

Abstraction, cruelty and other aspects of animal play (exemplified by the playfulness of Muki and Maluca)¹

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Abstract. Play behaviour is notorious for constituting a much debated, yet little clarified field of research. In this article, attempts are made to reach conclusions on the relation between human play and the play of other animals (especially cat play), as well as on the very character of play. The concept of Umwelt is reviewed, as are definitions of animal play, categorization of animal play and the role of meta-communication in playful behaviour. For some, play is a symbol of everything that is good. The author of the current article does not deny that social morality may have originated from play behaviour, but stresses the existence of *cruelty play*, which leads to additional assumptions. Another notion that is treated in some detail is *perceptual play*, which proves to demonstrate complex semiotic play that is related first of all to signification. At the end of the article an alternative categorization of animal play is suggested, in which the fundamental role of *mind games* is emphasized. Throughout the text, examples of play behaviour are offered by the two domestic cats Muki and Maluca.

¹ I dedicate the article to Maluca, that crazy cat we left behind at our land in Brazil, and deep ecologist Arne Næss (1913–2009), a philosopher who was playing until his last day.

The fun of playing resists all analysis, all logical interpretation [...] Here we have to do with an absolutely primary category of life, familiar to everybody at a glance right down to the animal level [...] Animals play so they must be more than merely mechanical things. We play and know that we play, so we must be more than merely rational beings.

Huizinga 1986[1938]: 3–4.

Starring in this article are two female domestic cats (*Felis catus*) — Muki (2005–) and Maluca (2007/2008–), who have their homes in Tartu, Estonia and Magé-RJ, Brazil respectively. While Muki was a young adult at the time of these observations, Maluca was at first a kitten, achieving sexual maturity — to much excitement — only at the end of this informal study period. As Darwin (1875: 165) theorized, within “the same country we do not meet with distinct races of the cat [...] from their nocturnal and rambling habits, indiscriminate crossing cannot without much trouble be prevented”. Despite living in different environments and under different climatic conditions, Muki and Maluca exhibit some common traits with respect to playing, to which I will return in the course of this small expose. They both display unique personalities. This is testimony to the fact that cats, like dogs, their “rival companion animal in our affections” (Sebeok 2001: 91; cf. Sebeok 1994), appear to be among the most adaptable animals on Earth.

As Sebeok (2001: 192) pointed out “a cat, by virtue of being assigned a personal name, can be dragged, if only to a degree, through the periphery of and into our Umwelt”. Maluca, which means ‘crazy (female)’ in Portuguese, learnt to obey her name, to the point of noticing when we talked about her. In another context Sebeok (1990: 77, cf. Sebeok 1981) hypothesized that social cooperation involved in play is a prerequisite for bearing “a singular proper name (SPN), marking each carrier animal as unique”. Vertebrates which are capable of individual recognition, according to Sebeok’s hypothesis, “tend to play as well, and vice versa”. He speculated that future probing would reveal that fishes play. As it happens, Gordon M. Burghardt, in his *The Genesis of Animal Play* (2006) — a book in which the author searches

for play in animals that are rarely thought to play — devotes a dozen pages to fishy play. According to Sebeok (1990: 92), natural SPNs “occur in those vertebrates which form personal societies” and “tend to be found in the phylum Chordata, typically in vertebrates, and, with increasing frequency, in birds and mammals”.

Play behaviour is notorious for constituting a much debated, yet little clarified field of research. In the words of Burghardt (2006: 6), serious scholars “typically ignore play; the exceptions also find themselves ignored”. All told, the phenomenon of play has not been “effectively confronted in science or society. Yet it may lie at the core of who we are and how we came to be” (Burghardt 2006: xiv). In the interpretation of Simonović and Simonović (2007: 6), “the development of creative powers [...] became the basis for the ‘detachment’ of man from nature and for setting up an active (change-aspiring) relationship with nature”. Kaplan and Kaplan (1982: 93), however, conclude that this power to initiate change is a much more widespread capacity.

Familiarity, the outcome of exploration, is also the starting point for play. [...] It is as if the identity of the elements was achieved through exploration and the way the elements can be arranged and rearranged is achieved through play. [...] With increasing familiarity, the mental entities become increasingly compact, increasingly discrete, and increasingly responsive to activation in the absence of what they represent. They become, in a word, manipulable.

