

CHAPTER ONE

CHILD PLAY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 CHILD PLAY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Clearly, a child is a playing being. Educators are eager to know whether child play has any educative significance. To find out, the playing child must be understood in the educative situations (pedagogic situations) in which he/she finds him/herself playing. From a pedagogic situation, a playing child is viewed phenomenologically in his/her being on the way to proper adulthood; this means that, for a real understanding of a playing child-in-education, no more suitable point of departure can be found than the reality of the educative situation itself. Such a phenomenological evaluation gives rise to the fundamental anthropological truth that a person is the only being who educates, is educated, and is dependent on education ⁽¹⁾, and lends him/herself to it ⁽²⁾.

From an early age, there is a dialogue between child and world, and play is one of its most meaningful forms. The most natural way of dialogue between child and world is a playful involvement with it. This play, as dialogue, is a means of being educatively involved with a young child. Initially, there is a period of few purposeful, planned educative encounters during which play is used purposefully as a means of educating. However, as a child becomes older, the significance of play for purposive educating becomes clearer.

Child play is a child's spontaneous involvement in dealing unsystematically with a still unknown, although alluring world which now and again appears to be other than it seems ⁽³⁾, but which entices him/her to continually attribute meaning to and receive meaning from it. In this connection, it is emphasized that a child lives in an open world with which he/she openly communicates. This includes a variety of possible ways of dialogue, of which play is a fundamental one. A child and his/her world form a unity because he/she is directed to and stands open for it. The meanings he/she attributes to the world, and each of his/her behaviors and expressions constitute a part of his/her being-in-the-world, of

his/her meaning-giving communication with his/her world. A child is openness, and his/her play, as a means of communicating, is a fundamental part of his/her dialogue with the world, since a young child still has insufficient language at his/her disposal for a linguistic dialogue. In other words, a child's play is his/her most meaningful dialogue with the world.

Heinz Bollinger⁽⁴⁾ says: " Initially, a little child plays with his limbs, his fingers, his hands, his legs, his mouth, his tongue, and the sounds he/she can make. He/she plays with things in his/her immediate environment by feeling them, throwing them to and fro, etc. This kind of play is called function-in-practice". The following two questions now arise (see sections 1.2 and 1.3):

1.2 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD PLAYS?

A person is an active being and these activities occur on different levels. Thus, e.g., thinking activities are on a different level than playing activities, an adult's playing activities are on a different level than a child's, etc. When a child plays, he/she places him/herself in the world in a certain way. Through playing, he/she designs his/her own future possibilities. This character of design shows itself very early in his/her first playing. Playing with his/her limbs and their functions determine his/her future relationship with his/her body-ness. In this way, he/she acquires an unrestricted positive relation to his/her body, body-ness, and sensuality. Only later is his/her involvement with his/her body, its organs, and functions, restricted by educating. By his/her playing involvement with his/her body-ness, i.e., his/her "sensuality", he/she has an abundance of desirable experiences which are enjoyable, or fulfilling. In this way, his/her immediate relationship with his/her bodily-being is grounded in positive meaning.

In early child play, a first combination of all the senses is possible, as are perceiving, imagining, relating, and beginning thinking, not to mention the first activities of his/her hands. In and by playing, the situation in which a playing child is, becomes united, as a totality, with what he/she plays with. Thus, it is said that: Child play is playing in the world in which his/her entire being-a-person is involved. In other words, playing is a truly existential way of being. All future potentialities are foreshadowed, and tried out in play. This means that play is directed to promoting a future. When play occurs, a child's potentialities are formed (designed). An

adult's horizon, and way of being-in-the-world are co-dependent on the designs which are made in early and late childhood play, as well as in the hearty play of puberty. Although a child's play is actualized in the present, futurity is foreshadowed in each act of play. The world of play is called an oasis of joy⁽⁵⁾. A child's play has a fulfilling character, and is enjoyable, which constitutes its character of paradise.

Human being-there (Dasein) is characterized by futurity. Because the future can be gradually and progressively actualized in meaningful ways in the present, it is and must be foreshadowed in play. A person is a person because he/she is not imprisoned in the past, and the present. In playing, he/she anticipates his/her potentialities, and embodies his/her higher and highest potentialities. Only through this anticipation is he/she able to progressively understand and actualize his/her potentialities in his/her historical existence.

The significance of play for a person's becoming cannot be emphasized strongly enough. A child's early playing with his/her body-ness (organs and their functions), although its content is nothing specific, also has a future-opening significance. Thus, a small child does not play something distinct, but plays his/her being-a-person, and plays to his/her future.

