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The "Playing" Field: Attitudes, Activities, and the Conflation of Play and Games

Chad Carlson

Many philosophers have attempted to describe the nature of play and games.¹ In doing so, they have come to a number of similar conclusions. Many have said, for instance, that play has nonderivative value, that games have rules, and that these human projects are universal in scope. Yet important metaphysical questions remain. Indeed, philosophers continue to debate the nature of play and its relationship to games. What exactly are games and play, and how are they related?

The persistence of these fundamental questions indicates that at least a degree of uncertainty remains. Some authors speak of play and games interchangeably, while others regard them as two distinct phenomena. However, even some of those who attempted to distinguish games from play provided ambiguous or otherwise confusing descriptions. The end result has been a tendency to conflate the two entities. This conflation is so commonplace that we regularly speak of participating in all and any games as "*playing* games," even though that may not be an accurate metaphysical description of our experiences.

Conflation is the unwarranted combining of two things into one. It often occurs when important differences between closely related phenomena are overlooked, ignored, or mistaken. Conflating two phenomena is to mix or fuse them into one even though each phenomenon has its own distinct features. This seems to be the case with play and games.

In this paper I will address the issue of play-game conflation and show that it comes in many forms. I begin by citing examples of this problem that are found in the writings of Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*), Roger Caillois (*Man, Play and Games*), and Bernard Suits (*The Grasshopper*) (7,4,19). All three authors, albeit in different ways, provide analyses that sometimes confuse games and play and the relationship between them. Huizinga and Caillois so conflate play and games that they frequently use the two terms synonymously or move from play to games and back again without any mention of possible differences. Suits, on the other hand, determines the distinct features of the two but does so in ways that have often been misinterpreted. In fact, a great deal of recent criticism directed toward Suits' writings focuses on perceived deficiencies in his description of play and game relationships (3,13).

After analyzing the work of the three authors, the second section of my paper will include a clarification of the elements that appear to generate the conflation. I will explain that inadequate phenomenological accounts make the play-game

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distinction opaque. This ambiguity has to do with a general failure to identify the relationship between intentional acts and intentional objects. Specifically, this is a failure to clarify differences between game and play acts, on one hand, and game objects from their play counterparts, on the other.

The third section will include an explanation of the basic causes of confusions discussed in the first two sections. I will argue that the conflation of play and games can be traced to two fundamental sources or root causes. The first one is metaphysical in nature. I will argue that a high degree of compatibility can be mistaken for identity. The second cause is related to the fact that well-constructed games are idealized conventions. Because they are ideal, they are powerful play attractors. This helps to explain the frequent conjunction of play and games and the mistaken assumption that the two are always (or nearly always) found together.

Analysis of Huizinga

Huizinga identifies a number of characteristics of play, some of which encourage its conflation with games. "Play is a voluntary activity" (7: p. 7), he says, explaining that forced participation is nothing more than an imitation of true play. It is "free" (7: p. 8) because we are never obligated or required to do it. Play is "a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity," he says because it is "only pretend" (7: p. 8). It is experienced "within certain limits of time and place," and thus takes place during "fixed intervals" and in "consecrated spot[s]" (7: p. 9). Huizinga explains that play "creates order" or it "is order" (7: p. 10). The orderliness comes when the player follows the rules, because "all play has rules" (7: p. 11). We follow the rules because they will lead us into the mysterious world of play that "is tense" and has uncertain outcomes (7: p. 11).

Inherent in these descriptions are the roots for Huizinga's conflation of play and games. When describing play, he fails to distinguish clearly between two aspects of lived experience. Play can be understood as a way of doing something or the particular thing that is done. That is, play can be a kind of attitude in contrast to a type of activity. Some of Huizinga's characteristics, such as play being voluntary, free, and absorbing the player intensely and utterly, speak of play as an attitude or stance toward things we do. Yet, some of his characteristics are those of activities. For example, when discussing fixed rules and orderliness, he is describing the nature of the things we encounter in the world.²