If civilization has its roots in playful behaviour, as many have suggested, then certainly this adds up to yet another reason to study animal play, since whatever explains, or helps understand, phenomena of major interest (such as civilization, and fun) is itself of major interest. Yes, let us not neglect this most trivial and nevertheless most imperative finding about play: “When animals play they are having fun” (Bekoff 2004: 837).

Playful Umwelten

The practice of playing appears to be so fundamental for the wellbeing of many social animals — at least at certain stages and in certain moments of life — that to deprive an animal of the chances to play can be tantamount to denying it a good life. *Homo ludens*, our own kind, might perhaps be characterized by playful sexuality, to the effect that an absence of playfulness in this region of adult life in many cultures comes to signify a dull and mind-numbing reality.

Contrary to the claim of Simonović and Simonović (2007: 6), my view is that there is indeed a continuity of animal play in the play of man. “Through playing,” they assert, “man does not confirm his animal nature, but his human nature — becomes man (unique personality), while the animal through “playing” becomes an animal (a member of the species)”. Alternatively we could establish that man does have an animal nature — which is our general nature, and a human nature, which is our specific nature. Interspecific play probably tends to confirm, or trigger, our animal nature, and some intraspecific games of an ‘animal character’ might very well prove to do so as well. The kind of playing that shapes a human being as a human being, then (imagine a child deprived of any chance to play), is not necessarily characterized by being intraspecific, human play instead of interspecific play. Rather, it must somehow be distinguished by a uniquely human quality accompanying the game at hand. While this ‘human element’ of play is likely to rely on abstraction as well as empathy, I intend to demonstrate, throughout this article, that neither of these two abilities is found in human play only. It is reasonable to assume that it is the human capacity for language, thought and communication that takes abstraction as well as empathy to new heights. Though I do not want to play down the importance of children’s play with other children, I therefore tentatively establish that what characterizes human play is not so much *who* you are playing with as *how* you play with them.

Almost all mammals who have been studied engage in play, according to Bekoff 2004 — where Bekoff writes that even reptiles, amphibians and (in accordance with Burghardt 2006) fish might be playing. Burghardt adds certain social insects, such as honeybees, to the list. As for birds, play has been described in about half of the avian orders (Sears Funk 2004).

A special controversy in the history of play research concerns the function of play — or, the straightforward question: Why do we play? A classical answer is provided by Huizinga:

Nature, so our reasoning mind tells us, could just as easily have given her children all those useful functions of discharging superabundant energy, of relaxing after exertion, of training for the demands of life, of compensating for unfulfilled longings, etc., in the form of purely mechanical exercises and reactions. But no, she gave us play, with its tension, its mirth and its fun. (Huizinga 1986[1938]: 3–4)

The problem modern ethology has with explaining performance of play behaviour derives from the fact that it is, as Burghardt (2006: 71–78) phrases it, not fully functional in the form or context in which it is expressed. Put bluntly, it doesn't contribute to survival. Due to playing, animals risk injuries, and they use a lot of energy. So why do they do it? Rather than acknowledging that animal life is not all about survival, modern ethology tends to search for positive, lasting functions of playful behaviour, not least effects on socialization and cognitive development. A more comprehensive explanation would add that when primary needs (related to survival) are met, secondary needs (related to well-being) call for attention. This simple observation goes well along with the fact that this behaviour, which is performed with more energy than purpose, typically occurs when an animal is at ease. As for “compensating for unfulfilled longings”, the craving and yearning implicated in play — which Burghardt refers to as ‘spontaneous’, ‘voluntary’, ‘intentional’, ‘pleasurable’, ‘rewarding’, ‘rein-

forcing’ — at least points to the apparent fact that the will of the animal is engaged in playful behaviour.

