Play and Ecstase: Beauty, Freedom and the Existential Value of Game Play

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Introduction

Ever since the emergence of aesthetics as a recognized philosophical field in the eighteenth century, play has endured as a key element in the theorization of aesthetic experience. In the two major, foundational works of aesthetic philosophy in late eighteenth-century German idealism – Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (2007[1790]) and Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (2016[1795]), the aesthetic – as a category of judgments, as a disposition, as a mode of being – is inextricably intertwined with the notion of play.

Still, if it is in play itself – and, more specifically, play as it is manifested in the form of games, that is, in game play – that our interest lies, then it is instructive to follow the lines of reasoning developed by Kant and Schiller in the reverse direction, and consider play in the light of the use to which the concept is put in their aesthetic systems, in particular as it stands in close relation to the concepts of *beauty* and *freedom.*

It shall be my claim in this paper that paying close attention to the aesthetic concept of play that is developed in Kant and Schiller will reveal that the concept remains current, serving as a precursor to, and enduring as the foundation for, later philosophical approaches to play: specifically, those of Jean-Paul Sartre (1966[1943]) and Eugen Fink (2015[[1960]), as well as continuing to inform contemporary approaches to the study of game play.

Aesthetics and play: Kant and Schiller

The vital importance that both Kant and Schiller grant to aesthetic experience within their systems can only be understood in terms of its relation to a fundamental duality that both philosophers identify as creating a rift that cuts to the very heart of human being.

In Kant, this duality reflects the status of his philosophical system as an attempted reconciliation of the rationalist and empiricist branches of Enlightenment philosophy. Human being, he argues, is an animal – that is, a natural being, existing in relation to a world that is perceived by the senses. As such a sensual being, human being is causally determined – by external stimuli, and by his own biological instincts, appetites and inclinations. At the same time, human being is also a rational being, imbued with a reason that provides us with universal concepts and moral principles (Eldridge 2001, 37).

Likewise, for Schiller, human being is torn between the competing demands of a "sensual-rational nature" (2016[1795], XI, 40) which takes the form of a tug-of-war between conflicting drives: the *material impulse* and the *formal impulse* (also often translated as *sense drive* and *form drive*). The first of these "derives from the physical existence of man" (ibid., XII, 41), and seeks sensation: that is, the constantly mutable, ever-changing stream of intuitions of the world that fill our consciousness to the brim. The formal impulse, by contrast, is based "upon [man's] rational nature" (ibid., 42), and, as such, is motivated by unchanging concepts and ideals. The object of the material impulse, then, is *life,* while that of the formal impulse is *form* (ibid., XV, 53).

In short, both subscribe to what Eugen Fink defined as the "centauresque metaphysics" of Western thought, by which the human is conceived of as a half-animal, half-rational being (2015[1960], 63). For both Kant and Schiller, the aesthetic disposition illuminates a way out of this apparently irreconcilable double bind, offering the possibility of a reconciliation of the two sides of the human being, bringing them together in a harmony that is experienced as freedom, through an operation, or an impulse, that is explicitly labelled as playful. In order to understand the concept of play that is at work in their writings, we shall need to proceed through a consideration of the notions of beauty and freedom, to which it is inextricably linked.

Beauty as a 'citizen of two worlds'

For Kant, the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful stands in contrast to two other kinds of satisfaction – that of the pleasant, and that of the good. The pleasant is a "pathologically conditioned" satisfaction (2007[1790], 32, §5). – it is occasioned by impulses external to the individual, and is, as such, determined by the senses that convey this externality to the individual's consciousness. If one is hungry, for example, any food will be judged as pleasant, by virtue of the *inclination* that is forced upon the individual by her appetite. The judgment of the good, on the other hand, is a judgment made on the basis of reason, and, equally, represents an imperative – of the "objective worth" of that which is deemed worthy of esteem or approval, according to the concepts supplied by reason.

