INTRODUCTION: Ludics—Play as Humanistic Inquiry

Vassiliki Rapti and Eric Gordon

"Play taunts us with its inaccessibility. We feel that something is behind it all, but we do not know, or have forgotten how to see it," Robert Fagan claims.[1] Play is an integral part of being human. It is how we learn, explore, how we imagine, and experience joy. But then we grow up. And the mystery of play ceases to matter. In most cultures, excluding competitive sports and gambling, play is largely detached from the "serious" matters of adulthood. It is an escape hatch, a safety valve, a mere retreat from the official structures of modern adult life. "All serious activities," writes Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, "irrespective

[1]Quoted in Sutton-Smith, Brian, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Harvard University Press, May 15, 2001), 2. https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674005815.

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of their fruits, are called labor, and every activity which is not necessary either for the life of the individual or the life process of society is subsumed under playfulness."[2] So there is labor—that which is directly applicable to personal or social goals, and everything else is play, which is marginalized and frivolous. In an extended footnote, Arendt equates this to another binary between necessity and freedom, wherein everything becomes either an activity to meet one's needs (i.e., we work in order to be able to live) or to be free from that necessity. Not even the "work" of the artist is left, she says: "It is dissolved into play and has lost its worldly meaning."[3]

By maligning play, confining it into the "non-serious" and the frivolous, society continues down its violent path of rationalization. The space of childhood discovery, the foundation of learning, becomes meaningless. The arts are further marginalized as neatly distinct from productive labor, and child's play is quickly forgotten as a fleeting stage of human development. Play is the label society puts on the frivolous, and as such Arendt is not interested in salvaging it. Instead she turns to the concept of action. She argues that the human condition, or the *vita activa*, consists of three parts: labor, work, and action. Labor is life itself, it is the physical effort involved in getting things done. Work "provides an 'artificial' world of things."[4] It is the product of human labor. Action is the perpetual process of creation, of invention, of putting new things into motion. It "corresponds to the human condition of plurality," which, she argues, "is the condition of human action, because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live."[5] Action is social. It is worldly. It describes the connections between individuals that are created through expression, experimentation, exploration, and play. But, she laments, it is also at risk. It is being squeezed out of a rational, laboring society,

[2]Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, 2nd Edition (8601300156224) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 127. https://www.amazon.com/Human-Condition-2nd-Hannah-Arendt/dp/0226025985. Accessed 29 May 2020.

[3]Ibid., 128.

[4]Ibid., 7.

[5]Ibid., 7–8.

and relegated to the irrelevant. So while she never makes the connection between action and play, we embrace Arendt's idea of action as a powerful form of play.

We have called this book *Ludics* because of its expansive meaning. Ludics derives from the Latin *ludus* (plural *ludi*), a direct derivative of the verb *ludere*, meaning "to play," on which the Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga comments as follows:

> In remarkable contrast to Greek with its changing and heterogeneous terms for the play-function, Latin has really only one word to cover the whole field of play*:* *ludus*, from *ludere*, of which *ludus* is a direct derivative. We should observe that *jocus*, *jocari* in the special sense of joking and jesting does not mean play proper in classical Latin. Though *ludere* may be used for the leaping of fishes, the fluttering of birds and the splashing of water, its etymology does not appear to lie in the sphere of rapid movement, flashing, etc., but in that of non-seriousness, and particularly of "semblance" or "deception." *Ludus* covers children's games, recreation, contests, liturgical and theatrical representations, and games of chance. In the expression *lares ludentes* it means "dancing."[6]

The slippage of meaning in the word *ludus* corresponds perfectly not only to the interdisciplinary character of this edited volume but also to our take on play as a *sine qua non* of humanistic inquiry. Play's association with "deception," and "semblance," pointed out by Huizinga further implies "mischievousness," "bringing to light," or "leisure," as opposed to seriousness, and alludes to its potential for new beginnings, setting into motion new realities, new inquiries, and new discoveries. Hence *ludus* shares the root of the word *leid*, which means to "let go frequently," which is common in many other languages, including the Latvian *laist*, which means "to let, publish," or "set in motion." The concept of ludics much like Arendt's action, suggests opportunity for new beginnings, for the unleashing of meaning into the world of discourse. Understood as poetics of play, ludics has deep connections to learning,

