

THE PERMEABILITY OF A ROAD CAPTAIN:
PLAYING AS A PHILOSOPHICAL
FRAMEWORK

IMARA FELKERS
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THE PERMEABILITY OF A ROAD CAPTAIN: PLAYING AS A PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

IMARA FELKERS

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ABSTRACT

What does a philosopher generally do? They read, write, and give lectures. However, in the philosophical struggle to liberate play from its marginal position, the act of playing itself is generally not acknowledged as a method or form of knowledge. This thesis explores the possibilities when playing is understood as a philosophical method and a form of knowledge. It develops new ideas on how to connect the concepts of play, mimesis, and philosophy as an embodied philosophical practice. By philosophising play as an embodied practice, this thesis aims to contribute to the broader movement of unlocking alternative sources of knowledge within the expansive decolonising movement. It serves as an invitation to consider how the ontology of play, when embodied as a practice, can contribute to epistemology and provide access to our human essence.

The thesis particularly explores the ideas of the philosophy of play of German phenomenologist Eugen Fink (1905 – 1975) as an embodied practice. A second contribution of this study is a critique of Fink's ontological differentiation in the manners in which children and adults play. Through this distinction, Fink seems to omit the embodied experience of playing as a child in the life of an adult. However, by criticising this difference through the act of playing, it becomes evident that Fink's perspective is strengthened, asserting that play is a fundamental phenomenon of human existence.

Restoring the connection between the concept of mimesis and play within philosophical anthropology allows for disseminating the ontology of play to a broader audience. The crux of this development lies in the decision to employ autoethnography as a methodology. By rebuilding elements from play experienced as a child into an adult's life, I embrace Fink's premise that the centre of existence is experienced in playing as a child. However, the significant difference is that theory becomes spatial. This approach empowers adults, students, philosophers, and non-philosophers to embody theoretical and abstract phenomenological ideas about play, thus gaining insight into the potential of human existence.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text.

No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed: Imara Felkers

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Since 2006, I have been teaching philosophy at the University of the Arts in Utrecht (HKU). What is typically characteristic of my philosophy courses is that, before delving into the philosophical frameworks, I have students 'mimic' the ideas and concepts found in the writings of various philosophers. Therefore, they embody these thoughts first.

One of my first inspirations for developing this kind of practical philosophy for education came from my own study of philosophy. In 2004, I took a philosophy course on self-knowledge with ethics philosopher professor Paul van Tongeren. He introduced Stoic philosophy through the diary of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180). This diary is an ongoing exploration where Marcus Aurelius attempts to live within Stoic philosophy and is, therefore, in dialogue with himself to maintain living this Stoic life. However, in the opening of the book, book 1, he lists what he has learned from each of the people who played a positive role in shaping his life and being a Stoic.

As a student, I received an assignment from professor van Tongeren to write my own 'book 1'. What I have learned from this assignment is that it reflects the competences we receive from those to whom we are connected.

Marcus Aurelius starts with short sentences, creating the impression of a somewhat hesitant beginning. As the expression progresses, contemplation and conversation emerge on the ways in which he learned from specific teachers, friends, or family members. His seventeenth gratitude is a note of thanks towards the gods.

Since 'mimicking' philosophy is at the core of this thesis, I use this template to express my gratitude to those to whom I am indebted for completing it. I begin with short sentences also and as the expression progresses my contemplation emerges.

1. From my father, I received a love for sports and learned to enjoy watching them on TV.

2. As a child, I learned how to make 'real' brown cycling helmets from my neighbour, 'Uncle' Ton. Becoming skilled at crafting the brown paper helmet was one of my first experiences that taught me that playthings can be a portal to magic.
3. Thanks to the members of the cycling club *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* in Krombeke, Belgium, I was able to grasp Johan Huizinga's study of the play-element in culture. I also learned why the phenomenologist Eugen Fink asserts that playing is structurally not an isolated activity but an intimate form of human community.
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traction. Thank you for opening your door, for opening your heart. Thank you for being my mentor and agent. Thanks to you I learned that being playful is possible while simultaneously remaining a well-respected priest. Because of you I could embody how Huizinga's comparison with a magic circle and a temple can be grasped. For me you are the embodiment of Homo Ludens.

9. From University of the Arts Utrecht, HKU, I received the trust placed in teachers to develop their own material. Within this trust I am able to design incredible projects with my incredible colleagues.

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11. My great colleague, visual artist Harm Hajonides van der Meulen, taught me to dare to be open, to dare to wonder, and to dare to see that we are beings who try and try, laugh about it, try again, or become confused. Thanks to your amazing qualities, I got the chance to grasp 'coming to appearance' as an embodied practice. I strive to be a good listener, as you are. I have never met someone who can listen and ask questions at the right time and at the right spot as you can. I feel truly privileged to work with you.

12. Wendy Russell, I am indebted for your incredible knowledge in the field of play and play philosophy. I feel privileged that you agreed to be my supervisor for this project. I first became acquainted with your name through your publication *Play for a Change* (Lester & Russell, 2008), which you co-authored with the late Stuart Lester. I am immensely thankful to you as one of the founders of the Philosophy at Play conference at the University of Gloucestershire. Your unwavering dedication has been instrumental in elevating play philosophy to a higher level through these conferences. It was your knowledge and enthusiasm that encouraged me to engage in playful thinking and apply it to the realm of philosophy. Your reflective abilities enabled

me to understand the significance of my actions. I am deeply indebted to you and carry this enjoyable and dedicated approach into my own teaching practice.

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16. From my mother, I learned to be loved. The day that you passed away

was a key turning point in my life. I decided to study philosophy. This thesis is in great part about you. Therefore, the thoughts and ‘talks’ with you during these years of research made you come ‘alive’ again. The remembrance of the walks we had made me chuckle again because of your ability to make up names for flowers you longed to know the name of.

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RATIONALE: YOU ARE HERE

“Disclaimer”

I thought my thesis would be about middle-aged men in Lycra (MAMILs). Until I dis-covered that the magic circle is leaking. This opening sentence leaves a lot to be explained.

Firstly, the notion ‘dis-covered’ is deliberately written with a hyphen. Why do I emphasise its components? Secondly, a clarification of concepts is needed. What is a magic circle exactly and who are these so called ‘MAMILs’? Thirdly, what can be said about the connection between this discovery and my moving away from MAMILs?

To begin with: The notion ‘discover’ can be understood by breaking it down into its parts: ‘dis-’ meaning to remove or reverse, and ‘cover,’ suggesting that to discover is literally to ‘uncover’ or reveal something previously hidden. The discovery was done by me, as an embodied act of dis-covering the concept of leaking. This experience has enabled me to philosophise play as an embodied practice.

What then is the subject of my discovery, the magic circle? Perspectives on the leakiness of the magic circle are expressed in different ways and have already been explored by several significant scholars. Therefore, I could have read about it and learned, for instance, that Castronova (2005) speaks about a ‘porous membrane’ in relation to the concept of the magic circle.

My colleague, Marinka Copier, at the University of the Arts in Utrecht (HKU), the Netherlands, emphasizes the problem of the notion of the magic circle. She suggests examining Johan Huizinga’s work. Copier (2009) challenges the magic circle concept proposed by Salen and Zimmerman (2004), questioning the perspective introduced by them. According to Copier, these American game scholars borrowed the notion from Dutch scholar Johan Huizinga (1872 -1945). His work *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1950) is recognized as a fundamental work on play (Avedon & Sutton-Smith, 1971; Caillois, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Suits, 2005;

Sutton-Smith, 2001, 2016). Copier asserts that Salen and Zimmerman (2004) turn Huizinga's concept of play into the concept of the magic circle.

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga uses three definitions of play. All are slightly different, but the emphasis is that play is 'a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 13).

According to the game studies concept of the magic circle, games proceed within their own boundaries of time and space, absorbing players utterly into a separate world set apart from ordinary life (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Copier (2009) concludes that drawing on Huizinga's definition, games provide this magic circle according to Salen and Zimmerman, and that this concept of the magic circle is widely spread and commonly used among game scholars. Huizinga does use the notion of the magic circle, but as one of several examples of playgrounds which are in the midst of the ordinary world. According to Huizinga, card tables, tennis courts, temples, courts of justice and magic circles are 'forbidden spots isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 10).

So, to which conception of the magic circle is my discovery connected?

I can easily answer this question by confirming that my discovery concerns Huizinga's concept of the magic circle. However, Huizinga already states that a magic circle is within the ordinary world, so how would this discovery of a leaking magic circle make a difference? This thesis suggests that the embodiment of playing makes the difference. Playing *is* self-witnessing (Fink, 1995). But it would be an understatement to say that there is quite some complexity around playing. Remarkably, part of this complexity lies in Huizinga's definition of play. I'll provide a short clarification of the connection between Huizinga's notion of play and the magic circle, in combination with the status of playing in my research. This is crucial because it has consequences for the outline of my PhD thesis.

This brings us to how the magic circle relates to MAMILs, an acronym that

stands for Middle-aged men in Lycra. Due to the rising popularity of road cycling, combined with health promotion and marketing, the term was coined in England for this group of cyclists who ride on (often expensive) racing bikes for recreational purposes, dressed in cycling clothing made from the thin fabric Lycra (Falcous, 2017).

At first, I recognised the playground of public roads where middle-aged men ride in a replicas of professional cycling team outfits, as a “forbidden spot.” Yet, it seemed transparent as well because I was able to watch these men while driving my car to the forest to walk my dogs. I especially noticed many of them on sunny Sundays. They ride on expensive Pinarello Dogma bikes, but the brand Specialized racing bikes, used by the professional riders of the Belgian Quickstep cycling team, are by far the most favoured, as I observed when passing them frequently with my car. The MAMILs ride in pairs, ride in groups, or ride alone. However, in the transparency of the public streets, somehow, they are hedged round, hallowed, and subject to special rules; just as Huizinga describes his examples of a tennis court, a temple or a magic circle.

The idea was to do ethnographic research as part of my methodology. It seemed suitable to uncover what happens there on these public streets. The men seem to be mimicking young professional riders, being highly deliberate in selecting their brands of racing bikes and all suited up in Lycra. My assumption was that these men would help me explore the philosophical notion of mimesis, and vice versa, the appearance of MAMILs would be a concrete example of this philosophical concept. I assumed there would in some way be a connection between Huizinga’s forbidden spots and the concept of mimesis.

What I didn’t realise is how difficult it is to distinguish a paradigm of mimesis while being in it (Kuhn, 1970). I was, in fact, immersed in a critique of Eugen Fink (1905-1975) on mimesis and, on top of that, in a philosophical assumption made by this German phenomenologist as well. Fink (2016) asserts that adults, contrary to children, hide their play. ‘In the end it is not 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’ (Fink, 2016, p. 18).

The assertion that an adult plays more secretly and in a more masked manner is at the heart of this thesis. This thesis not only addresses the problem of how the status of play influences (self) witnessing through playing but also poses the question of *who* witnesses in the domain of philosophy and how. Notably, leading philosophers who philosophise about play are predominantly men and employ classical philosophical methods such as the descriptive method (Malabou, 2011). According to Malabou (2011) this dominant position has consequences as a female philosopher. But, by consistently using the embodiment of play as a philosophical methodology, this thesis addresses this issue within philosophy while reinforcing the message of the German phenomenologist Eugen Fink, who argues that playing is a form of self-understanding (Fink, 1995). Therefore, it is an understatement to say that Fink's statement about secrecy and masked play by adults, as well as the separation between play as played by children and as played by adults, has consequences for this research. It made me to decide to change the form of research: from ethnography I shifted to autoethnography. And I made the decision to change the setup for the style of this PhD thesis. This decision was made to show what the implications are when a philosopher discovers that she is playing 'secretly and in a more masked manner.'

Theorising playing 'secretly, in a more masked manner' in 'forbidden spots'

The combination, 'secretly, in more masked manner' and 'forbidden spots' within the context of play, connects the perspectives of Johan Huizinga and Eugen Fink. In this thesis the complexity of play is embedded precisely within these two discourses. However, these two perspectives on play clash.

Otterspeer (2016) contends that Huizinga's perspective on play is drawn on a Platonic form of Idealism. Huizinga's choice in this seems surprising, since Plato denigrates play (Geuss, 2003; Murdoch, 1977). According to Fink (2016), this denigration of play is caused by Plato in connecting play to mimesis. Plato denigrates mimesis and hence he denigrates play as well. Fink argues that Plato's denigration of play still reigns in our contemporary assumptions on play (Fink, 2016, pp. 97 - 125).

With an example of the Dutch philosopher Samuel IJsseling I would like to demonstrate the complexity of playing 'secretly, in a more masked manner'. Not just as an 'adult', as Fink speaks of, but specifically this adult as a philosopher as researcher. After this example I'll return and bear this perspective

in mind to explore this complexity of play situated within ‘the present phenomenological and positivist “epistemology”’ (Fink, 2016, p. 244).

A short journey through IJsseling’s library

According to Dutch philosopher and Heidegger scholar Samuel IJsseling (1932–2015) a philosopher without a library and without books is hardly imaginable (Groot & IJsseling, 2013).

In a conversation with philosopher Ger Groot, Samuel IJsseling raises the question of what a philosopher is and, in turn, quotes the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl: “I have lived as a philosopher, and I also try to die as a philosopher.” (Groot & IJsseling, 2013, p. 135). IJsseling then ponders what Husserl might mean by this. ‘What does it mean to live as a philosopher and try to die as a philosopher?’ (p.135). Samuel IJsseling further elaborates on this question by asking what one sees when a philosopher is at work. Groot records IJsseling’s response: “He reads; *she* reads’, he quickly adds, ‘and writes. Books, articles, lectures. That is primarily it” (p. 135).

During my master’s studies in philosophy, I attended a guest lecture by Samuel IJsseling at Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Invited by ethics professor Paul van Tongeren, he gave a lecture on the concept of mimesis (IJsseling, 1990). When a question arose from the audience about the relevance of Plato’s view on mimesis, I recorded his response. IJsseling replied, ‘We are all still Plato’s children, firmly rooted with our little Greek feet in Greek ground’ (personal communication, I.F., 2006) [i](#).

Is epistemology itself masked?

During my PhD journey, I attended two research modules MR401 (Philosophy and Approaches of Research) and MR402 (Methodologies and Methods) at the University of Gloucestershire.

To understand the train of thought of methodology, one must first grasp the structure of epistemology. After all, the ‘PhD’ degree stands for ‘Doctor of Philosophy,’ and epistemology is a part of philosophy, as ethnographer Dr. John Hockey reminded us in this course.

Based on schemas from scholars such as Lincoln (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109), the epistemological position, how the world can be known, is a post-positivist position. In this “post” paradigm, which reveals that something precedes it, two major paradigms are joined: the positivist paradigm and the interpretive paradigm (Kuhn, 1970).

In general, positivist epistemology is an approach within philosophy that asserts knowledge can only be derived from sensory experience and empirically observable facts. It emphasises objective, observable phenomena as the basis for valid knowledge and rejects speculation or metaphysical explanations. In contrast, the interpretive paradigm acknowledges subjectivity and focuses on the social construction of meaning. It delves into the role of language, culture, and context in understanding the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kuhn, 1970).

Although these knowledge concepts may sometimes have different names or more extensive schemas (Ellis, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), ‘it has been unanimously established that the epistemology in which contemporary knowledge concepts reside is post-positivist’ (Ellis, 2004, p. 29). Ontological claims are made from this post-positivistic position in various knowledge domains, such as medicine, sociology, psychology, philosophy, theatre studies, the arts, and so on (Creswell & Garrett, 2008).

While in the literature (Ellis, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Smith & Sparkes, 2008), the positivist paradigm and the interpretive paradigm are visually depicted as equivalent domains, the reality seems to be different. Starting in the late eighteenth century, Romanticism tried to reverse Plato’s judgment on play. Geuss (2003) concludes that the Romantics tried to fight Plato’s judgment using its own weapons. They battled the rules within Plato’s values about what knowledge is. Poetry might easily be considered a form, not of knowing, but of making (as indeed the word poetry itself indicates). Or, it could be seen as an appearance, activity, or creating (Fink, 2016; Spariosu, 1989).

Creswell and Garrett (2008) advocate for a clear delineation of

ontological claims to maintain the purity of mixed methods research. But clarity is not at stake here. The issue here is the question of what has happened with the tension between what is real science and what is pseudo-science (Kuhn, 1970).

Eugen Fink places quotation marks on epistemology because rational understanding can only survey in the world. He uses the notion ‘intraworldly’ (Fink, 2016, p. 11), to refer to beings within the world, but the notion ‘worldly’ in ‘intraworldly’ signifies a difference. The train of thought within Fink’s ideas on play come from the perspective of this world-significance, and the ontology of play surpasses this tension.

As long as human play is judged from the superficial, though not untrue, perspective that holds that, as a specific embodied behaviour, play is led and guided by ideas that only concern an imaginary play-world – that play thus remains in the contrasting shadow of serious life – then an ontological understanding prevails that too quickly only distinguishes being actual and non-actuality, demarcating the simply real aspects of play (embodied activity) from the fictive play-world. The ontological problem of what an existent appearance is, what shadow, mirroring, image, and what symbolic representation are, is not dealt with at all. (Fink, 2016, p. 244)

To me, Fink’s concern sounds like an invitation to think through and contribute with a small suggestion.

Bridging, not closing the gap: the suspension bridge as a metaphor

If Fink asserts that ‘play is activity and creativity’ (Fink, 2016, p. 21) and aligns with the criticism that since the emergence of Western philosophy, a world-defining distinction has been made between play and reason, then the theory of knowledge (epistemology) has consequences.

To establish connections in general, the metaphor of a bridge is often used. ‘Building bridges’ is a metaphorical expression that means fostering connections and cultivating understanding between different parties or groups. However, the expression does not specify the type of bridge used to foster understanding. Is a beam bridge envisaged, in order to close a gap and connect two sides? However, Fink wants to stay out of a binary opposition, that is, there are not ‘two sides’ to connect. In short, his train of thought derives from ‘the all-encompassing fundamental feature of worldliness’ (Fink, 2016,

p. 191). He has a polysemous understanding of this concept of worldliness. 'While an individual processes runs its course, at the same time innumerable processes run their courses with it' (Fink, 2016, p. 189).

The polysemous concept of worldly and being in the world, 'intra-worldly', is connected to the concepts of the actual and the non-actual. These are not binarily related to each other: this is an artificial connection made by Plato which is still dominant according to Fink. His critique on the binary opposition is that in the actual, there can be non-actuality; like mimesis, imagination, or fantasy (such as a unicorn, using a clear example from Fink). Moreover, the non-actuality always needs actuality to be able to appear. Coming to appearance, a unicorn needs to be drawn for example. And a game of pretend needs, for instance, a middle-aged man, a racing bike, a public street. 'Even a simple piece of wood or a broken-off branch can serve as a "doll"' (Fink, 2016, p. 18). The awareness that non-actuality always needs actuality, makes play closer to reality than reality itself, clarifies Spurius (1989) Fink's train of thought. Boronat (2016) wonders if therefore Fink's concept of play is in fact multidimensional.

My suggestion to contribute to this particular problem of the structure of epistemology is to take a closer look at the construction of the bridge itself in the metaphor. That is to say, to look at the form of the bridge and not its function. My (perhaps naïve) assumption is that the function of a bridge will not easily be overlooked. I advocate for a suspension bridge. If a bridge is presented as a suspension bridge instead of a beam bridge, then epistemology, as a part of philosophy, can serve the value of the ontology of play within epistemology.

A suspension bridge, with its cable structure, experiences both the tensile force of the cables and the compressive force of the pillars. These two forces are balanced and precisely calculated by bridge designers. "Evidence" - using a notion from the positivistic paradigm - for the ontology of play would serve as the tensile force, while the embodiment of playing the ontology of play, would be the compressive force. It would remove notions such as boundaries and binary thinking, and allow epistemology to

be active. The energy of the tension is used in the suspension bridge metaphor: it is an 'active' bridge. Epistemology would be grasped as "activity and creativity" since there is an ongoing active balance of forces without which the bridge would collapse. Hence, it would make the epistemology permeable since it touches on the ontology of play.

Certainly, this thought experiment is a nice suggestion, but the complexity behind this proposal on epistemology is not just the problem of the devaluated status of play itself within epistemology; that is, the meso-perspective on the complexity of play. Fink's elaboration of play is embedded in a greater perspective: a cosmology (Bruzina, 2004; Elden, 2008; Fink, 2010). The title of his most eminent work on play refers to this: *Play as symbol of the World* (Fink, 2016). And besides this macro perspective, it also touches on the micro level around the complexity of play: human play. And within human play, 'adults play just as much as children do, only differently, more secretly, in a more masked manner' (Fink, 2016, p. 18).

But what happens when Eugen Fink's concern about how the embodied behaviour leads to an imaginary play-world, which distinguishes between actuality and non-actuality, is thoroughly scrutinised by the physical play activity of an (adult) philosopher?

Research Aim

Over the past few years, I have covered many miles on my second-hand Specialized Roubaix Ultegra racing bike, acquired for this research, exploring various terrains in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Spain.

These experiences, encompassing not just cycling but also engaging in play, have been meticulously documented.

I employ this documentation for three main purposes: 1) to gain access to our human essence, 2) to emphasise the importance of autoethnography in philosophical research on, 3) to explore these insights for the concept of philosophy of education.

Research Objectives

With the overall research aim, this thesis, has the following research objectives.

1. To explore the phenomenon of self-understanding through playing as an embodied practice, in order to 'un-abstract' what the ontology of play might be.
2. To explore specific conceptualisations of the ontology of play that can inform this analysis, namely:
 - a. Fink's phenomenological perspectives on the ontology of play.
 - b. The notions of the non-actual and actual.
 - c. The concept of mimesis and the notion of 'coming to appearance.'
3. To explore the embodied act of playing as a philosophical method.
4. To draw conclusions regarding the relation between self-understanding, mimesis and the embodied act of playing.
5. To valorise findings and implement them in philosophy of play courses and modules within higher arts education.

Central Research Question

Within this context, I elaborate on the following central research question:

- How can the philosophical embodiment of playing, recognised as an autoethnographic approach, deepen the understanding of the philosophy of play?

Sub-Questions

Fink's line of thought is clearly that of cosmology – ontology of play - philosophical anthropology, precisely in that order (Boronat, 2016; Elden, 2008; Fink, 2010; Krell, 1972).

If we wish to speak of a play of the world, we must decisively transform our thinking of the play-structures of human play, try to think anew those features by which it presents itself as *derived* from the prevailing of the world. The world prevails by giving emergence to all individual things, bringing things to all individual things, bringing things to appearance, letting them light up in the brightness of the sky and setting them back into the sustaining earth, apportioning to every individuated thing appearance and shape, place and allotted time, flourishing and withering. (Fink, 2016, p. 214)

In all modesty, as a human engaged in the philosophical anthropology of play, I propose that I have explored the ontology of play. This effort sought to uncover potentially overlooked aspects. The motive behind this decision was a suspicion arising from Fink's assumption on child's play. Is there more to explore within

human play if children can experience the essence of their existence through play? How does this experience manifest in the lives of adults, and could there be a causal relationship between how adults play and how play is treated? In my opinion, this aspect is left open for exploration and pertains to the central research question. Consequently, I have formulated eleven sub-questions to ensure a thorough examination of these aspects and to support the central research question.

Notion of Play:

- 1) If Huizinga studies the play-element of culture, to what extent is the notion of play integrated into culture?
- 2) What can be said about Fink's claim of masked play when play-worlds seem to be coeval co-existence fields and perhaps are multidimensional?

Notion of Mimesis:

- 1) What is mimesis?
- 2) What occurs in terms of mimesis when a middle-aged man cycles in a replica outfit of a professional cycling team?
- 3) What transpires in and through mimesis?

Philosophical Embodiment of Playing:

- 1) What is required for an adult to discover that they are playing 'secretly in a more masked manner'?
- 2) What are the implications of Fink distinguishing between childhood play and adult play?
- 3) As a contemporary thinker, can I operationalise the play of childhood in my adult life without relying on psychological frameworks? What is needed for this?
- 4) How can I further develop the ideas of Fink within a philosophical anthropology?
- 5) How do I shape the experience of playing while not actively participating in the activity of play?
- 6) How does playing, as an epistemological tool, present itself as a philosophical framework?

Methodology

In his exhaustive work *Play as Symbol of the World*, Fink (2016) grasps play as symbol of the world. He describes this world significance of play as coming to appearance [*die Erscheinung*].

Coming to appearance is the universal emergence of all. Beings, things, and events in a common presence that integrates everything individuated into a presence – in our midst. (...)

But the world is also the nameless realm of absence, from which things come forth into appearance and into which they again vanish. (Fink, 2016, p. 215)

However, my 'secretly playing, in a more masked manner' in my research, shifted the starting point from cosmology to a subjective philosophy closely aligned with philosophical anthropology through the embodiment of the ontology of play. Therefore, the major methodological decision lies in the embodiment of playing philosophy. Playing philosophy within philosophical anthropology has implications for how philosophy is received. Philosophy will be received not only as a theoretical form but as a spatially embodied form as well. It is precisely within this form that the fundamental concepts of philosophical anthropology can be received.

Canadian philosophers Erin Manning and Brian Massumi might characterise this approach as 'philosophy of experience' (Manning & Massumi, 2014). As contemporary thinkers, they are committed to bridging philosophy and artistic practice. Therefore, this thesis could very well be seen as a study that fits into the developed repertoire of Manning's SenseLab (Manning, 2016). This thesis places emphasis on the development of experience in the research process and could be designated as process philosophy (Manning & Massumi, 2014). But whereas Manning and Massumi are oriented towards the French philosophical line of Gilles Deleuze (1925 -1996) and Henri Bergson (1859 -1941), in this research, I adhere to the German roots of phenomenology and develop a vision of embodied play philosophy from Fink's play philosophy.

Phenomenology, from which Fink develops his theory of play, could be characterised by experience (Aydin, 2007; Bruzina, 2004; Moran, 2007; Moran & Magrì, 2010; Spiegelberg, 1975, 1994; Van Manen, 2016; Zahavi, 1997).

Spiegelberg (1994) asserts that the developments of phenomenology are diverse, but diversity is also found by philosophers in the developments of their train of thought. Aydin (2007) confirms that this is the reason why Spiegelberg (1994) opts for the notion of a movement that grows. Hence, phenomenology within philosophy is more than a 'ism'.

Although Fink earned his doctorate under the guidance of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, collaborated with Martin Heidegger, and was together with Edith Stein (1891-1942) and Jan Patočka (1907-1977) part of the Freiburg group, I place less emphasis on phenomenology and more on philosophy. Therefore, this thesis narrows the ontological claim down from phenomenology into an ontology of play within philosophy. Experience in the form of the embodiment of playing is a part of the methodology, but is grasped as an embodiment of the ontology of play. An exploration from phenomenology itself would be too large for the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, I suggest reading Spiegelberg's eminent work *The Phenomenological Movement* (Spiegelberg, 1994).

If I have understood it correctly, I have attempted to respond to the call of Czech sports philosopher Jan Halák. Halák (2015) sees Fink's work in the field of play philosophy as practical ontology. From this perspective, he argues that Fink's philosophy is concrete but lacks practical implementation, which he deems necessary.

However, despite narrowing down the philosophical position of this research, guided also by philosophical references, there remains one great uncertainty (among many). As an 'adult' philosopher, I noticed that I primarily engage my childhood in secret and masked play. This led me to make Fink's distinction between a child's play and an adult's play the subject of my research. At the same time, it brought significant uncertainty, as it is not common among philosophers to involve their own childhood in philosophical insights.

Although philosopher Joke H. Hermesen (2017) explains that children literally were not in the field of vision for male philosophers, this does not entirely explain why one would not involve their own childhood in research. Fink also

omits incorporating his own childhood play into his philosophy of play: He writes in the third person when discussing a child at play. However, it is precisely play from my childhood that proves to be a catalyst in this research.

My assertion about philosophy, that it can be embodied through playing, is therefore accompanied by a paradox. This claim arises precisely because I engaged with Fink's philosophy of play from a philosophical perspective. Thanks to Fink's *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* (Fink, 1995) [*Fundamental phenomena of human existence*], I realised that it is through playing that his concept of mimesis as a philosophical notion developed within philosophical anthropology, resonating with my childhood games.

As a child, I used to pretend to be a professional cyclist. In this pretend game, I always took on the role of a road captain. A road captain is a rider who guides fellow team members throughout the race (Zomer, 1989). This role allowed me to sit still on my bike. The memory of 'sitting on my bike' encapsulates Fink's assertion that a child is at the centre of its existence in play. Remarkably, my research is an exploration of this paradox: the philosophical consequences of playing as an 'adult' philosopher who, like anyone else, has been a child.

Playing Philosophy of Play: autoethnography or autoplayography?

In this thesis, philosophical anthropology serves as the main philosophical framework. In choosing this, I deliberately suspend Fink's cosmological perspective. I choose a different entry point as it were. Perhaps one day it will connect to this greater perspective, but for now I scrutinise the implications of what the openness and permeability of the ontology of play brings from 'here'. Therefore, I neither adopt nor reject Fink's worldliness of human play. I acknowledge the cosmological context, but through my suspension of it I focus entirely on the delimited framework of the 'intraworldly', which concerns the human being in the world (Fink, 2016). I remain agnostic to the broader perspective that Fink elaborates on, developing the concept of play as a symbol of the world. I propose that by integrating adult play experiences with those from childhood into the adult's play, we can discover potential expansion in our human existence.

I situate this approach within the methodology of autoethnography. This personal narrative as research methodology has existed since the seventies (Geertz, 1973), but in recent decades it has become much more familiar as a research methodology (Adams, et al., 2014; Adams, et al., 2021; Allen-Collinson, 2013; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2005; Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 1994; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010).

A prominent scholar on autoethnography is Carolyn Ellis. Her work *The Ethnographical I* (Ellis, 2004), is written as a fictitious module. In her many years teaching at the University of South Florida (USF) she composed this 'class' for this book. Therefore, I "took" this class by studying *The Ethnographical I*. As a student, I found it very evocative, being with the students in the fictitious class. With "Judy" and "Hector" as students Ellis explores what autoethnography is.

To a greater or lesser extent, researchers incorporate their personal experiences and standpoint in their research by starting with a story about themselves, explaining their personal connection to the project, or using personal knowledge to help the in the research process. (Ellis, 2004, p. 47 - 48)

Ellis and Bochner (2000) find over sixty terms in the literature with meanings similar to autoethnography. Ellis (2004) picks several for her class to underline this variety: 'phenomenological ethnography, personal narratives, narratives of the self, self- stories, reflexive ethnography, ethnographic memoir narrative ethnography' (2004, p. 40), are just a few of the examples.

I want to nominate one more term for this list and coin "autoplayography".

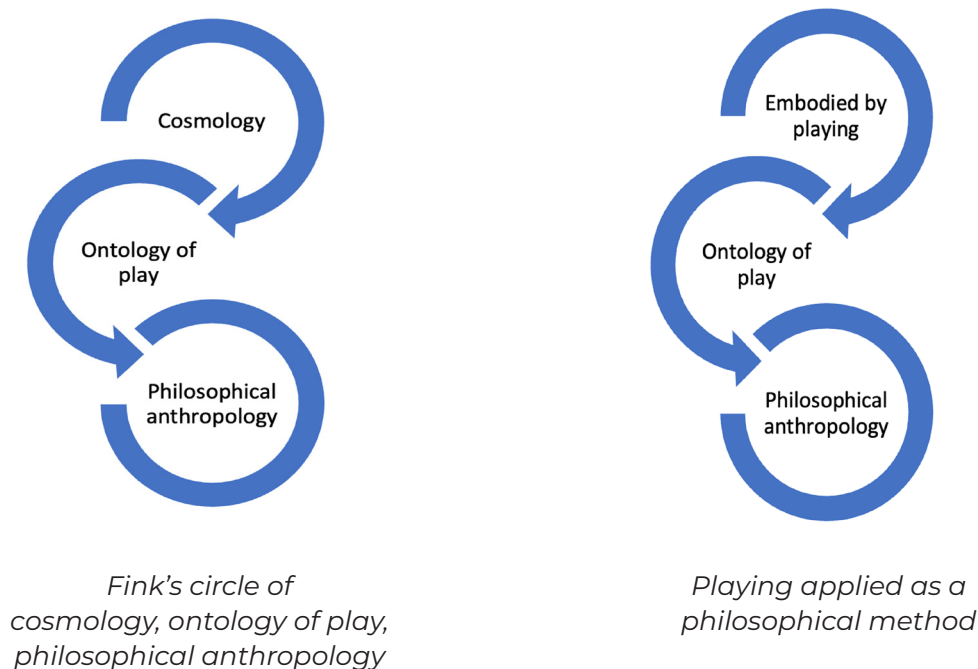
With this notion I want to emphasise the enactment-character of play (Fink, 2016) in the personal experiences of a researcher playing. This research project covers how I, as a researcher and philosopher, "played" philosophy. I assert that while 'playing' important key phenomena appear. This concept of 'coming to appearance' itself appeared, but so did the complexity of the notion play, and mimesis as well. Therefore, playing philosophy in order to philosophise play serves epistemological purposes. However, as a methodology the project touches on personal narratives, narratives of the self, self- stories and reflexive ethnography since it is a personal enterprise as well. It could be phenomenological ethnography, but there seems to be a dilemma here. Part of this research project aims to liberate

play from its marginal position. Therefore, the notion 'autoplayography' would be an appropriate concept. It would make 'play' visible as a concept in methodology. However, the concept poses a paradox: it is a non-existing concept and therefore confirms precisely the philosophical problem of the marginal position of play within science. Therefore, for reasons of clarity, and considering the complexity of the notion of play, as well as the fact that this project is not about coining a new term, I choose to include the concept under 'nomination' in the list of similar meanings. The decision to put the exploration and elaboration of my nominated concept on hold could be easily made, as 'autoplayography' aligns with the concept of autoethnography. This thoroughly reviewed, heavily theorised, and embedded methodology fits well to explore playing as a philosophical tool in autoethnographic methodology. It fits since Fink (2016) states that playing can't be a vegetative process. It implies therefore that playing is a self-witnessed process. According to Eugen Fink it is an enactment that is experienced. Playing is experienced since 'it is always an occurrence that is luminously suffused with sense [*sinnhaft*], an enactment that is experienced' (Fink, 2016, p. 16).

Methodological decision

This research demonstrates that the embodiment of Fink's philosophical notions on play gains a new dimension when key philosophical anthropological concepts such as self-witnessing and self-understanding (Fink, 1995) are engaged. Although personal narratives are rare in philosophical texts, they seem to be a necessary condition for exploring and embodying these theoretical ideas. Therefore, the embodiment of the philosophy of play, as a major methodological decision in this research, invites us to encounter all phenomena of our existence: moments of happiness; moments of fear, including the fear of living, the fear of making choices, and the fear of mortality; the phenomena of love, ruling and work; joy and laughter; but also moments of embarrassment, vulnerability, and shame. The use of personal narratives as a methodological necessity in embodying the ontology of play within the philosophical anthropological domain enables us to engage not only with elements such as happiness in our existence due to the permeability of fundamental phenomena (Fink, 2010), but more importantly, it demonstrates that vulnerability can be understood as a play-element.

Figure 1.1 Visualisation of outline methodological decision



However, one problem remains. This experienced playing is enacted secretly and masked by adults. How to research this and how to reflect this as the right form? The first paragraph of this rationale started with a “disclaimer”. And I mentioned earlier that elaborating this perspective within philosophy of play research project has consequences. Perhaps this notion comes is better demonstrated through the style and form of this thesis.

How to write a thesis?

Over the years, I have developed a form of practical philosophy with a mimetic approach during my lectures on philosophy. In short, students in my class ‘mimic’ (the structure of a) philosophy (Den Heijer, 2020; Felkers, 2018b; Nagtegaal, 2021). This embodiment entails that the theorised form of the chosen structure and its ideas will be ‘played out’ first before delving into the philosophical ideas in a theoretical sense. In my philosophy classes I elaborate, for example, the mimetic element of the outline of Plato’s *Symposium*.

The narrator of Plato's *Symposium*, Apollodorus, described the events of the banquet (symposium) to 'Glaucón' just the other day, while walking from Phaleron to Athens 'as the road into town is surely well suited for talking and listening' (*Symposium*, 173b). However, this particular 'walk to town' is not written out. It happened previously and therefore, Apollodorus is not unprepared when the companion asks to be informed about what happened at the banquet with speeches about love and desire, with contributions from Aristodemus, Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates.

In my class, we mimic this particular part, the walk of Glaucón and Apollodorus from Phaleron to Athens. Our "Phaleron" is the rural area of Amelisweerd and "Athens" is the city of Utrecht where the school of the Arts is situated. Hence students mimic a walk to Athens, which is mentioned and reflected in *Symposium*, but which remains in the non-actuality. The written words of *Symposium*, the actual, reflects this non-actuality. But is it a copy?

The focus of Plato's critique on mimesis is elaborated in works such as *The Republic*. The remarkable thing however is that almost all Plato's writings are mimetic (Marshall, 2020; Telo, 2022; Tsouna, 2013). Plato's dialogues are written as theatrical texts.

Plato's *Symposium* is written in the form of a framework within which the philosophical discussions take place. The banquet serves as the context in which the characters articulate their ideas, and this framework enables Plato to explore and present various approaches to love and beauty. It was one of the considerations when questioning *how* to reveal secret and masked playing as an adult, as a philosopher? Shall I 'mimic' Plato's writings and write a theatrical text? Or shall I mimic Ellis and set up a fictive "class"? To find a writing structure, I delved into techniques of writing (Campbell et al., 1990; Christophe, 2007, Christophe, 2019; Dorrestein, 2013; Ellis, 2004; Horsten, 2018; McKee, 1997; Vogler, 2020).

Eventually, I chose McKee's structure of storytelling. Robert McKee is an American author and lecturer in the field of screenwriting. McKee (1997) employs the structure of the unconscious and the conscious in storytelling. I was aware that with this narrative structure, I could mix up ontological

claims if I placed my 'secret' play under the ontological claim of psychology, using the notion of the 'unconscious', and my 'masked' play under the 'conscious'. But is flattening or eliminating psychology in this quest from a philosophical anthropology perspective even possible? However, writing about play in a theatrical form would deploy the ontology of play. Especially for this written representation of my research, this structure was a great help.

Through this framework, I could shape my findings into a writing structure. The concept and McKee's view of a script are, from this perspective, therefore prerequisite tools and do not form part of the conceptual part of this research. They support visualising the conceptual theoretical framework and the methodology I have employed in this research in a writing style.

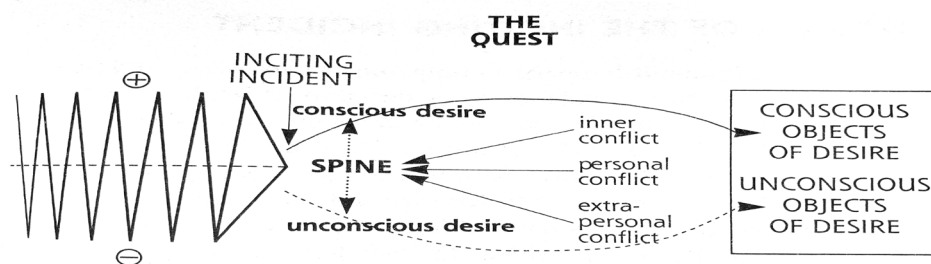


Figure 1.2. Robert McKee spine visualisation (McKee, 1997, p. 197).

Conscious desire

- I want to earn a PhD on Fink's philosophy of play.
- I want to make ontological claims on play from the domain of philosophy.

Unconscious desire

- Re-engage with openness and playing as an existence in movement.

Conscious object of desire:

- Earn a PhD degree.

Unconscious object of desire:

- Self-understanding.

Refining thesis style through an iteration of Christophe's critique

To gain insight into how to structure my research process, I made use of McKee's writing schema, despite certain critiques of this framework. The

combination of this critique and McKee's structure allowed me to give form to the unravelling of the interplay between secret and masked playing.

Playwright and colleague Nirav Christophe (2007, 2019) criticises American scriptwriters who approach a plot or story as a fixed model, without explicitly mentioning McKee by name. In his dissertation *Ten Thousand Idiots* (Christophe, 2019), Christophe departs from the implication that if a person is a vessel full of contradictions, then this must also be reflected in a plot. More than just McKee's scheme of conflict - the inner, personal, and extra-personal conflict - it is the contradiction that prompted me to explore the difference between secret and masked play. It appeared that the ontology of play has a different agenda than academic research. If I take Christophe's criticism into account, I notice that there is also a complexity in my unconscious desire. How many of these 'ten thousand idiots' do I actually consist of?

Christophe draws on Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who refers to the idea of the multitude of voices or perspectives within a text (polyphony). Bakhtin (2010) argues that in complex literary works, different characters and voices have their own unique ideas, values, and language styles. These voices can often be in conflict with each other and represent different worldviews.

Drawing on Bakhtin's critique elaborated by Christophe enabled me to give form to distinguishing secrecy and masked play. And set me on a direction to emphasise perspectives. Therefore, the style of this thesis is the style of a narrative and represents three perspectives: the perspective of the ontology of play, the perspective of (academic) research and the perspective of philosophy of play.

The ontology of play is represented by 'the swing philosopher'. The swing philosopher is an image I recall from when I was nine and learned at school what a philosopher is and does. I noticed similarities between my sitting on the swing and what a philosopher does: contemplating life. However, as an adult, I doubt whether I was truly 'thinking' while sitting on my swing. It was more a matter of unthinking. Hence, I projected this 'unthinking' onto what

philosophers do.

The swing philosopher represents the claim that, according to Fink, childhood may be shattered, but I object to the notion that the ontology of play can be shattered in a person's life. Hence, there is a problem that demands scrutiny.

The character of the swing philosopher, representing childhood games, can be compared with what the French philosopher Roger Caillois describes as 'paidia' (Caillois, 2001). Caillois' term paidia describes a form of play that is unstructured and unprepared, emphasising spontaneity and freedom. In order to access and distinguish between the secrecy and masked manner of play in an adult's life, I develop a way of seeing that requires a connection to frolicsome energy (Caillois, 2001). This involves embodying an 'unthinking' philosopher, someone whose strength lies in creativity, invention, and, therefore, a connection with the ontology of play. This philosopher, whom I can refer to as the 'swing philosopher,' specialises in 'un-abstracting' the ontology of play.

The term 'researcher' here refers to an academic research perspective, more of a 'role' as opposed to the embodiment of playing by the swing philosopher. (Inner) conflicts emerge between these two — the swing philosopher and the researcher. The ontology of play invents, creates, and the researcher executes this ontology of play. The conflict of the status of the ontology of play comes forth in this thesis as a personal conflict and takes shape primarily through the lens of the researcher. This perspective is in constant dialogue with both the swing philosopher and the play philosopher.

The play philosopher holds the perspective of play philosophy. This persona possesses reflective capacity but does not have all-encompassing knowledge. The practice of playing as a reflective practice manifests through the play philosopher. The ongoing consultation and questioning involve aspects such as: How can I interpret the embodiment of playing in a broader philosophical context? How can I present this body of thought in a way that is readable and scalable from a personal perspective to a more broadly applicable narrative?

For the purpose of clarity, I announce the perspectives in italics. And each perspective has its own colour. The swing philosopher has orange, the researcher blue, and the play philosopher has a mocha brown colour. The colours are chosen arbitrarily. Although Itten (1970) considers blue a cool colour. The colours mocha brown and orange are warm and share an affinity in their blend.

Title of the thesis explained

The Permeability of a Road Captain

The first part of the title of this thesis refers to the ontology of play. Play has the character of creating possibilities and demonstrating the permeability of reality, which are important characteristics for human existence. However, Fink makes a distinction between child's play and adult play. In child's play, the child is in the midst of their existence. For an adult, this is impossible; adults have masks at their disposal. What Fink avoids as a subject is the idea that every adult was once a child. By physically engaging in this research through playing, I demonstrate that, as an adult, I can reshape on a different scale by playing and rebuilding this childhood.

Playing as a Philosophical Framework

The ontology of play in this research culminates in the elaboration of a claim by Fink: 'The enactment-character of play is spontaneous activity, active doing, vital impulse; play is existence that is moved in itself, as it were' (Fink, 2016, p. 19). This thesis maintains a distinctive movement that allows me, as a philosopher and researcher, to gain insight into the practice that playing constitutes as an essential characteristic. Therefore, it might contribute to finding a position within the post-positivism paradigm. However, it is merely an attempt, an invitation undertaken on a 28mm-wide exploration scale, conducted in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain on a Specialized Roubaix.

Outline chapters

This thesis starts with a recounting of my childhood. This piece of text doesn't have an official chapter number, and I refer to it as 'départ fictif.' This is a cycling term that denotes the neutral zone before a race officially starts.

The chapters 1-8, including an intermezzo after chapter 2, follow a chronological order. The thesis spans a period from October 2017 to June 2023. Due to the choice of a theatrical text, chapter 8 concludes with a summary, but a concrete answer to the research question is left unresolved. The response to the research question is detailed as a continuation in the development stemming from this research, applying it to an approach within philosophy of education. The described examples serve, in a way, as the answer to this question. The accompanying sub-questions are addressed within the chapters. In my view, this choice is the right way to justify the style while remaining faithful to academic tradition.

DÉPART FICTIF

The play philosopher begins the introduction.

The term *départ fictif* is cycling jargon. This French term, “fictive start”, refers to the zone that consists of a certain number of kilometres before the official road race begins. During this fictive start, the participating cyclists are led away from the starting point under the guidance of a car, usually within the city limits of a town. The race jury is in this organiser’s car, which drives just ahead of the peloton of cyclists. In this neutralised zone, the race may already begin for the rider by, for example, taking a specific position in the peloton. However, the riders are not allowed to overtake the jury car. The ‘real’ race begins when the race jury, from the car, signals the start. This is referred to as ‘*départ réel*.’ Translated into English this means ‘actual start’ or ‘real start.’ This brief section precedes the ‘real’ chapters. In this “neutralised zone”, I describe memories of my childhood.

The swing philosopher specifies.

I describe how I ‘contemplated life’ on the swing and learned at school that philosophers also engage in such contemplation about life. I also describe the games I played, pretending to be a professional athlete.

The play philosopher provides context for the chosen title.

‘Départ fictif’ is the first significant term used in this thesis in an attempt to deal practically with phenomenology (Aydin, 2007; Spiegelberg, 1975; Van Manen, 2016). Unlike most sports competitions, cycling demonstrates that a physical road has already been travelled before the actual race begins. This route is a part of the race, but at the same time, it is not (Suits, 2005). The presence of the concepts ‘non’ and ‘nothing’ is crucial in the phenomenological movement (Spiegelberg, 1994). Given the focus of this dissertation on the embodiment of philosophical notions, I limit myself to a very brief exposition.

Eminent works by eminent phenomenologists, such as Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* (2008) and Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (2021), assert that something always precedes. Both philosophers emphasise the role of

'non' in their philosophy (Kanthack, 2019). They argue that the role of 'non' (or '*néant*' in French, meaning 'nothingness' or 'non-being') is fundamental to human existence because it is the source of human freedom. Sartre's '*néant*' refers to the absence of fixed essences or meanings in the world, allowing individuals the freedom to create their own meaning and values.

For Heidegger, the philosophical concept of 'nothing' was not an absence of meaning but rather an openness to meaning and possibility. In this sense, the 'nothing' relates to the possibility of meaning. Both Sartre and Heidegger employ the concept of 'non' to explore the complexity of human existence and the fundamental freedom of individuals. They elaborate on these notions from an abstract theoretical standpoint.

A cycling race also exemplifies the concept of 'non,' in the '*départ fictif*', albeit governed by the specifically applicable rules of the game. While a direct comparison between cycling as a sport and phenomenology from the ontology of sport perspective is impractical due to their distinct characteristics (Meeuwsen, 2020; Van den Bossche, 2005, 2010; Welters, 2018), they both share the manifestation of the non-actual within the actual (Fink, 2016; Spariosu, 1989). Utilising this simplicity, I make the comparison: phenomenologists express 'non' in their descriptions, and cycling introduces 'non' at the fictive start. In both, something always precedes.

The Role of preceding childhood in adult lives according to Fink

I chose the term '*départ fictif*' (fictive start) in this context to emphasise this preceding childhood in a life of an adult. Hermesen (2017) highlights the limited attention given to children in philosophy. The consideration of childhood in the life of an adult also seems to be rare. Scholars like Fink (2016), Huizinga (1938/2008) and Caillois (1961/2001) describe the child and play, but not how and in what manner the childhood during which it played influences the life of an adult.

Eugen Fink seems to initiate human life at adulthood. He consistently refers to the child in the third person singular, avoiding elaborating on the implica-

tion that every adult has experienced childhood. I have a suspicion regarding the reason for this avoidance based on the perspective of Samuel IJsseling (IJsseling, 2007).

Fink's mentor and the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who lived during almost the exact same period as Freud (1856–1939), perceived the emerging popularity of psychologism in Germany as a threat to philosophy as a discipline within German universities (IJsseling, 2007). Areas of knowledge such as psychology and psychoanalysis, based on Freud's ideas, extensively incorporate childhood (Andreas-Salomé, 1965, 1979; Breger, 2000; Chisholm, 1992; Freud, 1980, 2010; Phillips, 2014).

The increasing psychologisation of the world (De Vos, 2014) aligns with Eugen Fink's criticism that play is often employed for curative purposes – a '*Heilmittel*' (Fink, 2010, p. 11), seen as 'a remedy for the harms of contemporary technocratic civilisation' (Fink, 2016, p. 14). This instrumentalist view of play ensures that it maintains its marginal position. 'In positively recommending the curative effect of play, it becomes evident that one still considers it a marginal appearance' (Fink, 2016, p. 17). In this context, play is perceived as a serving function—a supplementary counterweight, depicted as a 'seasoning for the heavy meal of our Being' (p. 17), to convey his critique.

While acknowledging that Fink (1995, 2010) avoids incorporating memories of childhood play into the lives of adults, he does describe childhood play as a particularly special period.

He contends that, in play, a child finds itself at the centre of its existence. 'Play in children still appears to be an intact sphere of existence' (Fink, 2016, p. 17). Furthermore, he asserts that the ontology of play itself possesses a 'reflexive character' (Fink, 1995, p. 386). In essence, he implies that the ontology of play, concerning human play, possesses the characteristics to (re)create all phenomena of our lives. For example, we can play at being 'dead.' As humans, we can also portray ourselves as powerful beings, pretending to be superheroes. According to Fink, the human 'does not merely live outright; he relates to his entire earthly existence in the self-presentation of play' (1995, p. 106). In 2018, Serena Williams made headlines at Roland Garros when she wore

a catsuit designed to prevent blood clots, a condition she had experienced after giving birth. Williams later mentioned that the empowering catsuit made her feel like a superhero on the court, adding a unique and powerful dimension to her performance (Felkers, 2019). Besides this characteristic, the ontology of play also offers the opportunity to pretend that we are older or younger than our actual age.

At the age of nine, I assumed the role of 'road captain,' in my 'cycling game'. This 'being road captain' is a specific role. It describes a person who 'takes control in certain situations and directs the other riders of the team during the race' (Zomer, 1989, p. 100). During that time in my play, I portrayed an adult man who was able to keep an overview of the race. Therefore, rider and grand winner Joop Zoetemelk could rely on me.

However, the distinction between childhood games and experiencing childhood play as an embodied memory as an adult arises from the fact that, as a child, I could undoubtedly engage in this reflexive practice during play but lacked the capacity to reflect on the reflexive nature of play in my childhood.

Despite the potential risk of psychologising, I affirm that my recollection of the moments when, as a child, I sensed the core of my existence constitutes an integral aspect of my life. The challenge for me, as a philosopher, involves adhering to philosophical frameworks and steering clear of becoming entangled in psychologisation (Creswell & Garrett, 2008), a difficulty that will become evident later in this thesis.

Playing 'pro' in a playworld

In all the sports games I played by myself, the design of my game, and consequently the arrangement of my playing style, were more important than attempting to mimic a sport in terms of realism. I never fantasised about winning a race. In structuring the sports game, the presence of silence often held significant importance.

This implies that, while engaging in a 'real' sport, I had found a way to

fantasise and imagine in the actual world. 'Every sort of playing is the magical production of a playworld' (Fink, 2016, p. 25). By creating silence, this sports game could function as a 'playworld.' The playworld is an imaginary dimension, asserts Fink. 'We play in the so-called actual world but thereby attain [*Erspielen*] a realm, an enigmatic field, that is not nothing and yet is nothing actual' (p. 25). Hence, in the actual world, there is a playing field that is inscrutable.

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) describes the playworld in his work *Homo Ludens* as 'a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 8). In his characterisation, Huizinga distinguishes between two worlds: the playworld and the ordinary world. 'This temporary abolition of the ordinary world is fully acknowledged in child-life' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 12).

The significant difference in characterisation between Huizinga's depiction of the separation of the 'ordinary' world, along with its temporary suspension, and my experience, is that the 'ordinary' world not only persisted as 'ordinary,' but that I needed the ordinary world to explore the possibilities of the playworld. These experiences align with Fink's description of a sphere of two realms.

Everything that he does proceeds in a strange "simultaneity" on two "levels," is an actual comportment of a human being in the actual world and is simultaneously an activity in accordance with roles in a "non-actual world of appearance" (Fink, 2016, p. 78).

It was not so much that I was actively fantasising or imagining, but in this non-actual world within the actual world, I could experience the reflexive moment of being at play while playing. Especially in actual activities like being road captain by standing still on my bike.

Road captain in Duiven: village of the new urban development plan

The swing philosopher shares memories.

I was born in Arnhem, a provincial capital. I was five when our family, made up of my father, mother, brother and myself moved to the village of Duiven.

Our house was part of the first residential area of the new urban development plan in the seventies. We were 'chosen' by the government, I learned when I was about nine and in the third grade of primary school. Duiven had 900 inhabitants but, our teacher Mr. Janssens told us, there were building plans for many more houses. They would be constructed in all the fields that surrounded us, even on the football fields of the D.V.V. (Duiven Football Association) and the handball field. These sports fields would relocate to the other side of Duiven, where tennis courts would also be established. We were going to be able to play tennis.

We weren't the only village selected for such development. Zoetermeer and Purmerend were also chosen. Despite not knowing the word 'prestige,' I sensed that Purmerend and Zoetermeer were much prestigious than Duiven. Purmerend was near Amsterdam, and Zoetermeer was near The Hague, while Duiven was near Arnhem. This perception didn't change even when we got a Makro, a wholesaler where business customers can buy products in large quantities, and which required a membership card. Later, we became the first place in the Netherlands to have an IKEA.

Despite the Makro and IKEA, I still felt that Duiven didn't truly exist. It was so small that it wasn't even on a real map, except for the large map of the Netherlands at the front of our classroom, next to the blackboard. There was a big black dot representing Duiven, right next to the 'real' black dot representing Arnhem. Mr. Janssens had added this 'Duiven dot' himself with a black marker. It was evident that Duiven didn't really exist, because nothing significant happened in Duiven: Cycling only happened on TV, there were no races here. Despite football club D.V.V., real football was played in Arnhem and on TV.

