



**HAL**  
open science

## Intermediate Things

Steffen Wittig

► **To cite this version:**

Steffen Wittig. Intermediate Things: Concerning the Articulation of the Imaginary as Real Through the Gaze or: a Reading of Huizinga with Lacan. 8th International Toy Research Association World Conference, International Toy Research Association (ITRA), Jul 2018, Paris, France. hal-02083797

**HAL Id: hal-02083797**

**<https://sorbonne-paris-nord.hal.science/hal-02083797>**

Submitted on 29 Mar 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **Intermediate Things**

### **Concerning the articulation of the Imaginary as real through the gaze or: a reading of Huizinga with Lacan**

Steffen Wittig

*University of Kassel - Germany*

#### Abstract

This article seeks to explore how imaginary objects, such as toys, may become something real in such a medium as the “game”. To this end, two assertions are made which focus on the question of how things, that are only called imaginary, become something invariably real. Firstly, this paper proposes the thesis that imaginary things become real objects, within the “game”, through a certain subjective attitude of the player, which Huizinga would denote as 'holy earnest'. Secondly, the mode in which an imaginary thing is articulated, for Huizinga, as real in a game, the 'holy earnest', appears to be very close to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective of how we constitute ourselves through the binding on the 'gaze of the other'. This article concludes with Sartre in the thesis, that the 'gaze of the Other' articulates us as subjects, only in the form of an objectification, which is always imaginary as well. So we perceive ourselves in the objectifying 'gaze of the Other' only as subjects.

Keywords: Huizinga, Lacan, Sartre, game, toy, gaze, subjectivation

If one looks at the way in which the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga articulates the term 'game', one thing is striking: The game seems to him to be something that can hardly be defined. Rather, he sketches forms of negation, in which he tries to limit the problem of the game. For him, the game is nothing that can be described as a space of relieving oneself of a surplus of life force or as a matrix of calming down harmful impulses. It is neither something that could be explained by a congenital imitation instinct nor something which would result from the need to relax. Finally, for Huizinga it is also not exclusively a practice space, in which abilities that are articulated as useful, in a sphere beyond play, can be practiced without consequences (Huizinga 1980, p. 13). For him, something else seems to be important: The game can not just be determined by referring to an external purpose to the game.

Instead, for Huizinga in the game a "something" (p. 1) is present, which makes it a sphere attributing a meaning to itself and the objects dealt within. On the one hand this 'something' forms itself precisely because the game delimits itself, from an area of the seriousness of ordinary life. On the other hand, the constitution of meaning, this 'something', within the game only becomes possible through taking seriously the sphere of unearnestness produced (p. 20 sq.).

But this constitution of meaning touches specifically the central things of the 'game': the toys. In the 'game', you can pretend that a piece of fabric is a doll, as if a doll were another child, as if another child were a mother, father, policeman, and so on. In the game, the merely imaginary is articulated as reality and this imaginary reality in part appears "more real than reality", as Gebauer and Wulf (1998, p. 203) make clear. In the following, I would like to make two assertions that focus on the question of how things that are only called imaginary become something that is invariably real. In this regard, I would like, firstly, to propose the thesis that imaginary things become real objects within the game through a certain subjective attitude of the player, which Huizinga would denote as 'holy earnest' (1). Secondly, the mode in which an imaginary thing is articulated for Huizinga as real in a game appears to be very close to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective of how we constitute ourselves through the binding on the 'gaze of the Other' (2). Thirdly, I will try to conceive the argumentation in a nutshell (3).

### 1. Huizinga's 'holy earnest'

If we approach the question of how subjects become entangled in imaginary phenomena, we encounter the problem of the game. This mode of entanglement appears as a transformation of imaginary objects into – for the players within the game – real facts. If we follow authors like Caillois or Fink, a specific mode of 'as-if' not only seems to mark the central mode which characterizes the game and its objects. Rather, it demarcates the sphere of the game from a sphere of the earnest of ordinary life through the articulation of the imaginary, as real within the game.<sup>1</sup> But both authors come straight to this conclusion by referencing the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga. He developed a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of the game, from which it became clear how imaginary objectivities become real things within the game.

For an examination of the game concept of Huizinga, it is important for us to

---

<sup>1</sup> Huizinga 1980, p. 5, Caillois 1982, p. 14f., Fink 2010b, p. 83f.

consider what Huizinga explicitly ascribes an "independent" character to the game (Huizinga 1980, p. 6). In it, intellectual and community life are brought into a relationship, which is unnecessary. "Play would be altogether superfluous" (p.3), it is something without a function, which one "could equally well leave alone" (p. 8). Nevertheless, it does give sense to the practice of the subject (p. 1). But how can we understand this simultaneous superfluity and meaningfulness of the 'game' as a connection? A discussion of Huizinga's "formal characteristics of play" (p.13) allows us to take a closer look at this contradictory constitution of the 'game'. In this regard it is helpful to examine closely Huizinga's attempt to define the 'game':

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 1980, p. 13)

The relationship between two aspects of this formal characterisation seem crucial to us in pursuing the question of how imaginary things become real in the game: a) the as-if-mode, which constitutes the possibility-space of the game and b) the irreflective entanglement of the player in this mode of as-if, which Huizinga denotes as "holy earnest" (p. 20).

*a) As-if mode:* Huizinga sees the game as a space of freedom that is distinct from the seriousness of "ordinary life" (Huizinga 1980, p.9). At first sight, the seriousness denotes itself as outside of the game. Only the act of voluntary participation in the game, as a play action, is considered "not serious" (p.13), and describes a practice that draws a difference from the seriousness of ordinary life in the game. Play "is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own." (p. 8) Such a "sphere" (p. 25) is described as a space of the 'as-if beyond the seriousness of life'. As Bührmann (2012, p. 46) puts it aptly, it forms an "intermediate" in which it is no longer possible to distinguish between seriousness and non-seriousness. Exactly this intermediate articulates the possibility-space of the game.

