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Play as Production– Production as Game?

Towards a Critical Phenomenology of Productivity

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Abstract

Play-related products and their export have through recent decades contributed to a certain Danish image on the world level – with Lego bricks at the commercial end and adventure playgrounds at the pedagogical end. The phenomena of toy production and play exports challenge our understanding of what “play” and “game” are, and of their social as well as political significance. At the municipal level, the city of Odense – “city of Hans Christian Andersen” – is branding itself as “city of play”. On the international level, Danish play-related products have expanded on the world market. In the field of sport, Danish sport is not just elite sport, but also organized in local associations. People meet in mass summer festivals of popular sport. Folk Academies develop sport as personal development, often in an experimental way. Street sports, parkour, play and games are promoted. Civil society is a basis for the play foray of market and state. These empirical phenomena lead to some more theoretical questions. One question concerns the connection between play and Danishness. How are patterns of play and cultural identity related to each other? Other questions concern the relation between play and production. In contrast to the established understanding of play as per definition being “unproductive”, play also shows a productive power. Modernity has dissociated play and production, defining play as unproductive, and work as not-playful, and giving competitive sport priority as the ritual of industrial modernity. This can be questioned in a world of expanding high tech games and robot toys, as well as a commercial sport and entertainment industry. At a closer examination, it is not only the essence of play that is open to debate, but also how production and productivity are to be understood.

Keywords: Computer games, Danishness, Denmark, Play, Production, Productivity, Sport for all, Toy

Odense as city of play

The Danish city of Odense has tried to launch a brand as being a city of play, using the slogan: *To play is to live*. This echoes a word of the Romantic fairy tale poet Hans Christian Andersen: “To travel is to live”. For this branding, the municipality published in 2009, together with “Advisory Board for the Marketing of Odense”, a “vision flyer” that states:

To play is to live. Throughout life. Because play is joy and freedom. Play is creativity and innovation. In Odense, we want to be known as the city of play, a place where people and ideas are given every opportunity to grow. (Odense Kommune, 2009)

This vision of play was unfolded as a program for municipal policies embracing local economic policies, urban development, policies of environment, welfare policies, children’s welfare, university development and cultural policies. The chapters contained keywords like:

- From play to profit: Creating results in business is hard work ... Innovation and creativity are important resources.
- Making friends to create growth. (Urban development)
- Live life for the sake of climate, too.
- Life isn’t always fun and games. (Welfare)
- Playful children are bright children. (Robots and LEGO)
- Play with the truth ... on one campus ... scientists and artists meet. (University)
- Play with shapes. Culture is play. (Odense Kommune, 2009).

If the slogan *To play is to live* is understood so broadly, one may conclude that fundamentally everything is (or can be) play, whether economy or sport, science or welfare. In this case, the word of *play* could be read as just some smart rhetoric and superficial logo – or as an adaption to the positive values, which in sellers’ language as well as in educational terminology have been ascribed to play: creativity and innovation. Play is good. This appeals especially to the so-called “creative class”.

Nevertheless, there is a difference whether one talks about *To play is to live*, or about: *To work is to live*. Or: *To produce is to live*. Or also: *To do sport is to live*. There is good reason to pay attention to the nuances and undertones here. And this is more than just a question of intonation: If

play is put into the center – though rhetorically – this may move the municipal administration into a new direction. Whether real policies correspond to this, is, however, another question.

Danish play and games for the world market

Odense shows as a municipal case some features, which can also be found in Denmark’s national profile on the international level. For instance, Denmark chose for the World Exposition in Shanghai 2010 to present itself as a country of play.



Shanghai World Expo 2010: Danish prince Henrik plays an old traditional game from Gerlev International Playground in the Danish pavilion. (With friendly permission from Gerlev Idrætshøjskole.)