When I was nine, I wanted to become a professional cyclist and a philosopher. While I eventually did become a philosopher, it took me quite a while. My desire to become a professional cyclist likely originated from watching cycling races broadcasted on television.

I remember watching television as a child in the 1970s. In addition to the usual TV shows like *Pippi Longstocking* and *Calimero*, I also watched sports, because my father did. Sitting in his large black leather swivel chair, my

father watched football and cycling. At that time, we didn't have a lot of channels. Apart from Netherlands 1 and 2, we could also catch West German TV: they aired *Sportschau* on Saturday nights, featuring football. We acquired a colour TV relatively late because initially, my father considered it unnecessary. In football, he explained to me, they had the agreement that teams would always play each other in dark and white shorts. Hence, the necessity of the 'away jersey'; 'otherwise, they couldn't play,' he said. In addition to these channels, we also received BRT, the Belgian Radio and Television Broadcaster. Since they spoke Dutch with an accent, Belgium was familiar but also somewhat foreign. Belgium was both: a foreign country and not quite foreign. My father watched all cycling on the BRT. For hours, he watched cyclists ride, and I watched with him. During those times, he remained silent, and I remained silent too.

In the 1970s, the media hadn't advanced to the point where microphones were placed along the field. Because of this, for a long time, I believed that football players and cyclists didn't speak. When playing indoor football with my brother Arno, we attempted to mimic this in the hallway of our terraced house. In the narrow corridor, with a coat rack, a small wall cabinet holding the telephone and even a mirror, we were allowed to pass a soft ball back and forth. However, not speaking was almost impossible. We'd be busy gesticulating, because that's what we saw football players do on television, pressing our lips together to avoid speaking. I vividly remember the noises my brother made. They resembled trumpet sounds – a cartoonish image of tightly closed lips, a flushed face, and arms emphatically indicating where the ball should be played.

Silent cycling, on the other hand, was much easier for me to imitate. I could do this alone. For hours, I played on my purple Gazelle children's bike, pretending that I was a road captain.

The play philosopher explains.

During the summer, I used to play 'cycling.' I always played as the 'road captain.' I can no longer remember the moment when, as a girl of seven, eight, or nine, I learned what a road captain was.

Looking back, I realise that during the hours I spent playing cycling, I was not

actually cycling much, even though there was every opportunity to do so. I lived in a new, child-friendly residential area on a dead-end street that ended in a parking lot. The brand-new smooth black asphalt provided ample opportunity to ride laps in this neighbourhood. However, I usually cycled out of the street immediately, with my brown paper helmet on my head, toward 'the hill' near our school. From there, if I gazed into the distance, it was enough to sustain the feeling of being a road captain.

The swing philosopher specifies.

Joop Zoetemelk won loads, of that I was always certain. Because he was so good, I could afford to set out as a road captain, charting my own course. If he needed me, I would be there for him. Joop claimed the victories, and I savoured them atop the bike hill. Feeling confident and satisfied, I could descend and head home.

The play philosopher analyses.

Alongside my purple *Gazelle* bike with its ribbed plastic handles, my brown paper helmet was equally essential to assuming the role of a road captain.

The swing philosopher specifies.

The pressure of the helmet's band against my head, against my ears, pulling it down as far as possible without it tearing, down to my eyebrows, so that I could not just feel it but also see it. When I cycled, I tried to get my helmet over my eyebrows, so that I could also feel like a soldier.

Our neighbour 'Uncle Ton' consistently called me 'Zoetemelk' whenever he saw me cycling with my brown helmet. I remember how strange that felt. I wasn't Zoetemelk, he knew that: I was 'me', the road captain.

The paper tore quite easily, so every summer I created an arsenal of helmets. Our neighbour, 'Uncle Ton,' made this possible. He loved cycling and worked in Arnhem. He worked close to a Peugeot garage. Peugeot sponsored the cycling team that cyclist Hennie Kuiper rode for.

Every year during the Tour de France, Uncle Ton had these '*Peugeot caps*.'

He gave them to us, the neighbourhood kids, but also wore one himself. He wore it backwards, as was proper, when he was working in the back garden or working on or polishing his car.

The play philosopher provides context for the notion of 'Uncle Ton.'

For us, as neighbourhood kids, it was very common to address neighbours as uncle and aunt. I only found out later that this doesn't happen everywhere.

The swing philosopher interrupts and brings the topic back to toys.

However, I found the brown paper helmet more appealing than cycling with a cap. Yet I had only one morning a year to make as many helmets as possible.

Together with his wife, Aunt Rita, Uncle Ton was an active member of the neighbourhood association, and they helped organise neighbourhood activities for children who didn't go on holiday during the summer break. Both they and we went on vacation, so officially we weren't supposed to participate, but my brother, myself, and neighbourhood boys Wilfred and Emiel just joined in anyway. Uncle Ton was the leader. I don't remember what the other activities were, but besides the Tour de France cycling puzzle Tour he organised, the absolute highlight was the craft morning.

I had one morning to create a stock of cycling helmets under his guidance. Children who wanted to do crafts on this morning were supervised by Aunt Rita. And although I found Aunt Rita stunningly beautiful because she looked like Agneta from ABBA and was as tall as Simon Tahamata, Ajax's right winger, for this one day a year on craft morning she paled in comparison to Uncle Ton.

Craft morning took place at our school. School becomes something special during holidays. Even waiting until we were allowed inside was different. I tried to see through the glass of the heavy school door to see if Uncle Ton was coming yet to open it. But as it goes with thick windows, you could only see yourself. I don't know how many kids were making helmets; I don't think I ever looked around.

Uncle Ton always made one as an example, demonstrating the materials: a pencil, scissors, and a stapler. The most important thing was getting hold of the brown paper. On this morning, an infinite amount of brown paper was available to us.

You take a sheet of brown paper and measure the circumference of your head. With a pencil, you mark the spot. Then, you take a ruler and draw a line for a strip. The precise work begins next: the cutting. Here, danger lurked. Was it successful? Then quickly on to the stapler. After that, three slightly narrower strips, securely stapled over the strip, and done – on to the next one. The strips over the broad band should be as tight as possible. Not too tight, because then the strips would tear at the staple the moment you put on the helmet. But if there's too much paper, it bulges out, and you end up with a funny birthday hat made of brown paper. I remember Aunt Rita trying it with white, with yellow, with 'happier colours' because I was a girl. But no, it had to be brown. Carrying my loot, I went home. Displayed like trophies, they sat on the shelf of my bedroom cabinet, waiting to be used.

Because of the cycling helmet, I know that during the summer, I played at the 'spring classics.' In comfortable warmth, with the rising scent of new asphalt from the heat of the sun in my nostrils, I played that I was cold. I imitated the hardships that cycling in winter inevitably brought. This specific smell of hot asphalt in our neighbourhood was exactly like the scent of the burnt-out engines of the racetrack cars we played with in the cold attic of our house for an entire winter.

In addition to playing with the racetrack with my brother, I also played alone in my room. A favourite game was playing at billiards. I didn't have a billiard table; it wasn't necessary. I only had a broom handle. This stick was made of wood and had no brush. I held the stick under my armpit and gripped it tightly. With blue blackboard chalk, I chalked the billiard cue and contemplated which shot would be best. That was the game: thinking about the best shot while colouring my billiard cue blue.

The play philosopher picks up on this act of 'cueing billiards.'

I didn't become a professional cyclist or a billiards player. Instead, I became a philosopher, although that took some time.

The discovery of swing philosophy***The swing philosopher goes along with this transition.***

At the age of nine, I learned at school what a philosopher was. 'A philosopher is a man who thinks about life,' Mr. Janssens told me. Looking at the picture of a philosopher in the textbook on my desk, I realised, 'I already do this.'

The play philosopher looks back.

I must have been startled and must have inhaled sharply when I realised this: I am already something you can become when you grow up. I still vividly remember the shock, although I don't recall the gasp that accompanied it. I do remember not raising my hand enthusiastically and saying, 'Mr. Janssens! I already do this!'

The swing philosopher remembers.

Instead, I looked at the book and felt a strange panic rising: how on earth am I going to become what I already am?

The play philosopher contemplates and looks back.

That morning at school, I discovered that a significant part of my existence involved of 'thinking about life'; only I didn't know I was doing it.

The swing philosopher specifies.

In our backyard, I had a swing; I would sit there for hours, 'thinking' while swinging.

The play philosopher has evidence.

A photograph of this exists. A black and white photo taken from the kitchen door. I suspect it was taken by my mother, although it was usually my father who took the pictures. I'm seated at the far end of the garden. I've taken a digital picture of it in order to zoom in. In that one, I notice that I'm holding

the rope with one hand and sucking my thumb of the other. I'm sitting completely still. There is only one picture of this "swing game."

The swing philosopher expresses an opinion.

Of course, who would take a daily picture of their child to expressly celebrate the enthusiasm: 'Look at my child sitting motionless on the swing, look at how she swings without moving!' But in the stillness of the swing, I experienced something very special. I can't quite describe what it was.

The swing philosopher describes the act of philosophising.

Besides my real swing in the garden, I could also swing on immaterial swings. These would appear, and I would swing while sitting in class. I loved doing this; I experienced a balance, a calmness while everything passed by: the teacher spoke, wrote things on the blackboard, and time elapsed.

I remember looking at the bearded man in the book and seeing him look back kindly. He had small, dark, beady eyes; clever but still cheerful. His hair-style was lush, almost like a lion's mane, but at the same time, majestically combed like a king, and he had a full beard. This is a man who thinks about life. I flew out through the book and landed in an orchard with swings.

I'm on the swing and notice that the philosopher next to me is also on a swing. He sits, slightly hunched forward, leaning his elbows on his thighs. Because he's leaning, I can observe him closely from my swing. I notice that although he fits on the swing, his feet touch the ground. 'So, this is what thinking about life looks like.'

The play philosopher states.

Later, I will recognise the man I swung with as Karl Marx.

CHAPTER 1 THE PRIEST OF WATOU

Introduction

The play philosopher of elucidates.

This chapter inaugurates the exploration within this thesis, aiming to shed light on the complexity arising from the practical application of pivotal concepts from Fink's philosophy of play through field research.

Fink asserts that adults engage in play, albeit in a 'more secretly, in a more masked manner' (Fink, 2016, p. 18). Furthermore, he posits that 'the enactment-character of play is existence that is moved in itself, as it were' (Fink, 2016, p. 19). This complexity, adults playing secretly, in a more masked manner, where the enactment-character of play is existence that is moved in itself, is woven throughout this thesis. In this particular chapter it manifests in two realms.

Firstly, from this premise, the implications of how adults play are dissected, with a questioning of the pivotal role played by the availability of these masks.

The second area, although connected to my actions, involves the challenge of making abstract philosophical notions tangible. As a philosophical researcher, I aim to use field research to explore the philosophical concept of mimesis.

The researcher is confident in her approach.

I am not just seeking practical examples of Fink's perspective on the concept of mimesis but also investigating his assertion that an adult engages in masked play. I believe I have found an example in men cycling in replicas of professional cycling team outfits. In this research, my primary curiosity lies in the question: 'What can be said about Fink's claim of masked play when a playing field is shared and therefore not singular?' Cycling, as a sport taking place on public roads, seems particularly suitable for this exploration.

The swing philosopher is above all excited.

When I returned to the Netherlands from the University of Gloucestershire with approval for this topic, I couldn't believe my luck. My route passed through the Westhoek of Belgium. I remember wanting to stick my eyes out the window to see as far as I could: The Westhoek, the Moeren, that's where I'm going to cycle. With erudite philosophers as a cover, I will be cycling in an area I know from television but have never visited myself.

The play philosopher interrupts the enthusiasm of the swing philosopher.

Don't be alarmed; immediately following this introduction, the first paragraph kicks off with a 'cold open.' This term, originating from film and television, signifies that the viewer is immediately drawn into the story without an introduction. The aim is, in this case, to captivate the reader right away and maintain their attention. The reader is instantly witness to the situation, rather than the context. With this technique, I hope to convey that I no longer have control over the context of my research. It pertains to the preparation phase in which the groundwork is laid before the actual research begins.

The swing philosopher specifies participatory research.

I played. For seven weeks, almost two months. I loved it. I felt like a quartermaster. This military term refers to someone responsible for setting up a temporary location for a military operation. Here, equipment can be stored, and soldiers can rest to prepare for further actions.

I found a holiday home in the Westhoek in the municipality of Heuvelland ("Hill land"). This name refers to the rolling landscape in the area; with hills that carry the term 'mount' [*berg*] in their names. The house I found from which to conduct my work as quartermaster is in a meadow. It used to be the garage of a large house nearby. I suspect two cars used to fit inside, it's too low for agricultural equipment. The side of the house provides a view of the mountains and has window frames along its length. These mountains play a leading role in the Belgian Ghent-Wevelgem race, held annually in the spring.

If I move the comfy chair over to the windows, something amusing happens due to how low they are. The window frames resemble television screens. When I sit in front of them like this, as I do almost every day, I go through the

names of the mountains from the Ghent-Wevelgem race. The Kemmelberg, the most significant ascent in this race, is not visible from the house. However, on the far left is the Scherpenberg, followed by the Rodeberg (Red Mountain), next to it the Baneberg with its cable car to the Vidaigneberg, and finally the Zwarteberg (Black Mountain). It is an excellent spot to consider the optimal location to initiate PhD field research.

The play philosopher elucidates.

Indeed, but when I felt the framing and boundaries of my formal arrival and purpose, panic set in. With this, I'll end the introduction and hand over to the researcher who experiences the final days of her fieldwork.

The Frontier Route

The researcher is in her Volkswagen Caddy on the church square of Watou and is in a panic.

What on earth have I been doing here? Two months in the vastness of the Westhoek of Belgium. I think that towards the end, I mostly lingered in the German cemeteries. I am certain of it.

The swing philosopher explains.

As usual, I looked at the graves and read the German boys' names. I tried to calculate how old they were when they died. It was then that I first realised that no one buried here knows how the war ended. Exactly from this perspective, in this contemplation, a young blond man appeared to me. He had a very fresh and open face; he must have died unscathed. Strangely, I felt that his name was Gunther. But each time he appeared, I simultaneously knew that this couldn't be. Still, I scanned the graves in search of a Gunther. And every time I pictured Gunther's face, the face of Marcel Kittel appeared.

The researcher continues narrating while sitting in her car.

Marcel Kittel is a German cyclist. As a sprinter, he has an impressive list of achievements. But it was mainly because of his open gaze and attitude in interviews after his victories that I always enjoyed watching him.

At the German cemetery in Wevelgem, I had imaginary conversations with him after fantasising that I had emailed him about my research. He was

surprised but also very curious. He was interested in intergenerational war issues. He said that we still have no idea how traumatic experiences continue to affect us if they are not detected.

The play philosopher repartees.

Marcel Kittel disappeared as a conversational partner at the end of my research period and transformed into panic had long been lying in wait to make its appearance.

The researcher fumbles with her car keys in her pocket.

I didn't manage to become a member of a Belgian cycling club.

The swing philosopher adds with a tinge of dismay.

I own a racing bike, a *Specialized*, and cycling gear, but my pace is too slow. Even if I exaggerate by a few kilometres when reporting to the club's board about my speed, I still cycle too slowly to keep up with the Sunday rides of cycling clubs in this region.

The researcher takes over the conversation.

So, I cycled alone, for two months, in silence, with a purpose. The purpose was to find the "right" 'forbidden spot' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 10). This spot would be 'right' if the landscape would provide different appearances.

The play philosopher interrupts to provide a bit of context about the Westhoek.

In the Westhoek, the diverse appearances of the landscape attract both war tourism and cycling tourism. Therefore, through the lens of topophilia—a concept explored by cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1990)—an insightful perspective emerges. In essence, topophilia, defined as love or affection for a place, delves into the emotional connections individuals made with specific locations. Consequently, the emotional bonds, meanings, and values associated with these places and landscapes become evident in this area. Although both war tourism and cycling tourism share the same landscape in the Westhoek, war tourism may involve a more reflective and solemn connection, while cycling tourism may evoke positive emotions related to

the races in this region. So, to be honest, there was nothing 'wrong' with this research plan.

Initially, for my research proposal, I had already come up with a title: *Fink in Flanders Fields*. The title captures this ambiguity as it also refers to the famous poem *In Flanders Fields*, by the Canadian physician and poet John McCrae, written in 1915 during the Battle of Ypres (Graves, 2012).

The researcher describes what she has concretely done these past two months.

During these two months, I followed designated cycling routes that pass First World War sites and explored the countless cemeteries. There are twelve specific routes directly linked to stories about the First World War. In addition, I explored other designated routes.

I am leaving in three days. Today, the final cycling route was on the agenda: 'The Frontier Route.' This isn't a battlefield cycling route, but one that runs along the former smuggling paths along the Belgian-French border. I dare say that I have now cycled all the existing cycling routes in the Westhoek: But what have I actually done?

Just now, a woman walked right by my car. I wanted to quickly pretend I was doing something useful, grabbing a map or my phone, but I wasn't quick enough. To my great relief, I realised that she hadn't noticed me at all. After all, who looks to see whether someone is sitting in a white Volkswagen Caddy in a parking lot on a chilly, overcast day in October?

What would she have seen? I look at my face in the rear-view mirror. Evidently a face that has just cried, swollen eyelids, green eyes now glistening, clear whites, a burst blood vessel. A red face, but that's from cycling. I check if there are other people who can see me, but behind me there is nothing. I see the fogged up rear windows of my van and right behind me, the black handlebars of my racing bike. My bike, a Specialized Roubaix. I am proud of my bike; it's beautiful and fits perfectly into this environment. This *Roubaix*, equipped with Ultegra, isn't the fastest bike. It's made for rugged terrain. *Roubaix* derives its fame from the Paris-Roubaix cycling race, a spring

classic legendary for its infamous cobblestone sections.

The swing philosopher elaborates the magic that can happen.

Occasionally, as I mount my bike and gaze at the handlebars, they morph into the cabin of a truck; the shape implies a small space that feels surprisingly vast. Equipped with this sense of spaciousness, I am ready to embark on extended journeys, setting my own pace.

The researcher continues the narrative.

I took it upon myself to do preparatory work for my PhD research here. However, in the past few days, the realisation has set in that two months have passed, and the choice to refrain from talking to cyclists has proven to be detrimental for me. The emptiness I expected while cycling here always seemed distant.

The swing philosopher elaborates on the last sentence.

As you drive down the E40 motorway from Ghent to Calais, or vice versa, you seem to glide over this emptiness. It's as if this stretch of land in Belgium near the French border doesn't truly exist. The tall, pointed church towers scattered across this region serve as pegs anchoring down the landscape.

The researcher takes over.

Before I started on this Frontier Route that I just cycled, I was already sitting here in my car crying. I cried because I had wanted myself to do this. But at the same time, I saw the ominous clouds and knew I would encounter rain, and that it's always windy in this area.

The swing philosopher continues her story.

Part of 'De Moeren' is included in The Frontier Route. This is a flat, empty delta landscape in the border area of France and Belgium, ending at the North Sea. I wanted to cycle The Frontier Route because of De Moeren. I had previously checked the route on the map at my holiday home and seen that I would enter this area if I cycled this route. It would be such a loss if I left for home without cycling this one. It's special to me because the television broadcast of the Ghent-Wevelgem race always begins after

De Moeren. De Moeren itself never makes an appearance on TV, because this emptiness is too early for TV. It is the unseen terrain, the 'nothing' from which cyclists emerge on television. De Moeren is both the 'non' and the emptiness simultaneously. It is the presence of absence, creating the backdrop from which the race materialises. In this vast, empty plain of 'nothingness,' the wind has free rein. Fatigued, the cyclists come from De Moeren and finally appear on TV. What happened there? It must be beautiful.

The researcher evaluates De Moeren from a different perspective.

A vast open plain with long, straight roads. Missing a road sign here could lead to going the wrong way, necessitating doubling back over long distances — an overwhelming prospect.

The swing philosopher plays cycling commentator.

Wind, plenty of wind.

Potential bouts of hunger.

Potential for getting lost and never being found.

The researcher still sits in her car at the parking lot of Watou.

The dreadful realisation, re-entering Watou just now, after completing the Frontier Route, that I have spent the entire Frontier Route eyeing the sky. Looking at the clouds, the colours indicating the heaviness of a shower, the speed of the clouds, and their direction; I have only cycled to stay ahead of the rain.

The play philosopher concludes.

The realisation that it hadn't started raining and I had been afraid of rain that never arrived: that's when the tears came.

The researcher concludes.

What am I doing here? What have I done.

I have not spoken to anyone, except for brief conversations with cashiers, or even shorter: a 'hi' to people who greeted me while cycling. I have one chance. If I dare, I can seek someone out: the priest.

The swing philosopher explains.

I'm aware that the priest, the one who loves cycling and blesses bicycles, resides here in Watou. I discovered pictures online last week—images of a smiling priest with cyclists and their blessed bicycles. His name is Ludo, Ludo Lepee to be precise. I have a good memory for names. But where does a priest live? Clearly, it has to be by the church.

The researcher takes action.

I get out of my car and walk around the church. The only thing I see that could be a house is a space at the back of the church. It appears to be attached, but not entirely; perhaps it was an extension made during the Middle Ages when the church was built.

I walk back to the square, to the Spar-supermarket, and then decide to ask. I see two people in line at the counter. It's busy. I wander around, but I can't think of anything to buy. I look at the lottery forms.

The swing philosopher interjects.

Since my arrival, I've been playing the lottery. The desire to play is sparked by an inviting advertisement that accompanies me wherever I cycle—in every village, everywhere, the lottery beckons. The cheerful colours, along with the magazine *Dag Allemaal* [*Hello Everyone*], complete the enticing invitation. Initially unfamiliar with the lotto, the friendly owner of the Spar in Westouter guided me through it. Now, by filling out the form weekly, I've turned it into a routine, making it an integral part of my experience in this place. It gives me a sense of belonging: I've been living here and playing the lottery all my life. However, I'm aware the lottery is somewhat pointless. On Monday, I'll be leaving, and checking the numbers behind a computer isn't as exciting. It's different on TV or in the store itself— more thrilling.

The researcher interrupts, startled.

Suddenly, it's my turn. It's my turn even though I'm not in line.

"Where does the priest live?" I hear myself ask.

The round, open face of the lady behind the counter, ready to assist me, turns to shock. This shock quickly becomes surprise as I repeat her answer.

"Opposite the church?"

"Yes?" she replies, questioning, and confirms again, "Opposite the church." She walks out of the shop with me and points. It's a large house opposite the church entrance, obviously a rectory.

I walk back to my car to have a good view of the rectory from there. It's a real rectory. Can I visit a priest in my cycling jacket, even given that he loves cycling? The jacket is light blue, somehow elegant and matches well with the smooth fabric of my tennis trousers. Nice trousers, I know, it should be fine. I look in the mirror, tidy my hair, get out, and walk to the rectory. I feel too awkward to let my steps flow naturally.

"Meeting the Mentor" II

Arriving at the rectory, I see a gate. I open the gate. It creaks. It's a pleasant sound. I notice that there are chicken coops on both sides of the front yard, and chickens roam around. I can't help but chuckle, sensing that I can dare relax. The rectory has a broad four-step stone staircase and a landing. The dignified white front door has an audible bell that chimes when I pull it out and push it back in. I hear a small dog barking, and soon footsteps approach the door. I feel myself holding my breath. When a man in his late sixties opens the door, I see him looking at me with interest. I glance at the chain with a crucifix. This man is clearly the priest, I recognise him from the pictures on the internet. Balding, glasses, a mischievous face. Not overly tall.

"Are you Ludo Lepee?" I ask.

He replies with a drawn-out "Yesss?". His tone suggests it depends on who's standing before him.

"My name is Imara Felkers, I'm a sports philosopher researching cycling here. I've been here for two months, but the problem is that no one wants to talk to me."

I hear myself say it. In fact, I'm lying to the priest right now. I continue.

"Now I've heard that you love cycling. Is that true?" The priest steps back and holds the door open for me. "Come inside."

He leads the way, accompanied by the small dog, that most resembles a Jack Russell terrier. We walk through the long corridor of the rectory.

“A sports philosopher?” he repeats extremely slowly, as if he’s never heard of it. I nod; I can’t think of anything else to say, so I repeat it.

“Yes, a sports philosopher.”

The priest chuckles, but then abruptly comes to a halt, turns around, and walks back to the front door in a straight line. What makes me uneasy is that the dog effortlessly follows all the priest’s movements. A dog that already knows, my owner is about to kick you out again because that’s what he does when walks like this. At the front door, the priest stops. But he doesn’t hold the front door open for me; instead, he points to a room on the left by the front door. In a solemn tone, he says, “This is the library.”

I look inside. To my great surprise, I don’t see rows of Bibles, but a shelf filled with cycling books. My eyes quickly scan the space. Cycling books, sports ribbons, but also lots of caps; there are a lot of cycling caps in the library.

“Klakskes,” he says as I stare at a white cap with Peugeot on it. I used to have exactly that kind of cap in the past.

The swing philosopher specifies.

I can still feel the ridges of the cap on my forehead. Initiations of a true cyclist after a day of cycling.

The researcher continues.

“How do you say that in Dutch?” the priest asks.

“Petje”, [cap] I dryly reply. “Wielerpetje”. [cycling cap] I correct myself.

I spot Freddy Maertens’s autobiography on the shelf (Maertens, & Adriaens, 1988). “You have a autobiography of Freddy?”

“Yes”, the priest replies. I let the old paper cover slide through my fingers, simultaneously noticing that the entire room smells of old books.

“How remarkable”, I say, thinking of the day before when I bought Freddy Maertens’s brand new autobiography *Freddy!* (Maertens & Osselaer, 2017). But apparently, there is also a much older one. We walk back down the corridor as I draw this conclusion.

“Do you know Freddy?” the priest asks.

"Do I know Freddy?" I repeat the priest's question and ask for clarification.

"As in, acquaintance?"

"Yes?", the priest replies.

"No", I answer, "I used to think Freddy Maertens was a great name to have as a cyclist. Imara Felkers doesn't really sound like a cyclist's name."

"Are you a cyclist?" the priest asks.

I laugh, "No, no, no."

"Do you know Freddy Maertens?", I quickly ask.

"Yes, yes, yes," the priest answers. I'm surprised by his response. Here is someone who actually knows these people.

"From racing in Diksmuide", he replies and continues, "very, very amiable man; very approachable. He lives in Diksmuide. Have you been there?"

I nod. I briefly consider whether I could have conducted my research in that area after all. But I thought there were no races in Diksmuide.

In the middle of the corridor, the priest turns to the right. The racing bike leaning against the wall immediately catches my eye.

"What a beautiful bike."

The priest agrees.

"Bianchi," he says.

"Yes, I've read that you cycle a lot."

"15,000 kilometres per year."

"Fifteen thousand," I repeat, to digest the number.

"Yes, I make sure to finish some time before Christmas; usually, that works out."

I observe that it must be an expensive bike, Bianchi. Good saddle; narrow and thus fast; high-pressure tires. Yet I notice that the tires are soft.

"I haven't cycled outdoors much lately", the priest says.

The priest leads me to the kitchen.

"Coffee?"

"Yes, please."

On the long kitchen table that almost spans the entire length of the kitchen and runs parallel to the counter, there is a large thermos flask of coffee. To the right are windows with curtains offering a view of the church. 'I walked by there', I realise, and see myself walking again, and I can't believe I didn't see the rectory.

I see that the little dog has comfortably settled into a large, lazy chair. The chair is old and seems to have moulded itself entirely to the dog's small body. The priest pours coffee and practices my name. 'Imara? Imara.' It's a difficult name. He has never heard of it.

"It's a difficult name", I tell the priest, "That's why I wanted to be called Freddy Maertens when I was younger." The priest laughs.

"Sports philosopher?", he asks again.

"Yes," I reply, confirming, "sports philosopher." The priest chuckles.

"What are you researching?" he asks, taking out his tobacco pouch.

I explain that I am researching middle-aged men who cycle in this specific area and wear professional cycling team attire, such as Lotto or Quickstep.

"Wielertoeristen" ■■■ [Cycling enthusiast / Bicycle tourer] the priest says and lights his rolled cigarette.

I share mine: "MAMILs. Middle-aged men in Lycra." I explain that I am pursuing a PhD in England. "I am looking for bicycle tourists who want to keep a diary of what they're thinking during their cycle rides."

"What they're thinking during their cycle rides?" the priest repeats.

"Yes", I answer. The priest repeats the information he just gathered.

"You come from the Netherlands, you're obtaining a PhD in England, and you're researching cycling enthusiasts in Belgium, asking what they think while cycling."

"Why here, you wonder?"

"Yes", he quickly responds.

I tell him that I find the love for cycling here, in Belgium, so unique. In Belgium, it seems as though cycling is deeply rooted in the land: I sum up all the races. All these races carry the names of the places along the race Kuurne – Brussels – Kuurne, Nokere Koerse, Ghent – Wevelgem, Dwars door Vlaanderen, Driedaagse De Panne, Ronde van Vlaanderen, Brabantse Pijl, Liège – Bastogne – Liège, Scheldeprijs: All internationally renowned races. The Netherlands has the 'Amstel Gold Race,' and this name, of course, does not refer to a river in Amsterdam, rather it is a beer brand.

"You could say that France, with Paris – Nice, Paris – Roubaix, Paris – Tours, puts up good competition", I continue, "but there's something else that

makes this region so special, and that's the legacy of the Great War. It's a landscape with countless cemeteries. Large ones but especially small ones; almost hidden. I found them in the middle of a field, right next to a farmhouse, the craters in a farmyard, and in every village, the monuments. Cycling and the history of the war share the land here in the Westhoek."

After that, I tell the priest that I find cycling so special because this sport has no boundaries; it can take place anywhere. Road cycling also lacks a fixed playing field like a mat or a track. The asphalt of the road, the cobbles of the Kemmelberg, the mountains—all are temporarily lent to the race, only to resume their form as public roads afterward. The playing field is constructed using attributes such as the finish line. The 'end' therefore is clear.

The play philosopher provides extra information.

Accompanying barriers and the finish make the playing field visible.

The finish is closed to all traffic from its construction onwards. However, the roads chosen for the race remain accessible. A few minutes before the riders arrive, traffic is stopped by course marshals [*seingever*s].

These volunteers are tasked with regulating traffic, ensuring the safety and orderly progression of the race. Therefore, they also play a crucial role in allowing the playing field to be rolled out like a carpet. However, by the time the riders pass the finish line, the 'rear' of the playing field has, so to speak, already been 'swept up' by the 'broom wagon', and the course marshals have cleared the road for traffic.

The 'broom wagon' is jargon and refers to the final car which clears the course. Traditionally, this was a truck. A lot of trucks have a broom directly attached to the back of the cab, on the outside.

Hence, the playing field in cycling is never fully present during the actual race. The playing field of a road race is a process in which the field is rolled out and rolled back up. I suspect that the playing field of cycling can serve as a metaphor to elaborate on the philosophical notion of mimesis in a practice-based form. I believe this is due to its transparency and the fact that the playing field is never fully displayed. During a conversation with

the priest at that time, I found myself on the verge of engaging with these thoughts. Being there and talking out loud to the priest helped me develop a connection with my reason for being there.

The researcher continues.

“A playing field of cycling as a public road can thus indicate a space that remains visible as a public road but simultaneously takes on the appearance of a playing field.”

The priest drags on his cigarette, and I see that he is listening attentively.

“I find this moment of appearance while the landscape remains transparent intriguing here”, I tell the priest. “However, the Kemmelberg, the Scherpenberg, the Palingbeek near Ypres, are all places where heavy fighting took place during the First World War. But the Palingbeek and the Kemmelberg are also distinctive sections in the Ghent-Wevelgem road race. Both appearances, both the race and the war, are visible through reference points, but at the same time, they are also invisible. Do you see what a fascinating intersection it is? However, as mentioned, I’m struggling to find participants.” “There are bicycle touring clubs”, the priest brings up.

I respond to the priest that I have certainly thought about that. It would give me a foothold. “I asked several; in Ypres, for example; that would be a good combination. But it amounted to nothing. All the cycling clubs cycle at much too high a pace for me.”

When the priest asks about my average speed, I add a few kilometres and tell him that my average is around twenty-four, twenty-five kilometres per hour. The priest says that his brother is the honorary chairman of the bicycle touring club in Krombeke. In this association, they cycle together: men, women, and youth. Twenty-five kilometres is also the average for these rides. The priest agrees that this average is indeed lower than that of most clubs. “They pretend to be pros”, he says, shaking his head in pity. The priest has been a member of this club for over 25 years. Suddenly, he gets up and walks out of the kitchen. He returns a moment later with a stack of cycling jerseys and places them on the kitchen table.

The swing philosopher watches with interest.

Thinking they might be replicas of professional cycling jerseys, I try to recognise them, but they turn out to be jerseys of this cycling club. One by one, the priest unfolds them and lays them on the table. All have the name of the club, *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* on the jersey. Together we bend over the jerseys and study them with great care and precision.

The oldest one is made of wool. I'd spend all my money to have that one. There is also a striking, brightly coloured one reminiscent of the 1990s, the times of Mapei with rider Frank Vandenbroucke (1974 -2009).

When I ask where this place, Krombeke, is located, the priest points to the lefthand window without looking up from the jerseys. Out the window, then to the left, I deduce. And probably not too far.

Then the priest explains that this area, the area of Watou, Poperinge, Krombeke is the region of "Bachten de kupe". He teases me and asks if I already have studied this fact.

The researcher takes over.

'Bachten de kupe' is Flemish, and I try to make sense what it means in Dutch, but I haven't got a clue.

"No", I answer.

"It's the area behind the bow of Ypres", he explains. "The canons came within 15 kilometres, so, you are here, where the war wasn't", he says and laughs. "Bachten de kupe": 'behind the bow'. He has me say it. He laughs loudly at my pronunciation.

Cycling with this priest. My research plan would be saved. All's well that ends well. But the priest makes it clear in every way that this is not a good idea. For the war, I really need to be in Ypres, he informs me.

"So, you cycle these many thousands of kilometres with this club?" I ask. The priest shakes his head. He's a member, but does not cycle with them. I don't understand. I try to make eye contact, but the priest seems to have disappeared into his jerseys.

The swing philosopher understands the priest.

They are indeed beautiful jerseys.

The researcher analyses the situation.

This is a closed chapter. And somehow I feel that I must now take all the risks and tell the priest about my love for cycling, as strange and unusual as it may be, here, on a Friday afternoon, at the kitchen table with Father Ludo.

The swing philosopher tells Father Ludo about the enchantment of the spring races.

“As a child, I was enchanted by the spring races in Belgium. Especially the opening race Omloop Het Volk [The People’s Tour]. This race is the earliest in the year, when everything is still awakening. For a long time, I thought Omloop Het Volk bore the name of a socialist or, more specifically, a communist race, and not the name of a newspaper called Het Volk. In my perception, it was a gathering of people who really wanted to see a race; full of expectation after a long winter. In Belgium, people gather together to see a race. Wrapped in winter coats, enduring the cold to be able to watch. It was a race for them, for the people. When Omloop Het Volk changed its name to Omloop Het Nieuwsblad because of a merger at the newspaper, it still felt like, well, not like a betrayal, but as though these people in their thick winter coats had been abandoned. That it was a merger of newspapers only found recognition in the cognitive part of my brain.’

“A gathering of the people”, the priest repeats in pretend outrage and looks at me as though a direct representative of communism is sitting before him. The priest tells me about the history of Omloop Het Volk, which once started on St. Peter’s Square in Ghent in 1946, “where the riders were blessed in the square. And nowadays?” He doesn’t even wait for the answer, “banished to the outskirts of the city: to Deinze.”

The researcher notes.

I listen and try to remember everything. He explains that he is a sports chaplain, and what this means. A minister for the well-being of athletes. Then the priest talks about his predecessor, the first sports chaplain, Father André

van Cle, and about the establishment of sports pastoral work. “The riders didn’t have the status they have now, right?’ emphasises the priest and clarifies, ‘not stardom, like Tom Boonen. Van Cle was the first to care for those poor sods.”

Meanwhile, the priest carefully folds the jerseys again. When he is done, he gets up and sees me out of the kitchen. I am startled, especially at myself, at how afraid I actually am, that I daren’t ask him anything, don’t openly inquire about the possibilities, and don’t just do the things researchers do: asking questions, outlining intentions.

We walk back to the hallway where the racing bike stands. I condemn myself in an inner conversation, thinking, ‘I’ve just been sitting there as myself, and not in the role of a researcher.’

I try to create some order in my head. Then the priest abruptly halts in front of another door, right opposite the green Bianchi bike. He holds the door handle before solemnly announcing: “And then here, the in inner sanctum.” The priest opens the door with a grand inviting gesture. I see light coming in through large windows. The inner sanctum is a large room at the back of the rectory and has large windows overlooking the backyard.

The swing philosopher sees it too.

In that light, a steel racing bike gleams on a roller.

The researcher describes.

Right in front of this roller, there is a cabinet with a TV stand. On it are a television and a VCR. The priest cycles his 15,000 kilometres in front of the TV. His favourite is cyclocross, even more than road cycling, he says. For each cyclocross race lasting over an hour, the priest pedals 33 kilometres. However, he finds it challenging to keep up: ‘Mathieu van der Poel makes all races boring.’ When he can’t cycle along live with the race, he records it and cycles later; or he cycles them again. He demonstrates the stack of videotapes further down in the cabinet. There is writing on the covers. I try to decipher the tiny handwriting; I read ‘wk’ (world championship) and years, 1971, 1974.

The swing philosopher can barely contain her joy and unbridled fantasy.

I want to count the kilometres. I want to remember all the written names of the races, the years, I want to remember it all.

Proudly, the priest takes me over to the wall with sheets of paper stuck to it. My eye catches the sign 'bike workshop' above the door, but the priest finds it much more important to show me the wall with carefully printed A4 sheets. These are summaries of years, days, and the kilometres he has cycled. He enters these numbers after each cycling session, and every year he prints out the summary. Together we peer at the figures. The priest cycles a minimum of 33 kilometres every day, but often more, and indeed, it adds up to 15,000 kilometres. "These numbers tell the story of your life" he says.

The researcher observes.

I try to process the information and see what he sees. Then, I do see patterns; indeed, the numbers tell stories. "In 2012, you cycled very little", I observe.

The priest agrees, "That's the year my mother died."

"You switched from 12,000 to 15,000 per year."

"Yes, I reached 12,000 too soon in the year."

And indeed, I notice, the priest is always finished way before Christmas.

"You also cycle on January 1st."

The swing philosopher looks as well.

I shift my gaze from the sheets of paper to the racing bike on the roller stand. The handlebars are close to the TV, as though you can dive into it. The TV is not a plasma screen but an older model, the kind I know from the past; an indestructible cathode-ray tube.

"Do you want to try it?" he asks.

I look at the bike.

The researcher is startled.

I've never cycled on a roller stand; I look at the rear tire, at the wheel. I feel awkwardness creeping in; I will lose my balance and eventually fall over.

I decline.

The swing philosopher takes over.

I look at the little dog, her name is Swappie. She has taken her place on a small dog bed between the bike and the wall with the sheets of paper.

She is indeed old, the priest tells me. "I got her for free at some point. I taught her not to bark when she's lying there. Barking means I'm home."

"And not barking means you're not home, so you can keep cycling?"

The priest laughs.

The researcher attempts to understand what is happening.

"You cycle along with the races on television", I repeat to make sure I heard him correctly.

"Yes, otherwise, it's so boring", answers the priest, laughing.

"And you laugh at my research plan?"

"I don't think that much while on the bike" the priest continues to laugh.

"So, you accumulate the 15.000 kilometres here?"

"Yes. I fell once, but also, people will talk if the priest cycles too much."

"Is it possible that I could potentially join your brother's cycling club?"

"Then you'll have to train."

"Then I'll have to train", I repeat. "Agreed."

The priest confirms that he will inform his brother. I promise him that I will clearly outline my intentions in writing and email this motivation letter to him.

"Application letter", the priest corrects me.

"Application letter", I confirm, repeating him.

Then, all of a sudden, the doorbell rings.

The swing philosopher immediately checks whether Swappie passes the barking test.

Instantly, I look at the little dog. Swappie wags her tail in her bed, looks at her master, but does indeed not bark. Then, to my great surprise, we hear the door open. I look at the priest; he listens. Here I am, in the priest's most secret room. I wait for footsteps. Then we hear the door close again. The priest shrugs and lovingly pets Swappie.

The researcher concludes.

We walk back to the hallway. When we are at the front door, we see that eggs have been brought in. That is what just happened: someone has collected the eggs for the priest. “Do you want an egg?” the priest asks.

I look at the eggs on a tea towel; there are six of them. They vary in size, there is a very small one and a very large one. I’d never given that thought. I am too shy to be spontaneous. I politely decline. We say goodbye. He will put in a good word for me with his brother. I will email him my application letter as soon as possible.

“You can always talk to Freddy Maertens”, he says as we part. “He talks to everyone”, he assures me.

Caillois’ paidia – ludus continuüm

The play philosopher bridges the three months between the preparation phase and membership of De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers with a brief elaboration on the play types of French sociologist Roger Caillois (1913-1978) and Mary Midgley (1919-2018).

My membership in a cycling club will serve as an institutionalised form within which to engage middle-aged men in Lycra who are interested in participating in my research. The tension between the pleasure of freedom, characteristic of the swing philosopher, and the threat that the frameworks for my presence might become unstable, can be addressed in a section of the game and play vision written by sociologist Roger Caillois.

Caillois (2001) presents a continuum from free play (paidia) that transforms into rule-guided play (ludus). Ludus is ‘institutionalized, representing calculation, contrivance, and subordination to rules’ (Caillois, 2001, p. x).

Membership in *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* compels me to train. This aligns with Caillois’s explanation that ludus involves disciplining paidia. While Caillois presents the continuum from paidia to ludus as a sequence, my experience suggests that ludus can be understood more broadly than just a refinement of paidia energy, and vice versa (Felkers et al., 2016).

In collaboration with MacLean and Mulder (Felkers et al., 2016), we demon-

strated the need for this cheerful, exuberant paidia energy to remain present within ludus activities. The primary argument we present is rooted in the ideas of Mary Midgley in her essay *The Game Game* (Midgley, 1974).

Midgley (1974) argues that the player always brings themselves into the game. She notes that, regardless of which rulebook you consult, there is always room for the player. Even if a game starts with something as simple as rolling a dice, it reveals nothing about the player's intention.

With the player's intention, a field of possibilities opens up to explore perspectives that a player always brings with them. Midgley herself asserts that every player can already engage before the game officially begins. A player doesn't 'appear' when the referee's whistle blows to signal the start of the match and doesn't disappear when the referee blows the final whistle. An appeal is made for the presence of the human being. In the role of a player, one engages in a game. In the player, the intention of the person becomes evident. Therefore, we concur with Midgley that the playing field of a 'game' is a surface on which both the player and the intention of the human being playing, can manifest. Being cheerful and frolicsome can easily be associated with a human being rather than solely a player.

Membership of De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers

Three months after meeting the priest the researcher travels to Krombeke to become a member.

In my Volkswagen Caddy, I look at my navigation screen and simultaneously peer through the windshield. I see that the black screen does indeed match the darkness outside. In two minutes, I should be there, but I see nothing at all. Headlights reveal only small patches of grey asphalt along with bits of grass. It's all narrow.

"Did you know that there are no traffic lights after Ypres?" I hear the voice of Ludo in my head. I know the earth is not flat, and I also know that I'm really driving somewhere. To Krombeke, but where exactly? It can't be that Krombeke suddenly appears, can it? But of course it can. I make a sharp left turn and see the night adorned with lights in the distance. The Christ-

mas decorations in the sky turn out to be a church tower. The lights grow stronger and multiply rapidly. I see the outlines of houses. Dark barn walls. Next to the church, a small square opens up with houses awash with warm yellow light: Krombeke.

The swing philosopher joins the search.

The clubhouse of the Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers should be located on Krombekeplein, at number 13. I don't see a clubhouse resembling what I had imagined a cycling club building should look like; something involving wood. I'm not familiar with any cycling club buildings. I know a chess and checkers club building, a new house built of stone, but I can't recall ever having seen a cycling club building.

Where number thirteen should be, I see that there are two cafes. The lefthand one says 'Town hall'; the one on the right seems to have no name. The 'Town hall' looks dark. With the scarce light inside the café, I imagine a lone visitor sunk in candlelight at the bar. I look at the other café. These windows have a warm glow in which I discern dancing black shadows sharply outlined by the orange light. Just like in a cartoon where, when turn the doorhandle to go inside, an explosion of sound and music blows it open.

The researcher looks at the time in the car.

I still have half an hour. There are two evenings on which you can register, and this is the first one. Will Ludo be there? But a priest doesn't go to a bar, does he? I had emailed the board back to say that I was very pleased with the invitation to become a member and that I would come to register on Friday evening. I didn't get a personal response; it was after all, I saw, a general email sent to all members.

The swing philosopher adds nuance.

The awkwardness I felt due to the lack of an additional confirmation of welcome was quickly replaced by a proud feeling seeing my name among all those Belgian-sounding names on the general mailing list.

The researcher takes over.

I stand on the sidewalk, I hear the sound, the music, and the buzz. Under normal circumstances I would find this the most delightful sound. I open the door; the explosion of warmth, music, and sound blows in my face; it's crowded. I immediately encounter a wall of people. Where to start, how do I approach this? I'm glad of my height: Being six feet tall is now working in my favour.

I try to make my way through the throng of people; heads turn; men on bar stools look at me squeezing through; friendly looks that surprise me. I say 'sorry' and smile nicely. I spot a woman behind the bar, she has noticed me. I intend to say my rehearsed sentence, observing that her mouth is open, and she's making gestures. Fortunately, she's also pointing to the right, towards the end of the bar where it is a bit calmer.

I make my way towards the back, aided by having a clear goal and focusing on the landlady. However, I hesitate to ask my question. She laughs and promptly guides me to a door at the back of the cafe with the sign 'private.'

Opening the door, I find two men sitting behind a table. The two senior citizens seem to recognise me and offer friendly smiles. They rise slightly from their chairs, extend their hands, and introduce themselves as the board of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*.

Wearing his reading glasses, the older of the two points to one of the chairs in front of them, indicating where I can sit. Triumphant, he then picks up my application letter. As I gaze at the neatly folded document, my letter, he seeks confirmation, asking if I truly want to become a member. 'Yes,' I respond somewhat foolishly. It's almost unbelievable that this letter has travelled from my computer to printed form, to this room clad in birch veneer panelling and strips, creating an almost soundproof space. Glancing at both of them, I wonder if I still have a moment to look around and understand where exactly I have ended up. Two pairs of eyes continue to watch me, grinning, as they request an explanation of the purpose of my research in my own words.

I strive to answer as concretely as possible, employing the term I learned from Ludo, that my research focuses on recreational cyclists. I elaborate, emphasising that this area holds significance due to its wartime history and cycling culture. This is precisely why I aspire to cycle with the club for a season.

When I glance up at the gentlemen, seeking validation for my response, the landlady peeks her head around the door, inquiring if the enrolment can proceed. “Yes, yes”, the gentlemen respond in unison. She then asks if I’d like something to drink. Internally debating whether it’s appropriate to request coffee at this time of night, I observe the beverages on the table in front of me. Each of the two board members has a bottle of Jupiler beer. My eyes rest on the bottles. “A beer?” the landlady asks, laughing.

“Yes, please”, I respond. Meanwhile, a man enters the room. In response to the chairman’s signal, he takes a seat next to me. I am introduced as ‘the new member from the Netherlands.’

“Ah, yes, yes”, the man responds and looks up. I give him a friendly smile in return. He awaits the board’s handling of the paperwork. From his coat pocket, he retrieves two twenty-euro bills and hands them to the treasurer – the membership fee, I understand. In return, the man receives a green booklet that appears freshly printed, and he departs. His exit is promptly followed by the entrance of a woman. This time, I am introduced as ‘the researcher from the Netherlands.’

The woman responds enthusiastically, walking towards me with an outstretched hand. I attempt to remember her name, but to no avail. ‘She’s a farmer,’ the chairman proudly remarks. She takes the seat beside me, and I tune into the lively conversation following the chairman’s statement about her occupation. “Managing fifty cows and, twice a year, cauliflower.” The chairman calls her by her name: Marleen. And endeavours to convince her to join the ladies who cycle on Tuesdays. In his inquiry, he also addresses me, asking if I would like to cycle on Tuesdays. I respond that my preference is for Sundays initially, but during the summer period, when I’ll be here con-

tinuously, I'm open to cycling on Tuesday evenings also. However, my primary focus will be on Sundays.

Marleen replies that we will then see each other on Sundays. I like that thought. With the arrival of the beer, another woman enters. 'Martine', she says, and she clearly introduces herself to me; she is the secretary of the club; the board is complete. The chairman hands me a form. While filling it out, he tells me about the insurance; that I am insured in case of accidents, but that getting the cycling club card will take a while. "And then, of course, the gear", says the chairman, pointing to a large box next to him, where numerous shirts are packaged in plastic. I recognise the shirt. In the weeks before, Ludo had emailed me a picture of what awaited me in Krombeke.

The swing philosopher tries on the garment.

In the stack, they search for the right size. Martine and the landlady confer with the chairman. "Try this one", she suggests, handing me the shirt. As I survey the small space, I wonder how I'm going to try it on here. The landlady, seemingly anticipating this moment, leads the way; at the back of the compact room, another door awaits. She opens it, revealing a fairly spacious area with a kitchen, resembling a living space, and even equipped with a shower, visible a little further away. Do they live here? I glance around, and my gaze meets a large mirror on the door. I pause and halt my visual exploration. Holding the shirt in front of me, I change and put it on. As I do, I feel that it might be too tight; I observe my arm and follow the snug fabric down to my stomach. Eventually, I decide to take it off.

The researcher walks back.

"Just a bit too small", I remark; "XL then" is the conclusion. "XL", I affirm. This one suits me well. A sigh of relief escapes me. I return to the small hall, where everyone approves of the shirt. "Beautiful", I exclaim, happily sharing that Ludo had previously sent me a photo of the shirt. "Father Ludo?" Martine inquires, "Yes, Father Ludo", I quickly confirm. Clearly, Ludo is Father Ludo here. I receive one shirt with short sleeves and one with long sleeves. The latter feels like terry cloth.

The swing philosopher specifies and concludes.

White and green; bright, brand new. In my Volkswagen Caddy, heading back to the Netherlands, I've placed the shirts beside me; they feel like entities to me. In the darkness, I gaze at them and touch them for a moment. A mix of emotions floods over me. I feel like a beaming child with new toys, a teenager awkwardly infatuated, a neo-pro who has just signed his first contract. Alone in the car, I speed towards home. I long to be home; I am a young pro with too much money, driving my fast sports car as quickly as possible. I now have a shirt and a contract.

CHAPTER 2 – DÉPART RÉEL (Real Start)

Introduction

The play philosopher introduces the theoretical frameworks that will be discussed in this chapter.

This chapter introduces and develops two theoretical frameworks that contribute to the formal motivation for this research.

The research stems from my master's thesis in philosophy, where I explored the philosophical concept of mimetic desire by René Girard using the focus group of middle-aged men in Lycra. By testing this philosophical notion through interviews with a group of men who share similarities with professional cyclists, this target group provided me with the opportunity to delve deeper into the combination of mimesis and play. The target group seemed, in my eyes, to be hiding something. The specific attire they wear, along with their (often expensive) racing bikes, combined with the denial that they were playing and imitating professional cyclists, intrigued me greatly.

From the analysis of Girard's mimetic desire, this denial could be easily interpreted (Girard, 1982). However, the desire to explore mimesis further through this group was awakened.

Perhaps the concealment of play is not so much identifiable through a single group, but rather deeply embedded in culture, I thought. Huizinga (1950, 2008) argues that culture has arisen from play, asserting that all human culture and cultural actions stem from this transcendental concept. I use the priest from the previous chapter as the interpreter of this ideology.

The chapter begins with my training in the winter, ensuring that I am well-prepared for the start of the cycling season in the spring. It marks the beginning of the broad exploration of the role of imitation (mimesis) in our contemporary culture and the exploration of the possible concealment of play.

Mimetic desire and the start of winter training

The researcher adds to this introduction.

My master's thesis in philosophical ethics provides points of departure for further research. Therefore, I incorporate the focus group with which I explore Girard's perspective in my master's thesis. This focus group consists of middle-aged men who cycle in replicas of professional cycling team outfits. They shed light on the broad scope of the concept of play. On the one hand, the use of these replicas, combined with their expensive bicycles, identical to those used by professional cyclists, suggests that they are engaged in a form of imitation and play. On the other hand, during the field research for my master's thesis, these men indicated that they were not playing. This denial aligns with René Girard's theoretical framework. Above all, mimetic desire, coupled with the target group of middle-aged men wearing replicas of professional cycling team outfits, illustrates that 'play and playing' can be broadly interpreted.

The swing philosopher is excited because she already has a mashup of cycling commentary at her disposal.

Omloop Het Nieuwsblad

"There,
the wind coming from the right,
how smooth the narrow roads;
to dare as soon as you enter the meadow.

It's like every year;
the race of hope;
and at about sixty-five percent,
hope is already shattered.

Unless you say, no,
it's too early,
to speak aloud of ambition,
to show it to the people openly.

What luxury;

hidden;
at the back of Paddestraat;
revealed by the first rain of attack.

You always have to look ahead.
But the winter before is of even greater importance.”
(Wuyts, 2011a)

The play philosopher explains the term ‘mashup.’

The English term ‘mashup’ is derived from ‘to mash something up.’ In this context, it is used in popular culture to refer to a creative expression where elements are blended. Various media are combined, usually from different sources, such as fragments of images, videos, other media content, or elements from existing music tracks. Mashups can be created in various ways, with the goal of generating something new.

Blommaert (2015) provides a definition of mashup as ‘the capacity to blend different existing memes into new ones’ (2015, p. 12). In the context of this PhD the treatment of mashups is utilised as an artistic expression (Freeland, 2002).

The swing philosopher specifies.

I had already made a mashup, about a year earlier. It happened spontaneously, more or less by chance. During the World Road Cycling Championships in the Australian city of Geelong in 2010, the race was broadcast early in the morning due to the time difference. In my living room, I turned on the television but immediately walked into the kitchen to make coffee and do the dishes from the previous day. As I did that, I followed the race by listening to the cycling commentary from the kitchen. There, I heard Wuyts say, ‘How long’ and immediately after, ‘How far, does the dream reach.’ His intonation was very specific. They weren’t even questions. His intonation in these pronounced sentences was even, without the usual rising inflection of a question. This made it seem more like an affectionate observation he was making. I stopped doing the dishes and continued listening. There was a brief silence. Then I decided to leave the dishes for what they were, grabbed my laptop, and sat in front of the television to write down these sentences:

How long.'

'How far does the dream reach.'

'Biting the bullet.'

(Wuyts, 2010)

On television, I watched a rider I didn't know. Dressed in an outfit with the colours of a nationality I didn't recognise. I saw that he had escaped from a leading group and had a considerable lead. I followed him by writing down Wuyts' descriptions.

'Breathe in and breathe out.'

'Take a look at the escapees and then carry on.'