With these diverse characterizations, it is not clear what Huizinga thinks play is. Is play an attitude, a group of activities, or both? Without a clear understanding of play, it follows that play-game relationships would also be difficult to discern. And when relationships are muddy, particularly among closely related phenomena, conflation looms as a potential problem. Furthermore, with Huizinga's emphasis on the single feature of autotelicity as a core characteristic of play (i.e., play is a "free activity" with "no material interest"), it is not surprising that play is an expansive concept. Indeed, Huizinga was criticized for finding play under nearly every rock in the social landscape (23: p. 117). Given play's ubiquity, it becomes difficult to find exemplars of games that are not play, or are not likely to be encountered as play. When it becomes difficult to see games alone or apart from play, conflation of the two concepts becomes more likely. In short, both the lack of clarity about play and its purported ubiquity lead to problems of play-confusions including potential conflation.

Analysis of Caillois

Caillois draws conclusions that are, in many cases, similar to those of Huizinga. In fact, his definition builds largely on Huizinga's findings. He says that play has six characteristics. It is "a free and voluntary activity" (4: p. 6) that speaks of no obligation. It is "a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life" (4: p. 6). This separation involves "limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance" (4: p. 9). Play is "an uncertain activity" in which "doubt must remain until the end" (4: p. 7). In play, "property is exchanged, but no goods are produced" (4: p. 5). It is governed "by precise, arbitrary, unexceptionable rules that must be accepted as such" (4: p. 7). And lastly, play is "make-believe" or involves "awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality" (4: p. 10). In summary, he says that it is "an activity which is essentially ... free ... separate ... uncertain ... unproductive ... governed by rules ... [and] make-believe" (4: pp. 9-10).

Much like Huizinga, Caillois underscored some characteristics (e.g., rule-governed and limited by space and time) that seem to define games—that is, activities that may or may not be encountered from the stance of play. Still others, such as "free" and "unproductive" define an attitude or stance that we often ascribe to play. However, Caillois does not describe any difference between attitudes and activities nor does he draw any clear distinction between play and games.

Throughout his writing Caillois uses the terms play and game interchangeably. For instance, while Chapter One of *Man, Play and Games* is entitled "The Definition of Play," Chapter Two goes under the heading of "The Classification of Games." This shift in terminology occurs without any indication of a transition from one phenomenon to another (4). In Chapter Two he identifies four "categories of games" as contests, games of chance, simulation, and vertigo. However, in this chapter he also notes that, "all four [categories of games] indeed belong to the domain of play" (4: p. 12). This would imply that games and play are different things. Yet, curiously, later in his volume, he refers to these four categories of games as "the different categories of play" (4: p. 40). This could be interpreted as a claim for identity between games and play.

Nowhere in the text does Caillois explain to his readers why he uses the term "play" in certain instances and "games" in others. Even though he purports to define play in the introductory chapter and classify games in the next section of the book, he does not specifically identify these phenomena as identical, distinct, or somewhere in between. The reader is left wondering if play and games, for Caillois, are distinct phenomena or not? If they are distinct, how are they related?

Analysis of Suits

Unlike Huizinga and Caillois who focus on play and games in culture, Suits' main thrust is metaphysical in nature. He says that play is autotelic and relational. It is an experience valued for its own sake, and one that includes a "reallocation to autotelic activities of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes" (23: p. 22). Games, on the other hand, involve the "voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (19: p. 34). They are activities that are the products of constitutive rules, goals, unnecessarily restricted means, and whose challenges are contrived just so those challenges can be experienced and enjoyed. Suits calls this latter feature the lusory attitude. From these descriptions it is

clear that Suits regards play and games as two distinct and independent phenomena (19). One can be at play but not in a game. And conversely, one can be in a game without also experiencing play. Despite their independence, Suits implies that games and play are compatible. Both play and a game may be experienced together if one is voluntarily participating in an unnecessarily challenging activity for its own sake.