Firstly, such a possibility-space of the 'as-if' is characterized by the fact that the actions of the player are free "from ethical obligations" (Bührmann, 2012, p. 46). The player acting in the game does not have to take any responsibility for his/her actions. He/She is largely exempted from the moral criteria of his/her actions within the game: He/She is "only pretending" (Huizinga 1980, p.22). Secondly, that pos-

sibility-space of the game refers to an area in which things seem possible to the player which would be unimaginable within real life. Thirdly, in this space of the 'as-if', things can be made reversible, which are irreversible in the seriousness of ordinary life. For example, if a player is sentenced to a jail term in Monopoly, he/she may leave prison, if he/she owns a 'get-out-of-jail-free' card. In the seriousness of ordinary life, this seems unthinkable. Against this backdrop, the game becomes something which is "an unfolding of human life, a space of freedom" (Gebauer & Wulf, 1998, p. 191).

This possibility-space appears particularly interesting in the context of the question attributing meaning to something which exists only in the 'as-if' mode, because of the simultaneous blurring of the boundary between seriousness and non-seriousness. The difference between possibility and reality seems suspended, or like Huizinga states, "The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid." (Huizinga, 1980, p. 8)

This is particularly evident in the interaction of the player with the objects of the game, the toys. Huizinga gives a concise example:

[...] play is not 'ordinary', or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Every child knows perfectly well that he is 'only pretending', or that it was 'only for fun'. How deep-seated this awareness is in the child's soul is strikingly illustrated by the following story, told to me by the father of the boy in question. He found his four-year-old son sitting at the front of a row of chairs, playing 'trains'. As he hugged him the boy said: 'Don't kiss the engine, Daddy, or the carriages won't think it's real' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 8).

This point of the emergence from ordinary and real life is crucial for Huizinga. It is characterized systematically by that what which happens here in relation to the boy and his "engine" (Huizinga, 1980, p. 8): An object existing beyond the game is imagined, within the game, as something to which a specific meaning is attributed and seems anything but imaginary. If we follow the statements of Eugen Fink, then the toy carries this peculiar ambivalence in itself. It is both "thing in plain reality and at the same time it has another, mysterious, reality"; it has a "magical character" (Fink, 2010a, p. 22). So a toy is at the same time a 'plain real' thing as well as more than that. It is as something 'thing-like', something which magically transcends empirical reality. The toy in this regard is an 'in-between': A thing which is both real and imaginary. The crucial question is: In what is this magic founded that overcomes this difference of the simultaneity of the real and imaginary, in the toy, as a specific object of the game and what makes it a thing that is "more real than reality" (Gebauer & Wulf, 1998, p. 203)?

For Huizinga it is a kind of consciousness, which actually would make it im-

possible to consider the chairs as a real engine; it is the consciousness *to know*, that these chairs are not an engine. When you consider the case of the playing boy, especially his statements to his father, in which he expressed that he does not want to be hugged, otherwise the carriages would think that the engine is not real, we can see that he knows that the imaginary engine is not a real engine. But maybe it is precisely this consciousness which is the reason for that magical transformation.

*b) Irreflective entanglement:* Vital for this coincidence of imaginary and reality is the term of the "holy earnest" (Huizinga, 1980, p. 20): This concept designates a specific subjective attitude of consciousness in which, Huizinga says, "ordinary life is at a standstill" (p. 21) and in which, following Rodriguez (2006), the limits between the sphere of the earnest of ordinary life and the sphere of the 'as-if' of the game are blurring. However, that consciousness, which Huizinga describes here, subsists on the simultaneity of knowing about the 'as-if' of the game and getting lost in it despite – or maybe, we could hypothesise, because – of this knowledge. It is the consciousness of something that transcends this consciousness itself: a "partial consciousness of things 'not being real' in magic and supernatural phenomena generally" (Huizinga 1980, p. 23).

This concept of 'holy earnest' is generated from a assumed similarity between the game and the cult: Huizinga "characterize[s] ritual as play" (Huizinga 1980, p. 18). Both are thought in proximity to each other, because both are denoted by a certain "attitude" (p.21), which characterizes both – the relation of the player to the game and the the relation of the ritual executor to the rite. Both are serious concerning the realization of their practices, whether play or cult. Furthermore, both are "more real than reality" (Gebauer & Wulf, 1997, p. 203). For the player they are "profoundly" serious (Huizinga, 1980, p.20) and the playing subject can "abandon himself body and soul into the game" (p. 21). The player is gripped by the game and unable to leave this grip. The seriousness of the actual life seems suspended for the player.

Decisive for this suspension is the "play spirit" (Huizinga, 1980, p.21), in which the player plays the game. However, this suspension would be misunderstood, if one were to call it an effect of a substantively and sovereignly understood subjectivity. That consciousness can not simply be described as a reflexivity, in which the player intentionally distinguishes a realm of seriousness from a realm of non-seriousness, and then also binds him/herself in a sovereign turn to the imaginary context of the game. The boundary between the serious and non-serious would then not be suspended. The boy, who does not want his father to hug him in front of the carriages, because he does not want the wagons to notice that the locomotive

is not real, knows that these toy elements of the game just exist in the imaginary mode of 'as-if'. Nevertheless, he takes this well-known 'as-if' of the game unconditionally seriously, without dismissing this as a mere unreality. How can this be conceivable for Huizinga?

