

## THE VALUE OF UP-HILL SKIING

*Walking with the Earth as a Serious Game.  
Philosophical Notes on the Experience of Sport  
and Wilderness*

*Ignace Haaz*

“[...] mountains are like people: To love them, you must first get to know them, and when you do, you can tell when they are angry and when they are happy, how you should handle them, play with them, care for them when people hurt them, when it is better not to annoy them. But unlike any person, the mountains, nature, and the earth are much, much bigger than you are. You must never forget that you are a speck, a speck in space, within the infinite, and they can decide at any moment whether they want to erase that speck or not.” Kilian Jornet, *Run or Die*,

Ch. 1. Velopress, 2013

### **Introduction: These Mountains which are Part of Our Experience**

The great uphill runner Kilian Jornet argues that mountains are as persons from time to time angry or happy, and that if we would want to

play with mountains, and care for them when people hurt them, then we better learn to know them\*.

This close contact with nature has been described by Lord Byron and it has had a critical reception by Arthur Schopenhauer, who is seeing in nature and in play one same principle at work the Will, as conative power unifying all living beings and the world as a whole. A metaphysical development of the “objectivation of the will” is leading into a modern concept of playful activity, and to a sophisticated comprehension of the subject as inspired producer of the work of art. It has been widely recognized that Friedrich Nietzsche inherited Schopenhauer’s attempt to give a great synthesis between Baruch Spinoza’s immanent system of the Nature as Will and Kant’s proposition of a transcendental access to the world as pure idea or representation. It is by thinking through the perspective of art, and not forgetting ethical principles and a religious philosophy, seen as evolutionary momentum out of these first ludic steps of life, that Schopenhauerian axiology is unfolding, with an individualist approach for the philosopher of Röcken, and a collective perspective with Eduard von Hartmann. In a collection of unpublished notes, Nietzsche wanted to refocus on the idea why should human being be so passionate about mastering a set of obstacles. As he sees gradually this habit redefined as characteristic of a “will to power”, the reception of this concept did not draw a relation between both concepts. It is much later, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga first considered the idea of resistance to obstacles as central, in his great foundation of modern cultural theory, with, later, the American philosopher Bernard Suits, who readapted it to a so-called “lusory attitude”: a playful disposition, required to enter in the play of a game. With a large

---

\* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4146292> © Globethics Publications | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

reception, these isolated chapters eventually inaugurated as a whole the new area of the philosophy of sport as a discipline of social and practical philosophy. Let us come back to Lord Byron and Kilian Jornet and see why there is a temptation to truly see the environment, the tree, the path in the middle of the forest being present as immersive experience and then see why we cannot agree on totally reducing the subject to the state of being immersed, introducing a reason-based understanding, or as we shall see propose a legitimate concept of the world as abstract representation of the subject.

Byron presents the idea of an aesthetical immersion of the individual into the environment when he writes: “Are not the mountains, waves and skies a part Of me and of my soul, as I of them?” The immersive character of the subject with the world is reported to the reciprocal character of the world being part of me and, the subject being part of the world. Instead of being a reciprocal and an unifying immersion, as a theocentric or metaphysical hand holding the world from falling below a limit: earth represented as ball, caught by a divine hand full of compassion, on the contrary, the earth could be also seen as multilaterally emerging from mountains, waves and skies with Byron. The romantic view of a return to nature can be interpreted as a result of Byron’s separation with Annabella his wife who could not tolerate anymore his way of life, and his leaving of Dover, under public opprobrium, which lead him to Geneva, after a tour around the battlefield of Waterloo. Looking with poetic inspiration at the beauty of the French Alps, the Lemman Lac, and the reflection of the Mt Blanc into the water, has helped him to release much of his melancholic disposition, and to find through art a therapy and new start in life, rather reaffirm a pure passion of love, mediated by the beauty of nature<sup>83</sup>.

---

<sup>83</sup> We see the poet, Lord Byron in this occasion, pointing at a sentimental will to desire, a true passion, which is pure and authentic as the immaculate beauty of

Byron has also probably in mind to overcome a vision of the world of his time, what could be called the decadence of the British Empire after the battle of Waterloo, and the defeat of Napoleon who, for many as Byron, personified the defeat of the Enlightenment forces of modernization and democratization, against those of the Central European and British great colonial Empire. Back to nature means, in this second sense finding the inspiration to resist the literal physical aspiration by conservative political powers at that time<sup>84</sup>.

Walking with the earth focuses on a desire and bodily activity, which will be described with much attention as “objectification of the will” by A. Schopenhauer, in his *World as Will and as Idea*<sup>85</sup>, two years later in 1818. The German philosopher will also refer to the small poem of

---

the mountain. The metaphor of the mountain serves as a guide which would accompany the walker in his discovery of the hidden beauty of the world, and comfort himself in an existential joy of life as presence. Byron asks just a few lines below: “Is not the love of these deep in my heart With a pure passion? should I not condemn All objects, if compared with these? and stem A tide of suffering, rather than forego Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm Of those whose eyes are only turned below, Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not glow?” *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto III, §75, 710-714.

<sup>84</sup> Byron has written these lines as part of the poetry: *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto III, §75, 707. When he writes that the subject of perception has a reciprocal relation with the object of the perception, it is grounded on the concrete experience of his view of the mountain of Mont Blanc, the 3 June 1816, as he observes “for some time the distant reflection of Mont Blanc and Mont Argentière in the calm of the lake”. The image of the mountain is appearing through the window of the lake, which he is crossing in his boat. The distance of the Mont Blanc from their mirror is about 100km.

<sup>85</sup> Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World As Will And Idea*, Vol. 1-3, transl. by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp. Seventh Edition London Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. 1909. Gutenberg EBook 2011, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-pdf.pdf>

Byron, but with a totally different view from the view of a reciprocal emergence:

“Whoever now, has, after the manner referred to, become so absorbed and lost in the perception of nature that he only continues to exist as the pure knowing subject, becomes in this way directly conscious that, as such, he is the condition, that is the supporter, of the world and all objective existence; for this now shows itself as dependent upon his existence. Thus he draws nature into himself, so that he sees it to be merely an accident of his own being. But how shall he who feels this, regard himself as absolutely transitory, in contrast to imperishable nature? Such a man will rather be filled with the consciousness, which the Upanishad of the Veda expresses: *Hæ omnes creaturæ in totum ego sum, et præter me aliud ens non est* (*Oupnek'hat*, i. 122). 48 §35. In order to gain a deeper insight into the nature of the world, it is absolutely necessary that we should learn to distinguish the will as thing-in-itself from its adequate objectivity, and also the different grades in which this appears more and more distinctly and fully, i.e., the Ideas themselves, from the merely phenomenal existence of these Ideas in the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, the restricted method of knowledge of the individual.<sup>86</sup>”

Part of the important benefit from reading Schopenhauer’s theory of the Will is his introduction into the idea of a will to resistance, which will be further essential to introduce the concept of play-element in various types of bodily activities that we would call nowadays sports, by answering from the perspective of history of philosophy to the *aporia* of sport and walking not fitting the research excellence. Let’s look into the possible objecting that a promenade on the Lac of Geneva and the

---

<sup>86</sup> Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World As Will And Idea*, Vol. 1, p. 242

mirroring of the mountain in the water has no deep conceptual relevance.

## **Walking Not Fitting the Research Excellence Framework**

In a short appendices to her review of a recent attempt of drafting a philosophy of walking (Gros, 2014)<sup>87</sup>, L. Coupe proposes a fiction, to imagine the philosophy of walking “as if” it was addressing “fashionable issues” such as issues around innovation and impact. Are wise ideas on walking such as those great Ancient and Modern philosophers have attempted to transmit us, and as compiled by Gros, really proposing game-changing angle on the topic? If there is no doubt that we all should walk on daily basis, and that getting to the country side of a hike is good for us, celebrating the act of walking, as Coupe says rightly, doesn’t offer a way to understand the relevance of a written contribution on the subject. What is so impact relevant about walking? Defining walking in conceptual way might not reach the concrete impact of a research on concrete social problems such as, e.g. concrete current issues in the field of education and research as the prevention of plagiarism, for example, or deep systemic contemporary issues as the human impact on the environment, global disarmament and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

It is both reasonable and important to get to know the environment in order to witness something valuable beside the general crisis related to climate deregulation. Is a witness, namely a third person view on a

---

<sup>87</sup> Laurence Coupe, “Times Higher Education”, 10 April 2014, Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, Verso, 2014. Coupe’s research on the overlap between mythology and ecology, reimagining the Earth “recovering the sense of its sacredness” should be mentioned, in particular the Ch. “Earth” in: Coupe, L. *Myth*, London & New York: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised Ed. 2009.

subject the best experience of it, if we want to convince about engaging in values?

