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Cock: Essays and Illustrations on Attention, Accessibility, and Deep Play

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Cock: Essays and Illustrations on Attention, Accessibility, and Deep Play

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

Buck H. Buettner
For Roswell and, to a lesser extent, the rest of my family.
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It feels only appropriate that my thesis encompasses not one singular, flowing narrative but leaps enthusiastically and indiscriminately between subjects as wide as the cultural symbolism of violence upon non-human animals and as small as a passing parenthetical mention of Karl Marx among the pages of Geertz’s thirty page ethnography. In the pages to come, I will delve into the personal to explain why I see an anthology of detached essays and illustrations, all engaging with anthropological writer Clifford Geertz’s “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” as befitting my academic sensibilities more so than a singular piece of media might. In short, though, I have ADHD; what that means for me as a student, writer, and artist lies ahead, but the fact is seminal to the existence of this anthology and a point of pride in the creation of what I believe is a unique multimodal engagement with one of the anthropological field’s funniest and bluntest minds.

The field of anthropology is paradoxical in its dual accessibility among its ethnographies and saturation of jargon, self-reference, and, to be frank, monotony in its academic dialogues. Ethnographies, or rich studies of singular cultures, take the forms of written word, documentary, and photographic essay with equal esteem, whereas anthropological dialogues rely on supplication of prior knowledge. Ethnographies cover a wide berth of creative practices, and are as accessible to outsiders as any fetishization of marginalized or underrepresented groups that can be found on TLC. Less assigned in 101 courses or cited in clickbait listicles are the interpersonal engagements between anthropologists themselves, as they require something of an exponential library of prior knowledge to understand all the self-referential content. In a way, my aim here is to aid in that intellectual endemic: this project consists of eight short, prosaic essays
and eight accompanying digital illustrations which correspond with each written work. I demand no prior knowledge going into this thesis; any reference to the Geertzian text upon which it is based will be provided and analyzed with the non-anthropological layperson in mind. As I will further discuss, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” was the piece that piqued my interest in anthropology in the first place for its adept and accessible storytelling; its humor (which I would come to learn is a signature of Geertz’s ethnographies) and strength as standalone delivery of theory appealed to what, at the time, I did not realize was a learning disability which had frustrated my academic experience for two decades preceding. As such I empathize with both outsiders to the field and similarly neurodivergent academics in the following pages, hopefully adding to the annals of anthropology my own valued multimodal addition.

The short essays of which this project is composed are, I hope, self-explanatory; rather than delve into “Deep Play” as a whole, singular beast of anthropological writing, I sought to engage in a way that felt most natural to me: almost episodically, dancing and drawing connections (sometimes quite literally) between the text and outside sources. It is through this method that I shed light on and draw out a small handful of the many independent concepts partially explored in Geertz’s text: homoeroticism, communism, the psychology of comedy, and so on. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” is as valuable as a string of smaller theories as it is one massive one on the nature of recreation, especially to those (like me) who find engaging with the latter style disadvantageous to their learning and thinking.

Alongside each essay I feature an original illustration as both a dedication to the evocative and colorful prose with which Geertz describes the humid, sun-dappled jungles of small-town Bali and an acknowledgement of my own persuasion towards visual learning. As previously mentioned, there is no shortage of visual ethnography as self-contained works, but I
felt it my duty in a sense to make use of a productive hobby to supplement this piece with illustrations that may make it more engaging and thus available to a wider audience of readers.

All that is to say the thesis you are apparently still planning on reading is, by my definitions, an anthology of text and art. One could dedicate a lifetime to picking at “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” for all its complexities and ingenuities, let alone Geertz’s entire entertaining canon--and perhaps someone already has--but for both our purposes, reader, you and I will have to settle for my short and enjoyable few months in dialogue with Cliff.
PART I: STIMULATION

The mental stimulation spurred by *play* in its physical and psychological forms allow us to define the term’s meaning as Geertz uses it, as well as what beyond the titular Balinese cockfight can be defined as “deep play.”
Fig. 1: Humor and Relaying the Unfamiliar
Defining Play

Stimulation, per its biological definition, refers quite simply to an increase in nervous activity within a living body; in psychological circles, stimulation generally refers to activation in the neurons. In discussions of the experience of neurodivergence--that is, a blanket term used to refer to learning disorders and the resulting needs for academic and social specificity they require (i.e. ADHD or autism)--stimulation is far more specific, referring not just to the activation of nerves or neurons, but the consequences of that activation, be they positive or negative.

In the thesis which you are currently reading, I use stimulation as a term for its pleasurable manifestations, and the resulting positive consequences: the most relevant of which is entertainment. One self-stimulates via, say, clicking their pen; the result, however neanderthal and fleeting, is entertainment. I mean, what a great noise that pen makes! Play, similarly, is a complex source of stimulation and thus entertainment: I play Tetris in between writing paragraphs of this project, fire up my long-neglected left brain (so to speak), and am both stimulated and entertained. As such, play provides stimulation, and the concrete result of that stimulation is entertainment. I can only speak for myself in claiming that personal entertainment plays a significant part in the creation of a senior thesis, but the anthropological significance of amusement is not baseless, and I sense I am not alone in my fickle academic ability.

Clifford Geertz’s “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” faces entertainment as worthy of anthropological analysis. Deep play, Geertz teaches us, is microcosmic in its own right, representative of the greater structures at play within a culture. The deep play which Geertz studies can be ascertained from the article’s title: the illegal cockfights of a small Balinese

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village the anthropologist and his wife visited in 1958. But Geertz--taking up authority on the subject from Jeremy Bentham, who first offhandedly coined the term in 1840\(^2\) is reasonably indiscriminate in his criteria of play. As a matter of fact, Geertz hardly defines that half of the term at all: the majority of his time discussing Bentham’s theory in *Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* is spent analyzing the depth of deep play more so than the play itself; that is to say, the mutually agreed-upon factors of Balinese cockfights that give the game a multifaceted interest--heavy betting, well-bred birds, and the like. “The question why such matches are interesting takes us out of the realm of formal concerns into more broadly sociological and social-psychological ones and to a less purely economic idea of what ‘depth’ in gaming amounts to.” For his eventual thesis: deep play indicates the incorporation of unique cultural values as they pervade recreation, such as “the migration of the Balinese status hierarchy into the body of the cockfight” (Geertz 70-73). As far as play goes, however, Geertz and Bentham only cite gambling in their individual cases of discussion, leaving a wide margin for readers to apply their own areas of study to the collaborative concept of deep play. It is here that I find a kinship in Geertz--and here that I draw from my personal experience with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to claim that “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” contains similarly open-minded sensibilities on the nature of play.

Between Bentham and Geertz’s examples of deep play in action--again, both acts of gambling--one might take deep play to refer exclusively to sport and its subsidiary activities: literal games and the competitions on smaller, interpersonal levels created by participants and viewers (the play that is viewing, betting on, or “fantasy drafting” a team sport comes to mind). Being as it is a disorder characterized by its desperation for stimulation, though, ADHD is far less discerning in its definition of play. Borne of neurological hyperactivity that results in deficit

of dopamine compared to the typical person, my personal experience with ADHD has taught myself and those around me that amusement can be found just about anywhere through acts of self-stimulatory behavior, also known as “stimming”--for some, this comes in the form of tapping feet or flapping hands; for others, rigorous exercise or hyperfocus on flashy video games. Creation, labor, and even idle movement can take the form of play when utilized as a form of stimulation, and it is the first of these--creation--that I intend to elaborate on here.

For as long as I have been in school (and much longer than I have officially been diagnosed with ADHD), I have used drawing as a means of self-stimulation to pay attention when receiving auditory information in class. The act of illustration has always been far more than mere expression to me--for an ever-moving mind, it is reliable entertainment with few required materials. More so than a means of communication, ADHD has caused me to view art a bit more bluntly: as something to do. For my enjoyment of the medium and comfort in engaging with theory visually, it was early on in the advent of this project that I elected to engage with Geertz’s writing at least partially through illustration. I argue that drawing serves as play when utilized as a form of entertainment, and thus my illustrative exploration of “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” is deep play in and of itself: on the surface, playful engagement with the ideas Geertz introduces in “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” but a deeper representation of accessibility in multimodal anthropology below.

