

# Gadamer: Ethics and the Dialogic Character of Play

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## *Abstract*

Hans-Georg Gadamer's project of philosophical hermeneutics is an interpretive welcome for new insights and meaning, emerging from respectful dialogic encounter with the particularity of a given text. Gadamer's revelatory undertaking walks between the extremes of subjectivism and objectivism. As the title of Richard Bernstein's (1983) book, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, still suggests, there is a life world between interpreter and text. This dialogic meeting of a text constitutes a meaningful third, a living form of interpretive semiosis. This new dwelling, a horizon of revelatory meaning, garners life via dialogic play that engages a text in the interpretive process of respectful seriousness.

*Keywords: Hans-Georg Gadamer, respect, play, dialogue, semiosis*

## 1. Introduction

This essay outlines the dialogic character of play as the critical fulcrum upon which Gadamer's project rests; for Gadamer, play renders substantial communicative influence in the ongoing creative semiosis of knowledge generation. Play is performative semiotic action within which Gadamer envisioned communicative meaning emerging between person and text, with ownership resting in neither. Interpreter and text give rise to a dialogic process of creative semiosis. Gadamer's explication of play details the vitality of embedded experience that yields creative understanding.

In this essay, I underscore the importance of Gadamer's conception of play in the first section, "The Demands of Serious Play," which situates his creative interpretive mission. Second, I introduce Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in his description of "Phenomenological Experience." Third, I explore the serious nature of performative

play in a section entitled “Communication and Semiotic Coordinates,” casting Gadamer’s philosophy within the discipline of communication. Fourth, I highlight “Gadamer on Play,” referencing a number of his scholarly works with the goal of underscoring coordinates within his view of serious play. Fifth, I examine Monica Vilhauer’s (2010) book on Gadamer and play, responding to her thoughtful work in a section appropriating her phrase “The Ethics of Play.” Finally, in a section entitled “The Horizon of Play: Pivoting on Respect,” I conclude with an analysis of play inclusive of interpretive seriousness and utmost respect for the text.

## 2. The Demands of Serious Play

Gadamer’s enactment of understanding within an interpretive stance of play frames a dialogic pursuit of truth without the encumbrance of a universal method. For Gadamer, play is serious work and simultaneously resists reification/solidification within an intellectually affirmed technique. Gadamer’s (1960/1975) scholarly tome, *Truth and Method*, pivots on this basic assertion: creative understanding cannot be limited to a methodical paradigm. Gadamer’s conception of play embraces a demand to take a text seriously and a willingness to discover revelatory insights. Play yields a space within which unknown future considerations find life and identity. Gadamer’s vision of play is akin to intellectual jazz. One must know the music in order to discover what another cannot hear or envision. Play gives way to the revelatory next only when serious and thoughtful skills guide the interpretive work.

Play is an active meeting of a text propelled by tenacious hope of understanding, emerging between interpreter and text. Gadamer’s play is wrongly confused with optimism; it is far from an easy form of recreation that expects much from limited effort. Tenacious hope requires work, effort, and knowledge (Arnett, 2015). Gadamer expects the interpretive to bring something of substance and value to the text. One can understand hours of practice with a musical instrument in preparation for play; one must bring dedicated insight in the performative doing of play. Otherwise, one seeks to be entertained, like a customer, wanting enjoyment without one’s own responsible effort. Gadamer frames play as a communicative axis that turns the interpreter toward novelty of understanding if, and only if, one understands the serious demands of such creative work. One can imagine giving the following advice about Gadamer’s play: If you seek entertainment and place little responsible demands upon yourself, do not attempt to enter this creative venue. Gadamer’s emphasis on “bias” and “prejudice” illuminates more than standpoint and position; such words imply practiced skill and knowledge put to the test in the meeting of a text that pushes one’s imaginative knowledge to an unexpected place.

