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Oasis of Happiness: Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play

Eugen Fink
(1905-1975)

Translated by **Ian Alexander Moore**
and **Christopher Turner**

Eugen Fink (1905 – 1975) is a German philosopher who studied with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, later becoming Heidegger's colleague at Freiburg University. The following essay is a translation of "Oase des Glücks: Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels," in Eugen Fink, **Spiel als Weltsymbol, Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 7**, ed. Cathrin Nielsen and Hans Rainer Sepp (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Karl Alber, 2010).

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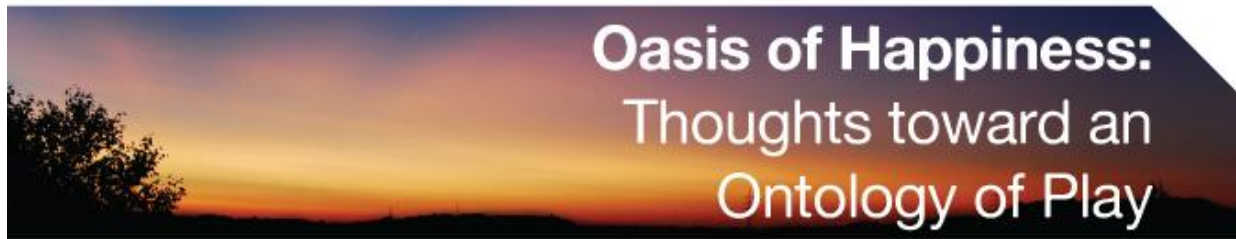
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Insight into the great significance of play³ within the structure⁴ of human existence is, in our century that is plagued by the racket of machines, on the rise for the leading intellects of cultural criticism, the pioneers of modern pedagogy, and academics of anthropological disciplines. It permeates the self-consciousness of the contemporary human being to an astounding degree, a consciousness that is reflected in literature and is also documented in the passionate interest of the masses in play and sport. Play is affirmed and cultivated as a vital impulse of independent worth with its own status. It is thought to be a remedy for the harms of a contemporary technocratic civilization. And it is extolled as a rejuvenating, life-renewing power—like a plunge back into a morning-fresh, primeval condition and plastic creativity. Certainly there were times in human history that bore the mark of play more than our own, times that were more cheerful, more relaxed, more playful, times that knew more leisure and had closer contact with the heavenly Muses—but no age had more objective play-possibilities and play-opportunities, because none had at its disposal so gigantic a life-apparatus. Playgrounds and sports fields are part of urban planning. Customary games in all lands and nations are brought into international contact. Toys are

manufactured through industrial mass production. But the question remains open as to whether our age has achieved a deeper and more compelling understanding of the *essence*⁵ of play, whether it has at its disposal a comprehensive perspective on the manifold manifestations of play, whether it has adequate insight into the *ontological meaning* of the phenomenon of play, whether it knows philosophically what play and playing⁶ *are*. With this, we touch on the problem of an ontology of play.

In what follows, I will attempt to *reflect* on the curious and peculiar ontological character of human play, to formulate its⁷ structural moments conceptually, and to indicate the speculative concept of play in a preliminary manner. To some, this may appear to be a dry and abstract affair. Such people would prefer to immediately feel a breeze of the wafting lightness of playing life, of its productive fullness, its effervescent richness and its inexhaustible charm. The witty essay, which plays with the listener or reader to a certain extent, and which elicits the magical subtlety of words and things in surprising word-plays, appears to be the appropriate stylistic element for a treatise on play. For, to speak *seriously* about play or even with the grim seriousness of the word-quibbler or concept-splitter in the end stands as a bald contradiction and a terrible corruption of play. To be sure, philosophy has, in the case of Plato⁸, for instance, ventured the light, winged course even for great thoughts and contemplated play in such a way that this thinking itself became an elevated play of spirit. But to this belongs Attic salt.⁹

The course of our simple and sober reflection is divided into three parts: 1. the preliminary characteristic of the phenomenon of play; 2. the structural analysis of play; 3. the question concerning the connection between play and being.¹⁰

I

Play is a phenomenon of life that everyone is acquainted with first hand. Each person already played at some point and can speak from his own experience about it. Thus it does not have to do with an object of research that must be first discovered and laid bare. Play is universally known. Each of us is acquainted with playing and a multitude of forms of play. Indeed, from the testimony of his own experience each was already at

some point a player. Familiarity with play is more than merely individual; it is a collective, public familiarity. Play is a well-known and common fact of the social world. One lives from time to time in play. One engages in it, performs it. One is acquainted with it as a possibility of our own activity.¹¹ In this way, the individual is not encapsulated or imprisoned within his solitude. In playing we are certain of our social contact with our fellow human beings in a particular¹² intensity. Every kind of play, even the stubborn play of the loneliest child, has an interpersonal horizon. That we thus live *in* play, that we do not come upon it as an extrinsic occurrence, points to the human being as the “subject” of play. Does he alone play? Doesn’t the animal also play, doesn’t the surge of life’s exuberance rise in the heart of every living creature? Biological research offers amazing descriptions of animal behavior, behavior that resembles human play in its mode of manifestation¹³ and in the motor forms of its expression. But the critical question emerges as to whether that which appears similar in external form is similar *ontologically*. I am not here contesting that a biological concept of the behavior of play can be established on good grounds, such that human and animal appear related. Nevertheless, it is not yet¹⁴ decided which mode of being has in each case the similar looking behavior. This problem could be resolved plausibly only when the constitution of human being and the animal’s way of being are ontologically elucidated and determined in advance. We are of the opinion that human play has its own genuine meaning—only in illicit metaphors could one speak of animal play or even of the play of the ancient gods. Ultimately, it comes down precisely to *how* we use the term “play,” to which fullness of meaning we intend thereby, to which contour and which conceptual transparency we are able to give to this concept.

We are asking about human play. And in so doing, let us inquire first of all into precisely the everyday familiarity with this phenomenon. Playing does not simply occur in our life like the vegetative processes; it is always a *sensibly* illuminated occurrence, a performance that is experienced. We live in the enjoyment of the act of play (which, mind you, presupposes no reflexive self-consciousness). In many cases of intense abandonment to play we are far removed from any reflection—and yet all play is maintained in a comprehensive self-association of human life. The everyday, accessible take on the matter [*Auslegung*], a generally accepted “interpretation