The pleasant and the good, then, relate to the two distinct sides of human being. Beauty, as the third kind of satisfaction, appears to stand between the two, answering to the specificity of the human as a being split between the two by bridging sense and reason: "beauty only concerns man, *i.e.* animal, but still rational, beings – not merely *qua* rational (*e.g.* spirits), but *qua* animal also" (ibid.).

Schiller's elaboration of this point is much more extensive. Mediating between the apparently irreconcilable material and formal impulses, he posits a third – the *playful impulse* (2016[1795], XIV, 51). Uniting the objects of *life* and *form,* the playful impulse strives for *living form,* which Schiller equates directly with beauty (ibid., XV, 53). The object of play – beauty - is living form, sensual matter given form, or, conversely, form made manifest in sensual matter. In the contemplation of the beautiful, the material and formal impulses are both harmoniously in play. Since beauty is the object of the playful impulse, this is the basis for Schiller's famous, and oft-quoted, dictum that "man plays only when he is a man in the full sense of the word, and *he is only a complete man when he plays*" (2016[1795], XV, 56-7): it is only when the playful impulse holds sway that both sides of man's nature, the sensual and the rational, are in harmony.

Play and freedom

The full import of beauty, play and aesthetic experience, for both Kant and Schiller, only comes into view when they are brought to bear upon the question of freedom.

Kant characterizes the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful as an inherently free one. The satisfaction of the beautiful, of the three kinds of satisfaction, "is alone a disinterested and *free* satisfaction" (2007[1790], 32, §5), compelled neither by the sensual inclinations of the individual's animal nature, nor by the concepts of reason. This freedom is intrinsically linked to play – nowhere more obviously than in the famous claim that aesthetic experience sets in motion the "*free play* of the cognitive faculties" (ibid., 38, §9). The aesthetic judgment of the beautiful relates to that representation of the faculty of the imagination which appears to possess the unity of form and purpose, but for which the faculty of the understanding can provide no fitting concept. It has "the mere form of purposiveness" (ibid., 42, §11), or "purposiveness without a purpose" (ibid., 58). It is, in short, "a subjective agreement of the Imagination and the Understanding – without such an objective agreement as there is when the representation is referred to a definite concept of an object" (ibid.). This results in a productive back-and-forth between the imagination and the understanding – a mechanism which, admittedly, remains rather unclear in Kant's writing, and which has seen a considerably body of commentary (Makkreel 1990, 49-58; Allison 2001; Guyer 2006).

The notion of freedom is just as central to Schiller's aesthetic project. However, Schiller departs decisively from Kant on the nature of this freedom (Roehr 2003, 126). For Kant, one is free when one overcomes the inclinations imposed upon oneself by one's sensual, animal nature, and thereby allows one's reason to guide her according to its moral ideals. In "On Grace and Dignity," on the other hand, Schiller suggests that nature and reason, inclination and duty, both make demands upon the individual, and posits a third faculty, that of "the will, which, as a supra-sensuous faculty, is subjugated neither to the law of nature, nor to that of reason, so that a totally free will remains, to direct itself according to the one or the other" (1793, 371).

Freedom, then, is not to be achieved by granting reason dominion over nature; rather, Schiller's concept of freedom is "the self-determination of persons who reach the height of their possibilities by realizing both their sensible and their intelligible nature, that is, their "mixed nature," to the fullest" (Roehr 2003, 131). In their normal, conflicting states, the material impulse constrains the formal impulse by making a claim of contingency, while the formal impulse restricts the material impulse by making a claim of necessity. When the two drives, united in the playful impulse, are in harmony, these constraints effectively cancel each other out: "as soon as two contrasting basic impulses are active within him, so they both lose their compulsion, and the opposition of two necessities lends *freedom* its origin" (Schiller 2016[1795], XIX, 72).