Gadamer’s concept of play advances knowledge and carries with it thoughtful repercussions. Play is serious activity and demands much from the interpreter. The scholarship of Annette M. Holba (2007, 2013) works with this conception of play, as

she differentiates “leisure” from “recreation.” Leisure involves active engagement with a text. For example, through a musical instrument or any artistic activity, requiring attentive comprehension of rules, one brings thoughtful knowledge and practice to a text. Such action nourishes the reality of imaginative play. Recreation consists of observation, not active playful participation. Leisure, as detailed by Holba, is active play; recreation is a form of passive watching akin to a consumer. Active play, more analogous to leisure, not recreation, resides at the heart of Gadamer’s dialogic venture. In American vernacular, the umpire begins a baseball game with the utterance “Play ball,” announcing the serious commencement of the implications of the play that has required hours and hours of practice prior to the moment of meeting. The dialogic character of Gadamer’s play resists passive consumer demands; it places responsibility upon the interpreter/participant. Gadamer’s conception of play dwells within responsibility, not to be confused with immediate pleasure, entertainment, or the demands of a customer.

### **3. Phenomenological Experience**

Gadamer was the student of Martin Heidegger, who, at his philosophical best, introduced him to an understanding of the life world as embedded, existential, and void of universal claims. From this perspective came Gadamer’s emphasis on historicity within existence. Gadamer’s stress on questions offers definition of a given historical moment as a natural extension of Heidegger’s existential project. Gadamer spent a number of years working closely with Heidegger as his assistant, from 1923 until 1928. Gadamer stressed acknowledgment of the demands of the life world and the importance of active attending to the “things themselves,” which connected him to the phenomenological tradition of Edmund Husserl. As one reads Gadamer’s project, one is struck by the manner in which he acts in a dialogically responsive fashion to both the work of Heidegger and Husserl—and in each case, respectfully. Additionally, in 1949, Gadamer succeeded Karl Jaspers at the University of Heidelberg as the chair of the philosophy department; Jaspers, known internationally for contributions to the study of existentialism and dialogue, was also the dissertation director for Hannah Arendt’s dissertation in 1929, which became *Love and Saint Augustine* (published in 1996). Gadamer’s dialogic sentiment guided his scholarship and much of his intellectual life.

In 1961, Gadamer supported Jürgen Habermas’s appointment as an assistant professor at the University of Heidelberg; this professional courtesy came as the two contended over the importance of tradition in discerning clarity of direction in the pursuit of truth (Di Cesare, 2007/2013, p. 195). Habermas rejected Gadamer’s conception of tradition as monolithic and oppressively unresponsive; this read of Gadamer on tradition was akin to a strawman argument in that Gadamer did recognize the vitality and importance of multiple traditions that offer dialogic tension, as they yield different

and textured interpretive communities (Arnett, 2012, pp. 240-247). Paul Ricoeur (1991) points to an underlying locality in Gadamer's point of departure, which responds to the accusations of universality leveled by Habermas (pp. 272-273). Gadamer worked from an interpretive orientation that garners respect for difference, in text, and in interpretive engagement with both text and interpretation situated within traditions that require respect and understanding.

Phenomenology opens insight into meaning as one attends to the things themselves. Husserl (1954) explicates this position in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, which acknowledges the reality of multiplicity of meaning and interpretation. The later existential work of Heidegger and Jaspers outlined the nature of position in existence for shifting understanding. Gadamer's phenomenological background framed the importance of respect for the things themselves and varied existential stances in meeting and understanding them. He situated meaning within horizons of significance where multiple understandings of a concrete event, idea, or person were naturally possible. Gadamer situates play within a phenomenological tradition of existential hermeneutics that he described as philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer understood interpretation as the central active metaphor for all of life (Arthos, 2011, p. 92). Thus, for Gadamer the human condition revolves within acts of interpretation. The movement to philosophical hermeneutics brings increasing reflection into the process of interpretation. Knowing the text and the situated nature of it, as well as what the interpretive brings to a meeting, harkens back to Husserl's desire to shed the natural attitude. Gadamer leans into Husserl's hope by making use of bias and prejudice and moving this existential reality into the dialogic engagement. One begins to do serious play with the situated limits of text and interpreter. Doing philosophical hermeneutics is serious play.