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[6]Huizinga, Johan, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955), 35. Amazon.com. https://www.amazon.com/Homo-Ludens-Study-Play-Element-Culture/dp/1621389995. Accessed 28 May 2020.

knowledge creation and its dissemination. In fact, we argue that the ludic drive, or the desire to play, is an essential part of humanistic inquiry and in this respect we align with Huizinga who claimed that culture arises in and as play. Also, in his definition of the humanities, Geofrey Galt Harpham argues that the "scholarly study of documents and artifacts produced by human beings in the past enables us to see the world from different points of view so that we may better understand ourselves."[7] Unlike the sciences that generate understanding through narrowing and refining, the humanities is the art of sensemaking, of interpretation, of generating discourse. But many disciplines representing the humanities have become so thoroughly disciplined in the modern university that they have little room to acknowledge their common connection to *ludere*. The humanities has trended toward putting objects on *dis*play—to immobilize, to capture meaning in time and space. Where play invites new beginnings, display invites reflection. Where play means activity and engagement, display calls for inactivity and speculation.

Through discipline and professionalization, the humanities risks losing sight of its simple goal of "understanding ourselves in the world." Arendt defines the world as all the ways in which people interact with each other and produce meaning through action. What she famously labeled "dark times" is a state in which people are increasingly alienated from the world, or the structures that comprise the space in between individuals. We are now living in dark times. As we write this introduction, the world is in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, wherein space between individuals is mandated as a public health requirement. We are literally distanced from one another as a means of keeping each other safe. But when Arendt speaks of the world as the space between individuals, she is not referring to physical space, she is referring to discourse, the generative play of meaning that happens through art, culture, conversation, love, and shared experience. Even when we are physically close, we can be void of connections. When the world is filled with misinformation, mistrust, and missed opportunities, then we are distanced. When public sector institutions fail to represent the public, when art speaks only for

[7]Harpham, Geoffrey Galt, *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 23. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/H/bo10774861.html.

the artist, when weaponized Tweets are mistaken for dialogue, and when the pursuit of truth is just another lie, then the social distance grows. Dark times prevail.

This book takes the bold position that *play is an antidote to dark times*. Rather than an escape hatch, it provides opportunity for discovery, connection, joy, care, and relational aesthetics—conditions that are central to worldliness, not extraneous to it. Even though play is often characterized as distinct from "everyday life," such as Huizinga's concept of the *magic circle*, it should be seen as a persistent fluctuation as opposed to a constant state.[8] Huizinga defines play as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly."[9] Stepping into the magic circle does not need to be premeditated. Play can happen within a well-organized game, or it can happen spontaneously in a moment and just as quickly subside. It can take recognizable form (games, sport, imaginative exploration), or it can look like something else entirely (deliberation, interpretation, discovery, flirting). Brian Sutton-Smith argues that play is not one thing or another, it is a set of competing rhetorics, most commonly split between the "rhetoric of progress" (play teaches and builds life skills), and the "rhetoric of fate," (play is the "illusion of mastery over life's circumstances").[10] These rhetorics are the ways academics, educators, policymakers, speak about the affordances or dangers of play. They are descriptive of the position of the player, as well as those looking at play from the outside. But Sutton-Smith also introduces the rhetoric of resistance, which represents how players make sense of the power dynamics in a playspace and how play is used as an oppositional strategy to fixed structures. Miguel Sicart characterizes this kind of resistance as playfulness. "To be playful is to appropriate a context that is not created or intended for play. Playfulness is the play-like appropriation of what should not be play."[11] From a unique flourish in a dance, to uneven rhymes in poetry, to a bold interpretation of a

[8] Huizinga, Johan, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*.

[9] Ibid., 13.

[10] Sutton-Smith, Brian, *The Ambiguity of Play.* Accessed 28 May 2020.