Befitting of my disability, I believe that the Geertzian anthropological methods--from the aforementioned lenience in what constitutes “play” to the signature lighthearted prose Kevin Dwyer analyzes in *Geertz, Humour, and Morocco*^3^--exemplify what a form of accessibility in anthropology could look like given the diversity of learning disabilities in academia. Indeed,

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though it is the only divergence I can speak to personally, consideration of ADHD is only the
beginning.
Humor and Relaying the Unfamiliar

In “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” at the very least, Clifford Geertz’s expertise lies in the analysis of play: as defined in my introduction, a complex source of stimulation and thus entertainment. *Deep* play defines what cultural values motivate the forms of stimulation that entertain us, as exercises in hypermasculinity and animal nature give cockfights their appeal to the proud, pun-loving young men of Bali. And it is evident the Balinese humor surrounding cockfighting is nearly as significant as its bitterness towards authority, or its dislike of primal behavior: after stringing his readership along just long enough to make them question whether his liberal use of the word “cock” in covertly humorous contexts is intentional, Geertz does reveal that he knows quite well what he and the Balinese cockfighters are doing in their apparently coincidental double entendre. “It works in exactly the same way in Balinese as it does in English, even to producing the same tired jokes, strained puns, and uninventive obscenities,” Geertz tells us. He goes on to list Bali’s favored rooster-related analogies, not unlike our more familiar “happy as a clam,” “sly as a fox,” and “stubborn as a mule” in English: “a desperate man who makes a last, irrational effort to extricate himself from an impossible situation is likened to a dying cock who makes one final lunge at his tormentor to drag him along to a common destruction,” and “someone in a new job anxious to make a good first impression is called ‘a fighting cock caged for the first time’” (60). Analogies aside, returning to the double entendre in its base form--the grounds for crass comparisons to male genitalia--skims over a subject that Geertz himself only ever mentions in passing, despite it relating quite well to his interest in cultural sources of entertainment: humor.
To dedicate one’s entire thesis to a singular work in an anthropological canon is certainly a declaration of interest, and undoubtedly raises the obvious question of what it is, exactly, that I find so entrancing about *Deep Play*. The following essays contained in this anthology seek to answer that question; there are more than enough textual components to the piece which I feel might benefit from elaboration and comparison in Geertz’s own anti-anti-relativist form. But all that came from long hours of consideration and too many re-reads to count; at the very start, when I was first assigned *Deep Play* in my Anthropology 101 course and reluctantly picked it up despite my relative disinterest in our readings thus far, I was struck by the humor of the piece. Despite the legitimacy of his studies and the sociopolitical depth they implied, Geertz did not take himself, his own role as an outsider and foreigner, nearly so seriously as the likes of Claude-Levi Strauss or Bronisław Malinowski. His instinct was not to disguise his presence in his ethnographic accounts, but rather to wholeheartedly admit to his awkwardness in the midst of a tight-knit Balinese village:

Early in April of 1958, my wife and I arrived, malarial and diffident, in a Balinese village we intended, as anthropologists, to study… We were intruders, professional ones, and the villagers dealt with us as Balinese seem always to deal with people not part of their life who yet press themselves upon them: as though we were not there (Geertz 56).

I found Geertz to be unique in his self awareness, proudly stating after the catastrophe of the police raid on the cockfight in the village center that he and his wife were the subject of ample good-natured mocking. “In Bali, to be teased is to be accepted,” Geertz asserts. “Getting caught, or almost caught, in a vice raid is perhaps not a very generalizable recipe for achieving that
mysterious necessity of anthropological field work, rapport, but for me it worked very well” (Geertz 59).

For all my deeply personal enjoyment of Clifford Geertz as a comic narrator, I have been long since beaten to the punch of analyzing this generally-overlooked aspect of his anthropological work. Kevin Dwyer of the American University in Cairo tackles the topic wholeheartedly in Geertz, *Humour and Morocco*, supplementing actual textual analysis of Geertz’s work with his own personal experiences witnessing the ethnographer lecture in person.4 “I remember his spirited story-telling and his sharp sense of humour from our occasional contacts over the years and I recall with real pleasure his presentation at Yale in the late 1960s of a pre-publication version of ‘Deep Play,’ one of the funniest papers I have ever heard,” Dwyer states, further evidence for his belief that “humour provides the kind of material that Geertz would have been able to put to excellent use had he chosen to study it” (Dwyer 397, 398).

Indeed, between his interest in play as it manifests in sport—as in *Deep Play*—and his signature thick description in analyses of the most lighthearted facets of individual cultures would make for rich comic analysis, only supplemented by the signature Geertzian tone. The closest Geertz comes to forthright acknowledgement of humor in *Deep Play* would be his passing acknowledgement of popular cock-based sexual innuendo, of which he lists none—as if to strategically draw attention from the tantalization of humor as subject of study—and the even briefer aforementioned statement that “to be teased is to be accepted” among the people of Bali (Geertz 59). These examples aside, all humor in *Deep Play* is metatextual: real-world fact made funny by the dry, blunt tone in which Clifford Geertz writes. The following passage, and a

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personal favorite, comes to mind; its content is unquestionably brutal, but the writing with which it is relayed is some of the funniest in a piece already rife with levity:

Of course, like drinking during Prohibition or, today, smoking marijuana, cockfights, being a part of “The Balinese Way of Life,” nonetheless go on happening, and with extraordinary frequency. And, like Prohibition or marijuana, from time to time the police (who, in 1958 at least, were almost all not Balinese but Javanese) feel called upon to make a raid, confiscate the cocks and spurs, fine a few people, and even now and then expose some of them in the tropical sun for a day as object lessons which never, somehow, get learned, even though occasionally, quite occasionally, the object dies (Geertz 57).

I will refrain, for the time being, from describing why I believe the above to be so amusing. After all, the explanation of humor is generally considered bad practice; timing is upset by the delay between joke delivery and comprehension; without the implicit knowledge of such-and-such media reference or culturally-held conviction, some humor goes from merely flat to inconceivable. For example, I shall share a personal favorite joke that almost always lands, as well as scenarios in which it might not.

JOKE TELLER: What did the leper say to the prostitute?
JOKE RECIPIENT: What?
JOKE TELLER: Keep the tip.
Assuming the definition of prostitution as the exchange of money for sex and its subsidiaries is already known, one must possess an awareness of both the stereotype of symptomatic leprosy--necrosis of bodily appendages leading to detachment--and cultural knowledge of genital slang terms to understand the joke. Not all will find the image of a broken-up penis being handed off to some poor sex worker funny, necessarily, but that comes down to taste moreso than comprehension. Dwyer sheds some light on the sources of amusement in story- and joke-telling: “Conventionally distilled, there are three main theories of humour: incongruity, superiority, release” (Dwyer 403). These are separate theories best known for their associations with various social philosophers, but I believe all can exist at once, that the leper/prostitute joke makes use of all three. The joke introduces incongruity in the absurd dissonance of discussion of sex acts paired with chronic illness and its less-than-pretties consequences (safe to say there are few things less arousing than the thought of a necrotic glans sitting pathetically in someone’s palm). Similarly, superiority manifests in a subconscious relief at not suffering from leprosy and, worse yet, losing a portion of one’s genitalia (conversely, there could be superiority gleaned from relief at being safe from the grueling labor of sex work, but I argue that the joke is told at the leper’s expense, not the prostitute’s). Finally, release--double entendre not intended. Generic jokes of the question-answer structure produce implicit “psychological tension,” as Dwyer puts it, as one awaits what will inevitably be an outlandish punchline when the information that preceded involves a leper and a prostitute. To return to Geertz’s account of cockfighting culprits left to bake in the Balinese sun, the source of the otherwise tragic account is not dissimilar. Incongruity comes from the seemingly mismatched crime and punishment, superiority from sympathy with the victims’ unpleasant death, and release from the plodding paragraph finally coming to a head in what feels like a tonally meek admission of brutality. You can almost see Geertz’s shifty gaze
averting elsewhere as he admits that occasionally, quite occasionally, those caught battling their
game birds die burnt and dehydrated at the hands of the Javanese fuzz.