Gadamer's discussion of philosophical hermeneutics provides a background for understanding the role of play in the interpretive process. Conceptually, he stressed: 1) traditions as carriers of meaning and perspective, 2) historicity and questions as carriers of temporal historical identity, 3) the hermeneutic circle of the interplay of part and whole as carriers of self-corrective interpretive understanding, 4) texts as carriers of situated meaning, 5) interpreter responsibility and bias as carriers of standpoint that yield novel insight, and 6) dialogue as the carrier of meaning emergent between interpreter and text. Dialogue is the act of interpretive serious play. Gadamer emphasized an existential fact: texts and interpreters are representatives of interpretive communities/traditions, which creatively meet in intellectual play. This dialogue yields understanding and insight not yet envisioned. Interpreters work within embedded traditions and bring uniqueness of response to historical questions that define a particular moment. This recognition upholds a standpoint from which one engages and meets a text. Historical questions begin interpretive conversation, situated within a perspective that opens revelatory possibilities for the text and its implications.

Interpretation emerges within the back and forth of part and whole efforts at

understanding. The standpoint of an interpreter is positional, biased, and limited; this reality gives rise to novel awareness of a given text. Gadamer's conception of tradition and bias in the interpretive act counters the cliché to think (play) outside the box. Gadamer's dialogic effort plays within the box, using limits as creative points of departure. Dialogue respectful of limits is a central feature in interpretive meeting of a text. Traditions of text and interpreters announce limits and call for respect, as one phenomenologically experiences revelatory birth of knowledge, owned by no one person or text. Dialogic meaning emerges in the interplay of limits that constitute both interpreter and text (Arnett, 2012). Note: the emphasis on limits does battle with taken-for-granted cultural assertions about such an emphasis. The West is known for pushing limits, ignoring limits, and denying limits (Arnett, 2013, p. 245). However, Gadamer viewed limits as the beginning of knowledge. We do not know unless we understand what we cannot comprehend. Meeting limits is more intellectually challenging than living within a fantasy of their non-existence. New insight commences with awareness of limits meeting Otherness. Such acknowledgment necessitates phenomenological attention to the things themselves. This awareness takes the interpreter to the unexpected that finds life through the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 273). Within the field of communication, Gadamer offers a third alternative to both the scientific method and raw subjective speculation. His project attends to a playful space between text and interpretation, respectfully framed by semiotic coordinates.

#### **4. Communication and Semiotic Coordinates**

One of the first communication introductions to Gadamer's project within the field of communication in the West came in 1978, as John Angus Campbell offered a review of *Truth and Method* in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. In that appraisal, Campbell underscored Gadamer's contribution to the "logic and purpose" of play with a stress on interpretive rules that suggest a serious game of understanding (p. 104). Campbell articulated play as a performative activity that exceeds self-expression, shifting all attention to a matrix of guiding coordinates that require serious attention, if one is to play the game successfully. A number of other communication scholars work with this same theme: play demands a refocus, from self to the game itself. John Stewart, in 1983, emphasized Gadamer's engagement with play as involvement within a game that places high demands upon the player. The game masters the player without the player imposing upon the game.

Put simply, this conception of play means that the player is played to the point that the fusion of horizons of player and game frame identity (Stewart, 1983, p. 387). Michael J. Hyde and D. Kevin Sargent (1993) underscore the performative nature of play as embodied in the act of complete participation. This idea of play assumes an unreflective phenomenological bracketing of self that, in the hands of a professional athlete, moves sole attention to the game. Since I conclude this essay with a baseball example, I now

turn to Kevin Costner, playing an ageing “ace” pitcher in the movie *For Love of the Game* (Raimi, 1999). As Costner takes the pitcher’s mound, one can hear a great volume of noise from the fans, with a number of comments being uncomplimentary. Costner leans his head and body toward the ground and says quietly to himself, “Clear the mechanism,” at which time he sees only the hitter and catcher and the movie audience only hears the ball hitting the catcher’s mitt. Costner’s moment of intense concentration emerges in many forms of art, medicine, and daily relational attentiveness. Indeed, in this film one witnesses “to the things themselves” in performative action. The serious nature of this performative play is central to life and is foundational to understanding and creative discernment. The difference between routine and the serious practice of play is attentiveness. Such play includes serious participation in family, friendships, communities, and organizations, wherever uncommon attentiveness permits one to understand the limits of interpreter and text, and the creative result generates genuine surprise. This form of play is not strategic. Costner’s movie has an apt title: *For Love of the Game*.