[11] Sicart, Miguel, *Play Matters* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 27. https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/play-matters.

biblical text, to a surprise kiss between new lovers, playfulness defines a whole slate of actions that are outside of what typically gets labeled as labor or serious work. Play is where and when we learn. According to Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown, "All systems of play are, at base, learning systems. They are ways of engaging in complicated negotiations of meaning, interaction and competition, not only for entertainment, but also for creating meaning. Most critically, play reveals a structure of learning that is radically different from the one most schools or other formal learning environments provide, and which is well suited to the notions of a world in constant flux."[12]

David Staley, in his book *Alternative Universities,* develops this idea further. He proposes a model of a university he calls "the Institute for Advanced Play," where play is acknowledged as the "highest form of learning, placed well above the acquisition and production of knowledge."[13] This institute is designed as a playground and encourages imaginative exploration. There is no specific goal for the acquisition of knowledge. It is for its own sake. Play always exists within structure. Staley's Institute is an imaginative articulation of that. Whether it's the structure of a board game, a playing field, a poem, the shared imagination of a group of children at a playground, within a dance, a conversation, flirtation, or even the laboratory, play is never completely free. Either the players themselves or the architects of the playspace create a space for play to happen. This can be entirely within the imagination of one person, or in a codified rule book. The Institute accommodates all forms. As play is enveloped by its own facilitating structure, it can be mobile—following players around from school to home, from peace to war. Staley continues in his explanation: the Institute is a "space for unlearning and failure. Unlearning implies the opposite of a specialist, who is someone with deep knowledge…Failure is a natural outcome of pure play. Freed from any pressure to perform or produce, [participants] explore and

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[12]Thomas and Brown, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change*, 97. https://www.amazon.com/New-Culture-Learning-Cultivating-Imagination/dp/1456458884.

[13]*Alternative Universities: Speculative Design for Innovation in Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 161. https://www.amazon.com/Alternative-Universities-Speculative-Innovation-Education/dp/1421427419. Accessed 29 May 2020.

appropriate and fail."[14] This space of play, removed from the pressures of industrial productivity, activates players toward discovering worldly meaning, without mind to specific outcomes. Play, when structured appropriately, provides a safe space to fail.[15] While Staley's speculative designs are fictional, untethered by the practicalities of tuition, grant funding, and the needs of benefactors, it provides a useful object from which to imagine other futures where ludics is aligned with humanistic inquiry.

This book is not a critique of the humanities, but rather a celebration of the play drive, "the core of humanity," in Friedrich Schiller's words, which binds humanistic inquiry together. Take notice of Schiller's famous quote, for instance: "Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word man, and he is only wholly Man when he is playing" (qtd. in Frissen, Valerie, Jos De Mul, and Joost Raessens, 76). Since Schiller an entire tradition in favor of play has been established in the humanities, from the rise of modernity to today's ludic century,[16] which is well summarized by Valerie Frissen, Jos De Mul, and Joost Raessens as the ludic turn:

> Alongside reasoning (Homo sapiens) and making (Homo faber), playing (Homo ludens) now advanced to the centre of attention. Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, Marcuse, Deleuze and Derrida (most of them considered as forerunners or representatives of postmodern culture) followed the ludological footprints of Heraclitus and Schiller in their attempts to transform modern, predominantly rationalistic and utilitarian ontology and anthropology. But in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, a strong interest in play – and the related phenomenon game – grew as well. One can think, for example, of the implementation of game theory in biology, economics and cultural anthropology. In addition to the interest in the phenomena of play and

[14] Ibid., 163.

[15] Juul, Jesper, *The Art of Failure* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013). https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/art-failure. Accessed 29 May 2020.

[16] Zimmerman, Eric, "Position Statement: Manifesto for a Ludic Century," In *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications,* edited by Steffen P. Walz and Deterding Sebastian (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press, 2014), 19–22. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1287hcd.5. Accessed 30 May 2020.