Neither Dwyer nor I could concretely place why Clifford Geertz chooses not to analyze
that which he is so adept at delivering through writing and, according to Dwyer, spoken word.
But we can at least posit why it benefits the unique works of Geertz, and, for my part, how it
contributes specifically to the thesis of “Deep Play” that even lighthearted stimulation and
amusement can represent significant cultural values. Dwyer elaborates on why incongruity,
superiority, and release are the theoretical sources of humor: in the case of incongruity,
“emphasis is on the unexpected juxtaposition of unlikely neighbors, of things that don’t
ordinarily go together”; arguably the popularity of incongruity comes from discomfort, and the
resulting impulse to laugh at that which does not compute. The humor of superiority is derived
from self-preservation--“when we find ourselves protected from the harm that befalls another.”
And then there is release which, as previously mentioned, covers a wide berth of jokes that create
tension before offering relief in the form of a punchline. Dwyer goes on to state the crux of
Geertz’s success in literary humor:

All these approaches highlight the existence of a tension that arises when anomalies,
contradictions, inconsistencies, contrasts, incompatibilities, are brought into proximity
with one another, and then some form of relatively economical and/or elegant resolution
of this tension ensues that triggers the laughing or smiling response. It is this
juxtaposition of anomalous or contradictory visions, expressions, perspectives, that has
led some… to think of humour as providing a challenge to our everyday attitudes, to the
taken-for-granted nature of everyday reality (Dwyer 403).
It is this challenge that I believe matters so dearly to the overall thesis of Clifford Geertz’s canon. Anthropology, I believe, is a study founded on unfamiliarity--foreign ethnographies of far-off lands seek to make their Western audiences comfortable with, or at least aware of, alien practices; Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and its focus on the spiritual practices of the New Guinean Trobriand people comes to mind as one of the field’s foremost examples. Perhaps more modern are at-home ethnographies, which seek to abstract what is already familiar for the sake of scrutinization with new eyes--*Renegade Dreams* by Laurence Ralph documents the hierarchy of popular footwear in black-majority urban communities like Ralph’s own Princeton, New Jersey, asking readers intimately familiar with black American sneakerhead culture to reassess something that they may presently view as normal and unquestionable. Geertz furthers unfamiliarity in his own work through humor--quite literally challenging even his own assertions of what is standard and typical of, for example, Balinese cockfighting culture. In introducing humor to the above statement of Javanese police brutality as punishment for cockfighting, Geertz challenges his readers to ask *why* one might unquestioningly accept the revelation of police brutality in a foreign nation, or not bat an eye at the unfamiliar form this brutality takes. Dwyer’s suggestions that Geertz perhaps chose not to contribute to the discussion of humor’s role in anthropology as “the subject struck him as too oxymoronic” or “sadly, he just never got around to it” may well be the case, but I believe another, inspired by the analyses of George Marcus is far more likely: “For Geertz, then, fieldwork and anthropological research, fitting as they did into the development paradigm and committed as their practitioners were to diagnosing problems if not to solving them, were very serious enterprises” (Dwyer 407). To elaborate on Dwyer’s mention of possible oxymoron,
Geertz’s humor could not have been more dire in the delivery of his ideas, and that fact fits quite well with the thesis of “Deep Play.” I would dare to suggest that the lighthearted turns in “Deep Play” may be manifestations of deep play itself: mental stimulation for the sake of amusement--to draw better attention to notions that need challenging within Geertz’s fieldwork, and perhaps personal entertainment on the part of Geertz himself--that reflects the deeper need to challenge one’s paradigm of anthropological normalcy.
PART II: THE COCKFIGHT

As Clifford Geertz assures us, there is much more to Bali’s favorite bloodsport than mere game birds and spurs.
Fig. 2: Cock Crazy
Fig. 3: Man on Animal Violence
Cock Crazy

Sometime around middle school, I remember a kind of diss on fans of professional sports--namely American football--circulating the online and in-person circles I frequented: generally those that glowered down their noses at all things mainstream, all while hypocritically enjoying equally exploitative counterculture (the *Twilight* and *Hunger Games* novels, respectively, come to mind). Preying on the toxic hypermasculinity and resulting compulsory homophobia of heterosexual, cisgender male peers, we burned them thusly: what could possibly be *less* heterosexual than beefy men in tights tackling each other into the mud?

Looking back on it, our own modified homophobia was equally insidious, if better disguised--implying homosexuality denotes an opposition to masculinity. But anthropology has long acknowledged that there is something to be said for the intimacy of homosociality--that is, social bonds between members of the same sex within a species, often defined as the “mechanism and social dynamic that explains the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity.”5 Per the Geertzian deep play, every aspect of sport indicates subtextual cultural values; American Artist Barbara Kruger conjures the persistence of sport in an untitled collage piece that features the phrase “you construct intricate rituals that allow you to touch the skin of other men.”6 Homoeroticism feels inevitable in patriarchal society, even more so in those that so value athletics. But Clifford Geertz’s cockfights--which he readily offers up as symbolic of Balinese culture, even if his focus is the monetary gambling aspect--introduce a degree of separation; the interactions that make up the sport of cockfighting do not occur between human participants, but the game birds they raise and preen in preparation for bloody combat. But cockfighting as a sport

is unique in its ability to retain a bona fide homoeroticism despite limited interactions between the men who partake: after all, its players’ identification with their game birds serve a multilingual sexual innuendo that is not lost on those who spectate.

“To anyone who has been in Bali any length of time, the deep psychological identification of Balinese men with their cocks is unmistakable. The double entendre here is deliberate,” Geertz notes. “It works in exactly the same way in Balinese as it does in English, even to producing the same tired jokes, strained puns, and uninventive obscenities” (Geertz 60). The homoeroticism--granted, cisnormative--of a sport centered around an obsession with a facsimile of male genitalia need not be mentioned, and yet there it is. Even the Balinese folk Geertz interacts with on the daily during his visit are unabashed in their awareness: “‘I am cock crazy,’ my landlord… used to moan as he went to move another cage, give another bath, or conduct another feeding. ‘We’re all cock crazy.’” Granted, “the intimacy of men with their cocks is more than metaphorical”; Balinese cockfighters fawn over their game birds as one would a purebred show dog, “grooming them, feeding them, trying them out against one another, or just gazing at them with a mixture of rapt admiration and dreamy self-absorption” (Geertz 61). To me the closest parallel is something of a mix between pet ownership and, perhaps, car ownership--it simply doesn’t align that a proud bird keeper would put their animal as readily into battle as they would a ceremonial bath of herbs and flowers. The parallel to vehicular obsession manifests here; loving protectiveness is replaced by a somewhat sadistic desire to test the limits of one’s prized machine (organic or otherwise). The more conspicuous aspects of the metaphor even carry over in consideration of the generally American stereotype that men driving massive, boisterous gas-guzzlers are compensating for, say, the size and performance of a certain appendage. High-performance roosters and roadsters alike represent the traditionally masculine man’s
adherence to the very masculinity they and their society value, as well as success within that oft-toxic system.

So there we have a fairly straightforward metaphor: Balinese men obsess over and identify with their literal, avian cocks, putting them in competition with those of their fellow man as symbolism for precious masculinity and male dominance. But Geertz introduces another layer of complexity to this seemingly simplistic simile of Balinese culture: the animal aspect. “Although it is true that cocks are symbolic expressions or magnifications of their owner’s self… they are also expressions--and rather more immediate ones--of what the Balinese regard as the direct inversion, aesthetically, morally, and metaphysically, of human status: animality,” he explains. Geertz goes on to cite the Balinese dislike for animals and what they consider to be animalistic behavior: infants are discouraged from crawling on their hands and knees; beastiality is punished much more violently than incest. Defecation and eating alike are considered shameful and obscene, and demand utter privacy and haste in their practices; non-livestock animals like stray dogs are treated cruelly and violently. There is nothing quite like this in the Western world--vermin like rats and pigeons are looked upon with either mild distaste or utter neutrality (and there are, of course, their rare defenders--I rather like pigeons myself); livestock undergoes mistreatment in industrial operations but is at least vocally respected for its resources and complacency in aiding human growth and health. And only society’s greatest degenerates would ever harm a mammalian housepet, publicly or privately. Animal rights activists even draw ire here and there for their apparent lack of concern for human rights violations when animals--most often dogs--inspire so much more universal empathy. In reading about the Balinese dislike for animal nature in combination with the homoeroticism of cock-centric sport, I couldn’t help wondering about the potential significance of these subjects in relation to Balinese
LGBT legislation. Perhaps the dislike of animal behavior extends to dated conceptions of sodomy, I thought, considering homosexuality is often considered sexual deviance on the level of incest or beastiality in less accepting nations— and we already know how mercilessly the Balinese react to the latter. But, as they so often do, my inherent biases got the better of me: despite recent movements in the larger Indonesia to push for conversion therapy and prioritization of the nuclear family in the past year, Bali itself is considered fairly safe for LGBT vacationers, be they simply a gay couple looking to relax or a more daring voyageur in search of an international gay scene. Like eating, defecating, or even stumbling, it would appear public displays of affection between any kind of couple is considered distasteful, and thus primal: “While homosexuality is accepted, any public display of romance, whether straight or gay, is frowned upon,” notes one travel tip site. It would seem the homoeroticism of cockfights is far more neutral an aspect of the sport than the apparent dance with death that is merely identifying oneself with a nonhuman animal: “the Balinese men is identifying not just with his ideal self, or even his penis, but also… with what he most fears, hates, and ambivalence being what it is, is fascinated by—The Powers of Darkness” (Geertz 62). The conclusion to be drawn here, then, in comparison with Western sport and the childish jokes with which I opened this piece: just as in Bali the distinctly more repulsive (and thus thrilling) aspect of recreational homosociality is forgoing one’s humanity, American sport as I criticized it in my youth (and enjoy and partake in it today) embraces the reverse, unquestioningly participating in animal behavior while flirting with the dual fear and fascination of the homoerotic.