'Take a look around, boy, just take a look around.'

'You're so amazing.'

(Wuyts, 2010)

The researcher is training.

Now I understand what Wuyts meant in his cycling commentary about the opening race of Omloop Het Nieuwsblad. "You always have to look ahead; but the winter before is of even greater importance."

To make sure I can keep up with the pace of cycling club *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, I am training on my racing bike this winter. My goal is to show up well-trained at the start in April, so I can continue fulfilling my role as a professional researcher. I want to maintain an overview without worrying about the distance or my speed in the group.

I am experimenting with capturing my thoughts. I record them with a mini voice recorder, specifically purchased for this purpose, along with a flat microphone. This microphone has a windscreen to prevent wind noise. I store the voice recorder in my back pocket and run the wire under my cycling clothes, securing it with duct tape to the bottom of my collar.

The swing philosopher is playing.

During my training sessions in the surroundings of Apeldoorn, where I

live, I wear my brand-new cycling attire. This clothing is green and white, littered with names of real sponsors. *Provelo* graces my arm, and the Belfius bank adorns my back and stomach. It looks very professional, as if I am a professional cyclist riding with ‘earpieces.’

Secretly, I imagine myself part of a small, promising cycling team. I catch myself constantly wanting to look at the shirt sponsorship on my arm, at *Provelo*, but I also need to keep my attention on the road.

The researcher is experimenting with a research method.

While cycling, fragments of memories related to my Master graduation topic surface, namely the philosophical concept of mimetic desire coined by René Girard (Girard, 1961). But how do I convey these ‘fragments of memory’ if I want to record them with a microphone? If I do that, I’ll be speaking these memories to myself, but it feels like a translation. I find myself internally deliberating: I devised this method and purchased special equipment, but I realise that conveying ‘fragments of memories about my thesis’ is different from using spoken language.

A provisional summary of what mimesis can be

The researcher revisits the philosophical notion of mimesis.

Upon returning home, I review my master’s thesis, *The Race, the Bike, and the Girl*: Girard’s mimetic desire depicted in a streetscape [*De Koers, de fiets en het meisje*: ‘Girard’s mimetische begeerte verbeeld in het straatbeeld’]. I chuckle because I used the enumeration of what mimesis is from IJsseling (1997).

Among the possible English translations of the Greek *mimesthai* are: to imitate, to follow, to mimic, to ape, to counterfeit, to forge, to reproduce, to copy, to mirror, to double, to depict, to represent, to render, to impersonate, to repeat and to translate, to recite and to cite, et cetera (IJsseling, 1997, p. 7).

I smile because IJsseling ends with ‘et cetera’, after listing eighteen possible translations. He emphasises that each of these words also raises new

problems; and a certain ambiguity strikes most of them. With the enumeration, he demonstrates the ambivalence and ambiguity that characterises mimesis. Nevertheless, he concludes with a provisional summary of what mimesis can be.

'It is a characteristic of mimesis that a displacement takes place. In and through mimesis, reality appears on a different level. This level is neither necessarily a lower one, as Plato thinks, nor a higher one, as Hegel and perhaps also Aristotle think' (IJsseling, 1997, p. 21).

Eugen Fink was especially drawn to the methodological self-awareness and narrative character of Hegel's phenomenology (Denker & Vater, 2003; Moran & Magrì, 2017). For Hegel (1977), mimesis was an evolutionary process in which art reflected and stimulated the intellectual development of society. Essentially, Hegel considered mimesis a dynamic force that not only mirrored reality but also actively shaped it in the continuous evolution of art and culture. In the Platonic view, art and play lacked intrinsic truth and were mere imitations of higher, timeless ideas. This perspective led to the devaluation of art and play as inferior to the real, unchanging truths found only in the World of Ideas.

However, IJsseling (1997) aims to liberate mimesis from this value judgment in his exposition, attempting to break free from hierarchical thinking about mimesis. 'Human beings and events, things and situations occur and appear in another place and another moment' (IJsseling, 1997, p. 21).

This appearance can take place on the stage, in films, or in literature, but it can occur in any form of imitation. The displacement is possible, IJsseling argues, based on the distinction that arises in and through mimesis. Hence, he establishes a connection between mimesis, appearance, and polysemy.

Instead of ambiguity, seen from IJsselings' perspective, one might rather speak of polysemy, for the mimetic occurs on many levels. This polysemy is according to IJsseling of the same order as that of 'appearance (*doxa*) and appearing, making one's appearance and presenting oneself (*phainesthai*), to which the mimetic is essentially linked (IJsseling, 1997, p. 8).

Imitation: René Girard's mimetic desire

What happens in terms of mimesis when a middle-aged man cycles in a replica of a professional cycling team outfit? Is it a case of mimesis as art and culture? (Hegel, 1977) Is it representation; where the intention is portrayal of reality (Plato, 2000), or does it involve the form of mimesis in the sense of 'imitation' (Aristotle, 2013). IJsseling (1997) argues that these last two forms of mimesis, - representation and imitation-, are the two distinctive forms of mimesis within the philosophical tradition.

In the form of mimesis as 'imitation' the importance of setting a good example takes centre stage. This conception of imitation was highly esteemed until the Romantic period. After that era, the place of the original is glorified. According to Girard, imitation in desire largely goes underground and is disguised in jealousy and envy.

He describes the exposition of mimetic desire by using literary works in *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* (1961). The literal translation would be "The Romantic Lie and Novelistic Truth". However, it is translated into English as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. In this work René Girard coins the notion of mimetic desire.

In my Master's thesis, I examined the appearance of the middle-aged man cycling in a replica through the framework of Girard's mimetic desire. A question that I thereby linked to this middle-aged man cycling in a replica shirt concerned whether I had, with this appearance, an example at hand showing that the framework of mimetic desire can indeed be demonstrated through non-literary figures.

In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, Girard's philosophy posits that a human is not capable of desiring independently. Desire is mimetic and arises through the other. This other, indicated by Girard as the 'model,' is chosen by the desiring individual, the 'subject.' The model then shows the subject what to desire. In this way, desire is activated.

Girard refers to the glorification of the idea that a desire is original as 'the

romantic lie.’ He utilises literary examples to illustrate the operation of mimetic desire. He does this to demonstrate that mimetic desire, according to him, operates differently in Romanticism, and is no longer consciously experienced. In literature, however, authors have the ability to vividly depict the process and structure of mimetic desire, which Girard describes as ‘novelistic truth’ (Girard, 1976). Fiction writers in particular have the freedom to delve into the thoughts and feelings of characters.

Girard illustrates this notion through examples from the work of Cervantes, in which Don Quixote openly attempts to imitate the knight Amadis. What is notable is that Amadis himself is also a fictional character within the fictional story, emphasising the immense gap between Don Quixote and Amadis. Within this context, Amadis presents objects to Don Quixote that differ from the objects Amadis himself desires. The figure of Amadis represents what Girard calls ‘vertical transcendence,’ symbolising the considerable distance between the model (Amadis) and the subject (Don Quixote).

Mimetic Desire Represented as a Triangle

The play philosopher elaborates.

The operation of mimetic desire is presented by Girard as a triangle. At the apex of this triangle is the model, who, through one diagonal line, shows the ‘subject’ (the individual) the objects to be desired. The subject and the object thus form the other two points of the triangle.

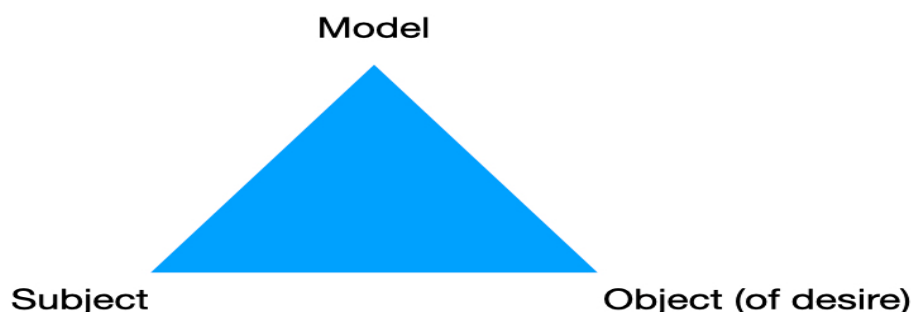


Figure. 2.1 Rene Girard's mimetic desire as a triangle with a vertical transcendence



Figure. 2.2 René Girard's mimetic desire as a Triangle with a horizontal transcendence

Girard argues that in Romanticism this vertical transcendence transforms into 'horizontal transcendence.' Two significant factors play a role in this transformation.

First and foremost, the influence of the French Revolution, whose motto '*liberty, equality, fraternity*' represents a new era of social mobility.

Secondly, the concept 'God is dead,' as formulated by Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 1974, 1961). Girard (1976) describes the view that this leads to a void where God once was.

With the shift from vertical to horizontal transcendence, the distance between model and subject seems to blur. Anyone can thus assume the position of 'god' due to freedom and equality.

However, the desired 'fraternity' degenerates into competition. The overt imitation of models is replaced by jealousy and envy, as seen in Romantic works by authors such as Flaubert, Stendhal, and Dostoevsky.

With the rise of Romanticism, the position of the model shifts, and the traditional triangle of model, subject, and object seems to collapse. This results in situations where everyone becomes each other's 'double' and 'shows' what objects are necessary for happiness. Girard argues that the position of the model now becomes an obstacle for the subject.

Mimetic desire from the Romantic period acts like a boomerang. This desire gives objects their value because the modernists believe that happiness lies in the objects others possess. It revolves mainly around the projections that the subject makes onto the objects it sees in others. Because mimetic desire in horizontal transcendence occurs unconsciously, this process can persist. Everyone has become each other's double.

But what about the middle-aged man who emulates a professional cyclist with his attire and expensive racing bike?

Girard's mimetic desire tested in practice

The researcher continues.

For my master's thesis, I decided to travel to Oudenaarde, Belgium, to explore the cycling culture surrounding the spring classic 'Tour of Flanders' (De Ronde van Vlaanderen). With 16,000 participants, the mass participation version of this race is one of the largest cycling events. Amateur cyclists can ride the mass participation version of the racecourse. My assumption was that this event would allow me to introduce a non-literary figure into Girard's framework, complementing his examples from literature. The participants represent a group that, at least in my opinion, is significant because they desire to ride a specific course on public streets, on a particular day, while donning the jerseys of professional cyclists. However, they are not merely well-intentioned amateur actors 'reenacting' the Tour of Flanders.

I waited for them at the finish line and interviewed middle-aged men dressed in the cycling jerseys of the Belgian Quickstep and Lotto cycling teams.

However, after interviewing a few middle-aged men in blue Quickstep shirts, it suddenly became clear to me why Girard uses literary figures to illustrate mimetic desire. The answers the men gave were brief and sometimes curt. All interviewees spoke highly of former world champion Tom Boonen. The short answers came in response to questions about imitation. No one openly imitated him. Neither was anyone jealous or envious of professional cyclists. The outcome I obtained from this field research was that all interviewed middle-aged men denied and therefore confirmed mimetic desire. They all answered that they liked the jersey they were wearing and wore it for that reason.

In addition to confirming Girard's hypothesis, this small field study also contributed to Girard's ideas. Among the cycling enthusiasts, there were no open signs of imitation, and none of them showed a trace of jealousy or envy

towards, for example, former world champion Tom Boonen. In fact, all Belgian men were proud of Tom Boonen.

In my conclusion, I ended by considering the possibility that wearing a replica might be part of performing this mass participation version. Did they want to execute this 'game' as well as possible? In that case, it would not be an imitation of another as a model.

Is it then about the representation of playing a game well? (De Koven, 2013). But if that's the case, what kind of play are we talking about?

The key to analysis lies in the meaning of wearing the replica, was my conclusion. What is striking about the bicycle touring enthusiast wearing a replica is that the attire seems to carry a double meaning. On the one hand, a replica is a variation of sportswear suitable for athletic activities. On the other hand, a replica is a carrier of a specific kind of meaning. In this case, the replica outfit refers to a professional cyclist. When an amateur wears this clothing in the same context, namely cycling, it also alludes to an element of play; the playfulness of 'disguise.'

In addition to denying that desire originates from others, the interviewees also denied that they were playing. They were not playing a game, not acting, but participating in a performance ride.

The play philosopher interprets.

Precisely the act of wearing a replica within this context, in the eyes of the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga, would be an indication to categorise this performance ride as a game (Huizinga, 2008, 1950). Thus, the treatment of mimesis could be taken back to the representation of reality rather than merely the imitation of others.

What happens in and through mimesis?

The play philosopher continues.

This notion of mimicking reality is reinforced by the fact that participants in the mass participation versions cycle on the specific roads of Flanders, the same roads that will form the race track the next day. Thus there is an ambiguity or a polysemy in the reality as well.

With the completion of my thesis, I found, in alignment with Huizinga, the initial clues to explore, through disguise and representation, the potential principles behind this secret concealed within the disguise. On a micro level, there is, following Huizinga, disguise by the middle-aged men who ride in replicas. 'The "differentness" and secrecy of play are most vividly expressed in "dressing up". Here the "extra-ordinary" nature of play reaches perfection. The disguised or masked individual "plays" another part, another being. He *is* another being' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 13). But on the other hand, on a macro level, Huizinga's title of the book *Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*, makes the remark that culture derives from play (Huizinga, 1950).

With IJsseling's notion of mimesis in mind, that the characteristics of mimesis are polysemous 'which of the same order as that of appearance and appearing' (1997, p. 8), what happens in and through mimesis? In this case, a thematic analysis of the notions of play and game would provide me with more insights to explore why these middle-aged men in Lycra riding the mass participation version of the 'Tour of Flanders' denied that they are playing. Hence, the examination of Girard's concept of mimetic desire conducted through empirical research with middle-aged men in a Quickstep shirt, coupled with the aspects of appearance, ambiguity, and denial, opened a new field for investigation. It prompted me to further develop this outcome in my PhD research.

Homo Ludens and Huizinga's three definitions of play

The play philosopher analyses.

In 1938, Huizinga's work *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* [*Homo Ludens: een proeve van het spelelement der cultuur*] was published. To this day, Huizinga's book remains influential in the under-

standing of play. Play scientists and sports philosophers still use Huizinga's definition of play, either critically or as a starting point to determine their own understanding of play (Caillois, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Suits, 2005; Sutton-Smith, 2001, 2016).

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (Huizinga, 1950, p. 13)

In the second definition he emphasises the autotelic element and there is place for feelings: a feeling of tension and a feeling of joy.

Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is "different" from "ordinary life". (1950, p. 28)

In the third definition, Huizinga adds a religious element to the activity.

Let us enumerate once more the characteristics we deemed proper to play. It is an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility. The play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth and relaxation follow. (1950, p. 132)

The groundbreaking work of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* is his exploration of the concept of play within the scholarly domain. He formulated a scholarly definition of play and expanded it to a broad perspective, namely the perspective of culture. On the other hand, he remains within the narrow confines of his definition by consistently stating that play is an activity.

In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Huizinga presents arguments supporting the idea that culture is deeply rooted in play. From a cultural-critical perspective, he emphasises that the play element must be taken seriously (Huizinga, 1950, 2008). He argues that the disappearance of the play element is equivalent to the disappearance of culture.

The warning not to allow play to disappear should be seen in the context of the period in which he published his work (Hanssen, 1996; Krul, 1995; Otterspeer, 2019; Van der Lem, 1993). The political tension of the 1930s, just before the outbreak of World War II, was also evident in Huizinga's personal life as Jewish colleagues at the University of Leiden were dismissed.

Huizinga's work *In the Shadows of Tomorrow* (Huizinga, 2019) describes how three totalitarian regimes were shaping Europe at that time. Hitler had been in power in Germany for two years in 1935, Stalin ruled in Russia, and Mussolini in Italy.

In his subsequent work, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Huizinga (2008, 1950) establishes a specific link between his cultural criticism and play. The final chapter, The play-element in contemporary Civilization, focuses on this warning. Here, Huizinga emphasises the rise of efficiency in society and illustrates it with the emergence of professional sports as an example. With the rise of professional sports, play has lost its intrinsic purpose, and efficiency has taken over. This is illustrated by the use of economic terms, such as the concept of a 'record,' in sports. 'A record, as the word shows, was once a simple memorandum' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 200).

Hence, Huizinga presents his theory of play within a broad cultural vision. I experienced this vision first-hand by becoming a member (with permission) of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*. Through the intervention of the priest of Watou, I eventually got the opportunity to embed my research through my membership. By linking fieldwork to philosophical statements, I am able to collect evidence on how the play element unfolds in what Huizinga calls highly developed cultures.

Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture reflected in Krombeke

The researcher embarks on her new official round of field research.

Even before I have pedalled my very first mile with *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, I unmistakably recognise the intertwining of play as an

activity in the culture of the West Flemish community of this cycling club. But I also recognise Huizinga's message that play is a serious matter.

WTC DE KROMBEEKSE PEDAALTRAPPERS vzw
KBO 0444/32 13 66
Lokaal Franky en Isabelle
Krombekeplein 13 8972 Krombeke
Tel: 057/40 01 19

Geachte Lid,

We beginnen aan het nieuwe seizoen op zondag 1 april.
Om 8 uur is er een korte sportmis in de kerk van Krombeke opgedragen door door Sportaproost E.H. Ludo Lepee.

Om 8u30 volgt er de inschrijving.

Om 8u50 is er een korte toespraak door Imara Felkers, die voor de universiteit van Gloucestershire (VK) een onderzoek uitvoert over wielertoeristen en alles wat erbij hoort.

Om 9u is er de jaarlijkse groepsfoto en daarna starten we met een korte kennismakingsrit (ongeveer 40 km), met onderweg een fietswijing te Watou rond 10 uur.

De dames midweekritten starten op dinsdag 3 april om 19 uur.
Zondagsrijders zijn hier ook toegelaten aan een tempo van de dames (ongeveer 18 km/uur).

Veel fietsgenot in 2018

Het bestuur

Apparently, I was going to address the members, I noted when I received an email before the start of the cycling season. My first meeting with Ludo at his kitchen table is now sorted into the roles of a university researcher and Sports Chaplain.

With the membership of the bicycle touring club *WTC De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, I find myself in an environment where I personally experience that play is a serious matter. But to what extent is play integrated in the culture?

The sports mass as a study of the play-element of culture

The play philosopher elucidates.

In his definition of play, Huizinga states that a sacred place in form and function is a play space. This means that sacred places can be understood as a play spaces.

The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules apply. (Huizinga, 1950, p. 10)

In Huizinga's view, this means that a play space is more than a location where a free action or activity takes place. If a sacred place is formally indistinguishable from a play space, then Huizinga argues that a sacred place is a play space. With temple, magic circle, arena, judgment seat, and gaming table, stage, and film, Huizinga 'points out' the domains: religion, magic, culture, law, play, and theatre.

The sports mass turns out to be a practical test of which I suspect this is how Huizinga intended his 'study of the playful element of culture.' However, the playful element appears to be fully noticeable and visibly present in this sacred act.

The researcher explores Huizinga's concept of play by participating.

When, on Sunday, April 1, well before eight o'clock in the morning, I easily find the church of Krombeke by daylight, I will find examples that in my opinion refer to 'the playful element of culture.'

I see a few cyclists from *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* approaching. We are wearing the same clothes. I get out of my car, and we greet each other. But then I see them entering the church with their racing bikes. I watch them go in. Then I notice that there are also some cyclists who arrive on foot without bikes.

I decide to leave my bike in my Volkswagen Caddy and walk to the church. Upon entering, I immediately see racing bikes leaned against the wooden panelling. All people are dressed in the green and white cycling gear of *De*

Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers are sitting on the wicker chairs. I am greeted with friendly nods. The board is sitting in the front row. Exactly at eight o'clock, Father Lepee appears. He steps onto the pulpit. With his white robe, he now has a solemn presence. He welcomes us as 'sports friends.'

In his sermon, he talks about the cycling race 'Three Days of De Panne' [Driedaagse De Panne] that traverse his two parishes, Watou and St. Jan ter Biezen. Every year, he goes to watch this race in St. Jan ter Biezen, he says. 'Cycling has always been a festive event,' he explains. It is a procession, a celebration. Commercial interests have joined the parade with advertising cars, all in a procession winding through the landscape. The police on motorcycles are the advanced posts of what is to come. 'But something has changed,' says Ludo. 'In the peloton, they no longer chat with one another.' He recounts that in the past, you could hear the riders coming from kilometres away because of the noise from the peloton, as all riders were in conversation with each other. Once the peloton had passed, this sound remained audible for the longest time. When everything had disappeared from sight, the cacophony of voices continued until the very last sounds faded away. 'But now it is silent in the peloton. The noise comes from commerce; the pressure, the stress, the high pace has made it so that no one talks to one another anymore. Dear sports friends, talk to one another so that everyone knows; here they come; there they are.'

After this sermon, the priest takes out his mobile phone. It seems for a moment as if he is about to make a call, but there is a song that he wants to play. He slides his phone under the microphone of the pulpit and plays it. We all listen to the cheerful tones of *Let the sun into your heart*. [*Laat de zon in je hart*] by Willy Sommers. The first line of this song starts with the following text: 'a smile, a greeting, a happy face, it seems so ordinary, but it is still a miracle' (Sommers, 2006). We listen to the entire song. Then, the priest asks us to congratulate each other on the new season, followed by the distribution of the host.

The play philosopher analyses.

The church, as a sacred place formally equal to other play-grounds, is com-

plemented that morning by the landscape in which we, as *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, will be cycling. That morning, I can witness and experience as an outsider, how sports, as a play activity, is fully integrated into a broader cultural context.

The researcher adds.

It is not so much about the theme of play as a binary opposition to seriousness, but about the binary relationship between the 'non-real' and the 'real' that comes under pressure. As an outsider, I am able to observe this. That Sunday morning I do not experience myself so much as a member of WTC *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, but rather as the character 'Gulliver' from Jonathan Swift's book *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift, 1992). I realise that philosophers (like Plato) often resort to partly fictional characters. But I am not a literary figure. It's a paradox: I feel like 'Gulliver' today, but I am not a 'character.' Just like the islands in *Gulliver's Travels*, for example 'Lilliput', Krombeke is on the map, but contrary to Lilliput, Krombeke is traceable and thus visible to everyone. Therefore, it is possible for anyone to visit Krombeke. Yet I feel that the separation between fiction and non-fiction is quite challenged this morning. I sense that I am entering a 'world' that fulfils Huizinga's definition of play: 'It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 13).

The researcher stands in the field research.

After the service, everyone takes their bikes, and we walk together towards the café that is also located at Krombekeplein. While I retrieve my bike from my Caddy, an older man approaches me. He introduces himself, and turns out to be Leo Lepee, Ludo's brother.

I notice that he is just as tall, or rather, just as short as Ludo. I can tell from his face and his white-gray hair that he is probably older than Ludo, likely in his seventies. He explains that he is the honorary chairman. After the registration for the tour, he will introduce me and he asks if I want a microphone for my speech. I feel my stomach tighten. Using a microphone makes it quite grand, I think to myself, and quickly dismiss it. "No, it'll be fine like this," I say. Another man also introduces himself. Paul Carbon. He is a journalist, he tells

me. He asks if it's okay to hold an interview for the newspaper afterward. "With a photo," he adds. "Ludo has told us a lot about you," he says, listing what he knows: "All the way from the Netherlands," "we consider it an honour."

From this, I gather that he seems to know both Ludo and the association of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* well. Together, we walk to the café that I recognise from a few months earlier; '*Hof van Vlaanderen*' is written in large letters on the facade. Carefully, I lean my bike against the other bikes already placed along the café wall and step inside. A small line has formed, weaving through bar stools and tables towards the back where the chairman sits behind a table. Each participant's entry costs one euro.

The swing philosopher specifies.

I feel the euro in the palm of my hand as I move along with the line. Upon arrival, the chairman marks my name on a piece of paper in front of him with a cross. The man and woman who cycle the most in a season become club champions.

The researcher is engaged in her research.

I walk back to a tall table where I see the woman from the sign-up evening standing with a few other members. Her name is Martine, I remember; she is the club secretary. 'And what did you think of it?' Martine asks. I tell her I found the sermon beautiful. 'Yes, he does that every year; he does it beautifully every year. The use of the mobile phone was new.' Leo, the honorary chairman, comes up to me and says that he is about to ask for silence so that I can introduce myself.

The swing philosopher doesn't like action.

I have to say something. I know that. I've practiced it too.

The researcher observes.

Leo stands on a chair. They're all very small here. I look at his bent legs and the lively gesturing of his arms, and I hear the sound of the crowded café quickly hushing. I tower over everyone with my 6 feet.

The swing philosopher participates in the research.

I try to listen to the honorary chairman. What is he saying? Meanwhile, I check if I still have my cheat sheet. Luckily, I do. I hear Leo saying that I'm a researcher, from the Netherlands, but also all the way from England, and that I'm going to cycle with them for a season. Then Leo steps down from the chair and looks at me.

The researcher and the swing philosopher introduce themselves to the members.

With Leo standing next to me again, I seem very tall. I cough uncomfortably. I tell the audience that I'm grateful to be able to cycle with them this season.

The swing philosopher adds.

And maybe longer, I say.

The researcher observes.

There is some laughter and murmuring. I mention that the cycling culture of the Westhoek doesn't exist in the Netherlands: 'The unique landscape of the Westhoek, where you live, where you grew up, and where the races pass by every year.' I refer to the sermon just now. 'The Three Days of De Panne, but of course also Ghent – Wevelgem, with the Kemmelberg. The Kemmelberg is also a landmark of the First World War. You learned to cycle in this area, and now you cycle together here every week in Krombeke. I only know this landscape and cycling culture from TV. That's why I would like to ask who among you is interested in keeping a diary of cycling experiences. Cycling commentary, like your cycling commentator Michel Wuyts does, but then for yourselves.

The swing philosopher concludes.

I say that I want to end with the cycling commentary of Michel Wuyts on Ghent-Wevelgem.

The researcher adds.

'Because this is the landscape where I'll be cycling with you from now on.'

The swing philosopher quotes the mashup.

'Ghent – Wevelgem

Towards what is this human riding?

A suspicion:

On the backs of the cobblestones:

Mount Kemmel.

On swaying turning roads:

Dranouter.

The Schomminkel Street:

It can be beautifully quiet here.'

(Wuyts, 2011b)

The researcher concludes.

I finish with 'thank you' and that I look forward to a beautiful season. I look at Leo. He nods kindly and quickly climbs back onto the chair. He puts his hands to his mouth to be heard over the rising hubbub. I hear him saying that we need to go outside because the group photo is about to be taken.

Briefly, the play philosopher offers an interpretation.

While reading Wuyts' cycling commentary aloud, I spoke this text for the first time. I hesitated on how to pronounce 'Dranouter.' This made me realise that I actually didn't know how to. This language issue, where I believe we speak the same language, is directly connected to the developments in my research. It reflects that there is more than one 'Dranouter.' There is a 'Dranouter' in my head, and there is a Dranouter being spoken aloud in an area where Dranouter actually exists. It's where people live, where certain streets transform into a race track annually.

The researcher continues.

In the stream of movement caused by Leo's announcement, I walk outside with the crowd. A man stands next to me and says something cheerful. I don't understand him and undoubtedly say something like 'huh?' with a corresponding expression. He looks at me very cheerfully and repeats what he said. I hear him, but I don't understand him; it seems to be something funny. That's when I realise that people speak Dutch to me because I'm Dutch, but actually, they speak Flemish. Flemish from the Westhoek.

The play philosopher recalls.

I still remember proudly telling a Belgian friend during dinner that I would be conducting field research in Belgium for my doctoral studies. She was very excited and asked where in Belgium I would be doing this. She herself grew up in Antwerp, and her entire family is from there. She has been living in the Netherlands for years. However, her excitement turned into something else when I mentioned that I would be cycling with a cycling club from Krombeke, in the Westhoek.

“But why there” she asked without using a question mark. Her face elongated in shock. I didn’t understand what was wrong with the Westhoek.

“Come on,” she said, “It’s impossible to understand them!”

I retorted that I thought it wouldn’t be that bad. I understood her, didn’t I? I thought, but I didn’t say it out loud. Instead, I explained to her that in West Flanders, cycling culture coexists with the remnants of World War I and how to comprehend a space situated at the intersection of war and sports.

“Have you ever been there?” I inquired, “to Ypres, at the Last Post.”

“But no!” she replied, vigorously shaking her head. The shock and aversion had not disappeared.

I know her whole family still lives in Antwerp. At her birthday celebration, where I was a guest, she, along with her mother and sisters, surprised the attendees by showcasing how well they could folk dance.

“But you’ve been on vacation there, right?” I tried. After all, the West Coast of Flanders is a popular vacation destination.

“But no!” she exclaimed again.

“At least once, on a school trip?”

“But no!”

She must have been to Plopsaland at some point. After all, every Belgian child goes to this amusement park on the Flemish coast of the Westhoek, I reasoned.

“Not even to ‘Plopsaland’?”

“But no!”

“But why not?”

“It’s impossible to understand them! I can’t understand them. Nobody understands them! They can’t understand each other.”

She told me that every village in West Flanders has its own version of West Flemish. In Poperinge, they speak a different language than, for example, in Izegem, which is twenty kilometres away. The Flemish in Zoutenaie is different from the Flemish in Veurne.

The researcher observes.

I find myself, a tall woman, in the back row with the supposedly tall men in a very small village in the Westhoek, in West Flanders.

In this research I'm applying Huizinga, the only play scholar that I can read in my own native language, to a linguistic area that resembles Dutch but which I cannot understand at all.

I look at petit Leo taking photos. I observe the journalist with a surname bicycles are made from: carbon, Paul Carbon. I observe the priest named Ludo, as from the Latin *ludere*, to play. It seems as if it's all not real and thus real. I am truly here in the unreal that is real.

'Go ahead and stand with the women,' says Martine after we all have taken our bikes and formed a line to depart. "Stand with the women?" I ponder to myself, attempting to understand what she means. Martine then points forward. Indeed, I see only women at the front of the row of cyclists. I follow the instruction. I count eight women, and behind us, the procession of cyclists continues to form, made up of men. I notice a father with two children; they are also standing at the front. In total, there are about forty of us.

The swing philosopher observes that it's all just like on television.

The procession is concluded with, indeed, a support vehicle. A car with a trailer carrying spare wheels and a hand-painted blue sign on the back 'WTC De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers' will drive behind us.

The researcher is cycling.

The group is led by the chairman. Martine cycles next to me. We are positioned in the third row.

'Stins!' Martine soon shouts.

This call quickly ripples backward. With repetition, I grasp the word. Stins, stones, stens, sténs, and I see black asphalt gravel disappear beneath me.

‘Do you understand West Flemish?’ Martine asks.

‘I thought I did, but it’s more challenging than I’d expected.’

A woman behind us joins the conversation. She introduces herself as Monique. She talks about her mother, who is in her eighties and knows a lot of proverbs. The woman and Martine continue the conversation, but the subject remains the same. How unfortunate it is that West Flemish is gradually disappearing. I realise I enjoy listening and getting lost in the chatter. However, as an academic researcher, I can’t say, ‘How lovely that I don’t understand you’. I can’t say: ‘I actually like not having to say anything.’ I can do that when I’m watching TV, but not here.

I recognise customs and attributes from the cycling races broadcasted on television. However, now I’m expected to say something. But how do I articulate the joy of the similarities? My delight that we are riding with a genuine support car with spare wheels. And the magic that, just like in the televised races, we continue through intersections without having to stop. This is because a few men in the group are cycling with ‘traffic signs’ in their back pockets. They quickly move to the front and, on the empty roads, halt all potential traffic.

‘Taking a pull? **iv**’ This time, not a shout but a question. An older man with grey-white hair kindly repeats his question. ‘You’re taking the pull; do you want that?’ He grins at me. I see that he’s wearing a band on his arm. It reads ‘marshal’ [*seingeveer*]. The old man is a fast man who blocks the intersections.

I try to recall how it works with the wind. You have to do something with the wind here. ‘Riding in echelon formation.’ ‘Taking a pull.’ Cycling jargon just won’t come out of its package of letters.

With a reassuring ‘we’ll turn the corner in a moment,’ I am saved. He rushes to the front; he’s gone.

“Mwoaise!” I try to decipher the letters.

I see mud appearing beneath me.

'Mud,' I hear someone say next to me; I look into the open and friendly face of a man. I estimate that he's somewhere in his late fifties. He introduces himself. His name is Johan. 'It's easier to cycle at the front,' he explains to me. I realise that I've slipped back and am now cycling among the men. He explains that cycling in a group works like an accordion. At the back, the accordion stretches the furthest. Together, we're cycling all the way at the back. 'Sit in my wheel, and I'll take you to the front.'

At high speed we pass the peloton, I feel like a 'lead rider' and Johan neatly drops me off at the head of the peloton.

"Stins!"

I look at the ground and notice the pebbles. They are black, carelessly arranged in a sharp turn. As I emerge from the turn, I need to accelerate, or the gap will become too large again. I want to get it right and search for the wind. I see clouds, with many shades of grey, directly over the field. Then, I realise that we are in Watou, by the church and the square.

The group slows down.

We form a circle of cyclists between the rectory and the church door.

We dismount. I also get off and join the circle. The church door is still closed. People lean on their bikes. 'We're early,' I hear around me. I listen to the pleasant tone of Flemish. I see Leo standing on the bench in front of the rectory with his large camera around his neck. It's a *Canon*, I notice on the wide black strap. He looks expectantly at the door; I follow his gaze. Then the doors open. The churchgoers come outside.

They are all dressed extremely well.

The play philosopher observes.

'There are two worlds: one of neat and well-dressed people, and the other world of adults in cycling outfits standing expectantly in a semi-circle. There is an exchange between these two worlds; hands are shaken, people laugh, look around, watches are checked.

The researcher experiences the blessing.

I notice that many churchgoers remain standing. It seems that now it's our

turn to be observed. Then, after a few minutes, Ludo appears in the opening of the church; he greets us and begins his journey along the assembled cyclists and bikes. Along with a youngster holding the holy water for him. I stand somewhere in the middle of the semicircle and watch the blessing. I enjoy the laughter, the hilarity of too much cold holy water in a face. I look at Ludo, at the joy; I wait; then Ludo blesses me and my bike.

After the blessing, we form a line again, two by two. I look for the women. But the arrangement for the return journey seems less strict. Cyclists bid farewell to the churchgoers. The bond between the residents of Watou and De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers is intimate, I notice. I have no idea where Watou is in relation to Krombeke.

‘There, out of the left window, left’. I recall Ludo pointing when I first met him here in this rectory, in front of this church.

The return journey to Krombeke is considerably faster. We have the wind at our backs almost the entire way. The cycling pace increases, but I can keep up well enough. Upon return, I indeed see on my bike computer a distance of 40 kilometres with an average speed of 25.3.



Figure 2.3 German military cemetery Wervicq-Sud, France.

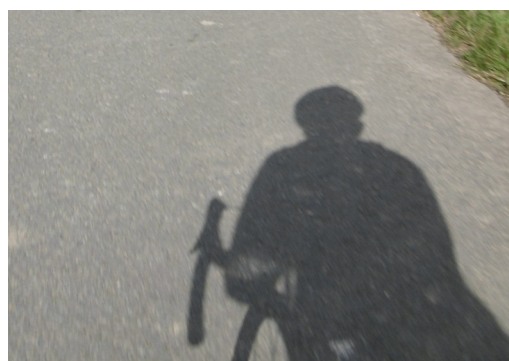


Figure 2.4 My shadow while I am cycling on Flanders roads.



Figure 2.5 Part of monument

Grieving Parents German military cemetery Vladslo, Belgium.



Figure 2.6 Membership
De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers,
Krombeke, Belgium.



Figure 2.7 The sports mass as a study of the playful-element in culture, Wautou, Belgium.



Figure 2.8 Interview newspaper *Krant van West-Vlaanderen*, April 6th 2018.

INTERMEZZO: A HUNDRED YEARS OF WAR IN A QUICKSTEP-SHIRT

Introduction

The researcher explains how ethnographic research is gradually shifting towards auto-ethnographic research.

In this round of field research, the scale of Huizinga's 'study of the play-element in culture' in the eponymous subtitle of his book, *Homo Ludens: a study of the play-element in culture* is reduced to a personal scope.

On the cobblestone ridge: the Kemmel

The researcher continues.

In response to the newspaper interview in *De Krant van West-Vlaanderen*, I receive two responses. Both middle-aged men who cycle in Lycra, but very consciously not in a replica of a professional cycling team outfit.

Wilfried, a middle-aged man from Watou, cycles in the outfit of St. Bernardus. The brewery of this beer brand is located in Watou. Watou is situated right next to France. He avoids Belgian roads and only cycles in France. Over the coming months, he will write about and document his cycling journeys on the French Opal Coast.

Jan, also a middle-aged man, from Ypres, comes across the article and my request through his wife Karine. While undergoing tests in the hospital for leukaemia, his wife Karine buys the newspaper while waiting for him. She emails me and tells me that they are both crazy about cycling. She apologises for the fact that neither of them cycles in a cycling outfit of Quickstep or another Protour cycling team. Jan prefers to cycle in a cycling shirt from an Italian amateur team, which he once bought on vacation.

When I later meet him at his home, he tells me that he often plays the role of Lance Armstrong coming back from his battle with cancer. Between treatments, he tries to cycle as much as possible and keeps a diary. Karine, his wife, also wants to contribute. She is a fashion teacher and creates Lycra cycling dresses that she cycles in herself.

Of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, only Marleen, -the farmer with fifty cows and twice a year cauliflower, will participate. She doesn't write down her thoughts but creates cycling reports: she smells the crops as she rides—peas, leeks, or flax. And when I cycle with her, she points to the crops in the fields along the way. Marleen never cycles at the front, but at the back, alongside Johan. I always ended up with them unintentionally: either due to the cobblestone sections where I slipped, or because I lost speed by braking too much.

Not a single man from *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* has participated in my research. However, they did teach me how to cycle.

During the cycling season, from April to October, I will eventually join *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* fifteen times. Martine becomes the 2018 club champion among the women, while José, the treasurer, clinches that title among the men.

Apart from the cycling days with the *Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, I follow Johan's advice.

Johan is a rough farm labourer in his late fifties. During the bike rides, he taught me how to handle cobblestone sections.

"The key is to go a gear heavier," he said when, for the umpteenth time, I lagged behind the group and he dropped back.

"Let your horse buck a bit, give it its head, come on, let him do his thing." Furthermore, he taught me what cycling is all about: "Cycling is not braking," he said, laughing heartily at his own definition. He also gave me tips on how to climb the Kemmelberg.

"You have to start from the east side," he explained. First east, then west.

"All wisdom comes from the east. You too are very wise, Imara," he added as a mnemonic, again laughing heartily at his own joke.

On swaying winding roads: Dranouter

On Tuesday evenings, I cycle along with the ladies. None of the ladies ride a racing bike. Martine, the secretary of the club is the marshal for the ladies, and she takes pride in it. The chairman also rides at the front with the ladies.

Indeed, we cycle at 18 kilometres per hour, as described in the route book.

Joining the Tuesday evening ride costs only 50 cents. "Less petrol, right?" the chairman explains to me when I hand him a euro. "Oh, the money you pay before the ride is for the support car," I realise.

I cycle with Christine. She only rides on Tuesdays, and she rides an electric bike. She regained her freedom with this bike. "I think this is true for many women," she says "I no longer have to be afraid." I ask what she was afraid of. Afraid that she couldn't make it, afraid that she couldn't keep up. "Now I can look around and enjoy."

She asks me about my research. I tell her about the intersection of cycling culture here in Belgium and the war. She points to the necklace she's wearing, inherited from her grandmother. Her grandfather bought this necklace with the money he earned clearing steel in WWI. Heavy and dangerous work because bombs could go off. Her oldest granddaughter already knows she will inherit it. "She asks about it regularly, just to be sure", Christine tells me. "She'll inherit the necklace, but also the story," I note. Christine nods.

All the ladies on Tuesdays are over fifty. We also ride two by two here. One evening, I ride with Linda. She asks what exactly I'm doing here. "I eavesdrop on your conversations and record them," I tell Linda. Linda has fattening pigs and arthritis. She finds it incredible that I spend my leave cycling with the people from Krombeke. When asked what she is thinking about while cycling, she answers that she likes to watch birds.

Schomminkelstreet: it can be beautifully quiet here

Apart from Sunday mornings and Tuesdays, I cycle alone. It's midsummer. During my tours I make my observations. I notice many 'mamils'. Also, many middle-aged men cycling in replicas. Most of them cycle around the Kemmelberg and not so much up it. I photograph 'Peter Sagan' in his rainbow jersey. He's waiting at the Schomminkelstraat for an agricultural vehicle to pass, so the road will be clear to cycle. I frequently spot 'Greg van Avermaet' in his black and red BMC shirt.

During my first round of field research last September and October, I bought a Lotto replica outfit. Because of the slogan '*Lotto Everywhere*', I felt more at ease. It contributes to my research more than the successful Quickstep formation. I decide to put on the bright red shirt to experience first-hand what it's like to cycle in a replica.

The embodiment of Lotto – Soudal

I don't know if it's because of the bright red colour of the Lotto shirt, but somehow, I feel like a clown: Pipo the Clown. The experience of wearing this red shirt gives me a feeling that lies somewhere between uncomfortable and conspicuously 'dressed up' play. But since I am also a researcher, I try to convince myself it's part of the research. If I want to interview MAMILs who cycle in replicas, then a good strategy is to dress the same way.

On a Friday afternoon, I decide to cycle to Ludo in my bright red shirt. I park my bike against the fence, climb the stairs, and ring the doorbell. I hear Swappie, the dog, barking. Soon, Ludo opens the door. Laughing, he says, "I'll gladly open the door for Lotto-Soudal."

In these summer weeks, coinciding with the Tour de France, I watch the television broadcasts with him. Wuyts chatters in the background. We also provide commentary, either on the stage or on Wuyts. But this time, Ludo mutes the sound. "Why is it that we admire the sportsperson and not the playing person?" Ludo asks.

"Imitation arises from admiration," he continues. "Why don't we imitate the playing person?"

"We do imitate the playing person," I respond.

"No," Ludo replies emphatically, "if only we did. Sport has become an expanded form of play. First, there is play. Then the spectator who comes to witness 'play'."

'First there is play, then the spectator who comes to visit play.' That's Huizinga, I think. In one short sentence, Ludo articulates my struggle with philosophical ideas with crystal clarity.

Ludo suddenly gets up. "We've received mail." With the letter in hand, he walks back to the table. It's an invitation from the local cycling club, De Trippeltrappers in Watou. Father Ludo is invited "to join the cycling this year, and feel free to bring your philosopher from the Netherlands," Ludo reads from the letter. Ludo mentions that he is invited to join this cycling club every year.

"Have you ever cycled with them?" I ask.

Ludo shakes his head. "Their emphasis is on 'tripel'," says Ludo while making a drinking gesture, "and less on 'trappen' (pedaling)." We discuss the possibilities of me becoming a member of this association to find more participants for my research.

A few days later, when I visit him again to go through my letter together, he bursts out laughing. I've printed my letter, inviting members of the cycling club De Trippeltrappers to put their thoughts on paper during the club's rides, on paper with the logo of the University of Gloucestershire. But according to him, The University of Gloucestershire's logo is way too intimidating.

"Can't you remove that?" he asks.

"Inner dialogues?" he reads from my letter.

"Yes," I say dryly.

There's a moment of silence, and then he asks,

"'God damn it', [godverdomme] is that an inner dialogue?"

"Yes," I answer.

"Good, because 'god damn it' is the only inner dialogue they have on bikes here."

He chuckles about the last part of my letter and quotes,

“‘Imagination and fantasy that appear during your bike ride.’ Do they appear?” Ludo asks.

“Yes”, I say. I am too confident in my answer.

“Maybe for the solitary cyclist,” he replies, “but not in a group. There, it’s just ‘God damn it,’ and maybe imagination and fantasy appear afterwards.”

Short film *A hundred years of war in a Quickstep-Shirt* as a form of art-based methods

I conclude this round of field research by creating a film. This film is part of the publication *A Hundred Years of War in a Quickstep-shirt* (Felkers, 2018a), for the journal ‘Tijdschrift Filosofie’. This edition focuses specifically on sports philosophy (van den Heuvel, 2018). Prior to this special edition, the University of Leiden is organising a conference.

I use the medium of film in an attempt to visualise the multiplicity and ambiguity in reality within the research of mimesis. Based on mixed-method design, I employ art-based methods for knowledge translation (Boydell, 2019; Leavy, 2015; Manning & Massumi, 2014). This form supports this peer-reviewed journal article and demonstrates how an embodied form of the philosophical notion of mimesis can be elaborated in a form of practice-based research, rather than solely theorising philosophy in written form.

I ask Jan if he wants to participate. He is the main character, but I also take part myself. I choose the shooting locations deliberately. I have Jan cycling in his Italian Lycra at significant locations from the history of the First World War that intersect with the Ghent-Wevelgem cycling race. I cycle through De Moeren and on the Rosenberg near Ploegsteert in my red Lotto-Soudal shirt. The Flemish rider Frank Vandenbroucke (1974-2009) lived out most of his life in Ploegsteert. He mentions the Rosenberg in his autobiography *I am not God* (Vandenbroucke, 2008).

I have asked the Belgian television commentator Michel Wuyts if he would be willing to voice my texts. These texts are taken from my article for the journal *Tijdschrift Filosofie* (Felkers, 2018a). I blend these texts with his

cycling commentary and footage from a Ghent-Wevelgem race broadcasted on television in 2015. In this race, Lotto-Soudal rider Jurgen Roelandts rides solo for sixty kilometres, but won't win. I intersperse these with footage of Jan on the Kemmelberg. In this montage, Wuyts (2010) provides commentary for Jan from my mashup from the World Championship in Australia. **v**

CHAPTER 3 THE MAGIC CIRCLE LEAKS

Introduction

The researcher starts the introduction.

After concluding the first official round of field research, I decide to undertake a second round. If I want to interview middle-aged men dressed in replicas because I suspect there is a secret to find in imitation while they play, I will have to cycle with them where they gather in large numbers: the amateur cyclist versions of major cycling tours.

I have interviewed these MAMILs before, for my master's thesis. I waited for them at the finish line of the amateur cyclist version of the Tour of Flanders. Now it is crucial that I cycle with them.

I have trained rigorously throughout the winter and plan to cycle the mass participation versions of all the Flemish spring classics. The spring classic Omloop Het Nieuwsblad is first on the agenda.

The play philosopher adds a different perspective.

Moreover, a theoretical development is concurrently unfolding within the specified context. In order to discover the secrecy of mimesis in practice, I connect two theoretical frameworks in the embodied form of play.

Huizinga, in fact, operates from a realistic conception of reality (Kuhn, 1970). However, this realism transcends humanity and precedes culture. In his view, culture arises from play. According to Huizinga, play is a 'given magnitude' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 3). This means that play cannot have originated from human hands.

In this chapter I'll introduce the philosophical concept of hyperreality by Jean Baudrillard and combine it with Johan Huizinga's ideas on play. In doing so, I employ Baudrillard's perspective to demonstrate the complexity of Huizinga's understanding of play in human life. Therefore, in this chapter I explore the tension that arises when the experience of play as a 'given magnitude' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 3). is an experience derived from television.

Positioning of the concept of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*

The play philosopher continues.

The concept of play in Huizinga's perspective thus fits into an ideal order. It is an idea based on Platonic philosophy, suggesting that play can be understood independently of culture (Otterspeer, 2016). However, unlike in Plato's conception, it is not reason [*nous*] through which we gain access to this ideal order. Rather, the play itself seems to be a 'given magnitude' that, from the ideal realm, permeates our culture. '

In culture, we find play as a given magnitude existing before culture itself existed, accompanying it and pervading it from the earliest beginnings right up to the phase of civilization we are now living in. (Huizinga 1950, p. 04)

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga (1950) argues that those often described as being 'uncultured', and poets, and visionaries possess a particular ability to comprehend play.

Primitive, or let us say, archaic ritual (...) play in the sense Plato gave to it—an action accomplishing itself outside and above the necessities and seriousness of everyday life. In this sphere of sacred play the child and the poet are at home with the savage. (Huizinga, 1950, p. 25)

Otterspeer (2016) notes that Huizinga equates the child with play. In this colonial thought pattern, Huizinga effortlessly designates non-Western cultures as archaic goods (Nagel, 2002). Otterspeer quotes Huizinga: 'In his magic dance, the savage *is* kangaroo' (Otterspeer, 2016, p. 15; Huizinga, 1950, p. 25). This implies that in play, they can *be* the kangaroo. Otterspeer concludes that Huizinga thereby attributes a mystical entity to the child. In play, it becomes another. In this sphere of the sacred play where, according to Huizinga, 'child and poet are at home, along with the savage. His aesthetic sensitivity has brought modern man closer to this sphere than the "enlightened" man of the 18th century ever was' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 26).

Play as an activity, represented in *Homo Ludens* by three definitions, is thus both a human and a sacred activity. Huizinga links this 'sacred play' to the philosophy of Plato. He incorporates both the human aspect and the transcendent cosmological aspect into the notion of play. Otterspeer points

out that Huizinga cites Plato at crucial moments and employs him in his argumentation to elevate play to a sacred play.

In Plato's *Symposium* (Plato, 2016), in the passage featuring Socrates articulating the idea of beauty through the seer Diotima, there is specific mention of the idea of beauty as something elevated above all individual beautiful things. The idea of reaching transcendence and the pursuit of understanding and knowledge that this wise woman from Mantinea encourages can be interpreted as a striving for the highest, in the sense of a higher, more elevated reality. Diotima emphasises the pursuit of a deeper understanding of love and beauty as a way to transcend the limits of human existence and connect with something celestial.

Otterspeer (2016) notes that Huizinga connects this perspective to play. He argues that Huizinga can do this because Huizinga links the Greek educational ideal to play. This ideal was *kalokagathia*, a concept derived from the combination of the Greek words for beautiful and good, *kalos* and *agathos*. According to Otterspeer, in *Homo Ludens* Huizinga mentions many examples that demonstrate the incorporation of the good and the beautiful in the play culture of the Latin West. Therefore, according to Huizinga, it is crucial to take play seriously because in play, one can strive for the good and the beautiful. But it is not just a moral issue. Since play transcends ordinary life, the good and the beautiful can be experienced as a transcendent encounter. Precisely the experience that children, savages, visionaries, and poets have.

If Plato posits that mimesis is an attempt to access a transcendent world, and if Huizinga links the Greek educational ideal of 'good' and 'beautiful' to the concept of play, as a means to transcend human limits and connect with something celestial, then the question arises how can I gain access to this experience? My personalised 'imitation theory' suggests that I can access this experience by imitating the imitator as accurately as possible while playing. However, there is one important caveat: in my personalised theory, the original resides in the realm of television. I consider television as the original source of experiences worth imitating for me.

Opening weekend: Omloop Het Nieuwsblad and Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne

“Will this be a heroic feat?

I believe so;

I believe so!”

(Wuyts, 2019, March 1, 2019, 5:15 PM)

The Swing Philosopher notes location, date and time.

Oudenaarde, March 1, 2019, 10:15 AM.

Today marks the start of the cycling season. It's the opening weekend with two races: Omloop Het Nieuwsblad today and Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne tomorrow (Sunday). The plan is to ride in all the mass participation versions of the 'spring classics.' As a child, I absorbed the cycling races that I watched with my father. Tomorrow, I'll be cycling the mass participation version of Omloop Het Nieuwsblad myself. The Haaghoeck, the Muur van Geraardsbergen, [The wall of Geraardsbergen] are cycling monuments in this race.

The researcher continues.

I am going to research the experience of a television experience. While I will be cycling there myself tomorrow, I will be collecting data all weekend by visiting the race today along the route.

My rented apartment *Studio Flandrien* for this weekend is located outside the centre of Oudenaarde. I chose the property for its name. *Studio Flandrien* is an upper floor that is part of a block of houses in the middle of a sleepy residential area.

This small town of Oudenaarde is not just part of the playing field for today's race, Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, but for numerous others. It even has its own museum for the Tour of Flanders. This Tour is considered the most important spring classic of Belgium. It finishes in the old centre of Oudenaarde, near the medieval town hall. I stood there when I interviewed men in Quickstep shirts for my master's thesis.

The swing philosopher takes over again.

For the first time in my life, I'm going to witness the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad in person. I've decided to watch it at 'de Haaghoek'. De Haaghoek is a cobblestone stretch of over two kilometres that connects the hamlets of St. Kornelis-Horebeke and Zegelsem.

Hardly anyone lives on the Haaghoek, the hamlet has more lampposts than inhabitants, as I learned from television. I recall an item on Dutch television, the NOS, that covered the Omloop and the Haaghoek. The item concluded with images of the vast emptiness of the Haaghoek. The glow of a lamppost on the cobblestones: yellow, fuzzy light on a misty late afternoon turning into evening. The light captured in the mist, slowly settling like down in a duvet. The cobblestones are still visible, albeit dark, but because they are wet, they glisten, reflecting the light from the downy duvet. This makes the stones resemble a sea and the mist a white sailing ship gliding just above the darkness. Before the Dutch broadcast ends with this panoramic view of a misty late afternoon in February, the NOS interviews a farmer. With his woollen cap and thick glasses, he stands by his farmhouse along the deserted cobblestone stretch. He talks about how busy it has become in the Haaghoek these days. "There's a lot of racing in the Haaghoek", he says, peering into the distant nothingness through his thick lenses.

Today, the riders will pass by the Haaghoek a whopping three times. The Haaghoek. The Haaghoek. The Haaghoek.

The researcher continues.

I place my coffee mug in the sink, leave Studio Flandrien, and step into my car. The Omloop Het Nieuwsblad has already started, and the riders are passing through Oudenaarde. But where exactly? As I drive, I look around. I know I can't accidentally end up on the route, but there's a strange sense of alertness. Suddenly, I understand how unknowing motorists end up on TV because they find themselves driving on the route: like this. Instantly, I see myself appearing: a middle-aged woman in a white Volkswagen Caddy casually driving. She's oblivious.

As I approach the cobblestone stretch of the Haaghoek, I see that the outer

edges of the cycling field are lined with rows of cars parked along the embankments. Let me see how far I can get. Not far. At the beginning of the cobblestone stretch, the road is blocked by police vans and an officer gesturing for me to keep driving. I make a hand gesture, and fortunately, I can quickly turn towards St. Kornelis-Horebeke. Slowly, I drive past the parked row of cars, hoping someone has left their spot for an emergency, but no, everyone is tightly parked. Car after car, I scan as though I'm conducting an inspection. Finally, I find a spot. I join the walk back to the race, which feels very strange, as though I'm walking towards a crowded stadium. Except there's no crowded stadium. There is an arch as the 'entrance' to the Haaghoek. Beyond this arch, there are barriers. In the field next to the arch, I recognise the red colour of *Lotto*. An inflatable advertising pillar that whips around in the wind. Everything is flapping, I notice.

Despite all the police presence, I can easily walk through the entrance of the cobblestone stretch of the Haaghoek. Some people are already waiting on the side of the road, and a few are continuing onwards. I walk on as well. I walk on the cobblestones. On the course. I can't get any closer as I look at a rain-soaked flat blade of straw in the wet mud on slippery cobblestones.