That redoubled relationship of the subject, which at the same time is distanced and without any distance from the game, seems vital here. The "fever of the game" (Bataille, 2001, p. 306) catches the player through the knowledge that it is just a game: The boy, who plays the engine, "plays and knows that [he] plays" (Huizinga, 1980, p. 18). In his knowing attitude, he is entangled in a "paradox of the simultaneous indistinguishability and undecidability of non-seriousness and seriousness, play and reality" (Pfaller, 2002, p.100), precisely because the distinction between seriousness and non-seriousness produces a simultaneous indistinguishability of both: Just because the player knows that the game is not serious, he/she still does not know whether it is not for others – if it concerns the imagined carriages or any other players, onlookers or him/herself as a spectator. Rather, this indeterminate 'Other' is always assumed to be somebody, who potentially believes in the seriousness of the game (Huizinga 1980, p.24). This imputed 'Other' enables the player to recognize him/herself as someone, who is perceived as playing in the gaze of that 'Other'. The productive spell of the game only unfolds against the background of the imputed gaze of the 'Other', which entangles the player in an illusion knowingly brought to life by the player: "Whether one is sorcerer or sorcerized one is always knower and dupe at once"(p. 23).

This requires a more detailed explanation: Robert Pfaller attempts to sketch that figure of the knowing entanglement of the subject in his *Illusions of the Others* under the term 'imagination without owner' (Pfaller 2002, pp. 9 sq.).<sup>2</sup> How could the phenomenon be explained, that we believe in something, from what we know, to be absolutely 'stupid' or 'idiotic'? So how could we lose ourselves in a spell, articulated by something, which is "formally accompanied by a better knowledge" (p. 10)? If we follow Pfaller in this regards, we may see he is describing this as an imagination, "which is experienced and sustained in the form of a distance" (p. 10). It is precisely this better knowledge through which that imagination is instituted in a suspended way. Through the knowledge of the non-seriousness of an imaginat-

---

<sup>2</sup> Those imaginings without owners are defined by Pfaller as follows: "So we are dealing with imaginings that (1) seem to have no bearers; which (2) are not abolished by better knowledge, but may possibly be strengthened first; (3) claiming themselves as strange, held at a distance by knowledge, in the form of coercion; their absence (4) often goes unnoticed and (5) therefore seems to have no content "(Pfaller 2002, p. 14).

ing, this is admittedly identified as non-reality. This non-reality, however, seems to depict a possible claim to reality which can be taken seriously. But because it is potentially real, it must be regarded as principally possible. Pfallers (2002, p. 25 sq.) figure of interpassivity points out: The non-seriousness becomes serious, because "it refers to a virtual, not to an actually present public" (p. 37). Practically the belief, to which the player 'objectively believes', is articulated as something which is imputed to an assumed third in the act of playing itself. The player does not need to believe in the seriousness of that context of play. It is the "belief-in-the-believing-of-the-Other" (Bergrande, 2010, p. 109), the believing, that the Other could take seriously the non-seriousness, which makes the player believe in the 'as-if' mode of the game.

But just because a third is assumed, whose believing in such an 'as-if' is imputed, does not mean that the player has to do the same. Rather, as Pfaller works out on Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, it is the moment in which the player sees through the illusion of the game, as something the Other could unconditionally believe in. This disavowing is the phenomenon, in which the player becomes irreflexively entangled in the game, because no differentiation between possibility (someone could exist, who takes serious the non-seriousness, e.g. the wagons of the train for the playing boy) and reality can be made (Pfaller, 2002, p. 113). This means, however, that the player is not "deceived by the game" (p.114), but "just and just then" the player is "grasped" by the illusion of the game, insofar as the player sees through "the illusion of the game" (p. 115).

The crucial point here is that "this effect can not occur through confusion" (Pfaller, 2002, p. 114) of seriousness and non-seriousness. The opposite is the case: "Only if you know that it is 'only' a game, you can be more involved in it than in other life", because "whatever the game pretends to be, the players may not fall for it – otherwise it's not a game for them anymore" (p. 114). Only at the moment of looking through the illusion of the game the gaze of the imputed Other on the player is articulated by the player him/herself. In the gaze of the imputed Other (in the example of the locomotive-playing boy, the imagined carriages are produced as this Other), the player sees her/himself as someone whose play could cast a spell over an imputed Other. Žižek gets to the heart of this figure of interpassivity by recalling a famous example:

Let us recall the proverbial crippled adolescent who, unable to compete in basketball, identifies himself with a famous player he watches on the television screen, imagines himself in his place, acting 'through' him, getting satisfaction from his triumphs while sitting alone at home in front of the screen – examples like this abound in conservative cultural criticism, with its complaint that in our era, people, instead of engaging in di-

rect social activity, prefer to remain impassive consumers (of sex, of sport ...), achieving satisfaction through imaginary identification with the other, their ideal ego, observed on screen. [...] I can be active (shining on the basketball court) only in so far as I identify with another impassive gaze for which I am doing it, that is, only in so far as I transpose on to another the passive experience of being fascinated by what I am doing, in so far as I imagine myself appearing to this Other who registers my acts in the symbolic network (Žižek, 2000, p. 116 sq.).

Vital is that "redoubled gaze" (Žižek, 2000, p. 116): The moment of seeing through the illusion of the game, in which the player has the impression that he/she knows what he/she is dealing with, makes him/her impute an Other, in whose eyes he/she emerges as someone whose actions could fascinate such an Other. The player is beholding that an imputed Other, a "virtual observer" (Pfaller 2002, p. 263 sq.), is watching her/him.

Indirectly, however, Pfaller points out that Huizinga encounters a decisive limit: If the belief in the seriousness of the non-seriousness of the game is constituted precisely by the assumption of a third instance, who really believes in the reality of the imaginary, so to say a "belief in the belief of the other", as Bergrande (2010, p. 109) says, it remains questionable<sup>3</sup> how such a binding to an assumed third instance could be conceived. However, a hint at this is provided by the 'engine'-example given at the beginning: At the moment the father 'hugs' the boy, the illusionary character of the game threatens to be revealed to the assumed third instance. The gaze of the assumed Other is looking at the boy constantly and the boy is observing this. But how can this 'redoubled gaze' be qualified in detail?

