

# Play as Inter-Play: A Dialogue between Gadamer and Schiller

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## Abstract

This paper addresses the concept of play concerning human formation, especially as manifested in the philosophies of Gadamer and Schiller. Gadamer depicted understanding as an organic motion that unfolds through seeing differences and characterized play as a flexible back-and-forth movement or interplay between possibilities and transformations. Schiller structured play as the playful impulse similarly as an interactive moving force that connects the two seemingly oppositional impulses of reason and sensation and lets the two affect the other dialogically. Both Gadamer and Schiller suggest that play, as in essence an inter-play, orients us into seeing more possibilities of making a refreshing sense of our intellectual and perceptual abilities and thereby transfiguring our living being into richer and fuller meaningfulness.

## Keywords

play – aesthetics – Gadamer – Schiller – human formation

## Introduction: Play as Inter-play

Play often refers to the activities that people engage in for enjoyment or recreation instead of serious purposes, and this paper argues that play is essential to human-life experiences and potentially educative. Human beings can play from birth, and play is one of the settings where people start feeling, experiencing, and *interacting* with others and the constantly changing environment. Our daily play experiences indicate that play necessarily involves uncertain

possibilities because whenever a game is being controlled or manipulated precisely, it can hardly remain playful. Hence, in genuine play, the player constantly encounters something unknown or novel and will be oriented to respond and interact with uncertainties. Such interactions often provide the player with space and time to explore the self and the world more fully and lead the person to see into differences and seek the possibilities of becoming *otherwise* or, ideally, a better or fuller being. More specifically, the play could lead the person to be a fuller being by orienting the person toward seeing, experimenting, and realizing more possibilities about the self and the world. With its rules and regulations, games orient a free agency to respond to the “unknown,” explore the self-being and the environment and, meanwhile, develop a growing understanding of the self and things through enriched living experiences. Play, thus, is the playground where people come to experience what could *be* alternatively, continually unfolding through the inter-play between the player and the sense and elements of the unknown, namely, the Other.

Therefore, play is a playful interaction, or the “inter-play,” between the self and a different or perhaps unfamiliar challenge or new thing, which is the Other, the known and the unknown, the game regulations and the spontaneous play, or the “shoulds” and the “coulds.” Centrally, play is the orientation into thinking, doing, and being otherwise towards an expanded understanding and an enriched human-being and -becoming. As an “inter-play,” play invites a respectful and hospitable manner of receptivity, communication, and interaction. The issue of play, in general, is seldom addressed in philosophy, yet Gadamer and Schiller offered an enlightening and critical analysis of the topic and valued the unique meaningfulness of play. On my reading, both philosophers indicate that play or playfulness is a reminder of human beings’ organic, creative, and adaptive nature. Based on the accounts of Gadamer and Schiller, this paper further presents that play is supposed to provide players with a widened range of possibilities for transforming and growing into better and more enriched organic human beings.

Briefly, this paper will first present the “unscripted” and organic nature of play and playfulness to explain how play orients people into seeing more possibilities and developing a growing understanding through the inter-play with the “unknown” elements in games. Then it will engage Gadamer’s account of play (the *Spiel*) and Schiller’s account of the playful drive to present that both philosophers construct “play” as a creative, responsive, and adaptive inter-play between different things and beings. Next, it will further represent that play, as a responsive inter-play, could orient people into a growing understanding and enriching living experience, which is a fuller being. Finally, it will end with a review and further implications regarding the unique meaningfulness of play.

## The “Unscripted” Play

This paper argues that play is a form of organic inter-play between different subjects and beings, and this feature of the play is inherent in playfulness, which is organically “unscripted” and constantly invites adaption. The sense of “unscripted” illustrates that play invites the seeing into possibilities, which centrally constructs the idea of play and/or playfulness. Michael Ridge (2017) summarized the historical-philosophical discussion on play and game and proposed a formula of play – “*An agent A is playing if and only if A is engaged in an unscripted activity for the fun of (p. 4)*,” which sheds light on the fundamental uniqueness of play and playfulness. Ridge highlighted the organic flexibility of play in the term “unscripted.” A game must be unscripted or at least partly unscripted so that it could allow players to engage the game setting with a creative agency and new and rich possibilities. Being “unscripted,” games leave space and opportunities for free human agencies to engage and explore.