I see a group of people just past the lowest point of the Haaghoek. They're standing at an inlet where cobblestones are laid; that's clever, you're less likely to get wet feet there. I notice they have bags with them; they are clearly well-prepared for the day. Two men and two women. They are bundled up against the cold. Due to their short stature, the quartet takes on a fairytale quality; but a contemporary fairytale with 'working class' characters. A bit too small, a bit too cheerful, red faces, twinkling eyes, grinning broadly with crooked teeth. They're English fans. A Sky flag is draped over the metal farm gate where they stand. This is the fourth year they're doing this. They travel to all the races, and the Sky cycling team knows them well; "they always honk when they see us."

"They always honk when they see you?"

"That's right", replies the round woman. "And that's because of Ted."

"Everyone loves Ted", adds the second woman. She ducks under the gate, rummages in a bag, and comes back up with Ted. Ted is a teddy bear wear-

ing knitted Sky team clothing. And a little beanie. “We also have Ted with a cap, but today he’s wearing a beanie.” “We have different versions of Ted”, clarifies the round lady.

I ask them why they’re standing here. “Because they pass by here three times, plus the ladies”, they shout in unison. “Ah, yes”, I sigh. I actually meant why did they choose this particular spot on the Haaghoek because, by attending the race, I want to experience the ‘original.’ But the experience of the original suddenly seems irrelevant. The fact that the riders pass by the Haaghoek three times plus the women: that’s why you stand here, that’s what’s important.

The play philosopher reflects.

Every time I want to explore a philosophical question by embodying it, I find myself engaging in extremely detailed ethnographic research (Bochner, 2015; Bochner & Ellis, 2002, 2016; Ellis, 2004) and end up feeling like the character ‘Gulliver’ from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (Swift, 1992). Now I am looking for the origin of the hyperreality of television but once again end up on ethnographic quests.

The researcher continues.

“How many times have they passed so far?” I ask, to be sure.

“Once. And the ladies too.”

That’s quick, but I’m nicely on time, I note with satisfaction. “It’s cold, too!” I say.

“Yes,” we laugh, “They have to pedal hard just to stay warm,” says the petite woman.

The police motorcycles appear first, followed by silence. Then we wait for the helicopter.

“They’re past Oudenaarde now and will be here any moment,” says the round woman, pointing to the helicopter. “There they are.”

I gaze at the circling helicopter above the green; there they are.

The swing philosopher experiences.

A road race right before your eyes, live, if you don't stare down the road after them, lasts a minute at most. The riders of Team Sky are passionately cheered on by my English neighbours. I, too, have my mouth open, but I say nothing. Through my mouth and nose I inhale the air pressure caused by the racing peloton passing by. They flash right by my face. I try to distinguish riders, I see helmets, recognise jerseys, see faces; so close. The distance between me and the peloton raging by is so much smaller than when I sit at home in front of the television. Within a minute, they are gone; follow-up cars follow. I stare after them for as long as I can. They are already at the top of the Haaghoek. I see the string of colour slowly disappearing. On television, you can't stare after them. You stare as I just did, but for hours rather than a minute.

The researcher has a plan.

In order to understand the relationship between mimesis and reality through cycling, I'm going to play with the different layers of reality that are all simultaneously apparent. I watch the race pass by the Haaghoek along the route once. Done. And now, moving on. During the second lap of the Haaghoek, I want to stand by a café that I know will be on television. While watching the race at this café, I'll be witnessing what will appear on television. I have my Dictaphone with me to capture everything accurately.

The researcher records the following reflection with her Dictaphone.

"I hope that what I'm doing makes sense. I feel joy, but also such loneliness. Huizinga describes culture and the play element: *A study of the play-element of culture*. I think I'm moving within that right now. We, as humans, can build such beautiful cultures together, in which we can really capture something. We are able to create. Culture is built from play, says Huizinga. But we also need culture to capture the invisible because, ultimately, there is nothing. That's why I'm here. Culture makes things appear. Hence, Huizinga. Play makes things appear. And hence, cycling. Cycling is a good example because it is literally a moment in a line of appearing and disappearing. It is a moving line, of appearing and disappearing. A continuous wave of motion in which appearance and disappearance follow and replace each other, I am trying to capture that appearance and disappearance and connect it with

the notion of mimesis. Here, at the Haaghoek, in moderate gale force winds. Very ambitious.”

The swing philosopher notices that the Haaghoek does have a centre.

At the top of the Haaghoek, the view is indeed beautiful; you can see them coming from afar. There's a T-junction with an adjacent farmhouse, with a little square. I try to remember if this is the farmhouse from the TV and the farmer who was interviewed, but I don't think so. Anyway, it looks very different now.

There's a food truck selling beer, burgers, and sausages. Although it's not crowded, the smell of burgers and sausages is delicious. It's kind of cosy here. People have brought chairs; some are drinking beer. People walked to this spot; there is actually a place to go on the Haaghoek, I realise.

I continue walking to Zegelsem; that was my plan, and it feels right. In the distance, I hear a buzzing sound coming from speakers; that must be Zegelsem. The sound itself is indistinct; still, I know it's race commentary by Michel Wuyts and co-commentator José De Cauwer. I quicken my pace, as if I'm running late, as if I'm missing something; all this while I'm on the course, standing on the course. I chuckle at that and speak into my Dictaphone:

‘So, you really do need culture, as a form, and maybe Michel Wuyts plays a major role in that, with his stories, with his narrative. After the subject has disappeared, the story still lingers.’

While walking to Zegelsem, passing the first farmhouse and seeing the church tower emerge, I hear the sounds from the speakers take on greater form and mass. It is indeed the cycling commentary that I can hear, but due to the distance, it's delayed. I record the sound because it's so beautiful. It's as though the sounds are floating through the air like a flock of starlings flying against the wind; then diving again, creating shapes. Sounds in the wind like birds. I record the commentary and immediately play it back. I grin: absolutely nothing. There's truly nothing to be heard, just the blowing of the wind. ‘Encrypted message,’ I record.

Arriving in Zegelsem, I quickly see where the sound is coming from. Next to the large white church stands a big screen. I recognise the white cathedral-like appearance from TV. The large church in the empty, barren landscape around Zegelsem looks like a floating castle on television. The white of the church and the cloud cover blend in the sky.

Now that I'm at the church, there's space between the white of the church and the grey cloud cover above us. The speakers are protected with black plastic. Around ten people stand before the screen, huddled in their coats. I join them; no one turns around to look. Because no one does, I realise that we are the same: spectators in thick coats with our hands in our pockets.

We watch. I look around. Behind me is the café; also painted white. The speaker cables run to the café. I look at the sky, at the constant clouds. It's not raining, but everything around us is wet. I look at the man standing in front of me. There's a raindrop in his hair. It's a significant drop, and its size makes it seem unreal. I see that the man is not really looking at the screen either. With his hands in his coat pockets, he's also looking around a bit. We're all standing in front of the screen, but no one seems to be listening to Michel Wuyts and José De Cauwer's commentary. I try not to listen either, but that's too difficult for me. I look at the heads of the bystanders, at how they're standing: how do you stand when you're not listening? Necks are buried in coats, shoulders up.

Gathering silently at the church, but around the screen. I cannot describe how happy I am, now that I'm in the 'gathering of the people'. The gathered people watching the 'Omloop'. I'm standing amidst the gathered people, silently watching in the same greys as the TV that I know from the past.

I don't want to disturb the image and look around very carefully. To the right, there's a high table where a few men are drinking beer. The beer is yellow. No one drank in my image. The image changes when several men look up. On the screen, I see where the riders are.

"It might be a bit early", I hear Michel Wuyts say. "You want to get into the final with as small a group as possible", José De Cauwer responds.

We hear the helicopter. On the screen, we see that they are already at the entrance of the Haaghoek. In a flash, I see the Sky flag with the English people. I was there! The directing cuts back to the entrance of the Haaghoek.

“Here’s another group of pursuers”, I hear Wuyts say.

Then the image cuts back to the motorcycles following the riders who turn left just before Zegelsem, towards the Leberg. I look at the screen; they keep broadcasting images from the motorcycle. Why not images from the helicopter as usual? Filming the church from above; majestically white in an otherwise empty landscape. I want to see the helicopter filming us. But it doesn’t happen. I want to see, on the big screen, that I’m at the church. I look at the screen; it’s still the Leberg on the screen. We’re not on TV. I feel that I can’t share this disappointment with anyone here.

It’s twelve kilometres by car to my apartment in Oudenaarde. Just in time to watch the final kilometres on TV.

I hear Michel Wuyts saying, ‘How is the boy feeling?’ I quickly grab a pen.

‘How is that boy feeling?’

I nod at the line ‘oh, this hurts.’

Tomorrow is my turn.

‘Is this going to be a heroic feat?’

‘I believe so.’

‘I believe so.’

Omloop Het Nieuwsblad

The researcher continues.

For the amateur cyclist version, I have ‘wired’ myself, so I can record the natural conversations I’ll have with middle-aged men in replicas and simultaneously speak my thoughts while cycling as a researcher.

A year ago, I practiced cycling with my dictaphone. I wanted to see if it would be possible for members of De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers to record their thoughts while cycling, using their mobile phones. I also wanted to test

whether you actually think about anything while cycling.

Once again, I taped the microphone under my cycling jacket and placed the recording equipment's wire in my back pocket. This way, it looks like I'm cycling with an earpiece, but this time in an amateur cyclist version of Omloop Het Nieuwsblad.

The swing philosopher plays.

It's too cold and wet for my red Lotto-Soudal outfit, but at least with my 'earpiece,' I have something that helps me imagine being a professional cyclist.

The researcher cycles.

My 'départ fictif' is the descent from the roof of the Delhaize XL supermarket parking garage just outside the centre of Ninove, where I parked my car. The descent in the parking garage is steep. I have to squeeze the brakes hard. I have no idea how I'll climb back up here this afternoon, but that's a concern for later. I have a knot in my stomach. I'm about to cycle 90 kilometres in a strong breeze, maybe even a moderate gale.

Of course, the mass participation version is different from yesterday's real race. The distance, for example. The middle distance of 90 kilometres that I've chosen both starts and finishes in Ninove, which was yesterday's finish location.

As I cycle through the industrial estate of Ninove, I see that I'm not alone. Parked cars with rear bicycle racks are everywhere, and people getting ready to unload their bikes. Most amateur cyclists come in pairs, and the majority are men, I notice. I also observe that, due to the inclement weather, everyone is sporting rain jackets. Owing to the rain, low temperatures, and wind, I hardly spot any men in replicas of professional cycling team outfits—actually, not a single one so far. I reach the starting point just before half past eight.

I observe people grabbing stickers with the kilometres and rest stops printed on them. They affix the stickers to the cross bars of their bikes, and I follow suit. However, it feels strange. I position myself with the cross bar between my legs and loosely grip it with one hand. Due to this posture and the

careful handling of the cross bar, it takes on a phallic appearance. The cross bar becomes a urethra. It mimics the stance of a man preparing to urinate. But I have no intention of entertaining such thoughts; that's not the focus of my research.

I look at the sticker; there are two rest stops, the first one at thirty kilometres. I see the Haaghoek on my sticker, and also the Leberg, the muur [wall] van Geraardsbergen, the Bosberg. Everything is on there.

Photographers stand at the departure arch. When I registered for the mass participation version, I read about this; there's a company taking pictures that you can buy afterwards.

Yet, there is a significant difference because the photographers now have a dual role: It's as though they have remained seated after yesterday's race, just like the finishing arch that is still there. Press photography, sports press as a 'cultural prop', as it's called. It resembles experiences from my past, such as childhood trips to the miniature world Madurodam or canal boat excursions in Amsterdam.

The photographers are almost like toys (Fink, 2016). But they are not playing; they are not imitating themselves; they are a different set of photographers. Their presence helps bring the touring enthusiasts into the "game" of 'Omloop Het Nieuwsblad' though. We are important enough to be photographed. At least, it works for me.

Although everyone starts individually, groups are quickly formed. Especially with this strong wind, it's almost a necessity to latch onto a group. I try to catch up with a group of recreational cyclists, and it works. At least, it works a bit; I have to make a considerable effort. I join a group and focus on the smoothly spinning calves in front of me. I hear English being spoken, and from the conversations, it seems they all know each other. I look up: the group consists of about ten, twelve men, all middle-aged in Lycra. English, moreover. I turn my attention back to the calves, or I'll lose the connection.

The group meets all the criteria, and now it's time for me to initiate a 'nat-

ural conversation' (Straatman, 2009) as a method to gather data. However, I have no idea how to begin. I decide to wait a little longer, just to catch my breath and gather my thoughts. Opting to eavesdrop first, as it's a skill I'm familiar with. The atmosphere seems merry, but unfortunately, I can't recall the details.

What strikes me is that I'm stepping into a story. Conversations are carried on loudly on topics not specifically about cycling, but fitting for the environment. As a result, it feels as though these discussions belong to a certain narrative, a narrative of recreational cyclists. I find this to be an important observation. I want to document it, but at the same time, I realise it would be odd if I suddenly started speaking Dutch to myself out of nowhere, out loud. I play the part of a rider wanting to discuss something with the team manager and not wanting to be overheard. I fall back in the peloton. That's pretty easy.

I speak in a hushed tone:

"You really fall into a story, into a cycling story." I glance around to see if I'm drawing attention; I'm not sure. In a whisper, I continue, as if providing commentary for a three-cushion billiards match. "Everything is real and yet it is not. We just cycled past the hotel of the British Cycling Team, and someone from the team was there cheering us on, a mechanic or something; yeah, nice! Talk about community - and with that community, you fall into a story and within that specific sports group (Wacquant, 2006), you undergo your own story, whatever it may be. And I've placed myself in that sports story, I've positioned myself in that narrative by becoming a part of a community; and in it, I can ride my own story; and that's what Eugen Fink (2016) says."

The play philosopher adds.

'Familiarity with play is more than merely individual: it is a collective public familiarity' (Fink, 2016, p. 15).'

This researcher records:

"This means that I never cycle alone."

The play philosopher quotes:

I/'it mostly has to do with the products of collective imagination and with what is self-binding' (Fink, 2016, p. 23). Fink connects it with 'the soul's archetypical foundations' (2016, p. 23).

The researcher records.

'Self-binding through collective images? But I am playing in a story of men. Just men here.'

The researcher takes a decision and carries on.

Why bother the men with a question I don't even have? They're having a good time with each other. I don't need to rejoin the group. I keep my legs still. Soon the group disappears from my sight.

Ouch! Damn cobblestones, that hurt!

"Let your horse run," I suddenly hear Johan say. Johan from the Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers, as though he's cycling next to me again.

"Let it buck, let it buck; you're the boss."

"Shift your weight backwards," I tell myself, "And downwards."

"Heavier gear," he adds. "Cobbles: always shift up a gear."

I'm afraid to acknowledge that there's water in my shoes. Is this water going to get warm? Like in a wetsuit? Or is this really not a good sign.

I notice that I'm looking forward to the Haaghoek. According to the sticker on my cross bar, I should be almost there. But that's it: I barely recognise the Haaghoek because everything is gone; no lines of cars announcing the entrance to the Haaghoek, no police, nothing. Only the red Lotto advertisement remains, and the arch and barriers. I walked here yesterday. I pass the point where I stood, and feel panic: how do I actually descend a cobbled section? I've only practiced on level cobbled roads.

'Don't brake, don't brake,' I hear Johan say. 'Straight down the middle, then you'll fly right through.' I don't brake. I brake a little. I try to fly. Finally, I'm allowed to turn left, the Leberg. I cycle fuelled by yesterday's disappointment:

The Leberg is incredibly easy.

I cycle my socks off, I exhaust myself, I'm at 60 kilometres. I'm cycling alone again; I'm drying off in the wind by now. I try to block my thoughts, whether I'm cold, how tired I am, and meanwhile, I keep pedalling and feel a sense of familiarity. I've done this so many times: cycling alone.

I notice that it's very quiet; riders, recreational cyclists pass me by; there's hardly any conversation between them; no greetings anymore either. 'I'm not going to talk to anyone today, that's for sure.'

It's very windy. I know from the Moeren, from the Pedaaltrappers, that this is not a problem; you won't fall if the wind lifts you for a moment. 'Just don't run into Jan Pieterke,' I hear Johan say, but there is no Jan Pieterke. There's absolutely no one. Men cycle together. Men cycle fast. There are few women, cycling alone and even slower than me, or cycling with a man at a much faster pace.

"Fatigue shakes you loose", I record. At the same time, I have to laugh at that, as though I would ever forget this.

The highlight of every Flemish race that includes the Muur [wall] van Geraardsbergen: that's where it all happens. From Google Maps, I know that the Muur starts just outside the Geraardsbergen city centre. I saw garage boxes there. I know them from TV. That's where the Muur officially begins. In reality, I notice that the Muur starts much earlier, right here in the centre. Beyond the church and the square with terraces, the road rapidly gets steeper.

There are a lot of spectators.

No, they aren't spectators at all. These are Sunday visitors to Geraardsbergen. There's a travelling funfair here. I had already seen the posters. The fair is still closed when I pass.

I look at wet seats on rides; these will have to be dried off first. I try to distract myself with these thoughts because I'm already losing my breath. Redirecting my attention to other things helps sometimes. I look at the seats;

it will be a lot of work, the towels will quickly be saturated. As I slowly pass the closed rides, I am cheered on by a woman who wants to cross the road here. I try to make myself appear firm. Only my shoulders want to cooperate, that's enough.

The swing philosopher takes over.

The woman smiles kindly; I see her teeth—a beautiful woman with a lovely smile. I feel a fondness for her. She feels the same way. Her smile transforms me into Fausto Coppi. I endure the suffering as Coppi would. I see that she perceives this. She laughs and daydreams about what it would be like to marry me.

The researcher suffers.

I can't afford to stop; I haven't even reached the garage boxes yet. Look down, look down; not too quickly; my breathing is strained; I'm panicking— what condition is my heart in? I should have had it checked at some point; I have to stop; my heart feels like it's on the verge of bursting.

The swing philosopher notices the garage boxes and starts playing cycling commantory.

There,
the turn,
a brief level stretch,
a moment to catch my breath.
There are the garage boxes.
This is the Wall:

Small pavers;
turned greenish.
form the upward path;
'I want to be god, they shall be sacred.'
'Undoubtedly,' adds the voice of Michel Wuyts in my head.

The researcher takes over.

'Undoubtedly,' I repeat as I think of Michel Wuyts. This is the moment. It's

slippery. I can't use the gravel path next to the road. There's a rope barrier, I have to stay on the small slippery green paving stones. I see that there's a timing device. I look at it; I try to put a curse on the thing, disable it with a single glance. I slip. Don't push too hard, don't pull. I'm being overtaken. 'Sure, not a problem,' I tell myself: 'Set your own pace. Everyone at their own pace; my own pace is good.'

The swing philosopher observes.

Right in front of me is a mountain biker. I have a strong opinion about the mountain biker doing the mass participation version of Omloop Het Nieuwsblad with his mountain bike. Yet it takes me a long time to come up with the word for what I think of him; it's as though I've just had brain surgery, and my skull is still partially open.

I think he's 'tacky.'

He's wearing baggy three-quarter-length mountain biking shorts. Ugly. I glance at his exposed calves; thick calves spinning at a leisurely pace. Tacky. The green film on the chapel wall stones is caused by algae, I notice. 'Doesn't matter' I say to myself. However, my eyes want to stay on the algae.

I count: one, two, three. But counting takes a lot of energy. Think of nothing; I'm exploding, breathing must settle. Then a man and his racing bike fall just ahead of me. I stare at the man for too long, and as a result, I can't cycle past him anymore. I have to dismount; I can blame the man.

I picture myself leaning over him, unleashing a tirade, but I don't. I don't kick his bike out of the way. I look around. It's too steep and slippery here to get back on the bike. I walk to the flat spot near the little house just below the summit, but it doesn't work: it's just too slippery. I ascend the holy mountain on foot. I see the photographers, the lenses. The dreamed-of picture. I curse. It was because of that man, and at the same time, I know it's not true; I can't do this; it's too slippery, and I'm scared, too exhausted. I just can't do this.

The researcher observes.

There are no cheering crowds at the top, fortunately, just the relics. I recog-

nise the chapel. I see the crucifix. Many stop here to take a moment. Not me. Not now. I get on the bike and descend the slope rapidly. I've seen this on television. I visualise the helicopter shots. I'm cycling there now. I feel myself merging into the flow of riders from the TV, as if they're sliding past me. It feels wonderful. It's a paradoxical delight. I can't climb. I can descend.

Suddenly, I'm ordered to stop. I've reached a T-junction. Others are already waiting. There's a traffic jam. I ask what's happening.

"We have to wait for the Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne race to pass."

"Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne?" I repeat in disbelief.

"Yes," says a man, "it's coming by soon, and we have to wait for it."

I'm a recreational cyclist riding Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, and in Geraardsbergen. I have to wait for the Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne race for professional cyclists. I count about fifty recreational cyclists who have gathered by now. We watch what is about to come. The police motorcycles passed by a while ago. There, the noise. I look at the riders turning right. I look at the cameraman sitting on the back of the motorbike. I take pictures with my phone and see that it's just past twelve, so it's still too early for the live broadcast.

Soon, I will continue my journey as a recreational cyclist in the opposite direction, the one the Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne riders just came from. On the same road.

When the route is re-opened by the marshals, and we're allowed to continue, I hear a man shout just in front of me as he quickly crosses the street with his bike. It sounds like a scream, but he's laughing. Only then do I hear what he's saying: 'chances for a new breakout!' A second man jumps into his wheel and sprints away with him. Both have their hands on the drops of their handlebars. Their faces are turned toward each other. They're laughing. They quickly disappear from sight. I look at the crowd as it slowly gets moving. Due to the fast men, the breakaway, I find myself left bewildered in the belly of the peloton. No one reacts to the breakout. Neither do I. I am filler. Peloton filler. With a microphone that asks nothing.

Oudenaarde, Monday morning

The researcher wakes up in Studio Flandrien in Oudenaarde.

Michel Wuyts' TV question 'how is that boy feeling' is no longer a question at all. I lie in bed, attempting not to move. How on earth is this going to be a heroic feat? I need to go to the Tour of Flanders Museum here in Oudenaarde. Fortunately, I've brought nice clothes – the kind I enjoy wearing as the successful version of myself. No advertisement flyer in Lycra. No padding. Putting them on becomes a painful exercise. Grey woollen pants from Essentiel-Antwerp, along with a vintage green wool Swedish jacket, and, well, a wool cap too. Being well-dressed in Oudenaarde is more than necessary for me this morning.

The museum begins with the shop, and as I walk past it, I notice the exhibition behind the counter. My eye immediately falls on a retro racing bike on a pedestal. Behind it is a large poster featuring the Belgian rider, Eddy Merckx. I wonder which heroes I'll encounter if I buy a ticket. However, I'm starting to feel repulsed. The images of men with traces of dust and mud on their faces, along with the black and white photos in various shades of grey make me turn around and walk back. I decide to stop at the museum shop, where numerous trinkets are displayed. Among them, I purchase a yellow water bottle adorned with a black lion – essentially the Flemish flag in the form of a water bottle.

At the checkout, there are cards on display. They are beautifully illustrated, large-format cards featuring bicycles. The larger size allows for a more detailed and captivating design. Impressed by their aesthetic, I decide to buy two – one for myself and one for Ludo.

I write to him on the spot. I debate what should be on the card. What do I write to my good friend, the pastor of Watou, who is not doing so well at the moment and who ensured that I could cycle here? I start with the line from the song by Willy Sommers that he played last year at the opening of the cycling season of the Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers during the celebration of the Eucharist in the church of Krombeke.

"Hi Ludo,

A smile, a greeting, a happy face; it seems so ordinary, but it's still a miracle.

How are you?

I just wanted to let you know how grateful I am that you made it possible for me to become a member of De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers. Thanks to them, I successfully cycled the Omloop. I soared over the cobblestones at Haaghoek and conquered the Muur. I cycled through beautiful landscapes with wonderful insights.

I hope you recover soon so that we can have more beautiful conversations about play, religion, cycling, and life! And of course, watch cycling on TV (and get annoyed at Michel W. :-))

Sporty regards, Imara"

With a view on television mountains: Jean Baudrillard

The researcher shares her fieldwork experience.

Omloop Het Nieuwsblad was the first of a series of mass participation versions that I plan to ride. There are five more on my schedule in the next five weeks. That's why I've settled into the holiday home where I also stayed during my very first round of field research. No more Studio Flandrien, but back in my converted garage with just meadows around me.

I'm sitting on the couch with my laptop on my lap. I've turned on the television and am following the events of Paris-Nice. This race, lasting a week, is called the race to the sun. But it's still stormy in Belgium.

The next mass participation event will be Nokere Koerse. But I think I'll skip it. 'Natural conversations' in gale force winds make no sense. It feels like playing truant. Just like the great big lie on the postcard to Ludo. Could I really write to my mentor, who isn't feeling well, that I couldn't climb the Muur van Geraardsbergen? The lie was necessary, I realise. I completed the journey. Not as a hero. But as a researcher. Just a week ago I cycled the Omloop. I stare at the television, watching a complete peloton. I try to make an analysis. I jot down 'Analysis' on an otherwise empty screen while simultaneously keeping track of the race on television.

The play philosopher observes.

Television, as a medium, has played a significant role in my life, not just during my childhood, but also as an adult. Because what am I mimicking exactly? Am I mimicking the imitator, the recreational cyclist, who emulates a professional cyclist in the setting of a cycling race? Or am I imitating a television image? If I incorporate Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994) into my exploration of the broader concept of mimesis, this may help anchor the experience of watching television within the research on mimesis.

The researcher is in serious doubt and uses the 'what if' as a philosophical instrument.

If this fieldwork were merely an embodiment of Baudrillard's central theory on hyperreality, I would now be diligently writing after the opening weekend of the traditional cycling season.

I have five more weeks. For five more weeks, until after Paris–Roubaix, I will stay here and process the data I gather by participating in mass versions of Spring classics. What if I completely flip the script and make Baudrillard's ideology central? It still aligns with my goal to embody philosophy, providing a straightforward framework for interpreting the acquired data. In the seventies, as a child, I watched 'Omloop Het Volk' on television—at a time when Baudrillard was active as a philosopher. Decades later, standing at Haaghoek, I observed the race before riding its mass participation version. It is a perfect embodiment of Baudrillard's theory. This experience not only reinforces my mimesis theory but also demonstrates the possibility of embodying philosophical notions.

The play philosopher delves deeper into Baudrillard's theory.

The French cultural philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard wrote the simulacra and simulation theory in his work 'Simulacra and Simulation' in 1981. Baudrillard argues that media are not conveyors but productive forces pretending to be conveyors. This is deceptive, according to Baudrillard, because people think that what appears in the media—particularly on television—is the actual reality. They do not account for the 'bending'

of the medium.

As a child, I watched television in the 1970s. My father did too. The nightly eight o'clock news consisted of announcements about events in the world. Children's programs like *Pipo de Clown* were imaginative stories unrelated to reality. Even though I wanted to marry Pipo's wife, Mamalou, I could distinguish that 'Pipo the Clown and Mamalou' were characters and therefore 'not real', while the casualties in Lebanon were.

I remember that I knew the difference because, at the ages of seven, eight, and nine, I used to play the 'eight o'clock news' by pretending to be the eight o'clock anchor-man. I would scribble some notes and then read them aloud, using two toilet paper rolls glued together as a makeshift microphone. My mother used to keep these 'news reports'. I still have the written 'news report' of the "casualties" of "Leballon".

However, according to Baudrillard, the reality produced by the eight o'clock news is just as fictional as *Pipo de Clown*. Media is a simulation of reality and, therefore, a hyperreality, asserts Baudrillard. According to my father, the eight o'clock news was real. The Dutch sports program *Studio Sport*, the German equivalent *Sportschau* with football, is real, and so is cycling on Belgian television.

The swing philosopher recalls.

Cycling on television lasted an eternity. I sat on the couch and watched the heat of the Tour de France on TV. The plant on top of the television didn't fall off during a mountain ascent. There was a transition, although Joop Zoetemelk existed outside the television as well. I was a road captain he could rely on. I knew Zoetemelk in this game of cycling wasn't real, I knew I was playing, but the transition from the television to my own cycling game was smooth. There was an existence of Joop Zoetemelk on TV. And afterwards, I cycled outside on my purple Gazelle bike with my brown paper helmet, playing Joop Zoetemelk's road captain. Zoetemelk was there, yet ahead in the race. I could play this for hours: standing still and keeping my feet on the ground. On the high mound of my school, I gazed into the far distance.

The researcher writes.

That Saturday, as a spectator at the Haaghoek, I experienced that the passage of the cycling race lasts at most a minute. And that, in this experience, a cycling race for me is the shifting of air pressure that I could inhale through my mouth and nose.

The play philosopher adds.

Television images are simulations, according to Baudrillard (1994). This means that the mountains on television, in Baudrillard's perspective, are television mountains: a mountain produced by the medium that is not an imitation of a real mountain; nor is it a duplication.

'Reality is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, control models, and can be reproduced an unlimited number of times. It is a hyperreality, in a hyperspace without atmosphere' (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 27). Hyper, derived from the Greek *huper*, means 'beyond the ordinary measure.' Beyond reality, hyperreality is an excessive reality. 'Reality no longer gets a chance to reproduce itself' (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 28).

I try to find out if, during the opening weekend of the spring classics, I experienced the realness of hyperreality precisely by producing the real in this specific design of my research.

Through Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1950, 2008) and works by Eugen Fink, I know that play is always real. Fink (2016) supports the idea that play can never be a vegetative experience. 'Playing does not simply occur in our life like the vegetative processes; it is always an occurrence that is luminously suffused with sense [*sinnhaft*], an enactment that is experienced' (Fink, 2016, p. 16).

Hence, if play is 'an enactment that is experienced,' then I experience the hyperreality in playing the hyperreality. What implications does that have: experiencing the hyperreality in playing the hyperreality? Moreover, did Baudrillard ever think about playing as a real experience?

I stare at my laptop and type this question. I modify it slightly:

“Has Baudrillard ever considered playing as an enactment that is experienced?”

As a child, I recreated the hyperreality of television on the school hill. The hyperreality of ‘Joop Zoetemelk’ in my living room, sweating in France, transformed into ‘Joop Zoetemelk’ in my play. Thus, there were numerous “Zoetemelks” when I assumed the role of playing road captain. Yet, my playing was a concrete experience.

Now, I play in my research, engaging in mass participation versions, playing within the framework, engaging hyperreality.

The swing philosopher responds.

No, that’s precisely the issue: I didn’t play there. Fast young men played. They shouted, ‘new chance for a breakout!’ They seemed to enter another world to which I still have no access.

The researcher responds.

But wait: I did play for a few moments. At the beginning, in the descent from the Delhaize parking lot when I wasn’t tired yet. I played ‘départ fictif.’ I was a rider cycling, preparing for what was to come. At a controlled, slow pace, I cycled to the start. In the steep descent, I tested my brake pads and knew that my form was good. I also played when I let myself drop back to the team manager’s car because I wanted to record something on my Dictaphone. And in all my fatigue, I still played an imaginary game where a woman in Geraardsbergen considered what it would be like to marry me.

The play philosopher stares at the question written.

“Has Baudrillard ever considered playing as an enactment that is experienced?” I reframe by adding: ‘and how through playing an appearance multiplies?’ Joop Zoetemelk co-existed on TV and in my play as a road captain. IJsseling (1997) uses the notion of polysemy to address mimesis in order to avoid hierarchy.

In Baudrillard’s hyperreality, there is no original; instead, numerous simulations are produced by ‘miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks.’ These simulations differ from the original experience of an event.

Clearly, this research on hyperreality seems to challenge Huizinga's vision. Huizinga's concept of play is that it is 'real' because he attributes a transcendent effect to play. His point of view places play in an ideal order, and he also attributes a mystical entity to play (Otterspeer, 2016).

The researcher makes a connection through the harvest of experiences.

I sit on the couch and gaze through the low windows outside. From here, I have a view of the 'television mountains.' Through the window frames, I observe them. Due to the shape and size of the frames, along with the distance to the mountains, the mountains 'in reality' are just as large as when I see them on television: television mountains. That was the confusion. I hadn't thought that the mountains in Belgium would be all too high and steep, and therefore 'difficult.' I have a view of the television mountains, of which I now know how steep they are. I descend them.

Scherpenberg: during a Sunday ride with *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*. When the Scherpenberg is ascended, everyone is allowed to do it at their own pace. At the top, at the *In De Zon* eatery, they then wait for each other. I look at the Rodeberg and then the Baneberg with the Schomminkelstreet; it can be wonderfully quiet here. The Zwarteberg, on the other hand, is a busy road with often a lot of people walking on the sidewalks as well. This ridge of the Zwarteberg, where the road lies, serves as the border between France and Belgium. There are many shops where you can buy alcohol and cigarettes. When I cycle there, for a moment I always feel like a rider who is cycling a 'carnival race' for money.

The play philosopher interprets.

I write down:

"I am right in the middle of it.

The presence of reality and representation as a 'television mountain,' precisely because of the distance, brings to mind the nominalistic idea that categories and concepts are merely human constructs. But in the meantime, I am looking at what I call 'mountains.'

With Huizinga and Baudrillard, am I dealing with examples that display the classical debate between realism and post-structuralism?

'Yes and no,' is the answer I find (Ehrmann et al., 1968; Huizinga, 1950, 2008; Krul, 1995; Kuiper, 1993; Tollebeek 2015).

'Yes,' when it comes to realism versus post-structuralism.

Huizinga starts from an image of play that goes beyond human constructs. He ponders an ideal world. However, Ehrmann et al. (1968) points out that Huizinga fails to include the status of reality in his play research.

'When it comes to the state of play in relation to reality, the problem of play is not linked to the problem of reality but linked to the problem of culture' (Ehrmann et al., 1968, p. 34).

Ehrmann thereby indicates that the status of the 'ordinary life' that Huizinga writes about is taken as a neutral given. If this reality is not reflected upon, it is considered objective.

In Ehrmann's analysis, the 'ordinary life' as Huizinga terms it is a reality that does not need to be further examined. Play is defined based on this 'so-called' reality. According to Ehrmann, play is measured against reality because reality is not or never in doubt. This is biased, as I understand from Ehrmann. I fully understand Ehrmann when he says that Huizinga did not take into account the status of reality in his play research. However, my head threatens to explode with this train of thought. I try to reformulate it. In other words, Ehrmann asks: how can 'reality' function as a norm and thus indicate the 'normal,' without having been itself interrogated from his play research? Ehrmann's message is to scrutinise this culture. He also advocates for starting not from a dialectic between play versus seriousness or work, but from an inclusion: and/and. Play and work. Play and seriousness, etc. But also, not to juxtapose play against reality.

The researcher derives conclusions from the data collected during field research.

If an imitation of a cycling race is a version without a competitive element (Caillois, 2001), then I can indeed question reality through imitation, but not through my focus group. It appears as if play has embedded itself in reality, a concept I observed in the statement of the playing adult man who shouted 'chances for a new breakout!'

This perspective isn't purely anthropological, as Girard explains mimetic desire within a framework, but something intriguing is happening with the play. By employing Ehrmann's findings, it becomes apparent that the culture defines reality, whereas playing has only a marginal role. Fink (2016) extensively explores this idea. In his well-known contribution, *Oasis of Happiness*, his point of departure is the positioning of play as a marginal opposition.

The play philosopher turns her thoughts into a question.

Ehrmann critiques Huizinga, asserting that 'play always represents something' (Ehrmann et al., 1968, p. 35). Ehrmann believes it is legitimate to question what right this reality has to speak. If Huizinga posits two worlds — the world of play and the ordinary world — but the ordinary world is not reflected upon, how can play be viewed as a separate world 'different' from this 'ordinary world'?

The researcher's pragmatic approach adds:

I mainly want to understand what happens in the mimesis. Through cultural frameworks, humans shape sports as culture. Something significant happens in the imitation of this sport. As a child, I imitated hyperreality on the hill by my school. Now, for a year and a half, I've been cycling behind men who cycle too fast in the hope that they will provide me with information about what happens in the mimesis. Why am I doing this? Why am I spending all my money, all my free time on a target group I have no access to? They cycle too fast. They play, but not with me. I have five weeks left. I'm going to stop doing this. I've rented this garage for six weeks. I have six weeks off. I'm not going to ride a single other mass participation version of a race. I'm going to stop this research. I'm going to embark on new research with a new research question: 'How does culture deal with reality, and what meaningful role does play have?'

The swing philosopher is having fun.

I'm just going to enjoy cycling for the pleasure of it, engaging with play forms that have no names; they are frolicsome and unprepared (Caillois, 2001). In justifying my actions, I will point to the great Roman Emperor and Stoic, Marcus Aurelius. In his diary, where he addresses himself through dialogue, he says, 'Set aside your books, do not be distracted any longer' (Aurelius, 2003, p. 30).

CHAPTER 4 EMBODYING ‘CHASSE PATATE’ IN NO-MAN’S LAND

Introduction

The play philosopher introduces.

As a play philosopher, I want to seize this moment to reflect upon my field research from the vantage point of a completed dissertation. I undertake this reflection because this phase marks the precise point from which I can truly comprehend the trajectory of my mimesis research in light of Fink’s critique of the prevailing mimesis perspective. This understanding becomes possible as I begin to prioritise play as an end in itself over play as a (research) instrument.

Prioritising also involves experiencing the increasing tension between, on the one hand, play as an instrument—utilised for external purposes—and, on the other hand, the inherently autotelic nature of play (Fink, 1995, 2016; Huizinga, 1950). Both Huizinga and Fink emphasise autotelic play as a defining characteristic, where the purpose of play lies within the play itself.

When I decided to set aside the research through MAMILs, as participants, a space emerged. It was not a free space, as I had not stopped doing my PhD research. However, through this intention, a liminal space (Spariosu, 1989) materialised within the ongoing research.

This liminal space is shaped by the swing philosopher with the term ‘chasse patate’. This is cycling jargon and literally means ‘potato chase.’ A wild goose chase in English: a hunt for nothing. This seems like a paradox, ‘hunting’ for ‘nothing,’ but precisely the activity of ‘hunting’ presupposes a space. This space, combined with ‘nothing’ to hunt, turns out to be condition of possibility for play research from the autotelic characteristic of play. However, this space where there is a chase for nothing occurs within the ‘ordinary world.’ The criticism that Ehrmann et al. (1968) directs at Huizinga is that in his play research, he does not subject reality, that is, ‘the ordinary world,’ to closer inspection.

In the stage of play research that I am at, it becomes increasingly clear to me that playing in ‘the ordinary world’ proves to be extremely complex for an adult. It is at this moment that the central research question arises: How can the use of an autoethnographic approach deepen the understanding of the philosophy of play?

With this research, I can demonstrate that there is a necessity for the use of autoethnographic research (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2014, 2021; Allen-Collinson, 2013; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2005; Bochner & Ellis, 2002, 2016; Ellis, 1994, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000, Geertz, 1973) in order to comprehend the autotelic aspect of play as the core of play. I do this by utilising the ‘in-between space’ that I shape with the cycling term ‘chasse patate.’ Particularly as *The ethnographical I* (Ellis, 2004), I can both experience the ontology of play and develop reflections regarding the complexity of the presence of play in the ordinary world.

Before concluding this introduction, I will briefly touch upon the nature of play that has the characteristic being autotelic.

Both Huizinga and Fink are play scholars who assert that the essential characteristic of play lies in the fact that play has its own course. It [play] contains its own course and meaning’ (Huizinga, 1950, p. 9). Fink conveys a similar message: ‘The activity of play has only internal purposes, not ones that transcend it’ (Fink, 2016, p. 20). This autotelic purpose of play thereby acquires the characteristic that it can interrupt. ‘It “interrupts” the continuity of purposeful activities’ (Fink, 2016, p. 21).

The major difference between Huizinga and Fink lies in the examination of the ‘ordinary world.’ This means that the autotelic purpose might interrupt (and is described by both in a similar way), but the play world does not, according to Fink. And that is a great difference.

Fink situates the ontology of play in the ordinary world and views this ordinary world as the “actual world,” a precondition for the presence of play. ‘The “scenery” of play, of course, always needs actual space and actual time

to be able to unfurl itself at all' (Fink, 2016, p. 209). This means that the environment of play does not coincide with the actual world. 'Space in the play world and time in the play world never coincide with the surrounding space and time' (p. 209). However, according to Fink, this does not make it a separate world. The playworld does not disrupt the real context of human beings and things.

The playworld in itself is indeed located in a closed-off space, yet in the midst of this real context as an unreal appearance; it has its real substrate in the playing human beings and their material playthings, which function as "bearers," as it were. A playworld can never exist alone by itself. It is always reliant on the simple actuality of players and playthings. (Fink, 2016, p. 113)

Thus, Fink emphasises that the playworld is in the midst of the real context. Within this real context an unreal appearance has a reality. The reality is materialised by the playing human beings and their playthings. Hence, following Otterspeer (2016), asserting that Huizinga's ideal order is based on a Platonic philosophy, in Fink's view there is a huge difference in the place of appearance: the playworld is in the midst of the actual world. However, it does resemble to Huizinga. They find each other on spatiality of play as an ontology. Huizinga refers to these as 'forbidden spots,' providing examples such as the temple, the court of justice, the tennis court, the card table, and the magic circle. 'All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 10).

While the perspectives on play between Huizinga and Fink may differ, the concepts of a play-ground show similarities—a spatiality amidst a real context. However, Huizinga emphasises play-grounds as forbidden, while Fink emphasises on the secrecy of adults playing.

In this chapter, I gain the insight that I have been playing Fink's vision of mimesis without being aware of it. I begin this chapter with the philosophical concept of 'liminal play' (Spariosu, 1989; Turner, 1982). From a philosophical perspective, it is the place where I find myself in my research. After this exposition, the floor is given to the swing philosopher. In cycling jargon, the swing philosopher sees 'chasse patate' as the ultimate embodiment of liminal play. Recognising the play of the swing philosopher ultimately leads to understanding a conception of mimesis that goes beyond mere

representation. Mimesis turns out to have a generative effect. With this discovery, I 'stand' in the perspective of Eugen Fink.

Liminal Play

The play philosopher elaborates the notion liminal play.

In various works, Spariosu (1989, 2014, 2016) has developed the notion of the liminal. He draws upon the insights of ethnographer Van Gennep (1961), who used the term liminal to signify transitional passages in human life (rites of passage). British cultural anthropologist Turner (1982), as interpreted by Spariosu, further refined van Gennep's concept of the liminal into a fully developed theory.

Spariosu himself (2014, 2016) delved into this concept, providing more clarity within the context of liminal play. He argued that etymology reveals 'liminality' to be a concept that extends well beyond an anthropological perspective.

The etymology of the notion 'liminal' has Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic roots. Spariosu, citing Lutbetzki (Spariosu, 2016), notes that 'the term *Lmn* originally meant 'harbour' during the Bronze Age' (Spariosu, 2016, p. 16). A place where land and sea meet, where the solid surface of the earth and the liquid surface of the water come into contact while being interconnected and influencing each other. In Latin, 'limes' originally meant the borders of the Roman Empire. The related term *limen* means 'threshold,' a passage.

Apart from anthropology and geography, the concept of the liminal also appears worldwide in religious doctrines, says Spariosu. He provides an example from Tibetan Buddhism with the notion of 'bardo,' representing an in-between space, an experience standing between death and rebirth. Zen Buddhism, according to Spariosu, speaks of a 'luminous void' (Spariosu, 2016, p. 19), a stillness from which all structures depart. Spariosu emphasises that, to the best of his knowledge, Turner (1982) was the first to emphasise the close relationship between play and the liminal in his work *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982). With the notion of the liminal, a universal term is available that breaks through dualistic thinking. According to Spariosu, the notions of play and the liminal are not interchangeable. 'Play is a form of liminality, but not all liminal activities or experiences are ludic' (Spariosu, 2016, p. 18).

Spariosu shapes this specific form of play, where play is considered liminal - 'liminal play' - by pointing to pre-Socratic examples. Liminal play is seen as both creation and absence thereof, both emptiness and activity. This elaboration of the interplay of activity and non-activity, emergence and disappearance, is also evident in the works of Nietzsche (Fink, 1979). Fink (2016) bases his indications of play in terms of 'activity and non-activity, actual and non-actual' on Nietzsche's interpretation of play. 'Play is activity and creation - and yet it is close to the eternal and silent things' (Fink, 2016, p. 18). Fink thereby indicates the duality of play and the paradox that play entails. He asserts that play is activity and creativity, and that this contrast allows play to break the course in a human life. 'Precisely because play withdraws from the uniform flow of life, it engages meaningfully with it: Play disrupts. Play is at a distance' (Fink, 2016, p. 19). A fundamental characteristic of play is that it is at a distance from goal-directed activities.

Definition of chasse patate

The play philosopher marks the location.

The investigation into 'chasse patate' and the relationship between play and imitation takes place in a holiday home between Reningerelst and Westouter. Meanwhile, the weather in Belgium is improving. The swing philosopher will develop an intensive training program here.

The swing philosopher studies the cycling term 'chasse patate' on Wikipedia.

'Chasse patate' (from French: Chasse, literally 'hunt', Patate, literally 'potato', but figuratively 'fool', 'simpleton') is a term used in cycling when a cyclist (or, exceptionally, multiple cyclists) breaks away from the peloton towards the leading group and lingers halfway. If this cyclist continues his **pursuit** (or even starts it) – without the prospect of **catching up** with the leading group – that pursuit is called a chasse patate. The cyclist makes a **relatively large effort** to stay ahead of the peloton alone, **apparently** still chasing the leading group but chooses, without the chance of influencing the outcome of the race (either by joining the leading group or by dropping back into the peloton), to persist in this **exhausting but unproductive effort**. As a result, **this cyclist's effort is not (any-more) to be taken seriously**. (Chasse Patate, 2023)

I copy the description onto my laptop. I highlight in bold the terms **pursuit**, **catching up**, and **large effort**. Terms that concern me are bold italic: **relatively**

and **apparently**. I try to ignore the figurative meaning of *chasse patate*: fool and simpleton.

It's as though I'm reading about a disease on the internet. Reading about a disease online gives me a tingling feeling of horror. It feels like a paradox: a 'don't want to know' coupled with a strange eagerness to fit all the descriptions.

However, I notice that I lose focus at the parentheses (after all, parentheses have a halting effect).

Once again, I try to concentrate on how the 'relatively large effort' ends. I read it again and summarise. The relatively large effort becomes an exhausting effort that yields little. I highlight 'exhausting but unproductive effort', in bold. However, 'unproductive effort' is more alarming than 'exhausting'. Hence, 'unproductive effort' must be in bold *Italic*.

I check to ensure I've thoroughly read everything. It dawns on me that there is a distinction between persisting and initiating: 'if a cyclist continues in his pursuit or even starts it.' Therefore, there is a difference between persisting and starting. I ponder the last sentence that encapsulates the conclusion: A *chasse patate* is a situation in which this cyclist's effort is no longer to be taken seriously. A *chasse patate* is a situation, I conclude. Therefore, this cyclist's effort is not (anymore) to be taken seriously', must be bold *Italic*.

The researcher notes.

I have brought all my books with me again. They are back in the bookcase of the holiday home. I look at them. Here, lying on my couch, I have a good view. I scan the spines of the books. I look at a black cover with yellow letters. It's the autobiography of Frank Vandenbroucke, *Ik ben god niet* (Vandenbroucke, 2008).

The swing philosopher specifies in detail.

On page 101, he describes how to win Ghent-Wevelgem. Ideally, I would like to defend my thesis on 'page 101'.

The researcher continues.

Right next to this autobiography is the latest biography. This one has a white cover.

With bold black letters, the title: *VDB* (Vanderhaeghe, 2018), the abbreviation for the name Vandenbroucke. This biography is much thicker than the autobiography that was published just before his death in 2009.

The swing philosopher elaborates.

That's because there are lots of pictures in it. Sports biographies are thick books about athletes, written on thick paper, with plenty of pictures.

The researcher provides context.

I bought it last year during my final weekend of field research, in September, in Meseu, directly from the author Stijn Vanderhaeghe himself during the *VDB VIP Tour*. The book contains a memorial card for Frank and kind words from Stijn directed at me. I don't remember exactly what they say, I will have to get up to check.

The swing philosopher is a bit more active.

I have also brought with me *Het Groot Vlaams Wielervoordenboek* (Wuyts & De Craemer, 2018), which Michel Wuyts co-authored with the Flemish writer Ann De Craemer. It lists over seventy Flemish cycling terms.

I get up and grab the book. Fortunately, I find the term 'chasse patate' under the 'c,' eagerly searching for further information as I quickly scan the text. 'Does the term allude to the feeling of being in a bind? Is there an implication of chasing something that grows underground and is therefore invisible?' (Wuyts & De Craemer, 2018, p. 48).

Frank Vandenbroucke (VDB) VIP Tour***The researcher explains.***

During the time when my previous field research was coming to an end, I received an invitation to participate in the annual memorial cycling tour for Frank VandenBroucke; the *VDB VIP Tour*. During this special memorial

event, author Stijn Vanderhaege presented his biography. He informed me during our conversation about the tour that this biography was created in close collaboration with Frank's mother, Chantal. The entire Vandenbroucke family would be there, including Chantal, Frank's mother, and Cameron, his daughter, who is now in her early twenties and a highly talented cyclist.

Having learned from experience, upon receiving the invitation I promptly inquired about the average speed for the upcoming cycling tour. The response indicated a 'pleasant pace,' with the cycling speed set at twenty-five kilometres per hour. The route consisted of two loops starting and finishing in Mese, each spanning forty kilometres. At the checkpoint, I would have the option to conclude after the first loop. To my surprise, only former professional cyclists and myself stood at the starting line. As the sole woman and a researcher, I emulated cyclists, navigating the routes.

While observing from a distance in front of the town hall of Mese as these former cyclists took pictures together, I spotted Stijn Vanderhaeghe at his book stand featuring his VDB biography. While gesturing towards the group photo being assembled in front of the town hall of Mese, he confirmed my feeling that they were indeed all former teammates of Frank Vandenbroucke. Pointing, he mentioned their names.

The swing philosopher adds.

Names that I only know from TV and Frank's autobiography.

The researcher takes over.

'Keuns,' VDB's former teammate and best friend, is not cycling, Stijn tells me, pointing. I look at Keuns, at his large stature. He wears a shirt of the beer brand *Kwaremont*. 'He's in the beer trade nowadays,' Stijn laughs.

I notice an older woman standing in front of the group of men. She looks around. I look around to see what she is looking at. I see a classic Belgian setting of nineteenth-century houses that form a nineteenth-century square. But she probably isn't looking at that. Nor does she look at the white party

tents and high standing tables within this historical setting. Racing bikes lean against some tables. I look at the frames of the bikes, at expensive Mavic tires with high rims. I notice the black-and-orange flags of the beer brand Kwaremont.

The older woman has handed her umbrella to someone. Indeed, it's not about to rain, I observe, watching the sky. Her bleached hairstyle has the right shade of blond for a woman of her age. She wears her taupe summer trench coat open. Taupe accentuates her colourful dress of green and red. She is neatly made up. I follow her jaunty steps by looking at her white pumps. With a graceful directness, she conducts the group of middle-aged men in Lycra to stand much closer together. She is an old queen presenting the nervous new cabinet at the town hall of Mesen, and she wants to put them at ease. 'That's Chantal,' Stijn says. I see from his familiar gestures and tone of voice in saying 'that's Chantal', that they have likely indeed worked closely together. I look at her now that I know she is Chantal. I see her grabbing the arm of a man and squeezing it for a moment. 'That's Frank's father,' Stijn points out. Arm in arm, they stand next to each other. They laugh and look ahead. During the extended smile for the picture, I look at them.

The swing philosopher realises in repetition.

'That's Chantal.' And that's the father. I will not just be cycling with former cyclists, but also with Frank's father. Oh my god!

The researcher repeats.

'Oh my god.' I thought. I am going to cycle with real cyclists. With Frank Vandenbroucke's father. I look at the father: I see a well-trained physique.

The swing philosopher approves of herself.

I am also wearing the attire of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*.

The researcher tries to make a plan.

At *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, I have learned that a club in peloton formation rides like a wolf pack: weaker members ride at the front and are, if necessary, shielded from the wind by the stronger riders.

The swing philosopher makes a gameplan.

The VDB VIP Tour was accompanied by motorcycles. We departed from the centre of Mesen. Mesen is a village built on a hill, so, wherever you are in Mesen, you always start by going downhill.

After the descent, a man slowed down and cycled next to me. “Cyclist’s code”, I knew. Later, this turned out to be Steve de Wolf. We had a chat.

The researcher corrects.

I said nothing. I nodded at what he said and tried to look as though I understood. My lungs were completely blown up within a few kilometres. Eventually, I said: “Go ahead, you don’t have to wait for me.” Then the last motorcycle that accompanied us came alongside me. A motorcyclist on a motorbike cruising at a little over thirty kilometres per hour in a VIP Tour in the area where Frank grew up. ‘Go ahead,’ I gestured. ‘I’ll follow the arrows.’

The swing philosopher adds her perspective.

For a moment, a look of understanding passed between us: the motorcyclist and I. With the acceleration of the motorbike, I felt: so this is what it feels like, ‘getting dropped’.

The researcher adds her perspective.

In watching the peloton cycling ahead of me, I saw myself disappearing from the VDB VIP Tour. Just like that: I am a disappeared cyclist.

The swing philosopher explicates.

I cycled behind the broom wagon. Officially, this does not exist! So, ‘it cannot exist!’ Being *in* non-existing area: that was a sensational feeling!

The researcher channels the experience into a philosophical context.

This is disappearing but not disappearing at the same time. I knew by riding with former professional riders, colleagues of Frank Vandenbroucke, that I was in a play world (Fink, 2016) with this Tour. And in this play world there was for me imitation as a form of playing. But I also knew that I was cycling *in* the phenomenological notions of appearing and disappearing; plus the

notions 'actual and non-actual' (Fink, 2016) as well.

I grabbed my camera to capture the moment in the form of a selfie. An exploded red face, white mucus dripping down my chin. In a landscape of green meadows, I rode the VDB VIP Tour. Bewildered as I was, I tried to analyse it all and began to laugh heartily.

The swing philosopher is still enthusiastic about this experience.

What I thought was: "I'm riding here with Frank Vandenbroucke's former teammates, and I'm being dropped." How real is this?! So, in part, I'm not in a VIP tour. It's just a real race, and I'm getting dropped.

I was able to keep them in sight for a long time, but eventually, I had to let go of the colourful dots. I pretended that I wanted to come back into the peloton, so I rode at my limit.

Researcher: Due to this focus, I naturally lost track of the arrows. I cycled back a bit, but no arrow in sight. Where on earth did I lose those arrows?

Swing philosopher: I saw that I was near Ploegsteert, VDB's place of birth, the roundabout where he cycled as a child, the square where he grew up, near the church where he is buried.

Researcher: So I thought, If I cycle to Ploegsteert, then I must be able to pick up the arrows of the VIP tour from there. But there was not an arrow to be seen in Ploegsteert.

