model of the development of children's skills. These skills, like language, perception and logic, develop by "*physical repetition*," that is by re-applying unanalyzed forms of behavior, rather than by breaking something up in component parts, as learning by "*arguments*" would require (ibid.: 15). According to Feyerabend adulthood does not drastically alter this picture: the same *natural* process goes on in mature scientific research, no matter how big is the effort to reduce it to a purely logical, rule bound, a-historical form of activity (ibid.:16).

---

[57] Feyerabend draws an interesting parallel between children's and scientists' activities: "as a child who starts using words without yet understanding them, who adds more and more uncomprehended linguistic fragments to his playful activity, discovers the sense-giving principle only *after* he has been active in this way for a long time [...] in the very same way the inventor of a new world view [...] must be able to talk nonsense until the amount of nonsense created by him and his friends is big enough to give sense to all its parts." (Feyerabend, 1975: 203)

2.4 Rorty (1989) amplifies this picture of a *playful* culture, for whose acknowledgment Goodman and Feyerabend strongly argued. His *playful* project is to change the whole culture, and not only knowledge and scientific language in general, back into a big "contest," an open and free fight which does not conceal any "metaphysical urge." This is the urge of discovering the essences lying behind language, for the metaphysician "assumes that the presence of a term in his own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which *has* a real essence" (ibid.: 74). It is therefore the need to unveil a solid reality which grounds and justifies the search for the "right" or "true" picture of the world.

In Rorty's description this contest takes place among different "vocabularies," that is among different and often incommensurable ways of phrasing the facts of the world. And this is also what philosophy really amounts to, that is to an attempt to work out the temporarily best vocabulary. "Interesting philosophy", Rorty (ibid.: 9) says, is "a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things". Similarly, Feyerabend (1975: 202) says that "one must learn to argue with unexplained terms and to use sentences for which no clear rules of usage are as yet available." Both Feyerabend and Rorty suggest that "scientific revolutions" are due to and grow along with the attempt to establish a different and new way of describing things. It is a different, if only tentative language, that makes people "see" new facts. For Rorty, as well as for Feyerabend, philosophy and culture in general exhibit a playful character of a Nietzschean competitive sort.

Rorty acknowledges explicitly Nietzsche's "spirit of playfulness," and describes it as "the ability to appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important" (Rorty, 1989: 39). In Rorty's philosophy this playfulness has the name of "irony." "Ironists" are individuals convinced of the contingency of world-views, language and culture, since they disclaim the existence of an "intrinsic nature" for everything (ibid.: 74). Ironists

know that, in the absence of a universal language which is above the contingent historical languages,[58] the only justifiable moves are the ones made within language. Those moves are called "redescriptions." To redescribe means to transfer into one's own vocabulary events, ideas, emotions. In a word, redescribing means to rephrase other's vocabularies into our own, to switch from some *described* events and ideas to other *described* events and ideas. Understanding the past, as well as people having different ideas, is a matter of "playing off" the new or unfamiliar vocabularies against the old and familiar ones (ibid.: 73). The hope to find a universal measure against which we can judge the goodness or wrongness of world-views is vain. We are left with accepting this non-reducible plurality and contingency. In our history there are just vocabularies confronting each other. We can choose our own, but with no claim to absoluteness. Ironists simply accept as inevitable having continuous doubts about vocabularies.

Those vocabularies are all "final" since their users have "no noncircular argumentative recourse" (ibid.: 73). They lack the support of a hard-wired reality which grounds their claims. None of these alternative vocabularies ultimately rests onto non-linguistic basis. Choosing a vocabulary is not a matter of relying on well defined "criteria," that is norms which infallibly pick out the exact referents of words. Criteria are the illusory weapons of a lost metaphysical battle. The use of them would presuppose the existence of essences, and represent "the temptation to think of the world, or the human self, as possessing an intrinsic nature" (ibid.: 6). Rather the change of language is a matter of historical "contingencies" (ibid.: 16) and "habit" (ibid.: 5-6), of being used to certain traditional descriptions. Language is a "social practice," which we are steeped in since we are born and which we cannot change by consciously adopting a different set of rules (e.g. criteria), but only by switching to another practice. Indeed the world is "indifferent" to choices, since the world itself does not speak

[58] By these "contingent vocabularies" Rorty means the ways of speaking and reasoning that different cultures and periods of time, or even people with different upbringing, have.

any language (ibid.: 7). Worlds and languages -- as already shown by Goodman -- are made along with each other.

Rorty's insistence on final vocabularies as the only available ones, characterizes itself as a clear Wittgensteinean stance. Indeed the idea of a "final vocabulary" echoes the ***Investigations***' criticism of a theory of meaning grounded on things and essences, rather than on linguistic use, as well as its rejection of the old-fashioned metaphysical notion of essence. "*Essence* -- says Wittgenstein -- is expressed by grammar." (PI 371).

Rorty mentions several times Wittgenstein's conception of language as a "tool". In order to be a tool a word has to be *used* in a certain way. It can be used *to do* certain things and to achieve certain goals. But words -- says Rorty -- are tools of a very specific sort: in creating new vocabularies we do use words we are unfamiliar with as tools, but without knowing in advance what kind of language we will end up building: "by contrast, the creation of a new form of cultural life, a new vocabulary, will have its utility explained only retrospectively. [...] For there are as yet no clearly formulatable ends to which it is a means" (Rorty, 1989: 55). Developing a new form of speech (like the Galilean vocabulary was with respect to the Aristotelian one) is not a separate act from devising a purpose for it: a new vocabulary is "a tool for doing something which could not have been envisaged prior to the development of a particular set of descriptions" (ibid.: 13).

This *creative* use of language, as a symbolic instrument that grows along with its end, is emphasized by Feyerabend (1987: 203) and Goodman (1978: 6, 96) as well. Considering language as a means we shape along with the world also reminds one of that "sickness of words" so much deplored by Nietzsche (ADHL: 94). This is the disease which affects a culture loaded with too many concepts, that is a culture which does not leave anything "not rubber-stamped with words." In modern terms this would be a criteria-ruled culture. According to Nietzsche this naming constraint injures life in its core, since it makes people suspicious of feelings and emotions which do not have a name yet, and therefore not yet embodied by the old culture. Thus with a strategy apparently divergent,

Nietzsche aims at the same point Rorty, Feyerabend and Goodman do, that is, to break with the traditional picture of language as a means to systematize and pigeonhole already discovered data. He does this in the name of "life," that is by putting life over and above language: life is too rich to be crystallized in names. The other philosophers, Rorty in particular, do that in the name of language itself: it is language which shapes worlds and selves, without just being a medium for "representing" the first and "expressing" the second (Rorty, 1989: 10-1).

In general, Rorty's account is more radical than the one of Feyerabend and Goodman: he not only dismantles traditional realistic ontologies and epistemologies, but he distrusts metaphysical approaches to psychology as well. He denies the existence of an entity called "the self" and disavows the idea of a "human nature" as a common, universal substratum. He praises Freud for having helped us "de-divinize the self by tracking conscience home to its origin in the contingencies of our upbringing" (ibid: 30). Rorty thus abandons a description of ourselves as beings having a central and Platonic sort of unity in favor of a description of our "selves" as transient outcomes of some historical accidents.

In his rather Humean-like standpoint Rorty maintains that we are nothing but "webs of belief and desire" (1989: 84), that is collections of interrelated opinions and emotions, which expand and modify in their encounters with other such webs, without presupposing a convergence on any deeper stuff. Expanding them so as to include more and more people in the number of those we consider as our "human fellows" and thus increasing the exchanges with different webs is the only kind of "solidarity" we can practice, once we give up the notion of what is *essentially* human (ibid.: 192). Solidarity is a matter of *widening* our historical experience and not *reducing* different experiences to a common denominator. This kind of solidarity provides the basis of social life.

Rorty's denial of a universal nature all human beings participate into, owes a great deal to Nietzsche's extolling the individual nature as a totally unique stuff. Rorty interprets positively Nietzsche's stated non-attainability of the original self through a common language, as the need to

build "self-knowledge." "Self-knowledge," in Rorty's terms, is a process of "self-creation" (Rorty, 1989: 27). Knowing oneself amounts to creating one's own peculiar vocabulary, realizing one's own absolutely special destiny.

Through the contrast between a "literal language" and "poetical language" Rorty (ibid.: 27-8) recasts in the most captivating way Nietzsche's conception of individuality. The need to safeguard one's depth from consciousness, which is inescapably social, is converted by Rorty into the task everybody has to mold him\herself. This is the duty to create one's own "idiosyncratic language," one's own exclusive description, in order to keep out other people's descriptions of oneself. These "other" descriptions would be inevitably framed in a language extraneous to us. They would tell our story in an alien language. In that case we would "fail as poets." And to fail as a poet "and thus, for Nietzsche, to fail as a human being -- is to accept somebody else's description of oneself, to execute a previously prepared program" (ibid. : 28).

Had Rorty stopped at this point in his analysis, it would seem that Nietzsche's philosophical proposal, as he reinterprets it, is just antithetical to Wittgenstein's rejection of a "private language," taken as the personal and incommensurable means to grasp our inner life[59]. However, Rorty himself acknowledges the non-feasibility of the Nietzschean project: "there can be no fully Nietzschean life" (Rorty, 1989: 42) since any new description has to rest on an already given description, and it cannot avoid being "parasitic." And this is so because of the communicative goal of language:

> A language which was "all metaphor" would be a language which had no use, hence not a language but just babble. For even if we agree that languages are not media of representation or expression, they will remain media of communication, tools for social interaction, ways of tying oneself up with other human beings. (Rorty 1989: 41)

Is this, for Rorty, a falling back on his steps? Probably not. Rorty's idea of a "final vocabulary" that each of us should gain, is meant to be a reminder of our just being historical events. It is an

[59] See below, page 168 ff, for a parallel between Nietzsche's conception of consciousness and Wittgenstein's "private language" argument.

invitation to accept the loss of metaphysical foundations. As historical accidents we are unique but still tied to a chain of other similar accidents. What is common is not a Platonic sort of essence, e.g., humanity, but our belonging to that chain. We cannot give up striving for our own description, though this can be "only marginally" our own.

We can go even farther than Rorty did, and say that there cannot be any "Nietzschean lives" at all. Self-creation or self-description is either total or it is no creation at all. We cannot "create" ourselves only marginally. If language is a common means of communication, we can only adapt to it, so that the description of our self is irremediably contaminated by other's description of it, for they are phrased in a language we use in common. Idiosyncratic descriptions are growths out of the same linguistic code and bear, in the end, the same impress. More coherent is Nietzsche then when he denies a way out of his impasse. The self is forever hidden. In this respect his and Wittgenstein's conception are much closer than one would think. The main difference is that Wittgenstein devises an argument to the effect that meaning is a linguistic fact, and not a mental one, whereas Nietzsche's unattainable self is the unwanted, but inevitable consequence of the centrality of that very self.[60]

2.5 Among the components of Rorty's theory "contingency" and "ironism" well apply to *play.* Play does not have fixed goals to reach and one of its distinctive marks is continuous renewal. That is to say that play too, in its extreme form, is a matter of accidents, of the actions and moves we happen to conceive of at the moment, free as it is of external constraints. And insofar as ironism is "inherently a private matter" (ibid.: 87) it seems to be a property of *play* as opposed to *games*. Indeed play, taken as synonymous with individual freedom, is a strictly private form of behavior that lives on its temporariness, willing to be "re-described" all the time. Play is ironical *par excellence. Games*,

[60] A more detailed comparison between Nietzsche's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of this point is postponed to the end of Chapter Five.

instead, have steady grounds, and their moves are sometimes rigidly interrelated. This way of dividing private ironism from public solidarity is tantamount to splitting play and games.

2.6 The acknowledgement of an irreducible plurality of languages and practices has a evident complement in "the thought of *différance"* thrust by Derrida against the language of Western metaphysics, that Derrida of whom Rorty (1989: 125) says that he "turns everything into private jokes." By denying *différance* the status of a "word" or a "concept" Derrida (1982) intends to prevent "the value of presence" from intruding philosophy any longer. This is the value established by the metaphysics of "Being," which has governed Western minds from the times of ancient Greek philosophy onward (ibid.: 22). The value of "presence" underlying our metaphysical language has allowed us to say things like "something *is*" or "something *exists*," thus reassuring us about its positive reality. "Presence" as *"ousia*" or "*parousia*," has granted us an absolute "origin" behind all transformations of life (ibid.: 9). On the contrary, what the thought of *différance* wants to do is putting into question "the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility" (ibid.: 6) and directing its attention to the "play of differences" (ibid.: 11).

These differences are, first of all, semiological differences. Referring to Saussure, who established on a firm basis the "principle of difference" in semiology, Derrida describes his *différance* as "the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted `hystorically' as a weave of differences" (Derrida, 1982: 12). The "play of *différance*" is what produces the differences between signs, denying signs any isolated meaning and only leaving them the meaning that they can acquire in relation to each other within a system. The resulting picture, as Murdoch (1992: 185) says, is the one of "the individual submerged in language." Therefore *différance* only exists in the differences it produces, and not as a pre-existing simple source of them (ibid.: 11). In the old language of metaphysics "*différance* is not" (ibid.: 21). Ontologically speaking,

différance is, for Derrida, "the play of the trace" which "transports and encloses the meaning of Being" (ibid.: 22).

In this Derridian context the concept of play is associated with the concept/non-concept of difference just because it conveys a sense of a movement that never rests on a beginning or an end. It is the passage from-to, it is the *existing-in-between*. The concept of play indeed suggests a lack of permanence, and thus it is the most appropriate one to voice Derrida's aversion to the metaphysics of presence. As Hans (1981: 10) puts it, Derrida "removes the notion of play from any metaphysical underpinnings." According to this comment, Derrida emphasizes to its maximum degree the notion of play as a totally unconstrained movement. Derrida's thought of *différance*, however, is also play in another more common sense, since it has liberated itself from "the seriousness of metaphysics," and "from the nostalgia for presence" (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1990:130). On the other hand, this metaphysics, which, in Derridian terms, is the cradle of Western "logocentrism," seems to be the one where the notion of "games" properly belong. Games have an identifiable structure, and as such they manifest a "presence."

CHAPTER FOUR

"STATESMAN" THROUGH PLAY.

1. The notion of play, which is synonymous with freedom-from-constraints in the Nietzschean kind of philosophies just examined, is employed toward a different goal in a classic type of philosophy like Plato's. Plato and Nietzsche are two rather antithetical thinkers. Where the one praises uniformity and order, the other celebrates the uniqueness of what is individual. As an example of this radical diversity take their opposite conceptions of "state." In ***Also Sprach Zarathustra*** Nietzsche says:

> Sprachverwirrung des Guten und Bösen: dieses Zeichen gebe ich euch als Zeichen des Staates [...] Viel zu viele werden geboren: für die Überflüssigen ward der Staat erfunden! [...] Staat, wo der langsam Selbstmord aller - "das Leben" heisst [...] Dort, wo der Staat *aufhört* - so seht mir doch hin, meine Brüder! Seht ihr ihn nicht, den Regenbogen und die Brücken des Übermenschen? (ASZ: 314-5)[61]

What Nietzsche says here is that (1) within the state there is no possibility of developing an *ethical* life, (2) the state is the place for the worthless multiplicity, (3) only outside the state can you find the highest natures, the individuals who are the measure of all things: beyond the state shines" the rainbow of the overman." The true ethical life for Nietzsche is the one of the overman, and for him the state represents a restraint for the growth of his spirit. The good and the evil pursued by a state are assessed with respect to the well-being of the whole community. *Good* is what is good for the community and evil what is evil for it. But for the overman there are no *communal* ethical measures. His high nature is the only measure.

According to Plato, on the other hand, the state is the opposite of what Nietzsche's picture evokes. The state is the supreme ethical entity, it is unity reached through the harmonious coordination of the many, and it is the ultimate reality where human beings can fulfil their needs and desires[62].

---

[61] Eng. Trans.: "Confusion of tongues of good and evil: this sign I give you as the sign of the state. [...] All-too-many are born: for the superfluous the state was invented[...]where the slow suicide of all is called "life" [...]Where the state *ends* - look there, my brothers! Do you not see it, the rainbow and the bridges of the overman?" (Kaufmann)

[62] This parallel, however, must take into account a historical circumstance: the kind of institution to which Nietzsche is addressing his derogatory remarks is the Prussian military state (see GS 104). In the light of

Plato's conception reflects the system of values of his times, when an individual was considered primarily as a citizen of his city-state. Thus good and evil according to him are what contributes to the growth of a peaceful state, that is, a state where each is granted his/her own role.

This comparison highlights, by way of contrast, the conceptual nodes in Plato's philosophy which are important for the present work. It brings to light Plato's idea of order (which means restriction and compulsion for Nietzsche). This idea is equivalent to the one of "proportionate *system*" -- whose typical instance is represented by music.

In the philosophy of Plato there is deep-lying relationship between the concept of order and the concept of good, which gives the former its special ontological role. In the Book VI of ***The Republic*** (507a-509d) Plato sets forth an argument, which has become very famous, in order to show the oneness of the universal concept of Good. His argument is a reasoning by analogy, as most of the arguments in his dialogues, and it goes roughly as follows:

As the sun empowers the eyes with the *power of sight* and the sensible objects with the *power of being seen*

so the "idea of the good" empowers the soul with the *power of knowledge* and the things that *are* with the *power of being known*.