Claiming a dialogue across cultures is interesting and urgent for global security and peace, this claim can only be done by real ambassadors of intercultural dialogue in practice. In the following text we shall apply this maxim. As we shall see walking, even in difficult conditions becomes a distinctively nature sport activity, distinct from taking a few minutes of exercise or a traditional contemplative walk in the nature *à la Rousseau*. Richard Schacht defines sport etymologically as deriving from “disporting”, being carried away, diverted: the activity aiming at overcome the sadness of existence by some sort of exercise based detour with Montaigne or diversion, thus a kind of amusement. If sport is a kind of activity which does not involve any useful end and which is a discharge of energy, for the sole end and need of working out, it might have only an indirect end, learning some basic motor and locomotor function, necessary for the development of the subject.

As we shall see, although this is partly true for sport as game in the sense related to the psychical and physiological development of the subject, some sports are constituting special categories of sport activities. Special technical skills are needed to assess natural risks as in sailing (wind surfing, kiteboarding, foiling, wing foiling, wave riding surf, ski touring, free style ski, base jumping, diving, rock climbing, ice climbing, cave diving (speleology), etc.). Is sport “a simple fact of civilization” as Huizinga has thought: an autonomous expression of some “agonal drive”, which does not have a clear function in any collective societal collaboration?

In some case, performance is primarily an issue of individual security, as adapting the level of skills to the level of risks. It is not about sensation. By contrast, adventurous sport could be seen as a

finality in itself<sup>88</sup>. The aesthetical category is also relevant in the context of an interest for the wilderness, as a path for a more authentic self-knowledge.

A way of including walking into both sport and artworks is by demanding how are some play-element necessary for learning exploration skills. Perhaps the creative factor comes from high artistic self-realization. Is the violinist playing on a high artistic level, as we could say the priest in the accomplishment of the religious rituals? They are artists of the highest kinds, interpreting the sacredness as a particular type of seriousness of play. First as Hunzinger has brilliantly defined, the very essence of the play element should be expressing human freedom “vis-à-vis both nature and morality” (ibid., 7-8). Play, like beauty in nature and art, to which it is closely related, is disinterested, distinct from ordinary life, “it contains its own course and meaning” and presents itself as an “intermezzo, an interlude in our daily lives” (ibid., 9). Playing is “non-serious” in the sense that it is not characterized by our daily concern for food, shelter, and everything else fragile beings like us need in order to survive. Play takes place “outside and above the necessities and seriousness of everyday life” (ibid., 26).

In order to be serious in a particular sense the play element needs to be beyond the profane seriousness:

---

<sup>88</sup> We think at the philosopher F. Nietzsche and his injunction to live dangerously: “The secret for harvesting from the existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to live dangerously!” Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science*, transl. W. Kaufmann, New York, Vintage, p. 228. See for this reference and the nexus of adventurous sport and nature from the point of view of the affective life. Houge Mackenzie, S. and Brymer, E. (2018): “Conceptualising adventurous nature sport. A positive psychology perspective.” *Annals of Leisure Research*, DOI: 10.1080/11745398.2018.1483733.



However, this does not exclude the fact that the activity of playing requires total devotion from the player. Playing is not merely “fun”, but earnest, even “holy earnest” (ibid., 23). For Huizinga, this is not (merely) a figurative expression: “In all its higher forms the latter [human play] at any rate always belongs to the sphere of festival and ritual – the sacred sphere” (ibid., 9). In order to distinguish this kind of intrinsic, sacred earnestness from profane seriousness we might call it sacred seriousness (on the relation between spirituality and play)<sup>89</sup>.

Artwork is often considered as entailing some imitation, improvisation or taking some joyful freedom with former plans and written conventions, as a philharmonic conductor plays in quickly combining different human interactions. But if we focus on a less sophisticated play, we can emphasize the relation to the wilderness, present in many sport activities and in walking in the natural environment.

How better promoting the crucial value of our mountains, rivers and forest than by being at the same time the creator and the creation of the beauty, which has the earth as place of performance? This is possible in some particular conditions, where the individual is reaching very exclusive encounters with the world (observing stones, wild animals and meteorological phenomena), as overcoming his own limits in being exposed to the dangers of the world outside there.

Alpine ascent on ice and immaculate snow fields combines perfectly on the one hand technical preparation needed for security and progression on icy environment and the breathtaking beauty of the

---

<sup>89</sup> Frissen, Valerie, Lammes, Sybille, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens (2015): “Homo ludens 2.0: Play, media, and identity” in: *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*, Edited by Valerie Frissen, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 13.

mountain, covered by snow, a momentum of aesthetical contemplation and gratitude. Where no single track of human presence is visible, in the virgin snow across newly formed natural shapes in winter, the human being is placed in front of the unknown, it is an invitation for adventure. This adventure element is well incarnated in alpine guides, but guides are not only adventurous minds they are also responsible group leaders, moved by the passion of the play-element of mountain walking and sports. Other sports combine the mastering of technical skills with the beauty of an artwork such as the imaginary fighting of kata, a Japanese martial tradition. This art is supposedly carried out in secret, where elaborate techniques could only be passed through “physical dances fighting imaginary assailants”, “a memory tool that helped masters pass down the traditions to the next generations.”

All forms of sport activities realize at a certain degree of excellence, and many lead as we see in the last examples to the idea of a group activity, which entails caring for the security of the group in the first place. Let's come back to the play element present in sports in order to understand more precisely different concepts which give either an overall impression of the whole or give a combination of very different aspects under the same abstract denomination of “play-element”. We shall look as well into the tension between the need for responsible behavior under the heading “Playing not fitting the ethical excellence framework”, below. In a delimited set of critical observations, we would revise possible objections against the value of the play-element in sports. In particular, we may pay attention to these objections as they might lead us to powerful objections against considering play seriously and spreading this framework of thinking on the fields of education and cross-cultural dialogue. Finally, we shall ask whether playing in the nature impacts positively the environment by reenchanting it or if, on the contrary, it does not add new risks to ecological preservation.

Let's unfold the first proposed analogy and see how walking is engaging us in a playful way, which in turn may open wide further social functions. The Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga has first demonstrated, that the concept culture, as a type of social category has an originally play-element<sup>90</sup>, very different from only seeing among cultural life tokens some playful elements in culture. The aim of Huizinga is not less than totally reframing "Western Civilization Sub Specie Ludi", and even comparing as global anthropologist various world views globally, against a prima facie view that the word and very notion of the game or the play-element could be related to a rather abstract notion, according to which ordinary language brings puzzling results.

