

The Powerful Play Goes On: Friedrich Schiller to Jacques Derrida on Play

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*That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.*
Walt Whitman

Play is a light and easy word. The natural activity of children and animals, especially young ones. Leisure and freedom. Commonly opposed to work and the serious. Surprisingly long the subject of philosophers, social scientists and artists. Play, a key to the topsy turvy world of postmodernity.

In many ways Friedrich Schiller's late eighteenth century discussion of play surprisingly anticipates the mid-twentieth century views of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gregory Bateson and the late twentieth century consideration of play by Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard. Rather than presenting a thorough history of the consideration of play, given the unbearable lightness of play, here I consider several significant contributions to this history. My objective is to explore these select writings/thinkers on play to expand our appreciation of the richness of play.

Friedrich Schiller

*Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a human being,
and he is only fully a human being when he plays.*
Friedrich Schiller

A curious thing happened in the course of a series of letters that Friedrich Schiller published in 1793 on the subject of aesthetic education. Well, it did not really originate with Schiller. He was influenced by Immanuel Kant and there were others before Kant. Still from my vantage, Schiller is the most notable and interesting among them. Writing about aesthetics, Schiller began with a discussion of his understanding of the fundamental drives or impulses that make up the peculiarly human character. Conflicting impulses, yet somehow each necessary. Beauty characterizes the situation in which these impulses are happily conjoined without either losing its force. But how to understand this both-that-cannot-be conjunction? This is the curious thing. Schiller wrote of this conjunction in terms of play. Furthermore, since beauty characterizes this relationship of concert,¹ he wrote of beauty also in the terms of play. Schiller, I believe, anticipates twentieth century writings on play, particularly those of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gregory Bateson, Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard. And it must be remembered that Schiller's writing directly influenced Charles Sanders Pierce.

¹ Schiller does not discuss what he means by concert.

Though considered a notable work in the history of aesthetics the collection of letters known by the title *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* is rarely referenced in considerations of play. There is an occasional reference to the Letters as contributing to one of the modern theories of play. Herbert Spencer, the nineteenth century psychologist, credits Schiller as his inspiration for his discussion of the surplus energy or exuberance theory of play. In the revised version of his *Principles of Psychology* (1870-2), Spencer cited Schiller for support, though indirectly since he could not remember his name, referring only to the influence of "a statement of a German author."² This exuberance theory has become prominent in its relevance to the modern correlation of play with leisure, in contrast with work, and with the modern sense of the value of psychological release.

The work most commonly cited since mid-twentieth century as the source or inspiration for contemporary studies of play is Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1944). Huizinga cites Schiller only one time. In his chapter "Play-forms in Art," he equates Schiller's *Spieltrieb*, play drive, with the human propensity to ornament, which he exemplifies by a reference to doodling.³ Huizinga gives no evidence of having read more than the Fourteenth Letter and he misrepresents Schiller.⁴

Schiller's connection of play with art was likely influenced by Kant's discussion of art in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790). In distinguishing "art" from "handicraft" Kant holds that "the First is called *free*, the other may be called *industrial art*. We look on the former as something which could only prove final (be a success) as play, i.e., an occupation which is agreeable on its own account; but on the second as labor."⁵ Art, like play, is autotelic as opposed to handicraft which works to produce something for a purpose other than the making.⁶ Kant calls upon "play" to make clear what he means by "soul" [*Geist*] in his discussion of what constitutes artistic genius. Some works of art are deserving of being called art in their demonstration of "taste," yet somehow they are "soulless." "Soul" is the animating principle in the mind. Soul is "that which sets the mental powers into a swing that is final, i.e., into a play which is self-maintaining and which strengthens those powers for such activity."⁷ In his discussion of the three divisions of the fine arts, Kant identifies one division as the "play of sensations" or the "beautiful play of sensations," by which he refers to music and the "art of color." By "play" Kant refers to "the effect of those vibrating movements upon the elastic parts of our body that can be evident to sense."⁸ In Kant's usage, play is "agreeable on its own account," that is, it is autotelic, and it designates a self-maintaining swing or harmony of vibrating

²See Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, translators and editors, *Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967), p. clxxxvi and Susanne Millar, *The Psychology of Play* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p.15.

³Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950, trans. of 1944 German edition), p. 168.

⁴Huizinga's book may be cast in a much needed critical light once the discussion of play from Schiller to Derrida has been traced.

⁵Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* translated by J. C. Meredith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) as quoted in Mark Taylor *Deconstruction in Context*, p. 39.

⁶ Schiller here anticipates Baudrillard's distinction between seduction and production.

⁷Ibid., p. 47.

⁸Ibid., p. 56.

movements. The association of play with vibrating or oscillating movement will be developed by others.

Schiller's Aesthetic Letters argue for the importance of aesthetic education, proposing that aesthetic education is essential to the realization of human potential. Foundational to his argument is Schiller's description of the two forces or impulses that drive human action, that define the human character. Schiller describes these two opposing forces in various ways. Analyzing the age in which he lived, heavily influenced by the French Revolution, Schiller felt that culture tended to bifurcate the individual placing him or her at odds within him or herself, with detrimental results,

either as savage, when feeling predominates over principle; or as barbarian when principle destroys feeling. The savage despises Civilization, and acknowledges Nature as his sovereign mistress. The barbarian derides and dishonors Nature, but, more contemptible than the savage, as often as not continues to be the slave of his slave.(IV.6)⁹

Schiller felt that his "age is, in fact, moving along both these false roads, and has fallen prey, on the one hand, to coarseness, on the other, to enervation and perversity. From this twofold swaying it [the age] is to be brought back by means of beauty."(X.1)

These forces operate not only within culture, but within the individual in the terms of "person" and "condition," that is, the self and its determination, being and becoming, endurance and change. These forces constitute

two contrary challenges to man, the two fundamental laws of his sensuo-rational nature. The first insists upon absolute reality: he is to turn everything which is mere form into world, and make all his potentialities fully manifest. The second insists upon absolute formality: he is to destroy everything in himself which is mere world, and bring harmony into his changes. In other words, he is to externalize all that is within him, and give form to all that is outside him.(XI.9)

Schiller formalizes these forces in terms of drives or impulses: the *sensuous* drive (*sinnliche Treib*) and the *formal* drive (*Formtreib*). The *sensuous* drive proceeds from the sensual and physical aspect of human existence. It is concerned with physical place in time and space. Whenever this drive acts exclusively, one is but "a unit of quantity, an occupied moment of time"(XII.2). There is no person, no enduring form, only the moment of sensation. The *formal* drive proceeds from the rational nature and strives to set the human at liberty from the flux of change and sensation. It strives to embrace the wholeness of time and space, seeking eternity to the annulment of temporal change, of determining event. Yet, when this impulse dominates, the human entity loses