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Man-on-Animal Violence

In his discussion of cockfighting as a symbolic staple of Balinese popular culture, Clifford Geertz cites an apparently nonexistent proverb in the assertion that “every people loves its own form of violence” (Geertz 84). Original source notwithstanding—all my searches only yielded citations of Geertz himself—the prospect introduced by Geertz’s proverb feels fairly objective. It seems no coincidence that beloved Western sports of all kinds either come with the risk of injury—football, basketball, hockey—or gamble on it wholeheartedly, as in boxing, wrestling, or martial arts. It feels fair to say that the delicate dance with violence is a powerful aspect of the human experiences; plenty of studies show all sentient creatures possess the hormones osteocalcin and adrenaline and resulting tendencies toward fight or flight, but only humans possess the ability to describe their pursuits of threats of death for the mere thrill of it.

Still, for the sake of specificity, I sought to study violence of the cockfighting kind—not just the thrill of bloodshed human cultures covertly desire, but that which involves—and generally subjugates—our fellow animals. Geertz maintains a unique draw to his Balinese sportsmen’s identification with their game birds, both as sexual innuendo and their status as non-humans. “In identifying with his cock, the Balinese man is identifying not just with his ideal self, or even his penis, but also, and at the same time, with what he most fears, hates, and ambivalence being what it is, is fascinated by”—that is, base animal nature (see Essay: Cock Crazy for further thoughts on this). I believe that, in participating in multi-species violence, cultures conjure up representations of their own unique senses of supremacy whilst still daring to challenge them in literal or metaphysical combat. Beyond mere animal sacrifice, which does not

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involve the pitting of human wit against animal, I believe deep play on the level of Balinese cockfighting can be observed in various multicultural competitions with nonhumans, those cited below only being a few possible examples.

American trophy hunting culture at its wealthiest encompasses North American game and international scores alike—but some purveyors of the sport blend the two in the form of import hunting, anthropologist Yuka Suzuki explains.10 “Wildlife industries have developed in places such as Texas, where ranches import exotic species from Asia and Africa for the purpose of sport hunting,” Suzuki says (Suzuki 17). And, despite the fact that the game meat won during these insourced safari hunts is often donated to charity organizations, Suzuki asserts that the draw of both Zimbabwean tourism and exotic import hunts “[rely] upon a particular fantasy of ‘wild Africa,’” allowing white American and European tourists to play at colonization and subjugation of African wildlife (Suzuki 16). While game hunting fulfills the practical purpose of food acquisition and thus cannot be called play, Geertz himself would agree that trophy hunting is deep play indicative of pervasive white supremacist ideals within the culture of American and European tourists who can afford the expenses of outsourced big game hunts, whether or not the animals have been imported closer to home. “The longing for a lost Eden,” Suzuki says, “propelled an age of African exploration and fused the dream of a place of untouched and exquisite yet savage beauty, with the idea of a land resplendent with material resources” (Suzuki 16). This ideological fetishization persists today in the form of African wildlife tourism, representative of colonialist ideals. The political tilt to this form of exploitative sport is evident in its related legislation: during his American presidency, Donald Trump’s administration within the Fish and Wildlife Service approved requests for Tanzanian imports of hunted lions, elephants,

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and even a black rhinoceros—a critically endangered species. As if to substitute modern day colonialism, white tourists in Africa exercise subjugation of local cultures through their wildlife as mere lighthearted sport. It is only fitting that these opportunities were made significantly more available during a presidency that resulted in more powerful platforms for fringe white supremacist groups and increases in hate crimes in radical Republican-majority counties.

Bullfighting (and the butchering and sale that follows) is one of the most iconic and long-lived Spanish traditions, seeing popularity even today in regions colonized by Spanish conquistadors in South-Central America. That being said, it is under about as much scrutiny as any other practice involving livestock these days. A spokesperson from Barcelona’s Association for the Defense of Animal Rights told National Public Radio (NPR) News in 2019 that bulls are “abused before they even enter the fighting ring. At 9 months old, they’re already tested for aggressiveness by being provoked.” In stark contrast, nutritionist Ismael Diaz informed the same source that meat sourced from bullfights is “the most ecological meat in the world. In no other meat industry in the world is the animal as well taken care of, or as protected, as the fighting bull. That is, until he enters the ring." The battle between animal rights groups and historical preservationists, conscientious gastronomists carries on seemingly unendingly, and with worthy sensitivity—and I posit that this turbidity in talks of tradition is as valuable in analyzing the values of Spanish culture as the play of bullfighting itself. So different from the aesthetically utilitarian simplicity of sport hunting or cockfighting, bullfighting reflects the

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colorful history--literally and figuratively--of the Spanish people. In slaying a mindless, uncivilized beast via cultural iconography, dance-like flourish, and artful poise, does a matador not represent all of Spanish conquest over larger entities, such as the whole of South-Central America? The conflict that arises from modern and progressive views on traditional bloodsport represents national shame at a brutal past (though few European countries are exempt from this sort of civil conflict), young and international protestors taking up arms against pride in what is, in the metaphorical case and the literal, an unnecessary show of power and superiority.

Not unlike Bali, Afghanistan, too, prides itself on the popularity of bloodsport--though its people do not restrict their animal participants to game fowl. Younger generations generally oppose brutality for human entertainment, calling animal bloodsport “the distasteful domain of warlords and their armed followers.” Indeed, one trait the bloodsport of Afghanistan and Bali do not share is the support and participation of local police: New York Times journalist Rod Nordland reports the presence of an armed officer attending an event of a thousand strong, despite the technical illegality of dogfighting in Afghanistan. In contrast with the inherent rebellion of Balinese cockfighting (and what I posit may be deep play reflecting the ideals of Indonesia’s late communist party; see Essay: Marx and Geertz), the popularity of Afghani dogfighting is indiscriminate between classes and levels of authority. “The people who support such sports, they’re mostly poor or illiterate,” claims one of Nordland’s young interviewees, “or rich people who get their money by bad means, like the militias.” Considering the anti-authoritarian nature of Baliese deep play via cockfighting, I believe the explicit involvement of and appeal to violent authority of Afghani bloodsport is a result of Afghanistan’s tenuous history of conflict and insurrection. Naturally, one must interject with the unabashed admission

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of clarity in that statement: possibly to the detriment of my thesis, I do not believe the Afghani people are the source of their cultural inseparability with violence. To even suggest it would be tactless, ethnocentric, and racist. No, I assert that outside influence is the singular base source of the conflict which defines Afghanistan’s interest in bloodsport nowadays--and that is in part due to the landmass of the nation itself, simple as the notion may sound. Sitting at a historical nexus point between the East Asian powerhouses of present day China and Mongolia, Europe in its perpetual aim for conquest, and the similarly battered Middle East and Mediterranean coast of Africa, one almost need not mention the country’s billions of barrels of untapped crude oil and resulting appeal to American greed. “After 40 years of war, lots of things are broken here,” stated another of Nordland’s interviewees, this one a dog trainer and participant in illegal dogfights. Afghani citizens may seek to cope with the pertinence of violence in their day to day lives brought about by homefront civil wars and foreign intervention alike. Afghani deep play draws from indiscriminate violence to fuel its bloodsport, just as cockfighting pulls from anti-authoritarian sentiment and masculine ideals, trophy hunting from the notion of overpowering less “civilized” lands, and bullfighting from artful cultural conquest.

My accompanying illustration draws from the latter. Inspired by the iconic imagery of the bullfight, with its token imposing beast and its matadors’ colorful tools, I chose to engage further with the symbolism of Spanish conquest. A great steer lit red by the stormy, angry sky rises from the Pacific, an Andean skyline in the sunlight beyond. Before the bull approaches a ship of conquistadors, its crimson sails conjuring the color cows allegedly cannot stand (in reality, as we all likely know, bovines are colorblind; it is the swift motion of the cape that sets them off during fights). Comparatively meek, the Spanish vessel seeks to tackle the looming, primitive beast by the might of its proud culture. This calculation and cleverness is, of course, all a ruse: Spanish
colonial might came not from supremacy, but immorality, dishonor, and, most pertinently, disease. The bull of South-Central America could be as powerful and proud as it liked; in the end, it stood no chance against the side effects of inquisition by a culture with poor hygiene, selfish ideals, and longtime expertise in a lack of compassion.
Art produced beneath the reign of capitalism is inherently unique in its awareness of necessary profitability; in a world driven by free-market superpowers, no play is free of depth.
Fig. 4: High-Stakes Bets and the Pepsi Logo
Fig. 5: Illustrated Text and the Marxist Parenthetical
High-Stakes Bets and the Pepsi Logo

In 2009, PepsiCo paid one million dollars to the (now defunct) Arnell Group to redesign their logo. The average American consumer will undoubtedly be able to conjure the first pass in their minds: a perfect circle with three horizontal, wavy layers--red on top, blue on the bottom, and a narrow strip of white in between. Post-redesign, the present day Pepsi logo has been tilted to its left side, wavy white division between red and blue replaced by an uneven white strike, a bit like the signature Nike “Swoosh” if it lacked the boomerang-track turn in its final few pixels.