On the other hand, the term “unscripted” may not emphasize that play requires players to seek meaningful possibilities, often in a *rhythmic* movement, especially **in response to** unexpected external influences. Lying on the sofa or taking a random walk outside in the park is unscripted, and we do it for fun, but few of us would think of lying on the sofa or taking a walk as play. Rhythm is generated in waves of differences, varieties, or contrasts such as pitch changes, duration, and loudness in a melody; in play, rhythmic movements occur within **the interplay**, which is the mutual engagement, sometimes between regulations and possibilities and sometimes between spontaneous actions and external action influences. Moreover, Ridge’s account focuses solely on the affective aspect of play, the “fun,” whereas play impels participants to expand their intellectual knowledge to inhabit the game world. All players are quite familiar with the “task” of constructing diverse strategies *in response* to different challenges in specific sports or chess games.

Thus, in addition to the emphasis Ridge put on flexibility and fun, I want to add that play entails spontaneous responses to specific requisite rules and correspondingly a need for learning or growth that may facilitate one’s transfiguration towards a fuller or better being.

Primarily, play preconditions the rules that players must follow, which constitute the external stimuli that the player would be called to respond to and *accommodate*. We can hardly participate in a chess game, for example, without comprehending its rules in advance. Gadamer (2013) argued: “*all play is a being-played* (p. 111).” Play cannot come to exist in the player’s subjective consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary, it draws the player into its dominion and fills the player with its spirit (p. 113). The being of play is an independent event

that the player needs to mindfully interact with and inhabit; it exists outside of the player's immediate subjectivity. Play "comes first," and the player is subject to being played, namely, being called to attend to and pay attention. The player is oriented to encounter, interact with, and finally accommodate the stimuli or regulations that constitute the environment's prescriptions and establish the borders of the particular "fictional" world. In an experience of play, it is a game that is "in charge," to so speak, rather than the player (Vihauer, 2009).

Play makes players play rather than vice versa; here lies the unique educational value of play. Players encounter the world of play with its distinct structure, compositions, and culture as a distinctive reality distinguished from their immediate actual life but complete in itself: play is different from our immediate reality but still presents the possibilities of engaging the immediate reality. Hence, play is the playground where we come to discover, experiment with, and create the possibilities of inhabiting our actual life. Play is the inter-play between a free agency and various distinct borders, challenges, and regulations.

More importantly, the play offers no specific guidelines on how a player should act. The movement of chess pieces is fluid and un-predetermined. Play is "unscripted." As Ridge explained, "an activity is scripted to the extent that the agent's behavior is fixed by some preexisting 'script,' with habit or rote rule-following as on an assembly line (p. 4)." Games rarely entail a standard mechanism of finishing a task, and players are supposed to decide their distinctive choices and movements. It is always the same game, but it is always different because it is subject to not completely controllable accidents (Chiurazzi, 2011). Leading the players to understand the rules and then seek to engage subtly mirrors the teaching and learning process. The game informs the player of where she is and leads her to try out how to inhabit the environment alternatively and better.

All games are interactive, therefore, and even in single-player games, players should move in response to unpredictable external stimuli thrown by the game. Squash could be a solitary sport, but it is still an interactive event because the player is bouncing the ball against the wall or, to say, bouncing the ball thrown by the game. Genuine players listen to the unremovable "accidentality" of the game and "catch the ball" thrown either by the game or other participants. They encounter accidents as new puzzles and progress to accommodate them. Through such responsive interactions, play initiates people into sensing more possibilities of behaviors and creations.