## 2. The gaze of the Other

One possible perspective on this is provided by Lacan, above all, with his investigations into the "gaze as objet petit a" (Lacan 1978, p. 72sq.). That assumed third, the Other, seems to be connected to it in a specific way. This gaze of the third, however, appears in a manner, that Lacan calls the splitting of eye and gaze. I want to refer, in two ways, on this gaze of the third.

Firstly, this gaze of the assumed third appears as something staring at the motionless subject. This may be better understood by the so-called Wolfman figure, whose case Lacan interprets in Freud's speech. It is the Wolfman's dream that makes the Other appear as this motionless staring entity. Freud noted his patient's

---

<sup>3</sup> And this question generally arises in relation to the interpretation of the game from the point of view of interpassivity as Žižek and Pfaller make it. see Žižek 1991, p.50sq, 2008, p. 36sq.; Pfaller 2002, p. 25sq.

comments about his dream as follows:

I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in bed. (My bed stood with its foot towards the window; in front of the window there was a row of old walnut trees. I know it was winter when I had the dream, and night-time.) Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. [...] In great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up. [...] The only action in the dream was the opening of the window, because the wolves sat quite calmly without any movement on the branches of the tree, to the right and to the left of the trunk, and looked at me. (Freud 2000, p. 154)

What is striking here is that this figure of the gaze of the Other manifests itself in the appearance of the wolves. Here the subject is bound by fear of the Other's gaze, which occurs through the fear of being eaten by the staring wolves. For Lacan, however, a division of the subject reveals itself at this point: between being seen through a foreign gaze, remaining outside of the subject, and its own seeing of the subject symbolized by the metaphor of the eye. In his seminar on anxiety, he tries to approach that concept of the eye. So he claims:

the eye, I would go so far as to say, organises the world in space, that it reflects what in the mirror is reflection, but which reflection is visible to the most piercing eye, the reflection that it itself carries of the world in this eye that it sees in the mirror, that in a word there is no need for two opposing mirrors for there to be already created the infinite reflections of the hall of mirrors (Lacan 2016, p. 280).

Two things become clear at this term of the eye: The seeing of the eye is what, on the one hand, opens up the epistemological space of the world. On the other hand, however, this space opens up as a reflection of a reflection. This refers to something that looks at the seeing of the eye itself: The gaze of the Other. Lacan starts from the "preexistence of a gaze" of that Other, which, just because it looks at us, first brings to life the possibility of the seeing of the subject (Lacan 1978, p. 78). At the same time, however, the gaze of the Other only appears in the seeing of the eye: It emerges as a reflection, as an image, in the "pupil" of the seeing eye, and thereby enables that the seeing of the eye focuses on this being-seen. Only through the opening of the window in the dream of the wolfman, the being-seen by the wolves appears; but at the same time the gaze of the wolves appears as the instance during which the dreaming see him/herself as seeing (p. 86).<sup>4</sup>

This is particularly clear in the second figure of the third's gaze: Lacan describes how he, as a young man, often went fishing with other fishermen. One day, one of those fishermen, Petit-Jean, "showed him something floating on the waves.

---

<sup>4</sup> For a closer look on the figure of the window cf. Lacan 2016, p. 138

It was a [...] sardine can, of all things. So it swam in the sun, as a witness of the canning industry, which we should supply: Reflected in the sun. And Petit-Jean said: Do you see the can? Do you see it? It, it does not see you!" (Lacan 1978, p. 101). For Lacan, this raises the question of how this can is able to look at him. Central to this is that the can is noticed by the crew, so to say: it catches the eye because it reflects the light. In the reflection of the can, however, the scenery of the fishermen is nothing but an image. At the core, however, being an image also means: "I am being beheld" (p. 113). In Lacan's example, the sign of being seen is the iridescence of the can on the sea. Only through this does the seeing bind itself to the reflection on the sea. It reflects itself in the reflection of the can in the light. And so Lacan sums up: "Through the gaze I step into the light" and this gaze is that of the Other, "that is in the outside" (p. 113). The Other's gaze is something that is completely external to one's own seeing. But this external gaze, insofar as it is grasped under the sign of reflection, initiates the seeing of the subject in such a way that it sees itself as seeing itself (cf. p. 90). It is nothing but an image to the external gaze of the Other. Lacan tries to limit how that end of the image can be determined by trying to delineate it with the metaphor of the artist. "In the image, the artist [...] wants to be the subject", i.e. he/she wants to appear "as a gaze". From here Lacan derives the thesis: In the image, there is always an eye-catching gaze (p. 107). For Lacan, the "function of the picture" simply refers to "the gaze": The artist "deposits" his specific artistic perspective, his gaze, in the picture; but, as it were, it produces this image in reference to the imputed "gaze of the admirer", the one who enjoys seeing this picture. He is literally giving this virtual observer something to see. To be an image in this sense means to be the depot of the other's gaze.

It is precisely this split between eye and gaze that now seems to cast a productive perspective on the posed problem, how a toy, which is constitutively split between an imaginary and real connotation, becomes something more real than reality in the game. This seems to become possible through the gaze of the Other that separates itself from the eye. This gaze of an imputed third becomes an object, namely, as Lacan calls it, an "object petit a". Lacan views this object as a cut-off part of the subject. It "visualizes" the constitutive lack that permeates the subject (Lacan, 2016, p. 267). "The gaze," Žižek writes (1991, p. 59) in relation to our question, is "the point in the object (in the image) from which the subject is already being looked at, i.e. the object is the one that looks at me". As something separated, this gaze focuses on the subject and, as it were, points to this subject as something belonging to the subject in the form of a "lack" (p. 59). The toy is an object, too, which places a gaze on the player and thus makes him an image. But this image

appears to this gaze as just something insufficient. It seems to be this 'lack' which connects the player to the gaze, from that game's object.