World expositions have for more than 150 years established frameworks for states and nations to present their products. Here, one displayed the productivity of the country and innovative ideas for sale. In Paris 1900, St. Louis 1904 and London 1908, world expositions included Olympic Games, with their “sport as national representation” approach – while similar international expositions had also health as their focus. For Shanghai 2010, the Danish group chose play as a motif for national branding, with among others Hans Christian Andersen’s Little Mermaid,

bicycles and curved bike routes, parkour running, and traditional village games (Ingels, 2012, 32-47).

The Danish branding in Shanghai did not happen in an empty space of good intentions alone, but it was based on some of the products of play and game, which have made Denmark well-known internationally. Among these products for export, the bricks of Lego have become the greatest success. From 1932, the play-toy enterprise Lego produced wooden toy and had its break-through after 1958 when its plastic bricks with knobs became patented. Lego bricks were connected in a system where all single elements could be combined (Lego, 2014). The Duplo bricks of Lego are today paradigmatic objects for children's play, for their playful discovery and exploration of the world, of others, and of themselves (Dietrich, Ehni, Eichberg & Nagbøl, 2013, 64-90).

Besides the bricks, the enterprise also launched other products, mostly in the field of play, such as figure games, board games, computer games and racer games, often linked to successes of popular culture like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars*. The figures were sometimes integrated into the brick system. The more complicated games remained, however, in the shadow of the success attained by the simple Lego bricks. There were, however, chances of expansion in Lego theme parks. After the first park was opened in Billund in 1968, it became an international export article with amusement parks in Windsor in England (1996), San Diego in USA (1999), Günzburg in Tyskland (2002), Winter Haven in Florida (2011) and Johor Bahru in Malaysia (2012) as well as several indoors mini Legolands in different places of the world. The enterprise also opened Lego Stores, up to 100 shops in Europe and North America (Lunde, 2012; Thorsted, 2013).

A minor, but also remarkable success was achieved by the enterprise Kompan, known for its play trestles. The enterprise started in 1970 in Odense and brands itself on the market as "one of the world's leading producers of playground installations and sport play solutions for all age groups" (Kompan, 2014).

By the comic strip *Rasmus Klump*, Danish culture of play established itself on the world market, too. This children's series was created in 1951 by Carla and Vilhelm Hansen, telling tales of a small funny bear Rasmus Klump [Swedish and Finnish: Rasmus Nalle, English: Bruin, German, French, Italian and Portuguese: Petzi], who travels and plays through the world together with his friends, the penguin Pingo, the pelican Pelle, the ostrich Knalle and the seal Skæg. In all parts of the world – from the North Pole to the Egypt of pyramids – the group of Rasmus Klump meets friendly animals, who enjoy the visit. The series began as a simple comic strip but has ended up in more

than 30 million newspapers. In 1952, the first album was published by the publisher Carlsen, the booklets being sold in more than 20 countries with over 20 million copies. In 1997 and 2000, also TV series were produced about Rasmus Klump (Rasmus Klump, 2013).

A similar playful friendliness characterizes the design of Bo Bendixen. Bo Bendixen started his own design office in 1973 and opened his first gallery in 1982. In 1991, Bo Bendixen obtained his international break-through when his design of simple, cozy animals and other figures was warmly welcome especially in Japan. He commented: “My aim is the same, always – to convey a positive, happy message, to put you in a good mood” (Bo Bendixen, 2013).

From cozy to scary – body and technology

Into other directions than the cozy animals and the simple bricks, technological games have also unfolded the Danish approach to play. Danish producers marketed especially GPS games in the landscape (Pedersen, 2009), play installations with an educational background (Vestergaard, 2012) and robot play toys (Lund, 2007). Also in these cases, one appealed to the idea that “play is good”, but it is still difficult to discover a particular Danish profile in these approaches.

This, however, succeeded in a surprising way by the computer game *Limbo*. In 2010, it received international attention and gained in short time several prizes. In the game, a nameless small boy moves through a wood landscape in black-and-white, at the border with hell. Expressionist imagery creates a scary mood (Limbo, 2014). As compared with the happy cozy figures of Rasmus Klump and Bo Bendixen, *Limbo* presents a strictly opposite atmosphere. Uniquely, the game avoids patterns of competition, which are normally dominating and make computer games sports-like. In contrast, *Limbo* replaced the system of points by artist creation of a scary atmosphere opening up for wondering and surprise – without any solution. This may be regarded as a particular feature born out of certain Danish traditions of non-competitiveness.