The classical ethologist Niko Tinbergen, in the words of Burghardt (2006: 13), “left out one group of phenomena in his four aims: the emotional, experiential, or phenomenological aspects of behavior” (cf. Tinbergen 1963, Burghardt 1997). In *Social is emotional*, Mette Miriam Rakel Böll (2008) investigates social play behaviour in canids. Pointing to the explanatory gaps in present ethology, she observes (Böll 2008: 332) that “[w]ithout a concept of meaning, it has proven difficult to explain and to define social play behavior within the terms of traditional biology”. The study of play, she alleges (Böll 2008: 344), turns into “a phenomenology of the moving body, especially when the behavior is meta-communicative which is the case with the play signals” (such as the play bow of canids). “When an individual is constantly confronted with ‘the other’ in social encounters,” she notes, as is typical of playful, social Umwelten, “a reflection of ‘my behavior’ is necessary. Such reflections are the felt emotions” (Böll 2008: 344) The emotional repertoire at play in play surely ranges from the intimacy of “both knowing this is a game” via the human taboos of playing with your food or “playing with yourself” to the delightful disobedience entailed in Maluca’s habit of lying down on top of a tiny bush we had planted in front of our house (the clearer we signaled that she wasn’t allowed to, the more eagerly she repeated this behaviour).

Sebeok did a great job enunciating the concept of Umwelt as a “matchless world of significances [...] to which [a living being’s] behavior must accommodate” (Sebeok 2001: 74) — “its sealed-off, private monadic model of the universe” (*ibid.*, 79) — the taxonomy that any living entity superimposes upon its universe in order to filter out otherwise unmanageable environmental noise (*ibid.*, 89). These three descriptions all derive from his article *What do we know about signifying behavior in the domestic cat (Felis catus)?* (Sebeok 1994), and represent but fragments of his manifold variations over Uexküll’s Umwelt theme. His greatest contribution as well as his more counter-

productive emphasis on the supposedly necessarily species-specific character of an Umwelt are enveloped in another quote (Sebeok 1992, cf. 2001: 124), in which Sebeok defines an Umwelt as “the ‘model’ of a species-specific segment of individual reality”. While the description of an Umwelt as a modelling system has proven to be highly fruitful, the second claim has proven to be simplifying in a misleading manner.

How many worlds are there? How many spheres within spheres — how many thresholds above thresholds? “[I]n the phylum Chordata alone — to which the genus *Felis* belongs — there are at least forty-five thousand known species and hence no fewer corresponding systems of communication”, Sebeok (2001: 194) states, thereby offering yet another description of an Umwelt. But don’t populations and the like, as well, constitute systems of communication? In reality, the phylum Chordata entails far more than forty-five thousand different Umwelten. There are species-specific Umwelten (such as the human Umwelt) and more local Umwelten (such as the human/cultural Umwelt of Rio de Janeiro, the *Carioca* Umwelt), as well as more global Umwelten (such as the Umwelten of primates). An Umwelt is *a shared, public sphere*, an arena for signs that make sense to a certain group of Umwelt participants. Umwelten are not species-specific (nor individual-specific — that’s the Innenwelt), but rather organism-specific. In categorizing Umwelten the threshold of the species is indeed useful — and it is certainly characteristic of intraspecific communication — but the threshold of the species is nevertheless but one threshold among many. To say that Umwelten are species-specific is therefore in part arbitrary. Said unconditionally such statements are misleading, bordering on false.

According to Uexküll (1928: 181; my translation), the aggregate Umwelt of an entire species is “larger and richer than the Umwelt of each [member of that species]”. Species, in other words, are not totally homogeneous — there is always a certain intraspecific variety in behaviour and phenomena. This behavioural and phenomenological repertoire — which any species put on show — is partly due to diffe-

rences in constitution among the organisms of the species, and partly owing to different life histories (cf. Uexküll's concept of an *Umwelt-tunnel*). Individuality, that is to say, has its roots in physiology as well as in the concrete situations, or contexts, in which a living being finds itself immersed, and through which it has taken form not as a general being, but as an actual, particular being.