Huizinga has well observed that "Nobody would expect that [the ordinary language] designates, in an equal manner, using the same term, a notion absolutely identical, as it goes in all languages to designate concepts as foot or hand<sup>91</sup>." The case is not simple: in some cultures, precise terms exist for forms of play but no unique precise term for all forms of play. This observation brings two corollaries: first, language may not have the right words to say the word "play", but it does not follow that we don't have in language as we speak, in any given language, a game structure at play as Wittgenstein sees speaking a

---

<sup>90</sup> Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture*. Ch. 3, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. For a good synthesis in the German reception of the value of the play-element see: Jörg Neuenfeld: *Alles ist Spiel. Zur Geschichte der Auseinandersetzung mit einer Utopie der Moderne*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2005. Also: Sandl, Marcus (2014). *Homo ludens: Überlegungen zur historischen Anthropologie des Spiels*. IASLonline, 39(2):404-421. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/iasl-2014-0022>; ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-100971>

<sup>91</sup> Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens*, "Conceptions and expression of the notion of play in the language", Ch. 2, pp. 57-8. Our translation based on the French version: Gallimard, 1951.

language. Second, there is a far more critical approach, also related to the abstract character of the notion play, a view intending not to subordinate all sorts of plays to the competitive general category with R. Cailloix. It shows more than one would expect from the view expressed by Huizinga, the further categories: A1) *agon*: competition, A2) *alea*: chance, A3) *mimicry*: simulation, A4) *ilinx*: vertigo. B1) *ludus*: controlled play, B2) *paideia*: improvisation<sup>92</sup>. C1) *jocus*: the joke, or *joci* the amusements<sup>93</sup>. Let's give an example of the combination of A3 and B1, the child can play to do as if, an imaginary situation was real, as if he was flying, running down a hill. A1) combined with B1) would correspond to mental or physical activities as a social practice, where there is observance of rules and where the joy is proportionate to the level of difficulty or constraint accepted by the competitors, often in order to gain social prestige. A2) and B2) relate to intellectual games more than physical ones, and where the combination of multiple factors and the computational power is important as for language games, playing cards, chess, etc.

We see from these few analyses of the concept of game that there are obvious reasons for considering the play as important, despite not considered as a serious pursuit. The playful attribute of any activity displays a dynamical overall impression, a changeability factor, and games are opening the intelligence and all models of explanation,

---

<sup>92</sup> Cailloix puts already in his abstract in light the strongly contradictory elements embedded by a seemingly singular type of activity: "indeed, the game is both serious and frivolous, subject to convention and liberated by fantasy". Caillois, Roger (Dir.) : « Jeux et sports » in *Encyclopédies de la Pléiade*, No. 23, Paris : Éd. Gallimard. Also: Ehrmann, Jacques, Cathy Lewis, and Phil Lewis. "Homo Ludens Revisited." *Yale French Studies*, no. 41 (1968): 31–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2929664>.

<sup>93</sup> « Jeu », *Vocabulaire de la philosophie et des sciences humaines*, edited by L.-M. Morfaux, Paris : Armand Colin, 1980, 185-6.

instead of closing them into narrow system thinking. This is very important as it shows suddenly that an activity considered by many as not so serious, becomes a new benchmark of credibility for the human mind<sup>94</sup>.

We understand it, playing can be a supra biological level of socially interacting, which is not necessarily proper to humans, but which gives a level of dignity to the creatures involved with it, and which cannot be reduced only to the satisfaction related to its various manifestations.

Walking in large inner spaces (as in monasteries, libraries, university buildings, in conference events, etc.) or outside in towns (as Kierkegaard

---

<sup>94</sup> Leibniz writes about the credibility of human mind, in his *Nouveaux Essais*, that “human mind” should be recognized as ‘paraissant mieux dans les jeux’ than in more serious pursuits’ (*New Essays*, Part IV, Ch. 16, p.466) Leibniz envisaged ‘a comprehensive study of games, dealt with mathematically’: first ‘all the games which rely on numbers’; next, ‘the games which also involve position, such as backgammon, checkers and especially chess’; and after them ‘the games which involve motion, such as billiards and tennis’. “What would be the point of this?” you ask. I reply: to perfect the art of discovery’. *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, Ed. C. I. Gerhardt, Berlin, 1875-90, III, p. 667-8. Leibniz, G.W.: *New Essays on Human Understanding* Edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge: Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy) 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1996. Completing the line of the productivity of games, as spiritual phenomenon, Wittgenstein develops the idea of a compatibility of the possibility to refer to an autonomous system, internal to the practice of a game (including language, mathematics, etc.) and the possibility of a grounding outside of itself. Let’s think at things we say to one another, which should follow rules but which are also true or not true, depending on how things are in the real world, therefor also tied to the real world not only to the rules of chess of a given language, or a universal grammar of all languages. Games should on the other side keep the characteristic of being a world of things where in some ways nothing impinges on this world from the outside. Schwyzer, Hubert, “Autonomy”, in: *Wittgenstein A Critical Reader*, Ed. By Hans-Johann Glock, Oxford: Blackwell, Ch. 14, 2001, p. 295.

was used to assign himself adventurous walks in town), or in the wilderness, etc.

The positive appeal of the natural environment brings other values, “beauty matters to inspire respect” (Girardin, 2020). Not only playing matters, our environment is so magical and unique that the beauty of oceans, the land and the air can be an important factor bringing to our imagination the full capacity to stand-up for the prevention of the environment<sup>95</sup>, Beauty can open our mind and help us reach a better balance in our life.

## **Playing Not Fitting the Ethical Excellence Framework?**

Before carrying on with play, as central element in walking and sport, let us examine some objections against play.

- It is in the relationship between the baby and its primary caregiver, that the early human self develops as healthy and balanced whole. The first discovery of playing for the little child is observed as directly related to a process of compensation: in order to overcome the disturbing and inexplicable absence of the mother, the child invents ways of playing and eventually creates words and discovers language (as shown by Sigmund Freud’s “Game of the Wooden Reel”<sup>96</sup>). By responding in a welcoming and reassuring way to the baby’s spontaneous feelings, expressions, and initiatives in all

---

<sup>95</sup> Girardin, Benoît (2019): “Beauty matters to inspire respect. A foundation stone for ethics” in *Blue Ethics*, Eds. By Girardin, B. and Fiechter-Wiedemann, E. Ch. 30, Globethics.net Praxis No. 13, p.223.

<sup>96</sup> Pascale Tollance, « Child’s Play? Graham Swift’s Shuttlecock and Freud’s Game of the Wooden Reel », *Études britanniques contemporaines* [En ligne], 41 | 2011, mis en ligne le 29 juin 2015, consulté le 26 octobre 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/2342>; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2342>

circumstances, in an invariable way, the child doesn't need to think too much about the maintenance of his true self, and create ways of overcoming the absence of the mother.

- Playing might refer to the capacity for being, instead of the capacity of doing. The playful element might be seen as the ability to feel genuinely alive inside. What if this capacity is kept for the self, as the autistic individuals do, immersing a great part of the presence of the individual in a solitary and incomprehensible indifference? Playing needs good delimitations from inside and outside, but is it not self-contradictory to the very principle of the play?
- Playing activity, as expressed in *gambling*, can be reduced to the potential to act as a simulation, as well as a projective play out of the imitation of social roles. Playing activity as gambling, notoriously described by Fyodor M. Dostoevsky in his partly autobiographical work, implies to change constantly masks and the hope and irrational attempt to change destiny<sup>97</sup>.
- In playing we reduce external phenomena to be in some sort of service of our dreams. There is a psychological investment, in the psychoanalysis sense, a manipulation of psychic affective energy and drives, to adapt external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling. Playing gives the illusion of “all mightiness”, which is useful if we want to give self-confidence to small children, but dangerous if the need for the illusion of all mightiness is not balanced properly. A great care for internal

---

<sup>97</sup> Koroleva studies the phenomenon of gambling basing on Dostoevsky's novel *The Gambler*. See Koroleva, K. (2021). Deep Play. “The Gambler” by Dostoevsky. *Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics*, 5(3), 117-139. <https://doi.org/10.17323/2587-8719-2021-3-117-139>

needs and a sense of the reality of one owns desires, is as important as knowing the external constraints of reality. The British pediatrician Donald Woods Winnicott (1896–1971) distinguishes *the game* organized socially from *playing*, a more essential activity which is an act of transforming oneself into “a creator”, it is the invention of an individual which allows “an infinity of variations”, whereas games as socially limited. Games limited to the aim of education are as well considered as much more limited than play<sup>98</sup>. Reciprocally, lack of feeling of that one is being creatively affecting the social environment with an activity involving a play-element, may lead to antisocial behavior, and retreat into delinquency. The institutional responses might also be mirroring the same deficit, such as when corporal punishment was seen as “action-reaction” type of education strategy<sup>99</sup>.

- The playful creative element involves a permanent process of erasure, which makes every object available for a new purpose—a process shared poetic creation and humor.

