The Game Studies Language Exchange Program: Uncovering Hidden Gems of European Game and Play Research

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ABSTRACT

An issue that requires “defragmentation” in game studies is the Anglo-Saxon linguistic hegemony. A work is not a part of the game studies discussion until it has been translated into English, our lingua franca. While we have been constructing a discipline and rediscovering the history of the study of games and play, thus far we have mostly been building bridges between different islands of English research, ignoring works in other languages. This panel will provide four introductions to little known European researchers, and discuss the broader implications of such blind spots (above and beyond Asia, Latin America, Africa).

Steffen P. Walz introduces the work of Dutch behavioral psychologist Frederik J. J. Buytendijk (1887-1974). He is best known for being dismissed by Johan Huizinga (1955) as biologist in the opening section of Homo Ludens. However, Buytendijk’s Het spel
van mensch en dier als openbaring van levensdriften (1932, published in German the following year) is a seminal book about the nature of play, and how it spans human (child and adult) and animal behavior.

Olli Sotamaa reviews the career of Swedish-speaking Finn, Yrjö Hirn (1870-1952). Professor of aesthetics and literature, his contributions to the cultural history of play, games and toys is worthy of a larger audience. Hirn's most relevant work for a game studies audience is probably Barnlek (1916, published in Finnish as Leikkitä ja taidetta in 1918 and in French in 1926 as Les jeux d’enfants), which explores the connection between play and art.

Sebastian Deterding reminds us that even much contemporary work remains behind language barriers as he takes on Claus Pias’ (born 1967) Foucauldian archaeology of video games, Computer Spiel Welten (2002), as an entry point to German game research in the tradition of media theory and media archaeologies following Friedrich Kittler (1943-2011).

Bernard Perron explores the works of philosopher Jacques Henriot, founder in 1981 of the first graduate program in the sciences of play at Université Paris 13. While his compatriot Roger Caillois (2001) has also dealt with the psychological attitudes needed to play a game, this attitude was at the centre of Henriot’s thoughts in his two books Le Jeu (1969) and Sous couleur de jouer: la métaphore ludique (1989). For Henriot, “playing” has always been more important than “play”.

Jaakko Stenros chairs the discussion. In English.

Keywords
Play, games, Frederik J. J. Buytendijk, Yrjö Hirn, Claus Pias, Jacques Henriot

BIBLIOGRAPHY