Fortunately, I have covered a few thousand kilometres in this area by now. So, I thought I'd cycle back to Mesen from here, and then I'd see them there.

Swing philosopher: Apparently, I had cut the route a bit too short since they hadn't arrived yet.

Researcher: "How was it?" Stijn, the author of *VDB* asked.

Swing philosopher: "Super cool, but I got totally dropped",' I said.

Researcher: “They’re still fast, huh?” Stijn replied.

“Yes,” I said. “A pleasant pace, a pleasant pace,” I mumbled a bit, wondering where they actually were. Stijn informed me that they were still working on the first loop and had already experienced three flat tires. We laughed about it. While laughing, I saw Frank VandenBroucke’s mother coming towards us. “This is the researcher, Chantal,” Stijn said. She inquired about what exactly I was doing.

Swing philosopher: “I’m cycling your son’s autobiography.”

Researcher: I heard myself say it. I was shocked that I said ‘son.’ With that, she became a mother. I quickly explained why Ploegsteert is such a special area for me.

Swing philosopher: I told her that I already found the autobiography very beautiful, but that this biography is special. I told her that I pictured how “you all sat at the kitchen table, how this book came about.” “That’s how you get the real story”, she replied.

Researcher: I told her that I would come back in March;

Swing philosopher: and that I would ride the Spring Classics for my doctoral research. “Ghent–Wevelgem!”

Researcher: I exclaimed a little too enthusiastically. She urged me to visit.

Be Frank

The play philosopher explains, but is quickly interrupted by the swing philosopher and the researcher.

I decided to go cycling in the time that had now become available. This particular approach of research may have failed;

Swing philosopher: but Ghent-Wevelgem was mine!

Researcher: How I would pick up the research afterwards, I would see then.

The route of the amateur cyclist version Ghent – Wevelgem would pass right by my house. So, I started cycling every day. Twice a day, I trained on the Kemmelberg. Training twice a day on the Kemmelberg made me feel that I was a professional cyclist. Therefore, I trained to play this ‘training game’ well (De Koven, 2013).

The play philosopher interprets.

But while training, I was playing. Hence, the foundation for riding Ghent-Wevelgem was intrinsically motivated from play as an autotelic characteristic (Fink, 2016).

The researcher recalls a good memory.

The Kemmelberg, much like all cycling obstacles in my life—cobblestone stretches, rain, or the wind—is forever linked to Johan from *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*.

‘Start with the east side,’ he said, following a mantra: ‘first East, then West.’ Just like the wise men, and you are wise. You are a very wise woman.’ He mentioned this after a Sunday ride with the club while sitting in the café, discussing how I could learn to climb the Kemmelberg.

The swing philosopher studies page 101 of the autobiography I am not God (Vandenbroucke, 2008).

In the days before Gent-Wevelgem, I had started training like crazy on the course with Keuns. The race was quite challenging with just one Kemmelberg and a total of 4 kilometres of cobblestones: one kilometre up, one kilometre down, and all that twice. I knew the route by heart because I had been training on it since childhood. In the past, I raced past in my imagination with a chasing peloton behind me, but no one managed to catch me, not even Eddy Merckx and Freddy Maertens. I knew the route like the back of my hand and studied every turn and bump with Keuns. He had already done a lot of work for me, and this time I wanted to repay him. Before the main road from Menen to Ypres and Wevelgem, there was a hill where the decisive breakaway had to take place. ‘Keuns, if you want to win, you have to be gone before Geluwe, or it’s too late,’ I impressed upon him. ‘If you come up there with six seconds, you’ve won,’ I told him. His eyes began to sparkle.’ (Vandenbroucke, 2008, p. 101)

The researcher vividly recalls the conversation with Johan in every detail.

The first meters of the east side are the most challenging: 'that's the surf. Then there's a flat stretch; don't look up, look down: look at the cobblestones. Keep on looking at the cobblestones. Then comes the last part, and when it gets steep, you know you're almost there. That's essentially the Kemmelberg.'

So really, the whole Kemmelberg is just ten meters. Like that, Johan tried to help me master a thousand-meter-long hellish ride.

After the morning session on the Kemmelberg, I almost always cycle on to Ploegsteert. Upon arriving, my gaze is instinctively drawn to the right, towards the café on the square owned by Frank Vandenbroucke's parents. I know they no longer live there; I know the café is no longer theirs; that they live elsewhere in Ploegsteert. I know I will never drop in for coffee. But I enjoy imagining that I do while cycling through Ploegsteert.

The swing philosopher plays while training.

Coffee served in white hotel cups and with a glazed caramel biscuit on the saucer beside the cup. The coffee in the cup warms the plastic wrapper of the biscuit, allowing the scent of the glazed caramel to escape through the plastic. After all these years, Chantal still serves hospitality cookies and has taken the white hotel cups for personal use.

The researcher continues training.

The narrow bike path along the canal to Menen is wet; it must be from the dew because it's not raining. I don't think much, to be honest. Ludo is right. Thoughts, inner conversations, and cycling: perhaps it's a peculiar combination. I'll mention it to him someday. I cycle every day. The landscape seems smaller compared to last year; the villages appear closer together. I realise I can't get lost anymore.

I cycle on roads that could turn into cycling courses any day in this March.

In the stillness of Belgium, the race passes by***The researcher meets with the priest.***

Upon inquiring about his well-being via email, the priest invites me to watch the Panne race together. This three-day race has now become a 'one-day' race. In his email, he mentions that we will do so 'in the quietest place in Belgium.' We agree to meet at the rectory at one o'clock.

The swing philosopher notes contentedly.

I don't have to climb the rectory stairs, I don't have to ring the bell. 'I saw you coming,' says Ludo as he closes the rectory door just before one o'clock. He's wearing a brown suede jacket. I've never seen him in a jacket before.

The researcher observes.

We're not going to the church across the street, which I had actually expected. Instead, he points to the small garage between the rectory and the church. "I'll just get the car out. The priest backs his Peugeot out.

The swing philosopher hops in.

I'm sitting next to the priest. In his car. A Peugeot. We pull onto the road. "We're heading for the quietest place in Belgium that the race passes", he says.

We drive north out of Watou, towards St. Jan Ter Biezen. But, of course, Ludo has a parish there too. Instead of going to the church, at the last familiar bike junction sign, we turn left onto a quiet country road.

"This is the Bermuda Triangle of Belgium," Ludo laughs. We stop at a farmhouse surrounded by green, green, green. We get out.

The researcher observes.

An old farmer in a traditional blue overall approaches and smiles at us. We stand on his property at the edge of the quiet road. I look at the two old men. Ludo has been coming here for years; I can tell by how close together they stand in the empty yard along the long, empty road surrounded by hilly greenery. Then, a big man with a youthful appearance walks over from the farm. He keeps his hands in his blue overall, nods at me, and gives Ludo

a friendly smile. He walks across the road and stands on the other side. I observe him; he must be around fifty, I realise. The farmer must then be around eighty.

The swing philosopher looks at the road.

We gaze in the direction the race will come from, towards the road we had driven earlier. The son gazes into the emptiness as though there is something there. The old farmer and Ludo do the same while chatting merrily, but I can't understand them. I love not having to say anything and just listening to an incomprehensible conversation.

Then, the entertaining banter between Ludo and the farmer stops, and Ludo seems to be listening intently. I listen along with him. Ludo points to the empty road where a sound is becoming audible. Indeed, there is sound. I listen and look at the empty road. The low tones rise. Suddenly, two police motorcycles appear at high speed. After they pass us, Ludo continues to listen. He looks at me, checking whether I hear it too. I hear the sound of the race. There's no helicopter announcing the race. 'This is pre-television landscape,' I realise. This is the appearance before it appears on television. I witnessed this moment after the 'Muur of Geraardsbergen' while waiting for the Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne race. The intersection was crowded then. Now, I stand in the emptiness of a farmyard on a country road.

We hear the sound of the race. Soon, it gets louder, and we see a peloton speeding past us. I catch snippets of conversations. A rider tosses a drinking bottle into the yard with precision. After the procession has passed us, Ludo watches the peloton. He prompts me to keep listening. Together, we listen. When the last taillights disappear around the bend, we can still hear the sound for minutes. The sound reverberates through the hills. Finally, it's silent again.

The farmer precedes us. The farmer's son laughs and picks up the bottle. He greets us with it in his hand and disappears behind to the barns on the property. The old farmer lets us pass to enter the farmhouse.

When I enter, it feels like I'm in a living open-air museum of a farm. Thanks to the priest. I look at him. He greets the farmer's wife warmly. Inside is dark.

Everything is made of wood and painted dark brown. The fireplace is burning brightly, providing light and warmth. Next to the fireplace is a large television. We sit at an oak table with a stack of advertising leaflets on the thick rug. I note that Ludo is Father Ludo here.

The researcher takes over.

Ludo finishes his conversation with the farmer and his wife. The West Flemish they speak is completely incomprehensible to me. We say goodbye. I thank the farmer and his wife for their incredible hospitality. The farmer's son has disappeared. We drive back.

"There used to be much more chatter in the peloton," says Ludo back in the car. "You could hear them for much longer. Now it's quiet in the peloton, due to stress, due to money, causing them to race hard so early in the race."

"This is the place you spoke about in last year's sports eucharist!"

Ludo grins. "You love silence, don't you? This is silence for your research."

Arriving at the rectory, we watch the tail end of the race. We're in a part of the rectory where I haven't been before. In this study with his desk, there are comfy chairs and, of course, a television. We remain silent, and in the stillness, the race unfolds on the television.

The play philosopher provides a transition through contemplation.

I remember watching the television with excitement because, at a certain point in the race, I saw signs for two cycling routes. These are the 'war routes' 'Round-Trip' [Aller-Retour] and 'No Man's Land' [Niemandslaan].

These cycling routes are part of the cluster of routes labelled '14-18.' The Centre for Tourism in the Westhoek has mapped out twelve such cycling routes, each focusing on a specific theme from World War I. In the case of 'Round Trip' and 'No Man's Land', attention is drawn to (medical) evacuations. By highlighting evacuation and supply, life both at and behind the front is illuminated.

During my initial period of 'pioneering,' I cycled these twelve war routes. At the Information Centre in Kemmel, I bought a beautifully designed box containing this complete cycling route series.

It was that afternoon, watching the race with Ludo, that my research took shape because I increasingly understood what I was looking for.

The De Panne race partially covers the same roads where the 'Round-Trip' and 'No- Man's Land' routes are laid out. However, the peloton does not cycle these cycling routes. Yet, the road remains transparent in a cycling road race, keeping the signposting of these cycling tours visible. Therefore, it seems as if the cycling peloton is cycling these World War I routes. It's a 'familiar paradox' (Foucault, 2021, p. 11) that allows us to separate the race of professional cyclists and 'No Man's Land' from each other while passing through the same course (Massey, 2005).

The researcher, along with the priest, sees that the race ends in a mass sprint.

"We're being fooled", says Ludo, and, to my surprise, he immediately switches off the television.

"That's why cycling is such a popular sport", he continues his argument. "We know we're being fooled. People love to be fooled."

I cannot deduce why we are being fooled. Does he mean that the well-informed viewer already knows that this race usually ends in a mass sprint?

"Chronicle of a sprint foretold", I paraphrase Wuyts somewhat pompously. But that's not what the priest means. It's about confirming that humans are being fooled here because divine knowledge precedes human knowledge. The 'fooling' continually confirms our place in our cosmology, Ludo explains. That's why we enjoy being fooled.

It's as if I'm hearing Huizinga again, quoting 'The very existence of play continually confirms the supra-logical nature of human existence. We play and know that we play, so we must be more than merely rational beings, for play is irrational' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 4).

The play philosopher analyses.

“Look at your research”, Ludo continued. “To what extent are we fooled by the landscape?” Ludo focusses on the landscapes and then asks, “What do the graves stand for? Graves stand for: belonging and not belonging. There is no war here.”

What I only realised later is that in the silence of watching television that afternoon and in the remarks of the priest, I could come to understand the train of thought about Fink’s play. However, for years, I couldn’t seem to uncouple silence from a psychological framework because I linked silence to my childhood and, therefore, to the silence that was always present in the house.

By playing, secretly playing, during this research but ‘attuned with excitement in the enactment of life’ and thereby experiencing this pleasure of play [*Spiellust*] (Fink, 2016, p. 89), a space of “non-research” via the MAMIL’s emerged. In this liminal space (Spariosu, 2016), I ‘trained’ for my mimetic research, ‘hidden’, and I trained for ‘Ghent-Wevelgem.’ Precisely in this space, I could shape the explanation of Wuyts and De Craemer (2018) definition of *chasse patate*: ‘chasing what grows underground’ (2018, p. 48). I was able to grasp what ‘grows beneath’ through the interpretation of cycling jargon.

The Helmet of Calimero

The researcher explains.

After her sudden death, I carried my mother’s life with me for years. Her life of relying on self-help books was packed and unpacked during my numerous moves.

One of her self-help books talked about how traumas make you trust something you already know. I don’t remember which book it was, but I recalled it because I made a comparison to Calimero, which helped me understand. Calimero is a little chick from the children’s series *Calimero* that I used to watch in the 1970s. Calimero wears an eggshell with a crack in it on his head. He is fused with this eggshell, never taking it off, even though it has a crack. ‘I am Calimero, not aware of the crack in my eggshell,’ I realised when reading the book *A Hippo in the House* by Finnish therapist Tommy Hellsten (2002).

The play philosopher looks back.

It read it in the period after my first round of field research, ending with the encounter with the priest. The period when I cycled all the war cycling routes laid out in the Westhoek. The period in which I explored where in the Westhoek the landscape simultaneously reveals the playing field of cycling and former battlefields. The period when I eventually started wandering through cemeteries and subsequently felt ashamed about it.

This shame kept other feelings, such as curiosity, away, preventing the development of action perspectives. This also made it impossible for me to thematise and contextualise this shame philosophically, perhaps combined with political elements (Krog, 1999) or with the war itself (Schlink, 1997).

The researcher continues.

Hellsten (2002) wrote *A Hippo in the House* as an expert by experience. He is the child of parents who both struggled with alcoholism. From this perspective, he writes about parents who choose the wrong generation as their conversation partners, preventing the child from being a child.

The play philosopher adds.

Hellsten (2002) describes these actions of his parents without passing moral judgment on them, without any condemnation.

The researcher goes back to the story about the inheritance of the books.

I have now disposed of the vast majority of her books. This occurred during decluttering sessions, which almost always coincided with holidays. Consequently, my attic with moving boxes full of self-help books, grew emptier with each passing summer.

These books, along with psychotherapy, but also dance therapy, helped my mother in the struggle to escape from what she called the 'shelter.'

Throughout her life, my mother felt like she was still living in the bomb shelter where she had been in her childhood. She described it as gum stuck to your fingers, that you can't shake off, even though it seems so simple. She hoped she would eventually get out. She occasionally shared this desire with me. "What do you think?" she would ask, "Am I out of it yet?" "Yes," I would

always say, and I'd nod to emphasise the answer. What else could we do? She hoped she would grow old.

The play philosopher describes.

My mother was born in 1940, just after the Second World War broke out in the Netherlands. She was born in Renkum, a village, as the name still indicates, in a bend of the river Rhine, situated between the river and the expansive forest area of the Veluwezoom. Renkum is about ten kilometres west of the provincial capital Arnhem, which is also located on this river.

She was four years old when she and her mother were evacuated in September 1944. Renkum had come under fire during the failed Operation Market Garden, an Allied attempt to end the war before winter. Unexpectedly, the Allies encountered significant resistance from German troops around the Rhine near Arnhem. This tragic attempt was later described by Ryan (1974) in his book *A Bridge Too Far*. The book was adapted into a film with the same title, directed by Richard Attenborough, in 1977.

For my mother, evacuation meant walking in a long procession of people from Renkum to Ede, a distance of about ten kilometres. She told me she had just started school a few weeks before the evacuation began. She had been looking forward to going to school, learning to read and write. Very early in her life, she knew that it was too late when she returned to school in August 1945 as a five-year-old. 'I will never make up for this delay,' she knew.

The researcher adds.

My mother and I have walked 'her' evacuation regularly since this route has largely become a hiking trail managed by the NS (Nederlandse Spoorwegen, National Railway). Just as evacuations in Belgium have become cycling routes known as 'Aller-Retour' and 'No Man's Land' in dangerous war zones, the failed landing in 1944 above the Ginkelse heath is part of an NS hiking route.

From the train station in Wolfheze, along the railway to the unguarded crossing. Then, to the left over the Ginkelse heath where the landing of

'thousands and thousands of paratroopers' took place, and finally descending to Oosterbeek.

"Where were the Germans then?" I asked her once during a break, while we were resting on a bench. I tried to get this wartime experience out of her during these walks, but it was always in vain. "Well, here," my mother replied and pointed around with her apple in her hand. "And here." From the look on her face, I immediately saw that all the parachutists and all the German soldiers were still there. I was shocked. I looked around.

I looked and looked. Where, where? I looked at a tree stump that wouldn't turn into a tired soldier with a beret and wild hair. A little further away, a stick leaning against the trash can would not turn into a rifle. I looked at my mother. She was engrossed in her apple core, wrinkles forming around her nose as she tried to smile at me. We walked on. We were silent. We often were. When I couldn't bear her silence any longer, I asked her the names of the flowers we saw. During her life, she had collected many books about plants and flowers. If she didn't know, she made up the names. For example, 'Yellow Tumbleweed,' she would say when she examined the yellow flower at my request. The strange thing was that the yellow flower then became the 'Yellow Tumbleweed.' I teased her. 'Are you sure it's not the extinct but resurrected Little Yellow Phoenix Flower?' She chuckled then. Now it was quiet. When she had answered my question for the first time.

'Did you see dead Germans, too?' I asked when we walked side by side again a little later. 'Yes,' she said. 'At the end of the street.'

'Of your street?' I repeated because I expected her to point out places in the forest.

'Yes.'

'From the Markweg?'

'Yes.'

'What did you see?'

'That he was dead.'

I was somewhat disappointed. I tried to picture the dead German soldier: Blonde boy, a red hole burned in his forehead.

The play philosopher interprets and provides context.

Years after her death, I understand a little how difficult it is to escape from the shelter, and I also begin to understand why she asked me this question so often.

I was born in a flat in Arnhem in the Presikhaaf district. According to my mother, going outside was dangerous. Our flat overlooked a busy road and a railway line a little further away. The danger disappeared when I turned five and moved to the village of Duiven.

The swing philosopher adds.

I got a bike, and my father taught me how to ride it.

I was ‘road captain.’ For hours I played ‘cycling’ as I stood on guard, checking the developments in the race, with my paper helmet and purple *Gazelle* children’s bike.

The researcher expands the memory.

My mother didn’t like it: cycling wasn’t for girls. ‘Cycling makes your legs fat,’ she said. Although things like ‘falling in love’ didn’t exist in our village, my mother seemed to have a great fear that I would become unattractive because of cycling and would be ‘left behind’ as she put it. Duiven had deep black asphalt and conifers everywhere, but there was nothing in our village that resembled marriage, excitement, or sex.

The play philosopher adds.

I still remember how elastic I was as a child in transforming into concepts. In that sense, I understand Huizinga’s passage as I catch it as a summarisation. In the atmosphere of a child, in the atmosphere of play, I was road captain: Being ‘road captain’ within the awareness that it is in the sphere of play. ‘The child plays in complete—we can well say, in sacred—earnest. But it plays and knows that it plays’ (1950, p. 18).

The swing philosopher takes over.

When I learned to cycle in Duiven, I already knew: *in play, I am a man*, because for me, ‘being a man’ was much more fun. And in play, I could be one. In play, I can be anything! And since play is an integral part of my life as a child (Fink,

2016, p. 17), the agility of play still coincides with the elasticity of concepts. In play, I was a man: both young and mature, close to being old. I was serious, responsible, I had an overview. And at the same time, I was nine. I knew I was playing the role of road captain but in this game, I was road captain.

The researcher adds:

Probably in the summer when I turned ten, I cycled less, or possibly not at all, with paper helmets. I can't remember, and I can't ask anymore. What I do know is that at the end of that summer, my mother showed me the newspaper. 'Look, a Dutch female cyclist has become the world champion!' She pointed to a photo in the newspaper.

The swing philosopher specifies.

I saw a beautiful woman. Impossible, because what I saw were beautiful legs: my legs, in a beautiful black bib short. It was a blow: it was possible! But I was too late. I had learned from my father that if I wanted to become a world champion, I had to start early. Great athletes start really early, he said. Ten is actually already too late, I realised. It was a tough decision when I looked at her in the newspaper.

The researcher lists the Dutch world champions.

Keetie Oosten-Hage and Tineke Fopma: Two women who came from the Netherlands and became world champions during the period when I was the road captain. I didn't know of their existence. And when I learned of their existence, they were still less real than Joop Zoetemelk or Hennie Kuiper.

Elaboration of Fink's notion of mimesis

The play philosopher elaborates the notion of mimesis by Fink's critique.

Fink argues that an examination of play requires a return to Plato's theory of imitation. In his work *The Republic* (Plato, 2000, trans. Ferarri & Griffith), Plato expresses his view of play as inferior, subordinating it to Reason. Plato's low estimation of play parallels his low regard for poetry and art. Through what Fink calls a 'world-historical decision,' (Fink, 2016, p. 99). Plato introduces an epistemological split in our culture, distinguishing art as play and philosophy

and science as serious and moral. Plato perceives play as inferior because it involves imitation. In this view, art is considered a lesser action. In Plato's theory of imitation, the concept of mimesis revolves around the representation of the original. Plato elucidates how various artistic expressions—such as theatre, visual arts, and poetry—create illusions rather than knowledge. In Plato's worldview, the 'World of Forms' described in *The Republic*, refers to a non-material realm where archetypal Forms exist as perfect and eternal ideals, serving as the originals for the manifestations observed in the sensory and observable world (Plato, 2000). When artists subsequently imitate these Forms through mediums like theatre or sculpture, they are replicating the materialised form, diverting attention from the true origin and eroding the desire for and memory of the original. Plato envisions a realm where 'the true, the good, and the beautiful' transcend the world inhabited by humans as incarnated beings.

Additionally, according to Fink's analysis, something remarkable happens. Plato separates play from Being and Truth. He does this on epistemological grounds, in terms of non-truth compared to 'truth,' but also on ontological grounds. Plato defines play as 'unreal' or as 'Appearance' [*Schein*]. Fink argues that, due to the establishment of Western metaphysics, play has undergone an ontological change. Since then, play has been presented as a representation. '*Mimésis mimésós*. A reproduction of a reproduction' (Fink, 2016, p. 104). It is grasped as an imitation, a reflection defined as mimesis. The consequence of this ontological change of play is in a broader ontological context. Play has become an 'unreality' compared to 'reality' and is less than 'real' things. Play is just a 'paraphrase,' as Fink uses this term in his explanation. With this term, Fink indicates that play has had no essential cognitive value for philosophy since then (Fink, 2016, p. 229).

According to Fink, Plato devaluates play by connecting it to mimesis. Fink (2016) asserts that with this theory, Plato creates space to devalue the process of imitation. Instead of making a distinction between the original and imitation, Fink elaborates mimesis as appearance [*Erscheinung*]. This notion of appearance is a key notion in Fink's mimesis theory.

The Latin origin of the English word 'appearance,' '*apparere*,' reflects the ambiguity in '*non*' or '*ad*' 'to' and '*parere*,' 'to come forth,' 'appear.' Thus,

appearance is to non-appear and to appear at the same time. Similar to the English word “appear,” ‘*Schein*’ in German refers to the idea that things may not be as they seem. At the same time, there is ‘*Erscheinung*,’ ‘to come forth,’ which is ‘not nothing’ (Fink, 2016, p. 292). Yet, it is Plato’s, according to Fink, ontological claim that makes appearance [*Schein*] less valued.

In the analysis of Spariosu (1989), Fink reverses Plato’s dialectic of reality and unreality and shows that unreality is, in fact, more ‘real,’ more actual than reality because it is a mode of knowledge that comes closer to Being (Spariosu, 1989, p. 129).

In the playworld, actual things belong to the playworld, but they can have the character of an ‘ontic appearance’ (Fink, 2016, p. 29). A tree branch, for example, can be a riffle. Therefore, actual things in the playworld can be anything: ‘they are clothed with a subjective appearance stemming from the human soul’ (p. 29). Hence the non-actual entails the openness for coming to appearance.

Fink warns us that the ontic appearance (mirroring and the like) is more than just an analogy of the playworld. This means that he wants to take his endeavour out of the playworld. The playworld is worldly. All things are worldly, asserts Fink. With this view, he sets play in a cosmological context (Elden, 2008; Krell, 1972).

Since this study is approached from a philosophical anthropological perspective, I refer to chapter four of *Play as Symbol of the World* (Fink, 2016), to take notice of this rich world-significance of play and return for now to this anthropological perspective and explain Fink’s endeavour from there, by taking his train of thought on appearance out of the playworld.

According to Fink the human being can produce artificial things to which an aspect of ‘existing appearance belongs as well’ (Fink, 2016, p. 29). In the actual world, a unicorn or a different kind of image can appear in the actual world. Fink emphasises the transparency of the objective.

Both Plato and Fink use sensory observable metaphors to explain the philosophical notion of mimesis. Plato uses shadows and the function of a mirror. In response to Plato, Fink also employs a physical metaphor. He uses the example of the poplar appearing on a surface of water. If Fink states that

play is 'creativity and activity,' mimesis is grasped as generative rather than solely a reproduction of the so-called reality. For his explanation, Fink uses a poplar by the waterside. He does this deliberately. Plato uses objects present in the sensorily perceptible world.

Fink illustrates the concept of mimesis through the image of the surface of a lake, where a poplar tree from the shore appears. The transparency of the surface of the water on which something appears is, in addition to the appearance on this surface, the carrier of this metaphor. Fink wants to indicate that the water does not disappear when an appearance takes place.

Spariosu (1989) clarifies Fink's view by stating that, in Fink's conception, play is an intertwining of reality and appearance. Therefore, Spariosu elaborates that Fink, in his work, lifts the binary opposition that has been installed since Plato. Once the binary opposition has been lifted, there is room for the revision of imitation. Imitation is not a copy made by the 'demiurge,' as Plato asserts, and therefore, causing a loss in its transmission. Mimesis is generative in the eyes of Fink because it is coming to appear [*die Erscheinung*].

Ghent-Wevelgem

The researcher has not brought her dictaphone.

For this mass participation version, I decided not to cycle with my "earpieces." But when I'm in the car on my way to Wevelgem, where the starting point is, I immediately regret not bringing my recording equipment. Fortunately, there is always the voice recorder on the mobile phone.

'I'm in my car, it's 7:40 A.M, and I'm crying, and deciding to record this,' I say, crying into the smartphone and then laughing about it.

The big day of Ghent-Wevelgem is here. 'I'm on my way to Wevelgem, and I'm crying because Blondie was playing on the radio.' I was nine and in love with Blondie.

The swing philosopher specifies in detail.

She sang 'tennis, tennis.' Later, I understood that it was 'Denis, Denis.'

The researcher cries.

I continue recording on my phone: 'I've been designing this for years, something in me, very slowly; and I feel like this is just a kind of closure of a trauma; it took me 49 years. It's weird, while you do other things, trying to get rid of your trauma, and the trauma is that I was born in my mother's bomb shelter; and I was fine with that because I loved her. And when she died, I blamed myself because for one moment, I hadn't paid attention. And then, for twenty years, working on a body, from being able to run 200 meters, today I'm going to cycle 140 km; as proof or something; as closure; as a celebration; it's over, the war is over; it's 2019. And I'll probably keep crying all day hahaha.'

The play philosopher modifies.

On the route, I take a short break to record. I want to remember that I find Ghent-Wevelgem too real.

The researcher records on her phone the insights on creating a scale model.

'I've designed a small island here, with the tiny village Krombeke. The narrow country roads, the grass, the smell of mud, and the green. And Ludo the priest. I have designed a representation of Duiven. But I've essentially reversed the scale model. Hence, I've reversed the process of imitation. And that is my approach! I play in a self-constructed playworld, with graves that I cycle past: 'look, mama, war is over,' and I ride here in complete peace as a road captain. I know the way, and I've cycled down every little road here. It's about the reversal of scale: I've transformed small details into significant elements; therefore, I've created a space where I can truly play. This is possible because the playworld I designed is in the midst of a tangible context.'

The play philosopher moderates.

Shortly after climbing the Kemmelberg, I stop again to record: 'It's about emphasising autotelic play. Autotelic play allowed me to reverse the scale. By reversing the scale and designing a playworld, I interrupt reproduction but activate mimesis as a generative quality. Repeat: I interrupted reproduction by autotelic play!'

The researcher records after successfully climbing the Kemmelberg.

'This is so cool! But that's exactly where the sorrow hides, so we don't get close to it, so we forget it, and ignore it. I allow myself to lift up the smallest details in play: turning and returning to the Kemmelberg. Elaborating on page 101, embodying it, imagining what it's like to obtain a PhD on page 101, by being here, doing this. Yet, this can't be play!'

The swing philosopher objects.

But this is the real Kemmelberg.

The researcher grasps.

And that's exactly why I don't like the 'real' Ghent-Wevelgem: my scale doesn't fit in a reproduction. Because it forces me into thinking in representation, in originality-thinking. That's the big mistake.



Figure 4.1 Sunday ride with De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers.



Figure 4.2 Mimicking Frank Vandenbroucke.



Figure 4.3 Mass Participation version Omloop Het Nieuwsblad.



Figure 4.4 Frank Vandenbroucke VIP Tour.

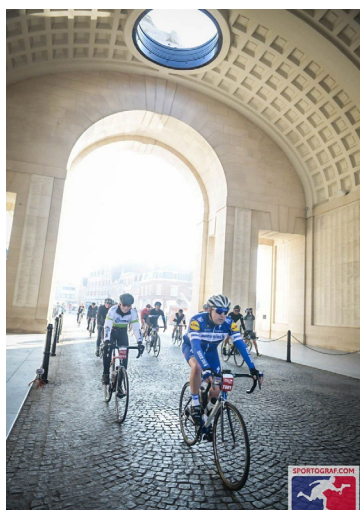


Figure 4.5 Mass participation version Ghent - Wevelgem.

CHAPTER 5 THE EMBODIMENT OF FINK'S THOUGHTS IN FLANDERS FIELDS

Introduction

The play philosopher provides an introduction.

After 'Ghent–Wevelgem', it seemed to be only a matter of time to shape my field research experiences into my PhD thesis. The title I had conceived for this, *Fink in Flanders Fields*, would still be fitting, since it encapsulates Fink's interpretation of mimesis.

Fink emphasises the productive, creative power of mimesis. Imitation is more than just a form of representation; it is appearance (Spariosu, 1989). Especially through this specific practical research, it would be possible to demonstrate the effectiveness of actually playing this philosophical notion. But that wasn't the only aspect.

With these results, I would have more than enough data to analyse how productive mimesis has a healing effect on a person. It is a creative force that shapes human existence. My human existence, in this case; with my inter-generational war-issues. Where I placed my mother's mental suffering in a landscape and played within it. My thesis would be that appearance, I would be suggesting that, from a phenomenological perspective, appearance always needs a place. My conclusion would be that play phenomenology is a practical ontology.

However, precisely the combination of this healing effect and the fact that I experienced the productive function of mimesis in play created a significant pitfall. I linked these two together.

From a philosophical anthropological approach to the philosophical concept of productive mimesis in play, I went on psychologise the outcomes. And this happens to be precisely the warning that Fink issues:

'In our century that is plagued by the racket of machines', as he describes

the centuries since the rise of industrialization, the attention to play has indeed increased, but play, however, 'It is thought to be a remedy for the harms of a contemporary technocratic civilization' (Fink, 2016, p. 14).

Fink points to the domains of pedagogy, cultural sciences, and literature, where play is described to have a beneficial effect on the mind in the busy seriousness of human life. As said, 'a remedy' but also a 'vital impulse' and a 'life-renewing power' (Fink, 2016, p. 14). Even I was on the verge of joining in by developing a concept that posits mimesis as a form of philosophical action with generative effects for humanity. Was I afraid that by letting go of the healing effect of mimesis I would have to let go of the idea that my mother could be healed?

The researcher interrupts.

But how can my interpretation of mimesis still feel like philosophy if, in my attempt to elaborate, I noticed that I was replacing philosophical domains with a psychological interpretation?

The play philosopher responds.

Perhaps because Eugen Fink's concept of play is indeed multidimensional (Boronat, 2016). A synthesis of three philosophical fields: cosmology, ontology, and philosophical anthropology.

The researcher wonders.

And did I grasp it from a cosmological perspective after all?

The play philosopher denotes the cosmological perspective.

The concept of 'wholeness' in Fink finds its articulation from a cosmological perspective. The notion of 'whole' is not something that was once broken, but is conceived within the concept of entirety. Fink connects this cosmological perspective to his philosophical anthropology when he speaks about the human image from this cosmic view: 'die Ergänzung durch das Ganze' (Fink, 2010, p. 123), the completion by the whole' stating that all finite things are 'fragments' [*Bruchstücke*], (Fink, 2010, p.122) of the world-whole.

The play philosopher emphasises the direction.

Essential to understanding this worldview is the direction of thought.

Fink thinks in terms of this world-whole. 'Thus, we must think the completion from the world-whole and not from an intraworldly wholeness' (Fink, 2016, p. 121). So, it is expressly not about making something 'whole' but 'rather precisely of conceiving innerworldly wholeness as such a fragment' (p. 121).

Critique on Fink's conception of humanity

The researcher presents a counterargument.

Nevertheless, in Fink's thinking, there was once a wholeness in the life of a human being, but it has shattered. It is this shattering that leads to the disintegration of the childhood world: 'die heile Kindheitswelt zerbricht' (Fink, 2010, p. 14). In this statement about 'shattering the intact world of childhood' (Fink, 2016, p. 17), Eugen Fink seems to omit this cosmic direction of thought. Moreover, it appears to be an inconsistency in his thinking. It seems inconsistent because in this 'intraworldly,' as Fink calls it, the world of the human beings, there evidently is a world that can break: the healing childhood world that shatters in a person's life. And in order to clarify this, I use the original German writing where he speaks of 'heil'.

'Heil' in German means 'whole', more than the English translation of "intact". The German notion 'heil' means 'remedy' or 'heal' as well. Hence it says that the 'whole' (or the 'heal') childhood world shatters.

The play philosopher draws a conclusion.

Therefore, I realised that the likelihood of staying true to Fink's philosophical principles lies in the subject matter where a child experiences play as the centre of its existence.

It becomes apparent that in his conception of humanity, Fink regards the child as a pure being. Perhaps more importantly, this realisation extends to Fink's conception of play in the childhood world. Fink also denotes play as pure, as the child experiences itself at the centre of its existence during play. 'Play in children still appears to be an intact sphere of existence' (Fink, 2016, p. 18). However, there is an important distinction: It seems that play in

childhood is not devalued as it has been in adulthood since Plato's time, as Fink asserts.

'Play is considered to be an element of childhood. But soon the course of life drives out such a "sphere" [*Mitte*, centre], shattering the intact world of childhood' (Fink, 2016, p. 18). Fink argues that in the course of a person's life, a rupture occurs, and an adult no longer has access to the intact sphere of existence. As children, however, we experienced this intact sphere through play. For Fink, the rupture means losing access to this sphere. 'The course of life' drives us from it. But Fink avoids elaborating on whether this course could also be (partly) philosophically determined.

This is mainly due to the still prevailing idea that play forms a binary opposition to the real: a linkage that, according to Fink, has been established and installed by Plato. However, if I read Fink closely, this installation extends beyond Western philosophy. The "Platonic perspective" seems to manifest itself in various fields, for example the domain of pedagogy, which interprets the ontology of play as an interruption of 'real' life. It thus seems as if Fink himself aligns with Plato's perspective while also criticising it. Adulthood may be different than childhood: life might have shattered childhood, but there can't be a difference within the ontology of play between childhood play and adulthood play. However, if Fink states that childhood is shattered, and if he is criticising the devaluation of play since Plato, and also asserts that an adult plays differently than a child, 'more secretly, in a more masked manner' (Fink, 2016, p. 18), then the question arises: What are the masks for in play? And is it the ultimate proof of how challenging it is for a adult and a contemporary thinker to escape the still prevailing influence of Plato's views on play?

As a contemporary thinker, am I capable of operationalising the ontology of play - experienced as the centre of my existence in my childhood - in adulthood, without resorting to psychological frameworks? And what is needed in order to do this? This was my starting point to break out of the impasse of thinking and writing.

About Playthings

The play philosopher continues.

I quickly found a starting point in the subject of playthings/toys [*Spielzeug*]. Toys are present both in children's play and in adult life. When a child plays with a ball or a bike, it is referred to as a toy. When an adult plays with a ball or a bike, it is equally a toy. Fagen (2011) would wonder if an adult denotes these objects of play as 'toys'.

I certainly wouldn't describe my Specialized Roubaix racing bike as a toy. I would say 'I brought my racing bike with me for research purposes.' But when, secretly of course, for fun, I played a page from the autobiography *I Am Not God* (2009) by Frank Vandenbroucke, where he describes how to win Ghent-Wevelgem, then my bike might indeed be a toy.

My purple Gazelle children's bike was a toy, even though it was a 'good' bike that I had to be careful with. In fact, according to my mother, my beautiful purple Gazelle bike was not a toy at all. 'It's not a toy!' my mother warned. But it became one when I played with it. This action, playing with goods and thus turning them into toys, supports Fink's statement about toys. 'What is a toy, a child can answer' (Fink, 1995, p. 365). However, Eugen Fink does not further explain this claim. Given the notion of 'purity' with which he earlier described the child, I suspect that he means a child is (still) free from any moral embedding and can play with anything (thus activating the transcendent function of toys).

I can connect this transcendent function of toys to my mother's fear. My mother's statement that my (childhood) bike was 'not a toy' fits into a vision of Fink. In her thinking, she gives meaning to Fink when he points out that the nature of toys is 'a dark and complicated problem' (Fink, 1995, p. 365). Toys are complex because, according to Fink, toys potentially have a magical character. He explains that this magical character arises because toys have two realms [*bereichen*]: 'An ordinary reality and an unreal imaginary atmosphere' (p. 366). He explains that when goods are played with, they can become something else, while the material of the toy itself does not change. These can be items that have been produced with the intention

of them being toys, such as sports equipment - a football, a basketball net, a baseball bat - and children's toys like a *He-Man* figurine or *Pokémon* et cetera, but they don't have to be. Fink gives an example of a piece of wood that a girl plays with. The wood becomes a 'child.' In this capacity, the girl becomes a 'mother.' Something changes in the existence of the girl and the wood, while they do not perceptibly change outwardly. Fink connects the two realms of toys and the doubling in play. With these two realms there are two existences at the same time as it were. The girl playing exists in two spheres: she is a child and a 'mother' simultaneously. Therefore, both the character of toys and the role being played have a magical nature. Toys exist within simple actuality and simultaneously have another mysterious reality.

From this concept of toys and Fink's description that toys are a dark and complex problem, I now understand my mother much better. She linked her fear that I wanted to become a cyclist to my play on my purple Gazelle children's bike. The 'magic of play' (Fink, 2016, p. 18) could be unleashed because I played with my purple Gazelle children's bike as a toy.

In a 'dark and complicated' way, toys and playing were thus connected to sexuality. For her. As an adult. It wasn't until I no longer played with my brown paper helmets that my mother pointed at Keetie Oosten-Hage in the newspaper. "Look!" she said, and pointed at the newspaper, "she's become the world champion!" Apparently, the danger had disappeared when I took off this helmet.

The researcher asks herself:

Do I have a fear or embarrassment regarding toys, similar to my mother's? Because I don't refer to my bike as a toy. However, I don't hear any other adult denoting their bike as a toy either. Do we all share a similar kind of fear, like my mother, seeing toys as a dark and complicated problem in our modern adult lives? Or is this implication too carelessly generalised?

I reflect on my mother's inadvertent conflation. Has embarrassment arisen around the term "toy" due to the nature of toys, that they can ignite this magic? Because magic is uncertain, and the term 'toy' has become a sexualised term in an adult's life. Sex toys, for example, are indeed referred

to as toys.

It reminds me of the controversy and ethical discussion that arose around the shirt sponsorship of the football club F.C. Emmen by *Easy Toys*, a company that sells erotic products. Initially, the Dutch football association (KNVB) prohibited FC Emmen from having this company as a shirt sponsor (NRC, 2020a; NRC, 2020b).

The play philosopher analyses and draws a conclusion.

Adults play with toys, even though adults seem to not label them as such when they play football with a ball or cycle on a Sunday morning with a racing bike (Bateman, 2018; Eichberg, 2015, 2018; Fagen, 2011; Pellegrini, 2011; Sicart, 2017). This concrete toy, through being played with, has the ability to be in two realms. By explaining the ontological nature of toys as the ontology of play, Fink is able to establish a connection with the possibility for humans to transcend the life they are living in the world, that is the 'intrawordly' aspects of this human life, and play as worldly, since from a philosophical perspective, the ontology of play shows that all things can be in two realms: a child becomes a 'mother' if the piece of wood in her playworld is a 'child'. Hence the child is in two realms – child and mother, but the piece of wood is in two realms as well: it is wood and a 'child'.

Therefore, based on this cosmic vision, Fink refers to the cosmic as the worldly. As mentioned, the cosmological lens determines Fink's direction of thought. This means that for Fink, it is crucial that in theoretical considerations, play in human life is expanded beyond just childhood play. 'In the end it is not 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' (Fink, 2016, p. 18).

The connection between the ontology of play and cosmology is a matter of existence for humans. But, as per Fink's reasoning, if play remains confined to childhood, he cannot make this plausible. Therefore, Fink emphasises that adults do play. They play differently than children, he asserts. This 'but differently' is possible because, unlike a child, an adult has masks at their disposal.

The embodiment of Fink's playing 'more secretly, more masked'

Conducting field research in the form of embodying the ontology of play myself has brought me a great deal. The greatest good I have found is that as an adult, I played secretly. But in my view, this is different from playing masked.

I wasn't so much 'masked' at the German cemeteries. Instead, I secretly fantasised about Gunther, a non-existent soldier who always appeared as the professional cyclist 'Marcel Kittel'. Secretly, I fantasised about this successful German sprinter. I imagined him telling me he had always been interested in philosophy and expressing appreciation for how I made it so practical. I fantasised that we were collaborating on a big project about mental health in professional sports. Secretly, I made plans.

Secretly, I enjoyed playing a professional cyclist. And secretly, I brought my mother to life and showed her, as a grown-up road captain, that the war was over. And noticing that I had increased the scale and built a collage of 'peace in Duiven' in the surroundings of the municipality of Heuvelland in Belgium, officially for PhD purposes. Secretly, I played on my racing bike. Around Ploegsteert, I played that I was Chantal's son who lives like a monk and in all his cycling devotion has dedicated himself to cycling. Secretly, I enjoyed my short-cropped blonde hair. Secretly, I enjoyed my tiny but sparkling diamond earring. It sparkles just as brightly as the one on the cover of Frank's autobiography *I Am Not God*. Definitely secretly, I applied all kinds of fake tattoos such as the image of Mother Mary on my upper arm, that just about did, or just about didn't, peek out from under my red *Lotto* bike sleeves. With great secret pleasure, I applied more of them, and couldn't care less that they could eventually be seen all over my arms. Secretly, I thought the resemblance with Frank Vandenbroucke was quite convincing. Secretly, I relished the idea that I could very well be him; after all, we were only five years apart. Therefore, top secretly, I enjoyed the thought that when I met Chantal during the VDB VIP Tour, she saw the resemblance too.

On the other hand, I did play masked because of the reason I was there: field research, collecting the experiences of middle-aged men in Lycra while

cycling. I could very easily deploy this role of researcher as a mask. I played while cycling in my *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* outfit. During the Sunday rides, but also when I wore it to cycle the mass participation version of Ghent - Wevelgem.

From this point of view, I played as a human being, already engaging in a dual existence. I operated as a person in two 'realms,' namely masked and secretly. I played secretly precisely because in this form of play, I experienced the absence of a mask. I felt exposed and concealed this play because what I engaged in was 'childish': a woman approaching fifty who wanders among graves and has imaginary conversations about intergenerational war issues with Marcel Kittel. A woman who, in playing, doubles as well: a woman, masked as a researcher, secretly playing Frank Vandenbroucke and in doing so, being Frank Vandenbroucke.

Playing secretly is a result of masked play

Fink's criticism of Plato is that the latter perceives play as reproduction, thereby disenchanting play, according to Fink. Plato interprets mimesis as reproduction; if play is mimetic, then it reproduces.

Certainly, play possesses a mimetic character. However, that is not the sole characteristic of play, argues Fink. Additionally, repetition is inherent in humans. Consequently, Fink deems Plato's argument, denigrating play by asserting its imitative nature, as weak. In the hypothetical debate between Fink and Plato (Fink, 2016, pp. 88-124), the crux lies in how we perceive "the 'non-actuality' of the playworld" (Fink, 2016, p. 114).

Fink's critique extends beyond a mere philosophical perspective; it aligns with a broader epistemological discourse. Rather than the term 'discourse,' Fink suggests that 'war' is more appropriate in this context (2016, p. 112).

In this case, the realm of the 'unreal playworld' can be very mysterious. Fink subscribes to this classical view of play where fantasy serves as a source of knowledge. 'The region of the unreal playworld could be the mysterious and ambiguous sphere where what is more existent and more powerful than all

things would come to appearance amid things' (Fink, 2016, p. 115).

The word fantasy is derived from the Greek word *phaino*, meaning 'I show' or 'I shine.' Thus, it originally belongs to the knowledge source of play, just like enthusiasm, according to Fink.

The notion of enthusiasm also has its origins in Greek. It comes from the Greek word *entheos*, composed of *en*, meaning 'in,' and *theos*, meaning 'god.' Thus, etymologically, enthusiasm refers to a state of being inspired or filled with divine inspiration.

'Enthusiasm that is not conceptually broken cannot and may not count for him as the higher form of life – he must subordinate it to thought. And the interpretation of play as *mimèsis* becomes the weapon in this war' (Fink, 2016, p. 112).

With play as imitation, a weapon was found in the establishment of this philosophy, asserts Fink. Philosophy found and gained self-awareness by opposing the play structure that, in this way, provided a comprehending form to the world through myth and tragedy. Play has been unmasked, according to Fink, by the 'critical gaze' of Plato's metaphysical thinking. The problem, he notes, is that we still find ourselves in that situation today. Contemporary humans are embedded in this metaphysical thinking. Consequently, Fink argues that we are no longer capable of questioning whether it is good that play has been unmasked because we cannot think outside the framework of metaphysical thinking.

Thus is play unmasked for the critical gaze of metaphysical thought. And if we want to pose the question as to whether this unmasking is ultimately right, then we cannot do so from a standpoint outside this one: the situation of our question is already stamped and co-determined by the history of the metaphysical tradition. (Fink, 2016, p. 107)

Hence, in addition to the disenchantment that Fink speaks of, caused by Plato perceiving play as imitation, play has also been unmasked. But this raises a question: does Fink's latter conclusion hold true? Is it accurate when he says that play is unmasked for the critical gaze of metaphysical thinking?

I, in fact, perceive the opposite and see that play is not unmasked, but rather masked. If play is dis-enchantment, as Fink claims, then play must

be masked.

It wears the mask of the 'margin' and declares, 'I serve the serious.' Play dons the mask of 'another world' and states, 'I am a temporarily exclusive place outside the real world.' It seems that Fink, in drawing conclusions about what has happened to play through metaphysical thinking, only takes one aspect of these consequences into account in the actions of the playing human.

Fink argues that adults play, but he avoids the implication that play is indeed masked due to devaluation. However, in my experience of playing, I discerned a distinction between masked and secret play. It was precisely in my secretive play that I experienced the devaluation of play and, therefore, recognised that play itself wears a mask. Fink's interpretation, however, differs. As mentioned, he does not distinguish between these notions. This makes it seem as though secret and masked are synonymous. He then elaborates only on the latter term. An adult plays masked because, in contrast to a child, they have a multitude of masks available. This enables the adult to play various roles.

The researcher interrupts.

But here's the remarkable thing: While playing, I don't so much experience roles, but rather enthusiasm, the ability to invent, the enjoyment of temporarily seeing things differently, I sense freedom, and it activates a call for adventure. I then conceal these experiences behind the mask of play that says, 'I am childish.' However, this 'mask' can only fit because play itself is masked. So, naturally, I hide this joy, this enthusiasm, and I don't openly share fantastic images. Nevertheless, according to Fink, I find myself in metaphysical thinking. This thinking dictates that I suppress this enthusiasm and perceive my fantasies as a malevolent magical force. I suppress them and hardly acknowledge them at all. On the contrary, I feel shame. This childishness, in turn, is once again masked. With judgments in question-form, such as: 'What am I, as a woman, doing in the Westhoek on my Specialized Roubaix bike, with my brand-new sparkling earring, with my temporary tattoos of Mother Mary, on my way to Ploegsteert?'

The play philosopher analyses.

I only dared to feel the joy, my enthusiasm, my imagination when I could connect it to my research. The enjoyment, the joy of cycling, the delight in inventing and designing research, but also in playing it for as long as possible (De Koven, 2013), disappeared. I found my earring silly, my fake tattoos childish.

In hindsight, I think that the shame - about my enthusiasm, about experiencing the power of fantasy - which suppressed the joy of play, may also have had consequences for my play research.

Remarkably enough, I hesitated to read a specific work by Fink. This book, *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* (1995) [*Fundamental Phenomena of Human Existence*], was only published in German and released posthumously. I hesitated to read it, not so much because of the difficulty of the German language, but because I was afraid of the book. Somehow, it held me back.

The researcher describes.

Throughout all rounds of my field research in Belgium, I carried that book with me. Each time I was in the holiday home between Reningerelst and Westouter, overlooking the Flemish mountains, the thick book with its bright orange cover stood in the cupboard. And each time, I felt shame. A philosopher who is afraid of a philosophy book.

Although I am aware that Nietzsche (2020) and Sartre (2010) have written eloquently about shame, to me it felt like a black hole sucking in all the light. A bright orange book, resembling a *Hippo in the living room* (Hellsten, 2002). When Sartre (2010) suggests that shame keeps you human, even when stripped of humanity in all other ways. Nietzsche (2020) posits that the reddening of your face indicates your humanity. Shame, however, felt vivid but also deathly painful for me. While I acknowledge Sartre and Nietzsche's perspectives, I find the engulfing suction more of a vivid experience of shame than a humanising one. Shame over a book, shame that I'm not a true philosopher, shame, shame, shame.

‘Guilt immobilizes you; I prefer shame,’ notes South African writer Antjie Krog (Krog, 1999, p. 161). She attends the Reconciliation Tribunal of the Apartheid Commission and listens to Nomfunda Walaza. Walaza, a clinical psychologist, argues that guilt immobilises and leads to inaction. Shame remains alive: in all its pain, it shows that it lives.

‘Der Mensch Spielt, wo er das Dasein feiert’ (Fink, 1995, p. 414). ‘The human plays where he celebrates existence’ (Fink, 2016, p. 319). With this last sentence, the editor of the ‘Gesamtausgabe,’ in which both *Oasis of Happiness* and *Play as symbol of the world* are included, concludes to emphasise ‘the festive character of play’ (p. 319). With this sentence ‘By playing, we celebrate our existence’ (Boronat, 2016, p. 95), the Spanish philosopher Nuria Sara Miras Boronat begins her essay.

But how? The notion ‘celebrating’ sounds so carefree. How can this be? What has ‘this human being’ done to play and even celebrate their existence? I was jealous of ‘the human being.’ The ‘Being’ that, according to Fink, we all are. But how?

The swing philosopher compares the book to ‘Paddington Bear’.

I was able to borrow the bright orange book *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* from the Utrecht University library without interruption. In all these years, no one has requested the book. But despite not reading the book, I didn’t return it; each time, I extended, extended, and extended it.

Like Paddington Bear was one day found at a train station, the book with the bright orange cover became my bear; one day ending up in the storage of a university library.

Fink's Fundamental phenomena of human existence

The researcher notes.

Remarkably, I recognised the fear of this book when I finally dared to read it, causing the shame to disappear. Fink writes about fear and connects the experience of fear with the fact that as humans, we don't have a complete overview of our position in the cosmos. As humans, we are still discovering galaxies, and we don't fully comprehend the extent of the space we inhabit. According to Fink, this fear and uncertainty are part of our human existence. To exist is also to be afraid.

The play philosopher provides context.

Fink clearly wants to move away from the point of view of philosophical idealism. He connects his cosmological vision to the human image of human scale and understanding. A human knows that it doesn't know everything.

Human reason is not declared the authority that can solve all the puzzles and mysteries of life, on the contrary: the force of thought and the power of its development does not diminish or lessen the mystery of being, of life, and our own existence. Understanding does not triumph by resolving and dismissing all that is incomprehensible in humans, by rationalizing love and death, but it opens up to us, more fundamentally than we otherwise know, the profound depth of the problem of existence itself (Fink, 1995, p. 54) **vi**

Fink suggests that human reason cannot solve all the mysteries of life; instead, it acknowledges their complexity without diminishing them. The emphasis is on humility, celebrating the depth of human existence rather than striving for a comprehensive explanation for everything. Therefore, it touches on epistemology and philosophical anthropology.

Understanding is linked to one's existence. 'Was ist der Mensch? Wer sind wir?' (Fink, 1995, p. 105). What is man? Who are we? According to Fink, this human existence can be understood through structures. He identifies five phenomena: death, work, struggle, love, and play. 'Essentially the human being is a *worker, player, lover, fighter* and *mortal* (pp. 105-106). **vii**

They are elementary and therefore cannot be reduced to any other phenomenon (Boronat, 2016). This means that Fink's conception of humanity is plural 'The existential basic phenomena not only constitute the ontological structure of human being, but they are also possibilities and paths of human

self-awareness' (Fink, 1995, p. 436). In contrast to Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, which emphasises the human as a playing being, Fink's view suggests that we are more than solely playing beings. Hence, contrary to well-known examples depicting the human being, such as the 'thinking being' (*Homo sapiens*) or a 'making being' (*Homo faber*), Fink diversifies the conceptualisation of the human being. Within human existence, these fundamental phenomena are intertwined with each other, he argues. They exist not so much side by side, but permeating one another.

Play belongs essentially 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 are interwoven and entwined. They do not occur next to each other in isolation; they permeate and pervade one another. Every such fundamental phenomenon thoroughly determines the human being. (Fink, 2016, p. 18)

Concisely summarised, they form a structure of five existential fundamental phenomena of humanity. However, Schütz & Schwarz (Fink, 1995) emphasize that Fink's fundamental phenomena are misunderstood when considered merely as a logical relationship already objectively predisposed by a specific thematic orientation. 'This understanding is embedded in the existential dialectic of openness to the world, with human existence directed towards a radically worldly conceived anthropology based on the questions of Being, truth and world' (Fink, 1995, p. 455).

