

Play, Boundaries, and Creative Thinking: A Ludic Perspective

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S U M M A R Y

The belief that play is "child stuff" is obsolete. The vast potentiality of play rests on the application of a ludic perspective to the social world. Play allows one to explore, mediate, and parse their constitutive individual and collective boundaries by engaging with the contingent, indeterminate, ephemeral "as if", subjunctive worlds by temporarily suspending a perspective of the world that treats such boundaries as absolute and impermeable. These subjunctive worlds allow one to creatively engage with non-conventional approaches to problems, behave in manners one may not usually behave, interact with others that they may not usually associate with etc. with the understanding that what is done in play may not have the same consequences as in reality. The subjunctive is where one can exercise their creative potential, apply unusual forms of ingenuity, and reconsider social boundaries perceived as intractable and impermeable. This proposition stems from participant observation conducted at the Sannat Stadium bocce courts through the 2012 Xpeditions Field School program and should be situated in the grander scheme of things rather than only being culturally specific to Gozo, Malta. The implication of this conception of play is a reconsideration of social navigation as strictly linear, determinant and without contingency. Instead, a ludic perspective weighs the myriad of one's ever-present reflexive and intermediate decisions, which do not always follow a predetermined social trajectory, as factors that also account for where one "is" in the world, and where one conceives as their place in the world.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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Think back to a time when a simple game, played alone or accompanied by others could captivate the imagination or collective imaginations and entertain for hours on end. Perhaps nostalgia too often pervades my sensibilities, but I have come to consider the days I spent on Gozo, a small, hot, dry island in the Maltese Archipelago much like the childhood game of hide-and-seek, where I was seeking not only a cultural experience but also an ethnographic experience as a budding anthropologist. The object of my first anthropological inquiry was a little-known and infrequently played game called *brilli*, which is similar to skittles or lawn bowling, supposedly played at a few places on the island by a few older men. I was told that one of those locations is next to a small soccer stadium in the town of Sannat on the southern coast of Gozo. However, this object of study I sought, as some ethnographers have experienced, was not what I originally intended it to be. While searching for the unique I found the mundane, the ubiquitous and the often passed over every-day; simply put, *just* a group of a few older men who come together daily to play *bocce* in the dirt. Bocce can be found everywhere and anywhere from stadium-side in Sannat on Gozo, to lakeside in Lucerne,

in Switzerland, to ice rink-side in Bryant Park in New York City, and even in Pittsburgh. However, the ubiquity of these seemingly mundane instances of play and other playful activities should not belie play's importance to the foundation of personal development and social education. I come to argue how these simple collective gatherings and instances of play are critical to the navigation of individual and collective boundaries and a means to tap into the potential of creative thinking, revealing the profitability of the application a ludic perspective to the way in which one understands and navigates the social world.

When considering an initial research topic I was enamored by the allure of discovering something special, something that few, if any, have ever observed or analyzed and felt pressure to find this unique thing, *brilli*, on Gozo. Retrospectively, this could be considered as the instance I entered into and thus became a part of the game of anthropological hide-and-seek, with finding *brilli* as an indeterminate outcome to end such a game. As should be known, the game had ended differently than I had planned. Through the objectification of things that are unique, in this case *brilli*, especially in a setting of which one is not very familiar, I came to realize the impracticality of elevating one aspect of culture over another. Not only are most things equally unique, but such an elevation could lead one to believe that "anthropology ought to be straight lines to a place" (Gilsenan 2011:62), as Gilsenan puts it, aware of the fallaciousness of such a treatment of anthropological fieldwork, which ignores the contingency and indeterminacy of the world. Such straight-line paths to the objectified unique can lead to "tunnel vision", a blurring the social *periphery* that "closes off too much, misses too much, violates too many other ways of reaching the point one hopes to reach whose exact nature and significance one is not exactly aware" (Gilsenan 2011: 62). This approach may lead one to cut out or to overlook certain things in the *periphery* of everyday lived experience. As far as anthropology is concerned, this social *periphery* has much if not everything to offer. By focusing on the way in which people experience everyday lived reality, one can develop a lucid understanding to socio-cultural particulars around which people make sense of their lives, as well as cross-cultural global tropes that undergird such lives.