As for Maluca — an individual indeed — she discriminated between me and my wife by tending to lick my hands and fingers, and bite hers — with equal commitment. For some reason my fingers didn't automatically qualify as play things, even though they were clearly recognized as *cat things* — while on the other hand (sic) the fingers of my wife, in Maluca's Umwelt, represented an enduring biting-quality, and thus acted as a limitless source of obsessive play. Other prominent play things in her world included beetles, birds, butterflies and other insects (banana flies, dragonflies, mosquitoes), feet and toes, flowers, frogs, leaves (cacao, cactus, mango), lizards, millipedes, nails, pens, plastic bags, screws and screwdrivers, seeds, shoes and snakes. All told: Anything she could catch, chase, bite, or move around, especially if the eligible play things somehow resisted, made sounds, or moved in unpredictable ways. It is a peculiar fact that Maluca never, during the study period, was observed to be playing with other cats, nor with mice — despite the fact that she was face-to-face with a mouse at two occasions (in both cases, a mouse was found in our swimming pool, holding on for its dear life). While mice appeared not to be recognized as play things, other cats were simply not attractive in Maluca's eyes (not, that is, until her sexual awakening) — a social reality that was probably owing to the fact that she appears to have been abandoned by her original human caretakers early on, and lived in unwelcoming semi-wild circumstances for some time thereafter.

In short, play things are attractive (eye-catching) Umwelt objects (or situations) which we can, without being extraordinarily informative as for now, characterize as having a playing-quality, that is,

Umwelt objects (or Umwelt circumstances) somehow inviting to play. But what is play, anyhow?

Categorization of animal play (Imitation of life)

In the remainder of this article I will make use of three everyday terms: *Player* (a subject of play — an animal that plays), *playmate* (an animal involved in the play of a player, whether or not the playmate is itself a player) and *toy* (an object of play — something that is being played with by a player). There are many ways to categorize animal play. Some set out by distinguishing between social and non-social play, and therefore refer to *social play* and *object play* (or *instrumental play*). Following this line of thought we can further distinguish, within social play, between intraspecific and interspecific play. Partly overlapping with this classification is an alternative distinction, between social play and *individual play*, where individual play can be either object play or somehow involve playing with one self devoid of any toy (or play in which the player itself represents or provides the toy (say, a dog or a cat chasing its tail, which is always at hand — or at claw, as it were). Partly overlapping with *this* taxonomy, there are further a number of concepts derived from the kind of physical or sensory activity the player is indulged in, such as *kinetic play*, *locomotor play* and *vocal play*. Finally there are concepts in use that are derived from the kind of behaviour which the playful acts are supposedly imitating — such as *aggressive play*, *predatory play* and *sexual play*.

According to Gregory Bateson (1955; cf. 2000: 181)

play is a phenomenon in which the actions of “play” are related to, or denote, other actions of “not play”. We therefore meet in play with an instance of signals standing for other events, and it appears, therefore, that the evolution of play may have been an important step in the evolution of communication.

For Bateson (2002: 116), play is best defined as a way of organizing simple actions.

What is characteristic of “play” is that this is a name for the contexts in which the constituent acts have a different sort of relevance and organization from that which they would have had in non-play. It may even be that the essence of play lies in a partial denial of the meanings that the actions would have had in other situations.

Play, then, might be something as self-contradictory as a *positively-minded negation expressed in the language of behaviour*. In a similar vein Dario Martinelli (2007: 76–77) observes that play, in company with the phenomena of lying and aesthetics, have, “in their evolution, achieved a certain peculiar ‘independence’ from their biological utility”. These phenomena, according to Martinelli (2007: 44), “are in a close semiotic relation”, as they all involve actions performed for their own sake, and are constitutionally related to the idea of representation (Martinelli 2007: 76).

A biologist would typically, in modest compliance with the scientific *Zeitgeist*, simply state that “when animals play they use actions that are used in such activities as predation (hunting), reproduction (mating), and aggression” (Bekoff 2004: 834). Ungulates, such as deer, elk, moose and gazelles, have according to Bekoff been observed running about in unpredictable zig-zag patterns during play, apparently imitating typical anti-predatory behaviour. Play, in the words of Gordon Burghardt (2006),

differs from the ‘serious’ performance of ethnotypic behavior structurally or temporally in at least one aspect: it is incomplete (generally through inhibited or dropped final elements), exaggerated, awkward, or precocious; or it involves behavior patterns with modified form, sequencing, or targeting.