Other computer games have tried to combine body and screen culture in original ways. In an experimental way, one constructed funny tournaments moving in the interface between technological device and the participants’ bodies. These games bridged between high-tech and old village games, which were characterized by culture of laughter (Wilson, 2011; 2012). Here it became clear that the production of play and game not only unfolds on the commercial market, but also has roots in the popular culture of civil society.

That the export of play and game is not only a matter of commerce, was also shown by the Nordic adventure playground, *skrammellegeplads* [trash playground]. This invention became a hit in the field of educational culture and placed Denmark on the world map of what in England is called *Playwork*. The first adventure playground was established for a housing association in Emdrup in 1943 by the garden architect C. Th. Sørensen. In contrast to the dominating functionalist playground with its standardized set of installations, children were offered planks, boxes and old automobiles to build and play according to their own creativity. The *skrammellegeplads* became the starting point for new genres of adventure playgrounds, building playgrounds, and nature playgrounds, all trying to replace standardization by playful do-it-yourself activities (Skrammellegepladsen, 2014).

In another way, playful, creative and innovative elements entered the field of higher education by *KaosPiloterne* in Århus. The education of “chaos pilotes” started in 1991. With its focus on project and process leadership, it uses play for international training of creativity and entrepreneurship. This appealed both to enterprises like SAS, Lego, Carlsberg, Grundfos, and Novo Nordisk – as well as to organizations in civil society such as trade unions, Red Cross and Refugee relief (KaosPilots, 2014).

In connection with the Danish tradition of Peoples Academies, the so-called *folkehøjskoler*, a particular play-educational practice developed at the International Playground in Gerlev. At Gerlev Sports Academy, courses in traditional village games and play had been started in the 1980s. This was followed up by historiographical play research, and in 1999 the “International Playground” (*Gerlev Legepark*) was opened as a public attraction. The Playground sent advisers, “play patrols” and former students of the sports academy as “play gangs” out into the country, among others in connection with the so-called *Store Legedage* [Great Play-Days], which during the 1980s became part of urban event culture. Play and games also entered into the large urban carnivals and into the Roskilde rock festivals. All this was connected with similar practices in other Nordic countries and in Western Europe (Flanders, Bretagne) and gave inspiration to initiatives in Poland and China. The play culture of *Gerlev* had a historical romantic starting point, which was documented by its original name *Idrætshistorisk Værksted* [Sport Historical Workshop], but the Playground sold play events also to enterprises, and also experimented with technological innovations (Eichberg, 2010, chap. 9; Eichberg & Nørgaard, 2005; Møller, 2010;).

That play also could contribute to policies and education of peace was shown by the *Open Fun Football Schools*, which started at Danish initiative in the Balkans after the previous civil war. Here,

playful football and play festivals were arranged as framework for an inter-ethnic encounter for peace. Later on, the organization Cross Cultures Project Association broadened its activities to the Caucasus, Arab countries and Afghanistan. It also contributed to establish an academy for sports leaders in Bhutan (Eichberg, 2010, chap. 13; Sterchele, 2008).

A further initiative towards policies of play can be seen in architecture and especially in the practice of *Lokale og Anlægsfonden* [Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities]. In connection with the sports critique of the 1970s, the established standardized forms of sports architecture and sports facilities with their dominance of the straight line and the right angle had been questioned. An architectural competition in 1988 at the Gerlev Sports Academy for a new movement house received support from Ministry of Culture and evoked several playful, eccentric and labyrinthine architectural designs (Eichberg & Riiskjær, 1989). This encouraged the Ministry of Culture to establish a permanent institution to promote innovation and cultural creativity in the field of sport facilities and planning. Since 1993, the Foundation offered consulting and financial support to experimental innovation, supporting among others elliptical swimming halls, ice skating rinks in urban centers, and installation for parkour and playgrounds (Eichberg, 1999 and 2000). Similar tendencies became visible in the world of private enterprises and planning, where challenging architectural designs were combined with play and parkour (Ingels, 2012).