⁹All references to Schiller's letters will be made in the text referring to Letter and paragraph. The source is *Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of man in a Series of Letters*, edited and translated by E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967).

individuality becoming an idea, a species. Humans are no more in time, they have become time.(XII)

Schiller holds that neither impulse is dispensable, yet both require restriction and moderation.(XIII)
Indeed, one reaches perfection through

a reciprocal action between the two drives, reciprocal action of such a kind that the activity of the one both gives rise to, and sets limits to, the activity of the other, and in which each in itself achieves its highest manifestation precisely by reason of the other being active.(XIV.1)

One cannot achieve this fullness so long as only one of these two impulses is exclusively satisfied or both alternately. Schiller argues that one gains a "complete intuition of his human nature," a "vision [that] would serve him as a symbol of his accomplished destiny," when these drives are conjoined in a third drive, that is, an experience in which "he were to be at once conscious of his freedom and sensible of his existence, were, at one and the same time, to feel himself matter and come to know himself as mind."(XIV.2)

Remarkably, in his attempt to give clarity to this combination of impulses, Schiller turns to the language of play, calling it "that drive . . . in which both the others work in concert"(XIV.3) the "play drive (*spieltrieb*)," begging his reader patience with the term until he might justify its appropriateness. This third drive is

directed towards annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity. ... The play-drive, in consequence, as the one in which both the others act in concert, will exert upon the psyche at once a moral and a physical constraint; it will, therefore, since it annuls all contingency, annul all constraint too, and set man free both physically and morally.(XIV.3 and 5)

Whereas the object of the sense drive is "life" and the object of the form drive is "form," the object of the play drive, to Schiller's understanding, is "living form," a concept that denotes aesthetic qualities, that is, "Beauty."¹⁰ Living form, beauty is the consummation of humanity. He pronounces: "With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play. ... Man only plays when he is in the full sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays."(XV.8 and 9)

Why "play"? By using the term play, does not Schiller risk trivializing both human perfection and aesthetic qualities? What is there of play that helps Schiller communicate these central concerns? He holds that his use of the word is fully warranted in terms of its usage in common speech, where play denotes "everything which is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes no kind of constraint either from within or from without."(XV.5) In other words, Schiller appeals to the usage of the word play in common speech, where he holds that it is understood neither as a

¹⁰Reminiscent of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "lived body" and his rejection of a simple mind/body duality.

state of mind nor as class of objects, where it is understood to be engaged without goal or necessity, that is, play contains its own satisfaction. Schiller, it seems, was not advancing a new theory of play, he was not advancing a theory of play at all. He was merely relying on what he considered common knowledge.

Schiller avoids the trap of so many modern understandings of play by appealing to a common understanding that it is neither subjective nor objective, that is, play is not distinguished as state of mind or attitude, nor as a particular set of actions or objects. By calling it a drive or impulse, but even more by describing play as a certain kind of interaction among other drives or impulses, Schiller moves play to the level of the description of relationships between and principles of interaction among other things—here the formal and sensuous drives.

Taking inspiration from Schiller, we may suggest that play refers to the principles or grammars that characterize structures, a set of structuring principles, a metastructure. This is, I believe, what Derrida refers to as "structurality."¹¹ Play denotes the principles in which structural oppositions, even structural anomalies, may at once be held together without reconciliation or reduction. It is not the simple alternation of taking turns, but a momentary focus on one structural element that reveals the power and dynamics of the opposing elements. Schiller thought of it in the dynamic terms of reciprocity and oscillation.

A mere game may be thought of as a set of relationships and activities prescribed by a set of rules, often including the designation of a space and the definition of an objective. Games, in general, may be designated as a particular kind of activity. But one may also think of game as the designation of a state of mind, a mental strategy, or an attitude. The word "game" is sometimes even used as a verb, as in such phrases as "to game a situation," though I think it a remarkably inelegant one. The play of a game is a result of a grammar of interaction as specified in the terms of rules and objectives. Common to the rules of a game is a description of "the play." A game "in play" subjugates its goal or objective to the holding together of opposing forces, an oscillation or back and forth movement among them, without resolution. There is no play when this principle fails or ceases to be operative; at that point the play of the game is over. Play is not game; game is not play. Game is played. There is the play of the game.

Considering game in terms of Schiller's form and sense drives, the rules to a game are at one polar position in this continuum. Here there is no play, only the potential for play. At the opposite pole, there are no rules, no boundaries, no definition, and therefore no game. Game play arises in the oscillating interaction between these poles.

A further clarification can be made here of Schiller's formal and sensuous drives. The rules and

¹¹The word "structurality" is an abstract noun denoting the state, condition, or quality of having the character of structure. Having come to believe that play is not best understood as a thing, experience, state of mind, or kind of activity but rather as a particular kind of condition of a thing, an experience, a state of mind, or activity, it requires this peculiar sort of nondesignation.

procedures that define a game may be thought of as their formal dimension while the raw physical actions of the game, its sensual dimension. The play of the game is achieved in the way that the rules both make possible, yet restrict, the sensual aspect of the game, that is, the range of allowable raw physical action, while at the same time, the physical actions (the sensual drive) give life and application to the rules. There is no play of the game if either the formal or sensual dimensions is missing.

While mere games are played; they are not the exclusive domain of play. This is what Schiller acknowledged in his use of the term play to identify the third drive. We see the characteristics of play echoed in the phrasing by which Schiller elaborated the play impulse.

the play-drive, in consequence, as the one in which both the others act in concert, will exert upon the psyche at once a moral and a physical constraint;(XIV.5)

it is precisely play and play alone, which of all men's states and conditions is the one which makes him whole and unfolds both sides of his nature at once;(XV.7)

the utmost that experience can achieve will consist of an oscillation between the two principles, in which now reality, now form, will predominate. Beauty as Idea, therefore, can never be other than one and indivisible, since there can never be more than one point of equilibrium; whereas beauty in experience will be eternally twofold, because oscillation can disturb the equilibrium in twofold fashion, including it now to the one side, now to the other.(XVI.1)

Schiller argued that when the sense and form impulses are interrelated/integrated in play, at least the idea of human perfection—the aesthetic—may emerge though not as the direct object. The whole series of letters is intent on showing that, through the playful engagement of the conflicting and potentially destructive impulses, human beings achieve their potential. Hence, "With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play."