But how does this 'lack', of a gaze of the Other, appear? To my mind there are two possible answers, which both qualify this systematic figure of the Other in a particular way, by tracing it back to Lacan's theoretical background, from which he evolves the figure of the Other. On the one hand, Lacan develops this split between the eye and the gaze through his perspective on the oedipal complex and the Other as prohibiting *Nom du père* (a) on the other hand he articulates this optics on the gaze of the Other through a recourse on Sartre's thoughts about the gaze in 'Being and Nothingness' (b).

a) The Other as 'lack': Freud (1976a [1924]) systematically makes it clear in 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' that this figure of the Other emerges in particular as a (prohibitive) limit. Characteristic for this prohibition is, in relation to the Oedipus complex, in particular, the threat of castration. The genital interest of the boy, which breaks new ground in this phase, is limited by a reference point, which prohibits touching oneself. Freud makes this quite clear in his 'Analysis of the Phobia of a Five-Year-Old Boy' (Freud, 1976b [1909], p. 245), in short: the case of 'little Hans': Hans' interest in widdlers was by no means a purely theoretical one; as may have been expected, it also impelled him to touch his member. When he was three and a half his mother found him with his hand on his penis." She menaced, "If you do that, I shall send for Dr. A. to cut off your widdler. And then what'll you widdle with?" Hans, "With my bottom." However, initially this castration threat is not taken seriously. But it comes into effect only by the fact that the boy becomes aware that the female sex does not have a penis. The 'little Hans' also recognizes this in his mother, whom he is one day watching while undressing. She asks him what he is doing there and he answers that he is only looking to see whether she also has a "Wiwimacher". On the one hand the threat of castration, on the other hand, the apparent proof of the execution of a castration. At this point the question arises how the castration threat unfolds its radical effect and the relationship to the figure of the father.

It is Lacan in particular who seems to see much less than a description of an "ontogenetic developmental stage" in this figure of the Oedipus complex (Pagel, 2002, p. 100). Rather for him, a relationship of the foundation of the subject "in a effect of the significant" (Lacan 2013, p. 67) is focused by the (necessary) reference to the figure of the father. This father figure encompasses what he understands as the "big Other" (cf. Lacan, 1997, p. 47). In the Oedipus complex, therefore, Lacan is concerned above all else with "the child taking on the phallus as a signifier, in a

way that makes him the instrument of the symbolic order of exchange, insofar as it precedes the formation of the lines. It is all about being confronted with the order that will make "the function of the father the linchpin of the drama" (Lacan 2014, p. 236). The Œdipus complex and the associated castration threat are not primarily related to the presence or absence of any real organ. The metaphor of the father which Lacan introduces here, that 'No of the father', the "Non du père", which simultaneously becomes the "Nom du père" (Lacan, 2013, p. 66; Miller, 2013, p. 8) is far more for him. The father is far less something that would incarnate real as a prohibiting instance; it is something that is embodied by the agents as a symbolic function; it exists only in its inscribing effects on the subjects into the symbolic order (cf. Lacan, 2014, p. 428). He is nothing but a metaphor. "It's not the 'real father' who spoke out a 'real' ban," as Pagel (2002, p. 101) writes. Rather, that 'non' refers to the presence of something in the relationship between the individuals which it constitutively traverses. The child, here in the form of Hans, is aware of "the deep dissatisfaction which the mother feels in the mother-child relationship" (Lacan, 2014, p. 238). This "indicates to him that, even if the mother is focused on him alone" (ibid., p. 265) the relationship between mother and child is traversed by something third. This is what Lacan calls "the law" (ibid., p. 250). This is clearly visible in the reaction of Hans' mother to his self touching. In the threat of the mother to get the doctor to cut off the 'Wiwimacher' if necessary, this law is hidden, namely the message: 'One ought not do that!' But precisely this form, this implicit prohibition, which appears in that situation, marks the way in which the law is rendered here. It appears as something preventing the self-pleasure satisfaction by a prohibition. Hans relates in this situation just to that prohibition, to this: 'one ought not do that!', resonating in the mother's statement as something 'third'.

It becomes quite clear what Lacan understands by what he calls the symbolic. He calls this a social context that is basically structured like a language (cf. Lacan, 2013, p. 27). In order to describe this nexus, Lacan makes use of the relationship of signifier and signified, as introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure (see in more detail de Saussure 2016, pp. 26sq.). If he asks himself what characterizes this strange act of speech between mother and son, Lacan comes across this 'law' again. On the one hand this kind of speaking is a "speaking to another" – that is, a speaking of the mother to a concrete other (the son) and vice versa; on the other hand, it is also a speaking to the big Other (Lacan 1997, p. 48). Especially in this situation with the mother, the child realizes that in her speech – and the "otherness" articulated within – she is permeated by the Other (ibid.). It becomes clear that this law speaks through the mother. And more: The law speaks the mother. She articulates the

threat because she has to refer to that 'one' of the '*one* ought not do that'. As a 'third' it pervades the relationship of the concrete others to one another. This "one" forms the signifier, that sign which establishes the mother's speech as signified. But what is the meaning of that 'one'? The mother herself is an educated creature faced (and will be faced) with prohibitions. She herself was and will be initiated into the symbolic by the prohibiting law. She is situated in a network of reciprocal references, for example the ideas of other individuals about how a three-year-old child should (normally) behave or how she should behave as a mother, etc. This 'one' now speaks through her. In short, she is related to a network of possible attributions of meaning, to a signifier which signifies her and her speech because she has been initiated into this law, into this nexus of the symbolic, immemorially. At the same time, however, there is an unbridgeable difference between the signifier, which shows that infinite network of reciprocal references in the prohibiting speech of the mother, and the signified. This Other in the act of speech between mother and son, this law, appears through the ambiguity of the signification process. However, neither the mother nor the son becomes fully aware of what this 'one' in this situation could be specifically called because it relates to a network of infinite relationships – of possible fixations of meaning one to another. Thus, here arises a situation in which both, the mother and the son, refer to a signifier based on their relation to the world, a law which is inaccessible to both, but which permeates both in their relationship.