---

<sup>98</sup> Winnicott, Donald W. "Playing: A Theoretical Statement." In *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott: Volume 8, 1967 - 1968*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016-10. <https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780190271404.001.0001/med-9780190271404-chapter-53>. Bailly, Rémi. « Le jeu dans l'œuvre de D.W. Winnicott », *Enfances & Psy*, vol. no15, no. 3, 2001, pp. 41-45.

<sup>99</sup> *The Chorus* (French: *Les Choristes*) is a 2004 French musical drama film directed by Christophe Barratier, which turns a model of education, without any artistic and musical play-element into a great comic satire. It shows how dangerous education becomes, when the hidden rules of the game, around the overarching principle of simplistic retribution of wrongs, replaces a collective play and musical transcendence.



- Rules of a game can be kept hidden and no longer shared. They can be constantly redefined by the person who silently proclaims them. Non-transparent games are often used to deprive other from power. Even a harmless retreat into inauthenticity is morally questionable. Is there a room for play when the mask cannot be teared away, in order to see the face of others and have true reciprocal empathy based communications?
- Mimetic play as imitation without reasons can spread violence (R. Girard). Desire to overcome obstacles and desires leading into obstacles, conflicts: psychology of early childhood.
- Performance is related to socialization and identity formation: risks and benefits.
- Play element may conflict with work: my work activity doesn't appear playful, is there a problem with my work? The importance of dealing with necessary/unnecessary obstacles vs. responsible leadership and agape. Is it possible to play-around in a positive sense with internet related communication technology? Play as language game: commutative power of human language and play element.

Life holds surprises, with health problems, epidemics, wars and death, I can't help but feel a little cruelly that we are lucky to witness misfortune, not to become a direct victim. The lottery aspect of life is perhaps scary, because when one plays a game of chance normally one expects to win or lose, yet in life the lottery happens without saying its name.

I love the element of play that makes life bearable, provided there is a lightness and innocence associated with a beauty of life and the world.

When reality turns grim, it takes moral, physical and mental resources to resist. For the moment, people may feel that they are spared, but hearing others worry can infuse a diffuse fear, an existential anguish.

What I praise in literature, philosophy and real encounters around questions of ethics and values is that these meetings are like announced feast days, because everyone wants to go beyond the original situation of existential angst. If this transcendence is done in a creative way, life is enchanted again and this enchantment and ethical hope is stronger than existential fear. Everyone wants to go beyond survival, life as a silent and unfair lottery. The impression of a change of scenery, of an endlessly renewed discovery that is offered by the true encounter, adds the tenderness and sparkling affection that is also part of life and which helps to transcend the real problems of this world, by bringing together two beings, affirming the metaphysical grounding in a principle of love.

## **The Philosophy of Walking vs. the Celebration of the Value of Walking**

Another important objection against the value of a philosophy of the play and the value of walking is methodological and semantical. There is no problem if walking seems to be rather a first-hand experience of the natural world, and not a thinking in cutting-edge terms, provided that there is a concrete value. We find two radically opposite approaches among philosophers: the first as human being grows older is called “vespertinal” type by Thoreau, it considers taking a walk as “taking exercise”, in the sense of a daily duty, it should not exceed a moderate investment of time, but limited “as the sick take medicine at stated hours”. Kant is well known for exemplifying similar daily habit. Just before sundown, this attitude consists of getting “all the walk” that one requires “in half an hour” (ibid.). Reason being that the ability to stay active along indoor occupations grows with age and has to do with

temperament. Appreciating the beauty of an architecture which forever stands out through the window, with calm and philosophy is very different from barely not standing anymore to stay confined to one office the whole day, sitting there, in a power of endurance, “with crossed legs, - as if the legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon” (ibid.).

On the contrary there could be a voluntary cultivation of a second type of attitude, that of “the camel”, a beast which “ruminates when walking” (ibid). As we may notice, the image of the camel does not need to be isolated from a larger process. Put in dialogue with the image of the lion and the little child, as later with Nietzsche, the camel is part of an interpretation of an inner transformation of the human being, which ultimately may aim at an aesthetical ideal, that of an “apotheosis of innocence” (Heller, 1973<sup>100</sup>).

In his work on the walk Thoreau does not aim at a radical transformation of values, and he certainly has no intention to refer to the metaphysic of the art, as Schopenhauer may have inspired Nietzsche. Interestingly, the American essayist is more interested by a distance towards over-civilization *à la Rousseau*, and his immersion in nature Emerson’s recipe. “It is as if a thicker cuticle could grow, a roughness of character”, “as severe manual labor robs the hands of some of their delicacy of touch. So staying in the house, on the other hand may produce a softness and smoothness, not to say thinness of skin”. (ibid.). “Perhaps we should be more susceptible to some influences important to our intellectual and moral growth”. In this second type of proactive engagement with walking, we can either naturally go to the woods: what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or a mall?” Some

---

<sup>100</sup> Heller, Erich, “Zarathustra’s Three Metamorphoses: Facets of Nietzsche’s Intellectual Biography and the Apotheosis of Innocence.” *Salmagundi*, no. 21 (1973): 63–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40547347>.

tried to import the woods to themselves, since they did not go to the woods.” “They planted groves and walks of Platanes”, where “they took *subdiales ambulationes* in porticos open to the air.” Here we touch upon the very idea of walking with the earth, the title of this book volume, if it is of no use to direct our steps to the woods, because they do not carry us thither, then we better call waking stepping in a garden, or even just hanging out in shopping mall. Thoreau nicely shows that we should be “alarmed” when it happens that [we] have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit.” We need “to shake off” the village, the thought of some work running in our head, and we are “not where our body is”, we are “out of our senses”. “What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?”<sup>101</sup>. We first need to make sure that our innocent activity is indeed harmless.

## **Walking and Harming the Earth**

Walking can present serious risks or harmful-conditions in limited situations, which spread in modern society very quickly, and become important risks. As possible answer to the increase over the years of persons who are overweight, in obesity or in extreme obesity (73% of US citizens over 20 years old enter overall such criteria), physical activity has increased in the same proportions. As we like doing good things with friends, walking and exercising in large groups has become a new trend. Let’s think about marathon running, or running event in any form including over 50’000 participants, it is easy to show that caring for our health could have concrete an extremely negative environmental impact. In 2010 the New York marathon, runners find “1690 portable toilets, 40’000 PowerBars, 92’000 bottles of water [...] a total of 1’200

---

<sup>101</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*, Myers, and David Widger, The Project Gutenberg eBook, 1997. URL: <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1022/1022-h/1022-h.htm>>

vehicles are used during the race, 2.3 million of paper cups containing 62'372 gallon of water<sup>102</sup>”.

## **Walking as a Sport and Sport as a Play**

To qualify for being a game, i.e. having a minimal play-element as activity, waking (or mountain ascent) needs to meet three conditions. First, there should be “a goal that can be understood and achieved outside the game itself” as Hurka explains. This condition is simple but important, as we shall see, the ultimate desire which drives the first inspiration to participate in an activity has to be of some sort, - usually a pleasing perspective, and different from the means used to achieve that end. Take golf, for instance, as Hurka presents the issue: “a ball goes into a hole in the ground”, [...] chess where “the pieces end up in a checkmate pattern”, mountain climbing, as “you stand atop a mountain”. The finality of the activity is outside of the activity itself, which might imply sophisticated strategic route to something, the end point of the walk, which brings the activity to the end, with the intended object of the desire, the thing that is actually wanted (being together at the top of the mountain<sup>103</sup>).

---

<sup>102</sup> Sailors, Pam R., “Earth 0, Humans 1: The High Cost of Getting Healthy”, in: *Sport and the Environment: Philosophical Dimensions*, 2012, pp.71-72.

<sup>103</sup> We might observe some analogy between the condition of external aim in sport or chess, defined as playing a game, and sexual desire and activity. We don't want to claim that sexual desire and sexual activity should be considered as a game, but we find in Blackburn's analytic description of the sin of lust comparable views, a strong dichotomy between final aims which are exterior to the activity in question (orgasm in sex, reaching to the top, for mountain climbing). The general theory is that of considering drives and activities which aim at an ecstatic final, as orgasm in sexual desire, and for this reason it is fitting that these final aims should be wanted, “but neither is the ecstatic finale all we want, as if we could just make do with it, bypassing the rest of the performance.