Understood in this way, Schiller, parting from Kant's view, does not base the aesthetic in the subjective. The aesthetic is articulated in terms of being "neither subjectively nor objectively contingent." Beauty, the exemplum of play engaged in the domain of human potentiality, is neither a state of mind nor a class of objects. However, as Anthony Savile shows,¹² Schiller discussed beauty primarily in terms of the achievement of the ideal human state and, by extension, that of society and the world. Beauty is necessary to the achievement of this state and characterizes its manifestations. Because of this concern with human ideals and his discussion of human impulses there is the general, but, I believe, incorrect, impression that Schiller held the aesthetic to be subjectively

¹²Anthony Savile, *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant and Schiller* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), Chapters 7 & 8.

based.¹³

It must be asked whether there is any basis in Schiller's work for an exuberance theory of play. In the final letter in this collection, Schiller considers the universality of the aesthetic ideas he has presented, the possible perfection not only of individuals, but of societies and of the universe. Schiller considers the presence of play structurality in the natural world that is apart from humankind. In one respect he is considering the question of the play of the world. He notes that "Nature has given even to creatures without reason more than the bare necessities of existence, and shed a glimmer of freedom even into the darkness of animal life."(XXVII.3) For example the lion, when "not gnawed by hunger . . . fills the echoing desert with a roaring that speaks defiance, and his exuberant energy enjoys itself in purposeless display."(XXVII.3) He sees the same spirit of joyousness expressed in the swarm of insects in the sunlight and in the melodious warbling of song birds. Here in nature there is freedom apart from necessity, apart from external need.

An animal may be said to be at work, when the stimulus to activity is some lack; it may be said to be at play, when the stimulus is sheer plenitude of vitality, when superabundance of life is its own incentive to action. Even inanimate nature exhibits a similar luxuriance of forces, coupled with a laxity of determination which, in that material sense, might well be called play. ... Thus does Nature, even in her material kingdom, offer us a prelude of the illimitable, and even here remove in part the chains which, in the realm of form, she casts away entirely. From the compulsion of want, or physical earnestness, she makes the transition via the compulsion of superfluity, or physical play, to aesthetic play; and before she soars, in the sublime freedom of beauty, beyond the fetters of ends and purposes altogether, she makes some approach to this independence, at least from afar, in that kind of free activity which is at once its own end and its own means.(XXVII.3)

Though, like Kant, Schiller opposes work and play, he describes an aesthetic hierarchy based essentially on the common presence of play. The expression of exuberance, the actions not accountable by any outward or inward necessity, is the product of play and thereby is linked, both hierarchically and developmentally, with the aesthetic in the human realm. It is quite in contrast to Schiller's stated understanding of play to credit him with a theory of play in which otherwise inexplicable actions and expressions—lion roars, bird warbles, insect swarms and a host of human actions—are thought to arise to meet the need to express exuberance or overabundance, for this is a need-based theory focused on a particular class of objects. To acknowledge that Schiller's advance was to identify play as metastructure¹⁴ and to designate it as "neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes neither outward nor inward necessity" clarifies his aesthetics, and establishes a perspective on play that, while heretofore not adequately acknowledged, has played a role in the development of modern thought.

¹³Hans-Georg Gadamer held a similar view as will be discussed below.

¹⁴He anticipates Bateson's discussion of playing containing the metameessage "this is play."

Hans-Georg Gadamer

*The movement which is play has no goal which would bring it to an end.
The original meaning of the word spiel [is] "dance".*
- Hans-Georg Gadamer¹⁵

On many occasions in his writings of the 1960s and 1970s Hans-Georg Gadamer turned to the subject of the ontology of the work of art. Remarkably in these works he considers play to be the "clue to ontological explanation." Like Schiller, Kant, and others before him he turns to play as the way to articulate some aspect of aesthetics. Play is, it seems for Gadamer, a metaphor for art. He therefore discusses play in preparation for considering the ontology of art. Like Schiller he writes of play as though there is no ambiguity to the common sense view. He is not advancing any new theory or understanding of play; he is merely calling forth the obvious. Introducing a long discussion of play in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes:

If, in connection with the experience of art, we speak of play, this refers neither to the attitude nor even to the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor to the freedom of the art itself.¹⁶

Whereas Schiller was interested in the contribution that beauty makes to the achievement of human potential and in acknowledging that the manifestation of such fulfillment is the distinguishing characteristic of beauty, Gadamer is interested in the mode of being of the work of art itself, which he understands as necessary to free art from the subjectivist base it has had since Kant. He wrote, "I wish to free this concept [art] from the subjective meaning which it has in Kant and Schiller and which dominates the whole of modern aesthetics and philosophy of man."¹⁷ To overturn the subjective view of art, which is that art is the "variety of changing experiences whose object is each time filled subjectively with meaning like an empty mold,"¹⁸ Gadamer argues that art has a distinctive mode of being and that is representation, an idea he derives from his understanding of play. "The playing of the play is what speaks to the spectator, through its representation, and this in such a way that the spectator, despite the distance between it and himself, still belongs to it."¹⁹

Being the clue to the ontology of art, Gadamer considers play at some length.²⁰ The first thing about play, according to Gadamer's understanding, is

¹⁵Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 93.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid. This discussion ought to be related to the concepts of "pure depth" and "flesh." See my *Body Brain Movement*, Lectures 10 and 11.

²⁰Gadamer's discussions of play may be found principally in *Truth and Method*, pp. 91-119 and in "The Relevance of the Beautiful," pp. 23-30, and "The Play of Art," pp. 123-30 both appearing in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, translated by Nicholas Walker, edited by Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

the to and fro of constantly repeated movement [and] . . . what characterizes this movement back and forth is that neither pole of the movement represents the goal in which it would come to rest. . . a certain leeway clearly belongs to such a movement. . . This freedom is such that it must have the form of self-movement.²¹

Play then appears as self-movement, movement without purpose or goal.²² It renews itself through repetition. Play absorbs the player into its movement. It takes on itself the burden of initiative. Every playing is a being played. Play does not allow the player or the spectator to act toward it as if it were an object. It cannot be understood as a kind of activity, nor can it be subjectively determined. Play is not frivolous; it is not opposed to the serious. Gadamer holds that "play is really limited to representing itself. Thus its mode of being is self-representation."²³ Play exists "to play." Gadamer commonly uses the examples of game play to illustrate his discussion. He notes, for example, that games often indicate a goal, a solution, an ordering that seemingly directs the play. Yet he argues that in play the purpose really becomes the movement of the game itself, that is, the play, the self-presentation.

Play is inseparable from freedom and risk. According to Gadamer, play must be conjoined with the freedom of choice among serious possibilities. Wherever there are choices there is risk. The attractiveness of play is in the danger associated with this risk.²⁴

Gadamer insists that play is not special or peculiar to human beings or even to the animal kingdom, for nature "is without purpose or intention, . . . is without exertion, a constantly self-renewing play."²⁵ Thus, he argues, extending the metaphor of play to art, nature may serve as a model for art, though art differs from nature in its being a "representation for someone." Art is not "the mere self-representation of an ordered movement, nor mere representation."²⁶ Art, in Gadamer's view, has its being in its performance or presentation--what he calls a "transformation into structure"--and this incorporates the spectator as an aspect of its mode of being. The image of theatre is illustrative of Gadamer's understanding of this aspect of the mode of being of art. In theatre the opening of the fourth wall is part of the closedness of theatre. The audience completes what the dramatic performance as such is. Gadamer centers on the primacy of the medial sense of play, that is, its to-and-fro movement. The original meaning of the word *Spiel*, Gadamer reminds us, is "dance."²⁷

²¹Gadamer, "The relevance of the Beautiful," pp. 22-23.