> games in these already existing disciplines, in the last decades – motivated by the substantial growth of leisure time and the growth of ludo-industry and ludo-capitalism – several new disciplines entirely devoted to the study of play and (computer) games have emerged.[17]

Sensing the resurgence of the ludic turn then, the editors of this volume in 2013 established a forum that would focus primarily on play and the cross-pollination it could potentially engender in the current humanities. They sought a kind of language very close to Mary Flanagan's ludic language that draws on Nicolas Bourriaud's cited relational aesthetics: "In this, the people involved in relational works together craft a dynamic disruption of the mundane and reconnect with humanness. In a sense, relational works are in direct opposition to abstractions and disembodied experience" (Flanagan 261).[18] Such disruption of the mundane could potentially disrupt the status quo of the traditionally understood humanities that this edited volume aspires to offer, by making room for embodied experiences of play as humanistic inquiry that encompasses poetry, performance, philosophy, and other disciplines. The essays collected in this volume were all presented at the *Ludics* seminar as part of the Harvard Mahindra Humanities Center,[19] which is co-chaired by the editors of this book. Each of the contributors was invited to present new work that examined the role of play in humanistic inquiry—from disciplines well beyond those typically associated with the humanities.

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[17] See p. 76. in Frissen, Valerie, Jos De Mul, and Joost Raessens, "Homo Ludens 2.0: Play, Media and Identity," In *Contemporary Culture: New Directions in Art and Humanities Research*, edited by Thissen Judith, Zwijnenberg Robert, and Zijlmans Kitty (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 75–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wp6n0.8. Accessed 30 May 2020.

[18] Flanagan, Mary, "Playful Aesthetics: Toward a Ludic Language," In *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, edited by Steffen P. Walz and Deterding Sebastian (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press, 2014), 249–272. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1287hcd.19. Accessed 30 May 2020.

Mary Flanagan delivered the talk "Purposeful Gaming" in a joint presentation with Constance Rinaldo at the Ludics Seminar on September 14, 2015. Their talk focused on the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL), an international consortium of the world's leading natural history libraries that has the goal of improving research methodology by collaboratively making biodiversity literature openly available to the world as part of a global biodiversity community.

[19] "Ludics—Mahindra Humanities Center—Harvard University." http://mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/content/ludics. Accessed 27 May 2020.

Over the years, the seminar has welcomed historians, literary critics, theologians, classicists, dancers, visual artists, philosophers, educators, entrepreneurs, translators, activists, and physicists. Each participant was asked to reflect on the role of play in their object of study, or in their process of inquiry and each one came up with their own ludic language, and in many cases, with their own *sui generis* embodied experiences as it is exemplified in the sections of poetics and performance of this book. The result is a playbook of distinct ludic narratives that together constitute aspects of ludic language situated in an eternal present and that oscillates between what Roger Callois calls free play (*paidia*) and constrained play (*ludus*),[20] between one discipline and another, in the hope to further advance a dialogue that will lead to a cross-pollination of thought. Together, the essays collected here represent a range of perspectives and approaches to humanistic inquiry where *ludics* is a common thread expressed in a ludic language.

The opening section of the book is called the "Playspace, Ethics and Engagement." Here the authors ask questions such as: Who benefits from play? Can play transform the structures of institutions? Who gets to be a player? And who makes those decisions? Miguel Sicart's essay, "Toward an Ethics of *Homo Ludens*," reflects on what happens when computers become the players and create worlds. More specifically, Sicart claims that, as we live in a historical moment defined by the ubiquitous presence of computers—playful machines that shape our experience of computers from video games and gamification to other forms of leisure, play has a fundamental role in shaping the cultures of the information age and therefore it has profound social, cultural, and ethical implications. Such an example is offered from another era by Arthur Louis Ruprecht, Jr., in his essay "SPORT MATTERS: On Art, Social Artifice and the Rules of the Game, or, the Politics of Sport." Ruprecht's essay showcases how C. L. R. James's *Beyond a Boundary* connects race, class, nation, and sport and emphasizes the moral and political meaning of organized sport.