In this analogy *light* is to *truth* what *the sun* is to the *idea of the good*: both light and truth are the properties by means of which what exists can be revealed. Light reveals physical existence, truth reveals "real" existence, i.e., "being." It follows that as the only things that I can see are the ones illuminated by light, so the only things that I can know are the ones *illuminated* by truth. Indeed, knowledge is a form of seeing (R: 518c -519b). In this view truth is a presupposition of the correspondence between *knowledge* and the *known* world (as light is a presupposition of the

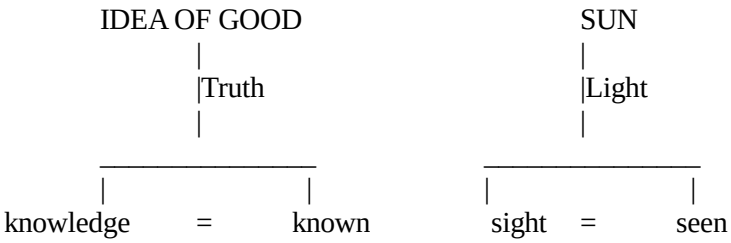
---

this Nietzsche's pervading criticism is an understandable reaction against the spiritual and political tyranny of such a political structure.

correspondence between sight and the seen world). If there were no truth, no agreement between these two terms could be granted.

In Plato's view truth is not only an ontologic principle, but rather a *good* principle, the best one. And if the notion of good enters into the definition of truth, then truth is not the ultimate, in the sense of most fundamental, concept. Rather, the Good is such a concept.

The following diagram might help us to "visualize" the content of the given analogy and understand the functional and existential parallelism between truth and light:



The "idea of the Good" is the root of being. It is the center of the *system* of being on which all existing things converge. In this way it engenders the *order* of the universe.

Since the "idea of the Good" is mainly an ethical concept, being in Plato's philosophy has, ultimately, an ethical quality. This ethical quality shows itself, above all, as a *formal* feature: "good" is whatever fits into the network of the relations of being. At this level, therefore, the concepts of "system" and "order" are interchangeable with the concept of "good." Only what exhibits order is good, and, vice versa, only what is good possesses order. Being, for Plato, is order and good.

This ideal of Good exhibits also an intrinsic aesthetic value: it is the ideal of καλ_ς κα_ αγαθοϛ (kalós kaì agathòs), of the "good and graceful," which is typical of all the classical Greek culture. What is good has to be pursued, rather than what is bad, because it is beautiful and invests its recipient with a particular quality, *grace*. Good can give the same kind of delight that works of art

can: it can be enjoyed for no other reasons but the disinterested pleasure arising from it. According to Plato this union of good and beauty should pervade all human activities.

The relationship between good, order and beauty has a fundamental impact on education. We can find this explained especially in ***The Laws***, the work in which Plato is mostly concerned with education. It is exactly in the field of education that the notion of "play" finds its creative location. The right kinds of play highly contribute to the forming of good citizens. Therefore play, through education, takes on an essential role in the life of the state. It helps bringing about the best-possible political constitution,[63] in which all "parts" of goodness, that is all kinds of virtue, are fully and harmoniously developed (L: iv, 705e).

The "idea of the Good", the model of "goodness", is still, in ***The Laws***, as it was in **The *Republic***, an abstract intellectualistic notion: there is only *one*, *absolute* good, and all the things and human activities can be said "good" insofar as they share in that universal notion. For example, musical performances, like "singing well" and "dancing well", can be called "good" only if they exhibit a content of proportion and harmony, which is a reflection of the universal concept of Good (L: ii, 654c). This participation of all the good things and activities in the unique Good generates the internal tie of being, the symmetrical correspondence between its parts.

Music is the ideal instance of what "good" means, since it provides the best paradigm of an "harmonious beauty". As such it has also an important function in having human beings achieve the highest goals of education. Its influence is essential in shaping men and women in accordance with the love of order (R: 401-403). In this respect music is very close to play: they both bring about the "discipline of pleasures" necessary for the realization of an ordered life in the state.

Plato defines education as

---

[63] In describing the "second-best state", Plato takes into account the concrete historical reality of men and women. This state and is the closest to the one depicted in ***The Republic*** which remains the ideal state (L: v, 739). Indeed as Jaeger (1944: 336, n.6) comments, "the distinction between the two books is not in their philosophical ideals, but in the difference between the levels of paideia which they assume."

> that schooling from boyhood in goodness which inspires the recipient with passionate and ardent desire to become a perfect citizen, knowing both how to wield and how to submit to righteous rule. (L: i, 644)

The Platonic concept of education has a unmistakable political content. Its aim is to shape children's mind in such a way as to make them ready to live in an ordered and just society.[64] Plato's faith in the power of education is so deep that he actually deems it the only enterprise that can bring about an ordered and just polis. His faith is grounded in his intellectualist ethics: the necessary and sufficient condition to live well is to know what "good" is.

The task of education is to have children develop the knowledge of the good since the early stages of their childhood. In that stage education can mold their mind profoundly:

> By education, then, I mean goodness in the form in which it is first acquired by a child. In fact, if pleasure and liking, pain and dislike, are formed in the soul on right lines before the age of understanding is reached, and when that age is attained, these feelings are in concord with understanding, thanks to early discipline in appropriate habits - this concord, regarded as a whole is virtue. (L: ii, 653)

In several places of the book Plato emphasizes the importance of "habit" in education. "Habit," the "habit" of goodness, is the result of a continuous training in the practice of the right values, it is the *form* of behavior human beings adjust to in the process of education. Practice, "long-life visible practice," is, indeed, the best tool of educators (L: vii, 729).

What is special about the Platonic conception of habit is its relationship with play. Through the playing of the same games human beings can shape their character and be *naturally* prepared to take the place that best suits them in society. This means that by the time children become adult they will be able to play their role in society as if this role were part of their nature, that is, as a habit. The most important habit, though, is the habit of "graciousness." This graciousness is the quality belonging to human beings who have made balance of manners, love of beauty and pursue of reason a part of

[64] "Political", in Plato's times, is anything pertaining to the well-being of the πόλις (polis).

their nature. Only men who have reached this habit, which is "the intermediate condition" of life between pains and pleasures (L: vii, 792), can be good statesmen. They are the best educated men, that is the ones who *played* best in their childhood. The men who played best are the ones who played the good games which inspire the values of justice, moderation, mastery of the evil impulses.

Therefore, play, for Plato, holds a central role in education. It favors the development, in the child, of the *natural* qualities necessary to the functions s/he is going to perform in adult life. Plato says:

> I proceed at once to say that he who is to be good at anything as a man must practice that thing from early childhood, in play as well as in earnest [...]. Thus if a boy is to be a good farmer, or again, a good builder, he should play, in the one case at building toy houses, in the other at farming [...]. (W)e should seek to use games as a means of directing children's tastes and inclinations towards the station they are themselves to fill when adult. (L: i, 643)

Within this teleological conception the role of play is to help children to "conform" to the right model of life prescribed by the laws, which take those natures into account.

In his conception of education Plato has surely hit upon a very important point, and that is the need of acting on the children's mind through positive influences. And his emphasis on play, I think, anticipates a modern educational concept, since it is meant to highlight the greater effectiveness, in education, of examples over impositions. Indeed his "good games" are but examples of the good life, of the way a good life should be conducted. Examples act on human nature more slowly, but more in profundity than any external restriction. And he is right in attributing play this shaping power, because, in childhood, play can exert its influence on a human nature which is yet unformed. Play can do this better that any another method because of the pleasure it offers to children.

However, I think that, though this general part of Plato's conception can be maintained as valid, his notion of "natural" can be dismissed as just a product of his times which is totally extraneous to our idea of democracy. In his view, the *natural* conditions coincide with the social ones. According

to him, in society each one has, since birth, a function to perform, which differs depending on the class s/he belongs to. If that function is well accomplished, the perfection of the whole society will automatically ensue. Play activities are instrumental to politics, since they make this accomplishment easy, by creating the habit suitable for that function.

I do not think that this concept of "natural" has any justification other than Plato's historical background, and thus can be easily dismissed. He built his theory of education on this accepted dogma of the identity between nature and social position. And this saved him from the task of investigating into the concept of nature. Outside of any pre-established conception, drawing the limits of what is natural is very difficult. I do not believe in the possibility of uncovering the real *nature* of an individual, in the sense of describing his/her own *original* character independently of the external influences that have played on it. Surely, these influences act on some original layer, but the identity of this layer is difficult to disentangle from the effects produced on it by external influences coming from family and society.

On the basis of a concept of natural freed from the historical conditioning of Plato's time, modern pedagogic methods seem to recommend the strategy opposite to the one he adopted: play is still considered a very useful tool, but in the sense that it helps educators discovering the *natural* -- i.e., strictly individual -- talents of children, which education should therefore strengthen. Plato says that in play-activities frequent changes should be banished because they could modify children's opinions about what is good and what is bad, and so alter their moral assessment of things (L: vii, 797b). Stability is what is needed in order to secure the healthy life of a community. And since play is a preparation for adult life in the state, it must prefer stability.

Play is not only praised by Plato for its instrumental value in education. Play is the highest paradigm against which we can judge human life. It is this paradigm that Huizinga (1938) uses to show the sacrality of play and its affinity with the sacred rituals. As he says, "the Platonic identification of play and holiness [...] exalts the concept of play to the highest regions of spirit" (ibid.:

9). Huizinga was fascinated by the Platonic conception of play as an activity that confers beauty on its participants. After all his whole conception of play is modeled after the Platonic ideals of harmony and grace. This fact shows in particular through his judgments about contemporary culture, a culture that has lost the sense of measure and the pleasure for beautiful things. According to Huizinga in our rationalistic era life "is no longer played, and even where it still seems to play it is false play" (ibid.: 206). The reason, we could add, is that modern times forgot Plato's lesson.

The paragraph of ***The Laws*** which deeply inspired Huizinga's work is the following:

> To be sure, man's life is a business which does not deserve to be taken too seriously; yet we cannot help being in earnest with it, and there's the pity. [...] I mean we should keep our seriousness for serious things, and not waste it on trifles, and that, while God is the real goal of all beneficent serious endeavor, man, as we said before, has been constructed as a toy for God, and this is in fact the finest thing about him. All of us, then, men and women alike, must fall in with our role and spend life in making our *play* as perfect as possible [...]. (L: vii, 803)

This passage sounds, at first, surprising. After all, in ***The Laws***, the efforts of Plato are directed to devising the best form of life for men and women within the state. Nothing seems more serious than that. And no task is undertaken more seriously by Plato than this one. Nevertheless man's life is considered a form of "play." "The analogy of play -- Celano (1991: 138) says -- stresses the gap between man and God." Indeed, deeming men and women, and their conduct in life, the object of a *serious* concern, would be, for Plato, to make them the goal of the highest interests. But in the Platonic hierarchy of being, God, not man, occupies the highest place. Therefore, God only can be the end of our serious efforts, because only what constitutes the true end can be worthy of serious interests.

However, Plato's admitting that men and women cannot but be judged "plaything" and "toy for God" does not amount, as Celano (1991: 138) again says, to recognizing "the inherent limitations that physical existence brings to the human soul." Rather, only thus can human beings achieve the greatest value: God was so concerned about human beings as to bestow on them the favor of using

them as His toys. Therefore, the noblest life for men and women is the one spent honoring God's design and fully realizing the purpose they were made for: playing. This is not meant to depreciate human life. Rather, it is meant to ennoble the status of play. Play, the *divine* play to which human beings must trust themselves, becomes the model against which human life has to be judged. Thus it is not life that loses importance, but play that gains one. Plato goes on:

> But the truth is that in war we do not find, and we never shall find, either any real play or any real education worth the name, and *these* are the things I count supremely serious for such creatures as ourselves. Hence it is in peace in which each of us should spend most of his life and spend it best. What, then, is our right course? We should pass our lives in the playing of games -- *certain* games, that is, sacrifice, song, and dance -- with the result of ability to gain Heaven's grace [...]. (L: vii, 803- 804)

By "real play" Plato means *only "certain* games" -- that is, the ones which prompt the growth of a harmonious soul by inspiring the love of the good values. For Plato the goal of the human life is to exhibit always balanced manners and an appropriate behavior (L: v,732). The reward awaiting this sort of life is the gain of God's "favor." This favor has, again, an aesthetic significance: it is enjoyment, it inspires a contemplative attitude. The ones who received God's favor have transformed their life into a work of art. No view could be further from this than the Aristotelian conception of play as a mere relaxation (_νπαυσις) from work (NE, 1176b).

2. The force and importance of play in ***The Laws*** of Plato has been beautifully interpreted by Jaeger (1936). He claims that the role attributed to play in the late philosophy illustrates Plato's novel concern about education. In the more concrete setting of ***The Laws***, in contrast to the one of ***The Republic***, Plato's efforts are addressed to the problem of "character-building," psychologically intended, rather than to the identification of the perfect rationally educated man under the guidance of an invariable logos. This implies a deep concern about the education of children since their early

childhood, that is a shift, in the work of educators, from the training of reason to the one of "the irrational forces of the soul." As Jaeger says

> Plato did not, as we might expect, abandon the belief that virtue is knowledge, but he moved the beginning of education further and further back. [...] (H)e is trying to mould the *desires* as early as possible [...]. No one, he thinks, can get the best out of his own logos unless he has been *unconsciously* prepared by the logos of someone else, teacher or parent. All aretê is based on the harmony of intelligent insight and *habit*. Paideia is the training of the pleasure-pain feelings, upon which that harmony is based in its turn. (ibid., vol. 3: 227) [italics mine]

"Habit" is the key word to understand Plato's view about education, in his late work at least. The notion of "habit" includes: the idea of a form of behavior reached through a long-lasting exercise and the idea of forces that act "unconsciously" and constantly toward the achievement of a goal. Admitting the influence of habit on our choices and actions involves a view of the human conduct as a function of the mind-body whole. This fact excludes the need to exhibit a permanent and open awareness of the reasons of our acting. We act the way we do because we have been *accustomed* to do so, with no other rational explanation.

The notion of habit emphasized by Plato is important in the present context because it seems to offer the connecting link between the individual and innovative strength of pure play and the regularity of rule-governed games. Indeed play has its roots in the spontaneity of children's activities. The unformed character of young boys and girls provides the soft ground on which play can exert its shaping power (see ***The Laws*** 653b). Through fun and repetition play generates a custom, that is a *regular* form of behavior which is not the result of a deliberate choice, but rather the outcome of an unplanned train of events. As Gulick (1920: 183) also says, children play is the expression of those "instinct feelings" upon which only can habits grow. Play shows that habit, that is regularity, rests on spontaneity, and therefore that rules emerge from the chaos of un-ruled behavior. Indeed habits which do not graft onto a natural inclination are scarcely successful.

The fact that, in Plato's ***Laws***, play creates habits adds to the notion of the molding influence of time the idea of a pleasure accompanying it. It thus bestows on habit an *aesthetic* quality. By means of habits, play gracefully drives the spontaneous energies of the human nature to comply with the rules given by the laws. Rules do not conflict with individual freedom in Plato's view. Rather they represent its natural guide. Play generates harmony out of the initial emotional chaos. Therefore, the aesthetical quality of habits is joined to an ethical purpose. Play, through habit, raises human beings in the love of order and grace.

3. In recent times Read (1958) has made an attempt to rescue the Platonic ideals of education. His main concern has been to rescue present methods of education from their one-sidedness. Education -- he says -- since the Renaissance, has focused almost exclusively on the development of the rational-logical qualities of children's character, disregarding arts as pure entertainment. Against this trend, he points out a different goal to educators, i.e., "the creation of artists" (ibid.: 11).

Read's idea of "education through art" is meant to favor a proportionate and harmonious growth of all human faculties. He takes the term "aesthetic" to mean, literally, "what is related to the senses," from the greek word `aisthesis' (α_σθησις). Accordingly, "aesthetic education" is one which favors the expansion of the expressive potentialities of our sensory apparatus. "Art," as defined by Read, "is present in everything we make to please our senses." (ibid.: 15)

The danger of subjectivism, present in the above statement, is avoided by Read by granting the existence of a universal paradigm of artistic pleasure, i.e., "nature." Indeed an "aesthetic feeling" consists in perceiving the "pattern" of the object or event experienced (ibid.: 37). But the "good forms in art," the ones giving us the greatest pleasure, are derived from nature: they imitate or remind us of the organic structure of nature (ibid.: 16). This is the "principle of form." Form, in turn, is joined to a sensorial, concrete content, provided by imagination. This is the second principle of art, i.e., the "principle of origination."

Education in the Platonic spirit has to encourage children to *feel* and *experience* concretely the structure of connections present in nature, rather than directing them toward the acquisition of an abstract notion of form. They should learn to perceive "balance and symmetry, proportion and rhythm" which are "the basic factors of experience" (ibid.: 61). They can grasp these factors by practicing arts:

> The aim of imaginative education has been adequately described by Plato: it is to give the individual a concrete sensuous awareness of the harmony and rhythm which enter into the constitution of all living bodies and plants, which is the formal basis of all works of art, to the end that the child, in its life and activities, shall partake of the same organic grace and beauty. (ibid.: 69)

This passage beautifully expresses the core of the Platonic philosophy of education. It highlights the notion of the *order of the universe*, into which education aims at integrating harmonious human beings. And it is close, in some respects, to Dewey's conception of art. For Dewey (1934) too, as it is for Read, art is not a special category of objects, but rather a *quality* of experience in general (ibid.: 214). All experience is aesthetic insofar as its multiple components are perceived as being part of a harmonious whole which is enjoyed as an end in itself. Dewey lays a strong emphasis on the ordered *rhythm* pervading the entire life of nature and therefore art, thus betraying a profound Platonic spirit.