²² Movement, particularly self-actuated movement, has become an important consideration for much of my current work. It should more extensively inform this discussion of play.

²³Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 97.

²⁴ Of course it was Derrida who wrote "to risk meaning nothing is to start to play." I think this idea of risk is also related to that of "incomplete reversibility" which should also be a consideration related to play. See my *Brain Body Movement Lectures* 9-12.

²⁵Ibid., p. 94.

²⁶Ibid., p. 97.

²⁷ I develop dancing as important to understanding play structurality and vice versa in various places. See particularly "Dance as Making."

The spectator and even the chance conditions in which art appears cannot be isolated from the mode of being of the work of art for these are inseparable from the presentation or performance itself, that is, the being of the work. The spectator is part of the being of the work of art. Gadamer argues further that "the true being of the spectator, who is part of the play of art, cannot be adequately understood in terms of subjectivity, as an attitude of the aesthetic consciousness."²⁸

Art, understood as play, finds its true perfection in a "transformation into structure." Citing Aristotle, Gadamer connects movement, particularly self-movement, with vitality. Play, as unmotivated undirected self-movement, is synonymous with vitality, with life force. Thus Gadamer reasons that "the being of play is always realization, sheer fulfillment, *energia* which has its telos within itself."²⁹ Realization gains its fullest achievement in art's medial process of "transformation into structure." To the question, What is mediated by art? Gadamer responds, Truth. In its self-presentation occurs the transformation from *energia* (energy) to *ergon* (a work or a creation). Gadamer notably suggests that "creation," *Gebilde*, would be preferable to "work."³⁰ The work of art is appearing structure, "a structure [that has] found its measure in itself and measures itself by nothing outside it."³¹ "The world of the work of art, in which play expresses itself fully in the unity of its course, is in fact a wholly transformed world. By means of it everyone recognizes that that is how things are."³² Through the play of art reality is transformed into structure. Gadamer understands art "as the raising up of . . . reality into its truth."³³

It may appear that Gadamer holds a rather traditional ontological view, that is, that reality is grounded in a hidden, stable, perhaps mystical, realm from which all manifestation is imitation, a pale and imperfect reflection of the hidden. Indeed, Gadamer refers to art as revealing what remains otherwise hidden. But his ontology is more radical than might first appear. This is clarified in his understanding of mimesis,³⁴ a concept essential to his understanding of art. It is to the communication of his special understanding of mimesis that play serves metaphorically so importantly.

The Greeks, Gadamer recalls, recognized two kinds of productive activity. One was ordinary manual production, but the other was

mimetic production which does not create anything "real" but simply offers a representation. . . [that is] it represents itself as something that it is not. A role is "played,"

²⁸Ibid., p. 111.

²⁹Ibid., p. 102.

³⁰"The Play of Art," p. 126.

³¹Ibid., p. 101.

³²Ibid., pp. 101-2.

³³Ibid., p. 101.

³⁴Gadamer frequently discusses mimesis. See "The Festive Character of Theatre," p. 64; "Art and Imitation," especially pp. 98-99; "Poetry and Mimesis;" "The Play of Art," pp. 127-9; and *Truth and Method*, pp. 104-5. This discussion anticipated Baudrillard's seduction/production distinction and relates to Walter Benjamin's discussion of "aura" in "original" art in his essay "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" 1929.

and this implies a unique ontological claim. ... Imitative representation is . . . a play that communicates as play when it is taken in a way it wants to be taken: as pure representation.³⁵

Mimesis is no deception, according to Gadamer's understanding. There is no intent to be believed. Imitation is a showing, or as he puts it a "true showing," an "appearance," a "self-presentation;" this is its mode of being.

Importantly, Gadamer argues that mimesis has nothing whatever to do with the relation between copy and original. It is a showing and

showing something means that the one to whom something is shown sees it correctly for himself. ... What is shown is, so to speak, elicited from the flux of manifold reality. Only what is shown is intended and nothing else. As intended, it is held in view, and thus elevated to a kind of ideality. ... An act of identification and, consequently, of recognition occurs whenever we see what it is that we are being shown.³⁶

All true mimesis is a transformation, perhaps more than an imitation; a primordial phenomenon that constitutes the experience of art.³⁷ Gadamer calls it "aesthetic nondifferentiation," that is, that which is represented in art is not distinguished from the representation. Imitation presents a "transformed reality in which the transformation points back to what has been transformed in and through it."³⁸ Imitation is an explorative self-presentation of reality. In mimesis is reality intensified, writ large.

Imitation must always be complemented by "recognition." Gadamer holds that the essence of imitation consists in the recognition of the represented. Through the act of identification, the cognition of the true, one knows the represented as something, that is, the represented is something already known. What imitation reveals then, Gadamer argues, is the real essence of the thing.³⁹ In art the truth is recognized as it only there presents itself.

Gadamer's view of art is similar to the "living form" envisioned by Schiller. Gadamer writes

the play of art is not some substitute dream world in which we can forget ourselves. On the contrary, the play of art is a mirror that through the centuries constantly arises anew, and in which we catch sight of ourselves in a way that is often unexpected or unfamiliar: what we are, what we might be, and what we are about.⁴⁰

³⁵"The Play of Art," p. 127.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 128-9.

³⁷"Poetry and Mimesis," p. 121.

³⁸"The Festive Character of Theatre," p. 64.

³⁹"Art and Imitation," p. 99.

⁴⁰"The Play of Art," p. 130.

With Gadamer's distinctive interpretation of mimesis he is pointing out that the being of art is in the play of its interpretation. In mimesis art is at play. Mimesis is the play of art. In art there is an "acting as if," a fabrication that is not to be taken for anything other than itself. "It 'intends' something, and yet it is not what it intends."⁴¹ It is wholly self-referential, yet "shows" a reality beyond itself.

Presentation and performance constitute the base for Gadamer's ontology. Things are as they present or show themselves in the world. Art shares this ontological base with all of nature whose purpose it is only to present itself.

The thrust of Gadamer's discussion of the ontology of a work of art is an attempt to push away from a classical ontological position in which reality stands somehow behind what is apparent and transient. The characteristics of play—the absence of subjective and objective contingency, the lack of outward and inward necessity, the to-and-fro movement that is itself life—are to Gadamer clues to the ontology of art. Play is at once metaphor for art and a description of the structure of art. Art gains its being in its self-presentation.