[*Interpretation*]" that has come to predominate as self-evident, belongs to the familiarity with play as well. According to this interpretation, play is valid as a *marginal* phenomenon of human life, as a peripheral appearance, as an only occasionally illuminating possibility of existence.¹⁵ Clearly, the great emphases of our earthly existence lie in other dimensions. Indeed, one sees how prevalent play is, the vigorous interest that human beings have in play, the intensity with which they carry it out—but one nevertheless commonly contrasts play, as “rest,” as “relaxation,” as cheerful idleness, with the serious and responsible activity of life. One says that the life of the human being is fulfilled in rigorous struggling and striving to attain insight, in striving after virtue and competence, after reputation, dignity and honor, after power and prosperity and the like. Play has, in contrast, the character of an occasional interruption, of a *break*, and is related to the genuine, serious carrying out of life in a sort of analogous manner to the way in which sleep is related to wakefulness. The human being must occasionally unharness the yoke of drudgery, get loose from the pressure of incessant strivings, disencumber himself from the weight of business, release himself from the confinement of organized time into a more casual relation with time, where time becomes expendable, indeed even so ample that we drive it away again with a “pastime.” In the economy of managing our lives we alternate between “tension” and “relaxation,” between business and diversion; we follow the well-known prescription of “rough weeks” and “joyful celebrations.” Thus, in the rhythm of conducting one’s life, play appears to assume a legitimate, albeit limited, role. It is valid as a “supplement,” as a complementary phenomenon, as a relaxing pause, as a recreational activity, as a holiday from the burdens of duties, as something that cheers us up in the severe and gloomy landscape of our life. Ordinarily, one determines what play is by contrasting it with the seriousness of life, obligatory ethical disposition, work, the sober sense of reality in general. One conceives it more or less as trifling and amusing nonsense, as an unbounded roaming in the airy realm of fantasy and empty possibilities, as a running away from the opposition of things into a dreamy, utopian realm. But precisely in order to not fall captive to the Danaidean daemon of the modern world of work, in order to not unlearn laughing as a result of ethical rigorism, in order to not fall captive to mere activity, play is recommended to contemporary human beings by cultural diagnosticians—as a therapeutic aid for the sick soul, as it were. But “how” is the nature of play understood in the case of such well-intended

advice? Does it still count as a marginal phenomenon—¹⁶ in contrast to seriousness, genuineness, work? Do we suffer, so to speak, merely from an excess of work, from a manic frenzy for work, a gloomy, unilluminated seriousness? Do we have need of a little of the divine sense of lightness and of the joyous lightness of play, in order to again come close to the “birds of the sky” and the “lilies of the field”? Should play loosen up only a mental [*seelisch*] tension from which the contemporary human being with his immense machinery of life suffers? As long as, in such trains of thought, one still naively operates within the popular antitheses of “work and play,” of “play and the seriousness of life,” and so forth, play is *not* understood in the content and depth of its being. It remains in the contrasting shadow of the putative counter-phenomena, and is thereby obscured and distorted. It counts as what is non-serious, what is non-obligatory and non-actual, as caprice and idleness. In positively recommending the curative effect of play, it becomes evident that one still observes it as a marginal manifestation, as a peripheral counterweight, as a seasoning for the heavy meal of our being, as it were.

Whether, however, even the phenomenal character of play is grasped appropriately by such a perspective is more than questionable. In its appearance [*Anschein*], admittedly, the life of adults no longer shows much of the elated charm of playful existence; their “games” are too often techniques of passing the time that have become routine and that betray their origin in boredom. Seldom are adults able to play without inhibition. However, play in children still appears to be an intact sphere of existence. Play is acceptable as an element of childhood. But soon the course of life drives out such a “sphere,” shattering the intact world of childhood, and the rougher winds of unprotected life take the upper hand: duty, care, and work tie down the life-energy of the young, adolescent human being. The more obvious the seriousness of life becomes, the more obviously, too, does play disappear in regards to its scope and significance. It is extolled as an upbringing “suitable for children” when this metamorphosis from a playing to a working human being is brought about without hard and brusque ruptures, when work is brought before the child almost as play—as a sort of methodical and disciplined play—when one slowly lets the heavy and pressing weight come to the fore. In this way one wants to preserve as much as possible of the spontaneity, the fantasy and initiative of playing. One wants to achieve from child’s

play a continuous access to a sort of creative joy of work. Behind this well-known pedagogical experiment we find the common view that play belongs, above all during childhood, to the psychic constitution of the human being and then increasingly recedes in the course of development. Certainly child's play more clearly shows determinate essential characteristics of human play—but it is also at the same time more harmless, less enigmatic and concealed than the play of adults. The child knows little about the seduction of masks. The child still plays innocently. How hidden, disguised and secretive play is even in the so-called “serious” business of the adult world, in its honors and titles, in social conventions—what a “scene” in the encounter of the sexes! In the end it is not at all true that it is the child who predominantly plays. Perhaps the adult plays just as much, only differently, more secretly, in a more masked manner. Taking the guiding principle of our concept of play from childlike existence alone has the consequence that the uncannily enigmatic, ambiguous nature of play is misjudged. In truth, the breadth of play reaches from a little girl's puppet show [*Puppenspiel*] all the way to tragedy. Play is not a marginal manifestation in the landscape of human life, nor a contingent phenomenon only surfacing at times. Play essentially belongs to the ontological constitution of human existence; it is an existential, fundamental phenomenon. Certainly not the only one, but nevertheless a peculiar and independent one, one that cannot be derived from the other manifestations of life. Merely contrasting it with other phenomena still fails to achieve an adequate conceptual perspective. Nevertheless, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that the decisive fundamental phenomena of human existence [*Existenz*] are interwoven and entwined. They do not occur next to each other in isolation; they permeate and govern one another through and through. Every such fundamental phenomenon thoroughly determines the human being. Shedding light on the integration of the elementary aspects of existence [*Existenz*—its tension, its conflict and its backward-turning harmony—remains an open task for an anthropology that does not merely describe biological, psychological [*seelisch*] and intellectual [*geistig*] facts, but rather, understanding the matter at hand, penetrates into the paradoxes of our lived life.

The human being is, in the entirety of his existence, and not merely in a domain of it, determined and marked by a death that comes forth and stands before him, a

death which he encounters wherever he goes. As an embodied, sensuous being, he is just as wholly determined by his relation to opposition and to the generous boon of the earth. The same thing holds for the dimensions of power and love in being with his fellow human beings. The human being is essentially a mortal being, essentially a worker, essentially a fighter, essentially a lover and—essentially a player. Death, work, mastery, love and play form the elementary structure of tension and the outline of the puzzling and polysemous character of human existence. And when Schiller says, “. . . man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being . . . ,”¹⁷ it is also valid that he only wholly *is* when he works, fights, holds out against death, or loves. This is not the place or occasion to set forth the fundamental style of an interpretation of existence that inquires back into the fundamental phenomena. As an indication, however, we may observe that all the essential fundamental phenomena of human existence shimmer and appear enigmatic. This has its more profound basis in the fact that the human being is simultaneously exposed and secure. He is no longer held to the ground of nature, like the animal, and still not free like the incorporeal angel—he is a freedom steeped in nature. He remains bound to an obscure impulse that occupies and governs him through and through. He *is* not simple and naive; with understanding, he takes an interest in his own existence—but he cannot, on the other hand, fully define himself through the actions of his freedom. To exist as a human is, through this entanglement of exposure and security, always a tense comportment of oneself to oneself. We live in unending self-concern. Only a living being “which in its Being has this very Being as an issue” (Heidegger),¹⁸ can die, work, fight, love and play. Only such a being [*Wesen*] comports itself to surrounding beings as such and to the all-encompassing whole: to the world. The threefold¹⁹ aspect of self-relation, understanding of being and openness of the world is perhaps less easy to recognize with respect to play than in the remaining fundamental phenomena of human existence.