Doris Sommer's "PreText: Press Play to Teach Anything," is a descriptive analysis of her play-based curriculum that uses playful humanistic

[20]Caillois, *Roger, Man, Play and Games* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1961). https://www.amazon.com/Man-Play-Games-Roger-Caillois/dp/025207033X. Accessed 28 May 2020.

inquiry to generate discourse. The curriculum invites participants to design activities, to create interpretations, and then pause to reflect. Speculations, readings that converge or diverge, and admiration for different points of view all come from the players in *eureka* moments that glow with pleasure. They add up to an aesthetic education in deep reading and in broad civility that can revive the school of Athens and Schiller's Enlightenment. Next is an article by political philosopher and civic engagement scholar, Peter Levine. "Work, Play and Civic Engagement" juxtaposes *homo ludens* with *homo faber*, contrasting the player with the public worker and artisan in the world. Being critical of civic engagement designed to be more play-like or game-like, Levine dismantles the relationship between work and play in the civic domain and discusses what may happen to that relationship if work disappears for many human beings while opportunities for play expand. The following essay is by scholar-architect Zenovia Toloudi. Her essay "Technoecologies: The Interplay of Space and its Perception" examines how play is used as a tactic in architecture and urban design. Here the author, through an examination of her own architectural work, reimagines a playful symbiosis that begins with language, between people and the environment. By working through tangible media (models and installations) with a grounded vision and through concepts/modes such, experiment and experience, metabolic aesthetics, ordinary and illusionary, empathy and vulnerability, public participation and user engagement, the living can be imagined as possible, positive, and even playful. Play with language is crucial for Toloudi's work and opens up possibilities for the perception of space. The section concludes with Eric Gordon and Gabriel Mugar's essay "Meaningful Inefficiencies: Incorporating Play into Civic Design" that examines play as a logic of civic design. Through play, they argue, it is possible to create spaces for trust between institutions and constituents. Based on research with civic organizations ranging from public newsrooms to municipal governments, they identify how practitioners are using play to scaffold community interactions. The essay concludes with a brief case study of a project called *Participatory Pokémon Go*, where play was used as a backdrop to engage youth in repairing data inequities in Boston.

The second section, "Playthings, Comedy and Laughter," comprises five essays that span three millennia from various disciplines, including theology, philosophy, classics, archaeology, music, theater, and dance, with a particular emphasis on laughter as a manifestation of play. Within this frame, Mary J. Yossi's "'Let Us Laugh and Play': Laughter in Greek Lyric Poetry" shows how laughter connects with play. Through a short selection of fragments of Archilochus, Theognis, Semonides, Sappho, and Pindar, with reference to genre and occasion, modes of behavior, and systems of value that the vocabulary of laughter reveals, Yossi shows that, apart from its principal function as a weapon for derision or blame (*psogos*), laughter in Ancient Greek Lyric Poetry can assume various meanings depending on the context (sympotic, erotic, ritual, etc.) within which the term (*gelōs*) is used.

Similarly, in his essay "Ludic Music in Ancient Greek and Roman Theater," Timothy Moore argues that that ancient theater's music was not just for fun but its ludic element is undeniable in any play we consider. In some, like *Mostellaria*, music carried audiences into a realm of playfulness that would be impossible in drama that was merely spoken.

The inherent connection between the ludic and comedy is also extended to our modern era. In his essay, "Comedy, Physicality, and Ludic Dance Gestures: The Comic in Ballet and Tai Chi?," John Robinson-Appels juxtaposes the training and performing traditions of ballet and Tai Chi only to see that the smile, as is true with the Mona Lisa's smile, is an enigmatic gesture in which both the tragic and the comic are interpreted. The physical action of producing a smile is a ludic operation filled with both hope and trepidation, and is deployed upon the domains of the tragic and the comic. The comic, Robinson-Appels argues, is a byproduct of the ludic gesture, the result of a ludic action, the aftereffect, the afterglow, of a committed physical gesture which has been enacted.