NYC branding guru Peter Arnell is responsible for the change in design. Beginning his career under the tutelage of oddball modern architect Michael Graves (I recommend a look at his work for the St. Coletta School of Greater Washington), Arnell evidently took ample inspiration from his mentor as he moved into the advertising world throughout the 80s and 90s. Arnell and his team--the titular Arnell Group--worked with brands such as Samsung, Chanel, Reebok, Mars, and plenty more, updating their visual identities for the minimalistic design sensibilities of the 2000s. I cannot say I am a personal fan of Arnell’s work, but his real masterpiece, more so than his visual stylings, is the document acquired by advertising journalism site AgencySpy justifying why a slightly smilier Pepsi sphere in the hues of the American flag was worth approximately as much as one of Picasso’s lesser known works.15

Before actually showing the document off--and I must emphasize that it is probably one of my favorite strings of code across the span of the internet--let me move back a few paces. Tim

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Ingold is the author of *Lines: A Brief History*, a highly theoretical anthropological analysis of delineation in all its cultural forms: illustration, scripting, music, walking, etc.

As I read various passages from *Lines*—and then, realizing about two actual concepts had registered at first go-around, read them again (see *Essay: Ingold and Neurodivergence*)—I found myself reminded of a certain logo design document I’d first witnessed long ago on borderline-dadaist social media site Tumblr.com, and its glorious meaninglessness. Behold, a mere two selections from the Arnell Group’s “Breathtaking”: the world’s first graphic design report that doubles as a psychedelic trip free of charge. The proceeding images are as surreal and theoretical as those featured from Ingold’s work above, and without accompanying text beyond their captions, it is any viewer’s guess as to what scientific basis upon which Arnell drew.

Arguably, the latter make use of intentional inaccessibility to trick their corporate audience into a conception of design justification beyond aesthetics; Ingold, conversely, takes pains to explain his highly metaphysical illustrations, and one cannot argue capitalistic motivations behind his writings.

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To reestablish the severity of the cost of these images, one million dollars currently describes the price of a small, undeveloped island in Belize called Funk Caye.\textsuperscript{17}

And just like that, Ingold’s theory popped back into my mind. The universe is so purely nonsensical at its core, full of actions and expansions and explosions that can only be described by a mathematical language humanity conjured from its own limited logic and understanding.

\textsuperscript{17} https://www.privateislandsonline.com/central-america/belize/funk-caye
We work with lines because they start, and then they end. A human moves along a meandering path, scores follow musical staffs, and artists create images by putting a brush to canvas and moving it from point A to point B. The actual linearity of time is debatable; quantum theory puts forth that the human perception of time all exists simultaneously. Still, Ingold is firm in his stance that lines denote natural connection and trackable movement, and they seem really very sensible. Peter Arnell slapping a drawing on the conference table at Pepsi’s headquarters and claiming mere graphic appeal about his proposal isn’t worth one million dollars, but digging into the theoretical human psychology of a soft drink logo through magnetic fields, gravitational pulls, and the Golden Ratio is priceless. Humans experience time in a linear fashion, with our pasts, presents, and futures falling on a kind of personal timeline we hold vaguely in the back of our minds. What Tim Ingold theorizes—and Peter Arnell exercises—is that “every thing is a parliament of lines.” In such a matter-of-fact tone that he can almost make one believe his assertion is obvious, Ingold asks: “What is a thing, or indeed a person, if not a tying together of the lines—the paths of growth and movement—of all the many constituents gathered there?” (Ingold 5). It leans more towards philosophy than it does anthropology, but I’m pleased to lean back into my befuddled ape brain and call it truth. Lines are growth, and time, and learning, and gesture; lines weave together in the tapestry of reality to create the thing we warily dare to call existence.

Besides—and you’ll forgive the pun—the cockamamie nature of the Arnell Group’s “Breathtaking,” potential connections remain between it and Clifford Geertz’s “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.” The presence of circles in both is evident; the Balinese cockpit is formed of padded siding, wood slats, sculpted concrete, or merely a chalk ring painted in the dirt, and features layered rings within the human audience based on the expense of one’s betting
ticket. The circles in “Breathtaking” need not be pointed out; between the logo’s shape itself and the visual justifications Arnell provides, there are more than enough circles to make for a visual motif shared with *Deep Play*. But I find there to be a far more pertinent and far less symbolic connection between these two pieces: the very source of a portion of Geertz’s cockfighting circles, and the reason for “Breathtaking”’s existence. In cockfighting and graphic design alike there exists a persistence of financial risk, betting as both means to further gain and status alone. PepsiCo could find dozens of talented designers who could rework their logo for significantly less than $1 million, but there exists a high standard of expenditure in the corporate world. Similarly, cockfights could still run and profit if financed by mere admission fees--but attendees boast social status and confidence through their bets (the titular deep play). “It is because money does, in this hardly unmaterialistic society, matter and matter very much that the more of it one risks the more of a lot of other things, such as one’s pride, one’s poise, one’s disposition, one’s masculinity, one also risks, again only momentarily but again very publicly as well,” Geertz explains (Geertz 72). In the sense that finances practically mean more for social status than they do returns, “Breathtaking”’s existence as a million dollar gamble in and of itself is one and the same with the cockfight attendees of Bali. Considering Geertz names betting Bali’s premiere deep play--to reiterate from our introduction, recreation made microcosmic of real-world cultural values--it is tempting to call Pepsi’s purchase from the Arnell Group a kind of deep play, too. But to refer to any action by an industrial monolith like the PepsiCo, Inc. as “play” feels utterly disingenuous in a neoliberal sort of way--an indulgence of corporate attempts to get in with the cool kids on social media and put forth a human front before their capitalist endeavors. No, however pointless, “Breathless” is in no way intentional play, entertainment, or self-stimulation on the part of a corporation. But maybe the public response to its leaking could be.
You will recall that I first discovered the existence of “Breathless”--and its legally ambiguous appearance on AgencySpy--through Tumblr.com, a social media site primarily frequented by young members of the LGBT community in search of content to suit their comedic needs. The popularity of “Breathless” as it circulated around Tumblr should reveal all one need know of the general Tumblr sense of humor; unable to crack funnier jokes than those accidental ones found in the Arnell Group’s infamous document, the website resorted to reacting in its way to the content found within.

Unquestionably, the creation of japes for little more than public amusement is play--but I posit that it is in fact deep per Geertz’s definition: a reflection of the greater cultural values found in the communities of Tumblr.com and, by association, youth on the interwebs.

Readiness to jump on the absurdity of corporate American marketing decisions is not exclusive to PepsiCo (similar cold-humored backlash met the slough of corporations that flew rainbow flags in honor of the Marriage Equality Act in 2011, displaying solidarity only when it
had become popular opinion); I posit that this critical, unforgiving mess of memes is in and of itself a revolutionary brand of deep play. It is a reflection of anti-capitalist sentiment disguised as harmless proletarian fun, and thus parallel to the efforts for personal pride and masculinity in the Balinese folk betting on cockfights. In effect, the population of minorities on Tumblr appear to be taking part in countercultural deep play in contrast to Balinese pop-cultural deep play, though there is room for debate over whether pop culture can still be referred to as such when it is locally punishable by law. A strange connection indeed, but—in my opinion as an escapee of Tumblr.com, and one of the very jokers stamping down corporate attempts at “hipness”—indubitable.