Traditions of unreflective awareness of our own participation come shaped by prejudices/biases of an important game that frames our identities as we participate. Participation in play within the life world necessitates asking questions that move understanding and conversation into performative action that houses a “moral phenomenon” (Hyde & Sargent, 1993, p. 134). Such is the reason that Martin Buber (1970) stated that human meeting requires participation with the whole of one’s being (p. 54). Play is the heart of intersubjective understanding that begins with the full participation of the interpreter (White, 1994, p. 105). Perhaps in everyday life, the demand for full participation is what separates a genuine player from a dilettante, a pretender, a want-to-be, or, in common vernacular, a phony. What separates the player from the others is not simply content or knowledge, but a willingness to give oneself over temporally to the game.

Play is the opening, a field within which question and answer propel conversation and understanding. As Kenneth W. White (1994) argues, “Gadamer’s concept of play ... rejects neither the collective norms of tradition nor the responsibility of individuals to arrive at meanings” (p. 109). Play assumes rules and orders that govern implicitly and/or explicitly, without defining an abrupt and definitive end goal; the game is “self-renewing” in repeated actions (Sandvig, 2006, p. 937). Levinas (1998) differentiated want and desire, with the former achievable and the latter unquenchable (pp. 56-57). Serious play is unquenchable; it does not end, but just moves to the next event. Gadamer’s understanding of play as dialogue presupposes a commitment to the “rules of the game” and the nature and limits of a particular dialogic exchange. Mutual and reciprocal commitment to the coordinates of a given dialogue announces care for performative limits framed by “ethical conditions” of respect for conversation and engagement particular to a given form of play (Gill, 2015, p. 21).

Gadamer’s view of play contrasts with any sophistic act endowed with private

meaning alone. This conception of play presupposes a third, an interpretive field that houses public rules of the interplay of understanding. Charles Sanders Peirce understood this activity as “interpretive musement,” which permits investigation of shifting meaning in a free-style association that is “more open than abduction and induction” (Corrington, 1984, p. 294). Play, for Gadamer, is the ontological avenue to understanding and meaning. Play is the field upon which imagination arises. Play invites imagination and meaning that offer opportunities for creative risk for an interpretive participant. As one engages the game and field upon which its rules require serious adherence, the possibility of being transformed by the game increasingly looms as a given. The play of such a game not only involves risk, but also functions as one of the reasons for continuation in play—as stated above, becoming an unquenchable desire (Baumlin, 1987, p. 40). Gadamer’s sense of play invites semiotic coordinates of tradition, respect for Otherness, and affirmation of uncertainty in meeting. Together, these coordinates offer an open-ended interpretive process housed in a game between the boundaries of “insight and bewilderment,” between certainty of the known and the unexpected interruption of the not yet (Laditka, 1991, p. 304). The ontology of Gadamer’s version of play connects to Johann Gottfried Herder and, of course, to Gadamer’s teacher, Heidegger. “Gadamer repeats from Herder the same four telling characteristics: 1) play is movement; 2) play is *with* someone or something; 3) play has rules; 4) play has risks” (Burwick, 1990, p. 63). Gadamer continually associates play with performative characteristics. He was resistant to the notion of sign alone as being too static; Gadamer’s commitment to play aligns more closely with Peirce’s conception of the interpretant due to it being a performative act of constant agitation, the home of semiosis. Susan Noakes (1985) writes,

One of Peirce’s definitions of the sign which is organized to begin from the interpretant rather than to move toward it as end may be helpful at this point in clarifying the meaning of the term: “A sign is ‘anything which determines something else (its *interpretant*) to refer to an object to which itself refers to (its *object*) in the same way...’” (Eco, 1976, p. 69). Thus, sign production, in the necessary generation of the *interpretant*, is intrinsically an act of repetition, of intended replication. The repetition is potentially infinite, for the *interpretant* takes on the property of what I have called the first *representation* in becoming itself a sign, which then requires an *interpretant*, and so on and so forth. (p. 111)

Gadamer’s view of play precedes consciousness (Thibault, 2016, p. 298), which makes him wary of a reified understanding of sign.