Suits describes games and play in very careful ways as distinct and compatible phenomena. Nevertheless, he could have done more to clarify his terminology and, consequently, reduce misinterpretations that lead to conflation. Examples are not difficult to find. At times Suits speaks of "games" as activities and at others he employs a hybrid term, "game playing," as a kind of action or behavior. In point of fact, he begins his definition by referring to an action . . . "to play a game is to . . ." (19: p. 34) as opposed to the activity . . . "a game is an object with certain necessary and sufficient characteristics." Consequently, it is frequently unclear whether playing means merely participating, on one hand, or genuinely playing as an autotelic relational experience, on the other. Given the very close relationship Suits sees between them, one wonders if this ambiguity is intended or intentionally overlooked (19: p. 16).

The ambiguity of game playing may have been fostered most directly by Suits' insistence that the lusory attitude lies at the heart of games. The first three descriptors in his definition—goals, means, and rules—are characteristics of games as activities. They are clearly attributes of things that we encounter in the world. The lusory attitude, however, describes the intention of the participant. It is not something we do, but a way in which we do it. This raises questions about whether games are best described simply as activities ("games"), or as activities that require certain attitudes ("game playing").

Although a careful reading of Suits' analyses of games and play would indicate that he has not conflated the two phenomena, two elements in his descriptions can lead to other conclusions. First, play and game definitions are similar in an important sense. The lusory attitude speaks to the recognition, tolerance, and acceptance of the hurdles inherent in games, stating that game means are endorsed "just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur" (19: p. 40). However, the "just so" part of this definition can be mistaken for a way of describing one of Suits' play characteristics—namely, autotelicity. Autotelicity answers questions about motives for engaging in an activity. When people are engaged autotelically, they participate for no reason other than the activity itself. In other words, we adopt the play attitude "just so" we can have the experience such play affords. Similarly, we adopt a lusory attitude "just so" the activity of solving an unnecessary problem can be experienced. The applicability of the "just so" logic and language to both lusory and autotelic stances toward the world can lead to a conflation of the two.

Suits also inadvertently allows for the second site of conflation by idealizing games. He argues that, although games are *one of many* subsets of play, they are also *the ideal* species of all play activities. Suits sees "game playing, and not merely playing in general, to be the essential life of the Grasshopper," his symbol of the good life (19: p. 16). When making recommendations about good living, he privileges games such as chess, car racing, and mountain climbing to the neglect of play activities that are not games such as holding a deep conversation, playing music, or eating a delicious meal (19). In ignoring the value to the good life of

play activities that are not games, Suits seems to imply that when one is at play, that person would (or should) also be in a game. Worthy play, for Suits, is game play. In short, his focus on games as a premiere play activity and his failure to carefully distinguish lusory from play attitudes have inadvertently contributed to the conflation of these phenomena.

Metaphysical Clarity

Confusions between games and play beg for additional metaphysical clarity, in particular an identification of those elements that contribute to play-game conflation. At the heart of the conflation is an important distinction between play and games as attitudes, stances, or ways of approaching an activity on one hand, and the thing that is approached—a play or game activity—on the other. Play, as we have seen, is an autotelic approach to the world, a way of engaging any variety of activities as ends in themselves. But play has also been described as the thing in which one is engaged—say, the activity of climbing trees, building sand castles, or hitting baseballs. Likewise, games are understood as things, activities, or conventions like chess, Sudoku puzzles, and football. But we also refer to “gaming” as an attitude, perhaps an ironic or gratuitous attitude of looking for and taking on unnecessary problems (12).

Thus, it would seem reasonable to distinguish playing from play activities and gaming from game activities. Playing and gaming, as stances or attitudes, are ways in which we do things. They are distinct intentionalities toward the projects we encounter. For playing, the intentionality or act is autotelic—an act that aims at and ends in the activities themselves. For gaming the act is lusory—one that aims at the solution of unnecessary problems, whether such problem solving is an end in itself or not.

Games and play activities, on the other hand, are things that we do. Playing is always a playing at or with something where that something has the potential to provide intrinsically satisfying experiences. Likewise, gaming is always a gaming at or with some activity in which unnecessary challenges or problems are found.