While my proposition was inspired by participant observation in daily bocce matches at Sannat Stadium, conducted through the Xpeditions Field School program in the summer of 2012, I use my experiences along with other examples as supporting details to situate my argument within a grander scheme of things than being culturally specific to Gozo. I ground my argument in a conceptualization of play that is at its basest a relatively consequence-free

"sequence of actions" that continually respond to changing situational factors. This conceptualization displays play as an intrinsic facet of both individual cognitive development and collective social education. While this fact that play is critical to socialization is generally accepted, there is more to play than just this respect. Play's alternate potentiality resides in the ephemeral subjunctive world that it creates. I argue that the engagement in instances of play allows one to exercise the ability to explore, mediate, and parse their constitutive individual and collective boundaries by engaging with the contingent, indeterminate, ephemeral "as if", subjunctive¹ worlds that play instances create. These subjunctive worlds enable one to try out non-conventional approaches to problems, behave in manners one may not usually behave *in reality*, engage with others that they may not usually associate with etc., in an albeit temporary suspension of a way of looking at the world that treats these boundaries as absolute and impermeable. Essentially, I am arguing that there is more than what meets the eyes when it comes to play. Not only does play carry the potential for exercising our creative potential and unusual forms of ingenuity, but there should also be a consideration for the application of a playful lens to everyday life. Such a playful lens carries with it the potential to elucidate the inherent ambiguity, contingency, and indeterminacy of the world. Considering Gilsenan's warning against a linear approach to fieldwork and my consideration of a playful lens to social navigation, I preface the meat and bones of my argument with a brief ethnographic recantation of how exactly I anthropologically and literally "got into the game". This recantation follows my quasi-linear search and for the ball court at which *brilli* is played, and displays how I engaged with the bocce players at Sannat Stadium to eventually become "just one of the guys". In one respect, I had some direction for finding *brilli*, the general location of the stadium, but in another way, I was hoping to come across it myself with a little luck and an active engagement with the cultural setting within which the game is embedded. I took to the streets on a particularly steamy afternoon, as many ethnographers have done in pursuit of their own objects of anthropological inquiry, and wandering the everyday Gozitan localities in hope of encountering *brilli*. However, after what was too many sun soaked circumambulations of the same few blocks in Sannat, I realized that I was dead lost, and the delirium of dehydration forced me to abandon my game of anthropological hide-and-seek. Not only was I lost, but also I had not seen anyone whom I could ask for directions in an unfamiliar town that I had only recently been acquainted with, my only company were the small lizards scurrying from rock to rock. Emotionally and physically drained, I unenthusiastically

retraced my steps to the town square and staggered into the café hidden in the shadows of Sannat's Santa Margherita Catholic Church in search of a cold drink and a push in the right direction. Coincidentally to my embarrassment, the café that I stepped into happened to stand directly adjacent to the Sannat Lions café, a local eatery run by the supporters of the local soccer team who competes at Sannat Stadium. After a few drinks enjoyed over relatively shallow conversations about soccer, rugby, and the location of the stadium with the barman, he began closing shop for his afternoon siesta, after which he would reopen in the cooler evening hours. It made no difference that my dizzying search for Sannat stadium could have been eased by cognizance to the siesta schedule, vacated the streets during the midday hours of the summer months, or by paying attention to the buildings along the main road into town, from which the stadium stood only a few hundred feet. I obtained the direction needed and was soon on my way.

With enthusiasm and a touch of anxiety, I approached what would become my field site for the weeks to come, in hopes of learning, recording, and analyzing not only *brilli*, but also the lived culture of those who play it. What I found was the bocce court frequented mostly by the middle-aged and older generations of Gozitan men enjoying their midday siesta or living out retirement. During my approach, I recanted the first thing "anthropological" that my program coordinator said about the initiation of anthropological fieldwork: "you are going to feel awkward and out of place sometimes, and that's ok." There I stood, hanging in suspense onto a chest-high ledge at the outskirts of the bocce court, existing as *the other* to this "magic circle", for what seemed like eternity of "feeling awkward and out of place." Interestingly, what seemed like an eternity was actually under five minutes. Within that period of time I was invited into the court, dirtied my hands, *ritually* clanged together the one-kilogram metal balls, and began aiming for the ever elusive tiny metal *lick*. A process I would take part in almost daily for the weeks to come.