Still, Gadamer has not achieved the abandonment of a ground of being behind self-presentation. His position seems to necessitate there being a reality beyond art and nature. It is hidden; it needs to be shown. The truth of this reality must be illuminated by art. Yet, he also holds that neither art nor nature is a reflection of a reality to which it must be compared. Reality has its being in its manifestation, even and perhaps most powerfully, in the being of a work of art. Though Gadamer insists that art does not invoke a comparison of original and copy or imitation, it is very difficult to simply dismiss an important ontological difference between reality hidden and reality shown. While it appears that Gadamer intends to diminish the significance of difference by concentrating on self-presentation or self-representation, his conceptions and the language by which he expresses them—imitation, self-presentation, recognition, and hidden reality—are dependent in a fundamental way on difference.

Gadamer's understanding of play is notably similar to Schiller's. Furthermore, Gadamer utilized play in much the same manner that Schiller did, that is, as a metaphor for or illustration of a kind of relationship, a kind of structuring principle. Both depend on an aspect of the common understanding of play by which to articulate and investigate the aesthetic. Gadamer's advances in the realm of aesthetics were to move from the consideration of the path to human perfection to the mode of being of an art creation. In the realm of philosophy, Gadamer moves away from a traditional ontology, yet remains attached to the foundational structure of such a perspective.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 126. My discussion of "self-othering" in dancing is related.

Gregory Bateson

"These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote," or, put more simply, "This is play."

Gregory Bateson

Visiting Fleishhacker Zoo in San Francisco in 1952, Gregory Bateson watched two young monkeys playing. In his analysis of the monkey message system, these monkeys were able to communicate to one another a message which Bateson formulated as, "These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote," or, put more simply, "This is play."⁴² The playful monkey nip which denotes a bite does not denote what would be denoted by the bite. With these monkeyshines, Bateson enters the discussion of the nature of signs, the exploration of the many contrasting levels of abstraction of sign systems. Monkeyshines led Bateson to consider play in terms of "metalinguistics" (the set of language used to discourse on linguistics or about language) and "metacommunications" (the acts of communication about communication).

In Bateson's analysis of play, he finds two peculiarities: "(a) that the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant; and (b) that that which is denoted by these signals is nonexistent." (183) The paradox in the monkey signals is doubly present and, of course, that is the fun of it. It is just this awareness that is put to play in fantasy and art.

It follows in Bateson's analysis that it is not what the monkeys do that makes it play, it is the communicated and accepted frame in which the action takes place that makes it play.

Generalizing, Bateson says that "play' is not the name of an act or action; it is the name of a *frame* for action."⁴³ Thus play is metacommunicative in that it sets a frame (by the message "this is play") in the terms of which the encompassed action is interpreted. That is, in terms of that complicated message filtering systems that say "These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote and indeed that which would be denoted does not exist."

Play, in Bateson's view, "sets a frame of the sort which is likely to precipitate paradox: it is an attempt to discriminate between, or to draw a line between categories of different logical types." (190) This occurs by means of a triadic system of relationships between messages, reminiscent of Charles Sanders Peirce⁴⁴ and Schiller. Bateson illustrates this triadic constellation by articulating three types of messages: "(a) Messages of the sort which we here call mood-signs; (b) messages which simulate mood-signs ...; and (c) messages which enable the receiver to discriminate between mood-signs and those other signs which resemble them. 'This is play' is of this third type. It tells the receiver that certain nips and other meaningful actions are not messages of the first type." (189)

⁴²Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972), p. 180.

⁴³Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), p. 139.

⁴⁴For fuller discussion see my "Charles Sanders Peirce: Play and the Logic of Discovery" 2009 www.Sam-Gill.com

Bateson, interested in the history of consciousness and the evolution of communication, speculates that play marks a major evolutionary step in communication.⁴⁵

In his *Mind and Nature* Bateson shows at length how "double description," "binocular vision" opens a third dimension, a category of a different logical type. In Bateson's description:

The binocular image, which appears to be undivided, is in fact a complex synthesis of information from the left front in the right brain and a corresponding synthesis of material from the right front in the left brain. Later these two synthesized aggregates of information are themselves synthesized into a single subjective picture . . . two sorts of advantages accrue. The seer is able to improve resolution at edges and contrasts . . . More important, information about depth is created. In more formal language, the *difference* between the information provided by the one retina and that provided by the other is itself information of a *different logical type*. From this new sort of information, the seer adds an extra *dimension* to seeing.⁴⁶

What is characteristic of this frame for action that Bateson calls play is just this presence of *difference*, this double description, this chiasma (so clearly exemplified in the neurological processes of seeing).

Jacques Derrida

To risk meaning nothing is to start to play.
 - Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida strips away the grounding to which Gadamer seems inextricably bound and sets play free in the joyous Nietzschean affirmation of the play of the world, a world without truth, without origin. Derrida does not see play so differently from Schiller and Gadamer, but he thinks of play in a radical way, consequently presenting a more mature understanding of play. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that play allows Derrida the language for the radical messages of postmodernity. We could say that Derrida takes play most seriously.

Derrida often uses the word "play" (*jeu*), though he rarely directly discusses play as a concept. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"⁴⁷ he explicitly discusses play. Derrida's subject is the challenge to the fixedness of structure that he understands to characterize our epoch, a challenge he sees exemplified by Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics, Freud's critique of self-presence, and Heidegger's destruction of the determination of being as presence. The

⁴⁵See Bateson's "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," pp. 178-9.

⁴⁶Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, pp. 69-70. This discussion may be enhanced by a consideration of "pure depth" as I considered in *Brain Body Movement Lecture Series*, 2009 www.Sam-Gill.com Lecture 11; "Emotion, Depth, and Flesh—Part I: Dancing as Pure Depth."

⁴⁷Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," in *The Languages of Criticism and the Science of Man*, edited by Richard Macksey and Eugene Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 247-265.

rupture in the way of thinking about structure was a shift from the structure to the principles that govern the structure, that is, a shift to what he terms "structurality." According to Derrida, structure has always been

neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was . . . to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay (*jeu*) of the structure.⁴⁸

A structurality characterized by the fixation of a center or an origin is given a foundation, a certitude, beyond the play of the structure. The center or origin which is of the structure is also outside of the structure. While the center permits the play of the structure it also closes off this play.