Conflation problems stem from a failure to honor these distinctions and accurately characterize them. On the side of intentionality—that is, the side of attitudes, stances, and approaches to the world—it is apparent that the play stance and the gaming attitude are distinct and compatible. That is, they have a life of their own, but they also overlap. We see their overlap in the compound or nested intentionality of what Suits ambiguously calls game playing. It is an intentionality that is both autotelic and lusory at the same time. Game players, in the deepest sense of those terms, are looking for and engaging artificial problems *as an end in itself*.

On the side of the intentional object, play activities and games once again are distinct and compatible. They have a life of their own, and they also overlap. Many things or activities, for example, are strong play attractors but clearly are not also games. Good books, lovely music, and delicious food are three cases in point. Similarly, games need not be play activities or attractors as, indeed, they are not play for those who participate only for extrinsic satisfaction or are forced to take part against their will. However, like play and game stances toward the world,

play activities and games can be experienced together. As Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits hinted, many of our most popular play activities are games and many of our games are also often play activities.

Frequently, play and games are depicted by a single Venn diagram that mixes acts and objects (see Figure 1). In this diagram one circle stands for the play as a *stance* and the other represents the games as *activities* (22,15). They are separate circles indicating independence, but they also overlap indicating compatibility. Play (as a stance) may or may not be directed toward games (as activities), and games like chess may or may not be experienced as play. These claims would seem to be noncontroversial. Thus, it might be concluded that this mixed or hybrid Venn diagram can be helpful in sorting out play-game relationships, as indeed Suits himself argued against his critics (22).

However, a more complete and potentially clearer depiction of play and games may require two diagrams, one for relationships between games and play considered as intentional stances and another one for games and play considered as activities (see Figure 2). On the Intentional Act side of the diagram, the play attitude intends involvement that is autotelic and fully self-sufficient—doings that are simply interesting, fun, exciting or otherwise engaging. The play attitude

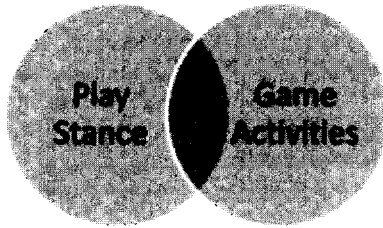


Figure 1 — Play and games are depicted by a single Venn diagram that mixes acts and objects.

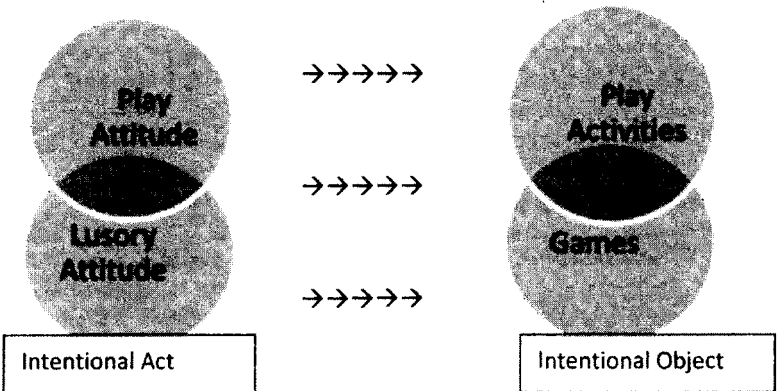


Figure 2 — Relationships between games and play considered as intentional stances and another one for games and play considered as activities.

would have us listening for, seeking, or happening upon play attractors and driving toward experiences that are interesting in their own right.

The lusory attitude, on the other hand, intends involvement that includes good problems—searching for challenges that are neither too hard nor too easy. It is an ironic attitude suggesting that harder, within limits, is better. As Suits noted, the lusory attitude is similar to our everyday work stance—one that would have us trying to figure things out and find optimal solutions. But it is also significantly different in that it does so under self-imposed, unnecessary limitations.

Neither attitude requires the other. One can be fully autotelic without also being lusory, for example, when one is dancing around the Maypole or reading a good book. And conversely, one can be looking for gratuitous problems without also being autotelic, as is often the case with some professional athletes who use games for extrinsic purposes and find no joy in them. Nevertheless, the two stances are compatible. The overlapping circles of the Intentional Act portion of the diagram (see Figure 2) symbolize the previously mentioned potential for hybrid or compound intentionalities when the two stances toward the world are taken up concurrently—that is, when the self-sufficiency or autotelicity of play is combined with the gratuity or irony of the lusory attitude.

