

## **Games as Transformative**

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If games are defined as a set of pre-arranged “moves” within the rules of a particular game in which a certain goal is its aim, then many aspects of life beyond simply board games and card games and the like qualify as constituting a game. Suits defined games as “goal-directed activities in which inefficient means are intentionally chosen” (24:2014). I believe this is a good definition and the basis on which this essay is predicated. With this definition, a great many activities can be considered as a game and I will motivate why games are in fact instrumental not only for civilization or as civilization, but as modalities that allow for growth, enjoyment, and ultimately co-operation. I demonstrate this through the following categories: art; science; math; sport and everyday life – and in the process argue for its edifying and uplifting qualities.

As a preamble before application to a single category, one might observe the following aspects of this notion of “games”:

- 1) It entails play (as developed by Huizinga [1949])
- 2) It is imaginative and also follows a certain logic
- 3) It requires submission to rules but allows for creative innovation

In terms of play, while certain games such as for example legal proceedings or working out the discrepancy between debt and credit in a ledger or the building on a construction site, appear to be more a matter of work than play, how is it that I am applying the definition so broadly so that indeed it does entail play? And surely in such practical tasks, the most inefficient means are not prescribed – it is highly practical and efficient and requires little imagination or creative expression. How can a brick layer go beyond the mere facticity of a repetitive act and find a creative spring?

Marxism attempted to save the worker from the mindless activity and enslavement to being a wage earner and its concomitant alienation to an authentic way of being, a work-ethic that was part of a creative life dynamic. Yet the capitalist who profits from the surplus produced by the laborer and the Marxist authority that controls the system of economic and political structures have not solved this dilemma. I will persevere in demonstrating how games are a necessary cog in many pursuits and offer a template for creative living and attempt to solve this conundrum toward the close of this essay. At this point, let us accept that games entail play which is distinct from “mere work”; it requires the exercise of the imagination or vision or fantasy as well as logic, coherence, and sense and an adherence to rules that does not negate the first two criteria (fantasy and logic).

### **ART**

Art is usually considered the domain of creativity and imagination. Yet this is an assumption which may not be true. Most art is a replication of simply what is considered to be art. Many consider technique the expression of knowing how to make art and yet this is something that can simply be learned. As the conceptualist Kosuth claimed that most art is simply art because it looks like previous art, whereas the creative act and thus art proper is precisely the opposite. Accordingly, most art is not particularly creative or even playful but simply a certain craft. Hence Croce defined the idea behind the art and not simply its material expression as the art as such. However, one defines art ontologically, it appears to potentially be a realm of freedom. Such a realm can be further defined as a game.

The game takes many forms: there are the games of the various kinds of fine arts; a history and theory in which one can reflect on one's own position in the game in relation to such theory and history; there are the wranglings of the gallery and art market which constitute a certain game concerning the arts value. There are certain general parameters of such a game: it usually takes place in a studio; it usually requires certain (kinds) of materials, and it is perhaps unique in that it emphasizes originality - creative solutions in terms of both methods and meanings. Yet such is a recent view of what art is and of its role vis a vis the artist, the gallery, museum and so on.

For most of human history, art was integrated into the life-process and the artist a servant of political and religious authority. Ancient Egypt repeated the same kinds of forms over centuries and the same might be said of the art of the Middle Ages or of China at various times in history and the artists were anonymous in most cases. Even contemporarily, as already indicated, most art is a copy of some kind akin to Plato's conception and not particularly original – in fact the notion of the “original” and the divine artist is a casualty of modernism.

Nevertheless, since one could probably make a certain verbal proposition or set of propositions about any given artwork, one is prompted to ask – why bother; why go through the effort of (in most cases) a visual replication or expression of these ideas or that sight or whatever? Let us recall Suits' definition of games: “...goal-directed activities in which inefficient means are intentionally chosen”. It now becomes immediately clear: the whole hullabaloo of art exists precisely because it is a game! By the term game I do not mean anything flippant or trivial. Rather, it is a prescribed domain with particular parameters or rules, through which we can think, act and feel – a discipline certainly, but also one of playful exuberance; imaginative flair; grammar or technique as well as always allowing for the potential of the untraditional, the unorthodox (which invariably may become mainstream as the story of art unfolds).