It remains to be specified how, in practice, it is possible to achieve "a real *union* and transposition of matter with form," with "the possibility of uniting both natures" (ibid., XXV, 98). For Schiller, the beautiful relates to appearance that has no motivation outside itself, that appears as its own principle and form, and that therefore appears *as* appearance itself. The domain of the beautiful, then, is the "*realm of appearance*" (ibid., XXVI, 102). Schiller writes that, "only insofar as appearance is *sincere* (expressly abjuring all claim to reality), and only insofar as it is *autonomous*

(renouncing all support from reality), is appearance aesthetic" (ibid.). In order to be aesthetic, the appearance of beauty must neither require the support of reality, nor make any pretence or claim to reality.

The aesthetic domain of beauty and play is defined, then, by "the principle of semblance, of appearance that is opposed to reality" (Hammermeister 2002, 58). It is precisely this opposition – or, rather, this separation – that allows it to stand as "the sole possible phenomenal expression of liberty" (Schiller 2016[1795], XXIII, 87ff.). The playful appearance of the beautiful is motivated by no cause outside itself; it is a free, unconditioned appearance, seeming to be motivated only by its own form.

This is what allows the beautiful to lead the individual, following the playful impulse, into freedom. In the contemplation of the appearance of beauty, the individual is led beyond the contingency of her condition, which, as such, ceases to determine her. This is what Schiller means when he says that "in the aesthetic state man is therefore a *nullity*" (ibid., XXI, 77), being set aside from the reality of the sensually-given condition.

 Of course, this is what brings personality into view, as the individual's capacity to exceed her condition in the form of who she is, and who she has the possibility of being, beyond any condition. As a result of the aesthetic state, then, the individual "can henceforth make of himself what he will […] the liberty of being what he ought to be is fully restored to him" (ibid.). As Kai Hammermeister explains, "beauty demonstrates the freedom of man to turn himself into whatever being he envisions," revealing a "freedom of self-creation" (2002, 57).

Existential play: Sartre and Fink

This intertwining of play with beauty and freedom – in the specialised senses granted to all three terms – is what links the notion of play in Kant and Schiller's idealist aesthetics to the usage of the same concept in twentieth-century existential phenomenology, especially in the work of Sartre and Fink. Here, the implications of the aesthetic understanding of play upon human freedom are further teased out and elaborated upon; as such, it is to a consideration of the notion of play in the writing of these two thinkers that I shall now turn.

The centauresque metaphysics of the human revisited

It is striking the extent to which the importance that Sartre and Fink grant play functions in relation to an ontology of human being that, in a fundamental way, hews close to the dualism of the human in which Kant and Schiller situate their aesthetics: the "centauresque metaphysics" of human being continue to hold sway over Wester thought, albeit in a modified form.

This is made explicit by Fink, who rejects the framing of this dualism as representing a position for the human between two worlds – "the *mundus sensibilis* and the *mundus intelligibilis*" (2015[1960], 64). Instead, he argues, what is at stake in this perceived dualism is "the ecstatic character of human being," which is understood as "self-surpassing, as a movement of transcending," that reveals human being as "a living being that is always more than itself" (ibid.). Human being is "intraworldly" – we exist, like all other things, as things situated in, and

conditioned by, the world. At the same time, however, "the human being is the innerworldly thing that exists in an ecstatic relation to the totality of the world […] and is turned towards it with understanding" (ibid., 65-66).

There is ample reason for such a perspective, already, in Schiller. The duality of human being represented by the competing material and formal impulses is also, he writes, a duality between *condition* and *person* (2016[1795], XI, 38). Reason provides the individual consciousness with a set of immutable laws and forms that do not arise from her present condition, and that, as such, grant her the sense of herself as a *person* who can extend beyond, or exert her freedom to separate herself from, her sensually given, material condition.