The ability to play is a fundamental way in which a child influences his/her becoming. That is, it is an influencing which child existence (Dasein) forms in certain ways, in that it progressively orders and givens form to child-living. This view of play has significance because it emphasizes the encounter. After what has been said thus far, play, as a matter of personal becoming, involves an encounter with the approaching future. By playing, the future is not only designed, but is progressively made present, and actualized. In a situation of encounter, there is playing, designing, and actualizing. It is pointed out that encounter constitutes an undeniable part of all human anticipations (expectations), which he/she then also introduces into his/her playing existence, and which eventually must lead to a truly personal encounter. For a small child, all encounters actualized have the character of the personal, i.e., truly personal being, and this is saturated with the personal. Personal encounter is meaningful encounter and occurs in terms of the anticipation sought for by the encountering person, will be found in authentic ways.

In playing with his/her mother's breasts, especially if he/she turns him/herself away from his/her mother, and then returns with obvious feelings of delight, or noticeable happiness, the initial anticipation of looking for personal encounter is actualized. Hide-and-seek is another early child game of the same nature. It can be observed that two-month-old children try to hide themselves behind the curtains of their cribs, and then become exceedingly happy if the mother notices this willful play, and also hides, and both players once more disappear from each other, and then appear again. The anticipation of personal encounter, searching for, and finding someone, are exemplified by this play. In this way, an anticipated later, authentic, conscious, fulfilling inevitable relationship of personal encounter also is designed. For a child old enough to grasp, it can be observed that any thing, e.g., building blocks, put in his/her little bed for him/her to play with, is held over the side of the bed, and after a brief hesitation, is dropped. The child expects that someone will put this thing back in his/her bed again. He begins this play each time anew, and repeats it countless times. This play can be understood as follows: A child identifies himself with the plaything. With this, he/she identifies him/herself with it because, for him/her this entails a personal encounter with everything he/she meets, and experiences; this encounter is accomplished through this identification.

Child play is a meaningful way in which his/her encountering being-there (Dasein) is actualized. Play is the fundamental way in which child being-in-the-world is actualized.

1.3 WHAT IS MEANT BY PLAY?

In the early philosophical tradition, play is seldom treated thematically. All the same, one finds in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and others discussions of play as a metaphor for human existence, and as a cosmic, and god-like resemblance. The play metaphor not only appears in philosophy, but also in specific religious literature, in numerous myths, and in the bible.

Only late in the history of Western philosophy has play enjoyed explicit philosophical attention. The first thematic philosophical consideration of play is written by Schiller, in **Über die Aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen** (On the esthetic education of persons). His philosophical approach is a specific explanatory theory of play.

Schiller indicates that a too one-sided definition of play is dangerous because, instead of considering play as a totality, some aspects can be overemphasized. Such overemphasis leads to an incorrect image of what play is.

Also, in contemporary descriptions there are arguments about the metaphorical, and literal meaning of play. Since the publication of Huizenga's masterpiece, **Homo Ludens** (Man the playing being), persons such as De Bruin, Buytendijk, and Sassen say that he includes too much under play, and that, consequently, one can call everything play.

1.4 A PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING OF PLAY

Many writers correctly observe that play is a fundamental form of a human being's way of existing in the world. This means that play is an existentiell (Heidegger), i.e., a fundamental feature of being-human. Thus, it cannot be eliminated from the human world in thought, and action, as though it has no significance. J. Huizenga agrees with this thought when he declares that, with play, one deals with an unconditional, primary category of life ⁽⁶⁾. H. Scheuer⁽⁷⁾ argues that play is a fundamental phenomenon which cannot be inferred from, or explained by other phenomena. E. Fink ⁽⁸⁾ notes, following A. Peters, that play (as are love, conflict, and work) is a fundamental of human Dasein.

However philosophically clarifying this discussion might be, it also is necessary to distinguish play from other fundamental features of being human i.e., (existentiellia). A philosopher cannot rest with the given temporal-spatial forms of play but must grasp the phenomenon as it appears by illuminating its essentials, and meanings. Playing is an original way of being, and this means that this existentiell finds its most adequate expression in an ontological, rather than a psychological, or sociological conception. This means that play must be investigated phenomenologically to disclose its essential meanings, and their relations with other events. Such a philosophical reflection on play has three phases: The first phase involves the phenomenological disclosure and description of play as such. The second phase focuses phenomenologically on the horizon within which the phenomenon of play occurs. The third phase places the entire phenomenon of play in the light of human reality, as a totality. The question is what is the ontological meaning of this

way of being; in other words, what is the fundamental sense and meaning of play?