Within Read's conception play "is a form of art" too. Play is an educational tool that should ease children's integration into this order of the universe (Read, 1958: 109). Thus, as for Plato, play is a connecting link between chaotic spontaneity and harmonious order.

The educational principles espoused by Read seem to be especially meaningful in our times, when this "integration" is permanently threatened by the many competitive tendencies fostered among children by society. The kind of competition pushed on us by present models of behavior is not the sane and noble competitive force described by Huizinga as being the mark of classical Greek civilization. It is a competition whose only aim is the destruction of the other competitors. Borrowing

a notion from the "theory of games" (see Suppes 1967: 310-14) we can say that these forms of competition are "constant-sum" games: what one wins is what some other participant has lost. Success is taught and learned only at the detriment of other people. Education thus is sadly affected by this competitive model.

In my opinion the teaching, still valuable today, that we can draw from the Platonic conception of play in education is the necessity to weaken the power of this winning/losing idea. Indeed I do not think that in education there should be place for victory or loss. There is only place for learning. And learning, independently of the external benefits it may procure -- benefits which may very well be considered as something to be won -- goes through negative and positive moments, which are both necessary. Play-activities might have a vital role, in the Platonic spirit, in re-establishing the right balance between the goal and the process of education. Play could favor an inversion in the educational methods. It could teach us that the learning process itself, and not its final result, is the most valuable thing[65]. Play could bring about this inversion because it is an activity which is typically not goal-oriented. If we take "fun" as its distinguishing criterion, play is an activity whose primary aim is to give a feeling of well-being. Even Plato says of play that it is "a performance which provides us with neither utility, nor truth, nor resemblance [...] an activity practiced solely with a view to this concomitant *charm* which is very properly called *pleasure*" (L: ii, 667). This "graceful" play should become the model on which education should be based.

[65] This idea is in perfect harmony with Plato's conception of the good. For Plato the Good is not a property existing outside the system of being; rather it is internal to it, it guarantees the system's highest unity. One of the examples Plato uses most to illustrate this notion is rhythm in music: the purpose of rhythm in a musical composition is to order, in time, the different elements of a melody. This order, in a word the "good" in music, constitutes its internal principle.

CHAPTER FIVE
‘PLAYING’ WITH LANGUAGE?
WITTGENSTEIN’S STRATEGY.

In this chapter I will explore Wittgenstein's concept of "language-game" in the light of what has been apprehended so far about the notions of "game" and "play." In particular, I will compare Huizinga's definition of "game" to Wittgenstein's analysis and description of games and language-games to find out their similarities and differences.

I will focus mainly on Wittgenstein's late philosophy and especially on the ***Philosophical Investigations***. However the ***Tractatus*** conception of language (which seems to satisfy, in part, Huizinga's definition of game) will be the starting point of my investigation, which is meant to trace the evolution of Wittgenstein's conception of language from the model of calculus to the model of game.

PART I

1. One of the most important features of the play activity emphasized by Huizinga

is, as I showed in the first chapter, its "significant function," that is, play's power to transcend its material expression and to point to a different realm. As Huizinga (1938: 3) says, "in acknowledging play you acknowledge mind." This feature constitutes the intrinsic representative power of the play activity, its capacity to direct our attention to something which is not materially present. An intriguing consequence of this point is that playing generates a second level of reality: it has, as it were, the effect of doubling itself into a second sphere of existence. Playing is not only a physical and concrete occurrence of an activity, but also the representation of something not physical. Playing is thus essentially *meaningful*.

In reading Huizinga's pages I noticed the close resemblance that this function bears to the notion of "picture" in the ***Tractatus***. Here, pictures and propositions are, as physical occurrences, signs "that can be perceived by the senses." (TLP, 3.1) But they also express a sense, and by means of this sense they refer to reality.

"A picture," Wittgenstein says, "is a model of reality." (TLP 2.12) Its sense is independent of the world. Indeed, a picture "represents a possibility," that is, the possibility that things in the world are connected to each other in the same way as the elements in a picture are. What is so represented constitutes the sense of the picture (see TLP 2.151 and 2.201 through 2.221). This "possibility" belongs to the realm of logic (TLP 2.0121) and therefore coincides with the notion of "form" (TLP 2.033). It is because of its form, that is because of its logical status, that a picture is able to represent "the existence of states of affairs," i.e., facts.

Form provides pictures with a representative power. Logic, to which form belongs, is even said to be "a mirror image of the world" (TLP 6.13). Hence pictures and propositions alike (thanks to sense independence -- TLP 4.061), become *doubles* of reality, referring to something which lies beyond their material existence. Propositions can only *show* how things are, they cannot *say* anything about their *way* of showing what they show (TLP 4.121). They send us back an *image* of the facts of the world which they *silently* replicate. A picture "represents its subject from a position outside it. (Its standpoint is its representational form.)" (TLP: 2.173). Danto's issue about the *transparency/opaqueness* of the material medium of expression[66] comes to the point here. The Tractarian language has just the status of a transparent medium, one which is not meant to be noticed in the use of it.

This doubling effect of pictures invites the hypothesis that the concept of language in the ***Tractatus*** exhibits one of the fundamental features of games, in Huizinga's sense: language is the very "serious" game of representing the world. It has a "significant function" par excellence. Language owes this game-like function to its underlying logical form. It is not difficult to understand why the Tractarian notion of language is close to the notion of game. As Wittgenstein himself later admitted (see PG: 211), language in the ***Tractatus*** is conceived of as a calculus. Since

---

[66] See page 73 above

propositions are descriptions, whose distinguishing feature is having a truth value (TLP 4.023), language is fundamentally a truth-functional calculus, where the truth-value of a proposition is obtained from the truth-values of its component propositions by means of a simple computation (TLP 5). An elementary proposition, too, is the result of a computation. As a sign resulting from a "nexus of names" (TLP 4.22) an elementary proposition is an "articulate" expression (TLP 3.141 and 3. 251) whose sense is determined by each of its constituent simple signs having a meaning (TLP 3.23). This is the so called "compositional principle of sense."

Thus language, as a logical calculus, possesses some of the features which are typical of "games-with-rules" as opposed to "play" (I am referring to the pairs of concepts used in the present work). Those are structure and form. Indeed, a game-with-rules is a highly structured activity which evolves through a combination of interrelated moves. A game, say chess, can be considered as a calculus, where each configuration on the board is a combination of pieces, each having a specific role -- like a proposition whose constituent expressions, not being just arranged in list but combined in a form, have different roles. Wittgenstein, in his ***Philosophical Grammar***, even alternates the words "calculi" and "games," in referring to linguistic phenomena (PG: 62,121,130,193), to suggest their kinship.

2. The transition from the philosophy of the ***Tractatus*** to the late conception of the ***Philosophical Investigations*** is gradual, and this conception is not altogether unrelated to Wittgenstein's early philosophy. In this transition a determining role is played by Wittgenstein's abandonment of the thesis of the independence of elementary propositions, i.e. the thesis according to which elementary propositions are confronted with reality in isolation from the rest of language (TLP 4.211). By the 1930s Wittgenstein has come to realize that at least one kind of elementary propositions does not agree with that thesis, namely the propositions expressing the degree of some

property (like colors, sounds, etc.). Statements about the degree of one such property "may exclude one another" (SRLF: 194). Therefore they offer "complete description" of reality (ibid.: 192; see also PR: 77).[67]

The rejection of the thesis of the independence of atomic propositions is contained in the concept of *Satzsystem*: propositions are brought close to reality in a system, and not one by one (PR: 82). The reasoning leading Wittgenstein to that decision is based on the acknowledgment of the multiplicity of logical forms hidden beneath the forms of our ordinary language (see SRLF: 188 and PR: 93). Indeed, the forms which admit of a gradation are not captured by our ordinary means of expression (SRLF: 190). This multiplicity of logical forms, pointing back to the existence of a plurality of "methods of projection" of the world into reality, is in contrast with the emphasis put on the method of projection in the ***Tractatus*** (TLP: 3.11 and 4.0141) and it seems to anticipate the multiplicity of uses of words in Wittgenstein's later philosophy (see PI: 23).

The notion of system, too, represents a precursor of the notion of language-game. It points to the existence of the surroundings of a proposition, through which the notion of context makes its first appearance. In fact Wittgenstein says that understanding a proposition means to understand its system (PR: 153) and that language is such a system (PG: 170). However the notion of "system," at this stage, is meant predominantly in a logical/syntactical fashion. It highlights the internal formal relationships holding between propositions belonging to the same category, and whose existence we take into account in our calculus of language.[68]

---

[67] For example, the statement that a sound has a certain intensity (expressed in numbers) or that a spot has a certain color, is *at the same time* the statement that *that* sound does not have any other intensity or that *that* spot does not show any other color. Thus the statement in question says something not only on that particular sound-intensity (or color), but also about the whole range of intensities (or the color spectrum), by way of exclusion.

[68] As Backer & Hacker (1992: 47) explain, the introduction of a Satzsystem is done by Wittgenstein in the spirit of his earlier conception of language as a "kind of calculus," that is as "a logico-syntactical system of formation-and-transformation rules."

It was the investigation into these "internal relations [...] which led to the theory of language-games," as Kenny (1975: 114) says.

3. Waismann's annotations of his conversations with Wittgenstein (dated 1929 through 1932) are a very illuminating source of research about the philosopher's gradual shift to his later conception. What emerges from these conversations is a notion of game as "calculus" which, as I have tried to show, inherits some of its features from the Tractarian conception of language, and, for other respects, anticipates some of the features of the language-game concept of the Philosophical Investigations.

In those conversations Wittgenstein focuses mainly on problems about mathematics. The example of the game of chess, in which the meaning of each figure is defined only by the totality of rules for their moves, suggests to Wittgenstein the existence of a third, alternative conception of the nature of arithmetic, besides the two ones envisaged by Frege in the paragraph 88 **Foundations of Arithmetic**, namely that arithmetical signs are either about something, which is their meaning, or else they stand for themselves, i.e., for material signs on paper (WVC: 150).

Wittgenstein extends the chess-analogy to the syntax of language which, like a game, is a system of rules and which, like a game, is "arbitrary." Indeed, the syntax of a language, says Wittgenstein, resembles the game of chess insofar as it is considered independently of its "applications," that is, of its projection onto the world (ibid.: 105, 163). The effect of the application is to transform the syntax's configurations into true and false propositions. The calculus of syntax thus yields a "theory" (ibid.: 126).

At this time the notion of game has a predominant syntactical quality. It amounts mainly to a set of instructions, i.e. rules, for producing "correct" moves. Both the syntax of a language and the game of chess only grant the possibility that moves be made in accordance with rules, that is a

"grammatical" possibility (WVC: 105).

Here we find the new important concept of "grammar." Grammar takes on the role that in the ***Tractatus*** belonged to logic, that is the investigation of possibilities (see TLP: 2.0121). The possibilities described by grammar are the uses of linguistic expressions (PG: 60). Grammatical descriptions provide the only available form of "analysis" (PR: 1 and PI: 90), but the purpose of this analysis is not retrieving the essential logical core common to thought and language (PI: 97), but it is, rather, the one of "clearing away the misunderstandings" about the use of words and expressions (PI: 90).

Within this conception of language as a game-calculus the notion of meaning as use is being anticipated. In fact rules determine the meaning of an expression by determining the range of its uses in a calculus, or in a game (WVC: 134 and PR: 152). Therefore, to understand an expression, or a proposition, is "to operate with it," e.g., "to calculate" (WVC: 167-8) according to the rules.

4. In the course of his conversations with Waismann Wittgenstein makes a very interesting remark about the logical distinction between games and non-games. "A game," Wittgenstein says, "does not border on a non-game" (WVC: 132), meaning that the two spheres of games and non-games are different, i.e., they belong to two different and incomparable categories. Therefore, it does not make any sense to speak of a limit dividing them -- as if they were lying on the same level and as if a transition from games to non-games were of the same kind as the transition from one color to another within the color space. Games and non-games do not occupy the same "logical space." From the rules specifying the "configurations of the pieces in a game" we cannot get to something which is a non-game. Rules can only define one particular game at a time.

This remark concerning the radical distinction between the two spheres of games and non-

games calls back to mind Huizinga's claim about the domain of a game as being an independent realm of existence: one cannot understand play except by being already in it. Games and non-games, for Huizinga too, represent two separate realms of existence and the experience of being in a game cannot be judged with the criteria belonging to the everyday experience. Huizinga, of course, is not establishing a logical difference, as the one Wittgenstein was trying to make, but a difference in feelings and emotions.

> The distinction between play and seriousness is also touched on briefly by Wittgenstein:
>
> What is the difference between language [...] and a game? You might say: It ceases to be a game when things begin to become serious, and here seriousness means application. (ibid.: 170)

This suggests, again, that language can be compared to a game if we take it only as a formal system governed by syntactical rules. This game turns into a serious matter once it is "applied" to the world. Wittgenstein also declares the neutrality of games, as far as the "fun" element is concerned: a game is neither "fun" nor "seriousness." It is a mere calculus.

This statement, too, is very close to Huizinga's emphasizing the lack of a sharp contrast between play and seriousness. He says that the common distinction between play and seriousness does not capture the variety of phenomena that we include in the category of play (Huizinga 1938: 5). It is rather an external and non-essential adjunct. Huizinga, like Wittgenstein (at this stage of his philosophy, at least) gives the concept "game" a formal characterization. Games are not, by definition, what produces fun, but what exhibits certain formal features. Indeed among his examples of games Huizinga includes also war tactics.

5. In the transition towards the Investigations the chess-analogy plays a double role, and,

as Backer & Hacker (1992) suggest, is itself responsible of a change of perspective. At first, as I have shown too, the concept of calculus mediates between language and the example of the game of chess. Language is a form of calculus like arithmetic; and since arithmetic is analogous to the game of chess, language is analogous to it as well. Later, as Backer & Hacker emphasize, Wittgenstein abandons the calculus-model of language. And according to them, one of the reasons for this choice is Wittgenstein's acknowledgment that "an understanding of language is [not] derivable from knowledge of definitions and forms alone" -- it involves more than a linear syntactical computation -- and that rules do not decide their own application (ibid.: 49). However, even when Wittgenstein abandons this model, "the chess analogy remain[s] useful", Baker & Hacker again say (ibid.: 49), especially in strengthening the connection between understanding and ability. The concept of "game" shows to be a "looser and more flexible" tool to analyze language, once the metaphor of calculus is dropped (ibid.: 50).

Backer & Hacker's remark clearly points to the fact that the component missing from the calculus-model of language is human behavior, seen as what establishes a linguistic "practice." And in considering "game" as a less rigid tool to investigate language, they are claiming that in the concept of "game," aspects other than the combinatorial ones, come to the fore. Games are taken as the paradigm of a human activity whose learning method is "training," and to which, unlike calculus, the requirement of completeness does not apply. It does not make any sense to say that a game is incomplete, even in the case in which its rules do not cover all the conceivable circumstances of application (ibid.: 51).

When Wittgenstein disavows a strictly syntactical conception of games and language, he does so in order to pay more attention to the circumstances in which we actually use them. Already in the ***Blue Book*** he says that, though "we" compare language to a rigorously directed calculus, ordinarily we

> rarely use language as such a calculus. For not only do we not think of the rules of usage -- of definitions, etc. -- while using language, but when we are asked to give such rules, in most cases we aren't able to do so. (BB: 25)

In language we play an *active* role: "words have those meanings which we have given them" (BB: 27). The belief that meaning is *something* definitely referred to with a word is an illusion created by a "misleading grammatical analogy." The question "What is the meaning of a word?" drives us to the conclusion that there must be something which fits the "what is"-part of that question (BB: 1). Indeed our difficulties in identifying *the* meaning of words come from the deceptive influence that some forms of expression have on us (BB: 31). On the contrary the meaning of an expression is what *we do* with it. The chess-analogy, so insistently employed by Wittgenstein in the early thirties, has exactly the role of emphasizing this *doing* with signs.

6. Language-games are introduced in ***The Blue Book*** as "particular cases" of "operating with signs" (BB: 16), that is, as cases of employment of a word in particular circumstances. Those circumstances which are ordinarily associated with the employment of an expression do not contain only linguistic ingredients, but also non-linguistic ones. At first, Wittgenstein compares language-games to the "forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words" and concludes that "we can build up the complicated forms" starting from the simplest ones (BB: 17). Though, as Backer & Hacker (1992: 52) comment, this statement might suggest the employment of "an *analytic-genetic* method" in the analysis of language-games there is no evidence of it in the later conception of the ***Investigations***. Invoking such a method of description would cast a shadow of incompleteness onto language-games.

Languages-games, however simple they may be, do not await supplementing. They are

"complete in themselves" (BB: 81). "Primitive" forms of expression are not more fundamental than others, as if they were original units out of which the system of language is built. Rather, they represent simple patterns of linguistic use, *in analogy to which* we build more complicated forms of expression. They are "primitive" because they are simple to master:

> It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words. (PI: 5).