Both Muki and Maluca engaged in various ‘hit and run’ attacks where the point seemed to be not so much to carry out — or even mimic — a

full-scale attack as to allude to its very possibility. Maluca was particularly fond of the preparatory stages of this game, during which she would be lurking behind corners, or hiding on a step in the stairs. The final act of this play would boil down to a hasty, yet harmless touch of a claw — though with lots of motion, and a crowd-pleasing theatrical effect.

Perceptual play (and meta-communication)

Social play often involves the playing out of an unconventional set of social norms. Taken as a tendency, or pattern, this fact allows us to observe that play behaviour is at least at times — if not as such — a *contra-factual activity*. In the case of social, aggressive play where existing roles of dominance and submission are reversed, the foundation of the game in play appears to be translatable to the question: “What if ... the social rules/roles were different?”

Assertions that there is an unbridgeable gap between human and animal behaviour in general and between human and animal play behaviour in particular are often met with references to meta-messages and meta-communication, which are easily traceable in animal play. I will get back to that. The best examples I have observed of complex play-related abilities, however, are not examples of social play, where meta-messages and meta-communication are to be found. Instead, they belong to a category we can call *perceptual play* (a notion that is to some extent in use already). In these two examples, Muki and Maluca had fun anticipating the movements of a ray of light (from a torch) and a stream of water (from a garden hose), respectively. In both cases — especially with Muki and the torch — the human playmate occasionally attempted to “catch”, or hit, the cat’s tail with the light or the water, whereas Muki and Maluca were busy trying to catch the ray of light and the flow of water (as it hit the ground) with their claws. What kind of game was this, from their point of view?

Importantly, both cats were — in my interpretation — able to distinguish between a solid, physical object — a cat thing that you can snatch with your claws — and a ray of light, or flow of water, which can not be taken hold of. My interpretation is that the cats, in both cases, were playing that the light, or the water, was in fact a solid object, or more precisely: something that they could catch with their claws. The object of their play, in other words, was in a sense the very notion of solidity. By pretending that the ray of light and the stream of water were in fact solid objects, Muki and Maluca came across a perceptual game that allowed them to chase their phantom toys until exhaustion (either of the cats or, more often, of their human playmates), since no final victory was ever within reach.

Admittedly, there are many ways to gainsay my argument. But as Böll (2008: 334) puts it:

It appears to be both a more simple and a more plausible explanation that the animals are aware, i.e. that they, to varying extent, know (in a non-language concept of knowledge, that is) what they are doing when they are playing, than it is to claim that a complex series of stimulus-responses is taking place, or that what goes on are pure actions of instinct.

One could claim that to be playing is first of all to exhibit a playful (embodied) mind — and as I would like to establish, it is conceivable that all acts of play (even social play) start out as mind games (how else would they carry out the transition from the *Innenwelt* to the *Umwelt*?). In my interpretation, these two examples go against Simonović and Simonović's claim (2007: 6) that human play, unlike animal play, "tends towards creation of new worlds", while the play of other animals simply represents a reproduction of 'the natural exigency'. My point is of course not that human play can not be world-creating — it obviously can, and many an innovation has started out as a game, a tale, or a joke — but rather that the "visionary disposition" (same page) of play is not distinctively human, but on the

contrary rooted in pre-human (and more-than-human) play. This creativity might very well represent not only ‘the highest point of humanness’, but furthermore a remarkable novelty of animality in a wider sense.

The examples of the torch play and the hose play further contradict John Deely’s sharp distinction between objects and things (cf., for example, Deely 2004) — or, more precisely, his assertion that only humans, qua semiotic animals, are capable of distinguishing between objects and things (for that to be the case, he would have to rely more heavily on the linguistic aspect of human perception and reasoning). In my two examples, Muki and Maluca are both capable of distinguishing between existing (‘visible’) and imagined (‘solid’) qualities. It would not be reasonable to assert that the two cats simply confuse the appearance of something ‘visible’ with something ‘solid’, since such confusion would not lead to all that exaltation. No — they *play* that what is visible is also solid, all the while being perfectly aware that that is not actually the case. That’s the game. By playing that things are not what they seem, Muki and Maluca display a semiotic intelligence by means of which they relate to Umwelt objects in a highly complex manner. Their percepts function not only as simple objects of perception, but further point to something which they are aware *is* the way it *is* regardless of the cats’ inability to seize it.