These fundamental phenomena of human existence revolve around human orientation. We constantly orient ourselves with and within our existence. Partly, our orientation is already predetermined by science, humanities, earth sciences, jurisprudence, that is, institutional establishments. Fink thus advocates for self-presence, self-awareness [*Selbstvergegenwärtigung*] and particularly avoids 'zoological or theological categories.' (Fink, 1995, p. 108). More than Johan Huizinga (1950) who emphasises culture, and more than Hans-Georg Gadamer (1990), Fink thoroughly elaborates on how play essentially belongs to the ontological constitution of human existence.

In *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins*, Fink discusses these five fundamental phenomena. He addresses the fundamental phenomenon of play last. Fink is quick to add that this does not mean that play, as a fundamental phenomenon, is the least important. On the contrary, the fundamental phenomenon of play is unique because it can encompass all other phenomena, including itself. Therefore, it is able to imagine all aspects of life. Death can be played, all aspects of love, power, work, and even play itself: playing that you are playing. The imaginative power belongs to the foundational phenomenon of play, asserts Fink. Therefore, play is the 'condition of possibility' for a human because it can imagine itself. We don't know exactly how we are situated in the cosmos, yet we are able to imagine it. And for the many things we don't understand, we are able to imagine them. The human death eludes understanding, but we can imagine what it would be like and therefore play is able to make appear the negative, the 'non' (Fink, 1995, p. 387).

The researcher notes that what Fink often overlooks is the lack of a clear distinction between the discussion of play as an activity (human play) and play as a fundamental phenomenon.

This ambiguity is partly attributable to the German language, where the term "Spiel" serves as both a noun ('game' or 'play') and a verb ('to play') (Fink, 2016, p. 10). However, the nuance becomes more intricate, as 'Spiel' can denote both the action of play and the concept of play. For example, in the sentence 'Ich spiel Fußball' ('I play football'), 'spiel' functions as the German equivalent of 'play' in English, referring specifically to the action of playing football. Consequently, in Fink's work, it remains unclear whether he is referencing playing as a fundamental phenomenon or play as a fundamental phenomenon.

Relationship between play as an end in itself and play as an instrument

The researcher continues.

There was another point that I would take from this issue of secret and masked play. And that was my role as my point of departure. I could play secretly from a fundamental phenomenon that Fink names in particular: work. In this notion, I managed to distinguish the difference between secret play and masked play. But

more importantly, to recognise the secret aspect. With work and play as two of the five fundamental phenomena, I could recognise their permeability and understand that they are interwoven with each other.

The play philosopher adds.

When Fink talks about the twilight character of human existence, he presents the fundamental phenomena of work and play as phenomena found therein.

‘The twilight character of human existence, in which opposites unite, penetrate, and become lived paradoxes, is also expressed in various ways in the basic phenomenon of work’ Fink, 1995, p. 267).

Where work, in his view, is a phenomenon in which opposites have become a lived paradox, the play of humans has a unique relationship to contradictions.

Play, in particular, ‘shields itself against a precise form and shows itself not in a simple form but indeed in clear structures’ (Fink, 1995, p. 386).

The researcher takes over.

More than a fundamental phenomenon, I felt that ‘work’ in terms of my job, identified my process. More than a fundamental phenomenon, I felt that ‘work’ in terms of my job, identified my process. And within this particular context of a job it was a different experience than ‘work’ within a philosophical context.

The swing philosopher clarifies.

Work provided me (mostly unconsciously) with an ‘alibi’ in which I could play secretly and be masked.

The researcher adds.

Secretly, I underwent Fink’s notion of the enactment of play. ‘The enactment of play is spontaneous activity, active doing, vital impulse: play is existence that is moved in itself as it were’ (Fink, 2016, p. 19).

The play philosopher observes.

However, this enactment of spontaneous activity, active doing, vital impulse happened in secret. ‘Spiel ist gleichsam in sich bewegtes Dasein’ (Fink, 2010,

p. 16); 'play is existence that is moved in itself, as it were' (Fink, 2016, p. 19), was an embodiment of secrecy as it were.

The researcher explains.

The fundamental phenomenon 'work' became an indicator here to perceive play as 'useful.' I do useful work: I play. I don't enjoy this. In fact, I experience it as heavy research. However, from this same layer, I was simultaneously also genuinely playing.

Are these two different existential experiences? Is one bad because I play from 'utility and healing,' and is secret play 'good and healthy' since I play as an end in itself?

The play philosopher answers.

If Fink states that 'play is existence that is moved in itself', and apparently that takes place through the fundamental phenomena, then play, which is in motion, is in different phenomena.

Play as moving existence indeed appears in the manifestation of utility, but within the fundamental phenomenon of 'work.' I can imagine that masked forms of play are found within this fundamental phenomenon of work because play, as a fundamental phenomenon, has the ability to penetrate into humans' other fundamental phenomena.

The researcher reacts.

This is beautifully expressed, of course. Except Fink seems to reject play as utility. But I could connect with my secret playing precisely through the permeability of play. In work, I played. Thus, the 'secrecy' could show itself because it was different from the 'useful' play of my work as a researcher. Due to the difference, I was able to detect it. Perhaps I could only approach it via utility because a direct approach to secret play as an adult might be almost impossible. Because according to Fink, play is still grasped from a metaphysical approach. 'All at once, the disenchanted one sees things differently' (Fink, 2016, p. 108).

The play philosopher concludes.

An important deduction is that Fink's vision now becomes even more transparent to me, the biggest difference in understanding being that I think the path can only lead through utility, through the action of work in this case.

The researcher adds.

Perhaps Fink never felt shame when he was playing. Or maybe he did. I don't know. I do remember how I sat at the table opposite the journalist after the very first bike ride with *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*. After some soup, the journalist's interview. "With what purpose, Imara?" he asked.

Is a person ever able to answer:

"With a secret purpose, Mr. Carbon. I'm researching 'secret play'. And I do so masked. Because there is no other way."

The play philosopher concludes this chapter.

How do I shape that I experience playing while not participating in the activity of play?

In the next chapter, I will continue and link my findings to my work.

I am a philosophy lecturer affiliated with an Arts university. And I will use these activities for the rest of my research project.

CHAPTER 6 THE PERMEABLE CHARACTER OF PLAYING

Introduction

In this introduction, the play philosopher outlines the upcoming chapter, focusing on a philosophy class for first-year art students.

The teaching approach, characterised by an embodied manner, brings to light a growing recognition of the advantages of integrating personal narratives into research projects. The foundation for this exploration is laid by social geographer Doreen Massey (1944-2016), whose personal examples substantiate the key concept of coeval coexistence. By her as an example, I acknowledge the value of autoethnography as a research method. The incorporation of Massey's concept into a personal narrative emphasises the significance of an embodied philosophy. The chapter further explores the enriching effects observed while teaching The Situationists and the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuijs (1920–2005), offering insights into addressing the issue of play through philosophical approaches for sustainable change.

As the narrative transitions to September 2019 in Utrecht, the Netherlands, I, in my role as a teacher, reflect on the challenges I encountered in developing thesis texts after completing the second round of fieldwork in April. The class also refers to the 'incubation phase' (Christophe, 2007) and implies the necessary digestion of research findings. He describes this phase as an unconscious process of reflecting on the subject. Christophe (2007) suggests that artists consciously create distance, engaging in activities such as sports, taking a shower, or going out for the evening, while ideas continue to evolve unconsciously. Notably, insights about 'philosophising' play by interpreting it as 'playing,' as an embodied coming to appearance, emerge in an Utrecht park and within the classroom setting.

"The Palimpsester"

The play philosopher experiences a contemporary form of palimpsest but emphasises the involvement of the worker.

I am in my classroom, preparing to shortly teach first-year art students. It's

the second week of classes, but the first in this particular classroom. I grab the eraser to wipe the whiteboard clean as I notice a few names still written on it. When I realise that erasing 'Rowan Suus Marieke' from the board is proving difficult, I chuckle. I recognise that this is an example of the original notion of a palimpsest, but for the 21st century. Someone has written these names on the board with a permanent marker.

A palimpsest is originally a manuscript or an ancient document from which the original text has been erased or removed to make way for new text. This process of overwriting or reusing parchment or papyrus was often applied in antiquity when the creation of new writing materials was costly.

Whenever I read about the original notion of a palimpsest, it usually refers to the object itself, traces of earlier texts on the ever-more fragile parchment. In a broader and more figurative context, the term palimpsest is nowadays used to refer to something in which traces or layers of previously used elements are still present, even if they have been overwritten or modified. This can apply to various things. For instance, it has become a metaphor in the psychoanalysis (Chisholm, 1992). The concept is also used to understand the succession of modes of describing history (Tollebeek, Verschaffel & Wessels, 2002). It is employed in historiography (Rabasa, 1993), as well as in geography to explain the formation of a city (Massey, 2005). Hence, in our time, this craft, the palimpsest, has transformed into a concept.

Today's topic for my students will be Constant. Constant is the pseudonym of Constant Nieuwenhuijs, an artist most associated with the CoBrA and the International Situationist art groups. However, due to the names already present on the board, Constant seems to blend in as a student who wouldn't be out of place in this list. At least, I catch myself immediately assuming that these are student names. Rowan Suus Marieke are not participating, and at the same time they are. And because all context has disappeared, they resonate with Constant: precisely the workings of a palimpsest.

I stand in front of the two-meter-long whiteboard, wondering: would a 'worker', for example, in the third century BC, scraping texts on fragile parchment, ever have thought: this *poièsis*, this act of scraping, will later become

a praxis, a practice, as a concept? Precisely because the removal of old texts that make way for new ones always leaves traces behind.

I take my deodorant from my bag, which is on a chair right behind me. In my attempt to erase 'Marieke,' I identify with the work of this "palimpsester". However, did a 'palimpsester' ever exist, or was it the 'writer' scraping the fragile parchment to reuse it? Curiosity prompts me to quickly grab my phone and search for the term "palimpsester" on Google Scholar. While the term does indeed exist, it appears to be rather scarce in usage. Consequently, I conclude that the efforts of "the palimpsester" might have faded in the conceptualisation of the term 'palimpsest.' This observation raises the possibility that it also encompasses a transformation in the concept of labour within Western metaphysics.

On one hand, there is praxis as an activity in which labour is in direct relationship with the worker, "the palimpsester". However, on the other hand, since the term 'palimpsester' is much less common in our contemporary times, this direct connection to the work has been severed. Forms of work have emerged where an alienation between labour and the labourer has arisen. Because if we only talk about palimpsest, as we usually do, workers thus, "palimpsesters", are erased from the concept.

With the thought of estranging the direct relationship between labour and workers, I see a philosophical giant appear in my mind while I clean the board. It's Karl Marx, the man with hair like a lion's mane, my good friend with whom I swung on swings. Together, we pondered life, in a classroom, yet 'outside in an orchard.' Now, he emerges alongside the philosophical concept of labour as I exert force to remove the letters with my spray deodorant. And find myself focused on the aspect of the action 'not-quite-successful.'

With this aspect, the transformation of the action from the original Greek term *palimpsestos* (from *palim*, 'again,' and *psestos*, 'smooth') into a concept seems to contain a paradox. Palimpsest could evolve into a concept precisely because of the traces left on the parchment due to its vulnerability. Thus, the 'smoothing again' was not entirely successful. However, it is

the non-success of the palimpsester's work that has succeeded in the form of the concept of palimpsest, I observe. The concept of palimpsest could emerge because "the palimpsester" left traces to avoid damaging the fragile material.

While I try hard to ignore the fact that the spray deodorant is not the most suitable method, I continue to develop these thoughts. This "not-quite-a-success" has a direct relationship to the makers' activities precisely because of the outcome. The personal approach of the maker to this "non-success" remains unexplored due to the abstraction into a concept.

While taking my hand sanitiser from my bag, the embodiment 'un-abstracts' the notion. Elements of play take part in this 'un-abstracting' process. I notice that I take pleasure in my resourcefulness. I consider myself highly skilled and independent. I also feel a pleasant tension about the question whether this substance containing 70 percent alcohol will work.

Exactly these micro-dynamics of personal experience (Straatman, 2009) seem to have been overwritten by the transformation into the abstracted concept of a palimpsest. Does this, the erasure of the maker's experience, indeed prompt Marx to appear in my mind? But does he appear as Marx from my childhood, thus serving to remind me that, as a child, complete dedication and boundless confidence in my abilities were the prevailing parameters in playing? I was a fully skilled 'road captain' and also a natural philosopher by being. Since I was not at all impressed by Marx as I am now as an adult philosopher, I observed him in the orchard with the swings. I was curious about how a philosopher sits on a swing. As equals, we sat on swings 'thinking about life.' Or does Marx not merely emerge as a nostalgic figure from my childhood games, but rather as a philosophical archetype symbolising the theme of alienation? As I contemplate the array of stains on the board, it becomes evident that both these things are true. On a personal level, it reflects the ingenuity, the joy, and the confidence I possessed as a child. I didn't delve into books on 'how to be a good road captain,' 'how to be a good pirate,' or 'how to sit on a swing'. Simultaneously, from an abstract standpoint, it encapsulates the broader theme of alienation.

However, when a personal connection exists with the layers of the new over the old, I find classical psychoanalysis in the literature. These works seem to highlight an issue in conceptualising the term 'palimpsest,' emphasising treatment (Freud, 1980). This approach is purposeful and also oriented towards interpretation, linking it to the origin of behaviour (Cixous, 1983). However, when there is no direct relationship with the maker of the erasure and the remnants of the layers, the concept of the palimpsest seems to become abstract.

However, Mexican historian Jose Rabasa (1993) interprets these imperfect erasures as a source of hope. Doreen Massey (2005) cites this specific perspective of Rabasa's, where imperfect erasures are seen as 'a source of hope for the reconstruction or renewal of the world from an originally non-Eurocentric perspective' (Massey, 2005, p. 110).

However, Doreen Massey argues that choosing the notion of the palimpsest is incongruous. 'Palimpsest is too archaeological,' (Massey, 2005, p. 110), she states in her critique directed at geographers and historians who use the classical metaphor. It always refers back to 'before.' However, these gaps in representation, Massey says, 'are not the same as the discontinuities of multiplicity in simultaneous space; the latter is the characteristic of coeval co-existence' (p. 110).

Massey advocates emphasising coeval co-existence, more than just the multiplicity within a history, as Rabasa suggests, which thereby maintains a linear arrangement. Simultaneity of time is truly different from the progression of time that harks back to the time that has passed. According to Massey, palimpsest seems unable to encompass this characteristic of simultaneous multiple existence, especially when it comes to interruptions that we do not perceive as interruptions.

Can I apply Massey's concept of coeval co-existence, thus, the simultaneous existence of simultaneity – to the experience of swinging with Marx in the orchard while being present in the classroom at the same time? From this perspective, it becomes a spatial experience. Precisely a spatial experience has the potential to remain free from any psychological interpretation. That

would then be a valuable outcome to utilise. Can I use this experience to analyse and apply Massey's coeval co-existence to a notion of personal simultaneity derived from playing?

I look at the clock. It hangs by the classroom door. Although it's open, I see that there are no students yet. So, I still have some time to think this through. Massey, as a geographer, provides a personal example of her commute between London and Milton Keynes. When Massey arrives at her workplace in Milton Keynes, she reconnects with meetings and discussions taking place there. She continues with her tasks in Milton Keynes, but in the meantime, events in Milton Keynes itself have not stood still. Back in London, she immerses herself again in other stories. 'Bit by bit I reimmerge, myself again into (just a few of) the stories of London' (Massey, 2005, p. 130). Yet, the interruptions are not perceived as interruptions. Massey thus brings up the personal aspect and simultaneously problematises the term palimpsest.

"That's what I want," I say, laughing in front of the whiteboard, holding the deodorant and hand sanitiser in my hands. Partly, I'm laughing at myself, and partly, I'm addressing Massey in my head.

'If you genuinely want to unravel, your tool is too limited. A board with text is inadequate for deconstruction,' I hear Massey reply.

While checking whether the classroom remains empty, I try to recall quotes from her book *For Space* (Massey, 2005) that discuss the concept of palimpsest.

In this form, deconstruction seems hindered by the primary focus on 'text,' no matter how broadly conceived. To illustrate this argument through the figure on the palimpsest, you must stay within the imagination of surfaces - it fails to bring to life the trajectories that together form this space. (Massey, 2005, p. 110)

Deconstructive Thinking in Massey's thought

Like no other, Doreen Massey employs abstract notions, such as the notion of deconstruction by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), to apply them spatially. Through this approach, Massey is able to make socio

geographical statements. In that sense, one could perceive Doreen Massey's method itself as the space of 'an active materialized practice' (Massey, 2005, p. 118). Understood in this way, I grasp what she means when she says that deconstructing a concept within language works too restrictively.

An example unfolds before me on the board. Constant can be a student, an uninterrupted movement, or a pseudonym of an artist named Constant Nieuwenhuys. Thus, the notion 'Constant' represents openness.

In his work, Derrida advocates for disengaging language from absolute truth. This perspective sharply contrasts with what Augustine notes in his work *Confessions*.

Augustine (354-430) was an early Christian theologian, bishop of Hippo, North Africa, and wrote his *Confessions* around 397-398 AD. This work is perhaps the epitome of how meaning is attributed to a word where the word stands for the object (Schokker & Schokker, 2000). In Book I, chapter viii, *That When a Boy he Learned to Speak, not by any set Method, but From the Acts and Words of His Parents*, Augustine describes this process of understanding. He observed how elders turned their bodies while naming an object.

When they named anything, as they spoke turned towards it, I saw and remembered that they called what they would point out by the name they uttered. And that they meant this thing and no other was plain from the motion of their body, the natural language, as it were, of all nations, expressed by the countenance, glances of the eye, gestures of the limbs, and tones of the voice, indicating the affections of the mind, as it pursues, possesses, rejects, or shuns. And thus, by constantly hearing words, as they occurred in various sentences, I collected gradually for what they stood; and having broken in my mouth to these signs, I thereby gave utterance to my will. (Augustine, 2008, p. 21)

This way of learning, words initially pointed out by the elders, assumes that the meaning of things lies within the words themselves (Foucault, 1970). This may seem like an outdated view. However, the way Augustine 'learned to speak as a boy' is a regular method still taught in schools (Callebaut, 2004; Huizenga & Robbe, 2013; NACCCE, 1999).

Children still learn to shape their lips to pronounce 'a' while a teacher points to an apple. But, according to contemporary Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (1865 – 1914), the 'a' does not belong to 'apple,' and the 'r' doesn't

belong to 'rose,' the 'f' doesn't belong to 'fish,' and the 'm' doesn't belong to 'monkey.'

De Saussure (2011) establishes that the signs and sounds of a language system are arbitrary and have no necessary relation to each other. The sound 'a' [sound] and the written symbol 'a' [image] are united within a language system. This means that the sound 'a' and the sign 'a' have systemic validity. Thus, de facto, sound and symbol are arbitrary in relation to each other. Within this systemic validity, this 'sound-image' acquires a fixed relationship with the signified. De Saussure (2011) therefore sets a whole new paradigm for language and reality (Barthes, 1986; Butler, 2011; Derrida, 2013; Irigaray, 2017; Karpinski, & Basile, 2021; Lacan, 1966; Wittgenstein, 2010).

Derrida (2013) analyses De Saussure's language system to further dismantle this view of language. Derrida takes the viewpoint of De Saussure a step further and disrupts this causal relationship. He emphasises that the lines of a sign are arbitrary, and these arbitrarily created signs are connected to sounds in an arbitrary manner. Yet, within a system, there is a connection: the sound and image of a sign are linked. Derrida appears to envision a freedom in language because these sound-images lack a fixed relationship with the signified. In this perspective, for example, the notion of 'masculine' is not necessarily tied to 'man.' The notion of 'feminine' does not refer to the archetype of 'woman.'

However, ultimately, Massey considers Derrida's linguistic notions to be too restrictive. Nevertheless, she gratefully leverages this linguistic foundation provided by Derrida. Specifically, she employs Derrida's 'difference/differance' example to incorporate time into space.

In an analysis of a text by the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (indeed the promoter of Fink), Derrida provides evidence with the intentionally misspelled term *differance*. This term *differance* sounds the same as the existing *difference*. This French term, *difference*, originates from *differ*, a verb that means both *difference* and *deferment*. There is deferment in meaning, and with this deferment, time is built in. Through this application, Massey contends that space is not only a displacement across surfaces but also time.

Therefore, she asserts that space and time are interconnected.

A place is '*space-temporal events*' (Massey, 2005, p. 130). And because everything is in motion, space can open up. In this openness, the possibility emerges to see space as a dynamic network of relationships that exist simultaneously.

'You are part of the constant process of the making and breaking of links, which is an element in the constitution of yourself', (Massey, 2005, p. 118) she states, providing her own examples of 'London' and 'Milton Keynes'.

I look at Constant on the board. He stands there amid remnants of once-formed letters, simultaneously spelling 'Marieke Suus Rowan.' It's as if, with my hand sanitiser and deodorant, I've affirmed to myself that a board is too restrictive for life's questions.

The swing philosopher notices.

Forty years ago, I was also in a classroom. I looked at a picture of a philosopher in a book - a friendly looking man with a beard, intelligent eyes. Through the history book with the picture, I flew outside. When I came back, I didn't dare raise my hand to say out loud that I, too, contemplate life on my swing, just like that nice man in the book with his long hair and full beard.

Mr. Janssens was already talking about something else. Apparently, we had moved on to another picture in the book.

The play philosopher wonders.

That classroom in Duiven, who is sitting there now, aged nine? The classroom here. I am a teacher now. The students taking my classes want to become artists, but perhaps some of them are thinking, 'I am here because I want to become what I already am.'

Philosophy as an embodied experience through artistic practices

Last week, I started my philosophy classes in the Julianapark, Utrecht. It's the second year that I've initiated this series of lessons outdoors in a park. With this outdoor setting, my aim is to convey to first-year students that

philosophy can be a spatial and embodied experience, extending beyond a theoretical exercise confined to a chair at a table in a classroom within a school building. This shift from the concept of a 'classroom' to a park is also a playful attempt to illustrate the ideology of the art collective, the Situationists.

Julianapark is an old city park, not located in the centre but a few bus stops away from it, along the bustling Amsterdamsestraatweg in Utrecht. You don't come here as a tourist; you come here because you live here, you come here if you know it. It's a large park with a Chinese restaurant, a playground, and even a small petting zoo. Inside and outside the park, there are chickens and roosters, seemingly owned by no one.

Although I sent an appointment to meet at the 'entrance corner Julianaparklaan – Amsterdamsestraatweg' at ten o'clock by email, I don't see anyone there. I hang around the information placard with the prominent red arrow stating 'you are here.'

I scan the area, looking for individuals barely in their twenties in search of 'the teacher.' They're already acquainted with one another from the introduction week; I only possess a list of names. For a moment, I question this choice. I check if those seated on benches near the entrance are scrutinising the park's visitors, seeking a philosophy teacher. They're engaged in conversation, and some of them are smoking. Apparently not. In Room 1.07, where I officially sit, it's a given that the young people sitting opposite me are my students. There is never any doubt that they could be anything other than students. I look at the young people on the bench. I'm almost sure they are my students, but because I don't know them, they look like loiterers.

Eventually, I ask these 'loitering youths' whether they are in fine art. This turns out to be the case. 'Loiterers' become 'students': 'my' students. A 'woman' becomes 'the teacher.' Without changing ourselves, we become students and teacher to each other. Together, we look for a suitable spot. We could stay by the benches, but there's too much distraction from joggers and parents with children heading to the playground. The expansive field of grass is more suitable. We just need to find a spot without too much goose poop. In the Julianapark classroom, the situation changes throughout the day.

This forms the foundation for this lesson. That's why in this 'grassroom,' I introduce the ideology of the International Situationists (SI). I tell them how I don't need to explain much, because this lesson situation aligns precisely with the vision of this group of writers, essayists, and artists. I tell the first-year students that the International Situationists formed as a group in 1957. The international aspect lies in the fact that this group has a French literature division, the Letriste Internationale, with Guy Debord as a Marxist writer, considered the main figure of the group. Debord is also the creator of the Dérive, which we will perform shortly with the students. In addition, the International Situationists also had a visual arts division. The shared origin of these visual artists who played a founding role in the Situationists lies with the Dutch artist Constant and the Danish artist Asger Jorn (1914 -1973) in the CoBrA group (1948-1951).

The general aim of the Situationists was to demonstrate that there can be no absolute reality, but that reality is created. They identified capitalism as the culprit for the current constructed image of reality. The goal of the Situationists was, therefore, to 'disturb the bourgeois worldview' (Massey, 2005, p. 116; Sadler, 1999, p. 78). In my explanation, I also quote Constant, who expressed that it was their intention to 'create completely new situations. Not only to break the monotony of cities and the life within them but also to stimulate the playful side of our way of living' (Van Halem & Van Der Horst, 2016, p. 154).

Constant operates from the human concept of Homo Ludens outlined by Johan Huizinga in the book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. However, he finds Huizinga too modest. Constant attributes this modesty to the fact that Huizinga was one of the first scholars to describe the view of mankind as homo ludens in the 'utilitarian society' where Homo Sapiens, the thinking human, holds sway. Constant asserts: 'The homo ludens has never been more than an infrequently occurring state of existence of Homo sapiens' (Van Halem & Van Der Horst 2016, p. 29). Hence, Constant advocates for free, unbound, experimental art and extends Johan Huizinga's cultural critique and the human concept to a more Marxist critique of current society. Lambert (1997) articulates that both art and the

masses must liberate themselves from the laws and conventions imposed by the ruling class. Or, as Constant himself puts it, 'The liberation of this ludic potential of man is connected to his social liberation' (Van Halem & Van Der Horst. 2016, p. 29).

I explain to the students that this knowledge is essential to understand why play plays a significant role in the artistic expressions of the Situationists. Moreover, these were almost always active forms. 'We are ludic potential,' I explain Constant's perspective as a Situationists. And as ludic potential, a building, a street, a city can be a play-space while you engage in play.

Derive

A playful form embraced by the Situationists is the practice of the 'Derive.' The term Derive translates literally from French as drift or wander. It entails roaming through the city. While one can undertake a Derive alone, Débord suggests that discussing observations with others adds value. A Derive is, therefore, distinct from a casual stroll through the city. Derives involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psycho-geographical effects and are thus quite different from the classic notions of a journey or a stroll (Knabb, 2006).

As part of psychogeography, a Derive for the Situationists is a particular form of geography where individual perception takes centre stage. Relying on personal observation breaks pre-produced patterns and logic (Knabb, 2006; Potlach, 1958).

I have the students conduct a Derive themselves. The assignment is for the students to devise a rule dictating their movements. The route they traverse based on the established rule becomes the foundation for creating their 'psycho-geographical' city map. With these guidelines, my aim is not only to fulfil the Situationists' objective of breaking the logic of perception but also to emphasise the 'playfulness' in the action.

In response to a student's inquiry about what a rule is, I connect insights from various scholars to provide an answer. Midgley (1974) asserts that a rule

is not a law. I then use the concise definition of play provided by Bernard Suits in his book *The Grasshopper*. Play is ‘a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles voluntarily’ (Suits, 2005, p. 54). Additionally, I paraphrase Huizinga (1950), who contends that while play is freedom, once you participate, you are bound by the established rules.

I sit on one of the benches in Julianapark. Opposite me, I see a few of my students in the distance, following a hen with several chicks. They squat down, sketchbooks in hand. I watch them as the hen and chicks disappear under the bushes. I can hear their laughter from here.

Returning to Julianapark is a recognition of my own student days. I see myself when I look at them. I can be ‘here’ and simultaneously feel that I could also be ‘there’ with them, but twenty-five years ago. Fully committed to crouching to follow a hen that disappears under the bushes and then collapsing with laughter. More and more, I realise that a multiplicity of simultaneity exists within a person. In my mind, I hear the distinctive voice of Axl Rose, the lead singer of Guns N’ Roses, belting out the lyrics of their renowned song *Sweet Child o’ Mine*, in which he reminisces, ‘Where everything was as fresh as a bright blue sky’ (Guns N’ Roses, 1988.). This track, an anthem of my student days, propelled Axl Rose into the realm of pop mega-stardom.

The swing philosopher reflects on the lyrics, the words echo:

“She’s got a smile that it seems to me /
Reminds me of childhood memories. /
Where everything was as fresh as a bright blue sky. //
Ay ay ay ay where did we go?
Where did we go now?”
(Guns N’ Roses, 1988).

It reminds the play philosopher of an essay about utopia and Arcadia.

I catch myself looking at my students in the same way parents gaze at their children in the park playground. It reminds me of the essay written by Darijana Hahn (2018), in which she describes the connection between utopia and Arcadia based on her observations of parents in a playground. She refers to a study

by Bentmann and Muller, describing this Arcadia as ‘romanticized desires for a golden past’ (Hahn, 2018, p. 196). I’m sitting here in the park in the role of a lecturer, nearby the playground where parents are currently watching their children. I experience Hahn’s differentiation between playing and observing. When I engage in playing, thoughts of ‘my golden past’ seem less prominent than when I observe my students. While cycling, contemplation about my ‘golden past’ tends to fade, as reflection is constantly interrupted by the present moment. A car is approaching, which way do I go, my knee hurts, my chain is rattling. That is different from sitting here, on a bench. It seems that memories can gain traction through sitting still. While sitting, I watch my students waiting for the hen to appear. Meanwhile, I sing along with Axl Rose in my head.

I realise that Massey (2005) also refers to the Situationists International. She focuses on the spatial aspect but does not include the perception of man as of the playing human. Or, to stay in Constant’s terminology, that we are a ‘ludic potential.’ In fact, Massey mentions the Derive method but connects it to the British writer Iain Sinclair, who conducts contemporary Derives in London (Sinclair, 2017). In Massey’s explanation, Sinclair’s form of a Derive is seen as an attempt by the Situationists to puncture the surface (Massey, 2005, p. 117). This is indeed accurate, however the Situationists did this based on the conception that humans are playful beings.

In her explanation, Massey relies on the ideas of Sadler (1998).

‘Early Situationists played with the ideas in which buildings could be spaces that enabled the unexpected and the unplanned’ (Massey, 2005, p. 112). However, when Massey quotes Sadler stating that the Situationists aimed ‘to disturb the bourgeois worldview’ (Sadler, 1998, as cited in Massey, 2005, p. 116), she does not explore the motivation for this action from the perspective of the playing human.”

Massey follows Sadler’s descriptions and explores the connection with the notion ‘flaneur,’ the Parisian ‘strolling.’ With the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1967) and German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), who highlights Baudelaire’s term “flaneur” (Benjamin, 1992), Massey appears to naturally veer away from the concept of the *homo ludens*. Massey seems to have supplanted the old texts that depict the *homo ludens* as a central concept in Situationist thinking with new discussions about deconstruction in architectural design.

While Sadler draws a link between Constant's *New Babylon* and the modernist architect Aldo van Eyck due to their close collaboration during the CoBrA period (Sadler, 1999, p. 78), Massey jumps from discussing Dutch architects to forms of de-constructivism in Bernard Tschumi's architecture of the 1980s. Notably, she omits the collaboration between Van Eyck and Constant in her argument.

I am sitting on a bench in Julianapark and notice that my class is going well. I ponder why, in the context of space, Massey doesn't mention Constant. Just as Massey concretises her abstract notions as a scholar, Constant did so as an artist through an artistic practice. He worked from this practice to bring his vision to life. As a creator, he referred to himself as an 'utopien,' someone who creates possibilities, rather than an 'utopiste': someone exploring impossibilities' (Van Halem & Van Der Horst, 2016, p. 145).

Mark Wigley (Wigley & Constant, 1998) suggests that Constant not only drew inspiration from Aldo van Eyck but also participated in several realisation of his projects. Wigley claims that these encounters led Constant to the practical construction which he would later develop in *New Babylon*.

I try to analyse how applicable Massey's concept of 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005, pp. 149-162) is to Constant's work. In this concept, coined by Massey, she describes a form of merging people and things in a specific place for a certain moment. 'It is chance, unpredictable, and sometimes magical' (Kohan, 2015). I try to imagine what it would be like if Massey had actually tested her vision of coeval coexistence and her 'throwntogetherness' against Constant's *New Babylon* project.

Constant dedicated himself to this futuristic project from his involvement with the Situationists in 1958 until its final exhibition in 1974. Through the use of models, drawings, and manifestos, he sought to conceptualise a 'social space' as a tangible environment facilitating encounters and connections. Constant envisioned this as a 'dynamic labyrinth.' Within this labyrinth, the public nature of a space becomes exposed to unpredictable influences. These processes unfold in infinite variations, simultaneously occurring in countless spaces, Constant suggests. 'Spaces, moreover, that in number and interrelation are also continually changing' (Van Halem & Van Der Horst 2016, p. 59). Hence, the homo ludens

found living space not only in models but also in scale models. Even life-sized art forms, such as the Derive, were scaled down.

Constant (Constant & Lochner, 1974) writes that *New Babylon* is a place designed for Derives. New Babylon facilitates its inhabitants' Derive and their frequent opportunities for encounters. By applying the concept of Derive to a scale model, it seems that Constant wants to draw attention to the idea that a space can expand and contract. Generally, we tend to associate the functioning of a space with that of mechanical clock time. His attempt, viewed through the lens of play, seems to illustrate how space assumes different dimensions during play. While it seems that Massey and Constant speak the same language regarding possibility, space as a network, interactions of social relations and encounters, play doesn't seem to become a player in Massey's thinking.

The swing philosopher tries to understand Massey through a memory.

My first encounter with the CoBrA art group was the profound disappointment of my parents. With our family, we went to a retrospective exhibition of CoBrA painter Karel Appel. I was about eight years old. It was during the same period when I wanted to become a cyclist and "philosophised" on my swing. Every year, we visited a museum in the Netherlands. My mother thought it was good for our general development.

We had already visited the open-air museum in Arnhem, and we had also been to the futuristic *Evoluon* museum in Eindhoven. And now, art: real art. I still remember my father walking among the paintings, apathetic, but also dismayed. At some point, he couldn't contain his irritation anymore. Irritation about being here and spending money on this. My mother, too, became quieter and quieter. We were looking at children's drawings. I do remember thinking, 'I could do this,' but I was also uneasy because of the unsettling silence from my mother. After all, she loved art. It was our last annual museum visit.

The play philosopher seeks to understand Massey's avoidance of play.

I catch myself wanting to retrace her life; to find something there. Evidently, I really want a discernible reason why she consistently avoids Constant and play.

The swing philosopher embodies it.

I have slid my hands under my legs and push forcefully against the bench.

The play philosopher interprets.

As though I want to tell myself to keep my hands off it.

The swing philosopher is witty.

But this is also psychologising! I wiggle my legs. In delight, I bite my tongue.

The play philosopher admits.

There's no escaping it. I decide to delve into it.

Doreen Massey was born in 1944.

The swing philosopher calculates.

So, she's four years younger than my mother.

The play philosopher continues.

She grew up in Wythenshawe. This Manchester neighbourhood is a 'council estate'; a uniform area built in the 1920s with the aim of realising large-scale public housing that also includes plenty of green space.

The swing philosopher recognises where Massey grew up.

I think of my 'urban development' Duiven. The orchard of the demolished farmhouse opposite our house turned into a tidy green strip, complete with a sign prohibiting dogs from pooping.

The play philosopher continues.

Massey's parents, just like mine, did not attend university, but they encouraged her to pursue higher education. After graduating, Massey delves into the social aspect of economic geography. She joins the CES, the Centre for Environmental Studies, a government-funded centre addressing environmental concerns and issues in urban living.

I see groups of students heading back towards me. They carry the city maps they've created. We spread the maps out on the grass. Stories and adventures are exchanged between the groups. One map is perforated with

cigarette burns. 'That's where our cigarette butts are,' a student clarifies.

Almost all the maps are drawn with visual images. We associate the maps with knowledge from historical pictorial map drawings, such as those found among the Aztecs (van Zantwijk, 1977), and the contemporary Dutch artist Jan Rothuizen (2023). Both examples convey first-hand experiential knowledge, breaking away from traditional authority.

The next assignment for the group is to exchange the rules and maps among themselves and then repeat their Derives. One student from each group is meant to accompany the rule and map to its new group. This particular student acts as a witness to the change that will occur in the map while the rule remains the same.

I overhear the conversation of the last group to leave. They are looking for a chicken, and indeed, there is currently no chicken in sight. They decide that the rule only comes into effect when they find a chicken. That's how the rule originated, they convince each other. The witness nods. I notice that they walk a bit too joyfully, a bit too loudly toward the park exit. This suits me well, because during the students' exchange of adventures, I felt the need to work something out.

Towards liberating play and philosophy

The play philosopher seeks a place to incorporate experience as an epistemological tool related to play and to map it out.

I climb a stone staircase. These steps lead to a raised platform on the lawn. The platform is made of concrete, but there is a lot of sand on it, probably blown over from the sandpit in the playground. However, it's not too dirty to sit on.

I sit at the edge of the platform and pick up a twig lying in front of me. I notice that all the students have disappeared from view. I draw the fundamental phenomena of Fink's philosophical anthropology in the sand, indicating each phenomenon with its first letter.

According to Fink, the fundamental phenomena are permeable: ‘they do not occur next to each other in isolation: they permeate and pervade one another’ (2016, p. 16). I attempt to visualise his explanation.

This means that play can permeate all fundamental phenomena, death, love, work, ruling, play. I indicate the permeability of play by drawing the letter ‘p’ five times.



Figure 6.1 Drawing the fundamental phenomena

I gaze at the ‘D’ of Death, the ‘L’ of Love, the ‘W’ of work, the ‘R’ of Ruling, and the ‘P’ of Play. With my twig, I scratch between the ‘P’ of ‘Play’ and the permeability of ‘play.’ Then, I alternate between work and play: you can play while you work.

I look at the five p’s that I’ve placed and the large ‘P’ as the fundamental phenomenon. Fink aims to move away from the place where play has been denigrated by Plato (Fink, 2016; Geuss, 2003; Murdoch, 1977). Therefore, it is more than just a descriptive manner of play; there is a mission in his work. ‘In the course of our thoughts, we have arrived at a critical point: we must attempt to free ourselves from the traditional condemnation of play as a mere reproduction of ‘actuality’’ (Fink, 2016, p. 104).

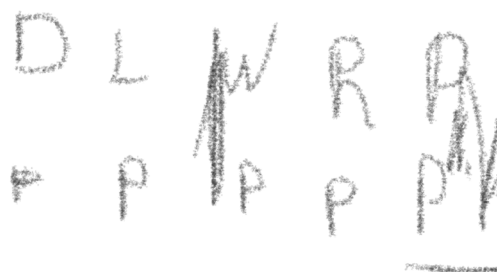


Figure 6.2 Drawing the permeability of the fundamental phenomena

‘We must free ourselves from this’, asserts Fink. It sounds like a form of activist philosophy; I like that. I turn his call into a slogan: “Towards liberating play and philosophy.”

But wait a minute, an attempt to free play and philosophy is exactly what I'm doing here with students: I philosophise play through alternating between "work" and "play." I philosophise play by allowing students to embody Guy Debord's Marxist theory of Derive. I take his 'work' as an artist and weave it into a module for art students. Moreover, not only do I embody it in order to philosophise play, but I also impart it to the students: you can play while having class, like my students.

However, is this what they will take away from this class? What will they mention about today's class to their families? They are more likely to mention that they have had a good time at the park. Should I tell them about Fink's ideas? How he wrote these thoughts about play during the times of Constant, The Situationists, in the late fifties? Should I add the work of Fink to the module and connect it to this activist approach? It would be valuable to do so.

The permeability of Homo Ludens

Despite the similarities between their ideas, there is also a significant difference between Constant and Fink. Unlike Constant, along with Huizinga, Fink argues that we are not solely homo ludens. There is no 'homo ludens' as such. Play appears in infinite relationships because of its permeability.

Yet Constant builds this view of mankind, 'the human as ludic potential,' based on Huizinga's homo ludens. But what if I adopt this 'ludic potential' of Constant? Then I can recognise this potential in Fink's vision, yet embodied. However, there is a complexity to signal. According to Fink, play is present in all five fundamental phenomena of humanity. Yet the focus in Fink's work is much more on play and not on the implications of the permeability of phenomena. He associates permeability in human play with his cosmological worldview. There is a permeability of play between the 'worldly' (play of the world) and the 'intraworldly' (play of the human being). Fink, however, doesn't elaborate on the permeability of play within human play. But precisely because of this permeability, numerous manifestations are possible.

Playing as a creative capacity

Fink assumes that in children's play, the child connects with the centre of its existence. He also asserts that in the course of a human life, there is no permeability between adulthood and the children's play that we have all experienced. This is impossible according to Fink, because this intact world is 'shattered.'

Seldom are adults able to play without inhibition. However, play in children still appears to be an intact sphere of existence. Play is considered to be an element of childhood. But soon the course of life drive 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. (Fink, 2016, p. 17)

This implies that Fink installs a world, an 'intact world,' in the intra-world [*Innerwelt*] of human life. However, the ontology of play has the capacity to interrupts and set one's life at a distance from them. '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 at a distance from them' (Fink, 2016, p. 21).

I now realise that through my playing, I myself create distance. If Fink states that 'play is creativity and and activity' (2016, p. 21), it is within the domain of philosophical anthropology the act of playing itself. Play as a fundamental phenomenon is a creative condition, yet playing is a creating capacity.

As a child, I created distance, but as adults, we can still do this! I am here with a twig. I create my own space with it. Within this existence, I create distance in these situations at that moment. As a human, I am capable of creating distance, but in my playing, this distance remains consistently and endlessly permeable.

I know that Johan Huizinga meticulously describes this permeability in play. 'A child, an athlete, a musician can immerse themselves in their play, but they know that they are playing' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 18). I now realise that this is a form of playing while the culture in which I find myself—school, class, life, existence—simultaneously continues. I don't change masks; I don't step off the stage (Goffmann, 2021).

Playing is 'time-space'

I can play during the current culture because I produce this distance myself. In doing so, I create space. 'Distance is space.' That is what I have taken from Massey's ideas. She argues, through concrete examples from London and Milton Keynes, that distance is space, and distance always involves a time-span. Since playing implies distance, as I do not coincide with reality, nor with play itself, I can only conclude that playing is space.



Figure 6.3 Drawing playing is 'time-space'

'Playing is space' I repeat to myself and improve my proposition: Playing is spatial. Doreen Massey's ideas allow me to grasp play as spatial. Spatiality has, thanks to the insights of Massey, distance. Yet playing allows me to create distance. I can create distance by playing. I'm trying to write this sentence in the sand, but it's tiring.



Figure 6.4 Drawing playing creates distance

This conclusion refutes the concern that Huizinga express in *Homo Ludens*. In his opening sentence, Huizinga asserts that 'play is older than culture' (Huizinga, 1950. p. 1), and therefore our culture is founded on play. Huizinga is concerned that play will disappear from culture. What he seems to ignore is the fact that as long as I live, I have the ability to create the culture in which I live. And with this playing, I create distance, and thus create my own space.

As a child, I had the opportunity to fly away, to become acquainted with Marx in my own way, away from the teacher's explanation. However, as an adult, I still have the ability to play, creating distance while seemingly running parallel to the culture in which I find myself.

Since, in my rounds of field research, I constantly create playworlds that are in the midst of culture. Worlds where I play but where I can also contemplate. Hence, if my active playing creates distance, this demonstrates that permeability exists on both sides. This means that playing is a human creative power. I create distance and thereby a private isolated world that is simultaneously permeable.

With my twig, I try to draw this world. But how do you draw space and distance? It cannot be Huizinga's magic circle because 'distance' is not a circle. Is the magic of the magic circle that it is porous? Is the magic of the circle that it is permeable (Castronova, 2005) and not isolated? The playworld is transparent.

The play space is always 'here,' and thus, always tied to the individual. The localisation of 'here' is an installing factor for play, Fink argues. And I don't have to do anything for that. I am always 'here.'

This means that playing is an existential localisation: 'you are here.' More than ever, I understand my amalgamation of the ideologies of Massey and Fink. With her concept of 'coeval co-existence,' Massey spatialises the past, breaking the thinking of succession: the perception of history as a linear line.

I poke my twig in the sand. With the installation of an 'intact world,' Fink corrupts the mindset when it comes to the permeability of play in a human life. If play is a fundamental phenomenon, as he asserts, then play itself cannot be destroyed. It is the installation of a world in the intraworld that can subsequently be shattered, but it has nothing to do with play! What the installation of an 'intact world' in childhood life does, is interrupting the idea of the permeability of the fundamental phenomena! That's my main critique.

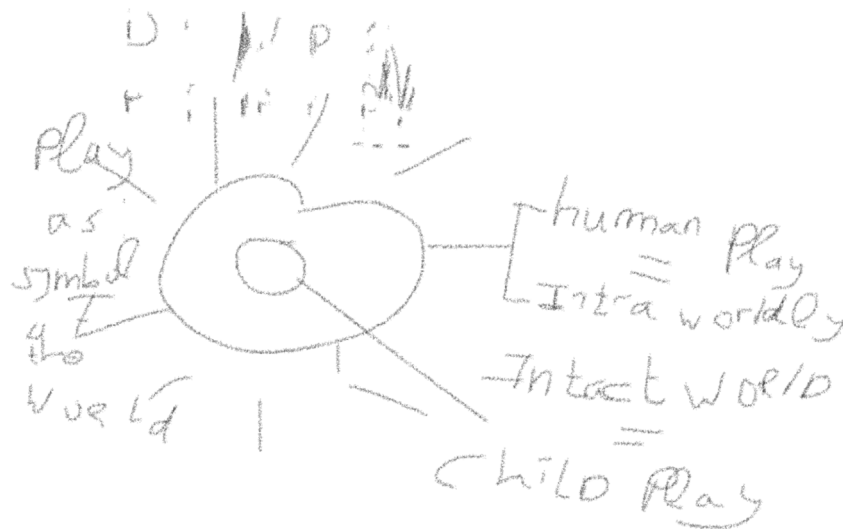


Figure 6.5 Drawing Fink's Play as symbol of the world

I am almost certain that Fink's incorporation of the 'intact world of a playing child' ultimately impedes his cosmological thinking from harmonising fully with his philosophical anthropology of human existence. I understand that he embraces Nietzsche's notion that only children and artists play innocently in this world' (Fink, 2016, p. 21). Presumably, the installation of the intact world of a child playing innocently in this intraworld stems from there. However, if I aim to contribute to knowledge, this is precisely where the gap in Fink's thinking emerges. There is room for criticism of his perspective, but also for revision. When we have reached the point of liberating play from a representation of the 'actual,' a revision of his critique becomes necessary. If I can unravel the implications for the permeability of play in human life, not only does his assumption about the breadth of play become much clearer, but I also create much more conceptual space for the notion of appearance.

With the question of appearance, to the extent that it belongs to human playing, we have touched on a philosophical problem. Play is creative bringing-forth, it is a production. The product is the playworld, a sphere of appearance, a field whose actuality is obviously not a very settled matter. And nevertheless, the appearance of the playworld is not simply nothing. We move about in it while we play; we live in it – certainly sometimes lightly and airily as in a dreamworld, 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? (Fink, 2016, p. 28)

While emphasising ‘*what*’ is imaginary and where ‘this strange appearance is located,’ Fink seemt to overlook that existence, *Dasein*, is indeed living a ‘whole’ or ‘intact’ life in an adult life. Therefore, the concept of appearance can be contemplated practically, drawing from Massey’s notion of coeval co-existence: Existence is sitting in a train, with a view from a train window, watching the ruins of a castle passing by, yet taking a picture of these remains and publishing this image in a book. Hence, it is Massey who clarifies Fink’s questions, embodied with her personal yet meta narrated research.

With my twig, I smooth the sand again. It’s not about the concept of Arcadia, not about my golden past that I long for; that’s not it at all. I am not engaged in a restoration of my ‘golden past,’ when I, as a child, experienced my play in the midst of my *Dasein*. Yes, there are traces of childhood, but also of my own student life. They are all here now, simultaneously present. Axl Rose sings in my head, and I am also in the park of ‘last year.’ There are ‘my’ black Dr. Martens that I loved so much. I don’t wear them anymore, but my students do.

Playing as moving existence

Through her work, Massey (2005) aims to demonstrate that what is here from the past is ‘here.’ However, this ‘here’ is constantly in motion. It is a construction of identity; in the making, always ongoing, with everything that is now, with everything that is here. And thus, open.

‘Here’ is where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures or trajectories which have their own temporalities. (...) It’s the returns (mine, the swifts’) and the very differentiation of temporalities that lend continuity. But the returns are always to a place that has moved on, the layers of our meeting intersecting and affecting each other; weaving a process of space-time. Layers as accretions of meetings. Thus something which might be called there and then is implicated in the here and now. ‘Here’ is an intertwining of histories in which the spatiality of those histories (their then and their here) is inescapably entangled. The interconnections themselves are part of the construction of identity. (Massey, 2005, p. 139)

This means that Massey’s ‘here’ exhibits permeability. An intertwining of histories.

The researcher intervenes.

But Massey, as a geographer, neglects to elaborate on the possibilities of play; not even the possibilities of space that play creates.

The play philosopher observes.

So, with Massey, I have a framework regarding the permeability of histories in the concept of 'here,' but no assumptions about how they relate to play as an existentially fundamental phenomenon.

Fink also focuses on the concept of 'being here.' Play ensures that we are 'here'; it brings us back from the future to the present, he states. This ability is an 'oasis of happiness' (Fink, 2016, p. 20).

The researcher is aware.

But there is a difference between Massey's idea of 'being here' and Fink's vision.

The play philosopher agrees.

Yes, there is. While Massey argues that 'here' is always in motion because 'now' is always in motion, Fink presents 'being here' as a point of rest. But he places this resting place in human play. He uses 'being here' in human play to substantiate the cosmological perspective from his anthropological standpoint.

Fink finds the non-metaphysical originality of cosmological philosophy in Nietzsche's concept of the play. 'In Nietzsche, the human play, the play of the child and the artist, becomes the key concept for the universe, transforming into a cosmic metaphor (Fink, 1995, p. 188). Artists and children, according to Nietzsche and adopted by Fink, live in a 'coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying without any moral additives, in forever equal innocence' (Fink, 2016, p. 30).

Fink (1995) explains that this does not imply that the mode of human existence was uncritically transferred to the entirety of being; it is precisely the opposite. The essence of humanity can only be understood and defined as

play when humans are considered in terms of their ecstatic openness to the prevailing world, rather than as merely worldly entities among others. Fink refers to *Fragment 52* of Heraclitus, depicting the world-contemplating Zeus as a child moving stones. 'The course of the world is a playing child, moving pieces on a board - a king's power belongs to the child' (Fink, 2016, p. 30). 'When Nietzsche understands Being and Becoming as a play, he is no longer within the confines of metaphysics' (Fink, 1995, p. 188).

The researcher concludes.

However, it confirms my suspicion of a ontological difference within of the human being in Fink's philosophical thinking. In Fink's thinking, apparently artists and children differ from human beings. They are innocent. Not every human being is artist, yet every adult has been a child. It confirms my assumption that Fink corrupts the movement during the life in a human life because he doesn't elaborate on the permeability in human existence. He describes the fundamental phenomena but avoids a thorough exploration of the implications of their permeability during a lifetime.

The play philosopher synthesises.

In her view of humanity, Massey also posits that we are constantly in motion. In contrast to Fink, she concretises this abstract concept and translates it into a train journey between London and Milton Keynes and a mountain hike in the Lake District.

This is the unique aspect of Massey's body of work. She not only makes significant concepts tangible by putting them into practice but also links them to her subjective experience through personal examples. This seems to be a pattern in her way of describing things.

In her personal examples of her commuter existence as a train traveller, she postulates essential abstract concepts. She places a photo with a view from the train next to her perspective on the productive operation of history. It appears as though it's a spontaneously captured snapshot. She then connects her anthropological vision and links it to space through this concrete practice.

‘You are part of the ongoing process of making and breaking ties, which is an element in the constitution of yourself, of London, or Milton Keynes’ (Massey, 2005, p. 112).

Massey continually validates through subjective experience. However, she doesn’t incorporate the concept of play and certainly doesn’t develop it as an existence.

“Commuting”, I almost say out loud. “In transit”, I repeat as if I am rehearsing - commuting: transport, in transit. I draw a train track. But it becomes a ladder. In fact, it resembles the ladder Constant drew in his *New Babylon* art project.

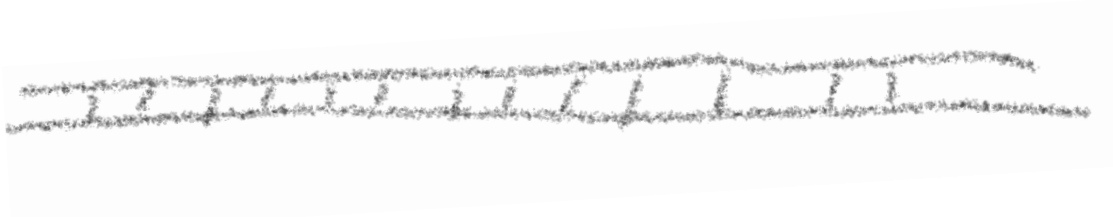


Figure 6.6 Drawing Constant's ladder

Autoethnography as an approach to perceive the embodiment of playing as a philosophical practice.

The play philosopher simultaneously thinks and draws

While I continue in this satisfaction, sketching Massey’s train tracks and at the same time Constant’s ladders, I try to imagine what impact it would have had on Fink’s train of thought if he had used personal examples. Would the classical example of a girl playing with a doll (Fink, 2016, p. 20), be replaced by a personal example? Did he ever identify himself with the playing child moving chess pieces from Heraclitus *Fragment 52*? Did he see himself actually playing? Moving pieces and ‘structuring and destroying without any moral additives, in forever equal innocence’ (2016, p. 30). Did he perhaps experience *spiellust* [pleasure in play] in autotelic play while ‘just’ moving the pieces back and forth? Back and forth, back and forth. I try to envision Fink as a child, engaged in play, moving chess pieces, but it doesn’t come easily. Another image emerges. A memory.

The swing philosopher narrates.

I was four. And as an Indian, I had a universal language at my disposal in my play. With this language, I could understand the whole world, and everyone understood me. The language consisted of two words: 'Tjidde kidde.' Tjidde kidde meant 'all well.' This could be in the form of a question, 'tjidde kidde?' - all well?' or the answer 'tjidde kidde,' to confirm 'all well.'

The play philosopher abstracts.

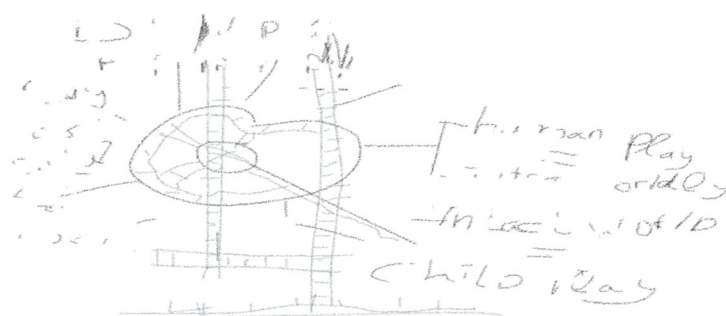
With 'tjidde kidde,' I constantly gauged the well-being of the environment.

The swing philosopher continues.