The Intentional Object side of Figure 2 mirrors the Intentional Act diagram. It includes a section for those activities that are self-sufficient play attractors or playgrounds, and another section of activities that are artificial challenges that we attempt to overcome—namely, games.³ The compatibility of the two kinds of activities is symbolized by the overlap between the two circles.

The two diagrams of act and object have a one-to-one correlation to one another. That is, the section on the Intentional Act diagram that includes only the play attitude correlates with the Intentional Object side of the diagram that includes play activities exclusive of games. The same can be said for the lusory attitude and its relationship to games that are not also play, as well as the middle sections of both sides of the diagram where the nested autotelic-lusory intentionalities on the left are correlated with play activities that are also games on the right.

In this double Venn diagram model we can more clearly see the two categories in which play and games reside. The phenomenon of play is a way of doing something—the intentional act—even though we can also refer to play activities. The phenomena of games—the objects of intent—are things that can be experienced but always with the appropriate noetic or intentional attitude. In sum, play and lusory attitudes are manners in which the world can be engaged. Play activities and games are objects in the world that can be so engaged.

While the double Venn diagram helps to clarify the issues at hand, it does not explain how intimately the categories of act and object are experientially connected. Play is an attitude but it also requires an activity that is being “played.” As Suits puts it, “playing always means playing *with* some x or other” (23; p. 20). Games, on the other hand, are commonly thought of as activities that pose unnecessary problems, but such problems make sense only in relationship to an intending subject who will see them as gratuitous.

So play can be considered an attitude, but it is inseparable from play activities. Games can be considered activities but they require the lusory attitude or gaming stance. Attitudes and activities come together in our lived experiences in such a way that the stance necessarily colors the activity.

Husserl has made this clear, saying that there can be "no noetic phase [the intentional act] without a noematic phase [the intentional object] that belongs specifically to it" (8: 250).⁴ Attitudes and that to which the attitudes belong (activities) could be called phenomenological pairs because of their intimate relationship. There is, for instance, an inseparable marriage between loving and that which is loved, wondering and that which is wondered about, hoping and that which is hoped for, playing and the activity that is played, and gaming and the activity to which the gaming attitude is directed.

With two stances or kinds of intentionality and two activities or kinds of objects and the various combinations thereof, opportunities for confusion are manifest. Some confusion is related to the fact that the two *stances* are at once independent and compatible. Further confusion can be traced to the fact that the two *objects* are likewise independent and compatible. Finally, if it is true that games have not just a logically compatible but an existentially privileged relationship to play, conflation becomes even more likely. Philosophers who intuit such a relationship might well begin by talking about play but end up analyzing games without noticing that they have moved across important boundary lines—from stance to activity (a horizontal move on Figure 2) and from one stance and set of activities to others (a vertical move on Figure 2).

To summarize the metaphysical landscape, then, three missed distinctions can lead to the conflation of play and games. The first and broadest has to do with inadequate phenomenological accounts. Play and games belong to two categories, not one. Conflation can occur when play, for example, is conceptualized as an inclusive stance and games are seen as ideal objects or recipients of that stance. Under these conditions, talk of play is invariably dominated by descriptions of games. The second and third missed distinctions have to do with confusions based on the more inclusive view of play and games as correlative acts and objects. On the side of acts, autotelic and lusory attitudes, as "just so" approaches to life, can be difficult to keep apart. One can be mistaken for the other. Furthermore, their logical compatibility (and experiential affinity for one another) can be mistaken for identity. On the side of the objects or activities, play activities that are not games are often ignored (Huizinga, Caillois) or relegated to a lower status and, consequently dismissed for normative reasons (Suits). Under such frameworks, analyses of play activities become de facto discussions of games.

Causes of Conflation

With the "playing" field clarified, I will continue the analysis of conflation by building on the causes or roots of this problem to which I alluded in the previous sections. I will describe two sources of conflation that may explain why many people, including Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits (or Suits' readers, at least) are prone to making this error.