Gadamer embraced Peirce’s pragmatism that moves beyond this solidified dualism into the realm of a third, the interpretant of possibilities, void of the subjective imposition of the interpreter or an effort to claim an objective rendering of a sign. The meaning of play is form in action, not definitive directives. Play resides between and with “playful behavior” and “artistic behavior” (Thibaut, 2016, p. 323), giving rise to form that cannot

be tamed even as it adheres to implicit rules guiding action. Play is the performative action that ignites ongoing metamorphosis of semiosis. Play is an entrance into semiotic coordinates of tradition, respect, and interpretive abduction that yields an ongoing emphasis on semiosis. Gadamer's perspective on play is a serious project that necessitates thoughtful use of content and practice with play housing the fusion of horizons of interpreter and text. This dialogic unity is the creative fuel for the existential reality of semiosis and continual knowledge generation.

## 5. Gadamer on Play

Gadamer (1983/1991) emphasizes play as “involved” and “earnest” participation (p. 32). He equates “‘playful’ teaching” with serious scientific inquiry (p. 74). Playing is serious activity, to the point of being “oblivious of self”; the forgetting of self remains at the heart of genuine learning (Gadamer, 1994, p. 4). Playing is a poetic form of taste that offers depth of learning in which the past meets the unknown. Note that when one performs a role, one is ever so conscious of self. When one gives into the field of play, a self-focus begins to cease, inviting holistic learning (Gadamer, 1994, p. 161). Wisdom begins within a rationality discovered in “self-prescribed rules” of a given act of play or game (Gadamer, 1986, p. 25). Absorption of participation guides play. Gadamer (1986) writes: “Play and seriousness, the exuberance and superabundance of life, on the one hand, and the tense power of vital energy on the other, are profoundly interwoven” (p. 130). Gadamer points to thoughtful consideration about traditions and limits in the act of play, which propels dialogue, the fusion of horizons (Schmidt, 1994, p. xx).

Live/performative play brings “risk” in that it transforms the player from reified self to someone with an unreflective participatory identity tied directly to the action (Gadamer, 1980, p. 5). Risk dwells in the open-ended nature of play; there is a pause without completion—such is the heart of non-stop dialogic learning (Gadamer, 1980, p. 154). Play includes action of resistance; one refuses absorption as a participant that emerges from acts of imposition (Bruns, 1997, p. 34). The distinction between playing with and being played lodges differences between the creative love of a game and mechanical application of learning in the form of alienated labor (Gadamer, 1997, p. 73). Limits guide play; they exist in the space between yes and no, go and stop, and “life and death”; play resides in the “between,” an ontological dwelling that invites meeting of text and interpreter. Described concretely, one can envision the between as a coin that would not exist without two contrasting sides; together the sides of the coin open a revelatory space conventionally understood as currency. Play in its serious and fully participatory form acts as a dwelling for a revelatory space of the between that acts as an “irrefutable witness” to the vitality of a given game (Gadamer, 1997, p. 183).

Words depend upon context for their meaning; there is an ongoing play of “question and answer” in the play of language (Linge, 1976, p. xxxiii). Understanding finds

meaning through mediation of play that unites words of tradition/text and words of tradition/interpreter. Playing brings together words of perspective/bias/tradition in the meeting of a text via an interpreter who seriously attends to the tradition and context of words in the revelatory search for implications. Uniting context with play suggests that play does not transpire in the abstract, but comes alive in a field of relational activity where full earnest participation calls one into action/performative understanding. Recounting Heidegger's rejection of metaphysics as dependent upon his response to Plato and Hegel, Gadamer (1976) announces the relational act of play in the pursuit of intellectual life (pp. 213-240).

Gadamer's (1960/1975) major work, *Truth and Method*, offers his clearest depiction of play within the life world. Gadamer describes Immanuel Kant's (1798/2006) differentiation of fantasy and imagination as he connected play to the real (p. 160). Fantasy is abstract. Imagination, on the other hand, attends to the implications and implicit rules of a given place, a given person, a given idea; imagination emerges in play between *what is* and *what might be*. New knowledge depends upon the "free play of imagination and understanding" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 40). Imagination is central to taste, quite different than abstract subjective fantasy. For Gadamer, understanding the horizon of taste is the first step to unleashing genius that engages imagination with response to *what is* in order to discern *what might become*. Play is aesthetic performance with the game being more important than the individual players (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 95). The significance of the game blurs when the distinction between players and spectators in a theatrical production lends concentrated focus upon the game. Aristotle's definition of tragedy includes the spectator in the "figure of play" (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 115). Play becomes the field that unites all those responding to the game.