Through the interactive experiences, furthermore, genuine players who tend to see more and see otherwise for better inhabitation and growth become potential learners. Players experiment with the impossibility of being the

master of reality (Chiurazzi, 2011). To *experiment* is one of the fundamental tasks of players because no player can control the game. Over time, players will naturally encounter new things, new situations, or new puzzles, so they will need to keep building a more prosperous understanding of the unknown and distinct “fictional” world. To conclude, lacking complete knowledge, players are motivated to adjust and advance their knowledge to adapt to new things that emerge accidentally along with the explorative play, which may ultimately help the person lead and build her real-life experiences with expanded and enriched possibilities, perspectives, or capabilities. It is through such inter-play between the free human agency and the challenging environment that the person may be led to develop a more complete understanding, richer living experiences and imaginations, and a fuller being. The person would be pushed to encounter the unknown in a certain fictional world and be invited to explore, interpret, understand, and finally accommodate the world. The inter-play between the human agency and the world is in this way a learning and growing experience.

The player explores and experiments with her faculties grounded on what she may consciously or unconsciously build into a more profound and broader understanding of the self and the world essential to one’s continuous human-being and self-formation. We play not to dominate the game but to inhabit it, to see and try afresh in realities different from our immediate environment; we play to adventure into a mysterious yet expansive world, a genuinely lush and fecund playfield. We play to draw a new extension of our experiences (Burke, 1971). Even though the player cannot always relate the concrete things she has learned in the game to the immediate physical world, such as the regulations of the movement of chess pieces or the recipe of magic medicine in the game of *Zelda*, she has learned to develop the habit of knowing more.

In addition, the love of play, or the genuine engagement as a responsive inter-play, keeps the player truly present in the game. The fun of play is without goal, end, or strain, but rather, it contains a spontaneous pleasure and a conscious presence. In short, play is a joyful orientation leading the player to embrace possibilities, expand their knowledge, and enrich their living experiences. And such love for play can only sustain itself when the person embraces the interactions with other things and beings, which requires the game to keep itself free of manipulation and open to genuine inter-play, or to say mutual engagement. A controller would not need to truly “interact” with the sense of the Other because she would have been able to manipulate the game mechanically. Gavin Ardley (1967) depicted play in the paragraph as follows:

“Game is disinterested, an end in itself. As with love, there can be no compulsion or necessity in play: its essence is spontaneity and out-givingness. There must be no professionalism (in the sense in which the professional has gained superior competence at the expense of the amateur virtues), no undue competitiveness, no over-eagerness to win, nor under-eagerness either, or the game degenerates into a sham. A real game is a case of simple timeless enjoyment (p. 233).”

I interpret Ardley as saying that genuine players are willing to engage in the game so long as they enjoy the engagement itself and that this willingness as a form of enjoyment cannot be thwarted by overwhelming expertise or improper competitiveness. The “engagement” to the core is a sustainable, mindful, and respectful inter-play. The “overwhelming” and the “improper” would unduly hinder other players’ meaningful engagement, yet professional expertise and healthy competitiveness could be properly pursued as embodied in the spirit of the Olympic Games that has an ancient origin. One who has overwhelming expertise can manipulate the game so that others might become the objects of the manipulation, and a “game” generating improper competitiveness makes the result of the event unfairly more critical than the “play” experiences. The two factors would entail destructive exclusion in collective events that are supposed to be educationally interactive, and exclusion would foreclose possibilities and ruin the fun and the game.

It explains why games are sometimes abused: we enjoy playing because we enjoy playing with freedom and possibilities, but if someone controls the game, the controller then knows how to manipulate the game to guarantee personal victory and leaves few possibilities for other participants to engage. To control the game is to end the inter-play precisely, which is to degrade the game into a purely mechanical assembly line. A genuine player would love the game in a genuinely interactive engagement. Thus, the pre-condition of play is that one sincerely wants to play and is willing to sustain the game, individually and collectively, as enjoyable and free of absolute fixity.

Presenting these descriptions of play, I attempt to characterize play as letting people respond to the uncertain and see the possibilities of what they can do or *be* alternatively and better. Charles Bingham (2005) proposes that play is like an open question since the structure of the question puts finitude into play in the same way that the thought of one’s mortality puts the finitude of existence into play. In his description, “a question, in contrast to a statement, is posed in order to emphasize the possibility that an object may be otherwise, and while a statement confirms, a question disconfirms (p. 554).” The question, or the open question, constantly invites meaningful and sensible engagement.