The diversity of Danish play traditions and innovation, thus, questions the alleged homogenization of global modernity.

Playful sport and instrumental entertainment

Some of the named initiatives can be seen in connection with the particular profile of Danish sport as *popular* movement culture, *folkelig idræt* (Eichberg 2010). Danish sport is not only – as in some other countries – hierarchically ordered in terms of achievement, up to the elite level. It is also based on local associations and finds among others its expression in large popular gatherings during the summer time. Sport is framed as “personal development” in People’s Academies, often in playful and experimental forms. A particular play culture can also be found in streetsports like Parkour. For all these activities, facilities are planned with cultural and innovative ambitions, with the already named Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities as organizational frame.

Playful folk sport in civil society constitutes, thus, a basis for the international ventures of the market. This particular profile has generated the idea that Denmark – in an international perspective

– should become a model country for popular mass sport. Danish sport policy in this way is seen as something other than that which is offered all around the world, in places such as Los Angeles, Beijing or Dubai where it is organized on global premises. Moreover, it is understood that games can be played on other fields than those standardized by Olympic sports scheduling (Brandt, 2010).

It should, however, be remarked that Danish popular sport as such is not identical with play. It includes also disciplinary practices from the exercise tradition of gymnastics and fitness-oriented activities, which are not especially playful.

Furthermore all this does not mean that play is an unproblematic activity. The romantic idea of “good play” is expressed among play-enthusiastic educationalists raving about play, creativity, innovation, and free learning (several contributions in Eyermann, Winther & Jørgensen, 2013; Knoop, 2002). And public health campaigns follow up using play as instrument to promote certain “boring” messages by fun, lightness, or what is called “edutainment” (Andersen, Hvem, 2009).

Attempts of practical play as well as uncritical expectations towards play circulate also in the world of private enterprise, where one sees play as a smart way to improve work climate. Enterprises hire project consultants who using play and games as the media, are expected to optimize the efficiency of the employees. Indeed, play and games employed in this way appear to have two dimensions: (i) work-related production; and (ii) interpersonal cooperation (Andersen, Power, 2009). The second dimension is not alone in being open to exploitation by play and games. Talking about “playification”, one combines *play* with other positive-words like creativity and innovation, communication and cooperation, joint identity building and wellbeing, inner-directed readiness, existential and ontological connection, non-linear self-organization and authenticity, trust and empathy (Andersen, 2009 a and b; Thorsted, 2013).

Other problems of “using” play arise in the context of militarism. The game *Fredericia Battle 1849* reenacted a battle between German (Schleswig Holstein) rebels on one side (who were supported by Prussian troops) and troops of the Danish monarchy on the other. The local initiators of the game merchandized it as a “location-based, alternate reality, pervasive role-playing game”. This marketing language describes a “role-game”, which has two targets. On one hand it should entertain people by the expectation of “becoming a soldier and ending as general” (as if the fate of the soldier was not rather to be killed or to kill other people), while on the other hand, it offers a “historical drama ... what it means to be Danish today” (and this should “create a national feeling of identity by common cultural heritage”) (Konzak, L. in Vestergaard, 2012, 88-97). The game is described in a patriotic and militarist style. This happened at a time when Denmark – under the

leadership of State Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, later General Secretary of the NATO – was driven into wars again, now in Iraq and Afghanistan. Play and game entered in the game into the opposite of what peace policy had on the agenda, for instance by the Open Fun Football Schools.

Play is, as this shows, not just a harmless entertainment. Play is a phenomenon of contradictions that mirrors societal contradictions.