Huizinga too pursues the study of play in its "primitive" forms, in children's play and in the "sacred rituals" of the primitive societies. Indeed at this level, he says, the phenomenon of play shows its most genuine form, that is, its order, its structure, its purposes stand out more "perspicuously", as Wittgenstein would say.

Nevertheless, it might seem, as Rhees (1958) has emphasized, that in the ***Blue Book*** Wittgenstein is attempting to give "an analysis of our ordinary language" -- where *analysis* is meant in the classical sense of retrieving the fundamental and simplest components of language. However, in the later work of the *Investigations*, Rhees sees language-games being used as "stages in a discussion leading up to the big question of what language is" (ibid.: vii-ix). And that is the reason of Wittgenstein's insisting on their completeness.

It is the "nature" of language-games as facts of language, and not their origin and development, which intrigues him so much. It is not a historical explanation what interests Wittgenstein, but rather, as his criticism of Frazer suggests (RFGB: 34) a "perspicuous representation." This is the only representation which lets us *see* the connections among the parts and therefore to understand, that is, to have a grasp of how those parts bear on each other. Indeed, understanding consists in becoming sensitive to the similarities existing among facts (RFGB: 35;

see also PI: 122). Wittgenstein's attitude towards language is, therefore, not substantially changed from the one he had in the ***Tractatus***, though his view about language itself is. He tries to answer a question about the *essence* of language, about its constitution, its way of functioning and non-functioning, though this essence is not explained any more by reference to "The Logical Structure" of language but by reference to a multiplicity of activities

The completeness owned by language-games is rightly interpreted by Harris (1988: 42) as a sign of a *holistic* conception of language, that is as meaning that "no simple equation is possible between a sign from one system and a sign from another system." An expression gets its meaning from the language-game it belongs to. Harris, following Saussure, takes holism as implying a well-defined notion of "system," as opposed to "use" in practice. As he says (ibid.:42), it is part of the Saussurean holism that a definition of linguistic signs be given in terms of their relationship to the other signs in "the language" to which they all belong. This means that their use is something belonging to a different level, i.e., it represents their *application*. Harris (ibid.: 37) also says that the system/use distinction follows, as well, from the game-analogy, since in the notion of "game" we find both the abstract idea of "an organized type of activity", whose parts form a whole structured in a certain way, and the idea of the particular occurrences of it in practice. In language the distinction is between language as a system of grammatical rules and its use in practice --in Saussurean terms it is the distinction between “langue” and *”*parole*”*. On the basis of this clear Saussurean distinction, the incoherent move that Harris attributes to Wittgenstein is that Wittgenstein, first, adopts holism, in his use of the game-analogy, and then disregards the distinction system/use which is one component of the holistic thesis (ibid.: 37).

However, I think that Wittgenstein has kept the system/use distinction into the background just because it has no clear-cut application. The priority of practice over rules, observed in the use of language, has suggested to him that it is not always possible nor necessary to pursue a distinction

of *system* and *use*, where "system" is meant as a coherent set of rules and "use" as the series of their applications. Rather, Wittgenstein, starting from the early thirties, identifies the two notions. Indeed, he says both that the *system* of language gives a proposition life (PG: 101), and that *use* can be called the life of a sign (BB: 4), which clearly blurs the distinction between the two notions.

7. I maintain that the main effect of Wittgenstein's narrowing down the attention to the small areas of language that are activated on different occasions is the one of *decentralization*: in those areas we can find what we need in order to grasp the meaning of expressions. As Wittgenstein says (BB: 42), the total system of language need not be present *in the mind* of speakers as a "permanent background." Therefore, I take his language-games as being like local mini-systems, entirely constituted by everything we *do and say*, materially. The function of language-games -- like the function attributed by Bateson (1976) to the "psychological frames" created by animal play[69] -- is the one of delimiting the context where action is going on.

Thus, in the place of a monolithic entity called "language" Wittgenstein puts a "multiplicity of language-games". This multiplicity might generate, as Mason (1978: 333) suggests, a form of "extreme relativism" of meaning, the occurrence in a language-game being the only fact we have in order to find out about the meaning of a word. One of the most alarming consequences of this relativism would, then, be that our ordinary "capacity to carry an understanding of a word used in one context to its use in a very different context" is put into question (ibid.: 332).

This would be the case if language-games were isolated events, as my calling language-games `mini-systems' might itself suggest. However, by saying `mini-systems,' I do not mean to say that language-games are totally independent from each other. Language is a network of

[69] See page 74-5 above.

interrelated language-games, at least because the events of our life, the occasions in which we use language, merge into each other in a continuous exchange. There are no artificial boundaries between one language-game and another: a statement about a state of affairs can transform into a question and this, in turn, into a command. And just because language as a whole is a loose sort of network, language-games can be interrelated in a variety of different ways.

I think that Mason's worries suggest that the relativistic consequences of a multiplicity of language-games, which is not governed by precise criteria for the identification of the differences among them, could be overcome only where such criteria were introduced. Only in this case would the question about the identity of the meaning of a word across different language-games be applicable (Mason 1978: 334). But the way Mason frames the question about the identity of the meaning of a word makes it seem as if he conceived of meaning as something *independent* from its applications and which can therefore be identified in the different contexts it appears into.

On the contrary, I think that, first of all, making recourse to a plurality of language-games is meant by Wittgenstein exactly as an instrument against the idea of a "sublime logic" existing behind language and defining meanings *independently* of their use. Secondly, I also think that the lack of clear bounds between language-games, their merging into each other, makes the question as to the identity of a word across different language-games not inapplicable but just superfluous. This not exhibiting precise borders indicates that it is by means of *analogy*, rather than by means of logical differentiation, that we should try to identify the meaning of a word as being the *same* in different language-games. Wittgenstein denies explicitly the possibility of drawing clear boundaries between games (see PI 69) and introduces the notion of "family resemblance" as the best way to categorize them (PI 67).

The dangers of a loose structuring of language may be seen, in Harris's (1988: 60) terms, as causing a transformation of language into "the realm of the unplayable". This expression gives

me the opportunity to bring back into the discussion the play/game distinction. In my opinion the slack netting and flexibility of language, due to the multiplicity of loosely and variously interrelated language-games, makes language as a whole resemble the phenomenon of "play". The variety of language-games is indispensable for the "play" of language. It increases its expressive power. Language seen as "play" is an open-to-continuous-change *reservoir* of uses from which more definite language-games emerge. This comparison with the phenomenon of play is inspired also by Wittgenstein's parallel between language and "an ancient city" (PI: 18): language, like and ancient city, is a blend of different patterns, overlapping each other and leading to different parts of the network depending on the mastery a speaker has.

8. Being a "local" phenomenon, language becomes deeply ingrained into our existence. We do not learn and understand language by way of reference to an abstract array of rules, but by reference to the concrete situation in which we use it. At the very beginning of the **Philosophical Investigations** Wittgenstein says:

> I shall call also the whole consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game". (PI: 7)[70]

And in one of the later sections of the book Wittgenstein also says:

> Not: "without language we could not communicate with one another" -- but for sure: without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc. And also: without the use of the speech and writing people could not communicate. (PI, 491)

Therefore, language is not an activity independent of other human activities, but it constitutes one

[70] This picture of language-game comes near to Hans's description of language as a "field of play," as an arena where both language and other human activities meaningfully interact (see Hans, 1981: 85¬110).

thing only with them. Apart from them, language is an idealized entity, but one that is of no use: "in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*." (PI: 107) Here, the "friction" Wittgenstein alludes to is created by the multifarious circumstances of the use of language, which are not reducible to a uniform measure, as the apparent grammatical analogies would make use believe. Indeed, the Augustinian picture of language is fallacious just because it equates all linguistic expressions to names (PI: 3).

The deep entrenchment of language into our life is a fact contrasting with the idea of an essence "hidden" behind our language -- an essence which, in -the naming-model of language, words are supposed to reach through a direct, as well as mysterious link (see BB: 220 it.). *Essence*," Wittgenstein says "is expressed by grammar." (PI: 371). What grammar describes, that is essence, is the sum of observable patterns of our daily uses of language. The "essence of language" is something that "lies open to view" (PI: 92). Therefore there is no unique definition encompassing the *essence* of a language-game (PI:65).

Wittgenstein's recommendation against this metaphysical temptation is: "look and see" (PI: 66) how similar and how dissimilar the instances of game are (including language-games) that we observe.[71] The use of one word, ‘game’, to cover disparate phenomena, like card-games, olympic games, or language-games, is justified not by the existence of some common property but only by "family resemblances" (PI: 67). Each game shares some features with some games, and other features with still other games. The "similarities and dissimilarities" occurring among them vary from case to case, and they cannot be subsumed under a single definite heading: they "overlap and criss-cross" each other as it happens among the members of a family. Thus we are left only with

[71] The recommendation "look and see" has already been used by Wittgenstein (see WVC: 146) about mathematics, where any new system of symbols or any contradiction has to be seen-- in order to be said to exist. Wittgenstein extends to language this kind of mathematical constructivism: there will never be a "discovery" of something new, in mathematics as well as in the grammar. The grammar of our common language is "already there" (WVC: 183).

"examples" of games which we can observe and "describe".[72]

> One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way. -- I do not, however, mean by this that he is supposed to see in these examples that common thing which I [...] was unable to express; but that he is now to *employ* those games in a particular way.(PI: 71)

Wittgenstein gives us an extended list of examples of language-games in PI 23: "There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols," "words," "sentences."

In Huizinga we find a parallel kind of reasoning. Huizinga, too, notices the wide variety of words with which each language denotes the function of play. He says:

> All peoples play, and play remarkably alike; but their languages differ widely in their conception of play, conceiving it neither as distinctly nor as broadly as modern European languages do. (1938: 28-9)

Not all languages name the phenomenon of play with a single word. Therefore, the analysis of the phenomenon of play must begin from the words and concepts we are familiar with. However, Huizinga's acknowledging the variety of play-words, parallel to Wittgenstein's observing the variety of games and language-games, is followed by an explanation of that very variety, which is

---

[72] Following openly Wittgenstein's suggestion, Danto (1981: 58) maintains that artworks, too, do not form a well-ordered set of objects, whit common features resulting in a clear-cut *definition* of "artwork." As with games, we can only "look and see" if they exhibit any resemblance. However, Danto's reasoning comes to the wrong conclusion, namely that Wittgenstein would accept a *definition* of art based on "recognitional skills" (ibid.: 59). In reality Wittgenstein intends to present no definition at all, neither of "games" nor of "artworks." His imperative "look and see" (PI: 66) is only meant to overturn the idea that concepts are definite notions making up the "essence" hidden behind words. His remark, though extended to art, is not a recommendation about the use of perceptual criteria to classify artworks.

missing in Wittgenstein. For Huizinga the fact that not all languages express the concept of play in one definite name is due to a lack of a high form of "abstraction." The abstraction of a general concept of play has not been brought about in all cultures at the same time. Thus his conclusion ends up being opposite to Wittgenstein's thesis of "family resemblances." The existence of a general definition of play which catches the essence of the phenomenon is the main premise of Huizinga's essay.

9. It is common to games to be played according to rules. Rules define, so to speak, the limits of a game and express what has to count as a correct "move" in it. Those rules are “constitutive" as Garver (1967: 232) says (see ***Introduction***, p. 5). And in being so, they give a game its *structure*. This notion of s*tructure*, in turn, involves the idea of a restriction of moves. However, such restriction is necessary. As Harris (1988: 59¬60) points out, the acceptance of a structure i.e., of a limitation, for speakers, in the use of language determined by rules – sets "a limit on arbitrariness," that is to "unlimited freedom of manoeuvre," but the existence of this limit is an indispensable device to prevent communicational systems from sinking into chaos.

The existence of rules constitutes the typical *social* aspect of games, for two reasons. It presupposes a tacit common agreement among the participants of a game: players who get into playing a game agree to comply by its rules. Besides, it points to the need of *training* players into the correct use of those rules. And *training* is a way of integrating participants into the common practice of a game (PI: 86). The result of getting into the practice of a game, that is, of a frequent participation into it, is the "mastery" of its technique, i.e., of its rules. Indeed, rules represent what Wittgenstein calls "a technique for a game" (PI: 125). Wittgenstein says:

> To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions). (PI, 199)

These remarks emphasize the component of adaptation of the individual players to the social structure of the game: indeed, they suggest the image of individual actions being shaped by a common canon through frequent repetition. Learning a game is a *reiterative* process. The reiteration of some fixed patterns of actions manifests the influence of time upon human beings. Thus time and social control seem to represent the predominant factors in the notion of training -- as Plato also has pointed out in his late theory of education.[73]

Wittgenstein's insistence on the role of training implies that rules need not be spelled out explicitly in order for somebody to learn a game. They constitute one and the same fact together with the game they are part of, such that "an observer can read these rules off from the practice of the game" (PI, 54). Besides, games, and language-games alike, cannot always be traced back to definite rules, whose interpretation is beyond doubt (PI: 82¬85). As Wittgenstein's "paradox" goes (PI: 201) "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule", which for Kripke (1982: 7) represents "the central problem of ***Philosophical Investigations***.

Wittgenstein's thought about rule learning and training alludes to what Sellars (1986: 7) will later call "pattern-governed behavior," as distinguished from "rule-obeying behavior." Applied to the case of language, playing language-games according to a "pattern-governed behavior" means using them by following the practice already established for their use, and, in all this, rules, though involved in the games, need not be made explicit. Learning language-games is a matter of getting directly *involved*, fully immersed in a practice and letting us be guided by it.

This idea of a "pattern-governed behavior" suggests a conception of learning as a *holistic*

---

[73] See above Chapter Four

process, having to deal with the whole of a language-game at once. A "rule-obeying" kind of behavior points out, instead, a sort of cumulative a*tomistic* process, where learning goes through adding one grasped rule to another. I also read a similar holistic approach to language in Schwyzer's (1986) thesis that the *practice* of playing a game is not exhausted by the rules governing that very game. One thing is *playing* the game of chess, for example, and another thing acting in accordance with its rules (ibid.: 178¬80). Schwyzer's claim that rules "cannot define the nature of an activity" (ibid.: 176) suggests that there is more to the *activity* itself than just the rules setting its boundaries.

This form of holism, centered on behavior, seems to fit Wittgenstein's notion of language-game better than Harris's form of holism, centered, instead, on the notion of system. It actually overcomes the system/use distinction Harris focuses on. Nevertheless, Harris's interpretation of the notion of language-game is understandable if we put ourselves in his point of view, which is the one of a linguist much in agreement with the Saussurean distinctions -- whose aim was clearing the field of linguistic study from some confusions regarding the status of a precise historical entity, i.e., the language we speak.[74]

The sense of the claim that rules can be understood by means of "characteristic signs of [...] the player's behavior" (PI: 54) is that it is *use* that *shows* the meaning of what we are "doing and saying. This claim might first suggest the survival, in the ***Investigations***, of the Tractarian dichotomy between "saying" and "showing." However Wittgenstein dismisses it in favor of the notion of actuality of grammar. All language-games *show* their "grammar" completely, but beyond the actual use of words in a language-game, there is nothing more to be apprehended. The

[74] This holistic feature of language-games may tie in also, in a stretched sense of the term, with the Kantian concept of "universality" [*Allgemeinheit*] as "an aesthetic quantity" [*ästhetische Quantität*]. This form of "universality" is unlike the logical one explained by having recourse to concepts -- which are, indeed, universal. It is, rather, a kind of "common validity" [*Gemeingültigkeit*] grounding the demand for a general agreement about an aesthetic judgment (KU: 8, 23). The fact that language-games are not always bounded by explicit rules seems to bestow on them an analogous kind of universality. Linguistic practice demands, implicitly, an agreement among speakers about their use.

"transcendental" logic of the ***Tractatus*** has shifted to an *immanent* grammar of linguistic facts.

Hintikka (1986: 121) maintains that the "contrast between *saying* and *showing* in the ***Tractatus*** has been taken over by a contrast between *saying* and *playing*." However, I think that instead of a contrast, Wittgenstein proposes, in the ***Investigations***, an equation between *playing* and *saying*.

The saying/showing opposition of the ***Tractatus*** was meant to make us clear about what we can say and what we cannot say in language. In language, according to Wittgenstein, we can say *that* things stand in such and such a way (see TLP: 4.022), but we cannot say anything about *how* things are. This *shows* itself in language, through its logical form. Now, if, as Hintikka suggests, this opposition has been replaced by one between *saying* and *playing*, this implies that what Wittgenstein, now, means by "playing" is comparable to what he meant, then, by "showing".

This does not seem to me to be the case. Indeed "playing," in this application, means using language in concrete situations, it is taking part in language-games. Since this is all there is to language - e.g., there is no hidden essence or logical form to show through the use of language -- then, taking part in language-games is *already* using language to *say* things. Thus there the contrast between "playing" and "saying" does not appear to be justifiable.

10. What shows itself through the ordinary use of language is the whole of the constant features of human life:

> The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language. (PI: 206)

It is only by making reference to the normal actions and reactions of human beings, the ones we expect from everybody in certain situations, that we can understand what language-games

people are playing, and according to which rules. This common behavior of mankind is what Wittgenstein calls "form of life."