Thus recommending the game of art as it were, one notes that its story is full of discovery: it includes magic; reflections of the divine; the move to the secular; innovations in materials; the innovation of perspective; of the understanding of light and the drive to the abstract domain and now new forms of art such as installation and new media (though I am more a fan of the former). One might say that an aesthetic that persists is the materialization of a new paradigm, though whether the art merely reflects that paradigm and is thus complicit for good or for ill or offers a different one, is unclear. In any event it is just an aesthetic moment and therefore loses its critical value and thus incapacity to challenge the status quo. On the other hand, one is wont to say that art can effect change in perception and understanding. A potentially edifying game where value should not lie in its monetary worth, though played out this is sadly, not usually the case. As cultural capital art itself becomes a subset of commerce, popular entertainment and fashion. Perhaps I still lament the old guard Modernist?

### **SCIENCE**

Although science has been around since the dawn of time with say the discovery of fire or later the invention of the wheel and so on and so forth, the scientific method as we know it today as a robust system of calculation and prediction occurred at the point now known as the Enlightenment say three hundred years or so ago. Here we find the combination of empirical knowledge and reason, or logic used to great effect for prediction, theorizing and technological advancement.

In what sense so conceived is science a game? And surely unlike Suits proposal that games include “inefficient means” has no connection to science with its highly efficient methods? We are further inclined to say that when it is proven true then that corresponds with nature as it is? A process is an

aesthetic. Science then has a form. The medium effects that which propagates through it. Therefore, all one can say is that the knowledge we regard as scientific is simply nature on that level and kind of analysis in the first place and not nature as it is. Yet, you retort are not the laws of nature as discerned by physics the very truths of nature. Again, that cannot be verified either because the law of induction refutes it or because the very system that studies it is so constituted and, in that sense, does not transcend it.

Yet science too, like art, as a technique, method and discipline is a game, only here the contexts are labs and academic halls, hospitals, technology labs; funding bodies for research and research teams, conferences and libraries of information. Often it involves a paradigm shift like from the belief that the earth is the center of the solar system to that of it being one planet revolving around the sun; or the discovery of the basic laws of motion; of the topsy turvy world of the quantum and relativistic quantities in their distortion of certain properties including time; of the evolutionary theory and philosophy in the age of genetic decoding, AI, gender issues and fractured political relations as is a perennial problem.

Suddenly science, like art – as an aesthetic or even as culture – cannot be critical but is often even complicit in certain political and social discourse, though we are wont to say science transcends this or is pure or is untainted by commerce, greed, politics, and religion and yet it is not simple. Furthermore, interpreting science in a realist fashion is itself beyond the scope of science and enters the domain of philosophy, whose position itself is unclear – as preceding scientific discovery or as anteceding it, or even transcending it or simply running parallel, as a further layer yet distinct from science itself.

Yet one still wants to laud the game of science as bringing light quite literally; making communications, travel, the potential spread of resources and knowledge as key not simply for our survival but thriving in what may become a human civilization in a universe with even other life forms.

### **MATH**

The engine of all of science is mathematics. Counting is of course ancient, but math as a robust discipline also only starts to come into its own during the Enlightenment, though the incremental growth dating back centuries in the East and the West is old, even primitive for the ability to abstract with numbers seems as basic as an alphabet. While most are not Platonists there is an uncanny quality to numbers and physical quantities appear almost magically given, for example their atomic number or various Constants in nature. In other words, if such quantities were not that precise value out of an infinity of possibilities, life would not be possible. Such is the anthropic principle.

Math itself can predict what will occur; it can predict what might exist; it can solve for unknown variables – and in so doing its power is indisputable. Yet, just as with its application in the domain of science and less obviously as related to art, it too may be complicit and used for unethical ends; a system/method/aesthetic/technique for other games to gain in ascendancy such as that of the political or economic. Although in its purest form, math may discover that which has no relevance in and as the world. Often though, such abstractions find an application many, many years later.

While the game of math is less grandiose as its partner, namely the sciences, in its social relevance, and differs remarkably from science in that it has no dependence on the empirical, the curious thing is, without or preceding experiments, the math can suggest possible real-world outcomes. This is as a result in following rules, grammars, methods that forge the discipline and can only be called “inefficient” in its long learning curve, I being possibly less than a novice.