Laughter is also discussed in a theological context. In his essay, "Did Jesus Christ Laugh? Umberto Eco's Question and Saint John Chrysostom's Response," Chrysonstomos A. Stamoulis delves deep into John Chrysostom's views on laughter and argues that what bothered the Father of the Church is the inopportune and measureless laughter that distances man from Godly mourning, not laughter itself. On the

contrary, laughter when manifested at the appropriate moment is what allows the flourishing of the mystery of friendship and community essential for the resurrection of the human soul. This reality presents joy, mixed with sorrow and pain which moves beyond theories of purity and fleshless idolatry of "types and forms." Interestingly, a reality that presents joy and laughter in the lives of children who are instructed to seek the divine is also reflected in the material culture of children's toys during the Byzantine era. In her essay, "Toys, Childhood and Material Culture in Byzantium," Brigitte Pitarakis argues that the universe of children's play offers a valuable tool for a new reading of Byzantine artistic production, as abstraction and phantasm, the two central elements in children's play, regulate exchanges between the sensible and the intelligible in all aspects of secular and religious life in Byzantium. Her examination of how toys mediated children's interactions with nature and animals, as well as their social interactions with children and adults, show how they were used as vehicles in the quest of divine knowledge.

The third section is called "Language and Poetics of Play." It delves into the playful and ironic intricacies of language, identity, and poetic art as defined by perception of space and the slippage of language. Starting with a reference to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* and diving into a detailed comparative poetry analysis, Sarah Green's essay "How to Catch a Falling Knife: Poetic Play as the Practice of Negative Capability," demonstrates how play activates poetic imagination and discloses *ars poetica* as negative capability. The endless capability to activate creative imagination is also demonstrated by Danuta Fjellestad in her essay "The Ludic Impulse in Postmodern Fiction," which is informed by Zimmerman's *Ludic Manifesto* and (re)claims a place for post-postmodern fiction in the so-called ludic turn. Focusing on the *Gameful World* collection, Fjellestad proposes that while postmodern fiction is high on cognitive ludicity, post-postmodernism is high on ergodic ludicity. It shows that the ludic impulse in post-postmodern fiction reconceptualizes the format of the codex: the gaming elements are recast from the diegetic level, the level of the story, onto the material machine or platform for telling stories, the book.

Yorgos Anagnostou in his *sui generis* autobiographical account "Immigraντ Poetics: Play as Performativity of the Liminal Self" reveals

from within how *ars poetica* is instinctively unleashed through play and how this process automatically creates the immigrant's oscillating self in an effort to constantly negotiate a sense of belonging and non-belonging, a sense of constant wrestling with language(s) and a sense of endless possibilities due to the constant slippage of meaning, where freeplay is seen as disruption of presence, an interplay between absence and presence.

In her essay, "Games Translators Play in Bilingual French-Canadian Theater," Nicole Nolette discloses how playful language in translation helps us understand how target-oriented practices can resemble a bow and arrow, and how translation can be a pointed trajectory toward purposeful exclusion. Such a conception of translation reminds us that translation doesn't have to occur between two languages and cultures, that it can even play across the two to consolidate a single community. Through playful translation, bilingualism and translation intersect, creating different versions of bilingual performances that cater to specific audiences in a gesture of resistance while accommodating unilingual spectators whose presence is considered to be necessary to become legitimate. Thus, the partial translation process points to its own bias, its own partiality and fondness for a particular ideal spectator, its own intended circulation from the margins. It is a jolting reminder that terms need not be deemed untranslatable, but that translation itself can engage with their resistance to substitution. In other words, it calls on us to take up what Apter refers to as "a linguistic form of creative failure with homeopathic uses" within the context of translation rather than without it.

The last section of this book is called "Play (Modes) & Performance as Transgression." It opens with Pierre Taminiaux's essay, "Ludics as Transgression: From Surrealism to the Absurd to Pataphysics," which analyzes the critical power of ludics in six of his plays, influenced by surrealism, the theater of the absurd and pataphysics, published in the last decade. These works constitute a metaphorical representation of twenty-first century French culture and of some of the main issues that characterize it, from random violence to the overall decline of the French social contract. Ludics is conceived here as an important tool for the

expression of a social and political discourse that is rooted in the community. Ludics is introduced to question ways of thinking that are based on purely objective and rational language.