As is evident with the previous anecdote, the consideration that there is linearity to the way in which one navigates the social world is a dubious misconception. The decisions that lead me through the aforementioned tribulations and travails by no means followed any sort of predetermined linearity. By finding and settling with the bocce court, the predetermined end of my search, *brilli*, was no longer a location on my "social map". Much of the same holds true in play. There may always be an anticipated end goal or point. However, the determinacy of such a result is always subject to the contingent nature of play. As was just

explicated, the world operates in a similar manner, and thus there is a potential to the application of this playful, ludic perspective to understanding social navigation. To get to the application of such a ludic perspective, I first examine what exactly play is in its most rudimentary form with respect to a fundamental categorical principle of an "action" and how that principle is prevalent in play activities like bocce matches at Sannat Stadium. Then second, I will then describe the way in which play is generative and constitutive factor in socialization, whereby play as an individual developmental process, and as a process that informs collective social experience is a something through which one bilocates across the individual-collective boundary as an individual, but one that is necessarily tied to a social collectivity. Then third, I discuss the fundamental differences between *ritual* and play. A difference that recognizes how play and *ritual's* similar subjunctive quality can undercut pervasiveness of an individualistic, introspective frame of existence in favor of a collectivist, extrospective frame that recognizes the contingency of the world and the ambiguity of its boundaries. Then finally, I move into the way in which play has the potentiality to explore creative thinking through the "playful" engagement with and navigation of individual and collective boundaries. This engagement reorients the way in which play can be applied to problem solving, leading to the creation of innovative ideas, design and policies to face the multi-faceted challenges of the contemporary world.

One of the most prominent forays into what exactly play is and its relationship to culture is Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in (of) Culture* (1955), in which he provides a definition of play from what he considers its nature and distinguishable characteristics. There is little utility in providing Huizinga's definition here because I will often in this piece call upon Roger Callois the six general characteristics of play. Moreover, Callois derives his six characteristic primarily from Huizinga's definition in *Homo Ludens* (1955). Callois' effort is to create the "largest common denominator" within which instances of play and games fit (Callois 1961:9). The six characteristics are as follows: play is

1. Free in that it is not an obligatory action;
2. Separate in that it has its own time and space;
3. Uncertain in that the outcome cannot be determined ahead of time;
4. Unproductive in that creates no material;
5. Governed by its own set of rules;
6. Make-believe in that it is accompanied by an awareness of another reality against real life (Callois 1961:9-10).

Huizinga's definition and Callois' general characteristics are problematic. Not everything that could be considered play reflects such a definition or fits within such boundaries. While Callois saw an analytical necessity in giving play characteristics to distinguish it as a category, things that may be considered play but do not necessarily adhere to his six characteristics, which need to be accounted for by an even larger "common denominator". I am more comfortable extrapolating Wittgenstein's idea that family resemblances should determine what should be considered categorically *games* (Wittgenstein 1997) to the method by which certain instances are categorized as play. This family resemblance classificatory system generates a collective concept based on the way in which things relationally overlap, instead of deriving a categorizations along rigid artificial boundaries (Calleja 2011:8-9). While discussion of classificatory system could easily lead into a rather philosophical dialectic concerning the finite or infinite schematization of things—whether or not all things are indeed related in some way—for the sake of analysis, there is something basic and inherent about play that is the governing principle that links all actions or events within the family of play.