As we have seen, this separation of person from condition, for Schiller, can only happen on the basis of the aesthetic disposition:

> It is only when he is in his aesthetic condition, standing apart from himself or *observing* himself, that his personality detaches itself from this world; and because he has now ceased to identify himself with that world, it is now evident to him. (ibid., XXV, 95)

Aesthetic experience – the experience of living form, the unity of form and matter – allows for the possibility of *contemplation.* It does this by setting the individual apart from the world, and from her own conditioned being within it, and thereby making it possible for herself, as subject, to take herself as her own object. The eccentric structure of human being that Fink describes is thereby established, whereby the individual gains a sense of not being equal to herself, of extending, in consciousness, beyond the actuality of herself in her material situation.

As a further such example of the persistence of this idea in twentieth-century thought to lay alongside Fink, it is pertinent to note the congruence between Schiller's phrasing in the above passage and Sartre's conceptualization of human being as *being-for-itself* in *Being and Nothingness* (1966[1943]) – into which this observation can serve as a convenient entry-point.

Sartre and play

There are ample grounds on which to compare Schiller's distinction between condition and person to Sartre's existential argument that the freedom of the individual, as what he terms *being-for-itself,* is established on the basis of, and in reaction against, the contingency of her situation.

As he writes, the for-itself "*is* in so far as it is thrown into a world and abandoned in a 'situation'" (ibid., 127). As a conditioned being in the world, then, "the for-itself is sustained by a perpetual contingency […] this facticity is what we shall call the *facticity of the for-itself*" (ibid., 131). However, it only becomes *for*-itself – that is, takes the distance from itself that allows it to take itself as an object *for* itself – once it becomes conscious of this contingency, and of her own being in relation to it: "man is free because he is not himself but presence to himself" (ibid., 568). To be oneself is to be bound to the conditions by which one is determined: by one's gender, nationality, genetic traits, family history, and so on. To be present to oneself, on the other hand, is to know that, in making one's conditioned, situated self an object, one is ecstatically projected beyond it, into the possibility and the freedom to *be* otherwise.

The common ground with Schiller is evident, even if, in Sartre, the 'personality' that has the potential to transcend a given situation is not determined idealistically by an absolute set of moral

concepts or principles given by reason, but is rather an undetermined 'nothingness' that establishes the ground of possibility for an even more radical freedom of self-determination (ibid., 51). It is even possible to draw a line between this nothingness and the *nullity* that, as we have seen, Schiller argues defines human being in the aesthetic state.

It should hardly surprise us, then, that Sartre's interest in play owes an acknowledged debt to Schiller (1999, 327). Sartre writes about play in relation to his existential theory of human being, specifically in his treatment of *having, doing* and *being* as the three primary categories of human life in the final section of *Being and Nothingness.* Sartre's account of play is ultimately little more than a passing aside, occupying a scant three pages of his *magnum opus.* Having said that, as some commentators have noted (Bell 1989; Anderson 1991; Zheng 2002, 2005; Pitt 2013), unpacking the notion reveals it to bear an outsized importance to the radical freedom that Sartre posits as constitutive of human being-for-itself.

To play, for Sartre, is to step outside the "spirit of seriousness," the attitude in which the individual denies her own radical freedom by perceiving her actions and projects – and, hence, her being – as determined by the demands of external reality. In the spirit of seriousness, we perceive ourselves as having no choice but to fit ourselves to the tasks, requirements, responsibilities and expectations of a reality we have no control over. Play, for Sartre, is the opposite of this attitude:

> What is play indeed if not an activity of which man is the first origin, for which man himself sets the rules, and which has no consequences except according to the rules posited? As soon as man apprehends himself as free and wishes to use his freedom [...] then his activity is play. (ibid., 741)

To play, then, is to reject the spirit of seriousness – to realize one's freedom in the face of the tasks, demands and expectations emerging from projects the individual is free to set herself, rather than pre-existing in the world awaiting her.