As Garver (1990) says, the form of life meant by Wittgenstein is not some part or activity of human beings, but the *human form of life*. This human form of life, as distinguished from other forms of life, exhibits the characteristics human beings possess just because they are human. This form of life is what "has to be accepted, the given" (PI: p.226). It therefore represents the starting point of an account of language-games. Language is part of this form, since the existing language-games are what our experience is involved with from the beginning. In fact one of the distinguishing features of the human form of life is the possibility of using language:

> T]he term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (PI: 23)

Wittgenstein's notion of *form of life* as what is "given" has the role that *tradition* has in artistic experience, according to Gombrich (1956). Language-games are part of this "given" in the sense that their role is to provide, as a starting point, an indivisible whole of language and life, of which our experience will be a part as soon as we learn those games. Likewise, an artist's innovative experience has first to confront itself with tradition, i.e., with what is historically "given." When that artist has learnt how to apply its rules, that experience becomes part of it.

Our form of life is contained in the "natural history" of mankind. The natural history is simply the totality of facts, abilities and activities of which human life is composed:

> Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing (PI: 25).

These activities are part of our biological and psychological structure as it evolved through time. They are the unchanged facts of our human nature. Unlike natural science, natural history is a mere recollection, and not an explanation, of facts of nature (PI: 230 and 415).

These facts are included in that "picture of the world" which represents the "inherited background" of our daily experience (OC: 94). The picture is grafted onto our language as a "mythology" (OC: 95; see also RFGB: 35) for it provides it with some universal images which secure human beings to their form of life. And it constitutes the basis of our indispensable "certainty." Certainty is part of our "animal" part of life (OC: 359 and 475) and it is the ground of knowing, doubting, speaking and believing. In a word it is the ground of our being human.

PART II

In this Part II I want to find out if there is any link between the notions of "language" and "game" such as can authorize the expression ‘language-game’. In exploring this possibility I will survey briefly the “theory of games."

Language and games: how far can we push the analogy?

In an article dated 1959 Gahringer interpreted the "new way of philosophizing," and its attempt to understand language by reference to the phenomenon of games, as if games were to be considered like exact *models* for language (ibid.:661). In reply to this, he said that the notion of game "cannot be more privileged or more obvious than that of language" (ibid.: 665) just because a game is, essentially, a form of communication, that is of language. This feature explained, according to him, the players' strong moral involvement in games.

In this article, however, Gahringer was actually objecting only to his own interpretation of

that "way of philosophizing." Indeed the aim of the analogy used by Wittgenstein was not to *reduce* language to games, as if "game" were a more fundamental category than language – which would justify Gahringer's remark. Rather Wittgenstein wanted to suggest that we can give an account of language *in the same way* as we do of games. Games, after all, were used only as "objects of comparison" (PI: 130).

At a first glance, there seem to be more differences than similarities between language and games, or between speaking a language and playing. Language is a medium we are immediately involved with since our birth: we were born *in* language. On the other hand, we only learn games at a certain age - though we attribute a general playful *attitude* to human (and also non-human) beings. Our main goal in playing is having fun or amuse ourselves, whereas language is only occasionally used for this purpose. Besides, playing, as an attitude, may embed an element of pretense: I can do even the most serious things as if I were playing a game, thus lowering the style of my actions, so to speak. And vice versa I can play a game with the utmost seriousness. This element of pretense is normally absent from the everyday use of language. Dramas and plays are an exception to this fact, since actors do use language in the form of a pretense. They pretend *to say certain things*.

But however different the activity of playing and speaking may be, Smart's (1957: 233) claim that "one can hardly imagine a more inappropriate linking of terms than [...]'language-game'" is unjustified. In aiming to show the radical difference between language and games, Smart mentions the fact that "[n]o game is of vital importance [...] but is rather an unessential activity, lacking a serious purpose." I agree with this claim, if it is taken to mean that no specific game is "vital." Maybe our life would be better off without the games of football or baseball. However, the fact that there are *some* games is as "vital" as the fact that there is a language, though this or that language-game may be missing. As Wittgenstein says, games belong to our "natural history" (PI:

25), they are a part of our "form of life."

From another point of view, we can certainly compare language to a game. Indeed, considered as a system of rules language has all the formal characteristics of a game. As Anderson (1986: 49) says, both language and games have the following characteristics in common: the arbitrariness of the "playing-pieces" and of the rules, and the definition of the "permitted moves."

Language, within the conception of the ***Tractatus***, can be regarded as such system of rules and therefore as a game. However, the attempt to find an explanation of the expression "language-game" in a parallel between language itself and a game loses ground as Wittgenstein moves away from that initial conception. In his late philosophy, Wittgenstein is not concerned with a definition of language as a whole. Rather, he restricts his investigation to the description of single linguistic examples, language-games. It is because, as Rhees (1970: 75) says, "having meaning is not one thing" that Wittgenstein "refers to the language-games." This shift suggests that, in seeking a justification of the use of the word "language-game," we should look in a different direction. The word does not necessarily presuppose a similarity between the two notions "language" and "game." Rather, it implies that small sections of language function like games. The comparison, therefore, has to be set between particular linguistic activities and games.

Language-games, as I said earlier, can be seen as mini-systems of language employed by speakers in different speech situations. In each of them we abide by specific rules or patterns of speech: "giving orders, and obeying them," "reporting an event," "forming and testing a hypothesis," "solving a problem in practical arithmetic," and "translating from one language into another" are some of the examples listed by Wittgenstein (PI, 23). Language-games need not be conceived of as smaller parts that, added up, give as a result a bigger unit, e.g., language: they are the language. Specht (1986: 146) meaningfully compares language-games to the "functional systems of an organism: circulation, respiration, the organ of sight etc." They represent the basic

units in terms of which only the single "cells" of language can be conceived and function.

Wittgenstein's conception of language-games in the ***Investigations*** amounts roughly to the thesis that the meaning of words and sentences depends on the context in which we use them. But the notion of language-game has more in it than the thesis of context-dependence of expressions: it says that meanings are not only determined by linguistic and non-linguistic factors, but that they are the outcome of the *active* participation of players-speakers. As the author says "words have those meanings which we have given them" (BB: 27). As it will be clear later in this work, this active role is attenuated by the way the mastery of a language-game, or game, is gained: learning the rules of a game mainly relies on customs and habit, which are the result of a long time exposure to the practice of language. However, applied to a particular linguistic situation, that is, in a "synchronic" way (in the Saussurean sense), the notion of language-game conveys a sense of active involvement.

Many similarities occur between a particular language event and a game. They are both activities limited in space and time, although for most language-games there are not non-vague criteria, as there are for certain games, to say when their moves have come to a halt. There is no clear evidence for the "winning positions" in the use of language on particular occasions. The idea of "winning" includes two main components: a precise time limitation and the exclusion of others. The first component is applicable to some language-games only. The second one, -- the most important component of the fact of victory -- implies that if we win something, we exclude somebody else from obtaining the same result. This is what happens in competitions, where there exists a final goal to be reached, according to certain rules and within a certain fixed period of time. The structure of a competition implies the idea of a one-person absolute achievement. Wittgenstein often uses expressions like "outside a particular language-game", and "the home language-game" of a word, which indicates the possibility of discerning which items are appropriate for a given

language-game and suggests the idea of a "limitation." However his conception of language-games leaves out the competitive component. For Huizinga, on the other hand, the spatio-temporal limitation of games, meant as a fixed dimension, is tied to the competitive nature of games and expresses the need for a special "order." Limitation, in his view, secures the autonomy of games from ordinary life.

The existence of rules determining which "moves" are correct and which are not is common to both language-games and games. However a clarification is necessary on this point. On the one hand, the rules of a particular language-game, which occurs in some historically definite language, are constitutive rules. Indeed each language has a grammar establishing which items and combinations of items are acceptable in order for a sentence, or a group of related sentences, to be accepted as meaningful. On the other hand, considered as part of the human form of life, that is as an expression of the human linguistic faculty, language-games are a *natural* component of our experience, and as such they cannot be said to possess constitutive rules.[75]

This means that rules are not "codified" before the language-games become established. As Wittgenstein says, the "grammar of a language isn't recorded and doesn't come into existence until the language has already been spoken by human beings for a *long* time." (PG: 62-3) From this second point of view rules are rather forms of behavior modeled on inherited patterns. "Language," Wittgenstein claims, "did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination" (OC: 475).

Rules represent a factor of *identification* of an activity. They guarantee the possibility of *repetition*: the uses of the words `same' and `rule' are "interwoven" (PI: 225). Therefore, they guarantee stability. In this respect, however, some games, like chess for example, keep a more constant structure than language-games in general do. Their changes in time are slower, and less in

[75] For a discussion of this point see page 13 above.

number. This happens because, as Huizinga (1938: 8) says, games really represent a "stepping out of real life," whose changeable course, therefore, does not affect them. On the contrary, a language-game is totally involved in our life. As Wittgenstein says, it constitutes a "whole of language and actions." The fact of being so deeply embedded in what we do may explain language's greater flexibility and variability through time, which does not characterize artificial rule systems like games. Changes in our way of doing things, or categorizing the world, go hand in hand with changes in our way of speaking about them.

Both Wittgenstein and Huizinga acknowledge the presence of rules in games. However, for Huizinga rules are "absolutely binding and allow no doubt" (Huizinga 1938: 11), which implies that they are always explicit and not available to interpretation -- at least while we are using them in a game. For Wittgenstein, on the other hand, not only language-games, but games themselves exhibit a sort of openness in the application of their rules (PI: 83). The presence of clearly definable rules is, for Huizinga, the indispensable element that separates games from real life. The emphasis that Huizinga puts on the non-ordinary effects of the playing activity is certainly far from Wittgenstein's view of games and language-games as a part of our everyday life. Huizinga is looking for the "essence" of "the concept of play," that essence contained in the very name `play', and for this purpose he needs to set exact boundaries. He aims to retrieve the "primary quality" that gives play its special place in the world. No idea, as we have already seen, could be more antithetical to Wittgenstein's conception of language. Wittgenstein, instead, is only looking for "family resemblances."

Black (1986) proposes a parallel of Wittgenstein's notion of language-game with some widespread views about the subject of "game", among which Huizinga occupies a central position. These views are summarized in six main points, which illustrate the "distinctive features" of the activities called "games," that is: "(1) *Games are designed for play* [...]. (2) *Games are rule-*

governed [...]. (3) *Games are goal-directed* [...]. (4) *A game's intrinsic goal need have no value or interest outside the game itself* [...]. (5) *The rules of a game are arbitrary* [...]. (6) *Games are bounded*. " (ibid.: 82-3) According to Black, Wittgenstein's language-games only satisfy the points (2), (5) and (6), but fail to meet "the crucial criteria of playfulness and pointlessness of games" (ibid.: 84), that is point (1). Therefore, they cannot be really considered as games.

I think it plausible that this failure would not constitute a genuine sign of exclusion from the category of "games" according to Huizinga himself, since he repeatedly said that the distinction between the spheres of "game" and "non-game" does not coincide with the distinction between play and seriousness. It seems that Black's analysis, taking for granted the presence of "distinctive features" of games, heads to a definition of the concept "game". Indeed, according to him, even "family resemblances" must rest on some unifying principle in order to be called `resemblances'.

However, his conclusions seems at odds with Wittgenstein's use of the concepts "game" and "language-game". Wittgenstein is not interested in working out a definition of "language-game." His point is that such a definition could never capture the infinite richness of the examples of games. Games do resemble one other, but in a variety of different ways: there are no essential features to be found in every single instance. It is true, as Black states, that games "must be similar in *some respect*." Wittgenstein does not deny this. But those "respects" cannot be grouped in a well-defined fashion even before looking at examples of games. The sense of Wittgenstein's argument about family resemblance is predominantly negative as Backer & Hacker (1992: 192) say, for it aims to overthrow the "dogma" of the existence of common characteristics belonging to the instances of a concept-word.

I think that between Huizinga's and Wittgenstein's conceptions there are more close points than it might seem. Indeed, to a certain extent at least, we can retrieve an aesthetic quality even in the notion of language-game. One of the signs of possessing an aesthetic quality is *autonomy* of

goals: our aesthetic experience with works of art *may* not have other purposes beyond mere enjoyment of it. Language-games seem to enjoy this autonomous status too: they may be seen as self-sufficient events mostly containing what is necessary for an understanding of language. It is true that in some language-games, like "commanding" and "obeying an order," we can use language in order to obtain a non-linguistic result. In them language is used as a means for an external end. But those games still constitute a "whole of language and actions" that is *autonomously* organized. It is this "whole" which is independent. The achievement of something, though external to language, is still internal to a language-game. Though language is used to do things, to procure us the satisfaction of our needs, still language-games have their own "internal goods," in MacIntyre's terms. Using language is already *doing* something, and this doing has its own standards of excellence. Language is, therefore, a network of many self-governed structures.

Language-games cannot be, like games, "artificially bounded", as Black (1986) claims. In this sense, they are not really autonomous. However, there is a way to consider autonomy as belonging to the investigation of language-games. That is, language-games *can be* autonomously investigated, without taking into account the network of related language-games. And even when these related games (for example, the games of communicating "desires, intentions, reports" in the game of the builders) make their appearance they do so as parts of the main game.

What can the "theory of games" tell us about language-games?

The mathematical theory of games was originally developed by the mathematician Von Neumann in 1928. Nowadays the heading "theory of games" (meaning by that "games of strategy") commonly refers to the theory as it was developed in the ***Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*** written by von Neumann and Morgenstern in the early forties. In this book a game is an "abstract concept" defined as "the totality of rules which describe it." A game is thus distinguished from its

own instances, that is from "the individual *plays*" of it. Similarly, while a game consists of "moves," a play consists of "choices:" choices are the "concrete instances" of those "abstract occasions" of choice called "moves" (Neumann-Morgenstern: 49). In practice games are taken as situations where "there will be *players* (at least two), and each will pick a *strategy*" about how to conduct his/her game, and where "the result will be a reward or punishment for each player: the *payoff*" (see Davis 1970: 6). The notion of strategy thus exhibits a temporal dimension, being a plan concerning the succession of moves chosen by a player from the beginning to the end of the game. Parlor games are typically games of strategy. However, "the word 'game' is not meant to imply a lack of seriousness" (Rapoport 1960: 109).

Neumann-Morgenstern employ the theory of games as a tool to get a deeper understanding of economic behavior, namely "an exact description of the endeavor of the individual to obtain a maximum of utility" (Neumann-Morgenstern, 1944: 1). The kind of behavior the book deals with is therefore the one which we are willing to call "rational" (ibid.: 9). As Rapoport (1960: 107-8) also explains, in his analysis of games of strategy, a *rational* individual is one who "takes into account the possible consequences of the courses of action open to him" and who "chooses the course of action which, in his estimation, is likely to lead to the most preferred consequence." Thus in the game-theorists' perspective being rational means being able to calculate, more or less precisely, how relevant, how successful a strategy is with respect to the goals we want to obtain. Rationality is thus centered on the *means-to-ends* relationship.

This is only a sketchy characterization of what game-theory is all about, though, in the use I am making of it, it already suggests an interesting question as to whether language-games too, as described by Wittgenstein, might conform to this notion of rationality.

If we take communication as the main, broad goal of the use of language, then language users are *rational* individuals, in the sense of the game-theory, insofar as they try to produce some

results through language. We speak in order to get answers to our questions, to have our desires fulfilled, our statements assented to and so on. This result cannot be easily compared with "utility" in the sense meant by game-theorists. In an economic exchange "utility," i.e., the advantage we can get from this exchange, corresponds to some measurable quantity, like for example money -- at least in modern economies (Neumann-Morgenstern, 1944: 8). But there is nothing like that in linguistic exchanges. The primary "utility" of language, if any, might be the one we gain from making ourselves understood and therefore from achieving what we want to. However, it is difficult to quantify understanding, or to find an exact, numerical measure of it. Rather, as also Wittgenstein seems to assert, understanding has a *qualitative* meaning: we know that our sentences have been understood from the way people around us react, from what they do and say in reply. Understanding language is an integral part of our form of life (PI: 23) and therefore it cannot be estimated apart from them. Understanding is part of the "phenomenon" of language, "the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language" (PI: 108).

Language as a phenomenon is language as we *actually* speak and use it, independently of any external goal we may want to reach through it. We might say that the kind of utility language exhibits is an *internal* utility, comparable to those "internal goods" that in McIntyre's terms can be procured only through continuous participation into a practice.[76] It is "*in language* that it is all done" (PG: 143). We must place this utility in the very circumstances of the use of language, and not in something outside. That is the sense of Wittgenstein's remark about two different ways of intending the expression "to invent a language." We can invent a language either as "an instrument for a particular purpose" *or* as "a game" (PG: 92, PI 492). The second sense of the expression clarifies the point of the analogy between language and games: they are both *ends-in-themselves*, circumscribed internally by arbitrary rules. They are not interesting as causes of some external

[76] See above page 27.

effects (though these effects may be present as secondary elements). On the contrary, taken in the first sense the expression "to invent a language" just means to devise a system of signs as a cause-effect mechanism.[77]

In Neumann-Morgenstern's view games of strategy work as *models* of a social economy, an economy whose participants depend on each other's choices in getting to the end they want to. They are good models because of their "similarity" with the situations of economic exchange (Neumann-Morgenstern, 1944: 32). For Wittgenstein, too, games represent a paradigm of investigation for language, since they provide valuable insights into common linguistic structures (PI: 83 and 108). Analyzing language in terms of language-games has the same general purpose that analyzing economy in terms of games of strategy has: it helps getting a clear view of the problems involved.