The boundary between signifier and signified by which the law stands out appears for Lacan in a specific practice. It is an attempt to be able to express the signifier in the real via the 'system of language' as signified. This fails, however: "The system of language [...] never leads to an index finger, which is aimed directly at a point in reality, it is the whole reality, which is covered by the totality of the net of language" (Lacan, 1997, p. 42), The tier of language always remains overdetermined, as the use of a signifier can have many superimposed meanings. The signifier to which the mother and the son refer in the moment of the pronouncement of the prohibition, that 'third', loses itself in that web of uninterrupted references. Thus Lacan writes: The signifier "always refers to the meaning [...], that is, to another meaning" (p. 42). The attempt to fathom this 'one' ends in a hodgepodge of infinite number of possible foundations of this signifier. But these explanations, no matter how complex and numerous, could not ultimately determine what could qualify this signifier. Thus, the attempt of the mother in the situation with Hans is the attempt to utter, what is meaningful, so to say significant for her, in this situation. However, the attempt to express the signifier in its meaning fails. The mean-

ing to be expressed in this speech remains nothing, other than the "coming of a sense," for "the signifier's reality is that it signifies" (Juranville 1990, p. 105 sq.). Thus, in the attempt to signify the signifier, nothing remains but the experience of the failure of this signification. In a nutshell this seems to describe how Lacan understands the castration complex: The prohibiting (big) Other remains nothing but an imagination, which shows itself in the failure of the significations.

Thus, the toy in the introductory example, Huizinga has given just seems to mark such a failure of the signification. The carriages in the boy's game are not real carriages, they are chairs; but these chairs are carriages for him within his game simultaneously. They are both – carriages and chairs or neither carriages nor chairs. They signify a boundary, a failure of the articulations, which, however, constitutes a matrix, from which that gaze, which was delineated before, spreads. At the same time, however, this is also a matrix that has inscribed itself into the subject as the failure of every articulation of language as the difference between the signifier and the signified. And so, inevitably, that (big) Other also appears in those statements regarding the carriages of the playing boy, as an unavailable 'third', permeating every form of playing practice. But in this example we could also see the second form of the appearance of the gaze of the Other as 'lack'.

b) ...the beheld gaze of the Other: This articulation of such an unavailable third connects to the practice of the gaze and inscribes itself into the subject. This is made clear by Lacan's recourse to Sartre's chapter on the look in his 'Being and Nothingness'. This gaze of the Other is illustrated by Sartre in some impressive examples, which allow us to resume the line we have already pursued: that of the gaze of the Other as a redoubled gaze. For Sartre, the Other is something that emerges in the field of the subjects perception. He gives the example of an observation of another person in a public park. The subject sees the observed person as an object, but at the same time as a subject. As an object, its position can be described spatiotemporally: It is located 2.20 m from the lawn of the park and passes through a group of chairs; it can be described how big it is, etc. However, if we consider this object as a subject, then the problem arises that this subject has a relation to the things around him, which is completely revoked from the position of the observing subject. The other subject may also perceive the lawn, which is 2.20 m away from it. But it perceives the lawn from its subjective relation to it (cf. Sartre, 1994, p. 459).

Here the "Other is" for Sartre the "permanent flight of things" (p. 461): The objects of the world are thus to be thought of exclusively as subjectively perceived. But as subjectively perceived objects, they can simultaneously be subjects, who in turn perceive the world from their perspective, which eludes an outside observer.

In the same way he/she is bound in his/her appearance to his/her objectivity (cf. p. 462). So in the observation in the park, just another person can sit and read on a bench. This person reading is just as subject as a stone lying or the rain falling. At the same time, however, this example of the reading person points out that the simultaneity of the objectivity and subjectivity articulates the Other: The person reading is on the one hand an object for an external observer; similarly this person reading is relating to the book in her/his hand and constitutes a subjective world in this relation, which eludes every kind of external access. The Other thus appears precisely as the absence of the world (relation of the reading subject to her/his world) in the relation to his/her own world (p. 463), or as Sartre would put it: the absence of the world in the Being-for-itself (cf. p. 163sq.). Insofar as that subjectivity of the concrete (reading) other is associated with its objectivity, then conversely this simultaneity of objectivity and subjectivity must also apply to the observing subject from the perspective of another subject, which observes the observing subject during its observation. Sartre says:

At most we are dealing with a particular type of objectivity akin to that which Husserl designated by the term absence without, however, his noting that the Other is defined not as the absence of a consciousness in relation to the body which I see but by the absence of the world which I perceive, an absence discovered at the very heart of my perception of this world. On this level the Other is an object in the world, an object which can be defined by the world. [...] if the Other-as-object is defined in connection with the world, as the object which *sees* what I see, then my fundamental connection with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of *being* seen by the Other. It is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject. (Sartre, 1994, p. 463)

It is precisely this possibility of "being-seen-by-another" (Sartre, 1994, p. 464), which has an effect on the observing subject. But this possibility is not bound up with the (physical) appearance of a sensuous form in the perceptual field of the observing subject (cf. p. 465): "But the look will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain" (p. 465). And from that point on, Sartre is just coming to the set of issues which is eliciting Lacan's reflections on the gaze of the Other as "redoubled gaze" and its separation of eye and gaze. Sartre writes: "On the contrary, far from perceiving the look on the objects which manifest it, my apprehension of a look turned toward me appears on the ground of the destruction of the eyes which look at me" (p. 466). What appears in this gaze of the Other is not the look of a concrete other, but the subjective apprehension of a gaze, which sees the observing subject as the observer. The gaze of

the Other "is to be conscious of being looked at", it "is a pure reference to myself". (p. 467).