The performance-character of play is spontaneous activity, active doing, vital impulse; play is existence that is moved in itself, as it were. But the character of being moved that pertains to play does not coincide with any other movement of human life. All other activity fundamentally has—in everything that is done in each case, whether it is simple praxis, which has its goal in itself, or whether it is production (*poiēsis*),

which has its goal in a work that has been shaped—an exhibition of the “ultimate aim” of the human being: felicity, *eudaimonia*. We act in order to pursue a successful existence in the proper course of life. We take life as a “task.” At no moment do we have, so to speak, a peaceful abode. We know ourselves to be “on the way.” We are always torn away from and driven beyond [*weg- und vorwärtsgerissen*] each present moment by the force with which we project our life onto the proper and successful existence. We all strive after *eudaimonia*—but we are in no way agreed as to what it is. We are not only affected by the unrest of the striving that carries us along [*forttreißend*], but also by the unrest of having an “interpretation” of true happiness. It belongs to the profound paradoxes of human existence that we, in incessantly chasing after *eudaimonia*, do not reach it, and that, in the full sense of the term, no one is to be counted happy before death. As long as we breathe we are caught up in a precipitous decline of life. We are entranced [*hingerissen*] by the urge to complete and fulfill our fragmentary being. We live in the prospect of the future. We conceive the present as a preparation, as a station along the way, as a way of passage. This remarkable “futurism” of human life is intimately connected with our fundamental trait, namely that we are not simply and plainly like plants and animals, that we are concerned with the “meaning” of our existence, that we want to understand why we are here on this earth. It is an uncanny passion that drives the human being to an interpretation of his earthly life—the passion of spirit. In this passion, we have the source of our greatness and our wretchedness. Existence [*Bestehen*] is not disturbed in this way for any other living being, such that it would ask about the obscure sense of its being-here. The animal cannot, and God need not, ask after himself. Every human answer to the question of the meaning of life entails the positing of a “final end.” For most human beings, to be sure, this does not happen explicitly, but a fundamental representation of what the “highest good” is for them always governs everything they do. All everyday purposes are architectonically secured in aiming towards a final purpose—all additional professional purposes are united in the putative final purpose of the human being in general.

In this structure of ends all human labor bestirs itself, the serious life bestirs itself, genuineness bestirs and proves itself. The *fatal* situation of the human being, however, shows itself in the fact that he cannot become absolutely certain of the final

purpose by himself, that he staggers in the dark when it comes to the most important question of his existence [*Existenz*] if no superhuman force helps him. For that reason we find among human beings an utter²⁰ confusion of language, as soon as it is a matter of saying what the ultimate purpose, the destiny, the true happiness of the human being [*Wesen*] is. For that reason we also find unrest, haste, agonizing uncertainty to be characteristic features of the human being's projective manner of life.

Play does not fit into this manner of life in the way the other activities do. Play is conspicuously set apart from the whole²¹ futural character of life. Play does not allow itself to be incorporated without further ado into the complex architecture of purposes. It does not happen for the sake of the "final purpose." Play is not worried and disturbed, as our acting otherwise is, by the deep uncertainty in our interpretation of happiness. Playing has, in relation to the course of life and to its restless dynamic, to its obscure question-worthiness and its forward-rushing orientation towards the future, the character of a pacified "present" and self-contained meaning—it resembles an "oasis" of happiness arrived at in the desert of the striving for happiness and Tantalus-like seeking that is otherwise our condition. Play *carries* us *away*. When we play, we are released for a while from the mechanism of life—as though transported to another planet where life seems lighter, more buoyant, easier [*glückender*]. One often says that playing is a "purposeless" or "purpose-free" activity. Such is not the case. It is purposively determined as a comprehensive activity and has in each case in the individual steps of the course of play particular purposes that are linked together. But the *immanent* purpose of play is not, as with the purposes of the rest of human activities, projected out towards the highest ultimate purpose. The activity of play has only internal purposes, not ones that transcend it. And where, for instance, we play "with the purpose" of training the body, of martial discipline or for the sake of health, play has already been distorted into an exercise for the sake of something else. In such practices play is guided by foreign goal-setting, and then clearly does not happen for its own sake. Precisely what is purely self-contained, the circular sense of the activity of play that is closed in on itself, lets appear in play a possibility of human sojourn within a time that does not have the character of a rending and forward-driving but rather allows one to tarry and is, as it were, a

glimmer of eternity. Because it is the child who predominantly plays, this feature of time is peculiar to the child most of all, concerning which the poet declares,

*. . . Oh hours of childhood,
when behind each shape more than the past
appeared
and what streamed out before us was not the future.
We felt our bodies growing and were at times
impatient to be grown up, half for the sake
of those with nothing left but their grownupness.
Yet were, when playing by ourselves, enchanted
with what alone endures; and we would stand there
in the infinite blissful space between world and toy,
at a point which, from the earliest beginning,
had been established for a pure event.*

*[. . . O Stunden in der Kindheit,
da hinter den Figuren mehr als nur
Vergangnes war und vor uns nicht die Zukunft.
Wir wuchsen freilich und wir drängten manchmal,
bald groß zu werden, denen halb zulieb,
die andres nicht mehr hatten, als das Großsein.
Und waren doch, in unserem Alleingehn,
mit Dauerndem vergnügt und standen da
im Zwischenraume zwischen Welt und Spielzeug,
an einer Stelle, die seit Anbeginn
gegründet war für einen reinen Vorgang.]*

(Rilke, Fourth Duino Elegy)²²

For the adult, on the other hand, play is a strange oasis, a dreamy resting point for restless wandering and continual flight. Play gives us the present. Not, to be sure, that present where we, having become still in the depths of our essence, hear the eternal breath of the world and behold the pure forms in the stream of transience. Play is activity and creativity—and yet it is near to eternal and tranquil things. Play “interrupts” the continuity and context of our course of life that is determined by an ultimate purpose. It withdraws in a peculiar manner from the other ways of directing one’s life; it is in the distance. But while it appears to escape [entziehen] the standard flow of life, it relates [bezieht] to it in a particularly sensible way, namely, in the mode

of portrayal [*Darstellung*]. If one defines play, as is usually done, in opposition to work, actuality, seriousness and genuineness, one merely places it, falsely, *next to* other phenomena of life. Play is a fundamental phenomenon of existence, just as original and independent as death, love, work and mastery, but it is *not* directed, as with the other fundamental phenomena, by a collective striving after the final purpose. It stands *over and against them*, as it were, in order to assimilate them into itself by portraying them. We play seriousness, play genuineness, play actuality, we play work and battle, play love and death. And we even play play.