Play and identity – play culture and the people

The contribution of play to production and export challenges our understanding of play and raises several political and theoretical questions. One of these questions concerns the connection between play and identity. Why is just Denmark branding itself by play? What makes that Denmark as “country of play” sounds – taken with a grain of salt – more convincing than, for instance, America (in spite of Disney and Hollywood),¹ England (in spite of football), Germany (in spite of the Brothers Grimm) and maybe even Sweden (in spite of Pippi Longstocking)?

The Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang (1895-1976) once expressed his personal relation to the Danish tradition by the words:

If I had the choice, I would prefer to be Hans Christian Andersen. In order to write the story of the Little Mermaid – or to be the Mermaid myself... (Yutang, 1944, 80).

This fairy tale fit, indeed, well into Lin Yutang’s philosophy of life. Basing on the classical Chinese literary tradition, he developed a sort of poetic materialist phenomenology where dining, laughter, dream, and play (*playful curiousness*) were important elements for human life.

A context for the Chinese philosopher’s interest in Danish fairy tale can also be seen in the fundamental contradiction going through the work of Lin Yutang: between the tramp and the soldier. The tramp or scamp represented the rascal or scallywag who goes curved ways, follows his own playful curiousness, and moves outside control. The scamp is in family with the Western popular figure “Mary Mary quite contrary” and what in Danish is called *Rasmus Modsat* [Rasmus always opposing]. The soldier, in contrast, is disciplined, obedient, and submissive. When Lin Yutang

¹ About America as a combined “hyper-real simulacrum” – with New York’s urban marathon and Las Vegas as hologram, the jogger, the rap gymnast, and the bodybuilder, Hollywood and Disneyland, Halloween and tv-laughter, but also as desert and drive, without metaphysics and phantasy in American life – Baudrillard, 1986/2004 has presented a picture of delirious paradoxes.

wrote his philosophy of the scamp, Fascism dominated Europe and glorified the soldier as model. The Chinese philosophy of the tramp could, thus, be read as a poetic Anti-Fascist narrative. At the same time, the Danish cartoonist Storm P created witty drawings showing tramps who were commenting life by their popular wisdom. The tramp in a Danish version met the scamp in a Chinese version.

From the Chinese tradition, Lin Yutang adopted as counter-image to the Fascist soldier the mythical monkey king Sun Wukong. Sun Wukong is one of China's most long-lasting literary figures, sustainable from the 16th century to the era of Mao Tse Tung and to contemporary Manga comic strips. In a playful and yet dangerous way, the Taoist monkey king is here joking, there recognizing hidden demons, and always ready to swing his stick in the martial art of the Shaolin monks.

But back to the Little Mermaid and China: Lin Yutang's preference was much more than just his own personal matter, and so it had a logic that the Little Mermaid in 2002 received a central place in the Danish pavilion at the World Exposition in Shanghai. Side by side with Danish traditional games, the Little Mermaid gave a picture of Denmark as a country of play and fairy tale.

Play, thus, opens up for questions about identity and difference between the peoples and their folk cultures. The French play researcher Pierre Parlebas (2003, 16) has pointed this by the words:

Social groups and people in general distinguish themselves as much by their games as they do by their languages: the Scottish Caber tossing, American Baseball, English Cricket, Basque Pelote, African dugout races or the Afghan Buzkashi are practices that are as distinctive as their homes or the structure of their genetic heritage.

This can, however, be misunderstood: Denmark is not Tivoli (the famous amusement park in Copenhagen), and Danish identity cannot directly be connected with Bamse's picture-book (a classic of Danish children's television) and Rasmus Klump, with a plaything monarchy with its old-fashioned plaything guard, or with the *nisser*, those little dwarfs appearing in Christmas time over the whole country (Eichberg, 1987). If one talks about Danish play in the world, this is not a matter of "national character". And: Play is not the same as play culture. One cannot directly conclude from single games to their larger cultural connection.

There are, however, connections which deserve some closer examination, indeed. For instance, there are relations between the way of playing and the players' – or a play culture's – equality.