Play gives birth to interplays between the finitude and infinite possibilities precisely like an open question that invites the interplays between rightness and unlimited tentative responses. **In a philosophical inquiry or play, inter-plays suggest active and respectful mutual engagement.**

### Gadamer and Schiller: Play and Playfulness

Both Gadamer and Schiller examined the idea of play philosophically, and on my reading, they highlighted the organic nature of play as an orientation to inter-play with different things and beings. Comparing their characterizations of play could help us better interpret the educational value of play. In a word, both philosophers address play as an orientation to seeing and being alternatively and organically. Noticeably, Schiller constructed the idea of the playful impulse within the subjective and conscious human mind as a creative and organic experience of the interplay between reason and passion, whereas Gadamer differed in making the idea of play “escape” subjectivity (Burwick, 1990).

Specifically, in Gadamerian philosophy, play is characterized as a flexible back-and-forth movement between different things, especially the known and the unknown. Such educative play is potentially promising for the enhancement of understanding. By orientating people into seeing differences and possibilities, play is central to *Bildung* [education; self-formation], which Gadamer interpreted as a process of human-formation through which one may keep the existing self-being open to a universal point of view and a fuller being (Gadamer, 2013). Schiller introduced the idea of playful impulse as a moving force that moves and bridges in-between passion and rationality (Schiller, 2016). With the playful impulse, some artificial constraints put upon either reason or sensation alone could be traversed, and novel yet harmonious meanings can emerge as new offspring of both, which we may refer to as *Beauty*. I interpret both philosophers as suggesting the organic nature of play as a mindful and constructive inter-play and an orientation into seeing more, knowing alternatively, and/or being more fully.

More specifically, play as Gadamer examined in his *Truth and Method* (2013) is essential to epistemic growth. Human understanding for Gadamer, in my reading, is an organic motion instead of a mechanical and lifeless staleness. Meanwhile, organic beings necessarily involve differences that condition renewal, adjustment, growth, or transfiguration. Hence, differences are the essential core, or the essential impetus, of understanding. Furthermore, play is a flexible back-and-forth movement between different things and beings.

It necessarily involves irreducible and ever increasing varieties. Consequently, play provides the orientation to knowing better and being more fully (Gadamer, 2013). In this sense, play is a spontaneous and playful movement that continuously renews itself and elucidates the structure of an organic understanding of which difference is the “life-blood (Vihauer, 2009, p. 359).” Play unfolds in the continuous and interactive *movement*.

Gadamer (2013) stated that in all play cases, what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end. This feature of play is reflected already in the German word of play “Spiel,” which originally means “Dance.” The to-and-fro movement, or to say the spontaneous inter-play, is the soul of play; it makes no difference who or what performs this movement because the movement backward and forward itself constitutes the directive forces driven by playfulness out of numb and soulless repetitions (p. 108).

In playful orientations, we are driven to adapt to differences contained in repetitive events and enrich our shortsighted knowledge with vibrant life and creative possibilities (Graaff, 2008). Gadamer (2013) suggests that we see differences in a lively manner to expand and refine our knowledge continuously. Each person generates a distinctive narrative of the world nearby, and no one achieves an omniscient vision. Thus, everyone relies on others’ perspectives to gain a fuller view of the shared world. Differences among us are windows through which we investigate the world beyond our limited vision. We see into differences to struggle against the inherent narrow nearsightedness of one single human being. Therefore, the sense of responsiveness and inter-play is central to our learning and expanding the single vision of each of us. It is based on seeing differences that Gadamer interpreted *Bildung* as “keeping oneself open to what is other – to other, more universal points of view.” (p. 760) Besides, the tendency toward a more *universal*, holistic view assumes that the agent should have formed a sense of self with a dependable, *local* view. Mindful local views are the starting point from which we come to recognize, respond to, and accommodate other views. To see into differences is to embrace the Other and see what is unseen yet beyond our innately limited and mostly self-centered local, singular human extension.