Second, we need a minimal set of rules, which interestingly might entail to “forbid the most efficient means to reach its goal”, for Hurka. “In golf you can’t pick the ball up in your hand, walk down the fairway, and drop it in the hole. In chess you can’t make three moves to your opponent’s one, or move your pieces in ways that break the rules. In mountain climbing you can’t take a helicopter to the summit.”

Third, as a game an activity needs to be related to “a particular attitude”. “To play a game you must accept the restrictions its rules impose because you want to pursue the goal through the only means that the rules allow. Golfers don’t wish they could use their hands or chess players that they could move their rooks diagonally; a mountain climber would refuse a helicopter ride”. Hurka sums up as follows: “More specifically, to be playing a game you must accept the rules because they make achieving the goal more difficult and you want to meet that challenge.”

In fact, the question is do we need to necessarily see walking as a game or a sport? In fact a long tradition shows that on the contrary, walking cannot be defined with a simple set of conditions. As a consequence, ski touring which is a kind of uphill walking in the snow, could be seen as a subpart of a general philosophy of walking (as F. Gros), not as a sport. This view, along the line of Gros, sees philosophy as a proximity to great thinkers, as an itinerary or a walk in the metaphorical sense. This is about a philosophical conception of wisdom,

---

Nor do we only want the relief that follows the ecstatic finale, or the state of having been through it. I might not want to go to the dentist, but nevertheless want to enjoy the relief of having been to the dentist. I might be going to enjoy having been to the opera much more than I will enjoy enduring the opera. But this is because the processes are regarded as in themselves unpleasant, whereas [two persons who want sex] are anticipating nothing but pleasure.” Blackburn, *S. Lust, The Seven Deadly Sins*, Oxford, UP, p.15.

in the way walking on a path is a proximity to a surrounding landscape, not a straight relation between two points as travelling on a road, wisdom seeking is to technical science what walking is to travelling.

Kundera explains on this line that we have a living experience of a walk, as we move through inspiring mountain views which makes the overall experience of the walk very different from just moving from one point to the other. Walking is not having in the background some sort of fixed image of a mountain. On the contrary, walking needs in order to be experienced something very different from the notion of a transition, from point to point, with minimal interaction with the context of a mountain.

Considered as kind of sport, touring ski can still fulfil partly what makes out of any type of physical activity a sport, and before being a sport a kind of game. Being in the proximity of great wisdom could be done by walking, not necessarily sitting in a library. As Hurka points out, mountain ascent is a particular game and since “people around the world spent over \$109bn (£83m) on video games in 2017. They also spent billions of hours playing video games, and similar amounts of time playing or watching football, Scrabble, golf, and more.” Therefore we may like walking in the Alps because “We like games<sup>104</sup>”, this doesn’t contradict praising surrounding landscape and being in the proximity of interesting persons and virtuous attitudes.

In *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Bernard Suits<sup>105</sup> devises a thought experiment using the metaphor of Aesop’s

---

<sup>104</sup> Hurka, Thomas, “From golf to Grand Theft Auto, why do we love playing games?”, *New Statesman*, 4 March 2019 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/2019/03/golf-grand-theft-auto-why-do-we-love-playing-games>>

<sup>105</sup> For some of B. Suits’ widely read articles on games and sport, in sport studies, as well as articles on Suits, see: The International Association for the Philosophy of Sport: <http://iaps.net/resources/suits/>

Grasshopper to grasp a concept of good life as being involved in a utopian sport activity of game playing which adds some conceptual thickness to what walking and ski touring might involve with regards to an ethical dimension of life, very different from what Gros envisages as a Kierkegaard related “moral style” or dimension of walking. We don’t intend to mean that no rule should ever apply to walking in the snow, but there is a wider scope where rule based activities are not displayed as main ethical deontological features, rules exist but as Kobiela point if out, the relation to ends in games, players’ attitudes and their limitative nature, as a whole place sport activities a following constitutive rules in a different way from technical activities or not-games type of ludic activities (Kobiela, 2018). As part of a lusory reason, backcountry skiing could exemplify some “lusory attitude that players have to adopt” in order to step into the utopic ideal Bernard Suits proposes, which revises in a positive manner the well-known symbol of the Grasshopper, becoming thus a radical utopian paradigm of an “voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles”, as we find in uphill mountain efforts.

“Sport is an extra-ordinary, unnecessary, rule-based, competitive, skill-based physical activity or practice where there is cooperation to fulfil the prelusory goal of having a competition, where mere sport participants endure or tolerate the implementation of a sport’s constitutive rules, whereas sport practitioners also aim at fulfilling sport’s lusory goal of winning, minimally not losing, whichever sport competition they partake in.”

To slightly moderate this view, it seems clear that mountaineering ski has to do with some very concrete obstacles, which are not pure fruits of our imagination, but related to real risks management. If crossing a frozen snow field is “governed by rules that create unnecessary obstacles to the achievement of stated goals, [...] rules [...]”



accepted for the sake of the activity they make possible”, we could argue that some other reason may as well prevail, which should not be seen as the mere overcoming of some existential threat. Mountain obstacles present particular risks and require precise technical skills in order to be manageable, as sitting on a motorcycle require knowing how to ride. Taking a road to the office on a scooter, and accepting possible risks related to this mode of transportation is very different from entering a wild area of traceless snow, including the assessment of risks as of the quality of melting snow and correlative risks of avalanche. The resistance of the obstacles and the modes of experience necessary to tackle and overcome obstacles depend on the kind of activity we are involved in. Unless I stop my motorcycle on the side of the road and take some time to reflect on where I should ride next, it is unlikely that this kind of sport exemplifies, for the reason of the fluidity related to our engagement in motorcycle driving, as in some martial arts or dance. It seems that motorcycling differs from walking in dangerous and steep contexts as this later necessarily involves a division in sequences of the activity, when facing important obstacles the person needs to stop and try again before walking as a fluid state of movement is again available (as Benovski nicely observed with regards to rock climbing, 2021 *infra.*). The possibility to divide an activity into various sequences makes out of it a puzzle, and when bodily sensation and taste are involved, a particular kind of work of art, as we shall see now.

## **The Touch of Fresh Snow: Ski Mountaineering and Artworks**

Despite technical know-how and precise information, the skier may be connected as part of his sport activity to some sense of the beauty of the environment, which explains why he is carrying the sort of game he is playing on that particular geographical space. If this assumption is true, walking with skis in the snow is a sport which entails an inquiry

that falls within the branch of aesthetics. The usual objection against this view is that sport has to do with winning much more than with a sense of the beauty, but as it is easy to see with some mainly individual sports that are not carried out for directly competitive aims, that that is objection fails for ski mountaineering<sup>106</sup>. An excursus in mountain climbing is needed in order to understand the aesthetical and bodily experience, if walking with skis may enter such category at all. To do so, walking uphill in steep environments should not be conceived as only aiming at getting to the top of something, but rather as aiming at producing “sequences of perfect movements” (Benovski, 2021). Failure or success may neither be a matter of sheer strength, as a climber on a given route might be puzzled by it at first, and may need to mobilize mental and sensory motor resources, if he doesn’t want to get stuck on ice, snow or rocks in the middle of nowhere. As Benovski argues, there are good reasons to believe “routes are puzzles – for the body and for the mind”, and climbing should be considered as “hyper-intellectual” sports (ibid., Nguyen 2017). There is a same kind of experience in choosing a route in ski alpinism, where meteorological conditions, the quality and the speed of the transformation of the snow in changing temperatures, the exposition to steep avalanche areas, the management of time of ascent and decent in poor light conditions, not to mentioning the physical resources available for the whole tour to be completed safely. Taking a mountain trail by night, gives the impression, in a very limited range of clear perception, that the whole up-hill skiing is almost essentially a tactile experience. Not only with limited vision, as by night skiing, which resembles what a speleologist may experience in the dark, ski tourers need generally to solve a whole range of questions, which may in the first place even relate to the experience of seeing some routes as impossible. Trial and error, but also the time of reflection and good

---

<sup>106</sup> Ziff, Paul. 1974. “A Fine Forehand.” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 1: 92–109.

planning, involving an inner experience of the ski climbing in one's body and imagination, is necessary to find precise positions in steep routes and in descend mode, riding in deep snow through unknown path, outside well-prepared ski station slopes.