Recalling Kant's emphasis on the disinterestedness of the judgment of beauty, Sartre characterizes play as "the least possessive attitude" (1966[1943], 740-1)*.* Play is, to be sure, not compelled by the desire to possess, and hence to *have,* its object; this might lead us to consider that in play, whose basis is action, it is *doing* that is primary. However, this would be a mistake, Sartre cautions, for "the act is not its own goal in itself" (ibid., 742). We act in playing, but this doing is only a vehicle for an exploration of our being. As such, "the desire to play is fundamentally the desire to be" (ibid.).

In practice, however, there is in every form of play an element of the impulse of appropriation. One of the examples Sartre gives is of children making a snowman. Their play relates to the snow as material, and this material in-itself is appropriated into their being by their attempt "to impose on it a form which adheres so deeply to the matter that the matter appears to exist for the sake of the form" (ibid., 743). Of course, as a player, this form comes from nowhere but myself: one way of looking at play, then, is to understand it as being aimed at making "this in-itself" (a given thing in the world that is made into the object of a play activity) into "a sort of emanation of myself while still remaining in itself" (ibid.).

It is impossible not to read here a direct echo of Schiller's living form, as formed matter – and, hence, an implicit return to the dualism Sartre disavowed. The elements of the aesthetic relation of play and freedom are arrayed here – play as the means of attaining an eccentric relation to the

determination of one's own situated actuality, the encounter between matter and form, here rendered as the encounter of the in-itself of matter with the forming will of the for-itself, and, finally, the separation of playful appearance from conditioned reality. All of these caught up in the dichotomy between play and seriousness that, as Rebecca Pitt points out (2013, 113), anticipates Johan Huizinga (1950). The significance of all these elements of play for human being are retained, but reworked in existential terms.

Fink and the notion of the playworld

Of all the philosophers treated in this chapter, Fink is the only one to specifically take up play as a theme. His 1960 work *Play as Symbol of the World,* together with a series of papers, lectures and notes written between 1957 and 1973, represents one of the most sustained philosophical engagements with the question of play.

Though Fink makes little direct reference to Kant and even less to Schiller, the understanding of play that is developed in their aesthetic projects animates Fink's own theorization of the concept just as much as it does Sartre's. This is already evident from the fact that, on one level, Fink positions his engagement with play as an attempt at tackling one of the oldest of questions with which philosophy has concerned itself, and which Kant and Schiller were very much engaged with when developing their aesthetics: "How are natural causality and freedom compatible with each other?" (Fink 2015[1960], 80).

To be sure, Fink's project differs from Sartre's as much as it does from Kant's and Schiller's. Fink is as little an existentialist as he is an idealist, though there are certainly elements of both existentialism and idealism in his philosophy of play, as shall become apparent.
One passage in Schiller, in particular, reads like an almost direct prefiguration of Fink:

> The condition of the human mind *before* any determination given to it through sensory impression is one of a limitless capacity to be shaped and defined. The sheer endlessness of space and time is at the free disposal of its powers of imagination; and since, by assumption, nothing is fixed in this vast realm of the possible, so also nothing is ruled out […] Now man's sense will be stirred, and from the infinite number of possible determinations he will be granted one single actuality. (2016[1795], XIX, 67)

There is nothing new here that we have not already touched upon in the previous section: this passage simply offers a restatement of the person/condition distinction, with an added emphasis being placed on a near-infinite extension of possibility as the shape by which the person exceeds the determination of her condition. Compare Fink's approach to the same question:

> The path of life, so to speak, is determined by an uncanny, accompanying contraction of our possibilities. Every activity that we carry out makes us more determinate and at the same time less possible […] The child is indeterminately everything, the old man is determinately little – we are born as many and die as one. (2015[1960], 89-90)

As in Schiller, Fink conceives of human life as a move from undetermined possibility to determined actuality. It is only through such a determination that the individual can gain a real existence in the world; at the same time, each successive determination – each choice made, each experience lived – narrows the space of possibility still open to the individual, and, thereby, reduces the extent of her freedom.