1.5 A PROVISIONAL EVALUATION OF THE WORLD OF PLAY

Viewed phenomenologically, one must start with the phenomenon of play as it is observable in its daily occurrences. One can begin by contrasting play, antithetically, with the serious world of work. In this contrasting light, work is an activity which aims for a useful result. It reflects a matter-of-fact aim. Work is directed to making the world habitable. A person's assurance of existing arises through work. An atmosphere of constraint, seriousness, and necessity permeate this event. Work appears as very real because a person cannot live without the fruits of his labor.

In contrast with work, play is an activity which does not occur for the sake of specific outcomes, or results, but for the sake of the activity itself. Also, when "play" strives for a victory, it no longer is playing. The activity of playing occurs almost by itself. It is free of difficulties, and it is spontaneous, frolicsome, and not serious, while work is an area which arises from tenseness and tension.

From this somewhat logical conceptualization of play and work, the differences between them are apparent. However, this matter needs to be phenomenologically broadened and deepened. The phenomenological method also provides a perspective on the different tensions between both concepts. As a phenomenon, play shows a more pathic (emotional) attitude toward reality. There is no mention of being directed to work, but to an act of play. The world of play is a form of interaction, and mutual communication. Playing with someone and something means not only that I play with someone, but also that someone and something plays with me. If play and concern are fundamental forms of a human way of existing, then the question is what their mutual relation is. For the sake of convenience, if play is interpreted as antithetical to work, and the serious life, then the fundamental form of play remains in the contrasting shadow of concern and is not done justice. One will then incorrectly interpret the phenomenon of play if it is viewed merely as a diversion from or as purely superfluous to life.

The world of play and of work shows a mutual connection and harmony. The world of play requires, in harmonious ways, the consolidated (firm) world, as a place in which to play. The "real"

world offers the true possibility for the illusive (make believe) world of play. It enables one to be playing-in-the-world. But conversely, play promotes new discoveries, and is constituted by them ⁽⁹⁾.

1.6 THE SPATIALITY OF PLAY

The meaningful structural aspect of the phenomenon of play is its closedness: play occurs in its own domain and sphere. It is separated from the ordinary world and has its own field of play and rules. A playing person acts differently than in everyday associations. This "difference" is the distinctiveness and definiteness of play. A space for actualizing play is symbolic of a delimited environment. A person can play only in a "cleared" sphere. E. Fink rightly calls play an oasis of joy in the desert of everydayness ⁽¹⁰⁾.

For a clear insight into the play existentiell, a hermeneutics of this closedness, and distinctness is important. It would be incorrect to understand and delimit the spatiality of the phenomenon of play's being-here, from the being-there of the surrounding everyday world. In this way, one is driven to the question of why and from what the being-here of the world of play is segregated. The emphasis on the player turning him/herself away from his/her concerns and directedness, and then living without concern and limits in a world of play, is a one-sided interpretation. The distinctness and authenticity of play is, in this one-sided interpretation, viewed as a denial of a factual limitation, which can be expanded without limit. This occurs by discovering the distinctness and authenticity of the phenomenon of play, since factual givens can be surpassed, e.g., work is exceeded in play.

E. Fink speaks of an inner space which is "nowhere", and yet, is "there", because of the unreal sphere of being which is, and yet is not ⁽¹¹⁾. One searches this "nowhere" for support in the "somewhere" of the actualities of life. The illusive spatial character of the world of play does not mean a lack of reality, but rather the acquisition of increasingly more reality. Thus, play is a certain way of unlocking, or disclosing reality.

The apparent limited nature of the world of play is, as it were, the landing place, the potential ability for the actual abundance of play. The closedness of the world of play is not a being closed, in opposition to the external world.

It is a focal point from which the power of the ordinary world emanates. Play takes place within a closed space and rejuvenates work. A person plays earnestly, authentically, and with reality. He/she does not allow him/herself to be limited by the actualities, and contents of the play. He/she also plays with these limits.

The world of play is not so much something separated, but it is something exceptional, while being interwoven with the everyday. In play, there is no evidence of surrender. It does not progress rectilinearly. In play, there is no opposition, but rather a reciprocity between here and there.

The closedness of play is characterized by an intimate connectedness. Here the trustworthy is mysterious, and the mysterious is trustworthy. Familiarity and unfamiliarity, the expected, and the surprising flow into each other. This reciprocity of familiar and unfamiliar, of expected, and unexpected expresses an essential of play.