How shall we then come to accommodate differences? We will constantly face challenges that the alien poses to the familiar, the Other to the Same, and the unknown to the known, so we are called by nature to experience the strange, the new, and the different (p. 759). Emotionally, people may feel more comfortable with the familiar than the strange. Some avoid or even debase strange things which disturb their prejudgments. Ironically, differences do not necessarily impede understanding. On the contrary, embracing differences strengthens communities and improves mutual understanding of issues



(Kerdeman, 2015). Understanding is an organic process of approaching and responding to the unknown unfolding in a collective human inhabitation. The Other is a permanent source of differences, new challenges, and, importantly, new meanings. In this sense, the Gadamerian play invites us to recognize differences, risk our prejudices, affect ourselves, and transform into more knowledgeable and fuller beings. To see into differences is to challenge the judgments and to achieve a mediation of the known and the unknown – the process Gadamer terms the “fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013, p. 317).” As a “curious suspension (p. 108)” followed by a meaningful re-entry, the fusion of horizons leaves us space for reflection, synthesis, and growth.

Gadamer (2013) suggested that understanding is essentially playful and interactive because it develops through a re-thinking, an interplay, of what is partly unknown and what is taken as absolutely known. Understanding consists of questioning or putting into play what people think they know. The Gadamerian play expects people to make new sense of differences previously thought of as impenetrable or even offensive. To embrace the otherness is to avoid judging the strange or uncertain as incomprehensible but rather as a playful orientation into knowing anew and otherwise. Here then comes the “hermeneutic circle (2013, p. 279)” in Gadamer’s words as I interpret them: the continuous interplay between the whole we have already comprehended and the new parts that occasionally surprise and challenge us. Understanding improves through hermeneutic circles as a continuous flow of intellectual inter-play.

To see into differences is the key to initiating and maintaining a genuine, playful, and educative *dialogue*, which means responding to differences in a careful and caring manner in hopes of a fuller understanding and, ultimately, a more promising adaptation.

“For Gadamer, to initiate a dialogue with the other (a text, a novel situation, a distant epoch, another person)” argued Chris Higgins (2010), “means risking our prejudices by putting them in play while trying to remain open to those moments in which we find our ourselves noticing just a little more than we thought we knew how to notice (p. 322).” In keeping ourselves open to adjusting our prejudices, we willingly put our knowledge into play and embrace the possibility of knowing otherwise and knowing more fully; “prejudices are revised as the dialogue proceeds (Retz, 2015, p. 219).” In dialogue, people share and handle differences collaboratively with peace and grace. By “peace and grace,” I do not intend to eliminate disagreements, agon, or conflicts that inevitably result from power or status differentiation; instead, I mean to accept and adapt to them without hasty denial or exclusion but with respect and patience. Driven by a playful openness, one may engage in an educative dialogue, where

genuine communication opens the possibilities of understanding and enlarges the extension of each distinctive human being.

In addition, the analysis of play could be enlightened by Schiller's playful impulse, which, in hopes of making a harmonious transcendence (O'Connor, 2014), moves and bridges in-between the material impulse and the formal impulse, namely, passion and rationality (Weber, 2011). Primarily, Schiller shared with Gadamer the fundamental interests in the educational play as a flexible and constructive inter-play but examined the issue from a different perspective. The "correspondence" between the two philosophers also proves to constitute the inter-play of ideas and dialogue in the educational play. Schiller (2016) offers us an insightful account of the playful drive, which, as I interpret, also highlights the organic un-fixity of play (or playfulness) and its interactive nature, whereas Schiller paid more attention to his idea of the playful drive as the *inter-play* between human reason and sensation.

In detail, Schiller structured the composition of human souls poetically:

"The material impulse seeks change, desires that time has a content; the formal impulse seeks to annul time, desires that nothing changes. This new impulse, the sensuous and the formal working within it (until such time as I have justified such a name, allow me to call it the *playful impulse*) – this playful impulse aims at the annulment of time within time, uniting becoming with absolute being, and change with identity (Schiller, 2016, p. 51)."

The material impulse impels us to sense the varieties of external influences that the massive natural world leads us to encounter, expanding and accumulating diverse sensually mixed experiences within the time horizon where we live physically. In contrast, the formal impulse impels us to inquire, reflect on, and identify the universal laws, principles, or forms that exist consistently across temporal changes, which is to grasp the world through abstraction and pursue a more enduring and unified understanding. The playful impulse is to connect these two "oppositional" impulses, let them work together, and affect each other in a compatible yet also confronting – which is *dialogical* – manner. The point is that the playful impulse is where the material impulse and the formal impulse "stretch" the limits of each. With the playful impulse, the enormous artificial constraints put upon either reason or sensation alone could be traversed, if not dissolved, and those new meanings can emerge as new offspring of both, which we refer to as grace and beauty.