Where Schiller posits the playful impulse in its directedness towards the beautiful as the means of consciously escaping one's determined condition, Fink is even more explicit in specifically making play the answer to the question of freedom. As he writes, "playing becomes a distinguished – because it is scarcely restricted – possibility of human freedom" (2016[1957], 26). Play "entices us into an 'aesthetic' bearing toward life and thus into an underdetermination of the reality of the human being," through "in-sincere, non-serious activity […] an 'acting as if'" (2016[1960], 86). Like Sartre, Fink characterizes play as the taking of action in a non-serious attitude. Unlike Sartre, Fink specifically understands play as an aesthetic disposition – a bearing in which not only our actions, but our very being, stand apart from the realm of the actual. This is what allows the individual, in play, to escape her determined condition. In play, "we again attain unwasted freedom in the dimension of a mere 'appearance'" (90).

This dimension of appearance is what Fink refers to as the 'playworld,' a concept central to his understanding of play. As a "sphere of appearance" (2015[1957], 28), it appears to be a direct echo of Schiller's stipulation of "the *realm of appearance*" as the domain of the aesthetic (XXVI, 102). As with the appearance of the beautiful for Schiller, the playworld is anchored in an encounter with sensible actuality; in its first moment, "playing is always a confrontation with beings" (2015[1957], 24), consolidated in the player's encounter with the materiality of the *plaything* as a worldly thing. Upon the material foundation of the plaything, however, *something* is brought into view. Fink writes that "play is creative bringing-forth […] the product is the playworld" (ibid., 28). The playworld, then, is a relationship of appearance to matter: it is "an objectively present appearance, which rests on simply actual things and overlays them in an entirely unique way" (2015[1960], 92).

In Fink's example, a girl playing with a doll produces a playworld in which the doll is a child and the girl, taking on a role with the playworld, is the child's mother (2015[1957], 24). The child is represented by an actual doll, but constitutes a "non-actual" representation superimposed upon the plaything, an 'as-if' that is "not nothing and yet is nothing actual" (ibid., 25). Just as important – perhaps even more so – is Fink's observation regarding what happens to the playing girl; for she too is taken up into the playworld: not as herself, but as the role she adopts in the playworld:

> In every kind of play in which the role-character of the players predominates and one moves about with a fictive conception of oneself, a 'non-actual comportment' is portrayed in an actual comportment, and such self-rapture in the realm of an 'appearance' is felt with excitement and pleasure. (2015[1960], 91)

The taking-up of a role in the playworld – a role that is, by definition, distinct from the player's actual, determinate self – leads to the appearance of the player, to herself *as* appearance, as a different actualized possibility of herself, and, hence, of her freedom to be someone different to the self she has actualized.

This visibility to the player of her own appearance is of crucial importance, and warrants a final comment. In the relation between actuality and the playworld, the ontology of play provides an objective correlative for the ecstatic structure of human being. Play grants the player a "double existence," for she is, in every instance of play, both player and role, and each functions as a perspective on the other. "This doubling," Fink writes, "belongs to the essence of playing" (2015[1957], 25).

In the final analysis, Fink offers something of a definition of play and its function in relation to human being:

> In human play an ecstase of existence toward the world takes place […] In play the human being 'transcends' himself, surmounts the determinations with which he has surrounded himself and within which he has 'actualized' himself, makes the irrevocable decisions of his freedom revocable […] leaps free from himself, and plunges from every fixed situation into the possibilities that stream forth in the primordial ground of life. (2015[1960], 206-7)

Play, then, is the foundation for the eccentric world-position of human being.

An existential-aesthetic approach to digital games

By tracing the aesthetic conception of play from Kant and Schiller through to Sartre and Fink, we have arrived at an understanding of play as being intimately tied to the question of human freedom via its relation to a dualism of human being of which, by its very nature, it partakes.

