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The Game

The game is an intriguing and obstinate appearance. It has always existed and will never cease to exist. Games are closely related to the act of giving - another ancient phenomenon. The main motive in the playing of games is disregard for results. This, because the player is primarily interested in playing. The only reward the player gets is the experience of the game itself. This explains the typification Huizinga gave man: 'Homo Ludens', the playing man. Games are in our genes - playing is child's play.

A lot of games are games in themselves, meaning: they are made up of a huge variety of playing rules that ensure there is a game to play. Etymologically speaking, playing rules are only boundaries outlined by man's ruler. Within these boundaries we make agreements on how to play the game and there we go, the games can begin. Many sports and games alike owe their very existence to these so-called boundaries, the playing rules. But there are more games: talking, singing, making music, art, sex, dancing, travelling, cooking... These activities are not bound to strict rules but they nevertheless deserve the predicate 'game'.

A game is always an activity you chose to participate with on your own accord. No one is forced to play pinball, 'korfbal' or hopscotch. The game, so we have learned from world history, is the exact opposite of work. Work being defined as the execution of compulsory tasks, with the existence of rewards, salary, and reprisals, like for example dismissal.

Therefore the 19th century Utopian Charles Fourier dreamt of a world, which would be built upon play instead of work. Would it be possible, he thought, to create a society where people were able to do just those things they liked to do? An enticing thought. But, as you know, not much became of this world.

Although? Hunters and gatherers have called upon the idea of the game for centuries, on their will to do just that what they enjoy. 'Why should I sow plants and plough the land when I can eat as many nuts as I please?', a Kung-bushman once said to an anthropologist. The artist and the top-class sportsman are examples of professions that show us how, in contemporary hunter and gatherer style, you can earn a living in a playful manner.

But the longing for the game also grows in a larger, social context. Thousands of new games and toys appear on the market each year, each with their own set of playing rules. The production of games and toys has become work... But work still does not equal play. In an international image culture with advertising, entertainment and other enticements, which dominate our daily lives, your seemingly everyday classroom or workplace might be a degrading prison, instead of a place for playful self-realisation. Work just isn't child's play.

The larger the presence of work the greater our yearning for the game. The Ancient Romans already knew: politics is the organising of enough bread and games. Well, it simply isn't easy being a 'Homo Ludens'.