Anthropological research has shown how hierarchical Christian power and subsequent totalitarian regimes have suppressed popular games (Hamayon, 2013). Though Fascist sport had good times in the 1930s, nobody would tell about Fascist play. Denmark is regarded as one of the most egalitarian countries in the world (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Could there be a connection between social equality and The Country of Play? – Anyway, it looks as if play stands in a complex connection with cultural patterns of sociality and identity.

Play and production

If play and games can contribute to modern production, export, branding, and product development, some theoretical questions arise concerning the relation between play and production, between play and work.

Normally, the dominating view is that play and work constitute a fundamental contradiction. Johan Huizinga (1956, 20), the classical historian and philosopher of play and culture, delivered the long-lasting definition that play is not dependent of any material interest and does not serve any utility. Play is per definition free and unproductive. This was followed up by – among others – the French philosopher Roger Caillois (1958/2001, 16). And the Danish expert in traditional games, Jørn Møller (2010, 148-166), found for this relation a simple formula: If the relation between process and result is larger than 1, we talk about play. If, in contrast, the relation between process and result is less than 1, we talk about work. Expressed in a dichotomist form, this means that work has its place in the realm of need, while play has its place in the realm of freedom. Seriousness is confronted with pleasure and fun. The rational production is fundamentally different from “irrational” play. On one hand, work proceeds under control, on the other hand play produces – and lives by – surprise. This dichotomist configuration, thus, confronts productive work with unproductive play. The *unproductive* character of play has therefore entered into attempts of definition of play, again and again.

At a closer examination, however, the relation is more complex. Problems of the relation can for instance be illustrated by the phenomenon of sport. Modern sport was not just a continuation of old games – whether traditional popular games or ritual games like the Olympics of ancient Greece. Sport took its form in late 18th century’s England and later on the continent as a specific way by movement and movement games to produce results in centimeters, grams, seconds, or points (Eichberg, 1978; Guttmann 1978). The stop watch was developed since the 1730s and became soon

an icon for the measurement, quantification, and record production of sport. By this process, older games (as well as non-game movements) were transformed from play and festivity to productive work. The ball – still nowadays the most popular device of play – became an instrument for the production of measurable results and for the construction of a new type of ranking. In sport, the dominant aristocratic hierarchies were replaced by new pyramids based on the ranking of achievement or success. Sport grew out of the configuration of productivism and became the foremost ritual of industrial production.

Alongside this sport-production connection, some have tried – especially from a neo-Marxist perspective – to place sport in a field called “reproduction” (Fischer & Meiners, 1973). Reproduction is the backside of production – comprising among others female house work, feeding the family, relaxation, and the birth of children. As reproductive activity, sport would meet with play and game – as leisure activity. Thus also here, play enters into the configuration of productivism, though in another way. The whole understanding of play as a form of production or as reproduction depends, however, from what production and productivity is. And these notions are not as clear as one might assume.

The problem of the relation between play and work shows in the children’s comic strip about Rasmus Klump and his friends. The narrative begins by the animals building a ship, “Mary”. Shipbuilding is a classic example of work activity. This is what happens on the shipyard, and shipyards deliver a typical image of a country’s production. But in the case of Rasmus Klump, this work is a play. The accompanying fun and laughter of the cozy animals confirm this.

Production – with its connection of work, reproduction, and productivity – has been in the center of modern thinking through two hundred years of industrial culture. And yet, it cannot be taken as given, as it is both historically and societally relative (see below).

Therefore we are confronted with the philosophical challenge whether there could be thought something third besides play and work. The question is affirmed – and politically emphasized – by the named empirical phenomena of “play as product”. And if the discourse about the playification of work should be more than just smart new-speak trying to sell sour, alienated work as funny play, one could in the terminology of “old modernity” talk about “productive play” (which, indeed, some management authors have done; Andersen 2009 a, 11). This talk contradicts the usual definition of play as unproductive activity.

What is production? What is productivity?

With the empirical observations about the production and export of play at hand – and with the arising philosophical questions about the relation between play and work – we do not only meet the old question again what play is. But we also meet the problem what production is. Normally we think that economists have answered to this question, and we rely on their definitions. This is questioned by the economists' discussion of the 19th century, the so-called controversy on productivity (Burkhardt, 1974; Foucault, 1966/1971).