Yet again one of Bateson’s concise wordings (1954, cf. 2000: 178) comes to mind.

If we speculate about the evolution of communication, it is evident that a very important stage in this evolution occurs when the organism gradually ceases to respond quite ‘automatically’ to the mood-signs of another and becomes able to recognize the sign as a signal: that is, to recognize that the other individual’s and its own signals are only signals, which can be trusted, distrusted, falsified, denied, amplified, corrected, and so forth[.]

In the case of Muki's torch play and Maluca's hose play, the communication between player and playmate is beside the point, as is the fact that, assisted by a human playmate, the cats engage in social play. The mind game taking place in the Innenwelten of these two cats is what is at stake here. Perceptual play of this kind therefore provides further evidence — adding to Bateson's evidence pertaining to meta-messages — that some animals can make truly semiotic (not merely semiosic) distinctions. Bateson (1954, cf. 2000: 177–178) differentiates between *meta-linguistic messages* (about language) and *meta-communicative messages* (about the relationship between the ones who communicate), and takes the meta-message 'This is play' to constitute a self-referential paradox. The function of play signals, or play markers, is to invite to play, and to avoid misunderstandings during play, not least by assuring that the game is still on. In the words of Bekoff (2004: 838) there is a need, during play, to "tell others, 'I want to play with you', 'this is still play no matter what I am going to do to you', or 'this is still play regardless of what I just did to you'". One way to signal a sustained play intention is to punctuate play sequences with these conventional actions.

Important as the meta-communicative aspect of certain kinds of play is, it is, as I have demonstrated by my two examples of perceptual play, not the only variety of semiotically complex play behaviour (as Muki was playing with a toy mouse, her swelling boredom as the toy mouse did not respond to her play signals easily killed her curiosity). What a study of perceptual play can bring about is new perspectives on the Innenwelt of players — the mind game aspect of play. What we animals can play with is evidently not restricted to the rules of social reality — it also extends to the rules of perceptual (and, as we shall see, sensory) reality, as well as, in the case of humans, linguistic reality. The meta-communicative aspect of social play is nevertheless sufficient to refute Paul Bouissac's false allegation (2004: 3396) that "the very notion of true, symmetrical interspecific communication remains a theoretical one as

long as *Homo sapiens* is not given an opportunity of interacting with another species endowed with meta-communicative competence”.

Cruelty play **(Play as a symbol of everything that is good)**

Bateson’s personal interest in the abstract problem of play originated from his desire to inquire into the ways in which organisms loosen up on the rules of communication. “They play with these structures or rules and thereby move forward to new rules, new philosophies, etc” (quoted in Sebeok 1990: 86). He held that human imagination and healing derive from play. *Encyclopedia of Animal Behavior* (Bekoff (ed.) 2004) in its turn lists trusting, niceness, fairness, forgiving, apologizing and justice among the norms of social play. As for honesty, Bekoff (2004: 839) notes that “[p]lay signals are rarely used to deceive others. [...] Cheaters are unlikely to be chosen as play partners because others can simply refuse to play with them and can choose others”. Since social play cannot occur in the absence of cooperation or fairness, he suggests it might be a ‘foundation of fairness’. “Even in rats, fairness and trust are important in the dynamics of playful interactions” (Bekoff 2004: 839). By playing, we are told, individuals learn what is right and wrong — what is acceptable to others, and how conflicts can be resolved. This symmetry, or egalitarianism “needed for play [...] is thought to be a precondition for the evolution of social morality in humans” (Bekoff 2004: 844).

While I admit that most of the above holds true for most instances of social play, I would like to direct attention toward *cruelty play*, for which hardly any of the abovementioned statements are valid. Reiterating the list of Maluca’s play things, it comes into sight that a majority of them were living beings, and yet — none of them, except me and my wife, were her consenting playmates. The rest were rather toys. Here, in other words, we encounter a kind of play in which

resistant ‘playmates’ are subdued and objectified; in which playmates are treated as toys. The object of cruelty play may or may not be aware of the playful character of its torture. The latter was probably the case for the snake Maluca bit the head and tail off, after it was sufficiently weakened by repeated bites and could no longer hide its frontal side for her teeth. For Maluca’s part the fun was over when it stopped moving (whereas her keenness was unambiguous as long as there was still a scent of danger in the air). Death is surely a sad thing.