Play calls for *attachment*, a situatedness to and upon the field that supports the game (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 109) and invites players to abide by self-forgetfulness capable of transforming their identity and role. Consciousness of moods, such as "bored" or "jaded," implies loss of participation in the game: play eludes such actors (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 113). Gadamer (1960/1975) alludes to Kant's aesthetic conception of play as disinterested, contrasted with undue interest in one's own actions. Disinterest in self-performance permits awareness of the game to transform one's native level of ability (pp. 446-447). This form of play permits historical significance to rise above the everyday; in such action, one discerns commitment to events that exceeds the subjective identity of the players. In play that seriously participates in the game, one brings prejudice of practices, tradition, and love for the task that challenges the vulgarity of raw subjectivity. Play constitutes a performative field that pragmatically attends to limits as crucial parameters of the game. Recognizing and honoring limits permits the transcending of them. Imagination commences when real limits offer fuel for performative actions, calling forth creativity and, at times, genius. Imagination requires adhering to the game and its "self-representations" that invite the emergence of new

insight as a by-product. The goal of playing a game requires adherence to public rules and structures. Such action is far from making a mere copy; creativity emerges from working “within the box” or within the rules of the game, which unexpectedly yields novelty of perspective and application (Warnke, 1987, pp. 50-52). Play, as detailed by Gadamer, works with a basic assumption: the game must triumph over the players. Play is the field of participation open to all engaged in performative imagination of the task; play eclipses the player, permitting excellence to transpire—at times, beyond all individual expectations.

At this juncture, the essay turns toward the implications of Gadamer’s portrayal of play. His discussion offers an interpretive ethic in performative action that guides the meeting and understanding of another, whether text or person. Gadamer’s work offers an intellectual landscape for discerning an ethic that initiates with respect for and protection of the field of play. Gadamer’s performative ethic cannot separate play from the field of play; they are intimately intertwined. The importance of respect emerges as one commits oneself to a given game to the point of losing oneself in the performance. Respect for the game both begins the ethic and opens the possibilities for discerning yet-to-be recognized excellence. A performative ethic that begins with respect protects the field and the game before, during, and after a particular contest with action that goes beyond the individual players. Interestingly, players who take on the task of protecting play and the field of play discover shifts in their own identity. The play transforms in the action. The identity of players changes as a direct result of engaged play within the game. One does not begin with the self, but with serious play. In the doing of play, one reconstitutes and shapes the self, with adherence to a performative ethic of respect. Monica Vilhauer’s (2010) book, *Gadamer’s Ethics of Play: Hermeneutics and the Other*, explicates the ethical implications of Gadamer’s understanding of play. She announces an intimate connection between this conception of play and ethics that embraces the performative importance of respect within the field of play. Respect for a person is not the starting gesture, but an inevitable consequence of respect for the field of play, which includes persons in the role of serious players.

## **6. The Ethics of Play**

Vilhauer’s interest in Gadamer finds public expression in three published essays on Gadamer (2009, 2013, 2016). Her book on Gadamer crystallizes the link with ethics and stress on “dialogic play.” She initiates conversation on play with an outline of the coordinates of play by explicating their presence and absence. Vilhauer contends that Gadamer frames play as central to knowledge acquisition only if one follows the rules of a particular act of play, which suggests that not all activities meet performative standards of play. Vilhauer’s book uncovers the coordinates of serious, respectful play, which announce the ethical implications of play in action and its role in new knowledge generation. Vilhauer originates her explication of the lineage between play

and ethics with a critique of social science that shields itself from the unknown and the revelatory.