Therefore, as Schiller concluded, "man should only play with beauty, and he should play only with beauty (Schiller, 2016, p. 56)." Beauty is where infinite

particular realities could exist in peace with the absolute, coherent laws of thought; within it, time will have to be delineated in a new light with the flow of newly unified and decorated meanings, and changes will be grasped as rhythmic elements of the thematic melody of time. Thus, beauty is the proper object of fair play, which is essentially the “noble” play of the organic nature of human existence. The noble play is a potential continuous re-direction of human existence. However, the play does not necessarily entail beauty because some interplays between reason and sensation are improper and abused so that *men should play with beauty*, as Schiller phrased neatly. Men should play for beautiful pleasures, for the elegantly poetic, for grace.

Grace, in my view, stands for the form of Beauty in a humane manner, for it is a humanely intelligible containment of a Beauty element divine-like, mysterious, or infinitely vast. Schiller might agree that grace, in the human sense, is the beautiful outcome of the movement of a beautiful or artful soul. He once wrote in his famous essay *On Grace and Dignity* (1793), which is said to be a predecessor of his *On the Aesthetic Education of Men*, “Anmuth ist die Schönheit der Gestalt unter dem Einfluß der Freiheit; die Schönheit derjenigen Erscheinungen, die die Person bestimmt (p. 349). [Grace is the beauty of the form under the influence of freedom; the beauty of those manifestations which the person determines.]” Schiller suggests that grace is generated as the ripe fruit of a free soul mindfully and artfully using and exploring its gifted multiple creative powers, especially in hopes of grasping and making a beautiful being or beautiful beings. As I interpret, Schiller expanded on this harmonious use of creative human powers later in the *On the Aesthetic Education of Men*, which I analyze further in the following paragraphs.

Schiller’s notion of playful impulse insightfully points out that the playful drive provides a playground for the interaction of reason and sensation, which are not preset as mutual enemies but are two necessities that function in a predominantly different way. In this way, the power of sensation and reason are not exclusive enemies but powers that can affect, challenge, cooperate with, and learn from each other. Therefore, the two human powers can engage in the other one with such an inter-play, or to say, mutual engagement. Play in its narrowest sense is *inter-play*, in a word, and Schiller exemplified this with the pair of the sensation and the intellect.

Another implication is that play provides a space where interplays can be liberated from segregated, self-enclosed dualisms or multiplicities. To this end, play can hopefully be the power of unification that bridges the gulf of disconnected faculties and exclude exclusion. It is, in my view, the most significant light the assertion that play means inter-play sheds on the conversation. Play must let itself play in-between at least two parties that cannot be assimilated

into one thing. In this way, it contains a “noble” duty of nourishing individual dispositions and social culture, which is the play’s own, perhaps sacred, seriousness that, I speculate, Gadamer (2013) insightfully saw in the work of play (p. 107).

In response to Schiller, Weber (2011) further argued:

“Play is genuinely human, because it allows us to distance ourselves from the instinctive impulses through reason. Nevertheless, we always remain part of the sensuous force of the world too, although without being overwhelmed by it (mere sensuous drive). We remain distanced from these sensuous calls that come towards us from the things, but still perceive them. At the same time, we have not yet fallen completely into the form drive, because we are still ‘just playing with the world’ without any ‘end-oriented’ intention. Thus, in a way, we are free and connected from and with both instincts and habits. As a consequence, we re-enter the realm of potentiality and become creative by unfolding our own unusual and unique usages and meanings. Through this expansion of meanings, and in the process of finally choosing one, the chosen becomes our very own one. This is why, for Schiller, we are only free when we play and we only play when we are free (p. 243–5).”