Play, for Derrida, is a "disruption of presence," "an interplay of absence and presence," conceived even before the alternative of presence and absence.⁴⁹ This disruption is coincident with the realization of the concept of the centered structure. This is a movement from structure to structurality, that is, from thinking about form to thinking about principles, such as designating a center, that govern the character of a structure. This shift in thinking leads to the realization that structures are of the process of signification and that the center of a structure is a surrogate for some central presence. But this presence is always transported outside itself into its structural surrogate. From here, Derrida argues,

it was probably necessary to begin to think that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a being-present, that the center has no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into being.⁵⁰

The concept of play casts the light in which Derrida is able to illuminate the vitality of such structures as language or any code system. The field of language is that of play, by which he means "a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble."⁵¹ It is not that the field of language is inexhaustible that it permits infinite substitutions, but because it is missing

a center which arrests and founds the freeplay of substitutions. . . . This movement of the freeplay, permitted by the lack, the absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center, the sign which *supplements* it, which takes its place in its absence—because this sign adds itself, occurs in addition, over and

⁴⁸Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," p. 247-8.

⁴⁹Similar to Jean Baudrillard's discussion of seduction as an oscillation of presence and absence in *Seduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990)

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 249.

⁵¹Ibid.

above, comes as a supplement.⁵²

Play then is a decentering movement; the movement of an infinite number of sign substitutions; the movement of the difference that must precede even the distinction of presence and absence.

These characteristics of structurality that are designated by the term play are also evident in Derrida's discussion of "différance" (the "a" being an intentional anomalous spelling of "difference" with a silent effect). Of the French Derrida notes that "the verb 'to differ' [différer] seems to differ from itself."⁵³ On the one hand, it is differ, the "difference as distinction, inequality, discernibility." On the other hand, as defer, it "expresses interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied." "Différance," neither a word nor concept, is used by Derrida to identify the commonness, the relatedness, of the two movements of differing to one another. "Différance" is "the sameness which is not identical" or "the play of differences." Importantly, characteristic of the rupture with structure that characterizes our epoch, différance "is not, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present (*on*). And . . . has neither existence nor essence. It belongs to no category of being, present or absent."⁵⁴ "Différance" designates the movement by which language or any code becomes constituted as a fabric of differences. It is this movement that Derrida commonly calls play (*jeu*).

By its anomalous spelling, "différance" as a signifier, has a sense suspended between two verbs "to differ" and "to defer." With the signifier "différance," Derrida designates the shading of one sense into the other in signification where meaning is always deferred by an endless supplementarity, yet meaning also depends on distinctive oppositions (differences). As Christopher Norris says, "Différance not only designates this theme [of the supplementarity of difference and sameness] but offers in its own unstable meaning a graphic example of the process at work."⁵⁵

Play designates the vitality, the movement that arises in differences. Play is movement in that sense described by Gadamer as the to-and-fro of constantly repeated movement, as back and forth movement where neither pole of the movement represents the goal, an unstable movement among poles that cannot co-exist.

The loss of center, the embracing of the play of différance, of supplementarity, need not be met with nostalgia for presence or origins. Nor is there any intent by Derrida to discover some alternative logic of play. He lucidly articulates the alternatives in the context of interpretation:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Derrida, "Différance" in *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 129.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 134.

⁵⁵Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982).

interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, through the history of all his history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game.⁵⁶

Though it might appear that Derrida opts for the second interpretation of interpretation, he says that there is no question of choosing between them.⁵⁷ Such a choice would be trivial, for we must "first try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différence* of this irreducible difference."⁵⁸ In other words, we must engage the play between these two irreconcilable interpretations of interpretation. In this play between play and not play, Derrida invokes radical imagery to capture some sense of it: "the species of the non-species, in the forlorn, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity."⁵⁹

Derrida, brings to fuller maturity the way that "play" has been understood by Schiller and Gadamer. In posing the play impulse Schiller sought to show the impossibility of choosing between the formal impulse and the sensual impulse, to illuminate the vitality of the interplay between these irreconcilable impulses. Schiller would surely have readily appreciated Derrida's discussion of "*différance*" and supplementarity. Whereas Gadamer attempted to move toward being in self-presentation, Derrida, by taking play radically, moves wholly away from the ontological language which tends to take the play out of play.

Whereas Schiller and Gadamer see play as fundamental to understand what distinguishes art, Derrida rather pushes the play of play, structurality beyond structurality to the unthinkable describable only in terms of the monstrous.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Baudrillard . . . Briefly

Play, as it is emerging from the discussion of a number of discourses on it, is a structurality, a process, a relationality. It is not thing nor action, but interaction and interplay. While I believe that it is beyond the responsible scope of this essay, I do believe that what we are here discussing in the terms of play would be well advanced by connecting it with other discussions that I find important.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, an existential phenomenologist, was a lifelong student of perception. At the end of his life he was articulating a philosophical perspective that would allow him to reject simple dualist structures such as mind and body, inside and outside, perception and perceived, percipient

⁵⁶Derrida, p. 265.

⁵⁷Derrida's discussion of interpretation parallels Jonathan Z. Smith's discussion of "locative" and "utopian" mapping strategies.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 265.

⁵⁹Ibid.

and perceptible, and so on. His perspective was articulated in terms of “flesh,” characterized by reversibility or chiasm. I think there is much kinship between Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh ontology” and the concepts of play as developed by Schiller, Gadamer, Bateson, and Derrida.⁶⁰

Jean Baudrillard’s work often disfigures and displaces our most common understandings of ourselves. I find particularly provocative his concept “seduction” developed extensively in his book *Seduction* (1979/1990). Seduction is set in a dual structurality with “production,” yet it is no simple dual structure. Seduction is, for Baudrillard, the “pure play of signs” and further “seduction does not consist of a simple appearance, nor a pure absence, but the eclipse of a presence. Its sole strategy is to be-there/not-there, and thereby produce a sort of flickering, a hypnotic mechanism that crystallizes attention outside all concern with meaning. Absence here seduces presence.”⁶¹ He discusses the interrelationship of play and seduction in his essay “The ‘Ludic’ and Cold Seduction.” My point here really is that among these several writers and others not mentioned there is a common concern to articulate the dynamics of meaning and reality in terms akin to those of play. I think we would do well to put much effort in the careful comparative reading of these writers with this in mind.

Gadamer and Derrida in Light of Schiller

*He [Schiller] takes his reader by the hand and leads him around and around, bringing him now up against a deadlock which will not be resolved until he reaches a different point on the same or on another circle, now to a solution which, as he moves still further round will reveal within itself problems of even greater complexity. He thus leaves him at the end with an impression, not only of a myriad-faceted problem, but of the multi-dimensionality of the solution he is offering.*⁶²

Schiller’s Aesthetic Letters have an iterative structure, their form corresponding with their theme, their author artfully engaged in the play of substitution.⁶³ Substituting one set of terms for the previous set, in supplementarity, Schiller moves from a concern for individual human potential all the way to the fulfillment of cultural potential in an Aesthetic State. He uses some terms like *Natur* in many ways.⁶⁴ He uses many terms for the same referent—eight, for example, to refer to God.⁶⁵

60I have discussed Merleau-Ponty’s work in some detail in *Brain, Body, Movement* 2009, Lecture 10 “Touch, Flesh, and Vision.”