High Compatibility

Play and games are so compatible and so often jointly experienced that we speak of them together in ways that promote their conflation. We talk about *playing* games when we mean *participating in* or *doing* games, for we know that game

participants are not always in the play spirit. This verbal error is more than linguistic laziness or the result of poorly crafted lexicons. We say that we *play* games because of the natural and logical relationship play has to games. We are often in or seeking the play attitude when we are participating in games. Our language, consequently, has adapted to this natural and logical relationship in such a way that we often use the terms in these imprecise and misleading ways.

Huizinga and Caillois exemplify this point. They talk about "play" as a verb and they use "play" and "games" as interchangeable nouns. As already noted, Suits is also guilty of employing common parlance when he uses the terms "game playing" in his analyses of games. Throughout his text, it is unclear whether he is using the term "playing" colloquially or if he wants to reference the autotelic attitude that he defined in "Words on Play" (23). Regardless of his intentions, the two phenomena have a natural and logical relationship because they are highly compatible. The play stance, particularly for adults, often has games as its object (that is, the thing that is played) and vice-versa. Our language, then, is a product of these common experiences but it inadvertently is also a source of conflation.

Suits may have been comfortable with the terms "game playing" because he understood the high compatibility between the two phenomena. This high compatibility of play and games may be explained by a common parentage. That is, games and play come from the same source. They give us something to do when there is nothing to do, or, more broadly, they give us something interesting to do when routine daily life offers no such invitations. Both play and games speak to the human need for diversion, distraction, serendipity, or a solution for the condition of having too much time and too little to do. In a word, boredom is undoubtedly one of the well-springs of these twin human projects. When bored, we either seek experiences that are attractive in themselves (play), experiences in which we attempt to solve unnecessary problems (games), or both at the same time (games in the mode of play). We conflate these highly compatible phenomena by grouping them together—as a class of boredom remedies, leisure activities, or recreational pursuits.

When we look at play and games at their most sophisticated levels, a case can be made for their experiential dependence on one another. In our day-to-day experiences, in fact, we often find them as reliable partners. Games are fluid, alluring, and durable access points into the play attitude. That is, games induce play. Because of the intrigue inherent in "just right" problems, they are excellent play attractors. As play attractors, they are natural "friends" of play.

But play is also a "friend" of games. If we could not or did not often find play in our games there would be little reason for them to exist. The gratuity of games, in the absence of play, would be plainly illogical not just ironic. Game means (including unnecessary hurdles) are the way they are because we *want* them that way. We find such hurdles oddly attractive. If they did not so attract us, if we did not find play in them, we would probably not participate in them. Games without play potential, in short, are bad games. We would expect games without good play potential to quickly die off.⁵

In sum, this two-way friendship has an element of truth to it. In describing mature play, it is natural to talk of the important play attractor called games. And in explaining the nature and value of games, it is natural to show their inherent dependence on play.

In this compatibility-generated conflation, we focus on the fact that play and games produce the same result—namely, they give us something interesting to do. By focusing on the common destination, we miss the distinct ways offered by play and games for getting there. In play, we combat boredom by finding intrinsically interesting natural distractions or diversions, or by being found by them. A tree "invites" us to climb in its branches. A mud puddle "wants" to be splashed in. A compelling novel "asks" us to open up its cover. In games, we combat boredom by finding artificial challenges, or by being found by them. We are driving home from work and decide to take the longer way home while stipulating that we must do so in a provocatively short amount of time. Play is a natural serendipity, games are conventions. Play is only incidentally related to problem solving. Games are built squarely around it. Play is accessible to animals and young children. Games require knowledgeable rule adherence and other intellectual feats characteristic of uniquely human and adult behavior (9). Therefore, although play and games are highly compatible, often experienced together, and offspring of common parents, they are still distinct phenomena.

Games as Idealized Forms of Play

Idealization is a second cause of the conflation of play and games. Games have unusual power as ideal forms of play activities. That is, games are activities that are reliable and durable play inducers. As noted, games are constructed to be just right problems. When such constructions are successful, games provide optimal challenges, stimulation, excitement, aesthetics, and cultural value. When games do not meet these high standards, we quit playing them or change their rules until they satisfy our interests.