My own take on visualizing the intersection of Geertz, Ingold, and “Breathtaking” had massive shoes to fill: such iconic and effortlessly amusing imagery as that seen in Arnell’s logo design process would be a challenge to blend with purposeful irony in light of that very document’s unintentional humor. As such, I took inspiration from the oddly astronomical, borderline abstract visuals Arnell employs in his design notes: two gamecocks dance in a tentative circle around one another atop a raised cockpit platform, their feathers illuminated by radiant light emitting from—what else?—Arnell’s new and improved Pepsi logo. Circling the cocks in turn are loose human forms as viewed from above, their feet firmly planted atop the signature splat shape of an interstellar quasar dotted with ice-blue stars. Arnell’s references to the “gravitational pull of pepsi” and the “Pepsi universe” inspired this illustration; I wanted to honor the simplistic center of gravity Arnell implies in his theoretical Pepsi-verse. Married in graphics of my own design are representations of the two types of gambling-based deep play discussed above: the high-stake bet of animalistic sport, and the high-stake bet of a million-dollar corporate logo redesign.
Illustrated Text and the Marxist Parenthetical

Multimodal anthropology of the kind you are currently reading may not be terribly pervasive in the field as a separate entity from visual ethnography--photographic essays, documentaries, etc--but visual accompaniment is far friendlier with the literary field. In some cases, we might call this translation or adaptation, though the proper term might be something along the lines of repackaging. A childhood favorite illustrated account of Ernest Shackleton’s perilous expedition to the Antarctic comes to mind: William Grill’s *Shackleton’s Journey*, chock full of colored pencil maps and inventories of scientific equipment and sled dogs alike. The examples don’t end there: I recall early reader-oriented picture books on the raid of Tutenkhamen’s crypt, countless entries in the *Who Was…?* series of children’s books on historical figures whose pasts were filled with unfathomable tragedy: Anne Frank, Joan of Arc, even Princess Diana. Illustration makes complicated or mature content more accessible not merely to children but to all visually-oriented learners, myself in all my ADHD-riddled glory very much included. Texts adapted for re-publication generally follow a standard of narrative for ease of illustration, as in *Shackleton’s Journey* or the story of Anne Frank; Harriet Tubman’s tales of treacherous repeated travels along the Underground Railroad lend themselves far better to visualization than, say, the political and economic musings of Karl Marx. And while that is not to say illustrating Marx is impossible, or even difficult--Marx’s imagery is vivid, despite an evident story arc--there is a prominent question of why one would choose to do so. Rius seeks to answer that in creative practice.

Eduardo Humberto del Río García--pen name: Rius--was born in 1934 in Zamora, Mexico, and drew upon the tumult that surrounded him in Central America for the political cartoons and comics he would later come to make his career. In a mix of his socio-political wit,
artistic talent, and a desire to translate/adapt not unlike that complimented above, Rius created 1976’s *Marx for Beginners*.18 “Another reason for trying to take on [Karl Marx] was my wish to understand him--an ambition which I haven’t satisfied,” Rius writes in his introduction. “Marx himself hasn’t made my job any easier by forgetting to provide a summary of his works. I got even less help from all those scholarly volumes which pretend to clarify Marx, but end up being more difficult than Charlie himself” (Rius 8). Intentionally or not, Rius perfectly summarizes here the nightmare that is academic jargon when one possesses a learning disability: attempts to clarify will only dig one deeper into their pit of misunderstanding. This inaccessibility can even feel antagonistic at times, as Rius so fluently puts it: “I should also like to thank the illustrious Marxist theoreticians who, when I asked them for a hand, replied politely that I must be out of my mind to start such a work. I really appreciate their ‘spirit of co-operation’ and regret not heeding their advice before settling down with *Herr Doktor* Karl Marx” (Rius 9). Joke at his own expense though he might, I can at least speak for myself in saying that Rius absolutely triumphed in his attempts to translate Marx for others like him. It is not necessarily the illustrations themselves that make obvious Marx’s philosophies of materialism, the inevitable ties between ethical questions and economic questions, and the benefits to expropriation of the means of production--for the most part, they consist of portraiture spouting speech bubbles containing the content of Marx, Lenin, and Engels’ writings, or merely reacting to it. But it is the manufactured dialogue between the reader, the writings, and Rius himself that allows for a level of comfort with Marxist material, just as that which may be gained from a true conversation on a complex subject. Put simply, Rius managed to make some of the most infamously complex economic theory (simple and widespread though its conclusion may be, especially in my own radical Bard College circles) accessible--and I could not have been more grateful for that than when I was

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confronted in one of the most confounding one-off statements in all of “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.”

For the sake of full disclosure and context, I will divulge the entirety of Geertz’s contextual paragraph mentioning Marx here. Before the paragraph in question begins, Geertz is engaged with the subject of “examining culture as an assemblage of texts”—that is, the anthropological theory that culture in and of itself is the result of text, written or otherwise, in response to other text: “saying something of something,” in Aristotelian terms which Geertz himself cites. The texts in question, Geertz wishes to clarify, are not necessarily written word—and Geertz begins the following paragraph thusly: “Such an extension of the notion of a text beyond written material, and even beyond verbal, is, though metaphorical, not, of course, all that novel.” And so we have our thesis on this particular bit of Deep Play, and can already begin to analyze its relevance to the titular Balinese cockfight: culture is the result of meaningful practice within a group crafted in response to practices that preceded. Thus, the Balinese cockfight—as a component of Balinese culture as it existed at the time of Deep Play’s writing—is a meaningful practice in response to previous meaningful Balinese cultural practices. Culture exists in the margins between this metaphorical dialogue. With that clarified, Geertz moves on to historical examples of this phenomenon in other cultures:

The interpretatio naturae tradition of the Middle Ages, which, culminating in Spinoza, attempted to read nature as Scripture, the Nietzschean effort to treat value systems as glosses on the will to power (or the Marxian one to treat them as glosses on property relations), and the Freudian replacement of the enigmatic text of the manifest dream with
the plain one of the latent, all offer precedents, if not equally recommendable ones (Geertz 83).

Blink, and you’ll almost certainly miss the presence of Rius’ dear enigma of an economic theorist in Geertz’s *Deep Play*. Nonetheless, there he is: crammed between meaningful cultural practices (let’s return to calling them texts) that exist as cultural components just the same as Geertz’s Balinese cockfights. Let’s break things down: Nietzsche’s “will to power” is a philosophical theory that went generally unrealized and unpublished until after the philosopher’s death in 1900, at which point his sister made public a collection of Nietzsche’s incomplete works under that very title: *The Will to Power*.\(^{19}\) Being that Nietzsche never fully defined the term, its meaning is, to this day, contentious. Nonetheless, it is generally considered to be Nietzsche’s conception of that which drives human action and overall existence—a sort of psychological force moving all of humanity along. And here Geertz claims that the pertinent text that exists in response to the will to power, and thus forms culture, are “value systems.” Here Geertz does not cite in his footnotes any clarifying evidence—only further discussion on the process of “freeing the notion of text… from the notion of scripture or writing,” so one must assume no specific value systems are being discussed. Instead I posit we take “value systems” to mean arbitrary societal non-truths that Nietzsche’s theory of will to power would not agree with: quite literally, in Geertz’s terms, “glosses” which obscure the will to power for worldly ideals. And here is where Marx comes in: parenthetically, as if he were merely an afterthought, Geertz likens value systems glossing over Nietzsche’s will to power to the very same value systems glossing over Marx’s “property relations.” Having gleaned what we could of the previous statement, analyzing this mention of Marx is at least a bit easier. As I see it, the strained relationships between

\(^{19}\) Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Will to Power*. Allen, 1924.
participants in property (land, finance, goods, stock) material ownership among social classes possesses a gloss of its own: value systems, akin to those discussed in relation to Nietzsche, similarly referring to arbitrary rules sold by capitalist society as truths. Read, per Geertz’s recommendation, as evidence of the “saying something of something” cultural theory, the will to power is to social construct as capitalist property relation is to economic construct.

… Or that’s what I’ve managed to ascertain, anyway. The fact is, this apparent throwaway line--barely a reference, even--is somewhat perplexing in the greater context of “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.” Why merely cite some vague reference to Marx’s stereotypical complaints about capitalism when Geertz could very well have connected the communal financial experience of cockfight betting to economic socialism, the Balinese villager’s expertise in fooling the authorities to the socialist hope to eliminate their supremacy altogether? Could illegal cockfights not be called deep play spurred on by the remnants of Indonesia’s now-banned communist party? Had Geertz elected to elaborate upon his promising reference to Geertz, we may legitimately have that worthwhile analysis of anthropological deep play in relation to economics, or at the very least social unrest on a larger scale than Geertz’s cheeky cockpit busts by the Balinese police. The Communist Party of Indonesia was the world’s largest non-ruling communist party on the planet prior to the mass anti-communist purges that ended its influence in 1965; the Balinese prioritization of community and enjoyment of lighthearted local conspiracy may well be the result of that bloody, untimely end to Indonesian socialism. When Geertz describes the good-humored Balinese dislike for self-important authorities, he may be unwittingly documenting the remnants of snuffed leftism on the island so often overshadowed by the greater Java.
Perhaps that would be a stretch, though--I do not doubt Geertz possesses knowledge of Marx, but I believe “Deep Play” could have taken on an entirely new sociopolitical tilt with an elaboration on the passing mention of Marx Geertz chooses to make.
PART IV: NEURODIVERGENCE

A turn towards the personal.
Fig. 6: Ingold, Illustration, and Bloodsport in the Brain
Fig. 7: The Attention Deficit Ethnography
At first glance, Tim Ingold’s *Lines: A Brief History* seems far more surreal than the average anthropological piece. Accompanied at every turn by complex diagrams of, say, “language at the interface between a plane of thought and a plane of sound imagery,” the aural and visual manifestations of gesture and inscription, and star charts, Ingold tells the tale of linearity in its most literal form throughout human evolution. Lines, he claims quite blatantly, “are everywhere… It is not just that line-making is as ubiquitous as the use of the voice, hands and feet--respectively in speaking, gesturing and moving around--but rather that it subsumes all these aspects of everyday human activity and, in so doing, brings them together into a single field of inquiry” (Ingold 1). I cannot disagree, and find myself intrigued by the otherworldly quality of Ingold’s account.

As previously mentioned, and can quite clearly be seen in the pages of this anthology, I favor drawing as a form of entertainment and means of self expression: low hanging fruit for Ingold’s theories, one might assume, though he actually opens *Lines* with an analysis of the linearity of auditory and musical notation. By the time Ingold gets to the subject of the drawn line, his lack of prioritization of, arguably, the most simplistic manifestation of manufactured linearity in *Lines: A Brief History* is evident: Ingold favors the complexity of naturally occurring delineation, as in the trampled-down earth of long-trod walking paths and the branching unconscious tracks of fungal mycelium growing outward. Drawing with a pigmented utensil is focused on with far less intensity than “the threading, twisting, and knotting of fibres… among the most ancient of human arts,” “reductive traces--for example in the sand--with [one’s] fingers,” and even a naturally occurring “precipitous gorge in an otherwise level plateau” (Ingold 20).

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42-45). Nonetheless, the connection unquestionably exists between the far more abstract delineative forms described within *Lines* and the so-called “doodling” I partake in for the sake of self-stimulation as a learning aid to my ADHD. “It is not enough to regard the surface as a taken-for-grANTED backdrop for the lines that are inscribed upon it,” Ingold states. “For just as the history of writing belongs within the history of notation, and the history of notation within the history of the line, so there can be no history of the line that is not also about the changing relations between lines and surfaces” (Ingold 39). This quotation brought to mind a term that finds its way around art schools and classes: mark-making, simplistic in its phrasing and far more technical, primal, than the artistic processes of sketching or rendering. Mark-making in academic contexts refers to experimentation at the outset of one’s education in a certain medium—to practice with the persistent fluidity of oil paint, for example, one might mix colors and test brushes on a strip of spare canvas. Mark-making begs the role of *creation* in less formal parts of the artistic process—and oftentimes I feel I am doing just that in my periods of self-stimulatory drawing, entirely separate from the dedicated sessions of attentive creation I generally end my evenings with.

On that note, it feels appropriate that I actually address my own work with Ingold’s sensibilities in mind. I work digitally, utilizing a Wacom Cintiq 13HD pen tablet and accompanying stylus, a lightweight Japanese drawing software called Paint Tool SAI, and an editing program called MediBang Paint; while self-stimulatory drawing in class is done using merely a ballpoint pen and sketchbook paper, I engage in far more calculated production when I draw digitally (as with the pieces that make up a portion of this thesis). The keen-eyed reader will note additions and effects that are either technically impossible or impractical in traditional art: chromatic aberration, for one—the thin outlines of neon red and cyan on either side of each
marking—and the presence of screentones, also sometimes referred to as Ben Day dots.

Traditionally, screentones are applied via adhesive transfer sheets cut down to size and generally make appearances in black and white illustrations to add depth in lieu of color. Digitally, screentones take the form of brushes, used at large sizes to fill areas as one might adhere traditional adhesive screentone clippings to a page and at small sizes to draw single file dotted lines. Citing artist Paul Klee, Ingold describes a “line” made of dots as “the quintessence of the static… To complete the pattern is not to take a line for the walk but rather to engage in a process of construction or assembly, in which every linear segment serves as a joint, welding together the elements of the pattern into a totality of a higher order” (Ingold 73-74). Ingold implies an inherent nonlinearity in lines formed by disconnected segments—generally a staple of my work in digital and traditional forms as a result of the constant starting and stopping that occurs as a result of both ADHD and non-artistic obligations.

Digital art offers the advantage of unlimited materials: one never runs out of ink or has to go out for another stack of screentone films or a new sketchbook. I believe Ingold would appreciate aspects of digital illustration—the infinite supply of linework hiding metaphysically within a stylus, and perhaps even the potential to readjust drawn lines after the fact. That said, Ingold is clear in his belief in the strength of a traditionally crafted line’s permanence: “When, pen in hand, Sterne recreated the flourish on the page, his gesture left an enduring trace that we can still read… Paul Klee described this kind of line as the most active and authentic” (Ingold 72). While Ingold’s present example of a traced physical gesture embodies the whole of his comprehension of the drawn line (by no fault of his own, naturally), digital art presents a greater berth for mark-making that is indirect or non-immediate. Take, for example, Paint Tool SAI’s stabilizer tool: set on a scale from 0 to 15, then S-1 to S-7, the stabilization level introduces a
chosen amount of lag on the user’s illustrative gesture. With a stabilizer set to S-7, an otherwise quick stroke of the stylus creates an immaculately smooth line tracking tediously behind the cursor. Set at 0, the stabilizer has no effect, and a tremor in the hand appears as readily as it would when drawing in pencil. As my ADHD medication makes my hands shake slightly, I generally keep my stabilizer set to 3, allowing for a fair amount of natural imperfection but still keeping my lines legible. Considering Ingold’s stance that “not everything that is done in a notation… need consist of traces” which allows him to analyze the more practical tactility of fiber arts (i.e. weaving), I assume Ingold would find value in the ability to edit digital markings and their resulting impermanence.

Clifford Geertz is not particularly attentive to the superficial movements and patterns of Balinese cockfights; his focus is on the depth of meaning of non-physical interaction made manifest in the titular bloodsport. That said, the cockpit can still be analyzed for linearity: the naturally occurring circle around the action, formed of layers of viewers disparate in financial status or perhaps merely punctuality. Speaking of both the pit’s metaphysical and literal periphery, Geertz tells us that “there are two sorts of bets, or toh. There is the single axial bet in the center between the principals (toh ketengah), and there is the cloud of peripheral ones around the ring between members of the audience” (Geertz 66). The concentric geometry of Geertz’s cockpit would undoubtedly fascinate Ingold’s taste for life as a tangle of human pathways: describing Journey Through Europe, a board game dating back to its 1759 publication, Ingold states that “on a map as on the game-board, locations or positions may be joined by lines to indicate possible moves. These lines are, of course, static point-to-point connectors. Together they form a network in which every place figures as a hub, from which connections fan out like the spokes of a wheel” (Ingold 98). The Balinese cockpit, “usually held in a secluded corner of a
village in semi-secrecy” but risked at a central venue during the Geertz couple’s visit, would undoubtedly take the form of one of those tangled hubs Ingold describes--all the more circular, in fact, for its real-world shape. Geertz even comes near to conjuring Ingold’s wheelhouse in his description of the cockfight’s central bet being “hedged in… with a webwork of rules,” but for the most part the theoretical venn diagram between Notes on the Balinese Cockfight and Lines: A Brief History is little more than two lone circles (Geertz 66). In that sense these pieces resemble two ends of the same self-stimulatory spectrum to me: Ingold’s creative expressions of oft menial mark-making for quiet periods of hyperfixative occupation versus Geertz’s complex, involved, and high-risk sport. Both have unquestionable value in coping with daily life based solely on personal experience: quiet boredom requires equally discreet entertainment, while manic energy begs expenditure in physically involved, adrenaline packed play. In spite of their evident differences, Ingold and Geertz’s disparate styles and subject matters mirror legitimate methods of self-stimulation in neurodivergent circles, and thus the deep play of seemingly mindless personal amusement--of which doodling in class is only one example.

This brings me to the accompanying illustration. Inspired, naturally, by Ingold’s precious line, I felt it only appropriate to experiment with a continuous line drawing--just as it sounds, a piece wherein the pen never leaves the surface of the paper (or the stylus and tablet, as the case may be). Per Ingold’s analysis, a continuous line emphasizes the organic process of creation: the line is subject to the natural whims of gesture and impulse; in the case of my ADHD, there is a particular propensity for visual anomaly. Note the thick tangle of linework towards the upper left of the page, located between the heads of the uppermost trio of roosters. The knotlike connection point of lines marks the place to which my pen instinctively returned as I contemplated my next move, and I can’t help feeling it resembles the metaphysical tangle Ingold describes in the
geographical discussions cited above--the connection point between the living lines that make up human movement. Also note the presence of screentones in the piece’s background, as well as fine chromatic aberration on the edges of the central forms (the effect of which may be a slight strain on the eyes when focusing on any one spot). I delighted in the loose, frantic creation of this piece: after the comparative stiffness of typing up its accompanying essay, it felt as if I were truly honoring Ingold’s vision--however distant it initially felt from what I perceived to be my own.
Despite going undiagnosed until the winter of my junior year at Bard, ADHD has long—and unbeknownst, by name, to me—affected my existence in the American educational system.