61 Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 84.

⁶²Wilkinson and Willoughby, p. lvi.

⁶³“The play of substitution” has been used to describe Schiller’s style and structure. Wilkinson and Willoughby indicate their preference for the term “tautology” in the attempt to counteract what they see as the tendency others have had to make too much of some ponderousness of Schiller’s style. It seems to me that their reticence to use the term “play” is consistent throughout the work with their basic misunderstanding of it. They tend to equate play with the light, the trivial, even in contrast with Schiller’s much more complex understanding.

⁶⁴See Wilkinson and Willoughby, pp. 322-6.

Antithesis is preferred to synthesis. His translators proclaim dance as

the most apposite of all metaphors for the form of his treatise. Not just for the rhythms of his periods . . . but for the philosophic and aesthetic complexity of the form as a whole. Partly because the manifest tautology of dance is a paradigm of the essential tautology of all art: of its inherent tendency to offer a hundred different treatments of the same subject, to find a thousand different forms of expression for the thoughts and feelings common to all men.⁶⁶

The Aesthetic Letters have a structure based on threes. Not only does Schiller reiterate the same concerns almost exactly every three letters, in each of these iterations the Letters demand a "third thing": a "third character" combining the virtues of both the animal and rational sides of human nature (Letter III); the clarification that the "third character" will differ from the Greek notions of wholeness and harmony (Letter VI); the call for a third term to resolve the dilemma that, to Schiller, characterizes human nature (Letter IX); the argument for the "third drive" conjoining the heterogeneous form and sense drives (Letter XII); beauty is identified with the third drive (Letter XV); a "middle condition" between activity and passivity, combining the advantages of each, is proposed (Letter XVIII); the aesthetic mode of the psyche, the "third state," is defined (Letter XXI); a description of the "third state" to which both individuals and cultures must pass, each moving through a three stage cycle, to achieve full potential (Letter XXIV); and, finally, all the "third things" come together in Schiller's conception of a "Third State," an "Aesthetic State," which fulfills all the previous ideals.⁶⁷

In all of these domains, the "third thing" arises as the interplay of two others. The "third thing" is that which conjoins, with vitality but without synthesis, two heterogeneous, even opposing, structural elements. The "third thing" is always double-faced; at once a warning of the dangers of collapsing or diminishing complexity and a demonstration of the dynamism and vitality of the structural dynamic the "third thing" makes possible.

It is the cross connection of two heterogeneous structures that Schiller presents both in substance and in structure in the Aesthetic Letters. His favorite rhetorical figure is chiasm: the rhetorical inversion of the second of two parallel phrases, clauses, and so on.⁶⁸

Schiller's paradigmatic play chiasm is: (put positively) the form drive achieves its fulfillment only

⁶⁵Ibid., p. cxxii.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. lvi. And, of course, this metaphor is especially appropriate since the original meaning of *Speil*, as Gadamer reminds us, is dance. It is also notable that Schiller wrote a poem titled "The Dance." I see dancing as an important exemplar of the structurality of play. See my "Dancing as Making" 2009 www.Sam-Gill.com.

⁶⁷This structure is the observation of Wilkinson and Willoughby who describe it, p. li.

⁶⁸His use of chiasmus is discussed in Wilkinson and Willoughby, pp. lxviii-lxx and in Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, "Reflections After Translating Schiller's *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man*," in *Schiller Bicentenary Lecture*, edited by F. Norman, (London: University of London Institute of Germanic Languages and Literatures, 1960), pp. 63-66. It should be read with Merleau-Ponty's and Bateson's separate discussions of chiasm.

through the sense drive, the sense drive through the form drive; (put negatively) without the sense drive the form drive runs amiss, the sense drive runs amiss without the form drive. The chiasm is redoubled, but not double-crossed: the chiasm that conjoins the form and sense drives is the play drive; chiasm is itself a "third thing," an illustration of play.

Sheinen, as discussed by Schiller, has two distinct, even opposing, meanings: "to shine" and "to appear or seem." In some usages they are synonymous or at least closely related. In senses related to light, for example, things appear as they shine or are shined upon. But the second sense of the word holds the key to the ambiguity, for there are multiple senses of "to appear or seem." A thing may appear to be what it in fact is, but it may seem to be what it is not. *Shein* may be identified with both *Erscheinung*, "appearance," and *Tauschung*, "deception."⁶⁹ Schiller's use of *Shein* in his discussion of aesthetics anticipates, and may serve as a critique of, Gadamer's conception of "mimesis." The peculiarity of the term, which seems to differ from itself (or, to maintain consistent language, to shine upon its appearances) is in the spirit of and anticipates Derrida's "différance." Further, *Shein* cannot be adequately understood apart from "play," nor perhaps "play" apart from *Shein*. Chiasm.⁷⁰

By this point in the Aesthetic Letters the discussion has shifted to the achievement of the full potentiality of the human species. Striving for "aesthetic semblance" is, for Schiller, a key to human advancement, since it

demands higher powers of abstraction, greater freedom of heart, more energy of will, than man ever needs when he confines himself to reality; and he must have already left this reality behind if he would arrive at that kind of semblance.(XXVI.1)

Before the rise of semblance, Schiller argues, humankind is chained to a brute material existence. The emergence of semblance is an advancement because it marks the rise of human invention, the abstraction of the ideal from the brute reality of nature, of form from substance. Semblance is wholly the work of humankind and exists only in the realm of ideas and forms. "Aesthetic semblance" (or variously "autonomous semblance" or "pure semblance") is based on maintaining a clear distinction between "semblance" and "actuality" and "truth." It "neither seeks to represent reality nor needs to be represented by it."(XXVI.13) "Logical semblance" in contrast, is confused with actuality and truth. It is mere deception.

Aesthetic semblance is key to the rise of art, to the aesthetic perspective, to human development. Where it exists "we shall see actual life governed by the ideal, honor triumphant over possessions, thought over enjoyment, dreams of immortality over existence."(XXVI.12)

"Play" is supplementary to "aesthetic semblance." In distinguishing aesthetic from logical

⁶⁹See the discussion of *Shien* in Wilkinson and Willoughby, pp. 327-9.

⁷⁰This consideration of chiasm anticipates Merleau-Ponty's "flesh ontology."

semblance Schiller wrote, "Only the first is play, the later is deception."(XXVI.5) He held that the play drive begins to stir at the stage of development when it becomes important to distinguish semblance from reality, form from body. (XXVI.7) What I believe he means is that there can be no play when the sense drive alone is operative, when, in his conception, human beings were at the stage of unreflective brute material sensuality. There is no play in a single pole structure for it functions as a center which takes the play out of the structure. "Aesthetic semblance" is one of the ways that Schiller expresses the importance of play. The structural dynamics of the meanings of *Shein* are an illustration, an exemplum, of the structural dynamics of play.