In this respect both Neumann-Morgenstern and Wittgenstein use a similar technique of investigation. They both start with the study of elementary examples of, respectively, games of strategy and language-games. These elementary situations have a methodological import since, as both authors say, they provide an almost unproblematic ground for understanding how economy and language work.[78] They are "prototypes" as Rapoport (1960: 109) suggests.

However, except for this general common framework there is a notion, which is fundamental in the theory of games, the notion of "strategy," which shows a non-easy application to the case of language-games.

---

[77] Wittgenstein's analysis of language on the basis of the calculus-analogy, in the early thirties, aims exactly to dispel the belief that understanding language consists in a sort of causal mechanism, going on in a special medium (see BB: 8-9, 153-4 it.; PG: 97,99,104).

[78] Neumann-Morgenstern (1944: 7) say that the study of elementary cases "serves to corroborate the theory." Similarly Wittgenstein (PI: 5) finds in primitive language-games an opportunity to examine unambiguous forms of language. See also on this point the parallel between Wittgenstein and Huizinga (p. 11).

As traditionally defined by game-theorists, a strategy is "a complete plan of action that describes what a player will do under all possible circumstances" (Davis, 1970: 7).[79] This plan of action is based on the assumption that players will *always* try to do their best in order to get the most favorable result for them (ibid.: 8). The assumption is a necessary one, if we remember that games of strategy are devised to provide a suitable definition of *rational behavior*. Indeed, being rational in a game of this sort means being able to choose the best strategy, that is the best available means to attain the desired end. What is most important about this definition of strategy is that it applies to both a player's and his/her opponent's behavior. Therefore, a player who wants to get the best outcome for him/herself has to take into account opponents who are trying to do the same for themselves. As Rapoport perceptively emphasizes, a game is different from a fight *just because* it implies the "rationality of the opponent." This implication shows, according to him, the essential "cooperative" character of games. In games, contrary to what happens in fights, player and opponent "speak the same language," that is the language of rationality (Rapoport, 1960: 9).

I think that this need to take into account the rationality of the opponent makes games more complicated and more engaging at the same time. Playing a game against an opponent who is known to be a weak player deprives that game of interest. That is why the ἀρετῆ, as Huizinga (1938: 63) says, is so relevant in playing. It measures the good quality of someone's performance in a game or sport: the greater the ability of opponents, the higher the ἀρετῆ of a player who is able to outwit them.

Strategy is not identical to the rules of a game. As Neumann-Morgenstern (1944: 49) clearly point out, a strategy is *freely* selected by a player. Rules, instead, only list all the authorized moves and exclude the unauthorized ones. Rules do not specify the order in which moves are to be

---

[79] The original Neumann-Morgenstern (1944: 79) formulation is: "a plan which specifies what choices [a player] will make in every possible situation, for every possible actual information which he may possess at that moment.":

selected, except for the starting conditions. It is up to the participants to specify that order.[80] Therefore, as I understand, the difference between rules and strategy is that while rules belong to a game, a strategy belongs to players. A player cannot make up his/her own rules, but s/he can decide which of the existing rules it is convenient for him/her to follow at a certain stage of the game.[81] A strategy can be successful or not. Rules, instead, are neither.

The notion of strategy can be limitedly applied to language-games, as long as it also includes "skill," that is the ability to use the means of language in a correct way.[82] Besides, even the all-inclusive concept of *rationality*, pointed out by Rapoport as an integral part of the choice of strategies, equally affects language-games. Speakers must pre-suppose in their fellows the ability to use the language.

However, beyond this general employment, the notion of strategy, as used by game-theorists, cannot be directly applied to language-games. First of all, language-games do not necessarily involve conflictual situations and winning positions, as games of strategy are mainly supposed to do.[83] Besides, a strategy in a language-game, if there is any, could not be an openly

---

[80] For example, in the game of chess, the rules establish the starting position of the pieces on the chessboard. What follows, that is which pieces to move and in which order, depends on the *free* choice of the participants.

[81] A strategy can be conveniently illustrated with the help of a tree-diagram (see Rapoport, 1960: 140-2). The nodes represent the various stages in the game. The branches, growing out of these nodes, represent the choices available at those stages, leading to different solutions. A tree displays all the moves available in a game, and can be very complicated depending on the number and type of rules. A strategy, instead, is the choice of one of the several paths available on this tree, according to the goal a player wants to attain.

[82] On this point see Introduction, page 18.

[83] This fact is shown by the existence of games with the so-called "equilibrium point" (Davis 1983: 17) or games which require the application of "the minimax theorem" (ibid.: 19). Both kinds of games are called 0-sum games, that is games where one player wins what the other loses. However there are non 0-sum games where, as Rapoport (1960: 175-7) shows, it is possible for players to be better off if they both assume a kind of *cooperative* -rationality, instead of a conflictual one based exclusively on self-interest.

declared one as the definition given by game-theorists takes it to be. Often when speakers interact they do not always know in advance what kind of conduct they will adopt. It certainly depends on the circumstances they happen to be in. If they do, their strategy is not generally an effective one, since it commonly prescribes the general goal but not the specific way it has to be attained.

The restraints we find in the application of the notion of strategy to language point out an important fact, that is, the huge number of alternatives speakers face at every stage in their use of language, which makes the choice of a strategy, on the basis of a preference-order, a very complicated fact. This number may be difficult to specify *in principle*, due to the flexibility of language (subject as this is to a continuous change) and the creativity of the speaker, who often make unexpected moves -- except in very simple games like "giving an order." Here two basic replies are possible: obeying or not obeying the order itself.

Rapoport (1960: 146) says that "there are *in principle* no unforeseen circumstances in a game of strategy. Everything that can possibly happen in such a game can be *listed*, because the rules of the game prescribe everything that can possibly happen, and therefore everything can be foreseen." No matter how big can the number of the available strategies be, it is possible, though impractical, to enumerate them completely (ibid.: 147). However, in language, rules do not prescribe everything that can happen. According to Wittgenstein even the rules of an ordinary game, and not just of a language-game, are directives often lacking precision (PI: 100).

Even the distinction posed by Neumann-Morgenstern between rules and strategy holds for language-games only within some limits. One thing -- it seems -- are the rules which list for every item in the language its possible employment and so establish the limits of a legitimate use of words.[84]

---

[84] Basically, rules are given by the syntax of a language. Semantic rules impose on language a constraint which does not hold, for example, in games like chess. Here all configurations on the board are "meaningful" if the pieces have been moved according to their "syntactic" rules. Instead in a language, among

Another thing is “strategy” meant as the speaker's choice of which expressions to use and in which combinations, in order to get a certain expected result. But it also seems to me that in Wittgenstein's later work the notions of "rules" and "strategy," which game-theorists want to keep separate, overlap to a certain extent. The rules he has in mind are mainly rules governing the use of language. And use is a notion which may already involve reference to strategies, in the sense that the language-game we play, i.e. the circumstance in which we use language, delimit the choice of the "strategy" a speaker can adopt to attain a certain result. It seems that the relationship between rules and strategy is reversed in the two cases. In games of strategy definite and overt rules always pre-exist the design of a strategy. In language-games instead it is the overall strategy, i.e., *use*, which contributes to an understanding of the rules being used.[85]

Acknowledging this inverted situation might drive one to abandon altogether the game-analogy. And indeed, according to Harris (1988), there is at least one sense in which the analogy between the games of chess and language fails. This sense has to do with the "determinacy," or exhaustiveness of the rules, that is with the existence of definite rules for any single occasion of use. As Harris remarks, language is different from chess in this very respect. For every chess piece there is a fixed rule to apply, since the rules of the pieces in chess "cover all possible positions on the chess board." Linguistic "pieces," on the contrary, may have, at times, an open range of uses, which implies more leeway for speakers in *deciding* how to use a piece, especially in dubious cases

---

all the admissible configurations of words - all the syntactically correct ones - only a subset of those are also "meaningful", that is have a legitimate use in communication. For example, of the two syntactically correct sentences "The baby eats the bread" and "The bread eats the baby" only the first one, in normal circumstances, is semantically acceptable.

[85] An example of a language-game where the strategy of the whole determines the meaning of its parts is parody. In a literary parody, say, the general purpose of mocking an existing text holds us from taking its component expressions in a literal sense. Caricature and metaphor represent analogous examples. This is also the meaning of what Wittgenstein says about a rule being in place "if it fulfils its purpose" (PI: 87).

(Harris 1988: 91). In short, Harris's stated disanalogy between language and the game of chess is that in chess rules have always priority over chess-players, whereas in language it is very often language-players who exercise authority over the rules, and figure out how to apply them and when. Backer & Hacker (1992: 49), on the other hand, take this divergence as showing only the existence of a dissimilarity between "language and calculus". Therefore,

According to them, it is the calculus-analogy, and not the game-analogy, to prove unsatisfactory. Indeed "the chess analogy remained useful" even when Wittgenstein dropped the calculus-model of language.

In my opinion the disanalogy between chess and language lies not only in the fact pointed out by Harris, but also in the difficulty of identifying the number of pieces available in language. It is not so easy to say what this number is. While in the game of chess we know that each unit on the board is a separate piece of the chess, with its associate rule, in language a unit may be, depending on different contexts, a single word or combinations of words, or else a whole composite sentence. Thus it is at the level of context that language and chess mostly differ. Chess is monocontextual. Its unique context is provided by the board on which a match is played. The context is the antagonistic situation of the two players. Language, on the contrary, involves a great variety of contexts, from which, often, the openness in the application of rules derives. In the end it seems that in language *play*, in the sense I take the word, has more room than *game.*

Harris attributes the impossibility of constructing a full analogy between chess and language to their different nature, which is respectively, *competitive* and *co-operative*. Speakers do not follow a "prior set of rules," he says, because "they are co-operating, not competing" (ibid.: 119). However, I maintain that it is not competition as such that requires a prior "set of rules." It is rather what we want the result of the competition to be that does it. If the goal is merely overcoming the opponent, anything will do, including the absence of any rule-formulations, as long as it buys

the victory.[86] If the goal is, instead, showing a better and more solid expertise than the rival can do, then rules are necessary in order to define the field in which the expertise has to be tested. Rules provide a sort of border enclosing the territory where competition has to take place. That is the rationalistic component of competition, which, in Huizinga's view, has to prove one's ἀρητῆ.

On the other hand, it is not always true that cooperation does not need pre-established rules. Once again, it depends on what the end of cooperation is. If -- going back to one of Wittgenstein's examples employed by Harris -- the goal of builder and assistant is not just building, but a construction that has specific features, material and aesthetic, then their cooperative enterprise needs to comply with some norms fixed in advance.

Harris interprets Wittgenstein's use of the analogy as if it were meant to offer an explanatory model of language, that is a paradigm which really *explains* the workings of language. In fact it is symptomatic that, in analyzing one of the points where the analogy between language and chess fails, he says: "it is misguided to insist that somewhere there must be [...] the counterpart to the rules of chess" (Harris, 1988: 111). This is inexact, as a report on Wittgenstein's use of that analogy, for two main reasons. Wittgenstein does not take the analogy in a literal sense, as if it implied the idea that language *is* like chess. Rather he suggests that:

> studying the nature of the rules of games must be useful for the study of grammatical rules, since it is beyond doubt there is some sort of similarity between them. - The right thing is to let the certain instinct that there is a kinship lead one to look at the rules of games without any preconceived judgement or prejudice about the analogy between games and grammar. And [...] one should simply report what one sees. (PG: 187)

Wittgenstein just follows his intuition that the example of, say, the game of chess, will offer

---

[86] In fact according to Rapoport's acute distinction (1960: 10) a "game" differs from a "fight" just because this one is "devoid of the rationality of the opponents" and its purpose is mainly to "harm the opponents," rather than "to outwit" them.

some valuable hints into the nature of language, or rather it will introduce us to a fruitful understanding of it.

Because of the existence of a loose sort of strategy in a language-game, the competitive factor, so powerful in Huizinga's picture, only remotely fits in with Wittgenstein's conception. No external rewards are foreseen for the supposed winner of a language-game. The only one, if any, would be the public acknowledgment of the winner's linguistic ability, a sort of "aretê" in the mastery of language. This kind of reward, if pursued on a large scale, would be an expression of highest respect paid to human reason. Having a good mastery of language is a sign of intelligent behavior. However, unexpected dangers could arise if the winning positions of some language-games were institutionalized, that is, if it were pre-established what has to count as *the* winning strategy. This is what happens, for example, in all kinds of dictatorship: some language-games are totally forbidden, while in others only some positions are allowed. It suffices to think of a certain state rhetoric, typical of totalitarian regimes, often devised to suggest to citizens the "right" use of words, and therefore the "right" association of concepts.[87] That is why Wittgenstein's relativism about the interpretation of the rules of a game is extremely important in this respect.

PART III

The strategic component in language-games represents, together with the component of skill, an active function in the use of language. Linguistic skill is the ability to employ at the best

[87] It is typical of dictatorships to coin a new phraseology aimed at affecting the imagery of people and, often, at radically changing their use of language. As Murdoch (1992: 459) says "[t]echniques of political oppression [...] may tend (as pictured in Orwell's 1984) to weaken and simplify and starve ordinary speech"; and this can happen up to the point where they make "certain things unsayable" (ibid.: 84). One example is the adoption, during the fascist regime in Italy, of a stereotyped and empty phraseology wanting to revive, in people's mind, the old splendor of the Roman empire. Another example is offered by the Catholic Church in the XVIIth century. In condemning Galileo the Church forbade the language-games of modern science.

possible level the expressive opportunities, both syntactical and semantical, provided by a language. Unlike a natural skill, that is a natural ability that we may have in doing something, for example singing well, a linguistic skill requires a previous training in the use of language (though also a natural talent or skill has to be practiced and so enhanced by continuous practice). The need of this training, representing the non-active component of *habit*, counterbalances the active role of strategy and skill. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the notion of habit or custom involves the idea of a reiteration of certain schemes of action through time. Habit is the outcome of a continuous "training," through which human beings eventually achieve a "mastery of language."

The concept of *custom* ties in with the statistic "law of large numbers" (Rapoport, 1960: 91). The law says that an event, which is completely indeterminate on the individual scale, can become determinate, i.e. certain, when we consider more instances of the same event. For example, we don't know which will be the result of the toss of a coin at every single instance. This result is indeterminate. We know however that if we toss the coin for a number of times, we'll get tails or heads with a frequency of approximately 50% each. Similarly a custom, a tradition is fixed by the repetition of a single action for a certain number of times, until it becomes easy to be foreseen on a large scale.[88]

Wittgenstein introduces the notion of "training" in one of the first sections of the ***Investigations***:

> A child uses such primitive forms of language when it learns to talk. Here the teaching of language is not explanation, but *training*. (PI, 5) [italics mine]

[88] It is very interesting to note the coincidence of these remarks with Monod's thesis (1970) about the change of chance into necessity. He shows how life evolves from utterly fortuitous events to the realm of order and of necessary laws, through a chain of microscopic variations. His view seems to state the existence of a sort of biological training that brings organisms to establishing customs from the initial chaos.

Here the notion of training is connected to the child's learning how to speak by means of rudimentary language-games. Both elements, e.g. the presence of a young human subject and the use of elementary forms of language, give training the sense of an action operating at a pre-rational level. Indeed, this level is still predominant in children. Their ability to learn things is activated mostly through a process of imitation. Therefore, training them in speaking the language becomes a matter of shaping directly their linguistic behavior -- and not of teaching them rules - by means of a reiterated practice in speaking, that is, a "day-to-day practice in playing" language-games (PI: 197). No explicit learning of rules is involved, but only an adaptation to pre-existing forms of communication.

This shaping of the linguistic behavior does not exclude the presence of standards of correctness. Speaking a language, as Rhees (1970: 78) emphasizes, includes making reference to "standards of what is correct or incorrect" and this reference is a fundamental fact which distinguishes speaking a language from following a routine behavior. Being able to discern the correct uses of language from the incorrect ones is part of linguistic practice. However, a comparison between the way we test the knowledge of our native language and that for a foreign language we have learnt as adults may be clarifying at this point. If asked to give an explanation of the use of a particular expression in our native language, most of the times we are not able to provide the exact grammatical rule. What we do is rely on a linguistic habit which has proved itself successful in communicating with other people. On the other hand, when we learn a foreign language we often need to make recourse to the rules of the grammar in order to feel reassured about the correctness of the use of an expression. This difference, hinted at by Rhees (ibid.: 82) himself, suggests that learning the correct use of language (the native one) is a matter of reinforcing this use through practice, rather than through the study of explicit grammatical rules. Besides, what

is correct or not in a language is a very time-relative notion. What was considered "correct" in the Italian of last century, for example, may not be "correct" today. This has an explanation in the fact that language is, to a large extent, arbitrary, that is not constrained to conform itself to some natural laws.