Weber characterized the playful drive as a potential harmony that settles itself down in neither reason nor passion alone but allows a continuous exploration of possibilities, alternative decisions, and enlightening new meanings. Such educative play entails an active suspension, or in other words, a search for equilibrium arising from tensions. A meaningful suspension is the opposite of an empty suspension, a complete breakdown, a suspension without re-entry, or a quitting and not being. A playfield is of profound experiences where the division between fantasy and reality, the subjective and the objective realms, is to vanish for a moment, and things will appear in a new light through re-entering (Kennedy, 2018). Play embodies a porous vagueness that invites creative thinking and new sense-making beyond the artificial borders of one’s already-built conceptual world.

Play or playfulness then may imitate poetry and art in opening people’s minds to *thinking, feeling, and being otherwise*. It is a social, interactive, multi-vocal engagement process where participants move beyond the nearsightedness of their thinking and toward more universal perspectives that could enrich their own (Vihauer, 2009). By universal perspectives, I mean more inclusive and balanced perspectives formed through the organic process when one recognizes the partiality of her own singular experience, consciously

liberates herself from incomplete judgments previously taken for granted and keeps her prior and existing perspectives open to further revision and synthesis. As an orientation into fuller and more universal perspectives, play is compatible with the gist of democratic conversations and interactions, which is to embrace differences and adapt to a larger collective inhabitation.

According to Schiller, as O'Connor (2014) argued, play acts in pursuing a higher form of necessity that combines and transcends existing forms of necessity (p. 1099). I interpret the term "a higher necessity" as a fuller human-being or a continuous organic transformation towards a larger harmony built within and around oneself. Although animals engage in play-like activities, we cannot identify whether they are playing (p. 1099). Schiller might respond that animals do not aim at a fuller being or a higher necessity even if they have been able to play before the rise of human societies, whereas human beings pursue meaningful play, a purposeless purposefulness, or to say, dynamic growth. By "purposeless purposefulness," I mean that though people may play simply for fun without practical purposes, they still are expected to engage in the game in a meaningful way. True happiness alone could constitute a significant meaning worthy of pursuit. Moreover, such meaningfulness realizes itself in an unending, open inquiry; "a higher necessity" exists as an incessant pursuit of living and self-formation in the organic nature of human beings to the eternal sense, and thus, Schiller (2016) made the famous argument in the Fifteenth Letter of his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* about play – "*Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word man, and he is only wholly man when he plays* (p. 56–7)."

For Gadamer, play is unique, independent from the subjective experiences of players. This difference is significant because while Schiller valued the playful impulse, I interpret Gadamer as valuing the actively spontaneous and un-mechanical nature of undefined human powers. In contrast, Gadamer indicated that in play, human beings are "being suspended" and "being engaged" by the unexhausted richness and accidentality of the play's events. As for Gadamer, play leads the player into a distinct setting where her familiar subjectivity might be suspended, challenged, or ultimately enlarged. The distinct or fictional play world involves a dream-like unreal element that the player must accommodate; in the play, the player is nearly forced to have an "as-if" mode of being or experience (p. 62). Separating play from the subjective consciousness of the player, Gadamer underscored the inherent unique value and meaningfulness of play as an "irreality" unfamiliar and uncontrollable to the player's subjectivity.

## Play, Growth, and Human-becoming

Genuine play is then inherently interactive and potentially educational, leading the player to see into differences, explore possibilities, and ideally re-direct the self-being towards an expanded fullness and meaningfulness. Such potency of transfiguration lies in the core of human-being as an organic becoming and growth. Speaking of the organic nature of human beings, I want to introduce Dewey's account of education and growth to elucidate further the mechanism of play as a resource of orientations essential to our continuous human-being and -formation. I argue that both Gadamer and Schiller's analysis highlights the meaningfulness of play as leading people to embrace possibilities and fuller living experiences, which is human growth, and Dewey's account of growth can help us better understand the relation between play, growth and human-formation.