The proper preliminary planning of alpine tours is not sufficient although a necessary condition, in resolving some of the puzzles of middle to high mountain trails. As for rock climbing, part of the puzzle solving is fully part of the activity happening in outdoor ever changing mountain conditions, as slow motion is compatible with thinking at what we do, a part of the contemplation of the environment. When access from one compartment of the terrain to the other is through narrow paths and the skier has to do quick conversions and moves on icy surfaces, there is limited place for error, and the inner perception of the movements as well realized moves, transforms the activity of walking into an artistic sort of dance. Once the harmony is found, "you dance your way up that wall" of snow, as Nguyen says applying to rock climbing. It is often noticed by ski alpinists that the shortest route is neither the easiest nor the safest, as climbing with skis on your feet is not only about getting up to the top, but about doing it in a nice and balanced way, thinking at the energy involved and focusing on an elegant progression, not just applying brute force, to finish a route in a clean way (Benovski, 2021). If this is true, it is not only by the beauty of the natural environment that we experience artistic qualities it is literally as producers of some sort artwork, as a solitary dancer in front of this mirror, or a martial art practitioner (many techniques involve individual exercise). It could be argued that the bodily experience, which the philosopher call "proprioceptive experiences", allows to count some type of activity as artworks, given we engage with our own body in some relevant way. Do we think while moving slowly on an icy slope between natural obstacles, trying to reach a peak before snow transforms into dangerous unstable avalanche zones, that our precise movements in

the snow are possessing “representational, expressive, and formal properties”, which would qualify these gestures for being artefacts? Many examples could be found of the instructional kind, while preparing a course, which quality for being representations of the environment, as snow analysis, weather prevision or topographic information, necessary to evaluate the time needed to do a ski run. But these are not typically artworks. Are human faces and gestures, by the fact of having expressive properties, when we unroll precise movement of progression, including stage-by-stage reflective puzzle solving phases, without being works of art? Are there artefact related formal properties or only formal properties answering utilitarian purposes?

Traditionally philosophers would seek to categorize any candidate human action who would want to apply for being artwork through these three conditions, some being more on the side of representation as classic mimesis related art, other on the side of expressive qualities (baroque painting, romantic literature), formal criterion such as perception related qualities of shape or colour, or non-visual or non-auditory perception related qualities as for the beauty of mathematical theorems. The subtle non-time-sensitive qualities, when the artefact is not primary object of vision or audition, the possibility of combing this intellectual component of the experience with taste or the sense of the whole body (not just the sense of touch), challenge traditional definitions. Touch as main canal of perception in some activities in the nature may imply other perceptions from the body, in addition to visual, auditory or olfactory ones<sup>107</sup>.

First, as Benovski puts it, “not having a definition of something [as rock climbing or ski mountaineering as art] does not mean that this

---

<sup>107</sup> These bodily perceptions called proprioception, depend at least indirectly to the sense of touch, they are “often supplemented and accompanied by the sense of touch.” Benovski, *op. cite.* p. 18.

something is inexplicable”. “Indeed, if we keep in mind the ever-evolving nature of art, [...] we simply should continuously update our understanding of what art is, and allow ourselves to be surprised from time to time when new, challenging forms of art emerge.”

Second, it seems that we are not talking about the beauty of the natural entities, which truly deserve the attribute of being objects of aesthetic contemplation (sunsets, landscapes, flowers, shadows). We think about human beings, as having interesting aesthetic properties. If this is true, we would need to explain how far human intention and intervention take place in the process of creation of an artwork. We need to understand what makes out of the human being the artistic value, including the perception of a desire for overcoming an obstacle, a desire that we cannot hear as the piano player plays music. The desire to overcome an obstacle plays an essential role in sport. It is true that it plays a larger role in artistic activities and eventually can be recognized as a proto-moral principle?

### **Walking as Overcoming. The “Earthly Positive Eudemonistic Moral” of the Artistic Play**

If the main common ground of the play element in sport is overcoming of obstacles, a moral psychological analysis of the motive and the aim can help us to understand the universal importance of sport and artistic creation in human life, as “proto-ethical” ground for morals<sup>108</sup>. Schopenhauerian philosophy, which has been seen as some kind of irrational romantic eccentric thinking by scientific and analytic philosophers, gives us a precious psychological key, which is not at all related to a romantic praise of pessimism, *Weltschmerz* and a philosophy

---

<sup>108</sup> Von Hartmann, Karl Robert Eduard (1879): *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewußtseins. Prolegomena Zu Jeder Künftigen Ethik*. Berlin: Dunker.

of despair<sup>109</sup>. The expression of “earthly positive eudemonistic moral” can be found in von Hartmann’s deep and extensive work on a hierarchical typography (or axiology) of ethical principles<sup>110</sup>.

The nature of desire and the paradox of a philosophy of the will, is as Reginster has showed twofold<sup>111</sup>. The will, the tendencies (Ger. *streben, neigen*) or unconscious drives at work are oriented towards liberation as a possible aim of practical philosophy (Hedonism of Cyrenaic philosophers, Epicureans, Eudemonism of Aristotle and Plato, Eudemonism of Spinoza). From this first point of view, the aim of the will into suffering as resistance to satisfaction ends up with “a quite strange view” (Register, p. 133). It is though not at all ridiculous to consider overcoming of obstacles as an important aim in many concrete types of plays and in particular sports. Therefor a second view, which is based on the pessimist perspective of Schopenhauer and which would say that human beings are not seeking pleasure and avoid displeasure but to overcome obstacles become clearer. Nietzsche, who builds on Schopenhauer’s thinking may conclude:

“what human beings want, what every smallest organism wants, is an increase of power; driven by that will they seek resistance, they need something that opposes it – Displeasure, as an obstacle to their will to power, is therefore a normal fact [...]; human beings do not avoid it, they are rather in continual need of it<sup>112</sup>”.

---

<sup>109</sup> A very different trend and recent rediscovery of the value of the so-called “German pessimistic philosophy”: Beiser, Frederick C. (2018): *Weltschmerz. Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900*. See Ch. 7 on Hartmann. Oxford: UP.

<sup>110</sup> Von Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewußtseins*, First Part.

<sup>111</sup> Reginster, B. *The Affirmation of Life*, 2006, 133.

<sup>112</sup> Nietzsche, F. *The Will to Power*, 702.

The question remains if we are searching for obstacles, why should our view be “earthly eudemonistical”, as von Hartmann categorizes artistic activity in his axiology? If we are not searching for pleasure or joy but on the contrary, need to overcome obstacles and seek resistance, then lose sight with the *summum bonum*, the latest and most prominent end in our hierarchy of values: joy in life for eudemonist philosophers.

There cannot be resistance without *a desire for desire*, as Reginster shows very well, reaffirming the value of overcoming obstacles for life, but there cannot be desire for desire without a desire revealed in the first place, this first desire is also a measure of some sort, it could be the love of a given person (the invocation of an inspiring Muse as in Greek mythology<sup>113</sup>). It needs to be a common ideal, as first target of the whole process of creation and art. The revelation (a kind of religious epiphany as with Greek poetry), was traditionally understood as a language of the Muses, “a voice that the Muses literally ‘breathed’ into” the artist<sup>114</sup>. We see that a metaphysic of artistic creation can be seen as a positive ethics aiming at the joy of finding the common measure and breath of artistic production, including new ways of conceiving art as a sport.

### **Skiing as Dancing, from Contemplation to Active Participation to the Beauty of Corporal Movements**

There are moral psychological reasons to think that many sports need to incorporate resistance and overcoming of obstacles, all the previous authors agree on this matter. As previously presented, in order to recognize that climbing in a mountain on skis is not only a sport or a

---

<sup>113</sup> Greek noun *mousa*, *mousai*, the adjective *mousike* refer to the goddesses of creativity and the arts. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 31.