II

The play of human beings, with which we all are intimately acquainted as an often already actualized possibility of our existence, is an existential phenomenon [*Existenzphänomen*] of an entirely enigmatic sort. It escapes into the polysemy of its masks before the intrusiveness of the rational concept. Our attempt at a conceptual structural analysis of play must reckon with such disguises. It will hardly offer itself to us as a crystal-clear structural edifice. All play is pleurably attuned, joyfully moved within itself—it is animated. If these stimulating joys of play are extinguished, the activity of play dwindles straightaway. This pleasure in play is a strange pleasure that is difficult to grasp, one that is neither merely sensual nor yet merely intellectual; it is a creative, formative bliss of its own kind and is in and of itself polysemous, multi-dimensional. It can incorporate deep sorrow and abysmal grief; it can even pleurably engulf what is horrible.²³

Pleasure, which pervades the play-activity of tragedy, creates its delight and its trembling, beatifying vibration of the human heart out of such an embrace of what is terrible.²⁴ In play, the face of the Gorgon, too, is transfigured. What kind of amazing pleasure is that, which is in and of itself so expansive and can merge oppositions and encompass horror and bitter heartache²⁵ while at the same time still giving precedence to joy, such that we, moved to tears, can smile about the playfully envisioned comedy and tragedy of our existence? Does the pleasure of play contain sorrow and pain only in the way that a present memory, cheerfully attuned, is related to a past grief? Is it only the distance of time that makes lighter the moments of bitterness that have since

passed away, the pains that were once actual? Not at all. In play we do not at all suffer “actual pains”—and, nevertheless, the pleasure of play allows a grief to resonate in a strange way that is²⁶ present and yet not actual—but seizes us, catches us, stirs us, shakes us. Sorrow [*Trauer*] is only “played [*gespielt*]”²⁷ and is, nevertheless, a power that moves us in the mode of the playful.²⁸

This pleasure of play²⁹ is taking delight in a “sphere,” delight in an imaginary³⁰ dimension; it is not merely taking pleasure *in* play, but rather pleasure *at* play.

It is now necessary to single out the *meaning* of play as a further aspect in the structure of play. To every game as such belongs the element of the sensuous. A merely bodily movement, of a limb-loosening sort, for instance, which we rhythmically repeat, is, strictly speaking, not play. In an unclear manner of expression, one all too often calls such relaxing behavior of animals or of small children a kind of playing. Such movements make no “sense” for the ones moving. We can first speak of play only when a specially produced meaning belongs to bodily motions. And at the same time we must still distinguish the internal play-meaning of a specific game, i.e., the meaning-context of things, acts and relations that have been played—and the external meaning, i.e., the sense that play has for those who first decide upon it, who intend to do it—or even the sense that it may eventually have for spectators who are not participating in it. Of course there are many games in which the spectators themselves belong as such within the total play-situation (perhaps in circus or ritual³¹ games)—and on the other hand there are games for which spectators are not essential.

Here a third aspect of the constitution of play can already be stated: the fellowship of play. Playing is a fundamental possibility of social existence [*Existenz*]. Playing is interplay, playing with one another, an intimate form of human community. Playing is, structurally, not an individual or isolated activity—it is open to one’s fellow human beings as fellow-players. It is no objection to point out that frequently, though, the ones playing carry on their games “all alone,” apart from their fellow human beings. For, in the first place, being open to possible fellow-players is already included in the meaning of play, and, in the second place, such a solitary person often plays with imaginary partners. The community of play need not consist of a number of real

persons. However, there must be at least *one* real, actual player, when it is a matter of actual and not merely purported play. Furthermore, another essential aspect of play concerns the rules. Playing is maintained and constituted³² through a bond. There cannot be an arbitrary variation of any activities whatsoever. It is not limitlessly free. If a bond is not fixed and adopted, one cannot play at all. And yet the rules of play are not laws. The bond does not have the character of the unalterable. Even in the middle of a game we can change the rules with our fellow-players' consent; but then it is precisely the changed rule that counts and that binds the flow of the reciprocal activities. We all know the difference between traditional games, whose rules one accepts, which are publicly known and familiar possibilities of playing comportment, and improvised games, which one, so to speak, "invents"—where one first agrees on the rules in the fellowship of play. One might perhaps think that improvised games would have greater appeal, because in these games free fantasy is given more room; because one can run riot in the airy realm of mere possibilities; because here the self-bond is chosen; and because here invention, the unrestrained wealth of ideas, can be applied. Yet this is not unconditionally the case. For binding oneself to the already valid rules of play is often experienced pleurably and positively. This is amazing, but can be explained by the fact that it mostly has to do with the products of collective imagination in the games passed down and with the self-bonds of the soul's archetypical foundations. Some children's games that seem simple are vestiges of the most ancient magical practices.

To every game belongs also a toy or plaything [*Spielzeug*].³³ Each of us is familiar with playthings. But it remains difficult to say what a plaything is. It is not a matter of enumerating various types of playthings, but rather a matter of determining the nature of the plaything or actually experiencing it as a genuine problem. Playthings do not delimit a region of things closed in on itself—as, for instance, artificially produced things do. In nature (in the broad sense of beings existing of their own accord) no artifacts are found—independent of human producers. Through his labor, the human being produces artificial things for the first time. He is the technician of a human environment. He cultivates the field, domesticates wild animals, forms natural materials into tools, forms clay into jugs, hammers iron into weapons. A tool is an artifact that has been formed by human labor. Artifacts

[*Kunstdinge*] and natural things [*Naturdinge*] may be distinguished, but both are things [*Dinge*] in a total actuality that is mutual and encompassing.

The plaything can be an artificially produced thing; however, it need not be. Even a simple piece of wood or a broken-off branch can serve as a “doll.” The hammer, which is a human meaning that has been impressed onto a piece of wood and iron, belongs, like the wood, iron and the human being himself, to one and the same dimension of the actual. The plaything is different. Seen, so to speak, from the outside, i.e., observed from the perspective of the one not playing, it is obviously a part, a thing of the simply actual world. It is a thing that, for example, has the intended purpose of keeping children occupied. The doll is considered as product of the toy industry. It is a piece of material and wire or an artificial mass, and can be acquired for purchase at a determined price; it is a commodity. But, seen from the perspective of a playing girl, a doll is a *child*, and the girl is its *mother*. At the same time it is in no way the case that the little girl actually believes that the doll is a living child. She does not deceive herself about this. She does not confuse a thing [*Sache*] on the basis of a deceptive appearance. Rather, she simultaneously knows about the doll-figure and its significance in play. The playing child lives in two dimensions. The character of being a plaything in the plaything, that is, its essence, lies in its *magical* character: it is a thing in simple actuality and has at the same time another, mysterious “reality.” It is thus infinitely more than a mere instrument, more than an incidental, foreign thing that we use to manipulate other things. Human play needs playthings. Precisely in his essential, basic activities, the human being cannot remain free of things; he is directed to them: in work to the hammer, in dominion to the sword, in love to the bed, in poetry to the lyre, in religion to the sacrificial altar—and in play to the plaything.