By this understanding, play relates to the sensible, the material, the worldly, to whatever is taken up as the object of play – the plaything. At the same time, play invests this matter with form, whether this is understood as the "form of purposiveness," the concept without a concept, as the productions of reason given free rein by the formal impulse, or as the form imposed by the for-itself in its radical freedom. The object of play, then, is beauty – the union of form and matter in the appearance which seems to be freed from conditioned actuality, and to be freely self-determined. It is in this way that play – and the playworld as its sphere, to use Fink's phrase – serves as an externalized appearance of human being's eccentric relation to the world, as both conditioned being and the possibility of transcending this being.

In all of this, it is important to bear in mind that, in the original aesthetic development of the concept of play, games were very much not what Kant and Schiller had in mind. We are at play when we stand in aesthetic contemplation of beauty – when we view a painting, listen to a piece of music, and so on. Schiller even makes the explicit qualification that "we do not here have in mind games that take place in real life" (2016[1795], XV, 56) when he speaks of the playful impulse.

Nonetheless, it is still pertinent to investigate the extent to which our understanding of games can be enriched if we consider them as vehicles for play in this sense. Such an approach could contribute to existing discussions in game studies on the aesthetic character of games (Niedenthal 2009; Kirkpatrick 2008, 2011; Vella 2015a, 2016). I shall limit myself to sketching out an initial outline for such a project.

Games as 'world'

Though Kant refers, by play, to an operation of the mental faculties, and Schiller uses it to describe a disposition, to play – in the sense of game play – is, fundamentally, to act. Alexander Galloway has argued that "with video games, the work itself is material action" (2006, 2), a notion Graeme Kirkpatrick also touches upon in his aesthetic approach to digital games (2011, 120). The player's actions are the material substrate of a game, but these actions do not happen in isolation. They gain their significance in relation to the situation the game establishes for the player: in other words, in relation to the gameworld.

The notion of a 'gameworld' is one that has grown *de rigeur* in digital game studies (for a small, representative sample, we could list Aarseth 2008; Nitsche 2008; Leino 2010; Jørgensen 2013; Wolf 2014), without any agreement on what the term precisely refers to – it has been used, variously, as a synonym for the computational game system, to refer to the digital environment as a spatio-temporal extension, or to the diegetic domain or fictional world for which the digital environment stands. For our purposes, Olli Tapio Leino's argument that games can be understood as "'worlds for their players' in an experiential sense" (2010, 186) is most relevant, allowing us to focus on the phenomenological and existential implications of the notion of the game as world.

In a general sense, existentially-motivated work in game studies has made the claim that "existential phenomena are repeated in play, as if they were from a world in a world or a life in a life" (Möring 2014, 2). Through notions such as the "gameplay condition" (Leino 2009, 12; 2010, 101) the "ludic subject-position" (Vella 2015b, 22) and the "gameplay situation" (Kania 2017, 7), such arguments have extensively theorized the ways in which the player's being in the gameworld is determined by the material conditions put in place by the game system. It might seem strange to speak of the player's freedom when her capabilities and limitations, the things-in-the-gameworld among which she exists, and the patterns of her engagement with these things are determined by the game system: when, in short, the game acts as a facticity that constitutes her situation for as long as she is to remain a player of the game.

Likewise, the orientation of the player's being towards largely predefined goals – and, indeed, the seriousness and determination (in both the everyday and the technical sense of the word) with which she is expected to pursue those goals – seems to allow little room for aesthetic disinterestedness, or for the surpassing of having or doing by being for its own sake. After all, as Hans-Georg Gadamer argues, "every game presents the man who plays with a task" (2013[1960], 112), and to submit to play is to allow this task to determine one's being.

However, the crux of the matter is not the achievement of the task – "such tasks are playful ones because the purpose of the game is not really solving the task, but ordering and shaping the movement of the game itself" (ibid.). To return to Kant's phrase, this is only the "form of purposiveness." The player's adoption of this task as her own, and the orientation of her being towards the achievement of the task, shapes her being into "one kind of *comportment* among others" (ibid., 112).