<sup>114</sup> Nagy, Gregory (2010): “Language and Meter”, in: *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, E. J. Bakker (Ed.), Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, 370-387.

play but as well a set of movement which as for dance or karate katas, makes out of the whole a kind of art, we need to rely on further reasons beyond the analogy between recognized major arts and sports which should not be seen as artistic activities.

Ski mountaineering is conventionally or institutionally not seen as an art but as a sport. This first impression should not repeal us from seeing some aspects of this sport as artistic, given the psychological moral logic described above, and, as Benovski rightly suggests for rock climbing, other theorists for uphill running, there is no consistency issue in having both aspects. Martial artists are often divided between those explicitly aiming at preparing the practitioner to respond to life threatening risks in suburban contexts, without any view for the beauty of martial art, and many others who attach value to the more contemplative approach. A higher esteem for artistic deconstruction of movements can be based on Asian medicine, the Asian philosophy of health or the very aim of teaching traditional technics as artistic and creative process.

In the following section we attempt to answer to the more fundamental questions of what kind of object is a work of art, namely to show the very nature of artistic work. This ontological and epistemological approach must include, as preliminary stage of our understanding, a better specification of the mode of presence of an aesthetical object.

On way of doing this sort of basic enquiry is to refer to and expand the category of the figuration, which we found in the third person point of view of a spectator (not the creator of the work of art).

Second, the need to come closer to the reflection needed in this experience, where we think about the aesthetical object among other objects. The subject first realizes that the model of an outstanding dancer, Rudolf Noureev, or the extraordinary mountain climber: Ueli



Steck, are very different from us as subject watching their movements. Nobody would step himself on the scene of a theater, as we know what is being experienced is a fiction, and we neutralize mentally, or put into brackets the subject, us who are watching the theater play. By doing so, we start a quest for the meaning of what we witness.

A third aspect is important in order to show what type of aesthetical experience dance or mountaineering ski should have in common, distinct from the purely performance driven aim as for ex. swimming or long distance running. In ice-skating competitions, the criterion of the artistic value of the performance is explicitly recognized and valued. In some case, it might be difficult to decide whether an activity should only be performance driven, as jumping from a ten meter platform, where performance is not about force but more about precision, as Olympic champion Matthew Mitchamand describes diving as sport. If the performance in this case is represented by the difficulty of the dive, which multiplies the aesthetical impression, then diving is partly about creating a work of art, transmitting the impression of “not feeling gravity”, being very brief, as the movement takes only two or three seconds<sup>115</sup>. Diving shares with mountain activities the relation to lightness, but temporality is very different, as the tension of ascending differs radically from release of descending.

It is by the very fact of being a living work of art that sports which focus on style and aesthetical qualities of life, invite us to reflect on the value of the living, distinct from the natural life bios/zoe. Language could be seen as the model of the quality of the living being: a sentence, a discourse, a painting, a piano play, the style of a poet is very different

---

<sup>115</sup> “Higher, faster and stronger” could be considered the mythic three pillars of the Olympic Games. As we see in some of our examples of disciplines, artistic creativity should not be a hidden non-Olympic second dimension (as the relation to the environment, human solidarity, gender fairness, etc.).

from the simple note taking of the clerk, or the minutes taking in an enterprise meeting. Objects seem to be animated for a child, and in the case of dance or rock climbing the visible is part of what is animated but knowing that not all objects are in movement and focusing on the movement. Mikel Dufrenne shows the importance of living movement in dance, and we can compare puppets with dancers in order to grasp the lack of intentional spiritual qualities in the former. The expressivity of dance, as for, Chi Gong, ice skating or ski mountaineering is a particular innocence and lightness which is called grace. It is life without the burden of worries. Grace, in slow progression uphill on snow, is as dance for Mikel Dufrenne<sup>116</sup>, it has the most central and specific aesthetical quality of life. For Erwin Strauss landscape is for the sight, what dance is for life, a symbolical space, different from a usual space, where utility and dependency are present. A mountain can be a space of experience of natural beauty as where anarchists might think to live, in order to better hide from the state authorities. Aesthetical qualities can be closely related to function related qualities as when a climber needs to adjust his movements to the natural convex inclination of the rocks, and avoid slippery forms of inclination, present on the other side of the mountain<sup>117</sup>. The natural object, the quality of the snow or the rock differ from the aesthetical quality of the style of ascent by the absence of neutralization of the object, in case of a purely instrumental approach. On the contrary, grace in the rhythm of the progression of ski climbers needs a difference of attitude, which is not only proper to the playing, and delimited by the conditions of that play, but as a contingency driven attitude, without signification as radical alterity, without any finality.

---

<sup>116</sup> Dufrenne, Mikel, (1989): *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, trans. by Edward S. Casey, 1<sup>st</sup> publ. in 1953, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

<sup>117</sup> First ascent of the Matterhorn succeeded from the Swiss side, and not from the Italian side because of the different inclination of the rock on both sides.

Grace in dance as in martial art or mountaineering is allowing to perceive an autonomy of the expression, as the truth of the perceived object for Merleau-Ponty, it puts away a cognitive and practical orientation but replaces it by a new meaning as movement in the whole set of movements done by the rock climber. This replacement of the functional expression resembles that operated by the painter who chooses a color in the whole set of colors in a painting, or a shape in the whole set of possible existing shapes.

### **Walking with Heaven: Style, Soft Power and Culture**

In some countries as Tibet or Switzerland, mountains attract deep symbolic archetypes, which are universal but also contextually formed, as cultural expression of a collective, what we also call soft power.

Not only collective but also individual figures stand out in History and could be mentioned in a book around walking with the earth such as the founder of Tibetology: Körösi Csoma Sándor. Körösi shows that walking can be attached to scholarly inspiration and the living example of walking on foot, through Europe to reach Central Asia, up into the highest mountains in Tibet is a unique example<sup>118</sup>.

At a time when Yoga and Western Buddhism is widely diffused in enterprises, meditation centers, neurological experimentation on the value of compassion and meditation for health and its direct impact on the brain, we see on YouTube the French Tibetan monk Mathieu Ricard, launching his *Carnets d'un moine errant* (Allary: 764pp.). What is the relation between the experience of spirituality and Eastern Asian languages and cultures in a Buddhist monastery in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, where winter season extends eight months long, and where there is not

---

<sup>118</sup> Alexander Csoma de Koros was declared as a Bodhisattva (Buddhist Saint) in 1933 in Japan.

heat, which seems a deep sign of some ludic passion for research, which transcends all empirical contingencies, and the soft power of Buddhism and East Asian culture which we all know?

This leads us to reflections on the quality of the soft power of a group of individuals or a large community in our present time. This analysis is intended to be comparative with other historical periods, which already valued the soft power of different ways of living. It is worth noting a possible gap, between the symbolic figure of some authority, and the possible message that the symbol could take on, to launch a particular way of life. Without this often very comical shift, and the ridiculousness of which should be transparently accepted, there is no playful element meeting an excellency framework of quality. At best, there remains the semblance of play which is always childish. Without good play, there is no good culture, that is to say no culture based on jousting, competition and public comparison, and no sporting desire for fair play to prevail over the opponent!

In the example of Ricard, one sees the ludic gap between writing an autobiographic work of art, the pragmatic intelligence of promoting the work in the very select Société de Lecture of Geneva with expert journalists, and the ideal of life chosen by the person, who has committed to a Buddhist simple way of life. Let's come back to the importance of this seemingly point of detail.

In the advent of all forms of collective life, a playful element is crucially important as Hunzinger shows (chap. 11). "Selling a way of life", as marketing managers and communication experts might say, can be done as finding out intelligent popular cultures, as dynamical forms and distinctive types of behaviours. All entail some sort of proto ethics of the lifestyles (here what matters is much more taste, popular outlook, fashion, etc. than being a true representative of whatever a high form of

culture). This ludic emulation could even be seen as preceding cultures as impulsion for social life. On the other hand, once a culture is historically constituted, communities, nations or subcontinents can act gradually as political great global powers with similar symbolic vehicles, but it is not “as a living fruit, separated from the mother plant” from which it originated, following Hunzinger (ibid). On the contrary, culture as a soft power “deploys itself in the playful element and as a playful element”. From a political realist point of view soft power, as an elaborate capacity to communicate about a model of excellence, is as important as being recognized as a pole of high historical achievement.