Each plaything is a proxy for all things in general. Playing is always a confrontation with beings. In the plaything the whole is concentrated in a single thing. Every game is an attempt on the part of life, a vital experiment, which experiences in the plaything the epitome of resistant beings in general. But human playing doesn't occur only as the aforementioned magical contact with the plaything. It is necessary to grasp the concept of the one who plays more acutely and more rigorously. For, here

there exists a very peculiar, though in no way pathological, “schizophrenia,” a splitting of the human being. The one who plays, who enters into a game, performs in the actual world a determinate activity that is well known in its characteristic features. In the internal context of the meaning of play, however, he takes on a *role*. And now we must distinguish between the real human being who “plays” and the human role within play. The player “conceals” himself by means of his “role”; in a certain measure he vanishes into it. With an intensity of a peculiar sort he lives *in* the role—and, yet again, not like a person who is deluded, who is no longer able to distinguish between “actuality” and “appearance.” The player can call himself back out of the role. In the performance of play, there remains a knowledge, albeit strongly reduced, about his double existence. It exists in two spheres—but not from forgetfulness or from a lack in concentration. This doubling belongs to the essence of playing. All the structural aspects touched on until now are merged in the fundamental concept of the *play-world*. Every sort of playing is the magical production of a play-world. *In* it lie the role of the one playing, the changing roles of the play-community, the binding nature of the rules of play, and the significance of the plaything. The play-world is an imaginary dimension, whose ontological meaning poses an obscure and difficult problem. We play in the so-called actual world but we gain [*erspielen*] thereby a realm, an enigmatic field, that is not nothing and yet is nothing actual. In the play-world we move ourselves about according to our role; but in the play-world there are imaginary figures. There is the “child,” who indeed lives and breathes there—but in simple actuality is only a doll or even a piece of wood. In the projection of a play-world the one who plays conceals himself as the creator of this “world.” He loses himself in his creation, plays a role and has within the play-world play-worldly things that surround him and play-worldly fellow human beings. What is misleading about this is that we imaginatively take these play-worldly things themselves to be “actual things”; indeed, in the play-world, we even repeat the difference between actuality and appearance in various ways.

Nevertheless, it is not thereby the case that the genuinely and truly actual things of our everyday environment become so concealed by the play-worldly character that they are covered up, and thus no longer recognizable. That is not the case. The play-world does not present itself like a wall or a curtain in front of the beings

surrounding us; it does not obscure or veil them. The play-world does not even have, strictly speaking, a position or duration in the actual context of space and time—but it has its own inner space and its own inner time. And yet we spend actual time playing and need actual space. But the space of the play-world never uninterruptedly passes over into the space that we otherwise inhabit. However, it is an analogue of time. The noteworthy interpenetration of the dimension of actuality and the play-world cannot be elucidated by an otherwise familiar model of spatial and temporal proximity. The play-world is not suspended in a mere realm of thought; it always has a real setting, but is, however, never a real thing among real things. Yet it necessarily requires real things in order to gain a foothold in them. This means that the imaginary character of the play-world cannot be clarified as a phenomenon of a merely subjective appearance, nor determined as a delusion that exists only within the interiority of a soul but in no way comes forth among and between things in general. The more one attempts to reflect on play, the more enigmatic and question-worthy it appears to become.

We have specified a few fundamental features and come to draw a few distinctions. Human play is a pleurably attuned production of an imaginary play-world. It is a wondrous joy in “appearance.” Play is always also characterized by the aspect of portrayal, by the moment of meaningfulness, and it is in each case transformative: it brings about the “alleviation of life,” a temporary, merely earthly solution, indeed almost a release from the burdens of existence. It carries us away out of a factual state of affairs, out of the confinement in a pressing and oppressing situation. It affords us a happiness of fantasy in the flight of possibilities, which remain without the agony of actual choice. In the performance of play the human being manages to exist at two extremes. Play can at one time be experienced as a peak of human sovereignty; the human being enjoys then an almost unbounded creativity. He creates productively and without inhibition because he does not produce in the space of real actuality. The player feels as if he were “master” of his imaginary³⁴ products. Playing comes to be a distinguished—because scarcely restricted—possibility of human freedom. And in fact the element of freedom prevails to a high degree in play. But it remains a difficult question, whether the nature of play must be grasped fundamentally and exclusively from the existential power [*Existenzmacht*] of freedom—or whether completely different grounds of existence reveal themselves and

are effective in play as well. And in fact we also find the opposite extreme of freedom in play. For, sometimes a relief from the real world-actuality can extend all the way to rapture, to enchantment, to succumbing to the daemonic character of the mask. Play can contain within itself the bright Apollinian aspect of free selfhood, but also the dark Dionysian aspect of panic-stricken self-abandonment.

The relation of the human being to the enigmatic appearance of the play-world, to the dimension of the imaginary, is *ambiguous* [zweideutig]. Play is a phenomenon for which the appropriate categories do not easily and unambiguously [*eindeutig*] present themselves. Its shimmering, inner polysemy [*Vieldeutigkeit*] perhaps most readily allows it to address the thought-resources of a dialectic that does not level out paradoxes. Great philosophy has always recognized the eminent essentiality of play, which the common understanding does not recognize, because play means to it only something that is idle, something neither serious, nor genuine, nor actual. Thus Hegel, for example, says that, in its indifference and great frivolity, play is the loftiest and only true seriousness. And Nietzsche formulates it in *Ecce Homo*: “I do not know any other way of handling great tasks than as *play*.”³⁵

Can play be illuminated, we must now ask, if it is taken uniquely and alone as an anthropological phenomenon? Must we not think beyond the human being? I do not mean by this the search for a comportment of play in another living being as well. But it is problematic, whether play can be understood in its ontological constitution without determining more closely the noteworthy dimension of the imaginary. Even supposing that play is something of which only the human is capable, the question still remains, whether the human as player stays within the human realm or whether he at the same time necessarily comports himself to a realm *beyond* the human one [*einem Übermenschlichen*] as well.

Originally play is a portraying symbol-activity of human existence, a human existence that interprets itself therein. The earliest games are magical rites, the great gestures of ritual imprint, in which the archaic human being interprets his inner standing within the context of the world, where he “portrays” his fate, brings to presence the events of birth and death, of weddings, war, hunting and work. The

symbolic representation of magical games creates elements from out of the circuit of simple actuality, but it also creates from out of the nebulous realm of the imaginary. In primeval times play is not understood so much as the deeply pleasurable carrying out of life on the part of isolated individuals or groups that temporarily remove themselves from social connection and inhabit their small island of ephemeral happiness. Play is primordially the strongest *binding* power. It is community-founding—different, to be sure, from the community between the departed and the living, or from the organization of power or the elementary family. The early human community of play *embraces* all these stated forms and shapes of being together and brings about a total presencing of the whole of existence. It links together the circle of the phenomena of life in the play-community of the *festival*. The archaic festival is more than the merry-making of a people; it is the elevated actuality—the actuality that has been elevated to the magical dimension—of human life in all its relations. It is ritual spectacle [*Schauspiel*], where the human being feels the nearness of the gods, the heroes and the dead, and knows himself as having been placed into the presence of all the blessing and frightening powers of the cosmos. Thus primeval play also has a deep connection with religion. The community of the festival envelops the spectators, the initiates and epoptes of a cultic play, where the deeds and sufferings of gods and humans appear on the stage, whose boards in fact signify the *world*.