In her turn, Catalina Florina Florescu's autobiographical play "2 Sisters, 2 Stories: Breast Cancer, Femininity, and Body Ownership" which is a tribute to her mother, a victim of breast cancer, uses the fluidity of ludics in order to talk freely and raise awareness about women's ill bodies. Inscribed in a feminist discourse informed by the transformational power of games in performance, Florescu created the game "Scrabble-Cancer Project" that encapsulates the playful dimension of people's lives and exposes and challenges the linguistic impact of the illness. This adapted scrabble game conceives of bodies and words as open, associative structures that connect through people's bodies via sensations and experiences in an infinity of connective tissues. For Florescu, games and exercises have the capacity to ease the embarrassment and pain of difficult conversations.

The next piece is called "'Don't Be Mean' and Other Lessons from Children's Play of the Federal Theater Project." Leslie Frost takes us back to children's theater in the 1930s, which seldom engaged with the most controversial political issues of its time, such as labor justice, anti-racism, and anti-fascism. Yet she discovered three children's plays of the Federal Theater Project (1935–1939) that explore how children's play and childhood imagination vanquish forces of violence, oppression, and inequality. The cultivation of civic virtue in early childhood education is the focus of the next chapter coming from the field of early childhood education and landscape architecture. Historian of architecture Diana Ramírez-Jasso in her article, "The Republic of Childhood: Friedrich Froebel's Kindergarten and *Naturphilosophie*" walks us through Friedrich Froebel's Kindergarten model, established during the Enlightenment. According to that model the garden functioned as a miniature state for children, since they were engaged in gardening practices that allowed for an engagement with objects, people, and nature that emerged out of the child's own desire. Such a recognition of the benefits of harnessing the child's natural curiosity and discoverability as a conduit for genuine artistic expression is undertaken in the final chapter of this edited volume. Vassiliki Rapti's essay, "Oscillating Between Tag and Hopscotch:

Theo Angelopoulos' Playful Aesthetics," examines how the Greek auteur-cineaste uses the children's games, specifically tag and hopscotch, as cinematic tropes for autobiographical reflection and reflection upon Greece's bleak history across his films.

The essays collected in this volume began as presentations at the *Ludics* Seminar. Each is engaged in the project of centering play in humanistic inquiry. Most of the essays are not traditional in format or subject. They span the range of the humanities disciplines, but they share the play drive,[21] the motivation for understanding the human condition that is more concerned with the connectivity of discourse than the capture of knowledge. In this spirit, we also introduce the artwork on the cover of the book. The piece is called *Gentleman's Game* and it is a collaboration between two artists, Brandon Friend and Jason Douglas Griffin. According to Pamela Bryan, the owner of the Octavia gallery, "In their signature technique, Friend and Griffin collaborate and create works by combining mixed-media that is unlike any other. *Gentleman's Game* has a unique process of turn-based mark making that results in arresting pieces rich with depth and texture. This process employs various methodologies rooted in painting, printmaking, collage, drawing and image transfer. Each mark on the canvas, whether unintentional or deliberate, forces the painting into a new context that is non-linear and shifting. The emergence of recognizable images or gestures is intended to provoke a sense of familiarity that echoes throughout the works. *Gentleman's Game* provides an aesthetic that explores themes in pop culture and mythology, which seamlessly fuses together a partnership built on individual approach, mutual respect, trust, and fair play."[22] The piece represents a give and take between two artists, a playful array of references, that seems not to lead any place in particular, but invites the viewer into the playspace to explore.

[21]This is inspired by philosopher Bernard Suits' notion of the "ludic attitude." He explains how players need to approach games with a desire to play the game. He declares that all games are voluntary. Indeed, we assert that must be voluntary as well, otherwise it drifts into the realm of labor. See Suits, Bernard, *The Grasshopper* (New York: Broadview Press, 2005). https://www.amazon.com/Grasshopper-Games-Life-Utopia/dp/155111772X.

[22]https://medium.com/@__Portia/gentlemans-game-4b9b87adf694. Accessed 29 May 2020.

As you, dear reader, explore this book, we hope that you approach it playfully. Don't look for specific outcomes; don't merely skim for a reference in the paper you're writing. Instead, look for connections between essays, imagine implicit connotations, find allusions to long-forgotten ideas of yours that have been gathering dust in your memory. We are living in dark times. Humanistic inquiry, guided by *ludere*, is more important now than ever before. Play invites new beginnings. We hope that you welcome them.

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