For Sartre, however, this gaze is a practice which first generates that self-consciousness. He describes this in his famous keyhole example. Sartre imagines the following situation:

Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice, I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. I am alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way known; I am my acts and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification." (Sartre, 1994, p. 467).

This self-consciousness of the subject articulates only where the Other appears as something that does not even have to be present. The Other emerges already only when the subject "hear[s] footsteps in the hall" (Sartre, 1994, p. 469). The Other appears as someone/something in whose gaze the subject looking through the keyhole becomes the object of a gaze itself. Only in this objectification by the Other the now observed subject gains self-consciousness. The Other is here assumed as another consciousness, which is able to objectify the subject (which is looking through the keyhole). We could imagine this Other coming up here as something that gives an identity to the subject which is looking through the keyhole. In its judging gaze we could assume that the Other articulates the subject as a voyeur perhaps. The gaze of the Other gives the subject an identity that simultaneously and fundamentally misjudges the identity of the subject. Ricken sums it up: "In the gaze of the Other I am learning myself not only as a certain someone, i.e. as someone who is located in a social order and for example, who is identified and classified as lazy or hard-working, clever or stupid, etc. The way in which I refer to myself can not be separated from the way in which I am referred" (Ricken 2016, p. 49). The self becomes aware of itself only when it sees the gaze of the Other and thus comes into a relation to itself. Sartre writes: "This means that all of a sudden I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other" (Sartre 1994, p. 470). Something similar, however, seems to be also to be found on that example of the engine playing boy.

### 3. The gaze, the game and the subject

Two assertions we made at the beginning of the text; both seem related. Firstly we asserted that the specific subjective attitude, in which the game is played, articulates the imaginary as real. In this context we have been concerned with the phenomenon of play and in particular with Huizinga's 'holy earnest'. He tries to illustrate this with the example of a boy playing an engine. For the boy, chairs become something real in the imaginary space of the game. They are for him the carriages of a train. At the same time, however, the father, who hugs the boy, is rejected as saying: "Don't kiss the engine, Daddy, or the carriages won't think it's real" (Huizinga 1980, p. 8). As has been pointed out below, it is that being-seen by the Other in the game, that produces the significant entanglement of the subject in the space of play and thus the realization of the imaginary. Decisive here, however, is that this being-seen-by-the-Other is seen by the player. It is the consciousness that it is just a game that ultimately leads to the player's irreflexive entanglement.

This led to the second assertion: The realization of the imaginary in the subjective mode of 'holy earnest' is to be seen in close proximity to Lacan's perspective on the constitution of modern subjectivity. We tried to clarify this with a closer look on the gaze of the Other. At that point, we have pointed out two modes of articulation of the Other which appear in Lacan's works: On the one hand there is a gaze of the Other, which stares at the subject on the other hand there is the gaze of the Other, which could be described in more detail as a 'redoubled gaze'. As a 'lack', this Other is looking at us when we see this lack. In this regard, we tried to approach this gaze of the Other as a 'lack' of two sides: On the one hand Lacan's perspective on the Other as a 'lack' inscribes into the subject as a constitutive difference articulated by the symbolic law. On the other hand, this was depicted with Sartre; we tried to point out this gaze of the Other as a precondition of the Lacanian perspective. The gaze of the Other makes us subjects, only in the form of an objectification. We perceive ourselves, so to say, in the objectifying gaze of the Other only as subjects, because we can not be identical to the objectification of the Other.

This has consequences. First, inasmuch as this connection between the realization of the imaginary, in the play, and the constitution of the subject from the perspective of Lacan is plausible, we could state that subjects are always objects at the same time. They are – as Fink puts it in terms on the regards of the toys – "intermediate things" (Fink, 2010a, p. 22). If we follow Fink, then the game – and the toys used therein – are a symbolization of the world, because it refers to a specific con-

stitutional logic. The toy is for him a "representation of all things in general" (p. 22). The whole of the world seems to be "concentrated" in the toy as one "single thing" (p. 22). Toys seem to negotiate constitutive points of social order.<sup>5</sup> However, maybe the game and its objects seem to become a specific sedimentation of the social and – we could note as a thesis now – even the negotiation of modern subjectivity is represented in the game. The subject is also an intermediate thing, which constitutes itself by transforming the imaginary into reality by taking serious the non-serious. However, this also implies, secondly, if we take Sartre's perspective on the gaze on the Other and the subject seriously, then subjectivation and objectification are reciprocally referenced (cf. Ricken 2016, p. 49). Perhaps the game and the toys thus offer a matrix with which the constitution of modern subjectivity can be given further thought especially if we factor such a perspective to optics on subjectification, which is how Foucault (1983, 1994a, 1994b) or Butler (1997) articulate them. To what extent do social spaces or even communities constitute themselves in this mode of realizing the imaginary? In what context is the phenomenon of play the concept of virtuality? And especially: how can it be described that actions in imaginary spaces can have effects on the seriousness of ordinary life? All this questions remain open.