III

Our attempt up to now—to apprehend the structure of play in a few conceptual forms: play-disposition, play-fellowship, rules of play, plaything and play-world—repeatedly made use of the expression “the imaginary.” One can translate this word with “appearance.” But an eminent intellectual [*geistig*] perplexity is concentrated therein. In general we understand the term “appearance,” especially in specific concrete situations, in this way. But it remains troublesome and difficult to express what we actually mean by it. The greatest questions and problems of philosophy are lodged in everyday words and things. The concept of appearance is as obscure and unexplored as the concept of being—and both concepts belong together in an opaque, confusing, downright labyrinthine way, permeating one another in their interplay. The path of the thinking that engages them leads deeper and deeper into the unthinkable.

With the question of appearance, to the extent that it belongs to human playing³⁶, we have touched on a philosophical problem. Play is creative bringing-forth, it is a production. The product is the play-world, a sphere of appearance, a field whose actuality is manifestly not well cultivated. And nevertheless the appearance of the play-world is not simply nothing. We move about in it while we play; we live in it—certainly sometimes lightly and airily as in a dream world, but at other times also full of ardent devotion and immersion. Such “appearance” has, from time to time, a stronger experiential reality and power of impression than the bulk of everyday things in their worn-out ordinariness. *What*, then, is the imaginary? Where is this strange appearance located, what is its status? In the end, insight into the ontological nature of play does not depend on the determination of position and status.

Usually we speak of appearance in multiple ways. We mean, for example, the outer semblance of the thing, the superficial aspect, the mere foreground and the like. This appearance belongs to the things themselves—as the shell to the kernel, as the manifestation to the essence. At another time we speak of appearance in regard to a deceptive, subjective ascertainment³⁷, an erroneous view, an unclear representation. Then the appearance lies in us, in those who conceive falsely—it lies in the “subject.” In addition, however, there is also a subjective appearance that is not thought of from the relation between the truth or error of the one representing and the things themselves [*Sachen*]*—*an appearance that legitimately dwells within our soul, precisely as a construct of the power of imagination, of fantasy. We make use of these abstract distinctions in order to formulate our question. What kind of appearance is the play-world? A foreground of things [*Sachen*]? A deceptive representation? A phantasm in our soul? No one would want to dispute that in every game, fantasy is especially at work and runs free. But are play-worlds *merely* constructs of fantasy? It would be too cheap an explanation to say that the imaginary realm of the play-world consists exclusively in human imagination, or that is an agreement of private delusional representations or private acts of fancy with a collective delusion, with an intersubjective fantasy. Playing is always in contact with playthings. Even from the side of the playing, one can see that playing does not occur within psychological interiority alone and without support in the objective external world. The play-world contains

subjective elements of fantasy and objective, ontic elements. We are acquainted with fantasy as mental faculty [*Seelenvermögen*]. We are acquainted with dreams, inner intuitions, the colorful content of fantasy. But what is an objective or ontic appearance supposed to mean? Now, there are in actuality entirely remarkable things that are themselves indisputably something actual and nevertheless contain in themselves an aspect of “non-actuality.” This sounds remarkable and astonishing. But everyone is acquainted with such things, yet we do not customarily characterize these things in such a roundabout and abstract way. There are simply objectively present *images*. For instance, a poplar on the lakeside casts its reflected³⁸ image on the shimmering surface of the water. Now reflections themselves belong to circumstances, the way in which actual things exist in an illuminated environment. Things in light cast shadows, trees on the shore are reflected in the lake; on smooth, shiny metal, things in the environment find a reflection [*Widerschein*]. What is the mirror-image [*Spiegelbild*]? As image [*Bild*] it is actual, an actual reproduction [*Abbild*] of the actual, original tree. But “in” the image a tree is portrayed. It manifests itself on the surface of the water, and yet in such a manner that it comes forth there only in the medium of the mirror-appearance, not in actuality. Appearance of such a kind is an *independent* sort of being [*Seiende*] and contains as a constitutive aspect of its actuality something that is in itself specifically “non-actual”—and, furthermore, in this way rests upon another, simply actual being. The image of the poplar tree does not conceal the stretch of the surface of water upon which it appears reflectively. The reflection of the poplar is *as* reflection, i.e., as a determinate phenomenon of light, an actual thing [*Sache*] and pertains to the “non-actual” poplar of the mirror-world in itself. That may perhaps sound too stilted—and nevertheless it is not a remote matter [*Sache*], but rather one that is universally known, which lies before our eyes every day. The entire Platonic doctrine of being, which in large measure has determined Western philosophy decisively, operates again and again with the models of reproduction [*Abbild*] as shadow and reflection and thereby interprets the structure of the world.

The ontic appearance (reflection and the like) is more than just an analogy to the play-world; it occurs within the play-world for the most part as a structural aspect in its own right. Playing is an actual comportment that, as it were, pertains in and of itself to a “reflection”: the play-worldly comportment according to roles. Even the

possibility on the part of the human being to productively engender a play-worldly appearance depends in large part on the fact that there is already in nature in itself an actual appearance. The human being cannot in general only make artifacts; he can also artificially produce things to which an aspect of *existing* [seiend] *appearance* belongs as well. He projects imaginary play-worlds. By virtue of a production imaginatively carried out, the little girl designates the material body of a doll a “living child,” and assumes the role of the “mother.” Actual things always belong to the play-world—but in part they have the character of ontic appearance, and in part they are clothed with a subjective appearance stemming from the human soul.

Playing is finite creativity within the magical dimension of appearance.

It is a problem of the greatest profundity and utmost difficulty for thought to unfold precisely how actuality and non-actuality pervade one another in human play. The conceptual determination of the being of play leads back to the cardinal questions of philosophy, to the speculation concerning being and nothing and appearance and becoming. Nevertheless, we cannot develop it at this point. But one sees, in any case, that the usual talk of the non-actuality of play remains inadequate, when one does not inquire into the enigmatic dimension of the imaginary. What human and what cosmic meaning does this imaginary dimension have? Does it form a demarcated³⁹ region within extant things? Is the strange land of the non-actual the elevated site of the conjuring presencing of the *essentiality* of all⁴⁰ things in general? In the magical, play-worldly reflection, the individual thing (the plaything, for instance) that is singled out by chance becomes a *symbol*. It represents. Human play is (even if we no longer know it) the symbolic activity of bringing to presence the meaning of world and life.