I still remember the exact moment when this understanding of the world in my play was abruptly disrupted. It was during the long summer holiday in Spain. As an Indian, I sat in the campsite playground, cross-legged and speaking with other children. 'Tjidde kidde.' All was well, with me and with the children. Tjidde kidde. Until a Dutch boy suddenly said to me, 'you talk weird!' With that, he broke 'something'. I remember this because I then went to my mother. My mother thought he was a foreign boy and explained to me that there were different languages. She revisited this in the camp store because the shopkeeper wanted to teach me to count. Every day she said to me, smiling widely, 'un, dos, tres, quatro,' and made me repeat that. 'un, dos, tres, quatro.' And quatro I was. I still remember people laughing and glowing when I said I was 'Quatro.' But I didn't want to be Quatro at all; I wanted to be the Indian.

That was the moment when I went underground, consciously; tjidde kidde was a universe that apparently couldn't exist.

Figure 6.7 Drawing Massey's 'throwntogetherness'



The play philosopher gets up.

I rise and inspect my constructed schema from a standing position. What I've drawn here is a human image of play, I note with seriousness, yet at the same time, I can't help but burst into laughter.

"Tjidde kidde" wasn't just satisfying to say. In my play, I could understand the whole world, and the world could understand me. It was an experience of existence. As an adult, 'tjidde kidde' no longer works, but thanks to the ontology of play, I still have the ability to play as an adult and experience fullness through the ontology of play. This mode of play is, therefore, a distinctly subjective experience.

Local knowledge

The play philosopher is in classroom 1.07.

I stand in my classroom. Traces are left on the tables: an empty plastic sandwich bag and pieces of tangerine peel. I have the brush in my hand. I read the words on the whiteboard.

Constant

utopiste, utopien, New Babylon: social network with multiple spaces;

Maquette model: scale up scale down

Dérive: create discover: Play chance encounter possibility

Homo Ludens Johan Huizinga 1938

social isolation homo ludens <_> homo sapiens?

Homo ludens: to create and be a possibility: to be a "potential"

playful being

Create -> Activist art Free freedom liberated 1957 Situationists

1948-1951 CoBrA, Copenhagen Brussels Amsterdam Asger Jorn

Karel Appel children's drawings, Monsters Jorn.

I gaze at 'Constant' on the board. With his *New Babylon* project, he attempted to concretise the human image of homo ludens, to embody it in spatial work. The disadvantage of abstract thinking in philosophy is that it seems to stay on paper, I notice as I continue reading. The danger of getting bogged down in a semantic discussion about the difference between play and existence looms.

Doreen Massey connects her subjective experience with abstract concepts. In doing so, she breathes life into abstract concepts and manages to establish a connection between her vision and me as a reader. I also walk, just like her, and look at the mountain that is 'there', and when I arrive there, it becomes 'here.' And like her, I pass landscapes while traveling by train. I also pick up the lives of students again when I am in Utrecht. Their lives and my life that both continue, while we take our trains back home.

It reminds me of my colleague here at the academy, philosopher Bibi Straatman. In her essay *In de herhaling ontstaat iets nieuws* (2009) [*In repetition, something new emerges*], she points out the methodological power hidden in the subjective experience of the Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582). Usually, the explanation is that this was a strategic move. As a woman, a nun, living in the 16th century, there was a real threat of being condemned for heresy by the Inquisition (Straatman, 2009). Weber (1996) argues that this is why Teresa writes in a relativistic and colloquial tone, making it seem as if it were spontaneously written. But, Straatman says, there is something else behind that spontaneity. In this way, Teresa not only addresses her fellow sisters but also demonstrates from her subjective experience that the 'path to perfection' is a personal journey. She hides this reformation behind the relativisation of her own story.

Through Derrida's notion of 'white mythology,' Straatman argues that subjective experience and inner experience still have a low standing in science. By this designation, Derrida means that we still live in the myth of the Enlightenment, which preaches the method of repeatability, describe ability, and control as a form of truth-finding. Straatman follows Argentine thinker Walter Mignolo (2012b), who, as a 21st-century thinker, aims to break the colonisation of knowledge and the one-sidedness of knowledge sources. Of course, there are significant differences between Teresa and Doreen Massey. A major difference is that Massey does not focus on inner experience but connects her subjective experience to the physical outdoor space. She applies her revision of space by describing the use of space from her own experience and placing abstract concepts in it. In this light, her experience, perhaps like Teresa's, is not serving but rather guiding.

Secret and masked playing

I stand before the whiteboard and erase all notions, concepts, data, and names. Only a few minuscule traces of Rowan Suus Marieke remain.

'A board with text is too limited,' I recall Massey saying as I gaze at the board. I grab my marker. I still have some time before my next class starts.

If I start from my own subjective experience, like Massey, like Teresa, then there are at least two types of play:

1. Play as an epistemological source of knowledge—play as a method of 'knowing,' and

2. Fink's conception of human play as a manifestation in my human existence. I will then employ play as philosophy to manifest the permeability of play. I will do this from a philosophical anthropological framework.

The play philosopher makes an observation.

The speed of writing on the board feels like I am teaching a class. I continue by distinguishing the permeability of play from philosophising play and the importance to distinguish 'secret' from 'masked' playing.

0) Permeability of play: Secret and masked playing
philosophise play Both: Aim and objective?

1. Play as an epistemological source of knowledge—play as a method of 'knowing,' and

2. Fink's conception of human play as a manifestation in my human existence. I will then employ play as philosophy to manifest the permeability of play. I will do this from a philosophical anthropological framework.

3. philosophical anthropology,

4. Playing as: appearance = phenomenology = philosophising play =

Playing as existence,

Play as activity.

This implies that the embodied secret and masked play that I recognised in my rounds of field research will be engaged. To emphasise how secret and masked playing ‘bring forth’ is as a multiplicity in itself. And therefore, it surpasses the concept of play explained by Fink as the ‘sphere as two realms’. Therefore I term it, in contrast to Fink, ‘secret and masked playing.’ I am ‘masked’ as a researcher, but while playing masked, its secrecy touches on the openness of the ontology of play. By adopting Massey’s approach, my subjective experience serves as an example of how these could manifest. I catch myself counting. There are four areas.

0). Zero is the foundational point: the permeability of play is connected to secret and masked playing. This ‘secret and masked playing’ introduces distance and, consequently, appearance. It generates a multitude of appearances within human play, serving as a fundamental phenomenon in itself. Playing is thus generative within the context of human play; it gives rise to a variety of manifestations as appearances that coincide with our engagement in life. The secrecy that is ‘covered’ touches on openness; the openness that I have certainly experienced in playing when I was a child.

1). If I further investigate this, this is immediately my first assumption to explore: how does playing as a source of knowledge present itself for philosophising play?

The researcher interrupts.

Will that be my main research question?

The play philosopher nods.

I guess it is indeed. How does playing as an epistemological tool present itself for philosophising play?

2). I explore through appearance, and therefore it touches on phenomenology. Thereby I keep in mind Fink’s mission, that it is time to liberate play from representation. Then, I conclude it is best to reinstall mimesis as appearance.

The researcher interrupts.

Is that my aim then? To reinstall mimesis as appearance through the embodiment of playing?

The play philosopher nods.

That is my aim: To reinstall the notion of mimesis as appearance through the embodiment of play.

The researcher asks.

Objectives?

The play philosopher nods again.

In order to explore the notion of mimesis as appearance through the embodiment of play:

- I embody the act of playing as a philosophical method:
- I explore the contribution of playing as form of knowledge in the (colonisation) of epistemological debate (Massey, 2005; Mignolo, 2012a; Straatman, 2009).
- In the embodied act of playing I explore being in the midst of the philosophical concept of mimesis as a representation and as appearance.
- I explore the method of subjective experience; autoethnography as research.

The play philosopher focusses on the scheme of the whiteboard and continues writing under point 3.

- 3). This means that this quest is situated in the domain of the anthropological field of the philosophy of play. From this specific domain, I examine the appearance in two forms of play: As activity, and the existence of playing as a fundamental phenomenon.
- 4) Playing can appear in a play activity. In the sense that I play a 'game' activity.
But playing encompasses existence.

With my phone I take a picture of my notes and erase the board. In erasing, I reflect. This implies that I am going to investigate the 'coeval co-existence' of playing.' This resembles mimesis. I feel the desire and hope that with these results, with this active materialised practice, I will activate Fink's phenomenology of play in an embodied manner as a philosophy of play.

Later that week, I encounter Bibi Straatman in the faculty room. I tell her that her insights about Teresa are helping me a lot. She responds that she is adopting Mignolo's method and is currently developing a form of 'natural conversations' as a method; as a source of knowledge (Straatman, 2009). 'The type of conversations you have during a walk can also be a form of knowledge', Straatman explains. She hopes that these forms of knowledge receive recognition and become epistemological sources in science. She points out the promising developments, such as the role of testimony described by Badiou (2018). She asks about my doctoral research. I tell her that I have just this week decided to conduct an additional round of field research. In order to philosophise play I shall actively utilise playing as an embodied philosophical method of being. And with a proof of playing as an embodied philosophical method I am able to philosophise play.

'How are you going to do that?' she asks. 'By bike?'

I nod.

'Are you going back to Belgium?' she asks.

I shake my head. 'To Spain.'

CHAPTER 7 PLAYING CYCLING: PLAYING FINK

Introduction

The play philosopher introduces

After ‘my moment in class’ in September 2019, when I wrote my insights on my whiteboard, I developed plans for an extra round of fieldwork. It is March 2021, and I am elaborating these insights on a ‘training field’ for cycling in Spain. This chapter embodies Fink’s conception of human play as a coming to appearance, manifesting the permeability of playing.

In concrete terms, this means that I am developing the notion of ‘self-witness’ within the context of playing and enjoying how philosophical tools can be applied in daily life. Therefore, it is an elaboration of a played philosophy of play in its human existence.

Deceuninck – Quickstep heading to Spain

In a rented apartment on the Spanish coast, the researcher reads the digital newsletters from the Deceuninck – Quickstep cycling team.

According to a news article from two years ago, the team would soon depart for their training camp in Calpe (*Deceuninck – Quick-Step trekt naar Calpe richting 2020*, 2019).

Deceuninck – Quickstep heading to Spain

The riders and staff will head south next week for the first training camp, in preparation for the upcoming season. For the third consecutive year, *Deceuninck-Quickstep* is heading to Calpe. In this Spanish city, the foundation for the upcoming season will be laid, and the program and goals will be determined. This training camp is crucial, as some riders will leave for their first race in a month from now. ‘We want to create a strong group in Calpe while enjoying the fantastic facilities and climate,’ says coach Koen Pelgrim. (*Deceuninck – Quick-Step trekt naar Calpe richting 2020*, 2019).

I have an apartment with an unobstructed view of the sea. Three palm trees to the left, and the endlessly summer-blue sea with the beach right in front of me. I’ve placed the large dining table right in front of the window. It is March 2021, and due to COVID-19, rental prices for seaside apartments have plummeted.

The swing philosopher adds.

It's an apartment that normally only well-paid sports stars can afford. Almost every morning, around half-past four, a tractor appears on the beach while it's still dark, sweeping the sand. I play the game of getting up earlier and then wait behind my table for the tractor. I meticulously follow how the sand is smoothed out. From the sixth floor where I am, the tractor has the dimensions of a large remote controlled toy.

I also have a good view of Calpe's ultimate tourist attraction: the Ifach rock. This is an immensely steep rock of over three hundred meters that protrudes where the beach and the sea meet. The rock is a designated nature reserve with flowers, herbs, and birds. After my arrival, I immediately went there the next day. At the top of the Ifach, I photographed my apartment and the mountains behind Calpe: the training ground of professional cyclists.

Once, in 2013, I read a travelogue by journalist Hinke Hamer (2013) in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw*. For two days, she cycled with former Belgian professional cyclist Patrick Deneut. Patrick cycled for the Belgian Lotto team for several years, but was not among the world's top cyclists. After his cycling career, he emigrated to Spain and has since been organising cycling holidays in the coastal province of Alicante. He takes you to train in the hilly and mountainous areas around the resorts of Calpe and Denia.

The researcher talks about the nature of her research.

Unlike my rounds of field research in Belgium, my stay in Spain is, this time, phenomenological research as a practice (Van Manen, 2016). In practice, my aim is to give form to the notion of mimesis by being here, a training ground for professional cyclists. In doing so, I align with Fink's mission that it is time to liberate play from the representation of the actual (Fink, 2016). My presence here is both in the actual and in the non-actual. In the field of representation, I shall play. In the embodied act of playing, I explore being in the midst of the philosophical concept of mimesis as a representation and as appearance.

The play philosopher adds.

This particular practice-oriented research into the philosophical notion of mimesis will be the foundation that ensures I can substantiate the claim about embodying philosophical notions by (re)playing them. Indeed, I hope that through this method of research, I can establish that playing is not exclusively linked to the execution of a game—i.e., a form of play as an activity—but can also be a philosophical approach to acquiring knowledge. Thus, it is an invitation to contemplate whether playing can be a movement in phenomenology; a phenomenological way, where playing through and with philosophical notions generates knowledge.

The researcher takes over.

Now, I am at a point in my research where the training area in former professional rider Patrick Deneut's region seems to present the most suitable opportunity for this invitation. While riding on public roads, I aim to incorporate Massey's notion into the research on play, mimesis, and appearance through embodied practice with physical execution.

There is, in fact, something peculiar about the training ground of cyclists. Every public road is, in essence, a cyclist's training ground. This raises the question of whether the cyclist's training ground is always present. Is this presence immanent, just as 'London' is immanent for Massey when she stays in Milton Keynes? Or is something else happening with the cyclist's training ground? Does the training ground only appear for a professional cyclist when he or she cycles on the public road as part of training?

The play philosopher catches this query and turns it into a meta-question.

Now, I pose the question: what does it mean for the actual when something is simultaneously immanent for another? And what possible connection does this have with the phenomenon of appearance?

The researcher wonders,

What if my findings indicate that the latter is the case? And suppose a training ground is only an appearance for a professional cyclist; what exactly does Patrick, as a former professional cyclist, show to his guests when

he takes them on training sessions in Calpe? And how far can I go with my method of imitation if a training ground for non-professional cyclists does not exist at all?

The swing philosopher adds.

Just like a professional cyclist, I am going on a 'training camp' for a month. To establish a solid foundation and, in the meantime, enjoy the 'fantastic facilities.'

Patrick Deneut still guides cycling enthusiasts, but I have not contacted him. Conducting desk research to find information on what exactly a professional cyclist does during a training camp seems to be a better option at this stage.

The researcher studies the website of the De Ceuninck-Quickstep cycling team.

"The first three days are mainly spent on photoshoots, but we also do a bit of core stability. After these three days, the real training starts, and the riders are divided into groups based on their goals', Pelgrim continues' (*Deceuninck – Quick-Step trekt naar Calpe richting 2020*, 2019).

The play philosopher processes the information on how a training camp for professionals is structured.

One, photoshoot; two, core stability, and only after three days, three, the actual training begins. If I don't count the travel time, and if I cheat just a little bit, then I can still join 'the real training.'

Photoshoot in Calpe (1)

The researcher gets to work.

It's Sunday morning, and I'm in the bedroom. I brought cycling clothing from the French brand *Café de Cycliste* to Calpe and am in the process of putting it on. Navy blue bib shorts, a white mesh tank top, and a jacket in grey and dark blue. After my last round of field research, I bought this expensive clothing from this French cycling brand. Partly because I think it's beautiful, but also because, due to a great deal of cycling, I now look like an

emaciated professional cyclist. For the first time in my life, I fit into French sizes.

Café du Cycliste is certainly not the only brand in the emerging market of fashionable cycling clothing. But what sets *Café du Cycliste* apart is that they use older models in their advertising. At least, they have a male model with a grey beard, into which the deep creases in his weathered brown face disappear. Unfortunately, the women are neither grey nor weathered, and certainly they have no creases. Still, fortunately, it seems that some of the sporty-looking models are middle aged.

I look in the mirror. I look well-trained, and I am well-trained, but I still don't cycle fast. I think of the models from *Café Cycliste*. No one knows how fast they cycle. Pictures are still images and therefore never show how fast someone is cycling.

The play philosopher reflects.

After my last round of fieldwork, in which I cycled the classics, I wanted to maintain my well-trained body and therefore continued making long rides at home in the Netherlands. However, due to my new appearance in the jersey of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, for the first time I received comments about my relatively slow pace. A woman on her electric bike overtook me, saying, 'I would've thought you could go faster.' Or I was accused of 'just messing around.'

The latter was the case during a cycling tour during a Covid lockdown period. I had dropped a paving stone on my toe because, during this mandatory home isolation, I wanted to work in the garden. I managed to get into my cycling shoe with my heavily bruised toe. At one point during the ride, I overtook a woman. She was my age and rode a 'regular' bike. But I couldn't keep up the pace at which I passed her for long. When she passed me again, she called out as she passed, 'you're just messing around.'

'Yes, indeed,' I thought, that's exactly what I'm doing: 'I'm just messing around.' But with this body in an official cycling jersey from a Belgian cycling club, I create different expectations for the outside world. Apparently, she expected me to launch a splitting attack to make the race intense.

Fink would classify this incident as an example that illustrates that there is always a sense in play [*Spielsinn*] (Fink, 2016, p. 20). Every instance of play involves a sense-imbued element. 'We can only speak of play when a specially produced sense belongs to bodily motions' (2016, p. 22). He argues that play is inherently full of sense. Without sense, there is no play. However, there is a distinction between types of sense when related to play.

When discussing the sense of play, Fink distinguishes between external play-sense and internal play-sense. He defines external play-sense as 'the signification that play has for those who first decide on it, who intend to do it—or even the sense that it may eventually have for spectators who are not participating in it' (Fink, 2016, p. 22). In contrast, internal play-sense refers to the 'sense-context of things, acts, and relations that are played' (p. 22). This coherence can also be imaginary, as the sense coherence is established within the context of the play.

Play-sense is thus twofold. On the one hand, it is recognisable to the outside world, but on the other hand, what happens in play is hidden from the sensory perception of a player or spectator due to the sense-context of the things, acts, and relations that are played.

It's important to note that play-sense differs from the pleasure of play [*Spiel-lust*] (Fink, 2010, p. 20). Fink speaks of pleasure 'at [*am*] play and pleasure in play' (2016, p. 22). What happens in play, is invisible to the eyes. Human play is 'a phenomenon of existence of an entirely enigmatic sort' (p. 22).

Most certainly, the middle-aged woman on her bike recognised the pleasure of play, and therefore, the sense of play in my actions. But at the same time, she accused me of 'just messing around.' That was correct. On the one hand, I wanted to maintain my fit body, but I did this in recognisable 'play clothes' and with a corresponding athletic physique. Precisely because of my appearance, I enjoyed cycling. Therefore, my play is more than just performing an activity. Understanding that it is more, whatever it is, can be grasped precisely through the distinction between external and internal play-sense. In a peculiar way, I created a sense-context while cycling with my skinny body in the outfit of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, along with

my heavily bruised toe.

The researcher continues and provides context.

Now that I have completed my research in the Westhoek in Belgium, I've decided not to cycle in the jersey of *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* during my stay here in Calpe, Spain. I want as little outside recognition as possible. This is also possible: due to Covid, there is currently no one here. There are no cycling enthusiasts for Patrick to guide. Only the roads and the mountains are present.

I could have stayed home as well. After all, the 2014 Tour de France winner, Italian cyclist Vincenzo Nibali, cycled through my street during the Giro d'Italia 2016 in Apeldoorn.

The Giro d'Italia, commonly known as the Giro, is an annual multiple-stage bicycle race, part of the professional road cycling calendar of the prestigious Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI). While primarily based in Italy, it frequently begins in other countries, highlighting its global popularity and attracting cycling enthusiasts worldwide.

The swing philosopher enthusiastically adds.

The Giro of that year, 2016, started with a time trial in Apeldoorn. The finish line was on the Loolaan. This avenue runs parallel to the street on which I live. The day before the start, Nibali, as the national champion in his Italian tricolour, rode slowly past my house. Like all other teams and riders, he had trained for the time trial and did his 'cooling down' in my street. I have a photo of him. Nibali passing my house. His time trial bike with a closed rear wheel reveals that this is not a MAMIL lookalike in a replica of the Italian national champion's outfit, pedalling around slowly in my street.

The play philosopher explains her design.

But I want distance. Roads that are as much as possible stripped of all other 'fields' like 'grocery cycling route' or 'commuting'. I want a road as empty as possible, on a possibly immanent training ground. In this way, my research design is that Calpe allows me to create a spatial 'ontic appearance' (Fink, 2016, p. 29) in the playworld of the training field of professional cyclists.

The researcher makes it concrete for herself.

Thus, just like in the Westhoek, I immerse myself in a playing field to bring forth. This bringing forth in play is facilitated by playing as an embodied method.

I have brought my jersey from *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers*, but in this phenomenological adventure, I wear *Café du Cycliste*.

The swing philosopher notices something remarkable.

What stands out about all the models of *Café du Cycliste* is that, while cycling, they gaze into the distance. I instantly recognise this gaze in the pictures.

In rugged, undoubtedly French, mountains, they effortlessly struggle along small roads with poor asphalt, gazing into the far distance. Sometimes the models wear sunglasses. *Café du Cycliste* also designs sunglasses. These frames look nothing like the glasses of professional cyclists but more like classic Prada-style frames. *Café du Cycliste* doesn't cycle for victory, but embodies an experience.

The researcher begins her cycling journey.

I grab my racing bike and step into the elevator. In the elevator mirror, I stare at myself and gaze at my bike. I am a real pro, handling the bike so easily in the small elevator.

The swing philosopher quotes Fink gracefully in fluently German.

'Wir fragen nach dem Menschenspiel. Und dabei fragen wir zunächst an gerade bei der alltäglichen Bekanntheit dieses Phänomens' (Fink, 2010, p. 13). 'We are asking about human play. And in doing so, we are first of all inquiring into precisely the everyday familiarity with this phenomenon' (Fink, 2016, p. 16).

The researcher explains.

There is a lot of play in a human life, but the question about play is a question about a very familiar appearance, Fink asserts. 'Playing does not simply occur in our life like the vegetative processes; it is always an occurrence that

is luminously suffused with sense [*sinnhaft*], an enactment that is experienced' (Fink, 2016, p. 16).

The swing philosopher has working titles for this 'enactment that is experienced'.

'Playing cycling, playing Fink.'

The researcher begins her journey.

I leave the elevator and get on the bike. I bought a bike map of the Costa Blanca area. On it, I saw that I can cycle from my apartment to the Bernia. The Bernia is a well-known mountain. That is to say, the bike shop owner who does my racing bike maintenance, asked enthusiastically when I told him about my plans, 'Are you going to cycle the Bernia?' Proudly and wholeheartedly, I said 'yes' and tried to remember the name.

The foot of this mountain is about ten kilometres from my apartment, and the climb itself is another nine to the top. I have more or less memorised the route to the mountain. I put my bike computer in my back pocket. "*Café du Cycliste* cycles purely and without instruments, I noticed.

I follow the signs to *Ermita de Lleus*. It turns out to be a church. A church so white it is almost blue. It is located on a small square. On this square, there are a few pine trees. The distance between the trees is perfectly calculated. I am amazed by the beauty of the place and wonder at the silence. It is Sunday morning, and there is no one at all in this paradisiacal place. I lean my bike against a pine tree and take a picture. I look at the scene I just photographed. My red and black Specialized Roubaix, my 'research bike,' against a pine tree, and behind it, a church white as icing sugar. I realise that during my rounds of field research, I almost always photograph my bike and never myself.

The swing philosopher interrupts.

'Except when I tried to mimic Frank Vandenbroucke's graffiti image.'

The researcher continues.

I correct myself. Mimicking the graffiti drawing of Frank Vandenbroucke turned out to be an at least thirteen-photograph attempt to capture his gaze.

That was on top of the Catsberg, by the chapel wall. Where I'm standing now is exactly the same type of landscape as the ones in the *Café du Cycliste* pictures. I grab my bike and place my camera on a church windowsill. I press the self-timer and then have ten seconds to strike a pose, leaning on my bike, gazing into the distance. I look at the result. The light creates an alienating effect. This could be *Café du Cycliste*. I put my camera on the low white wall of the square and grab my bike. I have ten seconds to cycle along the path of the olive grove and meanwhile gaze into the distance. I walk back and look at the photo. This could also be a *Café du Cycliste* picture.

I sit on the low wall and dangle my legs over the edge. Can I take more? I look at the clods of dry soil under the olive trees. Shall I stand there with my bike? Pretend that I'm cycling over the large clods in the grove? I know how these clods feel.

The swing philosopher reminisces about growing up in the 'urban development plan' of Duiven, surrounded by new housing blocks, sand hills, and deserted farmlands and orchards.

With my green wellies, I used to crush these clods of soil in Duiven. You hold one between the bottom of one boot and the top of the other, gently pressing while grinding.

I check how I can touch the ground with my cycling shoes to dig up a lump of soil. I purchased these cycling shoes especially for Calpe. This is actually the first time I'm wearing them: the black is still lustrous and velvety. It would hurt to damage my shiny shoes. I didn't just crush them, I also played 'war' with these clods. I still know what they feel like in my hands. How they become hand grenades. Find the pin, pull it out, throw it away, run for your life, quickly dive behind a wall, and then wait for the big explosion.

It's relatively easy for me to loosen the clods with my cycling shoes. I pick them up with my hands, lay them down beside me on the edge, and sort them by size. Using my index finger, I slide the grains of loose soil to the corresponding clod. I still have to ascend the Bernia, but I don't feel like it, I realise. I'm fine here.

Playing Philosophy

The researcher looks at the orchard.

I look at the orchard. I once swung in an orchard with Karl Marx. But the chance that I will gaze into the far distance here with Eugen Fink beside me, is nil. I've done "sitting with Fink". It was the only way for me to open *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* [Fundamental Phenomena of Human Existence].

The swing philosopher uses her play abilities.

I found out that *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* is a collection of lectures. I pretended he was addressing me directly with the written texts. But "playing Fink" was a different experience than sitting in silence with Marx in an orchard full of swings.

The play philosopher interrupts and provides context.

While exceptions exist (Horsten, 2018; Ossekop et al., 2015), the most crucial analyses of Fink's work generally position him as a philosopher within the context of two other prominent figures, Edmund Husserl and his successor at the University of Freiburg, Martin Heidegger. He is less frequently recognised as an independent scholar with a distinct position (Brinkmann & Friesen, 2018). Additionally, in-depth studies by Bruzina (2004) also place Fink within this philosophical lineage. From Husserl, Fink acquired a specific and precise phenomenological approach, while from Heidegger, he adopted the philosophical anthropology of 'being' (Bruzina, 2004). Moran (2007) argues that Fink's intention was to reintegrate the 'question of being' into transcendental phenomenology, rather than replacing Husserlian phenomenology with Heideggerian fundamental ontology.

The swing philosopher wonders.

Where can we recognise the enactment of play as a fundamental phenomenon in the in-depth studies on Fink's phenomenology?

The play philosopher continues to give more background information about Fink's philosophy of education.

What is often overlooked is that from 1948 onwards, Fink held a chair in

pedagogy and philosophy at the University of Freiburg. Under its aegis, Fink focuses on philosophy and education (Brinkmann 2016), and elaborates on educational planning and adult education outside the university (Kather, 2009). Many of Fink's lectures and seminars with this perspective have been collected and published (von Herrmann, 1970). With this philosophy of education, Fink develops his phenomenology into a pedagogical one.

The notion of 'Selbstzeugenschaft', 'self-testimony. or literally, 'self-witnessing' as an anthropological experience is a central theme in Fink's perspective on existence (Burchardt, 2001). This self-witnessing is, according to Fink, an 'anthropological ground moment' (Burchardt, 2001, p. 28).

After Fink's death in 1975, former students Egon Schütz and Franz-Anton Schwartz, edited a set of lectures from the summer of 1955, to be published as *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* in 1979.

Egon Schütz (2016), who continued to teach until his retirement in 1997, stresses that, especially from the phenomenological standpoint, the emphasis is not on presenting existing knowledge and established findings, but that the collections are intended to encourage readers to critically reflect on fundamental questions. This 'Erziehung Philosophie' (von Herrmann, 1970), education – philosophy, is therefore a line of thought that reaches deep into the history of German philosophy and education. Moreover, it touches upon the rich history of German Bildung "self-cultivation", in which personal development and cultural transmission go hand in hand (Meyer-Wolters, 1992; Schütz, 2016).

The swing philosopher suggests a method.

Why don't I play Fink's difficult book *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins*?

The play philosopher continues.

What if I literally play this book? And pretend that I'm attending a class by Fink and 'listening' to his lectures? Yet playing is much scarier than teaching students and giving them assignments on mimicking philosophers or artists. Therefore, I first choose something familiar to study. Hence, I reread

Mary Midgley's *The Game Game* (1974) first. In this work, Midgley argues that while some rules of the game are fixed, many are not. She gave me the final push to actually study the book by playing it.

The researcher interrupts.

Midgley (1974) makes me realise that to elaborate the notion play attitude (Huizinga, 1950, 2008; Steenbergen, 2004; Suits, 2005; Tamboer, 1985; Tamboer & Steenbergen, 2000) into an openness I have to understand how attitude includes that freedom. This openness would eventually connect to Fink's philosophical anthropology and the ontology of play. Midgley (1974) emphasises that attitude in the form of 'being' is not specifically defined in a rule of the game. I found it enlightening because games, especially sports, are often described in thick rulebooks, but there is an openness for the player. In sports it is presumed that you are 'an athlete.' But how to deal with 'being' while playing sports?

The play philosopher emphasises.

Existential matters like self-care (Fink, 1995) are not described in the regulations of a game.

The researcher makes it concrete with an example where self-care is recognisable.

At the Rotterdam Open tennis tournament in 2015, Dutch journalist Wilfred Genee observed a piece of paper on the bench of tennis player Andy Murray, along with a towel and an energy bar. On this note, Murray had written down 10 points for himself. At number 1 was 'Be good to yourself,' followed by 'Try your best' (The Guardian, 2015).'

The play philosopher interprets.

They are almost Kantian maxims of an extremely successful professional tennis player in relation to the institutionalised game. 'Be good to yourself,' 'Try your best.' It creates space to take control and stand on the tennis court with a specific attitude.

The researcher explains.

However, with Midgley as a moral philosopher, I once again realised that attitude, although it is often perceived as a rule and thus receives a similar treatment, it is not one. There is much more freedom than I think there is. There is much more freedom than I allow myself. This made me realise how crucial it is to distinguish between attitude as rules for living, and established rules.

The play philosopher designs an embodiment of Fink's theory by playing it.

Midgley and the reflection on the simplicity of Murray's rules for himself brought me to relaxation, and thereby perspectives for action. What if I exaggerate this? What if I use this as a subversive method to break through this fear of reading through play? What a liberation. But above all: what a 'pleasure' and 'play-sense' (Fink, 2016).

I placed myself in the narrative structure of the protagonist from Joseph Campbell's *A Hero's Journey* (Campbell et al., 1990; Vogler, 2020).

Campbell's analysis posits that many myths and novels adhere to a specific pattern. In this so-called 'monomyth' (Campbell et al., 1990), each story commences with the protagonist realising that the ordinary world is not what it seems, marking the hero's journey as a 'call for adventure.' Within this narrative cycle, the protagonist invariably encounters a mentor—an older or wise figure providing guidance.

The swing philosopher philosophises.

As a mentor, Fink quickly assumed the persona of 'Gandalf the Grey' from *The Lord of the Rings*. With this image, he also acquired the voice of actor Ian McKellen. Thus, the journey to the fundamental phenomena of human existence began.

The play philosopher finds out.

I recognised similarities between Fink's lectures from 1955 and the statements in Débord's concept of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1992). It's as if

the frontman of The Situationists has been taking these classes. In a lecture, Fink points out how institutions conceal the enigmatic nature of the world we live in. Therefore, the enigmatic is a part of real existence. Consequently, there is more to reality than what these institutions present as 'real.' Fink accuses these particular institutions of a political agenda behind concealing the enigmatic presence in our lives.

The institutions convey a sense of security – but they also conceal, through their interpretations of life, the original enigma of the world and existence. Additionally, they often obscure the fundamental phenomenon on which they themselves are based; they veil their origins, their origin from the will to power, and they disguise themselves in self-idealizations. And so, above all, they demand a way of life, liberation from the torment of questioning. The 'permanent revolution' is the greatest horror for all institutions. (Fink, 1995, p. 28) **viii**

The play philosopher summarises.

Fink sees in philosophy an opportunity. 'Instead, the opportunity lies in the fact that in this dispute, the ancient binding power of institutions, which otherwise binds the individual, breaks, and the gaze becomes free to the entire mysterious questionability of our existence' (Fink, 1995, p. 29). **ix**

Therefore, Fink proposes a radical earthly anthropology. 'A radical earthly anthropology that arises from the self-interpretation of human existence' (p. 29). **x**

The swing philosopher is enthusiastic.

A radically earthly anthropology!

It may be that in death, we are subject to the judgment of the divine world order, that the objective balance of our good and bad deeds is drawn, but it is the mystery of our freedom how we decide in earthly life: we take a stand, we are not puppets, not even in the face of the overwhelming force of fate; we take a stand, we assess our lives, not based on objective findings, but on experienced 'happiness' or 'misfortune.' From the immediate intimacy, we give our testimony (Fink, 1995, p. 40). **xi**

'From the immediate intimacy, we give our testimony' (p.40), I repeated. I am allowed to witness my own experience.

The researcher analyses.

Thanks to the mentor, I finally dared to think this out loud to myself. It sounded like an echo in my awakening. 'These testimonies,' he said, 'are specific articulations of self-understanding' (1995, p. 40).

The swing philosopher understands the mentor.

With a gentle gesture, the mentor opened up the image of a path full of obstacles and challenges that awaited me. But with McKellen's soothing bass tones, I was finally able to actually experience Fink's philosophical, unrelenting radically earthly anthropology personally.

'No one begins existence for the first time, inherited practices already delineate all the paths and traces of the interpretation of life' (1995, p. 41). **XII**

Finally, I had found the philosophical texts I had been looking for so long.

It is true that we are usually stuck in fixed, institutionally shaped communities - before we can think; we live in organized groups that, with their massive life doctrines, their dogmas and ideologies, as it were, halt and prevent the process of living self-understanding, giving a rigid order of meaning to sociality. And nevertheless, again and again, the question, the problem, the amazement breaks out in people with elemental force and drives us out of all safe havens into the open sea. (Fink, 1995, p. 41) **XIII**

The researcher points out.

Through Joseph Campbell's *Hero's journey*, I was able to recognise Eugen Fink's terminology such as 'living self-understanding' and 'radically earthly anthropology'. I could appropriate it through the distance of my playing philosophy, since the ontology of play bears this distance.

It withdraws in a peculiar manner from the other ways of directing one's life; it is at a distance from them. But while it appears to escape [entziehen] the standard flow of life, it relates [bezieht] to it in a manner that is particularly imbued with sense, namely, in the mode of portrayal [Darstellung]. (Fink, 2016, p. 21)

By linking the concept of 'radically earthly anthropology' to my 'living self-cultivation,' I finally dared to experience the elementary power that leads me out of all safe havens and into the open sea. The most important book for this study thus became an "adventure" (Campbell, 1990).

Just as there is a secret desire for illusory self-idealisation that must be fought, there is also a secret pleasure in self-accusation, in self-abasement, a pleasure in one's own disillusionment. And this is no less an obstacle to genuine and true understanding. But holding the real middle ground between these two extreme states of the soul does not necessarily lead to the individual treating oneself objectively like an object. The concept of 'objectivity' is misleading due to its ambiguity. (Fink, 1995, p. 49)^{xiv}

The book served as an explanation for my ongoing discomfort in my research. Investigations into idealised self-idealisation: the secrecy of a road captain ultimately with too low an average speed. Or constantly slipping into self-accusation, that I don't matter, and that only other people are allowed to be philosophers. I also found resonance in the offerings to embrace the ambiguous subjective experience.

The consensus we found was the notion of 'openness.' In openness, spatial diversity as a human image can simultaneously find a place that breaks with the perspective of objectivity.

'We always live in an openness to our existence, in an openness to "meaning," to task, to happiness and unhappiness, we live in an understanding, in an interpreted situation' (Fink, 1995, p. 49). ^{xv}

'Openness,' I reminded myself, 'openness.' And we live in an understanding, in an interpreted situation.

That human existence is most familiar with itself in no way means that only the primal intimacy of life with itself takes place here, that the familiar and trusted atmosphere of down-to-earthness, of homely grounding, only and exclusively prevails here. Rather, sudden revolutions towards the uncanny, the horrifying, and the mysterious belong to existence as such. (Fink, 1995, p. 36) ^{xvi}

The swing philosopher philosophises along.

With his deep-set pale grey-blue eyes, the mentor suddenly turned to me. He emphasised that human existence does not have the final answers to the final questions we pose to ourselves. If we tune into human existence alone, we shield off a large part of existence, leading to an unwarranted illusory fixation on a specific part of existence.

He saw that I was startled. Quickly, he tried to reassure me. He soothed me

by stating that we have tools for this.

‘Philosophy has the tools for it,’ he said. Then he listed the ‘hand tools’ [*Handwerkszeug*] that philosophy uses:

Curiosity, intellectual sharpness, judgment, speculative fantasy, critical alertness, and many other gifts, but most important is the emotion that befalls us as fate – the emotion caused by a profound sense of wonder. This wonder is the best part of humanity. It happens innocently in the ‘intact’ childhood. (Fink, 1995, p. 17) **xvii**

The researcher wonders.

I recognised his difference in thinking about existing between childhood and adulthood. But with Doreen Massey (2005) I explored the concept of coeval co-existence. From her spatial perspective I turned to philosophising play. Hence, ‘to wonder’ as a philosophical tool coevally co-exists without having to adopt an absolute existing of ‘wonder’, waiting to be reused. It can come into appearance. Perhaps the ‘intact world of childhood’ shatters, but the equipment of ‘wondering’ as a philosophical tool remains. Hence, how to apply these tools as philosophical tools?

It does make a difference how you use them, the mentor hurried to say. And he continued his plea about the place of understanding in human existence.

‘We do not first exist and then acquire a receiving understanding, no, we exist precisely as understanding, as beings open to meaning. Human existence is standing within an interpretation of itself’ (Fink, 1995, p. 50). **xviii**

The researcher continues.

Fink, therefore, sees the fundamental phenomena of human existence not so much as modes of being but as modes of understanding.

‘Human knowledge of humans ultimately finds expression in self-understanding,’ he says. But initially, we can’t form an image of this at all. ‘We stand in our existence’ (1995, p. 23). Yet, I tried to visualise this “standing in our existence”, but he continued. ‘Human existence is for us the place of all understanding and non-understanding, the place of all comprehension, and the place of all mysteries’ (p. 23). **xix**

The swing philosopher understands the complexity.

This complicates developing an image of what this self-understanding [*Selbstverständigung*] ultimately is. The mentor explained about the felt sense of embarrassment. [*Verlegenheit*]. ‘We are embarrassed the first time we try to formulate it. We prefer to immediately and directly describe self-understanding’ (Fink, 1995, p. 47). **xx**

The initial strain in my relationship with the mentor arose because Fink’s formulation lacks a detailed exploration of embarrassment.

The researcher criticises Fink, noting a lack of experienced embarrassment.

As an experiential expert, I am acutely aware of the dangers contributing to this sense of embarrassment. However, I found no personal anecdote guiding me on the challenges of self-understanding and why, initially, we struggle to convey it. Ultimately, our differences led to an argument.

The swing philosopher clarifies.

The argument didn’t start because I employed play as a method to understand his work.

The researcher continues.

The disagreement originated from a compliment. I intended to express that I consider his philosophical anthropology beneficial, and that his philosophy of education would integrate exceptionally well into the currently popular genre of ‘self-help books’ (Bergsma, 2007). However, he wanted nothing of it. He dissected the word ‘help’ in self-help books. Philosophy is not there to ‘help.’ Philosophy is already inherent.

‘Philosophy is already in us, even when ‘you sleep’ (1995, p. 16). **xxi**

He referred to the sleeping life we lead when we don’t realise that our living self-understanding is obstructed by ideologies and dogmas. But it can be awakened, emphasised the mentor. ‘That determines the nature of every philosophical movement: it is primarily an awakening. Not communicating doctrines, contents of research results, methods and techniques’ (1995, p. 16). **xxii**

The mentor continued to explain the philosophical tools for this ‘awakening’ in philosophy, and that they are accessible to anyone. That is the reason why philosophy has accessible philosophical tools: speculative fantasy, curiosity, and wonder.

‘But precisely for that reason,’ I replied. ‘The simplicity of the hand-tools aligns with your insight that the ‘greatest philosophical questions and problems are lodged in the most ordinary words and things’ (Fink, 2016, p. 27).

He shook his head. ‘Help’ implies being ‘helped.’ That creates inequality in the relationship within which philosophy is conducted. The book, as well as the authors, then become ‘helpers.’

‘Philosophy is a conversation among people,’ he said, ‘with shared questions, meanings, and interpretations; she has her true reality in communication’ (Fink, 1995, p. 16). **xxiii**

The swing philosopher is disappointed.

I told him accusatorily that I found his fervour quite striking. He looked at me uncomprehendingly.

The play philosopher continues explaining.

The image of mentor Gandalf shrivelled. But for the first time, I also felt that I was capable of opening any book and realising that it was not ‘written in a completely unfamiliar language’ (Rilke, 2012, p. 21). And I felt that what this reading experience yielded was the courage to increasingly take a position of my own and to emphasise even more explicitly the permeability of play.

Playing methodology: the impact of the generative experience of playing

The researcher is still at the white church.

I have a clod of soil in my hand. The clod is pointy. I try to feel where the detonator is, but it remains a clod. I try to identify where in my approach I make a significant change compared to Fink. I execute as it were, ‘the en-

actment-character of play' in 'spontaneous activity, active doing and vital impulse' (Fink, 2006, p. 19). Not only do I enact the enactment-character of play, but I also enact the whole written sentence. 'The enactment-character of play is spontaneous activity, active doing, vital impulse: play is existence that is moved in itself as it were' (p. 19).

This enactment of the enactment-character of play is done secretly and masked. Yet through this playing the ontology of play is revealed and the philosophy of play can come to appearance. It can come to appearance because the enactment interrupts these so called 'institutionalised concepts.' Fink is not 'against' this institutionalising, but shows that the ontology of play disrupts if the institutions conceal the questioning of existence. And therefore, I embody play as an epistemological method; it generates a different kind of knowledge: it appears in openness. Whatever it is, since I am 'not born naked' (Fink, 1995, p. 27). I am born, just like everybody else, into concepts that already exist. Growing up in a life with presumed convictions that teach us what life is about. I am 'standing' in understanding and in non-understanding, within the enigmatic alignment of my existence. Yet the awareness of playing as a philosophical tool generates freedom. Thus, the awareness of playing is a 'waking up' as a philosophical method. And therefore, my playing is an elaboration of the permeability of play. Since I am at work, here.

The swing philosopher understands.

My playing manifests in the permeability of my play, in the permeability of my work.

The researcher is still wondering.

But what does it mean 'when I play?'

Rubbing the clod over a scab on my knee in the meantime. One side starts to come loose.

The swing philosopher notices.

I am definitely a skilled surgeon. With the clod, I cut into the scab a bit. Now I can look under the scab. I confirm: this is precise work and not without some risk.

The researcher very much recalls taking classes by Fink, and continues to narrate.

Fink also attributes significant value to human to human experience within philosophy.

It is not about examining the human being as a foreign thing and making some sort of statement about this human thing. It is about risking a free attempt at life, based on the self-illumination of existence, the risk of living a self-interpreted life, to scrutinize all institutions, not to shy away from any upheaval of venerable customs and institutions. Philosophy is less scholarly knowledge than a way of existing. (Fink, 1995, p. 53)**xxiv**

The play philosopher elucidates.

That's exactly what the conflict ultimately boiled down to. There is a significant difference between 'risk' as text and risk as a felt experience.

The researcher is upset.

This marks the difference between us. Nowhere do I find discomfort or any embarrassment in his writing. In Fink's work, there's no cheat sheet akin to Andy Murray's 1) 'be good to yourself' and 2) 'try your best.' This absence becomes evident when attempting to take the risk of embracing life freely. Nowhere are there scabs of congealed blood formed as a result of a self-interpreted life. Instead, he reaffirmed his approach.

'The risk of living a self-interpreted life, to scrutinize all institutions, not to shy away from any upheaval of venerable customs and institutions' (Fink, 1995, p. 53).

But nowhere do I detect that he is familiar with how penetrating the smell of iron is because the wound appears not to have healed, and is causing blood to flow from his knee once more.

The swing philosopher asks.

Is it necessary for a philosopher to describe pain and discomfort when it comes to human existence?

The researcher answers.

Yes, I answer. And continue, at least for me, in this specific philosophical framework.

The swing philosopher asks ‘why?’

The researcher responds.

If Egon Schütz (2016), editor of Fink’s lectures *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins*, states that in the phenomenological perspective, the emphasis is not on presenting existing knowledge and established findings but to encourage readers to critically reflect on fundamental questions, where are these lectures situated? Just focussing on the reader seems (remarkably) to come with a paradox: how does the fundamental phenomenon of play appear when it is presented without embarrassment, shame and discomfort? As an institutionalised form of philosophy? But if that is the case how to recognise, as a reader, the problems where play is situated nowadays?

Fantasy as a creative power

The researcher reflects.

I use my clod of soil as a pen and attempt to create a list on the white wall. In Fink’s fundamental structure of human existence, he posits that play is a fundamental phenomenon. Fantasy is essential in this context. ‘In myriad ways, fantasy permeates human life performance’ (Fink, 1995, p. 355). **xxv** What may no longer be apparent is that the notion of ‘fantasy’ shares the same root as phenomenon, and thus, ‘appearance.’

The play philosopher explains.

Fantasy (Phantasie) and phenomenon have a common etymological origin. Both words are derived from the Greek word *phainomenon*, often translated as ‘that which appears’ or ‘that which is visible’. The verb *phaino* is paired with *menon*, indicating that something is currently happening. Hence fantasy in the fundamental phenomenon play establishes the permeability of reality. With fantasy, Fink indicates the permeability of the basic phenomena of human existence.

The researcher distinguishes between imagination and plaything, thereby explaining ontic appearance.

In my playing, appearances emerge, while the clod remains translucently present. I gaze at my clod. It functions as a pen but has also been 'grinding-material', a hand grenade and a surgical instrument. However, it remains a clod. The 'pen,' the 'grenade,' 'the surgical knife' as playthings are ontic appearances. They appear while the clod remains visible. However, something else happened while I was busy with clods. I was fantasising. But fantasising can occur without images and without play activity. 'Without fantasy, our existence would be bleak and without creativity' (Fink, 1995, p. 356). **xxvi**

The play philosopher provides context.

Although there is a significant difference between imagination and fantasy, Fink uses both. It is noteworthy that he does this in an unproblematic way. Warnock (1976), Nussbaum (2006) and Watson (1988) show that due to the translation from the Greek "phantasia" to the Latin "imaginator," a significant shift has occurred. From a source of knowledge to a category of psychology (Watson, 1988). Watson (1988) provides a thorough exposition of how fantasy was considered a source of knowledge in ancient thought.

Despite some differences, the main Ancient Greek philosophies treated phantasia as a theory of knowledge. Fantasy was not construed as a psychology but as useful for effective speech such as poetry and rhetoric. Watson gives the example of Philostratus, who wrote in the third century BCE: 'For the artist is not confined to reproducing existing reality: the power of phantasia (...) creates what eyes have never seen but mind has conceived' (Watson, 1988, p. 78).

Fantasy as appearance is thus a creative power in which an image, unlike imagination, does not necessarily have to be present. Fantasising, seen as a source of knowledge, offers many more possibilities, as Fink argues that 'without fantasy, existence is not creative.

The researcher is sitting with her clods.

My pen is crumbling apart.

‘Play-phenomenology’ in the sense that play disrupts the actual has room for the classical conception of phantasia as a source of knowledge in this revelation because it includes the visually imperceptible in this understanding. The boundless possibilities, and the ability to think in spatially simultaneous co-existence, are touched by fantasy.

I gaze at the empty square, at the empty olive grove.

It is the permeability in which fantasy makes the unspeakable possible in appearance. This means that in the permeable character of the fundamental phenomenon, play allows both the sayable and the unsayable in playing. If we persist in denigrating fantasy, we deny ourselves a valuable source of knowledge. I stand up and look around. Somewhere behind this grove, the Bernia must be located. I’ll cycle up it tomorrow.

I swoop down. Because of the immense Ifach rock near my apartment I know I can’t get lost. I hardly need to pedal, just brake. I wholeheartedly embrace Fink when he says that play is a fundamental phenomenon of humanity. Therefore it is crucial that I explain clearly that phantasia is indeed something different from the current conception of fantasy as a binary opposition, as it is commonly understood now—a notion of ‘not real.’ And thereby, less valuable.

“What will I do?” I ask myself as I descend into Calpe. Will I use the concept of phantasia in my plea, or will I rehabilitate the concept? And then? Will I play this concept and present it as a philosophical element, or will I extensively describe it as a source of knowledge?

Fantasy does belong to the fundamental phenomenon of play. Hence, playing operationalises the knowledge source of fantasy. It makes the invisible appear. Arriving at my apartment, I notice from my own hunger and the smells of food that it has become Sunday afternoon. It is also the day of Ghent-Wevelgem. I had intended to ignore Ghent-Wevelgem. The moment of the Kemmelberg, the Menin Gate; how happy I was. I prepare some food and turn on the television in my bedroom. In the top right corner, I see that there are still 68 kilometres to go until the finish. They have already passed the Moeren. Of course. They are now

on their way to the Kemmelberg. I recognise image after image that the motor camera broadcasts. I have cycled in every scene.

I walk to my *Curver* box and spread the books out on my bed. Fink's yellow *Nietzsche* book and the book *Friedrich Nietzsche* by Lou Andreas Salomé. 'Artists and children', I speak out loud. No, I decide, not now. I set them aside. First, anchor fantasy. I reread Watson and Warnock and look up my notes on my laptop.

Core Stability (2). The generative ability of the permeability

The play philosopher provides context.

Fink warns us that the ontic appearance, the mirroring, the shadows, water surface, and the connection with ontic appearance to playthings, are more than just an analogy of the playworld. Partly his concern is about play being seen as something separate (within the playworld) or conceived as a non-real, thus trapped in a binary opposition (Plato's denigration of play). With all due respect to Fink's ideas and warnings, I assert that the ontic appearance through playing allows me to be interruptive. It is the permeability that allows it to be generative.

The researcher wakes up.

I must have fallen asleep because when I wake up, there is no more cycling on television. I'm startled. From the corner of my eye, I see someone lying next to me. The person is slender but has completely taken my duvet and lies turned away from me. I study what I see. The grey and blue of my *Cafe du Cycliste* jacket is a well-shaped back. The hip is narrow. Undoubtedly, it's a woman. A certain sensuality emanates from the line at her hip. On her thigh lies the remote control. My grey sleeve now looks like a classic Russian fur collar. Carefully, I turn slightly toward her. How long can my sleeve remain her fur collar? I look at her. The TV is tuned to the 'world weather'. It broadcasts the weather forecast worldwide. I see that it's raining in Berlin. If I take the remote control from her hip, the enchantment will be broken. I close my eyes.

The swing philosopher wonders.

Is this fantasy?

'No', she answers.

'Rain, rain, rain,' she continues with a German accent and takes the remote control.

'Speculative fantasy then?' I ask and I keep my eyes closed.

It remains quiet.

The researcher adds.

I let her extend the answer. 'This is playing the ontology of play. This touches on the openness of coming to appearance: 'what is there to appear' she asks without a question mark; immediately following with a second question with a definite question mark: 'Have you thought about using Rilke's poem *The Grown-Up* as a starting point?'

I look to the right and keep my eyes closed.

'Yes,' I lie to her.

'Rainer and I had a special relationship. You know that?' she asks. I certainly do know that. Lou Andreas Salomé (1861 -1937) had relationships with all the major players around the turn of the century: with Nietzsche, who wanted to marry her, a special bond with Freud, and a love affair with Rilke.

'In dir du Kindgewesene, in dir.'

Salomé quotes the last line from the poem *The Grown-Up* by Rilke. 'In you, who were a child once- in you.'

I go through the poem again. The turning point is at 'in the midst of play.'

Till in the midst of play,
Transfiguring and preparing for the future,
The first white veil descended, gliding softly
Over her opened face, almost opaque there,
Never to be lifted off again, and somehow
Giving to all her questions one answer:
In you, who were a child once- in you.
(Rilke, 2015, p. 85)

In his essay *Oasis of Happiness* Fink (2016) writes down two poems by Rilke. Both poems are about the relationship of adulthood to childhood. But he

uses them to place the concept of the 'intra-worldly' nature of human play in the 'worldly'.

The first Rilke poem Fink quotes from is the *Fourth Duino Elegy* (Fink, 2016, p. 21), describing an adult looking back on his childhood. Fink uses the second poem from Rilke's *Late Poems*, (Rilke, 1926/2005), to conclude his essay. 'When thinkers and poets in such a humanly profound way to the immense significance of play, we should as be mindful of the saying: we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven if we do not become as children' (2016, p.31).

Fink incorporates Rilke's work into his cosmological vision through thinkers and poets. And with his last sentence, he refers to the Bible. But from the perspective of a radically earthly anthropology, we can have access to the immeasurable through imagination, through fantasy, through playing.

As a child, we identified with it, until inevitably the first veil glides over our face.

Her open face. Almost opaque, the veil. Only to never be lifted again. The veil that somehow shows: In you, who were a child once – in you.

'In dir du kindgewesene, in dir.'

I decide to keep my eyes closed for a moment.

The swing philosopher ponders.

What energy, what vitality Salomé must have radiated. I read her *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Andreas- Salomé, 1987) on the beach last week. I understand why men like Rilke and Nietzsche fell in love with her. Reading Salomé's *Friedrich Nietzsche* felt like private lessons, but ones taught by a good friend on the Spanish coast.

We are on a beach holiday together, both escaping the rainy weather in Germany and the Netherlands, engaging in conversation. She shares stories about the adventures of her young lover, Rainer, and her uneventful husband, Carl Andreas, but then, as agreed, about Nietzsche.

Friedrich Nietzsche.

In addition to Fink's *Grundphänomen des menschlichen Daseins*, his work on

Nietzsche in *Nietzsches Philosophie* (Fink, 1978) also maintains a high level of abstraction.

What if I first read a biography of someone who actually interacted with Nietzsche? This could assist me in comprehending Fink's interpretation of Nietzsche.

Thank goodness I read her here, on a beach towel in the sun, the Spanish sun in March, with my expensive Prada sunglasses on. And not, as I so often do, a few hours on Saturday and during the week in the early morning, to then travel to the city Utrecht to teach. I can now take part, at least a bit, in her flair. She must have been a very quick thinker. A very good player. Strategic, full of conviction, direct, seductive.

'I have spoken to Martin, but Eugen Fink, no, no idea, sorry. I could have told him everything about Rainer and Friedrich though. Anyway, are you going to address the fact that you played the 'road captain?

The researcher responds.