Vilhauer asserts that Gadamer's project is anathema to "preinterpretive objectivity" central to modern science aspirations. Gadamer's respect assumes the importance of prejudice and tradition as one engages in an interpretive pursuit of a text capable of illuminating the unexpected (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 18). Interpretation begins within the interpretive life world of the participant and the event/text engaged in dialogic understanding. Experience dwells in human finitude within traditions brought by the text and the interpreter, which together house the possibility of creative and innovative meaning. Significance and identity emerge via situatedness, the placement of dialogic understanding within human history; we are creatures of "historical consciousness" (p. 13). Gadamer's dialogue of play presupposes that all areas of study and living are natural and inevitable biases capable of giving rise to novel understanding, which constitutes a dialogue of play that advances knowledge between and among persons. Situated experience and knowledge contrast with the pursuit of objectivity, which adheres to the "false thinking" of scientism and modernity (p. 20). Experience as a situated being is an act of "aesthetic consciousness" and "historical consciousness," which manifest themselves in the performative and embedded nature of living (pp. 17-20). With an emphasis on aesthetic and historical consciousness, Gadamer's dialogic play acts as a counter to a Cartesian model of knowing centered on 1) the dualism of mind and body, 2) the effort to limit learning at the altar of achievement, 3) the eschewing of situatedness and prejudice of tradition/perspective, 4) the imposing of "my" subjectivity upon whom or what I meet, and 5) the normative assumption that objective knowledge equates with accumulation (pp. 26-28).

To illuminate an alternative to the above presuppositions of Descartes, Vilhauer explicates Gadamer's conception of understanding related to art. The key to performative understanding in the arts begins with differentiation between an original and something reproduced, a copy. Vilhauer (2010) suggests that a picture implies meaning beyond itself, while a copy, on the other hand, finds its identity confined by the scope of the original alone. A picture emancipates an original, offering an "increase in being" (p. 43). Such art brings forth an unexpected augmenting of possibilities. Additionally, the "spectator" of the art participates in the play of enhancement that invokes new potentialities. In the play of creativity, art and spectator dwell together within a field of possibilities. The play of understanding of text/art and interpreter/spectator is not dissimilar for the historian, scientist, philosopher, or an author of literary art. In classical Greece, the conception of history resided with participants and spectators who had to interpret behavior that they placed within a story and recorded as a public deed or action (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 185). One works with and in existence, enacting literary pictures that point beyond origins of behavior and yield access to the "not yet" of deeds understood as action within public life. A copy, on the other hand, remains imprisoned within its dependence upon an origin. With attention to the spectator, art, in the creative play-process, contributes to public

life, and only to one's own subjectivity as a byproduct of the play. The game or play of understanding announces its public character in dialogic meeting as new insight emerges between and among persons, owned by neither the art nor the interpreter. Such dialogue requires respectful meeting of the Other with consideration of revelation that emerges within the conversation; the ontological space of the "between" of dialogue announces the public nature of such activity. Interlocutors address one another with the "between" of unexpected insight, which Gadamer terms a "fusion of horizons" (see Vilhauer, 2010, pp. 50-70, 86, 96).

The fusion of horizons functions as a public dialogue capable of bringing persons together in the creation of novel comprehension. An interpreter begins with origins, the prejudice of tradition that guides the meeting of textual content. Dialogue is a game of communion that unites the different, yielding something larger. The dialogic process of serious play gives rise to the unexpected only if one enacts an ethics respectful of recognition of differences between persons. In the meeting of uniqueness of perspectives, dialogue makes understanding and insight possible. Ethics transpires in a pragmatic commitment to new insight that begins with and from an origin/prejudice/tradition. Vilhauer suggests a dialogic ethic that places higher regard for the meeting of traditions and innovative comprehensions than singular acts of one-upmanship of winning and dominance. The background of such an ethic depends upon recognition that we live in a social world of co-responsibility tied to text and interpreter. Through the performance of the practice of attentiveness to tradition and a respect for difference, dialogic ethics situates itself within play as a virtue of attentive respect. Values are private; virtues are public in that they function as publicly acknowledged practices—the dialogic ethics of play dwell in a public domain.