### **SPORT**

Suits definition of games fits most neatly at a quick glance in the case of sport. The ordinary usage of the word games is clearly in the case of activities such as sports and board games and so on. I do

not think there is a need to press the point, only to say that sport itself can be both studied, understood and improved in connecting it to science (as it has already taken shape in the field of sports science), in art (which as yet has not happened, but which I argued for – at least theoretically – in my doctorate entitled “A new interpretation of sport derived from art related aesthetics”) as well as mathematically (though the point for this is less obvious or necessary). In any event, sport is precisely the arbitrary construction of obstacles with a purpose to overcome and try to win. It forms part of culture and as with the previous analysis of other disciplines, one might note it also potentially being complicit in political and economic structures. Whether one can be critical of society within its structures or aesthetic does not appear to be possible.

### **EVERYDAY AESTHETICS AND THE BRICKLAYER**

In order for me to have argued that sport is like art I used the aesthetic as that linking concept. Moreover, I applied recent “moves” in aesthetics, namely the aesthetics of the everyday, where it is argued that everyday life and living can itself be viewed as an aesthetic act linking in the process art and sport (very much a part of everyday life as such) or at the very least a shared trait in their both be concerned with aesthetics, herein defined as a sense of form, usually associated but not necessarily with beauty. In the preamble to my thesis, I argued that it was the “weak”(Dowling 2010) form of this view to which I subscribed wherein everyday life and art are continuous.

Even though the former is said to inspire the latter, or even the other way around – one is saying more: the true art resides in the source of experience not its later manifestation as it undergoes transformations toward an object, a work of art and sport is a form somewhere between the act of brushing ones hair, saying good morning to a random person on the street, playing a game of cards, running down the road and for some, perhaps also making a painting for example. To live in wonder and rapture is to live life as if it were art, though the cruel realities of living tend to unsettle that harmony within the game, flow, aesthetic maneuvering.

The type of consciousness I am arguing for is one where one is aware of the ubiquitous nature of games. But is this exclusive? Is the work of the great masses inauthentic, hard, and unconscious other than instrumental ends? Why should the bricklayer be a philosopher or meditate while engaged in his activity or discipline? All the great “-isms” promulgate who and what this individual in view of the collective ought to be and yet history is a tale where all such “-isms”, even optimistic ones, have failed.

### **CONCLUSION**

Suits definition of games allows, I argue for an extended conception of games within the domains of art, science, math and sport, that may be applied very broadly to living itself provided the concept of games is borne in mind – a consciousness that one is in a certain context in which certain parameters (rules) are to be found and inefficient means for achieving a goal attained.

This immediately gives the agent freedom to adhere to such rules or not. If the rebellion is acute enough, a new paradigm may be forged, or a transgression of law incurred. Playing the game is not necessarily good; and there is certainly an aspect that makes for the fragility and unquantifiable mystery of life such that one should call life anything but a game, but a serious affair where life itself is at stake.

Yet curiously something else is at work: all is not real; life is transient and one’s knowledge minimal. In this sense, viewing life as a game liberates and reminds one that indeed, there is order, that I am a participant, a creator...perhaps I shall not gain victory, perhaps I shall lose - but another game, or a new game or many other games are yet to come. I may even enjoy the game.

And playing the game transforms me as I become more adept at it allowing my inner world to flow outward. Oh, I suppose I am playing a game that I have created. Is such a thing possible, each individual embroiled in a group and conditioned by a great many factors over the years? Or is some

game playing me only I think I am free and have defined my terms? The examined life as Socrates was said to say is truly worth living and so for me philosophical speculation is a game of rare wonder, sadly not in vogue today.

Games are transformative because they contain implicitly two dual, but complementary components: they are a portal beyond time and space in that to play is to consciously stand outside the situation itself, a second order experience. On the other hand, to play is to be immersed unconsciously, to be in the flow as it were. It is precisely this seeming paradox that when negotiated well amount to a game well played. It is like a sound (time) that requires silence (space) or to use another metaphor – it is like the form (light) that requires a background (space-time) in order to be or exist. A system of organization is itself a game. Therefore, to play games is to connect to the fundamental reality of the universe. All games, however, are not equal in their value, just as good exceeds evil and hence I have also argued in this essay for the potential complicit nature of even seemingly innocuous and pure games such as science and art and so on. Yet, each has great transformative potential for the good.

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