The ontological problems that play presents to us are not exhausted by the questions indicated above about the *way of being*⁴¹ of the play-world and about the symbolic value of the plaything or play-activity. In the history of thought one has not only sought to grasp the *being* of play—but also ventured the tremendous reversal of determining *the meaning of being from out of play*. We call this the speculative concept of play. In brief: speculation is the characterization of the essence of being *through an allegory of an existing being*. It is a conceptual *formulation of the world* that springs

from an *inner-worldly model*. Philosophers have already employed many such models: Thales water, Plato light, Hegel spirit, and so forth. But the illuminating power of such a model does not depend on the respective thinker's arbitrariness in his selection—it depends decisively on whether in fact the whole of being is in its own right repeatedly reflected in a single existing being. Wherever the cosmos allegorically repeats its constitution, its structure and layout in an inner-worldly thing, a key philosophical phenomenon is thereby indicated, from which a speculative formulation of the world can be developed.

The phenomenon of play is now a manifestation that as such is already distinguished by the fundamental feature of symbolic representation. Does play perhaps become an allegorical spectacle of the whole, an illuminating, speculative metaphor for the world? This audacious, bold thought has actually been thought before. In the dawn of European thought Heraclitus poses the aphorism: “The course of the world is a playing child, moving pieces on a board—a king’s power belongs to the child [*Der Weltlauf ist ein spielendes Kind, Brettsteine setzend—eine Königsherrschaft des Kindes*] (Fragment 52).”⁴² And after twenty-five centuries of the history of thought there is Nietzsche, writing: “In this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence”⁴³—“The world is the play of Zeus . . . ”⁴⁴ (*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*).

The profundity of such a conception—but also its danger and power of seduction—urges us on to an aesthetic interpretation of the world that cannot be unfolded here. But the strange formulation of the world, which lets beings on the whole prevail as a game, may perhaps give rise to the intuition that play is not a harmless, peripheral, or even “childish” affair [*Sache*]*—*that we finite men, precisely in the creative power and mastery of our magical production, have “been wagered, put into play [*aufs Spiel gesetzt*]” in an abyssal sense. If the essence of the world is thought as play, it thus follows for the human being that he is the only being in the vast universe who is able to *correspond* to the prevailing whole. Only in the correspondence to what is beyond the human [*zum Übermenschlichen*] may the human being then attain his native essence.

The playful openness of human existence to the playing ground of the being of all beings the poet thus attests to:

*As long as you catch self-thrown things
it's all dexterity and venial gain—;
only when you've suddenly caught that ball
which she, one of the eternal players,
has tossed toward you, your center, with
a throw precisely judged, one of those arches
that exist in God's great bridge-system:
only then is catching a proficiency,—
not yours, a world's. And if you then had
strength and courage to return the throw,
no, more wonderful: forgot strength and courage
and had already thrown . . . (as the year
throws the birds, those migrating bird swarms,
which an older to a younger warmth sends
catapulting across oceans—) only
in that venture would you truly join in.
No longer making the throw easy; no longer making
it hard. Out of your hands the meteor
would launch itself and flame into its spaces . . .*

*[Solang du Selbstgeworfnes fängst, ist alles
Geschicklichkeit und läßlicher Gewinn—;
Erst wenn du plötzlich Fänger wirst des Balles,
den eine ewige Mit-Spielerin
dir zuwarf, deiner Mitte, in genau
gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen
aus Gottes großem Brücken-Bau:
erst dann ist Fangen-Können ein Vermögen,—
nicht deines, einer Welt. Und wenn du gar
zurückzuwerfen Kraft und Mut besäße,
nein, wunderbarer: Mut und Kraft vergäße
und schon geworfen hättest . . . (wie das Jahr
die Vögel wirft, die Wandervogelschwärme,
die eine ältere einer jungen Wärme
hinüberschleudert über Meere—) erst
in diesem Wagnis spielst du göltig mit.
Erleichterst dir den Wurf nicht mehr; erschwerst
dir ihn nicht mehr. Aus deinen Händen tritt*

das Meteor und rast in seine Räume . . .]

(Rilke, Late Poems)⁴⁵

When thinkers and poets point in such a human and profound way to the immense significance of play, we too should be mindful of the saying: we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven if we do not become as children.

Notes

1. [A translation of “Oase des Glücks: Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels,” in Eugen Fink, *Spiel als Weltsymbol, Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 7, ed. Cathrin Nielsen and Hans Rainer Sepp (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Karl Alber, 2010), 11-29. Unless otherwise specified, *Glück* (and its cognates) has been translated as “happiness” (and its cognates), though other morphologically related terms are generally translated in the following way: *Glückseligkeit* (“felicity”), and *glückend* (“successful”). Footnotes that are not in brackets refer to the editorial emendations found in this German edition. The German editor explains such footnotes on pp. 307-308 of the German edition as follows: “In Fink’s *Nachlass*, there are four typescript versions of the essay: (1) The oldest version seems to be a fourteen page typescript abbreviated here as MS 1, the cover page of which bears the title: ‘Eugen Fink *Ontology of Play* (Given as a lecture at the Evangelischen Akademie, Herrenalb on October 2, 1955).’ The thirteen pages of the text proper are, in Fink’s typical manner, written in a single spaced format; in ink, they indicate the changes Fink made and are paginated in ink from ‘1’ to ‘13.’ (2a) is a twenty-four page typescript with one-and-a-half spaced formatting; the pages contain slight alterations that Fink made in ink, and are paginated by him in ink from ‘1’ to ‘22.’ Before that are found two cover-pages with the titles: ‘Eugen Fink *Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play*’ (cover page 1) and ‘(Given as a lecture on October 2, 1955 at the Evangelischen Akademie Herrenalb)’ (cover page 2). Identical with (2a) is a thirty-four page typescript version (2b), which was broadcast by Südwestfunk and contains no handwritten additions. The cover page bears the title: ‘*Kulturelles Wort* / date of transmission: January 27, 1957 / Time: 10:30-11:00 a.m. / *Die Aula* / Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play / 1st Part / by / Eugen Fink / (Given as a lecture on October 2, 1955 at the Evangelischen Akademie Herrenalb).’ (3) The same typescript version as (2a), likewise paginated from ‘1’ to ‘22’ by Fink in ink, yet with a few revisions and changes in ink and pencil (MS 2). Version (3) may have been the basis for the first printed edition: *Oase des Glücks, Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels*, Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1957, 52 S. Version (2b) was published under the title ‘Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels’ by Südwestfunk in an anthology: Horst Helmut Kaiser u. Jürgen-Eckardt Pleines (Hg.): *Gedanken aus der Zeit. Philosophie im Südwestfunk*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 1986, S. 11-34. As a comparison shows, there must have been at least one further, no longer extant version of the text between versions (1) and (2a). Decisive for what we have published in this volume is the printed version from 1957. The apparatus indicates

the concretely relevant deviations in MS 1 (1) and MS 2 (3).—Versions (1) through (3) bear the signature E 11 / 177.”—Tr.]