Truth is never endangered by attaching value to semblance, because the clear distinction of semblance and reality prevents any danger of substituting semblance for truth. Though Schiller warns that "it sometimes happens that intelligence will carry its zeal for reality to such a pitch of intolerance, that it pronounces a disparaging judgment upon the whole art of aesthetic semblance just because it is semblance."(XXVI.5)⁷¹

It may appear that Gadamer was right in describing Schiller as using subjectivist criteria in art. Semblance is, after all, described as a human construct, a human perception, not a state of being. But the subjective dimension of aesthetic semblance is confined to the form drive, the abstraction or construction of ideals and forms from nature, from brute reality. Semblance is one of those "third things" that cross connects, without syntheses, heterogeneous drives or structures. Semblance is how Schiller refers to the play of art, it is how one keeps straight the worthiness of aesthetic semblance from the deceptiveness of logical semblance. As a critique to Gadamer's position, it may be suggested that Schiller, by holding to the importance of distinguishing "semblance" and "reality" (however unsatisfactory are these terms) he can save the play which both he and Gadamer agree distinguishes the fine arts. Gadamer, worrying about the conflict of *Shein* and *Sein*, attempts to collapse this distinction, but loses the play that characterizes the mode of being of art (or at best reconstructing it in the conjunction of art and spectator); he muddles the distinction between the fine arts and nature; and without acknowledging their playfulness he uses terms that are inherently double-faced: imitation, representation, recognition, hidden reality.

Gadamer's "aesthetic nondifferentiation" is shown in a critical light by Schiller's discussion of *Shein*. By "aesthetic differentiation" Gadamer refers negatively to the abstraction of art from all of the conditions of its accessibility. This aesthetic consciousness divorces art from everyday life and also from issues of truth. Seen in isolation, Schiller's discussion of semblance might be understood as contributing to aesthetic differentiation, but seen in the context of the Aesthetic Letters it cannot. In fact, these concepts are focused at different points in the realm of art and the experience of art. Gadamer, reacting to the tendency he feels has wrongly influenced aesthetic consciousness to separate the meaning of a work of art from its particular experience, proposes "aesthetic nondifferentiation" which "clearly constitutes the real meaning of that cooperative play between

⁷¹ This suggests a relation to the distinction of *trompe l'oeil* (see Baudrillard's discussion in *Seduction*) and to the "reality" model for film.

imagination and understanding.⁷² He wrote that

it is invariably true that when we see something, we must think something in order to see anything. But here it is a free play and not directed toward a concept. This cooperative interaction forces us to face the question about what is actually built up in this process of free play between the faculties of imagination and conceptual understanding.⁷³

Gadamer is concerned, I believe, not with what distinguishes art, its mode of being, but with how we experience art and discern its meaning. Schiller's discussion of semblance is focused more on the importance of making that distinction between semblance and brute sensual reality, by which art is distinguished in the first place. There is no play without this distinction. Gadamer tends to shift the arena of play, in the context of this discussion at least, to the subjective realm of imagination and conceptual understanding, while for Schiller play is made possible by the basic distinction of aesthetic semblance, that is, form abstracted from the domain of sense.

A Self-Deconstruction: A Chiasmatic Hinge

Self-deconstruction is like auto-cannibalism. In practical terms it cannot be done. But it is fun to think about. The mouth is always the problem.

Play is among the most common of human actions. Children begin playing at an early age. Play is among the most common of words.⁷⁴ Children begin using it very early. It seems a long journey from the first "Can you come out and play with me?" to Jacques Derrida's remarks on play, but the distance traveled is not so far. I cannot say that I thoroughly understand Derrida. To say one understands Derrida is to show one does not understand Derrida. Trying to understand Derrida, here with reference to "play," is like a peep show. It is more seductive than productive. My excitement grows as I see the old garments that clothe the positions we hold so dearly come flying out, one by one, from behind the curtain. My imagination runs wild. My anticipation grows at the prospect of seeing the naked truth, the real thing. The curtain finally pops open then closes. In that instant I get to look, a mere peek. I see clearly for a moment. At least I think I do. Wow! But wait. What did I see? It wasn't what I expected. What was it? I am left only with the contemplation of and the deadly articulation of an after-image which I must construct and reconstruct, turn into a story. The play of presence and absence, of knowing and not knowing is seductive, holding the two together, allowing this interplay is, of course, to risk meaning nothing, nothing at all.

The concept of play, exemplified in Schiller, Gadamer, Bateson, Derrida, and Baudrillard, is not understood as some kind of activity, as play *in* the world. It is understood as the play *of* the world and this precludes the play of someone who plays. Play is neither objectively nor subjectively

⁷²Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," p. 29.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴ Play is considered a basic level category by George Lakoff as discussed in several of his works.

contingent. It is not dominated by meaning or by anything that surpasses it. These authors have required that play be understood, to use Derrida's words, as "beyond the activity of a subject manipulating objects according to or against the rules."⁷⁵

All this talk, this writing, this philosophizing about play—the twisting and transformation of terms, the abstraction and elevation of ideas—risks losing play altogether. Perhaps in the process of defining and articulating we have lost play in the twilight zone of thought and intellection to which this journey has taken us. It has been argued since Schiller that play is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, that is, play is neither a state of mind nor a class of activity, but we all know that there is a subjective side of play and that we frequently use the word play to refer to various classes of activities from games to the stock market. Play cannot be understood very well until its subjective and objective senses are considered, for here play is key to a theory of value.⁷⁶ Once we have established that play is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, we must, I believe, say that it is also both subjectively and objectively contingent. What's the difference? Play, as an abstraction upon an abstraction, is certainly no set of objects or activities in the world, nor is it determined by a subjective state of mind. But once play is the subject of discourse, it becomes an object and, as an object of thought, it reflects subjective variance; we have feelings about play. For example, a reader of Derrida may writhe with pain, feel frustration, even anger, at the play of his words and ideas, or the reader may delight in the dance of his pen. While the play is not subjectively determined the character of a reader's perception of it and tolerance for it is. To one it is a being played with (as a mouse is played with by a cat before being brutally killed); to the other it is an elegant artful dance.

Gregory Bateson's insightful discussions of play shows that there is somehow always a "not" implicit in the word. This too is like the child's shouting play "Is!" "Is not!" With the confidence of an occasional peep at the "is" of play, we declare "play is." But the "is not" of play immediately shouts back at us "Yeah yeah! You can't catch me!" And so this is the nature of play. "Is not!"

⁷⁵Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, English edition edited by Christie V. McDonald, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), p. 69.

⁷⁶See my "Charles Sanders Peirce: Play and the Logic of Discovery."