Consider, or doing a crossword puzzle. Be they sports or games with formalized rules or activities to pass time underwriting these everyday playful instances is the fact that play is an action; play is something that is done. Just as a game is only a set of props and rules awaiting human engagement (Calleja 2011:8), play is only play when there is active engagement, be it human or non-human as animals play too. Play, though, should not be considered solely pure physical movement—a consideration that would collapse the analytic rigor of the play-category into the broadest of categorizations, life itself— but instead such physical movement should be considered with a person's interface with things, others, themselves, etc., and the actions that follow such interactions. Dewey phrases this idea more eloquently and concisely by stating that a person at play is "*trying* to do or effect something, an attitude that involves anticipatory forecasts that stimulate present responses" (Dewey 1966:203). Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett follow the same logic by saying that "play is action generating action", where the action as noted before is placed within a *sequence* amongst other actions (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett 1971:45). However, concerning this sequential nature of play, whereby the intended act is another activity, and the indeterminacy of play experience, the fact that its outcome is not known, "it is not necessary to look far ahead and it is possible to alter [the intended act] easily and frequently" (Dewey 1966:203). In play, this ability to alter actions in response to the conditions afforded allows

those in a play experience to engage creatively with the ever-changing options at hand.

To flesh out this characterization of play better I will give an overview of the rules and the process by which the men at Sannat Stadium play bocce. This illustration will display the fundamental nature of play as an action, the sequential nature of actions in play, and the creative alterability of such action in play in response to continually changing situational challenges. Bocce at Sannat Stadium is played with anywhere from one to six players split into teams of one, two or three if there are an even amount of players; if an odd amount are present games can be played one against two or two against three. Both teams start on the same side of a sunken dirt court that measures approximately ninety feet long by ten feet wide. The game begins when a predetermined team rolls the *lick* down the court, an action towards which subsequent actions (tosses of a bocce ball) will be directed. The team that threw the *lick* then takes their first toss, attempting to land or roll their one-kilogram ball as close as possible to the *lick*. Following the first toss, the opposing team must attempt to get their ball closer than the ball that was just thrown. If the opposing team fails to do this, they must continue to throw until one of their balls is closer to the *lick* or have used all six of their tosses in such an attempt, making it the other team's turn to toss freely. The action of tossing a ball generates the action of tossing another ball, be it by the same team or not, into a gameplay situation that is necessarily different from previously because of the addition of another element, the extra ball. Once both teams have used all six of their tosses the round is over. A team receives from one to six points depending on how many of their balls sit closer to the *lick* than the opposing team's closest ball. Following scoring the teams walk to the other end of the court to repeat the same actions just described, the only exception being that the team that "scored" in the previous round restarts by tossing the *lick*. Games last until a team scores twelve points for a short game or twenty-one points for a long game, and are extended if both teams reach eleven or twenty until one team has two or more points than the other. For the even the most inexperienced bocce players there will be an interchange of turns to shoot in a round, opportunities to act on a new situation in gameplay, try out a new way to shoot the ball, or attempt risky high reward shots in favor of safer ones with a low reward but a higher success rate. Thus, in a bocce match there are many opportunities to explore alternate methods for finding a suitable outcome to the challenge of simply getting ones ball closest to the *lick*. From this exposition of the fundamental principle of action, exemplified in the bocce matches at Sannat Stadium, I would like to move into a discussion on the importance

of such play instances to socialization. While it is easy to take a materialist approach to and weigh the minimally tangible consequences of play with its importance, the idea that play is an important feature of everyday individual and collective existence has been generally accepted for quite some time. In Huizinga's foray into the play-aspect of culture *Homo Ludens* (1950) he proposes that: "Civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play... it arises in play and as play, and never leaves it" (1955:212). Huizinga saw a deep foundational relationship between the *civilized* world we live in and play. Moreover, I would like to investigate this idea in another light than the *ritual* context, which Huizinga forever locates within the play category. For present purposes, I suggest that replacing "civilization" with "socialization" would read this more as an overarching idea that attempts to wed together individualistic and collectivistic aspects to the centrality of play in everyday socialization. I want to break down Huizinga's statement on the centrality of play to socialization as an individual developmental process that "arises *in play*" and socialization as a developmental process that "arises in play and *as play*." First, socialization "arises *in play*" relates to the importance of play to individual cognitive development in that it constitutes the creation of subjectivity and objectivity. Winnicott proposes that play creates an area of intermediate experience, or third space, from which the basis of symbolization— the informing of the differentiation between purely subjective reality and a subject-object relational reality— leads the individual along a path towards experiencing (Winnicott 1971:6). Play, and thus every other subjective experience derived from play are foundational to human existence because it is in this area of transitional experience where people mediate "between inner reality and shared reality of the world" (i.e. the intertwining of subjectivity and objectivity observation) (Winnicott 1971:64). This space is not static; it is filled with movement, spillover from the past and present that comes to shape future experience. This refers to what John Dewey calls the "continuity of experience", which is reminiscent of the indeterminate sequentiality of play, wherein from inception everything a person experiences is referentially affected by that or those associated experiences that came previous, which will then in the future affect later experiences (1997:35). It is along this continuity of experience that one navigates the ebbs and flows constituting everyday life: "It covers the formation of attitudes...It covers basic sensibilities and ways of meaning and responding to the conditions which we meet in living" (Dewey 1997:35). It is from the amalgamation of the foundational instances of play that