2. [The translators wish to thank Professor Elizabeth Rottenberg of DePaul University for her encouragement and helpful comments on an earlier draft.—Tr.]

3. [The German word found here, *Spiel*, means both “play” and “game,” and will, depending on context and English idiom, be translated in either way. The reader should bear both meanings in mind anytime either occurs throughout this essay.—Tr.]

4. MS 1: instead of “structure,” “meaningful wholes” is written.

5. [Unless otherwise indicated, “essence” is a translation for *Wesen*.—Tr.]

6. [“Playing” is throughout this essay a translation for the German verbal noun *Spielen*, and refers to play conceived as an activity or process.—Tr.]

7. MS 1: after “its,” “categorical” is crossed out with ink.

8. MS 1: after “Plato,” “or Nietzsche” is crossed out with ink.

9. MS 1: after “salt,” “the subtleness of Zarathustra’s masks” is crossed out with ink.

10. [Generally, “being” is a translation for *Sein*, whereas “beings” and “a being” are translations for *das Seiende*.—Tr.]

11. Instead of “One” up to “activity,” in MS 1 is found: “We are much more acquainted with play first hand, insofar as it is a possibility of the human being that one is acquainted with first hand, than with any phenomena of the external environment or with the findings researchable by natural science regarding our own embodiment, [crossed out in ink: ‘inasmuch as these are withdrawn from the immediate testimony of our experience—ed.]. Playing does not primarily mean processes that we become aware of or even first discover, but rather an activity that we engage in, that we perform spontaneously.”

12. Instead of “particular,” in MS 1 is found “obvious.”

13. [“Manifestation” will, throughout this essay, be a translation for the German *Erscheinung*. Unless otherwise noted, other related words will generally be rendered as follows: *Schein* as “appearance,” *Anschein* as “semblance,” and *Phänomen* as “phenomenon.”—Tr.]

14. MS 1: after “not,” “definitively” is crossed out with ink.

15. [Unless otherwise noted, “existence” will be a translation for *Dasein* throughout this essay.—Tr.]

16. Before “in contrast,” in MS 1 and 2 is found “as a counter-phenomenon.”

17. Friedrich Schiller, “Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen,” 15. Brief, *SW Bd. 5*, S.618 [*On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), Fifteenth Letter, 107—Tr.]: “For, to mince matters no longer, man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and *he is only fully a human being when he plays*.”

18. Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, *GA Bd. 2*, S.57 *passim* [*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 68 *passim*—Tr.].

19. MS 2: “threefold” is interpolated.

20. Instead of “an utter,” in MS 1 and 2 is found “the Babylonian.”

21. MS 1: “whole,” written in ink, is a substitution for “other.”

22. Rilke, *Duineser Elegien*, *SW Bd. 1*, S. 699. [*The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1989), 171-173.—Tr.]

23. MS 2: Instead of the paragraph that begins section 2, there is written, “This warrants its being grasped more precisely. In order to at all attain the basic approach

for a sufficient concept of play, insight into the structure and the structural connection of play as such is required. Initially we can characterize as an essential aspect the fact that play is ‘attuned’. To be sure, every human activity is attuned in some way, be it cheerfully or sorrowfully or submerged in the gray mist of indifference. Play, however, is, fundamentally, pleurably attuned. The joy of play thoroughly governs and holds sway over the whole game in each case, sustains it, animates it. If the joy of play is extinguished, the activity of play dwindles straightaway. That does not mean, however, that, in play, we are always cheerful and glad. The pleasure of play is a remarkable pleasure that is difficult to figure out. It does not resemble ordinary sensuous pleasure, which, for instance, accompanies unhindered corporeal movement, the bodily thrill of speed and the like; and it is also not a purely cerebral [*geistig*] pleasure, a merely intellectual [*intellektuell*] joy. It is a pleasure that belongs to a creative process of an entirely special sort, and is in itself polysemous: namely, it can precisely contain within itself profound sorrow and abyssal grief. It has a breadth, such that it assumes its evident [MS 1: ‘apparent’—Ed.] opposite as an aspect.”

24. MS 2: after “what is terrible,” there is written, “The portrayal of what is horrible excites in a pleasurable way.”

25. MS 2: “which so mixes and blends, so shoves into one another the otherwise separated oppositions,” was changed with ink to what is found in the present text beginning with “which is in and of itself” and ending with “heartache.”

26. “Is” is added in the printed text.

27. [This is an untranslatable word play in which Fink is referring to German *Trauerspiel*, a form of tragic drama.—Tr.]

28. After “playful,” the following lines have been crossed out with ink: “But it is able to do that only as an ingredient of the encompassing play-pleasure. The pleasure of play belongs in a distinctive way to the performance of play. It cannot be compared with other well-known ways of taking pleasure in what one does well [*Funktionslust*]. To be sure, everywhere that we do not accept our own lives passively, everywhere that we exist spontaneously therein, conduct our lives of our own accord and form it in creative processes, we also always feel a pleasurable joy that need not at all be joy about something [*eine Sache*]. The productive form of existence [*Existenzform*] is in itself an ‘upsurge.’ But playing production is pervaded by a pleasure that is incomparable with other pleasures of performance and psychic [*seelisch*] upsurges.”

29. MS 2: “The pleasure of play is grounded not only in the aspect of productive spontaneity—it” was replaced in ink by “This pleasure of play.”

30. MS 2: “objective [*gegenständlich*]” was replaced by “imaginary.”

31. MS 2: “or ritual” is added in pencil.

32. “and constituted” is not found in MS 1.

33. [Throughout this essay, *Spielzeug* has been rendered as either “plaything” or “toy.”—Tr.]

34. MS 1: “imaginary” is a replacement for “magical.”

35. Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, KSA 6, S. 297. [*Ecce Homo*, in Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), “Why I am So Clever,” §10, p. 99.—Tr.]

36. After “playing,” in MS 1 and 2 is found: “as a dimension.”

37. Instead of “ascertainment [*Erfassung*],” in MS 1 and 2 is found: “conception [*Auffassung*].”

38. [Unless otherwise indicated, “reflection” (and its cognates) is a translation for “Spiegelung” (and its cognates).—Tr.]

39. Instead of “demarcated,” in MS 1 is found: “enclosed.”
40. In the printed text, “all” is italicized (here corrected according to MS 1 and 2).
41. MS 1 and 2: “way-of-being.”
42. [Fink’s translation. Charles Kahn, in *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, ed. and trans. Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 71, renders the fragment as follows: “Lifetime is a child at play, moving pieces in a game. Kingship belongs to the child.”—Tr.]
43. Nietzsche, *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*, KSA 1, S. 830. [*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1962), 62; Fink’s emphasis.—Tr.]
44. Ibid., S. 828. [Ibid., 58; trans. modified. Fink emphasizes ‘is,’ rather than ‘play.’—Tr.]
45. Rilke, *Gedichte 1906-1926*, SW Bd. 2, S. 132. [*Uncollected Poems: Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Edward Snow (