The surprisingly unfamiliar in the world of play must be interpreted differently from the strangely unfamiliar which a person recognizes in the everyday life of concern. In everyday life, there is a contrast between the familiar, as what is usual, and the unfamiliar, as what is strange. The less familiar something is to a person, the more it lies outside of his/her experiential world.

Because play is not intentionally directed to anything, nothing special is expected. It is the expectation, as expectation which is experienced in play. The primary concern is not the something played with, but the play itself.

The interpretation of the spatiality of play indicates a dialectic hierarchy between play and care, as higher and lower fundamental forms. This involves two complementary, relatively independent fundamental forms which are related to each other such that the world of play is not separated from the world of concern, but rather the world of concern is separated from that of play. The world of play communicates with the world of concern. A person can play only if he/she surrenders him/herself to the play. Play is not so much an act, as it is an event.

1.7 THE TEMPORALITY OF PLAY

Also, time appears very differently within the sphere of everyday concern than within that of play. From factual reality, one looks at the temporal limitations of play, in terms of the experience of the succession of past, present, and future. Play has a duration, but the inner time of play surpasses a chronometric temporal sequence, and is characterized by a timeless presence, by an eternal now. Just as, in play, no distance is traveled, there also is no moment of time experienced.

Indeed, there are games, such as hockey and football, which have precisely prescribed time periods. Play lasts for a specified time. If this doesn't happen, it begins to lose its form, and then it lasts too long, and the preceding play becomes undermined, and boredom sets in. The temporality of the world of play is characterized by an eternal now. The factually defined length of time ensures that the eternity is not an endless duration. Play needs unlimited time to go beyond reality and play with it. With its inner infinity, strictly speaking, play knows no end. Only a human being sets limits from the outside, and makes him/herself weary of play. The phenomenon of play remains open to repetition. This repetition continually gives new, and original form to the play.

Also, play does not have a clear beginning; the factual beginning only means entering playing. A person turns him/herself over to play and is not aiming at satisfaction. Play will not give rise to satisfaction. The player seeks an eternal moment in an endless time.

Even when a person satisfies biologically colored needs, and desires, play arises as a fundamental form. Here is found the meaningfulness of play therapy, i.e., that a person will not let him/herself be dragged along by a blind passion and, in playful ways, desires are elevated to a higher level. A person does not so much play a game, but rather the game plays (with) him/her. It is because of this that play diagnostics is possible.

The world of play shows a curious structure, which seemingly includes strange contradictions. This world possesses, as it were, a double ground. It is simultaneously real and unreal. A playing little girl experiences her doll as her child, and herself as the mother. Yet, she doesn't think that the doll is really her child, and that she is really the mother. A playing child does not mistake him/herself.

When a child becomes so swept up by the imaginary that his/her play no longer can be distinguished from reality, then he/she flees from reality, and no longer plays. Play becomes one-sidedly unreal because reality is playfully let go. However, a child who clings to reality, and cannot progress to illusive play is not quite free.

Child play moves between two limits: on the one side is the limit of reality, and on the other, the limit of unreality, of pure fantasy. Play is neither of these, but rather it is both. The world of play is essentially ambiguous. This ambiguity is not a reflective awareness but is playfully experienced⁽¹²⁾. An ambiguity can only be experienced within a playful attitude. Therefore, the sphere of the world of play is not real. The child plays with real toys; yet because of their smaller dimensions, they are actually unreal, and, for this reason, they can evoke the imaginary.

This double dimension of reality and unreality is not only characteristic of child play, and of the youthful time of life. One also encounters this double dimension in the play of adults when they are "youthful". When happiness or sadness are portrayed in a play (e.g., comedy, drama), the on-looker does not experience real happiness or sadness, but also, as the actor laughs or cries, he/she does not "live" his/her mood, as an unreal experience. Here appearance and reality are not confused for a moment. Indeed, the on-looker is a co-player in the play.

Play as play, symbolizes itself as a modality of human freedom which moves in a circle between possibility and facticity. Human existence, as the unity of can-be, and factual reality, loses its freedom as possibility, when its actualization, its engagement is avoided. Play exists in experiencing the "between". Therefore, play is not the freedom itself. Freedom will actualize that which can be as far as possible, but play is the tangible expression of itself, as a modality of freedom.

C. Verhochven⁽¹³⁾ says, " play does not create, but only offers possibilities". Play offers possibilities to reality and actualizes reality as possibilities. The pedagogical significance of play lies here. It is not so important **what** is played, but **that** there is play. Thus, freedom and creativity do not form play in any sense, but are actualized in a playful attitude, in a playful disposition.