## References

- BATAILLE, G. (2001) Spiel und Ernst. In: Bataille, G. *Die Aufhebung der Ökonomie*, Munich: Matthes & Seitz, p. 303–338
- BERGRANDE, W. (2010) Das Blinzeln des letzten Menschen. In: *RISS. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*. Issue 75 (2010/11), Vienna/Berlin, p. 100–114
- BÜHRMANN, M. (2012) Riskante Zwischenräume? Überlegungen zum Konzept des Spiels bei Johan Huizinga und Victor Turner. In: Strätling, R., *Spielformen des*

---

<sup>5</sup> If one focusses on chess, for example, as it is called by Thiedecke (2010, p. 23sq.), then it indicates to a form of representation of a specific historical-cultural articulation of the social. In the Indian-Persian region, this game appears for the first time in the context of a stratified social order. His name is derived from the Persian word "Shah" and is a reference to "the battle of two kingdoms". It offers, especially for the nobility of this hierarchically organized society, a simulation space in order to play through the constantly virulent struggle in this society for "rank positions and domination". In the same way, through its structure it refers to the hierarchical division of such a social order: in front the mass of peasants, whose value is less in comparison to the nobility and its entourage, who direct the strategic operations from the background. At the cost of some Pawn sacrifices the opposing king has to be led into a helplessness – this is the meaning of the word "shah mat". Cf. Davidson 1981. The same could be repeated with the Monopoly game.

- Selbst. Das Spiel zwischen Subjektivität, Kunst und Alltagspraxis*, Bielefeld: Transcript, p. 39–58
- BUTLER, J. (1997) *Körper von Gewicht*, [Bodies that matter], Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp
- CAILLOIS, R. (1982) *Die Spiele und die Menschen. Maske und Rausch*, Frankfurt/M./Berlin/Vienna: Ullstein
- DAVIDSON, H.A. (1981) *A short history of chess*, New York: David McKay
- FINK, E. (2010a [1957]) Oase des Glücks. In: Fink, E., *Spiel als Weltsymbol*, Freiburg/München: Karl Alber Verlag, p. 11–29
- FINK, E. (2010b [1960]) *Spiel als Weltsymbol*, Freiburg/München: Karl Alber Verlag
- FREUD, S. (1976a [1924]) *Der Untergang des Ödipuskomplexes* [The Dissolution of the *Edipus Complex*]. In: Freud, S. *Gesammelte Werke Band 13*. Frankfurt/M., p. 395–402
- FREUD, S. (1976b [1909]) *Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben* [Analysis of the *Phobia of a Five-Year-Old Boy*]. In: Freud S., *Gesammelte Werke Band 7*. Frankfurt/M., p. 243–377
- FREUD, S. (2000) *Zwei Krankengeschichten*. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer
- FOUCAULT, M. (1983) *Der Wille zum Wissen. Sexualität und Wahrheit I*, Frankfurt/M.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1994a) *Überwachen und Strafen*, Frankfurt/M.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1994b) *Subjekt und Macht*. In: Dreyfus, H.L./Rabinow, P.: *Jenseits von Hermeneutik und Strukturalismus*, Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, p. 243–261
- GEBAUER, G. & WULF, C. (1998) *Spiel – Ritual – Geste. Mimetisches Handeln in der sozialen Welt*, Reinbek: Rowohlt
- HUIZINGA, J. (1980) *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, London/Boston/Henley: Routledge
- JURANVILLE, A. (1990) *Lacan und die Philosophie*, Augsburg: Boer
- LACAN, J. (1975) *Freuds technische Schriften. Das Seminar I*, Weinheim/Berlin: Quadriga
- LACAN, J. (1978) *Die vier Grundbegriffe der Psychoanalyse. Das Seminar XI*, Weinheim/Berlin: Quadriga
- LACAN, J. (1980) *Das Ich in der Theorie Freuds und in der Technik der Psychoanalyse. Das Seminar II*, Weinheim/Berlin: Quadriga
- LACAN, J. (1986) *Schriften I*, Weinheim/Basel: Quadriga
- LACAN, J. (1997) *Die Psychosen. Das Seminar III*. Weinheim/Berlin: Quadriga
- LACAN, J. (2013) *Namen-des-Vaters*, Vienna: Turia + Kant
- LACAN, J. (2014) *Die Objektbeziehung. Das Seminar IV*. Vienna: Turia + Kant
- LACAN, J. (2016) *Die Angst. Das Seminar X*, Vienna/Berlin: Turia+Kant

- MILLER, J.-A. (2013) Notiz. In: Lacan, J., *Namen-des-Vaters*, Vienna: Turia + Kant, p. 7–9
- PAGEL, G. (2002) *Jacques Lacan zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Fischer
- PFALLER, R. (2002) *Die Illusionen der anderen*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp
- RICKEN, N. (2016) *Die Macht des pädagogischen Blicks*, In: Schmidt, F./Schulz, M./Graßhoff, G., *Pädagogische Blicke*. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, p. 40–53
- RODRIGUEZ, H. (2006) The Playful and the Serious: An approximation to Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, In: *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 6 (2006/1)
- SARTRE, J.-P. (1994) *Das Sein und das Nichts [Being and Nothingness]*, Hamburg: Rowohlt
- SAUSSURE, F. DE (2016) *Grundfragen der allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Reclam
- THIEDEKE, U. (2010) Spiel-Räume. Kleine Soziologie gesellschaftlicher Exklusionsbereiche, In: Thimm, C.: *Das Spiel*, Wiesbaden: Springer, p. 17–32
- WITTIG, S. (2018) *Die Ludifizierung des Sozialen. Differenztheoretische Bruchstücke des Als-Ob*, Paderborn: Schöningh
- ŽIŽEK, S. (1991) *Liebe dein Symptom wie dich selbst!*, Berlin: Merve
- ŽIŽEK, S. (1997) *Die Pest der Phantasmen [Plague of Fantasies]. Die Effizienz des Phantasmatischen in den neuen Medien*, Vienna: Passagen
- ŽIŽEK, S. (2000) Class struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please! In: Butler, J./Laclau, E./ Žižek, S., *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London/New York: Verso, p.90–135
- ŽIŽEK, S. (2008) *Lacan. Eine Einführung*, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer