Концептуализация серьезной игры в современной социокультурной реальности

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В условиях трансформации социокультурной реальности, ее процессов, уровней, сфер возникают новые интегративные социальные феномены, значение и роль которых в современном мире еще предстоит выяснить. Одним из таких феноменов является серьезная игра. Традиционно игровое и серьезное, на стыке которых возникает серьезная игра, позиционируются как самостоятельные и взаимоисключающие элементы общественного мира. Мы рассматриваем, какие изменения в социальной реальности, в отношениях игрового и серьезного, в положении человека в современных социальных процессах делают возможной серьезную игру и каким образом серьезная игра перепределяет условия своего возникновения.

Для этого мы использовали методы философского анализа и герменевтики: интерпретацию, концептуализацию, компаративный анализ. В качестве теоретико-методологической базы мы использовали категориальный аппарат социальной философии, теории практик, прагматизма, социальной эпистемологии.

В результате мы выявили, что серьезная игра мыслится как социальный процесс в диапазоне от индивидуального до глобального масштабов. В серьезной игре субъект через смыслопорождение осуществляет как производство и воспроизводство культуры в предзаданных онтоаксиологических основаниях, так и конструирует эти основания, осознавая при этом степень своей свободы, ответственности и погруженности в мир, который он создает посредством своих практик.

Значимость результатов нашего исследования заключается в том, что концептуализация серьезной игры на стыке отношений серьезного и игрового выявляет потенциал серьезной игры как элемента социокультурной реальности. Серьезная игра отражает уровень сложности современной реальности и обеспечивает адаптацию человека к постоянно возрастающей динамике этой сложности. Тенденция геймификации регистрирует это в пространстве высшего образования, что обусловливает изменение роли университета в современном общественном мире. Серьезная игра по-новому определяет положение человека в современном динамичном и индивидуализированном социальном мире. Впервые серьезная игра концептуализируется на стыке игрового и серьезного как самостоятельных и взаимоисключающих элементов социокультурной реальности и рассматривается в тенденции геймификации высшего образования.

Ключевые слова: концепт серьезного, концепт игрового, серьезная игра, социокультурная реальность, геймификация, Сенека, Хейзинга

In the conditions of transformation of sociocultural reality, its processes, levels, spheres, and new integrative social phenomena emerge, the meaning and role of which in the modern world have yet to be clarified. One of such phenomena is serious play. Traditionally, the playful and the serious, at the intersection of which serious play arises, are positioned as independent and mutually exclusive elements of the social world. We examine what changes in the social reality, in the relations of the playful and the serious, in the position of man in modern social processes make serious play possible and how serious play redetermines the conditions of its occurrence.

For this, we used methods of philosophical analysis and hermeneutics: interpretation, conceptualization, comparative analysis. As a theoretical and methodological basis, we used the categorical apparatus of social philosophy, theory of practice, pragmatism, and social epistemology.

As a result, we found that serious play is thought of as a social process in the range from an individual to global scale. In serious play, the subject, through the generation of meanings, performs both the production and reproduction of culture in predetermined ontoaxiological bases, and constructs these bases, while realizing the degree of his freedom, responsibility and immersion in the world he creates through his practices.

The significance of the results of our research lies in the fact that the concept of serious play at the intersection of serious and game relations reveals the potential of serious play as an element of sociocultural reality. Serious play reflects the level of complexity of modern reality and ensures that a person adapts to the ever-increasing dynamics of this complexity. The trend of gamification registers this in the space of higher education, which causes a change in the role of the university in the modern social world. Serious play redefines the position of a person in the modern, dynamic and individualized social world. For the first time, serious play is conceptualized at the intersection of the playful and the serious as independent and mutually exclusive elements of sociocultural reality and is analyzed in the trend of the gamification of higher education.

Keywords: concept of serious, concept of game, serious play, sociocultural reality, gamification, Seneca, Huizinga

For Reference:
Introduction

Traditionally, in comprehending culture, the serious is opposed to the playful: working a lot, having fun little; seriousness is attributed to adult life, game is attributed to childhood. In our study, we proceed from the understanding of the playful and the serious as elements of culture. Their meanings are being rethought today due to the transformation processes in social reality: individualization, institutionalization, identification of the social subject and social institutions, erasure of the former boundaries of the structural elements of the spheres of society (Zygmunt Bauman [1; 2], Erik Erickson [4]), and due to the philosophical reflection on sociocultural changes by social institutions and structural elements (Ronald Barnett and Søren Bengtsen [5]).

The serious as a system-forming axiological foundation of culture absorbs the traditions of ancient Greek idealism [6], accumulates and flourishes in the Stoic environment. The Stoics see the meaning of human existence as a way of conformity to the initially set ideal, independent of man, i.e. a model of the real adult life of a virtuous person (a good person, vir bonus).

The conception of the playful element of culture by Johan Huizinga [7] presents a different position of man in culture. Here, the playful, taken as a system-forming element of human culture, reflects both the dynamics of the social and the transformation of the role of man in sociocultural reality: from the performer and replicant to the author of the sociocultural world in which he himself exists.

The aim of this study is to comprehend how the role and relations of the playful and the serious are redefined in modern sociocultural reality and how this affects the position of man in social processes.

Materials and methods

The basis for the reflection on the serious and the playful as the foundations of culture was the hermeneutic method, which sees the goal of interpretation in overcoming the historical distance between the author and the interpreter and merging their horizons of comprehension, i.e. in reconstructing authorial meanings and producing those of one’s own [8].

The hermeneutic method is combined with the conceptualization of social phenomena: social reality, culture, the serious and the playful as elements of culture. Conceptualization as a research method implies the explication and analysis of the main characteristics of the studied object. Conceptualization forms a rational image of the object, which not only represents meanings, but also shows how they were detected.

In the logic of this study, it was also important for us to analyze the interpretation of Seneca’s and Huizinga’s conceptions of culture by modern student youth, and to identify the main images of understanding the role of serious play in the modern social world. We did it on the example of the trend of the gamification of higher education. We worked with 1st- and 2nd-year students within the course of philosophy as part of the educational project of the core of the bachelor’s degree program of the National Research Tomsk State University during 2018–2020 academic years [9]. The choice of Seneca’s and Huizinga’s works was intentional: these authors construct a picture of social reality from different positions,
which helps develop critical thinking important for teaching philosophy. In the analysis of students’ written (essays) and oral responses, we focused on the images of the social world in their works. Based on these images, the philosophical concepts of human culture are interpreted relying on the already established categorical frameworks of world perception and self-awareness. Verb tenses (a comparative analysis of the previous perception and the changed current perception is particularly important) and citation topoi of the deeply and holistically studied works by Seneca and Huizinga were used as markers for the analysis.

Results and discussion

The serious as the axiological foundation of human culture in Seneca’s conception

The understanding of the serious and the playful in Seneca’s concept of culture presented in his Moral Letters to Lucilius is classic. The serious is everyday life, meaningful and organized according to the rules; its core element is tradition. Seneca proposes to choose patterns of social behavior on the basis of mind: the desire for pleasure, for happiness, for success—everything—should contain a grain of reason. Paul Tillich, in his analysis of the stoic image of courage, writes about the rational principle of reflection [10]. Mind must be practiced correctly as it forms a meaningful structure of reality as a whole.

One of the fundamental qualities of a serious life, according to Seneca, is joy. It is preconditioned by mind and is the optimal principle for analyzing the quality of human life: only the path of a virtuous life can provide deep and lasting joy. The other choice is the path of philosophizing, which Seneca considers as the correct practice of the mind, the awareness of the inevitability of death. Seneca writes: “[Gaudium] Est enim animi elatio suis bonis verisque fidentis” [11, LIX], joy “is an elation of spirit, of a spirit which trusts in the goodness and truth of its own possessions” [12, LIX, p. 102], and further characterizes joy: “Gaudio autem iunctum est non desinere nec in contrarium verti” [11, LIX], “it is a characteristic of real joy that it never ceases, and never changes into its opposite” [12, LIX, p. 102]. Real joy is born from a lucid mind; it comes from a person; it is born inside; it is part of the eternal; it is integral; it cannot decrease or increase, that is, it is perfect.

The opposite of joy is pleasure, which is essentially external, superficial, sensual. Andrei Seregin explains the immanent personal nature of the so-called “external” possessions with everyone’s conscious life purpose of making their own happiness [13]. Joy and pleasure differ as results of following different kinds of desires. Desire as such is not harmful to a person’s soul. Seneca distinguishes between natural desires limited by the nature of man and desires unlimited by his imagination and ideas.

Seneca considers the playful nature of culture to be the quality of child life and refers to such behavior and disposition as boyishness. Boyishness, characteristic of infancy and adolescence, is dangerous with vices: “Illi [infantes] levia, hi [pueri] falsa formidant” [11, IV], “boys fear trifles, children fear shadows” [12, IV, p. 8]. Real joy is wise and calm.

In Seneca’s conception of culture, man does not choose a serious life, he accepts it, looks for the right path, which is essentially the only one—the path of virtue, wisdom, moral understanding [14]. Man is a creature of nature, but he develops and thus aspires to mind as an ideal through his awareness and choice of the right or the otherwise. Man learns to make the right choice, to feel joy, to philosophize, as well as to make the wrong choice, to have fun, and to indulge in fleeting pleasures. Mind is the cornerstone in the constitution of oneself in the world. Developing his mind, man fits into the world properly: he acts
correctly, feels, understands life, treats death. Thus, ontology, epistemology, and ethics are closely intertwined in Seneca’s conception of culture. They represent a classical system of understanding the serious and the playful as the mature and the childish, the meaningful and the formal, the enduring and the fleeting.

The playful as the ontological foundation of human culture in Huizinga’s conception

In the conceptualization of human culture, Huizinga discovers the playful not only as a life stage of socialization, as the initial stage of maturing, but also as an equivalent element of human culture throughout its history that is the basis for human self-identification as a subject of play [7]. Huizinga postulates the universal ontological nature of the playful element of culture: the playful permeates the existential, historical, and sociocultural levels of man’s being.

Huizinga interprets the creative principle of man as a playful principle, which manifests itself in the history of mankind in the form of constitutive and constructive activity. Like any activity, in contrast to the everyday unstaged life, play is purposeful, limited in space and time, and regulated. However, man manifests himself freely within the framework of play since he is fully engaged in it. If we think of play as of the forming of the Universe, then the emotional existential immersion in it becomes the only possible form of man’s existence. If man is not aware of the scales, rules, and stakes in play, it can falsely distract him from the serious and inevitable circumstance that Seneca called to understand and accept: The only bet man can make is his own life.

Thus, conceptualizing the serious and the playful as the ontological and axiological foundations of culture, Seneca and Huizinga characterize their rational principle, which is the guarantor of the correct social disposition of man’s being: reproducing a virtuous ideal (Seneca) or constructing social reality (Huizinga).

Contemporary social reality: The possibility of serious play

Modernity acquires a fluid character [1; 2; 4], and, along with the previous life, the structures that constitute the social being of the subject as a condition for his self-identification and self-realization change. The ontoaxiological structure of human culture creates an adaptive environment for new generations and for self-development, and it is in constant change. The dynamics of social processes is increasing, thus it is so important to philosophically rethink [15; 16] and thereby actualize the systemic elements of culture that determine the trends of its transformation.

The conceptualization of sociocultural reality reveals that this system-forming foundation is the value layer. This layer is enshrined in cultural codes whose meanings are performatively confirmed in practices that reproduce the social. Values are a product of the sociohistorical process of designation; they do not develop from the material basis, but themselves create this basis by penetrating into the natural and the material, and by generating sociocultural meanings in it. This process, in some peculiar version (diffuse authorship), can be thought of as a constructive one.

The key process for our research is the removal of the opposition between the playful and the serious in the modern sociocultural world. In our opinion, in Seneca’s conception, it is impossible to understand play as a serious sociocultural foundation, but rather as temporary arenas, where seekers of a virtuous path can practice cognitive and rhetorical skills. There also exists a different research position, e.g., E.A. Koval notes that it is in play that moral orientations can be formed and reflected on [17]. This opinion introduces new
meanings into the conceptualization of serious play, in particular, into the comprehension of the social constructive potential of individualization and gamification trends: everyone, playing for oneself, seeks to take a leadership, expert position, seeks the basis for playing out one’s own life as independent play, and, so that not to be suspended by one’s own pigtail, like Munchausen, returns to the existential, moral, social foundations. It is in these foundations, like in the natural environment, that Seneca lived and thought (“vero tenor permanet, falsa non durant” [11, CXX], “it is indeed consistency that abides; false things do not last” [12, CXX, p. 310]. Thus, one’s own being is not enough, man consciously accepts the interactivity and intersubjectivity of the cultural world, realizes the possibility of his influence on the world, and his total existential and ontological immersion in the world of social processes.

Thus, the very possibility of serious play in the modern social world, as researchers note [18], removes the opposition between the serious and the playful (as non-serious). The seriousness of the playful is established in man’s activity-based and conscious approach to the social environment of his habitat as to some global artifact: he never created this artifact, but he can change it given its anthropological nature. With such an intention, the “responsible” means being aware of values and relevant cognitive boundaries of the world, rather than understanding and accepting the world as it is (Seneca’s conception). Subsequently, these meanings and boundaries can be transformed, and social reality (including oneself) can be reassembled at different levels.

We interpret this conscious construction of one’s own social image, as a disposition for an interactive relationship with the world, as serious play. Thus, serious play is a process that transforms sociocultural reality by constructing its ontoaxiological foundations.

**Serious play and education**

The university, being a symbol of the transition from a child frivolous life to an adult professional life in modern society, being subject to the tendency of gamification, plays a role adaptive to modern serious plays. This does not fit into the classical Humboldt model, in which stakes are primarily made on the scientific component, and is one of the consequences of the crisis of the classical model in the modern educational space. Huizinga claims that science is the only area in which the playful element of culture is discovered with great difficulty [7]. Scientists’ competitive spirit can only manifest itself in an attempt to be the first to publish ideas, to tell the world about their inventions.