Naturally-occurring play activities, of course, do not show this flexibility. Because they are not the product of their constitutive rules, they lack the wherewithal for modification. A mud puddle, in one sense, remains a mud puddle with its more or less fixed invitations for play.

Essentially then, the playing field between play activities and games is not level. Natural problems or activities are trumped by these just right, sophisticated, and human-made artificial problems. The variable attractions of nature prove no match for the constructs of culture.

Games are built by us for us to enjoy, and it seems that they are unusually reliable at doing what we expect and hope for from play and games. They give us something to do when there is little to do and they give us something interesting to do when we are under-stimulated. Games are more accessible to us because we are more in control of them than play activities that are not games. I can easily get a game of soccer going, for example, as long as I have a round object, a rectangular open area, and at least one other person. Although I may have to change some ancillary rules to make soccer viable in my surroundings, I can have it virtually whenever I want. We choose and create games so that they will be there to fulfill our needs. Soccer is there for me when I need it.

Play activities that are not games, on the other hand, are less reliable. They come in two forms—natural and artificial. Natural play activities, such as making snow angels and body-boarding in the ocean, are often inaccessible because they force us to submit to the world's invitations at that moment. They are not possible

without snow or ocean waves that allure us. We have little control over whether or not the world will invite us to experience them. Artificial play activities, such as performing guitar music or enjoying a delicious meal, are more reliable to us than natural play activities. Since they are artificial, we can access them without having to wait on the world to present opportunities to us. However, Suits sees them as less reliable than games because they are not as durable. That is, they are fun at first, but their novelty wears off quickly because they lack the challenge inherent in games (19: p. 174).

Those who do not delineate between play and games miss these distinctions. Games are discussed as if they are the whole or nearly the whole of play. To be sure, games are the most prevalent and among the best and most reliable examples we can give when we describe play, but they are not the only type of activities that can be played. Playing in the rain or with a pet is not a game, but playing basketball or chess is.

This confusion, as I mentioned earlier, is apparent in the writings of all three authors. Huizinga, while purportedly focusing on play, continually gives examples of human-constructed play activities that are games. He describes bridge, hopscotch, jigsaw puzzles, and soccer as his play activity exemplars even though each of these activities is a game. More poignantly, Huizinga discusses language and religious ritual as play. These activities are conventional, artificially-created and orderly—like his other examples of games (7: p. 4, 20).⁶ By continually using games as examples of play, Huizinga missed the distinctions between natural, artificial, and gratuitous problem-solving activities.

Caillois idealizes games as his exemplars of play, too. One of his criticisms of Huizinga, for example, is that he (Huizinga) does not give adequate attention to games of chance or games of vertigo as subsets of play. He says that Huizinga “discovers play in areas where no one before him had done so, [but] he deliberately omits, as obvious, the description and classification of games themselves” (4: pp. 3–4). While both authors agree that constructed activities such as sports, contests, cops and robbers, and theatrical performances (competitive and simulated games) are play activities, Caillois wants to argue that games like roulette, the lottery, mountain climbing, and tightrope walking (games of chance and vertigo) are also authentic play activities. While they may be, Caillois has ignored serendipitous or otherwise naturally-occurring actions (play activities) that are outside the realm of games.

Huizinga and Caillois, therefore, reinforce the idealization of games within the realm of play. They usually cite play activities that are games, at the expense of play activities that are not games. They could have chosen such examples as listening to music, taking a walk, engaging in a deep conversation with friends, or other play activities to which many other authors have alluded.⁷ Instead they chose examples of play that are games. They may not have been aware that they were confounding two phenomena by idealizing games, but Suits was clearly cognizant of this leaning. He made idealization a central part of his text, and argued as to why it is so powerful and true.