In the case of cruelty play, what is for the player a comedy is a tragedy for the playmate — quite likely a struggle for life, until death. Often, but not always, the playmate ends up being eaten, or eaten upon (the human taboo of playing with your food has little sway in the world of cats). Unlike Maluca, Muki did, in fact, on a couple of occasions, catch a mouse, and her strategy was classical: Trying to keep the mouse alive as long as practically possible, by use of what is in social play called ‘self-handicapping’, or ‘role-reversing’. This entails that a dominant animal performs uncharacteristically submissive or compliant actions during play. In Muki’s play with the mouse, the effect of her self-handicapping was, from the mouse’s point of view, simply to prolong the torture. Notably, Muki’s self-handicapping was more significant during her play with a real mouse than when she played with a toy mouse. If that observation is to serve as a general guideline, it appears that object play in its proper sense (where the object of play is indeed an object, rather than an objectified playmate) is more exaggerated than cruelty play. Judging on the basis of Maluca’s various encounters, self-handicapping on the other hand seems to be stronger the weaker the objectified playmate is.

The existence of cruelty play proves Bekoff (2004: 839) wrong when he claims that “[u]ncooperative play’ is in fact impossible”. Cruelty play is exactly forced play — in which the playmate is an object, rather than a subject of play. In cruelty play, there is no breakdown in dominance relationships, except as mockery. While social play proper — play among consenting players — can be said to be

symmetrical, cruelty play represents a highly asymmetrical kind of play, in which the rules are dictated by one party. Against all of this, some will argue that the cat's play with a mouse does not qualify as play, since they are not both playing — or, that the cat is simply playing with an object. To that I can only retort first that wherever there is a player in action, there is play, and second that it should indeed make a difference whether the object of play is animate or inanimate (though the cruelty player resolves that question by reducing the animate to something inanimate). What is intriguing with cruelty play is exactly its conflation of social play and object play. As such, it could alternatively be branded as *asocial play*. Originating as a sadistic mind game, and then put into life, it constitutes a sort of behaviour in which communicative signals are ignored by the player, who focuses on rejoicing in anticipated signification.

The politics of play (Categorization of animal play revisited)

For Simonović and Simonović (2007: 1), freedom is the essence of play, or more precisely of libertarian play, which serves as the foundation of civilization. They further write (Simonović and Simonović 2007: 6):

While creating a civilization, man has not developed his own playing nature 'inherited from animals', but has developed his own specific playing being which continuously 'breaks through' the limits imposed on him, in the form of an established 'play', by the ruling order.

If there is something to what I have argued against Simonović and Simonović earlier in this article, then it appears that we here witness yet another denial of our animal roots (so to speak); of our rooting in nature — yet another mind game carried out as if it was not a game at all. Contrary to these views, Bateson (1954, cf. 2000: 179) held that as soon as organisms in play, "having eaten of the fruit of the Tree of

Knowledge, discover that their signals are signals”, language and all the complexities of empathy, identification and so on could follow.

All that is very well. What I want to emphasize is that if play is the cradle of civilization, of cooperation and of social morality, then it is likely also to have been the cradle of war, of relentless ambition and of our gradual sophistication of violence. Play is a phenomenon that occurs in countless circumstances, and it would be naive to think that it has an intrinsic value (in human terms) in all its manifestations.

Returning to the definition and categorization of play, it now appears that much of what is generally said about play as such is in fact valid only for social play proper, that is, play among players. Play as such is not necessarily a voluntary, egalitarian activity. Nor is it necessarily an imitation of ‘real-life activities’ (is cruelty play serious or non-serious behaviour?). As is evident with regard both to perceptual play and to cruelty play, nor, indeed, does it necessarily involve meta-communication. If there is one thing all play behaviour has in common, in addition to the fact that all players have fun, it is the fact that all play starts with a mind game (for which the object of play can be said to be the privacy of perception). Even communicative play, in other words, starts out as anticipated signification.