The gamification of modern higher education emphasizes the erasure of the boundaries between the playful and the serious. However, this trend does not contradict the true purpose of the educational system and human culture as a whole: cultivation, transformation of the “natural gift”, sculpting of man. The pedagogical project of Seneca and Stoicism comprehends education and culture as akin to sculpture or architecture: as a process that transforms natural material—the human mind. “For the Stoics, the task of upbringing corresponded to the general philosophical and theoretical-cognitive project of caring for mind” [19, p. 209], and this care also implies a sociocultural context adequate to modern trends: “The first thing which philosophy undertakes to give is fellow-feeling with all men; in other words, sympathy and sociability” (Hoc primum philosophia promittit, sensum commune, humanitatem, et congregationem) [19, p. 209].

Thus, we see that educational projects aimed at the implementation of culture-universal/universal/profession-universal competencies successfully use the elements and functionality of play that aim at teamwork, leader determination, role distribution, rule and norm following, etc.
In the implementation of professional competencies, serious play is seen as an effective teaching method [20] and, in a broad context, as a multifunctional element of modern sociocultural reality, which allows working with cultural heritage, updating the historical past, working with text/information, conducting business projects, training, etc. [21; 22]. Studies on the effectiveness of serious plays, their structure and applied potential, on new applications of serious play technologies are being conducted.

Likewise, the trend of gamification in higher education indicates neither the infantilization of humanity, nor the artificial prolongation of childhood. It does not at all imply the literal introduction of play; on the contrary, elements of play are built in and adapted to the tasks of the higher education system. There is a need to maintain a balance between the hedonism of play and its functionality [23]. Here the potential of the student as a player is revealed through participation in urgent projects, organization of activities that require role participation and are limited in time and space, limited by norms/rules. Some elements of play contribute to the development of the skill of following rules and norms.

The university retains the role of a mediator between childhood and serious adult life. Higher education has the status of a serious activity that develops personality and gives profession, opportunities for growth, for adequate relations with the changeable social world, of which serious play is an integral part today.

Discussion of the results

**Serious play in the reflection of modern student youth**

The students sharply posed the questions of whether the relation between the serious and playful elements of culture are mutually exclusive, whether serious play is possible in the modern social world. This is explained by the double reflection of both social reality and education as its part, i.e. students question both the adult life they made a transition to at the university and the real conditions of this transition.

In terms of values and cognition, students think of serious play with difficulty, yet perceive it as probable (they doubt the position of a global player in the modern conditions of man’s cognitive capabilities); they treat the playful element as an entertaining or training social phenomenon, the serious as a fundamental value and ethical basis of human existence, and think that the fusion of these elements into the image of serious play is probabilistic.

Comprehending the scenario of sociocultural reality, in which serious play would take a leading transforming position, students pay special attention to its features: conscientiousness of choice, responsibility for decisions made, freedom within frameworks, and cognition in activities that construct the social world. They also note the need for routine as a new way to take a break from play. They express the idea of a simpler and more acceptable scenario with given rules, in which all participating players have the opportunity to improve their social way of being (account, portfolio) at will, to reach new levels of sociocultural reality, and to expand the boundaries of their possibilities that construct social being.

Thus, in their worldview and self-reflection, modern student youth prefer Seneca’s intentions. What the playful element of culture in Huizinga’s conception lacks is making play serious, i.e. finding moral performative guidelines rather than invariant moral grounds.
Conclusion

The relation between the playful and the serious is changing in the trends of modern sociocultural reality. Their confrontation, mutually exclusive relations develop into their synthesis. A conceptualized image of serious play is the result of the reflexive analysis of the redefinition of this relation. We analyzed the role of serious play in the modern social world by comparing the serious and the playful in Seneca’s and Huizinga’s conceptions.

The initial meanings of the reflection of the playful and the serious are the established images of the serious as a fundamental value foundation of cultural life and the playful as an activity localized in sociocultural reality, self-intended, and defined by the functionality of external rules. The revealed meanings of the playful and the serious are actualized by modern sociocultural tendencies of dynamization, individualization, gamification, and erasure of boundaries. These meanings are associated with the transformation of relations between man and the social world. Each person builds one’s own life and becomes an independent player in sociocultural reality. At the same time, each person needs rigidly fixed foundations: they guarantee that what is happening is true and real, and allow constructing the person’s disposition. The conceptualization of serious play thus shows that play becomes serious when it acquires the characteristics of responsibility, freedom of creation, and awareness.

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