The question of who was productive, appeared for first time in the late 18th century, just before the French Revolution created a new order of the social relations. The French Physiocrats, an important group inside the growing economic studies, began to oppose against the dominating mercantilism by underlining that all productivity finally came from agriculture, as all utile things and values had their basis in the cultivated earth. Therefore, the farmer was the true productive producer. In social reality, this argument represented the interests of the land owners, i.e. of the land-owning aristocracy, defending themselves against the sectors of trade and of manufacturers. There was, however, more on the agenda than certain class interests – a new myth was born. Economy, which so far had been knowledge of house-holding, became now something new, a knowledge of production. And this is what it remained until nowadays. By confronting a “classe productive” with a “classe sterile”, the Physiocrats created a long-lasting discourse, which became fundamental for modern self-understanding (Burkhardt, 1974).

Inside this modern industrial paradigm, however, fundamental disagreement arose. Against the Physiocratic view, Adam Smith developed the bourgeois liberal assumption that all productivity came from industrial production, from what he called “the productive powers of labor”. Here, other interests stood in the background, the interests of the owners of enterprises and industrial technological “forces of production”. Karl Marx criticized the bourgeois assumption giving it a new inner-industrial turn: The workers were after all the productive class *par excellence*. This created larger inner-Marxist discussions about productive versus unproductive work (Pietsch 1979). The German founder of “national economics”, Friedrich List, however, disagreed with all these valuations, and asked why teachers should not also be regarded as productive. If the assumption was that a farmer was productive by breeding pigs, and the teacher taught young people how to breed pigs, was the teacher not at least as productive as the farmer – and may be more? Here, productivism in some respect was doubled by launching “the production of the productive force”.

There arose, thus, a lasting disagreement among economists about what production and productivity concretely were – and thus also how to best understand “reproduction”. Nevertheless there was agreement on one point: that productivity was fundamental for the functioning of society and economy. The controversy of productivity raved all through the 19th century – and never found a solution. In 1909, a German congress of economists decided to finish the debate as being insoluble. “We have no measure for the productivity of national economics”, the main speaker concluded. This did not mean, however, that the terminology of production and productivity disappeared, but from now on, productivity was operationalized by linking it to the prize, which certain wares or services obtained on the market. “Productive” was to be understood as what attained a monetary value or reward. Under this aspect, however, even the prostitute – the classical figure of *unproductive work* during the whole debate – was productive, as she earned her money on the market, and her services were rewarded. Thus, from having a value all its own, productivity became something dependent of the market (Burkhardt, 1974; Eichberg, 2003).

The controversy of productivity was, thus, a typically modern debate about an industrial myth – while at the same time, its positions depended of concrete class interests. And yet, the controversy had a common critical point. The critical message of the debate was that it was important for society to define certain *unproductive classes*, and these were in the very beginning monarchs and their administrators, soldiers – and prostitutes. This view could – in its time, which was the era of European revolutions – have subversive, revolutionary implications.

The critical point of this debate is far from being outdated. From right-wing side, one has argued against the so-called unproductive bureaucrats of the welfare state, against young people wasting their time by unproductive travels and studies – and against “parasitic” immigrants. But what about the soldier, who does not produce things and values, but trains for a work of destruction? And what – asks the left wing – about the broker and estate agent, who merchandizes dwellings without building them, and what about the banker and speculator at the stock exchange? The prostitute, whom all agreed of being an unproductive existence, gets a market prize for her sex work – and is, thus, productive? So, besides “productive play”, does something like “unproductive work” also exist?

The study of play and the problem of “productive work” versus “unproductive play”, thus leads to the myth of productivity and the rich intellectual debate confronting, mostly in a dichotomist way of evaluation:

- productive versus unproductive work (Pietsch, 1979)
- production versus destruction (Clausen, 1988 – destructive being both the work of the soldier and the ecological consequences of productive work)
- production versus reproduction, the latter being mostly associated with female work, the first with male work (Prokop, 1976, 65-82; Ästhetik, 1982)
- productive existence versus parasitic existence, often directed against ethnic minority groups like Jews, gypsies, and immigrants (Eichberg, 2011).

In spite of all the critical questions and contradictions that have arisen, production and productivity have remained powerful myths dominating the thinking of industrial modernity. Economy continues to be politically steered according to the *Gross National Product* (GNP). Alternatives like *Gross National Happiness* as applied in Bhutan have remained marginal, obtaining a certain intellectual sympathy, but lacking vigorous effect. In this respect, play can be seen as a subversive phenomenon, questioning the self-evidence of hegemonic productivist imagination. While the dissociative definition of play as unproductive was a part of the modern myth of productivity, a differential phenomenology of play can uncover a complex multitude of relations between play and production. Educational playwork, the playification of work in enterprises, play in entertainment industry and in advertisement industry as well as the Danish export of play, may disclose something third: Is the opposite of play maybe not work, but depression – as the play researcher Brian Sutton-Smith (1997, 198) has concluded?

The study of play under current challenges

The study of play as a lens of critical philosophy upon work and production may obtain particular significance in connection with three important tendencies in current society – the attention to quality of life, the concerns of the body, and the change of production towards digital networking, are flowerings of this perspective.

Modern welfare society asks more and more insistently; what is the connection between play, work, quality of life, and happiness? There has been increasing focus on international measurement and comparison of social capital – and it has shown that Denmark lies at the top concerning mutual trust, satisfaction with life, and happiness (Svendsen & Svendsen, 2006). In connection with democracy and with the significance of social equality (Wilkinson/Pickett, 2009), this may

contributed to a particular attention towards the Danish case, which the philosopher Francis Fukuyama (2011, 14-19) put under the title of “Getting to Denmark”. It remains open, how our particular case – the Danish contribution to play – is related to this. The trialectical – i.e. more than dialectical – relation between work, play, and depression, as quoted from Sutton-Smith, may point into this direction.

Another tendency concerns the attention to the body. This concern, which has developed through recent decades, had different roots: a move from the hard work of production towards consumer culture, the ageing of Western societies, feminism reclaiming the female body from patriarchy, new ecological conscience, a new uncertainty about the body following cosmetic and transplant surgery, virtual reality medias, and body-machine combinations as well as – recently – the provocation by Muslim body display (such as the use of hijab). Some of the body cultural innovations are related to play, while others are not. Anyway, the silence about play in some standard works about the body in society (Cregan, 2012; Shilling, 2012) is inappropriate. Though the identification of sport with play and game is usual, the relation is much more complex. And if sport is a form of play producing results, this also touches the connection between play and productivity.

A third tendency concerns current changes in the world of what so far has been called production. Digital networking replaces more and more the traditional industrial production where human beings earlier had moved and created material. Enterprises like Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Apple invade fields of industrial making, thus threatening established production enterprises like BMW, Daimler, Bosch, Thyssen, Krupp, and Siemens. Digital network programs “produce” by their data sets things (like cars), which – for instance by car sharing – move along data networks through the city. Human beings, in this new world of making, are no longer the actors of production, but rather a factor of insecurity (Jung 2014). What does this mean for the understanding of production as the basis of modern life – and for our self-understanding? And which new role has play in this context? These are questions for another day. Nevertheless, the critical philosophy of play does not only concern our understanding of play as such (in its deep seated but restrictive associations with children, fun, entertainment, leisure, learning, and creativity). Yet it may also lead us to a deeper and critical understanding of what production and productivity are. Play enlightens us about the dominant myths on which modern society of production has built its self-understanding. Play raises new questions: Play is to live – it is to laugh – it is to question – it is to produce – but what and how? In epistemological perspective this points towards a differential phenomenology –

both of play and of production. Neither does play exist as one unified phenomenon, nor does production. Both underlie societal patterns and historical change.

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