It is true that this comportment is "determined" by the game, but it is the player who makes the choice to play one game or another, and hence to take on a particular role in a particular playworld, with its attendant comportment – making the choice to play an exercise of the freedom to adopt a given comportment. It is this comportment that shapes the player's role in the playworld, and that determines the playing of a game as the bringing-into-appearance of a particular possibility of being, in Fink's terms.

The double perspectival structure of game play

The starting-point of any aesthetic understanding of game play, then, must be a consideration of the player's orientation towards the gameworld as her existential situation, within which she takes on a role that is shaped by the game system into a particular comportment. *Contra* Gadamer's argument that, in its final moment, play finds its culmination in its "transformation into structure"

– into the fixed form of the artwork, as it is received by an audience (2013[1960], 115) - Fink writes that "the production of play does not come down to a result […] the image is essentially a product, play essentially the act of producing" (2015[1960], 114). If form and unity are to be found in game play, they are to be found in the playing itself, not in any structured form that the playing produces (in the way that, say, for Gérard Genette, the playing of a game constitutes an aesthetic object for its audience in the form of a sequence of actions (1997, 58-61)). As Marta Matylda Kania writes, adapting a concept from Roman Ingarden, an aesthetics of games must perforce be an "involved aesthetics" (2017, 54-5), taking as its standpoint and material invariant the game's actualization through the actions of the player.

However, before we can understand the nature of games as aesthetic, we need to take a further step. Aesthetic perception, at least in its idealist formulation, relates to the contemplation of that object which appears to us to possess a formal unity we can judge to be beautiful. As such, it is not enough for the player to be active, and, in doing so, to en-act an existence as a determined being in the gameworld. It is also necessary to conceptualize the relation between the playing individual and her own in-game existence, defined by the role she steps into and determined by the comportment the game establishes for her. Taking its place in the "sphere of appearance" of the playworld, it remains to be said how this is made available to the player *as* appearance.

Luckily, Fink provides us with the tools with which to do so – namely, his observation, which we have already remarked upon, regarding the doubling that is part of the ontology of play. On this basis, we can formulate the idea of a "double perspectival structure of ludic engagement," by which "the player simultaneously plays out her experiential and existential being-in-the-gameworld and perceives it from a point of view outside the game, from which her own being-in-the-gameworld is seen as an intrinsic part of the game's […] aesthetic unfolding" (Vella 2016, 81).

Expanding upon this concept, Kania argues for an interrelation between the gameplay situation as the existential standpoint determining the player's existence in (and towards) the gameworld, and an aesthetic situation, which she defines as "the experiential perspective that enables her to reflect over herself within a game, as well as over her own situatedness within the gameworld" (2017, 55). It is this mechanism which renders game play as a formalized representation of play's status, which we have considered above, as the structuring principle of human being's ecstatic relation to the world. This, then, is the promise games make, in affording us a situation of play. They bring into being a playworld, a sphere of appearance, in which not only our own actions – for, as Sartre notes, in play doing is in the service of being – but our own being, in the freedom of its appearing possibilities, can be contemplated as beautiful.

Conclusion

A consideration of play in its relation to beauty and freedom in the aesthetic philosophy of Kant and Schiller, then, resulted in the crystallization of an understanding of play that – in the work of Sartre and Fink - aligns it with the notion of human being's eccentric relation to the world, by which human being is both worldly being, conditioned by the world, and the capacity to transcend that worldly situation and grasp it in the understanding. This understanding of play has led us to map out an aesthetics of game play defined by a double perspectival structure that formalizes this eccentricity of human being, allowing us, as players, both to act in the gameworld according to the

comportment the game conditions us into – and thus to freely actualize, in the domain of the appearance of play – a different possibility of ourselves that stands over and against our actual, conditioned being, and to contemplate this appearing comportment of ourselves, worked out upon the matter of the gameworld, as form.

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