ADHD—or Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder—is plagued by misunderstanding; most associate it with its titular inattention in a marriage with the proceeding hyperactivity: likely a sixth grade boy with a blonde rat-tail at the back of his neck spitting non sequiturs in math class. Much like Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), ADHD often goes undiagnosed in children who are raised presenting as female. Societal pressures to keep quiet and poised compared to their boisterous, boyish counterparts result in the self-stimulatory behaviors ADHD inspires manifesting totally differently from the long-observed outbursts and executive dysfunction associated with the disorder.

A team of four mental health specialists from the Innlandet Hospital Trust in Lillehammer of Oslo, Norway, alongside Martin H. Treicher of the Harvard Medical School, found that “females with ADHD are reported to have fewer hyperactive/impulsive symptoms and more inattentive symptoms when compared with males with ADHD. Further, females with ADHD present more commonly with the inattentive subtype than do boys. Less disruptive behavior in females with ADHD may contribute to referral bias causing underidentification and lack of treatment for females with ADHD.”

The team goes on to note that further studies on the subject have proven primary-level teachers are more likely to refer male students for ADHD diagnosis than female, despite equivalent levels of learning impairment.

All that being said, I won’t claim to have been ladylike at any point in my youth. My mother proudly cites from minute one that I was characteristically befuddling; when I popped

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out, pink and slimy, she and my dad proclaimed a joyous “it’s a boy!” at the sight of my umbilical cord tangled and dangling conspicuously between my thighs. The doctors shared amused glances, corrected the error by nudging my makeshift gonads out of the way; nowadays, we all like to laugh at the kismet of my androgyny even as early as my first gasping breaths.

Born just two years after my older brother, my stay-at-home father raised us with little more than convenience in mind. He knew I admired my elder, so why not treat his newest offspring to matching cargo shorts and turtlenecks from the Baby Gap’s boys department--better yet, hand down the same ones my brother had worn? We shared toys, activities, penchants for garbing ourselves in secondhand silk scarves and springtime Wisconsin slush alike. The irony of my brother turning out to be gay while I took up the mantle of traditionally boyish rebellion is not lost on us. Still, gendered society had taken hold, and my challenges piping down and sitting still in class were ignored. I was decently smart, after all, and I could focus on tasks pertinent to my interest like nobody’s business--I suppose it was assumed I was simply bullheaded than struggling with my own brain chemistry, for better or for worse.

Long story short, I learned to cope, as so many undiagnosed, disabled youth do. I attained the language necessary to convince teachers my doodling was benefiting my learning; I taught myself to trigger fits of hyperfocus to get work done. All the while, one of the symptoms of ADHD more commonly found, self-reported, in females, began to blossom with my nearing adulthood: anxiety. The aforementioned Norwegian team cites “higher rates of self-reported anxiety symptoms in females with ADHD” as a counterpart to the impulsivity and hyperactivity of males with ADHD--ironically, once I finally began treatment for the former in January 2020, the latter began to manifest itself with a kind of exuberant triumph that lined up quite perfectly with my transition to a more masculine presentation, complete with a new name.
Though I first read him a couple years prior, I like to think Clifford Geertz represented that tantalizing, explosive escape from the stifling. What felt like meek self-supposition in texts introductory to the anthropological field was lost with Geertz; he expressed his theories with unfettered humor, sarcasm, dual assurance in tandem with the acknowledgement that his biases were implicit and inescapable. Where earlier anthropologists made mice of themselves in attempted silent observation, Geertz was flashy game fowl, presenting his foreign, uncertain self unapologetically in the depths of small-town Balinese culture and pressing on by any means necessary to win the favor of the locals. My own apparent subconscious need to break free of what ADHD meant to my chromosomal biology was reflected in Geertz’s escape from the highly theoretical jargon I’d gleaned from previous Anthro 101 readings; where once was seemingly endless backtracking for the sake of reinforcing a highly theoretical hypothesis (Tim Ingold comes to mind), here was Geertz in the middle of a cockfighting ring, stating plainly and unabashedly that the birds used in local sport were symbols of players’ masculinity--literal cocks, as it were.

I should note that neurodivergency--a state of psychological being as it pertains specifically to the functional disorders of ASD, ADHD/ADD, and Dyslexia--gets along quite nicely with taboo, for better or for worse. We’ve all heard stories of folks with Tourette’s syndrome smattering their everyday small talk with curses and slurs, perhaps witnessed it in person; autism comes unquestionably with the stereotype of speaking out of turn, stating blunt and oftentimes inappropriate things with no malicious intent. ADHD as I experience it is much the same; riling myself and others up is self-stimulating, and results in an automatic spark of satisfaction in spite of any immediate consequences. So you can imagine my joy when Geertz wrote those fateful words: “To anyone who has been in Bali any length of time, the deep
psychological identification of Balinese men with their cocks is unmistakable. The double entendre here is deliberate. It works in exactly the same way in Balinese as it does in English, even to producing the same tired jokes, strained puns, and uninventive obscenities’’ (60). Finally, anthropology that did not merely suit my interests in food or art or gift-giving or what-have-you--but anthropology that spoke my language, regardless of its subject matter. The irreverence and unapologetic amusement of Geertz brings to mind the same self-stimulatory behavior that brings the ADHD brain near to busting like an overworked steam engine--hyperfixation on something simple, as little as a singular word or phrase, and the unquestionably enjoyable process of dedication oneself entirely to it for a blurred length of time. While it’s not particularly healthy--a neurodivergent person can easily forego eating, hydrating, and sleeping if it means keeping their train of motivation rolling--the passion with which Geertz dives headfirst into something so humorous and taboo reminded me of the joys I already knew of hyperfixation, and fed me the beginnings of serotonin unbound by chemical poverty. Not in the way it is generally seen, as wrought with executive dysfunction, laziness, inattention--but in the way I knew it then and know it even better now, Clifford Geertz’s Notes on the Balinese Cockfight was the first academic writing to speak to me in the language of ADHD.
In Conclusion

Accessibility is a difficult thing, reader. One anthropologist’s accessible could well be another’s academic hell, and I don’t doubt that, for as imbued as it is with my attention deficit and hyperactive sensibilities, this anthology will not appeal to all members of my chosen field. Even within the population of those diagnosed with ADHD, the disorder generally splits somewhere down the middle of its two aforementioned components in all their individual complexities; perhaps those who lean more towards the A and D more so than my own H will utterly lack interest in reading fifty-or-so pages on not just one anthropologist, but one entry in his canon.

But if I have introduced the wonders of Clifford Geertz to a mere few, anthropological experts or laypeople alike, I will have considered this endeavor a success. Anthropological engagement as textual interpretation, in contrast with the field’s more famed ethnographies, seems to lack identity and prestige (at least from where I’m sitting) for its monotony. Generally, an anthropological thesis takes the form of ethnography, following in the footsteps of academic giants in efforts to study peoples within and without a student’s surroundings. It simply didn’t come naturally to me, and anyways, the ethnographic genre is certainly not wanting for multimodality these days. Every ethnography allows one a glimpse into worlds in and of themselves, as diverse as any other form of narrative literature; were more people like me to adapt and regurgitate those most influential to the field at the very least, anthropology as a field would garner new eyes from neurologically diverse audiences. No one argues the study of chemistry is merely inaccessible text wrought with jargon--were that the case, children’s chemistry kits would not exist, nor the sorts of explosive Youtube videos one could waste their day on. Anthropology is just as deserving of a variety of forms--as any social science, it gives us
insight and empathy into otherwise wholly separate peoples whom we may only see some exposure to through internet connectivity (multimodal anthropology in and of itself, I’m sure those with more time than I have written).

Anyhow, there it is. Much of my experience in the American educational system has been a battle between myself, my ADHD, and archaic teaching methods which somehow still have not been updated to acknowledge the psychological diversity that is a reality in all academia. For once I’ve been given utter freedom to exercise my anthropological knowledge in the methods I love best, with no rubric in mind but my own personal tastes. For as much as writing a required thesis paper of fifty-plus pages can be considered play, I would define this anthology as such, and deep in its manifestation of the way I, ever unbending, most enthusiastically interact with the world around me.
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To Emily: thank you for always welcoming me when I wandered in through the bathroom as a break from writing, and you’re welcome in advance for offering the same service.

And to my mom, dad, Jack, and Zoe, thank you for fostering a familial environment in such a way that my thesis, a culmination of four expensive and rigorous years of higher education, is one enormous 69 page-long penis joke. I assert with nothing but fondness that this is entirely your fault.
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