'Most certainly!', I reply, 'the 'road captain' will definitely appear in the title of my thesis.'

'Exactly, but the road captain is a man. You played a man. Are you going to address that?'

'You know, I really want to focus on the ontological issue and not on the fact that my mother didn't want me to become a cyclist.'

'It's not about your mother. It seems that you leave the fact that you played a man unexplored. You may have decided not to address it in your thesis, but your thesis is about it. It would help you if you did address it. In fact, it would strengthen your thesis.'

'It's not that I haven't thought about it. I have definitely thought about it. Studying French philosophy led me to the path of the palimpsest with Helene Cixous. Her critically realistic play *Portrait of Dora*, (Cixous, 1983) in which she displays a new perspective, shows how Freud overlooks important themes such as sexual violence against women and assault. Thanks to Cixous' Theatre play, there are now at least two written versions. This doubling shows the extensive layering of perspective. I

also realise that I am far from done studying and certainly not done writing and thinking.'

The swing philosopher chooses a thought experiment.

'What if René Descartes had been a middle-aged woman?' I have Salomé ask, and she continues, 'would her doubt experiment still be at the heart of contemporary philosophical thinking today?'

The researcher contemplates this experiment.

I like the joyful criticism in this question. Descartes (1596-1650) engages in a process of radical doubt, questioning everything that can be doubted, to find a foundation of certain knowledge. His famous doubt experiment is a foundational element of his philosophical method (Descartes, 1989).

I continue developing the joke. 'No, of course not,' I reply. 'A middle-aged woman, undoubtedly going through menopause, no, then the concept of doubting as argument would never have become part of the canon of philosophy.'

'I agree!' she replies. 'Doubting middle-aged women are cursed. But then I've won!'

The blue-grey jacket next to me is very pleased.

I'm not saying there's nothing to be said for it. On the contrary, it is sad that my examples were men. And indeed, it is a pity that I wasn't the road captain for Keetie Oosten-Hage, Yvonne Reynders, Beryl Burton, or Alfonsine Strada. So, of course, my research touches on this, and I could also place my research in the context of feminist philosophy. However, the message I want to convey is a revision of the notion of play. Playing is an integral part of our existence. The productive power of fantasising as an original source of knowledge is proof that playing is the movement we are. My battle is an epistemological one. Therefore, I am developing alternative lenses for play and philosophy as well. There is a lot of work to be done. But these are the tasks that await me. With play and fantasising, we are creative power. Emancipation is also required here. It will take a long time before play and fantasy

are transformed and the inferiority of these notions in daily use is overcome again.

‘Shall we do a quiz about it?’

Through my lashes, I look at Salomé; at the grey of my jacket. The remote control has disappeared. ‘Do a quiz about it?’ I repeat foolishly and consider the possibility in my thoughts.

The swing philosopher continues.

‘Yes. We’ll take turns,’ explains Salomé. ‘Like roulette. Whoever can’t name another female philosopher will lose. If I win, you write about female philosophers in your thesis.’

‘Agreed,’ I say. ‘Who starts?’

‘Me. Me.’

‘Oh, you mean yourself?’

‘Yes.’

‘Okay. Alrighty then. Catherine Malabou.’ Malabou’s work is also somewhere here on my bed, so that’s an easy start.

‘Hypatia.’

‘Susan Neiman.’

‘Diotima.’

‘Rosi Braidotti.’

‘Theano.’

‘Ingeborg Bachmann.’

‘Arete of Cyrene.’

‘Susan Sontag.’

‘Themistoclea.’

‘Mary Midgley.’

‘Pythia.’

‘Pythia was more of a priestess than a philosopher,’ I reply to Salomé. I get a snide remark in return.

‘You’re only mentioning philosophers from after my death.’

‘That’s allowed; I’m still alive. Donna Harraway.’

‘No, that’s not allowed. You can only mention philosophers up until my

death.'

Ouch, that's difficult. I rack my brain. Salomé has already mentioned a lot of them.

'Within ten seconds, or you're out.'

'Uhhm, Christine de Pizan.'

'Laura Bassi.'

'Rosa Luxemburg.'

'Olympe de Gouges.'

With this rule, it becomes more challenging to beat Salomé. But of course, I forget: Edith Stein!

Edith Stein, like Eugen Fink, received her doctorate under Husserl. In 1916, she defended her dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy* (Stein, 2012). Husserl was not only her supervisor but became also her collaborator.

Inspired by Teresa of Ávila's writings on spirituality and mysticism, Edith Stein entered the Carmelite order in 1933. She translated works by Teresa. However, she fell victim to Nazi persecution due to her Jewish descent. Despite her conversion to Catholicism in 1922, in the eyes of the Nazis, she remained Jewish because of her Jewish parents. Edith Stein was eventually arrested and deported to Auschwitz, where she was killed in the gas chambers in 1942.

With my eyes closed, I try to find my laptop by touch. Among the books, I find the cool casing of my MacBook. I check whether her thesis is available and what other books by Stein can be found.

Quickly, I also look up other philosophers that Salomé would have known. Of course, the German phenomenologist Katharina Kanthack. She lived from 1901 to 1986. Once a student under Heidegger. Fink must have known her too. She earned her doctorate in architectural space. And later, she engaged in critical thinking about Heidegger's ideas. She wrote on Sartre ideas in *Von Sinn der Selbsterkenntnis* (Kanthack, 1958/2019).

Salomé is up. 'Katharina Kanthack,' she answers.

'Hannah Arendt,' I quickly reply, putting her back in the hot seat.

I revel in the fun of having to come up with a female philosopher for Salomé again. I find Hedwig Conrad-Martius. She lived from 1888 to 1966. She also belonged to Husserl's student group. What a life story she has! She was one of the first female students allowed to study at the university.

Conrad-Martius won a significant essay prize. But this met with great resistance from teachers who thought it was unacceptable for a woman to win this prize. Eventually, Martius grew into a critical thinker on Heidegger and developed her own theory. A perspective in which natural philosophy and cosmology give a unique direction to phenomenology.

'Hedwig Conrad-Martius', Salomé answers.

'Helene Cixous', I reply.

'Wrong!' Salomé crows, enjoying herself. 'Cixous was born three months after my death. Besides, you've already mentioned her.'

'Yes, but not during this quiz. Alright. Simone Weill.'

'Gerda Walther,' Salomé quickly replies.

I had seen that Walther also belonged to Husserl's study circle.

Walther, Conrad-Martius, Kanthack. All German female philosophers who have dedicated themselves to phenomenology in various ways. I see that Kanthack's "*Von Sinn der Selberkenntnis*" is readily available. What if I order it and have it sent here? That can easily be done. I'll order Stein's thesis as well.

'Well?' Salomé asks impatiently.

Oh yes, it's my turn.

'Nein? Drei, zwei, eins... Nein?'

No, without external help, no name comes to mind.

'Schade kein Gewinn.'

Catharine Malabou

Through playing, the researcher connects her topic to a broader issue.

Catharine Malabou, born in 1959, is a contemporary French philosopher. I was overwhelmed by her work *Changing Difference* (Malabou, 2012), particularly by the preface. It felt like she was speaking directly to me, not as an encouragement but to involve me in the question, 'what kind of life is it for a woman to be a philosopher?' (2012, p. iv) She teaches me that there are two types of feminism in philosophy. Traditional feminism relies on the proof of sexual differences, conceived as the duality of male and female. But there is also another, more recent feminism, often called 'post-feminism.' This movement emerges from American gender studies and queer theory, challenging the binary division of genders.

Malabou's goal is to seek recognition of a specific female space. In this era, she claims, this is quite a precarious undertaking. Therefore, she starts from a concrete situation, her own – as a 'woman philosopher,' a French 'woman philosopher.'

The core of her research revolves around the concept of plasticity and the possibility of plastic ontology. It combines biology, neuroscience, and philosophy. Plasticity has both the capacity to 'take form (as in the plasticity of clay) and to give form (as in the plastic arts and plastic surgery)' (2012, p. 76).

I lay Malabou's book aside on my bed. There is still so much work to be done. But first, this topic; my topic, the topic of the permeability of the road captain. I open my laptop. For the first time, I can clearly articulate the difference between a psychologising view of existential philosophy and my goal.

The goal is to contribute to developments to liberate play from its marginal position. With this goal, different thinking initiatives have emerged through the embodiment of philosophy. The method is playing as experience. This execution is threefold: 1) epistemology, 2) embodiment of ontology of play, 3) embodiment of the theory of self-understanding.

I stare at my typed sentences. I realise that both Malabou and Massey are on the thought-line of Spinoza that has developed through the French side of phenomenology. But precisely in playing, both the 'sayable,' to which we lend our identity, and the 'unsayable' are revealed. Not because we were once 'infantile' (Agamben, 1978) and couldn't speak, but because the 'unsayable' is part of our human existence. It can be found in fantasising, but it can also be found in emptiness and openness in which I, in my existence, appear.

I reach for the *Curver* box to see which books are needed to connect this knowledge to the ontology of play; in this way, anchoring play as an embodied philosophical practice. Because Malabou used herself as the subject of her research, she can use her experience as a data producer. From her discourse, I can pose the question of where to place my playing as an embodied philosophical practice.

‘Is it feminine and philosophical to have an eye for openness?’, I note on my laptop. ‘And include embarrassment, shame as data from experience of my secret playing in my field research to process it? Is it feminine to actually embody philosophy?’

Capturing and revealing this physical embodiment of play-philosophical practice will be the study. Within it, all my discomfort, shame, and joy. In this ‘self-witnessing’ (Fink, 1995) I shape autoethnographic research into a living experience (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2016). A philosophical anthropology in which philosophising manifests itself because philosophy is always present in human existence’ (Fink, 1995).

The real training begins (3)

The researcher concludes.

From my bedroom I watch as the tractor appears in my field of vision, creating flat tracks in the sand. This is what I love to do. Fantasising with Salomé, with Fink and once with Marx. In my playing I can have fluent conversations with them. In that sense, I never left the swing. The big difference is that I am now able to theorise the train of thought. Second order thoughts, like analysing, interpreting, questioning, over my thoughts. I understand the implication when Fink writes:

No one faces life naked, no one undergoes the first, original experiences; everyone already grows up in the meaningful space of a custom that teaches us what life is about, what the task of humanity is, what the lofty and the sacred, what the noble and the good are that one must strive for, and what is common, evil, and low that one should avoid. (1995, p. 27). **XXVII**

I was born into the concept of a ‘land,’ amidst ‘peace,’ but with ‘bomb shelters’ still in operation. According to my mother, they felt like glue on her hands—stuck and impossible to get rid of, ‘no matter how hard you shake.’ I entered a world of ‘Indians’, with swings, philosophers, televisions, images, a hill, a school, and a road captain. In a world of ‘dogmas and ideologies’ (Fink, 1995, p. 41) in and with these concepts, I appear, and reality appears. I stand in *understanding* and within *not-understanding*. And in German: ich ‘stehe’ in *mein bestehe*.

But if play is understood in its ontology, then playing is creating and thus,

I appear, create and shape, and therefore I am always in movement. And when I grasp Fink's 'play' in 'The enactment-character of play is spontaneous activity, active doing, vital impulse; play is existence that is moved in itself, as it were' (Fink, 2016, p.19), it will be forever ambiguous whether it is play [*Spiel*] or playing [*Spiel*]. The satisfying joke is that there is no linguistic difference in this difference. In (theoretical) language it will be forever equal, yet the embodiment of play by playing tells the difference.

The ontology of play reveals the structure of play as an aporetic structure in playing. With this permeable structure, breaking through these concepts is possible without them disappearing. Fink illustrates this with the notion of toys. Reality does not disappear; it expands in play, by playing. Magic, enchantment, happens in the midst of reality, in the midst of play by playing. I just need to look around: it is all there. My racing bike and the mountains of Calpe behind me. In front: an unrestricted view of the open sea. 'And out the midst of superabundance, it is delightful to look out upon distant seas.' (Andreas-Salomé, 1987, p. 110; Nietzsche, 1961, p. 90).

Bernia

The researcher starts the 'real training.'

Just like the Kemmelberg, the Bernia has an easy and a difficult side. I still take Johan's wise lessons from *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* to heart and cycle from Calpe to Xalo first, to start from the easy side of the mountain. And along the way I hear the commentary of both Michel Wuyts and José De Cauwer in my head.

'She's well-weighted.'

'She's well-weighted.'

'Rides smoothly.'

'Rides smoothly, shifts smoothly.'

I'm overtaken by a man. He passes me in silence.

The Bernia from the easy side doesn't pose any problems for me. I cycle up the mountain on my own in the 'gruppetto'. After all, that is the place of the road captain after all the work has been done. I descend at my own pace. Climbing the difficult side will be challenging, I observe, as I follow the descending line of the Bernia. But it's certainly not impossible.



Figure 7.1 View on Calpe from the peñon de Ifach, Calpe, Spain.



Figure 7.2 Playing photoshoot in Calpe, Spain.



Figure 7.3 Ermita dels Sants de la Pedra dels Lleus, Benissa, Spain.



Figure 7.4 Climbing the Bernia, Spain

CHAPTER 8 EPILOGUE: TOWARDS 'A RADICALLY EARTHLY ANTHROPOLOGY'

Introduction

For the last time, the play philosopher provides the introduction.

This chapter disseminates the outcomes of my research project. I valorise both philosophy as an embodied practice and the embodiment of the ontology of play in educational philosophy. I do this by elaborating on two examples.

The first example is the book written by the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* (2007). It follows the assignment of a student who mimics the permeability of reality which is lodged in ordinary things. It justifies the generative character when an idea is mimicked and altered into a different form. I connect the student's outcomes with the findings of my research project and analyse the concept of freedom in the ontology of play.

The second example is a description of a teaching module titled 'A Makers' Philosophy'. It elaborates how childhood games are a generative as an approach of mimesis, not as a reproduction, but as a bringing forth. Mimesis as an element of the ontology of play reveals the structure of play as an aporetic structure in playing.

In the final paragraph, 'Reframing philosophy', I summarize the thesis. But, I start with Cortázar as an embodiment of my philosophy of education.

A6: The kind of hidden land of Julio Cortázar and Carol Dunlop

The researcher is heading home to the Netherlands from Calpe.

I am parked with my car at a French rest area on the A6 motorway just past Mâcon. There is a hotel on this side, and it is very quiet. The white-grey Hotel Mâcon looks like a bunker to me. I'm looking at the other side of the road. There is a similar parking lot. A month ago, I was there photographing my car and the maintenance service's car. I tried to imagine how long a month would be if I only stayed in motorway rest areas.

I wanted to feel something of the journey that the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar (1914-1984) and his wife, the American photographer Carol Dunlop (1946-1982), made in 1982. For a month, they stayed at all 65 rest areas along the route from Paris to Marseille. The goal of their trip was not so much to drive to Marseille, but Marseille offered them the opportunity to describe the experiences this journey brought in a book.

They undertook the journey in a Volkswagen van. It was a game, in which they called the journey an 'expedition' and themselves 'expedition members'. In this game, they gave important attributes names. The red-colored Volkswagen van is called Fafner, after the dragon from Wagner's opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. They themselves alternated the endearing nicknames they have for each other, Little Bear and Wolf, with descriptions that they are on an expedition.

During this journey they impose four important rules on themselves. Firstly, they are on an expedition and remain in this role throughout the entire month. The second rule concerns the limited number of rest areas they are allowed to visit: two per day. This means that they will take 33 days to cover a distance of less than 800 kilometres. The third rule they adhere to is that they cannot leave the highway during this journey. Therefore, they bring as many supplies as possible from home. Typewriters, paper, comfortable garden chairs, a supply of wine and food. They are allowed to use the facilities that the rest areas offer, such as the kiosk at gas stations, restaurants, or, as here in Mâcon, a hotel. The fourth rule is to write a book inspired by the travel tales of the great explorers and 'the expedition (methods to be determined)' (Cortazar, 2007, p.36).

It is Julio Cortázar (1983) who ultimately writes *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* because Carol Dunlop, who already showed symptoms of illness before the journey, dies from leukaemia five months after the trip.

But here, a little before Mâcon, when we had the impression of having achieved a cruising speed thanks to which the freeway transformed into a kind of hidden land, inaccessible to any rhythm other than our own, it is here that they begin to grow impatient and show themselves at first timidly but eventually unveiling a strategy that, subtle though it may be, remains clear, at least to our eyes. (Cortazár, 2007, p. 193)

In this adventure, they reverse the speed. The maximum speed they maintain with their Volkswagen van on the motorway causes the landscape to turn into land that can hide in speed, they realise. But they bind themselves by the rule of visiting two parking lots per day. The simplicity of the second rule results in a reversal in speed. But it's not a delay that comes back. If you conceive the idea of visiting 65 parking lots in a month over a distance of over 700 kilometres, this 'delay' is already assumed. This means that the reversal of speed does not result in delay but in something else. They find happiness and love, 'anonymity and total freedom and, that the freeway kindly granted' (2007, p. 193) to them.

The play philosopher provides context about the book.

I discuss the book with my first-year fine art students. It follows the introduction of the Situationists, Constant, and CoBrA. Cortázar lived in Paris from the 1950s until his death in 1984. He lived amidst the Situationist art scene, writers, and artists. And thus, he lived in the realm of magical realism and surrealism. It is a setting where the emphasis on play in this art scene takes a central position, including philosophers like Roger Caillois and Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991). Hence, 'ordinary' life in Paris is examined from this polysemic perspective.

Every year, together with students, I examine the style of the book. Is it 'literature of experience?' [literatura experientia] (Leenhardt & Ferdinand, 1991). Is it 'the art of living?' (van Heusden, 2016), or is it a combination and therefore something else?

Cortázar is clear about the purpose of the journey: At the end of the book, he raises this question and recounts the comments they received upon returning. People wanted to know if their intentions had been playful or if behind them 'lurked a different sort of search.' And whether the immersion in a landscape was not merely 'a confrontation with ordinary life and with that defiant no-man's-land established in the middle of the frantic pace of civilization' (2007, p. 365).

Blinded by all these options, Cortázar writes that the expedition was never

conceived with deeper intentions. 'It was a game for a little Bear and a Wolf' (2007, p. 365). The nicknames of Cortázar and Dunlop.

The researcher recognises the embodiment of a radical earthly anthropology in Autonauts of the Cosmoroute.

If there is one example where I can point to the permeability in playing and the location of a playing field amidst the ordinary world, connecting to Fink's concept of the 'oasis of happiness' (Fink, 2016, p. 20), it must be Cortázar's journey. A 'kind of hidden land,' as Cortázar describes it, reveals itself in staying at rest areas. In my view, it shows the permeability of playing from the perspective of a radically earthly anthropology. They never left the highway, and yet it was a 'month outside of time.'

If Fink were here in my car next to me, then, looking at the opposite rest area, he would most likely nod 'yes.' Perhaps he would answer: 'The "scenery" of play, always needs 'actual space and actual time to be able to unfurl itself at all' (Fink, 2016, p. 209). Perhaps, he would reply that, besides children, artists can also travel outside of time. I'm sure he would invoke Nietzsche. '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' (2016, p. 30). By 'in' this world, Fink means the world as 'whole' [ganze]. 'The world is the play of Zeus' (2016, p.30). But more than where the 'artists engage in it', I would like to ask: how exactly did they engage?

Cortázar and Dunlop engaged in the 'hidden land' (2007, p. 193), waiting to reveal itself at rest areas. I look at the opposite rest area. Despite not being able to see much, it seems like I'm becoming more and more 'radically earthly' with my mountains in Calpe, my water bottle from Belgium, my desire to watch the rest area where Dunlop and Cortázar felt that they were being watched. At the same time, it suggests also a kind of playfulness and creativity in observing this environment.

I am chewing on a sandwich I made last night. I was planning to eat it sitting outside at one of the picnic tables. I was planning to sit at a picnic

table for a few hours as a tribute to Cortázar and Dunlop. To open my laptop and process my experiences of a month in Calpe here. I already saw myself sitting with my laptop. I would put the *Curver* box with books on the table. And maybe, for the picture, also place the small lemon tree I bought as a souvenir next to the table. But it's cold outside, and in my car it's wonderfully warm. Cigarette smoke wafts in through my car window. I imagine it's Salomé outside taking a smoke break.

'Actively doing' philosophy

By embodying Eugen Fink's statement, which asserts that 'the enactment-character of play is spontaneous activity, active doing, and vital impulse' (Fink, 2016, p. 19), the researcher is connecting the dots.

I am connecting the dots.

I am engaging by embodying play with philosophy. In doing so, I make it accessible to everyone. At least, that's what I'm aiming for. I try to do it in my teaching, anyway. And in doing so, I align with the philosophy of education as Fink and Egon Schütz intended it—a philosophy that is not presented as a fixed given, but which invites exploration.

My first-year fine art students are reading *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* for my course. Afterwards, the intention is for them to write a plan. I ask them: 'Which microcosm do they want to explore for a certain period?' Sometimes they execute the plan out of enthusiasm, since doing so is not mandatory.

I want to let my students experience the permeability of play by conducting an adventure in an everyday environment. As an example of what the students come up with, I mention Amy's experiment. She wanted to carry out the adventure of spending a night at school. Since she, like all students, is at school "day and night", she wanted to explore what the night at the school would be like. However, she didn't get permission from school. During the weeks of my course, she had conversations with teachers and students about her plan. She understood how Cortázar must have been blinded by the possibilities he received from friends and colleagues. She had the same experience: "Was it a statement against the significant housing shortage

among students?" a teacher asked. "Or was she initiating research about homeless people?" Also, she had a conversation with the tutor about the impact of increasing rules and safety measures.

They discussed how this not only leads to a smaller range of movement, but also results in a lack of experience and flexibility, potentially causing incorrect reactions in unexpected situations.

A classmate pointed out the exhibition panels as a perfect location. They are placed in the hall of the theory classrooms on the first floor. A panel is about 2.5 meters long and half a meter wide and has a door for access. No one ever comes in there, making it the ideal spot, she concluded. The week before her journey, she secretly brought things to already stash in the panel; a sleeping bag, pyjamas, a book to read, and a teddy bear. Anxiety set in because she was afraid that someone would see her doing it. If caught, her plan would fail. But it didn't fail. She documented her entire adventure on film. **xxviii** She holds her phone right up to her face and speaks to her audience, as it were. Amy has managed to turn this 'exhibition panel' into a 'little house.' Not only because of the things she brought with her, but also by broadcasting her emotions. Through her anxiety, we get a glimpse into the exciting or even scary space that a school building becomes at night. She hardly dares to sleep. When she wakes up in the morning, she is initially afraid to come out of the panel. She suspects that the footsteps she hears are those of the janitor. Later she understands it is the cleaner. He sweeps the floor right beside her. At first, she hardly dares to breathe, but then she notices that the sounds that the cleaner makes are actually quite loud. Then she decides to dress to the sounds of the cleaner. In the film she later makes about her 'sleepover' project, she captions 'It's as if we're doing a little dance together.' When she realises that the cleaner is far away, near the toilets, she comes out.

Amy's project succeeded. She embodied the permeability of reality right here at school. As a philosopher teacher I am glad to notice that the philosophical quality is in everyone. Exactly as Fink states.

The play philosopher analyses this assignment.

Just as Cortázar and Dunlop changed the function of the parking lot by

being there longer than just to use it for 'rest', Amy changed the function of the school by extending her presence. School became a place to sleep; yet it partly became a scary playground also. She played with fire, as she could get caught trespassing (Eichberg, 2018). Before her 'sleepover,' she mapped out the risks associated with the self-imposed obstacles (Suits, 1988), stemming from the decision to sleep there. The specific night chosen for her 'sleepover' was chosen for when the nicest janitor would be at work. If she would get caught, it wouldn't be as bad. Previously, she also identified the locations in the building where the alarm would go off. But despite this knowledge, she hesitated to leave. As a result, she stayed in the panel from 9:30 p.m. until 8:30 a.m. The panel became her 'little home,' a safe place where she could hide and sleep. Another important preparation was that she took one 'thing' at a time with her and placed it in the panel so that it wouldn't stand out. The things she needed to make it feel homey for her included a light, her pyjamas, her pillow, her teddy bear, a book, her sleeping bag, and her breakfast. Bringing these items allowed Amy to experience the ontic appearance in the plaything of the panel.

Changing the function of school did not make the school disappear. Neither did the panel; both remained visible. But the concepts of 'school' and 'panel' appeared to be elastic since they could change into something else. Amy played a well-played game (De Koven, 2013). At the right time, she stepped into her game, and at the right moment she stepped out of her adventure and again became 'a student' who is just going to have breakfast. She played out a perfect eleven hour hide and seek, with all the emotions and anxiety that come with playing (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The parallel between Cortázar/Dunlop and Amy's adventure is the secrecy in their play. In both cases, they tried to realise their projects legally, but didn't succeed. In Amy's case, it was prohibited. In Cortázar's project, they never received an answer regarding whether they were allowed to be on a free-way continuously for a month. So, secrecy was also at play in Cortázar and Dunlop's situation. A second similarity is the use of a transformation in the function of ordinary things, such as parking lots or school. This usage gave them an experience of total freedom.

The notion of freedom is at the heart of the ontology of play (Huizinga, 1938; Caillois, 1961; Fink, 2016; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; et al).

The ontology of play is able to 'break down' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 3) or to interrupt (Fink, 2016, p. 21). The major difference however, between Huizinga's 'Homo Ludens' and Fink's play as the fundamental phenomenon of human existence is that Huizinga sets the 'homo ludens' within culture. Fink's analysis on the other hand, signifies play as a fundamental phenomenon that is permeable within the human being. Play permeates through all other key phenomena as death, love, rule, work, and in itself, play. This means that the ontology of play operates in appearance of being mortal, being a lover, being a ruler, being a worker and being a player (Fink, 1995; 2016).

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 at a distance from them. But while it appears to escape [entziehen] that standard flow of life, it relates [bezieht] to it in a manner that is particularly imbued with sense namely, in the mode of portrayal [Darstellung]. (Fink, 2016, p. 21)

However, in my own fieldwork I noticed a difference between theorising play and play as an embodied practice. The main difference between theorising play and 'active doing', is that Cortázar, Dunlop, Amy, and myself embodied the ontology of play as total freedom by playing. Playing enables us to portray and therefore disable in practice the reality as fixed; a concern scholars Huizinga (1950) and Fink (1995), warn against. Therefore, the fixed becomes open where the movement can come to appear.

Cortázar eventually writes a book. By recording it on her phone, Amy enables us to witness her secret mission that has yet to be revealed. The book and the video are mediated forms of self-witnessing. However, it is within this self-witnessing that it becomes evident that, when the ontology of play is grasped, it can be distinguished from an activity. It is in the activity where the ontology of play becomes activated. Hence, the enactment-character of play as an 'active doing' is the embodiment of the ontology of play. How can I shape these insights in a permeable manner within a practice?

A Makers' Philosophy course as a valorisation

After her return from Calpe, the play philosopher asks her colleague to analyse the course 'A Makers' Philosophy.'

Right after my return from Calpe I ask my colleague at the school of arts, Harm Hajonides, if he wants to join me in analysing the module A Makers' Philosophy. I suspect that an analysis of this course will be the valorisation of my research project. We started this course after my return from my third round of field work in the Westhoek, in 2019. The findings from this round of fieldwork, during which I participated in the Ghent – Wevelgem bike tour and realised in the car that I had 'secretly' played in a 'rebuilt' area where I grew up and played, became the starting point for 'A Maker's Philosophy'.

Harm is a visual artist but a parttime lecturer also. Together, we teach this module in the master's program Crossover Creativity (MCC). In this two-year master's program, students learn to design impactful changes for complex challenges in society. The students are in their mid-twenties and upwards. They are professionals with work experience in areas where issues are complex and urgent. They work in healthcare institutions, government, municipalities, or education.

In the first year of A Makers' Philosophy, in 2019, we asked students to lay out the places where they used to play as children. We provided them with multiple sheets of paper for this task. The idea behind this is to make the 2D 'map' three-dimensional. Hence, we tried to keep the topic spatial. Laying out sheets of paper, provides the students space to physically stand in their map. We aimed for it to enable the students to embody the ontology of play. This approach succeeded. A student, for example, used several sheets of paper to make the street where he used to live as a child. The street 'ended' at the 'last' house. But that house was not where the street ended: the street "ended" at the house where his friend lived. Across the street there was a field. This field didn't have a specific purpose, but to them this field was perfect to play football, he explained. It belonged to nobody. Therefore, it was experienced as a kind of 'no-man's-land'. Since it wasn't 'theirs' either, it was the football which was able to enlarge the field. If they shot the ball beyond the 'football field' the land grew to incorporate the place the ball rolled to. If

they picked up the ball and continued to play, the land became the size of their made football field. He physically stretched the field with the pieces of paper embodying the power of the football.

This approach of A Makers' Philosophy became the starting point to intertwine the artistic and philosophical concepts of mimesis and childhood within an adult's life.

In the following academic year, we expanded this assignment. We elaborated the rebuild and asked which acts they remembered doing. The acts had to be formulated in verbs.

In my case it would be 'staring into the far distance'. I could do that sitting on the swing or sitting on my bike on the hill at the school. Some verbs that students come up are 'waiting', 'wandering', 'watching', 'poking', 'gathering'. The verbs are leading in the last assignment, when they rebuild their playground and invite other students to play. The activities caught in verbs are leading. I inform Harm that I am definitively planning to incorporate our lessons into the final chapter of my thesis. This aims to transform the embodiment of philosophy as a practice in order to philosophise play. More than just a lesson module, it is therefore crucial to describe the course of A Makers' Philosophy.

To avoid pitfalls and to align with Fink's and Schutz's vision of education philosophy, emphasising that it is not about presenting positions, we opt for a specific method. Harm and I agree to discuss and analyse the program (session 1). Afterward, I will transcribe this dialogue and send it to Harm. By using this modern form of 'mail-art' - inspired by the American art movement Fluxus, Harm will process the transcript. In a second session we then will determine how to orchestrate this outcome into the conclusion of this project. In advance, we express the shared hope for a poetic force.

Case: Childhood game reflected in the development of education-philosophy

When we want to formalise the agreement, we simultaneously receive an email from a student, Aniek Karina van den Berg. She is in the final phase

of her studies and requests a consultation. Her project aims to regulate or alleviate 'short-term stress' in waiting rooms of healthcare institutions for people waiting there. 'The patient is involved in the care process everywhere except in the waiting room because the care process temporarily pauses there', she noted.

During the A Makers' Philosophy course, she realised that her childhood games have parallels with her graduate project. As a child, she preferred to play in a corner or under the table, her vision 'scoped' as she calls it. In A Makers' Philosophy, she rebuilt this setting under the table. Using long strips of white paper, she covered a table and from under it looked out through the strips of paper. She invited Harm, myself and also other students, to follow the lesson from this perspective.

Under the table, we were handed a sheet of paper with the request to roll it up, thus viewing our lesson 'scoped' from under the table. I saw circles of denim, circles of ankles and shoes, and circles of the floor. I heard the murmur of voices around me. There was a class going on, my own class, but for a moment, I had the experience of not having to participate. Her request now is whether we would like to take a look with her again. Not under the table this time, but at the table.

She has a background in art and wants to graduate with an interactive artwork to place in a waiting room. However, since the study demands impactful change, she finds it challenging at this stage to theorise her actions.

We agree to meet in the same painting room where we regularly conduct A Makers' Philosophy classes at the Utrecht School of the Arts.

Harm asks if the hospital can be compared to 'the big world.' And if the waiting room is the place where you look at the big world, where you are afraid. She indicates that she had never thought about this interpretation of looking before. She shares that in observations she made in the waiting room, she discovered boundaries between arrival and waiting. She sees waiting as 'the space between where it happens.'

Moreover, she noted that there is a space between the 'staff' [the nurses,

doctors, etc.] and the 'waiters' [the patients]. 'No hospital staff member walks into or through the waiting room,' she observed. She agrees with our observation that you are still while waiting and watching life happening around you.

We explore the role of hiding. In a waiting room, you cannot hide, Aniek Karina explains, and indicates that she wants to create an interactive artwork where you cannot hide but can participate through the artwork. But also, not in a way 'that puts you in the spotlight.' She envisions an artwork that allows a waiting person to perform small actions from their seat; that the artwork is an 'excuse for these small encounters so that social support can return.'

Harm poses a clarifying question, asking if the work is, in a sense, the hospital itself? And that the waiting person can play with their own uncertainties as a waiter, so to speak. "And that you can intervene and change things?"

A: "That you start looking more closely, like, where am I really?"

H: "Not just the waiting room, but the entire hospital building. You were under the table, and you were looking at the world?"

A: "Yes."

H: "The position was under the table, what were you doing? And how were you looking?"

A: "I took that position because I was curious and sometimes felt: If I participate, I can't see everything."

H: "So, in that sense, was your field of vision narrowed?"

A: "Yes, detailed."

H: "Because, what is the waiting person like?"

A: "There are different types of people waiting: pragmatists, ones who are less selfreliant, ones that are critical of society. For some, it's a sort of outing and they see it as a picnic. Some say, 'Here is my hand, guide me.' And there's a group that says, 'I don't want to wait.' So far, all my assessors belong to that group: 'I don't want to wait.'

H: "Would you want that too?"

A: “I find that so fascinating; all of society comes into that waiting room.”
I find that a beautiful thought.”

Reflection case: enchantment in disenchanted spaces

We receive an email from Aniek Karina in which she expresses her gratitude. In the email, she has attached a page from her portfolio, saying ‘to demonstrate how my ‘child’s play’ has returned in my project. I am pleased to have incorporated my perspective in this manner.’

She developed five tactile cards that resemble flyers and can be placed in the waiting room alongside other (medical) flyers. This set includes a tactile card with a cut-out circle, allowing for a ‘scoped’ view of the surroundings. The shape of the hole appears to be manually cut, as the circle is irregular. On the card, there is a question asking what you see when you look through the hole. The installation she is graduating with is a glass sphere in which branches ‘breathe.’ Various magnifying glasses are set up, allowing you to observe the ‘breathing branches’ enlarged.

To me, as a play philosopher, education developer, and former lecturer to Aniek Karina, the format of the leaflet inviting patients to peer through a hole serves as a compelling proof of concept. Designing with specific autoethnographic memories from childhood is not just possible but can lead to the disruption of reality and the creation of enchanting experiences in disenchanted spaces.

The use of autoethnography as a research approach by Aniek Karina, drawing upon her personal experiences and reflections to gain insights into broader cultural phenomena, stands as a more than justified research method. This approach fosters a deeper understanding and engagement in the design process, rooted in personal experiences and insights embodied as an adult from an adult perspective.

This methodology provides ample justification for the continued development of such an approach, aligning seamlessly with education philosophy. Aniek Karina’s graduation project encapsulates the philosophy of play with-

in the realm of education. Commencing with a personal childhood game, a period when, according to Fink, a child experiences the centre of existence through play. As an adult, Aniek Karina possesses the ability to transcend the spatially reconstructed image of a playground, extending it towards a more expansive goal. This capability allows her to embody the ontology of play as a philosophical practice, thereby enchanting the disenchanted.

Playing as a philosophical framework (Session 1)

The play philosopher begins analysing the course 'A Maker's Philosophy.' Conducting an analysis may contribute to identify playing as a philosophical tool, a philosophical method and a form of epistemology in knowing the world.

Finally, Harm and I have found a date to discuss and analyse the program of 'A Maker's Philosophy'. I explain to Harm that I intend to understand the concept of philosophical openness, which, in my view, is inherent in a radically earthly anthropology, and to incorporate it into a methodology. I express my desire to develop this openness as a methodology in A Maker's Philosophy.

I ask Harm if he is familiar with the book *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* and how spatiality of 'autonauts' along with 'cosmos' and 'route' are connected. I explain to Harm how I am delving into an in-depth study of the artists' role as expedition members, playing 'outside of time,' allowing them to travel through the cosmos without leaving the motorway. However, Harm is not familiar with the book and asks if I am acquainted with the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969) and his book titled *Cosmos* (1968/2011). He mentions that it has been crucial to many artists.

"It's about a boy", Harm starts telling me when we are seated in 'our' painting room. It turns out that things aren't going so well at school for the boy. That is why he has to go to another school, to another village. And therefore, he has to live with a landlady. On the day he arrives in this village, it's very hot. It's so hot that he sits in the shade of a bush for a while. A bird hangs in the bush, and there is a small piece of iron wire among many other observed details.

Suddenly he sees all the connections. He continues on his way to meet the landlady. Arriving there, he notices that this woman has a small cut on her lip. He connects that small cut to the bird, to the wire, and in doing so, he slowly builds up a cosmos out of all the details that he sees.

“And that was such a revelation to me” says Harm, ending the story and continuing: “This is how you can look at the world. And you can build your own world like that.” Explaining it to me in turn.

“And that’s cosmos?” I ask him.

“Yes” he answers, “that’s your own cosmos.”

I ask Harm whether he considers this, what we are teaching in A Makers Philosophy, building your own cosmos.

Harm affirms, calling it “one’s personal cosmos”. I then reflect on how, until recently, I lived with the conviction that the earthly cosmos had to be very small.

“Why?”, Harm asks.

I respond, “Otherwise, you adopt a transcendental position.”

“I don’t understand,” Harm replies.

I explain that, until in recent weeks while working on my thesis, I had always been rooted in the Platonic or Christian paradigm regarding what ‘transcendent’ implies: ‘there and later.’ A concept of earthly cosmos, or ‘earthly transcendence’ is something I’m just starting to explore, and yet, I have a suspicion that we do this in our lessons—discovering the cosmos through the bird in the bush, through the iron wire being there also, and therefore make it spatial and consequently earthly. It is almost like we go through the material, seeing a woman with a cut on her lip. I’m beginning to understand only now how immense it is, and how we, as humans, are of immeasurable potential. “Is that what our lessons are about?” I finally ask.

“Is that what we do?” Harm responds, then immediately answers himself.

“Yes, maybe we do indeed.” He goes through the lesson module, starting from the beginning.

“In the first classes we ask the students to make a line. It is a search for their own materials and their own connections that they process into an object, or a direction, or a form.”

“But we start earlier, we start with the bag” I reply. “It is almost a

performance how you ask the students to bring a bag with them to the first class. It contains items from a list over twenty 'loose parts'" (Nicholson, 1971).

"Yes, the bag", Harm replies. "That's almost like a cosmos. Because you also have to collect those things. And that is indeed a cosmos."

At our laptop, we look up the list for lesson preparation. We read: "Styro-foam, wallpaper, various types of paper, plastic, fabrics, clothing items, satay sticks, small pieces of wood, rods, PVC pipe, aluminium foil, plastic cups, water hose, boxes with special colours and shapes, rubber bands, car or bike parts, foam, stockings. Or else, balls of wool, tape, foil, matches, inner tubes, markers, pens, pencils, charcoal, twigs, sticks. In short, material that can be broken, that can be worked with freely. It is cheap, stretchable or rigid, stiff or coloured, crackling or smooth, or unusual building material. The more varied, the better."

But it also indicates that the lesson begins long before the school bell rings (Midgley, 1974).

We agree that collecting the cosmos starts with the intention of the student and continue our conversation.

"As a child, you do that, really; you build your own cosmos. Right? Your own world", Harm reflects.

"Absolutely", I respond. "As a child, I had no trouble experiencing the transcendental as my own universe."

"No, hahaha", agrees Harm laughing.

"I had an overview of immensity; I had mastery over the material, and that was fantastic."

"It didn't all have to be concrete; anything could be there. Could be spirit or thought", Harm adds.

"Exactly, it didn't have to be concrete. Fantasising. What is the role of fantasising, of appearing, of creating, for you? Or is it entirely reversed to the image?" I ask.

"I think that if you want to understand that, you ultimately do it through words. Although also through an image. Or maybe both; understanding through an image and understanding through words. That's how I

understand something. If I read that Franz Kafka (Kafka, 2022; Kafka & Pasley, 1993) wrote about a man who is actually a balustrade, I get a kind of sensation. It is a fantastic, almost bewildering leap of the mind. I find that such a brilliant idea, and then I understand something. When the 'ordinary' is turned on its side; and you think: 'Oh, but that could of course happen too. It stretches," Harm explains.

"Do the words stretch?" I ask.

"Yes, words stretch reality. Because we're within such a narrow frame.

... That transcendence, that you seek, as it were, because – is that what you're looking for? Can you find it in the earthly, in cycling?" Harm asks.

"Yes", I reply, "In slow cycling."

"And then it's also much more physical. And then it's less of a thought", Harm observes.

"Yes, yes", I reply.

"But do you recognise, when I make a discovery like that, that you can think that a man is actually a balustrade, then, I can imagine that that's the attraction of philosophy for you? That you suddenly have a thought, or a thought is presented to you, that makes you think: 'It's possible to think like this!' That that's the magic of philosophy", Harm concludes.

"Yes", I reply.

"Yes, that's what it is for me."

The play philosopher provides context.

I continue my second session with Harm by email. He responds to the transcript that I've sent him of our conversation in the painting room. We send each other emails and maintain the poetic force. However, for the continuation of this dissertation, I'll skip this part and focus on the embodiment of electronic mail art and continue the analysis of A Makers Philosophy.

The permeability of a road captain (Session 2)

We discuss our 'mail art in the 21st century'. However, the conversation initially revolves around this chosen form. The "letter" has become a screen; physical distance has disappeared. There is no postman shaping the time between our letters. 'Mail art' has become a form of hyperreality

(Baudrillard, 1981). This leads us to discuss the phenomenon of television in our conversation.

H: “TV is image and sound. And sweat was a sheen behind glass. That is the remembered form. If a personal story serves as the source, does it generate an image or a series of images to which words, sound, smell, action, or movement are attached?” asks Harm.

I confirm.

I: “By cycling there in Spain, I experienced that ‘no one enters life naked’ (Fink, 1995, p. 27). Yet, it seems as if each day starts clean, anew. This absence of earthly concerns is most palpable when the direction of thought doesn’t originate from the cosmos but permeates through the earthly. Through the balustrade, like Kafka, through Cortázar’s rest areas, and for me, through the bike in Belgium and through clods of soil in a orchard near Calpe. That is the earthly openness, connecting with Fink’s worldly openness. It begins with oneself: ‘Until it releases us’ (Kopland, 1997).

H: “But all your examples are material, so that’s visual again.”

I: “Yes, very much so. By cycling, I make everything visual, but more importantly, I make everything physical. I create a physical image because I cycle.”

H: “You could almost say: And that started with black and white television?”

I: “Yes, I think so. It started there. Yes, that’s correct. Television gave me the image.”

H: “And now?”

I: “I want to present play philosophy as an education philosophy: A doing. How would you describe our educational philosophy?”

H: “What we offer?”

I: “Yes?”

H: “We play, bend, change colour. We know what offering-words are about to arise, and sigh. We know without thinking, we have done it. We stand next to each other. You start because your enthusiasm is immediately unwavering, I waver a bit, and then you stand

diagonally so that together we fall out of the horizontal/vertical form. We've sculpted a balance in those four years. Perhaps by listening and being silent. After standing next to each other, which I think we quickly reached consensus on, comes the second phase, the other. How to include the other, the interested person or the customer, in our skewed positioning? We just ask him, her, them to form a line with us. Then we immediately grasp if that line continues next to, below, or diagonally above us."

I: "We know what to do with that line."

Reframing philosophy

The play philosopher uses the form of the lines in her thesis.

Using the form of lines begins to bear fruit in chapter one. I am in despair because I think my project is failing before I've even started. I am looking for the priest of Watou and even that is a task I can't successfully complete. If I could talk to him, I would establish contact with the local people or even find an agent (Bourdieu, 2020) who could help me get this project started. So, there I am sitting in my car in the parking lot of Watou. Finally, I gather the courage to get out and seek help from the cashier at the local supermarket. Eventually, the woman asks me how she can help. On page 36, I write, 'Suddenly, it's my turn, even though I'm not in line.'

The literal words align perfectly with the figurative context. She directs me towards the house of the priest and suddenly a great rectory appears right in front of the church. How to include the priest? He opens the door. It is clearly the priest and I start telling my story; sports philosopher, cycling, contact with local people, fieldwork for study. He invites me into his house and, what I now understand has happened, is that I stopped thinking and asked him to form a line with me. And because of that, the permeability starts to open up.

The line continues in chapter 2. Due to the contact with the priest, it allows me to be in Huizinga's 'study of the play-element in culture', where the priest articulates the embodiment of Huizinga's concept of the magic circle. The

village Krombeke and the local cycling club *De Krombeekse Pedaaltrappers* make this study of the play element in culture appear.

In chapter 3, the line continues and runs parallel with the critique of Fink asserting the dominance of the perspective on mimesis as reproduction. Hence, in my skewed positioning I try to follow the assumed secrecy of MAMILs as well as possible.

In chapter 4, I play, bend, change colour. In my playing, bending and blushing I'm secretly playing mimesis in the alignment by mimicking the autobiography of Frank Vandenbroucke. Particularly page 101 where he explains 'how to win Ghent - Wevelgem. This chapter reflects how I continually interrupt the concept of mimesis as a reproduction by changing the measurements of the scale.

In chapter 5, I formed a line with Fink. The embodiment of the enactment-character of play turns out to be generative. Hence a connection between mimesis and play is made by the awareness of playing. This perspective of playing resonates with the ontology of play.

Then in chapter 6, I formed a line with Massey and Constant. And immediately grasped that line continues next to, below, or diagonally above us.

In chapter 7, I formed a line with Fink and Lou Andreas-Salomé. We play, bend, change colour in both the actual and the non-actual.

In this final chapter, chapter 8, we know what to do with that line and I recognise the form in my own fieldwork. By integrating this particular form of philosophy in education, I valorise it as a contribution to the process towards acknowledging playing philosophy as a source of knowledge and therefore philosophise play. Playing as a philosophical framework, touches on epistemology, anthropology and ontology of play. Writing accessibly, I hope to disseminate this knowledge widely.



Figure 8.1 Rest area on the A6 motorway, France.



Figure 8.2 Childhood game reflected in course A Makers' Philosophy.



Figure 8.3 Harm Hajonides and me teaching A Makers' Philosophy.



Figure 8.4 Leaflet. Childhood game reflected in graduation project.

NOTES

- i Original text in Dutch: 'wij zijn allemaal Platoonse kindertjes, en staan nog altijd met onze Griekse voetjes in de Griekse grond geworteld.'
- ii Vogler Stage 4 in Vogler's *A Hero's Journey*, is called 'meeting the mentor' (Vogler, 2007).
- iii There is no direct English translation for the term 'wielertoerist.' A literal translation would be 'cycling tourist,' but 'wielertoerist' in Flemish has nothing to do with tourism. They are (well-trained) cycling sports enthusiasts.
- iv 'Taking a pull' is cycling jargon. This means riding on the front of a paceline or peloton. To "take a pull" means you're the person working the hardest since you're not getting any benefits from drafting. In a rotating paceline, take a short pull, drift to the side, and then roll to the back of the line and let the next person pull.
- v Link film *A Hundred Years of War in a Quickstep-Shirt*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaxzphltdM8&t=139s>
- vi The translation of *Grundphänomene des Menschlichen Daseins* (Fink, 1995) was carried out by the author of this thesis. The original text follows below: Die Menschenvernunft wird nicht zur Instanz erklärt, die alle Rätsel und Geheimnisse des Lebens lösen kann, im Gegenteil: Die Kraft des Denkens und die Macht seiner Erschließung macht das Mysterium des Seins, des Lebens und unserer eigenen Existenz nicht kleiner und geringer; der Begriff feiert nicht Triumphe damit, dass er alles Unbegreifliche im Menschenwesen auflöst und zum Verschwinden bringt, dass er Liebe und Tod rationalisiert sondern er erschließt uns wesentlicher, als wir es sonst wissen, die Problemtiefe der Existenz als solche. (1995, p. 54)
- vii Original text in German: 'Wesentlich ist der Mensch Arbeiter, Spieler, Liebender, Kämpfer und Sterblicher' (Fink, 1995, pp. 105 - 106).
- viii Original text in German: Die Institutionen vermitteln das Gefühl der Geborgenheit – aber sie verdecken auch durch ihre Lebensinterpretationen die ursprüngliche Rätselhaftigkeit von Welt und Leben, und sie verdecken auch vielfach das Grund

Phänomen auf dem sie selber beruhen; sie verhüllen ihre Ursprünge, ihre Herkunft aus dem Willen zur Macht, sie verummummen sich in Selbstidealisierungen. Und so verlangen sie vor allem die Lebensführung, Erlösung von der Qual der Frage. Die "permanente Revolution" ist für alle Institutionen der größte Greuel.

(Fink, 1995, p. 28)

- ix Original text in German: 'Die Chance besteht vielmehr darin, dass in diesen Streit die uralte bannende Kraft der Institutionen zerbricht, die sonst den Einzelnen bindet, dass der Blick ein am frei wird auf die ganze rätselhafte Fragwürdigkeit unseres Daseins' (Fink, 1995, p. 29).
- x Original text in German: 'Eine radikal irdische Anthropologie, die aus der Selbstauslegung menschlicher Existenz hervorgeht' (Fink, 1995, p. 29).
- xi Original text in German: Es mag sein, dass wir im Tode dem Gericht des göttlichen Weltregiments verfallen, dass die objektive Bilanz unserer guten und schlechten Taten gezogen wird, aber es ist das Geheimnis unserer Freiheit, wie wir uns im irdischen Leben entscheiden: wir nehmen Stellung, wir sind keine Marionetten, auch vor der Übermacht des Schicksals nicht; wir nehmen Stellung, wir taxieren unser Leben, nicht nach objektiven Befunden, aber nach erlebten „Glück“ oder „Unglück“. Aus der unmittelbaren Innigkeit geben wir unser Zeugnis. (Fink, 1995, p. 40)
- xii Original text in German: 'Zunächst fängt keiner das Dasein erstmalig an, die überlieferte Sitte zeichnet schon Bahnen und Geleise der Lebensauslegung vor' (Fink, 1995, p. 41).
- xiii Original text in German: Zwar stecken wir zumeist in fixen, institutionell ausgeformten Gemeinschaften – ehe wir nachdenken; wir leben in organisierten Gruppen, die mit ihrer massiven Lebenslehre, mit ihren Dogmen und Ideologien den Prozess der lebendigen Selbst Verständigung gleichsam stillstellen und niederhalten, der Sozialität eine starre Sinn-Ordnung verleihen. Und trotzdem bricht immer wieder in den Menschen die Frage, das Problem, die Verwunderung mit elementarer Gewalt auf und treibt uns aus allen Häfen und Sicherheiten hinaus aufs offene Meer. (Fink, 1995, p.41)
- xiv Original text in German: Wie es einen geheimen Willen zur illusionären Selbstidealisierung

gibt, der bekämpft werden muss, so gibt es auch eine geheime Lust der Selbstanklage, der Selbsterniedrigung eine Lust an der eigenen Desillusionierung. Und dies eist nicht weniger ein Hindernis eines echten und wahrhaftigen Verstehens. Aber zwischen den beiden extremen Seelenlagen dir echte Mitte zu halten, muss doch nicht dazu führen, dass der Mensch sich objektiv wie eine Sache nimmt. Der Begriff der „Objektivität“ wirkt durch seine Zweideutigkeit irreleitend. (Fink, 1995, p. 49)

- xv** Original text in German: 'Wir leben immer in einer Eröffnetheit unseres Daseins, in einer Aufgeschlossenheit für "Sinn", für Aufgabe, für Glück und Unglück, wir leben in einer verstandenen, in einer ausgelegten Situation' (Fink, 1995, p. 49).

- xvi** Original text in German: Dass das menschliche Dasein am meisten mit sich bekannt ist, besagt keineswegs, dass hier nur die Ur-Vertrautheit des Lebens mit sich selber geschieht, dass hier die vertraute und vertrauliche Atmosphäre der Bodenständigkeit, des heimatlichen Gründens allein und ausschließlich vorherrscht. Vielmehr gehören zum Dasein als solchem die jähen Umbrüche ins Unheimliche Grauenvolle, Rätselhafte. (Fink, 1995, p. 36)

- xvii** Original text in German: Neugier, Verstandesscharfe, Urteilskraft, spekulative Phantasie, kritische Wachheit und viele andere Gaben aber am wichtigsten ist die Ergriffenheit, die uns als Schicksal widerfährt – die Ergriffenheit durch ein abgründiges Staunen. Dieses Staunen ist des Menschen bestes Teil. Harmlos geschieht es in heile Kindheit. (Fink, 1995, p. 17)

- xviii** Original text in German: Nicht sind wir zuerst und haben dann noch ein bekom-mendes Verstehen, nein, wir sind gerade als Verstehende, als Sinnoffene. Menschliche Existenz ist Innestehen in einer Ausgelegtheit ihrer selbst. (Fink, 1995, p. 50)

- xix** Original text in German: 'Das menschliche Dasein ist für uns der Ort alles Verstehens und Nichtverstehens, der Ort alles Begreifen und der Ort aller Rätsel' (Fink, 1995, p. 23).

- xx** Original text in German: 'Wir geraten in Verlegenheit beim ersten Versuch einer Formulierung' Fink, 1995, p. 47).

- xxi** Original text in German: 'Die Philosophie ist schon in uns, wenn sie auch zumeist "schläft"'

(Fink, 1995, p. 16).

- xxii Original text in German: 'Das bestimmt die Eigenart jeder philosophischen Belehrung: sie ist primär immer Erweckung – nicht Mitteilen von Lehrsätzen und Wissensinhalten, von Forschungsergebnissen, von Methoden und Techniken' Fink, 1995, p. 16).
- xxiii Original text in German: Sie ist mit-menschliches Gespräch, gemeinsames Fragen, Sinnen und Deuten, sie hat ihre wahrhaften Wirklichkeit in der Kommunikation' Fink, 1995, p.16).
- xxiv Original text in German: Ihr geht es nicht darum, den Menschen wie ein fremdes Ding zu untersuchen und irgendwelchem Satze über dieses Menschending aufzustellen, si eist da Wagnis eines feien Lebensversuchs, der sich auf die eigene Erhellung des Daseins gründet, das Wagnis, ein selbst-interpretiertes Leben zu leben, alle Institutionen zu überprüfen, nicht zu scheuen, vor keinem Umsturz ehrwürdiger Sitten und Einrichtungen zurückzuschrecken. Philosophie ist weniger gelehrsameres Wissen, als eine Weise des Existierens. (Fink, 1995, p. 53)
- xxv Original text in German: 'In tausenfaltigen Weisen durchdring die Phantasie den menschlichen Lebensvollzug' (Fink, pp. 355-356).
- xxvi Original text in German: '-ohne sie [fantasy] wäre unser Dasein trostlos und ohne Schöpfung' (Fink, 1995, p. 356).
- xxvii Original text in German: Keiner steht dem Leben nackt gegenüber keiner macht die ersten, ursprünglichen Erfahrungen; jeder wächst schon auf im Sinnraum einer Sitte, die uns lehrt, was es mit dem Leben auf sich hat, was die Aufgabe des Menschen sei, was das Hohe und Heilige, das Edle und Gute sei, dem er nachstreben muß, und was das Gemeine, Bose und Niedrige sei, das er vermeiden soll. (Fink, 1995, p. 27)
- xxviii Video Amy van der Steen 'sleepover' <https://youtu.be/zl5leFCbX2s>

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