In his *Democracy and Education* (1997), Dewey asserted that as a prerequisite of growth, immaturity conditions the potency of growth because immaturity, in a constructive manner, entails interdependence and plasticity by which people, especially children, are driven to develop social responsiveness as well as a habit of learning. Growth occurs only if a person can liberate herself from placing a fixed end on her movements, human beings, or self-development. The potency of growth makes us aware of a human being's innate immaturity, imperfection, and incompetence when facing new challenges and changes in the expansive environment constantly broader than what we have touched upon or known. It reminds us to develop non-mechanical, active, responsive, and reflective habits of living that are open to continuous and lively reformation and transformation of the self-being.

Play as various forms of inter-play teaches us the same lesson: players are expected to develop attentive and interactive responsiveness towards external stimuli entailed by the immanent accidentality of the game, to build the habit of learning to inhabit the game world which exists outside of their actual realities and to open themselves to unfixed possible ends which they may accomplish within or outside the game. When interpreting Dewey, D. C. Phillips (2016) conceived an example that in a game such as cricket, people must "imitate" others' actions and moves if they did not grasp the rules before, or otherwise, they would not be able to "coordinate" their actions with those of the others nor can they truly "play the game (p. 35)." The imitation vividly illustrates the central interactive, social mechanism of play and games, where people adapt to the things unknown and learn from (re)accommodations and (re)adaptations.

More importantly, Phillips explained that Dewey attempted to disclose that in contrast to other animals in which the process of growth has an inflexible goal, there is no predetermined, built-in end in human beings (p. 39). Compared to other animals, humans have been empowered historically to have a significantly more comprehensive range of possibilities of what one can become into, though it implies the possibilities of both goodness and badness. With the organic nature of humans, I speculate that Dewey might interpret Schiller's idea of "a higher necessity," which humans honestly and graciously play for, as the potency of growth, goodness, or a better human being. In this sense, play as the inter-play constantly reminds us to embrace the possibilities and varieties, thereby stretching the limits of our human-being and -becoming.

Dewey (1997) argued, "growing is not something which is completed in odd moments; it is continuous leading into the future....The mistake is not in attaching importance to preparation for future need, but in making it the mainspring of present effort. Because the need of preparation for a continually developing life is great, it is imperative that every energy should be bent to making the present experience as rich and significant as possible. Then as the present merges insensibly into the future, the future is taken care of (p. 56)." Growth is a dynamic process of conscious organizing and re-organizing of one's doing and thinking by which one can refine her understanding of an enlarged human-being and make sense of uncertainties, constraints, and challenges along the journey. In correspondence, the educational play leads participants to seek and re-direct proper actions on the way, especially when facing unpredictable, "unscripted" situations during which they are directed to build a responsive, reflective, and enjoyable movement towards epistemic or/and social growth. Educative play is generative and constructive as an orientation into organic growth or an enduring pursuit of gracious joy and betterness.

### Concluding Remark

This paper examines play as the orientation into mutual engagement and possibility-opening. It analyzes how play could benefit the growth and self-formation of human beings. Briefly, play is inherently unscripted and constantly invites people to engage in the "inter-play" between different things and beings. Significantly, Gadamer's account (2013) characterizes play as an active inter-play of the movement between the known and the unknown, and Schiller (2013) structures the playful drive as the creative and receptive inter-play between the major human powers. Both philosophers suggest that play involves an organic inter-play that could orient us to embracing fuller living

experiences. Lastly, I want to underscore that play is unique and essential in itself as an inter-play, as one of the most prominent signs of all beings' fluid and organic nature in this world. Play means an evergreen potency of spontaneity and renewal through repetitions. Though play is not necessarily the best state of human-being, if any, the best human-being must be accompanied by a gracious, respectful, sophisticated, and sustainable sense of playfulness. I speculate that this is one of the reasons why Gadamer ascertained the eternal and immanent value of play at the beginning of his analysis of "Spiel" in *Truth and Method* (2016): "When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself. In analyzing aesthetic consciousness, we recognized that conceiving aesthetic consciousness as something confronting an object does not do justice to the real situation. This is why the concept of play is important in my exposition (p. 106)." Play is valuable as a distinct "ir-reality" that may suspend and challenge our familiar subjective experiences; it is an orientation to be "as-if" and be alternatively. Play is the movement where ends and borders are suspended in peace for a more sensible re-entry, like a running river where angles vanish and all flows embrace each other in the inter-play.

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