
Homo Ludens

Presenters:
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Summary

- *Homo Ludens* by Johan Huizinga is a book describing the concept of play
- How play is linked to - Society and culture, language(s)
 - play originates from animals/ predates human culture
 - play integrates with human society
 - encompass idea in multiple domains
- Johan defined play by **5 core aspects**:
 1. Free
 2. Not real life
 3. Distinct from ordinary life
 4. Order
 5. No material interest or profit
- The text is a core basis of game studies

Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon

- First introduce play as a **concept older than society** -- can be found in animals - play pretend in dog fights for example
- Important is that play is **fun** and enjoyable
- Explaining the concept of play in previous theories focus play as a biological process -- but he argues that play is its own abstraction and examined as such
- Archetypes of human **society** relate to play: such as language -- metaphor is play on words; myth and ritual spawn law and order
- Then he expands on the 5 core aspects.

5 core traits of play

- Play must be **voluntary**
 - The participant chooses to play
- Play must be **superfluous**
 - The participant does not play to gain some material worth
- Play tends to go outside real life
- Play is limited in scope, being **outside the scope of reality**
- Play is **restricted** by a well-defined ruleset
- From this, we derive the concept of the “magic circle”, a microcosm constructed by the play world with a separate set of rules and actions.

Play in Language, and in Culture

- The text continues to an analysis of play within **language**
 - Certain languages, such as Greek and Sanskrit, have different words for different types of play (ex. Greek παιδιά for children's games, ἄθυμα for frivolity, ἀγών for contests)
 - In contrast, Japanese has a single word for play, but with variants of the play word serving as the etymological root of honorifics, suggesting a primacy of play within the noble class.
- Notes that **culture** is developed as a result of play
 - Similar to the argument that language developed originally from play behaviors.
 - Considers culture and play to be entirely separate, though with play as primary

Other Aspects of Play

- Law: Three **play-forms in the lawsuit**
- War: peace vs violence - transform into a war culture
- Playing and **knowing**: provides power with wisdom (riddle-solving)
- **Poetry**: playground of the mind - different from ordinary life or logic
- The elements of mythopoiesis: myth-making and poetry stems from metaphors (personifying inanimate)
- Play-forms in philosophy: figure of the Greek sophist
- Play-forms in art: poetry, music, dancing; professional artists creativity is ruled by discipline
- Western civilization *sub specie ludi*
 - “We have to conclude, therefore, that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come *from* play like a baby detaching itself from the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it.”
- Play-element in contemporary civilization - American election system is a national sport

Applied in our own work...

- Our primary point of interest is in that of the initial description of play; in particular, the **magic circle**.
- Ultimately, games are implements of play, and as such, **fulfill** the main concepts of the magic circle. Thus, for example, the ruleset of the game world must be well-defined and immersive, and the player should feel in control; this produces a low-stress environment.
- At the same time, subversions of this allow for the creation of distress, which itself has narrative relevance
 - Horror games like DDLC and imscared can rip control away from the player, thus “breaking” the magic circle.

Tips and takeaways

- Understand the concept of **play** as its own separate category
 - Ultimately, a game is a way to induce **emotion**.
 - Play as defined here is generally associated with stress reduction (escapism), and games tend to be played for stress reduction.
 - As such, we create the space as designers to enable (or break) that.
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