Situating play within the public domain announces the limits of dialogic ethics and play; not all efforts in the public domain fit the genre of ethics of respect in dialogue. Whenever domination, imposition, and destruction of the Other ascend, the play of dialogue and its ethical implications cease. Dialogue and play disintegrate when respect for difference ceases; such was the reason Maurice Friedman (2011) warned against the creation of "communities of affinity" (p. 72). Innovative discernment depends upon the different. A dialogic ethics of play embraces one's own tradition, attends to the tradition of the Other, and respects unexpected outcomes. A dialogic ethics of play gives birth to semiosis, shifting identities and insights in the meeting of the new. The origin of change commences with tradition and respect for difference that one meets. Respect for the entire field of play and all its players functions as the fundamental key to dialogic creativity and ethics.

## **7. The Horizon of Play: Pivoting on Respect**

Gadamer's conception of serious play hinges upon the actual performance of play, which curtails the assumption that all action is consistent with his vision of play. Gadamer's

depiction of play involves a code of performative semiotic signs that invite a dwelling where play is possible. When signs of respectful play go missing, action morphs into something quite contrary. I now turn to an examination of Pete Rose and his play in baseball that misses the horizon of respectful play deemed essential by Gadamer. Numerous examples from Rose's baseball career and his personal life announce actions that are in stark dissimilarity from Gadamer's respect for the entire field of play. Rose announced something quite antagonistic to a dialogic ethic. Multiple problematic instances punctuate Rose's public and private life; they reveal an eclipse of performative limits that assure respect on the field of play.

Recent news in American baseball brought the legacy of Pete Rose back into public consideration (Gelb, 2017). Rose played with the Philadelphia Phillies from 1979 through 1983 and assisted them in winning the World Series in 1980. In 2017, the Phillies management was about to honor him when more negative news about the man's actions broke into public awareness. By all standards of statistics, Rose was an extraordinary athlete. He started his career with the Cincinnati Reds in 1963, selected as the National League Rookie of the Year. His career credentials speak volumes: 1) he was an All-Star 17 times; 2) he was three times a World Series champion; 3) he received the 1975 National League Most Valuable Player award; 4) three times he led the National League in hits; 5) in 1999, fans voted him onto the Major League Baseball All-Century Team; and 6) he remains the all-time hit leader in Major League Baseball. With all these accomplishments, Pete Rose is still disallowed membership in the Hall of Fame due to gambling and tax evasion—there are also recent revelations indicating that he repeatedly had sex with an underage girl during the 1970s. Rose's enactment of "play" includes numerous bizarre stories about his personal life, revealing questionable character and judgment and an absence of respect for the field of play.

From Gadamer's perspective, Rose's "play" lacked respect for Others and the sanctity of the game of baseball; he displayed a destructive obsession with self and with winning at any cost. For instance, the 1970 All-Star game witnessed him run over an American League catcher, Ray Fosse, which left Fosse with a fractured shoulder and shortened his career. There are numerous other examples of behavior more akin to football or rugby. Baseball is America's national pastime, a sport, at its best, guided by dignity and grace. Rose moved his play of the game to something otherwise, as his actions displayed limited respect for opponents and the game. Rose did not engage serious respectful play in Gadamerian terms; he acted like a delinquent outside such rules of play. His statistics are impressive; however, his version of play resembled something closer to war. During the Vietnam era when real war was underway, Rose played baseball like it was a war. Gadamer's dialogic play summons an ethics of respect for the horizon of activity; Rose eclipsed them. Dialogic play calls forth an ethics of respect for persons on the field in which the participants play. Dialogic play invites an ethics of respect for the emergent, not just acts of domination and imposition that miss the ethics of play. The recent news about Pete Rose is ugly; however, as I reflect

upon his manner of “play,” I find little surprise. The man never learned to play well with serious respect for the field of play. Gadamer reminds us that play has a code of signs that yield a dialogic ethics of play. Rose lived by a code of domination and an impressive accumulation of statistics. Rose was so intent on winning, he disrespected the field of play. Rose is a micro example of a world in play defined as winning at all costs. Contrarily, Gadamer invites dialogic insights not owned by any one person and made possible only by respectful serious play.

Play that is thoughtful, respectful, and intense permits the unexpected to define the moment. Such activity is more akin to poetry than the bullying actions of one simply seeking to dominate the Other. Play necessitates the subordination of the players to the game itself. Indeed, the title of Kevin Costner’s movie is accurate: *For Love of the Game* (Raimi, 1999). Such is the dwelling place of play.

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