

Play and toys nowadays – their cultural claim

There seems to be no gaps in today's toy market and every day many new toys add to the ones that already exist.

Toys have meanwhile become mere goods and this process has also started to seize the play sector.

Games are being turned into paid games, into good-like structures.

Participation as one essential characteristic of pure play is being replaced by a money-determined relation.

Pleasure is turning into joy, into more and more passive and individual experiences rather than active and joint ones.

In history, play has always been a culture-creating activity. All the different areas of culture (language, dance, music, theatre, customs etc.) developed from play.

“Playing is what people do when they create culture.” [1]

But if we want to preserve our culture, play must continue to create culture.

“The expropriation of play by the forces of the market is threatening to completely destroy the cultural importance of play. With that, play might also lose its cultural sphere, which was created and kept alive by playful acting.” [1]

Play culture is mere play – and this means:

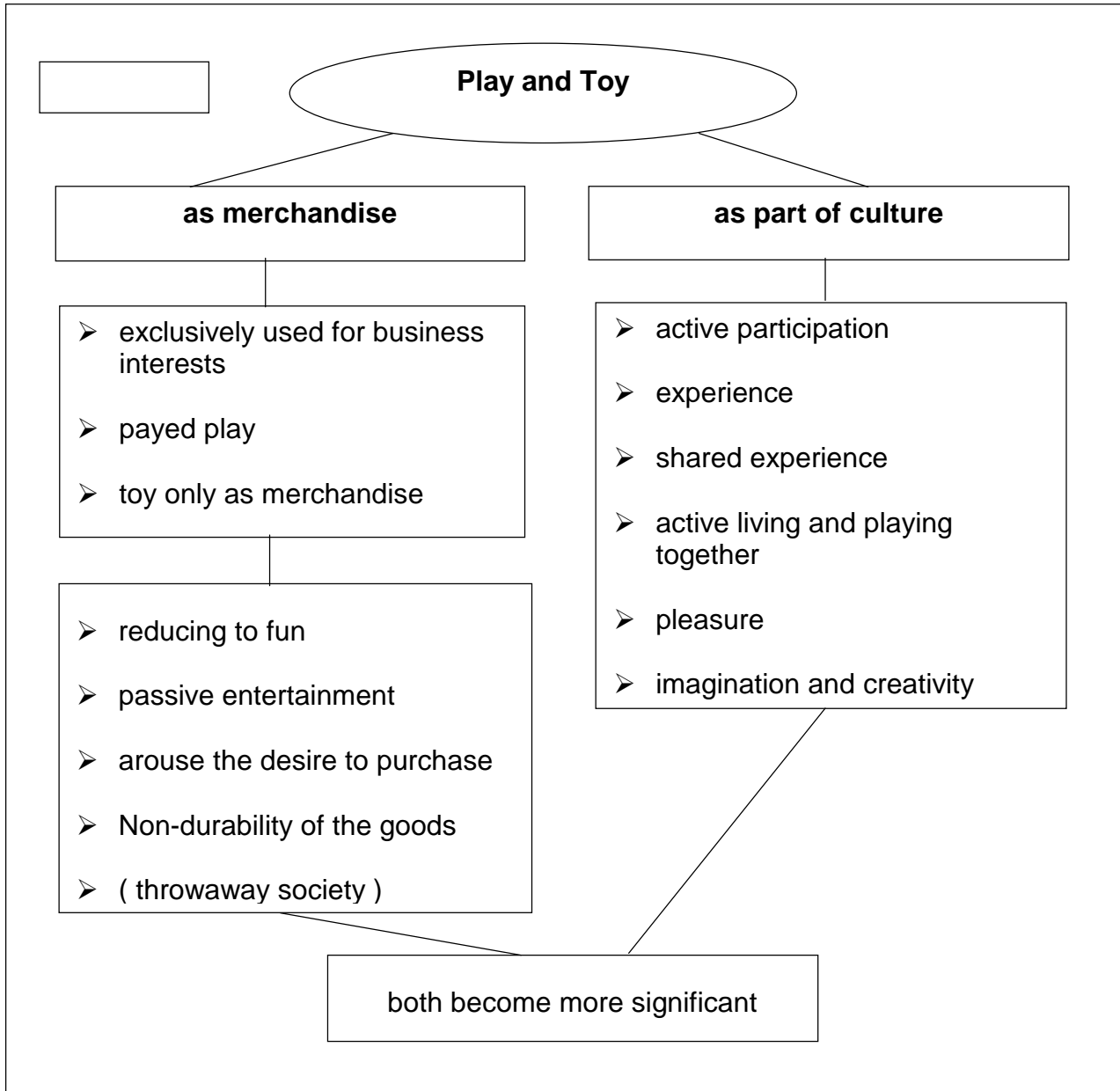
- care for the culturally inheritance
- the development of the comprehension and the respect of other civilisations
- the most intimate and the most nifty kind of human communication and participation
- the perfect kind of promotion of imagination and creativity
- the most significant expression of humanly liaisons
- enjoyment and experience by free dealings with each other
- to discard feelings like defence and anguishes

Because of this we consider three aspects to be especially important in our future work:

Aspect no. 1:

Toys as a mediator between men and culture have to support the realization of a play culture.

The current development of toys and play is leading into two directions.