generate personal existence that leads to sociality. Dewey notes: "We live from birth to death in a world of persons and things, which... is what it is because what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities" (Dewey 1997:37), where experience cannot exist as solely an inward act or state but something that verifies the inherent collective nature of human existence. This "world of persons and things" is the main, if not the only source, that gives rise to experience, and it is a source from which the individual is constantly fed. Second, concerning socialization as "arising *in play*, and *as play*," is the relationship between instances of play and their lived enactment in *everyday life*. Regarding what is socialized as normative interpersonal interaction, roles, etiquette, etc; essentially, collective social experience could be derived from play. This extends from learning acceptable conduct on the playground through actually pretend playing socio-culturally determined roles. Indicative of this, is David Lancy's *Playing on the Mother-Ground: Routines for Children's Development* (1996). While his piece is more interested in painting a portrait of Kpelle life and childhood development, rather than proposing cross-cultural implications, his study is exemplary of one way in which play can shape social reality. He proposes that each society has certain routines for the enculturation of their children that produce "development in accord with the demands placed on adults in that society" (Lancy 1996:12). These routines, while various and culturally specific, are ways in which societies transmit cultural knowledge from older to younger members. Play is such a routine that transmits small "bits" of cultural knowledge through the enactment of games (Lancy 1996:25). Understanding a culture's games becomes a recursive exploratory process into collective knowledge and social practice (Calleja 2011:8), whereby games may "define [a] society's moral or intellectual character, provide proof of its precise meaning, and contribute to popular acceptance by accentuating relevant qualities" (Callois 1961:82). For Kpelle youth "playing on the 'mother-ground'" is exemplary of this process. Children enact make-believe dramatizations of the real life adult activities like subsistence methods, normative interpersonal interactions and, but not limited to, other cultural *rituals* that they observe in an open public area with few if any *real* consequences (Lancy 1996:84). "Playing on the 'mother ground'" becomes socio-cultural education where normative intersubjective Kpelle life "arises *in play* and *as play*" by the conscious observation of adult Kpelle life and the subsequent pretend imitations of those observations by young children that will later take on a *real* character.

I dichotomized effect of play into an individual developmental process and a collective process that produces norms for everyday life to reconfigure and refocus Huizinga's proposition that "Civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play... it arises *in play* and *as play*, and never leaves it" (Huizinga 1955:212). By attempting to bifurcate the significance of play into separate spheres of individual and collective socialization, it becomes immediately apparent that they are intricately tied together. The contemporary social individual bilocates, existing in each sphere at the same time and the boundary between should by no means be considered immutable, but instead as a permeable and transitory entity. Therefore the bifurcation of play into separate individual and collective spheres is not *realistic*. Actually, the reverse of bifurcation is true; play necessarily takes on both individual and social character at the same time.

While the phrase "humans are social creatures" may seem like a trite statement to some, it represents something inherent about people that often is overlooked. With the Western emphasis on the individual social actor, it is easy to overlook the aforementioned collective social aspect that contributes to this socialization. Moreover, this emphasis on the individual is a frame of existence that in many Western cultures is socialized as normative, discounting the collective input in individual development. This resonates with Seligman et al.'s claim in *Ritual and Its Consequences: an Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (2008) that much of the contemporary world is marked by an overwhelming concern with something termed *sincerity*. *Sincerity* is an inward, intrapersonal, subjectivist framing of existence, where the constitutive arena of action resides within the individual (2008:4). *Sincere* views are concerned with the interior self, views of "'authenticity,' with individual choice, with the belief that if we can only get to...the unalterable and inimitable heart of what we 'really' feel, or 'really' think, then all will be well—if not with the world, then at least with ourselves"(Seligman 2008:8-9). This idea of the interior self stands in opposition to the external world of objects and public presentation (Rasanayagam 2011:12). The *sincere* frame tends to absolutize the boundaries that we draw around things in the world in an effort to give a definitive "as is" picture of those things (Seligman 2008:7). While the pervasiveness of a *sincere* view is readily apparent in most facets of Western cultural life, it is not the only frame of existence. *Ritual*, the other frame of existence, could be considered as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" (Rappaport quoted in Seligman 2008:11). Through its enactment, *ritual* creates and recreates social conventions beyond the will of any one

person by means of collective engagement. *Ritual* is a way of framing the world that opposes *sincerity's* intrapersonal basis supporting shared interpersonal experience through one's engagement with a shared subjunctive "as if" world (Seligman 2008:11). *Ritual* and *sincerity* both deal with the deep human need for boundaries as constitutive and structural forces that exist on another plane of existence outside our total control, but about which we are constituted (Seligman 2008:70; 11). Seligman proposes that through *ritual*, there is a way in which to mediate differences, and parse the boundaries, so characterized as absolute, that constitute differences by teaching us how to live within and between their ambiguous nature (Seligman 2008:7) Play and *ritual* in classical play theory have been conveyed as identical or with indistinguishable similarities. As mentioned earlier, Huizinga locates part, if not all, of *ritual* acts that come to underwrite our social past, present, and indeed future within the play-category (Huizinga 1955:27). They are not the same, though. While *ritual* and play both enact subjunctive worlds, their constitutive difference is the type of subjunctives world that they create. In this difference is where play's potential to suspend the *sincere* frame exists, if only for a short time, to allow an individual and/or group to engage in collective creativity. On one hand, the subjunctive worlds that *ritual* creates are eternal in that they evoke a permanent truth and connection to an ultimate reality, thus necessitating an compulsory action that refers to the past and present with a predictable end result (Seligman 2008:73-4). The actions by which a person may enter the subjunctive world created by *ritual* are thus proscribed, and often characterized by their non-negotiability. On the other hand, the subjunctive worlds that play creates are ephemeral, in that the end result is variable, indeterminate, contingent, and grounded in possibility; engaging in play is not compulsory or obligatory, but more so a "free" activity (Seligman 2008:73-4; Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett 1971:45). Concerning the topic of this piece, it is the ephemeral and indeterminate nature of the play subjunctive that enables a group of people to interact with spontaneity and creativity. The actions by which a person may enter the subjunctive world of play and what one can do in that space is then relatively more negotiable. Engaging in play's ephemeral subjunctive does not evoke some permanent truth and does not necessitate prescribed performatives and gestures. Play is an engagement with a collectivity along a much more informal medium, allowing for improvisatory and creative actions, strategies and ways of approaching challenges where consequences for such non-scripted actions in play are less heady. The ability produce a favorable outcome reintroduces itself on the next turn or on the premise that one can just play again.

Play and playfulness, like *ritual*, is deeply tied to the negotiation of boundaries, and their inherent ambiguity. To illustrate the ambiguous nature of what qualifies as a play experience, take for example how Csikszentmihalyi, Bennett, and Huizinga discuss the conscious or unconscious state of a player in a play experience. On one hand, Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett (1971) would posit that in the enactment of the play experience there is a balanced state of affairs between contingency and eventuality; awareness merges with action creating a lack of self-consciousness and outside analytic viewpoint (1971:46). The player is "lost in the flow of the game". On the other hand, Huizinga posits that in play there is always a consciousness that one is "only pretending" in opposition to reality (Huizinga 1955:22). Thus, the boundary that marks off a play "experience", to Huizinga, is contingent on what a person considers a playful state. To illustrate the example of the ambiguity of such boundaries between individual and outside world, consider the relationship between the cognitive and corporeal aspects of play. One toss of a bocce ball has the potentiality to allow a player to both cope with themselves; concerning their intrapersonal emotional, cognitive and corporeal dispositions are perceived to exist separate from play or games in *real life*. Additionally, one toss of a bocce ball has the potentiality to allow a player to cope with others; concerning the pangs or niceties in disposition that stem from interpersonal interaction emotions. Emotions, dispositions, and actions from the "real" world can, and often predictably, do slip through and these "carried in" things can be deeply tied to certain events within play as well as the outcomes of play. This implies the idea that our constitutive boundaries are ambiguous, permeable, and negotiable. I would not say that this idea runs counter to the works of play theorists like Huizinga and Callois, who propose play as a separate *unreality*, but it does call into question the bounded exclusivity of such a space.

Where then can one profit from play? There is great potential in play, especially in its ability to mediate and parse our constitutive boundaries. Despite this fact that will be examined just briefly, play is often trivialized and marginalized as a childish activity relegated to a realm where those who work in creative fields or the arts operate (Nussbaum 2013:118). This conception of play leads to its characterizations as an instance of "pure waste", a notoriously harsh treatment by Roger Callois now considered disingenuous considering the scholarship since his *Man, Play, and Games* (1961). This may be because of the prevalence and pervasiveness of the work-play binary where the two appear to be mutually exclusive: work seems to do little to stimulate emotions and the imagination in the

way play does (Dewey 1966:204) and play seems to have few pragmatic material results (Malaby 2009:206). This way of thinking marginalizes the potential of play to stimulate creative thinking that may lead to new ideas, products and alternate solutions for many of life's challenges. As noted before, play is an action; it involves "doing" something. I see the greatest potential of play in its ability to get people to "do" things together, by allowing them to suspend, if only temporarily, any inward focused *sincere* notions in favor of notions that elevate the group over the individual, as to achieve a goal or overcome a challenge.

There is a certain mysterious but inherent sociality *surrounding* the play experience and in the play experience. Seeing no formal difference between *ritual* and play and thus no difference between the "consecrated spot" and the play-ground, Huizinga (1955:10) would locate this mysterious social aspect in the "magic circles" of *ritual* and play, temporary subjunctive worlds within this one that are dedicated to the performance of an act apart (Huizinga 1955:10). These "magic circles", be they play-related or not, engender an observational or participatory curiosity because the ubiquity of such of groups necessitates a myriad "magic circles" to which one could be *the other*. Even when it is convenient to play alone games and play-forms often attract the intrigue of others and become pretext for exhibition or competition (Callois 1961:39-40). Often, at the bocce courts in Sannat, many passersby would stop, lean over the "tourist rail", as I came to call the median that differentiated this court's "magic circle" from the rest of the world, to simply watch a match. In stopping, this sympathetic audience would be caught up in such a spectacle and deeply affected by the gameplay, reflecting the "stimulus and response, thrust and parry, provocation and contagion, and effervescence or shared tension" of the ebbs and flows of *the game* and the pleasure as well as the thrill brought about by engaging with an anonymous multitude (Callois 1961:40). *Within* the play experience, the foundation and medium for sociality is the enactment of the game itself. Nigel Rapport so elucidates this point in his article *The 'Bones' of Friendship: Playing Dominoes with Arthur of an Evening in the Eagle Pub* (1999). At the Eagle pub dominoes serves as the "ambiguous foundation of sociality", existing as a medium familiar pub regulars to "shoot the crap", and the "foundation of ambiguous sociality", existing as a medium through which anyone that knows the rules can "communicate" in *the game* (Rapport 1999:101). Thus, the knowledge of and enactment of games and the play experience, in this case dominoes, serve as the way for a person to reap the psychological and physiological benefits of socialization and also to proverbially "get their foot in the door" of one of Huizinga's "magic circles". It is in the realm of dominoes that people

can construct relationships with others and build upon relationships that already exist, in a relatively consequence free environment. While this fact should not be limited to the groupings engendered by play, these networks and relationships contribute to the promotion of the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that allow people to solve problems easily (Putnam 2000:19; 288).

The potentiality of play to creative thinking hinges on how it can change the way one approaches "problems". The conventional model tends to be "identify the problem/find the solution" (Nussbaum 2013:124), where one problem affords one solution and there is little creativity involved in finding such solution. However, the assumption that this approach will always work is unrealistic. The world is fraught with contingency and constantly changing. There are "so many 'unknown unknowns,' that we don't know the questions we should be asking, let alone the answers" (Nussbaum 2013:124). Instead of taking a linear problem-solution strategy to solve things that may have more than one causative factor, there needs to be a holistic approach that accepts the world as contingent and "plays" with such contingency as a way to manage outcomes for the challenges of the contemporary world. The realm of play affords the tools needed to approach problems with a challenge-outcome strategy that affords flexible solutions that address multifarious situational factors. The creativity afforded by the "open-endedness", "freeness" of the relatively consequence free play subjunctive encourages people improvise and try things out that they may not be able to do in real life, take on new or alternate roles than those in *real* life, and imagine what would happen if people had different capabilities or behaved differently (Nussbaum 2013:119). While being ephemeral in their nature, the subjunctive worlds created by play allow those who enter them to engage with a collectivity, and through this engagement those who enter play explore individual and collective boundaries in a creative and improvisatory way; there is a type of learning going on. This is a learning that "allows you to navigate unknown areas, make unusual connections, and achieve goals in unforeseen ways" (Nussbaum 2013:124).

While much of what has just been elucidated about play refers to how the application of the enactment and incorporation of play instances, and thus creative thinking, to everyday problem solving techniques can to the innovation of suitable and realistic ideas, design, and policies to face the multi-faceted challenges of the contemporary world. To get to the merits of play's ability for creative thinking, I first examined the fundamental categorical principle of play and its sequential nature in play activities, which lead into an exploration of the importance of play as an intertwined individual developmental process and a collective socially

educative experience. Then I discussed the fundamental differences between *ritual* and play in light of their potential to undercut or, in the case of play, to suspend the pervasiveness of *sincerity* by revealing the contingency and indeterminacy of the world and the ambiguity of its boundaries. With the potential merits of play stated, discourse on play should not squabble over its importance for and place in contemporary social processes, but should deal recognizing how such merits can be applied to the contemporary world. With respect to this discourse, the stance that I occupy is that play and playfulness should be treated as a lens through which one understands the world, a ludic perspective per se, applicable not only for navigating anthropological fieldwork situations, but also a perspective on how one navigates their social world.

It hardly needs to be noted that "getting into the game", i.e. entering the "magic circle" of the bocce players at Sannat Stadium is exemplary of a form of social navigation. Even though the anecdote provided in the early pages of this piece treated such navigation as a game anthropological hide-and seek, illustrating how the tribulations, spur-of-the-moment and intermediate decisions contributed to and ultimately landed me at the Sannat Stadium courts, it elucidates the inherent indeterminate, contingent, ambiguous nature of the world. Often times we approach the world in the opposite way, navigating it in a linear fashion, which disregards the aforementioned qualities of the social world, similar Gilsenan's deliberately fallacious comment about how "anthropology ought to be straight lines to a place" (Gilsenan 2011:62), and similar to the one-problem/one-solution strategy approach to overcoming challenges. This consideration, the linearity of social navigation tends to boils down where one "is" in the world, their social location, along a sequential chain of relevant intermediate and long-term decisions marked by their "importance", of which one is consciously pursuing. However, referring back to Gilsenan again — either out of context, or entirely in context considering the way anthropology deals with lived human lived experience— this way of conceptualizing how one navigates the world "closes off too much, misses too much, violates too many other ways of reaching the point one hopes to reach whose exact nature and significance one is not exactly aware" (Gilsenan 2011:62). If a ludic perspective on life is considered, one that recognizes the contingent, indeterminate, and ambiguous nature of the world, and the way in which such qualities affect the myriad of one's ever-present reflexive and intermediate decisions, whose conglomeration are partially responsible for where one "is", than a more lucid understanding of how multifarious conscious and unconscious decisions contribute to how one navigates the social world.

Notes

¹ *Seligman proposes that the subjunctive creates an order that is self consciously differentiated from other social worlds. It is the "creation of an order as if it were truly the case" (Seligman 2008:20) often juxtaposed with the "as is" conception of reality.*

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