One way to deal with the troubled categorization of animal play would be to start categorizing anew. Playing such a mind game, I would suggest the following (admittedly incomplete) categorization:

<u>CATEGORY OF PLAY</u>	<u>PREDOMINANTLY...</u>	<u>OBJECT OF PLAY</u>
Role play	Iconic	Behavioural/social roles
Sensational play	Indexical	Pleasure of sensation
Perceptual play	Symbolic	Rules of perception

Here, further distinctions between social play vs. solitary play, and symmetrical/consented play vs. asymmetrical/forced play could be made within each of the three categories. Like cruelty play, sensational play (sensory play, or *elemental play*) would not in all cases fit with

today's orthodoxy concerning play's alleged simulation of 'real-life' activities (and who decided play is not a 'real-life activity', anyway?). Cruelty play — part sensory delight and part perverted sociality — would be located on the border of sensational play and role play. Humans take part in all categories of play — not least in mind games, the imaginary anticipation of play, be it role play, sensational play or perceptual play. In a sense, that is what play is all about: playing around with the possibilities of the mind.

As for the semiotic terms iconic, indexical and symbolic, it must be stressed that the different aspects of the sign may intermingle in various forms of play (as an example of symbolic role play, consider sexual fetish play). The three mentioned categories of play, as well, frequently intermingle (in social fetish play, role play can be explicitly combined not only with symbolic play, but also with sensational play — which is, in a vaguer sense, an intrinsic element of any kind of play, except — perhaps — pure mind games). Further distinctions could be made between *semiosis* (non-semiotic play, cf. the following) and *semiotic play* (play in which the player is aware about the *semioticity* [semiotic character] of the game), and between *communication-based* and *signification-based play* (where the latter, being in a vague sense universal, in a way envelops, or supports, the former).²

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Абстракция, жестокость и другие аспекты игр животных

Игровое поведение славится тем, что положило начало множеству спорных, но до сих пор мало выясненным исследованиям. В данной статье рассматриваются отношения между человеческими играми и играми животных (особенно кошек) и предпринимается попытка разобраться в сущности игры как таковой. По-новому интерпретируются понятие умвельта, определение игры животных, классификация игр животных и роль метакоммуникации в игровом поведении. Для некоторых игра является символом всего хорошего. Автор статьи не отрицает, что в игровом поведении могут скрываться начала морали, но подчеркивает, что имеется и так наз. жестокая игра, которая приводит нас к новым выводам. Второе понятие, которое подробно рассматривается — игра перцепции, что представляет собой комплексную семиотическую игру, связанную прежде всего с сигнификацией. В конце статьи предлагается альтернативная классификация игр животных, где особый упор сделан на играх ума. Во всей статье в качестве примеров приводятся игры двух кошек — Муки и Малуки.

Abstraktsioon, julmus ja teised loomamängu aspektid Muki ja Maluca mängude näitel

Mänguline käitumine on kuulus sellepolest, et selle ümber on olnud palju vaidlusi, kuid vähe selgust. Käesolevas artiklis püütakse jõuda mingite järeldusteni inimeste mängu ja loomade (eriti kasside) mängu vaheliste suhete ning mängu enda olemuse osas. Uue tõlgenduse leiab mõiste omailm, aga ka mõisted loomade mäng, loomade mängu klassifikatsioon ja metakommunikatsiooni osa mängulises käitumises. On neid, kelle jaoks mäng on kõige hea sümbol. Käesoleva artikli autor ei eita, et sotsiaalse moraali alge võib peituda mängulises käitumises, kuid rõhutab, et on olemas ka nn julm mäng, mis viib meid uute järeldusteni. Teine mõiste, millele on pühendatud omajagu täheruumi, on tajumäng, mis tõestab ennekõike tähistamisega seotud keerulise semiootilise mängu olemasolu. Artikli lõpetuseks pakutakse välja alternatiivne loomamängu klassifikatsioon, kus erilist rõhku on asetatud mõttemängudele. Kogu artiklis illustreerivad väiteid näited kahe kodukassi, Muki ja Maluca mängudest.