As Malcolm (1986: 305) comments, Wittgenstein's insistence on the "practice of language" shows that an "unhesitating behavior" is at the basis of our linguistic acts. And he says:

> What is striking is [...] that something of the same [instinctive behavior] permeates and surrounds all human acting and use of language. (ibid.: 303)

In Wittgenstein, like Plato, the notion of game is tied to the notion of *habit* and *custom*: games, typically children's games, have the power of molding human nature by gradually reinforcing certain behavioral patterns. A custom is thus the result of the influence of time upon us. Repetition produces regularity and uniformity.[89] Language in Wittgenstein, like ethics in Plato, is the result of a slow building process that sinks its roots in the pre-rational component of human nature. "Language - Wittgenstein states - did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination" (OC: 475).[90]

---

[89] The influence of custom upon human behavior has been acutely analyzed by Hume, whom Kripke (1982: 67) calls the "grandfather of this modern psychological notion". In emphasizing the power of non-rational components of the human nature he says that "we call everything CUSTOM which proceeds from a past repetition, without any new reasoning" (THN: I, III, VIII). Hume also understood the importance of the principle of custom in education (see THN: I, III, IX). Kripke's interesting parallel between Hume's denial of a "private causation" and Wittgenstein's denial of a "private language" (1982: 68) has the effect of bringing together the notions of *custom* and *agreement* which are the grounds of, respectively, cause-effect relations and uses of language. The fact that we are *accustomed* to observe certain regularities in natural phenomena, and the fact that we *agree* on the use of certain linguistic items are "brute fact[s]" (see Kripke 1982: 97) from which our investigation must begin.

[90] Goodman also emphasizes the role of habit within a philosophy which does not acknowledge the existence of a unique world anymore. See above, page 89.

Training brings us slowly to a partial abandonment of our original individuality and causes *spontaneity* to *adjust* to given forms of expression. The mastery of a language, and of any activity mastered through custom as well, is the sign of a reached integration with the community of speakers. The significance of *customs* is the one of emphasizing the need of expanding our own self and merging it with other selves, which is not an impoverishment, but rather an enrichment. This need is the very human need to have ourselves *accepted* in the large community where we live. As Cavell (1979: 20) says, the "appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community." In relying on customs, on the *we* that includes all of us, we satisfy the desire for a consensus among us and our fellow human beings. Any obstacle we might find in the way to this consensus would represent a restraint of this fundamental desire. Language, as a *communal* means of communication, represents the first and most important channel through which we can get this agreement.

The theme of language as being a fundamental, but inevitably *communal* means of representing our experience is an old one. As early as the XVIIth century, Locke brought into evidence this point in his ***Essay*** - by emphasizing the fact that communication would be impossible had not words a meaning agreed upon by everybody. In expressing their "ideas", which for Locke are "internal" representations, human beings must have recourse to the mediating function of language. Hence, even only to *understand* each other, human beings must use a means of expression which can be shared with others, thereby losing the irreducibly individual character of their experience.

With this issue, we are back to Nietzsche and Wittgenstein at the same time. Nietzsche is the great champion of the cult of the individual (see FW 335), but of an individual whose being has irremediably lost its *originality*. As he himself admits, language, representing the only common instrument through which human beings reach consciousness, determines the inevitable loss of the

most original part of the individual experience (see GS 354). The conscious, language-using individual is a *social* creature. Paradoxically enough then, human beings gain self-consciousness through language and communication, but, in this way, what belongs to the inmost individual sphere -- our deepest feelings, thoughts and emotions -- remains beyond the reach of language, forever sunk in the inexpressible depth of the self.

Here there seems to be an astonishing similarity between Nietzsche's reasoning and Wittgenstein's "private language" issue. Taking into account the necessary differences between the two positions, it seems that Wittgenstein's argument reaches the same conclusion that Nietzsche does.[91] A private language, one that only its user can use and understand, is unthinkable. The missing link in the so-called "private language" is the lack of "criteria of correctness:" there are no ways of identifying an experience as exclusively private because there are no ways of comparing it to something else (PI: 288 - 290). There is no possibility of "doubt" and no possibility of "error." Therefore there is no possibility of *understanding* either (see PI: 268). The meaning of expressions like 'I', or words of sensations, does not lie in a "private ostension," whose purpose is to point to a specific person. It lies in its "home language-game" (PI: 116), in its familiar grammatical use, that is, in its actual use.

Employing Walton's (1990) theory, we can think of a private language-game as an *unauthorized* one, not because the moves in it are loosened from any rules, but rather because the rules supporting it are not and *cannot be* the ones commonly accepted. However, whereas Walton seems to suggest that unauthorized games could become authorized, provided that their rules (though farfetched) be commonly assumed, a private language-game, for Wittgenstein, is one that can never become *authorized* in this way.

---

[91] In his edition of *The Gay Science*, Kaufmann briefly makes a similar point while commenting on GS 354.

The notion of private language-games is thus even stronger than the one of unauthorized games of make-believe. They are not only *unauthorized*, as a matter of fact, but they are *unauthorizable*.[92] From the moment we would start describing our private experiences they are not private anymore. Indeed the very meaning of a private experience is its exclusive belonging to its individual owner. It is true that the "struggle against evil, the love of what is good, the inspired enjoyment of beauty, the discovery and perception of holiness, continues all the time in the privacy of human souls" (Murdoch, 1992: 458). But at the very time I *tell* other people my struggle, my love, my enjoyment those are not *private* anymore. Murdoch considers Wittgenstein's conception of a private life unsatisfactory because it seems to leave out a great deal that we deem important in our life. On the contrary, I think that Wittgenstein's conception exalts the *private* aspect of our life by just excluding language from it. This is a way of excluding rules from the realm of the private, and therefore of excluding the possibility of customs. Indeed, where
I emit "sounds which no one else understands but which I *appear to understand*" (PI: 269) there is no possibility to share with other people.

There is a fundamental difference, though, between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche. In Nietzsche's view what constitutes the unique, incommensurable part of the being of an individual is a matter of regret. It represents the deepest and indispensable source of life for mankind, but it is inexpressible and lost forever. The only way in which men could regain the sense of that being and have a keen perception of it -- Nietzsche suggests -- is through music. Music is the only means of expression that can reach the profound depths of the human soul which are inaccessible to language.[93]

---

[92] For a detailed discussion about Walton's conception see page 64-5 above.

[93] See above, page 105, for Rorty's interpretation of Nietzsche's conception of consciousness as compared with Wittgenstein's notion of a "private language."

On the other hand, Wittgenstein just acknowledges the fact that the idea of a unique, private language, that is, a language that can be understood only by the individual to whom it belongs, and is inaccessible to others, is simply without sense. The notion of language is inextricably connected to the existence of *common* criteria of understanding. Individuals can emerge only through the "playing" of a *communal* language-game. Wittgenstein says that

> 'I' is not the name of a person. (PI: 410)
> To understand the meaning of that word we should ask:
> [I]s the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? (PI: 116)

"Individuals" and "private experience," as we come to know of them, as long as we want to give them an external expression, are a question of language; and language, with its rules, moves and strategies, is a social fact. As far as their *knowledge* is concerned, individuals have no more reality than the one we assign to the meanings of the personal pronouns we use in everyday life; and private experiences have no more in themselves than their linguistic expressions.

Our actual "playing" a communal language, which generates rules, that is customs, is the very bridge between individual creativity and tradition. This *playing* is all that matters. This is the playing that, as Harris (1988) claims, points to the priority of use over abstract rules. As he says (ibid.:113) in Wittgenstein's view "play is the best part of the game." But this sense of "playing" is also the one included in my notion of "play" as opposed to the one of "games."

CONCLUSION

In this work I have covered a wide variety of philosophical conceptions and points of view about the subject of play and games. This fact may (and at times does) generate in the reader the impression of being faced with an investigation following several paths, leading to different, but not always tied to each other, directions. Therefore in this conclusive remarks I will try to pull back together the threads running throughout my discourse.

In the present section I not only want to present, for the sake of clarity, a systematical summary of the ideas I have analyzed so far, but I also want to discern more extensively what are the insights they offer into the Wittgensteinean notion of language-game. Most of the conceptions I have dealt with belong to different philosophical traditions than the one Wittgenstein himself belongs to -- provided that Wittgenstein's thought may be inscribed precisely into one philosophical tradition or other and be exhausted by it. And at first glance it seems that no philosophers can be as distant from Wittgenstein's incessant analytical work as Plato and Nietzsche are. Nevertheless, this distance may represent a challenge to the uncovering of their inner links.

In what follows I will, first, offer a summary of my work and then an account of the affinities we can imagine as extisting between Wittgenstein and the other philosophers mentioned in my investigation.

1. Summary

When I started to work on the present subject I had in mind a specific goal, that is, taking Huizinga's definition of games, analyzing the significance and implications of it, and then applying the results so obtained onto Wittgenstein's notion of language-game. As I went into the details of Huizinga's conception of the play-activities and their cultural import, I realized that much of what he

was saying could be put to an interesting philosophical use. The attempt to identify and follow the various suggestions emerging from Huizinga's book has thus made me "wander" in different philosophical fields, from aesthetics to ethics and anthropology, in view of an enriched conception of games.

However, before moving to an application of Huizinga's conception to those philosophical fields, I thought I should take a preliminary step. The step was the one of supplementing Huizinga's investigation with a distinction he did not himself dwell upon in his work, that is, the distinction between the concepts of "play" and "games". I took "play" mainly as an *attitude* which is free from the restraints of the rules and is continuously renewing itself, and "games" as the rule-bounded activities which, rather, show a definite and steady form. By means of this distinction I could emphasizes the two opposite sides of the "play-concept". I found it necessary in order to bring together the very fields I mentioned above under the category of "play-activity," since each of them emphasizes one or the other of these two sides.

Huizinga's definition of the "play-concept" is the following:

> [P]lay is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is "different" from "ordinary life". (Huizinga, 1938: 28)

Leaving aside for the moment the remark about the consciousness of a "difference" created by play, in this definition I saw three main characteristics being stressed as belonging to play-activities, and these are: freedom, spatio-temporal limitation and rule-boundedness. These three features represent the most significant components of what I identify as "games". By games, indeed, I mean those activities like sport-games, card-games or chess which exhibit a well-defined structure, that is, a form such that these activities can be repeated unaltered in time and so handed down from one generation to the next.

Here the first guest from my philosophical "crowd" comes to the stage, that is, Gombrich. Gombrich has emphasized the extent to which tradition is determinant in *making possible* the works of art. Tradition is the source of the artistic languages, that is, of the rules -- i.e., "schemata" -- which shape those languages and guide artists' perception of their present scenery. The rules handed down to artists from the cultural tradition they belong to have the same *constitutive* role that the rules of games have.

Tradition and rules, therefore, have represented my first conceptual pair. Tradition and rules evoke each other: rules involve the possibility of reiteration, and reiteration generates tradition, that is, customs. They share in together with the notion of form, since this notion suggests the idea of something which exhibits some degree of regularity and stability, like games for examples.

The notion of tradition that I borrowed from Gombrich has enriched Huizinga's conception of the rules of a game with a temporal dimension, which was only implicitly dealt with in his investigation. It has also helped me to discriminate games from the attitude of "play", which, on the contrary, is centered on a different temporal mode, i.e., future, implying, in turn, unpredictability -- just the opposite of regularity.

Spatio-temporal limitation and freedom -- the other two features of games mentioned in Huizinga's definition -- did not show to be as antithetical as they might have, at first, appeared. Indeed, I understood that the freedom Huizinga was thinking of is of a *Kantian* kind: it is not the negative kind of freedom -- synonymous with disengagement from any restraints -- but rather the freedom of choosing and therefore making something happening, e.g., the game. This freedom of choice needs a delimited space where to exercise its power and be effective. Therefore the limitations in space and time are necessary in order to define the area where it is legitimate to make a free choice.

In the course of my work this notion of freedom presented me with a complication. In the **INTRODUCTION** to the present work I attributed the mark of freedom -- in the negative sense above mentioned -- to "play". Indeed, I took play to be the symbol of actions disinhibited from rules.

Huizinga, on the other hand, was dealing with a rather opposite notion of freedom, which does involve the existence of rules and limitations. The only way I envisaged of taking myself out of the impasse was by equating the freedom of "play" to the *spontaneity* which Schiller attributes to all natural phenomenon. Schiller showed a way of reconciling the two kinds of freedom in what he calls "the play impulse". His appeal to reach the ideal ethical stance through the practice of play and beauty had also an evident tie to Plato.

I considered that this reconciliation between the realms of *autonomy* and *spontaneity* (or "natural necessity", as Schiller names it) -- where we can locate the two kinds of freedom -- might be looked at from two different points of view: from the point of view of aesthetics or from the point of view of ethics. I noticed that, from the first point of view, the harmonization had been achieved by the Kantian joining of spontaneity and rules -- i.e., imagination and understanding -- in the aesthetic judgment of taste. According to Kant this union is realized in the form of a mutual "play" of the faculties. From the point of view of ethics, on the other hand, the harmonization had been seen by Schiller as a combination of the laws of reason and the spontaneity of natural instincts into a higher instinct, i.e., the "play impulse." Thus play worked, in both cases, as the element which favors the reconciliation.

The fact that this adjustment has been seen as possible under the form of *play* is significant. Though both Kant and Schiller use the German word `Spiel', which also means "game", they clearly have in mind the phenomenon of play as I meant it. Indeed, also Huizinga's (partially negative) comments on the use of the word Spiel by Kant in the sense of rule-free play are indicative of the way Kant uses that word. Both Kant's and Schiller's uses point to a phenomenon free from the rigid restraints of rules, and thus different from games.

It is exactly at this point, where the notion of game wanes, and its opposite comes to the fore, that I saw the aesthetical dimension of the "play-concept" emerging. Huizinga himself retrieved many affinities between aesthetics and the play-activity, but he did not subsume the second one under the

first category, given his stated irreducibility of the play-concept. According to Huizinga this dimension, to which the consciousness of "difference" mentioned in his definition mainly refers, is brought about by the special order created by the rules of a game, by its transporting its participants in a world where the rules of ordinary life are temporarily called off. Nevertheless, I perceived a dominant aesthetic bias in his whole book -- where my reading was deeply influenced by the reading of his book **The Waning of the Middle Ages**. And I thought that, especially as a result of Huizinga's far-reaching absorption of the Platonic philosophy of play, this overall aesthetic tone would suit more intimately the attitude of play rather than games. The attitude of free playfulness looked to me so close to the appreciation and creation of beauty that the two notions of play and art seemed inevitably tied together.

This justified the extension of my investigation in the Platonic conception of play and beauty. Indeed, for Plato the training in the good forms of play is the goal of an education aiming at the habit of "graciousness" as the most important ethical/aesthetical value. His conception brings together the notions of custom, play and beauty at the same time.

Once I entered the aesthetic field, two more philosophers have presented themselves to point out an interesting part of the aesthetic experience: Walton and Dewey. They both emphasize the role of appreciators in this experience. They both bring in the beholder of artworks as a fundamental component of the artistic phenomenon. Walton especially brings into evidence the importance of practices and customs in the appreciative experience through his distinction between "authorized" and "non-authorized" games of make-believe. A "non-authorized" game is one which is born out of a non previously established agreement, that is, one which is not backed by common practices and customs, and where, therefore, no rules are available.

Danto's interest in art lies on the opposite of Walton's and Dewey's concerns for the appreciator's experience. However, my choice to take him into the discussion depended on the function that, I thought, his "opaqueness/transparency" issue might have in clarifying an aspect of

the play-games distinction. Indeed the opaqueness -- or self-referentiality -- that he considered as a typical attribute of artwork is typical, in my opinion, of the play-attitude as well. A playful attitude is aware of the difference it makes in a world of ordinary attitudes. It is not a transparent medium, but one which wants to be noticed. People who are in a playful mood distance themselves from the everyday routine reality. Thus, we are back to the consciousness of "difference" so insisted upon by Huizinga.

I also found out that in Huizinga's investigation the *agonistic* component too is inextricably linked to the deep aesthetic character of the play activities. In fact, the feelings of "tension" and "joy", mentioned in the above definition, are triggered by the situation of a contest, where people put themselves in to test their excellence -- the _ρητ_ of the Ancient Greeks. This striving for excellence, this good competitive thrust, Huizinga maintains, exhibits an aesthetic quality insofar as it represents an incentive to improve oneself and the community we live in. The underlying desire for perfection, the yearning for ideals, constitutes the aesthetic contribution made by agonism to culture.

I thought that this agonistic component might be better underscored by looking into the philosophy of agonism *par excellence*, that is, into Nietzsche's philosophy -- which is referred to by Huizinga as a revival of the original agonistic *soul* of philosophy. For Nietzsche agonism, more than just being thematized in his thought, marks a style of life, the life of the "overmen."

The passage from Nietzsche to some of his modern philosophical "heirs" was induced in my investigation by one thought: their highlighting the often forgotten side of the agonistic phenomenon, that is, the need of plurality. The transition might have looked quite implausible, since the pluralism of voices and theories advocated by Feyerabend, Goodman and Rorty is antithetical to the aristocratic and exclusive kingdom of the overmen cherished by Nietzsche. Nevertheless, the pluralism they go for -- in science, in politics, in plain ordinary life -- is just what agonism starts from. Defending pluralism means to leave the arena open for competition, and its the main aim is to protect this arena from becoming the monopoly of one and only one participant. Therefore, the uniqueness of the

overman and the democratical defense of pluralism might be but the two extreme sides of agonism: the first is its final goal, the second its starting condition.