It is the task of everyone who deals with play – no matter if practically or theoretically, to make people aware of the historico-cultural and the current dimensions of toys and play.

These days, we have to find out what children really need for their development, not what their parents think they need.

The basic questions are:

- which toys are able to create culture and how they can do this,
- how the market objectives of toys regarded as goods can be brought into line with their educational functions.

What is important is keeping the **balance** between commerce and culture. The toys in our exhibition show that it is possible to keep this balance.

I would like to draw your attention particularly to toys such as

- the Seven Wonders of the World



- the Game of Religions



- the various miniature board games ("Games from all over the World")



- the Brain Game Kits in different sizes



- the Geometry Box



and many others.

Aspect no.2:

The second aspect that play and toys' scientists need to pay increasing attention to in research is the answer to this question:

What do children need for playing?

- time to play
- restfulness for playing
- an eligibly place for playing
- play areas, where it would be possible to continue play after interruption
- playmates (play is communication)
- contact persons, consultants
- eligibly toys

We should also take into account the public effect of this answer.

Only if all these requirements are met, play can be the most effective method of learning.

People do not have time to play:

During our development, we increasingly shifted the ratio of games, learning and working. We more and more tend to persuade our children that playing is a useless and ineffective waste of time.

Instead, we should think of Heine's saying:

(Everybody, who thinks that playing is only bauble and only work means business has a short understanding of both)

If our society is indeed about to turn from a

capitalist market economy into a

capitalist culture economy

- and this is what the prognosis says – playing as a culture-creating activity will gain importance again.

There is no suitable place to play:

Playpens, children's rooms and kindergartens are not enough. In most cases even the playground does not enable our children to realize such basic instincts as creative expression, constructing things, climbing, creeping, moving hand over hand or playing hide-and seek.

There is not enough space for playing:

Children need a lot of space to satisfy their urge to move and it is necessary to enable them to continue playing in the same place they stopped without having to put the game away. There is not enough p e a c e for playing – no place where children can satisfy their need to play undisturbed and continuously either on their own or together with their mates. With this exhibition and with our two models, the "Ludothek" and the children's play village, we would like to offer two attractive solutions. These models also fit into every concept of "Leisure, Recreation and Tourism" and they meet the children's need to play better than a huge leisure and recreation park.

Aspect no.3:

The third aspect includes the functions of toys today.

In 1986, Sutton-Smith [4] already mentioned the three main functions of toys in our society:

1. Formation of a certain consumer's attitude desired by the producer (owner's thoughts and a throw-away attitude)
2. a kind of barter between parents and their children.
3. a means of self-occupation

At this point at the latest we should realize that our children are increasingly becoming victims of a wrong market ideology.

Children have a right to consumer protection.

The child as a customer is especially in need of protection.

Also the fact that we have about 150.000 compulsive gamblers in Germany at the moment should also make us think.

According to the statute of the ICCP, the Council should try to solve such problems as well.

So which functions should toys have?

1. *Toys are a kind of mediator between men and culture.*
As a consequence, they also have to reflect the culture they convey. This applies to our past, presence and future in a balanced ratio.
2. *Toys are reflections of reality.*
With the help of toys it must be possible to imitate and simulate reality. Children use toys to learn how to master life and reality.
They should first get to know the real world in a playful way before getting into touch with virtual reality. Virtual reality can only be understood with the help of our real world.
3. *Toys should make possible pure playing (as shown in illustration no.1)*
4. *Toys should make possible thinking as well as the construction, installation, development, replacement, repair, stabilization or even transformation of things.*

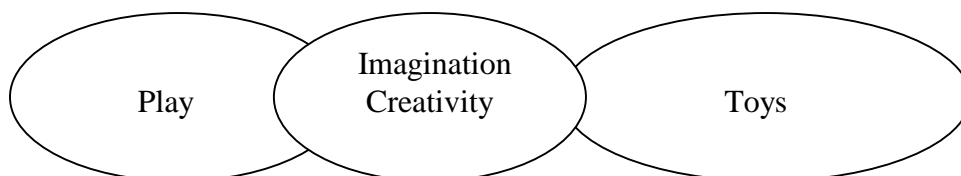
This requires a change in thinking – into the direction of functional toys. The new complex miniature games we're presenting here are connected with new ideas of

- recycling
- supplying spare parts as one possibility to increase the value of toys by repairing and overhauling
- a wider range of play possibilities by maximizing the play functions
- a better imitation or simulation of reality.

These activities, however, are also part of the basic instincts of human beings.

This is why a building set will always range among the best toys.

5. Toys should allow the development of imagination and creativity.



This works if ahead-looking strategic thinking, puzzling, and creative expression are promoted and developed with the help of toys.

6. Toys should make possible mental operations, i.e. comparing, rating, concluding, analyzing, synthesizing ...

This is the only way we can keep the balance between commerce and the cultural claim of toys.

- [1] Rifkin, Jeremy Das Verschwinden des Eigentums
2000 Campus-Verlag, p.351/356
- [2] Schiller, Friedrich Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen
Stuttgart 1989, p.59
- [3] Heine, Heinrich From: Weltbilds Mathematische Denkspiele
Weltbild Verlag 1997, p.7
- [4] Sutton-Smith, B. Toys as culture.
New York: Gardner 1986