Suits tells us that games are *the* ideal form of play (19). He asserts that game playing constitutes the good life. In his view, games are the most durable form of play because they are problem solving activities. Games continually offer us challenges whereas play activities that are not games do not—their novelty often

wears thin over time. It is interesting for us to seek and construct artificial challenges, and they are more closely aligned with the good life than nongame play activity (he uses the examples of vacationing in Florida, collecting stamps, reading a novel or playing the trombone in this nongame play subset). Suits juxtaposes chess with the previous list and proclaims that it is better than his other examples of play activities unless, of course, we can make a game out of the others. He states that the good life should not "consist simply in leisure activities [play], but that it ought to consist in playing *games*" (19: p. 16). Although vacationing in Florida, collecting stamps, reading a novel and playing the trombone are good leisure time or play activities, gaming them up by racing down to Florida, collecting full sets of stamps, reading a novel in one day, and playing the trombone in a competition are better types of play because they have been enhanced with artificial challenges or problems and have become games. These games, according to Suits, are more durable and therefore better than other leisurely pursuits that enable the play spirit.

Durability is the key characteristic of games in the idealization argument. Suits says that games are the ideal type of play because they are "the essence, the 'without which not'" (19: p. 176) of play or leisure time activities. Games have unusual power as play activities and gaming has unusual power in the play attitude realm. Well-crafted games are durable and have obstacles to overcome or challenges to face that are neither too hard nor too easy, leaving them as just right, interesting, and attractive projects to the participant and/or observer. As they are so often successful at evoking the play attitude, games are ideal forms of play. And as games are ideal forms of play, they lead to conflation of the two phenomena because we neglect play activities that are not games.

Conclusion

In summary, the conflation of play and games has hindered our abilities to accurately understand these phenomena. Conflation means mistakenly mixing, jumbling, or combining two separate things into one thing. By conflating play and games, we do not see the two phenomena as separate yet related entities. Play-game conflation is evident in philosophical literature. Huizinga, Caillois, and Suits are three cases in point. Each of them added to conflated views of the two phenomena in different ways, and my analysis of their writings displayed the breadth of the conflation problem. These and other philosophical analyses of play and games reveal a lack of metaphysical clarity that allowed the conflation to go unchecked. When we understand that play and games reside in two separate but related categories—as attitudes and as activities—we are in a better position to understand play, games, and the relationship between them.

The metaphysical "playing field" becomes even clearer as we look at the roots of conflation. I noted two factors that have led to this confusion. First, play and games are highly compatible. They are often spoken of and experienced together. This close relationship has been mistaken for identity. Second, games are idealized play activities. Games show unusual power as reliable and durable examples of play activities. However, neglecting examples of play that are not games leads to conflation.

While we learn much from Huizinga, Caillois, Suits, and other play and game authors, they left us with some work to do. For that reason, I have tried to dust off

the cobwebs of ambiguity that have grown around play and games as philosophers have continually studied the phenomena but neglected some of the major, although intricate, details. Even though it has been overlooked, understanding the distinctions between play and games is a key aspect of the metaphysical understanding of these human projects.⁸

Notes

1. Each of the authors listed in my bibliography and numerous others have tried to tackle metaphysical issues involving games and play.
2. Kretchmar (9), Meier (11), Morgan (13), Searle (16), and Suits (19) are the most notable among this group that has defined games as rule-bearing.
3. These two categories—play activities and games—can be broken down into more specific categories. The play activities circle, for instance, is made up of two subsets—natural and artificial play activities, the latter of which includes the overlap with games. For now, though, the two-circle diagram will suffice.
4. Husserl explains that *noesis* is the perception or the intent of the act and *noema* is that which is perceived or the object that is intentionally acted upon. For more, see (8: 235–328).
5. Morgan describes this claim beautifully as he says, “To say, as I do, that the gratuitous logic of sport is a contingent universal condition of its practice is to say that when such practices cease, when they no longer resonate in any social order or are no longer found sufficiently worthy to be included as a part of any cultural tradition, then the logic that founds and sustains them will cease as well” (12: p. 215).
6. The “game” of language has been the main thrust of several books by philosophers such as Wittgenstein (24) and Searle (16), while religious ritual can also have the elements of a game.
7. For arguments pertaining to this type of play, see (1), (2), (10), and (14).
8. The author would like to thank an anonymous reviewer and the editor for their insightful remarks during the submission process.

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