I noticed that Huizinga rightly inscribes agonism itself within the notion of games-with-rules. Rules are necessary for agonism to take place, since they delimit the field of play where participants can exhibit their excellence. Participants manage to be real masters of their play if they can show the best of themselves by complying to the rules of the game. I thought that this component of agonism could exemplify the two main trends in Huizinga's book, that is, the aesthetic and the rationalistic one, both related to the presence of rules in a game. The rules represent the rationalistic component of games. The tension generated by the need to act by the rules in contests increases the feeling of taking part in a special event, which is outside the routine of ordinary life. And this feeling is what raises games to the level of artworks.

2. Integrating Wittgenstein

It seems that, starting from Huizinga's definition of the play-concept, I have taken a long way before getting back to Wittgenstein. The reason of this "wandering" through various conceptions and uses of that concept is that I figured they might illuminate in some particular way Wittgenstein's notion of language-game. It is time, now, to see more closely how the integration works. The only thing I can do is to lay in open view what I have got so far and confront it with Wittgenstein's notion.

The notion of language-game is not given by Wittgenstein a clear-cut definition. Its most important achievement, in my opinion, is having emphasized the fundamental role of the public dimension of language. Saying that we interact with others through language-games -- and I do not mean only "linguistic interaction," but interaction *tout court*, since for Wittgenstein we do not just "communicate" by means language, we actually *do things* with it (see PI 491) -- is a way of saying

that we are tied to some communal agreements and to the institutional uses of the rules that the community we belong to has established. These instituted uses create "customs." And we need training in the mastery of those rules in order to merge our own uses in those customs, and become integrated in them.

The significance of this integration, of this becoming part of a whole, is what is suggested by Gombrich, Eliot, on the one hand, and by Kant and Schiller, on the other hand. This integration has not the meaning of a surrender of our individuality to tradition. On the contrary, it is a way of expanding it. Kant's and Schiller's use of "play" [*Spiel*], as the meeting point of rules and spontaneity, may be taken as the symbol of this *non-compelled* joining of tradition and individuality. The *practice* needed to be embodied into tradition is the concept implicitly underlying also Walton's notion of "authorized games" on the side of the appreciation of works of art. Appreciators have to get into the games authorized by tradition in order to fully enjoy their appreciative experience. This "authorization" is not a restraint, but rather a mark of the intrinsic openness of the artistic experience, that is, its need to get more and more people involved in it. This openness, though, is conditional on acquiring the indispensable technique, the language to enter the world of an artwork.

I see this need and fact of integration as the *aesthetical* aspect of language, brought to the fore by the notion of language-game. Indeed, if we reflect on the meaning of artistic experience -- without distinguishing, as Dewey suggests, between the moment of creation and the moment of appreciation -- we can see one and the same phenomenon occurring, that is, the phenomenon of integration with the world of art. *Integration* means, for the creator of art, working into tradition so as to become part of it and, at the same time, advance it and change it. *Integration*, for the appreciator of art, is an attempt to merge her/his own world with the world of art s/he is confronted with. This immersion into the world of art is not only a temporary one, since any deep aesthetic experience has a lasting effect on us. It enriches permanently our own self. Thus, creator and appreciator are but two participants of the same game.

This experience of integration does not contradict what Huizinga says about the awareness of a "difference" which, in his view, makes games close to art. It is because we integrate and merge our worlds with the artworld that we have the feeling of being transported into a different realm. The feeling of difference depends on the fact that this integration adds a new world to our old individual world.

With language things seem to stand quite in the same way: producer and listeners are both the indispensable components of the linguistic game. And by this I do not mean that a listener must be materially present in every communicative act, but only that, like an artwork, a linguistic expression is produced for an audience, i.e., for a potential receiver of the messages sent. *Integration* into language, unlike artistic integration, may be different in a respect, since it may have the immediate purpose of affecting the material world we live in. Indeed, through language we become entrenched into what Wittgenstein calls our "form of life" -- and we become "wholly human", to paraphrase Schiller. Taking part in a language-game is not an activity which removes us from ordinary life. It might achieve this in some cases, as when we use language for specific artistic activities, like poetry for example. Nevertheless, I see a sense in which even the everyday speaking of language might represent a shifting to a level different from the one of the immediate sense-experience, i.e., different from the level of the common exchange with the outer environment. Language by itself is a way of referring to things and events in their absence. By naming and talking about them we give them a sort of substitutive existence, one which only *represents* their real existence. The "joy", mentioned by Huizinga as the accompanying feeling of being immersed in the artworld or in a game, is missing, though, in the everyday linguistic interchange -- probably only because we have become too much used to it.

Playing is what continuously and imperceptibly seals together our individual uses and tradition -- very much in the Platonic spirit. Though the play-game distinction I set at the beginning of this work is not straightforwardly applicable to Wittgenstein's notion of language-games, it is still

useful to highlight the importance of practice against rules in the speaking of language. Indeed Wittgenstein's insistence on "mastery" and "practice" of language aims to emphasize the fact that we learn how to use language by operating with it, and not by learning all its rules before their application. There is no such thing as "all the rules" of a language. Rules are made "as we go along" (PI 83). He thus seems to suggests that the *playing* of language is what matters in those games.

The element that seems to fit less Wittgenstein's view of language is the Nietzschean kind of agonism. However, if we take agonism as a striving for excellence we might see some of this attitude active in language as well. In order to take part in a language-game we have to become masters of its rules, and this involves improvement and strengthening of our skills in order to reach the established standards of excellence. Besides, the competitive/pluralistic stance advocated by Feyerabend, Goodman and Rorty may be seen as a way of enlarging tradition itself and keeping alive the various multiplicity of language-games. Pluralism is a way of leaving the doors open to integration within diversity. It is a way of intensifying the trade between us and the tradition we are part of by letting more and more individuals into it. And it is also a way of saying that there is no ruling language-game.

In the end, it seems that Huizinga's conception of games only partially matches Wittgenstein's notion of language-game. Language-games are "voluntary activities" only from a certain point of view. We do not really choose language, but rather we already *find ourselves in it*. "Limits of time and place" apply only to some language-games. Rules are an important component of games, common to both Huizinga's and Wittgenstein's conception, though, as I noticed in **CHAPTER FIVE**, Wittgenstein takes rules to be a less binding factor than Huizinga does. However, what is most interesting is that the several ideas touched on in Huizinga's book could be worked out so as to expand his very conception and illuminate new aspects of Wittgenstein's notion of language-games.

REFERENCES

(* References in the text are made to the translated editions, here mentioned, and to the most recent editions of texts listed in parentheses at the end of the reference title.)

Anderson, A.R. (1986) "Mathematics and the Language Game" in: Canfield J. (ed.) **The Philosophy of Wittgenstein**, Garland Pub., New York, vol.11: 40-52.

Aristotle (NE) **The Nicomachean Ethics**, Bobbs Merrill Company, New York (1962). Ed. by Ostwald, M.

Backer & Hacker (1983) **Meaning and Understanding**. Blackwell, Oxford (1992 ed.)

Bateson, G. (1976) "A Theory of Play and Fantasy", in Bruner J.S. et al. (1976) **Play. Its Role in Development and Evolution**, Basic Books Inc., New York: 28-64.

Bencivenga, E. (1990) **Giochiamo con la filosofia**, Mondadori, Milano.

Bencivenga, E. (1994) **Philosophy in Play. Three Dialogues**, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis/Cambridge.

Black, M. (1986) "Wittgenstein's Language-games", in Shanker, S. **Ludwig Wittgenstein**. **Critical Assessments**, Croom Helm, London, vol.2: 74-88.

Caillois, R. (1961) **Man, Play and Games**, The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., New York.

Cavell, S. (1979) **The Claim of Reason**, Oxford University Press, New York.

Celano, A.J. (1991) "Play and the Theory of Basic Human Goods", in: **American Philosophical Quarterly**, (2); 1991.

Danto, A. (1981) **The Transfiguration of the Commonplace**, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachussets.

Davis, M.D. (1970) **Game Theory. A Nontechical Introduction**, Basic Books, New York.

Denzin, N.K. (1975) "Play, Games and Interaction: the Contexts of

Childhood Socialization", in: **Sociological Quarterly**, 16 (4): 458-78.

Derrida, J. (1982) "Différance", in **Margins of Philosophy**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Dewey, J. (1929) **Experience and Nature**, Dover, New York (1958 ed.).

Dewey, J. (1934) **Art as Experience**, Perigee Books, New York (1980 ed.).

Eigen & Winkler (1975) **Das Spiel. Naturgesetze steuern den Zufall.** R.Piper GMBH & Co. KG MÜNCHEN, It. trans. **Il Gioco. Le leggi naturali spiegano il caso.** Adelphi, Milano (1987).

Eliot, T.S. (1920) **The Sacred Wood**, University Paperbacks, Methuen, London (1960 ed.).

Feyerabend, P. (1975) **Against Method**, Verso, London (1988 ed.).

Feyerabend, P. (1987) **Farewell to Reason**, Verso, London.

Gadamer, H.G. (1960) **Warheit und Methode**, Mohr, Tübingen. Eng. Trans.: **Truth and Method**, The Seabury Press, New York (1975).

Gahringer, R.E. (1959) "Can Games Explain Language?", in: **The Journal of Philosophy**, LVI: 661-67.

Garver, N. (1967) "Rules", in **The Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, Macmillan, New York: 231-33.

Garver, N. (1990) "Form of Life in Wittgenstein's Work", in: **Dialectica** 44: 175-201.

Gombrich, E.H. (1956) **Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation**, Phaidon Press, London (1977 ed.).

Goodman, N. (1976) **Languages of Art**, Hackett Publishing. Company, Indianapolis

Goodman, N. (1978) **Ways of Worldmaking**, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis.

Gulick, L.H. (1920) **A Philosophy of Play**, McGrath Publishing Company Washington (1972 ed.).

Hans, J.S. (1981) **The Play of the World**, The University of Massachussets Press, Amherst.

Harris, R. (1988) **Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein** Routledge, London.

Hintikka, J. (1986) "Language-games", in: Shanker (ed.), S. **Ludwig Wittgenstein. Critical Assessments,** Croom Helm, London, vol. 2: 89-105.

Huizinga, J. (1935) **In de schaduwen van morgen, een diagnose van het geestlijk lijden van onzen tijd**, Tjeenk Tillink, Haarlem. French Tran.: **Incertitudes. Essai de diagnostic du mal dont souffre notre temps**, Librairie de Médicis, Paris (1946).

Huizinga, J. (1938) **Homo Ludens**, Tjeenk Willink, Haarlem. Eng. Tran. **Homo Ludens**, The Beacon Press, Boston (1955).

Hume, D. (THN) **A Treatise of Human Nature**, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1978), ed. by Selby-Bigge L.

Hyland, D.A. (1984) **The Question of Play**, University Press of America, Lanham, MD.

Jaeger, W. (1936) **Paideia. Die Formung des griechischen Menschen**, W. de Gruyter, Berlin. Eng. Trans.: **Paideia. The Ideals of Greek Culture**, Oxford, Oxford University Press (1945).

Kant I. (KU) **Kritik der Urteilskraft**, in: **Kant's Gesammelte Schriften. Band V**, ed. by Königlich Akademie der Wissanschaften, Druk und Verlag, Berlin (1913). Eng. Trans. by Meredith, J. **The Critique of Judgment**, Clarendon, Oxford (1952).

Kaufmann, W. (1954) **The portable Nietzsche**, The Viking Press.

Kenny, A. (1975) **Wittgenstein**, Penguin Books, New York.

Kripke, S. (1982) **Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language**, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachussets.

MacIntyre, A. (1981) **After Virtue**, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame - Indiana.

Malcolm, N. (1986) "Wittgenstein: The Relation of language to instinctive behaviour", in: Shanker (ed.), **Ludwig Wittgenstein. Critical Assessments**, Crooom Helm, London, vol. 2: 289-308.

Mandelbrot, B.B. (1983) **Fractal Geometry of Nature**, Freeman, New York.

Mason, H.E. (1978) "On the Multiplicity of Language-games", in **Wittgenstein and his impact on contermporary thought. Proceedings of the Second International Wittgenstein Symposium**, from 9th August to 4th September1977 Kirchberg, Hölder - Pitcher -Tempski, Vienna.

Miller, J.H. (1981) "The Disarticulation of the Self in Nietzsche", in **The Monist**, 64 (2)

Miller, S. (1973) "Ends, Means and Galumphing: Some Leitmotifs of Play", in: **American Anthropologist**, 75: 87-98.

Monod, J. (1970) **Les hasard et la necessité. Essai sur la philosophie naturelle de la biologie moderne**, Editions du Seuil. Eng. Trans.: **Chance and Necessity. An essay on the natural philosophy of modern biology**, Knopf, New York (1971).

Murdoch, I. (1992) **Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals**, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press.

Neumann & Morgenstern(1944) **Theory of Games and Economic Behavior** Princeton University Press, Princeton (1953 ed.).

Nietzsche F. (ADHL) **On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life**, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis (1980), Eng. Trans. by Preuss. Original title: **Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben**, Carl Hauser Verlag, München (1966), ed. by Schlechta

Nietzsche F. (ASZ) **Also Sprach Zarathustra**, in: **Werke in drei Bänden. Zweiter Band**, Carl Hauser Verlag, München (1966), ed. by Schlechta K. Eng. Trans. by Kaufmann: **Thus Spoke Zarathustra,** in: Kaufmann, W. (1976) **The Portable Nietzsche** Penguin Books, New York.

Nietzsche F. (FW) **Die Fröliche Wissenschaft**, in: **Werke in drei Bänden. Zweiter Band,** Carl Hauser Verlag, München (1966), ed. by Schlechta. Eng.Trans.by Kaufmann: **The Gay Science**, Random House, New York (1974).

Nietzsche F. (HTH) **Human, All-Too Human**, Russell & Russell, New York (1964), Eng. Trans. by Zimmern. Original title: **Menschliches, Allzumenschliches**, Carl Hauser Verlag, München (1966), ed. by Schlechta.

Nietzsche F. (GT) **Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik**, in: **Werke in drei Bänden. Erster Band:** Carl Hauser Verlag, München(1966), ed. by Schlechta. Eng. Trans. by Haussmann: **The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music**, Russell & Russell, New York (1964).

Perkins, R. (1977) **Prolegomena to the study of play in Nietzsche**, M.A. Thesis, SUNY at Buffalo.

Plato (R) **The Republic**, Basic Books Inc., New York (1968). Ed. by Bloom, A.

Rapoport, A. (1960) **Fights, Games and Debates**, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Read, H. (1958) **Education through Art**, Faber and Faber, London.

Rhees, R. (1970) **Discussions of Wittgenstein**, Schocken Books, New York.

Rorty, R. (1989) **Contingency, irony and solidarity**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Schiller F.(ÄEM) **Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen**, P.Reclam, Stuttgart (1965), ed. by Hamburger, K. Eng. Trans. by Snell: **On the Aesthetic Education of Man**, Yale University Press, New Haven (1954).

Schiller, F. (NSD) **ÜberNaive und Sentimentalische Dichtung** Blackwell, Oxford (1957); ed. by Mainland,W.

Schwyzer, H. (1986) "Rules and Practices", in: Canfield (ED.) **The Philosophy of Wittgenstein**, Garland Pub., New York, vol.: 173-89.

Searle, J.S. (1969) **Speech Acts. An essay in the Philosophy of language**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Sellars, W. (1986) "Some Reflections on Language Games", in: Canfield, J. **The philosophy of Wittgenstei**n, Garland Pub., New York, vol.6: 2-26.

Smart, H.R. (1957) "Language-Games",in: **Philosophical Quarterly** 7: 224-35.

Specht, E.K. (1986) "The Language-Game as Model-Concept in Wittgenstein's Theory of Language", in: Canfield (ed.) **The Philosophy of**

Wittgenstein, Garland Pub., New York, vol. 6: 131-54.

Suppes, P. (1967) "Decision", in: **The Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, Macmillan, New York: 310-14.

Suits, B. (1978) **The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia**, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

Plato (L) **The Laws**, Dent, London (1966), ed. by Taylor A.

Walton, K. (1990) **Mimesis as Make-Believe. On the Foundations of Representational Arts**, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachussets.

Waismann, F. (1967) **Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis**,Blackwell, Oxford;Eng.Trans.: **Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle**, (WVC) (1979) Barnes & Noble, New York.

Weinstein & Weinstein(1990) "Deconstruction as Symbolic Play: Simmel/Derrida", in: **Diogenes**, n. 150.

Wittgenstein, L. (1922) **TractatusLogico-Philosophicus**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London (1974 ed.).

Wittgenstein, L. (1929) "Some Remarks on Logical Form", in: Conte, A. (ed.) (1989) **Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus**,Torino (pp. 184-200).

Wittgenstein, L. (1953) **Philosophische Untersuchungen**. **Philosophical Investigations**, Macmillan Publishing Co., New York (1968).

Wittgenstein, L. (1958) **The Blue and the Brown Books**, Blackwell, Oxford.

Wittgenstein, L. (1964) **Philosophische Bemerkungen**, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main. Eng. Trans.:**Philosophical Remarks**, Barnes & Nobles, New York (1975).

Wittgenstein, L. (1967) **Bemerkungen über Frazers "The Golden Bough"**, Wittgensteins Nachlass Verwalter. Eng. Trans.: **Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough**in "The Human World" 3: 28-41 (1971).

Wittgenstein, L. (1969) **Über Gewissheit. On Certainty**, Harper, New York.

Wittgenstein, L. (1969) **Philosophische Grammatik**, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main. Eng.Trans.: **Philosophical Grammar**, University of California Press (1974)