Play is playing with images because only images allow dynamic possibilities to show themselves, which factual, objective reality cannot. In the sphere of play, things take on different appearances. For a player, this is not viewed cognitively as an object, but is experienced in an affective attitude as an image. Thus, there is reciprocal communication, and the image should be approached with respect, and should not be used aggressively for one's own aim. The image goes beyond the situation of harsh, unambiguous facts, and offers possibilities and surprises. In play, it appears that reality and the image contain possibilities which are not entirely real, and yet also not unreal ⁽¹⁴⁾.

However, play is not so much a play with images, but rather playing with images is a means of playing. One can say that a playing person plays in the world of the image, of the symbol. The illusive aspect of play, with its ambiguous relation of image-reality, can become disturbed, either from the side of controlled reality, or from the side of uncontrolled fantasy.

Play can represent something, but in play, this representation does not happen as it does in art. Play is actualized around play in images, around the to and fro between image and reality. Thus, an essential of play does not lie, for example, in the fact that wooden blocks or dolls represent something, but it occurs around the to and fro of the movement. Thus, art comes into being, not as play, but as culture **in** play, as J. Huizenga also says:

Each symbolic expression, or lived experience is playful because of the reciprocity maintained between expression and what is expressed, between the symbol and the symbolized. It is just by this playful and ambiguous to-and-fro that the expression differentiates itself from a discharge as a "living out". Therefore, when play is viewed psychologically, it possesses a certain degree of catharsis, and this lies not so much in what is expressed as such, but in the way it is expressed ⁽¹⁵⁾.

1.8 THE EXISTENTIAL VALUE OF THE PHENOMENON OF PLAY

When a philosopher wants to understand the ontological meaning, i.e., the essentials, of the phenomenon of play, he/she must allow him/herself to be addressed by play, as phenomenon. Play does not imitate, but represents, portrays, and makes a higher reality visible.

The image makes a person an onlooker, in the sense of a participant in a deeper human occurrence. In this way, a person is open to the symbol which appears in a higher sense. Through play, a person steps out of him/herself and turns him/herself over to a world which has been conjured up by play. Play is the to and fro between playing and being played. Play does not play itself outside a person. A person undergoes play, but this undergoing is an active participation, and positive induction and joining in. Thus, play diagnostics is possible. Play also does not play itself within a person; play asks a person to adopt a self-forgetting attitude. When the "doing" character of play is too much in the foreground, then a person also remains too much in the foreground, and he/she stays horizontally directed. Only in a playful attitude can the depth dimension of life become vertically apparent. In a playful attitude, a person discovers that "**playing is finding**"⁽¹⁶⁾.

1.9 PLAY AS "BOUNDARY PHENOMENON" OF LIFE

It appears that play is meaningful for the interpretation of the sense and meaning of life, and of the world. Therefore, play diagnostics is possible. To say that play is a boundary phenomenon of life is to express the precise sense of the essence of play. Play is the frame, the framework of life. Here one thinks of a painting. The frame captures the radiating power of the painting and allows the power of the work of art to show itself better. The frame around the painting delimits it from its surroundings in a remarkable way. What is remarkable is that the limit of the frame is not limiting but rather renovating. Without the frame, the power of the representation would chaotically flow away. Thus, play as boundary phenomenon of life creates a space for the emerging sense of life. The world of play delimits itself from the ordinary world. It requires its own separated place. It knows its own dress, laws, language, and rules. Thus, to understand the essentials of play, the world of play itself must be taken as the point of departure for study.

Summary

The preceding philosophical reflection on play allows one to see that play is a fundamental phenomenon of universal scope. Human and, thus, child play is a meaningful theme out of which all fundamental concepts and existentiellia, such as intersubjectivity and intentionality can be thought about. Playing provides a person

with an open horizon without which his/her ideas and experiences of reality are distorted. Play is the frame within which reality appears. Playfulness is a person's existential practice. Play does not mean a one-sided separation from the category of work--play lies precisely in between (reality and imagination). Play is the highest realm for a person; it is a way of being creative on a human level.

As a human way of being, it should also be worthwhile to view child play from other perspectives. In this study, child play is viewed from fundamental pedagogical (chapter two), psychopedagogical (chapter three), pedotherapeutical (chapter four), and practical (chapter five) perspectives.

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- (14) See Buytendijk, F., **Het spel van mens en dier**, Amsterdam, 1932, 137.
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- (16) See Buytendijk, F., **Het spel van mens en dier**, 97.