Selling a culture abroad is crucial, all political great powers recognize it across the planet at all times. Let's see some historical examples in European history since the Middle Age.

The ideal of courtly love in the 12th century, where "a whole elite" conforms to "a mannered ideal of life and love" (ibid.) is a set of signs distinctive for that period. In general we could note that the very notion of the style and of fashion entails as such a play element, as the baroque style of the 17th Century will make very clear by some kind of exaggeration. Baroque is “associated with the vision of a conscious exaggeration, of something deliberately imposing, resolutely unreal”. Such as distancing from simplicity, around 1665, and from the natural and practical, "hits its climax with the wig" (ibid.). The century of the French Enlightenment of Descartes, of Port Royal, of overseas colonisation produced the wig. Until French revolution, the fashionable to wear a wig remains for a century and a half, despite being non-natural, cumbersome and poorly hygienic. It is not as a pure caprice of fashion but in a gradual stylisation related to the opposition with the natural hairs and with anything natural as imitation of the empirical reality. 18th century Romantic style suggests other ludic styles of life, they have in common a tendency for “self-transposition of artistic and

affective life into an imaginary sphere from the past” “where figures in order not to be perceived precisely were loaded with mystery” and anguish. Is 20th century's Western American way of life (blue jeans, rock & roll and driving a car) a similar chapter of a long list of ludic developments?

Compared to Chinese medicine, Indian Yoga or Swiss watchmaking we see a homogeneous conformity, which is a condition for the existence of a subculture, with collective narratives about holistic medicine, soft physical exercise or the luxury symbol of a small country's precision and exclusiveness. It is not very clear how far are these forms of culture means for accessing ludic forms of life, and human flourishing? In fact none of the symbols need to be reflecting a message, as the wig did not have any meaning but was only the occasion for exploring a new lifestyle which remained very productive of new forms. Since 19th century, the play element has undergone a process of degradation, following the Dutch historian, as communities have become “more aware of their needs and efforts” and “the spiritual and material organisation of the society became a hindrance against the manifest action of this [ludic] factor”. (ibid.) Let us remind us for the comparison that for Heraclites all human thinking entailed “an innocent” play element, which suggest the open space of a completely ludic but partially unconscious continent. On the other side, it seems that as soon as we touch the need to decide whether an action is just or unjust, true or false, of compassion and pity the very question of style and play loses its quality of being an innocent but creative force.

## **Bibliography**

Bailly, Rémi. « Le jeu dans l'œuvre de D.W. Winnicott », *Enfances & Psy*, vol. no15, no. 3, 2001, pp. 41-45. DOI 10.391/ep.015.0041

- Beiser, Frederick C. (2018): *Weltschmerz. Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900*. Oxford: UP.
- Benovski, Jiri, *The Limits of Art On Borderline Cases of Artworks and Their Aesthetic Properties*, Springer Briefs in Philosophy, New York: Springer, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54795-0>
- Byron, Lord, *Works*, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III.
- Dufrenne, Mikel, (1989): *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*, trans. by Edward S. Casey, 1st publ. in 1953, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Frissen, Valerie, Lammes, Sybille, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens (2015): "Homo ludens 2.0: Play, media, and identity" in : *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*, Edited by Valerie Frissen, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press
- Hartmann, Karl Robert Eduard von (1879): *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewußtseins. Prolegomena Zu Jeder Künftigen Ethik*. Berlin: Dunker.
- Huizinga, Johan (1949). *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hurka, Thomas, "How Much Are Games Like Art?", *Analysis*, Vol. 81, 2, April 2021, 287–296
- Hurka, Thomas, "From golf to Grand Theft Auto, why do we love playing games?", *New Statesman*, 4 March 2019

<<https://www.newstatesman.com/2019/03/golf-grand-theft-auto-why-do-we-love-playing-games>>

International Olympic Committee, 2005, *Manual on Sport and the Environment*, Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Documents/Olympism-in-Action/Environment/Manual-on-Sport-and-the-Environment.pdf>

Jornet, Kilian, *Run or Die*, Transl. Peter Bush Boulder Colorado: Velopress, Outside Interactive, Inc. 2013

Kobiela, Filip, “The Ludic Background of Constitutive Rules in Bernard Suits”, *Argumenta* 4, 1 (2018): 125-137.

Karlsen, G. (2010): “The Beauty of a Climb”. In: Schmid, S. E. (Ed.), *Climbing – Philosophy for Everyone: Because It’s There*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Krein, Kevin, “Nature Sport and Wilderness Experience”, in: Tymowsky, Gabriela and Charlene Weaving (Eds.), *Sport and the Environment: Philosophical Dimensions*, Conference Proceeding 2012. Antigonish, Nova Scotia, pp. 2-9.

López Frías, Francisco Javier and Xavier Gimeno Monfort. “The Opposition between Instrumental and Lusory Rationality in the Utopian Proposal of Bernard Suits.” *Pensamiento* (Madrid), 2020-01-01, Vol.75 (287), p.1571-1585

Massin, Olivier, Monnoyer, Jean-Michel (2003): *Toucher et Proprioception*, in: *Voir [Barré]*, Périodique du Centre de recherche sur les aspects culturels de la vision. Le toucher. Les aspects culturels de la vision et les autres modalités perceptives, 26 : 48-73. <https://philpapers.org/archive/MASTEP.pdf>



Nagy, Gregory (2010): "Language and Meter", in: *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, E. J. Bakker (Ed.), Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, 370-387.

Nguyen, T. (2017): The Aesthetics of Rock Climbing, *Philosophers's Mag*, online at [www.philosophersmag.com/ressays/170-the-aesthetics-of-rock-climbing](http://www.philosophersmag.com/ressays/170-the-aesthetics-of-rock-climbing)

Nietzsche, F. *Works*. "The Will to Power".

O'Donovan G, Blazeovich AJ, Boreham C, Cooper AR, Crank H, Ekelund U, Fox KR, Gately P, Giles-Corti B, Gill JM, Hamer M, McDermott I, Murphy M, Mutrie N, Reilly JJ, Saxton JM, Stamatakis E. The ABC of Physical Activity for Health: a consensus statement from the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences. *J Sports Sci*. 2010 Apr; 28(6):573-91. DOI: 10.1080/02640411003671212. PMID: 20401789.

Reginster, Bernard (2006): *The Affirmation of Life*, Harvard: UP.

Ribeiro, Anna Christina (Ed.), *Continuum Companion to Aesthetics*, London: Continuum, 2012.

Ricard, Matthieu, *Carnets d'un moine errant*, Paris : Allary, 2021.

Sailors, Pam R., "Earth 0, Humans 1: The High Cost of Getting Healthy", in: *Sport and the Environment: Philosophical Dimensions*, 2012, pp.71-77.

Shaw, Christopher A. (2008): *Five Ring Circus: Myths and Realities of the Olympic Games*, Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers

Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World As Will And Idea*, Vol. 1\_3, transl. by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp. Seventh Edition London Kegan

Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. 1909. Gutenberg EBook 2011,  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-pdf.pdf>

Schrenk, M. (2014): Is proprioceptive art possible? In: Priest G., Young, D. (Eds.), *Philosophy and the Martial Arts*. Routledge, New York, pp. 101-116.

Suits, Bernard (1978/2015): *Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Broadview Reedition of the 1<sup>st</sup> ed. by Press University of Toronto Press.

The International Association for the Philosophy of Sport: Website:  
<http://iaps.net/resources/suits/>

Thoreau, Henry David, *Walking*, Myers, and David Widger, Gutenberg eBook, 1997. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1022/1022-h/1022-h.htm>

Tollance, Pascale « Child's Play? Graham Swift's Shuttlecock and Freud's Game of the Wooden Reel », *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 41, 2011, consulté le 26 octobre 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2342>

Winnicott, Donald W. "Playing: A Theoretical Statement." In *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott: Volume 8, 1967 - 1968*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016-10. <https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780190271404.001.0001/med-9780190271404-chapter-53>.